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**WHY DID JAPAN FAIL TO ACHIEVE FULL-FLEDGED  
DEMOCRACY BEFORE WORLD WAR II?  
AN ANALYSIS OF CLASS RELATIONS AND FORCES USING  
MARXIAN CLASS THEORIES**

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**Introduction**

Sustainable democratization started in Japan after World War II. The Allied Occupation between 1945 and 1951 was very important for the development of Japanese democracy. The major policies implemented by GHQ (General Headquarters to occupy Japan) were: (1) the promulgation of a new Constitution, (2) land reform, and (3) the dissolution of the *zaibatsu*. Essentially, full-blossomed democracy in Japan was brought from outside. That is, “The Democratic Revolution” was “A Gift from Heaven.”<sup>1</sup> Before the end of WWII, there were internal forces which fought against the authoritarian regime. However, these forces were not able to achieve democracy, except for a brief period of “Taisho Democracy” in the 1920s. GHQ policies were targeted toward dismantling the major components of the authoritarian regime. These policies weakened the state apparatus as well as landlords and commercial and industrial elites,<sup>2</sup> which made up the authoritarian regime. As GHQ’s policies accurately identified, in pre-WWII Japan, the state, landlords, and commercial and industrial elites combined their power to establish a totalitarian state which enabled the invasion of other countries.

The purpose of this paper is to obtain a better understanding of the trajectory of pre-war Japanese democracy. For this, Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens’ relative class power model of democracy<sup>3</sup> and Moore’s

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<sup>1</sup>John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), p. 67.

<sup>2</sup>In this paper, industrial and commercial elite and the bourgeoisie are used interchangeably. Also, the working class and the proletariat will be used the same way.

<sup>3</sup>Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens, and John Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

theoretical framework and his analysis of Japan will be utilized.<sup>4</sup> In discussing the foundation of these theories, various studies on class relations and forces in pre-war Japan will be juxtaposed in the analysis.

### **Theories of Democratization**

Social scientists in the West have developed two major lines of theoretical inquiry into class/stratum and democracy.<sup>5</sup> The first line is to understand the relationship between these phenomena using modernization theory that explains social mobility and stratification. This theory postulates that modernization creates the middle class through increased income and educational levels, and social mobility promotes political democratization in society.<sup>6</sup> That is, modernization is positively related to democratization. As a research tradition, modernization theory tends to use cross-sectional data to see the level of modernization in various societies; therefore, it is likely to be ahistorical. Although he also subscribes to modernization theory, Tominaga's analysis is different; he looks at changes in society from a historical perspective.<sup>7</sup> He claims that modernization in the Western and non-Western worlds are different because non-Western societies have undergone the process of modernization experienced by the West in reverse sequence. In the West, modernization started from social modernization followed by cultural modernization, then political modernization, and finally economic modernization.

In the modernization of non-Western societies, economic modernization came first, followed by political modernization, and finally social and cultural modernization. This reverse sequence is the prevailing factor that makes it difficult to transform non-Western societies into modernized societies. In this broad scheme of social change, the political

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<sup>4</sup>Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966, 1993).

<sup>5</sup>Tamio Hattori, Tsuruyo Funatsu, and Takashi Torii, "Introduction: The Emergence of the Asian Middle Class and Their Characteristics," *The Developing Economies* 41/2 (2003): 129-139.

<sup>6</sup>Masanori Nakamura, *Economic Development and Democracy*. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993); and Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

<sup>7</sup>Kenichi Tominaga, *Japanese Modernization and Social Change* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1990).

arena is described as a transition from despotism to democracy in politics, and from traditional law to modern law in the system of laws.<sup>8</sup> According to Tominaga, the reverse sequence which is the fate of the late starters of modernization affects the level of democratization negatively. I agree with Tominaga's assessment, but he does not show in detail how this reverse sequence affected various social groups in Japan and resulted in totalitarianism. I think another tradition offers a good understanding of the dynamism of those groups in relation to democratization. This tradition understands the relationship using Marxian class analysis, which views classes as historical change agents that inherently possess conflicts of interest in their struggle for supremacy. Democratization is considered to be the result of this struggle.

In terms of understanding democratization in pre-WWII Japan, the former theoretical tradition does not explain it well. Pre-war Japan modernized rapidly, taking the West as a model. Yet, here modernization did not result in democracy; the society moved in the opposite direction toward totalitarianism. Thus, Marxian class analysis which views social forces as complex and historical is a better analytical tool than modernization theory to interpret democratization in pre-war Japan.

