

The Flexible Structure of Politics in Meiji Japan*

Junji Banno

Professor Emeritus, the University of Tokyo

and

Kenichi Ohno

Professor, the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies

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Abstract

Japan's transformation period following the encounter with the powerful West, in which political regime was revised and new national goals and strategies were agreed, started with the signing of commercial treaties with the West in 1858 and ended with the settlement on the basic directions of political and economic reforms in 1881. In the intervening years, two goals of establishing a public deliberation mechanism (*kogi yoron*) and raising economic and military capability (*fukoku kyohei*) were set, which later split into four policy groups of a constitution, a national assembly, industrialization, and foreign expedition. The simultaneous pursuit and eventual achievement of multiple goals was supported by the *flexible structure of politics* in which goals, alliances, and leaders and leading groups evolved dynamically without solidifying into a simple hard structure or falling into uncontrollable crisis. This mechanism, which was unique to Meiji Japan, is rarely seen in other countries or other times in Japanese history. It was also different from authoritarian developmental states of East Asia in the post WW2 period. Chronological details of this political process, initiated by the former warrior (*samurai*) class, are given and how political leaders emerged and contested among themselves is analyzed.

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1. Introduction

In the second half of the 19th century Japanese society underwent a great transformation in response to foreign pressure. The Tokugawa shogunate, established in the early 17th century by ending a long internal war, brought two-and-half centuries of political stability and socio-economic development under a rigid class system with *samurai* (swordsmen) at the top, a feudal order that demanded absolute loyalty of *daimyo* (*han* or provincial lords) to the *Bakufu* (the central military government headed by the shogun), and severely restricted foreign contact and trade. However, in the middle of the 19th century gradual internal evolution was suddenly terminated by the arrival of the Western powers with superior economic and military might. In 1853, the American military fleet (the “Four Black Ships”) appeared in the Bay of Edo¹ to demand the opening of Japanese ports with military threat. Since then, the Japanese national goals had turned highly outward oriented and included withstanding pressure from the powerful West, maintaining political independence, accelerating westernization and modernization of Japanese society, and ultimately catching up with the West.

This paper analyzes the Japanese political process in the “transformation period” which spanned from the late Edo period to the early Meiji period. The characteristic pattern which we shall call the “flexible structure” will be highlighted as a historically very unique political process in a latecomer country that faced the enormous challenge of global integration. We present this model not only for re-examining the significance of the Meiji Restoration in Japanese history but also for comparing it with the steps that Japan took after the Meiji period as well as the development processes of latecomer countries in our time. The period from Late Edo to early Meiji is a period that has attracted much academic attention. Our interest in this dynamic period is mainly in the nature and movement of politics that enabled Japan to accomplish a holistic social transformation.

More precisely, the transformation period we study in this paper covers the 23 years from 1858 to 1881. By transformation we mean the process, in response to the Western impact, of re-organizing the political regime, re-defining national goals, and agreeing and deciding on the contents, priorities, roadmaps, and implementers of these goals. The year 1858 was the year in which five commercial treaties with the West, namely Americans, Dutch, Russians, British and French, were concluded, and trade with these countries began in the following year. It was also the year that saw an embryonic formation of political and economic strategies to cope with the Western impact, which we will call *kogi yoron* (government by public deliberation) and *fukoku kyohei* (enrich the country, strengthen the

¹ Edo is the former name of the city of Tokyo. During the Edo period, the official capital of Japan where the emperor resided was Kyoto, while the Bakufu which held real power was located in Edo, a city developed by the first shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu. Immediately after the Bakufu was replaced by the Meiji government, Edo was renamed to Tokyo in July 1868 and the capital was moved from Kyoto to Tokyo in February 1869.

military).² Thus, the year 1858 was the starting point of transformation from the viewpoint of global integration as well as the initiation of domestic response to it.

On the other hand, the year 1881 was the year of the “Political Incident of the 14th Year of Meiji” (the ousting of Okuma Shigenobu, who proposed a radical plan to introduce a constitution and parliament, from the government—see section 4-6) which resulted in the imperial edict that promised to establish a (conservative) constitution and a national assembly within nine years. It was also the year in which the policy of privatizing state-run enterprises was announced, finally abandoning the idea of direct official management of business enterprises. Moreover, these events were followed immediately by Matsukata Deflation in which Finance Minister Matsukata Masayoshi launched fiscal austerity measures to end inflation and began a series of monetary and fiscal reforms that established the Bank of Japan in 1882, which provided the necessary conditions for the private sector to grow. Thus, it can be said that the long period of transformation ended in 1881, as the deadline for establishing a constitutional monarchy was set and industrialization based on state-run industries was replaced by private sector driven one. From then on, Japan entered the period of implementation toward these agreed goals, and indeed succeeded, within a decade or so, in promulgating the Meiji Constitution and founding a Western style parliament as well as stimulating the emergence of private joint stock companies and initiating an industrial revolution.

According to the textbook account of Japanese history, *Taisei Hokan* (the return of governing authority from the Bakufu to the emperor) or *Ousei Fukko* (the restoration of the emperor’s direct rule) in late 1867 divides the Meiji period from the previous Edo period³. However, this is not a very meaningful period demarcation for our purpose. What happened from late 1867 to early 1868 was the exit of the Bakufu (the Tokugawa family) as a major political player. This was a big event from the viewpoint of who took the power, but not from the viewpoint of the characteristics of the political process at that time. As proved in detail later, the content and pattern of political competition did not change appreciably before and after the Meiji Restoration. Political players other than the Bakufu also remained basically unchanged. For this reason, from the perspective of the history of a latecomer country facing the pressure of globalization, it is more logical and convincing to regard the pre-1858 period as the pre-opening period, the period of 1858-1881 as the transformation period in response to the Western impact, and the subsequent period as the implementation period.

