

Thomas Blake Glover and Laurence Oliphant of Condie: Two Scotsmen and their roles in the creation of Meiji Japan.

John Oliphant

In the recent wave of publications on the events and individuals that transformed Japan into a modern state, and spared the nation the experience of colonization, two western figures have attracted particular interest among scholars of the late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods. Both were Scotsmen, but the difference in their social origins, personal interests and qualities and their visions of society make the contrast in their contributions to Japan intriguing. Until now, Glover's, being of a more tangible nature, has been the more widely recognized, while those writing on the more complex figure of Oliphant have been more guarded in their assessment of his importance in the development of modern Japan.

Thomas Glover arrived in Japan as a twenty-one year old clerk sent out from Shanghai by the Jardine Matheson company. After a lifetime based in Nagasaki, he died in his Tokyo mansion at the age of seventy, the first foreigner to be awarded the Order of the Rising Sun for his services to the nation. He is clearly remembered in Japan for his help to the rebels in overthrowing the Tokugawa shogunate and restoring the Emperor Meiji to power in 1868, and afterwards for helping Japan to take its place in the modern world, by promoting industry and empowering the military. The ships that defeated the Russians at Tsushima in 1905 were built at his instigation in Aberdeen. He made Nagasaki a ship building centre of the highest rank, and imported the British technology to develop coal mining at Takashiuma, and it is probably true to say that Glover had the greatest single role in the industrialization of the nation.

Lawrence Oliphant by contrast, came to Japan for only two short periods. The first was as Lord Elgin's Private Secretary when Britain signed its first treaty with the Bakufu in 1858. The second was as First Secretary to the new British Legation in Edo in 1861. Then, xenophobic samurai attacked the compound and he was lucky to escape with his life. Badly wounded, he was forced to leave for England and never set foot in Japan again. However, through his help and guidance given to several young men who later determined the shape of the Meiji state, some of whom were the first to represent Japan in the capitals of the Great Powers, Oliphant may have exerted a far more significant influence than was once thought.

1 McKay Alexander., *Scottish Samurai : Thomas Blake Glover 1838-1911.* (Canongate Press Edinburgh) 1993.

Since the achievements of Glover are already well documented,¹ this short article is intended to describe Oliphant's encounters with these men and point out their implications. It also examines how later attacks on Oliphant's personal reputation may have diminished recognition of his contribution.

Four years after Oliphant departed from Japan, in 1865, a group of carefully chosen students, predominantly from the samurai class of the Kagoshima area, set off from Satsuma for Great Britain on a ship provided by Thomas Blake Glover. Their departure was shrouded in secrecy, for a seventeenth century shogunal edict still rendered unauthorized travel from Japan an offence punishable by death. The Bakufu in Edo continued to prevent hostile domains from gaining precious technical and, particularly, military knowledge in the West, and would certainly not have approved the mission of this group of young men from Satsuma.² They departed, therefore, under assumed names and from a remote fishing harbour.

Professor Takaaki Inuzuka, some thirty years ago, was the first to trace the steps of these men on their journey, describing the samurais' encounters in the West and their significance for the new nation. Recently, Japan scholars have begun to recognize the distinctive contribution made by some of the men who boarded that ship when they returned a few years later to share in the creation of the Meiji nation, and to discuss the influences that affected them in the time they were away. Much detailed information has been found and many questions answered, but in piecing together the complex series of changing impressions, events and transformations, numerous subjectivities have emerged, sometimes revealing more about the conditioning of the writers involved than the puzzles presented.

Britain, the group's destination was not chosen by chance. Earlier plans to send out students from Satsuma had included trips around Europe, including France, but the final proposal submitted by the Satsuma council to the *daimyo*, Shimazu Tadayoshi, in December 1864 centered on London. Satsuma had been made all too conscious of British sea power when the Royal Navy's new Armstrong guns left most of Kagoshima in flames in August the previous year. This had come about in the aftermath of the murder of a visiting merchant, Charles Lennox Richardson, when it became clear that the domain had little intention of meeting British demands for an indemnity for the act. Richardson was struck down by an outraged Satsuma retainer when, with three other foreigners out riding, the English merchant obstructed his lord's procession on a narrow road near Yokohama. The Royal Navy's bombardment made a lasting impression and, in Japan, it is still sometimes referred to as the Anglo-Satsuma War. To the daimyo and his hierarchy, the acquisition of military technology was now imperative. To the British, the defiance shown by the domain indicated a strength and resolve that suggested it might make a useful ally against a weak Bakufu. With a mutual interest in developing contacts, the established presence of the merchant Glover

² Ivan Hall records how, even in late 1865, the shogunal delegation to London successfully exerted pressure on the British government not to admit students from Satsuma to the Royal Naval College. See Hall, I.P., *Mori Arinori* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1973) p. 73.

and his business in Nagasaki proved exceptionally useful in sowing the seeds of future Anglo-Satsuma relations.³

Several frustrating weeks were spent waiting for Glover's ship to arrive, before the nineteen men in the group finally departed. As their story unfolds, it should be borne in mind that they were samurai by birth and education. On embarking they were firmly asked to relinquish their swords, and as they journeyed on, western style suits and hair styles were adopted before they reached England.

