

**Commodore Perry's 1853 Japanese Expedition: How Whaling  
Influenced the Event that Revolutionized Japan**

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Thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State  
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

History

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5 May 2005

Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: commerce, Japan, Pacific Ocean, Perry, whaling

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Abstract

In July 1853, Commodore Matthew C. Perry illegally entered Tokyo Bay with a fleet of four American warships and challenged Japan’s isolationist position towards the United States. This radical diplomatic effort concluded with a return voyage a year later and ended Japan’s self-imposed isolation from the Western world.

Historians, in an attempt to explain the motivations behind Perry’s voyage, cite an American commercial desire for Chinese trade as the main reason behind the Japanese Expedition’s dispatch. This historical perspective ignores the important economic and political influence the whaling industry played in spurring American politicians to confront Japanese isolationism.

It is incorrect to assert that whaling, and not America’s desire to gain access to China, was the main reason behind the 1853 Japanese Expedition. This paper’s objective is to understand how whaling influenced Perry’s mission. It should be read as a supplement to current historical scholarship concerning America’s decision to send a naval force into Japanese waters.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Amid everlasting peace,  
Awake from a long sleep,  
Jokisen-tea,  
With merely four cups,  
Sleepless moments all night long.<sup>1</sup>*

On 8 July 1853, Commodore Matthew C. Perry brought a four vessel American fleet into Edo Bay [present-day Tokyo] in a bold challenge to a Japanese law that forbade such actions. This naval force, showcased around two advance steamer warships, intended to initiate diplomatic negotiations with the Japanese the next day in a peaceful and formal manner. Apprehension over the Japanese reaction to such an aggressive move worried the officers and crewmen of the American fleet until the early morning hours of the next day. As if intended as a divine sign, a brilliant meteor appeared in the night sky above Edo Bay. The impact of this celestial event, as recorded by witness testimony in Perry's personal journal, described a cosmic display that:

The ancients would have construed ...as an omen promising a favorable issue to an enterprise undertake by them, and we may pray to God that our present attempt to bring a singular and half barbarous people into the family of civilized nations, may succeed without resort to bloodshed.<sup>2</sup>

Symbolically, this meteoric display seemed to vindicate America's radical new strategy of illegally entering Edo Bay and demanding treaty negotiations with the Japanese. The

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<sup>1</sup>A Japanese Kyoka, or humorous poem, that circulated Edo when Commodore Perry appeared in July 1853. The term "jokisen" possessed the same pronunciation as the Japanese word for steamship and was symbolically used by this poem's author to represent the four American warships that entered Edo Bay. The last verse clearly identified the panic and concern that rapidly spread among Edo's citizens after Perry's sudden arrival. "Perry Anniversary Special," *Yomiuri Online*, <<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/education/kouza/english031001.htm>> 15 January, 2005.

<sup>2</sup>Quote by Lieutenant Duer, commander of the watch. Rodger Pineau, ed., *The Japan Expedition 1852-1854: The Personal Journal of Commodore Matthew C. Perry* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1968), 91.

result, after a second Perry voyage in February 1854, was the end of Japan's isolation from the United States and the beginning of a new era in Japanese history.

Perry's 1853 expedition was not the first time the United States had attempted to establish diplomatic relations with Japan. Seven years earlier, two American warships had entered Edo Bay in an effort to foster commercial relations with Japan and respond to an 1837 incident that seemed disrespectful of American prestige.<sup>3</sup> This naval mission, under the command of Commodore James Biddle, not only failed to establish commercial ties with Japan but, ironically, further damaged American pride when a Japanese sailor shoved Biddle and was not punished for the action. Biddle's unsuccessful 1846 voyage was followed by Commodore James Glynn's naval mission to Nagasaki in 1849, which demanded the release of fifteen imprisoned American seamen who had deserted the whaler *Lagoda* over a year earlier. Unlike Biddle, Glynn pressed his demands and achieved the whalers' release after he threatened to sail directly to Edo and petition the Japanese emperor in person.<sup>4</sup>

The 1852 Annual Report of John P. Kennedy, the newly appointed Secretary of the Navy, demonstrated how American attitudes toward Japan had changed in the three years after Commodore Biddle's mission. Writing more than a month after Perry

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<sup>3</sup> This incident involved the American merchant ship *Morrison* that, in a vain attempt, tried to return several shipwrecked Japanese sailors and organize a goodwill mission toward the Japanese government at the same time. Organized by C.W. King, an American businessman in Canton, the *Morrison* expedition wanted to open commercial relation with Japan and, as a result, carried no guns or religious literature that would identify the mission as anything otherwise. The Japanese response to this private mission, while initially positive, soon deteriorated and turned violent when the *Morrison* was attacked while trying to depart Edo Bay. This incident was interpreted by many American politicians as an insult to the national prestige in the years afterward and resulted in an 1845 House Resolution that dispatched Biddle with the intent to achieve "immediate measures...for effecting commercial arrangements with the empire of Japan and the kingdom of Corea." Thus, while spurred by political motives to correct a national insult, commercial interests remained paramount for House politicians when discussions about Japan concluded. Arthur Walworth, *Black Ships Off Japan: The Story of Commodore Perry's Expedition* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946): 8-12.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Booth Wily, *Yankee in the Land of the Gods: Commodore Perry and the Opening of Japan* (New York: Penguin Group, 1990), 23-28.

departed, Kennedy identified the Japanese Expedition as an “enterprise of great moment to the commercial interests of the country – the endeavor to establish relations with the empire of Japan.”<sup>5</sup> Kennedy further justified the voyage by arguing that:

The extension of the domain of the United States to the shores of the Pacific, the rapid settlement of California and Oregon, the opening of the highway across the Isthmus of Central America, the great addition to our navigation employed in trade with Asiatic nations, and the increased activity of our whaling ships in the vicinity of the northern coasts of Japan, are now pressing upon the consideration of this Government the absolute necessity of reviewing our relations to those eastern communities which lie contiguous to the path of our trade.<sup>6</sup>

According to Kennedy’s report, Perry’s voyage resulted from America’s increased commercial relationship with Asia.

Historians concerned with Perry’s voyage have emphasized Kennedy’s link between “the rapid settlement of California and Oregon” and “the great addition to our navigation employed in trade with Asiatic nations.” California’s statehood, they argue, provided the United States with easy access to the Pacific Ocean and fueled American trade in Asia. China, a lucrative market exploited by the British for decades, became more accessible and profitable to American merchants as a result of California’s statehood and the era’s technological advancements in steamship propulsion. Thus the dual economic themes of California’s accessibility to the Pacific Ocean and an intense American interest to reach Chinese markets have remained the centerpiece of arguments historians use when seeking to explain the motivations behind Perry’s Japanese Expedition.

Ironically, Japan is reduced in many historical narratives to a mere coaling station and a port of resupply for merchantmen en route to Chinese markets. This view was

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<sup>5</sup> “Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy,” *New York Times*, 9 December 1852, 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

epitomized by Samuel Eliot Morison, who argued that without “coal en route [to China], transpacific steam navigation would be impossible.”<sup>7</sup> Perry’s naval background in steamship design and development is cited as evidence that the commodore understood the potential of steamship trade between China and the western coast of the United States. As a result, scholars point to Chinese trade as the most significant economic reason for sending Perry to challenge Japan’s isolation from the United States.

Curiously, whaling, the only industry specifically cited by Kennedy and the most dramatic example of how American commerce immediately benefited from an accessible Japan, is largely absent from the historical literature. What mention of whaling that is made by historians centers on Japanese mistreatment of American whalers, such as those of the *Lagoda*, and the political justification it gave President Fillmore in sending an expensive naval mission to Japan. Scholars routinely ignore this large, profitable industry based in New England during the first half of the nineteenth century. This is a glaring dissociation of Perry’s effort.

This paper explores how whaling influenced the United States’ decision to illegally dispatch Perry into Edo Bay and dictate the need for treaty relations with a nation that had preserved its almost complete isolation for over two-hundred years. It will be argued that the American whaling industry played a crucial role in a decade-long argument to confront Japanese isolation. Furthermore, it will be shown that the whaling industry had a significant stake in the success or failure of any American diplomatic

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *“Old Bruin”: Commodore Matthew C. Perry 1794-1858; The American Naval Officer Who Helped Found Liberia, Hunted Pirates in the West Indies, Practised Diplomacy with the Sultan of Turkey and the King of Two Sicilies; Commanded the Gulf Squadron in the Mexican War, Promoted the Steam Navy and the Shell Gun, and Conducted the Naval Expedition Which Opened Japan* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1967), 266.

effort to end Japan's isolationist stance. Included in these arguments will be discussions about America's nationalistic sentiments and desire to exploit Pacific commerce.

In order to understand how whaling influenced Perry's mission, this paper will first seek to establish how the industry matured and changed before 1853. Whaling, a British dominated industry at the nineteenth century's beginning, had evolved into an American monopoly by the time of Biddle and Glynn's voyages to Japan. Two decades before Perry sailed into Edo Bay, the American whaling industry shifted a majority of its operations to Pacific fisheries and reaped record profits. The period between the 1840 and 1855 was so profitable for whalers that it has been labeled as the 'Golden Age' of whaling. For American whalers, the era's high price for whale products made the North Pacific region near Japan too valuable to ignore. Thus, as a matter of business, whalers from the United States routinely sailed thousands of miles to reach whale stocks in the North Pacific.

This business strategy placed Americans in close proximity to Japan and resulted in a unique relationship, albeit both negative and positive, between whalers and the Japanese. Before Perry's mission successfully opened Japan, the only Americans to have extensive and constant contact with the Japanese were whalers. Through adventure seeking and imprisonment, whalers viewed an aspect of Japan that no American had theretofore witnessed. Conversely, whalers rescued stranded Japanese sailors and offered them a glimpse into American society. Perry's mission benefited from the experience of whalers in Japan as their stories reaffirmed America's hope that the Japanese people would welcome American influences and would eagerly establish commercial ties with



the United States. The result of whalers' contact with Japan was the development of an American perspective that conceptually divided the Japanese government from its people.

Lastly, this paper will focus on the lobbying efforts used to justify sending Perry to Japan. Aaron Palmer's role as the chief lobbyist for the Japanese Expedition will be examined along with his skillful use of nationalistic rhetoric to motivate American politicians to act against the perceived mistreatment of whalers shipwrecked in Japan. This argument was combined with official discussions about the protection of American commercial assets in the Pacific Ocean to form a powerful incentive for the United States to dispatch Perry. Japan, a nation vital to America's commercial aspirations in the Pacific, had to be opened if the United States was to assume a dominant role in global trade. Whalers, as the only major extension of American economic activity near Japan, provided the justification politicians needed to confront Japanese isolation and open the nation to American influence.

It would be incorrect to assert that whaling, and not America's desire to gain access to China, was the main reason behind the 1853 Japanese Expedition. It was, however, one reason, and this paper's objective is to understand how whaling influenced Perry's mission. It should be read as a supplement to current historical scholarship concerning America's decision to send a naval force into Japanese waters. Perry's expedition, an event aimed at fostering America's commercial interests in Asia, achieved a result that few other diplomatic missions in world history can match – it opened a new era in Japanese history, one that transformed a feudalistic nation into a modern industrial power in just a few short decades.

## Chapter I

### “Pacific Whaling: An American Monopoly”

*There are over 15,000 American seamen, and 650 ships at present engaged in the Pacific fisheries, from which it will be seen that our countrymen have almost a monopoly of trade.<sup>1</sup>*

The whaling industry’s ability to influence Commodore Perry’s mission was made possible by the rapid nineteenth-century expansion of American whalers into the Pacific Ocean. All nations were free to exploit the world’s whales yet the United States, in a period of a few decades, developed a whaling industry that evolved into a global monopoly. Grown from humble colonial beginnings and rebuilt after the War of 1812, the United States’ whaling fleet established a reputation for aggressiveness and efficiency that outclassed foreign competition. In the two decade period before Perry’s Japanese Expedition, American whalers benefited from larger ship designs and technological advancements and swarmed the waters around Japan in search of profitable whaling grounds. The result was more American sailors in the dangerous northern Pacific region without the aid of major port facilities for refit and resupply. Logistics, and not apprehension of dangerous conditions, proved the most formidable adversary American whalers faced in the North Pacific. Since the North Pacific and Arctic fisheries were paramount to the health of the American whaling industry, an isolated Japan adversely influenced, both logistically and economically, the United States’ ability to maintain whalers in the Pacific Ocean. As a result, access to Japanese ports was vital if the whaling industry was to maintain its global monopoly.

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<sup>1</sup> “The Pacific Whaling Business.” *New York Times*, 24 February 1853, 7.

America's commercial whaling industry originated in New England's colonial period. Dead whales, or drift whales, washed ashore with great frequency and were used as a valuable natural commodity by early colonists. Since the collected whales were dead, the only major product they provided was oil.<sup>2</sup> Intense disputes erupted over the ownership of these dead whales as property rights were not yet clearly established in many coastal areas. In order to remedy conflicts, many towns established egalitarian plans that, by law, divided townsmen into teams that were instructed to process whales found within town boundaries. The processed whales were then divided equally among town residents. Other New England communities, principally those in Massachusetts, directed that whale profits be divided between colonial government, town jurisdiction, and the finder. Regardless of which method was applied, the commercial use of whales was established from the beginning of colonial settlement in New England.<sup>3</sup>

The late seventeenth century saw major changes in how New Englanders viewed the commoditization of whales. Instead of waiting for whales to wash ashore, some settlers, principally from Long Island and Nantucket, started the active search for whales along the coastline in cooperative efforts. These operations stayed close to shore and involved small boats and usually two teams of men. Once a whale had been found and

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<sup>2</sup> The most valuable commodity whalers supplied was sperm oil; a product that came exclusively from sperm whales that were found in abundance in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. This oil was used as a high quality lubricant and was renowned as a bright and clean energy source. Although too expensive for most households, sperm oil was widely used for public buildings and lighthouses. Oil from baleen whales, such as right, humpback, and gray whales, was refined into a heavy lubricant characterized by a heavy and vile smell. It was lower priced than sperm oil and, as a result, was employed in leather tanning, soap and paint manufacture, or any other industrial operation that required large quantities of cheap oil. Whalebone was little used before the 1830s yet peaked in price afterwards. Described as the 'plastics of its day,' whalebone was used in items that ranged from umbrellas, corsets, carriage whips to bed springs. In the early colonial period, sperm and whale oil was the primary commodity acquired from drift whales as whalebone remained little used. Lance E. Davis, Robert E. Gallman, and Karin Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan: Technology, Institutions, Productivity, and Profits in American Whaling, 1816-1906* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 23, 28-30; John Spears, *The Story of the New England Whalers* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1908), 338-339.

<sup>3</sup> Davis, Gallman, and Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 34.

killed, the teams towed the dead animal to shore, where processing operations commenced. This method of whaling stayed in wide use until 1760.<sup>4</sup>

As vessel size and length of voyage increased in coastal whaling operations, a new and more aggressive business technique emerged. This technique, an upscaled version of coastal whaling, involved voyages that lasted as long as six weeks but depended on towing dead whales to land for processing. Once on land, the whale blubber was packed into barrels and the whaleships returned to their respective home ports for unloading and resupply. Drift whales and coastal whaling continued to occupy the industry's focus but the use of larger boats to sail beyond the coastline indicated the aggressive risks some New England whalers took to acquire greater profits and fish in less competitive waters. By 1715, Nantucket, the center of colonial whaling, had six sloops engaged in whaling beyond the coastline that produced oil valued at £1,100 sterling. However, whale oil production remained an onshore activity as most whaleships remained too small to risk voyages beyond the immediate shoreline.<sup>5</sup>

By the start of the eighteenth century, the whaling industry had not dared venture into the open Atlantic Ocean in search of whales due to the dangers involved and the threat of spoilage to collected whale blubber. This changed, by accident, in 1712. During a coastal whaling voyage, Nantucketer Christopher Hussey was “blown off some distance from the land by a strong northerly wind, where he fell in with a school of that species of whale [sperm], and killed one and brought it home...this event gave new life to the business, for they immediately began with vessels of about thirty tons to whale out in the

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<sup>4</sup> Davis, Gallman, and Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 35; Ivan T. Sanderson, *Follow the Whale* (New York: Bramhall House, 1956), 185-186.

<sup>5</sup> Davis, Gallman, and Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 35.

deep.”<sup>6</sup> Large-scale whaling operations in the Atlantic did not materialize immediately after Hussey’s accident until a decade later when offshore barreling techniques for packing whale blubber were improved.<sup>7</sup> By 1726, Nantucket harbored a fleet of 25 sloops that annually sold £3200 sterling in whale oil. These sloops ranged in size from thirty to fifty tons and remained the port’s largest vessels until a seventy-ton schooner was launched in 1730. Nantucket’s whalers continued to grow in size throughout the eighteenth century as the city strengthened its control over the American whaling industry. By 1769, Nantucket’s 119 whalers produced 19,140 barrels of whale oil valued at £92,600. This value was an eighty-fold increase from levels fifty years earlier. Hussey’s fortunate accident with a sperm whale had provided the justification that resulted in the economic expansion of the city’s whaling industry.<sup>8</sup>

The 1743 incorporation of try-pots, or large ovens aboard whaleships, converted whale blubber to oil and made profitable voyages that ventured into the North Atlantic.<sup>9</sup> Whalers took advantage of such improvements and sailed as far south as the West Indies by 1756. In just twenty years, voyages to the Falkland Islands were possible as larger Nantucket whalers ventured into the South Atlantic and made profitable returns. Concern for profits induced whalers to take such risks and sail the distances to less competitive

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<sup>6</sup> Some historians dispute this claim and suggest that the first sperm whale kill actually occurred much earlier in 1686. For more information on this counterargument, turn to W. Ripley Nelson, *The Nantucket Whaling Museum* (Nantucket, MA.: Nantucket Historical Association, 1959). Davis, Gallman, and Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 35.

