



THE FALL OF THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE: INTERNAL WEAKNESSES
AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES IN THE BAKUMATSU PERIOD

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Annotatsiya. *The Bakumatsu period (1853–1868) represents a pivotal turning point in Japanese history, marking the end of over two centuries of Tokugawa rule and the beginning of modern Japan. Triggered by Commodore Matthew Perry's arrival and the forced opening of the country to the West, this era was characterized by immense political, social, and economic turmoil. This paper investigates the multifaceted causes behind the collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate, examining both external pressures—such as Western imperialism and economic disruption— and internal weaknesses, including political corruption, social dissatisfaction, and delayed reforms. Drawing from primary texts and scholarly interpretations, this study aims to reveal how these factors collectively undermined the shogunate's authority and set the stage for the Meiji*

Restoration.

Keywords: *Bakumatsu, Tokugawa Shogunate, Meiji Restoration, Perry Expedition, Japanese modernization, internal decay, foreign pressure, political transformation*

1.1 Background

The Bakumatsu period marks one of the most critical transitions in Japanese history, encompassing the final years of the Tokugawa Shogunate. This period began in 1853 with the arrival of U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry and ended with the Meiji Restoration in 1868. The long-standing isolationist policy (*sakoku*) was forcefully terminated due to pressure from Western nations, resulting in Japan's reluctant opening to the outside world. This transition induced political and social instability throughout the country. The Tokugawa regime gradually lost its grip on power due to a combination of external threats, economic crisis, internal dissatisfaction, and lack of effective reform. The growing demand for the return of imperial rule and anti-shogunate movements intensified, ultimately dismantling the feudal *han* system and initiating Japan's modernization. This study explores the defining features of the Bakumatsu period and the principal causes behind the Tokugawa Shogunate's collapse. Works by authors such as Kazuo Yamaguchi, Ryotaro Shiba, Yoshihiko Amino, Shōnan Yokoi, Kume Kunitake, Eijiro Honjo, and Katsumi Ogura offer detailed insights into this turbulent era.

1.2 Research Objective

The aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the Bakumatsu era and the reasons behind the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate. This period bridges the final phase of Tokugawa rule and the dawn of the Meiji era. Through an in-depth examination of the political, social, economic, and international forces at play, the study seeks to uncover how





these pressures contributed to the regime's collapse. The focus also includes societal transformation, the restructuring of the samurai class, new ideological movements, foreign diplomacy, and Japan's efforts toward modernization. Ultimately, this research not only enhances comprehension of a crucial historical process but also highlights the role of revolutionary changes that shaped modern Japan.

1.3 Analytical Direction

The Bakumatsu period is when Japan's traditional political order was fundamentally destabilized. Why, then, did a regime that had governed for over 250 years fall so rapidly? To answer this question, both external and internal factors must be considered. Western pressures, exemplified by Perry's arrival, forced Japan to open its borders, leading to the collapse of the isolationist policy. This triggered economic disruption and social unrest, undermining the shogunate's control. Internally, the Tokugawa government suffered from political corruption, a failure to enact timely reforms, the rise of powerful regional domains, and the intensification of the sonnō jōi ("Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians") movement. These interwoven factors culminated in the return of political authority to the emperor and the emergence of the Meiji government. Thus, the instability of the Bakumatsu period stemmed not only from foreign intervention but also from the structural limitations of the Tokugawa regime itself.

1.4 Overview of the Study

The Bakumatsu era marks the end of Japan's feudal system and the downfall of the Tokugawa Shogunate. The political, economic, and social instability of the time, compounded by foreign pressure and delayed internal reforms, exposed the vulnerabilities of the Tokugawa order. Contact with Western nations and internal dissatisfaction fueled a deepening crisis. The collapse of the shogunate was not solely the result of external pressures, but also of structural flaws within the regime and its inability to adapt to the demands of a rapidly changing world.

These factors generated the necessity for political reform, ultimately culminating in the Meiji

Restoration—one of the most significant transformations in Japanese history.

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