According to the popular view, the Meiji period is regarded as the period of a despotic government monopolized by the samurai of former strong han (feudal provinces) which, elevating

² The plan entertained by Satsuma Han Lord Shimazu Nariakira (1809-1858) was the earliest endeavor of this kind. He had the vision of han-based *fukoku kyohei* as well as the conference of several powerful han lords as a national decision making organ, which we will explain in detail later, although he did not reach the idea of institutionalizing a feudal assembly. His plan began to be implemented in Satsuma Han from around 1862.

³ According to the Western calendar, *Taisei Hokan* took place on November 9, 1867 and *Ousei Fukko* on January 3, 1868. According to the Japanese lunar calendar, both occurred in the third year of Keio (October 14 and December 9).

the emperor as the national symbol, engaged in an all-out effort in economic and military modernization while delaying the arrival of constitutional politics as much as possible. Some even argue that the Meiji regime was the first model of authoritarian developmentalism which was later adopted by other East Asian countries in the post WW2 period. According to these proponents, this is because the Meiji government was installed by two military coups, the one to expel the Bakufu in 1867-1868 and the other to wipe out feudal lords and provinces in 1871, and also because it engaged in aggressive industrial promotion after the return of the Iwakura Mission from the West and the ousting of the advocates of Korean expedition from the government in 1875 (see section 4). However, we will prove that this view is at odds with the facts.

In the post WW2 period, an authoritarian state guided by a strong leader emerged in many East Asian economies to propel industrialization and bring the population out of poverty. A series of developmental policies were designed and executed by the directives of top leaders to accelerate import substitution, export promotion, heavy industrialization, technology transfer, education and training, and the construction of infrastructure. Meanwhile the introduction of democracy was significantly delayed or even denied. The most salient cases were the Park Chung-hee Government in South Korea (1961-1979) and the Chiang Kai-shek Government in Taiwan (1949-1975). Additionally, the Deng Xiaoping Government in China (1976-1997), the Lee Kwan Yew Government in Singapore (1965-1990), the Mahathir Government in Malaysia (1981-2003), and the Sarit and Thanom Governments in Thailand (1958-1973) can be cited as similar political regimes (Watanabe 1998, Ohno and Sakurai 1997).

These authoritarian developmental states of East Asia exhibited the following features: (i) internal or external crisis as a catalyst to set up the regime; (ii) a powerful and often charismatic leader; (iii) a loyal and capable technocrat group to support him; (iv) prioritization of developmental ideology and postponement of political reform; (v) legitimization through economic performance and not by democratic procedure; and (vi) continuation of the same regime for a few decades and internal social transformation caused by the success of its economic policies. However, the Meiji Revolution had only one common feature with these, namely, crisis as a catalyst for initiating the regime, and shared no other. As our study will reveal, the early Meiji period was not a period when a dictatorial regime with a simple, solid and oppressive political structure lasted for decades. It did not have a charismatic leader who gave orders unilaterally, nor did it pursue economic modernization at the cost of all other goals. The legitimacy of the Meiji government was not derived solely from the authority of the emperor or economic performance. Surely, Emperor Meiji had an important political role as the symbol of national unity, and all Meiji leaders admired and respected him as one important source of political legitimacy, but he was not a political player with real power. For this reason, he is not included in our list of political leaders in Table 1 below.

The Meiji Revolution was achieved by the flexible structure of politics, which permitted the

competition of multiple goals (two goals of *fukoku kyohei* and *kogi yoron* in the late Edo period, or four goals of industrialization, foreign expedition, drafting a constitution, and establishing a national assembly in the early Meiji period) and continuous re-grouping of political leaders around these goals (Banno, 2006, 2007, 2008). Policy priorities shifted over the years, and neither winning coalitions nor losing ones stayed long in these positions. Political goals were not sacrificed for promoting economic goals. Despite occasional setbacks, dynamics derived from the flexible structure of politics resulted in the steady achievement of political and economic reforms in the long run without falling into chaos or national division. This was a very complex process with many phase shifts, far from the image of an authoritarian developmental state that single-mindedly pursued economic growth under a simple political structure and its linear evolution.

2. Three aspects of flexible structure

The flexible structure of the Meiji Revolution can be decomposed into three aspects: (i) multiplicity and dynamism of national goals; (ii) constant re-formation of alliances; and (iii) variability and resilience of leaders and leader groups. These aspects are discussed one by one below whereas the chronological development of the flexible structure, with concrete figures and events, will be presented in section 4.

The first aspect of the flexible structure was the multiplicity and dynamism of national goals. Japan's national goals continued to evolve throughout the transformation period. The earliest reform goals which gathered support among influential han after the opening of ports were the political goal of *kogi yoron* (government by public deliberation) and the economic and military goals of *fukoku kyohei* (enriching the country, strengthening the military). Of these, *kogi yoron*, which started as the proposal of alliance among four or five intelligent daimyo (han lords), evolved into the idea of a conference of all han totaling approximately 300, and even into the creation of the bicameral system consisting of the Upper House of han lords and the Lower House of lower-level samurai. As it turned out, the last plan among these which intended a peaceful power transition was overturned by the Boshin War that erupted in 1868-1869. This military conflict was caused by the refusal of the Bakufu to be downgraded to a minor power in the proposed political scheme, partly as a result of the provocation by the opponents of the Bakufu.

After the Meiji government was established in 1868, Kido Takayoshi (1833-1877), a former samurai from Tosa Han, together with the students of Fukuzawa Yukichi (1834-1901), a renowned academic leader who established Keio University, upgraded the feudal assembly model based on the class society to the idea of establishing a modern constitution and a Western style parliament. Political reformers were then split into the progressive group promoting a British style party cabinet government and the conservative group advocating a German style constitutional monarchy. Despite

these differences in form or orientation, the installation of a government by public deliberation of one sort or another was regarded as the key political requirement that would confer legitimacy to the Meiji Revolution and the new government established by it.

