

The United States fights Britain's Pacific Empire, 1820-1900

by Paul Goldstein

Twenty-six years after the historic "opening of Japan" by Commodore Matthew Perry's 1853 expedition—in which American naval vessels entered Tokyo Bay in order to establish relations with a nation that had been in self-imposed isolation for 250 years—former U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant outlined a renewed foreign policy commitment, a kind of "Monroe Doctrine for Asia." Speaking in Tokyo on June 20, 1879 on the dispute between China and Japan over the Ryukyu Islands, he said:

America has great commercial interests in the Far East, but she has no interests, and can have none, that are inconsistent with the complete independence and well-being of all Asiatic nations, especially Japan and China. It seems that rights, which Western nations all regard as sacred and inviolable, because absolutely essential to their independence and dignity, should not be denied by them to China and Japan.

American statesmen have long since perceived the danger of European interference in the political affairs of North and South America. *So guard against this danger.* And as a measure of self-protection it has become the settled policy of the United States that no European power shall be permitted to enlarge its dominion in American Affairs. *It is likewise that the policy of America in the Orient, that the integrity and independence of China and Japan should be preserved and maintained* [emphasis added].

Commodore Perry's 1853 expedition and the 1879 statement by Grant represent two critical inflection points in the struggle between the American System of political-economy and the British Empire's doctrine of free trade. This American policy commitment, which tentatively began in 1791 and lasted until the end of the nineteenth century, found the United States locked in power struggles against the colonial and imperial powers of Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Russia.

One of the central areas for this historic struggle was Japan. While Japan had cut off practically all ties to the outside world for nearly 250 years (1600-1853), the United States saw British designs in Asia as a threat to American

interests of peaceful trade, and sought to create a special relationship with Japan to counter the British moves.

Japan had successfully fended off foreign military invasions in the past, but by the nineteenth century, it could no longer resist the pressure coming from the Western powers to open up its borders for trade and diplomatic relations. Japan, which was not a colony like the rest of Asia, finally understood that if it was not going to be conquered, it would have to rely upon one foreign power which was not out to subjugate Japan: the United States.

From the 1830s through the 1890s, the United States consistently distinguished itself from the European powers concerning the question of colonization. The British intrigues against the United States undermined the fledgling efforts of the young American Republic in the Far East, while Great Britain and her erstwhile allies sought to extend their colonial domination of China and Southeast Asia, to include Japan. Responding to the colonial domination of Asia, the United States shaped a policy of developing cordial and cooperative relations with Japan.

President Grant's articulated U.S. policy objectives projected the United States into another strategic battle against the European powers. This renewed effort of political warfare, launched by the United States against the forces of the 1815 Congress of Vienna, sought to maintain the U.S. policy perspective of aiding Japan to become a modern industrial nation, first under the Tokugawa Shogunate and later under the Meiji emperor who was restored to power in 1868.

The United States also stretched this anti-colonial policy to try to support China, but the British position had become too strong within China during this period. It was only during the last decade of the nineteenth century that the United States attempted to intervene against the British in China, through the "Open Door Policy." That initiative, taken in 1896 by President William McKinley's secretary of state, John Hay, eventually failed in China; this wound up discrediting the United States and established the groundwork for the British move into Japan that resulted in the 1902 Anglo-Japanese alliance.

The United States was faced with the brutal reality of a British-orchestrated policy of colonization throughout the nineteenth century. The Opium Wars of the 1840s and 1860s

against China were the British model for dominating the region, while the United States found itself the only Western force supporting the independence and sovereignty of the Asian nations. Britain had not only secured a major foothold in the Asian theater, along with its French allies, but had planted the seed for destroying the fragile foundations of U.S. policy objectives in the region. Tragically, the reversal of U.S. successes in Japan by the British set into motion the eventual confrontation between Japan and the United States during World War II.

The colonial game and the Tokugawa Shogunate

Starting in the eighteenth century, Great Britain embarked on a project to establish itself as a “new Roman Empire.” Using the banking and merchant class, the British East India Company’s “free-trade” policies, and the Royal Navy’s military power, the British not only sought to replace the Spanish and Portuguese empires, but had as their strategic objective to colonize all of Asia. From Central Asia through China and Japan, Great Britain, using the intelligence methods of Venice, would come to dominate the entire region.

