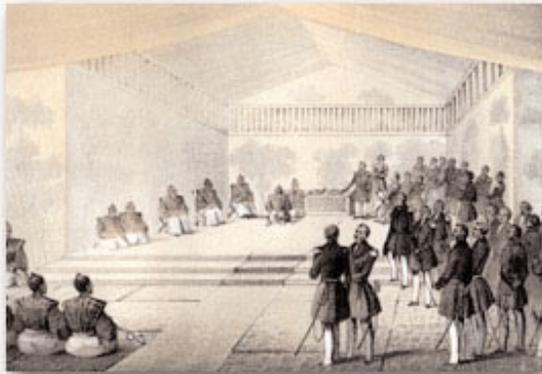


BLACK SHIPS & SAMURAI

COMMODORE PERRY AND THE OPENING OF JAPAN (1853-1854)

BY JOHN W. DOWER

CHAPTER FOUR: FACING "EAST"



"Delivery of the President's Letter"

Detail, from the official Narrative



"Perry Taking a Bow"

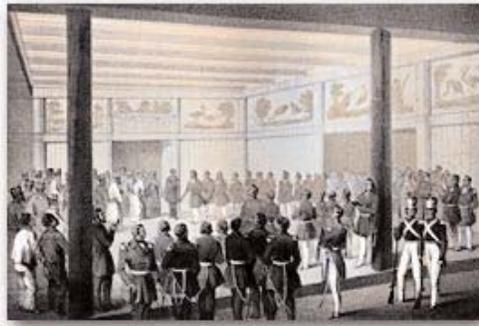
Ryosenji Treasure Museum

By far the greatest single source of American illustrations of the Perry expedition is to be found in volume one of the three-volume official Narrative published between 1856 and 1858. The most numerous and accomplished of these illustrations were done by William Heine, a German-born artist who was only 25 years old when he first accompanied Perry to Japan.

Heine, who worked primarily with sketchpad and watercolors, brought a gentle, panoramic, romantic realism to both the selection and execution of his subjects. His landscapes were invariably scenic. Where people were concerned, he preferred them in substantial numbers. He rarely lingered on the "exotic," did not dwell much (as happened later) on various social "types," did not seek out the sensational. So enraptured was Heine by the opportunity to immerse himself in new landscapes and cultures that, now and then, he even painted himself painting the scene being depicted.



Heine sketching in the Ryukyu Islands, 1853, from the official Narrative



*Shui Castle, Ryukyu Islands,
with two artists sketching the
scene, from the official Narrative
(detail below)*



*Entrance to Shinto shrine in Shimoda,
from the official Narrative (detail below)*



“Temples” attracted Heine (he, or whoever captioned the reproductions of his artwork, made no distinction between Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines), but he depicted them with the same appreciative regard that he brought to trees, mountains, skies, crowds, individuals, and other natural and human phenomena. He turned his brush (and also his drawing pencil) to a few religious statues and monuments, but again with restraint and respect—a striking contrast to the more garish renderings of imagined heathen deities that had appeared in Western publications prior to Perry’s arrival.

Since the Perry expedition never visited Edo or any other huge urban center, the illustrations in the official report conveyed the impression of a placid, rustic land of quiet villages and modest towns.

