

Feudalism or Absolute Monarchism?

Japanese Discourse on the Nature of State and Society in Late Imperial China

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The formation of centralized states in Europe and other areas of the world has been one of the major features of modern history. The key element for realization of a nation-state, namely the central government's capacity to control the population and mobilize resources, often ran into competition and conflict with the private interests of local magnates, religious institutions, or commercial establishments that directly controlled the primary producers. In Europe, the separation of state and society has been established through the working out of conflicts and compromises in the process of state making. In China, the state has had a longer history. For historians of China, one cluster of important questions has concerned the relationships among the state, local elites, and the peasant masses during the two millennia of imperial rule. These

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This article is one of the results of a graduate seminar on Japanese scholarship concerning modern Chinese history at UCLA in the winter of 1987. I would like to thank Professor Philip Huang and the Department of History of UCLA, as well as the students who participated in the seminar with unflinching enthusiasm. During my stay at UCLA, I was inspired by lively seminars sponsored by the History Department and the Center for Chinese Studies. I owe debts of gratitude to colleagues and friends at UCLA and in Tokyo, especially Professors Scott Waugh, R. Bin Wong, Benjamin Elman, and Mio Kishimoto for their inspiration and encouragement. Without the generous help of R. Bin Wong, who read several earlier versions of the manuscript, this article would not exist. I would also like to thank Linda Grove and an anonymous reader who gave helpful suggestions. Also, colleagues at the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan gave useful comments at a meeting of the Faculty Seminar. All interpretations and mistakes are mine.

MODERN CHINA, Vol. 16 No. 3, July 1990 330-370
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relationships may well be the key to understanding why the ancient empire continued until the twentieth century. However, a new set of questions, arising from comparative studies, concerns the changing nature of the state-society relationship in late imperial China. In this new perspective, China in the nineteenth century may have been in the process of modern state making. In this article, I attempt to outline the major themes of a debate on these issues among Japanese historians that began almost forty years ago.

The debate concerns the nature of society and the state in late imperial China, or the period of about four hundred years before the Revolution of 1911. It is likely the largest debate in post-war Japanese historiography of China, even larger than the famous controversy that took place during the 1950s over the sprouts of capitalism. It reflects the efforts of post-war scholars in Japan to build a new framework for studies of Chinese history.

Briefly stated, the underlying question in this debate was whether late imperial China was in fact a feudal society dominated by gentry-landlords who supported the imperial government, or whether it was a centralized bureaucratic state under the rule of an absolute monarch. Arguing for the first position were Marxist-inspired historians led by scholars at the University of Tokyo; this group became known as the Tokyo School or Rekken (that is, *Rekishigaku kenkyūkai*) School (Tanigawa, 1976: 174). Opposing them were historians at Kyoto University who had inherited the approach of their great mentor, Naitō Konan. The so-called Kyoto School maintained that the emperor of China from the beginning of the Song dynasty was an absolute monarch and that developments in late imperial China must be interpreted within the framework of absolute monarchism.

In interpreting the term “feudalism,” non-Marxist historians have generally accepted the traditional academic definition that centered on the lord-vassal bonds among the members of the ruling elite, while Marxist-influenced historians have emphasized the relationship between the landlords and the tillers of their lands. Most of those who actively participated in the debate shared the assumptions of Marxism and concentrated their efforts on understanding the nature of what they referred to as “feudal” society in China.

In the following section, I begin with the background and the origins of the debate that arose in the late 1940s. In the second section, I discuss the major hypotheses presented by Oyama Masaaki and Shigeta Atsushi, and the controversies that developed during the 1960s and 1970s.¹ Most of the views and works discussed in this section are of scholars of the “Tokyo School.” In fact, it was they who launched the debate, wishing to establish a new framework for the study of Chinese history to replace the influential Naitō theory. Kyoto historians did not respond directly to their challenge. Instead, in their publications they only occasionally pointed out what they thought to

be problems in the Marxist assumptions. For this reason, no major elaboration emerged on the theme of absolute monarchism. Since it is impossible to discuss all the works relevant to this debate, I will focus my discussion on the most controversial ones. In the third section, I discuss alternative perspectives that were proposed in response to the Marxist framework. In this section, I also discuss a new research trend among the younger generation, who began publication around 1980. In the final section, I present my own analysis of the historical significance of the debate.

MARXISM AND THE DEFINITION OF FEUDALISM

Japanese historians in the post-war era had their particular reasons for debating the structure of the state in pre-1911 China. They were motivated not only by an intellectual interest in reconstructing the past, but also by a sense of responsibility to account for Japan's invasion of China during the war. They believed that historians were partially responsible for Japan's action because Japan's mistaken image of China as a backward nation had justified its invasion (Kamachi, 1975). In their view, historians participate in making history by interpreting the past and thereby creating an image of the past for the people who take action. No doubt, such a belief made the debate very serious, and sometimes emotional. The Japanese historians' debate on feudalism in China was a part of their effort to build a new conceptual framework for understanding China's past. For them, the most basic question was how to periodize Chinese history and how to define the social-economic changes in each period, especially the medieval/feudal period.

The study of Chinese history in Japan goes back to ancient times. However, the idea of dividing history into ancient, medieval, and modern periods and of identifying the distinct character of each period is relatively new; this was a part of the modern Western impact on Japan after the mid-nineteenth century. Naitō Torajirō (Konan, 1866-1934), who taught at Kyoto University, had proposed the famous thesis which came to be known as the Naitō Hypothesis. He defined the Song period (960-1279) as the beginning of the modern era (*kinsei*) in China, and emphasized its important differences from the preceding Tang (618-907) era which he defined as the medieval era (*chūsei*). Naitō's thesis provided a scholarly basis for the Japanese view of China as a society that reached the modern age as early as the tenth century, but thereafter remained basically unchanged, in a sorry state of stagnation. It served to create a national image of China as a backward nation incapable of progress without help from outside.²

The post-war debate was an effort by China specialists to repudiate the concept of a stagnant China. Their desire to replace old concepts of history was shared by Japanese scholars of European and Japanese history. They keenly felt the need for a new framework for the study of the history of Japan in a global perspective to understand the course of events that had led to the catastrophic war. Fired by historians with a sense of mission and a public interested in history, the Rekishigaku Kenkyūkai (The Historical Science Society of Japan, founded in 1932) became the most active national organization of historians in post-war Japan. At its first post-war meeting in 1946, discussions were organized around the common theme of the nature of monarchism in various nations. To facilitate interchange in a comparative framework, the members voted at the 1949 meeting to reorganize the forum by abolishing the sessions on Japanese, East Asian, and Western histories, and creating sessions for ancient, feudal, and modern histories. The papers presented at this meeting were published in a volume under the title *Sekaishi no kihon hōsoku* (Basic laws of world history; Rekishigaku kenkyūkai, 1949; See also, Rekishigaku Kenkyūkai, 1957, 1972, 1982).

Although the debate among China scholars began with the question of the periodization of Chinese history, especially the question of identifying the beginning and the end of the medieval/feudal age in China, the focus of attention was on interpretations of social-economic conditions in late imperial China. In short, the question was whether or not conditions in late imperial China could be characterized as feudal. The participants in the discourse generally accepted the definition of feudalism derived from Marx and the Marxist scheme of the stages of historical development, as canonized by Stalin in the 1930s under the label of "historical materialism." The essential features of feudalism which they stressed, with varying emphases, boiled down to three elements: (1) the landlords' exploitation of their tenants and the peasant population at large in the forms of high rent, usury, and control over both local markets and other communal facilities, such as irrigation systems, that were vital to the maintenance of agricultural production; (2) the coercive judicial power exercised by the landlords over peasants; (3) the unequal legal status between landlords and tenants.³

In the Marxist five-stage development scheme, feudalism followed the ancient slave society and preceded modern capitalist society. Temporally, it was, in the European case, the period of the Middle Ages. Consequently, the logical question for those attempting to apply Marxist concepts to Chinese history was how to define the end of the ancient period, or the beginning of the feudal age, in Chinese history. On this point, controversies have raged for decades. As to the end of the feudal age, Marxist-influenced historians had no need to debate. When the People's Republic was established in China

in 1949, they readily accepted the Chinese Communist definition of their revolution as an “anti-feudal and anti-imperialist” revolution. For them, the year 1949 marked liberation from the feudal past and the end of the Dark Ages in China. Since then it has become a convention in Japan to refer to the pre-1949 society of China as “a feudal society.”

As a concept, feudalism—which has been defined countless ways—is complex enough for historians of Europe.⁴ For Japanese, it is even more complicated because it involves the problem of translating the European term. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the Japanese began to learn modern social theories along with science and technology, they faced the vexing problem of translating Western terms and concepts. To translate “feudalism,” the Japanese took a term from the ancient Chinese lexicon: *fengjian* (*hōken* in Japanese) meaning the system of enfeoffment during the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1122-221 B. C.). Later, in the imperial period, the Chinese used the term in a broader sense as an antonym of centralized bureaucratic monarchism. In Japan, to further complicate the matter, modern historians have used the term *hōken* to define the Japanese system of enfeoffment under the shogunate during the period between A. D. 1192 and 1868. These different meanings of “*fengjian*” and “*hōken*” filtered Japanese interpretation of Chinese feudalism.

