

Nagasaki in the Meiji Restoration: Choshu Loyalists and British Arms Merchants

Sidney DeVere Brown

The Diary of Kido Takayoshi is my starting point. Several entries in 1868 reveal an unusually close relationship between Kido (1833-1877), the Meiji statesman from Choshu, and Thomas Blake Glover (1838-1912), the British merchant from Nagasaki. Kido was one of the main creators of the new revolutionary government, while Glover headed the largest foreign trading firm in Japan. Their affinity stirs curiosity, and merits further investigation.

On May 12, 1868, for example, while attending on the young Emperor Meiji during his sojourn in Osaka, Kido called at Glover's place. "We talked together about events of the past three years," wrote Kido, "and we had a lot to say, having met after so long a time." Glover's parting gift, a pistol, was singularly appropriate, coming from the arms merchant who equipped the Choshu military forces for victory over the Bakufu army in 1866. A few days later the two had a chance encounter. "Today I met Glover and Mackenzie at the Kobe post-station," Kido noted. "Glover spied me in my kago chair, and came over to inquire after me." Probably the two made an appointment for next morning, on June 1, 1868, for Kido called at the Glover Trading Company to lease a warship to provide passage home for his domain prince, the Choshu heir who was in the Kyoto-Osaka area, where the Boshin War had barely quieted down. Two men in Glover's office that day were well-known to Kido. One was the Satsuma samurai entrepreneur Godai Tomoatsu who had used his intimate business ties with the Scot to turn the Choshu arms deal; and the other was Glover's Japanese manager, the returned castaway from America, Joseph Heco, whom Kido approached for employment for two of his Choshu proteges. The request suggested familiarity.

But it was Godai who had been particularly useful to Kido in 1865 when he was recalled from hiding, in the wake of the radical Kiheitai coup in his han, to take charge of preparations for the Second Choshu War with the Bakufu. Their acquaintanceship was a product of the secret Satsuma-Choshu link which resulted in alliance, and precipitated the overthrow of the Bakufu. Kido needed modern arms; Godai was his cover in Nagasaki for providing them through his close ties with Glover, at whose house he sometimes stayed overnight. For Kido Satsuma aid was indispensable for executing his han's new policy.

The policy, announced by the Choshu daimyo, in May 1865, stipulated that the han hereditary and volunteer forces should be converted into a Western-style army with modern military equipment. Its leaders should be the most talented men available regardless of their social status. Kido chose the brilliant military planner Omura Masujiro, son of a Choshu country doctor, to lead the military reform and summoned him home from Tosa to take charge. "When [Omura's] program is implemented," Kido observed, "Choshu will be a very strong country indeed;" but, for the moment, the local forces, even the Kiheitai, were "poorly equipped." "We cannot hope to obtain enough rifles immediately," Kido reported to the han government in Yamaguchi, "but I have heard that there are about 1000 long Minie rifles in the Nagasaki area. If this is true, I wonder if we should not acquire all of them at once." In the same report Kido also proposed the purchase of another warship from the treaty-port.

Kido's desperate need was weaponry in the summer of 1865, and he opened the supply line from Choshu to Godai and Glover in Nagasaki thus: Sakamoto Ryoma, the Tosa mediator, was asked, when he stopped over at Shimonoseki, to assist the embattled domain in making contact with arms

traders in Nagasaki from which the proscribed han was barred by using the name of Satsuma. Rice-short Satsuma armies, far from home in the capital area, could have some Choshu provisions in exchange, Kido promised. As a result the Satsuma mansion in Nagasaki put up the Choshu agents (Inoue Kaoru and Ito Hirobumi), gave them Satsuma pseudonyms, and took them to Glover's house on the south bluff of the bay after midnight to consummate the crucial munitions deal. Soon 7300 rifles of the latest design were enroute to Choshu. Nakaoka Shintaro a few months later remarked that "in every way the forces of the han have been renewed; only companies of rifle and cannon exist, and the rifles are Minies, the cannon breech loaders using shells." Gunnery was practiced constantly. Naval maneuvers also commanded attention as the steam warship Union, acquired from Glover, and manned by sailors from Sakamoto's company made its way to Choshu in December 1865. The rifles and the ship were central to the han fighting in 1866.