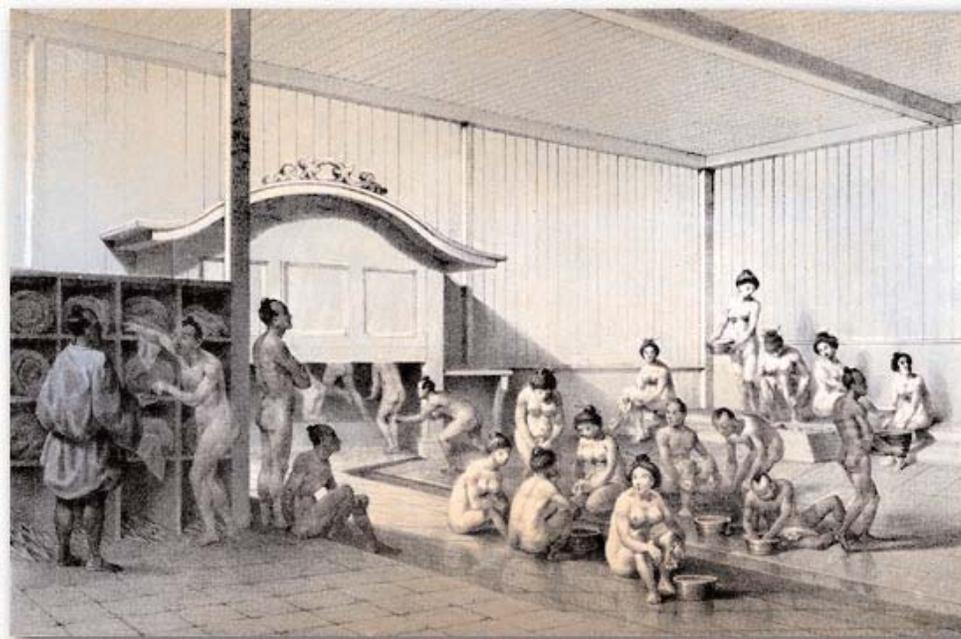
Heine and his colleagues gave only passing attention to commercial activities, and only rarely entered behind closed

doors. With but one exception, they chose not to illustrate subjects that provoked moral indignation among some members of the mission (and delighted more than a few crewmen), such as prostitution, pornography, and public baths.

The only illustration in the Narrative that subsequently provoked shock and condemnation among Americans depicted a public bathhouse in Shimoda. Men, women, and children bathed together in these establishments, and good Christians found them appalling. Dr. James Morrow, the mission's botanist, denounced the bath in Shimoda as one more example "of the licentiousness and degradation of these cultivated heathen," for example, while a ship's clerk sourly observed that "their religion might encourage cleanliness," but it did so in a "repulsive and indecent manner." The official report itself recorded that "a scene at the public baths, where the sexes mingle indiscriminately, unconscious of their nudity, was not calculated to impress the Americans with a very favorable opinion of the morals of the inhabitants."



Entrance to Shinto shrine in Shimoda, from the official Narrative (detail below)



Heine's controversial rendering of a public bath in Shimoda

Heine's illustration of the bathhouse in Shimoda was removed from later editions of the Narrative. Where intercultural relations are concerned, morality obviously was a two-way mirror in this case. For the manner in which the Americans pointed to mixed bathing as evidence of Japanese lewdness and wantonness was strikingly similar to John Manjiro's response, only a few years earlier, to the shocking spectacle of American men and women kissing in public.

The original artwork by Heine and his colleagues was seen by very few individuals. Rather, it reached the public in several different forms. Some 34,000 copies of the official three-volume Narrative were published (at the substantial cost of \$400,000), of which over half were given to high government officials, members of Congress, and the Navy Department.



*Chapter heading drawing
from the official Narrative*

The first and most pertinent volume of the set included some 165 handsome woodcuts and tipped-in lithographs depicting not only Japan but other stops on the two voyages—including China, the Bonin islands, and, of greatest interest, Okinawa in the Ryukyu (“Lew Chew”) islands.

In addition, this first volume also featured many small reproductions of pencil drawings by Heine, particularly at the beginnings and ends of chapters. Mid-century Western voyagers, artists, and scientists were intent on “mapping” literally all aspects of the little-known world, and in volume two several-score brilliantly colored plates were devoted to natural life, particularly fishes and birds. (Additional plates

depicting the plants of Japan failed to be published due to vanity and obstreperousness on the part of Dr. Morrow, who collected and drew illustrations of hundreds of specimens, but held these back in the hopes of seeing a separate publication devoted solely to his own findings. This failed to materialize, and his work has been lost.) The third volume of the Narrative, of little interest today, reproduced charts of the stars recorded over the course of the two long voyages.

The official publication was expensive, however, and the general public only encountered this handsome visual record indirectly. An affordable trade edition of volume one was published in 1856, with fewer lithographs and color throughout reduced to black and white. At the same time, a small number of illustrations (including some that did not appear in the official or commercial publications) were reproduced as large brightly colored “elephant” lithographs. One could thus encounter “Perry’s Japan” in various tones and formats.



