

AN
ECONOMIC
HISTORY
OF
JAPAN

TSUCHIYA

AN ECONOMIC HISTORY OF JAPAN

By

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AN ECONOMIC HISTORY OF JAPAN



Armour-maker's Shop

Kano Yoshinobu

PREFACE

Three years ago, I laid before the Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai in Tokio (Society for International Cultural Relations), a number of plans for making the sociological foundations of Japanese civilisation, and the actual state of Japanese scholarship in general, better known in Western countries. One of these proposals eventually matured in the form of a scheme to publish, in close collaboration with Professor Neil Skene Smith, English translations of a series of documents, books and other materials serving to illustrate Japanese social and economic history, while the Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai promised to finance, up to a certain sum, the costs of translation work and of furnishing these publications with such a wealth of pictorial illustrations as is generally inaccessible to works of this kind. We soon realized that every volume ought to be devoted to a single period or aspect of Japanese history; but that an introductory volume was desirable in order to supply the reader with a general framework serving as a system of first orientation in a vast field familiar until now only to a very small number of Western students. After a good deal of experimenting and even then not without some diffidence, I decided to choose for this purpose the "Nippon Keizaishi Gaiyo," by Assistant-Professor Takao Tsuchiya, of the Department of Economics of Tokio Imperial University, published in 1933 by the firm Iwanami Shoten in Tokio.

The reasons for this choice are given in my Introduction. I hope that the reader will approve it, and that he will feel obliged to the Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai for bearing the financial burden within the limits defined above and for lending at various occasions technical help through the courtesy of Mr. S. Aoki, secretary-general, and Dr. Ishida, head librarian. My best thanks are due to Professor Skene Smith whose untiring

energy and generous help tided me over more than one difficulty, especially by undertaking the laborious task of revising the translation (done with great devotion by Mr. Michitaro Shidehara), with the object of establishing a text that should make easy English reading, without effacing the Japanese warp of this version ; to Assistant-Professor Tsuchiya for agreeing to the publication of this translation in the present form and for putting at my disposal pictorial materials from which I have chosen some illustrations ; to Dr. Nobuo Ito my colleague at the Dai Ni Koto Gakko in Sendai, for collaborating readily in collecting pictures of prehistoric objects and for answering many questions that arose in connection with these pictures and of several passages of the text ; to the Zauhō-Press for the great attention given to the work of reproducing from partly unsatisfactory materials ; and to the editor of the Asiatic Society of Japan, Mr. C. P. Garman, who kindly read the proofs.

I had wished to clarify some points raised by the text of the translation, in correspondence with the author of this book. Language barriers, however, proved in this case quite insuperable.

Sendai, June 1937

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INTRODUCTION

The first foreign students of Japan were priests and physicians ; diplomats and linguists followed, and after came a host of travellers and journalists, engineers and merchants, many of them quite brilliant, often well informed, and generally eager to see things as they were. Scarcely a handful however, were schooled in the methods of social or economic science, and of those who were clothed with some degree of authority, almost none could prolong his stay sufficiently to carry his studies in Japanese economy and sociology as far as the nature of the subject and its difficulties of approach, linguistic and other demanded.

That in spite of these hindrances a young student like Dr. Karl Rathgen, the first in the line of Foreign Professors of Economics at the Tokio Imperial University, was able to produce, after a sojourn of eight years, his comprehensive and concisely written volume on Japanese Public Finance and Economy,¹ which seems to have found no rival nor sequel either in foreign or in Japanese literature of later times, may be attributed to the peculiarly favourable circumstances of the early Meiji epoch, which enabled the foreign teacher and scholar to count on the collaboration of younger Japanese students in a measure which, to say the least, has become extremely rare in the fundamentally changed conditions of to-day. Without such serious, persistent and enthusiastic collaboration, however, such as seems to have made possible also the fundamental studies of Professor Karl Florenz, working at that time in close conjunction with State Councillor Ariga, on the Political and Social Organization

1. Karl Rathgen : *Japans Staatshaushalt und Volkswirtschaft*, published in the series of *Staatswissenschaftliche Forschungen*, edited by Gustav von Schmoller in 1890.

in Ancient Japan,² no great progress can be expected in future. This will require new forms of cooperation.

It was hardly an accident that the studies of Japanese in the economic and social history of their own country began to develop rapidly during the last decades of the nineteenth century. This was the time when the (second) Historical School, guided by Schmoller, Brentano and Knapp, dominated German economics, and it was economists of this school who were then called to institute economic studies at the Tokio Imperial University. The German view of the State and its relations to Economy is in close correspondence with the traditional Japanese attitude towards these cardinal problems, so much so that it is rather difficult to distinguish the trend of thought in the writings of Japanese economists of the eighteenth century from those of the contemporary German and Austrian "cameralists." Nevertheless it is remarkable that interest in the history of the national economy in Japan antedates the foreign influence which culminated during the earliest phases of the Meiji Restoration. In fact, one of the first acts of the new régime was to establish a Government Bureau of History where historic records and materials were collected; and after 1876, the Finance Department, the Genroin, the Board of Industry, and the Department of Communication and Agriculture began to publish an astonishingly large number of volumes containing documents and materials arranged mostly in chronological order. It was not till the beginning of the new century that private scholarship definitely took the lead. Thanks to the industry of two generations of Japanese scholars trained in European methods of research and publication, an enormous mass of ancient writings, sources, and documents has been made accessible to the students of to-day in convenient form; the *Nihon Keizai Taiten* (Magna

2. Karl Florenz: *Die staatliche und gesellschaftliche Organisation im alten Japan*, Mitteilungen der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, 1892.

