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Shiba/Remembering Aizu

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Introduction

History is often a chronicle of the winners. This is certainly true of the Meiji Restoration and the subsequent transformation of Japan during the second half of the nineteenth century. We know of Chōshū and Satsuma, the domains that carried out the Restoration, and of Ōkubo Toshimichi, Saigō Takamori, Kido Takayoshi, Itō Hirobumi, and others from those domains who went on to build modern Japan. Even today, these figures are revered in Japan as “the great men of Meiji.”

Among the losers in the Restoration, the Aizu domain lost the most. For its loyal support of the Tokugawa house and its staunch opposition to the enemies of the *bakufu*, the shogun’s government, Aizu was treated most harshly by the new Meiji rulers: Its lands were confiscated and its samurai population exiled to the Shimokita Peninsula, at the northernmost frontier of Honshu. Unprepared for the severe winters and inexperienced in farming, the Aizu samurai lived on the edge of starvation; many succumbed to illness and disease.

One of those sent to the far north was Shiba Gorō (1859–1945). During the siege of Aizu Castle, in 1868, his grandmother, mother, and two sisters committed suicide so the men in the family could do battle without distraction. His father, a high-ranking samurai, and four brothers fought in the war. One brother was killed early on, but the rest of the men survived—contrary to their expectations. Gorō, as a child of

ten, had been sent to the Aizu countryside, away from the fighting. After two years of privation and hardship in the north, Gorō became an attendant at a prefectural office and was then taken by a finance ministry official to Tokyo, where he obtained work as a servant. A year later, at the age of fifteen, he gained admission to the Army Cadet School and, after that, to the Officers Academy. He rose through the ranks, won international acclaim as the colonel in charge of Japanese forces in Peking during the Boxer Rebellion, and eventually became a full general, a singular distinction for an Aizu “samurai” in an army dominated by former samurai of the Chōshū domain.

This book is Shiba Gorō’s own story of his early life and times. It is also the story of the Aizu domain and those of its samurai who survived the struggles of the Restoration era.

FOUNDING OF THE AIZU DOMAIN

After unifying all of Japan in 1600, Tokugawa Ieyasu had made three of his sons daimyo, giving them lands and retainers. These were the “three families,” the most honored of the collateral houses. The second shogun, Tokugawa Hidetada, also wished to establish a son, his third, as a domain lord. The circumstances, however, were complicated, for the son was by a concubine, and the shogun had a jealous wife six years his senior. Hidetada secretly placed the infant, born in 1611, with a nun for safekeeping, and in 1617 gave the child for adoption to Hoshina Masamitsu, the daimyo of Takatō. Takatō was a 30,000-*koku* hereditary domain in central Japan.* Hidetada’s

*During the Tokugawa period (1600–1868), there were three categories of daimyo. The *fudai*, or hereditary daimyo, were those who had been Tokugawa vassals before 1600. Their holdings were mostly small, but they staffed the governing councils within the *bakufu*. The *shinpan*, or collateral daimyo, were the children of early shogun who had been given fiefs. They usually had no formal role in the *bakufu*, though they sometimes gave advice. If the shogun was without a male heir, however, a collateral daimyo could be adopted and become shogun. The *tozama*, or outside daimyo, were lords who had become Tokugawa vassals after 1600. They ruled their own domains but had no role in *bakufu* governance. Under Tokugawa rule, all daimyo were obliged to spend alternate years in Edo (Tokyo), the shogunal capital.

wife died, and in 1629 the son, known as Hoshina Masayuki, was permitted to meet his real father, now retired as shogun, for the first time. He succeeded his adoptive father as daimyo of Takatō in 1631.

Tokugawa Iemitsu, the son of Hidetada by his proper—and jealous—wife, became the third shogun in 1623. He made great efforts to establish a close relationship with his half brother Hoshina Masayuki. In 1636, he named Masayuki to be the daimyo of Yamagata, a domain of 200,000 *koku*, and in 1643, moved him to Aizu, a domain with an official assessment of 230,000 *koku*. He also bestowed on his half brother additional revenues of 53,000 *koku* from Minamiyama, an adjoining *bakufu* holding. The Aizu domain was a mountainous, landlocked region in central northeastern Japan. Its castle town of Wakamatsu was at the southern end of a small plain, situated at the juncture of five roads that spread out through northeastern Honshu. Aizu was, consequently, a holding of strategic importance as a buffer between the Tokugawa heartland to the southwest and more northerly outside domains.

Confident that he had the shogun's support, Masayuki set about establishing control over his new domain. The steps he took were not unlike those being taken in other domains at the time: He changed the fief rents collected by samurai fief holders to stipends paid by the domain government; he set aside reserves of rice and money for use in emergencies; he encouraged the production of rice and such handicrafts as lacquerware and candle wax; he forbade the sale of human beings and limited indentured apprenticeships to ten years. Signboards posted throughout Aizu proclaimed these and other measures.

Even while reforming Aizu, Masayuki's counsel was increasingly sought by the shogun Iemitsu. Masayuki served his half brother unstintingly, earning for himself and his descendants a permanent seat—one of four—in the *tamarinoma* chamber of Edo Castle, the chamber reserved for daimyo with an advisory role in *bakufu* affairs. (At this time Aizu was still classified as an outside domain. It was officially recognized as a collateral domain and permitted the use of the surname Matsu-

daira and the use of the shogunal hollyhock crest only in 1699.) In 1651, Masayuki was asked by the dying Iemitsu to serve as guardian for his ten-year-old heir, Ietsuna. In this capacity Masayuki acted as the de facto head of the *bakufu* during the first half of Ietsuna's rule.

