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The Opening of Japan: Reforms and Reinventions

In May 1853, a squadron of United States vessels assembled in Naha Habour, Okinawa, Japan. Showing nothing but determination, the armed ships steadfastly refused to obey orders from the shore to turn around and leave. The task of this intimidating mission was to deliver a letter.

Eighteen American expeditions to Japan had already failed to initiate contact. In March 1852, American naval commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry received orders from President Millard Fillimore to make another attempt. By the mid nineteenth century, the Pacific was of immense importance to American interests. American vessels were increasingly frequenting the Pacific and especially the North Pacific whaling grounds off the coasts of Japan, on voyages and commodities in which big money was invested. The Californian gold rush had brough an influx of people to the Pacific coast of the United States, and sea-bound trade with Asia was rapidly increasing. Coaling stations and harbours for whaling and merchant vessels were necessary, and Japan was the place to convince. Yet Japan had remained resolute in its refusal to allow foreign vessels to land, or to engage in trade with Westerners. This time, Perry, as an experienced officer and highly engaged amateur intellectual, had learned from the mistakes of his predecessors: they needed to better understand Japanese motivations for their isolation, and above all, they needed a significant show of strength.

As the ships fired cannon salutes, the Americans landed in an impressive parade of marching bands and bearing gifts carefully selected to pique the curiosity they knew the Japanese held for European sciences and technology. The Japanese councilor of the Tokugawa Shogunate, who had upheld a

two-hundred-and-fifty-year isolationist policy of Sakoku, decided to read the letter, which asked for permission to talk about a trade treaty, and resolved under the threat of the American guns that opening up to the western world was inevitable, and agreed to negotiate with the Americans. This decision set in motion rapid changes, great struggles, and monumental reinventions, that saw the rise of Imperial Japan as a world power.

Southern Barbarians: Sakoku and the Tokugawa Shogunate

From the beginning of the seventeenth century until the mid-nineteenth century, Japan was in what is known as the 'Edo Period' (1603-1868). Edo, an east-coast city on the southernmost island of the group, was the premodern name for Tokyo. As Edo, it was the centre for the Tokugawa Shogunate, the military government in power. This period of Japanese history is best known for its enforcement of *Sakoku*, in which Japan was effectively isolated from the Western world in terms of trade, diplomacy, and military. *Sakoku*, established by the 'Seclusion Edicts' of 1614, occurred after several decades of contact with Europeans, who arrived in Japan 1543, and was the result of fear and frustration with what the Shogun termed 'Nanban Trade'. *Nanban* roughly translates to 'southern barbarian' and was used in Japanese language even prior to contact with Europeans to denote peoples from Southern China, the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and Southeast Asia, with whom the Japanese had encounters of trade and piracy since at least the A.D.900s. The term *Nanban trade* became associated with Europeans from the mid-1500s when primarily Portuguese explorers, missionaries, and merchants established long-distance trade routes with Japan. This contact facilitated the transfer of European firearms, armed shipbuilding (mainly galleon-style), and Christianity to Japanese people.

At this time, Japanese politics was largely characterised by clans, who vied for power between each other, and who were all subject to the overarching political and spiritual authority of the Emperor. These aristocratic clans, led by a *daimyo*, roughly equivalent to a 'feudal lord', were retained by a warrior class, known as the *samurai*. Over time, the daimyo of the most power clan was known as the Shogun. The Shogun was granted formal authority by the Emperor, to command over the network of daimyo, samurai, agrarian commoners, and merchants in his name. During the unstable 1500s with the onset of European interaction, a myriad of localized inter-clan civil wars eventually led to the supremacy of the Tokugawa clan, under the daimyo Tokugawa Ieyasu, who from 1603 wielded overarching military-based power over Japan as the Shogun. The Emperor remained as the nominal figurehead of the state, but participated very little in practical affairs.

