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## The Mindful Peasant: Sketches for a Study of Rebellion

IRWIN SCHEINER

PEASANTS have confused us. We have in our discussions of them, imposed a structure on their lives, defined their behavior and denied their consciousness. We believe their actions to be predictable, but their irruptions and the extent of their violence inexplicable. Bound by tradition, tied to their village, loyal to their lords, they seem to us simultaneously irreverent, rude, ribald and lacking in respect. We find them shrewd in their economic judgments, but incapable of knowing their own real interests. Though they appear responsive to social and economic change, they also seem bound by symbols and ideologies that tie them to the past. They are never at home no matter where they move. Committed to their own interests, they are nevertheless tricked and cheated by city slickers, seigneurs and nobles.

In the perception of historians and history, peasants are more acted upon than actors; they have had to respond rather than create. Lacking political symbols, they possess no self-consciousness, and thus no political awareness of themselves as a group. Structuralism, the mode most often used to analyze peasant and primitive alike, seems as much a normative determination of what peasants should be as a description of what they are. Bound, limited, led, rustic and unaware, words that describe, type, and set the worth of the peasant. Shrewd, pious and practical, market-oriented, economically sound, words that also describe the same peasant.

Marx in the nineteenth century and Weber in the twentieth both saw the limits of peasants as actors. To Marx they are a class, but in terms that seem to have resounded throughout scholarship ever since, they are less than one because they do not understand that they are a class, and that they share interests and goals with others like them. To Weber, they are forever bound to tradition and ingrained habit, their culture to that of the practice of cultivation. Ever susceptible to direction, in Arcadian time and time of crisis, they are forever led. Awaiting leadership in time of trouble, Elie Halevy tells us, they take the direction that their betters give—in France from the ideologues and in England from the Methodists. To the peasant mind, we are informed, the doctrines presented are identical, both satisfying the peasant's need for spiritual guidance and an elite leadership.

Intellectuals and historians have been concerned with the peasants as doctors are with disease. The peasants' presence is an omnipresence, their outbursts pathological and without mediation of mind or thought. Yet, they can not be ignored by the historian. They have been involved with every revolution in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and yet consistently they have been seen more as a natural force than a historical one. To explain their influence they have been

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equated with numbers on a counting machine rather than discrete creatures in a historical situation.

However much scholars concede the "dynamic state" of peasants, the "perpetual ferment" of the peasantry and the "endemic" character of rural disorder, they consistently, with unusual unanimity, reduce peasant protest to actions of masses, "bands sweeping across the countryside like an avalanche." Incited by specific grievances and represented by unstable coalitions, "the 'popular movement,'" the student of French Revolutionary popular violence Richard Cobb has written, "could only express itself either through the food riot or through attempted 'coalitions.'" Peasant movements have been characteristically described as unstable, easily spent when meeting resistance, and unable to remain organized both while in action and afterwards when the fruits of action are to be harvested. They are quickly dissolved, as the American anthropologist Eric Wolf wrote, "if adequate leadership is not provided from without." Necessarily, Antonio Gramsci theorized, they function "as a mass, incapable of providing a centralized expression for their aspirations and need." Part society, part culture, with their surpluses transferred to a dominant group of rulers, and their lives subject to the demands and sanctions of power holders outside their social stratum, peasants have been described by Eric Hobsbawm as inarticulate even when in rebellion, "pre-political people who have not yet found, or only begin to find, a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world."

Peasant ferment, inchoate as its expression may have been, always had clear and specific aims. A fear of dearth, all authors seem to agree, dominated much of peasant life, and most forms of peasant violence were aimed against the propertied classes, the juridically and socially superior, however unexpected and unpredictable the form of violence might be. Peasants existed as the subordinate part of society, frequently with their status defined by law as juridically inferior; most often their status was determined by their livelihood, deriving from their occupation as agricultural producer exploited by landowner, gentry, bureaucrat, businessman or wage owner. But always their distinctive features lay in the realm of world view, of value and style of life. Since most historians and anthropologists have seen peasant violence and its characteristic articulation as an expression of occupation and social subordination, they have also seen the limited goals, the consciousness and the conceptions of peasant movements from the cultural and political perception of the superordinate, and so very frequently from a developmental viewpoint, whether it be Marxist or modernist.

