Sonnô Jôi:
The Leaps in Logic in the Modern Japanese Political Scene

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Abstract: This article studies the mechanism of sonnô jôi ("Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians"), which caused the dissolvement of bakuhansystem and consequently brought about Meiji Restoration. Sonnô jôi, originally means crying for the expulsion of western powers, came to consent to kaikoku (opening ports) and accept westernization, displaying great changeability in logic and goal as Japan's foreign and domestic political situation developed.

The uncertainty of the logic of sonnô jôi stems from the basic fragility of the dual political structure of the bakuhansystem, in which the shôgun, as a practical executioner of political power, and the tennô, a symbolic authority with little power, coexisted. The Bakufu’s ambiguous political ground never allowed Japan to have a sound national ideology like Korea. The absence of a value system that was strong

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If we should establish a long-range national strategy, first we had better conclude peace treaties with both America and Russia, and then taking advantage of the Russo-American confrontation, enrich and strengthen Japan, develop Hokkaido, acquire Manchuria, occupy Korea, and annex the Southern islands. After achieving all of these, we should conquer America and cause Russia to surrender. This will surely lead us to success.¹

Introduction

After the mid-nineteenth century, East Asian countries had to face the need of taking some measures against persistent invasions by western powers, who had been growing increasingly aggressive in order to achieve their goal of expanding capitalistic markets. At the sight of China being involuntarily incorporated into the treaty system, Korea and Tokugawa Japan decided to hold their ground by maintaining a traditional world view of hua-i (K. hwa-i; J. ka-i; literally meaning the “civilized” and the “barbarian”) and expel the “western barbarians.”²

The expulsion of “barbarians,” as a subject of discourse and a movement, had its theoretical and ideological basis on wijŏng ch’ôksa (to reject heterodoxy <Christianity and other western values> in

². For the impact of the Opium War on the development of sonnô jôi, see Konishi Shirô. “Ahen sensô no wagakuni ni oyoboseru eikyô,” Komazawa shigaiku, 1 (1953).
defense of orthodoxy <Confucianism>) in Korea and sonnô jôi in Japan. The two ideas, which took different developmental courses, had great impact on the formation of the modern histories of the two countries. While the former remained relatively consistent despite occasional changes in form, the latter, by contrast, underwent dramatic transformation in nature and practice, greatly influencing the political scene. The “sudden stop of jôi movement” was followed by tôbaku (subjugating the Bakufu) movement, which turned into kaikoku (opening ports) movement, and finally another tôbaku (overthrowing the Bakufu) movement, inducing the fall of the Bakufu and leading to the establishment of the new Meiji government.

While the nature of sonnô jôi doctrine and movement is so confusing that it often prevents the comprehension of modern Japanese history, the secret of the success of the ôsei fukko (restoration of archaic tennô authority) coup d’etat, or the Meiji Restoration, could be found in the mechanism of its incessant changes. Furthermore, an understanding of sonnô jôi will enable one to clarify the determinants of the totally different “modernizations” of Korea and Japan. In that sense, the study of sonnô jôi provides one with an opportunity to gain insight into not only Japanese but Korean history. Inceptively this article discusses the change of sonnô jôi and its mechanism in bakumatsu, or “end of shogunate” era from 1853 to 1868.

3. There are a variety of translations of sonnô jôi, including: “Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians,” “Revere the emperor, repel the barbarian,” “Restore the emperor and expel the foreigners,” “the ideology of emperorism and expulsionism,” “Honor the Emperor and Expel the Barbarians,” or “redeeming their honor against the foreign menace.”


5. As a Japanese historical term, tôbaku has two definitions of “subjugating the Bakufu” and “overthrowing the Bakufu,” namely, the abolishment of the bakuhans system (the Tokugawa political system) in general. The latter has broader sense and includes such ideas as the return of political rule to tennô and the adoption of elements of the western parliamentary system into the shogunate. For further discussion on the details of their differ-
Ideological Background

It is said that the phrase sonnô jôi, originated not in Chinese classics but in Kōdōkan ki (1838, Record of the Kōdōkan) by Fujita Tōkō [1806-55], a Mito scholar. Sonnô, the original meaning of which is to revere tennô, embodies the idea of enforcing national unity under tennô, the traditional monarch. Jôi conveys the meaning of defense against outer invasion and the maintenance of national integrity. It is generally said that sonnô jôi is ideologically grounded in kokugaku (National Learning) and Mitogaku (Mito Learning; a school of thought derived from Shintô and Confucianism), especially the late Mitogaku.

Kokugaku, which pursued yamato-gōkorō (the pure Japanese spirit), originated in the studies of Shintô and ancient Japanese classics like Man'yōshū (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves) by seventeenth-century literati such as Kamo Mabuchi [1697-1769]. Kokugaku scholars, whose main concern was indigenous Japanese tradition, focused on interpreting the texts of such ancient classics as Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters) and Nihonshoki (Chronicles of Japan, also rendered as the Nihon’gi), excluding the influence of foreign thoughts like Confucianism and Buddhism from their scope of consideration. Compiled under Emperor Tenmu’s order to legitimize the rule by his clan, Kojiki and Nihonshoki are full of mythological and fictitious accounts on tennô and the “unbroken imperial line” of his family. In spite of the implausibility of these literatures as a source, kokugaku scholars attributed the origin of Japanese culture to the myth of tennô, and fabricated the idea that it was superior to Chinese and western cultures through arbitrary interpretation. Literally and fully accepting the account of these classics, they asserted that the legiti-

macy of a ruler unconditionally resided with tennō, a divine descent, and it was a truth inalterable even by authority, virtue, or benevolence. *Kokugaku* was a contained realistic vision of the world, expressed in the idiom of archaicism.