The general reader may well experience some confusion in tracing the adventures of the group owing to the fact that, in the growing number of studies now appearing, the students often bear three names; the name of their youth, an alias for the illicit journey, and a name which they lived under on their return. Godai Saisuke, the senior figure, takes the alias Seki Kenzo and later becomes Godai Tomoatsu. The man remembered as Mori Arinori, a central figure in this article, studied in Satsuma as Mori Kinnojo and traveled with the alias of Sawai Tetsuma.⁴

Several years previously, there had been talk of sending Satsuma students abroad, but it was Godai Saisuke (Tomoatsu) who eventually put the scheme into effect. Godai had wanted to avoid conflict with the British and was anxious, after the confrontation, to see that xenophobic *joi* factions in Satsuma would not let this happen again. Godai became a frequent visitor to Thomas Glover's house in Nagasaki and the Scotsman soon became deeply involved in the venture. Glover had already enjoyed commercial success in Japan and was to derive great profit from the turbulent situation in Japan in the 1860s, selling arms to different domains.⁵ Doubtless, he envisaged future advantages to his trading house when he lent his support and resources to the Satsuma scheme, but the fact that he was to involve his family in Britain to help the students and to arrange for the most academically gifted to study at his old school in Aberdeen suggests a certain personal wish to introduce the students to British and his own values.

Underpinning Godai's proposal lay the concept of *fukoku kyohei*, enriching the country and strengthening the army. The British bombardment's psychological effects ensured that few would oppose a plan proposing that Satsuma should possess improved military technology and organization. The next step was the selection of the students. Initially five men from the elite, the *monbatsu* class, were picked. Five members of the teaching staff of the Kaiseijo College were included, along with twelve students from

3 See Cobbing, A. *The Satsuma Students in Britain: Japan's early search for the essence of the West*. (Japan library, Richmond 2000) pp. 9-11. Cobbing's work is a translation and an extension of Inuzuka's original research. The English version attributes authorship to Cobbing, acknowledging that the study is 'based on an original study by Inuzuka. Unfortunately, no distinction is made between what is directly translated from Inuzuka's first edition and Cobbing's annotations. Form decrees that references should be indicated as above, although the credit for the original choice of subject and most of the research involved clearly also belongs to Inuzuka.

4 This problem has been considerably dealt with in Cobbing, *op. cit.*, where the various identities are tabulated. See Table 2, p.34.

5 Cobbing, *op. cit.*, p.17.

the college, ranging from thirteen to thirty one years old. Among these young men were some extreme conservatives who saw the expedition primarily as a journey to acquire the military means and knowledge to return to Japan and drive out the barbarians. Inuzuka points out that three of the five *monbatsu* members (Hatekayama, Shimazu and Takahashi) felt their inclusion on this voyage to the hated West to be an insult to their patriotism.⁶

Each student was assigned a speciality. Mori Arinori, for example, continued to regard himself as a naval student well into his sojourn in the West.⁷ The size of the mission was unprecedented and it is not absolutely clear how it was funded. Some suggest that Hamazaki Taheiji, a merchant known as 'The Smuggling King' was its main underwriter, which could well have been the case given the later economic power and influence in the region of that family.⁸

After an absorbing but relatively uneventful journey, stopping at Hong Kong, Suez and Malta the Satsuma party disembarked at Southampton on June 21st. 1865, where they were met by Glover's brother. This was not the first group of students to have arrived in Europe from Japan. The Bakufu had sent naval students to Holland in 1863 and in June of the same year, students from Choshu had slipped out of Yokohama with the help of the Jardine and Matheson company, another Scottish trading house with deep roots in the East, and a long and profitable involvement with the Chinese opium trade. Here, too, Glover was the prime mover in making the departure possible. The Choshu group included Inoue Masaru, later known as 'the father of railways in Japan' for his work as head of the Railway Bureau, afterwards known as the Railway Office, in the 1880s.⁹ But of all the expeditions to leave Japan either before the Bakufu ended the ban on foreign travel in May 1866, or subsequently, the Satsuma party was the largest and, some have argued, the most important in terms of its later contribution to the shaping the new nation. While later expeditions departed with strong preconceptions of the West and usually with highly specified goals for their studies or missions, the Satsuma group were young enough, with an average age of twenty-two, to have a greater openness, intellectual receptivity and flexibility to seek and derive gain from their various experiences.

The men have been described by Carmen Blacker as 'a remarkable group in so far as nearly all were later to make a notable mark on Meiji history as diplomats, government ministers, educators or captains of industry. Mori Arinori, for one, was later to become Minister to London and Washington, Minister of Education and author of the state school system in Japan.'¹⁰ It was Mori, according to his biographer Ivan Hall, who was responsible for the most significant act in the intellectual history of Meiji Japan in

6 *Ibid.*, p.27.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

8 *Ibid.*, p.156.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

10 Blacker, C. 'Laurence Oliphant and Japan' in *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits* Volume II ed. Ian Nish Japan Library p.43.

conceiving and sponsoring Japan's first learned academic society, the Meirokusha.¹¹ Aside from the individual achievements of the men, the group helped create an understanding between Britain and Satsuma, which carried over into the new relationship forged with the Meiji nation. This was clear when Satsuma resisted French offers to trade in much needed weaponry, for fear of disturbing this new amicable understanding.¹²

In an utterly alien environment, following their aims, and developing their understanding of the West, the students were fortunate in their personal encounters, and in enjoying the friendship of two men in particular. These may both have been Scotsmen but they were of very different character and outlook. This was reflected in the imprints they left on the Meiji state. One of them made a contribution more obviously visible, the other's, perhaps, was more significant in the longer term.

