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Not for the Shogun: Aizu's Personal Motives in the Bakumatsu

By

Armen Bakalian

Ursinus College

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Faculty of History
Tohoku Gakuin University

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日本語要約

日本の近代歴史に、会津藩のイメージのほとんどは「幕府側」です。だが、幕末のデータをもっと入念に勉強したら、会津藩の「幕府側」イメージはすぐ「会津側」のイメージに変わっています。当時の会津藩主松平容保は、自分と幕政の味方の一橋慶喜と松平慶永の政力を強くする為に、京都守護職の役目を拝命しました。だから、長州・薩摩・肥後・他の藩から京都に集まった浪士達をすぐ新たな敵にしてしまいました。この事は一番大事です：松平容保は幕府の為ではなく、自分の政力を強くする為に働いていました。戊辰戦争には、容保も奥羽越列藩同盟も榎本武揚と幕臣達も、幕府をよみがえるためではなく、自分と自分の将来を守るために戦いました。もっとも、歴史に残った「賊軍」の汚名にも意味無し。東北には別の天皇（輪王寺宮能久親王、また‘東武皇帝’）があったから、戊辰戦争は二つの「官軍」の間であった。これをよく覚えてば、幕末の本来の姿を少し分かれる事ができるかもしれません。

Abstract

“History is written by the winners.” People take this as a given, but it results in important aspects of history being ignored—and, though people don’t usually realize it, means that history is more a story of how things were *perceived* rather than what they actually *were*. The story of the Aizu domain in the Bakumatsu period is very much a case of this. Since it lost the struggle now known as the Meiji Restoration, others wrote the history in its place, and have judged it by impressions which the historical record indicates as being false. Despite how people viewed and continue to view it, Aizu and its lord Matsudaira Katamori, were motivated to have increased political power independent of the Tokugawa status quo, and also to interact with and learn from the Western world.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The saying that “history is written by the victors” is usually taken as a given in the study of history. As a result, sometimes history is more about how things were perceived rather than how they happened. In the recent history of Japan, the Aizu 会津 domain falls into this category. Having lost the struggle that culminated in what is now known as the Meiji Restoration, Aizu’s history and the motivation behind its actions in the period have been misunderstood, in some ways by the impressions that Aizu itself tried to foster.¹ Bound by its domain code to obey the Tokugawa government, Aizu went to Kyoto, fought in its name, and was one of the pillars of what was at least perceived as Tokugawa military authority in the mid to late 1860s. As a result, some historians have viewed it as a domain of “Tokugawa partisans,” opposed to political reform, Westernization, and above all, dedicated to preservation of the “old order.”² Despite how its contemporaries viewed it, and how historians have perceived it, the actions of the Aizu domain, and in particular, of its last lord, Matsudaira Katamori 松平容保, suggest a motivation not only for political advancement independent of the Tokugawa government, but also a drive toward learning from the Western world and increasing international relations.

¹ Harold Bolitho, “Aizu 1853-1868,” *Proceedings of the British Association for Japanese Studies*, vol. 2 (1977): 9.

² Marius B. Jansen, *Sakamoto Ryōma and the Meiji Restoration* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 334, quoted in Harold Bolitho, *Treasures among Men: The Fudai Daimyō in Tokugawa Japan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 246.

Chapter 2: The Aizu Domain- A Brief Historical Sketch

Aizu is located in Japan's northern Tohoku 東北 region. Landlocked, it is surrounded by high mountains on all sides, leading to the region's relative isolation until the 19th century. The domain's castle town, Wakamatsu 若松, is "at the southern end of a small plain, situated at the juncture of five roads that spread through northeastern Honshu."³ In the early Edo period, Aizu changed hands frequently, with Hoshina Masayuki 保科正之, founder of what was to become the Aizu-Matsudaira clan, being transferred there in 1643.⁴ Masayuki, the half-brother of the third shogun, Tokugawa Iemitsu 徳川家光, had been adopted into the Hoshina family in 1617. Iemitsu sought strong ties with his half-brother, so he not only bestowed the Aizu domain on Masayuki, but also land in the adjoining Minamiyama 南山 district, a landholding that had been under the direct control of the Tokugawa government.⁵ He also often sought Masayuki's advice, and this earned him the distinction of having a permanent seat on the four-man *tamari no ma-zume* 溜間詰 council, which was made up of daimyo which had an advisory role in government affairs.⁶ In 1651, Iemitsu, on his deathbed, even asked Masayuki to serve as the guardian for his ten year old son and heir, Ietsuna 家綱.⁷ In this capacity, Masayuki essentially ran the government during the first half of Ietsuna's reign as the fourth shogun.

Thus, having received the great favor of the Tokugawa house, the first article of the Aizu house code spelled out the domain's official purpose: to repay the Tokugawa

³ Shiba Gorō, *Remembering Aizu: The Testament of Shiba Gorō*, trans. Kate Wildman Nakai (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press), 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

house for its favor. It was this article that was to set the course, at least on the surface, for much of Aizu's fate in the Bakumatsu period:

大君の義、一心大切に忠勤を存すべく、列国の例を以て自ら処るべからず。若し二心を懐かば、即ち我が子孫に非ず。面々決して従うべからず。

Taikun no gi, isshin taisetsu ni chuukin o zonzubeku, rekkoku no rei o motte mizukara orubekarazu. Wakashi futagokoro o idakaba, sunawachi waga shison ni arazu. Menmen keshite shitagaubekarazu

Serve the shogun loyally with all your heart. Don't let yourself get absorbed into other domains' trends or tendencies. If the clan lord is disloyal to the Tokugawa, he is no son of mine, and you are never to obey him.

-- Noguchi Shinichi, *Aizu-han*, p. 53

In 1699, during the reign of Masayuki's grandson Masakata, the family received what it perhaps considered the greatest honor of all: it was recognized as a collateral domain (*shinpan* 親藩) of the Tokugawa house. This also allowed it to use the surname Matsudaira (which had been the name of the Tokugawa family prior to its rise to power), as well as its own variant of the shogunal hollyhock (*aoi* 葵) crest.⁸ Henceforth, the family formerly called Hoshina became commonly known as the Aizu-Matsudaira.

