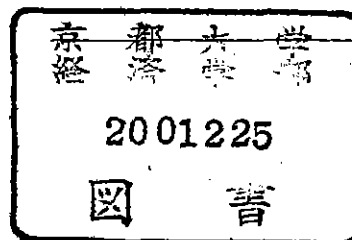


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THE AGRARIAN PROBLEM IN THE TOKUGAWA REGIME

1. THE LIFE OF FARMERS

In the days of the Tokugawa Shogunate, rice formed the basis of the country's finance and economy, and as the country's population had to be fed with the rice produced at home, the cereal was held as particularly precious by the people. Inasmuch as the country owed the production of this important commodity to agriculture, special regard was naturally had for agriculture, which was popularly called the mainstay of the country. Most scholars of those days regarded agriculture as the principal pursuit and looked upon industry and commerce as subsidiary occupations. They held that only by promoting the principal pursuit and by holding the subsidiary ones in check could the country be properly ruled and the happiness of the people advanced. Even Yamakata Banto, a scholar who was formerly a merchant in Osaka, says in his book entitled the *Yumenoshiro* (夢の代): "Agriculture should be encouraged, while commerce should be discouraged. Farmers are the essence of the country. They are more important than any other class of people. Farmers cannot be dispensed with, though we can do without merchants and artisans. Efforts should be made to increase the number of farmers and to reduce that of merchants. It is the pre-requisite of statesmanship to advance the interests of the farming population by encouraging agriculture at the expense of the townspeople."

The life of farmers in those days was, however, very wretched. Their freedom of action was most ruthlessly restricted. Their lot was, indeed, so hard that they appeared to exist simply for the purpose of paying taxes.

The fundamental policy of dealing with farmers in those days was to keep them to a low standard of living. Efforts were made to prevent them from improving their miserable mode of living in any way, or sharing in the bliss of civilised life, so that they might be contented with a life which was little better than that of dumb animals forever. "Agriculture is the mainstay of the State" was a popular saying, but the fact was that while agriculture was held in regard, the farmers were treated with scant respect. In other words, the saying simply denoted the principle of basing the country on agriculture, but not the principle of putting the interests of the farmers before those of any other class of people.

The famous official notice of the 2nd year of Keian (1649) describes farmers as a class of people who have neither wisdom nor prudence. From this notice it is clear that official interference thrust itself, not only into the management of the farmer's business, but even into matters relating to the private life of the farmer himself. As the policy of the authorities in those days was to keep farmers down to their low standard of living, it was considered a most detestable thing for farmers to lead a luxurious life by imitating merchants or townspeople. Villages were, therefore, dissociated from towns and farmers were isolated from townspeople. Furthermore, attempts were made to prevent the growth of economic knowledge among the farming population, so that they might be contented with the life of serfdom all their life through. Many scholars in those days held views supporting such a policy. For instance, a book entitled the *Hyakusho Bukuro* (百姓護) contains the warning: "Farmers should by no means imitate the mode of living of townspeople." In the *Kashoku Yōdō* (家職要道) appears the following advice: "Farmers should not wed their children to those of townspeople," while the *Keizai Mondo Hiroku* (經濟問答秘錄) mentions: "It is a good farmer who does not know the prices of cereals." It was considered the sole duty of farmers to produce,

regardless of the market price, the cereals with a single-eyed devotion, so as to be able to pay as much tax as possible. It is a well-known fact that taxes were exacted with the utmost severity. In the *Jikata Ochibo Shu* (地方落穂集), farmers are compared to well-water, saying: "If moderately drawn, a well can supply sufficient water to a farmhouse, for moderate drawing gives time enough for water to flow out. There will be, then, an inexhaustible supply of water for all times. If, on the contrary, the well be drawn on too abundantly, the supply would soon be exhausted, and what water that could be obtained would be too muddy to be drunk. In levying imposts upon farmers this truism must be kept in mind, for if farmers are taxed in the former way, they will not suffer much and the taxes will continue to flow in from generation to generation." This only shows the severity with which exactions were made. In short, farmers were, so to speak, a kind of productive machinery which was worked to an excessive extent. In the *Minkan Seiyo* (民間省要) it is said: "A class of people known as farmers are groaning under maladministration, heavy taxes, and exacting service, and yet they have no means of airing their grievances. Their hard lot causes many to go bankrupt, to sell their wives and children, or to suffer severe losses or lose their lives, but they must put up with it, suffering without complaint the abuses heaped upon them and the thrashings meted out to them at all times. However cruelly they may be treated, they cannot protest against their treatment. Officials, however petty, lorded it over farmers, who winced under their minatory stare. Some petty officials were formerly farmers themselves, and yet they treat farmers with harshness. It is like burning dried bean plants in order to boil beans. The overbearing attitude of these officials may be likened to that of a cruel driver of a horse or a cow. He puts a heavy burden on the animal and beats it mercilessly. When it stumbles, he gets all the more angry and whips it with greater violence, cursing it viciously. Such is the lot of farmers too." The