On the other hand, the goal of *fukoku kyohei* in the late Edo period was the idea that each han should set up a trading firm, procure highly demanded products from all over Japan for export, with proceeds purchase cannons, guns and military ships from the West, and bolster its military capability to compete effectively with other han and the Bakufu. In reality, those han that successfully achieved this feat became the major powers that eventually toppled the Bakufu and occupied central places in the new government. However, after the Meiji Restoration (1868) and especially after the Iwakura Mission to the West by high officials to study Western systems and technology (1871-73), Okubo Toshimichi (1830-1878), a former Satsuma samurai and the top official in the Meiji government, became convinced that *fukoku* should not mean merely the mercantilist principle of buying and selling of local products for the profit of han but should be the developmental notion of *industrialization*, namely, building factories equipped with imported modern machinery under the central government's guidance to dramatically raise national output. As to *kyohei*, the revolutionary army (called, perhaps unjustly, *fuhei shizoku* or former samurai with gripes), which had nothing to do domestically after achieving the revolution, began to demand foreign campaigns and the budget for their execution. Because of this development, *fukoku* and *kyohei* became two separate goals that competed for the same budgetary resource. In this context, what Okubo, the leader of the industrialization group, tried to do was to avoid external conflicts by appeasing the foreign expedition group, and secure as much fiscal resource as possible to build factories.

The second aspect of the flexible structure of politics was the constant regrouping of political coalitions. As noted above, the two goals of *kogi yoron* and *fukoku kyohei* in the late Edo period split into the four goals of industrialization (led by Okubo Toshimichi), foreign expedition (led by Saigo Takamori, 1827-1877), establishment of a parliament (led by Itagaki Taisuke, 1837-1919), and drafting of a constitution (led by Kido Takayoshi), and supporters gathered around these leaders (Figure 1). What is important here is the fact that no one group yielded sufficient political power to carry out desired policies, and could pursue them only by forming a coalition with one or two other groups which entertained other policy objectives. Whether advocacy of a foreign expedition, demand for a popularly elected parliament, or industrial promotion, the dominance of one group invited intervention from other groups, and the defeat of another group was compensated by assistance from others. Furthermore, this coalition re-formation with checks and balances hardly resulted in permanent grudges or vengeance against each other. Depending on circumstances, they could alternately become friends and enemies without generating irreconcilable hatred for mutual destruction. This process, which seemed like an endless political battle, was surprisingly successful in avoiding chaos and achieving multiple national goals in the long run, albeit with many setbacks

and through trial-and-error. It is as if the accumulation of many small earthquakes would prevent the occurrence of a catastrophic one, or a fairly broad currency band would allow daily fluctuations of the exchange rate while securing its long-term stability.

Why did such flexible re-formation of coalitions continue for decades? One reason was that, during the decade leading up to *Ousei Fukko* (restoration of the emperor's direct rule, 1867), interaction among influential han for pursuing commercial profits through feudal trading firms and contriving the plan to establish a feudal assembly became very active. This interaction generated mutual trust across different han and different policy lines, which naturally carried over to the post-Meiji Restoration period as continued coalition building based on former han groups. The four goals mentioned above can roughly be associated with the following former han groups: industrialization (one part of the Satsuma group), foreign expedition (another part of the Satsuma group), establishment of a parliament (the Tosa group), and drafting of a constitution (the Choshu group). Another reason was shared ideologies, such as nationalism and the Respect for the Emperor, among leaders in the late Edo period. These ideologies were suddenly and greatly activated at the contact with the West. Such centripetal social ethos kept political fights within certain bounds without exploding into unstoppable destruction. We will come back to this important point in the final section.

The third aspect of the flexible structure of politics was the variability and resilience of leaders and leader groups. In the eyes of the posterity, Saigo is remembered as a military leader and a rebel, Okubo as a developmental bureaucrat *par excellence*, and Itagaki as a campaigner for political freedom, people's rights, and the establishment of a parliament. However, none of these leaders pursued their respective goals single-mindedly from the outset. On the contrary, sharing goals and shifting allegiance were common among leaders in the late Edo to the early Meiji period. It could be even said that they all understood the importance of the two goals in the late Edo period or the four goals in the early Meiji period. It was through external stimuli, new inspiration or the force of circumstance that they ended up specializing in one of them.

From this perspective, the fact that Saigo continued to be extremely popular among the revolution army even after he was expelled from the government in 1873, the fact that Okubo's eyes were opened to modern industry during the official mission to the West (1871-1873), and the unexpectedly great success of the Petition for the Establishment of the Popular Parliament (1874) which Itagaki co-authored after leaving the government, were crucial in deciding the path of each leader. Had they not shared the multiple goals at the root, it would have been unthinkable that Okubo would write a letter to convey his shock and excitement in visiting British factories to Saigo waiting in Japan (section 4-3), and it would be difficult to explain why Itagaki vacillated between demanding a parliament and proposing a foreign expedition while he was in the caretaker government waiting for the return of other ministers from the West. For the same reason, Meiji politics required no

charismatic leader, and the death or the downfall of one leader (such as the assassination of Okubo in 1878) did not result in the extinction of the group which he had led.

One exception, however, was Okuma Shigenobu (1838-1922), a statesman without solid group affiliation. In economics, Okuma switched from a believer in the principle of a balanced budget to a supporter of fiscal activism. In political reform, he was long considered to be a conservative but suddenly presented to the Meiji government a radical plan to immediately install a constitution and establish a parliament, which caused him to be expelled from the government (the Political Incident of the 14th Year of Meiji, 1881, see section 4-6). Leaders from Saga (Hizen) Han⁴, which included not only Okuma but also Eto Shimpei 1834-1905), Oki Takato (1832-1899), and Soejima Taneomi (1828-1905), were all loners who did not act collectively with other Saga samurai. Saga Han, led by its intelligent lord Nabeshima Naomasa (1814-1871), was highly successful in *fukoku kyohei* in the late Edo period, so much so that it did not feel the need to cooperate with other han. Consequently, samurai from Saga Han had little experience of external cooperation or coalition building as the han did not offer a platform for such activities. For this reason, Saga leaders often had to resort to radicalism or a solo stunt to make themselves visible. This is why Saga was the least influential among *Sat-Cho-Do-Hi* (Satsuma, Choshu, Tosa, Hizen (or Saga)), the four former han that dominated the top positions of the Meiji government. This also explains why former Saga samurai could not participate in the flexible structure of politics.

