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The Life of Yamanouchi Yôdô and his Role in
the Overthrow of the Tokugawa Bakufu

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ABSTRACT

During the last years of the Bakufu, under the leadership of daimyô Yamanouchi Yôdô, the domain of Tosa played an important role in the events that culminated in the fall of the Shôgun. Tosa policy over this period reflected Yamanouchi commitment to the Tokugawa, and to their policy of *sakoku* (national isolation). Yôdô, however, was also aware of Japan's vulnerability to colonization in the face of western military superiority. His political vision was founded on limiting foreign influence within Japan, while simultaneously building up military and economic potential. This strength would enable Japan to repudiate the humiliating treaties signed in 1858, and redefine herself as a strong, sovereign nation.

Yôdô worked to stabilise Japanese government by uniting Court and daimyô under the Bakufu's aegis, but by mid 1867 it was clear that this process was failing and that civil war was imminent. Fearing the consequences of domestic disintegration and hoping to revive the Yamanouchi position as well as that of his Tokugawa overlords, in September of 1867 Yôdô and his advisors presented Shôgun Tokugawa Yoshinobu with a proposal for *taisei-hôkan* (a return of authority to the throne). This urged a superficial abdication on the Shôgun which would serve to mollify extremists, while maintaining the essence of his position and preserving intact the Tokugawa's traditional prerequisites.

Despite representing a widely acceptable compromise solution, the concept of rule by consensus which constituted *taisei-hôkan* was too ambitious to be successfully applied to a Japan still steeped in feudalism. Moreover, the absence of specific clauses regarding the post-abdication status of the Shôgun and the Tokugawa clan, allowed for a fatally broad interpretation. Thus, rather than lay the foundations for a Tokugawa revival, the abdication actually allowed the anti-Bakufu party to manoeuvre Yoshinobu into a position of extreme disadvantage. In this sense Yôdô and Tosa inadvertently provided anti-Bakufu interests with the legitimate grounds to overthrow the Tokugawa hegemony by force.

Chapters 1 and 2 examine Yôdô's early rise to national prominence, concentrating on his activities within Tosa, and on his association with the *kôbu-gattai* movement. Chapter 3 is concerned primarily with the creation of the *taisei-hôkan* proposal and Yôdô's role in this process. Chapter 4 considers the personal and political implications of Yôdô's failure to prevent the fall of the Shôgun. The thesis then concludes with a summary of the main points, considering the political and ideological obstacles that Yôdô faced, and evaluating the overall significance of his contribution to Japanese history.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to my supervisor Dr. Fumio Kakubayashi who was initially kind enough to accept my topic for candidature, and who subsequently has guided me through the mass of related resources and literature, to a stage where I am now able to present the thesis for examination.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	II
Preface & Acknowledgments	III
Names, Datings and Principles of Translation	V
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. Background	3
Chapter 2. <i>Kôbu-gattai</i> and Loyalists	26
Chapter 3. The Creation of the Tosa Proposal	55
Chapter 4. Abolition of the Domains and the Last Years	79
Conclusions	98
Glossary	103
Bibliography	105

NOTES ON DATINGS, NAMES AND PRINCIPLES OF TRANSLATION

1. Dating

In searching the literature in Japanese and English I have become aware of intercalary differences between writers who use the Gregorian calendar, and writers who report events in the pre-Meiji dating system. In this thesis, for ease of reading, dates follow the latter system but are expressed in western calendar terms. Thus, *Meiji gan-nen ni-gatsu futsuka*, is given as February 2, 1868.

2. Names

The standard pattern of presenting Japanese names in the traditional manner (the family name preceding given names) has been followed here. Researching the etymology of titles and the myriad of adopted, given and nick-names, can be extremely problematic for the student of Japanese. During the Bakumatsu-Meiji period the leading figures often went by a variety of titles (Yôdô himself had at least ten different cognomens) with individuals discarding old forms, adopting ancient titles and often completely changing their names to suit the new era, and this is an added barrier for the researcher working with primary sources.

In this study I have striven to confirm all my translations with advice from native Japanese, however, for any faulty interpretations or undiscovered misreading I offer apologies in advance.

3. Authography

I have adopted the circumflex to symbolise the long vowel sounds regularly found in Japanese. Italics are used to introduce specialised expressions, however, words in common usage in the English language such as samurai, Meiji and Shôgun, are not italicised.