above description is a true picture of the wretched life which farmers were forced to lead in those days.

The burdens under which farmers were groaning were so excessively heavy, that, being made of flesh and blood like other men, they could not be expected to remain contented with a life which was little better than that of the beasts of the field forever. With the general levelling up of the standard of living for all people, and especially when they saw the luxurious life which townspeople were leading, their desire for a better life received a stimulus, and their costs of living grew in consequence. The farmer who formerly used straws in tying their hair and who were contented with their shabby clothes, came gradually to prefer Edo (Tokyo) *motoyui* (paper strings for tying the hair) and to use aloes-wood oil, into the bargain. It is hardly necessary to say that this made their living even more difficult. According to a few books in which the economic life of farmers in those days is described, most farmers, middle-class and downwards, could not earn enough to support their families by following the agricultural pursuit only. To make matters worse, what with the crude state of agriculture then prevailing and the imperfect means of communication available, there were frequent visitations of famine, which wrought complete havoc with the life of many farmers. In short, it is quite clear that farmers were in great distress at the best of times, a fact which was, indeed, widely recognised by most scholars in those days. It must be admitted at the same time, however, that some big landowners among the farmers were quite comfortably off, so farmers were presumably divided into rich and poor. In the *Seji Kemmonroku* (世事見聞録) it is noted "that the disparity between the rich and poor has grown very marked, and for one man who makes a fortune, there are twenty or thirty farmers who are reduced to penury." Mention is also made of the fact that one man could live in luxury at the expense of a multitude.

2. THE IMPOVERISHMENT OF THE FARMING CLASS

I have already explained the great distress of the farmers in those days. Their difficulty of living produced its effects in various directions. To sum up, it brought about the impoverishment of the farming class.

(a) The population problem. As one phase of the impoverishment of the agrarian class, the population question must, in the first place, be dealt with. In the latter half of the Tokugawa Shogunate, conservatism and retrogression ruled in all fields of activity. The country's population was also, on the whole, stationary. In those days, the evil custom of abortion and infanticide prevailed all over the country, more particularly in the North-East, Kadsusa, Shimōsa, Kōdzuke, Shimodzuke and Hidachi provinces, Kyushu, Tosa and other outlying districts, and this greatly hindered the increase of the farming population. It is on record that in the 4th year of Meiwa (1767) an official order was issued prohibiting such evil practices. The official order said in part: "We understand that in some provinces farmers who have already many children put to death new-born babies immediately after their birth. This is a very inhuman act. Village officials must see that no such crime is committed in their villages, while farmers themselves should keep watch upon one another in order to prevent such crimes." In Kyushu, there was a custom to kill two out of five children born to their parents. In Tosa province, one boy and two girls were considered the maximum number of children to be brought up in one family. In some other districts, practically all the babies, whose births were reported to the local authorities, were boys. Hardly one out of every ten children reported was a girl. Again, in Hyuga province, only the first-born was allowed to live, all other babies being killed as soon as they were born. It was even thought better to buy children

from traffickers in children popularly called *hitokai-bune*, who came to sell boys and girls whom they had kidnapped in Kyoto, Osaka and other places, as this could save them much of the trouble of bringing them up. Many more similar examples can be cited to illustrate how infanticide prevailed in those days. Infanticide was then called *mabiki* (thinning), a fact which shows that people thought no more seriously of this shocking deed than rooting up vegetables. It seems that the urban districts were not entirely free from this evil custom, but things were not so bad there as in the rural districts. Needless to say, this was a custom which arose out of the difficulty of supporting many children and it throws much light on the very distressful life which the farmers were leading in those days. The decrease of the farming population resulted in a shortage of labour power, which, in turn, brought about the decline of agricultural interests.

