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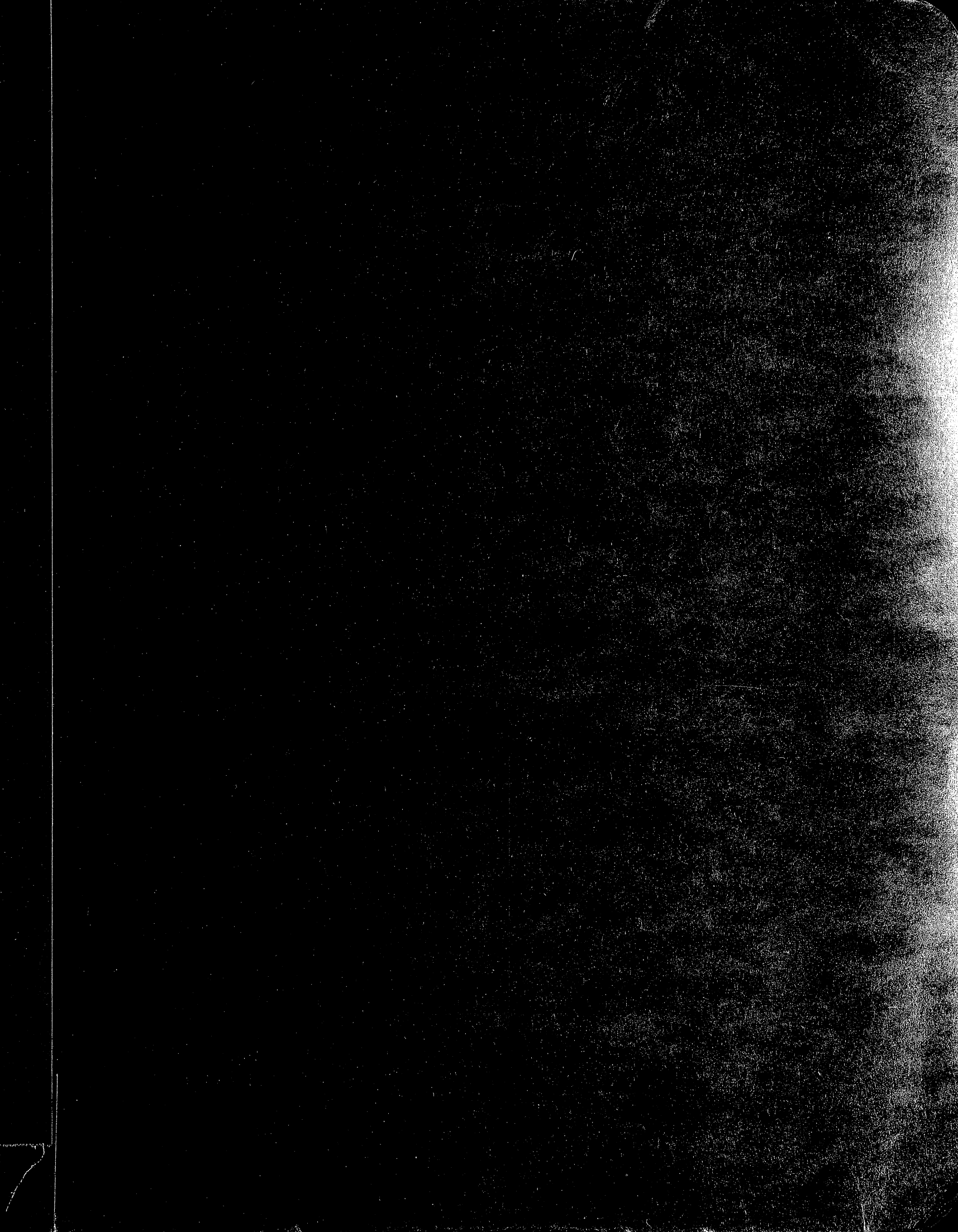
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An historical survey of social
change in the peasant class of
Japan.

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in the Department of Oriental Civilizations.

AN HISTORICAL SURVEY OF SOCIAL CHANGE
IN THE
PEASANT CLASS OF JAPAN

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University of Michigan

I. THE PEASANT CLASS IN THE TOKUGAWA PERIOD (1604 - 1868).

The most common descriptive term for the farming class in the early Tokugawa was hyakushō, but there were at least six class subdivisions whose respective terms were in rather common usage at the time. On the top of the hierarchy were the takamochi, large land owners who had so prospered that they were renting land out to others. In spite of the dominant economic position which the takamochi held among the farmers, the most respected landholders were generally the kusawake, or pioneers. It was from among the descendants of these original pioneers that the nanushi (village headmen) most often came.

The vast majority of the farming class was included in the group generally considered to be below the rank of the kusawake. These were the farmers, termed ne-oi (root-born), who were born in the mura where they owned and cultivated their own land. Generally their ownership was the result of inheritance which went back generations beyond memory, their title was considered perpetual so long as they paid the government tax. Another group of landowners was described by the term koshi-saku (cross-over cultivation), referring to the fact that they owned land in at least two separate mura. However this group was relatively small since they had civil rights only in the mura where they

lived, and the selling of land to an outsider was exceedingly rare. More often the mura itself would buy the land rather than have it fall into the hands of one outside the village.

Kosaku, a term meaning literally 'small cultivation', has now come to mean simply 'tenant' following its earlier application as a general term for renters of land. On the lowest level were the farmers called mizunomi (water-drinking). Although the upper classes often used this term to refer contemptuously to both the established renters and those who sold their labor, it was more properly applied to those farmers who for some reason, either poverty, family troubles or otherwise, were forced to emigrate from their native mura into another mura where they hired out as farm hands. With good conduct and diligent labor they often established themselves in the mura and made it possible for their descendants to rise to the level of kosaku.

The paternalistic relationship which had once existed between the peasant and his master rapidly dissolved under the increasingly severe demands of lords who, during the first half of the Tokugawa, were discovering the marketable value of rice in the evolving economy. The importance which rice assumed on the developing market economy served as a dominant factor in the changing social relationship between the lord and the peasant. The lord was made aware of the increased value of the peasant in an economy where it was becoming possible to market surplus rice; and in

order to hold onto this suddenly valuable peasant, the lords agreed upon restraints and restrictions which would serve to hold the peasant on the land.

Restrictions on movement were applied to the farmers with extremely stringent penalties imposed on those who ignored such laws. Barriers very effectively checked all travel and curtailed unauthorized movement. A Tokugawa law lists the following: "...Punishment of farmers who persist in urging complaints against their lord and afterwards band together and run away: The ringleader is to be beheaded, the village headman to be sentenced to major deportation; the foreman of the punchayets of the village to be expelled and his lands sequestrated; and the whole body of farmers to be fined in proportion to the tax-assessment of the village".¹ Other laws placed restraints on choice of crops, housing, and clothing; an ordinary farmer was allowed to wear nothing finer than cotton, while his house was limited to the type and size considered appropriate to his low station. A proclamation of 1649 ordered the peasants to rise early, to work at night if necessary, not to eat rice (preferably some less expensive grain), and to abstain from tea and tobacco.²

1. pg. 714; "Japanese Feudal Laws", by J. C. Hall; Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan, Vol. XLI, December 1913.

2. pg. 465; A Short Cultural History of Japan, by G. Sansom; New York, 1943.