#### **Marxian Class Analysis on Democratization**

A comprehensive understanding of class relations and democracy in the Marxian tradition has been developed by Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens. They call their theory "the relative class power model of democracy." Building upon a long tradition of discourse about the relationship between capitalist development and democracy, they argue that democratization is a matter of power. They state that "it is power relations that most importantly determine whether democracy can emerge, stabilize, and then maintain itself even in the face of adverse conditions."<sup>9</sup> In the theory, the working class is identified as the most critical actor in the advancement of democracy. The opposite pole is the landed upper class, the most anti-democratic force. Between these classes, there exist the bourgeoisie and the middle class. Whether democracy or authoritarianism results depends on two factors. The first factor is each class' consideration of benefits or losses after democratization. That is, if the benefit outweighs the

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<sup>8</sup>Kenichi Tominaga, *Theory of Modernization: The West and the East in Modernization* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1996), pp. 34-35.

<sup>9</sup>Rueschemeyer, et al., *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, p. 5.

loss for the bourgeoisie, they may coalesce with the proletariat. On the other hand, if the loss outweighs the benefit, the bourgeoisie is more likely to cooperate with the landed upper class. The second factor is a class' ability to organize itself and mobilize resources for its interests. If the working class lacks these abilities, achieving democracy is unlikely. Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens enhance their class-based model by adding two external influences, state and transnational power structures. The state can be a coalition partner with dominant classes. In this case, the dominant class' oppression by force of the dominated classes can be legitimated in the name of the state. Thus, they conclude that some autonomy of the state from the dominant classes, from the bourgeoisie and especially – where it still exists – from the landlord class, is a necessary condition for democracy to be possible and meaningful.<sup>10</sup> The importance of the transnational power structure is that it affects the power relations of internal class structure. In the case of Japan, when GHQ imposed its policies, the relative power of the classes changed dramatically.

Moore's analysis of modern political systems in selected countries is another important theoretical development in interpreting democratization. He identifies three paths to the modern political mode. The first path is liberal democracy, represented by the United Kingdom, France, and the United States. The second path is fascism represented by Germany and Japan. The third path is communism such as developed in China and Russia. Which path a country takes depends upon five factors. These factors are: (1) the relative power of state to landlord and bourgeoisie; (2) the degree to which the state supports the landlord's repressive agriculture; (3) the relative strength of the rural and urban dominant classes; (4) the alliances of domination between crown and dominant classes; and (5) the peasants chance to resist domination. Social actors in Moore's theoretical framework include the state, landlords, peasants, and the bourgeoisie. His main emphasis is on the relationship between the landlord and the peasant. According to Moore, in Japan, there was a coalition between the landlord and the state which supported repressive agriculture. The bourgeoisie also joined the coalition. The state supported the bourgeoisie through trade protectionism, selling off state factories, and the banning of unions. The peasants chance to organize was low because of repression, as well as tradition and custom which softened the antagonism.

Though Moore's discussion is insightful, his analysis of Japan is

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<sup>10</sup>Rueschemeyer, et al., *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, p. 64.

weak in two areas. One is his neglect of the role of the working class. In Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens relative class power model of democracy, they argue that landlords are the most anti-democratic force and the working class is the most important force for democracy. Their historical accounts of various countries suggest that the working class possessed more ability than any other class to organize for democracy. Peasants can be a force for democracy, but historical accounts indicate that they often were passive in regard to democracy. If the working class is the most important force for democracy, as suggested, it is necessary to describe the working class in pre-WWII Japan; and it is this that which is lacking in Moore's historical account of Japan.

Another weak point is his conceptualization of the relationship between the landlord and the peasant. He argues that the absence of a peasant revolution in Japan was due to the repression by the state, and fear and dependence of peasants, which created the elaborate Japanese code of deference. The landlord is characterized as a repressor and a parasite. For example, after WWI, the number of landlord-tenant disputes increased rapidly. When landlords were not able to handle the situation through the creation of cooperative unions, they asked the government to oppress the tenants, for example, police would be called upon to put down a dispute by force. Landlords were also parasitic; for example, in 1937, they sold eighty-five percent of their crops, which were mainly cultivated by their tenants. These characterizations are true, yet, they are not the whole picture of the relationship between landlord and peasant. For instance, Waswo points out that the Japanese landlords helped create winter jobs for peasants.<sup>11</sup> This account of a positive role of landlords for peasants needs to be integrated in the analysis in order to get a balanced picture of the relationship.

