

# The Influence of the Civil War in the US on the Meiji Restoration in Japan

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## Abstract

This paper presents an alternative or different point of view about the Meiji Restoration or the Japanese modernization. The author describes here that the Civil War in the US greatly accelerated the Japanese modernization known as the Meiji Restoration that occurred in the latter half of the 19th century.

Key Words: Meiji Restoration, Japanese modernization, Satsuma clan, Kagoshima, Civil War, world cotton crisis, John Manjiro, SHIMADZU Nariakira, HAMASAKI Taheiji, Nagasaki

## Introduction

Japan successfully achieved the Meiji Restoration or the Japanese modernization in the latter half of the 19th century. One of the main stages of the Meiji Restoration was motivated and moved by many persons of Satsuma, in what is now Kagoshima Prefecture, in the southernmost part of Japan. The two conspicuous figures in the Meiji Restoration were SAIGO Takamori and OOKUBO Toshimichi. Among others who were well known for their conspicuous contribution to the Japanese modernization are TOGO Heihachiro who is known as "the Nelson of the Orient", General KUROKI Tamemoto and OOYAMA Iwao, all of them prominent in the modern history of Japan. In addition, these five people came from a small part of Kagoshima City called Shita-Kajiyamachi. An ex- secretary general in the US once called the town "the town of heroes" or "heroes' place".

Kagoshima Prefecture has had a sister-state relationship with Georgia State in the United States of America since 1966. There are three common and salient features between the two sister states. In the first place, the main industry of these two states has long been agriculture. Secondly, both are located in the southern part of their respective countries. Thirdly, the two states became the main fields of the civil war in each country. The civil strife in Japan called the Seinan War or the Southwestern Rebellion and the Civil War in the US were the severest and the last internal wars in each country. The modernization of Japan advanced quickly after the Seinan War. In the US, on

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the other hand, the industrial revolution made great progress by taking advantage of the Civil War. In these two upheavals, in Japan and the US, two figures were prominent. They were General Lee in the US and General SAIGO in Japan, respectively.

This paper aims at showing a different point of view about the Meiji Restoration or the Japanese modernization. The author's point of view is that one of the reasons why Japan became an industrialized country rather quickly was an effect of the Civil War in the US. Before entering a discussion, I shall present a brief historical review of the Japanese modernization or the Meiji Restoration.

### **Historical background**

In general, Japan had closed the door to foreign countries either with respect to exports or imports of products or exchanges of people during the Edo Period (17th-19th century). The Shogunate government permitted limited trade under severe conditions only with the Netherlands, China and Korea. But later ships from some other countries in Europe and other areas in the world came around frequently for getting the trade chances with Japan. Towards the beginning of the 19th century, the pressure from other countries further increased. Among them was England. Since England had a colonial base in India, she extended her influence to other Asian countries, such as China. Such situations exerted pressure on Japan. However, the revolts in China (1851-64) and in India (1857-59) forced England to reduce her pressure on Japan. More or less the same occurred with Russia and France. Russians came down to Kamchatka as early as the 17th century seeking occasions to sell furs, far earlier than the US visit. Russia and France, however, had to retreat from Asia because of the outbreak of the Crimean War (1853-56) just before they established their formidable positions in Asia.

In the meantime, Commodore Mathew C. Perry of the US, on a steamship, visited Uraga in Kanagawa Prefecture in 1853. He succeeded in concluding of an agreement to open Japan to the US. On the basis of this agreement, Townsend Harris, the consul general of the US and the first Minister of the US to Japan, came over to Shimoda, Shizuoka Prefecture, the next year and succeeded in signing a treaty of amity and commerce. That treaty was unfavorable for Japan's rulers in many ways: Japan was subsequently forced to open her doors completely to the foreign countries.

European nations could not establish firm footholds in Asia because they were involved in international political conflicts as mentioned before, whereas America's influence on Japan was becoming predominant. However, the Civil War in the US broke out in 1861 and lasted for five years thereafter. By that time the US already had constructed a close relation with Japan. American fishing boats could often be seen in the ocean near Japan. They came down close to Japan looking for whales. They caught whales to get their oil. Whaling ships needed water, food and fuel supplies. Historical records about such cooperation show a close relationship between the Americans and

the Japanese at that time.

