The two and one-half centuries stretching from the era of the wars between the Northern and Southern Courts to the Sengoku period were a time of great institutional change in Japan. During this period the shōen system of the imperial state structure finally came to an end, and the political power of the nobles in the capital (that is, the shōen proprietors) declined precipitously. Following the collapse of noble power, actual power in the provinces was exercised first by the kokujin and then by the sengoku-daimyo. Although historians have tended to emphasize this momentous political upheaval, change was not limited to these political developments. Social and economic structures too underwent important transformations during this period, with important implications for the exercise of political authority and power within the national structure. Particularly significant was the emergence of the village community as an active participant in the political struggles of the period. As Professor Miyagawa has elaborated in the preceding essay, central to the establishment of the sengoku-daimyo domain was the process whereby the daimyo came to terms with this new political participant and established effective control over the land and cultivators of his domain. The purpose of this essay will be to examine the structure and function of the late medieval village community and to analyze the role of the peasant community in the formation of the sengoku-daimyo domain.

In medieval Japan, villages were heterogeneous in size and structural characteristics, reflecting local geographic and historic conditions. The most distinctive feature of the medieval village was that it formed a functional community for its peasant inhabitants. Regardless of the terminology which appears in historical records, when a group of inhabitants in geographical proximity formed a communal structure for the purpose of carrying out economic, social, and political functions, this was a "village community." Thus a village community, though perhaps actually a composite of hamlets, had as its important functions to further the economic
well-being of each member of the community; to exercise the social and political functions necessary to resist the lord’s authority and to improve each member’s social and political status; and to defend the community against intrusion by outside powers, whether political or military.

Village communities were not, of course, autonomous in the performance of these functions or in the assurance of protection against external threats. Such functions were performed, in fact, within the context of higher authority as exercised by lord or proprietor, or of superior local power as exerted by jišō or kokujin. For example, in the use of water and commons (mountains and open fields), the lord’s authority was imposed upon the village community, and some degree of restriction was placed on the freedom of use which otherwise would be limited only by self-imposed community rules. In actual fact, in any given locality the lord constantly attempted to reduce the extent of self-government within the peasant community by the imposition of his political authority. To this end, a lord might name some peasants in the upper stratum of the community to the village offices through which uses of water and commons were regulated and taxes in kind and corvee were collected. Thus lord and peasant viewed the village community from quite different perspectives as a result of the conflicting and mutually exclusive relationship between their interests, and village communities constituted arenas of conflict between them.

THE STRUCTURE AND ROLE OF VILLAGE COMMUNITIES

Kamikuze-no-shō, a well-known shōen four kilometers southwest of Kyoto, typifies the medieval village community.1 This shōen, which belonged to Tōji (a large temple of the Shingon sect), was a small, comparatively compact estate which encompassed precisely that geographical area occupied by a village community. The rich historical evidence preserved by the temple allows us to examine the life of the community in depth.2

According to the land register of 1357,3 this shōen had 53.1 chō in paddies and 8.1 chō in uplands, a total cultivated area of 61.2 chō. This land was held, as shown in table 1, by 52 persons. It is generally supposed that

1. In using this shōen as an example it is admitted that conditions in Japan varied considerably according to region. On these regional differences, see Nagahara Keiji, “Muromachi bakuetsu shugo ryōgoku seika no tochi seido,” Keizai gaku kenkyū 15 (1971).
2. Uejima Tamotsu, Kyōko shōen sanka kō no kenkyū (Tokyo, 1970), is a useful study in which this shōen is intensively examined.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of chō</th>
<th>Number of Landholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over 2</td>
<td>3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.5–1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 0.5</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Land Register of 1357.

4 One of the three was the shōen’s administrative officer (shikkan or kamn) who held 17.4 chō.

the labor of a nuclear family was able to cultivate one chō of land. Hence those households holding land in excess of that amount would presumably have a part of their holding worked by tenant cultivators or by a dependent labor force such as genin. By the same token, households with less than half a chō could not subsist on their landholding. This meant that they most likely became tenant cultivators or came to accept the status of dependent laborers of large landholders in exchange for the latter’s protection.4 Although we are unable to present a definitive statement on peasant society as it related to the economic structure of Kamikuze-no-shō,5 there were from the economic point of view two clearly differentiated groups of peasants: the upper who were owner-cultivators and/or landlords and the remainder who were owner-cultivators and/or tenants. Two status terms used to designate the members of this shōen—ryōshu and hyakushō—can be thought to correspond to the two economic groups just described.