In reviewing the theoretical frameworks of Rueschemeyer et al., and of Moore, it can be said that the Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens' theory is more comprehensive than Moore's theory. Moore's analysis is essentially based on the relationship between the landlord-bourgeoisie-state coalition versus the peasant. Rueschemeyer et al. add the working class into the framework. Although their theoretical framework is more comprehensive, unfortunately, they do not have a case study of Japan, in contrast to Moore's extensive Japanese case study. Considering the shortcomings of Moore's analysis, this paper will describe the working class before WWII and

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<sup>11</sup>Ann Waswo, *Japanese Landlords* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

reinterpret the relationship between peasants and landlords in pre-war Japan so that it is possible to have a more comprehensive sketch of the condition for democracy in Japan in this period.

### **The Working Class in Japan**

The development of modern capitalism in Japan began with the Meiji government's policies to promote industry.<sup>12</sup> World capitalism was already substantially developed when the Tokugawa regime was overthrown in 1868. The new government perceived only one choice for the maintenance of sovereignty in the presence of the strong nations of the West. The choice was to join world capitalism by promoting industry and building its military guided by the slogan *Fukoku kyohei* (rich country, strong military). Unlike advanced capitalist nations where the proletariat and the bourgeoisie were formed naturally, the post-Tokugawa class formation was rather artificial. In England, urbanization, which was initially accompanied by surplus labor (free labor), coincided with industrialization and technological advancement. However, when the government started industrialization in Japan, the majority of people were still rural. Moore mentions a major difference between Japan and England, which is that "Japan, unlike England, did not undergo on any widespread scale the process of expropriating its peasant, driving them to the cities..."<sup>13</sup> Thus, the lack of industrial laborers continued to be a major problem for Japan. Furthermore, this non-sequence of the development of free labor also affected the life of the proletariat.

Iwamoto identifies three routes to proletarianization in Japan.<sup>14</sup> First, peasants, who comprised 80 percent of the Japanese population, were forced to change their way of life by working in cities when the commercial and money economy developed. This was a typical way of proletariat formation in Western Europe. The difference between Western Europe and

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<sup>12</sup>There is a debate about the time when the initial capital accumulation for modern capitalism started in Japan. Some scholars argue that the capital accumulation started when the Meiji government initiated policies to promote industry. Other scholars argue that in the late seventeenth century capital accumulation started in rural areas where the commodification of agriculture and the development of manufacturing started. See Yoshiteru Iwamoto, "Capitalists and Wage Laborers," in *Social History II*, Yoshiji Nakamura, ed. (Tokyo: Yamakawa Publishing Company, 1967), p. 302.

<sup>13</sup>Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, p. 280.

<sup>14</sup>Iwamoto, "Capitalists and Wage Laborers."

Japan was that Japanese workers kept strong ties with families and relatives in rural areas. Second, the changes to the status of vassals initiated by the new government became a route to proletarianization. The Meiji government took away social, economic, and political privileges from the samurai. Third, artisans became part of the proletariat after the dissolution of guilds. The Meiji government's intention is clear in the process of proletarianization. In order to join the world capitalist market, the government had to dismantle the four social divisions (samurai, peasant, artisan, and merchant), which were the basis of Tokugawa feudal society. Moore summarizes the government's activity by saying that "in 1869 the government declared equality before the law for social classes, abolished local barriers to trade and communication, permitted freedom of cropping, and allowed individuals to acquire property rights in land."<sup>15</sup> The classes of proletariat and bourgeoisie that are necessary for modern capitalism were thus intentionally created by the state.

Dismantling the Tokugawa class system freed the peasants from the strict social control of five-man groups, a system of domination that used mutual responsibility to ensure the authority of the Tokugawa regime. However, the creation of the proletariat was not similar to its formation in Western Europe. Many peasants remained in their rural communities. They worked on their land and/or their landlords' land. These peasants who remained in rural communities gradually evolved into wage laborers. There were three routes for this transformation. First, while continuing to work the land, they also commuted to nearby cities to work in factories. Iwamoto says that commuting created conditions for a basic form of wage labor in the early period of the Meiji era. Becoming migrant workers was another way for peasants to become wage laborers. Young women who mainly worked in silk mills were the major component of this type of wage laborer. The third route was for peasants to become proletariat because of the bankruptcy of their farms. Bankruptcy was especially common during the deflation after 1881.