Concepts of social banditry and peasant rebellion, described as "primitive" and "archaic" forms of social agitation and pre-political behavior in the pioneering and provocative work of Eric Hobsbawm, have most probably been derived from Marx's insights into the alienated peasants of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and from a Leninist sociology which has denied to peasants the ideological capability to conceive and the organizational ability to construct a revolution. Since social bandits, Hobsbawm has written, merely represented the peasant community which "creates and calls upon [them]" and reflected their desires, the bandits' lack of "ideology debarred them from making revolt effective." Somewhat similarly, in his reflections upon the Sicilian Peasant Leagues of the 1880's, he concluded that the peasant's millenarian certainty that God willed "The advent

of a new world without poverty, hunger or cold . . ." was "fundamentally irrelevant" except "insofar as the peasants' aspirations were automatically expressed in its terminology." Hobsbawm has so structured peasant life as to reduce their spontaneity to mere reactions determined by the demands of biology, economics or innate hostility toward authority. Ultimately, however, Hobsbawm failed to recognize that the political part of society could merely describe the lawbreaker as bandit, outlaw him, hound him and search him out. Only peasants and their community could create "social" bandits and endow them, as well as other socially displaced and unattached itinerant laborers, preachers and story-tellers, with mythic saviour-like powers. Estranged and geographically distanced from political centers, as the bandit had similarly been outlawed, peasants could express their community's moral cohesiveness and political opposition to the regime by supporting the guerilla activities of the bandit. Rather than fantasizing and emulating their betters through "a little entertainment and vicarious glory," as the privatized, alienated city dwellers did, they used their community's moral authority and integrity to create and sustain the "social" bandit. Similarly, in time of sudden change, when social organizations were in turbulence, conventional imagery, conceptions and the authority of traditional religion could legitimate their aspirations, sustain their organizations and provide a messiah who could lead them to a new society. For societies on the periphery of the political culture and societies facing the excesses of social change, the conventional morality and the traditional religion offer the cultural means with which to articulate an authoritative political opposition to political society.

No historian could deny the distinction between a chiliastic movement with its vision of the millenium and the end of history, and hence of both society and polity, and a revolutionary movement which usurps the power of a regime in order to construct a new polity. Both images are provoked by a vision of a new world, but while the chiliast seeks the "end of days," as Joseph Levenson eloquently put it in the second volume of *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*, the revolutionary has the passion to remake society. Levenson's discussion of the Taiping Rebellion, "a rebellion different from all other rebellions," in the above volume, however, magnificently illustrates that the chiliasts' vision can be socially decisive, even if politically unsuccessful, if for once it can engender "a secession from [the literati's] intellectual world when its social cleavages seemed hopelessly sharp." Though most Chinese rebellions had had merely transitory associations with the "pangs of the messiah," leaving the Confucian arrangement with monarchy to continue to govern history, the Taiping movement permanently shattered the immutability of this association by offering its own intelligence as a legitimate replacement. Since the Chinese state official had been regarded "not merely as a technical administrator," as Eric Wolf wrote, "but also as a ritual figure," he stood with pre-eminent stature as the hinge figure between "Little" and "Great" traditions, between society and polity. With his mythic power, mediation and political intelligence subverted, Levenson suggests, the possibility of the community's usurpation of the polity becomes an ideological possibility.