The great appreciation which the Tokugawa authorities had for agriculture did not include the agriculturalists. Edicts relating to agriculture issued in the early part of the Tokugawa usually opened with the preface: "Since peasants are stupid people...", or, "Since peasants are people without sense or forethought...". Tokugawa Ieyasu is perhaps responsible for the most revealing statement of the prevailing attitude toward the peasant; Ieyasu instructed his subordinates to see that the farmers "have just enough to keep alive on and no more". Another saying attributed to Ieyasu, perhaps only a paraphrase of the above, just about sums up the taxation policy for his period. His order to his officials was "...to impose taxes upon farmers to such an extent that they can neither live nor die." The famous Tokugawa Councillor Matsudaira Sadanobu, listed some of the burdens on the peasant as follows: "The exactions from the peasant eat up 50 to 70 per cent of his produce. There are countless other taxes -- such a tax on the field, a tax on doors, a tax on windows, a tax on female children according to age, a tax on cloth, a tax on sake, a tax on hazel trees, a tax on beans, a tax on hemp.... The nominal tax is a koku of rice and a katori of silk but actually it is increased three fold through bribery and extortion."¹ Tributary payments were more

1. pg. 23; The Establishment of a Modern State in Japan, by E. H. Norman; New York, 1940.

common to the early Tokugawa, generally based on the division of shi-kō roku-min, or 'four to the prince and six to the people', but this of course varied according to the needs of the overlord, later changing to a 5:5 ratio.

Another form of taxation was the corvee, the peasant working either for his lord or on public works. The work for the lord usually consisted of repairing his fences or buildings, transporting commodities, and the like. The public works consisted largely of repairing roads and bridges. Only in exceptional emergencies such as earthquakes or floods did the lords pay the peasants for this labor. According to Asakawa¹ the Mito fief in the year 1799 required two million man-days labor out of the peasant population of two hundred thousand, and this not including the post-system, which was a great burden for all the peasants living near the post-roads.

The sustenance and income of the landlords and samurai derived almost entirely from the labors of the peasants, who were assumed by their lords to exist for the sole purpose of producing enough to keep the upper classes in idleness. It was not unusual for the shōgun or daimyō to aid in the development of agricultural technique for the purpose of increasing the agricultural productivity,

1. pg. 280; Notes on Village Government in Japan, by K. Asakawa; Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 30, 1910.

but the increase which resulted was taken by the tax collector to create a rising standard of living for all classes but that of the peasant. In good years the peasant could profit little from a good crop due to the more severe exactions of the landlord, and in bad years a poor crop left him on the verge of starvation.

When the delicate balance of the peasant's subsistence was weighted against him, the alternatives were usually limited to escape from the land or going into debt to the usurer. Of those who left the land, most made their way to the cities to seek employment as day laborers, others became vagrants wandering about the countryside in search of work. Those who stayed on the land found themselves at the mercy of, not just the landlord, but also the usurer. As the economic condition of the shogunate, the daimyō, and the samurai became more severe under the transition from an agricultural to a mercantile economy, the pressure on the peasant became greater. The rising group of merchants and money-lenders were primarily concerned with exploiting the members of the knightly order, but the latter shifted this rising amount of debt onto the shoulders of the already over-burdened peasant, attempting to relieve the pressure on themselves. As the merchant princes and rice-brokers became more powerful and obtained a firmer grip on the nobles' purse strings, the lords exploited the

peasantry in even more ruthless fashion.

The encroachment of money economy on the rural districts was not limited to the indirect process just described, but also included the gradual commercialization of agricultural production. Land finance became of increasing importance, resulting in a new differentiation of farming classes into those who held land and those who did not. This brought about an increase in the size of land-holdings and a general increase in the prosperity of the landlords, but on the other hand it intensified the already existing tendency of farmers to become tenants or employed laborers. As the increased tenancy made possible the concentration of land in fewer hands, the split between those who owned land they did not farm, and those who farmed land they did not own, became greater. The law of 1643 which prohibited the buying and selling of farmers' land, as well as the 1673 law which added further restrictions on the mortgaging, division, and giving away of land, were easily circumvented by subterfuge on the part of the landlords. In spite of the general poverty, there were a few who prospered, usually by increasing their land-holdings and working their tenants like slaves, but as one writer of that period states: "For one man who makes a fortune there are twenty or thirty reduced to penury".

The terrible impoverishment of the peasantry made it impossible to support children, so families were limited by such methods as infanticide and abortion. Infanticide, or mabiki as it was called, became quite common throughout Japan in spite of the official edict issued in 1767 to prohibit it. The pressure of the agricultural population was further moderated by the constant movement to the towns, this movement was a result both of the pressure on the land and of the positive attraction of city life. The abandonment and neglect of fields caused grave apprehension among the overlords whose income was a direct result of the labors of the peasants, but the increasingly stringent measures taken to prohibit migration met with only moderate success.

As if the evils of human greed and avarice were not enough, nature added famine and epidemics to the peasants' life of misery. Severe famines occurred in 1732 and 1783 accompanied by pestilence which took an added toll of lives. Characteristic of feudal economies was the ban placed on the export of grain from one province to another, contributing enormously to the severity of the famines. The extreme destitution of the poor during these periods of famine allowed the rich to increase their land holdings at a slight cost, increasing the number of tenants to

approximately 20 per cent of the total number of peasants.¹

As previously shown, the influx of commercial capital into the rural areas served to impoverish the peasant indirectly through the increased exactions of his overlord, and thus bring about a diminution in the small farmers' property. Also, the frequent famines contributed to the suffering of the peasant and together with the oppression of the feudal masters, drove many of the farmers from their land. The disintegration of the old system with its attendant suffering for the peasantry led to acute antagonism between the peasant and his various classes of rulers or overlords. The intense suffering of the peasantry eventually led them to revolt against their oppressors in agrarian riots which became more frequent toward the latter part of the Tokugawa period.

Farmers' riots were not new to the rural area of Japan, there had been a history of agrarian risings dating as far back as the Kamakura period. The early riots of the Tokugawa were primarily economic, the result of farmers' dissatisfaction with the heavy taxation, but this nature changed as the economic system changed. The farmers' revolts were of several types; perhaps the most common was the riot that followed the rejection of a petition previously submitted through the proper channels prescribed by law. When such peaceful appeals were rejected the

1. pg. 126; "The Japanese Farm-Tenancy System", by S. Wakukawa; Japan's Prospect, Cambridge, Mass. 1946.

peasants often formed a group which threatened the samurai with force, seeking to enforce their demands by attacking the homes of the village officials and rich men. Sometimes they were mere peaceful demonstrations, sometimes they were angry revolts by armed mobs numbering in the thousands. Whatever form they took, the riots generally ended in the cruel death of the ringleaders. Sansom cites the classical example of Sakura Sōgorō, "a poor farmer who on behalf of 300 of his fellows oppressed by their lord presented a memorial to the Shogun himself, in 1651. The guilty baron was punished by the Bakufu for his misrule, but Sakura and his wife were crucified, having first seen their children beheaded."¹

While the farmers' riots were generally for the purpose of forcing the authorities to ease their demands in the realm of taxation and rent, the uchikowashi, or rice riots, represented the poor peoples' demands for the sheer necessities of life. Directed against the rich classes in general, these riots tended to occur after a year of bad crops had forced the price of rice steadily upward. Denied a sufficiency of food because of the greatly increased cost of rice, the poor banded together and demanded that the merchants sell their rice at a reduced price. Refusal of this request served as the signal for the group

1. pg. 518; A Short Cultural History of Japan, by G. Sansom; New York, 1943.

of hungry peasants to take the rice by force and in the process to demolish the building. Pawn brokers, sake merchants, and storehouses of the rich were also objectives in the riots. Typical of the uchikowashi type of revolt was the Osaka riot of 1787 which followed a period of bad crops in which the price of rice doubled. In this riot, 200 shops were smashed and looted before the Shogunate's troops could restore order. Similar riots occurred in Kyoto, Sakai, Wakayama, and Edo, the latter being the scene of especially serious rioting.

