

The Trade Relationship between Britain and Japanese Feudal Lords at the End of the Edo Period

: From the Viewpoint of Britain

Yuka TAGUCHI*

Abstract

The object of this research is to clarify the trade relationship between Britain and Japanese feudal lords at the end of the Edo period in the middle of the 19th century. In 1858, the Japanese feudal government, Tokugawa shogunate, having a national isolation policy, made a commercial treaty with foreign countries and started trading with them. As the government had a monopoly on the trade at some specified open ports, foreign countries insisted that some ports in territories of feudal lords, specifically the Shimonoseki Port of the Choshu Clan, were opened. After the government refused, it was directly negotiated between Britain and the Choshu Clan. From the viewpoint of the Choshu Clan, it is difficult to say that the Choshu Clan offered it to Britain in a positive way as if they had the desire. However, from the viewpoint of Britain, it became clear that the Choshu Clan offered Britain the use of Shimonoseki Port in order to trade directly with foreign countries. Because of the different results, it is considered Britain needed to take measures to emphasise that the Choshu Clan desired to open the Shimonoseki Port, in order to make the Tokugawa government allow feudal lords to trade with foreign countries directly, regardless of the actual motivation on the part of the Choshu Clan.

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

1. Introduction

This research aims to clarify the trade relationship between Britain and Japanese feudal lords at the end of the Edo period in the middle of the 19th century. The Tokugawa shogunate, the Japanese feudal government, kept a national isolation policy from the 17th century, but finally the government made a commercial treaty with foreign countries and started foreign trade in 1858. However, as the government had a monopoly on the trade at some specified open ports, foreign countries began to demand the opening of some ports in territories of feudal lords, specifically the Shimonoseki Port of the Choshu Clan. The reason that they demanded the opening of the Shimonoseki Port was that they made a peace agreement with the Choshu Clan. The Choshu Clan attacked foreign ships in the Straits of Shimonoseki by the order of the Tokugawa government in 1863, and a year later, the combined squadron, Britain, France, the Netherlands and America, attacked the Choshu Clan in retaliation, which is called the Shimonoseki war. As to the reparations, the foreign countries and the Tokugawa government considered opening the Shimonoseki Port instead, but eventually the government refused. Therefore, it was directly negotiated between Britain and the Choshu Clan behind the scenes.

Regarding the negotiation, there are different theories in previous studies. One of the theories says that Britain offered the Choshu Clan to open the Shimonoseki Port. On the other hand, another says that the Choshu Clan was the offerer. However, according to one of the Choshu Clan documents, it became

clear that the lord of the Choshu Clan announced in his territory that he didn't expect to open the Shimonoseki Port, because a war against Tokugawa government was about to start. In addition, there is another document, which says that a British merchant who joined the meeting evidenced that he was one of the offerers. From the viewpoint of the Choshu Clan, it is difficult to say that the Choshu Clan offered it to Britain.

In this paper, using British documents from 1864 to 1865, it clarified the process of their negotiation from the viewpoint of Britain.

2. 1 Peace Agreement of Shimonoseki War

The four countries, Britain, France, the Netherlands and America, made a peace agreement of the Shimonoseki war with the Choshu Clan on 14th September, 1864. At that time, the British minister counselor to Japan was Rutherford Alcock, and the British foreign minister was Earl Russell. According to the dispatch on 28th from Alcock to Russell, the articles of agreement are as follows^[1].

Agreement:

1. HENCEFORWARD all ships of all countries passing through the Straits of Shimonosaki[sic] shall be treated in a friendly manner. Ships shall be allowed to purchase coal, provisions, wood, and water, and every other necessary. As the harbour of Shimonosaki[sic] is subject to violent winds and currents, people suffering from stress of weather shall be allowed to land without opposition.

2. Not only shall new forts not be built, but no repairs shall be made to the old ones, nor shall guns be mounted therein.

3. Although the town of Shimonosaki[sic] might justly have been burnt for having first fired upon foreign ships, it was left undestroyed. A ransom shall be paid for this, and in addition to this, the whole expenses of the expedition shall be defrayed (by the prince).

I agree to abide by the decision of the Foreign Ministers at Yeddo with regard to these two points.