At the start of the 1600s, as Japan's new military government sanctioned by the Emperor, or *Bakufu*, the Tokugawa Shogunate needed to consolidate its control over Japan. The Shogunate

ruled over the hundreds of smaller landholdings, or domains, in a military overlordship in the name of the Emperor. These domains were primarily agricultural and tithed the agrarian peasantry in rice, who were not granted freedom of movement or occupation. The prestigious samurai were retained by the daimyo with stipends and were the only class able to access military positions and were often exclusively skilled in martial practices. The Shogun feared Christianity as a cultural threat and resented missionary meddling in domestic politics, and wanted to halt the influx of European weapons and vices that were increasingly present. Consequently, at the orders of the Shogun, Japan shut its borders in a series of *Sakoku* (or 'isolationist') policies enacted in 1614, so that very few people came in, or went out for nearly three centuries.

Of the very few outsiders that did have contact, Dutch traders of primarily the Dutch East India Company (VOC) retained a tightly controlled foothold at Dejima, a small 2.2-acre artificial island off the coast of Nagasaki created in 1636 by the Portuguese, who were expelled shortly after in 1639 due to Catholic evangelism. Religious control was so important that for the next two centuries, even the Dutch ships that were permitted to enter were banned from holding religious services, and ships sails were seized until cargoes were strictly inspected for any Christian material. As the only traders with a small measure of contact with Japan, the VOC traded in silk and cotton from other posts in China and India, alongside deer pelts and shark skin from what is now Taiwan (formerly Formosa). Interestingly, while religious material was strictly banned, scientific books and instruments from Europe were in high demand, creating Dejima as a centre for medicine, military science, and astronomy, which was highly valued by Japanese intellectuals and samurai in the Rangaku movement. In exchange, Dutch traders returned with copper, silver, camphor, porcelain and lacquer ware, and rice.

The structure of society in this period has been termed 'Japanese feudalism', which can be described as a combination of the elaborate administrative systems inherited from the Ritsuryo legalism of the Chinese tradition, and the clan-based politics of Japanese aristocratic society. Japanese society was organised into a hierarchy of 'occupations', with the Emperor, Shogun, and daimyo at the top, then samurai, farmers, artisans, and merchants following. Although under a military government, the Edo Period a was stable, relatively peaceful time. The relative lack of civil war and contact with European influences allowed for steady growth, stable population, and flourishing of arts and culture. Edo Period feudalism, however stable and peaceful it may have seemed while Sakoku was in place, was an old-fashioned system, and would prove to be incompatible with pressures from developments in the rest of the world once Sakoku began to crumble. Importantly, daimyo that had been opponents to the Tokugawa during the civil wars

before 1603 were 'outcasted', as *tozama daimyo*. This however did not stop many of them from becoming independently influential, as did the Shimazu daimyo and Mori daimyo of the Satsuma and Choshu domains. As these were regions the most vulnerable by proximity to Western incursions, and therefore also the most familiar with Western technologies, it is little wonder that the daimyo and their samurai of these important domains, shunned by the Tokugawa, would later become the architects of the Shogunate's downfall in the wake of Perry's expedition.

Western Barbarians: Bakumatsu and the End of the Shogunate

With the end of sakoku and the 'opening up' of Japanese ports to foreign trade, came the wider forces of change that destabilised the longstanding social order in Japanese politics. During the years following the Perry Expedition, the Tokugawa Shogunate, the long-ruling clan, lost control over Japan's government and the military prestige they once held. The end of the Edo Period, characterised by the 'opening up' of Japan to foreign trade from the time of the Perry Expedition until the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate, is known as *bakumatsu* (1853-1867). One of the main terms agreed to in the initial meeting between Perry and the Japanese in 1854 was the installation of an American consul in Shimodo, Japan. The person selected for this task was Townsend Harris. Harris spent two years finalising the Treaty of Amity and Commerce (1858), which was enacted by 1859. Known as the Harris Treaty, its namesake negotiator managed to convince the inexperienced Japanese councilors, including the chair of the Shogunate council Abe Matsuhira and influential daimyo Ii Naosuke, that the terms he offered were the best that a western power would offer. In fact, this was flagrantly misleading, and the Harris Treaty is often recognised as an example of a devastatingly unequal treaty. Almost immediately, the Harris Treaty with the United States was followed by similar treaties with Russia, France, the Netherlands, and Great Britain. Foreign ships began arriving in the ports of Shimodo and Hakodate, opening a floodgate of international trading, which the Japanese economy, based on an antiquated social system, fractured currency production across hundreds of domains, and mainly subsistence farming, could not sustain. Japan was plunged into a deep economic crisis.

