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State-building and Political Economy in Early-modern Japan

MARK RAVINA

{Languages} determine the unique, often ambiguous tenor of human consciousness and make the relations of that consciousness to 'reality' creative. . . . To a greater or lesser degree, every language offers its own reading of life.

George Steiner, *After Babel*

Since the birth of humankind, where there have been things, there have been names. Names are, in origin, things affixed by common people, but this is so only for things with substance. Things which have no substance, in other words, things which cannot be seen by common people, are clarified and named by Sages.

Ogyū Sorai, *Benmei*

Land and Lordship

In 1785, on the occasion of his retirement, Uesugi Harunori, the daimyo of Yonezawa, composed a three-article epistle on statecraft for his heir, Uesugi Norihiro:

The state (*kokka*) is inherited from one's ancestors and passed on to one's descendants: it should not be administered selfishly.

The people belong to the state: they should not be administered selfishly.

The lord exists for the sake of the state and the people: the state and the people do not exist for the sake of the lord.

(Kasaya 1988, 252–53).

Harunori's concise missive is arguably the best-known political document of the eighteenth century. Because Uesugi Harunori was used as a model of virtue in prewar Japanese textbooks, the epistle was widely disseminated. To this day facsimiles of the original manuscript, now embellished by a portrait of Harunori, are available as

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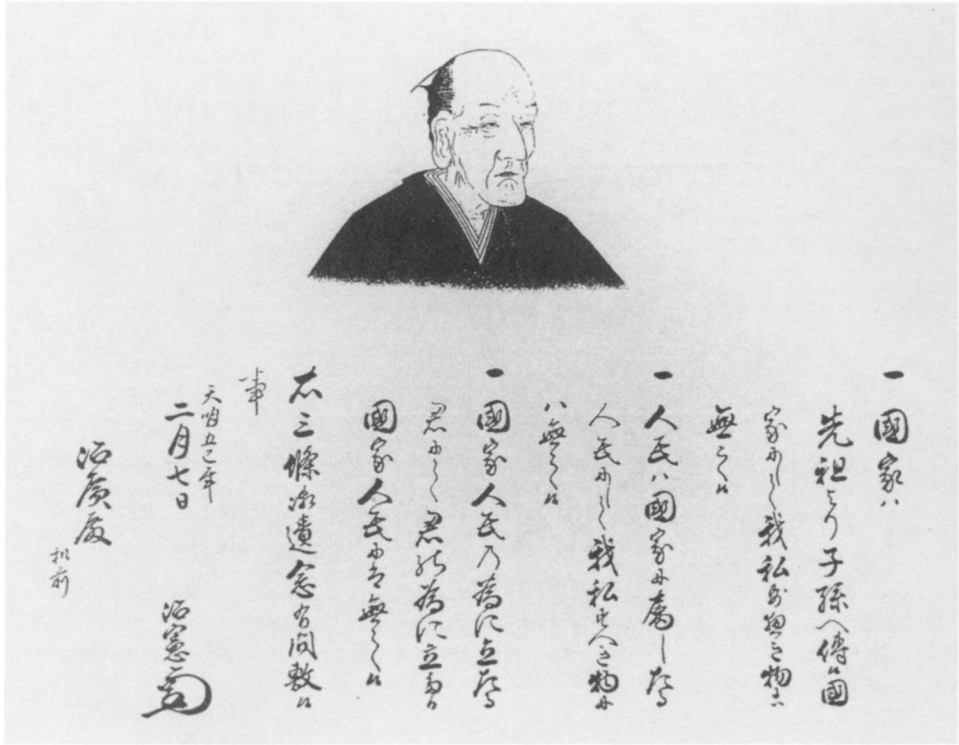


Figure 1. A portrait of Uesugi Harunori (Yōzan) with a facsimile of his epistle to Norihiro. The plaque is sold as a souvenir at Uesugi Shrine in Yonezawa City, Yamagata prefecture.

souvenirs at the Uesugi shrine in Yonezawa. The document has also received sustained scholarly attention: it is cited in numerous studies of early modern political thought (Tahara 1976, Ogi 1973, and Kasaya 1993). Historians have commonly focused on the strong Mencian aspect of Harunori’s notion of lordship. Although the lord did not rule at the behest of the people, he existed, nonetheless, to serve them. Harunori thus made civil administration the central task of warlord rule. By basing his legitimacy on the peace and prosperity of his subjects, Harunori presented the most enlightened face of Japanese enlightened despotism (Tahara 1976, 303–4).

As compelling as what Harunori included in his epistle is what he saw fit to exclude. His instructions make no mention of central authority, either the shogunate or the emperor. Harunori was scarcely unaware of the extent of shogunal power. As he wrote, his retainers and commoners were groaning under the burden of castle repairs mandated by the shogunate. For Harunori, however, the essence of statecraft was not serving the shogunate, but honoring one’s ancestors and providing for one’s descendants by nurturing one’s subjects. Presumably, a lord who fulfilled his obligations to his family and his subjects would also fulfill his duties to the shogunate, but service to the shogun was reduced to an implicit rather than an explicit duty.

Harunori's terminology reinforced this sense of daimyo autonomy. Harunori referred to his domain as a *kokka*, which in modern Japanese is translated as "state."¹ Harunori, did not, of course, mean a state in the modern sense of an institution with full and exclusive sovereign power. But he conspicuously avoided terms such as *ban* (domain) which would have implied fealty to a superior lord. *Kokka*, by contrast, implied autonomy, if not exclusive sovereignty. Harunori's epistle is striking in its clarity, but not in its content. The sense that a daimyo's obligations to his family and his subjects overshadowed his obligations to the shogunate was a critical component of early modern political practice. This ideology of autonomy, however, is neglected in our current historiographic paradigms.

American studies of early modern politics have centered on questions of state-building. A perennial research problem has been the status of the Tokugawa shogunate as a state. Historians have treated the centralization of authority by Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and the early Tokugawa shoguns as nascent state-building. The political practices of the early modern era have been examined largely for how they justified or sustained the power of the shogunal state (Bolitho 1974, Hall 1966, Totman 1967, and Sasaki 1981). The classic American studies of the Tokugawa shogunate, for example, compared the shogunate to the Stuart and Bourbon monarchies, implicitly drawing a comparison with state-building in Europe. By focusing our attention on state-building, these works presented local autonomy as an absence of centralization rather than as a fundamental feature of a legitimate political system. The political practices of daimyo domains were thus analyzed largely as responses to the shogunate: the core, not the periphery, determined the research agenda. In his study *Treasures Among Men*, for example, Harold Bolitho chronicled the decline of shogunal power, but from the shogunate's perspective. Since Bolitho treated the daimyo as shogunal vassals, he took their opposition to shogunal directives as evidence of shogunal weakness and incompetence. Significantly, both *Treasures Among Men* and Conrad Totman's 1967 study, *Politics in the Tokugawa Bakufu* emerged from studies of the collapse of the shogunate (Totman 1967, 1). The overleaf to *Treasures Among Men* thus poses the question, "by the middle of the seventeenth century the Tokugawa Bakufu seemed well on the way to achieving centralized control over Japan. Why did it subsequently weaken and fail?" (Bolitho 1974). This is an important question. The danger, however, is that the fall of the shogunate in 1868 penumbrates all previous political developments. Hence the decline in state-building after 1650 becomes a deformed rather than an alternative political process. This state-building paradigm lends an air of pathology to the entire early modern political system.

Historians have recently begun to suggest alternatives to the state-building paradigm. In his recent survey of early modern history, for example, Conrad Totman compared Hideyoshi's order to the Aztec and Roman empires, with the daimyo as rulers of subordinate "client states" (Totman 1993, 43–44). Mary Berry has characterized Hideyoshi's rule as "federal . . . the union of semi-autonomous domains under an overseer of the common interest." Such an approach, she argues, helps

¹In this essay I follow the tradition, common in philosophy, of using word-for-word translations of key terms. Thus, "kuni" is always rendered as "country" and "kokka" always as "state." These translations rely on a fortuitous correspondence of multiple meanings. "Kokka," in early modern Japanese, could refer to a variety of institutions ranging from an ancient Chinese kingdom, to the shogunate, to a large domain like Yonezawa. Similarly, "state" in modern American English can refer to either a fully sovereign state or a member of a federal union, such as the state of Delaware.

overcome the sense of “arrested political development or schizophrenic approach to rule” that is suggested by terms like “centralized feudalism” (Berry 1982, 147–67). These approaches provide frameworks wherein we can interpret regional authority as a legitimate locus of power rather than as an impediment to centralization. Uesugi Harunori’s epistle, for example, is outlandish for a petty noble but appropriate for the head of a “client state.” These alternative frameworks thus require that we conceptualize local politics not as a reflection or extension of center, but as component parts of a broader political structure. My project here is twofold. First, *pace* Berry and Totman, I wish to show how the dual identity of daimyo as quasi-sovereign lords and as shogunal vassals was a defining, rather than a destructive, aspect of the early modern order. Second, I wish to offer an alternative paradigm for the early modern order, that of a “compound state.”