Introduction

Broadly stated, the aim of this thesis is to follow the path of Yamanouchi Yôdô's personal and public life, describing the events that he was involved in and analysing his actions from the perspectives of personal experience and the wider framework of his role in national affairs.

The thesis will look closely at the development of relationships between Yôdô (Tosa) and the Bakufu, Court and anti-Bakufu party respectively. The nature of the changes that occurred within the Tosa leadership structure also receives attention. By observing the erosion of the traditional bonds that existed between Yôdô and his retainers, an understanding of the way in which daimyô-led domains began to change from a semi-autonomous feudal tradition, to the beginnings of a centrally administered prefectural system, can be attained. Although the study is very individually focused, it is hoped that by analysing Yôdô against the backdrop of his times, position and heritage, this will enable the emergence of a clearer picture of the forces and influences that shaped the period.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the domestic and international state of affairs that existed in Japan from the late 1840's to the emergence of Yôdô from confinement in 1862, subsequent to the assassination of Ii Naosuke two years before. Special attention will be paid to Yôdô's rise to a position of influence in the political world of Bakumatsu (1853-1868) Japan. This chapter will also discuss such issues as the nature of the bonds that existed between the Tokugawa and the Tosa Yamanouchi family; the events surrounding Yôdô's succession to the daimyôship; and the nature of his political and economic reforms within Tosa for the period ending with the assassination of Yoshida Tôyô in 1862.

Chapter 2 is concerned with the main events that occurred in the period that commenced with Yôdô's release in 1862 - after two year's house arrest - and concluded with the accession of Tokugawa Yoshinobu¹ to the Shôgunal position in December 1866. The significance of developments such as the unsuccessful loyalist uprisings of 1864, the failed Bakufu punitive expedition against Chôshû in 1866, and the subsequent creation of an anti-Bakufu, Satsuma-Chôshû league, will be considered. Related to this, the power struggles between Bakufu, daimyô *kôbu-gattai* (unity of Court and Bakufu) and loyalist factions which became sharply defined at this time will also be discussed. Tosa in particular was a microcosm of this conflict, and the various actions undertaken by Yôdô vis-a-vis political

¹ In rendering the last Tokugawa Shôgun's given name, authorities vary between Yoshinobu and Keiki - these being variant readings of the name characters. Both renderings are valid. In this thesis, in the interests of consistency, Yoshinobu is used throughout.

forces within his domain reflect very well the problems faced by the ruling samurai class in trying to reconcile divergent ideologies while still maintaining their traditional perquisites.

Chapter 3 is initially occupied with the promulgation of the Tosa *taisei-hōkan* proposals and the issue of identifying Yōdō's motives for initially sponsoring and then continuing to associate himself with the programme. Subsequently, the discussion will analyse the struggle that occurred between pro- and anti-Bakufu forces immediately after the Shōgunal resignation in October, 1867. The rout of the Bakufu forces at Toba-Fushimi in January of 1868 was for Yōdō, an event of great consequence and the significance of the complete failure of his political designs at this time form an integral part of the debate.

During this period a number of different proposals for the future government of Japan were being created by political thinkers and influential politicians. The last section of the chapter will scrutinize some of these proposals with special reference to ideological backgrounds and the nature of the individuals responsible for their conception.

The first part of Chapter 4 concentrates on Yōdō's role in the opening years of the Meiji period, as one of the great lords who actively cooperated with the new central government. The subsequent policies of *hanseki-hōkan* (return of lands and people) and *haihan-chiken* (abolition of the domains and establishment of the prefectures) were two important programmes enacted by the government, and Yōdō's reaction to these measures, which amounted to a destruction of the traditional establishment of which he was a member, are analysed.

The latter part of the chapter depicts the closing years of Yōdō's life; dispossessed by *haihan-chiken* and deprived of his supremacy in Tosa, ravaged by alcoholism and at the nadir in his political fortunes. This chapter relates his descent into hedonism and attempts to ascertain causes for this decline. The nature of his life in retirement and his brief return to moderation, are covered in the last section, before closing with the sudden onset of severe illness and his subsequent death in April, 1872.

The conclusion recapitulates the outstanding events and achievements of Yōdō's life, considering the efficacy of his policies and the overall significance of his political contribution to the subsequent development of post-Bakumatsu Japanese history. In final summation, Yōdō's blueprint for the future Japan, and the strengths and weaknesses of this vision are discussed and evaluated.