

## Some Observations

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Each of the papers in this panel touches on issues which individually are significant enough to warrant more leisurely consideration. We have Professor Fukaya on the subject of the relations between a daimyo and his retainers, a complex topic in which nothing is ever quite as it seems. There is Professor Hori on the virtually untouched theme of daimyo relations with their peers. Professor Morris directs our attention to the persistence of landed fiefs, a subject consigned to obscurity for a generation, and Professor Sippel moves well beyond the standard superficialities to look and the far from one-sided interaction between villagers and those who taxed them. Every one of these issues is of the greatest importance in determining precisely how Tokugawa Japan works. Perhaps one of these days, when more pressing matters of gender and sexuality have been resolved, we might see them receiving the notice they deserve.

For convenience I am dividing the four papers into two groups, an easy enough exercise, since Professor Fukaya and Hori, dealing as they do with the daimyo class, and specifically with two successive daimyo of Bizen, make a natural coupling, as do Professor Morris and Sippel, each of whom is concerned with the land—those who claimed authority over it, and those who worked it. The panel is in fact very nicely balanced between superstructure and substructure. I shall comment on each group first and then launch headlong into some observations.

Immediately after reading the Fukaya and Hori papers I grabbed for my copy of *Dokai kōshūki*. This, as many will know, is a work consisting of confidential appraisals of the state of each daimyo domain around the year 1690. The Bakufu commissioned them, and the officials it charged with the task of compiling them were most certainly not afraid to be critical where they thought criticism to be due.

So what do these reports have to tell us about the Bizen domain just eight years after the retired Mitsumasa's death, and some eighteen years after Tsunamasa had replaced him as daimyo. It's rather interesting, so I'll quote a couple of passages.

The habits of the samurai are orderly, and many cultivate both the literary and military arts. However this is not due to the present daimyo, Iyo no kami. It is due to the legacy of his father, Shintarō Mitsumasa, who was unmatched in the practise of letters and military matters and possessed of an abundance of fine qualities. Because the policies of Mitsumasa's time as they relate to government have not been altered, the people are happy and prosperous.

So that's the Bakufu's secret assessment of Ikeda Mitsumasa, who emerges from it sounding suspiciously like the *meikun* Professor Fukaya claims he wasn't.

Mitsumasa's son, Tsunamasa, who is the subject of Professor Hori's presentation, does not fare nearly so well under Bakufu scrutiny. Here is what *Dokai kōshūki* says of him:

Tsunamasa is stupid by nature, and lacks discrimination. His father Mitsumasa was famous throughout the realm as a master of the literary and martial arts. The son is ignorant and illiterate. Although he owns a mountain of books relating to Confucianism and military affairs, he has not looked at any of them. In consequence he is obtuse and ill-behaved. He devotes himself day and night to drinking parties and disreputable behavior, neglecting the way of government.

In the context of Professor Hori's paper, therefore, we can certainly see why the Bakufu might have preferred his distant cousin over in Tottori, and why he might have been reluctant to give Tsunamasa the court rank he wanted—at least without some money changing hands. Professor Hori's paper skirts around this latter possibility quite delicately, but since it also refers to the daimyo of Sendai and Satsuma having "consumed themselves" in the mid-eighteenth century trying to have their status raised, it's not a completely impossible scenario.

Nevertheless, if the passages I've just quoted from *Dokai kōshūki* lend credence to the substance of Professor Hori's paper, they do raise some questions about the *meikun* issue presented to us by Professor Fukaya. I should say at this juncture that I find Professor Fukaya's argument entirely plausible and—except for the problem raised by the Bakufu's secret report—entirely convincing. Bering in mind the kinds of tensions that always existed between a daimyo and his vassals, it makes sense that the latter should try to control the former—unobtrusively if possible, but in any case control was an issue from which retainers simply could not afford to back away. Far too much was at stake.

So what more natural than that they should fabricate the picture of a model ruler, and use that as yet another instrument in their perennial attempt to keep their daimyo under restraint? Mitsumasa's vassals, the minute he was dead, started to create an image of their late lord not as he was, but as they would have wished him to be, and the way in which they hoped that his successors might be. Where the real Mitsumasa was suspected by the Bakufu, resented by his retainers, and disliked by his people, the phony one was universally loved, and for just the right set of qualities.