*Kokugaku* discourse is said to have originated with the demolition of Japanese *hua-i* thought, particularly the one in which Japan is considered as the center of civilization. One of the major preconditions for the establishment of *kokugaku* was the shift in Japanese attitude toward China from reverence toward the “land of sages” to a strategic stance that produces a negative image of it as a “foreign land” with alien language and thought. In other words, *kokugaku* established itself as a “self(Japan)-referent” discourse by introducing the perspective of stressing otherness in China to its discourse.

With its nationalistic tone as seen in the views of Japan by Motoori Norinaga [1730-1801], “the master of the world,” and Takeo Masatane [1833-74], “the greatest country of all the world,” *kokugaku*, which was further developed by the late Mitogaku, became the foundation of the *sonnô jôi* movement at the bakumatsu era. It was also the inception of not only ultranationalism after the Meiji Restoration (advocated by those who opposed the Meiji government’s westernization policies), but also the idea of *kokutai* (national

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7. In his study of the changing process of pre-modern Japan’s image of self and others, Katsurajima Nobuhiro propounds three phases of Japanese *hua-i*; “courtesy and literature sinocentrism,” “Japanese style *hua-i*,” and “Japanese sinocentrism.” “Courtesy and literature sinocentrism” was Japanese Confucians’ acknowledgment of China and Korea’s cultural superiority to Japan, the “barbarian.” “Japanese style *hua-i*,” which presumably emerged from the dynastic change from Ming to Ch’ing, means the awareness of “Japanese interior” by the Japanese Confucians from the latter half of the seventeenth century to the former half of the eighteenth century. “Japanese sinocentrism” drew closer to “China as the barbarian” view, criticizing China and claiming that Japan is the center of civilization. Katsurajima Nobuhiro. “‘Kai’ shisô no kaitai to kokugaku teki ‘jiko’ zô no seisei,” *Edo no shisô*, 4 (1996).

polity) that sustained the tennō system.  

*Mitogaku* came into being in the compilation process of *Dai Nihonshiki* (History of Great Japan, completed in 1906) in Mito han (domain), a center of Confucian scholarship during Edo period. It was the first and only case of a han creating a learning on its own. The leading theory of the reform movement at a time when a sense of national crisis mounted in the face of the weakened bakuhan system and the threat of foreign powers, *Mitogaku* became the driving force of the sonnō joi movement in bakumatsu and later functioned in sustaining the tennō system ideology. *Mitogaku* can be periodized into early, late, and bakumatsu. Along with its project of compilation of the historiographies, the early *Mitogaku* constructed itself on the ground of Confucian meibunron (knowing one’s proper place, i.e., knowing one’s status in society) and emphasized worshipping the imperial family until the mid-eighteenth century. Its historical thought was developed into political discourse in the late *Mitogaku* by such people as Fujita Yûkoku [1774-1826], Fujita Tōko, and Aizawa Seishisai [Yasushi; 1782-1863]. With foreign crises deepening after the end of the eighteenth century, they kept their attention on current affairs, formatting and endeavoring to disseminate leading theories of domain reform, sonnō joi, and kokutai theory. The thought systematized during this period grew nationally influential and was put into practice in the form of han reforms and memorials to the Bakufu after the mid-1840s, which is called the bakumatsu *Mitogaku*.  

Aizawa Seishisai wrote *Shinron* (New Theses) in 1825, which became a “virtual bible” among many prominent political figures and shishi (“patriots of high resolve”). The work obtained a broad range of appeal among readers because, apart from the author’s

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good intention, it gave an ample space for them to interpret and use in support of their own standpoints on reforms. While lower-class samurai, who aimed at social rise, stressed Aizawa’s proposal of fukoku kyōhei (enrich and strengthen the nation), daimyō (lords) and their advisors focused on his assertion that the Bakufu went too far in its control over domains and should allow them more autonomy. Authoritative Bakufu leaders, on the other hand, would refer to the section on national defense in the work to insist on the necessity of increasing the Bakufu’s power and authority. Reformers who wished to see quicker reformation of the Bakufu found hope in Aizawa’s opinion that the governing method of the Tokugawa family was so old-fashioned that it should be overthrown. Some shishi were inspired to dream a more radical picture of removing the Bakufu and returning to tennō’s direct rule: namely, ôsei fukko. It could be safely said that the complexity of the later sonnō jōi stems from this wide variety of interpretations of Shinron.

**Development of Sonnō Jōi**

The Bakufu’s failure in reform efforts like the Tempo reform in the 1830’s and 1840’s and its inability to cope with the foreign crises after the coming of Matthew C. Perry [1794-1858] allowed the rise of such leading han as Satsuma, Chôshû, Tosa, and Higo. Successful in domestic reform through the establishment of western-style armament and the buildup of bureaucratic systems by taking talents, these han, with lower-lasc samurai at the helm, were making a move to take the initiative in reshuffling the bakuhan system with tennō as its center. On the other hand, the Bakufu started to invite leading han to participate in decision making, and headed toward a coalition government with the pinnacle of tennō, whose court was growing

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influential.