Searching for States

The political landscape of early modern Japan lacked anything resembling a modern state. In the eighteenth century the shogunate, or *bakufu*, exerted direct control over land assessed at over four million *koku*, roughly 15 percent of Japan.² Another 10 percent was entrusted to liege vassals (*batamoto*), who staffed the shogunate’s administration. The imperial family and various religious orders held roughly one-half million *koku*. The remaining three-quarters of Japan was ruled by some 250 daimyo, whose domains ranged in size from ten thousand *koku* to over one million. A political map of early modern Japan thus reveals an intricate patchwork of distinct governments, with broad areas of ambiguous and overlapping authority. Governmental control was at its most fragmented in the regions around Edo and Osaka: in the 1840s the five square *ri* area (roughly 150 square miles) surrounding Osaka was governed by 165 different authorities. This checkerboard pattern of administration often led to divided control over villages. In the Kawasaki region, for example, after 1717, twelve villages were designated as both liege vassal investiture (*batamotoryō*) and ecclesiastical lands of the Tokugawa house temple, Zōjōji. Two villages were treated, in addition, as direct Tokugawa holdings (Waters 1983, 40–43). Further from the Edo-Osaka corridor, political units tended to be larger and more contiguous: midsize domains such as Mito, Utsunomiya, Numata, and Fuchū traced a broad arc around Edo. At the periphery lay the massive, consolidated domains of great warlord houses like the Shimazu, the Mori, the Yamauchi, and the Date. These territories encompassed resources in complete disproportion to their number. In the 1860s roughly one in twelve Japanese lived in the three largest domains: Kanazawa, Satsuma, and Chōshū.

This spatial fragmentation of authority was paralleled by a vertical division of political rights. The shogun was effectively the supreme political authority in Japan, but the title referred to a military appointment by the emperor. The daimyo were, in theory, invested vassals of the shogun, and their fiefs could be revoked for infractions of shogunal edicts. Within their domains, however, daimyo held formidable political power. The daimyo maintained independent standing armies, wrote their own legal codes, set and collected their own taxes, controlled and policed their own borders. The shogunate maintained a monopoly on foreign policy, but the domains were

²*Koku* was a measure of volume, equal to 4.96 bushels.

entrusted with the management of their own domestic affairs. The authority of the shogunate was, of course, an important part of the Tokugawa system. The *sankin kōtai* system, for example, wherein daimyo were required to spend alternate periods of time in Edo, the shogun's capital, served as a constant reminder of the primacy of the Tokugawa house. The shogunate also issued laws regulating the personal conduct of daimyo and retained the right to oversee daimyo marriages and adoptions. But the authority of the shogunate focused on daimyo: it claimed only limited and indirect suzerainty over the commoner population of daimyo domains. The shogunate never asserted a right to tax commoners outside its direct holdings. This resulted in a schism between the rights of the shogunate and its responsibilities: the shogunate claimed sole authority in issues such as foreign affairs, but had financial authority over less than one-third of Japan.

Because of this imbalance in shogunal powers, assessments of the strength and legitimacy of the shogunate hinge on our understanding of state power. Drawing on a reading of Max Weber, James White has argued that the shogunate was a state because it maintained a monopoly on the physical use of force within Japan. The shogunate was not, White concedes, a modern state, but it prohibited daimyo from using force among themselves, while retaining for itself the right to use force against daimyo. The shogunate, moreover, steadily expanded its coercive authority over the people under daimyo rule. Following the Tenma Rebellion of 1764, which involved not only Tokugawa holdings, but also liege vassal and daimyo lands, the shogunate sent investigators through the entire area. They arrested at will and ultimately sentenced several hundred commoners for various offenses. The shogunate took similar action after the Kamo Rebellion of 1836 (White 1988).

Ronald Toby, focusing on foreign policy, came to a similar assessment of Tokugawa strength. The shogunate's monopoly on foreign affairs established its legitimacy as the supreme government of Japan. "The ability autonomously to manipulate foreign states and foreign monarchs in the formative years of the dynasty served to preserve the physical security of the Japanese homeland and to prevent the subversion of the new state, on the one hand, and to legitimate the new Tokugawa order, on the other." The shogunate's ostentatious reception of envoys from Korea and the Ryukyus served to enhance its legitimacy both internationally and domestically (Toby 1984, 3–22, 242).

We might contrast these approaches to statecraft with a fiscal approach. As Joseph Schumpeter argued, the modern state arose from the increased need of governments for revenue. "Taxes not only helped to create the state. They helped to form it. The tax system was the organ of development of [sic] which entailed the other organs." For Schumpeter, the modern state emerged when "common exigencies," such as war, allowed princes to assert a right to tax superior to traditional, feudal privileges. Taxation then became the central link between state and society:

The fiscal history of a people is above all an essential part of its general history. An enormous influence on the fate of nations emanates from the economic bleeding which the needs of the state necessitates and from the use to which its results are put. . . . The spirit of a people, its cultural level, its social structure, the deeds its policy may prepare—all this and more is written in its fiscal history, stripped of all phrases.

(Schumpeter 1954)

Schumpeter's argument that culture is a function of fiscal policy is hyperbolic, but his analysis rightly stresses taxation as a central link between state and society. This, in turn, leads us to question White's emphasis on coercion. State coercion is

impossible without assets gathered through taxation. Armies or police funded through private means are certainly agents of coercion, but questionable manifestations of state power. Resistance to taxation, in turn, is a major object of state coercion. Coercion is necessary to raise taxes. Taxes are necessary to fund coercion. Taxation is thus both a means and an end of state power.

The shogunate thus sits uneasily among these different definitions of state. This becomes more apparent when we employ more expansive and robust definitions of “state.” Charles Tilly, for example, while noting the difficulty in finding widely accepted criteria for “stateness,” denoted five areas as essential to state-building: the organization of armed forces, taxation, policing, control over the food supply, and the formation of technical personnel (Tilly 1975, 3–83, esp. 3–6, 70–71). Joel Migdal delineated similar criteria in a more theoretical form. The essential aspects of a state, he argued, are the capability to penetrate society, regulate social relationships, extract resources, and appropriate or use resources (Migdal 1988, 3–5).

Within these more expansive definitions of stateness, the shogunate’s power and authority seem dangerously unbalanced. In the Tenma and Kamo rebellions, for example, the shogunate prosecuted peasant rebels in the territory of other lords in the Kanto. By White’s criteria of “monopoly of coercion” this suggests sovereignty over the region. Yet the shogunate did not claim the right to tax the area it policed, nor did it reduce or change the holdings of the lords whose domains were involved in the uprisings. In Migdal’s terms, the shogunate sought to increase its regulative responsibility but not its extractive capability. The shogunate’s actions thus increased its obligations, but not its power. My purpose here is not to argue that finances are more important than diplomacy or the exercise of coercion. My point is that unless we narrow our definition of state to a single power, the shogunate emerges as a strangely contradictory, even self-destructive institution.

The shogunate also lacked the absolute sovereignty that is often treated as a defining attribute of the state. The original title *shōgun*, for example, did not designate a position of supreme authority, but a military appointment confirmed by the emperor. Although the title implied broader civil authority in addition to military command, it lost much of its luster with the collapse of the Ashikaga shogunate. The formidable power of the Tokugawa house stemmed largely from its ability to claim that it had created peace and order after decades of chaos. In the early seventeenth century, at the peak of the shogunate’s powers, political analysts implied that the imperial house had lost heaven’s mandate and the right to rule. The shogunate thus ruled in lieu of the emperor, rather than at his behest. But such claims were made largely in private documents. In public, even shogunal apologists were loath to assert shogunal supremacy over the emperor. Shogunal ideologues argued for a hegemonic shogunate by ignoring the emperor rather than denying him. By the late eighteenth century, however, the shogunate was commonly seen as subject to imperial authority. In 1788, Matsudaira Sadanobu, then serving as shogunal regent, explicitly described the shogun as an imperial servant (Ooms 1985, 162–93).

Some historians have treated the phrase *kōgi* or “public authority” as evidence of supreme shogunal authority. In the Warring States period, *kōgi* commonly referred to daimyo, but in the seventeenth century it came increasingly to refer to the shogunate. Some daimyo described themselves as servants of the *kōgi*, suggesting that their authority was based on shogunal assent (Sasaki 1981). But the term *kōgi* was not reserved for the shogunate. Even in the late eighteenth century, *kōgi* could refer to either the shogunate or a domain. The shogunate was sometimes distinguished by the term the “large *kōgi*” (*daikōgi*), but the meaning of *kōgi* is often clear only in context.

(See, e.g., Yozezawa-shi shi hensan iinkai 1981–86, 2:80, 4:130–31, hereafter GG). As Mary Berry has argued, *kōgi* was a “chameleon term that masks as often as it mirrors meaning.” Even the translation of *kōgi* as “public authority,” she argues, suggests a distinction between the public and private realms that was foreign to early modern thought (Berry 1986).

