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Peasant Protest in Japan, 1590-1884. By Herbert P. Bix (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986. xxxix plus 296 pp.).

Peasant Protests and Uprisings in Tokugawa Japan. By Stephen Vlastos (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986. xii plus 184 pp. \$20.00).

For the past three decades Japan has experienced a prolonged "history boom" – a burgeoning of academic research and media attention to the nation's past. One considerable benefit to scholarship of this often partisan and sometimes frivolous boom has been a widespread search for primary documents, their accessioning in public archives, and their publication as document collections and in local and prefectural history series. For several reasons, much of this new material has concerned social and economic conditions in the Tokugawa centuries, 1600-1868. Japanese historians, themselves the collectors and annotators, quickly exploited these records, diaries, and other public and private documents to renew debates about the nature and significance of commoner protest during those centuries. Western historians, however, wary of the polemics and unfamiliar with the sources, are only now beginning to deal confidently with these primary materials and secondary scholarship.

The two studies under review reflect this new competence. Both authors acknowledge the considerable influence of several Japanese historians of Tokugawa popular protest – especially for Bix, Toshio Yokoyama; for Vlastos, Kichinosuke Shoji; and for both, Katsumi Fukaya, Junnosuke Sasaki, and Yoshio Yasumaru. The books are thus useful expositions of current Japanese positions as well as important studies in their own right. They reflect the strengths of their Japanese colleagues, although they do not entirely avoid some of their weaknesses.

Vlastos proposes a two-stage model of Tokugawa protest. In the 17th and early 18th centuries, the most common actions were joint, direct petitions to domain lords and shogunate officials, seeking debt relief and tax reductions. These were limited yet effective measures because they drew on a rhetoric of paternal benevolence that, Vlastos believes, was not merely an elite piety but a widely held norm of official conduct. By the late 18th century, the political elites were weakened and the peasants were divided by an increasingly commercialized economy. Protests became more frequent and more aggressive, including house smashings and property destruction. Nonetheless, they did not directly challenge the state apparatus, but rather turned against local headmen and wealthy peasants and merchants, the chief beneficiaries of commoditized production. Peasants were, by Vlastos's assessment (pp. 145-147), active though not particularly progressive agents in hastening the end of Tokugawa rule.

Vlastos illustrates his argument with examples from the northeastern region of Fukushima. He does not elaborate the reasons for his choice, and he could have helped the reader more by providing an early, comprehensive introduction to the region, rather than scattering details through the narrative (e.g., we learn details of rural administration only on pp. 146-147). Still, his choice was strategic, because the region was composed of several areas of distinct ecologies and political economies, whose administrative patterns and protest histories he is able to

contrast effectively. His best chapters, 4-7, compare the two areas of Aizu and Shindatsu. He focuses especially on the 1866 uprising against a silk tax in Shindatsu, where sericulture was both a survival strategy of impoverished households and a risky venture for entrepreneurially minded smallholders, and on the 1868 uprising in Aizu that went beyond property destruction to the convening of local assemblies for visionary political reforms of village authority.

Bix offers a somewhat different, more elaborate paradigm of the Tokugawa state – its 17th century consolidation of power, its 18th century crises, as structural contradictions became apparent, and its eventual destruction in the mid-19th century. The first three sections of his book analyze the transitional and tempestuous 18th century by focusing on a trio of protests in central and western Japan: the Sanchu Rising of 1726-1727; the Ueda Horeki Rising of 1761-1763; and the Tenmei Rising in Fukuyama, 1786-1787. Each uprising was produced by and in turn further exacerbated elite demands on peasant production. The fourth section begins with brief mention of several famous incidents of the final decades of Tokugawa rule before turning to full accounts of the Kaisei Rising of 1866-1867 in the western domain of Tsuyama and the Debased Currency Risings of 1869-1870 in the central mountain region in Shinshu. Bix's Marxist perspective provides a coherently unified model of increasing exploitation, heightened class tensions, and ever more radical challenges to authority and privilege; unlike Vlastos, he sees peasant protest as having significantly progressive consequences (if only to bring entrapment in a more fully capitalist order). Those who are not already convinced of this view of the trajectory of change in Tokugawa Japan will probably remain unpersuaded by such notions as "antifeudal consciousness" and "a slowly rising level of relations of production" (p. 139).

The two studies taken together, valuable for the case materials they make available and provocative in their modeling of the Tokugawa experience, nevertheless leave me with two major reservations. The first concerns the "peasant" as a Marxist class term and as indigenous status category (i.e. the juridical estate, *hyakusho*, and its several further discriminations). Both Bix and Vlastos recognize this distinction, and the separate dynamics of the analytic and folk terms. However, in their substantive discussions, they slip back and forth between the two so often that we are left with only a vague picture of 19th century class structure and relations (e.g. Vlastos 166-167; Bix pp. 218-219). They are certainly correct that instability was more characteristic of 19th century rural household economy than either prosperity or immiseration, but neither adequately confronts the challenge this presents to a strict class analysis of joint action and collective consciousness. Class is undoubtedly a salient category of analysis, but much more is claimed for its power to explain Tokugawa formations than is actually demonstrated.

Also deserving further development in the two studies are the links between state and economy. Both studies imply the health of the state and the economy varied inversely. A repressive feudal state was weakened by a growing commercial economy; peasant protest was first framed by the state and directed against its political elite, then enacted within a commercialized economy against its privileged. Yet tributary extraction and mercantile circulation were closely linked from the start, and much production was commodified and drawn into

commercial exchange (even, it would appear, in 17th century Shindatsu; Vlastos, p. 94). While commercialization is the favored motive force in Japanese accounts of Tokugawa protest, it is much too broad a cover term for the quantitative growth and qualitative transformation of the rural economy. Its prominence in the models of both authors here does not do justice to the careful scholarship by which their case materials are presented.

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