While Masayuki's duties kept him in Edo, he did not neglect Aizu. In 1668, with the help of Confucian scholar Yamazaki Ansai, he drew up a house code to serve as a guide for his retainers. Several of its injunctions were moral:

Do not neglect military readiness.

Take as fundamental the way of the samurai.

Do not confuse the duties of the higher and lower ranks.

Older brothers should be respected and younger brothers loved.

The words of women should be totally disregarded.

Lawbreakers should not be treated with lenience.

A few items in the code dealt with particulars of government:

Other than elders [*karō*, the highest-ranking retainers], no one should have a voice in determining punishments and rewards.

If a retainer acts beyond his station, he should be dealt with strictly.

The money and rice set aside for emergencies are to be used for the common people, and only in times of famine.

But by far the most important injunction was the first:

Serve the shogun with single-minded devotion. Do not measure your loyalty by the standard of other domains. If any Aizu daimyo is disloyal to the Tokugawa house, he is no descendant of mine, and on no account are you to obey him.¹

Throughout the Tokugawa period, at the beginning of each new year, the code was read aloud by the school magistrate in

the presence of the daimyo and assembled samurai, who listened with heads bowed.

AIZU, A TOKUGAWA DOMAIN

The story of Aizu after Masayuki's death, in 1672, paralleled that of other large northeastern domains. For several generations it prospered. The castle town became a commercial as well as political center. But beginning in the early eighteenth century, deteriorating finances led the government to raise taxes and borrow from Mitsui and other merchant houses. In 1720, villagers in Minamiyama rebelled in protest against high taxes and corvée labor. In 1749, following a series of poor harvests, hundreds of Aizu peasants smashed and looted the houses of moneylenders and merchants, and breached the walls of the upper samurai district just outside the castle. The rioting, which lasted for seven days, was the worst of its kind in Aizu during the Tokugawa period. Forced to lower taxes, the domain borrowed more heavily; by 1752, it owed 364,800 gold *ryō*. To stabilize its revenues, it shifted the tax base from yearly surveys of land yield to a several-year moving average.

Finances recovered somewhat thereafter until 1781, when Aizu, and the rest of Japan, suffered another series of bad harvests. These marked the beginning of the Tenmei famine, which was particularly severe in northeastern Japan. In Aizu, the price of rice soared, starvation and disease were rampant, and many villagers abandoned their land. After agriculture recovered somewhat in 1787, the fifth daimyo, Matsudaira Katanobu, initiated a domain reform in tandem with the Kansei reform by the *bakufu* leader Matsudaira Sadanobu. Villages were put under the direct control of district officials, land was divided more equitably, production of candle wax, sake, and other local products was encouraged to counter the excessive dependence on rice, and rewards and punishments were reformed. Posts in the government were opened to men of talent, but at the same time,

social status was reinforced: Each of the eleven ranks of samurai was distinguished by the color of the ribbons used to fasten their *haori* surcoats or by the color of their kimono collars.

A most notable feature of Aizu was the moral training it gave to samurai of rank. Boys from ages six to nine were organized into neighborhood play groups of ten (*asobi no jū*). They spent the morning studying with individual teachers and in the afternoon met by turn at each other's homes. Before their play began, the most senior of the group recited the "seven rules."

1. We must not disobey our elders.
2. We must always bow to our elders.
3. We must not lie.
4. We must not act in a cowardly manner.
5. We must not pick on those who are weaker.
6. We must not eat in public.
7. We must not talk to girls.²

As each rule was proclaimed, the boys would respond, "Yes, yes," with vigorous nods of their heads. At the end they chorused, "Those things that are forbidden, we must not do." Punishments for infractions of the rules were graded and ranged from a slap on the hand with a bamboo rod, to holding a hand briefly over an open fire, being buried briefly in snow, or ostracism from the group. Ostracism was the most serious punishment, and an apology by parents was required for readmission to the group.

From age ten, samurai boys attended schools; by the end of the eighteenth century, a variety of schools had been established for samurai of all ranks, and for commoners as well. As a part of the fifth daimyo's reforms, a domain school, the Nisshinkan, had been built for the education of the four highest ranks of samurai. It was completed in 1803, and in the same year, the "Nisshinkan Injunctions for Children," a textbook, was compiled for the instruction of entering students. The book contained passages from the *Classic of Filial Piety* and other Confucian works, stories of exemplary Japanese historical figures,

and detailed injunctions on proper comportment. One injunction—no doubt useful at the school—was not to yawn or look bored in front of one’s elders. The school taught the Chinese classics, the Neo-Confucianism of Yamazaki Ansai, mathematics, medicine, astronomy, some Shinto studies, and the usual military subjects. The school grounds, located close to the castle, were extensive and contained a Confucian temple, two-storied lecture halls, a printing shop, a swimming pond, a teahouse, and even a rudimentary observatory. Aizu historians regard it as having been one of the finest schools in Japan at that time.

In 1805, a further set of seventeen rules was drawn up. Known as the “Instructions for the Very Young,” it bid children to rise early, wash their hands, rinse their mouth, not to begin eating until their parents had picked up their chopsticks, and so on. Little was left to chance. The rules no doubt applied to samurai daughters, as well as to sons, though books about Aizu are uniformly silent on the subject of their education. Girls presumably learned their letters at home. One authority does mention, however, that mothers made their children rehearse ritual suicide (*seppuku*) in front of the household Buddhist altar and gave their daughters daggers as a part of their trousseaus.³

Every Tokugawa domain had institutions to educate and discipline its samurai, but historians of Aizu view that domain’s samurai as having had an especially strict training. The consciousness of the domain’s close ties to the Tokugawa house, the founder’s injunction to serve it with unconditional loyalty, and the stress on hierarchy and self-discipline are seen as having shaped a distinctive ethos. Aizu samurai were known to be proud, austere, narrow-minded, and, above all, stubborn. Such was the character of the “Aizuppo.”

