
Japan and Western Europe, IV: A Comparative Presentation of Their Social Histories: IV.
Feudalism in Japan

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Japan and Western Europe, IV*

A Comparative Presentation of Their Social Histories

By FRANZ OPPENHEIMER

IV. Feudalism in Japan

I

THE SUCCEEDING PERIOD in Japanese history follows the typical course: the landed property of the aristocracy, and therewith the class political power, grow beyond all limits, whereas that of the central authority decays. The free commoners sink, while the lower order rises in numbers and political influence until it merges with the descending freemen in an indistinguishable class of people who are politically powerless and are economically exploited in a rigorous fashion.¹⁸³ A part of the lower class, however, attains the rank of the minor aristocracy. We are going to describe this process at somewhat fuller length.

The land reform was bound to miscarry because both those conditions were allowed to remain which universally preclude every reform, to wit: large landed property and slavery. The estates of the crown, of the ecclesiastical institutions, which were very important¹⁸⁴ and especially that of the victorious group of noblemen, the Fujiwara and their allies, were not subjected to the law, were not distributed, and did not pay taxes: "those in possession of shrines and temples, those granted to officials by way of salary, and those cultivated by serfs on government account." It was the increase, legitimate and illegitimate, of these exempt fields which in the succeeding centuries brought down the whole system and, in combination with other tendencies, brought about a feudal regime.¹⁸⁵ Members of the imperial family, officials from the eighth rank upwards, were exempt of taxes for their giant landed property just as doctors, scribes, soldiers and low officials were for their dwarf property.¹⁸⁶

Large property could only last and, more especially, could only increase, because slavery had not been abolished. Honjo reports that slavery grew strongly in this period. Therewith the condition was given which enabled the victors in the great battle of the aristocratic cliques to rise to ever

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¹⁸³ Sansom, *loc. cit.*, p. 214.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁸⁵ Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

greater political might. The Fujiwara and their allies had shared between them the huge loot consisting of almost the sole wealth of the period: land and the slaves needed for its cultivation. These possessions, enormous as they were at the beginning, grew, following the "law of agglomeration about present kernels of fortune,"¹⁸⁷ to unheard of measures. The Fujiwara "*monopolisaient bientôt toutes les richesses, toutes les forces du pays. Ils eurent un grand nombre d'esclaves et possédèrent d'immenses domaines. Grâce à ces esclaves, ils purent, soit défricher ou cultiver leurs terres, soit les affermer.*"¹⁸⁸ They cleared new land in the old provinces, and acquired enormous property in the newly conquered ones. Originally all these possessions were only fiefs to usufruct for "three lives" at the most, but laws were enacted as early as 732 and 743, granting at first a temporarily restricted, and then a hereditary right on newly cultivated land or land improved by irrigation.¹⁸⁹

These laws were intended to serve the interests of the then ruling group, the Fujiwara, and their retinue. But soon they proved to be dangerous to their power, because the Fujiwara also were now compelled—a regular system of taxes and money economy still being lacking—to confide or better to deliver to their officers and civil officials the taxes and services of the district or estate. Naturally these offices became hereditary in their turn and were lost to the central authority, which gradually had to bleed to death. The Kubunden-land shrank more and more, the more "Shoen" (the Japanese word for manor) came into being, until it was as good as vanished. Thus the principle became unavoidable also here: "*Nulle terre sans seigneur*";¹⁹⁰ with the result that the whole country threatened to become shoenized."¹⁹¹ Sansom says this explained the fortune of the mightiest of feudal families, the lords of Satsuma who descended from a manager of the Fujiwara, and of the equally great family, also of ministerial origin, the Shimadzu.¹⁹²

Highest winners in this game were the governors of the provinces, especially the more distant ones, the "Marches." They descended, as Hara says, mostly from the lower nobility, *i.e.*, very probably from families which had worked their way up as officers or civil officials.¹⁹³ They "engrossed" (as Adam Smith called the monopolization of the soil) "*par*

¹⁸⁷ System der Soziologie, II, p. 267.

¹⁸⁸ Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

¹⁸⁹ Honjo, *op. cit.*, p. 27; Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

¹⁹⁰ System der Soziologie, IV, pp. 527 ff.

¹⁹¹ Honjo, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁹² Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 255, 402.

¹⁹³ Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

divers moyens d'immenses étendues de terre." They became gradually the feudal barons of their soldiers instead of remaining the salaried commanders, the soldiers becoming their vassals; and they attained at last—the power of the central authority decreasing in the same proportion as their own increased—the position of territorial princes and justiciary overlords of their districts, which, henceforth, were their privy "house force."¹⁹⁴

This development took place to the disadvantage of the free commoners and of the central authority, represented here not by the Mikado but by the Mayor of the Palace.