During the entire nineteenth century, only two countries in Asia did not succumb to the intrigues and military domination of the British: Japan and Thailand. With the success of the Opium Wars against China, the British strangulation of Asia began. This treacherous policy enabled Britain to impose the 1842 Nanking Treaty, which ceded Hongkong to Britain and forced Shanghai to become an open Port City. After these initial ventures in China, the British launched the infamous Burma Wars, and, by 1851, they seized Rangoon, the capital of Burma. After two decades of colonial wars in the 1830s and 1840s, as a result of the Opium and Burma Wars, the British permanently established their presence, utilizing Rangoon as their primary base for colonizing Asia.

Out of the Crimean Wars in the 1850s, British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston forged the Anglo-French alliance. This furthered the imposition of the next round of humiliating concessions on China, and eventually subjugated the rest of South and Northeast Asia. Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, the British, French, and Dutch naval forces proceeded to seize a sizable portion of the southern coast of China, and in 1857 took over the city of Canton. Within the year, these same forces occupied the city of Tientsin, forcing yet another treaty arrangement, the 1858 Tientsin Treaty. By the time the British and French colonial powers were finished, four major Chinese cities and the Kowloon peninsula had been forcibly taken from China.

Under Napoleon III’s Second Empire (1859-62), the French sent troops into Vietnam and Cambodia, which became French protectorates, while the Russians were also seeking to stake a claim in East Asia. In fact, for nearly 60 years prior to Japan’s Meiji Restoration in 1868, Russia had been constantly spying upon and probing the northern Japa-

nese islands of Sakhalin, the Kuriles, and Hokkaido, looking to exploit any weakness. Russian naval expeditions began in the early eighteenth century, laying the foundation for the nineteenth-century attempt by Russian naval forces to establish trading and port facilities in Japan.

Tokugawa Japan (1600-1868) realized that the Western powers were preparing to strike against the island nation of Japan. By that time, the “Tokugawa Shogunate”—a military government—had forged a peaceful nation, after several centuries of internal warfare. The last phase of the civil wars, the Era of the Warring States (*Sengokujidai*) of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, had been settled by the Tokugawa Shogunate. After their consolidation of power, Japan virtually closed itself off from the outside world from approximately 1600 until 1853. With the exception of permitting Dutch and Chinese traders to ply their wares in the port city of Nagasaki, no foreigner was permitted to step onto Japanese soil.

By the early- and mid-seventeenth century, under pressure internally to allow some “foreign ideas” into Japan, the Tokugawa Shogunate made an exception to the condemnation of all things foreign, and permitted a Western intellectual movement to develop called the Dutch Studies Movement. This movement enabled part of the lower class *samurai* to have access to Western scientific and technological ideas, which later helped establish the class of Meiji intellectuals that led Japan. Among the most widely read books during this time were the translated works of Benjamin Franklin.

U.S. challenge to the British

The historic battle in Asia between the British System of free trade and the protectionist American System of political-economy began with Commodore Matthew Perry’s naval expedition to Japan in 1853. Although there were earlier attempts by the United States to reach diplomatic and trade agreements with Japan, the subsequent policy fight between the Americans and the British was not only over establishing trade relations with the Japanese, but also over what kind of economic system would take hold within Japan itself. Commodore Perry’s “opening of Japan” was only an initial success. It took State Department appointee Townsend Harris—the first American diplomat in Japan—to negotiate a treaty of friendship with Japan in 1858, which set into motion the special relationship between Japan and the United States.

The political struggle to establish in Japan, not only a national banking system modeled on Alexander Hamilton’s First Bank of the United States, but also an array of initiatives in the areas of science, technology, and education, represented the hallmark of this U.S.-Japan relationship. One of the key individuals involved in this effort was Erasmus Peshine Smith, a collaborator of Abraham Lincoln’s economic policy adviser Henry Carey. Sent by President Grant to Japan in 1871, Smith spent six years there as an adviser to the foreign and finance ministers.

What gave the United States the upper hand inside Japan,

and permitted U.S. officials like Smith to become trusted advisers to the Japanese government, was a long series of attempts by the United States to establish contact with Japan. From the very outset of the establishment of the American Republic, the United States had sought peaceful trade contact with Japan—a policy that the Japanese recognized as in their interest.

Over a 60-year period, the U.S. policy was to establish relations with the Japanese based upon the belief that Japan represented a unique opportunity to bring Western civilization to East Asia. This was the conscious mission of the United States. The first recorded attempt was carried out by the U.S. Navy in 1791, when Capt. John Kendrick stepped ashore in Wakayama, Japan. Posing as a shipwrecked seaman, Kendrick tried to establish relations with the Japanese by trading in seal skins; the Japanese rejected Kendrick's overture. Although his mission was an initial failure, it did produce the beginnings of an intelligence picture that would later be used in Commodore Perry's voyage.