In pre-war Japan, there were Marxist historians, often associated with the South Manchurian Railway Company, who conducted research in China and published insightful observations on Chinese society. Stimulated by the debate on Chinese social history in China during the 1920s and 1930s, some of them attempted to interpret Japanese and Chinese histories in the light of the Marxist theory of historical development (Tsurumi, 1985). They remained, however, outside academic circles and their work did not become the mainstream of Japanese scholarship. Sinologists in universities generally held a non-Marxist view of feudalism as a political system governing an agrarian society through the lord-vassal relationship, of which the essential elements were enfeoffment of the vassal by the lord and the vassal's fealty to the lord. They shared an understanding that such a relationship, in combination with the ancient kinship system, existed in China during the Zhou Dynasty and was replaced by a centralized system when the First Emperor of the Qin unified the country in 221 B. C. By this definition, the feudal system in China existed prior to the formation of the empire. When the post-war debate began, however, this definition was swept away as anachronistic. It was incompatible with the Marxist concept of feudalism as something necessarily located in the Middle Ages, and incongruous with the Chinese Communist claim that feudalism had been a target of the recent revolution in China.

As one can imagine, it turned out to be a formidable task to form a clear image of pre-modern Chinese society through the lens of the European concept of feudalism. Despite their arduous efforts, no consensus emerged among Japanese scholars on the issue of the prevailing form of land ownership in the late imperial period, nor did they agree on a definition of feudalism in China. Nevertheless, their discussions about how to characterize Chinese society have stimulated research and produced publications which have contributed a great deal to our knowledge of late imperial Chinese society.

In 1951, when the debate was gathering steam, a timely essay on the characteristics of Chinese feudalism was published by Niida Noboru (1904-1966) of Tokyo University, an internationally acclaimed authority on Chinese legal history. In this essay, which sparkled with spirited remarks on the nature of Chinese society, Niida proposed that feudalism, the target of the recent revolution in China, meant the whole system of the old regime, including religion, ethics, law, government, society, and economy, and that the entire system rested on the landlords' rule over the peasant majority of the population. In other words, he understood feudalism in China as the total social-economic system that prevailed until 1949.

As to the beginning of the feudal age in China, Niida suggested that the great social changes that took place during the period between the late Tang and early Song represented the period of transition from ancient to medieval (i.e., feudal) society. This was the period recognized by Naitō Konan and his students in Kyoto as the watershed from the medieval to the modern period. Niida acknowledged the points that separated his views from those of the Kyoto historians. He based his arguments on a series of studies of landlord-tenant relations in the early Song period that had been published by Suto Yoshiyuki (1907-) in 1950 (Suto, 1950). Niida pointed out that in China the residues of ancient society, such as the ancient empire and its patriarchal structure as well as social norms and ethics pertinent to it persisted into the twentieth century. For this reason, he emphasized, feudalism in China turned out to be something quite different from what it was in Europe. He refuted the generally accepted notion that China in the Zhou period had a feudal system similar to that of medieval Europe. In Niida's view, the resemblance between the two political superstructures was superficial and limited. Enfeoffment in Zhou China was no more than a ritual confirmation of the *de facto* control of the patriarchal ruler. In such a relationship, Niida stated, there was no basis for a voluntary pledge of loyalty nor a truly contractual relationship between free individuals, which Niida believed to be the essence of feudalism in Western Europe (Niida, 1951).⁵

Niida's article had a decisive impact on the course of the debate. After its publication, the notion of feudalism in Zhou China was dismissed as an

anachronism. Niida commanded great respect among younger scholars because of the accomplishments he displayed in the classroom as a legal historian and for his field surveys in North China, conducted during the 1940s, which resulted in volumes on merchant guilds in Beijing and the family system in the villages. In his field work, he was struck by the pervasiveness of guild or guild-like organizations and the energy of the masses which he regarded as the primary force in history. Niida's fascination with guild associations was shared by Imahori Seiji (1914-), who assisted Niida in field work, and then conducted his own surveys in villages and towns in North China and Mongolia. Imahori maintained that the essential nature of Chinese society was feudal in the sense that it consisted of various kinds of guild-like groups that guarded their collective self-interest through patriarchal organizations. Remarks of scholars like Niida and Imahori who personally observed the commoners' world in old China wielded great authority among younger scholars in post-war Japan (Niida, 1964; Imahori, 1978: 879-880).

SOCIAL CLASSES, GENTRY RULE, AND THE STATE

Even before the debate on feudalism in China dominated the academic scene in the post-war era, sinologists in Japan had been studying the social-economic changes that took place during the period between the Tang and Song dynasties. In the early 1950s, when academic life began to recover from the war time disruptions, important works on the Tang-Song transition centered on landlord-tenant relations and the tax collection system. Studies of the Ming and Qing period also focused on these topics. The tax collection system was scrutinized as the key to understanding the system of state control over its subjects. Among the social-economic historians who began to publish in the 1950s, Oyama Masaaki (1928-) contributed influential works on landlordism and the tax collection system during the Ming, and gained fame for his controversial proposition that feudalism began in China during the late Ming and early Qing period. His works were quoted by many others as the basis for their own understanding of feudalism in China. Among them, Shigeta Atsushi (1930-1973) extended Oyama's points most dramatically to form a thesis of "gentry rule" and the "feudal state" in late imperial China.⁶

Oyama's 1957-1958 article on the origins of large scale landlordism in the Jiangnan area during the late Ming and early Qing era combined bold arguments with extensive research in original sources. He argued that in the early Ming, most of the landlords in the Jiangnan area managed their land by

personally supervising their slaves (or bondservants) who worked on their land. Since slave ownership by commoners was prohibited by Ming law, the landlords disguised these slaves as their family members through ritual adoptions. When the landlords accumulated land beyond the scale that they could effectively manage through family supervision of slaves, they rented out some of the land to tenants (*dianhu*). The tenants were chosen from among the most trusted slaves whose marriages had been arranged by the landlord. Their economic situation forced these tenants to remain dependent on the landlords. They presumably owed the landlord high rent in addition to the obligation to work on plots kept under the landlord's direct management. Under such conditions, the tenants would not have had enough surplus to sustain economic independence. Moreover, the tenants were supposed to return the land to the landlord when they reached age 60, and were expected to be supported by the landlord for the rest of their lives. Oyama regarded this kind of tenant as a slave who was under the patriarchal control of the landlord, and thus defined this kind of landlordism as "landownership based on slave labor" (*doreiseiteki tochi shoyū keitai*) (Oyama, 1957-1958).

Throughout the Ming period, Oyama continued, significant changes took place in the economic condition of tenants. By the end of the Ming, tenants were capable of subsisting on their own, thanks to the development of a market economy that made handicraft production in peasant households profitable. Eventually tenant farmers accumulated sufficient surplus to organize community-based activities, such as the maintenance of irrigation systems, which made them less dependent on their landlord. At the same time, they began in an organized manner to resist rent payments. Oyama characterized this development as the transformation of tenants from slaves (*dorei*) into serfs (*nodo*). He distinguished serfs from slaves by the ability of the former to manage the land they rented, while slaves worked primarily under the supervision of the landlord. By this time, Oyama noted, large landowners had moved to urban centers, and no longer personally managed their estates. Absentee landlords sent their servants to the local government to serve as runners in charge of tax collection, and at the same time had them collect the rent from their tenants. This was permitted because the government had authorized the use of government personnel for chastisement of delinquent tenants. The landlords' mobilization of the state apparatus for protection of their private interests was possible, Oyama suggested, because of the enormous wealth of the large landowners who dominated local society in Jiangnan. Oyama concluded that this was a "feudal landholding system" (*hōkenteiki tochi shoyū*) that had appeared in the late Ming and early Qing period, and that the tenants of the large landlords were in essence serfs (Oyama, 1957-1958). Oyama did not offer any further discussion about why

he characterized such landlordism as "feudal." Nevertheless, his presentation came to be known as Oyama's hypothesis on the feudalization of China in the late Ming early Qing period. It led to sharp controversy, especially because of his characterization of Chinese society through the Ming period as a slave society.

Oyama published a revised edition of this article in 1974 in which he no longer claimed that Ming China was a slave society. However, he maintained that during the Ming period there was a considerable number of great landowners who depended on the labor of bondservants (*nupu*, *dianpu*, *jiapu*, etc.) for cultivation of their lands. At the same time, he admitted that the rural population of China consisted of various categories, including great landlords, small owners who tilled their own lands, and those who tilled others' lands as tenants but not as bondservants. Oyama's thesis raised a question concerning who were the major cultivators in the society as a whole: Were they bondservants, tenants, or self-managing farmers? Instead of answering this question directly, Oyama proceeded with further inquiries into the nature of bondservants in the Song, Ming, and Qing periods. He confirmed that bondservants lived in quarters provided by their master, and were also provided with clothing and food by their master, and that their marriages were arranged by their master. They served indefinitely in a status inherited by their children; they could be sold to another family or divided among the heirs of the master as a part of the household property (Oyama, 1974).

A crucial question was whether bondservants worked primarily in agricultural pursuits, such as tilling, planting, and harvesting. Contrary to Oyama's assumption, Yasuno Shōzō (1933-), Shigeta Atsushi, and Nishimura Kazuyo found that bondservants were not used primarily in the field, but for management of domestic concerns such as collection of rents and keeping of account books, and for various other chores in and around the master's house (Yasuno, 1974: 184; Shigeta, 1971c, 1975: 192). Nishimura Kazuyo's study of bondservants during the Ming suggests that, by the mid-Ming, large landlords who lived in cities tended to avoid personal involvement in the management of their estate and left this in the hands of bondservants. In such cases, bondservants supervised the tenants and commercial enterprises of the landlord. A larger number of bondservants served in the private "police" force of the landlord household, which collected rents in a high-handed manner and often bullied entire villages. As to the source of supply of bondservants, they were in most cases impoverished peasants who left their villages to escape from debt collectors. After gaining employment in a great landlord's household as bondservants, those who acquired skills in financial management and marketing were often entrusted with the house's economic affairs. As a result, some landlords fell prey to their own bondservants and lost control over their

property. Unscrupulous bondservants embezzled their masters' property, accumulated personal wealth, put on magnificent gowns, and behaved like gentry. A cold-blooded bondservant might even take his master to court and seize his property through false accusations (Nishimura Kazuyo, 1978, 1979).

