The British Role in the Meiji Restoration:
A Re-interpretive Note

By GORDON DANIELS

IT is an historical commonplace that the renewal of Western diplomatic contact with Japan, after the Tokugawa seclusion, seriously disturbed the Japanese political system, and contributed to the Meiji Restoration. Undoubtedly foreign demands for commercial and diplomatic privileges, combined with the presence of warships and military garrisons, cut sharply into the minds of all politically conscious Japanese, and added to the bitterness of internal conflict. But in the past numerous historians have gone much further than these general statements, and drawn far more specific conclusions about the policies and impact of Britain in these crucial years.

According to the familiar version of the history of the period 1864–68, Britain’s role went much further than mere involuntary influence, and included deliberate moral and material support for the proponents of an Imperial Restoration.¹ This interpretation, based largely upon the memoirs of two junior officials in the British Legation,² has had an understandable appeal for two distinct sets of historians.

¹ See e.g., (a) J. K. Fairbank, E. O. Reischauer, A. Craig, East Asia: The Modern Transformation, Boston, Mass., 1965, pp. 222–23, '... the French Minister, Léon Roches, ... worked energetically for a restoration of shogunial power under French influence. As a result of his efforts, a French school was opened at Yokohama, a naval dockyard built at Yokosuka nearby, and large quantities of weapons were imported. Not to be outdone, the British Minister, Sir Harry Parkes, who had played a large role in the opening of China, supported Satsuma with information and arms.'

² Comité Japonais des Sciences Historiques, Le Japon au XIe Congrès International des Sciences Historiques à Stockholm, Tokyo, 1960, pp. 160–61, 'It has long been recognized that the Meiji Restoration was influenced and motivated by foreign relations beginning with the Opening of Japan. Most scholars, however, insisted that it was left to Japan to decide at the time of the Restoration whether she should have the Emperor or the Shogun as her sovereign. Takashi Ishii has refuted this theory arguing that the Imperial Rule was established under the strong influence of British policy toward Japan.'

(c) E. M. Satow, A Diplomat in Japan, London, 1921, pp. 299–300, 'On the way we met the chief, who had come out to have a look at the Tycoon, to whose downfall he had contributed as far as lay in his power'.

interested people. To Englishmen, Satow’s claim that Britain supported the Imperial camp has provided welcome evidence for a belief in British perspicacity and shrewdness. For many Japanese, on the other hand, the view that Britain played a decisive role has provided grounds for righteous indignation over the extent of a foreign intervention which, it was alleged, extended to supplying useful weaponry to the triumphant activists.

It has always seemed plausible that Victorian Britain, taut with expansiveness and eager for markets, should have been quick to see the need for British techniques and goods and hence to support the forces which turned Japan towards modernization, but this superficially attractive thesis is scarcely borne out by a close examination of British aims and activities as revealed in British private and official documents.

There is undoubtedly one point on which one can readily agree with the terms of this familiar rationalization: Britain’s prime objective in Japan was certainly to obtain an expanding trade and safe conditions for British merchants. But the political conclusions which the Foreign Office drew from this position were very different from those of Satow and Mitford whose memoirs have influenced so much historical writing.

Successive British governments always viewed Japan as an area of far less commercial potential than China and consequently were unwilling to commit armed forces to action there in anything but the most extreme circumstances. In 1863 and 1864 the Royal Navy was used to bombard recalcitrant Japanese fiefs, in the first case to demand redress for the killing of a British national, and in the second to reopen the Shimonoseki Straits, but ever afterwards the Foreign Office made it clear that force was only to be resorted to in response to a clear threat to British lives and property. This tight restriction on the local use of force always limited the actions of British Ministers in Japan and, although the Royal Navy played an important role as a means of transport for diplomats, a source of intelligence, and a means of adding emphasis to British requests, it could never be freely used by British Ministers to intervene actively in Japanese internal events.

As a support for this basically civilian approach to Japan the Foreign Office had a quiescent attitude to relations with other Western powers in the region. From the opening of the British Legation in Japan in 1859 the continuous theme of advice from London was co-operation with other European powers. The aim was to confront anti-Japanese with a united front, and although from time to time Britain
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did see Russia and France as threats to her interests, these fears never changed her first objective of quiet constructive solidarity with other European powers.3

The most obvious motive for concerted action was the defence of Britain’s treaties, for these constituted the fundamental legal basis of her diplomatic and commercial position in a country which was unused to diplomacy and suspicious of the outside world. Furthermore treaties were not only a means of preventing a Japanese relapse into isolation but were also the means which Britain used to obtain ever greater diplomatic privileges.

These predominantly commercial and civilian attitudes, which were all geared towards trade, also dictated the political objectives of the Foreign Office. Needless to say, the desiderata of an expanding trade were low tariffs, open ports, and access to the Japanese interior. But all these advantages, once gained, would be of little value without political stability and civil order. If there were civil war Westerners might be involved, and commerce might be disrupted, and as long as there were anti-foreign zealots merchants would never live in safety or feel able to move freely in pursuit of trade. Thus the first objective of Foreign Office policy was to prevent civil war, or anything that might lead to political violence. The philosophy of free trade was seen as a complementary element in this policy for it was believed that the basic conflict in Japan, between Shogun and dissatisfied daimyo, was the result of the Tokugawa monopoly of foreign trade; and therefore, if unrestricted commerce were allowed between all Japanese and the outside world, political discontents would evaporate.4 All of these notions were permeated by the desire to avoid turmoil and strife, and as for seeking to support rebellious daimyo in a violent attempt to overthrow the Bakufu, nothing could have been further from the basic aims and methods of British policy.

In July 1865, Sir Harry Parkes arrived in Yokohama to take charge of the British Legation. He bore with him instructions from London which, far from suggesting any break with Whitehall’s traditional approach, merely confirmed it.

At this point the euphoria which followed the successful bombardment of Shimonoseki was still at its height. It was assumed that all Britain’s main problems in Japan had been overcome, and that Parkes’s basic role would be to maintain things as they now were. Perhaps this

3 As an example of the suspicions of France and Russia see FO Japan 55, enclosure in no. 108, Winchester to Russell, 23 June 1865.