Bibliotheca Oeconomiae Politicae Japonicae) edited by the late Professor Seiichi Takimoto, alone comprising more than fifty volumes. Scholars with varied interests and leanings have begun to utilize these materials and others still preserved in private archives. To give only one example of high achievements, there are the Satsuma documents, published and annotated in English and in Japanese by Professor K. Asakawa of Yale University, under the title "Documents of Iriki"—now by far the best introduction to the life of Feudal Japan available to foreign students. Vast tracts of Japanese economic and social history have been completely rewritten, and now appear in new light, but of all this important and stimulating work, only glimpses can as yet be seen by Western students of social sciences, and still less by the general reader who wishes to understand how the social fabric of Japan has come to be what it is, in what ways ancient and modern Japan are interrelated and in what respects they differed and still differ from their European counterparts.

It is scarcely too early to make a greater part of the fruits of Japanese scholarship available to the Western students; and, a matter no less urgent, to convey to the West a clearer conception of the way in which Japanese scholars are proceeding in their work of research and publication. The number of Western scholars able to read, by themselves, ancient Japanese sources will always be exceedingly small, for this involves not only the learning of a foreign language of great difficulty but the acquiring of command over many thousands of rare Chinese characters which are not familiar even to most well educated Japanese. On the other hand, it would be regrettable if participation in these studies should remain the monopoly of linguists and indigenous scholars. They need to be carried on by specialists and they can only advance satisfactorily if the work is shared by men inclined by birth and outlook to see things from new angles and in different contexts; an argument which gains in

force from the fact that many Japanese students are by nature, tradition or the requirements of the present stage of learning, inclined to specialize very strongly and to look with a certain kind of suspicion on every attempt to disregard the conventional borderlines between the various provinces of research.

It seems moreover that the peculiar social structure of Japanese life in general, and of Japanese academic life in particular, is in many respects unfavourable for the growth of co-operation, not only between foreign and native scholars where considerable difficulties of speech and writing in foreign languages intervene, but also between Japanese scholars of different universities, provinces and political creeds. It cannot be denied that similar obstacles are frequently found also in Western countries, but their scope must be much greater in a social system which retains many traits of clan organization and "feudal" loyalties and antagonisms, and where the daily meeting and converse of opponents in the market-place, the agora or town hall has not moulded the minds of many generations. This is not a country of "cities" in the European sense, and nothing could be more instructive to Western observers than to find the fundamental differences between a civilization based essentially on logic, debate and an agonistic spirit and another founded on allegiance, tradition, and sibship, operative even in the sociological spheres of intellectual work.

Perhaps it is not too rash to hope that this and similar publications, in spite of all their necessary shortcomings and even because of them, will contribute in some degree to a change, by making it obvious to a number of Japanese students that their country and their work have more to gain than to lose by their participation in similar undertakings. Japanese science has a right to be heard, and a more systematic attempt to make it vocal should be worth the trouble and loss of time necessarily involved in collective work.

No less important would be the removal of another obstacle which has proved to be the greatest handicap in our efforts: the difficulty of finding translators with, not simply a tolerable command of foreign languages, but also interest and training in the subject matter of the text they have to render into English. I am convinced that in this country of vastly overcrowded universities and limited possibilities of earning an income by intellectual work, there must exist scores of young men who could be profitably employed for a few years in such translation work and in assisting foreign scholars. They would thereby gain not only proficiency in languages but contact with foreign ways of working, seeing and thinking,—possibilities only rarely accessible to-day to young Japanese students under the existing academic régime, which knows no regular post-graduate courses in many faculties even of leading universities and which usually limits the activities of foreign University professors (a series rapidly converging to zero) to a rather early stage of studies. Moreover, personal experience goes far to prove that it is possible to kindle in some students an interest in Japanese things of the past as a result of seeing a foreigner passionately studying epochs and traditions which seem, in the eyes of many Japanese contemporaries, to have lost any bearing on their own conception and ways of life.

It is perhaps no idle dream to look for a continuation of these efforts on a bigger scale and for the establishment of an Institute of Oriental Studies in Tōkyō or Kyōto, where foreign students could pursue their work in fitting surroundings with the help of young Japanese assistants and translators and in collaboration with Japanese specialists.

