

# Perry's "White Flags" Revisited

( 再訪 ペリーの「白旗」 )

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## Part I

The purpose of this essay is to tell English-speaking people about what has passed in the matter of the investigation into Perry's "white flags" which, until I took it up in English in 1993, was not known in English literature, or indeed in any other language than Japanese.

So first of all, I will locate my first English presentation of 1993 in London at a function of the London School of Economics<sup>1</sup> between my first Japanese publication of the study in a professional journal of the Japan Association of International Relations in 1993,<sup>2</sup> a galley-proof of which was available well ahead of its actual publication, and my last essay in Japanese that was printed in the University of Tokyo Press's periodical *UP* in its December number of 2001.

Having done that, I will then proceed to address the controversy that was touched off, while the first treatise of 1993 was still in the form of a galley-proof, by a popular publicist, Matsumoto Kenichi, who was allowed to read it before its publication. As is the case with such an academic journal as that of the Japan Association of International Relations, the official date of publication and the actual coming out were significantly apart. The controversy was already afoot during this time lag.

So I owe it to myself to take up the task of reporting to an English-speaking audience what has happened not only since 2001, which will be satisfactory enough for Japanese readers, but from where I left off in London with my presentation of 1993, because it is obvious that this will be indispensable for a foreign readership.

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Now that I am going to engage in this task, I feel obliged to disclose the behind-the-scenes background story, which has not been told anywhere before but is very important, if fact indispensable, for the correct understanding of the nature of the controversy which was started by the publicist Matsumoto Kenichi in a most ungentle man-like manner. It was at the Kyoto home of Tsurumi Shunsuke, that Matsumoto was shown the said galley-proof of my first full-length study of Perry's "white flags." Tsurumi called me up in Tokyo asking if it was all right with me to let Matsumoto have a copy of the galley-proof. My answer was that I would be happy if he could put it to good use.

To begin with, the reason why it was in Tsurumi's hands needs a little explanation, though this could become quite involved. To give only the essentials, it was that Tsurumi, a Harvard-trained philosopher pacifist, was the son of Tsurumi Yusuke, one of the students but the closest colleague-type associate of Nitobe Inazo during his activities especially in the United States and Canada, where his chronic illness took his life while campaigning for the cause of Japanese military actions in and recognition of the puppet state in Manchuria.

Tsurumi Shunsuke, as an influential intellectual, was of opinion that Nitobe's former students who occupied powerful positions in government and politics failed to stop Japan from sliding into war with the United States in 1941. As I had a record of having done a critical study of Nitobe as part of my Ph.D. dissertation at Princeton University, Shunsuke asked me to show him any work I might do if it touched on Nitobe. He believed that if it had not been for Nitobe's admonition to his students that having weighed all the pros and cons and the decision having been taken all who had been involved in that decision making must work together to execute the decided policy, then there might have been someone among them who would have effectively opposed against the final action to go to war with the United States of America even at the risk of scarifying his own life.

My article in fact dealt with Nitobe concerning his translation of a Japanese document into English that totally misrepresented its content. The document was entitled "*Kaibo guson 10jo 5ji*" (Maritime defense in 10 articles and 5 themes), which had been composed by Tokugawa Nariaki of Mito, and presented to the Bakufu decision-makers. It was a scathing denunciation of Perry's entry into Edo Bay in blatant violation of Tokugawa

Japan's ancestral policy of seclusion and exclusion.

In spite of the all important fact that it was Perry's "white flags," the symbol of Japan's national disgrace, that was a central theme of the document, Nitobe totally erased this fact by turning the "flags" into Japanese flags advancing in foreign lands as a symbol of Japanese military conquest. This episode was treated in my London paper of 1993, too.

Now as for Matsumoto, he betrayed my friendly trust. He forged a new article of his own practically taking all the new information, excepting Nitobe's willfully falsified translation of an important archival document to hide Perry's insolence, from the final galley-proof of my first full-length academic essay and had it printed in the April 1993 issue of *Gunzo*, a popular Japanese literary monthly, which in fact got to the general readership several weeks ahead of the official publication date, that is in this case probably in the middle of March.<sup>3</sup> And this was before my article appeared at last in the journal of the Japan Association of International Relations.

This affront by Matsumoto in itself constitutes an issue grave enough to warrant being touched on legitimately in this new English essay purporting to be a "revisit." If you compare my published piece and Matsumoto's magazine article, you will be astonished how closely he repeated what I wrote for the academic journal before it reached the public in the early summer of 1993.