II

WE MENTIONED, that, after the Taikwa-reform, the freemen on allodial land and the hereditary tenants on Kubunde-land had to pay taxes, whereas many of the grandes had discovered how to evade this burden for themselves and their serfs. The latter, moreover, were exempt from military service, while the freemen had to equip and to sustain themselves out of their private means.¹⁹⁵ The saying went then: "When one man is called up, a household perishes."¹⁹⁶ They fell into debts and many lost their freedom through "commendation." Honjo tells of numerous "people who sought to evade public exactions under the protection of local magnates by contributing their land to them."¹⁹⁷ Naturally it became unavoidable to overburden the still remaining freemen by taxes and services, because, on the one hand, the requirements of the State for both court and church kept growing incessantly, whereas, on the other hand, more and more subjects became exempt.¹⁹⁸

The power of the central authority was bound to disappear with the freemen. Honjo reports that, already in the midst of the Heian-period (the period when the Fujiwara and the emperors held court in Kyoto, 794–1159), "the authority of the government gradually waned, while the local magnates steadily gained influence."¹⁹⁹ The immense wealth of the emperors shrank, so that, at the close of this era, only a few domains remained to them. The crown had lost its financial and military power with loss of the free population.

Sansom portrays the balance of the Heian-period as follows: "Halfway through the eleventh century the imperial government had lost most of its power and much of its prestige; the whole country was ravaged by

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁹⁶ Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

¹⁹⁷ Honjo, *op. cit.*, pp. 11, 32.

¹⁹⁸ Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

¹⁹⁹ Honjo, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

family feuds and civil war; and such law as prevailed was the house-law of the clans. Daylight robbery was rife in the capital, and bandits flourished on the main highways by land and by sea. It is not a pretty picture."²⁰⁰

It is almost the same picture that Europe presented in the same period. The contemporary sources portray no prettier picture. As early as 884 the Capitulare of Karlmann complains: "The enemy is the last to rob; robbery became an institution; defying king and church it is a poison which infected and ruined everything. Everyone, from the smallest to the greatest, from the serf and colonus upward to the vassal, wants to live at the cost of his neighbour."²⁰¹

The decay of the central power progressed inexorably in Japan as in Western Europe. "The inhabitants of the Shoen vowed allegiance to the lord of the district and tilled the land, paying taxes to the lord. Thus, the land and people were turned into private possessions of their lords, instead of being the public land and the public citizens of the former periods. The result was that the authority exercised by the central government over the provinces was considerably weakened. The Shoen was virtually independent of the central government, and there was no connection or unity whatever between these Shoen-districts. Although in the organization of the State in these days there existed a central government, it existed only by name."²⁰²

Already in 940 a military revolution against the Fujiwara had to be quelled, led by Masakado, a general of the great house of Taira, of imperial lineage. He perished in the only attempt ever made in Japan to overthrow, not only the mayordomate alone, but the dynasty itself.²⁰³ The Fujiwara boasted of never having managed a single one of their numerous estates;²⁰⁴ they were as unmilitary as possible, occupying the civil offices alone. Nonetheless they held their position two centuries more, although with ever decreasing power. Lafcadio Hearn ascribes this remarkable duration to the religious sanction protecting the old clan of high-priests but Sansom, we believe, is nearer to the truth when he says that they could only persist because the whole period since Masakado was filled by rebellions, "constant raids, feuds and arrays, varied with campaigns on a grander scale"²⁰⁵ between the great military clans, the Taira, Minamoto, Abe and Kiyowara.

²⁰⁰ Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

²⁰¹ Fluch, *Les origines de l'ancienne France*, Paris, 1886, Vol. I, pp. 141-2.

²⁰² Honjo, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

²⁰³ Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

²⁰⁴ Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

²⁰⁵ Longford, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

Longford ascribes the decay of the mighty clan to the effeminating effect of harem life,²⁰⁶ but this argument is rather suspect because it appears wherever a ruling family loses its power. The argument, although not without a certain weight, is too facile and gives an excuse to slide over the real, objective, more momentous causes of the decay.

The Fujiwara, according to Chinese usage and Buddhist custom, restricted themselves more and more to the civil offices, which they absolutely monopolized after the year 845,²⁰⁷ relinquishing the military positions to men of other aristocratic clans. This arrangement was like that in the late Roman empire, where the army, eventually, was completely abandoned to the "strong barbarian."

III

THE ARMY HAD BEEN reorganized in the great reform of the State during the Nara period. The third part of the able-bodied men was destined as a military class from which were recruited the garrisons of the more distant provinces, where fighting continued till the twelfth century, especially in the northern Kwanto against the Ainu, who could only very slowly be subjugated. About half a century after this first law, at the end of the eighth century, a new law was proclaimed that "all those of the rich peasants who had capacity and were skilled in archery and horsemanship, should compose the military class, and that the remainder, the weak and the feeble, should continue to till the soil."²⁰⁸ At exactly the same time Charlemagne arranged the military concerns of the Frankish State in just the same spirit.²⁰⁹

Sansom is of the opinion that "rich peasants" signifies the "district chiefs," officials subordinated to the governor of the province to which their district belonged. The governors were mostly high aristocrats, whereas the district chiefs were members of the gentry, the low aristocracy of the country. They were descended either from free commoners without court rank or from noble families whose landed property had become too small, through successive partitions among the heirs, to keep up their high rank (Japan knew no right of primogeniture).²¹⁰ Japan numbered 66 provinces with 592 districts, each of the latter having their chiefs.

