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The Journal of Economic History, Vol. 12, No. 1. (Winter, 1952), pp. 1-20.

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I

AS IN the Middle Ages in the West, so in Tokugawa Japan (1600-1868) men were fond of explaining the hierarchical society in which they lived by comparing it to an organism. Social classes, Confucian scholars said, were like parts of the body: each had a vital function to perform, but their functions were essentially different and unequal in value. In this scheme the peasants were second in importance only to the ruling military class. Just as the *samurai* officials were the brains that guided other organs, so the peasants were the feet that held the social body erect. They were the "basis of the country," the valued producers whose labor sustained all else. But, as a class, they tended innately to backsliding and extravagance. Left alone they would consume more than their share of the social income, ape the manners and tastes of their betters, and even encroach upon the functions of other classes to the perilous neglect of their own. Only the lash of necessity and the sharp eye of the official could hold them to their disagreeable role. They had to be bound to the land; social distinctions had to be thrown up around them like so many physical barriers; and, to remove all temptation to indolence and luxury, they had to be left only enough of what they produced to let them continue producing.

What the Tokugawa writers were describing was their ideal of a perfectly ordered and stable society. They were as far from giving a realistic social picture as the medieval schoolmen who explained European society by much the same sort of analogy. Nevertheless, their descriptions had enough verisimilitude to convince later generations, which have largely drawn upon them and upon legislation designed to enforce the ideal they express for historical material.

We still tend to think of the Tokugawa period in the absolute social categories of the Tokugawa schoolmen and to imagine the peasants as being what the lawgivers would have made them: a distinct and relatively homogeneous class at the economic base of society and, therefore, uniformly wretched, exploited, and impoverished.

This picture of the peasantry, if insisted upon strictly, creates a number of difficulties of historical interpretation, of which two examples may be cited here. The first concerns what is certainly one of the most arresting and significant features of Japanese history—the quiescence of the peasantry for centuries under conditions that would seem to favor revolt. Never did the Japanese peasantry stage the kind of general revolutionary uprising found in some other national histories: the Peasant Rebellion of 1381 in England, the Peasants' War in Germany, the Taiping Rebellion in China. Of course there were frequent peasant disturbances throughout the Tokugawa period and later, but they were sporadic, local, and largely devoid of political aims. This relative passivity seems incomprehensible if the peasants were roughly equal in their misery and, at the same time, left free from the immediate, local control of the military class, as they are supposed to have been.

The second difficulty concerns the Meiji restoration of 1868 which has long been interpreted as a nationalist, antifeudal revolution carried out by a dissatisfied wing of the *samurai* class. Historians have traditionally excluded the peasantry from participation in the restoration, presumably from the conviction that they were incapable of creative effort and that in any case their lowly social position forbade participation in a movement that was strongly aristocratic. There are several objections to this interpretation. First, there is some positive evidence of peasant leaders in the restoration movement. Second, granting that the low-ranking *samurai* had reason to rebel against the Tokugawa regime, why did they replace it with one that on the whole was even less favorable to their special interests? Third, how did it happen that an impoverished group of *samurai* succeeded in effecting so dramatic and sweeping a political change—unless they had powerful outside support? ¹

¹ E. Herbert Norman, *Japan's Emergence as a Modern State; Political and Economic Problems of the Meiji Period* (New York, 1940), pp. 49–70, argues that this support came primarily from the big-city merchants such as Mitsui. He cites as evidence particularly the loans made to the Meiji government in the critical years 1868 and 1869. However, these were

In the last decade or so, Japanese historians have begun to study intensively new kinds of materials on the peasantry—land registers, household budgets, diaries, mortgages, bills of sale. From these studies a picture radically different from the one drawn by the Tokugawa philosophers is slowly being pieced together. Incomplete as the picture still is, it already suggests a solution to the two interpretive problems just mentioned. Here I shall attempt only to sketch the main lines of this emerging picture; and for reasons that will be clear later I will confine the sketch to the seventeenth century, before the rising tide of capitalism had begun to obscure traditional arrangements in the village.

II

Everywhere in seventeenth-century Japan the peasant population was divided into those who held land and those who did not. This was more than a purely economic distinction, for it ordinarily implied rights and obligations of different kinds. Only peasants listed in the village land register—that is, *hyakushō*,² or landholders—had the privileges and duties that went with membership in the village. Since taxes of all kinds were laid on land rather than on persons, only *hyakushō* were responsible for payment of the various dues the village collectively owed the lord.³ In return, they alone could participate in a village assembly, hold village offices, draw shares of the common

forced loans of the kind merchants had long been accustomed to make at the order of any government powerful enough to require appeasing; they do not necessarily imply approval and support of the restoration government. Indeed, as late as 1866 the merchants made very large loans to the shogunate itself. *Meiji ishin keizaishi kenkyū*, ed. Honjō Eijirō (Tokyo, 1930), p. 359 ff., and *Nihon keizaishi jiten* (Tokyo, 1942), I, 596–97. Moreover, in the years immediately after 1868, the Meiji government did not show the degree of solicitude for the special interests of the great merchant houses that one would expect if merchant backing had been voluntary at the time of the restoration. (1) It promptly abolished the elaborate Tokugawa system of trading privileges of which these houses had been the chief beneficiaries; (2) it repudiated about 80 per cent of the enormous debts owed to them by its predecessors, the shogunate and the *han*; and (3) it adopted financial policies that were directly responsible for the bankruptcy, within seven years of the restoration, of Ono and Shimada, two of the three greatest merchant houses of the time, both of which had contributed heavily to the loans of 1868 and 1869. Takahashi Kamekichi, *Nihon shihon shugi hattatsu shi* (Tokyo, 1929), p. 89 ff.; and *Nihon keizaishi jiten*, I, 181, 742; II, 1351.