The flexible structure of politics exhibited by the Meiji leaders proved effective in the simultaneous pursuit of multiple goals, resilience to internal and external shocks, and the durability of the political regime in comparison with the simple hard structure of politics which was the hallmark of developmental dictatorship in East Asia in the post WW2 period. Although political institutions were in the early stage of development in early Meiji, the substance of politics, such as the content of policy competition and the process of consensus building, were already highly mature.

3. The source of political leaders and the role of han

Who were the people who led and executed the Meiji Revolution? In the late Edo and the early Meiji period which is the focus of our study, the answer is that political leaders predominantly came from the samurai (swordsman) class. The Meiji Revolution was a revolution staged by samurai, and the social transformation triggered by the Western contact was carried out by the hands of samurai who had been the political leaders and the privileged class in the Bakufu-Han System of the preceding Edo period.

⁴ Each han had at least two names, the one indicating the traditional feudal domain and the other indicating a main city or an alternative name which sometimes became the name of the prefecture after the Meiji Restoration. For example, *Satsuma* was also called Kagoshima, *Choshu* also called Yamaguchi, *Tosa* also called Kochi, Hizen also called *Saga*, and Echizen also called *Fukui*. These names were often used interchangeably—also see Appendix Map. In this paper, han are in principle called by the italicized names above which seem to be the most commonly used.

Table 1 shows the dates, the field of achievement, and the original class of prominent leaders in the late Edo and the early Meiji period, some of whom are discussed in section 4 below. They are listed in the order of birth year. Among the 55 leaders tabulated here, there are 44 han vassals (low-ranking samurai), 6 han lords, 2 *hatamoto* (samurai belonging to the Bakufu), 2 court nobles, and 1 merchant.⁵ Han vassals, which accounted for 80 percent, were the dominant group. Among them, the four most powerful han of Satsuma, Choshu, Tosa, and Saga produced 35 leaders. The collective samurai class, which included han lords, han vassals, and hatamoto, counted 52, or 95 percent of all leaders of this period.

It may be argued, theoretically, that leaders selected by the authors interested in the role of samurai and han are biased. As a practical matter, however, it would hardly be possible to construct a list of prominent leaders of this period which excludes the people we have selected or which do not largely coincide with them. A minor re-shuffling of candidates would not change the conclusion that the samurai class was the main source of leaders.

Needless to say, the number of leaders was miniscule relative to the total population. Their precise number is impossible to pin down because of the ambiguity of the definition of leaders. One suggestion comes from the *Who's Who of the Meiji Restoration*, compiled in 1981 by mobilizing 800 historians all over Japan to enumerate all VIPs in the period with which we are concerned, whether they were politically conservative, gradualist, or radical (Japan Historical Academy, 1981). The leaders contained in this book are approximately 4,300 in number which are again dominated by the samurai class. If we tentatively assume this to be the number of active leaders in the late Edo and the early Meiji period, the leaders occupied about 1 percent of the samurai population (about 450,000) or 0.012 percent of the total population (about 35 million).

A question may arise as to why the samurai class forced a revolution which would destroy the feudal system and the class system on which their privileged position depended. The answer is that their initial intention was merely to reorganize the polity within the old regime to cope effectively with the foreign pressure rather than a radical transformation of the regime itself. For this purpose, samurai performed the assigned role of leadership with a sense of duty and pride. However, the movement unexpectedly proceeded to the denial of the old system because the establishment and defense of the new government required an action far beyond the original plan. This came about because of enlightenment by Western thoughts, political conflict with the Bakufu, the necessity of a strong central authority, and resistance from the conservative forces (court nobility and han lords) in the early years of Meiji. Thus, the movement that started as a political reform ended up in a political

⁵ We regard Shimazu Hisamitsu (1817-1887), the *de facto* leader of Satsuma Han, as a han lord. Iwasaki Yataro (the founder of Mitsubishi group, 1834-1885) who was a low-level samurai close to peasantry, and Ito Hirobumi (the first prime minister, 1841-1909), a peasant's son who was given the title of lowest samurai together with his father, are counted as samurai, and similarly with Sakamoto Ryoma (1835-1867) and Nakaoka Shintaro (1838-1867) who abandoned the position of a han retainer of Tosa. Sons of han retainers who were still young at the time of the Meiji Restoration are also classified as samurai.

revolution.

In the late Edo to the early Meiji period, political contribution of the groups belonging to the old regime, such as court nobility, Bakufu scholars, private scholars, rich merchants, and wealthy farmers, was limited although there were some exceptions⁶. Similarly, the newly emerging groups in the period following the opening of ports (1859) or the Meiji Restoration (1867), such as farmers and landlords enriched by the export of silk and tea, the Yokohama merchants⁷, *seisho* (politically connected businessmen) and *zaibatsu* (business conglomerates), and intellectuals of the *meirokeisha* (the Society of the Sixth Year of Meiji) or Fukuzawa's Keio Academy, were not the main political players although some had close contacts with government officials. As to the political participation of the general mass, we can hardly detect anything in this period. Apart from farmers' uprisings which carried little political message and had been observed since the Edo period, it can be said that political participation of the general mass began with the Hibiya Riot in 1905, in which the urban mass protested against the small size of war compensation paid by Russia following Japanese victory in the Japan-Russia War (1904-1905). Modern popular movements and demonstrations demanding (male) universal suffrage, women's rights, and the liberation of the underclass, arose in the Taisho Democracy period (from the mid 1900s to the end of the 1920s), far beyond the early Meiji period with which we are currently concerned.

