CHAPTER 5

THE MEIJI RESTORATION

The Meiji Restoration stands as one of the turning points of Japanese history. Although the actual events of 1868 constituted little more than a shift of power within the old ruling class, the larger process referred to as the Meiji Restoration brought an end to the ascendancy of the warrior class and replaced the decentralized structure of early modern feudalism with a central state under the aegis of the traditional sovereign, now transformed into a modern monarch. The Restoration leaders undertook a series of vigorous steps to build national strength under capitalist institutions and rapidly propelled their country on the road to regional and world power. Thus the Restoration constituted a major event for Japanese, East Asian, and world history. The process whereby this came about has inevitably become a central issue in Japanese historiography, for verdicts on its content and nature condition all appraisals of the modern state to which it led. The work of historians has been undergirded by a vast apparatus of sources preserved by a history-minded government concerned with its own origins, and the scholarship that has been produced illuminates the intellectual history of Japan’s most recent century.

TROUBLES WITHIN, DISASTER FROM WITHOUT

Japan’s political crisis of the 1860s was preceded by serious internal difficulties and foreign danger that brought to mind formulations of Chinese historians who habitually coupled internal decline with border incursions made possible by that decline: “troubles within, disaster from without” (naiyū gaikan). A great deal of historical inquiry has been directed to the questions of how severe the first would have been in the absence of the second. Once the ports had been opened, there was no mistaking the complementary vibration between internal and external problems, but in the absence of foreign aggravation, the possibility of an internal upheaval sufficient to bring about the collapse of the feudal order remains uncertain. What is clear, however, is that the almost total
isolation of Japan before its "opening" by the West served to magnify the consequence of the foreign impact in the public imagination.

The regime's internal difficulties came into striking focus during the years of the Tempō period (1830–44), which receive detailed treatment in Chapter 2. During those years Japan was devastated by crop failures that caused ruinous famines in central and northern areas. These combined with governmental inefficiency and unresponsiveness to encourage or provoke popular resistance. The most spectacular revolt of this period was one led by a model Confucian samurai official in Osaka, Ōshio Heihachirō, whose emotional call to insurrection made him a hero for later historians who sometimes dated the loyalist revolts from his manifesto. Ōshio's uprising resulted in little more than the burning of large areas of Osaka, but the striking incompetence shown by bakufu officials in its suppression contrasted with his own courageous (though equally maladroit) performance to symbolize what was wrong with the regime. Ōshio's revolt, led by samurai and centered in the second most important city of the land, provided a national shock, but it was only one of many risings in that period. Peasant insurrections and urban "smashings" had tended to grow in size with the interrelationships of Japan's increasingly close-knit economy, and popular risings often moved rapidly along lines of communication. An added phenomenon of the period was the increase of chiliastic and millenarian movements. The world renewal (yonaoshi) uprisings were frequently led by a self-sacrificing individual who willingly martyred himself for the eventual good of his fellows. Ōshio, too, came to take on such an appearance in popular thought.

Nevertheless, the insurrections of the period proposed few alternatives to the social and economic system that gave them birth. Manifestoes and petitions usually focused on recent or threatened violations of what had come to seem as acceptable, though admittedly burdensome, government demands. Communication routes were natural conductors for such protest, as the villages along the right of way were ex-


pected to provide the *sukegō* porter service that moved travelers and transport on human and animal backs. Needs for such services increased in late Tokugawa times.

Rural order was also reinforced by an interesting group of nonofficial rural reformers whose teachings of sobriety, thrift, mutual cooperation, and agricultural improvement were designed to give farmers a better livelihood. The agricultural technologist Okura Nagatsune (1768–1856), the rural reformers Ninomiya Sontoku (1787–1856), with his plans for mutual cooperatives, and Ōhara Yūgaku (1798–1858) all worked to restore the health of the rural areas. Significantly, all three focused on the reclamation of land left fallow, whether by bad government or famine or migration. Their teachings were usually moralistic and pietistic, stressing the maintenance and care of land as an essential part of filial piety and ancestral obligation. Such efforts, though surely helpful to the government, were also evidence of the government’s inability to fulfill the paternal role it had long ago set for itself. Equally important, the appearance of genuine rural leaders of this sort testified to a rising level of scholarship and leadership among the commoner elite throughout the Japanese countryside.3

The bakufu’s response to these troubled times took the form of the Tempo reforms launched by the *rōjū* Mizuno Tadakuni in 1841. As Harold Bolitho points out in Chapter 2, the reforms, which included edicts against migration from country to city, provided relief for bakufu retainers’ debts, abolished merchant guilds, and attempted to rationalize and concentrate bakufu landholdings within a set radius of Edo and Osaka, struck at vested interests of townsmen and vassals, and ended in failure. Simultaneous reforms in some of the larger domains, notably Satsuma and Chōshū, were somewhat more successful, but none fully met its goals. The bakufu’s failure was particularly important, for its inability to raise its revenues augured ill for the greater crises that lay ahead. Nevertheless the ambitious, though abortive, plans for more intensive bureaucratic control of society have provided the basis for some historians’ interpretations of the Tempo years as inaugurating late-feudal nineteenth-century “absolutism.” Although judgments of these issues differ sharply, undoubtedly the future Meiji leaders, “men of Tempo” who experienced that turmoil in their early years, built on those lessons to their loss or gain.

The bakufu that had to deal with these problems was in many ways

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a less flexible and less adequate instrument of government than it had been. Although the eighteenth-century administrators had felt able to experiment rather widely within the pattern of the past, the language of the nineteenth-century leaders increasingly stressed the "obligations of the past" (sono sujisui no gohōkō) in a rigid adherence to tradition. Central authority, as Harold Bolitho's study of the fudai daimyo points out, had not grown;4 if anything, the shift from strong to weak shoguns had resulted in bureaucratic immobility. Mizuno's effort during the Tempō reforms to reclaim some vassals' holdings roused a storm of complaint, and yet his abortive efforts anticipated the measures that would be found necessary by future reformers when the crisis deepened in the 1860s. The once pragmatic bakufu had become a rather fine-tuned instrument that found it difficult to proceed without the cooperation of a number of distinct interest groups. Institutionally it remained premodern. The senior counselors (rōjū) served on cycles of monthly rotation, and the adoption of regular responsibilities and the abolition of the rotation system came only on the eve of the Tokugawa fall in 1867. Internal disaffection and bureaucratic rigidity may not have reached the levels that characterized contemporary China, but both regimes operated in a setting in which custom and precedent placed limitations on central power. More important, both regimes were limited by an inadequate governmental share of the nation's product. The precedents set by the ancestors and the barriers set by established and deeply routinized patterns of administration made it difficult to initiate radical change. The bakufu, though charged with the responsibility for the national defense, had access to only the income of its own lands. A shogunal procession to Kyoto in the 1860s required most of its regular cash income for that year, and the cost of restoring traditional preparedness and purchasing modern arms was soon to become prohibitive.5

The crisis in foreign affairs that followed the Tempō years is treated by William Beasley in Chapter 4. As he points out, it was a crisis that had been developing for decades. A growing consciousness of the foreign danger had been one of the unsettling elements in the nineteenth-century climate of opinion among informed intellectuals. The defeat of China in the Opium War of 1838–42 brought this conscious-

ness home to a far larger public. The Japanese had ready knowledge of that disaster through the messages brought by Dutch and Chinese merchants to Nagasaki, and Chinese accounts of the problem, notably Wei Yüan’s *Hai-kuo t'ü-chih*, went through many editions in Japan, where they were immediately accessible to all who had received formal education. In a secluded island country whose great metropolises were collection points for the literate elite of all sectors, speculation inevitably led to uneasy fears that imperialist flotillas would next come to Japan.6

Such consciousness had also been advanced by changes in the world of thought, which are treated by Harry Harootunian in Chapter 3. The nativist thought of national scholarship (*kokugaku*) moved in increasingly extreme directions in the nineteenth century. In the teachings of Hirata Atsutane and his disciples, it combined an increasingly assimilative and syncretic utilization of non-Japanese thought with a religious fervor focusing on the sun goddess Amaterasu as a national deity. A new and compulsive ethnicity was in formulation. Still premodern and perhaps only protonationalistic, this thought lay at hand as a potent incitation to alarm and indignation when once the sacred soil and sparkling waters of Japan might be sullied by foreign boots and hulls.

Knowledge about the West, and consequently informed awareness of its capability, was also available through the rise of Western learning (*rangaku*). A practice of translating Western books, launched in 1771 with the discovery by several doctors that the human anatomy conformed more closely to Dutch than to Chinese anatomical charts, grew so rapidly that at the time of his death in 1817 Sugita Gempaku, one of the doctors involved, compared it with the translation movement from Chinese a millennium earlier. The bakufu did its best to channel such learning and also to appropriate that part of it that seemed useful, but restless minds and figures soon carried it beyond the bound of the permissible. In the *Morrison* incident of 1837 a group of “Dutch scholars” concluded that the rude rejection of an English emissary would subject Japan to great danger. The ship in question had in fact already been repulsed successfully, but political criticism of this sort provided the impetus for political repression of the scholars in the purge of 1839.

A third, and ultimately the most important, development in the thought world of the nineteenth century was a growing concern with the imperial institution, which was the product of the *kokugaku* tradit-

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This cut across all groups, but it found its most forceful and powerful formulation in a blend of ethnic and Confucian teaching that associated loyalism with morality and justified — and even required — participation in the political process under its imperative. In the slogan “revere the emperor, drive out the barbarian!” (sonnō-jōi), loyalism wedded to antiforeignism became the most powerful emotion of mid-century Japan.

Historical scholarship has often limited its consideration of emperor-centered thought to treat it as a political tactic without considering its substance, in good measure as a result of and in reaction to the use made of the institution by the modern state. In fact, however, it can be demonstrated that the development of loyalist thought had a long continuity in Tokugawa intellectual history and was not without its roots in Chinese thought as well. The dominant stream of Tokugawa Confucianism drew on the Neo-Confucian thought of Sung China, which developed at a time when the foreign danger in the form of northern barbarians was at the forefront of scholars’ consciousness. The antiforeign thrust of Chu Hsi Neo-Confucianism became blunted in a China ruled by Manchus, but in Japan the nonfunctioning throne became idealized, and it ended as the focus of ethnic nationalism. In samurai minds the identification of “country” with “virtue” tended to make absolutes of duty and action. “Loyalty” (chūgi) became a “great duty” (tai gi) and the supreme test of the moral individual. This primacy of political values became the more powerful because, as Maruyama Masao has pointed out, it carried with it the implication that it was the vassal’s responsibility to “correct” or “admonish” as well as to “obey” his superior. In the nineteenth century, Tokugawa Confucian scholarship stressed a hierarchical scheme of obligations in which sovereign came to stand above shogun. Chinese civilization gradually came to seem distinct from the country of its birth, particularly after the fall of the Ming to the Manchus in the seventeenth century. Indeed, many nineteenth-century writers referred to Japan as the central country.

There were also trends in Tokugawa policy that gave impetus to this trend of imperial loyalism. In the eighteenth century, the bakufu, increasingly responsive to Confucian morality, demonstrated its respect for the court by protecting and maintaining the imperial tombs.
and by increasing the miserly stipends that the early shoguns had provided for the court and courtiers. Whereas Ieyasu and his immediate successors had taken care to sever the ties the court had had with the military class up to that time,9 awards of imperial rank and title to the Tokugawa cadet houses now became expected. Gradually extended to other leading daimyo, such titles became a matter of prestige and pride and helped lead to daimyo–court connections against which the early shoguns had guarded. Gradually and almost imperceptibly, the bakufu’s “virtue” came to be identified with its ability to protect and insulate the court and country from outside contact. Sakoku, begun as a measure to ward off domestic dissidence in the mid-seventeenth century, ended by becoming a criterion of shogunal loyalty and performance.

Intellectually this package of patterns and ideals found its most persuasive setting in the writings of a group of scholars in Tokugawa Nariaki’s domain of Mito. Aizawa Seishisai’s Shinron (1825) provided in particularly compelling form a warning of the power of the West, insistence on the sacred nature of Japan and its imperial polity, and reminders that that superiority was based on the benefits of the imperial family. Mito thought, and especially Aizawa’s book, became widely read in the 1840s and 1850s, at a time when the Mito daimyo began to take a vigorous part in urging measures of moral and material rearmament and in extending his political contacts to the Kyoto court.

THE HARRIS TREATY AND ITS AFTERMATH

The opening of Japan to international contact, described by Professor Beasley in Chapter 4, produced problems that were made more difficult by these strains. Economic difficulties and military unpreparedness made it important for Japan to avoid military conflict until preparations had been advanced. This required information (gathered by the Bansho shirabesho, the new Institute for Western Learning established in 1855), money (collected through new taxes, forced loans, and government economies), and political consensus to provide a time of quiet during which plans could be prepared. The search for that consensus brought efforts to consult, and thereby to educate, the daimyo and the Kyoto court. That consultation had the effect of activating first them and then their vassals and subordinates. A broadening circle of concern among people who were often poorly informed about for-

eign affairs but who were anxious to use those issues for internal affairs came close to paralyzing government processes.

The bakufu's first response to the news of the Opium War was to relax its standing orders for the prompt repulse of foreign vessels and to order that supplies be provided for them when they requested them. This order, issued in 1842, brought a reminder from Emperor Kōmei four years later to be careful about coastal defense. However mild its wording, it was an early indication that the court would consider itself involved in matters of foreign policy and defense. A letter of warning from the king of Holland in 1844 and the Biddle mission of 1846 were successfully turned aside, but no one doubted that more such would follow. Bakufu orders to daimyo to be vigilant about coastal defenses were issued in 1849, but because of the general financial stringency of the times, no real advances had been made when the Perry mission arrived in 1853.

Abe Masahiro, an able conciliator who had been rōjū since 1845, sent the Perry letter to the court for information and to the Tokugawa vassals with requests for advice. Abe was aware of the need for change; he had promoted a number of low-ranking officers to key posts. He also had a keen awareness of Japan's military weakness and had established an office of coastal defense over which he himself presided and which he manned with his own followers. Abe tried to outmaneuver the leading exponent of exclusion, Tokugawa Nariaki of Mito, by appointing him to a key defense post. The opinions that the bakufu received from daimyo and lesser vassals revealed a wide range of views on the American request, but for the most part they agreed that conflict should be avoided. The bakufu made its decision without a great deal of reference to the views that came in; it was a full year before it sent the text of the Shimoda treaty that its negotiators had worked out with Perry to the daimyo and the court. At the same time its orders to the daimyo had sharp reminders of the importance of coastal defense, and police officials (metsuke) were given sharp warnings about the importance of quick and ruthless action to prevent contacts between foreigners and ordinary Japanese. Abe seemed to have resolved the first step, but even his political agility could not conceal the change that was to come. In 1854 the court issued an order to melt down temple bells for guns, the first time in the entire Edo period that Kyoto had taken it upon itself to issue a national directive. Matsudaira Shungaku (Yoshinaga, Keiei), the collateral house (shimpan) daimyo of Fukui, Abe's father-in-law, and a leading figure in national politics from then on, wrote to remind Abe that daimyo respect for the bakufu
was contingent on the bakufu's respect for Kyoto. In the future, the bakufu's desire for daimyo support in difficult decisions would find it consulting them more frequently, and the court itself developed the tactic of suggesting that daimyo, or at least leading Tokugawa vassals like the gosanke, should be consulted again.  