² Throughout the Tokugawa period the term *hyakushō* was used in two senses: broadly, to designate the peasantry in general; technically, to mean a peasant who was enrolled in the land register. It is in the latter sense, as a synonym for landholder, that the term is used in this paper.

³ *Nihon keizaishi jiten*, I, 947–48.

lands of the village, address the village headman on official business, or take part in a legal act of the village such as the sale or acquisition of water rights.⁴ The rest of the population of the village was without public rights and duties, aside from the general obligation to abide by the law. Indeed, the local and higher officials rarely took cognizance of them at all except in criminal cases. Such people were completely dependent, in one form or another, on some *hyakushō* who used their labor on his holding; for most purposes he stood between them and the law, and their obligations and rights were defined primarily by their relations with him rather than with any public authority.⁵ But this class will be considered later; here we are concerned only with the *hyakusho*.

The land registers are the basic economic document on landholding in the village. Since they were compiled for the purpose of allocating taxes of all kinds, they list the names of the *hyakusho* and give a description of the holding of each. Too few registers from the seventeenth century have yet come to light to permit nice generalizations about the distribution of land among holders. It is obviously impossible from the number of registers tabulated below to guess, for example, what percentage of holdings were under one *chō* (2.45 acres),⁶ considered by Professor Fujita, whose conclusions are based on the study of a large number of family budgets, as the minimum holding that would support a family of five in northeastern Honshu at this time.⁷ But even the few registers we have leave very little doubt concerning the general picture of inequality among holdings. Although they come from widely separated areas, they all show holdings of less than one-half *chō*—some of them little better than gardens—or holdings whose annual yield was valued at less than five *roku* (one *roku* = 4.96 bushels) of hulled rice alongside holdings ten, twenty, or thirty times as large or productive.⁸ Not infrequently we encounter *peasant* holdings that can only be described as estates. For example, we find a

⁴ The fullest discussion of the evidence bearing on this subject is Furushima Toshio, *Kinsei nihon nōgyō no kōzō* (Tokyo, 1948), I, 1-55; for the author's conclusions, see pp. 50-55.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 465 ff.

⁶ There was no uniformity in Japanese land measure until the first part of the seventeenth century when the *chō* was generally stabilized at the present 2.45 acres. Even so, some local differences persisted, and complete uniformity was not achieved until the reform of the land tax in 1874. *Nihon keizaishi jiten*, II, 1067.

⁷ Fujita Gorō, *Nihon kindai sangyō no seisei* (Tokyo, 1948), p. 218. It should be added that the minimum figure would be smaller for central and southern Japan where cultivation was more intensive and agriculture more commercialized.

⁸ In the Tokugawa period the land tax was a percentage of the *taka*, or value-yield of the holding as expressed in *roku* of hulled rice.

TABLE I
DISTRIBUTION OF LAND AMONG HOLDERS: SIZE OF HOLDINGS IN TAN (10 TAN = 2.45 ACRES)

VILLAGE	PROVINCE	DATE	NUMBER OF HOLDINGS											TOTAL	
			0-5 tan	5-10 tan	10-15 tan	15-20 tan	20-25 tan	25-30 tan	30-35 tan	35-40 tan	40 and over tan				
Higashi 11	Iwashiro	1593	18	2	2	7	1								33
Kawachi 12	Iyo	1657	6								15				25
Okada 13	Echigo	1683	2	5		14									32
Koga 14	Yamashiro	1697	118	11	6	4	5								148
Shimajima 15	Aki	1705	33	30	12	6	9								90
Terayama 16	Sagami	1706	16	12	11	11									50

TABLE II
DISTRIBUTION OF LAND AMONG HOLDERS: VALUE OF HOLDINGS IN KOKU (1 KOKU = 4.96 BUSHELS)

VILLAGE	PROVINCE	DATE	NUMBER OF HOLDINGS											TOTAL		
			0-1 koku	1-2 koku	2-3 koku	3-4 koku	4-5 koku	5-10 koku	10-15 koku	15-20 koku	20-25 koku	25-30 koku	30-40 koku		40 and over koku	
Shimo 17	Echigo	1587	3	5	5											18
Kinebuchi 18	Shinano	1666						4								
Okawara 19	"	1677	9	11	6	1				5				10		23
Tsukiyama 20	Yamashiro	1694	4	2		1				5						54
Makuuchi 21	Iwashiro	1691								2	2					13
Nishihara 22	Mikawa	1730	4	1		8				8	12	2				30
Kaminagada 23	Mino	1734	5	16		30				4	1	2				21
Ikezaki 24	Kaga	1750	22		8					27	10					90

11 Toya Toshiyuki, *Kinsei nōgyō keitei shiron* (Tokyo, 1949), pp. 21-22.
 12 Ono Takeo, *Tsuchi ketaishi koshō* (Tokyo), p. 54.
 13 Kitajima, p. 26.
 14 Furushima, "Edo jidai ni okeru Kinai nōgyō to kisei jinushi," *Rekishi gaku kenkyū*, No. 149 (January, 1951), p. 37.
 15 Furushima, *Nōgyō no kōzō*, II, 594.
 20 Fujita, *Nōminzō*, pp. 190-91.
 21 Furushima, "Kinai nōgyō to kisei jinushi," pp. 8-9.
 22 Furushima, *Hōken jidai kōki no nōmin no seikatsu* (Tokyo, 1948), p. 240.
 23 *Ibid.*
 24 Furushima, *Nōgyō no kōzō*, II, 593.

village headman in Iyo Province in 1682 holding 34 *chō* with an annual yield of 165 *kokū*⁹; and, in the early eighteenth century, two families in Shinano Province with incomes from land of more than 100 *kokū* each.¹⁰