Born in relatively humble circumstances in Aberdeen., Thomas Glover is described most often as a 'merchant-adventurer'. In selling weapons to various factions in Japan in the 1860s he developed relationships that went beyond the simply commercial, and acted as a source of information and an informal diplomatic link for the British government. Cobbing writes that he '...paved the way for later British cooperation with the anti-Bakufu alliance of Satsuma and Choshu, countering the pact struck between the French and the Tokugawa regime.'¹³ Later in 1865, Glover helped three men from Choshu leave Nagasaki on one of his ships.¹⁴ It seems reasonable to say that the departure of such a large group from Satsuma would have been considerably more difficult, if not impossible, without Glover's close involvement. His help to the Satsuma students is remembered as but a part of Glover's contribution to Meiji Japan, and led one admiring biographer, Alexander McKay, to name him 'The Scottish Samurai'. In the new nation-state his name was associated with the introduction of railways, mines and shipyards. The pace and sophistication of Japan's industrial development, without doubt, owed a great deal to Glover's expertise and vision.¹⁵ But his help remained within the military and commercial realms. The Japanese government acknowledged his part in fulfilling the Satsuma, later the Japanese nation's, aims of *fukoku kyohei*, 'enriching the country, strengthening the army' and *fukoku kaimei*, 'enriching the country, admitting light' (in the form of technological knowledge), by awarding him the Order of the Rising Sun, the first foreigner to receive such recognition.

In London the Satsuma students had a letter of introduction, written by Glover, to the other man who was to play critical role in their experience. Laurence Oliphant was from a family renowned in Scotland for its dedication to the cause of independence. The contribution of Scotsman to the creation of the Empire

11 Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

12 Cobbing, *op. cit.*, pp.110-111.

13 Cobbing, *op. cit.*, p.19.

14 *Ibid.*

15 See McKay for the details of his contribution to the industrialization of Japan.

is well known and Laurence was one of several members of the family to serve Queen Victoria in distant parts.¹⁶ His uncle James was Director and Chairman of the East India Company, and his father was Sir Anthony Oliphant, Attorney General in Capetown at the time of Laurence's birth. Sir Anthony was transferred to Ceylon as Chief Justice and there Laurence spent the rest of his youth. Disdaining university, he began, instead, to travel and soon made a name for himself as a writer and journalist. His account of his journey to Nepal was a success and he soon became a fashionable travel writer.¹⁷ Through his connections, he was invited to serve as Lord Elgin's Private Secretary, perhaps helped by the fact that the Bruce family and the Oliphants had links through marriage back in the 14th century. Laurence accompanied Elgin to North America and then on his mission to China and Japan. His 'Narrative' an account of the experience was published in two volumes in 1859.¹⁸ In Carmen Blacker's words, the Narrative '...remains one of the most observant and enthralling accounts of Japan at a time when barely half a dozen foreigners outside Nagasaki were allowed to reside on Japanese soil.'¹⁹ Reading this work is said to have inspired the young Ernest Satow to dedicate his life to his studies on Japan. Oliphant was clearly enchanted by the innocence, the 'amiable contentment' of the Japanese and was struck by the absence of beggars and his idealized perception of this first encounter remained with him for his life. This could well have been otherwise, for, in 1861, when he returned to Japan, in his first official diplomatic post, as First Secretary of the Legation at Edo, he found the climate hostile to foreigners, and the embassy surrounded by 150 guards provided by the Bakufu. On the night of July 5th, the Legation was attacked by masked ronin from the domain of Mito, and Oliphant was fortunate to escape alive, defending himself from their swords with a riding crop, the only weapon to hand. He was badly wounded and was forced to return home. He was never to return to Japan.²⁰

The samurai knew Oliphant's name when they arrived in England. Cobbing quotes Ichiki's description of their first impressions.

....he was on friendly terms with Glover, so when Glover asked him to help us he kindly assisted us in various ways.... As a member of Parliament he was a man of some power, and when we called at his house, a porter appeared at the door, turned out smartly in a white collar with an air of great self-importance.²¹

16 Oliphants fought in the Khyber Pass, fought the Boer and fell to sniper fire in the Boxer siege of the Legations, while some made quieter contributions, in colonial administration or directing the Forestry services of India and the tropical colonies.

17 Oliphant, O. *A Journey to Khatmandu* (Edinburgh and London, Blackwood) 1852

18 Oliphant, O. *Narrative of the Earl of Elgin's mission to China and Japan in 1857, '58, '59* Edinburgh and London, Blackwood, (1866)

19 Blacker, *op. cit.*, p.36.

20 The attack is vividly described in Oliphant, O. *Episodes in a Life of Adventure: or, Moss from a Rolling Stone* Edinburgh and London. Blackwood (1887)

21 Quoted in Cobbing, *op. cit.*, p.67.

Oliphant, at the time, represented the Stirling Burghs in Parliament. It is important here to dwell for a moment on his Scottish heritage for, I believe, it has some bearing on aspects of his character. His family's estate was Condie in nearby Perthshire, and his local credentials in his constituency were impeccable since his ancestor Sir William Oliphant had defended Stirling Castle in 1302, when Robert the Bruce was outside the walls fighting for the English.²² Margaret Oliphant, herself from the impoverished Kellie branch in Caithness, begins her biography of Laurence with a brief account of the family's history, and writes, 'I am grieved to say that none of the many branches of the house have done anything very remarkable in life.'²³ However, she does stress the Jacobite tradition of the family which, I strongly suggest, may help in understanding a man described by his most diligent biographers, Schneider and Lawton, as 'one of the most baffling figures in Victorian society.'²⁴

