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Review by: Harold Bolitho

Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Dec., 1985), pp. 667-684

Published by: [Harvard-Yenching Institute](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2718976>

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REVIEW ARTICLE

Idealization and Restoration

HAROLD BOLITHO

Harvard University

The Revolutionary Origins of Modern Japan by *Thomas M. Huber*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981. Pp. xii+260. \$19.50.

Any one attempting to explain the Meiji Restoration will sooner or later be obliged to consider Chōshū's 長州 part in the events of the 1860s. To be sure, other elements were involved—259 other domains, large and small, the Tokugawa government, the imperial court, and even the activities of foreign diplomats—but there is no gainsaying Chōshū's formidable significance. Of all those domains which at one time or another fished the troubled Bakumatsu waters—Mito, Echizen, Tosa and Satsuma, for example—none displayed anything like Chōshū's obstinate persistence. From its first tentative decision to embark on a political career in 1858, Chōshū seemed determined on a course in which elementary prudence had no place. By 1862 with its adoption of the *sonnō* 尊王 line, Chōshū had already sailed far beyond more cautious competitors, and onto the lip of a maelstrom from which, with its insurrection in Kyoto, and subsequent attacks from both Japanese and foreigners, it was extremely lucky to emerge intact, let alone triumphant. Not one of Chōshū's rivals, not even Satsuma, had run such an appalling risk, nor had any of them contributed so much to the destruction of the old order. Clearly,

then, the reasons behind Chōshū's extraordinary behaviour constitute an essential part of the larger riddle of the Meiji Restoration—not the only part, certainly, but an absolutely vital one.

In 1961, in a work now widely regarded as a classic, Albert Craig attempted to explain just why Chōshū acted as it did.¹ His analysis canvassed a wide variety of factors, each of which, he claimed, played its part in determining Chōshū's response to the Bakumatsu crisis. It took in such elements as the *bakuhan* 幕藩 system, under which domains like Chōshū enjoyed considerable internal autonomy, and also embraced Chōshū's relationships with the Tokugawa Bakufu and the imperial court—a relationship not overly cordial in the case of the former, and unusually close in the case of the latter. There was an emphasis, too, on such material factors as Chōshū's size and wealth, for it was one of Tokugawa Japan's ten largest domains and, thanks to *buikukyoku* 撫育局 funds, more stable financially than most of its competitors.

Past these enabling factors, Craig's argument drew attention to the specific crisis confronting Japan from 1853 onwards. The arrival of Commodore Perry, with which the book begins, is clearly held to be an event of enormous significance. Its immediate effects, Craig claimed, were a nation-wide *crise de système* (p. 86) and within Chōshū a political convulsion in which the domain government was reshuffled in order to cope with new Bakufu demands (p. 95). Over a longer period, the effect of the American intrusion was to prompt Chōshū's entry into national politics, its consequent rivalry with other domains (notably Satsuma), and finally the decision to overthrow the Bakufu. In describing these events, Craig managed to turn historical orthodoxy on its head, developing an interpretation of Chōshū's Restoration activities which has coloured Western scholarship ever since. Where it had been accepted that Chōshū's rise to national eminence was the product of an alliance between lower samurai and merchants—the former smarting over their exclusion from political power and its material rewards, and the latter seeking new opportunities—Craig disagreed. Instead, he argued that Chōshū samurai were divided not along class lines but on tactics, and that popular support, insofar as it went to either side, was

¹ Albert M. Craig, *Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961).

given for reasons of prudence rather than ideological commitment. Ideology, in fact, was to emerge badly out of Craig's argument. Where generations of Japanese scholars had focussed on loyalty and devotion to the imperial cause, Craig demurred. Loyalism, he claimed, was not the mainspring of Chōshū's behaviour during the Bakumatsu era, but a by-product, having emerged "in response to the changing political situation" (p. 154).

His own interpretation of Chōshū's motives was far less deferential, since in place of loyalism it inserted the concept of "*han* nationalism." The influential figures in Chōshū politics, Craig argued, were "bound by their own interests within their particular society" (p. 163) and their goal was therefore the advancement of their own domain. It was ambition which led Chōshū to launch itself into national politics in a challenge to Bakufu authority which, at first oblique, became gradually more direct as Chōshū acted upon and reacted to the Bakumatsu political scene. Once committed to action, then Chōshū too, like other actors in the political drama, was to a large degree swept along by events, but the initial propellant was not loyalism, nor was it class solidarity. It was "the awareness on the part of Chōshū samurai of the pre-Tokugawa glory of the house of Mōri, and the desire to revive its past greatness" (p. 122). The trigger was Perry's arrival, for it altered a status quo which had prevailed in the *bakuhan* system for two centuries and more.