However, as western pressure for *kaikoku*\(^{12}\) (opening ports) and the movement toward western-style capitalism mounted and the Bakufu’s incompetence was exposed, middle- and lower-class samurai disputed the conclusion of a commercial treaty with the U.S. on the grounds of *sonnō*, insisting that it was against the court’s will, and opposed to its *kaikoku* policy under the slogan of *jōi*. The confrontation between the Bakufu and the leading *han* became obvious over such issues as the signing of the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1858, the shogunal succession dispute,\(^{13}\) and *kōbu gattai undō* (movement for unity of court and the Bakufu).\(^{14}\)

Inside the Bakufu, a group of *daimyō* who were in central positions attempted to check the leading *han* under the initiative of Ii Naosuke [1815-60], *tairō* (regent). In 1858, the fifth year of Ansei, Ii signed the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce for which, hampered by the leading *han* and Hitotsubashi Keiki [Yoshinobu; 1837-1913] and his faction, he could not obtain the *tennō*’s permission. He also placed Tokugawa Yoshitomi [1858-66] to the fourteenth

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13) During 1857-58, a political controversy arose over the successor of the 13th *shōgun* Tokugawa Iesada [1824-58], who was childless.

14. Literally, “*kō*” means *tennō* or court and “*bu*” samurai, that is, the Bakufu or the leading *han*. *Kōbu gattai undō* was a political movement which attempted to maintain and strengthen the *bakuhan* system by forging a more unified leadership under the authority of the court, which was on a rapid rise. The movement contained a struggle for leadership among the Bakufu and the leading *han*. Takagi Shunsuke. “Tōbakuha no keisei,” in Rekishigaku kenkyûkai and Nihonshi kenkyûkai (eds.), *Kôza Nihonshi* 5: *Meiji Ishin*. Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1970, p. 122. Tentative goal of *shishi* was *sonnō*, rather than *jōi*. Ultimately, it was even the negation of *kōbu gattai*. Hayashiya Tatsusaburō. “Bakumatsu no bunkateki shihyō: Bakumatsu bunka kenkyû jōsetsu,” in Hayashiya Tatsusaburō (ed.), *Bakumatsu bunka no kenkyû*. Iwanami shoten, 1979, p. 35.
shogunate while suppressing the opposing daimyō, court nobles, and domain samurai. This purge, which is known as Ansei Taigoku (Ansei Purge) of 1858, resulted in prompting the reformist lower-class samurai and court nobles to assume more anti-Bakufu tone in their sonnō jōi discourse, although neither subjugating nor overthrowing of the feudal Bakufu was within their scope yet.

The proponents of sonnō jōi plagued the Bakufu especially by their terrorism against the westerners, whom they viewed as “beasts.” Their perception was equally shared by Emperor Komei [1831-67] and became his ground for supporting jōi, and the position of the court was reinforced by the increasing expectation from the sonnō jōi camp. The proclamation of jōi by the name of the tennō, which was brought about under the impetus of the courtiers who had joined a secret league with Chōshū’s radical leaders, marked the remarkable rise of jōi movement and its dominance over the Bakufu.  

15. Besides the execution of eight people such as Hashimoto Sanai [1834-59] and Yoshida Shōin [1830-59], the object of the purge included Tokugawa Nariaki, his son Hitotsubashi Keiki, and Matsudaira Yoshinaga [1828-90] of Fukui. Although Ansei Taigoku is often said to be an unduly ruthless purge by the conservative wing of the Bakufu led by Ii, it was in a way the only solution for them, who were faced with such unprecedented political crises as liaison between the leading han and the court, in which people like Hashimoto and Saigō Takamori [1828-77] played active roles, and the resulting political interference by the court. Miyachi Masato. “Ishin shiryō shūhō ni miru rekishikan,” UP 304 (1998), p. 9.


20. Norman, E. Herbert. Ôkubo Genji (tr.), “Nihonban jo ni kaete,” in his Nihon ni okeru kindai kokka no seiritsu. Jiji tsushinsha, 1947, p. 7. Yet, as discussed in the following section, at the back of this “culmination” of jōi was the strata-
In July, 1863, an armed skirmish between a British naval squadron and Satsuma, which occurred over the Richardson Affair of August the previous year, developed into Satsu-Ei sensô (Kagoshima Bombardment). The battle, which ended with Satsuma’s nominal victory, made it realize the power of western military technology and shift to the implementation of an open ports policy. Shimonoseki sensô (Bombardment of Shimonoseki; 1863-64) was also significant in that it triggered the change from joi to tobaku. In May, 1863, Chôshû fired on the ships of America, France, and Holland in Shimonoseki. The shelling prompted a French and American countercharge, and a later retaliation bombardment. The following month, the U.S. attacked a Chôshû fort, and the representatives of the three countries and Britain decided to attack the han. On August 5 the following year, a combined fleet of 17 ships (9 British, 3 French, 4 Dutch, and 1 American) bombarded and immediately destroyed the Shimonoseki forts. The damage urged Chôshû to make a quick move toward making peace, and a peace agreement was signed on the 14th, in which Takasugi Shinsaku [1839-67] represented the han, joined by It Hirobumi [1841-1909] and Inoue Kaoru [1835-1915].

22. Britain, which also suffered heavy losses, recognized Satsuma’s capacity.
Thereafter the two approached each other and came to cooperate. In passing, the adequacy of the bombardment was questioned at the British House of Commons from a humanitarian viewpoint. In the discussion, one of the speakers maintained that, while the murder of Richardson was undoubtedly a shameful act, it was also true that the Bakufu could not yet abolish the 300-hundred-year-old law which allowed the killing of foreigners standing at the sight of the procession of daimyô. Minamura Takeichi. Za Taimazu ni miru bakumatsu Ishin. Chûô kôronsha, 1998, p. 61, 53.
24. Preoccupied with its own civil war, America participated for mere form’s sake, to get a share of the anticipated claim as a result of the attack. Furukawa. 1996, p. 181.
Realizing the impracticability of jōi by force, Chōshū opted to relinquish its advocacy of the notional sonnō jōi and immediately became the central force of activism. 

