

Ii Naosuke's Attempt to Save the Tokugawa Shogunate

EDWIN B. LEE

Hamilton College

For a brief interval, from mid-1858 to early 1860, the decline of Tokugawa authority in Japan appeared to have been halted. The hesitancy and temporization characteristic of the central government's policies since the early 1800's had given way to a reassertion of Tokugawa power so strong that opposition to the shogunate, which had been steadily mounting in intensity, had apparently been stifled, and once again the Edo castle seemed to be in firm control of the nation. Responsible for this revival of authoritarian rule by the shogunate was one of Japan's richest daimyos, Ii Naosuke, a man who, by virtue of name and rank, had been uniquely in a position to grasp control of the government. Ii was a Hereditary Vassal (*Fudai Daimyō*),¹ and it was his belief that if the shogunate was to be saved from destruction by the forces which seemed to threaten it from every side, the traditional dominance of the Hereditary Vassals, particularly those of the Antechamber (*Tamari-no-ma*), within the central administration must be reiterated in uncompromising terms. To do this, refractory elements within the central government had to be silenced, sources of discontent and dissension outside the capital crushed, and, through it all, Western nations, insistent in their bellicose demands for commercial arrangements, mollified.

Ii moved quickly and assertively, and to the casual observer in 1858 and 1859 it doubtless seemed that he and his colleagues in the shogunate were in firm control. But the critical combination of troubles which led Ii to move as he did proved too much for him. Indeed, it seems safe to say, no one could have extricated the government from the extraordinary difficulties, both domestic

and foreign, which beset it in 1858, and the revivification of Tokugawa authority under Ii proved to be short-lived. Ii's autocratic methods, in fact, in the end not only proved his own undoing but actually hastened the very thing he was trying at all times to avoid—the demise of the Tokugawa system. Ii Naosuke's time in office was, then, a period of crucial significance in late Tokugawa history. It constitutes a sort of dividing line between events which are truly "Tokugawa" in their implications and those essentially "pre-Meiji." It has, moreover, been termed a "watershed" between Edo and Kyoto as Tokugawa Japan's political center and between shogunate and imperial domination of the country.² To do justice to Ii and his spectacular failure, we must try to analyze the man and his mission in the light of the troubled times in which he was active; and to do this we should first take a look at Japan's central government in the middle of the nineteenth century.

By the time Ii Naosuke became lord of the Hikone fief in 1850 and thus acquired national prominence, the central bureaucracy of the Tokugawa government had undergone changes of so profound a nature that power more often than not rested with offices other than that of the shogun himself, a development unforeseen by the founders of the shogunate system. In the 1850's—certainly after the accession of the incompetent Shogun Iesada in 1853—authority was exercised, as had often been the case before, by the Senior Councilors (*Rōjū*).³ Originally established as an advisory committee of elder statesmen, the Senior Councilors, because of a simultaneous increase in the central government's duties and a series of irresponsible shoguns—developments not to be discouraged by men seeking power for themselves—had come to serve as administrators and policy-makers as well as advisers. This was a haphazard process, and few hard and fast regulations developed with regard to status within the Council. Membership was traditionally limited to five or six Hereditary Vassals, and often the member who had served longest was recognized as spokesman for the group as a whole. Less often a Hereditary Vassal was named specifically to lead the group. In either event the leader was known as "head" of the Senior Councilors or by some other inexact title.

In addition to the Senior Councilors, there were from time to time other officials in the central government who, in the absence of a strong shogun, managed individually to control the government. For example, a Regent (*Hosa* or *Kōken*) sometimes served when the shogun was a minor, and if the Regent was forceful and bold, he could dominate the Senior Councilors through use of the shogun's absolute power. There is, moreover, at least one instance in which a Grand Chamberlain (*Sobayōnin*), a subordinate of the Senior Councilors, succeeded in rising to a position of dominance in the government through his personal influence over the shogun.⁴ Most often, however, when the shogunate came under the control of someone other than the shogun or the Senior Councilors, that individual was a Hereditary Vassal bearing the title of Great Councilor (*Tairō*).

