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The Politics of Famine in a Far-off Place

- Nyūi Mitsugi and the Hōreki Crisis in Tsugaru -

By Rosemary Gray Trott

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University

October 2001

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Declaration

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Rosemary Gray Trott
October 2001

Abstract

The Tsugaru domain in far north eastern Honshu was located at the very northern boundary of Japan in the Tokugawa period, and its identity as an independent polity was almost as new as the shogunate itself. A relative newcomer to the political and economic structures that had taken shape by the end of the sixteenth century, the domain spent most of the seventeenth century establishing itself as a viable polity with a sound economic base. By the mid eighteenth century, after the productivity of Tsugaru had increased by a greater margin than that of any other domain, outgoing expenditures had also increased enormously and a fiscal crisis occurred.

This dissertation examines the program of reforms instituted in the Hōreki reforms to address the situation, arguing that the rationalisation of bureaucracy and integration of local commercial actors into managing official fiscal affairs showed some promise. Then, by closely tracing the experiences of famine in Tsugaru and two neighbouring domains, and their comparative fates in after the harvest failure that interrupted Tsugaru's reform program, I go on to argue that the combination of distance from the central markets, a climate unsuited to rice cultivation at the technological level of the period, and a late start in establishing sound procedures for fiscal management meant that the Tsugaru polity was hard put to move out of the precarious situation it was in by the mid 1700s.

The succession of a child daimyo had left the administration of the domain in the hands of a small group of hereditary elders before the crises. One of them, who favoured fundamental changes to government structures and procedures, was instrumental in the appointment of Nyūi Mitsugi to lead the reforms. Mitsugi stored rice in the domain's granaries and was able to save the domain from the famine by arranging the distribution of relief food supplies. The elders, religious institutions and established merchants of the domain, however, chafed at the radical reform policies with which he followed up that triumph, however, and he was dismissed.

Through an examination of some of the writings Mitsugi produced during the periods he spent under house arrest and in exile, I argue that although to a large extent the domain was captive to its geography, climate and lack of depth in administrative experience, the world of the spirit and the intellect had no boundaries.

Taking politics in the broadest sense of political economy and social organisation, the dissertation demonstrates that although the ideas and arguments for more equitable access to entitlements to adequate food were accessible to, and in fact elaborated by, Nyūi Mitsugi, the powers of wealth, status and a centralised political system militated against saving the poorest and most isolated people from starvation when famines occurred.

Dedication.....i

Acknowledgements.....iii

Notes to the reader.....v

Table of contents.....vii

Plates, figures, tables and maps.....x

Frontispiece.....xi

Dedicated

to the people of Afghanistan

who suffer too much

from politics and famine

Acknowledgements

My familiarity with pre modern Japanese language, history and culture, such as it is, grew in courses taught by Joan Anderson Crawcour, Richard Mason, Colin Jeffcott, John Caiger, E. Sydney Crawcour, Thomas Harper, Bitō Masahide, and Kojima Yasunori. I thank all these people for their guidance. To Kate Wildman Nakai and the other members of the *Rongo kenkyūkai* I am also grateful, for kindly allowing me to join their meetings for a year in 1991-92.

For three and a half years while working on this dissertation, I was the recipient of an Australian Postragraduate Award, which helped. In the Division of Pacific and Asian History I was provided with an ergonomic chair, several computers, and shelf space in a room overlooking a magnificent gum tree frequented by parrots, rosellas, cockatoos, kookaburras, and honeyeaters. For all that, and for allowing me to stay through stints of undergraduate teaching and recurring illness, I am deeply grateful to DPAH and its convenors over the years: Donald Denoon, Mark Elvin, Gavan MacCormack, Hank Nelson, Tessa Morris-Suzuki, and Geremie Barmé. Other people in the Division have provided a variety of support. For all their help, I thank Dorothy MacIntosh, Oanh Collins, Jude Shanahan, Julie Gordon and Tony Guyot. Jennifer Sheehan, of the RSPAS Cartography Unit, produced maps to order from ill-assorted sources with great patience and skill. And, to the indispensable Marion Weeks, keeper of our corridor, I can only fervently say, "Thank you for being there."

My office mate, Ellen Gardner Nakamura, has tolerated the smell of *nattō,* and set a wonderful example as *senpai* by finishing her dissertation with dispatch. Ellen and her predecessor, Mark Hudson, were both perfect company, not least because they knew the world existed before 1868. Mark could make conversation about Tosaminato, and Ellen's eyes light up at the mention of *hie.*

Over the years, friends among fellow post-graduate scholars that come and go at the ANU have helped broaden my cultural horizons and understanding, and kept me up to date with theoretical issues. For their friendship, good company and intellectual stimulation I thank Lim Choo Hoon, Thien Doh, Miyume Tanji, Lewis Mayo, Miriam Lang, and Josephine Fox.

For her kindness, her willingness to read and comment on my writing, and for heading my supervision committee, I thank Tessa Morris Suzuki. For reading over various non-sequential chapters at the last minute, I thank with all my tired heart: Maxine Macarthur, Ellen Gardner Nakamura, Vanessa Buffy Ward (for the happy violet, too), and Robin Fletcher from my corridor. My lay friends Clare Lahiff and Cheryl Johnson gave time to reading and picked up mistakes and bits that were too recherché. For his ongoing encouragement and support, as well as his reading, comments and advice, I am inexpressibly grateful to John Caiger.

To Nagaoka Megumi and Miura Masayuki, Sekidō Suzuna and Naribumi, Kojima Hiromi and Yasu, Trish Sippel and Bill Steele, and Malcolm Sullivan who have helped and advised and offered much practical support in Japan, I send fondest thanks.

I was overwhelmed by the readiness of the staff of the *Hirosaki shishi hensan shitsu* at the Hirosaki Municipal Library to offer me assistance, and access to materials of interest about which I now regret having had no idea at the time. They also tried very hard to introduce me to the only scholar who has ever been less than gracious and helpful to me in Japan. Takeuchi Yūzō of the Hirosaki Municipal Museum found odd bits of information for me with humbling thoroughness.

Finally, my lasting gratitude goes to: Norman, who started it all by deciding that we would go to Japan for the Christmas holidays in 1965; to Declan, who in 1991 explained to me how to lay siege to Himeji Castle, but now makes a good pizza; and to Colin, a (sometimes exhaustingly) bottomless resource on many aspects of Chinese thought, who also cooked and shopped, read aloud, and drove me to and fro - after bending my bike!

This is a long list, and I have not even included the doctors. With the support and help of so many gifted and kind people, a work of superb quality should have resulted. I can only ask them, with my readers, to pardon the mistakes and the shortcomings, for which I alone am responsible.

Notes to the Reader

Usage

- Nyūi Ichirōzaemon Noritomi was given the name Mitsugi by the Tsugaru daimyo in 1756. That is the name usually used now to refer to him. To avoid confusion, I use Mitsugi throughout this study.
- The word "farmer" is used where readers might expect "peasant". In one of my dictionaries, the definition of the latter begins: *n* (not in GB or US) countryman working on the land, . . .
- Australian English spelling is used, except in quotations from other versions of English.
- Japanese and Chinese personal names are given in the order in which they are used, usually with family name first.
- Gendered language is sometimes used deliberately.
- The word "heaven" is sometimes given a capital letter, out of respect.
- Tokugawa period lunar calendar dates are used where they are connected with the names of events, or when a number of happenings in the same reign era are being discussed.

Translation

- Characters and meanings are not routinely given for Japanese or Chinese words, but are added where they might be useful.
- I have deliberately not presented all the material taken directly from Mitsugi's works and other eighteenth century sources as long, direct quotations, but instead paraphrased a fair amount. This is because of the problems of voice and readability.
- Unless translations are otherwise attributed, they are mine.

Abbreviations used in footnotes

- NMZ *Nyūi Mitsugi zenshū*. 4 Vols. (1935-37)
- SHS *Shinpen Hirosaki-shi shi*, shiryōhen 2. (1996)
- HSS Hirosaki-shi shi. (1963)
- TKD Tsugaru kyūki denrui. (1958)
- TRK Tsugaru rekidai kirui. (1959)

Units of Measure

Length and area

1 *ri* = 36 chō = 3.93 kilometers or 2.44 miles

1 *chō* (or *chōbu*) = .992 hectares = 2.45 acres

Volume

2.5 *hyō* = 1 *koku* = approx 180 litres of rice.

Money and Weights

10 *rin* = 1 bu; and 4 *bu* = 1 *ryō* of gold

1 *kan* = 1000 *monme* = 3,750g, and 1 *monme* = 10 *fun* of silver

From the 1740's until 1800, 1 *ryō* = 61 *monme* 5 *bu* 7 *rin*

The price of rice was usually between 50 and 80 *monme* per *koku*.

Table of Contents

Prologue 1

Introduction On Being in History 7

I On being absent 9

II Narrative streams in political history 24

III Subjects and objects 39

Chapter One Tracing Nyūi Mitsugi 45

I Imagining the man 47

II Traces of the mind 49

III Texts of his time 55

IV Texts of our time 73

Chapter Two The Precarious State of Tsugaru 79

I The lay of the land 81

II Political economy 103

III Ideological, religious and intellectual positioning 117

IV Fields of power and room for manoeuvre 126

Chapter three Disturbing the Status Quo - the Hōreki Reforms..... 129

I Crisis, change, and crop failure 133

II Facing the famine: tightening the net 152

III The net unravelling 160

IV Patterns of reform 165

Chapter four Not a soul was lost: Tsugaru's famine that wasn't 175

I Famine in human history 177

II Farmers and famines in Japanese history 187

III Harvest failure and famine in Mutsu 198

III The makings of famine in Tsugaru 217

IV Managing the hazards 223

Chapter five Order in the social world, security for the people..... 230

I A samurai's priorities 232

II Vocation as mission 238

III The teachings of the sages and the basis of wealth 244

Chapter six The Measure of Things 248

I The universe 248

II The realm 255

III Down to earth 264

IV Locating Mitsugi as a thinker 267

Conclusion: The power to feed the people in a far-off place 277

Appendix One: The twelve Tsugaru daimyos 287

Appendix Two: Contents of *The Complete Works of Nyūi Mitsugi* 288

Glossary 291

Bibliography 295

Plates, Maps, Tables and Figures

Plate 1: Gatehouse and moat of Hirosaki castle....xi
Plate 2: Mount Iwaki photographed from the castle grounds....xi
Plate 3: Sign to *Nyūi Mitsugi no hi* 3
Plate 4: The Nyūi Mitsugi memorial stone....3
Plate 5: Heading, reading from right to left, *Nyūi Mitsugi sensei*....5
Plate 6: View from the stone across the village and rice fields to the other side of thevalley....5
Plate 7: Miss Kennedy distributing clothing at Kilrish 21
Plate 8: Japanese villagers fleeing from famine. 22
Plate 9: Portrait of Nyūi Mitsugi....46
Plate 10: Several *satsu* of the original Shigaku yōben 50
Plate 11: From a collection of famine foods....248
Plates 12 and 13: The gate and daimyos' grave area at Chōshōji....174

Map 1: The old provinces of the Tohoku and Kanto regions....10
Map 2: Tokugawa bakufu lands and some domains in the mid Tokugawa period..15
Map 3: Relief map of the Tsugaru domain 84
Map 4: The Tsugaru domain, showing main roads, some rivers and *itabi*....86
Map 5: Overland and sea routes between Tsugaru and the three main cities....96

Table 1: Some eighteenth-century domains, their castle towns, daimyo families and putative wealth14
Table 2: Chronology of Mitsugi's life and career 59
Table 3: Tsugaru debts in the Kamigata in Hōreki 4 (1754)....113
Table 4: Tsugaru's debts in Edo in Hōreki 4 (1754) 116
Table 5: Reforms by Time Period, in the Bakufu, Some Eastern and Some Western Domains 131
Table 6: Harvest damage in Nanbu, Hachinohe and Tsugaru from Genroku to Tenmei, 1694-1785202

Figure 1: Comparative changes in Tsugaru's rice fields....92
Figure 2:Number of famine years in half-centuries, 1600-1850....194
Figure 4: A causal structure of death by starvation 219
Figure 5 (opposite): Hazard sequence for a rice-producing household in Tsugaru 224
Figure 6: Zhou Dunyi's diagram of the Sugpreme Ultimate....250
Figure 7: Nyūi Mitsugi's corresponding hierarchies for the Creation, Kyoto and Edo....258
Figure 8: Territories marked in fifteenth century map of Japan 278





Plates 1 and 2: Gate and moat of Hirosaki castle, and a view of Mount Iwaki from the castle grounds

Photographs by the author unless otherwise acknowledged.

Prologue

From where I am standing on the bank of the moat of Hirosaki castle, beside the east gatehouse of the second compound, I can see along one side of the old earthen wall. A row of craggy cherry trees lines the top; *sasa* bamboo grass covers the slope down to the water. The pent roof of the gatehouse is unusually high, so the stronger roof above protects it from heavy snowfalls. There are no stone reinforcements beside the gatehouse, and the outer wall is low and simple. There has been no fear of attack since the castle site was chosen some time before 1608.

Beneath my feet, little turtles are paddling busily on the surface of the moat, and startled minnows and summer insects dart away in all directions. Deep down, where the water is still, swim large carp. Their progress is barely perceptible. Beyond the wall are what remains of the administrative headquarters of the twelve successive Tsugaru daimyos who ruled the domain between 1610 and 1868. Briefly during the 1750's an official called Nyūi Mitsugi held almost unassailable power here, while he worked to stave off the domain's financial ruin and a famine. Then he fell from grace. Traces of his existence can still be found.

To the east of the castle runs the bus route linking Hirosaki station to the village of Kawaratai, where Mitsugi was once exiled for a time. Passing between the moat and the City Office, the road heads westward out of town, then meanders back and forth across the Iwaki River, along its banks, past the weathered traces of old riparian works and a modern dam, to a valley near its source in the south-western foothills of Mount Iwaki. This mountain, a dormant volcano, is the dominant feature in Hirosaki's landscape: a stunning snow-covered "Tsugaru Fuji" for half the year, but now its steep, thickly wooded folds and peaks are swathed in summer mist.

Kawaratai is, literally, the end of the road. By the time we arrive there, Mount Iwaki has disappeared behind the closer slopes of the valley, which rise almost immediately on either side. By the grassy lot where the bus turns around is a little store. When asked for directions, its elderly, kimono-clad keeper says that just up the way there is a sign about a memorial for a teacher from long ago, but she can't remember who the person was. Sure enough, a short walk is rewarded by the appearance of a recently painted signpost that reads, "Nyūi Mitsugi Memorial Stone", and directs the visitor along a side pathway in between houses. It climbs steadily towards the red torii and narrow flight of concrete steps leading to the village shrine. In a clearing just by the torii stands the stone. Below the heading, "Master Nyūi Mitsugi" is a lengthy inscription. It is still legible for the most part.[1]

The epitaph begins with the assertion: "Nyūi Mitsugi was indeed a son of Tsugaru, land of steep mountains and long streams". We are then told that he became, at a very early age, "an accomplished scholar in the fields of Japanese, Chinese and Buddhist studies; and was therefore fully conversant with the mysteries of mathematics, the Doctrine of the Mean, and the Book of Changes before he turned his attention to economics". On that subject, "he wrote copiously, expressing his own impressively wide-ranging and impassioned opinions in urgent language, earnestly seeking to transmit ideals and guidance to the generations of Tsugaru administrators who would follow him".

He was appointed twice to serve as *kanjō bugyō* (勘定奉行) in Tsugaru.[2]

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[1] Help can be found from the transcript found at the front of the fourth, and final, volume of *Nyūi Mitsugi Zenshū* (The Complete Works of Nyūi Mitsugi). These four volumes were edited by Nakamichi Hitoshi and published privately in Tokyo under the auspices of the Nyūi Mitsugi Kenshōkai (Association to Celebrate the Memory of Nyūi Mitsugi) between 1935 and 1937. For this study I have relied on photocopies of the published *Zenshū*, obtained from the National Diet Library and the Hirosaki City Library, with reference to photocopies of some of the original handwritten texts.

[2] From two to eight appointees would hold these key administrative posts at any one time in Tsugaru; they were in charge of a wide range of domain financial, legal and judicial matters, including tax collection. *Kanjō bugyō* is translated variously, fore example, as "superintendents of finance" (Hall in the *Cambridge History*, page 169, Totman in *Politics*, page 271), "magistrate of the exchequer" (Ravina, *Land and Lordship*, page 227) and "fiscal-judicial commissioner" (Nakai in *Shogunal Politics*, page 2).



Plate 3: Sign to *Nyūi Mitsugi no hi*.

Plate 4: The Nyūi Mitsugi memorial stone.



Both were times when the Tsugaru government was faced with critical financial crises. Mitsugi, the account continues:

> dealt with the situation in a far-sighted manner, leaving behind a record of strong-minded administrative policy, including the recognition of Ainu as human beings.

This was a "distinctive measure", bestowing official recognition as people of Tsugaru upon the Ainu people who lived along the Sotogahama coast. They were to be counted in population censuses in the same way as all other subjects of the daimyo. During a "subsequent period of exile in Kawaratai, not only did he work hard to deliver the unlettered local inhabitants from the shackles of their ignorance; he also harnessed water from local mountain streams for irrigation, to the benefit of everyone in the vicinity". His life, described as "courageous and distinguished", came to an end on the 6th day of the 4th month of Kansei 4 (1792). "All things considered", the eulogist sums up, "he was a truly outstanding individual of rare ability and intellect."

Here, Mitsugi's story ends and the inscription turns to explaining why the monument was constructed, and who was responsible. I wonder, for a moment, why the epitaph has not mentioned the fact that Mitsugi saved the people of Tsugaru from starvation during the Hōreki famine, then go on reading. The explanation given about the erection of the memorial is that a local man, Hasegawa Susumu from Meyamura, "wished to make sure that Mitsugi's legacy would be handed down to inspire the future inhabitants of Tsugaru". In December 1935, the Association to Celebrate the Memory of Nyūi Mitsugi was formed. Its aims were to collate and publish Mitsugi's written works; and to obtain stone from nearby Meyanosawa for the construction of a monument at Kawaratai "in order to record this very account for the edification of posterity". The last line of the main inscription ends simply with: "Composed and written by Nakamichi and the others." The date is the sixth month of Shōwa 10 (1935). In the far left bottom corner is the name of Nyūi Tatsuo, one of Mitsugi's descendants, followed by a word indicating that the large title characters heading the main inscription are modelled on calligraphy he prepared for the purpose.



Plate 5: Heading, reading from right to left, *Nyūi Mitsugi sensei*.
Plate 6: View from the stone across the village and rice fields to the other side of the valley.



Turning from the stone and looking back across the valley, I am struck by how green it is - especially in comparison with the blanketed white stillness of wintertime. The strip of cultivable land is so narrow that a direct walk from beside the stone, down past the houses and through the fields, to the foot of the wooded hills on the other side takes just around five minutes. Random assortments of ripening egg-plants, green beans, cucumbers, pumpkins and pink alstroemaria flowers burst out of little plots between the rice fields and the houses. Along with the two-stroke fuel cans and blue plastic buckets, they are all so much part of our familiar turn-of-the-century world that the idea of trying to envisage this place as it might have been 250 years ago seems suddenly ridiculous.

Meanwhile, the kindly driver and storekeeper have kept watch for the solitary stranger, and signal that time has run out. The only other bus passenger motions me to sit beside her. When she is told in response to a sociable enquiry that the purpose of this early-morning visit has been to photograph Kawaratai and the memorial in the summer time, her browned face wrinkles with puzzled amusement. She is familiar with the stone, remembers vaguely that there was a big ceremony when it was put there, but she has never actually read the inscription. The name Nyūi Mitsugi means nothing to her.

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Introduction

On Being in History

> The historian is just another dim figure trudging along in another part of the procession.
> The historian without his facts is rootless and futile; the facts without their historian are dead and meaningless.
> History consists of a corpus of ascertained facts. . .like fish on the fishmonger's slab. The historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him.
> E. H. Carr[3]

> . . .when the mode of differentiation between significative factors and textual materiality changes, the same text may well be susceptible to an entirely different understanding.
> Naoki Sakai[4]

> Iterability "structures the mark of writing itself, and does so moreover for no matter what type of writing (pictographic, hieroglyphic, ideographic, phonetic, alphabetic, to use the old categories). A writing that was not structurally legible - iterable - beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing."
> Jacques Derrida[5]

We live in wordy times. They are self-conscious times, too, for those who would write history. It seems no longer possible to write with the clarity and certainty of E. H. Carr about what we do. Each of us shuffles along for a while, a little behind Carr's own cohort, in the endless winding procession of humanity and its chroniclers. Different sections of the procession come into focus at different times, but only for a moment. We can be startled by a glimpse here, and recoil; or be enchanted by a fragment there, and become lost in another world.

How can we pause long enough to coherently problematise the objects of our gaze, let alone critique other representations of them? Is it proper for us to set out to imagine the bodies, the selves, of others, constructed within and by all the complexities and transformations of the social in their place and

---

[3] E. H. Carr, *What is History?*, 2nd edition. London: Penguin Books, 1987. Pages 36,30 and 9.
[4] Sakai, *Voices of the Past*, page 2.
[5] Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Margins of Philosophy*, page 315.

time – in a section of the human procession so comprehensively other than ours? How can we, I wonder after reading Naoki Sakai, learn in time to differentiate between the verbal signification evoked by patterns of sign, and the coded body that includes the materials in which our textual sources are inscribed?[6] Will we transgress the rules of praxis in our field by not applying inverted commas and capital letters to certain common nouns, so as to render our meanings clear in the ephemeral discursive space we aspire to re-form by our engagement with it? Towards the end of this introductory chapter, I will outline some of the ideas that have helped me cope with such disabling questions.

Meanwhile, some other matters need to be made clear. What particular fish have been selected from Carr's trope-ical fishmonger's slab, and why those? And what, in this age of unstable meanings, *is* a fish any more? What recipes are used for preparing the chosen ones? If they are uncommon ingredients, not often chosen by historians cooking up this kind of story, why decide now to construct this version of it? Is it a variation on a comfortably familiar theme, or are the components combined in new ways?

While it can be said without equivocation that the domain of Tsugaru, an official called Nyūi Mitsugi, and the Hōreki crisis in Tsugaru are the main historical ingredients in what will be served up in the following chapters, and that they are not often selected by historian-cooks from the myriad phenomena on the slab of the past, I will discuss my approach to the tasks of selecting and using my sources in the section on subjects and objects at the end of this introduction. Before that, I mention some absences, partial and complete, from the kinds of histories of Japan and the Tokugawa period that have appeared over the last century. To suggest some reasons why those absences are not so surprising, I go on to examine a selection of particular parts of some familiar narrative streams in a little more detail. Finally, some theoretical ideas are self-consciously set out, so that the premises, intentions and the argument of this study might be as clear as possible.

I On being absent

E. H. Carr stirs up a hornet's nest with his fishy trope. At first glance, he seems to suggest that a cook simply does what he (sic) pleases: that the kinds of materials we historians make the objects of our scrutiny, the ways in which we interpret them and combine them with other subject matter to draw, or hint at, conclusions, are all a matter of uninhibited choice. But, what kind of utensils does his cook use? Whose recipe books are on the shelf, and how did his mother cook? Does he fear the smell of garlic? Does he respect genres, schools or traditions?

We are not so free at all, really. It is interesting, though, to think sometimes about the fish that are left behind on the slab: rejected because they do not seem to appropriate for the recipes and cooking methods to which the cook has recourse. The particular rejects I consider in this study have been left out for various reasons, which are not necessarily connected with each other. Famine victims in the pre-modern past, for example, usually walked so lightly on the earth and inscribed so little that there are few fish for historians to fry; while Tsugaru and Nyūi Mitsugi left a rather assorted catch, for which recipes have not been so readily available.

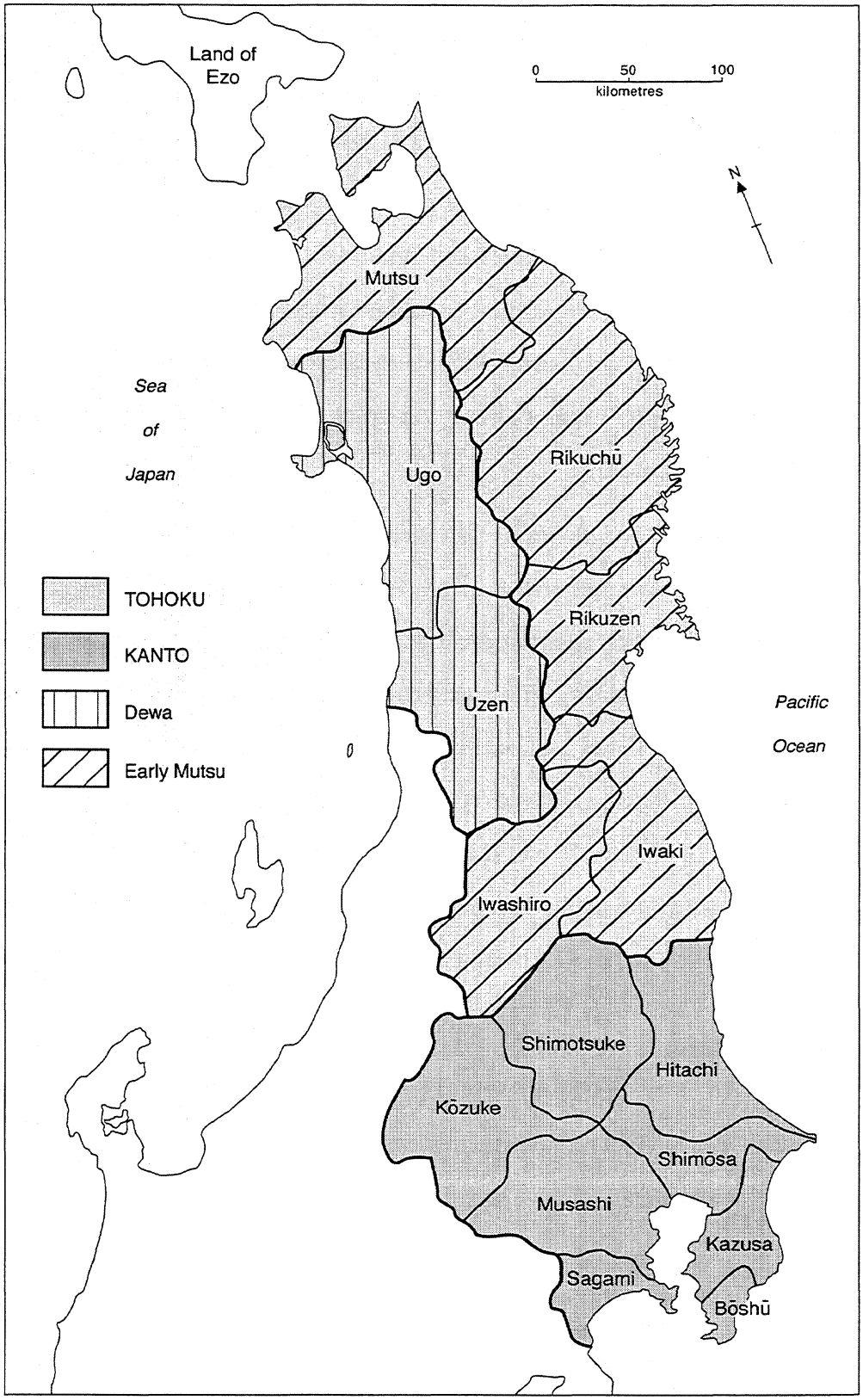
(i) Tsugaru

In an evocative memoir called *Tsugaru*, written after a trip home in the 1940's, Dazai Osamu laments the ignorance he found among contemporaries about the region.[7]

> Most people know little about the history of Tsugaru. . . It seems some even think Tsugaru is the same thing as Mutsu province or Aomori Prefecture. This is hardly surprising. In the textbooks on Japanese history that we used at school, Tsugaru was mentioned only once, and that was in passing. . .

---

[7] Dazai Osamu, *Tsugaru* , in *Dazai Osamu Zenshū: 7*, pages 94-95. Translated by James Westerhoven as *Return to Tsugaru*, Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd 1985. The passages quoted appear in the English version on pages 100 - 102. I have altered the translation in places.



Map 1: The old provinces of the Tohoku and Kanto regions

Based on: "Provinces of Japan in 1808" in Smith, *Agrarian Origins*, opposite page 1; and "Provinces and regions of early modern Japan", in Hall (ed.), *Cambridge History*, pages xxiv-xxvii. The Tsugaru territory was the western portion of Mutsu province north of Ugo.

Dazai follows up his complaint by quoting the textbook passage that tells how, in the year 658 CE, the Empress Saimei dispatched Abe no Hirafu to "pacify the regions that are now known as Akita and Tsugaru". He continues expanding on his theme, building a crescendo that ends with a set of loud rhetorical questions:

> . . . But there was no reference to Tsugaru anywhere else, not in our elementary school textbooks, or middle school textbooks, or even in lectures at high school . . . It fills me with sadness to think that our textbooks treated the Age of the Gods with great reverence, but only mentioned the name of Tsugaru once - in all those years between the Emperor Jinmu and the present. . .
>
> What on earth were they doing in Tsugaru all those years? Just getting up, rearranging their kimonos and sitting down again? For all that time? Did they do nothing but blink like owls, and never take a single step outside their own borders?

More than half a century has passed since *Tsugaru* first appeared, but a look at the indexes of any number of historical monographs, text books and reference works demonstrates that the intervening decades have not changed the situation much since Dazai's day. Tsugaru simply does not often attract the national historiographer's gaze. In the exciting event that an historian of the Tokugawa period, writing in Japanese or another language, refers to "Tohoku" in a title, more often than not the locus of enquiry turns out to be the Sendai domain, Aizu or Shōnai.

Although it is hoped that this study will patch over some small corners of the large hole Dazai so melodramatically conjures up, its purpose is not simply to fill selected gaps in familiar histories of Japan by furnishing more facts to strengthen their core narratives. At the very least, I want wherever possible to reverse the viewpoint, and to write about Tsugaru from a localised perspective rather than a central one. It is important, though, to consider why the lacuna Dazai bewails still exists.

One set of reasons for Tsugaru's fleeting appearance in Japanese national history is suggested by the series of textbook tales Dazai selects to highlight his point. This is a task he tackles with some gusto, working through

the arcane contents of the kinds of chronologies and narratives still found in standard texts, from before Yamato Takeru's legendary campaign against the Emishi, through Abe no Hirafu's so-called pacification campaigns and the glorious achievements of Sakanoue no Tamuramaro, who "subdued" and "subjugated" the Ezo during the ninth, and on and on to what was recorded as Minamoto Yoritomo's "subjugation of the whole of the northeast". After noting the founding of the Kamakura bakufu by Yoritomo, Dazai then leaps seven centuries to complete his dismal catalogue of Tsugaru's absences by pointing out that another momentous national historical event, the overthrow of the Tokugawa régime, was initiated by a triumvirate of *tozama* domains from the far distant southwest.

Between the Kamakura and Meiji periods, he might have mentioned the last decades of the sixteenth century when regional warlords were fighting the epic battles that gave the period its name. *Sengoku* (戦国) literally means "countries at war". There was no figure from Tsugaru at this time, either, to compare with Takeda Shingen, the legendary daimyo of Kai, or his equally celebrated foe, Uesugi Kenshin, of the Yonezawa Uesugi line; nor were there battle sites in Tsugaru to mention alongside Kawanakajima or Sekigahara, both of which have become vivid elements of popular culture by way of television dramas and electronic games. In Tsugaru there was just a rather ordinary story about the defection of a vassal. This betrayal, though, in contrast to Akechi Mitsuhide's of Oda Nobunaga, had no significant consequences in the political centre.

What Harold Bolitho has observed about the entire province of Echigo was even more true of Tsugaru, further north on the Japan Sea coast and even more distant from the Pacific coast and the Inland Sea, "where the flow of people, gossip, information, and ideas was never-ending."[8] Like Echigo, Tsugaru contained no places of historical cultural significance, like Hiraizumi; nor were there well-known sites of religious or scenic significance to attract visitors,

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[8] Pages 259-60 in Harold Bolitho, "The Echigo War, 1868", in Monumenta Nipponica, XXXIV:3, 1979, pages 259-77.

like the three sacred mountains of Hagurosan, Gassan and Yūdonosan in the province of Dewa.

There is just one context in which Tsugaru is hardly ever absent. It is when the major domains of Tokugawa Japan (circa 1600-1867) are listed or mapped in textbooks and monographs. For no obvious reason, the domain is nearly always among the twenty-five or so included, even when Hirosaki and Tsugaru do not appear in the index or text of the given work. The nature of "majorness" is rarely defined, though. As we have already noted, the region did not spawn major actors or host dramatic events that featured on what was to become the national stage. Nor, as Mark Ravina points out, was it among the domains whose territory comprised entire ancient provinces, or *kuni*.[9]

One important measure of political status, as well as the amount of financial or military support the shogun could demand of the daimyo of a domain, was its *kokudaka* (石高). This was the putative capacity of the domain's lands to generate taxable wealth, expressed as a volume of hulled rice of equivalent value. Tsugaru rated a *kokudaka* of only 47,000 *koku* throughout the entire seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when there were some twenty or so other domains assessed at 100,000 *koku* or more that are rarely included in the lists and maps.[10] Tsugaru was rewarded with added *omotedaka* (formal yield) status after despatching troops, on bakufu orders, to Ezo in 1805 and then to the islands of Etorofu and Kunashiri in 1808. The rating of the domain leapt first from 47,000 *koku* to 70,000 *koku*, and after the second expedition to 100,000 *koku*. **Note:** One *koku* is around 180 litres, or nearly 5 bushells.

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[9] Mark Ravina, *Land and Lordship in Early Modern Japan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, pages 19-23, 28-34 and 117-119. I have found Ravina a valuable interlocutor and foil, particularly for Chapters 2 and 3. I do not agree with his suggestion that Tsugaru's early daimyo took care to ingratiate themselves with Edo because Tsugaru did not have *kuni* (country) status. Their attitudes more likely quite realistic, and derived from habits and practices developed around the time of their ancestor's, probably treacherous, secession from Nanbu, when shogunal approval was urgently needed.

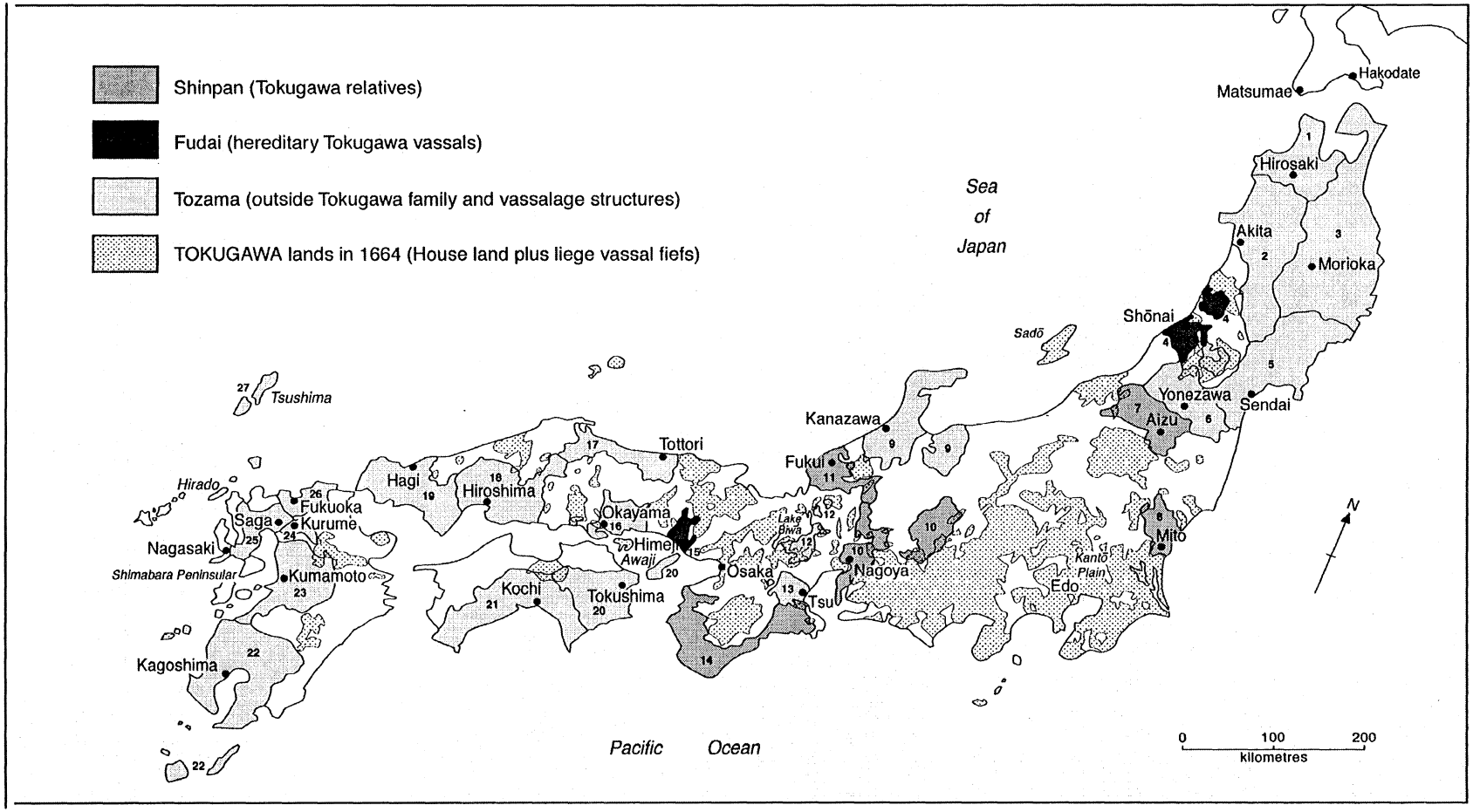
[10] Those domains include, for example, the *shinpan* Matsudaira domains at Matsue (186,000 *koku*), Kawagoe (170,000 *koku*), and Matsuyama (150,000 *koku*) and the *fudai* Yanagisawa domain at Kōriyama (151,200 *koku*). Bolitho points out in "Echigo War" (see note 8) that among the Echigo domains Takada, with a *kokudaka* of 150,000 *koku*, would only narrowly have rated inclusion among "Tokugawa Japan's top thirty" domains.

	Domain	Castle town	Daimyo family	Status	Wealth
1		Hirosaki	Tsugaru	*tozama*	47,000 100,000
2	Satake	Kubota (Akita)	Satake	*tozama*	205,800
3		Morioka	Nanbu	*tozama*	200,000
4	Shōnai	Shōnai (Tsurugaoka)	Sakai	*fudai*	140,000
5		Sendai	Date	*tozama*	620,000
6		Yonezawa	Uesugi	*tozama*	150,000
7	Aizu	Aizu-Wakamatsu	Hoshina-Matsudaira	*shinpan*	230,000
8		Mito	Tokugawa	*shinpan*	350,000
9	Kaga *	Kanazawa	Maeda	*tozama*	1,022,700
10	Owari *	Nagoya	Tokugawa	*shinpan*	619,000
11	Echizen*	Fukui	Matsudaira	*shinpan*	320,000
12		Hikone	Ii	*fudai*	350,000
13	(Anotsu)	Tsu	Tōdō	*tozama*	363,000
14	Kii	Wakayama	Tokugawa	*shinpan*	555,000
15		Himeji	Sakakibara, Sakai	*fudai*	150,000
16	Bizen*	Okayama	Ikeda	*tozama*	305,000
17	Inshū *	Tottori	Ikeda	*tozama*	325,000
18	Aki*	Hiroshima	Asano	*tozama*	426,000
19	Chōshū*	Hagi	Mōri	*tozama*	369,000
20	Awa*	Tokushima	Hachisuka	*tozama*	257,900
21	Tosa*	Kōchi	Yamanouchi	*tozama*	242,000
22	Satsuma*	Kagoshima	Shimazu	*tozama*	729,800
23		Kumamoto	Hosokawa	*tozama*	545,000
24		Kurume	Arima	*tozama*	210,000
25		Saga	Nabeshima	*tozama*	357,000
26		Fukuoka	Kuroda	*tozama*	520,000
27	Tsushima	Fuchū	Sō	*tozama*	100,000

Table 1: Some eighteenth-century domains, their castle towns, daimyo families and putative wealth

Based on: Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, list of ten greatest domains in 1690 on page 119; Kimura et al. (eds.) *Hanshi Jiten* , and *Hall* (ed.), *Cambridge History*, Map 4.1 on page 151.

- Tsugaru's *kokudaka* is most often given as 100,000 *koku*. *See the last paragraph of the previous page for details.*
- * denotes a *kuni* (domain comprising one or more entire provinces).
- Income is measured in *koku* of rice.
- Numbers refer to domains included in the map on the previous page.
- For domains not named in the **Domain** column, either the daimyo family name is used, or that of the castle town - or both, as in the Date/Sendai domain.
- The Tsushima domain (27) was in fact very small, but the daimyo was granted extra status in recognition of his role in supervising Korean-Japanese trade.



Map 2: Tokugawa bakufu lands and some domains in the mid Tokugawa period

Based on: "Tokugawa domains - 1664", Map 4 in Totman, *Politics*, page 71, and "Major daimyo domains and capital cities, mid-seventeenth century", Map 4.1 in Hall (ed), *Cambridge HistoryI*, page 151. Numbers refer to domains listed on the table opposite

The only other possible reason for Tsugaru's classification as a major domain is land area, which is, in fact, the domain's only apparent distinguishing feature. My argument in section II of this introduction will therefore suggest that we should not expect Tsugaru - or the Hōreki famine experience there or Nyūi Mitsugi - to be included in standard historical narratives of Japan and the Tokugawa period. Given the way those narratives are structured, they are irrelevant. That is not to say that lives which were lived, and events that occurred, in Tsugaru were not connected with what went on in the rest of Japan between the 1580s and the 1860s: far from it. It is to say, though, that those lives and events were peripheral to the ones that form the central core of Japan's national story. Unlike the Ina valley, northwest of Nagoya, which once pulsed with the productive, commercial and communications activity that emanated from the proto-national city hubs, but was later made into a periphery by the crude mechanisms of modernity, Tsugaru was always peripheral, and is perhaps even now only incompletely articulated with the centre.[11]

Lives lived and events occurring in that far-off place have been to the national story as *akebi* canes cut during the Tsugaru summer are to the gnarled old vines they are harvested from.[12] Were it not for the trunk and branches at the centre, no beautiful basket ware would ever be woven from those peripheral canes; but, on the other hand, were no canes harvested and no craft items produced, the life of the base vine would continue undisturbed, responding as it always had to the rhythm of the seasons.

(ii) Nyūi Mitsugi

After bewailing at some length Tsugaru's diminutive presence in the national story, Dazai actually goes on in the same passage to offer himself and his

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[11] Karen Wigen has written an engaging and provocative study of the fate of this valley, which is located in central Japan on what was a popular alternative route through the mountains between Kyoto and Edo: *The Making of a Japanese Periphery, 1750-1920.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

[12] The plant is *akebia quinata* (five-leaved akebia); its canes are used in such places as Tsugaru and nothern Nagano prefecture to produce baskets and other woven items. The craft is called *akebi zaiku* (アケビ細工).

readers reassurance. He responds to his own proposition that his Tsugaru ancestors had just blinked like owls and wriggled to adjust their kimonos while centuries of Japan's history had passed by, with:

> No, no - that can't have been the case at all. If you asked the people themselves, they would answer: "That's how it might seem, but we were pretty busy, you know."[13]

If old documents are anything to go by, one person who certainly does seem to have been busy, for a few of those years at least, was Nyūi Mitsugi - domain bureaucrat, scholar, reformer and tireless activist. According to the records, and at this point I am willing to concede that they are not all unproblematic as evidence, Mitsugi lived from the 2nd year of Shōtoku (1712) until Kansei 3 (1792). As the inscription on the stone in Kawaratai says, Mitsugi not only authored a substantial number of scholarly texts, but he also served twice as *kanjō bugyō* (a financial magistrate) in the Tsugaru domain government, courageously introducing radical reforms while in office. Furthermore, while staying in Kawaratai he provided the local folk with welcome and beneficial instruction in literacy, numeracy and hydraulics.[14]

That "subsequent period of exile" in Kawaratai, mentioned so cryptically in the memorial inscription, was, in fact, the official punishment to which he was sentenced at the end of his second period in office in An'ei 10 (1780). Both times when he occupied the position of *kanjō bugyō*, his reform policies caused such resentment and confusion in the domain that they were abandoned and he was dismissed in disgrace. That is the impression to be gained, at any rate, by one kind of reading of the records. Mark Ravina, for example, finishes his brief section on the Hōreki reforms simply by concluding - in what comes across as the admonitory tone used by champions of market forces when interference in the motions of the invisible hand are mooted - that Mitsugi's attempt to shift control of the commercial sector to the government was a complete failure.[15]

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[13] Dazai, *Tsugaru*, page 102.
[14] *Kudō Kieimon Hikki* in AKS, pages 276-277.
[15] Ravina, *Land and Lordship*, page 128.

There is an absence in this kind of reading, which rather surprisingly occurs in the account on the stone too, to take adequate account of one strikingly positive achievement of Mitsugi's official career: he saved the lives of the people of Tsugaru during the Hōreki Famine. During his first period in charge of domain finances he took such far-sighted and thorough measures to conserve, collect and redistribute food supplies throughout the domain that not a single death from starvation was registered during 1755 and 1756. Since this was a famine that is believed to have been particularly severe in the Tohoku Region, and to have caused tens of thousands of deaths in the neighbouring Nanbu, Hachinohe and Akita domains, it seemed to me that the circumstances of Mitsugi's Hōreki reforms and their failure warranted further enquiry.

Interest in a virtually unknown eighteenth-century person would not normally be immediately sparked, though, by a chance encounter with some documents or another mossy memorial stone. In my case, the desire to know more was first kindled by Kojima Yasunori's article entitled, "The Thought of Nyūi Mitsugi: Practicality and Reform in Tsugaru Domain".[16] Serendipity delivered me to Tokyo and the office of Professor M. William Steele just as he was finishing off his translation of this essay. Kojima's work conveys in a particularly engaging way the variety and vitality of Mitsugi's writings, highlighting the strong sense of vocational commitment they convey. He also notes only in passing the singularity of Mitsugi's achievement in keeping the people of Tsugaru alive through the dreadful Hōreki famine.

This article is part of a small corpus of work on Mitsugi and the Hōreki Reforms in Tsugaru that has gradually accumulated since the 1930's, bringing to life the legacy of the Association to Celebrate the Memory of Nyūi Mitsugi. The survival of the Kawaratai monument is one kind of testimony to the effort put in by Hasegawa Susumu and the other members of the Association. Despite the curious omission of any reference to the famine in its fulsome eulogy, it can truly be said to have gone on providing "for the edification of posterity" an enduring

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[16] Kojima Yasunori, "The Thought of Nyūi Mitsugi: Practicality and Reform in Tsugaru Domain." *Asian Cultural Studies* 19 (March 1993): 35-51.

record of Mitsugi's life and achievements. More illuminating, though, is the other result of their labours: the availability in several Japanese libraries of the four-volume set, *The Complete Works of Nyūi Mitsugi*.[17] Without the more accessible contributions, however, of someone like Kojima, as well as local educators and publicists from Aomori prefecture, it is difficult to imagine what those of us in posterity might have made of that record.

There has not been, however, so far as I am aware, much other consciousness in the national historiographical world of Nyūi Mitsugi and his works. His short exposition, "Statistical methods for government administration", appears in *Nihon Keizai Taiten* (A Compendium of Japanese Economics); and this seems to be the only reason for his name's appearing in the index, but not the body, of the much later comprehensive *Kokushi Daijiten*, an encyclopaedic dictionary of Japanese history.[18]

Kojima Yasunori has very appropriately worked a brief account of the Hōreki Reforms and Mitsugi's thought into his discussion of the Sorai tradition, political reform, and the social turn in eighteenth-century Confucian studies, which appears in the series, *Nihon no Kinsei* (Pre-Modern Japan).[19] Among users of English, Mark Ravina, in the monograph already mentioned, chose the Tsugaru domain as one of three comparative case studies in domainal economic management. While some aspect of Mitsugi's economic or practical thought, or his attempts at administrative reform, is acknowledged in each of these works, none of them makes more than a passing reference to his fight against famine, his thinking about political economy, his cosmology, or, for that matter, his poetry and his mastery of elementary surveying techniques.

It is not in the trajectories of Japanese economic history, or the development of modern or practical thought that I want to place Mitsugi. Rather, he will be located amongst the constant struggles that fill images of the Tsugaru

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[17] Nakamichi Hitoshi (ed.), *Nyūi Mitsugi zenshū*. 4 vols. Tokyo: Nyūi Mitsugi kenshōkai, 1935-37.
[18] Kokushi daijiten henshū iiankai hen, *Kokushi Daijiten* vol. 15b: Index of people's names. Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1996. p. 428.
[19] Kojima Yasunori, "Jugaku no shakaika", pages 123-74 in Kiichi Rai, ed., *Jugaku, kokugaku, yōgaku,* volume 13 of *Nihon no Kinsei*. Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1993.

domain during the eighteenth-century. The thought, practices, and cosmology, as read from the texts that have survived to represent the life he lived as an individual will also be interpreted as far as possible from that point of view.

(iii) Famine

Unlike Tsugaru and Nyūi Mitsugi, famine features with some prominence in the Japanese historical lexicon, as it does in the histories of most other societies that once practiced settled agriculture. Addressing the subject of famine has been one of the most challenging parts of this study: imagining the place famine, and the fear of it, might have had in the lives of people in a pre-industrial society.

Disaster and suffering are integral parts of life in that long procession of humanity E.H. Carr imagined shuffling through time: chroniclers through the ages have noted, among these calamities, terrible experiences of famine. We in our time are still appalled by accounts of the loss of life in India after the drought of 1769, and the famine in northern China a century later. About ten million people died each time.

Scattered survivors of last century's Ukraine famine, Bengal famine, and Great Leap famine are still recalling and recording living memories. Histories of the globalised, post-industrial, twenty-first century, too, will include accounts of the food deprivation, starvation and death, which are not yet past, in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and the Sudan.

Tales of the Great Famine, or Great Hunger (it is never necessary to say where, or when), haunt the histories of my own land, which was among those where many victims fled to make new lives after their experiences of poverty and dearth. In Japan, too, scattered images survive of the awful ways in which famine affected the lives of rural people. Given the number of lives that were lost or irrevocably changed, though, the coverage of famine in history and literature is disproportionately scant, especially when compared with the amount of space devoted to records and chronicles and memories of wars.



Plate 7: Miss Kennedy distributing clothing at Kilrish
Source: *The Illustrated London News*, December 22, 1849, page 404. *See footnote 19.*
Miss Kennedy is "under ten years old", and is shown distributing clothes to "the wretched children" brought to her by "their more wretched parents." The text mentions the woman "crouching like a monkey, and drawing around her the only rag she had to conceal her nudity." He noted also the very cold weather and "the wet and mire in which the naked feet of the crowd were immersed."[20]

It is a commonplace with which one can hardly take issue that the Tokugawa suzerainty (1600-1867) delivered Japan's peoples from insecurity and violence associated with endemic warfare. This so-called Pax Tokugawa, however, was increasingly disturbed as time passed, not only by peasant uprisings and harsh penalties; but also by disasters that were regarded at the time as natural. An earthquake, volcanic eruption, windstorm, insect plague, fire or flood, or just a wet, chilly summer could result in thousands of deaths from starvation or epidemic illness. Lives lost due to famine during the Tokugawa period alone must be counted in hundreds of thousands, despite the sanguine estimates of some economic historians.[21] For good reason, the spectre of mass death, illness and dislocation haunted much of Japan's population for most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and well into the nineteenth.

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[20] *The Illustrated London News*, December 22, 1849, page 404, from the website: http://www.ppeople.virginia.edu/-eas5e/Irish/Wagon.html

[21] See particularly, "Morioka", pages 126 – 160, in: Hanley, Susan B. and Kozo Yamamura, *Economic and Demographic change in Preindustrial Japan, 1600-1866*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977. The way in which population figures are used in this work to revise famine casualties places too much confidence in statistics that were routinely fiddled for Bakufu consumption.



流民の図　建部清庵「民間備荒録」（国立公文書館内閣文庫所蔵）

Plate 8: Japanese villagers fleeing from famine.
Source: Tatebe Seian, *Minkan bikoroku.* Property of the *Naikaku bunko shozō.*

Historical narratives of these centuries are, not surprisingly, punctuated by such disasters as the great fire of Edo in 1657, and the eruptions of Mount Fuji in 1703 and Mount Asama in 1783. The 1783 eruption was associated with the second of the Tokugawa period's so-called three great famines, in the Kyōhō, Tenmei and Tenpō eras, and in a following section I discuss the role of these famines in shaping the historical record. Let us pause here just long enough to observe that, although the Hōreki famine, which devastated the northeast of Honshu, is not recorded as one of the three greats, the Kyōhō famine, which affected mainly southwestern domains, is. It is, of course, through lack of accurate evidence about casualty numbers that this dubious honour must remain uncontested.

Even so, like Peter Laslett, we can not help but marvel at how much we know about the history of the empire, the growth of the state bureaucracy, the exploits of generals, the work of men of letters or the culture of the Heian court aristocracy; but how miserably little we have found out about whether the people who lived in pre-industrial Japan had enough to eat.[22] What we do know is that

[22] Peter Laslett, *The World we have lost*, page 127.

when famine struck, they didn't: thousands of them died. Matsudaira Sadanobu has long been credited with taking relief measures to prevent starvation in Shirakawa when he was daimyo there during the Tenmei Famine, but there is very little else to compare with Mitsugi's success in saving the people of Tsugaru some decades earlier. In the expression "the politics of famine", I mean politics in the sense that is inherent in an expression used by scholars, thinkers and officials of the Tokugawa period to refer to the task of government administration: *kei sei saimin* (経世済民). The whole expression is often translated now as "political economy", and has been abbreviated to produce the Japanese expression meaning "economics": *keizai*. A sanguine choice, since the compound originally meant something like "bringing order to the social world and saving the people".

The particular fragments of pre-modern experience in Japan around which my study has been generated, then are these: the vulnerability of the Tsugaru domain to famine, the man who acted during the Hōreki crisis to prevent starvation in Tsugaru, his effort to reform the polity, and the ideas expressed in his writing. The idea of a fragment is taken from an article by Gyanendra Pandey, in which he addresses the problem of representing violence and its victims. His concern was that the scars left by historical violence and suffering are suppressed in narratives whose themes and contexts do not accommodate them.[23] Just as Pandey found in relation to the suffering of the Muslim and Hindu peoples when murderous violence swept northern India, and for many of the same kinds of reasons, in Japanese historical narratives actual human experience of dearth, starvation, flight and mass death in famines is largely represented by absence, or silence. For, as Millman and Kates put it, "The hungry rarely write history, and historians are rarely hungry."[24] The personal experience of Tsugaru's famine victims is almost entirely beyond our reach: there is insufficient evidence to determine even their numbers with any certainty. One reason, then, for

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[23] Gyanendra Pandey, "In Defense of the Fragment", *Representations*, 37, 1992, pages 27-55, pages 27, 41.

[24] Sara Millman and Robert W. Kates, "Introduction" in Lucile F. Newman (ed.), *Hunger in History*, Cambridge, Mass., 1990, page 22.

undertaking a study like this one is to construct a narrative in which the existence of those victims is inscribed.

II Narrative streams in political history

(i) Pacification of the east and the emergence of bakufu rule

Many of the historical episodes listed by Dazai, and summarised in part (i) of the section above, are familiar elements in "pacifying the east" narratives. These accounts are rarely constructed from a viewpoint within the actual region where the events took place; where the bloody battles were fought, the troops encamped, the fields trampled, the structures built, the goods - and alliances - traded. Instead, histories of life in northern Tohoku over two millennia are shaped by, and encompassed within, chronicles concentrated upon the purview, ambitions and destiny of key figures connected with the imperial state at the political centre, whether that was Heiankyō (later Kyoto), Nagaoka, Nara, or one of the earlier Yamato Basin capitals. Pacification by the Japanese court of the eastern and northern regions of Honshu is a crucial component of modern national narratives, intimately intertwined with accounts of state formation and the nature of ruling authority.

It was, for example, from an origin in the Yamato court that Abe no Hirafu's expedition in 658 pressed on as far north as Akita and Tsugaru, as noted in Dazai's history textbook. The purpose of this campaign, and of the castles built at Taga (near Sendai) and Akita to house garrisons of guards during the following century, was to keep a frontier secure. This boundary, between lands of the Yamato and the not-Yamato seems to have existed principally in the minds of court functionaries at the capital. It was reproduced, with considerable embellishment, in the plots of warrior chronicles; then transmitted through the centuries to generations of Japanese consumers of literature, theatre, cinema, television and videotapes.

Recent research indicates that peoples of both northern and southern origin intermingled on either side of that line; but the narrative that unfolds with the Yamato peoples moving northward and eastward against recurring Emishi or

Ezo resistance has remained the dominant one. It was the destiny of the northern peoples, in this epic, to be progressively "pacified" or "subdued" by the forces of the civilizing political centre, so that their way of life would "become the same as those of the newcomers"[25]; and they would cease being "a constant source of trouble and a hindrance to the opening up of new land".[26] The way of life in question was, naturally, both settled and devoted to rice cultivation. In the light of archaeological evidence that rice cultivation may have been practised in the Tsugaru region as early as the fourth century, and certainly occurred during the seventh, this civilizing project seems in retrospect a little supererogatory.[27]

These are the images that still inform popular plot lines, even though the people responsible for pillage, rebellion and general lawlessness in the north were just as likely to have been *wajin* (Yamato people) settlers and warriors from the south as *emishi*.[28] The court waged a campaign over twelve years in the middle of the eleventh century, for example, against the armies of Abe Yoritoki, the very official it had appointed to keep the peace in Mutsu. Yoritoki was killed in 1057; but his son, Sadato, soon avenged him by routing the imperial forces. Imperial armies returned to the fray with reinforcements in 1062 to claim his head. It was the legendary Minamoto Yoshiiye, great-grandfather of Yoritomo and Yoshitsune, who finally bore this grisly trophy in triumph back to the (pacified?) capital of Kyoto.

This episode was an early trickle in what became another major narrative stream: the emergence of warrior rule. Yoshiiye went on to be appointed Governor of Mutsu Province, and fought a second war against insubordinate *wajin* in the north before returning to the capital. For the ensuing half millennium or so, power in the northeast was divided between regional chieftains. Yoritomo made

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[25] This is part of a 1935 note by Kume Kunitake on the destiny of indigenous peoples, in *Kyūjūnen Kaikoroku*, page 38, quoted in Michael Weiner, "Discourses of race, nation and empire in pre-1945 Japan". *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Volume 18 Number 3, July 1995, page 439.

[26] Sansom, *History*, page 91.

[27] Kudō Masaki, "Kōkogaku kara mita kodai Emishi no bunka", in *Michinoku Kodai: Emishi no Sekai*, pages 1-64. Tokyo: Iwanami, 1991, pages 39-40.

[28] The word *emishi* is usually taken as meaning Ainu, but, as Mark Hudson points out, it seems in older texts to be more like a political category, used to indicate peoples who had not yet been brought firmly under central Japanese rule. See pages 198-200 in his *Ruins*.

history in 1185 by having himself appointed *Sei-I Taishōgun* (征夷大将軍) or, barbarian-subduing great general, by the Kyoto court. He was claiming for himself the title originally instituted for the court noble under whose command Sakanoue Tamuramaro had "pacified" unruly easterners over a millennium before.

Yoritomo chose Kamakura, far away in the east, as the administrative seat of Japan's first bakufu, or warrior government. Even so, his power was usurped by his Hōjō in-laws, who were drawn back into power struggles at the capital. Another eastern warrior lord who was descended from the Minamoto, Ashikaga Takauji, led his forces up to Kyoto and tried to settle the dispute between bakufu and court. His solution was to install himself in the capital as shogun while appointing a royal prince as alternative emperor. Thus, the institutions of warrior government were brought to Kyoto, and the *Nanbokuchō* (南北朝) period began.[29] The Ashikaga bakufu survived in form until the end of the *sengoku jidai*. This was the period when the warrior generals, now called daimyos, or great names, raised armies from wherever they could, and gradually established the large independent domains from which they drew the resources to keep fighting. Those domains are referred to as *kuni* (国), or countries. *De facto* military and political power was divided between them, and the strongest few continued to vie for supreme authority.

During this new phase of warrior infighting, daimyos from the long-established Nanbu family continued to control their territory in the extreme north of Honshu unopposed, until at the very end they lost the Tsugaru region to an ambitious vassal, Ōura Tamenobu: he was to become the first Tsugaru daimyo. Needless to say, this detail does not figure in the core narrative of warrior power, which is taken up with the imperial succession dispute, the weakening shogunate, the Ōnin War, and regional warlords all far to the south of Tsugaru. Viewed from a point in the Tsugaru historical imaginary, narrative streams that pass through the subjugation of the east and the emergence of warrior rule on the journey to Japanese modernity seem largely irrelevant, though shockwaves reached the region from time to time and sometimes signalled its future fate.

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[29] This means "southern and northern courts". There was a separate emperor in each.

(ii) The centralisation of state power and the bureaucratic tradition

If warriors of legendary power emerging from the east feature prominently in histories of the Japanese nation state, one key theme that shapes those accounts is the evolution of a unified polity, ruled from a stable centre and administered by a loyal bureaucracy. One essential element of this evolution was the increase in power of successive *Sei-I Taishōgun* (征夷大将軍), barbarian-subduing generals, from the time of Azuma no Tamura Maro through to Ieyasu at the apogee of warrior rule. As the successor of Nobunaga and Hideyoshi -two very effective military campaigners - Ieyasu was able to establish a bakufu that eclipsed all other seats of authority in Japan; and it was at the place he chose for his headquarters that the modern nation's capital would later be constructed.[30]

Along this narrative stream are such high points as the founding of the Kamakura and Ashikaga bakufus, and the emergence of Nobunaga, Hideyoshi and Ieyasu from the chaos of the *sengoku* period. The first two sixteenth century unifiers established their central headquarters in the west - Nobunaga at Azuchi (now Ōmi) on Lake Biwa and Hideyoshi in Osaka. With Ieyasu's choice of Edo, the centre of centripetal political and military forces shifted from west to east, as it had briefly done when Yoritomo made Kamakura his shogunal capital in 1185.

In Yoritomo's time, the institutions in the imperial capital of Heian (Kyoto) in the west still held enough political and spiritual power to cause serious division and unrest. When the dawn of Japan's modernity was signalled in 1867, by the surrender of the fifteenth Tokugawa shogun to the authority of the imperial throne, however, the capital stayed where it was. It was the emperor who moved east to occupy the shogun's castle and preside over a new epoch – of government run by warriors! Accounts of the Tokugawa suzerainty, therefore, are mostly constructed to explicate these three phases: first, the course of events which

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[30] Ieyasu's victory at Sekigahara marked the beginning of his pre-eminence; and after the shogun's surrender to the emperor in 1867 the bakufu was no longer Japan's government. Other possible dates for the beginning of the period are: 1603, when Ieyasu was appointed shogun, or 1615, when his forces attacked Osaka castle and killed Hideyoshi's vassals and heirs. 1868, when the Meiji emperor issued the Charter Oath, is sometimes taken as the end.

led to Ieyasu's supremacy; second, the capacity of the warrior regime he established in Edo to keep the peace for so long in spite of periodic calamities; and third, how the fall of the bakufu signalled Japan's readiness to become the modern world power she was destined to be.

The dispatch with which the transition between the centralised Tokugawa bakufu and the imperial Meiji government was accomplished is explained in this his-story in terms of a series of transformations of the warriors' political and social roles. In Sakanoue Tamuramaro's time fighting men were mostly members of mercenary bands fighting under warrior leaders who rented out their services, often to the imperial government for the purpose of "subduing" the *emishi* on the imagined north eastern frontier. Gradually, they became identified with certain leaders and districts, to eventually become disciplined ranks of trained retainers fighting for the regional daimyos who were vying for absolute military supremacy. After the Tokugawa settlement, these *bushi* (武士) retainers and their daimyos found themselves obliged to participate, for the large part as civilians, in an elaborately structured and highly regulated hierarchical system of bureaucratic government.[31]

Carl Steenstrup succinctly sums up historical relations between the Japanese state, its government and bureaucracy with military power in a review of a monograph provocatively entitled *The Taming of the Samurai*:

> In the long sweep, the political history of Japan looks to be the history of its soldiers, and, more particularly, of those soldiers who held power of command. Over time, their functions changed from individualistic fighters on horseback to group fighters on horseback; from there to officers leading infantry; and finally, during the Tokugawa period, to upholders of peace and order in general, with many civilian tasks. After 1868, their privileges were diluted, but their influence grew steadily until 1945.[32]

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[31] See the article,"Samurai in Passage: Transformation of the Sixteenth-Century Kanto", by Michael Birt, for an account of this process among higher echelons of samurai in the Kanto region. Pages 369-399, in *Journal of Japanese Studies,* 11.2, 1985.

[32] Carl Steenstrup, Review of Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. Pages 426-428, in *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 22.2, 1996.

Twentieth century developments notwithstanding, there is no doubt that in the early 1600's, with prowess in battle and knowledge of weapons and strategy suddenly superfluous, warriors urgently needed to develop administrative and managerial skills. Until the middle of the century, though, large numbers of masterless and disaffected *bushi* lived in political and social limbo as a result of the attainder or transfer of their daimyo leaders. Many of these masterless *bushi*, or *rōnin* (浪人), died defending Hideyoshi's heirs in Osaka, or in local skirmishes. The prudent majority, in the popular narrative, transformed their loyalty and dedication to military duty into a rationale for service as domain and bakufu bureaucrats in the Confucian scholar-official mode. This new identity was predicated on serious attention being paid to cultural and political skills as well as the military arts, the combination popularly styled *bunbu* (文武). They beavered away in administrations with such diligence and efficiency that the transition to a centralised national bureaucracy in the nineteenth century was a natural one for Japan.

Like all general historical explanations, this one fits where it touches; and it does not fit the Tsugaru experience very closely. The Nanbu had been firmly in charge of their lands in the northeast since the twelfth century, well before the final scramble of the sixteenth century began. When an argument arose within the old daimyo family over a succession issue, Ōura Tamenobu took advantage of the distraction to realize his personal ambition. He and his retainers overran a number of Nanbu fortresses and castles in Tsugaru: he laid claim to the territory, and then sought the patronage of Hideyoshi. Later, he was careful to ingratiate himself with Ieyasu as well.

In contrast to this straightforward story, however, the central unifiers had difficulty bringing the more powerful daimyos of the south and west under their sway, and they used daimyo transfer or attainder as instruments of control. Nobunaga, for example, cut the Yamanouchi warrior family off from its roots in Ōwari through a forced transfer to Tosa. Ieyasu confiscated a large portion of Mōri territory around Hiroshima and confined that daimyo family to the *kuni* of Chōshū. He was able to make only an uneasy peace with his erstwhile Shimazu foes.

They retained considerable economic and strategic power, based on access to the Pacific and the East China Sea from Satsuma. Thus, the relations of these three dynasties with the bakufu at the centre were by no means amicable from the very beginning. Nearly three centuries later, when the centripetal forces keeping the power balance began to weaken, it was those three domains from the southwestern periphery that led the coup against the shogunate.

Tsugaru was never a spawning-ground for that kind of major political or military subversion, and produced none of the individuals so celebrated in accounts of the Meiji Restoration, or the associated development of nationalist ideology. Far away from the shogunal capital of Edo, Tsugaru was at the extremity of the networks of highways that criss-crossed most of the land, and far off the sanctioned overseas trade routes: geographically, economically and politically peripheral. It was on the way to nowhere but Matsumae, that special frontier domain separating the known order of Japan from the barbaric otherness of Ezo and beyond: a place of ambivalent identity. Tsugaru's warriors submitted very tardily, and perhaps even half-heartedly, to the sovereignty of the centre. Even then, it was chiefly to serve their own interests.[33]

(iii) The not yet of the pre-modern

Histories of a nation state are, in their very being, projects of modernity. It is perhaps therefore inevitable that, being focused on the time immediately prior to that which required their invention, histories of the pre-modern take on a general air of the incomplete, portraying conditions and peoples poised for their transformation or development into something else: instinctively propelling themselves into more and more enlightened ways - of producing, selling, buying, controlling, learning, protesting - so that modern otherness might emerge from the midst of familiar old institutions and habits and transfigure them. Many school and university textbooks adopt this pattern, tending to portray static traditional societies to contrast with dynamic modern and and post-modern ones.

