

## Imperialism in the Far East: China & Japan,

Like the countries in South Asia, Southeast Asia and Africa, the nations of the Far East (east Asia) faced a growing challenge from the military superiority of the West in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The Tokugawa shogunate had ruled Japan for two centuries and implemented an isolationist foreign policy to cut off the island nation to foreigners. From the early 1600s to the mid-1800s, Japan had controlled very limited trade with China and the Dutch and had diplomatic contact with Korea. But beyond that, Japan was largely isolated. British, French, Russian, and American officials tried to convince the Japanese to open up. But the Japanese repeatedly refused.

That situation changed in 1853 when American steamships with cannons entered Japanese waters under the command of Commodore Matthew Perry. The next year, Japan and the United States signed the **Treaty of Kanagawa**. It agreed to open Japan to trade with America. Soon afterwards, Japan made similar deals with European nations.

Below is a painting that depicts the landing of American **Commodore Matthew Perry** in Edo (now Tokyo) Bay at Yokohama in 1854. The Japanese soon agreed to the **Treaty of Kanagawa**, which opened two ports to American trade. Similar trade agreements were soon signed by Japan with several European nations. Analyze the painting and explain why Perry's landing had the impact that it did. Be sure to point out as much as you can about the image. Finally, write a creative title for the piece below.



Many in Japan resented the government's new foreign policies. In fact, they supported the overthrow of the government in 1868 and brought to power **Emperor Mutsuhito** who called his reign the **Meiji (Enlightened) Restoration**. It was during his reign that Japan was transformed into a modern industrial and military power. The Meiji leaders were well aware of the fate of Japan's immediate neighbor, China, where resistance to change only brought humiliation and defeat. They believed Japan was in danger of foreign attack. They recognized that the need for modernization was urgent. The new Meiji government moved quickly to discard the feudal system and launch a series of reforms that profoundly changed Japanese society. These

reform programs—administrative, economic, social, legal, educational, and military—were carried out under the slogan "fukoku Kyohei" (enrich the country and strengthen the military). The government funded this transition by heavily taxing the peasants. Discontent among the hard-pressed peasants led to the outbreak of many local rebellions. There were nearly 200 uprisings from 1868 to 1878 but the government put them down and had a consistent revenue stream throughout the period.

The government adopted many policies designed to create a modern economy and society. Students were sent to Europe and the United States to study modern science and technology, while foreign experts were hired to help establish factories and educational institutions. The Japanese then chose what they believed to be the best that Western civilization had to offer and adapted it to their own country. They admired Germany's strong centralized government, for example. And they used its constitution as a model for their own. The Japanese also admired the discipline of the German army and the skill of the British navy. The Japanese came to realize that the Western powers had acquired colonies with sources of raw materials, inexpensive labor and markets for manufactured goods. To compete, Japan would have to expand, as well.

*The following declaration, often called the "Charter Oath of 1868" is one of the first documents issued in the name of the new emperor (he was only 15 at the time); it was written by the leaders of the new Meiji Restoration who were former samurai. It reveals much about the new society they hoped to create. This was a time of uncertainty and this was the first public statement of the goals and ideals of the new regime.*

“By this oath we set up as our aim the establishment of the national weal [a prosperous state] on a broad basis and the framing of a constitution and laws.

1. Deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by public discussion
2. All classes, high and low, shall unite in vigorously carrying out the administration of affairs of state.
3. The common people, no less than the civil and military officials, shall each be allowed to pursue his own calling so that there may be no discontent.
4. Evil customs of the past shall be broken off and everything based upon the just laws of Nature.
5. Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule.”

Summarize the main goals of this new society? How do these goals reflect Western thought, particularly, Enlightenment thought? What does this reveal about the Meiji Restoration?

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Japan's race to modernize paid off. By 1890, the country had several dozen warships and 500,000 well-trained, well-armed soldiers. It had become the strongest military power in Asia. Japan soon forced Korea to open its ports to trade, causing tension with China, which had long controlled Korea. In the resulting **Sino-Japanese War** of 1894, Japan proved victorious. As a result, China **ceded Taiwan** to Japan. Japan's activity in Korea also infuriated the Russians. Ultimately, Japan launched a sneak attack and sunk the Russian Pacific Fleet and the two nations also went to war. Japan humiliated Russia in the **Russo-Japanese War** (1904-1905), proving it had become one of the great powers. Although suspicious of Japan, the U.S. allowed Japan to **annex Korea** in 1910, in return for recognition of U.S. authority in the Philippines.

How do you believe the Japanese justified their imperialism in Korea, Taiwan and China?

What event above is being depicted in the cartoon to the right? Explain.



Jap the Giant Killer.



Study the cartoon to the left. Where did Japan go next in its search for colonies? Explain the meaning of the cartoon in your answer to this question.

Like Japan, China had restricted European merchants' ability to trade in their country, limiting them to one port. Needless to say, Europeans did not like this arrangement. For example, the British imported more goods from China (mainly tea, silk and porcelain) than they exported (mainly cotton), creating an **unfavorable balance of trade**. Britain soon began trading highly addictive opium, grown in India, with the Chinese. As a result, the British gained the upper hand in trade with China. The Chinese government outlawed the opium trade, tried to appeal to **Queen Victoria** and blockaded ships carrying the drug. In the resulting **Opium War**, the **Qing Dynasty** was no match for the British navy and was forced to ask for peace. The **Treaty of Nanjing (1842)** opened five Chinese ports to British trade and China gave Britain the island of **Hong Kong**, among other concessions. Other European countries and the United States were soon given the same trade rights as Britain, opening China to Western influence.

The competing nations of Japan, Britain, France, Russia and Germany soon developed "**spheres of influence**" in China or areas where each imperial power had exclusive trading rights. As a result, in 1900, many in China (known as "boxers" because of their exercise of shadowboxing or boxing an imaginary opponent) began to resent foreign influence in their country and began to attack and kill foreigners. **The Boxer Rebellion** was eventually stopped by British, French, German, Russian, American and Japanese troops.

Use what you just read about China above to explain the cartoon to the right. Be sure to include who you think each of the people represent in the piece **and label them**.

What would make a good title for the cartoon and why?



1.) Why did Japan industrialize?

2.) How were Japan's industrialization and imperialism linked?

3.) Why was Japan able to colonize Korea, Taiwan and parts of China?

4.) Which nations "got a slice" of China and why did this happen?

5.) During the new Age of Imperialism Europeans and Americans often cited Social Darwinism and *the white man's burden* as justifications for imperialism. How did the Japanese "import" these ideas to justify their own brand of imperialism?