The influx of farmers into towns was another contributory cause of the decrease of the farming population. The life of farmers being so wretched as has been described above, many farmers, finding it unbearable, forsook the plough and moved to towns, where they either turned tradesmen or became day labourers. It is quite natural that there should have been a marked inflow of countryfolk into towns, once it was discovered that they could live in a freer atmosphere in towns and that it was easier to earn a living there. The fact is generally admitted that the expansion of big cities—Edo (Tokyo) in particular—was due largely to the influx of countryfolk. In a book written by Dazai Shuntai, a famous scholar in those days, we find the passage: "There has been a steady increase in the number of farmers who originally came into town to secure temporary employment but decided to take up permanent residence in Edo, either as day labourers or as hawkers, with the result that the city has now extended itself to a distance of five *ri* with a great density of houses." Ogyu Sorai, also a famous scholar, says: "In their eagerness to lead a luxuri-

ous life, many farmers have forsaken the plough, and taken to commerce. This tendency becoming marked of late, there has been considerable impoverishment of the rural districts." There is no denying the fact that this influx of farmers into towns reduced the farming population.

Due note must at the same time be taken of the fact that rural life gradually took on much of the aspect of urban life. Although it was the policy pursued by the authorities in those days to dissociate the rural districts from the urban districts and to isolate farmers from townspeople, farmers living near towns gradually got into the habit of imitating the life and manners of the town. (v. the *Kashoku Yodo* 家職要道). Some farmers made it their aim to live the life of townspeople for which they had been yearning. Some married their children to those of townspeople, while others gave up the plough and set up small shops. In the *Keiseidan* (經世談) it is mentioned that farmers "desire to become townspeople and prefer to marry their daughters and sons into the families of merchants..... Many wish to make over their property to their younger brothers so that they can move to flourishing places such as castle-towns or port-towns to live there. Even in the case of those who live in their native villages all their life through, they are in the habit of imitating the elegant manners of townspeople in regard to the style of doing up their hair and the pattern of the clothes they wear." Thus it seems that there were many inhabitants of farm villages who did not follow agriculture as their sole pursuit. A memorial submitted to the authorities by a certain person in the 4th year of Horeki (1754) says in part: "Of every one hundred farmers, there are about fifty who follow trades and handicrafts, leaving farm work to their wives and children. As regards the remaining fifty, they do farm work along with trades of various kinds. There is scarcely any who attends to farm work as their sole occupation." This is an interesting remark worth noting.

Thus, the farming population fell off by processes both

natural and artificial. All who remained in their native villages did not follow the plough. This naturally caused a shortage of labour power, with the result that farms were allowed to go to waste and the farmers became impoverished. This is the most important phase that calls for attention in considering the question of the impoverishment of the agrarian class.

(b) The land question. During the Tokugawa régime, the sale of farms owned by farmers was prohibited in order to prevent the bankruptcy of farmers and the annexation of land. It was with the same object in view that restrictions were put on the division of land by farmers among their children. It was laid down that unless they owned land covering over 1 *cho* (2.45 acres) which yielded rice amounting to over 10 *koku* (some 50 bushels) of rice, farmers should not divide their land among their children, because it was feared that if the division of land were allowed unrestrictedly there would be created numberless poor farmers who could not manage to pick up a livelihood. As a matter of fact, however, it seems that this prohibitory rule was not strictly enforced. Various devices were invented to elude the prohibition to sell farms. Farms frequently changed hands also in the form of pawns forfeited, and there actually occurred many cases of annexation of land. Inasmuch as the farmers in those days were reduced to such straits, as already explained, many had to pawn their land in order to raise the money necessary for paying taxes and obtaining means of sustenance, and as there was no alternative but to turn to rich people for financial aid, land inevitably passed more and more into the hands of the rich. According to the *Seji Kemmonroku* (世事見聞録), all good farms fell into the possession of the rich, the poor owning only such farms as could produce but little. In some districts, the practice was widely resorted to by poor farmers to under-rate the quantity of rice produced in the fields which they intended to sell and to over-rate the rice yield for the fields which they wished to retain, for the express

purpose of selling their fields at as high a price as possible. The result was that rich farmers could obtain good farms on which light taxes were imposed at comparatively low prices, while poor farmers had to cultivate bad fields burdened with heavy taxes. Those who were unfortunate enough to part with even their bad farms sank to the status of tenant farmers. The lot of tenant farmers was a very hard one. They had to drudge on the farms of big landowners, handing all the rice produced thereon over to their landowners as rent, themselves retaining only chaff, bran, straw and the like. Not a moment of rest or comfort could they get all the year round. The rich, on the other hand, went on amassing wealth, increasing their land every year. They created branch families, each of which lived in grand style. On the contrary, the poor grew poorer and poorer. They parted with their farms, disposed of their estates and, in many cases, their homes were scattered. Thus for one farmer who became wealthy, there were twenty or thirty farmers who were reduced to distress.