Illustration from the 1856 commercial edition



Tinted lithograph from the official printing of 1856



Independent large-format lithograph, ca. 1855-56



It also happened that, in moving from one form of printing to another, the details of the original rendering were slightly altered—as seen, for example, in the famous depiction of Perry's landing in Yokohama that appears in the official and trade editions.



Two versions of Commodore Perry meeting officials at Yokohama

The trade edition of the Narrative (detail, above left)

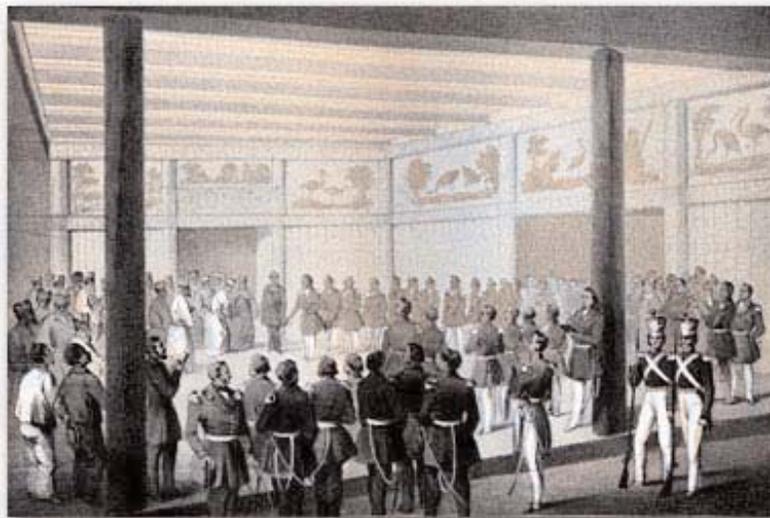
The official government edition (detail, left)

From the 1853 Expedition

The artwork in the Narrative (and independent lithographs) begins with impressions of ports of call en route to Japan (including scenes from Ceylon, Singapore, Canton, and Hong Kong), and then presents a record of major interactions between Perry and officials in “Lew Chew” and Japan.



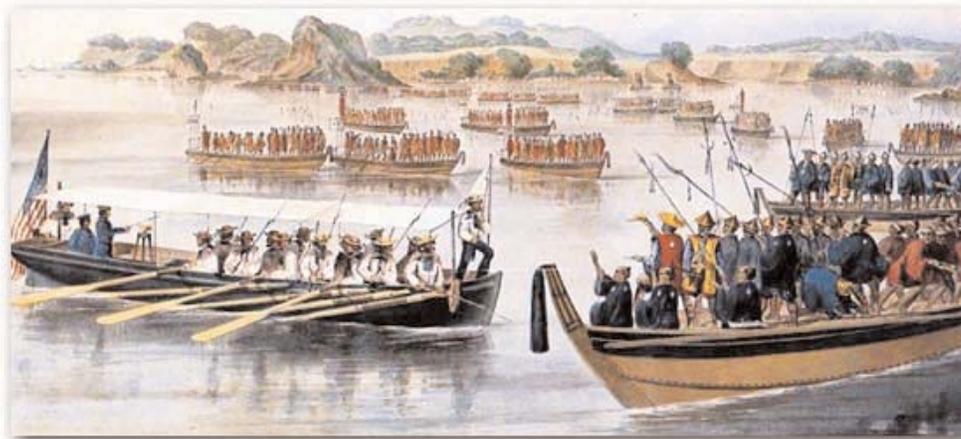
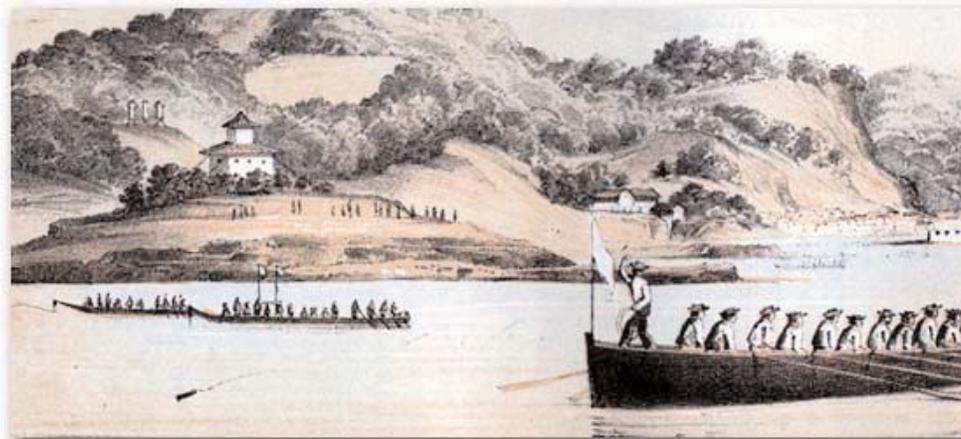
On the first visit to Okinawa, we move from the “exploring party” mingling with native peoples in bucolic settings to the castle in Naha, where Perry and his entourage paused by the imposing “Gate of Courtesy” and then attended a crowded formal reception.