The Commercial Treaty of 1858 negotiated by Townsend Harris marked the real opening of Japan to trade and residence. Harris drew his most effective arguments from the disasters that China met in the second round of warfare (the Arrow war) that ended with the Tientsin treaties in 1858. Oddly enough, the bakufu's fear of following the course of China into foreign subjection led it to accept treaties almost identical to those inflicted on China.

The debates about the Harris treaty next became inextricably interwoven with the problem of shogunal succession. Tokugawa Iesada, who died in the summer of 1858, had no successor, and so adoption procedures had to be set in motion. The leading candidates were Hitotsubashi Yoshinobu (Keiki), an able young man who was in fact one of the many sons of Tokugawa Nariaki of Mito, and a still-immature descendant of the Tokugawa house of Kii (Wakayama), the future Tokugawa Iemochi. Iemochi's selection would be the more conventional, and in the maneuvering that took place, reference to an "able" heir was code language for choosing Hitotsubashi (later Tokugawa) Yoshinobu.

Hotta Masayoshi, who had succeeded Abe Masahiro as chief bakufu official, informed Townsend Harris that the regime would need the formality of court approval of the new treaty before signing it, and he arrived in Kyoto to secure that approval in the spring of 1858. To his astonishment, the court instructions he received a half-month later instructed the bakufu that because this was of utmost importance to the country, it should take up the matter once more with the three cadet houses (gosanke) and the daimyo. This marked the first time in the Tokugawa years that the court had presumed to disagree publicly with bakufu policy. What had happened was that a number of leading daimyo, among them Tokugawa Nariaki, had recognized in the com-


11 The point is Ono Masao's in "Kaikoku," Iwanami kösa Nihon rekishi, vol. 13 (kinsei 5), pp. 1–39. Nakamura Tetsu, "Kaikokugo no bôeki to sekai shijo," however, points out that the Ansei treaties were superior to the Tientsin treaties because they did not legalize opium or permit missionaries and provided better tariff arrangements, pp. 108–9.
commercial treaty an issue on which they could use the court’s xenophobic instincts to influence bakufu policy in the matter of shogunal succession. Henceforth they would propose that the court couple reluctant approval of the treaty with the condition of selecting an “able” and mature heir to the shogun.

When Hotta addressed his second request for approval to the court, he was close to having his way when eighty-eight Kyoto nobles joined to protest. As a result, instructions to consult the vassals were handed down a second time. With this the lines were drawn for a showdown. House succession went to the heart of Tokugawa policy and was an internal Tokugawa matter. As the fudai daimyo of Hikone, Ii Naosuke, put it in a letter, selection according to ability might be the “Chinese way,” but it was not the way things were done in Japan. Last-minute bakufu lobbying blocked a court plan to call for an able shogun.12

The court’s second rebuff came in a context of growing exasperation with Kyoto xenophobia and obstruction, and it brought hard-liners to the fore in Edo. Shortly after Hotta’s return from Kyoto, Ii Naosuke of Hikone became regent (tairō) and took over the leadership role in the Edo councils. He now began a period of personal leadership that had no real precedent in the history of shogunal ministers. It seemed to him that the reassertion of bakufu control over dissidents was a matter of the highest priority and that other issues were secondary.

On June 25, Harris was promised that the treaty would be signed by September 4. Once again letters were sent off to the daimyo in apparent conformity with imperial instructions. But when Townsend Harris brought word of the Treaty of Tientsin and speculated that the British and French warships would probably proceed to Japan next, the treaty was hastily signed on July 29 before the results of the new survey were in hand and without court approval. Ten days later the bakufu announced that shogunal succession had gone to the young Iemochi of Kii. Thus Ii Naosuke had decided the two burning questions of the period within ten days, and quite on his own authority.

Ii now moved against the opposition. Bakufu moderates and foreign affairs specialists who had come to office under Abe and who had favored a cooperative and conciliatory policy toward the daimyo were dismissed, demoted, or moved to less important posts. The great

12 George Wilson, “The Bakumatsu Intellectual in Action: Hashimoto Sanai and the Political Crisis of 1858,” in Craig and Shively, eds., Personality in Japanese History, pp. 234–63, quotes Ii’s retainer Nagano: “To nominate a lord because of his intelligence is to have inferiors choose their superior and is entirely the Chinese style ... the custom of our empire must be to respect the direct line of descent,” p. 260. But Nagano was too dogmatic in this; the adoption system permitted great flexibility in succession to secure ability.
daimyo who had lobbied through their agents in Kyoto for the succession of Yoshinobu as heir were driven into retirement and, usually, house arrest. Matsudaira Shungaku of Fukui, Tokugawa Nariaki of Mito, Tokugawa Yoshikumi of Owari, and Yamauchi Yōdō of Tosa were only the most eminent of those punished.

Emperor Kōmei was furious at this flouting of his sentiment and even considered abdication to demonstrate his frustration. He ordered that the head of one of the three cadet houses (gosanke), or the tairō himself, come to Kyoto, only to receive the response that the house heads were being punished and that the tairō was too busy with national affairs to absent himself from Edo. A lesser rōjū, Manabe Akikatsu, was designated as emissary, and even that worthy delayed almost two months before setting out for Kyoto. The court struck back; its directive to the bakufu, in a totally unprecedented breach of channels and security, was transmitted to the Kyoto representative of Mito and sent on to Edo by him to the consternation of the bakufu, which forbade Mito to divulge its contents to other quarters. At Kyoto, low-ranking agents of the daimyo who had favored the Hitotsubashi cause urged on inexperienced courtiers in misguided efforts to have the court insist on a reversal of bakufu policy, the dismissal of Ii, and a reversal of the Harris treaty. Ii Naosuke had his own agent in Kyoto, one Nagano Shuzen, who reported all this activity to Edo and helped provoke the counterstrokes that followed.

By October, bakufu arrests of those agents began. Umeda Umpin, Mito agents, and others were arrested in Kyoto. Hashimoto Sanai, Matsudaira Shungaku’s chief emissary, was arrested in Edo. The men arrested in Kyoto were transported to Edo in cages and under heavy guard, and once there they were severely interrogated by a judicial board of five that sat for only the most serious offenses. The sentences handed down were unexpectedly severe and made this one of the largest crackdowns in the history of the bakufu. Over one hundred men were sentenced. Eight were condemned to death, and six of them were beheaded like ordinary criminals.

While all this was in progress, rōjū Manabe was working to wring approval from a sullen and reluctant court for the treaty that had already been signed. His hand was strengthened as bakufu punishments approached the court itself, with a round of changes and retirements in courtier positions there. In the end the reluctant sovereign agreed that because the treaties had been signed, it was too late to stop them.

Ii Naosuke has had harsh treatment at the hands of historians,
especially those who wrote before 1945. His personal rigidity and harshness were untypical of bakufu procedure and, indeed, of most of Japanese administrative history with its preferences for collegial decision making. Moreover, his victims included some of the ideal types revered by the future Meiji state. The Fukui counselor Hashimoto Sanai, trusted assistant of Matsudaira Shungaku, was clearly carrying out instructions from his lord. In character and attainments he had won universal respect and admiration. Despite this, his sentence read: He “should have remonstrated with his lord that this was a serious matter . . . and he acted without respect for Bakufu will.”

Even more serious and tragic in popular imagination was the fate of the Chōshū scholar-teacher Yoshida Shōin. Yoshida began as a low-ranking but brilliant student of military science. After traveling to Nagasaki and elsewhere he concluded that these places would not suffice to protect Japan. He came under the influence of the modernizer Sakuma Shōzan and tried to persuade Perry to take him back to America with him for a period of study in 1854. After Perry maintained his commitments to the shogunate and refused this request as illegal, Yoshida was discovered, arrested, and sent back to Chōshū. There he was given partial freedom to teach in a village academy that came to number among its students many of the future Meiji leaders. Furious at what he considered bakufu disrespect to Kyoto and the servility to foreigners shown in signing the Harris treaty, Yoshida schemed with Umeda Umpin to engineer the assassination of Manabe on his way to Kyoto. Arrested and extradited to Edo, Yoshida was executed after his fellow inmate Hashimoto Sanai. He became posthumously exalted as a martyr for emperor and country.

Postwar historians, however, have been kinder to Ii Naosuke. Freed from the compulsion of earlier historiography to side with those who fell in the “Ansei purge” and able to see courage and intelligence on both sides of the struggle that was to rend the political fabric of mid-century Japan, later writers have softened their denunciations. Yet in any case, Ii Naosuke did not long survive his triumph. On a snowy day in March 1860, as his entourage approached the Sakurada gate of the great Edo Chiyoda Castle, a group of swordsmen, seventeen from Mito and one from Satsuma, cut through his guards, whose swords were covered to protect them from the late winter snow, and took the tairō’s head. The assassins’ manifesto attacked the regent personally rather than the government he had headed, but it made it very clear

that Ii's crime had been that of indifference to the imperial will, and it urged all Tokugawa retainers to turn with shame to the sun goddess of Ise in penitence. The loyalist years had begun.

THE LOYALISTS

The purge that Ii Naosuke carried out had resulted in his murder; the persecuted loyalists had retaliated by assassinating the chief bakufu minister. These events ushered in a period of violence and terror that transformed the setting of late Tokugawa politics. The loyalists, known to their contemporaries and to history as *shishi* — men of high purpose — became an explosive element in local and national affairs and ended by serving as ideal ethical types for the ideology of the modern imperial state and also as models for young radicals in future periods of instability.

*Shishi* tended to be of modest rank, status, and income. Lack of status meant that they were little encumbered by official duty and office, which were reserved for higher samurai rank. They lived in a world that was less structured by ritual than was that of their superiors, and communication with men from other domains was also easier for them than it was for their superiors. Because the *shishi* were at the outer circumference of the ruling class, frustrations of limited opportunity and ritual humility often made them suspicious and critical of their cautious superiors. Poorly informed about the context of national diplomatic and political issues, they were inclined to the simplistic solutions of direct action. Calls for preparedness that accompanied the opening of Japan produced a lively expectation of war and led to a setting that was alive with rumor and that put new emphasis on the importance of the martial arts. Swordsmanship academies were crowded as never before with students, and together with tournaments they became settings for political bravado and self-assertion. The *shishi* were men of the sword.

The lower samurai's frustrations often meshed with the discontent of the rural samurai and village leaders. In the countryside, pseudo-samurai pretensions were symbolized by swords, surnames, and rudimentary scholarship. These could combine with the experience of administrative responsibility to encourage critical attitudes toward urban-based but underemployed samurai, sometimes with the conclusion that it was the leadership of the farm villages that really mattered. In Tosa, for example, a Shōya League of the 1840s produced complaints that summed up many of the frustrations and that harked back
to a past order in which village leaders had carried out the court's commands without interference from castle town samurai. Tosa *shishi* included sons of rural leaders as well as lower samurai.\(^\text{14}\)

*Shishi* learning varied widely, but it tended to include assertion of the primacy of sincerity demonstrated through action. The Satsuma hero Saigō Takamori was steeped in the views of Wang Yang-ming Confucianism which stressed the identity of knowledge and action. Others drew on popularized teachings of Chu Hsi and Mencius to emphasize the meaning of sincerity and a well-ordered polity and to draw quick conclusions from bakufu concessions to the imperialist powers and its apparent disregard of the wishes of the court. Although they were drilled in the virtue of loyalty and subordination (*meibun*) as the highest duty (*taigî*) of all, the *shishi* also accepted the retainer's obligation to correct his superiors when convinced of their errors. The bakufu itself accepted this in its death verdict against Hashimoto Sanai. He "should have remonstrated with his lord" instead of blindly carrying out his instructions in Kyoto. By the same logic, the *shishi* were ready to condemn bakufu officials for carrying out shogunal instructions in defiance of the sovereign's wishes. A popular history of Japan that was written from the standpoint of Confucian loyalty, Rai San'yō's *Nihon gaishi* (Unofficial history of Japan) circulated in increasing volume, first in its Chinese original and then in Japanese translation, to spread the praise of loyal servants of the court in former days. Rai Mikisaburō, a younger son of the historian, was executed in 1859, one of the victims of Ii Naosuke's purge.

The *shishi* began as loyal retainers, convinced of the identity of their lord's wishes and the desires of the court. Ii Naosuke's punishment of the daimyo who had advocated the Hitotsubashi cause and did their best to block the Harris treaty turned them against the bakufu minister in the name of loyalty to their lord. In the southwestern domain of Tosa, for instance, an oath signed in blood committed a group of young swordsmen to a loyalist party in the fall of 1861 with a statement that combined indignation at the humiliation of Japan by the barbarians and the punishment of "our former lord . . . who, instead of securing action, was accused and punished." "We swear by the gods," the statement concluded, "that if the Imperial Flag is once raised we will go through fire and water to ease the Emperor's mind,

carry out the will of our former lord, and purge this evil from our people.”

At the outset, ethnic nationalism, retainer loyalty, and imperial reverence could be combined in a devotion that was relatively free of moral dilemma. But once feudal loyalty seemed at variance with imperial reverence — when the daimyō chose the path of caution and pulled back from the loyalist cause — the shishi faced a difficult personal choice. Large numbers resisted renewed subordination to their superiors through flight from the domain jurisdiction, seeking protection and employment under the aegis of a domain perceived as more committed to the imperial cause (Chōshū long served as a protector of men from all over the country) or entering the employment of court nobles in Kyoto who had need for bodyguards, agents, and messengers as the political cauldron heated up. Participation in politics in this way was dangerous and often tragic for men who gave up the security of family, home, and safety, but it also proved stimulating and ennobling for many who contrasted the excitement of their new life with the tedium of the ritualized subordination that they had known at home. The Tosa activist Sakamoto Ryōma wrote his sister to contrast the importance of his activities with this old life at home, “where you have to waste your time like an idiot”; at another time he asserted that “the idea that in times like these it is a violation of your proper duty to put your relatives second, your domain second, to leave your mother, wife, and children — this is certainly a notion that comes from our stupid officials. . . . [But] you must know that one should hold the Imperial Court more dear than country, and more dear than parents.”

The loyalists did not have a structured view or program toward which they were working. They had slogans (of which the most important was sonnō-jōi — revere the emperor! drive out the barbarians!) but not programs. They were opposed to their authorities but not to authority; they were full of ethnic nationalism but only dimly aware of the possibilities of a true nation-state in which the two-sworded class would not stride forth as a special repository of virtue and privilege.