AIZU IN THE MEIJI RESTORATION

In the years before Perry’s arrival in 1853, Aizu, like other domains, was assigned the task of bolstering Japan’s coastal defenses. Despite financial difficulties, the domain performed

its duties as commanded. In 1806, after Russian raids on settlements in Hokkaido, Aizu patrolled the island's northern coast for three months. In all, 1,200 troops, most of whom had never been to sea, participated in the action. Costs were defrayed by borrowing from Aizu merchants and by selling to commoners the right to bear surnames and swords. In 1810, Aizu was ordered to patrol the Miura Peninsula to the south of Edo. The 180 troops it sent remained for ten years, and to pay for their upkeep, samurai stipends in the domain were cut. In 1846, Aizu was told to patrol the coast of the Bōsō Peninsula, a strategic area to the southeast of Edo across "Tokyo" Bay. The cost of maintaining 230 troops for seven years was defrayed by a temporary grant of the income from *bakufu* lands assessed at 31,000 *koku*. In consequence, though Aizu was a landlocked domain removed from centers of culture, commerce, and political power, its government and a considerable portion of its ruling class were made aware of a potential foreign threat to Japan.

Perry opened Japan to diplomatic relations with the West in 1854. During the four years that followed, a few collateral and outside daimyo emerged to seek a voice in national policy-making. They challenged the power of the hereditary daimyo, who, as *bakufu* councilors, had determined such matters. But in this first phase of Restoration politics, Aizu had no role; its daimyo, Matsudaira Katamori (1835–1893), was too young. Born the sixth son of the daimyo of Takasu, a collateral domain of 30,000 *koku*, Katamori had been adopted in 1846 as the heir to the daimyo of Aizu. He succeeded his adoptive father in 1852, at age seventeen, just one year before Perry's first visit to Japan. A later photograph of Katamori shows a young man of delicate build with regular, finely honed features; though dressed in full military attire, his expression is tentative and not particularly warlike. He was nevertheless said to be "direct and soldierly," with a reputation for "gentle humility and integrity."⁴

Aizu was also inactive during the second phase of politics, from 1858 to 1860, when the hereditary daimyo councilors reestablished their control over national politics. Headed by Ii

Naosuke, they purged daimyo, nobles, and samurai who had attempted to enter politics during the earlier period, decided the shogunal succession in favor of their own weak candidate, and signed a commercial treaty with the United States over the objections of the Kyoto court. Their reimposition of authority worked well until 1860, when Ii was assassinated by fanatics from the Mito domain. Ii's successors lacked the determination to continue his tough-minded policies, and the *bakufu* began to drift.

A third phase of politics, from 1860 to 1863, saw the Kyoto court emerge as an alternate center of political power. Supporting the court were radical young samurai, whose slogan was "Honor the emperor and expel the barbarians." Implied in the slogan was a criticism of the *bakufu*, which had been unable to expel the foreigners or deny them treaties and trade. Also supporting the court was the Chōshū domain, which had been more successful than Satsuma in mediating between the court and the *bakufu*. By late 1862, this combination of Chōshū and radical samurai held sway in Kyoto; together they plotted, assassinated "enemies of the court," and disrupted the social order. Parallel to these events during this third phase of politics was the reemergence of moderate collateral and outside daimyo who had been the targets of Ii's purge. They succeeded in taking national policy-making out of the hands of the *bakufu* council and into their own. This was achieved when Tokugawa Yoshinobu, daimyo of the Hitotsubashi house, was appointed as regent to the young shogun, and Matsudaira Keiei (Yoshinaga; Shungaku), daimyo of Fukui, was named as supreme councillor (*seiji sōsai*).

It was at this point that Matsudaira Katamori of Aizu stepped onto the stage of national politics. In 1862/5,* at the age of twenty-seven, he was made a *bakufu* advisor (*san'yo*). Several months later, he was named to the newly created post of Kyoto protector (*shugoshoku*); as protector he would take over from the Kyoto deputy (*shoshidai*) the vital tasks of pro-

*See p. 23 for translator's explanation of dates and calendar years.

tecting the security of the emperor and palace and policing the city of Kyoto. His appointment had been engineered by Yoshinobu and Keiei to strengthen their hand in Kyoto.

On hearing of Katamori's appointment, two Aizu elders hurried to Edo to advise him against accepting the post. Taking the position, they counseled, would be extremely risky—like “trying to put out a fire while carrying a load of firewood.” Heeding their advice, Katamori declined the appointment on the grounds that he lacked the talent to perform so important a task. He also protested that his samurai were unfamiliar with the ways of the imperial capital. Yoshinobu and Keiei immediately joined in efforts to persuade Katamori to accept the position. Aizu, they argued, had proven its loyalty to the *bakufu* over the years, political opinion within the domain was united, and its samurai were renowned for their stern warrior deportment. In one of several letters he sent to Katamori, Keiei wrote that “were Hoshina Masayuki alive today, he would certainly take on the job.”⁵ Unable to resist such arguments, Katamori accepted the post in 1862/18. He left Edo with a force of some one thousand Aizu samurai and arrived in Kyoto late in the year.*

With the arrival of Katamori, the tide that had favored Chōshū began to recede. Katamori asked for more troops to suppress extremist activity and wider authority to better control the daimyo and *bakufu* officials who had converged on the city. He quickly established contacts with pro-*bakufu* nobles, won the trust of the conservative emperor Kōmei, and began talks with representatives of Satsuma, who were disgruntled at Chōshū's success. The turning point came in 1863/8, when troops from Aizu and Satsuma seized the palace gates in a military coup d'état.⁶ Then, having cut off Chōshū's access to the court, they speedily suppressed the radical pro-emperor samu-