*Gate of Courtesy
at the castle in Okinawa
(above, left)*

*Reception at Shui Castle,
Okinawa (left)*

Moving on to Edo Bay, the artists recorded a tense moment when the Americans began to survey the harbor and were briefly challenged by Japanese in small boats—a dramatic confrontation, referred to as “Passing the Rubicon,” that was inexplicably only made available as an independent print.

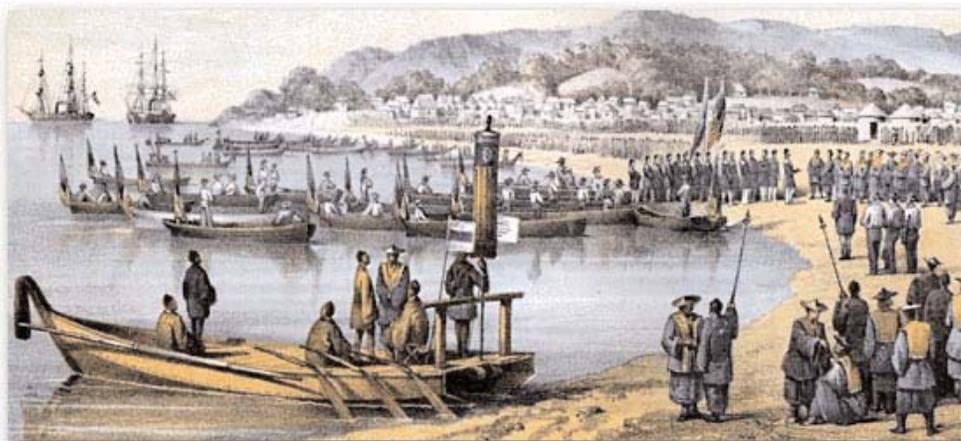


The White House Collection

The Americans sounding and surveying Edo Bay (detail, top, from the official Narrative)

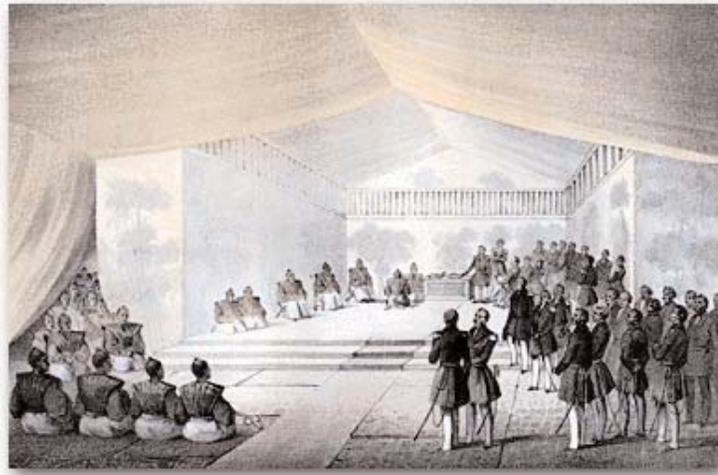
"Passing the Rubicon": Japanese officials confront the surveying party (detail, bottom)

Thereafter, all becomes decorous again. From the brief 1853 mission come iconic paintings of Perry coming ashore in Japan for the first time (on July 14, at Kurihama) and delivering President Fillmore's letter requesting the end of the policy of seclusion.