This point requires further comment. E. H. Norman’s pioneering study of the Restoration perceived a coalition of “lower samurai” and “merchants” at the center of the political movement, with implications

for future social change, but more recent writers have differed sharply over the utility of this as an analytical distinction. The "merchant" participation has proved even more difficult to examine, much less establish. W. G. Beasley's masterly summary of Restoration politics examined the evidence in a number of the most important domains to conclude:

There is, therefore, a valid connection between low-rank — rank below that of hirazamurai, which qualified a man for domain offices of some responsibility — and rebellion, terrorism, or the threat of violence. The rōnin who were the placard-posters, the demonstrators, the conspirators, the assassins were characteristically men of lower standing than the "politicians."

The same argument extends, Beasley wrote, to others whose "claim to samurai status was tenuous or even nonexistent: the village headmen, rich farmers, and merchants who had perhaps bought the right to use a family name and wear a sword." Tokugawa status divisions had no provision for the political participation of such individuals, and to participate at all was to set aside authority and to ally oneself with kindred spirits who had at least some claim to status. Thus the Tosa loyalists included a goodly number of rural samurai (gōshi) (including Sakamoto) and village heads or their sons whose normal horizons of political awareness would have been expected to be limited to the valley within which their acreage lay.

Albert Craig, who restricted his focus to Chōshū, found the "lower samurai" phrase imprecise and without analytical value. "Almost any large movement of samurai would by necessity be a lower samurai movement," he wrote, and the conventional definition of "upper" would fit only seventy or eighty (out of five thousand, or counting rear vassals, ten thousand) Chōshū samurai families. Moreover, in Chōshū there were high-ranking loyalists and low-ranking conservatives. "The samurai class," Craig concluded, given its disparity, "could not act as a class, a gentry class, with common class interests." Thomas Huber, who also studied Chōshū but limited his attention to the students of Yoshida Shōin's academy, defined "lower" as an income of two hundred koku or less to conclude that the Chōshū movement, which included commoner village administrators, represented the interests —

or at least the discontents – of the “service intelligentsia,” thus refining and improving Norman’s argument and position.20

Even when one grants the frustration and occasional fury of low-ranking members of the Tokugawa military elite and grants the importance of their enthusiasm and violence in energizing a political situation theretofore torpid and somnolent, one is reminded that the story that unfolded after the loyalist years was one of action and decisions taken by domains. Loyalists as such were brought under control after 1864 and required the cooperation of men who held power. Han policy was set by men of rank with access to the narrow elite that monopolized the highest offices. That elite seldom moved until it was convinced that the perils of inaction outweighed the risks of participation. At the last, the danger of failing to join a common front was that of exclusion from a new political order and structure. Regional and family self-interest had to be calculated with the greatest precision by men who inherited status, authority, and wealth. The shishi helped create an atmosphere in which movement was possible. Many, perhaps most, of them, perished in that work. Those who inherited the fruits of their labors were for the most part middle- and upper-ranking samurai who moved their han into positions in the years that followed.

Han policy and the logic of events seemed to enroll most samurai in some domains, notably Choshū, under the loyalist banner before the Tokugawa fall. But in 1867 Choshū had the most to lose and the most to gain. In other areas the scales were balanced differently. But just as many – indeed, far more – similarly placed samurai in other domains responded differently in other contexts, remaining aloof or following other banners. The bakufu responded to disorder and terror in Kyoto and Edo by recruiting and organizing shishi or rōnin who, seeing the Choshū–Satsuma force as regional and “selfish,” proved potent instruments of counterviolence. Lower samurai of the Tokugawa domain of Aizu, who served to keep the peace in Kyoto through the final Tokugawa years, were subject to the same class interests and frustrations as were their Choshū counterparts and probably included as many advocates of exclusion and imperial loyalism among their number. But they responded to different regional and historical affiliations, and their domain provided the single most effective counter to Satsuma and Choshū military strength until the Aizu castle was put to the torch in

the desperate siege of Wakamatsu in 1868 that ended the Aizu presence on the national scene.

The domains of Satsuma, Chōshū, Tosa, and Hizen furnished the early Restoration leadership. With the notable exception of Mito, which destroyed its strength in a civil war, remarkably few other han achieved a clear-cut presence or identity in the Restoration movement. Among these, Saga was a latecomer and was co-opted only after 1867. It may have joined the charmed circle chiefly because its proximity to the port of Nagasaki, which it was required to defend, helped bring some able and experienced leaders to the fore. Consideration of the sources of Restoration leadership therefore leads immediately to inquiry into the special characteristics of a very small number of domains. If samurai constraints and frustration were roughly comparable in all parts of Japan, what additional factors distinguished those southwestern domains and the few others that counted in the late Tokugawa years?

Factors of size and location come to mind immediately. Satsuma was second, Chōshū ninth, Saga tenth, Mito eleventh, and Tosa nineteenth in assessed productivity among the feudal domains. Distance and tradition helped create pride and autonomy. Large-scale resources were necessary for mounting a significant military force through the purchase of Western ships and guns in the 1860s. Satsuma, Chōshū, and Tosa also had disproportionately large numbers of samurai. Satsuma and Chōshū had been on the losing side in the struggles that brought the Tokugawa to power in the early seventeenth century; they suffered a loss of territory and had compressed a large military force into a reduced area. Also, the three domains were integrated territorial units with defensible borders along land communication routes that permitted vigilance over contacts with contiguous areas. Satsuma, at the extremity of southern Japan, was particularly famous for its own exclusion system. Each was a tozama domain, although Tosa’s status was special because the Tokugawa founder had installed a man of his own selection after expelling his predecessor. Consequently, the Tosa lord sought some way of combining gratitude with warning and worked out the suggestion for shogunal resignation. Elsewhere, compunctions of loyalty were weaker. The entire samurai class of Satsuma and Chōshū and the lower ranks in Tosa, many of them rear vassals who had served the
previous daimyo, harbored a centuries-old resentment of Tokugawa rule.

Remoteness and secure borders made for a greater degree of autonomy and of self-consciousness. "Han nationalism," to use Albert Craig's term, guaranteed that strong competitive urges operated to drive men on and to exacerbate fears of being left behind or out of whatever new political order might eventuate. Remoteness also made for a smaller role and presence in Edo, for higher costs and greater inconvenience attached to the central bakufu control mechanism of *sankin-kōtai*, and for reliance upon the Osaka market over that of the shogunal capital. Distance and size made possible relatively autonomous responses to bakufu and imperialist demands, as when Satsuma refused to make amends for the murder by its retainers of an English trader who happened along its line of march on horseback (the Richardson, or Namamugi incident), and when Chōshū tried to expel the foreigners by shelling ships along its shores without bakufu authorization. These incidents brought both domains face to face with the superiority of Western military technology, demonstrated by the British fleet against Kagoshima in 1863 and a foreign flotilla against the Chōshū Shimonoseki batteries the following year.

Remoteness had other consequences. At a time when money economy, economic change, and social dissolution were making the domains along the main-traveled parts of the Osaka and Edo plains, most of them held by Tokugawa houses, less feudal, social and economic relationships in southwestern Japan were still backward and traditional. The higher ratio of samurai to commoners in southwestern Japan could also be used to inhibit commoner complaint or participation; this was particularly so in Satsuma. Traditional authority structures provided an effective base for efforts to bolster the domain economy, tap more of its surplus for the regime, and speed military reforms. The Tempō reforms failed in bakufu territory, but Tempō fiscal and economic reforms in Satsuma and Chōshū left those domains in much stronger position for the competition that lay ahead. In Saga, too, the mid-century decades witnessed a successful campaign to redistribute land equally once again on the lines of the old Heian *kinden* system, a "land reform" program that spoke volumes for the ability of the feudal administration to control its most important resource.21

At mid-century the great fiefs of the southwest also enjoyed strong and able leadership. Throughout Japan able daimyo were few and far

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between in the late Tokugawa years, and in Edo itself shogunal power was entirely in the hands of surrogate bureaucrats during the reigns of Iesada and Iemochi. In Satsuma and Tosa, however, a fortunate accession to power of able men, products of the adoption system, introduced strong direction at the center. Saga too had an able daimyo, though the Chōshū lord was a cypher. What counted was the presence of a generous number of unusually able and adroit subordinates in each fief, men who did not hesitate to speak their minds.

This combination of historical, geographical, and economic circumstances helps to account for the few domains that took leading roles. But it does not explain why so few other domains, some more or less comparably endowed, took vigorous part in national politics. In Mito, where the loyalist teachings of the Confucianists and the personal prestige of Tokugawa Nariaki made for a leading role in the 1850s, an internal power struggle that destroyed domain unity combined with a Tokugawa affiliation to remove the han once Tokugawa Yoshinobu became a bakufu leader. In Fukui, also a related Tokugawa house (shimpan), Matsudaira Shungaku's early leadership gave way to watchful waiting and hoping for the moment when political conciliation would again be possible. But most daimyo – and indeed most upper samurai – witnessing the dangers that could accompany wrong judgments, preferred to conserve their resources and keep their counsel until the situation was clarified. There was no “anti-imperial” party, but there was a good deal of suspicion, much of it well founded, that those who professed loyalty to Kyoto were chiefly interested in their own advantage. For Tokugawa adherents, on the other hand, the twists and turns of bakufu policy made it both difficult and dangerous to follow a consistent and active line.22

The assassination of Ii Naosuke was followed by a series of efforts to bring court and bakufu together in a new and more cooperative structure. It did not succeed. For Edo, as Beasley points out, it meant “a bolstering of bakufu authority by the use of the imperial prestige,” while to the great lords involved “it implied a renewed possibility of intervening in politics in the Emperor’s name so as to achieve, among other things, an increase in baronial privilege.”23 Yet these efforts were important, for they led to the Bunkyū reforms of 1862, reforms which so changed the political balance of power that a recent study begins its consideration of the Tokugawa fall at that point. Meanwhile for others the hopes they engendered returned at the last to inspire the

23 Beasley, Meiji Restoration, p. 177.
Tosa proposal under which the last shogun agreed to surrender his powers in 1867.

The proposals are usually grouped under the slogan *kōbu-gattai*, for reconciliation of court (*kō*) and camp (*bu*). The first of these to be proposed was put forward by Chōshū, where the official Nagai Uta persuaded his daimyo to urge that a new agreement make it clear that the shogunate ruled "in accordance with the orders of the court," which would thus set policy while the bakufu carried it out. Having secured agreement with this in Kyoto, Nagai proceeded to Edo for negotiation. But there he was soon overtaken by a Satsuma proposal and mission that seemed to promise Kyoto a good deal more. This proposed pardon for all those who had been punished by Ii Naosuke in 1858 and dismissal of the principal bakufu leaders who had held office since then. More important, the court would designate certain daimyo to represent its interests in Edo; the two principal figures of the succession quarrel, Matsudaira Shungaku, daimyo of Echizen (whose vassal Hashimoto Sanai had been executed for advancing the candidacy of Tokugawa Yoshinobu), and Tokugawa Yoshinobu (Keiki) himself were to be appointed to newly created offices. Yoshinobu, who had been denied the shogunate, would serve as guardian (*kōken*) for young Iemochi, while Shungaku would be Supreme Councillor (*seiji sōsai*). This set of proposals was brought to Edo by the court noble Ōhara Shigetomi, and the escort was provided by a large Satsuma military force headed by the regent Shimazu Hisamitsu.

These plans had antecedents in thinking that began in the years following the arrival of Townsend Harris under the urgency of military reform. The great lords who had lobbied for the succession of Tokugawa Yoshinobu wanted cooperation to replace the costly control measures of the Tokugawa system. Yamauchi Yōdō, the Tosa daimyo, had proposed a seven-year moratorium on *sankin-kōtai* duty for daimyo at that time, and many large domains had developed steps for financial reform to make military spending possible. Saga had pushed the implementation of its land division program, and Tosa and Satsuma had developed programs for central merchandising of regional specialties to increase domain income – Satsuma with sugar from its southern islands and Tosa with its camphor and indigo. Modification of the ritualized alternate attendance at Edo would be the best possible economy measure.

Unfortunately the strains generated by Ii Naosuke's purge and the enforced absence through punishment of several of the daimyo who were most important to the Ansei reforms had changed this pattern of planned cooperation into one of competitive assertion and rivalry. The
Ohara-Satsuma mission itself was soon followed by a third, this time accompanied by troops from Tosa.

While Yamauchi Yōdō was still in forced retirement, his chief minister had been assassinated by loyalists, who promptly moved to the center of the decision structure that surrounded the young successor daimyo. Takechi Zuizan, the leader and founder of the Tosa Loyalist Party, now proposed in his young lord’s name that the court nobles Sanjō Sanetomi and Anegakōji Kintomo proceed to Edo with orders from the court that the bakufu prepare to expel the foreigners immediately. These plans went on to propose establishing the Osaka-Kyoto (Kinai) plain as the private realm of the court, granting the court clear political primacy, ending sankin-kōtai so that the daimyo could spend their money for defense, establishing seven or eight of the daimyo of southwestern Japan in Kyoto as support for the court, and establishing a private defense force of courageous rōnin from all parts of the country to defend the court. Costs of all this would be met by ordering wealthy merchants in the Osaka area to put up the money. This proposal was one of the most sweeping the loyalists put forward, and it serves to illustrate the way thinking became radicalized. But it did not get much farther, for much to Takechi’s surprise his former daimyo, Yamauchi Yōdō, moved skillfully to oust the Tosa loyalists after he was released from house arrest. After lengthy interrogation Takechi was ordered to commit suicide in 1865 for insubordination.

The Choshū and Satsuma initiatives, however, produced results before the Sanjō-Tosa procession had reached Edo, and the changes that came are known as the reforms of the Bunkyu era. These changed the political setting so basically that a recent study of the Tokugawa fall begins with the assertion that “the Tokugawa bakufu’s time of troubles began early in 1862 . . . [when] a series of political changes . . . reduced the bakufu to a secondary role in national politics.” In terms of politics, the most important changes were the implementation of the Ohara mission proposals: Matsudaira Shungaku of Fukui was appointed seiji sōsai (Supreme Councillor) and Hitotsubashi (Tokugawa) Yoshinobu kōken (guardian), the latter appointment specifically announced as made at “imperial request.” Japan’s problems with the imperialist powers, the extent of court disaffection, the insecurity of top-level bakufu officials, several of whom had been assassin’s targets, and the appearance of the strong Satsuma military force in Edo to accompany Ohara had combined to suggest to

25 Totman, Collapse of the Tokugawa Bakufu, p. 3.
bakufu officials the wisdom of retreating from Ii’s insistence on traditional bureaucratic direction of bakufu and national affairs. Shungaku and Hitotsubashi were in any event from Tokugawa houses, and the appointments did not at first seem an undue participation by outsiders in bakufu and national affairs.