This agreement being merely for the cessation of hostilities upon this occasion it has nothing to do with questions affecting Choshiu[sic] which have to be settled between the Japanese Government and the Ministers of foreign Powers.

2. 2 Intention of Opening Shimonoseki

As to the reparations, Alcock also reported the foreign countries and the Tokugawa government was considering opening the Shimonoseki Port instead, and he requested Russell his instructions for it as follows^[2].

IN reference to the Convention entered into by Vice-Admiral Kuper, by which it was stipulated that the Prince of Nagato should pay a ransom for Shimonasaki[sic], and an indemnity to cover all the expense of the expedition, the Tycoon's Government has offered to take upon itself the whole of the claims preferred by the four Treaty Powers for the past acts of aggression on the part of the Prince of Choshiu[sic], and either to liquidate such amount as shall finally be agreed upon, or open a port—Shimonasaki[sic] or some more eligible port in the vicinity of the Straits—at the option of the Treaty Powers.

I shall be glad to receive your Lordship's instructions upon this point, and, in the meantime, no indemnities will be exacted by me, nor, I think, by any of my colleagues. It may be necessary, in the progress of negotiations, to fix some amount provisionally as due or payable, in order to show what

material advantages will accrue to go further until I have heard from your Lordship what are the views of Her Majesty's Government.

Russell received the dispatch from Alcock on 27th November, and he send a reply soon on 3rd December. He answered the position of the British governmnt as follows^[3].

IN your despatch of 28th of September, you requested to be instructed as to whether, in lieu of any pecuniary ransom for the town of Shimonasaki[sic], and of any indemnity to cover the expenses of the late expedition against the Prince of Nagato, Her Majesty's Government would be willing to accept the opening to foreign trade of the port of Shimonasaki[sic] or of some more eligible port in the vicinity of the Straits; and I have to acquaint you in reply that Her Majesty's Government are willing to renounce any money payment if greater or equal advantage can be secured by stipulations to be obtained from the Tycoon or the Mikado.

According to his reply, it is said that British government expected to gain from trade with Japanese feudal lords at the Shimonoseki Port. Regarding the trade with Japan, Alcock said as follows, in his memorandum on 22nd September^[4].

It may even be a question, as a security for the bona fide abolition of such monopoly, whether the free right of any Daimis[sic] to admit foreign ships and trade to his own ports under treaty conditions, should not be stipulated for? In which case, Kagoshima and Simonoseki[sic] might be opened, with many collateral advantages.

He was thinking about the free trade with Daimyos, which means Japanese feudal lords, in order to abolish the Tokugawa government's trade monopoly. At that time, British diplomatic policy was free trade imperialism. Accordingly, it is said that both the British government and minister counselor to Japan expected that the opening of the Shimonoseki Port would bring the free trade.

2. 3 Shimonoseki Convention

A conference on the reparations for the Shimonoseki war was held by representatives for four countries and the Tokugawa government in Yokohama on 22nd October, 1864. In the conference, they decided that the government chose either payment of reparations or opening of Shimonoseki Port. The third article of the Shimonoseki convention is as follows^[5].

Inasmuch as the receipt of money has never been the object of the said Powers, but the establishment of better relations with Japan, and the desire to place these on a more satisfactory and mutually advantageous footing is still the leading object in view, therefore, if His Majesty the Tycoon wishes to offer in lieu of payment of the sum claimed, and as a material compensation for loss and injury sustained, the opening of Shimonoseki, or some other eligible port in the Inland Sea, it shall be at the option of the said foreign Governments to accept the same, or insist on the payment of the indemnity in money under the conditions above stipulated.

Eventually, the Tokugawa government announced to representatives of four countries on 5th April 1865, that they had chosen not to open the port but to pay reparations. This choice meant that the

Tokugawa government refused to allow the free trade between foreign countries and feudal lords in their territories. That is, it is said that the government tried to keep the trade monopoly in opposition to expectations of foreign countries.

