

The British Policy of Free Trade for Japan in the end of the Edo Period: Focusing on the Shimonoseki war in 1864

Yuka TAGUCHI *

Abstract

This paper discusses the policy focusing on the period after the Shimonoseki war, especially from the last half of 1864 to the middle of 1866 when a war between the Tokugawa government and Choshu clan started.

Regarding the Shimonoseki war, British Prime Minister Palmerston wrote that our relations with Japan needed a “successful display of superior strength” and then at last “peaceful and settled commercial intercourse advantageous to both parties” would be built. That means he was going to pursue the policy of expanding free trade with Japan as the next step after the Shimonoseki war. Sir Harry Parkes, the British consul general in Japan, wrote about expanding their free trade that “the union of the Mikado (the Japanese Emperor) with the Tycoon (the Tokugawa government) on the foreign question was essential to the security of the relations based upon those Treaties.” That is to say that, the British Government took the policy of expanding free trade with Japan by getting the Emperor’s agreement. In a national conflict in Japan in 1866, the British government expressed a stance of placing importance on the official diplomatic relations with the Tokugawa government in order to continue trade.

Therefore, the British diplomatic policy with Japan after the Shimonoseki war is an expansion and continuance of free trade with Japan.

Keywords: *Imperialism of Free Trade, Britain, Meiji Restoration, Tokugawa government, Choshu clan*

1 Introduction

The objective of this research is to clarify the British Diplomatic policy with Japan at the end of the Edo period in the middle of the 19th century. This paper discusses the policy focusing on after the Shimonoseki war, especially from the last half of 1864 to the middle of 1866 when a war between the Tokugawa government and Choshu clan started. The proposed methodology is to use British documents from 1864 to 1866 stored in the UK and Japan.

At that time, the Japanese feudal government, the Tokugawa government, kept a national isolation policy from the 17th century. The government finally acceded to the demand of Western countries and made a commercial treaty with them in 1858, and started foreign trade the next year. However, the Japanese Emperor disagreed with the treaty, and then he demanded to exclude foreigners from Japan after foreign trade had started. In fact, the Choshu Clan, one of the feudal lords, attacked foreign ships in the Strait of Shimonoseki under the Emperor’s order in 1863. In

response, the combined squadrons of Britain, France, the Netherlands and America attacked Shimonoseki to break down their opponents after a year. This is called the Shimonoseki war.

British Prime Minister Palmerston wrote that our relations with Japan needed a “successful display of superior strength” and then at last a “peaceful and settled commercial intercourse advantageous to both parties” would be built.¹⁾ That means he was going to pursue the policy of expanding free trade with Japan as the next step after the Shimonoseki war.²⁾

This paper reveals the details of the British diplomatic policy with Japan after the Shimonoseki war.

2. 1 Process of the assent of the Emperor to the Treaties of Commerce

When The Tokugawa government made a commercial treaty with Western countries in 1858, the Japanese Emperor disagreed with it. Therefore, the British government needed to get the Emperor’s agreement of the Treaties, in order to

* 一般科目

expand free trade with Japan.

The British Foreign Minister John Russell told the deputy British consul general in Japan Winchester on his letter as below.³⁾

You will see by the copy of my despatch to Her Majesty's Representatives at Paris, the Hague, and Washington, herewith inclosed,* that Her Majesty's Government wish to remit any further payment of indemnity under the Convention of October 22, 1864, provided certain terms, of which the principal are the opening of the port of Hiogo and city of Osaka, and the assent of the Mikado (Emperor) to our Treaties of Commerce, are agreed to.

In fact, Harry Parkes received this letter, who came to Japan as the British consul general in Japan. At once, he moved into action with France, the Netherlands and America. The combined squadrons of the four countries left from the Hyogo bay in order to win the assent of the Emperor to the Treaties on November 4th. Hyogo is located near Kyoto, it means they gave military pressure to the Emperor. Finally, the Emperor assented to the Treaties on the 22nd.

2. 2 The report from Parkes to British Government

Parks reported to Russell that they won the assent of the Emperor, as below.⁴⁾

I trust, however, that the approval of the Treaty by the Mikado will prove the most important of the desired concessions, as we may expect that it will terminate those unfortunate dissensions between the Mikado (Emperor), Tycoon, and Daimios on the subject of the foreign policy of the country...

Parkes also emphasized "the union of the Mikado with the Tycoon on the foreign question was essential" in order to as the policy after the Shimonoseki war in another his report, as below.⁵⁾

My predecessors had therefore clearly seen, as is well known to your Lordship, that the union of the Mikado (Emperor) with the Tycoon on the foreign question was essential to the security of the relations based upon those Treaties, and that unless union were at once effected, no extension of present privileges could be obtained through the Tycoon's authority alone, and probably other and more serious embarrassments might ensue.

In reporting that this important advantage has now been secured, I am very sensible, my Lord, that it would be presumptuous in me to lay claim to any other credit than that of not neglecting an opportunity of completing, in co-operation with my colleagues, the work to which they and my predecessors had so long devoted themselves, and which had been signally advanced by the affair of Shimonoseki (Shimonoseki war). That blow, however, proved insufficient in itself alone to gain the end that is now attained...

3. 1 British deal with a national conflict in Japan

On July 1866, a national conflict in Japan started, which was between the Tokugawa government and Choshu clan. The Tokugawa government demanded foreign ships not to pass through the Shimonoseki straits.

Parkes, the British consul general in Japan, protected the demand, and made not only the Tokugawa government but also the Choshu clan accept the use of the straits by foreign ships except during battle. He reported to Vice admiral King the result as below.⁶⁾

It was satisfactory to find that both parties disclaimed all wish to interfere with the use of the straits by foreign ships. The Minister simply urged with obvious reason and good sense that foreign ships should avoid the passage during the occurrence of hostilities, and that if they passed within the line of fire they must do so at their own risk.

