

Translation of the Memorial of Imakita Sakubei to the Lord of Tosa, Yamauchi Toyochika

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Translators introduction: The following document is a petition submitted by a samurai of Tosa domain to his lord in 1787. Many samurai submitted memorials that year offering advice on how to improve a government that was in deep crisis. In the previous years famine had aggravated deep dissatisfactions with corruption in government. Widespread peasant and townsmen protests had rocked the domain in the spring of 1787 and induced the lord to initiate a governmental reform to restore more legitimacy to rule. Sakubei's petition is remarkable in that he calls for inclusion of commoners into the councils of government, but it also includes much thought about government and corruption common to his contemporaries. Sakubei was a full samurai but of low rank. He had served as a castle guard and as a shinobi, a kind of secret investigator for the lord. At the time of the petition he had been recently promoted to magistrate of the tax storehouses. Sakubei was decently learned but not a scholar. His petition is filled with originality as well as reliance on continental learning such as Confucianism and the I-ching. The lord did not adopt the suggestions in Sakubei's petition but did subsequently employ Sakubei as a member of the reform government.

Translation of the Memorial of Imakita Sakubei to the Lord of Tosa, Yamauchi Toyochika¹

¹ "Kojo oboe" (6/26/1787) transcribed in ms. "Toyochika-ko ki" "Tenmei shichinen jūgatsu-jūnigatsu no kan", 65-74th folios held in the Yamauchi jinja homotsu shiryokan in Kochi city, Japan. I have assigned my own folio numbers counted from the first folio of the volume. This is a transcription made in the 1920's or 30's

Memorial

The whole country [of Tosa]² is in disturbance because there have been bad harvests of the five grains throughout the *tenka iVâ* (Japan) in recent years. The people have become impoverished because the price of rice has risen to unheard of levels. I think it is indeed a case of the saying, "If the people lose a secure living, then they lose secure hearts and cannot avoid selfish wrongdoings". I think, however, that there is another related source of the recent disturbances: In recent years the high and low have been drifting apart.

Because your lordship's primary duty is to be ruler of this country, I expect that you think of nothing but how to maintain the people in peace and security. However, as your intentions pass down through the hands of officials their true content becomes lost, and your lordship's will does not reach the low. Therefore, I think that you

by Yamauchi house historians. The original memorial was held in the archives of the lord of Tosa but the portion of the archives in which it was held ('Tenmei monjo') was burnt in the air raids of World War II. The transcription is the only known version to survive. I have published the original Japanese in "Tosa hanshi Imakita Sakubei ni yoru hansei kaikaku an--Tenmei shichi-nen no jiyu minken shiso no ichi genryu," *Tosa Shidan* (Jan. 1996), no. 200, pp. 53-61, and an extended English discussion of the petition in "A Petition for a Popularly Chosen Council of Government in Tosa in 1787," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 57, no. 2, (Dec. 1997), pp. 575-96.

² In the documents of early modern Tosa the word *kuni* 国 refers almost invariably to Tosa, while *tenka* or *Nihon* 日本 refers to Japan. I prefer to translate *kuni* as 'country' rather than 'province' or 'realm' because I think that many aspects of modern nationalism in Japan were formed within large domainal countries such as Tosa. For my thoughts on this matter see my book, *Mercantilism in a Japanese Domain: The Merchant Origins of Economic Nationalism in Eighteenth Century Tosa* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

should return the way of government to what it was a hundred years ago, and in order to do this you should, at the right time, directly ask the lower people what they think as well, and consider how to do things so that in all respects the feelings of the high and low are communicated to each other.

Of course because your lordship's finances are in a poor state, you cannot order things for the welfare of the people just as you would wish. Although you may think that with the world as it is today it would be extremely difficult for the high and the low to become close, it is the way of heaven and earth that when they are in harmony then all things flourish. This has not changed through the ages. If your lordship places importance on righteousness and sincerely thinks of nothing but the welfare of the people then that truth will be communicated to the low, and high and low will become as one body.

