

Outside Tokyo

Hakodate: A Strategic Port

Hakodate, at the end of the Oshima Peninsula jutting out from southwestern Hokkaido, is reached from the city of Aomori on the northern tip of Honshu, the main island, by the Seikan ferry that plies the Tsugaru Strait between the two Japanese islands. This port city of 350,000 has long been the main entry to Hokkaido from Honshu. In addition to the Seikan ferry, Hakodate is linked to the rest of Japan by an airport, and both the Hakodate and Esashi train lines providing access to other

parts of Hokkaido converge on this strategically located town.

The name Hakodate dates back to 1454 when a man named Kono Masamichi dominated the area around the present city. Kono supposedly built a manor house shaped like a box, and hence the name Hakodate, meaning "box manor." In 1869, when the newly formed Meiji government redivided the nation into prefectures, the character for the *hako* of Hakodate was changed, but the reading of the name remained the same.

The signing of the Kanagawa Treaty in 1854 between the shogunate government and Commodore Perry marked the beginning of an era of prosperity for Hakodate, which was designated along with Shimoda as one of the first two ports to be opened to American ships. In 1859 trade agreements were signed with the United States, Great Britain, Russia, France and the Netherlands, and four more ports were opened (Yokohama, Nagasaki, Niigata and Kobe). Hakodate became an im-

portant base for north sea fishing and flourished on the trade brought in by the many foreign ships that filled its port.

The city extends back from its docks up the slopes of Hakodate-yama and out to the flatlands on either side. The breathtaking night view of the harbor and city from the top of Hakodate-yama puts Hakodate with San Francisco and Rio de Janeiro among the three most beautiful port cities in the world.

The city's north sea fishing industry was revived in 1952 after World War II, and today Hakodate boasts a wide range of industries. It is particularly famous for its *surume-ika* (squid), and has a vigorous seafood processing industry as well as net- and rope-making factories and other enterprises peripheral to the fishing industry. There are also shipbuilding docks, cement and petrochemical plants and a coastal industrial zone lined with petroleum refineries and plants manufacturing paper and plywood products.

The Hakodate plain that spreads out behind



the city was one of the first areas in Hokkaido to be cultivated, and it is dotted with rice paddies that have been there since the beginning of the 19th century. The farmhouses and occasional clumps of cedar and rows of pine that are to be seen in this area present a scene more typical of northern Honshu than of the rest of Hokkaido. Roughly the size of Switzerland and Denmark combined (around 79,000 square kilometers), the island of Hokkaido is well known for its dry, cold climate. Yet even in January, usually the coldest month of the year, the average temperature in Hakodate seldom goes below -4.1°C and it is this temperate climate that accounts for its northern Honshu-like atmosphere.

Hakodate-yama, which affords the spectacular night view of Hakodate, rises 334 meters above sea level. It has six peaks, the most notable being Goten-yama, and measures roughly six kilometers around its foothills. Because it looks to many like a sleeping bull, the mountain is also known by the nickname

Gagyu-zan (reclining bull). Up to the end of the war, Hakodate-yama was closed to the public as a strategic area, but today a skyline drive and cable car to the summit make it one of Hakodate's major tourist attractions.

Turbulent times

Hakodate was to play a significant role in the traumatic years that marked Japan's transition from nearly three centuries of isolation to a modern state working hard to catch up with the West. In January 1868, Satsuma and Choshu forces demanding restoration of power to the emperor defeated a shogunate contingent that had been sent to suppress them, and on May 3 of the same year they took over Edo Castle, sparking the brief Boshin Civil War that brought about the end of the Tokugawa shogunate that had ruled the nation with an iron fist since 1603.

A Tokugawa naval commander, Enomoto Takeaki, however, succeeded in escaping with eight Tokugawa navy warships. Stopping in Sendai to pick up sympathetic pro-shogunate soldiers from the Sendai and Aizu fiefs, Enomoto made his way to Hokkaido, then known as Ezo, and set up headquarters in the Goryokaku in December 1868. The Goryokaku, which can still be seen today, was the last fortress to be built in the Edo period (1603-1868). Covering 25 hectares (roughly 62 acres) this unusual Dutch-style fortress shaped like a five-pointed star and surrounded by a moat was designed by Takeda Ayasaburo, a scholar of Dutch learning, and was built between 1857 and 1864.

Determined to resist the new Meiji government in Tokyo, Enomoto declared Ezo a republic with himself as president. On April 9, 1869, a contingent of imperial soldiers arrived in Ezo and quickly gained control of the hinterland of Hakodate. They began their attack on the Goryokaku on June 3. Enomoto fought hard, but his casualties mounted and on June 10, 1869, he finally surrendered.

Enomoto's fleet consisted of eight warships totaling 11,000 tons and he had 50,000 men under his command. The imperial fleet of six ships totaled only 6,000 tons and there were only 12,000 imperial soldiers. By all accounts, Enomoto should have won hands down. Reckless misjudgment was his downfall, however. In a move meant to cow the imperial forces, Enomoto sent his largest ship, the Dutch-built 2,800-ton *Kaiyo-maru*, to Esashi on the other side of Oshima Peninsula in mid-February 1869. The plan backfired when the *Kaiyo-maru* embarked in the midst of a raging storm and sank off the Esashi coast along with two of its escort ships.

Despite its lesser tonnage, the imperial fleet had a major advantage in the *Stonewall*, the first iron-clad warship to be seen in Japan. Built in France at the Bordeaux shipyards, the *Stonewall* had seen action in the American Civil War before being purchased by the shogunate government.

As a specialist in Japanese diplomatic his-

tory (my 1975 doctoral thesis at Hitotsubashi University was on Franco-Japanese relations following the Russo-Japanese War), I was intrigued to discover in my research that Enomoto had several French advisers on his side. These were military specialists hired by the Tokugawa government in 1867 to help in the formation of a modern army. Eighteen such specialists had been sent by the French government, and the eight who joined Enomoto, led by Jules Brunet, did so on their own personal initiative, resigning their official posts before committing themselves. Of the original eight, two were naval officers from the French squadron of five ships that was located in the East China Sea at the time. Enomoto entrusted Brunet with the Goryokaku's defense and the other Frenchmen provided invaluable help in piloting the rebel ships and in directing firepower. Unfortunately, fate was against them and they soon found themselves on the losing side. The new Japanese government complained bitterly to the French government and the errant French officers were stripped of their ranks.

Technopolization

Today, the Goryokaku is all that remains to remind Hakodate residents of those turbulent days. Modern Hakodate is instead directing its attention, under a program sponsored by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, at molding itself into a technopolis. The Hokkaido Industrial Technology Center has already been completed and plans are under way for an industrial complex adjacent to the Hakodate airport, the Asahigaoka New Town housing complex, a large-scale aquaculture base, marine farms, automated dairy farms and high-tech international exchange facilities of all kinds.

The Hakodate airport is only a 10-minute drive from the center of the city. Lockheed, Tri-star and Boeing 747s carry a million people in and out of this busy airport every year, and construction is under way to extend the airport's total runway length to 3,800 meters in preparation for its inauguration as a sister international airport to the New Tokyo International Airport.

Of more immediate interest is the completion of the Seikan Tunnel (which has been under construction for more than 30 years) scheduled for this year. Rail service will be available through this undersea tunnel next year, reducing travel time between Aomori city and Hakodate from the current four hours by ferry to only two hours. A 72-day Hakodate Exposition will be held from July 9 to September 12, 1988, to commemorate this historical event, and visitors are urged to visit the nearly life-sized model of the *Kaiyo-maru* that will be on display in the harbor.

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