

Reviews

Philip C. Brown, *Central Authority and Local Autonomy in the Formation of Early Modern Japan* (Stanford University Press, 1993)

reviewed by J. F. Morris
Miyagi Gakuin Womens' Junior College
Sendai, Japan.

Philip Brown's book *Central Authority and Local Autonomy* represents a welcome addition to the English-language literature on early modern Japan. The core of the book is a study of land taxation and land survey methods in Kaga domain from c. 1580 to c. 1650, and it is not surprising that the strengths of the book lie in its evaluation of these two areas. Fortunately Brown also takes up the task of trying to find an adequate framework for describing the nature of the Japanese state in this period, and makes some progress away from the simple "all-or-nothing" dichotomy which is ironically suggested by the title of his book. The book does not provide us with a complete or even adequate overview of the formation of the early modern Japanese state, nor does it even give us a comprehensive analysis of Bakufu-han relations: Brown's subject matter is too limited to permit this. Brown himself remains aware of these limitations, so that mercifully, we are spared the burden of another "definitive study" which slams the door on any further questioning or research. Brown gives us something far more useful: a book which opens the door on questions which too many seem to think were closed beyond reasonable doubt.

At the narrowest level, this book provides us with a case study of the development of the three related areas of land surveying, taxation, and local administration of rural areas in Kaga domain during the formative first century of

the early modern period. Brown finds that in these three areas, the custom of "warichi," whereby villagers "owned" shares in the cultivable land area of each village rather than specific fixed plots, and which had been the prevalent form of peasant land-holding in the region from at least the mid c.16th, gave the development of Kaga domain institutions a very distinctive touch. In Kaga domain, the daimyō made no effort through land surveys to determine individual plots of land or their cultivator. Domainal surveys simply aimed to determine the overall area and productive capacity of each village, and left it up to the villagers themselves to determine which person cultivated any particular piece of land. Concerning taxation, Brown finds that the adoption around 1600 of regular annual inspections of standing crops in order to determine taxes for each individual village resulted in markedly lower levels of taxation, and that the highest levels of taxation in Kaga domain were achieved in the last two decades of the c.16th, i.e. the period immediately subsequent to the Maeda family entering their new holdings there. On the matter of local administration, Brown finds that in Kaga domain this was marked by a dependence on "districts" rather than individual villages as the basic unit of rural administration. The practice of villagers regularly redistributing land within the village in accordance with each villager's share in the overall arable land available meant that the villagers themselves kept accurate records of the available land and its distribution. Therefore, for Kaga domain, effective rural administration was best achieved by utilising this naturally-occurring pattern of land management as the basis for rural control. Seen from Brown's perspective, domainal rural policy was more than non-interventionist; local rural social development played an important contributing role in determining the development and content of Kaga domain's

rural administration. It is this interpretation that brings Brown into collision with mainstream thinking on the nature of the early modern Japanese state.

Given the bottom-up orientation of mainstream Japanese scholarship (i.e. the persistence of the idea that the social base determines social superstructures), Brown's line of thinking here does not appear to be much of a surprise. What sets Brown off from mainstream thinking is that it is the conservative element in rural society that he sees as contributing most positively to the successful development of stable and effective rule in Kaga domain. In Brown's version of the founding of Kaga Domain, there is no place for Hideyoshi's land surveys (the "taikō kenchi" 太閤検地) nor his so-called status laws (身分法 or what Brown would probably call class separation laws). Hideyoshi is portrayed primarily as a military commander, and not as a powerful suzerain with administrative powers reaching deep into the lands of his retainers, and determined to use those powers to effect a policy of social engineering throughout the reach and breadth of Japan. It is Brown's treatment of these dimensions of his findings that give his book an interest beyond its immediate focus as a local case study of Kaga domain.