Craig's view of the Meiji Restoration, and of Chōshū's part in it, was to endure unchallenged for a generation as his book passed through three editions and into a fourth. But in 1981, in the work under review, Thomas Huber reopened the Chōshū issue in a new attempt to "grasp the essential 'cause' of the Restoration" (p. 5). In a set of six propositions at the very beginning of his book (p. 3), Huber countered Craig's interpretation with an argument of a very different sort.

Professor Huber contends that 1) the Restoration leadership "acted on behalf of a distinctive social category or class"; 2) this class, the "service intelligensia," was "both materially deprived and spiritually tormented" in the late Tokugawa period; 3) Restoration leaders took "elements of their own tradition to construct iconoclastic and compelling ideological support for their social complaints"; 4) in doing so they "developed notions of social change

similar to those implemented in Meiji,” constructing reform programs without reference to Western models; 5) violence during the Bakumatsu years was not disjointed, but rather a continuous escalation of political hostilities . . . against conservative power”; 6) the “Meiji transformation” consisted of reforms “advocated for decades by Japan’s indigenous service intelligentsia.”

In demonstrating these propositions Huber, like Craig, elected to concentrate on the part played by Chōshū and, more specifically, on the careers of three men who, one after the other, dragged Chōshū to the very threshold of the Meiji Restoration. The first and by far the most important of these was Yoshida Shōin 吉田松陰, in whose career Huber has discerned the “wellsprings of the Meiji rebellion” (p. 7). Yoshida, described as a “radically progressive utopian empiricist” (p. 63), was the Chōshū scholar and schoolmaster whose concern with reform at all levels—reform of the Chōshū *han* school, reform of the Chōshū *han* administration, and eventually, perceiving that the Tokugawa government was failing to meet the needs of the people, reform of the Bakufu itself—was to lead in 1859 to his imprisonment and execution. Huber’s second figure was Kusaka Genzui 久坂玄瑞, “the student for whom Yoshida Shōin’s expectations, both as a scholar and as a political leader, were highest” (p. 111). After his mentor’s death it was Kusaka, Huber says, who kept Yoshida’s reform campaign alive, and the Bakufu on the defensive, by orchestrating the “exhilarating street politics” (p. 93) of Kyoto, the imperial city, in 1863–64. With Kusaka dead in 1864, the torch of reform and activism then passed to Huber’s third figure, Takasugi Shinsaku, 高杉晋作, another of Yoshida’s students, once judged by his teacher “a man who in ten years will do much” (p. 146). Aided by the *shotai* 諸隊, the domain’s irregular military forces (formed in 1863 and led by no fewer than thirty of Yoshida’s former students), it was Takasugi who seized control of the Chōshū government and brought it, by the time of his death in 1867, to the brink of a final confrontation with the Bakufu.

Huber argues that these men, and those allied with them in their great reformist enterprise came from the class he describes as the “frustrated and embattled service intelligentsia,” those whose social status obliged them to study hard and compete desperately for the miniscule material rewards of official preferment. The core of this

group Huber defines as “lower” *shi* 士, samurai from “lower staff echelons” (p. 34), receiving less than 200 *koku* of income. To this group he seems further prepared to add the very bottom ranks of the Chōshū military hierarchy, the *sotsu* 卒 and the *baishin* 陪臣, “classes that were also partially educated and professionalized” (pp. 35–36), and in the countryside, the village headmen, or *shōya* 庄屋, “an entire stratum of underfranchised service official” (p. 186). From such “austere and highly educated service strata” (p. 32), Huber claims, came the impulse for the Meiji Restoration, seen essentially as a social revolution, “a blow struck at pervasive patterns of social injustice” (p. 3). Those who did the striking were motivated in part by an element of “collective self-interest—that is, class interest,” but also by “patterns of idealistic social commitment” (p. 52), a wish “to make the world better,” and a belief that “their cause represented the good of all.” Such beliefs “lent to Shōin and his followers a quality of transcendent religiosity that served to buoy the teacher’s morale while he lived and the students’ morale after his death” (p. 58). Yoshida Shōin did not live to see the Restoration nor did a great many of his students, Kusaka and Takasugi among them, but Huber nevertheless sees the village schoolmaster’s hand in the policies of the new Meiji government in which others among Yoshida’s former students were so prominently represented. Yoshida’s “vision of increasingly more comprehensive institutional reform . . .,” Huber claims, was by 1859 “approaching the reforms that actually would be carried out by the Meiji regime a decade later” (p. 50).