It is not surprising that such extremes of wealth and poverty among *hyakushō* of the village were accompanied by marked social distinctions.²⁵ We may pass over differences of dress, food, and housing,²⁶ which directly reflected economic well-being, to distinctions of education and family with one comment. Two contrary complaints about the peasantry run through the economic writings of the whole Tokugawa period and, not infrequently, through the works of a single author. On the one hand, it is said that the peasants lived like beasts in the field; on the other, that they lived with the reckless extravagance of the merchant.²⁷ Since these are views persistently expressed by contemporaries who knew of what they spoke, they cannot be ignored; and they can only be reconciled if we understand them as comments on the way of life of two rather distinct economic classes among the peasantry.²⁸

Although the law bound them to the land and treated them in other respects like ordinary peasants, the rich landholding families were not purely peasant in origin. Many could trace their ancestors back not many generations to petty warriors, some of whom collected taxes and administered justice in the village and, on occasion, even demanded military service from the peasants under them.²⁹ In the century of

⁹ Kitajima Shōgen, "Echigo sankan chitai ni okeru junsui hōken no kōzō," *Shigaku zasshi*, LIX, No. 6 (June, 1950), 19-20.

¹⁰ Furushima, *Nōgyō no kōzō*, II, 522. [For notes 11 through 24, see Table I.]

²⁵ Tanaka Kyūgū, "Minkan shōyō," *Nihon keizai sōsho*, ed. Takigawa Seiichi (Tokyo, 1914-17), I, 280-81.

²⁶ For evidence on the living standards of various groups in the village, see Koseki Toyokichi, "Hansei jidai ni okeru nōson ni kansuru seisaku to nōmin no seikatsu," *Tosa shidan*, No. 44 (September, 1933), pp. 92-128; Sekijima Hisao, "Tokugawa matsugo no nōson jinushi no shōhi seikatsu," *Shakai keizai shigaku*, XII, No. 9 (December, 1942), 69 ff.; and Kakayama Tarō, "Nōmin no kaikyū to minzoku—Edo jidai wo chūshin to shite," *Minzoku gaku*, IV, Nos. 10 and 11 (October and November, 1932).

²⁷ For examples of such comment, see Kobayashi Yoshimasa, *Nihon shihon shugi no seisei to sono kiban* (Tokyo, 1949), p. 18; and Fujita, *Kinsei ni okeru nōminzō kaikyū bunka* (Tokyo, 1949), p. 91.

²⁸ Not infrequently the existence of distinct economic classes in the village was explicitly acknowledged. Horie Eiichi, *Hōken shakai no okeru shihon no sonzai keitai* (Tokyo, 1949), p. 87; and Nakamura Hideichirō and Asada Kōki, *Nihon shihon shugi shakai keizai shi* (Tokyo, 1949), pp. 86-87.

²⁹ On the recent warrior status of many wealthy peasants in the early Tokugawa period, see Furushima, *Nōgyō no kōzō*, I, 125-26, and *Kazoku keitai to nōgyō no hattatsu* (Tokyo, 1949), pp. 101-02; Kitajima, p. 4; Fujita, *Kindai sangyō*, p. 200; and Nishioka Toranosuke, "Kinsei shōya no genryū," *Shigaku zasshi*, XLIX, No. 2 (February, 1938), 3-4.

anarchy before Nobunaga's time, there had been no clear distinction between soldier and landholder,³⁰ the very possession of land implied arms to defend it. "No arms, no land," the saying went.³¹ Hence, Hideyoshi and the other barons had found no satisfactory distinction at hand for prying warrior and peasant apart when they sought to separate the two at the end of the sixteenth century, with the result that nearly everywhere a backwash of warrior families was left among the peasantry.³²

No wonder that such families were at pains to maintain their traditions and past dignity by the only means the new order, which had dropped them legally into the peasant class, permitted: education and intermarriage with their kind. While the general run of peasant was illiterate, literacy in the more substantial families went far beyond the rudiments of reading and writing. What else are we to think when we find them maintaining private tutors in their homes,³³ keeping diaries, composing family histories, and making reports on conditions in the village in the exacting official style of the time,³⁴ or placing orders with the village headman going off to Edo on business for such books as the *Nihon shoki*?^{35, 36} Even training in the use of weapons was not unknown among such families.³⁷

They showed the same solicitude for the proper marriage of their children as for their education. The Hino family of Kamiyama village

³⁰ Nakamura Kichiji, *Kinsei shoki nōsei shi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1938), p. 255.

³¹ "Ichiryō gusoku" or "ichiryō ippiki," literally, "one holding and armour" and "one holding, one horse."

³² I do not refer to *gōshi*, or warriors, who, while remaining on the land, retained *samurai* rank; but to former warriors who were incorporated in the peasant class. The best discussion of the separation of the warrior and peasant classes is Ono, *Nihon heinō shiron* (Tokyo, 1943), pp. 131-54. A detailed and important study of the application of this measure in Kai Province is Itō Tasaburō, "Iwayuru heinō bunri no jissō-teki kenkyū," *Shakai keizai shigaku*, XIII, No. 8, 1-50; on warriors being dropped into the peasant class, pp. 31-32, 39, 45-48.

³³ Nishioka, p. 14.

³⁴ Furushima, *Nihon hōken nōgyō shi* (Tokyo, 1941), pp. 125-27; and Fujita, *Kindai sangyō*, pp. 240, 247.

³⁵ The *Nihon shoki* or "Chronicles of Japan" was compiled in 720 and was written in the Chinese language. While it purports to be an authentic record of early Japanese history, it is in fact a skillful blending of myth and history in such a way as to enhance the prestige of the imperial family. This amalgam was later used by the restoration leaders as historical justification for their revolutionary activities; thus, interest in this text is as much a comment on political outlook as on literacy.