Now, what are the major points which must be properly taken up in this revisit as something that had been revealed since my last published work? My last essay while the controversy was raging appeared in the December 2001 issue of the University of Tokyo Press journal *UP*. After this, within a year a major study covering the controversy and each individual participant's arguments came out as a book. It was written by journalist Kishi Toshimitsu of the *Mainichi Shimbun*, one of the three major dailies of Japan, and was entitled *Peri no shiro hata* (Perry's White Flags), (Mainichi Shimbun-sha, 2002).

One odd and surprising "disclosure" was made just about the same time. Miyaji Masato, himself a former director of the Historiographical Institute, the University of Tokyo, declared that by far the most important archival material in the whole controversy, Perry's "white flags" message, which was assured of its authenticity by a special marking was in fact a false document. It was first declared in the August 2001 issue of a Japanese language monthly

of the University of Tokyo Press, the *UP* and then was followed by another full-length article in a professional journal of historiography.<sup>4</sup> What an incredible revelation? For the first time in nearly a century an authority contradicted the marking of authenticity.

In its place another document numbered 20 in the same volume of historical documents was introduced. It pointed out that the faked written message's content was instead given orally to the Bakufu official in contact with one of Perry's officers. Iwashita Tetsunori explains how this came about in his book, *Yokoku sarete ita Peri raiko to Bakumatu joho senso* (Forewarned Perry's Sailing to Japan and the Intelligence War in the Closing Years of the Bakufu) published in 2006. Before putting it down in his own book, he shared this piece of information with Kishi Toshimitsu, who included it in his aforementioned book.

That is what happened, and since then I had been quite agitated that the time had come to write a new English essay to keep foreign readers up to date about the matter. It has taken me a long time to get around to doing it, but at long last here it is.

So I could in effect conclude this new essay here and now. But I hesitate to do so, as somehow I suspect it will be of some benefit for English readers to be given an opportunity to see what Perry's "white flags" controversy had amounted to, as revealed in my works made available to the public up to and including 2001. So I will try to summarize the essentials in the following.

## Part II

My investigation into Perry's "white flags" was prompted by Matsumoto's essay that appeared in the November 1991 issue of one of Japan's leading opinion journals, *Chyuo koron*, that marked the 50th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack of 1941. Matsumoto wrote that Perry had given a couple of "white flags" to the Tokugawa Bakufu with a short explanatory note about when and how to use them. "Just hoist these flags," it stated, "when you want to recede from open hostilities with us. Then we would immediately stop firing and set an arrangement for peace." It shook me from the bottom of my academic consciousness because I had never read in English materials anything even just to suggest suspicions about Perry's

behavior since my student days at Georgetown University in 1952-1956 and Princeton University in 1964-67.

My immediate response to this provocation became the article in Japanese published in 1993 in the journal of the Japan Association of International Relations. And my first presentation in English took place at a function of the London School of Economics in the same year, first orally and then published in one of its publications, as I mentioned at the outset.

Since then requests for further clarification from me about the matter arose in English speaking countries, but mostly in the United States. Meanwhile, within Japan some serious attention began to be given to this matter, for Matsumoto had started a controversy with me in a very ungentlemanly manner, to say the least, by using my essay meant for the aforementioned academic journal while it was still in the stage of a galley-proof. It was in the hands of Tsurumi, who had said to me that whatever I write about Nitobe he would appreciate reading, because he said Nitobe's students were significantly responsible for not having stopped Japan's sliding into the Pacific War in 1941.

It so happened that Matsumoto was visiting with Tsurumi, and Tsurumi asked me on the phone if it was all right with me to let Matsumoto read the galley. My answer was that I would be happy for Matsumoto to use it for our common good. But what he did was just the opposite. He used the substantial new materials I had found and worked into my article to write his own new essay and had it printed in another popular monthly magazine. It was already a serious breach of faith, but his offense did not stop there: he denounced my article, assuming it had already been published, as an example of how silly academism was and such like. All this using my own galley-proof, before my article as published had ever been read by anybody yet!

Much later on, when Matsumoto covertly apologized for this act in a book review journal, Tsurumi wrote to me: "You two would do greater good if you worked together amicably." This is the background of the controversy which drew major attention in the field of Japanese journalism, leading to a good investigation into the matter by a professional journalist, as well as a well-positioned scholar and even publicists involved in the contents of school textbooks over which the Ministry of Education exerts authority.

