The Organized Peasants

The *Wakamonogumi* in the Edo Period

by RICHARD E. VARNER

History is transmitted by those who have the ability and means to record it, for otherwise there is no way of communicating with posterity. We know a great deal about the lives and loves, the feelings and tastes of Heian courtiers for those articulate and sophisticated nobles left extensive accounts in their diaries and novels. But of the contemporary peasant class we know next to nothing as the unlettered farmers had no way of recording the intricate details of their daily life. The same is also true of even recent periods of Japanese history, for example, the Tokugawa era. The samurai were by and large literate and committed their affairs to writing, thus providing later historians with ample material to study; the peasants living in remote and obscure villages left no such record and as a result they have for the most part been overlooked in accounts of Tokugawa life and society. Consequently it is only too easy for the modern reader to assume a samurai-oriented view of Edo history and not take into sufficient account the peasants, who, it is said, made up about 80% of the total population in late Tokugawa times. The peasants had their hopes and fears, their pleasures and joys; they also showed both wisdom and common sense in contriving ways of meeting the challenges of their environment and social system.

History books tell us that villagers were divided into *gōningumi,* or groups of five households responsible for paying a specified share of the community tax burden. This government-imposed structure is well known because the *gōningumi*

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This article is based on the author's M.A. thesis, East Asian Studies, International College, Sophia University, 1976. He wishes to acknowledge the kind help and guidance of Professors Tsurumi Kazuko 鶴見和子 and Maurice Baey.

1 Which is not to say that the subject has been completely neglected, for various works, both in Japanese and English, have been published since the war on the role of the peasants in the Edo period. Nevertheless most of these books and articles deal with the peasants in their relation to the *bakufu* (e.g., popular uprisings, taxation, rice production, rural economic development, etc.) and do not attempt to describe in detail the internal organization of village life as such.

were documented in the tax records kept by samurai officials. Much has been learned about family structure from these records for they describe in detail the extended families with their branches arranged in hierarchical pattern; they also show how eldest sons succeeded to family property and how, in the case of relatively wealthy families, younger brothers would be allowed to establish collateral branches. The historical value of such records is undeniable for they are an important source of information about agricet society. But at the same time it should be borne in mind that these documents portray peasant life from a definitely bakufu point of view; the purpose of their compilation was the efficient collection of taxes and the preservation of law and order; any additional information gleaned from them is incidental. Furthermore, the goningumi system was a structure imposed from above and did not originate spontaneously to serve the peasants' needs. It took from the village but gave very little in return.

As the folklorist Segawa Kiyoko has observed, 'In the Edo period the orders of the bakufu were very strict, but their purpose was to collect taxes and to suppress resistance. The bakufu never really came into touch with the actual conditions of village life; in each village, the people made their own rules and lived by them.' Thus there was another side of village life which was planned and largely managed by the peasants themselves, but not much is known about this feature of rural society because the villagers left very few records about such activities.

One of the primary differences between samurai and peasant lies in the method of social stratification and the related matter of role differentiation. Samurai society was essentially hierarchical, stemming from the patriarchal system in which the father was the undisputed head of the family. The hierarchy was perpetuated by the general custom of primogeniture by which the position of the eldest son as the next head of the family was secured through role differentiation by birth. The relative positions of the younger brothers were also determined by order of birth. Hence status within the hierarchy was clearly defined and, at least in theory, unalterable, and this led to the highly stratified society of the samurai class.

There was also a hierarchy in the organization of a peasant village, but this only later developed into a stratified society. Originally the unity of the village was not founded on social hierarchy but rather on the communal agrarian way of life shared by all the members of the group. In peasant society there were only two basic social strata—the landed peasants (hombyakushō or takamochi) and the landless ones (mizunomi-byakushō). These two groups were mutually dependent, largely on account of the division of labor in farming communities. On the one hand there was the labor directly connected with rice cultivation, and this included the preparing and tending of the paddy fields, the sowing of the crop, and harvesting. This type of work was the responsibility of the land-owning family, which

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4 本百姓, 高持, 水谷百姓
would arrange labor agreements, called yui and temagari, \(^5\) by which the mizunomi-hyakushō would receive wages in kind or the use of land in exchange for their work in the fields. This kind of relationship between land-owning and landless peasants can be traced through tax records, which describe in some details the financial circumstances of the family, the unit from which the bakufu obtained its tax money.

There was, however, another type of labor in which the takamochi and mizunomi participated on more equal terms. This was communal work which was only indirectly related to rice cultivation and it included projects such as building bridges, repairing roads, and managing communal property. In many villages there were tracts of land, called iriaiyama, \(^6\) which were owned by the community as a whole and provided lumber, firewood, and cut grass for use as fertilizer in the rice paddies. This land was managed at the communal level as the upkeep involved so much labor that no one family could assume responsibility. The community work force also tended the village temple and local shrine and was in charge of organizing the various festivals throughout the year. The takamochi and mizunomi families combined efforts in arranging funerals and doing all that was necessary to ensure the smooth transition of the villagers into the next world. Death was part of communal life.

The two terms chien and ketsuen \(^7\) are important in any study of village unity. Both words contain ‘en’, which not only means ‘relationship’ but also implies the idea of ‘fate’ and ‘destiny’. En is a predestined relationship, determining the circumstances into which a person is born. Chi, or ‘earth’, combines with en to signify a relationship with the land or a territorial consciousness shared by all the peasants of the village. No matter who held the actual property rights, the peasants strongly identified with their own village and all the territory it occupied and possessed. Ketsuen means consanguinity or blood relationship. This does not necessarily mean that all the inhabitants of a particular village were related by blood, but they did identify with a common ancestor, often the founder of the community. This was the ujigami, \(^8\) the local deity, possibly the deepest source of village unity.


\(^6\) 入会山. The term iriai is also used, but as such tracts of land were generally on a hillside (being unsuitable for rice cultivation) the suffix yama is often added. A great deal of material on the iriai system and the resolution of territorial conflict between villages is to be found in Nakano Masao 中野正雄, ‘Tokugawa Jidai ni okeru Yamaron no Ichirei’ 徳川時代に於ける山沿の

\(^7\) 遺締, 血縁

\(^8\) 氏神
In addition, there was the ominous presence of the bakufu, which, while not directly involved in village affairs, was always in the background demanding its cut of the local wealth. When taxation was set at the shikō-rokumin\(^9\) rate, the peasants paid the government 40% of their produce, but this was increased to 50% when the gokō-gomin\(^10\) rate was in force. There was a current saying, Chiri motsumoreba, yama to naru\(^11\) ('Dust piled up becomes a mountain'). So it was with peasant life, year after year piling up dust, creating something out of nothing, hoping that someday it would become a mountain. For the most part the peasants were tied to their village for life and few managed, or even wished, to leave and work elsewhere. Feelings of loyalty toward and identification with one's own village were strong, and even people from neighboring communities were regarded as outsiders.

