

Late Tokugawa reform & foreign policy, or, What to do about those barbarians?

The focus of our study this week is the variety of responses to the appearance of both internal and external threats to the social and political order that the Tokugawa bakufu had maintained with relatively few disturbances from the early 17th to the late 18th century. Internally, the spread of a monetized economy in the hands of the officially despised merchant class, new relations in the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services in a proto-mass urban market, and increasingly frequent natural catastrophes (famines caused by unseasonable weather, floods, fires, earthquakes) had all put a strain on the Tokugawa government coffers, not to mention on the finances of the struggling middle and lower ranks of the samurai class. The plight of the majority of the peasantry—particularly tenant farmers and holders of very small plots of land—goes without mentioning. In short, the Tokugawa regime was faced with an increasingly acute economic crises from the late 18th to the early 19th century. Coupled with this domestic problem was the more frequent appearance of a new wave of "barbarians" (i.e. westerners) seeking trade relations with Japan. The first of these foreigners were primarily Russian explorers, fishermen, and fur-traders who came to Japanese shores from the northern regions with greater frequency from the 1770s. Within the next half-century English and American merchant ships began showing up uninvited and were asked to leave unceremoniously. This new foreign presence, along with a general need for economic if not political reform within Japan, catalyzed an on-going debate over Japan's relationship—economic, cultural, political, intellectual, spiritual—with the rest of the world. Various schools of reformist thought, generally associated with degrees of **jōi** ("expel the barbarians") on the one hand or **kaikoku** ("open the country") on the other, emerged during this period to rethink, revise, revamp, put into question, or just plain lambaste the Tokugawa socio-political order.

In order to gain a more animated and hopefully "stickier" understanding of the issues at stake, you will divide up into groups to present to the bakufu's chief advisor Abe Masahiro (me) the views expressed by the representative thinkers and orientations listed below. Do **all** the readings, but then pay especially close attention to the readings which your group has been assigned to represent in our debate. The four groups (two associated with **jōi** and two with **kaikoku**), which often overlap as well as conflict in their views, are:

Jōi-related:

- 1) **Mito Scholars** such as **Aizawa Seishisai** and **Fujita Tōko** (Japan, 129-142; "Debate over Seclusion," 85-96)
- 2) "**Loyalists**" such as **Yoshida Shōin** and **Tokugawa Nariaki** (Japan, 140-147; "Debate over Seclusion," 109-115; letter to bakufu in ER "Coming of the American Fleet," 17-31)

Kaikoku-related:

- 3) **Rangaku** as represented by **Sakuma Shōzan** (Japan, 140-147; "Debate over Seclusion," 96-109)
- 4) **Ii Naosuke's** support of **kaikoku** in letter to bakufu (ER in "Coming of the American Fleet," 31-35)

Your assigned kumi ("groups": 1. cherry, 2. chrysanthemum, 3. plum, 4. pine), corresponding to the list of readings above, are as follows:

1. Sakura	2. Kiku	3. Ume	4. Matsu

Study your group's readings and sketch out main points of your position individually before coming to class; you will have a short time in class to coordinate your positions before we open up discussion.