

Land and Lordship in Early Modern Japan. By Mark Ravina (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999) 278 pp., \$45.00

One of the key controversies in studies of early modern Japan concerns the nature of the country's polity from 1600 to 1868 when the Tokugawa line of military shoguns forced the emperor to delegate them effective rule over the country. The Tokugawa, in turn, devolved administration of much of Japan to fellow samurai lords, who exercised considerable fiscal and governing autonomy in return for demonstrations of loyalty and deference to the shoguns. Historians have long debated if this was a kind of centralized feudalism or a strategic move by absolutist rulers. How should we understand the Tokugawa polity in relation to both the absolutist regimes in early modern Europe and the modern nation-state that was established in Japan by the new Meiji leaders in the late nineteenth century? Ravina offers an original and compelling formulation of these issues that should reward the attention of any scholar of the ideological bases and fiscal imperatives of early modern polities.

Ravina describes Tokugawa Japan as a "compound state" to capture its delicate fusion of three idioms of legitimacy in its rule: the personal, perishable compacts of feudal authority that bound a particular lord and a particular vassal; a patrimonial principle by which an investiture was a family line's patrimony across generations and thus bound houses over time; and a suzerain authority, which was the remarkable autonomy that

lords exercised over civil affairs in their “countries” (a term that Ravina finds more appropriate than the more common “domain”). With these distinctions, he transforms the debate from the degree of authority delegation to the complex tensions produced by such an ideological amalgamation.

His analytical emphasis is on the implications of suzerain statecraft, which, in broadest practical terms, demanded that samurai retainues be provisioned with sufficient stipendiary incomes from taxes extracted from a commoner population. Managing this clash of interests between larger stipends and lower taxes was the constant of Tokugawa administration, but it was ever-shifting in form and success through the centuries because of demographic changes and proto-industrial activities.

Ravina properly identifies the large domains, or the “great countries,” as crucial sites, and the substantive core of the book is an effective contrast set of three extended cases of domain political economy. Hirosaki, on the northern tip of the main island, had both a large samurai population and an economy based in grain agriculture; Yonezawa, an inland basin domain, had a large samurai population and a relatively commercialized economy; and Tokushima, a domain on Shikoku near to the markets in Osaka, had a smaller samurai population and a more aggressively commercial economy. In each case, Ravina traces how two centuries of political crises and policy-reform initiatives shaped, and were shaped by, increasing demographic pressures and the opportunities and challenges of proto-industrial development.

This book succeeds both in its analytical claims and in its methodological strategy. It is an important advance in our appreciation of the varieties and commonalities of Tokugawa statecraft.

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