



Japan's encounter with the West is a story of gradual discovery, followed by forced interaction. Before Commodore Matthew Perry's arrival in 1853, Japan was a largely isolated feudal society under the rule of the Tokugawa shogunate.

While European traders and missionaries had made initial contact in the 16th century. For over two centuries, fearing foreign influence, the Tokugawa had enforced a policy of strict isolationism, known as "**Sakoku**" which limited foreign interaction to a few designated ports and primarily with Dutch and Chinese traders. Japanese society was highly

structured, with a rigid class system consisting of samurai, farmers, artisans, and merchants. The economy was based on agriculture, particularly rice production, and the samurai class held significant political and social power. While there were internal peace and stability, Japan lagged behind the West in terms of technological and industrial development. This isolationist policy preserved Japan's unique cultural identity but also left it vulnerable to external pressures from Western powers seeking trade and influence

The 19th century witnessed increasing Western interest in opening Japan for trade and diplomatic relations. The United States, driven by its burgeoning Pacific trade and **whaling industry** (which Japan continues till this day), took the lead. In 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry led a squadron of U.S. Navy ships into Edo Bay (present-day Tokyo), delivering a letter from President Millard Fillmore demanding that Japan open its ports to American ships. The Japanese, overwhelmed by the superior military technology of the Americans, were unable to resist.

Faced with the threat of military force, the Tokugawa shogunate signed **the Treaty of Kanagawa in 1854, marking the end of Japan's isolation**. This treaty opened several Japanese ports to American ships for trade and refuelling. Soon after, similar treaties were signed with other Western powers, including Great Britain, Russia, and the Netherlands. These unequal treaties, as they came to be known, granted Westerners extraterritorial rights and imposed low tariffs on

foreign goods, placing Japan at a disadvantage. **The arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry** and the subsequent treaties had a profound impact on Japan, leading to the collapse of the Tokugawa shogunate and the beginning of **Meiji Restoration**, a period of rapid modernisation and Westernisation.

The First Sino-Japanese War, fought between the Qing Dynasty of China and the Empire of Japan from 1894 to 1895, marked a significant turning point in East Asian history. It was a conflict born from long-standing tensions over influence in Korea, which both nations considered vital to their strategic interests. China, as the traditional regional power, asserted a form of suzerainty over Korea, while Japan, rapidly modernising and expanding its ambitions, sought to establish its own dominance. The war's outcome dramatically shifted the balance of power, paving the way for Japan's rise as a major world power and exposing the Qing Dynasty's internal weaknesses.

Several factors contributed to the outbreak of the war. Japan's **Meiji Restoration** had transformed the nation into a modern, industrialised state with a strong military. In contrast, China's self-strengthening movement had achieved limited success, leaving its military and economy vulnerable. The Korean Peninsula became the focal point of these competing ambitions. **The assassination of a pro-Japanese Korean official in 1894 (a false flag)** provided Japan with the pretext to intervene militarily, triggering a conflict that China

was ill-prepared to fight.

The war itself was a resounding victory for Japan. Its modern army and navy quickly overwhelmed the Qing forces in Korea and Manchuria. Key battles, such as the **Battle of the Yalu River** and **the capture of Port Arthur (The Treaty of Portsmouth)**, demonstrated Japan's superior military capabilities. The **Treaty of Shimonoseki**, which concluded the war, forced China to cede Taiwan, the Penghu Islands, and the Liaodong Peninsula (Dalian, Port Arthur) to Japan, as well as recognise Korean independence and pay a large indemnity. This treaty not only humiliated China but also signalled the end of its regional dominance and the beginning of Japan's imperial expansion.

The Shōwa period (1926-1989) in Japan witnessed the rise of **Shōwa Statism** (Japanese fascism), a political ideology that dramatically reshaped the nation's trajectory. This era marked a significant departure from Japan's historically insular and conservative nature, propelling it towards becoming a formidable military superpower. The transformation was fuelled by a potent combination of ultranationalist sentiment, militaristic expansionism, and a centralised, authoritarian government. This shift had profound implications for Japan's foreign policy, particularly its aggressive expansion into mainland China.