Unfortunately for those who thought in these terms, Shungaku saw his appointment as a first step in a sharing of power by the great lords who had been his allies in the succession dispute a few years earlier. He began by insisting on a general pardon for those who had been punished by Ii; having carried his point he went on to demand punishment for the bakufu officials who had helped direct the purge. There followed a stream of demotions. The house of Ii lost its mandate as protector of Kyoto, and Ii’s retainer and adviser Nagano Shuzen was ordered to commit suicide. Soon additional pressures represented by the Sanjō-Tosa mission persuaded bakufu officials of the need to show good faith with the court by extending the punishments to almost all officials who had worked with the successor governments that followed the murder of Ii and to the men who had negotiated the treaties with the foreigners. In considering the remarkable equanimity with which most Tokugawa fudai saw the bakufu collapse a few years later, it is well to keep in mind the demoralizing effect that turnabouts of this sort must have had on vassals’ loyalty and resolution.

The 1862 reforms went on to a series of steps that were cumulatively disastrous to bakufu primacy. The first of these was the moderation and virtual abolition of the system of sōnokai, undertaken in order to permit economies to facilitate domain military preparedness. The period of daimyo residence at Edo was reduced to one hundred days in three years. Many of the lords, freed from duty at Edo, now transferred their attention to Kyoto, which thereafter competed with Edo as center of a national politics. Within a year bakufu officials were trying to undo the effects of this; two years later the bakufu asked all daimyo to send their families to Edo as before. Some lesser lords complied, but the more important domains showed no interest in returning to the restrictions of earlier times. By 1865–6 the great lords hardly granted the bakufu the courtesy of a reply to its summons, and a bakufu survey of Edo mansions turned up the fact that some of the lesser lords had gone so far as to rent their residences to commoners.26

Another step that was undertaken to repair relations with Kyoto involved a visit to the imperial court by the young shogun Iemochi.

26 Ibid., p. 141.
No shogun had visited Kyoto since the third shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu had traveled south with a mighty retinue in 1634 to demonstrate his power. Iemochi’s trip to Kyoto was a dramatic contrast to that of his ancestor. Iemitsu had gone to Kyoto to show his might; he had acted to sever daimyo connections with the court, and redirected daimyo residence and attendance from Kyoto to Edo. Iemochi, however, went to Kyoto as part of an attempt to gain strength from reconciliation at a time when daimyo attention was shifting from Edo back to Kyoto. In one point the visits were comparable. Iemitsu had taken an imperial princess as consort, and the same course was now suggested for Iemochi. In an effort to further cement relations with the court an imperial princess (Kazu no Miya) was proposed as consort for the young shogun. The arrangements were made in apparent disregard of her own reluctance and that of the Emperor Kōmei, and the matter served to inflame loyalist indignation further as a demonstration of shogunal disrespect.

Iemochi’s trip was planned to be a short one for reasons of economy and politics; bakufu optimists hoped that his presence would serve to reestablish the awareness of bakufu primacy in Kyoto. It worked out quite differently; before the young shogun could be extricated from the intrigues at the imperial capital four months had gone by. He was obliged to show ritual humility in processions to imperial shrines, and his ceremonial deference to the emperor left little doubt of his subordinate position. In 1634, in contrast, it was the emperor who had called at the shogun’s Nijō castle. The shogun’s position had always depended in the last analysis on force; it was therefore significant that bakufu ministers now thought it desirable to secure a specific court authorization of shogunal authority. Unfortunately, that commission included orders to drive out the barbarians. Further instructions reminded Iemochi to consult with daimyo on major questions and to respect “lord and vassals” relations. “Not since the Muromachi period,” Totman observes, “had a shogun been given such a patently empty title of authority.”

The shogun’s visit was an important step in the growing transfer of political centrality to Kyoto. Within months of his return to Edo proposals for a second visit were underway; he was to die at Osaka, still a youth, on his third visit in 1866. More and more daimyo now established headquarters in the ancient capital. Kyoto became a prime

28 Totman, Collapse, p. 58.
object of political and military planning for the southwestern domains. It was preeminently the preserve, at least until 1864, of the radical loyalists and shishi who made its streets unsafe for suspected enemies. In one celebrated instance of symbolic rebellion, they lopped the heads off statues of the Ashikaga shoguns. In order to retain control of the capital the bakufu appointed Matsudaira Katamori, young lord of Aizu, protector (shugo) of the city in 1862, and as a result he became an important actor in the politics of the next decade. So important did Kyoto become to Edo policy that the fifteenth and last shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, spent his entire period in office in the Kyoto area and never once felt free to take time for a return to Edo. All this added urgency to the bakufu’s economic problems. The Kyoto visits of Iemochi were ruinous for bakufu finances, and the necessity of maintaining an ever larger force and presence three hundred miles from the Tokugawa heartland worsened an already difficult situation.

A fourth product of the Bunkyū reforms was cooperation with the great daimyo. This had indeed been at the very heart of the program of proposals grouped as kōbu-gattai from the first, and it constituted the platform on which the last shogun based his resignation in 1867. The great lords that mattered included, in addition to Matsudaira Shungaku and Tokugawa Yoshinobu, a number of leading lords: Yamauchi Yōdō of Tosa, Shimazu Hisamitsu of Satsuma, Date Munenari of Uwajima, Mōri Yoshichika of Chōshū, and Matsudaira Katamori of Aizu. They were intermittently drawn into conference to discuss court-bakufu relations and diplomatic problems. In theory this was supposed to prevent unilateral, “selfish” bakufu direction. But the meetings, which began in 1862 and continued sporadically thereafter, produced no real results. There was no agreed-upon program of procedure, and the lords themselves were at least as “selfish” as the bakufu, usually retiring to their domains when things did not go well. The Tokugawa members, meanwhile, inherited the suspicion of bureaucratic “regulars” in Edo. The first attempt ended particularly badly when Matsudaira Shungaku, Supreme Councillor who had brought the whole program into being, resigned and returned to Fukui, followed by a bakufu order that he place himself under house arrest. He was pardoned by the summer of 1863 and remained a major figure, but then and later his program of conciliar cooperation had no real basis in regional interest and bureaucratic politics. As far as bakufu leaders in Edo were concerned, Shungaku and the others were outsiders whose interest in and loyalty to the Tokugawa cause was quite different from their own. In addition, haughty daimyo had great
difficulty in controlling irritation and overcoming disagreement. Confrontation was not a congenial mode of resolution for them. A system without provisions for retreat and conciliation found them bargaining by absence and boycotting meetings. Most important of all, however, was the fact that the Western pressure left no slack for the resolution of differences. The insistence of court xenophobes on undoing the treaties clashed directly with the deadlines that had been agreed upon with the Western powers.

The Bunkyu program foundered most importantly on the issue of foreign policy. Throughout most of the negotiation about restructuring power between Edo and Kyoto, Japan was facing diplomatic problems and military threats that required more effective central-government decision making at the very time that power was becoming more diffuse. Important figures at the Kyoto court never wavered in their distaste for the treaties that had been signed with the Western powers, and an inevitable effect of the increased attention to court wishes in the rhetoric of 1862 and 1863 was subscription to promises, however ambiguously worded, to get rid of the foreign plague.

The Ansei treaties opened to foreign trade Yokohama (Kanagawa), Nagasaki, and Hakodate; within four years (by January 1863) Osaka, Hyōgo (Kobe), Niigata, and Edo were to be opened. Hakodate proved of little importance, and foreigners soon lost interest in Niigata, but Osaka was a national center and located, together with Hyōgo, close to the imperial court at Kyoto. In the spring of 1862 the bakufu sent a mission to Europe to ask for delay in the opening of additional ports, and an attack on the life of Andō Nobumasa, just after the mission had sailed, underscored its assertions about domestic difficulties as grounds for the request. Trade had not yet assumed major proportions, and even Rutherford Alcock, British consul general and later minister, thought the request reasonable. A protocol delaying further openings until 1868 was worked out as a result.29

The agreement unfortunately unraveled quickly. Within Japan competitive jockeying for favor at court produced more extreme demands for exclusion of foreigners, while on the spot "exclusion" in the form of samurai and rōnin terrorist attacks on foreigners (and, in 1863, on the British legation itself) produced a negative response on the part of the imperialist powers. At Kyoto demands for exclusion were set in motion to embarrass the bakufu, which then confounded its critics by

29 Beasley, Select Documents on Japanese Foreign Policy 1853–1868 (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 1–93, provides the most incisive account.
agreeing to exclusion even after many great lords had backed away from the prospect of unsuccessful war.

The Satsuma regent, Shimazu Hisamitsu, emerged as a force for moderation. On his way into Kyoto in 1862 his men crushed a rōnin conspiracy in which his retainers had taken a leading role, and upon his return from Edo (whither he had conducted the court noble Ōhara) he warned of the impossibility of exclusion. Unfortunately his samurai had also taken a major step in strengthening English policy by their murder of Richardson on the way back to Kyoto. Thereafter Hisamitsu was preoccupied with the impending threat of British reprisal (which took the form of shelling and burning of his castle town of Kagoshima), and he helped destroy the hopes for a successful council of great lords by leaving Kyoto for Satsuma.

In Chōshū during this same period the pendulum swung from conservatism to radicalism. The initial Chōshū initiative represented by the proposals of Nagai Uta had failed before the more sweeping counter initiative of Satsuma; Nagai was disgraced, retired, and ultimately ordered to commit suicide. By summer of 1862 Chōshū stood as the principal protector and instigator of radical shishi and rōnin activities at Kyoto. In the latter part of 1862 Chōshū strength was joined by that of Tosa after the loyalists had taken control of that domain.

Thus it happened that, as has been described, the Tosa-Sanjō mission to Edo carried with it the clearest call yet for immediate and unconditional exclusion of foreigners from Japan. The chief bakufu representatives in Kyoto, Matsudaira Katamori (guardian of Kyoto) and Togugawa Yoshinobu (shogunal guardian), were inclined to the view that the bakufu would have to announce agreement with this demand to show sincerity, and meanwhile look for some way of delaying its implementation, but the regular bakufu officials at Edo were aghast at the dangers involved in even a verbal pledge of exclusion. Edo leaders were operating under the guns of foreign warships in Edo bay and in fear of an English bombardment of their city when they hurriedly agreed to pay over to Great Britain an indemnity for the murder (by Satsuma men, it will be remembered) of Richardson in the spring of 1863, just as Togugawa Yoshinobu was returning from Kyoto where he had agreed to a court demand for a promise of expulsion. It seems probable that Yoshinobu and other officials hoped they could avoid a clear deadline for action, and that even when they accepted, reluctantly, the court-imposed date (June 25, 1863) they thought of it as a date on which negotiations would commence (and inevitably fail). In any event they passed it along to the daimyo but with instructions to avoid hostilities.
In Chōshū, however, the extremist-dominated administration seized the opportunity for full compliance and opened fire on an American merchant ship at anchor in the Shimonoseki straits and later on French and Dutch vessels as well. Thus the kōbu-gattai program ended in a shambles: the Satsuma lord in Kagoshima vainly trying to prepare for a British attack on his city; Matsudaira Shungaku, author of the program, in retreat in his domain in Fukui; the bakufu verbally committed to exclusion at the same time that it was paying damages to Great Britain for actions it had not committed; and a defiant Chōshū determined to carry out exclusion on its own.

THE TREATY PORTS AND FOREIGN INFLUENCE

The Western powers had created the bakufu’s political problems, and they remained to complicate them by their presence in the ports that had been opened. From the time that Yokohama, Nagasaki, and Hakodate were opened to trade in 1859, the bakufu found itself faced with insoluble dilemmas in having to yield to foreign pressures at the same time that it was being pressured to end the foreign threat. The foreign presence, however, also contained elements of hope for the bakufu: Tariffs provided a new source of central income, and the purchase of foreign weapons and foreign assistance in training soldiers and sailors was more easily available to the bakufu than to other governments in Japan. But arrangements for capitalizing on these opportunities were slow in being planned and worked out, and long before they might have helped restore Tokugawa political and military primacy, the negative aspects of the foreign presence had dealt mortal blows to some of the institutional aspects of Tokugawa power.

In some ways, however, the Tokugawa political institutions proved surprisingly resilient in their capacity to accommodate the problems that the mid-nineteenth century brought, for the tradition of seclusion contained few of the expectations of international hierarchy and national centrality that bedeviled contemporary Chinese efforts to accommodate institutions to international society.30

From the first, Abe Masahiro entrusted negotiation with the Americans to men he had selected for their ability. By the summer of 1858 a new magistracy was set up to specialize in foreign affairs, the gaikoku

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bugyō, with the appointment of five men to serve in a collegial capacity. From then until 1867, when a more streamlined and responsible structure was worked out, a total of seventy-four officials served in it. This also demonstrates a difficulty: Institutional flexibility was there, but political instability and uncertainty made the post hazardous to occupy. Policy shifts required new teams, and the magistracy changed its occupants like a revolving door. The individual and career patterns of virtually all late-Tokugawa high officials show the political hazards. The board of rōjū showed a 100 percent turnover with the substitution of Ii for Hotta. Ambassadors sent to the United States in 1860 to ratify the Harris treaty disappeared into a (probably well deserved) obscurity upon their return to Japan. Lower-level interpreters and “technicians” like Fukuzawa Yukichi and Fukuchi Gen’ichirō, on the other hand, survived to travel again and become the commentators and pundits of the future.31

The bakufu sent a series of missions to the West in the 1860s. They became more frequent, more professional, and more serious. The first, in 1860, included seventy-seven men. The discovery that life was possible in the West without mountains of straw sandals and the full panoply of ritual that accompanied Tokugawa society made it possible to be more selective with future missions. In 1862, thirty-eight men went, the interpreters for a second time; this group stayed longer, worked harder, and learned more. Mission followed mission, and a sixth was abroad at the time of the shogun’s fall in 1867. By then a number of leading domains, including Satsuma and Chōshū, had smuggled students abroad to study. It will be remembered that Yoshida Shōin, the Chōshū martyr, had himself wanted to sail with Perry to learn about the West. The shogunate too sent students to Leiden to study. Upon his return, one, Nishi Amane, was charged with drawing up a modern charter for the shogunal regime. Japan had an exhibit at the Paris Exposition of 1867, as did Satsuma, which sent its own exhibit and tried to work out independent status as ruler of the Ryūkyū Islands. The bakufu rescinded its ban on the construction of oceangoing ships as early as 1853: It permitted Japanese exhibitors to go to Paris and buried the last of the seclusion provisions in June 1866 with a tariff convention that removed all restrictions on Japanese trading at the open ports, on Japanese purchase of foreign ships and employment of foreigners, and on Japanese travel abroad. In legal

and institutional terms, in other words, the bakufu was able to move speedily to dismantle the barriers it had established between Japan and the outer world.

