

Meiji Restoration and Japan's Industrialization

EE 482: Public Policy and Industrialization

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Faculty of Economics, Thammasat University

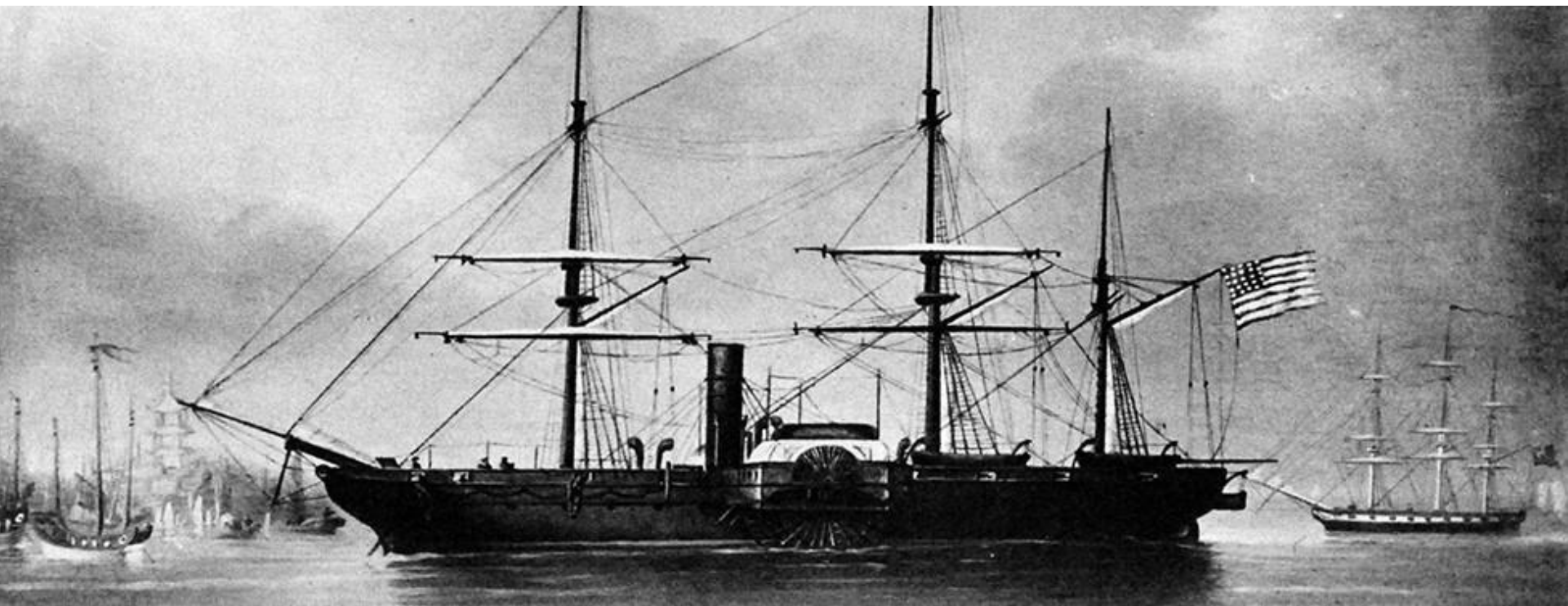
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Commodore Matthew C. Perry and the Opening of Japan

- **In 1853 American ships** under the command of **Commodore Matthew Perry** arrived Tokyo bay.
- The **feudal Tokugawa** shogunate **had isolated Japan** from the outside world for many centuries.
- Recognizing the **superior military technology** of the American navy, the shogunate **agreed to open** its **ports** to **foreign trade**.
- This decision was **unpopular** in Japan and **weakened** the **Tokugawa shogunate**.



USS Powhatan (Sidewheel-Steam Frigate)



USS Powhatan (Sidewheel-Steam Frigate)





