



The Meiji Restoration

At this point, while the bakufu and many domains were still struggling with their unresolved problems, the foreign crisis developed and very suddenly brought matters to a head. We may think of it as a catalyst, speeding up the reaction to pressing domestic problems that otherwise might have been allowed to continue unresolved for some time longer.

The foreign crisis quickly galvanized the forces of change. The remarkable responsiveness of Japanese society to the Western challenge is thus, in part, to be understood as resulting from the gradual buildup of social and economic problems during the preceding century. Had Japan not been characterized at this time by institutional incapacity, widespread social unrest, and an anxious groping by political leaders for new reform measures, the Japanese response would doubtless have been more ponderous and reluctant.

Tokugawa Foreign Relations

Let us begin by considering the background of the foreign crisis. One of the key control measures instituted by the founders of the Tokugawa system was the strict management of foreign relations. The most striking part of this effort was the restriction of contacts with the outside world. In the early 1800s the term *sakoku*, meaning closed country, began to be used to describe the policy of national isolation. In actuality, Tokugawa Japan was not so totally isolated as is sometimes thought.

Historians are increasingly inclined to believe that the primary intent of the seclusion edicts between 1633 and 1639 was to enhance the legitimacy of the shogunate by resolutely bringing foreign relations under its control. The eradication of Christianity and the restrictions on travel abroad were indicative not so much of isolationist sentiment as

of the bakufu's determination to establish its authority both internally and externally. Because Japan's relations with the Western world were drastically restricted, Western historians may have overemphasized the degree of Japanese seclusion during the Tokugawa Period. "The bakufu," writes Ronald Toby, "never intended entirely to isolate Japan from foreign intercourse."¹ Politically, culturally, and commercially, Japan's foreign relations with Asia continued to thrive. "As a result," Marius Jansen observes, "sakoku seems more symbol than fact."² Although only 700 or so Dutch ships entered the port of Nagasaki over the next two centuries, private trade with Chinese merchants was far greater. Between 1635 and 1852 more than 5,500 Chinese ships came to Nagasaki. Commerce with Korea through the island domain of Tsushima grew to significant proportions, and in recognition of its importance Korea dispatched twelve official embassies to Japan during the Tokugawa Period. Trade with the Ryukyus, which brought goods from China and Southeast Asia, was acknowledged by more than twenty embassies to the Tokugawa Bakufu. Through the visits of Korean and Ryukyuan emissaries, imported books, and reports prepared by Dutch and Chinese ship captains, the shogunate established channels to gain news of the outside world. One of Japan's leading cultural historians recently sized up the "seclusion" policies as

the embodiment of Tokugawa political wisdom. Seclusion eliminated the factor of instability in foreign relations and let the shogunate focus its energies on perfecting the administrative setup. At the same time, the country wasn't really walled off. You might say it was surrounded at most by a bamboo blind or a silk curtain that let the breeze in and allowed the administration to maintain a balance between internal and external pressures in both the economic and cultural spheres. The shogunate could bring in the things it needed and keep out what it didn't. It could take in all the information it needed and keep out what it didn't. It could take in all the information it found useful without letting out any information it didn't want to. In this way it ensured the nation's security, both externally and internally. It was brilliant. . . . For all the talk of seclusion, Japan was probably receiving more information from other countries than any other non-Western country of the time.³

Obtaining knowledge of the outside world was largely the work of a small number of Japanese known as "Dutch scholars," who were familiar with Western technology and science. As early as 1720, the seclusion edicts had been eased to the extent of allowing Western books to circulate in Japan as long as they did not expound Christian doctrine. This decision was made by Tokugawa Yoshimune, a shogun who had a serious interest in the Western calendar as well as curiosity

about astronomy, watchmaking, geography, and other topics he learned about from the agents of the Dutch trading station who visited Edo. By the mid-eighteenth century some translation work was beginning and "Dutch studies" gained importance as the efficacy of Western medicine began to be demonstrated. By the eve of Commodore Perry's arrival, as a result of the small but growing number of Dutch scholars, the Japanese had a considerable store of knowledge of the West and of its technology. They had access to translations of Western treatises on astronomy, chemistry, geography, mathematics, physics, and (as attention turned to problems of defense) on ballistics, metallurgy, and military tactics. Many scholars have argued that, at that time, knowledge of Western science was already more widespread in Japan than in any other Asian country.

It was only in the early nineteenth century, when Dutch supremacy in the Far East had ended and other Western powers began aggressive challenges to the bakufu's system of foreign affairs, that the seclusion policy assumed a more negative, inflexible, and xenophobic form. National isolation became more a reality as the bakufu took new steps to close the country by announcing that Westerners would be expelled by force. In its Expulsion Edict of 1825, the bakufu declared that Western barbarians "have become steadily more unruly, and, moreover, seem to be propagating their wicked religion among our people. . . . Henceforth whenever a foreign ship is sighted approaching any point on our coast, all persons on hand should fire on and drive it off."⁴

Although this edict was moderated somewhat in 1842 to permit foreign ships to receive supplies before being forced to leave, the policy of national isolation had now become the inviolable law of the land. In the face of new, aggressive challenges from the West, the bakufu expected to uphold this policy by force if necessary.