Peasant life was therefore often poor, nasty, brutish, and short, with precious little arts and letters. And yet Thomas Hobbes’ famous dictum is not completely appropriate as regards Japanese village life, for existence in the rural communities was certainly not solitary in the sense that the villagers had little contact with each other, for the harsh conditions under which they lived required intricate patterns of communal cooperation. The purpose of the present article is to describe one of the concrete embodiments of peasant cooperation—the wakamonogumi.\(^12\) This was the social structure which organized and largely controlled the men of the village as regards communal activities. Few general observations can be made about this subject because there were pronounced regional variations in the structure and role of these organizations; the wakamonogumi could in fact differ from village to village within a given region. This lack of conformity clearly illustrates an essential feature of these groups—the organization was not imposed from above by outsiders but sprang up spontaneously to meet the particular needs of a village. As a very general rule, it may be noted that the wakamonogumi appear to have been strongest and most numerous in western Japan; in the northern regions family consciousness among peasants seems to have been more developed and group solidarity correspondingly weaker.

**Sources**

The existence of wakamonogumi is documented by eighty-three sets of records, or jōmoku,\(^13\) dating from the Edo period. These records were gathered from village warehouses located in fifteen prefectures throughout the country during the 1930s in a search sponsored by the Dainippon Rengō Seinendan\(^14\) and were subsequently last 1867, with six bearing no date) and then by area, followed by the complete texts of all the jōmoku, in Wakamono Seido (see n. 15, below), pp. 331–508. Both this work and Segawa use the identical chronological numbering when referring to the jōmoku.

\(^9\) 四公六民
\(^10\) 五公五民
\(^11\) 廃も積れば山となる
\(^12\) 若者組. Alternative names are provided below in n. 19.
\(^13\) 条目. These records are listed in chronological order (the first being dated 1677. the
\(^14\) 大日本連合書会
The first four articles of the ten-article Jōmon-oku, de al Hitori
10 (1700), of Arai village, Kamo county, Shizukawa prefecture.
Yanagita unfortunately does not specify his sources, but it is more than likely that he came into personal contact with late surviving wakamonogumi during his constant wanderings around rural Japan. A series of articles by Ariga Kizaemon throws further light on the role of the wakamonogumi in peasant marriages.\(^{17}\)

But the most important source of information is undoubtedly Segawa Kiyoko’s *Wakamono to Musume o Meguru Minzoku*,\(^{18}\) an in-depth probe into rural society based on prewar fieldwork with special reference to customs related to young men and women; the study, however, provides a great deal of general information about villagers of all age groups. Segawa also draws from a variety of local studies, which are especially interesting as they were compiled by people living in a particular area and are rich in the kind of detail of which only a local person would be aware. But the richest source of information was Segawa’s own extensive fieldwork in rural communities located in different parts of the country. Without a careful study of her material, it is impossible for the reader to fully appreciate the contribution made to this field of study by Segawa Kiyoko, a dedicated scholar of the finest Japanese tradition. A glance at the references made in the notes of the present article will reveal my indebtedness to her research.

**Structure of the Wakamonogumi**

The *wakamonogumi* was essentially a local organization and, as noted above, its diversity in structure makes it difficult to describe in general terms. Even the very name of these organizations differed from place to place (*wakaren*, *wakamononakama*, *wakashii*, and *wakarenshii*\(^{19}\) are just four examples), but the term ‘*wakamonogumi*’ has been adopted by scholars as a general appellation for the sake of convenience. With this caveat in mind, the structure of the *wakamonogumi* will be discussed as regards participation ages, leadership, meetings, lodge, rules, and relationship with the *bakufu* authorities; at the same time various suggestions will be tentatively offered to explain the reason for variations in some of the above-mentioned items.

*Wakamonogumi* means ‘young men’s group’, but this literal rendering is apt to be misleading because middle-aged men also participated; although the various names for the organization usually begin with *waka*- (‘young’), membership was by no means restricted to youngsters and it would perhaps be more appropriate to translate *waka* in this context as ‘active’ or ‘working’. The age range of the *wakamonogumi* is often specified in the *jōmoku*. For instance, in a set of articles dating from 1713 in Shimokawazu village, Kamo county, Shizuoka prefecture,\(^{20}\) we read that members joined the group at the age of fifteen and retired at thirty-four. In another set of articles dating from 1851 and in force in


\(^{18}\) See n. 3, above.

\(^{19}\) 若連 若者仲間, 若衆, 若連衆

\(^{20}\) Segawa, p. 162.
Akasaki village, Kisen county, Iwate prefecture, membership age ranged from fifteen to forty-three; jōmoku dated 1875 from Kamitsuki village on Miyakejima required men from the ages of fifteen to forty to participate in the organization.

Such age ranges often appear in the various jōmoku and show that the wakamonomogumi was not made up of only ‘young’ men. To understand the implications of the participation age range it is necessary to consider the three basic groups of males within the village as a whole. First, there were the children, that is, the young boys who had yet to take part in the coming-of-age ceremony; at the other end of the scale were the elderly men who had retired from active life. In between these two extremes were the men in their working prime and it is they who made up the membership of the wakamonomogumi.

The passage of a boy from the children’s group to the ranks of men was marked by a coming-of-age ceremony. This rite is an interesting topic of study in itself, but for present purposes it may be noted that the ceremony coincided with entrance into the wakamonomogumi and that both events took place around the age of puberty, that is, about the age of fifteen years. As entrance into the wakamonomogumi was biologically determined by the beginning of puberty, the lower age bracket is about the same in all the jōmoku. The age of retirement, however, varied greatly from village to village and reflects an adaptation to local demographic conditions, with special reference to the numerical size of the active male population. As will be seen later, the wakamonomogumi was involved in many essential activities in village life and was organized as a work group to provide community services. A certain basic number of active men had therefore always to be available, and this would necessitate the prolongation of wakamonomogumi membership in small communities. Men often served well into their forties, and forty-three was a common age of retirement. In some cases the upper age limit was flexible, and in the example from Akasaki village cited above, the jōmoku lay down that a member reaching retirement age but having no younger man to replace him had to continue belonging to the wakamonomogumi. It should be borne in mind that people aged relatively quickly in rural villages during the Edo period and a man retiring from the wakamonomogumi in his late thirties or early forties might well have been regarded as an elderly member of the community. Hence entrance into the wakamonomogumi meant that a boy was recognized as having reached manhood, while retirement marked the end of his active life. In effect the wakamonomogumi was composed of men in the prime of their working lives.

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21 Ibid., p. 159.
22 Ibid., p. 233.
23 The first three chapters of Segawa, pp. 9-134, deal with various aspects of the seinen-shiki 成年式; see also Ariga, IV, pp. 1203-15.
24 Probably because the 42nd year was the great climacteric (taiyaku 太厄) in a man’s life and theoretically marked the end of his active career. Further examples of retirement ages are given in Ariga, IV, p. 1312.
25 Segawa, pp. 159-60. Membership, which was compulsory, was from the ages of 15 to 33 in Kashiwara buraku, Higano prefecture: Ushio, p. 100.
In addition to age there was also another aspect to participation and this was
directly related to role differentiation within peasant society. Two different
patterns can be discerned, one an earlier type and the other a later. With regard
to the former, Segawa observes, 'The wakamonogumi was a young man's peer group,
an older and simpler form of organization having originated in an era when role
differentiation according to age was highly revered. That is, all the young men
in the village, whether they were the eldest sons or younger brothers, had to par-
ticipate equally in the wakamonogumi.'\(^{26}\) Thus there was a hierarchy, and seniority
therein was determined by age, with the older members naturally occupying
positions of authority and respect. Segawa makes a further comment on this
system: 'At that time there were different levels of wealth and so village society
cannot be said to have been egalitarian. But the wakamonogumi was relatively
egalitarian inasmuch as participation was determined by age and not family
status. Paradoxically, in feudal times role differentiation according to age was
the only principle of equality.'\(^{27}\)

