

The Memorial Exhibition of the Renewal of the Hagi Museum and the 150th
Anniversary of the Foundation of the Shokasonjuku Academy

The Spirit of the Virile Sons of Choshu

The Big Four of the Shokasonjuku Academy and Kogoro Katsura

Toshimaro Yoshida observed, “Shinsaku Takasugi is a runaway ox. Genzui Kusaka is a politician in the Cabinet. Kuichi Irie is a wooden sword. Aritomo Yamagata is a stick.”

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The Hagi Museum

355 Horiuchi, Hagi City, Yamaguchi 758-0057

The Memorial Exhibition of the 150th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Shokasonjuku Academy

The Big Four of the Shokasonjuku Academy and Kogoro Katsura (Takayoshi Kido)

In 1857, 150 years ago, a private academy with only an eight-mat lecture room was established in Matsumotomura, Hagi. It was named the Shokasonjuku academy. The building, which was rebuilt by the hands of Shoin Yoshida and his disciples, have been still preserved intact. Even now a lot of people from all over the country have come to see it and have been deeply impressed with his view of life.

The academy was hosted by Shoin Yoshida at one time. He taught at the academy for less than three years. Later his disciples followed his ambition and got to take the leadership of Japan in the late Edo period and in the Meiji period.

In this exhibition about the Big Four of the Shokasonjuku academy (Shinsaku Takasugi, Genzui Kusaka, Toshimaro Yoshida, and Kuichi Irie), and Kogoro Katsura called their elder brother, we'd like to retrace how they lived through their historical materials. Shinsaku swore before taking up arms at Shimonoseki that he'd show the spirit of the virile sons of Choshu. We also try to make an approach to the spirit of the young disciples who dared to take the risk of making the great reformation of the Meiji Restoration

The Shokasonjuku Academy

Bunnoshin Tamaki, Shoin Yoshida's uncle, founded a small academy in his house. The academy was named the Shokasonjuku Academy because it was in Matsumoto Village. Shoin Yoshida learned there in his boyhood. Later it was discontinued for a while but Gorozaemon Kubo resumed it. In 1857, Shoin Yoshida took it over.

He treated his disciples equally regardless of the social status or age. He brought out their strong points in them and developed the individuality of each disciple. Later his disciples followed their teacher's ambition and came to mark a new epoch in the history of Japan.

He taught future national leaders his ideology of strengthening Japan through reverence for the emperor. They absorbed his ideas and played key roles in bringing about the Meiji Restoration.



Shoin Yoshida (1830~1859)

An educator and thinker of the late Edo period. He was born as the second son of han samurai, Yurinosuke Sugi, in Matsumotomura, Hagi. He was known by the name, Torajiro Yoshida. At the age of six he was adopted into the Yoshida family, whose job was a strategist of the Yamaga school. He was educated by his uncle, Bunnoshin Tamaki, to be an instructor at the domain school called "Meirinkan". By the age of ten, he was instructing other han samurai.



In 1850, he was given permission to visit other regions for five years he walked through much of Japan from Kyushu to the Tohoku district. He absorbed new knowledge from such outstanding teachers as Shozan Sakuma and Seishisai Aizawa.

He saw the Black Ships of Admiral Perry at Uraga in 1853, and attempted to leave Japan illegally, only to fail and to be imprisoned. He was later released to house arrest at the Sugi family house, and in 1857 he began to teach at the Shokasonjuku academy. He nurtured individualism in his youthful disciples. His plot to assassinate the chief councilor was exposed later, and transferred to Edo to be executed at the age of 30.

Shinsaku Takasugi (1839~1867)

Born in Hagi. A central figure in the movement to overthrow the Tokugawa Shogunate. He attended the domain school, Meirinkan and from 1859 he studied at the Shokasonjuku academy.

In 1862, he was sent by his domain in a shogunate ship to Shanghai. From that experience he became convinced that Japan must strengthen itself to avoid a similar fate and came to the conclusion that the Shogunate must be overthrown by force.