Over the decades, the domain made a name for itself, especially in the realms of education and national defense. The Nisshinkan 日新館, its school for upper samurai, was built in 1803, and, in the words of historian Chokusei Ahagon, became "one of the most notable schools in the Tokugawa era."⁹ Located in Wakamatsu, near the inner circle of the castle, Nisshinkan's grounds were extensive, containing, among other things, a swimming pond, shooting ranges, a printing press, sword training halls, lecture halls, and

⁸ Noguchi Shinichi, *Aizu han* (Tokyo: Gendai Shokan, 2005), 57.

⁹ Chokusei Ahagon, "The Influence of the Oswego Movement upon Japanese Education, through Hideo Takamine in Early Meiji Japan, 1860's-1880's" (PhD diss., State University of New York, Buffalo, 1994), 42.

even an observatory.¹⁰ Admitting students at around age twelve, it served to reinforce their moral education with a firm grounding in the moral foundation of Confucianism, which contributed to the popular idea that the Aizu samurai were stubborn and proud to a fault.¹¹ As for national defense, Aizu was often deployed in various parts of the country with coastal patrol duties. In the decades leading from the start of the 19th century up to Commodore Perry's arrival, it was deployed no less than four times, to places as isolated as Hokkaido or as critical as Edo Bay. Some of these deployments were longer than others; Aizu's presence in the Miura Peninsula alone lasted 10 years, from 1810 to 1820.¹² Thus, for a landlocked, isolated domain, it was remarkably well-situated in the realms of education, national defense, foreign affairs, and politics. It was with this background that Aizu entered the Bakumatsu period, and the most controversial period of its history.

¹⁰ Shiba, 7.

¹¹ Ibid, 7.

¹² Noguchi, 151.

Chapter 3: Aizu after the Sakuradamon Incident

In 1853, vessels of the United States Navy under Commodore Matthew Perry arrived at Uraga 浦賀, dangerously near the Shogun's capital of Edo. It was not the first time that a foreign vessel— apart from the usual Dutch, Chinese, and Korean ones in Nagasaki— appeared in Japanese waters, but it was the first time that the Japanese had no way of turning unwanted foreign vessels away. Having neither the political nor military power to refuse, they agreed to Perry's demands and, and with Hayashi *Daigaku no Kami* 林大學頭, the rector of the Bakufu College, representing Japan, the Treaty of Kanagawa was signed in March of the following year.



Figure 1- Ii Naosuke

Aizu, he was sent to the domain for formal education at the Nisshinkan school, and the importance of the house code was firmly impressed upon him. Thus, when he succeeded to the headship of the Aizu clan at age 17 in early 1852, Katamori's services were almost immediately called upon by the Shogunate. Unable to undertake security at Uraga independently, the government called on several domains to assist in security

At the time of Perry's arrival, the young Matsudaira Katamori had barely been lord of Aizu for a year. Since the previous lord, Katataka 容敬, had not produced a male heir, Katamori was adopted from the Mino-Takasu 美濃高須 Matsudaira family. As part of Katamori's preparation to become lord of

arrangements around Edo Bay. Aizu was deployed at Gun Platform Two in Shinagawa, under the personal direction of Katamori himself.

However, things were soon to change drastically. A movement led by Ii Naosuke 井伊直弼, lord of the foremost *fudai* (譜代, Tokugawa-vassal) domain of Hikone 彦根藩, restored the *fudai* to their traditional role as the stewards of Bakufu politics, decided Shogunal succession in favor of a young and malleable candidate (passing over the more capable Yoshinobu, son of the famed Mito lord Tokugawa Nariaki, and head of the Hitotsubashi Tokugawa), and signed an unequal treaty with the Americans, despite the objections of the Imperial court. Opponents to these policies were systematically imprisoned or executed, ushering in a period known in history as the “Ansei Purge” (*Ansei no Taigoku* 安政の大獄). Famous victims of the Purge include Choshu intellectual Yoshida Shoin 吉田松陰(executed), Fukui Matsudaira retainer Hashimoto Sanai 橋本佐内(executed), Mito lord Nariaki 烈公齊昭(made to resign), Hitotsubashi Yoshinobu 一橋慶喜(placed in confinement), and many others, from daimyo to court nobles, from samurai to commoners. As a result of these policies, Ii caused violence and civil unrest amongst the fanatical nationalist *ronin*—men primarily of the southwestern domains of Choshu 長州, Satsuma 薩摩, and Tosa 土佐— gathering in Kyoto, as well as earning the hatred of two sets of clansmen whom he had directly affronted: those of the Mito Tokugawa (Yoshinobu’s birth family) and the Echizen-Fukui Matsudaira (the clan of the executed Hashimoto Sanai). Both Mito and Fukui, while ruled by branches of the Tokugawa house, were ironically to produce some of the same men



Figure 2- Matsudaira Yoshinaga (Shungaku)

who were to bring down the Tokugawa government a few short years later. Not surprisingly, it was also men from Mito who were to bring Ii Naosuke's career to a bloody end in early 1860. All but one of the assassins who ambushed Ii's procession outside Edo Castle's Sakurada Gate (the Sakuradamongai no Hen 桜田門外の変) were Mito clansmen. Mito-born Yoshinobu and the Echizen-Fukui lord Matsudaira Shungaku (Yoshinaga) soon came to the fore of Bakufu politics, and were to remain prominent until the fall of the Shogunate in late 1867.

It was also Yoshinobu and Shungaku who were instrumental in the creation of a new post to quell the unrest in Kyoto: that of *Kyoto Shugoshoku* 京都守護職, or “Lord

Protector of Kyoto.”¹³ The city magistrates of Kyoto, as well as the Shoshidai 所司代 (the Shogun's traditional representative in Kyoto) were increasingly unable to maintain public order in Kyoto, and thus the duties of Shugoshoku were instituted—a position that had as its direct mission the maintenance of public order by military force. Matsudaira Katamori, their close political ally, was the natural choice for the position. Not only did Katamori rule a domain known for its strong martial tradition—a domain which, over the course of its history, had thirty-seven schools of martial arts—but, as



Figure 3- Tokugawa Yoshinobu, 1867

¹³ Takano Kiyoshi, *Tokugawa Yoshinobu* (Tōkyō: NHK Books, 1997), 133.