An exception to the average unorganized uprising was the Farmers' Riot of 1771 in Karatsu, Hizen. In order to force suspension of the new taxation schedules the farmers agreed upon a plan of action which entailed the following:

- "1. We shall not speak or yell to our superiors anything that will not be to our benefit.
2. We shall be silent whenever the officials urge us to return home.
3. We shall not fight among ourselves whatever may be the circumstances.
4. Any suspicious person found in our midst shall be arrested and immediately subjected to close examination.
5. Anyone who falls ill must choose a proxy before returning home.
6. Unless the petition be accepted as a whole we shall not disperse whatever may happen.
7. If anyone of our number be arrested we swear that we will resort to such means as have been decided upon.

We hereby swear that each and every one of us in the army of demonstration will observe the aforesaid rules."¹

Moving in perfect order the "army" assembled all who would support the agreement, the number eventually reaching 23,000. The clan chief, after seeing that he could not force this group to disband, finally promised that he would concede every demand, whereupon the farmers returned peacefully to their homes. But Saiji Tomita, the man who was primarily responsible for organizing the peasantry into a disciplined and unified group, was later arrested and beheaded.

As the Tokugawa regime entered the 19th century, the peasantry still suffered under agrarian distress which bred revolts, increasing both in frequency and violence. The period 1833-37 was marked by years of successive famine climaxed by the Osaka revolt led by the scholar, Oshio, who set an example followed by others who felt enough sympathy for the peasants to forswear comfortable positions and join in their battle. Battling for rice when all other sources of subsistence failed him, the peasant therefore had all his energies concentrated on the task of producing and holding enough food to sustain life when complex political and economic events led to the Restoration in 1868.

1. pg. 138; The Economic Aspects of the History of the Civilization of Japan, Vol. 3, by Takekoshi Yosaburo; New York, 1930.

II. MEIJI RESTORATION (1868)

Generally unaware of how they had contributed to the political revolution, and certainly oblivious of the causes of such a change, the peasantry confusedly reacted in an even more riotous manner than before. Spurred on by vague hopes that their burdens of tribute and debt might be lightened, yet suspicious of the purposes and innovations of the new era, and finally disallusioned as they received no respite from their feudal obligations, the peasants renewed their violence, their revolts reaching a high point in 1873. As suggested above, these uprisings were the result of two contradictory motivations, one force being revolutionary and therefore aimed at overthrowing the feudal privileges which still maintained a grip on the peasant, and the other reactionary in that it represented the opposition of a conservative peasantry to new and strange innovations.

It is important to note however, that although the superstitions and ignorance of the peasantry may have been responsible for arousing them into action, almost invariably the reaction toward some misunderstood government attempt at modernization was directed against the richest usurer, the land-grabbing landlord, or some tyrannical official. This mixture of superstition and shrewd estimate

of class interest reflects the presence of both revolution and reaction in the make-up of the peasant. For even though the outbursts of violence following the abolition of the Eta, the toleration of Christianity, and the programs of vaccination can be ascribed to centuries of superstition and indoctrinated bigotry, the fact that such violence was turned against the usurer, the rice-broker and other personifications of feudal oppression indicates a rationalistic, revolutionary approach to their problems.

It soon became obvious to the peasants that irregardless of the promises that the new government might make them, they would still be expected to pay the same high rate of taxation as before; and with the new centralized and unified collection system the peasant found himself enmeshed even deeper in the coils of an impersonal absorbent of his production. Certainly the new government had no intention of giving up the source of capital then available. The expense of the new regime was so distributed that the peasant was again carrying a disproportionately heavy load; for although the merchants had done much of the early financing, the farmer was still looked upon as the primary source of steady income. The peasantry throughout this period was weighted down by the double burden of the old feudal restrictions which had yet to be

removed, and the burden of a new modernized system which demanded a constant flow of revenue.

For the peasant, the first indication of change was when his feudal lords suddenly became his "governors", but this change in terminology meant little to peasants weighed down with debts and exorbitant taxes. The proclamation of December 1868 freed the peasants from feudal serfdom and made them titular landholders. This accordance of legal recognition to private ownership of land was the first step toward the enactment of a new land tax, which was to be the foundation of the government's new fiscal policy. In addition to this, the feudal restrictions on crop selection were removed in 1871. The following year the ban against the sale of land was removed, abolishing the edict of 1643 which had been in force until then. The feudal bans on mortgage, subdivision of land, and sale of crop were abolished by 1873.

From 1868 to 1873 the government had relied on the old tax system for its revenue, a basic factor in the riotous protest of the peasantry which had expected to be relieved of this oppressive feudal burden. By 1873, however, the government had completed the preliminary steps for a new tax system, a change which was to have a revolutionary effect on the land system, going so far as to shape the framework within which modern Japanese agrarian relations are still confined. Because of the extreme

departure from the old feudal taxation system, the new land tax law must be considered as more than a revision of existing tax laws, its actual significance may be found in its forceful and compelling recognition of private property.

The basic principles of the new land tax were that the cash value of land, rather than the harvest, would serve as the norm for tax payment. Instead of payment in kind, the new tax law required payment in money. The new tax rate was set at three per cent of the assessed value of the land with no allowance for adjustment in good or bad harvests. For the peasant, the most important implication of the new tax was not in the slightly lower rate he had to pay, but rather in the fact that now the landowner paid the tax, not the producer, as it had been in the past. This made it necessary for the new government to legally acknowledge an owner for every acre of land in order to fix the responsibility for the tax. This the government set out to do in all haste. With the sole objective of fixing ownership by the issuance of title deeds, the government had begun distributing certificates of landownership as early as 1872. With the utmost speed the government rushed to completion this tremendous task of determining precise legal title to lands which for generations had been worked according to custom and tradition with no strict conception of private ownership.

Systems of land tenure had varied widely from region to region during the Tokugawa period, for which no allowance was made by the government. The inevitable ambiguities and disputes over ownership were swept aside by a government intent upon providing a constant source of income in the greatest possible speed. Equity and justice were only of secondary importance and all too often the claims of landlords and usurers held precedence over the claims of the peasant. The frequency of such practices is attested to by the expression of peasant protests in the form of riots and demonstrations. The problem of determining ownership over lands held and cultivated in rotation, a practice common to many parts of Kyushu and Shikoku, in which no individual ownership was recognized among the farmers cultivating in rotation, was solved usually by arbitrarily conferring ownership deeds on those occupying the land at the time the deeds were issued. In the case of tenancy it was customary to confer title on the recipient of the ground rent. This worked an injustice on those who had mortgaged their land and were paying rent to the mortgage holder, who in this case received title to the land.

It is through consideration of these institutional changes, certainly the most significant for the peasantry, that it is possible to interpret succeeding events in the

socio-economic life of the peasant. Within the legal framework just described, the class of farmers were forced to seek their livelihood. Within this same framework occurred the growth and development of Japan's present agrarian problems. It is necessary therefore to examine the effect of this new legal development on the life of the farmers, to discover the points where it allowed the peasantry positive gains, as well as to discover the points where its rigidity atrophied growth and created new suffering and discontent.