Let us consider this system a little more closely. When a boy reached a specified
age, usually fifteen, he entered the wakamonogumi. All the male villagers were
required to do this, regardless of family status, and in this sense the wakamonogumi
was egalitarian inasmuch as all the men of the community were treated alike.
Once a boy entered the group, role differentiation according to age continued
to operate. The new member became a kohai, or junior, vis-a-vis the older mem-
bers, his sempai,\(^{28}\) and he occupied a subordinate position. But with the passing
of time he automatically became a sempai himself vis-a-vis new members who
joined the group after him. In this way there was a built-in provision in the system
for advancement and this applied equally to all the members; while there was a
hierarchy in which the relative positions of leader and follower were clearly
defined, the principle by which these positions were differentiated was essentially
egalitarian. This stood in marked contrast to the system prevailing in samurai
society, in which there was little social mobility: a man's position within his
family was determined by order of birth and his position within society at large
was determined by the rank of the family into which he happened to have been
born. It is possible that the egalitarian system of the wakamonogumi could exist
only because the peasants occupied the lowest rung of Edo society.\(^{29}\) Thus the
earliest participation pattern of the wakamonogumi was one in which membership
and role within the group were determined by age,\(^{30}\) and this is clearly evident
in the various jomoku which specify an age range for members and insist on the
participation of all male villagers.

\(^{26}\) Segawa, p. 236.
\(^{27}\) Ibid., p. 173.
\(^{28}\) Sempai, 後輩
\(^{29}\) In theory the peasants were ranked second in the shi-no-kosho 士農工商 (samurai-
farmers-artsans-merchants) social order, but in practice they occupied the lowest places.

30 The nenshokujutsu 年齢序列 ('advancement by age' system) is basically identical with the
nenukujutsu 年功序列 ('advancement by length of service' system) practiced today in Japanese
society, in that promotion is automatic, escala-
tor-like, and fundamentally depends on the passage of time which applies equally and
But there was also a second, and later, participation pattern by which only eldest sons or one member from each family joined the *wakamonogumi*. This was, of course, far less egalitarian as the eldest sons were being especially favored on account of birth. As will be described below, the *wakamonogumi* was deeply involved in the village marriage process and the first step in mate selection was taken by joining the group. In at least some of the cases where only the eldest sons were allowed to join, younger brothers may as a result have been excluded from marrying or have had their chances of marrying severely impaired. As regards this second pattern, Segawa notes, ‘Participation of one person from each household or of just the eldest son was a new development which took place after the patriarchal system and primogeniture penetrated into the villages.’

Now the patriarchal family system and primogeniture were characteristic of samurai society, and Segawa is suggesting here that the family system in the village communities was gradually modified by the adoption of higher-class social customs. There is evidence, for example, of the wealthier families in the villages imitating samurai culture and going outside their own community to arrange marriages for their children in defiance of the traditional peasant custom which provided a freer choice of partner within the community. The subject of samurai influence on peasant customs is an interesting study, but all that need be noted here is that this later development tended to undermine the egalitarian nature of the *wakamonogumi* and to transform it into an elitist group.

Within the *wakamonogumi* itself there were two clearly defined age brackets. The younger was made up of members from fifteen to about twenty-five years of age, and they were occupied in being trained to carry out the communal duties of the village and in searching for and choosing a mate. The second division consisted of the middle-aged members ranging from their mid-twenties up to their mid-forties, depending on the local retirement age, and these men served as the leaders of the group, managers of the village communal property and systems, and teachers of the junior corps. Role differentiation according to age defined the leadership structure in general terms, with the older members occupying positions of authority. There were, however, different rules for determining specific positions of leadership and these are spelled out in the various *jōmoku*.

According to *jōmoku* 14 and 16 (Shizuoka prefecture, 1788 and 1797), the leadership of the local *wakamonogumi* was to be made up of a head and two sub-

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31 Segawa, p. 236.
32 Yanagita, pp. 186–91.
heads.\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Jōmoku} 25\textsuperscript{35} (Nagano prefecture, 1810) specifies ten assistants and ten apprentices. As regards choice of these officials, \textit{jōmoku} 8 and 12\textsuperscript{36} (Shizuoka prefecture, 1760 and 1767) lay down that a prospective candidate must make his bid before the assembled group. According to \textit{jōmoku} 54\textsuperscript{37} (Nagano prefecture, 1847), four assistants were to be chosen at a general meeting every year. The office of assistants entailed definite responsibility for they could sometimes be called on to settle a deadlocked problem arising in the village. \textit{Jōmoku} 8\textsuperscript{38} ruled that any problem disturbing the harmony of the community should be referred to the head of the \textit{wakamonogumi} in the first instance and he would adjudicate. Should this not produce the desired settlement among the contending parties, the sub-heads were to be summoned and they would take the matter up with the headman of the village. The head of the \textit{wakamonogumi} was not invariably chosen on the basis of age, experience and ability, and probably as a result of the penetration of outside influence into the villages it sometimes happened that the eldest son of a wealthy family was chosen as leader of the group. As may be seen, the principle of role differentiation according to age was not strictly observed when it came to appointing the leadership of the group, but this was of necessity and did not invalidate the general principle on which the group was based. In the case of a dozen contemporaries, or \textit{dōhai},\textsuperscript{39} being eligible for the post of leader, for example, it is obvious that a criterion of selection other than age had to be used to choose just one man.

As a rule the older members were the leaders of the group, but there was so much variation from village to village in the selection procedures that it is difficult to detect a general pattern. This in itself points to an important aspect of the leadership structure—that leader selection was carried out according to criteria determined at the local level in keeping with the customs and needs of a particular village. These criteria included chiefly age, but at times were also extended to family status and personal ability; this last qualification is stressed by the rules in force in Igaya village on Miyakejima, where it was specifically laid down that ability and willingness to work would also be taken into consideration as regards promotion.\textsuperscript{40} As in any well-ordered society, there was also a system of checks and balances to curb any misused exercise of authority, and in \textit{jōmoku} 12\textsuperscript{41} we read that members of the local \textit{wakamonogumi} dissatisfied with a leader of the group who had stepped out of line were entitled to appeal to the headman of the village for his dismissal from office.

In any analysis of the structure of the \textit{wakamonogumi}, it is necessary to consider the meetings of the group for these played an essential role in its activities. The assemblies were usually called \textit{yorai}\textsuperscript{42} and discussion of all important matters

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Kashira} 頭 and \textit{ko-gashira} 小頭 respectively.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., pp. 399–400.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., pp. 355–6 & 369–70.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., pp. 454–5.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., pp. 355–6.
\textsuperscript{39} 同輩
\textsuperscript{40} Segawa, p. 234.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Wakamono Seido}, pp. 369–71.
\textsuperscript{42} 候合い.
took place at such meetings. *Jōmoku* 43 (Shizuoka prefecture, 1713) stipulates that a member not attending a particular meeting had no right to argue with any of its decisions; furthermore, these decisions were not to be discussed with younger brothers and sisters (*Jōmoku* 9, Aichi prefecture, 1763).44 The *wakamonogumi* might meet to discipline wayward members, investigate proposed marriages, plan village projects such as road building and roof thatching—or simply just to drink *sake* and have an enjoyable time. A *yorai* was often scheduled to coincide with the principal local festival so that members who had left the village but usually returned for the celebrations could also attend the meeting.