A Great Councilor, despite his title, had no organic relationship with the Senior Councilors. He stood, in fact, between them and the shogun. When the shogun was himself a forceful personality, the Great Councilor served as a sort of prime minister, representing the shogun in the tedious day-to-day deliberations of the Senior Council and other advisory bodies. But when, as more often happened, a Great Councilor was appointed by (or in the name of) a weak shogun who for one reason or another sought release from political responsibility, the man who filled the extraordinary post was in dictatorial control of the government, subject only to the pressures exerted by the various advisory bodies in the Edo castle.⁵

We have noted that the Senior Councilors were by all odds the most important of such groups. In the mid-nineteenth century the two next most significant pressure groups were the Great Corridor (*Ōrōka*) and the Antechamber, the names referring to those chambers in the Edo castle in which the members of the bodies assembled for their deliberations. The Great Corridor, dominated by the leaders of the three closest Tokugawa collateral families and including certain other Tokugawa relatives and, every now and then, an Outside Lord (*Tozama Daimyō*) or two whom the shogunate wished especially to honor, provided the chief agency through which the extended shogunal family made its opinions known to the bureaucracy. In theory, the self-interest

of this group was identical with that of the shogun; and the Great Corridor did not meet regularly, but assembled for consultation only when summoned in the name of the shogun.⁶

The Antechamber, although its membership included certain Tokugawa relatives, was composed principally of five or six Hereditary Vassals who because of wealth, tradition, or personal influence had come to be regarded as spokesmen for their class as a whole. Like the other councils in the Edo castle, the Antechamber was lacking in specific rules concerning its constituents, but in the nineteenth century, at least, this body was generally thought of as influential enough to require its regular attendance upon the shogun. The members of the Antechamber often sat with the Senior Councilors when matters of importance were under consideration, and sometimes an individual Hereditary Vassal occupied posts simultaneously in the Senior Council and the Antechamber.⁷ It is of immediate significance, as we look at Japan in the mid-nineteenth century, to note that leadership of the Antechamber had come to be exercised by the head of the Ii family of Hikone, the same family which occasionally filled the post of Great Councilor.

There was, on the surface, every reason for the central Tokugawa family (in which the line of shoguns was hereditary), its relatives (as represented by the Great Corridor), and the Hereditary Vassals (in the persons of the Senior Councilors, the Antechamber members, and, from time to time, certain individuals such as a Great Councilor) to co-operate. Each was closely involved with the basic principle of delegated authority according to which the shogun, serving as the legitimate deputy of the emperor, was charged with administering the government of Japan. Any alteration of this premise would jeopardize the role played by each of the major groups in the Tokugawa political system. It is evident, nevertheless, that conditions existed which, under certain circumstances, could lead to disunity at the highest levels of the shogunate. That is, if the purposes of the Tokugawa family and the Hereditary Vassals were at variance, either might seek an alliance with outsiders who had steadfastly been denied the right to a substantial voice in political responsibility: the Outside Lords or, perhaps, the imperial court in Kyoto.

Just such a division, first noticeable during an abortive reform movement in the 1840's, flared up again amid the reactions to Commodore Perry's visit in 1853. Abe Masahiro, head of the Senior Councilors, unwilling to acquiesce immediately in the American demands and yet aware that he was in no position to refuse, sought release from his dilemma by appealing for outside advice in an effort to widen the base of responsibility for Japan's response to the American challenge. Suggestions and opinions came in from every quarter—from Outside Lords as well as Hereditary Vassals—much of which was unrealistic but some of which showed a deeper appreciation of Japan's unhappy position than Abe perhaps had suspected. To him, however, two replies were of particular importance, since his own decision would have to be made in the certain knowledge that if the two writers were in disagreement he would surely offend one of them.

