

The Iwakura Mission in America & Europe

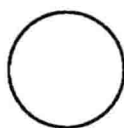
A New Assessment

Edited by
Ian Nish

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in America
and Europe*

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THE IWAKURA MISSION IN AMERICA AND EUROPE
A NEW ASSESSMENT

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THE
IWAKURA MISSION
IN AMERICA
AND EUROPE



Iwakura Tomomi flanked by the four vice ambassadors, from left to right, Kido Takayoshi, Yamaguchi Masuka, Itō Hirobumi and Ōkubo Toshimichi. COURTESY ISHIGURO KEISHŌ

In Honour of
Professor W.G. (Bill) Beasley
doyen of Meiji Studies in Britain
over five decades

FOREWORD

A HIGH-POWERED delegation led by Prince Iwakura Tomomi visited the United States and Britain in 1872 and the major countries of Europe in the first half of 1873. The findings of the mission had vast effects on the subsequent development of Japan as a nation-state. It seemed fitting therefore to commemorate the 125th anniversary of that visit which fell in 1997. Since the triennial conference of the European Association for Japanese Studies was held in Budapest, Hungary, in August 1997, it seemed appropriate to devote a session of the History, International Relations and Politics section to a discussion of the mission. Fortunately, papers were offered covering the activities of the mission in many of the countries visited, while the audience included a number of experts in this field who had not themselves offered papers.

The intention behind the session was not so much to duplicate the work that has been done, or is in progress, on Japanese sources for the mission. Rather it was primarily to ask what materials existed in American and European sources which would throw light on the mission and on the Western reaction to it. Thus, it was not the wide-eyed accounts chronicled by the Japanese that we were interested in so much as the wide-eyed accounts of their hosts, whether they were politicians, journalists or the general populace. This was not always easy to do. Understandably, this was a difficult task because in the nature of things the Iwakura mission was of more importance to Japan than it was to the countries visited. Some of the papers show up the lacunae in the sources and the scarcity of information on this point.

After the success of the session, attention turned to whether the results of these various research papers could be published. It was first necessary to redress the balance of the papers. Because the original

conference session did not deal comprehensively with the countries to which the delegation travelled, it has been necessary to ask contributors to modify their papers in some cases. In the case of other countries, it has been necessary to recruit new contributors to the project. We are particularly grateful to them for taking part at short notice.

Bearing in mind the stern reserve which publishers normally apply to conference papers, we are doubly grateful for the enthusiasm with which Mr Paul Norbury has taken up our proposal. As editor, I have to thank my co-chairman of the History session, Dr Bert Edström of the University of Stockholm. I must also thank the contributors who have helped greatly by sending in their papers so punctually. For the general organization of the conference we are grateful to the Budapest College of Foreign Trade and to the office-bearers of the European Association for Japanese Studies without whose help this academic project would not have been realized.

We hope that the resulting volume will offer some new insights on the mission and raise doubts about some of the myths that have arisen around it. We had no agreed agenda: the authors wrote independently and no attempt has been made to prescribe the form that their essays should take. We cannot claim to have said the final word but trust that this collection may make some contribution to the many research projects which are being pursued in Japan and around the world on this important world event, the Iwakura mission.

IAN NISH
March 1998

EDITOR'S NOTE

Japanese Names

Japanese names have generally been rendered with the surname or family name preceding the personal name in accordance with normal Japanese practice.

Bibliography

There is no overall bibliography in this volume; but selected bibliographies appropriate to individual countries are to be found at the end of chapters 1, 2 and 7.

Beio Kairan Jikkei

There are occasional variations in the romanized spelling of the Kume diaries.

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CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>xi</i>
Introduction <i>Ian Nish</i>	1
1 America 15 January-6 August 1872 <i>Alistair Swale</i>	11
2 Britain 17 August-16 December 1872 [1] Early Meiji Travel Encounters <i>Andrew Cobbing</i> [2] The Mission's Aims, Objectives & Results <i>Ian Ruxton</i>	36 54
3 France 16 December 1872-17 February 1873, 15-20 July 1873 <i>Richard Sims</i>	69
4 Belgium 17-24 February 1873 <i>Willy Vande Walle</i>	86
5 Germany 109 7-28 March, 15-17 April, 1-8 May 1873 <i>Ulrich Wattenberg</i>	
6 Russia 29 March-15 April 1873 <i>Ian Nish</i>	123

7	Sweden 23-30 April 1873 <i>Bert Edström</i>	133
8	Italy 9 May-2 June 1873 <i>Silvana de Maio</i>	149
9	Engineering Education in Japan After the Iwakura Mission <i>Silvana de Maio</i>	162
10	The Social Whirl of 'White' Yokohama After Iwakura's Return <i>Olavi Fält</i>	170
11	Kume Kunitake as a Historiographer <i>Shigekazu Kondo</i>	179
	The Iwakura Mission: Aftermath and Assessment <i>Ian Nish</i>	188
	Appendix: Kume Museum of Art (Tokyo) <i>Fumiko Ito & Seiji Takata</i>	199
	<i>Notes</i>	205
	<i>Index</i>	226

