

NICHIBUNKEN MONOGRAPH SERIES No. 3

THE ORIGIN AND
DEVELOPMENT OF
JAPANESE-STYLE
ORGANIZATION



KASAYA KAZUHIKO



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International Research Center for Japanese Studies

Kyoto, Japan, 2000

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Note on Transliteration

The Hepburn system of romanization is used for Japanese terms, including the names of persons and places. Long vowels are indicated by using the macron.

With regard to Japanese names, we have followed the local custom of placing the family name first.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Professor Kasaya Kazuhiko's *The Origin and Development of Japanese-style Organization* can best be described as a work of historical sociology. His extensive study of bureaucracies in the early modern period and their antecedents in medieval warrior households serves as the basis for him to extrapolate characteristics that he argues form an integral part of business, government, and other organizations in Japan today. Readers will gain insights into the political workings and power struggles in early modern bureaucracies through his analysis of the impact of the supplemental salary system in the Tokugawa bakufu and of the custom of "forced retirement" (*oshibikome*) in domains. He describes the tensions within these organizations, such as the contradiction between efforts to maintain formal status hierarchies on the one hand, and the need for talented officers to conduct substantive reforms on the other. And, he shows how individuals negotiated these contradictions for their own gain. Kasaya concludes that Tokugawa society was far less rigid and oppressive than it is often depicted; and, more importantly, that the manner in which early modern organizations resolved conflicts catalyzed the development of Japanese-style organizations and facilitated modernization.

The approach used in translating this work has endeavored to retain the organization and wording of the original, which is itself a partial adaptation of the author's earlier book in Japanese, *Samurai no shisō: Nihongata soshiki to kojiri no jiritsu* (Samurai Thought: The Independence of the

Individual in Japanese-style Organizations; Iwanami Shoten, 1997). In the original, descriptions sometimes alternate with analysis, but none of the author's fascinating evidence is tangential to the important overall theme of his book.

English forces a distinction between singular and plural, which occasionally presented a problem in translating some words, including the key terms describing the focal point of this book, "Japanese-style organization" (*nihongata soshiki*). The translation has relied on context to determine the singular or plural rendering of these words. Readers should bear in mind that the author is interested in describing both distinct examples of Japanese-style organizations, such as Tokugawa-period domains (*han*), as well as the general development of the salient features of these organizations.

While the Japanese word *mibun* is usually rendered as "status" in English, the translator sometimes used the word "rank" when describing divisions of status among, for example, samurai. Technically, all samurai in the Tokugawa period shared the same hereditary status, which distinguished them from commoners, who had their own status as farmers, craftsmen, merchants, and the like, depending on where they lived and their occupation. There were great divisions within these respective statuses due to heredity, wealth, and occasional benefits won through talent and hard effort. Indeed, the wealthiest merchants enjoyed lifestyles far beyond the reach of the lowliest samurai, even though the latter supposedly had higher status in the Tokugawa world-view. Therefore, it seems more accurate to contrast high-ranking samurai with those of lesser rank, while acknowledging that both were from the same samurai status.

In the translation, Japanese names are rendered family name first, while Japanese words appear in italics and with macrons where appropriate, except for words such as shogun which are found in English-language dictionaries. Gender-specific language and terms, such as craftsmen, are used because the premodern organizations and institutions described were patriarchal, generally allowing little formal role for women to participate. Japanese terms appear in parentheses following their English equivalents; the translated word is used thereafter, except in cases

where the Japanese term has become the accepted technical word used in English scholarship, or when there is no suitable and concise English equivalent, in which case the Japanese term is left in romanized form with an explanation.