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[33] Ravina explains the attitudes of Tsugaru leaders to the political centre in terms of "currying favour" (page 23) and self-preservation. The latter seems more to the point, from beginning to end, as he remarks himself on page 153. Tamenobu established a pattern of relations with Edo and Kyoto that appear to have been instrumental or even exploitative rather than forelock-tugging.

In the very naming of this period in Japan – as Tokugawa, Edo, or pre-modern – we hint at one narrative trajectory or another. In "Tokugawa" we have echoes of the old, even feudal, order of warrior rule, which in the national story was ruptured, overturned and replaced with a parliamentary government under imperial rule. Before Tokugawa Ieyasu was installed as shogun in Edo, the right to establish a bakufu had only been granted to two other heads of military houses: Minamoto Yoritomo and Ashikaga Takauji. But those two family names have not been used to name historical periods. The Minamoto grip on power in Kamakura waned quickly after Yoritomo's son succeeded him; and, though Takauji and his descendants kept the title of Shogun from 1338 until the 1570s, they only ever had limited control over the affairs of state: their period of incumbency included the war torn *sengoku* century.[34] In contrast, the Tokugawa bakufu and its administration held the reigns of power through fifteen generations; until what might be called, in a history yet to be written, their betrayal and sudden downfall during a succession dispute.

Because it names directly where central power lay – if not with the Tokugawa shogun himself, then with persons who served in the bakufu administration or were members of the extended Tokugawa family – the Tokugawa appellation will be used in this work. The word *bakuhan* is not commonly used to label the period, even though it suggests the balances and contingencies of a ruling structure that was shared between various organs of Tokugawa authority and the daimyos governing more than two hundred separate domains.[35] Neither the name of the predominant lineage, nor that of the city where the shogun's castle was situated, gives any hint of that crucial feature of Tokugawa rule.

The name of Edo, as Carol Gluck recently pointed out in her essay, "The Invention of Edo", is now used to evoke innumerable nostalgic images of a timeless

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[34] Conflict over the imperial succession, between the Northern and Southern courts, continued from the 1330s until the 1390's. The resultant animosities and other rivalries between regional overlords continued to intensify, culminating in the Onin Wars of 1467-77. By then, the organs of central administration had disintegrated. 1482 is the date commonly associated with the start of the *sengoku jidai* (period of countries at war).

[35] Ravina suggests the term "compound state", arguing that the term *bakuhan* is merely an invention of modern historians. (See his *Land and Lordship*, pages 27-28.) It seems to me to be a very useful invention, and has the advantage of being bilingual!

and essential Japanese culture.[36] The title of Gluck's essay itself acts as a deterrent to the use any more of such terms as "Edo period", and some of its contents seem to imply that such studies as the one I am engaged in are cock-eyed tricks with mirrors. The historiography of all but a privileged few, who are apparently in possession of context- and theory-free viewpoints, is deemed to be invented, or imagined. While claiming the right to be nostalgic, and owning the intention of trying to be inventive and imaginative, I want to claim even more - if not just for myself, for some older Japanese scholars I admire and respect.[37] I *can* avoid deliberately misrepresenting or otherwise distorting the texts and other evidence that are my inspiration; but no-one can ever write anything in a cultural, linguistic and ideological vacuum, and few translations of *kanbun*, *sōrōbun* and other eighteenth century languages are perfect, least of all those attempted on the edge of the scholarly world. Having said that, I recognise and share the concern Gluck infers, that some contemporary writing about the Tokugawa period implies, or even argues, that Edo was an already-there, modern capital-in-waiting, with the apparatus of a bureaucracy and nascent central state; and crowds of consuming residents and tourists competing to patronize businesses in already thriving commercial and entertainment sectors.

These images are all compatible with various national narratives. They can be employed in the telling, for example, of the Japanese as a uniquely created people, possessing a singular culture and exclusive tastes and traits; or of a city, once pre-modern castle town, then modern national capital, and now one single, gigantic post-modern network, virtually real but with origins in a state whose genesis is mysteriously indeterminate, lost in the cosmos somewhere near the sun. The partially centralized form of government and the urban culture of Edo are elements that are also suggested by the pre-modern label. It is not intended that this study engage with any of these narratives: its purpose is neither to reinforce nor refute them.

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[36] In Stephen Vlastos (ed.), *Mirror of Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
[37] Some of the targets of her expolstulations are scholars whose contribution to historical scholarship on the eighteenth century I regard as foundational, so perhaps it should suffice to keep their company!

It is inevitable, though, that the time and place, the events and persons that are my subject matter are located also within those narratives: in a Japan which was not yet modern, not yet emerged as a nation state, not yet restored to its originative, unified sacred imperial state, and not yet fully apprised of the virtue of unfettered commercial and financial marketing. The purpose of my work, however, is not to illuminate nascent traces of modernity among the feudal elements in the Tsugaru domain in general, or in the reform program and thinking of Nyūi Mitsugi in particular. Nor is it to identify prescient moves toward a unified national consciousness, or signs of the emergence of manufacturing industry, or class consciousness, or a market economy. The pursuit of such origins implies inappropriate states of incompleteness.

The events of 1866-88 in Japan were not pre-ordained by the gods of the market or liberal democracy or any other modernist myth. Where the so-called restoration is concerned, it is clear that the currencies of power minted in the institutions and discursive spaces of the shogunal capital, and of Tsugaru and other cities and domains throughout Japan, were circulated back and forth and roundabout in myriad ways and directions for a very long time before the overthrow of the shogunate was even thinkable, let alone achievable. At a number of points during that time, the evolution of Japan's modernity could have taken a turn towards gentler, now forgotten, nascent possibilities. This view is of course as transient and of its time as all the others in history.[38]

It is always a temptation to nestle historical studies of out-of-the-way places comfortably within all-embracing national meta-narratives. But, if recourse to telling stories of the transforming imperatives of technological progress, national identity, and capitalist expansion were resisted, then the eighteenth century could be reconsidered: not as a time when the bakufu in Edo was still failing to unify the polity, or when it had not yet been superseded by a more enlightened, progressive and modernist regime; but as a time when it was quite

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[38] Tsugaru's considerable miliary force and weaponry, for example, prepared for expeditions to Ezo and for Russian-repelling, would have been at the disposal of the Northern Alliance had just one courier lost his footing on a pass between Kyoto and Hirosaki, and relations between the Alliance and the southwestern domains could easily have turned out differently. See Harold Bolitho, "The Echigo War, 1868", *Monumenta Nipponica*, XXXIV:3, 1979, pages 259-77.

rational for administration to be fragmented and localities such as Tsugaru largely self-governing. It could be imagined, too, as a time when individuals and groups struggled, as people everywhere have always done, to survive in the place where they found themselves; and to give their lives what meaning they could in terms of the values and ideals espoused by the communities they were part of - whether real or imagined. By examining the traces left by particular minds and institutions, which worked for a short time in a single location, we might distinguish some elements particular to that time and place, but also others that signal a wider context - in both chronological and spatial terms. That is inevitable, but the wider context of the central narratives is not necessarily the place to start.

In the out-of-the-way place of Tsugaru, we will certainly find evidence of the ideological fragmentation that seems to have characterized intellectual life at the time, without causing significant political unrest. We see the effects, too, of the enormous variations amongst the 250 or so separate political and administrative units of Tokugawa Japan: in land area, population numbers, demographic characteristics, climate, topography, agricultural productivity, natural resources, industrial output, ideology, religious beliefs and practices, and so on. The demands on administrators, and the policies they came up with, were correspondingly various, resulting in markedly different social and economic relations from domain to domain. These differences were for a long time accommodated within the structures set up by the Tokugawa centre.

There existed at the same time a shared universe of ideas that shaped the ways in which both domain and bakufu administrators conceived of the world, the problems they confronted, and the parameters within which they had to structure their solutions. What interests me is the interplay between the powers of the bakufu, the autonomy and particularities of a domain, and the more free-flowing, borderless world of ideas; for ideas reached beyond Edo, and the boundaries of Japan, and the eighteenth century. The projection of political, ideological and military power by the Tokugawa regime at the centre, as well as the more and less autonomous fields of local power in Tsugaru, are significant features of the eighteenth-century terrain that I wish to explore.

(iv) The waxing, waning and implosion of the Tokugawa regime

As well as possessing an air of incompleteness, histories of the Tokugawa period often portray a series of increasingly serious crises and disasters, which less and less competent administrations met with more and more inadequate policies and reforms. This pattern could be depicted as an uneven sine curve, drawn through time with an overall downward trend. Crises occur at the minimum points and recovery is achieved at the maxima. Among the best-known points along this particular narrative path are three famines and three bakufu reform programs. They are the Kyōhō famine (1732-33) and the Kyōhō Reforms of Tokugawa Yoshimune (1721-28); the Tenmei Famines (1782-87) followed by the Kansei Reforms (1789-99) of Matsudaira Sadanobu; the Tenpō famines (1833-37), and the Tenpō Reforms of Mizuno Tadakuni (1830-44).[39]

The downward trend is pretty steep after that, because the positive outcomes of the Tenpō reforms were mitigated by vacillating leadership in Edo under successive shoguns. This exacerbated factional strife among bakufu ministers over dealings with foreigners and defence of the coastline. General popular unrest ensued. Finally, the more experienced and capable Tokugawa Keiki was appointed shogun, but too late to prevent the bakufu's overthrow. Credited with hastening the collapse are the strident proto-nationalist ideologies of some *kokugaku*, or nativist, scholars; rapidly expanding rates of popular participation in learning, commerce and travel; and the impression, gained from the appearance of foreign ships and guns in her ports, that Japan had been permitted to become technologically backward compared with Americans and Europeans.

My chief concern about this narrative pattern is the way in which it invites teleological interpretations of evidence from the entire pre-modern period. The overall scheme of decline is enlisted to explain events that occurred, and policies enacted in response to them, up to a century before what was the quite rapid disintegration of a relatively stable structure of government. Whether it is informed by a Marxist, Hegelian, liberal economist, or some other determinist metanarrative, the conviction that the political system was bound to collapse is

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[39] Conrad Totman calls this the 'Heyday of the Kyōhō reform', in *Early Modern Japan* on page 296.

not an illuminating one.[40] With regard to reform programs in particular, it tends to turn histories into the stories of reactionary officials making futile efforts to prop up archaic administrative and legal structures.

(v) The shape of reforms

Reforms were instituted throughout the Tokugawa centuries in domains all over Japan, often under very different circumstances and in a variety of ways. These discrete events tend to disappear in the general narrative, or else are lumped together with the ups and downs of the centre. Domain level reforms are often portrayed as either precursors or imitators of those introduced in Edo. In the newly-established capital and domains alike, the early decades of the seventeenth century were taken up with innovation and reorganisation on a scale that probably outdid most of the reform programs subsequently labelled as such.

This was a vital period in the formation of stable, durable polities based on adequate economic resources. Daimyos transferred to new fiefs, and those who had come only recently to power, like Tsugaru Tamenobu, had to work particularly hard to construct institutions that would unite under their authority the local *bushi*, farmers and merchants. Land surveys were undertaken and large-scale *shinden kaihatsu* (新田開発) programs carried out, literally opening up new fields for rice production. In some cases these fields were assigned to retainers for development as income-bearing fiefs called *jikata chigyō* (地方知行). In others, local village farmers formed units from which the domain directly extracted tax payments in kind. Systems were devised for the assessment and collection of tax rice. Transport infrastructure was put in place to expedite its journey to the markets of Kyoto, Edo and Osaka.

Adjustments were made to the existing fiefs of many retainers. This process was to be repeated many times in subsequent reforms. The overall tendency was for older investitures, where retainers managed established land holdings independently and exacted their own taxes, were gradually converted to

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[40] More sanguine studies of Tokugawa bakufu management do exist. Patricia Sippel's unpublished thesis, *Financing the Long Peace*, is an example. Sippel examines bakufu financial policis over an extended period, and shows that there was not a pattern of uninterrupted fiscal decline.

stipendiary fiefs. That is retainers who held *jikata chigyō* (landed fiefs) were transferred to *kuramai* or *kirimai* (蔵米/切米), or treasury rice stipends instead. The stipends would then be paid from central treasuries and granaries, in grain or cash, or both. Many of the retainers who were allotted stipends were required to abandon their warrior personas and take up administrative tasks commensurate with their ranks. Furthermore, they were obliged to leave the land and reside permanently in castle towns or other urban centres.

All these changes over the first half-century or so were accommodated with varying degrees of compliance. Some retainers resisted or deserted, or formed factions and later took sides in succession disputes among their daimyo's descendants. Quarrels over succession during the 1650s and 60s, for example, resulted in the formation of separate branch houses in the Tohoku domains of Tsugaru, Sendai and Nanbu. Many new polities were also confronted with natural disasters at this early stage. Yoshinaga points out that Aizu-Wakamatsu, for example, was already facing shortages of seed rice, deserted villages and uncultivated rice paddies in the wake of a famine very early in the 1600s.[41]

As well as having to cope with sudden, unpredicted disasters, which continued to occur, from the last decades of the seventeenth century onwards many domain treasuries experienced intermittent cash flow problems caused by the growth of commercial activity. They made efforts to strictly control or even block market expansion into their domains. Depending on the degree to which commercial commodity production was developed, and to what extent trade had stimulated the growth of a monetised sector in their domestic economies, some domains were able to stimulate that production and monetisation further, often in tandem with domain monopsonies or monopolies on specified commodities. Aizu saw one of the first monopolies in Tohoku when the government took control of lacquer sales.[42] Because the development of commodity trade was slowed by a general shortage of cash money, domains would issue separate currencies for

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[41] Yoshinaga Akira, "Tōhoku shohan ni okeru hansei kaikaku no tenkai", *Aichi kyōiku daigaku kenkyū hōkoku*, Vol 26, 1977, page 232.
[42] Ibid. page 230.

domestic use at the same time as encouraging the production of goods for export. These were two commonly adopted reform measures.

Leadership was vital to the successful implementation of any reform program, and it is instructive to note that the same configurations of authority led reforms at both bakufu and domain levels. In the early decades, setting up the institutions and offices of domain government was the responsibility of the daimyos themselves; and in Edo it was the new shogun and his successor who established the administrative and legal structure there. Well before the shogun Yoshimune implemented his Kyōhō reforms, able daimyos in Hirosaki, Nanbu and Hachinohe were making vigorous efforts to consolidate the bureaucratic and economic administration of their domains.

When ruling dynasties faded, or a daimyo or shogun was very young, elders and other senior retainers took the key roles in drawing up and implementing reforms. This sometimes led to conflict when factional rivalries and divisions within governing elites would come into play to the detriment of the reform and the polity. During the crisis period now called *bakumatsu* (literally, the end of the bakufu), it was just such dissension that caused delays in central decision-making and left the way open for ambitious younger *bushi* from outside to take control. During the last eight years of shogunal government, the name of the reign period was changed four times, a clear sign that the officials in charge of the calendar at least had been willing reform for some time.

Altogether, some 164 different reform programs are listed in *Kokushi Daijiten* as having been undertaken in one domain or another during the Tokugawa period. For the 150 years before the Hōreki period, just fifty-one reforms are recorded, while eighty-seven are mentioned for the following 100 years.[43] It is clear that the frequency with which reforms were undertaken increased markedly over the entire period - and, judging from the number of times the word *kaikaku*

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[43] Yoshinaga Akira, "Hansei kaikaku" (domain government reforms) entry in the *Kokushi Daijiten,* and a short comparative essay, "Tōhoku shohan ni okeru hansei kaikaku no tenkai", *Aichi kyōiku daigaku kenkyū hōkoku,* Vol 26, 1977, pages 220-224.

(改革), meaning reform, appears in press headlines today, the trend has continued since.

III Subjects and objects

Being self-consciously engaged in history as a creative industry while at the same time necessarily living in my own unique segment of history, whose histories are drawn from the entire accumulation of past events up until the moment of telling, does result, as I mentioned at the start of this introduction, in a certain degree of discomfort. Reading, writing, travelling, and living through time change a person; change a mind. If you, the reader, find inconsistencies in this work that could be because its author has changed, from moment to moment, experience to experience, place to place, and, distressingly, computer to computer. The following paragraphs comprise a discussion of matters that were on my mind at the time when this study was nearing completion: it represents, as well as I can make it do, the points of view that shaped my enquiry and my writing.

(i) Getting a grip on things

As the author of a piece of historical writing, itself an object in more ways than one, I feel obliged to acknowledge the independent existence of things-in-themselves in the world: rice fields, wooden images of arhats, the skulls of famine victims rolling about on the ground. These are real, tangible, things. I believe my corporeal self to be one too, though one that is aware of only an exceedingly small portion of all the others around me. My experience of living in the world, observing and interacting with old things and new, watching with my own eyes the processes of birth, decay and death, convinces me that other people in the past have had lives and experiences that are in some ways commensurable with mine. To some degree, given their traces, I can imagine, or apprehend fragments of experience that might be similar to theirs.

My mind is at times capable of producing thoughts as a result of that imaginative exercise. The nature of these thoughts as things is more of a puzzle, but I represent them from time to time by typing words on a keyboard attached to a computer which projects those words on a screen. All those are clearly

things-in-themselves: the words, the keyboard, the computer, the screen and my fingers doing the typing. A short distance from my computer is a printer, which, on a good day, will transfer my words to paper, thus producing a palpable text. And, this text is the means by which the representations of my thoughts will be communicated to you, a reading subject.

The words I choose to type, in this unremittingly logocentric exercise, are not necessarily the words of the thoughts themselves; and, they are at the same time both mine and not mine. They come to me from a shared stock, but I use them in my own way. As readers read, they will not necessarily experience thoughts that are the same as mine ever were, either originally or as I reshaped them for typing. That is an inevitable condition of the project of writing for readers, which is what I believe history writing to be. At the same time, since my intention is to communicate a rather large number of connected thoughts, which I have been putting together over the past several years, I take care to use vocabulary and expressions which I believe not to be peculiar to my own understanding and usage, but capable of conveying my thoughts to others who read and write and think. That is because I consider myself to be a participant in a discussion, and I therefore want to represent my thoughts and intuitions as accurately as possible so that my readers' thoughts will connect with those, and not with others as a result of miss-representation due to ill-chosen words.

Like Naoki Sakai, I sometimes experience difficulty connecting myself with the words I typed a moment ago - or yesterday, or last year.[44] What he calls this "rupture, distance, and delay" can be usefully dealt with by a suspension of belief in a clearly delineated, discernible and constant sovereign "I" in any location at all. It must, I feel sure, be the case that this unstable set of relations between my idea of myself, my thoughts, the "I" doing the writing, and the words I use and the text the printer will produce, is recognizable to a great many of my readers. That, too, seems to me to be an inescapable condition of this kind of task. It is exacerbated by the use of the technologies that have intruded upon our lives, and

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[44] Naoki Sakai, *Voices of the Past*, pages 1-2. I have had to consider Sakai's monograph particularly carefully, since it deals with the texts and voices and languages of eighteenth century Japan.

I look with some wistfulness upon such remnants of the world we have lost as Nyūi Mitsugi's fluid characters, that I imagine being brushed onto handmade pages, while the faintly astringent scent of *sumi* and damp *tatami* filled the air.

(iii) The subject, the facts, the cook and the menu

Mitsugi is both the writing subject of the texts in the *Complete Works*, and the subject represented in others that portray him and his agency during the reform period. He is also the object of derision, admiration and anger expressed in those texts. And, he is, along with the Tsugaru domain, an object of my enquiry. We are both situated in Carr's metaphorical human procession: and I, trudging along in my part of it, was arrested by imagined glimpses of Mitsugi in his. They were, of course, glimpses prompted by texts; for, as a deconstructionist might observe, there is nothing other than text for us to go by.

The iterability of written texts is something for which most of us engaged in history are grateful. In Mitsugi's case, the result has been the survival of enough written material, originating with him and his contemporaries, for a set of quite clear images to coalesce. They do not necessarily aggregate to make a coherent, cohesive whole; nor are they expected to. The lives, thoughts, actions and events these texts were once part of are long gone, and with them also such coherence and cohesion as there might once have been. They are, on the other hand, consistent enough in places to allow a degree of imaginative reconstruction: not of the past as it really was, which is really and truly gone; but of conceptual connections, of causes and effects, or problems and solutions.

The availability of the *Complete Works of Nyūi Mitsugi*, as well as a number of other contemporary official and private documents, has offered a rare opportunity. Fragments of institutional and private commentary entered in diaries and records while Mitsugi held office in the domain can be read alongside a substantial collection of his own writings. What I set out to do, then, is to take that slice of time in the Hōreki period and examine records that were related to the reform program and the famine in the light of the region's history, and then consider some of the intellectual preoccupations of the key reforming protagonist

as they are represented in his written works. It is not intended as a neatly consistent "life and times" project, or even as a "thought and action" or "principle and practice" study: it is merely a collection of commentary on a set of contemporaneous traces, and later representations, organised around the experience of famine in Tsugaru, the domain's Hōreki reform experience, and the historical figure of Nyūi Mitsugi.[45]

Mitsugi's writings do not often indicate who he thought his readers might be, and not knowing is at once a liberation and an imposition. We are free to imagine who his interlocutors were, but we must identify them as people whose utterances might share discursive spaces with the meanings we glean from his writings. This is a particularly interesting exercise, since his writings are, and would have been then, structurally legible to different groups of readers because he wrote in different languages and sets of symbols. Some texts were written, and have been transcribed, in Chinese, some in *sōrōbun* (Japanese formal documentary style), and others in narrative pre-modern Japanese; yet others are expressed in poetic, or mathematical language. For each of them there are, of course, cohorts of other contemporary texts, which could be employed in the construction of a variety of discursive spaces. The writings left by Mitsugi are so various, though, that this task is beyond me. Instead, I hope that by presenting a close reading of some texts, and suggesting a possible set of interlocutors, to help position Mitsugi in his time and place, as well as conveying something of the range of his terms of reference and modes of thought.

From the myriad offerings on the slab of the past, then, I have chosen texts, not facts, and mostly from various written sub-species. To add some piquancy, a small quantity of scenic, artistic and architectural flavour has been added. What I have concocted will be served in the following order.

There are four separate, but interrelated courses in the chapters to follow. The first involves a discussion, in chapter one, of the kinds of texts that were

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[45] Studies that I have found particularly congenial and helpful as models in various ways include: Herman Ooms' *Charismatic Bureaucrat*; Kate Wildman Nakai's *Shogunal Politics*; Tetsuo Najita's *Visions of Virtue in Tokugawa Japan*; and Victor Koschman's *Mito Ideology*.

available for my study, the ways in which they can help interpret the processes of famine and reform, and how they relate to the person of Mitsugi, his career, and some of his intellectual preoccupations. A chronological sketch of his life is put together from textual sources collected in one published series of transcribed contemporary materials.[46] The second course, served as the second chapter, comprises a set of historical notes on the development of various fields in which power was structured in Tsugaru, to suggest the ways in which multiple forces had the potential to combine and counter Mitsugi's attempts to bring about change.

The implementation and undoing of the Hōreki reform program is the focus of the third chapter, which is the first part of the rather bulky third course. Mitsugi's reforms were conceived in two phases, one before and the other after the Hōreki 5 harvest failure. The unravelling of the reforms follows very soon after the implementation of the second phase. Then, we turn to the experience of famine, and the impact of Mitsugi's reform policies on the consequences of the Hōreki 5 harvest failure in Tsugaru. The basic idea around which I construct my argument is, in broad terms, that Mitsugi's capacity to act as an agent of radical reform in the Tsugaru domain was both created and constrained within a dynamic complex of interwoven fields of power and interest. The forces forming that complex were sufficiently disrupted by the threats of financial collapse, and then famine, to accommodate the initial phases of the Hōreki reforms, but later re-aligned to eliminate both Mitsugi and the thrust of his policies, with tragic long-term consequences for the people of Tsugaru.

The fifth and sixth chapters, presented as the fourth course, are devoted to tracing the way in which Mitsugi's writings depict a strong and practical vocational consciousness, as well as the capacity to engage in speculative thought. Consistent with the notions expressed about the proper role of the retainer-official are texts that reflect hands-on engagement with the practicalities of administrative responsibility, land management, and farming. Then there are those that present a set of convictions about the workings of the universe or

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[46] The series is *Michinoku sōsho*, edited by the Aomori ken bunkazai hogo kyōkai.

some imaginative allegorical fiction. The positions taken in his works are grounded in a very particular cosmology derived from classical Chinese sources.

The concluding teas and fruits contain reflections on such themes as margins and peripheries, markets, and virtuous rule. It is intended that they will help in the digestion of what has come before by suggesting how my subject matter does, or does not, lend itself to some of the recurring interpretive schemes in Tokugawa history.

Many of the glimpses of Mitsugi's life and career evoked by contemporary texts, and some elements in his own writing, locate him firmly in the bureaucracy of a remote provincial domain under bakufu authority in the eighteenth-century Japan of familiar narratives. There are enough anomalies, though, to make his life, thought and practice provocative objects of enquiry: for famine remains to this day one of the most persistent yet preventable causes of human suffering and untimely death.



Chapter One

Tracing Nyūi Mitsugi

> His cheekbones were high and sharp, as if pared with a knife; and his eyebrows were so bushy and long they grew all the way over to his temples. His eyes would pierce people right through. He was tall and strong. Once, when he was joking around with some people, he hung a sixteen-*kan* weight on his ear and strolled about with it dangling there, just the same as ever, without changing the way he walked at all. He also had incredibly sharp teeth, and would crunch up and eat the seeds of *akebi* and other stone fruit.
>
> Kudō Kieimon.[47]

Scholars and thinkers often leave texts as traces, and Mitsugi was no exception. Active political and social reformers tend to write less, and their policies and activities are more often recorded and commented upon by others; who can be neutral about change, its beneficiaries, or its unhappy targets. Mitsugi and the Hōreki reforms generated all three types of response. The victims of famine, meanwhile, usually leave little other than bodily remains, though survivors sometimes record their memories and paint their nightmares for posterity. All these kinds of traces have accumulated and survived over several centuries from the peripheral domain of Tsugaru, where the thinking, learning, reforming and starving occurred that are the subjects of this study.

Through the mediation of the Nyūi Mitsugi Appreciation Society, we have in the *Complete Works*, some indication of the kinds of subjects that preoccupied Mitsugi at one time or another. The sustained efforts of several generations of historically conscious citizens in Aomori prefecture have made other texts available, which contain threads we can use in creating a narrative outline of Mitsugi's life as it was recorded by known, and unknown, third persons.

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[47] *Kudō Kiemon hikki*, TKD, pages 237-38. One *kan* (貫) weighs 3.75 kilograms.



Plate 7: Portrait of Nyūi Mitsugi
Courtesy of the Hirosaki Municipal Museum

These texts also enable us to imagine the environments in which he lived and worked: from the climate and geography, to political processes, economic activity and social life. Such a range of textual material both stimulates and disciplines the historical imagination, evoking images, setting parameters and posing unanswerable questions. There are collections of extracts from a range of diaries, household records and personal memoirs, as well as the official records kept by the domain, in Hirosaki and at the daimyo's Edo residence. Since these eighteenth century texts have been transcribed, edited and reproduced over the last century, there is now a small corpus of historical studies that focus on one or more aspects of Mitsugi's writing or his reforms.

I Imagining the man

The fragmentary depictions of Mitsugi's person on pages 45 and 46, one verbal and one visual, suggest that he was probably regarded as more than slightly eccentric by some of his contemporaries. The original brush portrait hangs in the local history section of the Hirosaki Municipal Museum, located in the castle grounds. The distinctive eyebrows are featured, but, alas, there is no sign of an ear ornament! The comment inscribed above the portrait, though, appears to have been composed and written by its subject, providing a third glimpse of a personality that is lost to us.[48]

> What is it that a flock of crows will attack? An owl.
> Who is it that the common crowd will laugh at? Mitsugi.
> Now that I am decrepit and foolish, the old saying that being old is like a second childhood is some consolation. How true it is! We don't look at all like children, but our words and actions are the same. That is why the *Liji* teaches that old people and those who are in mourning should never be punished when they do something wrong. Wise men, though, can afford to be kind-hearted about failings that are cruelly mocked by the common crowd.
> Some time ago, a friend of mine painted this portrait, and his comment on the finished work was: "It's not a unicorn; and it's not a phoenix. It's a stray dog!" At least stray dogs have learned enough about the world to bark at thieves!
> I am not living, but neither am I dead; just a babe in the womb.

[48] A reproduction of the text can be found on the page before the beginning of Nyūi Tatsuo's introductory comments at the beginning of Volume One of the *Complete Works*.

The wry, self-mocking tone of this inscription is tinged with a hint of the indefatigability of the person evoked in the poem written by Tsugaru's daimyo in Hōreki 6. *See page 61.* In the image of a baby awaiting birth, Mitsugi adds a sanguine, or at least slightly defiant, note to counter his earlier depiction of what it was like to be old. If he had actually been as strong as Kieimon made him, he must have been aware of his physical decline, though he would have been saved from the preoccupations that were to develop in later centuries with what we now refer to as "the body".

Yet another picture evokes one more moment in Mitsugi's life as it is recorded in the *Kudō Kieimon hikki*. It depicts a rice crop ripening along the narrow valley floor at Kawaratai. *See Plate 6, on page 5.* Like many other landscapes that have undergone significant change over time, this one can only be read for a historical meaning with reference to another, written, text:

> Mitsugi made for himself a very careful examination of the slopes on the mountains around the village, and cut a channel through one of them so that water flowed through to several villages. The villages then established several hectares of their own fields, and for the first time they were able to eat rice they had grown themselves.[49]

The people in those villages would previously have subsisted on such staples as barley, millet varieties and soybeans.

Despite these glimpses, Nyūi Mitsugi the man remains in large part an enigma. As Kojima has pointed out, very little is known about his life.[50] The *Complete Works*, also, contain almost no writing of an autobiographical nature. The documented involvement of a Nyūi descendant in the 1930's Kawaratai memorial stone and *Complete Works* projects, combined with the fact that members of the family have had Mitsugi's gravestone removed from the temple in which it was originally located and transported away from Hirosaki, might

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[49] *Kudō Kieimon hikki*, in TKD, pages 237-38.

[50] Kojima Yasunori,"The Thought of Nyūi Mitsugi - Practicality and Reform in Tsugaru Domain", *Asian Cultural Studies*, 19, March 1993, pages 39-51, page 35.

indicate that family members might still have some personal papers in their private possession.[51]

II Traces of the mind

(i) The Complete works of Nyūi Mitsugi

At the Museum, displayed in the local history cabinet along with the portrait are several volumes of Shigaku yōben (*A primer for aspiring scholars*), said to have been written by Mitsugi himself.[52] Their presence behind the glass offers some comfort to the viewer seeking material evidence of Mitsugi's onetime existence as a man who generated meaningful texts.

Some of the other manuscripts used for the transcriptions that comprise the *Complete Works*, however, are copies made by Mitsugi's students and descendants. Among the nine works in Volume Four, for example, is *Chōkenjutsu saimoku zukai* (An illustrated guide to surveying methods), which originally comprised three *satsu*, or small bound volumes. The first and third of these were transcribed from texts thought to have been copied by Nyūi Tokumi in the early nineteenth century, since the writing looks like his; while the second was based on a text copied by Nyūi Tatsuo in Meiji 36 (1903), using a copy from someone else's library and fragments from a much older version.

On the other hand, the transcription of *Shogaku sanpō* (Beginning arithmetic) is from a poorly preserved original thought to have been written in 1781 by Mitsugi for his pupils in Kawaratai. It contains his name and the address where he lived in Mizoguchi after his release from banishment. "Lives of eminent Tsugaru retainers" and parts of "A collection of poems to enjoy" were also transcribed from texts believed to have been in Mitsugi's hand.[53]

Unfortunately, only few of the manuscripts, either original or copied, reveal the dates of their composition. Thus it is difficult, should one desire to do so, for a researcher to pinpoint with any certainty precisely when Mitsugi

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[51] Personal communication from temple staff.
[52] For a list of contents of the *Complete Works*, please refer to Appendix One.
[53] NMZ 4, Explanatory notes.

might have formed the opinions or been struck by the ideas that are recorded in his works. Clearly, though, the very iterability and re-iterability of these texts is the inherent property that has brought them to us; and one that enables them to be read again and again, and in many ways. One kind of limit to the possibilities of interpreting any one of the *Works* is the range and nature of the contents of all four volumes. A summary follows in the next section.

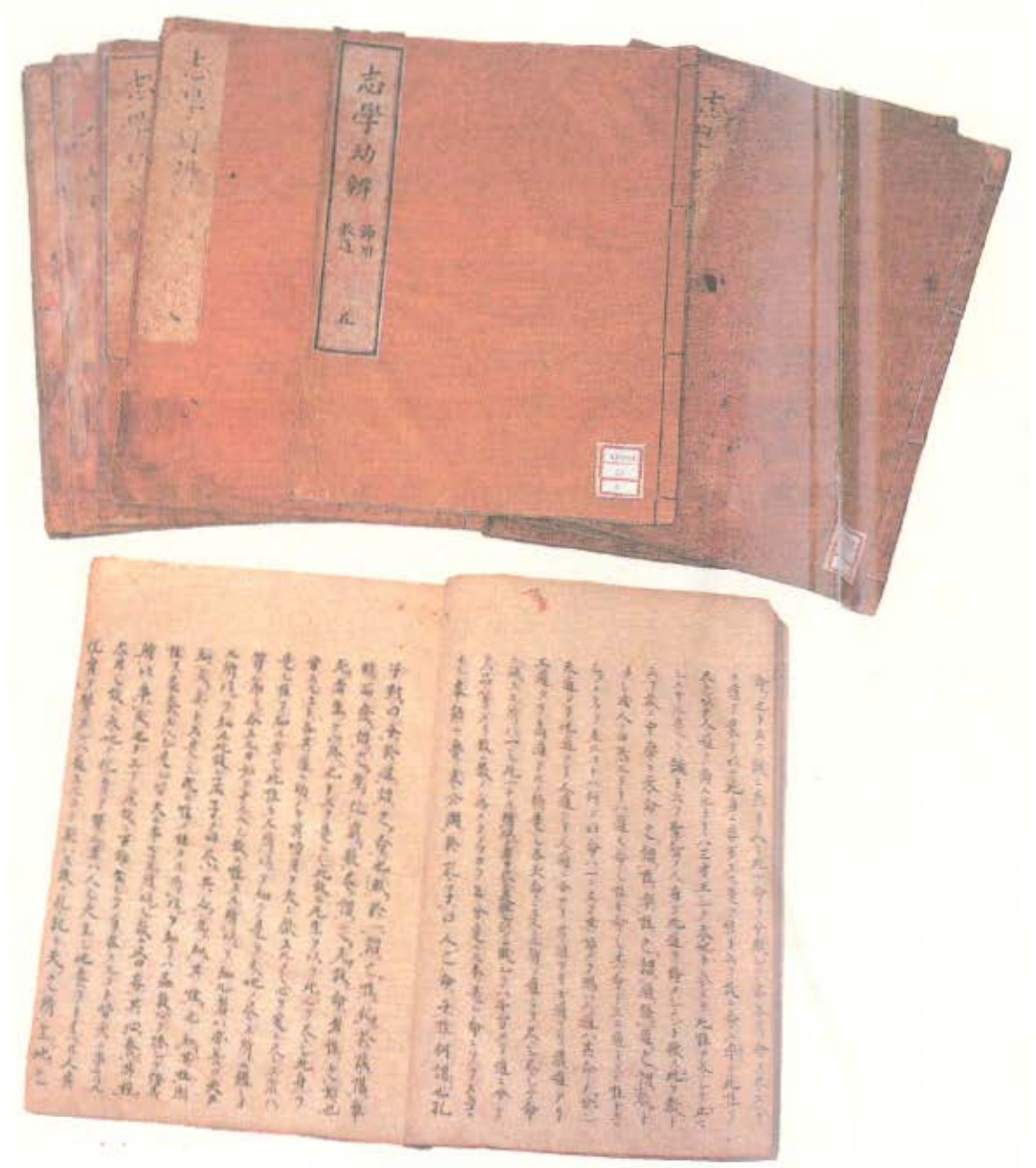

Plate 10: Several *satsu* of the original Shigaku yōben
Courtesy of the Hirosaki Municipal Museum

(ii) Leafing through the pages

Over forty separate works are contained in the four volumes: the longest takes 407 pages in printed transcription (with 520 characters to a page), while the shortest ones take less than ten. Their arrangement seems vaguely thematic, and the idea of introducing them in such categories such as practical politics, cosmology, literature, thought, history, mathematics and so on has some appeal until the attempt is made. Problems arise: Whose thought? Whose practice? Whose cosmology? Whose real world? All those subject-object issues come to the fore. The discussion that follows, therefore, covers works used in the later chapters of this study as well as some others that attest to the range of Mitsugi's output. A browse through these volumes is an excursion through a surprising variety of fields of engagement. They were not necessarily as disconnected from each other in the mind we are attributing to our subject-author as they are in ours. *See Appendix One for complete list of contents.*

It is no coincidence that the most substantial piece by far was written when Mitsugi was under house arrest after the failure of the Hōreki reform program; and it is no surprise, either, that it contains some very partial and strong statements about the principles of good government. It is called, rather deceptively, Shigaku yōben (A primer for aspiring scholars) and is dated Hōreki 13 (1764). Most of the original, which comprises ten *maki* (scrolls, or chapters) written on Mino paper, is thought to be in Mitsugi's own hand. The ten parts contain a total of twenty-nine separate sections on such themes as: ruler and minister, loyalty and filial piety, public and private, rites and music. The language could be described as clear, expository Japanese. Proper nouns are set off in the original by dashes, and Mitsugi also provided *furigana* (pronunciation written in *kana*) for unusual character readings, though the concepts and the tone of the discussion are by no means elementary.

A number of other works are related to matters of government, but are written from a very different standpoint. They all take as an authoritative model the *Zhouli*. Three that appear at the beginning of the second volume are *Shūrei tsūyō* (Applying the *Zhouli*), *Keikoku doryō* (Statistics for governing the

land), and *Doryō bunsū* (Measurements and apportionment). The last is a longer, applied version of the second, written in Japanese instead of classical Chinese.

The Zhou model is also evoked in several works in the third volume. Their subjects include: levying cartage labour in post stations, and calculations for allotting fiefs, tax exactions and stipends; methods by which a ruler can apportion power and emoluments to people of differing status; and properly positioning retainers of various ranks and the rest of the people in relation to the daimyo so that greed and dishonesty will not destroy the polity.

These themes are perhaps given the fullest treatment in two works in Volume Two, called *Ōbunshi* (A record of appropriate portions), which are also heavily informed by the numerical orders of the *Ijing*. The first is written in classical Chinese, and is a long essay about ideal ways of dividing the territory and resources of a polity amongst its people, according to their ranks and occupations. The whole exercise is based on the principles set out in the *Zhouli*. After a theoretical introduction, Mitsugi illustrates his points in a diagram. It has a nine-*ri* square area at the centre, to represent the capital and its surrounds; then a fifty-*ri* square around that, and finally, an outer one hundred-*ri* square. He then works through a number of sample calculations for dividing up the 10,000 square *ri* of land proportionally between the nine ranks, starting with dukes, earls and counts, and taking into account variations in land type - flat areas, hills and valleys. The shorter version follows, written in simple Japanese and much less technical: it explains ebbs and flows in personal and government wealth in terms of the principles of yin and yang.

Two chapters that take inspiration from the *Zhouli* to address conditions in a Tokugawa period domain are *Setsuyōsoku* (Economising on the use of resources), in which Mitsugi attempts to calculate living allowances for a ruler and four different occupational classes, and *Kokka zaisei* (Managing a country's wealth), where he discusses ways of circulating wealth so as to avoid an extreme gap widening between rich and poor. Another two pieces in the same volume also deal with the circulation of goods and wealth: both are called *Shōka ridō* (The merchant's way of profit). The longer, more detailed version

was written in 1789, just three years before Mitsugi died. In it he posits an ideal social world where those who govern follow the Way of Heaven and find the middle way: there are therefore no shortages or surpluses to cause dissension and disorder.

In relation to political administration, Mitsugi also wrote some explorations of aspects of the *Yijing*, mostly concerned with the kinds of numerical schemes linked with principles he found in the *Zhouli*. His careful explication of Zhou Dun Yi's cosmological scheme, however, is both accessible and surprisingly appreciative, since he was not at all enamoured of the kind of Sung Confucian worldview with which Zhou is now associated. The vocabulary, explanations and diagrams are based on the *Yijing*, but the argument is straightforward, closely following Zhou. In brief, (and with apologies to Zhou) the *taikyoku* (great ultimate) is the name given to the great formlessness whose state was one of constant movement, and which, at the extremes of its agitation and quietude formed the *yō* (yang) and the *in* (yin), which in turn from their myriad combinations formed the five *gyō* (elements), which were endowed with matter. Mitsugi's essay reads as a clear and evocative treatment of what is now rather recherché subject matter, but which in his time was a major source of ideas about many forms of order: cosmic, aesthetic, political and social, to mention several that Mitsugi explored.

In a completely different vein are the poems, and imaginative prose works. There are three hundred poems, gathered under the title, *Karaku eikashū* (A collection of poems to enjoy). The two prose works are *Nanashi sato* (Village with no name) and *Miyama Sōji* (The Zhuangzi of Miyama). Both have a rather unearthly tone with Buddhist echoes: *Miyama Sōji*, the much longer of the two, becomes quite mystical in parts. In keeping with the Daoist reference, this narrative is built around the experience of a man who retires to a cave deep in the mountains, far away from the society and governments of men. Each chapter develops around a question asked by the ghostly human visitor who drops in regularly and elicits lively discursive responses of the hermit. The fifth, for example, comprises an argument over the virtue in some

different types of social attitudes and personal convictions of sentient beings, in the form of a discussion about insects.

Insects, Sōji declares, are of five kinds: those that are naked and stay on the ground, being grubs and worms; those that have scales and like water; those with armour, that gather in caves; those with hair, that crawl in trees; and those whose wings enable them to soar through the air. The great general of the last group is the phoenix. Entomological quibbles aside, in 1762 Mitsugi had already written an allegorical story in the form of a confrontation between a praying mantis and a dragonfly, presumably both of the soaring kinds. He gave it the title *Gochūron* (Debate among five insects), indicating that he might have been considering an extended work that would have included three other kinds of insect. As it stands, it is a thinly veiled, scathing criticism of the kinds of Tsugaru officials Mitsugi blamed for the failure of his career as an administrative reformer.

Lest Mitsugi be consigned to the ranks of effete literati, idealists and dreamers, it should be noted that there are a number of works in the collection, some long and detailed, that are entirely practical guides to basic arithmetic, and the more advanced mathematics of measurement and surveying. He wrote about fractions, place value, squares, cubes and the usefulness of the abacus and compasses. His illustrations and calculations to do with surveying techniques contain calculations clearly associated with right-angled triangles without resort to Pythagoras. Then, in connection with the fields that might have been surveyed, there is an essay on the virtues of upland rice as a food crop, which is based on findings from Mitsugi's own planting, cultivating and harvesting experiments over a number of years.

Yet another voice adopted by Mitsugi is that of traditional historical biographer. *Tsugaru meishin den* (Lives of eminent Tsugaru retainers) is an abridged remake of an older local work of the same name by someone else. It is of interest because Mitsugi included stories about people who were not in the original collection. One noteworthy addition is the story of a woman. It is

about the virtuous widow of a soldier in a Nanbu brigade during the time of the Nanbu-Ōura split and Tamenobu's ascendancy to power in Tsugaru.

A Nanbu brigade had been encircled, and its isolated stronghold captured by Ōura (Tsugaru) troops. Before a messenger from the triumphant Tamenobu reached them to let them know he intended to spare them, the survivors had all committed suicide. On the 10th day of the 3rd month of Keichō 5 (1601), now firmly installed as the daimyo of Tsugaru, Tamenobu held a public memorial service for the spirits of the dead from both sides at the old Daikōji castle site. The widow of one of the brigade members went along, and, having placed a suicide note before the altar, she quietly killed herself amongst the crowd. Her virtue was admired and praised. The original suicide note was written in *kana*. Mitsugi rewrote it in Chinese, and included her story among those of the eminent retainers.

Probably most directly personal of all the texts collected in the *Complete Works* is the resignation letter reproduced at the end of the final volume. It is addressed to the daimyo (御藩主), Hori Goroemon and Munakata Jūemon. Mitsugi's sense of loneliness and despair at having had his career end in such an impasse are poignantly conveyed. For the actual course of that career and the matters that caught the attention of some members of the literate public at the time, we have to turn to other documents.

III Texts of his time

Since Mitsugi's official career, the Hōreki reforms and the famine are mentioned only briefly in his own works, we must turn to other contemporary texts to shape narrative accounts of those experiences in Tsugaru, as well his life. Fortunately, an assortment of materials has survived the ravages of time and disaster, and many of them have been identified, compiled, transcribed or published.

(i) Records, documents and diaries

The official Tsugaru domain diaries have been photocopied and bound into book form in chronological order for easy reference. These volumes are

housed in the Hirosaki city library. They provide a skeletal outline, from the point of view of the domain administration and the Edo *yashiki*, of the domain's ritual, ceremonial and administrative life, and any other happenings that impinged on the official goings-on.

The *Shinpen Hirosaki-shi shi* (New edition of the history of Hirosaki) contains separate volumes of sources, and the *Kinsei* volumes contain a great many extracts from the official domain diaries. In the Hirosaki city library's collection of documents, the diaries are housed under the title, '*Tsugaru hanchō nikki*" (Tsugaru domain official diary), but the editors of the new Hirosaki history have distinguished between the *Koku nikki* (country/domain diary) and the *Edo nikki* (Edo diary) for the purposes of the new publication. These diaries are indispensable sources for legal and administrative documents associated with the Hōreki reforms.

The eight *Michinoku sōsho* (Michinoku series) collections that were published from 1956 onwards have provided access to a variety of other Tsugaru documents. This series is based on a comprehensive collection of historical materials undertaken during the first decade of the Meiji period, with the co-operation of the last Tsugaru daimyo. A great many of the surviving documents were to do with the lives of the successive Tsugaru daimyo, their lineages, consorts and children, as well as the lives and careers of the domain's retainers. Smaller amounts of material were related to the lives and careers of figures active in fields such as formal scholarship, military studies, poetry, painting, medicine, and the Shinto or Buddhist priesthood, in addition to documents sorted under such headings as rituals, justice, and exhortations to farmers.

The materials compiled for these collections have been extracted from a number of household, temple, shrine and personal diaries, as well as the official domain records. Each volume is arranged in chronological order, so there is, for example, a section devoted to Nyūi Mitsugi amongst the eighteenth century retainers in the fifth volume, while some entries associated with the administration of the Hōreki reforms are contained in the chapter

covering the incumbency of the seventh daimyo in the first part of the seventh collection.[54] One drawback of these edited collections is the brevity of many of the fragments, though the variety of documentary sources presented on each page helps prevent the imposition upon them of any single narrative or thematic interpretative scheme.

The various diaries themselves have had long and often complicated histories. Many were kept hidden away for long periods. One, now generally called the *Eiroku nikki* (永禄日記), from which some of the texts quoted in this study are taken, has appeared in a number of versions under different names since 1558. This was the year in the Eiroku period during which the earliest entry was made. The diary is said to be a record kept for generations by the Yamazaki family, descended from the Nanbu lord of Namioka castle. It seems, though, that the earlier entries were written by someone associated with the household called Satō. One version of the work was compiled, copied, and presumably edited, by Yamazaki Ryūboku (1747-1805), and this later appeared in some places as the *Tatekoshi kiroku* or *Tatekoshi nikki* (館越記録、館越日記), using the name of the village where Yamazaki lived.[55]

Another related diary, the *Satōke ki* (佐藤家記), is also based on a family record, and some local historians believe that the earliest parts of the *Eiroku nikki* were actually transcribed from this work. Entries from the *Satōke ki* that were related to the history of the domain were compiled and transcribed in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by Satō Heihachirō. This diary was a key source for the early Aomori prefectural histories and the *Michinoku sōsho*, but the whereabouts of the originals have been unknown since 1963.[56]

Two of the diaries were kept by successive administrative officers of major shrines in Hirosaki: they are the *Takaokaki*, kept at the Kōshōgu shrine, and the *Hirosaki Hachimangu shamu nikki* (弘前八幡宮社務日記), from the

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[54] TKD, pages 225 ff., and TRK, pages 203 ff. respectively.
[55] I have not been able to find the local pronunciation for 館越.
[56] *HSS*, *Shiryō kaisetsu*, 附録、pages 1-8.

Hachiman shrine. Extracts from the *Takaokaki*, also sometimes referred to as the *Takaoka Reigenki* (高岡霊験記), were included in the early *Tsugaru rekidai kirui* (Records of successive generations of Tsugaru) and *Tsugaruhan kyūki denrui* (Biographies from the old records of Tsugaru han) collections in *Michinoku sōsho*. It is regarded as a reliable source for domain history after 1712, the year when the shrine was founded to honour the spirit of the esteemed fourth daimyo, Nobumasa. (The diary's reputation is perhaps enhanced by this connection.) At the Hachiman Shrine, records were kept by successive heads of the Ono family, and they are now kept in the Hirosaki University library store. Extracts to do with the Shrine's experience of the Hōreki reform policies have recently been published in *Shinpen Hirosakishi shi*.

(ii) A public life, as compiled in *Tsugaru kyūki denrui*

From all those eighteenth century texts it is possible to gather a set of references to Nyūi Mitsugi, arrange them in chronological order, and construct a kind of life story. This is how the biographical sketches in Chinese dynastic histories were usually put together, and those in *Tsugaru kyūki denrui* are similar. The life story of Mitsugi contained in this volume therefore contains a strange mixture of ingredients. There are official notices referring to the ups and downs in his career path intermingled with negative comments, random observations and even reminiscences taken from diaries kept by individuals. It is all focused, however, upon Mitsugi as a publicly observed figure. There is no material from his own works and nothing of a private nature about his family members, or personal relations, or feelings.

Table 2 lists known key moments in Mitsugi's life and career. It is provided to help clarify the sequence of events in the account that follows. Mitsugi's childhood and other names are underlined. In the biographical narrative, italics are used to distinguish paraphrases of text in the section on Nyūi Mitsugi in *Tsugaru kyūki denrui* from my explanations and comments.[57]

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[57] No conscious attempt is made to distinguish the writers' "voices".

1712 Shōtoku 1	Nyūi Yasazaemon Noritomi (弥三左衛門建富) born in Hirosaki, eldest son of Nyūi Gizaemon Norihisa (儀左衛門建尚), a Tsugaru retainer on a 50 *koku* stipend working as a copy clerk, then attendant to the fifth daimyo, Nobuhisa.
1735 Kyōhō 20	At age 24, appointed apprentice page (*hōkōminarai* 奉公見習) to the sixth daimyo, Nobuaki, and ranked in the fifth *Temawari* guard unit.
1736 Genbun 1	Father, Norihisa, dies. Noritomi succeeds him as family head, inherits the stipend and is renamed Ichirōzaemon (市郎左衛門). He is promoted to the third *Koshō* guard unit.
1744 - 49 Enkyō 1 - Kan'en 2	Daimyo Nobuaki dies, leaving child heir. At age 33, Ichirōzaemon joins the Hirosaki castle kitchen staff (*zenban* 膳番). The next year, he is made a personal valet (*konandoyaku* 小納戸役) to the daimyo, and four years later, a personal secretary (*kinjūkoshō* 近習小姓).
1751-1752 Hōreki 1-2	At age 40, resigns from official posts because of chronic eye problems. Recovers and returns to office the following year. Reappointed to rank of fifth *Temawari* guard unit; later promoted to *yoriai* (寄合), a higher rank equivalent to that of liege vassal.
1753 H 3	Appointed *kanjō bugyō* with a 150 *koku* stipend.
1755 Hōreki 5	Hōreki famine. Travels to Edo and received by the seventh daimyo, Nobuyasu. Appointed General Overseer (*motoshi yaku* 元司役) of Finance Office, at the rank of steward (*yōnin* 用人).
1756 H 6	Daimyo Nobuyasu bestows personal name of Mitsugi.
1757 Hōreki 7	Mitsugi promoted to rank equivalent to domain elder (*karō* 家老), with a stipend of 1000 *koku* and a new residence. His son, Sa'ichirō, granted a separate allowance of 300 *hyō*.
1758 Hōreki 8	Mitsugi disinherited, dismissed from office, deprived of rank. His residence is confiscated. Sa'ichirō is named head of Nyūi household and guardian of Mitsugi, who is placed under strict house arrest.
1768 Meiwa 5	Receives partial pardon, but still confined in the family residence under official watch.
1778 An'ei 7	At age 67, reappointed *kanjō bugyō*. Resumes active policy reform.
1780 An'ei 9	Dismissed again. Sentenced to live out his life as an exile in Kawaratai village.
1784 Tenmei 4	Pardoned by the eighth daimyo, Nobuharu. Returns to Hirosaki to live on a stipend supporting five retainers.
1792 Kansei 4	Nyūi Mitsugi Noritomi (now written 建福) dies in his eighty-first year.

Table 2: Chronology of Nyūi Mitsugi's life and career.

Sources: *Tsugaru kyūki denrui*, pages 225-240; *Tsugaru rekidai kirui*, pages ??? .

The section headed Nyūi Mitsugi Noritomi, in a chapter devoted to domain retainers, in *Tsugaru kyūki denrui* begins with an extract from the

papers of a later member of the Nyūi family telling us Mitsugi's various given names and that he was *a ninth - generation descendant of the warrior, Nyūi Ōsumi Tatekiyo, who loyally supported Tamenobu in his campaign* against the Nanbu. *In the year Genbun 1 (1736), Mitsugi succeeded his father, Giemon, upon his death while serving in a minor official post with a stipend of 150 koku. After 1744, Mitsugi was appointed valet, then personal secretary in the service of the daimyo.* The daimyo was the small boy, Nobuyasu, who was living with his adoptive mother far away in Edo at the time. *In the first year of the Hōreki period (1750) he* (Mitsugi) *left official service on the grounds of chronic ill health. A little later he returned, having completely recovered, and at the beginning of 1753 was appointed* kanjō bugyō.[58]

An entry from the *Takaokaki* shrine records is inserted at this point, to flesh out this skeletal chronology.[59] *As a youth Mitsugi was very clever and had an exceptional range of skills. He was working as a valet when he claimed to have an eye complaint and withdrew from his duties for some time, which gave him a chance to take stock of what was going on in the domain. Some time after Lord Nobuyasu became daimyo, a famine occurred, starting in the year Kan-en 2 (1749). The administration at the castle was exceedingly distressed, and officials tried many different measures. They requested substantial donations from wealthy townspeople and halved the stipends of retainers, but there was poverty everywhere, and our young daimyo knew nothing at all about it. Munakata Saeimon worked so hard that he fell ill and died. He was over seventy. Tsugaru Mondo succeeded him, whereupon Mitsugi recovered in no time at all and returned to work at the castle.*

He (Mitsugi) *petitioned Mondo about many important official administrative matters: poverty relief, plans for the daimyo's installation and wedding ceremonies, and the bad state of repair of shrines and temples, roads and bridges and rural housing. Mondo had already consulted his high-ranking colleagues about these matters, but no satisfactory conclusions had been*

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[58] From the papers of a member of the Nyūi family, TKD, page 225.
[59] *Takaokaki* in TKD, pages 225-26

reached. Mondo had made a general appeal for suggestions from all loyal, hard-working retainers, regardless of rank. Mitsugi said he had some ideas but suggested that Mondo approach his stewards and magistrates once more before he spoke. So, Mondo gathered together the four magistrates and the stewards and asked for their opinions. The only person who responded was Mōnai Ariemon, a steward. Later, when Ariemon had left, Mitsugi addressed Mondo, saying that Ariemon's ideas were quite acceptable, but that if his own were put into effect, the domain would be well off again in less than two years. Then he outlined his own suggestions for reform. Mondo was so impressed that he appointed Mitsugi to a post as kanjō bugyō.[60] *Whether it was relations with shrines and temples, repairs to roads and bridges or attending to broken-down houses in the countryside, he* (Mitsugi) *had an opinion.*

From this passage it is easy to form the impression that its author at the Kōshōgu shrine regarded Mitsugi as something of a parvenu, rather too clever from an early age, persistent in putting himself forward when the opportunity arose, and scheming to make sure the stewards and magistrates were placated before he made the final move to press for a prestigious appointment. The text of the official announcement mentioning his promotion was recorded in the *Kudōke ki.* It gives notice of the elevation of Satō Gyōzaemon to the post of general director of the finance office, Mitsugi's duty to assist him, and Mōnai Ariemon's role as their supervisor. It appears from way this particular extract is arranged by the *Michinoku sōsho* compilers, that the founding of the *Oshirabekata* was announced on the same day as Mitsugi's appointment, in the first month of Hōreki 3. This differs significantly from the 15th day of the 8th month, recorded in the much longer memorandum transcribed from the *Koku nikki* in *Shinpen Hirosakishi shi.*[61]

Now follows a charming anecdote, from a work called *Hitoki hagi*, about Mitsugi's first day on the job. The new appointee *took one quick look at the*

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[60] The entry from the *Takaokaki*, is also reproduced in AKS, with unabbreviated characters, on pages 273-74. A more detailed rendition of this passage, which I helped edit, can be found in Kojima, "Thought", pages 36-37.

[61] SHS, pages 626-27.

kabegaki (壁書), *which were the ancient laws pasted around the office walls, summoned the* kogashira *(head clerk) and instructed him to peel them all off and burn them. When the older officers arrived at work and were dismayed that the hallowed statutes had disappeared, Mitsugi explained that he had them removed because they were no longer applicable. But they objected, saying that since they were the statutes from ancient times, they wished to comply with them. Realizing his mistake, Mitsugi called for the sign writer and dictated the statutes one by one for him to write. When they were pasted back on the wall not a single character was different. He was extremely clever, and his memory was phenomenal; he was brilliant at numbers too. Once he saw or heard anything, he never ever forgot it.*[62]

There are no further entries until, suddenly, Mitsugi's first year in office is almost over. The last month of Hōreki 3 (1753) seems to have been a busy one for diarists, and the reform faction too. One short excerpt from *Ariemon hikki*, and a very long one from the *Kudōke ki* record official notices. They both appear to be reporting from the very detailed, 22-clause set of memorandums issued from the *Oshirabekata yakusho* announcing the administrative and procedural changes planned for the following year. Then, a short note taken from both the *Takaokaki* and the *Mōnai Ariemon hikki* is added to reveal that Mitsugi *took all the papers and forms collected in the investigation of the domain's purveyors and burned them.* Another entry for the twelfth month notes Mitsugi's arrangements for keeping rice in the Tsugaru granaries and charging money for promissory notes; and concludes with a remark that *these days it seems that Nyūi Ichirozaemon is being thought of as something of a deity.* This is the voice of the *Takaokaki*, which has returned on a more unequivocally positive note after a short, businesslike entry from the *Kudōke ki* about repaying retainers' stipends. Mitsugi is reported to have modestly demurred when Ariemon and Mondo expressed praise and gratitude for the policies that had brought *such abundance to the*

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[62] *Hitoki hagi*, *TKD*, pages 226-27.

domain. It was such a shining example of ethical conduct, and the entire country is united in gratitude".[63]

In the 3rd month of Hōreki 5, Nyūi Ichirozaemon, Tsugaru Mondo and Mōnai Ariemon set off together for Edo. This cheerful line, extracted from the *Saitō Nagato nikki*, is juxtaposed with an account taken from the *Satōke ki* on the famine conditions that overtook the domain later the same year. *Grain was distributed to the poor from the storehouses of those who had plenty, and profiteering on sales forbidden.* The final comment in this entry observes that *Mitsugi and Ariemon worked terribly hard and that they were both most admirable.*[64]

These last remarks are of particular interest as we put together contemporary reports and observations in an effort to explain the career trajectory of Nyūi Mitsugi. Not very much later, the relations between these two influential men seem to have been far less congenial and co-operative. At the end of the same year, Mitsugi was appointed *motoshi* (General Overseer). He went to Edo and accompanied the newly invested daimyo on his journey from the shogun's capital to Hirosaki in the fifth month of Hōreki 6.[65]

In autumn during harvest time, Tsugaru Nobuyasu was so pleased with amount of grain flowing into the domain's granaries that he honoured Mitsugi with his celebratory name, which is used throughout this study for the sake of consistency. It was presented within a (not terribly felicitous) haiku verse; evidence, no doubt, of Nobuyasu's grooming in literary pursuits during his boyhood in Edo.

The poem went:

いく年も	四季の間絶へぬ	貢かな
いくとせも	しきのまたえぬ	みつぎかな
ikutosemo	*shikinoma taenu*	*mitsugikana*[66]

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[63] TKD, pages 227-29

[64] *Satōke ki*, TKD, page 229.

[65] Loc.cit.

[66] Nobuyasu plays with the words *mitsugi* (tribute rice, or support), and *shikinoma* (the Four Seasons Room in Hirosaki castle, or throughout the four seasons).

Two possible renditions, depending on how the words are played with are:

> Year upon year, in the four seasons room without limit,
> Ah! Such piles of tax rice!
>
> Year upon year, all year round but never exhausted,
> Mitsugi, what a man!

On the 1st day of the 9th month of the same year, *Mitsugi set off on an official trip within the domain; he was received all the way with great awe, and feasting, just as if he were the daimyo. At Sotogahama, old women held their prayer beads and worshipped as he passed. He crossed from Sotogahama to Kodomari by boat, and returned to Hirosaki through the newly developed farming areas. During this trip he declared that all the Ainu people of Sotogahama should be considered as real people: the men should shave their beards and trim their sideburns, and the women could style their hair and colour their teeth. Their households should be registered and the members counted; and they might choose a temple to belong to as well. The Ainu people were so thankful that they too remembered Mitsugi as a god.*[67]

On the 15th day of the 9th month, hyōfu *(ration coupons) were issued in exchange for everything (of value in the possession of households in the domain), including money and rice, at about one tenth of the value of what was handed over. From the following month, they were to be used in all transactions instead of currency.*[68] The *Takaokaki* record keeper seems to have had a dim view of the new system and its planners. He wrote an imaginary account of the way in which it might have been conceived as the result of a social encounter between Mitsugi and an acquaintance, Ashibane Chōjūrō, son of the influential merchant Ashibane Jirōsaburō. The Ashibane were originally a *bushi* family from Nanbu. Chōjūrō had been a student in Kyoto and learned the arts of elegant living there. He and his father were in charge of implementing the *hyōfu* system.

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[67] *Kudōke ki* and *Saitō Nagato Kyūki*, in TKD, page 230.

[68] Details about the *hyōfu* system and its implementation are discussed in Chapter Three, and are therefore omitted here, except where the recorded comments refer to Mitsugi himself.

It was Nyūi Ichirozaemon's idea to collect all the wealth and gold and silver of the domain and display its abundance all at once. Since he had run out of policy ideas, *on one occasion when Ashibane Chōjūrō was visiting, he must have said to him "Last year because we helped the people out after the bad harvest, an enormous amount of silver and gold flowed to other domains. It is already time to start thinking about granary stipend payments. If you have any idea about how to deal with the situation, do not hesitate to tell me about it." Chōjūrō went off, and after two or three days returned with his reply.*

His plan was to arrange for the upper classes to have an abundance of silver and gold, and for benefits to flow to the lower classes at the same time. They should make a big effort and collect all the silver and gold from within the domain; then have the lower classes use hyōfu *(coupons) for money. While they were using* hyōfu*, the gold and silver could be used for Mitusgi's own purposes. Nothing could possibly work out better for all the people. It was truly an ingenious method for enriching the polity and keeping the people content.* The imagined encounter between Chōjūrō and Mitsugi ends here, but the diarist goes on to express his displeasure at the new system.

As for the way they put the hyōfu *into circulation; every single thing of value was collected from every nook and cranny of the entire domain, then this great jumble of things mixed up together was handed to the authorities. They had the merchants put it all in storage.* Hyōfu *for life's necessaries were given out to everyone, and when we needed things that were absolutely essential we handed in the coupons to exchange for them. It was then that we realized that the hyōfu were being used alongside gold and silver. The lower classes were to have no money to use, but the upper classes were to become unbelievably rich. If you complained that it was a shameful trick, you were told that the system was Nyūi's idea, and he was in complete charge of everything.*

A second extract from the same diary goes on to lament the situation. *Nyūi Ichirozaemon has brought us all to ruin, it says. He flattered the young daimyo, so now he is living in luxury and splendour with indescribably splendid attendants. Every day he dines at the height of sumptuousness and has his*

choice of watching sumo matches or performances of Noh and kyōgen. *He has everything he could possibly wish for, and more, to the extent that there is nothing between his circumstances and those of the lord himself.*[69]

An official notice that was delivered to Mitsugi on the 11th day of the 10th month of Hōreki 6 hints at the kinds of excesses enumerated by the Kōshōgu scribe:

> On the occasion of your being appointed *motoshi*, you were given also the status of steward. Until further notice, however, your status has been withdrawn, and from here on, you should fulfil the duties of *motoshi*. You will be notified about the matter of status in due course.[70]

In the 3rd month of Hōreki 7, it was confirmed that Mitsugi's stipend would remain at one thousand *koku*. A week later, the daimyo's *sankin kōtai* party set off for Edo. Among those who joined Nobuyasu's procession to the capital were the *karō*, Tsugaru Mondo, the *motoshi*, Nyūi Mitsugi, and an official purveyor, the merchant Ashibane Chōjūrō. He, according to the Satō household diarist, *belonged to Nyūi's cohort and worked with him on the official accounts.*[71]

Back in Tsugaru, as the days went by during this same month *complaints about the trouble and inconvenience of using* hyōfu *grew more and more numerous. At first there was no difference, but as goods became more and more scarce and queues longer and longer, anger at the general decline in the domain knew no bounds.*[72] The *Umeda nikki* reports that at this point, *Kakugen, who was the chief priest of the Tōshun'in Zen temple in Hirosaki, set out for Kyoto, to attend a memorial service for his master. As he passed through Edo, he reported the turmoil Mitsugi's administration was causing in the domain.*

This skeletal report is fleshed out in colourful detail in the *Takaokaki*, which tells us that *before he left, Kakugen first wrote a meticulously detailed petition outlining all Mitsugi's policies, and the hardship and chaos that had*

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[69] Both extracts are taken from the *Takaokaki*, TKD, pages 230 and 31.
[70] *Kudōke ki*, loc. cit.
[71] *Satōke ki*, loc. cit.
[72] TKD., pages 231-32.

resulted. He addressed it to Matsudaira Kunaishō Tadatsune (松平宮内少輔忠恒), *who held the post of* wakadoshiyori *in Edo and was in charge of Tokugawa* hatamoto *(bannermen) affairs.* Tadatsune had acted as guardian of the boy daimyo, Tsugaru Nobuyasu, during his years in the capital and had taken as a consort the third daughter of the previous Tsugaru daimyo, Nobuaki. *Kakugen travelled to Edo with a group of mendicant priests, and delivered his petition to Tadatsune, who was deeply shocked and hastily arranged a private meeting with the young daimyo. They discussed the letter, and Tadatsune recommended Mitsugi's dismissal. After they parted, Nobuyasu immediately summoned Mitsugi, and interviewed him at length about the implementation of the* hyōfu *exchange system, the engagement of the official distribution agents, and the distress being caused to the people. Mitsugi respectfully informed him that all responsibility for the handling of money and goods was in the hands of the official agents, and agreed to travel back to Tsugaru to restore order in the domain by completely dismantling the* hyōfu *exchange system.*[73]

Mitsugi arrived back in Tsugaru on the 12th day of the 6th month: the Kudō and Satō household diaries then record that *from the 23rd onwards, a number of officers working as distribution agents were detained and questioned on suspicion of misappropriating people's valuables and the improper use of* hyōfu. In the following week, all *hyōfu* were withdrawn from circulation; and the people were *greatly relieved to be using money again.* On the first day of the following month, *retainers' rice allowances were distributed, and on the 21st the instruction was given that those who held* jikata chigyō *fiefs should return to extracting their stipend allowances directly from the farmers cultivating their lands. The same was to apply to shrines and temples. A loan amnesty was also announced,* and in due course all the reforms were reversed. On the 26th day of the 8th month, *a number of distribution agents, with at least five members of the Ashibane household among them, were found guilty of twenty-three offences and imprisoned.*[74]

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[73] ibid., page 233.
[74] loc. cit.