Politically it was another matter. The readiness of the bakufu officials to build bridges with Kyoto at the cost of the careers of the officials who had negotiated and approved the early stages of the opening meant that foreign affairs specialists' careers showed a dizzying, roller-coaster sequence. Obscurantism and xenophobia among the two-sworded men who cursed the foreign presence meant that it was dangerous to be known as an expert in the new specializations associated with the West. Fukuzawa Yukichi found himself in fear of his life when he returned from Europe and America with the material that he made into his best-selling book, *Seiyō jijō* (Conditions in the West). Prominent consultants like Sakuma Shōzan and Yokoi Shōnan who had the ear of decision makers were murdered on suspicion of being pro-Western and even, in Yokoi's case, pro-Christian. The most trusted retainer could find himself ordered into suicide when the wind changed for his lord.

Yet for those who had access to foreign travel or, in time, the products of such travel in books like Fukuzawa's, the power of Japan's overseas adversaries provided convincing proof of the need to open Japan in order to strengthen its institutions and arms. Nor was the evidence all baleful. Fukuzawa found much in the West to praise: George Washington was almost a culture hero in late Tokugawa Japan; so, too, was Peter the Great. The West offered attraction as well as repulsion. Repulsion was close to hand on the Shanghai coast. Japanese who traveled to Shanghai on missions to buy ships and arms for their domains saw in the conditions at Shanghai a glaring example of humiliation and insult they were determined to avoid for their own country. Others recognized power: Inoue Kaoru, a Chōshū loyalist and future Meiji leader, recognized in the "forest of masts" in the Shanghai harbor sure evidence that exclusion could never succeed, and Takasugi Shinsaku, his superior in that movement, was shocked by the incidence of Western arrogance and superiority he encountered in Shanghai.

Nevertheless few Japanese made that trip, and none were more consistent in xenophobic instincts than the court nobles and their loyalist allies. Iwakura Tomomi, who had worked for the success of a reconciliation with the bakufu and helped arrange the shogun's marriage with Kazu no Miya, found himself out of office and forced into hiding to protect himself from angry *shishi*.

The representatives of the Western powers were quick to credit the
erratic course of Japanese politics to dishonesty and deception. Rutherford Alcock, who initially favored accommodating the bakufu's requests to delay the openings of additional ports, changed from an advocate of accommodation to one of retribution. Japan's inability to protect foreigners was seen as bakufu unwillingness to do so, and security was sought in the presence of foreign detachments – Britain's came to number fifteen hundred men, and French units added several hundred more. These inevitably brought new problems and resentments with them. In 1864 the arrival of Harry Parkes as British minister brought to Japan one of the most vigorous and choleric of the China-coast specialists in gunboat diplomacy. Parkes soon developed contempt for the bakufu's inability to control the daimyo and domestic violence, and before long he added doubts about the bakufu's *de jure* authority to the clear evidence of its deficiencies in *de facto* authority. Leon Roches, the French minister who preceded Parkes by a few months, on the other hand, never showed the slightest doubt about bakufu legitimacy and detected an opportunity for French leadership in providing military assistance, economic advice, and institutional suggestions to the Tokugawa leaders. Yet even Roches was quick to join his colleagues in joint demands for bakufu concessions, and he warned Tokugawa officials that it would be folly for them to try to stand against the foreigners' wishes. The foreign presence thus provoked antiforeign incidents, which in turn brought demands for additional concessions, with the result that the imperialist presence became a one-way ratchet opening Japan. It was a process that wounded the bakufu more than it did the daimyo, for it was the bakufu that claimed, but could not exercise, full authority. Meanwhile, the evidence of foreign influence and the fears of more to come stimulated and fed a sense of danger and crisis among the Japanese elite. This was only natural. In addition to the background information about the fate of China, there were stories closer at hand. There was a Russian "occupation" of Tsushima for several months in 1861, and the possibility of future danger in a contest between Great Britain and France for leadership, the one favoring the great lords and the other helping the bakufu.

The economic impact of the opening of the ports on the social unease and political turbulence of mid-century Japan requires particular attention. Japan entered the world trade system at its point of greatest growth and at a time when the English Industrial Revolution was the chief locomotive of the trade expansion. The nineteenth century saw an exponential growth in the rate of world trade: Beginning with the 1820s, the growth rates for the successive decades were
roughly 33 percent, 50 percent, 50 percent, 80 percent (for the 1850s), and 44 percent for the 1860s, when the Civil War in the United States slowed trade. Exports constituted an ever-larger part of England’s product, surpassing 60 percent in the 1850s. The unequal treaties with non-Western countries were important instruments of that advance. Persia (in 1836 and 1857), Turkey (in 1838 and 1861), Siam (in 1855), China (in 1842 and 1858), and Japan (in 1858), entered that system in quick succession. Commercial arrangements that had been worked out for other areas were easily and speedily applied to Japan. The Peninsula and Oriental Steamship Company (founded in 1840) steamers added Yokohama to their calls. At Yokohama and, secondarily, at Nagasaki, the trading houses, agencies, and banks that had been set up along the China coast extended their networks and assigned their men to the newly opened ports of Japan.

From the first the Japan trade exceeded the modest expectations that had been held of it. In 1860, imports stood at 1.66 million and exports at 4.7 million Mexican dollars, respectively; five years later, exports had quadrupled, and imports were up ninefold. At a time when world trade was complicated by the American Civil War and the China trade was disturbed by the Taiping Rebellion, the unexpected growth of Japan drew pleased surprise from British consular and trading representatives and doomed any hopes that bakufu optimists might have had of Western willingness to accept reduction or forgo the planned opening of additional ports. For a dispute of 1823 in which 1,007 villages resisted the jurisdiction of Osaka guilds, see William B. Hauser, Economic Institutional Change in Tokugawa Japan: Osaka and the Kinai Cotton Trade (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 97ff.


33 For a dispute of 1823 in which 1,007 villages resisted the jurisdiction of Osaka guilds, see William B. Hauser, Economic Institutional Change in Tokugawa Japan: Osaka and the Kinai Cotton Trade (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 97ff.
trade grew, its largest items were raw silk and tea. In 1863, at a time when the bakufu was ostensibly committed to closing Yokohama, the silk thread guild sought relief from taxes levied on its products that did not move through Edo, and for a time it virtually managed to close Yokohama by boycotting shipments. A year later the bakufu tried to reassert its authority by banning the planting of additional mulberry trees on lands under its control. Such efforts drew quick protests from the representatives of the foreign powers, so much so that some historians suggest that the naval demonstration against Choshū in 1864 had as a secondary aim the intimidation of the bakufu’s efforts to channel trade. The foreigners’ demand coincided with that expedition and brought abandonment of the ruling that products move through Edo channels. The following year the powers succeeded in getting tax and tariff agreements against the imposition of internal transit taxes on goods bound for the ports. Foreign trade thus had the effect of weakening the bakufu’s ability to control domestic commerce and opened Japan to the ports as well as opening the ports to the foreigners.**

The market for Japanese silk was made larger by the European silkworm blight that resulted in large exports of cards of silkworm eggs in 1865 and 1866. The consequence was a dramatic rise in the price of eggs and thread for the Nishijin weavers of Kyoto, whose raw material prices doubled almost overnight. The unemployment that resulted became an element in several urban riots. Urban handicraft laborers and fixed-income groups were the chief victims of price instability in products that had long seemed stable.

Foreign trade was, however, only one element in a wild inflation that sent the prices of all essentials spiraling upward in the early 1860s. The major element in this instability was the bakufu’s need to recoin. A closed country had been able to maintain a 1:5 gold-to-silver ratio as long as neither could be exported. But the open ports brought in a flood of Mexican silver dollars from nearby Shanghai, where the international rate of 1 to 15 prevailed. The disruption that followed, in what one author called the “great gold rush,” was countered by the bakufu in a basic recoinage program that was punctuated by charge and countercharge between foreigners and Japanese officials. Gold, silver, and copper coinage all were devalued. At the same time the hard-pressed bakufu grew more liberal with its permission to the daimyo to mint their own coin and to print paper currency. Currencies of this sort were not supposed to circulate beyond domain borders, but the integration of Japan’s commercial economy guaranteed their

34 Ishii Takashi, Bakumatsu bōeki shi no kenkyū (Tokyo: Nihon hyōronsha, 1943).
spread. Satsuma, for instance, minted millions of copper coins and profited hugely from them. Counterfeit coinage added to the problem. At the time of the Restoration there were sixteen hundred issues of paper money in addition to the multiple varieties of coinage in circulation. An economy that had always known a multiplicity of issues – the bakufu had first debased its coinage in the late seventeenth century and did so fairly periodically thereafter – in the short space of a decade now enormously increased the number, variety, and quality of its issues. Regular requirements of large payments to the foreign powers – for equipment, military needs, and indemnities – worsened the problem by skimming off a significant fraction of the gold and silver bullion available; such payments were assayed with the greatest care and exactness.

The consequence of all this was a galloping inflation that drove up the price of essentials, particularly rice. For the daimyo and upper samurai who measured their income in koku, this posed no discomfort, but the vast majority of the warrior class had long since had their incomes commuted to money. Emergency levies in the form of stipend reductions added to the injury. City dwellers were equally distressed. As early as 1862 the Edo city magistrate reported that inflation had raised commoners’ living costs by 50 percent. Placards denouncing merchants and foreigners contributed to the tension and growing level of violence. During one month in 1863, “some twenty people were murdered in the city (Edo), and uncounted others were attacked and threatened. . . . One worrisome aspect of the situation was the extent to which the keepers of the peace were becoming the breakers of the peace.” In addition to undisciplined members of rōnin units, the bakufu had co-opted to cope with policing problems, “members of the new Bakufu infantry units were suffering from demoralization, and some of them also became engaged in brawls and abuse of city folk.” Open ports also brought disease. A major cholera epidemic coincided with the opening of the ports. Nationwide, births in 1861 were 12 percent fewer than the year before, and in some central provinces they were as much as 80 percent lower. If one adds the earthquakes in Edo in 1854 and 1855 and the severe crop failures in 1866 and 1869, it becomes clear that the last years of Tokugawa rule were difficult for most Japanese.

Finally, mention must be made of the monetary payments that the bakufu had to make to the foreign powers. The Richardson indemnity, paid for Satsuma violence, came to £100,000. The Shimonoseki indemnity was set at an astounding 3 million Mexican dollars. “During the early days of the seventh month of 1865,” Conrad Totman noted, “officials at Edo secretly transported to Yokohama some 30,000 to 40,000 ryō per day for delivery to the foreigners as another $500,000 payment on the indemnity.” Even this was only part of the very large sums that were shipped to the ports to pay for costs involved in new shipyards, guns, batteries and missions abroad in the next few years. National politics, the visits of the shogun to Edo, support to needy daimyo, rebuilding the Kyoto palace (destroyed by fire in 1854) and Edo castle (destroyed by fire in 1863), and the movement of troops to the Kyoto area—all, or most such expenses, could be described as direct or indirect consequences of the opening of the ports. As the inflation worsened, all impoverished the city dwellers and also those on fixed incomes, and all weakened the political posture of the bakufu. Confidence can hardly have been raised by the series of impressive drives for special loans from merchants that were launched between 1862 and 1867; some specified numbers and amounts expected, and others established classes of contributions, for a total of 2.5 million ryō of gold, or three times the bakufu’s regular annual income in specie.

**BAKUFU RALLY**

In 1863, loyalists at Kyoto and in the domains overplayed their hand. Satsuma recalcitrance against the English brought on the bombardment of Kagoshima, and Chōshū insistence on implementing exclusion without waiting for bakufu instructions resulted in the four-power naval demonstration at Shimonoseki and doomed the bakufu’s efforts to stave off the opening of additional ports and to take up the closing of Yokohama. The Tosa loyalists’ efforts to seize the initiative in the name of their former lord resulted in their punishment and elimination on grounds of insubordination after Yōdō was free to turn his attention again to the direction of domain affairs.

This series of miscalculations enabled the bakufu leaders in Kyoto to claim to be more effective implementers of the imperial orders for exclusion programs and to oust the loyalists from Kyoto. Their colleagues at Edo took heart from these developments and tried to

reassert Tokugawa control more broadly. The latter part of 1863 and
most of 1864 saw the bakufu leaders advocating reconciliation with
the court, but this time to their own, and not to the great lords’,
advantage.

The loyalist military and political setbacks came in quick succes-
sion. In September 1863, Aizu troops staged a successful coup with
the assistance of Satsuma to drive Chôshû units out of Kyoto and
thereby make it impossible for Chôshû loyalist leaders to communicate
with and claim the authorization of the court. In the Kyoto area two
loyalist risings, one led by a Tosa figure and the other by a Fukuoka
shishi, were crushed by bakufu units when they tried to rally rural
leaders to the loyalist cause and set up a regional political base. Nearer
to Edo, in the summer of 1864, a loyalist movement led by elements of
the Mito samurai class that began as the product of confusion over
bakufu purposes was exacerbated by obtuse leaders and erupted into
full-scale civil war. When it was finally crushed five months later, the
domain of Mito was for all practical purposes eliminated as an effective
political force. Over one thousand men died in the fighting, and hun-
dreds of the holdouts who had been taken prisoner were executed the
next year. Also during the summer of 1864, Chôshû loyalist units tried
to avenge their setback by staging a military invasion of Kyoto that
was driven back, though at immense loss of property in the fighting
and fires that swept through the ancient capital. Leading loyalist court
nobles fled to Chôshû with the defeated loyalists, thus ridding the
court of some of its most troublesome elements. 39 Though discomfited
by the way that suppression efforts had revealed its military ineptness,
the bakufu stood to gain from this new evidence of loyalist rashness
and insubordination, and it now tried to demonstrate its own loyalty to
the court’s instructions. During the shogun’s first visit to Kyoto, the
bakufu had accepted the imperial order for exclusion, and Tokugawa
Yoshinobu had been named supreme commander of Imperial De-
fense. Yoshinobu now assumed a steadily larger role in Kyoto, though
not without incurring the suspicions of Edo bureaucrats that his appar-
tent acceptance of expulsion was wrongheaded and impractical.

For a few months after the shogun’s return to Edo in the summer of
1863, the bakufu basked in the discomfiture of its Chôshû critics.
Unfortunately, however, Kyoto’s approval still hinged on the imple-

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39 The fullest account of the Mito rebellion in English can be found in Totman, *Collapse*, pp.
208–46; Tosa in Jansen, *Sakamoto*, pp. 145–52; and loyalist reverses more generally in
mentation of promises of expulsion that were clearly impossible to keep. Within months the shogun was in receipt of an imperial order directing him to return to Kyoto to report on the progress he was making in closing Yokohama. Edo bureaucrats put off compliance as long as they could, citing the pressure of diplomatic efforts and national politics. Their arguments had a good deal of substance, for the early stages of the unrest that would result in the Mito rising were evident, and a disastrous fire had reduced much of the shogunal castle complex to ashes. But by early 1864 the shogun was back in Kyoto, now in much higher favor, privileged with a number of audiences with Emperor Kōmei and able, through his appointment of Matsudaira Katamori of Aizu as guardian of the capital and the exclusion of Chōshū, to exert exclusive authority over access to the court.