<sup>7</sup> Even Hussey’s fortunate collision with a whale did not overcome the technological limitations that existed in the early eighteenth century. As a result, the whale Hussey killed was towed back to shore for processing. Granville Allen Mawer, *Ahab’s Trade: The Saga of South Seas Whaling* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 17

<sup>8</sup> Davis, Gallman, and Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 35; Mawer, *Ahab’s Trade*, 17; Sanderson, *Follow the Whale*, 212-213.

<sup>9</sup> Try-pots are large ovens heated by furnaces on a whaler’s deck. This technology allowed whalers to process whale blubber into oil before the whale spoiled and became worthless. More importantly, it allowed whalers to explore new hunting grounds further away from traditional processing centers located in New England and became an enduring symbol of whaling in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Spears, *New England Whalers*, 69.

whaling grounds as North Atlantic fisheries faced increased competition from American and British whalers.<sup>10</sup>

The focus on South Atlantic fisheries benefited aggressive whalers, especially those from Nantucket who preferred longer southern voyages rather than shorter ones into the North Atlantic. Nantucket, with its fleet of 150 whalers by 1775, contained about half of the American colonies' total whaling industry. Eighty-five Nantucket whalers ventured into southern whale fisheries and, when combined with the remaining fleet, produced two-thirds of the oil production in colonial America. The number of whalers stationed at the port city and the amount of whale oil produced vindicated this strategy that focused on longer voyages with larger ships. The result was the profitable expansion of American whalers into the South Atlantic and the successful establishment of whale fisheries in previously unfamiliar waters.<sup>11</sup>

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The economic health of the American colonial whaling industry depended heavily on Great Britain as an estimated eighty percent of whale oil produced in the colonies was shipped to Britain. London's five thousand street lamps and extensive textile industries required immense quantities of whale oil for operation. An estimated 5,000 tons of whale oil was imported by Britain in 1763, and this figure rose to about 8,000 tons by 1771. More importantly for American whalers, as British imports rose, so did prices. The average price, per ton, in 1742 was £14 7s. By 1754, this price had doubled to £29 per ton, where it remained until the early nineteenth century. American whalers enjoyed these high prices in the British market and capitalized on this profit to fund voyages

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<sup>10</sup> Frances Robotti, *Whaling and Old Salem: A Chronicle of the Sea* (New York: Fountainhead Publishers, 1962), 111.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

deeper into the southern Atlantic. Without British trade, Nantucket's extended southerly voyages would have been unprofitable.<sup>12</sup>

British whalers, unlike their Nantucket counterparts, relied on North Atlantic whaling grounds for a majority of their profits. As a dispersed fleet operated by many independent firms, British whalers were cheaper and smaller when compared to American ships, most of which were owned and operated by independent captains. British firms often limited vessel size as Britain's whalers had easy access to North Atlantic fisheries and crew costs were more expensive than American whaleships. In 1750, in an effort to encourage the British whaling industry, Parliament passed a 40s bounty per ton on oil collected by British whalers. This incentive offered an extra £600 profit to the average whaleship owner and was designed to increase the total supply of lubricants needed to keep Britain's textile industry profitable and sustain its growth. London received the most benefit from the revived British whale industry as the city harbored 71 percent of British whalers in 1753. From London, easy voyages into the North Atlantic could be launched in an effort to win the bounty profit and capitalize on rising oil prices. Many British whalers, in the words of one captain, "fitted out as much certainly in the intention of catching the bounty as of catching fish."<sup>13</sup>

American whalers enjoyed no such bounty and were forced to venture into southern Atlantic waters as the North Atlantic hunting grounds experienced an influx of British whalers due to Parliament's actions. The British whaling industry, even with Parliament's help, remained unstable due to poor returns in the early 1760s and again declined in the face of American competition. The American Revolution provided the

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<sup>12</sup> Gordon Jackson, *The British Whaling Trade* (Hamden, CT.: Archon Books, 1978), 55-56.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 55, 58, 61.

incentive that was needed to boost whalship investment in Britain. Since a majority of British whale oil imports came from the American colonies, any cut in this vital commerce would seriously damage Britain's textile industry. British investors wisely understood this predicament and equipped 10,000 tons of new whalers for the 1775 whaling season. Political unrest and the expectation of conflict in the American colonies provided the economic incentive that justified such a rapid infusion of investments into the beleaguered British whaling industry.<sup>14</sup>

Once hostilities with the American colonies commenced, the global whaling industry experienced a major shift from New England to Great Britain. Of the 151 whaling vessels that sailed from Nantucket during the conflict, 134 were destroyed by the British and 15 were lost at sea.<sup>15</sup> This destruction to Nantucket's whalships alone cost an estimated £200,000. The American exportation of whale oil to Britain ceased and by 1793, had recovered to about a tenth of its prewar levels. It remained stagnant for the remainder of the 1790s.<sup>16</sup> Warfare, not competition, destroyed New England's vibrant whaling industry as the business emerged from the American Revolution crippled and devoid of any means to work its way back into the lucrative British markets.<sup>17</sup>

British whalers, unlike their American counterparts, experienced a surge of profits from the destruction of New England's fleet and the slow reentry of Americans back into the whale oil business.<sup>18</sup> British whale oil imports rose in value from an estimated

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>15</sup> Davis, Gallman, and Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Prewar exportation levels accounted for four-fifths of the total whale oil market in Britain. Ibid., 477.

<sup>17</sup> Granville Allen Mawer, *Ahab's Trade: The Saga of South Seas Whaling* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 8; Jackson, *British Whaling Trade*, 69-70.

<sup>18</sup> Even American privateers failed to seriously destroy British whalers during the war. Ironically, the largest inhibitor of an expanded British whaling fleet came from the British government itself. Due to the need to transport large numbers of war supplies and men to America, Parliament was willing to pay £1



£248,518 in 1791 to £562,605 by 1800.<sup>19</sup> Britain's appetite for whale oil and bone product increased in the postwar period, and this factor fueled British expansion beyond the North Atlantic hunting grounds. The British monopoly gained strength as Britain's whalers, bolstered with the addition of larger vessels, moved into South Atlantic fisheries and made limited explorations of whaling grounds in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

By 1803, the American whaling fleet had rebounded from the Revolutionary War and had quadrupled its 1794-1799 average tonnage of three thousand tons. In 1804, a total of 48 whalers were dispatched from American ports. More importantly, in the previous decade, American whalers had ventured into Pacific hunting grounds for the first time. In 1791, the whaleship *Rebecca*, rounded South America and entered Pacific waters. This vessel, immense for her day at 95 tons, illustrated the correlation between ship size and length of voyage. Her Pacific entry signaled the renewed aggressiveness of American whalers as they moved beyond the British dominated North Atlantic fishing grounds into new fisheries much further away.<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately for America's expanded whaling industry, the specter of conflict with Great Britain rose once more in the early nineteenth century. Jefferson's Embargo Act of 1807 stopped the whaling industry's recovery and the War of 1812 halted almost all whaling activity from New England. In stark contrast with the Revolutionary War, and as a sign that American whalers understood the dangers of conflict with Britain, only

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per ton per month to any British vessel that could be used as a transport. Many investors accepted the offer and instead of risking vessels in dangerous North Atlantic waters, simply turned whalers into transport ships that guaranteed a profit unless sunk. This situation changed once hostilities ceased and whalers returned to normal activities. Jackson, *British Whaling Trade*, 68.

<sup>19</sup> These figures represent the whale oil imports from Britain's Southern and Northern fisheries. By this period, British whalers were becoming more dependent on Southern Atlantic and Pacific fisheries for profits as migrating whales could be found easier in breeding grounds in those regions. Gordon Jackson, 112-113.

<sup>20</sup> Robotti, *Whaling and Old Salem*, 23.

twelve ships sailed from Nantucket during the war. The British destroyed three of these whaleships. Although not as severe as the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 again stunted an industry that had experienced a rebirth in both profits and expansion from the economic nadir of the late eighteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

The rapid return of American whalers after the War of 1812 is testimony to the continued economic demand for whale products, both in the United States and Great Britain, the era's largest importer of American whale oil. In 1815, less than a year after the War of 1812's conclusion, fifty whalers left Nantucket with twenty ships headed toward the Pacific.<sup>22</sup> Hawaii was visited by an American whaler in 1819, and Captain Joseph Allen of the *Maro* is believed to be the first American whaler to sight Japan one year later.<sup>23</sup> Allen, like all whale captains, did not sail to a distant land in order to explore unknown territories; instead, he went in the pursuit of profits and the hope of finding new whale fisheries that could be exploited. Business, not exploration, fostered the rapid return of America's whale fleet after the War of 1812.

In comparison, Britain's whaling industry, after the War of 1812, suffered a serious blow that ended the British post-Revolution monopoly on the whaling business. A Parliamentary Select Committee reported in 1820 that "the time when monopolies could be successfully supported, or would be patiently endured, either in respect to subjects against subjects, or particular countries against the rest of the world, seems to have passed."<sup>24</sup> As a result, in 1824 the British whale industry lost its 40s per ton bounty

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<sup>21</sup> Davis, Gallman, and Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 37-38.

<sup>22</sup> Mawer, *Ahab's Trade*, 124.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-126.

<sup>24</sup> This act was influenced by the ideas of Free Trade that saw bounties and economic tariffs as inhibitors to supply-and-demand economics that limited industrial growth. The British whaling industry survived on continued Parliamentary incentive as Britain's whalers, on the average, had larger crews and much greater overheads than American vessels. A loss of any incentive would be a serious blow to the

on oil and suffered from open competition with the United States. A more serious blow came from a drastic decline in oil prices, which fell from £32 per ton in 1814 to £18 or £19 per ton in 1821. These two events severely damaged the British whaling fleet's ability to compete against its American rivals. By 1822, Britain's whalers had lost about a quarter of their fleet as whaleship-owners struggled to make a profit.

Technology, and not Parliament, became British whalers' greatest threat as the nineteenth century progressed. Competition from coal-gas and vegetable lighting further depressed whale oil prices in Great Britain. Gas lighting quickly spread throughout London. The number of gasometers in the city grew from one in 1814 to forty seven in 1823, while overall capacity expanded from 14,000 cubic feet to 917,000 cubic feet.

British whalers, in a fight for survival, argued in a report submitted to Parliament that:

They [the whaleship owners] deny its being a public benefit to light shops, houses and other buildings internally. They contend it is a private benefit to individuals which ought not to be allowed to interfere with the existence of important national fisheries, and therefore the Shipowners say they hope they will not be allowed to light houses, shops, etc, with gas – There being no consumption for spermaceti oil except in shops, houses, and public places, it is not used in our manufactories, and for that reason the fishery must be lost if the light from gas is allowed to be used indoors.<sup>25</sup>

British whaleship owners saw gas lighting as a serious threat that endangered the entire British whaling industry, and the monopoly enjoyed by Britain in the North Atlantic whale fisheries collapsed as profits declined but labor costs remained constant.

The British Pacific fisheries, never developed to the point of their Atlantic counterparts, also declined due to the end of protective tariffs and alternative fuels. At their peak strength, British whaling fleets in the South Atlantic and Pacific regions

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British whaling industry as profits would decrease immediately and investors would look for quick returns elsewhere. Jackson, *British Whaling Trade*, 119.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 123.

achieved only 75 per cent of the revenue that North Atlantic operations generated and, more importantly, accounted for, at most, 38 percent of the whaleships that sailed annually from Britain. Growing competition within the British market, chiefly from Australian whalers, made it unprofitable to outfit many British whalers on long Pacific voyages as whale oil prices continued to be depressed.<sup>26</sup>

American whaling benefited from the economic misfortune of British whalers and grew rapidly in both numbers and profitability as the United States' demand for whale oils and bone remained strong. New Bedford, not Nantucket, became the new center for American whaling. Nantucket's shallow harbor limited ship size and became a serious liability as whaleships grew larger. New Bedford became the nation's leading whaling port in 1823 because its port facilities could handle the largest whaling ships used during the era. Nantucket's fleet peak strength was 88 in 1843 but declined to 77 by 1846 and continued downward throughout the nineteenth century. New Bedford, by comparison, reached peak strength in 1857 with 329 whalers. This fleet alone represented nearly half of the world's total whaling industry.<sup>27</sup>

In the long term, the industry's shift to New Bedford benefited the aggressive nature of New England's whaling fleet, which increasingly penetrated Pacific waters with heavier boats in search of prey. This fact is reflected in the percentage of whalers that sailed from New Bedford into the Pacific Ocean. In the five year period between 1816 and 1820, 62.5 percent of New Bedford's fleet sailed into the Atlantic and 34.9 percent to the Pacific. Between 1821 and 1825, these figures changed to 47.7 percent Atlantic and 52 percent Pacific. While the ten year period of 1826-1835 saw 51.4 per cent Atlantic

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<sup>26</sup> Davis, Gallman, and Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 39; Jackson, *British Whaling Trade*, 138.

<sup>27</sup> Mawer, *Ahab's Trade*, 179-180.

voyages as compared to 44.4 percent Pacific.<sup>28</sup> By 1846, New Bedford had 62.5 percent of its whalers devoted in the Pacific with another 6.8 percent in the Western Arctic. The Atlantic in comparison, accounted for just 6.3 percent of New Bedford's whalers in 1846.<sup>29</sup>

The key to New Bedford's rise and Nantucket's decline was the profitability of larger vessels sailing to distant fisheries, especially those in the Pacific. Larger ships held more oil, and crewmen costs were equal to Atlantic voyages in terms of labor expenses per ton of whale oil acquired. As a result, overhead remained manageable and profits did not suffer as the size of New Bedford's whalers increased from an average of 301.8 tons in 1825 to 365.7 tons in 1856.<sup>30</sup> This increase also affected smaller vessels such as barks and converted merchantships that were operated as whalers. These vessels were about 20-30 percent smaller than the larger whaleships and entered the whaling fleet in substantial numbers in the 1830s. By Perry's voyage, newly launched barks had grown in number to about nine-tenths of the active whalers that were based in New Bedford and were able to reach whale fisheries in the North Pacific. The rapid tonnage growth of smaller barks, and the larger whalers, indicated that the whaling fleet changed as a response to the Pacific characteristic of the whaling business. Thus, the future of

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<sup>28</sup> This fact is related to the rapid decline of British whalers in the North Atlantic waters. As British competition declined, American whalers filled the vacuum and increased the industry's overall output from 81,623 barrels of whale and sperm oil in 1821 to 366,652 barrels by 1841. Whalebone levels, in comparison, also skyrocketed to new records as an estimated 2,000,000 pounds were collected annually by 1841. The 1821 level was a mere 62,893 pounds. For more information on whale oil and whalebone collection, refer to the extensive quantitative figures found in Davis, Gallman, and Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 379-380.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>30</sup> The mean number of crewman per ton in New Bedford's nineteenth century sailing fleet supports this argument. In the decade of 1826-1835, the Atlantic mean number was .0745 crewmen per ton; the Pacific's number was .0733. By 1846-1855, the Atlantic mean increased to .0794 and the Pacific rose to just .0817. *Ibid.*, 229.

American whaling required operations in the Pacific Ocean and necessitated larger ships in order to maintain profits.<sup>31</sup>

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The presence of American whalers off of the Japanese coasts in 1823 was an example of how New England's whaling industry shifted its focus from Atlantic hunting grounds to new territories in the Pacific Ocean. As early as 1820, American whalers had begun to explore waters near Japan in order to harvest newly discovered whale stocks. The search for profits drove the whalers near Japan as the industry's rapid business expansion after the War of 1812 saw increased competition in Pacific whale fisheries near the South American coast. This business concern was explained by Captain Francis Post of New Bedford in an 1850 letter that described the transformation of Pacific whaling. According to Post:

When, half a century ago, our ships first ventured into the Pacific in quest of sperm whales, the coasts of Chili and Peru abounded in them; and our hardy pioneers in this daring occupation, were there enabled to fill their ships, without the necessity of penetrating further. But the whaling fleet increased extensively; the persecuted whales were in a measure killed and driven from their haunts; so that later voyages, to insure success, have been compelled to push their adventures into still farther and comparatively unknown seas. One unexplored track after another has been traversed, until it may now be said that, from Chili to New Holland, from California to the Japan Isles, and China Sea, with the whole intermediate space – in a word, over a square expanse comprehending about eighty degrees of latitude, and more than one hundred of longitude, there is scarce a spot of any extent but what has been furrowed by the keels of a whaler, and been a place privation to her enduring crew.<sup>32</sup>

The completion of larger whaleships that sailed from New Bedford aided whalers in their quest for Pacific profits but logistical concerns that centered on supplies and ports-of-refuge remained serious problems for American whalers that ventured into the North

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 220, 225-226, 228-229.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted from M.F. Maury, *Explanations and Sailing Directions to Accompany the Wind and Current Charts* (6<sup>th</sup> Edition, Philadelphia: C Biddle, 1854), 373-374. Mawer, *Ahab's Trade*, 259.

Pacific. These two factors, and not voyage length, became major inhibitors that limited the growth of American whaling near Japan.

Hawaii provided a temporary answer to American whalers' need for major Pacific ports that could be used to reach the North Pacific. The first American whaler visited Hawaii in September 1819, and by the following month, the American whaler *Maro* had sailed from Hawaii and discovered large sperm whale sites in waters 1,000 miles east of Japan. Several American whalers, after hearing word of *Maro's* find, diverted their intended voyages and sailed to the newly named Japanese fishery in early 1820. Over the next three decades, the Japanese fishery would be one of the most reliable whaling territories throughout the entire Pacific Ocean. Hawaii's location developed quickly as the initial launching point of many American operations in the Pacific but was critical to all northern Pacific voyages as no major ports were open to American whalers in the North Pacific.<sup>33</sup>

The discovery of the Kodiak Grounds near Alaska in 1835 further elevated Hawaii's importance to the whaling industry.<sup>34</sup> This find was followed by the discovery of whales off of Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula in 1843 and in the Sea of Okhotsk [Sea of Japan].<sup>35</sup> These discoveries coincided with a sharp rise in the New Bedford market price for sperm and whale oil and whalebone.<sup>36</sup> The New Bedford average for the five year period of 1836-1840 was \$26.62 per barrel of sperm oil, \$10.11 per barrel of whale oil,

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<sup>33</sup> Mawer, 126; Robotti, 190.