### **John Manjiro, a fisherman, and his contribution to the Satsuma clan**

One of the episodes related to the development of the Satsuma clan is that of John Manjiro from Tosa or Kochi Prefecture. One day in 1841, a young fisherman, Manjiro, went fishing by boat and met with a storm; his boat was wrecked. Fortunately he was saved later by an American whaling ship and brought to the US. While he stayed there for 10 years, he studied English. In addition to this language acquisition, he obtained advanced knowledge about such matters as shipbuilding technique, whale-catching methods, the Constitution of the US, and so on. He came back to Japan in 1851. Japan refused to accept returning citizens who had once been abroad, and subsequently he concluded that the only one possible way he could come back, illegally, to Japan would be through Ryukyu or Okinawa. In those days, Ryukyu was under the control of the Satsuma clan. When hearing the news of Manjiro's landing at Ryukyu, the Satsuma clan was obliged to send him to Nagasaki as a prisoner. On the way to Nagasaki, John Manjiro stayed in Kagoshima for forty-eight days. SHIMADZU Nariakira, the 28th Lord of Satsuma clan was able to collect a variety of information about what Manjiro had obtained and learned in the US. Nariakira was one of the cleverest among Japan's lords. He was a scholar, strategist, industrialist and also talented in shipbuilding. It was Nariakira who chose SAIGO Takamori out of a number of his followers.

Nariakira thought about the reasons why western countries were strong, and came to the conclusion that military and cannons were not the sole causes making those countries powerful. He saw that the science was one of the important factors for strengthening countries. For the advance of science in Satsuma, he set about building a smelting furnace for the first time in Japan and next a reverberating furnace. In addition to those projects, shipbuilding, cotton-spinning, and manufacturing Satsuma cut glass were all started on his suggestion. Today we may see the remnants of many projects that Nariakira initiated in Iso Park, Kagoshima City.

The Satsuma clan built western-style sailing ships, *Iroha-maru* and *Shouhei-maru*, for the first time in Japan. Nariakira was also the first Japanese to build a steam boat, *Unkou-maru*. The success of construction was partly attributed to the American shipbuilding techniques introduced by John Manjiro, even though the techniques and knowledge of shipbuilding largely derived from Dutch books.

### **Towards the beginning of the Meiji Restoration in Japan**

The Satsuma clan implemented financial readjustment for 5 million *ryo* in debt in the

1830's. After that this clan made its best effort for the development of new selling systems of Satsuma's special products such as black sugar, in the central market of Japan, Osaka and also by smuggling edible kelp from Hokkaido to China through Ryukyu. The Satsuma clan had several special sources of income. First of all, the Satsuma clan had unrefined sugar production from sugar cane in the Amami Islands, which, endowed with warmer climate, was part of the Satsuma clan. In the second place, the Satsuma clan had a smuggling trade of edible kelp produced in Ezo, Hokkaido at present, with China through Ryukyu. In this way that clan succeeded in the financial reform among other clans. Nevertheless, all those activities should not have produced enough funds for the Boshin War.

When Japan was forced to conclude the treaty of amity and commerce with the US in 1858, the Tokugawa Shogunate government finally decided to conclude the treaty without the permission of the Imperial Court. In this situation the government excused itself both to the Court and the people: "Now, we accept the ratification of the treaty, but foreigners should be gradually expelled from the country". It seemed quite natural that the Imperial Court and most Japanese had come to have an idea that Japan was a sacred country and that western people were barbarians, after Japan had closed her door to the western world for more than 2 centuries.

After Japan opened its doors, the lives of the Japanese people became worse. And they blamed the trade that Japan started with the US, England, the Netherlands, France, and Russia in 1859. From Yokohama, Hakodate and Nagasaki, they exported tea, oil, paper, raw silk and cotton. The prices of most commodities in Japan went up and the people had a harder time.

In 1860's, exclusionism was prevalent. The terrorism against foreigners took place here and there inside of Japan. In this situation when most clans held a stand on exclusionism, the Satsuma clan was the only one which had a positive posture of keeping trade relations with foreign countries. The Satsuma started its own foreign trade with these countries in Nagasaki through Thomas B. Glover and thus deposited funds enough for the Boshin War.