#### Peasant Studies and Studies of Rebellion in Japan

No study of Japanese peasant revolt has appeared in English since Hugh Borton's

monograph in 1938. But, since World War II, Western scholars have revised many of their assumptions about Japan's modernization since the Meiji Restoration (1868). In particular, they have recast most of their work on Tokugawa agrarian society and on the contributions of Tokugawa religion to modern Japan. Two such seminal studies are Thomas C. Smith's *The Agrarian Origins of Modern Japan* and Robert N. Bellah's *Tokugawa Religion*. In his search for the agrarian origins of modern Japanese economic growth, Smith fundamentally revised all interpretations of this amazing economic development and astutely described the gradual evolution of the traditional economy from subsistence production to production for the market. Concomitantly, he noted, social-economic relations became freer, since workers and tenants became bound by contract rather than by status relations and ties of a real or putative familial type. Bellah elegantly demonstrated that Tokugawa values, not new Western ideas or a conversion to Western values (as had previously been argued), were instrumental in forming a Japanese population willing to work for the new Meiji polity and its economic and social objectives. Smith, however, in his description of the transformation of the economic objectives of the peasant and in his analysis of the growing rationality of agricultural methods ignored both the intellectual and the psychological changes that they provoked. Bellah, on the other hand, in his concern with clarifying the total "Tokugawa Religion" and in describing the Tokugawa consensus, the Japanese equivalent of the "Protestant ethic," ignored all indications either of a millenarian vision or of values and ideas that demonstrated a strong dissatisfaction with the social order. Smith ultimately limited his analysis to structural changes and slighted their effects, while Bellah explained the transformation of Japan as a mere substitution of new leaders and institutions, without any suggestion that the reformulation of traditional values had been affected by any considerable defection from them.

Smith no less than Bellah believed that peasants docilely submitted to the governance of the Meiji government because they remained well disciplined and subject to traditional norms. Both scholars, therefore, explained substitution but not transition. They described a move from one set of objectives to another within a similar form and even a similar language. After reading both of these works we would not know that accompanying the sudden economic and social changes of the latter years of the Tokugawa period there had been an epidemic of rebellions, a florescence of new and popular religious sects engendered by peasants and the appearance of millenarian "World Renewal" (*yo-naoshi*) and "World Leveling" (*yo-naori*) peasant rebellions.

Borton based his descriptive study on Japanese scholarship, particularly the work of Kokushō Iwao. Native Japanese historians have been compiling data, collecting sources and writing on both Tokugawa and Meiji peasant revolts for about four decades. But, particularly since Japan's defeat in World War II, most Japanese students of modern Japanese history (like so many of the New Left historians in the U. S.) have spent much of their time seeking an indigenous radical tradition. After a hundred-year history dominated by a God-like emperor, an essentially autocratic oligarchy, a conservative bureaucracy and a compromised party system, these historians have had to turn to peasant rebellion in both the late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods to find authentic, uncompromised cases of the anti-government movement. Though all of the rebellions of the late Tokugawa

are quite genuinely popular, especially in cases where even the traditional leadership of the local notables was usurped by either the poorest of the peasants or the day laborers, none, these historians believe, marked a significant rise in political consciousness among the peasantry. Tokugawa peasants, Tōyama Shigeki wrote, could find no sanctions for a political rebellion in any of the doctrines available to them. Other historians, such as Aoki Koji, limited their studies of the *yo-naoshi* rebellions to a description of the class composition of the participants and totally ignored the ideas and sentiments that appeared in peasant petitions, slogans, and diaries and writings of their leaders. Yasumaru Yoshio, while describing the religious doctrines of the rebels, concluded that they offered no ideological formulations with which to make a revolution.