<sup>34</sup> The Kodiak Grounds are located in the Gulf of Alaska and its discovery opened a previously unknown whale stock for exploitation. The whales caught there were described by captains as having twice the blubber and more bone than expected. It is regarded as one of the most important Northern Pacific whale fisheries in the nineteenth century. Davis, Gallman, and Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 39.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>36</sup> By this period, sperm oil remained the most sought after whale product as it continued to be used for candles and high-quality lubricants. Whale oil, while less expensive and much lower quality, was used primarily for lighthouses during this period.

and \$0.19 per pound of whalebone. By the period of 1851-1855, these prices had risen to \$45.45 per barrel of sperm oil, \$19.66 per barrel of whale oil, and \$0.43 per pound of whalebone. These prices attracted increased numbers of whaleships to waters in and around Japanese shores. Without Hawaii, American whalers would have been unable to penetrate northern Pacific waters and exploit the Japanese and Kodiak fisheries.<sup>37</sup>

Beyond Hawaii, the most fundamental problem of supplying American whalers in the North Pacific came from the Russian government. Since Russia possessed territory stretching from the Kamchatka Peninsula to Alaska, it effectively controlled a majority of usable ports that American whalers could use for refit and resupply. More troublesome was the Russian attempt to compete against American whalers in the Pacific. In 1842, a communiqué was transmitted from the Russian-American Company to the Russian government that estimated thirty American whalers were operating in the Bering Sea. The Russian-American Company demanded that armed warships be sent into the Bering Sea to stop Yankee whaling activities, but costs prohibited such an action. The ironic aspect of the Russian dilemma was the fact that most of the Russian-American Company's business involved the fur trade and other assorted merchant activities not associated with the whaling industry. According to company officials, American whalers "stole oil from the Aleuts and Eskimos as well as food and women, leaving in return bad liquor and syphilis."<sup>38</sup> In the minds of disgruntled Russian government officials and businessmen, American whalers were "yankee hellships."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted from Howard I. Kushner, "Hellships: Yankee Whaling along the Coasts of Russian-America, 1835-1852," *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 45, No. 1 (March 1972): 92.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 92.



Russian officials complained to the United States about the encroachment of these 'hellships' in Russia's territorial waters, but the American government argued that it "did not have enough power...to restrict its citizens from arbitrary actions [along the Russian coast]." This argument carried weight as an estimated 260 American whalers operated in waters near Russia by 1845. This number was four times larger than the United States Navy during the period.<sup>40</sup> The Russian government, unable to send warships to regulate this immense number of American whalers, had decided three years earlier that "whalers can be kept from landing but not from whaling."<sup>41</sup> This decision closed major Russian ports to American whalers and stopped the flow of legal supplies that could be used to extend whaler's operations in the North Pacific.

In 1849, Russia's concerns rose even more when an estimated 250 American ships entered the Sea of Okhotsk in the pursuit of whales. The Russian government, alarmed at this foreign presence, believed that this figure was conservative and entertained a Russian-American Company petition to close the Sea of Okhotsk to all foreign whaling activity. The Russian government understood that a threat of force was too expensive to be realistic, and that such an action would generate official complaints from the United States. In an 1849 response to the Russian-American Company demand, the Russian Ministry of Finance allowed company officials to organize a whaling fleet to compete against the Americans. The move was an effort to make it too competitive and unprofitable for Americans to hunt in Russian waters. As a result, the Russo-Finland

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<sup>40</sup> Facts and figures on the United States Navy and other foreign nations will be provided in Chapter III.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted from the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, 9 December 1842. Kushner, "Hellships: Yankee Whaling along the Coasts of Russian-America," 91.

Whaling Company was formed in 1851 but folded by 1854 as American whalers proved too competitive for inexperienced Russian whalers.<sup>42</sup>

Russia's hostility toward American whalers only exacerbated the need for friendly ports in the northern Pacific region. Shortly after American whalers entered the waters near Japan a tragic event underscored the need for access to Japanese shores. In July 1823, a British whaler reported that the *Lady Adams*, a New England whaler, had caught fire off the Japanese coast. The British captain reported no survivors from the *Lady Adam's* disaster. Such an incident was commonplace in an industry that experienced, per year, a 6 percent loss rate throughout the nineteenth century. New Bedford, America's largest whaling port, reported 231 whalers failed to return from voyages out of a total fleet of 750 vessels from 1816 to 1905. This figure states that New Bedford's loss rate per ship lifetime was about 31 percent. While insurance rates remained constant throughout the century, at about 2.5 percent, whaleship owners sought lower rates in order to increase profits and soften the financial impact of against unsuccessful voyages.<sup>43</sup> Accidents such as that which struck the *Lady Adams'* signaled the need for

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<sup>42</sup> Some historians such as George Samson in his book *The Western World and Japan: A Study in the Interaction of European and Asiatic Cultures* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1949) argue that Russia was just as instrumental in ending Japan's isolation as Perry's 1853 mission. Evidence used by Samson cites the expanded role Russia played in her efforts to compete economically against the United States during this era. Russian whalers, as an example, showed how Russia's economic influence could be applied to waters close to Japanese shores. However, Samson's arguments fails to explain the reasons why Russian whalers failed in their efforts to compete against American whalers that traveled thousands of miles to enter North Pacific whale fisheries. Other historians, such as Howard Kushner argue that the presence of large numbers of American whalers around Russian territory showed how Russia was unable to effectively govern and economically open its North America and western Asian territories. This argument accounts for how Russia was unable break America's nineteenth century Pacific whaling monopoly. *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>43</sup> Many captains sailed without insurance and, in the famous 1847 case of Captain Walker from New Bedford, made a fortune. Walker, having bought the dilapidated whaler *Envoy* for \$325 dollars, sailed uninsured into the North Pacific where in a series of cruises, he netted a total profit of \$138,450 dollars. Walker's case illustrated the immense profit and risk that some captains took in order to reach the lucrative northern Pacific whale fisheries. "Successful Shipping Adventure," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 9 January 1851, 2.

alternative ports, both for refuge and supply, if the safety of American whalers was to be increased in North Pacific fisheries and insurance rates were to be decreased.<sup>44</sup>

Russian territory, while immense, did not encompass the whole northern Pacific Rim as many small, uninhabited islands remained open to American whalers in need of aid. The most important, the Bonin Islands, is a collection of thirty small volcanic islands about 500 miles southwest of Japan. These islands remained uninhabited until 1830, when a combination of settlers, shipwrecked sailors, and deserters gave the island chain a total population of forty-two. This assorted band of residents described the islands' limited resources as including "many jungle fowl...[a]lthough the timber is in great plenty, there is none fit for masts...the mulberry-tree is very hard, and is used for posts and stanchions. There is also a small quantity of sandalwood."<sup>45</sup> Whalers, in need of refit due to foul weather and harsh operating conditions, could not rely upon the Bonin Islands for necessary repairs. The Bonin's main contribution would be in supplies, but to a large fleet of American whalers these islands remained inadequate.

Even with its liabilities, the Bonin Islands served a vital purpose as the only territory near Japan that would offer supplies to American whalers. In June 1853, Commodore Perry made a four day stopover to the Bonin Islands while he sailed toward Edo and acknowledged their contribution to American whalers that operated near Japan. According to Perry, the first American whaler visited the Bonin Islands in 1823 and during his four day visit, noted that three American whalers stopped for supplies. Perry depicted the Bonins' main limitation as not one of supplies but of manpower. As recorded in his journal, "were it not for the scarcity of working hands, a much greater

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<sup>44</sup> Davis, Gallman, and Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 258; Jackson, *Ahab's Trade*, 183.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Quin, "Notes on the Bonin Islands," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* vol. 26 (1856), 234.

extent of land would be cultivated. At present there cannot be more than 150 acres under cultivation in the whole island [main island of Peel or Chichi Jima]”<sup>46</sup> However, a large proportion of the cultivated land was devoted to tobacco and sugar, two commodities the settlers traded for outside goods. While Perry viewed the Bonin Islands as possessing the potential for extensive commercial opportunity, the description he provided in his journal was one of an underdeveloped and inadequate territory that could not service more than a few vessels at a time.<sup>47</sup>

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The American economic dominance of the North Pacific whaling industry was complete by the early 1850s. In February 1853, a Boston newspaper article reported that 275 whalers had visited Hawaii in one month and carried cargoes estimated at \$19,414,016 dollars. Among these ships were 258 American, 10 French, 4 Prussian, and one each from Britain, Chile and Hawaii. This article stated that “from the facts above brought to view, we are warranted in the conclusion that a more successful whaling season has never crowned that branch of business since the ‘inconsiderable villages or hamlets’ of New Bedford, Nantucket, Fairhaven, New London, &c commenced operations, in delving for the wealth of the ocean.”<sup>48</sup> What attracted these whalers were Hawaii’s plentiful supplies of food, wood and water and the ability to repair any damage before sailing home or to their planned whaling grounds.

An 1852 *Times of London* article acknowledged the importance of Hawaii to America’s northern Pacific whaling fleet and the limitations whalers faced when they operated near Japan. According to the *Times of London*:

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<sup>46</sup> Pineau, *The Personal Journal of Commodore Matthew C. Perry*, 74.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-73.

<sup>48</sup> “The Whaling Fleet in the North Pacific,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 17 February 1853, 2.

Among the hundreds of American whalers annually compelled to pass the Straits of Sangar, some are inevitably forced by stress of weather upon the inhospitable coasts on either hand, and the consequences are imprisonment or death; and vessels in distress, instead of being permitted to make a friendly harbour for repairs and to refit, are compelled to keep at sea, to the almost certain destruction to all on board...The single fact that at one time within the last year there were 121 American whalers lying in the harbours of the Sandwich Islands – far away from their cruising-grounds, because they could not enter any harbor on the coast of Japan for repairs.<sup>49</sup>

That ‘121 whalers’ were stranded in Hawaii showed that a closed Japan posed not only an economic disadvantage but also a personal risk to American whalers. Hawaii, unlike the Bonin Islands, offered the only facilities open to large numbers of whalerships. As indicated in this article, the only open port that could aid whalers in distress was in Hawaii. This reality, when combined with the fact that whalers faced a roundtrip of several thousand miles from Hawaii to North Pacific fisheries and back, posed a significant danger that exacerbated the industry’s already high loss rate and loss of profit due to insurance rates.

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Whaling was a very dangerous business. Whales are among the strongest creatures on earth and many whales, especially sperm whales, turned violent when hunted. They succeeded in sinking many vessels alone. In 1820 the American whaleship *Essex* was sunk by a whale in only 10 minutes. With Russian territory closed and island chains such as the Bonin unable to meet the resupply needs of American whalers, Japan’s strategic location in the Pacific Ocean would greatly benefit the United States’ whaling industry if the island nation’s ports were open. With technological improvements and bigger ships, American whalers had reached the inhospitable North Pacific waters. The major hurdle to operations there and to the safety of American whalers was the lack of

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<sup>49</sup> “The American Expedition Against Japan,” *Times of London*, 26 March 1852, 8.

friendly and open port facilities. This problem could be solved with a successful diplomatic effort to open Japan.<sup>50</sup>

Whalers, unlike other Americans, possessed a unique opportunity to aid Perry's mission and understand a society that had been closed to all formal American contact. Through shipwreck and the rescue of stranded Japanese sailors, whalers provided the first sustained and extensive contact between the United States and Japan. This unique relationship, one that developed quickly as more American whalers operated near Japan, redefined how Americans and Japanese viewed the other respective society. Whaling, an American industry that penetrated into the farthest corners of the Pacific Ocean in the nineteenth century, was the only business capable of strongly influencing American perceptions toward Japan. The result would have a profound impact on Perry's 1853 voyage into Edo Bay.

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<sup>50</sup> Robotti, *Whaling and Old Salem*, 12.

## Chapter II

### “Whalers and Japan: A Unique Relationship”

*In one year, 160 American ships have been sighted, passing through the Straights of Matsmayae [the Tsugaru Straits]. Why are so many coming to the Sea of Japan?<sup>1</sup>*

Whalers, in sharp contrast to other Americans, aided Perry’s expedition with intimate knowledge about Japanese society and culture. This aspect, overlooked by many historians, helped Perry end Japan’s seclusion and proved useful when negotiations commenced in Edo Bay. By initiating frequent contact, whether through shipwreck or the rescue of stranded Japanese sailors, whalers exposed an alien culture and alleviated fears that a strong diplomatic effort would be met with violence. Conversely, whalers were among the first Americans in Japan and, as such, were studied intensely by Japanese officials in an effort to understand better the motives and economic desires of the United States in Asia. Whalers provided information that supported an American assertion that the Japanese government did not reflect the people that it governed. Expedition proponents seized upon this idea and argued that the Japanese people desired outside commercial contact and Japan’s alleged great wealth benefited America’s capitalistic expansion in the Pacific Ocean. As a result, whalers influenced the development of a perception that the Japanese government did not accurately represent its people. The consequence was further strengthening of an idea to illegally dispatch an American squadron into Edo Bay.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by William Heine, the Japanese Expedition’s illustrator and painter, in a discussion he had with a Japanese interpreter in February 1854. Heine, in his memoir, noted that these ships were probably American whalers and “their frequency in these waters seems to have done us much good.” Frederic Trautmann, ed, *With Perry to Japan: A Memoir by William Heine; Translated, with an Introduction and Annotations, by Frederic Trautmann* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 105.

In the early nineteenth century, western knowledge of Japan was highly limited due to the island nation's self-imposed seclusion. Only the Netherlands and China were permitted limited trade, and all foreigners were forbidden access to mainland Japan.<sup>2</sup> This trading arrangement existed to keep Japan informed of changes in the outside world and resulted in one or two Dutch vessels and about ten Chinese junks visiting Japan annually. The Dutch, unlike the Chinese, were granted a small agency, or trading post, on Deshima Island in Nagasaki harbor but were subjected to humiliating conditions that included armed Japanese guards who kept Dutch traders isolated and the requirement of public displays against Christianity. Not surprisingly, the tight controls placed on foreigners also applied to Japanese subjects. Japanese fishermen were restricted to coastal craft and communication with foreign vessels was strictly forbidden. Even shipwrecked Japanese sailors were denied repatriation as they brought "forbidden thoughts with them."<sup>3</sup> Japan's isolation was designed to restrict information about the island nation and provide advance warning of any external threats that endangered the Japanese way of life.<sup>4</sup>

An important aspect of Japan's ability to defend its seclusion was information provided by the Dutch. Earlier in the century, the Dutch had proved themselves useful with reports on British and Russian moves against China. While it is certain that the Japanese feared Britain and Russia, it is less clear exactly how they felt about the United

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<sup>2</sup> In 1640, Japanese rulers massacred thousands of Christian converts near Nagasaki when political ambitions were suspected and fears arose over Japanese Catholic's allegiance to both the Shogun and Pope. Forty-eight Portuguese were also executed with the announcement of an official edict that declared: "So long as the sun warms the earth, any Christian bold enough to come to Japan...even if he be the god of the Christians, shall pay for it with his head." The Dutch were considered neutral in the conflict and interested only in trade and were thus granted the only western trading rights in Japan. Walworth, *Black Ships Off Japan*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from historian Samuel Morison. Morison, *Old Bruin*, 263.

<sup>4</sup> Morison, *Old Bruin*, 263; Walworth, *Black Ships Off Japan*, 5-6; Wily *Yankees in the Land of Gods*, 16-17.



States. The first book about America the Japanese published appeared in 1708, and reports of the formation of the United States reached Japan around 1807.<sup>5</sup> By 1848, the Dutch provided annual reports about the United States to the Japanese government. These reports resulted in the publishing of a highly accurate Japanese atlas of the United States that argued “[t]here are no kings, or lesser rulers, however; in every state, a number of wise men are chose as government functionaries, instead.”<sup>6</sup> The influence of this atlas on the success of Perry’s mission is uncertain, but it did contain important inaccuracies about America’s naval forces. The United States Navy was said to have included forty-seven frigates with more launched every year. The actual number during this period was fifteen.<sup>7</sup> Overall, Dutch information about the United States proved very reliable but neglected topics that the concerned America’s social and cultural life.

It is ironic that the Japanese knew of Perry’s expedition before it sailed from Norfolk in November 1852. An early 1852 Dutch report about the expedition was submitted to Edo via Nagasaki and included information about an American force commanded by a “person named Perry” and comprised of two steamships and two other vessels.<sup>8</sup> The Dutch warning caused great uncertainty in the Japanese government as some officials believed it was a ploy by the Netherlands to gain expanded trading concessions while others pressed for more information. Many officials dismissed the

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<sup>5</sup> The first book published about America was highly inaccurate and argued that the American colonials “loved to fight, ate human flesh, liked strong drink, and worshiped the devil.” Inhabitants were said to have wore “bird’s feathers and skins of tigers and leopards. Wiley, *Yankees in the Land of Gods*, 231.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Peter Wily. *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed description of the United States Navy, refer to “Letter to D.S. Yulee, Chairman to the Committee on Naval Affairs,” *Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy to Officers* (21 March 1850): 44-45.