In discussing the activities of his three central figures and, by extension, those associated with them in the great task of national reform, Huber is at some pains to emphasize that despite their commitment and idealism they could be coolly rational when they needed to be. The activities of Yoshida and his students, Huber notes, were characterized by “thorough observation, pragmatism, and careful deliberation” (p. 26). They were never, therefore, the wild-eyed puppets of imperial loyalism but rather, like Yoshida (who “used the emperor as a convenient symbol” [p. 65] to foster “an intellectual climate favorable to the reforms he advocated” [p. 66]), milked the imperial institution for all they could. Nor, for that matter, were they mindless prisoners of xenophobic passions. To

Huber's reformers, Perry's arrival was in itself something of no significance; all it did was present them with "a convenient instrumentality" in advancing their reform plans. The Western threat, therefore, was not feared but welcomed, as something which "strengthened Shōin's hand" (p. 64). Later, his students even went out of their way to engineer a confrontation along the Straits of Shimonoseki to provide a "Western military stimulus" (p. 124) for their campaign to control the Chōshū government. Huber, indeed, is happy to assign these two issues a peripheral role, noting that "both loyalty to the emperor and the contest with the Western military represented only particular aspects of a highly complex and sophisticated view of polity and the role of institutions in society" (p. 129). In fact, those who took such issues seriously—ill-educated martial arts buffs for the most part (p. 129ff)—were often an embarrassment. It was the irrationalism and emotionalism of loyalists like Kijima Matabei 来島又兵衛 and Maki Izumi 真木和泉 which cost the reluctant Kusaka his life during the ill-fated attack on the imperial palace in 1864. Similarly it was the xenophobia of those "exponents of literal expulsionism" (p. 162) which forced Takasugi to go into hiding after his capitulation to Chōshū's Western attackers.

It would be difficult to conceive of two versions of the same set of events more directly opposed than these. Craig, while entitling his work *Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration*, gives very much more attention to elements external to Chōshū—to the Bakufu, to the imperial court, to other domains like Satsuma—than does Huber, who despite a title in which Chōshū is not mentioned considers little else. Naturally their approaches yield contrary results. Craig, placing Chōshū in its Bakumatsu context, nevertheless argues for its singularity, those factors which tended to set it apart from other areas of Japan. Huber, without raising his eyes beyond Chōshū's borders, nevertheless prefers to emphasize not its singularity but its typicality, inviting us to see in both Chōshū's class structure and the idealistic reform program of his heroes a microcosm of the entire nation. The difference here is one of breadth, and there is no question but that Craig's approach is the broader. But they differ also in depth, in the attention they pay to the historical context. In Huber's case, although he provides Yoshida Shōin with an intellectual genealogy, established by scant references to Honda Toshiaki

本多利明, Sakuma Shōzan 佐久間象山, *et al*, Chōshū itself is made to appear without antecedents of any sort—political, social, diplomatic or economic—without, in fact, any of the preconditions Craig considers important. Chōshū's Tempō 天保 reforms, to which Craig devotes an entire chapter, do not appear in Huber's book, beyond one reference to “the noted Chōshū reformer,” Murata Seifū 村田清風 (p. 67).

The substance of their arguments, too, is very different. Almost everything Craig considers significant in explaining Chōshū's actions is ignored by Huber. Conversely, those aspects most important to Huber were either disregarded or dismissed by Craig twenty-odd years ago. If Craig sees the arrival of Commodore Perry, together with the entire diplomatic and military (and economic) flurry it occasioned, as absolutely central, Huber prefers to see it as somehow incidental and peripheral, subordinate to long-standing class grievances. If Huber judges Yoshida Shōin's contribution to the Meiji Restoration as so momentous as to be worth 84 pages in a 231-page text (36% by my calculation), to Craig it is worth no more than 9 pages out of 374 (2%). Huber may be prepared to see in the *shotai* a move towards “egalitarian Western forms of military organization,” (p. 122), but Craig observes instead that they were riddled with class distinctions (pp. 279–280). To Craig, *han* nationalism lay behind Chōshū's irruption into national politics, and Nagai Uta's 長井雅楽 proposal, no less than the more radical ones which replaced it, was adopted “to steal a march on Satsuma” (p. 108). Huber, on the other hand, rejects *han* nationalism on page 2, and does not mention it again. Rivalry with Satsuma he mentions not at all. Instead it is class interest and idealism which drive his samurai, to whom the idea of *han* boundaries, and therefore *han* nationalism, is profoundly irrelevant. Did the makers of the Meiji Restoration always know what they had in mind for the world they were about to create? No, says Craig, observing that in carrying out the Restoration they had “no conception of its eventual social ramifications” (p. 360). Yes, says Huber, who writes of “blueprints” (whether “evolving,” as on p. 43, or “far from being detailed,” as on p. 116), drawing attention to the way in which Yoshida's plans for reform “increasingly resembled the Meiji reforms of the 1870s” (p. 42).