Another phase of the land question is presented by the waste of land. As already stated, the desertion of their villages by poor farmers caused large areas of land to go to waste. For other reasons also, land was let run waste. For instance, farmers gradually learned by experience that it was foolish to do any work earnestly from which they could derive little profit. Some concluded that it was more advantageous to earn a living by selling firewood or doing manual work as day labourers than to waste much energy in putting barren land under cultivation for a pittance, and gave up the plough. Some went in for a retrogressive life and neglected their farms, because of their desire to be relieved of the troublesome procedure of cultivation and tax-paying. Owners of good farms also found the taxes levied upon their land so heavy that there was no margin of profit, despite their indefatigable labour. They, therefore, vied with one another in giving their land away to poor people. In some extreme cases, they had to give some

money together with their land, as, otherwise, they could not induce poor people to accept it. This anomalous state of things was particularly marked in Mito and district, and it had the grievous effect of transforming many fertile farms into waste land. Of course, the work of reclaiming land for cultivation purposes was going on in many places in those days, and, generally speaking, there was an increase in the acreage of land under cultivation, while improvements were also made in the methods of cultivation. On the other hand, however, there were cases where old rice fields were damaged by the process of creating new ricefields. The taxes levied upon farmers were very heavy or the methods of collection adopted were extremely exacting. Finding themselves unable to stand all this, many farmers abandoned their villages to complete ruin, and large tracts of land were left to go to waste in the Ohu and Kanto districts, and many other localities.

Another cause of the waste of land was the *sukego* system. In those days there were agents at the post-towns on the five High Roads and other roads, who kept men and horses in readiness for service. As traffic grew heavier, these men and horses were found inadequate to meet the demand, and what was called the *sukego* system came into being in consequence. Under this system a certain number of men and horses were commandeered from neighbouring villages according to their size. It often happened that the agents tried to put larger part of service on villagers, or that they kept men and horses commandeered from villages all day long without any work, letting them go home towards evening. Some villages from which men and horses were very frequently requisitioned were obliged to ask the agents to undertake the task for them by paying exorbitant compensation at the rate of 700 *mon* per head and 1000 *mon* per horse. This added greatly to the distress and complaint of the villages. It is obvious that this *sukego* system interfered with the farming business and caused land to go to waste and farmers to become impoverished in many cases.

(c) The farm tenancy problem. The farm tenancy system prevailed in the Tokugawa régime. What with the difficulty of living, inadequate economic utilisation of land and crude conceptions about land on the part of many people, the cultivation of land was neglected altogether in some cases, while, on the other hand, some people obtained acre after acre, until, finding it impossible to work the whole acreage themselves, asked others to till it for them. In this way, the farm tenancy system became general. There came into existence two classes the landowning class who, while holding land, did not engage in farming, and the class of tenant farmers who did not own land which they could cultivate. There was also a class who cultivated land of their own, and still another class consisting of farm labourers who could not even rent land. There were two kinds of farm tenancy. One referred to the tenancy of the land belonging to landowners, which was called *myoden kosaku*. The other kind, which was termed *shichiji kosaku*, referred to the tenancy of the land in pawn. Ordinary tenancy was that where big owners of land rented their land to small farmers to cultivate. When the period of tenancy was fixed at over twenty years, it was called *eiko-saku* (permanent tenancy). The permanent tenancy system, was often adopted so as to facilitate the recruitment of tenant farmers for the cultivation, for instance, of rice fields newly reclaimed. The labourers who were employed on the reclamation work were often made permanent tenant farmers. *Shichiji kosaku* was also divided into two kinds. One was that the owner of the land in pawn became the tenant of it and this was called *jiki kosaku* (direct tenancy), while the other kind, which was known as *betsu kosaku* (separate tenancy) was that the creditor rented the land in pawn to a person other than its owner.