The *wakamonogumi* had its own special meeting place, or *yado*,43 and members would sometimes actually live in this building, possibly to alleviate the shortage of space in their own family homes. Often enough a village would possess more than one *yado*, in which case a man would have to decide which one he wished to belong to. The younger members would invite girls to the *yado* in the evening to help to make handicraft items, such as sandals, for the village; these occasions gave the young men and women a chance to get to know each other better for purposes of mate selection. Sometimes a *yado* would be located in the house of a childless couple, who would then become the *oyakata* of the young people and help them to find suitable partners.

A concrete example of *yado* organization and activities can be taken from the records of Hama village in Saga prefecture.46 Hama had four *yado* and the young men lived in the one of their choice from the end of their schooling to the time of their marriage. Social education was one of the basic purposes of the *yado* and youngsters were taught etiquette, for example, the proper way of greeting people, and evening visits to the local temple were organized to hear appropriate sermons. The younger members were responsible for the upkeep and cleaning of the *yado*, and they were expected to prepare the bath and bedding for their seniors. In return the older members instructed the young men in the handling of boats and the care of fishing nets.

The existing *jōmoku* show that detailed rules were drawn up for the smooth running of the *yado*. Here again a concrete example taken from Okada village, Chita county, Aichi prefecture,47 best illustrates the maze of precepts and traditions that were in effect from the late Edo period down to the Taishō era, that is, to the second decade of the present century. When a man went to the *yado*, he was obliged to walk there alone and then dutifully await his turn to enter the building; entering the *yado* took time because everyone was expected to give

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43 Ibid., pp. 349–50.

44 Ibid., pp. 360–1.

45 吳. Much detail on this subject is provided in Ariga, iv, pp. 1911–40, where it is noted (p. 1331) that there were three types of *yado* to be found—one for men, another for women, and a third for both men and women together.

Photographs of still existing *yado*, most of them built on sites, are included in Segawa, and also in Noguchi Kôtoku 野口恭作, "*Tosa no Tomari-goya*, 士佐のトマリ小屋, in *Shokki-Keizaishi Gaku*, vol. 3 (June 1935), pp. 335–6.

46 Segawa, pp. 205–6.

the proper greetings and bows to the other members. All the members were seated in strict order of seniority. A fire was not to be started in the hibachi but had to be carried into the room in a fire-pan. If anything had to be borrowed, due consultation with the head of the household lending the object had to be made and the article, for example a candlestick, properly cleaned before being returned. The rules were not limited to conduct within the yado itself but touched on various aspects of village life. In Okada village the wakamonogumi was also in charge of transporting articles to and from the communal warehouse where important documents, such as jōmoku, were stored. On such occasions two of the older members would be accompanied by three of the younger. When their mission had been accomplished, the younger men were supposed to check the lock of the warehouse door seven times, the senior men would then make an inspection to satisfy themselves that it was properly closed, and as a final precaution their juniors would examine the lock thirteen more times. On their way home the men were forbidden to swing the warehouse key back and forth as they walked. Whether or not these detailed rules were strictly observed on all occasions may perhaps be doubted, but they served in this instance to emphasize the importance which the villagers were expected to attach to community property. And in general the host of petty regulations, hallowed by custom and tradition, gave concrete form to an accepted code of community conduct.

As in many other villages, Okada had its system of passing messages among its members and here again the wakamonogumi played a leading role; needless to say, the procedure was governed by detailed instructions. The message would start from the center of the village and two people would pass it on to four more, each of whom was supposed to transmit it to two other people. If the message originated before noon, only one person need begin its transmission, but if it started later in the day two villagers had to initiate the procedure in order to speed up the process. A messenger was enjoined never to delay in this operation and was instructed to stand in front of the house of the next recipient and call out three times; if there was no response, he was to knock on the door until he received an acknowledgement. When a message had to be delivered to another island, the jōmoku describe in detail the procedure to be followed as regards borrowing a boat, talking to strangers, behavior in another village, delivery of the message, return of the boat and the expression of gratitude to its owner for allowing its use.

This mass of petty regulations served a practical purpose in outlining in concrete terms the behavior expected of a male villager in his daily life. Details tend to vary, with each village coping in its own way best suited to local circumstances. The system was perpetuated from generation to generation through the social

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48 Various seating plans are illustrated in Wakamono Seido, pp. 88–9.

49 This renraku system is still practiced by members of organizations in Japan, parti-

cularly in rural areas, although the usual method of transmission is now the telephone.

instruction that took place in the *rado* where the elders taught the younger men. The rules listed in the *jōmoku* were the guidelines for this social formation, specifying in detail the procedures to be followed for a man to perform his role as a member of the community. The overall purpose of the system is summed up in *jōmoku* 2851 (Shizuoka prefecture, 1813), where it is written: ‘Why is there a *wakamonogumi*? When a child grows up in his own household with his parents, brothers and sisters, he becomes selfish. When a boy joins the *wakamonogumi* at the age of fifteen, he learns about the important matters of life from members of the group . . . ’

The process of socialization which took place in the *wakamonogumi* created a group orientation which focused on the community rather than the individual family. It goes without saying that in any society community consciousness and family consciousness exist side by side, and variation occurs only in the greater emphasis accorded one or the other. But in the peasant villages of the Edo period (and very possibly in earlier eras as well), role differentiation by age, a principle which transcended family membership, allowed families to be integrated into a community group and consolidated the villagers in one closely knit unit.

There is a distinctly moralistic flavor to most of the *jōmoku* and members of the *wakamonogumi* were exhorted to lead frugal, hard-working lives. The following or similar admonitions are to be found in many of the extant documents:
—Respect the *bakufu* and obey the laws of the land.
—Do not turn your back on your parents, brothers, sisters, wife, friends and fellow villagers.
—Do not swear, quarrel, gamble or steal.
—Avoid using luxury goods.
—Do not become addicted to wine, women or pleasure.
—Be true to your trade or profession, and do not forget your forebears.
—Worship the gods and respect the Buddhist law.

These were the standards of village life and anyone observing them in their entirety was a model member of the community; conversely, anyone grossly neglectful of these precepts did not fit into the group and was regarded as an irritant in the smooth and uneventful running of village life. The system undoubtedly contributed to peace and harmony within the village, but it accomplished this at the cost of personal individuality. A man trying to go his own way was not admired but considered weak, for in the villagers’ eyes the need to assert one’s individuality stemmed from a feeling of weakness and insecurity. The young people in particular found it difficult to conceive of themselves as anything but members of the group. As Segawa observes, ‘The young people never had enough strength to be independent; strong self-confidence was the sign of an inferiority complex.’52 Thus the sense of identity existed more on the group level than the individual, and as a result people living across the valley in the next village were

51 *Wakamono Seido*, pp. 403-5.  
52 Segawa, p. 213.
looked upon as outsiders. The social education of the village emphasized group cooperation at all times. The members of the *wakamonogumi* had to learn by heart a detailed procedure to perform even the simplest task, and in this way the men could carry out their work in the approved and traditional way. Rote learning standardized the behavior of the illiterate peasants and so each village society attained a high degree of conformity. But procedure was determined locally, with the rules and regulations of each community differing to a greater or smaller degree, and this uniqueness (albeit often in only small petty details) of the lore of a particular village served to emphasize the community’s corporate consciousness.