The translator wishes to thank Professor Kasaya for his patience and help in clarifying questions about the original manuscript, and Mr. Toritsuka Osamu of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies for logistical assistance.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This text is a translation of my fourth book, *Samurai no shisō: Nihongata soshiki to kojim no jiritsu* (*Samurai Thought: The Independence of the Individual in Japanese-style Organizations*) first published by Nihon Keizai Shinbunsha in 1993 and later in a revised edition by Iwanami Shoten in 1997. For this English translation, the contents of the book have been greatly expanded to include the author's subsequent research. While the entire text has seen some changes, the discussion of the household (*ie*) in Chapter 1 has been revised along with the issue of pharmaceutical production in eighteenth-century Japan, described in Chapter 4. The original text only touched on these areas in passing, but the English translation offers a deeper consideration of the issues. Another area that required elaboration was the addition of explanations for non-Japanese readers. While readers will probably be familiar with samurai, the varieties of status divisions among samurai as well as the various systems affecting samurai, such as those that determined their stipends, all required careful descriptions. Explanations of these key issues were added throughout the book. Since many Japanese readers may not know all the details about these matters, I thought that these explanations might serve them as well. Carrying out these revisions changed the contents of the manuscript translated, and the author feels that a completely new work has grown from the original.

The present book, like all my previous works, owes a great debt to prior scholarship. In particular, the discussion in Chapter 1 of the origin of the samurai and of local lords (*zaichi ryōshū*) is based on the work of

Ishii Susumu. The argument presented in Chapter 2 about Oda Nobunaga's effort to deify himself derives from the scholarship of Asao Naohiro. In Chapter 3, the discussion of bushido and of the concept of loyalty emphasizes the ideas of independence and the individual in samurai thought, drawing on the research of Sagara Tōru and Maruyama Masao. Academics and some readers will be familiar with the contributions of these scholars, but I wish to acknowledge my debt to them here as well.

I would be remiss if I did not mention a collective work by three scholars, Murakami Yasusuke, Kumon Shunpei, and Satō Seizaburō, *Bummei to shite no ie shakai* (Household Society as a Type of Civilization), published by Chūō Kōronsha in 1979. This book examines the economic character of the Japanese household and pursues its implications for civilization. The treatment of the characteristics of the household in my book, not to mention the course of development of the organization of the Tokugawa-period domain, as well as the more general argument about Japanese-style organization, all build on the prior scholarship contained in this classic of modern scholarship. While my own position often takes issue with the arguments presented in the book, this point of debate is purely academic. I wish to underline the fact that my criticisms do not diminish my estimate of the value of the text written by these scholars.

When I was developing my argument about the household and about Japanese-style organization, I benefitted from the long debates I had with Hirayama Asaji and Hioki Kōichirō, and found the interdisciplinary discussion with them to be extremely useful. I would also like to mention the many valuable ideas I gained from the solid and very stimulating reports by and discussions with Japanese and foreign scholars of various specialties who participated in the "Courtiers and Warriors" research group at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies. I wish to take this opportunity to express my thanks to them all.

In addition to the aforementioned specific examples, this book is based upon a wide range of research by both Japanese and foreign scholars. For particular citations, I direct my readers to the notes at the end of the text.

This book is the third volume to be published in the English monograph series of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies. I wish to express my great appreciation to the members and staff of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies for their many instances of assistance and offers of encouragement as well as their painstaking work in the translation and editing.

Finally, I want to offer my profound thanks to Dr. Eric C. Rath who was in charge of the translation. This book was intended to develop arguments about the character and complex mechanisms of samurai power. I realize that at times the nature of the book must have presented great difficulties for translation, but the translator did not complain about this as he carefully rendered the text into clear English. At times when the original was ambiguous or there was a question about the appropriate term to select for the translation, he asked my opinion and incorporated my responses, which allowed the work to be brought to fruition without leaving any lingering problems. The translation reflects the labors of the translator, and it is my opinion that it is faithful to the original. I have even come to feel closer to the English translation than to the original. I wish to offer my deep thanks to Eric Rath for this.

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INTRODUCTION

Modern Japanese society bears many similarities in patterns of behavior, values, and other characteristics with the West, Asia, and other regions, but Japan possesses its own distinct character. Hierarchy, groupism, the lifelong employment system, the corporate family, corporate unity, the seniority system, emphasis on group relations and affiliations, bottom-up style decision making, and authoritarianism are among the systems and characteristics often cited in reference to Japan.

