

## Contesting the Record:

### Katsu Kaishū and the Historiography of the Meiji Restoration

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#### Introduction

This essay examines different interpretations of the Meiji Restoration. In particular, it shows how former Tokugawa retainers, men who were on the losing side of Japan's civil war, sought to contest an "official" narrative of events that was emerging in the 1880s. The historical works of Katsu Kaishū (1823–1899) will be highlighted. In the 1880s and early 1890s Katsu was placed in charge of organizing the documentary record of the old regime. He compiled a series of histories covering the military, diplomatic, and financial fortunes of the Tokugawa family. Katsu was himself a key actor in the Restoration drama. Aside from these institutional histories, he published several accounts of the events of the 1860s based on his personal experience. His view of the Meiji Restoration and his evaluation of the legacy of Tokugawa rule offer a critical alternate interpretation of the birth of modern Japan.

Three questions inform this paper. How did Katsu Kaishū—a man who played a leading role in the events of 1868, a man who was on the "losing side"—view the Meiji Restoration as "history"? Why were he and others engaged in a flurry of historiographical work in the late 1880s and early 1890s? Finally, the paper makes inquiries into the relationship between narratives of the past and engagement with domestic and foreign issues of the present. Alternate readings of the Meiji Restoration held by Katsu Kaishū and Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901), for example, relate directly to the different prescriptions they proffered for Japanese foreign policy in the period leading up to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. Katsu, representative of the old regime, was opposed to war in Asia and urged mediation and a peaceful solution, much as he had done in negotiating the bloodless surrender of Edo Castle; Fukuzawa, the Westernizer, was strangely the champion of bushidō and martial solutions leading to Japanese hegemony in Asia. Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, as then, history wars over events such as the Meiji Restoration continue to influence the way people look at their nation and their world.

#### The Creation of an Orthodox View of the Meiji Restoration

What was the Meiji Restoration? When did it begin and when did it end? What was its significance? In the late 1860s some commoners interpreted the Restoration in millennial overtones. The god-emperor would bring on a new age of social renovation (*yonaoshi*). Adherents of the nativist teaching (*kokugaku*) envisioned the restoration of an ancient order of imperial rule in which Japan would sweep away the pollution of foreign Chinese and Western influences. The Satsuma and Chōshū men who engineered the palace coup in late 1867 were more practical. Using the imperial symbol, they sought to unite the nation and carry out reforms designed to preserve Japanese independence. Foreign observers were equally

divided in their immediate evaluation of the events of 1868. The British press hailed the revolution that would place Japan on the path of civilization, while the American press was more cynical. *The New York Times* described the inauguration of the new imperial regime as follows: "The mikado, who has been slowly and painfully emerging from the seclusion of centuries, like a butterfly from its chrysalis, has at length consummated the act, thanks to my Lord Satsuma, and has celebrated it by a royal coronation. In the imperial city of Kioto, at 8 o'clock A.M., on Oct. 12, year of grace 1868, the splendid farce was enacted, and the poor boy, born a priest and educated a woman, was dragged out to play the King for the pleasure of the Southern Daimios."<sup>1</sup> Enomoto Takeaki (1836–1908) and others who fought the new regime to the bitter end had even harsher words. The new imperial government was a sham: "The deliberations of the imperial government do not result from public discussion, but simply from the private views of one or two domains."<sup>2</sup> Enomoto set up a rival regime, a republic, in Hokkaido.

By the spring of 1869 Enomoto had been defeated, the civil war was over, and the new government was in firm control of the country. Gradually the differing views of what had taken place in 1868 coalesced into a common "official" narrative. 1868 was not a revolution, but a restoration of imperial rule (*ōsei fukko*). The historical slate was to be wiped clean. The Restoration marked a new beginning, similar to the inaugural rule of Emperor Jinmu (trad. r. 660–585 B.C.E.). The emperor and his supporters had overthrown the forces of tradition. The corrupt, weak, and self-serving rule of the Tokugawa family was no more; it had been replaced by the enlightened and selfless rule of Emperor Meiji (1852–1912). Under the leadership of the emperor, Japan would be able to lay the foundations for a strong, rich, and independent nation-state.<sup>3</sup>

The problem of history was a priority of the new regime. As early as 1869, Emperor Meiji ordered the compilation of a history of Japan in order to "set right the relation between monarch and subject, to make clear the distinction between civilization and barbarity, and to implant the principle of virtue throughout the empire."<sup>4</sup> A government history bureau was established, the forerunner of the Historiographical Institute (Shiryō Hensanjo) now at Tokyo University, and among other projects the massive task of compiling documents relating to the course of the Meiji Restoration was begun. The *Fukkoki* (Records of the Restoration) and *Meiji shiyō* (Outline of Meiji History) were completed in 1889.<sup>5</sup> This monumental collection in its modern reprint edition consists of fifteen thick volumes of documents. Although high standards of positivistic research were to be employed, the histories were clearly intended to provide legitimacy to the imperial government. Document after document showed clearly how "men of determination" and loyalist daimyo fought on behalf of the imperial cause in the waning days of Tokugawa rule.<sup>6</sup>