Unfortunately these “gains” were still premised on promises of expulsion. When the bakufu informed the daimyo that it had been decided to work toward the closing of Yokohama, it encouraged some to press for stronger measures at the same time that it convinced the foreign emissaries of its mendacity. And when bakufu bureaucrats tried to extend their reassertion of control over Kyoto with steps to move toward a return of daimyo residence at Edo, they received lame excuses that should have told them that their old political primacy could not be restored.

The high point of the new bakufu enthusiasm for kōbu-gattai – on its own terms – came in 1864 after the impetuous attack of the Chōshū loyalists had resulted in a devastated Kyoto and an indignant court purged of its most extremist nobles. Ironically, the bakufu’s decision to punish Chōshū, which was demanded by the court in late summer, was made more attractive because of the prior demands of the foreign powers, who wanted retribution for the shelling of their vessels. At first the bakufu tried to tie that punishment to the closing of Yokohama, only to have the imperialist powers respond that they would then undertake it themselves at bakufu expense. They did so in late summer, before the bakufu expedition got under way, and submitted as their bill the demand for the indemnity of three million Mexican dollars, which they offered to waive in return for immediate opening of an additional port. Bakufu administrators, committed by their promises to the court to have fewer and not more ports, saw no alternative but to agree to pay the indemnity, although doing that also strained their understanding with the court.

The court now insisted that the bakufu go ahead with its own punishment of Chōshū, thereby adding further expenses to the heavily burdened regime. A ponderous allied force commanded by the Toku-
gawa daimyo of Owari, with Saigō Takamori of Satsuma as his chief of staff, got under way and seemed for a brief moment to represent the return of the kind of Tokugawa-led coalitions that had been formed in earlier centuries. Yet the conditions were very different; it was not in the interest of allied daimyo to deplete their own forces for bakufu purposes or to provide precedents for the future by crushing the Chōshū dissidents. Consequently, a compromise, one that disappointed both court hard-liners and Edo traditionalists, was worked out. The expedition was declared a success, and the armies were disbanded before Edo had given its full approval. Under the terms, Chōshū was to offer a formal apology, suppress the irregular militia companies that had attacked Kyoto, turn over the loyalist court nobles who had fled to Chōshū to Fukuoka for custody, and order the suicide of the three domain elders (karō) who had been responsible for the mistaken loyalist attacks. The nobles were duly transferred and the apology delivered, together with the heads of the three karō.

This settlement was acceptable to the bakufu leaders in Kyoto, but men in Edo anxious to reassert full Tokugawa primacy did not find it punishment enough. They wanted the terms strengthened to include the bringing of the Chōshū daimyo and his heir to Edo, as a symbol of submission and as a prelude to the return of other major daimyo to residence there. In short, the squelching of loyalist dissidence in the Kyoto and Edo areas and the encouraging evidence of ascendancy over Chōshū had brought personnel shifts that saw the hard-liners again take over bakufu policy positions. Some were seasoned specialists in foreign affairs, wanted an end to the charade of exclusion, and thought the time had come for closer coordination of policy planning and implementation. Fudai traditionalists in Edo were fully supportive of this and desirous that the influence of the “outsiders” who represented the Tokugawa cause in Kyoto be lessened. This medley of purposes produced a consensus that led to the preparation of a second Chōshū expedition, the death of young Iemochi in Osaka where he had gone to “lead” his armies, and the disasters of the second Chōshū campaign of 1866. By then daimyo awareness of Tokugawa purposes had also produced a very different political climate, one that made all such plans depend on a convincing military victory.

**REGIONAL REFORM**

With central power diminishing, the future of Japan was to be decided by a contest among regional powers, and the chief contestants were the great domains of southwest Japan and the bakufu itself. Preparation
for the struggle was primarily military and secondarily administrative. What counted was the ability to marshal resources and to use them effectively within a social context of obsolescent status distinctions.

Military reforms had been anticipated in some of the frantic preparations for possible war that followed the coming of Commodore Perry. In the domain of Tosa in the 1850s, for instance, desperate efforts were mounted to procure and produce better weapons. Officials were sent to Satsuma to study efforts that had been made to build a reverberatory furnace for arms production. The most important Tosa innovation was probably the decision to form a people’s corps (mim-peita) made up of commoner formations commanded by rural samurai (gōshi). But these efforts were abandoned after a few years’ experience; war with the West had not eventuated; and Yoshida Tōyō, the administrator who had sponsored these efforts, was assassinated by the loyalists. The loyalists who succeeded him in control of domain fortunes were men of the sword and not of the gun.

In Chōshū, however, loyalist extremism accommodated Western arms and methods. In that domain, military reforms began in the 1860s, and as extremism drove the han into solitary opposition to the bakufu and its allies, the sense of crisis served to speed up military reform. The innovation for which Chōshū was to become best known was the recruitment of militia companies (shotai) with complements drawn from both samurai and nonsamurai; of these the Kiheitai are the most famous. Some of these companies were set up by government action, and others collected around extremist samurai who lived away from the castle town. All the companies were made up of samurai and commoners. The commoners showed a wide range of origin (hunters, mountain priests, townsmen, and fishermen), but the largest category seems to have been sons of village headmen. Thus the leaders of these companies were the sort of men who exercised effective, as opposed to formal, authority in the countryside. The companies also included rōnin from other areas. In the fighting that followed in 1866 and 1868, these units fought with tenacity and even ferocity. They must have known that if they failed, neither the bakufu victors nor the highly placed Chōshū conservatives would have shown much compassion. More than any other domain, Chōshū was becoming a small-scale “nation in arms” of the sort that the Meiji modernizers wanted.

The capitulation of the Chōshū government to the first expedition mounted by the bakufu displeased loyalists of many sorts in Chōshū, but none more so than the military units that were to be disbanded by the terms of the settlement. One of these, led by Takasugi Shinsaku,
revolted and seized a government office in Shimonoseki before the ink was even dry on the agreements, thereby producing an offer from the bakufu negotiators to provide a body of troops to help the domain regulars suppress them. The Chōshū administration, confident in its own ability to subdue the militia, declined, but its confidence proved misplaced. Within a short time, additional shotai victories had produced an advance on the castle town itself and a strong sentiment of criticism against the domain administration that had let the civil war come about. This situation was resolved by the emergence of a new domain administration in the early spring of 1865 that represented a coalition of extremist and moderate samurai. This group led the domain on its collision course with the bakufu and into the early Restoration government.

The Chōshū violence had elements of class or at least of status conflict, and yet it was not a contest between upper and lower in any simple sense. The new administration produced a commitment to the loyalist cause, yet it was also staunchly Chōshū centered in values and objectives. It was nominally antiforeign and exclusionist in its goals, and yet places of influence were beginning to be found for individuals who knew the West. Itō Hirobumi, one of the future leaders of the Meiji state, symbolized the course of a leadership generation in the shifts of his career: a student of Yoshida Shōin, then a student in England, an interpreter and translator in the concluding stages of the foreign bombardment of Shimonoseki, next a commander of a militia company, and finally a protégé and trusted lieutenant of Kido Taka-yoshi, probably the single most important figure in the new Chōshū administration. Itō was of modest rank and origin. Responsibility and opportunity sobered judgment, and information about the outer world gradually moderated the extremism of the young warriors. Yet what seemed to their elders reckless “extremism” had brought them to power within Chōshū, and their pursuit of the bakufu was not likely to be more conciliatory.

Satsuma, unlike Chōshū, experienced no internal violence or political upset. Its samurai numbers were large and needed no supplement of commoners; distinctions of rank and income within its samurai ranks were so large that rifle-bearing companies could be mounted with little of the status compunctions that hampered the bakufu levies. Most importantly, however, the Satsuma regent Shimazu Hisamitsu was able to maintain political control and enlisted the talents of Saigō Takamori and Ōkubo Toshimichi, men who had been tempered by danger and punishment in 1858. They helped suppress Satsuma ex-
tremists at the beginning of the kōbu-gattai movement in 1862, and by 1865–6 they recognized and acted on the need for the domain to know more about the West. Fourteen students were selected and sent to London under the guidance of domain officials. Once in Europe the students were set to studying a variety of technological and military specialties. Before long they were joined by a second group. Satsuma officials in Europe tried to secure for their domain status as an independent country for the Paris Exposition of 1867, citing as reason the domain’s control of Okinawa. They negotiated a number of agreements for industrial and mining operations, and although little came of most of these, the purchase of five thousand rifles added important strength to the Satsuma military. Thus, whereas Chōshū, under great military pressure from without, underwent a political upset that placed power in the hands of “extremists” who had use for the advice of the Western-experienced Itō and Inoue Kaoru, Satsuma, without the goad that military crisis provided for administrative change in Chōshū, was, thanks to the English bombardment of Kagoshima, no less alert to the need for Western equipment. Expulsion, one may conclude, was now a dead letter (though it remained a useful slogan) after the shellings of Kagoshima and Chōshū. The overthrow of the bakufu, which was not a practical proposition before the reforms of 1862, had become a goal of many men by 1865.

The changes of the early 1860s had made the bakufu itself a regional power. No set of reforms was more impressive and more extensive than the changes that the Tokugawa leaders initiated in their Kinai and Kantō territories. The Osaka and Edo plains were under full foreign and Japanese observation and hence subject to all the interference that national and international politics could provide. These territories were also divided between those under direct bakufu administration and the lands of minor daimyo and hatamoto who administered their holdings independently. Cumulatively the largest holdings of any daimyo in the Tokugawa structure, the Tokugawa tenryō was also the most affected by urban and national commerce and communications, the most “modern” in economic developments, and the most lightly invested by resident samurai. In Tokugawa lands, samurai as a percentage of domain population were relatively few and highly urbanized. The bakufu thus faced particular problems in its military modernization.

The bakufu’s Bunkyū reforms of 1862 included administrative and military changes as well as the relaxation of daimyo controls that have already been discussed. On the whole, the administrative changes were more successful than the political changes. New procedures were
developed for the rapid promotion of able men. Unessential jobs were eliminated; so many, in fact, that the unemployment that resulted required special programs of aid and relief for the newly unfortunate.

Military reforms found the bakufu (and its rivals) struggling to acquire the most lethal weapons at a time when firearms were undergoing rapid change in the Western world. A second problem was to transform the corps of house retainers (hatamoto and gokenin) into rifle companies. This last was easier to do in theory than in practice, for the urbanized samurai, who were essentially an army of occupation that had spent many generations in peace and quiet, often resisted drill.40

Extensive plans were worked out for a modern army and navy within the confines of the troop strength that retainers were expected to be able to provide. Efforts were made to correlate income to the rank structure of the modern forces, and planners set the goal of drawing one-half of those forces from the bakufu's house retainers. Thus it was assumed from the outset that it would be necessary to augment samurai with commoner strength.

Naval training got its start when a small Dutch training contingent came to Nagasaki in the 1850s; in the early 1860s Katsu Kaishū was assigned the responsibility of organizing a naval training school at Hyōgo. Katsu's tendency to recruit his men from many areas alarmed bakufu conservatives, who saw the institution becoming a nest of loyalists, and so Katsu was replaced in 1864. The point is significant: Bakufu reformers tended to draw on men of many areas, but the great southwestern han could be exclusive and probably had more esprit de corps. Sustained efforts were devoted to the land arm of the new military structure. By 1864 some ten thousand weapons had been imported through Yokohama, and from then to the end of the bakufu, gunrunning to Yokohama and to Nagasaki (for the southwestern domains) proved one of the most lucrative aspects of trade at the ports. As the second expedition against Choshū drew near in 1865, bakufu leaders were beginning to realize that their reliance on their retainers (and especially the landholding hatamoto) would have to change. First they tried to get them to provide conscripts as part of their feudal military service requirement, but before long it became clear that a better system of recruiting commoners was needed. As the forces took shape, the composition of the principal rifle-bearing units gradually

40 For Satsuma, Beasley, Meiji Restoration, p. 246; for bakufu military reforms, Totman, Collapse, pp. 25–7: (for Bunkyū), p. 182 (for 1864), and p. 199 (for 1865). Totman's discussion of technological changes involved in muzzle loaders, Minie rifles, breech-loading rifles, and multishot pistols, p. 25, is particularly useful.
became commoner based. By degrees, hatamoto military service requirements were becoming commuted to a money tax that was used to cover the costs of conscripting and training peasants. All of this affected only part of the Tokugawa vassal armies, but it was that part that indicated future trends.41

The Tokugawa military reforms required extensive foreign cooperation, but as the nominal government of the entire country, the bakufu had the best access to foreign assistance. Its first moves were by way of the traditional link with Holland, and in the fall of 1864 three navy officers were sent to the Netherlands to study shipyards and other Western military developments. Negotiations for a shipyard were begun with the Dutch and also for a warship; talks also began for the building of a warship (the future Stonewall) in the United States.

But the most important channel of foreign assistance was that with France. Minister Leon Roches, who arrived in Japan in April 1864, worked unceasingly to consolidate for his country the role of principal source for military — and, he hoped, political — reform in Japan. Those plans developed gradually; they represented Roches’ enthusiasm and not that of his government. Foreign aid never assumed the dimensions that the bakufu’s domestic rivals feared it would, because neither Tokugawa nor French leaders were prepared to take risks. Yet the plans were extensive and stand as reminders of the possible impact that imperialist competition could have had on a developing Japan.42

Roches began with specific goals: The French silk industry was in dire need of help from Japan because of a silkworm blight, and that made him the bakufu’s most importunate customer. But he was free with additional suggestions. Before long he had secured the appointment of Kurimoto Joun as special liaison officer between himself and the rōjū, and by the end of 1864, bakufu officials had requested his help in planning for the construction of a naval yard and arsenal at Yokosuka. Gradually confidence in Roches’ intentions developed. In 1865 a mission was sent to Europe to seek military assistance as well as machinery and equipment for Yokosuka. Arrangements for a mint and a military training mission took shape, and bakufu officials began to develop hopes of a special source of access to the technology and training they knew they needed.

41 Totman, Collapse, p. 182. For purposes of brevity, this discussion telescopes changes that came at different speeds in different periods and areas.
These experiments gathered momentum with proposals for an officially sponsored trading company that would generate funds for bakufu purchases abroad. The banker Fleury-Herard was invested as the bakufu representative in Paris and put in charge of purchasing equipment for a foundry and mint. French advice (though not, it should be noted, French money), began to pour into Tokugawa circles about ways to restructure Japan’s economy and administration in order to speed modernization and build up power. Long before much could come of this, however, the Tokugawa forces were gathering in Osaka to carry out the second punitive expedition against Chōshū. When hostilities broke out in the summer of 1866, it was still a largely traditional congeries of bakufu vassal forces that tried to contest the issue with the more highly motivated Chōshū units.