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previously demonstrated, his domain had also been prominent in politics and missions of national defense.¹⁴ And above all, Katamori ruled the one domain that was renowned for its house code's status as the contract that bound him and his retainers, down to the last man, to obey the orders of the Tokugawa house. Thus, it was only natural that Katamori should take the assignment.

For Katamori, though, it was not so easy to accept. He might have been more than happy to go to Kyoto, but this opinion was not unanimous amongst his retainers. Most notably, Aizu clan elders Saigo Tanomo 西郷頼母(1830-1903) and Tanaka Tosa 田中土佐 (1820-1868), upon hearing of their lord's intention to accept the assignment, rushed from Aizu to Katamori's mansion in Edo and made their dissent known in no uncertain terms.¹⁵ As with



Figure 4- Tanaka Tosa

many clan elders in those years, they tried to keep their lord and domain out of the conflict, knowing full well that taking sides would not only bring a high cost in money and manpower, but would inevitably create enemies. In the end, both clan elders and



Figure 5- Saigo Tanomo

supervised Aizu's coastal defense operations at Shinagawa upon Perry's arrival in 1853

Katamori knew that the past fifty years had been economically rough for Aizu: frequent security deployments to Hokkaido and the Edo area had pressured the farmers greatly, and the financial situation remained tenuous.¹⁶ They were also well aware of the political situation both inside and outside Japan; after all, Katamori had personally

¹⁵ Yanatori Mitsuyoshi, "Saigō Tanomo," *Rekishi to Tabi*, November 1977, 131.

¹⁶ Shiba 8.

and like anyone else, knew on sight that America, and by extension the outside world, was a force to be reckoned with. Ultimately, both Katamori and Tanomo were thinking of the domain, but in different ways. Katamori, much like his predecessors in the war-torn 16th century, doubtless knew that political instability was bound to bring success to those who struck ahead of everyone else. Tanomo and Tosa, however, were thinking of self-preservation for Aizu. Of the two, Tanomo took the hardest line, comparing the Kyoto assignment to “carrying a load of firewood while trying to put out a fire.”

Katamori definitely could understand what Saigo Tanomo was trying to tell him, and began efforts to reject the position.¹⁷ However, Yoshinobu and Shungaku would have none of it. They responded in kind by pressuring Katamori to accept, and Shungaku, in writing, even reminded Katamori of his responsibility of obedience as stipulated by the Aizu house code. With no way of turning down his two closest political allies, Katamori had no choice but to accept. Saigo Tanomo was relieved of his duties as clan elder. Tanomo returned to Aizu, and was to remain out of the realm of domain affairs until the start of the Boshin War in 1868.¹⁸

Analysis

While Katamori invoked his duty as stipulated in the house code as the reason for accepting the assignment of Kyoto Shugoshoku, his actions tell a different story. Along with Hitotsubashi Yoshinobu and Matsudaira Shungaku, he came to the forefront of Shogunal politics following Ii Naosuke’s assassination, at a time when the senior Tokugawa-collateral domains as well as the larger “outside” domains were once again vying for a greater say in government affairs, as they had prior to Ii’s tenure and the

¹⁷ Shiba, 10.

¹⁸ Majima Isao, “Matsudaira Katamori Kashidan Jinmei Jiten,” in *Matsudaira Katamori no Subete*, ed. Tsunabuchi Kenjō, 190-191.

Ansei Purge. While many daimyo were trying their best to stay out of the way of politics, those which were among the loudest voices and most influential figures in the immediate post-Ii period were leaders of domains such as Satsuma, Aizu, Sendai, Tosa, and others, clearly interested in political advancement, an intention they were to later demonstrate by their actions in no uncertain terms.

Thus, when Yoshinobu and Shungaku, Katamori's principal allies in Edo, created the position of Kyoto Shugoshoku in order to improve their say in Court politics, Katamori, unable to turn down neither his allies nor an opportunity for political advancement, accepted the job. Some might say that he did so without regard to the consequences to his domain, however, evidence suggests that he knew full well but was willing to gamble on the chance of success. While it is true that Katamori was to succeed at first, his path would eventually lead him to financial ruin in his own domain, unflagging pursuit by the enemies he had made, and the alienating of some of his most important allies. But in late 1862, all of that lay in the future.



**Katamori, summer 1864: in full armor and commanding the Aizu forces at the scene
of the Kinmon Incident**

Chapter 4: Kyoto and Aizu's rise to Prestige, 1862-1864

In late 1862, Katamori left Edo at the head of 1000 Aizu samurai, heading for his new job in Kyoto. The Shogunate had provided generously for him: he was to receive a “salary” of 50,000 *koku*, and a loan of 30,000 gold *ryo* to cover travel expenses.¹⁹ Near the end of the twelfth lunar month, he crossed the Sanjo-Ohashi bridge and entered Kyoto. After paying his respects to the Imperial regent Konoe, he set up his headquarters at Kurotani, in eastern Kyoto. In preparation for his arrival, he had sent vassals ahead in



Figure 6- Katamori in Court Costume

order to establish contacts with the Imperial court. It was because of his duty in Kyoto, for example, that he needed to present himself (even before arriving there) as adhering to the concept of “joi” (攘夷, barbarian expulsion) when he previously was, and would once again in 1868 prove to be, very much in support of opening the country.²⁰

At the time of Katamori's entrance into Kyoto, opinion with regards to the deployment was

¹⁹ Satō Masanobu, “Matsudaira Katamori Ryakunen-fu,” in *Matsudaira Katamori no Subete*, ed. Tsunabuchi Kenjō, 249.

²⁰ Harold Bolitho, “Aizu, 1853-1868,” *Proceedings of the British Association for Japanese Studies*, vol. 2 (1977): 12.

still very much divided amongst the vassals. There was understandable concern over the fact that Aizu would be dirtying its hands as a domain by fighting the mass of ever-increasing masterless samurai in Kyoto. That being the case, it was incredibly fortunate that, soon after Katamori arrived in Kyoto, a group of men arrived who gave him a solution to this very problem.