All of this makes sense to me but, as I said, it does leave us with the *Dokai kōshūki* testimony to explain away. We know the Bakufu had its doubts about Mitsumasa, so, in the context of a secret report, why should its inspectors have pulled any punches? If they could say that the living Tsunamasa was stupid and illiterate, why could they not say that the dead Mitsumasa was untrustworthy, authoritarian and greedy? Instead, at the very moment that the Bizen vassals are inventing their *meikun* image, the Bakufu seems content to accept it too. As the King of Siam once said on Broadway, "It is a puzzlement." I certainly don't have the answer, but it's certainly a query that needs to be raised. Perhaps Mitsumasa really was a *meikun*.

With the papers from John Morris and Patricia Sippel (both of whom, incidentally, I am proud to claim as my fellow-countrypersons—and perhaps it is here that I should express my gratitude to Phil Brown for acting as the panel's token American) we are brought very much closer to the land. There can be no doubt that both papers have got it right—in John's case, that the significance of *jikata chigyō* have been minimized all too often, and the *hatamoto* left out, in the general stampede to construct a picture of a Japan in which samurai all live in castle towns and draw salaries. In this, as in so much else in Tokugawa Japan, where experience varied wildly from place to place, we can really take nothing for granted. It is an interesting topic and, I suspect, an extremely complicated one.

Patricia Sipple's paper, too, is absolutely convincing. It's all very well to make diagrams of Tokugawa Japan's power structure showing the shogun at the top, followed by the daimyo, followed by the samurai, followed by everybody else, especially the farmers, with everybody able to push around everyone beneath them, but we all know that's a caricature. Villagers were not powerless, not nearly so powerless as the wording of Bakufu and *han* laws suggests. Their negotiating position was, if not one of equality, then certainly not far from it—the power structure, after all, needed them rather more than they needed the power structure. As Patricia says of the villagers of Nishi-Takahashi and Nishi-Mizunuma, "It was, after all, their community." They could comply when it seemed appropriate, and resist when it seemed appropriate. Taken in conjunction with John's paper, it made me wonder what on earth would have happened if the hare-brained scheme proposed by every ideologue from Ogyū Sorai to Ikuta Yorozu had been put into practice. If the samurai had been forced out into the countryside, and the doctrinaire position demanded, and made to work their fiefs as farmers, how would existing fief-holders have coped with the influx and, more importantly, how would the villagers? If the Shimotsuke villagers were uncooperative about bringing in a few farmers from elsewhere, imagine how they would have reacted to a mass invasion of soft-handed samurai.

Now Professor Fukaya has warned us against going down the blind alley represented by the debate over a centralized or decentralized Tokugawa Japan. On the whole I tend to agree with him, because it seems to me that the debate, such as it is, is not so much about the actual phenomena involved as it is about interpretations, and interpretations, as we know, can be influenced by many extraneous elements, among them temperament, perspective and opportunity. How are we to describe the *bakuhau taisei* — is it incomplete central government or limited regionalism? Should we deplore a failure to proceed to total national integration, or applaud the resolute survival of regional independence? Is the glass of the *bakuhau taisei* lamentably half-empty or heroically half-full? Pessimists might say the former, optimists the latter. Observe the glass from the top down and it appears half empty; from the bottom up, it seems half full. Neither position is totally right, and neither totally wrong, and in any case, both are oversimplifications. Two hundred and sixty-some years is a long time, and naturally there were fluctuations in the water level, both from time to time, and from place to place. Sometimes the level inched up a little, as it did under Tsunayoshi, for example, and sometimes it went down. It was certainly not static and, like just about everything else in Tokugawa Japan, was subject to enormous regional variation, so that, for example, the level in Fukuyama was always much lower than in Satsuma.

But what is certain, as these papers all demonstrate, is that each side of the *bakuhau taisei* — the *baku* on one hand and the *han* on the other — had an essential role to play in the Tokugawa order. Take the status question which Professor Hori has presented to us. I quite understand that Tsunamasa was angling for higher court rank not from any wish to strengthen his links with Edo, but rather to re-establish his status *vis-a-vis* Tottori, and by implication with all the other daimyo as well. That's a good point. But to get that status he had to turn to the Bakufu — there was just nowhere else to go.

Then, too, if you look up the Ikeda in *Dokai kōshūki* you don't find them under that name. Instead they are the Matsudaira of Bizen, a family name granted to them by the Tokugawa, just as the Mitsu of Mitsumasa and the Tsuna of Tsunamasa were granted by the shoguns of the time. Presumably accepting these marks of Tokugawa esteem (not that they could readily be refused) was symbolic of something.