The nature of the treaty was uncontrolled trade through five of Japan's most significant ports. Japan did not negotiate for the rights to set exchange rates, and fixed ruefully low import and export duties, over which Japan had no control. It specified rights for American citizens to purchase land, construct warehouses, and reside permanently in the ports, and gave away Japan's authority to try foreigners under Japanese law. As well as the apparent removal of national trading and legal rights established by the Treaty, the influx of trade that these extremely open conditions created spiraled inflation and rendered the disjointed currencies of Japanese regions nearly

worthless. Food and fuel production could not keep up, and famines began to set in. Combined with a deadly outbreak of cholera, introduced by foreigners whose activity was unregulated in the harbours, the Japanese people were plunged into a semicolonial nightmare ratified by an official treaty.

The initial terms of the treaties negotiated by the Tokugawa leaders were considered humiliatingly unequal by many members of Japanese political society, and in particular that the conditions created for contact with Westerners were a threat to Japanese national sovereignty. The Tokugawa who endorsed the Harris Treaty remained unwavering. Even at the death of the Shogun Tokugawa Iesada in 1858, a new leader was appointed – the twelve-year-old Tokugawa Iemochi – who would act as an easily-controlled puppet of his regent, Ii Naosuke who negotiated the treaty, and the former Shogun's wife Tenshoin, Iemochi's adoptive mother. By the early 1860s, the situation was dire, and hostility to Westerners was peaking. As tensions rose, it was the Satsuma samurai, under the direction of a mighty samurai Saigo Takamori who took the next step, and murdered a British trader, Charles Lennox Richardson, while he was visiting a temple as a tourist. Despite the British demanding reparations from an embarrassed and highly vexed Tokugawa government, the Shogunate representatives stood by their treaty, demanding in turn that the Shimazu clan of Saigo Takamori pay the money. When they refused, the British sent a naval squadron to bombard Kagoshima in a short but important Anglo-Satsuma war in 1863.

The buildup of hostilities between Japanese and Europeans led to even further dissatisfaction with the Tokugawa Shogunate and its ability to manage the rapid changes that were occurring. A radical movement amongst the governmental classes to revive the Emperor as head of state, and 'expel the barbarians', embodied in the phrase *sunno joi*. The 'barbarians' initially implied Westerners. Breaking with centuries of non-interference tradition, the Emperor Komei agreed with this sentiment of Western contact under these conditions being harmful to Japanese sovereignty, and began to actively protest the treaties. In 1863, Emperor Komei, who alone could give authority to power in Japan, gave a *direct order* to 'expel the barbarians', which unleashed a profound series of events that ended the Shogunate and brought forth a new era of modernisation to Japan.

It was the Choshu region that first took up the order to expel the barbarians, when in 1863 under the leadership of the samurai Katsura Kogoro opened fire without warning on foreign ships in the dangerous but essential Shimonoseki Strait that separated the Honshu and Kyushu islands. Hostility between the Choshu samurai and various foreign powers, including the United States, France, British and Dutch continued into 1864, and it took an allied effort on the part of foreign powers, including nine British, four Dutch, and three French warships with two thousand soldiers

to finally ward off the attacks in the strategically important narrow waterway. One practical result of this valiant show of strength was that the United States, under its own civil war in the 1860s, did not re-enter Japanese affairs to support its treaty partner, the Tokugawa, when other foreign powers were taking sides.

The Tokugawa, who in theory were required to obey the Emperor but in practice had wielded power themselves for centuries, had no intention of reneging their position and turning on the Westerners. They had no intention of following the Emperor's order. Others, however, transferring their loyalty to the Emperor over the Shogun, began to attack not only foreigners in Japan, but also the Tokugawa, as effectively 'barbarians' by association. In particular, the traditionally outcast domains of Satsuma, Choshu, and Tosa, became irrevocably unreconciled with the Shogunate. Although outcasted for their opposition to the Tokugawa in the seventeenth century, these regions had become independently powerful with high number of samurai and relatively strong leadership. It was also these regions that were the most vulnerable by proximity to western incursions, and who had gained the most familiarity with Western science and technology through the Dejima portal. The Satsuma defeat at Kagoshima had been a wake-up call for these domains. They realised how far 'behind' their armed forces really were. Yet, the outcome of the Anglo-Satsuma war had ironically fostered mutual respect between the two belligerents, and importantly, a deal for the British to supply military expertise and steam warships to the Satsuma.