The Coming of the Foreign Crisis

In contrast to domestic problems, which had been developing since the Genroku Period, the foreign intervention occurred abruptly, with a suddenness and intensity surely unexpected by most politically conscious Japanese. There had been forewarnings—occasional omens—as early as the 1790s, but they were infrequent and easily forgotten in the press of more immediate concerns.

Russia had posed the initial problems. Its envoys and traders began appearing on the islands north of Hokkaido in the 1790s, seeking to open trade relations with Japan. In every case they were rebuffed, and after 1813 there was no further contact for several decades. In the meantime, however, the British, having extended their power

into India and Malaysia, had begun to build up a China trade and to probe Japanese coastal waters. A series of incidents ensued, beginning in 1808 when a British frigate sailed into Nagasaki harbor demanding supplies of food and water. It was not, however, until word was received of the Opium War (1839–1842) in China, which ended in British acquisition of Hong Kong and the forced opening of five ports to British trade and residence, that concern spread in Japan that a serious challenge to the policy of restricting foreign contacts was imminent. To the Japanese who thought about it, expanding British power in the Far East represented a distinct threat. The Dutch, in fact, acting through their trading station representatives in Nagasaki, warned the bakufu in 1844 of the situation and urged that the country be opened voluntarily before Western nations undertook to force Japan to this decision.

As it transpired, while Britain was preoccupied with its new involvement in China, the United States took the lead in forcefully testing the bakufu's policies. The opening of Chinese treaty ports presaged a new era of national rivalry among the Western powers in the Far East with America too acquiring trading interests on the China coast. Taken with the settlement of the disputed claims to the Oregon Territory in 1846 and the acquisition of California in 1848, these interests gave the American government cause for much greater attention to Pacific affairs. In 1852 President Millard Fillmore approved the mission that would be headed by Commodore Perry to try to establish relations with the Japanese government. The Perry mission originated in the desire to protect shipwrecked American sailors and to acquire coaling stations and the right for ships to take on provisions. But deeper than those reasons lay the hope for trade and the conviction that America had a destiny to expand its interests in the Pacific.

Although apprised by the Dutch of the mission well in advance, the bakufu was nonetheless uncertain how to deal with it. When Perry arrived with his squadron of four ships and anchored off the coast on July 8, 1853, political opinion in Edo was confused and divided. Almost all of those who thought about the problem were agreed on the need for strengthening defenses to meet the threat of foreign attack. On other questions of foreign policy, thought was sharply divided between the *kaikoku* (open country) school and the *jōi* (expel the barbarian) school.

The *kaikoku* school was closely associated with and drew its strength from "Dutch learning" (*rangaku*), the work of a small number of Japanese scholars who had been compiling knowledge of the West. Keenly aware of the West's more advanced technology and of Japan's military weakness, the Dutch scholars argued pragmatically that Japan needed Western weapons and techniques to defend itself; therefore it must avoid war with a Western power, at least until it had a

chance to strengthen itself—even if that meant giving in to foreign demands for the opening of ports.

Those who favored opening the country were generally of what we have called the realist school of reform thought, regarding foreign trade as an opportunity for bakufu profit and therefore as contributing directly to the solution of the financial problems of government. Of course a good deal of variation was found among those who advocated an open country, but most of them saw it primarily as a matter of national defense. They saw an open country not necessarily as good in itself but rather as a means to create a strong and independent Japan.

One of the leaders of this kind of argument was Sakuma Shōzan (1811–1864), a samurai-scholar who exercised considerable influence, partly through his followers and partly through his lord, who was a bakufu councillor. As a young man he studied Western gunnery, and then, turning to other aspects of Dutch studies, became convinced of the critical importance of such technology to his country's defense. In particular, his thinking was influential for its insistence on the application of pragmatic ideas rather than abstract moral principles. Thus he referred again and again to his belief that "Eastern ethics and Western science" were both proper in their separate spheres. Confucian morals remained valid as a criterion for personal behavior, but it was necessary for political leaders to look beyond Confucian scholarship for answers to the practical problems of governance. Impressed by the example of Peter the Great, he proposed the appointment of "men of talent in military strategy, planning, and administration" to carry out a program of national strengthening by establishing relations with foreign countries, obtaining the advantages of foreign technology, and building up defense through a new political structure.

Sakuma was assassinated in 1864. His views had been violently opposed by *jōi* samurai, who passionately believed that opening the country would bring political and cultural disaster. To them China's defeat in the Opium War was attributable less to Western military techniques than to the contamination of Chinese society by Western customs and religion. *Jōi* thinking was often pervaded by an intense xenophobia and by a national consciousness and zealous commitment to the imperial institution as the mystic embodiment of the Japanese nation we saw in the last chapter in the writings of the nativist and Mito scholars.