The present book was chosen for translation as one of the first comprehensive surveys of recent research work done by Japanese scholars in the field of economic history; and as fairly representative of the majority of the younger generation of students who received their intellectual training and their

main ideas during the period preceding the present "Showa Revival." I would have been pleased to present a specimen of the latest phase of Japanese spiritual life but there cannot be expected ripe fruits, in the sphere of research and history-writing, from a national movement which began only to gain momentum less than a decade ago.

The work of Assistant Professor Tsuchiya shows comparatively little of the influence of the German "Historical School" which used to characterize the earlier phases of Japanese economics. His attention is not focussed on the sphere of the State, on the institutional framework or on economic policy, but on the technological side of production and on the welfare and the suffering of the masses. In his terminology and classifications, he makes little or no use of the earlier German "Stufentheorien" or of the powerful analytical tools which Professor Werner Sombart has put at the disposal of economic historians. Although the author does not stress a particular theory of evolution, a belief in a universal sequence of stages seems to underly his historical account; leading through the stages of promiscuity, matriarchy, clan organization, the patriarchal family, and feudal society to the beginning of commercial capitalism and finally to the threshold of industrial capitalism. Conspicuous is the absence of a drawing of parallels with western developments, certainly a wholesome reaction to earlier tendencies either to overaccentuate similarities or to exaggerate differences in development, and there are no dogmatic assertions as to the determination of social processes and conditions by economic factors, although traces of such a general view may be noted here and there, especially in those later chapters in which the author's own contributions to the study of Tokugawa economy form the backbone of his account. The most significant example of this tendency is the attempt to see in a struggle between English and French financial groups an important factor of the Meiji Restoration. This will remain a point of histori-

ographical interest to Western readers but they will scarcely be inclined to attribute much weight to such a detail, for competition of this kind was going on during the whole era of European commercial and political expansion: but there was only one country able to resist, and only one Emperor Meiji.

A comparison of this book, which was written for the popular Iwanami collection¹ (the Japanese equivalent of "Göschens's Bücherei" or of the Home University Library), with other works of Japanese on the economic history of their country, will help us to realize better than anything else, the remarkable degree of progress made in Japanese research during the last thirty years. The late Professor Tokuzo Fukuda's book in excellent German, on "The Social and Economic Evolution of Japan,"² will always remain an outstanding example of the moulding of a versatile and acute Japanese intellect by Western methods of teaching, thought and writing; and it may be noted that it was, at the time of its original publication, one of the first and ablest reviews of the whole social and economic history of a nation, even in German literature. Nevertheless, it contains very little information which could not be derived from the texts of laws and ordinances, for the author was obliged to work far from his country and able to use only a relatively small number

1. After these lines had been written, Mr. Tsuchiya has published a new volume of studies on "Problems of the Social and Economic History of Japan" (*Nihon Shakai Keizaishi no Mondai*; published by the firm Nankosha, Tokyo, 1937) containing an essay, written in 1930, on "Theories of Economic Evolution and the Peculiarities of Japanese Economic History." These few pages are full of sound observations, but deal only with nineteenth century writers, from Friedrich List to Karl Marx.

2. Tokuzo Fukuda: "Die gesellschaftliche und wirtschaftliche Entwicklung in Japan," published by Professor Lujo Brentano, for whose Seminary it was written, in his series *Münchener Volkswirtschaftliche Abhandlungen*, Stuttgart 1900. In 1927, it was translated into Japanese and published in Tokio with slight alterations and additions.

of books and sources. On the other hand, the "Economic Aspects of the History of the Civilization of Japan,"¹ by Mr. Yosaburo Takekoshi, a distinguished journalist, member of the House of Peers and house-biographer of Prince Saionji, the last of the Genro, presents to the reader a mass of interesting details, gathered by Mr. Takekoshi's collaborators from a large number of old and recent writings, few of which are cited in the English version. The author being renowned for his classical Chinese diction, it is only natural that the main quality of his work does not become visible in a translation; but the peculiar arrangement of the materials and excerpts, resembling more the complicated pattern of a Persian rug than a piece of architecture, lends a peculiar Eastern cachet to this undertaking, certainly one of the last of a genus gradually dying out even in the East.²

Asst.-Prof. Tsuchiya's book is decidedly less Oriental in style than that of Mr. Takekoshi, but also less Western than that of Professor Fukuda, although here the differences are less obvious, consisting sometimes more in what is not said than what is said, in hesitations rather than in assertions, and in the almost imperceptible way in which European notions are modified after crossing the Vistula frontier. But it is probably too early to define the individuality of an author, still young and open to the intellectual currents of this age of transformation.

It will be scarcely necessary to add, at his juncture, that almost every written statement in the field of social and economic history remains controversial, here as in Europe. The interpretation of earlier documents and writings is, in spite of, and more often,

1. An English version of this work was published in three large volumes, in 1930 by Messrs. George Allen and Unwin, Ltd. London.

2. Professor E. Honjō's stimulating essays, familiar to many Western students from their appearance in the Kyoto University Economic Review, and now revised and collected in an attractive volume under the title "The Social and Economic History of Japan," Kyoto 1935, deal in considerable detail almost exclusively with Tokugawa economy.

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