The second war with Chōshū proved a disaster. Although elements of the bakufu’s new units were employed, they were fielded together with old-style units from other han. The bakufu army was a coalition of vassals’ armies, as had always been the case, enabling the Chōshū warriors to select their target and attack the Tokugawa forces where they were weakest. Bakufu efforts to attack Chōshū at each of its borders were poorly coordinated, and the forces were poorly led. While all this was in progress, the young shogun Iemochi died at Osaka.

When the full scale of the military disasters became clear, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, now the ranking figure on the bakufu side, reluctantly decided that the battle would have to be broken off and seized upon the shogun’s death as a face-saving reason for a cease-fire. Yet the cease-fire left Chōshū troops occupying areas of bakufu and fudai land, and it dealt the shogunate a blow in prestige from which it never fully recovered.

The defeat of the bakufu armies by Chōshū gave the Tokugawa modernization movement new urgency. The last year of the Tokugawa shogunate saw sweeping changes that portended centralization, rationalization, and bureaucratization. Once Yoshinobu was fully invested as shogun, with full honors and titles, the reconstruction of the bakufu began in earnest. Foreign relations were regularized. Permanent missions were set up in capitals. Yoshinobu’s younger brother Akitake was sent to France as the bakufu representative at the Paris Exposition of 1867, and plans called for him to spend years of study there to prepare him for future leadership. Appointive changes brought to office some of the most effective of the modernizing officials of the recent half-decade. The entire foreign diplomatic corps was invited to Osaka for an audi-
ence with the new shogun, who entertained them at a dinner prepared by a newly employed French chef. Western dress replaced Japanese at the shogunal court for that occasion.

Numerous requests for advice were addressed to Roches, and he answered during long sessions with senior officials and a private audience with the shogun Yoshinobu himself. The list of questions covered administrative changes, taxes, military development, mineral resource development, economic growth, queries about Switzerland and Prussia, and questions about the abolition of feudalism by European countries. Administrative reforms followed; these set up a sort of cabinet system with specialized responsibilities replacing the monthly rotation of all-purpose generalists that had been the pattern. New personnel practices were designed to facilitate the selection of competent officials, with a regularized salary system for government departments. A great deal of time went into the preparation of diagrams laying out specific administrative responsibilities and procedures, and initial steps working toward the commutation of vassal lands and stipends developed. Shogunal power in the Edo area was strengthened by measures to call in small nearby fiefs in order to rationalize and centralize administrative procedures. Military reforms were pushed particularly rapidly. A French military mission arrived in January 1867. Western uniforms were adopted; obsolete forces were disbanded; and steps were taken toward the substitution of a monetized tax on house vassals as the basis for a peasant conscription system. Nishi Amane, newly returned from study in Holland, was ordered to draw up a more modern scheme of government and produced a parliamentary draft that envisioned a division of power among the court, an executive branch, and a bicameral legislature with an upper house of daimyo empowered to dissolve the lower house.

As a result, it can be asserted that the bakufu leaders were launching a modernization program – perhaps a “Tokugawa restoration” – that would in time have emulated at many points the programs adopted by their successors in the Meiji government. Seen in this light, it can be said that the civil war of 1868 was fought over the issue not of whether Tokugawa feudalism would survive but whether its demise would be presided over by Tokugawa or anti-Tokugawa leaders. It was no longer a matter of saving the bakufu system but of replacing it, now that it was collapsing. As Totman said of the period immediately before the summer war, “there was no longer in Japan an authority

symbol capable of moving the feudal lords. There was no national polity; the bakuhan system no longer existed.  

Ironically, however, these needs were probably seen more clearly by the bakufu leaders than by the southwestern lords who opposed them.

The changes launched in Edo are difficult to evaluate, for they did not mature in time to help the bakufu; it is always easier to sketch reforms than to carry them out. Nevertheless, the fear that they would result in a greatly strengthened shogunate was an important factor in impelling leaders in Satsuma and Chōshū to try to anticipate such success with efforts of their own to overthrow it. What they particularly feared was that the administration of Yoshinobu would use French military and administrative assistance to build a central government capable of destroying the daimyo, with the shogun serving as its chief executive officer.

In 1867, the death of Emperor Kōmei of smallpox brought changes at the court as well. Though consistently antiforeign, Kōmei had usually been well disposed toward the bakufu as represented by Tokugawa Yoshinobu, with whom he had established relations of considerable trust. With the succession of the boy Mutsuhito, the future Meiji emperor, court nobles had a new field for political maneuver. The most able and important of those courtiers was now Iwakura Tomomi, a shrewd judge of events and possibilities. By the fall of 1866 Iwakura was writing that the court had the choice of siding with the bakufu against Chōshū and, possibly, Satsuma, or maneuvering to make itself the center of a new united polity. Because bakufu prestige and power were in decline, he suggested that "the Emperor should issue orders to the Bakufu that from now on it must set aside its selfish ways, acting in accordance with public principle; that imperial rule must be restored; and that thereafter the Tokugawa house must work in concert with the great domains in the Emperor’s service." To restore national prestige and handle the foreigners, the country would have to be united, and "for policy and administration to have a single source, the Court must be made the center of national government." In additional documents Iwakura sounded more and more like the Satsuma leaders with whom he communicated, as when he wrote: "In the heavens there are not two suns. On earth there are not two monarchs. Surely

44 Totman, Collapse, p. 291.
No country can survive unless government edicts stem from a single source. . . . Hence it is my desire that we should act vigorously to abolish the Bakufu" and relegate the Tokugawa house to the ranks of the great domains.45 Some of this language was echoed in future proposals, as in a Satsuma–Tosa document worked out in the summer of 1867:

There cannot be two rulers in a land, or two heads in a house, and it is most reasonable to return administration and justice to one ruler. . . . It is evident that we must reform our regulations, return political power to the court, form a council of feudal lords and conduct affairs in line with the desires of the people. . . . only then can we face all nations without shame and establish our national polity.46

These notes of national danger, international prestige, and the need for an effective, single center of government recur in many pronouncements of late Tokugawa days. In fact Japan now had not only two governments but even two bakufus, given the presence of Yoshinobu in Osaka/Kyoto and the more Tokugawa-centered world of the bureaucrats at Edo.

Although such divisions of power seemed impossible to men like Iwakura and many others, they also made it troublesome for foreign representatives who wanted firm guarantees of their privileges and a clear understanding as to the channels of power. Roches accepted the bakufu as a legitimate national government and devoted his efforts to help it become a more effective one. His British counterpart Harry Parkes was not sure and suspected that Japan would not have a real government until basic changes in Edo–Kyoto relations took place. Though junior to Roches in time of residence, Parkes proved a ruthless competitor, on one occasion forcing his way into a private meeting between Roches and Yoshinobu to insist on equal treatment as Her Majesty’s representative. When the bakufu requested postponement of the second installment of the enormous indemnity exacted for Shimonoseki because of the costs that had been incurred in the preparation of the second campaign against Chōshū, Parkes demanded an accounting of those costs. When the bakufu argued court opposition as grounds for delay on Hyōgo, Parkes demanded— and secured— explicit court approval of the treaties by staging a demarche at Osaka in November 1865. When he saw the bakufu’s difficulties with its recalcitrant daimyo, Parkes concluded that England, in a spirit of neutrality, should cultivate those daimyo as possible future power

holders, and he alarmed bakufu officials by visiting several castle towns in the southwestern domains, including Kagoshima. Parkes's interpreter Ernest Satow, probably the best informed foreigner in late Tokugawa Japan, maintained close friendships with the leaders of the southwestern han and wrote a pamphlet (which was immediately translated into Japanese) arguing that English policy should work toward the creation of a council of great lords, of whom the Tokugawa head would be one, under the emperor, in order to secure binding guarantees of foreign privileges and rights. This private opinion was widely taken to represent English policy and seemed to be in the process of implementation by the actions of Harry Parkes. Thus foreign as well as court and daimyo opinion was working to exacerbate unstable national politics.

As the great domains shook off their subordination to bakufu leadership, they began to negotiate private agreements among themselves. These were no longer the personal discussions of daimyo, as in the early years, but policy decisions reached by the bureaucratic leaders who staffed han administrations. The most important of these was an agreement between Satsuma and Chōshū that was worked out early in 1866 to lessen the possible dangers for Chōshū in the approaching second bakufu punitive campaign. The agreement was made possible by the efforts of Sakamoto Ryōma and Nakaoka Shintarō of Tosa who provided their good offices. In February 1866, Kido Takayoshi, for Chōshū, and Saigō Takamori, for Satsuma, agreed that Satsuma would provide its help in mediating for Chōshū at court; it would do its best to prevent the bakufu from crushing Chōshū; it would secure Kyoto if necessary; and it would join with Chōshū, once that domain had been pardoned, in working for “the glory of the Imperial country.”

After the defeat of the bakufu armies at the hands of Chōshū, the Satsuma–Tosa agreement that has been mentioned added another agreement. The two domains agreed on a program for politics: The court should have full authority, and a council with two houses would be established in Kyoto, one chamber staffed with daimyo and the other made up of “retainers and even commoners.” The shogunate as such would be abolished. New treaties would be drawn up with the foreign powers “on the basis of reason and justice”; institutions would be revised and brought up-to-date; and self-interest was everywhere to take second place to the consciousness of the larger national good.

This optimistic view of an unselfish future, clearly a legacy of the kobu-gattai persuasion, represented a Tosa plan to secure a peaceful solution to Japan’s political crises. Chōshū, flushed with its victories in
the summer war, was still technically under the ban of both court and bakufu and determined to exploit its military advantage in further violence. Simultaneously, the treaty powers were demanding action on the opening of Hyōgo, which was scheduled for the summer of 1867. Once again the great lords assembled to discuss the crisis. Matsudaira Shungaku, Shimazu Hisamitsu, Yamauchi Yōdō, and Date Munenari proposed to Yoshinobu that the bakufu combine a solution to the two and proposed to the court a pardon of Chōshū together with court approval for the opening of Hyōgo. Yoshinobu, however, was inclined to hold out for the impossible condition of an apology from Chōshū, but because Hyōgo could not wait, he proceeded to wrest approval from the court for that opening on grounds of pressing national danger.

This stance confirmed Satsuma’s discouragement with even a reformed bakufu and helped produce a new Satsuma–Chōshū agreement for a military coup against the shogunate in the summer of 1867. The Tosa leaders, holding a median position, still tried to head this off with a peaceful solution. Tosa’s size made it fearful of losing out in a military showdown. Its relationship to the bakufu, which had treated the Yamauchi house favorably, was also one of obligation and loyalty. All this reinforced hopes of a negotiated settlement by which the shogun would agree to step down and become one of the great lords in a new conciliar structure under the aegis of the throne. Similar hopes had been at the heart of the kōbu-gattai movement since 1862. Matsudaira Shungaku reappeared on the scene once again. Sakamoto Ryōma, once a Tosa loyalist and then an associate of the bakufu official Katsu Kaishū, subsequently sheltered by Satsuma and central to the Satsuma–Chōshū agreement of 1866, now worked out an eight-point program that contained Tosa hopes for a negotiated settlement. The Satsuma leaders who willingly subscribed to this program in endorsing the Satsuma–Tosa compact in the summer of 1867 were quite willing to help propose the bakufu’s voluntary dissolution and were prepared to use force if a peaceful settlement should fail.

These currents converged in November 1867. While Edo modernizers were pushing reforms to produce a more effective bakufu and Chōshū and Satsuma leaders were readying their troops for a military showdown, Tosa representatives in Kyoto presented Yoshinobu with Yamauchi Yōdō’s proposal that he resign his office and titles. The proposal contained eight parts: The court would rule, but a two-house council, made up of daimyo and court nobles, would be established; new treaties would be worked out; an imperial army and navy would
be established; errors of the past in procedure and institutions would be abolished; wrong customs in the court would be reformed; and once again, self-interest would be put aside.

Yoshinobu accepted the proposal. He did so without consulting the Edo government leaders and after almost no consultation in Kyoto. Clearly he saw it as a way of escaping his predicament of responsibility without power and retaining the power base that his reforms were building at Edo. Once the court accepted his resignation as shogun, the Tokugawa polity of 267 years formally came to an end.

But there was still nothing to replace it. The council of daimyo did not materialize, for uncertainty was so widespread that only sixteen daimyo arrived in Kyoto in response to a court request for attendance. Kōbu-gattai proved no more viable in 1867 than it had been in 1862. Soon large contingents of samurai were being sent to Kyoto; parts of the Chōshū domain army, still unpardoned, were nearing the city. The Satsuma–Chōshū plans for a military coup were still intact, and tension grew steadily. On January 2 and 3, 1868, an assembly at the court was convened, dominated by Iwakura and Satsuma men. Yoshinobu and his closest supporters, suspicious of what was planned, declined to attend. The meeting resolved to transfer the palace guard from bakufu to non-Tokugawa hands, to abolish old offices, and to demand the surrender of Tokugawa domains to the "court." Yoshinobu, in doubt as to his next step, withdrew to Osaka.

For over three weeks, things were at a standstill. Court representatives ordered Yoshinobu to appear in formal contrition and surrender, only to have him propose that all daimyo dedicate a comparable fraction of their income and land to the court. Roches offered Yoshinobu such French aid as he could muster, an offer that was not accepted, but neither was the advice of bakufu leaders who wanted to fight. A powerful document from Yoshinobu to the court calling attention to Satsuma's duplicity and his own exemplary behavior was kept from the young emperor. The former shogun's indecision began to cost him the support of even Tokugawa houses. Finally, in late January 1868, Yoshinobu decided to return to Kyoto with a body of troops to remonstrate. His commanders did not expect to have to fight their way back; their formations and composition represented an unlikely mixture of modern and premodern companies. To their misfortune they were

47 The proposal read: "We must have a force which will have no equal in the world."
opposed and ambushed by modern Satsuma and Chōshū units that stopped them and drove them back. The civil war had begun; force would decide the issue.

Fighting at Fushimi-Toba went on for four days and produced a casualty count of five hundred dead and one thousand to fifteen hundred wounded. On both sides, units fought well, but the leadership and determination of forces committed to the Kyoto cause was superior to that on the bakufu side. The bakufu commanders seem to have let a fear of popular disorder keep them from using all their Western-trained and armed troops at the front, whereas their adversaries had their best units at the right places. The bakufu units, trying to advance along two narrow roads, one on either side of the Yodo River, had the harder task to carry out. In some units, morale was a problem, but others, notably those of Aizu, fought with dash and courage.