Aizawa Seishisai of the Mito School, whose *New Theses* (*Shinron*) inspired the *jōi* samurai, wrote in 1825, for example, that Western countries represented less a military than an ideological threat. They were able to cultivate a spiritual unity and allegiance in their people through their state cult of Christianity. By indoctrinating their peoples with a state religion, Western rulers achieved mass loyalty both in their own peoples and in those they colonized. In this way they were

able to enlist the common people into large armies and mobilize their energies in pursuit of state goals:

The Western barbarians . . . all believe in the same religion, Christianity, which they use to annex territories. Wherever they go, they destroy native houses of worship, deceive the local peoples, and seize those lands. These barbarians will settle for nothing less than subjugating the rulers of all nations and conscripting all peoples into their ranks. . . . Should the wily barbarians someday be tempted to take advantage of this situation and entice our stupid commoners to adopt beliefs and customs that reek of barbarism how could we stop them?⁵

To counter the ideological threat the bakufu should have the Emperor propagate a Japanese state religion to cultivate national unity and mass loyalty. Aizawa called this spiritual unity *kokutai* or "what is essential to make a people into a nation." Lacking this popular allegiance Japan was in jeopardy. "Should the barbarians win over our people's hearts and minds, they will have captured the realm without a skirmish."⁶ In retrospect we can see that Aizawa was asserting the need for nationalism—what in Japan later was called the "emperor system"—in order to integrate the common people into the struggles of the nation.

A similar defense of *jōi* was offered by Confucianists, who thought that Western religion would undermine the ethical basis of Japanese society and who believed that Western trade, bringing greater wealth to merchants, would in turn be destructive of morals. They did not accept Sakuma Shōzan's pragmatic advocacy of preserving traditional ethical values while adopting the new technology. "To say that we can accept Western science although we must reject Western moral teaching as evil and wrong," wrote the conservative Ōhashi Totsuan, "is like telling people that although the mainstream of a river is poisoned yet they can safely drink from the sidestreams."⁷ In a sense, he and like-minded Confucianists were right. The threat was cultural, for it would be impossible (as was subsequently demonstrated) to preserve traditional values unchanged once Western science was accepted.

In their moral conservatism the *jōi* advocates appeared to have much in common with the fundamentalist school of domestic reform. They saw positive benefit in armed resistance to the Westerners, for they expected hostilities to revive samurai morale and to restore habits of discipline and frugality. Furthermore, they regarded foreign trade as harmful, bringing a loss of specie and further disruption of the economy. Nevertheless, the *jōi* samurai were symptomatic of the alternative visions of order discussed in the last chapter. They seemed to be conservative because of their opposition to Westerners, but in reality

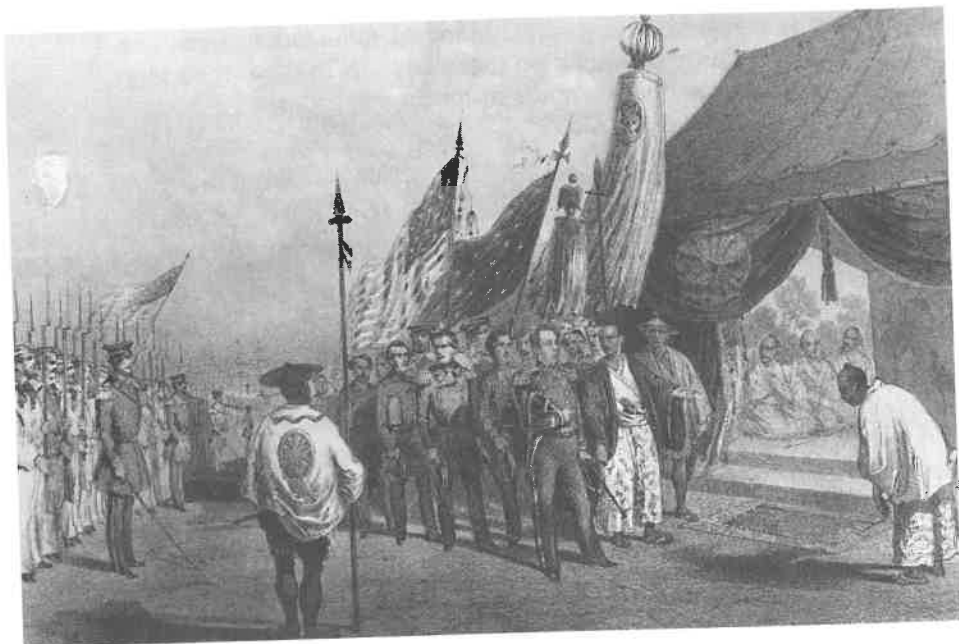
they could be a revolutionary force. Many of them proved open to change if it would provide a solution to the crisis in Tokugawa society, a new basis of social solidarity, and a restoration of order.

The Treaties

Commodore Perry presented his demands for treaty relations in the summer of 1853 and then withdrew, warning that he would return the following spring for an answer. Abe Masahirō, the head of the bakufu's Council of Elders and the effective head of government owing to the incompetence of the shogun, temporized. Faced with sharp divisions of opinion, aware that antiforeign feeling was strong but believing that Western demands could not long be resisted, he sought to gain consensus by requesting all the daimyo to express their opinions regarding American demands. This unprecedented step amounted to a confession of the bakufu's weakness, nor did the daimyo's responses produce the basis for concerted action vis-à-vis the foreign powers. "Abe's policy of government by consensus," writes Bolitho, "was a disastrous mistake. In a sense it is understandable that Abe should have been receptive to the ideas of others. After all, he seems to have had very few of his own." When a translation of Millard Fillmore's letter was shown to the daimyo for their views it elicited a bewildering variety of responses:

Of those replies remaining to us, two favored accepting the American demands; two more favored accepting them for a while; three favored allowing the United States to trade, subject to certain other restrictions; one suggested allowing trade for a short time, while preparing to attack; three advocating treating the foreigners politely for a longer time, and then, once an adequate defense had been prepared, expelling them; four supported prolonged negotiations, preparing an adequate defense the while, and then refusing; eleven urged fighting on Perry's return; three were undecided. Clearly it was impossible to derive a mandate from this response. . . . By his policy of consultation, Abe managed to do the Tokugawa Bakufu a great deal of harm. At its best, the process was time-wasting, helping to defer decisions that should have been taken quickly. At its worst, it invited a degree of interference in Bakufu policy-making that was paralyzing in its effect.⁸

Within bakufu circles, during the winter of 1853–1854, policy was debated. The most powerful of the house (fudai) lords, Ii Naosuke, expressed what soon became the dominant view in the bakufu when he advocated a positive, *kaikoku* response, adding: "When one is besieged in a castle, to raise the drawbridge is to imprison oneself and



Commodore Perry arrives to meet with the Japanese. *National Archives*

make it impossible to hold out indefinitely."⁹ He therefore urged a period of trade that would allow Japan to acquire the knowledge necessary to defend her independence.

When Perry returned, this time with a flotilla of eight ships, the bakufu acceded to his demands. A treaty was signed on March 31, 1854 (the so-called Kanagawa Treaty of Friendship), which provided that two ports, Shimoda and Hakodate, would be opened to American ships and limited trade, and that an American consular agent was to be permitted to reside in Shimoda. Prior to the signing of the treaty there was a ceremony at which the Americans presented several tokens of their civilization as gifts, including a model railroad, a telegraph set, farm tools, and a hundred gallons of whiskey. The Japanese, for their part, put on a demonstration of *sumō* wrestling, and the Americans then responded with a minstrel show. Afterwards Perry, who had something of the self-confident and pompous air of another American military figure who arrived in Japan almost a century later, concluded that "Japan had been opened to the nations of the West" and that "the Japanese are, undoubtedly, like the Chinese, a very imitative, adaptive, and compliant people and in these characteristics may be discovered a promise of the comparatively easy introduction of foreign customs and habits, if not of the nobler principles and better life of a higher civilization."¹⁰

Shortly after the signing of the Kanagawa Treaty, the bakufu concluded similar treaties with Britain, Russia, and Holland. The shogunate took solace from having forestalled any large-scale opening to trade, but this comfort proved short-lived for, unsatisfied with anything less than full commercial treaties, the Western powers in succeeding years put increased pressure on the shogunate to grant still further concessions. Again, it was an American, Townsend Harris, who played the leading role. Harris came to Shimoda in 1856 as the first American consul. He set about at once to persuade the authorities that further opening to trade was inevitable and that it would be far better to conclude a reasonable agreement with his country than to await the forceful demands of other powers. As evidence, he pointed to the outbreak of the Anglo-French War in 1856 and to the likelihood that the British fleet assembled for the war against China would next be used to extract a commercial treaty from the Japanese. Harris's tact and persistence paid off. Hotta Masayoshi, who had succeeded Abe Masahirō as the senior member of the bakufu's Council of Elders, was convinced of the irresistibility of foreign demands as well as the positive benefit of foreign intercourse for the building of Japanese defenses. "Our policy," he concluded, "should be to stake everything on the present opportunity, to conclude friendly alliances, to send ships to foreign countries everywhere and conduct trade, to copy the foreigners where they are at their best and so repair our own shortcomings, to foster our national strength and complete our armaments, and so gradually subject the foreigners to our influence until in the end all the countries of the world know the blessings of perfect tranquillity and our hegemony is acknowledged throughout the globe."¹¹

On July 29, 1858, the Harris Treaty was signed. It became the model for similar treaties signed in the following weeks with Britain, France, Holland, and Russia. They provided essentially three things: (1) Edo, Kobe, Nagasaki, Niigata, and Yokohama were opened to foreign trade; (2) Japanese tariffs were placed under international control and import duties were fixed at low levels; and (3) a system of extraterritoriality was established, which provided that foreign residents would be subject to their own consular courts rather than to Japanese law.

These unequal treaties imposed for the first time in Japan's history extensive restrictions on its national sovereignty, and, while they did not require the cession of any territory (such as the powers required elsewhere in Asia), they placed Japan in a semicolonial status. In the long run the treaties became a symbol of the national impotence that was exposed by renewed contact with the West, and recovery of national independence and international respect became an overriding goal, which the Japanese pursued with extraordinary tenacity. In the short run the treaties ignited political conflict that destroyed bakufu

authority and led, a decade later, to the establishment of a new government.

Declining Fortunes of the Bakufu

By breaking with the 250-year tradition of the Tokugawa government and referring Perry's demands to all the lords for their frank opinion, the shogunate unwittingly encouraged open debate and criticism of all its policies. In this situation it became increasingly difficult to stop the unraveling of bakufu authority. In 1858 Hotta Masayoshi, the effective head of government, sought the approval of the imperial court to the draft of the Harris Treaty—tantamount to still further confession of weakness. He hoped thereby to defuse what he knew would be bitter opposition to the treaty, but he also revealed the declining authority of the bakufu, and, when the court refused, this was clear for all to see. Rebuffed by the newly emboldened Emperor and nobles, Hotta was forced to resign.