The landing at Kurihama (detail)

*Delivery of President
Fillmore's letter*



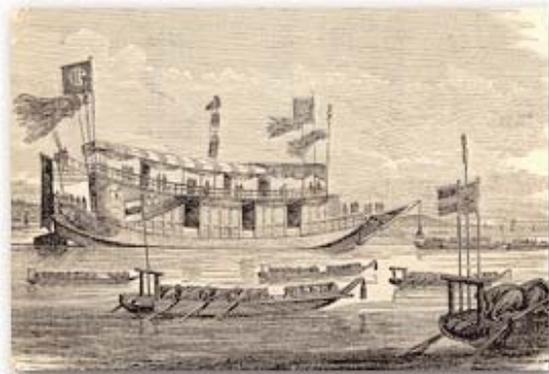
From the 1854 Expedition

The commodore's return visit in 1854, which lasted for several months and saw the opening of Shimoda and Hakodate to foreign vessels, provided the occasion for more extended artwork. Perry's landing in Yokohama on March 8 inspired a crowded scene of troops on parade before a horizon prickled with the masts of the black ships, as well as a solemn rendering of the commodore greeting the Japanese commissioners.



The landing at Yokohama (detail)

Yokohama Archives of History



"Imperial barge" at Yokohama



Japanese officials greet Perry at Yokohama



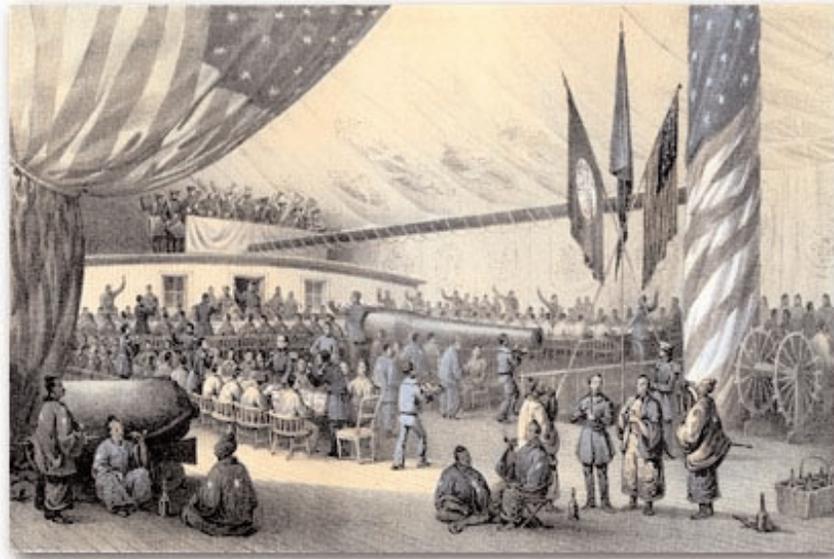
In another illustration, armed samurai were depicted clustered together, some mounted and some on foot (a rare close-up of the thousands of warriors mobilized for defense).

Samurai defense forces (detail)

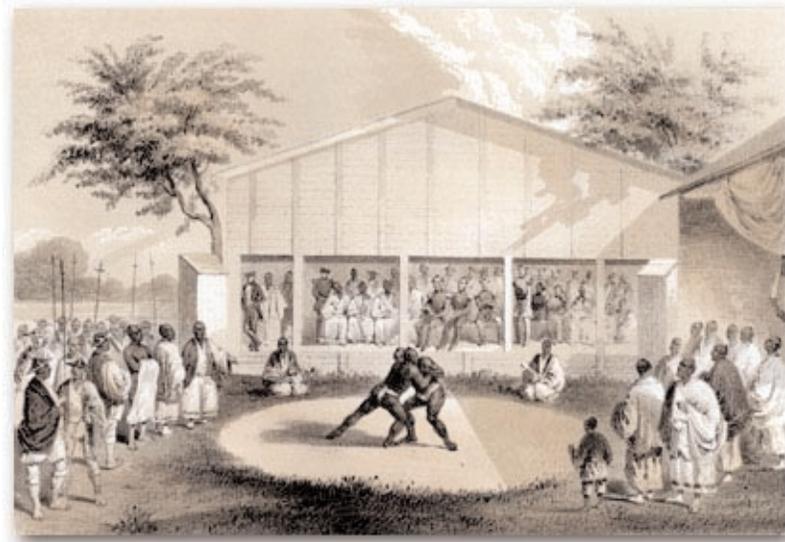
Formal occasions—the presentation of American gifts, a banquet on Perry's flagship, a performance of sumo wrestling—were duly recorded.