Tenant farmers are a class of people who, owning no land of their own to cultivate, till the land which they rent from others. The social position of such farmers was accordingly very low. They were not qualified to take rank

with landowning farmers. When, on some occasions, villagers met together, they always took the lowest seats. The same marked disparity in social position as existed between landlord and tenant in towns subsisted between landowner and tenant farmer. In towns, landlords were privileged to take part in the discussion and settlement of public matters relating to their towns or streets, but such rights were absolutely denied to tenants.

I have already described the pitiable life of the farmers generally. If the lot of common farmers was a very hard one, the life of tenant farmers was positively wretched. In a book entitled the *Minkan Seiyō*, we find the following: "Landowners know perfectly well that tenant farmers can hardly find their account in farming and wonder how they can manage to pay their landowners their rents in rice, as stipulated. Yet landowners think it politic not to betray what is in their minds." Instances are also quoted where landowners took their tenant farmers to task, because taxes and other public imposts on their land increased in proportion to the increase in the yield of rice, thanks to the assiduity with which tenant farmers cultivated the land. Tenant farmers found themselves in a dilemma, for their energetic cultivation only earned for them the displeasure of their landowners, while, if they went about their work in a sluggish way, they could not earn enough to keep body and soul together.

It would appear at first sight that it was to their mutual interest that those who had no regular occupation should take to tenant farming, while owners of extensive tracts of land should rent their land to tenant farmers. As a matter of fact, however, the interests of landowner and tenant farmer were often at variance, and there were evidently many cases even in those days where the two classes—the landowners, the oppressors, and the tenant farmers, the oppressed—were at daggers-drawn. So far back as the Kyōho era (1776–1785), there were tenant disputes. The *Minkan Seiyō* tells us that "In a Year of the Kyōho era, there was

a failure of the rice crops and at the end of the next year, tenant farmers handed over the land which they had been cultivating for years to their owners, as if by common consent. This greatly embarrassed the landowners, who left no stone unturned to induce their tenant farmers to resume cultivation. They either offered to reduce the rent by five *sho* or one *to* in rice or gave them some money by way of compensating them for their cost of fertiliser. The trouble was largely settled in this way, but as some land was still left on their hands, landowners had to undertake its cultivation themselves by employing men and purchasing horses. By their actual farming, they could realise that tenant farming was by no means paying. They were put to heavy expense. In addition to expenses on account of the employment of men, the purchase of horses, etc., fertiliser cost them much." The embarrassment of the landowners when they had their land returned on their own hands may well be imagined.

It is also clear from documents drawn up in January of the fifth year of Meiwa (1768) and in the second year of Kwansei (1790) that there was constant trouble between the tenant farmers and the landowners or their managers at the newly reclaimed villages at Fukano. The tenant farmers put their heads together and agreed that they should keep the speech and conduct of the managers of landowners under strict supervision. On the other hand, the managers acted with considerable arrogance towards the tenant farmers when collecting rents, and clashes often ensued between them. Each time there occurred a collision, the trouble was temporarily settled by means of an exchange of memoranda.

In the Kōkwa (1844-1847) and Kaei (1848-1853) eras, the tenant farmers comprising three or four hundred households at Honjo, Musashi province, approached their landowners every year with a demand that the rents should be lowered, whenever the time fixed for the payment of rents came round, basing their demand on the ground of famine. In order to meet this situation, twelve landowners formed

an association among themselves. These landowners forbade their tenant farmers to be away from home on the day fixed for the collection of rents. In case tenant farmers disregarded this notice and were out on the day, such farmers were "black-listed" and none of the twelve landowners would rent their land to them. The association of these landowners also resolved that they should not accept rice, barley and peas and beans of inferior quality from their tenant farmers, that any reduction to be made in rents should be decided upon by the landowners in conference, and that to those tenant farmers who protested against the insufficiency of reduction made in the rents no land should be rented. These resolutions had their effect upon the tenant farmers concerned, who are said to have ceased to prefer demands for big reductions in rents. This, however, simply means that the tenant farmers yielded to the pressure brought to bear upon them by their landowners. It by no means shows that perfect harmony was restored to the relationship between them.