The English materials I had read up to then, if anything, only glorified what Perry had accomplished: the opening of Japan. Now that a grave

question about the dawn of modern Japan had arisen, I had to delve into Japanese materials, both primary and secondary. Soon I got to a document in a volume of *The Archival Documents of Japan* published in 1910 by the Historiographical Institute, the University of Tokyo.<sup>5</sup>

The message that allegedly accompanied the said "white flags" was printed in full in Japanese translation, with its authenticity assured by a special editorial mark attached to the upper margin of the page. You have to believe it. How could it be otherwise, with the mark and the authority of the publisher?

Nevertheless, something kept me from accepting the document as dependable. There were several reasons. First of all, it is said that the original message had been lost in a fire. Secondly, a copy of the original was made by the officer on his way to properly store the original in the archives. As the message had been shown to a select few besides the top decision-makers of the Bakufu, no matter how few they might have been, there must have remained some copies somewhere and/or in somebody's hands. But there is no indication of this sort in that documentary volume.

Fortunately Professor Kanai Madoka, a friend of mine with whom I had always kept in close contact on academic matters, had been on the staff of this very Historiographical Institute. He responded to my telephone inquiry about the document, saying "it is dependable." He continued by remarking that in fact he had been tested to read that document when he applied for a position at the Institute. The officer who copied the document was Korari Tamaki, and such recording as he did was not an uncommon practice in those days. He did so from a diary of an official who worked as a messenger between top decision makers of the Bakufu.

So I went on in my study of Perry's "white flags" to produce several essays over the next few years. One of the major questions I had to address was, of course, why there was no mention of this affair in Perry's published official report about his mission to Japan for which the U.S. Congress appropriated a handsome amount of \$40,000 for the publication of three thick and heavy volumes.<sup>6</sup> Many copies of these were distributed among influential international personages throughout the world. But the essential fact of the matter was that the volumes made no mention of this particular episode. My essay, then, was to discover and narrate how this had happened by studying Perry's editorial involvement in the published reports.<sup>7</sup>

My first major study, written sometime in 1992, was entitled “Perry’s Fourth Letter” and was published in the journal of the Japan Association of International Relations, as already mentioned, in February 1993. Perry was under the specific instructions of President Millard Fillmore that his was a peaceful mission and he was never to use threatening means to accomplish his objective of opening Japan to international intercourse. It was clearly anticipated that the Japanese government of the Tokugawa Bakufu would have to undergo the hard task of surmounting opposition to discarding the ancestral policy of international seclusion and exclusion in order to comply with Perry’s objective.

For his part, Perry was ready to employ a forceful manner in spite of the President’s command, but at the same time he was honestly concerned with maintaining the honor of his extended naval family’s name. My analysis of his editorial involvement demonstrated that he took special care to strictly shun any untoward information, such as his threatening actions and attitude, from slipping into the narrative of his official report.

It turned out that the first occasion for presenting my study in English took place at the London School of Economics at a meeting presided over by Professor Ian Nish, and it was soon published in one of its periodical reports. It drew some attention from scholars across the Pacific, primarily because they had not heard of the “white flags” and the accompanying threatening note of instruction. And they wanted to learn more about the event. So I went on to carry out other topical investigations.

One of them was concerned with how and when the Perry episode had been used by Japanese publications because by then it had become clear enough that it had surfaced for the reading public to consume at hard times in the history in U.S.-Japanese relations. One of the most pronounced cases in point was over the passing and the going into effect of the Johnson Act of 1924, which was identified by the Japanese as an anti-Japanese immigration law. Soon one striking characteristic that emerged was that the document was almost exclusively cited to denounce American racism by specialists in international law, contrasted with the essential absence of its use by historians. Another fact that is more surprising was that even at the height of hate propaganda during World War II nothing was made of the outrageous instruction of what I called “Perry’s Fourth Letter” of 1853.

I have noted that the “Perry’s white flags” message was used only by in-

ternational legal specialists, and practically not at all by historians, but I have to qualify my assertion by bringing in an extraordinary exception. It is a case of false representation of a historical document. The case in point is Nitobe's very first book in any language. It was an English book published in 1889 by the Johns Hopkins University Press. His motivation for writing the book at all was stated clearly in its foreword: he wanted to express his thanks to the United States of America and its people.