Families in Scotland tend to have certain sustaining myths and for the Oliphants, that of the fearless Jacobite ancestors risking all to march with the rightful Stuart kings has been the most compelling. It was the older Oliphant of Gask who lost his estate, confiscated by the Crown after the Rising in 1715, only for his friends to rally around and buy it back for him at auction. Gask was said to be the inspiration for Sir Walter Scott's character, the Baron Bradwardine in *Waverley*. When Bonnie Prince Charlie returned to raise the clans in 1745, the old laird acted as Quartermaster for his army, and his son became one of the Prince's aides de camp. It was after sleeping and breakfasting at Gask House in the heady early weeks of the campaign that the Prince rode into Perth announcing gaily that that in his war chest there was 'but a shilling'. After the disaster of Culloden when the Jacobites were massacred and scattered by the Hanoverian and hired Hessian forces under "Butcher Cumberland", the old man and his son spent weeks hiding 'in the heather' before escaping to exile.²⁵ Lady Nairne, the author of the famous *Jacobite Ballads*, who wrote 'Charlie is my Darling', was born Carolina Oliphant and was a daughter of the house. Certain qualities Laurence Oliphant believed himself to possess, courage, loyalty, spontaneity, charm, a pronounced indifference to material wealth and the strength of personality to ensure his friends' devotion, were all, perhaps, a part of his perceived Jacobite spirit. This might be a useful reference point in reading certain actions in the different chapters of his life.

In his work on behalf of the students in the early days in London, Oliphant is described by Ivan Hall as, 'an amateur politician'.²⁶ Hall, however, points out his effectiveness in helping Terajima by accompanying him to the Foreign office and through his speeches in Parliament, with the result that

22 Thomas Kington Oliphant, *The Oliphants in Scotland*, records the family's illustrious past.

23 Margaret Oliphant W. Oliphant, *Memoir of the Life of Laurence Oliphant and of Alice Oliphant, His Wife*. (Blackwood, Edinburgh MDCCCXCII) p.3.

24 Schneider, H. W. and Lawton, G. *A Prophet and a Pilgrim*. Columbia, New York 1942) p. xvii.

25 Oliphant, T. K. *op. cit.*

26 Hall, *op. cit.*, p.86 Here hall may have intended a compliment of sorts, suggesting an absence of the cynicism of the 'professional' politician in Oliphant.

Harry Parkes in Japan was instructed to explore more actively the possibilities of an alliance to counter the Bakufu.²⁷ Aside from his political and diplomatic assistance, Carmen Blacker states that Oliphant became the students' 'guide and mentor'.²⁸ It was he who introduced them to Professor Williamson at University College, where a rigorous curriculum was prepared for them. All the while, throughout this first year in London, Oliphant found time from his political activity, literary career and intense socializing to see that the students were successfully introduced to helpful connections. While the original aims of the mission, to develop *fukoka kamei*, were not disregarded, and the students made dutiful excursions to ironworks and shipyard,²⁹ Oliphant took great pains to see that they were also introduced to certain critical concepts in the English way of life; law and justice, international conduct, the relationship between governments and that between the state and the individual, and the sense of the moral character of a nation. As a result, other notions took seed and later were applied to institutional reform in the new nation.³⁰ In Ivan Hall's view, Mori Arinori's realization that wealth and armaments were not enough, and that moral and spiritual qualities were even more fundamental, 'can only be explained as a product of English example and of tutoring by Laurence Oliphant.'³¹ Although there were evidently others in subsequent years whose ideas had a strong effect on the Satsuma men, their report sent back home referred to Oliphant, 'our British friend', and was a very clear reflection of his influence. :

When we first arrived in this country, we understood little of what we saw and everything around us took our breath away. With the passage of time however we have finally become able to make our own critical appraisal of affairs here. We have found one British man who has been a good friend to us, and after asking him questions about the situation in Europe and America, we have come to realize that, while there are few ideas here that would merit adoption in Satsuma, there are numerous features that we should avoid.³²

After a remarkably short time in England, largely through Oliphant's commentaries, the students had come to see the hypocritical, despotic and rapacious traits of the western nations in their approach to the acquisition of new territories from which to gain profit and influence. Oliphant, commenting on the British elite through one of the characters in his novel, 'Piccadilly', had written:

27 *Ibid.*, pp.73-74.