In the Meiji period other schools of history emerged. Of particular interest is the so-called "history of civilization" (*bunmei shiron*) school that was influenced by current trends in Western historiography. Henry Thomas Buckle's (1821–1862) *History of Civilization in England* and François Guizot's (1787–1874) *General History of Civilization in Europe* were both translated into Japanese in the early 1870s.<sup>7</sup> Their concern with progress and development lent weight to arguments that the old regime had been a drag on Japan's advance toward civilization. Such were the conclusions of Taguchi Ukichi's (1855–1905) *Nihon kaika shōshi* (A Short History of Japan's Enlightenment), published in 1877.<sup>8</sup> Fukuzawa Yukichi was an-

other proponent of enlightenment history. His analysis of the causes of the Meiji Restoration, contained in *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, is instructive.<sup>9</sup> He noted that before the Restoration “the Japanese people had suffered for many years under the yoke of despotism. Lineage was the basis of power. . . . Throughout the land there was no room for human initiative; everything was in a condition of stagnation.”<sup>10</sup> But Fukuzawa had to admit that even in all that stagnation, there was some progress and by the end of the Tokugawa period people were frustrated and ready for action. Commodore Perry’s arrival in the 1850s provided the opportunity for reform. “People actually set eyes on foreigners and heard them speak, read Western books and translations, increasingly broadened their horizons, and then woke up to the fact that a government, even a demonic one, could be overthrown by human powers.”<sup>11</sup> For Fukuzawa, the Meiji Restoration was certainly the occasion for “bright rule,” bringing an end to the darkness that had long prevailed over the Japanese people. He and other enlightenment scholars, as Tanaka Akira (b. 1928) notes, were easily able to accommodate themselves to establishment views of the Restoration.<sup>12</sup> The young emperor was doubly confirmed as the legitimate force behind Japan’s struggle to gain recognition as one of the civilized nations of the world.

### Alternate Narratives

In the early years of the Meiji period there were few who contested this official view of the past. The Meiji Restoration was the work of patriotic young men from the Southwestern domains, especially Satsuma and Chōshū. They had restored the emperor to his rightful place, and under his leadership they sought to create a new Japan. As Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909) said in his famous “Hinomaru” speech given in San Francisco, “Japan is anxious to press forward. The red disk in the centre of our national flag shall no longer appear like a wafer over a sealed empire, but henceforth be in fact what it is designed to be, the noble emblem of the rising sun, moving onward and upward amid the enlightened nations of the world.”<sup>13</sup> By the late 1870s and into the 1880s, however, some people began to adopt a different view of Japan’s past. Ueki Emori (1857–1892) and other thinkers related to the People’s Rights Movement, for example, could see in the Meiji Restoration the onset of despotic rule rather than its destruction.<sup>14</sup> By the end of the 1870s he and other People’s Rights activists were calling for a “second Meiji Restoration” in order to replace autocratic rule with that of a parliamentary system. By the same token, they found inspiration in the “public discussion” (*kōron*) discourse active in the late Tokugawa period. Gotō Shōjirō (1838–1897), leader of the Daidō Danketsu Movement in the 1880s, dismissed the emperor from the center of the Restoration. Instead he saw the events of the late 1860s as a revolution that fought for people’s rights and national independence.<sup>15</sup>

Writers whose sympathies lay with the former Tokugawa regime; some of them former Tokugawa retainers such as Katsu Kaishū, were among the most influential critics of the official narrative of the Restoration.<sup>16</sup> Some of them, like the founders of the Edo Kai (Edo Association), sought to establish a more positive memory of Tokugawa society. The first issue of their journal, *Edo kaishi*, published on 26 August 1888 (the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary to the day of Ieyasu’s entry into Edo), emphasized the outstanding debt modern Japan owed to the Tokugawa past, not the least of which was a tradition of peace, stability, and moral integrity.

According to them, the Tokugawa era was “the period in which Japanese civilization achieved its greatest progress and development.”<sup>17</sup> Instead of progress, the members of the Edo Kai feared that the period since the Restoration was leading Japan in the wrong direction.<sup>18</sup>

Another group, equally nostalgic for the past, sought to give primacy of place to the Tokugawa in narrating the events of the Restoration. Fukuchi Gen'ichirō (Ōchi, 1841–1906), a former bakufu retainer who distinguished himself in the Meiji Period as editor of the *Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun*, wrote a series of histories of the bakufu and bakufu leaders that told the story of the Restoration from the Tokugawa point of view. His *Bakufu suibō ron* (On the Collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate), published in 1892, is the most famous. He was conscious of the newness of his approach: “Earlier works may have been studies of the Meiji Restoration, but they fail to describe the fall of the bakufu.”<sup>19</sup> He defended the Tokugawa family against charges of disloyalty to the throne. And while the narrowness of the Tokugawa feudal system could be blamed for its downfall, he did credit the regime with the ability to carry out reform. It was the bakufu, he noted, that decided to open the country to the outside world in the 1850s; and it was the anti-foreignism of Chōshū and Satsuma that was the real cause of the Tokugawa family's failure to insure stability in the 1860s.<sup>20</sup>

### Katsu Kaishū

Katsu Kaishū is known primarily for his role as mediator in the last days of Tokugawa rule.<sup>21</sup> It was he who represented the Tokugawa side in the negotiations with Saigō Takamori (1828–1877) over the surrender of Edo Castle in the spring of 1868. Born in 1823 into the house of an impoverished retainer of the Tokugawa family, Katsu had obtained training in Western military science and because of that come to the attention of ranking bakufu officials after the visits by Commodore Perry and his warships in 1853 and 1854. Employed by the shogunate, Katsu worked on behalf of naval reform and in 1860 was captain of the *Kanrinmaru* as it sailed across the Pacific, carrying the first Tokugawa mission to the United States. During the 1860s his attempt to create a truly national navy failed. He criticized bakufu policies that sought to strengthen the Tokugawa at the expense of the other daimyo. This earned him a good reputation in the anti-bakufu domains of Satsuma and Chōshū. In 1868, in command of all Tokugawa forces, he tried to obtain terms of surrender generous to the Tokugawa family, but failed.<sup>22</sup>

In the Meiji period Katsu served as advisor to the new government. Between 1872 and 1875 he held the important office of Naval Minister. Despite his entry into the new government, he did not slacken his commitment to the Tokugawa family. He helped to establish a Tokugawa banking institution designed specifically to grant loans to needy former retainers of the Tokugawa and their families. He organized fund-raising societies for the repair and preservation of Tokugawa family temples and shrines. In 1880, for example, he set up the Hōkō Society for the repair of the Tōshōgū Shrine in Nikkō. Finally, he sought reconciliation between the imperial household and the Tokugawa family. His aim was to erase once and for all the stigma of the designation “enemy of the court” that had hung over the Tokugawa family since 1868.