³⁶ This information is taken from the diary of a headman from a village near Niigata. The diary is dated 1867, considerably after our period, but appreciation for a book like the *Nihon shoki* was not likely to have come from less than several generations of literacy. Parts of this extremely interesting diary are published in Fuse Tatsuji, "Tokugawa matsugo nengu shūnō no kunan wo egaita Edo kikō," *Shakai keizai shigaku*, VII, No. 4 (July, 1937), 106-17 (esp. 111-12).

³⁷ Nishioka, p. 14.

in Iyo Province is a good example. The Hino had been warriors since the fifteenth century and had been reduced to *hyakushō* status in 1632. They had not, however, been deprived of their considerable holdings in Kamiyama, and the lord partly compensated them for loss of status by making them hereditary village headmen.³⁸ Not once in the seventeenth century did the Hino intermarry with a Kamiyama family, although there were well over a hundred families in the village.³⁹ The reason seems obvious: since the Hino were the only family in the village with a warrior background, except for their former military followers, and until 1587 had held the entire village as a fief from the shogun, to find suitable matches this proud family had to look to other villages. On occasion they even went as far afield as neighboring provinces. Of course this does not prove that the practice was general; but it would be surprising, when the histories of other families are studied, to find that there was anything unusual in the very strong preference the Hino showed for intermarriage with families of similar background and economic position.

The economic and social dominance of the larger *hyakusho* in the village was supported by a tight monopoly of local administrative and political power. Invariably the headman and his lieutenants came from this class,⁴⁰ and their monopoly of office was almost impossible to break—short of rebellion. Often the office of headman was hereditary in a single family and at best it rotated among a few qualified families, each holding office for a generation.⁴¹ In rare instances, it is true, at least in the late Tokugawa, the headman was elected by the *hyakushō* of the village; but given the unequal stacking of the cards in other respects, it is not very difficult to guess how these elections ordinarily turned out.

The practice of restricting local office to the larger holders was not new. By the Tokugawa period it was already so firmly established in custom that legal enactments to support it would have been superfluous. For some four centuries before 1600 land, arms, and political power had been an inseparable trinity in the village. As early as the Kamakura

³⁸ Aruga Kizaemon, *Nihon kazoku seido to kosaku seido* (Tokyo, 1943), pp. 223–24.

³⁹ Nishioka, No. 3, pp. 76–77.

⁴⁰ Even if there were not an imposing array of cases to support this view (and none, to my knowledge, contradict it), we would be assured of its accuracy by a Bakufu law of 1673 stipulating that a holding could not be divided among heirs unless it were valued at more than 10 *ko* in the case of an ordinary peasant and at more than twice that figure in the case of a headman. Furushima, *Hōken nogyo*, p. 109.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

period (1185-1333), the *myōshu*,⁴² as the landholders were then called, were already securely in control of local affairs outside the fast-disappearing public domain. They were the armed officials of the *shō*⁴³ who saw to its defense, collected its taxes, directed the labor of its tenants, and maintained law and order in its precincts.⁴⁴ The local power of this class was greatly strengthened during the prolonged civil war that ensued on the collapse of effective central government in the first half of the fourteenth century; and when, in the sixteenth century, unity and order were at last imposed on the country by Nobunaga and his successors, those warrior-landholders who were left on the land were disarmed but not stripped of their local administrative power.⁴⁵ Nor could they be. They were the innumerable points of support scattered about the countryside upon which the whole machinery of government ultimately rested, for local government consisted of nothing more than the authority they had traditionally exercised in the village.

III

Thus far we have been considering only the *hyakushō*: that is, those peasants who were listed in the land registers. Until recent years it was believed that the land registers accounted for the whole peasant population and, accordingly, that the Tokugawa village was a community of small holders who were the virtual owners of the land they worked. Tenantry, so characteristic a feature of modern Japanese agriculture,

⁴² In the light of other evidence bearing on the social origins of the village headmen, it is significant that the most common title they bore in the Tokugawa period, *nanushi*, was written with the same two Chinese characters as *myōshu*, and that *shōya*, the only other title that had wide currency, in the Kamakura period referred to an officer of the *shō*. (On the significance of the *shō*, see n. 43.)

⁴³ The *shō* was an institution that emerged after the eighth century with the gradual decline of the imperial government. It first appears after land had been nationalized in the seventh century, simply as a piece (or pieces) of privately owned land that had been separated by one means or another from the public domain. Later, as the power of the government failed, the *shō* became tax free and immune from the police power of the government. And new *shō* were continually being formed, until by the Kamakura period (1185-1333) scarcely anything remained of the public domain. The titular possessor of the *shō* at this time was usually a court noble or a Buddhist temple through whose influence the *shō* had won and continued to maintain its immunities and who drew revenues from its lands. The real possessors, however, were the local officials who managed the *shō* and held land within its confines. These landholders, or *myōshu*, had already armed themselves and had developed among themselves an intricate system of military relationships. Thus, at the height of its development, the *shō* was being transformed into a fief, a transformation that was completed during the protracted civil war that began in the fourteenth century.

⁴⁴ Shimizu Mitsuo, *Nihon chusei no sonraku* (Tokyo, 1942), p. 29 ff.

⁴⁵ Nishioka, No. 2, pp. 3-4.

could be explained, therefore, as the result of capitalism having invaded the village, thrusting this peasant up and that one down.⁴⁶

This view is no longer tenable. The assumption upon which it rested was first called into question by Professor Imai's suggestion, made in 1940, that the land registers listed only holders and not the entire population of the village.⁴⁷ Imai's hypothesis has since been confirmed; there is now ample proof that part of the peasantry stood outside the land registers for the simple reason that they did not hold land. This class of peasants was not confined to any particular region. It is found in such widely separated places as Kyushu and northern Honshu, Shikoku, and the area along the Sea of Japan.⁴⁸ But if the evidence clearly points to this class as a general feature of Japan's institutional development at that time, and not as a local historical accident, it is less satisfactory on point of numbers.

