THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY was one of the most turbulent in Japanese history; it was also one of the most spectacularly eventful. During the first half of the century, the country fell apart into autonomous political fragments, and armed conflict was constant and widespread. During the second half, these fragments were first hammered together into regional alliances by powerful local warrior chieftains, and then methodically forged into a single national political structure by the famous triumvirate of "Great Unifiers": Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu. If lawlessness and political anarchy were characteristic of the early half of the century, the mailed fist is the principal image we have of the second. The "Three Heroes" of this period stand in history as incarnate symbols of the bloody struggle required to quench the fires of civil war, to restrain the wilful daimyo, and to channel the energies of the Japanese people to constructive ends.

The great castles of the Azuchi-Momoyama epoch, with their massive stone walls and fastslung moats, are the monuments of Japan's sixteenth-century military unification. They remind us that Japan was a mighty military power second to none in the Orient of the day. How great this power was may be judged from the fact that Hideyoshi could mobilize a force of 250,000 men for the campaign to subdue the daimyo of Kyushu. Korea was invaded twice as a result of Hideyoshi's grandiose plan to conquer Ming China and divide the East Asian mainland into feudal domains for his vassals. The gold bullion in Nobunaga's and Hideyoshi's vaults began a legend, and art historians still marvel at the grandeur of the gilded decorations of their castle palaces. The Momoyama age has been called Japan's renaissance. Surely, it signaled Japan's emergence as an East Asian power.
Yet within little more than a half century, in fact by 1639, this remarkable age of adventure and expansion had come to an end. Japan's fleet of buccaneering merchants, which had sailed to the faraway Indies and pillaged the China coast, had been called back. Sakoku, seclusion, was the new policy and the national mood. The restless openness of Momoyama had given way to Tokugawa exclusiveness and introversion.

For later viewers, the theme of unification and its symbols, the "Three Heroes," held an ambiguous place in the historiography of Japan. Was not unity, particularly in the manner it was achieved—through bloodshed, terror, and repression—imposed at the expense of the creative interests of the Japanese nation? The unifiers, for all their heroic proportions, appeared as conservative or even reactionary influences. Nobunaga for his brutal destruction of Buddhist communities, Hideyoshi for his restrictive social policies, and leyasu for placing Japan on the path to national seclusion. Behind all the period's glory, it would appear, lurked despotism, and behind the despotism lay repression and stagnation.

It is clear that by 1550 Japan had reached a state of political and social instability that could only be brought under control by a militarily powerful autocrat. It is the nature of military consolidators that they must rely on sheer force and absolute authority to win their way. It would seem that in that age it was also in the nature of such leaders to use conservative measures in order to consolidate their gains and safeguard their new powers. The "Three Heroes" were no exception to this rule. But is it right to judge their place in history only by looking at the negative, repressive policies they used to impose a new hegemony on the country? Was Sakoku the underlying thrust of their policies? A closer look at this transitional period of Japanese history suggests that the new hegemony created by these men also had its creative aspects.

The movement toward Japan's national unification was not limited to the military dimension. During the sixteenth century, the country underwent a veritable revolution in the institutions through which government touched the people. Nobunaga, Hideyoshi, and leyasu adopted fundamental changes in national political organization, local government, and village and town administration as they consolidated their hegemonies. The new institutions devised by them were dynamic and not simply restrictive in their effect. Their historical importance ought to be measured not by reference to the closing of the country in the 1630s but rather by a look at the vigorous manner in which Japan came out of seclusion in the 1850s and 1860s when challenged by the West. They must be judged by the dramatic growth of Japan as a nation, economy, society, and culture during the intervening two centuries.

All major institutional revolutions in Japanese history have been achieved through compromise between rulers and ruled, between the effort to control and the effort to resist control. This was as true of the revolution of the sixteenth century as it had been of the Taika Reform, which in the latter half of the seventh century established the early aristocratic state, and as it was to be of the modern revolution of the Meiji era.