According to a record written in 1458,6 nearly a century later than the land register which we have just examined, we find that the inhabitants of this shōen were classified under two still different terms: “samurai-equivalent status” (sannai), of which there were 21, and “peasant-

4. Peasants of dependent status, in the sense used here, were not persons directly under the shōen ryōshu but persons who were economically dependent on upper class peasants and who were required to provide taxes in kind and corvee to upper class peasants in exchange for various economic and other assistance.
5. Uejima, Kyōko shōen sanka kō no kenkyū, holds that upper class peasantry relied on lower class genin for labor. I do not find evidence for a class division within the village; see my Nihon kōten sei shisetsu kaisei no kenkyū (Tokyo, 1961).
studies. Not apparent in Kamikuze-no-shō, but common in examples elsewhere, were two other distinguishable classes of peasants—mōto and sanjo. Mōto were newcomers to a village community who had not yet been given full-fledged status as community members: their status was defined with respect to the community rather than to the organization of the shōen. In contrast, sanjo were persons who had been grouped together to perform specified work (nonagricultural corvée such as transporting or cleaning) by the shōen proprietor: their status was defined with respect to the shōen and consequently was looked down upon by the peasants of the community. It is difficult to determine whether sanjo were excluded from membership in the village community or not, or whether they enjoyed some type of restricted privilege. We note only that there existed a class of persons who were outside the true membership of the village community, as exemplified in the documents pertaining to our reference community, Kamikuze-no-shō.

**ECONOMIC FUNCTIONS**

Peasants in feudal society privately possessed such things as land, agricultural implements, and draft animals and, in principle at least, carried out independent economic activities. This does not mean that each economic unit was self-sufficient and capable of supplying all the needs for continuing its economic life. In Japan, unlike in Europe, the two- or three-field system which required the communal use of land did not develop. In this sense, a village community as such did not engage in communal activities involving production. Yet the role of community in Japan was significant in terms of the use of commons and water, both of which were essential to paddy cultivation and, in various economic functions, to the lives of its inhabitants.

During the early medieval period in Japan (that is, up through the Kamakura period), the most secure form of landownership by the peasant was the possession of myōden (name land). Because myōden could be transferred through inheritance, it differed from isshikiden (paddies belonging to the shōen) which could be redistributed to new cultivators by the proprietor. To be sure even myōden were to some extent precarious holdings and subject to proprietary control. There are examples of proprietors who redistributed myōden so as to equalize the landholdings of myōshū. Myōden in general could not be bought or sold. Also, when peasants

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**T web 2**

**Class Structure in Kamikuze-no-shō, 1458**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Shōen</th>
<th>Sociopolitical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class I</td>
<td>Owner-cultivator</td>
<td>myōshū</td>
<td>Samurai-equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and/or landlord</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class II</td>
<td>Owner-cultivator</td>
<td>hyakushō</td>
<td>Peasant-equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and/or tenant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 通利水, WO 303.

The three statuses do not necessarily correspond on a one-to-one basis, and the economic status is indicative only of the general pattern.

In Kamikuze-no-shō there was one person who held by far the largest landholding, 17.4 chō, most of which was cultivated by tenant-cultivators who paid kejishi or rent. Such a person, by virtue of his wealth and superior status as shōen administrator, was able to acquire a position approximating that of proprietary lord. Not all village communities produced such middle-level lordships, and great variation obviously existed in the degree of political independence which such families might acquire. On the other hand, the example of Kamikuze-no-shō provides us with a common model of a three-layer village community in which resident lord, peasant leaders, and common peasantry were drawn together into a political-economic unit.