The *Takaokaki*, again, contains further detail. *The rice, money and other assets that the Ashibane had collected for their own corrupt purposes were taken out of storage and handed back to their owners in Hirosaki and the countryside. Then, Mitsugi set off back to the capital. News of some kind of deception by the Ashibane that was causing a commotion among the people in Tsugaru gradually reached him, followed by disturbing reports one after the other, including one that the entire domain money supply was exhausted. Mitsugi took a roundabout route to Edo, going by way of Kyoto. There, he paid his respects at the Konoe residence and was unexpectedly given an audience. Through an employee of the household, he requested that a new Tsugaru genealogy be written up by Lord Konoe* (who performed this task upon the entry of each new daimyo into the castle). *His Lordship quickly obliged, and Mitsugi set out for Edo, after sending off a letter to the* karō *(Tsugaru Mondo) and Hori Goroemon to let them know that arrangements with the Konoe family had gone well, and that the genealogy had already been completed.*

The two elders, however, would not take delivery of his message. Tadatsune had become quite agitated by the idea that Mitsugi was corrupt, and had contacted them privately. He was convinced that it would be a good idea to dismiss Mitsugi there and then, as he had already become presumptuous enough to begin ingratiating himself with the Konoe household. Reports and protests about the chaos in Tsugaru had continued to come to Tadatsune's notice. He urged the two officials to get rid of Mitsugi and to begin making plans for restoring the people's wellbeing. If he were in their place, he would send a letter to Kyoto on the spot, ordering Mitsugi back to Tsugaru and informing the Lord Konoe of his dismissal. No one in either Kyoto or Edo had ever been aware of his scheming plans; they were all completely taken in. At that, Tadatsune laughed aloud at them; and the two men could only blush and bow deeply before him. Mondo and Goroemon were probably deeply humiliated when they realized that Matsudaira Tadatsune believed Mitsugi had made fools of them. In spite of his long-standing friendship with Mitsugi, Mondo must have made a decision and sent a message from Edo. On that very day, the

entry concludes triumphantly, *Nyūi Ichirozaemon* (Mitsugi) *was ordered home in a letter sent express to Kyoto.*

The *Kudōke ki* takes up the story in Hirosaki. Mitsugi arrived back from Kyoto on the 16th day of the 3rd month of Hōreki 8, and was *summoned immediately to the residence of the* karō, *Munekata. Before a full assembly of retainers of every rank, from the* Ōbangashira *(Captain of the great guard) down to the* Ometsuke *(inspectors), he was formally ordered to retire from domain service. Thus, he was made a spectacle before the retainers, and then among the local residents for block after block, as he walked away from the castle. As he passed by the area around the upper Dotemachi bridge, townspeople and retainers crowded around him, making a great commotion, shouting abuse and throwing stones and gravel at him.*

An official notice was published the following day, explaining his dismissal on the grounds of *failing to put his ideas into practice and instead causing discord and confusion.* Mitsugi's residence was confiscated; he was placed under house arrest, and forced to relinquish his position as head of the household to his son Sa'ichirō. *He was allowed no unnecessary visits, even from relatives. Sa'ichirō was transferred from his 300-*hyō *post as* sobazutome (側勤の処), *working as a personal attendant of the daimyo, to the ranks of the orusuigumi* (御留守居組) *guarding the castle, with an allowance of only 100* hyō. The *Satōke ki* records one further humiliation: *an emissary from the castle presented an official notice to Mitsugi ordering him to hand over all his books and any gifts he had received from the daimyo. He complied.*

In the *Okufuji monogatari* there is a rather unsympathetic summary of the situation. Nyūi Mitsugi , it begins, *was appointed to serve as* motoshi *in the years of Hōreki 5 and 6 with the intention that he should take care of administration. As the mainstay of the government, he served with great power and influence. He discarded the time-honoured rules and regulations of the domain and replaced them with new ways. The* (miraculous) *perspiration of the Fudōson, for example, he classed as just another old wooden object*

absorbing and exuding moisture.[75] *Since Miyama is such a windy and cloudy place, in his opinion it was not in the least surprising to discover moisture there, and absolutely no reason for our special services and offerings.*[76] *As a retainer, he would say how wrong it is to disregard the commands of one's lord's and then abandon all the oaths he had taken. He would declare that a country with an upright ruler never has any reason to resort to using spies* (to check that retainers are doing their duty), *and then shirk his own responsibilities by cutting corners. What's more, he threw all the old records of the domain and castle administrations into the fire. And another thing: in Lord Nobumasa's time, it was ordered that every year several* koku *of rice would be set aside for military provisions. It was good quality glutinous rice and it would be set up around a ceremonial altar to the earth, before being steamed, pounded and then mixed with water and eaten. Nyūi Mitsugi just handed all the rice straight to the cake shops and had them do it. Narita Sajihei*, the scribe added, had *said that the way he treated the old documents was the saddest of all the dreadful things he did.*

The *Kudōke ki* notes that when the daimyo granted a general amnesty on the 14th day of the 6th month of Meiwa 5 (1768), Mitsugi's *sentence was eased; but he was only to be permitted to leave the family residence in emergencies.* The next entry, from the *Satōke ki,* tells us that on the 1st day of the 9th month of An'ei 7 (1778), *Nyūi Mitsugi was pardoned and reappointed to the post of* kanjō bugyō, *in his sixty-seventh year. His new stipend was 100* koku, *and his official salary, 50* koku.[77]

There is nothing between this report and an entry from the *Kudōke ki* for the 3rd day of the 6th month of An'ei 9, two years later, recording that Mitsugi had been *arraigned before the highest court and dismissed from his*

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[75] The Fudōson (不動尊) is Fudō myōō (不動明王), Acala, the god of fire.

[76] It was treated as a wondrous event when drops of moisture appeared on the Fudōson's brow. People made special offerings to the temple and paid for special services at these auspicious times. Mitsugi explained that the wooden statue simply absorbed moisture in hot, humid weather, and when the temperature dropped, it contracted. If the humidity was high, drops of water would condense on the statue. His view was that the temple was profiting by duping the people.

[77] Page 235.

post. A summary of the judgement follows. Mitsugi had been *reappointed because the domain's financial situation was in disarray and he was someone known to have ideas about what to do. He had, however, pursued his own interests in a series of devious schemes, working tirelessly to succeed in bringing about the destruction of the domain. Having perpetrated such deceptions inside this* kuni *and beyond, he was guilty of heinous crimes for which the penalty was an official order to commit* seppuku. *Through the clemency of the daimyo, however, it was instead decreed that he should live the remaining years of his life in exile in the village of Kawaratai.*[78]

An entry from the *Satōke ki* adds that *while he was imprisoned within the court buildings, he wrote the following lines on a fan that he left behind.*

> Bashō wrote of his jouney to the west:
> Abandon the world, count it as nothing
> but on nights when it snows you will still be cold
>
> Mitsugi wrote of his mountain dwelling:
> I am to turn my back on the world and travel deep into the mountains
> but when people don't have food to eat they will still die.
>
> If you think about it, not being constantly fed *manju* like a spoiled child, and spending night after night in a place where snow covers the ground, is nothing more than the duty of any loyal and filial person, even if he does freeze to death. It is merely to eschew commonplace attitudes and emotional reactions.
>
> To have the endurance of the ancients and take matters of life and death in one's stride, regardless of the opinions and judgements of others, however, (is even more difficult). That is how real ministers conduct themselves.[79]

A rather sympathetic piece is inserted here, from the *Fujita shi shōroku* (Abridged record of the Fujita family), noting that *during his second term in office Nyūi Mitsugi was advanced in years but in robust health and extremely energetic. He strove diligently to rescue his reputation from the damage it had suffered in the Hōreki years, but the* karō *thwarted him at every turn, and a merchant named Miyazaki Genbei used dishonest means to*

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[78] Pages 235-36.
[79] TKD, page 236.

prevent his success. In the end, unable to show any results at all for his pains, he was once again meted out a severe penalty. The comment concludes with the remark: *It is said that all right-minded people felt very sorry for him.*

One line from the *Satōke ki* records that in Tenmei 4 (1784), *during the incumbency of Tsugaru Nobuharu, Nyūi Mitsugi was granted a five-person support stipend and an extra allowance of five* ryō *in cash.*[80] A different source, the *Muetsu ki* then explains that Mitsugi was *accorded much respect during the early years of Lord Nobuyasu's rule, and that he had advanced gradually until he was appointed* motoshi, *second in rank only to the* karō. *From his written communications, it seems that Lord Nobuyasu thought of him as an uncle. After that, however, he adopted some unorthodox methods, which resulted in the suspension of his stipend and his banishment to a distant place. When Lord Nobuharu came into office and took charge of the administration he learned of Mitsugi's case. Because Lord Nobuyasu had thought of him as an uncle, Lord Nobuharu thought it regrettable that Mitsugi should be living so far away. He therefore ordered that he be pardoned, brought back to Hirosaki and permitted to wander about freely. This was a very filial decision. People believed that he was acknowledging Mitsugi's past service and admired him greatly.*

From a Nyūi family collection comes the simple entry: *On the 6th day of the 4th month of Kansei 4, (1792) Mitsugi passed away at the age of 80.* The description of Mitsugi quoted at the beginning of this chapter follows. A short summary of how he spent his time at Kawaratai, a list of his written works, and an outline of the lineage of mathematicians whose works he compiled complete the entry. The small section about Mitsugi's activities in Kawaratai encapsulates much that is so interesting about these traces. This is in fact the last contemporary comment so far located about the way he lived his life.

During the time he spent in exile in the village of Kawaratai, some seven ri *from Hirosaki, he would regularly gather the elderly men and women around him and teach them Chinese and Japanese or tell them funny old moral tales.*

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[80] Page 237.

All the villagers, both old and young, looked after his every need and loved him as they did their own parents.

When he arrived the entire village had been illiterate, but many young people of both sexes visited him to study basic arithmetic and writing skills. Some even learned to read classical Chinese or to do quite advanced mathematics problems. From that time, many public-spirited people came from the area.[81]

IV Texts of our time

In a note to the opening paragraphs of the 1993 English version of his article, "The Thought of Nyūi Mitsugi", Kojima Yasunori provides a list of his twentieth century scholarly predecessors. My own study owes a debt to that historiographical lineage, and is perhaps part of it, chronologically at least. A number of the listed works appear in my bibliography, particularly those connected with Mitsugi and the reforms, where I have drawn on much the same pool of sources as Kojima and his predecessors.

The earliest project Kojima records is a three-part account of Nyūi Mitsugi's life, entitled *Nyūi Mitsugi Den*, which was contributed by Fujii Shōji in 1938 and 1939 to three successive issues of *Utou*, a local historical journal published in Hirosaki. In fact, the first version of this biography appeared before that: in 1935, at the beginning of the first volume of the *Complete Works*. In addition to this biography and celebratory tracts produced for the actual launching, several essays on Mitsugi and aspects of his life and thought were also published around the time the *Complete Works* became available.[82]

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[81] TKD, page 237.

[82] They included Nomura Kentarō's, "Tokugawa-Period Economic Thought", which appeared in *Utou* in 1939, and three further pieces written by Fujii and published in 1941: "Nyūi Mitsugi's Philosophical World View" in *Utou*; and "Nyūi Mitsugi's Place in the History of Thought" and "The Utility and Practicality of Learning" in *Gekkan Tō-ō*, an Aomori-Prefecture monthly. In 1957, Haga Yoshichirō's essay, "On Nyūi Mitsugi and his Legitimate Heir", also appeared in two parts in *Mutsu Shidan*. None of these four works has been referred to in my work. Where the subject matter was of interest, they were overtaken by later studies to which I had access. Generally speaking, the hagiographic tone in earlier writing about Mitsugi had faded away by the 1960's.

During the 1960s, when local histories such as the *Hirosaki-shi shi* (History of the city of Hirosaki) were being compiled and published, journal articles appeared from a new generation of local historians, who examined aspects of the reforms and Mitsugi's thought. Among them were: Miyamoto Masumi, "On the Economic Thought of Nyūi Mitsugi"; Ōkawa Tetsuo, "A Comment on the Hōreki Reforms in the Tsugaru Domain"; Haga Yoshichirō, "Scholarly Traditions in the Tsugaru Domain"; and Miyazaki Michitaka, "The Theoretical Background of the Hōreki Reforms in the Tsugaru Domain". [83] Considerably later, "Nyūi Mitsugi: the man and his achievements. A lesson in the history of local administration", by Tanaka Mamoru, was published in *Ajia Bunka Kenkyū*, in 1977. [84]

The concerns motivating this study, though, diverge significantly from those of most of its antecedents, for although Tsugaru's Hōreki reform program has been the object of intermittent enquiry by local historians, the subject of domain-level famine relief is, like the actual experience of famine itself, not often addressed in histories of the Tokugawa period. And, while a scattering of domain-level reformers have appeared in historical narratives, studies of the cosmological and intellectual preoccupations of these regional administrators are not common. Mitsugi's attempts to alter the distribution of socio-economic and administrative entitlements in Tsugaru have been quite plausibly construed as inevitable outcomes of the fundamental contradictions inherent in the bakuhan political system, particularly by those writing in the 1960s. At the same time, there is enough evidence of Mitsugi's idiosyncratic world view and the sense of urgency in his approach to political and social action to make for an interesting exploration of how he himself represented that system in his writing. It is clear too, that the frequency with which famines occurred in Tsugaru was not merely a symptom of class inequality, but of other forces as well.

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[84] Ōkawa, "Comment", in *Hirosaki Daigaku Kokushi Kenkyū*, (Studies in Japanese History, Hirosaki University), no. 24, 1960. Miyazaki's "Theoretical Background" appeared in *Chihōshi Kenkyū*, a journal of local history, in 1965 and was republished by Tsugaru Shobō in 1977 in *The Culture and History of Aomori Prefecture.*

Subsequent work on local history has built on the substantial work of these previous scholars, and over the same period, thought and political economy have had to make way for other areas of research. The original Japanese version of Kojima's article appeared in the first of two collections of research articles on the Tsugaru region published in 1984 and 1988. The early volume concentrates on historical themes and the other is more eclectic. Both were edited by Hasegawa Sei'ichi, who teaches at Hirosaki University. Since then, he has put together several pamphlets. One of them contains his own examination of the reception among local shrines and temples of the Hōreki reforms, and Kojima's essay on Mitsugi's short chapter about the virtues of upland rice as a food crop found in the third volume of the *Complete Works*.[85]

Overall, except for Kojima's interest in exploring the ways in which Mitsugi's thought adhered to the Sorai – Shundai heritage while continuing the intellectual tradition established in Tsugaru by students of Yamaga Sokō, most of the research effort on the Tokugawa period has gone into locating, sorting and explicating documents; then interpreting them fairly uncritically in the context of familiar narratives. The recently updated histories of Hirosaki City and Aomori Prefecture have basically conserved the narratives, but added (alas, mostly too late for me) splendid collections of documents that will be most useful for future scholars.

One work that must be included in this discussion is the MA thesis of Asakura Yūko, completed at Hirosaki University and entitled, "Kinsei kōki ni okeru Tsugaru-han no kenkyū". The essay focuses particularly on the reform process during the years 1753-56, and in her research Asakura made extensive use of the bound copies of the domain's daily records housed in the Hirosaki Municipal Library. She gleaned many snippets of detail, especially about policies enacted in the countryside, to include in her work. Since the diaries have yet to be transcribed and published, access to the material they contain is difficult to achieve without focussed searching and a fair amount of time. I

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[85] Hasegawa Seiichi (ed.), "Tenkanki hokuō han no seiji to shisō", Hirosaki daigaku jinbun gakubu, 1993.

became very grateful for Asakura's work after deciding that reform policies, other than those connected with famine relief, had a place in my study.

From this short exploration of works that focus in some way upon his life and work, it is probably obvious that Nyūi Mitsugi has not travelled far from Tsugaru as an object of historical enquiry. While Kojima's work has been an inspiration and guide on thought, the most significant recent writing on reform in Tsugaru is that of Mark Ravina. My study shares its focus on the so-called "dead" middle of the Tokugawa period with his recent monograph, *Land and Lordship in Early Modern Japan*[86]. This was the time when domain governments were firmly established, with their precedents well and truly set at home, and their external relations with the bakufu and neighbouring domains on the whole settled and manageable – though some old animosities towards the Tokugawa still festered.

Because Tsugaru was located, however, on the geographic and institutional periphery of *bushi* society, with its culture of personal feudal bonds, patrimony and suzerain power, the domain does not serve well to illustrate the points Ravina makes about levels of sovereignty.[87] In Chapter Two, I note some of the ways in which different spheres of sovereignty were constantly being negotiated in Tsugaru, affecting the policy choices available for managing the economic wellbeing of the polity. A consideration of the way in which the polity of Tsugaru evolved, for example, throws some light on the spheres of power that were crucial in shaping life and meaning in the domain, and therefore the reform options open to it by the middle of the 1700s. That approach results in my explaining the relations between Edo and Hirosaki in different terms from Ravina's, and my finding the suggestion that capital development could have been left to the private commercial sector in Tsugaru during the 1750s impossible to entertain.

Ravina considers the relation between political economy and ideas in his discussion of particular reform policies adopted in Tsugaru (Hirosaki), Awa

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[86] Ravina, *Land and Lordship*, page 4.

[87] Ravina, *Land and Lordship*, pages 34-42. See also my remarks in footnote 29 on page 29.

(Tokushima) and Yonezawa. His accounts of these reform programs, along with the ideas behind them, make for informative comparisons. The choice of Tsugaru as a domain to compare with Awa and Yonezawa is, however, leads to a less subtle analysis than might have resulted from an examination of three more equal cases. As I pointed out in the Introduction, Tsugaru was not in any respect a major domain in Tokugawa Japan. Both the others were significant *kuni* ("country" domains): Yonezawa because of its powerful Uesugi daimyo dynasty and Awa (Tokushima) for its precocity in trade and commerce. Tsugaru was a newly-founded domain, still struggling to develop enough rice paddy to sustain itself at the time when indigo was already an established commercial crop in Awa.

Awa's *kokudaka* (putative taxable wealth) in 1615 was 258,000 *koku*, and Yonezawa's an already vastly reduced 300,00 *koku*, but Tsugaru's was only 47,000 *koku*. It was not until the end of the seventeenth century that a few peak harvests of over 300,00 *koku* were recorded: and the domain's status was not raised to 100,000*koku* until the nineteenth century. The Uesugi lands in Yonezawa were reduced further in 1664, but the domain's rank then remained around 150,000 *koku*, three times that of Tsugaru throughout the eighteenth century. The Yonezawa polity was also founded on a much firmer footing than Tsugaru. It was administered by experienced leaders with a cohesive band of retainers who had their own heritage of disciplined, benevolent rule.[88]

Instead of Tsugaru, the Nanbu (Morioka) domain would have made for more robust and nuanced comparisons in Ravina's framework. Nanbu was a *kuni* ruled by an established daimyo dynasty. It had larger land area, higher putative wealth in 1615 (200,000*koku*), and even worse weather than Tsugaru; as well as a dramatic trajectory of initial success and later failure in gaining a foothold in the wider commercial economy. The comparisons made in this study between Tsugaru on the one hand, and Nanbu and Hachinohe on the other, are only regional in nature and are focussed on harvest failures and strategies for

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[88] ibid. pages 1-4, and others. Ravina makes much of Uesugi Harunori (1751 - 1822), but the family had for centuries been involved in the political and military machinations of the centre - both Kamakura and Kyoto.

coping with famine. Even though those two domains were as isolated from the major urban centres as Tsugaru, and grew their crops in similarly unfavourable climatic conditions, their experiences of famine were not parallel.

Tsugaru has been located in this chapter through the lens of the sketchy biographical data available on Mitsugi. Chapter Two comprises a discussion of the domain as geographic place and part of the Tokugawa polity.



Chapter two

The Precarious State of Tsugaru

> Ōshū - domain of the Ezo, so swift to take cover at every attack and so swift to retreat into their mountains when pursued. Ōshū - where everywhere the massive mountain ranges form a natural barrier to human traffic.[89]
> Ōshū - surrounded by the Japan Sea, tempestuous and inhospitable, and the Pacific Ocean, its waters barred in their course by the jagged Kamikita Ranges. Ōshū - with its thick winter mantle of snow, coldest place in all of Honshu, since time immemorial plagued by failed harvests.
> Pitiful Ōshū - with barely fifteen percent of its land arable, compared to twenty-five percent in Kyushu. Thus handicapped in every respect by unfavourable natural conditions, how can Ōshū manage. . .? Satō Hiroshi[90]

Professor Satō was writing during the Meiji period; but Tsugaru, in the furthest corner of Ōshū, is still considered one of the most isolated and vulnerable regions of Japan; and not altogether without reason. Neither of the region's principal cities, for example, has yet been linked to Japan's contemporary political and economic centres by the fast rail system. In contrast, both Morioka and Tsubota (Akita), the castle towns of Tsugaru's old neighbours, are on Shinkansen routes.[91] Just as distance and the local mountains are still barriers to fast overland communication, so, too, climatic conditions continue to pose a threat to farming. Apples are presently the mainstay of Aomori prefecture's agricultural sector, but, while they are less vulnerable to fickle weather than rice, a bumper crop can be wiped out in a matter of hours by a typhoon, as happened in 1991, when the fresh fruit harvest was reduced by around 80%.

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[89] Ōshū (奥州)is the Sinicised name for the province of Mutsu(陸奥). Mutsu, as can be seen in Map 1 on page 11, refers in history either to the provinces of Iwashiro, Iwaki, Rikuzen, and Rikuchū as well as Mutsu, or just to the northernmost province of Mutsu.

[90] Satō Hiroshi, *Ōshū sangyō sōetsu* (Introduction to the industries of Ōshū), quoted in *Tsugaru,* page 66.

[82] Morioka and Akita are terminal stations of two branches of the Tohoku Shinkansen network.

Documents attest to the frequency of harvest failures in Tsugaru: not, it must be admitted, "since time immemorial", but certainly during the Tokugawa period. Of all the adverse conditions affecting harvests in the domain, the weather was certainly the most commonly recorded. Snows that did not melt until late spring, cold growing seasons, wet summers, floods, and strong on-shore winds were all among the climatic conditions that could come between Tsugaru's farmers and adequate crop yields. Since rice was the primary source of income for the entire polity, poor harvests threatened the proper conduct of government affairs at elite administrative levels, as well as the very survival of the labouring rural and urban populations.

As the administration of a substantial *tozama* domain, the Tsugaru government was in many respects autonomous, as Mark Ravina points out.[92] Most day-to-day policy issues were dealt with entirely at the local level; but when fiscal crisis occurred in the 1750's, there were constraints on the range of measures administrative officials could propose. Like the crisis itself, which linked the treasury in Hirosaki to merchant houses in Osaka and financiers in Edo, these constraints were partly imposed by the workings of the Tokugawa political settlement and partly shaped by conditions particular to Tsugaru.

In this chapter, some characteristics of the domain and its history are introduced. Some issues are raised that became important when Mitsugi attempted to implement the Hōreki reform measures. One of these is the way in which the domain was founded, late in the sixteenth century. Tsugaru Tamenobu and his successors opened up large amounts of territory to rice cultivation, committing the domain to exclusive dependence on rice as the foundation of wealth and the basis of the taxation system. At the same time, many local *bushi* became Tsugaru retainers without relinquishing their direct association with the lands and farming villages comprising their hereditary fiefs. A second important issue was the degree to which the domain had become indebted to merchants and financiers in the Kamigata and Edo, and a

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[92] Mark Ravina, *Land and Lordship*, pages 25-7.

third is the degree to which established rituals, customs and beliefs had come to govern the rhythms of social and economic life in the domain.

Much of what we know about Tsugaru during the Tokugawa period is accessible to us only because of the centralised and bureaucratic nature of the shogunal government in Edo. During the seventeenth century, Tsugaru was drawn increasingly into its structures and systems of control, and it is impossible to give an account of the state of the domain in the mid eighteenth century without constantly juxtaposing local conditions and events with those closer to the political and commercial centres of the Tokugawa polity.

I The lay of the land

Tsugaru's location and terrain were obviously not unrelated to the ease with which one wily vassal stationed there was able to usurp authority Nanbu over the region's five *kōri* (districts) and create a separate domain. With a range of mountains between him and the authority of his chief in Morioka, and the resources of the fertile Iwaki River valley as well as the port of Tosaminato under his command, Tamenobu had geography on his side. The territory in dispute was even more distant from Toyotomi Hideyoshi's headquarters in Osaka. It must have been at some extreme periphery of his strategic imagination while he was taken up with extending his hegemonic authority eastward towards the Kanto at the same time as planning invasions of Korea and China. When Tamenobu petitioned for recognition of his exclusive claim over Tsugaru, Hideyoshi would have been only too willing to invest him with a separate fiefdom in return for demonstrations of loyalty and the promise of a secure frontier in the far north.

After Hideyoshi's death and the final victory of Tokugawa Ieyasu, however, those same advantages were not so conducive to the functioning of Tamenobu's domain as part of the system imposed from the new political centre. To begin with, there was very little land suitable for rice cultivation. The water supply greatly exceeded demand, making extensive flood-control, irrigation and drainage works necessary before the river could be harnessed

and the domain's productivity increased. Even then, climatic conditions caused frequent harvest shortfalls and failures in this far northern domain.

Whether or not the season was favourable and the crop bountiful, a significant portion of the annual tax rice collected in Tsugaru always had to be transported southward to Osaka and Edo to be exchanged for the silver and gold that supported the daimyo and his retinue during their compulsory sojourns in the capital. Different sea routes were favoured over the years, but delivering rice to the central markets always entailed long, risky journeys.

On most routes the cooperation of agents, merchants and porters along the way had also to be arranged. Overland cartage was obviously unsuitable for heavy loads of grain. Travel on rarely frequented land routes, through mountains and sparsely populated areas, was arduous and dangerous, even for unencumbered individuals. Tsugaru's climate and location, therefore, were not at all suited to the political economy in which the domain was obliged to function.

(i) Rugged mountains and swift-flowing streams

The Ōu mountain range, of which the volcano, Mount Hakkōda, is the highest point, formed natural boundaries between Tsugaru and the Nanbu domain to the east, and the Satake domain in the southeast. In the southeastern slopes rise some significant tributaries of the Iwaki River. Mount Iwaki, another volcano, rises on the edge of a series of steep north-south ridges in the west and southwest, between which run streams that empty either into the Iwaki River or the Japan Sea.

The Iwaki River flows almost due north after a sweeping turn northeast of Hirosaki. It drains the fertile Tsugaru plain, boarded on the east by the Tsugaru range, which forms steep barriers in the far north of the Tsugaru peninsula and a watershed down its eastern coast. South of Lake Jūsan on the Japan Sea side of the peninsula is a long strip of swampy sand dune country that obstructs drainage and causes the lowlands beyond to be unusually wet. As the number of waterways marked on the map indicates, the Tsugaru plain

was extremely well watered by the Iwaki River and its tributaries. Just 102 kilometres long, the Iwaki rises in the Shiragami Mountains to the west of Hirosaki, flows east past the castle, then through the plain and into Lake Jūsan, a large shallow lagoon that empties into the Japan Sea.[93] The final stretch of the Iwaki after its confluence with the Taira River at Fujisaki is sometimes called the Ōkawa, or great river. *See Map 4.*

The network formed by the Iwaki River system through the Tsugaru plain was vital to the productivity of its arable areas, and so also to the economic survival of the domain. One of the primary preoccupations of the second, third and fourth Tsugaru daimyos over most of the seventeenth century was opening up these areas for rice cultivation. The river system provided the main arteries of the irrigation and drainage systems required for rice production; it also served as the first stage of the transportation system that conveyed Tsugaru's newly generated wealth, in the form of tax rice, to central markets in Edo, Kyoto or Osaka. Logs of construction timber, one of Tsugaru's earliest profitable export commodities, were also transported down the river on the first leg of a journey from the domain's forests that would most often end in one of the three major cities. Within the domain, a variety of goods, including timber to be used in the construction of the domain's new castle at the Takaoka site (now Hirosaki) were also delivered by river.

By the end of the seventeenth century, silt deposited in Lake Jūsan by Tsugaru's rivers over the centuries had made the lake so shallow that Jūsan (formerly Tosaminato) ceded its centuries-long prominence as the region's principal shipping centre to Ajigasawa and Aomori. This was in spite of a large-scale dredging project undertaken by the third daimyo in 1694, employing 3,000 workmen for three months. Jūsan remained, however, the port through which all the rice being shipped away from Tsugaru passed, before being transhipped at Ajigasawa. Kanita, on Mutsu bay, and Imabetsu on the Tsugaru Strait were the principal timber ports. Those five ports, along with Fukaura,

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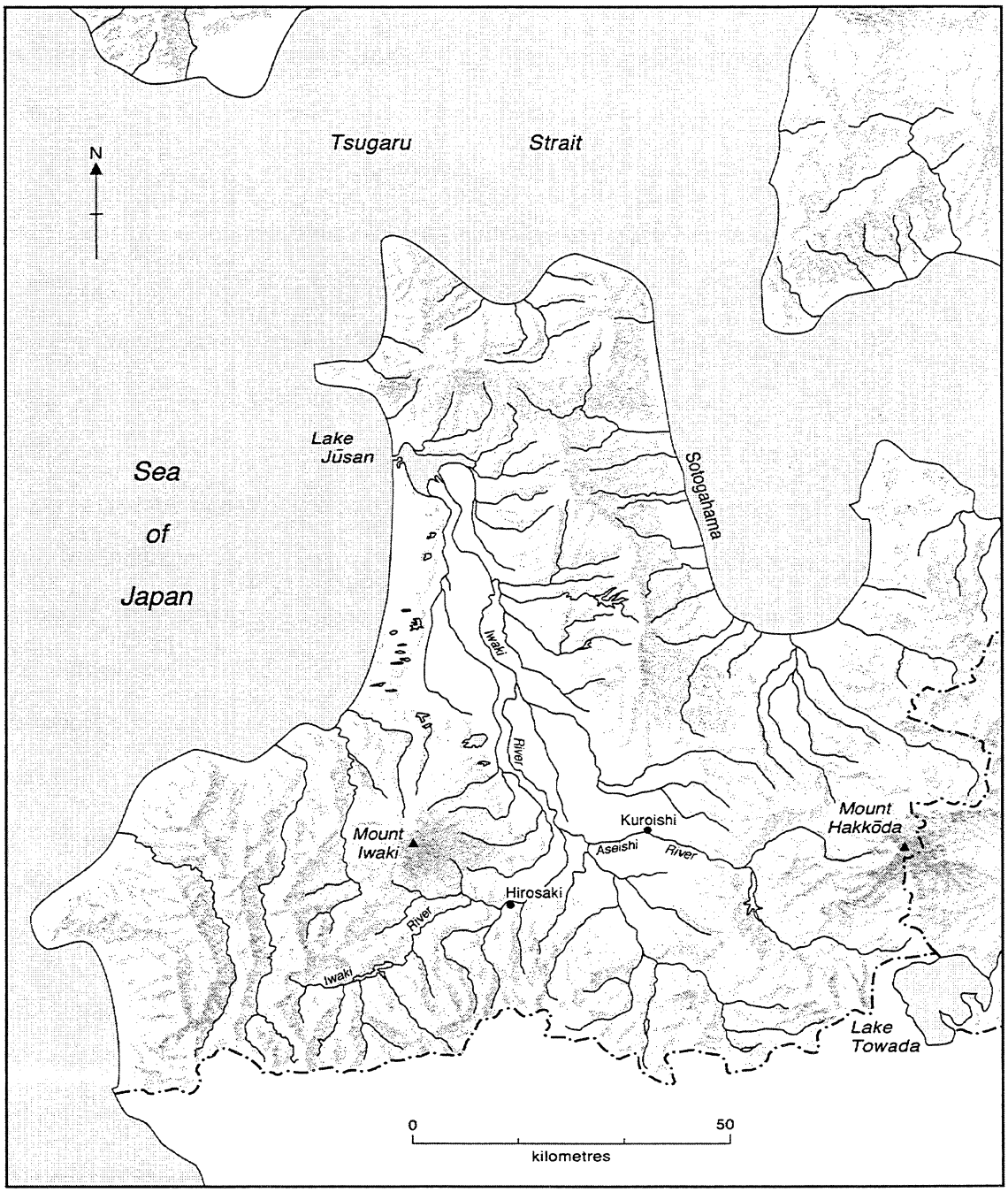
[93] Lake Jūsan is sometimes referred to as Jūsan-numa, or Jūsan lagoon. The name of the port, Tosaminato, uses the Japanese pronunciation *jūsan*, which is *tosa*. The characters signify the number thirteen.



Map 3: Relief map of the Tsugaru domain

Source: *Zusetsu Aomori-ken no rekishi,* page 99 and end insert map

on the Japan Sea cast, and the three main land border posts, were all supervised by a *machi bugyō* (town magistrate).

Roadways and footpaths through Tsugaru territory naturally followed the waterways where possible, only taking to ridges and passes when necessary.

These overland networks were gradually registered, and descriptive maps or charts of the various routes drawn up. The old *ichi-ri-zuka* (earth mounds) or *ichi-ri-matsu* (pine trees) that had been placed along well-used roads at one-*ri* intervals, were gradually augmented by a system of posts.[94] After a road distances survey in Genroku 6 (1693), the Tsugaru *ri* (里) was reduced by one fourth to conform with what was becoming a standard length in the rest of the country. The fact that this change was made after almost a century of control and regulation from Edo is an indication of how long it took for Tsugaru to be drawn into the bakufu-domain administrative system even in simple matters.

In accordance with the practice being adopted in cities and larger towns, avenues of trees were planted along stretches of Tsugaru's major roads, such as the one between Hirosaki and the Ikarigaseki barrier.[95] Since most overland travellers entered the domain on this road, it was thought of as the domain's *Omote dōri*, or main street. A new section, which was constructed after a severe landslide completely blocked the old roadway, was planted with pine trees in 1685.[96] Another 540 were planted in a different section in Genroku 1 (1688), followed by 1,884 in 1694 and a further 2,000 in 1697, so that a good portion of the last stage of a journey to the castle in Hirosaki along the major external route was through an avenue of pine trees.[97] Some of these pines are still standing.

(ii) Forces of nature

Archaeological evidence suggests that rice was being grown in the Tsugaru region before the third century CE.[98] There is, however, no reason to believe that its cultivation was continuous, or that rice agriculture historically had the kinds of cultural significance that are currently the subject of

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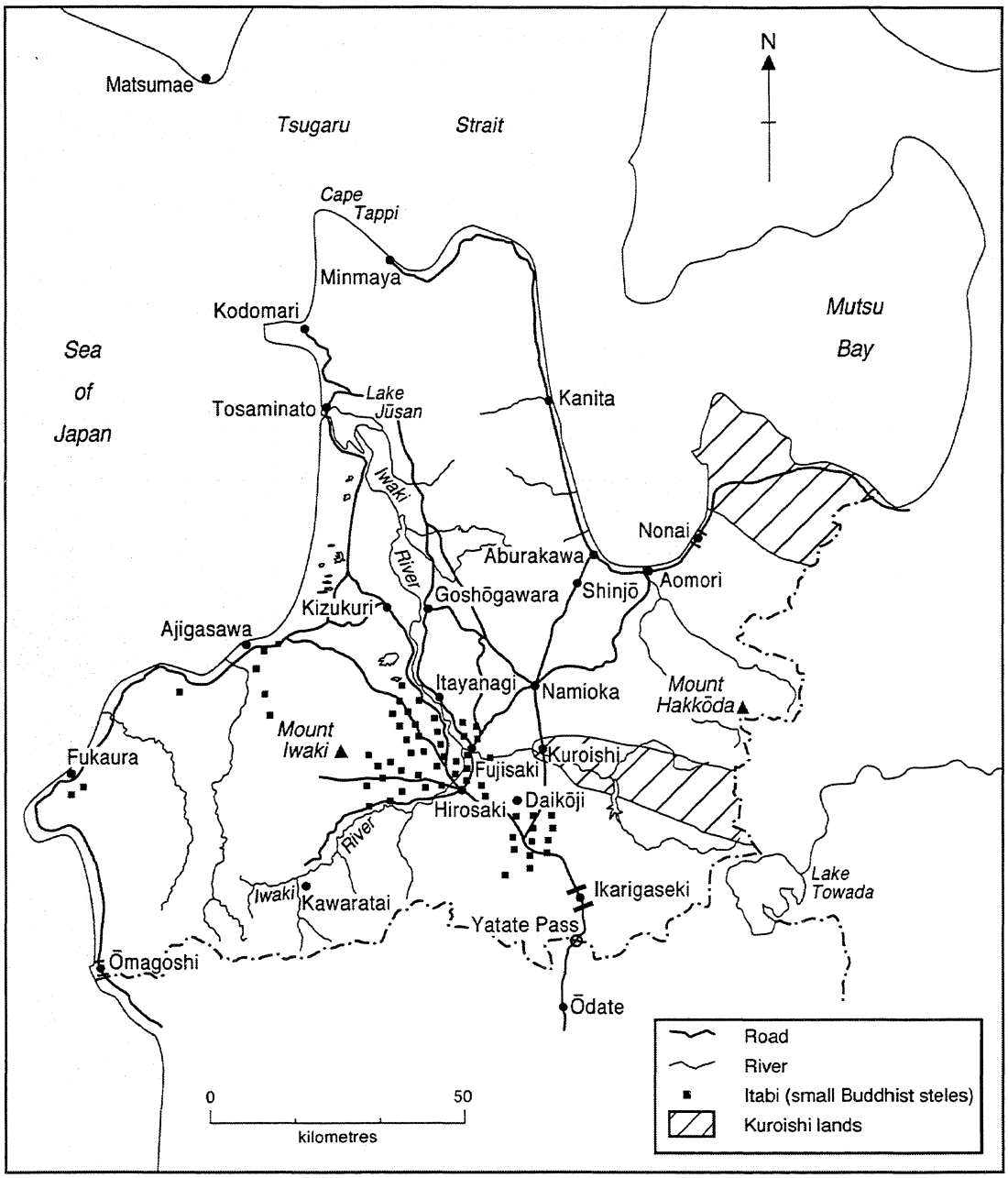
[94] One *ri* (里) usually equals about 3.93 kilometres or 2.44 miles, but the *ri* marked out in Tsugaru until 1693 were one third as long again. 36 *chō* (丁) = 1 *ri* and 50 *chō* is approx. 5.5 km.

[95] *Seki* (関) signifies a barrier. I use the word Ikarigaseki intact, instead of writing 'the Ikari barrier', because it is also the name of the village nearby.

[96] Conrad Totman refers to bakufu encouragement of roadworks, and the general attention given to tree planting and marking distances, in *Early Modern Japan*, pages 153-54.

[97] HSS, p. 158.

[98] Mark Hudson, *Ruins of Identity*. Hawai'i: Univeristy of Hawai'i Press, 1999, page 198.



Map 4: The Tsugaru domain, showing main roads, some rivers and *itabi*.
Based on: Maps on map insert and pages 234, 240, 159 of *Zusetsu Aomori-ken shi*.

contention.[99] Farmers on the Tsugaru plain have always benefited from precipitation that falls when winds from the north and west encounter the Ōu Mountains, but there has never been a guarantee that the rain will stop after an optimal amount has fallen, or that cold wet summers will not spoil crops.

Nor has the region ever been completely sheltered from the most severely cold *yamase* winds blowing in from the northeast. Tsugaru lies firmly in the area described as "suffering from spells of abnormally low temperatures

[99] Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Rice as Self*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, pages 30-36.

in summer" that are seriously disruptive about once a decade.[100] Since it was still the case in the 1980s that "a temperature deviation of 1.5°C below normal results in a rice harvest about 30% below normal", it is reasonable to suppose that cold summers were even more destructive in the 1700s.[101] Some *yamase* effect occurs in most years, and the eastern domains of Nanbu and Hachinohe were more often affected than Tsugaru, but it was in the periodic extremely severe years that disaster struck all three domains.[102]

Tohoku's cold summers are explained in at least two ways. In both cases they occur because the polar front passing from south to north and bringing the *tsuyu* rainy season in early summer is blocked by a high to the northeast of Tohoku. That high can be caused either by cold sea water temperatures or by ash ejected into the stratosphere by major volcanic eruptions. The standard geographer's explanation is that when low temperatures persist for long periods in the waters of the Okhotsk Sea, a strong anticyclone forms to the northeast of Japan, and cold air flows over the northern and eastern Tohoku. In these conditions, the cold northern *Oyashio* current flows further south along the Pacific coast before the seas are warmed by *Kuroshio* current flowing from the south.[103]

The volcanic eruption theory has been proposed by Jusei Kondo, whose work is based on Sendai Meteorological Observatory records. Kondo has identified seven periods over the 300 years from around 1680 during which frequent lean years have been caused by cool summers in Tohoku. He calls a lean year one in which the rice harvest is less than 80% of normal. Not surprisingly, the first four of these seven periods are 1692-1703, 1747-57, 1783-86 and 1833-38, coinciding with the Genroku, Hōreki, Tenmei and Tenpō famines of the Tokugawa period. Kondo concludes that the cold spells occurring before the Tenmei and Tenpō famines, and two of the three later

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[100] Glenn T. Trewartha, *Japan: A Geography*. London: Methuen, 1965, pages 371 and 377.
[101] Jusei Kondo, "Volcanic Eruptions, Cool Summers, and Famines in the Northeastern Part of Japan", *Journal of Climate*, Vol. 1, August, 1988, pages 775 - 788, page 755.
[102] See Map 5 for the location of Hachinohe on the Pacific coast.
[103] Trewartha, pages 45-46.

lean periods were all caused by volcanic eruptions. He did not have data on which to base any determination about the Hōreki famine.

Because of the unpredictable summer temperatures, whatever the cause, and long winters, with heavy snows and only around half the year frost-free, almost no double cropping has ever been possible in Tsugaru. The region is also too far north for mulberry leaves to prosper, so raising silkworms was not a profitable option during the Tokugawa period. Sweet potatoes became an important supplementary source of nutrition in Japan's famine periods after the beginning of the seventeenth century, when they were introduced from the Ryūkyūs: but they could not be grown in Tsugaru either.[104]

To provide a snapshot of the range of climatic and other disasters that regularly struck Tsugaru and its people, a resumé of the disasters and portents recorded by chroniclers during the twenty years before Mitsugi came to power will do very well. It is found in second volume of *Tsugaru no yoake*, by Yamagami Shōsuke, and the relevant chapter section is entitled *Sai-i zokuhatsu* (災異続発), "One disaster after another".[105] Yamagami's chronological narrative is based on a prodigious number of sources, listed together at the end of the book, but he does not supply reference notes.

Nobuaki, the sixth daimyo, succeeded his dilettante spendthrift father, Nobuhisa, in 1731. A major epidemic of an unidentified disease in 1733 caused many deaths.[106] Major fires occurred in the downtown area of Hirosaki in 1734, in the port of Ajigasawa in 1735 and in the domain's other major port, Aomori, in 1737. The Iwaki River flooded in 1737, and two years later the region suffered an earthquake followed by strangely hot, dry weather and aftershocks for ten days. Black clouds appeared in the sky that turned out to be smoke from an eruption of Usugatake in Ezo. Then a typhoon struck, bringing with it fierce winds that toppled giant old trees, and heavy rains that tasted of salt. Even then, there was some rice to harvest, and the domain

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[104] Trewartha, *Japan*, pages 357-377.
[105] Yamagami, *Tsugaru no yoake*, 2, page 84. The following summary is based on pages 84-90.
[106] *Aomori-ken shi*, page 185.

scraped by. In the 6th month of 1739, a flotilla of Russian fishing boats appeared in the Pacific off Hachinohe and caused a flurry of surveillance orders from the bakufu. Tsugaru was instructed to strengthen its watch over the northern coast.[107]

Famine overtook Tsugaru the next year, after a cold summer in the classic pattern. Many villages harvested no rice at all. In the 11th month hungry people began wandering about in search of food and begging in the towns. *Kayu* (rice gruel) was served in shelters for the destitute in Aomori and Hirosaki. Around 430 people died. By the spring of 1741, an increasing number of people were starving, and there was unrest everywhere. Incidents of hungry dogs attacking and killing weakened people were reported. A good harvest that autumn relieved people's hunger, but rumours and discontent continued to ferment. Nobuaki finally issued a law prohibiting gossip and criticism about the domain's administration.

A big fire caused severe damage in the northwestern port of Kodomari, and then an outbreak of rabies occurred that wiped out most of the dog, fox and draught horse population of the domain, and also caused human casualties. Before spring came, fires also occurred in Aomori and Kajita. In the 7th month, a tsunami struck the west coast, washing away a large number of people, houses and rice fields.[108] Over the year's end and into the 1st month of 1742, Usugatake erupted again, depositing up to twenty centimetres of ash and grit over a wide area of Tsugaru.

Towards the end of summer that year, the rivers of the domain swelled and bad flooding occurred in the Kanagi district and along the Sotogahama coastline. More than 60 people and a number of farm horses were drowned, and extensive damage was caused to houses, fields and irrigation infrastructure.[109] In the spring of the following year, the Iwaki River flooded again, washing away great quantities of rice and timber. At the end of 1743, in

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[107] Recorded also in the *Kudōke ki* and found inTRK, page 197.
[108] Ibid., page 198.
[109] Ibid., page 199.

the 12th month an ominous comet appeared, distorting moonlight and sunlight over the New Year period. The people were unnerved, and in fulfilment of the signs, a drought delayed rice-planting the next spring (1744). In intense, dry heat in the 5th month, the Motomachi district of Hirosaki went up in flames in the biggest fire the city had ever seen. Well over three hundred residences burned to the ground, and there was extensive loss of property and stores.[110] Six days after the fire, before the remains had been cleared up, the daimyo returned from attendance in Edo. He died eight days later.[111] The day after his funeral, heavy rains broke the three-month drought, in answer to many prayers and a special pilgrimage made by *yamabushi* to Mount Iwaki. But, the Iwaki River system flooded, destroying houses, timberland, farmland, horses, many bridges and 20,000 *koku* of rice.[112]

Tsugaru Nobuyasu, who was to give Nyūi Ichirozaemon the name Mitsugi, and create for him the special post of *motoshi*, *was* the six-year-old boy daimyo who succeeded Nobuaki. During the twelve years of his minority, domain elders were to govern Tsugaru. They presided over the onset of the Hōreki crisis, and Mitsugi's appointment to his first eminent post.

(iii) Bringing forth grain

Enjoined by the bakufu to settle uncultivated lands and grow rice, the Tsugaru leadership turned very early to the task of opening up new areas and putting irrigation infrastructure in place. Much of the plain watered by the Iwaki River and its many tributaries was so swampy that in many places large-scale drainage projects were necessary before it could be made cultivable. Water regulation remained vital to the farmers on the plain, and earthen embankments stand to this day as testimony to the time and effort put into securing the water supply and preventing flood damage.

Although the most striking increases in the productivity of *shinden* (new fields) occurred during the lengthy incumbency of the fourth daimyo,

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[110] *Kudōke ki*, in TRK, page 200.
[111] Loc.cit.
[112] Ibid. page 202.

Nobumasa (r. 1656-1710), expansion began from the time of Tamenobu. People of retainer and non-retainer backgrounds were awarded fiefs, and relieved of their corvée obligations for periods of three to ten years, in return for undertaking to develop lands assigned to them. Attracted by these rewards, and offers of assistance in the form of building materials and food supplies, settlers came from other parts of Tsugaru, and from the neighbouring domains of Nanbu and Akita. Some even travelled from as far afield as Sendai, or Japan Sea coastal areas on Tsugaru's shipping routes.

Among the investitures granted new settlers, *kochigyō* (小知行) were small investitures with stipends of thirty *koku*, and *shinchishi* (新知士) were offered to retainers as new stipends at one hundred *koku*. The settlers numbered in the thousands, and came from both *ashigaru* soldier and farming backgrounds.[113] The *kochigyō* arrangement was favoured by Nobumasa, the daimyo who presided over so many years of *shinden kaihatsu* (new field development). When it came to the swampy areas to the north of Goshōgawara and Kizukuri, however, the domain took charge of the development process. Fiefs originally granted in these districts were therefore mostly *kurachi* (蔵知) that took the form of stipendiary payments made to their holders from the domain's central granaries and treasury.

From 1664 onwards, the biggest area of new fields in Tsugaru's history was opened up, mostly to the west of the Iwaki River. High ranking retainers were appointed to direct the settlement of specific areas; and the labour of up to ten thousand workmen contributed to such projects as the canal dug to link the Tappi marshes with the Iwaki, which alone led to the establishment of 137 new villages. The area north of Kizukuri turned out to be thick with rushes and miscanthus reeds, and it was not until the 1670's that development there began in earnest.[114] Earthen dams were built to block streams, and embankments constructed to redirect their flow. Drainage canals were dug to prevent waste water flowing into irrigation storage ponds and flooding them. The drainage

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[113] *Shinpen monogatari hanshi I*, page 96.

[114] The name Kizukuri means "made of trees", and is said to be derived from the method used to make pathways through the reeds and rushes, by laying logs of wood on top of them.

problem, though, was intractable. Much of the land was at sea level, and the engineering feats required to redirect the streams involved were not performed until the 1930s. Tens of thousands of corvée labour hours were to be devoted to those swamps in the meantime, under both Nobumasa and his successor.

One further hazard that had to be overcome before the extensive Kizukuri *shinden* area became fully productive was the long stretch of sand dunes to the west, along the Japan Sea coast. Strong offshore winds would turn into sandstorms and scour new growth and ears off the rice plants. To block these storms, as well as winds blowing down from Mount Iwaki, the daimyo planned to turn the entire area into a forest plantation. During the 1680s a total of 690,376 trees were planted over the fifty-four *byōbu* (folding screen) hills. Miscanthus, coastal barley, and silverberries were planted among the trees in order to prevent erosion. Labour was drawn from up to 646 different villages. A law was passed, stating that anyone caught secretly felling trees in the area would have his head ground for fertilizer.[115]

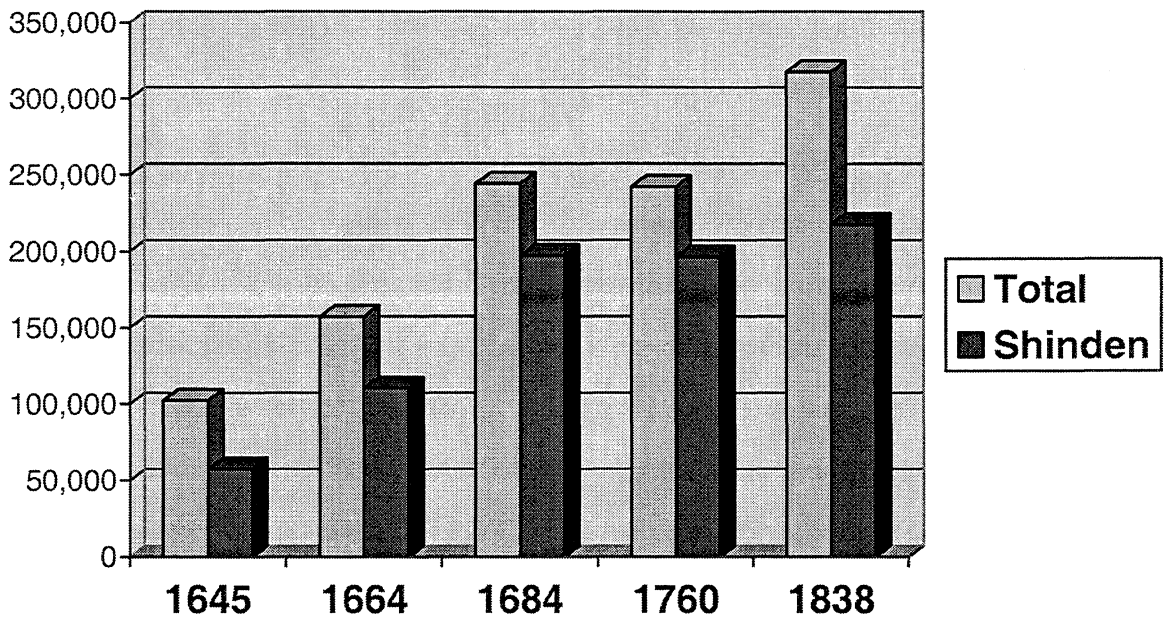

Figure 1: Comparative changes in the productivity of Tsugaru's established and newly developed rice fields
Sources: *Aomori-ken shi* I, II; Zusetsu *Aomori-ken no rekishi*, page 205.

[115] 「首は肥料にせよ」 HSS, page 99.

It is clear that the increase in new rice-producing land area in Tsugaru was dramatic. The domain in fact recorded the greatest percentage increase in productivity in the entire realm.[116] There is, however, substantial reason for doubt about the sustainability of that level of productivity given both the climatic conditions that prevailed during the Tokugawa period and the levels of expertise in hydraulic technology achieved. Tsugaru farmers were plagued by the domain's inability to control flooding during periods of excessive rain

(iii) To market, to market

Most shipments of rice destined for markets in the Kamigata and Edo began their trips from such river ports as Fujisaki, Sanzeji, and Itayanagi and Goshōgawara. After the new rice-farming districts began producing, the port at Goshōgawara handled so much rice that it gained the appellation of *minato*, usually reserved for sea ports. Another busy river station was the wharf in Hamanomachi, just below the castle at Hirosaki, where rice for retainer stipends was downloaded for storage. Extra rice was also supposed to be stored there for food relief in times of famine, but the pressing needs of supplying Edo and Osaka seem to have taken precedence over this arrangement.

Straw bales of rice would be loaded on to locally built *takasebune* (flat-bottomed river boats) operating out of each port. They travelled downstream, out to the coast across the Jūsan lagoon, and then south to the main port of Ajigasawa. Even at this early stage of the journey, the cargo was vulnerable to damage and loss. A typhoon in 1690, for example, is recorded to have overturned a loaded boat from Itayanagi on Lake Jūsan before it reached the coast.

From Ajigasawa, ships headed either east or west. As early as 1625, some loads of rice were dispatched eastwards from the newly designated port of Aomori, but it was not until the 1640s that the route was made reasonably secure. At that time, cargo shipped eastward had to be unloaded at the port of Chōshi and carried on smaller boats up the Tone River to the Edo River,

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[116] See, for example, the table in Tsukahira, *Feudal Control*, page 194.

downstream to Edo Bay and than across to the city's warehouse district. Tsugaru engaged a "Hitachi itako onyashiki azukari" (常陸潮来御屋敷預) in Chōshi to supervise this process. The earliest shipment of rice from the Satake (Akita) domain on the Japan Sea coast to travel via the Tsugaru Strait and the eastern route to Edo set off in 1655 from Noshiro.[117]

In the 1670's, when the Edo merchant Kawamura Zuiken was supported by the bakufu in expanding his shipping business to provide transport between the domains of eastern Tohoku and the capital, he made significant improvements to the port facilities along the coastline in Hitachi and Shimōsa provinces, including Chōshi and Kashima. Kawamura's shipping routes took boats toward Shimoda or Misaki so that they could then ride winds from the southwest safely into Edo Bay. He was able to reduce significantly the time and costs involved in the arrangement entailing off-loading cargo at Chōshi, and there were also fewer risks of theft and other damage through leakage and handling. After 1664, when a branch of the Nanbu family formed an independent domain with its capital at the northeastern port of Hachinohe, ships sailing between Ezo, the Shimokita Peninsula, Tsugaru's ports and Edo began to call there as well. The number of rice shipments from Tsugaru shipped to Edo via the eastward route reached a peak in the 1750's.

Waters in the Japan Sea were generally calmer than those on the Pacific coast, so as voyages between Tsugaru and the Kamigata were becoming more frequent and regular during the early seventeenth century, the western route was favoured. One small but telling piece of evidence of traffic along this coastline is an *ema*, or votive picture tablet, found in a temple in the Tsugaru port of Fukaura. It is dated 1633 and was offered in the name of a Shōji Tarōzaemon of Tsuruga. He is thought to have been a ship's captain operating between Ezo and Tsuruga, which was the most frequented port on the Japan Sea coast at the time. Shipments of rice and other goods taking the westward route from Tsugaru would be loaded onto ocean-going vessels, usually

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[117] HSS, page 173.

at Ajigasawa. The ships would either sail down the Japan Sea, through the Shimonoseki Strait to the Inland Sea and Osaka, and perhaps on to Edo; or, proceed as far as the Japan Sea port of Tsuruga, where their cargo would be offloaded and hauled overland to the shore of Lake Biwa. After crossing the lake by barge, it would be reloaded onto carts for the final leg of its journey to market.

In the early 1600's, Tsugaru's shipments of tax rice were mostly handled by agents in Ōtsu and Kyoto. Shōji Tarōemon and another Tsuruga merchant who acted for the domain both became so wealthy that they offered to repair Tsugaru's warehouses and other buildings in Kyoto free of charge, and declined the domain stipends offered them in recognition of their services.[118] For some time after 1678, the domain's own ships were used to carry much of the annual rice harvest directly to Osaka via the Shimonoseki Strait, but as technologies improved, long distance shipping agencies took over.

Kaga, Echizen, Echigo, Shōnai and the other provinces along the coast all had ports on a variety of routes plied by seafaring traders: some hugged the coast while others ventured further out to sea. The craft they sailed included *hagasebune* (shallow-drafted boats) *dongurisen* (acorn-shaped boats?), and long-distance *hokkokusen* (north country ships), later replaced by the *kitamaesen* with their huge rectangular sails.[119] Regularly each spring, traders' ships would set out for the northern territory of Ezo, loaded with such goods as clothing, sugar, cotton, paper, sake, salt, and *tatami* facing from the Kinai region and ports on the Inland Sea. The most ambitious pattern was to trade en route, and arrive in Ezo with rice and straw goods which could then be traded for seasonal marine products such as herrings and sardines, other dried or salted fish, *konbu*, and dried fish fertiliser.[120]

After 1644, when a branch of the Nanbu daimyo family broke away and formed an independent domain with its capital on the coast at Hachinohe, ships

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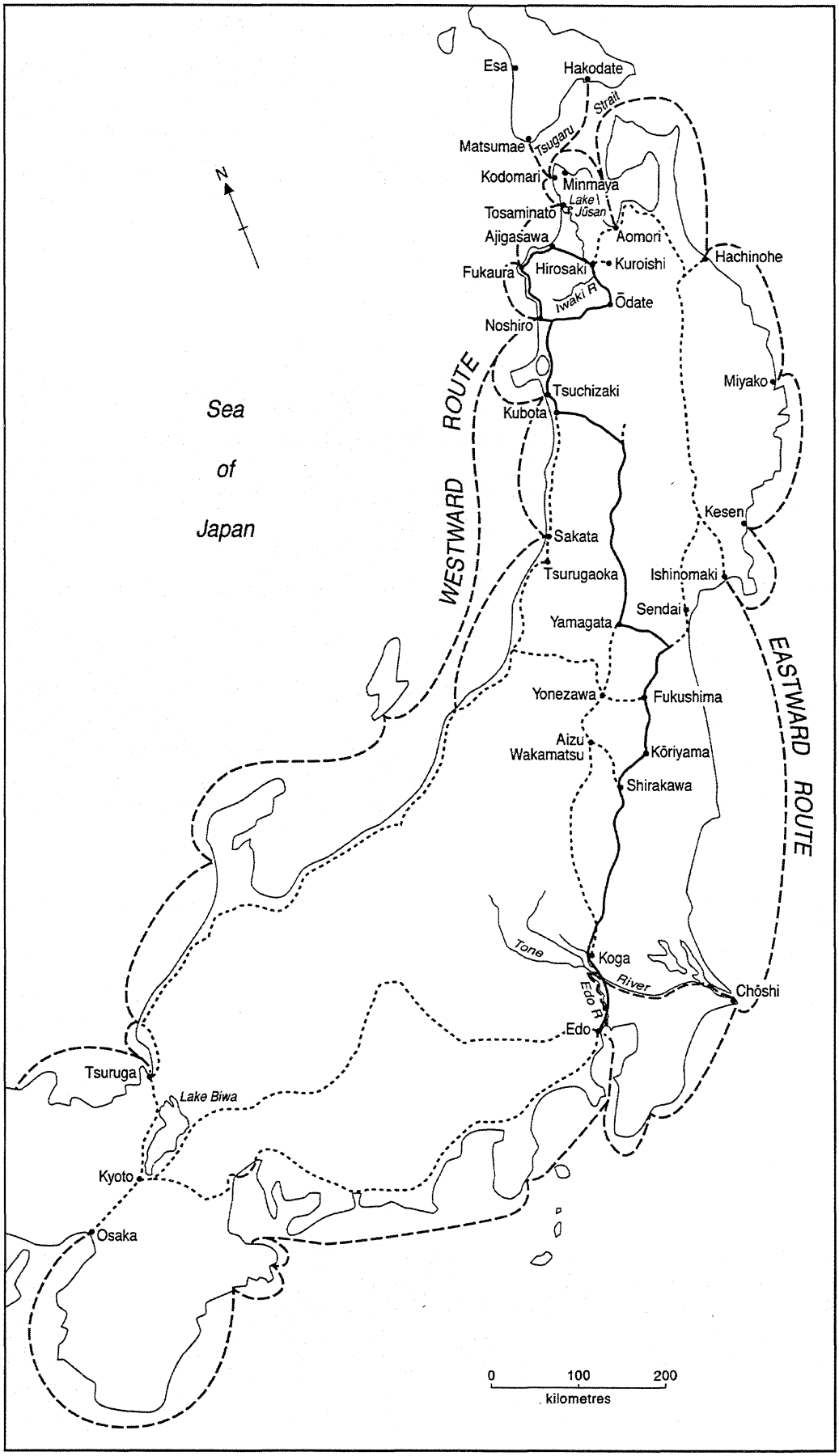
[118] HSS, page 174.
[119] Ōishi Manabu et al. (eds.) *Nihon zenshi.* Tokyo: Kodansha, 1991, pages 638-639.
[120] Maruyama Yasunari, *Jōhō to kōtsū.* Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1992, page301.



Map 5: Overland and sea routes between Tsugaru and the three main cities.
Sources: *Jōhō to Kōtsū,* pages 32-33; *Hanshi daijiten I,* page 45, Totman, *Early Modern Japan,* Map 6.

operating between Ezo, the Shimokita peninsula, the Tsugaru ports and Edo began to call there as well. Eventually, the ports of Aomori and Ajigasawa became key ports on both the eastward and westward routes to the south, as well as for ships sailing north to Ezo. Thus, the integration of the Tsugaru region into a shipping network centred on the ports of Osaka, Nagasaki and Edo completely erased its historical linkage into the far northern trading community of Japan Sea ports.

(iv) Travelling from the end of the road

Tsugaru is where the old Ushū and Ōshū highways both begin.[121] Their very names – the main routes from the 'frontier' and 'the end of the road' - suggest distance and remoteness.[122] The Ōshūkaidō was one of five officially designated highways converging on Edo, along which most daimyo were required to approach the city on their *sankin kōtai* journeys.[123] The official part of this road, however, was south of the Shirakawa barrier, which, as Dazai Osamu reminds us, marked for the poet Bashō the bounds of civilization as he knew it. North of Shirakawa, lines on maps are often misleading, in that they often represent little more than the kinds of "wretched bridle tracks" that was the Ushūkaido along which Isabella Bird travelled via the Yatate Pass to the Ikarigaseki barrier late in the nineteenth century.[124] The Ushūkaidō was one of a number of lesser roads that merged with a main highway on the way to Edo.

Both these routes from Tsugaru originated at the port of Aburakawa on Mutsu bay, and travellers on the Ushūkaidō could join the Ōshūkaidō at either Shirakawa or Kōriyama, in present day Fukushima prefecture. Just east of Aburakawa, on the Ōshūkaidō, was the Tsugaru fishing port of Aomori. To the northwest, the road through Matsumae led towards Cape Tappi and terminated at Minmaya, which was the port used by most boats crossing to Ezo from Tsugaru.

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[121] The *Ōshū kaidō* (奥州街道) and the *Ushū kaidō* (羽州街道).

[122] *Ōshū* is derived from *michinoku* (陸奥),the far end of the road, and *Ushū* from Dewa (出羽), thought to come from *ideha*, or *idehashi*, the frontier. Cited from Kida Teikichi in Dazai, *Return*, page 103.

[123] The other four were: the Kōshūkaidō, the Nakasendō, the Tōkaidō, and the Nikkōkaidō.

[124] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*. London: J. Murray, 1888, page 357.

From Aburakawa, the Ushūkaidō passed through Shinjō and Namioka before arriving in Hirosaki. It continued southwest through the Ikarigaseki barrier and across the Yatate pass into the Akita domain, then ran south to Ōdate before turning west to Noshiro on the Japan Sea coast, and south again to the castle town of Kubota. From there it turned inland, passing through Yokote before leaving Akita and proceeding south to Yamagata and Kaminoyama, then through the Kosaka pass to Kōriyama.

Until 1665, the official route taken by the daimyos and their processions took neither main route, but headed out of Hirosaki in a westerly direction to the Japan Sea port of Ajigasawa. It then turned south and followed the Japan Sea coast through Fukaura and Ōmagoshi, then across the border into the Akita domain. It joined the Ushūkaidō a little south of Noshiro. The *bansho*, or checkpoint, for the border crossing between Tsugaru and Akita was near Ōmagoshi. A manned police guard post was situated just south of the coastal village until 1621. In that year construction of an official compound began, and a man of the rank of *machi bugyō*, or town magistrate, took charge. Lodgings were available to the north of the village.

From 1607, there was a *bansho* functioning at Ikarigaseki as well. After 1665, when the official route to Edo from Hirosaki was changed to exit the capital along the Ikarigaseki highway, the checkpoint quickly became the domain's most substantial barrier and inspection point for both goods and people travelling over land. For the next two hundred years, the Tsugaru daimyo and his *sankin kōtai* entourage set out for Edo along this route, and official bakufu inspectors entering the domain from Akita used it as well. The barrier itself comprised three separate checkpoints and official lodgings were situated in the nearby settlement of the same name.

People approaching Tsugaru from the Hachinohe and Nanbu domains to the east would pass through the Nonai barrier. Before the secession of the Kuroishi branch line from Tsugaru, this barrier also consisted of three check points. They were all situated on the Ōshūkaidō, but the two furthest east were incorporated into the Kuroishi domain. Just over the border, travellers

and goods would pass through a Nanbu checkpoint on the Ōshūkaidō before heading south towards Morioka.

All these barriers and inspection points required staff, ranging from the presiding *machi bugyō*, who were rotated on four-monthly shifts, to military guards and military officers to do the policing, and *machi doshiyori* (town elders). Although the settlements at all three of Tsugaru's land barriers were very small and confined, someone with the rank of a *machi bugyō* usually took charge. The personnel under him were responsible for such tasks as securing the barriers themselves, interviewing travellers and checking their permits, inspecting personal baggage and commercial goods, or dealing with fugitives and an array of weaponry: lances, bows and arrows, firearms, ammunition, and bamboo fuse cords.[125]

Each person passing through a barrier was required to submit an official permit specifying permission to either exit or enter the domain. Those who left were supposed to return through the same barrier unless they had applied to do otherwise. Some indication of the workload of barrier staff is given by some statistics from Kyōhō 2 (1717), showing the number of people passing through each of the barriers, in one direction only. A monthly average of 250 individuals were processed at Ikarigaseki, 100 at the Nonai barrier, and forty at Ōmagoshi. Records were made of all comings and goings, including the nature and quantities of the commercial goods and luggage inspected. A great deal of this surveillance and record-keeping brought no gain at all to this far-off domain, except the appearance that it was conforming with Edo's requirements and protocols should inspectors arrive.

For internal purposes, bans were sometimes placed on taking specific goods out of the domain. From itemised lists of these proscribed exports, some idea of Tsugaru's basic needs and fears can be gained. Proscribed goods included cows and horses, rice and all other grains, soybeans, precious metals (including bronze, iron and lead), farming implements, firearms, linen thread,

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[125] HSS, pages 160-163. The following details are taken from the same pages, unless otherwise indicated.

raw cotton, *benibana* (safflower, whose flowers were used to make yellow dye, and seeds squeezed for oil), and raw lacquer.[126] From 1687 onwards taxes were imposed on imported goods considered to be inessential and export products of value to the domain and its people. To discourage smuggling, especially in hard times, temporary check posts would be set up at other points on Tsugaru's land borders and along the coastline.