Delivery of the American presents at Yokohama





*Banquet on board
the Powhatan*



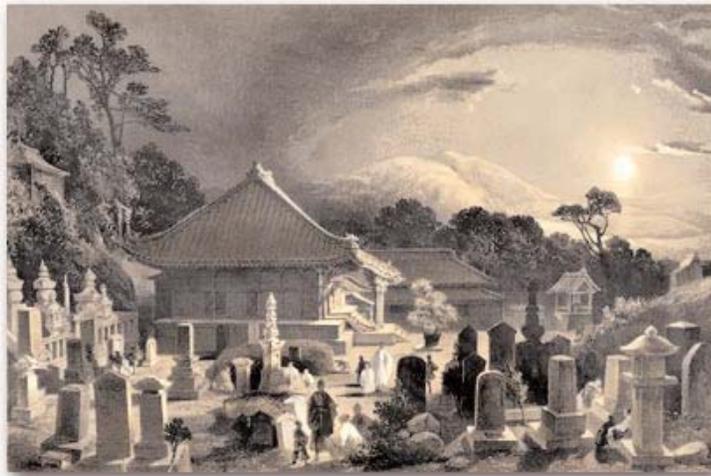
*Sumo wrestler
at Yokohama*

Yokohama, and subsequently the newly designated “treaty ports” of Shimoda and Hakodate, provided the Americans with more intimate access to the countryside and the ordinary people who lived there.

The rugged vistas in these areas inspired Heine to new heights of scenic romanticism, and he and his fellow artists also took advantage of their excursions onshore to depict the local people and their places of worship and daily activities (including the scandalous public bath in Shimoda). Although these detailed scenes are usually crowded with people, often with foreigners and natives intermingling, there is little sense of tension or strangeness. The atmosphere is serene. Everyone, native and foreigner alike, is comely. In the American record, these first encounters come across as almost dream-like.



Shimoda "from the American Grave Yard"