As is inescapable in the feudal order, these offices likewise became hereditary, and the fief of the official became private property. Thus a

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 86.

²⁰⁷ Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 29; Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

²⁰⁸ Griffis, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

²⁰⁹ System der Soziologie, IV, p. 523.

²¹⁰ Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

healthy agrarian middle class arose. This "kind of yeomanry recruited on an hereditary basis" constituted after the military reform of 783 the kernel of the standing army and became "the beginning of a privileged class of soldiers."²¹¹ From this class were chosen the well-to-do warrior-peasants who were settled as a tax-exempt militia on the Ainu-frontier which was continuously pushed forward.²¹² This also is an arrangement common to all States in the stage of moneyless "natural economy": Laeti, Limitanei, Kossaks, Kroats, Szeklers, the Akrites of the Byzantine empire—we find them everywhere on threatened boundaries.²¹³

In this manner the sword-aristocracy of the Samurai took its start. It had just the same origin in the lower class of the nation as that of western Europe which arose from the "unfree" *ministeriales* of the high nobility and the monasteries.

This is the beginning of feudalism proper in Japan.

None of the characteristics with which we are familiar from European history is missing here. The first is the tax-exemption and "immunity" of the ruling class, including, naturally, the ecclesiastical estates. "The Shoen was virtually free from taxation or from intervention of local lords; it enjoyed a sort of extra-territoriality."²¹⁴ We hear further of private troops kept by the temporal and spiritual magnates, of castles and monasteries constructed as fortresses,²¹⁵ of "private churches," established to procure to the owner the particular advantages which the clergy had known how to acquire. The full development of feudalism is ascribed by Honjo to the period when the small landholder frequently was obligated to several different feudal lords. This safeguarded the peasant of western Europe against that complete enslavement to which his equal in eastern Europe, where the evolution did not mature to this extent, had to bow. The explanation given by Honjo cannot satisfy: it is impossible for a peasant to accommodate himself to several different lords at the same time. In reality feudalism had developed in Japan exactly as in western Europe in such a manner that the most various rights against the peasant or rather against his holding could be enfeoffed to different feudal subjects. "Attached to each parcel of land were numerous and various rights, known as *Shiki*."²¹⁶ Such rights were assigned, for example, "to the manager

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

²¹² Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

²¹³ System der Soziologie, IV, Introduction, p. viii.

²¹⁴ Honjo, *op. cit.*, pp. 11, 100.

²¹⁵ "A refuge for every sturdy knave with a soul above earning a livelihood by the commonplace drudgery of honest work." (Murdoch, quoted by Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 35.)

²¹⁶ Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

or bailiff of such plots as parts of a shoen," to the lord of the manor and lastly to the territorial overlord who is responsible for immunity and exemption from taxes. This was similar to the European arrangement whereby the territorial or justiciary lord had the right to the public taxes, the owner of the land to the rent, and under certain circumstances the bailiff and the lord of the commons to special dues, whereas the church received the tithes. All these rights could be sold and inherited, either whole or divided: and from this resulted an entanglement of rights and possessions which took place also in Japan. The different persons entitled to dues or services naturally took good care that "their" peasant was not, as it were, swallowed up by another of the crowd. This was the salvation of the western European peasant.

Supremacy within the nation was gradually shifted to the class of warriors in the same measure as it acquired growing economic and political power. At first this development was still under the leadership of some families of primal or high nobility. Eventually, however, some Samurai ascended into the high aristocracy; they became Daimyo, owners of large landed property with princely rights, in the same manner as this occurred in Europe. The sovereign princes of Reuss, for instance, descend from an unfree family of *ministeriales*, and not even from the more highly ranking "imperial *ministeriales*." These upstarts very soon outshone the Kugé, the arrogant courtiers of imperial blood, if not in standing, yet certainly in wealth and influence.²¹⁷

IV

TOWARD THE MIDDLE of the twelfth century two families of imperial lineage were rivals for the supreme power: the Taira and the Minamoto. The former had engrossed landed property in such enormous masses that they were called "Land-thieves" by the impoverished courtiers.²¹⁸ They are said to have owned at the zenith of their power no less than half the soil of Japan.²¹⁹ The Minamoto had gained their giant landed property and their military house-force as margraves in the unruly North, the Kwanto, where the famous general Yoshiye, "the son of the War-God," who had conducted the last war against the Ainu, enjoyed divine worship.²²⁰