When the Meiji government declared an equality of social classes, they made a concession to the samurai class. Because the samurai class was the dominant class in the Tokugawa regime, the new government was careful in their dealings with them. After 1883, the government paid cash and bond as compensation to the samurai who surrendered their title. In 1886, the government ordered the samurai to surrender their title in exchange for a uniform national bond. Only the samurai class was compensated by the government. However, the average compensation was 548 yen per person;

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<sup>15</sup>Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, p. 249.

This amount was not enough to generate interest to live on. Thus, samurai became independent farmers and merchants. However, their lack of experience often brought failure in their new businesses. Many of them became part of the proletariat. In 1868, guilds were dissolved and artisans lost their prerogatives. Worse still, the demand for the products shifted. Initially, the artisans produced goods for the samurai, but the decline of the samurai class meant that there would be less demand for the goods. Changes to the social environment accelerated the proletarianization of this group.

These processes formed the working class in the nation, but the magnitude of the formation and the characteristics of the workers were not sufficient to become a strong political force in Japan. As of 1882, the total number of workers in factories was about 60,000. The total number of workers in state-owned factories was about 10,000, and the private sector employed about 50,000. Most of the state-owned factories were metal and machine industries. In the private sector, the dominant industry was textile; here, seventy percent of the employed were women. In the private sector, there were also the metal and machine industries which employed men. However, these men accounted for only ten percent of all workers in Japan. Most of the male workers were employed as unskilled laborers, such as handymen and mine workers. This data, along with the previous discussion of commuter workers, indicates that the proletariat in the early period of the Meiji Era can be characterized by the dominance of female workers and commuter workers. Female workers were bound by tradition and they had little education. Commuter workers were tied to the landlord-tenant relationship and they were still rooted in rural communities. Thus, the process of formation and the characteristics of the working class in Japan worked against the creation of class consciousness which is important if a class is to become a political power.

In the next two sections, working conditions of workers and their struggles for a better life are discussed based on Iwamoto's data and arguments.

### **The Working Conditions of the Proletariat**

The working conditions of industrial workers were characterized by long working hours and low wages. In 1868, on average people worked ten to twelve hours a day. The determination of the working hour derived from a typical idea of laboring from sunrise to sunset. In state-owned factories, eight to nine hours was the norm. The shorter working hours in the state-owned factories were due to the influence of Western Europe. But this relatively

good condition was short-lived. As competition accelerated along with a shortage of skilled laborers, working hours were extended to ten hours. In private factories, conditions became much worse. For example, in Gunma and Nagano prefectures, workers in the silk industry worked for fifteen to sixteen hours a day. A wage level was determined in reference to the wages of a day laborer in craft and in agriculture. For example, at a spinning mill in Osaka in 1882, men received 0.12 yen a day and women received 0.07 yen a day (0.12 yen equals 3.6 liters of rice.). Because of the lack of worker awareness, the extended working hours did not result in the increase of wages. Despite the harsh working conditions, the relation between management and labor was not as conflict-ridden as one might think. The bourgeoisie used family as an analogy, that is, the bourgeoisie were seen as parents and the proletariat as children. This ideology successfully deflected the inherent conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

### **Labor Movement**

Around the turn of the century, the working class had grown rapidly and was potentially a strong political force. In 1900, there were 387,796 workers in factories that employed more than ten people. In mining, there were 140,846 workers, and in railways and shipping 166,079.<sup>16</sup> Although the conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie was deflected by the ideology of pseudo-kinship, after 1897 the proletariat gradually formed a class consciousness. Before 1897, wage laborers in coal mines and factories fought for better a working environment. In some of the spinning mills, female workers also fought for better conditions. However, these disputes were not based on class consciousness. The disputes were the outbursts of dissatisfaction with their daily life conditions. After 1897, the nature of disputes changed. The idea of socialism was brought to the movement when Sentaro Joe and Honnosuke Sawada came back to Japan from America with socialistic ideas. Around this year, several socialist organizations were formed such as the Socialist Club led by Sei Kawakami and Shusui Kotoku (1898) and the Social Democratic Party led by Sen Katayama and Shusui Kotoku (1901). Also, workers started to organize by themselves. As identified by Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens, an ability to organize itself is a critical factor for the labor movement.