On 2 March 1898, Katsu was successful in arranging a special audience with the Meiji emperor and empress for Tokugawa Keiki (Yoshinobu, 1837–1913), the last shogun. In his

diary entry for that day, in an unsteady hand, the old Tokugawa retainer asked: “Have my efforts for the past thirty years at last made some headway?”<sup>23</sup> For him the Meiji Restoration may have begun with the “Restoration of Imperial Rule” edict of the 12.9.1867, but it did not end with the takeover of Edo Castle, or with imperial victory in the war against the Northeastern League or against Enomoto and the Hokkaido Republic. In Katsu’s mind the Meiji Restoration ended only in 1898 with the recovery of honor by the Tokugawa family. Less than one year later, in January 1899, he died. By the traditional reckoning, he had reached the auspicious age of seventy-seven.<sup>24</sup>

Katsu’s activities in the 1880s included the compilation and editing of documents relating to the history of the Tokugawa bakufu, especially in its final years. His histories of bakufu financial institutions, *Suijinroku* (five volumes) and *Suijin yoroku* (one volume), appeared in 1887.<sup>25</sup> His history of the bakufu navy, *Kaigun rekishi* (two volumes), was published in 1888,<sup>26</sup> followed by a history of the army, *Rikugun rekishi* (three volumes), published in 1890,<sup>27</sup> and a history of late Tokugawa foreign relations, *Kaikoku kigen* (Origins of the Opening of the Country, five volumes), published in 1893.<sup>28</sup> A project was begun, but never completed, to compile documents relating to the history of Edo Castle. Considering the breadth and depth of the work—the histories comprise fifteen volumes in the Keisō Shobō edition of his collected works—it is surprising that these texts have received little scholarly attention. Studies of Katsu Kaishū, and there are many, normally end with his role in the 1868 civil war. Some books note his role in the 1873 debate over Korea and other foreign policy issues in the Meiji period (he was, for example, one of the few Meiji statesmen opposed to war with China in the 1890s), but scant mention is given to his work as a historian. Similarly, studies on Meiji historiography overlook Katsu’s achievement as an historian. Tanaka Akira’s otherwise excellent essay on pro-bakufu views of the Restoration makes no mention of Katsu’s histories.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Ōkubo Toshiaki’s (1900–1995) study of the formation of modern Japanese historiography omits Katsu and other former bakufu retainers, although it does cover works relating to the role of the domains during the Restoration.<sup>30</sup> Yet exactly because they provide an alternative reading to the official narrative of the Meiji Restoration, Katsu’s histories are valuable, and moreover they preserve many Tokugawa official documents that have since been destroyed by fire and other disasters.

### **The History of Bakufu Finances: *Suijinroku***

The first of Katsu’s histories was the *Suijinroku*, a history of bakufu finances, of 1887. It was based on the now-lost archives of the bakufu treasury (*kanjō bugyō*). It that regard alone, the five volumes of documents—touching on topics such as population, taxes, river management, currency, and stipends—are an invaluable resource for students of Tokugawa period social and economic history. The title of the collection is difficult to translate: “A Record of Dust Blown Away” hardly sounds felicitous. The title does, however, contain interesting clues about Katsu’s purpose in compiling these documents. It refers to a famous dream of the legendary Yellow Emperor. The Yellow Emperor, like others of the early sage kings, was in constant search for the secret of good government. In his dream the Yellow Emperor sees dust being swept from heaven. The dream is interpreted, through a series of linguistic twists, to indicate the imminent arrival of an able administrator who would assist the emperor in

bringing about reform.<sup>31</sup> Katsu's preface to the *Suijinroku* refers to this legend. "Life is but a single long night. . . . It is all a dream. This book is but the telling of a dream in a dream."<sup>32</sup> On the one hand Katsu was dusting off old documents that might well be a meaningless task. On the other hand, Katsu thought the example of the Tokugawa age could provide valuable lessons for contemporary political and economic problems. Indeed, upon completing the manuscript, Katsu personally delivered a copy to Matsukata Masayoshi (1835–1924), the Minister of Finance.

Matsukata, from Satsuma and a dozen years junior to Katsu, had assumed the position of Minister of Finance in 1881, and had immediately implemented measures to reduce the amount of paper currency in circulation, divest government-operated enterprises, cut government spending, raise taxes, and establish a central bank. The effect of these policies was deflationary, and though certain of the measures proved advantageous to rich landlords and industrialists, they hurt small farmers and the urban poor. The government used force to suppress a series of rural riots demanding more equal distribution of wealth and power. By 1885, the people's rights movement had been silenced and the government was at work devising a constitution that would solidify the position of the emperor as "sacred and inviolable." At the same time education became progressively nationalist in content, capped by the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education. By the time the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) broke out, the Meiji state had fully elaborated the imperial system that remained in force through the Second World War. In a sense, these developments marked the fulfillment of the Meiji Restoration as the advent of a benevolent but absolute imperial reign.

Such too were the findings of official history projects such as the *Fukkoki* and the *Meiji shiyō*, both completed, as noted earlier, in 1889. Needless to say, Katsu and other formerly pro-Tokugawa writers objected to these conclusions. Like the prominent journalist (and one-time bakufu interpreter) Fukuchi Gen'ichirō, Katsu gave little credit to the pro-Kyoto forces when he composed his account of the Restoration. The bakufu had overextended itself; its attempt at absolute hegemony was the cause of civil war. Katsu was critical of Tokugawa leadership which had failed to "care for the people" (*bokumin*) as its first priority. Katsu, like Fukuchi, placed emphasis on the "fall" of the bakufu rather than the "restoration" of the emperor.