From the above, it will be clear that disputes between landowner and tenant farmer were existent so far back as the middle period of the Tokugawa Shogunate. As regards the methods adopted in carrying on these disputes, they were practically the same as those resorted to at present. At any rate, there is no denying the fact that tenant farmers were always pressed down and squeezed by landowners.

(d) Peasant riots. Farm tenancy disputes mean trouble between landowner and tenant farmer, or, in a sense, hostile rivalry between two classes of farmers. In some cases, however, groups of farmers in certain villages rose in revolt against their feudal lords or the agricultural officials. Thus these disputes lead to peasant riots. If the birthcontrol measures, and the abandonment of the plough already referred to were negative steps taken by the farmers to extricate themselves out of the difficulty of living, the peasant riots were the positive measures to better the distressing conditions of their existence.

Peasant riots broke out frequently during the latter half of the Tokugawa Shogunate. They occurred most often when there were excessive exactions, or when the authorities failed to take appropriate relief measures in famine years. The discontent and irritation which farmers entertained towards their liege lords and the agricultural officials at other times found violent vent on such occasions. The farmers who were similarly circumstanced rallied round the ringleaders and advanced in large bodies on the castle-towns to make direct appeals to their feudal lords, running riot at the same time. The ringleaders were condemned to death in such cases, but the demands of the rioters were generally accepted. Towards the closing days of the Tokugawa Shogunate, these riots grew very complex in nature, and some of them hardly fall within the domain of agrarian problems. However that may be, the peasant riots generally occurring during the Tokugawa Shogunate clearly constituted important agrarian problems as embodying the positive revolt of farmers against their rulers.

3. THE POLICY TO RELIEVE AND ENRICH THE FARMING CLASS

I have dealt with the more important phases of the agrarian problem, and next I propose briefly to state the measures taken by the authorities of those days in coping with the situation then prevailing.

(a) The population policy. So far as the policy for the prevention of abortions and infanticides is concerned, the Shogunate gave it a good deal of attention, and its policy in this direction seems to have been productive of some good results in some districts. But, on the whole, it was not very effective. Efforts were also made by many clans to reform these evil customs. Lord Shirakawa Rakuo, for instance, took much pains in order to eradicate them. Hearing that while there prevailed such evils in his chief fief in Shirakawa, Echigo, his branch fief, was quite free from

them, the inhabitants there being industrious and having a strong aversion from infanticides because of their firm religious faith, he caused Echigo women to settle in Shirakawa. He saw to it that these women were supplied with houses and land, got married, and engaged in farming and weaving. He also kept the registers of pregnant women, and ordered the people to report births to the proper authorities. The system of official inspection of newborn babies was also adopted. To the poor parents of babies money was given towards the expense of bringing them up. Thanks to these measures, the calculation of the number of people taken in the fourth year of Kwansei (1792) showed that the population within the fief of Shirakawa increased by more than 3,500 since the fifth year of Temmei (1785). Some new villages were created and there was an increase in the production of rice in many places. In the Sendai, Shonai, Mito and other clans also, the system of supplying infant-rearing funds and other kindred methods were adopted. Many scholars in those days urged in their books the need of such methods for the reform of the bad customs and for the increase of the population.

By way of preventing the influx of countryfolk into the urban districts, the Shogunate pursued the policy of inducing these people to go back to farming. The Shogunate decree issued in March of the fourteenth year of Tempo (1843) prohibited the settlement of farmers in Edo (Tokyo). Even in the case of those who had already settled in Edo, steps were taken to make all, except those engaged in permanent occupations or having their families with them, return to their native villages. With regard to those farmers who went up to Edo in search of work, a certain period was fixed for their residence there, and they were ordered to go home at the end of this period. Strict control was also exercised over Buddhist and Shinto priests, fortune-tellers or pilgrims who frequented Edo. These measures did not meet with eminent success, however. They had the effect of reducing the farmers in temporary employment in Edo for a

time, but they did not bring about any tangible result.

(b) The land policy. That the Shogunate pursued the policy of preventing the annexation of land, as far as possible, is obvious from the fact that permanent sales and purchases of land and similar transactions were vetoed. This policy was not successful, as I have already noted, as transfer of landownership took place in the form of the forfeiture of land or estates, held as security for mortgages, etc.