Three additional remarks are in order to supplement the discussion of the Meiji Restoration.

First, the Meiji Revolution was not a revolution by low-ranking samurai alone. The lords of the influential han were equal or even superior to their most capable vassals in knowledge, leadership and agility. For example, Satsuma Han Lord Shimazu Nariakira (1809-1858), and his younger brother and successor Shimazu Hisamitsu (1817-1887), ordered Saigo Takamori, Okubo Toshimichi, Komatsu Tatewaki (1835-1870), Godai Tomoatsu (1835-1885), and other vassals to manage the feudal trading firm of the han, push the idea of a feudal assembly, and build coalitions with other han. In turn, these lower samurai frequently reported to the han leader. Thus, the revolutionary movement of Satsuma Han was a joint product of the han leader and his samurai. The contribution and influence of han lords, who were naturally fewer than han vassals in number (Table 1), should not be underestimated. From another angle, it can also be stated that one peculiar feature of the Meiji Revolution was active participation of low-ranking samurai, who in normal times should be less visible than their lords.

The second point, related to the first, was that a clear division of labor between a handful of top

⁶ Shibusawa Eiichi (1840-1931), one of the first officials of the Ministry of Finance and later a powerful business coordinator who helped to establish hundreds of joint stock companies and economic and social institutions, came from a rich farming family in Saitama.

⁷ Foreigners were confined to limited areas around the designated foreign settlements and could not travel beyond these boundaries without an official permit. For this reason, independent Japanese merchants emerged to work with foreigners to collect local products for export and distribute imported products in domestic markets. The largest among the designated foreign settlements was Yokohama, a newly reclaimed port city, and such merchants were called Yokohama merchants.

leaders and a much greater number of supporting elites was not observable in the Meiji Revolution. Many countries in East Asia, such as Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia, in the post WW2 period had a strong president or prime minister who led development effort on the one hand, and a cohort of elite technocrats, often with PhDs from the West, who were mobilized to concretize the leader's vision on the other. However, Japan in the late Edo to the early Meiji period did not have such a demarcation. While samurai supplied most leaders, who would occupy the top position and who would serve him as supporters was not pre-determined. Had the "Upper House" of the feudal assembly come into being in a peaceful manner, intelligent han lords could have played an important role in the new political arrangement. But in reality top leaders of the Meiji government who emerged from the military conflict were former low-ranking samurai and not han lords. Moreover, leaders in the early Meiji period did not have to rely on a large number of technocrats or voter support to run the government, because the parliament and the election system had not yet been installed. In this sense, leaders and elites were undifferentiated and political support base for the government was neither present nor necessary.

Third, the role of han was vital as a unit that prepared the conditions for the flexible structure of politics to emerge among the samurai class. Vassals in powerful han accumulated domestic and foreign knowledge, negotiation skills, and commercial experience through contacts with similar samurai from other han and Bakufu officials as well as exposure to foreigners and information from Europe and America. This in turn led to the sharing of the national sense of crisis and nationalism among them. Low-ranking samurai of the influential han, trained in both theory and practice, continued to form and re-form groups with the former han as the basic unit into the early Meiji period. In this way, han in the late Edo period served as an incubator of human resource and network formation that enabled Japan to cast off the class-based feudal system and face squarely with the Western powers.

This concludes the presentation of viewpoints to analyze the transformation period. The next section will give a detailed chronological account of the political development from the late Edo to the early Meiji period.

4. Dynamic evolution of policies and politics (abridged – see full version)

- 4-1. Feudal trading firms and plans for a feudal assembly (1858–1868)
- 4-2. Groping for concrete reform strategies (1871–1873)
- 4-3. Conflict between industrialization and a "continued revolution" (1873–1875)
- 4-4. The Osaka Conference and the Coalition for Domestic Policies (1875)
- 4-5. The rise and fall of the industrialization group (1876-1880)
- 4-6. A revival of the constitution group and the military (1880–1881)

4-7. The end of the transformation period (1881)

5. Final remarks

Before concluding the study, two additional observations are in order.

The first observation, which was already touched upon in section 2, is concerned with the question of why re-formation of coalitions could continue for a long time without falling into uncontrollable chaos or being intervened by the Western powers. One answer, already given above, is the cumulative experience of cooperation among samurai groups in the decade preceding *Taisei Hokan* and *Ousei Fukko* in 1867, both vertically between han lords and their vassals and horizontally among influential han. In the political events following the Meiji Restoration, leaders continued to trust the goodwill of their opponents even to the moment of final confrontation. For instance, Okubo Toshimichi, who openly opposed Saigo Takamori over the proposal of an expedition to Korea in 1874, was in the previous year inclined to send a passionate letter to Saigo to report his visits to British factories. Later, when Okubo and Saigo ultimately had to engage militarily with each other in the Satsuma Rebellion in 1878, Shimazu Hisamitsu, the former *de facto* leader of Satsuma, ordered his high-ranking vassals to remain neutral in this conflict. Goodwill and mutual trust were similarly pervasive when Satsuma vassals and Tosa vassals agreed on the proposal of a feudal assembly in 1867, or when Satsuma samurai and Choshu samurai joined forces to fight an internal war to oust the Bakufu in 1868-1869.