John W. Hall introduced what were called "local studies" into American scholarship as a way of demonstrating how changes dictated at the centre were implemented at a regional level. In approaching Kaga domain, Brown has turned this approach on its head; he looks at Kaga domain to see if changes purportedly dictated at the centre have any relevance at all for Japan in general, as represented by Kaga domain. Deviations found in Kaga domain from what the hegemony (mainly Toyotomi Hideyoshi) were supposed to have ruthlessly implemented as national policy are not dismissed as mere chance or

attributed to local "backwardness," the traditional excuse for failing to have thought any further. If no evidence can be adduced from Kaga domain to support the argument for Hideyoshi's land surveys having been implemented in the region, or if no evidence can be found to suggest that Hideyoshi's sword hunts were conducted in the area, or that the Tokugawa Bakufu could and did readily move about daimyō at will, then Brown goes looking for evidence to see if these policies were indeed implemented anywhere. The "local region" or "periphery" has changed from being an imperfect mirror of "the centre" into an autonomous actor who can serve to question the presumptions of "the centre." Now that Brown has demonstrated that "local history" has more uses than simply providing illustrative examples, I hope that any claims made for the history of "the centre" will be subjected to a more rigorous and realistic standard of proof.

In terms of specific content, what Brown has to say about revising our ideas about "the centre" may be summarised in the three points given above. Before yet another American Ph. D. student embarks on a litany of the overwhelming power of the Tokugawa Bakufu as an introduction to a thesis, that person should have a look at Brown's "Introduction," especially p. 24 on the limitations on the Bakufu's use of its power of fief transfer and attainder. Also, Brown's tying together of recent research on the "kokudaka system" (石高制) on pp. 75-88 finally liberates those restricted to English-language sources from having to think of this system as representing a radical break from its precursors, that it was necessarily predicated on the payment of taxes in rice, and that Hideyoshi enforced this system/standard uniformly throughout Japan. For those who might find Brown's argument a bit too strong, it should be pointed out that he has consistently taken a rather

conservative stance in arguing his case. In fact, his argument is an example in moderation, as he consistently takes the most minimal conclusion that the data he presents will support. A closer look at the data for actual "taikō kenchi" can support conclusions even more radical than those advanced by Brown. Even those who find Brown's detailed data on Kaga survey and taxation purposes too detailed, should take the time to look at these pages to deepen their understanding of the limits to Hideyoshi's much-touted surveys. Furthermore, I would think that Brown's handling of the birth of the "kokudaka-system" will make far more sense to historians from other fields looking for an explanation of the birth of early modern Japan that reads like a description of something from the real world rather than say, science fiction.

Brown is on solid ground when dealing with matters related to taxation and land surveys, but he becomes shaky when he enters into the other two areas to which he devotes a considerable part of his book. Kaga domain is marvelously rich in data on surveys and taxation for the period in which Brown is interested, but is suffers from a great paucity of documentation on the actual villages and villagers about whom Brown is writing. This fault is not of Brown's making; to rectify it would require forgery. However, whether intentional or otherwise, the lack of information on village society is a problem for Brown's argument. Brown's focus on the district as the basic unit of integration of local and domain administration is interesting and suggestive, but this reviewer could not help but wonder how a "fuchi-byakushō" (扶持百姓) or "tomura" (十村) could be fully informed about conditions in all of the several villages attributed to his care. There was clearly some dependence on village headmen, but these people remain nebulous and undefined. Brown needed to address at least the issue of

whether the perspective his documents reveal is unnaturally slanted towards the district to the detriment of the village, or whether the lack of documentation on villages is in itself an integral part of the story. Likewise, Brown attributes changes in the form of tax assessment mainly to changes in domainal policy. We are not told whether these changes might conceivably be related in any way to changes in village society, yet are left with the question of why villagers could pay under higher rates of taxation in the late c. 16th, and yet had to resort to usurious lenders in order to pay substantially reduced tax rates in the first half of the c. 17th. For the explanatory weight given to villagers as playing an active, formative role in Kaga domain institutions, they are most conspicuous in Brown's book by their absence. Brown is too honest to rectify this problem by outright forgery or its academic equivalent, unsupported assumption or assertion. If indeed nothing at all can be said with any degree of certainty about the role of the administrative village or the implications of changes in village society in Kaga domain, then even just acknowledging the possibility of these lines of argument would have given Brown's arguments more depth and resonance.

