



## Political Groups in Tosa, 1858-68

W. G. Beasley

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## POLITICAL GROUPS IN TOSA, 1858-68

By W. G. BEASLEY

Much of the recent work done in Japan on the political and social background to the Meiji Restoration has concentrated on analysing the manifestations of unrest in Japanese society, which arose from its failure to adjust quickly enough to economic change. Writers point to the growing wealth of merchants, accompanied by the impoverishment of samurai, to the increasing differentiation between 'rich' and 'poor' farmers in the village; and they relate the consequent discontent to samurai reform movements within the great domains (*han*) and to the rising incidence of peasant revolt. These factors in turn are fitted into general—and often widely differing—explanations of the overthrow of the Tokugawa Bakufu and the nature of Meiji political institutions.<sup>1</sup>

The samurai class has an important part to play in all these explanations. The feudal lords and 'upper' samurai appear, naturally enough, as conservatives, even reactionaries, concerned to uphold the established order and maintain their own privileges. The 'lower' samurai, by contrast, are variously conceived, depending on the interpretation one favours or the particular aspect of their activities which is under discussion, as radical innovators influenced by Western models, creators of a form of bureaucratic absolutism, allies of the richer farmers against both feudal authority and peasant uprisings, or embryo capitalists. They are certainly regarded as the principal *direct* participants in political events, though they are also said to have been 'influenced' or 'prompted', as the case may be, by peasant, landlord, or merchant interests.

It has never been clear precisely how such interests were made politically effective. The fear of provoking peasant revolt, or of alienating the sympathies of any substantial and influential section of the community, must obviously have been relevant to the decisions of any government, whether feudal or modern; but this is not the same thing as asserting that peasants and other non-samurai in the late Tokugawa period participated in politics themselves, or had contact with those who did. Nevertheless, it has been argued that something of this kind took place. On the one hand, it can be shown that in some areas a new class of rich farmers (or even entrepreneurs) succeeded in establishing a hold on local offices, like that of village headman, which at least put them in touch with the lower echelons of feudal government. On the other, samurai of the very lowest rank, some of them being of fairly recent non-samurai origin, can be found not only among the activists of the anti-Tokugawa movement, but also as leaders of local peasant revolts. From this it can be inferred that samurai politics and rural unrest were more or less closely related. And there can be no

<sup>1</sup> No useful purpose would be served by trying to give here a full bibliography of the subject, but I have in mind the views expressed in works like the following: Tōyama Shigeki, *Meiji ishin*, Tokyo, 1951; Rekishigaku Kenkyūkai (ed.), *Meiji ishin to jinushi-sei*, Tokyo, 1956; Sakata Yoshio, *Meiji ishin shi*, Tokyo, 1960; and Ishii Takeshi, *Gakusetsu hihan Meiji ishin ron*, Tokyo, 1961.

question about the links between samurai and the merchants of the towns. For the most part the two were not only debtor and creditor, respectively, in their private capacities, but also colleagues in the handling of domain finance.

There is, in fact, a clear case for the continued investigation of these relationships, since it is only by the detailed study of actual local situations that the inferences can be tested and the conclusions made more exact. Unfortunately, such a task cannot readily be undertaken by those of us who are not resident in Japan. There is, however, another part of the problem—a part relatively neglected by modern Japanese historians—in which progress can be made without the same need for constant access to village records: that is, the study of domain politics themselves, with particular reference to the way in which different samurai groups or factions were able to influence the alignment of their domains on major national issues. So-called ‘loyalists’, or *shishi* (men who held radical anti-Bakufu views), appeared in most domains after 1858 and sought, though not always with success, to win control of policy from those who had held it hitherto. In Chōshū, for example, they gained a great deal of power as early as 1862, and kept it, save for one short interval, down to 1868.<sup>2</sup> In Tosa they were influential in the period 1861–3, but lost ground quickly thereafter. Accordingly, a group of moderate reformers was able to monopolize the principal offices in Tosa after 1864, taking the initiative in the end in trying to mediate between the Shōgun and his enemies.<sup>3</sup> In other domains, too, there were struggles between radicals, moderates, and conservatives, the outcome of which was to determine the balance of power within Japan in the crucial closing months of 1867.