The Meiji example, being more familiar to us, can be used to illustrate this point. Called variously an "absolutist revolution," a "nationalist revolution," or an "aristocratic revolution," it was anything but the kind of violent change through social upheaval that we tend to think of when we use the word revolution. Quite clearly a "revolution from the top," the Meiji Restoration nonetheless brought about fundamental changes in government and society, and in the relationship of both to the sources of power and wealth. The striking feature of all of this was that it was samurai leaders who took the initiative in dismantling the old order and in abolishing their own class privileges. In the case of Meiji, politically conservative leaders adopted revolutionary policies in what they conceived to be the national interest, and incidentally as a prudent compromise between the extreme objectives of those who would maximize central political power and those who would open the way toward popular representation.

The example of Japan's modern period is a useful glass through which to view the sixteenth century. For in the Ashikaga-Momoyama epoch Japan underwent a revolution which was aristocratic in leadership and autocratic in spirit, yet which took account of a broad spectrum of political and social aspirations within the samurai and non-samurai classes.

At the risk of getting ahead of myself, I should like to explain what I mean by this statement. First, the most obvious result of the unification movement of the sixteenth century was the establishment of a new national power structure in which the national hegemon acquired for himself unassailable, almost monarchal authority. Yet this political authority was won through compromise with the rest of the military aristocracy, and indirectly with the peasantry. Since the daimyo retained their semi-autonomous positions in the countryside,
the new hegemon was obliged to share his power with his subordinates. In the new order, moreover, while the national hegemon and his daimyo followers became the unquestioned rulers of the country, they at the same time lifted up into the samurai class a large segment of the rural population, thereby spreading the privilege of aristocratic status many times wider than it had ever been before. The sixteenth-century revolution was to this extent a pro-samurai revolution.

Furthermore, while the unifiers gave to an expanded elite class secure rights and privileges and an assured income, they also obliged samurai government to acknowledge a greater social responsibility. By recognizing certain privileges of popular self-government, they gave to the peasantry and the bourgeoisie new areas of autonomy from the arbitrary exercise of political power. The result was a combination of absolute rule exercised over units of administration within which Japanese of every class—especially the peasantry—were given the protection of legally defined spheres of existence. The sixteenth-century revolution was to this extent a pro-peasant revolution.

To understand these assertions we need to go back to the start of the sixteenth century. We begin with a condition of extreme political decentralization and widespread warfare to which the Japanese gave the name Sengoku, the nation at war. The country was divided within itself at every level. There was no national authority which had the power to provide protection and justice. The emperor had long ago become a powerless and shadowy figure. The Ashikaga shogun, lacking significant wealth or armed forces, had by this time lost the capability to act as a balance of power (but not the capacity for intrigue) between the competing factions of the military aristocracy. Without a central power which could be relied upon to maintain a legal process or to guarantee rights over property, the individual proprietor had but three alternatives if he wanted to safeguard his holdings: to become militarily irresistible in his own right, to seek protection by alliance with others like himself, or to subordinate himself to some superior, stronger power.

The warfare of the early sixteenth century gave rise to two distinct types of organization for the purposes of security: those of the daimyo, or domanial lord, and of the ikki, or league. The two types were fundamentally different in structure and intent. The daimyo were local warlords who sought to become absolute masters of land and people within their territories, aiming to reduce all samurai to vassalage and all peasants into dues-paying workers of the land. The authority relationship within the domain was basically hierarchical and feudal.

The ikki was, on the contrary, collective and in principle egalitarian. Its symbol was the collective oath or compact signed, often in blood, with names written in a circle so that none took precedence over another. Local samurai or small embryonic daimyo made compacts with each other to resist the authority of the shogun, when that was still a factor, or the encroachment of neighboring daimyo. Bands of country samurai and village leaders joined forces to resist taxation or to expel invading military forces.