For the peasantry the most obvious gain from the Meiji reforms was freedom from feudal bondage. They received the freedom of choosing their own fate, they were free to move about at will; they were no longer tied to the land by feudal restrictions. But on the other hand, the insecurity of the small landowner cannot be stressed too strongly. They were subjected to all the vicissitudes of nature such as storms, blight, and bad crops, as well as the fluctuations of the rice market, which in the new money economy, assumed tremendous importance. Besides this constant risk the peasant had to face the new and unadjustable requirement of a land tax which would not be modified to accord with good or bad years. The burden of turning 25 to 30 per cent of his crop¹ over to the

1. pg. 143, The Establishment of a Modern State in Japan, by E. H. Norman; New York, 1940.

government forced the small farmer, operating with almost no capital resources, to sell his produce immediately after harvest when the price was at its lowest.

The case of the tenant was even more serious. Not only were the tenants denied the security of tenure, but rents tended to remain high, 68 per cent of the total crop being considered a normal rent at the time of the tax reform in 1873.¹ The tenants were still bound to the old feudal rent payments in kind, so that the increase in the price of rice during the early Meiji period profited only the landlord, not the tenant. After converting his share of half the tenant's rice crop into money, the landlord paid the land tax to the government and pocketed the remainder as clear profit, and while the market price of rice remained high this was a considerable sum indeed. The increased profit of the landlord can best be shown by the following chart² showing the proceeds from the land going to the state, to the landlord, and to the tenant:

	State	Landlord	Tenant	Total
Division under feudalism, when share averaged 5 to state and 5 to people.	50%	18%	32%	100%
On eve of Land Tax Revision of 1873.	34%	34%	32%	100%
1874-76, based upon average price of rice.	13%	55%	32%	100%

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1. pg. 131; "The Japanese Farm-Tenancy System" by S. Wakukawa; Japan's Prospect, Cambridge, Mass., 1946.
 2. pg. 150; The Establishment of a Modern State in Japan by E. H. Norman; New York, 1940.

The gain for the farmers in receiving ownership of the land they tilled was no more an outright gift than the curtailment of feudal privileges could be conceived a total loss to the class of overlords. For the loss of their rights under feudalism, the rulers were compensated by the new government with bonds, cash, and subsidies amounting to the sum of ¥ 379,000,000, an extraordinarily large sum for the time. During the four years that this tremendous sum was being paid off by the government, the farmers contributed 80 per cent of the total governmental revenues through the new land tax, so it can conceivably be stated that the peasants paid fully and dearly for their freedom from the more oppressive feudal restraints. In general, the feudal lords suffered very little from the Meiji reforms. Some succeeded in having their feudal holdings recognized as private properties by the new government. Others shifted their hold on the peasantry from feudal overlordship to modern capitalistic landlordship by investing their government bonds in land. Thus the stage was set for the dispossession of the peasantry, and with increasing momentum the trend toward land concentration in the hands of the landlord class continued to develop.

According to the figures of a German agricultural expert, Paul Mayet¹, 367,744 agricultural producers

1. pg. 144; *ibid.*

suffered sales for arrears in the payment of the land tax from 1883 to 1890. The total amount in arrears was 114,178 yen, an average of 31 sen per person, while the total value of the confiscated land amounted to 4,944,393 yen. Thus the value of land confiscated from the peasant proprietors was 27 times the amount in arrears. The need for longterm credit in small sums is very graphically indicated by these figures. In 1881 there were two million mortgages over all Japan, averaging 72 yen each. In such a situation the usurer's capital becomes of great significance and assumes a dominant role in the dispossession of the peasantry. Since agriculture requires longterm credit at low interest with gradual repayment, the short term, high interest loans of the usurers became a tool to force foreclosures on the peasants' land. The high, uniformly constant money land tax almost inevitably forced the small cultivator into the hands of the usurer, and thereafter the long, downhill road of debt usually led to expropriation. Interest of 13 per cent was considered a philanthropic rate according to statements of the Shakkintō, or Debtors' Party, which was an organization of peasants formed to combat the wholesale expropriation which threatened them.

Tenancy, which had occurred in the Tokugawa only be subterfuge, was now recognized by a government interested, not in whether the land tax was paid by the cultivator or

by an absentee landlord, but only that it was paid. Tenancy increased steadily as more of the heavily indebted farmers were forced out of the struggle. In 1872 it is estimated that approximately 31 per cent of the cultivated land was under tenancy. This figure increased to 36.7 in 1883, 39.3 per cent in 1887, and 39.9 per cent in 1892. Simultaneously the percentage of proprietor-cultivators dropped from 39.9 per cent in 1883 to 32.1 per cent in 1892. This same process has continued right up to the present time, although the peak for full tenancy was reached in 1920 when pure tenants made up 28.5 per cent and part tenants 40.9 per cent of the total.

It is worthy of note that the expropriation of the peasants failed to reduce the number of peasant households on the land, or otherwise extend the average unit area of cultivation. That the atomization and parcelation of land existing in feudal days should continue into the period of private landownership was largely a result of the extraordinarily high rate of rent which the landlord received. This high rate of rent amounted to a return on capital which could hardly be expected even under a system of individual entrepreneurship. Consequently there was no incentive for the landlords to work the land for profit by paying wages to their laborers and selling all the produce on the market, as would be the case under

individual entrepreneurship. Instead of creating a mass exodus of peasants into the cities, the effect of the expropriation was to change their status from owner to tenant while remaining, if at all possible, on the same land cultivated for generations by their ancestors. The population pressure on the land was relieved, not by family movement to the city, but by individual members of the family, usually the young, seeking work in the city. As far as methods of production and technique were concerned, Japanese agriculture tended to retain the old forms, the limited invasion of capitalism onto the land made no revolutionary changes in technique such as mechanized or extensive agriculture.

The aborted development of capitalism in agriculture had important implications for the peasant class. An understanding of the unique character of the Japanese farmer is greatly facilitated by an examination of the interrelations of feudalism and capitalism in the life of the farmer. For instead of being forced off the land completely, or remaining only as a wage-earning laborer, or conversely, becoming a capitalist entrepreneur, the Japanese farmer shows a disconcerting mixture of all these possibilities. The tenant farmer may be considered an entrepreneur in the sense that he shoulders all the risk for the enterprise, but unlike an entrepreneur, the farmer

receives no profit for taking this risk. Instead, the landlord takes the profit while incurring none of the risk. The tenant farmer also resembles the landless proletarian in that he receives the equivalent of a defined wage for his labor. The payment in kind for his labor is certainly not identical with a money wage, but the end result for the farmer is much the same. In good years, the size of the tenants' percentage share of the crop increases, which would seem to indicate that the profit of the tenant increases also. This however is rarely ever true, for invariably the market price of rice falls during the years of good harvest when the supply runs high, so that the money income often declines in spite of a good crop. Thus to all the unpredictable vicissitudes of nature are added the risks of the market, for the peasant is firmly involved in the money economy and often feels the direct effect of fluctuations in the world market. It is this double nature of his social relations that has made the Japanese peasant both conservative and radical, exhibiting a stolid, fatalistic acceptance of extreme suffering punctuated by eruptions of unrestrained violence.

Despite the high taxes, debt, and increased tenancy which plagued the farmer following the Restoration, the agrarian class managed to make vital contributions to the developing economy of the Meiji Period. Industrialism

in Japan was developed largely by the capital furnished by agricultural taxes, passing from the state coffers in the form of subsidies. Through preferential tax rates the farmers of Japan made a disproportionately heavy contribution to the development of the new industrial economy, but the profits accruing from this industrial expansion never found their way back to the farmer from whence the original stimulus had come, but remained in the hands of industrialists favored by an extremely low tax rate.

