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COLLAPSE OF THE *BAKUFU*, 1859-1867

A. Letter of Yoshida Shoin to Kitayama Yasuyo on the Rôle of Dedicated Lower-Ranking People, May 9, 1859.

I am writing from prison and, besides, what I have to say is based on conjecture, so it may very well strike you a bit odd.

Well, the general trend of the times has become fairly clear; the Divine Country's condition of imminent collapse is truly cause for great anxiety. The *Bakufu* really is without men of talent. There may be some who can discuss adequately insignificant problems, but there is no one who can take a long-range view and set up a big plan. Especially the problem of dealing properly with the foreign barbarians - it is an extremely great problem now, one past a proper solution, and gradually, step by step, we find ourselves being controlled by the foreigners. Since the years of *Water-Ox* and *Wood-Tiger* [1853-54], about six years have already passed and still there is no plan about making voyages [to foreign lands]. Where is Washington? What kind of a place is London? If we do not see the actual places, how can we deal with the matter?

Further, the officials of the *Bakufu* are all of them meat-eating [i.e. worldly], uncivilized fellows and weaklings;

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even if there were among them one or two men of great stamp, as Mencius said,* it will be impossible to curb the voices of a multitude of men. Hence, that the Eastern Tsin, the Southern Dynasties, and the Sung were unable to restore the Central Plain [northern China] was only natural; how then is the present Tokugawa *Bakufu* to do anything? As long as the Tokugawa [*Bakufu*] continues to exist, it is impossible to imagine how far it will be controlled by America, Russia, England, and France. It makes one heave a sigh. Fortunately, at the very top we have a wise Emperor who is deeply concerned about this problem, but the Court nobility is even more steeped in evil ways than the *Bakufu*, and all they ever do is talk about the Divine Country's being defiled if it approaches the foreign barbarians, but they are unable to devise majestic plans as in days of yore. No wonder then that the [expel the barbarians] plan does not succeed. As for the lords of the various *han*, all they do is curry favour with the *Bakufu*, and they do not have any countermeasures at all. If the *Bakufu* were to surrender to the foreign barbarians, they would have to follow suit and surrender also. Can any red-blooded person bear seeing Great Japan, which has for over three thousand years preserved its independence, at this late stage suffer the control of foreigners? Nothing less than a Napoleon back from the grave and chanting "*Vrijheid*" [Freedom] can assuage the anguish in my breast.

I had no hopes of succeeding, of course, but since last year I have tried what little I can; my efforts availed me

* "If but one man of Ts'e be teaching him, and there be a multitude of men of Ts'oo continually shouting about him, although his father beat him every day, wishing him to learn the speech of Ts'e, it will be impossible for him to do so" [Legge, *Chinese Classics*, II, 151].

nothing, and I have ended up in prison. If I make public any more counterplans without due caution, [both I and] my whole family will on that account be punished. However, the present *Bakufu* and the feudal lords are all like a bunch of drunks, and there is nothing that can be done to save them. Our only recourse is to place our hopes in dedicated lower-ranking people. We can by no means be unmindful of the kindness of this *han* [Choshu] and the goodness of the Imperial Court. Accordingly, if by means of such dedicated lower-ranking people we are able to give support *first* of all to this *han* and next aid in the restoration of the Court, though it at first glance seems to violate the spirit of allegiance of individuals, still, anyone who does such things [i.e. plans and puts them into effect] can be said to have rendered meritorious service on behalf of the Divine Country. Such a man would be a greater person than even Kuang Chung [an illustrious minister in ancient China].

What is the situation of the foreign barbarians? In my opinion, the handling of the Americans seems to be proceeding smoothly. The founding ideals of America are splendid and the nation itself is not very old. I think it is our most formidable enemy. As for the English, many members of the *han* have gone to Nagasaki and then exaggerated the weakness of the English. The Russians have a large-country spirit, but they seem to be a little careless. What is your opinion?

