

Diplomatic Relations between Japan and Britain in the End of the Edo Period

: With a Central Focus on the British Policy toward Japan in 1865

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Abstract

This paper aims to clarify the diplomatic relations between Japan and Britain in the end of the Edo period from the viewpoint of Britain. In Japan, the hostilities between the Tokugawa shogunate which was the Japanese feudal government from 17th to 19th century and several feudal lords like the Choshu clan came out into the open in the 1860s. The Tokugawa shogunate sent their troops to the Choshu clan territory, and in the end the war broke out in 1866.

According to one popular theory, it have been thought that the French supported the Tokugawa shogunate while the Britain supported the Choshu clan. However, previous studies say that the British government would take a stance of the neutrality in their hostilities. In fact, there are some diplomatic dispatches, which the British consul general to Japan reported to British Government that recommended a policy of accommodation to both the Tokugawa shogunate and the Choshu clan. In addition, there are some articles in the British newspapers, which denied that British Government supported the Choshu clan. Therefore, this paper reveals the details of the diplomatic relations between Japan and Britain by an analysis of dispatches from the British consul general to Japan and British Newspaper articles in 1865 right before the war in Japan.

Key words: Meiji Restoration, Tokugawa shogunate, Choshu clan, Britain

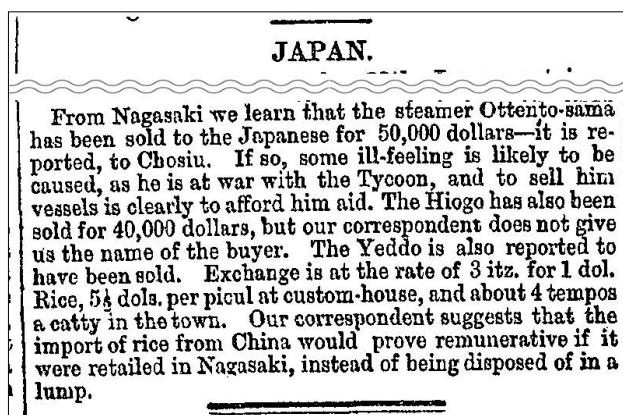
1. Introduction

The objective of this research is to clarify the diplomatic relations between Japan and Britain in the end of the Edo period, the middle of the 19th century, with focus on the British policy toward Japan. In Japan, the hostilities between the Tokugawa shogunate which was the Japanese feudal government from 17th to 19th century and several feudal lords like the Choshu clan against the regime came out in the open in 1860s. The Tokugawa sent their troops to the Choshu territory, and in the end the war broke out in 1866. In the end, the Tokugawa shogunate was overthrown by the feudal lords and Imperial rule was restored at the end of 1867, which is called the Meiji Restoration. It also signified Japan's transformation from a feudal policy into a modern industrial state.

According to one popular theory, it is thought that the French supported the Tokugawa shogunate, while the Britain supported the feudal lords, which are like the Choshu clan and the Satsuma clan, in the process of Meiji Restoration. The reason why the Britain stood by the feudal lords is generally explained that some British merchants exported weapons to them. However, this theory seems to be drawn a conclusion from only one aspect of Britain. There are some previous studies which say that the British government would take a stance of the neutrality in their hostilities^[1].

There is an interesting example concerning the issue. This British newspaper article, *the Daily News* on 27th August 1866, reported as follows (Figure1^[2]).

Figure1



From Nagasaki we learn that the steamer Ottento-sama has been sold to the Japanese for 50,000 dollars—it is reported, to Chosiu. If so, some ill-feeling is likely to be caused, as he is at war with the Tycoon, and to sell him vessels is clearly to afford him aid.

In fact, it's true that a British merchant sold the steamer to the Choshu clan. The steamer named Ottento-sama was a warship with guns, and the Choshu was fighting against the Tokugawa government at the time. In this case, it must have shown the Britain supported the Choshu clan. Therefore, this article pointed out "some ill-feeling is likely to be caused". That means the British Newspaper stance on the hostilities in Japan was not to support the Choshu clan.

Therefore, it is necessary to make an analysis of various aspects in order to clarify the stance of the Britain. In this research, the British stance is found from an analysis from the perspectives the British government and its stratum of society. The method is to make an analysis of some documents of the British Foreign Office. The documents include many correspondences between the foreign office and every consul general to Japan. Especially in 1865 before opening their hostilities, it was under a tense situation between the Tokugawa shogunate and the Choshu clan. In the first half of the year, Winchestrer Charles Alexander was in charge of the deputy consul general. From latter half of the year, Harry Smith Parkes was appointed the consul general. In addition, there are a great number of articles in the British newspapers regarding Japan in 1860s. It shows that the British society had a strong interest in the Japanese situation. Therefore, this paper will reveal the details of the diplomatic relations between Japan and Britain by an analysis of dispatches from the British consul general to Japan and British Newspaper articles in 1865 right before the war in Japan..

2. First half of 1865

The background of the hostilities between the Tokugawa shogunate and the Choshu clan is following. The Choshu clan caused a fighting in Kyoto in 1864, which is called affair of Kinmon. Therefore, the Choshu clan was considered the Emperor's opponent. This event gave the Tokugawa government a chance to attack the Choshu clan. On the other hand, the Choshu clan tried to purchase weapons from foreign merchants. The Tokugawa government got the information, and asked the deputy consul

general Winchester not to communicate with the Choshu clan privately. Winchester send to the foreign minister John Russell the following dispatch on 30th January 1865^[3]. This dispatch includes his circular to British consuls to Japan. In his circular, he ordered consuls to prevent the British people in Japan from engaging the trade with the Choshu clan as the Tokugawa asked Winchester. Mori means the Prince of Choshu, and Gorogio means head ministers of the Tokugawa.