Sonnō jōi movement was a political movement the original purpose of which was to rectify and maintain the bakuhan system through criticizing the Bakufu’s policies. After the Satsu-ei sensō and Shimonoseki sensō, however, it turned into the tōbaku movement, which was aimed at overthrowing the Bakufu. The new movement began in practice in Chōshū with the rebellion led by Takasugi against the han conservatives. Of the two expeditions mounted against Chōshū by the Bakufu, the first one of December, 1864, ended virtually without fighting upon the declaration of submission by the han. However, the intransigence of the radicals led by Takasugi, who had taken control of the han government, instigated the Bakufu to plan its second expedition in 1866. The plan was opposed by other han and the court, and Satsuma refused to send its troops from the earliest stages. Chōshū, united under the tōbaku faction by this time, entered a military alliance with Satsuma and overwhelmed the Bakufu troops.

The second Chōshū expedition started on June 7, 1866, when peasants’ uprisings and urban riots were intensifying. When Shōgun Iemochi (formerly Tokugawa Yoshitomi) died in Osaka castle on July 10, it was kept as a secret, and the decision was made in favor of Hitotsubashi Keiki, who was chosen as the 15th shōgun, to take the field on Iemochi’s behalf. Keiki, however, had no alternative but to give up the continuation of the expedition at the news of the fall of Kokura castle. Although the Bakufu was barely able to save face by making peace on account of Iemochi’s death and discharging the army using the occasion of Emperor Kōmei’s funeral, its de facto occupation.

25. The part of the reason was that the Bakufu did not really wish military occupation.
defeat in a war to a single han considerably undermined its authority. Consequently, the concept of tōbaku came to be perceived as a realistic political goal, for which Satsuma and Chōshū, in alliance, came to influence the national political situation as a new leading force. It was the beginning of the political force called the tōbaku faction. With the Bakufu on the verge of degrading itself to a mere daimyō force, Tokugawa Keiki (formerly Hitotsubashi Keiki), who ascended to the shogunate, implemented vigorous political reforms in desperate efforts to regain its authority and control over han. While assuring the foreign ministers that the Bakufu was the legitimate ruling power of Japan, Keiki performed (with the help of Leon Rochés [1809-1901], a French envoy) reform efforts, including taking talents to higher positions, reconstruction of the vocational system, and the naval and military modernization under the guidance of a French officer. However, these radical reform projects left the Bakufu with various internal problems, and the procurement of imperial permission to open Hyōgo port, hastily made against fierce opposi-

1. Iwanami shoten, 1994, p. 103.
28. Miyachi. 1994, p. 104. Some assert it is incorrect to say that the Bakufu practically fell to the position of a daimyō after kaikoku. According to them, the laws instituted by the Bakufu were still nationally effective, and the issue in the conflicts among han was how to get a say in the Bakufu’s policymaking. In spite of the inadequacy of its aged ruling system and han’s refusal to support the Chōshū expedition, these researchers say, the Bakufu stayed at the helm of feudal lords until the dissolution of the bakuhan system. For further details, see Ono Masao. “Bakuhan sei seiji kaikakuron,” in Rekishi-gaku kenky kai and Nihonshi kenky kai (eds.), Kōza Nihon rekishi 6: Kinsei 2. Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1985, p. 337.
29. After a French attack on Kanghwa, Korea, in November, 1866, in revenge for the General Sherman incident and the murder of its missionaries that had occurred earlier that year, the Bakufu tried to act as an intermediary between the two countries and America. This attempt to gain international recognition and support, however, ended in vain as Korea rejected any negotiations. This scheme of a Japanese government using its relationship with Korea in order to obtain legitimacy and lift its authority was taken from earlier Japanese history. Miyachi. 1994, p. 105.
tion of anti-Bakufu forces, became one of the factors motivating Satsuma, under the initiatives of Saigō Takamori and Ōkubo Toshimichi [1830-78], to pursue tōbaku by force. Another damaging blow to the Bakufu was the sudden death of the pro-Bakufu Emperor Kōmei. It facilitated the return of anti-Bakufu court nobles like Iwakura Tomomi [1825-83] from exile, and, with Iwakura’s maneuvering in cooperation with Ōkubo, resulted in the court’s inclination to tōbaku.

Securing national independence came to be recognized as an urgent need, as antagonism toward the western powers and a sense of national crisis deepened due to western pressure and kaikoku problems. As a consequence, the tōbaku movement took the direction of pursuing national unity by relinquishing the dual sovereignty of the Bakufu and the court, which became obvious through their rivalry. In the light of the apparent lack of capacity on the part of the Bakufu to reconstitute itself from the administration of the Tokugawa family into that of Japan as a whole, it was in due course that the jōi movement changed its goal to the abolishment of the Bakufu and, further, the establishment of a new national government that would replace it. The protagonists of the movement with a new orientation of ōsei fukko (Restoration of imperial rule) were not Mito samurai but people like Ōkubo of Satsuma or Takasugi Shinsaku and Kido Takayoshi [1833-77] of Chōshū.