The final battle for the crown (here, for the mayordomate) of these powerful clans began on the occasion of one of the innumerable succession-

²¹⁷ Longford, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

²¹⁸ Griffis, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

²¹⁹ Tauchiya, *op. cit.*, p. 41; Longford, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

²²⁰ Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 150; Gowen, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

feuds, when one of the pretenders called them to the capital to protect him against the too powerful and too insolent monks of the monastery Hiyeizan.²²¹ The rivalry of the Taira and the Minamoto recalls the contemporary conflict between the Hohenstaufen and the Welfs in Germany, both of them likewise closely related clans of imperial lineage. The Taira fought under the white, the Minamoto under the red flag, a purely external similarity with the famous war of the roses in England (1453-85). At that time the Onin-war devastated Japan.

It had been decades since it was merely a feud between two clans hostile to one another; it was the clash of two political systems, of revolutionism against conservatism, of the bees against the drones. The Taira, who, more than their rivals, were addicted to the life of the court, had no other intention than to replace the Fujiwara.²²² The Minamoto, on the contrary, were carried forward by a strong popular movement demanding serious reforms. Thus their party was predestined to win.

The present writer, in his "System of Sociology," has emphasized again and again, what an enormous difference it means for a nation, whether its ruling class has the psychology of the "warlord" or the "landlord," meaning with the last term the mere pocketeer of rent. The warlord needs as many, as sturdy and as faithful followers as possible, and he treats them correspondingly. The landlord, the rentier, however, has but one interest, to squeeze out from as few, as pitylessly exploited and as miserly fed agrarian proletarians as possible the highest possible rent. These miserable serfs are, therefore, much less numerous and much less robust than the retinue of the warlord, and the master has to expect the opposite of loyalty.²²³

With some exaggeration it may be said that the Taira represented the principle of the landlord, and the Minamoto that of the warlord. The Taira had their chief stronghold in the old provinces, whereas the Minamoto had their principality in the North and East which they had to hold against the remnants of the Ainu. They had, therefore, preserved the mentality of the warlord, and it was only natural that they took the lead of the great agrarian movement and were borne to victory by marshalling the bees against the drones.

This revolution was not that of the agrarian proletariat, but of the totality of the country-folk under the leadership of members of the

²²¹ Gowen, *loc. cit.*

²²² Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

²²³ Cf. *System der Soziologie*, II., pp. 326, 558, 691; *ibid.*, IV, pp. 414, 582 and *passim*.

well-to-do middle class, *i.e.*, of those warrior-peasants and especially of the "mayors" (bailiffs), the managers of the aristocratic estates in the whole country. As in western Europe "they had originally been unfree serfs who were trusted with the management of the manors and participated as *ministeriales* in the ascent of their class."²²⁴ And again, as in Europe, "The property vanished under the hand of the lords and came into the possession of the mayors and peasants."²²⁵ The masters "were economically disinherited."²²⁶ These upstarts were the successors of the originally installed managers of the large estates, the owners of which lived at the court in Kyoto or in another of their numerous domains. These positions also had become hereditary, and these lands factual possessions; and now these undervassals were fighting for full independence.²²⁷

Victory was first with the Taira, by the help of a part of the Minamoto who were cleft by discord. The latter were led by Yoshitomo no Minamoto who had his own father and four of his brothers executed although not even one of them had fought against his party. The murderer himself was killed in a conflict about the booty. The same fate hit the Taira themselves in 1189. They were several times defeated and ultimately, in an embittered sea battle, almost completely exterminated according to the hard custom of Nippon.²²⁸ In contrast to the European custom of making prisoners in order to get ransom, the Japanese knight neither accepted nor gave pardon,²²⁹ The "Japanese Nibelungenlied," "Heike Monogatari," written about 1240,²³⁰ contemporaneously with the German epopee, narrates the death of these braves.

The Taira were hated not only for their arrogance, but also because they had promised certain agrarian reforms which they never intended to introduce: "*Leur ambition n'avait pas été de jeter les basses classes de la société contre les aristocrates.*"²³¹ Therefore they lost the best elements of their adherents, and hence the victory fell to Yorimoto as the leader of the serious reformers. The political constellation reminds us of the fight of the sturdy agrarian middle class of England, the "Ironsides" of Cromwell, against the aristocratic "Cavaliers."

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, IV, p. 901.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1066.

²²⁶ Lamprecht, essay on *Grundbesitz* in the *Handwoerterbuch der Staatswissenschaften*, third ed., p. 148.

²²⁷ Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

²²⁸ This implacable practice lasted until the Tokugawa period (Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 228-9).

²²⁹ Heike is the Chinese sign for Taira.