But financial support was only one aspect of the farmers' total contributions to the nation. For the expanding industries the farms became a vital source of cheap labor, which in slack seasons could reabsorb the unemployed. To implement an aggressive military policy, the farms became the manpower pool from which the army drew deeply in times of need. This great manpower demand was filled with alacrity by a population just beginning to feel the pressure of rapidly increasing numbers. It was not surprising that the farmer tended to look upon military ventures abroad with favor, for it was with a sense of relief that he saw the excess population of the farms drawn from the crowded fields into factories and barracks. By furnishing sons to the army and daughters to the factories, the farmer could expect some remuneration from his children's earnings without the expense of paying for their upkeep. Successful wars with China and Russia

only served to solidify the support of the farmers for the government's policies of expansion.

The political leaders of Japan, after belatedly recognizing the tremendous contributions of the farms to the national economy, began in the 1890's to formulate rather limited reforms for relieving the agrarian distress. Although a bill submitted to the Diet in 1891 for the purpose of creating credit societies was killed, the Diet in 1896 reversed its stand and created the Hypothec Bank and made provisions for local agricultural banks which would supply farmers with cheap capital. This government move sought to meet a need which had been felt in the agrarian class since feudal days, and which had been only partially answered by mutual financing societies and credit guilds, developed into a workable system by Ninomiya Sontoku before the Meiji Restoration.

The cooperative movement in Japan received official support in 1891 when Home Minister Shinagawa and Count Hirata founded a rural organization based on German models. In 1905 Count Hirata organized the Central Union of Co-operative Societies in Japan, composed of 1,671 societies and 68,730 members.¹ Official recognition was complete when Emperor Meiji donated ¥ 20,000 to the movement in 1911. The Central Union had strong government support

1. pg. 480; "The Cooperative Movement in Japan", Pacific Affairs, Vol. XI, No. 4, 1938.

from the very beginning, and this association was perpetuated by the policy of making Prefectural governors honorary chairmen of the cooperative leagues in their prefectures. In like manner, when the Central Cooperative Bank was formed in 1923 the government furnished the bulk of its capital, making the organization directly dependent upon the national government's goodwill. However, one can not overlook the part played by such cooperative leaders as Kagawa and Sugiyama, who consistently avoided government patronage and dictation while attempting to stress self-reliance, self-government and other democratic principles deriving from the Rochdale Plan.

By 1932, eighty-one per cent of all the cooperative societies in Japan belonged to the government sponsored Central Union, and seventy-nine per cent belonged to the Central Bank. Due to the government repression of labor unions, the cooperatives never formed a close association with the labor movement, nor did they align themselves with any political party. The liberal wing of the cooperative societies, limited as it was, lost all semblance of coherence after the Manchurian Incident when it was absorbed into the united front behind the government's leadership. By the opening of the war on China, the total membership of the organization had reached six million, suggesting the importance of the cooperatives in the government's plan for mobilizing national resources and labor for a war economy.

III. BASIC CONDITIONS OF AGRICULTURE IN JAPAN

At this point it seems necessary to depart from a strictly historical approach to the farmer's social and economic life in order to describe the basic conditions of agriculture which furnish the context in which the social problems of the farmer develop. This aspect of the problem cannot be treated here with the full attention it deserves, yet its relationship to the central concern of this paper is so vital that an understanding of the farmer's social and economic difficulties seems to be possible only through an understanding of the unique conditions which have determined the limitations on his way of life.

One of the basic limitations felt by the Japanese is the severe restriction of land resources. The limited area of Japan proper is even more limited in level land, of the total area only 16 per cent is classified as cultivated land. To this total of 6 million cho, equivalent to 14.8 million acres, very little marginal land can be added by reclamation. From 1900 to 1939 only 168,402 cho¹ was added to the total of cultivated land through reclamation. Being marginal land it was naturally difficult and expensive to reclaim, and in spite of the effort

1. pg. 74; Aspects of Japanese Agriculture, by S. Nasu; New York, 1941.

expended on it, relatively unproductive. The small ratio of cultivated land to total area in Japan is all the more striking when compared with 39 per cent for France, 43 per cent for Germany, and 45 per cent for Italy.¹ The figures for per capita area in Japan are even more significant, there being less than one tan (0.245 acres) per capita.²

Japan's population, which had remained more or less stationary through the latter half of the Tokugawa Era, began to increase at a rapid rate following the Meiji Restoration. The estimated population of 33 million in 1868 more than doubled within 60 years, reaching 73 million in the census of 1940. The farming class comprised nearly 80 per cent of the total population at the time of the Meiji Restoration,³ but since then this ratio has been steadily declining until 1935 when farming households made up only 43 per cent of total households.

1. pg. 194; Japan, A Physical, Cultural, and Regional Geography, by G. T. Trewartha; Madison, Wisconsin, 1945

2. pg. 134; "The Japanese Farm-Tenancy System" by S. Wakukawa; Japan's Prospect, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1946.

3. pg. 7; Aspects of Japanese Agriculture, by S. Nasu; New York, 1941.

TABLE 1. HOUSEHOLDS AND FARMING HOUSEHOLDS IN JAPAN PROPER

Year	(A) Farming Households (1,000)	(B) Total Households (1,000)	Percentage of (A) to (B)
1886	5,518	7,747	71.1
1911	5,498	9,121	60.3
1915	5,535	9,834	56.1
1920	5,573	10,578	52.7
1925	5,549	11,252	49.3
1930	5,600	12,166	46.0
1935	5,611	12,974	43.2

Source: Nasu Shiroshi, Aspects of Japanese Agriculture, New York, 1941; pg. 8.

TABLE 2. JAPANESE POPULATION BY OCCUPATION (1,000)

Occupation	1872		1920		1930	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Agriculture	14,787	78.9	14,128	52.1	14,156	48.4
Industries	719	3.8	5,300	19.9	5,291	18.1
Commerce	1,329	7.1	3,188	13.0	4,463	15.3
Others	<u>1,901</u>	<u>10.2</u>	<u>4,011</u>	<u>15.0</u>	<u>5,311</u>	<u>18.2</u>
Total	18,763	100.0	26,627	100.0	29,221	100.0

Source: Nasu Shiroshi, Aspects of Japanese Agriculture, New York, 1941; pg. 7.

The above tables serve to indicate that whereas the proportion of farmers in the total population declined greatly, the absolute number of farming families remained almost stationary.

The Japanese farm unit averages only 1.1 cho¹,

1. pg. 11; Nasu S., Aspects of Japanese Agriculture, New York, 1941.

tending to increase from south to north with considerable variation in each prefecture. Some of the prefectures along the Inland Sea average only 1.5 acres per farm unit, while in Northern Honshu the average size is 3.5 acres, and in Hokkaido it is 12.5 acres.¹

TABLE 3. ESTIMATED AREAS OF CULTIVATED LAND BY SIZE OF HOLDINGS
(in 1,000 cho)

Year	Below .5 <u>cho</u>	.5-1.0 <u>cho</u>	1 - 3 <u>cho</u>	3 - 5 <u>cho</u>	5-10 <u>cho</u>	10-15 <u>cho</u>	50 and above	Total
1910	585 9%	950 14.6%	1,762 27.3%	2,093 32.2%	860 13.2%	1,033 15.9%	217 3.3%	6,500 100%
1923	614 9.1%	902 13.4%	1,787 26.6%	921 13.7%	888 13.1%	1,218 18.1%	381 5.7%	6,713 100%
1938	591 9.7%	936 15.4%	1,328 21.8%	848 13.9%	787 13%	1,257 5.5%	332 5.5%	6,078 100%

Source: Nasu Shiroshi, Aspects of Japanese Agriculture, New York, 1941; pg. 11.