Ikkis tended to be ephemeral. They were effective in resisting authority but had trouble perpetuating a lasting order. In time all such regional confederations either dissolved or moved in one of two directions. They either transformed themselves into daimyo domains, generally as one of their number rose to a position of paramount leadership, or they were converted into religious ikki. Of the latter, the most prominent was the organization of the True Pure Land (or Ikko, "Single-Directed") sect, which held the province of Kaga from 1488 to 1580. Even there, however, with the establishment of the Kanazawa Mido, an ecclesiastical headquarters with extensive political and military power, the ikki structure after 1546 became almost indistinguishable from that of the standard daimyo domain.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, there remained only daimyo domains and a few militarized religious communities with sufficient armed force and organizational capacity to hold or safeguard large spheres of local autonomy. Of these two types of political organization, it was the daimyo structure that had the capability of further expansion and ultimately the creation of a national hegemony. Already the daimyo had demonstrated their potential through the formation of large regional coalitions or alliances, based on feudal vassalage. Region by region, the more vigorous of the daimyo secured the submission of weaker neighboring daimyo, and organized them into territorial alliances. By the 1560s such clustering of daimyo into regional leagues had proceeded to the point that national conquest by one of them became a practical possibility.

Although we think of national unification as the work of military giants such as Nobunaga and Hideyoshi, it is more accurate to say that it was achieved by the ascendancy of one daimyo alliance over other such alliances. Within the regional alliance structure there was built in from the outset a compromise between central authority and local autonomy. Nobunaga and Hideyoshi, for all the military re-
sources they could muster, were still first among equals in relation to their most powerful daimyo allies, such as Ieyasu. The wars of unification, except in a few instances (and those largely under Nobunaga), were seldom fought to the finish. Daimyo were often encouraged to surrender their territories by the guarantee of being reinvested in their original holdings or in equivalent territory in exchange for pledges of allegiance. Under Hideyoshi and Ieyasu, even those who resisted, if they capitulated before being totally overpowered, were often reinvested although in suitably reduced circumstances, so long as they swore fealty to the victorious overlord.

In the unification process, the reduction of all daimyo to a condition of vassalage to a national overlord was a comparatively straightforward matter. It involved battle in the traditional manner, leading to an accepted political solution in which the loser acknowledged the overlordship of the victor. Both the battle and the peace agreement were part of the samurai way of doing things. Less easily handled were religious ikki and other temple organizations. Such religious communities, since they were bent on preserving their autonomy by military resistance, could not be incorporated into the daimyo system. The only solution was the destruction of the ikki nature of these communities and the reduction of all religious institutions to military importance and political subordination. The ruthless attacks which Nobunaga launched against the warrior monks of Hieizan, the "religious monarchy" of the Ishiyama Honganji, and its subordinate groupings in Ise, Echizen, and Kaga reveal the absolute and uncompromising attitude of opposition which the regime of the unifiers took against these religious-military complexes.

Since the unification process resulted from the ascendancy of one daimyo coalition over the nation and not from the reemergence of a central monarchical authority, the new hegemony, rather than destroying daimyo rule, extended it uniformly upon the people of the entire nation. Daimyo in the first half of the sixteenth century had sought to be both absolute in their control of their domains and autonomous with respect to superior authority. The power of the coalition armies assembled by the "Great Unifiers" reduced the autonomy of the daimyo. And yet, once they had accepted the overlordship of Nobunaga, Hideyoshi, or Ieyasu, they were left to govern their territories with a relatively free hand, even under the more bureaucratically centralized Tokugawa regime.

When we talk of daimyo rule we refer not to a single static system but to an evolving form of government. For all their ambition to achieve total imperative control, daimyo in the early sixteenth century were far from being absolute masters of their localities. Many daimyo domains were only loosely held together, and the daimyo could claim only the weakest powers of overlordship over vassal military families who themselves jealously guarded their local rights. Daimyo struggled constantly to reduce their samurai subordinates to dependent status and to bring the economic resources of their domains under their own direct command.