It was a sincere gesture of expressing the deep sense of gratitude of Japan as a nation and of himself as a representative citizen of the country which he believed was completely indebted to the United States for its successful transformation from a feudal state to a thriving modern nation state. So much so, that he consciously falsified an important document when he quoted it in his English translation. Nitobe purposefully misrepresented a reference to the Perry note.<sup>8</sup>

This was one of the main thrusts in my investigation. The document in question was authored by Tokugawa Nariaki. It was a lengthy and serious piece of advice to the Bakufu decision-makers as to what to do regarding Perry's insolent actions. Nariaki's was a decisively militant response to Perry's squadron forcefully entering Edo Bay (today's Tokyo Bay) in clear violation of Tokugawa Japan's long-standing policy of seclusion and exclusion. Nariaki denounced Perry's intimidating action of presenting the Shogun with "white flags" and advising him to use them when he found his open hostility towards Perry was futile and had to sue for peace.

That was clearly stated in the document. But Nitobe's English version was a falsification. Instead of mentioning Perry's presentation of the "white flags," Nitobe referred instead to the Japanese flags hoisted where Japanese military forces had victoriously made advances into foreign lands. What a glaring distortion of historical fact! Flags of victory in place of defeat! This Nitobe did out of a sense of indebtedness to the Americans and the American state for Japan's growth as a modern nation, as well as for his personal education that made him what he was, including his joining the Society of Friends in faith.

In terms of source materials made public, the busiest year was 1910. For example, in addition to the official documents series put out by the Historiographical Institute, the University of Tokyo, the diary which was kept by Samuel Wells Williams, the first interpreter of Perry, but had not been



submitted to Perry despite his insistence that he had to have it to compile his official report because Williams suspected Perry's duplicity, was made available in Tokyo that same year by his son, Professor F. W. Williams of Yale University.<sup>9</sup> This diary contradicts Perry's published volumes proving that Perry was not telling the whole truth.

Further, the secrecy of Perry's manipulation was revealed when his own minute day-to-day recordings were published with his editorial instructions in marginalia as *The Japan Expedition, 1852-1854: The Personal Journal of Commodore Matthew C. Perry*, edited by Roger Pineau (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1968). In spite of these fundamental materials already made accessible, as far as my memory goes, it was only in 1979 or so that American publications for the first time referred to the Japanese primary source.

Who and when and how was Perry's note of instruction referred to? Occasions arose from U.S.-Japanese crises like the San Francisco School Board's exclusion of Japanese immigrants from its schools; the State of California legislation prohibiting Japanese ownership of land; the Johnson Act which did not allow Japanese to enter the country as immigrants; the Washington naval disarmament treaty that set the ratio of capital warships for Great Britain, the United States, Japan, France and Italy at 5: 5: 3: 1.75: 1.75; and the Japanese conquest of the Chinese territory of Manchuria in violation of the open door policy of the United States for China as well as the Kellogg-Briand Pact signed in Paris in 1928.

The Japanese navy's accusers of Perry over his affront included Admiral Sato Tetsutaro, who admired and translated Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan's monumental book *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1897), and Yamamoto Isoroku, who was from a top-notch samurai family whose fortunes were destroyed in the civil war that brought about the Meiji Restoration in the wake of the fall of the Tokugawa regime that had been touched off by the conclusion of the Treaty of Kanagawa with Perry.

American journalist Willard Price wrote an article immediately after the Pearl Harbor attack based on an earlier interview done with Yamamoto as a young officer, in which he disclosed that his reason for entering Japan's naval academy was because he wanted someday to return a visit to counter Perry's insolent entry into Edo Bay.<sup>10</sup>

Takahashi Sakue was perhaps the very first who made use of the document on Perry's message published in 1910 by the Historiographical Institute, the University of Tokyo. He had served on board a warship at the start of the 1st Sino-Japanese War in 1894 as an expert on international law in war. He had been sent to earthquake-shaken San Francisco by the Japanese government. In his essay which quoted Perry's threatening advice, he offered a theory that since Perry's opening of Japan the country's relationship with the United States had been that of an uncle and niece, but since Japan's winning of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 it had become one of equality.

Tokutomi Soho was an outstanding publicist, and as such deserves the credit for editing 100 volumes of the pre-modern and modern history of Japan. In one of the volumes published in 1929 that note on Perry's instruction about the "white flags" is included. But the popular opinion-leader did not write anything flagrant against the Americans. Instead, he was amicable as crises mounted. He was similar to Nitobe. It was likely that his Christianity was the reason, as he was a member of the so-called Kumamoto Band of Christians. They were baptized by the ex-Confederate Army Officer Captain Jains when they were young boys. Here was another man acting like Nitobe as a mediator.

Asakawa Kanichi was yet another. Yale-trained Asakawa as a Yale University professor wrote to its President a few days after Japan's surrender in 1945 to the Allied Powers that he prayed the American occupation in Japan would not become as severe as Perry's behavior.