Why should your lordship forget your financial straits? If you order things directly and honestly, and if all officials came to live properly according to their status, then the high and low would come to trust each other. Then, even if you did not disburse rice and money, your intention of benevolent care would be communicated to the low and they would receive your benefits. But there is a saying, "the more you rake in wealth, the more the people flee". Although your lordship is in financial straits, officials with power are amassing wealth and the people are fleeing.³ There is also the proverb, "criticising others while not holding oneself accountable to the same faults." Currently all of the officials entrusted with instructing the people live themselves merely for their own benefit. Therefore the people are not submissive in their hearts, and all scorn and despise those on high. Although your lordship is in financial straits, the people see the better half of your officials getting wealthier and they come to develop hearts hating your lordship. For retainers to arouse such hatred of your lordship in this way is the extreme of disloyalty! Retainers entrusted with positions have many

expenses, and even when they receive office stipends they should naturally be poorer than retainers without office. But what does one see? Their houses and whole style of life are full of wealth.

Because people see these officials take care of those close to them, and ignore those of no relation, the people are not honestly obedient. Thus the government of the country suffers greatly. The ruler of *tenka* rules by spreading his intentions over all of the *tenka*, the ruler of a country by spreading his intentions over that country. It is a great crime for an official in the middle to alter your lordship's intentions. For one person to cause many people distress for his selfish benefit is a crime against heaven. There is the saying, "The benevolent man loves people well and hates people well" which is apt. To punish one for the benefit of the many is the way of benevolent government. If you investigate thoroughly and punish severely then the country will become peaceful.

ITEM. If you wish to govern the country peacefully then you should give great thought towards improving the public morals of both the high and the low. With the current way of government the low have nothing but distrust of your lordship. If public morals became healthy again, then the high and low would come to trust each other. If you wish to order things to improve public morals, then you should select a number of "people of fidelity" (*chushin no hito* 忠信の人) from among people throughout the country high and low, regardless of status. If you then place these people at your side and have them discuss and investigate everything, then public morals will improve and the people will trust your lordship.

ITEM. Because it is the recent custom for many people to desire appointment to public office only to make a living, from the day they are employed all they hope for is to do their job without incident for a certain number of years so that they may achieve a promotion and an increase in their fief. They abandon righteousness and pursue wealth. They take care of those close to them and ignore those who are not. Because of this they bring hardship to the masses and cause

³This is in reference to one of the spring protests wherein over 700 mountain villagers fled the domain.

you great expense.

ITEM. A person of fidelity is one who strives to reject profit and carry out what is righteous, who strives to abandon self interest and carry out the lord's public will. Such people are without ambition for fame or fortune. But there are two kinds of people without ambition: There are those born inept and unable and thus without ambition, and there are those who have intelligence and virtue and can perceive what is righteous. Likewise, there are two kinds of ambitious people: There are those who when they attain office hope to raise their families in ease and who hope for later advancement and fief raises, and there are those who look at the customs of the day and put themselves forward so that they may do something. Although these are quite different from the virtuous type without ambition, because they desire to do something, they can still be made useful and should be given full and careful consideration.

On the whole, although it is possible for those on high to know in a general way about the conditions and feelings of the low through writings, it is very hard to get a real understanding of things without talking directly to people who live in that location and are routinely involved with the things [under consideration]. People who live in an inferior position know all about what is wrong and right, profitable and unprofitable in government. However, if you ask the average person about the conditions and the feelings of the common people, you will come up against the problem that they will answer according to their own interests, and for their own benefit and righteousness will be hidden. Because this would have the opposite effect of giving your heart consternation, you must choose people of fidelity.

Now, because people of fidelity are of a will different from the mass of people, they cannot be chosen in the ordinary way. You should order all of the people of the country to choose such people, and if you order a careful investigation then such people will be found. Certainly there will be those who merely pretend to be people of fidelity, and you must be careful about this. If you can find one good person then there will be others like him. If you do the above then public morals will naturally improve. There are many examples

in history showing that when a ruler gains good people their realms are well governed. Even in these times there are good people living within the country.