For all the apparent novelty² of Huber's version of events—the refreshing claim, for example, that Yoshida Shōin and his followers were far more concerned with reducing the privileges of upper samurai in the interests of efficient government than they were about either the foreign threat or the imperial will—it is far from sure that his book is necessarily more up to date than Craig's. Indeed, in two respects it is curiously old-fashioned. One of these lies in the fact that (no doubt with the best intentions—perhaps even unconsciously) Huber subscribes to the “great man” (or more accurately, *idai-naru jimbutsu* 偉大なる人物) theory of history. The pride of place accorded Yoshida Shōin as *fons et origo* of the Chōshū reform movement and therefore also of developments after his death, leaves little room for doubt on this score. The book's subliminal message, never articulated but pervasive nonetheless, is that only Chōshū behaved in so decisive a fashion because only Chōshū had Yoshida Shōin.³

The other far from new aspect of Huber's book involves his general explanation for the Meiji Restoration. Compare this theory:

“The Meiji Restoration was a social rebellion carried out by Japan's disciplined and highly educated service intelligentsia against aristocratic oppression and outmoded social forms. The Restorationists were motivated to act politically first, because of material deprivations suffered by their class, and second, because of their idealistic commitment to the welfare of the whole political community.”

with this:

[The Meiji Restoration] was a revolution against the Tokugawa system carried out by lower samurai, and, in the eyes of some, by a certain strata of commoners as well. It [the explanation being described] emphasizes the social and political frustrations which, supposedly, turned these groups not only against Tokugawa rule but against the very system itself. . . . It speaks of the lower samurai as a class which, . . . finding no outlet for its ambitions within the existing society, was willing to turn tradition upside down to found a new order.”

² In this case the novelty is heightened by Professor Huber's vocabulary, in which echoes of the 1960s—“dynamic”, “commitment”, even a near-Halberstamian “most promising and brightest” (p. 105)—still resonate.

³ It is true that in the last chapter of his book, in a paragraph on pp. 223–24, Professor Huber explains Chōshū's activity in quite different terms, noting its reformist tradition and its “flexible pattern of policy-making,” both of which were allegedly enjoyed in greater measure in Chōshū than in the rest of Japan. However, since neither factor has been mentioned previously, neither is subsequently developed nor is an analysis of either factor offered for any other domain, it is difficult to take these assertions seriously.

Allowing for obvious lexical differences, these two are really remarkably close, but the first is Huber's (p. 211), written in 1981, and the second is Craig's description (p. 350) of what, by 1961, was already established as the standard interpretation of the Meiji Restoration. It may not be quite what Huber intended, but despite his insistence on the extra element of "idealistic commitment" and his reluctance to use the term "lower samurai," there is considerable reason for equating the two.

I raise this point with some hesitation since Craig, drawing attention to it in a review of Huber's book,⁴ attracted a rather stiff reply⁵ in which Huber complained of misrepresentation. Nevertheless, the issue is by no means as straightforward as Huber would have us believe. Craig's review drew attention to a statement contained in a note to Table 1 on page 33 of Huber's book:

My own research suggests that the politically crucial dividing line was in the range of 200–400 *koku*: families with over 400 *koku* clearly tended to oppose reform; families with under 200 *koku* tended to support it; families with between 200 and 400 *koku* might support or oppose.

Craig interpreted this to mean that "upper samurai were conservative and lower samurai were reformers" (p. 140). So for that matter did I, and so apparently did Sidney Brown, who has noted⁶ that "Huber designated 200 *koku* of income as the dividing line between the factions," the factions being, in Professor Brown's words, "radical lower samurai" on the one hand and "upper feudal groups" on the other. Apparently, however, it is not an interpretation which pleases Huber, who rejects the imputation that "the income levels of samurai caused them to embrace one political line or the other." Yet the 200 *koku*–400 *koku* line appears so frequently in Huber's book,⁷ in one case accompanied by the assertion that it is "possible to characterize supporters and opponents of Chōshū activism in a meaningful way by precise income categories" (p.

⁴ *Journal of Japanese Studies* 9.1 (1983): 139–49.

⁵ *Journal of Japanese Studies* 9.2 (1983): 449–60.

⁶ S. D. Brown and A. Hirota, *The diary of Kido Takayoshi* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1983), vol. 1, p. xviii.

⁷ In his reply to Craig, Huber seems to suggest (pp. 449–50, n.1) that Craig has given to these "obscure lines" far more significance than the author meant them to have. In fact, Huber repeats the same argument, in almost exactly the same words, on p. 190 and p. 219 of his book.