Katsu's *Suijinroku* can also be read as criticism of Matsukata's economic policies in the 1880s. On 8 May 1887, the same year as *Suijinroku* was published, Katsu was awarded the title of count (*hakushaku*). He attempted to refuse the honor, and when that was unsuccessful, managed to avoid the knighting ceremony by pleading illness. By way of making amends for his absence, he paid a visit to Itō Hirobumi, prime minister at the time, on 25 May, to express his gratitude. He had more than thanks on his mind, however, and he used this occasion to submit a twenty-point memorial criticizing the economic, political, diplomatic, and cultural policies of the day.<sup>33</sup> He voiced particular concern over the dominant role played by Satsuma and Chōshū men in government affairs. Favoritism and political infighting should be strictly avoided and the welfare of the common people should be given first priority. "The poverty of the people," Katsu warned, "leads to the poverty of government." Measures for tax relief should be enacted, and military conscription should, in part, be replaced by alternate service, especially donations of labor for railroad construction. Despotism must be rejected and reform must be gradual, always taking the people's interests into consideration. China,

Japan's neighbor, must be given the respect it deserved. Trade with China should be encouraged and made the basis of Japan's economic strength. "We should not view the Chinese as enemies, but rather have intercourse with them on a basis of trust." Finally, Katsu criticized the recent vogue of ballroom dancing. "Recently high officials, unbefitting their station, have been attending parties and night entertainments and in other ways swimming in extravagance."<sup>34</sup> This was a jab at Itō and Matsukata and other government leaders who had joined in the Western-style socializing of the elite at the Rokumeikan, dancing the night away, in Katsu's view, while small farmers were forced into tenancy and consumer taxes cut deep into the livelihood of the poorer members of society. Implied was a warning that the Meiji leaders in the late 1880s were heading down the same path as the bakufu had taken in the late 1860s.

Moreover, *Suijinroku* indirectly criticized Matsukata's economic policies by drawing (unfavorable) contrasts with Tokugawa ideals. Taxes, he maintained, were lower and collected with more fairness during the Tokugawa period. Good government should seek to "care for the people" and be receptive to popular grievances. Tokugawa laws had provided the basis for a well-ordered and stable society; reforms were undertaken and laws changed only after mature consideration, and then on a careful and gradual basis.

Katsu was one of the first to add a golden touch to descriptions of Edo period society. Indeed, his positive reflections on the Edo period are strikingly similar to later attempts by scholars to rescue the pre-Meiji past from darkness and feudal decadence.<sup>35</sup> But between the lines of Katsu's texts emerge sharp criticisms of the Meiji regime. Its zeal on behalf of change meant that Tokugawa laws and customs were discarded. The new system, however, failed to provide for social stability, and meant that in many ways the people were worse off. Katsu's conclusion was that the experience of the Edo period continued to be relevant to the sorts of problems confronting Japan in the years well after the Meiji Restoration. There were positive lessons to be learned and warnings to be heeded.

### Katsu's Restoration

Aside from Katsu's work in preserving the record of the Tokugawa bakufu, he left several narrative accounts of the last days of the old regime. Here Katsu often wrote from first-hand experience, basing himself on his (at the time unpublished) diary.<sup>36</sup> These works include *Kainanroku* (Explaining Difficulties, 1884), *Danchōki* (A Record of Grief, 1888), *Gaikō yosei* (The Power of Diplomacy, 1889), and *Bakufu shimatsu* (Last Days of the Bakufu, 1895).<sup>37</sup> Finally, in his later years, Katsu published his (dictated) memoirs (*Hikawa seiwa* [Conversations with the Sage of Hikawa], 1898) and a collection of interviews (*Kaishū zadan* [Conversations with Kaishū], 1899).<sup>38</sup>

Although he enjoyed government sponsorship for his historiographical endeavors, Katsu's account of the Restoration differs greatly from "official" narratives. Indeed, he may well have been prompted to contest the record that was itself emerging in the late 1880s. His version of the Restoration paid scant attention to the young Meiji emperor and his loyal supporters. Like that of Fukuchi Gen'ichirō, it focused instead on the fall of the bakufu. His hero was the last shogun, Tokugawa Keiki, and the climax of his drama came with the peaceful surrender of Edo Castle in the spring of 1868 and not the military coup that restored the

ancient imperial system in the last month of 1867. What follows is a summary of Katsu's account of the "last days of the bakufu," following the text of the *Bakufu shimatsu*, written in the mid-1880s, but not published until 1895.<sup>39</sup>

Tokugawa Keiki returned to Edo on the twelfth day of the first month, 1868, after Tokugawa troops had been defeated in their attempt to re-take the Imperial Palace in Kyoto. Katsu's narrative of the events becomes detailed from this point up to the surrender of Edo Castle on the eleventh day of the fourth month. "After Keiki returned to Edo and re-entered the Castle, the excitement of the *hatamoto*, various officials, and their retainers was extreme. . . . They spoke of nothing but mad, absurd, violent plots of reprisal. They were out of control. It was like a huge hive of wild bees broken loose."<sup>40</sup> Oguri Tadamasu (1827–1868) and others pressed the deposed shogun to continue to fight, but according to Katsu, Keiki had determined otherwise. On the eleventh day of the second month, he announced his intention to surrender and entered domiciliary confinement. Katsu was pleased with the decision, but other retainers pushed for war. "We can stop the imperial army at Hakone pass, unite the lords of the Kantō, and make a solid defense." Some said that "if Keiki were personally to lead the troops, he could invigorate their *bushi* spirit and make them passionate warriors." Still others wanted to send warships to attack Osaka, and many simply shouted, "Subdue Satsuma and Chōshū!"<sup>41</sup>

According to Katsu's account, Keiki attempted to curb their bellicose spirit: "I wholly respect the imperial decision and wish to apologize for the errors I have committed. Although there is reason to be resentful, if we fight and there is no reconciliation, we will commit the same mistakes as India and China and the entire nation will collapse. I cannot bear to cause the people suffering. My guilt will pile up and increasingly I will incur the anger of the emperor. You retainers should understand me and not create any violent uprising. Those who do not heed me and act rashly are no retainers of mine."<sup>42</sup>