Nor were these Japanese historians satisfied that even the most radical, seemingly revolutionary, rebellions in the Meiji period, such as those in Chichibu or Fukushima in the 1880's, testified to a growing political consciousness among the peasantry. Peasants, they wrote, were limited in experience and bound by the past. Hence they were incapable of autonomously conceiving or organizing a political rebellion. Samurai organizers from the recently organized Popular Rights Movement, which was based upon Western liberal ideas and party organization, not Chichibu peasants or Fukushima headmen, provided the political consciousness, inspiration and organizing talent that transformed a peasant *jacquerie* into a rebellion with revolutionary demands. Inoue Kiyoshi, the famous Kyoto University historian, stressed the essential importance for all political action of the Popular Rights Organization, and his colleague, Horie Eichi, though describing the Chichibu rebellion as a great struggle for freedom, believed it became revolutionary only because it had samurai leadership, as had, he concluded, the only rebellions with such possibilities in the Tokugawa period. As good Leninists, which most of these historians are, only the party (and none of these men miss the implications for the present) can prescribe the means, prepare the organization and invoke the consciousness that would turn amorphous peasants' complaints about taxes, debt and the alienation of land into a movement with political and social objectives.

At least one Japanese historian has questioned this interpretation. For the past decade, in a host of books and articles, Irokawa Daikichi has argued that within the Tokugawa village, uncorrupted as yet by Meiji government machinations and class cleavages, there existed a pure peasant populism (*heimin shugi*) which, in fact, preceded the adaptation of Western ideas of democracy (*minshū shugi*) by the Popular Rights Movement (*Jiyū Minken Undō*). In pursuing the idea of democracy into the Tokugawa past, and (at the least) equating peasant populism with Western democracy, Irokawa has been able to charge the modernizing, oppressive Meiji leadership with both the suppression of the Popular Rights Movement and the subversion of the peasant community. Concerned only with economic goals and the development of a strong government, Meiji leaders imposed an authoritarian Imperial ideology upon the country and sacrificed the peasant community to national growth. Local notable leaders, the wealthy peasants (*gōnō*), who had recognized in Popular Rights doctrine an attractive articulation of their own feelings and in the Liberal Party an ally, were persecuted by government-appointed local officials or jailed for their party membership. Modernization and its proponents, even its adherents today, have become Irokawa's villains. But, in

his efforts to rescue the peasant from conventional interpretations of obsequious obedience to tradition, overlord and landlord, he has had to deny the evidence of the overwhelming changes in ideas and structure during the latter part of the Tokugawa period. Instead he sees the peasant revolts of the Meiji period as simply a "function" of their efforts to preserve the tradition of the past. Nonetheless, through the work of Irokawa and others such as Inoue Koji, in his study of the Chichibu Incident, we have begun to see the relationship between Meiji revolts and the Tokugawa past.

### Some Incidents of Rebellion

In mid-autumn of 1884, Chichibu peasant rebels marched into battle carrying signs and banners which read, "Popular Rights—Itagaki Taisuke—The Divine Rectifier—World Renewal" (*Jiyū Minken Itagaki Taisuke daimyōjin yo-naoshi*). Along the battle route they were joined by more peasants chanting the same slogans. Itagaki Taisuke had founded and at the time of the rebellion was presiding over the Jiyū Party, and Popular Rights was, of course, his and the party's major slogan. But neither he nor any of his brain trust (all adherents of some form of Western Liberal doctrine, usually Rousseau's or Mill's), had ever associated their program of Western Liberal Modernization with backward Tokugawa millenarian slogans or superstitious myths of fabled (and failed) saviours. Nor, in fact, had Itagaki wished in any way or fashion to be associated with the Chichibu Incident. Prior to the rebellion, he had coldly rejected some furtive requests for advice from Chichibu leaders, sending them a message to quash even the thought of any extensive protest program. Throughout the several weeks the rebellion lasted he denied that either he or his party had been in complicity with any rebel or had aided or abetted the rising. And Itagaki had not lied. Peasants were never truly welcomed into the party; Ueki Emori, the party's stalwart Rousseauian, held peasants in the greatest contempt, feeling that they were short-sighted, incapable of considering anything but their own interests, and hardly capable of the grand gratuitous gestures of the samurai. Party ideologists, for the most part, evinced little concern for the social needs of the peasantry, prescribing instead wholly political solutions for all of Japan's problems.