<sup>8</sup> Perry had extensive discussions with the Dutch ambassador in Washington DC about Japanese protocol along with general discussions on Japan. As a result, the Dutch were aware of the American expedition and passed the information to their Japanese contacts in Nagasaki months before Perry left Norfolk.

reported expedition because the United States had been easily rebuffed during Commodores Biddle and Glynn's expeditions and most of America's navy was believed to be confined to the Great Lakes. The sudden arrival of Perry in July 1853 caught those Japanese officials who ignored the Dutch report completely by surprise as they further believed the United States lacked the initiative to sail illegally into Edo Bay and demand a treaty. The Dutch, while a useful source of information about Perry's expedition specifically, did not provide extensive details about the United States to Japan during its nineteenth century trading relationship.<sup>9</sup>

Central to Japan's understanding of the American people was its contact with shipwrecked whalers. Although some whalers, such as the crew of the *Lagoda*, proved troublesome in captivity, experiences gained from interaction between Japanese and Americans affected later negotiations conducted by Perry in Edo Bay. Ranald MacDonald, an adventurous whaler caught exploring Japanese shores, noted that upon capture he was greeted by a "Japanese whose exterior denoted consequence" who immediately inquired about his possessions and offered him an English-sounding drink called "grog-yes."<sup>10</sup> This encounter preceded MacDonald's imprisonment but illustrates the intense curiosity the Japanese had when they encountered anything American.

An interview conducted by Moryama Einosuke, a close aide to the governor of Nagasaki, illustrated how the Japanese used captured whalers as a source of information about the United States, especially on religious matters. After questions that concerned MacDonald's place of birth and family, Moryama, in front of Nagasaki's governor, asked the whaleman about his religious beliefs. As a member of the Anglican Church,

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<sup>9</sup> Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry*, 177-178; Wily, *Yankees in the Land of Gods*, 227.

<sup>10</sup> This drink was a type of sake and originated from earlier contact with the *Lawrence* whalers. Wily, *Yankees in the Land of Gods*, 13.

MacDonald recited the Apostles' Creed to Moryama.<sup>11</sup> The immediate translation provided by Moryama to Nagasaki's government was not MacDonald's answer. Moryama's version of MacDonald's response was "there is no gods nor buddhas. [I] merely cultivate mind and will and reverence heaven in order to obtain clear understanding and to secure happiness. [I have] nothing else to say."<sup>12</sup> Moryama's statement, as an inaccurate translation, was meant to protect MacDonald from Japanese persecution of anything deemed Christian. An accurate translation would have endangered the young whaleman's life. It also showed that Moryama, as an official of the Nagasaki bureaucracy understood that MacDonald was an important source that could provide useful information about the United States.

More interviews followed MacDonald's initial meeting with the governor as Japanese officials probed him for more information. An area of interest concerned commerce and the nature of industry in New England. The Japanese asked questions about where MacDonald had traveled, the nature of affairs in other foreign nations, and descriptions about the nature of people he had encountered in his life. The Japanese even inquired about the whaling industry as MacDonald had served aboard a New England whaler and understood how the business operated. MacDonald, in response to Japanese curiosity about the whaling industry, asked about Japan's willingness to provide supplies to whalers and end its seclusion from American commerce. The Japanese response was a terse "No! It is against the law!"<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This creed, recited by many Christians, was a straightforward reply to Moryama's question as the first verse is "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord."

<sup>12</sup> Wily, *Yankees in the Land of Gods*, 17-18.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted by Peter Wily, *Ibid.*, 19.

During the months of interviews conducted by various Japanese officials, Moryama remained close to MacDonald and learned to speak fluent English as opposed to the elementary speaking skills he had acquired from the Dutch. Moryama learned quickly from MacDonald and mastered the complexities of English grammar and pronunciation in a period of seven months. Other officials joined Moryama's studies with MacDonald and scheduled regular visits that focused on grammar and pronunciation. While teaching officials, MacDonald was able to work on his Japanese skills and soon the close working relationship between the whaler and Moryama developed into a friendship.

MacDonald and Moryama's friendship cooled when the whaler inquired about the state of affairs in Japan. After seven months of captivity, MacDonald was able to ascertain that Japan was ruled by a feudalistic system that divided the government between a secular shogun and a religious emperor. No information was provided by Moryama about other whalers held captive, but MacDonald suspected that an unknown number were imprisoned due to Japanese questions about nautical terms in English that had not been discussed. MacDonald's captivity taught him that the Japanese highly valued information as it was vital in maintaining the nation's isolation against foreign encroachment. Even MacDonald, a whaler who befriended many Japanese, including a governor's aide, was kept ill-informed about fundamental facts concerning Japanese political and cultural life.<sup>14</sup>

Commodore Glynn's 1849 Japanese Expedition secured MacDonald's release. As such, MacDonald's story is indicative of the experience between Japan and American whalers. While, on an interpersonal basis, positive relationships resulted, the Japanese

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 21.

government suspected darker motives for many whalers in Japan. One such fear is found in an 1849 communiqué between Edo and Nagasaki over the deserters from the whaleship *Lagoda*. This document stated that:

It may be possible...that the foreigners landed for the purpose of surveying the coast. If that should be true, the forwarding of the foreigners to Nagasaki and their repatriation therefrom, in accordance with the customary procedure, would only serve to transmit to foreign countries additional knowledge of Japan's geography.<sup>15</sup>

Fears about whalers exposing Japanese secrets were well-founded as they were the only Americans during the period who had lengthy experiences within Japan. The level of whaling activity around Japan heightened Japanese apprehension as the United States increased its oceanographic and geographic knowledge through aggressive whalers who pushed further into Arctic waters. By 1849, whalers were extensively fishing the Sea of Japan and had penetrated the entire North Pacific region, driven by the immense profits available. Japanese officials, as their communiqués suggest, were apprehensive over the impact of American whalers near Japan as more whaleships entered the North Pacific fisheries and American naval expeditions, such as Commodore Glynn's voyage, were required to rescue shipwrecked whalers stranded on Japanese shores.

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The United States' attitude toward Japan changed rapidly in the 1840s as American whalers and merchantmen expanded commercial enterprises across the Pacific Ocean and looked for new business opportunities. Aaron Haight Palmer, the director of the American and Foreign Agency of New York, combined information provided by whalers and argued that Japan was open and ready for an aggressive American diplomatic effort. A political lobbyist who desired an increased American commercial

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted from Shunzo Sakamaki, *Japan and the United States: 1790-1853* (Tokyo: 1939), 62. Walworth, *Black Ships Off Japan*, 13.

presence in Asia, Palmer advocated the formation of a naval mission to Japan years before 1852. According to Palmer:

Japan is vulnerable at every point, and, although a brave and warlike nation, they have no means of land defence adequate to resist a single frigate. Most of their forts are of painted canvass, their powder is very bad, and they are quite inexpert in the use of artillery. Their troops are chiefly armed with bows, swords, spears, and matchlocks. None of their junks exceed three hundred tons, and they do not possess a single vessel of war.<sup>16</sup>

Few questioned Palmer's claim that Japan was weak. It was widely assumed that any American naval force sailing into Edo Bay would dominate Japanese forces. However, a military solution, even if feasible, was not desirable as the United States wished to distance itself from aggressive tactics the British and Russians used in earlier encounters with the Japanese. A factor that influenced this attitude, one shipwrecked whalers facilitated, was the racial perception many Americans possessed of the Japanese.

Many westerners, including Perry, believed Asians were an inferior race, but they distinguished between the Japanese and Chinese in several important aspects. The latter, as described by Perry, were:

Of all races...probably the most knavish; from the highest mandarin to the lowest boatman the art of deception and trickery is practiced with skill and audacity. To cheat and rob those who they call barbarians might well be expected, considering the light in which they hold us, but they are equally prone to rob each other, both on the land and water. And there is no part of the world where piracies are at this day more open or more frequent. The Canton River swarms with piratical boats; the fishermen frequently join the marauding parties and if the opportunity offers they actually rob and maltreat each other.<sup>17</sup>

This negative view of Chinese character was reinforced by the country's capitulation to Britain following the Opium Wars of the nineteenth century. The United States benefited from the British victory when the 1844 Treaty of Wanghia opened China to American

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<sup>16</sup> Palmer, *Documents and Facts Illustrating the Origin of the Mission to Japan*, 13.

<sup>17</sup> Pineau, *The Personal Journal of Commodore Matthew C. Perry*, 55.

commercial interests.<sup>18</sup> The failure of China to protect itself was a sign of weakness, both politically and racially, and was regarded as a sign of inferiority by many westerners.

The Japanese, in contrast, were viewed much more favorably by Perry and other Americans. Japan's desire to maintain a unique culture, free from western influence and protected by impressive isolationist measures, was given respect and explained Japan's use of treachery and deception in its dealings with western nations. Perry explained that although the Japanese were still an inferior race, they had:

[M]any redeeming traits...[being] brave, generous and humane, inordinately curious and fond of pleasure, giving importance to form and ceremonies beyond any people in the world, and spending half their lives in attendance upon the capricious edicts of the Court, which exercise and extraordinary influence over people by a system of perfectly organized *espionage*, extending to every individual, however obscure, on half the population being employed to watch the other half.<sup>19</sup>

Perry thought that the Dutch, and not the Japanese character, were responsible for Japan's lack of trade with the outside world as "[the Dutch] have stopped at nothing, however dishonorable, or degrading to their national character, to effect their object [of trade]."<sup>20</sup> This relatively favorable depiction resulted in an important conceptual division Americans made, and argued for, between the Japanese government's motives and the commercial aspirations of its people. The role whalers played in this American idea of Japan was critical.

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<sup>18</sup> This treaty was very similar to the British version except that Britain was ceded Hong Kong. The United States was granted permission to trade in five Chinese ports, granted most-favored-nation status, established the duties on American imports, and gave extra-territorial claims for American citizens in China. European powers continued to exploit China in the years after 1844 as Chinese capitulations continued until the 1912 fall of China's last dynasty. Morison, *Old Bruin*, 262.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Wiley, *Yankees in the Land of Gods*, 80.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

Throughout the debate over America's reasons to illegally enter Edo Bay with a naval squadron, a characterization of Japan developed that divided Japanese politics from the perceived commercial desires of its people. Japan's government, and not the racial or ideological qualities of its people, kept the country closed to American trade. Perry identified the problem as "the restrictions of their [Japan's] political institutions [inhibited a people] who seemed inclined to throw themselves into the hands of any nation of superior intelligence." The 'superior intelligence' of western nations desired commercial trade with Japan and, in the case of the United States, ports of refuge for a large whaling fleet. This conceptual division neatly identified negative perceptions of Japan as the product of government interference while extolling positive attributes of the ordinary Japanese subject. The stories of whalers were used by both Perry and Palmer to reinforce this perception and influence the debate over the expedition's goals.<sup>21</sup>

Palmer and others identified the Imperial Japanese government as the sole reason why Japan was hostile toward shipwrecked whalers. Palmer argued, in his memoirs passed to American politicians, that:

[T]he rescue of fifteen of the surviving crew of the American ship *Lagoda*, of New Bedford, who, together with Ranald MacDonald, of Oregon, were shipwrecked and detained nearly a twelvemonth in loathsome prisons in Japan; with a narrative of the cruel and barbarous treatment they suffered at the hands of Japanese provincial and imperial authorities, from the time of their landing in the country up to the day of their delivery on board the *Preble* [by Commodore Glynn].<sup>22</sup>

Palmer identified Japanese contempt of foreigners as a product of Japan's contact with the Netherlands. He asserted that "Dutch residents...for upwards of two hundred years, with the object of maintaining their paltry trade at Dezima [Deshima Island], have

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<sup>21</sup> Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry*, 171; Wily, *Yankees in the Land of Gods*, 80.

<sup>22</sup> It is notable that Palmer never included any positive details about MacDonald's treatment such as his confinement in a Buddhist temple or his friendship with Moryama. Palmer, *Documents and Facts Illustrating the Origin of the Mission to Japan*, 11.



inspired the court of Yedo with a profound contempt for foreigners of the western nations.”<sup>23</sup> As further proof of Japanese openness to westerners and contempt for their own government, Palmer used the story of whaleship captain Mercator Cooper to support his characterization of Japan’s government from its people.

On 1 April 1845, the whaleship *Manhattan* proceeded past southeastern Japan en route to whale fisheries in the North Pacific. The *Manhattan*, commanded by Mercator Cooper, stopped near a small island off Japan’s coast to look for refreshments and discovered a group of shipwrecked Japanese sailors. In his first encounter with the Japanese, Cooper noted that “they came forward and prostrated themselves to the earth before him, and remained on their faces for some time...[as they] were much alarmed, and expected to be destroyed.”<sup>24</sup> Once Cooper convinced the Japanese he was there to help them, they “consented with great joy, and abandoning every thing they had on the island, embarked with him immediately for his ship.” The *Manhattan*, a whaleship from New York, set a course for Edo Bay with eleven Japanese sailors aboard, intending to “restore the shipwrecked strangers...[and] make a strong and favorable impression on the [Japanese] Government in respect to the civilization of the United States, and its friendly disposition to the Emperor and people of Japan.”<sup>25</sup>

While sailing toward Edo, Cooper found a sinking Japanese junk and collected another eleven Japanese seamen for his goodwill mission. Aboard the junk were charts and graphs of Japan that Cooper described as “the most interesting specimens of geographical art and literature which has wandered from the shores of Eastern Asia.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>24</sup> C. F. Winslow, “Japan,” Washington, *Daily National Intelligencer*, 19 March 1852, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 3.

When the *Manhattan* arrived near Edo Bay, Cooper went ashore with two of the shipwrecked Japanese and sent them to Edo to inform the emperor of his intention to enter the harbor and return his passengers. After dispatching the Japanese sailors, Cooper explored the shores and encountered several fishermen who he claimed “were pleased with his visit, and made no objections to his landing.” Due to inclement weather, Cooper delayed his voyage to Edo and was blown out to the open ocean but soon regained his position using the Japanese charts taken from the sinking junk. When the *Manhattan* arrived in Edo Bay, a Japanese official of “rank and consequence” informed him that his message had been received and that he was permitted to enter Edo harbor. Cooper, with this permission, became the first American ever to enter Edo and see the Imperial City in person.

The story of Cooper’s four day experience in Edo, as recounted in newspaper articles and Palmer’s memoirs, shows the Japanese government’s hostility toward foreigners. Cooper stated that once in Edo, he was informed that “neither he nor his crew would be allowed to go out of the ship, and that if they should attempt it they would be put to death.”<sup>27</sup> Japanese military officers boarded the whaleship to ensure the crew obeyed the law against foreigners setting foot upon Japanese soil and coastal craft covered with lances and swords circled the *Manhattan*. Cooper interpreted these actions as a clear indication that the Japanese officials intended violence at the first sign of illegal activity. This threat was symbolically communicated to the crew when an official drew a sword across his throat in an act that intended to reinforce Japanese law against foreigners.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 3.

In contrast to the hostility implied by imperial officials, Edo's governor and the Japanese sailors showed nothing but admiration for Cooper's daring voyage. Before leaving the *Manhattan*, the shipwreck survivors "clung to him [Cooper] and shed many tears. This scene, the reports of the shipwrecked men of the many kindnesses they had received, and the uniformly prudent and amiable deportment of the American captain, made a very favorable impression on the Governor of Jeddo [Edo] during his stay." On the fourth day of Cooper's stay, and after the whaleship had been replenished fully, the captain reported that there "seemed to be no disposition manifested by the Government to force him away, but there was none for him to remain." After a courteous exchange with Japanese dignitaries, the *Manhattan* was towed twelve miles out to sea and resumed its voyage into Arctic fisheries.

Aaron Palmer, after discussions with Cooper, included the *Manhattan's* experience in his arguments in favor of the Japanese Expedition. Palmer's account of the voyage focused on the Imperial government's effort to restrict the ship and the commercial opportunity that would be available if Japan were opened to American vessels. Ordinary Japanese were described as "filled with an insatiable curiosity to see the strangers, and inspect minutely every thing on board."<sup>28</sup> Edo's governor was described as a man very interested in the United States and influential with the Japanese emperor. Palmer's account represented the governor as a "grave and elderly looking person, somewhat grey, with a remarkably intelligent and benignant countenance, and of very mild and prepossessing manners...greatly interested with Captain Cooper's account

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<sup>28</sup> Aaron Palmer, "The Empire of Japan," Washington, *Daily National Intelligencer*, 18 November 1852, 2.

of the people and civilization of our country.”<sup>29</sup> Observations provided by the *Manhattan* were cited as evidence that Edo’s harbor was deep enough for the largest American vessels and possessed extensive commercial opportunities.

Palmer did not include the subject of Japanese imprisonment in his account of Cooper’s 1845 voyage but used the experience of the whaleship *Lawrence* to showcase official Japanese brutality toward American citizens. Shipwrecked in May 1846, survivors of the *Lawrence* were immediately imprisoned by Japanese officials and were interrogated “regarding our country, religion, and every other particular that could be thought of.”<sup>30</sup> After weeks of confinement in a small prison, the survivors stated that they were shipped “on board of a junk and stowed...in the hold – a dark, filthy place; and during the time we were in her, some three or four months, not a single moment were we allowed to step on deck to breathe the fresh air or see the light.”<sup>31</sup> Salvation for the whalers came from the Dutch manager of Deshima Island, who arranged “kind, generous, and hospitable treatment...during the rest of our stay in Japan.”

According to Palmer’s account, crew from the *Lawrence* had no interaction with ordinary Japanese subjects. There is no indication of friendly treatment by Japanese officials or compassion toward the plight of the American whalers. This account, crafted to motivate politicians to act on behalf of the mistreatment of Americans in Japan, intended to straightforwardly showcase the Japanese government’s brutal treatment of stranded whalers. Furthermore, it portrayed the Dutch favorably but only in the case of a single individual who aided men in distress. Palmer’s two accounts, Cooper’s and the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>30</sup> Aaron Palmer, “Japanese Barbarities,” Washington, *Daily National Intelligencer*, 22 June 1852, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 2.

*Lawrence*, reinforced the American perception that Japan was governed unjustly but populated by friendly people who enjoyed contact with Americans.