219), that I cannot see what other conclusion the reader is expected to draw. If income and political attitudes are so insistently juxtaposed, surely—whether Huber realizes it or not—the reader is being invited to see some connection between them. If there is no relationship, why juxtapose them at all, let alone three times? Like it or not, the Huber thesis does read very much like the old lower samurai argument; lower samurai with a dash of idealism, perhaps (although Huber is far more informative on their income than their idealism, the latter being taken for granted), but lower samurai nonetheless. Indeed, Huber is prepared (p. 220) to equate Chōshū's reformers with "the educated service intelligentsia," and their "adversaries" with the domain aristocrats. This is just too facile, as Craig has already pointed out in his review. Whether reformers or adversaries, Chōshū's politicians can only have come from the same educated service intelligentsia. So, for that matter, would Chōshū's adversaries in national politics, veterans of reform movements of their own in Bakufu and in *han*. Class antagonism certainly played its part in the Meiji Restoration, but it cut across political divisions, not along them, as Ōtori Keisuke 大鳥圭介 (100 *koku*) and Enomoto Takeaki 榎本武揚 (100 *hyō*) would happily have acknowledged.

Obviously these two antithetical views of Chōshū's role in the Meiji Restoration cannot both be correct; the confrontation is far too comprehensive for that. So who is right, or rather, leaving room for a judicious measure of agnosticism, who is least likely to be wrong? I am afraid I do not think it can be Professor Huber. Can any movement really be assessed in terms of three of its heroes, especially heroes who, being safely out of the way by 1868, could be all the more readily romanticized by those who survived them? Can we assume that the characteristics of these three men were automatically shared by large numbers of their fellows, let alone the "several thousand" (p. 34) with incomes under 200 *koku*? For that matter does the experience of one domain, even if it was as Huber describes it, hold good (as Huber's set of six propositions suggests) for the other 259 domains of Bakumatsu Japan? It is all extremely unlikely.

Beyond this unlikeliness, too, there are some aspects of Huber's book which, to put it at its mildest, fail to inspire confidence. In particular there is the author's marked proclivity for idealization,

which surfaces both in his handling of his heroes and of the Meiji state. He may praise Yoshida Shōin and his followers for their pragmatism rather than their loyalism, but nevertheless he praises them as unreservedly as any historian of the *idai-naru jimbutsu* school has ever done. For Huber, Yoshida Shōin is not just one whose “academic performance and conceptual knowledge was unsurpassed in his generation” (p. 218), but also “one of the more brilliant political thinkers that Japanese society has ever produced” (p. 8). As might be anticipated, Yoshida counted among his attributes “a sacrificial dedication” and an “extraordinary vision” (p. 48) which enabled him to develop, one after the other, a series of “shockingly unorthodox ideas” (p. 43), “provocative demands” (p. 45), “startling plans” (p. 47), “breathhtaking suggestions” (p. 64) and “innovative proposals” (p. 64). Naturally, too, his students were equally commendable—Kusaka Genzui, a man of “resourcefulness and courage” (p. 113), Takasugi Shinsaku, a figure of “inflexible integrity”, and the *Sonjuku* 村塾 group in general “gifted and promising” (p. 40). Those associated with reform, members of a class devoted to service, from which they all derived “a warm feeling of well-being” (p. 215), displayed precisely the “intelligent interest in political questions” (p. 105) one would expect of “highly motivated and politically conscious activists” (p. 122).⁸

Indeed, one can only marvel at Huber’s determination to see nothing but the best in his heroes. If it seems implausible that several thousand samurai with incomes of less than 200 *koku* could all be anything, let alone something as demanding as “austere and highly educated” (p. 32), “austere and literate” (p. 40) or “stern and highly literate” (p. 214), Huber does not think so. Perhaps the word “austere” should not be taken too seriously. It is, after all, in almost obligatory use in some quarters as an approbatory term, connoting such commendable qualities as humorlessness and self-righteousness.

⁸ Their opponents although possibly from the same social class were, not unexpectedly, made of very much baser clay, mercenaries attracted to the side of privilege “in disregard of their own long-term class interests because it was lucrative in posts and emoluments” (p. 246). Huber clearly has little time for such people, referring to no more than four by name. Since only one of those, the “overbearing elder” Nagai Uta (p. 109), is allowed any characteristics of any sort, one must assume that whatever other qualities they may have had, idealism, integrity, intelligence, observation, pragmatism and “transcendent commitment” (p. 159) were not likely to have been among them.

Taken at face value, however, “austere” does not seem an adequate description of too many of Huber’s heroes. Certainly Yoshida Shōin was austere, by any definition. Even Kusaka Genzui, whose enthusiasm at the prospect of assassinating someone—anyone?—shines through Professor Huber’s book like a beacon, would probably qualify. But what of Takasugi Shinsaku? Is “austere” really the word for a man who in 1865 stole a large sum of money from Chōshū and spent it sightseeing in Shikoku with his *petite amie*? Were all the other Chōshū reformers austere? We know at least one who wasn’t. Compare these two statements: first, Yoshida Shōin in 1848.

The buying and selling of [rare] tea
vessels and paintings should be stopped.⁹

Next, Kido Takayoshi 木戸孝允, Yoshida’s student, in 1868, twenty years later.