The critical elements in this struggle were the lowest level of the samurai—namely the jizamurai (the terms gentry or yeoman are perhaps appropriate in this instance)—and the agricultural villages. In the early Middle Ages, the samurai yeomen lived within the agricultural communities which they held in fief, exercising both fiscal (that is to say, tax-collecting) and judicial control over the cultivators. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, farmers organized themselves into ikki in an effort to gain freedom from such samurai control.

The ikki structure was well suited to mobilize communal action by peasants against village samurai. It was especially effective as village leaders obtained the resources to arm themselves. The do-ikki of the fifteenth century, in which peasants from widespread areas banded together into resistance groups, demonstrated the potential of rural leagues. Gradually, village communities won free rights over such aspects of their life as police action, access to water and communal land, and the right to sell property. Most critical was the acquisition of autonomy of tax collection. Villages acting as autonomous units agreed to deliver to the daimyo set quotas of taxes on a contract basis, thus avoiding the interference of samurai tax collectors and the likelihood of rate increases. Such village autonomy tended to be won by villagers at the expense of the local gentry samurai, usually by negotiation with superior daimyo authority. Hence the growth in village autonomy placed the rural samurai in an increasingly precarious position.

The militancy of the peasantry at the village level and the increased demands of military service in the years of the wars of unification brought about fundamental changes in the relationship of samurai to village in the daimyo domains. The daimyo, ever intent onsubjecting their vassals to dependent status and direct discipline, took over the dynamism of village autonomy for their own purposes. They did so by acceding to the peasantry's desire to control their own lives, by granting them substantial measures of autonomy so long as taxes
were forthcoming, and by enlisting village leaders into their own rural administration.

By thus reaching down directly to the village level, the daimyo forced the local samurai to relinquish their close ties with the land and the peasantry and to move instead to the daimyo’s castle headquarters, where they would reside as members of the daimyo’s house band and garrison troops. For those among the local samurai whose position had already been threatened by peasant resistance, such a move was undoubtedly welcome. For those local warriors still closely and securely associated with the land, it created a critical dilemma. For them the choice was to give up the sword and become peasants, or abandon the land and become hereditary soldiers of the daimyo. Faced with this unhappy choice, a substantial number of jitamurai left the countryside and became castle-town stipendaries. By the Tokugawa period, the samurai class therefore constituted a remarkably high 7 percent of the population, all living in towns or cities.

At the start of the unification movement, the ideal-typical daimyo domain, one in which the daimyo had become a local autocrat and his vassals a corps of stipended officials, had not yet come into existence. But by the time military unification was completed in 1591, it was well on its way. In the process the daimyo received a major assist from Hideyoshi, who in his later years enforced nationally as a general policy the institutional changes which the more advanced daimyo had been undertaking in their own domains.

A people which had been at war for decades, the Japanese at the end of the sixteenth century held the overriding desire for security, law, and order. Once a certain degree of political stability was attained, it was natural that efforts should be made to reduce the incidence of domestic violence. The most obvious effort in this direction was the series of “sword hunts,” begun under Nobunaga, conducted locally by daimyo, and prosecuted on a national scale by Hideyoshi. Hideyoshi’s 1588 edict proclaiming this nationwide policy read: “The farmers of all provinces are strictly forbidden to have in their possession swords, short swords, bows, spears, firearms, or other types of weapons. If unnecessary implements of war are kept, the collection of annual taxes becomes difficult and uprisings are encouraged. . . . Thus daimyo using their retainers as agents should collect all such weapons and turn them over to higher authorities.” The edict went on to say that this confiscation policy was intended to promote the best interests of the farmers, who would now be able to cultivate their fields in peace, and that moreover the confiscated weapons would not be wasted, since the metal would be used to make nails for the construction of the Great Buddha which Hideyoshi had ordered built in Kyoto.