Moonlit graveyard at Ryosenji Temple, Shimoda

Harvard University Library

A Gallery of Images from the Expedition



Perry's troops in formation at Ryosenji Temple, Shimoda

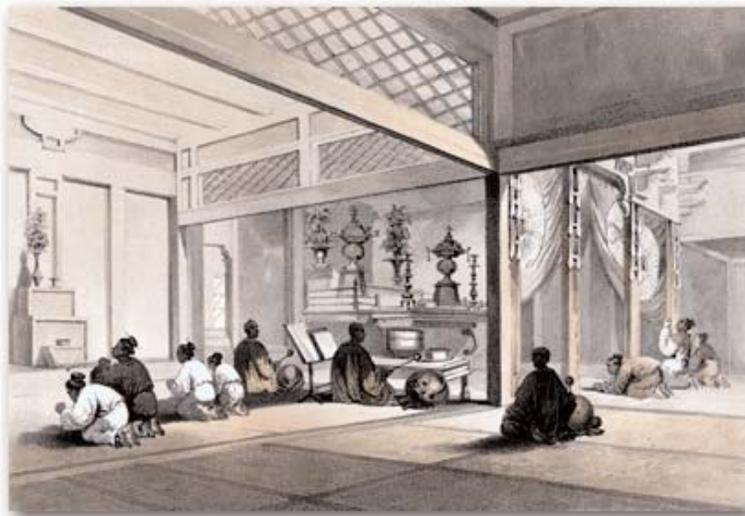
US Naval Academy Museum



Hachiman shrine, Shimoda

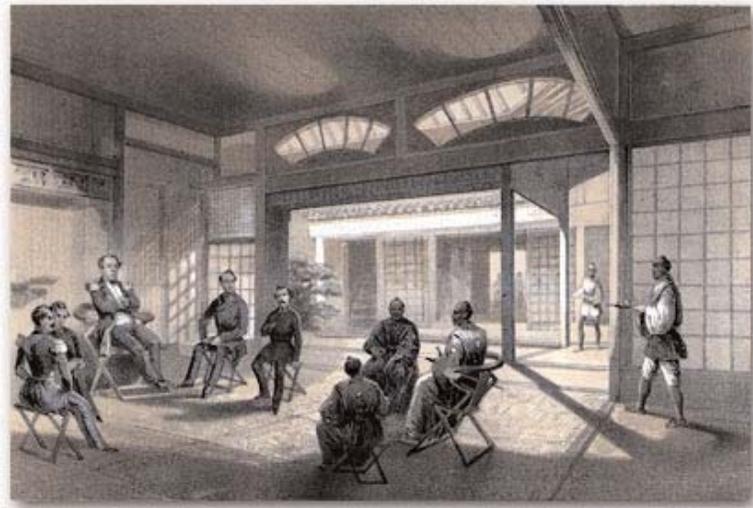


Mariner's temple, Shimoda (detail)



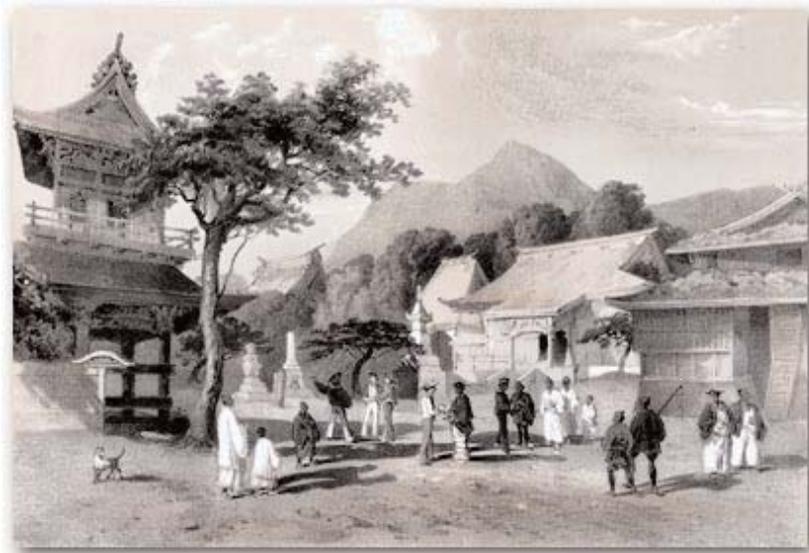
*Devotions in a
Buddhist temple,
Shimoda*