On reading the precepts of good behavior and right conduct listed above, one might easily presume that the *wakamonogumi* system would have found favor with the *bakufu* authorities, who themselves were much given to issuing sumptuary regulations for the benefit of the lower classes, but this was not the case. In fact the *bakufu* went as far as banning the *wakamonogumi* in some regions, and the order issued in 1829 to the men of Komae village, near Edo, is a good example. The main points of the injunction are as follows:

—*Wakamonogumi* groups in villages gather together at the time of festivals.
—They waste the leisure time from their useful farming work by doing mischief.
—They do not heed the advice of the village headman.
—The official organization of the village is the *goningumi* and any problems should be settled through the *goningumi*.
—If such problems cannot be settled through the *goningumi*, they should be brought before the headman.
—If such problems cannot be solved at the village level, they should be brought before the district official.
—In future, matters concerning festivals will be discussed by the village headman and the peasants’ representatives. The *wakamonogumi* will not be asked to help.
—Consequently, the *wakamonogumi* is prohibited from now on.
—All the members of the village will sign this order.  

This type of prohibition was quite common and there can be no doubt that the *bakufu* tried to eradicate the *wakamonogumi*. The reason for this official displeasure was that the organization was created at the local level and to a certain extent reflected a tendency toward local autonomy. And although Tokugawa officials were not overly concerned with the local affairs of the illiterate peasants, they could not afford to overlook any movement fostering a type of self-government. The *goningumi* was the official, state-approved organization in that it was created by the *bakufu* and for the *bakufu*, and any unauthorized competing structure was bound to be regarded with disapproval.

But because of their grassroots foundation, the *wakamonogumi* were extremely difficult to eradicate permanently. For example, the men’s group in Ichinobe village, Gamō county, Shiga prefecture, was ordered to disband in 1819, but

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53 Ibid., pp. 167–8.
twenty years later the villagers won local support and obtained permission to re-establish the *wakamonogumi*.\(^{54}\) Even though the *bakufu* might prohibit a particular *wakamonogumi*, the group would sometimes re-emerge after the lapse of one generation. The *wakamonogumi* met a definite need in the life of the village and no amount of government prohibitions could root out the organization. When a prohibition was issued from above, the villagers would bow docilely and wait patiently, and after some time had passed the structure would re-appear because it was necessary for their way of life. In the interim the responsibilities would be taken on by another group with a different name but with the same membership. In many cases the structure of the *wakamonogumi* was so flexible that the group could fall into and out of existence as circumstances dictated. In its simplest form, the *wakamonogumi* was merely an assembly of the village men to determine a group consensus and to organize communal activity. The flexibility of its structure and the high degree of its integration into peasant society made it incredibly resilient and difficult to eliminate. The persistence of community identity in Japanese rural society is well illustrated by Segawa, speaking about her experience while undertaking fieldwork in the countryside:

The villages we visited in the mid-1930s were no longer populated by people who had developed the land at the times of the villagers’ foundation. They were villages in which the family system as it had existed under feudalism had come to an end and collapsed. But as far as labor and resources were concerned, community loyalty was still regarded as a virtue. The ideals of which the villagers spoke were squeezed out of feelings based on a very old village way of life. The older people had had to face the rapid social changes of the Meiji era; their consciousness was a mixture of the old and the new...\(^{55}\)

In other words, social innovations had brought about great changes as regards family consciousness, but the villagers’ communal identity had somehow endured.

*The Function of the Wakamonogumi*

In any discussion of the function of the *wakamonogumi* in village society, it is useful to keep in mind Yanagita’s distinction between *ke* and *hara*.\(^{56}\) The former was the serious side of peasant life and consisted of onerous physical labor and decision-making, while the latter represented the more relaxing aspects of life, the periods of respite when body and soul were refreshed, as in the periodical festivals and in mate selection. To put it simply, *ke* was work, *hara* was play.

The earliest surviving *jōmoku* are dated 1677 and originated in *Ichihara* village, Gamō county, Shiga prefecture.\(^{57}\) These articles describe a specific work project,

\(^{54}\) Ibid., pp. 163-4.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., p. 220.

\(^{56}\) 植, 晴

\(^{57}\) Segawa, pp. 156-7; *Wakumono Seido*, pp. 346-7.
in this instance road-building, and the location and division of labor are set out in some detail. Each household of the village was called upon to provide one man for the task; any family unable to meet this requirement was obliged to pay a certain amount of rice in lieu of physical labor. Road-building was the kind of service not provided by the bakufu authorities, and in any such project the villagers had to organize the operation by themselves. Another jōmoku, dated 1851,58 lists communal work such as fire-fighting, house construction and roof thatching; village property held in common and rights of access are also mentioned. Any household withdrawing from the wakamonogumi or not obeying its rules would not receive the group’s assistance in time of need and would also lose its rights to the communal lands. The wakamonogumi was a powerful element in village life and could threaten to withdraw from uncooperative residents the services that only it could supply. If a family wanted its roof thatched, it had to approach the wakamonogumi, and if it was not on good terms with the group, then it did not get its roof thatched. This kind of social pressure was even more effective as regards the ever-present danger of fire, for in many villages the wakamonogumi served as the local fire department and could, if it chose, refuse to aid a family when prompt help was desperately needed. This branch of wakamonogumi public service continued well into the Meiji period and there are numerous cases of the men’s group being finally re-organized into the official fire department.59

Members of the wakamonogumi served not only as fire-fighters but also as local police patrols. In a certain village on Miyakejima these patrols were called nakaaruki and murafure;60 in some places all the members of the wakamonogumi were obliged to take part in these patrols, while elsewhere only the unmarried second and third sons did so. The men would assemble and then patrol the village at night in what was essentially a policing function, although love and romance rather than law and order may have been uppermost in the minds of some of the younger vigilantes. But all apart from regular patrol duty, the members of the group were also available at any time to keep the peace. One jōmoku,61 from Aichi prefecture, 1854, instructs the villagers to summon the wakamonogumi immediately if a thief or any suspicious-looking character is seen entering the neighborhood. According to an earlier jōmoku,62 from Shizuoka prefecture, 1794, anybody witnessing a crime and failing to report it to the wakamonogumi was liable to receive the same punishment as the miscreant.