Before leaving the example of Kamikuze-no-shō, it is necessary to amplify the above example by drawing on material from other case.
During the early medieval period, the shōen proprietor (or his administrator) normally coordinated peasant corvée and constructed and maintained irrigation facilities, built reservoirs, dammed rivers or streams, and constructed ditches or canals. Peasants using the water were required to pay the proprietor an iryō or water charge on the theory that "every drop of water belonged to the proprietor."11 By the late medieval period, such was not the case. The construction and maintenance of reservoirs and irrigation ditches was undertaken collectively by peasants either from a single village community or from several village communities banded together as a work unit for the task. Thereafter the peasants, turning the tables, would demand that the proprietor pay a water charge.12 Gradually, the custom of paying taxes after subtracting the water charge became well established in most shōen.

Similar changes were observed for commons (sanyō, literally, mountains and fields). During the early medieval period, a commons was considered the property of the proprietor. Peasants were allowed to cut grass and gather firewood from the commons, but it was not a secure right. There exist for this period numerous historical records relating to disputes over rights to commons.13 Such cases usually involved the complaint of proprietor against proprietor; very few occurred among peasants or between peasant communities. During the late medieval period, the use of commons by peasants became a right sanctioned by custom, and village communities drew up their own codes pertaining to its use. To take a random example, the village community of Imabori in Ōmi is recorded as having compiled a village code in 1448, one article of which stated that unauthorized cutting of trees from commons would be subject to fine. Such village codes were rare in the early medieval period.

9. The following historical evidence is revealing on the rōnin manekise: "When paddies are not planted or when the yields are poor because of the absconding or death of ōmishin [commons], both the azukari-dōroko and the jūshō must cooperate to entice and settle rōnin under their jurisdiction following [local] customs"; from a document, Kantō gohō-ji, dated 1 March 1262, in the possession of the Kanazawa Library and published in Senso Seichūtō, ed., Kanazawa baka sato (Tokyo, 1970), pt. 1, no. 106. The fact that the disposition of the land was determined by the azukari-dōroko and jūshō indicates that neither village communities nor the relatives of the absconded peasant had any voice or claim over the land vacated by the latter.

10. The shinden was land which was directly held by the shōen ryōsho, but not assigned to any myōsho. Cultivators of ishikudō were required to pay a higher tax than was levied on myōsho but no corvée was required.


12. That the shinden in fact had the same characteristics as sōyūden is clear from the example of Imabori. See Kanamori Masayuki, "Chūsei kōki ni okeru Ōmi no sōseki: Tokuchirō Imabōrō no rekishi," in Nihon shakai keizai-ko kenkyū, Chūsei-ken, ed. Hōgetsu Keigo Sensei Kanreki Kinencii (Tokyo, 1967), pp. 243-304.

13. On the iryō, see Hōgetsu Keigo, Chūsei kangei no kenkyū (Tokyo, 1941), pp. 106 ff.

14. Hōgetsu, Chūsei kangei. In Tōji's Kanno-šō in Yamashiro, the myōsho, who had been responsible for paying the water charges, ceased paying them. By the Ōei period (1394-1428) the ryōsho's demand for the payments was in vain. Also, in the Kinkuke-no-shō where, following custom, the ryōsho was paying 3.3 koku to the peasants, the latter demanded higher payments to cover the cost of a new reservoir. When the ryōsho refused, they withheld tax payments.

15. For example, the Imabori code of 1448 stated: "A fine of 500 mon shall be imposed on those cutting young trees . . . and a fine of 100 mon shall be imposed for cutting branches of mulberry trees." An article in another decree issued in Imabori in 1489 read: "In the forest belonging to the village, no one shall, without proper authorization, cut or gather trees, leaves, or branches [for fertilizer]. The villagers violating [this] shall be purged [i.e., lose the privileges accorded to the members of a village community]. If the violator is not a villager, he shall be banished." Yet another decree of Imabori issued in 1502 stated: "No one shall freely enter into common or private forest for the purpose of taking branches or leaves or earth under trees [richly fertilized]. Violators shall be fined 100 mon." From an unpublished copy version of Imabori Hishō jinjya monjo in the possession of Tokyo Daigaku Shiryōkan.
As the peasants’ rights to commons became better established and the management of commons was taken over by the village communities, it became increasingly difficult for proprietors to impose their authority on these community activities in order to safeguard their political power. Proprietors were forced to adjust to the changed political situation. At the same time, new opportunities were presented to proprietary lords for maintaining their authority if they adapted to the new situation; they could now maintain their superior authority by acting as arbitrators of disputes between village communities. As we shall see, such mutual accommodation between lord and peasantry provided the basis for the formation of the later sengoku-daimyo domain.