²³⁰ Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

²³¹ Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

V

YORIMOTO ACCOMPLISHED the work the Taira had begun: the unification of the dismembered realm into one powerful organization according to the promised reform of the taxes and the agrarian concerns. His iron-sides received what they had been promised: "*Le nouveau gouvernement se garda bien de négliger les intérêts de ses guerriers.*" More still, and in accord with the characteristic point of view of the warlord: "*Il dut, a façon de pouvoir le cas échéant lever des armées, prendre grand soin, non seulement de ses fidèles, mais de toute la population.*"²³² And thus Brinkley is right in speaking of "a revolution in a double sense," "because it was not only the substitution of a military democracy, but also the rehabilitation of a large section of the nation who had once been the serfs of Kyoto nobles."²³³

Henceforth the last semblance of the ancient imperial might has vanished. The Mayors of the Palace no longer live in the same city together with the imperial court. Yorimoto wanted, as Gowen supposes, to avoid the neighbourhood of the entirely corrupted court.²³⁴ The Fujiwara, from a similar motive, had moved to Kyoto, leaving Nara with its unbearable holy terror, the monks, who had changed the beautiful city into a sort of mountain Athos.²³⁵

More than by this consideration, however, Yorimoto was obviously moved by the wish to be near to his home-province, the Kwanto, when he transferred his residence to Kamakura near present-day Tokyo. From similar motives the Taira-chieftain had chosen Kobe instead of Kyoto as his residence after his initial victory over the Minamoto. He wanted, as Hara says, to avoid the priests and the bureaucracy.²³⁶ Later, after the Hôjo, another dynasty of Mayors of the Palace, had been deposed, the seat of the government was established first in Muromachi, a suburb of Kyoto, and finally, after a new revolution which abolished the rulership of the Ashikaga, in Yedo, the Tokyo of today.

The ruling lord is, henceforth, called Shoegûn, after Yorimoto, in 1192, had acquired the title of "Sei-i-Tai-Shogûn" which is in Chinese "Taikun," English "tycoon." The title signifies "Barbarian repressing great general." What is new is merely the addition of the word "Tai" (great): without this it is the traditional title of every general. The full new title may be translated by "regent of the empire." It means the essence

²³² Hara, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-9.

²³³ Quoted by Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

²³⁴ Gowen, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 115; Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

²³⁶ Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

of the privileges and rights the patricius had in late Rome, and the Mayor of the Palace in the reign of the Merovingians. For, in sharp contrast to the Fujiwara, the new Shogūn has also the military power.

Yorimoto, who, as Sansom charmingly says, "thought in terms of fiefs and manors, not of peoples and government,"²³⁷ enjoyed the advice of the best officials of the Kyoto government who hastened to join his court.²³⁸ He would have been unable to build the government in Kamakura, if he had had at his disposal only his warlike but almost illiterate followers, and not men like Oē, the wise ancestor of the later famous princely family of Mori.²³⁹ With their help he adjusted taxes more equitably,²⁴⁰ abolishing at least partially the exemption of the privileged estates. Henceforth all of them had to pay the war-tax in rice, "a revolutionary measure, provoking the greatest consternation" among the affected.²⁴¹ He promoted arts and trade,²⁴² and "he gave Japan for the first time in many centuries a semblance of peace."²⁴³

The empire was unified, but only to break asunder once more. However huge its power, the new dynasty had to move in the magic circle described, this fatal process dispossessing the central government and raising the local magnates to overpowering might.

The giant possessions of the Taira were the prize of the victory. Yorimoto installed members of his family as governors in no less than five provinces, and appointed in all the others civil governors (Jito); to each of whom, however, he adjoined a "military protector" (Shiugu) "to advise him in all military concerns." The office of the Jito could be declared hereditary from the beginning, whereas that of the Shiugu was not, at first, heritable, but, naturally, became so very soon. The Shiugu played at first the part of the British "Residents" at Indian princely courts: eventually, having disposal over the military force of the district, they brought the Jito into dependency as their vassals. In the succeeding period of the Ashikaga there is no longer any direct connection between the Shogunate and the Jito. The Shiugu is the overlord of his district, no longer as a liege but by his own right.²⁴⁴ Many of them knew how to aggrandize their domination far beyond the original bounds.²⁴⁵

²³⁷ Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 396.

²⁴⁰ Honjo, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

²⁴¹ Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

²⁴² Longford, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

²⁴³ Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

²⁴⁴ Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

After the death of Yorimoto the Hôjo, the family of his wife, after having, as usually, murdered the sons of Yorimoto, took over the government, but not the Shogûnate. They placed the Shogûnate in the hands of "Shadow Shôguns," mostly children of the imperial family or of the Fujiwara. They reserved for themselves, however, the factual rulership under the name of "Shikken," meaning "regent." It happened even that a "tutor" had to be appointed for a Shikken, whose predecessor had retired or had been compelled to retire into a monastery. This tutor "now controlled the Shikken, who was supposed to control the Shôgun, who was supposed to be the vassal of the emperor, who was generally a child under the control of a corrupt and venal court."²⁴⁶ This raising of the mayordomate in the second and even the third power was only possible in Japan, where conquest from abroad never led to a change of dynasty. However, just this atypical occurrence is striking proof for the sociological law which takes its effect wherever it is unhampered by the prevalence of the law of absolutism.