The shogunate’s formidable authority stemmed less from any single title than from a concatenation of multiple systems of legitimacy. The shogunate drew legitimacy from the imperial house through a series of offices: minister of the right (*Udaijin*), rector of the Junna and Shōgaku colleges (*Junna*, *Shōgaku ryōin betto*), captain of the left imperial guards (*sa-konoe-taishō*) and inspector of the left imperial stables (*sa-meryō-nō-gogen*). As Ooms has noted, the shogunate also enhanced its legitimacy by refusing imperial appointments, thereby increasing the independence of those it accepted. Each shogun was also head of the Tokugawa house, the most powerful warlord house in the land. Through imperial assent and creative genealogy, the Tokugawa shoguns were further dubbed heads of the Minamoto lineage, the first warlord house to claim the title shogun. Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first Tokugawa shogun, was posthumously refigured as Tōshōgū, a Shintō deity. A memorial shrine, spectacular both in architecture and setting, was built in Nikkō to burnish Ieyasu’s image (Hall 1966, 345–53). Ieyasu’s status as a Shintō deity also gave him elevated status in certain schools of Buddhism, where Shintō deities were viewed as alternative manifestations of *bodhisattva*. The shogunate was thus legitimized not by absolute authority within a single statist ideology, but by commanding authority within multiple ideologies: Neo-Confucianism, Shintoism, Buddhism, the emperor system, and the traditions of warrior rule were all brought to bear in defense of shogunal power. This gave the shogunate considerable power, but also bound it to the political institutions with which it shared political legitimacy. The shogunate thus existed in ideological interdependence with both the imperial house and rival warlords (Ooms 1985, 162–93).

While illogical as a state, the shogunate was exceptionally capable as a warrior house. For over two-and-one-half centuries the Tokugawa ruled unquestioned as Japan’s supreme warlord house. Only a confrontation with Western imperialism led imperial loyalists to envision a world not dominated by the Tokugawa house. To argue that the Tokugawa shogunate was a failure as a state, but a success as a shogunate, begs the question. But the longevity of the Tokugawa dynasty suggests the danger of treating nonstates as weak states.

Language and Land

In determining what the early modern order was, rather than what it was not, it is essential to attend to period terminology. As noted above, Uesugi Harunori deemed his domain a *kokka* or “state.” By contrast, historians commonly refer to the territories of daimyo as *han*. Although sometimes treated as an historical expression, the term was never used in shogunal investitures or official documents. Prior to the Meiji Restoration, *han* was an informal, literary term, used largely for its resonances with classical texts such as the *Book of Odes*, where it referred to military investitures granted by the Chinese emperor during the Chou dynasty (Hall 1968, 79–80). When used, the term *han* carried demeaning connotations. In the eighteenth century, the scholar Arai Hakuseki, who sought to recast the shogun as a Chinese-style monarch, referred

to daimyo holdings as *han* in order to diminish their authority relative to the shogunate. In the nineteenth century, imperial loyalists used the term to emphasize the subordination of daimyo to the emperor. It was in this sense of submission to the emperor that *han* was first used in an official context: in 1868 the Meiji government referred to all daimyo holdings as *han*, as part of its reorganization of Japanese territory. In the strictest sense, *han* existed for only three years, between the Meiji Restoration and the implementation of the prefectural system in 1871.³

The term *han* thus reflects how advocates of a strong shogunate or imperial authority understood daimyo authority. Because all daimyo were equally shogunal vassals, their domains were all equally *han*. The term conceals important distinctions in how daimyo and their retainers viewed themselves. The records of small domains commonly refer to the “holding” (*ryōbun* or *ryōchi*) of the ruling family. In large domains, however, the most common term was *kuni* or “country.” Officials spoke of the traditions of their “country,” the prosperity of their “country” and the well-being of their “countrymen” (*kokumin*). From a modern perspective this language is problematic since terms such as *kuni* could refer to a variety of political bodies: provinces, domains, or countries in the modern sense. In the house records of the Motoki family, wealthy Tokushima landowners, for example, the meaning of the term “country” (*kuni*) varied according to context. Writing of Western ships in the 1840s, a Motoki referred to “warships of foreign countries.” In such contexts, the family’s allegiance was to the country of Japan, or *Nipponkoku* led by the shogun (*shōgunsama* or *kokūō*). In most other contexts, however, the term “country” meant domain. In reporting the panic after Ōshio Heihachirō’s failed rebellion, Motoki wrote, “the dead are too many to number, and as a result of the disturbance the daimyo each tend to their own Edo residences, and the daimyo of neighboring countries race back to their castles.”⁴ The Motoki commonly associated the person of the daimyo with the country of Tokushima, referring to the daimyo as *okunisama*, or lord of the country. Often the final honorific *sama* was elided, and the country served as a synecdoche for the lord. When Hachisuka Nariaki, who was without heir, adopted a child from the Tokugawa house, the Motoki recorded that “the country has adopted a young lord of the shogun.” Finally, the Motoki used *kuni* to indicate the provinces of Japan as defined by the ancient *ritsu-ryō* system. This usage was commonly employed when referring to the Kantō, which was controlled by hundreds of small domains. The Motoki tended to distinguish between foreign countries and domestic “countries” through adjectives. Hence, other provinces or domains were “various countries” (*shokoku*), while Russia and European countries were “foreign countries” (*ikoku*). Yet even this distinction was far from consistent. During the Tempō crisis, the Motoki wrote angrily of daimyo who would not allow ships of “foreign countries” to dock. The price of rice was therefore rising, despite bountiful harvests in “other countries” of Japan (Fukui 1968, 210, 356).

This polysemantic use of *kuni* was not limited to private, colloquial works such as household records. In his 1727 essay *Seidan*, Ogyū Sorai used the term *kuni* as did the Motoki, to refer to three different political entities. Sorai spoke of Japan as a

³Some important sources are misleading on this subject. The editors of *Japan before Tokugawa* suggest that domains were called *kokka* in the sixteenth century but *han* in the seventeenth. No such abrupt transformation occurred, save in historical writing. See Hall 1981, 7–8. See also Kasaya 1993, 138–39.

⁴The Motoki diary is from “Kadoya nikki hikae,” reproduced in Fukui 1968, 157–364. For the reference to Ōshio Heihachirō, see pp. 262–64.

country, but also of the *kuni* of daimyo and of *kuni* as provinces. As in the Motoki diary, this led to passages which strike the modern reader as quixotic. Warning of the dangers of unregulated internal migration, Sorai argued that “because people can go freely to other *kuni*, come freely from other *kuni* and live [where they settle] freely, people throughout the *kuni* of Japan are in confusion” (Yoshikawa 1973, 275). Sorai also referred to provinces as *shū*, but, despite his concern with linguistic precision, did not use this term to consistently distinguish provinces from domains or countries.

Terms such as *kokka* were similarly ambiguous. In modern Japanese, *kokka* refers to a centralized state, but in the Tokugawa era it could signify either the shogunate or a domain. *Kokka*, literally, the “house of the country,” often referred to the ruling family of the domain, or, by extension, the ruling family and its retainers. The term thus lacked the sense of an absolute sovereignty that characterizes the modern notion of a state. But *kokka* could also designate an abstract political institution. In 1622, for example, the daimyo of Fukuoka, Kuroda Nagamasa, warned his heir to choose his successor wisely. Do not entrust the *kokka*, he cautioned, to someone who is self-indulgent, willful, or fails to heed his advisors. Such conduct would result in “divine punishment” (*tenbatsu*) and loss of the domain. The key to managing the domain lay in recognizing that it was not the daimyo’s property, but something entrusted to him. A good ruler thus brought “peace to the people and farmers” and avoided self-indulgence (Kasaya 1988, 249–50). This notion that the daimyo serves the *kokka* is echoed in Uesugi Harunori’s statement that “the lord exists for the sake of the state and the people: the state and the people do not exist for the sake of the lord.” This conception of the *kokka* thus embodies both a modern conception of the state as an abstract political entity and a less rarefied notion of the state as the patrimony of the ruler. The notion that a daimyo inherits a “state” suggests that a *kokka* was little more than an investiture to be carefully managed for one’s descendants. But the argument that the lord exists for the state is reminiscent of Frederick the Great’s claim that the monarch is the first servant of the state. Because this conception of a *kokka* did not involve supreme political authority, Nagamasa and Harunori could describe their realms as “states” without denying that they were invested by the shogun. In Tokugawa writing, Japan thus consisted of “states” within a “state.”