4 FO Japan 52, no. 10, Russell to Parkes, 23 August 1865.
complacent tone was understandable, for officials in London believed that one fundamental problem had now been surmounted. Previously it had been feared that many Japanese might question the legality of western treaties since these had been signed by the Shogun but not by the Emperor. However, in the aftermath of the Shimonoseki Expedition, the Bakufu had undertaken to obtain Imperial ratification of foreign treaties, and it was assumed that if this had not been achieved, the Emperor would have at least acquiesced in complete Tokugawa control of foreign relations. Certainly there were no grounds for serious dissatisfaction with the existing Japanese regime, as was clear from the central maxim of Parkes’s instructions which urged ‘firm but conciliatory’ behaviour towards the Bakufu.5

By August 1865 the attitude of the Foreign Office towards events in Japan had become somewhat sceptical and concerned. The Shogun had failed to obtain the Emperor’s ratification of the treaties or his agreement of the Bakufu’s control of foreign relations. What was more, a Satsuma agent had visited London, and if nothing else had ensued from this encounter its very occurrence and friendly atmosphere had clearly demonstrated that all the Shogun’s earlier statements could not be trusted. In the past Tokugawa officials had always maintained that every han was uncompromisingly anti-foreign, and they had often cited this as a reason for refusing to open further ports.

The Satsuma interview, along with the Shogun’s broken undertaking, certainly damaged the Foreign Office’s trust in the latter’s word. But at this point such smouldering suspicion of the Edo government was far from being the most serious of the British Government’s worries. It was now believed that Japan was close to civil war, the thing most likely to jeopardize the whole British position in the treaty ports, and the Foreign Office’s response to this danger was to repeat its old free trade credo that, if only the daimyo were granted commercial freedom, the prospect of violence would probably diminish.6 Fortunately another turn in Japanese government policy provided a ready aid to this British objective. In the spring of 1865 the Bakufu had requested an extension of the period in which they were to pay the second instalment of the Shimonoseki indemnity and, although this might appear a sign of unwelcome evasiveness, in British eyes financial compensations were always less desirable than commercial opportunities. Indeed, the substitution of the latter for the former was not only desirable in itself, but something which could contribute to improving Japanese stability.

5 FO Japan 52, no. 5, Russell to Parkes, 8 April 1865.
6 FO Japan 52, no. 10, Russell to Parkes, 23 August 1865.
At the same time this conciliatory element in British policy was balanced by an element of firmness; for if the Japanese rejected the alternative of commercial concessions they were to be denied any extension of the time in which the indemnity was to be paid.

In the months which followed this despatch there were no major changes in Foreign Office policy, but merely refinements and clarifications which explain how the philosophy of free trade might be applied, and how it might serve British purposes. It was hoped that a thriving trade would produce a Japanese middle-class that would be a source of order and moderate politics. And Whitehall's concern for the rights of dissatisfied daimyo, along with its fear of civil war, produced a constitutional scheme for resolving Japan's internal crisis. London believed that the granting of commercial freedom to the daimyo should be paralleled by the granting of political rights; and that important han should have some say in national decision making. A constitutional settlement was clearly preferable to a violent solution.

This triple concern for trade, a new middle class, and a constitutional settlement was clearly British in character, but Whitehall was very well aware of the dangers inherent in trying to foster or encourage any alien institutions in Japan. It was recognized that any solution which did not 'bear the stamp of the Japanese character' could not be lasting. Clearly, any scheme that was known to be foreign would be suspect in Japanese minds and there was yet another danger in any whispering campaign in favour of a particular scheme or faction. For if civil war did erupt, association with any party would produce a hostile reaction from its enemy, and this might well lead to violent outbursts against British nationals.

In the final three years of the Tokugawa regime it was clear to officials in London that neutrality towards the rival parties was the safest policy. The Bakufu, the daimyo and the Imperial Court were clearly all so strong in terms of prestige or power that the destruction of any one of them seemed impossible, and the best hope for the future apparently lay in a reconciliation of all three elements. For the sake of happy relations in the future, harmonious contacts with all parties seemed the wisest policy. British officials recognized the Emperor as the sovereign of Japan but they believed that his titular supremacy could not be transformed into full administrative control within the foreseeable future; in this situation informal relations with the daimyo

7 FO Japan 63, no. 30, Clarendon to Parkes, 28 February 1866.
8 FO Japan 63, no. 66, Clarendon to Parkes, 9 April 1866.
9 FO Japan 63 Confidential Hammond to Parkes, 26 April 1866.
as well as the customary contacts with the Bakufu seemed both permissible and desirable.

Whatever the policies and opinions of the Foreign Office, in a period of slow communications it was almost inevitable that a British Minister in Japan would have some latitude in the mingled process of forming and executing policy. Thus it would not be surprising to find a Minister acting in detail in ways contrary to the principles enunciated from London. Sir Harry Parkes was undoubtedly an independent-minded and strong personality, but although these circumstances pointed towards likely conflicts between London and the Edo Legation, there is no evidence that Parkes's assumptions or actions ran contrary to those of successive Foreign Secretaries.

Before his arrival in Japan, Parkes's diplomatic experience had been virtually confined to China, and from these activities he had learned two principles of action; first the need for tough and resolute tactics when faced by Oriental intransigence, and secondly, after witnessing the Taiping Rebellion, a strong abhorrence of civil war. Both of these axioms were relevant to his action in Japan, particularly in the summer of 1865.

When Parkes arrived at Nagasaki in June 1865 the likelihood of civil war between Choshu and the Bakufu appeared to be increasing daily. This ominous danger, as well as the whole crisis in Japanese politics, was underlined by the contacts which Parkes had at Nagasaki with the representatives of local daimyo. These men spoke of their desire for free trade and the likelihood of internal strife, but Parkes counselled restraint and peaceful methods, and in subsequent months frequently repeated this advice.