The first reply was from Tokugawa Nariaki, former head of the Mito branch of his family and still the most powerful voice in the Great Corridor despite his official retirement from that body some years earlier. The other was from Ii Naosuke, lord of Hikone and head of the Antechamber. The two opinions were diametrically opposed. Ii favored conciliation, if necessary, to avoid the hostilities which he thought would surely ensue if Japan refused Perry's demands. Tokugawa Nariaki, on the other hand, advocated rejection of the American proposals even if it meant war, or so he seemed to say. War, indeed, Nariaki implied, might serve as a stimulus to the nation's lagging military spirit. *Yamato-damashii*, the ineffable essence of Japanism, would provide victory.⁸

These are curious ideas, and they did not necessarily reflect Nariaki's true beliefs. In light of other opinions voiced by him both before and after 1853, it appears that he, as much as Naosuke, favored a course of action which would strengthen the shogunate. But unlike Ii, who observed that the country was simply too weak to resist the American demands and should therefore make whatever concessions were required to avoid conflict, Nariaki seems to have felt that the shogunate's sole possibility of survival lay in complete reform, a reassertion of basic principles, and, perhaps most important, close co-operation with

the imperial court. His call for war, therefore, may well have been a studied attempt to bolster what he regarded as weakened leadership within the government.

Abe Masahiro, head of the Senior Councilors, had little choice but to agree with Ii Naosuke and disagree with Tokugawa Nariaki. Regardless of his personal inclinations, it was he who had to reply to the Americans, and he chose to follow the general line of reasoning supported by Ii and to reject that of Tokugawa Nariaki.

From this time on through the remainder of the 1850's, Tokugawa government was marked by a struggle between Ii Naosuke and Tokugawa Nariaki, each of whom sought to control policy, whether for personal ambition or dedicated purpose. Abe Masahiro, who desperately tried to conciliate the two, finally, with the appointment of Hotta Masayoshi, a friend of Ii Naosuke, allied himself positively with Ii's ideas; and when Abe died in the summer of 1857, there was every indication that Hotta, who became head of the Senior Councilors, would co-operate fully with Ii and the Antechamber which he represented.

From this brief summary it can be inferred that foreign relations profoundly influenced Japanese domestic activities in the mid-nineteenth century, but the reverse was to be the case also. Domestic problems centering upon the choice of a successor to Shogun Iesada were to impinge upon Japan's international obligations in 1857. Who controlled the office of shogun controlled the government; and an opportunity arose, in the shogunal succession question, for the Great Corridor and Tokugawa Nariaki, now alienated from the Senior Councilors and the Antechamber, to gain control over the office of shogun and therefore the shogunate.

It had been apparent since his accession in 1853 that an heir would have to be provided for the childless and unwell Shogun Iesada, and two candidates for this honor had emerged. One was a child, first cousin to Iesada, from the Kii branch of the Tokugawa family; the other was an adult from the Hitotsubashi branch of the family. But the Hitotsubashi candidate happened to be a son of Tokugawa Nariaki who had been sent by his father into adoption in 1847, perhaps, if we give Nariaki credit for possess-

ing almost superhuman insight, for just such a contingency. If the Hitotsubashi candidate were to be chosen, it would therefore mean that Tokugawa Nariaki would in effect control the government. Consequently, Ii Naosuke and those who supported him (including, of course, Hotta Masayoshi) favored the young boy from Kii. They surmised that if Iesada were to be succeeded by a minor, the Senior Councilors and the Antechamber would most likely be able to continue what they regarded as their rightful domination of the government. If, on the other hand, Tokugawa Nariaki's son became shogun, he would be sure to do his father's bidding, and the influence and prestige of the Senior Councilors and the Antechamber—of Hereditary Vassals—would disappear from the central government. To Ii this meant that the shogunate itself, in its traditional, and to him only legitimate, form, would be threatened with extinction.

In the midst of this factional division, Townsend Harris, a New York City businessman well acquainted with the Far East, arrived in Japan in the summer of 1856 to serve as the United States' first consul general there. Determined to negotiate a new, commercial agreement between the United States and Japan, Harris, by the autumn of 1857, had, despite obstacle after obstacle put in his way, hammered out in conferences with shogunate representatives a rough draft of such an agreement. He then pressed for final conclusion of the treaty, warning Hotta Masayoshi, head of the Senior Councilors, that Japan would be subject to the same harsh treatment Britain and France had recently accorded China unless Japan and the United States had previously concluded a commercial agreement which could serve as a model for subsequent treaties with other nations of the West.⁹ Alarmed, Hotta agreed to begin final negotiations.