In the letter, he also told King his opinion, as follows:

I am of opinion that at this juncture one of Her Majesty's ships should be stationed near the straits to observe the proceedings of both parties, and see that British interests are not compromised by the acts of either. Much useful information might be obtained by this step and means provided for checking irregularities on the part of British ships if such should occur.

Augus, British warship, send to the Shimonoseki straits from Nagasaki latter.

3. 2 Official Notification for British subjects in Japan

On September first 1866, Parkes issued the following official notification for British subjects in Japan.⁷⁾ (Figure)

Section 81.

"If any British subject commits any of the following offences, that is to say, —

1— "In China, while Her Majesty is at peace with the Emperor of China, levies war or takes part in any operation of war against the Emperor of China, or aids or abets any person in carrying on war, insurrection, or rebellion against the Emperor of China;

2— "In Japan, while Her Majesty is at peace with the Tycoon of Japan, levies war or takes part in any operation of war against the Tycoon of Japan, or aids or abets any person in carrying on war, insurrection, or rebellion against the Tycoon of Japan;—

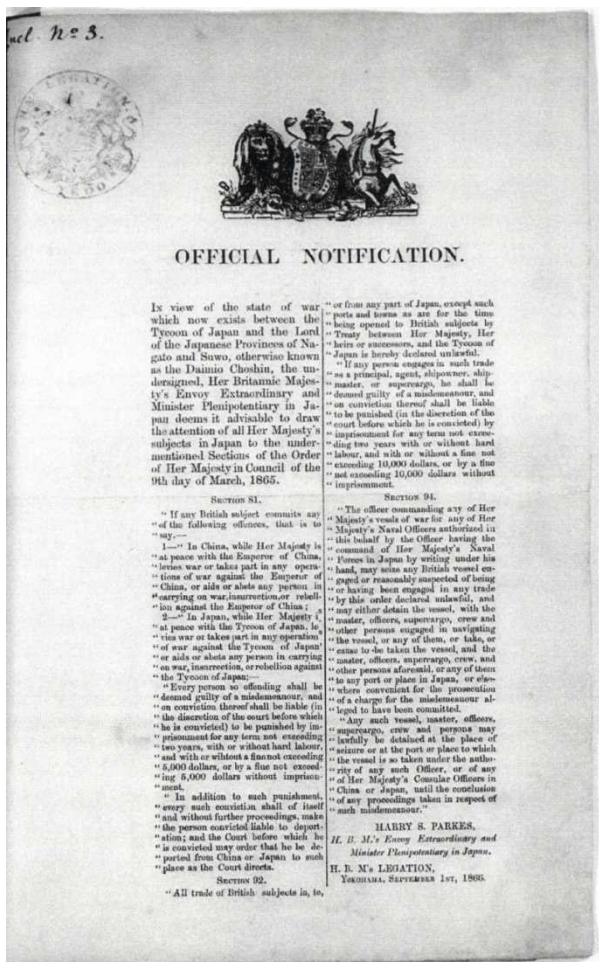
Every person so offending shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and on conviction thereof shall be liable...

Section 92.

All trade of British subjects in, to, or from any part of Japan, except such ports and towns as are for the time being opened to British subjects by Treaty between Her Majesty, Her heirs or successors, and the Tycoon of Japan is hereby declared unlawful.

If any person engages in such trade as a principal, agent, shipowner, shipmaster, or supercargo, he shall be deemed guilty of misdemeanor, and on conviction thereof shall be liable...

First, Section 81 declares that “Her Majesty is at peace with the Emperor of China” and “the Tycoon of Japan.” With acceptance on this point, it says that any British subject who sides with parties against the Tycoon of Japan shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor. Next, Section 92 says that any British subject who engages in unlawful trade except at ports opened by the treaty shall be also deemed guilty of a misdemeanor. According to this official notification, it is said that Parkes put a high priority on continuance of trade with the Tokugawa government in the national conflict in Japan.



Figure⁸⁾
Official Notification
(September 1st, 1866)

4 Conclusion

This paper clarifies the British diplomatic policy with Japan after the Shimonoseki war, as follows:

Firstly, the British government won the assent of the Emperor to the Treaties of Commerce in order to expand the trade. Secondly, the British government expressed a stance of placing importance on the official diplomatic relations with the Tokugawa government in the national conflict in Japan, in order to continue trade.

Therefore, the British diplomatic policy with Japan after the Shimonoseki war was for expansion and continuance of free trade with Japan.

Notes

- 1) Letter from Palmerston to John Russell, October 5, 1864, PRO30/22/15C, National Archives.
- 2) Yuka Taguchi, “The Bulletin of Institute of National Colleges of Technology Japan, Oshima College” No.49 (2016).
- 3) Letter from John Russell to Charles Winchester, July 24, 1865, FO410/10 No.41, National Archives.
- 4) Letter from Harry Parkes to John Russell, November 25, 1865, FO410/10 No.109, National Archives.
- 5) Letter from Harry Parkes to John Russell, November 28, 1865, FO410/10 No.111, National Archives
- 6) Letter from Harry Parkes to Vice admiral King, August 7, 1866, ADM125-119, National Archives.
- 7) Official Notification, September 1, 1866, ADM125-119, National Archives. Gaimusho-hikitsugi-shorui730, Historiographical Institute, The University of Tokyo.
- 8) Official Notification 「長防二州戦地タルヲ以テ外国船馬関隘泊禁止ノ布告請求一件」 外務省引継書類 730、東大史料編纂所所蔵 (Gaimusho-hikitsugi-shorui730, Historiographical Institute, The University of Tokyo.)

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