Although the evidence available on the ratio of tenants to *hyakushō* in our period is too scanty to permit precise conclusions, tenants must have comprised a substantial part of the total population. In some areas the percentage of tenants runs very high indeed. The figures for Buzen Province, which are based on a detailed census during the years 1681-1684 that included even horses and oxen, show as tenants over 50 per cent of the total number of family heads. It is very difficult to believe that this ratio could have held for the country as a whole. Nevertheless, even in the ten villages of Kawachi Province, where the percentage is the lowest of any area for which we have figures, tenants comprised just under 25 per cent of the total population, and only two villages of the nine had no tenants at all.⁴⁹

We shall probably not fully understand the significance of tenantry and precisely what it entailed until its institutional origins have been further explored. But this much seems certain: tenantry was already characteristic of Japanese agriculture in the seventeenth century before capitalism had invaded the countryside in any considerable force. Indeed, it seems to have been most firmly entrenched in remote or mountainous areas like Buzen and Shinano which were isolated to a high degree from influences of the marketplace. The inference seems ines-

⁴⁶ *The Documents of Iriki: Illustrative of the Development of the Feudal Institutions of Japan*, ed. K. Asakawa (New Haven, 1929), pp. 336-37; and Nakamura Shōnosuke, *Nihon kosaku seido ron* (Tokyo, 1936), I, 196 ff.

⁴⁷ Imai Rintarō, "Kinsei shotō no okeru kenchi no ikkō-satsu," *Shakai keizai shigaku*, IX, No. 11 (March, 1940), pp. 116-21.

⁴⁸ The evidence bearing on the population outside the land registers is summarized in Furushima, *Nōgyō no kōzō*, I, 3-25.

⁴⁹ Nakamura, *Nihon Kosaku*, pp. 147-48.

TABLE III

TENANTS AND HOLDERS IN BUZEN PROVINCE, 1681-1684 *
(TOTAL PEASANT POPULATION OF FIVE COUNTRIES: 39,808)

COUNTY	HOLDERS		TENANTS
	Village Officials	Other Holders	
Total	28	3353	4018
Kiku	6	831	697
Tagawa	7	982	1496
Tsuiki	4	438	684
Miyako	7	622	373
Kamike	4	480	768

* Furushima, *Nōgyō no kōzō*, I, 48-49.

capable, therefore, that tenantry reflects some differentiation among the peasantry that antedates the Tokugawa period. Moreover, the overtones of personal dependence associated with tenant status suggest something more than a purely economic contract between the tenant and his landlord.

The tenant did not share any of the public rights and duties of the landholder. It has already been noted that his rights and duties, for the most part, were private in nature and that they were governed by his relationship to his landlord (for so we may now call the larger *hyakushō* whose holdings were worked wholly or in part by tenants). Although this was a customary and private relationship, it was respected and supported by the political authorities. There seems to have been no general legislation in the period regulating it, and administrative interference by the local magistrate, which did occur infrequently, was resisted by landlords as an invasion of a domain that was their exclusive concern.⁵⁰

Certainly tenantry involved an economic dependence on the landlord that was very nearly complete. Although custom gave the tenant some measure of protection in his holding, he had no legal claim to the land he worked. The only right acknowledged by the village register, and consequently by the lord and his officials, was that of the landlord. The landlord sold or mortgaged or passed on to his heirs both land and tenants, without consulting the latter's wishes. No doubt in most cases he could also dispossess his tenants without cause or compensation if

⁵⁰ Mori Kaheiei, "Kinsei nōmin kaihō no shakai keizai shiteki igi," *Nōmin kaihō no shiteki kōsatsu*, ed. Shakai keizai shigakkai (Tokyo, 1948), p. 70.

only he were prepared to risk the censure of his neighbors.⁵¹ Everywhere the plots assigned tenants were too small to have permitted them to accumulate any significant capital of their own.⁵² There is good reason, moreover, to believe that when favorable economic or political factors, such as increased productivity or a low tax rate, made a higher income for the tenant possible, the landlord took the increment in higher rents.⁵³ But the tenant was dependent on the landlord not only for access to land; the house in which he lived and the tools with which he worked often belonged to the landlord. And he had access to the common forest and wastelands of the village, which provided much of the fertilizer⁵⁴ and all the fuel and building materials so essential to the economy of the peasant household, only because the landlord drew a share of the common as a village *hyakushō* and permitted the tenant the use of it.⁵⁵

The personal relations of the tenant and landlord reflected the generally accepted criteria of the time for dealings between unequal parties. All relations of this kind in Tokugawa society between employer and employee,⁵⁶ teacher and pupil, lord and vassal tended to approximate the Confucian ideal of family relationships. All had their peculiar features, but all had in common distinctions of worth between the two parties and reciprocal but different sets of obligations—obedience and loyalty on the one side and benevolence and protection on the other—that ideally obtained between father and son. To the tenant the landlord was *oyakata* or “parent”; to the landlord the tenant was *kokata* or “child.”⁵⁷

⁵¹ Arbitrary dispossession was not possible in the case of tenants called *bunsuke hikān*. For historical reasons that are not wholly clear, such tenants had exceptionally strong claims to the land they worked, and the landlord could only liquidate their claims by purchase. But this type of tenant has been found only in a few places, and even there in relatively small numbers. Furushima, *Nōgyō no kōzō*, II, 497.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 594.

⁵³ Furushima, “Edo jidai ni okeru nōgyō to kisei jinushi,” *Rekishi gaku kenkyū*, No. 144 (March, 1950), pp. 13, 15.