Although there was progress in the labor movement, the

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<sup>16</sup>Mitsusada Inoue, Kazuo Kasahara and Kota Kodama, eds., *Japanese History* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Publishing Company, 1984), p. 273.

unionization of workers was not as smooth as one might think. Two factors worked against smooth unionization. The first factor was that factory workers were still dominated by females, who often lacked adequate education. Thus, the formation of class consciousness was not very strong. There was also a cleavage between intellectual socialists and uneducated female workers. Here, we see the internal difficulties that held the proletariat back from becoming a political force. The intellectual socialists failed to form a large-scale political force. Furthermore, the uneducated female workers did not have the chance to reflect on their condition and mobilize for their rights. Although Moore attributes the lack of democratization in Japan to the landlord-peasant relationship, here we see another factor, that is, the failure of an internal drive for organizing among the working class, especially female workers.

The second factor was that after realizing the increase of labor disputes, the government passed the Security Police Law in 1900. This law allowed the government to directly suppress the unionization of laborers and crush the disputes. After passing this law, the labor movement showed a significant decline. It was not until 1905 that the labor movement regained its momentum. In 1907, affected by the recession after the Russo-Japanese War, the number of disputes hit a record high. At the same time, socialist groups repeated many internal fights which created the fragmentation of the movement. In addition to this fragmentation, the government's oppression increased. The execution of 24 socialists by the government put a brake on the socialist/labor movement. This removed the slight chance the working class had for unionization.

The next rebound of the labor movement was after WWI. The war brought an economic boom. However, the distribution of the profit was uneven: the bourgeoisie monopolized the profit, while the living conditions of the proletariat actually deteriorated. This discrepancy between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie ignited a series of disputes. In 1917, there were 497 disputes attended by 63,000 workers. The number of participants was the highest in the history of Japan. Around this time, the labor movement joined with advocates of "Taisho Democracy." Together, these groups requested universal suffrage. This movement became a national movement and characterized the Taisho era. Again, after the WWI boom, a recession came. The workers faced the possibility of mass unemployment. Along with the continuous repression from the government and the bourgeoisie, the fear of unemployment reduced the number of disputes. However, "Taisho Democracy" brought universal suffrage in 1925. This reflected progress

toward democracy. In the same year, the government also passed the Peace Preservation Law. Later, this law became an instrument to oppress any group which opposed the Japanese military government and its policy.

In sum, the government made a concession to democratic forces by offering universal suffrage. At the same time, the government installed a law which far outweighed the benefit of universal suffrage, thus, opening a door toward the totalitarianism and the invasion of other countries. Here, we have to be cautious about the nature of “Taisho Democracy” from the point of view of the Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens theoretical discussion. “Taisho Democracy” was not a democratic movement of the working class. Rather, it was the bourgeois democratic movement that was made possible by the emergence of a new urban middle class.<sup>17</sup> Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens argue that the middle class is not the genuine supporter of full democracy in every case. It depends on its position between the elites and the masses. In this sense, “Taisho Democracy” was not a full-scale democratic movement.

In concluding this section, we see four characteristics in the working class in pre-WWII Japan. First, the labor movement was affected by a series of wars. Before WWII, Japan experienced three wars: the Sino-Japanese War, the Russo-Japanese War, and WWI. These wars were followed by economic booms and busts. For example, the boom after WWI made the proletariat realize their miserable position in relation to the bourgeoisie. Thus, after that, labor disputes increased. Second, the workers were not able to have a leading ideology that could guide their movement. This was due to the internal conflicts of the socialist intellectual elites, as well as the cleavage between the socialists and the mass laborers, who were mostly uneducated. Third, the working class in Japan did not have an opportunity to form a coalition with other classes for democracy, except for a brief period during the era of “Taisho Democracy.” There was a lack of political consciousness that the working class needed to unite with the peasant, another oppressed class. On the other hand, the dominant classes effectively formed a coalition. The coalition consisted of the landlord, the bourgeoisie, and the state. Fourth, Japan’s late development of modern capitalism created a peculiar sequence in the development of free labor. The state created industry first; Then, the workers were supplied haphazardly. In

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<sup>17</sup>Takayoshi Matsuo, “The Development of Democracy in Japan – Taisho Democracy: Its Flowering and Breakdown,” *The Developing Economies* 4/4 (1966): 612-637.

the early period of the Meiji era, most of the laborers were female workers and/or commuter workers who were less likely to organize for democracy. Although Moore emphasizes only landlords and peasants, his generalization can be applied here. Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens summarize Moore's argument: he sees the conditions favorable for democracy – like Weber and de Schweinitz – bound up with the historical constellation of early capitalism.<sup>18</sup> The late development of modern capitalism was thus a disadvantage for the working class in Japan. Tominaga offers a similar conclusion in his discussion of political modernization. He attributes limited democracy, as seen in “Taisho Democracy” and The Liberal Movement in the late nineteenth century, to the late start of Japanese modernization; that is, political modernization was preceded by economic modernization.<sup>19</sup>