TABLE 4. FARM LAND OWNERS BY SIZE OF HOLDINGS
(in 1,000 persons)

Year	Below .5 <u>cho</u>	.5-1 <u>cho</u>	1-3 <u>cho</u>	3-5 <u>cho</u>	5-10 <u>cho</u>	10-50 <u>cho</u>	50 and above	Total
1910	2,340 47.4%	1,266 25.7%	880 18%	273 5.4%	127 2.5%	41 .8%	2 .04%	4,933 100%
1923	2,484 49.6%	1,226 24.5%	903 18%	229 4.6%	114 2.3%	45 .9%	4 .08%	5,008 100%
1938	2,475 48.6%	1,308 25.7%	928 18%	222 4.5%	110 2.1%	44 .9%	3 .06%	5,089 100%

Source: Nasu Shiroshi, Aspects of Japanese Agriculture, New York, 1941; pg. 11.

1. pg. 198; Japan, A Physical, Cultural, and Regional Geography, by Trewartha; 1945.

Thus far two determining factors in Japanese agriculture have been illustrated, tiny individual farms and the endless division of ownership into minute parcels. An equally important factor is the existence of a large number of landless peasants, in 1936 there were 1,517,701 households (27.11 per cent of the total farm households) classified as jun kosaku (tenant farmer). This classification includes only those who depend entirely on land hired from others. If the jisaku ken kosaku (part owner, part tenant) classification were included, the total of tenants and part tenants would constitute nearly 70 per cent of the agrarian households. Of the total farm area, 47 per cent was under tenancy in 1934, while 53 per cent of the paddy land -- the choicest land -- was under tenancy.

TABLE 5. NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF TENANT AND NONTENANT FARM HOUSEHOLDS, BY YEAR

Year	Farm Households (1,000)				Percentages		
	Total	Owner-Cultivator	Tenant	Part Tenant	Owner Cultivator	Tenant	Part Tenant
1908	5,408	1,799	1,491	2,117	33.27%	27.58%	39.15%
1921	5,456	1,669	1,555	2,232	30.59	28.50	40.91
1930	5,600	1,743	1,486	2,370	31.13	26.54	42.33
1936	5,597	1,731	1,518	2,349	30.93	27.11	41.96
1938	5,441	1,626	1,407	2,408	29.80	26.00	44.20

Sources: Wakukawa S., "The Japanese Farm-Tenancy System"; Japan's Prospect, 1946; pg. 116. Schumpeter, E.B. (ed.), "The Industrialization of Japan and Manchukuo", 1930-1940; New York, 1940. pg. 129.

The following two tables (#6 and #7), based on surveys by the Department of Agriculture and Forestry and reported in Nasu's "Aspects of Japanese Agriculture," indicate a continuous favorable balance for the farmer through the decades of 1920 and 1930. Nasu admits that the results shown in these tables are somewhat misleading, showing that when each family is classified according to whether it actually has a balance or a deficit, the favorable balance no longer holds for all farmers. According to a survey made in 1933, twenty-seven per cent of the farmers, including both tenants and proprietors, had a deficit.

TABLE 6. YEARLY AGRICULTURAL INCOME AND COST PER FARMER
(Amounts in Yen)

Year	Total Agr. Revenue	Index Number	Cost of Agr. Production	Index Number	Net Agr. Income	Index Number
1924	2,991	100.0	1,637	100.0	1,354	100.0
1925	3,362	112.4	1,813	110.8	1,549	114.4
1926	3,037	101.5	1,725	105.4	1,313	96.9
1927	2,896	96.8	1,622	99.1	1,275	94.1
1928	2,915	97.4	1,610	98.3	1,305	96.4
1929	2,912	97.3	1,619	98.9	1,293	95.5
1930	1,935	64.7	1,198	73.2	737	54.4
1931	1,773	59.3	999	61.0	774	57.2
1932	1,849	61.8	979	59.8	870	64.2
1933	2,201	73.6	1,163	71.1	1,038	76.6
1934	2,216	74.1	1,173	71.7	1,043	77.0
1935	2,383	79.7	1,236	76.5	1,147	84.7
1936	2,533	84.7	1,335	81.6	1,198	88.5

Source: Nasu Shiroshi, Aspects of Japanese Agriculture, New York, 1941; pg. 139.

TABLE 7. YEARLY AGRICULTURAL INCOME AND EXPENDITURE PER
PEASANT PROPRIETOR HOUSEHOLD
(in Yen)

Year	Agri. Income	Income from Subsidiary Occupations	Private Domestic Income	Total Income	Expendi- tures	Balance
1931	478.27	121.53	41.34	641.14	630.80	10.34
1932	544.22	118.73	39.84	702.79	631.56	71.23
1933	666.22	125.48	45.56	838.15	694.06	144.09
1934	673.05	125.73	38.62	837.40	679.76	157.64
1935	765.27	134.23	54.18	953.68	793.81	159.87
1936	848.58	130.19	50.74	1,029.51	841.20	188.31
1937	1,006.28	129.74	57.84	1,194.40	892.75	301.64
1938	1,067.47	139.20	41.52	1,248.19	938.26	309.93

Source: Nasu Shiroshi, Aspects of Japanese Agriculture,
New York, 1941; pg. 138.

The constant favorable agricultural income which the above tables seem to indicate is contradicted by information from other sources. For instance, Wakukawa states that:

"With a majority of the peasants it is not a question of profit from their endeavors. The primary concern is to eke out a scanty subsistence... The peasant concentrates on production of food crops,...his first consideration is satisfaction of immediate needs at home; marketing values are secondary. Any surplus after meeting family needs is converted into cash to meet payments for taxes, fertilizer, tools, clothing, education, medical care, etc. As it often turns out, the income from such sources as domestic handicraft, day labor, or remittances from sons or daughters employed in factories has to be applied to operating expenses to keep the farm going."

Wakukawa offers the following figures from the 1938 edition of the Nippon Rōdō Nenkan (Japanese Labor Year Book) to substantiate his opinion:

TABLE 8. BALANCE SHEET OF THE JAPANESE FARMER, 1935-36
(In Units of Yen)

Class of Operator	Income	Expenditures	Net Profit (✓) or Loss (-)
Owner-Cultivator	1,147.28	1,175.82	- 28.54
Part Tenant	1,192.07	1,185.16	✓ 6.91
Pure Tenant	1,086.93	1,210.72	-123.79
Average	1,142.09	1,190.57	- 48.48

Source: Wakukawa, S., "The Japanese Farm-Tenancy System"; Japan's Prospect, 1946; pg. 139.

In a survey of 35 tenant farms, Ladejinsky¹ found an average deficit of ¥ 44 in the household income and expenditures of these tenant farms. Likewise Trewartha cites an investigation of the budgets of 208 tenant farmers conducted by the Japanese Department of Agriculture which "revealed that the average incomes of these tenants from all possible sources was not sufficient to cover their poverty-level living expenses."² The total farm debts, estimated at ¥ 250,000,000 in 1870, rose to ¥ 746,000,000 by 1912. In 1932, a governmental survey listed the total debts at ¥ 4,717,000,000, and by 1937 they were estimated to be around

1. pg. 436, "Farm Tenancy and Japanese Agriculture" by W. Ladejinsky; Foreign Agriculture, Vol. I, 1937.
2. pg. 211, Japan, A Physical, Cultural, and Regional Geography, Madison, Wisconsin, 1945.