⁵⁴ Fertilizer was intensively used throughout the Tokugawa period. Surviving budgets show that in some cases as high as 34 per cent of the total outlay of peasant households went to buy fertilizer. Horie, pp. 58–59. However, the peasant provided most of his fertilizer himself, the chief sources being compost in the form of grass and leaves gathered from the common and manure from animals grazed on the common. Dried fish and night soil were also important. Furushima, *Nōgyō no kōzō*, I, 133–38, 183.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 183–94.

⁵⁶ The house laws and shop rules of most merchant families contained sections on the proper relationship between employer and employee; for examples, see Miyamoto Mataji, *Kinsei shōnin ishiiki no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1942), pp. 125–26, 139–41, 146–47, 166–68.

⁵⁷ *Nihon keizaishi jiten*, I, 183.

This system of values inevitably tended to turn economic dependence into intense personal subordination. There are a few scraps of evidence that throw some direct light on this aspect of the tenant's position. The tenants of Shinano Province, in addition to performing labor services for the landlord, were all subject to a class of obligations that seem more a signification of personal dependence than an economic payment. Some tenants were required to send their sons and daughters as unpaid servants to the landlord for a fixed term; others to deliver firewood to the landlord, or to provide a meal for him on specified occasions, or to attend him on occasions of personal sorrow or rejoicing; and still others to deliver a small quantity of rice and wine or such things as a wooden bucket or a piece of cloth at certain seasons of the year.⁵⁸

The authority that landlords exercised over the lives of their tenants is suggested by the admonitions one of them laid down for his tenants in 1725. Tenants were not to leave the village on a visit or to put up relatives for more than five days without reporting the reasons to the landlord; they were strictly forbidden to lodge wandering priests, pilgrims, and other strangers even for a single night. They were to avoid ostentatious and expensive things. Specifically forbidden were *zōri*, *haori*, and *wakizashi*.⁵⁹ They were not to put new roofs on their houses or otherwise repair them without the landlord's permission. All "luxurious" things in their houses, such as *shōji*⁶⁰ and mats, were ruled out, but gables, which had been forbidden in the past, were now allowed. They were to show due respect at all times to the landlord and his family and servants and to the *hyakushō* of the village. They were not to wear footgear in the presence of the landlord, nor to adopt a family insignia resembling his, nor to use a character in a name that was in use in his family, and so on.⁶¹ This document, which recalls a Tokugawa feudal lord lecturing his people on the virtues of frugality and proper behavior, is by no means unique; there are numerous other documents of this kind, some of them of much later date, that strike the same note.⁶²

⁵⁸ Furushima, *Nōgyō no kōzō*, II, 480.

⁵⁹ *Zōri*: a particularly elegant type of straw sandal; *haori*: a type of coat, again very elegant; *wakizashi*: a dagger worn at the side.

⁶⁰ *Shōji*: sliding doors usually made of a fine, translucent paper mounted on a light wooden frame and used as partitions between rooms.

⁶¹ Mori, pp. 65-68.

⁶² See particularly an undated document from the Tokugawa period in Nakamura and Asada, p. 107.

But the degree of personal subordination which tenantry involved was not everywhere the same. There were two main types of tenantry at the end of the seventeenth century, one of which gave the tenant greater personal freedom than the other.

Over the greater part of the country, the landlord allotted a part of his holding in plots to his tenants for their support; the rest he exploited directly for his own profit with the labor services his tenants owed him in return. The cases of tenantry cited above were of this type. But, in the economically more advanced areas where trade was destroying the self-sufficiency of the village and spreading rural industry and commercial agriculture, this regime was giving way to the modern form of tenantry. Landlords were breaking up their entire holdings among tenants, except perhaps for what they could work with family labor and servants, and substituting rent in kind for labor services.

The reasons for this shift are not obvious. From the evidence at hand it seems likely that with the spread of rural industry and the development of the market,⁶³ the possibility of by-employment caused tenants to place a higher value on their labor, and the landlord was forced to make concessions to keep them on the land since emigration to the cities, although quite illegal, was impossible to prevent in fact.⁶⁴ On the other hand there are no grounds for believing that landlords lost by the new arrangement. Throughout the Tokugawa period the costs of production—the meals provided tenants on workdays, fertilizer and agricultural implements, the wages for hired hands at the planting and harvest—were constantly rising, making the old system of management less and less profitable.⁶⁵ Providing that labor services were commuted into rent in kind at a high enough rate, the new system could serve to transfer the increasing burden of these costs to the tenant; and this may have been the real reason for its adoption.

⁶³ A convenient short discussion of this subject may be found in Horie, pp. 37-67.

⁶⁴ There was a spectacular growth of urban population at the end of the seventeenth century: Edo grew from 353,000 in 1692 to 553,000 in 1731; Osaka from 345,000 in 1692 to 382,000 in 1721; and there was a proportionate increase in the population of port cities, castle towns, and stations along the main routes of overland travel. Furushima, *Hōken nōgyō*, p. 304, and *Nōgyō no kōzō*, II, 611. There is convincing evidence that this growth was owing primarily to the influx of population from rural areas. A census of Edo in 1721 showed a ratio of 100 men to 53 women, suggesting a heavy immigrant population in the city (*ibid.*). There were constant complaints from local officials at this time of a serious shortage of agricultural labor which they attributed to the movement of people from the villages to cities and towns. Oda Yoshinobu, *Kaga han nōsei shikō* (Tokyo, 1929), p. 578.