### **Peasants and Landlords**

During the Tokugawa regime, peasants were chained to land and forced to cultivate crops. It was against the law for them to move to other places or choose another occupation. Although *daimyo* (great lords) issued a cultivation title to peasants, they were prohibited from selling or dividing their land. *Daimyo* heavily extracted rice from the peasants. This rigid system of control had been gradually weakened by the influence of the money economy. After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the new government dismantled the domains. Thus, *daimyo* ceased to be the ruler of peasants. This is different from the experience of Western Europe. For example, in England, feudal lords transformed themselves into new landlords in the process of modernization. However, in Japan, there was a disjunction in the modernization process; the former *daimyo* moved into new businesses such as industry and banking after the dissolution of the domains.

The majority of the new landlords came from peasantry. The money economy in rural areas, which was developed toward the end of the Tokugawa regime, cleared the way for the inroad of the new landlords. Moore summarizes the emergence of the new landlords in this way: “Paternalistic relations were being replaced by the explosive ones of landlord and tenant, as a landlord class emerged out of the peasantry – it would seem rather more than out of the aristocracy – as a result of the advent of

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<sup>18</sup>Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup>Tominaga, *Theory of Modernization*, p. 193.

commercial farming.<sup>20</sup> Commercial farming led to differentiation among peasants. Some peasants became landlords after gaining power through lending money or rice to poor peasants. In the process, many peasants were not able to take advantage of the growing money economy. The deeds issued in 1871 by the Meiji government legitimated the position of the new landlords.

In addition, there were three other ways to become landlords. First, *goshi* became new landlords after the dissolution of *daimyo*. *Goshi* were rural samurai who survived the Warring States period in the sixteenth century. They remained as landlords under *daimyo* during the Tokugawa era. When the Meiji government dissolved *daimyo*, *goshi* survived, remaining in the landlord class. Second, a special kind of peasant became new landlords. These peasants were characterized by large holdings and the usage of *nago* (serfs). These peasants also remained in the landlord class. The third way to become a landlord was by acquiring a title through participating in reclamation projects. In any case, unlike *daimyo* that lived in castle towns, the new landlords lived in rural villages side by side with peasants.

Waswo lists six common types of tenancy in Japan.<sup>21</sup> The first type was permanent tenancy. This type of tenant usually had a right to cultivate permanently. The permanent cultivation right was obtained through labor in reclamation or through working on the same plot for more than twenty years. These peasants were allowed to pay lower rents. The second type was direct tenancy, which was a result of the advent of the money economy. Landowners pawned their lands for loans, but remained on the lands as tenants. The interest was paid every year and the principal was due in three years. After paying the principal, the tenants regained their property rights. The third type was separate tenancy which was similar to direct tenancy. The difference was that the pawned land was cultivated by the third person, not the original landholders. The fourth type was caretaker tenancy. When a landholder lived in another village, he asked someone living in the village to take care of his plot. The caretaker paid tax and sent rent to the landholder. The fifth type was contract tenancy, which was similar to caretaker tenancy. The tenant assumed a managerial role for lands. He was responsible for rent and taxes. The final type was ordinary tenancy. In this type, landlords and tenants had no special relationships like other types. If the tenants worked long enough in a plot, they might become permanent tenants. When the land

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<sup>20</sup>Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, p. 269.

<sup>21</sup>Waswo, *Japanese Landlords*, p. 23.

settlement of 1868 was enacted, the first five types of tenancy disappeared. Thus, throughout the Meiji era, ordinary tenancy became universal.

### **The Relationship Between Peasants and Landlords**

Moore views Japanese landlords as repressive and parasitic. According to his account, the landlords used the state to squeeze rents out of tenants. He believes that peasant rebellions were low because of the feudal legacy which mitigated open conflict. It is true that landlords were repressive, but they turned to repression when peasants started open conflict after WWI. This implies that Japanese landlords were not always repressive. Moore also views the relationship between the landlord and the peasant as inherently conflict-ridden. In this view, landlords were able to avoid open conflicts for a certain period of time; it is only because they successfully inherited the feudal legacy of quiet acquiescence by peasants. This view derives from Marx's ideology which postulates that ideas legitimate a class's domination of another class.<sup>22</sup> The feudal legacy legitimated the landlords' domination and deflected the formation of class consciousness among peasants. It seems that by emphasizing the false class consciousness, Moore tends to minimize the landlord-tenant disputes after WWI. Also, he views the feudal legacy, specifically pseudo-kinship, as a one-way obligation, that is, that the peasants as children have to obey the authority of the landlord (father). Thus, he sees that pseudo-kinship minimized the development of class consciousness.

