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**FROM CONFRONTATION TO CIVIL WAR**

**CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE  
SATSUMA REBELLION, 1877**

**A Thesis presented in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

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# ABSTRACT

The orthodox view of the outbreak of the 1877 Satsuma Rebellion characterises those actions of Japan's central government which provoked the insurrection as mistakes made in an effort to defuse the confrontational relationship that had developed between the government and Kagoshima prefecture. This thesis offers a critical reappraisal of this view, and examines the hypothesis—suggested by the Japanese historians Inoue Kiyoshi and Mōri Toshihiko, as well as by the historical novelist Shiba Ryōtarō—that those actions were intentionally provocative, with the aim of promoting a military resolution of the confrontation. Rather than an accidental outbreak of violence, the Rebellion and the ensuing civil war are considered, in Clausewitzian terms, as “a continuation of (domestic) politics, with the addition of other means”, in which the transition from non-violent to military confrontation was, arguably, engineered by the government leadership (in particular by the de-facto leader of the Meiji oligarchy, Ōkubo Toshimichi), just as Bismarck engineered the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War by means of the Ems Telegram, in order to bring about armed conflict without taking the role of aggressor.

The thesis also examines the influence of unforced strategic error on the course of the civil war in its early stages. This leads to a reappraisal of the orthodox view that the imperial forces were never in danger of defeat, and to the conclusion that the Rebellion could well have succeeded but for major strategic error on the part of the rebel leaders.

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In apologising to anyone whose name I may have inadvertently neglected to mention, I would add, of course, that any errors in the resulting text are my own.

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*Peter Tuffley*  
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## A Note on Pronunciation and on Japanese Names

There are various approaches to the transliteration of Japanese into the Roman alphabet (a process often rather awkwardly referred to as “romanization”).

The method employed in this thesis (except in quotations from authors taking an alternative approach) is based upon the so-called Hepburn System, with the difference that long *o* and *u* are represented by the addition of a circumflex—as, for example, in the names Saigô and Kyûshû, not to mention Tôkyô.

Generally speaking, the vowels in the Japanese words and names that appear in the text may be pronounced more or less as in Italian or New Zealand Maori (preferably without the stress-accent that is a natural feature of English); and the syllable represented in the Hepburn System as *fu* should ideally be sounded like *hu* (a shortened version of *who*), with an initial expulsion of breath between relaxed and slightly parted lips. The vowels *i* and *u* usually become devoiced when they occur between voiceless consonants.

Japanese personal names that appear in the text are given following the Japanese convention whereby the family name precedes the given name.