Whalers further contributed to the divided American perception of Japan with stories about rescued Japanese sailors. This cross-cultural contact aided efforts to convince Americans that Japan was open and ready for American influence. One famous case, that of John Mung or Manjiro Nakajima, illustrated how public perceptions about the Japanese Expedition were shaped by stories about Japanese castaways returned to the United States.<sup>32</sup> Mung's story showcased the similarities between Americans and Japanese, especially in the subject of commerce, and strengthened the argument that Japan was ready for open trade.

In 1841, Captain W. H. Whitfield of the whaler *John Howland* rescued five Japanese stranded on a small island near Japan. Whitfield returned to Honolulu with his shipwrecked passengers and then sailed to the United States with the youngest, a fourteen year old boy given the Americanized name of John Mung. Whitfield decided to bring Mung to the United States because he considered the boy intelligent, cheerful and willing to experience American life. The story of Mung's shipmates is not known, but newspaper accounts reported that "four of the members remained here [Honolulu], one having died."<sup>33</sup> The young boy, rescued "from a desolate and uninhabited island, where...[he] had lived for one hundred and eighty days on sea fowls," achieved celebrity status when he reached California a year after Whitfield found him. Mung's experience

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<sup>32</sup> American papers of the era referred to the rescued Japanese sailor as John Mung but contemporary historical sources list him as Manjiro Nakajima.

<sup>33</sup> "Interesting News From Japan," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 23 January 1851, 1.

in the United States only elevated his fame as he became fully incorporated into American society.<sup>34</sup>

Amazingly, the cultural contrast between the United States and Japan had little apparent impact on Mung's ability to adapt to American life. Once Whitfield's whaler returned to New England, Mung "attended school for several years and apprenticed as a cooper...[afterwards, he] shipped on a whaler, joined the California gold rush, saved six hundred dollars, and sailed to Hawaii...and arranged to be returned to Japan."<sup>35</sup>

Newspapers reported that Mung's desire to return to Japan stemmed from "his ambition to command a junk...and show his Japanese countrymen that the 'outside barbarians' understand navigation."<sup>36</sup> In 1851, Mung voyaged from Honolulu aboard a whaleship and was returned to Japan where he was immediately arrested and questioned by local officials. As an individual who had experienced American life firsthand, Mung and his 1852 book *Narratives of the Castaways*, greatly expanded Japanese knowledge about American motives and lifestyles. Although information on the United States to this period had been extensive, Japan still understood little about the fabric of American cultural and social life. Mung, with his experiences, was an invaluable source to influence Japanese knowledge and ease fears about American motives in the Pacific.<sup>37</sup>

Mung's positive relationship with the United States is reflected in his testimony provided to Japanese official upon his arrest in 1851. Mung stated that Americans were

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<sup>34</sup> Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry*, 178.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted from John Schroeder. *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>36</sup> "Interesting From Japan," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Curiously, scholarship is void of any account of Americans learning new information about Japan from John Mung. Since the boy was rescued at a young age, and due to Japanese society's intense level of secrecy and social control, it is doubtful that Mung possessed extensive knowledge about Japan's political or economic organization. Mung did reinforce American characterizations that the Japanese people were open to economic influences from the United States due to his rapid accommodation to American life and his participation in such events as the California Gold Rush.

civilized, highly industrialized, with a government superior to any other in the western world. In his statements, Mung said Americans were “naturally gentle and sympathetic and prize integrity. Above all, they are industrious and trade with countries in all directions...[they are] upright and generous, [and] do no evil. Among them are neither homicides nor robberies as a rule.”<sup>38</sup> Further, Mung stated that Americans formed families that were “very loving and...peaceful and affectionate... [from] a proclamation to the gods...after which they usually go on a sightseeing trip to the mountains.”<sup>39</sup> Mung’s portrayal of American lifestyle did not paint a threatening image nor did it imply that the United States was aggressive in imposing its lifestyle upon the Japanese.

Historians have long debated the impact of Mung’s testimony on Perry’s negotiations. A majority, such as John Schroeder, state that “the precise effect of Manjiro’s report is not known, but it did help dispel excessive fear and suspicion about Perry’s expedition.”<sup>40</sup> Schroeder cited evidence provided by Captain John Brooke, leader of an American Pacific exploring expedition in the late 1850s, who stated that Mung “had more to do with the opening of Japan than any man living.”<sup>41</sup> Others, such as Peter Wily disagree and argue that many Japanese officials were suspicious of Mung as he “had been too close to the Americans and could not be relied upon in a tense situation.”<sup>42</sup> While the exact nature of Mung’s influence on Perry’s expedition will probably never be known, even historians such as Wily agree that Mung possessed unique information about the United States that Japanese officials received for the first time. The fact that Mung

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<sup>38</sup> Quoted from Hisakazu Kaneko, *Manjiro: The Man Who Discovered America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956). Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry*, 178.

<sup>39</sup> Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry*, 178-179.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted from George M. Brooke, Jr., *John M. Brooke: Naval Scientist and Educator* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1980), 201.

<sup>42</sup> Wily, *Yankees in the Land of Gods*, 392.

received easy treatment during his imprisonment and was not executed is evidence that the Japanese saw him as a valuable source of information. However, Wily's claim does warrant examination as Mung was not used as an interpreter when Perry arrived in Edo and had no role in the Japanese Expedition's negotiations.

Essentially, Cooper and Mung's stories provided the United States with additional characterizations about Japanese society, and most importantly, seemed to support commercial arguments that the nation's people were open to American influence. This idea, explained in an 1852 *Washington Daily National Intelligencer* article, incorrectly asserted that Japan's source of wealth flowed from "mines of gold and silver...[and] a direct trade to that empire would increase the commerce of this country about two hundred millions of dollars annually, if not more."<sup>43</sup> The Dutch were again blamed for having "fostered, cherished, and increased the prejudices of the Japanese against all nations." The article concluded that it would "require but small efforts to accomplish commercial intercourse with Japan." When combined with the experiences of Commodores Biddle and Glynn, American whalers gave the United States the most complete information about a closed society possible before Perry opened Japan to American influence.

This assertion is supported by an 1852 *Times of London* article that detailed knowledge of Perry's expedition and Britain's failure to be in a position to form its own expedition. According to the British paper:

Of Japan we ourselves know little or nothing. Our ignorance is in some measure attributable to our own neglect.

Well nigh forty years had elapsed since an English ship-of-war – the *Phaeton* – had last appeared in that port [Nagasaki]. Time was when the English might have turned their intercourse to good account.

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3. <sup>43</sup> W. D. Porter, "The Empire of Japan," *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 14 April 1852,



In the year 1616 the Emperor of Japan had granted our people the privileges of commerce, with permission to erect a factory. Seven years afterward, in 1623, the East India Company abandoned the settlement because their commerce with Japan had not at the outset yielded them such profitable returns as they expected.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, Britain's inability to trade with Japan was due to British complacency over the Anglo-Japanese commercial arrangements since the seventeenth century. The *Times* said nothing about Japanese efforts to maintain isolation or the role religion played in closing the nation to most foreign influences. The *Times* also claimed whalers provided geographical data on Japan and were "intimately acquainted with the navigation along the eastern shore of Japan." British opinion, as explained in the article's conclusion, was favorable to the American expedition as Britain would benefit from commercial relations with Japan.

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The unique relationship that existed between whalers and Japan significantly influenced the chance that the Japanese Expedition would be successful. The stories of whalers who had experienced Japanese captivity supported arguments provided by expedition proponents that the time was right for an American naval mission to end Japan's seclusion. The ability of the United States to accomplish this task, without violence, hinged on the reception that Perry would receive when he arrived in Edo Bay. The knowledge provided by whalers eased tensions on both sides as the level of understanding between two alien cultures dramatically increased. The role whalers played in the reduction of suspicion between the United States and Japan was vital if

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<sup>44</sup> In 1807, the *Phaeton* conducted a raid against the Dutch factory in Nagasaki. This incident resulted in the suicides of both Nagasaki's governor and eleven other Japanese officials who were disgraced by the incident. The Japanese refer to the *Phaeton* raid as a "barbarian encounter" and were startled when Perry informed them, during a casual conversation, that the *Phaeton's* captain was now a British admiral. Wily, *Yankees in the Land of Gods*, 445.

Perry's mission was to succeed. This influence reflected the special ability only whalers possessed and, in arguments used by Aaron Palmer, formed another crucial aspect that facilitated America to dispatch Perry in 1853. Shipwrecked whalers, and the politics of nationalism, developed into a potent reason for the United States to confront Japan's mistreatment of whalers unintentionally stranded on Japanese shores. Thus, a political discourse developed two decades before Perry's expedition over the protection of whalers near Japan. This political argument would radically influence the American justification of sending Perry into Edo Bay.

### Chapter III

#### “Politics, Nationalism, and Whales”

*If that double-bolted land, Japan, is ever to become hospitable, it is the whale-ship alone to whom the credit will be due; for already she is on the threshold.<sup>1</sup>*

Commodore Perry's expedition relied upon whalers' experience in Japan not only for information about a little understood society but also as a political justification to sail into Edo Bay in July 1853. Political lobbyists, most notably Aaron Palmer, used nationalistic rhetoric to spur politicians into action over Japan's mistreatment of shipwrecked whalers in order to justify a diplomatic effort never attempted before in American history. The Japanese Expedition, formulated around Palmer's nationalistic ideals, was further influenced by America's progressive commercial attitude toward Asia. The whaling industry's nineteenth century development epitomized the commercial potential and profitability of an expanded American presence in the Pacific Ocean. Justification for Perry's mission relied upon a nationalistic appeal to both the protection of shipwrecked whalers and the commercial spirit of the age. Aaron Palmer, the skilled political lobbyist who intertwined these two themes, presented a powerful argument to Washington's politicians and helped justify why the United States needed to send a naval expedition illegally into Edo Bay. Whalers, the only Americans who had limited contact with the Japanese, formed the core element of Palmer's arguments and the debate over protection of American commercial enterprises in the Pacific Ocean.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, 1851. Peter Booth Wily, *Yankee's in the Land of Gods: Commodore Perry and the Opening of Japan* (New York: Viking Press, 1990), 5.

The earliest political arguments that mentioned Japan with America's Pacific whaling industry were presented by an Ohio lawyer named Jeremiah Reynolds. In 1828, in an attempt to lobby for a Pacific exploring expedition, Reynolds addressed the House of Representatives with a report on the whaling industry provided by friends who lived in Nantucket. This report argued that:

The increased extent of voyages now pursued by the trading and whaling ships into seas but little explored, and in parts of the world before unknown, has increased the cares, the dangers and the losses of our merchants and mariners. Within a few years, their [whaleship] cruises have extended from the coasts of Peru and Chili to the Northwest coast, New Zealand and the isles of Japan. This increase risk has been attended by an increase of loss. Several vessels have been wrecked on islands and reefs not laid down on any chart: and the matter acquires a painful interest from the fact, that many ships have gone into those seas, and no soul has survived to tell their fate. Your petitioners consider it a matter of earnest importance that those seas should be surveyed in an accurate and authentic manner, and the position of new islands, reefs, and shoals, definitely ascertained. The advancement of science, and not their private interest only, but the general interests of the nation, seem, to them, imperiously demand it.<sup>2</sup>

Reynolds' argument linked the need for further scientific knowledge about the Pacific Ocean with a national economic interest in protecting the whaling industry. Although the government did not organize any formal expedition from this request, the report was the first to identify a governmental role in protecting America's whaling industry.<sup>3</sup>

Reynolds, thwarted in his first attempt to motivate Congress to act, did not abandon his effort to link national interests with those of the whaling industry. In 1832, Reynolds became a private secretary aboard the USS *Potomac* and documented the vessel's Pacific travels. While in Honolulu, Reynolds modified his argument about the whaling industry's need for governmental scientific research to that of a threat American

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted from J.N. Reynolds, *Address on the Subject of a Surveying and Exploring Expedition* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1836): 165-166; Mawer, *Ahab's Trade*, 184.

<sup>3</sup> Mawer, *Ahab's Trade*, 183-184.

whalers created themselves. Reynolds used evidence gathered through discussions with the US consul in Honolulu to argue that:

[T]he importance of having a vessel of war stationed at these islands, for the protection of the whale-fishery; there has hardly been one vessel in the harbour that has not had more or less difficulties. I have at one time had sixty Americans confined in irons at the fort; and hardly a day has passed that I have not been compelled to visit one or more ships to quell a mutiny, or compel by force whole crews to heir duty, who had united to work no longer. I should say, too, that there were over one hundred deserters now on shore from the American ships this season, regular outlaws, ready to embark in any adventure.<sup>4</sup>

The characterization of whalers as a threat to America's commerce in the Pacific was a new argumentative issue in American politics. Reynolds, with the help of the US consul in Hawaii, documented how whalers often deserted their ships and resorted to criminal activities in a foreign land.<sup>5</sup>

Back in the United States, Reynolds continued to lobby for a scientific expedition in the Pacific and obtained permission to address the House of Representatives in 1836 about whaling protection. Instead of using an argument focused solely on scientific knowledge or criminal conduct by whalers, Reynolds chose to highlight the dangers faced by shipwrecked whalers on foreign shores as the primary justification for government action. The example that he discussed in his House of Representatives address was the 1832 shipwreck of the whaler *Mentor*. Reynolds explained in his address that the *Mentor* had struck uncharted reefs near the Philippines. Eleven crewmen survived the accident but only two were still alive by the time a British merchantship found the men nineteen months later. Abused by local natives, the two survivors

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted from J.N. Reynolds, *Voyage of the US Frigate Potomac* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835), 473; Mawer, *Ahab's Trade*, 185.

<sup>5</sup> Ironically, Reynolds' argument echoed the Russian characterization of the 'Yankee Hellships' that operated a decade later in the North Pacific. However, there is no documented evidence that the Russians cited Reynolds in their discussions with the United States. Furthermore, no scholar has argued that the Russians were aware of Reynolds' arguments to American politicians.

provided vivid firsthand accounts of the risks whalers faced when operating in distant Pacific waters. Reynolds, in a display of political savvy, used the disaster of the *Mentor* to his advantage and convinced the House of Representatives that action was needed to protect whalers who operated in the Pacific Ocean.<sup>6</sup>

As a result of Reynolds' address, on 18 May 1836, Congress authorized the first official exploratory expedition in the Pacific Ocean undertaken in American history. This expedition was tasked to explore the Southern Pacific "as well to determine the existence of all doubtful islands and shoals, as to discover, and accurately fix, the position of those which [lay] in or near the track of our vessels in that quarter, and [might] have escaped the observation of scientific navigators."<sup>7</sup> Additional instructions guided its commander, Charles Wilkes, to survey and examine the coasts of Oregon and California and then sail to the Sea of Japan and chart all uncharted small islands en route. The Wilkes Expedition sailed from Virginia in August 1838 and commenced a four year voyage that ranged from the Antarctic Ocean to the Philippines and California coastline. As America's first Pacific Ocean exploratory expedition, Wilkes' mission combined the interests of the whaling industry with a larger national interest in protecting American citizens by scientific observation of unknown reefs and small islands.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mawer, *Ahab's Trade*, 187-188, 190.

<sup>7</sup> John S. Jenkins, ed, *Voyage of the U.S. Exploring Squadron, Commanded by Captain Charles Wilkes, of the United States Navy, in 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, and 1842: Together with Explorations and Discoveries Made by Admiral D'Urville, Captain Ross, and other Navigators and Travellers: and an Account of the Expedition to the Dead Sea, under Lieutenant Lynch* (Hudson, NY: Wynkoop, 1850): 26.

<sup>8</sup> It is not stated in the Wilkes Expedition's official narrative why the exploring squadron did not conduct the Japanese observations that Congress had authorized. According to mission parameters, Wilkes was instructed to sail from California to Hawaii then venture into the Sea of Japan. In actuality, Wilkes sailed from Hawaii directly to the Philippines then voyaged to Singapore. It can be deduced from examining the official narrative that logistical concerns probably dissuaded Wilkes from entering the Sea of Japan or any other North Pacific region. *Ibid.*, 29.

Unfortunately for whalers who operated near Japan, Wilkes' expedition did little to aid whaleships near Japanese shores but detailed the Hawaiian Islands' importance to the nation's whaling business. According to Wilkes, Hawaii's favorable geographic position "must be of great benefit to them [Hawaiians] in a commercial point of view...[and] to the whalers frequenting the Pacific this is of great importance...[as] five hundred whaling vessels annually visit the Hawaiian Islands for refreshments."<sup>9</sup> To any whaleship headed toward Japan, Wilkes' characterization of Hawaii illustrated the islands' logistical importance. The commercial exchange identified by Wilkes indicated that both American whalers and Hawaiians benefited from business interaction. No mention was given to the rowdy or imprisoned whalers Reynold's identified in Hawaii a decade earlier.

Protection of the American whaling industry in the South Pacific was the main impetus behind Wilkes' expedition, although his voyage's geographic and scientific analysis aided whaling operations. Japan, and the waters near the island kingdom, remained unexplored by any federal effort and absent from political debate. This situation changed in less than a decade when reports of American whalers shipwrecked upon Japanese shores reached the United States. These reports detailed harsh mistreatment of Americans at the hands of Japanese authorities and spurred politicians into action. As with Reynolds' use of the *Mentor* tragedy, the abuse of whalers proved the most effective justification politicians could give for the United States to organize a federally-funded expedition toward Japan.

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<sup>9</sup> Wilkes did not specify the whalers' nationalities but it can be assumed that most were probably of American origin since the United States possessed a global monopoly on the Pacific whaling business during the period of the expedition's visit. *Ibid.*, 390.