Even in retrospect Itagaki found little good in the Chichibu rebels. In his history of the Jiyū Party he described the rebels as a "mob of dissatisfied peasants, professional gamblers and hunters." He decried their objectives as simply "satisfying their immediate desires" and portrayed "as something terrible" their violent "destruction of government offices . . . their burning of bonds of debt and mortgage . . . [and] their attack on officials, landowners and usurers." He disparaged the peasant's social program "as [mere] looting" and wrote that their efforts to reduce taxes and interest rates were "tinged with socialistic characteristics." Ōi Kentaro, one of the few Popular Rights leaders who favored land reform, had been on the stump in Chichibu county of Saitama Prefecture shortly before the rebellion. Informed of the planned rebellion, he dispatched several of his followers to advise the Chichibu leaders to stifle the movement. They spoke to Inoue Denzo, who had long been interested in the Popular Rights Movement, and to Tashirō Eisuke, who had at one time sought information on the party and prepared an application form for admission to it. Ōi's admonition neither surprised Tashirō nor stopped the rebellion.

Although Itagaki (and the government) described the Chichibu leaders as bandits who had led a mob of uncontrolled and disorganized pillagers into a campaign of self-indulgent looting, "dividing among themselves both money and goods," many of these "social bandits" had led Chichibu peasants in a five-year campaign of petitions and litigation. They had attempted to negotiate new loan terms from local usurers, petitioned the government for its intercession and then sought favorable adjudication of their demands through two appellate courts. Both appeals had been denied. Refused aid and advice from the Liberal Party, they nevertheless had an experienced leadership, the beginnings of an organization and clearly focused economic and social objectives. The peasants, moreover, possessed a millenarian terminology which could convey their economic aspirations, which expressed their opposition to the government and which envisaged the likelihood of an alliance with the Popular Rights Movement and its leader, Itagaki Taisuke *daimyōjin*.

Well over six thousand peasants, many coming from Saitama's neighboring prefectures of Nakano and Gumma, joined the rebellion. A thousand or so were fully interrogated by the police. It was discovered that only about two hundred had been drawn into the planning of the rebellion, and among that group a mere handful of six or seven leaders had participated in every step leading to the rebellion. These leaders prepared the petitions requesting usurers and wealthy men to call a moratorium on loan payments, or, at the least, to lower their rates of interest. They were hardly respectable members of the community. Tashirō Eisuke, President of the Poor People's Army (*Konmin gun*) which was at the core of the revolt, and his Vice-President, Kato Orihei, were part-time gamblers, and Tashirō was also a self-styled Robin Hood (*kyōkaku*). Tashirō told his police interrogators that he had acted at the request of his poorer neighbors, but "I've been doing this for the past eighteen years. I acted as mediator whenever people were in trouble." His own mission, he reported to the police, had been "to punish the strong and help the weak." And he like many other peasant rebels claimed at least a moral allegiance to the Popular Rights Movement because they associated it with their belief in the necessity of "changing the world" and "evening [the people in] the world" (*yo-naori*). For them there must be an identity of interest between a reduction of usurious payments and the emancipation of man.

To the men of Chichibu and to many people from the entire Musashi plain, the image of Itagaki Taisuke as "World Redeemer" and the association of Popular Rights with "World Renewal" came easily and naturally, as did the selection of Tashirō as the local leader. Tashirō, who was 56 in 1884, must have remembered the Chichibu Rising at the very end of the Tokugawa in 1866. Then as in 1884, men like himself who were on the periphery of social respectability had taken the lead "in order to punish the unrighteous ones as a lesson for the world" and "in order to help the people." These few itinerant carpenters and one eccentric wealthy man became renowned in story and song after the event. In one narrative poem Tashirō was described as "the squire of the area for many generations [who] looked at the situation and felt that the miseries of the poor could not be overlooked." The two carpenters allegedly claimed "to help all the poverty-stricken people in Japan."