Most intriguing is Tokugawa usage of the term *kokumin*, literally “people of the country.” After the Meiji Restoration, *kokumin* was used as a Japanese equivalent for “nation.” Prior to the 1860s, however, *kokumin* could refer equally to the people of a domain as to the people of Japan. *Kokumin* could refer merely to “the commoners,” but it was often used to stress the obligation of the state to its subjects. In describing the failure of a form of fiat money, Kudō Kōichi, a Hirosaki official, noted that “the *kokumin* were impoverished” and “driven to riot.” When the daimyo learned of this he dismissed the responsible officials in order to “bring peace to the *kokumin*” (Aomori-ken bunkazai hogo kyōkai 1958, 233–34). In some instances, *kokumin* could include samurai. In 1833, amidst the Tempō famine, the government of Yonezawa referred to *kokumin* when justifying emergency rationing:

Given the recent series of exceptionally poor harvests, his lordship has been pained by the prospect that his land will not have enough food for next year. Although there are both noble and base among the four estates [peasants, samurai, artisans and merchants], the *kokumin* are one and indivisible. Accordingly, [his lordship] thinks of the entire land as one family and orders that even those who have ample rice should eat rice gruel, sending their surplus to those who do not have enough.

(Yonezawa-shi shi hensan iinkai 1981–86, 6:75–76)

Although the *kokumin* of Yonezawa were not a “nation,” they were obviously understood to share a common interest and purpose, even across class lines. Luke Roberts’s translation of *kokumin* as “countrymen” captures much of this sense of solidarity (Roberts 1991). When constructed as a *kokumin*, the people of Yonezawa were loyal first and foremost to their fellow countrymen, irrespective of class.⁵

Language and Translation

The polysemy of political discourse complicates the translation of Tokugawa texts. “Languages differ,” as Roman Jakobson observed, “essentially in what they *must* convey and not in what they *may* convey” (Jakobson 1959, 236). There is no word in modern English which can capture the multiple meanings of *kuni*: country captures the sense of cultural commonality, domain the sense of political suzerainty, and province the sense of geographic contiguity. Yet a *kuni* could be all or any one of these units. We confront similar problems with the translation of *kokka* and *kokumin*. Because our modern political vocabulary seeks to clarify sovereignty, formal translation tends to specify what the original Japanese has left unspoken.

Although direct translations of Tokugawa political discourse can sound quixotic and contradictory, period English-language accounts of Japan employed a language as foreign as early modern Japanese. François Caron’s widely read account of Japan, first published in 1645–46, described a “country” subdivided into “countries” and “kingdoms.” The supreme ruler of Japan was the “Emperor,” by which Caron meant the shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu. But the country was subdivided into “Countreys,” ruled by the various “Kings, Princes, Dukes and Lords of Japan.” The “Emperor” had formidable power over these nobles and could “banish or punish with death, at pleasure, his offending Kings and Lords, and . . . give away their Commands and Treasures to those he fancies more deserving than they.”⁶ Yet for Caron, the subservience of the daimyo to the shogun did not make them any less “kings.” Caron’s political language was typical of early modern European political discourse (Caron 1935). Into the eighteenth century, Englishmen conflated countries and counties, speaking, for example, of the “country” of Lancashire. In central Europe, the supremacy of the nation state, and the corresponding vocabulary, emerged still later. As late as the 1790s, Prussia was referred to as both a “state” and an amalgamation of “Prussian states.” Similarly, the Holy Roman Empire could be defined, in 1786, as a “state (*Staatkörper*) made up of many small, particular states.” In 1833 Metternich observed that Prussia was emerging as a “state within the state in the fullest sense of the term.” The central concept in traditional central Europe was not the state but the *Land*. *Länder* were territorial units with distinct institutions, laws and customs. Like *kuni*, *Land* implied political authority, but not sovereignty: “a *Land* asserted its identity but not its primacy.” *Länder* were thus porous political units, and could be penetrated by outside elements, such as the Catholic Church or the Holy Roman Empire. While neither the “country” of seventeenth-century English nor the *Land* of eighteenth-century German are precise equivalents of the *kuni* of Tokugawa Japanese,

⁵It is worth noting the limits of who was included in this “family” of Yonezawa subjects. The four classes did not include untouchables such as *eta* or *hinin*.

⁶I have relied here on the 1663 English translation of Caron’s *Rechte Beschryvinge Van het Machtigh Koningbrijck van Iappan*. See Caron 1935.

all three terms convey the polysemantic ambiguity of early modern politics (Sheehan 1989, 11–41; Wehler 1985, 20).

By contrast, it is difficult to translate Tokugawa political texts into modern Japanese: the language of Tokugawa politics did not outlive the Tokugawa political order. In 1868/6 the *dajōkan* (council of state) designated three types of internal division for Japan: *ken*, *fu*, and *han*. *Ken* and *fu* were ancient Japanese terms for provincial units of the imperial state and were created by aggregating Tokugawa house lands, liege vassal holdings, and small domains. Larger daimyo holdings were designated *han*. Under the pretext of restoring seventh- and eighth-century political institutions, the Meiji government eliminated the word *kuni* as a term for domain. Implicitly, Japan became the only effective country/*kuni*, the Meiji state the sole state/*kokka*, and the Japanese people the only true nation/*kokumin*. The introduction of distinct terms for prefecture, domain, and state was thus part of the construction of the modern state itself.

The polysemy of early modern Japanese has two important implications. First, the parallels between early modern Japanese and early modern European political discourse suggest that the “states within states” phenomenon was a political formation common to Europe and Japan, not some dysfunction of the state-building process unique to Japan. Second, the polysemy of Tokugawa discourse makes clarity in translation a problematic virtue. However vexing the ambiguities of “country,” to translate *kuni* as a province, domain, or a country, depending on context, is to translate Tokugawa thought into modern, post-Restoration thought. Although the result is increased clarity, this is a dubious virtue, since this lack of clarity was a salient aspect of Tokugawa political texts. In clarifying Tokugawa political language we therefore run the risk of effacing the complexities of the early modern political order. More seriously, the interjection of such “clarity” antedates the transformation of political language which accompanied the Meiji Restoration and treats the nation state as an ontologically privileged institution, existing even in a world which had no words to describe it. That large domains called themselves “states” does not, of course, mean that they were states in the modern sense. But to translate “*kokka*” as state only when it refers to the shogunate is, in effect, to impose a modern theory of sovereignty on Tokugawa thought. The danger here is that we will find evidence of state-building because we have put it there through our process of translation.

Language and Sovereignty

A close examination of early modern political language suggests a need to reexamine the bases of daimyo authority. Daimyo based their rule on three coincident sources of legitimacy: feudal authority, patrimonial authority and suzerain authority.

Feudal authority was once seen as the primary source of legitimacy in the Tokugawa polity, hence Sansom’s characterization of the early modern order as “centralized feudalism” (Sansom 1963, 3:46; see also Reischauer 1970; Reischauer 1956). I use feudalism here in a more limited sense to refer to the personal compact between lord and vassal. The feudal bond was created when a vassal swore loyal service to a superior lord in return for an investiture. In this form, feudal authority touched all samurai. All daimyo were invested vassals of the shogun, and their authority over their domains was thus derived partly from shogunal authority. Daimyo, in turn, invested their own samurai and demanded oaths of loyalty. These ties of vassalage also linked daimyo to the emperor, who, in theory, designated the shogun.

Daimyo oaths were commonly simple vows of loyalty, based on the three-article oath originally demanded by Ieyasu. When Tsugaru Nobuaki of Hirosaki swore fidelity to the new shogun Ienari in 1787, he vowed strictly to obey all shogunal laws, to keep his house from wickedness, and to serve his lord diligently. Failure to fulfill this oath warranted “all the resolute punishments, both revealed and hidden, of Bonten (Sk. *Brahmā*), Taishaku (Sk. *Śakra devānām Indra*), the Four Heavenly Kings, and the gods of the sixty provinces of Japan, especially the *gongen* of Izu and Hakone, the daimyōjin of Mishima, the bodhisattva Hachiman, and Tenman tenjin” (Kodama 1987b). Nobuaki signed his oath in blood before the assembled shogunal elders (*rōjū*). Daimyo demanded similar oaths from their high retainers. The domain elders (*karō*) of Takazaki domain, for example, swore in blood to obey all laws and edicts of their lord (*kōgi*), to serve him above all others and in all things, and to carry out all his instructions without question or demurrer. The closing oath before the gods was identical to that demanded of daimyo by the shogun (Shinji 1984, 111–12).

The feudal bond between daimyo and shogun both created and conveyed authority. The ritual of blood oaths can be seen as reproducing authority as well as representing it: in drawing their own blood to proclaim their obedience, daimyo helped to create the authority they served. Similarly, the invocation of a wide panoply of deities gave the feudal bond a weight greater than the *de facto* military might of either party. Having enhanced shogunal authority, daimyo then had their holdings legitimized by it. The investitures of each daimyo house were confirmed by a vermilion seal on a certificate of investiture which specified the location and extent of the holding.

The salient characteristic of feudal authority was its personal nature. It bound a single vassal to a single lord, not one institution to another (Berry 1986). Accordingly, feudal authority did not give the shogunate suzerainty over commoners outside its own holdings. The shogunate was the daimyo’s lord, not the lord of the daimyo’s commoners. The feudal character of the shogun-daimyo bond is revealed in the original “Laws Governing Military Houses,” a set of edicts issued in 1615. The laws delineated acceptable daimyo conduct and established the authority of the shogunate in several key areas. Daimyo were not to arrange marriages without shogunal approval, nor enter into private alliances, nor make modification to their castles. Daimyo were also instructed on the rule of their domains, but these passages were largely hortatory. The thirteenth and final article, for example, instructed daimyo to “select officials with a capacity for public administration.” While clear in general purport, this article did not proscribe any particular action save gross incompetence.