INTRODUCTION

Ian Nish

IN NOVEMBER 1871 the representatives of the powers in Tokyo were informed that Japan was about to arrange for a special embassy to set off for the United States and Europe. As they reported to their governments they did not find it entirely surprising because Japan had already sent abroad two missions: the Takenouchi mission to Europe in 1862 'the first official government mission to Britain' and then the 1865-6 mission. It was 1866 when Fukuzawa Yukichi published his experiences of journeying abroad in the first volume of *Seiyo jijo* (Conditions in the West). So there was much awareness of Western progress and a desire that Japan should share in it. In practice, however, the preoccupation of Japan's leaders with the restoration of the Emperor Meiji, the civil war and the move of the capital to Edo (Tokyo) left little scope for the new 'reformed' government to take up the problem of its relations with the West. Surrounded by many divisive domestic problems, it is amazing that they were able to contemplate sending a major delegation around the world as early as the autumn of 1871. But, in spite of battles over the constitution of the delegation and the timing of its visit, the leadership was sufficiently assured to let senior figures join the mission.¹

What was special about this mission when the details leaked out was the eminence of the participants. Prince Iwakura Tomomi, the *udaijin*, who was chosen to head it was among the most important members of the government. He proposed to take with him four vice-ambassadors: Okubo Toshimichi; Kido Koin (Takayoshi), Ito Hirobumi and Yamaguchi Naoyoshi. The first two were among the leaders of the

day. Ito was still young and Yamaguchi the representative of the Foreign Ministry who was a specialist in international law was on the periphery of politics. But Iwakura assembled a large delegation with lots of promising specialists such as Tanaka Fujimaro of the Education Ministry with his entourage of inspectors. Moreover, there were linguists. In each port of call there were *ryugakusei* who had enough of the language to act as their interpreters. All in all, there were some fifty emissaries and about sixty *ryugakusei*.²

This was a master-stroke which for boldness and originality would put most governments to shame. Half the senior leaders of the new administration were sent abroad for an indefinite period which could not in the nature of things be short. In the end it was extended much beyond the original intention to twenty months. But was it seen at the time in Japan as being important? The treaty port press did not cover it in great detail. Occasional mention filtered through from press associates in Europe but there was only restrained coverage. And that was not necessarily accurate.³

The motives underlying the mission differed over time and according to the thinking of the participant concerned. The essayists will describe their perception of them as seen in each of the countries visited. When the delegation left Edo, a foreign observer described its motivation as follows:

. . . a personal Mission to the European [sic] Courts, designed to represent in a becoming and dignified manner the aspirations of the Empire towards a fitting and acknowledged place in the comity of nations.⁴

Alistair Swale has dealt at length with the question of Treaty Revision over which the commissioners' views changed frequently. (chapter 1) At the point of departure it was not intended as a negotiating mission because Iwakura thought the revision of treaties could be deferred until the embassy returned from abroad in one year's time (then the expected duration of the mission). Equally important was the collection of information on how modern industrialized societies worked. Not less important was the projection of Japan's image as a modern state: Japan must impress foreign governments with the quality of Japan's modernization in the hands of the new, young ministers and convince them of the solidity of its foundations.

The Iwakura commissioners reached San Francisco on 15 January 1872 and Washington on 29 February. Persuaded that they might succeed in negotiating a new treaty with Secretary of State Hamilton Fish, they discovered that they did not possess acceptable plenipotentiary powers to sign a treaty. Okubo and Ito, therefore, returned to

Japan in order to obtain the appropriate Letters of Credence. Meanwhile, the Japanese put forward the proposal that a conference of treaty powers to revise the Japan treaties should be held somewhere in Europe, an idea that was anathema to Secretary Fish. By the time Okubo and Ito rejoined the mission, the 'negotiation' had been relegated to second place behind the needs of information-gathering.

Dr Swale has no doubt that the reception of the delegation by the Americans, whether it was the administration, the businessmen or the press, was warm and enthusiastic. The cordiality of the American welcome to the mission was such that those in Europe had difficulty in matching it.

Because of the protracted nature of the commissioners' stay in the United States, the schedule for their visit to Britain was greatly held up, much to the inconvenience of the London government. Eventually, the mission reached Liverpool on 17 August. The British government had been intrigued by the proposal the Japanese had put forward in America for a European conference which would have had the effect of putting the world spotlight on Japan. That the US had declined the idea did not automatically mean that Britain would follow suit. Indeed, Britain had watched the progress of the Japanese delegates through the US with vigilance and suspicion because since the civil war the Americans had been pursuing their interests unilaterally, not least in Japan. For their part, foreign representatives in Japan did not favour talks being conducted outside Japan and felt that the minutiae of the treaty question could not be understood by those far removed from Japan. London accepted their recommendation.⁵

The second half of August was for a host of reasons the worst time to launch an official visit to London. Parliament was in recess until the end of October, and cabinet ministers were frequently out of the capital. Queen Victoria had already gone to Scotland for her summer holiday on 15 August and, since the death of her consort, had not generally been available for audiences in London till the end of the year. Iwakura and his advisers took the view that they would not raise policy matters until they had had their audience with the sovereign. This left plenty time for the wide-ranging visits of inspection on which the mission had set its sights. These are fully covered in Ian Ruxton's and Andrew Cobbing's papers (Chapter 2).