I have a different interpretation of pseudo-kinship. Instead of a one-way obligation, it was a two-way obligation. Thus, the peasants obeyed the landlords; at the same time, the landlords had responsibilities to take care of the peasants (children). Using Waswo's analysis, I would like to elaborate on this point. The Japanese landlords, as parents, had many responsibilities for peasants. The most important responsibility was to protect peasants during a poor harvest. When a poor harvest occurred, mainly due to weather conditions, the landlords were expected to reduce rents. The landlord's offering of jobs such as silk-reeling, rope-making or household servants in winter was critical for the survival of the peasants, especially in poor harvest years. Sometimes, the landlords hired peasants as household servants more than were needed. The landlords also took leadership in their villages. They became mayors and treasurers, and protected the community interests from the opposing interests of the central government and nearby villages. For

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<sup>22</sup> Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

example, when securing a waterway became an issue between villages, the landlords protected their community (and personal) interests. Another responsibility the landlords took was their contribution to education. When the universal educational system was established by the Meiji government, the cost to construct and to operate local schools were expected to be carried out by the local governments. The landlords shared the cost of education. They also offered scholarships to bright young people in the villages and sent them to colleges and universities. After graduating from colleges, the young people were obliged to work in the villages as innovators, doctors, or teachers for a couple of years. The landlords were often hosts of feasts. For example, on New Years Day peasants' marriages were celebrated at the landlords' expense. As these examples show, the relationship between landlords and peasants was mutual. Waswo highlights that landlords served as the protectors and benefactors of their tenants and of the villages in which they lived.<sup>23</sup>

Here, I have shown positive roles played by the landlords. This is a consequence of the historical peculiarity of the emergence of the new Japanese landlords. After the Meiji Restoration, *daimyo* was replaced by the new landlords who resided in their villages and who used to be peasants themselves. The peasants and the new landlords knew each other and lived together in the same communities. The proximity between them created a mutual obligation. Landlords were also responsible for communities. I think Moore's argument based on Marx's ideology which suppresses class consciousness does not offer a good framework for understanding the relationship between the landlords and the peasants in Japan. Moore's argument is more adequate in its discussion of the relationship between the industrial elites and the working class. In their relationship, the family analogy was used to suppress open conflicts. The bourgeoisie required the proletariat to obey their authority because, in the analogy, the proletariats were children who needed to obey the authority of fathers. In this case, the obligation was one-way. The bourgeoisie did not pay much attention to the welfare of the proletariat. The ideology of pseudo-kinship was effective to suppress open conflicts.

Why was the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat a one-way obligation, in contrast to the two-way obligation of the landlord-peasant relationship? The difference was due to a discrepancy in social proximity between the dominant and the dominated. In factories,

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<sup>23</sup>Waswo, *Japanese Landlords*, p. 34.

workers came from rural areas. This meant that the bourgeoisie and the proletariat did not know each other well. For the bourgeoisie, the workers were strangers and it was unlikely that they would take good care of strangers. Also, they did not form a community. This means that they did not have common interests to share and to defend. The major concern the bourgeoisie had was to extract as much surplus value as possible. The bourgeoisie did not need to take care of the workers for this purpose. On the contrary, this purpose was achieved through greater exploitation of them. Thus, the relationship between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie was structured as a one-way obligation, in contrast to the mutual obligation of the landlord-peasant relationship.

### **The Landlord-Tenant Disputes**

Upon describing the mutual relationship between the landlords and the peasants, it is necessary to characterize landlord-tenant disputes. Landlord-tenant disputes swept over the country after WWI. Table 1 shows the magnitude of the disputes. The disputes started to increase around 1921, in this year, the number of disputes increased four times. The table also shows that the year of 1926 was the peak in terms of participation in disputes. In that year, 39,705 landlords and 151,061 peasants participated in 2,751 disputes. The series of disputes were due to the severe depression after WWI. Because the life of peasants had deteriorated, they asked for the securing of cultivation rights and the reducing of rents. The disputes continued until 1935, but, after that year, the movement petered out mainly because the state took a significant role in repressing the movement.