In studying these events one is bound to ask questions about the way in which they were related to the changing social and economic structure of Japan in the period immediately before the Restoration. Especially must one try to identify the participants in the political process. What kind of men were they, who engaged in domain politics in these years? Above all, who were the ‘loyalists’? What was their social status, economic background, age? How, if at all, did they differ from moderates and conservatives? And do the answers throw any light on the wider issue, the nature of the Restoration movement as a whole?

In this article a beginning will be made in seeking answers to these questions by a detailed examination of political groups in Tosa. This is not to say that Tosa is necessarily typical—there may well be no ‘typical’ domain in this context—but its political history is important, interesting, and well documented, so that one may hope the results will be useful for their own sake, quite apart from any value they may have in suggesting hypotheses to be tested against evidence from other areas.

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent study of Chōshū politics, see A. Craig, *Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration*, Cambridge, Mass., 1961.

<sup>3</sup> On Tosa politics in this period, see M. B. Jansen, *Sakamoto Ryōma and the Meiji Restoration*, Princeton, 1961; also the same author’s article, ‘Takechi Zuizan and the Tosa Loyalist Party’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, xviii, 2, 1959, 199–212.

## A. POLITICAL GROUPS

Not all Tosa loyalists adopted the same methods in trying to get their policies carried out. Broadly, one can distinguish between those who sought to influence the government of their own domain, in an attempt to get it to act against the Bakufu, and those who fled to join extremists from other regions in action independently of the domain, thereby becoming *rōnin*. On the basis of this division, the following groups can be identified for study :

I. *Takechi group* (22 men). The leader of the Tosa loyalists in the early 1860's was Takechi Zuizan, who organized a considerable local following—including 192 known signatories of a blood pledge in support of the imperial cause—as well as establishing connexions with men of similar outlook from other domains. In May 1862 he engineered the assassination of Tosa's moderate leader, Yoshida Tōyō, and from that time was able to exercise a good deal of influence on domain policy. In the autumn of the following year, however, events in Kyōto turned against the loyalists ; and encouraged by this the Tosa moderates, now led by Gotō Shōjirō, were able to regain control. Takechi and a number of his associates were arrested. After a long period of interrogation in prison, some were executed or ordered to commit *seppuku*. Others were sentenced to various other forms of punishment, so that the loyalist party virtually ceased to exist. The group of 22 men here examined includes Takechi himself and his closest associates, most of whom were punished, more or less severely, at the time of his fall.

II. *Noneyama group* (23 men). While Takechi was in prison there was much talk among loyalists about the possibility of taking action to force his release. Only one such scheme came to anything : a kind of armed demonstration on Takechi's behalf organized at Noneyama in 1864 by 23 men from the Aki district of Tosa. The domain promptly treated the affair as a revolt and suppressed it accordingly. All those taking part were killed or executed.

III. *Tosa rōnin* (55 men). Even as early as 1862 there were Tosa loyalists who thought Takechi's methods too slow and devious. Many of them fled to Kyōto to enlist in the households of Court nobles and join the bands of *rōnin* who terrorized the city's streets. With Takechi's fall they were joined by others who had begun to despair of legal methods ever bringing success, so that Tosa was eventually represented in almost every loyalist incident of the time—Sanjō's flight from Kyōto (1863), the Yamato revolt (1863), the Chōshū attack on Kyōto (1864), and many more—as well as in the irregular units organized to defend Chōshū, first against foreign, then against Bakufu attack. I have been able to secure information on 55 of these men, though the list is certainly not complete.

IV. *Itagaki group* (9 men). To compare with the activists, it is useful to look also at the men who did *not* quit the domain. A small group of these, led by Itagaki Taisuke, has always been described as loyalist, though before 1868 its concern seems to have been more with military reform than politics, and it was only in urging, against conservative opposition, that Tosa should join Satsuma

and Chōshū in military action against Edo at the time of the Restoration that its members committed themselves directly to loyalist policies.