I refer of course to the famous Shinsengumi. Led in early 1863 by Kondo Isami (an Edo-based sword teacher) and Serizawa Kamo (a former Mito clansman), they were recommended to Aizu by way of Serizawa's brother, who was a Kyoto-based official of the Mito domain. It was in this small group of only a dozen or so men, then known as



Figure 7- Kondo Isami

Roshigumi, that Aizu found its solution: it would fight fire with fire, employing its own “masterless samurai” in order to fight those whose subjugation they had been charged with. Though paid for by the Shogunate, these men owed their direct allegiance to Katamori and Katamori alone.²¹ The actions of the Aizu domain also show quite clearly that it treated these men as second-tier, expendable forces, and it was quite willing to wash

its hands of these men if the need arose. One example of this attitude is the extremely delayed arrival of Aizu forces at the scene of the Ikedaya raid (early summer 1864). The raid ended in a victory for the Shinsengumi, but with great difficulty and at great cost (1 man dead, 3 of the best swordsmen in the unit badly wounded), leaving the student of history to think that had Aizu provided reinforcements, perhaps the raid might have been resolved not only more quickly, but with less bloodshed on both sides.

²¹ Bolitho 9.

Chapter 5: Katamori and the Court

As previously stated, the first thing that Katamori did upon arrival in Kyoto was to pay his respects to Konoe, the Imperial regent. Not too long afterward, he made his first visit to the Palace proper, meeting with the Emperor himself. However, Katamori had, after all, come to improve his and his allies' position at court, and so, he set about acquiring supporters amongst the courtiers. In this regard, he was much like the people he had been sent to subdue—men who had their own Imperial “faction,” in the form of Sanjo Sanetomi, Iwakura Tomomi, and others. In the summer of 1864, Aizu was to make full use of these connections. In those days, the security of the Imperial palace was overseen by a combined force of several domains, which included, among others, Satsuma (at that point seeking a greater voice in politics, as well as being possessed of a singular distrust of Choshu), Aizu, and Choshu. Following the Shinsengumi's victory over the Choshu and Higo ronin at Ikedaya, Aizu sought to continue the push, and lobbied for the Emperor to approve of Choshu's removal from guard duty at the palace. Emperor Komei, more than nearly any previous emperor in the Edo era, was eager to independently conduct his own “restoration” of sorts, and as such, it was becoming more and more natural for him to interfere in Shogunate politics. He particularly caught the attention of the entire country by ordering the dismissal of two *roju*- Abe Masato and Matsumae Takahiro, an action which was viewed by some as inconveniencing the Shogun's control of his own affairs. With Katamori firmly ensconced as Kyoto Shugoshoku, he soon acquired his own voice at court- that of the sympathetic court noble *Nakagawa no Miya Asahiko*. After some initial difficulty, Aizu acquired the edict from the Emperor (through Asahiko's continued efforts) and, together with several other domains, fought Choshu ronin *and*

domain troops in and around Kyoto in the summer of 1864, in what was known alternatively as either the Kinmon Incident or the Battle of Hamagurigomon. Another



Figure 8- Emperor Komei

part of this incident was the *shichigyo ochi* 七卿落ち, the flight of seven pro-Choshu Imperial aides. These included the aforementioned Sanjo and Iwakura, among others, all of them escaping to Choshu. Of course the immense conflict that followed resulted in the burning of much of Kyoto, but all the same, Choshu was routed from Kyoto. In recognition for (at least) the accomplishment of this goal of routing Choshu, Emperor Komei presented Katamori with two letters of commendation, recognizing the army led by Katamori as the *kangun*—the Imperial Army. To the end of his days, Katamori cherished these letters, wearing them in a bamboo tube that he carried on his person at all times. Despite this, Katamori was not above ignoring the Imperial court when it suited him; when a Satsuma clansman was implicated in the murder of a Court noble, Katamori ignored Komei’s requests for an Aizu investigation into the matter, fearing quite reasonably that it would place unnecessary strain on the already tenuous Aizu-Satsuma alliance.

Komei was to further improve Katamori, Yoshinobu, and Shungaku’s position when he named them and two of their allies- Yamanouchi Yodo of Tosa and Date Munenari of Uwajima, to be Imperial Advisors (*chogi sanyo* 朝議参預, forming the 参預会議 *sanyo kaigi*, or Advisory Council).²² This list, while it included three members of

²² Takano 185.

Tokugawa-collateral domains, did not include the contemporary shogun, Tokugawa Iemochi (then brought to Kyoto at the request of Katamori himself), or any “regular” member of the Tokugawa government.²³ As historian Harold Bolitho says:

Matsudaira Katamori “was named – a fact which suggests that, while helping to cheapen shogunal prestige, he had not forgotten to enhance his own at court. Bringing the Shogun to Kyoto and keeping him there was one, of course; persuading the Bakufu to increase courtier stipends was another. Pretending to sympathize with the xenophobia of Komei and his attendants, despite his own preferences, which were for opening the country, was yet another.”

--Bolitho, *Aizu 1853-1868*, p. 12

Another aspect of Aizu changing the Kyoto dynamic was the fact that its presence increased the irrelevance of the age-old institution of the office of *Shoshidai*. The incumbents during Matsudaira Katamori’s early months in Kyoto, Makino Tadayuki of Echigo-Nagaoka and then Inaba Masakuni of Yamashiro-Yodo, were not very effective in their duties, and the *Shoshidai* only really regained some meaning with the appointment of the young Matsudaira Sadaaki of Kuwana...who was none other than Katamori’s birth brother. Indeed, it was through Katamori’s efforts that Sadaaki, barely 19, even acquired the post, usually reserved for men of greater age and already proven ability.²⁴ With the presence of Sadaaki and the Kuwana forces, the increase of Aizu retainer presence in Kyoto to around 1,500, and the added numbers of the *Shinsengumi* (at peak strength around 200), it was no surprise that Katamori, more certain than ever of his position, was to firmly refuse all offers of working with other domains in the duty of

²³ Bolitho 12.

²⁴ Satō 249.

defending the Emperor.²⁵ Taking more and more of a firm tone in this realm, he was to alienate people who were otherwise willing to be allies, which ultimately contributed to his downfall.