Although the medieval village economy was basically agricultural, this did not mean that the peasants were self-sufficient in producing all the goods necessary for cultivation and consumption. Two kinds of products could not be self-supplied by peasant families. One was those goods, such as salt and iron, which could be produced only in certain regions and which had to be purchased from these regions through the agency of merchants. The other was goods whose production required highly specialized skills, such as items crafted by skilled carpenters and cabinetmakers, pottery, leather goods, dyed cloth, and “manufactured” products of wrought and cast iron.

Markets in early medieval shōen were infrequently held, often only a few times a year, and rigidly controlled by shōen administrators—a reflection of the proprietor’s view that markets too were his economic property.16 Markets, in short, had not become free arenas for trading among peasants. Also, in dealing with “manufacturers,” shōen proprietors provided land, or kyōden, to skilled artisans who, in return, produced goods as required for the lord and for the market through which peasants acquired these goods.17 Thus, though these artisans entered villages for the purpose of meeting the needs of the villagers, they came under the control of the proprietor.

As “manufacture” and commerce grew rapidly in the late medieval period, markets began to be held much more frequently; three to six times per month became the norm. Parallel to this development, village artisans began to produce both to meet the demand of the immediate village community and to serve newly emerging regional markets. Agricultural villages near Kyoto and Nara began to specialize in the production of various processed agricultural products.18 Faced with these changes, proprietors of shōen gradually gave up the system of encouraging production by assigning land to artisans and turned instead to the regulation of markets through decrees (ichiba kinsē, market regulations) designed to maintain peace and order and to assure orderly trading.19

Thus by the late medieval age proprietors were no longer able to directly control manufacture and commerce, supplementary activities in the peasant economy, but could exert their influence only indirectly by regulating markets. This shift from direct to indirect control was analogous to the change we observed in the lord’s rule vis-à-vis the commons, in which the arbitration of disputes between village communities was substituted for direct control by proprietors. This change in the relationship of the proprietor to the market was clear evidence that peasants in the late medieval period could obtain, independent of the proprietor, those products which they themselves could not produce. The increase in agricultural productivity and consequent expansion of trading left little opportunity for the lord to exert his direct control over the process of production. In comparison to the earlier period in which the proprietor controlled handicraft and markets and consequently deprived village communities of their economic independence, the peasants in the late medieval period clearly enjoyed a much more advantageous position.

SOCIAl AND POLITICAL FUNCTIONS

Initially the primary function of a village community with respect to its members was economic; the economic units comprising the community—individual peasant households—were unable to sustain their economic activities without support from the larger group. By the late medieval period, proprietors had fewer opportunities to directly impose their authority over the economic functions of the village communities. As the economic circumstances of the village community changed, its raison d’être also changed and became increasingly social and political.

16. A letter of transfer written by Wada Shigetsuna and dated 12 August 1296 read: “Included in the transfer . . . [was] the southern section of the Namaha market [market held on 7th, 17th, and 27th of the month] in Okyama-shō in Echigo.” Such a description infers that the ryōshū considered the market his private property; Niigata-ken Kyōiku kinkai, ed., Okyama-shō shiryōshū (Niigata, 1965), p. 104.


18. Handicrafts and premodern manufacturing were specialized, as a rule, on the village basis, i.e., village A might produce oil; B, noodles; and C, bamboo shades; Watake Haruko, Nihon chōrei shigōsh ō taisetsu no kokutai (Tokyo, 1967), pp. 419–522.

19. A typical example is a decree dated 25 April 1353 pertaining to conduct at the market in Numata-no-shō in Aki. In this decree, Kobayakawa prohibited his subordinates (nōken), along with the residents of the Numata market, from disturbing the peace of the market. His decree clearly was issued in his role as mediator. Kobayakawa monyu, in Dai Nihon komonyo, iraseke monyu, series 11, no. 25.
Peasants could raise their social and economic status only in proportion to their ability to eliminate, through a united effort, the proprietor's power of control over various functions of the village community. Increasingly, villagers united themselves into village communities in order to achieve greater social and political independence. Communal solidarity was the means for waging war against proprietary authority. Although the social and political potential of the village community was scarcely recognized during the early period, it was realized during the late medieval period.