⁶⁵ For evidence on rising costs, see Furushima, *Nōgyō no kōzō*, II, 603-16. Regarding the causes of this rise: (1) the rapid expansion of commerce and industry created constant new demands for labor and materials; (2) more and more food was required to support the expand-

Although the change spread so slowly and unevenly that to date it for the country as a whole is impossible, it appears that the older form of tenantry remained dominant through the greater part of the seventeenth century.⁶⁶ The tenant was obviously less free under this form than under the one that was gradually displacing it, for it put a good part of his time and labor at the disposal of the landlord. The greater personal freedom of the new form of tenantry should not be exaggerated, however. While the tenant was no longer constantly at the beck and call of the landlord, his legal position was unchanged: he remained without rights in the village and dependent on the landlord for representing his interests, and there is no reason to believe that his economic position was much improved, if it was improved at all.⁶⁷ Moreover, there was nothing inherent in the new arrangement that required tampering with personal relations of long standing. The old habits of authority and obedience, while they were no doubt loosened in the course of centuries by the elimination of labor services, must have persisted unchanged for a very long time. Indeed, until very recent times they could still be found in some regions of Japan in forms that were familiar in the seventeenth century.⁶⁸

There was a third type of tenant who may have been the most free, for he was a new tenant and not the legacy of an earlier time. This was the former landholder who, through poor husbandry or bad luck, or because his holding had become uneconomic, had lost his land and become a tenant. Capitalistic influences, which gave the wealthy peasant the means and incentive to acquire more land while undermining the

ing urban population; and (3) hardpressed feudal lords were continually resorting to various forms of currency inflation to meet their financial difficulties.

⁶⁶ So it would seem, at least, for it was not until after the Genroku era (1688-1703) that the writers of *Jikata no shu*, a kind of textbook on agricultural management and administration, took much notice of the newer type of tenantry; by the late eighteenth century, however, such books were concerned with little else. Furushima, *Nōgyō no kōzō*, II, pp. 602-03, 605.

⁶⁷ The scanty direct evidence we have on the economy of the tenant under this type of management shows him existing on an incredibly small agricultural income, sometimes not more than one *roku* annually. The evidence on this point is summarized by Toya, pp. 352-57.

⁶⁸ When, after the restoration (1868), tenants were given full legal equality, many of them submitted pledges to their landlords swearing not to abuse their new rights, "never to forget the way of master and follower," and binding their "children and children's children" to observe this pledge. For the text of such pledges, see Mori, p. 67. That these pledges were often observed, in some cases down to very recent times, was revealed by a series of field studies of landlord-tenant relations in the 1930's, the findings of which are summarized in Irimajiri Yoshinaga, *Nihon nōmin keizaishi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1949), pp. 401-48. To cite but one case in point: in Ekari village, Iwate Prefecture, the tenants of M., in addition to paying rent on their holdings and houses, owed him an average of eighty workdays a year, and each tenant family was under the obligation to send two sons for one year each and two daughters for two years each to work as servants in M.'s household (p. 407).

position of the small holder, constituted the economic lever that produced this type of tenantry on a large scale. Such tenants were probably already numerous in the seventeenth century but they did not become the dominant type until well into the eighteenth.⁶⁹ Since the peasant did not relinquish his land until he was destitute, such tenants could have had no more economic independence than others. But whether they lost their rights in the village when they lost their land and became legally, as well as economically, dependent on the landlord to the same extent as other tenants is an open question of the greatest importance. Until this question is answered there is no way of knowing whether the slow growth of capitalism in the Tokugawa period was gradually altering the pattern of tenantry, or simply extending among the peasants the incidence of legal inequalities that date from an earlier time.

IV

High as the figures cited earlier on the ratio of tenants to *hyakushō* seem to be, they by no means show the whole peasant population that stood outside the land registers. Entirely omitted in these figures are the hereditary servants that were often found in the households of rich peasants.⁷⁰ This group appears in the documents under a variety of names, but perhaps the most common and certainly the most descriptive is *genin* or "low person."⁷¹ It is impossible to guess how numerous the *genin* were, but there can be no doubt that they were an important source of agricultural labor under the older system of landlord management. For example, in Makuuchi village, where this system prevailed until well after the seventeenth century, 14 large holders used a total of 38 *genin* in 1691; and the number of *genin* to each varied roughly according to the size of the holding, with the largest holder in the village using 14 of the 38.⁷² So far as our data on other villages go, these figures do not appear exceptional.⁷³ With the shift of landlords to the new type of management, there seems to have been a con-

⁶⁹ Since this type of tenant is clearly the product of the intrusion of money economy in the village, it is found most commonly in the more economically advanced regions—the area along the Inland Sea and in the vicinity of cities and towns.

⁷⁰ *Nihon keizaishi jiten*, I, pp. 470–71.

⁷¹ Among others: *zusa*, *fudai*, *shojū*, *hikan*, *zōnin*.

⁷² Fujita, *Nōminzō*, pp. 190–91.

⁷³ See the figures for twelve villages in Shinano Province in Ichikawa Oichirō, "Edo jidai no nōka no jinteki kōsei no henka," *Rekisho gaku kenkyū*, No. 147 (September, 1950), pp. 36–37.

siderable decline in the number of *genin*.⁷⁴ What generally happened to these people is unknown, but, sometimes at least, the landlord made them tenants. Since this appears to have occurred even under the older form of management, it is not unlikely that systematic investigation would reveal in this practice an important institutional root of tenantry.

Very little is known for certain of the evolution of the *genin*, and his status even in the Tokugawa period is shadowy. The most plausible theory is that the *genin* developed from the numerous class of slaves known to Japan's early history and that their more recent ancestors, at least in some cases, had been military servants.⁷⁵ That many landholding families in whose households they are found bore arms earlier, and that some of the various names by which the *genin* were called were common names for the lowest class of military retainer from the Kamakura period on, are facts that tend to confirm this theory. Like the tenant, the *genin* had no public standing in the village, and his rights were defined by his relations to his master. Although he was handed down in a single family from father to son like any other piece of property, it is the opinion of one of Japan's outstanding social and legal historians that he could not be transferred to a new master against his will.⁷⁶ Perhaps the best way of describing the *genin's* position is as an inferior member of the master's family. One of the distinctive features of the Japanese family is its capacity for almost indefinite expansion to include not only remote relatives within its lines of authority, but persons having no blood or marriage relationship to the family at all. Indeed, not infrequently the *genin* was formally incorporated in the family: he worshipped the family ancestors, owed loyalty and obedience to the head of the family, and in return received such protection as the family accorded members of inferior standing.⁷⁷

V

Although the most recent Japanese studies have left important problems regarding the peasantry still unsolved, they have nonetheless

⁷⁴ For figures showing this decline in various villages, see: Furushima, "Kinai nōgyō to kisei jinushi," p. 10; Ichikawa, p. 34; and Suzuki, pp. 40-41.