This book addresses the topic of Japanese-style organizations that are found in Japan today and that the above terms attempt to describe. How did Japanese-style organizations develop with these types of characteristics? What types of meanings and functions did these organizations have? The purpose of this book is to investigate these questions in Japanese history. In particular, this book takes the social organizations of Japanese warriors, called samurai or *bushi*, as a point of analysis, examining the organizations used by warrior rulers, called daimyo.

The age when samurai dominated Japanese society was long ago, but their influence is clearly visible in Japan today, such as in the way that modern Japanese think and feel about things and in patterns of behavior and organization. In particular, as this book explains, employees working in corporations and government offices, patterns of behavior, the system of advancement for government officials, and forms of organizational decision making, all closely resemble the system of political organization

found in samurai domains (*han*) during the Tokugawa period (1600–1868).

The characteristics and distinctive qualities of Japanese society today took shape due to many diverse factors, but it is undeniable that the influence of samurai, who held a position of dominance for such a long period in Japanese history, constitute one of those factors. While warrior society by itself has its own long history, a point of fruition of the development of warrior society (though not necessarily the only one) is found in the organization of warrior domains. Taking shape in the Tokugawa period, domains have an archetypal meaning for Japanese society today. That is to say, a society based on the household and a vertical society — i.e., a society ordered on the basis of rank — bear an organic relationship to one another, and both of these two organizational principles, which are emblematic of Japanese-style organizations, are clearly evident in the structure of Tokugawa-period domains.

This book provides an understanding of the distinct structural factors that are referred to today as Japanese-style organization, first, by uncovering the meaning and characteristics of a vertical society based on the household, and then by examining the formation and organizational development of Tokugawa-period domains. The topics to be examined include the meaning and characteristics of lifelong identification with an organization, the function of the seniority system and its relationship to talent, the mechanics of reaching decisions by circulating letters (*ringi*), as well as power structures in hierarchical organizations.

At the same time, this book enters a debate concerning a problem that is closely related to the topics under consideration, namely the place of the individual in Japanese society. Japanese-style organizations and their prototypes, the Tokugawa-period domains, are both strongly group oriented. It is generally assumed that the individual is subsumed by these structures, but that is not the case. In the case of organizations of Tokugawa-period samurai, the leadership of these organizations did not simply seek to make the members blindly submit to their demands.

Rather, leaders recognized the importance of independent, autonomous actions by individuals in their organizations as a way to empower

the organization. Since warrior organizations placed the highest values on loyalty and dedication, it is often believed that absolute obedience to the commands of the lord constituted the dominant pattern of warrior behavior. Moreover, it is strongly perceived that people in the Tokugawa period were dominated by organizations with these authoritarian methods of operating; and, it is thought that it was not possible for such patterns of dominance to continue for a long time.

On the contrary, retainers did not simply obey the commands of their superiors reflexively. On some occasions, subordinates repeatedly expressed their opinions about orders that they considered problematic or opposed and did not sanction. It was recognized at the time as a general rule that the strength of an organization and its continued survival depended on the numbers of individuals acting autonomously who would never be swayed by conditions in their surroundings. The questions surrounding the fate of individuals within Japanese-style organizations is a key focus of this book, and readers will learn about the debate that this book is entering.

As an introduction, I offer a brief explanation of the structure of this book. The first chapter investigates the household, the distinct form of family structure in Japanese society that forms the fundamental structural model for Japanese-style organizations. The manifold characteristics of the household determine the distinctive qualities of Japanese-style organizations to a profound extent. Moreover, the particular family structure of the household appeared in Japanese society at the same time as the emergence of the samurai class. The history of the advent of samurai and of the organizational development of feudal rulers is, in other words, the history of the organizational growth and formation of the household in Japanese society. This work examines comparatively the progress of the development of these two structures.