Japanese depictions of Perry's Black Ship



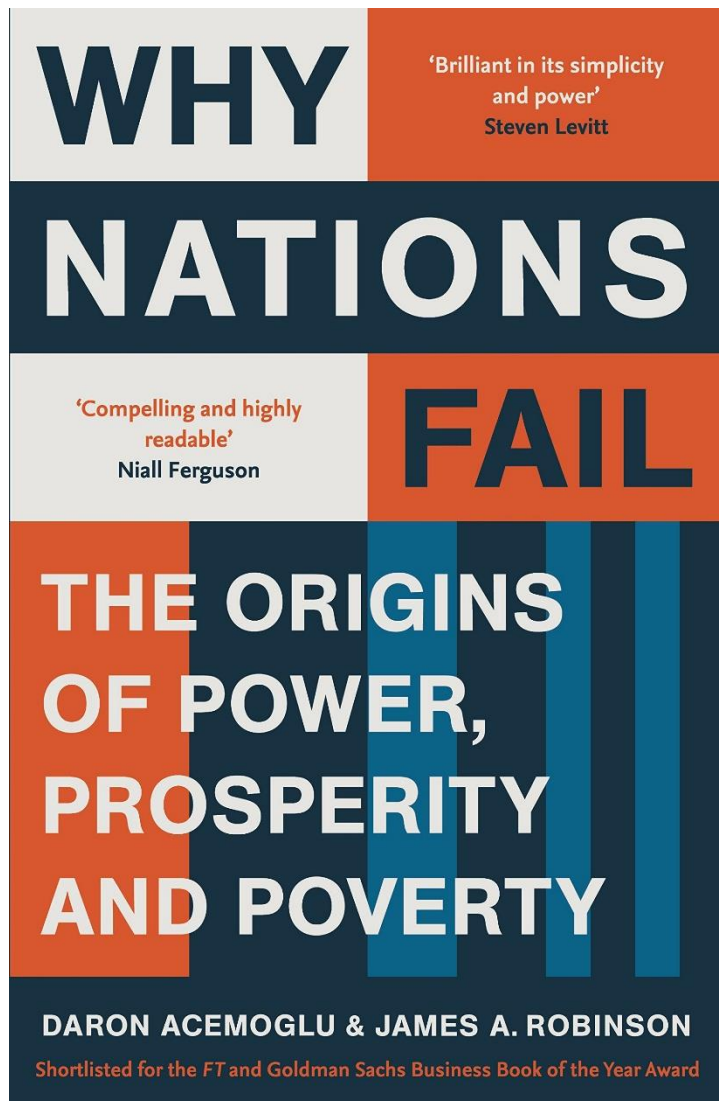
American Commodore Matthew Perry



Japanese depiction of Perry



Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Japan and the US, 1858



Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty

by Daron Acemoglu (MIT) and James A. Robinson (Harvard University)

<http://whynationsfail.com/>

Why Nations Fail: Japan's Meiji Restoration

- In the autumn of 1867, **Ōkubo Toshimichi**, a leading courtier of the feudal Japanese **Satsuma** domain, traveled from the capital of **Edo, now Tokyo**, to the regional city of **Yamaguchi**.
- On October 14 he met with leaders of the **Chōshū** domain.
- He had a simple proposal: they would **join forces**, march their armies to Edo, and **overthrow the shogun**, the ruler of Japan.
- By this time Ōkubo Toshimichi already had the leaders of the **Tosa** and **Aki** domains **on board**.
- Once the leaders of the **powerful Chōshū agreed**, a **secret Satcho Alliance** was formed.



Ōkubo Toshimichi (young *Samurai*)



Ōkubo Toshimichi (Finance Minister)

Why Nations Fail: Japan's Meiji Restoration (cont'd)

- In **1868** Japan was an **economically underdeveloped country** that had been controlled **since 1600** by the **Tokugawa family**, whose ruler had taken the **title shogun** (commander) in 1603.
- The **Japanese emperor** was sidelined and assumed a **purely ceremonial role**.
- The **Tokugawa shoguns** were the dominant members of a class of **feudal lords** who **ruled** and **taxed** their own domains, among them those of **Satsuma**, ruled by the **Shimazu family**.

19th century samurai. Like the knights of medieval Europe, these warriors were bound by a strict code of honour and loyalty to their clan – image Public Domain. **Source:** <https://www.insidekyoto.com/kyoto-samurai>





Samurai with sword, c. 1860.

J. Paul Getty Museum (Partial gift from the Wilson Centre for Photography, object no. 2007.26.155), digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program



Samurai in Armour, hand-coloured albumen silver print by Kusakabe Kimbei, c. 1870s–90s; in the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

J. Paul Getty Museum (object no. 84.XA.700.4.58), digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program

Why Nations Fail: Japan's Meiji Restoration (cont'd)

- These lords, along with their **military retainers**, the famous **samurai**, ran a society that was similar to that of **medieval Europe**, with strict **occupational categories**, **restrictions on trade**, and **high rates** of **taxation** on **farmers**.
- The **shogun** ruled from **Edo**, where he **monopolized** and **controlled foreign trade** and **banned foreigners** from the country.
- **Political** and **economic institutions** were **extractive**, and **Japan was poor**.
- But the domination of the shogun **was not complete**.
- Even as the Tokugawa family took over the country in 1600, they **could not control everyone**.