SOME rumours have reached me of attempts, on the part of foreign vessels, to open an illicit and clandestine trade in arms with Mori Daizen, and a despatch has been received from the Gorogio, (snip) I direct you to do all in your power to discourage Her Majesty's subjects from engaging in such commerce.

In June, four representatives, Britain, America, France and Netherland had a conference concerning the expedition of the Tokugawa against the Choshu clan. Winchester send to Russell the following dispatch on 23th June 1865^[4]. This dispatch includes the following memorandum of four countries. In this memorandum, the four countries including Britain, agreed with the nonintervention in Japanese civil war, and the suppression of illicit trade.

1. The maintenance of the free navigation of the Straits;
2. Absolute non-intervention in the civil hostilities which may ensue; and
3. Support, as required by Treaty, of measures employed by the Tycoon for the suppression of illicit trade, and especially of contraband of war during hostilities.

On the other hand, some British Newspapers published at that time reported about British stance on the Japanese situation. One of the newspaper articles, *Pall Mail Gazette* on 9th August 1865, reported that the British government would support the Tokugawa as follow (Figure2^[5]).

Figure2



In that case the British Government, which cannot make separate treaties with a dozen petty sovereigns, or risk a succession of little wars with nobles who cannot bind each other, may be compelled to assist the Tycoon...

There is an article concerning “pretty sovereigns” which means feudal lords. *The Leeds Mercury* on 28th August 1865 extracted from Times, and reported that the feudal lords desired to trade with foreign countries as follows^[6].

Figure3

A telegram received from Japan a week or two ago announced that “civil war” was on the point of breaking out—an intimation which we interpreted to mean war between the nobles and the Tycoon. Fuller advices confirm this supposition. The Tycoon, indignant at some act of disobedience on the part of the Prince of Nagato (the noble who rules the entrance to the inland sea), has declared war on him, and levied an army of 100,000 men. The Prince of Satsuma, however—the noble whom we punished so terribly at Kagosima, and who owns, among other wide possessions, the Loochoo Islands—intends, as he asserts, to assist his brother daimio, and the Tycoon’s force may be unequal to the work before it. In that case the British Government, which cannot make separate treaties with a dozen petty sovereigns, or risk a succession of little wars with nobles who cannot bind each other, may be compelled to assist the Tycoon, and once more batter down the seaside strongholds on which the daimios appear almost universally to rely. One novel and formidable incident is connected with this affair. The Prince of Nagato has resolved to obtain European aid, and offered “Major” Burgevine the command of all the troops he could collect, an offer which was fortunately declined.

In the same way the Daimios, who hated the intruders from the West, now demand that the Tycoon shall not have a monopoly of foreign commerce. They are in truth ready and willing to open the ports within their own jurisdiction in the hope of securing a share of the advantages of foreign commerce.

This article means that the feudal lords tried to open ports in their territories to get the foreign trade profit. It goes on to report about a stance of British government.

It will probably be prudent to confine our diplomatic relations to those with the Tycoon, or, or least, not to enter into treaties with his tributary princes. Such a course may not be the most favourable to a rapid extension of Japanese commerce, but it is the best way to insure its permanence, and after a short further experience we may reasonably expect that an addition may be made to the open ports without any opposition.—Times.

As described above, some newspaper articles reported that British government would support the Tokugawa shogunate to keep trading with Japan.

3. Letter half of 1865

Harry Parkes was in charge of consul to Shanghai, but he was appointed to the consul general to Japan in July 1865. On 30th September 1865, the foreign minister Russell informed Parkes about the policy on Japanese situation as follows^[7]. First is, the Order in Council of the 9th of March.

I have to state to you that Her Majesty’s Government are of opinion that Mr. Winchester took every

proper step in his power, the Order in Council of the 9th of March last not having then reached Japan, to prevent British subjects from interfering in those hostilities. Her Majesty's Government are further of opinion that you will have ample power under sections 7, 8 and 9 of the new Order to prevent British subjects from interfering in the apprehended civil war, So with regard to the prevention of illicit trading, the previous of the Order in Council of the 23rd of January, 1860, under which the measures adopted by Mr. Winchester were taken.

Second is, the new Order to prevent the British subjects from interfering in the apprehended civil war. Third is, the Order in Council of the 23rd of January, 1860, regarding the prevention of illicit trading. So, the government policies are, as following figure4. These policies are much the same.

Figure4

Year	Consul General	Policies of the British Government	
		on illicit trading	on the Civil War
The first half of 1865	Winchester (deputy)	23 rd January.1860 "The prevention of illicit trading"	9 th March 1865 "To prevent British subjects from interfering in those hostilities"
The latter half of 1865	Parkes		New for Parkes (no date) "To prevent British subjects from interfering in the apprehended civil war"

On his way to Shanghai, Parkes visited Shimonoseki in the Choshu claim territory and saw some warriors who belong to the Choshu clan on 8th December 1865. He reported to Prime Minister Russell about what he told them at that time, as follows^[8].

I was visited by several officers of Choshu, who are believed to be in his confidence, and while I assured them of the complete neutrality of Her Majesty's Government in their dispute with Tycoon, I recommended to them, as I had repeatedly done to the Gorogio, a policy of accommodation.

It deepened the hostilities between the Tokugawa shogunate and the Choshu clan, and finally the war broke out in July 1866.

3. Conclusion

An issue to be solved is whether the British government supported the Choshu or not. As a result of this discussion, it was clarified the policies toward Japan in 1865 was nonintervention as following figure5. In other words, it is said that the British government didn't support the Choshu clan.

Figure5

Year	Consul General	British Government Policy on the Japanese Civil War
The first half of 1865	Winchester (deputy)	Nonintervention
The latter half of 1865	Parkes	

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