

Background Information

Letter and Response of Commodore Perry

United States Flag Ship *Powhatan*
At anchor off the Town of Yokohama.
Edo Bay, 10 March 1854

Your Highness,

In reply to the communication of your highness, which was brought to me yesterday by Kurokawa Kahei, and the chief interpreter, Moriyama Yenosuke, I hasten to remark that it has given me the greatest satisfaction to learn from its contents, that the imperial government of Japan has at last awakened to a conviction of the necessity of so altering its policy with respect to foreign nations, as to consent to an interchange of friendly intercourse with the United States.

Though the propositions set forth in the communication of your highness furnish strong evidence of the enlightened spirit with which the imperial commissioners are disposed to meet the suggestions which I have had the honor to submit, they fall far short of my anticipations, and I do not hesitate to say that they would not satisfy the views of the President.

I cheerfully accede to those of the propositions of your highness which offer to guarantee kind treatment to such vessels of the United States as may hereafter visit the parts of Japan, or be wrecked upon its coasts with protection, and suitable hospitality to the people who may belong to them.

Also, that provisions and other supplies shall be furnished to them and payment received for the same.

Also, that American steamers shall be supplied with reasonable quantities of coal, and at fair and equitable prices.

These are all very well so far as they go, and can be incorporated in the treaty which I shall expect to make; but my instructions require me to look for an intercourse of a more enlarged and liberal character, and I feel assured that the Imperial government, in consideration of the spirit of the age, and with the full knowledge of my strong desire to conduct my mission in peace and friendship, will no longer hesitate to enter with cordiality into a treaty that will be mutually honorable and advantageous to both nations.

The convenience of the immense and growing commerce of the United States in these seas will require, certainly, as many ports of resort in Japan as are specified in the treaty

with China, and these must be free from any restrictions not recognized, by the usages of free and independent nations.

In a word, I again earnestly urge upon your highness the policy of fixing upon some written compact that will be binding as well upon the citizens of the United States as the subjects of Japan.

It would be needless in me again to express the sincerest desire of my heart to bring these negotiations to an amicable and satisfactory termination; nor will I again allude to the importance of such an issue—important as well to save time as to prevent the necessity of sending from America more ships and men, and possibly with instructions of more stringent import.

I have the power and the wish to meet the Imperial commissioners in all good faith, believing that there can be no more favorable time than the present to settle all the questions under consideration in such manner as will bring about a good understanding between two nations, whose geographical positions, lying in comparative proximity, would seem to enjoin, as a measure of wise foresight, a mutual interchange of those acts of kindness and good will which will serve to cement the friendship happily commenced, and to endure, I trust, for many years.

With the most profound respect

(signed) M. C. Perry

Commander-in-chief U.S. Naval Forces
East India, China, and Japan Seas
And Special Ambassador to Japan.

United States Senate. *Executive Documents*. 33rd Cong., 2nd. sess., 1854–55, Vol. 6., 138–139. 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).