V. *Gotō group* (8 men). Finally, there were the moderate reformers, men whose readiness to compromise with the Bakufu made them enemies of the loyalists, just as their taste for reform incurred the hostility of conservatives. Since they were in office for much of the time after 1863 it is not always easy to distinguish them from career officials, whose activities did not necessarily imply a commitment to reform, or loyalism, or any other positive and controversial view; but I have selected for consideration eight who seem to have formed the nucleus of Gotō Shōjirō's supporters.

## B. FAMILY STATUS

Any realistic analysis of Tokugawa social structure must subdivide the samurai class. At the top of it were a small number of upper samurai families, monopolizing the most important offices in domain administration. Next to them were the middle samurai (*hirazamurai* or *heishi*), who furnished the majority of castle-town officialdom.<sup>4</sup> Below these again were men of many different kinds of minor rank: the lower samurai, whose status and designations varied widely from one area to another. They included families which had lost some of the privileges of samurai rank because of an inability to fulfil its obligations; *gōshi*, who ranked lower because they lived in the countryside, not the castle town; foot-soldiers (*ashigaru*), whose military function was subordinate to that of the samurai 'knight'; and a host of others, often farmers or merchants in origin, who had received grants of rank—usually rank of little consequence—for their services as local officials or their contributions to the domain treasury.

In Tosa,<sup>5</sup> the upper samurai included, apart from branches of the *daimyō* family, only a few houses of *karō* and *chūrō*. Next below these came some 800 families of *uma-mawari*, the highest ranking of the middle samurai, followed by much smaller numbers of *kojū* and *rusui-gumi*. The lower samurai were dominated by the *gōshi*, who were as numerous, and often as wealthy, as the *uma-mawari*, though of much less standing.<sup>6</sup> With them one must bracket the

<sup>4</sup> When I previously discussed this question, in an article on 'Councillors of samurai origin in the early Meiji government', *BSOAS*, xx, 1957, 89-103, I called these men 'lesser samurai', because they were the lower of two segments of the samurai class proper, i.e. of those holding full samurai rank. I have since come to the conclusion that use of this label raises more problems than it solves. There was a whole range of lower ranks, which were—and are—loosely called 'samurai', even though their claim to that title is sometimes tenuous. The holders of these, too, have often been described as 'lesser samurai'. Hence to apply the term to the *hirazamurai* alone causes confusion and makes it difficult to find a label for those of lower rank. In the circumstances, it seems better to designate the subdivisions of samurai simply 'upper', 'middle', and 'lower', avoiding the word 'lesser' altogether.

<sup>5</sup> On the Tosa samurai class in general, see especially *Kōchi-ken shiyō*, Kōchi, 1924, 264-6.

<sup>6</sup> Figures for six of the domain's seven districts (*kōri*) in the early nineteenth century show 749 *gōshi* families having assessed landholdings (*ryōchi-daka*) which averaged some 54 *koku* per

village headmen (*shōya*), who, if only on the fringes of the samurai class, shared with the *gōshi* the leading place in rural society.<sup>7</sup> Certainly a number of *gōshi* and *shōya* families were related, either by blood or marriage. So, too, were some of the men who had some kind of samurai rank, perhaps as *ashigaru*, by virtue of holding minor office in the domain's local administration. What is more, the fact that all these lower samurai, even the *gōshi*,<sup>8</sup> could be of farmer or merchant origin, gives them a vital importance in any consideration of the relationship between politics and socio-economic change.

TABLE I  
POLITICAL GROUPS IN TOSA : BY STATUS

GROUP	Number in group	STATUS *				
		Upper samurai	Middle samurai	Lower samurai	Non- samurai	Not known
I. Takechi	22	0	5 + (2)	13 + (2)	0	0
II. Noneyama	23	0	0	17 + (2)	4	0
III. Tosa <i>rōnin</i>	55	0	2 + (3)	31 + (4)	4	11
Total I + II + III	100	0	7 + (5)	61 + (8)	8	11
IV. Itagaki	9	0	7	2	0	0
V. Gotō	8	1	7	0	0	0

\* Under status, the numerals *without* brackets show the numbers of men concerned whose status is sufficiently confirmed by the records ; those *within* brackets indicate men for whom the classification is probable, but cannot be confirmed.