The Hôjo, who, during the whole Kamakura period, functioned as regents and tutors, proved to be capable managers who especially tried to secure honest jurisdiction.²⁴⁷ They succeeded more or less in holding the empire together, until they were overthrown by a revolution which, as usual, broke out at the occasion of a succession feud between pretenders for the imperial throne. The participants were not only the great temporal feudal lords, but also a seditious general and several of the great ecclesiastical lords whose strongholds had to be stormed. After civil war had raged for years the Hôjo were vanquished, and Kamakura was destroyed (1333). A period, Namboko-cho, followed when two emperors fought for the throne, lasting until 1392, when one of the lines resigned. The real victor was, however, General Ashikaga, scion of a family which Hara²⁴⁸ calls a branch, but Sansom²⁴⁹ vassals of the Minamoto. Thereafter the Shogûns were of this family with the seat in Muromachi. Their rulership lasted until 1603, when they were replaced by the Tokugawa who, in their turn, ruled until the Meiji restoration.

VI

THE THREE CENTURIES of the Ashikaga regime are filled with the ever-growing disintegration of the empire, culminating in the formation of almost independent territorial principalities, governed by the "Daimyo,"

²⁴⁶ Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

²⁴⁷ Sansom, *op. cit.*, pp. 295-6.

²⁴⁸ Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

²⁴⁹ Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

the new nobility whose origin we described. This came about, as in Europe, through unending feuds and civil wars in which the greater seigneurs dispossessed the smaller ones. It is reported that about three thousand manors subsisted in the Hôjō period.²⁵⁰ They melted away like snow in the sun during the war between the rival emperors, after which the Shogûns no longer had the power of commanding the high lords but were compelled to win them over by concessions.²⁵¹ Before the murderous Onin War there still existed 260 "Big Houses" (Daimyo) who, however, with the exception of only one dozen, had disappeared or had lost all influence by 1600, while some others, rather less than more, had risen from low positions as vassals and undervassals or even from complete obscurity.²⁵² The Onin War had about the same result as the contemporaneous War of the Roses in England: the old aristocracy vanished, and the power came into the hands of a quite new class.

The Shoguns eventually were as powerless as the emperors, "the real power being held by the local princes. In many cases they had largely increased their holding by conquest and were almost entirely independent of the central authority."²⁵³ The Shiugu, those military residents installed by Yorimoto beside the civil governors, had the right to impose taxes to sustain their troops and "gradually absorbed the entire authority and probably in most cases removed the Kukushu who only represented the powerless government at Kyoto." After having attained the heredity of their fiefs they became the real rulers of the provinces, the civil and military administration of which they retained even after the centralized absolutism of the Tokugawa had brought the country under strict government."²⁵⁴

The causes of this renewed feudal disintegration were the same we found efficacious in the Heian period. It is a perfectly typical manifestation following with iron consistency from the laws of social psychology: the central power cannot avoid fostering the identical powers which will devour it, because, with their emancipation, the central authority loses its financial and military basis. "The financial difficulty of the Muro-machi period was the natural outcome of the decentralized feudalism."²⁵⁵

The peasant population, after an all-too-short respite, fell back into poverty and misery. They suffered terribly through the eternal civil

²⁵⁰ Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 395.

²⁵³ Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 277-8.

²⁵⁵ Honjo, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

wars which devastated the country, and through the crushing burden of the taxes.²⁵⁶ The country was contaminated with vagabonds, "Ronin," whom poverty made into robbers; the sea was infested by pirates. The whole period teems with rebellions of the peasants²⁵⁷ and the Gokenin, the lowest stratum of the Samurai,²⁵⁸ who demanded nullification of their debts with the natural result that they lost all possibility of obtaining credit any more, as was proved by an attempt made in 1297 to enforce the nonsensical measure. The movement was at first directed against the pawnbrokers, under the leadership of heavily debt-burdened court aristocrats and Samurai, whose promissory notes were burned together with the others on occasion of these pogroms.²⁵⁹ Exactly at the same time pogroms against the Jews occurred in western Europe with just the same motives, participants and methods.²⁶⁰ Genuine peasant wars exploded a little later, aimed mainly against the aristocracy of the Samurai, as for example 1429 and, on a grand scale, 1485-6, when "articles" were formulated and submitted to the government.²⁶¹

It is again remarkable that the great peasant wars of western Europe occurred at the same time: Belgium in 1324; France (Jacquerie) in 1352; England (Wat Tyler) in 1381; Spain in 1455; Germany (Bundschuh and Armer Conrad), 1513-4; and the big peasants' war in 1524-5.