Katsu reports his own warning against rash actions, in which he stressed that although victory was possible, submission was the most advantageous course of action:

If we decide now upon a course of war, both high and low must be resolved to offer their lives. First, I will lead warships to Suruga and land two to three hundred troops there. The imperial army will attack, and the odds being against our troops, we will no doubt suffer defeat. Thereupon, the enemy troops will take advantage of the situation and advance. When they get close to Kiyomigaseki our warships will attack them from the side. In this way we can certainly break up the enemy. Simultaneously, our troops should engage them in hand-to-hand warfare while cannon power from the warships breaks up the nucleus of their army. In this way we will immediately gain a victory. Taking advantage of this, the Kantō military spirit will flourish. Immediately we will urge our eastern allies to set fires and prevent the [pro-court, anti-bakufu] army from communicating with each other and regrouping. Then I will lead three warships to Osaka Harbor and cut communications between the western and middle provinces, both by land and sea, and if necessary the city of Osaka can be reduced to ashes by the fire of our ships. Thus the base of supply for provisions for Kyoto being cut off, we may calmly view the situation and await the result.<sup>43</sup>

Katsu continued, however, to note that victory would only be illusory; instead of a reassertion



of Tokugawa control over the nation, military hostilities would lead to foreign domination. "But still the nation will collapse, because the lords of Kyushu will give free play to their wild spirit through the English."<sup>44</sup> The only way to avoid national humiliation, Katsu reasoned, was to surrender to the imperial forces.

Katsu continued his narrative by citing the alternative plan of action that he had proposed: "The spirit of the Kantō forces for war is, I confess, the spirit of passion. If we could only demonstrate our peaceful intention, with the sole purpose of tranquility, for the happiness and safety of the people, and are willing to sacrifice our personal interests and possessions, to surrender even our arms and castles, thus leaving the fate of the House of the Tokugawa to the will of Heaven, and this for the sake of our common country, then will nothing be able to harm us."<sup>45</sup>

Katsu's history quotes the threats that had been made on his life in response to his call for peace: "We will cut off Katsu Awa's head and offer it as a sacrifice to the God of War, as he is surrendering us into the hands of the enemy."<sup>46</sup> At one point, as he attempted to dissuade Tokugawa troops from deserting, shots were fired in his direction, killing three men standing at his side.

Writing about this later on, he did not omit testimony of his own heroic resolve. "Not a shadow of doubt did I have that I was proceeding right. I resolved that if, in the imminent danger to the city, we could not save the innocent multitude, we should, at least, be the first to sacrifice ourselves."<sup>47</sup>

Katsu's narrative of his negotiations with Saigō Takamori over the surrender of Edo Castle on the thirteenth and fourteenth days of the third month, 1868, are of particular interest to later historians. He argued that he proclaimed to Saigō, "If you are bent on threatening weak people with brutal force, we shall not shrink from accepting the challenge. Even as it is, we are making ourselves the laughing stock of foreign nations. If you will spare the city, I will be personally and officially grateful even unto death. When the Mikado is restored Edo will naturally become the capital of the new empire; the castle and its equipments are yours, and the land yielding millions of koku of rice to the House of Tokugawa can help supply administrative expenditure. Besides, as foreign complications are now pending, we must be aware that our helpless country does not follow the disastrous example and fate of India and similar conquered countries. In the face of a common danger internal strife should give place to patriotic harmony and helpfulness; and foreign countries seeing this, their faith in us will be strengthened and their friendship augmented."<sup>48</sup>

Katsu's arguments proved effective. "Saigō immediately countermanded the order for the assault contemplated on the city on the morrow, and I returned alone on horseback to report to Keiki. I was not surprised to be fired on three times, at dusk, as I approached my house. Fortunately the bullets passed over my head, and I escaped."<sup>49</sup>

The castle was surrendered without bloodshed, and Katsu reported that lenient treatment was to be afforded the Tokugawa: "His Majesty, the Mikado, is graciously pleased to allow the said house to be perpetuated and leniently treated, and the life of Keiki to be spared in retirement and seclusion (at Shizuoka)."<sup>50</sup>

Katsu concluded his account by urging the imperial government to act with discretion, otherwise the new regime would be no better than the old, and would resemble the fable of a soldier who, "having fled from the enemy fifty steps, laughed at another soldier who had

fled a hundred steps. . . . Future generations must not rest content with the meritorious deeds of the past, or abandon themselves to luxury and ease, satisfied simply with the restoration of the imperial power, but should lay broad and deep the foundations of a progressive and military nation, elevating by united effort their country's prestige in the Far East, and not forgetting to let their power be felt in the world. Such is my hope, and could I but see it realized, I should not shudder at the thought of being beheaded or enduring any punishment, however severe."<sup>51</sup>

### Conservative Backlash

Katsu's account of the Restoration placed primacy on decisions made by the Tokugawa side to protect national interests. He emphasized the importance of restraint and mediation. Moreover, his and other revisionist accounts that emerged in the 1880s downplayed the role played by young activists from Satsuma and Chōshū and their quest to restore the emperor. As Carol Gluck notes, by the time of the promulgation of the Constitution in 1889, the terms "loyalty to the emperor" and "expel the barbarian" had lost their magic touch. The Restoration "had so diminished in meaning that it had practically to be reinvented in order to give modern Japan a historical first principle."<sup>52</sup> New accounts placed emphasis on public and popular opinion, on the need for a "second restoration" to complete the fight against absolutism, and, as in the case of Katsu Kaishū, on Tokugawa contributions to the new nation-state. In addition, the development of a modern school of critical history at Tokyo Imperial University threatened believers in a Japanese national essence (*kokutai*) centered on the emperor.<sup>53</sup>

