Hayashi Tadasu was born in 1850 in Edo, the son of a doctor practising Rangaku (Dutch-style) medicine. He was quick to take up the study of the English language in Yokohama. Thanks to his father’s prestige at the shogun’s court and the patronage of Sir Harry Parkes, the British envoy, he was sent by shogunate officials with a group to England in 1866. He stayed in London from January 1867 and entered University College School in the autumn. Before long he and his companions were recalled to Japan as the Bōshin civil war approached. Hayashi was just in time to join the last stand of Tokugawa supporters and went north to Hokkaidō to serve that cause with Admiral Enomoto Takeaki. He was captured after the battle of Hakodate and languished in prison for two years, expecting execution. Although he had been on the defeated side and did not have useful clan affiliations, Hayashi was released because he seems to have been regarded as useful by the officials of the Emperor Meiji by reason of his knowledge of English. He was allowed to enter the service of the post-Restoration government in 1871.¹

In the following year Hayashi accompanied the Iwakura Mission as second secretary, serving in effect as interpreter. He visited the United States and went on to act as advance party to prepare the ground for the Mission in Britain. There, he committed an indiscretion and had to return to his homeland early in the company of Kido Kōin.²

In 1873, he entered the Kōbushō (Industrial Affairs Bureau). In 1882, he accompanied Prince Arisugawa during his visit to Europe to represent the Emperor Meiji at the coronation of the Tsar Alexander III, which was postponed. After various postings he came to notice as governor of the newly established Kagawa prefecture in 1888 and of Hyogo prefecture two years later. Hayashi had surmounted the obstacle of his Tokugawa background and secured remarkable promotion as a Meiji official.
In May 1891, Hayashi's patron, Viscount Enomoto Takeaki, became foreign minister and invited Hayashi to join the ministry as vice-minister, an office he was to hold for four years. His qualification was his outstanding knowledge of English, and his ability to deal with foreigners. But he had had no experience as a diplomat overseas, apart (that is) from his membership of the Iwakura Mission and the Arisugawa Mission. At all events he served the second Ito cabinet and was attached as aide to the ailing foreign minister, Mutsu Munemitsu, who was appointed in 1892 and wanted Hayashi, for whom he had great respect, to stay on.3

In his vice-ministerial position he played a substantial part in the negotiations for the Anglo-Japanese commercial treaty which was eventually signed in July 1894. It was part of Mutsu's strategy that the site of the negotiations should be in London away from the frenzied anti-foreign atmosphere of Tokyo at the time. But Hayashi and Mutsu had to lobby strongly with Hugh Fraser, the British minister, before the talks in London got under way.4

Hayashi also played a major role during the Sino-Japanese War, especially in the peace-making process. The peace negotiations began early in 1895, first in Hiroshima and later at Shimonoseki and Mutsu went to western Japan to accompany Prime Minister Ito as plenipotentiary. From April he was forced to withdraw to Kyoto because of illness. The role of the vice-minister in Tokyo became critical because he was the channel of communication with Mutsu and with the other negotiators. Since the European powers – Russia, France, Germany – interfered in the peace process through their ministers in Tokyo, Hayashi's role became one of substance rather than acting merely as an administrator and postbox. For his shrewd handling of this international crisis, probably the first major one which the young Japan had faced, he was duly honoured. Strangely enough, he was more highly esteemed by Mutsu during this crisis than he had been by his earlier patron, Enomoto.5

Shortly after the conclusion of the negotiations, recriminations were made against the minister in Berlin, Aoki Shūzō, who belonged to the Yamagata faction and was not respected by Mutsu and Hayashi, for having mishandled the Germans and misinformed Tokyo. This disagreement was to play a significant part in Hayashi's later career. In October he was made a baron for his pains during the war.

As soon as the Triple Intervention was resolved, Hayashi was posted on 21 June 1895 as minister to China, his first diplomatic posting. In March 1897 he moved to St Petersburg as minister to Russia, Sweden and Norway. It is notable that, while he took on the Russian assignment, he was never posted to Berlin, where he may have felt that the main roots of the Intervention were to be found. During his Russian posting he went as Japan's representative to the First Hague Peace Conference, which had been convened at the initiative of the young tsar, Nicholas II.

LONDON LEGATION

But it was Hayashi's promotion to the Court of St James's that was the high point of his diplomatic career. He was posted to London in February 1900, taking over from Katō Takaaki who had cultivated cordial relations with Britain over the years of Russian expansion from 1895 to 1899.

Hayashi's conversion to the need for an alliance with Britain came