As guarantor of the daimyo holding, the shogun reserved the authority to reduce or seize the investiture of a daimyo who violated these edicts. But because feudal authority focused on personal ties, feudal sanctions were directed predominantly towards personal conduct. During the first half century of Tokugawa rule, the shogunate reduced or eliminated the investitures of scores of daimyo. Between 1600 and 1650 the shogunate seized over twelve million *koku* in over 130 incidents of attainder. The most common cause for seizure was the death of the daimyo: this accounted for nearly half of all attainders before 1650. Although the shogunate commonly recognized the heritability of investitures, death dissolved the feudal bond, and the shogun could legitimately reject a designated heir as unsuitable. These seizures made heritability conditional, even for large, established daimyo. The other focus of attainders was the daimyo’s conduct towards the shogun. Roughly one third of attainders resulted from rudeness, “madness,” tardiness in attending the shogun, or similar personal actions by the daimyo. Attainder was rarely used to punish a daimyo

for incompetent rule or for violations of administrative procedures. Philip Brown has calculated that administrative issues accounted for a maximum of 12 percent of attainders between 1601 and 1760. A stricter definition of administrative failure would put the rate as low as 3 percent (Brown 1993, 24; Fujino 1975, app.). Feudal authority thus required loyalty, propriety and general competence rather than any strict adherence to an administrative code.

The feudal principle that death dissolved the lord-vassal bond was counterbalanced by the patrimonial principle that investitures were heritable. Within the framework of patrimonial authority, an investiture was part of a family's patrimony and was transmitted from patriarch to patriarch across generations. Thus, while feudal authority linked two individuals until death, patrimonial authority made the feudal link a bond between houses across generations. Patrimonial authority was rooted in the *ie*, or Japanese family system. The *ie* system was characterized by what social scientists have termed "stem-linearity," or "stem succession." An *ie* could be succeeded only by a single heir, either natural or adopted. Even when a family had more than one heir, the headship of the *ie* was not partible: the lesser inheritor established a separate "branch" *ie*. Unlike specific households, an *ie* was understood to exist as a singular, corporate unit across time: although property was partible, family headship was not. The task of each generation was successfully to sustain the *ie* and then cede it to the following generation. Although much of the solidarity of an *ie* stemmed from kinship ties, the survival of the *ie* was more important than kinship. Succession through adoption rarely diminished the legitimacy of an *ie*.⁷

An important discussion of the political implications of the *ie* system has been developed by Mizubayashi Takeshi. Mizubayashi argued that the decentralization of the Tokugawa order was rooted in the strength of the *ie*, not the weakness of central power. The most important political manifestation of the *ie* was the warrior household, wherein the warrior's investiture, with its attendant rights and privileges, was the family patrimony. The body politic consisted of a hierarchy of warrior *ie*: the shogun invested the daimyo, who in turn subinfeudated vassals. Although the autonomy of these warrior *ie* was drastically reduced during the seventeenth century, the shogunate continued to honor the financial and legal autonomy of the daimyo. Indeed, it was the daimyo who were most effective in redefining their vassals as subordinate members of their own *ie* rather than independent *ie* heads. Thus, despite the supremacy of the shogunal house, shogunal power was constantly mediated through the authority of other daimyo *ie*. The notion of the *ie* is particularly important because it can readily be linked with other terms of Tokugawa political language: a state (*kokka*) is the *ie* of a *kuni* (country). Mizubayashi has thus dubbed the Tokugawa order a "composite" or "compound state" (*fukugō kokka*), wherein the large daimyo domains existed as small countries (*shōkokku*).

The concept of *ie*, Mizubayashi observed, permeated early modern Japanese society, governing the management of farmer and merchant households, as well as religious orders. In True Pure Land Buddhism for example, wherein priests married, the headship of a temple was commonly treated as the patrimony of an *ie*. The eldest son succeeded his father as head priest, while younger sons held lesser positions in the temple complex. There are thus distinct parallels between the *ie* and the idea of *Herrschaft* in early modern Europe. Much as the concept of *Herrschaft*, or lordship,

⁷For a discussion of the *ie* see Nakane 1970, especially pp. 101–5. Also valuable is Murakami 1984. This is best read in tandem with the critiques in *Journal of Japanese Studies* 11:1 (Summer 1985).

served to bind different *Länder* together in an imperial union, *ie*, linked through ties of vassalage, constituted a compound state. More broadly, *Herrschaft*, like *ie*, legitimized authority across class lines. Both concepts served to substantiate the authority of the father in a peasant household as well as the legal autonomy of a noble house (Mizubayashi 1987, 272–307).

The vassal household held a potentially contradictory position with the daimyo's *ie*. The rights and privileges of each warrior house constituted an *ie* and were thus legitimized by patrimonial authority. This principle allowed retainers to resist reforms, such as the standardization of tax collection or limits on *corvée*, that challenged their established perquisites. The autonomy of vassal *ie*, however, could be challenged by subsuming vassal houses within the daimyo house. This process reconstructed the vassal *ie* as a subordinate unit of the daimyo *ie* and made the survival of the daimyo house the paramount concern for both lord and vassal. Because the head of an *ie* could direct family members in the broader interest of the *ie*, the daimyo, as patriarch to his vassal, could bind them to rules of conduct and strip them of traditional autonomy. Patrimonial authority thus encompassed a tension between independent vassal *ie*, bound to their lord by a feudal pledge, and subsumed vassal *ie*, bound to their lord as members of his house (Mizubayashi 1977).

Kasaya Kazuhiko has taken this tension as a defining quality of early modern politics. According to Kasaya, the early modern era was characterized not by the diminution of independent, patrimonial rights, but by their transformation. In the Warring States era, samurai had broad, independent authority over their holdings. Their patrimonial authority (which Kasaya calls their *mochibun* or holding) gave them broad latitude in defending their interests: in order to increase or defend their territory, they could declare war, conclude peace, and arrange alliances. In the early modern structure these powers were eliminated. Daimyo stripped vassals of their right to independent military action and made them subordinate to daimyo rulings. The shogunate exercised similar authority over daimyo. Kasaya insists, however, that we also look at what retainers gained when these autonomous powers were lost. As agents in a daimyo's government, retainers gained the power to affect the decisions of a larger political structure. Instead of raising an army to advance their interests, powerful warrior families could use their hereditary positions in the domain government to influence policy regularly and systematically. Kasaya notes how in early modern politics, dictatorial lords were vastly outnumbered by consultative lords: daimyo and shoguns who relied on the counsel of their retainers. Daimyo were rarely autocratic, he argues, because early modern politics was based on patrimonial authority. Daimyo respected the patrimonial rights of their vassals by consulting with them on major issues. The pervasiveness of consultative decision-making and the scarcity of daimyo autocracy, reflect the continued power of subordinate warriors (Kasaya 1990, 35–61).

The subsumption of a samurai's patrimony into the broader daimyo *ie* had a transformative effect on political practice. Because a warrior's *ie* was only as vital the broader state structure of which it was a part, the preservation of patrimony became enmeshed with loyal service to the state. Effective service as a domain official became a part of defending and increasing one's patrimony. Kasaya has thus pointed to a "bureaucratic" tendency in the patrimonial system. If a lord acted against the best interest of his house, or challenged the administrative traditions of the domain, a retainer could legitimately depose him. Loyalty to the institution of the daimyo "house" took precedence over personal loyalty to the daimyo.

Japan's early modern bureaucracies were not Weberian bureaucracies. Even when tightly bound by government regulations, samurai administrators were as concerned

with rank and status as with the exercise of instrumental rationality. Further, administrative positions were heritable, thus making early modern administrative structures more *Gemeinschaft* than *Gesellschaft*. But Kasaya's notion of bureaucracy points to another essential tension within patrimonial authority: vassals owed service both to their own "house" and the "house" of their lord (Kasaya 1990, 35–61; Kasaya 1988, 273–79; Mizubayashi 1977, 1–63).

The third source of daimyo authority was what I call suzerain authority: the autonomy of country daimyo in civil affairs. Suzerain authority had its roots in the independent political authority of Warring-states era daimyo. *Sengoku daimyō* based their rule on their ability to bring tranquility and order to their holdings. They brought peace to their realms by stopping feuds among their retainers and repelling invaders. This, in turn, justified their expanded authority over commoners: *sengoku daimyō* claimed independent fiscal authority, conducted cadastral surveys, and regulated commerce and currency. Such daimyo described themselves as *kōgi* based on their ability to bring peace to the lands they ruled (*ando*) and to succor the people (*kokumin*) of their states (*kokka*) (Katsumata 1981, 101–24).