In the evening I went to Ikenosho with
Unsen. I bought a teacup holder and a
jewelled cup. I did not acquire any
unusual things on this trip. I bought
two hanging scroll paintings by Chinese artists.¹⁰

Kido was certainly literate and highly educated. He may even have been stern on occasion. But he wasn’t austere, however you wish to define the term.

In fact it would be difficult to find a more convincing refutation of Huber’s idealized vision of his heroes than that provided by Kido. Uncannily, it is almost as if this particular Chōshū reformer deliberately set out to demolish Huber’s romanticized image of his group. Describing the “upper samurai” life-style, against which Yoshida, Kido and the rest are said to have chafed, Huber notes that a typical member of this class “cultivated the elegant tastes appropriate to his station in his appreciation of paintings, tea vessels, poetry, chess and courtly fashion in dress and facial cosmetics” (p. 212). Leaving aside dress and cosmetics, Huber might just as well be describing Kido Takayoshi. Kido, so Sidney Brown tells us, acquired “twenty-five to thirty hanging scrolls” by Tanomura Chikuden, his favorite painter, bought “a tea cup, a water jug, and a lacquered bowl” from a dealer in Fushimi-chō in August, 1868,

⁹ Quoted in Huber, *Revolutionary Origins*, p. 46.

¹⁰ Brown, p. 54.

“delighted in poetry competitions,” and was passionately fond of chess, “so much so that he kept a professional player around.”¹¹ Chess was not the only thing he was passionately fond of, either. In apparent disregard of Yoshida Shōin’s condemnation of samurai who “immersed their minds in women and drink,”¹² Kido Takayoshi never hesitated to indulge his well-documented fondness for (one might say addiction to) *sake*, and his no less well-documented meaningful relationships with such ladies as Ume, Okumi, Okame, Ofuku, Ohama, Hamakichi, Otetsu, Okatsu, Omatsu, Okiyo, Misako, Oharu, the unnamed girls of Kobe’s Yanagiwara quarter, Osaka’s Minamikata quarter, Tokyo’s Imado, Shiba, Shimbashi and Yanagibashi quarters, and, of course, those Kyoto girls who went home with him after dinner one evening for “another party.”¹³ If austerity was like this, no wonder it was so much in vogue in Bakumatsu Chōshū.

Since Huber’s heroes can do no wrong, it comes as no surprise that their activities during the 1860’s should also appear sanitized beyond all recognition. Take, for example, what Huber refers to as “exhilarating street politics” (p. 93), or alternatively, “the exhilarating world of street politics” (p. 147). Such terms make it all sound like good clean fun, conferring upon his “street activists” (p. 99), or alternatively “activists in the street” (p. 119), something of the romantic bloom of the clean-cut, sneaker-shod student demonstrators of the 1960’s. Such an image may well suit these idealized “young reformist samurai in the street” (p. 118), but it is hardly an adequate description of what Huber’s heroes actually did. Huber may claim that Bakumatsu violence was not disjointed, but the fact remains that many of its objects were, and in a most disagreeable fashion. Take, for example, Kagawa Hajime 賀川肇, one of whose arms, tastefully wrapped, was given to Iwakura Tomomi 岩倉具視, the other to Chigusa Arifumi 千種有文, and whose head was casually tossed over Tokugawa Yoshinobu’s 徳川慶喜 garden wall,¹⁴ or Ikeuchi Tōsho 池内陶所, one of whose ears

¹¹ Brown, pp. xxiv, xxxii, lii, 80.

¹² Quoted in Huber, *Revolutionary Origins*, p. 53.

¹³ Brown, pp. 15, 19, 78, 114, 169, 172, 175, 186, 202, 217.

¹⁴ Ōkubo Toshiaki 大久保利謙, *Iwakura Tomomi* 岩倉具視 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron-sha, 1973), p. 122.

went to Sanjō Sanenaru 三條實愛, and the other to Nakayama Tadayasu 中山忠能, by way of friendly warning.¹⁵ Such things, all too common in the exhilarating world of street politics, were atrocities, and it is a disservice to scholarship, not to mention humanity, to imply otherwise. True, Huber's heroes believed that "they and they alone assured the well-being of society" (p. 58), but then so do terrorists everywhere.

Huber's idealization extends beyond his heroes to the Meiji state, depicted in his book as the logical culmination of two decades of heroic activity. Like those who created it, it is portrayed here completely without blemish, as in this breathless appraisal of the Meiji reforms (p. 210):

These sweeping changes altered the essential quality of public life. They brought a vitality and rationality that enlivened all spheres of public action. There soon followed unprecedented growth in crop yields, commerce and industry. There arose a vigorous press and a healthy general clamour for democracy. Philosophy, literature and the arts, nourished by foreign as well as native inspiration, flourished as never before. Famine was unknown, and modern medical knowledge spread across the land.

