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The Choshu Domain was the most prominent anti-Tokugawa domain and

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formed the Satch? Alliance with the rival Satsuma Domain during the Meiji Restoration, becoming instrumental in the establishment of the Empire of Japan and the Meiji oligarchy.

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The Satsuma Rebellion, also known as the Seinan War (Japanese: ?????, Hepburn:

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The Satsuma and Choshu leaders sought to overthrow the Tokugawa shogun and

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place the Emperor Komei into a position of real power. Through him, they felt that they could more effectively meet the foreign threat. However, Komei died in January 1867, and his teenaged son Mutsuhito ascended to the throne as the Meiji Emperor on Feb. 3, 1867.

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## **How the Meiji Restoration Ended Shogunal Rule in Japan**

Several entries in 1868 reveal an unusually close relationship between Kido (1833-1877), the Meiji statesman from Choshu, and Thomas Blake Glover (1838-1912), the British merchant from Nagasaki. Kido was one of the main

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creators of the new revolutionary government, while Glover headed the largest foreign trading firm in Japan.

When Commodore Perry arrived in Japan to open the country to Western trade in 1853, he found a medieval amalgam of



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sword-bearing samurai, castle towns, Confucian academies, peasant villages, rice paddies, upstart merchants, bath houses, and Kabuki. Fifteen years later, Japan was on its way to becoming the only non-Western nation in the nineteenth century with a modern centralized bureaucratic state and industrial economy.

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This book is a study of the Meiji Restoration that changed the face of Japan. Prominent historian Albert M. Craig tells its story through that of the domain of Choshu--whose role in the formation of modern Japan was not unlike that of Prussia in Germany--during the fifteen crucial years between 1853 and 1868.

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Whereas previous studies have stressed the role of discontented lower samurai and frustrated rich merchants and peasants in this transition, claiming that they provided the motive power behind the political movements of the Restoration period, this work sharply challenges these earlier interpretations. Craig instead emphasizes

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the vitality of traditional values in Japan's early reaction to the West and foregrounds the critical contribution of the old society to the formation of the new Meiji state.

Choshu in the Meiji Restoration is a seminal work for scholars and students of Japanese history.

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First, there are questions concerning the role and relative importance of internal and external factors in the pattern of events. Did the activities of the Western

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powers prompt changes in Japan that would not otherwise have taken place? Or did they merely hasten a process that had already begun? Similarly, did Western civilization give a new direction to Japanese development, or do no more than provide the outward forms through which indigenous change could manifest itself?

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Was it a matrix, or only a shopping list? Second, how far was the evolution of modern Japan in some sense "inevitable"? Were the main features of Meiji society already implicit in the Tempo reforms, only awaiting an appropriate trigger to bring them into being? More narrowly, was the character of Meiji institutions

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determined by the social composition of the anti-Tokugawa movement, or did it derive from a situation that took shape only after the Bakufu was overthrown? This is to pose the problem of the relationship between day-to-day politics and long-term socioeconomic change. One can argue, paraphrasing Toyama, that the



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political controversy about foreign affairs provided the means by which basic socioeconomic factors became effective; or one can say, with Sakata, that the relevance of socioeconomic change is that it helped to decide the manner in which the fundamentally political ramifications of the foreign question were worked out.

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The difference of emphasis is significant. Finally, have recent historians, in their preoccupation with other issues, lost sight of something important in their relative neglect of ideas qua ideas? Ought we perhaps to stop treating loyalty to the Emperor as simply a manifestation of something else? After all, the men whose

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actions are the object of our study took that loyalty seriously enough, certainly as an instrument of politics, if not as an article of faith.

Jansen tells the story of the Restoration in

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the career and thought of Sakamoto Ryoma and, to a lesser extent, Nakaoka Shintaro, each an example of the new type of political leader: idealistic, individualistic, and patriotic.

This volume examines the Meiji Restoration through a global history lens

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to re-interpret the formation of a globally-cast, Japanese nation-state.

Like the French Revolution, the Meiji Restoration transformed a whole society. Japan was never the same after 1868. The meaning of the events that led to the restoration has therefore profoundly

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concerned historians, but most Western accounts probe only the dimension of political leadership, largely ignoring the common people. In this book, George Wilson argues that the restoration was a total national event--a revolution to redeem the whole realm of Japan--accomplished by samurai and

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commoners alike. This study foregrounds the classic contest of agency versus structure, focusing on the actors in Meiji Restoration history rather than the institutions through which they acted. Wilson argues that the samurai who triumphed sought not only the patriotic goal of defending the realm against the

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external threat of Western imperialism but also the redemptive goal of rescuing the realm from the bakufu's failures. The common people no less than the samurai elite wanted to save Japan in its time of troubles. According to Wilson, redemption complemented patriotism as a motive for both the elite and the general public,



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contributing a double force to Japan's rising nationalism.

The Meiji Restoration of 1868 is most often seen as a glorious event marking the overthrow of Tokugawa feudalism and the

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beginning of Japan's modern transformation. Yet it had its dark side. The Aizu domain in northeastern Japan had staunchly supported the old regime. For this it was attacked by the new government's forces from Choshu and Satsuma in the autumn of 1868. Its castle town was burned to the ground, and during

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a month-long siege, whole families perished. After defeat, the domain was abolished and its samurai population exiled to barren terrain in the far north. Shiba Goro was born into an Aizu samurai family in 1859. He was just ten years old at the time of the attack, which claimed most of his family. In the cruel world of

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exile, he lived with his father on the edge of starvation, struggling to survive.

Eventually making his way to Tokyo, he became a servant, and though born in an enemy domain, gained entrance to a military school of the new regime. Shiba's abilities were recognized, and he rose through the officer ranks to become a full

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general - a singular distinction for an Aizu samurai in an army dominated by former samurai of the Choshu domain.

Remembering Aizu tells of Shiba's earlier years. It is an extraordinary story that provides insights and material for a social history of the Restoration and its aftermath. But above all, it is a vividly

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rendered personal account of courage and  
determination, loss and remembrance.

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