It has been suggested that the national sword hunt had a social purpose, that of visibly separating warriors from farmers. While this element was probably involved in the decision, it is clear that the measure had a more significant military purpose and was designed to lower the possibility of resistance to tax collection in a countryside from which the samurai had already been largely withdrawn.

How thorough the confiscation was we do not know, nor do we have any idea of the total quantity of confiscated weapons. One document from the province of Kaga records the submission of 1,073 swords, 1,540 short swords, and 160 spears from one county alone. The document is dated just a little more than a month after the issuance of the original decree and is signed by the daimyo of Kaga. Leaving aside the question of whether or not it was to the advantage of the daimyo to relinquish the confiscated weapons to Hideyoshi, it was certainly in their interest to have the rural populace in their domains disarmed. Hideyoshi’s edict could provide them with useful backing in their effort to reduce the capacity for violence within their domains. But it is also important to recognize that the sword hunt was to the advantage of the peasantry as well, and to the nation as a whole. The assumption that the sword hunt was simply the device of military conquerors bent on creating a defenseless peasantry is not borne out by the other features of daimyo rule. For once the rural areas were pacified, it became possible to install a system of local administration which permitted the farming population to expand its resources dramatically in the succeeding decades.

Yet although the sword hunt may not have been class legislation in intent, it had the broadest social impact in practice, for it helped to underline the social distinction between samurai, whose profession it was to handle weapons, and farmers, whose job it was to till the soil and cultivate the mulberry. The fact that a functional differentiation between samurai and peasant was being clarified throughout Japan at this time is revealed in Hideyoshi’s edict of 1591, which prohibited the change of status from samurai to farmer or merchant, or from farmer to merchant. This edict, coming at the successful conclusion of the campaigns in northern Japan, sought to prevent samurai whose daimyo masters had been defeated in battle from drifting back to the
countryside where they might take the lead in stirring up peasant unrest. By that time a clear separation had been achieved between samurai and peasant.

Apart from the battles of unification themselves, the most massive activity begun under Nobunaga and completed by Hideyoshi was the series of land surveys, which by the time of Hideyoshi’s death had been pushed across the entire nation to consolidate the practices of land registration, tax assessment, and peasant tenure into a single system. This act, more than anything else, was at the root of Japan’s sixteenth-century revolution, laying the base for the new social institutions which brought order and stability to Japan for the next two and a half centuries.

The significance of the new land survey of the late sixteenth century was that it represented the necessary final step in a change in land tenure practices which had been under way for almost four hundred years. Ever since the establishment of the Kamakura shogunate in the twelfth century, there had existed a dual system of legitimation for land ownership at the proprietary level. One system was based upon the imperial court, the other on the military government. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries these two systems operated in parallel. With the establishment of the Muromachi bakufu, and particularly after the turn into the fifteenth century, the shogunate provided the only effective machinery for proprietary guarantee and land dispute adjudication. With the decline of the bakufu, the whole area of land right certification was left without superior enforcement authority. Daimyo sought by right of might to become themselves the supreme proprietors within their domains, while religious institutions clung to historical grants of ownership originating in the imperial court. Rural samurai claimed privileges to exploit the peasantry of their fiefs, while village leaders resisted in the name of village autonomy. To resolve the conflicting proprietary claims, the establishment of a new legal authority was clearly necessary.

The more powerful of the daimyo had in fact begun to undertake just that task in their territories, issuing house laws and conducting new cadastral surveys which catalogued all land and recorded its encumbrances. But these attempts were erratic and unsystematic. Moreover, since the problem of land ownership was not purely local, only a truly national effort could resolve the basic issues. The beginnings of a methodical, universal policy to extend the emergent national re-

gime’s control over the provinces by means of the land survey can be traced back to Nobunaga’s last years, especially after the conclusion of the “Ten Years’ War” against the Ishiyama Honganji in 1580; it is, however, Hideyoshi who is properly associated with its successful pursuit on a national scale. Immediately after he succeeded Nobunaga in 1582, Hideyoshi issued orders for a systematic resurvey of the territory under his control, province by province; by the time of his own death in 1598, all provinces had been thoroughly surveyed, in many instances several times over.