30. Oka. 1967, p. 88. The sense of national crisis turned into expansionism in advocacy for which various discussions were made after Perry’s arrival. Expansionism, which took the shape of seikanron (subjugation of Korea), was supported by both pro-jōi and pro-kaikoku camps, based on the strong sense of foreign pressure and the pursuit of national unity. Kimura Naoya. “Bakumatsuki no Chōsen shinshutsu to sono seisakuka,” Rekishigaku kenkyū, 679 (1995), p. 19.

31. There is a view that the goal of the tōbaku force to achieve national unity was only in terms of coping with foreign powers. According to this view, every effort was made by the tōbaku force to secure the independence and autonomy of han. Nihon keizai shinbun 19th December 1998 (yūkan).

32. Tōyama Shigeki. Tōyama Shigeki zenshū 2. Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1992
It can be said that western pressure induced the explosion of the energy accumulated during the Edo period and politically activated the Japanese society, with various social strata including samurai and gōnō (wealthy cultivators) with different political orientations actively pursuing their goals. Western impact also brought to the surface such structural problems as peasant rebellions, financial disorder, and uncontrollable business customs, and sakoku (national seclusion) policy under challenge, none of which the Bakufu could handle by itself. Furthermore, kaikoku and the development of foreign trade that followed triggered price increases, aggravating the financial difficulties of the Bakufu, daimyō, and samurai, which had already come into existence with the growth of commercial capital. This served the tōbaku movement well as a factor to justify its cause.33

From this political chaos emerged the tōbaku faction from Satsuma and Chōshû that was to pursue a westernization line. Replacing the Bakufu with a new Meiji government, this group of people would grow into the officials of a “modern” state in a short while.34

33. Oka. 1967, p. 36.
34. Takahashi Hidenao. “Haihan chiken ni okeru kenryoku to shakai: Kaïka e no kyōgō,” in Yamamoto Shirō (ed.), Kindai Nihon no seitō to kanryō. Tokyo sōgensha, 1991, p. 90. The established view is that the Satsuma-Chōshû Alliance was based on the agreement to confront the Bakufu by force, whether the two han had a vision of unifying the whole country under the tennō system or under the alliance of the leading han as the only polity. There is, however, an opinion that the goal of the alliance was solely to avoid a civil war and therefore it is inadequate to regard it as a military alliance for the purpose of subjugating the Bakufu by force. See Aoyama Tadamasa. “Satchō meiyaku no seiritsu to sono haikei,” Rekishigaku kenkyû, 557 (1986), p. 1. On the other hand, Umegaki says, “the absence of the corresponding monarchical center made it necessary for that alliance to become a surrogate monarchy as the foundation of absolute power in the place of the bakufu which had lost the basis to grow to be the monarchical center itself.” Umegaki, Michio. After the restoration: The beginning of Japan’s
The Mechanism of the Changing Doctrine and Movement

As I mentioned earlier, what is confusing about modern Japanese history is the fact that *sonnô jôi*, while crying for the expulsion of western powers, actually consented to *kaikoku* and accepted westernization. To the Japanese, the concepts of *jôi* and *kaikoku*, and westernization that followed, did not conflict in fundamentals, so that many of them professed to stand for *jôi* but transformed themselves into the executors of *kaikoku*. 35 This all comes from the correlation and inseparability of *sonnô* and *jôi*, about which Tokutomi Sohô [1863-1957] gives a felicitous description: 36

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35. Terao Gorô. *Tôbaku no shiso: Sômô no ishin*, Shakai hyôronsha, 1990, p. 250. It is said that the typical evaluation of *sonnô jôi* in Japan during W.W. II was that it was the manifestation of national awareness, leading people to fight against the intention of western powers to colonize Japan, defend national independence, and succeed in establishing the Meiji Restoration. See T yama Shigeki. “*Sonnô jôi* shisô to nashonarizumu,” in Tôyama Shigeki, Hattori Shisô, and Maruyama Masao. *Sonnô jôi to zettai shugi*. Hakujitsu shoin, 1948, p. 3. Contrary to the wartime interpretation, Herbert Norman says, “*sonnô jôi* was accepted by the political leaders out of sheer necessity: Neither the Bakufu nor even the most radical *jôi han* were against the idea of having close relationships with western powers, which was barely hinted by the *jôi han*’s language and behavior. It can be even said that they were willing to seize every opportunity to earn the diplomatic support of the western powers, for the purpose of purchasing arms and winning the domestic power struggle. Thus, *jôi* was one complicated movement and the feudal ruling classes supported it because … they aimed at appeasing antiestablishmentarians and averting people’s attention from their struggle against feudalism … lower-class or masterless samurai advocated it because it was the strategic and decisive weapon for taking power from the Bakufu. (After all,) *jôi* did not facilitate social revolution but put political power into the hands of lower-class samurai.” See Norman. 1947, pp. 7-9.

At that time, it seemed like sonnô and jôi were almost identical concepts with different names, and inseparable. Some people started with sonnô and came to advocate jôi, and others jôi to sonnô. To put them into historical order, first, a sense of jôi, or antagonism toward the foreign powers, was lit up by their pressure, and aroused sonnô, or reverence to tennô, which had been accumulated in the people’s hearts.