All the rapid changes and swelling of animosities of the Harris Treaty, bakumatsu and sunno joi might have amounted to little change, when in 1866, as passions rose to fever pitch, both the groundbreaking Emperor Komei, and the young Shogun Tokugawa Iemochi, only twenty years old, passed away. Initially, successions to the two traditionally most powerful positions in Japanese society went ahead as they had always done. This time, however, the context was very different when a young and politically astute Emperor Meiji succeeded at the same time as a very reluctant new Shogun. In the midst of suppressing another uprising amongst the samurai of Choshu, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, an accomplished samurai who believed in his duty to the Emperor, eventually accepted leadership of the troubled Shogunate. After two hundred and fifty years, Yoshinobu would be the last Tokugawa Shogun. At this time of crises and monumental changes, a new strain of power was building amongst the samurai of the tozama domains, who saw a different future for Japan.

Eastern Barbarians? The Meiji Restoration and Wakon Yosai

In the tozama domains of Satsuma and Choshu, those most impacted by the presence of the West and long distanced in relations with the Shogunate, the samurai were changing how they thought about Japan's place in the world of modernisation. The Satsuma and Choshu leaders, sometimes known as the 'Meiji Oligarchy' or Ishin-no-Sanketsu (the 'three great nobles of the Restoration') included among other reformers, the samurai and later Lord of Home Affairs Okubo Toshimichi and the strongwilled militant samurai Saigo Takamori of Satsuma, who had been involved in the Richardson murder, along with the samurai Katsura Kogoro, renamed Kido Takayoshi of Choshu, the main agitator in the Shimonoseki attacks. These samurai were relatively familiar with western ways having been at the front lines of Dejima trade, educated in Rangoku, and fought the initial conflicts with foreign powers in the 1860s. They knew how far Japan had to go before it was a competitive country. Rather than *sunno joi*, or expelling western barbarians, it was increasingly apparent that the best way to ensure Japanese sovereignty was to learn from the western powers, and apply this knowledge to a uniquely Japanese process of modernisation. Japan needed to reinvent itself. This approach to modernisation is known as *wakon yosai*, or 'Japanese spirit with Western learning'. This was the second, and some argue the authentic, 'opening up' of Japan.

No longer would Japan be inferior to the West. As this new group of leaders from the samurai of the tozama domains emerged, a new 'enlightened' approach to modernisation became Japan's pathway forward, to blend the strengths of Japanese values with the best of western innovations. During bakumatsu, the immediate period of 'opening up', Japan under the Tokugawa Shogunate had proven vastly inferior, antiquated, and incapable of managing the onset of foreign contact. The people, stricken from economic crisis, disease, and bloodshed, had nothing left to lose. A revolution was coming. For wakon yosai to occur, the samurai of Satsuma and Choshu agreed, the first thing to go had to be the Tokugawa.

Despite the new Shogun Tokugawa Yoshinobu pledging his loyalty to the Emperor, on November 9, 1867, a secret order was created by the 'Meiji oligarchs' in the name of the Emperor commanding the 'slaughtering of the traitorous subject Yoshinobu'. Without contest, Yoshinobu stepped down, abdicating his position as Shogun, hoping that his declaration of loyalty to the Emperor would ensure his clan's survival in the new system. However, this was not enough for the reform-minded samurai of Satsuma and Choshu. While Yoshinobu's resignation was uncontested, the systems of government that upheld the Shogunate continued to exist. Furthermore, the Tokugawa family remained an influential political group, many in positions of local and state government. This the Satsuma and Choshu leaders,in particular the stalwart samurai Saigo Takamori, could not tolerate, and felt to be incompatible with the total nature of the reforms required for wakon yosai to be successful.