Under his replacement, Ii Naosuke, the strongest of the fudai lords, there was a brief resurgence of bakufu strength. Ii took forceful steps to assert his authority. Disregarding the attitude of the imperial court, he ordered the signing of the Harris Treaty and afterward compelled the court to give its consent. Then he ordered into retirement or house arrest all the daimyo who had opposed his policies. These strong-arm methods, however, further inflamed the bitterness that many fanatical samurai felt toward the bakufu for having conceded so much to the barbarians. On a snowy day in March 1860, as his procession was entering the gate of the shogun's castle, Ii was assassinated.

It was a decisive event. Ii's successors proved less able and less forceful than he; the full tide of antibakufu sentiment, which had been gathering since 1854, now swept over them. They were unable to control the flow of events that carried the bakufu toward its demise. After the assassination, opponents of the shogunate and its policies looked to the imperial court as a counterweight. The daimyo of Satsuma proposed a "union of court and bakufu" to improve the position of the court. The shogunate accepted the proposal, hoping to use the court's prestige to shore up its own, but to gain court backing it was forced to make several damaging concessions. The bakufu was compelled to appoint to high positions in the shogunate reform-minded officials who were to implement the "union." Under the influence of these officials, the bakufu approved a relaxation of its control measures, permitting family hostages to leave Edo and diminishing the alternate attendance requirement to a mere 100 days every 3 years. Symbolically, the most important concession was the agreement of the shogun that he would travel to Kyoto to consult with the court on national policies, thereby

rendering himself to some extent accountable to the Emperor. When Tokugawa Iemochi made the trip in the spring of 1863, even his extraordinary procession of 3,000 retainers could not conceal the momentous fact that it was the first time since the seventeenth century that a shogun had felt compelled to visit Kyoto.

In the aftermath of these concessions, the bakufu found it difficult to exercise its will over the most powerful daimyo. The domain of Chōshū tried to carry out an antiforeigner policy by firing on foreign vessels passing through the Shimonoseki Strait, adjacent to the domain. When, under pressure from the powers, the bakufu sent an emissary to Chōshū ordering that it desist, extremist samurai in the domain killed him as he fled after delivering the message. Shortly thereafter forces from Chōshū marched on Kyoto and attempted to stage a coup and establish its influence in the imperial court.

The attempt failed, but the shogunate decided to organize a punitive expedition to punish Chōshū's overt disobedience and its breaking of the Tokugawa peace. A force of 150,000 samurai, drawn from the chief domains, was assembled on the borders of Chōshū in late 1864, but the participation of many of the domains was half-hearted and the bakufu therefore could not plan a sustained campaign. Instead, through the mediation of Saigō Takamori of Satsuma, a lenient settlement was agreed upon, requiring a formal apology and the suicide of three senior officials held to be responsible for the attempted coup in Kyoto.

Despite the qualified character of its success, the bakufu took heart from this assertion of its leadership. It tried to achieve total restoration of its authority by reimposing the alternate attendance system, by sending troops to Kyoto to establish control over the court, and by acquiring French technical assistance in building up its military strength. The specter of a bakufu attempt to reestablish its former supremacy alienated many lords and brought the two most powerful domains, Chōshū and Satsuma, together in a secret alliance to work for the restoration of imperial rule. The alliance became operative in 1866 when the shogunate, confronted with renewed defiance from Chōshū, organized a second punitive expedition. This time several of the major domains, including Satsuma, refused to participate; Chōshū, using modern weapons and buoyed by superior morale, roundly defeated the bakufu forces, who sued for peace and withdrew.

Samurai Activists

In the last chapter we discussed the deep discontent among able lower-ranking warriors, who felt unjustly cut off from higher office by the rigidities of the hereditary system. This latent discontent came to

the surface in many of the prominent domains after Perry's arrival, for the treaties raised fierce emotions and opened up political issues to much wider discussion. Moreover, they created a sense of crisis in which the argument for promoting men of talent took on new force, and the effectiveness of the traditional ruling segment of the samurai was more insistently called into question.

Not only were the new activists of lower rank, they were young—representatives of a generation that was to provide Japan with new leadership in the aftermath of the Meiji Restoration. Because of their temperament, their involvement in plots and conspiracies, and their resort to violence and assassination, many were known as *shishi* (men of spirit). They were a wenching, impulsive, devil-may-care type of young man, passionately devoted to the imperial cause, which they called the highest loyalty of all. "The shishi had no care for the morrow. He was brave, casual, carefree, took himself very seriously where 'first things' were concerned, and was utterly indifferent where they were not. Irresponsible in many matters, he was also a roisterer, given to wine and women."¹² Flouting conventional standards of morality and feudal discipline, the shishi were symptomatic of a search for a more satisfying loyalty and for a new political and social order.

Lacking a clear revolutionary program, they reacted to Perry's coming with a burst of emotion that was initially directed at the barbarian. Only after the bakufu acquiesced in the Harris Treaty did they vent their fury on the shogunate and others of the ruling elite, whom they held personally responsible for the plight of Japan. Ii Naosuke and many other officials were assassinated by shishi angered at their failure to expel the foreigner.