Equally symbolic was the elaborate ceremonial network centered around the shogun. I didn't have time to check the Bizen situation, but the experience of successive daimyo of Utsunomiya was probably not too different in kind, if more modest in scale. Traditionally, on his accession the daimyo of Utsunomiya gave the shogun a sword, thirty pieces of gold, five rolls of crepe, a horse and a saddle. Twice a year he gave gifts of silver. Each new Year, on the occasion of the first Noh performance, he gave the shogun a wooden tray and some gold in lieu of *sake*; in early spring he gave him a box of mushrooms; in early summer a box of dried rice; in midsummer a box of noodles; in early autumn a box of salt fish; in winter a box of sweet potatoes. "So what?" you might say. Big deal. But these gifts of mountains, uplands, paddies and sea were all symbolic of the subordination of one to the other. Symbolic, yes, but we can't discount symbols any more. Ritualistic, yes, but we can't discount ritual, either. Maybe—gasp!—the names and gifts were actual stage props in a theater of authority and submission. Whatever they were, they clearly had some meaning.

Then there were the Bakufu's practical powers — over foreign relations, foreign trade, adjudication of disputes, *sankin kōtai*, disenfeoffments, fief transfers, and forced labor. These were not negligible, even if not used to the fullest. Nor, it must be said, were those powers wielded entirely at daimyo expense. The fact is that daimyo during the Tokugawa period were safer than they had ever been, simply because of the monopoly of power the James White has pointed to. They did not have to worry about each other (except in status terms, as Professor Hori indicates), and they did not have to worry about being overthrown by their vassals; in *oie sōdō* the Bakufu almost invariably supported the daimyo and punished the vassals. In the Tokugawa period it was possible to become a daimyo at the age of two and go untouched through a normal life span. This was certainly not the case in earlier periods of Japanese history.

On the other hand, beyond these kinds of powers the Bakufu was not a government which had a great impact on the rest of Japan. The domains were substantially able to do as they wished in a number of areas—tax policies, trade policies, samurai numbers, law and order, to name a few. For most Japanese the central government as such hardly existed, represented only by posted proclamations. There was absolutely none of the paraphernalia of central governments elsewhere—no public statues, no heads on coins, no triumphal arches, no grand boulevards, nothing to impress on the general populace any sense of who the shogun might be, or what he might look like. Instead he was sheltered from public gaze by castle walls and palanquin lattices, and his government was no less secretive and remote. All the *ofuregaki* to the contrary, his government interfered as little as possible in everyday life. The number of things it simply could not do is legion. It couldn't enforce a ban on tobacco growing, it couldn't control prices, it couldn't control consumers, it couldn't restrict travel, it couldn't prevent the alienation of land, it couldn't close down the pornography industry, and on, and on, and on.

So it doesn't matter much how we characterize the level of water in the glass, so long as we recognize what the outlines were. If we're clear on those, then we can allow each other some latitude. We can even call it a compound state, if you think that sounds any better, as long as it does not imply stasis, and as long as it does not overlook the fact that there was a more or less constant tug-of-war going on at every level—centrifugal against centripetal, shogun against daimyo, daimyo against retainers, farmers against officials—all of them with legitimate interests to push. And it was not a system that sprang from any conscious design, from the brow of Ieyasu or Iemitsu

or anybody else. Ultimately, like all human endeavour, it was produced by a combination of many things—accident, ambition, compromise, fear, inertia and habit.

Inertia in particular hardly ever receives the recognition it deserves, but its importance in Tokugawa Japan is undeniable. It lay at the bottom of all the criticism leveled at the system by Confucian ideologues. With few, if any, exceptions, they disparaged the system of government, not because it was too repressive, but because it was not repressive enough. Because it was too indulgent, went the usual refrain, the samurai became flabby, the merchants arrogant, and the peasants revolting. No doubt all this was true, and the critics were right to draw attention to it, but they were not right to see it as a shortcoming. Because in so many ways the system of government was unorganized, haphazard in practice, if not in theory, lacking in discipline, and at best reactive rather than proactive, it allowed the development of what I suspect was one of the world's less disagreeable societies. We, with our different expectations, would certainly not have cared for it ourselves, but that is not really the point.