The Tokugawa Shogunate government proposed to the Imperial Court that they should exclude foreigners on and after May 10, 1863 (Note 1). On the day of the practice of foreigner's exclusion, the Choshu clan attacked an American vessel. In retaliation, four allied nations of the US, England, France and the Netherlands counterattacked the fortress of the Choshu clan at Shimonoseki in Yamaguchi Prefecture in the next year. At the conflict, the Choshu was defeated badly. In February, 1864, two young terrorists attacked the cotton-loaded boat of HAMASAKI Taheiji, a merchant under the Satsuma clan's patronage, near Kanmon strait in Shimonoseki. The terrorists went to Osaka, and put up the head of the captain they killed, with a notice board publicly accusing that the Satsuma of trade with foreign countries. Then the two terrorists committed suicide. The Satsuma clan had concealed the fact of foreign trade to the public. As two terrorists of the Choshu clan suspected, HAMASAKI's ship was loaded with cotton collected in Osaka for the purpose of sale to foreigners in Nagasaki. In

those days the surrounding area of Osaka was very famous for its cotton fields.

Before the Civil War in the US broke out in 1861, the first industrial revolution took place in Great Britain, and the US was working very hard to catch up with and to overtake Great Britain. In order to overtake England, factory machinery had to be in full operation. Oil was a much-needed material for lubricating machinery. The lubricating oil for the factory machinery was acquired from whale oil. Thus, for Americans, whale oil was a very important resource for operating factories at that time. This was the reason why the Americans came all the way to Japan across the Pacific Ocean for whales. Whale oil was used not only for the lubrication of machineries but also for lamps in order to make possible the twenty four- hour operation of factories. The American Industrial revolution was well underway in the North in this way, whereas the revolution in the South was not so advanced and the production of cotton was continuing as one of the main industries.

### **Taheiji and the Satsuma clan**

HAMASAKI Taheiji bought a total of 36,000 *ryo* worth of cotton at Osaka. If he had succeeded in sending all this cotton to Nagasaki and selling there, he would have got 144,000 *ryo*, a net profit of more than 100,000 *ryo*, according to the tentative calculation on the basis of the Historical Document of SHIMADZU Tadayoshi (1976). Both the decrease of cotton production in the South and the sharp rise in cotton prices, "the world cotton crisis", were caused by the Civil War which broke out in the US. Carrying cotton from Osaka to Nagasaki was considered to be a courageous act because going to Nagasaki by boat for the purpose of foreign trade meant that ships had to pass the Kanmon strait where there was the fear of attack by the exclusionist groups of the Choushu clan. The Choushu, however, which first had been against the Satsuma's idea of dealing in cotton, agreed later to trade with foreign countries, especially in the import of western weapons. According to the History of Kagoshima City (Kagoshima City, 1955), the Satsuma clan bought 10,000 guns in Nagasaki in 1862. The Satsuma clan collected 82,300 *ryo* by the donation of 34 merchants out of which 20,000 *ryo* was from Taheiji. In the same year GODAI Tomoatsu, one of the elite warriors of the Satsuma clan, was sent to Shanghai by the clan's mission, for market research and to obtain a steamboat. The purchase of guns and a steamboat was carried out, strengthening the Satsuma clan's military power. During the Civil War, weapons were greatly improved. Old-fashioned or used weapons were brought to European nations and, moreover, to China. The Satsuma clan had a continuing intention to pool more weapons and ships thereafter which were later resold to other clans, making large sums of profit.

In 1865, 19 students and delegates of the Satsuma clan were sent abroad for study. They were first sent to England and then some of them went to the other European countries and to the US for further study (Note 2). In those days, to send one person

abroad for study required a lot of money. Such a lot money would have been paid finally by the Satsuma clan with the assistance of HAMASAKI Taheiji and other merchants.

### Towards the accomplishment of the Meiji Restoration in Japan

The Satsuma clan and the Choushu clan had long been on bad terms with each other. Both clans, however, joined hands by the enthusiastic efforts of SAKAMOTO Ryoma of Tosa, Kochi and started working under the Imperial Court in order to establish an entirely new government. Unfortunately, he was assassinated and so did not witness the Meiji Restoration (Note 3). The Satsuma-Choushu alliance was established in January, 1866. Two years later, the Boshin War broke out. For the preparations of the war, the Satsuma clan started the reinforcement of the army and the supply of guns. The Satsuma people tried hard to prepare for the war. They knew that the war would spread all over the country. It was the fastest warship that could make them superior over the enemies. They thought if they had one everything would go well for them because the Satsuma warriors or army were already well trained and well equipped with advanced models of guns.