Yoshida Shoin (1830–1859) is one of the best remembered of these activists for the influence he had on Chōshū samurai. He studied under Sakuma Shōzan in Edo, became convinced of the need for Western learning for the defense of Japan, and attempted to leave Japan with Perry's squadron to continue his studies in America. He was apprehended by bakufu officials and returned to Chōshū, where he opened a school and gathered about him a group of shishi passionately committed to the imperial institution and to national defense. Among his group of students were future leaders of modern Japan, including Yamagata Aritomo and Itō Hirobumi. The signing of the Harris Treaty of 1858 aroused them, as it did shishi all over the country, to violent action. The fury that had previously been directed at the barbarians was now turned on the bakufu. In many domains young samurai of all ranks became involved in politics, and fanatical activity by shishi sought the removal of "evil" officials who stood in the way of radical opposition to the foreigners.

The shishi, however, were soon given convincing demonstrations of the irresistibility of Western military power, which served to calm

their fanaticism and redirect their energies along more thoughtful paths of action. In Chōshū the attacks in 1864 by the combined fleets of Great Britain, France, Holland, and the United States, precipitated by the domain's attempt to close the Shimonoseki Strait to foreign shipping, convinced many samurai activists of the futility of opposing Western demands for commercial rights.

Word of such demonstrations of Western military strength traveled, and by 1865 it had combined with increased knowledge of the outside world in general to create a widespread acceptance among activists and officials alike that military reform was essential, and that in order to buy expensive ships and weapons foreign trade was imperative. What was more, to build such weapons a knowledge of science and technology was required. By this time, many military reformers were also ready to acknowledge the organizational needs of industry and finance, and some were beginning to speculate about the reorganization. It was the combined action of Chōshū and Satsuma that brought the latter phase to fruition.

Chōshū-Satsuma Alliance

As we have seen, these two outer domains, which had been vanquished in the battles that established the Tokugawa hegemony, emerged rapidly in the years after Perry's arrival to play the leading roles in the overthrow of the shogunate and the establishment of a new government. A number of reasons impelled them to take the lead. As outer domains excluded from the central government and generally distrusted by the shogunate, they had a tradition of hostility toward the Tokugawa. Craig tells us of some of the ways this anti-Tokugawa bias was kept alive in Chōshū:

One ceremony embodying this animus was held annually on the first day of the new year. Early in the morning when the first cock crowed, the Elders and Direct Inspectors would go to the daimyo and ask, "Has the time come to begin the subjugation of the Bakufu?" The daimyo would then reply, "It is still too early; the time is not yet come." While obviously secret, this ceremony was considered one of the most important rituals of the han. Another comparable custom in a more domestic setting has also been recorded. Mothers in Chōshū would have their boys sleep with their feet to the east, a form of insult to the Bakufu, and tell them "never to forget the defeat at Sekigahara even in their dreams." In the case of Satsuma, every year on the fourteenth day of the ninth month the castle town samurai would don their armor and go to Myōenji, a temple near Kagoshima, to meditate on the battle of Sekigahara.¹³

Of more immediate importance than those formless thoughts of revenge was the fact that both domains were among the very largest in terms of productive capacity and both had an unusually large number of samurai. They were therefore extremely strong domains, and their strength was enhanced by financial solvency. Chōshū for nearly a century had regularly saved a portion of its income and had invested it in profitable enterprises, thus accumulating capital that could be used in time of emergency. Satsuma owed its solvency to a highly profitable state-operated sugar monopoly. These resources contributed to high morale in the samurai class and enabled Chōshū and Satsuma during the 1860s to buy rifles, cannons, and ships. Without the 7,000 rifles that it purchased from the West, Chōshū probably would have been defeated in the second bakufu punitive expedition. Still another advantage that favored the two outer domains was the fact that commercial development had not progressed so far there as in many areas more centrally located, and as a consequence class unrest had been less erosive of morale than in places close to the major urban centers.

For these reasons, as bakufu authority began to crumble, Chōshū and Satsuma emerged as the leading domains in the struggle to resolve the national crisis. At first they were rivals, each proposing its own solution to the crisis. Satsuma, as we have seen, became identified with the proposal of a "union of court and bakufu"; in 1862 it was able to win important concessions from the bakufu in the appointment of reformist officials, the moderation of the alternate attendance requirement, and the agreement for the shogun to travel to Kyoto to consult on national policy. Chōshū, on the other hand, put forth a rival and more extreme proposal for solution of the national crisis, favoring a more resolutely proimperial court stand and demanding the expulsion of the foreigners.

By the end of 1864 it became apparent to both domains that neither plan alone was satisfactory. After the shelling of its forts by the combined foreign fleet, Chōshū's leadership had to acknowledge the futility of expelling the barbarians. Satsuma, for its part, was dismayed by the bakufu attempts to assert its traditional supremacy in 1864–1865 by reinstating the alternate attendance system, dispatching troops to Kyoto to establish control of the court, and gaining French technical assistance to build up its own power. In this situation, the antagonism between Chōshū and Satsuma was gradually overcome by their mutual interest in preventing a reassertion of Tokugawa supremacy.