In 1863, he announced to organize the Kihei Corps, Japan's first modern militia to defend the domain and the country. The Kihei Corps, which enlisted samurai and commoners alike, became the core of Choshu fighting forces and provided a base for his political activities.

In 1866, he took command of the Kihei Corps in a fight against the

Tokugawa Troops attacking the Choshu domain. The domain forces, however, repelled the Shogunate army. Choshu's victory thoroughly brought the Shogunate into discredit and opened the way for other antishogunate domains to take united action.

He made the path to the new age but he had long suffered from tuberculosis. He died in 1867, the year before the Meiji Restoration.

Genzui Kusaka (1840~1864)

Born in Hagi and a leading figure in the antishogunate movement of early 1860s. A disciple and brother-in-law of Shoin Yoshida.

In 1862, impatient with Choshu's moderate political policy, which at the time sought cooperation between the Tokugawa Shogunate and the imperial court, Kusaka decided to abandon his domain and join other imperial loyalists in plans to expel foreigners from Japan. Early in 1863 he and his fellow activist, Shinsaku Takasugi, set fire to the British legation in Shinagawa, Tokyo. Returning to Choshu, he participated in the bombardment of Western ships in the Shimonoseki Strait.

In the summer of 1864 he joined a Choshu expeditionary force in an attempt to retake the Imperial Palace. His contingent was defeated by Satsuma and Aizu forces. He was wounded in the engagement and later committed suicide.



Toshimaro Yoshida (1841~1864)

Born as a son of Kiyouchi Yoshida in Matsumotomura, Hagi. A loyalist in the late Edo period. His by-name was Eitaro. In 1856, at the age of 16, he entered the Shokasonjuku academy. He was suspended as he declared Shoin's false charge, but he left the domain as he was ordered to go to Hyogo on business. Then he gathered information in Edo and Kyoto. Later, he joined to bombard foreign ships and became a member of the Kihei Corps for Sonnojoji activities.

In 1864, while gathering at Ikedaya, Kyoto for recovering powers of sonjo ha, he was attacked and wounded severely, and killed himself outside the gate of the Choshu domain.



Kuichi Irie (1837~1864)

Born in Hagi. A loyalist in the late Edo period. Yasushi Nomura is his younger brother. In 1858, at the age of 22, he entered the Shokasonjuku academy hosted by Shoin Yoshida. He came to be called one of the Big Four of the academy.



By the domain's order, he went to Mito to know the movement of imperial loyalists of the Mito domain. When the time to carry out the expulsion of foreign people was concluded, he hurried to Shimonoseki to bombard Western ships.

He also helped Shinsaku Takasugi to organize Japan's first modern militia named the Kihei Corps. In 1864, he joined a Choshu expeditional force to attempt to retake the Imperial Palace and failed to be killed.

Kogoro Katsura (1833~1877)

Born into the samurai household of the domain physician in Hagi. A statesman of the Meiji period. He is known as one of the "three heroes" of the Meiji Restoration with Takamori Saigo and Toshimichi Okubo. As a representative of the Choshu domain he negotiated the secret alliance with the powerful Satsuma domain that eventually overthrew the Tokugawa Shogunate. His initiatives between 1868 and 1871 as a Meiji government official brought about the abolition of the feudal system and the creation of a centralized bureaucratic state.



Kido's career was the briefest among Meiji leaders, yet it divides into distinct periods. During the first period, from the mid-1850s to 1865, as an imperial loyalist he schemed against the Tokugawa Shogunate, helped at times by his geisha lover Ikumatsu.

In the second period, 1865-74, he emerged as a statesman who influenced the course of the nation in his roles as a Choshu official and afterward as a Privy Councillor in the new government.

In the final period, 1874-77, he became the cabinet's conscience, acting as an in-house critic of the rapid pace of modernizing reforms.



Eboshi-typed helmet worn by Shinsaku Takasugi when he took up arms at Shimonoseki



Purse carried by Toshimaro Yoshida at the Ikedaya Incident



Writing of blood pledge signed by three patriots, Kuichi Irie, Shinsaku Takasugi, and Shingoro Hori



Drawing of orchids drawn by Kogoro Katsura for the fun of it