The leaders of the "World Renewal" revolts during the latter years of the Tokugawa period were characteristically itinerant—priests and preachers, gamblers,

story-tellers, and "clever fellows." Generally, their enemies were the newly rich, the village officials, the *han* government, and always, the usurer. Both the government and the rich raised standing armies from among the poorest members of society, and often rebels fought against peasants rather than against the samurai. Quite frequently soldiers would desert their armies in order to join the rebels, and many peasant members of these forces, we are told, were secretly in sympathy with the protestors.

The leaders of the rebellion always seemed to acquire mythical attributes. Kanno Hachirō, who is regarded as a leader of a "World Renewal" rebellion in 1866, came to be called *Yo-naoshi Hachirō daimyōjin*. Miura Meisuke, who led the Nambu rebellion of 1853, received the same title. Many of the women of surrounding villages extended the appellation to all the rebels, also calling them "Honorable Master Destroyers" (*Uchikowashi sama*) whose purpose was "to save the miserable people [and] the people know it." In some cases, not unlike that of the Chichibu Rebellion of 1884, rebels claimed inspiration from the heroics of national figures. Sano Masakoto, who assassinated the Junior Councilor Tanuma Mototomo, was called *Yo-naoshi daimyōjin* as was Ōshio Heihachirō, the bakufu official who led an abortive rebellion in Osaka in February of 1837. Shortly after the defeat of their rebellion, indeed, rebels of the Nose Rebellion claimed the direct inspiration of Ōshio for their own acts.

More accurately, perhaps, the actions of an Ōshio or a Sano merely gave the peasants the occasion for rebellion. In no cases did these "Redeemers" provide the peasants with either a program or an ideology. In both the Tokugawa and Meiji periods, Chichibu peasants protested against usurious rates of interest and the expropriation of their property because of slow payment of debts. Like the peasants of Nambu in 1853, they also complained of new taxes, describing them as extraordinary. Nambu peasants also claimed that local officials had abused their authority and had entered into collusion with monopoly merchants, and they presented a list of 52 demands to the domain government, ranging in complaints from the increase of samurai supervisors and examiners to the expenses of feasting visiting officials.

Ōshio's belief that only a "restoration of the Age of Gods" (*Jindai fukkō*) could ameliorate the corruption of the times must have attracted those peasants who heard or read his slogan. But this kind of millenarian yearning was hardly new to most of the peasants. Since the very beginning of the period, in almost every village, there had always been festivals celebrating the "Ship of Maitreya" (*Miroku no fune*) and the coming of Maitreya, who would usher in a good world and an abundance of goods and money. Most villages also had a ceremony called a "longing after the good world," and in some villages peasants would chant:

Give us a pleasant world and a peaceful world  
Give us a world which is full of rice and millet.

*Oḱagemairi* dances and pilgrimages to Ise in order to give "thanks" (*oḱage*) to the Sun Goddess occurred at least every sixty years throughout the Tokugawa period. Poor peasants and even poorer city dwellers left their villages and towns and wandered throughout the country demanding alms, eating the rice and claiming the goods of the wealthy. Elderly women dressed as maidens, fathers sexually

assaulted their daughters, women flaunted their private parts, and many, contemporary observers report, took the pilgrimage as an opportunity to indulge in a continuous sexual orgy. The world had become topsy-turvy and licentious behavior common. Peasants then felt that their pilgrimage was a divine inspiration to overturn all proper standards.

The *okagemairei* were cyclical releases, a seasonal fête of social deliverance. But at other times (1667, 1759, 1771, and 1814), when natural disasters loaned credence to eschatological omens, villages carried out special New Years ceremonies celebrating the coming of Maitreya. They sought his intercession in order to prevent misfortune and even to bring about a new world of prosperity. In some instances, as in 1725, they believed that the existing world would come to an end, and that with the coming of Maitreya "one will be able to do what he cannot do now." But both in the *okagemairi* pilgrimages, in which the poor likened themselves to their betters and simply attempted to eat and live as they did, and in the pious ceremonies dedicated to Maitreya, peasants remained quietistic, dependent upon divine aid, with neither clear social objectives nor class or political enemies. Nor did they make plans, organize or seek leaders to carry them on to a new world.