Analysis

Aizu was sent to Kyoto with the stated mission of preserving the city's peace and restoring the authority and good relations of the Tokugawa shogunate with the Imperial court. Though this was its stated mission, in reality, Matsudaira Katamori, as the Kyoto

Shugoshoku, was to pursue a path not unlike his early allies and later enemies—one of personal gain and one that increased his political strength. He was willing to listen to the Imperial court when it suited him—like when Emperor Komei commended his actions at the Battle of Hamagurigomon—and he was willing to present himself as loyal to the Tokugawa Shogunate when he needed to—like



Figure 9- Yoshinobu in his later years when he lobbied to bring the Shogun to Kyoto and keep him there. However, the improvement in his status (including the thirty percent increase to his domain) and situation resulted in the revelation of another side of Katamori—that of a person devoted first and foremost to his own career.²⁶

The creation and maintenance of the Shinsengumi as Aizu's second-tier, disposable, "dirty work" unit was one sign of Katamori's true motives of independent

²⁵ Bolitho 14.

²⁶ Bolitho 8.

work. Where other domains stuck with stipended retainers for their Kyoto-based forces, as of 1863 there was only one that had mercenaries of any sort—and that, of course, was Aizu. There would later be others, such as the Shonai domain's Shinchogumi, but Shinchogumi does not easily fall into the same category—its members were actually, in many ways, folded into the Shonai retainer force, whereas Shinsengumi was, first and foremost, a group of mercenaries. Even though they were eventually made direct retainers of the Shogun, in the end, they still needed Aizu as a source of legitimacy for their operations, and to the end, fought alongside Aizu forces, even to the end of the siege of Aizu in fall 1868 and beyond.

The second major sign of his willingness to work for improvement of prestige outside the Tokugawa system was his acquisition and maintenance of his own faction at Court. Through the efforts of *Nakagawa no Miya Asahiko*, Aizu was able to consistently

acquire the Imperial legitimacy it needed to do what it wished.

Katamori's acquisition of the title of Imperial Advisor, along with the four other members of the Yoshinobu-Shungaku "party," was also not a coincidence in this regard—if



Figure 10- Nijo Castle, the Shogun's Kyoto residence

anything, while Komei was trying more and more to form his own locus of power independent of the Tokugawa shogunate, he was also very much under the control of those who had the military and strategic upper hand both in and around Kyoto.

A third aspect of Katamori and the Aizu domain's increase in prestige and political power was the degradation of the importance of the office of Shoshidai. An old and venerable office dating back to the days of Oda Nobunaga, it was reduced to little more than a position of military reinforcement subordinate to Aizu.²⁷ And it was this position of subordination that was to bring Sadaaki his fair share of the punishment that the Meiji government was to inflict upon his brother and the supporters of his brother's domain after the Boshin War of 1868.

²⁷ Kōri Yoshitake, "Matsudaira Sadaaki," *Rekishi Dokuhon*, January 2006, 100.

Chapter 6: Aizu and the Boshin War, 1868

In January 1868, the Boshin War began with the Battle of Toba-Fushimi.

Yoshinobu, Katamori's longtime ally and then the 15th Tokugawa shogun, had resigned, and withdrawn his forces from Kyoto to Osaka. Yoshinobu and Katamori, late in the 10th lunar month of 1867, were summoned by the new boy-emperor, Meiji, thanked for their families' generations of service to the Imperial house, and asked to do their utmost to continue doing their part in keeping the peace. Despite this, the Imperial Court, and the young, impressionable Emperor, soon came under the control of the pro-Choshu court nobles, as well as the newly allied Satsuma and Choshu. Despite the Emperor's face to face thanks to the two men, Iwakura Tomomi and several Satsuma and Choshu figures, the night before, forged an Imperial edict and acquired permission to punish the Tokugawa family by force.²⁸ In the opening days of 1868, Aizu, along with its ever-faithful Kuwana and Shinsengumi, and a handful of other domains, spearheaded an effort to reenter Kyoto and reestablish control of the city, as per the face to face request of Meiji himself as of late 1867. They tried to negotiate their way in to the city, but when Satsuma troops refused and fired on them, the battle began in earnest. The Shogun's forces, while well-equipped and larger in number, were thoroughly routed from the field by the determined, tenacious fighting of the Satsuma-Choshu-Tosa combined force.

Then Yoshinobu, in a move that shocked and flabbergasted his retainers and allies alike, slipped out of Osaka Castle by night, taking Katamori and Sadaaki with him and escaping to Edo by sea. The Satsuma-Choshu-Tosa army then acquired a brocade banner "from the Emperor" (most probably also from Iwakura and his faction), and officially

²⁸ Shiba 40.

became the “Imperial Army” (*kangun* 官軍).²⁹ While this was clearly against the previous Emperor’s *and* the current Emperor’s direct wishes, the Court, as it had once bowed to the power of Aizu, now bowed to the power of the Sat-Cho force.

Katamori, after arriving in Edo, immediately entered into voluntary confinement at his Edo estate. Quite understandably, he was embarrassed at having turned his back on his retainers at Toba-Fushimi, and even more so, he was fed up with his former allies. Much as Yoshinobu was the former shogun, Katamori made no secret of his disgust, calling him “infinitely irresolute.”³⁰ During his self-imposed confinement, he was by no means not busy—he and his son Nobunori, who became the acting daimyo of Aizu after Katamori’s abdication early in the 2nd lunar month, wrote letters to several daimyo, and submitted apology after apology to the Imperial Court (or at least, its Satsuma-Choshu representatives). The apologies went unheard, but it was the appeals to the daimyo, especially those who were Aizu’s larger neighbors in northeastern Japan, which were to bear fruit.³¹ One such letter, from Nobunori to Date Yoshikuni, the daimyo of Sendai, bears quoting here in full:

“As you know, my father *Higo no Kami* [Katamori] has worked tirelessly for seven years, despite all pain and difficulty, in order to unify the interests of the Court and Shogunate. When he was sick, His Majesty the previous Emperor showed fatherly concern over his health, which was a great boon to our clan. But now his Excellency the Shogun has suddenly been named an ‘Enemy of the Court,’ and, as he was fired upon first, was forced to do battle outside Kyoto on the third of this month. We have also fallen

²⁹ Henmi Hideo. “Sendai-han: Maboroshi no Tōbu Kōtei Yōritsu.” *Rekishi to Tabi*, October 1998.

³⁰ Bolitho 15.

³¹ Shiba 12.

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victim to this stain on our honor, and it grieves us greatly. Therefore we beg of you to convey to the Court our sincere wish that this stain may be lifted from our name.

Keio 4 (1868), first month, 29th day.