The Taikō kenshi, as this operation came to be called, proceeded in three steps: measurement of land, assessment of its quality and hence of its capacity to be taxed, and determination of ownership. Quality, depending on whether land was paddy or dry field, was determined on the basis of yield in rice or equivalent product per unit. Yield was measured in units of rice, either actual in the case of paddy or by calculation in the case of dry fields, the unit being a standard koku (roughly five bushels). Cadastral registers, kenshi-chō, were prepared village by village. On the basis of such registers, superior authorities were provided with precise figures for each village on the total tax base (namely, the sum total of yield figures for all land in the village). These figures, known as kokudaka, became the basis of a systematic and uniform tax system. Daimyo could levy at will a tax of 40 percent, 50 percent, or whatever figure they chose upon the assessment base of their domains.

While the cadastral survey achieved its primary purpose of reorganizing the land-tax system of Japan, it had much more far-reaching and deeply significant effects upon the structure of Japanese society. For it became the basis upon which the legal status of both the samurai and the peasant classes rested for the next two and a half centuries.

What did the survey mean for the samurai? Since it was carried out in the name of Hideyoshi as the ultimate feudal lord of the vassal daimyo, and since the cadastral registers were placed in the possession of Hideyoshi and his daimyo vassals, all superior rights, namely the rights of taxation and governance, were in the hands of the military aristocracy. The power to dispose of these superior rights was Hideyoshi’s alone, and he delegated such rights to daimyo, or to religious institutions, over his own vermilion seal. The Taikō kenshi swept aside the complicated system of layered estate rights which had persisted under the shōen system. Any remaining local authority—whether samurai or religious establishment—which clung to histori-
cal claims of proprietorship had those claims nullified and its lands reassigned on the basis of new grants from Hideyoshi or one of his daimyo vassals. In this fashion Japan's military hegemon also became the country's supreme proprietary overlord. There was now but one supreme authority over the land and the people who worked it.

The great land survey also provided the national overlord with new powers of political control. With an accurate chart of the location and productive capacity of the country's land base, Hideyoshi was able to adjust wealth to status in his political hierarchy more precisely. Daimyo were enfeoffed in domains on the basis of so many koku, their holdings comprised of a county here or a village there, so as to make up a certain kokudaka figure. In the early rounds, the survey was clearly used to ferret out excessive land holdings. The great monastery of Kōya-san was found to have over fifty thousand koku in hidden holdings and was cut back to three thousand. Such daimyo as the Nakamori of the great Aizu Wakamatsu domain, who tried to falsify their figures, had their lands confiscated. The kenchi was a device by which the national hegemon was able to intrude his authority into every corner of the land; it did not, however, work only to Hideyoshi's benefit. It must be admitted that it also gave to every holder of a patent of proprietorship the backing of Hideyoshi's power and authority. And for the daimyo this was all-important.

The use of the kokudaka as a basis of calculation for rights of taxation had another subtle but important result. Daimyo were granted their domains from Hideyoshi in terms of kokudaka, not land area. It is true that for the larger daimyo the grants usually coincided with whole provinces, and such daimyo remained identified with set locations. But for the vast majority of daimyo, who were enfeoffed at figures of ten or twenty thousand koku, the domains—while perhaps centetering on a small headquarters castle—had no clearly drawn territorial boundaries, being calculated instead in terms of appropriate numbers of villages whose sum koku added up to the requisite figure. Moreover, since the daimyo was allotted his fief in terms of koku, not land, it became largely immaterial whether the fief was changed from one location to another as long as the income was not decreased. The daimyo became increasingly dependent upon Hideyoshi's superior power of encoffment. Even more important to the nation was the fact that the daimyo held their domains not as private possessions but rather in trust from the national overlord as his delegates. Their rights of exploitation were carefully spelled out by Hide-

yoshi and later the Tokugawa shoguns. In essence their power was political rather than proprietary.