One of the most profound changes in political organization was the transformation of the village assembly (yorai) into an organ for formulating and articulating the common will of the villagers. Although intracommunity status distinctions such as wealth, lineage, or length of residence in the village remained important, the yorai was attended by nearly all of the villagers and run by consensus. Membership in the assembly was no longer limited to myōshū, as in earlier periods, and the peasants (hyakushō) now had rights of participation and voting in the assembly. Since decisions concerning the village community were made through "community discussions" (shōgū) at the yorai, attendance at meetings was an important duty of village members. As the first article of the 1448 village code of Imabari village stated: "Those who fail to come after receiving the second notice for an assembly shall be fined 50 mon."20

This new sense of communal solidarity and self-government was also reflected in the increasing use of village codes to regulate the internal affairs of the community. By the end of the Kamakura period the practice of using a form of sworn declaration (kishiemon) signed by all members of the village when a specific matter had been agreed upon became widespread. During the fourteenth century more formalized codes were adopted in which the customs of the village, and the rights based upon them, were made known in the form of "notices of the hyakushō" or of "laws of the sbēn."21 By the fifteenth century, village codes, similar in nature to a village constitution, began to be used as the basic rules for governing such communities. In the example of Imabari, the codes covered matters relating to the village assembly; the use of common lands, mountains, and fields and of common paddy land; the accommodation of travelers; and matters relating to preservation of law and order within the community.

That the late medieval village communities possessed a limited form of self-government is evident in the village codes noted above. To get a better sense of the degree of autonomy which such communities attained we must look at the village's jurisdictional autonomy and the tax contract system. Jurisdictional autonomy involved the acquisition by the peasants of political powers which had been exercised previously by the proprietor, such as village police powers and the right to adjudicate intravillage disputes. An example will be illustrative. During the mid-fifteenth century, Sugaura village in Ōmi—a village well known for achieving a high degree of self-government—could call itself "a juridically autonomous area," and the proprietor gave implicit recognition of this.22 If a thief was caught in this village, for example, he was punished by the village community rather than by higher authority.23

In contrast, an example from the early medieval period when such autonomy had not yet developed is revealing. In 1300, the jito for Yamada and Kamibefu villages in Satsuma was known to have exercised his jurisdictional power—arresting and fining heavily—even over such minor cases as the theft of sweet potatoes, speaking ill of others, adultery by wives, the possession of hidden upland, the killing of a dog, and the like.24 To be sure, this is an extreme example which caused conflict with the villagers. However, when this example is compared to that of Sugaura, it is evident how advantageous it was for a village community to have jurisdictional autonomy.

How many villages of the late medieval period came to enjoy jurisdictional autonomy is difficult to establish. In one example, a village called Ikuraga-no-shō demanded, in 1418, that the ryōshū, Hōryūji, meet certain conditions, including payment for water and jurisdictional autonomy. These demands, agreed upon by the village, came with a threat that if not granted the myōshū and all peasants would abandon their paddies fields and abscond.25 For a village community to win jurisdictional autonomy, it had to be prepared to mount a fierce struggle. This village did win limited jurisdictional autonomy at the expense of the shōen ryōshū but soon had to cope with a jito who attempted to deprive the community of its hard-won autonomy.

20. Imabari Hiyashi jinya monjo.
22. A posted decree (kabegaki) written by the Sugaura village community and dated 1568/14/12 began by stating: "No entry to the shūme; this is a community with its own rules [jīken-dan]." The decree was signed by 16 otoma and 20 naka-otoma. Shiga Daigaku Keizai-gakubu Shiryō-kan, ed., Sugaura monjo (Tokyo, 1967), 2, no. 925.
23. "On the matter of the chief which the shō-community reported, do punish him as befitting his crime." Ibid., 2, no. 816, "Seikūrō Kozuki chūmon," item dated 1433/12/15. And, "On those matters reported from Sugaura... the community may mete out punishment if evidence is sufficient"; ibid., 1 (Tokyo, 1960), no. 227, "Sugaura sōshō okibumi," item dated 1461/7/13.
In 1506, an incident involving the abduction of a bathing peasant woman gave the jito an opportunity to claim jurisdictional rights within the village. To prevent this jurisdictional encroachment, the village community had to seek the assistance of the civil proprietor at the cost of yielding a part of the jurisdictional autonomy which the peasants had earlier won. Clearly, the attempt to gain and maintain village jurisdictional autonomy was extremely difficult when the peasantry had to battle against such a changing combination of new and old forces—shōen proprietors, jito, kokujin. But there is evidence that the villages near and around the capital, with their more advanced economy and peasant political consciousness, did manage to acquire varying degrees of jurisdictional autonomy during the late Muromachi period.