Events came to a head on January 3, 1868, when the fifteen-year-old Emperor Meiji declared his own restoration to full power with the Charter Oath. This new government was a centrally structured under the Emperor, and called for the daimyo to surrender their land and titles to him, with pensions in return, and reappointment as governors of the same lands, now subdivisions of the central government. While not fully realised until 1871, this was a dramatic departure from how land had been organised for centures in Japan. As Takamori demanded, the position of 'shogun' was abolished and all Yoshinobu's feudal lands were confiscated. This meant the removal of the Tokugawa clan entirely. On January 17, 1868, Yoshinobu declared that he would not accept these terms and called for repeal, which was denied. On January 24, Yoshinobu prepared to attack Kyoto, occupied by Satsuma and Choshu forces. This was the opening of the Boshin War, effectively a Japanese semi-revolution, or more accurately, a 'restoration' of the Emperor as the active head of state. The opening conflicts of the Boshin War testified to the new complexities of political and military conflict in Japan. The Shogunate was assisted by French allies, while the Satsuma and Choshu had the military backing of the British, whose artillery made up for their three-to-one numerical disadvantage. Initially, the war was somewhat inconclusive, until the Satsuma and Choshu reappeared on the battlefield at Toba-Fushima under the banner of the Emperor. This was as powerful a legitimising statement as any army could make in Japan. The tozama domains, initially the 'rebels' against the Shogunate, were now the Imperial Army, representing the Emperor himself, against whom the Shogun, the loyal samurai Tokugawa Yoshinobu, and the majority of his forces, simply could not fight. Edo was renamed Tokyo and taken for the new Japan. Despite a group of determined Shogunate forces continuing and building a stronghold on the northern island of Hokkaido, the Shogunate faced its last stand at sea, in a courageous yet foolhardy naval battle off the Hokkaido coast. On 27 June 1869, the Emperor and his supporters from Satsuma and Choshu, with British warships and training, had successfully done away with the Tokugawa, clearing the way for new architecture of government, society, and economy. To emphasise the Emperor's power and the legitimacy of the new era, Yoshinobu, the last Shogun, was entreated to a lavish and peaceful retirement, enjoying the merits of the new Japan, including hobbies like cycling and photography, until his death in 1913.

The Meiji Restoration, with its principle of wakon yosai, was to instigate enormous changes throughout Japanese society. These changes, to everything from structure of government, laws, taxation, military, even diet, housing, and clothing, were felt to be necessary adaptations if Japan were to find its new identity in the wider world that now had access to Japan's resources. The experience of bakumatsu had made it clear that becoming another dependent and downtrodden

island colony in the face of European expansion and technology was a very real risk if Japan did not accelerate its development.

At its core, wakon yosai required learning. To this ends, the Japanese organised a diplomatic mission to the United States and Europe. This deputation, known as the Iwakura Mission was of immense significance for the newly re-created Japanese nation. It held a three-fold set of aims. Firstly, it was highly symbolic, to promote and gain recognition for the Imperial government of Emperor Meiji. This was important, as several delegations from the Shogunate had visited the United States and Europe in the 1860s, so the new government needed to make its presence known. Secondly, the delegates sought to renegotiate the unequal treaties that the Tokugawa had made with foreign powers. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the participants of the mission were to study, observe, and learn about modern industrial, political, military, educational, and trading systems in the United States and Europe. At the head of the delegation was Iwakura Tomomi, a longstanding statesman and a cousin of the former Emperor Komei, who had liaised the Five Charter Oath of Emperor Meiji, and would later become a major reformer of Japan's financial system and land prefecture system. Considered very wise and moderate, Tomomi was an advisor to the Emperor and the principal figures in the Meiji Restoration. Other members of the delegation included two of the 'Meiji Oligarchs', Okubo Toshimichi and Kido Takayoshi, and Ito Hirobumi, a samurai of Choshu who would later serve as the first Prime Minister of Japan.

Sailing from Yokohama on the *SS America* in December 1871, the Iwakura mission arrived in San Francisco to a friendly welcome as the group observed educational and university systems, rail networks, and other industrial operations in centres such as Boston, New York, and Washington. The primary aim of this leg of the itinerary was, however, outright unsuccessful: There was no way that the United States were going to renegotiate the Harris Treaty. The delegation then sailed for Great Britain on the steamer Olympus, arriving at Manchester and travelling onward to London. After visiting the British Museum and the Royal Dockyards, the party dispersed to keenly observe industrial and shipbuilding centres in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Manchester, Newcastle and Bradford. The saw gun manufactures, mining operations, chemical works, as well as hospitals, schools, parks, and libraries. Most of these things were very new to the Japanese. Although English commentators were impressed with the delegates' dress and manners, and they held an audience with Queen Victoria, there were to be no treaty renegotiations with Britain either. They travelled onward through France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, Italy, and Switzerland until finally returning to Yokohama via Egypt, Singapore, and Hong Kong in September 1873. When the Iwakura mission returned, they had seen a large part of the most advanced countries of the western world, and had learned what truly modernized countries needed.