⁷⁵ For this view, Takigawa Masajirō, *Nihon shakai shi* (Tokyo, 1946), pp. 214-15. Takigawa's study of family registers of the Nara period suggests that somewhere between 5 and 10 per cent of the population at that time were slaves. Ono, *Nihon shōen-sei shiron* (Tokyo, 1943), pp. 31-32.

⁷⁶ Takigawa, p. 219.

⁷⁷ Aruga, p. 354 ff.

established the main lines of a picture that is not likely to be radically altered. The peasants were not the homogeneous class depicted by the Confucianists. Peasant society itself was a pyramid of wealth and power and legal rights that rose from the tenant and *genin* at the bottom through small and middling landholders to what might be called a class of wealthy peasants at the top. Nor was this pyramid a recent structure, the work of capitalism in placing one peasant over another. Rather it was the survival from an earlier age in which men were raised and lowered in society by force of land and arms, not by the power of money.

I should like to suggest, in very general and tentative terms, the possible bearing of this picture of the peasantry on the two interpretive problems mentioned in the introductory section of this paper, with a warning to the reader that some of the inferences to be made go beyond the evidence available at present.

The persistent docility of the peasantry, in a country where peasants even today number almost half the population, is a fact of obvious and immense significance. Most students would agree, I believe, that this political and social passivity has provided an extraordinarily solid base for authoritarian government and support for social policies of the most conservative order for the past four centuries at least. To inculcate and enforce such discipline among peasants who, in general, have been held consistently at the ragged edge of starvation implies some extremely efficient system of social and political control. I would suggest that this system was composed in part of the following elements. (1) The peasantry was divided against itself by arrangements in which one peasant exploited the labor of another and in which the upper layer of the peasantry was in fact an adjunct of the ruling class, sharing in the economic benefits of the regime and in the administration of the country so that any prospective peasant uprising would find this group—the wealthy and literate families of the village—aligned solidly against it. (2) This group sprang partly from the warrior class: in its ranks were many men who had run local affairs by a combination of land and arms for centuries; and although it was disarmed at the end of the sixteenth century, its local authority was by no means weakened, for it was now supported by the armies of a feudal lord. (3) Despite the spectacular changes effected in other spheres, the Meiji restoration passed over the village without disturbing the distribution of power or the system by which land was exploited. Thus, the Japanese landlords of modern times, taken as a whole, were not a new and precariously

dominant group thrown up by the impact of capitalism on the village but a class whose habit of power goes back to the formative period of Japanese feudalism.

The other interpretive problem concerns the need for finding a more satisfactory social and economic explanation of the Meiji restoration. Specifically, the participation of some other class than the low-ranking *samurai* is needed to explain both the nature and the success of the restoration. Without denying the leading political role to the *samurai*, it is possible to believe that decisive outside support came from the wealthy peasants.⁷⁸ That such a class existed and that it was accustomed to playing a political role is certain. Moreover, as rural industrialists, local merchants and moneylenders (roles the larger holders developed after the beginning of the eighteenth century), and as heavy taxpayers, the members of this class had cause to be dissatisfied with the Tokugawa system. Indeed, much of the "progressive" legislation of the restoration government—the abolition of legal classes, the removal of restrictions on the use and sale of land, the abolition of official trading monopolies, the commutation of *samurai* pensions—can most readily be explained as reflecting the interests and aspirations of this group. There is, moreover, direct positive evidence of the participation of a considerable number of peasant leaders in the restoration movement.⁷⁹

But, it may be asked, how does one account then for the generally conservative character of the restoration? To put the question differently, why should this class of wealthy farmers have surrendered top leadership to the *samurai*, thus almost wholly excluding themselves from positions of power in the restoration government, rather than leading a popular revolutionary movement? Partly, the alliance with the *samurai* was a necessary stratagem (conscious or not) to split the military class. Partly, it was dictated by the nature of Tokugawa political institutions, which permitted the *samurai* alone the necessary freedom of movement to organize a nation-wide, conspiratorial movement. But as important as either of these factors was the interest of the wealthy farmers themselves. Socially, they were more nearly akin to

⁷⁸ Nobutaka Ike has emphasized the role of the wealthy peasants in the restoration, particularly those who had interests in rural industry. *The Beginnings of Political Democracy in Japan* (Baltimore, 1950), pp. 11-21.

⁷⁹ The evidence on this point has never been treated systematically, to my knowledge. There is, however, a good deal of very important scattered evidence; see particularly, Tōyama Shigeki, "Sonno jōi shisō to nashanarizumu," *Sonjō shisō to zettai shugi*, ed. Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo, (Tokyo, 1948), pp. 28-30; and Tanaka Sōgorō, *Meiji ishin undō jimbutsu kō* (Tokyo, 1941), pp. 111-31.

the *samurai* than to the ordinary peasant—the small holder and tenant. Moreover, if they were being forced by their expanding interests to free themselves from the economic and social restrictions placed on them, they were under the necessity, at the same time, of conserving their hold on the land and the system of exploiting it. Thus they were simultaneously revolutionary and conservative. While they were intent on finding means of changing leadership and policy at the top, they were determined to avoid the violent overthrow of the regime from below with the terrible risk of social revolution that entailed.

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