

Background Information

Japanese Reply to President Fillmore

The return of your excellency [Commodore Perry] as Ambassador of the United States to this Empire, has been expected according to the letter of his majesty the President, which letter your excellency delivered last year to his majesty the Emperor of this empire.

It is quite impossible to give satisfactory answers at once to all the proposals of your government, as it is most positively forbidden by the laws of our imperial ancestors; but for us to continue attached to ancient laws, seems to misunderstand the spirit of the age. However, we are governed now by imperative necessity.

At the visit of your excellency last year to this Empire, his majesty the former Emperor was sick, and is now dead. Subsequently, his majesty the present Emperor ascended the throne; the many occupations in consequence thereof are not yet finished, and there is no time to settle other business thoroughly. Moreover his majesty the new Emperor at the succession to the throne promised to the princes and high officers of the empire to observe the laws. It is therefore evident that he cannot now bring about any alterations in the ancient laws.

Last autumn, at the departure of the Dutch ship, the superintendent of the Dutch trade in Japan was requested to inform your government of this event, and a reply in writing has been received.

At [Nagasaki] arrived recently the Russian ambassador to communicate a wish of his government. He has since left the said place, because no answer would be given to whatever nation that might communicate similar wishes. However, we admit the urgency, and shall entirely comply with the proposals of your government concerning coal, wood, water, provisions, and the saving of ships and their crews in distress. After being informed which harbor your excellency selects, that harbor shall be prepared, which preparation it is estimated will take about five years. Meanwhile commencement can be made with the coal at [Nagasaki], by . . . (16th of February 1855).

Having no precedent with respect to coal, we request your excellency to furnish us with an estimate, and upon due consideration this will be complied with, if not in opposition to our laws. What do you mean by provisions, and how much coal?

Finally, anything ships may be in want of that can be furnished from the production of this Empire shall be supplied; the prices of merchandise and articles of barter to be fixed by Kurokawa Kahei and Moriyama Yenosuke. After settling the points before mentioned, the treaty can be concluded and signed at the next interview.

Seals attached by order of the high Gentleman
Moriyama Yenosuke [interpreter]

United States Senate. *Executive Documents*. 33rd Cong., 2nd. sess., 1854–55, Vol. 6., 137. Joseph O'Brien (Instructor). Adapted from "Information for Students." Department of History. John Jay College of Criminal Justice. <http://web.jjay.cuny.edu/jobrien/reference/ob54.html> (16 March 2007).