Of course there also arose Matsukata deflation, the Hokkaido scandal, unprecedented militarism, continental aggression, vigorous press censorship and an unhealthily repressive police force; freedom of speech, association and assembly was unknown, and the Emperor System spread across the land. Huber prefers to ignore them, just as he ignores the oligarchy, directed and staffed by many of his heroes, which controlled Japan far more rigidly than the Tokugawa government had ever done. If, as Huber claims, the Meiji government was "recruited solely on the basis of merit" (p. 209), one has to ask how Chōshū samurai came to have such a monopoly of that particular quality.

In a sense Huber's debt to *hanbatsu* 藩閥 historical scholarship is too obvious to be of any harm. Utterly noble heroes, perfect harmony, peerless achievement are all the stuff of caricature, material fit for fairy stories or morality plays, but not for serious historical explanation. Most readers, therefore, having identified Huber's sympathies, will take the steps necessary to discount them.

¹⁵ Yamakawa Hiroshi 山川浩, *Kyōto shugoshoku shimatsu* 京都守護職始末 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1965), vol. 1, p. 46.

Nevertheless, it is a matter for regret that another opportunity to understand the past has been lost. Objectivity may be difficult or indeed ultimately impossible, but as Professor Najita has recently reminded us, we still have an obligation to try to attain to it.¹⁶ I do not believe Huber has made the attempt; his argument and his language are those of the advocate, not the investigator.¹⁷

Perhaps the most crucial piece of idealization in Huber's book—crucial because it masks one of the most revealing features of the transition between Tokugawa and Meiji—concerns the unanimity of his band of heroes. Did Kusaka and Takasugi share the aims of their teacher? It is Huber's assertion that they did, discounting the evidence of serious disagreement between them (and, implicitly, dismissing the well-argued position of Professor H. D. Harootunian).¹⁸ Did the members of the Aumeisha 嚶鳴社, the other private academies, most of the *shotai* (excepting, of course, the impractical "loyalists" condemned on pp. 129–31), and indeed the thousands of idealistic Chōshū samurai existing on incomes under 200 *koku* also share them? Huber would still say yes. Had they always shared them? Yes. Would they continue to share them once the Restoration was accomplished? Again yes. Huber's vision of the Chōshū reform movement would allow of no less. Yet if this is so, why then did that movement, impressively unified in defying the Bakufu in 1866 and in preparing to destroy it in 1867, dissolve in a welter of disagreement in 1868? Kido's diary for that year complains that those who were once his allies—men like Mihori Kōsuke 御堀耕助, Nomura Yasunosuke 野村安之助, Hirose Saneomi 広沢真臣—now mistrust him.¹⁹ Before a year had passed he was deploring developments in Chōshū, where "nine out of ten decisions in both internal and external matters go contrary to my view," because his old com-

¹⁶ In Tetsuo Najita and Victor Koschmann, eds. *Conflict in Modern Japanese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 21.

¹⁷ It is instructive to compare the terms used by Craig and Huber to denote the factional divisions in Chōshū politics. To Craig, it was appropriate to name them after their leaders, the Sufu faction on one side, and the Tsuboi-Mukunashi faction on the other. Huber, however, prefers the Justice Faction and the Mundane Views faction—English equivalents of titles which, while undoubtedly in use at the time, were never impartial.

¹⁸ H. D. Harootunian, *Toward Restoration* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), Ch. 4, 5.

¹⁹ Brown, pp. 35, 97, 107.

rades “do not really understand what the Restoration is all about.”²⁰ At the same time, dissatisfaction was beginning to fester among the Chōshū *shotai*—representatives, in Huber’s argument, of the domain’s “service classes” (p. 187). By the beginning of 1870, large numbers of them, led by Tominaga Yūrin 富永有麟, a visiting instructor at Yoshida Shōin’s school in the early 1850’s, had started to mutiny, declaring that the new government was “worse than the Tokugawa.”²¹ Kido wrote in his diary of their “sinister purposes,”²² one of which would appear to have been the termination, with extreme prejudice, of Kido himself. In 1872 Maebara Issei 前原一誠, one of the few surviving *Sonjuku* students, was to resign from the government, and in 1876 along with Okudaira Kensuke 奥平謙輔, Yokoyama Toshihiko 横山俊彦, and upwards of a hundred other austere and highly educated former samurai, all on less than 200 *koku* a year, proceeded to launch an armed rebellion against it. None of this sounds verymuch like the “solidarity of young and old” to which Huber attests.²³

