

## Kaiyomaru (開陽丸)—Bakufu's battleship constructed in the Netherlands

To protect Japan and deter Western powers, the bakufu planned to establish a modern navy with powerful battleships. In 1855, the bakufu started to buy second-hand foreign ships, and requested the Netherlands to assist naval training. The Dutch agreed, and created a naval academy in Nagasaki, offered one ship for training and dispatched naval trainers from the Netherlands. 150 Japanese students entered the academy as the first class in 1855. By 1862, the bakufu's navy had several old battleships purchased from abroad, but it needed a latest capital ship to compete with modern foreign fleets.

In 1862, the bakufu approached US Consul General Townsend Harris for the possibility of building a new battleship, but Harris declined as the US was in the midst of Civil War. The bakufu turned to the Netherlands again, which accepted the order and also agreed to train 15 Japanese students to operate the ship. The bakufu's order was to "build one battleship under 3,000 tons with latest design and technology of the Dutch Navy driven by steam engine and equipped with 20 or more cannons." A Rotterdam firm designed the ship in 1863 and Cornelis Gips & Zonen in Dordrecht undertook construction. Japanese students arrived in the Netherlands also in 1863. Dutch officers who had taught in Nagasaki took care of them. The battleship was to become the largest and most powerful one built by the Dutch Navy, and Dutch people and media were greatly interested in its construction. The ship was named, launched, rigged, mounted with cannons and guns, test-operated, and handed over to Japan in October 1866.



Kaiyomaru made its way to Japan guided by a Dutch officer and navigated by nine Japanese naval students through the Atlantic and Indian Ocean, and reached Yokohama in March 1867. The maiden voyage took five months. In Japan, payment was made, Enomoto Takeaki, one of the naval students who studied in the Netherlands, was appointed as the captain, and new crew were selected and trained.

But the arrival of Kaiyomaru was too late to improve the bakufu's position. The ship was originally built to deter foreign powers, but it was actually used to fight domestic enemies and only for a short time. By the time the ship was deployed, in 1867, the last Tokugawa shogun (Yoshinobu) already decided to return power to the emperor, and final battles between the bakufu and the anti-bakufu forces began. Kaiyomaru, along with other bakufu ships, were moved to Osaka Bay to increase the bargaining power of Yoshinobu and exert pressure on his enemies gathered around Kyoto, and also engaged in small sea battles. But the bakufu's joint army lost the crucial land battle at Toba & Fushimi (near Kyoto), and Yoshinobu ordered Kaiyomaru to carry him back to Edo, leaving Captain Enomoto stranded in Osaka.



Enomoto Takeaki  
(1836-1908)



Tokugawa Yoshinobu  
(1837-1913)

Tokugawa Yoshinobu submitted to the new Meiji government, but the remaining bakufu forces led by Enomoto retreated to Northern Japan, continued fighting and occupied the southern tip of Hokkaido. But Kaiyomaru was stranded and sunk in a storm and could not participate in the Battle of Hakodate, the last battle between the bakufu and the new government, which completely ended the rule of the Tokugawa family.