Facing Hotta, however, was the precedent of Abe Masahiro's solicitation of advice four years previously, and he therefore proceeded to make just such an appeal in the closing days of 1857. Ii Naosuke had already indicated his approval of a new treaty, but Hotta was probably both surprised and pleased to learn that Tokugawa Nariaki's firm opposition to relations with the West had mellowed. While not approving the full diplomatic

relations desired by Harris, Nariaki nevertheless seemed reconciled to the fact that Japan was no longer isolated.¹⁰

Contrasted with Nariaki's encouraging, if puzzling, sentiments, however, were the ominous statements sent in by a number of persons known to be allied with Nariaki against Ii Naosuke, statements which tied their qualified approval of the treaty to the nomination of a "capable man" as heir to Shogun Iesada.¹¹ Hotta thus realized that the domestic problem which he had tended to ignore was still very much alive.

How, then, to conclude the treaty without alienating those who felt that the succession question deserved priority? In what turned out to be a disastrous decision, Hotta determined to secure support for the new treaty from an unlikely source: the imperial court in Kyoto. If, as he hoped, the court's commitment to the new treaty succeeded in quieting the Hitotsubashi supporters, who held the court in high esteem, he could then sign the treaty immediately and postpone the vexing problem of who should be Iesada's successor.

So it was that Hotta, in early 1858, set out for Kyoto in hopes of convincing the court that it should give positive support to the shogunate's actions regarding the new commercial treaty with the United States. This move was, in the first place, subversive of the basic Tokugawa regulation which removed the court from governmental responsibility. In the second place, it was doomed to failure for the simple reason that a number of very important court nobles agreed with Tokugawa Nariaki's ideas on shogunate reform. These men, undoubtedly with prior approval from Nariaki himself, soon informed Hotta that while the imperial court did, indeed, desire to see the foreign problem settled, it regarded the succession problem as much more important. Iesada's heir should be the only qualified candidate, Tokugawa Nariaki's grown son, Hitotsubashi Keiki.¹²

When Hotta left for Kyoto, there was no disagreement between him and Ii Naosuke. But reports sent back to Edo by a trusted retainer whom Ii had stationed in the imperial capital indicated that Hotta's mission was not proceeding favorably. Through his aide, Ii learned almost as soon as Hotta did that the court was suggesting something very much like a bribe: in

return for assurance that Hitotsubashi would be named heir to Shogun Iesada, the Emperor would bestow his approval on the new commercial treaty with the United States.¹³

The internal crisis in the Japanese government thus came to a head in the spring of 1858. Hotta Masayoshi, having set out for Kyoto a supporter of the Kii candidate as heir to Iesada, changed his mind because of his belief that the treaty question could not be settled otherwise, and he prepared to return to Edo disposed to the nomination of Tokugawa Nariaki's son. It appeared, therefore, that the co-operation between the Antechamber and the Senior Councilors was at an end, since Hotta could control the decisions of the latter group, and that the official shogunate position, determined by the Senior Councilors and the Great Corridor, would favor Hitotsubashi's nomination. To Ii Naosuke and his supporters in the Antechamber, this would mean a revolutionary upheaval fraught with danger for their own positions, for the shogunate, and for the nation itself.

But Ii, as we have noted, was in a position to forestall this development; he did just what Nariaki and his partisans must have feared, and took for himself (under the pretense of shogunal appointment, to be sure) the office of Great Councilor (*Tairō*). This office, a sort of regency for an adult shogun, usually filled in a time of emergency, had come to be associated with three families: Sakai, Yanagisawa, and Ii. The last occupant of the office, from 1835 to 1841, had, in fact, been an older brother of Ii Naosuke, Ii Naoaki.¹⁴ All the necessary elements for the filling of this extraordinary post were present in the late spring of 1858: an emergency existed (in both foreign and domestic affairs); the Shogun, completely indisposed by now, was incapable of independent action; and a representative of a family traditionally associated with the post was available and strongly supported.

Thus Ii Naosuke, acting in concert with his colleagues in the Antechamber, with some of the Senior Councilors, and with certain influential ladies of the inner apartments of the Edo castle, assumed a title on June 3, 1858, which would enable him to thwart Tokugawa Nariaki's plans to gain control of the government.