*As Kyoto protector, he was given 50,000 *ryō* as an office salary (*yakuryō*), a loan of 30,000 *ryō* to cover travel costs to Kyoto, and a monthly allotment of two thousand bales of rice and rice revenues equivalent to 10,000 *ryō*. These generous emoluments, we imagine, helped persuade him to accept the job.

rai movement in Kyoto. As the chief policeman of Kyoto, it is not surprising that Katamori was particularly disliked by the young extremist samurai.⁷

The Satsuma-Aizu coup inaugurated a fourth phase of politics, from 1863/8 to 1866, in which national decision-making centered on Kyoto and was in the hands of Yoshinobu, Katamori, and, to a lesser extent, Matsudaira Sadaaki, who was Katamori's younger brother and the new Kyoto deputy. During these years, the fortunes of Chōshū continued to plummet. In 1864, its forts at Shimonoseki were captured and destroyed by a four-nation fleet in retaliation for its having fired on foreign ships. Later in the same year, Chōshū troops were defeated by Aizu and Satsuma forces when they tried to recapture the Kyoto Palace. In 1865, Chōshū was forced to surrender to a twenty-four-domain *bakufu* army. The severed heads of the domain elders responsible for its radical policies were forwarded to the *bakufu* army headquarters. Originally, Katamori had been ordered to command the *bakufu* army, but the order was countermanded when it was decided that his role in Kyoto was critical.

Aizu's fortunes were decisively reversed in the final phase of politics leading to the Meiji Restoration, from 1866 to 1868. A civil war in Chōshū returned the radicals to power in that domain. Satsuma withdrew from the Kyoto coalition and entered into a secret alliance with Chōshū; it felt that it had not been given a voice in politics commensurate with its role in the 1863/8 coup. A desperate Chōshū, armed with superior weapons, single-handedly defeated a second *bakufu* expedition in 1866. Katamori argued strongly that the expedition should reform and continue its attack, but it was called off when the shogun died in 1866/7. Yoshinobu became the new shogun a few months later. By then it was too late to restore the fortunes of the *bakufu*.

In 1867/12 (January 1868 by the Western calendar), Satsuma, in alliance with Chōshū, and with the support of several other domains, seized the Kyoto Palace and proclaimed

the restoration of imperial rule. As its first act, the new court government stripped the shogun of his lands and abolished all *bakufu* offices.

Yoshinobu had earlier offered to return the reins of government to the emperor, but his vision of imperial rule was of a council of daimyo, which he would control by reason of his vast lands. When it was announced that he would lose his lands, Yoshinobu, who had withdrawn to Osaka Castle, sent an army of 15,000 to recapture the court. Katamori's voice was one of the strongest in favor of this action; 1,600 Aizu troops joined the *bakufu* ranks. The *bakufu* army was defeated by the smaller but better-armed troops of Chōshū and Satsuma in a battle outside Kyoto. Two Satsuma participants later told Ernest Satow, a British legation interpreter, that the Aizu men "fought very bravely."⁸ One samurai son remembers that his father deliberately disobeyed orders of retreat and charged with his sword into enemy ranks.⁹ During the four days of battle, 120 Aizu samurai died and 158 were wounded.

When news of the battle's outcome reached Osaka, Yoshinobu, Katamori, and other *bakufu* leaders fled by ship for Edo. In Edo, Katamori argued that eastern Japan should unite in a war against the "traitors at the side of the throne." Yoshinobu, however, realized that such a war would be futile. He sent a letter of submission to the court and withdrew from Edo Castle to a temple to await the dispositions of the new government.

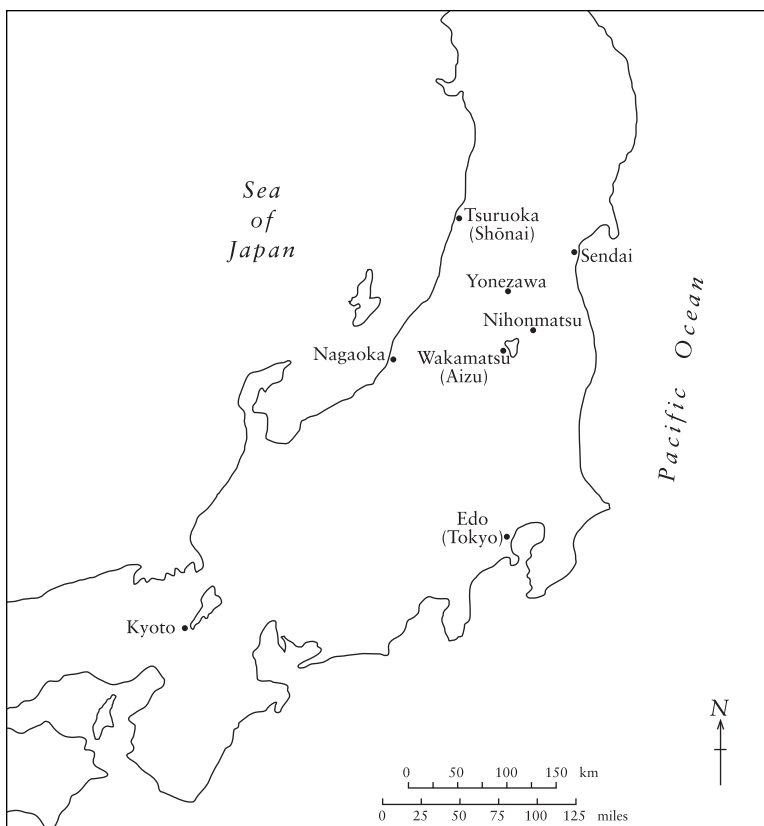
Katamori repaired to Aizu in 1868/2. Hoping to keep his lands and retainers, that is to say, hoping to be treated like other daimyo, he wrote to more than twenty daimyo asking them to intercede with the new government on his behalf. Katamori stated that he was willing to submit to the authority of the emperor's government, and protested that he had never opposed the court but had simply fought in self-defense against Satsuma and Chōshū and had wrongly been labeled "an enemy of the court." Not surprisingly, the Satsuma and Chōshū leaders in the new court government ignored his appeals and ordered the military subjugation of Aizu.