In Chōshū, after the first bakufu punitive expedition, a civil war occurred that brought to power a new han government determined to press the struggle against the shogunate. The new government owed its triumph to mixed rifle units of samurai and commoners, some of which were commanded by former followers of Yoshida Shoin. When

in August 1866 the bakufu sought to topple this new government and organized its second punitive expedition against Chōshū, it faced an army that was better disciplined and armed. Moreover, Satsuma this time refused to participate in the expedition, for the two domains had earlier that year concluded a secret alliance pledging mutual support. Chōshū's easy victory over bakufu forces obviated the need for overt aid from Satsuma. A year later, however, the two domains openly joined forces to administer the coup de grace to the demoralized shogunate. Acting in collusion with friendly elements in the imperial court, they seized the palace on January 3, 1868, and had the boy Emperor, Mutsuhito (1852–1912; later known as the Meiji Emperor), proclaim the end of the Tokugawa regime and the restoration of imperial rule. In the ensuing weeks, Chōshū and Satsuma troops, now calling themselves imperial forces, engaged the bakufu army and, though outnumbered, quickly put it to flight. After two and a half centuries the Tokugawa Shogunate had come to an astonishingly sudden end.

The Significance of the Meiji Restoration

Much controversy has surrounded the Meiji Restoration, and the problems of interpreting its meaning have sharply divided historians. Should it be called a "revolution"? Was it motivated primarily by class interests or by ideology? What was the extent of Western influence? What was the relation between long-range socioeconomic change in the Tokugawa Period and the reforms that came after 1868? What role, if any, did the populace play in these events?

If we were to look at the events up to 1868 and no farther, then it is possible to see only a coup d'état—the displacement of one feudal group by another. Satsuma and Chōshū vanquished the Tokugawa, much as the reverse had occurred over two and a half centuries earlier. Thus Albert Craig concludes that "the Meiji Restoration was not a revolution, not a change in the name of new values—such as *liberté*, *égalité*, and *fraternité* in the French Revolution. Rather, it was what is far more common in history, a change carried out in the name of old values. It was a change brought about by men intent on fulfilling the goals of their inherited tradition. It was a change brought about unwittingly by men who before 1868 had no conception of its eventual social ramifications."¹⁴ Studying the Tokugawa downfall from the perspective of Chōshū's motivation in joining Satsuma, Craig was impressed by the weakness of class consciousness, the strength of the vertical ties of samurai loyalty to the han, and the passive attachment of commoners to local political units. The morale of samurai in Chōshū was high. They were motivated to oppose the bakufu not by economic grievances but rather by their long-standing enmity toward the clan that

had done in their ancestors centuries before. Craig concludes that "dissatisfactions . . . were not the sole or even the chief internal factor determining the course of the Restoration. On the contrary . . . the Restoration stemmed more from the strength of the values and institutions of the old society than from their weaknesses."¹⁵

The strength of traditional institutions and values helps explain the Restoration but not the revolution that ensued after 1868. Why did the Chōshū and Satsuma forces, if they were intent on preserving their traditional values and institutions, not build another bakufu? Why did they proceed to destroy the old order? Here most writers emphasize the nationalism of the new ruling elite, their determination to make whatever changes were required to restore national sovereignty. The motivations that initially inspired their campaign to destroy the Tokugawa gave way to recognition that traditional institutions were not equal to the tasks of national defense. In this sense, William Beasley concluded that the Restoration is best considered a "nationalist revolution, perhaps thereby giving recognition to the nature of the emotions that above all brought it about."¹⁶

Patriotism was certainly a prime motivation for the revolutionary changes that the new leaders embarked upon, but does this emotional reaction to the foreign crisis tell the whole story? If old values were strong in the outlying domains of Chōshū and Satsuma, as Craig contends, they were nonetheless weakened in many parts of the heartland, where the economic basis of the system had been transformed, where the problems of government were unsolved and morale sorely tried. The fact that the bakufu structure fell as easily as it did and was not replaced by another feudal military government owed much to the debilitation and frustration that long-term social and economic change had wrought. The intense emotional reaction of the shishi to the bakufu's capitulation to foreign demands, and the dissatisfactions among peasants, inarticulate or backward-looking as they may have been, nonetheless were symptomatic of a disposition for radical change from the traditional social order. Beasley believes that the Restoration lacked "the avowed social purpose that gives the 'great' revolutions of history a certain common character," but other historians are not so sure.¹⁷

The old society was no longer seen as a source of strength by significant numbers of all classes. Many writers now argue that in addition to a patriotic desire to respond to the foreign crisis, the Restoration was motivated by radical dissatisfaction with the domestic social order. Najita objects to interpretations of the Restoration as simply a political process, with limited revolutionary inspiration, whereby "a small group of ambitious samurai . . . restored the archaic king to enhance their narrow political interests."¹⁸ So narrow a focus obscures the breadth of revolutionary discontent that set the stage for the

Restoration. He and other historians believe that the role of ideas and social movements has been slighted.