Matsudaira *Wakasa no Kami* Nobunori

To Matsudaira [Date] *Mutsu no Kami* [Yoshikuni]”

-*Sendai Shi-shi*, p. 480-481

While the Boshin War, following the fall of Edo Castle, consisted primarily of the efforts of Aizu and its allies in the north at self-defense, it can in fact be divided into two semi-distinct threads that converge occasionally but ultimately diverge: that of the Tokugawa retainers, led by Enomoto Takeaki and Otori Keisuke, and that of Aizu and the northern domains, led by Matsudaira Katamori. There were distinct objectives for both group of men, but ultimately, they both wanted the same thing—self-preservation. Neither was interested in reinstating the Tokugawa shogun to political power, a fact illustrated by the open statement of Katamori and his allies, as well as of Enomoto, to the foreign powers:

Sendai, Nagaoka, Aizu, Yonezawa, and Shonai (summer 1868): “We will destroy the offenders. Those who fly before us we shall not pursue; but we will reconquer Japan, that the Emperor may indeed reign over it...”³²

Enomoto (1869): “We pray that this portion of the Empire may be conferred upon our late lord, Tokugawa Kamenosuke [Tayasu Kamenosuke Iesato]; and in that case, we shall repay your beneficence by our faithful guardianship of the northern gate.”³³

³² John R. Black, *Young Japan: Yokohama and Yedo, Vol. II* (London: Trubner & Co., 1881), 214.

Analysis

Katamori, having long since shown with his actions that he was only interested in the Tokugawa system when it suited him, instead went on to form his own nascent government: the Ou'uetsu Reppan Domei 奥羽越列藩同盟, loosely translatable as "The Northern Alliance of Confederated Domains." From as early as the 2nd and 3rd lunar months of 1868, the northern domains were starting to show signs of support for Aizu. The lord of Yonezawa sent senior councilor Kinameri Yonin to ask Date Yoshikuni, the lord of Sendai and the brother in law of Katamori's son Nobunori, to lead a coalition of domains in support of Aizu's cause.³⁴ Soon afterward, Sendai retainers Tamamushi Sadayu and Wakasei Bunjuro, in a reciprocal move, were sent to Yonezawa to further discuss the situation.³⁵ Then, from the 19th to the 21st of the fourth month, senior retainers



Figure 11- Date Yoshikuni

from 25 domains of northeastern Japan met in Shiroishi, the Sendai domain's secondary castle town, and, unanimously, agreed to form what was then known as the Ou'u Reppan Domei 奥羽列藩同盟, or "The Confederation of Domains of Mutsu and Dewa Provinces."³⁶ Formal institution came on the 3rd of the fifth month, and three days later, six domains of northern Echigo province (some of which, like Nagaoka, were

³³ Black, 241.

³⁴ Hoshi Ryōichi, *Sendai Boshin Senshi* (Tokyo: Sanshusha, 2005), 52.

³⁵ Ibid 54.

³⁶ Naramoto Tatsuya, *Nihon no Kassen: Monoshiri Jiten* (Tokyo: Shufu-to-Seikatsusha, 1994), 424.

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of land in Echigo itself) joined the alliance, making it the Ou'etsu Reppan Domei 奥羽越列藩同盟, the “Confederation of Domains of Mutsu, Dewa, and Echigo Provinces.”³⁷

Aizu itself was not part of the initial alliance, joining it later and only ever being, in terms of rank within the organization, second to the larger Sendai domain, but the confederation was formed in part as a result of Katamori's requests for assistance, as well as his personal efforts at diplomacy with the larger domains like Sendai and Yonezawa, and his threats of violence against the smaller ones, like Nagaoka, Miharu, and Moriyama. It was only a month later that the new alliance was to receive what was essentially a godsend: *Rinnoji no Miya* Yoshihisa, the young Imperial prince and former abbot of the Tokugawa family temple at Kan'eiji in Ueno, who had, with the help of Enomoto Takeaki, escaped the battle there, entered Aizu on the 6th of June. It was a perfect situation: *Rinnoji no Miya* was discontented and looking for people with military power to back his desire for greater a greater political role; in turn, the Northern Alliance needed a source of Court legitimacy to counteract the southwesterners' claim that the northern lords were “Enemies of the Court.” So, barely a week later, *Rinnoji no Miya* Yoshihisa did the unthinkable: he declared himself the new sovereign- Emperor Tobu 東武皇帝, with the *nengo* (年号, era/reign name) of Taisei 1 大政元年.³⁸ The daimyo lords who formed the Northern Alliance were named to all the important positions in the government of the new sovereign, who too Date Yoshikuni's adopted daughter as his Empress. Matsudaira Katamori was no doubt pleased: despite the *Nanbokucho*-era overtones, no one could claim that he was a rebel against the throne anymore, since he

³⁷ Mori Mayumi, *Shōgitai Ibun* (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 2004), 287.

³⁸ Henmi 81.

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too served an Emperor. The foreign press also caught sight of this situation, and an article even appeared in the New York Times on October 2, 1868, about the “new Mikado.”³⁹

The document listing the officials in Emperor Tobu’s government appears below:

³⁹ Ibid.

The document indeed lists all the major daimyo of the northern domains and many other figures, some of whom were former Shogunate officials. Indeed, two former *roju*, Ogasawara Nagamichi and Itakura Katsukiyo, were to establish themselves in Shiroishi, the center of government for the confederation, and work as its administrators. With this firm political foundation, the northern domains were in a much better position to bargain with their opponents from the south. The memory of the Nanbokuchō period was probably omnipresent in the minds of any who contemplated the implications of a country divided between two emperors, and both sides wanted to end the war quickly for the sake of their pretender to the throne.

Indeed, this is a far cry from the stereotypical description of the Northern Alliance in Western texts—those where they even receive so much as even a passing sentence, at any rate—“Tokugawa partisans.” Aside from Aizu and the Moriyama domain, which were Tokugawa collaterals (and Moriyama was a *very* small one), there were only a handful of *fudai* domains in the Confederation—the *fudai* being the only class of lords who might have even the slightest sense of duty to the Tokugawa house because of centuries of service. Instead, the driving forces behind the formation of the Northern Confederation were some of the largest *tozama* domains of northern Japan- Sendai, Yonezawa, and Nanbu being the three most important ones. And as previously stated in the quote from their statement to the foreign powers, they indicated in *writing* that they accepted the fact that the Shogunate was gone and nothing could bring it back, and that what they were really interested in was the Emperor (Tobu or Meiji...the documents I’ve read don’t really say, and this is probably intentional...) and making sure that Japan was “truly” under the Emperor’s control, as well as trying to redress the issues of Aizu’s

unfair treatment at the hands of the “other” Imperial army. However, the truth of the matter is that had the Northern Confederation succeeded in its goals and fought off the southwesterners, a hypothetical “new order” led by them would probably have entailed more of what Japan had already seen for hundreds of years—others with the real political and military power ruling in the name of a puppet emperor. Thus, neither the Northern Confederation’s plans for Japan, nor the things that Satsuma and Choshu had planned for Japan were really a “new” order—they were just the old order with new skin, after a fashion.