VII

THE ASHIKAGA PERIOD is usually characterized as "anarchy" in opposition to the "tyranny" of the Hôjo. The term is well deserved. Indeed: the war of all against all was raging, conducted with every means of violence and treason, even against the nearest relatives.²⁶² The fighting parties changed sides so often, that these feuds are called the "war of the turn-coats." The ecclesiastical grandees, *i.e.*, the conflicting sects, did not fail to take part in these conflicts.²⁶³ The orders intermingled:²⁶⁴ all officials of the court, not only physicians and painters, but also dancers, actors, and the like were ennobled by raising them to Samurai. Plebeian upstarts procured the rank through purchase or adoption by an indigent nobleman.²⁶⁵ Persons of efficiency had the chance to rise: "Every warrior,

²⁵⁶ Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

²⁵⁷ Honjo, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-6.

²⁶⁰ System der Soziologie, IV, pp. 845 ff.

²⁶¹ Honjo, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

²⁶² Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

²⁶⁴ Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

²⁶⁵ Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

head of a family became a Daimyo."²⁶⁶ A blue-blooded abbot complained: "Even an outcast can aspire to the rule of a province."²⁶⁷ More and more frequently rose condottieri of low origin to the position of Daimyo and large landholders. The leaders of the expedition which Hideyoshi sent to Korea (1592) were two generals, one of whom was the son of a pharmacist, the other of a blacksmith. The all-powerful Hideyoshi himself was the son of a poor peasant: he had to be adopted by the entirely impoverished Fujiwara to provide an adequate rank.²⁶⁸

The Ashikaga period is "Junkers' time," dominated by Junkers' psychology in all its characteristics.²⁶⁹ Its first trait is to despise work and working people and especially trade, "the most degrading of all occupations";²⁷⁰ the second trait is the tendency to squander, including its finer form as open-handedness; the third and most laudable is the loyalty towards the liegeland and the death-spurning *bravoure*, which, again, has its contrast and caricature in the tendency to brawling and the exaggerated point of honor which sometimes attained insanity. The civilian is less than nothing: The testament of the first Tokugawa, Jeyasu, ordains in Paragraph 45 that the Samurai has the privilege of killing without further ado the civilian who "does not behave as was expected." In practice, however, it was not quite so bad. Hara reports that attack or serious provocation had to be proved, in default of which the killer had to expect heavy punishment.²⁷¹

There were fourteen Shogūns in the Ashikaga period: two were murdered by their own vassals, one was forced to commit suicide, and five died in exile.²⁷² The terrible disorder and the awful brutalization of this time show in these facts.

There were, however, some laudable traits as well. Art was flourishing at the many princes' courts, just as at those of the "principini" of Italy, the Este, Medici, Gonzaga, Sforza, etc., who, being usurpers, had to provide a nimbus for their dynasty.²⁷³ The national drama, "No," arose in this time or at least attained its definitive form; the monk Mincho, called the "Fra Angelico of Japan" (he died in 1431) painted;²⁷⁴ religious painting emancipated itself from the art of portraiture,²⁷⁵ and it was no longer

²⁶⁶ Gowen, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

²⁶⁷ Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

²⁶⁸ Longford, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

²⁶⁹ System der Soziologie, II, p. 341.

²⁷⁰ Longford, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

²⁷¹ Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

²⁷² Gowen, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

²⁷³ Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

²⁷⁴ Gowen, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-3.

²⁷⁵ Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

the formal draftmanship of the past, but a new individualistic art, representing the personality which here, just as in Italy's *rinascimento*, was awakening. It is again remarkable that the renaissances of both the extreme East and West took place in the same fifteenth century, and here as well the Cinquecento is considered "the purest, the most classical, period of Japanese art."²⁷⁶ Nor is the succeeding baroque of the Secento missing here: the great sculptor who built Jeyasu's mausoleum in Nikko is called the Michelangelo of Japan."

And it sounds like a quotation from Burckhardt's "History of the Renaissance" when we read: "*Il arrivait fréquemment que les personnages les plus dépravés, tels que destraitres et des meurtriers, étaient tres cultivés.*"²⁷⁷ The men who committed treason against the Ashikaga were mostly well educated, many of them even high-spirited poets and great Maecenases.

Towards the end of the period the old magnates, the nobles of the court and the ecclesiastical grandees, were dispossessed. Their own managers and military adventurers had seized their landed property, and there was nowhere a power strong enough to eject them. The smaller junkers had been subjugated or even radically swallowed up by the big ones, and thus originated "*véritables principautés, formées le plus souvent de plusieurs domaines, ayant chaoune à sa tête un chef militaire dont les droits étaient sans limites.*"²⁷⁸ In exactly the same manner the great territorial principalities of western Europe were shaped. Pirenne splendidly described the process in his "History of Belgium."²⁷⁹

VIII

IT IS PERMISSIBLE, therefore, to consider as the equivalent of the European State of Estates the second half of the Ashikaga period, in which "*la formation des petits états compacts et virtuellement indépendents*"²⁸⁰ had widely progressed. "The State of Estates in its extremest development, when princes and Estates have their particular courts, officials, treasuries, even armies and embassies."²⁸¹ By the term "prince" must be understood not the powerless emperor, but the Shogûn or Shikken. The Daimyo are the Estates.