Thus, the picture of "slaves" that emerged from Nishimura's study was quite different from what Oyama had painted. Some of Nishimura's bondservants appear as *de facto* managers, or perhaps "managing servants," of the great house, performing roles similar to those of the stewards and bailiffs of medieval English manors, who took advantage of their lords' sumptuous life-style and neglect of management. In the Chinese case, landlords were preoccupied with preparation for civil service examinations and government service which was regarded to be a more lucrative source of wealth than diligent attention to their estates.

Although Oyama's presentation of China's peasantry as a counterpart of European serfdom did not convince many, his assumption that the great majority of the rural population in China were tenants who were personally bound to their landlords found a receptive audience. Still, some challenged this assumption. Miyazaki Ichisada (1901-), the dean of the Kyoto school historians, maintained his view, first published in 1952, that the tenants (*dianhu*) of post-Song China were small farmers who were not personally bound to their landlords. In the first place, he argued, they had free contractual relationships as tenants, and in the second place many of them rented land from more than one landowner. Miyazaki, as heir to Naitō's theory, did not hesitate to argue that application of the Marxist concept of historical materialism did not help in understanding Chinese history. In his view, feudalism did not necessarily characterize a medieval society, even though that happened to be the case in Europe (Miyazaki, 1952, 1977: 56-63). Also, Yanagita Setsuko (1921-) maintained that a small number of great landlords could not have taken in all of the peasants as their tenants, and that a great number of the inhabitants in the villages were self-managing small farmers. At the same time, she expressed her reservations about Miyazaki's characterization of the landlord-tenant bond as a totally free contractual relationship. She suggested that the rent the tenant paid was, in fact, feudal rent because landlords could use extra-economic coercion by seeking government intervention against delinquent tenants (Yanagita, 1970, 1976).⁷

How did the landlords gain control over the peasantry at large, including those who did not till their lands? This was the most challenging question for those who took the position that feudal landlords ruled over the countryside. From ancient times, great landlords or local magnates who dominated local society were crucial figures in Chinese history. They were the great families

(*haozu*) of the later Han dynasty, the noble families (*guizu*) of the Six Dynasties, the rich local families (*xingshihu*) of the Song dynasty, and the local gentry (*xiangshen*) of the Ming and Qing periods. Since the establishment of the centralized empire, they always functioned as the mediating elite between the state and local society. The question then became: In what ways were the local elites in the "feudal" age different from their predecessors? To answer this question, Shigeta Atsushi, a young scholar at the University of Tokyo, offered a thesis that was built around a concept of "gentry rule." In his thesis, Shigeta characterized the gentry-landlords of the Qing period as a category unique to the period.

Shigeta outlined his thesis of "gentry rule" in two short articles published in 1971. Although his untimely death deprived him of a chance to develop it fully, this thesis has remained the most provocative hypothesis in the debate. He proposed that "gentry rule" during the Qing was the final phase of feudalism in China. The landlord with gentry status, acquired through an academic degree won in the state civil service examination or purchased from the state, had privileges to communicate on equal terms with government officials, and to participate in local politics. Because of their scholarly status, gentry were entitled to exemption from the labor tax. Landlords without gentry status were eager to establish trusteeships with the gentry landlords so that they could avoid taxation of their lands. For lesser landlords, close ties with a gentry family provided a shield not only from tax collectors but also, thanks to the gentry-landlords' gangs of armed bondservants, from their own rebellious tenants. Moreover, taking advantage of their economic power and social status, gentry-landlords accumulated land through coercive purchases, extorted high interest on loans, and controlled local markets. They placed various demands on local officials in order to promote their own private interests, and when they resisted tax payment, local officials would not, or could not, readily coerce them (Shigeta, 1971b, 1971c).

Shigeta's thesis on "gentry rule" was built on his earlier work (1966) on the significance of the combined land-and-poll tax (*didingyin*) in which he shared Oyama's view that feudalism in China was established in the late Ming and early Qing period. For Shigeta, early Ming society was composed primarily of self-cultivating farmers who paid land tax on their land and poll tax according to the number of male adults in their households. Toward the end of the Ming, however, the concentration of land in the hands of large landowners made it difficult for the state to collect the poll tax. Eventually, the state's attempts to collect the poll tax became unrealistic because large numbers of people were landless tenants who had too little surplus to pay any tax. To meet this reality, the state adjusted the tax system by combining the poll tax with the land tax and levying the combined taxes only on the land.

In other words, the state created the land-and-poll tax out of realistic concern for securing tax revenue. However, Shigeta pointed out, the new system produced far greater consequences than the state had envisioned: it inadvertently altered the principle of taxation that had been the norm of the ancient Chinese empires, namely, direct taxation on all subjects (male adults). By combining the land and poll taxes, and collecting the taxes only from landowners, the state virtually abandoned the poll tax, the principal link between the state and its individual subjects. Thus the state practically gave up the principle of direct rule over every individual subject and became dependent on the landlord for raising tax revenue.

For this reason, Shigeta argued, the state protected the rights of landlords to collect rent from their tenants. Protecting private rent collection meant securing state revenue, or as the proverb goes, "the tax revenue comes out of the rent." It was not by coincidence, Shigeta pointed out, that a sub-statute regarding the state sanction against delinquent tenants was instituted around the time when the new tax system was enforced on an empire-wide scale during the reign of the Yongzheng emperor (1723-1735). In this way, state tax reform opened the way for rule through gentry-landlords (Shigeta, 1966).

It has been widely acknowledged that the new arrangement for tax collection replaced the *lijia* system which had been instituted in the early Ming. Japanese scholars have written a great deal, dating back to the pre-war period, on the nature of state control through the *lijia*. One of the questions raised by these studies was whether or not the state in organizing the *lijia* units honored the natural boundaries of villages and the social hierarchy within the villages. On this question, Ming specialists were split. Some suggested that it was a device of the state not only for tax collection but also for social control. Others proposed that there were at least some links between the *lijia* units and natural villages, and that the *lijia* units functioned not exclusively for purposes of tax administration but also for some communal concerns. As to the communal life of the peasants, everyone assumed that small farmers needed to resort to communal cooperation in order to survive and maintain agricultural production. Yet the question remained whether or not the villagers had enough surplus to sustain communal activities such as relief and recreation, considering the level of agricultural productivity attained by early Ming times.⁸

On the question of the relationship between the *lijia* units and the village hierarchy, Oyama Masaaki's study of the tax captain (*liangzhang*) shed important light. According to Oyama, tax captains, whose position was instituted in early Ming in the Jiangnan area, were in charge of transportation of the tax grain collected by the *lijia* heads in the *qu* (sub-county). In other words, the primary duty of the tax captain was to deliver the tax grain

collected in the sub-county to the county (*xian*) government. This service was assigned by the government to the most influential household in the sub-county. In addition, the tax captain allocated corvée duties among the households under his charge, and promoted agricultural production by supervising maintenance of irrigation facilities. Tax captains also heard civil disputes and even delivered verdicts on the disputes despite a statutory prohibition against such action. The lifestyle of tax captains was very similar to that of local officials; indeed they were treated as the social equals of officials. Oyama concluded that state control over the rural population was built on the existing social hierarchy: on top were the households of tax captains which also produced government officials through the civil service examination system; then came the households of the *lijia* heads; and below these elite households were the households of the peasants. Oyama emphasized that the official hierarchy in the *lijia* system reflected the social order in rural society (Oyama, 1969).⁹

Although Oyama's works served as an important support for Shigeta's thesis that feudalism was established in China during the late Ming-early Qing period, Oyama himself did not discuss "feudalism" in his articles. Perhaps this is a good example of the Japanese scholarly style inherited from the pre-war days when sinologists locked themselves in an enclave of historical positivism in order to avoid ideological problems. Even after the war, the typical scholarly article remains extremely terse, devoid of any substantial introduction or discussion that might otherwise make clear the writer's broader perspectives. Moreover, ideas and arguments are usually understated or only implicitly expressed between lines discussing factual matters. These practices do not seem to trouble Japanese scholars who, as members of a highly cohesive academic community, understand the intellectual context out of which their scholarly publications emerge. In fact, even in his essay on tax captains for general readers, Oyama made no reference to "feudalism."¹⁰

If gentry-landlords, as the new elite of the rural society, dominated the rural population, why did they not become territorial lords? This was the final question that Shigeta tried to answer. He suggested that not only did the Qing state depend on landlords, but gentry-landlords depended on the state as well. The primary reason why gentry-landlords needed state authority was, according to Shigeta, the growing self-confidence of tenants and their resistance to rent payments. To collect rents from recalcitrant tenants, gentry-landlords counted on the state's ability to intervene in rent disputes. In this matter, the state and gentry-landlords shared a common interest. The state was willing to stand behind landlords who collected rents from their tenants and paid taxes to the state. Shigeta characterized this as a symbiotic relationship

(Shigeta used a medical term *yuchaku*, meaning adhesion) between the state and landlords, and thus developed his thesis of “gentry rule” (*kyōshin shihai*). Shigeta stated that feudalism in China was established in the late Ming and early Qing period, and that gentry-landlords extended their control over the entire population of a local area, including independent small farmers, through their private police forces and private courts where they judged litigants in the same manner as the magistrates did, executed punishments, and even issued proclamations (Shigeta, 1971c).