In August 1865 Parkes arrived at Edo, and in the following months the prevention of violence and the protection of Britain's physical position provided the major themes in his activities. On the side of positive preventive action he unsuccessfully pressed the Japanese to import rice and to buy it through British merchants. Both these acts would remove the danger of high food prices and, incidentally, associate foreign merchants with an improvement in Japanese social conditions. He hoped that such a combination of events would remove the roots of urban violence and perhaps contribute to the popularity

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10 In 1865 normal despatches took two months to travel from Edo to London and the nearest telegraph was at Galle in Ceylon.
12 FO Japan 55, no. 7, Parkes to Russell, 30 June 1865.
of Westerners among the Japanese population. On the level of defensive strategy the British Minister showed an equally resolute face to both Bakufu and Choshu requests for concessions. He rejected a Tokugawa plea for a reduction in the British garrison at Yokohama, and a Choshu demand for permission to remount batteries on the Shimonoseki Straits. On these vital matters there was no sign of sympathy for anti-Tokugawa elements, nor of any concession which might encourage violence or weaken the British position in any possible civil war.

Parallel to these essentially defensive measures Parkes embarked on a more positive course in the final months of 1865. On receiving his second major set of instructions he was most impressed by the section relating to the Shimonoseki indemnity. Winchester, a previous Chargé d'Affaires, had suggested a new approach to this problem and the Foreign Office had already given its approval. His suggestion was that two-thirds of the indemnity should be remitted in exchange for the Imperial ratification of treaties, a lowering of tariffs, and the opening of Hyogo on 1 January 1866. The Foreign Office had unfortunately failed in its attempts to organize international action on this basis, and now asked Parkes to consider with his colleagues whether a delay in the indemnity payment should be conceded. Parkes misunderstood these instructions, believing that they gave him carte blanche to decide not only whether a delay should be conceded but also the exact terms on which such a concession might be made.

Acting upon these conclusions Parkes gathered the Western representatives together, and on 30 October 1865 they agreed to carry out the Winchester proposals. They would collect a joint naval force and sail to Hyogo where all but one member of the Roju was in residence. Their main aim was to press forward the British scheme, but the desire to resolve the indemnity problem was not the only consideration which suggested the action to the British Minister. Although war had not yet broken out between Choshu and the Bakufu the Tokugawa ultimatum to Choshu was due to expire in mid-November and Parkes hoped that the Western initiative would provide the Shogunate with a pretext to delay the conflict, if not to seek a compromise solution. Besides this, a naval and diplomatic initiative would have considerable public relations value. Osaka and Hyogo were due to be opened in

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13 FO Japan 56, no. 24, Parkes to Russell, 11 August 1865.
14 FO Japan 57, no. 51, Confidential Parkes to Russell, 30 September 1865.
15 FO Japan 57, no. 59, Parkes to Russell, 30 October 1865.
1868 and a naval visit would give local inhabitants an opportunity to accustom themselves to foreigners. It would provide an occasion for Parkes to test the truth of Tokugawa assertions of widespread anti-foreign feeling and would be a useful demonstration of Western strength to the anti-foreign daimyo who were said to be clustered round the Kyoto Court.

On 4 November the Western squadron arrived off Hyogo and in the first phase of the discussions Parkes laid most emphasis upon the need for Imperial ratification. He chided the Bakufu for its broken promises, and its failure to admit daimyo to the profits of foreign trade, and tautened the atmosphere with direct and indirect hints of moving towards direct negotiations with the Imperial Court. In doing this he sought merely to impose pressure on the Bakufu but he had no desire to destroy it. He believed that the Shogun, though irresolute, was acting in good faith and was trying to oppose the conservative elements in Kyoto.

At the same time Parkes also desired to make clear his neutrality in the dispute between the Bakufu and Choshu. Obviously the warships off Hyogo were designed to put pressure upon the Shogun and the Court, but Parkes feared lest too long a stay might be widely interpreted as a commitment to support the Tokugawa cause against Choshu. To counterbalance this possibility the British Minister threatened to leave Hyogo Bay to visit the Choshu leaders.

The British approach to the main negotiations became much more urgent on 17 November when news came that two moderate members of the Roju, Abe Masato and Matsumae Takahiro, had been dismissed from office. Faced by this sign of anti-foreign success, Parkes and his colleagues forwarded notes identiques demanding a clear reply by 26 November to their demands for concessions or the prompt payment of the indemnity. Although military force was not openly referred to, the threat that the allies would 'act as they thought convenient' clearly implied the possibility of naval action. This sharp

18 FO Japan 58, Private Parkes to Russell, 18 November 1865.
19 Ibid.
20 FO Japan 58, enclosure 1 in no. 68, Parkes to Clarendon, 28 November 1865.
gesture soon produced the desired effect and on 26 November the Tokugawa officials agreed to future tariff negotiations and presented a declaration of Imperial acquiescence in foreign treaties. The Japanese still claimed that it would be dangerous to open Hyogo to foreigners but, as they undertook to pay the whole of the Shimonoseki indemnity, the Western representatives were highly satisfied by the results of their endeavours. Two important concessions had been gained and absolutely nothing given in return.

From Osaka Parkes sailed to the Shimonoseki Straits to meet the Choshu leaders; again he emphasized the need for a peaceful solution to the dispute with the Bakufu, and stressed his hope that the recent Imperial decision would help to bring about national unity. However the British belief that economic frustrations lay at the heart of daimyo discontent was hardly substantiated in these encounters, for Choshu councillors showed no interest in opening their own ports as they feared that this would alienate their allies and anger extremists among their own followers.21

This pessimistic news of the commercial policies of the southern daimyo received further confirmation when Parkes proceeded to Shanghai in December 1865. There he consulted with Gower from the Nagasaki Consulate and a representative of T. B. Glover and Company, an important trading enterprise in the same port. Both of these men emphasized that the daimyo had only a very limited interest in trade, and that they were hostile both to foreign residents and to the opening of their own harbours. This news along with the Shogun’s positive response to the Osaka expedition increased Parkes’s sceptical attitude towards the daimyo and strengthened his belief in the importance of the Shogun.22

The British Minister’s main preoccupation in the first half of 1866 was with the negotiation of new tariffs which had been promised in the Hyogo agreement. In these discussions Parkes had two distinct objectives, to remove commercial obstacles, and to draw Japan inextricably into international relations. The latter objective required freedom for all Japanese to participate in trade with foreigners and, more important, to travel abroad. These provisions were included in the agreement and, along with the narrowly commercial aspects of the treaty, went a long way towards drawing Japan permanently into international relations. The political repercussions of trade were never