*Yo-naoshi* rebels shared their fellow peasants' belief in the millenium. But they sought its accomplishment through their own actions and they planned for its achievement. *Yo-naoshi* rebels destroyed the property of privileged merchants, village officials and usurers, and they attacked government officials. They claimed a justification and legitimization of their rebellion because of their alliances with "Godly rectifiers," whom they had created to represent their demands, but they also claimed that they, as peasants, carried a bit of the divine in them. Some rebels carried the symbol of Brahma-Deva, the God who created the world, to symbolize their own attempts to create a new world. Others chanted: "Maitreya is not Buddha. Buddha is the mind; Mind is God and God is called man." Neither quietistic nor orgiastic, they used millenarian doctrines to lead a rebellion to overthrow their political and economic superiors and to change the world.

They frequently described *han* officials as "foxes," "dogs," or "evil wolves," and ascribed less than human attributes to usurers who were "similar in kind to leeches" since they "bit the legs of the poverty-stricken peasants as if they were sucking blood." Their own impulses were egalitarian. As an agricultural technologist wrote (strangely enough in a book entitled *Lessons for the Encouragement of Farming*), "people are people and there is no difference in man. Even though there is a difference between rich and poor and the high and the low, these are tools (the class order) of politics." And, the people claimed that in some way "World Renewal" inhered in them. "We are the people of World Renewal. We are the peasants who will level the world." In preparing documents for the cheap (and forced) sale of rice their authorization designated them the "Honorable Godly Rectifiers of World Renewal."

Like Tashirō Eisuke, many of the "*daimyōjin*" did not expect victory. (Before the Chichibu Rebellion began Tashirō said his final farewells to his family and tidied up all of his affairs.) They accepted their martyrdom, destroying themselves "for society to let the world know our anger from the Nakasendō to Yokohama." Clearly, many were taken up in the dream of a utopia, but if few prepared as precise a plan to transfer themselves from the service of a *han* to that of some

future national government as did the peasants of Nambu in 1853, there was careful planning and thought behind almost all of these *yo-naoshi* rebellions. Few peasants drew proposals for programs and organizations over a 17-year period, as they did in Nambu, but in almost every incident there were sets of rules drawn up which stated the line of procession, the form of organization and the prohibition of unprovoked violence. Peasants were cautioned to be concerned with the property of their fellows, never to rob and always to seek recovery of the property of their fellow peasants. Similarly, most peasants seemed to feel that they must be involved in the revolt. If there were some who were forcibly enlisted into the rebel battalions, most, including women, joined with enthusiasm. And many declared joyously that they were the "gods of *yo-naoshi* who have come to give punishment."

Against them stood the feudal authorities and also, in most cases, the traditional village leadership. When *yo-naoshi* rebellions became rampant, many village leaders came to complain of the willful young and the treacherous itinerant. In some cases, before any violence had taken place, as can be seen in Wake county in Okayama *han*, village officials ceded their usual rights to administer their own villages by admitting their helplessness and seeking the aid of the *han* government. In other cases, members of the local peasant elite became Nativist scholars (*kokugakusha*), seeking the restoration of the Emperor, whom they believed divine and in a mystical and immemorial union with all the people of Japan. They joined national academies and entered into communication with members of the samurai elite. Some condemned the Tokugawa system and believed themselves in the vanguard of those who sought an Imperial restoration. They identified their interest with many samurai who also believed themselves deprived of the political authority and social status that belonged to them. At a later time they sought alliances with these samurai, and as we have already seen, in defense of their own interest they formed their own armies or allied with the *han* to beat back the *yo-naoshi* rebels. Many of these nativistically inclined wealthy peasants were nouveau riche who had just begun to accumulate power of their own within the village.

