

13 Ōkubo Toshimichi's Opinion Against Korean Expedition, October 1873²¹

In order to govern the country and protect the people it is necessary to have a flexible policy and to watch [the world situation]; always watching the situation as we go forward or retreat. If the situation is bad we simply stop. The reasons *why I say that it is too early to send a mission to Korea are as follows*:

1. . . . The basis of our government is not yet firmly established. We have made remarkable progress in abolishing the *han*, etc., and if we look at the central part of Japan, everything seems accomplished, but if we look at the countryside, many people who oppose this will be seen. We have established a fortress and have good military equipment, so they dare not rise up against us. But if we reveal some weak point, they will be quick to take advantage. There is no special problem now, but we must look to the future. With the restoration many new laws have been promulgated, but people are not yet at ease and they fear our government. In the last two years there have been many misunderstandings and these led to uprisings. It is a truly difficult situation. This is one reason why I am opposed to making war on Korea.

2. Today government expenditures are tremendous, and income is below expense. Thus if we open fire and send several tens of thousands of men abroad we will incur enormous expense. This will require heavy taxes or foreign loans or the issuance of paper notes and will lead to higher prices, social unrest and uprisings. Already we have 5,000,000 [yen] in foreign loans; even this is difficult to pay.

3. Our government has started to stimulate industries, but it will be several years before we get results. . . . If we now begin an unnecessary war, spend a huge amount of money, shed blood, and worsen the daily life of people, all these government works will break like a bubble and lose several decades of time. We will regret it.

4. Regarding the foreign trade situation, each year there is a one million yen deficit . . . and our gold reserve decreases. Thus our international credit worsens, leading to inflation and our people's livelihood becoming hard. Also the export of our products faces difficulties. If we open fire without thinking of our economic and military power, our soldiers will have a bad time and their parents will be in difficulty; they will cease to work well and our national productivity will decrease. Such things as weapons must be purchased from foreign countries; our foreign trade deficit will become worse and worse.

5. In regard to the diplomatic situation, the most important countries for us are Russia and Britain. . . . Relations with them are uncertain. I fear that Russia will interfere unless we secure our independence. If we open fire on Korea,

Russia will fish out both the clam and the bird and get a fisherman's profit. Thus we should not begin a war in Korea now.

6. In regard to the Asian situation, Britain is especially powerful, watching with a tiger's eye. Our foreign loans depend on Britain. If there is trouble and we become poor, Britain will surely interfere in our internal affairs on that pretext. Look at India . . . observe carefully the process by which India became a colony. We must build our industry, our exports, etc. It is our most urgent business.

7. The Japanese treaties with Europe and America are not equal. This is harmful for our independence. Therefore we must do our best to revise them, or England and France will send armies on the pretext of an insecure internal situation. . . . The first thing is to revise the treaties, the Korean business after that.

Conclusion. As I have said above we must not hurry to begin war. Of course, we cannot overlook the arrogant attitude of Korea, but we have no clear reason to attack Korea. Now it is argued, send the envoy and depending on his reception open fire or not. But we may be sure from experience that his reception will be cold, so this automatically means open fire. Thus we must decide about sending an army before we send the envoy. If there is war we must have more than 100,000 soldiers, laborers, ships, etc. It will cost many times 10,000 yen. Even though we are victorious, the expense will be far beyond the profit. Also after the victory there will be uprisings over there. Even though we get all kinds of goods in Korea, they will amount to less than the expense. Also it is said that neither China nor Russia will intervene, but there is no proof. It is said that we cannot endure Korean arrogance, but this is an insufficient reason and it would be very bad to open fire without thinking of our security and our people's welfare. Therefore I oppose. . . .

²¹Hilary Conroy, *The Japanese Seizure of Korea: 1868-1910* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), pp. 47-49. The full text is in *Ōkubo Toshimichi Monjo*, Vol. 5, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-64.