Conservative ideologues fought back. The Imperial Rescript on Education (1890), for example, could be used to stifle academic freedom; from the 1890s it became nearly impossible to write about the imperial family except to extol it. In 1891, Kume Kunitake (1839–1931), chair of the Department of History at Tokyo Imperial University, came under attack for asserting in a journal article that Shinto was simple nature worship and hinting that Japanese imperial ancestors had Korean roots.<sup>54</sup> More broadly, a number of conservative scholarly associations were founded in the late 1880s and 1890s, many of them dedicated to an elevation of Japan's unique emperor system and its history. In 1888, for example, Nishimura Shigeki (1828–1902) helped to found the Meiji Kai (Meiji Association); its journal, the *Meiji-kai sōshi*, published a series of articles clarifying aspects of Japan's unique *kokutai*. That same year Miyake Setsurei (1860–1945), Shiga Shigetaka (1863–1927), and others founded the Seikyōsha; its journal *Nihonjin* was dedicated to "the preservation of the national essence" (*kokusui hozon*).<sup>55</sup> Of particular concern to historiographical debates was the establishment, in 1889, of the Ishin Kai (Restoration Association). Spearheaded by former daimyo from Satsuma, Chōshū, Tosa, and Mito as well as leading members of the court nobility (Sanjō, Iwakura, and Nakayama), the association was founded to collect and publish documents relating to the "great achievement of the Meiji Restoration" (*Meiji chūkō no daigyō*).<sup>56</sup> The Ishin Kai professed academic neutrality, but as can be seen from its leadership, representing families active in the support of the imperial cause, the association lent its weight to the formation of an ideology of imperial loyalism. Its main activity was a mammoth oral history project. Between 1892 and the completion of the project in 1938, some 411 volumes of interviews with men and women connected with the Restoration were published. Despite its clear bias

for the imperial side the *Shidankai sokkiroku* [Stenographic Records of Historical Narratives] continues to be an invaluable source for any study of the Meiji Restoration.<sup>57</sup>

Fukuzawa Yukichi added his weight to arguments against the pro-Tokugawa version of the “fall of the bakufu.” In 1891 he sent copies of a manuscript entitled “Yasegaman no setsu” (On Fighting to the Bitter End) to Katsu Kaishū, Enomoto Takeaki, Kimura Kaishū (1830–1901), Kurimoto Jōun (1822–97) and other eminent survivors of the old regime.<sup>58</sup> The essay criticized Katsu and Enomoto for their failure “to fight to the bitter end” at the time of the Meiji Restoration. According to Fukuzawa, the peaceful surrender of Edo Castle was nothing but an expedient; in the long run Katsu’s failure to rally Tokugawa troops had harmed Japan’s martial spirit.

At that time (1868) I knew as well as Katsu that the weakened bakufu had no chance of victory. Nonetheless, I also knew that, in order to maintain Japan’s martial spirit, the time was not right to make calculations over questions of victory or defeat. The very survival of the nation was at stake. One may strive for victory and be defeated, but there are few examples of people who strive for defeat and gain a victory. Katsu, however, had already adopted a defeatist position, and without engaging the enemy gave orders for the ruling authority of the Tokugawa family to dissolve itself. He earnestly sued for peace, saying that people would be killed in military action and property needlessly destroyed. While he sought to soften the loss of life and wealth, he cannot escape blame from harming Japan’s warrior spirit of dogged endurance so vital to the make-up of the country.<sup>59</sup>

Katsu’s active role in the Restoration reached its climax with the surrender of Edo Castle; to Fukuzawa this was a “shameful episode in our history.” Fukuzawa worried that any praise of Katsu’s efforts at peacemaking would not only slight Japanese national spirit (*Yamato damashii*), but dampen any enthusiasm among the people to fight on behalf of their country. “In the future how can we be certain to avoid a crisis brought on by threats from foreign countries? In such a crisis situation it will be no good to attempt to avoid hostilities. For those who hope, in the future, to make their country flourish and establish good relations with foreign countries, I should never wish them to study the events of our Restoration and adopt its expediencies.”<sup>60</sup> Katsu, on the other hand, championed mediation, restraint, and peacemaking as essential for the preservation and advancement of Japanese national integrity.

The two famous former bakufu retainers represent two diametrically opposed views of the Restoration as history and, at the same time, two contesting ways of relating past to present. Fukuzawa’s essay on “fighting to the bitter end” relates directly to his concerns about Japanese foreign policy in the 1880s and early 1890s. Peaceful negotiations were no substitute for military readiness; Japanese citizens had to be prepared to sacrifice their lives in defense of their country. Katsu thought otherwise. He lamented the loss of life and thought that foreign wars in Asia would only benefit the Western powers. Cooperation, not contest, was necessary between the Asian states. As such, differing interpretations of the surrender of Edo Castle relate to a broader dispute over the nature of Japanese culture and its relations with the outside world.

## Conclusion

Katsu's treatment of the history of the Tokugawa army and navy and of late Tokugawa foreign policy similarly challenged the official narrative of the Meiji Restoration and offered a forum to criticize contemporary domestic and foreign policy. By quoting the 1863 objections to the vast amount of money spent transporting the shogun to Kyoto, for example, Katsu clearly had Japan in the late 1880s in mind: "High and low within the country have experienced change in their patriotic sentiments to the extent that inequalities have arisen; tempers have flared and countrymen are at war with each other. Where this will lead is uncertain. Our national treasury is exhausted and expenses can only be obtained by squeezing out the blood and sweat of the poor people. Families will fall short of funds and both high and low will be in distress. In the end we will come to depend on foreign capital and all sense of direction of political and economic policy will be lost."<sup>61</sup> Implicit in his treatment of the Tokugawa attempts at treaty revision during the 1860s was criticism of contemporary Japanese foreign policy under the direction of a government dominated by Satsuma and Chōshū. For example, in his history of late Tokugawa diplomacy, Katsu reminded his readers that: "Much to the diplomatic and financial embarrassment of the bakufu, was it not the policy of two certain domains to carry out expulsion, fire on foreign ships, and make assassination attempts on the lives of foreign residents?"