As the sense of crisis heightened over Japan’s possible semi-colonization by western capitalist powers after the coming of Perry, the tide of Japanese politics rapidly turned from sakoku to kaikoku, and from shôgun to tennô. These changes politicized tennô, who had been traditional and apolitical, making way for the creation of a centralized nation under his name. Yet sonnô jôi, the determinant of these drastic changes, did not orient itself towards overthrowing the Bakufu at first. It was rather aimed at bolstering up the bakuhan system, shaken by the increased appearances of western boats, which

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37. In the discourse of kokugaku, which ardently admired the bakuhan system, tennô was “sacred” and a cultural symbol, but never a political existence. However, as western pressure increased political unrest and a concept of a new polity called “Japan” was generated, the cultural symbol came to take on a political hue. Tennô in Mitogaku was one of these manifestations, which was further developed by Yoshida Shôin. Thus, through the changing process of sonnô, tennô departed from a cultural symbol (kokugaku) to the embodiment of the bakuhan system (Mitogaku), then to the symbol of national political unity. Inoue Isao. “Sonnô jôiron,” in Hashikawa Bunsô, Kano Masanao, and Hiraoka Toshio (eds.), Kindai Nihon shisôshi no kiseki. Yûhikaku, 1971, p. 5.

38. Fujita Satoru argues that sonnô jôi thought was established in the early nineteenth century as a political theory to strengthen the bakuhan system. According to Fujita, a view was expressed inside the Bakufu that tennô had entrusted it with sovereign power, and it was clearly stated in Matsudaira Sadanobu’s memorial to shôgun. Furthermore, the Bakufu not only defined its position in the state system and its relations with the court, but also demonstrated the idea by submitting a foreign affairs memorial to the court around the first to seventh years of Bunka (1803-10). At the background of the emerging of the idea was the Bakufu’s recognition of people,
was not surprising, considering that the reverence for tennō coexisted with loyalty to han lords and the shogunate in Mitogaku. 39

Then, what was the theoretical structure of sonnō jōi, and how did it change? I would like to discuss these points by concluding it.

Jōi of the bakumatsu period had the elements of both feudalistic antiforeignism and budding nationalism. Yet, when expulsion of western powers was advocated in a country which had the long tradition of developing its culture by adopting foreign things and thoughts, it was on the tacit premise that foreign culture, especially science and technology, should be absorbed. 40 This mindset is clearly demonstrated in the fact that the most active figures in ōsei fsukko were the most eager promoters of kaika (enlightenment), or “progress,” which practically meant westernization. As a matter of fact, fsukko, much talked about in bakumatsu, did not only mean tennō’s return to the center of politics. When Tokugawa Iemochi declared in 1862, at the occasion of westernizing the military system, that Japan was going back to the time prior to the Kan’ei period (1624-43), when the ruling Tokugawa clan was the most powerful in its history and foreign trade was flourishing, the Bakufu was justifying its westernization reform by use of the phraseology. 41

Sakatani Shiroshi, a member of Meirokusha, a society of scholars
as well as the presence of western powers, as a threat to its ruling system.


that disseminated the idea of “enlightenment” from 1874 to 1875, even says that sonnô jôi meant “to honor the emperor by expelling from Japan the barbaric elements that did not conform with the mores of an enlightened and civilized world.” What had to be removed, says Sakatani, was Japanese civilization or culture, and there was enough ground for sonnô jôi to change into “enlightenment,” that is, kaikoku.

It could be said that, in post-sakoku Japan, there was a kind of general agreement on westernization, which was not held by the Bakufu alone but nationally shared. While professedly advocating bunmei kaika (“civilizing and enlightening”), the Japanese had what could be almost called a manifest premise that their survival be protected against the western imperialistic powers by adopting their culture. The “national agreement” was later developed into a nationalism oriented towards the expansion of national power and defense buildup, which was the only course available for an impulsive antagonism against “western barbarians,” if intellectually controlled. Even the proclamation of kaikoku and amity was a part of a national defense plan, in which jãi was included as a possibility. The seemingly conflicting ideas of jôi-sakoku and kaikoku-amity were consonant.

As a matter of fact, the focus of the national debate on kaikoku in 1850s was not on the pros and cons of the signing of the “unequal treaties,” but how this kind of decision should be made. Kaikoku was not a matter of choice, but a fait accompli. The fact would be fairly

44. Hirakawa. 1971, p. 335; Seiô no shôgeki to Nihon, Kôdansha, 1985, pp. 111-12.
understandable if one remembers that, back in 1842, the _Ikokusen uchiharai rei_ (Order for the Repelling of Foreign Ships), the basis of the maritime defense policies since 1825, was already abrogated to avoid conflicts with western powers. At that point, Japan practically abandoned _sakoku_ policy, or _jōi_ as a foreign policy, and, on this keynote, smoothly reached the conclusion of the Treaty of Kanagawa without major conflict when Perry came in 1853 and 1854. One of the peculiarities of _jōi_ is that it had the scope for, and was a means of, implementing _kaikoku_.

It should be also pointed out that the logic of _jōi_ had to change in accordance with the development of the domestic political scene. As I stated earlier, _sonnō jōi_ was intrinsically not only oriented toward maintaining the _status quo_ by bolstering up the enfeebled Bakufu; it was also motivated to change the situation as another logical consequence of denouncing its misgovernment. It goes without saying that this ambiguity of _sonnō jōi_ made it a common slogan of various political forces with different orientations in _bakumatsu_.