Turning now to the results of the inquiry, table 1 sets out the status of the various participants in Tosa politics during the 1860's, so far as this can be determined.<sup>9</sup> From an inspection of this table it is at once apparent that the

household. This would have been a reasonable figure for *hirazamurai* at the lower end of the scale of rank. The distribution of *gōshi* holdings by size was as follows :

under 20 *koku*, 135 holdings  
20 to 49 *koku*, 327 holdings  
50 to 99 *koku*, 198 holdings  
100 *koku* and over, 89 holdings

The figures have been computed from the complete list of *gōshi* holdings for these six districts which is given in *Tosa-han gōshi chōsa-sho* (*Tosa Shiryō Sōsho*, No. 3), Kōchi, 1958.

<sup>7</sup> On rural society, see especially Jansen, 'Takechi Zuizan', 200-3.

<sup>8</sup> Of the Tosa *gōshi*, those of longest standing were descended from samurai retainers of a former *daimyō* house, the Chōsogabe, replaced by the Yamauchi at the beginning of the seventeenth century ; but later the rank was made available to farmers, whether or not of samurai descent, and finally to merchants, the chief qualification being the ability to bring a given amount of new land under cultivation. For a detailed account see Irimajiri Yoshinaga, *Hōkensei hōkai katei no kenkyū*, Tokyo, 1948, 76-141.

<sup>9</sup> Many of the loyalists and other samurai referred to in this article have been the subject of published biographies, most of which are listed in Takanashi Kōshi, *Ishin shiseki kaidai : denki hen*, Tokyo, 1935. There are two collections of short biographies, in which men from Tosa figure prominently : *Kinnō resshi-den*, Tokyo, 1906 ; and *Zōi shoken-den*, 2 vols., Tokyo, 1927. In addition, there is a collection of short biographies entitled *Zoku Tosa ijin-den*, Kōchi, 1923. A good deal of useful information is also to be found in *Ishin Tosa kinnō-shi*, Tokyo, 1912 ; Sasaki Takayuki's memoirs, *Kinnō hisshi : Sasaki Rō Kō sekijitsu-dan*, Tokyo, 1915 ; and several

men whose activities were the more violent and illegal came usually from the ranks of the lower samurai, who constituted over 60 per cent of the Takechi, Noneyama, and *rōnin* groups. What is more, the leaders of these groups themselves came from this class. Takechi was a *gōshi*, as were the two Kiyooka cousins who led the Noneyama rising. Of the *rōnin*, two of the most famous were Sakamoto Ryōma, another *gōshi*, and Nakaoka Shintarō, a *shōya*. Altogether there were 25 *gōshi* clearly identifiable among the loyalists in these groups, as well as 16 *shōya* or village officials. Many of the others show signs of having had a similar background. Even those classified as non-samurai conform to the pattern, in that most of them were not in any ordinary sense peasants: the four involved in the Noneyama affair included two who had studied medicine and a farmer who is described as being of samurai descent, while the four non-samurai *rōnin* were a farmer, a merchant, a doctor, and a Buddhist priest. This bears out the interpretation of the Tosa loyalist movement as something relatively class-conscious, reflecting the resentments felt by a respectable and substantial gentry, or at least a kind of rural upper middle class, against the domination of society by upper samurai and the castle town.<sup>10</sup>

By contrast, the Itagaki and Gotō groups, which were primarily concerned with the politics of the castle town, were composed almost entirely of middle samurai, the majority being *uma-mawari*. Even Itagaki's two *gōshi* followers, who are shown as lower samurai, were later promoted. Moreover, Itagaki and Gotō eventually became *chūrō* and *karō* respectively, which emphasizes the difference in status that marked them off from most of the extremists. In one sense, of course, to say this is only to restate one of the facts of political life in a Tokugawa-period domain: a man had to be of middle samurai rank, or higher, to qualify for an office of any consequence. Even Gotō, the moderate, found it convenient to seek the help of a hereditary *karō*, while Takechi had to have the assistance of *hirazamurai*, like Hirai Masazane and Kominami Gorō, in order to place his proposals before those who were formally in a position to take decisions. From this point of view it is not easy to distinguish the *legal* political groupings from each other. Whether their sympathies were loyalist, like Itagaki, reformist, like Gotō, or even conservative, they were composed largely of middle samurai.<sup>11</sup> One might add, as a corollary, that lower samurai who wished to

articles, especially those by Hirao Michio, in the periodical *Tosa Shidan*. Nevertheless, for precise information on rank and status one cannot do without the manuscript records preserved in the Prefectural Central Library at Kōchi, notably the lists entitled *O-samurai-chū senzogaki keizu-chō*. I would like here to express my thanks to the Librarian for giving me access to these materials; and to Professor T. Yamamoto of Kōchi University, whose help in obtaining photographs and transcripts of relevant parts of them, when I was not able to be in Kōchi, has been of incalculable assistance.