*Perry conferring
with local officials
in Hakodate*

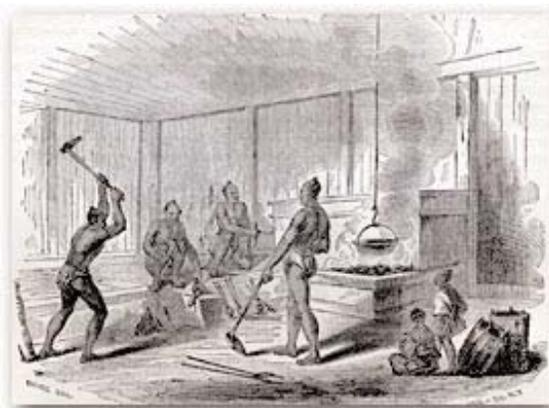




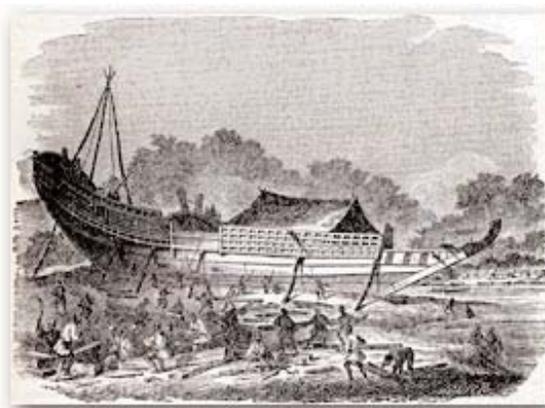
*Hakodate
“from Telegraph Hill”*



*Street by a temple in
Hakodate*



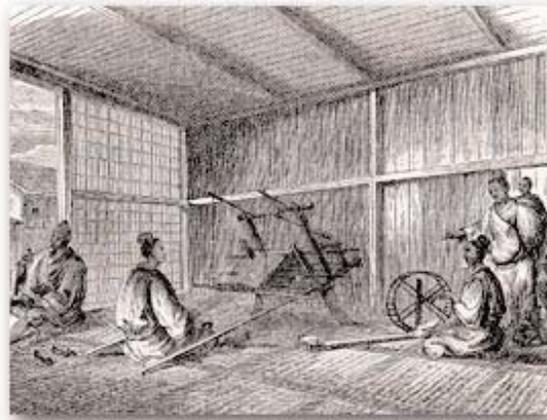
“Imperial barge” at Yokohama



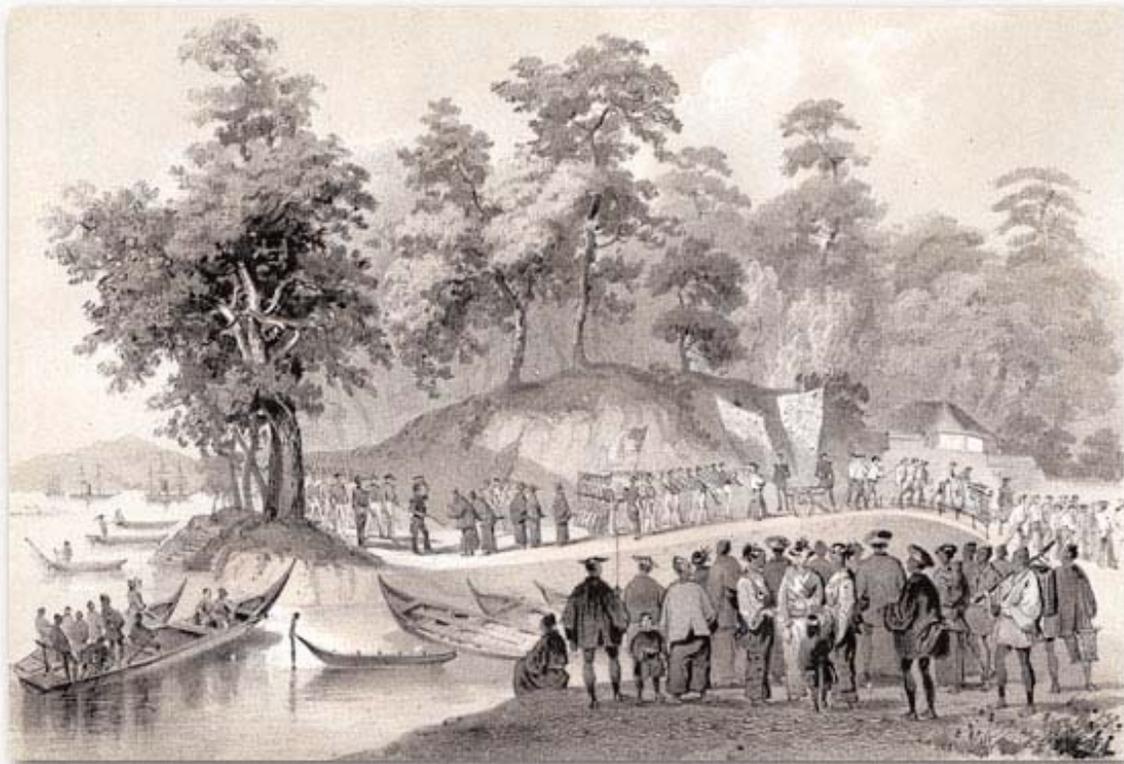
Japanese officials greet Perry at Yokohama



Japanese kago (palanquin)



Spinning and weaving



Commodore Perry bids farewell to officials in Shimoda