Nagasaki Treaty Port in the 1860S

Why was smuggling so easy at Nagasaki, so lately the tightly controlled focus of the Tokugawa sakoku policy, "the world's peephole into Japan"? Why was Glover who "exemplified the buccaneering spirit of the British merchant" able to import rifles, cannon, and warships for rebels with impunity? He sold arms not only to Choshu, but to all comers, it appeared, even to the Bakufu; and he dealt in Western consumer goods as well, as did Alt and Company, Sassoon and Company, and others in the heyday of the treaty port in the decade after its opening on July 4, 1859. Nagasaki was only a small city of 40,000 population, but a mere 250 to 300 foreigners who resided there changed Japan forever.

Nagasaki's remoteness from Edo was one factor in dissolving Bakufu political authority, especially with the general weakening of the Tokugawa control structure at the end of the political cycle. Whereas once the Dutch factor, the opperhoofd of Deshima, humbled himself when ordered into the presence of the Bakufu Commissioners in the era of the "closed country", now in 1863 the British consul summoned the Nagasaki Vice Governors to his establishment. In the latter period neither British consul nor Bakufu commissioner sought seriously to control the trade which had once been a restricted Edo monopoly. In the 1860s, indeed, Bakufu officials winked at smuggling, and were corruptible. In the bill to the Choshu government for the purchase of the ship Union appears an item for sake for treating Bakufu officials, suggesting that the price of influence was small. The British interpreter Ernest Satow summed it up: "At Nagasaki most of the territorial nobles of Western Japan had establishments whither they sent for sale the rice and other produce received in payment of tribute from the peasants, and their retainers came into frequent contact with foreigners, whose houses they visited for the purchase of arms, gunpowder, and steamers." Satsuma had such an establishment, and Tosa as well, but not the "rebel han" Choshu which carried out the abortive raid on Kyoto in 1864.

Nagasaki was an excellent port, protected from the southwest typhoons by mountains around its "long, land-locked harbor," which appeared "almost like a very broad river." To the first-time visitor from England, the island-dotted waters provided "a vision of beauty," particularly the sugar-loaf shaped Pappenberg Island with its luxuriant growth. The only blemish was the ugly Russian settlement at the head of the bay.

The beautiful port flourished on account of proximity to China, particularly to Shanghai from which many of the traders including Glover had come, bringing with them a domineering and lawless style

conditioned on the China coast. Shanghai, incorporated as it was into the world economy, helped carry Japanese trade into the broader stream. Moreover, Nagasaki connected readily to the treaty ports and cities elsewhere in Japan, Kobe, Osaka, and Yokohama, where Glover also did business and had branches.

Small though it was Nagasaki, the window to the West, beckoned foreign merchants, diplomats and consuls, missionaries, samurai, and daimyo. (Once Ex-Lord Nabeshima Masanao of Hizen explored the city incognito.) Foreigners and Japanese were free to mingle, and the city attracted those most interested in the ideas of the West in the 1860s, “an exciting period which increasingly undermined the shogunate.” Nagasaki was also the major point of cultural exchange with the world; for the Choshu and Satsuma students who first studied in England left from there. To the new open port Protestant missionaries came as well, of whom the Reverend Guido Verbeck (Dutch Reformed, United States) was the most successful in espousing Western ideas. “Some sort of friendly feeling...sprang up, which was increased by the American missionaries who gave instruction in English to younger members of [the samurai] class,” remembered Satow, “and imparted to them the liberal ideas which had no small influence on the subsequent course of events.” Verbeck has been credited with first proposing the Iwakura Mission, 1871-1873, the Great Japanese Embassy to America and Europe to study its political institutions and factories, its military systems and schools.

Glover’s Role in Nagasaki

No one exploited loosely controlled Nagasaki in the pre-Restoration decade more profitably than Thomas Blake Glover, who symbolized the era, and made his cultural contribution as well. Marius Jansen’s summation of Glover’s career is succinct: He was “a Scottish merchant who played a large role in importing weapons and exporting students for the anti-Tokugawa han in late Tokugawa days.” The fine Glover house on the south bluff above Nagasaki harbor attests to his importance, a dwelling which the Nagasaki Chamber of Commerce in more recent days has denominated the “Madame Butterfly House.” There is even a small bronze statue of Puccini’s fictional character on the terrace below the house, but Glover’s only connection with the story is that he conducted a parallel romance. His own wife, Tsuru, was a kind of a Cho-Cho Sama without the tragedy. She entered his house informally like Pinkerton’s lady, but later was recognized as Glover’s wife “in mature years of respectability,” and was buried with him in the foreign cemetery at the port.