By the 1820s, the United States embarked on an ambitious program to make contact with Japan. Following the discovery of sperm whales off the northern coast of Japan, the United States sent whaling expeditions to make contact with Japanese merchant or whaling ships and to gather intelligence about Japan. These "whaling expeditions" provided the impetus for Commodore Perry's mission.

Between 1840 and 1850, two famous cases of shipwrecked seamen played a significant role in opening up relations between the two countries. Shipwrecked American sailors were brought back to Japan and imprisoned, while Japanese seamen were brought to the United States and educated.

In the first case, the U.S. Navy in 1848 sent a Chinook-American naval officer named Ranald MacDonald to Japan to discover what had happened to a group of shipwrecked American sailors. MacDonald was not only well received, but was greeted with fascination, because he looked Japanese and spoke perfect English. The Japanese permitted him to teach English, and one of his students, Moriyama Einsuke, later served as the interpreter for Commodore Perry's mission. The Tokugawa Shogun's friendly view toward the United States was shaped in part by how well the United States treated shipwrecked Japanese sailors, in comparison with the European powers; on the other hand, since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the two major clan powers, the Choshu and Satsuma, with the Shogun's approval, had sent out Japanese seamen to gather intelligence on the intentions of both the Europeans and the Americans.

The second case involved a Japanese seaman named Nakahama Manjiro, who was shipwrecked in 1843 and was picked up by a U.S. whaling ship and spent the next ten years in Massachusetts and Hawaii, where he was educated in higher mathematics, engineering, and shipbuilding. He was sent back to Japan in 1851, to the southern island of Kyushu,

where he made contact with Lord Shimazu, the head of the powerful Satsuma clan. Manjiro, who had converted to Protestant Christianity, was sponsored by the grandfather of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Warren Delano. Shimazu was considered an enlightened Japanese leader of the Tokugawa (Edo) era, and proceeded to learn from Manjiro all he could about steamships, engines, trains, telegraphs, and photography. At the recommendation of Shimazu, Manjiro was sent to see Prince Yataro Iwasaki, a leader of the Tosa-ha clan and eventual founder of the Mitsubishi industrial and shipbuilding concern. Manjiro was appointed by the Shogun

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to the Institute for Foreign Books, the forerunner of what became the Tokyo Imperial University.

As a result of this contact and growing Western influence, the Japanese saw the Americans in a completely different light than they did the Europeans. The Americans in turn saw the opening of Japan as a flanking operation against the European colonial powers, and when Commodore Perry, the head of the U.S. Navy's East India, South China Sea, and Sea of Japan squadron, succeeded in establishing trade and diplomatic relations by February 1854, the Japanese-American Friendship Treaty was signed. Commodore Perry, who was also appointed special ambassador to Japan, carried a letter to the emperor (not yet in power) from President Millard Fillmore, who wrote that "the United States and Japan should live in friendship and have commercial intercourse with each other. . . . The Constitution and laws of the United States *forbid all interference* with the religious or political concerns of other nations. I have particularly charged Commodore Perry *to abstain from every act which could possibly disturb the tranquility of Your Imperial Majesty's dominions*" (emphasis added).

The British and continental Europeans reacted vigorously against the U.S. treaty with Japan, and demanded equal access to the Japanese ports. While in Hongkong, Commodore Perry received reports that Russian and French ships were headed for Japan to demand a similar treaty. Perry headed straight back to Japan, where he received support from a group of Japanese aristocrats led by Lords Hotta, Abe, and

Ii Naosuke, who were hoping to forestall Europe's demand.

By 1858, when U.S. Consul Townsend Harris had settled in Japan, he explained to the Japanese the fundamental difference between U.S. and European policies, telling Japanese Foreign Minister Lord Hotta that "the aggressive conduct of England, Russia, and France in the Far East" threatens Japan, and that U.S. policy could aid in helping Japan develop itself into a modern nation. By 1858, Harris secured another commercial treaty with Japan, in which the two countries agreed to outlaw the import of opium into Japan; the United States also won a concession from Japan: the right of "the free exercise of religion" on the part of U.S. missionaries and diplomats. The teaching of Christianity in Japan had been outlawed through a series of edicts for 200 years.

By 1860, Perry and Harris's efforts succeeded in establishing full diplomatic relations, and the Americans and Japanese exchanged emissaries on a mission of friendship and cultural exchange. Japan sent some of its top intellectuals to the United States to study the American political, legal, and economic system. Trust between the two countries was further enhanced when a naval ship built by the Japanese was commanded by Americans, because the Japanese did not have the navigational skills required for transpacific crossings. This treaty became the model of all Japanese treaties with foreign powers until 1894.