Messenger runners and post horses were also provided at assigned post stations along main roads, in accordance with the system instituted by Hideyoshi to facilitate the movement of goods and people. By bakufu decree, at least one hundred men and horses were kept at the ready at post stations on the Tōkaidō, for example. Those along the Ōshūkaidō between Edo and Shirakawa were required to have twenty-five. Needless to say, though, the volume of traffic on Tsugaru roads was almost imperceptible compared with that on roads leading directly to the Tōkaidō.

If the number of runners or horses at a post station was not adequate, particular nearby villages were called on to make up the shortfall, either in kind or the cash cost of acquiring them elsewhere. Provision of this service was a tax obligation levied by the domain on the designated villages, but excessive burdens were compensated for in cash. Such payments were made to villages that provided *sakanamochi* (fish-bearing) runners, who delivered fresh fish from the coast to the castle in Hirosaki.[127]

The provision of labour and horses for these communications services would have been an imposition in many Tsugaru districts, bringing none of the the growth recorded in some post stations on well-used routes leading to bustling commercial centres. Still, providing fast messengers and strong horses was one way in which some villages were able to ease the pressure of their tax dues. The headman of the village at Ōmagoshi, for instance,

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[126] Cattle and horses were used as draft animals, while textiles, oil and lacquer were among the commodities whose production was encouraged from time to time by the Tsugaru government.
[127] ibid.

supplemented his income in the 1830's from an official appointment supervising the supply of horses at the post station.[128]

There were two hundred places in Tsugaru where horses could be requested. Between Hirosaki and Aburakawa, for example, Namikawa was one of four such stations, and the village assigned to provide back-up supplies was Nakanomura.[129] For the main Hirosaki post station in Shiowakemachi, three horses were levied on each of ten of the town's *machi* to work six shifts a month; making a total of 2,160 regular shifts to be filled by horses in rotation through the year. Hiring out these horses was an important source of supplementary income in the neighbouring villages. In addition to the monthly shifts, there were up to fifteen extra ones for relief horses, which could bring the total in any one year as high as 4750. Hostile relations over competition and burden-sharing between post stations and supporting villages does not seem to have developed to the extent it did on more heavily travelled routes.

In official Tsugaru hiring regulations dating from 1744, just before several years of widespread flooding, the following charges are set for a trip on horseback between Hirosaki and the port of Aomori, via Shinjū. The distance was estimated at about 12 *ri* (around 47 kilometres or 29 miles).[130]

Persons carrying the free allowance of five *kanme* of baggage, or less	348 *mon*, plus 19½ *mon* per *ri*
Persons carrying between five and forty *kanme* of luggage	348 *mon*, plus 29 *mon* per *ri*
Charge for a companion on foot	174 mon, plus 14½ *mon* per *ri*
From the start of winter in the tenth month until spring in the following second month, or whenever the snow cover is as deep as winter's, a surcharge of 30% will be added.	

[128] HSS, p. 163
[129] HSS, page 162.
[130] loc cit.

All travellers had to submit their trip schedules and lodging plans for approval before they set out. Those who planned to pass through a domain border barrier were required to have their exit and entrance marked on their permits at the check posts, and then submit the documents for inspection when they returned. While lodgings were available at many post stations on the busier routes in the southern and western provinces, in Tsugaru they could only be found at barrier posts, in Hirosaki, and at the busier port settlements. Conditions seem to have been Spartan. The lodgings at Tsugaru's main overland barrier village at Ikarigaseki were still smoke-blackened structures like sheds, with leaky rooves and barely adequate provisions, well into the Meiji Period.[131]

Runners conveying official documents for the domain government during the Hōreki reform period were required to complete the journey between Hirosaki and Edo in eleven days during the summer months and thirteen in the winter. Later in the eighteenth century, express services were being paid over three *ryō* for a delivery made in six days during the winter, and around one third of that amount for one taking ten to twelve days in summer. In 1868, when the Tsugaru daimyo was vacillating over the decision to continue supporting the resisting northern domains or the rebellious southwestern forces, a message sent from Lord Konoe in Kyoto took twenty-four days to reach the castle in Hirosaki.

In sum, overland trips between Tsugaru and the southern centres, and often within the domain itself, were generally arduous and costly for the traveller, and burdensome for those who assisted. Message services over long distances to and from the centres of power were neither consistent nor reliable. By the mid eighteenth century, internal communications were sufficiently developed to enable the tendrils of government power to penetrate the domain from Hirosaki castle. Tsugaru complied with the requirements of Edo's regulatory authorities, maintaining at a rudimentary level all the accoutrements of a functioning link in the bakuhan transport and communications networks. It is indisputable that from 1580 onwards Tsugaru's

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[131] Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks*, page 361.

communications links with the hubs of Japanese cultural, political and economic life became stronger and stronger as the region was steadily being integrated into the Tokugawa polity. It also needs to be borne in mind that the kinds of roadside facilities, stimulating exchanges, and hustle and bustle evoked in writing about the *sankin kōtai* system and the growth of provincial towns were experienced by only a very privileged few of Tsugaru's inhabitants, and far away from the domain itself.[132]

II Political economy

Tsugaru's desperate financial predicament in Hōreki 3 (1753) was similar to those experienced periodically by other domains, and even the bakufu. This crisis, with the reforms enacted to address it contributed significantly to the domain's own version of that sine curve pattern so often evoked in Tokugawa period histories. Tsugaru was reduced to such a degree of indebtedness just at this time for a complex of reasons: cash loans were no longer as readily available as they had been during the seventeenth century; low market prices for rice had decreased the buying power of retainers' incomes; the money economy and commodity markets had expanded into the countryside from the major cities; a cluster of natural disasters, local and regional, had reduced agricultural productivity; rice transport routes were not safe and secure; and, the cash outputs involved in meeting official ritual obligations as well as maintaining domain personnel, residences and warehouses in Edo and the Kamigata were constantly increasing.

Tsugaru's economic structures and systems were proof against none of these inroads and stresses, and their conjuncture in the 1750's threatened domain bankruptcy. The interwoven webs of local and shogunate politics and politics did not allow much freedom of movement.

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[132] See, for example, Constantine N. Vaporis, "To Edo and Back: Alternate Attendance and Japanese Culture in the Early Modern Period", *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 23.1, 1997, pages 25-67; or Katsuhisa Moriya, "Urban Networks and Information Networks", Chapter Four in Nakane and Ōishi (eds.) *Tokugawa Japan*.

(i) The Tokugawa compact

Tsugaru owed its very existence as a separate domain polity to the process that established Ieyasu in Edo. Tsugaru Tamenobu, founder of the local daimyo dynasty, secured the fief and title by means not dissimilar to those employed by the new Sei-I Taishōgun: a combination of skilful military strategy, opportunistic alliances, betrayal, and targeted homicide. He started by invading and conquering, or otherwise taking possession of, all the castles and strongholds in Tsugaru held by vassals of the regionally powerful Nanbu, still actually his own overlords. Then, needing sanction for his position as local strongman, he turned to the supreme commander of the land, Toyotomi Hideyoshi.

First, he dispatched emissaries with gifts of highly-prized Tsugaru hawks and horses for Hideyoshi. Then he took troops and joined the campaign against Odawara castle. These overtures clearly met with the Taiko's approval, for in 1580 Tamenobu was granted possession of Tsugaru, with a stipend of 45,000 *koku* and the right to adopt the surname. Now Tsugaru Tamenobu, he travelled to Kyoto during the following decade and met Hideyoshi in person, between continental invasions. He arranged with members of the Konoe house for his new domain to adopt a variation of their family crest, and was also granted a minor imperial post in recognition of his new status. Tamenobu continued supporting carefully chosen hegemonic campaigns; most importantly the Tokugawa cause at Sekigahara, two years after Hideyoshi's death. In response, the triumphant Ieyasu added a small grant of 2000 *koku* from his own Kōzuke territory to Tamenobu's investiture. With that, Tamenobu had secured a fief of 47,000 *koku*, the hereditary rank of daimyo, a new surname, the court rank of junior fourth, lower grade, and the title of Steward of Eastern Kyoto.

For his own part, Ieyasu had attained the elevated status of Sei-I Taishōgun through strategic perspicacity, and he applied those same skills to creating an administrative regime to preserve that supremacy. Every conceivable threat to central power was anticipated and forestalled through

the direct control of shogunal agencies. Ieyasu's participation in the Nobunaga and Hideyoshi regimes had furnished him with a range of experience in these matters. He and his immediate successors determined that the Tokugawa dynasty would never be destroyed by treacherous house vassals or alliances of enemy daimyo. Nor would it be undermined by unruly faiths and ideologies, or unbalanced by sudden inundations of wealth, either from foreign parts or within the realm.

Foreign contact was severely restricted and kept under close supervision from Edo. Christians were carefully watched until this foreign faith was proscribed altogether, along with the socially disruptive *fujū fuse* (不受不施) Buddhist sect. Imported books were strictly censored, and foreign trade conducted only at officially policed, designated ports with persons arriving on ships registered in only four countries : Korea, China, The Ryūkyūs and Holland.

The construction of any kind of ocean-going vessel inside Japan was forbidden, and the money supply regulated from the centre. The bakufu alone kept the right to issue legal tender, and directly controlled gold, silver and copper mines. All daimyo had to seek shogunal permission before starting significant construction projects in their domains; and, as a further security measure, the castle headquarters of a number of daimyo were dismantled. Succession arrangements in daimyo houses were regulated and closely monitored, with unsatisfactory or illegitimate heirs being among the grounds for attainder and other severe penalties.

Probably the most damaging of all shogunal policies for the economy of underdeveloped domains like Tsugaru was the continuation and refinement of Hideyoshi's hostage system, *sankin kōtai* (参勤交代). It was compulsory for each daimyo to maintain at least one official residence in Edo. His closest family members were to be permanently housed there, and he was required to stay there himself during periods of compulsory attendance upon the shogun. The journeys of each daimyo to and from the capital took place between specified dates, and even the locations where they ate lunch and stayed

overnight were set down. The Tsugaru daimyo, for example, was to arrive in Edo during the third month of alternate years, take eighteen days for the journey, spend his ninth night in Yamagata and have lunch on the fourteenth day at Shirakawa. It is even possible that the domain's sixth daimyo died as a result of a condition contracted on his homeward journey in 1744.

(ii) The Tsugaru polity

From the outset, political factors were not favourable for the implementation of the Hōreki reforms. Tsugaru Nobuaki had died prematurely in the 5th month of 1744, just after returning from Edo to find Hirosaki recovering from a major fire. He was only twenty-six years old. His son and designated heir, Nobuyasu, was a child of five or six, and therefore required by bakufu law to remain in Edo with his mother until his coming of age at eighteen years.[133] In the 2nd month of Hōreki 3(1753) Nobuyasu had his first audience with the shogun, Tokugawa Ieshige; and in the 12th month of the same year he was formally invested at at fifth lower junior rank, Tosanokami. He did not leave the comfort and security of life in the domain's official residence in Edo until the 4th month of 1756.

As daimyo, Nobuyasu was to head a government with a full complement of administrative responsibilities. He had to maintain a large number of retainers, and ensure that that the domain could afford their allowances and stipends. This entailed constant adjustments to investitures, taxation methods and currency arrangements. The government was in charge of land development and routine public works within the domain, but could also be called upon to provide labour and materials for large-scale construction or repair works being undertaken in bakufu territories. Internal order and stability were maintained by domestic legal codes, judicial procedures, and policing, while bakufu perceptions of external threat could result at any time in

[133] In fact, Nobuyasu was born in Hirosaki castle to the daughter of an Edo townsman, who had become a favourite of Nobuaki's. He was adopted by his father's wife, who was Matsudaira Tadatsune's daughter, and taken to Edo to live with her.

demands for active service from the domain's military forces, which had therefore to be kept in constant readiness.

The duties of the *bushi* retainers who were appointed to posts in the domain's bureaucracy were therefore widely various and correspondingly onerous. It is on the basis of these powers and functions that the argument is made for domains being state-like.[134] The antecedents of the administrative hierarchies in the Tokugawa period were the military ranks in the retinues of earlier daimyo-commanders. The number of official employees in a domain therefore depended partly on the way in which its founding daimyo had gained his fief, and partly on the degree of trust the bakufu had in him. It also depended on the thoroughness with which the system of standardised land surveys, first implemented under Hideyoshi, had been carried out.

In these surveys, the size and productive capacity of particular fields were first determined. Then a value was assigned to those fields according to the amount of rice they could be expected to produce in a normal year.[135] Values were then extrapolated for other nearby areas of land in the same holding, village or domain. The amount of rice was measured in *koku*, and the total value called the *kokudaka* of the lands involved. All land was subsequently taxed according to its *kokudaka*, regardless of whether it was actually planted in rice or any other crop. When fiefs and stipends were granted to daimyo or retainers, they were usually measured in *koku*.

In some regions, implementation of the *kokudaka* system resulted very early in individual farmers being permanently assigned to the cultivation of specific plots of land. This distinguished them from *bushi,* with their military or administrative duties, who would be assigned incomes according to their rank, usually based on an area of land and measured in *koku*. There was not necessarily a connection between a designated stipend, or official post, and any particular piece of land. Hideyoshi reinforced this separation of occupational

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[134] See Chapter 2, "The Nerves of the State", in Ravina, *Land and Lordship.*

[135] Philip C. Brown discusses standards of thoroughness and accuracy in land surveys in his article, "The Mismeasure of Land: Land Surveying in the Tokugawa Period", *Monumenta Nipponica*, 42:Summer, 1987, pages 115-155.

status with his sword hunts, after which only *bushi* were supposed to carry military weapons, and only farmers were to cultivate the land.

Domains like Tsugaru that evolved from territories unified under the leadership of a local *bushi* commander who subsequently became daimyo, tended to contain a large number of subordinate vassals with their own retinues of soldiers. These vassals had usually been attached for generations to particular localities, with military and family relations to the people who farmed the land and resided in the villages. It was unlikely that all these *bushi* and their descendants would ever be completely cut off from their hereditary lands - whether or not their overlords had been killed or driven from their local castles in Tamenobu's campaigns. They had more real power, status and independence as holders of *jikata chigyō*, landed fiefs in the countryside, being able to extract their own incomes directly from the cultivators of the lands assigned them.

In Tsugaru, large numbers of *bushi* were never all moved off their lands at once to be housed in urban quarters, because the Tsugaru daimyo did not ever suffer punitive attainder or even a reduction in his territory, as happened in Yonezawa, for example.[136] Tsugaru remained in possession of all the rural lands its retainers were identified with.

The demands of a central bureaucracy, the requirements of a standing army, and possible disloyalty, however, were separate matters. In the end, a good many Tsugaru retainers were required, by reason of their official or military occupation, or because their submission to Tamenobu's authority had not seemed wholehearted, to reside in designated *bushi* residential districts, mostly in Hirosaki. They retained their sword-carrying and surname-bearing status, which was affirmed by the location of their residences; but in some cases were obliged, even at this early stage to move from *jikata chigyō* status to receiving periodic salary-type payments from the central treasury.

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[136] Ravina outlines the fate of the Uesugi house on pages 72-74 of *Land and Lordship*.

Arrangements in the countryside, however, were much more ambiguous, and the situation became more complicated with the long period of land reclamation. Some solid farming households had laid the foundations for becoming extremely wealthy and influential landowners over the following century, possibly even for purchasing *bushi* status. Some *bushi* of lower ranks who had been able to set themselves up on modest holdings were eventually to become the tenants of either more prosperous and astute senior retainers on large established estates, or of wealthy farming households. Even more unfortunate men would become *nago* or landless labourers, with their households permanently under threat of starvation in bad years.

(iii) Markets, productivity and balancing the budget

There is no question that the key economics structures and institutions of the Tokugawa period were put in place to consolidate and maintain the power of the bakufu in Edo. It is therefore no accident that this discussion is shaped in large part by the policies and institutions of the Osaka and Edo centres.

The shogun's government took direct control over the main centres of commerce, finance and industry. Markets were watched over by bakufu and domain officials, and in the earlier decades were primarily viewed as organs for the conversion of *bushi* grain allowances into money for the purchase of other necessities. One key move that facilitated the evolution of bakufu financial management was the appointment as early as 1670 of ten official business agents to handle its affairs. These included the Kōnoikeya in Osaka, which became one of Tsugaru's principal creditors.[137]

By the middle of the eighteenth century, one outcome of the economy-growing policies of central and domain administrations was that a wide range of products other than rice were appearing in many market places. The machinery for marketing commercial goods had therefore grown in complexity, which in

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[137] "Kinsei Ōsaka ryōgaeshō keiei no keisei katei – jūnin ryōgae no sōsetsu to Kōnoike ryōgae ten", by Sakudō Yōtarō, contains an analysis of the development of the Kōnoikeya as one of the ten money-changing businesses officially designated by the bakufu as agents. *Bankingu*, Sangyō keizaisha, no. 175, October 1962, pages 32-54.

turn made reforms necessary in the economic management of all jurisdictions, from the bakufu to the smallest domains.

To make up for the lack of bakufu-minted money in circulation, for example, some western domains issued their own internal currency notes, called *hansatsu*. The bakufu ban placed on this expedient, as well as Arai Hakuseki's recoinage and the organisation by Yoshimune of urban merchants into *kabu nakama* during the Kyōhō reform period, represented three significant attempts by Edo to keep control over the economy during the first half of the eighteenth century. *Kabu nakama* were officially registered commercial guilds, each controlling the warehousing and marketing of a particular commodity, such as paper, tea, tobacco, salt, sake, soy sauce, and cotton in one or another stage of production.[138] Most of these guilds were located in Osaka or Edo.

Over the decades after 1700 when these fiscal and commercial adjustments were being made, however, rice prices in the central markets had fluctuated violently. This was due to runs of good and bad agricultural seasons in a number of key rice-producing regions, followed by the Kyōhō famine (1732-33). The price of one *koku* of rice in Osaka ranged from around just 20 *monme* of silver up to as much as 150 *monme*.[139] The bakufu reacted by encouraging frugality and cutting the amount of money that was in circulation, and these measures set up the conditions for depression. When large quantities of rice arrived at the central markets after a succession of good seasons, storehouses overflowed and prices dropped: so the daimyos, *hatamoto* retainers of the bakufu and other *bushi*, who all relied on exchanging their rice stipends for specie, suffered drastically reduced incomes. This squeeze coincided with marked price increases in commercial markets where the *bushi* shopped, which was an outcome of earlier bakufu monetary policy.

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[138] Relations between the bakufu and Osaka merchants are discussed by Nakai Nobuhiko and James L. McClain in "Commercial Change and Urban Growth in Early Modern Japan", pages 568-575; and bakufu price policies byTsuji Tatsuya, in "Politics in the eighteenth century", pages 449-456; in Hall (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Japan*, Vol. 4. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

[126] Tsuji, "Politics" (see note 109). In normal times, prices were around 40-70 *monme* per *koku*.

In the 1730s and 1740s, the bakufu was able to solve its own immediate problems by extracting more tax income from its extensive lands, and officially debasing the coinage. For the Tsugaru treasury and retainers, though, efforts to raise revenue met with less success. In fact, the situation of domains and *bushi* was made even worse by a bakufu decision in 1730 to allow speculation in rice futures, which exacerbated the tendency to borrow against future harvests and stipend payments.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, then, the basic functions of the central market places had changed, and bakufu policies had become mostly reactionary. Instead of simply converting tax rice into money for the purchase of a few essential goods, the key markets were negotiating complex systems of value and exchange. Their combined dealings determined the relative values throughout the polity, not only of tax rice and other grains, but of a variety of commercial manufactures and commodities, of the coinage issued by the bakufu, and of a number of forms of credit as well.[140]

Beyond Edo and Osaka, also, the effects of expanding commercial activity were being felt and economic policies adjusted accordingly. In many domains, attempts were being made to engineer a shift from primarily concentrating on rice production and the exploitation of fluctuating grain prices to the promotion of more diversified commodity production. Tsugaru, in contrast, had not yet settled on a safe, reliable routine way of shipping its tax rice to Osaka; and still resorted to a disadvantageous series of dealings with grain agents and financial institutions in order to cover expenses in Edo.

(iv) Debt

When he was appointed *kanjō bugyō*, and charged with reforming the domain's economic administration, one of Nyūi Mitsugi's earliest decisions was to order a complete and thorough audit of Tsugaru finances. As a result, it

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[140] The ways in which bakufu attitudes to the uses of money changed, the place of *hansatsu*, and the emergence of credit facilities during this period are ontlined in the article, "Tokugawa chūki ni okeru shinyō seido no tenkai – tokuni kinyū to zaisei no kenren o chūshin to shite", by Sakudō Yōtarō. *Rekishigaku Kenkyū* , no. 264, April 1962, pages 66-70.

was revealed in 1754 that the domain was in crippling debt.[141] Cash and rice were owed to a range of financial houses, merchants and money-lenders in the Osaka area, Edo, and Tsugaru itself.

Converted into gold equivalents, these arrears were worth a total of around 350,000*ryō*, which was nearly double the domain's entire income in a good year.[142] One such year for which detailed statistics are available was Meiwa 14 (1777). Since no significant growth in domain productivity occurred between 1750 and 1790, this year offers a meaningful comparison. In Meiwa 14, 159.000 *koku* of rice was harvested; gold income was 1,800 *ryō*, and silver 1,800 *kan*. At one *ryō* per *koku* of rice, or 60 *kan* of silver, the total income was around half the 1750's debt figure. Records showing that the harvest of 1777 was regarded as bountiful (豊作) amplify the critical nature of the Hōreki crisis.[143]

Kamigata debt fell into three main categories:

a) current loans with three major merchant houses - the Ibarakiya Kōnoikeya and Satōya;

b) payments overdue on a variety of old loans;

c) assorted old, outstanding, and new payments due on credit raised through the use of promissory notes made out on anticipated rice shipments. These notes were called *kome kitte.*

In the *Kamigata*, which included Osaka and Kyoto, loans were taken out and recorded in units of silver currency. Sixty *monme* of silver are taken as equivalent to one *ryō* of gold in the following table.

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[141] Kudō Mutsuo published a series of sources from which the debt figures have been calculated in "Hōreki kaikaku mae in okeru Hirosaki-han no zaisei jojō", *Hirosaki Daigaku Kyōiku gaku*bu *kiyō,* No. 9, 1962.

[142] Note: 4 bu = 1 *ryō* of gold 1 *kan* = *1000 monme* = 3760g of silver 1 *monme* =10 *fun*
From the 1740's until the turn of the century, 1 *ryō* = 61 *monme* 5 *fun* 7 *rin.*
Rice prices fluctuated, but were usally between 50 and 80 *monme* per *koku.* In 1754, rice cost 45.9 *monme* of silver for one *koku;* and in 1755, 66.8 *monme.* 2.5 *hyō* = 1 *koku* of rice.

[143] Kojima, "Thought", page 143.

Type of loan	Silver amount	Gold equivalent	% of total
Ibarakiya	5,422 *kan* 993 *monme*	90,383 *ryō*	37.0
Kōnoikeya	573 *kan* 341 *monme*	26,222 *ryō* 1 *bu*	10.7
Satōya	277 *kan* 319 *monme* (+10180 *ryō* in gold)	14,801 *ryō* 3 *bu*	6.1
Overdue payments owed on various types of loans	5,744 *kan* 595 *monme* (+346 *ryō* 1 *bu* in gold)	96,236 *ryō* 1 *bu*	39.4
Previous loans in silver on rice notes	435 *kan* 986 *monme*	7,266 *ryō* 1 *bu*	3.0
Debt carried on undredeemable old rice notes	299 *kan* 910 *monme*	4,998 *ryō* 2 *bu*	2.0
Currently negotiable rice notes	229 *kan* 632 *monme*	3,827 *ryō*	1.6
Short-term unsecured loans	30 *kan*	500 *ryō*	0.2
Total	14,648 *kan* 295 *monme*	244,235 *ryō*	100.0

Table 3: Tsugaru debts in the Kamigata in Hōreki 4 (1754)
Sources: Asakura, page 22; Kudō, pages 2-3.

Included in the total amount owed in the Kamigata is a sub-total of 96,236 *ryō* and one *bu*, representing overdue repayments. These arrears had already been itemised as far back as 1737 in a summary found among Tsugaru records, and they constituted 39.4 percent of the entire Tsugaru debt in the Kamigata area. In addition to these long-overdue repayments, another significant component comprised loans taken out as credit advanced on *kome kitte*. These promissory notes would be issued to Tsugaru personnel by the official purveyors and merchants who staffed the domain's Osaka agencies. They were used for many different kinds of purchases, and were thus equivalent to loans in silver cash from various merchants with retailing businesses.

Because of the significant harvest failure in 1749, rice did not reach the Kamigata granaries in significant quantities, and debt in unredeemable *kome kitte* had escalated steeply in the first few years of Hōreki, from 1751.

Very little had been paid off the principal amounts borrowed since the late 1730's, but now even the interest was outstanding on many of these loans.[144]

The lists of arrears owed to Ibukiya contain clear indications that the Hōreki financial crisis had much earlier origins. Among the loans taken out with Ibukiya for which repayments remained outstanding in 1754, the earliest listed had been taken out in Kyōhō 10 (1725). The stated purpose of another, taken out interest free in Genbun 2 (1737) for the amount of 1,169 *kan* 439 *monme* 7 *fun* was to cover repayments in silver currency that were already outstanding at that time.[145]

There are also signs of earlier financial ills in the accounts with the other two houses. Although the total amount owed to Kōnoikeya was less than that owed to Ibarakiya, there is a marked trend in Tsugaru borrowing away from Ibarakiya and towards Kōnoikeya, around the end of the 1740's. The exact dates are not clear, but there are notes written in red ink beside some entries to record that Ibukiya had refused to lend further amounts. This would account for the shift to Kōnoikeya.[146] As the crisis deepened in the 1750's, small amounts were in fact borrowed from Ibarakiya: but it was from Kōnoikeya and Satō that larger loans were obtained, even though arrears in the domain's repayments to the Satō household had already reached the equivalent of 10,180 *ryō* by 1749.[147]

One striking manifestation of the relationship that developed between Tsugaru and the Kamigata financiers was the number of individuals among them who were awarded official stipends by the domain. Three types of investiture were involved: *chigyō, fuchi, and hyōshi. Chigyō* were based on the putative rice yield of a given area of land, and were therefore measured in *koku.* The enfeoffed individual received a fixed share of that yield, or the equivalent in cash. *Fuchi* were rationed allowances of rice or other grains, ranked according to the number of persons who could theoretically be supported by the ration.

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[144] Ibid, pages 6-7, 12.
[145] Kudō, pages 3-5 (*kanjōbusoku gintai murisoku chūshaku*, 勘定不足銀滞無利足中借).
[146] Ibid., page 5.
[147] Kudō, pages 2-6.

Hyōshi simply designated the number of straw bags of rice presented to the individual each year.

Ibaraki Mantarō was the recipient of the most generous settlement: a *chigyō* stipend of 700 *koku* per year. Impressive, too, was the grant of 550 *koku* and *fuchi* rations for ten persons to Kōnoike Shinjūrō, while another member of his household was awarded 500 *koku*.[148] These stipends ranked the three financiers among the highest six percent of 299 Tsugaru retainers, who were listed in 1758 as receiving stipends of 100 *koku* or more. A total of sixty-one stipends were awarded, including some to men believed to be employees of the Kōnoikeya and Ibarakiya. The name Satōya does not appear in the records at all. This could mean simply that another family had taken over, either the whole establishment or the money-lending section, by the time Tsugaru became a significant client.

Compared with what was owed in the Kamigata, undoubtedly the economic powerhouse of the country at this time, debts outstanding in Edo did not amount to a great deal: just a little less than twenty percent of the Kamigata total. The nature of the loans was different too. Rather than an amount made up of relatively large sums borrowed at low interest rates from influential merchant families, the Edo debt consisted of an accumulation of small, separate loans taken out at very high rates of interest. Nearly all the lenders listed are individuals, rather than established banking houses. A significant proportion of Edo loans were also taken out from blind persons' associations, and agencies representing temples or shrines, licensed by the bakufu to lend out money on interest as a source of income.

Difficulty with loan repayments in Edo seems to have occurred rather later than was the case with Kamigata debt. The first recorded arrears are in instalments overdue in the early 1740's. It is not clear whether there was no official borrowing in Edo at all until then, or whether any loans taken out earlier had been duly discharged.

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[148] Kudō, page 19.

Type of loan	Silver amount	% of total
New loans taken out after 1743	10,610 *ryō*	25.3
Payments owed to customary creditors in 1749	10,916 *ryō*	26.2
Outstanding commitments on rice shipments	9,817 *ryō* 3 *bu*	23.4
New loans with associations for the blind, or shrines or temples.	5,543 *ryō* 3 *bu*	13.3
Old and new gold debts with the same associations.	3,074 *ryō*	7.3
Loans in gold associated with official obligations.	1,938 *ryō*	4.6
Total	41,900 *ryō* 2 *bu*	100.0

Table 4: Tsugaru's debts in Edo in Hōreki 4 (1754)
Source: Asakura, pages 28-29;Kudō, pages 12-16

As was the case with older loans taken out with Kamigata merchants, very little of the principal amounts had ever been repaid; and in 1754 no interest had been paid. Of the official Tsugaru debt contracted in Edo from Enkyō 3 (1746) through Hōreki 3 (1753), a total of 8,632 *ryō* was made up of outstanding repayments on borrowed principal amounts: the remaining sum of almost 2000 *ryō* represented arrears in interest payments. That is to say, almost 20% of the debt accrued over some five or six years in Edo was attributable to the very high interest rates in that were being charged in that city's money markets.

From the 1740's, redemption of Edo loans taken out with *kome kitte* as surety had begun to fall behind; they were then renegotiated as they became due as loans in gold cash at higher interest. By 1754, out of the total of 9817.3 *ryō* owing on these loans, some 6727 *ryō* was for the principal amounts borrowed and just over 3090 *ryō* was for interest payments.[149]

Borrowing from guilds of *zatō* (blind persons) and agencies of *shidō* (shrines and temples) tended not to require collateral security, and was therefore prone to higher interest rates.[150] Recourse to such loans became essential for the Tsugaru personnel in Edo when remissions of rice from

[149] Kudō, page 14.
[150] Ibid., page 18.

Tsugaru began to fall short of expectations. The number of defaults grew steadily during the years before 1747, when they suddenly increased, along with the number of new loans being taken out and the amounts being borrowed.[151] That was the year when severe flooding affected the rice harvest in Tsugaru, so that deliveries to the domain's granaries were reduced and stores fell below optimal levels. Some *kome kitte* were clearly issued after domain officials must have been aware that there would be insufficient granary rice to redeem them.

Neither the rice stores nor the financial situation had recovered before the harvest failure of 1749 occurred. From then onwards, more and more loans of small amounts in gold currency were taken out, to be repaid in instalments over five or ten years. A little later, when the domain began allotting the stipends of retainers serving in Edo directly to interest payments on their loans, borrowers could leave their loans unredeemed for longer and longer periods. Lenders, too, were able to profit by negotiating higher interest payments after insisting that desperate borrowers should take out bigger loans than they had requested.

The Hōreki financial crisis in Tsugaru, then, was not a sudden calamity. It had been developing over three or four decades, at least, and was the outcome of continued borrowing and overspending, inadequate accounting procedures, and an unpredictable official annual income.

III Ideological, religious and intellectual positioning

If the reason why a political ideology evolves is the need for "a social agreement, in thought and action, to view a system of government as legitimate and just", then, by the time Nyūi Mitsugi was appointed to address the threat of immanent bankruptcy, ideology had fulfilled its role in Tsugaru.[152] Any doubts about the legitimacy of the ruling regimes, in either Hirosaki or Edo,

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[151] Ibid., page 17.
[152] Ooms, *Ideology*, p. 5.

had long been settled. Elements of both these well-entrenched ideological structures of legitimation were to prove important to the acceptance or rejection of particular Hōreki reform policies.

Problems arose around matters of occupational status groups and the delimitation of the functions and powers that went with them. There were ramifications stemming from current conceptions of the proper relations between farmers, *bushi*, and the land; and from long-accepted ideas about the economic functions and social status appropriate to the merchant fraternity. The customary roles and independence of Tsugaru's established religious institutions were also challenged; and, eventually the authority of Mitsugi himself was destroyed, partly because he lost the support of the domain's esteemed elders. What was at stake was more than the ideological foundation of elite privilege and domination, but epistemologies and even religious beliefs and practices were being called into question.

Although none of the Hōreki reform measures in themselves directly attempted to control what went on in people's minds and hearts, the basic premises of Mitsugi's social vision, as well as the power vested in him as an individual, were clearly obstacles to the success of the reforms. In the end, his policies seem to have offended the beliefs and principles of a number of influential groups in Tsugaru. Social roles and institutions in the polity were disturbed to the extent that rebellion was in the air.

On the other hand, without the capacity to conceptualise the impasse that had been reached in Tsugaru, and to theorise possibilities for change; without the conviction that actions could be founded in appropriate authority and intention; and without some confidence in criteria for deciding what was just, true, or good, it would not have been possible for Mitsugi, or anyone else, to address the situation at all. It was in large part because of the intellectual, ideological and spiritual affronts posed by the reforms that Mitsugi's opponents were able to clarify their positions and unite against him.

(i) Ideologies of domain and bakufu rule

Hermann Ooms, in *Tokugawa Ideology*, constructed an account of the ways in which scholarly and religious individuals associated with the bakufu, or aspiring to be, contributed to the construction of a field of beliefs and ideas that legitimated Tokugawa rule. Over several decades, a variety of elements were drawn from Shintō, Buddhist, and Confucian codes to shore up multiple dimensions of bakufu legitimacy. These cosmological rationalizations for the social and political outcomes of *bushi* dominance over the other social orders contained religious and mythical elements as well as the Hayashi school's particular strain of Zhu Xi Confucianism.

In Ooms' view, the end of the seventeenth century saw the culmination of a gradual process of sacralization of the entire Tokugawa social and political order, producing an all-embracing new socio-political discourse. Supported by ritual, this discourse constituted the Tokugawa ideology in which warriors were transformed into virtuous rulers, and society was represented as a "sacred, undifferentiated whole", wherein the commoner classes were committed to subordination and service. And so, the government in Edo and other privileged *bushi* were able to deflect attention away from the structural reality, in which the elite strata of one occupational group had illegitimately seized military and political power.

Insofar as the Tokugawa ideology emanating from Edo had an influence in Tsugaru, it was in the elevation of two behavioural values: respect for, and loyalty to, superiors; and the assiduous pursuit by each individual of the occupation inherited along with his social status.[153] This emphasis on the social hierarchy the obligations of each individual according to his occupational status is directly linked with the close association of Yamaga Sokō (1622-85) and his school with several members of the Tsugaru daimyo household.

Although the structure of legitimacy pieced together by the early rulers of Tsugaru mirrored in many respects that of the Tokugawa shoguns in Edo, there were some significant variations. Tamenobu, for example, in the

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[153] Women's status was determined by that of their male relatives.

process of securing power over the Tsugaru region in the 1580's, was careful to construct a separate line of access to imperial court circles as well as seeking recognition from the chief commander of the *bushi* hierarchy. While he looked in turn to Hideyoshi and Ieyasu for formal investiture as daimyo, at the same time he rekindled an old family connection with the Konoe courtier family in Kyoto.

The Konoe were among the very few lineages from which empresses and court advisers were traditionally chosen. This strategy of Tamenobu's made for a complicated process in Kyoto in 1600, when power and influence seem to have passed full circle. After his victory at Sekigahara, Ieyasu needed to gain the assent of the emperor to legitimate his claim to the title of Sei-I Tai-shogun. Tamenobu, on the other hand, used his connections with the Konoe to have court representation made to Ieyasu on his behalf to ensure confirmation of his own position in the political hierarchy as Tsugaru's daimyo.

Tamenobu's tactic of drawing on both the shogun and court circles for legitimation of his status served his successors and Tsugaru well right up until the fall of the shogunate in the 1860's. Even at the bitter end, when daimyo throughout the land, and the Tokugawa authorities themselves, were deeply divided between the cause of imperial restoration and preserving the bakufu, this dual support structure gave Tsugaru's ruler more flexibility in making his decision. At the last minute, Konoe contacts sent information from Kyoto about the progress of negotiations underway there, and Tsugaru pulled out of the northern alliance, which was already at war against the southwestern putsch. As a result, while Nagaoka castle burned and Aizu was humiliated, Hirosaki remained unscathed. So it was that links with Kyoto were not only an element of the legitimating structure that instituted Tsugaru as a domain and Tamenobu's descendants as daimyo: they enabled Tsugaru to survive as an independent polity even after the demise of the bakufu.

Despite the role of court connections in Tsugaru's long life as a political unit, elements of Shinto belief stressing the unbroken imperial line and Japan's unique relations with the gods were not significant in mid eighteenth-century

Tsugaru. Where religious legitimation was concerned, the founding Tsugaru daimyo concentrated very early on merging his temporal authority with the power generated in local fields of belief. Even before being granted permission to use the Tsugaru surname, when he was still manoeuvring to unify the region under his leadership, Tamenobu made Mount Iwaki a symbolic and ideological ally. He encouraged his retainers to put their faith in the *manji* (卍) and the priest's staff, both of which were used by local mountain priests. He adopted the *manji* as the crest on one of his house banners, and a stylised depiction of the metal trimmings on the priest's staff for use on his own commander's standard. Thus, the spirits of Iwakisan and the mystics who worshipped there could visibly be seen supporting him. To this day the *manji* is used as a symbol of the city of Hirosaki.

In 1589, the sacred mountain erupted, and three temple buildings near the summit were burned down. Tamenobu took the opportunity to rebuild them, and as part of the process to rid Mount Iwaki of its association with Tendai esoteric practices. That was the faith of his erstwhile fellow countrymen and now declared enemies, the Nambu. Instead, he installed Shingon deities and accoutrements, and promoted the beliefs and practices of Shingon and Zen as the Buddhist elements in the belief structure associated with the mountain.

Later, this trend was followed in Hirosaki as well. Tamenobu had chosen and renamed a place called Takaoka as his capital, and planned the castle he would build, but it was his son who supervised its construction. Tamenobu did, however, see the completion of the Omiyadono on Mount Iwaki, and fifty *Rakan* (arhat) statues installed there along with his personal dedicatory tablet, which all remained in place until after the end of the Tokugawa period.

Nobumasa, the fourth Tsugaru daimyo and renowned developer of *shinden*, carried on the founder's tradition and oversaw a number of repair projects on Mount Iwaki's religious structures. In 1687, he dedicated one of them to the fourth shogun, Tsunayoshi, in commemoration of his forty-second year, which was regarded as an *akudoshi*, or inauspicious year. He had the entire main hall of the Oriinomiya moved and rebuilt. The lavish style in which

the decorations were executed led to the results being given the title "Oku no Nikkō", or the Nikko of Mutsu. In this ideologically economical gesture, Nobumasa wove together the authority of the shogunate, the power of the deities and Buddhas of the mountain, and the legitimacy of the Tsugaru domain and dynasty.

(ii) Religious beliefs and practices in Tsugaru

Like any other locality in eighteenth century Japan, Tsugaru was host to a wide range of belief and practice, of which the following three spheres of religious life represent typical differences among the origins, symbolic significance, and deities worshipped: firstly, the customs and practices revolving around Mount Iwaki, related so closely to the landscape of the domain; secondly, the installation of *itabi*, which are evidence of fourteenth century communities of faith in *Dainichi Nyorai* and *Amida Nyorai*; and thirdly, the major temple and shrine founded by the Tsugaru daimyos as projections of their power in the region.

The origins of Buddhism in the Tsugaru region are unclear, but well before the sixteenth century priests in the vicinity of Mount Iwaki belonged to the esoteric Tendai tradition. Tendai Buddhism had been established in northern Tohoku since the time of Fujiwara dominance in the tenth and eleventh centuries. *Shugenja* (修験者) and *yamabushi* (山伏) were actively engaged in their ascetic practices throughout the area. The mountain's old name was Onagoyama (女子山) and there are legendary accounts of the spirits of women being enshrined there.[154] One was the dragon woman of Tatsubi marsh, who married a conquering warrior. Dazai Osamu quotes an account from the diary of Tachibana Nankei, a late eighteenth century medical scholar who travelled to Tsugaru. Local people told Nankei that the goddess of Mount Iwaki was Lady Anju, the woman mistreated by Sanshō the Steward while she was in the province of Tango northwest of Lake Biwa. Whenever anyone from

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[154] Gakkō Yoshihiro (ed.), *Tohoku reizan to shugendō*. Tokyo: Chūji seihan, 1977, pages 49-53. The following material on Mount Iwaki is taken from the same source and Miyata Noboru, *Yama to sato no shinkō shi*. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbun*kan*, pages 61-69 and 92.

that region entered Tsugaru, the Lady would express her anger by summoning forth "wind and rain and storms". Nankei reported that when severe storms struck the area, the local magistrate would still comb the area for natives of Tango.[155] Whatever her origins, the female deity of Mount Iwaki continued to be a symbol of fertility and nurturing for the surrounding lands and their people.

Adding to its mystery, Iwakisan is one of a number of free-standing conical mountains in Tohoku that are called *moriyama* or *moyayama* (靄山), literally "misty mountains". The hazy, forested valleys on their slopes are the objects of special religious observances and practices, and, in the case of Mount Iwaki, it was believed that these slopes seclude the ancestral spirits of surrounding villages. That means that the mountain is identified with local tutelary deities, and is welcomed directly into the shrine of each village in springtime and farewelled back to the mountain in autumn. The clan deities and tutelary deities of each village in Tsugaru were not necessarily always the direct ancestors or clan heads of the inhabitants, because people had moved from place to place and formed new communities, especially in the *shinden* areas. Sometimes they installed their original deities; sometimes local ones, or they took advice from a *yamabushi* or some other mountain ascetic as to appropriate deities. These included Hachiman, Inari, and Kumanomiya as well as established regional deities.

The annual pilgrimage to the summit of Mount Iwaki was the most significant communal religious observance in the domain. Men were forbidden to set foot on the mountain outside the pilgrimage season, for fear of disturbing the spirits and deities that were constantly coming and going; and women could never approach it. A mountain guardian is still enshrined at the foot of Mount Iwaki, where pilgrimages used to be made outside the designated season. One particular place on Mount Iwaki, called Okuraishi, was where spirits of the dead were believed to go a certain time after death. In the area there are several grave markers and Jizō shrines, and there is a dry

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[155] Dazai, *Tsugaru,* pages 74-75.

stream bed nearby, dotted with piles of little stones. That is where the bones or bodies of the poor were sometimes left. All these spirits, too, were believed to travel back to their home villages each year to watch over the harvest, and then return after the festival of thanksgiving. Climbing the mountain during the pilgrimage season, therefore, was not only an act of thanksgiving for the harvest; it was a way of communing with this host of spirits.

In the Tsugaru region - in the entirety of present Aomori, Prefecture, in fact - *itabi* are distributed in quite discrete areas, clustered either around Hirosaki and Nakabetsu to the west of Mount Iwaki, or in smaller groupings scattered along the south western coast. *See Map 4 on page 83 for the location of* itabi *in Tsugaru.* *Itabi* are small stone steles inscribed with Buddhist texts or motifs in Sanskrit.[156] Those in the vicinity of Hirosaki and Mount Iwaki were nearly all put in place between 1300 and 1330, while those in the western coastal region are dated after 1340.

Well over half the total of the identified 290 odd *itabi* are dedicated to *Dainichi Nyorai*, and only one fourth are inscribed with the "*Namu Amida Butsu*" prayer to *Amida Nyorai* - in contrast to the Kanto region, where more than eighty percent of *itabi* are dedicated to *Amida Nyorai*. A good three quarters of the *itabi* in the Hirosaki - Nakabetsu area are dedicated to *Dainichi Nyorai*, while just over half those in the western area are dedicated to *Amida Nyorai* and less than one third to *Dainichi Nyorai*.

The conclusion has been reached from this clustering of distributions is that the earlier *itabi* were installed by adherents of the old Tendai esoteric sects centred on Mount Iwaki, and influenced by Kumanomiya. Those beliefs and practices reached Tsugaru overland, through Hiraizumi. The *itabi* belonging to the later period were installed after Jōdoshū (Pure land sect) teachings had travelled up the Japan sea coast, with the trading ships, and entered the region from the west. Thus, while Tsugaru remained in many

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[156] The most comprehensive summary of recent research on Tsugaru's *itabi* is in *Zusetsu Aomori-ken shi*, pages 159 -162.

respects beyond the institutional frontier of the Japanese state for another two centuries, *itabi*, and other elements of material culture that represented Yamato civilization were a familiar part of life in the region much earlier. The land route from Hiraizumi to the Tsugaru port of Tosaminato (Jūsan) and the Japan sea coastal shipping route, which linked Tosaminato with trading ports in Ezo, Sakhalin, Manchuria and further north, dated from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when the inhabitants of the Tsugaru region lived and traded as part of a far northern cultural community rather than as a Yamato outpost.[157]

Another example of the early establishment of religious institutions and practices is the Chōshōji temple of the Sōtō sect, which was said to have been established by Tamenobu's Ōura ancestors. After being dismantled and moved several times, it became the domain's tutelary temple and burial place for daimyos. After the Meiji government's *shinbutsu-bunri* decree ordering the separation of all Shintō and Buddhist institutions and places of worship, special halls were built in Chōshōji's grounds to house the *Rakan*, *Kannon* and other Buddhist images that had been installed in Mount Iwaki's temples over nearly three centuries by Tsugaru Tamenobu and his successors. People making the annual climb to the shrines on Mount Iwaki's summit these days routinely complete their pilgrimage by returning to Hirosaki and paying respects to the removed statuary at Chōshōji.

The other major shrine associated with the Tsugaru house was Kōshōgu, which was built to honour the economic expansionist daimyo, Nobumasa. The daily records of this shrine, the *Takaoka Reigenki*, became one of the most important documentary sources for eighteenth and nineteenth century domain history. *See pages 57 and 58.*

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[157] The monograph, *Tsugaru Andōshi to kitakata sekai*, edited by Ogushi Masashi, Kawade shobō shinsha, Tokyo 1995, contains chapters on *itabi*, the fortress at Fujisaki on the Aseishi River, and the links between the Hiraizumi Fujiwara, the Tsugaru Andō, and the Kenchōji temple in Kamakura.

(iii) The influence of Yamaga Sokō

While the early Tsugaru daimyos obtained enough practical advice and guidance in political matters from relatives and patrons linked with the bakufu and court, politics and *bushi* ethics as subjects of intellectual engagement made their mark in the domain during the long incumbency of Tsugaru Nobumasa (b. 1646; r. 1656-1710). At the age of fifteen Nobumasa began to pursue classical and military studies under Yamaga Sokō. Apart from the ten years (1666-1675) Sokō spent under the supervision of the Akō daimyo after offending bakufu censors with his teachings and publications, Nobumasa remained his student and friend until Sokō died in 1685, and heavily promoted his teachings and influence in Tsugaru. Nobumasa's younger brother and two sons also studied with him, and Nobuhisa, the fifth daimyo, continued to invite Sokō's followers to teach in the domain. A considerable number were awarded retainer stipends and stayed on in Tsugaru.

Sokō's eldest daughter, Kame, married an eminent Tsugaru retainer who took her family name. He later became a domain elder and was given the title of *Tsugaru daigaku*.[158] Kame's descendents subsequently became the main Yamaga family line, and the Tsugaru domain officially sponsored the publication of a number of Sokō's works. Until Matsudaira Sadanobu decreed in 1790 that Song Confucianism was the preferred tradition for teaching in domain schools, and Tsugaru scholars complied, Sokō's thought and the military arts of the Yamaga school were predominant elements in the education of the domain's elite. Sokō, along with Sorai and Shundai, was among the few Japanese thinkers commented upon in favourable terms in Mitsugi's writings.

IV Fields of power and room for manoeuvre

Poor harvests not only caused misery and abandoned fields in the villages; they also meant that retainers' allowances had to be cut, and less rice shipped to urban wholesale markets. So in Osaka there would be less silver

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[158] Yamagami, *Tsugaru*, pages 454-456. Kojima, "Thought", pages 150-51. *Kudōke* ki in TRK, page136.

cash available for repaying loans and credit advances. Little would be left to exchange for gold to settle the domain's outstanding accounts in Edo, where the daimyo's compulsory biennial attendance was an ever-increasing financial burden. Existing loans had to be refloated and additional credit negotiated, until even the interest payments were too much to bear, and the principal sums could not possibly be repaid without drastic changes in the domain's budgeting processes.

This was the process that had reduced Tsugaru's finances to such a perilous state by the early 1750's that the government's focus shifted from merely coping with immediate disasters to a concerted search for more fundamental solutions. To be effective, any change would necessarily alter the balance of power maintained amongst the various interlinked structures and interests in Tsugaru's political economy. Furthermore, reform policies would need to be congenial with the ideological, intellectual and metaphysical terms in which the polity was conceived and the individuals within it fulfilled their various roles as rulers, producers, marketers, protectors, and so on.

From the bakufu side, three elements of the settlement with the domains combined to affect Tsugaru's political economy, and contributed to the crisis. The first of these was the exclusive emphasis on rice as the foundation of wealth, and the basis of the taxation structure. Related to this concentration on rice production was the constantly promoted social ideal, dating from Hideyoshi's *heinō bunri* policy, that the population should be clearly divided into occupational orders. *Bushi* would not, as a rule, engage in agriculture, which would be left to the separate order of farmers. They would instead serve in the military and administrative hierarchies of the various domains and the shogunate. Households engaged in commerce would not be involved in agricultural, political or military pursuits. Thirdly, there was the hostage system, instituted by Hideyoshi and refined by the Tokugawa. Though conceived primarily as a security measure, this imposition eventually made financial control at the domain level impossible.

Thus it was that the balance of economic, political and ideological power in the domain depended upon forces emanating from the central bakufu structure as well as those that were generated locally. It was in the large-scale, centralised markets of Osaka that Tsugaru was provided with the exchange services and credit arrangements essential to financing the domain's obligatory presence and duties in Edo; but it was the quality of harvests far away in the northeast that determined how much rice could be exchanged, or guaranteed, for silver and gold.

It could well have been right there, in the very territory itself, where prayers and supplications for decent weather and adequate harvests were perennially treated as a matter of life and death, that some of the most insuperable obstacles to Tsugaru's prosperity lay.[159] The location, the weather, the landscape and the resources of the domain may simply not have been up to keeping its political and economic machinery functioning at an adequate level to meet the demands of the time. There was no question, either, in the middle of the eighteenth century, of dismantling those fundamental structures and systems. They could be adjusted to accommodate change, but only within certain conceptual and strategic bounds. It was those bounds that Nyūi Mitsugi transgressed in his reform program and his thinking.

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[159] Hasegawa Sei'ichi, "Tenkanki", page 12 contains a memorandum to a temple on the need to offer constant prayers for the land (*kuni*).

Chapter 3

Disturbing the Status Quo - the Hōreki Reforms

> For better or worse, most societies have concluded, albeit tacitly, that scholarship and government are fundamentally incompatible. Harold Bolitho[160]

Many of the crises that caused domains to embark upon reform programs during the Tokugawa period were financial ones. The impetus for reform often became more urgent because of a sudden disaster, which itself demanded immediate responses. Disasters exacerbated fiscal woes, disrupted the agricultural round, damaged harvests and often caused food shortages. Tax remissions were diminished, causing deadlock at domain government level, which in turn resulted in added imposts and forced loans. This lowered morale. Poverty and despair within communities then often led to protests and uprisings, or threats of criminal behaviour.

This type of pattern tended to recur, over time and in different domains. Although reforms were implemented in a wide variety of sequences and combinations, they tended to fall into four general categories according to their main objectives. Emergency measures would first be employed to cope with the crisis or disaster; secondly, efforts would be made to monitor and restrict official spending; thirdly, extra demands would be made on established sources of income while new sources were considered; and fourthly, attention would be given to law and order, moral tone, and a sense of unity among the people. In the following list, examples of common policy measures are given for each of these four objectives.

❖ Dealing with the triggering disaster and its immediate financial consequences. This could require urgent repairs to infrastructure, immediate currency adjustments, forced loans from retainers or wealthy farming and merchant families, official debt renegotiation, and the distribution of food

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[160] This is the opening sentence of Bolitho's review of Kate Wildman Nakai, *Shogunal Politics: Arai Hakuseki and the Premises of Tokugawa Rule*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988. The review is in *Monumenta Nipponica*, 44:3, 1989, pages 354 ff.

relief. Domains in dire need appealed to the bakufu. The bakufu had recourse to support from all its vassals, in theory, but most often extracted assistance from Tokugawa house vassals.

❖ Auditing and limiting official expenditure. Outgoing payments from the domain treasury were monitored, then eliminated, postponed or cut wherever possible. Daimyo processions, official gifts, seasonal observances and religious rituals became more modest. Commercial houses were contracted to provide official provisioning, banking, freight, shipping and other services that had been the duties of retainers. Retainers were sent to live outside expensive urban areas to cut the need for cash. Sometimes they were resettled on their landed fiefs to directly raise their own incomes, and pay taxes to the domain. This measure is now referred to as *bushi dochaku* (武士土着), or attaching retainers to the land.

❖ Stabilising and expanding the economic base of the polity. Systems for assessing and collecting taxes were elaborated and applied. Administrative organs were rationalised. New land surveys were carried out. Landless people or immigrant settlers were offered subsidies of foodstuffs and grains, tax concessions, building materials and farming implements in return for tending deserted fields. Loan debt amnesties were declared and interest rates restricted. Fixed tax rates were applied to fields, regardless of crop yields. The production of new agricultural or industrial commodities was promoted, sometimes supported by domain monopsonies or monopolies. Specialty export industries were also promoted. A domain currency might be issued for domestic use, while precious metals and coins became government property.

Raising the esprit de corps, social ethos, and moral tone within the polity. Exhortations to ideal behaviour were issued publicly. Awards were made for exemplary conduct. Public rituals and ceremonies were performed. Scholars were installed or consulted as advisors to daimyo or shogun. Laws and regulations were issued to occupational groups setting out the duties and the responsibilities befitting their roles in the polity and economy. Temples and

shrines were repaired and refurbished. Legal codes were elaborated and promulgated, while harsh exemplary punishments were administered. Official schools were opened for retainers to be taught military arts, and classical and literary studies. The number of domains establishing official schools rose noticeably from the beginning of the Hōreki period.[161] Villagers were encouraged to send their children to local *terakoya*, or temple schools, and temples were exhorted to establish such schools.

Eastern domains	Mid17th Century	Genroku 1690s	Kyōhō 1720s	Hōreki 1750-64	Tenmei/Kansei 1780s & '90s	Bunka/Bunsei 1800-1820	Tenpō 1830s
Tsugaru		✔		✔	✔		✔
Hachinohe		✔			✔	✔	
Nanbu		✔	✔				✔
Kubota			✔		✔		
Sendai			✔		✔		
Yonezawa	✔				✔		
Aizu	✔		✔		✔		
Kawagoe	✔	✔				✔	
Mito	✔	✔	✔	✔			✔
Shirakawa	✔						
Kaga	✔						✔
Ōwari	✔				✔		
Bakufu reforms			✔		✔		✔
Western domains							
Wakayama	✔	✔		✔	✔		
Okayama	✔				✔		
Hiroshima		✔					
Tottori		✔		✔			
Chōshū				✔			✔
Takamatsu	✔			✔	✔		
Tokushima				✔	✔		
Tosa	✔				✔		✔
Satsuma				✔			✔

Table 5: Reforms by Time Period, in the Bakufu, Some Eastern and Some Western Domains

Sources: Yoshinaga Akira, "*Hansei kaikaku*" (domain government reforms) in the *Kokushi Daijiten* 11, pages 787-89; and "Tōhoku shohan ni okeru hansei kaikaku no tenkai", pages 222-232.

The east-west divide in this table falls somewhere between the Kii Peninsula and the Ōwari domain. The domains are chosen for their proximity to Tsugaru, their importance in Mark Ravina's monograph, their prominence in historical narratives, or simply to spread the geographic distribution in the table.

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[161] *Kokushii daijiten* vol. 11, entry on domain schools (藩校) pages 742 - 765.

While it is difficult to convey much that is relevant about reform programs in statistical terms, it is nevertheless interesting to note that domains in all regions of Japan attempted major adjustments two or three times during the period, and that in the complete data, numbers peak earlier in the commercially precocious west than in the east.

The precipitating crisis in Tsugaru leading to Mitsugi's appointment and the Hōreki reform program was the financial impasse reached in the aftermath of the 1749 harvest failure, which had been the final blow to an economy already severely weakened by an accumulation of long-term debts. Less than three years later, after coping with successive reform measures that imposed radical change on most facets of its existence, the polity was again confronted by the prospect of disaster: this time, in the form of a major famine. This was when the strengths and weaknesses of the new structures and systems put in place by the reformers were revealed in sharp relief.

Most remarkably, mechanisms were already in place that enabled the distribution of food relief to the entire population: and a famine that was recorded to have caused around 50,000 deaths in Nanbu passed without a single life being lost to starvation in Tsugaru.[162] On the negative side, the reform group was left with the goals of its earlier policies still not achieved, as well as the additional obligations they entered into after the 1755 harvest failure. This exacerbated already marked tendencies towards autocratic leadership and stifling control. The introduction of Mitsugi's universal coupon system, followed soon after by the exposure of corruption among official agents, provoked widespread resistance, abandonment of the reforms and the reversal of much that had been achieved.

An account of the Hōreki reform experience in Tsugaru can therefore be divided into two separate periods of policy implementation, and a short, final stage of unravelling. The first period lasted from around the time of

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[162] Estimates of the casualties in Nanbu vary. The figure of 50,000 is taken from the entry headed *Kōryaku no kikin* in KDJ 12, pages 660-61.

Mitsugi's appointment at the beginning of 1753 until the extent of the rice harvest failure became clear, late in the autumn of 1755. The second was taken up with staving off famine in the domain, pacifying creditors and trying to shore up the domain's economy. The unravelling began in the 6th month of 1757, when Mitsugi's *hyōfu* (ration coupon) system was declared a failure and abandoned. It ended when he was dismissed and placed under house arrest in the 3rd month of 1758.

I Crisis, change, and crop failure

During the first three years, Tsugaru's Hōreki reform program followed the familiar pattern. The domain leadership attended to the immediate crisis by making attempts to balance the budget and increase revenue. Moves were quickly made to control official expenditure and other outflows of cash. Surveys and investigations proceeded apace. The data collected was used to rationalise administration, first within the finance office in Hirosaki and then further afield. Changes were implemented in other government organs, in urban centres, and then the countryside. The arm of reform also extended to the domain's personnel and offices in the Kamigata and Edo. And, in keeping with general practice, the reformers turned their attention to improving the general moral tone of the polity.

In line with policies aimed at saving money and controlling exchange procedures, the decision was made not to ship all the Hōreki 4 intake of tax rice to central markets, but instead to store it in the domain's granaries for periodic shipment. Local currency reforms were also implemented and stipend payment procedures adjusted. The problem of domain income was addressed first by tightening central administrative control over the countryside and the collection of taxes. After that, effort was also put into increasing rural output and stimulating the production of potential export commodities. In the meanwhile, regular notices and instructions issued from government bureaus to people in all walks of life, admonished extravagance, encouraged virtue and insisted on diligent application to work.

(i) Attending to the immediate crisis

The three leading advocates of reform were positioned at the head of Tsugaru's administration by the end of the first month of Hōreki 3 (1753). Tsugaru Mondo had been sharing the responsibilities of domain government with his fellow *karō* (domain elders) since Nobuaki's death in 1744, and Mōnai Arieimon had served as *goyōnin* (steward) since the 5th month of Hōreki 1.[163] The appointment of Nyūi Ichirozaemon (Mitsugi) as *kanjō bugyō* (finance magistrate), noted in entry of the Kudō household diary headed the 11th day of the 1st month of Hōreki 3 (1753), completed the group.[164]

While decision-making power in the domain was eventually to be concentrated in the person of Mitsugi, it appears that at this stage he and Mōnai Ariemon worked in harmony. One impression of their respective approaches to administration is found in this snippet from the *Takaoka Reigenki*: "Nyūi's ideas kept rice and money circulating, and the morale of the people was kept up by Mōnai's integrity."[165] For part of the year at least, Tsugaru Mondo was in Edo, supervising the ceremonial and rituals associated with Nobuyasu's coming of age and investiture.[166]

Local debts, and the excessive amounts owed in the Osaka and Edo markets were put in order in the finance office, with the assistance of another *kanjō bugyō*, Kamayachi Heizaemon. He and Mitsugi succeeded in negotiating unlimited extensions for payments on 101,180 *ryō* in gold debt and 7,780 *kan* in silver, out of the total of 240,000 *ryō* in gold. For the remainder of the debt they obtained three-year loan extensions.[167] The need to send scarce cash out of the domain was therefore no longer quite so urgent, and the second element of Mitsugi's money-saving strategy was put in place: while rice was being "intentionally kept in storage" in the Tsugaru granaries, *kome kitte* (rice

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[163] *Satōke ki*, in TRK, page 206.
[164] *Kudōke ki*, loc. cit.
[165] Quoted on page 12 in Ōkawa Tetsuo. "An examination of the Hōreki reforms in Tsugaru". *Hirosaki daigaku kokushi kenkyū*, no. 30, 1962, pages 9-38, *Takaokaki* in TKD, page 217.
[166] He is noted in the *Kudōke ki*, TRK, page 206, as one of the attendants accompanying Nobuyasu on the occasion of his first audience with the shogun, Ieshige.
[167] Okawa, "Examination" page 18.

promissory notes) were sold to merchants in the local area and the Kamigata.[168] That brought currency into the treasury, and gave the finance office a small interval of breathing space.

All official loans held by the domain with retainers were extended. These loans were in fact forced contributions deducted from regular allowances and stipend payments. The arrangement made at the time of the 1749 harvest failure, that half the value of stipends would be held back, was still in effect. It applied to all allowances paid in cash, rice or other grain equivalents. From 1750, one third of the amounts of gold and rice normally remitted to Edo had also been held back.[169] All the rice not being paid to retainers or sent to Edo was stored in the domain's granaries, along with the year's harvest that was not being shipped to Osaka. The goal was to save money and gain control over the exchange processes by directly exchanging grain for gold, instead of first selling it for silver. Local currency reforms also formed part of this strategy. A little later, enough rice had accumulated through the *kome kitte* scheme for the treasury to pay back to retainers one third of the total amount that had been borrowed from them, and to send an extra ten percent to Edo against what had been "borrowed" from there.

Along with these cash-saving measures, it was announced that any funds paid in lieu of compulsory contributions of labour to public works, would be cut in half until the price of rice recovered to 15 *monme*. Proportional cuts were then made to the large amounts budgeted for the daimyo's *sankin kōtai* trips to Edo, as well as the cost of maintaining entourages and residences there. On the other hand, allowances for horses and expenses on the road were slightly increased so as to prevent shortfalls resulting in unauthorised borrowing at post stations along the way. No official allowances were paid out to shrines, temples, or domain officers stationed in the nine ports, though in some cases amounts of up to five percent were paid, in a gesture acknowledging hardship.

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[168] *Takaokaki*, in TKD, page 228.
[169] *Kudōke ki*, inTRK, page 206.

(ii) Counting costs and gathering data

In a joint statement from the general director of the finance office, issued in the names of Satō Kanzō and Nyūi Mitsugi on the 15th day of the 8th month of Hōreki 3, the disorganised state of the domain's book keeping and accounting is described:

> Due to the disorganisation and lack of ability of those who are employed in it, the office has become increasingly chaotic over the years. Numerous instances over-statement and under-statement, as well as complete omissions, have been detected in the figures and calculations...Clear summary statements of income and expenditure never appear at the top of a page.

It was completely impossible, according to the report, "to get a clear idea of the financial state of the domain", and the two *kanjō bugyō* were therefore prevented from attending to "even the most pressing financial matters". They claimed that "private matters are mixed in with the official business" of the finance office, and because "this is so complicated to sort out, another office section is required". The request is spelled out, with the recommendation that someone of the status of *kogashira* or above would be most suitable to supervise the task, with one or two other officers to work with him.[170]

Their suggestion was taken up, and, as an item recorded in the *Tsugaru hen san nikki* for the 10th month records, a new agency was to be established called the *Oshirabekata yakusho*, or general bureau of investigation. Satō Denzaemon (Kanzō), currently general inspector of the finance office, was also to head the *Oshirabekata yakusho*. Since his combined responsibilities were expected to be too onerous for one person, Mitsugi was to assist him in both.[171] These new arrangements were to be carried out under the supervision of Mōnai Ariemon.[172]

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[170] SHS, pages 626-27.

[171] Contrary to accounts relating that the elder, Tsugaru Mondo personally chose Mitsugi to implement reforms, the nature of Mitsugi's appointment was, in formal terms, simply to assist *Kanzō*. 「一人にて相成間敷候間、右同役乳井市郎左衛門手伝申付...) loc. cit.

[172] SHS, pages 626-27. The entry from the *Kudōke ki* inTRK, page 206, which notes the establishment of the *Oshirabekata* is recorded under the same date as Mitsugi's appointment, in the first month of Hōreki 3. A date in the 10th month, after the submission of the report in the 8th month, seems more likely.

On the document registering the founding of the *Oshirabekata yakusho*, Ariemon's appointment as its general director appears with those of Mitsugi and Kanzō. In addition, the associated promotion of the accountants Kudō Sadakazu, Mizoguchi Ichizaemon and Kakizaki Tōshirō as staff members to take care of official business is noted. A weighty pledge of office is set out above all their names.[173]

During the last three months of Hōreki 3, the inspections and surveys advocated by Mitsugi and Kanzō in their finance office report were put in place. An audit of expenditure on retainers' rice stipends and money allowances was carried out in the 10th month. Shortfalls in official income from the agricultural tax were to be addressed by a comprehensive survey of all land under cultivation, including both the long-established and newly developed farming areas. Older fields had of course been assessed previously, but they were all inspected anew by appointed officials, along with those in the three more recently developed shinden (new rice field) areas. Inspection teams were enjoined to carry out their duties with the utmost propriety, accepting no gifts from farmers of cotton cloth, money or the like. They were to confirm and register an accurately assessed yield for each field.[174]

All temples and shrines in the domain were also required to submit detailed information concerning their assets, personnel and income. In some cases several forms had to be filled out and submitted before the investigators were satisfied.[175] The enquiry covered

- the area of all lands within the bounds of each sect
- a list of all buildings associated with the temple or shrine, giving their full names and their floor area, measured in tatami mats -halls, pagodas, hermitages, residences, and so on, including those that were unoccupied, not in use, or broken down

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[173] SHS, page 627.
[174] SHS, pages 628-29.
[175] ibid., pages 678-79.

- the total annual income received in official allowances, rice offerings, gifts or any other form
- the names and titles of the person in charge, and all other personnel, including priests have gone to Kyoto to study, or those currently residing at their head temples.[176]

In a long memorandum, issued on the 27th day of the 12th month outlining changes that were to take effect in the new year, there is a clause setting out conditions that would apply to obligatory loans from retainers, temples and shrines, and rural, town and port magistrates. In effect, claims on the "loans", whether they were fully paid or not, were to be dropped by the finance office.[177] Taken together with the insistence of the *Oshirabekata* on full disclosure from the shrines and temples, and the notice issued in the following 5th month, which stated their religious duties to the polity and the intention of the government to take responsibility for upkeep and repairs, the policy seems to be part of a broader plan to bring even shrines and temples under the financial and administrative umbrella of the domain.

(iii) Reconfiguring the networks of power

In late 1753, several new sections of the *Oshirabekata* were set up under the direct supervision of the *kanjō bugyō*. One was to handle all alterations to the payment of stipends and allowances, in rice or as money wages; another to approve and register any changes in family names; a third to supervise the employment and dismissal of mercenary troops; and a fourth to be responsible for deciding orders of hereditary succession to rank, official posts and family headship. It was necessary to organise the various bureaus to allow time for clerical work and record-keeping as well as daily face-to-face administrative business, especially during times when compulsory documentation was being submitted in response to requests for information by the new office. Shrines and temples, for example, were constantly furnishing

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[176] The notice pressing for data on absent personnel and disused buildings is dated the 27th day of the 2nd (intercalary) month of 1754.
[177] SHS, pages 629-31.

additional details about their personnel, buildings, income, landholdings and so on.