Glover’s fortunes rose and fell with Nagasaki. He arrived from Shanghai in 1859 as a twenty-one year old clerk to Kenneth Ross MacKenzie, local agent for Jardine, Matheson and Company. Later in 1862 Glover established his own firm with advances from Jardine against 10% mortgages on building lots he had acquired in the treaty port; and the firm was destined to flourish to the extent that when Kido met the young Scot in Kobe in 1868, Glover had Mackenzie working for him.

Why did Glover sell to Choshu? One interpretation is that he was a political romantic who was entranced by the radical loyalist cause. He himself seemed to subscribe to the idea that he was a political adventurer who was known as the greatest enemy of the Tokugawa government. The young merchant (who was thirty in 1868) may have felt empathy for the young loyalist Choshu leaders (Kido, 35; Ito, 28). Moreover, the youthful British interpreters, Ernest Satow and Algernon B. Mitford, who were in and out of Nagasaki, were committed to the Imperial cause, and may have carried Glover with them.

A second interpretation is that the Scot simply acted as an agent of British imperialism which backed

the Emperor's cause to counter French imperialism behind the Bakufu. Tsuchiya Takao wrote of rival imperialisms colliding in the 1860s to create a balance of power which forestalled intervention by either. In fact, while Britain wanted to end feudal rule which impeded trade expansion, it regarded a popular revolution or direct intervention by the West as totally disruptive of commercial activity, and supported the nationalism of the reformers only insofar as it promised gradual change. Aid to Satsuma and Choshu might accomplish that. As Gordon Daniels has noted, no matter what Mitford and Satow said, Minister Harry Parkes who arrived in 1865 was scrupulously neutral, and committed only to expanding trade, which might be accomplished by dismantling the feudal system without committing to revolution. In his support of Choshu Glover went considerably beyond the limits established by Parkes.

The third interpretation is that Glover was simply a pragmatic, profit-oriented merchant who was willing to sell to "any who would pay," even "something of a freebooter," as Olive Checkland has observed. Glover's mentor Mackenzie was held to be a specialist in illegal trade upriver in China at Hankow before he was sent to Japan early by Jardine to put his talents to work—to obtain, by whatever means—illegally if necessary, silk which was a third cheaper in Japan than China, or seaweed which could serve as a substitute for salt then in short supply in China. The unflattering assessment is John McMaster's. Glover emulated the older man, then outdid him, selling arms to Choshu as well as to the Bakufu. Glover also engaged in legitimate trade. He imported cotton goods and woolens from England, and exported refined tea and rice from the anti-Bakufu han to China. The tempting unneutral trade in arms and ships was the most profitable, however.

Glover slid into bankruptcy as soon as stability returned to the country after 1868, and the center of trade moved eastward to Hyogo and Yokohama. His joint venture with Tosa in the nearby Takashima coal mine, and his grandiose scheme to engage in shipbuilding, to enter shipping on the run to Shanghai, and to refine tea on a large scale, stirred suspicions among his creditors, mainly Jardine, Matheson, who foreclosed in 1870. As a business consultant to Mitsubishi Steamship Company, Glover recovered and lived comfortably until the end of the Meiji era. Glover in old age with his full white moustache is the one we know from photographs, impressive appearing, but less important than the young swashbuckling arms merchant who gave Choshu aid at a critical time through its Nagasaki connection.

Choshu Military Modernization and Nagasaki

Choshu had the radical spirit of loyalism when Kido took charge of war preparations in 1865, but not the weaponry to make "the righteousness of our cause prevail." "We must make good use of last year's truce" with the Bakufu, he wrote Hirosawa Saneomi, a radical whom he had brought into government, to "prepare for victory by all means at our disposal." Choshu had a complex military organization, a regular han army, irregular samurai-commoner units known as shotai of which the Kiheitai was the first and most famous, and even a merchant-farmer militia. The regular forces were inferior to the Kiheitai, and "laughed at even by peasants," according to one report. But none was well-equipped.

Overall morale was high in Choshu, believed Kido, and a feeling approximating modern nationalism prevailed in the han. Even commoners were "clasping their hands while deploring the state of the nation, and prepared to have their bones bleach on the battlefield." The foreign threat had shaken the people out of their torpor of 300 years under the Tokugawa, and created a welcome

sense of “alarm,” wrote Kido. The doctor’s son, using a medical metaphor, explained that a “skilled physician” could revive Choshu, and possibly “cure the disease of the Empire,” if only he could neutralize the “poisonous medicine” of the Bakufu.