The early Tokugawa shoguns greatly restricted the ambit of daimyo autonomy, but the traditions of daimyo suzerainty remained an important part of the early modern political system. In the rhetoric of the great domains, the daimyo were lords invested by heaven with "countries" and obligated to succor their "people." The investiture was itself evidence of the lord's virtue, but it also demanded virtuous and sage conduct. From the mid-seventeenth century, suzerain authority drew largely on Neo-Confucian conceptions of rulership. Daimyo were thus expected to manifest *jinsei* or "benevolent rule." The concept of *jinsei* called for a wise and virtuous ruler dedicated to the promotion of the people's welfare. Like much of Tokugawa thought, suzerain authority was syncretic and also incorporated Buddhist elements. Daimyo were expected to treat their subjects with "compassion" or "mercy," thus manifesting Buddhist virtues.⁸ Suzerain authority assumed an equivalence of daimyo and shogun. Both were lords entrusted by a higher power with the responsibility to bring peace and prosperity to their people. "The realm (*tenka*) is the realm of heaven, not the realm of any one man," wrote Sakai Tadayuki, daimyo of Obama. "Hence even what is held by the shogun, much less what is held by the lords, is held in trust" (Tahara 1976, 301–3).

Daimyo varied in their perception of the importance of the shogunate in conveying the "heavenly mandate." Ikeda Mitsumasa, for example, saw the shogunate as instrumental in conveying the heavenly mandate to the daimyo. "The shogun receives his authority from heaven. The daimyo receives authority over the people as a trust from the shogun. The daimyo's councillors and retainers should aid the daimyo in bringing peace and harmony to the people" (Hall 1966, 403; Sasaki 1981, 284–86). Although Ikeda clearly subordinated himself to the shogun, his tactic should be considered in context. Mitsumasa held advisory privileges with the shogun Iemitsu and was related to the Tokugawa house: his mother had been adopted by the shogun Hidetada and his wife was a niece of Iemitsu (Ooms 1985, 50). Daimyo without such strong links with the shogunate were less inclined to subordinate themselves to shogunal intercession. Kuroda Nagamasa, for example, had been a Tokugawa ally at the battle of Sekigahara and praised the shogun in his will as a leader peerless in both war and peace. Nagamasa, did not, however, mention the shogun when instructing

⁸For a discussion of *jinsei* see Harootunian 1970, 62–65; Scheiner 1978; and Fukaya 1972.

his heirs on managing the domain. Rather, his instructions implied that the daimyo was responsible largely to heaven. “If your descendants should carry on our spirit, strictly obeying the law, practicing frugality and prudence, ruling the people with humanity and virtue, perfecting government (*seidō o tadashiku*) and keeping the customs of our house manly and upright, all the world (*tenka*) will hear of the humanity and virtue of our house and will submit [to our rule] in great numbers.” A failure to rule in this fashion would result in “heaven’s punishment” and the loss of the “state” and “country” (Ishii 1974, 10–32). In a similar fashion, Tōdō Takatora, daimyo of Tsu, wrote, “as our precious country is something entrusted to us, we cannot be negligent in any way.” Takatora skillfully left unanswered the question of who or what had entrusted Tsu to the Tōdō (Tahara 1976, 301–2).

In ignoring the role of the shogunate, apologists for daimyo authority were adopting a strategy parallel to that of shogunal apologists. In his essays on shogunal legitimacy, for example, Arai Hakuseki did not denigrate the emperor. Rather, he noted that Tokugawa Ieyasu had brought peace to Japan after a period of chaos and received heaven’s mandate. Hakuseki thus implied that the imperial house had lost heaven’s mandate through incompetence and thus could not be superior to the shogunate. Hakuseki thus cast the shogunate as Japan’s supreme ruler without directly challenging the emperor system. In a similar vein, apologists for daimyo authority did not deny that heaven’s mandate passed through the shogunate. Yet in neglecting to explore this process, they made the shogunate’s role incidental rather than critical (Tsuji 1991, 203–14).

Defenders of daimyo autonomy were careful not to attack the shogunate. Yet a close reading of domain laws suggests that daimyo and their advisers had reservations about the ambit of shogunal authority. In the early 1600s, for example, Yonezawa repeatedly ordered retainers accompanying the daimyo to Edo strictly to obey shogunal laws. (See, for example, GG 1:46[1623/5/16]; 1:50 [1626/5/22], 1:51 [1626/6/19] and 1:103 [1662/4/28].) Clearly, Yonezawa legal authorities thought that shogunal laws applied to Yonezawa retainers outside Yonezawa. But the situation inside Yonezawa was less clear. There is no edict in the collected domain laws that explicitly commands retainers to obey shogunal laws when in Yonezawa. Rather, the orders to retainers in Yonezawa enjoin them from publicly criticizing shogunal edicts (GG:1:93 [1657/2]). The difference here is telling. Outside Yonezawa, the shogunate was both powerful and legitimate. Inside Yonezawa, however, the domain recognized the shogunate’s power more than its legitimacy: hence retainers were not directed to obey the shogunate but were warned not to criticize it. Although the domain often relayed shogunal orders, it explicitly interposed itself between the shogun and its retainers (GG 1:160 [1695/10/23]). By implication, shogunal orders did not apply unless the daimyo conveyed them to his people.

This sense of autonomy was most pronounced in large domains established in the sixteenth century. In period parlance, these were known as the lands of “country holding” (*kunimochi*) daimyo. In the narrowest sense, “country holder” referred only to daimyo whose holdings encompassed an entire province. These lords were also known as the “eighteen country holding houses,” a group of powerful daimyo families including the Maeda of Kaga, the Shimazu of Satsuma, the Date of Sendai, the Hachisuka of Tokushima, and the Uesugi of Yonezawa. Beyond true “country holders” were two broader groups of powerful daimyo. The “great country holders” (*taishin kunimochi*) were lords who had holdings of at least 150,000 *koku*, but did not rule an entire province. Daimyo with “country holding rank” (*kunimochikaku*) had investitures of at least 100,000 *koku*. “Country holding” daimyo enjoyed markedly greater

autonomy from shogunal directives than other lords. In 1633, for example, the shogunate gave these daimyo broad discretion in civil affairs: “in the case of country holders, complaints from retainers, townsmen or farmers should be dealt with in accordance with the wishes of that lord” (Kasaya 1993, 150–2; Kodama 1987a). In practice, these daimyo were exempt from the shogunal sanction of attainder: only once after 1700 did the shogunate move, seize, or reduce a domain over 150,000 *koku*. Ironically, the target of this action was not a *tozama* warlord house but the hapless heir of a shogunal regent. Ii Naosuke’s heir, Naonori, had his domain reduced in the power struggle following Naosuke’s assassination.⁹

“Country-holding daimyo” were few in number: in 1869 only forty-three out of two hundred and sixty-five were formally assessed 100,000 *koku* or above, and only twenty-five at 150,000 *koku* or above. But the size of these domains made them disproportionately important. In 1869 nearly eleven million people, or 36 percent of the Japanese populace lived in domains of 150,000 *koku* or larger. Over thirteen million people, nearly 44 percent of the population, lived in domains 100,000 *koku* or larger. The formal investitures of the “eighteen country holders” alone comprised one-third the territory of Japan. The sense of domains as “countries” was thus common to much of Japan.¹⁰

Suzerain, patrimonial, and feudal authority often served as complementary rather than oppositional doctrines. Feudal authority emphasized the daimyo’s obligation to loyally serve the shogun. Patrimonial authority stressed the lord’s obligation to safeguard the domain as his family’s patrimony. Suzerain authority emphasized a lord’s obligation to bring peace and prosperity to his people through a mastery of civil affairs. Sound and sage rule often fulfilled all these obligations. A lord whose domain was peaceful and prosperous was both a worthy recipient of heaven’s mandate and a diligent custodian of his family’s patrimony. Unless he displayed a contempt for shogunal regulation, he was also a loyal retainer. When a lord’s obligations to “heaven” and the shogun were coincident, a daimyo who brought peace and prosperity to his realm was also serving his lord, the shogun.

Syncretic Legitimacy and Political Practice

The coexistence of feudal, patrimonial, and suzerain authority gave political domain discourse a remarkable flexibility. A striking characteristic of domain politics is how retainers could treat their lord as a servant of heaven or a servant of shogun depending on immediate political concerns. The actions of the house elders (*karō*) of Tokushima during the 1760s are a revealing example.

In 1766 Tokushima introduced a set of radical reforms designed to stop Osaka merchants from forcing down the price of indigo, Tokushima’s major cash crop. To undermine the ability of the Osaka merchants to fix prices, Tokushima set up an

⁹Naonori’s holdings were cut in 1862 after his father, Ii Naosuke, a loyal if unsuccessful *bakufu* administrator, was assassinated and his policies discredited. For data on attainder and transfer see Fujino 1975, appendices #1 and #2. In my calculations I have ignored the shogunate’s purported seizure of Mōri land in response to the Forbidden Gate Incident, since the shogunate could not effectively enforce the order.