As a historian in his later life, Katsu Kaishū was one of the first writers to link the Edo period with modern success in creating wealth and power. He traced the beginning of Japan's modernization to the period before the Meiji Restoration. Bakufu bureaucracy and bakufu laws had been responsible for a society at peace for over two hundred and fifty years. And it was the bakufu that opened the country: in the 1850s it inaugurated a policy of Westernizing the armed forces; it had begun schools of Western learning and had invited foreign specialists to help introduced new technologies; it had sent diplomatic missions to the United States and Europe and honed skills in diplomatic practice. Japan's success, Katsu implied, derived more from the Tokugawa legacy than from the restoration of imperial rule. Continuity, rather than change, was the keyword in Katsu's historiography of the Meiji Restoration. The late 1880s and early 1890s saw the birth of what Carol Gluck has called "Japan's modern myths." Katsu Kaishū and others similarly had their eyes on the past, but instead of an "invented past" theirs was more grounded in reality. Katsu argued that the legacy of the Edo period, rather than the legacy of Amaterasu Ōmikami, was the true origin of modern Japan.

At the same time, Katsu and other historians of the Meiji Restoration consciously related past to present. The controversy over the nature of the Meiji Restoration that emerged in the late 1880s and early 1890s reflected differing understandings of the range of foreign and domestic problems then confronting Japan. On the one hand, "conservative" interpretations of history, as Carol Gluck and Takashi Fujitani have shown, could and did legitimate a spirit of self-sacrifice and imperial service and encourage Japanese imperial ambitions. Accounts of the Meiji Restoration by Katsu Kaishū and other historians gave more positive press to the Tokugawa past; *sakoku* (seclusion) was not its legacy, but peace, stability, and even openness to innovation when in the national interest. Moreover, Katsu argued strongly on the need to uphold reason over emotion. Similar to the situation confronting Japan in the late 1860s, Japan in the early 1890s should not carelessly enter into hostilities. Instead

of the dream to make Japan into a military power replete with colonies, Katsu derived from the past arguments on behalf of tolerance, restraint, and Asian brotherhood. Like Fukuzawa, Katsu looked back to the men of Mikawa, but instead of the spirit of “fighting to the bitter end,” he championed their advocacy of patience and restraint (*nintai fubatsu*) as a means to overcome all difficulties.<sup>62</sup>

Finally, in 1897, two years before his death, Katsu once again used history to criticize the government’s failure to respond adequately. This time the current problems were pollution and flooding caused by the Ashio Copper Mine. “The present government is supposed to be civilized, while the bakufu is supposed to have been barbarian, but look what the so-called civilized government is doing to the people in Ashio. . . . Is not civilization something that accords with principle and makes sure the people do not fall into harm’s way?”<sup>63</sup> In this and in other historical debates, neither side, of course, is entirely correct. History is interpretation and also often social comment. Katsu Kaishū contested the “official” record with contemporary issues in mind. Historians still, even now at the outset of the twenty-first century, continue to debate the meaning of the Meiji Restoration—and they continue to find relevance in those now ancient history wars.<sup>64</sup>

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## NOTES

- 1 *New York Times*, 15 December 1868.
- 2 *Fukkoki* 1975, vol. 7, p. 215.
- 3 On the development of an “official” interpretation of the Restoration, centering on the history of the restoration of the emperor, see Ōkubo 1988, pp. 39–58; see also Tanaka 1987, pp. 6–24.
- 4 Quoted in Numata 1961, p. 265. See also Brownlee 1997.
- 5 *Fukkoki* 1975, 15 vols.; *Meiji shiyō* 1966, 2 vols..
- 6 On the *Fukkoki*, see Tanaka 1987, pp. 71–89.
- 7 On the “history of civilization” school of history, see Ōkubo 1988, pp. 109–134; Tanaka 1987, pp. 25–35.
- 8 Tanaka 1987, p. 32. Taguchi Ukichi is also known by his literary name Teiken. His work is referred to by Suzuki Sadami in his essay in this volume.
- 9 Fukuzawa 1973, pp. 65–70.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- 12 Tanaka 1987, pp. 36–37.
- 13 Quoted in Lanman 1872, p. 15.