British countermoves

However, the British were not standing idly by. Recorded in Townsend Harris's diplomatic diary was a series of reports about the intrigues of the British ambassador, Sir Rutherford Alcock. The diplomatic war over Alcock's conduct of affairs with Japan became so intense that the British were forced to replace him with their ambassador to China, Sir Harry Parkes. Parkes had been in China for nearly 20 years and was able to carry out British policy far better than the imperious Alcock.

Under Parkes's direction, the British began pursuing a concert of action by the colonial powers to ensure that their treaty and "extraterritorial rights" were initiated against Japanese sovereignty. Up until that point, only the United States had had access to two port facilities, and the Europeans demanded equal treatment. In reaction against these demands, one of the major clans, the Satsuma (from the island of Kyushu), carried out an assassination of the principal treaty negotiator, Lord Ii, along with a British official named Richardson. Immediately upon receipt of this news, British Foreign Minister Lord John Russell launched a major intervention against Japan, accusing the Shogun and the Satsuma clan of the assassination and setting the stage for military action.

It should be understood that this incident and other attacks against foreigners occurred during the U.S. Civil War. As a result of these circumstances, the United States was forced by the British, French, and Russian naval forces to back the limited military operations against Japan. U.S. Secretary of

State William Seward agreed in this joint effort to crack down on the Choshu and Satsuma clans, in a limited way. This tactical shift by Seward did not undermine U.S.-Japanese relations, however. In fact, Yuichi Fukuzawa, one of the Japanese to visit the United States in those years, remarked to a colleague years later that Seward "always reminded me of the U.S. antipathy for the English."

But then in 1863, a British squadron launched a short naval bombardment of Kagoshima in reprisal for Richardson's death, and several months later a combined naval force of American, Dutch, French, and British vessels targeted the port city of Shimonoseki in southern Japan, near Nagasaki, for reprisal for the attacks on Western commercial shipping. Ironically, this military action helped convince the Japanese that they would have to change their policies if they were to prevent themselves from being colonized. A movement developed within Japan to overthrow the military government of the Tokugawa Shogunate, which catalyzed enormous changes in Japan. Within five years, along with tremendous internal social upheaval, an alliance of the Satsuma, Choshu, Tosa, and Hizen clans overthrew the Tokugawa Shogunate and restored the emperor to power. Under this new arrangement, the major clans, specifically the Satsuma and Choshu, found themselves in virtual control in 1867, and, with the restored emperor, embarked on a modernization program aided by the United States.

The American System in Japan

Between 1860 and 1870, the United States sent over 200 advisers, missionaries, and educators to Japan, and helped Japan to organize a modern school, tax, and postal systems. The first missionaries arrived in 1860 and established schools in Yokohama and later Tokyo. Initially, the success of these missionaries led to the conversion of leading Japanese intellectuals to Christianity. This impact was underscored by the rapid assimilation of Western science and technology, and, within ten years of the arrival of the missionaries, educators, and technical advisers, Japan built its first railroad.

But the single most important work by a U.S. adviser was the establishment of a national banking system, modeled on the American System of national banking of U.S. Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton. President Grant authorized Erasmus Peshine Smith to go to Japan for this purpose, where his ideas became the hallmark of the Japanese economic miracle.

Smith was a protégé of Henry Carey, the architect of President Lincoln's industrialization policy during the Civil War and a principal theoretician of the American System. Smith had been a political operative of Secretary of State Seward and was an appointee to the State Department's Claims Division. In 1871, Smith went to Japan and became the leading adviser to the Foreign Ministry under Lord Iwakura. Along with Smith, Rev. Guido Verbeck became influential with the administrator of the National Bank Okuma.

Dr. W.S. Clark, president of the Massachusetts Agricultural School, became an adviser to the Agricultural Ministry and set up an agricultural college in Hokkaido. Dr. David Murray, a Rutgers professor of mathematics, became the superintendent of the Ministry of Education and established a public school system, whose purpose was to train a modern industrial workforce. Murray also helped establish the Tokyo Imperial University and the Imperial Academy of Literature and Science. A former Civil War general in the Union Army, Horace Capron, became an adviser to the Colonial Bureau of Japan.

But it was Peshine Smith whose work with Prince Ito Hirobumi, Okuma Shigenobu, Okubo Toshimichi, and Fukuzawa Yukichi turned Japan into a modern industrial nation. Smith stayed in Japan for six years as adviser to the Foreign and Finance ministries, and established a special American position as policy adviser which lasted 40 years—until 1911.

