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Japan's Industrious Revolution

Economic and Social Transformations
in the Early Modern Period

 Springer

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Preface to the English Edition

This book explains how economic and social transformations in pre-1600 Japan led to an industrious revolution in the early modern period, a profound change which made the vast majority of the population “industrious” – in a different sense from Professor Jan de Vries’s thesis. While the de Vries thesis focuses on consumer behavior, the author argues that what happened in Japanese history was the rise of labor-intensive agriculture which was compatible with the rise of the market.

The volume is a modified version of *Kinsei nihon no keizai shakai* (Economic Society in Early Modern Japan), which was published by Reitaku University Press in 2004. Looking further back, it began with the 1973 edition of *Nihon ni okeru keizai shakai no tenkai* (Development of Economic Society in Japan), a textbook on the economic history of Japan written for undergraduates at Keio University. The state of research in economic history in 1970s Japan was still under the influence of Marxism which had dominated the 1950s and 1960s, yet economic growth due to “Japanese-style capitalism” had begun. Confronting the reality that economic standards that departed from those of the low ones of the immediate postwar days were starting, studies of economic history from new angles grounded in economic development theory and quantitative observations – not those of traditional descriptivist methods – became prominent. Yet, none of these methods satisfied the masses, so textbooks aimed at undergraduates written from a variety of standpoints also lined the shelves at bookstores, and beginners could not figure out which one to choose.

Such being the case, the aforementioned textbook is a compilation of the author’s historical perspective. Up until that point, the author had limited himself to three research areas: studies on rural villages in the Kantō district (where the observational results primarily taught the author about the creation of market economies in that areas), studies on the cadastral surveys performed at the beginning of the early modern period, and demographic analysis of rural villages from the latter half of the seventeenth century until the Meiji Restoration (1868). On these three bases, the author published a 128-page textbook in 1973.

Naturally, although it was an “economic history of Japan,” the ancient and medieval periods (prior to the latter half of the sixteenth century) are covered only briefly, and the author does not specifically elaborate on the Meiji Restoration onward. It goes without saying that it does not incorporate trends in recent research in economic history (global economic history, comparative economic history).

However, looking back on this volume, the author saw that a hypothesis had started to form in the author’s mind as to the course where economic modernization was achieved through a market economy: the ancient state system which was highly centralized; economic as well as religious authority was actually the factor which did not permit the development of market economy; and what enabled it was a society where religious and secular authority, in addition to political power and economic agents, were separated. This was greatly influenced by the author’s experiences during stopovers – albeit short – in the Middle and Near East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia on the author’s way to and from the author’s studies abroad in 1963 and 1964.

For example, the colossal sense the author felt when the author ascended the pyramids in Egypt: the massive amount of labor required to construct these royal tombs, colossal structures irrelevant to everyday lives in an era where the only tools were rollers. Thinking about the pyramids and comparing them to the modern Egyptian homes spread out below, the author noticed this major gap and questioned himself as to its causes. In the end, the answer the author discovered was that this disparity was due to the nature of the ruling class (ruling elites) and the common people at the bottom.

In ancient societies, there was no middle class between the ruling and ruled classes, and the ruling class was almighty in monopolizing politics and economics, as well as culture and religion. Viewed in this light, the ruled classes were almost animals in human form, and if they were worked to death, all that was needed was to start a war and bring back prisoners. Therefore, it was not at all difficult to build these massive structures that modern people find incomprehensible. The scale of the massive burial mounds in fourth to sixth century Japan is also on a par with the structures built elsewhere in the ancient world. In short, an ancient society also existed, if not a grand scale, in Japan.

What dismantled these ancient societies – including Japan’s – was the encounter with religion (not folk beliefs, but ones where gods and scriptures exist). Religion possesses transcendental absolutes, so once religion enters ancient society, its secular ruling class is no longer almighty. In addition, with the appearance of missionaries who transmit the scriptures to believers and intermediaries who spread the teachings among the masses, the rulers distinguished them from the ordinary masses and granted them a protected status, giving birth to a middle class. Political rulers embracing a particular religion meant they would lose their prior almighty authority, but the key to dismantling ancient society can be found in their unawareness of this paradox.

Another factor is commerce. Commerce is said to be “as old as the history of mankind,” but in ancient societies, it was difficult for the masses to engage in commerce peacefully. All profits went to the ruling class, and circumstances were such that commoners were not permitted to obtain profits through commerce. However, once the separation of religious and secular authority began and secular rulers were no longer absolute, commercial activity by the masses appeared.

What first started as barter developed into markets – particularly regular markets – and transactional distances shifted from near-distance to long-distance. Products also did not incur shipping charges at first, and items with significant value differences – such as jewelry and precious metals – were traded, and these came to be exchanged in the form of gifts and reciprocity.

Currency was born as a result of expanded commercial activity, and this currency stimulated it, acting as a positive feedback function. However, currency did not always stimulate the economy in that manner. In Japan, copper coins were minted in 708, an imitation of those minted in Tang dynasty China, but since the economy was not sufficiently developed to require currency, its circulation was also limited, and minting ceased 250 years later. We might call it “currency before its time.”