¹⁰See Kasaya 1993, 150–51 and the discussion below. The calculations rely on data presented in Ravina forthcoming. The total population of Japan, for these calculations, was 30,089,401.

indigo market in its castle-town. Merchants were required to come to the market, examine the indigo offered for sale, and submit bids for approval to a government assessor. The system of open, competitive bids was designed to stop the cartel's price-fixing. Since the dependence of indigo growers on advances from Osaka buyers helped sustain the price-fixing system, the domain also offered special loans at terms more favorable than the cartel's. In notifying the shogunate of the reforms, the daimyo was careful to balance his role as a vassal of the shogun with his status as lord of a "country." "It is our belief," he concluded, "that since this matter deals with a product of our country (*kokusan*), it does not involve your lordship's laws (*osata*), but since it is a change in the existing balance we hereby notify your lordship" (Nishino 1940, 82).

The reforms cut deeply into the profit margin of the Osaka indigo cartel and sparked an immediate lawsuit. In 1766/9, roughly two months after the reforms were implemented, twenty-four indigo wholesalers and jobbers delivered a petition to the Osaka city magistrates opposing the Tokushima reforms. The magistrates favored Tokushima's case, but the domain's reforms were opposed by Matsudaira Takemoto, the Edo senior counsellor (*rōjū*). Takemoto dismissed the city magistrates' initial findings and ordered Tokushima to disband the indigo market. Takemoto's order was striking for its brevity and imperiousness: "the establishment of a market in Tokushima is something of recent origin. Therefore, be informed that matters should continue as heretofore." The *rōjū* offered no justification for his decision, but the rationale was implicit in the language of the edict. Although Tokushima had called itself a "country," the edict referred to the "investiture" (*ryōbun*) of Tokushima (Hasegawa 1975, 148; Amano 1986, 26; Nishino 1940, 90–91). As an investiture, rather than a land, Tokushima had no authority to act independently, even in the interest of its people. Matsudaira Takemoto's edict thus asserted suzerain authority over Tokushima: the shogun could prohibit the indigo market merely because it violated precedent. The daimyo's power was reduced to the feudal authority conveyed by the shogun.

The shogunate's edict dismayed the Tokushima administration. The domain requested a clarification of the decision and reiterated its original justification for the market. Since the indigo market addressed the problems of Tokushima indigo cube traders and farmers, they claimed, it was a matter of "national," meaning local, politics (*kokusei*). But the domain knew through back channels that Matsudaira Takemoto was unlikely to reverse his ruling. Resigned to a formal defeat, the administration planned to challenge through subterfuge what it could not overturn through legal appeal (Nishino 1940, 90–91; Nagao 1908, 2: ch. 6).

In a letter dated 1767/9/10 Hasegawa Ōmi, a domain elder, detailed a strategy for feigning compliance with the shogunal decision while maintaining the Tokushima market. The domain would initially ship to Osaka all of its indigo cubes. The following year, however, it would ship 70 percent, then 50 percent, and then 30. By 1773 the domain would have effectively returned to its initial plan of forcing buyers to come to Tokushima. The strategy relied on the shogunate's poor knowledge of conditions in Tokushima: "although the shogunate (*kōgi*) has issued a ruling, they have not investigated the details of the situation. . . . It would be difficult for the shogunate to investigate all of our own state (*okokka*)." Since the domain could feign compliance in case of an official visit, it could effectively ignore the shogunal decision. "Because this is a matter for the lord of our country, I believe that the shogunate's decision can be taken lightly" (Nagao 1908, 2: chap. 6). Hasegawa believed that the shogunate had exceeded its jurisdiction in banning the Tokushima market, but he

did not advocate a direct legal challenge. Instead, he proposed that the domain challenge the shogunate by testing its ability to enforce its decrees. Tokushima sought to defend its trade policy, and its rights as a “state,” through subterfuge rather than open dissent.

Hasegawa’s policy proved remarkably successful. Only in 1788 did the shogunate realize that its edict was being ignored, and not until 1790 did it effectively stop the Tokushima market. Even this ruling only stalled Tokushima’s determination to undermine the Osaka cartels: starting in 1802, the domain began organizing an indigo supplier’s cartel, designed to counterbalance the influence of the Osaka wholesalers. In this struggle between the shogunate and the domain, the Tokushima *karō* clearly considered their domain a “state” with broad economic powers. Although they wisely did not advocate an open challenge to shogunal authority, they were more than ready to ignore the shogunate when “national” interests were at stake.

It would be misleading, however, to call the *karō* domain “nationalists.” When their own patrimonial perquisites were challenged, they proved equally willing to draw the shogunate into domain affairs. In 1769 they engineered the remarkable feat of having the shogunate depose their daimyo.

The struggle between the Tokushima *karō* and their daimyo, Hachisuka Shigeyoshi, had its roots in a series of reforms Shigeyoshi introduced in 1759/2. Like many adopted daimyo, Shigeyoshi was more interested in talent than lineage in his senior retainers. Accordingly, he sought to weaken the links between hereditary rank and office. Most boldly, he opened the high offices of executor (*shiokiyaku*) and Edo executor (*Edo shiokiyaku*) to retainers outside the five *karō* families, the elite clique who dominated Tokushima politics. Shigeyoshi’s reforms encountered fierce opposition from the *karō*, who viewed him as arrogant and disrespectful. The *karō* Yamada Oribe Masatsune, for example, submitted a formal remonstrance warning Shigeyoshi that the new system was a grave mistake. It showed a lack of respect for one’s ancestors, and a lack of the humility becoming an adopted son. Further, argued Yamada, harmony was the key to successful administration: even if Shigeyoshi’s policy had merit, it would fail if it provoked resistance among the retainers (Kasaya 1988, 21–22).

Shigeyoshi responded aggressively. On 1759/3/1 he summoned four of the house elders, Kashima Kazusa, Kashima Bizen, Yamada Oribe, and Ikeda Noboru, and read his response to Yamada’s remonstrance. Yamada, he argued, had failed as a house elder by obstinately defending the existing administrative system: rather than noting the failings of previous daimyo, he had aided and abetted a faulty system. Further, Yamada had failed to understand Confucian principles. He had argued, based on the Analects, that “one does not change the way of one’s father for three years,” but had failed to note that this did not apply in critical matters, nor had he demonstrated that a birth son and an adopted son have the same obligations. Finally Shigeyoshi accused Yamada of hypocrisy: Yamada had argued that harmony was essential to successful rule, but had the arrogance to accuse Shigeyoshi of unfilial conduct (Kasaya 1988, 23–24). He then dismissed Yamada Oribe from his post as executor and ordered him into isolation.

Shigeyoshi’s fierce response cowed many opponents, but did not break the determination of the *karō*. In late 1761 Yamada began to solicit support for a plan to draw in the *bakufu* and have Shigeyoshi replaced with Hachisuka Shigetaka, a grandson of the fifth daimyo, Hachisuka Tsunenori. Shigeyoshi managed to divide the *karō* and further consolidate his control over the domain. Shigeyoshi discovered the scheme,

ordered Yamada to commit *seppuku* and ordered two other *karō*, Hasegawa and Kashima, into confinement (Kasaya 1988, 25–28; Kamikawa 1915, 32–36).

His hold on the domain now secure, Shigeyoshi resolved to move decisively on reform: in 1761 he declared a seven-year retrenchment program. In stark contrast to common practice, Shigeyoshi reduced the investitures of high ranking retainers while maintaining or increasing the stipends of poorer retainers. Shigeyoshi also challenged the immunity of landed fiefs, ordering a cadastral survey of *karō* Inada Kurobei's fief. Shigeyoshi insisted that this was not a reprisal against Inada, but part of the standardization of stipends under the *yakusei yakudaka* system. The daimyo further shocked the domain establishment by putting in prison retainers opposed to his reforms. Shigeyoshi justified his actions by arguing that such persons had been stripped of rank for improper conduct and then sentenced to jail. Thus, samurai were not being imprisoned. Overall, Shigeyoshi showed little respect for rank and protocol. He ignored the *karō* and promoted officials of middling rank to high office (Kamikawa 1915, 33; Kasaya 1988, 33–38; Ōtsuki 1955, 140).

The domain elite was beaten but not defeated. While Shigeyoshi challenged their perquisites at home, the domain elders were conspiring with shogunal officials to arrange his ouster. When Shigeyoshi arrived in Edo on 1769/10/22 he was presented by the *bakufu* with a four count indictment of his conduct. The shogunate charged him with upsetting traditional domain regulations, beleaguering his subjects with ill-conceived policies, failing to consult with his elite retainers (*kachū fudai*), and indulging in selfish disportment at the expense of his retainers and subjects. Shigeyoshi defended his reforms but the *karō* clique prevailed: on the last day of 1769/10 Shigeyoshi was ordered into retirement for improper conduct. The retirement was a clear victory for the Tokushima old guard. Shigeyoshi was succeeded by his twelve-year-old son, Haruaki. The *yakusei yakudaka* reforms were abandoned and power returned to the *karō* clique, led by Hasegawa (Kasaya 1988, 34–42; Amano 1986, 27; Ōtsuki 1955, 142–43).

