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The Great Man

Hōkoku Yamada

by Susumu Mizukawa

Do you know who Hōkoku Yamada was? He was born in 1805, the same year as Hans Christian Andersen, Danish Author of such classics as "The Ugly Duckling," "The Little Mermaid" and "The Emperors New Clothes", and he lived two years longer.

He was what we would today call a public servant, who turned the finances of the Bitchu-Takamatsu clan from debt, into surplus. A versatile economic reformer and an educator, he urged the peasants to produce pots and pans. He also encouraged the production of the three-teeth hoe, a kind of sickle used for rice farming. These were transported down the Takahashi River to the Tamashima port.

So important was his legacy to Okayama that, even though almost all of the train stations in Okayama are named after their locations (the nearest towns or cities), there is a rare exception between Niimi and Bitchu-Takahashi, Hōkoku Station, which was named after this great man. In August 2006 it was announced that an asteroid discovered by an Okayama born astronomer would also take his name.

He vigorously promoted industry and began drastic financial reforms when economic crisis was looming over his feudal lord. Under his reforms:

- ① Bribery was prohibited
- ② Luxury was strictly banned
- ③ Regulations against thieves were strengthened
- ④ Gambling was prohibited
- ⑤ 40 rice storehouses were built in order to prepare for food shortages in the event of a drought or flood.
- ⑥ Roads were widened
- ⑦ Clogged rivers and ditches were cleaned



Portrait of Hōkoku Yamada

Picture supplied by Takahashi Hōkokukai

- ⑧ Three *meyasubako* (suggestion boxes) were established to allow anyone in the feudal domain to contribute to improving the fiefdom (a rare instance of political participation for those days.)

Hōkoku Yamada was a pioneer of economic reform, and a promoter of local specialty products. He developed many new methods of making the country prosperous and is one of Okayama's most celebrated personalities.

Extracted from "The Guide to Hōkoku Yamada"