²⁷⁶ Gowen, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

²⁷⁷ Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

²⁷⁹ System der Soziologie, IV, pp. 100 ff.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 210; Cf. Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 374: Here also people turned backward in romantic yearning, towards the splendor and glamour of the Nara time. The Genji-Monogatari of the Fujiwara period became as favored as the Vergilius in Italy.

²⁸¹ Jellinek, *Allgemeine Staatslehre*, p. 320.

This comparison must be adopted with a very sizable "grain of salt," because momentous factors of European evolution are missing in Japan. There was absent, first of all, the towns, whose interests are opposed to those of the Estates: in this period there is, barring the capitals Kyoto and Yedo, only one city in Japan, Habato on the island of Kiusiu, the ascent of Sakai occurring later. Missing also were the influences from abroad, by the Pope and foreign States, and chiefly the foreign wars, the mighty builders of States' constitutions.

The Daimyo held court and had their particular organization of government and administration; most of them had fortified castles of European style, stronger and more sumptuous than those of the Shiugu of old.²⁸² They minted their own coins, which had currency in their particular States only.²⁸³ They closed their boundaries against import and export in the eternal desire of absolutism to dominate and regulate everything, and, especially, to pocket the return of monopolies.²⁸⁴ Frequent famines resulted, because the commerce in grain was eliminated which levels supply and prices. They kept their own standing army, the Hatamoto, with the Gokenin as reserve,²⁸⁵ and made their own politics, and not only in the interior (when they, accompanied by their soldiers, marched blusteringly through the cities, to fight their private feuds in the streets, as happened frequently on occasion of succession disorders²⁸⁶) but also towards foreign powers. The prince of Kiusiu, for example, exchanged ambassadors and gifts with Kublai Khan.²⁸⁷ In regard to the inhabitants of their States, they wielded unrestricted authority, especially in matters of taxation.²⁸⁸

The European State of Estates was supplanted by complete absolutism at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. The "three magicians," Louis Onze in France, Fernando the Catholic in Spain, and Henry the Seventh in England, imposed it upon their subjects just as Charles the Bold did in Belgium. In Japan this revolution took place a century later at the time when German territorial princes, after having elevated themselves from lords of Estates to absolute independence, succeeded in subjecting their Estates.²⁸⁹

A great warlord, Nobunaga, scion of a family of *Ministeriales* which had just risen to independence, made an end to this state of things which

²⁸² Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 232; Saito, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

²⁸⁵ Saito, *op. cit.*, p. 234; Sansom, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

²⁸⁶ Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

²⁸⁹ System der Soziologie, II, p. 583.

had become entirely impossible. He secured "the ultimate unification of the empire now split up into numerous petty kingdoms" which, all of them, recognized the sovereignty of the Mikado in theory, only to deny it in practice.²⁹⁰ He defeated the ruling Shôgun in a civil war in which the ecclesiastical powers again took part. The huge fortified monastery of Hieizan was destroyed by the most agnostic condottiere who was not in the least awed by the sanctity of the location. The same fate hit the still more imposing cloister-fortress of the Shin-sect in Osaka. Nobunaga and his two generals, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Jeyasu Tokugawa, are genuine figures of the renaissance, quite like the great contemporaneous condottieri of western Europe, the Pescara, Colleoni, Frundsberg, Wallenstein, Rohan, etc. They are distinguished like them through military genius, diplomatic astuteness, inflexible will—and a conscience that was not to be disquieted.

Nobunaga perished by the treason of one of his generals, whom he had rendered, so we are informed, his mortal enemy by a "practical joke." The question is permissible whether it was not an ecclesiastical intrigue which brought about the end of this enemy of the clergy. Hideyoshi defeated and killed the traitor and took over, first as regent, later as "Taiko" (great prince), the government of the State which he quickly united through decisive victories over the great territorial princes. He ruled with wisdom and moderation, the first soldier in Japan's history who was at the same time a statesman. He knew how to spare the vanquished adversaries instead of slaughtering them. After his death in 1598, Jeyasu took over the government, defeated a coalition and had himself nominated Shogûn (1603). He was the founder of the Tokugawa dynasty.

It is nearly superfluous to mention that Hideyoshi had the children "eliminated,"²⁹¹ and that Jeyasu did the same in regard to the progeny of Hideyoshi.²⁹²

²⁹⁰ Longford, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

²⁹¹ Gowen, *op. cit.*, pp. 209 ff.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 242.

(Continued)