For the purchase of a warship, MATHUKATA Masayoshi, who later became a finance minister of the Meiji government, went to Nagasaki in 1867, just before the Boshin War, with a budget of 40,000 *ryo* from the Satsuma clan. He found a very sophisticated warship, named later *Kasuga-maru*, which he eagerly desired to get. The ship made 16.1 knots, whereas the strongest ship of the Tokugawa shogunate, *Kaiyou-maru*, could run at the speed of 10 knots. The sale price was 160,000 *ryo* and he had to pay 80,000 as a deposit. Although he didn't have enough money with him, he didn't give up. He went to a branch office of HAMASAKI Taheiji's company in Nagasaki, and borrowed money from him so that he could get the warship.

In parallel with the reinforcement of several weapons and warships, the Satsuma clan intended to reform its military formation to resemble England's. For instance, an English platoon consisted of 100 soldiers. Each platoon of the Satsuma army, 42 platoons in total, was also of the same number. It is considered that about 6,000 persons including 4,500 soldiers served in the Boshin War (Kagoshima Prefecture, 1931). In January, 1868, the Boshin War broke out in Toba and Fushimi, near Kyoto, and ended in May the next year at Hakodate, Hokkaido. It lasted a year and five months. The war was led by SAIGO as a commander with the help of OOKUBO.

SAIGO and OOKUBO had worked together for their ambitious goal, the Japanese modernization. However, five years later after the Meiji Restoration, they broke up because of the difference in their opinions over diplomatic policy toward Korea. SAIGO was quite disappointed in the policy of the Tokyo Government represented by OOKUBO. So, he resigned his post in the government and returned to Kagoshima. He found-

ed an army school in Kagoshima and rose in revolt against the Tokyo Government. The revolt is well known as "Seinan War". SAIGO led his followers and students of about 13,000 members to the battle-field in Kumamoto Prefecture. They lost every battle they fought. On September 24, 1877, SAIGO committed suicide at the small hill called Shiroyama, located in the center of Kagoshima City. The number of casualties of both the government and the opposition was about 13,000. At the time of the Boshin War, the number of casualties of the Satsuma clan was only 570. Thus Kagoshima Prefecture lost many young lives in the war that led to the further loss of Satsuma's leading power, in the modernization of Japan.

### Conclusion

As stated in the text, the Satsuma clan would never have been able to become the driving force of the Meiji Restoration - and moreover the Restoration itself could not have been accelerated - without the Civil War in the US. The Civil War led to 1) the reduction of US pressure on Japan, 2) the sharp rise of world cotton prices which enabled the Satsuma clan to get enough funds for defeating the Shogunate government and 3) the influx of massive weapons, improved and used during the War, to the Asian markets, mainly to Shanghai, which strengthened the military forces of the Satsuma clan and also made it richer by profits on re-sale to other clans.

### Notes

- 1) The dates concerning on Japan before 1873 in this paper are described based on the old lunar calendar.
- 2) Many of the students and delegates became very famous and leading figures in modern Japan. Among them, TERASHIMA Munenori became the first foreign minister in Japan. MORI Arinori became the first minister of education. NAGASAWA Kanae, the youngest student, was only 13 years old at that time and became a wine grower in Santa Rosa in California. MURAHASHI Hisanari started the Sapporo beer factory. MACHIDA Hisanari founded the Ueno National Museum. MATSUMURA Junzou, who studied at the American Naval Academy at Annapolis in Maryland became the president of the Japanese Navy College
- 3) SAKAMOTO Ryoma is also remembered as the person who introduced the honeymoon to the Japanese for the first time. He and his wife Oryo were invited to Kagoshima by the Satsuma clan for their honeymoon, and stayed at Kirishima, the northern mountainous part of Kagoshima. This invitation is considered to indicate the full confidence existed between the Satsuma clan and Ryoma.

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