21 FO Japan 58, no. 70, Parkes to Clarendon, 8 December 1865.
22 FO Japan 58, no. 70, Parkes to Clarendon, 8 December 1865; and no. 72, Parkes to Clarendon, 15 December 1865.
far from Parkes’s mind and he inserted grain among the agreed list of duty-free imports, thus fulfilling his earlier project for associating foreigners with the lowering of food prices.23

During the negotiations which preceded the 1866 commercial treaty the Japanese authorities again requested a delay in the payment of the Shimonoseki indemnity. Not surprisingly, Parkes refused to consider such a demand until the Bakufu’s attitude towards foreign contacts was clarified by its behaviour in the tariff talks. Fortunately these went well and Parkes was glad to forward the Japanese request to London, recommending its acceptance. There could be no clearer indication of his favourable view of the Shogun’s foreign policy.24

At this stage Parkes was well aware of the difficult political position of the Shogun who was apparently threatened both by progressive daimyo who were interested in trade, and by highly reactionary elements clustered around the Court.25 This analysis merely added to the British Minister’s overriding fear of political violence. He recognized the Emperor as the ultimate sovereign but realized that his authority was far from effective. In this situation the Shogun appeared the most reliable basis for political stability. The daimyo seemed deeply divided and unreliable and, although they would form an essential element in any solution, their internecine rivalry seemed distinctly dangerous. When the Foreign Secretary wrote to Parkes in the summer of 1866 describing meetings with Satsuma agents, Parkes countered by emphasizing the deep divisions among the councils of the various han, and explained that Satsuma’s interest in acquiring foreign friends was probably due to its political isolation at home.26 Parkes’s belief in the superior importance of the Shogunate did not stop at vague and indefinite statements of support. In May 1866 he recommended that the British government should send military advisers to assist the Tokugawa forces, and in the same month British units participated in a field day with Bakufu troops. The climax to these opinions came in July 1866 when Parkes wrote unequivocally that ‘the Tycoon’s government appears the only power able to preserve general order . . . we have no desire to see his general authority weakened or subverted’.27

In the early months of 1866 there was friction between the British Minister and the Tokugawa authorities, but only on a minor scale.

23 FO 391/14, Hammond Papers, Parkes to Hammond, 27 June 1866.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 FO Japan 68, Private Parkes to Hammond, 29 May 1866.
27 FO Japan 69, no. 123, Parkes to Stanley, 24 July 1866.
Parkes resented the obstacles put in his way when he sought to visit government officials or independent daimyo. He was disappointed that the Edo authorities did not soften their attitude towards Choshu, as intransigence might provoke hostilities, but these minor irritations did not take on a serious turn until August 1866 when Parkes visited the Satsuma capital.

Parallel with his carefully considered attitude towards the Edo Government, Parkes had an extremely sceptical view of the powerful daimyo. There was often talk of instability and inter-han rivalry, and in the summer of 1866 Satsuma was said to be resisting the opening of Hyogo so as to embarrass the Shogun. The Kagoshima leaders seemed quite prepared to use foreign treaties as a tool in the internal power struggle, and when Parkes visited Satsuma it was not merely to state Britain's policy of an intervention but also to lecture the Kagoshima councillors on the dire consequences of any action which might be damaging to Britain's treaty position.28 During his visit Parkes was convinced by the Satsuma leaders that the Hyogo document, indicating imperial approval of foreign treaties, was not genuine, and had been specially edited for foreign consumption. He was relieved when the Satsuma leaders emphasized their lack of hostility towards the Bakufu but their revelations about the Shogun's deceit, linked as they were with news of deteriorating Bakufu-Choshu relations certainly lowered his estimate of the Edo administration. Although Parkes's fears about Satsuma were allayed by his visit, he was far from convinced that all daimyo fell into the same 'progressive' category.29

In July 1866 warfare again broke out between Choshu and the Bakufu and soon raised a variety of complex questions on which Parkes had to make quick decisions. The first Tokugawa reaction to the war, though understandable in military terms, merely added to Parkes's suspicions. Fearing that foreign traders might supply Choshu with weaponry, the Bakufu requested that all Western ships should keep clear of the Shimonoseki Straits.30 To Parkes such a request was unacceptable, not because he wished to see Choshu victorious, but because he regarded the preservation of free navigation as a right which should not be given up in any circumstances. Britain's desire to avoid any damage to her trade or to the interests of her merchants was certainly a key consideration in her attitude towards the civil war, but equally

28 FO Japan 67, Confidential Parkes to Clarendon, 28 February 1866; and FO Japan 68, Private Parkes Memorandum on Satsuma-Oliphant Meeting, 29 May 1866.
29 e.g. FO 391/14, Hammond Papers, Parkes to Hammond, 31 October 1866.
30 FO Japan 69, no. 119, Parkes to Stanley, 2 August 1866.
important was her desire to avoid any action which might damage
relations with either party in the conflict. Parkes refused to declare
the Shimonoseki Straits out of bounds to British ships, but this was
counterbalanced by his declaration that no British trading vessel
should anchor in the Straits during the hostilities. Similarly he wished
to avoid the involvement of British merchant ships in exchanges of
fire or any appearance of deep commitment to the Shogun's side.
Thus he placed a ban upon the use of British merchant ships for troop-
ing purposes in the Shimonoseki Straits.31 British ship owners were
still permitted to transport Tokugawa troops as far as Osaka, but not
to venture nearer the zone of conflict. At the same time, negotiations
for a British naval mission to advise the Tokugawa authorities continued
without interruption. A naval mission could have no immediate
impact on the civil war, and to abandon the scheme might help French
influence over the Shogunate to become paramount. Parkes's over-
whelming desire at this time was to 'ensure that foreigners are as far
as possible kept out of these internal conflicts', and all his actions
appear to have been clearly directed towards this end.32

In describing the collapse of the Bakufu some historians have placed
considerable emphasis upon the activities of Thomas B. Glover, a
British merchant based in Nagasaki, who sold weapons to Satsuma
agents who in turn conveyed them to the Choshu armies.33 Parkes was
a friend of Glover's but this is not to say that he supported this trade
with a political objective in view. At this time the link between Choshu
and Satsuma was a well kept secret, and what is more Parkes believed
that Satsuma had no desire to destroy the Tokugawa authority. Thus
acquiescence in arms sales to Satsuma at no stage indicated desire to
destroy the Tokugawa government.34