Chapter 2 surveys the characteristics of Oda Nobunaga's (1534–1582) rule and his influence on Japanese-style organizations. Oda Nobunaga was a warlord who transformed medieval society, laying the groundwork for the early modern era. At the same time, he changed the organizational structure of warrior society, replacing a decentralized system with

an integrated organization, organized vertically and founded on the principle of lasting obedience toward the lord and superiors. This book dissects both the peculiarities of the vertical organizational structure put in place by Nobunaga and political opposition in warrior society to it.

Chapter 3 forms the core of this book. Building on the first two chapters, Chapter 3 investigates the massive organizational structure of the Tokugawa-period domain as a culmination of organizational developments within warrior society. The domain was the household of a daimyo, who was an overlord of many samurai. The samurai under the command of the daimyo were vassals in his household. The domain, as explained later, consisted of the lord and his group of retainers organized as an army.

However, under the conditions of lasting peace of the Tokugawa period, this structure transformed into an administrative mechanism for rule, variously undertaking the domain's management, beginning with the management of its revenues. Chapter 3 analyzes the distinct characteristics of domain organization. Domain power structure, decision-making mechanisms, and the role of the individual are particular points that will be scrutinized. While critically testing the validity of prior scholarly arguments, this chapter investigates the debates about hierarchical organizations, particularly Japanese-style organizations. The same chapter also takes up philosophical issues of the virtues of loyalty and selfless patriotic service known as the "way of the warrior," *bushidō*, offering a new perspective on this topic, while concentrating on the main issue of the independence of individuals within Japanese-style organizations.

Chapter 4 studies the course of evolution of the domain in the Tokugawa period. The structure of the domain in warrior society maintained the hereditary status system of samurai, placing the daimyo at the top. However, with the growth and increased complications of social problems stemming from economic development in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the organization of the domain became deadlocked. In response to the demands of this period, organizational reforms were needed that would allow for the employment of people based on their abilities regardless of their birth or hereditary status.

We will follow how the conflict between two systems, one based on status and the other on merit, was overcome. One solution to this problem would have been to completely abolish the principles supporting a status system altogether. Yet, the other side of the status system was its rationale as a system of authority. The feudal lords of England resisted the absolutist, anti-feudal measures of the monarch through the Magna Charta. By preserving their own rights derived from their status, they contributed to the formation of the tradition of democracy in England.

Therefore, one cannot simply conclude from the perspective of the political development of society that preservation of a status system means a lack of progress toward democracy. The Tokugawa-period domain solved the problem of the conflict between the status system and the need for talented individuals in government service. This compromise formed the basis for methods of resolving the same problem later in Japanese history.

The series of reforms that appeared at this time had a crucial meaning for the structural growth of Japanese-style organizations. A seniority system was created, which became one of the distinctive qualities of Japanese-style organizations. Moreover, the problem of how leadership in Japanese-style organizations should adapt to a series of reforms also came into question. This chapter investigates this problem in the setting of the domain, exploring a series of reforms that took place in the eighteenth century, tracing the progress of the structural development of Japanese-style organizations and the development of a role for a leader compatible with a Japanese-style organization.

The final chapter, Chapter 5, discusses Japanese-style organizations and modernization. Japanese-style organizations did not simply endure through the process of modernization; rather, they played a driving role in the modernization of society, and the modernization of Japanese society can be viewed as the development of Japanese-style organizations.

Japanese-style organizations, on the one hand, as evident in the series of organizational reforms undertaken in the eighteenth century spontaneously and through internal development, moved toward modernization. On the other hand, the many characteristics of Japanese-style organizations

functioned effectively at a time when social restructuring occurred in Japan with the adaptation of Western forms of knowledge and through contact with Europe and America in the nineteenth century. In fact, the profound ability of Japanese-style organizations to adapt to conditions facilitated the rapid modernization of Japanese society.

In summary, this book focuses on studying the formation and development of Japanese-style organizations, attempting to clarify their structural qualities and the place of the individual within them.