¥ 6 billion. This latter figure would make the average debt of the farm household around ¥ 1,000.

It is easy to exaggerate the disadvantages of agriculture in Japan by over-emphasizing the fact that arable land is a scarce natural resource in relation to population. Although this is certainly one of the more basic factors related to agricultural distress in Japan, there are equally vital factors whose moderating influences tend to bring the total picture into a more balanced perspective. E.F. Penrose has pointed out that: "...it has to be recognized that comparisons of the area of land per person in different countries have only a limited economic significance.... an acre of land in one country or region often has a very different quantitative significance as a factor of production from an acre of land in another country or region".¹

This can best be illustrated by pointing out those agricultural practices which are characteristic of Japan, and which play a predominant role in influencing the total patterning of Japanese agriculture. First, over half the cultivated area of Japan consists of paddy or "wet" land on which almost all the rice crop is produced. In 1939, out of a total cultivated area of 6.07 million cho, 3.21 million cho were paddy fields. In the same year rice

1. pg. 116, The Industrialization of Japan and Manchukuo, E. B. Schumpeter (ed.); New York, 1940.

occupied 3.19 million cho, which consisted almost entirely of irrigated paddy field except for .15 million cho which was in upland dry fields.

Second, multiple cropping is a characteristic practice in Japanese agriculture. On a large part of the land in Japan the fields are required to support more than a single harvest in the year cycle. The frequency of this practice may be indicated by the fact that in 1939 the total cultivated area was only 6.08 million cho, whereas the total area planted to crops was a third larger, 8.11 million cho.

TABLE 9. ANNUAL FREQUENCY OF CULTIVATED-LAND UTILIZATION (1937)

District	Cultivated land	Paddy Fields	Upland Fields
Hokkaidō	0.876	0.902	1.106
Tōhoku	1.103	0.966	1.327
Kwantō	1.285	1.192	1.347
Hokuriku	1.230	1.187	1.393
Tōsan	1.365	1.384	1.348
Tōkai	1.433	1.352	1.547
Kinki	1.429	1.310	1.864
Chugoku	1.472	1.411	1.624
Shikoku	1.659	1.711	1.594
Kyūshū	1.801	1.786	1.819
Total Japan	1.332	1.300	1.368

Source: Nasu Shiroshi, Aspects of Japanese Agriculture, New York, 1941; pg. 92-93.

This table represents the ratio of the total of the areas in crops to the total area of cultivated land. Only in Northern Japan does the land bear less than one crop a year. Moving toward the south the ratios increase steadily, reaching the maximum in the prefecture of Kumamoto where the ratio is 1.975, indicating that practically all the cultivated land in Kumamoto bears two harvests a year. Two crops of rice a year are grown on only an extremely small part of the total area, the general practice is one crop of rice followed by another cereal such as barley or wheat. Following the harvest of the rice crop, the winter crop of wheat or barley is planted, this in turn is harvested either in late May or early June in time to transplant the rice seedlings for the next rice crop. The sowing of rice seed beds in the spring for transplanting some two months later is a response to the pressure exerted by the scarcity of arable land, since it delays the actual planting of the rice until the winter crop can be harvested.

Interculture practices pertain as a rule to vegetables grown in the summer. In the prefectures of Osaka and Hyogo the index of double cropping for upland fields is 2.4 and 2.7. Trewartha describes these interculture practices as follows:

"Near cities the paddy lands are likely to get little or no rest between the major summer crop of rice and the winter crop of cereals. For example, immediately after the rice harvest a

field may be ridged and a quick-maturing crop, such as the giant radish (daikon) planted on the ridges and eggplant along the bottoms of the furrows. To give them a head start these vegetables may have been sown earlier in seedbeds and the young plants subsequently transplanted to the paddy fields. Usually the daikon is mature before the eggplant interferes. After the daikon is harvested winter grain is planted on the ridge tops. The eggplant is pulled when it begins to interfere with the growing grain. In the spring a quick-maturing crop, such as dwarf taro, cucumbers, or seedling melons may be planted in the troughs between the rows of young grain. The vegetables are somewhat shaded by the grain, to be sure, but they struggle upward for light and finally, after the grain harvest, have the field to themselves until the time comes to relevel the field and transplant rice seedlings on it. Genge, rape, and millet compete to some extent with wheat and barley for the available rice land in winter."¹

Third, such practices of multiple cropping as described above require large quantities of fertilizer, with frequent application. Chemical fertilizers make up only a small part of the total amount. Manure makes up the bulk of the fertilizer used, 'night soil' alone accounting for one-fourth of the total. In 1933 expenditures for fertilizer amounted to approximately 20 per cent of the total cost of production, and the rate was increasing in direct proportion to the increase in the amount of rice in production.²

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1. pp. 224-5, G.T. Trewartha, Japan, A Physical, Cultural, and Regional Geography, 1945.
 2. pg. 120, S. Nasu; Aspects of Japanese Agriculture, New York, 1941.

In summarizing these three characteristics of Japanese agriculture it will be noted that in terms of either the human labor applied per unit-area, the number of crops planted per year, or fertilizer consumed per unit-area, agriculture is seen to be unusually intensive. Nasu endeavors to prove that Japanese agricultural production stands under the strong pressure of the law of diminishing returns by means of the following table, in which he points out that "the number per unit area of people engaged in small-scale farming is three times that of large-scale farming, but the income in the former case is only twice that of the latter".

TABLE 10. RETURNS FROM DIFFERENT SCALE FARMING

	Area of cultivated land (in <u>cho</u>)	No. of people engaged in agri.	Number engaged in each <u>cho</u>	Agri. income from each <u>cho</u>
Large-scale farming	12.34	9.8	.80	79
Middle-scale farming	2.94	4.6	1.59	108
Small-scale farming	1.58	3.7	2.31	139

Source: Nasu Shiroshi, Aspects of Japanese Agriculture, New York, 1941; pg. 116.

IV. POLITICAL ACTION SINCE 1920

Japan's status in the First World War, which allowed her to share in the rights and privileges of the belligerents without risking the destructive consequences of actual combat, made possible a tremendous increase in her trade to the European allies. As a result, the economic activities of Japan underwent a tremendous expansion in which the industrialists both increased their profits and strengthened their monopolistic controls. The landholding class benefited from an unprecedented rise in the price of rice by using their augmented capital to expand their land holdings at the expense of the destituted peasantry. For once again the peasantry had been denied a share in the general economic amelioration. The wartime prosperity had engendered a sharp inflationary trend in commodity prices which soared to new highs. Rice which sold for ¥ 16.37 per koku early in 1917 had jumped to ¥-30 per koku by July 1918. By August 7, this price had jumped to approximately ¥ 50 per koku.¹ The farmers' earnings, however, remained far behind this rapid rise in the cost of living. Even the farmers who produced the rice failed to share in the increased price since most

1. pg. 171; Wakukawa, S., "The Japanese Farm-Tenancy System", Japan's Prospect; Cambridge, Mass., 1946.

had been forced to convert their harvest into payments in kind for rent and debts contracted before the rise in price. Thus all the low income groups of Japan dependent on rice for subsistence felt themselves under an especially threatening situation.