Another method by which the village community gained freedom from direct proprietary interference was through the practice of tax contracting. Under this arrangement a village community, either the whole village or a group of villagers, contracted with the proprietor to deliver a given amount of tax in exchange for not having their yield assessed annually by an officer of the proprietor (and possibly having their tax raised). This, in short, was a method by which the peasants attempted to limit the most important right of the proprietor, the right to tax.

Early examples of tax contracting can be found in the mid-thirteenth century. However, in these instances tax contracts were made with the proprietor by a group of large myōshū and not by the village community as a whole. Such a contract with several large myōshū was not necessarily disadvantageous to the proprietor, since he could be assured that taxes would be exacted from the peasants. In contrast, a tax contract with a village community, in which all the village membership participated, signified a rise in the status of villagers other than myōshū and a retreat from the proprietor’s power. Such contracts could be found only in the late medieval period.

Tax contracts with whole village communities were probably achieved with more difficulty than the right to jurisdictional autonomy. The right to tax was basic to the survival of the proprietary lords, a fact to which they were increasingly sensitive as a result of the growing pressures for self-government within village communities. Even during the fifteenth century, proprietors resisted demands for contracts with village communities as a whole by agreeing to tax contracts between themselves and only the larger myōshū. Earlier studies have failed to draw sufficient distinction between

these two contractual methods, but the differences are important, and the prevalence of the latter method signifies a smaller degree of independence among the peasants than is sometimes stated.

However well the late medieval village communities succeeded in strengthening their political and social unity, there still existed economic and status differences among the villagers. Moreover, the upper stratum continually struggled to elevate itself to the status of minor proprietor by shedding restrictions imposed upon it by the community. This meant that proprietary lords could gain the support of peasant leaders by giving them special privileges, such as the tax contract, and thereby weaken community unity. An examination of surviving historical evidence reveals that most tax contracts were negotiated with the upper class peasants and not with village communities as a whole. One must be cautious, therefore, in interpreting all tax contracts as a sign of the emergence of self-governing village communities. Nonetheless, we may say that, as a general trend, the tax contracts, along with jurisdictional autonomy, indicate the growth of political power in village communities and the decline of the lord’s power.

By the late medieval period peasant struggles against proprietary authority had developed into open conflicts over such issues as the reduction of taxes and corrée or the dismissal of shōen administrators who had exceeded their authority. The form of these protests varied, sometimes including litigation, petition under threat of violence (gūso), absconding, and revolt.

A noteworthy development in petition was the increasing use of “letters of peasant appeal” (hyakushō mōshi ji) signed by more than one peasant. An analysis of these letters of appeal reveals that signers were originally limited to the upper class within the shōen. But as time went on the signers began to include villagers who were not myōshū. In Tara-no-shō of Wakasa, for example, where the shōen and the village community boundaries coincided, a letter of appeal was signed in 1354 by myōshū and others, 59 individuals in all, requesting a reduction in taxes and the dismissal of the shōen administrator. The signers stated that they had participated in “communion in holy water” (ichimi shinshu) before signing, meaning that the village members had taken an oath of unity after drinking holy water from the village temple in the presence of all. No better

27. On the peasant struggles during the late medieval period, see Susuki Ryōsichi, “Junsei hōkensei seiritsu ni okeru nōmin tō,” in Shōki kōsetsu taisetu (Tokyo, 1949); and Nagahara Keiji, Nihon hōkensei seiritsu kaisetsu: Rekonzoku (Tokyo, 1961), pp. 404–460.
28. For the significance of the appearance of hyakushō mōshi ji, see Satō Kazuhiko, “Hyakushō mōshi ji no seiritsu ni tsuite,” in Minbashī kenkyū, 9 (1971).
expression of the political function of a village community can be found than this.