3. 1 Negotiation with the Choshu Clan for Opening Shimonoseki

Since the Tokugawa government didn't accept the opening of Shimonoseki Port, it was directly negotiated between Britain and the Choshu Clan behind the scenes. In the British consular office in Nagasaki, Gower who was an acting consul had a meeting on opening the Shimonoseki Port with two subjects of the Choshu Clan on 16th April 1865. The next day, Gower sent a dispatch about the meeting to Charles Winchester who was an acting minister counselor in Yokohama. According to his dispatch, the object of their mission was as follows^[6].

The object of their mission, therefore, was to consult with me as to the best means of opening that port to foreign commerce without the intervention of the Tycoon's Government, and thus avoid what, in their opinion, would be an unjust precedent, detrimental to the true interests of other Daimios[sic] who, like Choshu[sic] himself, are most anxious to be in direct friendly relations with foreign powers.

"Tycoon's Government" means the Tokugawa government, and "Daimios" means feudal lords. The two subjects said, the government prevented feudal lords from trading with foreign countries directly, therefore their Prince desired to open the port in his territory. In addition, in his dispatch, they told Gower that "it is the intention of their Prince to send to England an Embassy, invested with plenipotentiary powers." As soon as Winchester received his dispatch, he sent it as an attachment to British foreign minister, Earl Russell, on 27th April^[7].

3. 2 Negotiation with the government

A conference was held between British acting minister counselor, Winchester, and Japanese minister of foreign affairs, Shibata Hyuga no kami, on 2nd May. Winchester, who recognised that the Choshu Clan desired foreign trade, urged Shibata to open Hyogo or some other port in the Inland Sea. According to his dispatch to Russell on 11th May, his main statements were as follows^[8].

A Part of the ill-feeling against foreigners on the part of these Daimios[sic] was, no doubt, owing to the restrictions and impediments to which the Government of the Tycoon subjected them when wishing to part with their produce; and that it became more and more evident that the Daimios[sic] of Kiusiu, Sikoku, and the central provinces, headed by Choshu[sic], were anxious to enter into commercial relations with foreigners.

First, he emphasised that feudal lords obviously desire to begin trading with foreigners without intervention of the Tokugawa government. On the other hand, he also stated the position of the British government, as follows.

(snip) and while Her Majesty's Government was of opinion that there is nothing in our Treaties with the Tycoon preventing us from entering into commercial agreements with Daimios, the arrangements made after the affair of Kagoshima proved that neither Her Majesty's Representatives in this country nor the Government had any desire to embarrassed the Tycoonate by a premature adoption of such a

policy. On the contrary, it was the desire of Her Majesty's Government to see the authority of the Tycoon so increased and enlarged as to give him the effective control of the whole empire;

That is to say, Winchester indicated at the conference, that the British government considered that it was important to keep the treaty between Britain and the Tokugawa government, and desired to trade with feudal lords under the treaty.

4. Conclusion

As stated above, from the viewpoint of Britain, it became clear that the Choshu Clan offered to Britain to open the Shimonoseki Port in order to trade with foreign countries directly. However, from the viewpoint of the Choshu Clan, it is difficult to say that the Choshu Clan offered it to Britain in a positive way even if they had the desire, as previously pointed out.

As to the reason for this, it is considered as follows. At that time, British diplomatic policy was the free trade imperialism. First, Alcock was thinking about the free trade with Daimios, which means Japanese feudal lords, in order to abolish the Tokugawa government's trade monopoly. Second, in fact the British government and minister counselor to Japan also expected that the opening of the Shimonoseki Port would bring the free trade in the Shimonoseki convention. Eventually, the Tokugawa government didn't accept opening the port and tried to keep the trade monopoly in opposition to expectations of foreign countries. Therefore, it is considered Britain needed to take measures to emphasise that the Choshu Clan desired to open the Shimonoseki Port, in order to make the Tokugawa government allow feudal lords to trade with foreign countries directly, regardless of the actual motivation on the part of the Choshu Clan. In other words, as it was convenient information for the part of Britain that the Choshu Clan desired to open the port, Winchester used it without examination of the authenticity of the offer from the subjects of the Choshu Clan.

This is a part of the research to clarify the international relations of Japan in the middle of the 19th century. The next stage of this research will reveal the Japanese diplomatic policy against the free trade imperialism.

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