28 Blacker, *op. cit.*, p.43.

29 Cobbing, *op. cit.*, pp.71-73.

30 Hall, *op. cit.*, p.92.

31 *Ibid.*

32 Cobbing, *op.cit.*, p.117.

Expediency has taken the place of principle, conscience has been crushed out of existence by calculation...we simply present to the world at large the ignoble spectacle of a nation of usurers trembling over our money bags.³³

Mori's fear of colonization, is attributable, in very great part, to Oliphant's warnings on the moral bankruptcy of the political classes of the western powers.³⁴ It was Oliphant who encouraged Mori to visit Russia in the first summer of his sojourn in the West. Matsumura recalled that Oliphant, 'our helpful guide in all things', had criticized Russia in the harshest terms.³⁵ It was Mori's experience of witnessing life under the Tsarist aristocracy, that helped him to define, through contrast, his vision of Britain, and of what could be learned from her ways. Visiting Newcastle, Mori was struck by the evidence of commercial strength in its bustling shipyards, but seemed more impressed when taken to see the city's schools for the deaf and dumb and the blind, and concluded that these worthy ventures 'teach us a great deal about Western society as a whole.'³⁶ At this time, Mori began to discern a difference between *moto no gakumon*, 'fundamental learning', and *sue no gakumon*, peripheral learning or mere technology. This distinction might be regarded as 'the germ' of his philosophy of education.³⁷ Largely through Hall's work, Oliphant has been remembered as Mori's 'mentor', and as was mentioned earlier, Blacker describes him as guide and mentor to the group as a whole on their arrival. The bond was clearly a deep one, for it was Oliphant whom some of the students were to follow into one of the most remarkable cultural encounters in history.

The Satsuma party clearly remembered Oliphant had been in Edo when the Legation was attacked and his courage when, on his way home severely wounded, he confronted the commander of a Russian ship skulking off Hokkaido in contravention of international agreements, and skillfully persuaded him to leave. His work as a war correspondent for the Times in the Balkans was probably also known to the Satsuma party. Courage was perhaps a quality the young samurai felt to be essential in one in whom they were to place their trust, and the psychological rapport and mutual respect where Oliphant was concerned, was strong enough for them to be persuaded to participate, under his wing, in a venture unforeseen when they departed from Japan in the quest for military and technological knowledge.

Those Satsuma students who followed Oliphant to join Thomas Lake Harris in his community of 'the Brotherhood of the New Life' were probably the most influential of the original group when returning to forge the new Japan, and since this experience was an essential part of their opening to the West, it is

33 Quoted in Henderson, *op. cit.*, p.129.

34 Hall, *op. cit.*, pp.84-85.

35 Quoted in Hall, *op. cit.*, p.87.

36 *Ibid.*, p.90.

37 *Ibid.*, p.88.

important to acknowledge the roles in their development played by Oliphant and Harris, and also what the Japanese students, Mori Arinori, in particular brought to Brocton and afterwards came away with. Historians have almost all agreed in regarding Laurence Oliphant's encounter with Thomas Lake Harris as an unmitigated personal tragedy. Anne Taylor described Harris's influence as 'longstanding and disastrous' and responsible for Oliphant losing his career in Parliament, his reputation and many of his friends.³⁸

Born in England, Thomas Blake Harris lived in America from the age of five, earning his own living from the age of thirteen. By the time he was twenty-one he was a preacher of an Independent Congregation, with a large following of women attracted by his impassioned eloquence and good looks. He began to evolve his own doctrine, sometimes describing it as 'Christian Spiritualism'.³⁹ Much of his writing was done in a state of trance and is far from easy to decipher, but many references are made to the realms of the dead, and a doctrine of counterparts which establishes 'true spiritual partners' who rarely happen to be husband and wife on earth. A system of respiration, known as 'The Use' was said to harness the Divine Breath.⁴⁰ Harris aroused interest in Swedenborgian circles in London and was invited to England, where he met Oliphant and his widowed mother. It was not long before they were eager to join his community in New York State, The Brotherhood of the New Life.

The negative historical image of the Brotherhood's Brocton community and the long shadows cast over Oliphant's posthumous reputation are both traceable to the Philadelphia born Evangelist Hannah Whitall Smith, who devoted a chapter to the Brotherhood of the New Life in the first part of her work, *Religious Fanaticism*. There she wrote:

Everything connected with Harris is dark and mysterious, wrapped in a sort of esoteric symbolism, and enveloping a secret central doctrine which grows more and more repulsive the closer one approaches to understanding it.⁴¹

Smith went on to say the 'Prophet' was 'a greedy and dangerous sensualist, self-deluded, no doubt, but arrogant, harsh and revengeful.'⁴²

In the second part of the book, 'Personal Experiences of Religious Fanaticism', Smith focused on Oliphant himself, insinuating that he was sexually debauched and unscrupulous in his supposedly spiritual invitations to young women of good family. She claimed that, when reading his cousin Margaret Oliphant's

38 Taylor, *op. cit.*, p.115.

39 Henderson, *op. cit.*, pp.42-5.

40 See Scneider and Lawton, *op. cit.*, for the most thorough analysis of Harris's thought and life.

41 Smith, H.W. *Religious Fanaticism* (1928, 1973 AMS Press, NY edition) p.118.

42 *Ibid.*

'eulogy', she felt something 'was not right' and set about correcting the record herself, claiming, 'How he managed to get through life without an open scandal has always been a mystery to me, except that those whom he deluded must have been too ashamed of their delusions ever to speak of them.'⁴³ The danger he posed was that, 'he seemed when you were with him, the very last person for such things. He was a cultivated gentleman of apparently a great deal of good worldly sense, and, except to the initiated, conveyed no idea of the inner secrets of his life. In this lay largely his power over others...'⁴⁴

This deep suspicion seems to have affected several later Anglo-Saxon writers in their observations on Oliphant, Harris, the Satsuma men and the Brocton experience. In her Biographical Portrait of Oliphant, Blacker wrote that Oliphant's last service to the Satsuma group, introducing them to Harris, 'a fraudulent American guru', was 'a more equivocal one'.⁴⁵