Why did the landlord-tenant disputes occur although I have characterized the landlords as protectors and benefactors? It is because agricultural improvements and the educational attainment of the peasants changed the nature of the relationship.<sup>24</sup> Agricultural improvements accelerated the agricultural sector's integration into the modern capitalist economy. This integration, for example, the adoption of a uniform rice inspection made the landlord-peasant relationship contractual. This weakened the personal and familial relationships. The agricultural improvements themselves increased the independence of the peasants financially. This resulted in the weakening of the relative position of the landlords. The universal educational system led to an increase in the literacy rate of the peasants and gave them an opportunity to come in contact with

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<sup>24</sup>Waswo, *Japanese Landlords*.

radical ideas such as socialism.

**Table 1. The Number of Landlord-Tenant Disputes<sup>25</sup>**

Year	The Number of Disputes	The Participation of Landlords	The Participation of Peasants
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<sup>25</sup>Iwamoto, "Capitalists and Wage Laborers," p. 434.

1918	256	N/A	N/A
1919	326	N/A	N/A
1920	408	5,236	34,605
1921	1,680	33,985	145,898
1922	1,578	29,077	125,750
1923	1,917	37,712	134,503
1924	1,532	27,223	110,920
1925	2,206	33,001	134,646
1926	2,751	39,705	151,061
1927	2,053	24,136	91,336
1928	1,866	19,474	75,136
1929	2,434	23,505	81,998
1930	2,478	14,159	58,565
1931	3,419	23,768	81,135
1932	3,414	16,706	61,499
1933	4,000	14,312	48,073
1934	5,828	34,035	121,031
1935	6,824	28,574	113,164

Thus, the personal relationship between the landlords and the peasants was transformed into an impersonal relationship. In the process, the landlords discarded their obligation to protect the peasants. The vertical relationship, which was stronger than the horizontal relationship among tenants, crumbled and resulted in large scale landlord-tenant disputes.

Moore minimizes the landlord-tenant disputes because of his emphasis on the inheritance of the traditional past. He says that real class warfare never took hold in Japanese villages. Due to the structure inherited from the past, the landlord's influence spread into every nook and cranny of village life.<sup>26</sup> He is hesitant to accept the emergence of class consciousness among the peasantry. But, I think there emerged class consciousness among the peasants after WWI.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, when the peasant's movement heightened, the state started crushing the movement by force.

In sum, in the early period of the Meiji era the relationship between the peasant and the landlord was personal and communal. They had mutual

<sup>26</sup>Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, p. 306.

<sup>27</sup>Rin Abiko, "Landlords and Peasants," in *Social History II*, ed. Yoshiji Nakamura (Tokyo: Yamakawa Publishing Company, 1967), p. 434.

responsibilities. Because of the strong vertical ties, there were not many open conflicts. However, the agricultural sector's integration into the modern capitalist economy along with universal education transformed the relationship into an impersonal and contractual one. In the process, the two-way obligation was abandoned. When the severe recession after WWI struck the country, the peasants openly fought against the landlords, who abandoned their obligation. However, it was already too late for the peasants. By this time, the landlords had already formed a strong coalition with the state and the bourgeoisie.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the movement did not bring fruitful results for the peasants.

### Summary

Democracy in Japan was brought in from the outside when the Allied Occupation implemented a series of policies which transformed the power relation of classes. However, people in Japan had a history of struggles for democracy in pre-WWII Japan. Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens teach us that when the working class is strong and the landlord class is weak, there is a greater chance for a country to achieve democracy. On the other hand, when the landlord class is strong and the working class is weak, it is difficult for a country to achieve democracy.

In this paper, it was indicated that the Japanese working class before WWII was weak due to the disadvantage of the late capitalist development of Japan. In rural areas, the peasants and the landlords lived in mutual obligation. This relationship put off the development of the peasant movement until the end of WWI. The agricultural and educational improvements accelerated the agricultural sector's integration into modern capitalism. In the process, the relationship between the landlord and the peasant changed to an impersonal one. When the depression after WWI struck the country, the landlord did not help the peasants as they did before. With new levels of educational attainment, the peasants launched a series of landlord-tenant disputes. However, as Moore extensively analyzes, the landlord-bourgeoisie-state coalition had already been formed. Thus, the movement was repressed by the state. When both the working class and the peasant class were silenced, the state single-mindedly marched toward the repression of its people and the invasion of other countries. Japanese people had to wait until the end of WWII for full-fledged democracy, when the transnational power structure changed both Japan's internal class relations

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<sup>28</sup>Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*.

and the forces for democracy.