In 1847, reports emerged from the Dutch embassy in Nagasaki that detailed the fate of the missing whaleship *Lawrence*. These reports included information about the *Lawrence*'s surviving crew being "questioned, watched, forcibly confined, fed a meager diet of rice and fish, and transported from place to place in cages."<sup>10</sup> Concern over the *Lawrence* survivors increased when the United States received word that one man imprisoned by the Japanese died due to harsh treatment. Politically, the *Lawrence* survivors' plight justified the need for the United States to send a naval mission to Japan in order to protect American sailors shipwrecked upon Japanese shores. This need rose further a year later when reports from the whaler *Lagoda* reached the United States.<sup>11</sup>

The *Lagoda* incident reflected Reynolds' earlier concern that American whalers themselves sparked conflict with foreign nations due to adventurous or criminal conduct. A year after the *Lawrence* shipwreck, fifteen unruly whalers deserted the *Lagoda* and landed upon Japanese shores, where they were captured by Japanese soldiers. These sailors endured over a year of imprisonment and were subjected to strict supervision and control due to numerous escape attempts and resistance to authority. Ultimately, two died in captivity, with one being strangled by a shipmate. The fact that the crewmen deserted their whaleship and proved unruly was ignored by American politicians who used the incident to stir nationalistic feelings and organize a government response to the mistreatment of Americans on Japanese soil.<sup>12</sup>

The official political reaction to the imprisoned crewmen from the *Lawrence* and *Lagoda* was the April 1849 dispatch of Commodore James Glynn. Glynn was instructed

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted from John H. Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry: Antebellum Sailor and Diplomat* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 164.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>12</sup> Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry*, 164; Wiley, *Yankees in the Land of Gods*, 22.



to approach negotiations in a firm manner as “[t]he protection of our valuable whaling fleet, and the encouragement of the whale fishery, are objects of deep interest to our government.”<sup>13</sup> Glynn’s conduct during negotiations with the Japanese illustrated his resolve to secure the release of the imprisoned Americans and the seriousness of his naval mission to Japan. Glynn insisted on direct and respectful negotiations with the Japanese and quickly responded to any perceived disrespect to his command.<sup>14</sup> When asked by Japanese officials why he had sailed to Nagasaki, Glynn replied that “wherever [we] have merchant ships or citizens, [we] send the men-of-war to protect them from injustice or oppression, and to relieve their necessities, if necessary.”<sup>15</sup> With the help of a Dutch mediator, Glynn secured the freedom of the imprisoned whalers and left Nagasaki without incident. The expedition’s official account to Congress concluded that the treatment of American whalers in Japan “shows the cruelty of the Japanese government, and the necessity of making some arrangement with it, involving the better usage of those who are cast upon its shores.”<sup>16</sup>

Newspaper coverage of Glynn’s voyage, in both the American and European press, was decidedly positive due to the reports of Japanese mistreatment of American whalers. According to the *Times of London*, Glynn negotiated the release of “American citizens from an ignominious and cruel imprisonment of nearly 17 months. Against these men the Japanese urged not the slightest charge, except the difficulty they had had in

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<sup>13</sup> This quote is from Commodore David Geisinger, the commander of the U.S. East India Squadron, to Glynn before his 1849 dispatch. Wiley, *Yankees in the Land of Gods*, 25-26.

<sup>14</sup> Such a display occurred when Glynn first entered Nagasaki’s harbor. The Japanese, by custom, would throw a warning notice wrapped around a stick aboard any foreign vessel that entered Nagasaki’s port. This notice warned of serious consequences if any foreigner left the ship, fired a gun, or did not behave in a civilized fashion according to Japanese law. Glynn responded to this notice by throwing the stick overboard and demanding that all discussions be conducted in person. *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted from the *Official Documents Relative to the Empire of Japan*, (United States Senate, 32<sup>nd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, Executive Document 59), 50. Wiley, *Yankees in the Land of Gods*, 29.

building prisons and cages strong enough to hold them.”<sup>17</sup> No mention is included in the *Times*’ article about the whalers deserting their ship and trying to escape on numerous occasions. The Japanese were depicted as warlike by the *Times* but, curiously, were described as advanced “in the arts, and general intelligence, [as] the inhabitants of this group are by far the most interesting unenlightened nation in the Pacific Ocean.” Even with this contradiction, the *Times* justified the reasoning behind Glynn’s dispatch.

Initially, the experience of the *Lagoda* had little impact in the United States Congress. The only legislation discussed concerning the whaling industry and Japan was a 21 February 1850 resolution presented by Maine Senator Hannibal Hamlin that asked the Secretary of State to provide more information about the mistreatment of Americans in Japan. Specifically, this resolution requested that:

That the Secretary of State be requested to communicate to the Senate such information or particulars as may have come to his knowledge, respecting the detention, imprisonment, and barbarous treatment, by the Japanese Imperial and Provincial authorities, of American seamen who have the misfortune to be shipwrecked on the coast of Japan, and its dependencies, which are now frequented by a large American whaling fleet in the peaceful pursuit of their lawful enterprise.

That the Secretary of State be also requested to communicate to the Senate such a recent and reliable information, in the possession of the Department of State, as relates to the Independent Oriental nations, and their capabilities for profitable American commerce; and that he report on the expediency of the appointment of a special diplomatic agent or commissioner of the United States, to be vested with authority to open amicable relations and make commercial treaties with the sovereigns of those nations.<sup>18</sup>

Unlike Jeremiah Reynolds’ impassioned use of firsthand accounts to lobby for a scientific expedition, Senator Hamlin’s resolution did not propose any official government effort to aid whalers near Japanese waters. Domestic issues, such as slavery and the Compromise

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<sup>17</sup> “American Prisoners in Japan,” *Times of London*, 23 January 1851, 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Congressional Globe*, (United States Senate, 31<sup>st</sup> Congress, 1849-1850, 1<sup>st</sup> Session), 410-411.

of 1850, dominated the legislative session during that year. Japan, and the nation's whaling industry, had to wait two years before the government acted upon its protection.

When news of a planned Japanese expedition hit newspapers, in mid-1852, the whaling industry and the mistreatment of American whalers became paramount in the political arguments used to justify the voyages. According to one paper, the proposed objectives of the newly-announced mission, declared that "the chief objectives of the expedition to Japan are to secure protection for the lives and property of American citizens shipwrecked on the Japanese coast, and, if possible, to effect an arrangement by which American steamers may be supplied with coal."<sup>19</sup> As indicated by this article, the protection of Americans was the foremost concern whereas the acquisition of coaling stations was an open question. Other papers were more detailed in the association between the whaling industry and any Japanese expedition.

The *Times of London* followed upon its positive interpretation of Glynn's expedition and endorsed the proposed expedition as motivated almost exclusively by the need for the United States to confront the abuse of American citizens in Japan. The *Times of London*, in its opinion, argued that:

Foreign ships in distress approaching the shores of Japan, instead of being assisted, are repelled by force and insult; shipwrecked mariners are imprisoned, exhibited in cages, or put to death; and cargoes are confiscated. There certainly can in this case be no question of a palpable violation of the law of nature and nations...[t]he subjects of the American Republic have of late been the chief victims of this barbarous and intolerable law; the fishing grounds of whalers being close to the Japan islands, which afford naturally their most convenient ports of refuge, and several hundred of them passing yearly through the strait which divides the great island of Nippon from the more northern large one of Jesso.

The Americans...send a force to demand reparation for injuries done to themselves by such flagrant violation of the laws of nature and society, to compel the Japanese to renew their intercourse with the rest of mankind, and to forbear from the practice of a ferocious

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<sup>19</sup> "Expedition to Japan," Washington, *Daily National Intelligencer*, 26 April 1852, 2.

inhospitality. For the common good of the world, and for the sake of civilization and justice, we wish them every success.<sup>20</sup>

Evident in this explanation are the experiences of the whalerships *Lawrence* and *Lagoda* and Commodore Glynn's 1849 Nagasaki voyage. Instead of referring to the planned American effort as the Japanese Expedition, the *Times of London* used the terminology of the "redress squadron" in its final analysis of the proposal.

A key expedition proponent, one who probably would have endorsed the term 'redress squadron,' was Aaron Haight Palmer. In September 1849, Palmer presented a letter titled the "Plan for Opening Japan" to Secretary of State John Clayton. This document used the *Lagoda* affair to justify the opening of a diplomatic effort to Japan and proposed an expedition commanded by a naval officer who resembled Commodore Glynn's forceful approach in negotiating with the Japanese. The rights of Americans, according to Palmer, demanded the government act upon the needs of shipwrecked and stranded sailors.<sup>21</sup>

Concern for the whaling industry is evident in Palmer's letter through the methodology he used to craft his expedition argument. Palmer stated that the *Lagoda's* experience illustrated that:

[I]t is imperatively incumbent on our Government to adopt immediate and energetic measures to compel the Seagoon of Japan to make the most satisfactory atonement and indemnification for such barbarous and outrageous treatment of shipwrecked Americans, and guaranty the rights of hospitality and friendly protection to our countrymen who may hereafter have the misfortune to be thrown upon

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<sup>20</sup> "The American Expedition to Japan," *Times of London*, 19 April 1852, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, "Old Bruin," *Commodore Matthew C. Perry, 1794-1858: The American Naval Officer Who Helped Found Liberia, Hunted Pirates in the West Indies, Practised Diplomacy with the Sultan of Turkey and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies; Commanded the Gulf Squadron in the Mexican War, Promoted the Steam Navy and the Shell Gun, and Conducted the Naval Expedition Which Opened Japan* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), 166.

the coasts of Japan, or compelled to put into any of the ports of the Empire, by stress of weather or in want of assistance.<sup>22</sup>

Afterward, Palmer proposed that an ultimatum should be given to the Japanese government by “a commissioner...[to] demand an audience with the Seagoon, or head of the proper department of the Imperial Government; holding no official or personal intercourse with any other subordinate Japanese functionary.” This assertion used the lessons from Glynn’s expedition to argue that a forceful approach was necessary when dealing with Japanese officials. Furthermore, nationalistic sentiments dictated that an American officer be treated with respect and negotiate with a person of suitable rank. From this standpoint, Palmer pressed a five point ultimatum to the Secretary of State John Clayton that used the whaling industry as the primary justification for a future Japanese Expedition and nationalistic ideals to guide discussions once in Japan.

Palmer’s first point concerned the mistreatment of Americans, specifically the *Lagoda* crew.<sup>23</sup> According to the ultimatum, the Japanese commissioner should demand “[f]ull and ample indemnity and reparation to the shipwrecked American seamen [*Lagoda* crew], for their detention, imprisonment, and barbarous treatment by the Japanese officials, during their captivity in that Empire.”<sup>24</sup> Reparations identified by Palmer included unspecified amounts to be determined by the Japanese commission who will conduct the voyage and five thousand dollars for each American who died in

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<sup>22</sup> Aaron Haight Palmer, “The Empire of Japan,” Washington, *Daily National Intelligencer*, 18 November 1852, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Included in Palmer’s arguments is a reference to Ranald McDonald, a young whaler that was freed with the *Lagoda* deserters. MacDonal was a crewman aboard the New York whaler *Plymouth* that decided to explore the Japanese coastline in early 1849. At first greeted by friendly Japanese, MacDonal was soon captured by soldiers and imprisoned until Commodore Glynn secured his release later in the year. Palmer used MacDonal’s experience as further evidence of the harsh mistreatment of Americans by the Japanese due to the New York whaler’s impoverished and thin physical condition at the time of this release. For more information on MacDonal’s experience in Japan, refer to Wily, *Yankee’s in the Land of Gods*. 5-22.

<sup>24</sup> Palmer, “The Empire of Japan,” Washington, *Daily National Intelligencer*, 2.

Japanese custody. The total damages to be awarded to American citizens are not stated but Palmer argued it should be large enough to be “a guarantee or pledge to be exacted from the Japanese Government of its future good conduct towards Americans.”

The ultimatum’s second justification concerned the whaling industry’s need for access to Japanese ports. According to Palmer, the Japanese are obligated to provide ports facilities in “cases where American vessels are compelled, by stress of weather, in want of repair or assistance, to put into any of the ports of the Empire, that they may be aided and provided with necessities to refit.” This demand acknowledged the lack of friendly ports open to the nation’s whaling fleet in the North Pacific and Arctic regions. Logistical concerns that inhibited operations, in addition to the physical welfare of whalers, underscored this demand.

An appeal to American nationalism appeared in Palmer’s third point. After the establishment of ports, as outlined in the preceding demand, the United States was to establish consuls with “recognized rights, privileges, and immunities incidental to such functionaries under the law of nations; and specially exempt from any degrading ceremonials or observance incompatible therewith.” The Dutch experience of limited trade, public acts against Christianity, and confinement by armed Japanese guards was not acceptable to Palmer. Further, Japan and the United States would agree upon commercial terms that showed “perfect equality between the two sovereign and independent nations.” Fundamentally, these two demands would illustrate that the United States warranted respect from Japanese officials and appealed directly to American notions of nationalism as they existed during the era.

The fourth ultimatum point explained the commercial rights that whalers possessed in operating near Japan. After he established the need for American ships in distress to have access to Japanese ports, Palmer introduced a nationalistic argument as to why all whaleships should be allowed into Japanese ports. He explained that American whalers should “have the privilege of catching whales off the coast of Japan, and in the different bays of Yeso and the Japanese Kurile Islands, without molestation, and of touching therein to refit or procure wood, water, and provisions.” Since American whalers operated near Japanese shores without molestation, the important aspect of this argument was the industry’s need to access Japanese ports for resupply due to the lack of any other adequate port alternative in the North Pacific. According to Palmer, it was the commercial right for whalers to operate near Japan, and, in doing so, they should have the ability to enter Japanese ports for provisions. The appeal to American nationalism is apparent in this argument as Palmer states that the United States had the commercial right to whale anywhere in the world and it was the obligation of Japan to respect that right.

The conclusion of Palmer’s argument to Secretary of State Clayton referenced the need for America to take firm action against personal indignities such as the treatment of the *Lagoda* crewmen. This action, in Palmer’s words, would “secure the desired privileges for our steamships and whalers in its [Japan’s] ports, and harbors, and reflect lasting credit on the firmness, decision, and energy of General Taylor’s Administration.”<sup>25</sup> As a display of executive action and concern about American citizens’ treatment in a foreign land, the Japanese Expedition, according to Palmer, was

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<sup>25</sup> Zachary Taylor won the presidential election of 1848 but died in 1850. Millard Fillmore assumed the presidency following Taylor’s death in July 1850. Quote from Aaron Haight Palmer, *Documents and Facts Illustrating the Origin of the Mission to Japan, Authorized by the Government of the United States* (Washington: Henry Polkinhorn Press, 1857), 19.

an opportunity that would show American political leadership. Thus, Palmer's ultimatum to Clayton used nationalistic rhetoric and concern over the treatment of shipwrecked whalers to justify the formation of a diplomatic mission to Japan.

By 1851, Palmer's lobbying effort expanded beyond Secretary of State Clayton to include President Millard Fillmore. In a 6 January 1851 letter to Fillmore, Palmer explained how the *Lagoda* affair demanded "redress for the wrongs they [Japan] have inflicted on our countrymen, with a satisfactory guarantee against their recurrence."<sup>26</sup> Palmer cited his extensive lobbying effort as evidence that shipwrecked Americans in Japan needed "energetic national measures being adopted to compel the court of Yedo to make satisfactory atonement and indemnity for such outrages, and guaranty the rights of charitable hospitality and friendly protection to those of our countrymen."<sup>27</sup> The political argument Palmer presented to President Fillmore used the *Lagoda* as the paramount justification for why the United States should confront the Japanese. As an experienced lobbyist, Aaron Palmer understood that the mistreatment of Americans by a foreign nation stirred emotions and made his proposed Japanese Expedition attractive to Washington politicians. Jeremiah Reynolds had proved the effectiveness of such tactics two decades earlier. Therefore, in May 1851, the Fillmore administration announced the formal plans for an American expedition to Japan.<sup>28</sup>

In 1855, one year after Perry's Japanese Expedition concluded, the full impact of Palmer's lobbying campaign was acknowledged in a report prepared by Clayton to the Senate's Committee on Foreign Relations. This report argued that Palmer deserved compensation since his 'Plan for Opening Japan' letter was "subsequently adopted as the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>28</sup> Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry*, 168.



basis of the policy of our government in the expedition...accomplished by Commodore Perry in accordance, it would seem, with the leading views, suggestions, and recommendations contained therein.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the report cited, as an additional basis for compensation, Palmer’s distribution of 2,250 copies of his memoirs to members of Congress and numerous executive officials.<sup>30</sup> The report’s conclusion characterized Palmer’s services to the United States as “highly meritorious and valuable.” As indicated by Clayton’s report, Palmer strongly influenced American foreign policy toward Japan. A major theme in the development of that policy was the protection of Americans from Japanese detention and abuse. The whaleship *Lagoda*, in Palmer’s view, justified this position.

A brief statement prepared by Secretary of the Navy John P. Kennedy paralleled Clayton’s conclusion about Palmer’s lobbying effort. According to Kennedy’s undated report, “[b]y direction of President Fillmore, Mr. Palmer had frequent interviews, between the 6<sup>th</sup> January and the month of May, 1851, with his lamented friend, the late Hon. Daniel Webster.”<sup>31</sup> These interviews, as indicated by Kennedy’s report, were followed by meetings with Secretary of the Navy Kennedy and Commodore Perry about the Japanese Expedition. Although Kennedy made no mention of the *Lagoda* whalers or the need to protect Americans from Japanese maltreatment, the impact of Palmer’s

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>30</sup> Palmer’s memoirs contained geographical, hydrographical, political, and commercial details on Japan, Korea, China, and other Asian nations. Secretary of the Navy Kennedy described the memoirs as the “latest and most reliable data and guides, in a condensed and comprehensive form, for the intelligent and efficient prosecution of the [Japanese] expedition that can be obtained by our Government from any other source whatever.” Aaron Haight Palmer, *Documents and Facts Illustrating the Origin of the Mission to Japan, Authorized by the Government of the United States* (Washington: Henry Polkinhorn Press, 1857), 22.