Even among the Americans there are some I do not fear; Harris, who came to Edo Castle, is one. There are an extremely large number of lies in what he says. Yet the fact that no one in *the Bukufu* has been able to get the better of him in an argument is truly deplorable. If every-

thing Harris says were to be put into effect, the Divine Country would really be in danger. If his words are only empty threats, we could not be more fortunate. What do you think? Since the Americans have no territories in the East, it is inevitable that they desire Java or Japan.

These are my thoughts; I have not been able to explain each of them in detail. To sum up, the way things stand now the Divine Country's downfall is certain. To restore it, some Liu Pang, Hsiang Yü or Napoleon is absolutely necessary. Yet no one has paid any attention to this matter. Since you always have singular opinions and rare knowledge, I would like to hear your views.

Year of Clay-Sheep, 4th month, 7th day.

Translated by Edmund Skrzypczak.

B. Memorial to the *Bakufu* by Yokoi Shonan on Foreign Intercourse, March, 1863.

Not long ago I learned about the proclamation that the foreign barbarians are to be rebuffed immediately, and that, in addition, it was proclaimed war should be entered upon without delay, without taking up the three-article demand of the English barbarians. Seeing the imminent peril to the empire, its continued existence or its demise at stake, my heart's great pangs lead me to speak up without reserve or hesitation. The present world situation is such that navigation has developed, all countries linked by the four oceans have become neighbours, and no single country can close off its land. With greater reason should our empire, bounded as it is on four sides by the sea, open the country and communicate, not close and defend; of its own *initia-*

tive it should go out, not draw back and drive away—a great change is taking place in the world, and that our empire’s former isolated closure should by no means be carried out to-day does not need discussion: it stands to obvious reason. On these grounds, when, in conformity with the course of nature, we have ended national isolation, adopted their good points, and carried out a policy of strengthening our country economically and militarily, our becoming a great and powerful country within a few years is also a self-evident consequence. Further, since the three-article demand of the English barbarians can seem to be in accord with reason, Your Reverence should bestow on it fitting treatment, whereas completely ignoring and flatly rejecting it leaves room for question about who is wrong and who is right; it is clear that they, on the other hand, can claim that they are in the right, and spread throughout the world the story that we are in the wrong, and then foreign countries will come with demands and invade our land; thus, in a stroke the splendid reputation of our empire for reasonable government will vanish away, and the resulting shame will be without parallel in history. Moreover, at present the hearts of men are not united, and [war] apparatus is inadequate, so **if it** comes to war the inevitable outcome will be a hundred defeats, a million casualties, and tremendous tragedy. I do not think this can be tolerated. Even **if it** is an imperial edict, if this kind of excessive action is taken, I do not think Your Reverence can vindicate it to the Gods above, nor to the nation here below, and therefore I am especially desirous that Your Reverence make all efforts possible and exhort [the Court to act otherwise]. And if it happens that His Majesty, upon hearing the matter, does not understand, I would wish Your Reverence

promptly to give back the supreme power [to the Court], return to Your Reverence’s castle in the Kanto, explain the situation in detail to the foreign countries, and then reject negotiations. In this time of serious national emergency, I have committed capital offense and been heedless of my numerous sins by speaking up thus; with profoundest, deepest apologies, my head bent low, I submit the above.

3rd year of Bunkyu, 2nd month.

Translated by Edmund Skrzypczak.

C. Reply of Four Roju Concerning the Kazu-no-miya Marriage and the Expulsion of the Barbarians, Communicated to Sakai Tadayoshi, August 20, 1860.

WE have respectfully read a copy of Your Reverence’s second letter containing Your Reverence’s confidential ideas about the marriage of Princess Kazu-no-miya. What Your Reverence thinks is reasonable, but the *Shogun* is deeply desirous of this marriage, with a desire that is not merely a passing whimsy. The Shogun is deeply concerned about the matter, and we have been informed of his views. If we can have this desire fulfilled and, after due consideration on the part of the Court, have the marriage take place, all of us would consider it a matter for rejoicing, we who have been so concerned about the matter and have discussed it so lengthily.

The results of our discussions and our written consent [to the conditions set by the Court] follow.

About Your Reverence’s statement that this proposal of a marriage was not opposed from the outset and that, since