Between the 24th and 27th days of the 12th month, plans for a complete overhaul of the domain bureaucracy were announced. A large number of bureaus and agencies were to be affected by amalgamations or eliminations. On the whole, these changes enhanced the structural power of the *Oshirabekata* by clearing away intermediate level authorities. Administration of the rice granary, the internal domain treasury, official loans, upland agriculture and animal fodder supplies were all among the matters placed under its direct authority, along with the oversight of cottage industries, control of the movement of goods in and out of domain warehouses, and the authorization of all the government's outgoing payments.[178] A superintendent of monies had hitherto had control of expenditure, and the uplands had been under the supervision of Kudō Manzaemon, from a post in the now disbanded criminal investigation office.[179]

Within the finance office itself, personnel were shuffled and reshuffled for several years. There had customarily been eight posts available at the level of *kanjō bugyō*, but the number of appointments seems deliberately to have been kept much lower, perhaps so that control would be more direct and possibilities for conflict minimized. An unusually large number of men were dismissed from their posts, with six departing during the three years from 1753. In the same period, only two new appointments were made: those of Kamayatsu Heizaemon and Kanehira Rizaemon. From 1754 onwards, the names of officials who seem to have been sympathetic with the reformers predominate: Mitsugi himself, Satō, Kamayatsu and Kanehira, for example. The personnel in charge of accounts also changed often, though it is difficult to tell whether records of their movements correspond in any way with those

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[178] Ibid., pages 629-31.

[179] This seemingly odd arrangement was quite fitting, because the theft and smuggling across the border were a constant drain on Tsugaru's valuable timber resources.

of particular *kanjō bugyō*.[180] In contrast, there are comparatively few changes registered in appointments to other posts. It was clearly essential to preserve some continuity among the bureaucrats who handled practical, day-to-day administrative matters, but at policy-making levels disruptions were frequent.

This streamlining of structures and functions within the finance office quite closely resembles the alterations made in the bakufu finance office in Edo during the Kyōhō reform period. In Tsugaru, the dismissal of personnel from positions within the office, the redistribution of duties among those who remained, and the careful fostering of those at *kanjō bugyō* level, all seem to have been aimed at gathering a concentration of officials who were both qualified and willing to expedite the reform process.

One significant aspect of the changes taking place in administrative procedure was the appointment of influential merchants to quasi-government positions. Ashibane Jirōsaburō and Takeuchi Hanzaemon, official purveyor attached to the domain's central paper goods store, for example, were made official *Oshirabekata yakusho* business agents.[181] All currently engaged purveying merchants were required by the *Oshirabekata* to join the new agents in making written pledges of service.

The general thrust of the reforms toward reduction of personnel and concentration of power also had ramifications in rural districts. Dismissals occurred regularly, well into the second year, and altogether some hundreds of posts were eliminated from various public works departments, including those connected with the supervision of dams, lacquer production, and new rice field development. An extract from the *Mōnai Ariemon hikki* following one from the *Satōke ki* dated the 12th month of Hōreki 3 on the same subjects, indicates the removal of some hundreds of upland and forest officers alone. Ariemon

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[180] Asakura Yūko has set out the comings and goings of the *kanjō bugyō* and accounting officers in her unpublished MA thesis,"Kinseiki ni okeru Tsugaru han no kenkyū: Hōreki kaikaku no ichi kōsatsu." I am grateful to Kojima Yasunori for giving me this, albeit handwritten and very faintly copied, essay to read.

[181] The Ashibane appointments are recorded in a document issued in Mōnai Ariemon's name, reproduced in SHS, page 639. That of Takeuchi is recorded in a *Kudōke ki* entry in TKD dated the 12th month of Hōreki 3, page 227.

observes that the mountain areas he visited were rife with smugglers, and that the surveillance being paid for was totally ineffective.[182] Many of these posts would have been seasonal or part time contracts, possibly held for generations in one family, and remunerated with small periodic allowances from the domain. One entry in the Hirayama diary for the 4th month of 1754 reads:

> For the past thirty-six days, evening after evening, people are being dismissed from their posts. Everyone works in hushed silence.[183]

And the process generating this picture of widespread retrenchment was to go on. On the first day of the 6th month of 1754, a directive was issued announcing that the three offices staffed by magistrates with administrative authority over rural districts, towns, and shrines and temples were all to come under the direct supervision of the *Oshirabekata yakusho*, in the same way as the finance bureau. Inspections and surveys had resulted in this kind of estimation of the performance of the rural district office:

> It is a basic fact that the finance office and rural district magistrates have been the two administrative pillars of the countryside for a very long time. It is also true that trade and commerce in our rural areas are at present totally bankrupt, and this is causing difficult problems for the magistrates. This does not benefit the public purse at all; and, because funds are therefore very short, the district magistrates cannot function. As a result, justice does not prevail, properly functioning services do not exist, and matters are not handled with proper care. Therefore, all matters that were heretofore under the jurisdiction of the district magistrates will be absorbed into the finance office.[184]

Several further adjustments were made to the structure of rural administration. Firstly, the way in which *daikan* (local intendants) were assigned to districts was changed. The three main districts of Tsugaru had previously been divided into 25 *kumi* (groupings). After a series of trials towards the end of 1753, the total number of *kumi* was decreased, through

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[182] TKD, page 215.

[183] A notice about lumber workers' dismissals also appears in SHS, page 635. Diary entry quoted by Asakura, page 48.

[184] Document 910 on page 636 of SHS contains some of this directive, quoted here from Asakura, page 49.

several amalgamations of two, or even three, old *kumi* to form one new *kumi*. The domain was then divided into twelve large blocks and a total of 24 *daikan* installed. Later, in the middle of 1754, one spread-out *kumi* containing a large number of villages was combined with a newly developed forestry area to form a single block, while the total number of blocks was cut by amalgamations of up to four or five old *kumi*, to make a total of seven blocks. This streamlined arrangement required the appointment of only 16 *daikan*.

As well as this constant rearrangement of districts and posts, the incumbent *daikan* themselves also seem to have moved about a great deal. Their superiors were apparently determined that these local intendants would never be able to put down roots in the districts to which they were appointed. One Narita Kichisaburō, for example, is recorded as serving in the Fujizaki and Kashiwagi *kumi*, then Yokouchi and Uramachi, followed by Namioka and Tokiwa, over a period of less than two years. A short time later, during 1754, the number of men with the rank of *daikan* was reduced from twelve to seven, and 24 "men of eminence and distinction" were appointed as major village headmen. Their appointments corresponded with those of the 24 earlier *daikan*, but were not particularly related to the seven new clusters of for which *daikan* were to be responsible.

In line with their new duties, these village heads were appointed to *bushi* ranks of *omemie* or above. That is, they were eligible to have direct audiences with the daimyo in the same way as *hatamoto*, and permitted to bear swords as well as receiving allowances to support fifty subordinates each. Administrative responsibility for two clusters of villages each was reason for them to be officially granted this status. Perhaps the most significant point to make about these twenty-four new appointees is that at least fifteen of them were from rural merchant households, or else were themselves purveying merchants who had special relations with the domain and a household business

of their own. In the twelfth month of 1755, the remaining nine persons were all registered as domain freight officers and inspectors of purveyors.[185]

In the new chain of command, these wealthy rural figures with strong commercial links had their own administrative assistants, who supervised the clerks who headed each five-family group. They were accountable to the seven *daikan*, who were in turn answerable to the District Superintendent. This replaced the old structure of the five-family groups under a village headman who was responsible to a local *daikan*. In the overall disposition of power throughout the domain though, the functions assigned to the major village heads did not ramify far through administrative networks. They included, for example, scrutinising petitions for relief in times of shortage, dealing with accidental deaths, and keeping contact with banished persons. The *daikan*, in contrast, had quite far-reaching authority, in the legal, economic and political spheres. Among their responsibilities were surveillance of Christians, dealing with all loans of seeds and other foodstuffs, resolution of problems with neighbouring domains, concerning land use and timber resources in border areas, and distributing allowances to banished persons residing in their jurisdictions.

(iv) Insulating Tsugaru's economy

The most immediately recognised longer-term need was to make Tsugaru proof against uncontrolled penetration by the rapidly spreading market economy until the domain had sufficient money and saleable commodities to hold its own. This involved efforts to prevent excess money flowing out of the domain, and to harmonise official financial dealings inside Tsugaru with those in Osaka and Edo, so as to gradually co-ordinate economic management between the three arenas. The basis of Tsugaru's financial income being the money earned in exchange for its annual rice tax, the market in Osaka was a pivotal point for the fiscal health of the domain. Mitsugi set about eliminating the insecurity caused by the domain's dependence on the

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[185] Asakura, page 59.

silver exchange in Osaka, by circumventing that stage in the process of procuring gold for Tsugaru's official outlays in Edo.

The reformers sought to control currency circulation and exchange by all the people of Tsugaru, both within and beyond domain territory. Commerce within the domain was to rely chiefly on capital held by local merchants; limits were placed on the amount of cash that could be held by households without official permission, and the stipend inheritance law was revised to limit the domain's future obligations to pay retainers in cash. Exchange rates between gold and silver were pegged to those that applied in Edo, and all other market transactions involving money or rice were subject to approval by the *Oshirabekata*. A system of taxes levied in cash was applied on imports and purchases of some commercial products; and to slow the outflow of currency, increased taxes were imposed on transfers across the domain's borders.[186]

To compensate for inadequate amounts of cash within the domain itself, the currency system was adjusted to a silver standard and an internal exchange system put in place. The rates were set so that one *monme* of silver was worth sixty copper cash. For all official transactions, payments in the ports and in other places where domain cash was used, amounts were to be converted directly into cash at that rate. Officially designated merchant households were to run exchange agencies in the main centres: the Miyakawa in Hirosaki, the Takeuchi in Aomori, the Kikuya in Ajigasawa, and so on.

During 1754, regulations were also issued forbidding commercial activity in the countryside, except for a few businesses permitted to sell sake, cotton and haberdashery, and the routine sale of necessities such as salt, miso and oil. Eventually, trade in cotton, for example, was limited to Motomachi in the Hirosaki downtown area, restricting opportunities for rural residents to outlay

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[186] "Comprehensive memorandum on the circulation of gold, silver and copper money", SHS, pages 640-644. The information on the regulation of exchange rates and licensed agents comes from the same source.

cash while greatly enhancing the position of the merchants licensed to handle it.[187]

During the same year, arrangements were made for allowances that had been previously transferred in lump sums from Osaka to the Edo establishment to be sent directly from Hirosaki on a monthly basis. This money was "borrowed" from all the officials living in the nine port towns, who were from "meritorious families of good character". These stalwarts were obliged to make cash loans in return for domain rice coupons as security. Their contributions amounted to the value of some 46,144 *koku* of rice, which was a demonstration that merchants appointed to these regional posts were able to meet considerable demands.

An almost immediate result of this set of measures was an increase in the quantity of metal currency in the domain and a decrease in the amounts going out. Both the shift to sending remittances to Edo and the change to a silver standard made a difference. Merchants within the domain came into the possession of large quantities of rice through the receipt of rice coupons as payment for goods - in much the same way as merchants in Osaka did. They were able to sell this rice outside the domain at a significant profit. At this point it seems that Tsugaru was approaching a breakthrough in reaching a stable currency arrangement. The previous pattern of exchange and debt accumulation that routed capital from Hirosaki through the Osaka warehousing merchants and financiers to the Edo residences had been altered, to the benefit of Tsugaru's treasury and the domain merchants employed along the way. On the 10th day of the 9th month the finance office was able to send off 800 *ryō* to Edo, in plenty of time to cover the domain's anticipated expenses there for the tenth month of 1755.[188]

(v) Securing and augmenting income

While powerful local commercial and landowning interests were being drawn into the net of centralized control and regulation, the vital role of the

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[187] Documents 902 and 903, on page 632 of SHS.
[188] Asakura, pages 81-82.

honbyakushō, or land-owning farmers, was not ignored in the reforms. With the effects of the 1749 famine still being felt throughout the domain, urgent priority was given to keeping these farmers on their land.

Takimoto Hisafumi has pointed out the rapid decline in the status of many of Tsugaru's village farmers between the Hōreki and An'ei periods, demonstrating that without the kinds of policies Mitsugi was trying to implement, a fall in the number of small-scale independent farming households was inevitable. Takimoto traces a decline in three steps in the status of farmers after they had begun borrowing against their land. Landowners burdened by debt usually forfeited ownership of their land and became cultivators (百姓) attached to the land, sometimes on fixed allowances. The next step was when the new landowner cut off their rights to income, but they were able to continue living and working on the land and raise their own food crops. This fate was also often suffered by junior members of large farming families, who had been split off from living and working as part of the main household. The status of these new households was *takanashi* (高無), for "no rice allowance". Finally, the family would be put off the land, and its head would be reduced to hiring himself as a day labourer.

As well as attempting to maintain and strengthen the productive capacity of small-scall farmers, the reformers also made efforts to collect their surplus as efficiently as possible. This took the form of legal and bureaucratic regulation, financial controls and exhortation. In the eighth month of 1753, for example an exhortation was issued encouraging farmers to plant barley as a supplementary crop.[189]

The process of calculating and collecting agricultural taxes was reorganised on the basis of data collected in the land surveys conducted early in the reform period. Firstly, the annual land tax due to be paid by every village was worked out. For each village a particular storehouse was then designated where the required number of straw bags of rice would be received and securely stored. This procedure of limiting each village to one assigned

[189] *Hanchō nikki*, quoted in Asakura, page 63.

storehouse seems not to have been practically accomplished for some time. In the 9th month of 1754, emergency instructions went out to *kōri bugyō* (district magistrates) who were supposed to manage the receipt and storage of the harvest. Heavy snowfalls were preventing villagers from transporting rice to their assigned warehouses, and last-minute changes were to be made.

New laws and ordinances were introduced like this continually, over a period of a nearly twelve months, after one major set announced by the four magistrates in the 8th month of 1754. They included such clauses as the following:

- Tax payments in rice and annual cash payments or interest instalments outstanding from past years will all be cancelled.
- Farmers are to 'inspect their fields and estimate yields, make their own adjustments, and then submit the figures to the *daikan*.
- Labourers who go on foot or on horseback to work in mountain areas are to be paid in cash.

There was also this warning on the payment of major tax instalments:[190]

- From now on, the total amount due is to be increased and the excess paid by the farmer. For those who neglect to comply, there will be no attention paid to inspection estimates, but a single adjustment will be made of an additional one quarter *ryō*.

Then, in the first month of 1755:

- Hereafter, no one whose own loan accounts are not settled is to receive any payments, or deliver his crop for storage or make any tax payments. Those whose obligations are very onerous should report their situation.

And later, in the fifth month of the same year:

- The taxation rate on fields with compulsory cash payments is to be lowered: from high to medium or low, and below that, to extra low.

Policies such as this last one were needed to counteract the rapacity of some landowners and agents, whose diligence in collecting government revenues needed to be balanced with *saimin*, the protective care of the general populace

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[190] These directives are in documents 918-921 on pages 640 - 47 in SHS. They include two very detailed memoranda on changes in the circulation and uses of money in the domain.

by an ideal government in the Confucian mould.[191] With respect to the same tax collection procedures, though, some retainers who held fiefs with entitlements to rent in kind from their lands also needed extra consideration.

The order of the 1st month of 1755, that tax payments could not be made by people with uncleared debts, can also be interpreted as direct support for merchants, even though it was supposed to be part of a strategy support the domain's *honbyakushō*. Scope was provided for the injection of capital into farming villages, and for lenders to have some control over farmers' financial activities. The domain was retreating from direct intervention in village affairs by central administrative personnel. Instead, official authority in rural districts was given to brokers who had a direct financial interest in keeping control over the borrowing and spending of village residents.

Official appointments in rural areas increased dramatically between the twelfth month of 1754, when 64 purveyors were listed, and the end of 1755, when there were 137. There is little shift in the 27 in Hirosaki and the 22 in Aomori, but the increase of 85 in the countryside is dramatic, indicating a new emphasis on the sharing of privilege with "prominent rural persons".[192]

Proofing the rural producers of the domain against the predations of commercialism, albeit by agents whose very livelihoods depended on it, was one of two important strategies for augmenting Tsugaru's commercial strength. The other was to encourage local production of saleable commodities, with a view to expanding the domain's export trade, which was heavily weighted towards resources such as timber, rice and marine products. It was intended that the manufacture and export of high-quality commercial goods would bring hard currency back into the domain and eventually make manufacturing industries in Tsugaru self-supporting. Marketing permits were also issued for the export of products whose sale outside the domain had previously been forbidden. They included ore from the domain's three sulphur mines, locally

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[191] The effects of these efforts to stablise the management of the taxation system in rural areas are discussed on pages 683-686 of *Goshōgawara-shi shi.*

[192] Documents 926 - 930 on pages 649-52 of SHS all relate to this process.

bred cattle, and the region's horses, which were so prized by military men of rank.[193] Other established industries, such as the production of construction timber and Tsugaru-style lacquer ware, were encouraged to expand their outputs and explore new market possibilities. Finally, the domain introduced some new industries thought to have export potential.

The principal new manufactures targeted were woven cotton textiles, sesame oil, medicines and indigo-dyed textiles. The purchase of six *monme* of ginned cotton (*kuriwata*) in Osaka, reported in the entry for the 4th day of the 11th month of 1754 in the official domain diary, along with the "temporary employment of a cotton textile expert from Akita to teach everyone to weave cotton" clearly indicate the administration's determination to support the fledgling cotton weaving industry.

Another entry during the same month reads:

> Starting next spring, sesame producing villages are directed to plant a surplus amount, so that it can be contracted out to an oil manufacturer, who has undertaken to produce oil equal in quality to what is sold on the Kyoto market. [194]

The same standards were to apply to cotton cloth and other Tsugaru manufactures, so that receipts from sales in the cities would increase and help defray current domain debt, while at the same the domain would build a sound reputation for good quality exports.

In the seventh month of 1754, and the first month of 1755, edicts encouraging the production of lacquer for commercial purposes were issued. Even though villages already producing lacquer had been exhorted in the past to increase their output, 'not a single additional tree had appeared', and this was

> in spite of official encouragement regarding concerted planting efforts and the indication of suitable places for lacquer plantations; as well as advice on raising small trees and the need to be careful about timing and growth stage when planting them out.[195]

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[193] Documents 924 and 925 on page 649 of SHS.
[194] *Hanchō nikki* entry for the 22nd day, 11th month, Hōreki 4, cited by Asakura, page 88.
[195] Asakura, page 67.

The controlled placement of merchants with strong commercial interests and capital to invest in quasi-official positions in rural Tsugaru was consistent with all these efforts to further the domain's industrial production.

(vi) Inculcating ethics and virtue

Through the reform period, edicts, ideological formulations, practical intrusions, exhortations and role models were targeted at people from all walks of life throughout the domain. Among the undesirable attitudes and behaviour to be corrected were extravagance, reluctance to pay taxes, and neglect of occupational duties. One of the earliest notices in this vein concerned *bushi*, and is entered in the *Satōke ki* on the 1st day of the 8th in Hōreki 3, two weeks earlier than the date of the memorandum announcing the new *Ōshirabekata* reproduced in the *Shinpen Hirosakishi shi* document volume. The names of Mondo, Ariemon and Mitsugi all appear on it.

> Notice of a change in policy. Retainers in the towns are reverting to their old ways. Even when they are on official duty, in every matter the old attitudes and values and rivalries come back into play. Furthermore, during the time while our young daimyo has been growing up in Edo, retainers in the kuni have become lazy and degenerate: and furthermore, they are nearly all in disgraceful trouble with debt. It is our intention to rectify this situation.[196]

With the investiture of Nobuyasu as daimyo by the shogun scheduled for later in the year, the reform faction was clearly feeling pressured about having the domain in good functioning order before the young daimyo arrived in Hirosaki to be installed as head of Tsugaru's government. When their attention turned to the countryside, priority was given to removing the seductions of commerce that were associated with extravagant displays of consumption in dress, diet and housing. A regulation issued in the 1st month of Hōreki 4 prohibited indulgence in inappropriate refinements throughout rural Tsugaru.[197] Strict limitations were also placed on the sources of temptation by the elimination of most marketing activities, and in a stronger memorandum of

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[196] *Satōke ki* in TRK, pages 206-7.

[197] Document 902 on page 632 of SHS. *Kudōke ki* in TRK, page 207.

the 2nd month of 1755, people were forbidden to sell tea or cut hair, to thatch roofs or hire themselves out as carpenters without written authorisation.[198]

The role of shrines and temples in the political economy of the domain was threefold: to unite the people in a common awareness of their duties to each other and to their polity; to unceasingly offer prayers for peace and prosperity in the domain while properly observing the calendar of religious observances; and to keep their own accounts and records up to date and in proper order. A notice circulated to all the temples and shrines registered in the domain on the 28th day of the 5th month of Hōreki 4 (1754) reads:

> Of all the administrative matters throughout the realm, there is none that takes precedence over caring for the people, no matter who they are or of what station. There is no better means of caring for the people than by providing them with sustenance. Even though human powers cannot prevent natural calamities, you can certainly pray for unity and tranquillity among the people. . . from dawn until dusk, be absorbed in your prayers so that you forget your meal. Pray for the *kuni*; pray for our ruler. It is your duty to pray unceasingly, without losing concentration for these things. . .[199]

In town, merchants were to give up using the family names they had adopted and refer to themselves only by the names of their businesses. Individuals were exhorted to behave in decent and helpful ways towards their fellows, and to report exemplary examples of pious and filial behaviour.[200] From the 2nd month of Hōreki 4, more and more individuals considered to be mystics or "loyal and devoted persons" were singled out in Tsugaru's towns for official praise and rewards. A Mother Gō, for example, who daily "bestowed her care and compassion upon others", was judged to be commendably benevolent. A farmer who reported a strange shadow on one of his fields was granted a ten-year suspension of his tax payments, because it was considered so mysterious. Other farmers who also had shady fields protested against the wastefulness involved, and volunteered to contribute the tax.[201]

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[198] Document 923 on page 648.
[199] Document 914 on page 638 of SHS.
[200] *Umeda nikki* entry in *TRK*, page 207.
[201] Asakura citing *Han nikki*, pages 96-97.

So it was, that the hapless farmers and labourers who bore the brunt of the burden caused by Tsugaru's financial woes were rewarded with adequate, though by no means bountiful, sustenance, shelter and infrastructure, while being bombarded constantly with exhortations to improve various aspects of their personal, social and communal lives for the good of the realm. Many of the changes in financial administration were expedited by the creation of a new stratum of financiers, particularly in areas outside the urban centres of Hirosaki and Aomori, where they added to the intrusions and pressures on farmers' lives. What had hitherto been a process of directly appropriating the rural surplus in kind had been transformed into more convoluted sequences of borrowing and lending, producing and collecting, purchasing and financing, all mediated by merchant financiers. The final destinations of as much wealth as could be commandeered were the domain's treasury and granaries, and discretion over its disposal entirely in the hands of *Oshirabekata* officials. The end result after nearly three years was that, in effect, the entire domain was governed from this bureau, and what remained of the original administrative structure continued to exist in name only.

II Facing the famine: tightening the net

In the 9th month of Hōreki 5, the domain's harvest was officially declared a failure, caused by continual summer rain, low temperatures and two frosts in the 8th month. Even in normally hardy fields, the rice stalks had withered. In a notification to the bakufu, the situation was described succinctly

> Notification of loss: out of our formal investiture of 47,000 *koku*, 280 *koku* has been lost. We harvested 2,620 *koku* out of an expected harvest of 32,150 *koku* in the old lands, and lost over 161,130 *koku* out of an anticipated total of 196,353 *koku* from the new fields.[202]

To add to the distress of the domain's treasury, plans were being made for the new daimyo to arrive from Edo to be installed in the castle in the 5th month of Hōreki 6. In the event, he was accompanied on his journey back to

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[202] *Kudōke ki*, in TRK, page 209.

Hirosaki by the elder, Tsugaru Mondo, the steward, Mōnai Ariemon, and the newly appointed overseer, Nyūi Ichirozaemon (Mitsugi): the three chief administrators presiding over the reforms.[203] This is one indication of the scarcity of domain officials capable of carrying out responsible tasks during the 1750's. Evidence of the immense expense of domain ceremonial is also found in the report that from the 26th day of the 5th month until the 5th day of the 6th month, 6,340 members of staff were involved in the feasting and entertainments, which included Noh performances, presented for the daimyo, his family members and entire entourage.[204]

(i) Attending to the immediate crisis

The *Satōke ki* entry for the 15th day of the 11th month records that an inspection was undertaken of the storehouses of all rural households previously been registered as well off. Food supplies calculated to be surplus to their needs were appropriated by the domain and redistributed to the poor and needy. Merchants were prohibited from buying or selling food grains without permission. As a result, according to our scribe, even though the harvest was less than half that of 1749, hungry people did not appear in great numbers, and not a single person died of starvation.[205]

The stipends of retainers, which had only just been restored to their real value, once again became subject to "borrowing" by the treasury. Later, in the 6th month of Hōreki 6, all *jikata chigyō* fiefs were converted to granary stipends, at the rate of sixty percent of the formal investiture. Stipends paid on investitures made in the years before 1711 were all to be converted to *okurairi* (stipends paid in rice from the domain treasury), and those that had been *watashikata* (handed straight to the fief-holder in annual amounts) were to become *okurawatashi*, (paid in regular instalments from the domain granaries). "Lands granted retainers as fiefs", the notice concluded, "can turn

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[203] *Kudōke ki*, in TRK, page 210.
[204] *Satōke ki*, in TRK, page 210.
[205] *Satōke ki*, in TKD, page 229.

out to be good or bad, and this should not result in advantage and disadvantage. Please register the amounts of any losses you suffer."[206]

This announcement indicates that Mitsugi was taking advantage of harvest failure to move towards transforming the nature of retainer remuneration. Many investitures had originally been in the form of rights to exact taxes directly from the yields of particular areas of farmland. When those who lived on their own fiefs (*jikata chigyō*) could not collect adequate rice allowances because of poor harvests, they could be shifted to periodic salary payments administered by treasury and granary officials. The first step was for the domain itself to collect agricultural taxes, then distribute allowances due to retainers at their invested amounts from its granaries and treasury. Even though they were already being paid in this way, and had moved to live and work in urban areas, however, some retainers still retained direct links with the lands and people in their fiefs.

The domain waived all the agricultural tax obligations of farmers, and Mitsugi announced a general amnesty on debts held inside Tsugaru that were of more than ten years' standing. The government was also to take responsibility for any private loans contracted with lenders outside Tsugaru that were still outstanding.[207] Eventually, an appeal for relief rice to augment food supplies was sent to the bakufu on the 13th day of the 3rd month in 1756, along with the details of the harvest failure quoted above.[208]

(ii) Mitsugi alone at the helm

Mitsugi's appointment to an administrative post created specifically for him was announced from Edo on the 23rd day of the 12th month of Hōreki 5. He was to take up the position at the beginning of the following year. His new title was *motoshi*, or overseer, and it was granted in conjunction with a promotion to the quasi-military status of steward. The new office was created in response to the Hōreki emergency, and no further appointments were ever

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[206] *Kudōke ki*, in TRK, page 210.
[207] 「借貸無差別二相成候事」 *Tsugaru henran nikki*, inSHS, page 659.
[208] *Mōnai Ariemon hikki*, in TRK, page 210.

made after Nyūi's dismissal two years later. Nothing like it seems to have been done before. The authority associated with announcing the position, asking for policy suggestions to be submitted, and then vetting the candidates was said to have been Lord Nobumasa, the young daimyo himself. It should be noted that Mitsugi's most congenial colleague, Tsugaru Mondō, was with Nobumasa in Edo at the time.

From the amount of comment preserved in various records, it can be concluded that this was regarded as an unusual, and not entirely welcome, development. There seems to have been a significant degree of controversy over the appointment from the start. "Notwithstanding his personality, great results are expected of him", for example, cannot by any means be read as an unconditional endorsement of the chosen candidate.[209] Further evidence of division in the administrative ranks is that although Ariemon was promoted to the rank of *karō* at the same time, he declined the appointment. This is the first obvious sign that factions had begun to coalesce around Ariemon on one side, and Mitsugi and Mondo on the other. The impression is reinforced by the observation that although he rejected this prestigious appointment on account of illness, Ariemon remained inside the castle even after the new daimyo, Nobuyasu, had been formally installed. Ariemon's retirement from office was not formally recognised until the 12th month of Hōreki 6.[210]

His withdrawal left authority over the entire reform program, already consolidated in the *Oshirabekata yakusho*, now concentrated in the single person of Nyūi Mitsugi. All petition documents, for example, were to be submitted to him, and all appointments to the *Oshirabekata yakusho* made by him. He was to have purview over officially contracted merchants and freight agents with responsibility for handling the domain's rice, silver, gold and cash and stipend allowances. Later, they were also to manage the *hyōfu* (exchange coupons) system from the *unsō yaku* (distribution bureau) under his supervision.

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[209] 「其性形二者不相拘莫大之成功を被思召」 *Hanchō nikki* entry for 14th day, 1st month, Hōreki 6, quoted in Asakura, page 107.

[210] Extracts from *Satōke ki*, *Takaokaki*, *Mōnai yuisho*, in TKD, pages 221-222.

Further afield, the *motoshi* was to have direct authority over *daikan* and village group headmen in the countryside, as well as timber cutters and other workers in upland and mountain areas.[211] All in all, this was an ideal position from which to hasten the process of creating an economy less vulnerable to outside prices and cash flows, and eventually self-sufficient enough to participate in commodity markets.

(iii) Issuing the *hyōfu*

Mitsugi's next move was to organise the collection and then redistribution of all material resources and other goods throughout the entire domain, using data collected in surveys and inspections. The goal was to ensure that the basic needs of all Tsugaru's people were met at a level that that enabled each of them to function at a conscientious and effective level in his or her own particular domiciliary and occupational circumstances. All items of market value in the possession of every household in the domain were gathered into predetermined collection points. This clean sweep included not only gold, silver, rice, cash money and commercial goods, but daily necessities, household utensils and farm implements as well.

Under the supervision of the official merchant, Ashibane Jirōsaburō, everything collected was taken into supervised care by the domain's bureau of statistics, and detailed inventories were made. Produce and commercial goods where temporarily stored in the domain's official warehouses. Meanwhile, all merchant households were required to submit for each of their enterprises and residences a meticulously detailed business statement. The entire stock of collected material goods was then divided between selected merchants, according to their status and specialisation. Everything was to be redistributed, item by item, to households in the domain according to the number of persons they contained and the requirements of those persons to sustain a basic livelihood at their occupational status level.

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[211] Documents 931 - 933, on pages 654-55 of SHS.

This drastically thorough redistribution of goods and equipment was based on a set of complex calculations done by Mitsugi himself.[212] He worked out the needs of individual people based on their gender, age and occupation, and the lifestyle and obligations appropriate to them; then applied those indices to statistics gathered on population and material goods in the surveys he had instigated over the years since at least Hōreki 3. These surveys had been both detailed and intrusive. One made in Hōreki 5, of *bushi* housing in Hirosaki, required numbers of rooms and their floor areas for all structures, as well as detailed plans of properties, giving compass directions, boundary neighbours and the types and dimensions of all buildings on them. In Hōreki 6 another survey covered all the domain's urban settlements, *machi* by *machi*, and even included temples and shrines.[213]

The means used to carry out the redistribution were booklets of coupons, called *hyōfu*, which were essentially ration coupons for a variety of goods. A small number, for partial payouts of domain rice, were issued on the 29th day of the 10th month, and after the end of that month individuals were able to submit the coupons to granary officials, one by one, in exchange for rice. The *hyōfu* issued to retainers were a kind of *kome kitte* (rice promissory note) secured by the grain held in domain granaries; but they could be used as well as exchange for other foodstuffs and commodities. In contrast, those used by the general populace were *dakan-nashi*. That is, they were not assigned particular values in rice or silver that could be exchanged for goods of equivalent value. Instead, they contained entries marked with official seals, recording the number of persons in the household and their requirements for particular items, food and other resources. These goods were to be provided by the merchants specified to handle each commodity. Before any exchange could be completed a store's accountant and packager had to mark the client's

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[212] NMZ 2, "Setsuyō soku", pages 259-266.

[213] Hasegawa Sei'ichi, "宝暦期弘前城下、町方屋敷改めについて" (Registers of residences in the Hirosaki downtown and urban areas during the Hōreki period), *Tsugaru kinsei shiryō* ,3. Tsugaru kinsei shiryō kankōkai henshū, Hirosaki: Hokubō shinsha, 1986.

coupons to show how many individual rations of the item had been claimed and provided. Only then could the goods be handed over by the clerk.[214]

People were obliged to follow this procedure in order to obtain even the simplest necessities of life, while at the same time food was still quite short, and most of the population was living at the most basic level. In contrast, merchant enterprises acting as agents received ten percent profit on the value of all transactions. Anything further was profit for the domain. Merchants were thus prevented from generating profits through their own contacts and acumen: they simply reaped the benefit of sharing out survival rations and essential goods to the people at large. The wealth of the domain was to pass through its treasury and granaries under the eye of the *motoshi*, and merchants were merely the instruments for achieving its redistribution.

The cumbersome nature of the processes involved, the enrichment of participating merchants, and the resentment of at least one individual, are made clear in a bitterly critical extract from the *Takaokaki* included in the *Tsugaru kyūki denrui* section on Nyūi Mitsugi's life. It is paraphrased on pages 63 and 64 in Chapter One, section III (ii).

To underpin the value of *hyōfu*, Mitsugi and his colleagues kept control over hard currency, which was used as the medium of exchange for officially supervised transactions, mostly outside the domain, such as the remittances sent off regularly to Edo. The ambivalent nature of metal specie in the early eighteenth century as still partly commodity and partly medium of exchange makes this an interesting division, since *hansatsu* were often issued by domains with the intention of making them the sole medium of exchange locally, without the backing of precious metal coinage. Mitsugi therefore did not apply to the bakufu for approval of his *hyōfu* issue, because they were regarded as tokens to be substituted directly for goods rather than functioning as domain currency.

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[214] TKD, pages 226-27.

With money and precious metals being held in the domain treasury, and the exchange of goods completely restricted to the use of *hyōfu* in specified merchant houses, Tsugaru's population was effectively cut off from commercial activity of any kind. Only retainer officials and privileged merchants had any involvement with managing the circulation and distribution of commodities, both inside and outside the domain. Thus, the effects of the development of a money economy in the urban market centres, felt in Tsugaru since the turn of the century, were to be checked at the boundaries of the domain: the barricades were erected, in the hope that the local economy would convalesce and develop a degree of robustness that would enable it to re-enter the wider marketplace.

Immediately after the *hyōfu* were issued, there were adequate supplies in local stores, and goods were easily obtained, but as time passed "everyone was bothered because when they went out shopping, the clerks would ignore them", and "no-one treated them with any consideration".[215] In Hirosaki, the miso, and oil shops were all very low in stock, and therefore people would appear at the crack of dawn, scrambling with one another to run from store to store. Retainers and townspeople suffered, according to one contemporary comment, "as much distress as a harvest failure would cause".[216] Some members of the merchant fraternity, who could not make the profits they desired inside the domain, arranged transactions and carried on their business outside its borders, leading to shortages within Tsugaru.

There is not enough evidence for any conclusions to be drawn about the reasons for this extreme turn towards state control over the economy. There seems to be no reason for thinking that it was planned from the start. Perhaps Mitsugi was inspired by the success of his food redistribution, or perhaps it was a desperate attempt to cure Tsugaru's persistent, and worsening, economic ills. Writers of household diaries were more taken up with the day-to-day

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[215] Document 940, on pages 664-666 in SHS.
[216] Loc.cit.

effects of the reforms, and the official records do not as a rule contain anything as lengthy as policy discussions.

In his writings, though, Mitsugi clearly expressed two important convictions that were given practical expression during his period of active participation in Tsugaru's administrative affairs. The first was the need for leaders to take positive action to improve the situation in their domain. If they were pusillanimous and refused to take the risks entailed with bold decision-making and interventions, concentrating instead on self-cultivation or busily wringing their hands in a show of concern, then that was a serious dereliction of duty. The other was the importance of the population at large to the wealth and survival of the polity. If people were harshly treated by authorities, or left to fend for themselves in times of hardship, they would end up fleeing their villages or starving to death. Since the entire domain depended for its continued existence on farms and workshops being able to maintain and increase their outputs, it was imperative for the administration to ensure that the people had sufficient means of production and an adequate livelihood.[217]

III The net unravelling

A year-long tussle developed in Edo during the latter half of Hōreki 7 over the allegedly chaotic situation in Tsugaru among a number of influential figures connected with the domain. A detailed account appears on pages 64-67 in Chapter One. The principals involved were: the daimyo, Tsugaru Nobuyasu, who was in the capital fulfilling his *sankin kōtai* obligations; Matsudaira Tadatsune, a bakufu official serving at Edo castle, who had been Nobuyasu's patron and childhood guardian; Tsugaru Mondo, who was in the capital with the daimyo; and Mitsugi, who was meanwhile travelling between Edo, Hirosaki and Kyoto attending to domain matters. In the end, Tadatsune prevailed and

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[217] The two works in which these ideas about administration are most clearly expressed are "Gochūron" (五虫論) and "Shigaku yōben" (志学幼弁). "Gochūron" and three *maki* of "Shigaku Yōben" are reproduced in SHS, pages 719-809.

Mitsugi was dismissed and put under house arrest in the third month of Hōreki 8, as recorded in the records paraphrased in Chapter One, section III (ii).

Meanwhile, in Hirosaki disintegration in the *hyōfu* system was accelerated by rumours about the Ashibane men. They were accused of working with a covey of associates to profit privately by printing and distributing conterfeit *hyōfu*. As the account in Chapter Once indicates, Mitsugi himself was reported to have arrived back in Hirosaki on the 12th day of the 6th month and begun investigations, but the system was not formally abolished until the 29th day of the 6th month, when Ashibane Jirōsaburō was arrested and the domain ceased issuing *hyōfu*.[218]

Jirōsaburō had been in charge of both issuing and distributing the *hyōfu* , and had brought into the organisational structure he managed a number of merchants who were new to official duties. Only those who were given supervisory roles had previously had any experience as official purveyors or freight managers. Many of the new recruits were rural merchants, and a number were the sons and younger brothers of the older generation of privileged merchants. The implementation of the scheme had therefore, perhaps unwittingly, been put in the hands of a whole new stratum of younger profiteers, with no experience of official service.

From the available evidence, it seems that the *hyōfu* system fell apart very quickly, apparently because of the lack of administrative supervision over the merchants. No procedures appear to have been put in place to ensure transparency and accountability in their activities. In any case, the use of *hyōfu* as a medium of exchange worked directly against profit maximisation and would not have been congenial with the entrepreneurial instincts of ambitious merchants. It was unlikely, therefore, that they would be eager to remove obstacles to the smooth functioning of the new system.

During the 7th month, rice allowances were distributed to retainers, another debt amnesty was announced, and the gold, silver and other valuables

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[218] Ibid. Document 944 on pages 668-670.

that had been collected from people throughout the domain were handed back to them.[219] On the 20th day, a notice was addressed to retainers and temples and shrines holding country-based fiefs directing them to return to dealing directly with the cultivators on their lands. They were warned, however, that

> at this time especially, farmers are to be treated in such a way as to avoid suffering and hardship over such things as collection of levies. If farmers are treated improperly in any way whatsoever, the law stipulates that your stipend will be converted to *okurairi* in perpetuity.

Another memorandum sent out on the same day, to be communicated to all farmers in the domain, read as follows:

> On the lands of all persons receiving income from investitures, if there is any inappropriate behaviour towards farmers, or they are driven to destitution by levy extractions, this should be reported to the *daikan* through the village group head, and after investigation the investiture of the offender will be terminated.

And, on the 25th day,

> Tax rice payments made by retainers to the treasury have up until now been handled by the individuals concerned, but if payment is not submitted by the determined date, the investiture will be ordered converted to an *okurairi* stipend in perpetuity and all independent cultivators, farmers, field and mountain labourers will be removed from the jurisdiction of the fief holder and put under the authority of the domain treasury, according to the law.[220]

It is possible to read from these warnings an indication that the move away from *jikata chigyō* had not been at all popular among the landed fief holders, since threats of other forms of investiture were regarded as deterrents.

Merchants, too, were eager to return to their old ways of doing things. After the punishment of the Ashibane family, as a group they expressed the wish to withdraw from the prominent role that had been thrust upon them. On the 25th day of the 7th month of Hōreki 7, they petitioned saying:

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[219] Extract from *Takaokaki*, on pages 233-34 in TKD.

[220] Documents 948 and 949, from the *Koku nikki*, on pages 671-73 in SHS. Extract from *Satōke ki* in TRK, page 212. This extract ends with the comment that all the new ways were being abolished.

> We, who have for generations always handled the business of your land have always been of a lower class. We are overwhelmed with shame, and humbly request that our titles be changed back from "respected purveyor to the domain" to "official merchant and freight agent".

This request was rejected, and a number of leading merchants were instead appointed as managers in the finance office. [221]

In their previous posts, they had been constrained as a commercial class, but at this stage they were not only being appeased but being placed in positions of considerable influence and responsibility. Another measure that favoured commerce was the cancellation of the general debt amnesty; and yet another was an official increase in the interest rates on loans being negotiated for the financing of a purchase of two thousand bales of old rice for sake production. Finally, in the 10th month, the domain returned to circulating standard currency, the actual stuff of commercial profit.

In the 7th month, before the year's harvest was gathered, a warning was issued that a new three-year compulsory loan was to be imposed on retainers' stipends. Those with stipends over one hundred *koku*, one hundred and fifty *hyō*, or fifteen *ryō* were to forego one third of their allowances. For those serving in Edo, the rate was one quarter. Stipends over fifty *koku*, one hundred *hyō*, or ten *ryō*, were levied at one quarter (one fifth in Edo), and those of over 35.50 *koku*, or seven *ryō*, at one fifth (one sixth). In addition, a compulsory loan of up to one quarter was to be levied on all merchant enterprises in proportion to the total amount of rice they handled.[222] Also in time for the harvest, *tedai* (clerks) who had been appointed functionaries of the *Oshirabekata* were returned to their original status as village group headmen. The village group heads, however, continued on in their posts, though their paid stipends were reduced to "thirty *koku* of the harvest" for each of them.[223]

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[221] *Hirayama Nikki.*

[222] TRK, page 212.

[223] *Tsugaru henran nikki*, 9th month. *Koku nikki*, 6th day 10th month. Documents 960 and 961 on pages 677-78 of SHS.

Mitsugi seems to have set off for Edo again as soon as possible after the harvest business was over in Hōreki 7, and he remained in his post as *motoshi* the spring of 1758. After his dismissal and disgrace, the power that had been concentrated in his position was fragmented and weakened. Any regulations that used to be enforced on his authority alone, like the three mentioned above from the 20th and 25th days of the 7th month dealing with tax rice payments, the treatment of farmers and extraction of stipends, now had to be handled by the remaining *karō* and *yōnin* (elders and stewards).

From Hōreki 8 onwards, the merchants of the domain began to draw back from the front line of administrative matters, but the village group headman remained as an integral part of rural political culture. Through them, the representation and authority of influential farmers was strengthened. Even after the reforms had disintegrated, the domain continued to carry out the practical business of collecting harvest taxes through arrangements and connections made between village group headmen.

Village commercial agents, however, lost their functions as the domain moved back towards a system of direct appropriation. Their place completely disappeared with the Kansei reform *bushi dochaku* ruling that urban-dwelling retainers should return to the countryside and resettle on deserted lands. These *bushi* were to become actively involved in agricultural life and draw their income directly from the land, thus bypassing the distribution of stipendiary grain allowances by agents.

Resort to the *bushi dochaku* measure always appears to be a move in the direction of conservatism and stability, on the principle that if retainers directly managed the land, it would improve their morale and ethics. They would be guaranteed rent and develop interdependent and binding relations with the farmers who contributed their labour. After the Tenmei famine (1782-87), however, there was a dramatic increase in the number of ownerless and deserted fields in Tsugaru; and, many of the people who had been saved by Mitsugi's radical policies were dead.

IV Patterns of reform

(i) Regional diversions

Tsugaru was unusual among Tohoku domains in undertaking reforms during the middle of the eighteenth century. Some larger neighbours - Nanbu, Sendai and Kubota - had been among the ten or so domains engaging in reform some decades earlier, around the time of the bakufu's Kyōhō reforms. During the 1750's and 60's, only six domains in the eastern regions, compared with twenty in the west, instituted changes significant enough to have been recorded as reforms.

By the Hōreki period, most domains had experienced serious fiscal difficulty, and Tsugaru was by no means alone in having accumulated crippling debts over many decades. Another problem, particularly in the east and not unrelated to domain debt, was that successive famines had left rural areas with seriously depleted populations and growing numbers of neglected fields. This jeopardised official income in agricultural taxes, and made financial planning for economic expansion impossible. Also associated with the aftermath of famine were food shortages, rising taxation rates and disruptions to administrative practices. These conditions combined to undermine morale, as well as law and order. Reformers responded by focussing attention on spiritual, ideological and educational matters.

Climatic conditions in Tohoku seemed perennially to require that efforts be made to expand, or sustain, or recover rice production levels. The hope during the eighteenth century in Tsugaru seems to have been, at least temporarily, that once income from the agricultural tax had stabilised, production of commercial commodities and participation in the wider market economy could be developed and supported. One way of coping with the domain's unreliable rates of productivity was initially to involve the government in commercial capital investment so that the resulting profits could be applied to making the domain's economy strong enough to withstand pressures from outside.

Other Tohoku domains adopted a variety of reform strategies. Some tended to preserve the old principles of collecting agricultural taxes. In Sendai, for example, reforms around 1780 were based on a system of fiefs that continued to be directly managed by retainers in the countryside. In effect, this turned out to be the supervision by *bushi* of *honbyakusho* (landholding cultivators) who used the labour of indentured landless peasants to cultivate lands that were increasingly in pawn. In this arrangement, expropriation by the domain of the rural surplus was facilitated by its retainers. They had access to a supply of indentured labour as well as the agricultural expertise and management skills of the *honbyakusho*, who were ever more likely to be burdened by debt and lose their farms to creditors.

The Satake (Akita) domain strategy was different again. There, the government instituted a domain monopoly on selling rice, and at the same time sought to insulate the economy from external conditions by issuing domain currency in the form of silver certificates. *# In contrast to both Akita and Date policies, a succession of reforms in Yonezawa, during the period from the Hōreki through the Tenmei era (1751-89), achieved successful outcomes when links were deliberately forged by domain authorities with major farming and merchant families.

The ongoing economic challenge through this period in Tohoku was to preserve agricultural labour strength in villages while at the same time encouraging the production of commercial commodities. In a region that had been developed to concentrate on rice as a single crop, it was difficult to draw adequate labour power to agricultural villages when the natural flow was away to other regions and jobs in commercial and craft enterprises. Some domains encouraged small-scale industries in rural villages to halt the breakdown of farming communities and limit the predatory activities of urban merchants. In Tsugaru - and at bakufu level as well - value had always been given by some thinkers to farming and rice production not only for the wholesomeness of rural life, the possibilities of food self-sufficiency and increased tax remissions, but also as a source of capital accumulation in the economy.

In western and southern domains, by this time the economic emphasis had begun to shift towards the development of specialised export industries. Tokushima, for example, was so heavily committed to the production of commercial goods that the domain actually imported rice for daily consumption. Crops such as cotton, tobacco and indigo; handicraft manufactures like lacquer ware, metalwork and textiles; and food products like soy sauce and miso were all beginning to appear as regional specialties in inter-domain markets.[224] To bring together the management skills, expertise and capital required for these commercial enterprises, links were forged between domain officials, merchants and wealthy farmers. This process, too, led to resentment and unrest among social and occupational groups excluded from the new wealth-generating structures. Along with domain debt, popular uprisings were a common phenomenon. A number of domains, both east and west reacted by revising rules and penalties to regulate public behaviour.

Reform programs, therefore, were devised to address particular constellations of problems, determined by the size and location of the domains involved. Yoshinaga remarks that by the eighteenth century a number of measures that belonged to the seventeenth century period when domains were being established had faded away altogether from reform agendas. These included land surveys, developing new fields, and the conversion of landed investiture systems to those involving stipends distributed from central granaries and treasuries.[225] The Tsugaru and Date cases, where *jikata chigyō* fiefs remained an integral part of the domain political economy, demonstrate that this general observation is not universally applicable.

(ii) The Tsugaru trajectory

In Tsugaru at the time of the Hōreki crisis, both the choice of reform measures and the pool of leadership talent were limited. There was no reason to expect that agricultural productivity could be increased beyond the levels

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[224] A discussion of eighteenth century regional commodity specialization can be found in Shinbo Hiroshi and Hasegawa Akira, "Shōhin seisan ryūtsū no dainamikksu", Chapter 5 in Hayami Akira and Miyamoto Matao (eds.), *Nihon keizai shi*, Vol. 1.

[225] *Kokushi daijiten*, vol. 11, page 788.

already reached. Regular harvest failures and intermittent famines had left farming villages with diminished populations and deserted fields. Any attempt by the domain to raise its already high taxation rates would only have led to more desertions.

In any case, harvests and income from the agricultural tax were always going to be subject to the vagaries of the region's climate, which at this time was only marginally suited to large-scale rice cultivation, and would not support the production on a commercial scale of crops which had proved successful as profit-generating exports elsewhere. Income from construction timber and seasonal marine produce, the domain's most significant trading commodities other than rice, had already reached a peak in the late seventeenth century.

In those conditions, the effect of further commercial activity in a situation of this kind would have been to drain precious specie out of the domain with little or no hope of reciprocal gains. With its official debt already close to overwhelming, as a polity, Tsugaru could only try to minimise expenditure, raise productivity levels and use every means available to accumulate cash currency in the domain's treasury until the arrears were paid off. Priority had to be given to keeping owner-cultivators secure on their farmland. If industries with commercial potential could be fostered in the meanwhile, there was a chance that the domain could be safely exposed to the market networks expanding from wealthier regions.

In terms of leadership, there were two unfavourable conditions for the implementation of Tsugaru's Hōreki reform program. They were: Nobuaki's premature death and the arrival of his successor in Hirosaki late in the 5th month of 1756, when the domain was still reeling from the 1755 harvest failure; and the very small pool of domain elders involved in central domain policy formation. The lack of experienced middle and high-level bureaucrats was very likely the reason for Tsugaru Mondo's making requests for policy suggestions to all the domain's retainers, regardless of rank.

During the period of Nobuyasu's minority, the senior elder, Munakata Sakuyuemon, is said to have worked himself to death trying to address the social and economic effects of the 1749 harvest failure and resultant famine.[226] Tsugaru Mondo was Sakuyuemon's successor、and a familiar of Nyūi Mitsugi's. Mitsugi entered the elite political leadership party after regaling Mondo with suggestions and observations on the state of the polity. Mondo was said to be agreeably impressed by his perceptive ideas, and Mitsugi was catapulted into a senior post where his stipend of 1.000 *koku* was equal to that of Arai Hakuseki, advisor to two shoguns in Edo earlier in the century.[227] Mitsugi's capacity to keep producing ideas and policy measures seems not to have waned at all during the five years he was in charge of the finances and administration of the domain.

Mondo, Mōnai Ariemon and Mitsugi were therefore the three key figures responsible for designing and implementing the reforms. While Ariemon's integrity and Mitsugi's ingenuity were widely acknowledged in Hirosaki, acceptance of the reforms in the early stages undoubtedly depended on Mondo's authority as well. The measures implemented before the end of 1753 were aimed at streamlining the domain's top administrative structures, clarifying chains of command and accountability, and setting up an accurate, transparent accounting system. Policies were based on data gathered in comprehensive initial surveys of the domain and the new bureaucratic order put in place, consolidating power in the offices of the *kanjō bugyō* (finance magistrates) and the general inspector who headed the *Oshirabekata*, a new bureau of investigation.

From the beginning of 1754 onwards, Mitsugi made a sequence of orderly decisions. One of them, the temporary stop on gold remittances to Edo was one of the earliest and most significant changes in the way the domain spent its income. This was an important move in the direction of treating the

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[226] 「棟方作右衛門甚労して疾を廃し、寛延三年七十余歳にして病死せり」 *Takaokaki*, in TKD, page 225. The account of Mitsugi's submissions to Mondo appears later in the same passage.
[227] Bolitho points out that this was not a very high allowance by Edo standards. Review of Nakai, *Shogunal Politics*.

domain's financial affairs as an integrated whole, rather than as three or more disconnected systems. Outlays to Edo were the domain's biggest single expense, and lack of information about rice prices and gold-silver exchange rates prevented proper budgets being kept in Hirosaki and exacerbated the tendency to borrow in both Osaka and Edo.

Steps were then taken to articulate the political and economic administrative organs in other urban centres and the countryside with those functioning in Hirosaki. As well, significant cuts were made in cash and grain outlays on allowances for official functionaries whose tasks often existed only on the account legers; and agricultural tax income boosted by the streamlining and regulation of collection and recording procedures.

At this stage, while priority was being given to the parlous state of the treasury, Mitsugi seems to have been laying the groundwork for more radical reform, by making moves to strengthen the esprit de corps of the retainers and boosting the general morale of the domain so that the changes he planned would be less disruptive. As was the case in numerous other domains, such attempts to codify and impose acceptable attitudes and behaviour anticipated the establishment of an official domain school. The domain school was founded during Tsugaru's next reform period, in the Kansei era (1789 – 1781).

The basic thrust of the policies implemented until the summer of Hōreki 5 (1755), therefore, was not so much towards suppressing social change, or halting commercial development, but rather for the domain to go through a process of financial adjustment and economic growth before attempting to hold its own against the predations of commerce: which, after all, were already playing a considerable part in the grief afflicting Tsugaru's treasury. The reformers did not simply react conservatively and try to block commercial development. They were working at setting up the conditions for eventually widening the scope of economic activity within the domain.

Mitsugi made a concerted attempt whenever the opportunity offered to decrease the number of *jikata chigyō* (landed fiefs) held by Tsugaru retainers,

an important step in most narratives of development in the direction of economic sophistication. Furthermore, he was not at all reluctant to make mutually congenial arrangements with merchants to draw commercial management skills and capital into the official sphere. These measures achieved a certain degree of success, although it is possible, with hindsight, to detect signs at this early stage of Mitsugi's idiosyncratically abrupt and sometimes blinkered approach to going about achieving his objectives. His social and collegial skills do not appear well developed.

Before the end of 1755, it became clear that the reform program would be completely derailed by the massive crop failure. The limitations imposed on a domain whose economy was based on rice production, and the vulnerability of Tsugaru to the elements, were vividly exposed by the revelation in the 9th month of the extent of that failure. There had not been a worse harvest since the one in 1695, which was followed by the Genroku famine. The response of the reformers was immediate: first to address the financial repercussions of the famine, then to draw the administrative net even tighter.

The decision taken to use the rice so deliberately stored in the domain's granaries as part of financial policy the previous year was crucial to the survival of Tsugaru's population, but its consumption was a blow to the domain's struggling economy. Large amounts were distributed: in reduced retainer stipends and as relief food to the people at large. Very little remained for the regular shipments south. Mitsugi and his colleagues hastily renegotiated loan schedules in the Kamigata and in Edo. They arranged a much-reduced remittance to Edo, literally buying the time they needed to once more put the affairs of the domain in order.

These emergency measures, as well as the previous structural reforms, were devised and implemented reasonably smoothly while relations between Ariemon and Mitsugi remained cordial and co-operative. When differences surfaced, however, and they clashed over ways of dealing with the young daimyo's succession, marriage and investiture far away in Edo, Mitsugi prevailed. Ariemon withdrew, leaving Mitsugi alone with the responsibility for dealing

with an economic crisis that had become, if anything, worse than it was when he was first appointed. There was the added pressure now of pledges to repay the renegotiated loans.

Mitsugi probably sealed the fate of the reforms by drawing men from established farming and commercial households further into the central organs and mechanisms through which the *Oshirabekata* controlled finance and commerce. When he selected eminent merchants to manage the domain's granaries and the distribution of stipend allowances, those left out were cut off from access to the most favourable and lucrative business opportunities. In the countryside, too, a majority of the new *ōjōya* (village group headmen), who replaced the existing network of *daikan* (local administrative intendants), were rural merchants or wealthy farmers.

This shift, from employing the old stratum of licensed urban merchants and official purveyors to the domain, to the inclusion of merchants in the domain's financial administrative structure, was one of the strategies designed to cope with Tsugaru's economic weakness in the face of external commercial and financial forces. The domain's resources had long been subjected to both direct and indirect exploitation by networks of merchant houses spreading from local coastal ports through intermediate ports like Chōshi, Tsuruga and Ōtsu, and into Edo and the Kamigata. The attempt to turn merchants into the domain's own instruments was a move towards gaining control over these process of transfer and exchange.

The moves to redistribute food supplies and other necessities for daily life and work by means of the *hyōfu* system, and to weaken the place of *jikata chigyō* were significant features of the second phase of economic interventions, though the success with famine relief must surely have been the most remarkable. It appears that the *hyōfu* system may not have been planned from the very beginning, but that it was precipitated by the harvest failure, which produced a change of direction between the first and second phases. Such a dramatic move was inevitable in a domain where official spending was profligate and agricultural tax remissions unpredictable; especially given the need to

catch up from even further disadvantage after the famine year. Recognising the domain's position, Mitsugi moved to rebuild Tsugaru's commercial and financial base by making the government itself an investor in commerce and diminishing the number of retainers with the power to sap resources from the centre by means of their landed holdings. It was clearly not a propitious moment for attempting such changes so suddenly.

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Plates 12 and 13: The gate and daimyos' grave area at Chōshōji

Chapter 4

Not a soul was lost: Tsugaru's famine that wasn't

> When government is straying from the Way, Heaven issues its warning in the form of a natural disaster. Tung Chung-shu[228]
>
> The suffering people struggle for ferns on Mount Shouyang While everywhere their fires are banked, and their bamboo doors shut. It is spring and the second month; yet there is no joy in verse. For whom are the colors of the land bursting forth? Emperor Go-Hanazono[229]
>
> O Almighty Lord God, who for the sin of man didst once drown all the world, except eight persons, and afterward of thy great mercy didst promise never to destroy it so again: We humbly beseech thee, that although we for our iniquities have worthily deserved a plague of rain and waters, yet upon our true repentance thou wilt send us such weather, as that we may receive the fruits of the earth in due season . . *Amen.*
>
> *The Book of Common Prayer*[230]
>
> Famines imply starvation, but not vice versa. And starvation implies poverty, but not vice versa Amartya Sen[231]
>
> Famine can only be understood properly when it is solidly placed in its social and economic context. Andrew Appleby[232]

When whole communities suffer food deprivation, they lose not only their means of physical survival, but also a vital medium through which individual, family, and community life is ordered and given meaning. In this way, famine threatens the very foundations of being. Food is so scarce that most people are severely weakened by malnutrition. Significant numbers starve to death. The suffering of victims is unspeakable, indelibly scarring the lives of those who survive. Fundamental tenets of law, custom and belief are

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[228] Quoted in Matsumoto, "The Idea of Heaven', in Najita and Scheiner (eds.), *Japanese Thought*, page 186.

[229] This poem is said to have been addressed to Ashikaga Yoshimasa by the emperor during the period of drought and famine between 1457 and 1460, when Yoshimasa was continuing to outlay extravagant amounts of money on building projects and entertainments. Quoted in H. Paul Varley, *The Ōnin War*, page 118.

[230] *The Book of Common Prayer*, London: Cambridge University Press. (No publication date) Ratified, 1571.

[231] Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981, page 39.

[232] Andrew Appleby, *Famine in Tudor and Stuart England*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1978, page 3.

repeatedly transgressed in the struggle for survival. Normally hidden machinations of power become starkly visible. Famine is first apprehended as demographic and economic crisis, but its insidious effects resonate in social, political, and cultural life long after food supplies are restored. Small wonder, then, that famines provide entire peoples with some of their most disturbing memories and deepest fears.

One does not need to have suffered to remember. In 1846, a Justice of the Peace called N.M. Cummins, who was a landlord in County Cork, addressed a letter to the Duke of Wellington after visiting some of his tenants during the "Great Hunger". This well-fed witness found one "wretched hamlet deserted", and his account continued:

> I entered some of the hovels to ascertain the cause and the scenes that presented themselves were such as no tongue or pen can convey the slightest idea of. In the first, six famished and ghastly skeletons, to all appearance dead, were huddled in a corner on some filthy straw, their sole covering what seemed a ragged horse-cloth and their wretched legs hanging about, naked above the knees. I approached in horror, and found by a low moaning that they were alive, they were in fever – four children, a woman, and what had once been a man. It is impossible to go through the details, suffice to say, that in a few minutes I was surrounded by at least 200 such phantoms, such frightful specters as no words can describe. By far the greatest number were delirious either from hunger or from fever. Their demoniac yells are still ringing in my ears, and their horrible images are fixed upon my brain . . . the same morning the police opened a house on the adjoining lands, which was observed shut for many days, and two frozen corpses were found lying upon the mud floor half devoured by the rats.[233]

This compelling passage evokes images like those found in Japanese brush paintings depicting the agonies of hell. For Cunningham, writing as a regional specialist, it illustrates the human cost of empire and industrialization. In Arnold's work it sets the scene for a study seeking out the "wider, even global, significance of famine", and representing it "as a phenomenon of far-reaching

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[233] Quoted in Arnold, *Famine*, pages 17-18, from W. Cunningham, *The Growth of English Industry and Commerce during the Early and Middle Ages*, vol. I, page 388.

political, social and cultural importance as well . . . as demographic catastrophe and economic malaise".[234]

As Arnold's objectives imply, although each famine is a unique historical event, from a historian's point of view there are properties of famines that can be discussed and compared in fairly general terms. These include a range of immediate and underlying causes of food scarcity; the effects of starvation on social groups; and the measures taken by individuals, families, communities and governments to cope with famine. Recent scholarship on these subjects is used in the first section of this chapter to suggest interpretive schemes for the subject matter of this chapter; and in the last two sections to provide frameworks for discussing pre-modern Tohoku's vulnerability to famine, and the various strategies and interventions available for forestalling the worst consequences of harvest failure. In between, the second section contains a discussion of famine in Japan, Section III is devoted to a more detailed account of famine events in far northern Tohoku during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and Section IV contains material specific to the experience of famine in Tsugaru.

I Famine in human history

(i) Famine as phenomenon

In accounts of famines, no matter when or where they occur, we read strikingly similar descriptions of how victims and social groups are affected. The very young and the very old weaken and die first. Mourning rituals can not be properly observed. People find themselves foraging for all manner of strange insects and animals. Some of what they eat makes them ill. Violent offences are committed against the persons and property of those who appear to be storing food for themselves. Travellers are accosted and robbed of food stuffs and other possessions that might be exchanged for food.

The hungry who have enough energy desert their homes and villages to seek food and employment in towns and cities, where their appearance is often

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[234] Arnold, *Famine*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988. Foreword.

the earliest notice of rural hardship. They dress in rags, having sold their clothing, personal effects and other possessions to buy food: but prices are impossibly high. Households sell or abandon females or children. Muscles waste, minds wander, and vision blurs. Unclean and forbidden foods are consumed. The weak are killed to end their suffering; or for their flesh. The dead are left unburied. Bodies clog pathways and ditches, preyed upon by birds and animals. Frantic survivors sometimes break into official storehouses or government offices, or join together in random mass protest. These elemental political acts are rewarded with relief; or brushed away and ignored; or brutally punished, even with death.

Given the fact that each particular famine is actually a unique cluster of such a range of phenomena, it is not surprising that casualty figures are often quoted very tentatively. Tracing the numbers, or times, or proximate causes, of individual deaths is clearly a challenging task. Because victims always die in impoverished conditions, and often in large numbers, burial documentation and death registrations can be incomplete or non-existent. When the starving have fled far from their home districts, their identity and origins can be an insoluble puzzle after death. Those who flee and survive are often counted as casualties in their places of origin, which may well have suffered a major demographic crisis.

A further complicating factor in determining whether or not people are victims of famine is epidemic disease. Relations between starvation and epidemics are extremely complex; and the task of tracing their roles in the mortality of historical victims is time-consuming and complicated, even when records exist. This, nonetheless fascinating, line of enquiry is discussed by Ann Bowman Jannetta, in a short chapter on deaths in Hida during the Tenmei and Tenpō famines.[235] People whose organ functions are breaking down because of starvation can display symptoms, such as fever, mental impairment, bloody vomit and constant diarrhoea, which are common to a number of medical

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[235] Ann Bowman Jannetta, *Epidemics and Mortality in Early Modern Japan*, Chapter VII, "Epidemics and Famine", pages 173-187.

conditions. They can therefore appear to have contracted a disease when they are simply terminally hungry. On the other hand, even though famine kills off the most vulnerable hosts for infection very early, the resistance of malnourished survivors to epidemic disease can be lowered. If they flee to crowded urban areas, their chances of infection are raised considerably.

To ascertain whether or not a person has starved to death, the most useful evidence would be records of food intake and the proximate cause of death: but, for most pre modern or early modern human communities, this information is unavailable. We must instead have recourse to whatever data have survived. These can be statistics on fluctuations in food prices, and on variations in mortality rates, sometimes in particular locations. They can be used together with descriptive accounts of the circumstances in which people died to draw at least tentative conclusions about whether disease was likely to have been implicated.[236] Even when disease is recorded as the proximate cause of death, however, malnutrition can still have been heavily implicated, through lowering the victim's resistance to infection.

Severe malnutrition to the point of organ damage can also cause serious injury or sudden death when starving people are suddenly provided with normal subsistence foods, in a relief or rescue effort, for example. This ironic fate befell some victims of the Genna famine when a conscientious young daimyo of Tsugaru attempted to save his subjects. He was, unfortunately, unfamiliar with the insidious effects of starvation on the human body.

(ii) Famine as historical event

Archaeological evidence of famine events is older than any written records. It is still not possible, though, to say with any certainty when famines made their way into human experience. By the eighteenth century, though, a

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[236] A discussion of these matters in the English case is found in "Famine, disease and crisis mortality in early modern society", which is the editors' opening chapter of Walter and Shofield (eds.), *Famine, Disease and the Social Order in Early Modern Society*, pages 1-73.

great deal of evidence related to famines had accumulated in Japan, and in that context the Hōreki famine has been regarded as a significant event.[237]

Because the drastic harvest failure that triggered famine throughout most of Tohoku in 1755 did not result in the normally anticipated outcomes in Tsugaru, but was instead prevented from claiming lives, I have referred to it as a "famine that wasn't". It is sobering to find so few cases in history with which to compare Tsugaru's experience. The deliverance of vulnerable communities from starvation and death has seldom been noted. In history, as in life, good news is probably rarely important news, and the impact of averted disasters is negligible compared with the vivid impressions left by mortal calamity - as evidenced in the preceding pages. Leaving unwritten stories of success to one side, though, failure to avert famine in the past was probably due at least partly to logistic obstacles; but there has also been in history a certain thread of fatalism where starving people are concerned.

This fatalism has taken different forms, for it has been grounded in a variety of belief systems. A kind of Malthusian fatalism goes some way toward explaining the indifference shown by English overlords to suffering in their Indian and Irish colonies, for example, or by Russian Czars to the fate of their peasant subjects, or by people in famine-free countries to starvation victims in China and India. It was in some quarters accepted wisdom that famine was inevitable, because it was one of Nature's essential periodic correctives for overpopulation. This argument can still be encountered in reference to the Bengal, Ethiopian or Sahel famines, where combinations of natural disaster, civil strife and unstable international commodity prices are much more to the explanatory point.

More nuanced neo-Malthusian theories are currently being developed by ecological historians, environmental scientists and population experts, who are concerned about the long term capacity of the earth to accommodate a human

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[237] Saitō Osamu discusses work on the chronology of famines in Japan in "The Frequency of Famines as Demographic Correctives in the Japanese Past", Discussion Paper Series A, No. 386, Institute of Economic Research, Hitotsubashi University. Tokyo, 2000, pages 4-5.

population expanding at present rates. The approaches of some scholars of the *longue durée* may be justified in the long run, but simpler Malthusian arguments no longer provide satisfactory explanations for the ghastly scars left by dearth and famine in the collective human memory. To be sure, from time to time particular populations have temporarily outgrown their food resources - and perhaps developed new technologies as a result of dearth and suffering. It is true also, that famine claims large numbers of lives when normal supply lines are blocked, by natural or human-induced disasters. It is not possible, however, to demonstrate that food supplies in pre-industrial or early modern societies would have run out if such famines had not occurred.[238]

Long before Malthus, another type of fatalism is written into historical narratives. So-called natural calamities like famines, which seem to have occurred through no obvious design of man, have long been interpreted as portents from Heaven or malevolent spirits. In the Christian tradition, climatic catastrophes and famine are often read as signs that Heaven is offended by the sins of mankind, in general or in a particular place. In Chinese civilizations, natural disasters have for millennia been signs that a ruling regime has lost celestial favour. In contrast with the Christian case, it is not the subject population that is believed to have transgressed: but it is their suffering through plagues, flood, pestilence and famines that signals a ruler's failure to properly order society and bring relief to the people. If the dynasty does fall, the disasters are then portrayed as significant portents in historical narratives.