Why Nations Fail: Japan's Meiji Restoration (cont'd)

- In the south of the country, the **Satsuma** domain remained quite **autonomous** and was even allowed to **trade independently** with the outside world through the Ryūkyū Islands.
- It was in the Satsuma capital of Kagoshima where **Ōkubo Toshimichi** was born in 1830.
- As the son of a samurai, he, too, **became a samurai**.
- His talent was spotted early on by Shimazu Nariakira, the lord of Satsuma, who quickly **promoted him** in the **bureaucracy**.
- At the time, Shimazu Nariakira had already formulated a plan to use Satsuma troops to **overthrow the shogun**.
- He wanted to **expand trade** with Asia and Europe, **abolish** the **old feudal economic institutions**, and construct a **modern state** in Japan.

Why Nations Fail: Japan's Meiji Restoration (cont'd)

- His nascent **plan was cut short** by **his death** in 1858.
- His **successor, Shimazu Hisamitsu**, was more circumspect, at least initially.
- Ōkubo Toshimichi had by now become more and more convinced that **Japan needed to overthrow the feudal shogunate**, and he eventually **convinced Shimazu Hisamitsu**.
- To rally support for their cause, they wrapped it in outrage over the sidelining of the emperor.
- **Shogun Yoshinobu agreed to resign.**
- On **January 3, 1868**, the **Meiji Restoration was declared**;
- **Emperor Kōmei** and, one month later after Kōmei died, **his son Meiji** were **restored to power**.



Tokugawa Yoshinobu

Why Nations Fail: Japan's Meiji Restoration (cont'd)

The treaty (Ōkubo Toshimichi had already signed with the Tosa domain asserted that:

*“a country **does not have two monarchs**, a home **does not have two masters**; government devolves to **one ruler**.”*

Clauses 2, 3, 4, and 5 stated:

- 2. **Two legislative bodies**, an Upper and Lower house, **should be established**, and all government measures should be decided on the basis of general opinion.*
- 3. Men of ability among the lords, **nobles and people** at large **should be employed as councillors**, and **traditional offices** of the past which have lost their purpose should be abolished.*
- 4. **Foreign affairs** should be carried on according to **appropriate regulations** worked out on the basis of general opinion.*
- 5. Legislation and regulations of earlier times should be set aside and a new and adequate code should be selected.*

Why Nations Fail: Japan's Meiji Restoration (cont'd)

- Following the Meiji Restoration there was a **process of transformative institutional reforms** in Japan.
- In 1869 **feudalism was abolished**, and the **three hundred fiefs were surrendered** to the government and **turned into prefectures**, under the control of an **appointed governor**.
- **Taxation** was **centralized**, and a **modern bureaucratic state** replaced the old feudal one.
- In 1869 the **equality of all social classes** before the law was introduced, and **restrictions** on **internal migration** and **trade** were **abolished**.
- The **samurai class** was **abolished**, though not without having to put down some rebellions.
- **Individual property rights** on **land were introduced**, and people were allowed **freedom** to enter and practice **any trade**.

Why Nations Fail: Japan's Meiji Restoration (cont'd)