A strong nation needed institutions that cultivated legitimacy amongst the people: rule of law, banks, hospitals, public libraries, schools, railways, shipping lines, civil codes, and industrialised agriculture. But more importantly, a genuinely strong, civilised nation with the respect of the international community needed a strong constitution and advanced armed forces.

And so, the transformation of Japan began in earnest. It was akin to a Japanese 'industrial revolution'. The Iwakura mission had initiated a state-led industrialisation program, designed to rapidly build Japan's economy, and expand industrial and military capacity. Above all, these developments consolidated all of the Japan's activity under one overarching government that could oversee a national-scale effort. Feuding domains, or interests of individual regions or clans were discouraged in the spirit of the new modern age, as well as in reform policies. The new Imperial Government built railroads, upgraded roads, installed telegraph cables, invested in factories and agricultural science stations, and introduced universal education for all children. By the 1880s, there had been massive land reforms, along with new parliamentary systems, a robust corporate business framework, known as *zaibatsu*, and the central Bank of Japan that could further fund industry and issue national currency, the yen.

To help fund these developments, the Government needed to reform its tax base. A big target for reform more generally was the antiquated agricultural sector. Previously, taxes had been collected from rural peasants in percentages of rice or other agricultural yield, the principal farmer of a given plot of land having to surrender the produce to the collector personally. This was a system prone to inconsistencies, and indeed to corruption and abuse. It also provided an unstable tax base for the new central government and was a deterrent to the acceptance and circulation of currency. The old feudal domains had already been converted to governorships in 1868, when the Emperor asserted his position. In 1871, upon returning from the Iwakura mission, Okubo Toshimichi, along with Kido, Saigo Takamori and others, organised to abolish the system altogether, and create a system of prefectures with government-nominated appointees to govern them, who could voice their concerns in a series of local level consulative assemblies. Former daimyo-turned-governors were given generous pensions. However, despite being granted the power of debate at the local level, political representation at higher levels was some time away still. Constitutional government and democratic principles were difficult for Japanese political sensibilities to reconcile, and despite the creation of a Senate and a new Supreme Court in the Osaka Conference of 1875, the nature of the land governance reforms were more in keeping with strengthening government control than granting liberties to individuals. Furthering this trend towards consolidating the land governance system reform, in 1873 the Daijokan issued a Land Tax Reform ordinance, largely designed by Okubo Toshimichi. Overhauling the old system almost entirely, the new standardised land tax

system calculated the amount payable based on the cash value of the land's harvest potential, rather than simply taking a percentage of actual yield. This rate was set at 3% of the value. Furthermore, the tax was now payable in cash, not crops, and the landowner – usually, formerly the feudal daimyo – was liable for its payment, not the farmer. The practice effects of this reform were not only to stabilise the tax revenue for the government and encourage the use of cash, which was a necessary measure after the initial troubles of the 1871 New Currency Act, which consolidated the individual coinages across the old domains into a national currency, the Yen, but also, perhaps as a side effect, this new system began to articulate the private ownership of land in Japan.

With this new system, however, came new demands for the population of Japan. Transferring to cash payments and meeting the projected harvest potentials for their plots of land proved difficult for many local landholders and the farmers. Meeting higher demand for food and other products for increasing population, and higher numbers of visitors to the towns, placed extra burden on the agricultural regions. But most significantly, it was a new burden on the agrarian population that triggered anger and rebellion amongst peasant and samurai alike. It was the notorious Conscription Law of 1873. This was to be one of the most drastic and enduring changes to Japanese society, politics, military, and life in general of the Meiji reforms.