Good quality weapons were needed in oft-defeated Choshu, not the cheapest in small quantities as officials in Yamaguchi castle town advocated, but the best Minie guns in sufficient numbers to equip an army. Kido’s quest led directly to Thomas Glover, who at first seemed wary in his letters and personal conversation, but, after expressing his reservations, possibly as a bargaining device, always delivered.

The Bakufu had made “a pointed request to the British Queen not to allow the illicit trade. The Shogun himself sent her a personal letter,” Glover explained, and to sell arms to a rebel force would be a treaty violation. “Glover feels sorry for us,” Kido explained to the Seijido [Political Council] in Yamaguchi, “but there is nothing he can do.” The Scot did have a suggestion to circumvent the Bakufu. If Choshu would send a vessel directly to Shanghai to buy rifles, “Glover will do everything in his power to buy and load as many guns as we want; he seems to be deeply committed to us on this matter.” If Choshu needed a ship, Glover would use his influence to buy one in Shanghai.

In the end Glover provided the needed rifles directly from Nagasaki, and accompanied Ito Hirobumi back to Shimonoseki, on October 15, 1865, for his first personal meeting with Kido, who noted: “This man is the wealthiest of all foreign merchants who have come to Japan; and he is on intimate terms with ministers and consuls. I am supposed to hand the money for the guns to him.” Glover had come “partly for sightseeing” aboard a rundown wooden steamship, so as not to attract attention; and he had introduced Ito to his own crew as a Satsuma man. “Trading with our han is strictly prohibited for a foreigner; therefore, Glover is very reluctant about dealing with us,” explained Kido; and he had not told his own crew about the sale of guns which, in any case, were not aboard that ship. If discovered, Glover could be prohibited from engaging in foreign trade for three years, and even fined or imprisoned. A profit of 10,000 or 20,000 ryo was not worth the risk, Glover argued. The canny Scot may have been seeking to up the price. Never one to miss a sale, Glover proposed selling the decrepit vessel on which he and Ito had arrived to Choshu, but Kido declined to buy the wooden steamer.

Actual delivery of the 4000 Minie rifles (Kido’s figure) was made at the secluded port of Mitajiri from a Satsuma ship under the supervision of Inoue Kaoru the following day; and the nervous captain barely halted long enough to unload his contraband cargo before proceeding to Osaka. For 92,000 ryo, a large sum, the han received 4300 Minies and 3000 Gewehrs. The price for each Minie was 18 ryo, for each Gewehr 5 ryo, a worthwhile investment for the well-equipped Choshu forces for their war ahead.

Kido’s letters reveal that he struggled with conservative economizers in han councils over the purchase of a high quality steam warship in the fall of 1865. His opponents regarded a 60 horsepower vessel as powerful enough, he held out for a 120 horsepower ship. “The greatest value of a gunboat lies in the fact that it is powerful and fast, even though it is small. To take an analogy from the flight of birds, it can be compared to a great hawk or a falcon. A falcon which lacks quickness has little value.” He acquired his ship, the *Union*, for 37,500 ryo from Glover, in December, 1865; and Sakamoto himself commanded the vessel, renamed the *Otchu-maru*, in the decisive naval battle

against the Bakufu fleet near Oshima-gun on the Eastern front in July 1866.

Kido's preoccupation with weaponry, probably with prompting from Omura, extended to worry about the Bakufu's advanced artillery technique; and he once instructed Ito Hirobumi in Nagasaki to buy some books on artillery or other aspects of military science, and send them home with Yamashiroya Wasuke, Choshu's purchasing agent. "If you run out of money, you may borrow from the Satsuma mansion," Kido told Ito, but by all means purchase enough copies for general circulation among the troops.

Takasugi Shinsaku who commanded the Choshu fleet in its notable victory over the Bakufu at Oshima-gun in July 1866 was another Choshu leader who frequented Nagasaki, knew Glover, and crossed over to Shanghai. Appalled that Shanghai was virtually an English and French colony, he wrote a journal which inspired Choshu memorials that Japan should avoid China's fate. Exhibiting the ambivalence toward the West shared by his compatriots, Takasugi planned to go to England in 1865, as Omura Masujiro recommended, but was dissuaded by Glover, who hoped to use him to open the port of Shimonoseki in Choshu to foreign trade. Before he died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-nine, in 1867, Takasugi had commanded Choshu naval forces in victory over the Bakufu fleet at Oshima-gun in the east part of his han, and watched in gratification through the binoculars from the deck of his warship as the Bakufu commander fled Kokura castle across the straits; but he missed the great tide of Western han samurai students to London in the 1860s.