The new government, though, would have none of it. Though they had secured Edo Castle peacefully through the efforts of Tokugawa retainer Katsu Kaishu, a large group of discontented Tokugawa retainers and their sympathizers formed the Shogitai, and fought the new government at Rinnoji no Miya’s former residence of Ueno-Kan’eiji. This battle changed the new government’s approach, and the generous settlement that



Figure 12- Katsu Awa no Kami Kaishu

Katsu Kaishu was working on for the Tokugawa family fell through. Having endured Toba-Fushimi, the surrender of Edo, and finally, the Shogitai, they were in no mood to be bargaining, neither were they inclined to let themselves be intimidated by the Imperial legitimacy that the north’s

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“Emperor” gave. With this being the case, they pressed their attack northward, and, thanks in great part to Itagaki Taisuke’s push for a fast conclusion, were able to bring down Enomoto’s fortress of Goryokaku in mid-1869, finally bringing an end to a war that had gone on far too long and at far too great a price.

Chapter 7: Katamori and the West, 1868



Figure 13- E. Henry Schnell war reached its territory. It was, contrary to popular belief, not only interested in military tactics and equipment, but also in medicine and some aspects of culture, as well. If there is any figure who is proof of this, it is none other than the Prussian-born, Yokohama-based merchant E. Henry Schnell. Working as a secretary with the Prussian legation until the end of 1867, he then went north with his brother Edward and joined the quickly forming Northern Alliance.⁴⁰ While his brother was to operate out of Niigata, selling guns on a large scale to various Northern Alliance domains, such as Nagaoka (whose chief councilor Kawai Tsugunosuke bought Gatling guns, rifles, and mines from him), it was Henry who would be closely associated with Aizu-Wakamatsu. Everything about his connection to Aizu suggests that he had the lord's direct patronage: he took up residence in the castle town, married a samurai woman, and even took a Japanese name—Hiramatsu Buhei 平松武兵衛—and of course, the letters of “Hiramatsu” are the very same letters that appear in the name “Matsudaira.” Serving as a military advisor to

⁴⁰ Kobiyama Rokurō, “Matsudaira Katamori Kankein-in-jiten,” in *Matsudaira Katamori no Subete*, ed. Tsunabuchi Kenjō, 200.

Yonezawa and Aizu, he was to take on the responsibility of a senior councilor during the Boshin War. When the fall of Aizu was imminent, Katamori sent him a private message, urging him to escape—which he did, along with several refugees from Aizu, whom he eventually took to California, where they founded the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony.

The Schell brothers' presence was only a small part of the large-scale military reform that Aizu hurriedly carried out in the wake of the defeat at Toba-Fushimi. For generations, Aizu had relied on Japanese-style military organization and battle tactics, in

the form of the Naganuma-ryu tradition of military strategy. However, that system was proven to be inadequate for meeting the southwesterners on anything even remotely approaching equal terms. As with its weapons (a mishmash of American, British, and Dutch equipment), Aizu used a combination of Prussian and French style military organization and structure. The Byakkotai, one unit of which was to later become so



Figure 14- Matsudaira Sadaaki famous, were trained in French-style infantry formation and fighting style.

Another realm of Western knowledge that Aizu was interested in was that of medicine. Matsumoto Ryojun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu's personal physician, had fled north to Aizu, where he started a medical school, the Nosobyoin, at the Nisshinkan academy. Matsumoto Ryojun had studied Dutch medicine in Nagasaki with the physician J.L.C. Pompe, and was thus thoroughly flabbergasted by what he saw during the siege: Aizu

people washed wounds with low-grade *shochu* alcohol and lacked bandages altogether.⁴¹

Still, the efforts at medical care during the subsequent siege were outstanding,

considering the circumstances. Katamori's sister Teruhime was to see to much of the

caregiving operations

personally, even giving

her silk gauze kimono up

to be torn into strips and

used as makeshift

bandages. The British

doctor, William Willis,

was to see one of the



ヤンシー号で斗南藩の野辺地に上陸する人々 (会津武家屋敷蔵)

Figure 15- Aizu samurai arrive at the new "domain"
more inhuman sides of the siege when he visited captured Aizu samurai to provide medical care. There were many cases where amputation was necessary, and the situation of the survivors following the fall of Aizu was apparently one of a “deplorable state of filth and wretchedness.”⁴² This situation would only worsen with the incarceration and forced march of the Aizu survivors to detention camps, and then to exile in the frozen north of Japan, in the Shimokita peninsula. There, living in a land where the soil was frozen over for most of the year, many of the already sick samurai died, and others became so desperate for any sort of nourishment that they were reduced to chewing the bark off of trees.

⁴¹ Shiba 153.

⁴² Shiba 153.

Analysis

The situation following the fall of the Shogunate was, without question, one of greater opportunity than ever before for daimyo all around the country. As had been the case with the power vacuum immediately before the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, there was plenty of opportunity for anyone ambitious enough to make great progress in the realm of expansion of land and income. The Shogunate was gone...Katamori and all the daimyo had no doubt of that. However, in the wake of its collapse, Katamori did his best to acquire political and military backing from his neighbors. Having served side by side with Aizu previously in missions of national defense (particularly in Hokkaido), or having been threatened by Katamori, and in some cases, related to Katamori by marriage or other familial ties, they were more than willing and eager to throw in their lot with him. The entry of Prince *Rinnoji no Miya Yoshihisa* was a catalyst in this regard, because, with the prince as the new Emperor, the daimyo had all the legitimacy they needed—and had they won the war, as might very well have been the case, they would have been at the top of a new, restructured, Emperor-centered government, which was what the daimyo in general wanted anyway—it was just a question of who would be at the top of such an arrangement.