On returning from his visit to Satsuma Parkes passed through the
Shimonoseki Straits and, with the French Minister, enquired whether
they might act as mediators in the civil war. This suggestion received
no encouragement from the belligerents, but friendly conversations
with Choshu leaders convinced Parkes that their attitudes were not
anti-foreign, and that they had no intention of closing the Straits.
As a result Parkes took no action, save a formal protest against the
remounting of the batteries on the Shimonoseki Straits.35 To have

31 FO Japan 70, no. 135, Parkes to Stanley, 1 September 1866; and FO Japan 70,
no. 147, Parkes to Stanley, 10 September 1866.
32 FO 391/14, Hammond Papers, Parkes to Hammond, 12 September 1866.
33 e.g. see W. G. Beasley, op. cit., note 2, p. 84. See also supra, p. 299.
34 e.g. FO Japan, 69, Parkes to Hammond, 2 August 1866.
35 FO Japan 72, no. 199, Parkes to Stanley, 1 December 1866.
resorted to force would have meant the abandonment of non-intervention and, even more serious, the likelihood of a clash with the Foreign Office.

The slight cooling of Parkes's attitude towards the Bakufu which stemmed from the onset of the civil war was soon eliminated by the pressure of a yet more serious event. In August 1866 Shogun Iemochi died, and the consequent political vacuum made Parkes fear that a weakening of authority and civil strife might ensue. This heightened regard for the importance of the Bakufu was soon reinforced by the heartening news that Yoshinobu had been selected to be the new Shogun. He was known to be an energetic leader, and the British Legation believed that he was disposed to be friendly to the West and agreeable to a compromise in the Choshu controversy. Beyond the possible cessation of the civil conflict the British now began to hope that the Shogun's spirit of compromise would also extend to the formation of a new Committee of State in which the powers of decision making would be shared with prominent daimyo. This optimism was temporarily strengthened by news that an assembly of daimyo had been summoned, an act which seemed to presage important constitutional changes.

By the close of 1866 an armistice had been signed in the civil war and, although there were again doubts about the Shogun's constitutional policy, the atmosphere of Anglo-Tokugawa relations remained essentially friendly. Certainly there were no issues which divided Britain and the Bakufu sufficiently for Parkes to welcome the disintegration of the Tokugawa government.

Although this Choshu armistice and the appointment of Yoshinobu as heir apparent clearly removed some of the principal dangers and uncertainties from the situation, new problems followed which stemmed from the power and prestige still residing in the office of Shogun. In early January 1867 Yoshinobu invited the Western diplomats to visit him at Osaka. Parkes was hesitant to accept the invitation, not, as Satow later claimed, because he realized that the Shogun's power was waning, but because he was concerned with such familiar problems as diplomatic status and the strict execution of international treaties. If the Western powers accepted Yoshinobu's invitation before he had

36 FO 391/14, Hammond Papers, Parkes to Hammond, 12 September 1866.
37 FO 391/14, Hammond Papers, Parkes to Hammond, 29 September 1866; FO Japan 71, no. 180, Parkes to Stanley, 31 October 1866.
been fully installed, they might inadvertently raise his prestige and, what was even more dangerous, he might use such an encounter to declare publicly that the treaty undertaking to open Osaka in 1868 would not be carried out. This would mean a humiliating loss of prestige at any time, but in the context of a long journey to meet the new ruler such a rebuff would be particularly damaging. In addition to these fears there was the usual apprehension that the Japanese might use the occasion to score diplomatic points by compelling Westerners to undergo humiliating ceremonials. In other words there were strong fears lest Westerners should suffer at the hands of the relatively powerful Bakufu, rather than any feeling that the Shogun’s regime was on the verge of collapse. On 12 January 1867 the Western powers met together and, at Parkes’s suggestion, agreed not to accept this dangerous invitation until preparations for the meeting had been made at lower diplomatic levels.39 Four basic principles were to underlie the meeting with the new ruler. No meeting would take place until Yoshinobu was fully installed, the agenda of any conference would be worked out in advance, European court etiquette would be followed on all occasions, and a diplomatic commitment to carry out the treaties would be demanded in return for visiting the Tokugawa chief.40

Soon after this international agreement Parkes’s ablest subordinates, Satow and Mitford, visited Osaka to prepare the way for the important meeting. To their surprise the Tokugawa officials proved extremely co-operative, and the general air of harmony which was evident throughout the preliminary talks contrasted not only with the previous behaviour of Bakufu officials,41 but also with Satsuma’s statements that the Shogun was basically opposed to the opening of all ports to Western merchants.

Before these successful preliminaries could be brought to fruition, the anti-foreign Emperor Komei died. Court and Bakufu went into mourning, and the invitation to the Western powers was withdrawn. Parkes was, on balance, pleased at this delay for the longer the meeting was postponed, the greater would be the urgency which he could bring to the negotiations. As the official date for the opening of Osaka drew ever nearer, the justification for increasing pressure would become more and more irresistible.42