Ii was at first very cautious. For example, he allowed Hotta

to remain a Senior Councilor despite their estrangement. Furthermore, he took pains to try to conciliate the imperial court. The Emperor's reply to Hotta's request for treaty approval had included a recommendation for another canvass of daimyo opinion regarding the proposed treaty. Once this was done, the court had said, it would certainly support whatever course the daimyos appeared to favor. Ii, who apparently was sincere in his respect for the Emperor, therefore proceeded with another solicitation of opinion. The replies were virtually the same as those of six months earlier: most favored if not a positive pro-treaty policy at least a policy of peace as opposed to war.¹⁵ Ii therefore felt confident, as he once again requested imperial sanction for the treaty, that the court would have no choice but to grant its approval as it had promised.

This done, Ii then attacked the problem of the shogunal succession. Fully intending to solve it once and for all, he went through the motions of inquiring of Iesada his choice of successor and announcing to Kyoto that an heir had been selected, without mentioning what everyone knew to be the case—that the nominee was Kii and not Hitotsubashi.¹⁶

Before he could proceed with Kii's adoption, however, the foreign problem once again demanded his attention. Townsend Harris suddenly sailed into Edo Bay aboard an American man-of-war with the news that Britain and France, in a great show of force, had extracted the Treaties of Tientsin from China. His earlier warnings that such action in China would be repeated in Japan as the West pressed its demands seemed now to be confirmed. Still, Ii sought to retain the September date for the treaty-signing already agreed upon, assuming that by that time the Emperor's approval would have been forthcoming. Not until Harris repeated his dire predictions even more forcefully did Ii dispatch two officials with what amounted to plenipotentiary powers to deal with Harris aboard ship. The officials were to sign the treaty only after trying once again to persuade the American envoy to wait until September, and then only after exhausting every effort to obtain a guarantee that the British and French would not attack Japan if the American treaty had already been concluded. Harris refused both these pleas, and the treaty was

at length signed, not by Ii himself, but by his designated subordinates.¹⁷

Ii had thus taken the first decisive action of his new career as Great Councilor, an action sure to cause repercussions among the group which demanded the nomination of Hitotsubashi as shogunal heir before any decision regarding the treaty was made. In preparation for such developments, Ii quickly took a number of steps to consolidate his control. He dismissed Hotta, the latter's usefulness as intermediary between the government and Townsend Harris having ended with the signing of the treaty. He fired or shuffled about a number of other officials, replacing them with persons of unquestioned loyalty. He then let it be known that he intended to announce, on August 3, 1858, the name of the heir to Shogun Iesada.¹⁸

This news drove Tokugawa Nariaki and his supporters, already angry over the treaty-signing, to desperation. Only a miracle could have prevented Ii from nominating Kij rather than Hitotsubashi, but Nariaki and his partisans were determined to make a last-ditch effort to frustrate Ii's plans. Nariaki, his son Yoshiatsu (official head of the Mito branch of the Tokugawa family), and two other close kinsmen arrived unannounced at the Edo castle on the morning of August 3, forced their way in, and demanded to see the Great Councilor. The purpose of the visit was not immediately clear, but when Ii finally appeared after a good deal of confusion and noise, Nariaki and his relatives informed him that if Hitotsubashi were named heir to the Shogun, the Emperor would grant his *ex post facto* approval of the American treaty. Ii, outraged, dismissed the visitors with the terse announcement that the Shogun had already chosen Kij to be his heir and there was nothing further that could be done about it. The group then withdrew, having accomplished nothing more than provide Ii with an excuse to hit back at them for their unauthorized entry into the castle.¹⁹

Two days later, on August 5, Ii announced publicly that the Shogun had adopted his young cousin from Kii. On August 12 a series of announcements issued forth from the Shogun's apartments, ostensibly from the dying Iesada, prescribing punishments for the participants in the castle-trespassing incident.²⁰ The sen-

tences, domiciliary confinement, were not particularly severe, but they were, Ii apparently felt, condign in that they would silence the leaders of the groups opposed to him.

On August 14, Iesada died, and his young adopted heir became Shogun Iemochi. Ii Naosuke was now Great Councilor to this twelve-year-old boy, he had subordinate to him a body of officials who were completely loyal, and he had eliminated the influence of Tokugawa Nariaki and his followers by confining them under house arrest. He was firmly in command of the shogunate, and the problems which had caused him to assume the office of Great Councilor had apparently been solved. But the calm now settling in upon the Edo castle was deceptive, and it was not to last for long.