In his most recent reference to the episode, Cobbing's interpretation is that 'increasingly short of funds', Mori, along with his five remaining companions in Britain, was persuaded by Laurence Oliphant, 'their mentor' to cross the Atlantic for a further year abroad at a 'Utopian Christian colony' in New York state.⁴⁶ In his portrayal of Mori, Cobbing prefers to dwell on the influence of Herbert Spencer in later years, mentioning only in passing that Mori's sojourn with the 'eccentric' Harris gave him 'not only polished English skills but also a passionate belief in the power of rationalism and an almost Western style persona that set him apart from other young leaders in the new Meiji government'.⁴⁷

Countering the long accepted interpretation that Oliphant driven by higher spiritual impulses, renounced a glittering career in Parliament to seek enlightenment, wisely or otherwise in the New World, Anne Taylor has suggested that his political and diplomatic future may not have been so bright after all, as he had succeeded in alienating his own party over the reform of the franchise, and upset his diplomatic contacts by airing internal differences over China policy. She goes further in implying that it could very easily have been syphilis that drove Oliphant to leave London so suddenly, and Harris to forbid him to sleep with his wife. The first point can only be answered with conjecture. No firm evidence of the second suggestion has been found. There are no medical records indicating that Laurence Oliphant had the disease. The first suggestion came from the otherwise discredited Harris at a time when he was feuding bitterly with Oliphant. Blinding headaches alone may be attributed to many another condition. On the third point, Harris had elaborated his theory of counterparts long before meeting Oliphant, and had, himself, renounced sex with his wife for long periods in accord with it.⁴⁸

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 226-7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁴⁵ Blacker, *op. cit.* p. 35.

⁴⁶ Cobbing, A. 'Mori Arinori, 1847-89: from Diplomat to Statesman' in *Britain and Japan Biographical Portraits*. Ed. Cortazzi, H. (Japan Library, 2002) pp. 4-13.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Whatever the forces that drove him, Oliphant sailed for New York on July 27th 1867 to join the Brotherhood of the New Life, having resigned his seat in Parliament. Differing emphasis has been placed on the students' motives in following him. Funds were low, but, as Hall points out, a measure of their enthusiasm was that five of the six men remained at Brocton until late the following Spring.⁴⁹ The other, Nagasawa Kanae, followed Harris to California devoting his life to him, and became one of the state's first 'wine barons' after prohibition.⁵⁰ Like Sameshima and Yoshida earlier, Mori, Hatakeyama and Ichiki had listened to Harris with great interest in London and began to question the fundamental concepts of loyalty and obedience that they had been brought up to accept uncritically as samurai.⁵¹

In the eyes of Hannah Whitall Smith, Harris was 'a preacher of new doctrines, known only to a handful of cranks, possessed of neither wealth nor influence' and his community was one of several such aggregations of the credulous and the ignorant, the rise of which she claimed was 'but a bypath, an excrescence upon the normal history of the period.'⁵² Schneider and Lawton's study of the community in those years shows, instead, a rather solid group of citizens, including five orthodox Protestant clergymen and a former Virginia slave owner, two Shakers and a Quaker.⁵³ In their manner, dress, speech and culinary habits they were far from extraordinary, and Hall comments that they were, 'in terms of artistic and intellectual interest and ambition a good cut above average'.⁵⁴ The excesses, sexual and spiritual, in which Harris was said to indulge might lead one to expect a somewhat different profile to that drawn by the New York *Sun*: "Mr. Harris is a tough, wiry compact man, some forty five years old, of medium height and much muscular activity. His eye is keen, clear and firm and his intellect strong and practical. We were surprised, phrenologically speaking, to find his intellect and common sense so predominant over his imaginative and spiritual faculties. Judging from his personal presentation, not even Gradgrind himself had a better appreciation of 'hard facts' nor was less a dreamer."⁵⁵

On his arrival, Oliphant was given a period of trial and was made to live in a shack in isolation for three months before he could join the community in late November 1867. To the members of his community Harris offered chastity, poverty, obedience and hard work. Oliphant was made to clean boots and cart manure, while his mother, Lady Maria Oliphant worked in the laundry. However, Taylor was a little hasty in asserting that the high born samurai resented such menial tasks, washing dishes and

48 See Taylor, *op. cit.*, p.128, on Oliphant's political performance on the Reform Bill issue. Also p.257 on the hypothesis that he suffered from syphilis.

49 Hall, *op.cit.*, p.105.

50 Cobbing, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

51 *Ibid.*, p.114.

52 Smith, *op. cit.*, p.28.

53 Schneider and Lawton, *op.cit.*, p.150.

54 Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

55 Quoted in Hall, *Ibid.*, p. 123.

chopping wood were the usual duties, and 'left with relief'.⁵⁶ Sameshima and Yoshida, the first to experience communal life with Harris, appreciated the extreme sense of humility and sincerity there and the context in which they were asked to offer their labor. They also spoke favorably of Harris's teaching involving 'some form of meditation such as that in Zen Buddhism.'⁵⁷ In Hall's view, the Satsuma men found, at Brocton, a resonance between Harris's values of obedience, self-effacement and self-control and the traditional samurai ethic of *muga*, or 'rising above self',⁵⁸ Blacker concedes that the students '...oddly enough for young men educated in the strict Confucian and martial tradition of *han* schools such as the Goju and the Zoshikan, the six Japanese were apparently as happy as larks'.⁵⁹

To both Harris and Oliphant, the presence of the Japanese was a source of great happiness. Harris saw a parallel between the divine mother on Fujiyama in Shinto and his Lily Queen who ruled a higher sphere.⁶⁰ Arthur Cuthbert, in his hagiography, *The Life and World-Work of Thomas Lake Harris*, wrote.