Between September and early November members of the delegation had either individually or in groups visited twenty British cities and travelled over 2000 miles. In discussion with Foreign Secretary Lord Granville, they made clear that their ultimate objective was for certain modifications of the treaties to bring them into line with the

altered situation of Japan since the Meiji restoration. But they were more anxious to hear Britain's views than they were to put forward specific proposals of their own; and Britain was no more anxious to be specific. Granville raised the dual issues of religious toleration and the foreigners' right of travel throughout Japan and greater facilities for European ships to visit Japanese ports, matters which were to crop up in their discussions elsewhere in Europe. Asked whether extraterritoriality could be ended quickly, Granville replied that it could be done as soon as Japan had a proper code of laws administered by tribunals which Britain could trust.

Two weeks after the official audience with the Queen at Windsor Castle on 5 December, the delegation left Victoria station. They were accompanied as far as Dover by their two escorts, General Alexander and W.G. Aston of the British Far East consular service as interpreter.

If their timing in Britain was not ideal, their timing in France over the Christmas New Year period was a strain on both sides. As Richard Sims points out (Chapter 3), the focus of their policy discussions was on treaty revision and on religious freedom for Christians. In the press and among the public, there appears to have been a subdued reaction.

They paid two of their shorter visits to Belgium (from 18 February 1873) and to Holland (from 24 February). Their experiences in Belgium (Chapter 4), a small but highly industrialized state, were very relevant to Japan and are fully recounted in Professor Vande Walle's account which contains a great deal of intricate press comment. Here, more forcefully than elsewhere on the continent, the Ultramontane party had unleashed a furious campaign against the Japanese ambassadors. Iwakura in particular was targeted on the grounds that he had (allegedly) issued the order which had resulted in the massacre of 2000 Christians in Edo. The complaints were probably erroneous.

On the mission's activities in Holland the writings of Dr Miyanaga throw much light. With the Dutch the Japanese had a special relationship because of their settlement at Deshima throughout the *sakoku* period.⁷ The visitors were therefore taken special care of by persons with Japan connections. They were escorted by Polsbroek, the Dutch minister in Japan (1869-70) who had stayed there for 12 or 13 years. They also associated much with van der Tak, a Dutch merchant who had served under the Nederlandsche Handel Maatschappij at Deshima from 1859 and with Bauduin who had been a doctor and teacher in Japan. The ambassadors were interested in the Dutch monarchy and were hospitably received by members of the royal family. They went to many factories and covered most of the important cities in this important small country: the Hague, Rotterdam, Leyden, Delft, Amster-

dam. If there was one object which excited their special curiosity it was the canal system of Amsterdam, on which a special investigation was launched.

From 7 March the mission allocated three weeks to Germany (Chapter 5) which was in triumphant mood after the achievement of her unification, her victory over France and the occupation of Paris. They were later to return in transit on two occasions, thus covering not just the centre, but also the northern ports and the southern cities. It was a skilfully arranged itinerary and ensured a more thorough coverage of the country than elsewhere on the continent. This is fully covered by Dr Ulrich Wattenberg. Their stay included influential interviews with Chancellor Bismarck, whose thinking was to have a considerable impact on some of the Meiji leaders.

Already the remote thunder of disputes in the beleaguered ministry in Japan was reaching them. At the end of his German stay, Iwakura received a positive order to send someone back to Japan. After some anguished discussion, it was agreed that Okubo, one of the deputy leaders, should return and he left the mission, travelling independently to Frankfurt-am-Main and on to Marseille to join his ship.

The rest of the party travelled on to Russia (Chapter 6) which was allocated only two weeks. While Russia was a vast country which was a potential threat to Japan in its northern outreaches, her problems (notably the emancipation of serfs inaugurated in 1861) were not relevant to Japan. The tsarist monarchy was a matter of intense fascination to the Japanese; and the imperial family was particularly hospitable to the visitors. They formed strong links of cordiality which were slightly out of line with the political uncertainties between the two countries.

KIDO'S PARTY

Further pressure was brought to bear on the delegation as its stay in Russia drew to a close. The result was that Kido, the other deputy leader, was required to go back to Japan post-haste. He detached himself from the main party but continued with a progress through Europe which can only be described as leisurely. He passed to Posen, Berlin (Ostbahnhof) on his way to Vienna.

During his time in Austria-Hungary, a country not covered at our conference, Kido was able to attend the opening ceremony of the Great Vienna Exposition on 1 May. Kido was taken to the grounds in a carriage escorted by Heinrich von Siebold who worked for the Austrian legation. The exposition was opened by the Emperor Franz-Josef in the presence of the Empress, and the Prince of Wales, later to become King Edward VII, in an altogether glittering occasion.