THE AIZU WAR

Early on, in 1868/1/17, the court government had ordered the Sendai domain to attack Aizu. Sendai did not comply. It was sympathetic to Aizu, and, like Aizu, saw the Restoration as a coup by a few western domains that had little national backing. In 1868/3, the government sent three thousand troops to Matsushima Bay, not far from the Sendai castle town, to put further pressure on the domain. If anything, the action backfired: Sendai joined the Yonezawa domain in convening a meeting of northeastern domains in 1868/4 and again in 1868/5. The outcome was a loose alliance of domains that protested the government's demands for Katamori's life and lands. Aizu and the other northeastern domains prepared for war.

The court government was not unhappy at the prospect of further military campaigns. It was confident that it could win the war and believed that victory would strengthen it against the domains in the rest of the country. By the spring of 1868, government armies had accepted the surrender of Edo and consolidated their grip on eastern Japan; by early summer they were advancing toward the northeast. The strategy of their commanders was to pick off the northeastern domains one by one. This was feasible because the alliance had no plan for joint military actions. Government troops followed the main trunk roads north and also landed on the coasts of the Sea of Japan and the Pacific Ocean. Several domains fought fiercely, but most surrendered quickly. The dates of surrender reveal the routes taken by the better-armed and numerically superior government forces: 7/29 Nagaoka, Nihonmatsu; 9/3 Yonezawa; 9/15 Sendai; 9/22 Aizu; and 9/23 Shōnai.

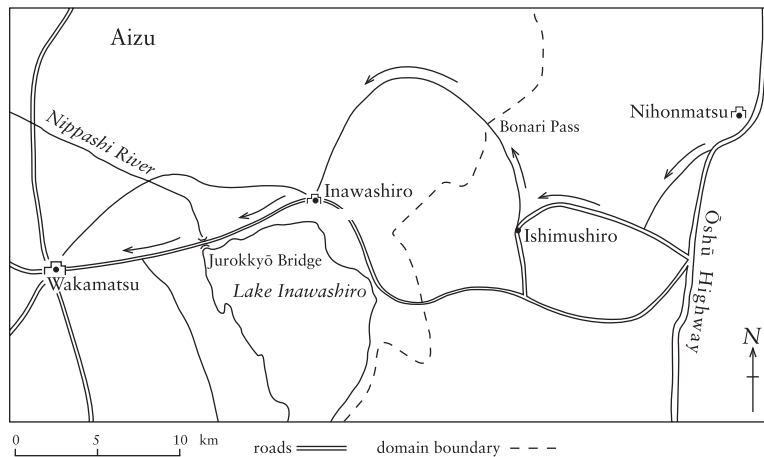
Of the battles in the northeast, that against Aizu was the most bitter. The government army originally planned to leave Aizu for last, for it was seen as the greatest and most determined foe. But in 1868/8 (late September by the Western calendar), Itagaki Taisuke, the field commander of one of the government armies, pressed for an immediate, full-scale attack against Aizu. "In this cold land," he said, "snow will inevitably



PRINCIPAL NORTHEASTERN DOMAINS

fall within thirty days, and a winter war will be disadvantageous for our troops who are accustomed to warmer climes.” He added, “Aizu is the trunk and Sendai and Yonezawa are merely the branches and leaves. Once the trunk is destroyed, the branches and leaves will wither away.”¹⁰

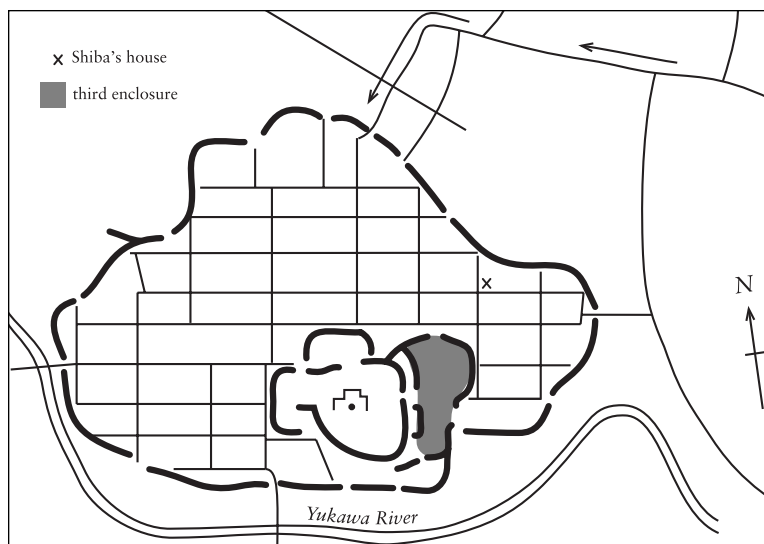
Most of Aizu’s seven thousand troops, three thousand of whom were peasant recruits, were fighting beyond its borders to the south and northwest. Itagaki assembled three thousand troops, mainly from Chōshū and Satsuma, at the castle town of Nihonmatsu on the Ōshū trunk road to the east of Aizu. In a



ROUTE OF ITAGAKI'S TROOPS

brilliant tactical move, on 1868/8/21, he started out on a road that led southwest from Nihonmatsu, then took a mountain path northward and crossed the Bonari Pass into Aizu. His soldiers then seized a fortification at Inawashiro, a town to the north of the lake of that name, crossed a strategic bridge over the Nippashi River, entered Wakamatsu, and captured a northern gate in the outer wall of the castle on 8/23. Until arriving at the castle town, they met only the lightest resistance. They were marching on foot and carrying their own supplies, and so for that age, the two-day, thirty-seven mile advance from Nihonmatsu to the castle town was a lightning strike.