On August 8, 1918, when a group of fishermen's wives paraded through a small town in Toyama prefecture calling upon the landlords and merchants to sell their hoarded rice at a reduced price, the whole nation was precipitated into action. The following day when news of their action was published over the nation, riots broke out in the prefectures of Wakayama, Hiroshima, and Aichi. Rioting next broke out in Kyōtō, Tōkyō, Ōsaka, and Kōbe, soon engulfing virtually the entire nation.

Originating as a protest against the rising price of rice, the riots soon assumed an anti-capitalistic character. Homes of wealthy merchants and business men were looted and burned. Plundering and wanton destruction of property occurred day after day in widely separate parts of the country. Only after the government called out the army and applied stringent countermeasures were the riots stemmed after three weeks of violence. Shocked by the spontaneous uprising, the government hastened to force down the price of rice and to offer various forms

of social relief to the suffering members of the population, more or less as a means of appeasing the masses. Naturally these unforeseen results of the people's collective action had a tremendous impact on the developing social consciousness of the masses. This was the period following the Russian revolution when organized workers' movements had already sprung into existence in Japan's larger cities. An intelligentsia made articulate the discontent and dissatisfaction felt by the peasants and constantly reminded them of their latent power, which could be effective only in a collective movement.

The changing attitude of the peasantry is reflected in statistics of the number of tenant disputes. In 1917 there were only 84 tenant disputes, in 1918 there were 296, and by 1921 there were 1,680 disputes. The following table shows the steady year by year increase:

TABLE 11. NUMBER OF TENANT DISPUTES, BY YEARS

Year	Number of Disputes	Land Area Involved (in <u>cho</u>)	Number of Tenants Involved
1917	84	--	--
1918	296	--	--
1919	326	--	--
1920	408	27,000	34,000
1921	1,680	88,000	145,000
1922	1,578	90,000	125,000
1923	1,917	89,000	134,000
1924	1,532	70,000	110,000
1925	2,206	95,000	134,000
1926	2,751	95,000	151,000
1927	2,052	59,000	91,000
1928	1,866	48,000	75,000
1929	2,343	56,000	81,000
1930	2,478	39,000	58,000
1931	3,419	60,000	81,000
1932	3,414	39,000	61,000
1933	4,000	30,000	48,000
1934	5,828	85,000	121,000
1935	6,824	70,000	113,000
1936	5,769	36,000	58,000
1937	5,364	28,000	48,000

Source: Wakukawa S., "The Japanese Farm-Tenancy System", Japan's Prospect; Cambridge, Mass., 1946; pg. 152.

Of the various cases contributing to the landlord-tenant disputes, the following five are perhaps the most significant: excessive rent, delinquency in debts, eviction for default, shortage of arable land, and conversion of the land from rural to urban classification with consequent eviction of tenants. Another factor which must be considered is the sudden fluctuation of the rice market, creating conditions similar to those which presaged the rice riots of 1918. During the twenties, disputes were due largely to excessive rents, centering around the tenants' demands for rent reduction. After 1930, however, the disputes were more often caused by attempts of the landlords to terminate leases and evict tenants from the land. Between 1932 and 1939, nearly 54 per cent of all tenant disputes were occasioned by owners' attempts to eject tenants. In general the struggle between landlord and tenant in the thirties tended to center around the vital question of the tenant's right to cultivate the land.

Following the first World War, attempts to organize the tenants followed systematic and coherent plans, quite unlike the spontaneous, unorganized movements which had previously been the tenants sole form of collective protest. In 1922 the Nippon Nomin Kumiai (Japan Farmers' Union) was founded. From its very inception it was an aggressive

proletarian movement for the peasantry, with the avowed purpose of lowering rents, bettering the farmers' position, and defending the tenants' right to the soil. Instead of restricting itself to purely tenant problems, the organization sought to improve the lot of the entire peasant class. A survey of the organization's literature showed the following principles and purposes:¹

Socialization of arable land; to make rents reasonable; to establish a tenant law in which the right of reclamation is clarified and recognized; to fix laboring hours and minimum wages for agricultural laborers; to establish cooperative buying and selling; to abolish the tax which oppresses the tenants and guards the capitalists and agricultural landowners; to establish an educational system for the proletarian agricultural tenants; to abolish prefectural laws which oppress the tenant movement; to establish a tenants' movement all over Japan.

The peasants responded to the Union's program so that by 1926 the membership numbered 70,000. The Union had some success in abolishing surcharges on rents, and in many cases rent rates were reduced permanently or temporarily. The Nippon Nomin Kumiai was the first

1. pg. 294; Orchard, D., "Agrarian Problems of Modern Japan", Journal of Political Economy; Chicago, 1929.

organization in Japan to advocate alliance between the urban proletariat and the rural poor in a farmer-labor party. In the latter part of 1925 such a party was formed, called the Nōmin Rōdōtō. (Farmer-Labor Party). Within three hours of its founding, however, the Home Minister ordered it dissolved because of suspicions of radical tendencies. Several months later it was revived under the name Rōdō Nōmintō (Labor-Farmer Party) after excluding several left-wing organizations in order to meet with the approval of the police.

Incessant internal dissension marked the subsequent history of these two organizations. The extreme right-wing of both groups broke away to form the Zen Nippon Nōmin Kumiai Dōmei (All-Japan Federation of Farmers' Unions) and the Nippon Nōmintō (Japan Farmers' Party). In 1927, another split led to the founding of the Zen Nippon Nōmin Kumiai (All-Japan Farmers' Union), a middle of the road group. Its deviation from the methods of the parent organization may be noted in its principles and purposes:¹

To organize against the landlords and for mutual aid; to secure the right to permanent tenancy; to secure the social, political and economic condition of the farmer;

1. pg. 294; *ibid.*

to reform the law with respect to tenant farmers; to develop cooperative buying and selling guilds and cooperative production; reduction of rents; to educate the farmer in the social sciences, village culture and amusement; to develop political activity among the farmers looking toward a farmers' party; to exclude movements imported from abroad; to exclude from our villages tenant farmers of the left wing.

There are marked similarities in the aims and purposes of the various unions but there is a no less significant difference in their methods for solving the mutually recognized problems. The unions are unanimous in agreeing that the immediate and pressing problem of each union is to bring about reduction in rents and to secure recognition of the tenant's right to till the soil. The tenant unions reached their peak in 1927 when the total of 4,582 unions included a membership of 365,322. This rapid growth was not without opposition, however, for the organized tenant farmer, as well as the organized factory worker, were under the constant espionage of the police. The first large-scale arrest of radical leaders took place in 1928 following the elections, when 1,013 persons were arrested as communists. Although it succeeded in retarding the progress of the labor and farmer movements, the oppressive

measures of the police failed to stop the spread of ideas conducive to the proletarian movements.

After the Manchurian Incident of 1931, Japan entered an even more extreme period of reaction in which all social movements were forced to alter their course to conform with the national policy. The organizations that survived were those that reformed their policies in order to be in perfect accord with the government. The others were forced out of existence and their leaders arrested for "dangerous thoughts". The tenant unions went into a steady decline after 1934 under government pressure. Evidence that the demise of the tenant unions was not self-imposed by a suddenly satisfied peasantry is found in the fact that tenant disputes reached an all-time high in 1935 with 6,824 disputes. By 1940, the last two agrarian organizations actually representing the peasantry dissolved "voluntarily" in the name of national unity. This left only the government-sponsored ultra-nationalistic agricultural organizations, of which Teikoku Nōkai (Imperial Agricultural Association) is more or less typical. By 1941, therefore, no organization was left in Japan which could be said to represent or reflect the opinions, beliefs, or attitudes of the peasantry.

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