At the same time, the war gave Katamori the chance he wanted to improve his connections to the outside world. Particularly in the realm of military affairs, he benefited greatly from the presence of the Schnell brothers. If Katamori is assumed to be radically “antiforeign,” as some in the Shogunate perceived him to be, then there is no justification for his bestowing upon Schnell of a Japanese name, a wife, and duties of a clan elder. While some in the Aizu retainer force were opposed to using firearms (such as clan elder

Sagawa “Ogre” Kanbei), and some also had more than a little resentment for Schnell, on the whole, the domain took the military reorganization, and the presence of a foreigner near the top of the domain administration, rather well. The other area of major Aizu focus on learning from the West was that of medicine. Matsumoto Ryojun, the ex-shogun’s personal physician, was instrumental in the founding of a Western-style medical program at Aizu’s Nisshinkan academy, and indeed, it was the Nisshinkan that was turned into a hospital for much of the war. While he tried his best, and acknowledged the medical efforts of the locals, he unfortunately was unable to work to his full potential. Western medicine appeared in Aizu with its full potential only after the surrender and the arrival of Dr. William Willis, who was in the employ of Satsuma and yet tried his best to ensure fair and restrained treatment of the Aizu prisoners of war. Even so, with the period of exile that was soon to follow, many more died before the end of the domain system in the early 1870s. It was only after the domains were disbanded that the exiles could finally go home.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In the end, the enemies he had made, either through combat (Choshu) or through alienation (Satsuma) caught up with Matsudaira Katamori, and in turn, Aizu. Aizu was destroyed, its people scattered, and, though the Matsudaira family received a small landholding in the frozen far north of the island of Honshu, before long the domain system came to an end, and the people were left to manage on their own, as Katamori and his new infant son, Kataharu, were summoned, as with all former daimyo, to live in Tokyo. While there were some in the new government, such as Kido Koin (Katsura Kogoro) who were merciful, for the most part, there was an attitude of contempt in higher circles toward Aizu.

There were many people from the Northern Confederation, and from the ranks of the Tokugawa retainers, who were to go on to important, prominent positions in Japanese government and society. Tatsumi Kanzaburo Naofumi, an Imperial Army General who had once served as Matsudaira Sadaaki's page, is one. Yamakawa Hiroshi, another general who was a senior councilor during the siege of Aizu, is another. Even *Rinnoji no Miya* Yoshihisa, at first disowned for his role in the Northern Confederation, but later readopted into the Imperial *Kitashirakawa no Miya* branch house, joined the army and became a famous general, commanding the Konoe Guards and dying of illness shortly after the Japanese entry into Taiwan. Despite this change of fortune for survivors and children of the "rebels against the throne," Katamori himself was never allowed to have any role in national politics, instead ending his days as the chief priest of the Toshogu shrine in Nikko.⁴³

⁴³ Bolitho 17.

The history of the period was, naturally, written by the victors. As a result, Aizu was judged as a backward domain, supporting the name of the Shogun and of the Tokugawa house at all cost, and working against the inexorable tide of modernization. The people of Aizu, however, ostracized from many areas of Japanese society because of their status (for the whole of the Meiji Era) as “enemies of the throne,” told a different story. When the last of the *genro*, the Satsuma-Choshu oligarchs, began passing away in the early 20th century, new histories and memoirs began to be published, among which were the writings of the aforementioned Yamakawa Hiroshi, who wrote what is perhaps the only text directly recording the history of Aizu’s years in Kyoto.

In the 1920s, Aizu’s honor was finally cleansed. Setsuko, the daughter of ambassador Matsudaira Tsuneo, himself the son of Katamori, was betrothed to Prince *Chichibu no Miya*, the brother of the prince who later became Emperor Showa (Hirohito). But Aizu’s “bad” name still continued to circulate, in part because the first wave of history was only just beginning to pass through the language barrier and into the realm of Westerners and their study of Japan. This image has remained much the same for nearly the last century, and it is only *now*, thanks to a new generation of young historians—some of whom were initially motivated by things as seemingly unprofessional as history-themed cartoons—that the full story of Aizu, and those who fought alongside it, is coming to light, on both sides of the language barrier.

So did the Aizu clan fight for the Shogun in the Bakumatsu period? The answer, most definitely, is no. While they, and Katamori himself, invoked the hereditary duty that they were called to, lord and vassals alike, by the house code, the reality was that Katamori was eager to get in on the fluid political situation in Kyoto while the time was

still right. And the time *was* right, because he did what many other daimyo were not able to do: achieved success, increases in income, and praise from the Emperor, all while managing quite conveniently to avoid total commitment to either the side of the Emperor or the side of the Shogun. This reality, this motivation behind the actions of Matsudaira Katamori *and* the Aizu domain, radically changes the standard Western perception of “sides” in that period of Japanese history, and shows that though Aizu was charged with the subjugation of “opportunist” ronin in Kyoto, in fact, their objectives and actions made them more similar to the people they were trying to subdue than the government they were ostensibly trying to protect. This attitude was consistent in the actions of Katamori, and continued into his attempt at reorganization and preparation for defense in 1868, and the simultaneous founding of a new “new government” in northern Japan. The question might also be posed, did the northern domains side with Aizu entirely out of goodwill to a neighbor, or was there something else involved? The answer to that is that no, they didn’t entirely act out of goodwill—in fact, their involvement in the government of “Emperor Tobu” proves that they too were all for personal advancement, in any form they could achieve it.

In studying this period, it is my humble opinion that one can realize the flaws and tendencies that ran through many, if not all, strata of Japanese culture and society in those days. We can see that everyone who was politically active in Kyoto, from the Choshu ronin, to Shinsengumi, to the Tokugawa retainers, to Katamori himself, was trying to do their best to get ahead. There is no doubt that everyone *knew* that a change was coming—the difference was in how they believed that change would come, and *what* they believed the change would be.

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Daimyo or retainer, ronin or Emperor, Japanese or Prussian, ultimately, the only person whose existence one can be sure of when he closes his eyes is himself.

完成

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-My brother.

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To all those above, and to those I may have inadvertently forgotten, *makoto ni, makoto ni, on-rei moushiagemasu.*

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