When the Bakufu fell under the power of the conservatives, their chief concern was to sustain the present political structure; they purged reformists, and the Bakufu became incapable of either leading nationwide reformation or coping with the changing domestic and foreign situation. Thus, losing identity, the Bakufu kept “wandering in the highly volatile situation.” Such inefficiency of the Bakufu drew increasing criticism from Mito, and gave rise to the “authority problem” of _shōgun_. As the weakening of the Bakufu, or shogunate, became obvious, the _daimyō_ and lower-class samurai of the

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leading han, as well as the Bakufu itself, started making a move to use tennō and the court.\(^{50}\)

While the Bakufu tried to enforce its shaky power foundation by using tennō, daimyō attempted to expand their political influence through the medium of the court, undermining the power of shogunate by sonnō. Lower-class samurai, recognizing foreign pressure as a national crisis and equipped with the doctrine of culminating sonnō jōi, endeavored to achieve their political goals by making tennō the central point in fixing the national course. Furthermore, such ruled strata as gōnō and gōshō (wealthy merchants) also supported sonnō jōi, as they sought to have an opportunity to participate in politics by changing the existing social system under shōgun.\(^{51}\)

Next, a few vulnerable points of the logic of sonnō jōi should be indicated. First, it had such a variety of advocates that their assertions and causes ended up running to patterns, and their discussion becoming changeable. Second, while sonnō jōi had a blanket target of expelling whatever was threatening national independence, it basically remained the composition of two incompatible causes. Tennō, a nominal and sometimes inviolable ruler, was an object of manipulation after all, and his usability changed depending on the rise and fall of the shōgun’s authority and the political strategies of the leading political force.\(^{52}\) The logic of sonnō jōi could change whatever

\(^{50}\) It seems that the Bakufu still maintained its power at the time of commotion caused by the coming of Perry. On his second arrival, the Bakufu requested some daimyō to dispatch forces as a part of the efforts to quiet Edo residents. No daimyō rejected the request, although they were concerned with the financial difficulties that would arise from this responsibility. While the coming of Perry is generally regarded as the beginning of the Bakufu’s enfeeblement, this example illustrates that its control over daimyō was still functioning at this point. See Uematsu Toshihiro. “Peri-raikō to kokujì daimyō no dōin,” Nihon rekishi 645 (2002) for detail.


\(^{52}\) Defining the Bakufu as the “powerholder” or the “regency” and arguing that it should demonstrate its “virtue” by worshipping tennō, Fujita
way according to its surroundings, its goal varying from **tôbaku** to **kaikoku**, to even patriotism.\(^{53}\)

Such a two-sided characteristic of **sonnô jôi** is typically embodied in Yoshida Shônî, a **bakumatsu** thinker, many of whose students became protagonists of the Meiji Restoration. He was a zealous **jôi** advocate and an outspoken **kaikoku** proponent,\(^{54}\) and an aspect of his expansionism, or invasionism, that accompanies his advocacy of

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Yûkoku insisted that the Bakufu is in charge of politics and should “rule kingly” in his *Seimeiron* (1791, On the reflection of Names). Aizawa Seishisai, in his *Shinron*, made some proposals for rebuilding the malfunctioning and oscillating *bakuhan* system by practicing **sonnô jôi**. Considering that the ground for the existence of the Bakufu was sought in the “practice of **sonnô jôi**,” it seems the “productive use” of **tennô** was not aggressively pursued at this point. See Tôyama Shigeki. *Meiji ishin*, Iwanami shoten, 2000 [1951], p. 85. Even **kokugaku** in **bakumatsu**, typically seen in Nakazui Unsai, — although it aggressively insisted on **tennô**’s legitimacy and later became the ideological foundation of the Meiji government, which claimed the righteousness of **tennô**’s “direct rule”— could not utilize **tennô** as a political tool, even though it placed him at the center of the national polity. See Terawaki Megumi. “**Sonno jô** undô no shisô: Nakazui Unsai o chûshin ni,” *Rerikhigaku kenkyû*, 553 (1986), p. 31. There is a great discrepancy between the **kokugaku** scholars and **sonnô jôi** advocates like Yoshida Shônî or the protagonists of **ôsei fukko coup** and the new Meiji government, who “productively used” **tennô** by the name of **sonnô jôi**.

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\(^{53}\) On the difference of the **bakumatsu** political movements among **han**, there is an opinion that it was the product of not their difference in recognizing the concepts of **jôi** or **kôbu gattai**, but the different “methods” they used to justify themselves in order to maintain their lordships. This view proposes a unique perspective to the conventional framework constructed by such post-war Japanese historians as Tôyama Shigeki and Inoue Kiyoshi. Interpreting the moves of the **han** in the framework of the Chôshû-led radical political movement, these people had considered the **tôbaku** movement as the consequence of the majority of **han**’s advocacy of **jôi**. Sasabe Masatoshi. “**Jôi to jiko seitôka**: Bunkyû kî Tottori han no seiji undô o sozai ni,” *Rerikhigaku hyoron*, 589 (1999).

\(^{54}\) Just as Yoshida Shônî went through drastic changes of ideas several times, his image and evaluation in later ages kept changing as time went on. For the images of Yoshida Shônî since Meiji era to the present, see Tanaka Akira. *Yoshida Shônî: Hentensuru jinbutsuzô*. Chûô kôron shinsha, 2001.
kaikoku can be seen in the quotation at the opening of this article. Shônô and other jôi thinkers held that it would be a national disgrace and equal to abandoning Japan’s own act of volition to open its ports following the demand of foreign powers, incurring their contempt and even threatening future national independence. Therefore, they maintained, Japan should deny the western demand and temporarily opt for jôi and, later, implement kaikoku as its own decision. In their concept, kaikoku was the ultimate goal and jôi only just a part of the strategy to achieve it.55

Tôyama Shigeki, a renowned scholar of modern Japanese history, once described sonnô jôi movement as following:56

... it was turned to tôbakû by not negating sonnô but putting even more emphasis on sonnô. It was then turned to kaikoku for jôi, or kaikoku for expansion abroad, or invasion, precisely, by not negating jôi but putting even more emphasis on antagonism against foreign powers.