Shigeta characterized gentry rule as a “Chinese manifestation of that universal tendency for power to be turned into the semi-independent private property of certain specially privileged strata which grew up under the umbrella of a centralized system” (trans. by Christian Daniels, p. 349 in Grove and Daniels, 1984). Shigeta emphasized the primary importance of the social-economic factors that allowed gentry-landlords to dominate local society and to influence local politics. He regarded the government degrees and official ranks enjoyed by gentry-landlords as the icing on the cake. In the final analysis, Shigeta stated that gentry-landlords fell short of establishing their feudal rule in the strict sense and the best they could accomplish was a symbiotic relationship with the state. “The privileged position which made the gentry what they were was after all guaranteed by and within the framework of centralized dynastic rule. Landlordism was not established according to the principles of feudal rule in the strict sense. Gentry rule was, in effect, the domination of feudal rulers unable to become feudal lords, and it developed to the utmost under the protection of centralized power” (Trans. by Daniels, in Grove and Daniels, 1984).¹¹

The complex relationships between the state and local elites captured by the “gentry rule” hypothesis provoked further questions: (1) Concerning what Oyama and Shigeta called “gentry-style landownership” (*kyōshin teki tochi shoyū*), to what extent was their ownership of land based on their privileges as members of the gentry? (2) Concerning what Shigeta called “gentry rule,” did the gentry-landlords have power and authority to rule over self-cultivating farmers (*jisakunō*)? If so, how was it possible? (3) Were the majority of cultivators landless tenants or small holders? (4) Did the Qing state continue to rule its subjects primarily through its bureaucracy or did it rule through the gentry? If the latter was the case, what kind of arrangements existed between the state and the gentry?

To answer these questions, many historians focused their research on the tax collection apparatus of the state. Nishimura Genshō (1944-) studied the abortive land surveys of 1663 that illustrated the gentry-landlords’ resistance to the state’s attempts to update the land registration, the basis for the land tax. Nishimura concluded that the state was forced to compromise with the

gentry-landlords, and that the "land-poll tax" system was a step toward what Shigeta had called the symbiotic relationship between the Qing regime and gentry-landlords. That the state was unable to collect taxes without cooperation of the leaders of local society was not a new phenomenon. What was new during the Qing, Nishimura argued, was that the growing power of tenants made the landholding system more complex and attenuated the ownership rights of the landlords. During the early Qing, especially in the southern coastal areas, the rights of the users (tenants) of the land was extended to include the right to sell their user's rights to a third party. As a result, land changed hands frequently without the knowledge of the landlords, many of whom did not care to know the precise location of their plots, but were satisfied as long as the rents were delivered. In fact, under such circumstances, it was difficult for the landlords to collect rents without resorting to the threat of, or the actual use of, physical coercion against delinquent tenants. Amazingly, Nishimura pointed out, the Qing government somehow continued to collect land taxes without updated land registers. This was possible only because, Nishimura concluded, the state struck compromises with gentry-landlords, who refused to cooperate in a cadastral survey but promised to pay taxes (Nishimura Genshō, 1974).

Nishimura also discussed the origins and the development of the system of tax collection through private contractors, or the system of "tax farming" (*baolan*), which became prevalent soon after the land-and-poll tax was established in 1733-1735. He discussed five different types of tax farming systems in the Jiangnan area, none of which received statutory sanction. He argued that the state's reliance on private tax farming was inevitable, because the state was not only unable to obtain data on taxpayers' landholdings, but also lacked the bureaucratic apparatus to collect taxes directly from individual taxpayers. The tax farming system allowed the gentry-landlords to collect their "feudal rents" not only from their tenants but also from lesser landlords and small farmers with the claim that they were collecting land taxes for the government. Once private tax farming was tacitly approved by the state, the tax farmers, who served as the agents of local gentry-landlords, pressured small farmers to sell out their rights to pay taxes. For small farmers, it was virtually impossible to resist tax farmers, Nishimura pointed out, because if they chose to deliver their taxes to the yamen, they had to deal with the clerks and runners who were usually a part of the tax farming racket. In the absence of updated land registers, the amount of taxes levied on individual families was decided by local government clerks based on their own record books. Also, it was clerks and runners who measured the tax grain, examined the quality of the tax silver, and issued tax receipts. In this process extortion and fraud were common. For individual taxpayers, it was less painful to pay tax

farmers who operated under the patronage of gentry-landlords. In fact, some of the tax farmers were bondservants of gentry-landlords (Nishimura Genshō, 1976).

Scholars generally agree that the social and legal privileges of the members of the gentry ultimately protected their tax farming activities. One of the gentry privileges was exemption (*yournian*) from labor tax. After the land and labor taxes were combined and levied on land, a part or all of the lands owned by members of the gentry was exempted from taxation. This prompted commendation (*guiqi*) of land to gentry families by their kinsmen and unrelated landholders who did not have gentry status. To examine how the privileges were distributed among the members of the gentry, Wada Masahiro (1942-) analyzed the statutory basis of the labor tax exemptions for degree holders. According to Ming regulations, the amount of land that could be claimed for exemption varied in accordance with the rank and status of the degree holder or official. Despite the regulations, Wada pointed out, the amount of the land transferred to gentry households increased. The state attempted to restrict the amount of exemptions, lest the tax-paying farmers without exemption privilege become overburdened. Wada's study, which focused on the *juren* degree holders in the lower Yangzi area during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, demonstrated that the state was unable to prevent the abuse of gentry privileges. Rural crisis finally compelled the gentry to accept a reform known as the "land-based service equalization" (*juntian junyi*) system which was designed to ameliorate the plight of small taxpayers stemming from taxation abuse by large landholders (Wada, 1978; see also, Yamamoto, 1977).

Two centuries later, taxes remained a major issue as the state and gentry battled over provincial-level fiscal reforms. Usui Sachiko (1949-) published a series of studies of tax administration in Jiangsu province that illuminate the delicate balance in the tug of war among the local elite, provincial and regional authorities, and the central government. Usui analyzed two sets of tax reform proposals, one submitted in 1863 by Feng Guifen, a notable member of the local gentry, and the other, officially proposed by the governor of the province in 1865, and the final decisions made by the central government. From these, Usui concluded that, despite the gentry's attempts at restructuring the tax administration system for the purpose of taking over tax collection, the state apparatus remained intact; the county government continuously administered tax collection with the government clerks and runners still in charge. Moreover, the gentry leaders' plea for reduction of the tax burden in Jiangsu province was not heeded; rather the reform resulted in actual tax increases as the state was pressed by ever increasing financial needs. As the tax burden in the province increased, Usui emphasized, the

inequity of the tax burdens between the large and small land holders also increased. The larger land holders were given much better exchange rates for commutation of grain and cash, and, as a result, the smaller taxpayers were made to bear even heavier burdens (Usui, 1981, 1984, 1986).

The prominence of provincial efforts at tax reform reflects a shift in relations between the center and the provinces. It has been generally recognized that the central government's ability to control provincial finance declined considerably after the great rebellions in the mid-nineteenth century, when the provincial governors were pressed by their own financial needs. The latter were forced to tap new sources of revenue for suppression of the rebellions and for financing reform programs. A question awaiting clarification is: To what extent did the provincial authorities gain financial autonomy vis-à-vis the central government? Some studies have portrayed a situation in which the traditional system of fiscal control over provinces totally collapsed, and financially autonomous provinces supported the central government not through regular remittance of tax funds but through irregular contributions in response to requisitions from the central government. According to a study by Iwai Shigeki (1955-), the traditional system of financial allocation (the system in which tax funds raised in some provinces were channeled to the central government or to other provinces that fell short of self-support) ceased to function after the mid-nineteenth century. By that time, Iwai concluded, the financial needs of the central and provincial governments had expanded beyond the capacity of the traditional system (Iwai, 1983). Other studies illustrated the financial balance between the central and provincial governments tipping in favor of the latter. Some studies suggested that the changing financial relationships between the central and provincial governments was a clue to understanding the background of the 1911 Revolution. Kuroda Akinobu (1958-) studied monetary reforms in Hubei province and demonstrated that commercial prosperity at Hankou, a newly opened trading port, gave greater financial autonomy to the province and contributed to its centrifugal propensity (Kuroda, 1982, 1983). The issue of the financial balance between the central and provincial governments was further explored in recent studies by Kuroda (1987, 1988), Miki Satoshi (1987), and Yamamoto Susumu (1988).

Japanese scholars who discussed nineteenth-century state-gentry relations paid special attention to peasants and their great rebellions. Shigeta Atsushi discussed the peasant movements as a crucial factor behind the alignment of gentry-landlords and the state. Tenant resistance against rent payments during and after the Taiping Rebellion was viewed as an especially important factor that deepened the crisis of landlordism and prompted the further

collusion between landlords and state authorities. Efforts to substantiate this point have continued. Studies based on finer examination of first-hand materials, such as record books of landlord bursaries, brought to light convincing evidence of the rising power of tenants vis-à-vis landlords. Natsui Haruki's (1949-) analysis of rent collection at a landlord's bursary in Suzhou is a good example. Takahashi Kōsuke (1943-) examined local magistrates' handling of disputes between landlords and their recalcitrant tenants in the early twentieth century when many such cases were reported in newspapers (Natsui, 1981; Takahashi, 1980; Miki, 1982).¹²

Through the 1970s and into the early 1980s, the research agenda set by Shigeta continued to guide mainstream research in Tokyo. One example is Kawakatsu Mamoru's (1940-) huge volume on the tax system of the Ming and Qing dynasties, published by the University of Tokyo Press in 1980, *The Administrative Structure of the Feudal State in China*. His subsequent articles illustrated the domination of local gentry families over local society, which he characterized as "feudal rule." Another giant volume from the University of Tokyo Press, Hamashima Atsutoshi's (1937-) work on rural society in late-Ming Jiangnan, suggested that the gentry-landlords, who had settled in urban centers and thus were no longer capable of controlling rural affairs, yielded to state authority in matters concerning maintenance of irrigation systems and accepted tax reforms that were designed to alleviate the excessive tax burden on small farmers (Kawakatsu, 1979, 1980, 1981; Hamashima, 1982a).