Apart from the rich experience of cooperation among han, several centripetal forces which had been generated in the Edo period were also critical. Under the political stability of the Bakufu-Han System and limited foreign contact under the “Closed Door” policy (1639-1854), Japan had an opportunity for over two centuries to develop its society and economy without being seriously interrupted by internal conflicts or foreign pressure (Umesao 1957, Ohno 2005). Among conditions nurtured by internal social evolution of the Edo period, the following two are particularly important. First, there emerged a layer of wealthy merchants, intelligent samurai, and professionals who had strong demand for new knowledge and political participation as a result of the steady development of agriculture, commerce and handicraft industries supported by effective transport and communication infrastructure. Second, there was growing nationalism in the private sector spurred by the fact of political and economic integration of the nation as well as the rise of *kokugaku*, or research on ancient Japanese literature and spirit. In the late Edo period, nationalism was suddenly and greatly activated by the contact with the West which entailed the danger of being colonized. Thus, private-sector nationalism and *sonno shiso* (the doctrine of respecting the Emperor), which were widely shared among the wealthy and the learned in the late Edo period, maintained national unity that worked to hold the last line amid political struggles, prevent a civil war from getting out of

hand, and reduce the risk of colonization by the Western powers.

However, even with the intellectual maturity of samurai, scholars, rich farmers, and wealthy merchants, their emergence as the shaping force of history would have been impossible had the strict class order and social boundaries of the Bakufu-Han System remained intact. From this perspective, it is important to note that Japan in the late Edo period, especially after the opening of ports in 1859, had conditions under which enlightened people, especially low-ranking samurai, could challenge traditional authorities and act independently. One of such conditions, arising as a long-term trend, was the gap between the reality of a thriving market economy supported by the growth of commercial crops and handicraft manufacturing on the one hand, and the physiocratic doctrine of the Bakufu-Han System which regarded rice production by self-sufficient family farms as the sole base of social order and taxation on the other. This gap called for a political reform that would launch a package of new economic policies to stimulate trade and industry as a historical necessity.⁸ Another condition, which was more short-term in nature, was the cumulative failure of the Bakufu's military, diplomatic, political and economic policies following the arrival of American warships in 1853-54 which severely undermined the legitimacy of the Bakufu as a military government, and created the social atmosphere in which disobedience to the traditional authority became permissible. A political struggle which disregarded traditional values and feudal rules was unleashed to establish a new order under the social circumstance in which restraint was in place to prevent this struggle to go overboard. In this sense, Japan in the late Edo to the early Meiji period experienced a historically very unique and highly fortunate period of transformation. To put it differently, it is hardly possible to duplicate the flexible structure of politics, the hallmark of Meiji Japan, in developing countries of our age.

The second observation is that, as a matter of fact, industrialization policy *in the narrow sense* in which government took the initiative to install and operate imported machines embodying Western technology in state-run factories, as pursued by the Okubo group, did not succeed commercially. As noted earlier, this policy was promoted vigorously from 1876 to 1880, a relatively short period in the entire period of transformation. The Meiji government, which managed to appease disgruntled farmers with a land tax reduction in 1876 and financed the military spending to suppress the Satsuma Rebellion (whose expenditure was roughly equal to the annual national budget) by issuing paper money in 1877, the only remaining source of public investments for industrialization was the issuance of industry bonds amounting to 10 million yen (or 25% of the national budget).

In reality, however, the cotton spinning industry established by the Ministry of Home Affairs with nearly the half of this financial resource (4.5 million yen) by importing British machinery never achieved profitability. Three years later, when the government decided to sell off these national assets to the private sector, few private enterprises showed interest (Takamura, 1996, p.215). The

⁸ In the terminology of Marxian economics, this situation can be stated as the rise of production force and associated transformation of production relations, which belong to the *infrastructure*, generating a conflict with the political system, which forms a part of the *superstructure*. A revolution became necessary to dialectically resolve this conflict.

reasons for this unfavorable outcome were the shortage of capital, the operation size of 2,000 spindles which was too small for efficiency, the use of waterwheel as the power source with severe constraints on the location and operation time, and the lack of competent engineers (Abe, 1990, pp.165-166).

The overcoming of these difficulties had to await the establishment of Osaka Boseki Company, a private spinning mill created by Shibusawa Eiichi, a super business coordinator, in 1882. On the other hand, the indigenous spinning industry owned by private operators rapidly increased the export of silk yarns mainly to the US market thanks to the success in blending imported technology with the traditional production method (Takamura, 1996, p.219, p.230). In short, it was the private sector that achieved great success in export promotion while import substitution by the hand of the government was largely a failure.

Although the government could not produce any positive results in factory operation, it must also be admitted that industrialization policy *in the broad sense* conducted by the Meiji government played a crucial role in preparing the conditions for private investment to prosper at later stages. This includes the construction of industrial infrastructure such as railroads, roads, telegraphic communication and lighthouses; promotion of technology transfer through the direct employment of foreign advisors and project contracts with Western partners; human resource development through the dispatch of Japanese students to top-level universities in the West and the establishment of *Kobu Daigakko* (Institute of Technology) and technical colleges; military factories which trained Japanese engineers who later migrated to establish their own workshops; encouragement of invention and innovation by hosting a series of domestic trade fairs; establishment of various research institutes; and modernization of the fiscal and monetary system. The Industrial Revolution of Japan took off in the late 1880s in the aftermath of Matsukata Deflation, an austerity package introduced by Finance Minister Matsukata Masayoshi to suppress inflation. Its main players were private joint stock companies in the textile industries and railroad operation. Industrial policy in the broad sense in the early Meiji period prepared the conditions for this private business boom to materialize.