When the dimensions of this new disaster were apparent, Tokugawa Yoshinobu and his bakufu army headed north for Edo. Within two weeks the former shogun had decided against further resistance to his enemies, despite Roches' encouragement and advice that he try again. The bakufu army was dismantled as the daimyo took their units to their own domains, some to join and others to apologize and submit to the “imperial” armies that advanced from the south. In the spring of 1868 Edo itself was surrendered by the bakufu official Katsu Kaishū to an imperial army commanded by Saigō Takamori.

But the war was not over, for the fighting known as the Boshin conflict went on until May 1869, when the Tokugawa naval units that had sailed to Hokkaido and held out there under the command of Enomoto Takeaki surrendered. The war in the northeast had been carried on by a daimyo alliance headed by the Sendai domain. Its cause was really not that of the Tokugawa, which was clearly doomed, but, rather, that of its region against the distrusted southerners from Satsuma and Chōshū. This “Northeastern League,” in fact, claimed that its members were more loyal to the emperor than were the “selfish and self-serving” southerners. The most fierce battle of the campaign came at Aizu castle in Wakamatsu, where the men of Matsudaira Katamori, former shugo of Kyoto and long a thorn in the side of Satsuma and Chōshū, fought desperately. The castle was put to the torch, and Aizu lost almost three thousand samurai in the war, more than the combined total of the opposition. After its defeat, the domain was broken up, and its ruling family was moved to a niggardly and inhospitable plot of ground unable to support the remnants of its former retainer force. Katamori himself was made a Shinto priest,
guardian of the Tokugawa burial shrines. No other domain was treated as harshly, though a number of recalcitrant daimyo were forced into retirement and others into house arrest. Tokugawa Yoshinobu himself was ordered to retire as house head and withdrew to Numazu in Shizuoka where he did his best to maintain his retainers. By the 1890s he had been received by the emperor and restored to honor. His successor, Iesato, was first head of the House of Peers.

The regime that replaced the bakufu, as Chapter 10 makes clear, underwent many changes before becoming the Meiji government. Its first institutional probings came in the January meetings that maneuvered Yoshinobu into opposition. The same meeting that declared bakufu offices abolished established a new three-tier structure of sōsai, gijō (councilors), and san'yō (junior councilors) and named Prince Arisugawa sōsai in order to make the greatest possible use of imperial legitimacy. Gradually, however, status and office filtered downward to the samurai leaders of the southwestern han whose lords dominated the original table of organization, and as that process matured, the Meiji government took form.

In a basic sense, the program of the new government was enunciated as early as the spring of 1868, at a time when the regime was still seeking to reassure the doubtful and to enlist the wavering. In April, one day after Katsu and Saigō negotiated the surrender of Edo, the young emperor was presented with what became known as the “Charter Oath,” five articles that bridged the transition from the Tosa proposals of 1867 to the constitutional order of the modern Japanese state. These articles promised the creation of “deliberative councils” and the determination of policies on the basis of “general opinion,” the cooperation of all classes in carrying out the administration of affairs of state, full opportunity for commoners as well as for officials, and the abolition of “evil customs of the past.” They also proposed basing everything on the “just laws of nature.” Finally, a search for knowledge “throughout the world” would follow in order to “strengthen the foundation of imperial rule.” This was a document couched in terms sufficiently general to conform to the social structure of its day, but it also held out the possibility of changes so basic that it could still be cited as authorization for the democratic institutional changes that followed World War II.

THE RESTORATION IN HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

If the definition of the Meiji Restoration is limited to the events of 1867 and 1868, it constituted little more than a coup that shifted rule from one sector of the ruling class to another. But when it is considered as a larger process, one that began before mid-century and that culminated in the modern state at the century's end, it can be seen to have brought revolutionary changes in Japanese society. Studies of these events during the century that followed them have inevitably been intertwined with the climate of opinion within which they were carried on. The nature of the nineteenth-century historical process, and the motive forces involved, have provided basic problems of classification and analysis.

The orthodox view of Japanese history before 1945, and one that is by no means dead, was based on interpretations that emphasized the maturization of currents of imperial loyalism through the Tokugawa period. With the coming of Perry and the foreign danger, the textbooks explained, selfless patriots—the shishi—fought to reverse their han policies and to defeat the bakufu by wakening long-slumbering imperial and national consciousness. Saigō, Ōkubo, Iwakura, Kido, and all the heirs of Yoshida Shōin were portrayed as though foretold by anguished loyalists of earlier times. Laudatory biographies told their stories as they themselves would have wished to be remembered. Official historiographical institutes provided proportional representation for the southwestern han to make certain that the praise would be allocated equitably. These views were spread by a modern education system that was centered on patriotism and loyalty, reinforced by the popular press, and fortified by scholarly compilations. So brief a summary risks distortion. There was enough of substance in the commitment of Restoration figures, enough romance and color in what they did, and enough national pride in what they produced to retain for the loyalist leaders a secure place in any historiography. But the identification of their success with morality and patriotism also introduced a strong bias in much that was written in a highly nationalistic setting.

Yet the nationalist emphasis of prewar history had developed in a context of much more critical writing. By the 1880s, historians had begun to fit Japan's experience into international models of liberal and capitalist societies, and some were becoming troubled by the disparities they sensed between the "deliberative councils" that had been promised and the reality of the Imperial Diet they saw approaching. Japan seemed to be eclipsing the timetable of other countries in mod-
ernization, but the reforms granted "from above" were somehow different from the reforms won from below. By late Meiji times the conservative and pragmatic government leaders in power also seemed quite unlike the hotheaded, two-sworded idealists of romantic memory. To some, they were becoming Japan's new problem, and judgments of the bakufu softened as a result. By the early twentieth century a new generation of writers had begun to separate the leaders from what they had brought about, to minimize the conflicts, and to explain the Restoration and modernization programs by showing the material advances that had taken place in Japanese society under Tokugawa rule. Tokutomi Sohō argued that it was not the Meiji leaders but inexorable trends that had created the new Japan. He and others stressed the fragility of feudal society, and the growing independence of stouthearted rural leaders, as the critical factors in the overthrow of Tokugawa feudalism. In turn, such interpretations were usually related to political advocacy and the desire to find legitimacy for liberalism and to advance social reform in Japan. By the 1890s, however, the flush of victory over China, soon to be followed by the conquest of Russia, the maturation of the ideology of the imperial state, and the completion of the network of national schools all combined to reinforce the official orthodoxy with its sanctification of the modern state. Tokugawa Yoshinobu himself, in his memoirs (1915) and in an authorized biography (1918), became a loyalist.

After World War I, Marxist analysis provided a new and powerful teleological expectation of what the Restoration should or could have produced. Economic instability culminating in the world depression, increased political and intellectual surveillance consequent to the formation of the Japan Communist Party in the form of the Peace Preservation Act of 1925, and the aggressive course of Japanese foreign policy all combined to encourage new evaluations of Japan's recent past. Marxist historians divided into the Labor-Farmer (rōnō) group, which was prepared to describe the Restoration as a basically bourgeois movement that had ended feudalism in Japan, and the gloomier Lectures (kōza) group which held that feudal relationships had lived on in the countryside through noneconomic and non-contractual

restraints on tenants as the basis of a new "absolutism" built around the "emperor system," a term that was utilized in the Japan Communist Party theses of 1932. Like their Meiji predecessors, these historians were directing and relating their views to problems of political advocacy.50

Japan's surrender in 1945 freed the air of "emperor system" orthodoxy (although it replaced it with equally compulsive derogation for a time) and produced immensely important work that retained some of the Marxist categories without repeating the simplistic formulas of much of the earlier writing. Nevertheless, the presentist orientation of historical evaluation continued, and many writers' concerns were to identify and eliminate feudal remnants and advance democracy.51

When the focus of research is brought closer to the decade in which the bakufu was toppled, problems still outnumber answers. The principal actors among the leaders have been clearly delineated, but the source of their backing remains a matter of dispute. Shibahara Takuji, after summarizing movements of popular discontent and disorder in Restoration times, did not hesitate to term agrarianists the "moving force" of the Restoration and saw popular antifeudal sentiments as the key historical ingredient in the events of the decade. On the other hand, Conrad Totman's analysis of the bakufu's fall, though recognizing commoners' antifeudal attitudes, concludes:

This anti-feudal mentality did not become an anti-Bakufu mentality, however, and the reason seems to be that the political contest of the 1860s was pitting some parts of the ruling or feudal elite against others. . . . In conse-

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quence one finds commoners in all camps and on all sides of major disputes. . . .

One statistical examination of the incidence of popular revolts between 1865 and 1871 (a total of 545) found that they were least prevalent in future “Restoration-led” areas and most common in Tokugawa-ruled or related areas and related this to the relative prosperity and productivity of the Tokugawa areas and the relatively depressed and suppressed state of the antibakufu domains. Effective anti-Tokugawa political action cannot be related to such popular discontent, but Tokugawa efforts to maintain control and counter nonsamurai resistance were, presumably, hampered by the relatively less stable social base of the Tokugawa territories.

No one can doubt the evidences of commoner restlessness and movement. Recent studies of a bizarre movement that swept the principal communications routes of central Japan during the final months of Tokugawa rule provide fascinating evidence of a widespread and rather joyous spirit of revelry and mischief that was so troublesome for Tokugawa forces of order that some were prepared to blame the outbreaks on loyalist suggestion and stimulation. Yet the mood of the crowds was overwhelmingly optimistic, more appropriate to festival than to fury, and more social than political. The wealthy, who were expected to provide food and entertainment because the gods had favored them with talismans of good fortune, paid the bills. Nonetheless, it is clear that the bakufu leaders interpreted such movements as threatening their control of society. Spontaneous, large-scale febrile movements like this also related to the rising trend of popular pilgrimage to Ise in the nineteenth century. Occasionally they became associated, at least briefly, with sentimental homage to loyalist shishi killed in the Restoration violence. There was much political satire in occasional wall writings and shrine placards, but these phenomena do not seem to have been sufficiently focused to grant them a very significant role. The search for an independent merchant interest and role has also been unprofitable. Some merchants did assist the shishi: Shiraishi Shōichirō, a Shimonoseki shipping guild merchant, was a man

of culture and means whose diary includes the names of four hundred shishi, to whom he was generous with food, drink, and lodging. But even more merchants, whether or not by choice, assisted the bakufu, which based a good deal of its emergency financing on massive loans. It seems logical to conclude that in a setting of widespread disaffection with the state of political and social order, many commoners favored those who promised change. But it is also true that regional loyalty—and distrust—affected commoners as well as samurai.

Another series of debates centers on the foreign threat. The increasing intimacy of Leon Roches with the bakufu leaders in the closing years of their regime and the bluster with which Harry Parkes obstructed that contact have led many to emphasize the danger of imperialist competition for influence in Japan. There was at one point negotiation for a French loan that would be predicated on Hokkaido's resources, and Roches apparently offered Yoshinobu the services of the small French military mission after the Fushimi–Toba disaster in January 1868. But the danger of foreign intervention has probably been exaggerated. Satow's influential pamphlet on English policy was written, as his memoirs make clear, without the knowledge of his short-tempered chief, and Roches seems consistently to have extended his personal diplomacy, as he called it, beyond the authorization of his government, which had all the imperialist problems it could handle in Mexico and in Southeast Asia during those years. Even if the bakufu leaders had decided to commit themselves to French assistance, they would have found that there was very little to be had: Far from being able to negotiate loans, they had to pay for everything in advance and in cash. Yet it has also to be granted that none of this lessens the perceptions of foreign danger that the Japanese held in the 1860s. That impression itself was a fact impelling men to action, and the fear of entangling loans and foreign leverage lasted throughout the decades of nation building in the Meiji period.

The importance of the imperial institution and the role of the court present further problems for historical analysis. The policy of the Meiji government to keep that court area sacrosanct and to accept it as a basic element in national character and history produced an understandable reaction in post–World War II days when authors minimized its substance and stressed its use as a tactic and artifice of the Meiji planners. Yet clearly there was more than tactic involved. Although the Restoration leaders frequently lamented popular indifference to the existence of the court, they themselves clearly kept it uppermost as the quintessential center of national identity, and that
emphasis was later diffused among the people through centralization, mobilization, and education. The emotion generated among the shishi by charges that the bakufu had somehow allowed the emperor to be disturbed – heightened at court, where nobles knew that the emperor was in fact indignant – was a powerful solvent of ordinary discipline and restraint. Yet the court itself, after the loyalist frenzy of the early 1860s, was much less a factor than it had been at the beginning of the process. As Totman put it: “It was shishi who gave effective voice and real content to this sonnō-jōi rhetoric, and so the prominence of the imperial role is primarily attributable to shishi success in making their views heard.”

The historian turns finally to the Restoration leaders, men of modest rank but immodest self-assurance, who gloriéd in the opportunity to establish for themselves, their friends, and their domain a visibility that had been denied them under the constraints of feudal discipline and status, and who saw their cause as pure and selfless because it held out the hope of winning for their emperor and country the place they felt they deserved among the nations. Those hopes were great and almost the reverse of the circumstances of their time. For a country humiliated by Western powers, they wanted a leading role in the world; for a sovereign restricted to secluded impotence, they demanded full authority over a country his ancestors had once ruled; for their domain, they wanted a full share in national politics instead of second-class vassalage and, for themselves, honored status as imperial servitors instead of vassals’ rear vassals.

Yet in the final analysis, most of this concerned the locus of leadership and not its goals. Most Tokugawa partisans wanted much the same thing. One is struck by the convergence of planning between bakufu and Restoration leaders in the last decade of Tokugawa history. Indeed, the bakufu leaders, charged with responsibility, approached the steps that their adversaries worked out later. Discussion of shogunal resignation and substitution of a council of great lords began in Edo quarters, found its way into Tosa councils by that route, and came to fruition in the Charter Oath’s promise of “deliberative councils”; later it was integrated into Meiji political institutions. Military reforms found the bakufu, like its southwestern vassals, discover-

56 Totman, Collapse, p. 462.
ing that samurai hauteur went poorly with the discipline and drill required for infantry companies and substituting, by steps, a personnel and then a money tax as basis for a conscription system that would displace the samurai altogether. The bakufu planners who worked this out were, like their adversaries from the southwestern han, of middle rank within their status hierarchy, hatamoto or petty daimyo who set about disestablishing their fellows. Needs of administrative retrenchment and rationalization produced programs for integrating the vassal domains nearest to the metropolitan centers, leading to rumors that a system of postfeudal, effective centralization was being prepared. The Meiji government, which used the Tokugawa lands as its own without parceling them out to daimyo after the civil war of 1868–9, kept them as the core for the centralization that was consummated by the return of feudal registers in 1869 and the establishment of prefectures in 1871. In brief, the pressures posed by opening and reconstruction revealed to friend and foe alike the impossibility of long continuing with the institutional structure of the bakuhan system and the need to replace it with the structure of a central state.