<sup>31</sup> Daniel Webster became Secretary of State in 1850 under Fillmore’s administration. Webster served until his death in early 1852.

The personal and official correspondences of Daniel Webster do not contain mention of these interviews but, according to this report, they detailed how the Expedition’s commander would conduct negotiations with the Japanese. Ibid., 20.

lobbying is explicitly acknowledged in his letter. President Fillmore deemed it worthwhile to direct Palmer to discuss his views on a Japanese Expedition with Secretary of State Webster. Clearly Fillmore agreed with Palmer's call that protecting Americans was a national priority that deserved a rapid government response.<sup>32</sup>

Edward Everett, the secretary of state after Daniel Webster's death in early 1852, agreed with Palmer's plan and argued for a harder American stance toward Japan. Everett outlined his policy toward Japan with three main orders to Perry that were developed around Commodore Glynn's firm yet nonviolent experience in Edo Bay. The first stated that if the mission's "Commodore should fail to obtain from the government any relaxation of their system of exclusion, or even any assurance of humane treatment of our shipwrecked seamen, he will then change his tone, and inform them in the most unequivocal terms that it is the determination of this government to insist."<sup>33</sup> Everett justified this confrontational approach on the grounds that crewmen from the *Lawrence* and *Lagoda* whalers had been "treated with great barbarity...that their lives were spared only through the intercession of the Dutch governor of Nagasaki."<sup>34</sup> Everett insisted that it was the duty of every nation to care for those "persons who are cast by the perils of the ocean upon her shores." This formed the basis of the mission's first objective that stated Perry was to "effect some permanent arrangement for the protection of American seaman and property wrecked on these islands, or driven into their ports by stress of weather."<sup>35</sup> The Japanese were not to have a choice in how they treated Americans cast upon their shores. Perry's instructions reflected Everett's position on this point.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>33</sup> Walworth, *Black Ships Off Japan*, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 242.

The State Department's second objective concerned securing "[t]he permission to American vessels to enter one or more of their ports in order to obtain supplies of provisions...to refit so as to enable them to prosecute their voyage." Whalers who operated near Japan greatly benefited from this demand as no major port was open to them in the North Pacific. The third and final objective was to secure commercial rights allowing American traders to barter and sell within Japan. This would also benefit whalers arriving in Japan as many whaleships carried items ranging from tobacco to foodstuffs that could be traded for local goods. All three State Department objectives, as outlined in Perry's instructions, influenced whaling operations in the North Pacific and appealed to America's nationalistic notions.<sup>36</sup>

President Millard Fillmore's "Great and Good Friend" letter to the Japanese emperor, drafted by Everett and delivered by Perry, voiced the president's concern over the mistreatment of Americans in Japan. According to Fillmore:

[G]reat numbers of our people pursue the whale fishery near the shores of Japan. It sometimes happens, in stormy weather, that one of our ships is wrecked on your imperial majesty's shores. In all such cases we ask, and expect, that our unfortunate people should be treated with kindness, and that their property should be protected, till we can send a vessel and bring them away. We are very much in earnest of this.<sup>37</sup>

Fillmore's letter included no confrontational language demanding that the Japanese comply with the American demand. Fillmore listed Perry's objectives to the Japanese Emperor as "friendship, commerce, a supply of coal and provisions, and protection for

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<sup>36</sup> Walworth, *Black Ships Off Japan*, 242; Morison, "Old Bruin": *Commodore Matthew C. Perry*, 283.

<sup>37</sup> Walworth, *Black Ships Off Japan*, 250.

our shipwrecked people.”<sup>38</sup> The justification for sending an American naval squadron illegally into Japanese waters, as indicated by Fillmore, included the protection of Americans shipwrecked in Japan and the development of a commercial intercourse between the United States and Asia.

Historians have characterized Fillmore’s letter as immature and childish in tone due to its friendly title and the president’s introduction of “Your good friend.” In actuality, this letter reflected how little Americans understood the official protocol used to address a Japanese official. Since this was the first time an American president had attempted a direct correspondence with the Japanese emperor, Everett decided that an amicable presentation was the best. Ironically, this letter also indicated the lack of knowledge Americans had about the Japanese political system. In 1852, during the late Tokugawa Shogunate, the Japanese emperor was a mere figurehead with real political and military power resting with the Shogun. Even Ranald MacDonald, the captured whaler who understood that Japan was ruled by a feudalistic system divided between a secular and religious ruler, did not fully comprehend the Japanese political system after Commodore Glynn secured his freedom in 1849.<sup>39</sup>

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While shipwrecked whalers provided politicians with a powerful incentive to challenge Japanese isolation on nationalistic and commercial grounds, issues concerning the security of American vessels in the Pacific elicited additional support for Perry’s

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<sup>38</sup> Fillmore, in an effort to support his argument for commercial intercourse with Japan, argued that California produced “about sixty millions dollars in gold every year.... [and] Japan is also a rich and fertile country, and produces many very valuable articles.... [Therefore] our two countries should trade with each other, for the benefit both of Japan and the United States. No specifics are provided on the trading relationship that Fillmore desired or any estimates as to the commercial intercourse that would develop if Japan accepted America’s terms. Ibid., 249-250, 251.

<sup>39</sup> Morison, “*Old Bruin*”: *Commodore Matthew C. Perry*, 285-286.

mission. Due to the United States Navy's small size during the mid-nineteenth century, politicians were forced, by necessity, to consider plans that used private vessels as converted warships in times of war. America's extensive whaling fleet, a viable option if the navy needed vessels and able seamen, was regarded as a national asset that warranted protective measures to ensure its safety during peacetime. Nationalistic concerns that promoted global commerce also raised the specter that warfare with a major European power such as Britain or France was always a real possibility as American vessels increased their presence on the world's oceans. As such, the Japanese Expedition's goal of increasing the number of friendly ports open to American whalers and merchantmen alleviated some of these fears if warfare with major European power or Russia erupted as Japan was not allied to any European nation. As indicated with President Fillmore's "Great and Good Friend" letter to the Japanese emperor, the United States had a large stake in Pacific commerce. Whaling, America's great monopoly of the era, was at the forefront of this discussion about protecting the nation's commercial enterprises in the Pacific Ocean.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the United States possessed the world's fifth largest navy.<sup>40</sup> This force, divided among several squadrons around the globe, was charged with the protection of the nation's extensive whaling and trading fleets. The realization that the United States was ill-prepared to support the expense required to protect the America's maritime interests adequately worried many naval officers,

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<sup>40</sup> In 1850, the American navy consisted of 9 ships-of-the line, 15 frigates, 27 sloops, 4 small sailing vessels, and 8 steamers. In comparison, Great Britain's naval force was estimated at 102 ships-of-the-line, 103 frigates, 177 sloops and smaller sailing vessels and 57 steamers; Russia's navy, the greatest threat to whalers near Japan and the North Pacific, contained 40 ships-of-the-line, 50 frigates, and many smaller sailing vessels. Russia also possessed an unknown number of steam vessels during this era. Matthew Perry, "Letter to D.S. Yulee, Chairman to the Committee on Naval Affairs," *Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from Officers* (21 March 1850): 44-45.

including Commodore Perry. In a personal correspondence to Secretary of the Navy William Graham, Perry reported that the United States was open to a destructive naval war since the nation was “vulnerable in a valuable commerce that gives employment to at least 150.000 men, and to 3.334.000 tons of shipping, of which 1.440.000 tons are employed in foreign trade; traversing every sea and visiting every part of the world.”<sup>41</sup> America’s small navy, would face serious problems if forced to defend the commercial interests of the United States against a major naval power like Great Britain. Perry’s letter to Graham underscored how much the United States risked if such a conflict erupted.<sup>42</sup>

In contrast to Perry’s concern over America’s ability to protect its vessels in the Pacific, Great Britain recognized that the United States possessed huge reserves of men who gained invaluable naval experience in whaling and fishing activities. The *London Mercantile Gazette*, in an article about the United States’ whale and coastal fisheries, argued that the “number of American ships engaged in the Southern whale fishery alone, would of themselves be nearly sufficient to man any ordinary fleet of ships of war which that country might require to send to sea.”<sup>43</sup> Whaling opportunities in the North Pacific, argued this article, provided America with a “new and extended branch of the whale fishery...[that] alone affords to the United States of becoming a great maritime power, and, indeed, what they aim to be, the greatest naval country in the world.” The *Gazette* made no mention of America’s small navy or of its ability to fund larger naval forces. The contribution of whalers to America’s security needs, according to this article,

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>42</sup> Wiley, *Yankees in the Land of Gods*, 77.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in “The Navy and Fisheries of the United States,” *New York Times*, 10 November 1852, 1; “The Navy and Fisheries of the United States,” Washington, *Daily National Intelligencer*, 8 November 1852, 2.

centered on the industry's role in training sailors who could serve on warships. In British eyes, the potential of the United States to become a great naval power in the Pacific lay in its whaling and fishing industries. Therefore, those industries would become obvious targets if hostilities flared between Great Britain and the United States.

Protecting whalers in the Pacific Ocean presented significant problems to the United States as no major ports existed to support a large American naval presence in the Pacific Ocean. California's 1850 statehood opened ports along the Pacific west coast, yet very few friendly ports existed beyond Hawaii. Whalers who ventured into waters near Japan did so without American naval protection. Perry acknowledged this fact when he wrote D. S. Yulee, the Senate Chairman of the Committee on Naval Affairs, about the United States' ability to defend commercial and whaling ships in the Pacific. According to Perry's letter:

With respect to our whaling interests and the general commerce between the western coast of America and the Eastern coast of Asia, our ability to extend protection, must depend mainly on the relative strength of our own and an enemy's general naval force in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. It must be borne in mind, however, that France now holds Tahiti, which would give her advantages for operations against our whale ships, and those navigating for ordinary purposes, between Asia and the western coast of America. Great Britain also holds many points on or near the Asiatic coasts, where she keeps a considerable Naval force, that would undoubtedly be increased in case of war with us, to interrupt as far as possible our trade in those regions.<sup>44</sup>

Perry identified America's lack of geographical possessions, as they related to logistical resupply, as the fundamental problem that America's naval operations in the Pacific Oceans. However, European powers, such as Britain and France, possessed limited

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<sup>44</sup> It is uncertain why Perry did not identify Russia as a major threat. Throughout his career, Perry had extensive naval experience with the British and French navies yet there is no record of Perry of having contact with Russians before this 1850 report was sent to Gram. Perry, "Letter to D.S. Yulee," 44.

geographical possessions in the Pacific region and, as such, could be used as naval bases against American interests, which had no major port facilities outside of Hawaii.

The security of American ships in the Pacific became a paramount concern in the mid-nineteenth century as politicians still viewed Britain as a competitor and, potentially as a dangerous enemy. Perry, especially, was very apprehensive of Britain's intentions in the Pacific Ocean as the nation laid a weak claim upon the Bonin Islands and could easily interdict Pacific commerce through its naval base in Hong Kong. The Japanese Expedition's expected contribution to the security of American commercial enterprises in the Pacific was twofold. If Japan ended its isolation from the United States, Japanese coal reserves would be available to American naval steamships operating in the North Pacific. Steam technology during the era remained primitive and required huge quantities of coal. Although Japan never actually possessed large deposits of coal, both Perry and President Fillmore incorrectly believed that the island nation was rich in this vital natural resource.<sup>45</sup> Access to Japanese coal would provide a solution to the logistical problem that the United States Navy faced using steamships to protect commercial vessels in the Pacific. Second, the Perry's expedition would open Japanese supplies to America's commercial steamships that transversed the 'Great Circle Route to

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<sup>45</sup> It is uncertain why Fillmore and Perry believed Japan possessed huge coal reserves. When Commodore Glynn visited Japan in 1849, he inquired about Japan's coal reserves and attempted to communicate his question more fully by showing Japanese officials a piece of coal stored aboard his ship. One Japanese official responded with "[w]hat a curious stone it is!" after seeing Glynn's example and then denied Japan having such a mineral. In 1854, when Perry asked the same question on his return trip into Edo Bay, he was told that Japan had large reserves of coal. No evidence has been found to date that can reconcile the contradiction between the two Japanese responses. Wiley, *Yankee's in the Land of Gods*, 27, 310.



Japan.<sup>46</sup> The protection and further development of America's Pacific commerce rested heavily on the success or failure of Perry's expedition.<sup>47</sup>

Through Perry's voyage, the United States Navy showcased steamships as a solution to America's security and commercial needs in the Pacific Ocean. The navy argued, in a 16 February 1853 report to the Senate, that government endorsement of a steamer line between California and China would boost American commerce as California's statehood and mineral wealth fueled business expansion in Pacific markets. As described in this report, California's acquisition "has given impulse to the business of this country...[and] if the Government shall adopt the proper measures to maintain and improve the vantage ground we have so fortunately obtained, a few years must find us enjoying an eminent control over the most valuable commerce of the world."<sup>48</sup> The report continued by stating that the "use of coal by the steamers...will cause the establishment of depots in the islands of the Pacific. These depots, in time of war, would be subject to the use of the Government, which, at this time, has not a single depot from which warsteamers can be supplied." Since the quickest route between the United States' western coast and China passed by Japan, the island nation's expected large coal reserves provided the best location to refuel steamers in the North Pacific region.

Private ambitions and military support for a steamer line from California to China increased political pressure on the government to ensure that Perry's expedition succeed

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<sup>46</sup> Chartered by naval lieutenant M.F. Maury in May 1848, this circular route was the shortest distance between California and China. Estimated at 5,400 miles, a ship that used the 'Great Circle Route to Japan' shaved several thousand miles off of their voyage as a stopover in Hawaii was unnecessary. Access to Japan was vital if mail steamers were to carry time sensitive mail and cargo between China and the United States. For a visual representation of this route, refer to Wiley, *Yankees in the Land of Gods*, 90-91.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 92, 488.

<sup>48</sup> "Steam Communication between the United States and China," *New York Times*, 20 February 1853, 2.

in negotiating a treaty with the Japanese government. Politicians, in an effort to address cheaply the security needs of whalers and commercial vessels in the Pacific, agreed with the navy that mail steamships were the solution to America's weak naval force. The idea, promoted in the early 1850s by powerful lawmakers such as Thomas King, the chairman of the House Committee on Naval Affairs, required government subsidization of a Pacific steamer line to be constructed under navy supervision and quickly converted into warships if needed. In reality, mail steamers proved much more costly to build than anticipated, and the plan was almost abandoned by Congress. In order to maximize profits and save the subsidy program, steamship captains needed the 'Great Circle Route to Japan' opened. A successful expedition by Perry would achieve this hope and save the steamer fleet.<sup>49</sup>

The whaling industry, like commercial steamships, benefited from California's statehood and the ability to sail the circular route from the west coast to Japan, bypassing Hawaii. Many whaleship-owners expected the industry's center to shift from New England to California as whalers focused on Pacific operations. Port cities such as San Francisco supported whalers en route to Pacific fisheries and allowed ships to extend voyages, even though California was 3,000 miles away from North Pacific whaling grounds. Many whalers still sailed toward Hawaii but such voyages added months to cruises that lasted up to three years in many cases. The ability for a whaler to sail northward, operate in the North Pacific, and dock in Japan would save time and money for whalers. Whaleship owners understood this scenario and actively lobbied government officials for action to open Japan for American whalers.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>50</sup> Sanderson, *Follow the Whale*, 256.

Perry acknowledged the lobbying efforts of whaleships-owners' in a letter he wrote to Secretary of the Navy Graham. The owners, in a meeting with Perry, argued that the industry's economic welfare depended on his mission. Perry explained to Graham that:

“the owners and masters of whaling ships exhibited a strong desire to give me every information with respect to the cruising grounds and usual ports of resorts of the ships, and all agree in the importance of having ports of refuge in Japan...[as] whaleships at present are valued at about seventeen million dollars and employed seventeen thousand souls.”<sup>51</sup>

This argument reflected the strong motivation whalers had to gain access to Japanese ports and how economically important whaling was to the United States' economy. Whalership-owners, as revealed in their discussions with Perry, added mission planning with information about Japan as the whaling industry had a large financial stake in the Japanese Expedition's success.

The political relationship between the whaling industry and America's economic enterprises in the Pacific formed early in the debate over the creation of a Japanese Expedition. Aaron Palmer, the lobbyist most responsible for Perry's mission, argued that “the government of that country [Japan], ere long, be compelled, by the force of circumstances...to succumb to the progressive commercial spirit of the age.”<sup>52</sup> Throughout his nationalistic arguments, Palmer used shipwrecked Americans as justification for governmental action. The financial incentives of an expanded American presence in the Pacific increased politicians' willingness to hear Palmer's ideas about how to end Japanese isolation and safeguard Americans from Japan's harsh treatment of foreigners who illegally entered the kingdom.

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<sup>51</sup> Matthew Perry, “Letter to Secretary William Graham,” *Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy to Officers* (27 March 1852): 145.

<sup>52</sup> Palmer, *Documents and Facts Illustrating the Origin of the Mission to Japan*, 19.

The whaling industry's recent history supported Palmer's progressive commercial idea because the business depended so heavily on Pacific fisheries for profits by the mid-nineteenth century. In addition, whaling's rapid expansion after the War of 1812 enhanced the belief of many American businessmen and politicians that the United States would dominate world commerce and reap enormous profits. In order to promote this nationalistic ideal, newspapers compared the Japanese Expedition's expected expenses to the profit potential of a successful whaleship. According to the *Daily National*

*Intelligencer*:

Congress has appropriated for this expedition [to Japan] one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars; a large sum, to be sure, but how small when contrasted with the magnitude of the work to be accomplished!

The commerce that thus sustains the Government asks but little in return. For want of such information as it is the present purpose to obtain, a whale ship of four thousand barrels of sperm oil was lost not long ago; the *Memnon*, with a freight worth \$250,000, perished in a like manner.<sup>53</sup>

Comparing the value of a wrecked whaleship's cargo to the Japanese Expedition's expenses provided a powerful argument that helped win over political opponents of the mission.<sup>54</sup> The article concluded with the assertion that the expedition's "purposes [are] wholly subservient to the pursuits of peace." Whalers, representations of America's strength in commercial activities, supported the paper's position for the Japanese Expedition.