The conversion of *shōen nengu* payments into currency began during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and large quantities of Sung and Ming dynasty coins were imported throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The economy came to require currency. The chaos of the Sengoku (Warring States Period) passed, and the Tokugawa shogunate established the currency system that the short-lived regimes of Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi could not. This system, with gold and silver as standard and copper coins as supplemental currency, was not a simple one: exchange rates between gold and silver were introduced, and in several domains, *hansatsu*, a domainal paper currency, was issued. In any case, by the Edo Period everyone residing in Japan knew of currency and came to use it.

From this, Japan finally became a currency-based economy, and with that came developments in a variety of systems, facilities, and professions, in addition to learning and thought. The author calls this condition “economic society.” Naturally, economic society was not made up in a day. However, between the period prior to the emergence of economic society and the one that followed, there were major changes in the lifestyle, thinking, and values of those who lived there. Referring to the period following the emergence of economic society as “modern” is acceptable, but this volume will call this era “early modern” and examine how it developed.

A great deal of knowledge and works have been useful for the author to establish the idea of the history of Japan developed in this volume. Here the author wishes to point out just five works that decisively impacted on the author’s idea to write this volume: (1) John Hicks, *A Theory of Economic History* (Oxford University Press, 1969); (2) Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne* (Allen and Unwin, 1939); (3) B. H. Slicher van Bath, *The Agrarian History of Western Europe, A.D. 500–1850* (Edward Arnold, 1966); (4) Robert Heilbroner, *The Making of Economic Society* (Prentice-Hall, 1963); and (5) Douglass C. North and Robert Paul Thomas, *The Rise of the Western World* (Cambridge University Press, 1973).

Finally, the author wishes to deeply thank Osamu Saito, a former student of the author and Professor Emeritus of Hitotsubashi University, who read and checked the manuscripts of several chapters of this book at the final stage of the editing process. Without Osamu’s help, I couldn’t have completed this book.

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About the Author

Akira Hayami is a member of the Japan Academy and a correspondent member of the Academy of the Moral and Political Sciences, France. He is professor emeritus of Keio University (Tokyo), the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Kyoto), and Reitaku University (Kashiwa). Hayami is also the former vice president of the International Association of Economic History, honorary president of the International Committee of Historical Demography and former president of the Socio-economic History Society in Japan. He was awarded the Order of Cultural Merit (Japan) in 2009.

Major publications include *The Historical Demography of Pre-Modern Japan* (University of Tokyo Press, 2001), *Population, Family and Society in Pre-Modern Japan* (Global Oriental, 2009), and *Population and Family in Early-Modern Central Japan* (International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2010). He also co-edited with Ad Van der Woude and Jan de Vries the volume *Urbanization in History: A Process of Dynamic Interactions* (Oxford University Press, 1990) and co-edited with Osamu Saito and Ronald P. Toby the book *Emergence of Economic Society in Japan, 1600–1859* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

Hayami's major contributions include the application of historical demography methods to early-modern Japanese data, the finding of fresh facts made possible by the methodological breakthrough, which in turn emancipated early-modern Japanese historiography from a “dark age” imagery, and the coining of the term “Industrious Revolution.”

Glossary

bakufu-han (bakuhan) system	Political system consisting of bakufu and han (daimyō domains)
gōshi	Landed samurai
kemi	Field inspection
kokuga	Provincial headquarters
komononari	Miscellaneous taxes
konden	Reclaimed rice fields
kuge	Court aristocracy. A term referring to the emperor and court aristocrats
kumigashira	Head of the goningumi
kuraichi	Land under shogun's or daimyō's direct rule
nago	Hereditary servant
nakama	Guild
nanushi	Village headman
rakuichi rakuza	Free markets, open guilds
shōya	Village headman
shugo	Military provincial governor
tato	Land manager
tenryō	Shogunal lands
yui	Cooperative work group in rice planting
yusoden	Taxable fields
za	A trade or craft guild that originated in the eleventh century. Most active in the Muromachi Period

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Provinces in Mid-Edo Period

- | | | |
|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| 51. Aki | 29. Iga | 30. Ōmi |
| 8. Awa (1) | 41. Inaba | 65. Ōsumi |
| 56. Awa (2) | 27. Ise | 25. Owari |
| 37. Awaji | 45. Iwami | 11. Sado |
| 50. Bingo | 55. Iyo | 10. Sagami |
| 49. Bitchū | 21. Izu | 54. Sanuki |
| 48. Bizen | 35. Izumi | 66. Satsuma |
| 59. Bungo | 44. Izumo | 33. Settsu |
| 58. Buzen | 15. Kaga | 28. Shima |
| 61. Chikugo | 18. Kai | 6. Shimōsa |
| 60. Chikuzen | 34. Kawachi | 4. Shimotsuke |
| 2. Dewa | 7. Kazusa | 19. Shinano |
| 12. Echigo | 36. Kii | 52. Suō |
| 16. Echizen | 3. Kōzuke | 22. Suruga |
| 13. Etchu | 24. Mikawa | 40. Tajima |
| 46. Harima | 47. Mimasaka | 38. Tanba |
| 20. Hida | 26. Mino | 39. Tango |
| 63. Higo | 9. Musashi | 57. Tosa |
| 5. Hitachi | 1. Mutsu | 23. Tōtōmi |
| 62. Hizen | 53. Nagato | 17. Wakasa |
| 42. Hōki | 14. Noto | 31. Yamashiro |
| 64. Hyūga | 43. Oki | 32. Yamato |