In addition to road-building, fire-fighting and policing, the wakamonogumi performed a variety of other tasks and an examination of the jōmoku reveals some interesting rural customs. The jōmoku of Hijikata village, Ogasa county, Shizuoka prefecture, 1859,63 notes that the local wakamonogumi had been ordered to disband some fifteen years earlier during the time of the Tempō reforms but that the

58 Segawa, pp. 159–60.  
59 Segawa, p. 171; Ushiomi, p. 100.  
60 ナカアル(中歩)キ, 村歩れ. Segawa, p. 234.  
61 Wakamono Seido, p. 273.  
62 Ibid., p. 373; Segawa, p. 170.  
63 Segawa, p. 164.
villagers’ petition to re-establish the organization had been granted. Among this group’s functions was the practice of amagoi, a type of rain-making rite, and mushiokuri, or insect-expelling. For the latter activity the men would gather in the rice paddies at night and light pine torches which created dense clouds of smoke. The purpose of the exercise was to drive obnoxious insects out of the fields and the men would advance together, waving their torches and expelling the bugs from their fields—and possibly into those of neighboring villages, thus straining inter-community relations.

It has been briefly mentioned above that rivalry and suspicion often existed between neighboring villages, and the wakamonogumi strove to keep the peace not only in their own communities but also with outsiders. There was always liable to be territorial disputes over communal property on the fringes of villages where one community’s forest lands ended and another’s began, and the respective wakamonogumi were often involved in discussion aiming at reaching a peaceful settlement. Squabbles on a more personal level between the members of different communities were particularly prone to arise at festival times when the sake flowed freely and people were warned by their wakamonogumi to be on their best behavior when visiting other villages to watch amateur sumō, dancing and theatrical performances. The various jōmoku strictly enjoined on the villagers to go sightseeing in groups and to be courteous to outsiders. If the youngsters of another village started a quarrel, the reason for their displeasure was to be asked politely and an amicable solution was to be reached as quickly as possible; restraint was to be exercised on all occasions. In the same way, when strangers entered a village to take part in a local festival, the members of the community were to treat them with all respect and avoid any disputes.

The wakamonogumi always played a particularly important role in fishing villages on account of the communal nature of fishing operations. While individual families might have owned their own boats, the launching, docking and unloading of these craft required a great deal of strenuous labor which could be accomplished only on a cooperative basis. Fishing villages usually had a group of able-bodied men ready at all times to put the boats out to sea and dock them on their return with their catch; their duties also involved aiding disabled boats and shipwrecks. As a result of this essential contribution to the well-being of the community, the wakamonogumi tended to survive in fishing villages until a very late date.

The case of the villages on Miyakejima provides concrete examples of wakamonogumi activities in fishing communities. The earliest jōmoku surviving from this region are dated 1801 and make reference to mizubatarai, or dock work. There were forty fishing boats and thirty men (from each village?) were supposed to join in the group work of launching, docking, unloading, and helping boats in distress. In addition, the wakamonogumi cooperated in visiting the different households and collecting goods to be sent for sale at Edo. One somewhat unusual

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64 雨乞, 虫送り  65 Segawa, p. 214.  66 Segawa, p. 230.  97 水働き
duty laid on wakamonogumi members was to raise the alarm if they saw an unexpected ship on the horizon; in such cases they were to drop whatever they were doing and run to the harbor, where the group was to assemble immediately. During the sakoku period Japanese boats were generally small and kept close to shore, and any ship spotted far away on the horizon might well be a foreign vessel. In such cases the group was expected to gather and prepare to defend the village from foreign invasion. Some of the men seem to have been less than enthusiastic about this duty, and the jōmoku rebuke various members of the wakamonogumi for having to be dragged down to the harbor instead of hurrying there voluntarily.

One final example may be taken from an 1806 set of jōmoku belonging to Ōhara village in Miyagi prefecture, for the thirteen clauses of this document provide a fairly detailed list of wakamonogumi activities and responsibilities. Among other duties, the group was to provide care to old people and children, and assume responsibility for fire prevention, boat repair, assistance to boats in distress, and funerals; it was also to encourage good manners and village harmony. Significantly it was involved in taxation and other matters pertaining to bakufu/peasant relations, for this sphere of activity was usually reserved for the official voningumi organization. From all of this it is obvious that the range of wakamonogumi duties and activities affected not only one sector of the male population of the village but also the community as a whole. The extent of the group's development varied from place to place, but in its most organized form, such as in fishing villages, the wakamonogumi acted as the central management and labor group of the entire community and its jōmoku assumed the character of a community contract.

To assert its authority in the village, the wakamonogumi had at its disposal a variety of sanctions, one of which (the withdrawal of labor in time of emergencies) has been mentioned above. For specific offenses there was the system of ginmi, or inquiry, by which a man accused of breaking the rules was questioned and judged at a yorai meeting. If the group consensus found him guilty, the assembled wakamonogumi assigned appropriate punishment, the most extreme forms of which were ostracism and expulsion. This represents the general pattern, but as usual the specific application of the system varied from village to village.

In Nagaoka, Mie prefecture, two special meetings were held annually on the twenty-eighth day of the first month and the eighteenth day of the seventh month, and on these occasions new members were inducted into the group and offenders were penalized for misbehavior. The persons so punished were referred to as haneraretamono, or 'those who have been cut off'. The members of the wakamonogumi...
gumi would not help them to land their boats; even if there were an abalone run, the boycott was to continue for three days—a considerable hardship in a village where income was mainly derived from abalone fishing. Offenders were moreover obliged to wear one purple stocking and one white stocking, which served to invite ridicule and emphasize their isolation from the group. Yet another way of making culprits look conspicuous and stand out from their fellow villagers was to make them wear a straw belt and shave half their heads and forbid them the use of the customary hachimaki, or towel around the head. If such men did not apologize by sending sake to each member of the wakamonogumi, they would not be reinstated.72

The terminology, severity, and form of punishment varied greatly in different regions. In Kitahama village, Shimane prefecture, the sanction was called haboku,73 and anyone incurring it could continue his normal work but was not allowed to join in purely social functions.74 In the case of a misdemeanor, the men of Abe village, Tokushima prefecture, would assemble in the jado and discuss the matter; then, to avoid any disrupting confrontation and argument, the leader would go around and ask the opinion of each member individually; if the last man shook his head, thus indicating the general consensus, the offender was found guilty and suitably punished.75 Here again, he would be allowed to rejoin the group if he expressed regret and distributed sake. Far harsher punishments could be inflicted, however, and on Yakushima, Kagoshima prefecture, an offender could be physically mistreated by having logs and stones piled on his legs;76 in the case of expulsion, or muragae,77 the miscreant would be cheated to the border of the village. But such extreme punishment was probably seldom imposed for its frequent application would jeopardize the unity and harmony of the community. A more common sanction was to order a man who had shocked his duties to cut from five to twenty bundles of wood, while a woman would be assigned the


Proof of the effectiveness of ostracism is documented in Dan Fenno Henderson, ed., Village ‘Contracts’ in Tokugawa Japan, University of Washington Press, 1975, p. 188, where the Japanese text and translation of a wabiyo 華稚, or written apology, dated 1866 are given. The apology is made by a young man and his two brothers living in An’yōji village, Kurita county, Ōmi, and they ask pardon for their unruly behavior, for which they had been expelled from the wakamonogumi; as a result, but have had no one to consult with, and

‘since we were thought to be evil persons, it has touched us deeply.’ They had therefore retained the services of a mediator to submit the apology, and they promised reform and good behavior in the future. Their application was apparently successful. Ushio, p. 100, remarks that villagers were reluctant to submit written apologies, for these documents were kept for generations as material evidence of bad behavior.