Reforming Japan's armed forces was one of the driving goals of the modernisation program of the Imperial Government. Vast improvements in military technology, naval advances, production and purchasing of artillery and firearms had occurred alongside the philosophical and statecraft aspects of wakon yosai. Military leaders such as Saigo Takamori's cousin, Oyama Iwao, had been sent to France to study the arts of war at the same time as the Iwakura Mission. Oyama Iwao, a respected samurai, had officially observed the Franco-Prussian War, and was impressed by the Prussian military performance. Consequently, a formal invitation was sent to Helmuth von Moltke, to send instructors to Japan, which he obliged by sending one of his most talented officers, Jakob Meckel, to train Japanese officers. The Imperial Japanese Army had been overhauled in the German style, from infrastructure to uniforms and tactical training. The Japanese Navy, benefitting from sustained friendly relations with the British Royal Navy, was swiftly becoming one of the finest in the world. While still having most ships built overseas until the 1890s, newly educated Japanese engineers were overseeing shipbuilding in British dockyards that had significant maritime observers commenting that the British were building ships for Japan of better quality than those of the Royal Navy.

The world was watching as Japan became more powerful at arms during the 1870s. But what needed to change the most, however, was its numbers. The army drew exclusively from the

samurai class, who had traditionally fought for clan-based causes under the Emperor. The traditional martial class of the Samurai was a cultural as well as political institution in Japanese society, its members ferociously proud of their status and traditions. The peasantry of the land was well accustomed to respecting the samurai superiority, and not having their own sons sent to war. The Conscription Law of 1873 dismantled life for both groups. It dictated mandatory military service of three years, with a further four in reserve, for all men in the twenties, drawn by lots. For those not chosen for active service, a term of twenty years in the national militia was required. While this solved the numbers problem for the Imperial Armed Forces, it enraged the agrarian communities, and deeply offended the most the samurai. For the peasantry, it meant that valuable labour on the farms was lost, and now their own sons were being sent to be killed at war. Or as it was said, 'their blood was to quench the thirst of foreigners'. A number of agrarian riots broke out, but they were short lived, as the primitive weapons of the farmers were no match for the modern firearms wielded by the very conscripts they were protesting. Over time, and especially once it became realised that conscripted soldiers not only earned honour in battle but could also send money home to help with the new cash taxes, general acceptance of the new Conscription Law amongst the peasantry took hold.

The Samurai, however, were not so easily placated. During bakumatsu and the first decade of wakon yosai, many samurai did not fare so well in the new order that was being established. Not all had managed to work their way into position of government, and still relied on their marital roles, which became desperate when their stipends, traditionally granted by the daimyos, were removed with the landholding class. Many had fallen into practical poverty, the historical prestige of their warrior class being the last element of pride that remained. This group, of 'former samurai', forced by the reforms into a new role, were known as shizoku. Despite their first loyalty to the Emperor and support of his new government, there were many culturally traditionalist samurai still throughout Japan, who resented the effective removal of their class status with universal conscription. Traditionalists amongst the samurai were not confined to those who had not fared well in the Meiji reforms, either. Significantly influential samurai also began to feel the social insult to their way of life, known as *bushido* (or, 'the way of the warrior') as the reforms gained unstoppable momentum. What place in the new Japan did the samurai have? The rapid onset of modernisation, with its tendency to corruption and frivolity, had deteriorated the morality of Japanese society in the eyes of many traditional samurai, whose understanding of morality and honour was very high and antique. One important samurai who wrestled with these issues was none other than the longstanding member of the Meiji Oligarchy, Saigo Takamori.