<sup>10</sup> See Jansen, 'Takechi Zuizan', 201-3, 206-7; also *Sakamoto Ryōma*, 108-11, where he makes the point that the predominantly lower samurai composition of the loyalist movement prevented some upper samurai from joining it, despite their sympathy with its political objectives.

<sup>11</sup> I have also analysed the status of 30 samurai who opposed Tosa participation in the attack on the Bakufu in 1868 and who are therefore counted as conservatives. Two were upper samurai and 26 were middle samurai. The other two also seem to have been middle samurai, though this cannot be confirmed.

play a part in politics had to choose between exerting influence behind the scenes, or flight. The latter led almost inevitably to violence. Hence many of the ambitious, as well as the hot-heads, are to be found among the *rōnin*.

### C. AGE

Table 2 classifies the same participants in Tosa politics as table 1, but this time in terms of age. Age is given for the year 1862 (the beginning of important loyalist activity), or for the first year thereafter in which the individual concerned began to play a direct part in political affairs.

The results need little comment. Most of the younger men (under 25) are to be found in the Noneyama and *rōnin* groups, that is, those which were involved

TABLE 2  
POLITICAL GROUPS IN TOSA : BY AGE

GROUP	Number in group	AGE *					Number surviv- ing after 1868	Number holding high office after 1868
		Under 20	20-24	25-29	30 & over	Not known		
I. Takechi	22	1	1	9	10	1	11**	2
II. Noneyama	23	4	10	7	2	0	0	0
III. Tosa <i>rōnin</i>	55	7	29	13	6	0	12	6
Total I + II + III	100	12	40	29	18	1	23	8
IV. Itagaki	9	0	3	1	2	3	8	2
V. Gotō	8	0	1	2	4	1	7	6

\* Age is taken as in 1862, or the first year thereafter in which an individual became directly involved in politics. It is estimated according to Western usage, where precise dates of birth are known. Otherwise age by traditional Japanese usage is taken, and one year subtracted to give an approximate Western equivalent.

\*\* There is one other whose date of death is not known; but he almost certainly died in prison before 1868.

in violence. No doubt a sense of adventure had something to do with this, especially for the under-twenties. By contrast, the politicians—those who were concerned to influence domain policy by techniques not necessarily entailing the use of force—included a higher proportion of maturer men, quite a few of them over 40. Here again the Takechi, Itagaki, and Gotō groups, despite their differences of outlook, have more in common with each other than with the other two. Age, it seems, or at any rate maturity, may have been as important as status in deciding the nature of a man's political activity, if not his brand of politics.

### D. LATER CAREERS

Table 2 also shows how many of the men in these groups survived until the new government came to power in 1868 (excluding any who died in the civil war) and how many attained high office in the Meiji period. For these purposes 'high

office' has been taken as including high rank in the armed forces or local government, but not routine bureaucratic appointments.

Of the 23 who survived in the Takechi, Noneyama, and *rōnin* groups, two died fairly soon after the Restoration and another eight—six of them were Takechi's followers—retired into obscurity in Tosa after the civil war. Five more had fairly undistinguished careers in government service. The remaining eight all reached the peerage after holding various important posts, two of them serving in the Cabinet. Interestingly, only one of the eight joined Itagaki's Jiyūtō.