73 ハポト
74 Segawa, p. 221.
75 Ibid., p. 221.
76 Ibid., pp. 221–2. This type of punishment, much used in Tokugawa times to extract a confession, was generally called wariki-zaime 割木責め.
77 ムラガエ (村外). Also called mura-hachibu 村八分, the origin of which term is discussed in Smith, p. 585.
job of carrying sand for road maintenance. But perhaps the most effective sanction in a closely knit society was ostracism, and fear of being cut off from the rest of the group was sufficient to keep most villagers in line.

The punishment inflicted was sometimes calculated to make a positive contribution to the well-being of the community, and thus in a concrete way the offender could make reparation for disrupting village life. For example, in the last century a man named Kojima Tarō lived in Kuta village, Tsushima, Nagasaki prefecture, and in 1896 he and his friends had been causing a lot of upset with their practical jokes. On one particular night they hung a life-size dummy from a tree in a lonely place on the road leading to the village, and people passing by that night were frightened out of their wits, believing that somebody had committed suicide. To put a stop to Mr Kojima’s light-hearted pranks, the wakamonogumi ordered him to make a hundred sets of straw sandals for his sins. Mr Kojima was not at all pleased by this turn of events and a relative intervened on his behalf, claiming that the punishment was too severe, with the result that the sentence was reduced to forty pairs of sandals. And as late as 1931 the manufacture of sandals was still being used as a punishment; in that year a Mr Ninomiya Gentarō and Miss Ōniwa Sawato attempted to elope from their village in Nagasaki prefecture and were ordered to make sixty sets of sandals over a period of a year.

The manufacture of sandals was a very practical penalty, for most villagers could make them and all of them wore them; as the sandals were made of straw, they wore out fairly quickly and there was a constant demand for new ones. In addition, the size of the sandals did not vary much, and as they were of a standard pattern, they often got mixed up and lost when the villagers met together in a group, leaving their footwear outside the door.

So much for the ke side of peasant life. Let us now briefly review the hare activities, or recreation, with special reference to the social interaction between the young men and women of the villages.

Yanagita has left a description of a peasant form of marriage which differed from that practiced by the samurai class inasmuch as it was based on personal choice and mutual consent rather than arrangements made by parents and go-betweens. There also existed musume gumi, or girls’ groups, in the villages, and both types of organizations served as guardians and overseers of the peasant form of courtship and marriage. The older members of the groups taught their juniors how to form physical relationships with the opposite sex. As the junior members would gather in the yado in the evenings for the avowed purpose of making handicraft items, their seniors would arrange opportunities for the boys and girls to meet. Through these casual but controlled encounters, a young man and woman could select each other and a more lasting relationship would be allowed to

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78 Segawa, pp. 220–2.
80 Yanagita, pp. 188–209.
81 姨組. Further information in Ariga, iv, pp. 1214–25.
develop. Mate selection was based on this freedom of choice, and the *wakamonomgum* used its considerable influence in the village to prevent individual families from interfering in the marriage choice of their children. Parents reluctant to approve of a match which had originated in such a way would be kept under pressure from the *wakamonomgumi* until their assent was given; if, however, they continued to refuse to give their blessing to the match, community cooperation (fire-lighting, roof thatching, etc.) might be withdrawn in time of need.

The system apparently found favor with the young people themselves for it gave them greater freedom in the selection of their life partners than that enjoyed by their samurai contemporaries. The matter is clearly expressed by a girl on the Gotō islands, Nagasaki prefecture, when speaking about peasant marriage and the *yado* system:

> Freedom is the most important thing for young people between the ages of seventeen and twenty when they are trying to find a mate. Even if somebody makes several mistakes along the way, a person finding a spouse by mutual consent will not have a divorce. People who stay at home will not get married, and everyone should be sent to the *yado*. We quit going to the *yado* because of the police order and a girls’ association was set up instead. But it’s not much good because it doesn’t help us to find a husband, and all they want is our money for dues.

When a young couple decided that they wanted their relationship formally recognized by the community as a permanent union, they informed the *wakamonomgumi*. The group would then assemble in a *yorai*, and the young man and woman were closely questioned to determine whether their choice of each other was completely free and spontaneous. The couple stood before the meeting and pledged their serious intent, and the senior members made inquiry into the circumstances of the proposed marriage. Recognition of the marriage involved a group decision, but there always existed the possibility of divided opinion because many conflicting interests could arise in delicate matters of the heart. The problem of jilted lovers was particularly difficult, because such people may have had a brief affair with one of the couple wishing to marry and thus feel that they had a stronger and more legitimate claim to marriage. In order to reach a group decision, therefore, a fundamental criterion had to be established according to which all opinions, feelings, facts and claims could be examined. In the case of a proposed marriage, the criterion was stability. If it could be determined that the proposed union was likely to be successful, the match would generally be recognized and approved. The stability of marriages was vitally important to the prosperity and even survival of the community, because a couple had not only to bear and raise children to perpetuate the population and work force but

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82 Segawa, p. 286. Ariga also repeatedly refers to the traditional freedom of marriage choice among the peasants; for example, 'Kô shita koi wa mina kёkkoku o jisugen suru' かうした恋は皆結婚を実現する (sw, p. 1322).
had also to contribute their share to the harmonious running of the village. But
delicate balances in human relations had to be considered in this decision-making
process. Jilted lovers would have to receive an apology and this was made in the
form of gifts of sake. The purpose of the whole exercise was to produce permanent
matches and the future of the village depended to a large degree on the success
of the system. If a couple divorced after marrying with the blessing of the wakamonogumi,
they were liable to be ostracized or even expelled from the community.
Divorce caused enmity between families and the resulting factions could cripple
village life.

Such was the mate selection system in operation in various villages throughout
Japan, but further details of the process are to be found in the research carried
out by Segawa and other scholars. In general there were two types of visits be-
tween young men and women in the villages. The first was casual and its purpose
was to obtain sexual experience. On Enoshima, Nishisonoki district, Nagasaki
prefecture, a boy would be introduced to a yado-oyakata, or yado sponsor, who was
referred to for this purpose as totchan.83 Totchan would receive sake and fish as a
present, and he would then be in charge of the youngster up to the latter’s mar-
riage. The boy would enter the yado and duly pay his respects to the oyakata and
seniors there. His sponsor would then take him to a woman’s yado and introduce
him, and the boy was then ready to begin yoasobi,84 or ‘night play’. This pattern
of visiting was called shansu.85

The women were sometimes shy about visiting the men, and so the latter had
to take the initiative and present themselves at the women’s yado, which appar-
ently they did even on the stormiest nights. Shansu was essentially a short-term
sexual encounter, and a man had to have made many shansu before he could think
of marriage as serious negotiations could not take place until this stage was com-
pleted. If some poor youngster was unable to arrange a shansu, the fellow members
of his yado would rally around and do their best to find a girl for him. In some
regions the practice of sobane and soene86 was observed. If a young man wished
to sleep with a particular girl, custom and politeness would oblige her to agree
to his proposal. But their bed was divided and the boy was not permitted to cross
over to her side and become intimate without her free assent. On Fukuejima,
Nagasaki prefecture, a quasi-permanent relationship would begin to develop
after the pair had slept with each other several times; if this continued for a year,
they were then recognized as having entered into a common-law marriage. If the
couple were to break off the relationship at this point, the wakamonogumi would
probably have objected.87 From this time on, the couple would have a permanent
relationship called tsumadoi.88 Often enough the husband would not have the
means to establish his own household straight away, and if he were not the

83 ツッチャン (Segawa, p. 288), presumably
derived from otōsan おとうさん, ‘father’. Ariga,
rv, p. 1314, gives totsan ツッサン.
84 夜遊び. Ariga, rv, p. 1315.
85 シアンス (相思). Ariga, iv, p. 1314.
86 ソブネ, ソメ
87 Segawa, p. 286.
88 末間
eldest son, he might not be able to invite his wife to live in his parents' home. In such cases the man would visit his wife either at her house or at her yado.