The significance of such letters of appeal can be seen more clearly when compared to practices in the early medieval period. Then, although the shōnen proprietors in theory accepted direct petitions from peasants, as did the Kamakura bakufu, it was actually next to impossible for peasants to make accusations against jito to the bakufu. The Kamakura bakufu in 1250 established a procedure called “commoners’ litigation” (zōmin sosha) which ostensibly enabled peasants to bring cases directly to the bakufu, but in reality this avenue of litigation was in most instances closed to peasants simply because the peasants needed a “letter of recommendation” from the very jito who were the object of the suits. Against this background, the fact that letters of appeal by peasants began to appear frequently after the end of the thirteenth century, and that proprietors were unable to ignore them, indicates that significant changes were taking place at the local level by this time.

A more direct form of peasant appeal, gōso, or petitioning with the threat of violence, also came into more frequent use in the late medieval period. Villagers resorted to collective physical coercion against proprietors, generally because they had little expectation of the legal process yielding any results. An example of gōso can be found in the case of Kamikaze-no-shō. In 1437 the inhabitants of the shōen appealed for a tax reduction because of flood damage. When the proprietor granted only a small part of the reduction demanded, the shōen inhabitants marched en masse to Tōji, the proprietor, to protest. According to the records of the temple: “The myōshū and all inhabitants of the Kamikaze-no-shō came. The number approached sixty. They spent a night at the warehouse of the temple and continued to press their demand.” Since the number of households in the shōen at this time is estimated to have been around a hundred, it is obvious that more than half of the households sent participants in this “petition under the threat of violence.” Though the leaders of this demonstration were myōshū, many others also took part, and the village assembly discussed the matter. The change from the letter of peasant appeal to such tactics shows that communal solidarity had strengthened to the point of making such action possible.

Eventually the threat of violence gave way to the actual use of violence, and this trend culminated in peasant revolts (ikki). Threats of violence or abandonment of land continued to be the main means of applying collective pressure on the proprietor. But in confrontations with the shugo or dosō (moneylenders and/or pawnbrokers), both of whom were backed by the power of the bakufu, peasants organized large-scale and regionally coordinated do-ikki (peasant revolts).

As peasant ikki occurred more frequently, the need to strengthen social unity within village communities increased. Some of the villages in central Japan even began to construct moats around their habitations for defense against intruders. Outsiders were looked upon with suspicion, and in some instances village codes prohibited the accommodation of travelers. The fact that discriminatory attitudes became generally more pervasive among the population at large toward such groups as sarro, hita, kanen, kawaramono, and mōto was not unrelated to this growing sense of village exclusiveness.

Village unity and its external manifestation, village exclusiveness, had one effect which worked against the peasant effort to secure independence from proprietary authority. The internal unity achieved by the late medieval village communities became a major reason why village communities found it difficult to pool their forces over wider areas encompassing large numbers of villages and why they tended to remain isolated and mutually exclusive. From time to time, however, efforts to form some type of village federation across village communities were successful. The formation of such federations was clearly linked to the degree of internal social unity attained by the village communities of the region. The fact that the villages around Kyoto took joint action in large-scale do-ikki clearly demonstrates the greater sophistication of the peasantry of the central area.

CONCLUSION

How did the political functions of village communities which developed during the fifteenth century change during the sixteenth and how did this relate to the rise of the sengoku-daimyo? In answering this question, a leading scholar of the Muromachi period, Suzuki Ryūichi, has advanced the following view. Paralleling the increasing intensity of peasant