ITEM. After you have assembled these people of fidelity, they should report to you all of the details of the good and bad of the country's government. Beginning with:

- One. Frugality for the high and the low.
- Two. Public morals, from the samurai down to the very low, as well as occasional rewards and punishments.
- Three. Methods to reduce transportation *corvée* during the three seasons of spring, summer, and autumn so that it does not interfere with peasants' farming.
- Four. The punishment of peasants who neglect farming and methods to promote agriculture.

And many other things, such as government office expenses at all levels, concerning which you should order these people of fidelity to report to you.

ITEM. Setting these people of fidelity to work will certainly crimp the freedom of greedy people. Therefore some people will slander and reject the people of fidelity, and plead difficulties so as to obstruct your use of these people of fidelity. However if you investigate these issues thoroughly the common people and retainers without government office will be put at ease.

ITEM. You send secret investigators around the country entrusted with investigating the good and bad of people high and low. The effectiveness of government and the comfort or hardship of the people depends upon whether the hearts of these investigators are true or false. When good and evil, corrupt and true are revealed plainly then people of fidelity will come forward, wicked people will retreat, and all of the people will enjoy peace equally. When good and evil are unclear then people who race after profit will advance, righteous people will retreat and all of the

people will experience hardship.⁴ The secret investigator is a very important post, so in the future you should choose a few understanding and honest men from among the ranks of the samurai who receive your great favors, and at times send them out as secret investigators. If they see to it that your lordship's intentions are not lost during implementation and are truly communicated to the low, then the condition of public morals will be restored.

ITEM. Ninety five out of a hundred people already appointed to office are good people, but it is the common man's desire to pursue profit. They become stained with base customs they learn over many years. Even though what they learn over many years in all of the public offices goes against reason, they become confused by the feelings of their superiors, or fall victim to a weakness for helping their brothers and relatives. Even though they know their ways to be wrong they let their days pass without mending their ways, and public morals naturally go into decline. If you ordered now a great cleansing, then the common person would become a good person again.

ITEM. If you wish to wash out these stained-in, base customs, then first you should order the chief administrators to make inquiries on all of the magistrates and the lower officers at unexpected times. And in keeping with this you should order each magistrate to take great concern in the affairs of his office down to the least official. If you order things so that there is no rift between high and low, and so that nothing is hidden, then

common people will become honest. Indeed, it is impossible for me to convey on paper the importance of this one item.

ITEM. You should order a strict governmental reform, noting that you will grant pardons for all but the most severe offenses of the past, but reproclaim the laws and note that henceforth all offenses will be punished most severely for high and low alike. This will improve public morals and when all officials, from the general administrators down to the least work selflessly and tirelessly for the governance of the country, and high and low become as one, then your finances will become healthy and this will become a country governed in peace.

ITEM. From ancient times grave governmental matters were decided in accordance with the will of the gods. That is the purpose of the *I-ching*. Now if at this time you wish to do things carefully, you should order a consultation of the *I-ching* to help you make your decisions. If you would do this much to reveal your interest in the importance of the government of the country, and your true heart spread throughout the country, then the common people would become eternally loyal and obedient.

The items that I present above are my deepest thoughts and are difficult for me to fully express on paper. If there are some items that you find questionable, I respectfully submit that I would like to explain things orally in your presence.

Seventh year of Tenmei (1787) year of the lamb, sixth month, twenty sixth day

Imakita Sakubei (seal) Takamitsu
Magistrate of the Tax Warehouses

⁴The original of this sentence contains two transcription errors which I have corrected in the translation. The original reads 善悪邪正分明候時ハ利ニ走り候者進ミ義を重する者随申萬民苦ミ申候。 However the 分 should be 不, and the 随 should be 退. In both cases the cursive forms can be almost identical. The meaning of the sentence is unclear without these changes, and with the changes it contains the contrast with the previous sentence which was obviously intended.