When Itagaki's troops attacked the northern gate, the domain authorities rang the fire bell to summon the elderly samurai men, women, and children to the protection of the castle. Earlier, when Katamori returned from Edo to the domain, he had exhorted his samurai to "fight to the death to wipe out the stain on Aizu's honor." The women and children had been told by the authorities that they were free to act as they saw fit. When the fire bell rang, men and women alike acted with a calm and determination that often crossed over into self-sacrifice; indeed, many seemed to embrace death. One wonders



WAKAMATSU CASTLE

The castle had two sets of defenses: an outer moat, with an earthen wall extending the length of its inner bank, and an inner moat, which surrounded the castle proper. The outer moat enclosed an area of about 534 acres and contained the residential quarters of the upper samurai—some 440 houses, the domain school, granary, stables, prison, and other structures. Of the sixteen gates in the wall, the one captured by Itagaki, as indicated by the arrow, was to the north.

if they saw their fortunes as so bound up with their domain that their world would end with its downfall. Or were their actions the consequence of the Aizu ethos of samurai duty and honor?

One samurai son, who was fourteen at the time, wrote afterward: “I hastened to the inner enclosure of the castle. I knew of course I would never return home . . . not that I had the time to think of such matters. . . . All the women in my family had resolved to die, and yet, as I took leave, not one person shed a tear.”¹¹

Many of the elderly, women, and children chose to stay at home, for as noncombatants they would only be a hindrance and needlessly consume provisions in the castle. Of those who stayed behind, 230 took their own lives. In Shiba Gorō’s fami-

ly, his grandmother, mother, oldest brother's wife, and two sisters killed themselves. Elsewhere, another sister committed suicide with her wounded husband, two daughters, and two sets of her husband's parents, real and adoptive. In the family of Saigō Tanomo—the domain elder who had opposed Katamori's acceptance of the post of Kyoto protector—his mother, wife, five daughters, and two sisters killed themselves; if we include cousins and others in the extended family, twenty-one died in all. The older sister wrote as her farewell poem:

Each time I die and am reborn in the world,
I wish to return as a stalwart warrior.

The younger sister wrote:

I have heard that this is the way of the warrior,
and so I set out on the journey to the Land of the Dead.

Saigō's thirteen- and sixteen-year-old daughters composed a poem together:

Hand in hand, we will not lose our way,
So let us set forth on the mountain path to death.¹²

Another incident, famous in the annals of Aizu history, concerns the Byakkotai ("White Tigers"), a battalion of sixteen- and seventeen-year-old samurai youths who had been mustered to support the Aizu troops in battle. On 8/22, as Itagaki's troops advanced toward Wakamatsu, thirty-seven of the teenage soldiers were sent out with a larger force to halt the advancing troops. In the confusion of retreat, twenty became separated from the main body. They made their way to a hill, saw the castle shrouded in smoke, thought all was lost, and committed suicide. One survived.

Though Itagaki's troops had gained a foothold at a northern gate of the outer castle wall, other gates remained in Aizu hands. On hearing of the attack on the castle town, about one

thousand troops returned from defensive deployments on the domain's borders and entered the castle through a southern gate. Under cover of night, the Aizu men made forays into enemy positions. In one such foray, 110 of the raiders were killed. The corpses bore identification tags inscribed with their posthumous names and the phrase, "Died in battle on the twenty-ninth day of the eighth month, Keiō 4."

Reinforcements continued to bolster Itagaki's army until thirty thousand had assembled and surrounded the castle.¹³ On 9/3, the Yonezawa domain surrendered and called on Aizu to cease its struggle. To this, the domain elder Sagawa Kanbei, who had fought at Toba-Fushimi outside Kyoto, replied:

The reason we formed the alliance and took up arms was to remove the villains at the side of the emperor. Look at what their troops do: They plunder, kill innocent people, and rape—their cruelty knows no bounds. They are a band of evil men, not soldiers of the emperor. We have no recourse but to fight. I have heard that their commander-in-chief, Prince Ninnaji, has arrived at the village of Tōdera. . . . If I could meet with the prince and convince him that we are not enemies of the court, I would gladly submit. But without making this clear, I cannot possibly obey his order to surrender.¹⁴

On 1868/9/14, Itagaki launched an all-out offense: His troops burned the samurai houses in the outer castle precincts while fifty cannons pounded the castle day and night, some positioned 1,600 yards away on a hill overlooking the donjon. The Aizu warriors responded with old-fashioned, four-pound mortars with a trajectory of only eighty-five yards. Besieged within the inner walls of the castle were more than 3,000 warriors and more than 1,500 women and children. Women cooked and also nursed the wounded, older men molded bullets, and children flew kites in a vain demonstration of high morale. Soon ammunition, food, and water ran low; dead bodies were thrown into empty wells.