The same was even more true of the samurai as a class of former encoffed gentry. Although the first round of kenchi-chō registered cultivators by plot and indicated the authority to which rents and dues were owed, the direct relationship between samurai and cultivators was soon broken. By the early Edo period, samurai (except in a few scattered and exceptional instances) had been deprived of their direct private rights over the land and its cultivation as a result of the forced move into the daimyo's castle. While in some areas, and for varying lengths of time, former fief holders were permitted to interfere directly in village affairs, setting dues rates and collecting labor service, this practice had disappeared almost totally by the early years of the Tokugawa period.

The warfare of the sixteenth century had forced the samurai to move physically off the land and into the daimyo's headquarters, but it was the kenchi that drew a legal line between the samurai and the land. The withdrawal of the entire land-owning aristocracy from the land and its conversion into a military-administrative officer corps attached to national and regional centers of government was perhaps the most fundamental social change of the sixteenth century. Samurai were no longer landowners, and land as taxable property was not transferable by sale among the samurai class. Samurai could not acquire private landed wealth. Their income could be increased only by the acquisition of merit increases of stipend in the service of daimyo or shogun. The kokudaka system was unique among East Asian land systems, and it created a ruling class unlike any other in East Asia.

The kenchi also had a revolutionary impact upon the cultivator class. By registering land in village units and imposing taxes village by village, the survey first of all acknowledged the autonomy of the village communities over broad areas of communal life. While villages were held strictly accountable for exact and timely payment of taxes, the villagers themselves were given the right to determine how the village put together its quota. Within the village, the headman was the prime authority; and although he was accountable to daimyo law, he was at least a member of the village, and often the chosen representative of the villagers.

Perhaps the most important feature of the cadastral survey from the cultivator's point of view was the factor of registration itself. Registration worked in two ways. It identified the villager with a certain
plot of land, making him responsible for tax payment on the plot. It also confirmed the villager’s right to cultivate that land or to have it cultivated. While the first condition placed a number of restraints on alienation, the second provided security of tenure which had not existed in the past.

The kenchi affected conditions within the village only incidentally. It did not reduce all villagers to the status of paddy-land cultivators, and it did not necessarily break up landholding farm families whose patriarchal organizations contained unfree dependent households. What the survey did accomplish was to give new legal status to an entire class of land-cultivating farmers, the hyakusho, who by being entered in the cadastral registers became what might be called copyholders, secure in their occupancy and free under certain conditions to alienate their property. Above all, the hyakusho class as a whole was cut away from the private interference of a military gentry and placed under the uniform laws of the realm or of the domain. But the converse was also true. No hyakusho could make his way into the samurai class by virtue of landed property. The farmer, by definition, owned only the cultivator’s rights to his land. The samurai class, in the name of the national hegemon, exercised political rights which were forever out of the farmers’ reach.

Domestically, the sword hunt and the cadastral survey marked a major turning point in Japanese social history. The kenchi, by systematically and legally defining the relationship of the two major classes (the samurai and the hyakusho) to the land, brought into being the Early Modern Japanese state, which vested political authority in the samurai class but placed the samurai under the absolute constraints of their leaders and of the strict laws of the land. The sword hunt, while its immediate objective was to suppress rural unrest, had a deeper political meaning. For it was significant that the confiscation order had to be couched in terms which emphasized the benefit it would bring to the people and the nation. This is the beginning of the use of moral justification for public policy, a practice which was to become increasingly common in the next decades, particularly as Japan’s rulers absorbed the vocabulary of Neo-Confucian political theory. It is the beginning, in other words, of the acknowledgement of responsibility on the part of samurai government toward the rest of the population. 13

It is natural that we, as later observers of the sixteenth-century scene, should think of the main characteristics of the age in terms of