The system of irrigation control has been scrutinized by many as a mirror that reflected the power structure in the countryside. The assumption is that those who controlled the management of the irrigation system probably controlled the farming community of the area. During the early Ming, the management of water control was one of the responsibilities of the lijia heads and the tax captains who were appointed by the state. When the lijia system was undermined, the duties of the lijia heads were divided among several people. The question is whether the state continued to exert control over water management in the countryside. If not, who was in charge? It appears that villagers sometimes managed the system as a part of communal cooperation. According to some, a new type of small farmer emerged during the late Ming and early Qing periods who was less dependent on the landlord than in the past and who, collectively, were economically capable of maintaining village communities. Another possibility was the creation of private corporations—which were separate from both the village communities and state administration—by the major users of the irrigation system. Presumably such private corporations were dominated by the gentry-landlords. The roles of

the local gentry and the state authorities in water control continue to be researched and debated vigorously (Hamashima, 1982b. For an earlier study of water control systems in central and south China during the Qing, see Morita, 1974).

Shigeta's thesis of a "feudal rule" of the gentry within the centralized state inspired many but did not convince all. Even those who accepted its premises recognized that it had serious problems. The most troublesome problem was that, in reality, self-cultivating small farmers not only continued to exist, but that they were the overwhelming majority of the rural population. How did gentry-landlords extend their "feudal rule" over these small farmers, or did they? To deal with this problem, Tanaka Masatoshi (1922-), a leading authority at the University of Tokyo, presented a paper at a meeting of *Rekishi Kagaku Kyōgikai* (Historical Science Association) in 1972. Commenting on the widely accepted understanding of *lijia* units as groups of small-scale owners of land, Tanaka argued that these small farmers in Ming China should not be regarded as the same as small farmers in modern societies. He pointed out that the similarities between the two, such as self-management and use of family labor, should not obscure the differences between the two. First of all, the concept of ownership rights in China was not the same as in modern societies where owner-cultivators enjoy exclusive, absolute, and perfect rights to their land.

Professor Tanaka characterized the existence of self-cultivating farmers in Ming China as a transient phenomenon of history and stated that those small farmers were sooner or later to be differentiated into two groups, namely landlords and tenants. Furthermore, he stated that self-cultivating farmers existed merely as an ideal conceptual type under the universal rule of the emperor, which provided the state with an ideological basis for collecting taxes from all subjects. In reality, Tanaka continued, even before gentry-landlordism became prevalent during the Qing period, the rural Chinese population consisted mostly of landlords and their serf-like tenants. In this way, he "solved" the problem of self-cultivating small farmers by denying their existence (Tanaka, 1972).

Yanagita Setsuko sharply rebutted Tanaka's statement on small farmers: How could self-cultivating farmers, who appear as the great majority in official records since Song times, be relegated to a "transient category" to be differentiated sooner or later? Even the Communist government recognized them as "middle peasants" in their Land Reform. Yanagita emphasized that understanding the small farmers was crucial to explaining the nature of autocratic government in China which lasted for over 2,000 years (Yanagita, 1975. For other discussions of Shigeta's thesis, see Mori, 1975, 1975-1976;

Ihara, 1975; Takahashi, 1977; Grove and Esherick, 1980; Hamashima, 1982b; Grove and Daniels, 1984).

Despite the controversies over his interpretations, Shigeta's approach, by the late 1970s, became an academic convention among social-economic historians in Japan. At this juncture, a young scholar leveled iconoclastic criticisms. Adachi Keiji (1948-), a graduate of Kyoto University, published studies of the management of a small farm in the seventeenth-century lower Yangzi delta in which he presented a new picture of farmers as entrepreneurs, and argued that the standard units of agricultural production in the area were small-scale farms owned and managed by independent farmers. He openly questioned the validity of the theme of "feudal China," stating that the endless citation of examples of serf-like conditions of tenants cannot verify the existence of feudalism in China. The most undeniable historical fact was, he stated, the persistence of a small farm economy that supported the gigantic structure of the imperial government for 2,000 years. Adachi also questioned the proposition that the Qing state lost actual control over the registration of land. Basing his argument on his study of a land register, or "fish-scale book," from the lower Yangzi area, he suggested that, assuming the original entries were updated and supplemented, the data in the book were surprisingly accurate, contrary to the observations of Nishimura Genshō (Adachi, 1978, 1983b).

In a brilliant analysis of the Japanese discussions of "feudalism" in China, Adachi stated that, contrary to the intentions of their authors, most of the works published in post-war Japan demonstrated that the relationship between state and society in late imperial China cannot be characterized as feudalism. He discussed the major theses presented by Niida Noboru, Oyama Masaaki, and Shigeta Atsushi, that had contributed to the foundation of the proposition in question. Adachi criticized Niida for confusing the rights of public control, such as administrative, military, and judicial control, with the rights of private control, such as personal obedience of the tenant to the landlord, absence of the tenant's freedom to move, the landlord's rights to sell his tenants together with his land, high rent, miscellaneous labor services the landlord imposed on the tenant, and so on (Adachi, 1983a). On this point, Adachi's argument was similar to that of Joseph R. Strayer (1904-1987), an eminent American historian of medieval Europe who also commented on feudalism in China and Japan. Strayer adopted the position that it is "only when rights of government (not mere political influence) are attached to lordship and fiefs that we can speak of fully developed feudalism in Western Europe," and stated that "in political terms, feudalism is marked by a fragmentation of political authority, private possession of public rights, and

a ruling class composed (at least originally) of military leaders and their followers" (Strayer, 1956: 16, 1968: 3. Strayer's views are discussed together with other leading scholarly theses in Brown, 1974: 1072-1073).¹³

On Oyama's interpretation of the status and the role of the tax captain during the early Ming, Adachi commented that under the *lijia* system, taxes were collected for the imperial government and were not to be kept by the tax collectors. Adachi admitted the probability of embezzlement, but criticized the assumption that the *lijia* system was established to accommodate the local magnates in the ruling structure. Adachi emphasized that the local magnates in charge of tax collection functioned as public servants and therefore could not be characterized as a prototype of feudal lords. On Shigeta's claim that the gentry-landlords exercised jurisdiction over peasants, Adachi argued that unless their actions were endorsed by the state and were free of state intervention, these actions could hardly be regarded as attributes of feudalism (Adachi, 1983a).¹⁴

Shigeta had hypothesized that the state continued to exist in the feudal society of China as an embodiment of the collective interests of the feudal rulers, that is, the gentry-landlords. To substantiate such a proposition, Adachi argued, it would be necessary to prove the following points: that the gentry-landlords collected the major portion of the surplus not only from their own tenants but also from the rural population at large including owner-cultivators, other landholders' tenants, and lesser landlords; and that the centralized state allowed the gentry-landlords to keep the greater share of the surplus to themselves. It would be unrealistic, Adachi noted, to assume that the gentry-landlords were capable of collecting "feudal rent" from the population at large. Why did Shigeta build his thesis on such shaky ground? Adachi asked.

To answer this question, Adachi suggested that Shigeta was fully aware of the problem, and therefore had to stretch the logic of his thesis in a procrustean manner. The fact was, Adachi continued, that the power of the gentry-landlords fell far short of legitimating their domination over the local population. Therefore, Shigeta explained that they secured accommodation with the state by obtaining *de facto* recognition of their rule by the state and creating a symbiotic relationship. Shigeta had to resort to this sophistry, Adachi suggested, to maintain his assumption that the Qing regime was a feudal regime of the gentry-landlords. Shigeta had stated that the reality of feudal society in China was reflected in the people's struggle over the past 100 years, and that, if we deny feudalism in modern China, it would be tantamount to regarding the "anti-imperialist, anti-feudal" revolution of the Chinese people as misdirected (Shigeta, 1969: 371). This had been the line set by Niida Noboru in 1951. The ideological commitment to evaluate the

Chinese revolution within the Marxist scheme of periodization was shared by many who participated in the debate. Such a commitment generated enthusiasm for further research. At the same time, that commitment caused them to reject alternative themes arising from the rich realities their research uncovered (Adachi, 1983a).¹⁵

ALTERNATIVES TO MARXISM: STUDIES OF LOCAL SOCIETY

Those who expressed dissatisfaction with the prevailing thesis based on the Marxist definition of feudalism were not limited to young scholars like Adachi Keiji. A defiant voice was raised by Tanigawa Michio (1925-), a Kyoto-educated historian who taught at Nagoya University for many years before receiving an appointment at his alma mater. In a book published in 1976, Tanigawa proposed not only to study medieval China as a nonfeudal society, but also to discard the entire concept of feudalism as a means for defining any part of China's past on the ground that the Marxist equation of "medieval," "feudal," and "the serf system" was not applicable to China. He expressed his doubt that a political-social system comparable to European feudalism ever existed in China. In this regard, Tanigawa recognized the merits of Max Weber's and Etienne Balazs' characterization of the Chinese empire as a totalitarian bureaucratic state that persisted from antiquity to the present. At the same time, Tanigawa was ambivalent about the views of Weber and Balazs because of their association with the theory of "Oriental Society," an anathema tantamount to the justification of imperialism. Tanigawa noted that these Western scholars' views evolved around modern European values such as liberalism and individual freedom, and tended to emphasize negative elements, such as lack of individual freedom under a totalitarian regime inherent in China's system. Tanigawa and scholars in Nagoya focused their research on local society (*chiiki shakai*) as "the primary element for historical analysis" (Tanigawa, 1976. Translation by Fogel, 1985: xxi).¹⁶