Until recent years the role of new ideas and revolutionary thinking in laying the basis for the Restoration has been underrated. It was often said that the leaders of the Restoration lacked a clear blueprint for the future, a clearly articulated set of goals they wanted to achieve. Many historians are giving attention to a rising tide of radical thinking that began in the eighteenth century when, in the face of the commercialization of the economy, the official orthodoxy clearly was no longer an adequate description of reality. Although most Tokugawa thinkers were conservative and fell into the category of fundamentalist reformers, urging a rollback of the changes that had occurred, some thinkers were clearly of what we have called the realist school, who saw systemic change as both inevitable and desirable. They called for revolutionary changes of policy that foreshadowed the Meiji reforms. To take just one example, the political economist Honda Toshiaki, writing about 1800, advocated radical structural changes to solve the crisis at hand. He urged an agenda of change that foreshadowed the policies of national wealth and power that the Meiji government subsequently implemented. In place of a feudal structure, Honda wanted a highly centralized government that could control the economy, establish universal education, adopt Western science, construct a merchant marine, conduct foreign trade, and provide a strong national defense.

A recent school of historical writing rejects a narrow political focus and argues that such a limited view overlooks the social foundations of revolutionary change. These historians stress the role of the populace or the "crowd" in setting the stage for the Restoration. They depict a restless and volatile society, rife with discontent and disorder, its stability undermined not just by the coming of foreigners but by the ineffectiveness of government. The resulting anomie took many forms, not necessarily political or coherent, but nonetheless reflective of a widely felt sense of dislocation and disarray, particularly in central Japan, in those areas most affected by social and economic change. George Wilson points to a diversity of expressions of popular anxiety in which hundreds of thousands of people participated at the end of the Tokugawa Period: new religions, millenarian movements, mass pilgrimages to sacred places, urban riots and reveling, and peasant uprisings. The malaise that pervaded the populace "emboldened unhappy elements within the samurai elite," Wilson writes. "The samurai elite and the popular movements were simultaneously groping for a new and stable order in Japan."¹⁹ There was a breakdown of public order. "Commoners became disobedient, rude, and abusive of officials, and were less and less deterred by threats of dire punishment."²⁰ A vacuum in society cried out for strong and purposeful leadership.

The new government set about restoring order after 1868, suppressing many of the signs of disarray and malaise, consolidating power, and creating a national ethic that would answer the popular need for surety and direction.

We are left with a complex view of causation. At its heart, the Restoration was a political change carried out by a party within the old samurai elite and coming from the traditional feudal enemies of the Tokugawa. As their symbol, the anti-Tokugawa forces restored the Emperor, the traditional source of political legitimacy, to the center of government. They did not seek to interfere with landholding patterns, but rather confirmed the wealthy peasants in their dominant position in the countryside. To this extent, the Restoration was conservative. But it was precipitated by profound social and economic change and pervasive discontent among all classes of Japanese that undermined the legitimacy of the Tokugawa system. To a growing number of reform thinkers, Tokugawa institutions no longer seemed adequate to cope with the new social and economic conditions. The role of the foreign crisis was to bring into sharp focus the impotence of the old system and to prompt revolutionary action to create a new order.

An important key to understanding Japan's rapid response to the challenge of the West in the years after 1868 (in contrast to the slow response of other countries in Asia) is the fact that discontent with the old order was widespread and felt in every social class. The country was ready for change. In other words, saying simply that the new leaders were impelled by nationalism or the desire to make Japan the military equal of Western nations is not sufficient. In other Asian countries there was also plenty of patriotic feeling and understanding of Western technological superiority. What was distinctive about the Japanese case, as Thomas Smith observes, was "the conviction that the traditional social order was not itself a source of strength."²¹ Had Perry come to a country that was more stable, a country that was more content with its institutions, the response would have been very different.

Notes

1. Ronald P. Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 8.
2. Marius B. Jansen, *China in the Tokugawa World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 3.
3. These are the observations of Haga Tōru. See Yamazaki Masakazu and Haga Tōru, "Reexamining the Era of National Seclusion," *Japan Echo* 19 (winter 1992), 73-75.
4. Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, *Anti-Foreignism and Western Learning in Early Mod-*

- ern Japan: The New Theses of 1825* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 60.
5. *Ibid.*, 168-169.
 6. *Ibid.*, 124.
 7. Carmen Blacker, "Ōhashi Totsuan: A Study in Anti-Western Thought," in *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, series 3, vol. 7 (Yokohama: Asiatic Society of Japan, 1959), 165.
 8. Harold Bolitho, "Abe Masahirō and the New Japan," in *The Bakufu in Japanese History*, ed. Jeffrey P. Mass and William B. Hauser (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985), 182.
 9. William G. Beasley, *Select Documents on Japanese Foreign Policy, 1853-1868* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 117.
 10. William G. Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1972), 96.
 11. *Ibid.*, 117.
 12. Marius B. Jansen, *Sakamoto Ryōma and the Meiji Restoration* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), 98.
 13. Albert M. Craig, *Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), 20-21.
 14. *Ibid.*, 360.
 15. *Ibid.*, 353.
 16. Beasley, *Meiji Restoration*, 424.
 17. *Ibid.*, 423.
 18. Najita Tetsuo, "Conceptual Consciousness in the Meiji Ishin," in *Meiji Ishin: Restoration and Revolution*, ed. Nagai Michio and Miguel Urrutia (Tokyo: United Nations University, 1985), 87.
 19. George M. Wilson, *Patriots and Redeemers in Japan: Motives in the Meiji Restoration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 80.
 20. James W. White, "State Growth and Popular Protest in Tokugawa Japan," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 14 (winter 1988), 24.
 21. Thomas C. Smith, *Native Sources of Japanese Industrialization, 1750-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 152-153.