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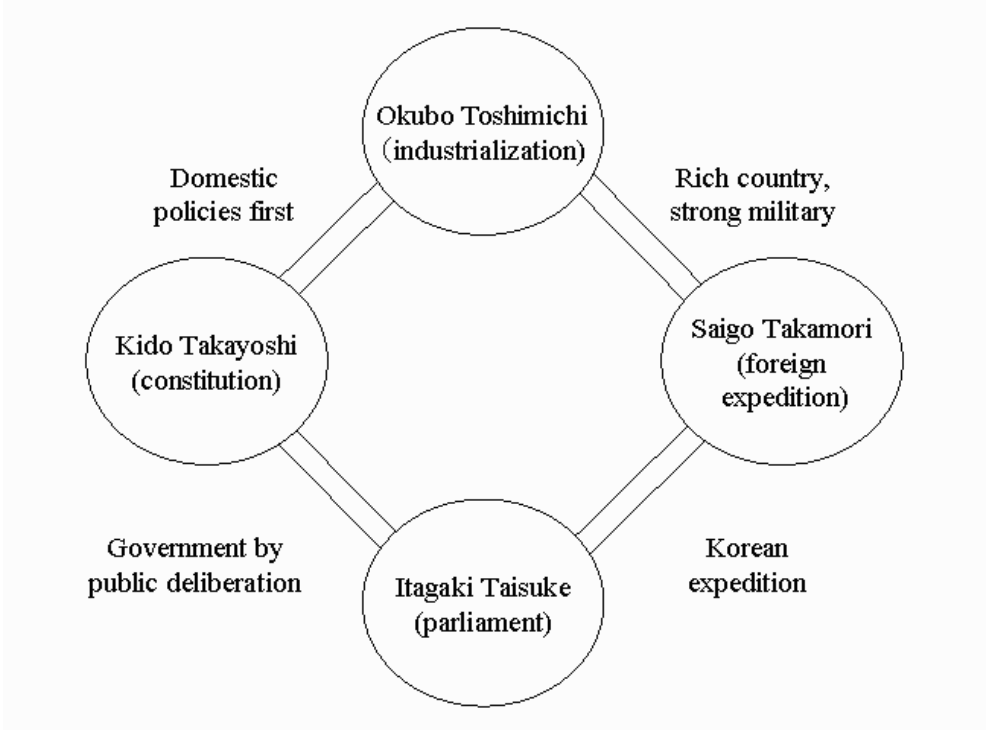
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Table 1. Leaders in the Late Edo and the Early Meiji Period