The Tenpō famine in Japan, for example, is often cited, among other negative events, as evidence of the irreversible decline of the Tokugawa bakufu. Disasters other than those deemed natural, which also presage regime collapse in Chinese civilizations, include succession disputes in the ruling family, popular rebellion, economic instability, and barbarian military threats on the

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[238] See, for example, the arguments presented in Sen, *Poverty*, pages 174-79, and Arnold, *Famine*, 34-42.

frontiers. Christians, too, have long prayed for deliverance from such events, over which they also assume Heaven's power :

> From lightening and tempest; from plague, pestilence, and famine; from battle and murder, and from sudden death, *Good Lord, deliver us,* From all sedition, privy conspiracy, and rebellion: . . .[239]

While the possibility of direct intervention from the heavens has lost explanatory power in many circles, it is more difficult to abandon the idea that famines and other human disasters, both present and past, might sometimes occur in contexts where men and their leaders have behaved in inappropriate or inadequate ways. Governments frequently do fall if they are corrupt, or fail to properly maintain infrastructure, or neglect to regulate the provision of services, or are cavalier about the security of their citizens. In a post-modern, democratic system their demise might be explained in terms of unemployment statistics, bank failures, the crime rate, crowded schools and hospitals, political nepotism, or interruptions to utility services. These are all clear signs of failure at state level.

In pre-modern societies the failure of states to promote the social and economic welfare of their populations clearly caused disasters, which were read in moral and religious idioms: but these interpretations also signalled real structural weaknesses that were very probably implicated in causing disasters like famines. Below Heaven, the idea of portents can be applied usefully by giving careful attention to the wider social, political and economic contexts in which famines occur. Signs of vulnerability to famine can be seen in the means by which power is gained, expressed and articulated in any society.

As well as signalling that all is not well in relations between men and their rulers, famines are also sometimes interpreted as events that actually change the historical fate of a people through their sheer weight as events. The Great Famine has been put in this category by Joel Mokyr, as David Arnold noticed. Mokyr claims that this famine "completely altered the course of Irish

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[239] From "The Litany" in *The Book of Common Prayer*, page 29.

history", at the same time as making "Ireland into a demographic anomaly which singles it out as *sui generis* in modern European history."[240]

In contrast to these more immediate outcomes of famine, the approach taken by historical geographers, ecologists and some Annales historians, has been to examine whole ages of plenty and dearth, development and decline, to shape narrative accounts of the very long term rise and fall of peoples and states. These studies trace the deep ecological, climatic and geographic changes that have taken place in a region, and their influences on the survival of societies over extended periods. The distinct characteristics of any single historical event are not relevant in most such studies, but the recurrence of mortality crises like famines can be signs of the long-term lack of sustainability of a particular way of life or a social structure or even an entire civilization.

(iii) The nature of causes

There have developed, alongside different ways of understanding famines as events, at least three different approaches to explaining why they occur at particular historical junctures in specific places. These approaches concentrate on immediate causes, prevailing structural conditions, and the effects of much longer-term transformations. Evidence at all three levels of causation can be examined to account for famines in history; even though in the past most famines were understood and experienced in terms of their immediately apparent causes, with ultimate responsibility perhaps attributed to supernatural agents, or blame for the worst outcomes directed at scapegoats, political powers or commercial operatives.

Until recently, then, the immediate causes of famine have for the most part been recorded as either human agency or natural calamity. Man-made famines were either deliberately engineered, as weapons of mass murder, war or coercion, or they were the outcomes of collateral damage. The capacity to withdraw food or provide access to it is one of the greatest powers one person

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[240] Arnold, page 17.

or group has ever been able to wield over another; and the history of sieges and blockades is therefore long. The strategies used by Stalin against the people of the Ukraine, and by Nazi occupation authorities against the western Netherlands are recent chilling examples of this type of famine causation.[241]

Famines characterized as natural events have been treated as the same type of unpredictable disasters as those that trigger them: volcanic eruptions, violent storms, droughts, floods, plagues of plant disease, rodents, or insect pests, all of which disrupt the production of food.

Generally speaking, disasters that are purely climatic or seismological events have retained their natural label, but causes of famine like plagues of pests and ruinous plant diseases, which were viewed as natural in the past, have gradually been recast, along with epidemics, as human disasters that can be avoided. It is now widely accepted that given appropriate applications of scientific knowledge, political willpower, education and economic infrastructure, none of these events need happen. Governments are increasingly expected to use the powers invested in them to deliver their polities from such horrors.

In the case of plant disease, for example, human agency can easily be part of a pattern of causation or prevention - at the farming level, in local communities and in governments. Farmers through the ages have experimented to develop high-yielding and disease-resistant plants. They have also co-operated at community level to develop methods of maintaining soil fertility and field hygiene. Local leaders and governments have contributed to research and experimentation, sometimes mandating the introduction of certain crops and practices, or insisting on the concentrated cultivation of particular plant varieties. Large-scale monoculture, though, has always risked devastation through abrupt climate change; or on contact with diseases and pests to which the favoured crop or variety is not immune. Dearth and famine can result when

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[241] Stalin's terror in the Ukraine was initiated in 1932, when the region's harvest was forcibly requisitioned and access to food imports cut off. Davies puts the death toll at "some 7 million" on page 965 of *Europe*. The Dutch Hunger Winter was imposed on the region containing such major cities as Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague, from October 1944 until May 1945. High mortality rates were recorded after the already rationed food supply ran out in February 1945.

the vulnerable crop is a staple food or a key market commodity that is exchanged for cash or food.

The Irish potato famine was an extreme example of this scenario. It was triggered by the arrival across the Irish Sea of the fungal blight, *phytophthora infestans,* which wiped out Ireland's potato crops over several years, even though it had had only nuisance value where it came from. This virulent disease was therefore, according to the eminent historian, Norman Davies, the immediate cause of "one of Europe's worst natural disasters".[242] The relatively recent introduction of the potato into Ireland, however, and the speed with which it had become the dominant staple food of the poor, as well as the bias towards planting only particular high-yielding varieties, were all outcomes of human interventions and interactions. The squalid, malnourished life of the Irish tenant farmer and his family, whose diet the potato comprised, was also the end product of a range of human institutions, beliefs and practices, some of which emanated from powers as far away as London and Rome. It is therefore not possible to claim, as Davies does, that this was a **natural** disaster!

Infestations of insects and rodents as causes of crop failure are similar to plant diseases in that they are often thought of as coming from nowhere. Clearly, though, human ignorance or carelessness can result in pests being introduced. This was probably the case with the leaf hoppers that travelled from the Chinese mainland to Kyushu in Japan and triggered the Kyōhō famine of 1731-32. Effective methods of eradicating pests or diseases by human agency were not available then, so Kyōhō period farmers resorted to constant parades around their rice fields with pine torches burning, bells jangling, drums beating and conch horns blowing - and mostly to no avail. It might be observed that modern chemical measures taken against plagues and blights have caused more damage in the long term, to soil, cultivators and consumers, than pest infestations would have done: and that would bring us back again to human agency, at the structural or social level.

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[242] Davies, *Europe*, pages 832-33.

(iv) Structures and circumstances

Wars, storms, fires, insect plagues and floods afflict entire populations indiscriminately; but the capacity to prevent or control the damage is never evenly spread, either through societies or among them. Historically, some occupational groups, classes or castes have always been more affected by food scarcity than others. More recently, famines have only occurred in countries of the so-called Third World, where, in turn, some groups suffer mortality crises and others do not. Reasons for this uneven spread of damage and suffering can be found in the structural or circumstantial level of causation, where social institutions and conduits of power are implicated.

Amartya Sen has argued that when famine conditions prevail, for whatever reason, the people who die soonest in any socio-economic system are always those poorest in entitlements to own and exchange goods. According to Sen, an individual's survival will depend "on what he owns, what exchange possibilities are offered to him, what is given to him free, and what is taken away from him."[243] Although his position has been criticized for over-simplifying the relations between poverty, starvation and famine it does not seem inappropriate as a way of considering famine in Japan during the eighteenth century. The social, political and economic structures of the polity were not designed, and only rarely functioned, to prevent mortality crises from developing after major natural (or man-made) disasters. Typhoons, insect plagues, droughts and floods are serious natural calamities, but they do not cause famine and death where societies have developed the exchange mechanisms, welfare regimens, food substitution strategies and commercial regulation to cope with them.

Since famine is always a concomitant of wider imbalances and ills, causes need to be traced in more structures and practices than those directly

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[243] Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, page 155. Sen has since developed his entitlement argument, and produced more complex analyses of starvation and famines, but the concept is a helpful tool for explaining famine deaths in Tokugawa period domains where income was predominantly dependent on rice production.

connected with food production and population statistics.[244] Economic, political, social and cultural forces all influence the mechanisms by which food is produced, distributed and consumed. These various fields of power can be examined, and their contributions to food scarcity and the allocation of entitlements assessed. For, whether or not a natural calamity develops into a human disaster at a given juncture is governed by the particular circumstances in which it occurs. These circumstances are shaped by the institutions, technologies and practices a human society has put in place over time.

Within a polity, the access of each separate household or family to food is determined by its capacity as a unit to grow and store, or to buy food. In turn, that capacity depends on its entitlements to use land and labour; or to earn and possess some kind of medium of exchange, such as money. When a polity is prepared to intervene with crisis management strategies that alter normal structures and entitlements, natural disasters can often be prevented from causing severe famines. That was, after all, what Nyūi Mitsugi achieved in the wake of the Hōreki harvest failure.

II Farmers and famines in Japanese history

As Amino Yoshihiku and others have argued, rice cultivation was never universally practiced throughout Japan. On the other hand, some parts of the country have been inhabited by settled, rice-cultivating communities for longer than its recorded history. Forms of state that developed after the introduction of writing were largely funded by revenues raised as agricultural taxes, primarily on rice. Japan's farmers produced solid foundations and means of maintaining a variety of social and political systems, from an aristocratic monarchy managed by a centralized court elite, to regency rule over a system of estates held by noble families, to authority shared by emperors and shoguns, to scattered fiefdoms under regional generals, religious institutions and court loyalists.

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[244] Appleby, quotation on page 167, above.

This fragmentation of central power was resolved in part by general submission to the Tokugawa shogunal dynasty, which presided over the country from Edo under the putative authority of the imperial dynasty some distance away in Kyoto. The new court-bakufu-domain political structure was sustained by agricultural wealth garnered by means of a comprehensive and closely monitored taxation system, based on rice productivity units and processed through central grain markets. Eventually, that same farming sector was also to bear the brunt of the expansion of Japan's military-industrial power in the name of a constitutional emperor.

In all these forms of state, through deliberate design or systemic outcome, farmers were consistently subordinated to more privileged social strata comprising aristocratic, religious, military, commercial or industrial elites. During the Tokugawa period, as the geographically segmented economy gradually expanded, and commercial tendrils reached out to join resources and products with money and markets, the majority of those whose occupational status attached them to the land became increasingly disadvantaged. Their entitlements to food, cash wealth, material goods, and technology decreased over time, and many were finally alienated from their land after years of accumulated debt and hardship. Along with this tendency towards rural impoverishment, vulnerability to famine increased.

(i) Records and images

In any version of that very popular genre, the Japanese historical chronology or timeline, terms indicating harvest failure and famine appear with almost monotonous regularity. The most common among them are *fusaku*, *kyōsaku*, and *daikyōsaku* (不作、凶作、大凶作), for a poor harvest, a harvest failure and a major harvest failure. And, sometimes preceded by one or more harvest failures, periodic appearances are made by *kikin* or *daikikin* (飢饉、大飢饉), indicating famine or major famine. Although it is difficult to discern any statistical or qualitative consistency in the ways these terms are used over time, places and publications, the last two seem most often to indicate total

harvest failures that resulted in severe food deprivation associated with starvation and a significant number of deaths.

The Meiji period compilation of historical documents, *Nihon no kikin shiryō* (Materials on famine in Japan), opens with a comprehensive time line of some four hundred and fifty natural disasters that occurred over two millennia or so up to the year Meiji 25.[245] It originates in the year 660 BCE, when the first emperor was said to have ascended to the throne. The first three items in the list are famines, recorded for the (Japanese) years of 568, 666 and 976. Needless to say, there is no documentary material in the collection connected with those early events, and also, famine is no longer usually considered to be simply a natural disaster to be listed beside such events as typhoons and earthquakes. The first entry in the timeline mentioning the Tōsan region, which included present-day Tohoku, is in the year 1342 (682 CE).[246] It notes a calamity associated with wind, which was perhaps a typhoon. Famines in Tōsan appear in entries for 709 and 710 CE; the cause recorded in both cases is rain.

Since this was around the time the Japanese imperial court, then situated in Nara, began to engage the Emishi peoples further afield with some persistence, it is not surprising that climatic events in the eastern mountains begin to appear in records, though parts of Mutsu and Dewa were to remain beyond the direct reach of the central government for nearly a thousand more years.[247] There are ten instances of famine in the Tōsan region noted for the eighth century: two in association with water, two with wind, four with drought and one that afflicted the entire land.[248] The other was associated with wind, water and rats. Dewa is first mentioned by name as having experienced famine

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[245] Shihōshō keijikyoku (comp.), *Nihon no kikin shiryō*, pages 1-34.

[246] The Tōsandō actually took in all provinces east and north of the Tōkaidō, except for the seven of the Hokurokudō. That is, the Tōsandō extended from present-day Shiga and Gifu prefectures, through Nagano, Gunma and Tochigi as well as taking in all of Tohoku.

[247] The land surveys initiated by Hideyoshi and continued in the early Tokugawa decades, despite the fact that they were incomplete and inaccurate in some cases, were the first instances of the institutional reach of a Japanese central government extending through the region.

[248] 諸道三十一国, which is to say, "the thirty-one provinces of all the various regions". "The fifty-eight provinces (or countries) and three islands" are referred to in Nara period texts.

in the year 846 CE, and Mutsu in an entry for 1402, when it suffered the combined onslaught of wind, drought, famine and water!

What is to be made of all this? Certainly nothing terribly much can be concluded from very early chronologies, except that famines and natural disasters have for a very long time been amongst the events recorded as Japanese history; and that records are more likely to be kept during relatively peaceful times when a degree of administrative authority is in place. It is possible sometimes, though, to use other sources to flesh out the bare chronological record. A number of descriptions of famines survive in historical chronicles and other literature from pre-Tokugawa times, even though there is actually very little evidence of the experience of the victims themselves. Paul Varley, for example, has used material from a diary. He quotes a passage written by the Zen priest, Taigyoku, in the *Hekizan Nichiroku* (碧山日録). It centres on the starvation death of a young child on the streets of Kyoto in the 3rd month of 1460 CE.[249] This famine appears in the *Kikin shiryō* timeline entries for the Japanese years 2120 and 2121, along with a catalogue of calamities caused by wind, water, drought, epidemic disease and insects inflicting the Goki (五畿) and Shichidō (七道).[250]

The child had died in the arms of his mother, who had travelled to the city to beg for food because the district where she lived had been overtaken by famine after three successive years of drought. The passage contains an account in her voice of the rice crop failure at home in Kawachi, the excesses of local officials, the weight of tax exactions and the unavailability of cash loans. Then, a few lines further on, Taigyoku describes a large group of nobles indulging in an extravagant flower-viewing party just a couple of city blocks away from the woman. The priest expresses concern at the extremes of misery and lavish consumption he has witnessed - the division "between the

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[249] Varley, *The Ōnin War*, page 117. This diary is a rare personal record of the period preceding the War, written by the Rinzai zen priest, Taigyoku (太極、1421-1472?), of Tōfukuji. It contains entries from the first month of 1459 to the end of 1468.

[250] *Kikin shiryō*, page 20. 1460 and '61. The Goki were the five provinces around Kyoto: Yamashiro, Yamato, Kawachi, Settsu and, from AD 716, Izumi. The Shichidō were the regions of Saikai, Nankai, Sanyō, San'in, Hokuriku, Tōkai and Tōsan: which is to say, Japan without Hokkaido and the Ryukyus.

starving poor and the stinking rich", as David Arnold styles it - and he records that he presented funeral money to the bereaved mother, as well as promising to say a service for the child's salvation.[251] His account vividly highlights the gap between those with access to food and drink in the Ashikaga shogun's capital and those without. He also honours the woman's agency in recounting her attempt to save herself and her child. But even this degree of sympathetic engagement is far from a firsthand account of the experience of starvation and famine.

There is certainly no way of knowing whether any of the events described in such texts, or recorded in the disaster timeline, had any relation to what was going on in remote Tsugaru, or, for that matter, whether they happened at all. The stories and images, though, accumulate and reinforce each other to form one kind of popular historical narrative, providing an ever richer font of images to draw on through the Tokugawa period. Mention of wind as a problem in the eastern mountains in the region's earliest entry is a sadly accurate hint at conditions a millennium later. For it was to be the cold northeasterly *yamase* winds, blowing southward from the north pole over the Sea of Okhotsk and onto Japan's Pacific coast, that would regularly cause crop failures in northern Tohoku.[252]

It is also interesting to note that the Hōreki 5 famine year, listed for the Tōsan region in the long disaster timeline, was noted to be a windy, watery one. This is a description that is certainly corroborated in many other chronologies and accounts of the famine. Tohoku is noted in one history after another as having born the brunt of famine in Japan during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and those cold, rainy summers are an episode in the longue durée of climatologists who theorize about a "little ice age" during that time. Similarly, the 1460 famine in the Kinai area, too, is part of a wider historical narrative: the waning of the Ashikaga shogun's power,

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[251] Arnold, *Peasant Societies*, page 2. The dead boy will be saved in the afterlife.

[252] *Kenkyūsha's New Japanese-English Dictionary* defines the *yamase* (山背) wind as "a cold, dry wind blowing down from over the mountains", which does not accord exactly with older descriptions.

then the lapse into political confusion, military clashes and the *sengoku* period. For those educated in Chinese political theory, as Zen priests often were, and historians have tended to be since, the series of natural disasters, persistent famine, peasant revolts in the countryside, and intrigues in the capital all combined to signal serious dynastic decay: the incumbent political regime had lost Heaven's mandate to govern.

Political authority in the Tokugawa period was less contested, and because the bakufu imposed a system of record-keeping and reporting, teams of local and central bureaucrats created a huge number of documents and records. Among those that have survived the predations of insects, floods, fires, wars and modern carelessness, some can be used to suggest and reconstruct elements of famine experience. Local temple registers used for keeping track of Christians, for example, are useful sources for tracing death statistics. Because literacy skills were acquired by many people other than those whose official duties demanded them, texts from beyond the official sphere also exist. Texts of all kinds are in general more numerous for the years from the Genroku period onwards. There are diaries, daybooks, guide-books and travellers' tales, which refer to famines and famine conditions in a variety of ways.

(ii) The narrative trajectory of the Tokugawa period

While famines clearly demonstrate the practical implications of socio-economic and political relations between the privileged, well-connected social strata and the rest of the population, in Tokugawa Japan they also reflected to some degree the relationship of men and their institutions with the natural environment - topographic, geographic and climatic. This can be seen in the variations in timing, causes and severity of famines during the period among the regions of Japan.

The Kan'ei famine, for example, occurred over three years from 1640 and has been associated with a number of natural causative factors. It was the first large-scale disaster to confront the bakuhan system after the

Shimabara war. The southwest and central provinces suffered severe drought, with the entire region from the Kinki through Shikoku and Kyushu having lost up to half their draught animals to a cattle plague in 1639 and '40. In the Kumamoto domain in Kyushu, an insect infestation further damaged crops. Conditions were particularly severe in the Kansai area, where corpses were said to have littered the roadways and could be seen floating down the rivers day after day.[253] In the Hokuriku domain of Kaga, cold winds and heavy rain ruined harvests, while in Tsugaru it was so cold that the *nashi* trees were blooming in high summer. Elsewhere in Tohoku, Aizu had heavy rains and hailstorms in the 6th month and frosts fell in Akita in the 8th.[254]

During the Genroku period (1688-1704), much of northeastern Japan was devastated by recurrent extremely cold and wet weather during the rice-growing season, making the Genroku famine one of the region's most serious. In contrast, the Kyōhō famine, being the first of the so-called *san dai kikin* (three great famines), was primarily a western disaster. It was caused by leaf-hoppers, which spread through Kyushu and Shikoku to western and central Honshu as far as the Wakayama domain on the Kii peninsula.

The Kyōhō famine combines with the Tenmei and Tenpō famines and the Kyōhō, Kansai and Tenpō reform programs to shape popular conceptions of the course of Tokugawa period history. The patterns of plenty and dearth, however, varied from region to region, as Kikuchi Isao points out in the opening paragraphs of his recent monograph.[255] In Tohoku's historical chronicles, while the standard outline of three or four famines is retained, they are not the same as those that shape the national narrative. For this region, the Hōreki famine of 1755 is combined with the Tenmei and Tenpō famines to make three great famines; and the Genroku famine of the 1690's is added to frame a narrative with four. The Kan'ei famine was also experienced in Tohoku, but the national blueprint of three or four key negative turning points is generally

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[253] Morita, *Nōmin*, page 149.
[254] Kikuchi, *Kinsei*, pages 13-14.
[255] Kikuchi (1997), *Kinsei no kikin*, page 1. Dates for the Kyōhō period are 1716-36, for the Tenmei period, 1781-89, and for the Tenpō period 1830-34.

preserved in narratives of ups and downs in the region during the Tokugawa period.

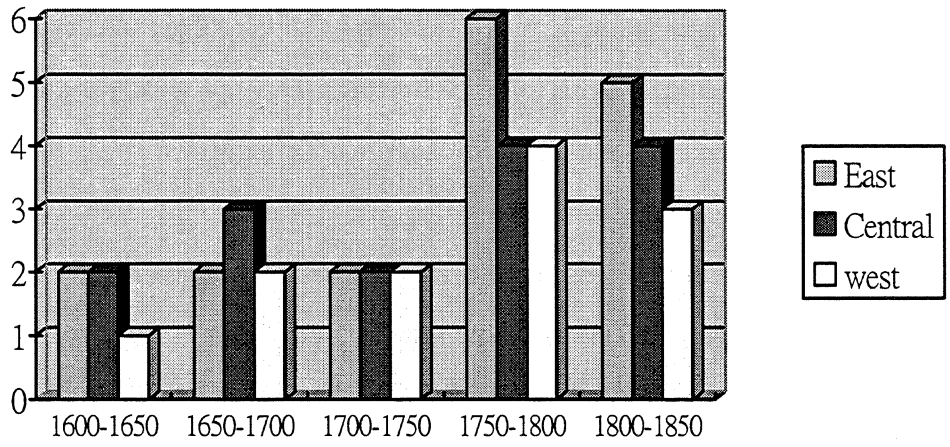

Figure 2: Number of famine years recorded in half-centuries, 1600-1850

East denotes the Tohoku region;

Central, the Kanto, southern Tōsan, Tōkai and Hokuriku regions; and

West, the Kinai San'in, Sanyō, Shikoku, and Kyushu.

Sources: Kikuchi (1997), *Kinsei no kikin*; Morita, *Nōmin*.

Widespread drought was again experienced in central, southern and western Japan in 1770; but two years later there were major harvest failures in the south and west due to flooding after continuous spring and summer rain. 1778 saw more floods in Kyushu and the Kansai. Then, in the following year Sakurajima erupted in southern Kyushu. In 1782, persistent spring and summer rains again caused crop failures in the south and west, and in 1783 Mount Asama erupted violently in central Honshu. 20,000 people were killed directly by the eruption, but the ash and laval flows combined with unfavourable weather patterns in other parts of the country to trigger the Japan-wide Tenmei famine, which was to last at least five years.[256] The natural factors associated with that prolonged famine are listed, according to location, as excessive rainfall, drought, cold growing seasons and the Mount

[256] Kondo, "Volcanic Eruptions", page 776, discusses the meteorological consequences of volcanic eruptions.

Asama volcanic eruption. The last calamitous famines in most Tokugawa period narratives were those of the Tenpō period, which peaked in Tohoku in 1836-37.

No matter which three or four famines gave shape to what kind of narrative, however, those were clearly not the only times when people died of starvation during the Tokugawa period. Added to the so-called major famines, a significant number of smaller-scale or regional famines, like those of the early seventeenth century mentioned above, meant that in most places throughout Japan famine conditions were experienced, on average, at least once every forty to fifty years.[257] Since life expectancy for Tokugawa villagers at birth was around forty years, it is reasonable to suppose that the famines were part of living memory in most farming villages.[258] Historical accounts of village stores being disastrously empty at times when crops failed indicate that starvation was often connected with extra taxation imposts, or importunate creditors, or the activity of grain merchants privy to information on market trends further afield.

Most shoguns had access to sufficient information, to have understood the nature and effects of famine: but, apart from the efforts of Yoshimune to help domains in Kyushu and Shikoku during the Kyōhō famine, very little leadership in famine relief emanated from Edo. Compared with the prominence given famines as historical events in Tokugawa Japan, accounts of efforts to predict and forestall them are very rare. Even Yoshimune's relief measures could be viewed as rather less than charitable, and certainly not the result of much foresight. He simply shipped surplus rice from bakufu granaries in Osaka to distressed domains, on credit. The Kan'ei famine had demonstrated very early, to bakufu and domain governments alike, the importance of maintaining relief granaries against food scarcity; but in the long run this basic tenet of benevolent government was observed more in exhortation than practical action.

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[257] Ibid., page 779. Kondo's graph of rice crops in Tohoku between 1830 and 1980 shows clusters of lean years occurring consistently every thirty to forty years, even as rice production increases.

[258] See Saitō, "The Frequency of Famines", page 21, for population and life expectancy figures.

Matsudaira Sadanobu's success in saving the domain of Shirakawa from the Tenmei famine immediately following his arrival there as daimyo, is portrayed as a rare exemplary case of *jinsei* (仁政), or benevolent administration, in the classic Confucian tradition.[259] A quick glance through the statistics on popular protests and uprisings in Tokugawa Japan, the petitions presented by the protagonists, and the justice meted out by authorities, however, strengthens the impression that aspirations after such practical concern on the part of governments were considerably more developed in the minds of hungry subjects than in those of their rulers.[260]

It is significant, also, that two of the three great central and western famines, and three of the four major famines in Tohoku all occurred during the latter half of the Tokugawa suzerainty, despite the logical expectation that earlier experiences might have led to improvements in both prevention and relief strategies. In general, then, intermittent famines are recorded in all regions from the beginning of the Tokugawa period, with some longer-term causal factors overlapping from place to place and local events triggering famines of varying severity at specific times in particular locations. Famines occurring from the Genroku period onwards were recorded as more severe, with increasingly large numbers of casualties. As yet, there is no way of knowing whether this is a reflection of the increased severity of famines or developments in the keeping and preservation of records.

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[259] Ooms, *Charismatic Bureaucrat*, pages 49-53, discusses Sadanobu's succession and food relief program. He also points out that the new daimyo's ailing stepfather and predecessor, Matsudaira Sadakuni, had probably already instigated the purchase of relief rice before his replacement arrived in Shirakawa.

[260] Scheiner, "Benevolent Lords", in Najita (ed.), *Japanese Thought*, pages 39-62. Scheiner's essay explains the emergence of millennial style *yonaoshi* ideas in Tokugawa Japan. In it he discusses the concept of *jinsei* (benevolent rule) as it was understood by Dazai Shundai, who was one of Mitsugi's role models. He also refers to the use in some domains of the term *onbyakushō*, which he translates as "honourable peasants" (for want of something less awkward in English to represent the Japanese honorific).
Anne Walthall, *Peasant Uprisings in Japan.* Chicago: University of Chigago Press, 1991, pages 57-61, contains the peasant petition of 1644, the resultant policy changes and penalties inflicted by the bakufu in the legendary Sōgorō story from the Kanto region. Pages 94-95 cover the grievance meeting of a group of peasants with officials in the western domain of Tsuyama, and pages 109-116 the punishments for a subsequent riot in 1727.

(iii) Poverty and famine in the Tokugawa period

To begin at the beginning of Sen's line of reasoning, we can say that a growing proportion of Japan's rural population during the Tokugawa period was poor, in that they suffered relative deprivation in the society as a whole.[261] In the face of well-substantiated claims that popular material culture reached extremely comfortable standards in some instances, it is still possible to find evidence that from time to time less privileged groups went hungry. And when families or villages were very short of food some individuals were malnourished to the point where they starved; and starvation in its extreme stages resulted in deaths.[262] When the number of people dying was significant enough for someone to have made a note of it, famine had struck. The course of events in all the Tokugawa period famines discussed in this study is the same: a harvest failure was followed by prolonged and severe food deprivation associated with a significant number of starvation deaths.

In the aftermath of any famine, there was inevitably a shortage of farm labour in the countryside. Recovery to previous levels of productivity was therefore slow, and this in turn depressed domain government incomes from agricultural taxes, leading to increased official borrowing. A visible after-effect in many domains was the number of deserted fields and villages, whose cultivators and occupants had either died of starvation or fled. It was in these conditions of general rural impoverishment and desolation that commercial and financial interests from urban areas were able to penetrate villages, through their capacity to offer loans secured against future harvests. As harvests failed, and defaulting occurred, land gradually accumulated in the hands of moneylenders, commercial landlords and wealthy farming households. The cultivator often ended up as a tenant farmer, pressed by both landowner and

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[261] The degree of poverty afflicting the population in general varied significantly over time and region, as can be seen in the evidence marshalled by Conrad Totman and Susan Hanley in their articles "Tokugawa Peasants: Win, Lose, or Draw", and "How Well did the Peasants Live?"

[262] Progressive crises of this kind, from food deprivation through widespread hunger and starvation to famine, are discussed in the works of Sen, Arnold and other scholars specializing in the history, causes, symptoms or prevention of famines.

the domain authorities; or as a hired casual labourer, with no resource or entitlements.

Thus an overall pattern emerged where, although the economy expanded through the eighteenth century while the population remained almost static, a large part of the farming sector experienced increasing poverty and insecurity. Key wealthy rural landholders, who had previously cushioned the harshness of lean years for the relatives and tenant dependants who worked their lands, gradually gave up cultivating all but their most productive land. They gave over some less fertile areas to relatives and rented out fields to tenants in purely commercial arrangements, investing their own surpluses in money-lending or industrial ventures in local villages and towns. Those same households were in large part those who held powerful positions in village administrations, including the right to allocate tax burdens among farmers. This gave certain established households hereditary political and economic advantages over the majority of other villagers, who cultivated smaller or less productive fields and had limited rights, or no rights at all, to make use of public lands. Given these trends, the insecurity and anxiety of poorer villagers increased, resulting in more and more protests and uprisings, especially in times of food scarcity.

Notwithstanding the upheavals and distress that accompanied them, food supply crises continued to occur with increasing frequency, as did the angry reactions of disadvantaged groups in towns and villages. Tokugawa authorities cruelly punished protest leaders, and sometimes granted particular petitions. They failed, however, to address the fundamental causes of the disturbances, despite the fact that the spectre of famine had long been acknowledged as a serious threat to the survival, prosperity and peace - not only of individuals, households and local communities, but of entire polities as well.

III Harvest failure and famine in Mutsu

Today, Tohoku produces 20% of Japan's rice harvest, despite a climate that allows only single cropping. A significant proportion, including some very

popular household varieties, comes at competitive prices from around Hachirōgata in Akita prefecture, close to the border with Aomori prefecture. This was also the border between the old provinces of Mutsu and Dewa; Mutsu originally comprising roughly the area that is now Aomori prefecture. *See Map 1 on page 10.* This is an indication that the region was not terminally unsuited to any kind of rice production. In hindsight, however, it is clear that given the conditions that prevailed during the Tokugawa period, Nanbu, Hachinohe and Tsugaru were on the very margins of viable rice country. All three domains were exposed to the cold, northeasterly *yamase* winds. The Tohoku Pacific coast was particularly vulnerable to cold weather, and the cold atmospheric conditions there often brought flooding rains to Tsugaru. These three northern domains did not, however, always have parallel experiences of dearth and famine.

Terminology is not consistently used in official records or histories of food scarcity and famines, while measures and definitions are rarely provided. From the sources listed for Figure 3 and Table 6 (see pages 192,194), however, it can be concluded that Tsugaru had at least fourteen bad seasons in the period between 1591 and 1839, of which nine were complete crop failures; and that Nanbu had nine crop failures, but as many as forty-three bad harvests.

(i) Early trends

It did not augur well for Tsugaru that within months of Hideyoshi's 1591 confirmation of as daimyo, the farmers of his newly-established domain registered a major harvest shortfall of about 80 percent. A quarter-century later, in **Genna** 1 (1615), the year Tokugawa Ieyasu besieged Osaka castle and killed Hideyoshi's heirs, there was a complete crop failure in Tsugaru: and the following year was so bad that the rice seedlings were not even planted out in the domain's paddies. The harvest of Genna 1 was recorded as a *daikyōsaku*, indicating major crop failure with less than 25% of a normal yield harvested. It was caused by a typhoon with heavy rain in early summer, followed by *yamase* winds and then early frosts, which fell on the ears of grain during the 8th month before harvest time.

According to the *Eiroku nikki*, when news of this crop failure reached the second daimyo, Nobuhira, who was in attendance in Edo, he hastened home. Taking the old official route, his entourage crossed the seaside border with the Satake (Akita) domain at Ōmagoshi, on the 27th day of the 12th month.

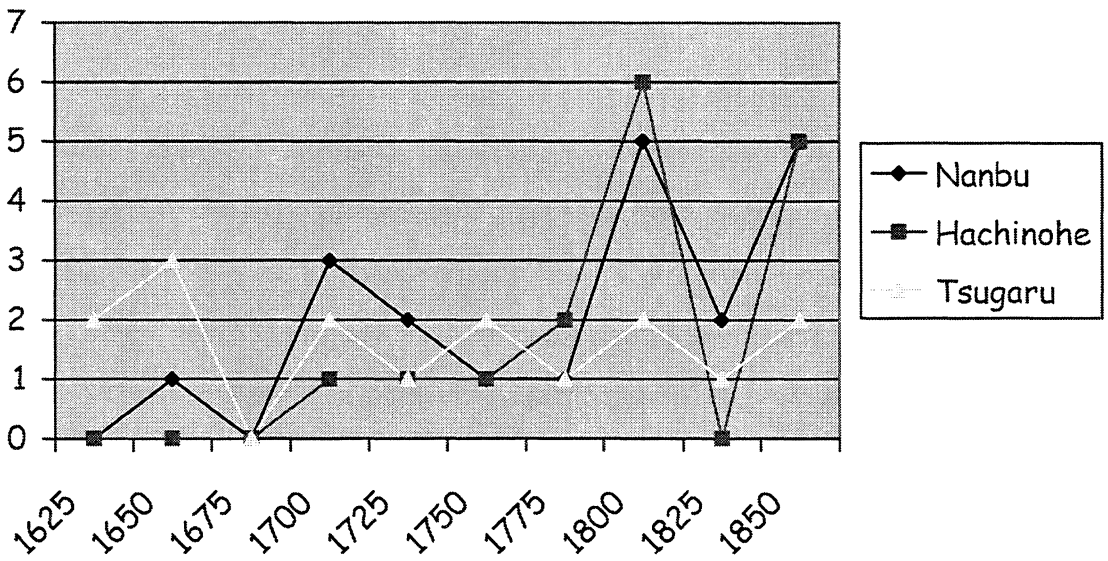

Figure 3: Number of years, in 25-year intervals, in which major harvest failures or famines were recorded for Nanbu, Hachinohe and Tsugaru, 1600-1850.

Sources: Arakawa *Kikin*, pages 42,71; Kikuchi, *Kinsei no kikin*, pages 1-5; Kasai, *Kegaji*, pages 4-7.

Note: The Hachinoe domain did not come into existence until 1664.

The men carrying the daimyo's palanquin had to pick their way through, and sometimes over, several hundred corpses scattered over the sand. They were the bodies of people who had been trying to flee the domain he ruled. It was also recorded in the *Eiroku nikki* that when the daimyo reached Hirosaki, the corpses of famine victims choked the castle moat, and that piles of bodies were being made on the outskirts of town when the daimyo reached his capital.

In the following year, Nobuhira was so disturbed at the number of empty houses appearing in Tsugaru's towns and villages that he made arrangements to import rice from Echigo for distribution to the hungry. When it arrived, he had the rice cooked and fed to needy people, who had not eaten adequately for a year or more. Many of them died immediately, and their corpses were added to the large piles of starvation victims on the outskirts of

Hirosaki. These heaps of bodies were called *gakiyama* (餓鬼山), evoking the hungry ghosts of one of the Buddhist hells. Nobuhira then applied to the bakufu and obtained a further 10,000 *koku* of rice on loan. The distribution of this relief grain, some of it in the form of convalescent-strength gruel, aided the eventual recovery of the domain.

The **Kan'ei** famine years of 1641 and 1642 brought severe hardship to both Tsugaru and the neighbouring domain of Nanbu, where less than half normal yields were harvested in 1640 as well. A substantial number of starvation deaths were again recorded in Tsugaru. Although the third daimyo, Nobuyoshi, obtained rice on emergency loan from the bakufu, he did not engage in a sustained relief effort to compare with that of Nobuhira during the Genna famine. In contrast, the Nanbu administration once more had enough grain and cash reserves to provide relief for most of the hungry, albeit on starvation rations, and almost no deaths were recorded.

The general pattern during these early decades was for poor harvests in Nanbu to be precipitated by extreme climatic conditions; whereas, in Tsugaru, what were actually milder versions of the same environmental factors were exacerbated by government mismanagement, and famines occurred. In the fledgling domain of Tsugaru, administrative inexperience and incompetence led to the neglect of official involvement in preparations for disaster relief, such as the supervised storage of food grains. To make matters worse, manpower was subtracted from the agricultural routine for irrigation works in new rice fields that were being established, and construction projects like the new castle. There was therefore a generally higher incidence of both famine and casualty rates in Tsugaru than in Nanbu until the Genroku years.

In the following table, because of the way data were selected to keep the table manageable, the tendency of bad harvests to cluster in periods of two to five years is not so obvious, but that is a feature in the northern Tohoku domain records. It is noticeable, too, that a pattern recurred in Nanbu, of two or three less-than-optimal harvests followed by a drastically reduced

one, which was sometimes followed by famine; then one single bumper harvest would follow, after which there were two or three very lean years.

Table 6: Harvest damage in Nanbu, Hachinohe and Tsugaru from Genroku to Tenmei, 1694–1785

Year	Nanbu	Hachinohe	Tsugaru	Year	Nanbu	Hachinohe	Tsugaru
1694	50+%loss		50+%loss	**1748**	50+%loss		25+%loss
95	Famine	Famine	Famine	**49**	50+%loss	25+%loss	Famine
96	25+%loss	50+%loss	Famine	**50**			Famine
1699	75+%loss	75+%loss		**1753**	50+%loss	50+%loss	
1701	50+%loss	50+%loss		**1755**	Famine+	Famine+	No deaths
02	Famine	Famine	75+%loss	**56**	50+%loss	50+%loss	
1705	50+%loss	50+%loss	50+%loss	**57**	25+%loss	50+%loss	
1707	25+%loss	50+%loss	50+%loss	**1767**	50+%loss		50+%loss
1711			25+%loss	**1772**	50+%loss	50+%loss	50+%loss
1716			25+%loss	**73**	50+%loss		50+%loss
1720		25+%loss	50+%loss	**74**		50+%loss	50+%loss
1723		25+%loss	25+%loss	**1776**	50+%loss	75+%loss	50+%loss
24	25+%loss	25+%loss		**1778**	25+%loss	50+%loss	
25		50+%loss	25+%loss	**79**	25+%loss	25+%loss	50+%loss
1728	25+%loss	50+%loss	25+%loss	**80**	25+%loss	50+%loss	50+%loss
29	25+%loss		25+%loss	**81**	25+%loss	25+%loss	
1733	25+%loss	25+%loss		**82**	25+%loss	25+%loss	50+%loss
1737		50+%loss	50+%loss	**83**	Famine+	Famine+	Famine+
1741	25+%loss	25+%loss	50+%loss	**84**	Famine	Famine+	Famine+
1744	25+%loss	25+%loss		**85**	Famine	Famine+	

Notes on Table

25+%loss represents the Japanese term *fusaku* (不作);
50+%loss represents the Japanese *kyōsaku* (凶作); and
75+%loss represents the Japanese *daikyōsaku* (大凶作).
Famine, or *kikin* (飢饉), means a complete harvest loss followed by starvation and a significant number of deaths.

Famine+, used for *daikikin* (大飢饉), indicates a complete harvest loss followed by many starvation deaths, usually lasting into the following year, often occurring through a number of regions, and possibly accompanied by epidemic disease.
The percentages are those devised by Morita for use with Nanbu figures. His basic table has been altered according to the other sources given. I have left out years when only one of the three domains recorded harvest losses, unless severe damage was noted for Tsugaru.
Sources for Table 6: Morita, *Nōmin*, pages 143-145; Kodate Yoshimi,"Tsugaru kikin shiryō no ichi kosatsu", pages 49-50; Kasai, *Kegaji*, pages 4-6.

After bad harvests had triggered a famine, even when good seasons followed the social and economic repercussions still often lasted for several years.

(ii) The Genroku famines

Because famine recurred intermittently during the Genroku period, the most severe suffering occurred at different times in the three Mutsu domains, but for all three the results were exhausting and debilitating. In **Nanbu**, the Genroku famine was the first to assume what was to become the classic regional form. In the early 1690s, abnormally cold and wet weather caused a succession of bad harvests, with yields hovering around one half normal expectations. In the Nanbu pattern outlined above, Genroku 3 and 5 (1690 and 1692) were particularly bad years, but a normal harvest was achieved in Genroku 6. The following year, however, a *daikyōsaku* of less than one quarter the normal yield was recorded, and signs of famine began to appear. The Nanbu government was able to distribute relief rice all the way through Genroku 7 (1694), but, when rain and cold temperatures reduced the 1695 harvest by 70%, famine conditions spread through the domain, affecting the northernmost districts most severely.

In Genroku 9 (1696), after much improved weather during the growing season, but with significantly diminished manpower in the fields, the harvest intake recovered to around 80% of optimal levels. Through the previous year, and in the winter and spring months of Genroku 9, though, a total of around 40,000 people are recorded to have died of starvation.

In **Hachinohe**, the climatic conditions were much the same as those in Nanbu. As early as Genroku 7 (1694) the domain placed an embargo on the

export of grain. Even though there were many hungry people in Hachinohe over the following three or four years, no deaths from starvation were registered and they could even offer some relief to victims who had fled from Tsugaru.[263] Towards the end of the 1690s, though, there was the same series of poor harvests as was recorded in Nanbu.

The Genroku famine struck **Tsugaru** in the year Genroku 8 (1695), and up to the 8th month of Genroku 9 as many as 100,000 deaths due to illness or starvation were said to have occurred. The incumbent ruler was the celebrated and apotheosised fourth daimyo, Nobumasa: he who had presided over the latest and most meteoric increase in Tsugaru's productivity, which, according to the Jōkyō period land survey, had surpassed 300,000 *koku* (see Chapter 2). Cold *yamase* winds were recorded for the spring and summer of Genroku 8, followed by frosts and early snow, resulting in a harvest of about 30% of normal yields. The people are recorded to have been still wearing their *watairi* winter garments, padded with raw cotton, as the middle of summer approached.

Despite the weather, during the 6th month of that year Tsugaru's government authorities shipped 100,000 *hyō* (bales) of rice out of the domain through the port at Ajigasawa. The threat of famine must already have been palpable at that stage. Equally arresting are the domain's records of corvée labour, requisitioned from farming villages at the rate of three hundred men each day to work on constructing stone ramparts for Hirosaki castle and enlarging the southern irrigation reservoir.[264] More evidence of the insouciance of Tsugaru's *bushi* elite can be seen in one anecdote from Edo. On the 1st day of the 8th month of 1695, after the Sendai, Nanbu and Akita daimyos had all reported significant harvest failures in their domains, the shogun, Tsunayoshi, enquired about conditions in Tsugaru. Nobumasa, oblivious of his people's plight, is said to have given his overlord great pleasure when he answered that the domain was anticipating at least a 70% harvest.

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[263] Morita, *Nōmin*, page 150.
[264] Ibid., page151.

When, in the middle of the 8th month, the gravity of the situation in Tsugaru became apparent, work on the castle walls was halted and notification sent to Nobumasu in the capital. The embarrassed daimyo had to wait for the Akita daimyo to communicate the sad news to the shogun before he could apply for the 10,000 *ryō* he knew was generally available towards relief. In 1696 and 1697 up to 15,000 *chōbu* of land in the domain was left completely unplanted; but, although the assessed tax obligations of those empty fields were waived, no reductions were made in the amounts collected from other areas. Payments stood as the presiding *daikan* had assessed them. Given this combination of natural disaster, financial opportunism, political carelessness and tax extraction, the appalling and much-quoted figure of 100,000 Tsugaru lives lost in the Genroku famines seems understandable, if exaggerated.

Extrapolating from the population of 149.569 persons registered in 1706, the drop in Tsugaru's population would have been something like 40%. This seems impossibly high, even considering the number of people who might have fled in search of food and work, and the depressed birth rate for several years after the famine. Still, the story is told that four separate burial places were designated, where day after day large holes were dug and four our five hundred bodies buried together at a time. Sometimes, when there were more corpses than collectors could cope with, the birds and dogs would tear them to pieces in the streets.[265]

Both Tsugaru and Nanbu enjoyed standard harvests in Genroku 10 and 11 (1697 and 98), but the following year brought continual rain and low temperatures that resulted in a major harvest failure in Nanbu, where 20,786 people were given relief aid. Harvests in the following three years were dismal. Relief aid was provided to 2,858 people in Genroku 14 (1701) and to 54,111 people in Genroku 15. Some 20,500 deaths during those two years were attributed to starvation. In Nanbu, then, famine conditions prevailed over at least eight of the Genroku years, with extreme harvest shortfalls resulting in

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[265] *Tsugaru shi jiten*, page 153.

the domain's reserves being drastically reduced by constant distributions of relief grain.

Less than optimal harvests followed for several years, but a good harvest in Genroku 13 (1700) brought some relief. In Genroku 14 and 15, persistent rain and floods again caused significant crop damage. Tsugaru's government seems to have recovered a great deal of optimism after a good harvest in Genroku 16; for when the rice price rose to a favourable level, four grain dealers in Ajigasawa and Aomori were given permission to export their very large stocks of rice. The next year's harvest was not a complete disaster, but it was recorded that there was insufficient food grain in the domain and that starvation deaths again occurred.

In Genroku 15 (1702), the weather in Hachinohe was very cold at the beginning of the 6th month. The rice plants did not ripen at all, and in the middle of the 8th month, typhoon winds and heavy rains caused floods. A loss of 17,800 *koku* was recorded, against the domain's formal assessment of 20,000 *koku*. A major famine resulted. A note recorded on the 20th day of the 1st month of Genroku 16 referred to villages in turmoil, and beggars and gangs of hoodlums being driven away. In a survey conducted in the 3rd month of the same year, 13,660 people were registered as suffering from hunger, and 16,745 had left for other domains. 1,230 head of cattle and horses had already died, and another 378 were in piteous condition. Three years previously, the total population of Hachinohe was recorded at 56,664 people, which would make the hungry portion in Genroku 16 around 30%.[266]

The effects of famine on these three domains reflect variations in their vulnerability to cold weather, and the degree of awareness and flexibility within their respective governments. In Nanbu, where crop failures were familiar, and experience in domain management comparatively long, some coping strategies had developed. But in Tsugaru, an area that is recorded to have had plenty of rice since the thirteenth century, and had recently experienced its most abundant harvests ever, there appears to have been little apprehension

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[266] Morita, *Nōmin*, pages 150-151.

of the danger of famine and no procedural provision for relief. The following text, which notes these contrasts between the two domains, was written after the Genroku famine.

> . . . even the farm labourers in the countryside and the lowest-ranking *bushi* attendants all ate rice both morning and evening. Not for them any *awa* (millet), *hie* (deccan grass), or barley. There was also very little common knowledge about local sources of wild foods. Even though the roots of certain grasses and the leaves of some trees were quite edible, it was a rare individual, even among farmers, who knew about them. Last year when there was a crop failure, there they all were, in the countryside, in the towns, and in the temples, looking about for their food. From around the end of the eighth month, a lot of people dug fern shoots (*warabi*) and ate them morning and evening just to stay alive. They are normally a luxury. Some other items that people found to eat were: white radishes, soy bean leaves, wisteria leaves, *konbu, wakame*, straw, goosefoot grass, taro and the young shoots of arrowroot vines. . . It was the first time that people in Tsugaru, from the wealthiest elite all the way down to the poorest country folk, had ever been obliged to eat this kind of food.
>
> But, there is a place in Nanbu, called Tanabe, that doesn't have many rice fields, where they have always lived on other grains and made dishes and gruels from wild foods. Even during this last famine there wasn't a single person in that place who died of hunger. In this domain too, some people were able to survive this latest disaster; and from now on if we could prepare everybody better, no matter how badly the harvest failed, we could avoid the awful distress of deaths by starvation.[267]

In breaking away from the Nanbu administration, the Tsugaru leadership left behind the kind of corporate administrative memory and traditional practices that went some way towards helping Nanbu cope comparatively well through most of the seventeenth century. Hachinohe, with its significantly smaller land area in an extremely exposed location suffered consistently worse weather conditions, and was not able to build up sufficient reserves before experiencing an extraordinary number of inclement growing seasons through the Genroku period.

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[267] *Nihon shomin seikatsu shiryō shūsei*, Vol. 7. Tokyo: Sanjū-ichi shobō, Pages 302-3.

(iii) The Hōreki famine

The Hōreki (宝暦) reign period (1751-1764) did not deliver the wealth and prosperity implied in its name to the province of Mutsu. Nor was it a good time in other parts of northeastern Honshu. The famine of 1755, often referred to as *Hōgo no kikin* (宝五の飢饉), was a disaster of the order of the Tenmei and Tenpō famines for the entire Tohoku region. It affected domains in Dewa province on the Japan Sea coast, throughout Mutsu, and south into the Kanto region.

In the Tsugaru domain, floods had already caused a huge crop loss of 131,873 *koku* and a number of starvation deaths in Kan'en 2 (1749). Nanbu, Hachinohe and Tsugaru all noted harvest shortfalls in Hōreki 3, and famine conditions were recorded in Hachinohe. One or more of the three Mutsu domains noted harvest damage in the years Hōreki 3, 5, 6 and 7. *See Table 6, page 199.*

In the autumn of Hōreki 4, on the other hand, all three Mutsu domains recorded abundant harvests. Because it was generally a bountiful year in the northeast, rice prices in the region fell markedly, making it more profitable for grain to be shipped to the Edo market than sold locally. Merchants operating along the *Sanriku* Pacific coast were able to profit from the price difference and bought up large quantities of rice, particularly in Nanbu[268]. Even under those conditions, it would have been prudent for indebted administrations not to ship their grain away immediately, but to store as much as possible until the market price rose, as it regularly did, in the following spring.

The Hōreki 5 agricultural year began with a reasonably promising early spring. But chilly winds began to blow across the northeastern area from the middle of the 5th month; then it rained constantly from the 6th month until the end of the 8th month, with only six or seven clear days recorded in Nanbu and Hachinohe. Heavy downfalls caused landslides and floods that broke through dams in Hachinohe, leaving much of the rice crop under water. *Yamase* winds blew over Tsugaru from the beginning of the 6th month, and the 8th month was

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[268] Kikuchi, *Kinsei no kikin*, pages 135-36.

extremely cold, with frosts falling on the 16th and 17th nights. The freezing temperatures instantly withered crops in the few fields where ears of rice were on their way to ripening. It was so cold in most fields that the seedlings didn't grow at all, but stayed as short as they were at planting out time. Occasionally a small ear formed, but none ripened. On the *sanpuku* , or *doyō* days, which were usually the very hottest in midsummer, it was as cold as the beginning of winter and people were wearing several padded jackets at once. The feet and hands of those who went to tend the rice fields were chilled to the bone.[269]

Hachinohe, with a formal assessment of 20,000 *koku*, reported a total crop loss of 18,573 *koku*.[270] The Nanbu and Tsugaru harvests duly came in at around 20% of normal expectations. In the *shinden* (newly-developed) areas of Tsugaru, the damage was most severe, with a shortfall of 161,130 *koku* in fields assessed as yielding 196,353 *koku* 5 *to* 2*sho*. In the older areas, 34,280 *koku* was lost of an assessed 47,000 *koku*. When these desolate fields were covered with early snow during the 10th month, a few unripe ears poked up through the flat whiteness. Hungry vagrants took to hanging about burial ceremonies conducted on the edges of the fields, so as to scavenge the small *makura meshi* (pillow food) dumplings that mourners left as offerings on the fresh graves of the dead. The people could do nothing but wail and lament that famine had come to Ōshū.[271]

In Nanbu, where the *omotedaka* (formal assessment) was 100,000 *koku,* and 148,000 *koku* was the normally expected harvest from newly developed *shinden* areas, 75,7170 *koku* of the *omotedaka* was lost, as well as 122,530 *koku* in the *shinden*. Of the total loss, the quantity of rice that was not damaged by flooding or strong winds, but simply failed to ripen, was 186,628 *koku*. Many of the flooded fields were permanently ruined, their earth works and irrigation equipment completely swept away. The cost of losses and

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[269] Namikawa Kenji, "Tsugaru hansei no tenkai to kikin", *Rekishi*, No. 52, 1970, pages 23-41, page 24.
[270] From *Hachinohe han nikki*, cited in Kikuchi, *Kinsei*, page 126.
[271] Kasai, *Kegaji*, page 74.

damage quoted in Nanbu's report to the bakufu was higher than the amount that was to be registered at the time of the Tenmei famine, twenty-six years later.[272]

In western Tohoku, too, the Satake domain in Dewa experienced a record-breaking, cold, wet and windy growing season; then further damage was done by insect pests. After flooding rains swept away embankments and dykes through a large portion of the domain's rice farming area on the 24th day of the 5th month of Hōreki 5, an insect plague destroyed what remained of the crop. The infestation lasted through the following year as well. To the south of Akita, in the Yonezawa domain, cold temperatures prevented the maturation of 75,820 *koku* of grain, while heavy rain washed away or flooded another 37,780 *koku*.[273] The large Date domain, on the Pacific coast south of Nanbu, reported a total loss of 540,000 *koku* from an assessment of 620,000 *koku*. In Aizu, inland and to the south, around half the harvest was lost to cold temperatures and flooding, making the Hōreki 5 experience in that domain significantly more severe than that of Genroku 8.

At that point the narrative paths diverge. While other domains in the northeast experienced starvation deaths and desertions numbered in the tens of thousands, not a single famine death was recorded in Tsugaru, and most of the farming population stayed on their lands. Under the leadership of Nyūi Mitsugi, the administration was reorganised to function efficiently as the central mechanism for supporting and sustaining the domain and its population. Relief rice was immediately distributed to the destitute; while a series of levelling economies and frugalities were enforced throughout the domain.

On the 15th day of the 9th month, all demands for taxes were waived, and small cultivators were permitted to keep what they had harvested for their own household use. A loan amnesty was proclaimed, and a strict ban on all profiteering put in place. Powerful village headmen, other local officials and all wealthy households who were in a position to take advantage of this

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[272] Kikuchi, *Kinsei*, pages 133-34.
[273] *Yonezawa shi shi: kinsei hen 2*, in Kikuchi *Kinsei no kikin*, page 128.

redistribution of resources were forbidden to make private profits. Officials policed restrictions and bans, while all the people of Tsugaru, regardless of their age or rank, were urged to petition the domain administration if they suspected that anything at all was amiss. Storehouses were systematically searched and all surplus grain confiscated and added to the relief store. No-one was permitted to keep rice aside for any purpose whatsoever, even for religious rituals.

In the *Satōke ki* diary, an entry for the 11th month of Hōreki 5 reads:

> Dealing in grain was forbidden. If hidden stocks or illegal trading were discovered, the offenders were driven from the village or banished from the domain. We were absolutely forbidden to make *mochi*, even at new year's.[274]

Everyone in the domain was treated equally. No-one was permitted to be extravagant, and no-one died. Every month throughout the bitter spring and early summer of Hōreki 6, relief rice was delivered to each village.

In Nanbu, where famine relief was very effectively managed during most of the seventeenth century, in contrast to the devastation caused by harvest failures in Tsugaru, the Hōreki famine was particularly hard. The domain's earlier financial and economic stability had already been badly shaken by the succession of Genroku famines; and the mines that had hitherto steadily brought in supplementary income were almost exhausted. In Hōreki 3, the bakufu struck the final blow to any hope of economic recovery in Nanbu by officially requesting support for repairs to the Tokugawa mausoleum at Nikko. This compulsory contribution cost the domain considerable manpower and 50,000 *ryō* in gold, most of which was borrowed. After the Hōreki 4 bumper harvest, therefore, the Nanbu administration arranged to ship more than 100,000 *koku* of grain to the Edo market to help offset its official debt and cover normal expenses in the capital.[275]

To address the domain's financial plight, a frugality order was promulgated; expenditures were carefully monitored and forced loans imposed

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[274] TKD, page 229.
[275] Morita, *Nōmin*, page 156.

on the allowances of retainers. Administrative reforms were undertaken, and efforts made to maximize annual agricultural tax income. Despite these measures, the debt burden was overwhelming. The domain finally resorted to the sale of investitures at a rate of fifty *ryō* per hundred *koku* of fief. In the middle of the 6th month of Hōreki 5, there was not enough rice left in the domain's granaries to cover even reduced stipend allowances.[276]

After the dimensions of the harvest shortfall became clear, and grain supplies had almost run out, official efforts were made to stabilize grain prices at affordable levels. Enforcement was impossible, and a black market developed because the set prices were so low. With imports from other domains blocked off, food deprivation became acute. Major temples set up emergency refuges, eventually supported by the domain through the new office of food relief commissioner. There were only scant supplies of grain to distribute, made up as weak gruel, and large numbers of people died in overcrowded refuges.[277]

Many farmers escaped death by giving up their cultivating rights, their status and their homes to landlords and creditors. They became *nago* (名子), owing labour to their landlords; or *yadai* (屋代), who had the same status as *nago* but worked for merchant households. The bones of many rural people littered the roads leading south; and *hitokai* (人買) dealers prowled the countryside looking for women and children to kidnap and sell.[278] Famine conditions lasted into Hōreki 7, and were not broken until that year's crop was harvested. It is estimated that around fifty thousand people died.

In the Date (Sendai) domain, too, which usually dispatched around 250,000 *koku* of rice to the Edo exchange each year, bakufu requirements of assistance with construction projects at the Ueno shrine in 1749 had brought about the exhaustion of relief stores. A shipment of some 300,000 *koku*, including even seed rice that had been collected from village to village in order

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[276] Kikuchi, *Kinsei*, pages 135-6.
[277] Kikuchi, *Kikin*, pages 138-9.
[278] loc.cit.

to meet the demands of creditors in Edo, sank near the port of Chōshi. From that time onwards, there were no official grain reserves to call on, and the domain became increasingly indebted to Osaka merchant houses for annual cash advances on its rice harvests. Date's established commercial households and wealthy farming families, like those in Nanbu, were invited to make cash payments in return for *bushi* status.[279]

A medical specialist from Miyagi prefecture who studied *shūmon aratemechō* (compulsory household religious registers) from eighty-seven locations in the Date (Sendai) and Nanbu domains, found deaths registered for individuals of all ages, and sometimes of whole families at a time, with regional mortality reaching a peak in Hōreki 6. Using proportionally generalized figures from his survey, Aogi calculated that the death toll in Nanbu from the Hōreki famine would have been 68,900. He adjusted that figure downwards to 49,100, though, to allow for two factors: In the abundant year of Hōreki 4 few people would have gone seriously short of food; and, the rates of famine mortality in his data for Hōreki 5 and 6 increased in proportion with the distance north it was gathered. Another casualty total, gained from figures reported from various Nanbu *daikansho*, is 49,594 deaths, along with 7,043 houses left empty.

It is interesting to note that the people of Tanabe in the mountains of northern Nanbu, who had survived on alternative foods during the Genroku famine (*See page 204*), suffered very few casualties during this much more severe subsistence crisis.[280] Other sources suggest that the Nanbu population dropped by only 2,217 between Hōreki 5 and Hōreki 6, but, as happened at the time of the Kyōhō famine, it is likely that official casualty figures were kept low for bakufu consumption..[281] As well, there are the unknowns always associated with determining death tolls that were discussed in Section I (i).

Aogi noted, by the way, that in most of the death registers he examined, the name and alternative names, date of death, place of residence, occupation,

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[279] Ibid., pages 136-37.
[280] Kikuchi, *Kinsei*, page 134. Kikuchi gives the reading *tanabu* for 田名部, and Ōdate gives *tanabe*.
[281] *Morioka-shi shi*, cited in Kikuchi, page 133.

and family connections of the deceased were entered. Details on close relatives and given names sometimes enable the sex of an individual to be determined. Only occasionally was the proximate cause of death entered. Many registers, or parts of registers, belonging to the temples he consulted had been damaged or were missing, due to fires, floods, insect infestation and other disasters. His findings on the Date domain were that the death toll was between twenty and thirty thousand, with the areas north of Sendai being most severely affected.[282]

In the Hachinohe domain, which had already experienced famine conditions in Hōreki 3, and was to be visited by disaster again in Hōreki 12, the outcome of the devastating harvest failure of Hōreki 5 lasted until the summer of the following year.[283] A local doctor recorded in a diary called *Jimoku kyōsairoku* (耳目凶歳録) that the Hōreki 5 famine was:

> . . . a far more dreadful calamity than anything in stories passed down through the ages, or written in the ancient records. The assessed fields yielded nothing but chaff and straw.
>
> There were fern shoots and the roots of arrowroot vines to eat. . . and we would all race to get to the familiar places in the woods and hills and dig out food to bring back. We made *kayu* (gruel) out of horse chestnuts for elderly people, and *mochi* (glutinous rice cakes) from acorns for the children. Those were the elegant dishes.
>
> We also boiled seaweed and pine bark, flavoured with straw, and sometimes added a taste of straw or chaff. Lacquer berries were used as a substitute for soybeans. They would stave off hunger for a while, but they poisoned some of the weaker old people and children. They suffered terrible cramps and quite a number of them died. I felt so sorry for them that I made up a medicinal broth from dried leaves, and that saved quite a few lives.
>
> It was pitiful to watch people making meals out of the chaff they would normally have fed to animals. Day by day, all the chickens, dogs, cows, and horses became thinner and thinner, and during the night they died.
>
> People just managed to cling to life from one moment to the next, by whatever means they could. There was no way really to eke out even a bare living. We had no clothes on our backs;

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[282] Ibid page 134. *Miyagi ken shi* 22.
[283] Kasai, *Kegaji*, page 66.

> there was nothing but suffering all around, and only death to look forward to. We could not even offer help to our closest relatives, or show any consideration whatsoever to old friends.
>
> The moneylenders and pawn shops had all emptied their shelves and shut up shop. It was the kind of time when the small number of businesses that could stay open would sell off expensive things at ridiculously low prices. That's just how it was.
>
> If people or horses in this most isolated and far-off village died of hunger, their homes and stalls would simply turn into their graves. Crows would relish their eyeballs, and dogs would gnaw on their arms and legs. When people with bad eyesight shuffled about in the street, skulls would roll about in all directions.
>
> The smell was an affront to our noses. Every five steps we took, we saw or heard something unspeakable that would literally make our hair stand on end. Right before our eyes real scenes appeared directly from tales of the most evil tortures in the depths of hell. It is said that around one third of our people starved to death during this time. Even though some of us managed to stay alive, we knew that unless we could find real, lasting help, all of us - the living hungry ghosts, the dying tormentors in hell, children and grandchildren, and babes in arms - would soon be reduced to nothing but tattered remains of life's flotsam and jetsam.[284]

In this most marginal northeastern domain, the Hōreki weather had not yet taken its toll. In the first week of the 7th month of Hōreki 9, after two days of very heavy rain, the domain suffered major floods, which washed away seven hundred bridges and 207 dwellings. Scores of people were killed and the damage caused amounted to 45,081 *koku*. Then, before the domain could recover, further severe flooding occurred after heavy summer rain in the following year as well.

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[284] Morita, pages 156-57.

(iv) The later eighteenth century

When warning signs of what would become the **Tenmei** famine appeared in Tsugaru in 1783, the export of rice was prohibited, and all grain in storage was collected by the domain. Severe restrictions were placed on the use of rice for manufacturing sake, *miso* and soy sauce. Authorities also requisitioned cash from wealthy farmers and merchants, some of whom were granted *bushi* status in return for their "donations". Official domain refuge shelters were set up, where the lives of some of the starving were actually saved. The government redeemed pawned farm implements on behalf of their owners, and continuously exhorted farmers not to leave their land. Loans were taken out with the bakufu to fund the return of retainers to their lands. Unfortunately, these commendable emergency measures were not matched by foresight: the domain treasury had sent its entire agricultural tax intake of some 400,000 *hyō* to Osaka and Edo the previous year. It was therefore not long before people began to die of starvation and cold. In Hirosaki, it was recorded that seven great holes were dug to bury the dead.[285]

One outcome of the extreme food shortages and suffering of the people during the Tenmei famine was that the resentment and despair among them reached new levels. Public opinion by this time had turned against rich merchants and bureaucratic functionaries, and anger was expressed in the widespread violation of laws, conventions and taboos. Wealthy households were targeted by more and more violent break-ins, often under the cover of deliberately lit fires. Travellers were set upon by highway robbers. Anything edible found anywhere at all was fair game, including all kinds of plants, trees, roots, leaves, nuts, seeds and bark, as well as cats, dogs, horses and cows. Newly covered graves were reopened for the fresh flesh they contained. Young children and weak old people were murdered so that their flesh could be eaten or sold.[286] Organised groups planned strategic attacks on the households of rich merchants and farmers and made away with goods and food stocks. Government officials and agencies were confronted with strong, angry demands

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[285] *Hirayama nikki*, in *Amori-ken shi* II, pages 427-430.
[286] Kasai, *Kegaji*, pages 131-32.

and petitions. Before the famine was over, a succession of rural uprisings and mass break-ins had occurred in the centers of Hirosaki, Aomori, Hirosu, Kizukuri, Ajigasawa and Fukaura.[287]

During the Tenmei famine Tsugaru lost 81,702 people, which was around one third of its population. Some 64,000 deaths are said to have occurred in Nanbu and 30,105 in Hachiohe. If the Hōreki famine was precipitated by natural causes and managed, for better and worse, by the interventions of the state in both Tsugaru and Nanbu, measures taken against the Tenmei disaster were both late and inadequate. By this time, the predations of commercial markets, too, were an important factor contributing to high prices and food scarcity, for mechanisms had become sensitive enough for grain to flow where the profits were greatest. It was after this famine that the rice riots and other forms of protest noted in Tsugaru became more widespread in the northeastern domains.

III The makings of famine in Tsugaru

In the chapter of his monograph on famines devoted to discussing the nature of peasant societies, Robert Seavoy poses the question:

> During long periods of peace, why do peasant populations increase their numbers to the maximum carrying capacity of the land during normal crop years and periodically endure seasonal hunger or famine during consecutive poor crop years?[288]

While the farming population of Japan clearly endured hunger and famine at periodic intervals, Seavoy's dilemma seems a peculiar one indeed for a student of Northeast Asian social history to ponder. The implications of this question are: firstly that the farming population of say, Tsugaru, for example, had lots of children during good times; and secondly that their dying in periodic famines was due to their failure to produce and store enough excess grain to cover their needs in poor crop years.

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[287] Kasai, *Kegaji*, page 159.
[288] Robert Seavoy, *Famine in Peasant Societies*, pages 9-10.