Itagaki's own supporters fared very much the same. Apart from Itagaki himself, who became a Cabinet minister and party leader, only one achieved much recognition: a professional soldier, who was made baron, then viscount. Another continued as a follower of Itagaki in party politics; two filled routine government posts; and three concerned themselves with local affairs in Tosa. By contrast, Gotō's group provided five senior members of the early Meiji government, all of whom remained influential enough to become peers. Another reached the peerage and Cabinet via the army, and only one, the *karō*, Fukuoka Kunai, retired into private life. All this tends to confirm, what other evidence suggests,<sup>12</sup> that participation in the loyalist movement before 1868 was by no means a guarantee of important office later. Of the Tosa men, at least, the Gotō moderates were if anything the more successful, notwithstanding their former reluctance to destroy the Tokugawa.

#### E. SOME CONCLUSIONS

From the evidence presented above, supplemented by the more detailed case histories in the many biographies which are available, one can piece together a fairly convincing picture of samurai politics and politicians in late-Tokugawa Tosa.

Characteristic of those who engaged openly and directly in the struggle for control of domain policy in this period was the man of middle samurai status, in age a year or two either side of 30: a man of some birth and position, just reaching maturity, but possessing neither high rank nor great wealth. If he were among the more able and successful of his group he might well rise to high office, probably through posts in the *daimyō*'s household or personal entourage. He might even achieve a permanent increase in rank, though it was more likely to be for life than to be hereditary.

These characteristics seem to hold good for all shades of political outlook. A conservative would certainly find himself co-operating with a number of upper samurai. A radical would have lower samurai among his colleagues, and possibly some who were not samurai at all. But in both cases the real core of the group seems to have been its *hirazamurai*. Nor is this surprising. On the one

<sup>12</sup> Beasley, 'Samurai councillors', 96, 102-3. On this subject generally see a recent work by B. S. Silberman, *Ministers of modernization: elite mobility in the Meiji Restoration, 1868-1873*, Tucson, Arizona, 1964.

hand, the upper samurai families were too few and too inbred to be likely to produce men of much ability. On the other, the lower samurai were excluded from all important offices by their rank.

This provides one obvious explanation of why those who engaged in illegal activities were usually of more humble birth, as well as younger : denied access to office, and therefore to official discussions of policy, they had to bring their ideas to the attention of authority in other ways. Certainly in Tosa the difference in status between domain politicians and agitators or terrorists is more clearly marked than that between, say, the radical and the conservative politician. The typical *rōnin*, in fact, like the more turbulent of Takechi's followers, was a young man of lower samurai origin, probably born to a family of the rural gentry and in his early or middle twenties. He was led by men who were a little older than himself, sometimes of slightly higher rank. Some of those who joined the loyalists, one suspects, were motivated by little more than a love of excitement. Others, perhaps, were influenced as much by family obligations as by political zeal, for a good many were related to each other. In addition, there was a handful of fairly wealthy men, who provided the extremists with hospitality or funds, but usually took good care not to get personally involved in the more dangerous kind of adventures. Indeed, the one thing missing is any evidence that this was a movement of the desperate poor.

Rather, it found its coherence in the fact of bringing together those who felt that they were not being accorded the recognition, whether political or social, which their merits and standing deserved : middle samurai, who resented the upper samurai monopoly of power ; *gōshi* and village headmen, with a similar resentment against the castle town ; and a few merchants, whose money had brought them a small advance in rank, but without any commensurate increase in the degree of their acceptance by society. It was this common sense of protest against the established order which made possible a measure of co-operation against the Bakufu, though it was not great enough to survive after 1868 in face of the problems raised by the need to create a new régime.

How far this pattern applies to other regions of Japan is still in doubt. That some aspects of it do, is certain. Middle samurai dominance of the active political groups was almost universal.<sup>13</sup> So was the need for such groups to secure upper samurai co-operation if they were to come to power by methods short of revolution. There remains much work to be done, however, before one can tell to what extent the social relationships which lay behind the Tosa loyalist movement were repeated elsewhere, especially in areas where anti-Bakufu sentiment proved strong.

<sup>13</sup> Even in Chōshū, where the part played by groups from outside the ranks of castle-town samurai was much more important than in most domains, the leadership seems to have remained in the hands of middle samurai, like Kido and Takasugi ; see Craig, *op. cit.*, *passim*. I have also made a study of Satsuma politics, which tends to the same conclusion ; see my article, ' Politics and the samurai class structure in Satsuma, 1858-1868 ', *Modern Asian Studies*, I, 1, 1967, 47-57.

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