A Wider Window on the West

Nagasaki's second, and ultimately more significant role was cultural. Radical Emperor loyalists lived among "barbarians" in Nagasaki where Japanese and foreigners mingled more meaningfully than in the newer treaty ports. There was less "political scheming" in Nagasaki, and more attention to trade pure and simple albeit the arms trade. Sakamoto observed to a Choshu friend that "Nagasaki, with all these people here, is as interesting as something from the period of the warring states." Godai believed that Nagasaki, where radicals lived among foreigners, moderated the innate xenophobia among these loyalists. The conversion was completed when they actually started for the West. "More than half of our number had been leading instigators of anti-foreign sentiment, but when they stepped ashore at Malta in the Mediterranean and saw for the first time the enlightened progress and the mighty power of Europe they awoke at once," he continued.

Glover's hand was visible in the two major study abroad projects of the period, as his firm arranged secret travel for the Choshu Five to England in 1863 when it was still illegal, and quietly sent the fifteen from Satsuma under Godai there in 1865. A Mr. Weigal, Glover's manager in Yokohama, put the Choshu youths, disguised as English sailors, aboard a reluctant Captain J. S. Gower's vessel at 1000 ryo each, bound for Shanghai where they were sheltered on an opium storage ship before dividing into two groups for the long voyage to London. Inoue Kaoru and Ito Hirobumi, destined to be two of the greatest statesmen of the age, worked as deckhands aboard the 1500 ton steamer *Pegasus* on the voyage to Europe.

William Matheson himself introduced the Japanese students to Professor Alexander Williamson, University College, London, a chemist in the Royal Academy. As is well known, Inoue and Ito returned to Japan after a few months of observing the military and industrial might of England to warn Choshu authorities to abandon their extreme joi policy, but the other three stayed long enough to become technical experts. One of them, Yamao Yozo went to Glasgow to study science at the

Andersonian, and to work in the shipyards, 1866-1868, evidently with introductions from Glover. These five modernizers, with their British experience though without university degrees, alloccupied important offices in the early Meiji government: Inoue Kaoru as Acting Finance Minister, Ito as Minister of Public Works, Inoue Masaru—Director of Railways; Yamao Yozo—founder, Imperial Engineering College; and Endo Kinsuke—Director, Osaka Mint. Japanese modernization owed that much to Glover.

Satsuma was not far behind Choshu in sending fifteen young samurai under the escort of a Glover associate named Ryle Holme in April 1865. One of the number stayed at Glover's old home in Aberdeen, Scotland. Leaders were the naval officer Godai Tomoatsu, destined to be the founder of the Osaka Chamber of Commerce, and the medical professor Terajima Munenori, a future foreign minister. Mori Arinori, who studied navigation in England, boarded a sailing bark to deliver coal from Newcastle to Russia in the summer of 1866, and returned home to Kagoshima shortly after the Restoration so foreignized as to be suspect in his conservative castle town.

Missionaries at Nagasaki became agents of enlightenment, most notably the Reverend Guido Verbeck (Dutch Reformed, United States) who arrived in 1859, and taught Okuma Shigenobu and Soejima Taneomi (finance minister and foreign minister respectively) about "the New Testament" and "the American Constitution", in addition to inspiring the Iwakura Embassy. The blot on this record of Nagasaki as a center of Western liberal thought was the treatment of the kakure [hidden] Christians when they were discovered in 1865. No less a person than Kido Takayoshi of Choshu was dispatched by the new Meiji government to Nagasaki to deal with these violators of the ancient ban on the alien religion in 1868. He identified the "Christian ringleaders," and had them transported into exile in Tsuwano han next to his own Choshu, and elsewhere, aboard steamships possibly hired from the accommodating Glover. Not until he met the estimable Christian convert Niiijima Jo in the United States in 1872 during the Iwakura Embassy did Kido moderate his traditional, hostile view of Christianity.

By then Nagasaki, the source of arms for his revolution and an agency of the new government's modernization policies, had dropped behind the treaty ports closer to Tokyo, and Glover had gone bankrupt. The aims of Japan's nationalist revolutionaries and of Britain's profit-maximizing merchants had coincided for only a fleeting moment in history at Nagasaki in the 1860s.

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