It would have to be pointed out in answer, firstly, that the population sometimes scarcely managed to replace itself, much less increase to anything near "the maximum carrying capacity of the land". Secondly, it might be retorted that production did increase, but that landlords, money-lenders and the state habitually expropriated more than was truly surplus to the needs of rural families. Seavoy's premise that there were many periods in farming life that could be characterized as long and peaceful is also dubious. As the title of Alan Macfarlane's monograph, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, so vividly suggests, periods of dearth and famine regularly inflicted all the horror, destruction and suffering of war upon rural households and villages.[289]

Famine and starvation in the domains of Tohoku were certainly not caused by population problems in the Malthusian sense, but an argument could be made that chronic underpopulation, combined with the bakufu's bias towards rice as the economic base of the polity, constrained the economic development of the region.

(i) Why people starve

As the figure below suggests, people in Mutsu suffered starvation and famine for complex sets of reasons, natural, sociopolitical and economic. The weather, of course, played a large part in ruining crops. As well, however, despite the sanguine image portrayed by the dominant ideologies, economic, social and political forces combined in the Tokugawa polity to distribute what budget surpluses there were amongst elite *bushi* bureaucrats, influential religious institutions and prominent commercial households. Meanwhile most of the farming population became increasingly impoverished through tax extraction. The chain of famine causation in Tsugaru clearly began with the natural environment and a hierarchy of rights to the appropriation of food or the means to acquire it. The distribution of entitlements to land, labour and means of exchange left many households with no bargaining or buying power, and nowhere to forage for food. When climatic events triggered crop failures, and food was scarce, the burden of tax obligations pushed households over the

[289] Alan Macfarlane, *The Savage Wars of Peace*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.

poverty line to the point where members suffered serious food deprivation, starvation or death.

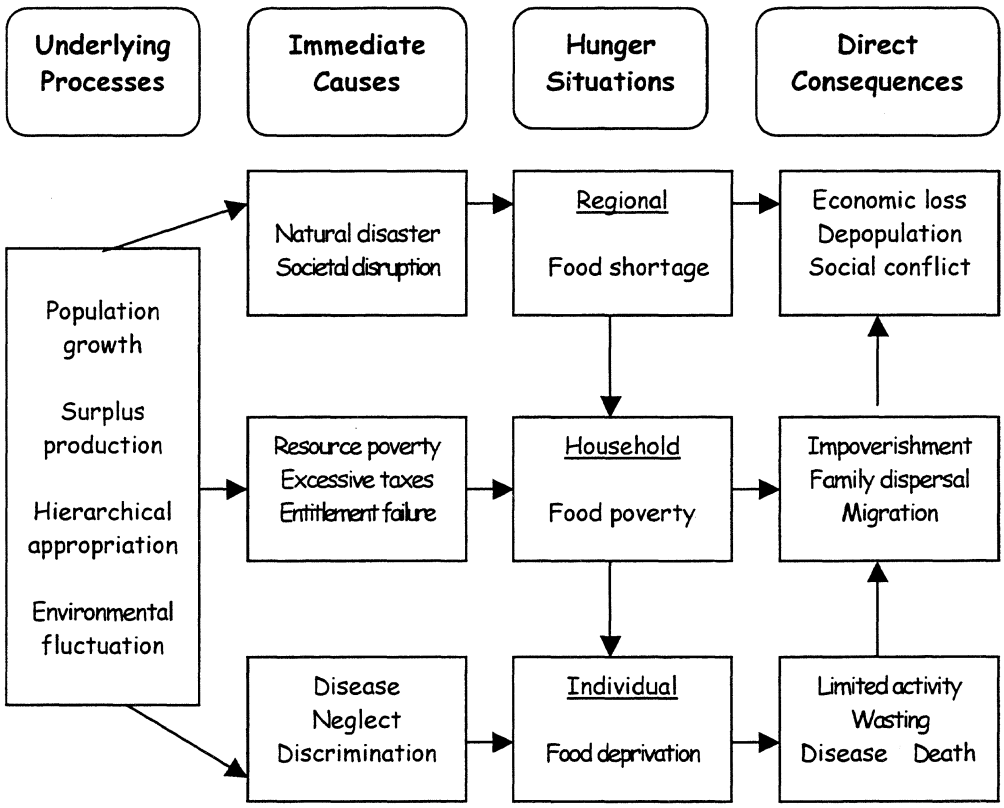

Figure 4: A causal structure of death by starvation

Source: Adapted from Millman and Kates, "Toward Understanding Hunger", in Newman (ed.) *Hunger in History*, page14

(ii) Natural calamity

We have seen that over the two and a half centuries of Tokugawa rule, the people of Japan experienced famines that were triggered by a wide range of causes. Insect pests and foraging animals, afflicted domains from Fukuoka in the south to Akita and Hachinohe in the north, and although cold, wet weather was the scourge of the northeast, drought was sometimes a problem in other regions. Volcanic eruptions caused serious disruptions to seasonal plantings, and typhoons in summer often ruined crops that were on the point of being ready for harvest.

In Nanbu, Hachinohe and Tsugaru, the especially bad times were when low temperatures, constant rain, and the *yamase* winds combined. Even now,

although rice seedlings are usually planted out a little later in Tsugaru than Nanbu, and sturdy, cold-resistant varieties have been developed, the harvest is still usually earlier in Tsugaru. Growing conditions on the Nanbu side of the Ōu Mountains remain less favourable for the same, old, reasons. In a book written early last century by Morita's father, the typical Nanbu pattern for bad years is described as follows:

> Spring temperatures would stay low and snow would stay on the ground until late, so that the planting out of rice seedlings was delayed. Then in around the 6th month the rainy season would begin, and rain continued to fall while the temperatures stayed cool and the *yamase* winds blew from the northeast. When summer came, people would still be wearing their padded clothing, the sun would shine only weakly and the young plants would make no progress at all. The ears of grain would begin to form very late, and then the cold winds and rain of autumn would arrive. A heavy frost around the middle of the 8th month would turn the plants white, and they would wither where they stood.[290]

Because of the weather, the odds in Nanbu had always been against abundant rice harvests; so the people had become accustomed to raising millet, soy beans and other upland crops as emergency food supplements. The Nanbu fields were even measured using larger units than elsewhere because their productivity was so low. If conditions were good, of course, it was far more profitable to grow rice than anything else in Mutsu, so domain authorities in all three domains insisted on generation after generation of farmers giving priority to raising and planting out rice seedlings, even in years when the weather was unpromising.

(iii) The makings of disaster in relations of power

In geographic and political terms, as we have seen, Tsugaru was a peripheral domain in the Tokugawa structure. The population had grown over centuries, from the interaction of northern peoples with those from the south who gradually moved into the region and expropriated the land and resources. The social organization and political institutions of southern and central Japan,

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[290] Morita, page 146.

including the preference for settled rice cultivation, were formally imposed over the whole of the Tsugaru region by 1611. This was the year when Tsugaru Nobuhira, the founding daimyo's son, moved into the new castle he had built in Hirosaki. The political compact his father had entered into with the Tokugawa shogun, in order to retain possession of the domain, obliged Nobuhira to obey directives from Edo to a degree not necessarily imposed all other daimyos.[291]

In opening up vast areas of new land for rice cultivation, the second, third and fourth Tsugaru daimyo not only exceeded the achievements of all their peers, they committed generations of farming subjects to an enterprise for which the climatic conditions were to be unfit. Furthermore, the political economy of the Japanese state had been founded on the expropriation of surplus production by the governing elite. With extensive groundwork done by both Nobunaga and Hideyoshi, the structures and mechanisms of that process were already highly developed by the time Ieyasu was establishing his bakufu in Edo; and the division of the population into separate occupational groups was an ideal fast becoming the reality in many domains.

During the decades of expansion in Tsugaru, people of both farming and *bushi* backgrounds were given incentives to settle in the newly developed areas. The result was a population spread rather thinly over large districts where water flows were only just under control, and the climate only marginally suitable. The region was in fact endowed physically with enough flat land and water resources for quite adequate rice production, even in the Tokugawa period: but it was the unreliable weather - excessive rains and low temperatures - during the growing season that regularly brought on calamity.

While the new domain's institutions and economic base were being developed, Tsugaru's resources in manpower, wealth and materials were

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[291] Ravina, in *Land and Lordship* emphasises this punctiliousness in Tsugaru relations with the bakufu, but it seems quite natural, since the other major northern domains had been acculturated to central authority to a much greater degree than the Tsugaru lineage, and therefore did not need to alter, or devise, ways of doing things in order to conform to the Edo models. The fact that there was so much land available for developing new rice fields is an indication of the degree to which Tsugaru had not been penetrated by southwestern patterns of social and political organisation.

seriously depleted. There was the construction of an entire new castle, completed in 1611, the surrounding residential and commercial areas, and then refurbishing of the monumental Chōshōji temple, to commemorate the domain's founder, Tamenobu. As well as meeting the financial costs of these projects, the huge amounts of labour was obtained by the imposition of corvée levies on rural villages.[292] This drain of manpower from the countryside meant that important seasonal tasks were neglected or skimped. The collection and preparation of organic fertilizers, for example, and working them into the soil before planting out; or the preparation of seeds, starting them off at planned intervals, raising the seedlings, and the successive plantings of different rice varieties to ensure optimal harvests, were tasks that required effort and co-ordination over a long period beginning towards the end of winter and lasting until early summer. During 1615 on the Chōshōji site alone, one thousand labourers from farming areas were drafted every day, starting after New Year's; exactly coinciding with the most demanding time of the agricultural year.[293]

As well as routinely failing to be guided by the agricultural calendar, the Tsugaru administration did not seem to accrue much wisdom concerning reserves of food grains. This was a subject that seemed to exercise Nyūi Mitsugi's mind a great deal. The domain's record of selling off surplus rice good years, and even in the spring of bad years, so that there was none left in storage against famine is evidence of astonishing short-sightedness – as well as debts and overspending in Edo and the Kamigata. The lack of attention given to provision for famine relief was partly an outcome of the prosperity of earlier years, but Tsugaru's trajectory through the Genroku famine years, for example, is a telling example of the contribution human institutions can make to suffering and disaster.

Structural and circumstantial causes also included inappropriate rural administrative practices and heavy tax exactions. Tax rates in Tsugaru were

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[292] TRK, pages 66, 67, 68.
[293] Loc. cit.

higher than allowed for the usual equal shares for ruler and people. They were actually over 60% at times. The rate was a proportion of the assessed taxable yield, called the 分米, but in Tsugaru this was rarely accurate, and the yields were much higher. The rate went down according to the quality of the fields. Comparing Tsugaru's taxation method with Nanbu's, it was not as fair or rational, as it was lighter on fields that yielded more. In Tsugaru, even *geden* low-grade fields were taxed at around 60%. Probably in both domains, the exactions were at lower rates of the actual harvests than figures suggest; but it was still true that the less land a farmer cultivated, the greater his burden, and the less grain his family were able to reserve for food. When farm households were living on the margins, one harvest shortfall would often beget another because of the loss of manpower caused by the first. Discussion of the ways in which the Tsugaru government contributed to famine disasters is continued in the following section.

IV Managing the hazards

(i) Measures taken by farmers

The first obvious preventative measure against starvation that could be taken at household level was to avoid dependence on rice as the dominant source of nutrition. Not surprisingly, it was the farmers in Nanbu who came up with the longest lists of alternative foods to rice, and many different varieties of food grains that could be used for re-plantings after early- and mid-spring crops had failed. It is recorded that during the Tenmei famine relief foodstuffs originating in Nanbu were delivered as far afield as Echigo.

As well as the large range of rice varieties, farmers in Nanbu had developed 51 kinds of early ripening millet, 97 midterm varieties and 119 late ripening varieties. For glutinous millets and *hie* (deccan grass), too, they could distinguish respectively 5 and 28 early varieties, 9 and 29 midterm ones, and 96 and 28 late ripening kinds! For years when the snow melted late or the spring and summer were cold, grains belonging to the late groups would have been vitally important. In addition to those very hardy grain types, they also

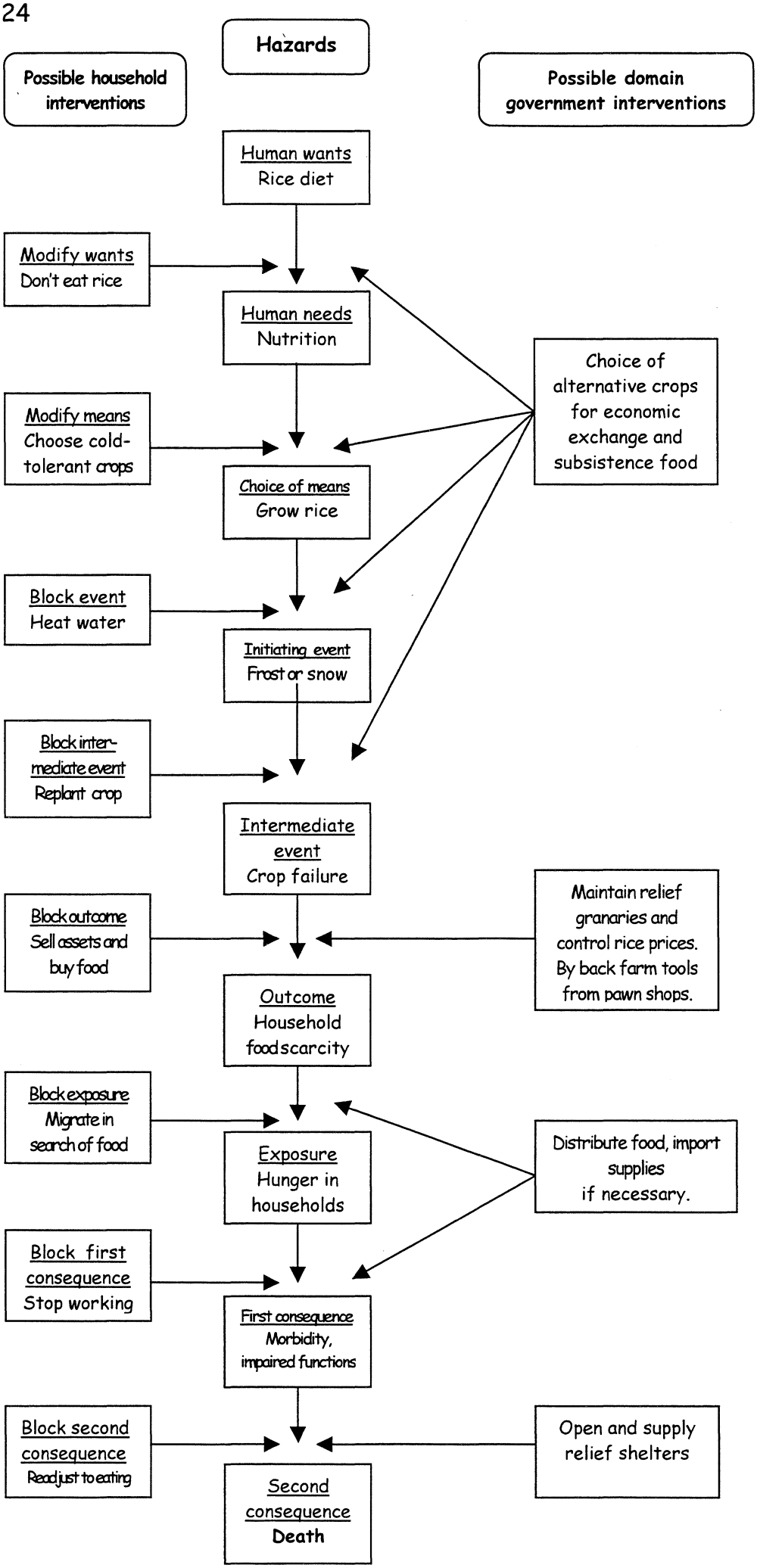
Hazards
Possible household interventions
Possible domain government interventions
Human wants
Rice diet
Modify wants
Don't eat rice
Human needs
Nutrition
Choice of alternative crops for economic exchange and subsistence food
Modify means
Choose cold-tolerant crops
Choice of means
Grow rice
Block event
Heat water
Initiating event
Frost or snow
Block inter-mediate event
Replant crop
Intermediate event
Crop failure
Block outcome
Sell assets and buy food
Maintain relief granaries and control rice prices. By back farm tools from pawn shops.
Outcome
Household food scarcity
Block exposure
Migrate in search of food
Exposure
Hunger in households
Distribute food, import supplies if necessary.
Block first consequence
Stop working
First consequence
Morbidity, impaired functions
Block second consequence
Readjust to eating
Open and supply relief shelters
Second consequence
Death

Figure 5 (opposite): Hazard sequence for a rice-producing household in Tsugaru
Source: Adapted from Millman and Kates, in Newman (ed.), *Hunger in History*, page 6.

raised different varieties of *kibi* (another millet), wheat, barley, soy beans and *azuki* beans.[294]

One resourceful feature of this considerable ongoing effort was developed around the custom of one or more villages banding together to contribute to a savings scheme so that a pilgrim could be sent on a trip to the shrines at Ise. Apart from the serious task of petitioning the *kami* when he got there, this pilgrim delegate would be charged with closely observing farming practices along the way while on his trip, and, where possible, seeking out the seeds of promising plants to bring home for experimental planting. As well as wearing the amulets he brought them, and hearing his accounts of the journey and the prayers he had offered on their behalf, the villagers would plant and carefully monitor the seeds he had bought or otherwise gathered.

Names for early-ripening rice like *Sendai kowase*, and *Tsugaru wase*, or *Miyako mochi* for a glutinous variety give clues to the origins of some of the seeds Morita lists from an older record.[295] The farmers would use manures, cut grass, and other fertilisers with great care during these experiments, in hope of discovering or breeding developing hardy crop varieties. Mutsu farmers also tried to heat irrigation water for planting out time by digging extra channels around the borders of their paddies. Chilly water that had filled storage ponds during the spring melt would be exposed to warmer spring air temperatures before being flooded over the rice seedlings.

Even with the kind of ingenuity and perseverance evidenced by these measures, much of Nanbu's population and the rest of Mutsu's inhabitants seem to have lived on the edge of starvation. Many times over, after a few good years, official managers and merchants in all three domains gambled on a bumper rice harvest and invited the market to gobble up the contents of their granaries, only to have the region overtaken by crop failures. Larger, more

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[294] Morita, *Nōmin*, pages 140-143.

[295] Loc.cit.

wealthy households were able to store some grain for emergency use, or even grow cash crops or engage in money-lending.

The smaller-scale owner-cultivator had access to his crops, but it was incumbent upon him to give priority to rice production and most of his output was expropriated in taxes. He was hard put to stretch what was left to maintain his family, save seed and pay for fertilizer. Family sizes in the region were not large, so options for starving households were reduced to selling off property, migrating, or waiting at home, conserving their energy and hoping for food relief. The property sold or pawned often included farm implements, or even the land itself, leaving households even less able to produce viable outputs and thus even more vulnerable to famine.

(ii) Interventions by governments

The Tsugaru administration compared very badly with that of Nanbu in its capacity to conceive of strategies for countering the damage done by famines. Apart from periodic suggestions that farmers plant cash crops, there seems to have been little practical effort to break down the predominance of rice production as the focus of agriculture, even though crop failures repeatedly devastated food supplies, and it was a struggle to recover both population and production levels after they occurred. Despite the remarkable increases in domain productivity during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, official spending Edo and Tsugaru more than kept up with income, resulting the depletion of reserves and mounting debt

The average Tsugaru daimyo did not live to see his forty-ninth birthday; so, given that they spent their youth in Edo, a number of them must have ruled with no recollection of the horror of famine. Perhaps that was why the second daimyo distributed cooked rice grains instead of gruel to victims of the Genna famine. In spite of these hiatuses in memory and practical experience at the highest level, though, it would be surprising if there were not domain elders with living memories, or at least fathers and grandfathers to tell them cautionary tales. Whatever the reason, the domain in general neglected the

maintenance of relief stores: perhaps repeated experiences of poor harvests that did not trigger famines in some perverse way added to the corporate carelessness.

The role of commercial markets in the Tsugaru political economy also militated against the careful management of food supplies. At times when harvests in the northeast were abundant and prices therefore lower than those further south, commercial agents could profit handsomely from sailing north to buy up rice. Merchant activity of this kind depleted rice stocks in Tsugaru just before the Genroku famine, and in Nanbu just before the Hōreki 5 harvest failure. Sometimes bureaucratic efforts were made to control rice prices after famine conditions developed, but stocks had often been sold off to visiting merchants at market prices during the early spring before food supplies for the following winter had been secured.

As the earlier discussion of domain debt showed, from at least the Genroku period onwards there was a constant demand for substantial rice deliveries to the Tsugaru agents in Osaka to meet domain expenses in Edo and outstanding debt repayments. Importunate offers of payments over the local market price from merchants on the spot were therefore not easy to turn down. Neither was the planting of alternative food crops of minimal market value likely to be officially encouraged.

Tsugaru's government did open official famine relief shelters when mass hunger was apparent, but, as has been noted, they seem more often than not to have been places where large numbers of people simply went to die. This impression is consistent with Kikuchi Isao's comment that official shelters were often no more than a gesture symbolising the compassion of rulers, while there is little evidence of serions intentions to actually save the lives of the starving people who took refuge in them.[296]

During the Hōreki crisis in Tsugaru, several deviations from customary government practice were very effective. They included: the storage of a

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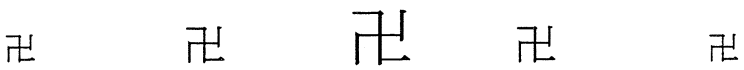
[296] Kikuchi Isao, "Kikin to segyō koya", in Watanabe Nobuo, *Kinsei Nihon no minshū bunka to seiji*, Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 1992, Pages 189-206, page 202.

substantial amount of rice from the previous year's harvest in the domains granaries; the strict control of all grain marketing; the early provision of relief rice; and the collection and redistribution of all surplus food grains in the domain. Nyūi Mitsugi demonstrated through his reform and relief measures in Hōreki 5 and 6 that radical departures from precedent and custom could indeed save lives, and that they were best undertaken at the highest levels of government.

The Hōreki 4 harvest failure was of life-threatening proportions, and was followed throughout northern Honshū by the Hōreki famine. In most of the Tohoku region, this was a famine that destroyed lives and lands and livelihoods on a large scale. In Tsugaru, it wasn't.



Chapter 5

Order in the social world, security for the people

> Said the dragonfly to the praying mantis:
> You seem to have the disposition of a warrior, always fronting up to things swinging your axe. What an aggressive attitude to life! That is why you have the reputation expressed in the saying, "Like the mantis standing up against the great Imperial chariot, swinging his little axe." This is a metaphor for not knowing your proper status, pointing out how silly it is to pit oneself against impossible odds. Don't you feel humiliated?
>
> The praying mantis replied, saying:
> I do not take any pleasure in being aggressive. And, it is not the case that I am unaware of what you say. I just seem to have the natural disposition of one born into an axe-wielding lineage. I have always been this way. I don't necessarily wish to face up to great chariots and vanquish them; but nor do I wish to be crushed by them. It is simply my lot to want to stick by my principles, and to put the welfare of my family first. Surely this is common to all living things, not limited just to me. Even the likes of parasites and Mayflies open their mouths and snap at things that come too close to them.
>
> Nyūi Mitsugi[297]

Despite the title of Mitsugi's allegorical work, "Gochūron" (五蟲論), which means "Debate among five insects", only the dragonfly and the mantis appear in it.[298] The introduction is dated Hōreki 12 (1762), which is the earliest date to appear in any piece of writing by Mitsugi contained in the *Complete Works*. The piece appears to have been written during the years he spent under house arrest after his dismissal in Hōreki 8 (1758), and in it very strong convictions are expressed, in the voice of the praying mantis, about the nature of good administration. Contempt and frustration are also expressed, towards those who did not share his views. The mantis is particularly scathing about those who remain passive or retreat in the face of imminent danger; in what can be read as thinly disguised censure of Mitsugi's colleagues in the *Oshirabekata* for their failure to support his reform policies.

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[297] NMZ 4, "Gochūron", pages 315-42, pages 321-22.
[298] The work and the three other insects are discussed on page 53.

In his introduction to "Gochūron", Mitsugi refers to his respected predecessor, Yamaga Sokō, whose banishment to Akō he perhaps recalled with some special sympathy at the time. He was, he claimed, modelling himself on Sokō in "setting out his argument in the guise of insects' voices". In so doing, it was his intention to "clearly distinguish right from wrong", and "attack those who believe in the dead practices (死物の行ひ) of Zhu Xi".[299] This is the earliest evidence we have from Mitsugi's own hand of his scholarly identity and sense of vocation. It was during that same period of detention that he also wrote "Shigaku yōben" (A primer for aspiring scholars), his most thorough exposition of his positions on various themes in the field of what would now be called political economy.

An animus against Zhu Xi and the other Song Confucians is striking in much of Mitsugi's writing, particularly when he is on the subject of domain administration. In his work dealing with the imperfect fit between Japanese social and political life and the underlying tenets of Song thought, Watanabe Hiroshi throws some light on the reasons for the dissension among Japanese Confucian scholars about the nature and purpose of self-cultivation. Watanabe suggests that in Imperial China any individual could, theoretically, aspire to gaining a responsible government post. Men with such ambitions therefore needed comprehensive moral, theoretical and practical training to prepare them for a wide range of contingencies. In Japan, where offices were hereditary and generally stable, self-cultivation had tended to shift either towards training in specialized practical matters like the military arts, or to concentration on the private, inner lives of individuals – perhaps in search of the kind of fulfilment their administrative work did not provide.

Whatever the problems Mitsugi faced in the course of his work - and they were not few - the need to escape monotony does not seem to have been one. Both in and out of office, he seems to have had his mind not only on political and economic challenges but on quite practical matters as well.

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[299] Mitsugi refers to Sokō as his respected teacher (夫子) in the introduction to "Gochūron", pages 315-19.

Another text believed to have been written during the twenty years between Mitsugi's two terms in office is "*Okaboki*" (陸稲記), his account of the benefits of cultivating upland rice. This is an example of the kind of project dealing with practical, hands-on problems to do with agronomy, applied maths and surveying that comprised a second field of intellectual engagement for Mitsugi in his persona of domain administrator.

A great deal of his writing is focussed on the meaning of life as a *bushi*-administrator in the polity, the moral responsibilities it entailed, and the attitudes of mind appropriate to dealing with the demands of the position. Mitsugi lived at a time when the ideological edifice legitimating bakufu rule and the notional division of society into four occupational groups was firmly in place. The arguments in his written works were therefore never about whether the *bushi* ought or ought not be privileged and in charge, but instead focussed on the appropriate mindset for a retainer official, how his duties in society were defined, and practical ways of fulfilling those duties.

The following sections are arranged along those lines. In the first, some traits of *bushi* administrators are discussed in terms of what Mitsugi has the praying mantis and dragonfly arguing; then some views on the role and functions of the *bushi* in society, as expressed in his commentary on the Akō *rōshi* incident, are introduced. In the second, some pieces about work, occupations and vocations are commented upon; and in the third, his account of work on some practical problems is summarised.

I A samurai's priorities

In the "Delusion and enlightenment" (迷悟) section of "Shigaku yōben", Mitsugi wrote:

> Society is in turmoil and the people are destitute, yet there is not one single scholar directing his attention to administration and relief (経済). What a wretched state of affairs.[300]

[300] NMZ 1, "Shigaku yōben", pages 1-408, page 281.

Scholarship should, he had already stated in the section entitled "Constancy and change" (常変), be "of use to the domain".[301] There was no point in learning to expound the words and phrases of the rites and the classics without aspiring to make positive contributions to the great task of governing the country. It was not a matter of "learning all **about** the ancient sage kings, Confucius and Mencius". It was essential instead to "learn **from** them". The Six Classics were merely traces of the Way left to help lead people in the Way. To Mitsugi they were in fact all "lifeless dregs" (粗末糟粕死物) of the Way.[302] They were not the Way itself. The task of the scholar was to take into consideration all that was sought after by the sages, Confucius, and Mencius in their various fields of endeavour, and then put them to use in the "here and now".[303]

Mitsugi repeatedly stressed the importance of throwing all one's effort into addressing the problems of the day. His insistence on direct intervention in the affairs of the present, without any hesitation or indecision, perhaps originated from his experiences in office when the domain was in crisis - or perhaps that was just the constant state of affairs in Tsugaru. He portrays even a moment's delay in the face of wretched poverty and starving people as a grave moral failing. Expressions like *konnichi tadaima* (今日唯今), "this very day, this very moment", occur repeatedly in his writing. At one stage we find the following passage (in which the underlined sections are all attempts at rendering *konnichi tadaima*):

> Governing the state (国家) is done <u>this very day, at this very moment</u>. The state is governed in accordance with the teachings of the sages. Apart from the teachings of the sages there is no Way of Government that is <u>immediately relevant</u>. There are no teachings of the sages that are not concerned with the <u>immediate present</u>. The teachings of the sages are <u>immediate</u>. The <u>immediate present</u> constitutes the teachings of the sages.[304]

The praying mantis conveys some of this sense of urgency to the dragonfly.

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[301] Ibid., page 231.
[302] Ibid., page 391.
[303] Ibid., "Delusion and enlightenment", pages 300-301.
[304] Loc. cit.

(i) *Bushi* as praying mantis

After the mantis points out to the dragonfly, in the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter, that any insect would be angry at the prospect of ending up in a child's collection, the dragonfly concedes that he does indeed attack in that situation. "No one", he concedes, "wants to be killed just for the transient amusement of a child." He then challenges the mantis, pointing out that he gives a completely different impression when he, the praying mantis, is fronting up to a threatening opponent. From the dragonfly's point of view it doesn't look anything like a bold confrontation with an enemy. Instead, it has every appearance of frightened timidity, as if the praying mantis is wringing his hands, in two minds about what he should do.

The mantis retorts that such an interpretation was only to be expected from a common insect like the dragonfly, and offers to explain, adding that if the dragonfly opens his ears and listens carefully, he might get the gist of the argument. "What is commonly called timidity", says the praying mantis, "is to fail to perceive the kind of danger that makes a truly moral man feel threatened, but instead to run away from what the common people consider dangerous."

Timidity, he goes on to say, is to investigate the situation thoroughly before anything happens, and when you perceive danger to feign illness and retreat in an effort to preserve your best interests, neglecting your duty and disregarding justice, not going to the aid of the crisis. It is to show your face in peaceful times but to yield and snatch your own safety in times of difficulty, to dress up your actions in fine words. It is to take what the vulgar mob calls knowledge and make that your own, instead of making up your own mind by your own will. All of this is what the *bushi* and his lord call cowardice. Cowards can never distinguish between good and evil, and they make no progress at all.

The mantis continues in this very critical vein, addressing the failings of what can be assumed to be the majority of Tsugaru's key administrators. They all suffer from the vice of being ignorant of the Way and are therefore unable to grasp the truth. They become wedded to old names and forms. This is

because their natural inclination is to neglect the public good and attend to their own private affairs. Those of us who wield our axes are not of that ilk; we are merely setting up defences and keeping ourselves prepared for both calamities and opportunities. If a carriage should come in order to attack, we would shoot to kill. If a carriage does not come to run over us but passes us by, then we can fold up our defences and go home.

Warming to his theme, the praying mantis continues his lecture. When we hear a noble carriage coming, he concedes, we don't deliberately go and place ourselves in front of it. There are times, though, when we accidentally meet up with one. Then we stick to our principles. The common instinct would be to jump in, boots and all; but we know our strength is puny in comparison with theirs. How can we be called useless and aimless just because we recognise that we will almost certainly lose a fight, and retreat to safety. We all have to survive, you know. We might be very small in stature, but that has nothing to do with the size of our commitment.

Mitsugi seems to be implying that he had confronted the domain's fiscal crisis, the famine, and the opposition to his reforms, with the best intentions, but that the obstacles turned out to be insuperable. There is no doubt, though, that this piece is sending the message that active intervention is preferable to standing back and watching a bad situation get worse.

(ii) The misguided loyalty of the Akō retainers

Perhaps the clearest discussion in all Mitsugi's works of the way men of *bushi* status ought to envisage their role in society is his commentary on the Akō vendetta.[305] Because of Yamaga Sokō's history as a protégé of an early Akō daimyo, and the strong views expressed in his written works about the vocation of the *bushi* to keep order in society, it is interesting that Mitsugi should have come down so strongly on the side of the legal decision that the

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[305] The daimyo of Akō, Asano Naganori, drew his sword and slightly injured Kira Yoshinaka inside Edo castle. Naganori was ordered to commit *seppuku* and his domain was confiscated. The next year, forty-six erstwhile Akō retainers (and one virtual comrade) broke into Kira's residence and killed him. The case was the subject of great public interest, a *shisō ronsō* (philosophical controversy), and kabuki dramas - which were quickly banned by bakufu censors.

forty-six *rōshi* (浪士) had committed a capital crime. His assessment of the immorality of their behaviour was much less equivocal than that of the bakufu judges or Ogyū Sorai. Both the official verdict and Sorai's commentary on the incident were tempered by recognition of the loyalty and single-minded dedication of the Akō *rōshi*, but, according to Mitsugi, these were the very qualities in which their delusions were most manifest.

Let's consider, he wrote, a situation in which *bushi* hid what was on their minds and kept their eyes firmly shaded. If you were to carefully examine the traditions of all the people of heaven and earth - Japan, China, India, and the barbarians as well - you would discover that there is not a single warrior principle that allows a virtuous soldier to kill a man in those circumstances. This, he adds, is what is meant in Japan by, "the supreme warrior (神武) does not kill". This is the fundamental meaning and true virtue of being a fighting man. That is why, he goes on to explain, I never try to argue with someone who tells me that he has his own good reasons for killing someone. He is violating the most basic of principles (in harbouring private reasons for murder, but is a person who values resentment over principle).

Whenever one person kills another, he himself is inevitably bound to submit to a death penalty. I do not believe that there has ever been a single case of one person living under heaven being killed by another, or even by a large group, that has ever been sanctioned by heaven: not from the time the heavens and the earth were created until this day. That is why it says in the Yijing that the godlike warriors of old were perceptive, intelligent and knowledgeable, but they did not ever kill other men.[306]

Recently forty-six samurai from Akō under the leadership of Ōishi Kuranosuke killed Lord Kira to avenge their own lord's death. They argued that they had gone to Edo and struck him down because he was evil. From the start Ōishi resolved to kill him out of resentment. He did not shirk from confronting Kira and fighting him: and therefore it is said that he understood the principle

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[306] NMZ 1, "Shigaku yōben", page 164.

of doing his duty to his ruler. But in the end, that principle was no principle and neither Kira nor Ōishi and his followers escaped the death penalty.

In the *Reiki* it says that it is wrong to kill while still feeling resentment.[307] Ōishi killed Kira, and then later Ōishi died. Neither of them won or lost. If Kira had still been regarded as a real foe of Ōishi's ruler, why would Ōishi have been sentenced to death? Striking against a foe without justification is not among the principles of the way of the *bushi*. Precisely because they privately banded together in enmity and harboured resentment for the purpose of avenging the virtue of their lord, they ended up as common executed criminals. Because they behaved in a way that appealed to the vulgar attitudes and beliefs of the mob, they were thought to have upheld *bushi* ideals. In fact, they forgot who they really were, abandoned their own people, and offended gravely against the mighty laws of the realm.[308]

Mitsugi condemned the way in which the Akō forty-six confused their affection for their ruler and their sadness over his death with their public duty, as well as their apparent desire to earn a public acclaim by a gratuitous display of loyalty. They had inappropriately conceived of themselves as military retainers, and even then not behaved according to the true way of the warrior.

Mitsugi acknowledged that the first duty of a samurai who has a post as a military or administrative retainer is to his lord, or daimyo. This was to recognise the first of the basic Confucian social relationships, that between a ruler and his minister, or *kunshin* (君臣). The Akō *rōshi* had, however, completely neglected the virtuous way of the ruler and minister. Their overlord was dead and his castle had been surrendered to the bakufu. If they had wanted to act as *bushi* retainers, they could have done so by bravely meeting their deaths defending it. There was no doubt about the appropriate way for ministers without a ruler to conduct themselves; that was a simple

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[307] loc.cit. The *Reiki* (禮記) is the *Liji*, the Record of Rites.
[308] NMZ 1, "Shigaku yōben", page 164.

matter. If the ruler was dead and his territory and headquarters confiscated, his retainers were no longer his ministers in the real world.

As his ministers while he was living and ruling, it had been their ordained occupation to serve him, and join with him the sacred task of protecting their homeland. They were not hired hands, grateful to him for the handouts they received so that they could maintain their households and feed their families. The lord had not existed for the purpose of granting favours, but to make manifest the will of heaven in his land through the agency of his retainers. That had been their justification for living: carrying out the will of their ruler to achieve his purposes.

After his death and the confiscation, there was no ruler, no ministerial duty to uphold, no domain in which to serve. What remained to the retainers were their wives, their parents, their children, their brothers and their friends. It was incumbent upon all men at all times to strive to the utmost to sustain these relationships, to keep their families from cold and hunger and to follow the way of filial piety and brotherly love. This was the great way of human relations (大倫の道). Just for the sake of reputation, to leave home and discard one's family like a handful of dirt or mustard seeds, is something that even an animal wouldn't do.

II Vocation as mission

Bitō Masahide, writing in the 1960's and again in the 1980's, has explored possible reasons for the relatively peaceful acquiescence during the late sixteenth century to the enforced separation of military service from farming as an occupation. He suggests that it was at least partly due to the much older idea of an individual's *shiki* (職) being linked in people's minds to the Tokugawa concepts of *yaku* (役) or *shokubun* (職分), combining the ideas of social rank, occupation and a corresponding set of duties.[309] These ideas seem continuous with what Mitsugi construed as an occupation ordained by heaven,

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[309] Pages 4-6 of Bitō Masahide, "Society and Social Thought in the Tokugawa Period", a lecture published in *The Japan Foundation Newsletter*, Vol. IX, No. 2,3, 1981. Pages 1-9.

which he referred to as *tenmeishoku* (天命職). They do not necessarily, however, imply the kind of active commitment that he brought to the category.

(i) Occupations ordained by heaven

In Mitsugi's writings, a *tenmeishoku*, or *tenshoku*, is not portrayed as an inevitable fate to which an individual had to resign himself, but it is instead construed as something more like a mission he was being appointed to accomplish. It could give people a heightened appreciation of themselves and their occupations. This in turn was, as Herman Ooms argues in *Tokugawa Ideology*, a way in which a sense of subordination could be ameliorated and desires for upward social mobility foreclosed, especially when members of a governing elite adopted an ideological scheme that equated hereditary occupations with *tenshoku*.[310] On the other hand, though, such a belief could also work to raise the consciousness of the privileged and heighten their awareness of their responsibilities towards those they governed. In Mitsugi's case it offered a compelling argument for striving to meet those responsibilities.

According to his exposition in the *bugei* (martial arts) subsection in "Shigakuyōben", every single person had a *tenshoku*, literally ordained by heaven, and therefore bore the responsibility of devoting himself to that occupation. For the *bushi*, farmers, artisans and merchants these were separate and interdependent functions, as he explains:

> The occupations of farmer, tradesman and merchant are the three determined by Heaven, and as they are each accomplished they contribute to the ongoing welfare of society. The farmers should provide various foodstuffs so that everyone, from the emperor above to the common people below, should have enough to eat without ploughing the fields. Is this not the great good achieved by farmers?
> The craftsmen should repair people's homes and make tools and implements so that everyone, from the emperor above to the common people below is clothed and warm without needing to weave, and everyone has enough tools without enduring heat

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[310] Herman Ooms, *Tokugawa Ideology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985. See, for example, his section on Suzuki Shōsan's application of Buddhist concepts in an ideology directed at distinguishing the four occupational classes, pages 122-43.

> and cold to make them. Is this not the great good achieved by the tradesmen?
> Merchants should deal in various commodities and operate in many countries, travelling by ship and cart through China and Japan, never faltering over long distances, so that from the emperor above to the common people below, all can live their lives and manage their affairs without haggling or making arduous journeys. This is the great merit of the merchants. By means of success in these, their ordained occupations all reap their reward and provide support for their parents, families and servants. Is this not what is called the bounty bestowed by Heaven?[311]

In this way, he went on, the three orders each play a part in creating abundance in the realm through devoting themselves to their respective occupations. The *bushi* alone, who drew his stipend without even the slightest evidence of achievement in his appointed occupation, was nothing more than a parasite on the people. There were those who believed that they were adequately fulfilling the role of *bushi* by becoming skilled experts in the minutiae of military tactics, archery, horsemanship, the sword and the spear, or by being able to acquit themselves appropriately at a tea ceremony or poetry gathering, but this was simply the adoption of "the outward form of a *bushi* by those who were in fact the idle unemployed."[312]

According to Mitsugi, the *tenshoku* of the *bushi*, which he referred to as "the way of the bow and arrow", was to attend to the way of the ruler and govern the people with virtue so as to secure their success in their occupations and thereby bring prosperity to the realm. These were the objectives of the *bushi* as he strove to serve his ruler. The occupation of the retainer was therefore to engage in a wide range of activities that were connected with governing the domain, including keeping the peace and managing the economy. There was no question but that those who were not assigned military roles should actively serve in some other capacity.

This position echoes that of Yamaga *Sokō,* who had questioned the place of *bushi* in peaceful Tokugawa society, asking:

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[311] NMZ 1, "Shigaku yōben", pages 152-3.
[312] Ibid., page 154.

> How can it be that the samurai eats without tilling the soil, makes use of things without making anything, and is able to profit without buying and selling?"[313]

Mitsugi made the same general point as Sokō that those who had previously been warriors were now to identify themselves as moral and ethical exemplars. Sokō, however, tended to stress the need for *bushi* to realize moral ideals by living exemplary lives and admonishing the other orders. *Bushi* not only ought to know, he taught, what tasks were fitting to their status, but they were also to:

> . . . bring righteousness and the rule of Heaven to the realm by meting out swift punishments to any members of the other three orders who behaved in an immoral way.[314]

Mitsugi seems to have been more taken up with the practical implications of administrative responsibility. *Bushi*, he believed, should engage in statecraft in order to bring about prosperity and well being in the domain. The demands of the times would not permit the view that it was noble and virtuous for *bushi* to be removed from worldly affairs, ignorant of financial matters and disinterested in economic activities.

(ii) The trouble with Zhu Xi

Mitsugi expressed a lot of irritation about the conduct of those who seemed to have forgotten what the occupation of a *bushi* was: those who averted their eyes from the political reality of a domain wracked by poverty, while seeking above all else comfort, peace and quiet for themselves. Lacking the courage to face the crisis, they feared failure and cowered away from acknowledging their responsibilities, prudently doing only "the bare minimum required in their official capacities". He despised them, accusing them of setting their sights very low, and at the same time protecting their interests behind a façade of virtuous modesty and reticence:

> The only thing they have learned is that it is a virtue to be seen concentrating on the cultivation of humility. This means that even when they see the anguish of their ruler and the

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[313] *Yamaga Sokō*, Nihon Shisō Taikei 32. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1970. Page 31.
[314] *Yamaga Sokō*, page 32.

> peril of the land they are not moved to come forward and make an effort to help. Not wishing to draw attention to themselves, they simply defer to others whenever there is risk involved. When the situation gets really tough, they take evasive action. On occasions when instructions from the daimyo are conveyed to the administration, no matter what the task is, these people let others take the lead while they just follow along, mouthing ingratiating phrases about how humble and unworthy they are. Their only concern is for themselves. Never do they anguish over the terrible state of the domain. This is how pusillanimous they are, using their modesty and humility as a front. They pile caution upon hesitation until in the end they bring down disaster upon their land and their ruler.[315]

Mitsugi seemed to have no doubt that the cause of this kind of passive bureaucratic behaviour, which had his colleagues feigning humble reticence in order to avoid taking decisive action, lay in the study of the introspective Method of Mind associated with Zhu Xi Confucianism. He claimed that the energy of Cheng-Zhu scholarship was directed exclusively at the cultivation of the individual mind, while matters of state and devotion to public service were dealt with by perfunctory commonplaces. He concluded that as a result the concerns of intellectuals and scholars had become quite remote from the issues involved in achieving competence in government.

Mitsugi argued that the real Confucian tradition was not fundamentally concerned with the moral rectitude of individuals, but with bringing unity and order to the world and wise government to its various states. That there were so many retainers who "abandoned administration and relief work" and "failed to alleviate the distress of the domain", but instead "concentrated from dawn till dusk on ascetic exercises for the improvement of their own minds", was because they had been led astray by "Zhu Xi's Confucianism, the scholarship for cowards".[316] He protested that:

> The Song scholars begin by establishing a programme for the study of the mind: its nature, its functions, then its cultivation and training. The very first stage in their programme is to completely internalise all the teachings of the sages, and it is right from that initial point onwards that learning diverges

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[315] "Shigaku yōben", NMZ 1, page 293.

[316] The last epithet is found in NMZ 4, "Gochūron", page 333. The preceding quotations are from NMZ 1, "Shigaku yōben", page 213.

> from [seeking] the way of good government, so that it is eventually completely cut off from the concerns of the present day.[317]

Mitsugi was particularly critical of the order of priorities in the *Daigaku*, complaining that it is not until the final step in the prescribed scholarly agenda that "ruling the land and bringing tranquillity to the realm" appears. He strains more than a little, I think, to read this passage of the *Daigaku* as suggesting that the achievement of good government will come about simply as a natural outcome, and only after the individuals in charge have perfected their own personal moral cultivation. Any suggestion that engagement in concentration on the self might be permitted to precede scholarly attention to the practice of good government he seems to have found completely intolerable.

Zhu Xi's teachings, he complained, not only failed to tackle questions concerning administration and government, but they provided as well an evasive excuse for urgent matters to be put off indefinitely by his passive colleagues.

> In the *Daigaku* it says that we should first make an exhaustive study of the principles of things and cultivate the individual person, and then after that think about the matters of good government and tranquillity in the realm. How long, then, does it take to cultivate the individual person? And furthermore, if cultivating the self necessarily precedes governing the state, are we supposed to go ahead and just ignore the social breakdown and poverty that are before us right here and now?[318]

Later, in the section on rewards and punishments, *shōbatsu* (賞罰), he insists that there is no point in renouncing one's life in the present so as to cultivate the inner self and therefore be of no use to the state (*kokka*). On the contrary, genuine reverence for Confucius and Mencius would be to apply their teachings now, in present conditions, and govern the state accordingly. Mitsugi's is clearly engaged in a polemical exercise inspired to some extent by frustration at the metaphysical preoccupations of some of his colleagues who

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[317] NMZ 1, "Shigaku yōben", page 243.
[318] NMZ 1, "Shigaku yōben", page 161.

were reluctant to actively participate in administrative affairs. His interpretation of the *Daigaku* is therefore rather partial.[319]

III The teachings of the sages and the basis of wealth

The teachings of the sages were, Mitsugi wrote, the very stuff of government. The reality, or indeed the truth, of what had been learned was determined by the outcomes it produced in the practice of government. He summed it up this way:

> The application (用) of the teachings of the sages is a matter of practical effort, just like harvesting grain after tilling a field or drawing water after sinking a well.[320]

Reliable moral knowledge was not, according to Mitsugi, located in the actual texts containing the teachings of the sages. Nor was it to be discovered through introspection or the identification of the individual self with a universal absolute. It is fairly clear, though, that he did entertain the belief that the innate goodness of the universal order could be at least partly known through the careful investigation of phenomena in the real world. But, more than anything else, following the sagely teachings meant exerting an effort to deal with real things. The range of subject matter covered by what he termed "teachings of the sages", therefore, included agriculture, public works, surveying and applied mathematics.

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[319] This is a translation of the offending "eight items" of the *Daigaku* (*Daxue*), as they appear on page 331 of Wm.Theodore De Bary (ed.), *Sources of Chinese Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. *Daigaku* (lit. Great Learning) means something like advanced education, or study for adults. One of the Song Confucian Four Books, it is an extremely short work: the following passage comprises nearly half of the entire text.

> The extension of knowledge lies in the investigation of things.
> It is only when things are investigated that knowledge is extended; when knowledge is extended, that thoughts become sincere; when thoughts become sincere that the mind is rectified; when the mind is rectified that the person is cultivated; when the person is cultivated that order is brought to the family; when order is brought to the family that the state is well governed; when the state is well governed that peace is brought to the world.
> From the Son of Heaven to ordinary people, all, without exception, should regard cultivating the person as the root. It can never happen that the root is disordered and the branches are ordered.

[320] NMZ 1, "Shigaku yōben", page 301.

(i) Cultivating the realm

In Mitsugi's scheme of what was worthwhile, agriculture took a prominent place. It was the source that sustained life, brought benefit to the people, abundance to the land, and wealth to the polity. There were, however, two forms of the way of cultivation: that of the common man (庸人) and that of the gentleman (君子). The person following the first form plans solely in terms of his own benefit, and turns his hand to whatever is most immediately profitable. Eventually this leads to widespread poverty in the land. Those following the second form take into account the benefit of the entire country, eschewing immediate profit until eventually the mountains are prospering, new fields have been opened up, and the country is wealthy.

Since it is the earth that is the source of all things, giving forth treasure and riches, he argued, to value the money before our eyes and shut off the fount of wealth is the height of stupidity. "The Way of Cultivation", he repeated, "is the great foundation upon which the people are sustained". When the time comes in which "we are as sparing with clods of earth as we are with money", people will live in communities and make progress in their occupations. When the people are actively engaged in their occupations, the lands of the domain will be opened up. If, however, money is prized and the way of cultivation neglected, the mountains, forests and lands will all fall into ruin. That is why "the way of the art of cultivation is the principle of rule over the land, riches for the world, and profit for all".[321]

He goes on to argue that rice is the most important of the five grains, but then inserts a justification for making sure the people have plenty to eat:

> Theft occurs in the world because of greed. Disorder as a result of greed arises when there turns out to be insufficient grain. When there is enough food and clothing, people understand what it is to have dignity.
> So it is that Guan Zhong says, "If people are poor they will take their family responsibilities lightly. If they neglect their households they will offend against the law and when they commit offences they are difficult to govern. When people are prosperous they take their families seriously. When they

[321] NMZ 3, "Okaboki", page 215.

> take their families seriously they respect authority, and when the people respect authority they are easy to govern.[322]

When he observed merchant households engaged in money-lending and profiteering, for example, he regarded that as an instance of theft. They were forgetting their appointed occupation, which was to be of service to the domain by circulating and increasing its wealth through their commercial activity. Mitsugi himself did not seem to have expected Tsugaru to grow wealthy on agriculture alone. During the reforms he encouraged the production of commercial commodities and freed up the export of livestock and mining products. But while he did not avoid the reality of commercial expansion, there is no sign that he shared, for example, Kaihō Seiryō's optimism regarding the emergence of a competitive economic and social structure. Tsugaru was still in a position where it was important to foster agricultural productivity while carefully watching the state of public finances. The accumulation of private capital by merchant enterprises was neither desirable nor feasible under current circumstances, though the overall wealth of the domain was one of his main preoccupations.

A little further on in this treatise, he calls on the ultimate authority:

> Confucius also said, did he not, that there is nothing that takes priority in government over making the people wealthy.[323]

For people to thrive, they needed food, and the most essential foods were the five grains. Farming produced the five grains, and farming could not happen without farmland. Farmland was the possession of the ruler. He was the one who opened up the land, and when he opened up large tracts of land, then the harvests of grain are also large. When there was sufficient grain, people gathered together, and where people came together it followed that treasure and riches would be abundant. This, according to Mitsugi, was what was known as "The virtue of the ruler" (君徳).

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[322] Loc. cit. The *Guanzi* is a work of uncertain authorship, containing advice about practical administration, grain prices, food supplies and so on. This passage is taken from the "Bokumin" section.

[323] NMZ 3, "Okaboki", page 217. Taken from the *Analects*.

> Virtue is the foundation and abundance the outcome. If abundance is taken to be the foundation, however, and the order of cause and effect reversed, then even when fields fall into disuse, money will not be made available for their restoration, and the country's farmland will be ruined. Revere the land as you do a deity; value grain as you do your ruler; treat money with the disdain you have for clods of earth; and regard profit as lightly as you do dust. Do this for even just one month and the finances of the state cannot help but improve.[324]

From this kind of passage, it seems reasonable to assume that Mitsugi considered agriculture to be fundamental to the structure of the domain polity. Even though he did, in practice, enact policies for using trade as a means of making profits, he clearly believed that the prosperity of the domain was based above all else on productive agricultural activity, and that sufficient investment should be guaranteed for basic agricultural infrastructure.

(ii) Mitsugi as agronomist

Since he regarded agriculture as the foundation of all other productive activity, Mitsugi turned his mind to one of the basic provisions for farming: the problem of opening up new land. Even opening up land, though, he believed, should be done within set limits, stating that "it is a desirable thing to open up land for retainers, but when it is not done under strict control the necessary economies cannot be imposed."[325] When land was developed according to a careful plan, the taxation system based on a putative yield for every field could be maintained. In the "Okaboki" essay, he gives detailed calculations for values of tax rates and areas of cultivated land, along with maps showing the land neatly divided into sections.

After setting out his proposition that agriculture is the foundation of the polity, and discussing the opening up of new fields, Mitsugi goes on to advocate the cultivation of upland rice. In farming, he claimed, nothing offered more return than the five grains, and the most beneficial of the five grains to farmers was rice. Rice, however, no matter how much land was

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[324] NMZ 3, "Okaboki", page 218.
[325] Ibid., page 228.

available, could not be grown without water. It was also an extremely labour-intensive crop. Moreover, there was the anxiety every year over floods and droughts. Mitsugi decided to try growing paddy rice in a dry field. Right up until the time it was ripening, he found there was not the slightest difference from paddy rice. He concluded that if paddy rice were to be transformed into upland rice it would be as if the people had gained wings.

> We must plant it on the slopes and on the plains. There would be no need to worry about floods and droughts, or draining ditches and reinforcing embankments. The whole domain would be opened up and foodstuffs would abound. It would be a source of plenty for ten thousand generations.

Mitsugi believed upland rice would be of benefit "not just to a single domain" but that it could "help the people of the whole country." [326]

He kept seeds from his harvest the first year and planted them the next, with the same results. After a period of ten years, holding seeds over from year to year and testing the crop in both cold and warm conditions, and recording all his results, he tried to convince the domain administrators that it was worth trying, but no-one would take him seriously. That, he explained, was because:

> Throughout the entire country all the daimyo set great store by money and profit but spare little thought for farming the land. So, why would anyone pay attention to what I have to say?[327]

He had compiled detailed notes on cultivation techniques based on his experiments: on the scale and layout of the cultivated fields, on planting methods, on compass directions for sowing, and other details.

In spite of his *bushi* status, Mitsugi actually succeeded in accumulating a great deal of practical know-how in such matters as water control and irrigation, soil quality and fertilizing techniques. Thus it was that when he was exiled to Kawaratai he was able to help the villagers improve their material

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[326] NMZ, "Okaboki", page 224.
[327] Ibid., page 227.

well-being by growing their own rice, as well as teaching them new literacy, numeracy and cultural skills.[328]

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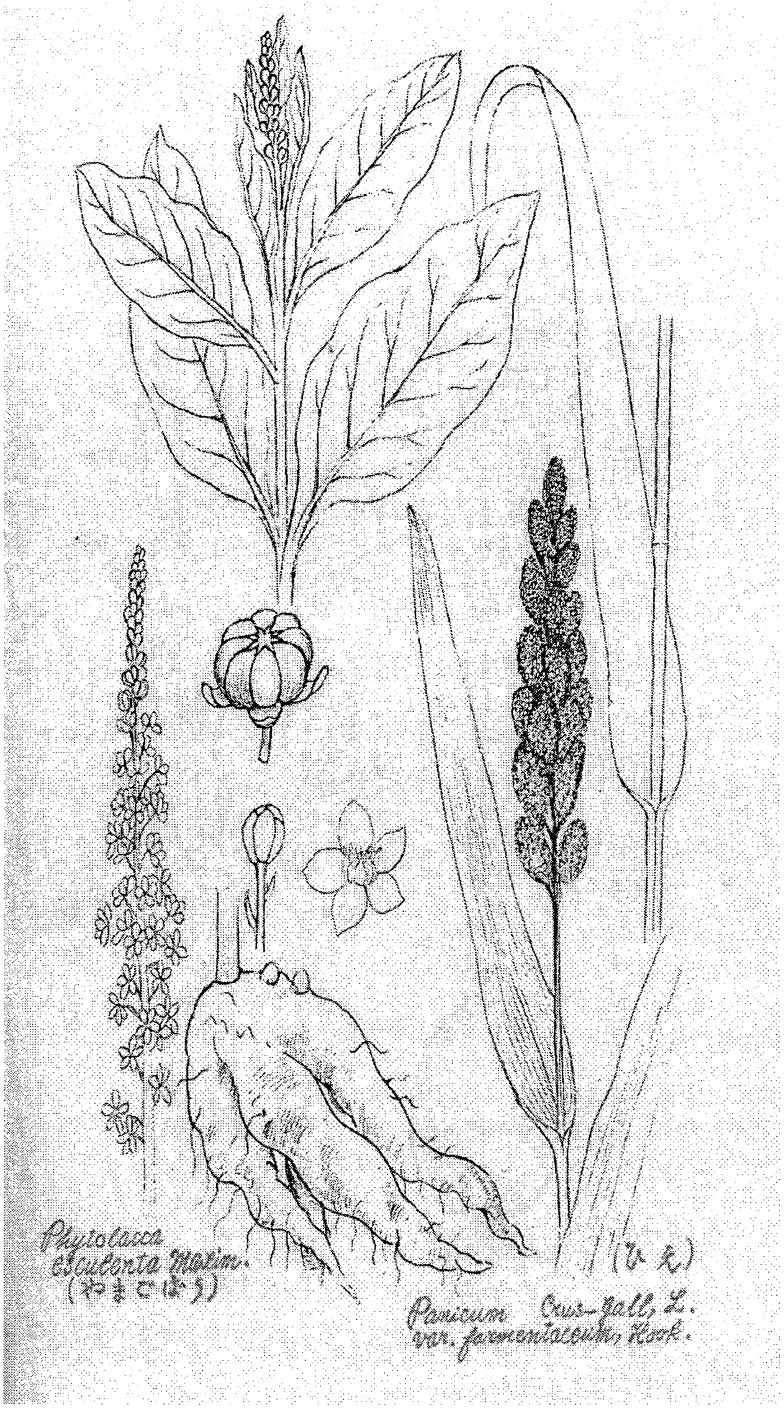

Plate 11: From a collection of famine foods.
On the right is the coarse millet called *hie*, sometimes referred to as deccan grass, or barnyard grass, in English.
Source: "*Kyūkō shokubutsu zusen*", reproduced in Nishimura Makoto and Yoshikawa Ichirō, eds., *Nihon kyōkō shi kō*, Tokyo: Maruzen, 1936.

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[328] See pages 4 and 48, in the Prologue and Chapter One, above.

Chapter six

The Measure of Things

King Wen is on high, Oh, he shines in Heaven!
Zhou is an old people, but its Mandate is new
The leaders of Zhou became illustrious,
was not God's Mandate timely given?
King Wen ascends and descends on the left and
right of God. The Classic of Odes[329]

Ideas about numbers or measurement are fundamental to much of Mitsugi's writing, and seem to permeate, either directly or by implication, his understanding the universe and human affairs. Whether he is writing in Confucian didactic mode, reporting his findings as a hands-on practical man, or devising the schemata of a numerologist, ordered patterns and numerical categories shape his argument in one way or another. His applications of numbers range from very ordinary practical arithmetic, through surveying techniques and the application of Zhou period schemes to matters of everyday administration in Tsugaru, to mystical speculation on the creation of the universe.

I The universe

Mitsugi sets out his understandings about the creation of the universe in his "Explanation of the diagram of the Supreme Ultimate".[330] The diagram is thought to be the work of a tenth century Daoist master: it is a schematic representation of the genesis of the phenomena that comprise and sustain the universe. In the classical interpretative tradition of the Chinese cultural sphere, Mitsugi uses the terminology and categories of the *Yijing* (易経),

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[329] The poems in the "Classic of Odes" mostly date from early in Zhou period (circa 1040-256 BCE). This is probably a ritual song. *Sources*, pages 25 and 38.
[330] MZ 3, "Explanation of the diagram of the Supreme Ultimate", pages 1-23.

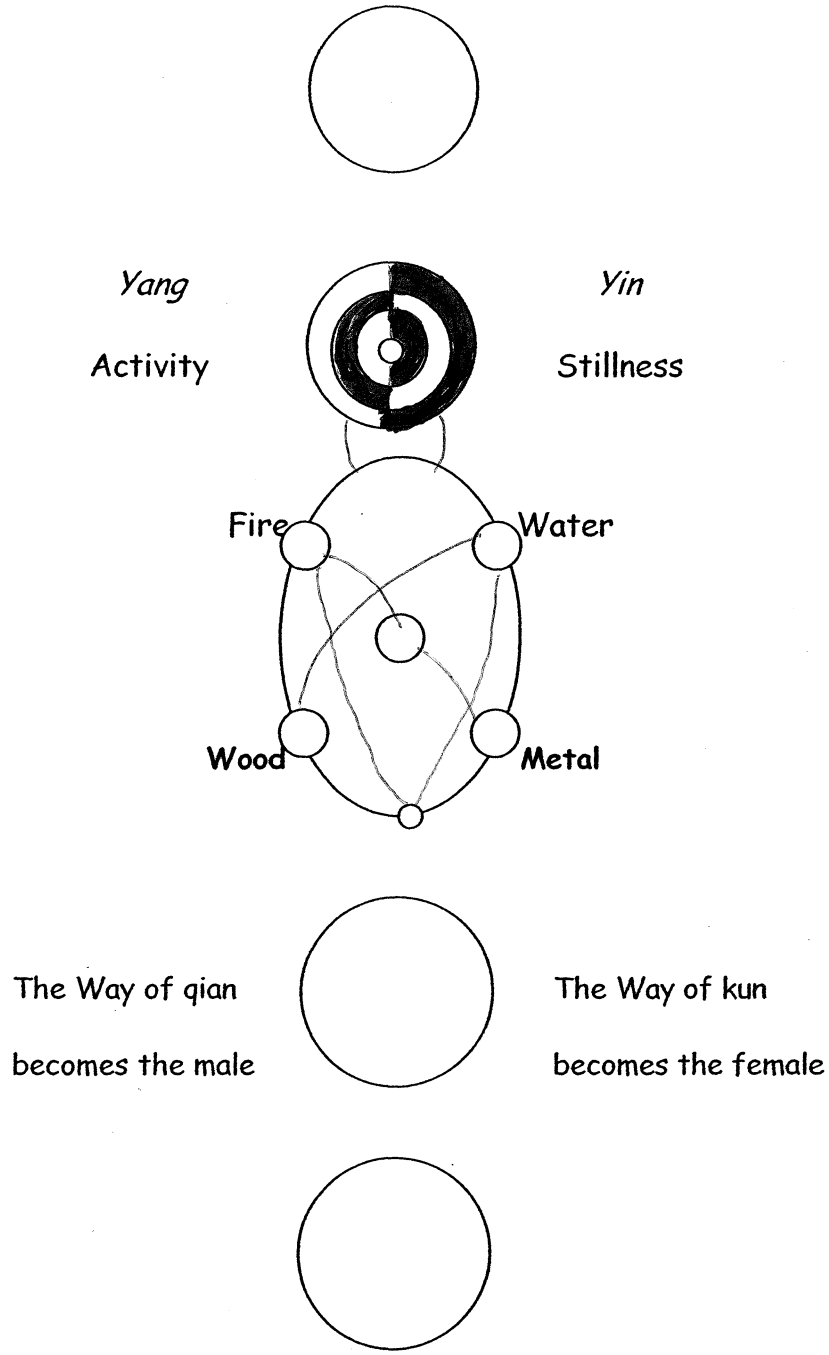

Figure 6: Zhou Dunyi's diagram of the Supreme Ultimate

Source: De Bary (ed.), *Sources of Chinese Tradiotion,* page 674.

Classic of Changes, intermingled with key concepts drawn from the Daoist tradition. Mitsugi was but one of countless thinkers who worked on the diagram and the ideas over many centuries.

(i) The diagram of the Supreme Ultimate

Mitsugi takes the title for his "Explanation of the diagram of the Supreme Ultimate" (太極図説) from Zhou Dunyi (1017-1073), the early Song scholar who refined the diagram. Zhou, whose "Explanation" was adopted as a foundational text of Song Confucianism (朱子学) by Zhu Xi, against whose school of thought Mitsugi railed so strongly, also left a number of texts with strong Daoist affinities. As well as receiving Zhu Xi's imprimatur, his "Explanation" was included in the *Daozang*, a key compendium of Daoist texts.[331]

The terms used for the two foundational creative forces in Zhou Dunyi's brief genesis account, *wuji* (無極) and *taiji* (太極), are both important conceptual categories in the Daoist tradition, even though Zhu Xi was able to locate the *taiji* (J.*taikyoku*) in the Confucian tradition as well, because of its appearance in classical commentaries on the *Yijing*. Mitsugi's works also reveal a strong affinity with the Daoist tradition, so it is perhaps not surprising that his interpretation of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate follows a very similar line to Zhou's, although he gives primacy to the four seasons and directions, illustrating his explanation with rectangular and square diagrams to explain the eight trigrams of the *Yijing*, rather than using the very simple circles of Zhou's canonical "Explanation". *See next page.* Both pieces are quite short, with Zhou's translated into English taking only around two pages of *Sources*, while Mitsugi's, a photographic reproduction of his own handwriting on small pages of Minō paper, occupies twenty-three, around half of which are filled with his diagrams.[332]

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[331] De Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, page 671. I have not adopted the term "Supreme Polarity" for because I do not need the conceptual converse of "Non-polar" (無極) in this elementary discussion of Mitsugi's "Explanation".

[332] Ibid. The translation of Zhou's "Explanation" and his diagram are on pages 673-76.

In Mitsugi's "Explanation", the process in which a cosmic primordial unity is differentiated to form the "myriad things" comprising the universe begins with the *taikyoku* generating (生) the two modes (儀) of *yin* (陰) and *yang* (陽).

In Zhou Dunyi's scheme, *yin* and *yang* alternate and combine to generate water, fire, wood, metal and earth, and the four seasons proceeding through them. Mitsugi has *yin* and *yang* generating the four seasons, from which the eight trigrams are formed that than determine the eight cardinal compass points. It is arresting that on the first page of his piece, before he even points out Zhu Xi's errors, Mitsugi introduces as an alternative possibility the scheme of another Song figure, Shao Yong. Shao had the *Taikyoku* originally comprising *yin* and *yang* forces, and the four seasons then forming as the *Taikyoku* constantly moved within itself, as it did, between states where *yin* and *yang* were alternately in the ascendant.

I am not in a position to endorse or refute Mitsugi's reading of Shao Yong's interpretation, though it does differ from the one implied in *Sources*.[333] Apart from noting that Mitsugi was one of many scholars in the long history of thought in the Chinese cultural sphere who found it natural and congenial to study and apply both Daoist and classical Confucian ideas, there is no reason here to further examine the complexity of the intertwining that went on between Song Confucian, Daoist and Han Confucian interpretative thought – in any case, I have already exhausted my resources on the subject. My purpose is simply to point out that Mitsugi not only allies the line of his "Explanation" with Shao Yong's overall interpretation, but that his writings also reveal other elements in common with Shao's work, while the model "Explanation" is clearly Zhou Dunyi's. Whereas Zhou's diagram shows alternations and combinations of *yin* and *yang* generating the five elements comprising the *ki* (気), vital energy, which combines and coalesces under the influence of *yin* and *yang* to generate male and female; both Shao and Mitsugi adhere to the binary and quaternary progression through one further stage, in harmony with the *Yijing* numbers of

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[333] De Bary, *Sources*, page 680.

four, eight and sixty-four. In all three schemes, the *ki* generates and transforms the myriad things from earthly matter, or *shitsu* (質), which subsequently goes on regenerating, alternating and transforming without end.

It is important to note the place Mitsugi gives Shao Yong (1011-1077) in his interpretation of the workings of the universe, because Shao is by far the most significant Song figure in the development of ideas based on numerological formulations. His writings give primacy to the idea of constant change in the universe, and he derived numerically based patterns to explain the way changes occurring in heaven are linked to what happens on earth. And, he extolled the capacity of the ancient sages to perceive and comprehend earthly matters in truly cosmic terms.[334] These are also three distinctive elements in the writings of Mitsugi, who linked constant change in the affairs of the world to the need for administrators to be actively aware of the times they lived in and to react accordingly; and looked to the writings of the sages for patters and schemata to guide him in his actions. The *Yijing* was a particular source of inspiration in this regard.