Local society, or the primary rural community, according to Tanigawa's definition, was a self-generating and self-sustaining community which included within it all social classes. He focused his attention on the moral and cultural quality of the leaders of local society, as well as their relations with the aristocrats in the capital. Tanigawa depicted the aristocrats of the Six Dynasties as a nobility of personal quality who attained their positions in the bureaucracy because of the reputation they enjoyed in their local communities. He emphasized that the community not only admired them but also

trusted them, believing that their moral qualities guaranteed their self-restraint against greed. Tanigawa saw China's uniqueness in its educated bureaucracy, a positive asset in China's legacy. Apparently, Tanigawa was motivated not only by his despair over the Marxist formulation but also by his wish to shed light on positive aspects of China's tradition. Among other leaders of this group at Nagoya were Kawakatsu Yoshio (1922-1984), a specialist of the social history of Medieval China (3rd-10th century A. D.), and Mori Masao (1935-), a social-economic historian of the Ming-Qing period. They follow the legacy of Utsunomiya Kiyoyoshi (1905-), a venerated Kyoto-educated social historian of ancient China who taught at Nagoya. Utsunomiya's scholarship centered on the examination of the thesis that the founder of the Han dynasty gained the throne primarily because of his success in gaining the support of the local elders, and that the Han system of recruiting local elites to the state bureaucracy gave stability to the dynasty (Tanigawa, 1976: 194-195).¹⁷

Central to the analysis of the state-society relationship in this strain of Japanese scholarship has been the question of "community" (*kyōdōtai*, that is, the Japanese translation for *Gemeinschaft*) in Chinese society. After many years of animated discourse on this concept that had its origins in the pre-war era, Japanese scholars have arrived at a general conclusion that China did not have the cohesive village communities once imagined, not to mention the common fields and communal systems of cultivation found elsewhere. Nevertheless, they continued to wonder about the kind of primary community that China's rural population did have. For the Japanese who had experienced cohesive village communities in their recent past, it was quite unsettling to imagine an agrarian society without some sort of communal structure. Those who searched for alternative approaches to the study of rural society began to use a new term, *chiiki shakai* (local society), to avoid the heavily loaded old term, *kyōdōtai*.

A proposal to solve the old puzzle has been offered by Ueda Makoto (1957-), a young scholar at the University of Tokyo, who now teaches at Rikkyō University. His celebrated article, "Magnetic Power that Works in the Village," is a brief research note on the recent history of a village in Zhejiang. Ueda suggested that the people of China were indeed like a loose sheet of sand; however, the sand was "magnetic." In a village there were various "circuits for electric current" such as lineage organizations, secret societies, and government bureaucracy. Once the electric current ran through a circuit, it created a magnetic field, and the people (magnetized sand) responded to it. For example, when a lineage member outside the village sent money for construction of an ancestral hall, the members of the lineage in the village would be mobilized in response. As a result, people within the

magnetic field would form a cohesive group, and this group would function as a community for that particular purpose. The power of magnetic fields varies according to the extent of the circuit. The most powerful circuit has always been the one that was connected to government bureaucratic channels (Ueda, 1986). Ueda's ideas seem to offer a plausible solution to the problem that has bewildered the Japanese scholars for over two generations.¹⁸

In recent years, Japanese scholars have begun to analyze social-economic changes in Chinese local society by examining the productivity of agriculture, population growth, commercialization, increased demands for administrative services, and so on. They no longer regard the stages of development as the key issue. Instead, they seek to understand more fully how the whole system worked at a given time.¹⁹ Among such scholars, Ōtani Toshio (1932-), a graduate of Kyoto University who now teaches at Kagoshima, illuminated gentry-dominated local society in a light different from that shed by the writings of Oyama and Shigeta. In his study of the "gentry-managers" (*shendong*), or the experienced gentry-merchants who were recruited by the provincial authorities to serve at the Bureau of Water Control, a new institution in late-Qing Jiangnan, Ōtani characterized gentry participation in public administration as a response to the government requisition. He discussed how the gentry-managers performed administrative functions by using their private resources under the supervision of government officials (Ōtani, 1980, 1981). In a similar manner, Kataoka Kazutada's (1946-) study of the management of public works in late nineteenth-century Shaanxi province called attention to the significance of gentry participation in the administration of the Bureau of Public Works (*chaiyaoju*), a semi-public corporation for transportation and communication services. It was run by gentry-managers under the supervision of government officials (Kataoka, 1985). Throughout the Qing period, demand grew for administrative skills to manage ever more complex administrative work. Demands on local administration increased to the extent that they could no longer be handled within the old bureaucracy, a bureaucracy that was staffed with a small number of officials with scholarly training but little managerial experience, and a large number of clerks and runners who had a built-in propensity for corruption. To cope with this situation, the government turned to those who had financial resources, managerial skills, and influence over guilds and other local organizations: that is, the local gentry.

As the dramatic changes in social-economic conditions in the early Qing era gave gentry-landlords greater wealth and self-confidence, they demanded greater autonomy in management of the local affairs. The prosperity of gentry-landholders and rich farmers in local society not only influenced politics within local government, but also prompted the development of new

political ideas. Their self-image and positive views on the pursuit of wealth were reflected in the writings of late-Ming and early-Qing philosophers. Intellectual historians have long paid attention to the new trend in philosophical writings during the Ming-Qing transition period.²⁰

Many of the works in social-economic history published in the 1980s were written in the post-Marxian framework. They focus on the "structure" of the society rather than on "stages of development." For an example, works by Kishimoto-Nakayama Mio (1952-), the most productive social-economic historian of the younger generation, demonstrated the promise of the new approach. In a recent article, she has analyzed the late-Ming phenomenon of multi-polarization of political authority, which eventually came to an end with the successful re-structuring of social order under Qing imperial authority. She examined the group dynamics of the urban masses and the power of public opinion in late-Ming Songjiang prefecture in the lower Yangzi area, where all sorts of social groups converged. As a result of the commercialization of agriculture and development of cities where numerous kinds of labor services were in demand, farmers were no longer confined to their villages, and more goods and people went back and forth between the villages and cities. As primary rural communities were undermined, individuals began to form new types of groups known as *she* or *meng* (alliance). These groups were organized either through vertical alliances with a gentry member as the core of each group, or through horizontal alliances of individuals of equal status. A gentry-centered group was formed when many people flocked around a reputable member of the gentry seeking to establish personal ties with him to exploit his social influence. Horizontal alliances could be literary societies of intellectuals or gangs of urbanized laborers who were organized along the lines of their occupation. Kishimoto demonstrated that these groups generated powerful public opinion and staged *minbian* (riots) to express popular sentiment for or against local officials or prominent gentry leaders. In Kishimoto's analysis, the local gentry emerges as an important element in the complex political process during the time of transition, but not as a uniform ruling class as in Shigeta's thesis (Kishimoto, 1987b).²¹

In her study of Qing economic policies, Kishimoto has suggested that Qing government policy, at least in its intention, aimed at achieving stability and harmony for society as a whole, and not at protecting the interests of the landlord class or any other particular group. In the process of implementing its economic policies, the government adopted a flexible approach which allowed local officials to make adjustments according to local conditions. This did not mean, however, that the government delegated its authority to the leaders of local society, she emphasized. She characterized the structure of the eighteenth-century Qing administrative system as follows: Though it

was a centralized system, its local terminals were a nebulous blend of public and private sectors. She noted that without such an ambiguity the system could not have functioned well (Kishimoto, 1987c). On this point, Kishimoto concurred with the observations of Iwai Shigeki, who analyzed financial administration of the central and the provincial governments in the nineteenth century (Iwai, 1983).²²

As an extension of the study of the relationship between the state and local society, some younger scholars have begun to reexamine the 1911 Revolution. They are studying the "structure," or functional relationship between local society and the state. Studies by Yumoto Kunio (1945-), and Kuroda Akinobu are attempts in this direction. Yumoto wrote an ambitious treatise analyzing the changes in the structure of local society in Kunming on the eve of the 1911 Revolution (Yumoto, 1980). Kuroda's analysis of the financial administration of Hubei province under Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909) illustrates the tension between the regional leader and the central government over the control of funds that Zhang raised to meet the ever increasing cost of military modernization (Kuroda, 1983). To mention a few more examples of recent works by younger scholars working along a similar direction, Fuma Susumu discussed the relationship between the state and local elite in his studies of the management of charitable organizations in the lower Yangtze area (Fuma, 1982, 1983, 1986); Tanii Toshihito published an analysis of the state's response to the wide-spread crime of queue cutting during the Qianlong era to illuminate the consequences of social mobilization that made crime control by the state increasingly difficult (Tanii, 1987). Yoshio Hiroshi discussed the problems of local defense in the late Ming period in his study of Yang Sichang, a Minister of War (Yoshio, 1987). Tanaka Issei contributed more case studies of lineage groups in the eastern Zhejiang area (Tanaka, 1989). Ueda Makoto published several imaginative works on the social history of eastern Zhejiang (Ueda, 1987, 1988a, 1988b). The works by this new generation were published not only in well-established journals but also in new journals that sprang up in the 1980s, such as *Chūgoku kindaiishi kenkyū* (Modern Chinese History, published by Chūgoku Kindaishi Kenkyūkai and distributed by Kyūko Shoin, 1981-), *Shingai kakumei kenkyū* (Studies in the 1911 Revolution, published by Shingai Kakumei Kenkūkai, 1981-), *Chikaki ni arite* (Being Nearby: Discussions on Modern China, published by Nozawa Yutaka and distributed by Kyūko Shoin, 1981-), *Raobaishin no sekai* (The World of the Laobaixing, published by Chūgoku Minshūshi Kenkyūkai and distributed by Kembun Shuppan, 1983-), and *Chūgoku: Shakai to bunka* (China: Society and Culture, published by the Sinological Society at the University of Tokyo, 1986-).