And there is someone special we cannot afford to pass over: Irokawa Minaka. He was a successful merchant and an accomplished scholar at the same time in today's Tsuchiura City, Ibaraki Prefecture. He manufactured soy sauce as the major commodity of his business and also dealt with herbal medicines. His daily activities included collecting whatever information he could about the goings-on since Perry's arrival in Japanese waters from passers-by in the busy highway route to and from Edo, where his house for business was situated.

One such passer-by was a man transporting big tree trunks. He explained to Irokawa that they were to be set up as dummy cannons on the bases hurriedly constructed in the waterfront of Edo Bay during the interval of Perry's two visits in 1853 and 1854. Irokawa had earlier heard about Perry's "white flags." But after all it was hearsay, and since then he had

been weighing its credibility. On the day he learned of the dummy cannons he recorded it in his diary, but he also added a comment that rumors remain rumors, whatever they may say about Perry's message, until reliable news comes from proper samurai authorities.<sup>11</sup>

So there we are. These are the major points in what I have published up to and including 2001.

### A listing of my essays on and about Perry's "white flags"

- 「ペリー『第四の書簡』(Perry's Fourth Letter)」日本国際政治学会編 『国際政治』第102号(1993年2月)、37、43頁。
- 「山本五十六はペリーに復讐した (Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto retaliated against the United States of America)」上智大学アメリカカナダ研究所編『アメリカと日本』(彩流社、1993年)。
- “Perry's Fourth Letter and Nitobe Inazo,” *Discussion Paper No. IS/93/269* (September 1993), Suntory-Toyota International Centre for Economics and Related Disciplines, London School of Economics.
- 『人道主義』の名において反発した日本：新渡戸稲造を中心として (Japan reacted in the name of humanitarianism: with Nitobe Inazo in the center)」三輪公忠編著『日米危機の起源と排日移民法』(論争社、1997年)。
- 『隠されたペリーの「白旗」——日米関係のイメージ論的・精神史的研究 (The hidden “white flags” of Perry: a study of U.S.-Japanese relations from the standpoint of mutual images and in the perspective of intellectual history』(Sophia University Press、1999年)。
- 「ペリーの『白旗』——アメリカ側に記録が無いわけ (The reason why no record of Perry's “white flags” is found in American documents)」、東京大学出版会『UP』350号(2001年12月号)。

### notes

- 1 Kimitada Miwa, “Perry's Fourth Letter and Nitobe Inazo,” *Discussion Paper No. IS/93/269* (September 1993), Suntory-Toyota International Centre for Economics and Related Disciplines, London School of Economics.
- 2 三輪公忠「ペリー『第四の書簡 (Perry's Fourth Letter)』」日本国際政治学会編『国際政治』第102号(1993年2月)。
- 3 This magazine article was included in Matsumoto's book of 1995, 松本健一『白旗伝説』(新潮社、1995年)。
- 4 宮地正人「ペリーの白旗書簡は明白な偽文書である」『歴史評論』2001年11月号。
- 5 東京帝国大学編纂『大日本古文書・幕末外国関係文書之一』東京帝国大学文科大学史料編纂掛、(1910年)、269-70頁。
- 6 Matthew Calbraith Perry, *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan, Performed in the Years, 1852, 1853, and 1854, under the Command of Commodore M.C. Perry*,

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*United States Navy, by the Order of the Government of the United States*, vol. I (Washington, D.C.: Beverly Tucker, Senate Printer, 1856). Vols. II and III were published in 1857.

- 7 三輪公忠「ペリーの『白旗』——アメリカ側に記録が無いわけ (The reason why no record of Perry's "white flags" is found in American documents)」東京大学出版会『UP』350号(2001年12月号)、19-24頁。
- 8 三輪公忠『人道主義』の名において反発した日本：新渡戸稲造を中心として (Japan reacted in the name of humanitarianism: with Nitobe Inazo in the center)」三輪公忠編著『日米危機の起源と排日移民法』(論争社、1997年)。
- 9 S. Wells Williams, First Interpreter of the Expedition, ed. by his son F. W. Williams, *A Journal of the Perry Expedition to Japan, 1853-1854* (Transactions of Asiatic Society of Japan, XXXVII, part II, 1910).
- 10 Willard Price, "American Enemy No. 2: Yamamoto," *Harpers Magazine*, April 1942, 449-58.
- 11 中井信彦校注『片葉雑記 色川三中黒船風聞日記』(慶友社、1986年)、11、30、37、43頁。