While all the aristocracies of the world have proved, on the whole, but with individual exceptions, adverse influences, occultly, to the advancing Divine Breath...Mr. Harris himself has always expressed a strong conviction that the ruling Royal family, and the descendents of the old Princely Nobility of Japan were at this day, and would probably prove in the future, the greatest and most notable exception.⁶¹

The Japanese, Oliphant felt, had certain traits that suited them particularly for the community: openness, sincerity and responsiveness to affection. During his period of isolation on probation he wrote, 'I see them, dear souls, every day hard at work, with their countenances beaming with delight. They feel the effects of the sphere and of the influx that comes with labor, and they say that they never knew what happiness was before.'⁶² Other Japanese arrivals came independently to Brocton and Oliphant declared that they '...feel the force of the sphere of love and purity which pervades the very atmosphere, but an ordinary closed Western person is not conscious of this subtle influence.... Indeed they are all of tender sensitive natures and are so very "open" that they are able to judge of a person by his sphere much more readily than we

56 Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

57 Ichiki is quoted in Cobbing, *op. cit.*, p. 104. Schneider and Lawton, p.426, point out that there were clear Buddhist influences on Harris, but not until later, when he moved to California. See Hall, pp. 113-4 on the differences between the more frenetic and emotion generating breathing exercises at Brocton and those in Zen.

58 Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

59 Blacker, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

60 Taylor, A. *op. cit.*, p.144.

61 Cuthbert, A.A. *The Life and World-Work of Thomas Lake Harris*. (Glasgow 1909) Appendix C.

62 Quoted in Hall, *op. cit.*, p.109.

63 Quoted in Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

can, and are much more amenable to the sphere of love.’⁶³

References made by Oliphant to the Japanese students as his ‘dearest boys’ and ‘little lambs’ prompt Ivan Hall, in a footnote, to wonder, along with Henderson, whether the language reveals a homo-erotic fixation. Hall, unfortunately, for he is clearly the best qualified person to do so, does not delve deeper but states simply that there was ‘an extreme complexity in Oliphant’s psycho-sexual make-up.’⁶⁴ The numerous insinuations and accusations that have tarnished and thereby diminished Laurence Oliphant’s reputation for a century deserve a fuller analysis than space here permits, but it seems clear they have led to a tendency, among Japan scholars to create two Laurence Oliphants. The first is the ‘restored’ persona, the insufficiently appreciated friend of Japan, the writer of the splendid Narrative, the hero of the attack on the Legation and the bearding of the Russians at Tsushima, and later the sophisticated but practical mentor and guide to the bewildered students in the innocence of their first year in London, opening the eyes of Japan’s future diplomats to the realities of modern international relations. The less palatable portrayal, heavily influenced by moralistic and unsubstantiated allegations from late Victorian Evangelists, is of Oliphant as not only the dupe of a conniving American spiritual fraud; but also a man of homosexual tendencies, who may have fled to Harris, and obscurity, not for spiritual release but in shame when his debauchery was punished by syphilis.⁶⁵ It has even been claimed that the National Vigilance Association was at one time preparing evidence to prosecute Oliphant under the 1885 legislation on homosexuality. The publication of a book by Isabel Burton, widow of Sir Richard, in 1891 suggested Oliphant had a homosexual relationship with John Hannah Speke, who had searched, with Burton for the source of the Nile. Burton and Speke later quarreled violently, supposedly at Oliphant’s instigation, and Speke died out shooting soon afterwards. It seems probable that he committed suicide, although many prefer to record his death as a shooting accident. Isabella Burton’s literary executor was the secretary of the National Vigilance Association, which is now best remembered for its successful prosecution of the man who published Emil Zola in England, and when C.M. Berridge in 1897 wrote that Oliphant was ‘saved by death from sharing the fate of a well known dramatist of the present day.’, there may have been some substance in the observation.⁶⁶

It is more fitting and historically more sound to consider Oliphant the man as a single person. His influence over the Satsuma students did not end when he embarked for America. Indeed, the Brocton period has been described by Hall as a ‘hothouse’ experience, where proximity to Oliphant and Harris and isolation from the world outside intensified the Satsuma men’s immersion in their values. Oliphant remained the students’ tutor even in matters of theology.⁶⁷

64 *Ibid.*, footnote to p. 112.