However, the part of Brown's argument with which I have the most trouble is his section on the development of the status system (身分制) or what Brown calls the "class system." To begin with, I have trouble with confusing "class" with "status. No matter how far Marxian theories may have fallen into disrepute, I still think it is more productive to distinguish between "class" as an essentially economic category, and "status" as essentially a socially-determined category related to, but definitely not the same as "class." Brown argues that the separation of "bushi" (武士) and peasant in Kaga domain took place over almost a century and in accordance with developments largely within and

around Kaga domain, rather than in response to any directives that Toyotomi Hideyoshi may have issued to attempt to bring this change about by fiat. This argument parallels Brown's arguments concerning the genesis, implementation and content of the "kokudaka system," and is one with which, in principle, I agree. I do have considerable reservations, however, about the way Brown arrives at this conclusion. One problem about Brown's book for the uninitiated reader is that key terms are too often introduced without explanation: for example, the key term "Kaisaku Hō" (改作法) is introduced without any explanation. At this level, this is a problem of readability for the uninitiated, but in the case of the status system, this lack of attention to defining terms becomes a serious problem. The debate about the status system, what it was and how it arose is every bit as convoluted and littered with false leads and unproven assertions about hegemonial intervention as the debate concerning the "kokudaka system." The difference is that the debate over the status system has never been pursued to the extent of that over the "kokudaka system," so that there are no comprehensive studies to which one can look for ready overviews and guidance (or misguidance...). By failing to define what were the defining aspects of the early modern status system, Brown leaves both himself and his reader to flail about in the dark. From the later c17th, a person's status was defined by which family register (人別改帳 or variant) that person was listed on; even if resident in the same village, as in Sendai domain, people of "hyakushō" (百姓) status would be listed on a different register from people of "bushi" status. This type of register is never referred to in Brown's book. Official status was determined by the type of "service" (役) one provided for the lord of one's region. People of "bushi" status and peasant status were expected to render different kinds of "service;"

this difference being the very heart of the system so far as officialdom was concerned. Brown is silent also on this crucial area. However, paying some attention to this aspect of the status system might have led Brown towards one possible answer to one of the unsolved puzzles of his book, the problem of the rise and fall of landed fiefs in Kaga domain.

According to Brown, there was a veritable explosion in the number of landed-fiefs granted to retainers in Kaga domain around 1612. Brown deals with this sudden expansion in the extent of landed-fiefs which rose from a total of 235,000 koku in 1612 to some 900,000 koku by 1616 (p. 186-7) largely in terms of the domain searching (unsuccessfully) for a more effective and rational tax collection system. It would be interesting to know whether this burst in granting fiefs had anything to do with problems in securing peasant labour for Maeda retainers trying to fulfill military service obligations, and whether the subsequent abolition of fiefs was predicated on the growth of urban labour markets as a suitable alternative to enforced peasant corvée service. Personally, I hesitate to suggest that this classic argument for the "role" of landed-fiefs as put forward by Sasaki Junnosuke represents the total argument, but it does serve to show that there are other lines of argument that can be pursued in dealing with the matter of landed-fiefs other than just viewing them as a part of the overall domain taxation structure. This is all the more important since Brown needs to explain why the domain persisted in maintaining the institution of landed-fiefs in Kaga despite their obvious failure in delivering taxes, which is the main role he ascribes to them.

Actually, in his treatment of landed-fiefs in Kaga domain, Brown has broken new ground without realising it. Apart from seeing the rapid expansion of landed-fiefs

from around 1612 as representing part of the domain's experimentation with new forms of taxation, Brown treats the persistence of landed-fiefs as though it were related to the process of separating status groups, 兵農分離. Landed-fiefs (地方知行制 ジカタチギョウセイ) and the separation of status groups are two unrelated problems, unless the fief-holders farm their fief land, or one is talking about giving fiefs to farmers, neither of which was the case in Kaga domain. Moreover, even in these two special cases, closer examination of the actual content of the system may reveal a society with a clearer division between different status groups than in supposedly well-ordered domains like Kaga. Granted that Brown's handling of the interpretative importance of landed-fiefs is very badly dated (I would like to point out here that Brown is merely following mainstream American research on this point, as his footnotes demonstrate), by sticking faithfully to his material he does provide enough relevant data to point up a problem central to thinking about landed-fiefs in Kaga. Edo period landed-fief systems, to work, require a detailed listing, plot by plot, of the land assigned in fief and the person responsible for paying taxes due on each plot of land. The fief thus assigned was typically held in the family for generations unless some special circumstances intervened. Brown's work on Kaga land surveys make it clear that the institutional infrastructure necessary to support a viable landed-fief system, principally a plot-by-plot listing of all arable land within the domain, simply did not exist. Retainers granted land in fief had only a vague idea of the location of their fiefs, and these fiefs were rotated too often to allow retainers (or their tax agents) to get any experience in taxing any given particular village. If Kaga domain never had the institutional infrastructure to support a viable land-fief system, then what requires explanation is not why the fief