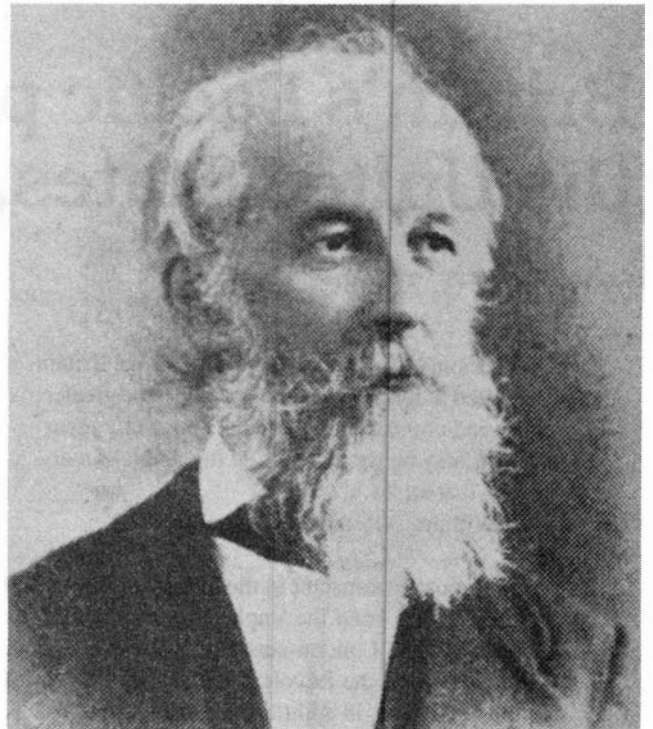
The Japanese view of the United States was deepened when Fukuzawa wrote several books about the United States and Western civilization. He recognized the need for Japan to transform itself, based in part on his experience traveling as an emissary to the United States. One of his most famous books, written in 1870 and titled *The Encouragement of Learning*, sold nearly 2 million copies. Fukuzawa, a product of the Dutch Studies Movement, became one of the first members of the Japanese elite to read English. He established a national newspaper and created a university now called Keio University, today the second most prestigious school in Japan. His impact reached the highest levels of Japanese society, including such individuals as Prince Ito Hirobumi, who in 1870 came to the United States and studied U.S. financial institutions, the taxation system based on protective tariffs, and national banking.

British subversion succeeds

The British understood the impact that the American System of national banking would have on Japan. "Prince Ito supported the American system of national banking . . . in spite of opposition from those who favored a central banking system," wrote British scholar G.C. Allen of the University of London.

By 1872, the Japanese established the "Regulation for a National Bank," which set into motion the necessary credit policy for Japan's rapid industrialization. In 1868, some 80-85% of the Japanese population was agriculturally based. Within the first ten years of the new policy, that was cut by 20%, and between 1872 and 1900, virtually all the manufacturing of Japan's major industries was the result of a government-directed credit policy.

By 1885, Japan was on the road to complete industrialization, and the British embarked on a new policy of subverting Japan from within and turning the special relationship between Japan and the United States into an arena of confrontation. British operations inside Japan sought to win over a



Erasmus Peshine Smith, adviser to the Japanese Foreign and Finance ministries (1871-77) and a protégé of American System economist Henry Carey. Smith's project to establish a national banking system in Japan was the hallmark of the Japanese "economic miracle."

faction of the Japanese elite away from cooperating with the United States. The key to the eventual British success was their relationship with a faction of the Choshu and Satsuma clans who wanted to model themselves on the British. Because Japanese society is based on family lineage, the British played on "blood and soil" ties and a sense of racial superiority in comparison to the rest of Asia.

By 1890, the pro-American faction had been severely weakened, and the emerging Japanese military forces were looking to become a player in the geopolitical designs of the British. One of the central figures was General Yamagata, who promoted a pro-British policy vis-à-vis China. By 1894-96, the Sino-Japanese War took place, and with it a Japanese triumph. Convinced that the British were more reliable and powerful than the Americans, the Japanese began to pursue a pro-British policy line which led to the 1902 Anglo-Japanese Treaty, locking Japan into an imperial policy.

From 1864 to 1898, the United States and Japan had been collaborators against the imperial powers of Europe. By 1896, and well after 1902, the Japanese alliance with Great Britain meant that an eventual war in the Pacific against the United States was inevitable. The tragic mistake was that the United States also adopted a British policy following the assassination of President McKinley in 1901, and saw Japan as the emerging threat to American interests in Asia.