65 Anne Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

66 Quoted in Taylor, *Ibid.*, p.252.

67 Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

On the lasting benefits of the Satsuma expedition, Hall wrote:

The most significant long-range function of the Satsuma expedition of 1865-8 probably was the training of a corps of able young diplomats, fluent in the English language and very much at home in British and American society—Mori, Yoshida, Samejima, Terajima—who traded off among themselves the ministerial posts at Washington and London during the 1870s and into the early 1880's, contributing immeasurably to the relatively smooth and amicable tenor of Anglo-Japanese and Japanese-American diplomatic and cultural relations during the opening decades of Meiji.⁶⁸

It was the Satsuma students' good fortune to have Westerners to open their eyes so soon to the international realities, while those sent by the Bakufu were incarcerated in the Royal Naval College under the watchful eye of the Chaplain. Terajima recalled that Oliphant first warned him that "if foreigners come to Japan for the purpose of trade, they certainly would make off with the wealth of the land." Terajima reflected, '...as I look back on it now, rare indeed was the foreigner who would issue this sort of warning.'⁶⁹ Matsumura remembered Oliphant telling him "modern diplomacy is necessarily half truth and half lies" and that foreign debt would inevitably lead to territorial absorption by the creditor nation

Oliphant clearly felt that his protégés were destined for higher things and that a sojourn with Harris would be a fitting completion of their education in the West. So he was determined that the students from Aberdeen should also be brought to Brocton. This entailed taking them away from the Glovers and Oliphant's testy remark that 'these merchants care for nothing but money'⁷⁰ suggests that there was a certain tension between the two men whose aims for the students had now diverged.

Clearly, Mori Arinori is too complex a figure for us to say that he had one mentor, Ivan Hall asserts that meeting Harris was a highly significant step in his development, and that while Mori acquired a sense of a New Justice from Oliphant in 1865-66, he gained a New Morality from Harris's teachings and the experience of Brocton in 1866-68. The latter was of particular importance in Mori's formulation of a vision of the New Japan.⁷¹ Anne Taylor claims that Mori, Matsuki Koan, the first Japanese ambassador to London, and Sameshima, the first ambassador to France were 'Harrisites for life'.⁷²

Of the others in the Satsuma party helped by Oliphant in London, who proved highly successful and influential on their return, Godai Tomoatsu is credited with a leading role in creating the Osaka stock exchange and Chamber of Commerce, turning the city into 'the Manchester of the Orient'. Terashima was

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.127.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

⁷¹ Hall, *op. cit.*, p.128.

⁷² Taylor, *op. cit.*, p.143.

Ambassador to London from 1872 and fought valiantly to have the Unequal Treaties rescinded, without success. He later served as Minister of Education and as a Privy Councilor. Machida Hisanari devoted many years to the creation of museums in Japan and suddenly abandoned all to become a wandering Buddhist priest. Matsumura spent his life in the service of the Japanese Navy after going on to study at the United States Naval Academy after Brocton. Mori, of course fell to an assassin's blade in 1889 when Education Minister. His death was a shock to the nation, and he was given a state funeral, although soon afterwards there were as many visitors to his killer's grave as to his own.⁷³

Oliphant said his farewells to the Japanese at Brocton as they returned home, some to fight to establish the restoration, others to shape its future, marking the end of his close ties to Japan. His own future was more troubled, as he split acrimoniously with Harris, and began his arduous struggle to start a new colony in Palestine, where he lost his wife. His somewhat 'esoteric' methods of offering spiritual experience to young women and his complex involvement in the Speke-Burton controversy ensured that he remained in the public eye. In Taylor's view, 'he defied convention and invited disaster'.⁷⁴

His writing on Japan consists of the hundred odd pages of his Narrative, the greater part of which was devoted to China, and his short but colorful accounts of the attack on the Legation and the confrontation with a Russian ship at Tsushima. in *Episodes*. in a Like of Adventure.

There is no trace, after Brocton, of any extended contact between Oliphant and his former Japanese protégés. Perhaps, in later years, the Jews became his new 'exotic others' whose customs and heritage he eulogized and whom he sent to Brocton, now run without Harris, who had decamped to California. But the value of his service to Japan is difficult to deny, even for his most intolerant detractors.

An enigma to the end, Lawrence Oliphant dined with Queen Victoria at Balmoral a few months before he died and explained to her the benefits of his creed of "Sympneumata". At his death, in a friend's mansion at Twickenham, Harris in California exalted, claiming he had witnessed his demise from the spirit realm, the Prince of Wales sent a wreath, the Empress Frederick a telegram. But many, once friends, spurned his funeral. After Hannah Smith's book appeared in 1928, Oliphant suffered an undeserved period of historical neglect, until Philip Henderson's biography appeared in 1956. With interest now revived by Japan scholars, there is a need to reconsider some of the original attacks, and to form a deeper appreciation of the context in which they were made. Oliphant's second wife, Rosamund, the grand daughter of Robert Owen, described meeting her future husband for the first time as 'like meeting twenty men at once'. This multiplicity in his personality suggests the danger to the biographer of believing that his work has been done and the essence of his subject captured. Work on this intriguing Victorian may be far from complete.

73 Hall, *op.cit.*, p.5.

74 *Ibid.*, p.259.

While Glover's place in history as a friend of Japan is secured, Oliphant's is in the throes of re-assessment. In 1908, when the Emperor Meiji awarded Thomas Glover the Order of the Rising Sun, the citation listing his achievements for the nation ran to some twenty pages. Oliphant's help was far less known, but had he not created an awareness of the dangers inherent in friendship with the west, and offered Japan's future diplomats an early insight into Anglo-Saxon ethics and consciousness, the money and arms Japan acquired would not have sufficed to preserve national autonomy and identity. In the approaching post-industrial age, which will necessitate a shift in national goals and values, Japan's encounter with Lawrence Oliphant offers some interesting points for reflection.