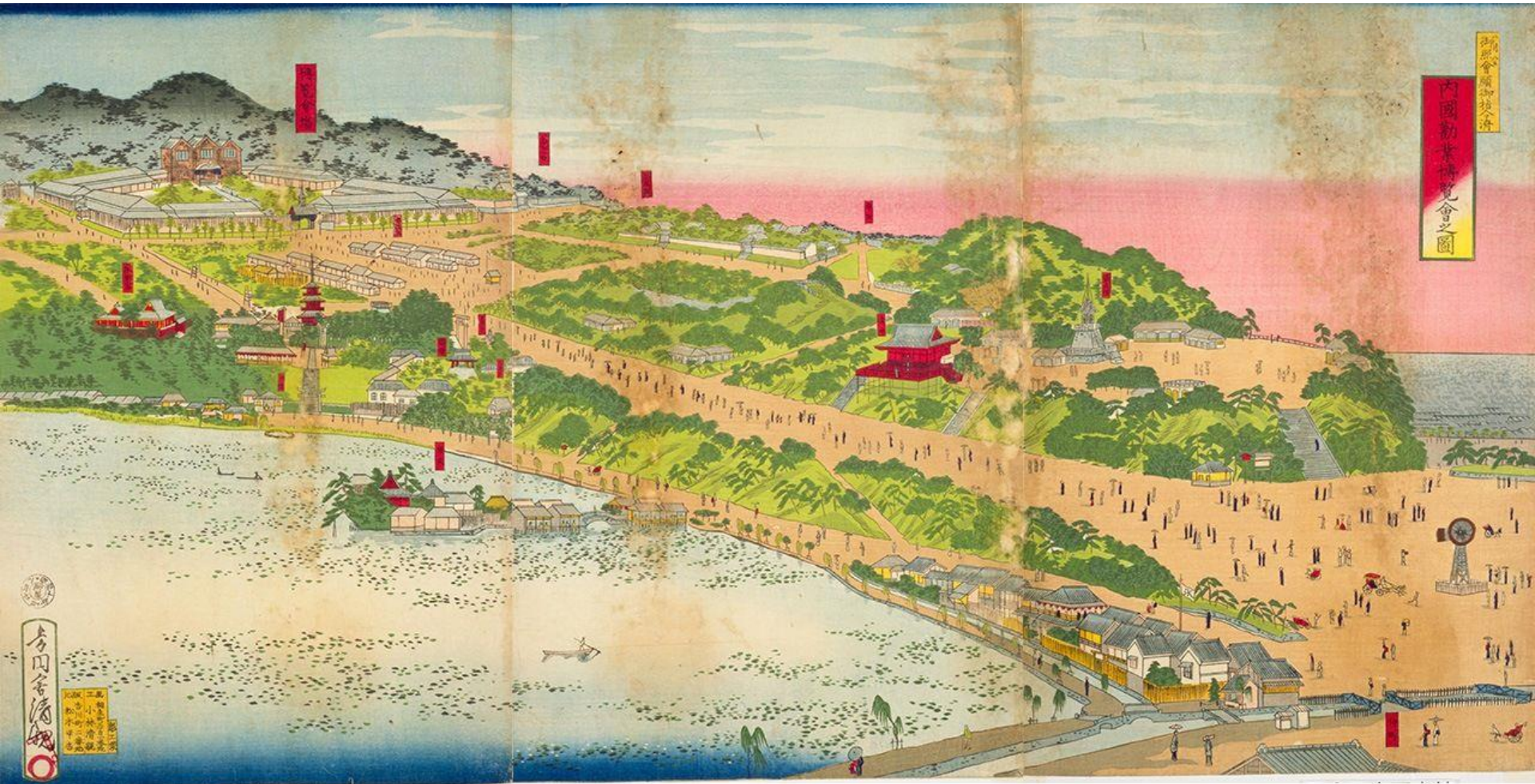
- The state became heavily involved in the **construction of infrastructure**.
- In contrast to the attitudes of absolutist regimes to railways, in **1869** the Japanese regime formed a **steamship line** between **Tokyo and Osaka** and **built the first railway** between **Tokyo and Yokohama**.
- It also began to develop a **manufacturing industry**, and **Ōkubo Toshimichi**, as **minister of finance**, oversaw the beginning of a concerted effort of **industrialization**.
- The lord of Satsuma domain had been a leader in this, **building factories** for pottery, cannon, and cotton yarn and **importing English textile machinery** to create the **first modern cotton spinning mill** in Japan in 1861.



A print depicting the start of **Japan's first rail service**, from **Tokyo's Shinbashi to Yokohama**, in 1872. Utagawa Hiroshige III, 1872.
(Courtesy of the Minato City Local History Museum)



An image of the **Tomioka Silk Mill** in Gunma Prefecture. Utagawa Kunitaru II, 1873. (Courtesy of the National Diet Library)



The first **Domestic Industrial Exposition**. Kobayashi Kiyochika, 1877.
(Courtesy of the National Diet Library)

The Edo Period Roots of Modernization

- The **groundwork** for **Japan's rapid modernization** in the early Meiji era (1868–1912) was, however, **laid in the Edo period** (1603–1868).
- In addition to the samurai elite who studied at domain schools, a large number of **common people learned to read and write** at *terakoya*, or **local temple schools**.
- The **publishing industry flourished**, allowing for **further self-improvement** and **education through reading**.
- Japan also developed its **own advanced form of mathematics**, called *wasan*.
- The country's **primary education** was arguably **the best in the world at the time**.

Why Nations Fail: Japan's Meiji Restoration (cont'd)

- **Two modern shipyards** were built.
- By 1890 Japan was the **first Asian country** to adopt a **written constitution**, and it created a constitutional monarchy with an **elected parliament**, the Diet, and an **independent judiciary**.
- These changes were decisive factors in enabling Japan to be the **primary beneficiary** from the **Industrial Revolution in Asia**.



- **Tarō Asō** was the **Prime Minister of Japan** from September 2008 to September 2009, and was also Minister for Foreign Affairs and Finance Minister.
- He is the **great-great-grandson** of **Ōkubo Toshimichi**.
- Also, he is the **grandson** of **Shigeru Yoshida, the Prime Minister of Japan** from 1946 to 1947 and from 1948 to 1954.