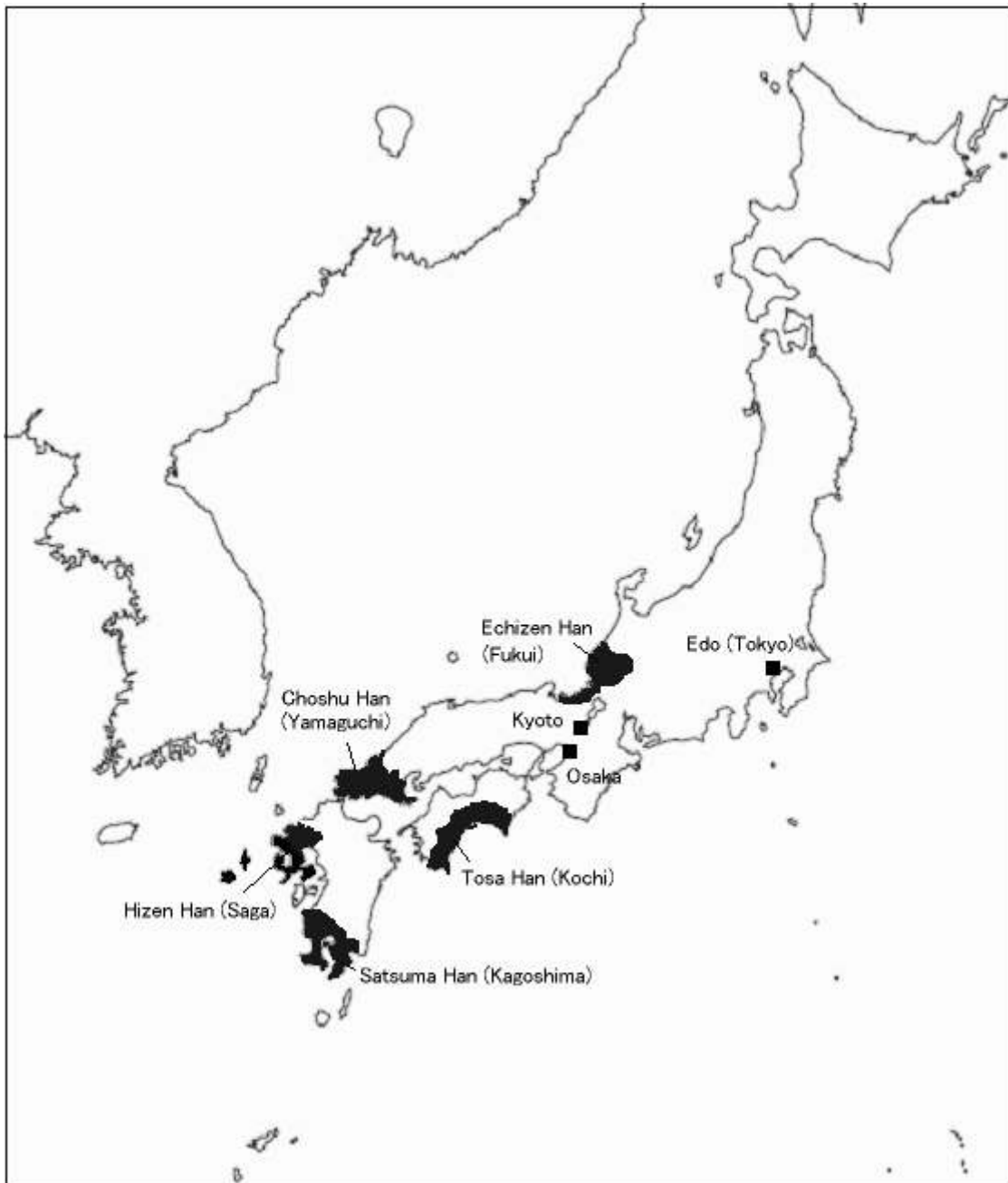
	Name	Years	Area of achievement	Original class
1	Nakane Sekko	1807-1877	Political scientist	Han samurai (Fukui Han)
2	Shimazu Nariakira	1809-1858	Han lord	Han lord (Satsuma Han)
3	Yokoi Shonan	1809-1869	Confucianist, statesman	Han samurai (Higo Han)
4	Sakuma Shozan	1811-1864	Militarist, jurist, confucianist	Han samurai (Matsushiro Han)
5	Nabeshima Naomasa	1814-1871	Han lord	Han lord (Saga Han)
6	Uchida Masakaze	1815-1893	Bureucrat	Han samurai (Satsuma Han)
7	Yoshida Toyo	1816-1862	Statesman	Han samura (Tosa Han)
8	Shimazu Hisamitsu	1817-1887	Han top leader	Han lord in substance (Satsuma Han)
9	Okubo Tadahiro	1817-1888	Bakufu official, statesman	Bakufu samurai
10	Hasebe Jimbei	1818-1873	Bureaucrat	Han samurai (Fukui Han)
11	Date Munenari	1818-1892	Han lord, statesman	Han lord (Uwajima Han)
12	Nagai Uta	1819-1863	Advocate for open door policy	Han samurai (Choshu Han)
13	Murata Ujihisa	1821-1899	Statesman	Han samurai (Fukui Han)
14	Katsu Kaishu	1823-1899	Bakufu militarist, statesman	Bakufu samurai
15	Iwakura Tomomi	1825-1883	Statesman	Nobleman
16	Yamauchi Yodo	1827-1872	Han lord	Han lord (Tosa Han)
17	Saigo Takamori	1827-1877	Statesman (1 of 3 Ishin Heroes)	Han samurai (Satsuma Han)
18	Iwashita Michihira	1827-1900	Statesman	Han samurai (Satsuma Han)
19	Saisho Atsushi	1827-1910	Bureaucrat	Han samurai (Satsuma Han)
20	Ijichi Masaharu	1828-1886	Militarist	Han samurai (Satsuma Han)
21	Matsudaira Shungaku	1828-1890	Han lord	Han lord (Fukui Han)
22	Yoshii Tomozane	1828-1891	Bureaucrat	Han samurai (Satsuma Han)
23	Soejima Taneomi	1828-1905	Statesman	Han samurai (Saga Han)
24	Yuri Kosei	1829-1909	Statesman, businessman	Han samurai (Fukui Han)
25	Takechi Hampeita	1829-1865	Statesman	Han samurai (Tosa Han)
26	Yoshida Shoin	1830-1859	Thinker, teacher	Han samurai (Choshu Han)
27	Okubo Toshimichi	1830-1878	Statesman (1 of 3 Ishin Heroes)	Han samurai (Satsuma Han)
28	Oki Takato	1832-1892	Statesman	Han samurai (Saga Han)
29	Kaieda Nobuyoshi	1832-1902	Statesman	Han samurai (Satsuma Han)
30	Kido Takayoshi	1833-1877	Statesman (1 of 3 Ishin Heroes)	Han samurai (Choshu Han)
31	Mori Kyosuke	1834- ?	Bureaucrat, statesman	Han samurai (Tosa Han)
32	Eto Shimpei	1834-1874	Statesman	Han samurai (Saga Han)
33	Iwasaki Yataro	1834-1885	Founder of Mitsubishi Zaibatsu	Unaffiliated samurai (Tosa Han)
34	Fukuzawa Yukichi	1834-1901	Philosopher, founder of Keio Univ.	Han samurai (Nakatsu Han)
35	Sakamoto Ryoma	1835-1867	Freelance patriot	Han samurai, absconded (Tosa Han)
36	Komatsu Tatewaki	1835-1870	Statesman	Han samurai (Satsuma Han)
37	Godai Tomoatsu	1835-1885	Business leader in Kansai area	Han samurai (Satsuma Han)
38	Inoue Kaoru	1835-1915	Statesman, businessman	Han samurai (Choshu Han)
39	Fukuoka Takachika	1835-1919	Statesman	Han samurai (Tosa Han)
40	Matsukata Masayoshi	1835-1924	Statesman	Han samurai (Satsuma Han)
41	Kawamura Sumiyoshi	1836-1904	Navy militarist, statesman	Han samurai (Satsuma Han)
42	Sanjo Sanetomi	1837-1891	Statesman	Nobleman
43	Tani Tateki	1837-1911	Army militarist, statesman	Han samurai (Tosa Han)
44	Itagaki Taisuke	1837-1919	Military leader, statesman	Han samurai (Tosa Han)
45	Kabayama Sukenori	1837-1922	Navy militarist, statesman	Han samurai (Satsuma Han)
46	Nakaoka Shintaro	1838-1867	Freelance patriot	Rural samurai (Tosa Han)
47	Goto Shojiro	1838-1897	Statesman	Han samurai (Tosa Han)
48	Okuma Shigenobu	1838-1922	Statesman, founder of Waseda Univ.	Han samurai (Saga Han)
49	Yamagata Aritomo	1838-1922	Statesman, army militarist	Han samurai (Choshu Han)
50	Komuro Shinobu	1839-1898	Statesman, businessman	Son of a rich merchant
51	Kuroda Kiyotaka	1840-1900	Statesman	Han samurai (Satsuma Han)
52	Ito Hirobumi	1841-1909	Statesman	Han samurai (Choshu Han, upgraded from peasantry)
53	Mutsu Munemitsu	1844-1897	Statesman, diplomat	Han samurai (Kishu Han)
54	Furusawa Uruu	1847-1911	Statesman, bureaucrat	Han samurai (Tosa Han)
55	Yano Fumio	1850-1931	Statesman, literary man	Han samurai (Saeki Han)

Figure 1. Basic Combinations of Leaders and National Goals



Note: Under the flexible structure of politics correspondence between leaders and national goals was variable and coalition among groups was changeable. This diagram shows basic patterns only.

Appendix: The Map of Powerful Han in the Late Edo Period



Note: The term in the parentheses is the alternative appellation of the han. This often became the name of the newly created prefecture under the Meiji government. The city of Edo changed name to Tokyo in July 1868.