Immediately after the American treaty had been signed by the two junior shogunate officials whom Ii had dispatched to deal with Harris aboard the American warship, Ii reported the details to Kyoto by ordinary post. Both the report itself and the way in which it was sent infuriated the Emperor, and, in what was an audacious gesture for an emperor in the Tokugawa scheme of things, he summoned Ii (or, in his place, one of the members of the Tokugawa family then in confinement) to Kyoto.²¹ Receiving the Emperor's summons on the very day of Iesada's death and certain now that the shogunal succession dispute had been settled irrevocably, Ii not only refused to go to Kyoto or to send one of the Tokugawa relatives, but also implied in his answer to the Emperor that special emissaries then enroute to Kyoto to seek once again imperial approval of the American treaty would also investigate the court's antagonism toward the shogunate government.²²

At this news, Ii's enemies in Kyoto sprang into action in one last attempt to thwart the Great Councilor before his lieutenants arrived in their midst. A number of courtiers, abetted (and advised) by a small number of men of samurai rank who were present illegally in Kyoto as representatives of Ii's antagonists in the central government, began to exert pressure upon the Emperor. After considerable hedging and much soul-searching by some of the participants, they persuaded the Emperor to make a ceremonial challenge to a basic premise of the Tokugawa system by

communicating directly with the Mito branch of the Tokugawas, without routing the letter through the prescribed channels (i.e., via the shogunate authorities charged with liaison between the court and the outside world).²³ The Kyoto "loyalists" (*shishi*), as the lower-echelon group now active in Kyoto had begun to call themselves, gambled that Ii, fearful of antagonizing the powerful and increasingly discontented Outside Lords who supported Tokugawa Nariaki, would not meet such a challenge—that he would not run the risk of censuring the Emperor. The way would then be open, they seem to have believed, to re-establish the government of Japan in a way that would diminish the political authority of the shogunate and increase that of the imperial court, along lines not yet fully delineated.

The plan failed because Ii did meet the challenge—through measures which have come to be known as the *Ansei Daigoku*, the "Great Persecution of the Ansei Period." Ii now extended to Kyoto the purge which he had already begun in Edo with the dismissal of Hotta and the confinement of Tokugawa Nariaki.

For the most part the victims of the purge in Kyoto were the samurai or *rōnin* (masterless samurai) who comprised the "loyalists." In renewed action in Edo, Ii ordered the arrest of men of similar rank who had been active as intermediaries between Nariaki and the Kyoto courtiers. Eventually, the hunt for subversives was pressed even into the fief of a powerful Outside Lord when Yoshida Shōin, an influential samurai who openly advocated moves aimed at undermining the shogunate, was seized (because of his close connections with the Kyoto opponents of Ii) in Choshu. All told, the *Ansei Daigoku* brought about the arrest of some seventy persons, every one of whom was, in Ii's estimate, either guilty of the crime of sedition or intimately associated with someone who was. A number of the victims died in prison, but only seven, including Yoshida Shōin, were executed.²⁴ The *Ansei Daigoku* was, therefore, perhaps less harsh than is generally realized.

To Ii Naosuke, the purge seemed to have accomplished its aims. The opposition to his authoritarian rule—to his attempt to save the shogunate, as he saw it—had been overwhelmed. But a symbol of that opposition remained: the imperial letter sent

directly to the Mito Tokugawas in defiance of shogunate regulations. This was a manifestation of a studied attempt by outsiders to challenge the Tokugawa system and was therefore anathema to Ii, who viewed as subversion any move to modify the shogunate from without. To wrest this symbol of treachery from Mito, where it had been taken for safekeeping, became Ii's obsession, and this obsession led directly to his death.