Much to Parkes’s taste the meeting was delayed until April. Then,
with the other European diplomats, a substantial squadron of warships, and an imposing military escort, the British Minister proceeded to Osaka. The technical negotiations for the opening of the Kansai cities and the establishment of the foreign settlement were despatched speedily and satisfactorily, while both formal and informal meetings with the Shogun were characterized by harmony and good relations.\footnote{E. M. Satow, op. cit., p. 198; FO Japan 80, no. 74, Parkes to Stanley, 26 April 1867.} These latter meetings were just as significant politically as the technical discussions on commercial matters. The events of the previous summer had made Britain doubt the integrity and objectives of the Bakufu, but face to face contacts with the new Shogun produced a rapprochement which raised Anglo-Tokugawa friendship to new heights. The British Minister was highly impressed by the new Shogun’s qualities, for besides his dignified appearance and great intelligence he expressed political sentiments which coincided with British aspirations. He made it clear that he wished to ensure good foreign relations and, equally important, saw the need to make concessions to the daimyo so as to bring about a peaceful solution to the internal crisis.\footnote{FO Japan 80, Parkes to Stanley, 4 May 1867.} In his main public speech Parkes underlined the Shogun’s opinions by emphasizing the need for respecting international treaties and for proceeding with political and technical modernization. Parkes’s belief in Yoshinobu’s good intentions and wisdom was so great that he declared: ‘I am quite disposed to give him all the support I can in whatever position he occupies’,\footnote{FO 39I/14, Hammond Papers, Parkes to Hammond, 6 May 1867.} and he was also ready to accept a Tokugawa denial of earlier Satsuma stories that the Emperor had never ratified Japan’s international treaties.\footnote{FO Japan 80, no. 92, Parkes to Stanley, 12 June 1867.} According to his memoirs, Satow took this opportunity to urge the Satsuma representatives at Osaka not to miss the chance of making a revolution, for he feared the growing strength of the Shogun,\footnote{E. M. Satow, op. cit., p. 200.} but in this instance as in many others Satow's activities were hardly representative of the official policy of the British Legation.

Just as the summer of 1866 had seen suspicions of the Bakufu mar the goodwill of the commercial treaty, so the summer of 1867 removed some of the euphoria of the Osaka rapprochement. The hopes of a domestic political settlement went unfulfilled, the talk of a daimyo assembly came to nothing, and what was worse, old irritants returned to damage Anglo-Tokugawa relations. As in the past, Bakufu officials sought to use insulting forms of address when referring to Queen
Victoria. Once more the Shogun, with French support, made claims
to be the supreme ruler of Japan, and yet again the Bakufu sought to
limit and monopolize international trade. Britain successfully resisted
these lines of policy but two far more important issues arose which
provoked long standing diplomatic difficulties and seriously damaged
Parkes’s view of the Tokugawa regime. In August 1867, after visiting
the ports of Northern Honshu, the British Minister arrived in Nagasaki
to find that two British sailors from the ship Icarus had been murdered
in the pleasure quarter. Local Japanese officials had failed to find the
men responsible, though suspicion fell upon members of Tosa han. This
was an issue which directly concerned the safety of British subjects,
and Parkes devoted great diplomatic efforts towards ensuring that
the Bakufu did all it could to arraign the guilty men.

Parkes met the Shogun at Osaka and his pressure produced the
dismissal of the Nagasaki governor and the arrival of Tokugawa
troops at Nagasaki to patrol the foreign quarter. Parkes himself sailed
to Kochi, the Tosa castle-town, and using his characteristic tactics
of violent interrogation tried to identify the criminals. As no Tosa men
were guilty of the offence it is hardly surprising that the mission failed,
or that Parkes’s angry enquiries did nothing but create hostility among
the han leaders. But the importance of the crime lay not in the details
of attempts at its solution but in the political reaction it provoked.
The ineffectiveness of Tokugawa attempts to find the guilty men
increased British irritation with the new Shogun, while the vigorous
diplomatic attack upon Tosa demonstrated the overwhelming impor-
tance of day-to-day factors in British policy. Long term political con-
siderations were noticeably absent. Tosa was in fact the one han favour-
ing a political solution which was very close to British objectives;
nevertheless this similarity of views did nothing at this stage to bring
about close relations between Parkes and Tosa, and nothing to allay
British suspicions over the Icarus affair.

The other new issue which arose in the summer of 1867 was the
highly emotive problem of native Christians. The activities of French
Roman Catholic missionaries near Nagasaki had revealed the presence
of Japanese Christians who had secretly practised their faith since
the seventeenth century. Furthermore, the French had recently made
new converts, and together these Christians appeared to many Japanese
to pose a threat as an alien and subversive sect. Bakufu plans to destroy

48 FO Japan 81, no. 141, Parkes to Stanley, 18 August 1867; and FO Japan 81,
no. 156, Parkes to Stanley, 11 September 1867.
49 E. M. Satow, A Diplomat in Japan, p. 252.
the Christian colony by deporting its members, and scattering them over many provinces, provoked a hostile reaction from Roman Catholics in France and Parkes was also concerned at the matter, though for other reasons.51 He feared that missionary activity might provoke a general anti-foreign movement. The persecution of Christians as a religious or theological matter, was of little interest to Parkes, whose concern was almost wholly with the physical harm which might come to British subjects as an indirect result of missionary activity. He was willing to see missionary activity temporarily discouraged, and was ready to show great restraint in his reaction to the Bakufu’s anti-Christian policy.52

Parkes’s doubts about the Shogun’s qualities, and his criticism of his behaviour, were always freely expressed in times when violence and revolution seemed a distant prospect. But whenever the permanence of the Shogunate seemed in serious doubt, fears of violence restored much more sympathetic emotions to his mind. In October 1867 the British Minister returned from a trip to Mount Fuji, to find rumours of the Shogun’s abdication circulating widely in Edo. He thought these stories were of doubtful authenticity, but the fear that the prospect of abdication stimulated, provoked him to record his true feelings towards the Shogun. At this stage he was appalled at the prospect of Yoshinobu resigning his authority for, conscious of the need for a strong man to ‘prevent a flood of anarchy’, he felt ‘that it would be a misfortune for Japanese and foreigners if the Tycoon gave up his position’.53 Although the September rumours were unfounded, the Shogun did agree to abdicate from his traditional position of authority on 8 November. This abdication was, however, so highly qualified that it appeared to pose no immediate threat to political stability. For the time being the Shogun was to retain the decisive authority in domestic and foreign affairs, and when he eventually renounced the direction of policy the news accompanied by talk of a projected constitution which seemed very close to the British ideal. Under this proposed reform there were to be two elected assemblies, with a Supreme Council headed by the Shogun.54 This appeared to fulfil earlier British hopes that the Shogun would lead the liberal movement and produce internal stability by encouraging constitutional reform. Certainly the projected

52 FO 391/14, Hammond Papers, Parkes to Hammond, 27 July 1867.
53 FO Japan 82, Private Parkes to Stanley, 15 October 1867.
54 FO Japan 82, Confidential Parkes to Stanley, 14 November 1867; and FO Japan 82, no. 194, Parkes to Stanley, 27 November 1867.
constitution was a welcome development, and the British Minister could always console himself with the thought that, irrespective of paper constitutions, the sheer wealth of the Tokugawa house would ensure that Yoshinobu would dominate any government for some time to come, and thus there would be a strong element of continuity.\footnote{FO 391/14, Hammond Papers, Parkes to Hammond, 16 December 1867.}

No events in December 1867 did anything to disturb this optimistic view of Japanese political progress. The immediate concern of all the Western powers was the long-sought opening of Osaka on New Year's Day 1868. This took place in a festive atmosphere, without any hindrance or obstruction, and the minor irritation of Satsuma and Choshu troops near the foreign settlement was soon remedied by a firm diplomatic protest.