CONCLUSION

I have outlined the major themes in the post-war Japanese debate over the nature of state and society in late imperial China. The initial controversy over the periodization of Chinese history remains inconclusive, and the differences in the opinions between the two major schools of Japanese sinology, namely, the Tokyo school and the Kyoto school, have been far from settled. Scholars in Kyoto have maintained the view that the medieval period in China ended between the Tang and Song and that the latter marked the beginning of the early modern era (*kinsei*). Some scholars of the Tokyo School regard the Song period as the beginning of the feudal (therefore medieval) period. Others think that the process of the feudalization of China was completed at the time of the Ming-Qing transition. Both schools acknowledged the differences in each other's views, and the discussions over periodization quickly developed into a debate over the relationship between state and society during the Ming and Qing periods.

The debate stimulated many works that have made important contributions to our understanding of late imperial China. Perhaps the most significant achievement of these works was that they illuminated the great social transformation of the late Ming and early Qing period to reveal that early Qing China was profoundly different from China in the early Ming. New insights into this social transformation have confirmed an image of China dramatically different from the old image of a "stagnant society." According to previous assumptions, there were no significant changes in Chinese society and political institutions from the beginning of the Ming through the mid-nineteenth century when the Western gunboats appeared on China's coast. Now, no one doubts that the dynamics of Chinese society initiated a great transformation before the "Western impact." Among the changes that occurred during the Ming-Qing transition, the most significant was the emergence of the gentry-landlords as a new social elite. The greatest amount of research effort has gone into this topic. Also, changes in the economic condition of the peasantry throughout the Ming-Qing period have attracted attention. The economic and social life of peasants in advanced areas has been understood to have been more diverse and complex than previously assumed. As for the relationship between the state and the local elite, we have begun to understand more about how the local elite participated in the public sector. Studies of tax collection mechanisms; the maintenance of irrigation systems, transportation and communication facilities; relief organizations; and other areas where the members of the local elite shared responsibility with government bureaucrats illustrate the evolution of a new style of

public administration that heavily depended on private resources and local leadership.

The core of the debate has been the question: How do we characterize the Ming-Qing state and society? Was there development of a “de facto feudalism” within the centralized bureaucratic monarchism? Or are we to understand the state-society relationship as a continuation of absolute monarchy making a series of adjustments to cope with the demands of the modern age? For many scholars, the choice between these two themes, namely, what I tentatively call the “feudalization theme” and “absolutist theme,” involved more than the practical question of “which works better?” Considering the intellectual background of the debate that took place during the entire post-war period, it involves deeper ideological issues.

In this article, I have tried to avoid discussion of the intellectual milieu of post-war Japan. To conclude with an analysis of the historical significance of the feudalization/absolutist debate, however, a brief review of the historical background of the debate seems in order. Japan has experienced the birth pangs of a modern state twice: First in the mid-nineteenth century and once more after World War II. Japan’s defeat in the war revealed the bankruptcy of its pre-war strategy for achieving world power status. For historians in Japan, the defeat meant the bankruptcy of their conceptual framework for understanding world history. After the war, when Japan set out to reconstruct its economy, historians began to search for a new conceptual framework. In this process, historians of China assigned themselves the task of dismantling the assumptions of the pre-war scholarship that had been used to justify Japan’s invasion of China and other countries in Asia. Driven by chagrin over scholarship that had been used to condone Japan’s actions in these areas, they pledged to reconstruct a framework for world history that could integrate histories of the advanced European nations and other nations including Japan. At this point, Marxist theory had great appeal, because of its universalist scheme and its idealist prophecies. The debate among Japanese scholars on feudalism in China was part of their collective effort to build a new framework for studying Chinese history and to clear a common research ground for the community of China specialists in Japan. Historians and social scientists specializing in China in post-war Japan started off their work in an environment that was highly cohesive and ideologically sensitive. In this environment, the debate was, in a sense, an ideological campaign to maintain their commitment to the common goals of the academic community.²³

An irony of the debate was that it did not promote comparative studies of premodern societies, despite the fact that it started as an effort to find a

framework for studying Chinese history as an integral part of world history. Marxist faith in a universal law of history seems to have precluded Japanese scholars from opening their eyes to empirical studies of premodern societies in Europe and elsewhere. Of course, it is not an easy task for a historian to learn all the foreign languages necessary to keep up with scholarship in other countries. Still, if there were a strong desire for a comparative perspective, China specialists could have opened meaningful dialogues with scholars of European history in Japan. But the debate was mostly confined to the community of sinologists in Japan.

Leaving the ideological aspects aside, the Japanese debate on feudalism in China was, in essence, a debate on the limits of the state in an agrarian society. The symbiotic structure discussed by Shigeta was, in a sense, what Max Weber called the "liturgical" structure of local government, something which Susan Mann has beautifully illustrated in her book on state and local merchants. In Mann's analysis, the government used the public services of local elites in a conflict-ridden relationship strained by the continuous competition for resources between the state and local communities. Moreover, this system was a compromise arrangement to make up for the limited capacity of the bureaucratic administration. In the liturgical arrangement, Mann argued, the state was forced to compromise with the local intermediaries and had to allow them to "build their own power on the structure provided by the state" (Mann, 1987: 1-2, 12-13, 217). Observations along this line have been made by William T. Rowe, who analyzed the process of the "privatization of administration" in nineteenth-century Hankou (Rowe, 1984), and by Jerry Dennerline who, in his study of the late Ming-early Qing fiscal reform, discussed "participatory local administration," a product of the gentry-bureaucratic alliance (Dennerline, 1975). For Shigeta, who emphasized the class struggle between the landlords and peasants, it was unacceptable to characterize gentry participation in local public affairs simply as a compromise to make up for the limitations of the archaic bureaucracy. Shigeta stated that the archaic state of China, like any archaic state, produced privileged groups of people who infringed upon state prerogatives and privatized part of the state functions for their own benefit. Shigeta pointed out that this line of thinking had been presented in the 1950s by Matsumoto Yoshimi (1912-1974), who had characterized the Chinese gentry-landlords as the "bastards of the bureaucracy" (*kanryōshugi no otoshigo*). Rejecting Matsumoto's approach as an explanation of "feudalization from above," Shigeta stated that a bureaucratic appointment was not the origin of gentry rule but was the final cap on their de facto rule in the countryside. In Shigeta's words, gentry rule in China was "feudalization from below" (Shigeta, 1971c: 169-170). Shigeta held on to this point even when it seemed unconvincing.

His ideological commitment did not allow him to do otherwise. One's choice from among many possible interpretations of factual evidence depends much on one's intellectual outlook and ideological orientation.

The spectrum of ideological orientations among historians in a society may vary from culture to culture. Even in a single society, historians' perspectives change when the self-image of the society changes. In the modern world, however, historians in different societies can share the same questions, and can pursue the same questions from different perspectives. In fact, the Marxist-influenced historians of Japan were asking questions not very different from those asked by American historians. In his work, Oyama Masaaki asked: How did the state respond to the changing nature of the local elite? How did the state try to rationalize the tax system in order to maximize its revenue? In fact, the questions asked by Oyama and many others concern the limit of "state capacity to intervene in society and to control it," and the processes of modern state-making, which Mary B. Rankin discussed in her recent book on the Zhejiang elite (Rankin, 1986: 1-33).

For the younger generation of Japanese scholars, it would be easier to acknowledge that they share with American scholars the same ground for research. Tsukamoto Gen (1959-), a junior scholar at the University of Tokyo, has noted the usefulness of American scholars' perspectives, which he found refreshing and insightful. A series of his articles on Hunan provincial government in the early Republican period is an analysis inspired by the concept of "state-building" in China (Tsukamoto, 1987). Reading through works of younger scholars published in the 1980s, one cannot but feel that they are breaking away from the ideology-laden theme of feudalism in China. They have quietly conducted their research on more concrete and manageable topics, such as the history of a landlord family, economic thought of a landlord, an ordinary man's life in local society, or patterns of settlement in frontier villages. This kind of micro-approach has proven to be fruitful and has become a new trend. The younger generation in Japan today is dubbed *shin-jinrui* ("Neo homo-sapiens"), and has been characterized as a non-ideological, materialist generation. Undoubtedly, the young historians of today's Japan are pursuing practical projects. Although their work indicates that they are mindful of the large questions their predecessors raised, they seem to deal with the questions in more pragmatic ways, translating their research interests into more manageable projects. It appears to me that this new trend is the most promising offspring of post-war scholarship in Japan.

Perhaps the changes in the orientation of Japanese scholars reflect the fact that Japan, as a nation, has achieved its long-cherished goal of becoming a modernized nation equal to those of the West. Its economic success has relieved scholars of the sense of crisis that has so long dominated their

worldview. It appears that, for them, the search for a universal scheme for world history is no longer a matter of great urgency. Liberated from the ideological pressure to formulate a universal theory of historical development, the younger historians appear to be looking at the finer texture of society in late imperial China. Today the mainstream research orientation is no longer toward defining developmental stages (*hatten*) but more and more toward finer analyses of the complexities of social structure (*kozō*). This trend among the younger scholars is their reaction to the prolonged debate over feudalism that has dominated scholarship in modern Chinese history. Instead of confining themselves to ideological debate, they will surely produce rich literature on the structure of Chinese society. As serious historians, however, they will still have to face the old question of how to explain historical change from one type of social structure to another, such as the transition to capitalism.

Japan's younger generation seems to be capable of shaping its research agenda more individualistically than the older generation. Perhaps this is a reflection of an important change in Japanese society; the concept of individual freedom is taking deeper root. Heated discussions on ideologically charged issues have become rare nowadays, to the lamentation of nostalgic older scholars. Notwithstanding all these changes, group efforts to evaluate each others' accomplishments have been maintained by the younger generation today, as exemplified in the publication of annual reviews of the field. In this respect, the Japanese community of scholars seems to retain a character that still differentiates it from its American counterpart.