The Japanese imperial army's invasion of China during World War II was a key example of Showa Statism's impact. **The army's ability to wage a large-scale war depended heavily**

on its access to weaponry and military supplies. The sources of these armaments were diverse, reflecting Japan's evolving industrial capacity and international collaborations during the period.

Post Scriptum

Japan allegedly used as proxy military force. The proposition that Japan served as an ultra-state proxy military force during World War II requires a nuanced evaluation. While Japan undeniably pursued its own strategic objectives, its actions were shaped by diverse factors. Its relationships with other nations and the overarching geopolitical dynamics of the era, most notably its **alliance with the Axis powers, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy**, significantly shaped its military endeavours. Japan harboured its own expansionist ambitions in Asia, particularly in China and Southeast Asia, driven by a desire for resources, territorial gains, and regional hegemony. These aspirations, transforming Japan from a permissive, closed-off nation into an aggressive military power, suggest that external forces exerted some influence on Japan's military conduct during World War II.

Commodore Matthew Perry, a U.S. naval officer, played a pivotal role in opening Japan to the West in the mid-19th century. In 1854, his arrival in Edo Bay (Tokyo) with a fleet of imposing warships compelled the Tokugawa shogunate to sign the Treaty of Kanagawa (1854), ending Japan's long-standing isolationist policy. This treaty not only established diplomatic and trade relations between the United States and

Japan but also paved the way for other Western powers to engage with Japan, leading to significant social, economic, and political changes in the country. Perry's actions had far-reaching consequences, shaping the course of modern Japanese history and its emergence as a major global power.

The Treaty of Kanagawa, (1854), between the United States and Japan, marked a pivotal moment in Japanese history, ending the country's long-standing isolationist policy known as Sakoku. Negotiated by Commodore Matthew Perry, the treaty opened the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate to American vessels, guaranteeing the safety of shipwrecked American sailors and establishing a U.S. consulate in Japan. While not a comprehensive trade agreement, **it paved the way for future commercial treaties and significantly influenced Japan's subsequent modernisation and engagement with the Western world.** The treaty also highlighted the growing influence of the United States in the Pacific and its desire to expand trade and exert its power in the region.

The **Meiji Restoration (1868-1889)**, a political revolution in Japan, a period of drastic change that brought about the modernisation and westernisation of the country. This era saw the end of the feudal system and the restoration of the imperial rule under Emperor Meiji. The restoration was triggered by a combination of internal factors, such as growing discontent with the feudal system and the Tokugawa

shogunate, and external pressures from Western powers seeking to open Japan to trade and influence.

The Meiji government implemented a series of reforms that transformed Japan into a modern industrial nation. These reforms included abolishing the feudal system, establishing a centralised *government (Shōwa Statism, Japanese fascism)*, creating a modern army and navy, promoting industrialisation, and adopting a new constitution. The Meiji Restoration created an ultra state governance for Japan which propelled Japan onto the world stage as a major power and laid the foundation for its subsequent economic and military success

The Battle of the Yalu River 黃海海戰 (1894), was the first major land battle that led to the First Sino-Japanese War. It took place on September 16, 1894, near the mouth of the Yalu River, on the border between Korea and China. The battle was a decisive victory for the Japanese, who routed the Chinese Beiyang Army and captured the city of Pyongyang.

The battle began when the Japanese First Army, under the command of General Yamagata Aritomo, crossed the Yalu River into Korea. The Japanese force of about 10,000 men advanced towards Pyongyang, where they encountered a Chinese force of about 15,000 men under the command of General Zuo Baogui. The Chinese army was entrenched in a

strong defensive position, but the Japanese were able to outflank them and launch a successful attack.

The battle lasted for several hours, and the fighting was intense. The Japanese were better trained and equipped than the Chinese, and they were able to inflict heavy casualties on the enemy. The Chinese army was eventually forced to retreat, and the Japanese captured Pyongyang.

“The Battle of the Yalu River was a major turning point in the First Sino-Japanese War. It demonstrated the superiority of the Japanese military and helped to pave the way for the Japanese conquest of Korea”.

The Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895), signed on April 17, 1895, marked the end of the First Sino-Japanese War. Japan's decisive victory over the Qing Dynasty of China resulted in significant territorial gains and a strengthened position on the world stage. The treaty's terms, however, sowed the seeds of future conflict and resentment in China, contributing to long-term instability in East Asia.

Key provisions of the treaty included China's recognition of Korean independence, the cession of Taiwan, the Pescadores Islands (Penghu), and the Liaodong Peninsula (Dalian, Port Arthur) to Japan. China was also forced to pay a large indemnity to Japan and open several ports and cities to Japanese trade and residence. These concessions granted Japan significant economic and political influence in China, further weakening the Qing Dynasty's already fragile hold on

power.

The Treaty of Shimonoseki had far-reaching consequences. Russia, France, and Germany, concerned about Japan's growing power, pressured Japan to return the Liaodong Peninsula to China in what became known as the **Triple Intervention**. While Japan eventually relented, this diplomatic manoeuvre highlighted the competing imperial ambitions of European powers in East Asia. The treaty also fuelled Chinese nationalism and contributed to the Boxer Rebellion, an anti-foreign uprising that further destabilised the region.

The Triple Intervention (1895), a diplomatic intervention by Russia, Germany, and France in 1895, pressured Japan to relinquish the Liaodong Peninsula, which it had seized from China during the First Sino-Japanese War. This perceived injustice fuelled Japanese resentment and expansionist ambitions. A decade later, these simmering tensions contributed to the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), a conflict fought over control of Manchuria and Korea. Japan's victory in this war marked a turning point in East Asian power dynamics and further solidified its position as a major world power, **while simultaneously exposing the weaknesses of Tsarist Russia.**

The Treaty of Portsmouth, signed in 1905, formally concluded the Russo-Japanese War. Negotiated with the mediation of U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, the treaty

was signed in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. While it granted Japan significant territorial gains and influence in Korea and Manchuria, it also compelled Russia to cede Port Arthur and Dalian to Japan. The treaty's terms were met with dissatisfaction in both Russia and Japan. In Russia, **it fuelled resentment towards the Tsarist regime, contributing to the unrest that would later escalate into revolution.** In Japan, many felt that the treaty did not extract enough concessions from Russia, leading to riots and a sense of unfulfilled expectations despite their victory in the war (two birds with one stone). Despite the controversy, the Treaty of Portsmouth marked a turning point in global power dynamics, signalling the rise of Japan as a major world power and earning Roosevelt the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Mukden Incident (1931), also known as the Manchurian Incident, was a staged event (false flag) engineered by Japanese military personnel as a pretext for the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931. On September 18, 1931, a small quantity of dynamite was detonated by Lt. Suemori Komoto of the Japanese Kwantung Army near Mukden (now Shenyang). The Japanese army blamed Chinese dissidents for the act and used it as a justification for retaliating and occupying Manchuria, leading to the establishment of the puppet state of Manchukuo. The incident heightened tensions between Japan and China and significantly contributed to the escalation of World War II. The strategy mirrored the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (1937), instigating the Second Sino-Japanese War. **A strategy still used today to**

incite violence.

The establishment of Manchukuo in 1932, by Japan was a calculated move driven by a combination of economic interests, expansionist ambitions, and geopolitical strategy. In the early 1930s, Japan, facing economic hardships and seeking resources, set its sights on Manchuria, a region in northeastern China rich in minerals and agricultural land. The Mukden Incident in 1931, orchestrated by Japanese military personnel, provided the pretext for Japan to invade and occupy Manchuria. Subsequently, in 1932, Japan declared the establishment of Manchukuo, installing Puyi, the last Qing Emperor, as its figurehead ruler. a puppet state under its control.

This move allowed Japan to exploit Manchuria's resources, create a buffer zone against the Soviet Union, Manchukuo became a key component of Japan's vision for a "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," serving as a resource base, marking a significant step in Japan's aggressive expansion in Asia during the lead-up to World War II. The puppet state collapsed after the Soviet invasion of Manchuria in 1945.

Japan's military aggression had a significant impact, contributing to the downfall of the Qing Dynasty and the Tsar Regime in Russia, and also played a role in the rise of Marxism-Leninism in both China and Russia.