(ii) The *Yijing*

One of the three most substantial texts in the *Complete Works*, is "Symbols from the *Yijing*", Mitsugi's study of the numerical concepts in the *Yijing*.[335] It draws on the ideas established in the two works that come before it: his "Explanation" and "Symbols and their mathematical transformations". The *Yijing*, or "Classic of Changes", is thought to have been compiled within a century or so of 1000 BCE. It was used in the Zhou period as a divination manual; and was also called the *Zhouyi*, or "Changes of Zhou". The text, together with later Han and Song Confucian interpretations and commentaries, came to be "ranked as the primordial source of traditional wisdom and the first of the Confucian classics."[336] In the introduction to his scholarly, but nevertheless extremely helpful, translation of the *Yijing* with an influential

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[334] De Bary, *Sources*, page 680.
[335] NMZ 3, "Yishō", pages 49-155.
[336] De Bary, *Sources*, page 318.

commentary by the eminent Han scholar, Wang Bi (226-249), Richard Lynn makes the point that given the "dense and opaque" nature of the original text, its meaning in many times and places has depended entirely on the understanding of commentators who have interpreted the hexagrams and the Appended Phrases. The Song period interpretations of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, created in a cultural and scholarly environment separated by seven centuries from that in which Wang's commentary was written, therefore reveal a great deal to do with historical change in Chinese thought between the Han and the Song in the meanings they give to the "Changes of Zhou".[337]

Regardless of, or perhaps due to, these transformations, the text and its appendages have for millennia been used as instruments for "penetrating movements of the cosmic order" and determining actions and decisions appropriate to the particular circumstances of ordinary individuals, rulers and states.[338] Mitsugi is no exception to this general rule, and the record of his ruminations is some evidence of the kinds of ancient authorities important to scholars of his time and place who were out of sympathy with the Zhu Xi school.

Mitsugi identified the Zhou period with the time when ideal rulers presided over perfectly administered states according to the wisdom of the sages. It was therefore important that King Wen, one of the founders of the Zhou dynasty, was believed to have devised the sixty-four hexagrams from the eight original trigrams and then written their associated judgements. The statements for each of the six lines in each hexagram are attributed to the Duke of Zhou, King Wen's influential younger brother and regent to his heir. Together, these elements form the invariable kernel of the *Yijing*.[339]

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[337] Richard John Lynn (trans.), *The Classic of Changes*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, page 8. I have chosen this translation of the *Yijing* to work with because Mitsugi clearly used the works of Song scholars other than Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi, with whose commentaries he takes issue. Lynn's is the only work I know of that is not based on a Cheng-Zhu version. Belonging to the ranks of the uninitiated as I certainly do, I am drawn to the suggestion that the enormous range of meanings, from the weightiest to the most trivial, drawn from the *Yijing* over the centuries might be directly proportional to its opacity.

[338] Lynn, *Changes*, page 1.

[339] Ibid., page 4.

In the very first statement of "Symbols and their mathematical transformations", Mitsugi states the legendary links between the Yellow River chart and the Luo River diagram, the sage-kings, and the numbers in the *Yijing*.[340] According to Confucius, Mitsugi tells us, the mythical sage-king, Fugi (Ch. Fu Xi), originator of the eight trigrams, based them on a chart written on the back of a dragon-horse that had emerged from the Yellow River. And, the Luo River diagram was revealed to the sage-king U (Ch. Yu) by a spirit-tortoise that appeared while he was controlling the waters. He used it to divide the land into nine numbers (provinces).[341] Mitsugi asserts that:

> If these numbers and symbols are carefully examined then the mysterious ways in which change works in heaven and earth will be revealed; if they are pondered deeply the great patterns of change in heaven and earth will become clear.[342]

He proceeds to set out a bewildering array of diagrams: familiar nine-squares and circles, triangles, circles within circles, circles around circles, a triangle within a nine-square within a circle, stars around hexagons and nonagons, and arrays of numbers associated with points of the compass arranged in concentric squares.

His explanations begin with tens from the Yellow River chart and nines from the Luo River diagram, which are then combed them with the vital force principle (気理) of heaven and the matter principle (質理) of earth, the male and female principles and other symbols and numbers derived from the *Yijing*. He asserts that a full understanding of the changes in such phenomena as the sun and the moon, and day and night, will reveal the mathematical principles by which the universe is constituted. Thereby a conception will also be gained of the eternal, unwavering Mean, on which humankind must always depend.[343]

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[340] 易繫辞曰河出図洛出書聖人則之又曰天一地二天三地四. . .
[341] NMZ 3, "Yisū", page 27, with some vocabulary from Lynn, page 74.
[342] Quoted by the complier. NMZ 3, page v.
[343] NMZ 3, "Yisū", page 41.

II The realm

When it came to theorising the administration of a polity, Mitsugi's model was the Zhou state, which overthrew the Shang around 1040 BCE, ruled through the time when Confucius lived and on until the third century BCE. In the introduction to his work, "Applying the *Zhouli*", Mitsugi points out that the Appended Phrases in the *Yijing* were all the work of Zhou figures, but that subsequent traditional commentaries applied to "conditions in China".[344] That is to say, even the Han commentaries were written after the unification of the empire. Mitsugi found the ancient works more suited as guides to governing a domain, because the fragmented structure of administrative authority in China during the Zhou period was closer to that of Tokugawa period Japan. It should be understood, Mitsugi went on in his introduction, that after gaining a thorough understanding of the *Zhouli* (周禮), "The Rites of Zhou", we can apply its teachings to the benefit of the realm and its people; but if we do not fully understand the *Zhouli* and apply it in form only, we will cause harm to the real and its people.[345]

One of the strongest ideas from the *Zhouli* and other contemporary texts that are constant themes in Mitsugi's works is the conviction that rulers who have received the Mandate of Heaven are morally bound to fulfil their duties by respecting Heaven and caring for their people. Heaven is the natural moral force of the universe, whose workings were linked with those of earth according to an overarching design. Insight into that design could be gained from study of the *Yijing*; and insight into the intentions of Heaven for the ordering of human existence were best sought in records of the practices of the early rulers of Zhou. The principal task of a ruler was to order his polity so that peace prevailed and the people flourished.

(i) Applying the *Zhouli*

In the Zhou administrative structure, the Prime Minister was the central figure, and in his administration were six offices corresponding to

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[344] NMZ 2, "Shūrei tsūyō", page 1.
[345] Ibid., page 3.

heaven, earth and the four seasons. The office of the prime minister corresponded with heaven; the earth minister was assigned education, the spring minister, the histories, the summer minister, the military, the autumn minister, justice and policing, and the winter minister, lands and peoples. Mitsugi elaborated this system with sixty bureaus attached to each office, and the six offices divided into seven grades, and so on.[346]

神明 Spiritual intelligence 太局 Supreme ultimate	天子 Emperor 太政大臣 Imperial Chancellor	君 Daimyo 大老 Great Elder
陰儀 *Yin* 陽儀 *Yang*	左大臣 右大臣 Minister of the left Minister of the right	家老 Elders
大陰 少陰 少陽 大陽	大将 参議 中納言 大納言	用人 Yōnin
坤 艮 次 巽 震 離 兌 乾 Earth Restraint Thunder Cohesion Water Compliance Joy Heaven	宮内 大蔵 民 治 刑 兵 式 中務 The eight official departments of the *Ritsuryō* administrative system: Imperial household, treasury, judicial, military, regional, home, and ceremonial affairs, Imperial secretariat.	勘定奉行 Kanjō bugyō 町 奉行 Machi bugyō 郡 奉行 Kōri bugyō 寺社奉行 Jisha bugyō

Figure 7: Nyūi Mitsugi's corresponding hierarchies for the Creation, Kyoto and Edo
Source: NMZ 2, "Shūrei tsūyō", pages16-17.

His model for an earthly administrative hierarchy was founded in the order of creation under as found in the *Yijing*. Heaven and Earth and the six forces are represented by the eight trigrams created from combinations of *yin* and *yang* with their greater and lesser forms, as shown in the first column of the figure. Wang Bi's explanation of functions of the eight is translated by Lynn this way:

> As Heaven (Pure Yang) and Earth (Pure Yin) establish positions, as Mountain (Restraint) and Lake (Joy) reciprocally circulate material force, as Thunder (Quake) and Wind (Compliance) give rise each to the other, and as Water (Sink Hole) and Fire (Cohesion) do not fail to complement each other, the eight trigrams combine with one another in such a way that, to

[346] NMZ 2, "Shūrei tsūyō", pages 14-16.

> reckon the past, one follows the order of their progress, and, to know the future, one works backward through them. The Divine Ruler comes forth in *Zhen* (Quake) and sets all things in order in *Sun* (Compliance), makes them visible to one another in Li (Cohesion), gives them maximum support in *Kun* (Pure Yin i.e. Earth), makes them happy then in *Dui* (Joy), has them do battle in *Qian* (Pure Yang, i.e. Heaven), finds them thoroughly worn out in *Kan* (Water Hole) and has them reach final maturity in *Gen* (Restraint).[347]

Mitsugi goes on to explain that while the Japanese Imperial bureaucracy (second column), with its eight departments, adheres to the model, the functions and offices are not immutable fixtures and come and go with time and necessity.

He then sets out an extremely simple hierarchy of contemporary offices that would correspond with the bakufu and domain administrative arrangement. It is headed by a ruler (君), under whom the *tairō* (chief minister), *karō* (elders), and *yōnin* (stewards) are ranked, followed by the four magistrates - for finances, town centres, country districts, and shrines and temples.[348] The rest of the piece is devoted to various schemes based on nine-square divisions applied to such matters as the distribution of lesser administrative posts, physical features of the lands of the realm, occupations of the people, and productive trees and crops.

In contrast with this arcane piece are the two works entitled "A record of appropriate divisions" (応分志). The first is written in Chinese, and the second, which is in two parts, in Japanese.[349] They contain much the same material, and, while still firmly based on the concepts and numerology of the Zhou world view, they also contain evidence of some concern on Mitsugi's part to put things in order in the present.

Mitsugi begins by stating the basic premise that when territory of a country (国土) is not divided up appropriately, then great losses result and uncontrollable abuses occur. It is therefore important to allot benefits and

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[347] Lynn, *Changes*, pages 120-21.
[348] NMZ 2, "Shūrei tsūyō", page 17.
[349] NMZ 2, "Ōbunshi", pages 31 - 91; "Ōbunshi, Part 1", pages 93-128; "Ōbunshi, Part 2", pages 129-147.

responsibilities according to the Mean, and to set up standards that will guide the ruler.[350] The glories of the dynasties of the sage kings were all due to their being founded on these principles. Think of a set of pitch pipes, where the tones of the twelve pipes vary according to their lengths. If the lengths are not in the appropriate proportions, then the sound is dreadful. It is exactly the same if holdings of land are not properly apportioned. The resources of the country will end up exhausted. These are very different phenomena, but they are governed by the same Way.[351]

It is not only sagely rulers who hope for adequate territory and a wealthy population: bad rulers want the same. And, it is not only sages who hate evil and appreciate virtue: bad rulers can be like that too. The reason why good rulers manage to achieve desirable outcomes and bad rulers do not, is that they follow different Ways in pursuing their goals. To seek good outcomes by doing evil is a very different way of going about things from driving away evil in order to do good. Even a sage who does not model himself on the Way cannot attain virtue. And, a lesser man can achieve anything if he will only follow the teachings of the sages.

Having thus established that any leader who takes care to follow sagely models can satisfactorily apportion the land in his polity, Mitsugi turns to the territory itself. If it is not divided up in a properly ordered and fair manner, state income from taxes will not be adequate; and, if you overdo the taxes, the resources of the land will become exhausted. Mountain and forest areas, for example, will be ruined if arable land is allowed to go uncultivated. This is the beginning of poverty, where a great deal is extracted and very little put in. At that stage, a ruler is obliged to both borrow from others and raid his own realm. The more he consumes, the more he loses; and his endowment from Heaven (Nature) is lost forever.

In his recent article, Brett Walker gives an account of this kind of damage in the domain of Hachinohe, one of the three far north eastern

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[350] NMZ 2, "Ōbunshi", page 31.

[351] Loc. cit. The following paragraphs are paraphrases from the same page.

domains of Mutsu discussed in Chapter four, above. Unable to rely on taxing rice production, because of the climate, the domain encouraged farmers to engage in the slash-and-burn method to cultivate soybeans, which could be sold as a cash crop. Without intensive inputs of fertilizer, the soil became quickly depleted. As more and more land was cleared on the hillsides, not only did severe erosion and landslides cause loss of life and resources during the heavy rains often experienced in the region; but the wild boar that were endemic to the area lost their foraging territory, and took to rooting out farm crops for food. The results were harvest shortfalls and famine, resulting in loss of life.[352]

Mitsugi had probably heard about the calamity in Hachinohe, but it is hard to know whether or not he connected it with the principles of the king of Zhou, who "made uniform the units of land measure and had charts drawn up of the nine regions" that had submitted to him, by "using the numbers from the Yellow River chart and the Luo River diagram".[353] He then sets out a series of diagrams for dividing up a territory of 50 square *li*, remarking that when the nine-grade scale is applied, "One knows about places without going there, and one understands what to do without seeing the territory."[354] Allotting areas of land for the castle and administrative offices, he proceeds to suggest ways of calculating prices, stipends, profit margins, exchange rates between gold, silver and rice, and so on.

Setting the value of annual stipends, he goes on to assert, ought to be an ongoing process, based on averages over a period of up to ten generations. If the people became accustomed to such a system, even if prices fluctuated in the short term, they would be able to budget for taxes and their own welfare. That is why the kings in the age of the sages took taxes at a rate of only one

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[352] Brett L. Walker, "Commercial Growth and Environmental Change in Early Modern Japan." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 60, no. 2, May 2001, pages 329-351.
[353] NMZ 2, "Ōbunshi", page 31.
[354] Ibid., page 33.

tenth: their laws were modelled on the balance of nature and responded to the needs of the times.[355]

After this first basic outline of the ancient principles, Mitsugi launches into a critical assessment of the current practices of domain administrators in Japan. He begins by declaring that they ought to understand the Way of bringing stability to their domains by keeping the people in plenty. Confucius said that the lord is as a boat and his ministers are as the water. The water either keeps the boat afloat; or it capsizes the boat.[356] Yao said that when the wider world is in great turmoil, then stipends and incomes are wiped out for all eternity. That is why ministers who try to run the country by being mean with expenditure and always making economies and increasing taxes, are the same ones who do not take appropriate sentencing for robbers seriously (because they expect that widespread theft will be an outcome of their policies) Therefore, if the methods of accumulating wealth in a country are according to the Way, then it will survive; if they are not, it will fail. If your realm prospers, then your tax income will be enough, and to spare. If your income base is inadequate, that is because you do not understand the Way.[357]

He sets out a hexagon of profit and loss, and explains that it applies the Way by taking from the top and benefiting those at the bottom, which is regarded as "applying justice to advantage".[358] The high and the low are thereby kept in mutual contact, the high bestowing favours on the low and the low responding with affection for the high so that mutual feelings are close. Thus lasting stability, happiness and peace can be brought about if the lower benefit from the higher at the beginning, because everyone shares the benefits in the end. The *Yijing* says that when the high lose and the low benefit, then the happiness of the people will be unbounded.[359] The hexagon of the Way of loss, in contrast, brings about the impoverishment of the people through the exaction of taxes. The high and low are therefore negating each

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[355] Ibid., page 34.
[356] NMZ 2, "Ōbunshi", page 42.
[357] Loc. cit.
[358] Ibid., page 43.
[359] Loc. cit.

other: the low resent the high and the high detest the low, and feelings between them are distant. This is how a country reaches a state of poverty and exhaustion, leading to disaster and rebellion.

A little further on, Mitsugi addresses the idea of profit, commenting that while the common people desire profit, the moral man desires to know the Way. Even though there is a contradiction between these two things, unless the government acts in accordance with the Way, profit will not come to the country. The moral man's desire to know the Way is founded in his desire for his country to flourish, but if he loses sight of profit altogether, how can he make his country flourish. If the world were completely without profit, how would any life remain in it? In places where profit is to be found, everyone on earth will want to congregate. To places where there is human kindness, everyone on earth will be inclined to go. People never congregate in, or desire to go to, a place where there is impoverishment of resources and not enough of anything to go around.

The discussion then returns to the numbers and patterns of the universe, with Mitsugi stating that each of the sixty-four hexagrams, and the 384 trigrams they comprise, speaks of the presence and absence of benefit. The Way of benefit that applies to the *yin* and the *yang* and the eternal cycle of life is therefore what must be carefully investigated. And, he begins his investigation with the two categories of benefit and loss, from which he generates to five major categories of loss (失) and the five of gain (得), in the primordial patter of the five elements.[360]

(ii) Dividing the land and managing resources

Among the problems that Mitsugi addressed that seem more closely connected with the actual substance of bringing plenty to the land and its people were the storage of food grains in sufficient quantities to tide the domain over a disaster, and the establishment of farmland in advantageous situations, where sunlight and drainage conditions would be optimal.

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[360] NMZ 2, "Ōbunshi", page 44.

"Doryō bunsū" (Measurement and apportionment) is one of two substantial works of around fifty transcribed pages each, in which Mitsugi addressed the task of sharing out the resources of the domain. It is written in Japanese and its content is similar to that of "Keikoku doryō" (Measurement for administration), which is written in Chinese and comes before it.[361] Both chapters are based on the nine-rank scheme devised by the Duke of Chou, and the second begins with some strident statements about the provision of grain storage against want.

On the opening page, Mitsugi states that:

> Lacking a reserve of three years' food is to be in a state of crisis. Being without six years' reserves is to be in a state of want. A country that does not hold nine years' food in reserve is no longer a real country. But this is not merely a matter of storehouses. The small-minded follow the Way of storehouses, and that is the main cause of impoverishment. It is really a matter of appropriate measurement and apportionment.[362]

He goes on to explain that it was part of the wisdom of the sages to recognise that Heaven waxes and wanes and therefore there will always be good and bad seasons. It was mankind's role to recognise that state of affairs, and work out the adjustments necessary for maintaining normal conditions. That would be done by long-term, basic planning that included the proper division of the country along the principles outlined in "Ōbunshi", above.

Mitsugi sets out the nine types of land use in a country, ranging from the area given to the castle, official residences, shrines and temples, through farmlands for growing grains and vegetables, to wilder areas given over for firewood and fertilizer collection. In each of nine notional divisions of the territory, all containing land used in the various ways, is then allotted its share of residential land, farmland from which stipends would be derived, empty space and grasslands, roadways, fields, mountains and hills, rivers and streams, rocks and sand, rice paddy woods and forests, and swamps and marshes. The principle underlying this torturous process seems to be that if all the available

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[361] NMZ 2, "Keikoku doryō", pages 149 - 189. "Doryō bunsū", pages 191-257.
[362] NMZ 2, "Doryō bunsū", pages 191-92.

land is put to suitable use, and its various resources divided equitably, if not equally, between the different socio/occupational strata of people so that all basic needs were met, then over time neither want nor surplus would result.

Mitsugi's attitude to the duties and functions of commercial households was similar, though the context in which they worked and the resources they distributed were different.[363] They were also, however, according the views expressed in "Shōka ridō" to be aware that just as in Heaven there are the changes of waxing and waning, so on earth there are fluctuations between plenty and dearth, presence and absence, and for men there are movements between profit and loss, advantage and disadvantage. The merchants' Way of profit was to work to create a balance so that there were never extreme shortages or great surpluses.

Mitsugi conveys a strong sense of social and political hierarchy, but he also repeatedly refers to the importance of benevolence and providing for the poor. In this piece he complains that because distinctions between rich and poor have not disappeared, and the domain cannot meet all its needs without official borrowing, and merchants cannot make big profits without lending out large amounts of money, and no-one can show benevolence without feeling any loss, the entire world moves in the opposite direction and no-one ever takes the Way of Heaven. As a result, everyone is poor. Is there, he asks, a kind of magic spell that would enable us to live according to the Way of Heaven and yet selfishly use all the resources of our land, to continue extracting taxes at the rate of half each person's tiny budget until the country's finances are healthy, and yet have no-one suffering the slightest hardship?[364] It does not seem to me that this piece implies that merchants should work for the good of the state, so much as that they should not deliberately set out to profit from the loss or misfortune of poorer people, particularly those in farming villages.

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[363] NMZ 2, "Shōka ridō", pages 303 - 345; and pages 347-357.

[364] Ibid., page 304.

In some general remarks on a book written by someone else about ways of circulating wealth, Mitsugi makes it quite clear that he does not approve of the expedient of assigning small parcels of land to retainers because there is no money in the treasury to pay their allowances. There is no way then of ensuring that the units are viable or well managed, and more and more land falls into disuse when those who cultivate it fail to make ends meet.[365] In the long run, a great deal of harm is done to the polity if its territory becomes fragmented, and then more and more land falls into the hands of fewer and fewer people leaving many villagers vulnerable to poverty and destitution.

III Down to earth

(i) Applying mathematics

In contrast to his ruminations and calculations based on mystical numbers and ancient principles, Mitsugi also worked out a great many sample problems that are firmly grounded in recognisable properties of right-angled triangles and parallel lines. The three sections on surveying methods at the beginning of Volume Four of the *Complete Works*, for example, begin with measurements calculated in plane triangles, and then moves on to some problems applying methods of scale drawing. These methods are applied to calculating the height of a nearby hill, or dividing up oddly shaped fields.

In the third section, beginning on page 121, he actually explains how to construct a set of compasses, and then demonstrates the solution of some problems dealing with fractions using sectors of a circle.[366] He then returns to more complex surveying tasks in sample neighbourhoods with hilly and plain areas, sketching out three-dimensional diagrams to illustrate his methods. Judging from the markings on the diagrams, he was making extensive use of similar triangles.[367]

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[365] NMZ 3, "Tsūzai hitokoto hanrei" (Explanatory notes on the circulation of wealth), pages 305-328.
[366] NMZ 4, "Chōken jutsu", pages 121-24.
[367] See, for example, the diagram on page 149 in NMZ 4, "Chōken jutsu".

At a more basic level, but with the unexpected intrusion of *yin* and *yang*, is a work on elementary mathematics that was developed while he was in Kawaratai. It contains a quite ingenious explanation of place value based on an example using units for measuring length: after counting the *ri*, if there is something left over, we measure that with a smaller unit. So it is with hundred thousands, ten thousands, thousands, and so on.[368] He demonstrates division and multiplication by using examples from real life, such as dividing a number of people in given proportions among several villages (an eighth-grade problem in Australia!) or paying registration fees for given numbers of horses and cattle at different rates.[369] Further multiplication and division exercises are based on problems using the principle of moments and a diagram picturing an elementary weighing device made of sticks, twine and a two *monme* stone. One other interesting section on mathematics is an illustrated set of explanations about how to do division and multiplication problems using a nine-by-nine, eighty-one square number board and the rules of place value. It seems likely that methods based on the number nine would have appealed to Mitsugi because of its association with the Luo River diagram.

These are all ordinary problems in mensuration, and they are solved using standard traditional Chinese methods, not resembling in any significant way the more elegant and complex display problems of the Japanese *wasan* mathematical tradition, and all demonstrably useful. From Mitsugi's point of view, he was also engaged in rational and useful activity when he spent time and energy working out mathematical solutions based on cosmic numerology for problems of supply and demand - of land, money and goods - in the domain, or the proper positions of government bureaucrats in a hierarchy.

(ii) Being useful

The matter of *yō* (用), meaning usefulness, or practical applicability, was of importance in Mitsugi's view of life as a worthwhile individual as well as a *bushi*-official. This idea in his written works has been explained by Kojima and

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[368] NMZ 4, "Shōgaku sanpō", pages 201-205.
[369] Ibid., pages 205 and 212.

mentioned by Ravina.[370] Suffice it to say that in Mitsugi's universe, unlike Yamaga Sokō's, poetry clearly had an important social and cultural function. Sokō wrote that:

> In Sagely Learning, neither literary study nor scholarship per se is necessary. If each day we concentrate on implementing what we have learned in ordinary affairs, that is enough, and no special effort or method of holding to reverence or the practice of quiet-sitting is necessary.[371]

Mitsugi clearly agreed with him on the subject of plumbing the depths of ones own individual psyche to discover the Way, as we have seen in his distaste for the principles expressed in the *Daigaku*. On the other hand, it is possible to speculate that Mitsugi found it expedient to emphasize his adherence to Sokō's view of the world because of the official Tsugaru connections with Yamaga household and military arts tradition.

Mitsugi's works indicate that he was, in fact, much more inclined to speculative thought about the order of the universe than was Sokō, whose mind seems to have been focussed very much on the given world of Tokugawa Japan and its social order. It is instructive that he worked out his commitment to *jitsugaku* (scholarship grounded in real, practical truth) by teaching traditional martial arts; while Mitsugi tried, though in vain, to derive rational, universal principles for re-ordering society and politics, taught applied mathematics, and altered the entitlements of the poor so that they wouldn't starve to death.

Mitsugi's deep interest in numbers was a rational extension of the concern his expressed with rational order and productive functions for everyone in the society he was part of, and the survival of the Tsugaru domain. Mark Ravina's claim that in Mitsugi's scheme of things, "merchants served an important but limited function", is probably accurate; but one of the strongest

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[370] Kojima, "Thought and Practicality", Ravina, *Land and Lordship*, pages 123-24. Ravina points out the impracticality of Mitsugi's assumption in his trope for free-flowing commercial commodities, that access to an adequate water supply was free and equal in Tsugaru. I should have thought the periodic overflowing of wells by the heavens with more water than could ever be coped with would have been more relevant grounds for quibbling.

[371] Quoted in Minamoto Ryōen's seminal essay, "'Jitsugaku' and Empirical Rationalism in the First Half of the Tokugawa Period," in de Bary and Bloom, eds., *Principle and Practicality*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1979.

messages conveyed in Mitsugi's political writings is that he believed the same thing of everyone in Tsugaru, from the daimyo to the daughters of the poorest landless agricultural labourer.[372] He is certainly recorded as having been able, himself, to switch between wildly different functions and tasks and approach them all with equal zeal: from visiting one of the most influential households attached to the imperial court in Kyoto and arranging for its patriarch to update the Tsugaru genealogy, to surveying drainage patterns and teaching reading and arithmetic to illiterate villagers while serving out a criminal sentence in an isolated village.

Even when he was solving problems on the ground, so to speak, elements of his belief in consistent cosmic patterns still occupied his mind, though, as can be seen in the Kawaratai textbook. *Yin* and *yang* were part of his rational universe, at a time when even the most scientifically enquiring minds in the land were only just beginning to postulate proto-scientific arguments against any connection between Japan's earthly socio-political order and the workings of the cosmos. Mitsugi's sustained attempts to understand and apply a set of principles for good government that he believed had been established in the distant past seem considerably more enlightened and benign than the imposition by the Meiji government of a xenophobic and mythical cosmology on Japan's modern citizenry. His decision to redistribute material goods according to principles derived from the I-Ching and the Duke of Chou's administrative order also compares quite favourably with the faith that informs much economic policy making today in the unimpeded mechanisms of commercial and financial markets.

IV Locating Mitsugi as a thinker

Because so little is known about Mitsugi's early education, his personal contacts and correspondence, it is not possible to identify his intellectual peers or colleagues with any certainty. His apparently close friendship with the domain elder, Tsugaru Mondo, and their shared commitment to radical

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[372] Ravina, *Land and Lordship*, page 124.

reform of the domain's political and economic administration, perhaps indicates commonly-held convictions about the duties of administrator-*bushi* derived from Yamaga Sokō's thought. And, if Yamagami's account of the relationship between Mitsugi and Ashibane Chōjūrō is at all accurate, he shared many scholarly interests with this Kyoto-educated merchant, whose family had moved from Nanbu to Tsugaru after renouncing their *bushi* status.[373]

To place Mitsugi as a thinker among others of the Tokugawa period, we need to turn to the contents of the published *Works*. Based on such criteria as the traditions he found congenial, the subjects and issues he chose to address, and the authorities he drew on, we can arrive at some tentative conclusions about his intellectual world and the currents of thought he might have been exposed to. There is no known evidence, though, to link him directly with any thinkers other than those he lists in passage quoted below, and the few already mentioned in previous chapters of this study.

(i) His affiliations

In "Shigaku yōben" Mitsugi provides an unequivocal statement of the scholarly traditions with which he associated himself:

> For more than 3000 years, since the time of the sage kings and Confucius, only Mencius and Zhuangzi have truly understood the sages. In Japan, there are only three genuine scholars. They are Yamaga Sokō, Ogyū Sorai and Dazai Shundai.[374]

For him, as his writings strongly attest, political wisdom was founded in the way of the ancient sages, as revealed in the original Confucian canon. From the institutions and principles of the sage kings and the wisdom of Confucius in those texts, he gained inspiration and models in his role as a domain official. As we saw in this chapter and the previous one, the *Zhouli* and the *Yijing* were of particular significance to him in this respect.

In Mencius, Mitsugi would have encountered the idea of the innate moral worth of each human individual and social group. His admiration of

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[373] Yamagami, *Tsugaru Yoake*, Vol 2, pages 179-80. See page 88 for comment on Yamagami's work.

[374] NMZ 1, "Shigaku yōben", pages 300-301.

Mencius was not in keeping with the view of Ogyū Sorai. In his essay, "Bendō", Sorai criticized Itō Jinsai on the grounds that reliance on the Mencius led him to give the idea of universal human goodness precedence in his thought, over the ethical and benevolent qualities of the sage kings, as elucidated by Confucius.[375]

The study of Daoist texts, particularly the *Zhuangzi*, provided many Tokugawa thinkers with foundations for positive, optimistic and objective ways of thinking about the natural world and the human condition. Daoism was a formative influence on Kaiho Seiryō, and another prominent *bushi*-turned-scholar, Ogata Kōan, an eminent teacher of Dutch language and science in Osaka. Mitsugi might have drawn from the *Zhuangzi* the objective and proto-scientific attitudes he took to practical problems in the domain, but this text was also clearly an aesthetic and literary inspiration - though even the old hermit character through whom he speaks in *Miyama Sōji* has an air of distance and objectivity when he muses about political and economic affairs. *See pages 53-54.*

Although Mitsugi's thought is not modelled consistently on the work of any of the three Japanese *kogaku* scholars he praises, he did share with each of them concern over social, political or economic issues, as well as the strong emphasis they all placed on the direct interpretation of Confucianism's classical texts, without resort to the mediation of commentaries written by Han and Song thinkers. Since Sokō and Sorai were two of the three key figures responsible for positioning ancient learning during the seventeenth century as a powerful rival tradition, to both the Cheng-Zhu neo-Confucianism of the Hayashi family and the Wang Yang Ming school as well, it is not surprising that they were two of Mitsugi's most respected Japanese forebears. Dazai Shundai (1680-1747) studied with Sorai as an adult, and he clearly

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[375] Nijita, *Tokugawa political writings*, pages 9, 17.

appealed to Mitsugi because of the thoroughness with which he analysed issues in Tokugawa political economy.[376]

Mitsugi, in identifying himself with the *kogaku* tradition, followed Sorai's example and devoted himself to the way of the sages. He learned to write competent standard classical Chinese and to compose acceptable Chinese verse, but there is no evidence that he ever attempted to speak the language, or that he found it important to reproduce the music of the ancients. His estimation of the *Mengzi* and the *Yijing* as important classical sources was shared with Sorai's *kogaku* interlocuter, the Kyoto merchant, Itō Jinsai.

Unlike Yamaga Sokō (1622-85) and his contemporaries Kumazawa Banzan (1619-91) of the Wang Yang Ming tradition, and Hayashi Razan, promoter of the Cheng-Zhu school, Mitsugi left no evidence either that he was exercised by the historical fact that the sages and Confucius were Chinese, and not Japanese.[377] His identity as a *bushi*-retainer and scholar, located physically and politically in Tsugaru, but intellectually and historically within the Chinese cultural sphere, seems to have been firm and untroubled. Like Sorai, he seemed to believe that the sages and their social worlds were not necessarily any more distant from him and his than they were from his contemporaries in China and theirs. He left no hint either of ambitions to serve the bakufu in Edo, or a daimyo of another domain, as Sorai, Sokō, Razan and Banzan all did.

In contrast to Sorai's claim that *bushi* ought to live in the countryside and be in active contact with the farmers and villagers on whom they depended

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[376] The general points made in comparisons between Mitsugi and other thinkers in the following paragraphs are taken from the following works unless other references are given:
Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion*. Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, eds., *Principle and Practicality*. Wm. Theodore de Bary and Ryūsaku Tsunoda, comps. *Sources of Japanese Tradition*. John Whitney Hall, *Tanuma Okitsugu*. H. Harootunian, *Things Seen and Unseen*. Maruyama, Masao, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*. Tetsuo Najita and Irwin Scheiner, eds., *Japanese Thought in the Tokugawa Period, 1600-1868*. Tetsuo Najita, *Visions of Virtue in Tokugawa Japan*, *Tokugawa Political Writings*, and "History and nature in eighteenth-century Tokugawa thought", in Hall et al., eds., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol.4. Kate Wildman Nakai, *Shogunal Politics*. and "The Naturalization of Confucianism in Tokugawa Japan", and Herman Ooms, *Tokugawa Ideology*.

[377] Kate Wildman Nakai, "The Naturalization of Confucianism in Tokugawa Japan: The Problem of Sinocentrism", *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 40: no.1, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard-Yenjing Institute, 1980, pages 157-199,.

for survival, Mitsugi's engagement with the Hōreki financial and commercial reforms involved efforts to cut Tsugaru *bushi* off from the land and move them into the wider money economy through annulling their *jikata chigyō* investitures. It is easy to see the inspiration of Shundai's thought here. Dazai Shundai (1680-1747) recommended *bushi* participation in commerce and financial exchange as the only alternative to their permanent decline as a status group, not to mention general political and economic chaos. This generally pessimistic view was shared by Sorai, Sokō and Banzan, who all recognised that the lack of economic productivity among the *bushi* was untenable.

Mitsugi's urgent sense of obligation to be actively involved in domain affairs can be seen, too, as an echo of Yamaga Sokō's strong ideas about the vocation of the *bushi*, but it is not so simple to place a number of other elements of his thought in relation to the writings of these three thinkers.

(ii) Mitsugi's contemporaries

By the early 1700's, serious questions had already arisen in the Tokugawa polity about the proper basis of social and political knowledge; and on the answers to those questions depended other definitions crucial to the formation of social and political values: definitions of virtue, verifiable truth, and justice. The turn-of-century disquiet was prompted by the visible poverty of lesser *bushi* and villagers in many rural areas, by growing indebtedness among the highest orders of the *bushi* elite, and by rapidly expanding financial and commercial activity. Contenders for recognition as the possessors of authoritative knowledge sometimes called their scholarly pursuits *jitsugaku*, to emphasize either the substantial, moral quality of their wisdom in contrast to the empty falsehoods of Buddhist or Daoist beliefs, or else the real, practical applicability of their knowledge in contrast to the self-searching of some Cheng-Zhu followers.

Thus, when Mitsugi was young, the three main categories of epistemological authority were: the natural universe, revealed by proto-

scientific, practical investigation; the wisdom of the ancients, which was revealed, according to *kogaku* enthusiasts, by the study of appropriate ancient texts; and the great universal Principle (*ri* 理) inherent in all beings and phenomena, which was revealed, according to Cheng-Zhu scholars, by plumbing the principle in one's individual mind and/or various external phenomena. One popular test of the validity of scholarly endeavour was the usefulness that could be claimed for its outcomes.

Andō Shōeki (1703-62) was born just a decade earlier than Mitsugi, and lived and worked in close proximity to Tsugaru. He denied the validity of all enquiries, schools of thought and authorities. Instead, he advocated demolishing the entire Tokugawa social, intellectual and political edifice. Shōeki practised medicine in the Hachinohe domain, and, like Mitsugi, witnessed first hand the hardship and misery caused in Mutsu by famines and the unequal allocation of resources.

Outraged by the way in which the *bushi* elite expropriated what farmers produced, Shōeki railed against the teachings of all sages, saints, Buddhas and Confucians. In his view, all traditions of thought or belief were nothing but artifices invented to justify socio-economic hierarchies and the parasitic existence of those who did not produce their own food. Unlike Mitsugi, whose reformist activism was motivated by belief in the validity of the sages and Confucius, Shōeki's response in the 1750's was to formulate an egalitarian social ideal. Men and women would live in monogamous relationships, producing food and clothing for themselves and their offspring in harmony with the rhythms of the natural universe, unimpeded by the laws of lords, shoguns, sages and deities.

In far away Kyushu, and in contrast with Shōeki, who would have eliminated the need for money and financial institutions altogether, Miura Baien (1723-89) addressed the plight of destitute village farmers by drawing up a co-operative saving plan. He later developed a sophisticated theory of value. Like Shōeki, Baien rejected history and religion as sources of truth, but

instead of doing away with such human inventions as money he strove to analyse and them objectively in terms of universal natural principle. He held that:

> The comprehensive way of understanding Heaven-and-earth is the study of the logic of things . . . and verifying everything by empirical evidence.[378]

Having observed, for example, that commercial mechanisms and financial institutions had combined to increase the value of money, making everyday goods too expensive for rural households, he suggested a return to social utility as the sole criterion for the value of coins, rather than the scarcity and decorative appeal that had made gold and silver so sought after. The use of iron instead of precious metals in the production of money, according to Baien, would help match value with utility and volume.

Mitsugi, too, was well aware of the negative effects on society at large of the rising cost of living caused by fluctuating relations between grain prices and currency values. He was not a radical thinker, but he did challenge social norms by expecting everyone in Tsugaru to co-operate with equal commitment to the public good, regardless of occupation or rank. His practical solutions at the time of the Hōreki crisis were based on similar insights to those articulated by Baien; but they were aimed at intervening mechanically between the most damaging exchange processes and the disadvantaged parties. In the early stages, it was the domain treasury he sought to protect by circumventing the most costly exchanges in Osaka. When the domain was directly threatened by famine, he could only advocate doing away with money-grain exchange altogether and redistribute food resources directly.

(ii) Later currents

Just one generation after Mitsugi, another far more radical reformer also based his policy suggestions on painstaking measurements, surveys and calculations. Kaiho Seiryō (1755-1817), a scholar who had abandoned *bushi* status, was influenced by Shundai's treatises on commerce and exchange. Seiryō formulated a principle of the measurability of all phenomena to address

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[378] Tsunoda et al. eds., *Sources of Japanese Tradition,* Vol. 1, page 482.

the problem of growing impoverishment among the *bushi*, who, he claimed, were ignorant of social reality and the principles of commercial exchange even though their existence depended on them. Seiryō studied under a Sorai disciple, was a student of Daoism, and admired Sorai and Arai Hakuseki, because they "discussed things with real facts in mind".[379] Travelling widely to collect data, he worked alongside merchants and influential farmers to allocate numerical values to a wide range of material, social, economic and political phenomena, including personal loyalty and noble titles. Seiryō claimed that everything in heaven and earth could be assigned a value according to the profit or benefit it produced, and therefore could be made subject to commodification and exchange.

As well as their use of mathematics, measurement and proportions in collecting and marshalling objective data, Seiryō and Mitsugi held in common the conviction that *bushi* should abandon the attitude that money matters were beneath them and begin to deal with their own financial affairs as well as taking charge of official money transactions and commercial ventures in their domains. While it does not seem that Seiryō would have contemplated, as Mitsugi did, the appointment of wealthy farmers or merchants to official posts previously filled by *bushi,* the two men did, however, also share a sense of reformist urgency. Seiryō opposed the attitudes of those who would "leave things as they are" and "carry on as usual without changing things", declaring that people should broach social and economic reform as if they were "about to embark on a difficult manouevre" such as "walking in deep water". They needed to "roll up their cuffs" and proceed with "courage and decisiveness".[380]

Another thinker of Seiryō's generation, and one he greatly admired, was the Kansai-born Yamagata Bantō (1748 - 1821). Bantō's early experience was in practical political economy, but he later developed an interest in scientific thinking and learned astronomy. The strategy Bantō devised when he was given the task of engineering the Date (Sendai) domain out of its long-term debts

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[379] Maruyama, *Studies*, page 294.
[380] Ibid, pages 296-297.

while he was working in an Osaka financial house is strikingly similar to financial reform policies planned by Mitsugi. In Bantō's scheme, transactions between Sendai, agents in Edo, and the financier in Osaka were all direct. All the hard currency in the domain was collected and invested through one financier, while internal paper currency was used for all transactions within the domain.

Bantō believed, like Mitsugi, that since merchants did not pay agricultural taxes they should to contribute to the public good by keeping markets functioning smoothly through contributing their wealth and talents.[381] Another point on which these two scholars agreed was their refusal to believe in disembodied spirits, magic or any other superstitions. Bantō's claim that religious traditions were based on fabrications and mystifications was, like Shōeki's iconoclasm, far stronger than Mitsugi's controversial demurral at the miracle of perspiration on Acala's brow, but they were all in the same vein.

One other thinker, who experimented with upland rice, like Mitsugi, and whose plans for an ideal society recall those of Andō Shōeki, with whom the comparisons began. Satō Nobuhiro (1769-1850) travelled, like Kaiho Seiryō, and gathered empirical data from a wide range of regions. Like Andō Shōeki, he was disturbed by rural poverty and decline; and repelled as well by the extent of infanticide he saw in the poorest areas of the northeast and southwest, including no doubt Shōeki's old home district. Inspired by the ancient sages, Nobuhiro claimed that proper management of the land and more appropriate institutions would relieve much of the distress he had witnessed. Like Mitsugi, he experimented with crops, including upland rice, that suited conditions in many domains better than paddy rice. Further inspired by ideas including Sorai's concern over institutions, Hirata Atsutane's Shintō, and the mercantilism of various European states, he planned a utopian, united Japanese polity in which industries would be perfected, goods circulated and government authority centralised. Unlike Shōeki, however, he did not envision a society in which the *bushi* would not be in charge.

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[381] Najita, *Visions of Virtue*, page 250.

Choosing stars from the galaxy that was eighteenth-century Japanese thought is a random exercise at best, particularly since the data on Mitsugi's intellectual interlocutors is so sparse. The themes have recurred, however, of status and obligation, the value and uses of money, the plight of the rural poor, the indebtedness of the *bushi*, and the authority of religious or spiritual beliefs, practical knowledge and historical knowledge. These identified with a number of different traditions and drew upon a variety of authorities.

Yamaga Sokō, for example, started as a student of Cheng Zhu neo-Confucianism in the Hayashi school. He had also studied Daoism and Buddhism before he turned to the study of the ancients and then Shintō as well. Sokō believed that for the sake of the country *bushi* should research the weapons technology and military strategy brought by foreign ships to Japan, which made him an early supporter of European studies too. In contrast, Baien, as a village doctor's son, studied medicine and Chinese classics at first, but was later exposed to serious mathematics and Western astronomy through contacts in Nagasaki. Untroubled by *bushi* status consciousness, he became convinced that the truth, reason and order of all things would only by revealed after thorough empirical study of the natural universe and man's social existence using objective, dialectical principles.

It is obvious, then, that in his reliance on ancient texts as the basic sources for the principles of practical domain administration and distributive justice, in his commitment to the acquisition of practical skills and empirical knowledge, and in his identification with the *Zhuangzi* in his contemplative retirement years, Mitsugi exhibited an eclecticism that was not at all unusual in his time. He shared particular concerns with different thinkers of the 250-year period, from the earliest *kogaku* scholars to the later students of empirical science. It was the circumstances of his life and career in the remote Tsugaru domain that determined the ways in which his intellectual activities worked their way out in practice.

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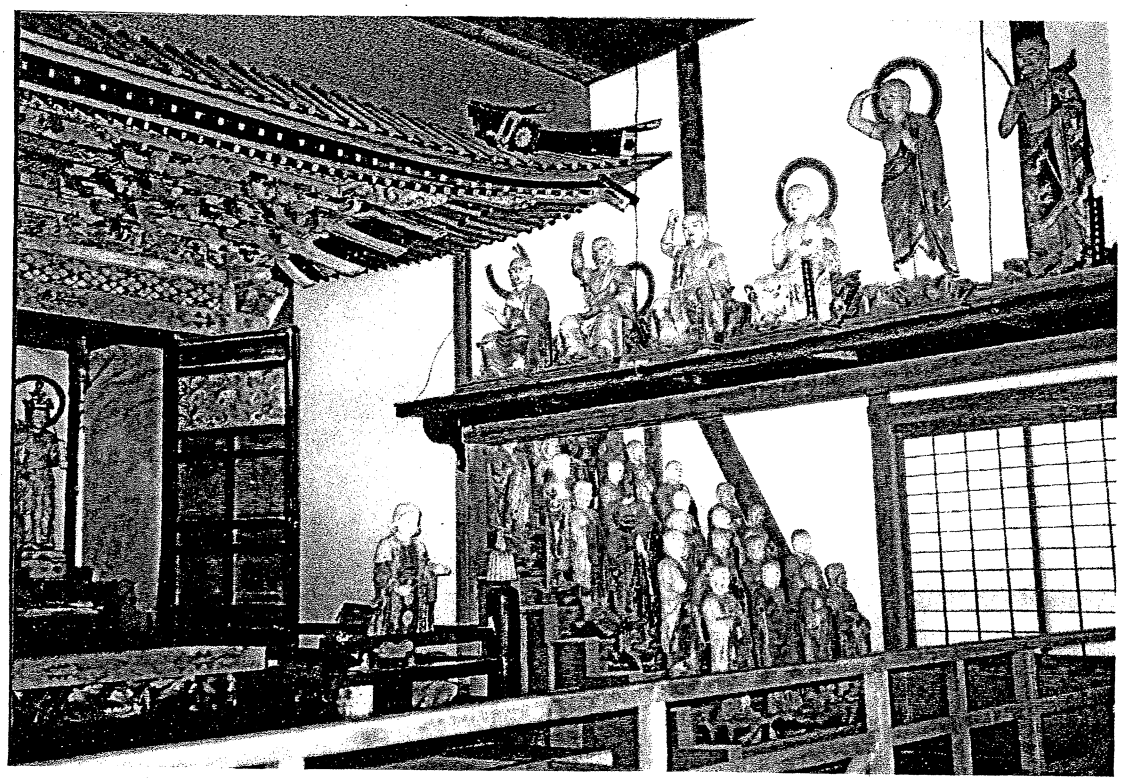



Extra Plates: The ahats from the summit of Mount Iwaki in their present accommodation in Chōshōji temple

Conclusion

The power to feed the people in a far-off place

> Question: what you have set down above, is just about sending out rice and taking in money. Is there a difference between that and putting out money to pay for bringing in rice? I would say there is no difference.
> Answer: The first makes rice the priority; the second puts money first. Outside the cities, prices are high. In the capital the price is low. Both these facts come from the natural circumstances of geographical distance. Nyūi Mitsugi.[381]

> And still the rain falls, and roads, bridges, rice-fields, trees, and hill-sides are being swept in a common ruin towards the Tsugaru Strait, so tantalisingly near; and the simple people are calling on the forgotten gods of the rivers and the hills, on the sun and moon, and all the host of heaven, to save them from this "plague of immoderate rain and waters."
> Isabella Bird.[382]

A foreign contemporary of Nyūi Mitsugi's, who shared his scepticism towards religious and superstitious beliefs, left behind influential texts on such subjects as the nature and outward forms of virtue, and the motivation of wealth. And, although Adam Smith (1723-90) is now most studied as "the founder of modern political economy", like some later thinkers in that tradition - Mill and Marx, for example - he was a serious social theorist and philosopher.[383] It is from that nineteenth-century notion of political economy, in which state, social and religious powers are all considered relevant to the shaping of economic outcomes, that I have drawn the various threads of my argument.

On a map of the eastern provinces of Japan drawn by a Korean emissary during the fifteenth century, the province of Mutsu occupies the eastern two thirds of Tohoku, and the "large village of Tsugaru" (津軽大里) the western third. The province of Dewa is far to the south, its northern border at the

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[381] NMZ 2, "Shōka ridō", page 308.
[382] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, London: J. Murray, 1888, page 355.
[383] Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pages 743-44.

same latitude as the Shirakawa barrier. Within Mutsu, but towards the border with Tsugaru, the term *Ichi* (夷地) is entered. The island now known as Hokkaido is labelled *Itō* (夷島). Tsugaru was thus understood by our cartographer's informants in Kyoto to be surrounded by, or contiguous with, lands occupied by the *Emishi*.

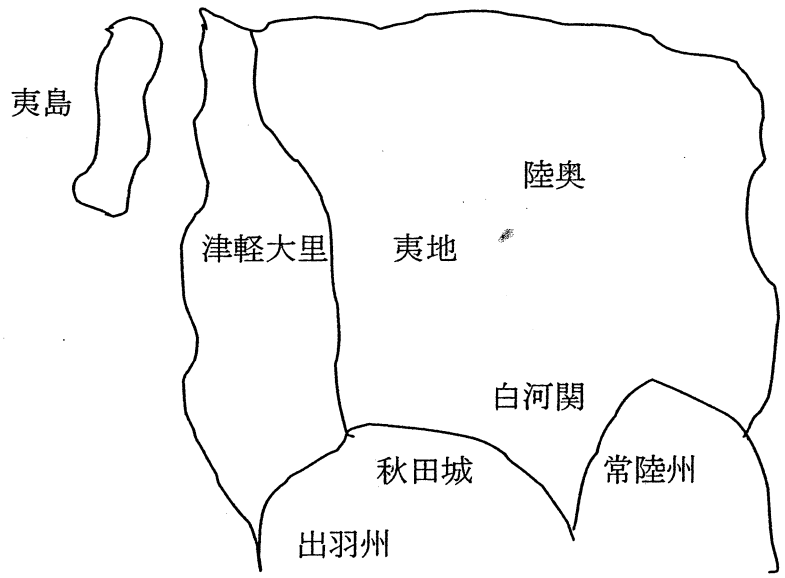

Figure 8: Territories marked in part of the map made in the fifteenth century by a Korean emissary to Japan
Sources: Map based on "Kaitō shokoku ki" (Record of countries in the eastern seas), reproduced in Morita, ed., *Aomori-ken no rekishi,* page 180.

Compared with regions of Japan to the south, east, and west, Tsugaru was in fact a place with ambivalent relations to the country's political and institutional centre at that time, and was to remain so for more than another century. Although the port of Tosaminato had long been integrated into a trading network linking mainland China, Korea, and the island of Ezo with Japan, the penetration of Tsugaru's settlements and fortresses by land had been sporadic and partial. Most conspicuously enduring was the presence of Buddhist priests, who engaged in esoteric Tendai or *Shugendō* practices, or

else taught the compassion of the *Amida* and *Dainichi* Buddhas, leaving their *itabi* as traces.

When Nobunaga began his drive towards the unification of military and political authority, Tsugaru was scarcely on the map, so to speak, and when Ōura Tamenobu thrust the region, and himself, into Hideyoshi's consciousness, it was at a time when the targets of the latter's ambitions were beyond the opposite boundaries of Japan, in Korea and China. Even if we avoid terms like parvenu and traitor, it is still the case that Tsugaru as a domain was definitely a latecomer so far as the Tokugawa settlement was concerned. The Nanbu, and Satake daimyo families, for example, who presided over Tsugaru's large adjoining neighbours, both had long histories managing substantial territories and armies.

Political power in eighteenth-century Tsugaru was an amalgam of constantly shifting fields of influence. Some insight into the sources of that power is essential to an understanding of the nature of famines, even though their defining features as disasters were primarily economic and social, culminating in large numbers of the poor starving to death because they could not afford to buy food. Tsugaru's political economy, as I have interpreted its significance in relation to famine, was shaped by four sources of influence. They were: the domain's geographic location and climate; the authority of the incumbent daimyo in relation to the central power of the shogunate; the economic forces mobilised by the bakuhan system of shared power; and a number of ideas, beliefs and practices that were rooted in the local landscape and its history, as well as in various Shinto, Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist traditions. While Shinto traditions were at that time primarily local, those of the Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist cultural spheres were influential through the entirety of Tokugawa Japan, and far beyond its closed borders.

For a substantial part of the seventeenth century, the domain of Tsugaru was establishing itself. Natural resources and manpower were poured into building projects in the new capital, as well as flood control and irrigation infrastructure in the establishment of huge areas of new rice paddy.

Compared with areas further south that had been developed under *Sengoku* daimyos like the Takeda of Kai, the Tsugaru plain was virgin territory waiting to be opened up for cultivation. This could have made for an economic advantage in the medium term, since the domain was willing to place *bushi*-retainers on rural fiefs in newly-developed areas and was therefore briefly in a position to manage the ratio of enfeoffed retainers to farmer-producers to the advantage of its treasury.

From the very start, however, a significant number of retainers, who had long been established in their fiefs, were reluctant either to move away to the capital or to accept their stipends as treasury payments. Apart from those older households, the domain added to the complexity and stagnation of its economic life by periodically trying to move *bushi* from urban areas back onto the land. Two further drawbacks also connected with Tsugaru's location, were the weather and the markets.

Whether or not volcanic eruptions or the often mooted "little ice age" were responsible, Tsugaru's weather during the Tokugawa period was not suited to the cultivation of rice as the primary source of official income and popular sustenance. Improvements in agricultural technology and civil engineering skills since then have meant that it is now possible to control the waters of the Iwaki River system, but that was not until well into the twentieth century. During crucial stages when the domain was being established, and into the eighteenth century, significant outlays in manpower and resources were wasted on riparian works. Kondo has pointed out that during the twentieth century, even without regular major floods, there were still sufficiently cold summer temperatures every three or four decades for rice yields to plummet for several years. Methods of raising rice seedlings under plastic, and warming water before it is circulated to paddy fields for planting out, have been developed, but the technology and materials required for combating climatic conditions were simply not available to Tokugawa-period farmers.

Tsugaru's very existence as a new polity depended on its continued acceptance by the shogun and bakufu in Edo. The daimyos of the seventeenth

century could therefore not afford to appear ungenerous in their expenditure on gifts, performances of fealty, and the material accoutrements of domainal status. The costs of substantial building and infrastructure programs in Hirosaki, establishing and maintaining two sizeable residential compounds in Edo, and another in Kyoto, were added to the expenses of riparian works and the *sankin kōtai* process.[384] Furthermore, the spending habits of the privileged strata were clearly profligate, as instanced by the lavish performances put on by the domain when Nobuyasu first arrived in the domain.

Added to overspending, the actual ways in which the domain's income was handled exacerbated the problem: each year, grain from the agricultural tax intake was set aside for retainer allowances and castle needs, and the rest was shipped to the domain's dealers in Osaka to be exchanged for silver and gold. Gold transfers were then arranged by financial agents and sent to the domain's finance office in Edo. Silver and copper cash would also be sent back to Tsugaru. The domain was therefore not in control of the exchange and handling processes in either of the major market places. That was why, when he was put in charge of the Hōreki reforms, one of the first things Mitsugi did was arrange to store rice in the domain and ship it off in periodic instalments to directly meet payments in Edo. Not only did this policy fulfil the ruler's duty to store grain against famines, it cut out a number of exchange processes.

Despite Tsugaru's performance in outstripping all other domains in the project of increasing productivity by opening up new fields for rice production, the official accounts were in chronic deficit before the mid 1700's. Then, a series of disastrous floods caused such harvest shortfalls that the state of the domain's affairs approached bankruptcy. Apart from dealing with the crisis through new deals with market financiers, and arranging granary storage in Tsugaru for the new harvest, in his position as chief reformer Mitsugi tried to change the domain's spending habits. That raises the question of entitlements.

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[384] See Tsukahira, *Feudal Control*, Chapter IV, for an account of the expenses involved in the *sankin kōtai*.

Mitsugi repeatedly expressed a very strong sense of social hierarchy and orders of privilege, which can be seen in the number of graded divisions in his breakdown of the population in "Setsuyōsoku" (Rules for economizing in the use of resources) for the calculation of their living costs.[385] Alongside that, however, he set out equally robust ideas about the duty of governments to care for their people: not to make them all equals, but to give them all equal chances of surviving, and living productive lives appropriate to their occupational status, and their position within that status.

The question of status, occupation and class is a complex one, but Mitsugi wrote frequently of all men being engaged in a particular occupation, and contributing usefully to the polity in that context: even in the case of the religious, who should concentrate on offering prayers for the prosperity of the domain and the health of the daimyo. He himself is recorded to have appointed merchants and farmers to official posts customarily held by *bushi,* so it does not seem that he adhered strictly to the hereditary principle, but instead appointed capable individuals, whatever their birth status. It seems to have been a practice in the domain, too, to appoint *bushi* of merit to elevated positions in the administration, as we have seen in the promotions of members of the Yamaga family, and of Mitsugi himself.

There is evidence in the documents compiled from old diaries that it was relatively privileged persons and institutions in Tsugaru who were most incommoded by the Hōreki reform policies, and the most vocal about the inconvenience and discomfort they suffered. These were people from the entrenched commercial and religious establishments, or from land-holding retainer families who were accustomed to extracting and disposing of their own income. In Edo it was the conservative political advisor, Matsudaira who was convinced that Mitsugi was corrupt. We do not know about the vast illiterate majority of Tsugaru's inhabitants. We do know that it was a well-fed man who complained that the inconvenience caused by the reforms was "ten times worse than the upheavals caused by a harvest failure".

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[385] NMZ 2, "Setsuyōsoku", pages 259-267.

Clearly, the ways of life to which privileged and relatively wealthy groups had become accustomed were significantly disrupted by the imposition of Mitsugi's reform policies. Retainers holding substantial landed fiefs, wealthy land-owning farming households, and merchants not holding privileged official posts were all inconvenienced and deprived. And furthermore, by insisting that all shrines and temples participate in property surveys, by questioning the validity of locally recognized miracles and mysteries, and by refusing to outlay public funds for seasonal rituals, Mitsugi diminished the independence and authority of influential religious institutions, as well as their opportunities for garnering extra income.

Mitsugi left no evidence at all that he found it acceptable for members of these socio-economic strata to live comfortably while poorer people died during famines. On the contrary, he wrote a great deal to indicate the contrary: that all the people would be saved, and at considerable official cost, if necessary. Hence, he made those cost of living calculations, and attempted to apply the results. These were ideas and convictions he formulated out of an interest in numbers and assiduous study of some of the most revered texts of the cultural sphere he inhabited. In the far-off place where he lived, texts conveying the wisdom of the ancient sage kings did not need to be naturalized, or translated, or pronounced in the original language. Mitusgi applied them just as he read them, and developed his innovative, practical and fair-minded ideas. Neither the politics of Tsugaru, nor those of the distant centre, could accommodate those ideas to the point of acting upon them - as Mitsugi himself did.

Like ephemeral summer insects flitting across the water's surface, Mitsugi and his Hôreki reforms were swallowed up by the turtles of centralized, bakufu political power and its economic ramifications. And, like the carp whose movement in the castle moat is almost imperceptible.

patterns of climatic change and the Tsugaru region's waxing and waning interconnectivity with the Japanese state to the south, or peoples and polities to the north and west determine now, as they did then, the degree to which human intervention can alter the fate of the region's inhabitants.

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Appendix One: The twelve Tsugaru daimyos.

Sources: *Tsugaru shi jiten*, pages 16-20, 23-41;

Name and family connection	Life span Years as daimyo	Age at death/retirement Location of grave	Period in office Age at succession
1. Tsugaru Tamenobu 津軽為信 b. Ōura Tamenobu	1549 - 1607 17	58	1590 - 1607 41
2. Tsugaru Nobuhira 津軽信枚 Tamenobu's son	1585 - 1631 24	46	1607 - 1631 22
3. Tsugaru Nobuyoshi 津軽信義 Nobuhira's son	1619 - 1655 24	36	1631 - 1655 12
4. Tsugaru Nobumasa 津軽信政 Nobuyoshi's son, and brother of first Kuroishi daimyo.	1645 - 1710 54	65	1656 - 1710 11
5. Tsugaru Nobuhisa 津軽信寿 Nobumasa's son	1668 - 1746 21	78/63	1710 - 1731 42
6. Tsugaru Nobuaki 津軽信著 Nobuhisa's grandson	1718 - 1744 13	26	1731 - 1744 13
7. Tsugaru Nobuyasu 津軽信寧 Nobuaki's son	1738 - 1784 40	46	1744 - 1784 6
8. Tsugaru Nobuharu 津軽信明 Nobuyasu's son	1761 - 1791 7	30	1784 - 1791 23
9. Tsugaru Yasuchika 津軽寧親 6th Kuroishi daimyo	1762 - 1833 35	73/63	1791 - 1825 29
10. Tsugaru Nobuyuki 津軽信順 Yasuchika's son	1799 - 1862 14	63/40	1825 - 1839 26
11. Tsugaru Yukitsugu 津軽順承 9th Kuroishi daimyo. Third son of Matsudaira Nobuaki.	1799 - 1865 20	66/60	1839 - 1859 40
12. Tsugaru Tsuguakira 津軽承昭 4th son of Hosokawa Saigo	1841 - 1930	Became governor of Hirosaki at 28. Died aged 79.	1859 - 1869 18

Contents of *The Complete Works of Nyūi Mitsugi*
乳井貢全集　　目次

第一巻
Volume One

志学幼弁　Primer for the beginning scholar

巻一 Chapter one

君臣 忠孝 道法 生命
Ruler and minister　Loyalty and filial piety　Morality and law　Destiny

巻二 Chapter two

名実 事里 公私
Names and realities　Events and the principles that govern them　Public good and private interest

仁義 見識
Benevolence and justice　Perception and knowledge

巻三 Chapter three

自然
That which occurs spontaneously of itself without human intervention

成敗 時宜 善悪 勇怯
Success and failure and cowardice　Rightness for the time　Good and evil　Courage

巻四 Chapter four

金気 法令 武芸
Legal penalties[1]　Laws and ordinances　Military arts

巻五Chapter five

節用 数道
Frugality　Calculation

巻六 Chapter six

常変 賞罰
Constancy and change　Rewards and punishments

巻七 Chapter seven

迷悟
Delusion and enlightenment

巻八 Chapter eight

治道 諫言
The Way of Government　Remonstrance

巻九 Chapter nine

曲直 無為 雑門
Crooked and straight　Inaction　Other subjects

巻十 Chapter ten

礼樂
Rites and music

大学文盲　Illiteracy in the *Daigaku*

[1] Penalties are the "shadow" side of the law, and parallel the element of metal and the fall.

第二巻
Volume Two

周礼通用　Applying the Chou li

応分志　A record of appropriate divisions

経国度量　Measurement for administration

度量分数　Measurement and apportionment

節用則　Rules for economizing in the use of resources

国家財政　State financial administration

識量門等　The subject of measurement

商家利道　The way of profit for merchant households

無名卿　Village with no name

第三巻
Volume three

大極図説　Explanation of the diagram of the supreme ultimate

象数　Symbols and their mathematical transformations

易象　Symbols from the Yijing

夫貢制　Regulations for labour levied at post stations

定分禄　Determining proportional stipends

王制利権之方　The King's system for determining power and emoluments

利権主客之位　The proper positions of ruler and subjects in the apportionment of power and emoluments

陸稲記　Records on upland rice

損益指掌　A simple introduction to profit and loss

年穀多寡節用 Economising according to the size of the annual harvest

期月而已可 "It's all right to finish it after a month"

通財一事凡例 General notes on the subject of circulating wealth

得失門答 Questions and answers on achievement and failure

制地考 Essay on land regulation

検地法 Land survey methods

検地政 The administration of land surveys

城制法 Methods of castle construction

城制規矩 Standards of castle construction

第四巻

Volume four

町見術細目図解 Diagrams explaining details of surveying methods

図術真法方図伝 True methods for drawing techniques with illustrations

初学算法 Beginning mathematics

観中算要 The appearance (of place order) in basic mathematics

版ちゅう Setting out a number board

五蟲論 "Debate among five insects"

津軽名臣伝 Lives of eminent Tsugaru retainers

深山惣次 Miyama sōji

可樂詠が集 A collection of poems to enjoy

余録 Miscellaneous items

Glossary

bunbu	文武	Literary and military arts.
bushi	武士	Warrior, or samurai.
chigyō	知行	An investiture, or fief, which took the form of either *fuchi*, or *kuramai* , both of which were commonly called *chigyō.*
chigyōchi	知行地	Land apportioned to a retainer by the daimyo or shogun as his investiture.
chigyōtori, jitō	知行取 地頭	A retainer allotted *chigyōchi* by daimyo or *bakufu* .
daikan	代官	Official intendant, representing the administrative authority of either the shogunate or the domain
emishi	蝦夷	Name given to peoples of northern Japan, particularly the Ainu.
Ezo	蝦夷	Name given to peoples in northern Japan (including the Ainu) or the island of Hokkaido.
fuchi	扶持	An allowance, measured by the number of adults it could support for one year.
hatamoto	旗本	Bannermen, or liege vassals, of the shogun with fiefs of less than 10,000 *koku.*
heinōbunri	兵農分離	Policy of separating the occupations of the *bushi* and farming populations.
hie	稗	Barnyard grass, or deccan grass. A course type of millet.
honbyakushō	本百姓	Independent, landowning farmers.
hōroku	俸禄	Salary paid to a retainer.
hyōfu	標符	Ration coupon for obtaining goods assigned to the household.

itabi	板碑	Small Buddhist stone stele inscribed with Sanskrit text.
jikata chigyō	地方知行	Rural holdings allotted as fiefs to higher or middle level retainers, called *chigyōtori* (see entry above), who managed the land and held rights to directly extract taxes and labour services.
jinsei	仁政	Benevolent rule.
jitsudaka/ uchidaka/ kusadaka	実高 内高 草高	Actual size of a daimyo's holdings expressed in terms of productivity in rice, measured in *koku* of rice. cf. *omotedaka* or *hōdaka*
kabu nakama	株仲間	Association or guild of merchants dealing with the same product or manufacture.
kamon/ shinpan	家門 親藩	Daimyo and *bushi* households descended from Tokugawa Ieyasu.
kanjō bugyō	勘定奉行	Financial magistrate. Post held by Nyūi Mitsugi.
karō	家老	Elder in domain administration.
kemi	検見	Inspection of rice crop to determine appropriate tax assessment.
kochigyō	子知行	Small fief granted to retainers or farmers who lived on newly-developed farmland.
kuni	国	Country, often used to refer to a larger domain.
kokueki	国益	Interest, or profit of a domain, directed at self-sufficiency.
kome kitte	米切手	Rice promissory note.
kōri bugyō	郡奉行	District magistrate.
kura irichi	蔵入地	Land under domain's direct administrative control, from which tax and other obligations were extracted.

kuramai/ kirimai chigyō	蔵米/切米知行	Investiture whose holders were paid a stipend from the domain treasury, which might retain some association with a landed fief.
kuramai/ kirimai	蔵米、切米	(lit. treasury rice) Samurai stipend, commonly paid in rice.
kuramaitori	蔵米取	Retainers who received stipends as rice from the domain granary, and were not normally as high-ranking as *chigyōtori*.
kuroshio	黒潮	The warm current flowing northwards up the Pacific coast and also into the Japan Sea.
kyūyo	給与	Allowance, ration, or grant.
machi bugyō	町奉行	Town magistrate.
motoshi	元司	General overseer. Post held by Nyūi Mitsugi.
nago	名子	Status held by rural labouring families attached to landowning households, and not eligible to hold village posts.
nengu	年貢	The agricultural tax, assessed in equivalent rice value and paid to the relevant overlord in rice, other grains and commodities, or money.
ōjōya	大庄屋	Major village headman, who had administrative responsibility for a group of villages
omotedaka, hōdaka	表高、法高	Putative wealth of a domain, and the formal investiture of its daimyo, designating his status in relation to the shogun. Measured in *koku* of rice.
oyashio	親潮	The cold current flowing past the Kurile Islands.
sankin kōtai	参勤交代	System of compulsory residence in Edo and attendance on the shogun during alternate years, imposed on daimyos.
shōnō	小農	Small-scale landowning cultivators.
shōya	庄屋	Village head man.

shugenja	修験者	Mountain ascetic.
tenbatsu	天罰	Punishment from heaven.
tozama	外様	Category of daimyos outside the Tokugawa lineage and not involved in bakufu administration.
unsōyaku	運送役	Office of distribution.
yamase	山背	Cold wind blowing from the northern polar region over Tohoku during the summer.
yamabushi	山伏	Itinerant priest, usually associated with a mountain temple.
yōnin	用人	Steward, or manager.
zeni	銭	Copper coin.

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