Peasants who claimed Itagaki as the *daimyōjin* and identified their interests with the Popular Rights movement were not making a mistaken association. Much of what they had learned from the experience of the late Tokugawa period had made the identification possible. In choosing leaders from men outside the normal status structure they indicated, as they had already done during the Tokugawa period, that the village was no longer a unified community. Through the new leaders that they themselves sought and created, they were making a deliberate effort to construct a new community. It can be argued that they were making a very sophisticated effort to legitimize both their rebellion and the new community that might proceed from it. By their rules for rebellions, which were disciplined and self-consciously community-minded, as in their choice of leaders, who were creatures on whom they projected their own desires, they seemed to be making at least some attempt toward the establishment of a viable political community. Certainly, they were going in a different direction from the wild and licentious dances and pilgrimages of the *okagemairi* movement which had been endemic throughout the Tokugawa. The *okagemairi* pilgrims to the Ise shrine of the Sun

Goddess sought the alms of the wealthy and attempted to turn the world topsy-turvy by making claims to the food and life style of their superiors, but in the end they turned to simple exercises of sexual fantasy. The *yo-naoshi* rebels, however, formulated both a justification and a method for attempting to "even the world."

### Some Final Comments

Peasants have a past entwined with rituals and ceremonies. Daily rote obeisance, cyclical celebrations of planting and harvesting, the quotidian ceremonies surrounding birth and life, have long conditioned peasants' understanding of reality and history. No wonder then, in time of crisis in many countries throughout the world, peasants inevitably, even if fleetingly, associate themselves with the ultimate ideals of their religions, the sleeping Emperors, the Christs or the Maitreyas the millennial movement and the millenium. But if most often the millenium remains a model of the world in the future and a conception of a higher reality, men impatient with their own times may make of this model a blueprint for the present and a constitution for revolution.

Chiliasm and revolution are usually not equated. Any absolute distinction, however, between chiliastic and revolutionary movements would also be incorrect. Certain kinds of chiliasm can challenge the legitimacy of the Great Tradition and engender secessionist movements. Many scholars have recognized the revolutionary implications of millenarianism. But they have also faulted it. Millenarian movements, Edward Shils has written, depend upon a "cosmic act of judgment," since chiliasts "believe that no earthly action can ameliorate or attenuate evil. . . ." But, as we have seen, millenarians have not simply depended upon "acts of God" to carry out movements with revolutionary implications; nor have they simply sought utopias in an other than temporal world. *Yo-naoshi* rebels needed no last judgment to restore justice on earth. They believed themselves active agents of Maitreya, fully capable of both identifying evil and removing it. While revolutionary movements attempt to usurp the power of a regime in order to construct a new polity, millenarians make use of religious symbols and conceptions of messiahs in order to create a new conception of reality which, at the very least, threatens the legitimacy of any established order and hence the acceptability of its authority.

### Bibliography

I wrote this essay after several years of reading in both Japanese and Western materials on peasants and peasant rebellions. Although I have cited particular books and authors, my generalizations derive more from a reading of the literature than from an analysis of any single writer. Over the past few years I have also discussed peasants and peasant rebellions with a number of my colleagues. Often, in fact, Gene Brucker, Robert Bellah, Gerard Caspary, Peter Duus, Delmar Brown, Gerald Feldman, Harry Harootunian, David Keightley, Ira Lapidus, Lawrence Levine, Robert Middlekauff, Tetsuo Najita, Nicolas Riasanovsky, Thomas Smith, Wei-ming Tu, Frederic Wakeman, and Reginald Zelnick must have despaired of my sanity as they heard me out, again and again, as I attempted to work out the themes in this essay. I thank them for their graciousness and aid. Joseph Levenson died four years ago, but his ideas and work continue to influence my

own thought; and this piece also has been effected by suggestions made in some of his own essays.

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