Mito warriors, already incensed by the arrest and execution of some of their colleagues in the *Ansei Daigoku* and by Ii's cavalier treatment of their former master, Tokugawa Nariaki, and his sons, rebelled at the efforts to procure the imperial letter. And it was a group of them who, having renounced their feudal allegiance to spare their lord embarrassment, on a snowy March morning in 1860 killed Ii Naosuke as he was about to enter the Sakurada gate of the Edo castle.²⁸

The harsh methods which Ii had used to solidify his control over the shogunate—to preserve it, in his view—thus in the end cut short his plans for a reassertion of Tokugawa power. The assassination, indeed, ushered in a period marked by violence (principally against foreigners) on the one hand and government by compromise and temporization on the other, with the ultimate result the demise of the Tokugawa system. Ii's attempt to save the shogunate, thus in vain, is extremely hard to analyze with great certainty. It is abundantly clear that what have been described as policies designed to save the shogunate were at the same time moves by Ii to strengthen his own position, to gain undisputed control over the Japanese government; every move he made did both these things. But the very act of ensuring his own dictatorial control was probably, to Ii, a move to strengthen the government. What he feared was that outside forces, hostile to the Tokugawa system, would undermine it. To prevent this, Ii had no compunctions about changing the policies of the shogunate (witness his approval of ending isolation) so long as such innovations were determined and put into effect by the shogunate itself—not because of pressure from groups that were potential rivals for political power. Exacerbating the whole complex problem was the relationship between Ii and Tokugawa

Nariaki. Were they political rivals who then became personal enemies? Or was it just the other way around?

The difficulty of fathoming II's motives has resulted in his becoming an extremely controversial figure. During the century since his death he has occasionally been the subject of laudatory biographies. More often, though, he has been described as a figure of some historical significance whose positive actions were tainted with lese majesty, whose motives were as much personal vengeance as anything else.²⁸ Since the end of the Pacific War, II's heirs in Hikone have been engaged in a comprehensive program of publication designed to set straight what they regard as the anti-II bias of all but the most recent historical studies of the late Tokugawa period.

It seems unlikely, however, that II will emerge an entirely new figure. It remains a fact, after all, that he did deal with the court in ways which were blunt even for Tokugawa times, and, rightly or wrongly, Japan's acquiescence in unequal treaty relations with the West can be blamed on him. But if II's reasons for acting as he did can be ascertained, the unhappy results may perhaps come to appear less important than has hitherto been the case. What is being suggested here is that there is a certain amount of internal evidence in the II bibliography, heretofore unnoticed, which may be able to throw some light on the man's motivations. The clue to II's reasons for assuming the office of Great Councilor may lie in the timing of his *coup*. Had he sought power only, or principally, for power's sake, or for personal aggrandizement, it seems likely that he would not have waited until Hotta, through his shift in the succession dispute, compromised what II regarded as the only proper structure of the Tokugawa political machine. Had II's personal animosity toward Tokugawa Nariaki and his partisans been the basic factor, II could most likely have become Great Councilor when Abe died in 1857, if not earlier. But he chose to rely on the traditional way of doing things, trusting that Hotta's leadership of the Senior Councilors would preserve the Hereditary Vassal control of the government which II regarded as essential. Only when Hotta's *volte-face* threatened the stability of the central government did

Ii make the moves which placed him in a position to preserve the status quo.

There are questions that remain to be answered, but on balance it seems reasonable to assert that Ii's actions were, as he conceived of it, patriotism, and it was in an attempt to save the shogunate, not to acquire fame and fortune, that Ii became Great Councilor, concluded the unequal treaties with the West, instituted the *Ansei Daigoku*, and, in the end, gave his life.²⁷

NOTES

1. The English translations of Japanese offices are those of John W. Hall in *Tanuma Okitsugu, 1719-1788, Forerunner of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, 1955).

2. Albert M. Craig, *Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration* (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 167-168.

3. The information concerning the shogunate's structure is based on a number of sources. See Wada Hidematsu, *Kanshoku yōkai* (Tokyo, 1926), pp. 312-323; Matsudaira Tarō, *Edo jidai seido no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1919), *passim*; and Tōyama Shigeki, *Meiji ishin* (Tokyo, 1951), pp. 81-85.