NOTES

1. Some important works by Shigeta and Oyama have been translated into English, annotated, and analyzed by Linda Grove and Christian Daniels (Grove and Daniels, 1984. See also, Grove and Esherick, 1980).

2. For discussions of the Naitō thesis and its influence, see Miyakawa (1955) and Fogel (1984b). Miyazaki Ichisada, successor to Naitō's chair at Kyoto University, elaborated on the thesis in an effort to draw parallels between Chinese history and world history; for instance, he compared the Song period to the Renaissance in Europe (Miyazaki, 1959a, 1959b).

3. We must hasten to note here that the use of Marxist concepts by Japanese scholars was by no means a simple-minded application of dogma. This point has been emphasized by Grove and Daniels (1984: 3-7) in their discussion of Japanese scholarship on Ming-Qing social-economic history.

4. Even among historians of medieval Europe, supposedly the home of "authentic" feudalism, no comfortable consensus seems to exist concerning the characterization of feudalism or feudal society. This is an observation of Elizabeth A. R. Brown, who has traced shifting meanings of the terms "feudalism" or "feudal system" in the definitions of feudalism by leading

historians of Western Europe of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the conclusion of her survey, Brown deplors the futility of trying to generalize about the intricate complexities of life (Brown, 1974: 1083-1084).

5. Those who were inspired by Niida set the agenda for the debate and the study of the social-economic history of late imperial China. Among them, Shigeta Atsushi, a leading figure in the debate, acknowledged the importance of Niida's work (Shigeta, 1971a: 81-82). In the midst of the enthusiastic reception accorded Niida's article, a sharp-minded scholar expressed his reservations about Niida's sweeping generalization while commending his work as inspiring (Shiga, 1952).

6. Shigeta (1971c) attributed to Oyama the creation of the concept of the "gentry landlordism" (*kyōshinteki tochishoyu*) as a historical category that emerged during the late Ming-early Qing period. Shigeta (1971b) also noted that the term "gentry-landlord" (*kyōshin jinushi*) had been used by Yasuno (1961).

7. In 1976, Tanigawa Michio wrote that "the idea that the tenancy system was serfdom has ceased to be generally accepted among scholars. Even those who had argued the case for feudalism now have misgivings about equating Chinese tenancy with the Western conception of serfdom" (Tanigawa, 1976: 32; trans. Fogel, 1985).

8. Among those who contributed to the body of knowledge on lijia and village community in Ming China are Furushima Kazuo (1921-), Hatada Takashi (1908-), Fujii Hiroshi (1913-), Shimizu Taiji (1890-1960), Yamane Yukio (1921-), Kuribayashi Nobuo (1911-), Tsurumi Naohiro (1931-), Kawachi Jūzō (1928-), Sakai Tadao (1912-), Iwami Hiroshi (1924-), Hosono Kōji (1943-). They in turn owe their understanding to their predecessors, Wada Sei (1890-1963), Matsumoto Yoshimi (1912-74), and Shimizu Morimitsu (1904-) who, in the 1930s, set out to examine the organization of rural society and its links with the centralized bureaucratic structure. For a review of works on local society published from the 1930s through the 1970s, see Tsurumi (1979, 1985).

9. Among others who published important works on lijia and local control, Kitamura Hironao (1919-), Saeiki Yūichi (1923-), Yasuno Shōzō, and Tanaka Masatoshi pursued the question of the relationship between landlordism and privileges of the gentry. As early as 1949 Kitamura conceptualized two types of landlords—the managerial landlords who lived in the countryside, and the "parasitic" landlords who lived in cities (Kitamura, 1949). For evaluations of Kitamura's work, see a review by Nakayama (Kishimoto) Mio in *Toyō gakuho* 57.2 (1976); Yasuno (1974).

10. In the introduction to his chapter on tax reform in the Iwanami series of world history, Oyama characterized the late Ming-early Qing period as "an era in which a system that had been established during the Tang-Song transition transformed itself into another system, which was to become the target of the Land Reform in the post-World War II Revolution" (Oyama, 1971: 313). In a chapter in another book written for students to explain the transformation of the rural elite from the Song to Qing, he did not mention the word "feudal." He simply stated that during the mid-Ming, local elites were large landowners who rendered service to the state as lijia heads, and local magnates in the sub-counties who served as tax captains. When economic changes undermined the lijia system during the latter half of the Ming, a new type of local elite, namely the gentry-landlord, emerged, and the Qing state ruled through the gentry (Oyama, 1967: 50-54).

In a review article, Oyama characterized his work on the large landownership in Jiangnan (Oyama, 1957-1958) as an effort to understand the "disintegration of landownership based on the slave system and the development of feudal landownership" (Oyama, 1966: 283). I cannot find a further explicit statement on the reason why he regarded what he described as attributes of feudalism.

11. The ambivalent relationship between the state and local society in the formative years of the Chinese empire has been a major concern of historians of ancient China. For a review of the discourse on ancient state and society, see Tada (1982).

12. For a bibliography of studies of peasant rebellion, see Takahashi (1978) and Mori (1978).

13. Interestingly, throughout the debate in Japan, little attention was paid to definition of the terms "feudalism" and "absolute monarchism." Discussion went on without scrutinizing these concepts, of which loose definitions were commonly shared in the Japanese community of scholars. Preoccupied with the question of the nature of state and society in late imperial China, the participants in the debate paid little attention to European scholarship on feudalism and absolute monarchism.

Many Japanese historians acknowledged their debt to Chinese scholarship on specific topics, aside from their general respect for Communist assumptions. It is difficult to assess, however, the impact of Chinese scholarship on this debate. During the 1960s and most of the 1970s, Chinese scholars faced extreme difficulties in research and publication, and international scholarly communication was severely limited because of the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution and ideological tension in Japan caused by the war in Vietnam.

14. In fact, quite separately from the discourse on feudalism, legal historians have confirmed that the authoritarian state never surrendered jurisdiction over its subjects. Shiga Shūzō (1921-) and Okumura Ikuzō (1932-) argued that the state never relinquished its jurisdiction over individual subjects and did not condone killing as a private sanction against crimes within a lineage group. see Shiga (1970); Okumura (1969).

15. After all, Adachi maintained, the two axioms in Chinese history were a small farm economy on the one hand, and centralized autocratic monarchism on the other (Adachi, 1983a). Adachi's iconoclastic article was the first item to be discussed by Katayama Tsuyoshi (1952-) in the annual review issue of the *Shigaku zasshi* (Katayama, 1984). Katayama pointed out that, even though the Chinese state never gave up its ideal of direct rule, it did not have a large enough bureaucracy to implement the ideal, and that the state could not even straighten out the records of landownership without assistance from the local intermediaries who stood between it and the small peasants.

16. For translation of the Japanese term *chiiki shakai*, I follow Joshua Fogel's translation of Tanigawa (1976).

17. For outlines of the research projects on local society at Nagoya and Kyoto, see Mori (1979, 1980, 1982) and Tanigawa (1983).

18. The analogy of "magnetic fields" had been suggested in Shigeta's discussion of state and local society (Shigeta, 1975: 164).

Prior to this article, Ueda had published a series of studies on the formation of local communities. Ueda (1983) traced the pattern of settlement of village populations from the Tang through Qing, in reference to the extension of main lineage organizations, development of rural industries, local markets, and the role of lineages in public works such as the construction of dikes and local shrines. Another of Ueda's works (1984) is a close examination of the functions of lineage organizations in a Zhejiang village and the impact of class differentiation on the lineage hierarchy. On this subject, also see an analysis by Tanaka Issei (1932-) of the functions of ritual drama in the Jiangnan area (Tanaka, 1986, 1989).

19. For a critical evaluation of "hattensetsu" (development theory) and a discussion of a new perspective, see Kishimoto (1987a).

20. Among them, Ōtani Toshio emphasized the importance of social-economic factors reflected in the writings of intellectuals such as Huang Zongxi (1610-1695) and Li Zhi (1527-1602). The driving force behind their assertiveness over the legitimacy of profit-making was the growing self-confidence of gentry and entrepreneur farmers. Ōtani reminded his readers

that the new developments in Confucian scholarship, including the School of Statecraft, must be understood in the light of these intellectuals' contests with what he calls "Mandarin Confucians" who defended the absolute authority of the monarch (Ōtani, 1978, 1978b, 1985). While recognizing the importance of the social-economic environment, Mizoguchi Yūzō, a leading intellectual historian at Tokyo, emphasized that philosophical thought has its own logic that transcends social-economic conditions and cautioned against hastily resorting to social factors to explain individuals' thoughts (Mizoguchi, 1979). Although intellectual history is one of the most developed areas in Japanese sinology, space does not permit discussion of the field here.

21. The theme of great social changes during the late Ming-early Qing transition was suggested earlier by Mori Masao who characterized this period as a "crisis in social order" (Mori, 1979). Also, Hamashima Atsutoshi characterized the trend of this era as the disintegration of the ruling structure in the countryside, which had been maintained by the landlords who resided in the rural areas (Hamashima, 1982a).

22. In another of her recent works, Kishimoto sketched an early Qing local society in Shanghai, based on a memoir of a man who was born to a once rich and influential family and lived in the turbulent era of the Ming-Qing transition (Kishimoto, 1986). For earlier examples of this approach, see Terada (1974).

23. Even now, some historians in Japan are preoccupied with ideological questions concerning their mission as China specialists. In review articles, they ask themselves, "For what purpose do we study Chinese history?" and peruse each others' worldview expressed between the lines of their scholarly writings. From time to time, explosive exchanges take place in professional journals; For a recent example, see the exchanges between Mizoguchi Yūzō and Kubota Bunji (1936-) in Mizoguchi (1983, 1986) and Kubota (1985).

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