- 14 Tanaka 1987, pp. 51–56.
- 15 Steele 1984, p. 132.
- 16 On pro-bakufu historiography, see Tanaka 1987, pp. 149–180; Ōkubo 1988, pp. 354–75.
- 17 Gluck 1985, p. 24.
- 18 Tanaka 1987, p. 152–53.
- 19 Fukuchi Gen'ichirō, *Bakufu suibō ron* 1967, p. 5.
- 20 On Fukuchi, see the excellent biography by James Huffman (Huffman 1980).
- 21 Biographies of Katsu Kaishū include Matsuura 1968 and Ishii 1974. In English, see Steele 1976.
- 22 On Katsu's negotiations with Saigō (and his attempt to resist new government designs on the Tokugawa family), see Steele 1981.
- 23 *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, 1973, vol. 21, p. 516.
- 24 Most accounts of Katsu's life end with his activities during the Restoration. The only substantial account of Katsu's political thought and activities after the Restoration is Matsuura 1987.
- 25 *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, volumes 6–10 (1974–78).
- 26 *Ibid.*, volumes 12–13 (1978, 1974).
- 27 *Ibid.*, volumes 15–17 (1976–77).
- 28 *Ibid.*, volumes 1–5 (1977–80).
- 29 Tanaka 1987, pp. 149–79.
- 30 Ōkubo 1988, pp. 346–55.
- 31 See Ōguchi Yūjirō's commentary on the *Suijinroku*, in *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, vol. 6 (1974), p. 50.
- 32 *Suijinroku*, *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, vol. 6 (1974), p. iii.
- 33 *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, vol. 14, pp. 451–52.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 452.
- 35 On the “invention” of Edo, see Gluck 1998.
- 36 Katsu Kaishū's diary was first published in full in *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, vols. 18–21 (1972–73).
- 37 These short books are included in *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, vol. 11 (1975).
- 38 Both are included in *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, vol. 14 (1974).
- 39 The *Bakufu shimatsu* was originally prepared for an American friend, E. Warren Clark (1849–1907), in response to his request for an account of Katsu's involvement with the Restoration. An English translation was prepared and parts of it appear in Clark's short biography of Katsu (Clark 1904).
- 40 *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, vol. 11, p. 258; Clark 1904, p. 47.
- 41 *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, vol. 11, p. 259; Clark 1904, p. 48.
- 42 *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, vol. 19 (*Katsu Kaishū nikki*), p. 15.
- 43 *Ibid.*, vol. 11, pp. 259–60; Clark 1904, pp. 48–49.
- 44 *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, vol. 11, p. 260; see also vol. 15 (*Katsu Kaishū nikki*), vol. 19, p. 16.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 260; Clark 1904, 50–51.
- 46 *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, vol. 11, p. 261; Clark 1904, p. 51.
- 47 *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, vol. 11, p. 262; Clark 1904, pp. 51–52.
- 48 *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, vol. 11, pp. 262–63; Clark 1904, pp. 52–53.
- 49 *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, vol. 11, p. 264; Clark 1904, p. 53.
- 50 *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, vol. 11, p. 268; Clark 1904, pp. 55–56.
- 51 *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, vol. 11, p. 270; Clark 1904, p. 56.
- 52 Gluck 1985, pp. 23–24.
- 53 Brownlee 1997, p. 96.
- 54 On the Kume incident, see Brownlee 1997, pp. 92–106; Ōkubo 1988, 144–50.
- 55 See Shively 1971, pp. 77–119; see also Gavin 2001.
- 56 Tanaka 1987, p. 182.



57 Shidankai 1971–75.

58 Fukuzawa 1959. For commentary and translation of the text, see Steele 2002.

59 Fukuzawa 1959, pp. 563–64.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 566.

61 *Gaikō yosei*, in *Katsu Kaishū zenshū*, vol. 11, pp. 285–86.

62 *Kainanroku*, in *ibid.*, pp. 355–56.

63 Matsuura Rei devotes an entire chapter to Katsu's response to the Ashio Copper Mine incident. Matsuura 1987, pp. 176–91; see especially pp. 177–78.

64 For an account of the Takashima textbook lawsuit, which involved contrasting views of Korea held by Fukuzawa Yukichi and Katsu Kaishū, see Inokuchi and Nozaki n.d.

## GLOSSARY

- Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大御神  
*Bakufu shimatsu* 幕府始末  
*Bakufu suibō ron* 幕府衰亡論  
*bokumin* 牧民  
*bunmei shiron* 文明史論  
*bushi* 武士  
 Chōshū 長州  
 Daidō Danketsu 大同団結  
*Danchōki* 断腸記  
 Edo Kai 江戸会  
*Edo kaishi* 江戸会誌  
 Enomoto Takeaki 榎本武揚  
*Fukkoki* 復古記  
 Fukuchi Gen'ichirō (Ōchi) 福地源一郎  
 (桜痴)  
 Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉  
*Gaikō yosei* 外交余勢  
 Gotō Shōjirō 後藤象二郎  
*hakushaku* 伯爵  
*hatamoto* 旗本  
*Hikawa seiwa* 氷川清話  
*hinomaru* 日の丸  
 Hōkō 奉公  
 Ishin Kai 維新会  
 Itō Hirobumi 伊藤博文  
 Iwakura Tomomi 岩倉具視  
 Jinmu 神武  
*Kaigun rekishi* 海軍歴史  
*Kaikoku kigen* 開国起源  
*Kainanroku* 解難録  
*Kaishū zadan* 海舟座談  
*kanjō bugyō* 勘定奉行  
 Katsu Kaishū 勝海舟  
 Kanrinmaru 咸臨丸  
 Keisō Shobō 勁草書房  
 Kimura Kaishū 木村芥舟  
*kokugaku* 国学  
*kokusui hozon* 国粹保存  
*kokutai* 国体  
*kōron* 公論  
 Kume Kunitake 久米邦武  
 Kurimoto Joun 栗本鋤雲  
 Matsukata Masayoshi 松方正義  
 Meiji 明治  
*Meiji chūkō no daigyō* 明治中興の大業  
 Meiji Kai 明治会  
*Meijikai sōshi* 明治会叢誌  
*Meiji shiyō* 明治史要  
*mikado* 帝  
 Mito 水戸  
 Miyake Setsurei 三宅雪嶺  
 Nakayama Tadamitsu 中山忠光  
*Nihon kaika shōshi* 日本開化小史  
 Nikkō 日光  
*nintai fubatsu* 忍耐不拔  
 Nishimura Shigeki 西村茂樹  
 Oguri Tadamasa 小栗忠政  
 Ōkubo Toshiaki 大久保利謙  
*ōsei fukko* 王政復古  
*Rikugun rekishi* 陸軍歴史  
 Saigō Takamori 西郷隆盛  
*sakoku* 鎖国  
 Sanjō Sanetomi 三条実美  
 Satsuma 薩摩  
 Seikyōsha 政教社  
 Shidankai sokkiroku 史談会速記録  
 Shiga Shigetaka 志賀重昂  
 Shiryō Hensanjo 史料編纂所  
*Suijinroku* 吹塵録  
*Suijin yoroku* 吹塵余録  
 Taguchi Ukichi 田口卯吉  
 Tanaka Akira 田中彰  
 Tokugawa 徳川  
 Tokugawa Keiki (Yoshinobu) 徳川慶喜  
*Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun* 東京日日新聞  
 Tosa 土佐  
 Tōshōgū 東照宮  
 Ueki Emori 植木枝盛  
*Yamato damashii* 大和魂  
 Yasegaman no setsu 瘦我慢の説  
*yonaoshi* 世直し