The forced retirement of Shigeyoshi suggests, at first, a victory for the *bakufu*, a defeat for domain autonomy, and a step forward in state-building. The shogunate cited how Shigeyoshi's failure to rule his country properly had harried the people (*kokusei torimidare, kokumin nangi ni oyobi*), suggesting that the shogunate could intervene in the interest of the subjects of Tokushima. Suzerain authority over the people of Tokushima thus lay with the shogunate, not the Hachisuka house. Yet this logic was tempered by the shogunate's insistence on maintaining the traditions of the Hachisuka house, implying that these precedents bound not only the daimyo but the shogunate as well. Indeed, Shigeyoshi was punished, in part, for reforms which violated Hachisuka tradition. Thus, even when it asserted suzerain authority, the shogunate continued to recognize the patrimonial authority of the Hachisuka house. Accordingly, the shogunate made no prescription for the future rule of Tokushima save an exhortation to return to precedent, nor did the shogunate assign any agents to supervise or direct Tokushima politics. The impact of shogunal authority thus remained largely feudal: the shogunate exerted power over the rulers of Tokushima, but not Tokushima itself.

The case is still more problematic as an example of state-formation. The shogunate's ability to depose Shigeyoshi was a clear reflection of its strength. But the shogunate put power in the hands of Hasegawa Ōmi, the domain elder who had directed Tokushima's quiet violation of the shogunate's directives on indigo. The victors in this case seem to be the Tokushima *karō*, who not only violated shogunal orders, but then used shogunal power to their own advantage.

The victory of the house elders lay in their ability to exploit the tension between feudal, patrimonial, and suzerain authority. Unable to unseat Shigeyoshi on their own, they successfully used the *bakufu* to depose Shigeyoshi and install a pliable heir. In doing so they acceded to a notion of their lord as a servant of the shogun, dependent on shogunal sanction for governing authority. But the *karō* were hardly shogunal allies. The domain elite was no more willing than Shigeyoshi to cede control over trade in indigo. When the issue was trade, Hasegawa believed that domainal affairs were not the shogun's affair, but those of the "lord of the country." It is tempting to dismiss this apparent contradiction as opportunism: the *karō* deceived the shogunate in the name of their lord, and their lord in the name of the shogunate as it suited their immediate interests. This opportunism, however, was grounded in the patrimonial authority of the *karō* houses. Hasegawa and his allies acted to defend Tokushima's economic interests because their patrimony as elite retainers depended on the vitality of the Tokushima economy. They were equally willing, however, to depose their lord when his reforms threatened their patrimonial claim on the domain's premier offices. These patrimonial concerns were reflected in the shogunate's indictment of Shigeyoshi. The shogunate found him unfit for rule because he broke with the tradition of consulting with his elite retainers. The *karō* acted consistently, not as shogunal or Tokushima vassals, but as defenders of their patrimony.

Nations and Names

As these examples suggest, great domains could be defined both as autonomous "states" and as vassal holdings of the shogunate. Completing the political order, however, was the underlying concept of patrimonial authority, which legitimized warrior power as family patrimony. How can we characterize such a multivalent system? Concepts such as "empire" and "federation" offer useful analytical frameworks. Domains like Tokushima are aptly characterized as "client states" in a Japanese empire or "states" in a Japanese federal union. My preference, however, is for the term "compound state." The term, as originally proposed by Mizubayashi Takeshi, highlights the status of large domains as small states within a broader state system. "The compound state order was created through the combination of small states such as the Tokugawa domain, which encompassed the *fudai* daimyo and the *batamoto*, and the domains of the country holding *tozama* daimyo who were descendants of Warring States daimyo" (Mizubayashi 1987, 279). The concatenation of these political structures comprised the Tokugawa state. Although in isolation neither the shogunate nor any of the domains was a state, in combination they exercised most state powers: the organization of armed forces, taxation, policing, control over the food supply, and the formation of technical personnel (Tilly 1975, 3–83, esp. 3–6, 70–71),

Two additional considerations support the choice of "compound state." First, the term aptly reflects the composite legitimacy of the early modern order. Tokugawa ideology was syncretic in two senses. It fused multiple ideologies (Shintō, Buddhist, and Neo-Confucian) in support of multiple forms of authority (feudal, patrimonial, and suzerain). The shogunate and the domain were not supported by a single statist ideology, but by several ideological traditions. Thus, as seen above, the Tokushima *karō* could simultaneously oppose and invite shogunal intervention in domain affairs. This concatenation of ideologies gave the early modern order great strength but also

great inertia. When, for example, the shogunate sought to replace its liege vassals with a conscript army in the late 1860s, it was acting appropriately as a recipient of heaven's mandate but irresponsibly as a feudal lord. These reforms thus strengthened the shogunate's position as an absolutist regime but cast doubt on its reliability as a party to a feudal compact and as a guarantor of the patrimonial rights of the *batamoto*. Because of its composite legitimacy, the shogunate was simultaneously undermined and strengthened. The term "compound state" captures these contradictory effects.

Second, the notion of a compound state directs our attention to the prevalence of autonomous structures within the early modern order. The persistence of such autonomous powers was more than a legacy of sixteenth-century politics. Although "country" domains were largely a legacy of the 1500s, the shogunate actively created semi-autonomous institutions. An example is the house of Danzaemon, ruler of the untouchable castes of *eta* and *binin*. The Danzaemon house relied on Tokugawa sponsorship to achieve dominance over other *eta* families in the late 1600s. The shogunate invested Danzaemon with legal authority over leather work and alms seeking. Danzaemon, in turn, invested houses beneath him: Kuruma Zenshichi, for example, was made head of the *binin* and invested with exclusive rights to seek alms. Danzaemon held independent judicial authority over his people. In disputes among *eta* or *binin* he was empowered to investigate the conflict, pass judgment, and decree punishments as severe as the death penalty. In disputes between commoners and untouchables, judicial authority was ceded to the responsible daimyo, but Danzaemon remained responsible for applying any punishments assessed (Mizubayashi 1987, 288–94). Within the framework of state-building, Danzaemon represents a retrogression: rather than expand its direct authority, the shogunate created another feudal agent. The concept of a compound state allows us to understand Danzaemon as part of a coherent political order rather than a "schizophrenic approach to rule." If we treat the state order as a composite of subordinate institutions, all linked by shogunal imprimatur, then the creation of independent authorities like Danzaemon becomes part of a consistent political order rather than a departure from state-building.

Finally, the term "compound state" avoids the implication of a dichotomy between the shogunate and the domains. As the case of Tokushima reveals, the shogunate was not uniformly in favor of a "strong" shogunate, nor the domains uniformly in favor of "strong" domains. Rather, notions such as patrimonial authority cut across the shogunal/domain divide. The reluctance of the Osaka city magistrates to intervene against Tokushima makes little sense if we see them solely as shogunal agents. But the magistrates were also petty daimyo and thus shared with Tokushima an interest in maintaining the patrimonial authority of warriors against the suzerain authority of the shogunate. The domain elders of Tokushima had a similar interest in a strong shogunate. If suzerain authority lay solely with their daimyo, they could not check his attempts to reduce their patrimonial privileges. By treating the daimyo as an agent of the shogun, the elders were able to depose Shigeyoshi while still maintaining the integrity of their domain.

Writing the history of a compound state involves a distinct set of challenges. Although such a history does not preclude either synthesis or closure, it does require that we abjure presenting the Tokugawa order as an imperfect precursor to the nation-state. Although one can find in early modern politics the antecedents of modern statecraft, central authority was but one strand of political practice. Central to an understanding of early modern politics is the recognition that the great domains did not arrive at uniform, or even markedly similar, responses to the challenges of a

changing socioeconomic structure. Rather, in a contentious intellectual environment, different governments employed a broad range of countermeasures and adaptations.

The replacement of the domains with prefectural government subject to direct central authority was among the signal accomplishments of the Restoration. The new state, as H. D. Harootunian has observed, reduced the “polyphonic discourses of the late Tokugawa, with their many voices speaking about the same things, to the single voice of an authoritative discourse” (Harootunian 1991, 258). In essence, the national policies of the new state were an epitaph to domain autonomy: it was the destruction of the domains which made possible the centralized powers of the Meiji government. The danger, however, is allowing this watershed to assume teleological status. We must avoid treating strong domains as an impediment to a strong state in order to emplot Japanese history in a metanarrative with the nation as subject, an “etatist *Bildungsroman*” (Geyer 1989, 321–22). The task of writing Tokugawa political history is thus to understand domain politics not only as a precursor to the Meiji state, but as part of a world which the new regime systematically destroyed.

Glossary

daikōgi	大公儀
hatamotoryō	旗本領
ie	家
karō	家老
kokka	国家
kokumin	国民
kokuō	国王
kokusan	国産
kokusei	国政
kōgi	公儀
kuni	国
kunimochi daimyō	国持大名
kunimochikaku	国持格
rōjū	老中
ryō	領
ryōbun	領分
ryōchi	領地
taishin kunimochi	大身国持
tenka	天下

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