Katamori, having no choice but to surrender, asked Yonezawa to intercede. On the twenty-second of the ninth month, one

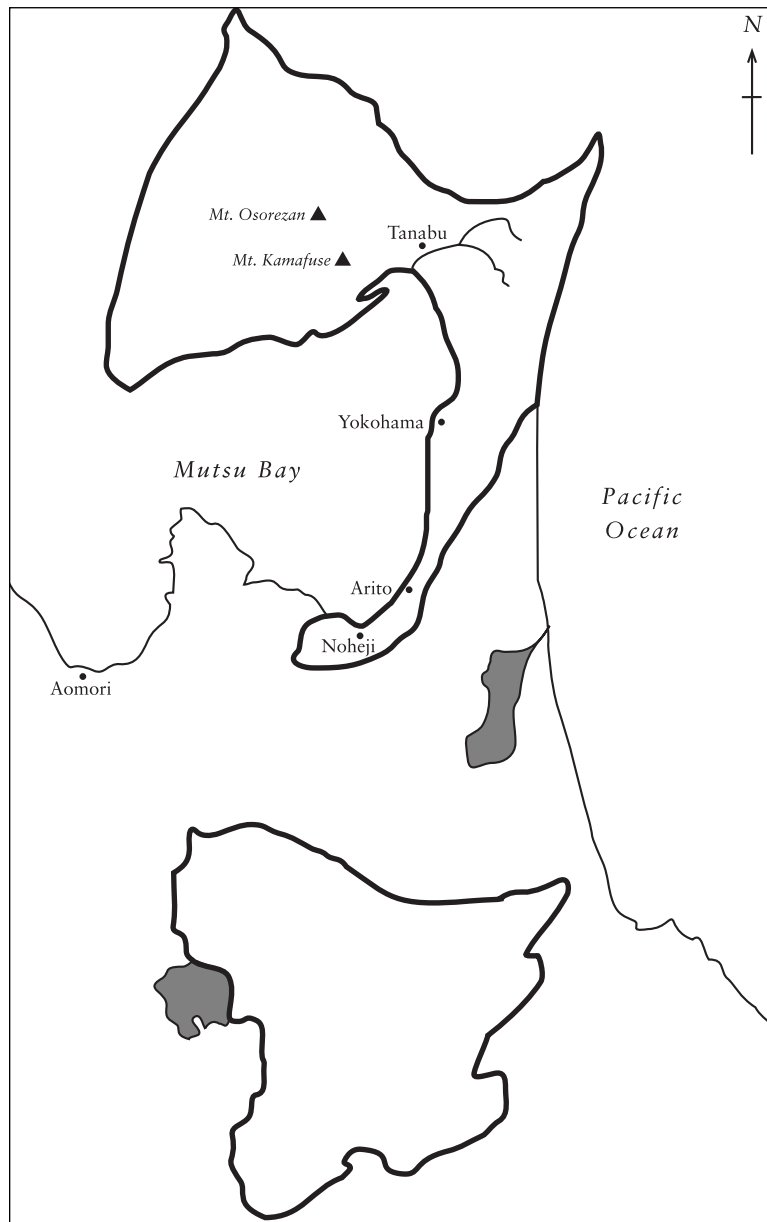
month after the siege had begun, a white flag was raised above the northern gateway of the castle. During the nine months between the battle outside Kyoto and the surrender of the castle, 2,610 Aizu men had died.¹⁵

AFTERMATH OF THE SURRENDER

Two days after the surrender, government troops entered the castle. Katamori was confined in a temple on the outskirts of Wakamatsu, and the men in the castle were sent to a camp in Inawashiro. One prisoner was a woman, Yamamoto Yaeko. Dressed in the clothes of her brother, who was killed in the battle outside Kyoto, she had insisted on being called by his name and fought side by side with the men. The men deployed at the domain borders were sent to a camp in Shiokawa. The elderly and women and children were free to do as they wished. In 1868/10, Katamori was sent to Tokyo; his death sentence was commuted to life-long domiciliary confinement.* The domain was confiscated. The following year, the Aizu samurai were sent to detention camps in Tokyo and in Takata on the Sea of Japan.

In 1869/11, Katamori's infant son was given permission to revive the daimyo name and line. He was granted land on the Shimokita Peninsula, at the northeastern tip of Honshu in what is now Aomori Prefecture. The new domain, named Tonami, consisted of two separate pieces of land composed mostly of volcanic ash and was buried half the year in snow. Tonami was assessed as having a product of thirty thousand *roku* of rice, but actually yielded less than one-fourth that amount. Late in the spring of 1870, the Aizu samurai in Tokyo and Takata left for Tonami. Their families in Aizu were allowed to join them soon after. The relocated population numbered about 14,800, or 2,797 samurai families.¹⁶ Their rice stipends were miserably small. They knew nothing of farming, but attempted to farm marginal lands. Inade-

*The government ordered one of the surviving domain elders to commit ritual *seppuku*.



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quately sheltered and clothed, many fell victim to malnutrition and disease. The local villagers, who saw them eating wild plants and roots, called them “Aizu caterpillars.”

With the abolition of the domains in 1871/7, the new domain became Tonami Prefecture and was soon merged with other small neighboring prefectures to become Aomori Prefecture. The Aizu samurai were told they could stay or return to Aizu. About two hundred families remained.