The problem of determining when a relationship had progressed from the casual encounter (shansu) to the more permanent common-law marriage (tsumadoi) was not always easy. At this point an exchange of sake was very important, especially if one of the partners had two or more lovers, and the correct form of procedure was laid down in some detail. In Anjō, Aichi prefecture, in the early nineteenth century, the couple would send sake, called mizuimura in this instance, to the wakamonogumi in order to obtain its blessing on their proposed marriage. But if there was a jilted lover in the offing, the sake was returned and the wedding had to be postponed until a formal apology had been made and accepted. On Himakajima the gift of sake was called enkiri no omiki and its purpose was, as its name implies, to sever a former relationship. Sake was sent but if repeatedly sent back, and it was only after sufficient drink had been offered to make further refusal impossible that the marriage could take place. The deeper the resentment felt, the greater the quantity of sake sent. When agreement was finally reached, the person possessing a prior claim to one of the partners accepted the sake and promised never to approach the former lover again. At the time of the wedding more sake was sent to the wakamonogumi; the members of the group would consume the drink while carving two white radishes in the form of human genitals, which they later took along to the wedding feast to add to the general merriment.

An additional advantage of the yado system was that it ensured that that spouse selection would be restricted to within the village, for the peasants were generally opposed to marriages contracted with outsiders. The women of the village were considered to belong to the village and liaisons with men of other communities, perhaps only a mile or so distant, were discouraged, if not forbidden outright. There were, however, cases of wealthier families ignoring local tradition and sentiment, and arranging marriages of convenience for their children outside the village. In this they were probably influenced by samurai marriage procedure, especially toward the end of the Edo period, and by the beginning of the Meiji era there were few rural communities in which the old peasant customs were observed in their entirety. Be that as it may, a family that sidestepped the traditional procedure of the wakamonogumi and the musumegumi and arranged a marriage with an outsider was liable to arouse hostile feelings within the village. There was an old song that ran:

-Muko ga kuru sō na
-Enoki no baba e
-Uma de kuru sō na
-Suzu ga naru. 93

90 水代
91 エンキリノオミキ (線切の御神酒)
92 Segawa, 176.
93 Vanagita, p. 200. The subject of outside marriages is discussed in Ariga, iv, 1192-1203, in the section Sonnaihō to Songaikon 村内婚と村外婚-
The words may originally have been written on the occasion of a girl being obliged by her parents to marry a stranger. When the outsider was about to enter the village to claim his bride, he was liable to be met by resentful villagers who would greet him by throwing stones and water at him to express their disapproval. If the stranger was a woman, she would have to undergo the custom of ‘bride-viewing’. Her luggage would be opened by the villagers so that her possessions could be publicly examined and assessed; even after she entered her new home, the local people would assemble outside, pull open the sliding doors, and take a critical look at the young bride. Such was the fate of those who, willingly or otherwise, bypassed the traditional ways of the wakamonogumi.

Conclusion

Yanagita suggests that the wakamonogumi was an ancient form of peasant organization of obscure origin which may have begun as a primitive form of group marriage. In later ages it became the watchful guardian of the peasants’ monogamous marriages. Whatever its remote beginnings, we may say with certainty that the wakamonogumi was composed of able-bodied male peasants who banded together to organize the village’s communal work which existed alongside of the family-managed rice cultivation. Role differentiation within the group went generally by age, with positions of leadership determined by local criteria. The members of the wakamonogumi were active in both the labor and social activities of the community and as a result the organization of the group was highly integrated into village life. In its more developed forms, the wakamonogumi played a key role in the day-to-day lives of the villagers and attained a high degree of local autonomous organization.

While it is impossible to determine the exact number of wakamonogumi groups existing in the Edo period, a general idea can be obtained from various surveys conducted during the Meiji period. During this latter era rural villages were regrouped into larger administrative units, in each of which there was supposed to be only one seinenkai, a more modern type of youth organization; official encouragement was given to the wakamonogumi to become branches of the seinenkai. If we take the specific case of Shimo-inà county, Nagano prefecture, we notice that the county possessed no less than 127 seinenkai groups. This is significant because other records reveal that there were only 42 administrative villages in that county in 1911 when the survey was made. Simple arithmetic shows that if there was only one seinenkai in each of these villages, as there should have been,

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94 Yanagita, p. 197.
95 Here the term ‘monogamous’ is used in the rarer sense of marrying only once in a lifetime. Often enough a divorced couple was ostracized by the village and a new marriage with another partner became all but impossible.
there must have been 85 ‘other seinenkai’ not accounted for. This survey does not
distinguish between the new seinenkai and the older wakamonogumi, but clearly the
latter continued to exist and indeed outnumbered the seinenkai in the district by
two to one—and this as late as 1911.

The Shimo-ina survey was only part of a nationwide inquiry into rural youth
organizations and was carried out before the establishment of the national Seinen-
dan. According to the inquiry, in 1912 there were 24,000 rural youth groups,
including grade-school alumni associations, seinenkai and wakamonogumi, with a
total membership of 2,450,000. Clearly, with a membership of this magnitude,
such groups exerted a good deal of appeal and fulfilled a tangible need in rural
society.

Although the wakamonogumi managed to survive the displeasure of the bakufu,
they were less successful in meeting the challenges of recent modernization and
social change in the countryside. As state and local authorities assumed respon-
sibility for many of the activities formerly carried out by the wakamonogumi, much
of the raison d’être of these groups diminished. But other community activities have
been left to local initiative and in some rural districts the wakamonogumi still has a
function to fulfill. For example, a group is active in Karasuyama, Tochigi prefec-
ture, where it periodically stages remarkably fine amateur kabuki.

The wakamonogumi organization originated spontaneously to meet a need in
rural life. The unlettered peasants were perhaps not versed in the traditional fine
arts, but the harsh conditions in which they were born, lived and died made
them wise in the art of survival. And it was only through banding together and
pooling their manpower and meager resources that they were in fact able to
survive at all. In this context it is instructive to recall the memorable last scene
in Kurosawa’s Shichinin no Samurai, a classic of the Japanese cinema. The three
surviving samurai stand in front of the grave mounds of their fallen comrades
who had died defending the village against the repeated attacks of the bandits.
They then turn and look down on the peasants exultantly planting their rice crop
in the paddy fields. Many lives had been lost in the fighting, but new life would
spring up from the fruitful earth. The wise and experienced samurai leader
observes thoughtfully, ‘We lost again. The peasants—they won. They always do.’