Clearly, for at least some of Huber’s heroes the “warm feeling of well-being” cooled rapidly, and one has only to look at the Meiji reforms to see why. Huber would have it that these reforms “went smoothly” (p. 220) in his idealized Meiji state. In the real Meiji state however they provoked disagreement, often violent and some of it on a large scale, over two issues in particular. Initially, as Kido’s diary makes clear, there was disagreement over just what rewards Chōshū could expect for its key role in bringing about the change of government. True, there were positions to be had in the new bureaucracy and Chōshū men—being more meritorious—obviously had a better chance of winning them than most other people, but there were still not enough jobs to go around. There was, too, a lively belief that Chōshū, having taken over lands captured by its troops during the fighting in 1866, should not give them back but rather incorporate them into the Chōshū domain and channel their revenues into Chōshū pockets. “There is a great deal of

²⁰ Brown, pp. 155–56.

²¹ Hayakawa Junzaburō 早川淳三郎, ed., *Kiheitai nikki* 奇兵隊日記 (Tokyo, 1970), vol. 4, p. 270.

²² Brown, p. 325.

²³ Huber, *JJS* 9: 2, p. 454.

unfavorable and noisy comment about my offering up [i.e. surrendering] the Iwami and Buzen territories last year," wrote Kido in 1868. "These fellows are oblivious to the broader trends in the nation, but instead fix their attention exclusively on a single domain. . . ." ²⁴ He was to note this particularist sentiment again later that year, observing that "When I act impartially without seeking the advancement of my domain, a great controversy breaks out. . . ." ²⁵ One of the themes in the *shotai* rebellion of 1870 too, wrote Kido, was his "strong support for the central government." ²⁶ Clearly, then, not all Chōshū Restorationists shared the same "idealistic commitment to the welfare of the whole political community" that Huber talks about (p. 211). Nor were they all opposed to "outmoded social forms" (p. 211). Some rather approved of them, in fact, like Takasugi Shinsaku, who when contradicted in debate by Akane Takendo 赤根武人, said ("with the directness for which he was famous," Huber observes) "Akane is just a farmer from Ōshima, while I am a samurai, a hereditary retainer of the house of Mori (sic)" (p. 172). Others, notably Maebara Issei and the scores of men who fought by his side in 1876 to preserve samurai status and perquisites, appear to have been attached to them, too.

It is far more likely that the Restoration movement in Chōshū, like any other movement involving large numbers of people, meant different things to its different constituent elements. To suggest that they were all united in the pursuit of the common good, or social justice, or any other abstraction is to ignore just how fragile and limited their unity was. What drew these disparate entities together, briefly, were the twin elements of fear and ambition which Huber, committed to idealism, is obliged to discount. With Craig, on the other hand, there is no such difficulty. The events set in train by Perry's arrival, to which Craig gives so much emphasis, served to create an atmosphere in which both fear and ambition could flourish as never before. In the Bakufu it reinforced a wish, confirmed in the Treaty of Shimoda, to keep all Western trade (and therefore profits and access to foreign weapons) in its own hands. In the great domains of the southwest, therefore, it provoked a fear

²⁴ Brown, p. 98.

²⁵ Brown, p. 119.

²⁶ Brown., p. 327.

of what a reinvigorated Bakufu might do (“it will be as if Tokugawa Ieyasu has come again,” warned Kido Takayoshi).²⁷ At the same time, however, by demonstrating just how powerless the Tokugawa Bakufu actually was, the Bakumatsu foreign crisis encouraged a number of domains, Chōshū among them, to try their luck in national politics. For the first time in over two hundred years there was the prospect of big prizes to be won—in Satsuma’s case, as Saigō was to observe, the possibility that “all of Kyūshū will be ours.”²⁸ For the vast majority of daimyo domains—without Chōshū’s land base, without Chōshū’s manpower, without Chōshū’s available funds: all the enabling factors which Craig identifies—the risks were far too great. For that matter, few other domains had Chōshū’s access, through its possession of Shimonoseki, to Western contact and encouragement. Chōshū, with all these advantages and with so much to lose were Tokugawa Ieyasu indeed to come again, was finally pushed and pulled into a precarious unity, particularly in 1866 when it could scent for the first time a victory far larger than it had originally envisaged. Once that victory was achieved, however, the squabble over the spoils began—in Chōshū, in Satsuma, in Saga, in Tosa. It was not a seemly spectacle, but it was nevertheless a significant aspect of Japanese history in the early Meiji years, and I do not see that any advance is to be made by ignoring the very large part that *han* nationalism, together with personal ambition at its most transparent, played in it.

²⁷ Quoted in Ōyama Shikitarō 大山敷太郎, *Nōhei-ron* 農兵論 (Tokyo: Tōyōdō, 1942), p. 253.

²⁸ Quoted in Inoue Kiyoshi 井上清, *Saigō Takamori* 西郷隆盛 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron-sha, 1970), vol. 1, p. 102.