When Restoration forces seized control of the Imperial Palace in Kyoto, on 3 January 1868, both Satow and Parkes recognized the danger of civil war erupting, and the British Minister discussed with his colleagues the possibility of mediating in the conflict.\footnote{e.g. PRO 33/15/2 Satow Papers. Diary. 1 January 1868.} At this point the British Minister was committed to neither side in the struggle, and hoped to have friendly relations with both parties until a new government clearly appeared which was worthy of official recognition.\footnote{FO 391/14, Hammond Papers, Parkes to Hammond, 5 January 1868.} Unfortunately talk of mediation was outpaced by events, for on 7 January the Shogun fled to Osaka, dejected and apparently displaced from authority. Even at this late stage, however, Yoshinobu still appeared a political personage of the greatest importance, and when Parkes wrote to him on the same day, he addressed him as he had always done, with the title \textit{Tycoon Denka} (Your Highness the Tycoon). Yoshinobu’s reply acknowledged a decline in his own political position, for it was signed \textit{Uesama}, which merely indicated leadership of the Tokugawa house, not tenure of the position of Shogun. In his letter, Yoshinobu suggested that Parkes should visit him on 9 January but, on hearing that the French Minister was to meet the Tokugawa leader on 8 January, Parkes rushed uninvited to the Franco-Tokugawa meeting. The exchanges at this conference contributed further to Parkes’s growing suspicion, and his disillusionment with the ex-Shogun, for although he welcomed the news that Yoshinobu would not resort to force, he was struck by the incoherence of his story and the subtlety rather than the boldness of his approach. The ex-Shogun claimed that he had resigned on condition that the constitutional problem would be dealt with by a daimyo assembly, but that the coup d’\'etat
had prevented the fulfilment of this objective. Parkes was by now so
distrustful that he suspected that Yoshinobu had sought the settlement
of the constitutional issue not by general assembly but by a collection
of picked followers who would vote in the direction he ordained.58
Nevertheless, despite these suspicions of the ex-Shogun’s tactics and
motives, Parkes was still far from being committed to the Restoration
forces. He was still haunted by the fear that the new coalition would
be unable to hang together in a unified administration, and he was
seriously concerned lest the new leaders should fail to gain support
from feudal lords who were so far uncommitted. In this period of
indecision and uncertainty the British Minister’s influence among
Western diplomats was always devoted to a policy of neutrality in
the Japanese conflict.

On 9 January after a long wrangle, the diplomats handed the ex-
Shogun a declaration of neutrality and a letter asking where the centre
of Japanese government really lay. His reply was temporarily reassuring,
for he made it clear that he would at least continue in charge of foreign
relations.59 Soon afterwards however he broke his previous undertaking
to avoid the use of force, and his armies marched north towards Kyoto.
With this renewed danger of fighting, and the continued absence of
any official contact with the party controlling the Emperor, the
Western powers again began to consider the possibility of mediating
in the dispute.60 As before, events overtook such preliminary discussions;
news came of fighting at Edo, and on 27 January the Tokugawa
armies were decisively beaten at Fushimi, an important river port
south of Kyoto. This defeat threw the Bakufu administration into
disorder and Yoshinobu left for Edo. Before the last Tokugawa officials
abandoned Osaka, they warned the Westerners that they could no
longer protect them, and all the foreign representatives fled to Kobe
to the shelter of their warships.

In the uncertainty and disorder which had characterized the first
weeks of January the British had sought to maintain contact with
both parties, and had tried unofficially to establish relations with the
new forces. So far, however, there had been no Imperial response to
these overtures and in the absence of any local Tokugawa administra-
tion there was virtually a vacuum in Anglo-Japanese relations. In a
country where anti-foreign violence was common, and where armies
were now on the march, this was an extremely threatening situation,

58 FO 391/14, Hammond Papers, Parkes to Hammond, 10 January 1868.
59 FO Japan 91, no. 9, Parkes to Stanley, 10 January 1868.
60 FO 391/14, Hammond Papers, Parkes to Hammond, 30 January 1868.
and the first confrontation between Westerners and the Imperial forces was hardly auspicious.

On 3 February a detachment of Bizen troops belonging to the Restoration army fired on Westerners in the newly established Kobe foreign settlement. Parkes, the most powerful and vigorous Western diplomat, realized that this was a crucial incident which could well provide a precedent for all future relations with the new government. More important, he saw the need to emphasize the permanence of treaties to the new regime. To emphasize that the Westerners’ dispute was not with Bizen alone, but with Japan, the allied military forces seized four Japanese steamers, and the next day Parkes approached Satsuma agents and suggested that the new government should send representatives to discuss the matter.\(^{61}\) Three days later Higashikuze arrived and confirmed that the Emperor now controlled foreign relations, and that the government would protect foreigners from all future outrages. He assured the representatives that they would be welcome to visit the Imperial capital. This meeting marked a decisive turning point in the attitude of Britain towards the Meiji Restoration. It made clear that the new government was willing to deal fairly with Westerners,\(^{62}\) and in return the Europeans returned the steamers which they had commandeered. The Imperial messengers accepted all the Western claims for compensation and what was even more significant, they unequivocally announced the Imperial ratification of foreign treaties. Just as signs of Imperial friendship were increasing, news came from Edo which made Parkes even cooler towards the dethroned Shogun. The officials at Edo were now proving even more evasive than in the past, and were making the elementary mistake of asking for a temporary closure of Osaka and Kobe, a concession which was unthinkable in view of the long diplomatic battles which had preceded their opening.\(^{63}\) By now Parkes was so convinced of Imperial goodwill that he regarded the execution of the Bizen officers as an unnecessary punishment. He believed that the publicizing of the government’s pro-foreign policy would do more to influence samurai behaviour than unnecessary blood letting.\(^{64}\) On this matter the British Minister was outvoted by the other diplomats, but his attitude of friendship to Kyoto was now virtually unshakable.