After having his plans for an invasion of Korea rejected, Saigo Takamori resigned his positions in government and returned to his hometown in Kagoshima. There he found many Satsuma ex-samurai shizoku, many with no purpose or income, and in order to employ these men, Takamori founded a series of private training academies, the Shi-gakko, which spread quickly through the area. This created some worry in Tokyo amongst the Imperial Government, who had been quelling smaller samurai uprisings in other areas, as the academies were effectively training private warriors, in a paramilitary arrangement, with an experienced and respected former government member and samurai at its head. Takamori had more than once been outspoken and acted in a vigilante way, he commanded the respect of many due to his personal abilities and skills, and the Satsuma samurai were historically troublesome to central authorities. By 1876, support for Saigo Takamori's academies was so strong, it effectively isolated him from the new central government. That year, the final insult to the samurai was issued in the Haito Edict, that forbade the carrying of swords. Highly suspicious of rebellious activity amongst highly disgruntled samurai and shizoku, the government sent spies into the academies, who when discovered, confessed under torture that they were sent to assassinate Saigo Takamori. Any pretence of friendliness now gone, the government sent a warship into Kagoshima in early 1877, to confiscate weapons, which combined with a formal removal of samurai rice stipends at the same time, set the conditions for Takamori and his students to engage in conflict. Takamori's students successfully attacked arsenals and dockyards, which drew the semi-retired Takamori back to the battlefield, against his own former ally, Okubo Toshimichi, who personally took charge of putting down this rebellion. As one samurai returned to the political arena, another left, with the death from illness of Kido Takayoshi, formerly Katsura Kogoro, Takamori's long-time collaborator and co-founder of the Restoration. The Three Great Nobles, the Meiji Oligarchy, had turned on each other. By February 1877, the Satsuma Rebellion had started, and by its end in September that year, the great samurai of Japanese society had made their last heroic stand at Shiroyima, when Saigo Takamori and the last standing forty samurai charged to their deaths, swords in poetically in hand, fighting the new order that he had himself helped to create.

Saigo Takamori's legend lived on. He became a national heroic figure, the last bastion of 'true' bushido, and ironically, a model of duty and virtue for future Japanese soldiers to emulate. Just like the last Shogun, his legacy was redeployed for the New Japan. The Imperial Army, the result of the modernisation and the ranks of which were filled with the conscripted peasants wielding the best of modern firearms, had finally closed the last chapter of Old Japan. But it had come at a heavy cost. In fact, defeating Saigo Takamori and the Satsuma samurai had nearly bankrupted the government. As well as skyrocketing the national debt and forcing a reduction in the newly instilled

land tax, squashing the Satsuma Rebellion forced the government to sell off some of its finest trophies of modernisation: its factories, mines, and other state-owned industrial enterprises. The buyers were well connected merchants and officials who often acquired these lucrative industries for a ridiculously low price. Collecting up businesses prompted the need for corporate models, which emerged in a particularly Japanese style of conglomerate, known as the *zaibatsu*. These zaibatsu companies, such as Mistui and Mitsubishi created enormous wealth for classes of Japanese society not traditionally influential or prestigious, and formed the model of Japanese corporate conglomerates for over a century to come.

In 1878, another reshuffling of power in Japanese politics was set in motion by the assassination of Okubo Toshimichi, by a supporter of Saigo Takamori. This event, removing the most influential politician in the Meiji Oligarchy, cleared the way for even greater changes to unfold as a transformed Japan entered the 1890s.

Conclusion: Northern Barbarians and Imperial Japan's arrival on the world stage

By the end of the nineteenth century, Japan had accomplished massive reforms to become a serious presence in the world of industrialising powers. It had overhauled its land system, its social classes, its industries and its armed forces. Yet it had retained its sense of Japanese identity, with the continuity of the Emperor as its head of state. The last frontier for Japanese modernisation was constitutional. In the wake of Okubo Toshimichi's death, another Oligarch who had been on the Iwakura Mission and actively in favour of western-style governments, Ito Hirabumi, began to gain more power. He studied constitutions in practice in Europe in the early 1880s, and established a new peerage system in Japan, the Kazoku, in 1884. The following year, Ito Hirabumi became Japan's first Prime Minister in a newly established Cabinet government, that replaced the Daijokan. Japan was accelerating towards another level of sophisticated government. But aside for suppressing the Satsuma Rebellion, its new and powerful armed forces had not been witnessed by the other powers. This would change profoundly from the 1890s, when Japan, with a new constitution and a powerful navy, demonstrated one of the most important the outcomes of its rapid modernisation: its capabilities in the theatre of war. Victories in the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894, and a successful invasion of Taiwan the following year, saw Japan become a worthy ally of victorious world powers against China in 1899. But the real tests were still to come. The toughest enemy Japan had yet faced lay to the north, in the Russian Empire and its interests in Manchuria. Facing a formidable world power, the Imperial Japanese Navy engaged in war and won a decisive victory at battle of Tsushima, culminating in a total victory that impressed the world

powers and contributed to Russia's own revolution. Most importantly, the peace treaty, the Treaty of Portsmouth, was negotiated by the United States on its own soil, and the Japanese negotiated with the ferocity and skill of a people on an equal standing.

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