It could be safely said that Shônô’s thought falls into this framework, although attention should be paid to the fact that his ultimate goal was not tôbakû but the preservation of national polity, for which purpose he came to advocate tôbakû. The following words of Tokutomi Soh are explanatory of Shônô’s thought.57

Shônô started from jôi and reached sonnô. He was a realistic jôi advocate and no utopian sonnô advocate. This is where he differed from Mito scholars. Of course, he revered tennô. Through

55. Oka. 1967, pp. 31-32. Yoshida Shônô regarded tennô as the authority by which the Bakufu should be chastised, although, in his last years, he conceived the idea of demanding tennô to sacrifice himself for tôbakû and Japan. He had two conflicting images of tennô in his mind; tennô as an idea and as a reality. Okazaki Masamichi. Itan to han’gyaku no shisôshi: Kindai Nihon ni okuru kakumei to ishin. Perikansha, 1999, p. 53.
56. Tôyama. 2000 [1951], p. 117.
his life, he was consistent in his spirit of sōnō, which became even stronger at the end. It should not be forgot, however, that he came to espouse sōnō out of his reverence of national polity. Therefore, he was not a tōbaku proponent from the first. Nor did he become one until the end. Seeing that jōi could not be executed by the Bakufu, nor could the national polity be preserved by it, he recognized the need to go out of his way to support tōbaku. Yet, even at that point, he did not set tōbaku as his final goal. He only came to support it out of sheer necessity in order to preserve the national polity, enlighten and inspire people, and enhance national glory.

Having pressed the Bakufu with the importance of ocean defense and having insisted on war with foreign powers, Mito scholars advocated kaikoku after all, and their slogan of sōnō jōi turned out to be a mere means to that end. In the background of this “defection” was the need of a policy, that would bring people to a national agreement. In other words, they resolutely cried for jōi but, seeing little prospect of succeeding, turned to kaikoku. Even Aizawa Seishisai, who had zealously propagated jōi in his Shinron, declared his reversal of opinion, stating that he had spent hundreds of thousands of words in asserting that Japan should not make peace with western barbarians, avoiding the unnecessary disclosing of his real intention.58

Behind this transformation was a logic that one needs to advocate jōi in order to become the subject of reform and a political leader, and, to stay as a subject, it was necessary to practice kaikoku. Based on this logic, the Meiji government, which came into being under the slogan of jōi, thoroughly switched to kaikoku policy as soon as it was established, informing the ministers from foreign countries of the completion of ôsei fukko and domestically proclaiming amity with western powers.59

Its meaning as a goal lost, jôi became a method, or an excuse. While kaikoku for jôi's sake was advocated in sonnî jôi discourse, jôi for kaikoku's sake was discussed in tôbaku discourse.\(^60\)

In short, the overthrow of the Bakufu, the success of the ôsei fukko coup d'etat, and the establishment of the Meiji government were made possible not by practicing jôi movement, but by its sudden stop.

Such changeability of the logic of sonnî jôi stems from the basic fragility of the dual political structure of the bakuhan system, in which the shôgun, as a practical executioner of political power, and the tennô, a symbolic authority with little power, coexisted.\(^61\) The Bakufu’s ambiguous political ground never allowed “Tokugawa ideology”\(^62\) to become a sound national ideology like (Neo-)Confu-

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61. If we encompass the cultural aspect in our discussion of the transition, the following explanation would be applicable; “…overall, the transition of jôi into kaikoku to bunmei kaika was made with comparative flexibility. One of the reasons was that the bakuhan system was fragile in its social and political structures and ruling ideology, while the other being the absence of solid structure in the international and cultural awareness of Japanese people, ruling orruled.” Tôyama Shigeki. “Henkaku no shutai to minzoku mondai,” in *Iwanami kôza Nihon rekishi 24 <bekkan 1>*, Iwanami shoten, 1977, p. 120.
62. In his study of the relationship between the early seventeenth-century Neo-Confucianism and the social and political order under Tokugawa rule, Ooms sees in Yamazaki Ansai [1618-82] Tokugawa ideology as the first and the only ideology Japan has created, or “ideological completion.” Ooms shocked many Japanese scholars who had assumed Confucianism, particularly Neo-Confucianism, was the Bakufu’s orthodoxy. Instead of equating Tokugawa ideology to Neo-Confucianism, Ooms defined it as a domestically created ideology which is characteristic of its components of Japanese religious mores including Buddhism and Shintoism. Kasai Hirotaka states that, in Ooms’ discussion, the concept of ideology is used not for explaining the dynamics of social change, but as a tool for clarifying the unchangingness of history. Herman Ooms. *Tokugawa ideology: Early constructs, 1570-1680*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, pp. 288-89; Kasai Hirotaka. “(Shohyô) J. V. Koshuman cho, Yûichirô Tajiri, Naoyuki Umemori yaku,
conceived by Confucian thought, which would otherwise have bestowed it, like it did to China and Korea, with an ideological consistency through the ideas of rule-by-virtue and yi-xing (K. yôksông, J. ekisei) revolution (change of dynasty). The absence of a value system that was strong enough for ideological control led to the rise of kokugaku and its impact on sonnô jôi. The instability and fragility of “Tokugawa ideology” is fully displayed in the fact that Confucianism was exposed to the unreserved attack of kokugaku once the need arose to emphasize the tennô’s sacredness.

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