On 18 March 1868 eleven French sailors was murdered by Tosa

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\(^{61}\) FO Japan 92, nos. 22 and 23, Parkes to Stanley, 13 February 1868.

\(^{62}\) FO Japan 92, no. 26, Parkes to Stanley, 13 February 1868.

\(^{63}\) FO Japan 92, no. 28, Parkes to Stanley, 15 February 1868.

\(^{64}\) FO Japan 92, no. 49, Parkes to Stanley, 11 March 1868.
samurai at Sakai, and this delayed Parkes's plan for a visit to the Imperial capital. Naturally he showed solidarity with the other Western powers and retreated from Kobe to his flagship, but he was only willing to demand moderate compensation for the outrage, and his confidence in the new government was hardly affected by the incident. His faith in the new rulers was once again confirmed when they speedily gave redress for the Sakai outrage, and less than a fortnight later Parkes arrived in Kyoto in response to an official invitation. Anti-foreign samurai attacked Parkes on his way to the palace, and compelled a postponement of the Imperial audience, but despite the horror of this incident he was very sympathetic towards the embarrassed government officials. He made no demand for reparations but simply suggested that the government's disapproval of anti-foreign outrages should be proclaimed on placards, and that the samurai responsible should suffer a humiliating form of execution. When the proposed audience with the Emperor finally took place everything went according to plan. Parkes stressed to the Court the need for internal stability and its importance to good international relations, and soon after left for Edo.

After his return from the Kansai, Parkes's commitment to the Imperial government remained unaltered, though the focus of his attention now turned to avoiding the imposition of vindictive terms upon the defeated party. He feared that fighting might be renewed if harsh terms were imposed and that political reconstruction would become extremely difficult. Consequently he devoted a good deal of diplomatic effort to softening Imperial terms, and to avoiding any personal victimization of the ex-Shogun. Although this British pressure may have contributed to saving Yoshinobu's life, a compromise peace between the Imperial armies and Aizu, the most devoted followers of the Takugawa, proved impossible. To Parkes's dismay fighting was renewed in northern Honshu and dragged on into November 1868.

Despite the British Minister's failure to avoid a renewal of civil war, he was generally agreeably impressed by the first moves that the new government made to reorganize its ministerial structure. These changes seemed to indicate a clear commitment to reform, and in the provisions for a Foreign Ministry there seemed to be proof of a desire to continue international relations.

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65 FO Japan 92 Confidential no. 55, Parkes to Stanley, 11 March 1868.
66 FO Japan 92, no. 66, Parkes to Stanley, 26 March 1868.
67 FO 391/14, Hammond Papers, Parkes to Hammond, 14 April 1868; and FO Japan 92, no. 72, Parkes to Stanley, 9 April 1868.
68 FO Japan 93, no. 84, Parkes to Stanley, 18 April 1868.
The culmination of British approval of the new regime soon followed in May 1868, when Parkes visited Osaka again and handed over his credentials to the young Emperor. Even at this stage the British Minister was more concerned with the realities of political and commercial conditions than with a dogmatic commitment to the new government. He was still sceptical about the ability of the new leaders to maintain their unity, he disliked the presence of conservative courtiers in the regime, and he continued to be embarrassed by the anti-Christian policy of the administration. He was convinced that he would have to educate the new government a good deal if it was to serve the cause of British interests.69

In October 1868 the Tokugawa fleet which had been anchored in Edo Bay sailed for Hokkaido to continue resistance against the Meiji government. The Imperial Navy was still of dubious strength and this new initiative posed a substantial threat to the new government's hold over northern Japan. Fortunately the land war was going well for the new regime and, equally important, the new leadership had widespread support from public opinion.70 These developments convinced Parkes that the Meiji government had triumphed, and on 9 February 1869 after some weeks of persuasion, he convinced his colleagues that they should withdraw their declarations of neutrality in the civil war.71 This was of more than academic significance, for a large American-built warship, the Stonewall, had been ordered by the Bakufu but had been kept in American hands throughout the conflict. Now the war was legally at an end this vessel was transferred to the Meiji authorities for use in the closing skirmishes of the campaign.

Although the legal termination of the civil war added the final touches to British commitment to the new government, it did not herald a period of unruffled Anglo-Japanese relations nor did it change Britain's fundamental objectives or her criteria in evaluating Japanese governments. In April 1869 minor anti-foreign incidents again occurred on the Tokaido and diplomatic relations were suspended.72 In later years rapid Japanese reforms provoked British criticism, and Japanese pressure for an end to extraterritoriality met with hostile British reactions. British objectives continued to be political stability, expanding trade, and a safe existence for British merchants, and as in Tokugawa

69 FO 391/14, Hammond Papers, Parkes to Hammond, 13 May 1868.
71 FO 391/14, Hammond Papers, Parkes to Hammond, 10 February 1869.
72 FO Japan 109, no. 110, Parkes to Clarendon, 14 May 1869.
days Japanese resistance to these often produced friction between the two countries.

From 1865 to 1869 British policy in Japan was marked by consistent objectives and an overwhelming preoccupation with day to day realities. Japan had been the scene of too much political violence for any British Minister to risk giving complete support to any party before the outcome of the crisis was clear. Parkes never expected the Tokugawa house to disappear as rapidly or as completely as it did, and the regime which finally emerged from the struggle was a far cry from that which he and the Foreign Office had tentatively sketched. Satow may have supported Choshu from 1864, and his opinions may have influenced important Japanese, but official British policy was a very different story. The Foreign Office consistently supported Parkes’s action and he made no commitment until February 1868. Afterwards he did all he could to support the new regime, but far from anticipating events his policy was always cautious. He never threw discretion to the winds, and only abandoned neutrality when the vital battle was won and the victors had shown themselves worthy and responsible.