The waste of land caused much concern to the Shogunate, which often issued instructions ordering farmers to engage in farming with diligence. In the preface of the Goningumi-cho we find the injunction not to allow even a patch of land to go to waste. In October of the eighth year of Temmei (1788), instructions were issued to Mutsu, Hidachi, Shimōsa and Shimodake provinces, under which rich people were ordered to take into their service those farmers who might be contemplating leaving their provinces to seek fortune elsewhere, and put them to farm work. It is also mentioned that the Shogunate was willing to give allowances to poor farmers to help them put waste land under cultivation. In some other clans too, similar steps were taken. Lord Uesugi Harunori, of the Yonezawa clan, appropriated a certain sum as an agricultural encouragement fund, which was employed for the promotion of the cultivation of land and the settlement of people in his fief. He is also said to have seen to it that new farmers were supplied with funds and that reclaimers of waste lands were exempted from taxes. Earnest endeavours were made to increase the productivity of old farms, and when it was feared that old farms would be damaged by the reclamation of new fields, such reclamation work was not permitted. As a matter of fact, however, it seems that there were many cases where the productivity of old farms was affected by reclamation works.

In the Tokugawa days, there was what was called the land allotment system (*jiwari*). At every stated interval, land was divided into many parts, each of which was allotted

ed to the villagers, re-allotment taking place at the end of each period. This system operated over quite a wide extent of our country. So far as has been ascertained up to the present, it was in operation in the provinces of Iwashiro, Hidachi, Kaga, Mito, Echigo, Echizen, Etchu, Owari, Shinano, Tosa, Hizen, Hyuga, Satsuma, Iki, Tsushima and Okinawa (Luchus). Various causes may be assigned for the coming into being of this system, but the main cause was, when it was applied to old farms, a desire to make the incidence of taxes on the villagers as fair as possible, so as to prevent the waste of land. Where floods were frequent this system was operated in order to equalise profits and losses for the villagers so that "all villagers could be saved from ruin" (v. the *Jikata Hanrei Roku* 地方凡例録). When it was applied to newly reclaimed land, it was due to the joint reclamation of land, or for the purpose of equalizing profits and losses for the farmers in flood-time. Thus, this land allotment system may be regarded as one device to avert the annexation of land, to prevent the flight of bankrupt farmers from their villages, and to avoid the waste of agricultural land.

(c) The policy of providing against famine. Famines were frequent in the Tokugawa days, and this rendered the life of farmers all the more difficult. These times of dearth sometimes dealt a fatal blow to many farmers. The miseries caused by the famines which overtook the country in the Kyoho, Temmei and Tempō eras were enough to make one's blood run cold. Needless to say, various relief measures were then projected and an earnest study was made of substitutes for rice and barley. Moreover, there had been in general operation a system of providing against famines. For instance, the Shogunate and all feudal lords had their warehouses for the storage of cereals to be used in time of emergency. In Edo, Osaka and other places also, storehouses of a similar kind were provided against the day of need. But for this storage of cereals, which served the good purpose of relief, the effects of the famines would have been far more disastrous.

The difficulty of living of the farmers was mainly due to the excessive burden of taxation and therefore there was no doubt that the lessening of this burden was a most desirable thing. But the rulers were so circumstanced that they could not carry on unless the farmers were taxed heavily. In such circumstances, good feudal lords, their wise vassals and scholars, who might have been cognisant of the necessity of lessening the burden on the farmers, probably found that nothing short of a radical reform of the political, social and economic systems then ruling would enable them to carry out their wishes.

The population policy, the land policy and the policy of providing against famine, which have been explained above, may well be looked upon as measures adopted for a solution of the agrarian problem, but it is not likely that these measures were adequate to solve it. Seeing that the question of lightening the grievous burden on the farmers, which was the nucleus of the whole problem, was beset with such supreme difficulties as already stated, an effectual settlement of the agrarian problem could not be expected to be achieved, if all other measures, which were, after all, of secondary importance, worked well. Indeed, a successful solution of this basic problem was an utter impossibility unless the political and social organizations of those days in which the samurai class was predominant and the farmers and merchants subservient were changed. It must be remembered that, just as the agrarian question to-day is due, after all, to the essential nature of agriculture and the present-day economic system, the agrarian problem in the Tokugawa days sprang from the political, social and economic systems of those days.

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Note: The agrarian problem is exhaustively dealt with in my book entitled "*Historical Survey of the Agrarian Problem in Tokugawa Days*" (近世農村問題史論), which was published in 1925 in Japanese. The present article is a translation of the gist of what I describe in my book.