The people of Aizu never forgave the leaders of Chōshū and Satsuma. Other domains in the northeastern alliance had seen their lands reduced, but Aizu alone had been abolished and its samurai sent into exile. It is noteworthy that even today some natives of the Aizu Wakamatsu area bear an enmity toward Chōshū and Satsuma. Local historians of the former Aizu still refer to the Chōshū and Satsuma forces as the “western army” and not as the government army, the usual term. Shiba Gorō’s story is a vivid testimony to the tragic events of those years.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

It is not certain when Shiba Gorō wrote his memoirs. In the preface to the published version (Chūō kōronsha, 1971), the editor, Ishimitsu Mahito (1904–1975), writes that Shiba showed him the manuscript in 1942, during World War II, with a request to improve the style. Ishimitsu was a journalist by profession; his father, a graduate of the Army Cadet School, had been befriended by Shiba in his youth. He took the manuscript home, and on reading it, was “struck dumb” and “overcome with awe” by Shiba’s story. He copied the manuscript with Shiba’s permission, and over several visits, held extended conversations to fill in the details and clarify factual and chronological inconsistencies. On these occasions, he recalls, Shiba was often moved to tears. By the time Ishimitsu had finished his revisions, Shiba was in his eighties; his siblings were all dead, as were his wives (he married twice) and several of his grandchildren. On Japan’s defeat in August 1945,

Shiba attempted suicide; he died of his wounds four months later.

With permission from the Shiba family, Ishimitsu called the revised manuscript to the attention of the Chūō kōron publishing house. It was published in 1971 as *Aru Meiji-jin no kiroku: Aizu-jin Shiba Gorō no isho* (The chronicle of a certain Meiji person: The testament of Shiba Gorō, a native of Aizu). Since then the book, which includes an essay by Ishimitsu, has gone through thirty-three printings.

Shiba's original manuscript was believed to have been lost, but in the early 1990s, it was discovered by his grandson Shiba Yoshifumi while he was sorting through family papers. The manuscript is written with brush on thin rice paper and bound in Japanese style. Its title page merely reads "Boshin junnan kaikoroku" (A memoir of the sacrifices of the Boshin War).

The difference between Shiba's original manuscript, which I have read, and the published version consists mainly of the information that Ishimitsu wove in to provide a larger historical context. This was a valuable contribution, though he added his own, more recent interpretations of historical events. When the narrative shifts from the personal to the general, it is often a shift from Shiba to Ishimitsu. In footnotes, I indicate one or two such interpolations. Ishimitsu's narrative also occasionally leaps ahead of the story line; for the sake of clarity, whenever appropriate, I have taken the liberty of putting these materials in a more chronological order. Ishimitsu also seems to have amplified certain dialogues in the original manuscript, presumably based on his conversations with Shiba. Some original material has been omitted; usually it is of minor importance—lists of names, several rather artless poems, an account of an excursion to Kamakura and Mount Fuji with friends. The one serious, and to me inexplicable, omission is Shiba's account of the neighborhood association of young boys to which, he says, he owed his lifelong habits of self-reliance. I have restored this passage to the text, suitably footnoted. The prose style of Shiba and Ishimitsu, apart from occasional literary flourishes by the

latter, is very much the same—the sober classical style (*bungo-tai*) favored by those educated during the early Meiji era. The chapter titles were added by Ishimitsu. Footnotes and information enclosed in square brackets are the translator's.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

In both the introduction and translation, I have used the dates given in the published text. These follow the Japanese lunar-solar calendar up to the time the Western calendar was adopted, on January 1, 1873. Thus, for simplicity's sake, in the introduction, I write 1868/8/22, instead of writing “the twenty-second day of the eighth month of 1868.” Needless to say, the year 1868 in the Western solar calendar is not exactly congruent with the generally equivalent year-period in the lunar-solar calendar; depending on the date, it would be more precise to say Keiō 4, or Meiji 1. Every few years the lunar-solar calendar required the insertion of an extra, intercalary month. This is indicated as follows: 1862/i8. In the translation itself, I have used such phrases as “the twenty-second day of the eighth month” to retain the flavor of the Japanese text. Wherever relevant, I have provided the Western calendrical equivalent.

I have also left ages in the Japanese count, by which reckoning a child is one on the day of his birth and two on New Year's Day of the next calendrical year. Shiba, who was born in 1859/5/3, would have been a little over nine years and four months old at the time of the siege in 1868, an intercalary year. In Japanese usage, the family name comes first. When I have been unable to ascertain the reading of a name, or when Japanese sources differ, I have chosen the most commonly accepted reading. I have also amended several incorrect transcriptions of proper names that appear in the published edition.

Gold was the basis of coinage in eastern Japan, where Shiba lived. The standard unit was the *ryō*. One *ryō* equaled four *bu*, or sixteen *shu*. Silver was the basis of coinage in western Japan.

The exchange rate between gold and silver remained fairly stable throughout the Tokugawa period, with one gold *ryō* equaling sixty silver *monme*. In the 1860s, however, silver began to decline, and by 1871, one *ryō* equaled 192 *monme*. Copper pennies, or *mon*, were used throughout the country. Copper was also steadily devalued, and in 1867, one *ryō* equaled about eight thousand *mon*. Under the New Coinage Act of 1871, the yen replaced the *ryō* as the basic unit. One yen equals one hundred sen or one thousand *rin*. In 1872, when Shiba went to Tokyo as a servant, one *shō* (1.805 liters) of rice cost about four sen. One could go to the public bathhouse for one sen five *rin*, or get a haircut, including a shave, for twenty-five sen. An English-Japanese dictionary cost two yen fifty sen. In 1875, one could buy a bowl of buckwheat noodles for eight *rin*, a bowl of *azuki*-bean soup for three sen, a sweet bun for five *rin*. A policeman's starting monthly salary was six to seven *yen*. The reader will note that Shiba refers to various denominations throughout the narrative.

The size of a domain was expressed in terms of its estimated annual rice yield as measured in *koku* of rice (one *koku* equals 5.1 U.S. bushels). A samurai's rank stipend, or the yearly amount of rice to which he was entitled, was also expressed in terms of *koku*.