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<sup>53</sup> "An Expedition to Japan," Washington, *Daily National Intelligencer*, 18 November 1852, 3.

<sup>54</sup> Opponents of the expedition, such as Arkansas senator Solon Borland, attacked the Fillmore administration for threatening a nation that the United States had no quarrel or reason to expect hostility. Senator John Hale of New Hampshire, while not as cynical as Borland, dryly stated that the expedition was a "device to use the bloated officer corps and unneeded ships." Curiously, no specific criticism about the need to protect American from Japanese mistreatment or the expedition's commercial benefits has been found. Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry*, 179.

American whaling, both as an institution and operation, influenced the development of Perry's mission through nationalistic appeals and its representation of America's commercial dominance in the Pacific Ocean. Shipwrecked whalers provided the United States with a legitimate reason to directly confront Japanese mistreatment while they bolstered security and commercial discussions about America's future in the Pacific Ocean through whaling activities near Japan. Aaron Palmer, the Expedition's foremost lobbyist, skillfully used the representation of mistreated whalers in Japanese custody to combine themes of nationalism and commercial opportunity into a powerful argument that motivated politicians to act. Whalers, the only Americans in a position to aid Palmer's effort, proved invaluable to his planned Japanese expedition. Thus, in a direct fashion, whalers' contact with the Japanese helped the United States dispatch a naval squadron to Edo Bay in 1853.

## NEGOTIATIONS AND CONCLUSION

*The United States of America, and the Empire of Japan, desiring to establish firm, lasting and sincere friendship between the two Nations, have resolved to fix in a manner clear and positive, by means of a Treaty...the rules which shall in the future be mutually observed in the intercourse of their respective Countries.<sup>1</sup>*

On 9 July, 1853, Perry presented a ‘letter of credence’ along with President Fillmore’s “Great and Good Friend” communiqué to a Japanese official who boarded the Japanese Expedition’s flagship, the *Susquehanna*.<sup>2</sup> Perry’s letter, framed in his own hand, identified the protection of Americans from harsh Japanese treatment as the mission’s first objective. Perry cited whalers directly as the primary motivation for his voyage. As stated by Perry:

[T]he President entertains the most friendly feelings toward Japan, but has been surprised and grieved to learn that when any of the people of the United States go, of their own accord, or are thrown by the perils of the sea, within the dominions of your imperial majesty, they are treated as if they were your worst enemies.

The undersigned refers to the cases of the American ships *Morrison, Lagoda, and Lawrence*.<sup>3</sup>

With the Americans, as indeed with all Christian people, it is considered a sacred duty to receive with kindness, and to succor and protect all, of whatever nation, who may be cast upon their shores, and such has been the course of the Americans with respect to all Japanese subjects who have fallen under their protection.

The government of the United States desires to obtain from that of Japan some positive assurance that persons who may hereafter be shipwrecked on the coast of Japan, or driven by stress of weather into her ports, shall be treated with humanity.

...as the United States and Japan are becoming every day nearer and nearer to each other, the President desires to live in peace and friendship with your imperial majesty, but no friendship can long

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from the Treaty of Kanagawa, signed 31 March 1854 in Edo Bay. John Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry*, 217.

<sup>2</sup> Pineau, *Personal Journal of Commodore Perry*, 94.

<sup>3</sup> The American merchant ship *Morrison* tried to return several shipwrecked Japanese sailors and organize a goodwill mission toward the Japanese government at the same time. Organized by C.W. King, an American businessman in Canton, the *Morrison* expedition wanted to open commercial relation with Japan and, as a result, carried no guns or religious literature that would identify the mission as anything otherwise. The Japanese response to this private mission, while initially positive, soon deteriorated and turned violent as the *Morrison* departed Edo Bay.

exist, unless Japan ceases to act toward Americans as if they were her enemies.<sup>4</sup>

Perry hoped that Japan would understand the “necessity of averting unfriendly collision between two nations, by responding favorably to the propositions of amity, which are now made in all sincerity.” The specific nature of Perry’s letter is in stark contrast to Fillmore’s diplomatic overtures and was intended to indicate the seriousness of the mission’s determination to change Japan’s foreign relations. Historians are unsure if the two letters were meant to increase Japanese panic or just to complement each other. Regardless, the two different tones contained in Fillmore and Perry’s letters, whether intentional or not, thoroughly confused the Japanese government. Perry’s announcement that the Japanese Expedition would return the following spring added to the tensions that pervaded Edo when he departed on 17 July 1853.<sup>5</sup>

When Perry returned to Edo Bay in February 1854, months ahead of schedule, the Japanese were unprepared for his visit but responded cordially to his sudden arrival. Negotiations resumed, but tensions soon arose over the mistreatment of Americans by Japanese authorities. The *Lagoda* deserters were identified by the Japanese as an exception to how Japan treated foreigners shipwrecked upon its shores. As Daigaku Hayashi, Japan’s chief negotiator with Perry, explained, the *Lagoda* deserters were of poor character and “refused to obey Japanese laws, and accordingly had been forcibly detained until they could be taken to Nagasaki.”<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Perry pressed his concern over the safety of shipwrecked Americans and secured agreement from the Japanese that they would not be imprisoned or treated harshly. Afterwards, Perry changed the topic to

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<sup>4</sup> Walworth, *Black Ships Off Japan*, 252.

<sup>5</sup> Pineau, *Personal Journal of Commodore Matthew C. Perry*, 104-106.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted from John Schroeder’s account of D. Hayashi, ed. “Diary of an Official of the Bakufu,” *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 2:7 (1930): 98-119. Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry*, 226.

commerce and received a sharp Japanese response. Hayashi stated that “you have obtained your purpose. Now, commerce has to do with profits, but has it anything to do with human life?”<sup>7</sup> Perry replied that that “[y]ou are right. As you say, I came because I valued human life, and the important thing is that you will give our vessels help. Commerce brings profit to a country, but it does not concern human life. I shall not insist upon it.” This reply, according to historian John Schroeder, forced Perry to “distinguish between human life and commerce; that is, between a treaty of amity and friendship and a treaty of amity, friendship, and commerce.”<sup>8</sup>

The *Lagoda* exchange between Perry and Hayashi underscored how Japan had interpreted the Perry’s ‘letter of credence’ as opposed to Fillmore’s “Great and Good Friend” communiqué. Clearly the Japanese better understood America’s frustration over the harsh treatment of shipwrecked sailors and not the desire for commercial relations between the United States and Japan. Issues that concerned the resupply and logistics were contested by the Japanese but agreement was reached when Japan agreed to open two ports to American vessels. Other ports were to be visited only by ships in distress, and shipwrecked Americans were not to be imprisoned immediately upon capture. No details were provided on the fate of deserters, such those from the *Lagoda*.<sup>9</sup>

The Treaty of Kanagawa, signed between the United States and Japan on 31 March 1854, reflected the Japanese position on negotiations and Perry’s failure to press commercial issues. The treaty stipulated that the port city of Shimoda, located near Edo

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>8</sup> Details about this exchange were never included into the Expedition’s official account or Perry’s personal journal. No explanation has been discovered about Perry’s response to Hayashi’s characterization of the Japanese Expedition’s core objective of protecting shipwrecked Americans. Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry*, 226-227.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 232-234.



Bay, would be opened immediately to American ships with another port in northern Japan accessible in a year. No shipwrecked sailors were to be imprisoned upon capture; instead they would be taken to Shimoda or the northern port for repatriation. Permanent diplomatic relations were to be established in late 1855 with an American consul located at Shimoda. When he left Japan, Perry, after an inspection of the proposed port facilities in November 1854, concluded that the Japanese Expedition was a success and set a course for the United States.<sup>10</sup>

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On 5 May 1859, the New Bedford whaler *Florida* approached the Japanese port of Hakodadi for supplies. As the whaleship entered the harbor, the captain noted that “there were several Whale Ships and a Russian Man of War in here besides any number of Junks.”<sup>11</sup> This scene, foreign to American whalers five years earlier, was a result of Commodore Perry’s Japanese Expedition. The *Florida’s* crew, after they docked, stayed in Hakodadi for several days and witnessed a Japanese burial in addition to visiting a workshop that made candles. Throughout the time, the crew interacted freely among the people and engaged in lively discussions with the help of Japanese interpreters stationed in the city. Once all necessary supplies were obtained and entertainment curiosities satisfied, the *Florida* departed and vowed to return to the port again in the fall.<sup>12</sup>

Such experiences illustrated how Commodore Perry’s mission changed the nature of Japanese interaction with foreigners, especially with whalers. Instead of being imprisoned like the crew of the *Lagoda*, the *Florida* was received warmly. The Japanese, according to the *Florida’s* crew, seemed to embrace foreigners and the commercial

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>11</sup> Harold Williams, ed., *One Whaling Family* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964), 52.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 51-55.

interactions that took place. Perry's success, when contrasted with the fact that the *Florida's* visit occurred only five years after Japan signed the Treaty of Kanagawa and after two hundred years of self-imposed isolation, is impressive by any standard used to measure it.

Whalers were among the first to Americans to interact with the Japanese and could not have foreseen what dramatic changes awaited Japan as whaleships from the United States entered the North Pacific region during the 1830s. Perry's mission, as understood by those who saw the brilliant 9 July meteor, did revolutionize Japan and opened a feudalistic nation to the world without bloodshed. This accomplishment forever altered the course of Japanese and world history.

*One hundred and fifty years ago, in 1854, Japan signed the Japan-U.S. Treaty of Peace and Amity, which marked the first time Japan had ever exchanged official documents with a foreign government. With this Treaty, Japan established an official relationship with the United States of America and took its first step into the modern world.<sup>13</sup>*

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<sup>13</sup> Statement released by the Japanese Parliament commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Perry's arrival in Edo Bay. "Japanese Parliament Passes Japan-U.S. 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Resolution," Embassy of Japan, <<http://www.us.emb-japan.go.jp/english/html/pressreleases/2004/041206.htm>>, 3 December, 2004.

## APPENDIX I

Letter of Millard Fillmore, President of the United States of America, to His Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Japan<sup>1</sup>

*Great and good Friend:* I send you this public letter by Commodore Matthew C. Perry, an officer of the highest rank in the navy of the United States, and commander of the squadron now visiting your imperial majesty's dominions.

I have directed Commodore Perry to assure your imperial majesty that I entertain the kindest feelings toward your majesty's person and government, and that I have no other object in sending him to Japan but to propose to your imperial majesty that the United States and Japan should live in friendship and have commercial intercourse with each other.

The Constitution and laws of the United States forbid all interference with the religious or political concerns of other nations. I have particularly charged Commodore Perry to abstain from every act which could possibly disturb the tranquility of your imperial majesty's dominions.

The United States of America reach from ocean to ocean, and our Territory of Oregon and State of California lie directly opposite to the dominions of your imperial majesty. Our steamships can go from California to Japan in eighteen days.

Our great State of California produces about sixty million dollars in gold every year, besides silver, quicksilver, precious stones, and many other valuable articles. Japan is also a rich and fertile country, and produces many very valuable articles. Your imperial majesty's subjects are skilled in many of the arts. I am desirous that our two

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<sup>1</sup> Walworth, *Black Ships Off Japan*, 249-250.

countries should trade with each other, for the benefit both of Japan and the United States.

We know that the ancient laws of your imperial majesty's government do not allow of foreign trade, except with the Chinese and the Dutch; but as the state of the world changes and new governments are formed, it seems to be wise, from time to time, to make new laws. There was a time when the ancient laws of your imperial majesty's government were first made.

About the same time America, which is sometimes called the New World, was first discovered and settled by the Europeans. For a long time there were but a few people, and they were poor. They have now become quite numerous; their commerce is very extensive; and ancient laws as to allow a free trade between the two countries would be extremely beneficial to both.

If your imperial majesty is not satisfied that it would be safe altogether to abrogate the ancient laws which forbid foreign trade, they might be suspended for five or ten years so as to try the experiment. If it does not prove as beneficial as was hoped, the ancient laws can be restored. The United States often limit their treaties with foreign States to a few years, and then renew them or not, as they please.

I have directed Commodore Perry to mention another thing to your imperial majesty. Many of our ships pass every year from California to China; and great numbers of our people pursue the whale fishery near the shores of Japan. It sometimes happens, in stormy weather, that one of our ships is wrecked on your imperial majesty's shores. In all such cases we ask, and expect, that our unfortunate people should be treated with

kindness, and that their property should be protected, till we can send a vessel and bring them away. We are very much in earnest of this.

Commodore Perry is also directed by me to represent to your imperial majesty that we understand there is a great abundance of coal and provisions in the Empire of Japan. Our steamships, in crossing the great ocean, burn a great deal of coal, and it is not convenient to bring it all the way from America. We wish that our steamships and other vessels should be allowed to stop in Japan and supply themselves with coal, provisions, and water. They will pay for them in money, or anything else your imperial majesty's subjects may prefer; and we request your imperial majesty to appoint a convenient port, in the southern part of the Empire, where our vessels may stop for this purpose. We are very desirous of this.

These are the only objects for which I have sent Commodore Perry, with a powerful squadron, to pay a visit to your imperial majesty's renowned city of Yedo: friendship, commerce, a supply of coal and provisions, and protection for our shipwrecked people.

We have directed Commodore Perry to beg your imperial majesty's acceptance of a few presents. They are of no great value in themselves; but some of them may serve as specimens of the articles manufactured in the United States, and they are intended as tokens of our sincere and respectful friendship.

May the Almighty have your imperial majesty in His great and holy keeping!

In witness whereof, I have caused the great seal of the United States to be hereunto affixed, and have subscribed the same with my name, at the city of Washington,

in America, the seat of my government, on the thirteenth day of the month of November,  
in the year on thousand eight hundred and fifty-two.

[seal attached]

Your good friend,

By the President:

MILLARD FILLMORE

EDWARD EVERETT

Secretary of State

## APPENDIX II

The Treaty of Kanagawa, signed by Commodore Perry, March 31, 1854<sup>2</sup>

**Article I.** There shall be a perfect, permanent, and universal peace, and a sincere and cordial amity, between the United States of America, on the one part, and the Empire of Japan on the other, and between their people, respectively, without exception of persons or places.

**Article II.** The port of Simoda, in the principality of Idzu, and the port of Hakodadi, in the principality of Matsmai, are granted by the Japanese as ports for the reception of American ships, where they can be supplied with wood, water, provisions, and coal, and other articles their necessities may require, as far as the Japanese have them. The time for opening the first named port is immediately on signing this treaty; the last port is to be opened immediately after the same day in the ensuing Japanese year.

Note. – A tariff of prices shall be given by the Japanese officers of the things which they can furnish, payment for which shall be made in gold and silver coin.

**Article III.** Whenever ships of the United States are thrown or wrecked on the coast of Japan, the Japanese vessels will assist them, and carry their crews to Simoda or Hakodadi, and hand them over to their countrymen appointed to receive them. Whatever articles the shipwrecked men may have preserved shall likewise be restored, and the expenses incurred in the rescue and support of Americans and Japanese who may thus be thrown upon the shores of either nation are not to be refunded.

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<sup>2</sup> Walworth, *Black Ships Off Japan*, 257-258.

**Article IV.** Those shipwrecked persons and other citizens of the United States shall be free as in other countries, and not subjected to confinement, but shall be amenable to just laws.

**Article V.** Shipwrecked men, and other citizens of the United States, temporarily living at Simoda and Hakodadi, shall not be subject to such restrictions and confinement as the Dutch or Chinese are at Nagasaki; but shall be free at Simoda to go where they please within the limits of seven Japanese miles (or *ri*) from a small island in the harbor of Shimoda, marked on the accompanying chart, hereto appended; and shall in like manner be free to go where they please at Hakodadi, within limits to be defined after the visit of the United States squadron to that place.

**Article VI.** If there be any other sort of goods wanted, or any business which shall require to be arranged, there shall be careful deliberation between the parties in order to settle such matters.

**Article VII.** It is agreed that ships of the United States resorting to the ports open to them shall be permitted to exchange gold and silver coin and articles of goods for other articles of goods, under such regulations as shall be temporarily established by the Japanese government for that purpose. It is stipulated, however, that the ships of the United States shall be permitted to carry away whatever articles they are unwilling to exchange.

**Article VIII.** Wood, water, provisions, coal, and goods required, shall only be procured through the agency of Japanese officers appointed for that purpose, and in no other manner.



**Article IX.** It is agreed, that if, at any future day, the government of Japan shall grant to any other nation or nations privileges and advantages which are not herein granted to the United States and the citizens thereof, that these same privileges and advantages shall be granted likewise to the United States and to the citizens thereof without any consultation or delay.

**Article X.** Ships of the United States shall be permitted to resort to no other ports in Japan but Simoda and Hakodadi, unless in distress or forced by stress of weather.

**Article XI.** There shall be appointed by the government of the United States consuls or agents to reside in Simoda at any time after the expiration of eighteen months from the date of the signing of this treaty; provided that either of the two governments deem such arrangement necessary.

**Article XII.** The present convention, having been concluded and duly signed, shall be obligatory, and faithfully observed by the United States of America and Japan, and by the citizens and subjects of each respective power; and it is to be ratified and approved by the President of the United States, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate thereof, and by the august Sovereign of Japan, and the ratification shall be exchanged within eighteen months from the date of the signature thereof, or sooner if practicable.

*In faith whereof, we, the respective plenipotentiaries of the United States of America and the Empire of Japan, aforesaid, have signed and sealed these presents.*

*Done at Kanagawa, this thirty-first day of March, in the year of our Lord Jesus Christ one thousand eight hundred and fifty-four, and of Kayei the seventh year, third month, and third day.*

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