4. See Hall, *Tanuma Okitsugu*, for a basic study of such a man.

5. Matsudaira, *Edo jidai seido*, pp. 712-716.

6. Tōyama, *Meiji ishin*, p. 97.

7. Imabori Bun'ichirō, *Ii Naosuke* (Tokyo, 1959), pp. 75-76.

8. Tōkyō Daigaku. Shiryō Hensanjo (comp.), *Dai Nihon komonjo. Bakumatsu gaikoku kankei monjo* (Tokyo, 1911-), I, 509-522, and II, 255-259. (Hereafter cited as *Bakumatsu gaikoku kankei monjo*.) For partial translations see W. G. Beasley, *Select Documents on Japanese Foreign Policy, 1853-1868* (London, 1955), pp. 102-107 and 117-119.

9. *Bakumatsu gaikoku kankei monjo*, XIV, 650-658. See also *Ishin shiryō hensen jimukyoku* (comp.), *Ishin shi* (Tokyo, 1941), II, 268. (Hereafter cited by title.)

10. *Bakumatsu gaikoku kankei monjo*, XVIII, 860-868. For a translation of the document's highlights, see Beasley, *Select Documents*, pp. 168-169.

11. Inobe Shigeo, *Bakumatsu shi gaisetsu* (Tokyo, 1950), p. 167.

12. Ii tairō shijitsu kenkyūjo (comp.), *Ii tairō no kenkyū. Dai-ichi gō* (Hikone, 1950), pp. 77-81. (Hereafter cited by shortened title.)

13. Akao Tōichi, "Nichi-Bei kari tsūshō jōyaku chōin mondai o meguru Ii tairō to Mito han ippa to no kōsō," *Shirin*, XXVI (1941), 429.

14. For details concerning the office of Great Councilor, see Matsudaira, *Edo jidai seido*, pp. 712-716.

15. Katsu Yasuyoshi, *Kaikoku higen* (Tokyo, 1895), III, 2307-2314.

16. Inobe, *Bakumatsu shi gaisetsu*, pp. 191-192.

17. *Ishin shi*, II, 406. See also W. E. Griffis, *Townsend Harris, First American Envoy in Japan* (Boston, 1895), pp. 320-321.

18. *Ii tairō no kenkyū*, p. 48.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-55.

20. Inobe, *Bakumatsu shi gaisetsu*, pp. 206-207.

21. *Bakumatsu gaikoku kankei monjo*, XX, 598-600.

22. *Ibid.*, XX, 717-718.

23. *Ibid.*, XXI, 17-19.

24. For a detailed account of the *Ansei Daigo* see *Ishin shi*, II, 557-516.

25. For details of the assassination, see Matsunobu Kitarō, *Sakurada gikyo to sono ittō* (Tokyo, 1939), pp. 83-88.

26. For many years the best biography of Ii was a generally admiring account by Shimada Saburō: *Kaikoku shimatsu: Ii kamon no kami Naosuke den* (Tokyo, 1888). Against this must be balanced the anti-Ii bias of Tokutomi Ichirō, who devotes no fewer than five volumes of his monumental *Kinsei Nihon kokumin shi* (50 vols.; Tokyo, 1934-1936) to Ii and his administration (vols. XXXIX-XLIII). Even such a respected work as *Ishin shi* reflects the fanatically pro-imperial temper of the years in which it was compiled and so sometimes depicts Ii in less than objective terms. (See, for example, II, 432-663.) A casual sampling of monographic works concerning Ii might reveal less condemnatory opinions, but the following do little more than suggest that Ii is a figure about whom controversy properly hangs: Saltō Bunzō, "Sakurada jihen no kansatsu," *Chūō shiden* I (1920), 4; Honda Kōyō, "Tairō Ii Naosuke no hyōron," *Shigakkai* IV (1902), 11 and 12; Hashida Jirō, "Ii Naosuke nakariseba," *Rekishi kyōiku* III (1928), 3; and Tobimatsu Masamu, "Ansei ka-jōyaku chōin dankō no jijō," *Rekishi kyōiku* VII (1932), 8.

27. This opinion is shared by the leading contemporary authority on Ii Naosuke, Professor Yoshida Tsunekichi, of the Historiographical Institute (*Shiryō hensanjo*) of the University of Tokyo; and his biography of Ii, *Ii Naosuke (Jimbutsu sōsho #113)* (Tokyo, 1963), reflects his attitude.