32. Suzuki, “Junsui kōkei seiritsu ni okeru nōmin tōso.”

33. Studies on the social status of the medieval peasant made by Kuroda Tosho and Amino Yoshihiko examine this point carefully. Also, for evidence on groups which were discriminated against during the medieval period, see Buraku Mondai Kenkyūsho, ed., Buraku ni kawamu stōtōki kenkyū, 3 (Kyoto, 1962) and 4 (Kyoto, 1965), especially the summary comments in each volume by Hayashiya Tatsushaburō. On the nonexclusive aspects of shiten villages during the early medieval period, see Amino Yoshihiko, Chūsei shiten na yōi (Tokyo, 1966).
porate into the framework of his polity the villagers' right to handle their own affairs with regard to the maintenance of law and order within their own territories. Article 84 of the same law stressed that, in matters relating to the use of water by geographical units larger than a single village community, established customs would continue to be respected. In this case the daimyo merely hoped to play the mediating role in intercommunity disputes. Thus, rather than impose their authority arbitrarily over the village communities which comprised their domain, the sengoku-daimyo accommodated themselves to the peasant struggle by institutionalizing into their systems of local governance the various functions which had been won by village communities in their effort to secure autonomy. In so doing the daimyo sought to legitimize themselves by acting as protectors of peasant interests. The daimyo frequently used the phrase "public good" (kōgi) as a way of expressing their "ideological" claim to political authority. By stressing the public, rather than private, characteristics of their authority, the daimyo attempted to justify the use of their power. At the same time they made use of the self-governing functions of village communities, reorganizing them into systems for the maintenance of law and order and for tax collection to the benefit of the daimyo.

It was this reorganization of local administration to take account of the various functions of village self-government which laid the basis of the successful daimyo domain. But since, in reality, the daimyo sought to use the self-governing capacities of the peasantry as a means of imposing his own control over peasant communities, the process was not achieved without further conflict between peasant and daimyo, especially in the central region around Kyoto where the political functions of village communities were most developed. The great Ikō ikki in the Nobi and Osaka areas were an obvious demonstration of the intensity of such conflicts. The fierce resistance mounted by the Ikō ikki exemplified this final battle against the attempts by daimyo to reorganize and restructure the political functions of the village communities, making village autonomy subject to superior daimyo authority. Only after the late medieval village communities were subsumed under daimyo control was the Tokugawa political system made possible.

36. The following order issued by Miyoshi Nagayoshi is a case in point:

Recently Guseki village began to dispute with Magami village concerning the path of irrigation ditches, and litigation resulted. Though both parties could present maps indicating the path of the irrigation ditches, neither has conclusive documentary evidence to prove its case. Magami village argued that no such irrigation ditches existed in earlier times, and thus Guseki village has no right to newly construct them. However, after a careful survey made by the officials who were sent to investigate the dispute, we have come to the conclusion that Guseki village's claim is justified. It is hereby ordered that Guseki village may open new ditches, as indicated on its map, in order to obtain water.

19 May 1559  For Guseki Village  Nagayoshi

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ant strives throughout the fifteenth century, class distinctions appeared in village communities, with the myōshū in the upper layer growing into minor proprietors who sided with the lord's authority and becoming, in effect, betrayers of the peasant struggle.

Suzuki's view has long been accepted as the authoritative interpretation, its correctness seemingly borne out by the fact that the peasant revolts in the regions near Kyoto in the course of the sixteenth century lost the élan they once had. However, while confirming his basic observation that the upper layer of the peasantry became minor proprietors, thus weakening the cohesiveness of the village communities, recent research has shown that the peasant struggles of the sixteenth century widened in geographical scope to include all regions of Japan and that the leadership of such revolts in many areas began to be taken by the common peasantry (hyakushō). It is also evident that these struggles had a real effect on the coercive power of the daimyo and that the control exerted by the sengoku-daimyo over peasants during the sixteenth century had certain obvious limitations. Above all, the effective tax rates were not high. This was clearly due to the persistent peasant resistance to tax payments, and abscinding as a form of such resistance continued to plague daimyo, who were forced to take great pains to prevent it.

The fundamental problem facing the sengoku-daimyo was the suppression of peasant resistance whether by force or accommodation.

When examined from this perspective, it is evident that the political functions of village communities were not as weak as Suzuki has stated. The daimyo could not refuse to recognize certain self-governing political functions of village communities, even though in so doing they found their own local authority challenged. In responding to this challenge, the daimyo took two positive steps: they attempted to integrate the various institutional arrangements for village self-government into their own system of local administration, and they sought to strengthen their mediating role in solving intercommunity disputes.

For example, Article 64 of the Date Law of the Domain (hankokai) called the Jinkaishō states: "In cases in which merchants of other provinces [kuni] or travelers are robbed of their valuable possessions by mountebank robbers, the responsibility for the crime belongs to the villages in which such crime occurred." This clearly was an attempt by the daimyo to incor-