system was abolished, but why the Maeda family ever tried to set up this system on such a huge scale in the first place (by 1616, the greater part of domain lands must have been granted in fief), and why they persisted with this system until 1654 despite its being a fiscal disaster (as Brown makes clear). The ramifications of the problem that Brown has thrown up here are not quite at the same level as his work on surveys, taxation, and "taikō kenchi," but his findings do make an important contribution by making clear for the first time what was "atypical" about landed-fiefs in Kaga as a starting-point for understanding why they were abolished there.

As I have suggested above, Brown's argument is not without problems. Those areas where his argument is weakest are where he has depended most heavily on standard (aged?) American sources for his interpretative framework. A better grounding in more recent Japanese historical research might have made for a more convincing argument overall. Notwithstanding the shortcomings of his argument, Brown does succeed in those areas where he ties together his own research in primary sources with innovative Japanese scholarship which supplies the material and ideas to further develop his own findings. As a result, the English-language literature on early modern Japan now finally has a work which argues the case for a more limited interpretation of the powers and intentions of the founders of the early modern state. Brown's argument is neither conclusive nor complete, but it is put strongly enough so that subsequent research can only ignore it at peril. Hideyoshi, in future, will have to be a little more circumspect, and in itself, this is an important step forward.

About the reviewer: John Morris was awarded the degree of Doctor of Literature from Tohoku University in 1986

for his thesis on the landed-fief systems of Sendai and Nambu domains, and published as 『近世 日本知行制の研究』清文堂、大阪、1988. He teaches on Japanese culture and Australian society at Miyagi Gakuin Womens' Junior College, Sendai, Japan.

Kumayama chō shi: Ōaza hen 熊山町史一大字編: 通史編, 参考史料編 470 pages, ¥5,000

Philip Brown
Niigata Japan

Local histories (city, town, and village histories) in Japan tend to follow a few, set patterns which are reflected in both the structure and the emphases of the volumes. My own personal tendency probably reflects the approach of many local history users. I start by seeking out histories that have fairly extensive collections of documents, especially those that have separate *shiryō* volumes with document titles indexed chronologically within subject categories. Most local history users quickly recognize that within a given region, much of what is written in general treatments of village or town histories (*tsūshi*) quickly gets repetitive and that what we really want is to identify those documents which directly illuminate our research problem. The end result is that single volumes which appear to be general treatments are far less likely to be given a serious look.

Kumayama chō shi: Ōaza hen would at first appear to be just such a general volume, yet the concepts underlying it (the first of three) are distinctive, the materials collected here rather unusual, and the outcome fortuitous, at least for early modern specialists interested in land use patterns, the relationship between settlements and their surroundings, and local cultural history. Under the general guidance of

Ishida Hiroshi 石田寛, emeritus professor of Hiroshima University, the editorial committee and its staff faced a formidable challenge: How do we develop an overview of the region incorporated as Kumayama Town (1954), in the face of the very limited number of documents that often are employed to prepare such a history?

The inspiration for meeting this challenge came from Ishida's background as a geographer. Using several early modern maps, maps from the early Meiji era and modern maps, Ishida has reconstructed the relationship between Kumayama villages and their natural environment. The major effort here was to reconstruct the shifting course of the Yoshii River, the northernmost of the three large rivers that drain modern Okayama Prefecture, and its impact on settlements.

A second innovation was to structure the volume in geographical units that were constant over the early modern and modern eras down to the immediate post-war years, the *ōaza*. This consistency in the units facilitated the use of oral history in the absence of other documentation. Even when the *ōaza* lost their superior administrative position (they were incorporated into larger administrative villages before World War II) many residents still viewed them as their "neighborhood" and through the *ōaza* and its subdivisions, they identified the location of their farm plots.

To recreate a record of how *ōaza* expanded their territory and transformed land from one use to another, Ishida conducts a careful analysis of the meaning of local place names in conjunction with the available written documentation and close examination of the topography. Although not as certain an precise as contemporary documents, I believe readers will find the results of his analytical approach interesting.