

## 11.5 Famine and village society: the response of Kami-shiojiri, Japan to the Great Famine in the Tenpo period Room 203

*Conveners: Moto Takahashi and Hiroshi Hasebe*

*Chair: Peter Spufford*

**Peter Spufford** is Emeritus Professor of European History, University of Cambridge, Life Fellow of Queens' College, Cambridge and Fellow of the British Academy. He is an economic Historian working primarily on late medieval Europe, with a special interest in the history of trade and financial institutions. His most important book is 'Money and Its Use in Medieval Europe', his most recent large book is 'Power and Profit. The Merchant in Medieval Europe'. He is currently writing on the rise and decline of financial centres in from the thirteenth century to the present day. He will contribute a chapter on the use of money to the series of volumes on Kami Shiojiri.

This session investigates the responses of the Han domain governor and village community to the 'Great Famine' in the Tenpo period (the 1830s), from various view points, and by comparing what happened in Japan with similar events elsewhere. We will examine the village administration, the characteristics of the famine as a natural disaster, demographic patterns, social and economic polarisation and the policy of saving corn stocks which was introduced by the Han domain.

This research group has been engaged in the 'parallel and contrast' study of two rural societies, one in England and the other in Japan during the period in which the market economy was established, in other words the 'early modern' period. This study has chosen two village societies namely Willingham, Cambs., UK and Kami-shiojiri, Ueda, Nagano, Japan. It comprehensively analyses as well as contrasts and parallels the changes in the ordinary daily productive activities in these two villages and the development of the responses to extraordinary natural disasters such as famines and bad harvests.

This session focuses on Kami-shiojiri village which at the time was under the governance of the Ueda Han domain, in Nagano prefecture (old name is Shinano). Like other parts of Eastern Japan, Ueda Han domain experienced quite serious bad harvests in 1833 and 1836. In particular the bad harvest in 1836 caused significant damage to the village, and suffered deaths as a consequence of epidemics. Kami-shiojiri village, however, managed to recover from the two bad harvests and the famine through taking effective measures based on their experience of famines in the past to help them deal with any future harvest failures.

Kami-shiojiri had a population of around 800 at this time and there were about 150 houses, making it an average-sized Ueda Han domain village. As our research has clarified, this village showed a level of economic development corresponding to the market opportunities one would expect it to have as the main village of the silkworm egg industry in Nagano from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. It is not surprising that, the village society had a social and economic structure characterised by a huge gap between different individuals within the upper echelons of society as well as considerable differences between those in the middle and lower social strata. Those at the top of the social pyramid had generally acquired certain family businesses, family property and a family name as silkworm egg traders. Those lower down the social scale had not been so fortunate. Nevertheless, the village families and households all had social links between them. These links had a general tendency to be ie (family of household)-unions based on *dohzoku* (kin groups), which is usually said to be one of the original Japanese social characteristics. Simultaneously the families or households were organised into gonin-gumi (the equivalent of the English frank pledge) and into villages which were all distinct administrative units. As Kami-shiojiri had a social and economic structure of this type, the Tenpo bad harvests affected the villagers very differently according to where someone was in the social and economic hierarchy. By following a series of policies from the Han government which were designed to deal with the bad harvest, the village as an

administrative organisation got through the famine by coordinating the families whose responses to the crisis inevitably differed considerably.

As far as famines in early modern Japan are concerned, there are a considerable number of studies ranging from the source books of an earlier period to the recent demographic research. However, most of them focus on the famine as a social crisis, which caused great damage as seen by the numerous victims who starved to death. Research has also focused on the Tohoku (north-eastern) area of Japan which is recognised as the area most likely to suffer bad harvests. Even if a particular area had no direct past experience of famine to rely on, there were many examples of areas surviving famines through the experience and knowledge gained by others of the disastrous harvests and famines elsewhere such as the Tenmei Famine and the Tenpo Famine. Current research is investigating these very examples. This session aims to clarify the process at each stage using a body of evidence including each individual family's exact circumstances and responses. It would be possible to apply what we have learnt from these cases to European early modern rural societies including England.

### 11.51 Moto Takahashi – Kin relationships and families in Kami-shiojiri: with a contrasting parallel study of Willingham, Cambs., UK

As with the English cases, the functions of kin groups should have been exposed when the group members were at risk and this should be particularly true when it comes to customs relating to inheritance in Kami-shiojiri, a Japanese village. However, it is not so often that such information appears in the records. To be specific, if there were public social welfare records like the English Poor Law documents, there is some possibility that they might have survived as historical documents. However, even English documents would not necessarily show the reality of a famine directly and precisely.

First of all, in England after the seventeenth century, there are few records of famines producing deaths from starvation. At least Willingham, Cambs. does not seem to have experience of such a famine. In this respect, Kami-shiojiri is has something in common with Willingham, as it did not record the death from starvation itself in the records even in the period of the great Tenpo nationwide famine.

Nevertheless, it is still possible to find cases of people starving to death but this was generally recorded as 'falling dead on the roadside (*yukidaore*)' and such a record was usually treated as an event, concerning outsiders and not as something that had happened inside the village.

Moreover, it is also likely that one can find some outsiders living from hand to mouth who came to this village by way of Kami-shiojiri 'relatives' to settle down. Yet I have not come across any records for the bad harvest period to describe such immigration. Paradoxically, during a lean harvest, if not famine, it becomes much less affordable for people to keep records. On the one hand, the relatively prosperous families with holdings and sufficient status to pass all this on by inheritance were not likely to be among those who died of starvation. On the other hand, some '*honke* (main branch family)' distributed or divided the property among the '*bunkes* (stemmed branch family)' as a means of support, and accordingly losing their vigor and influence. The trigger of such a decline was often a famine or bad harvest such as the one under consideration here. We can find an appropriate example in Kami-shiojiri during the Tenpo famine period.

### 11.52 Hiroshi Hasebe – Famine, crises and mutual aid in Kami-shiojiri

This paper aims to analyse how the village of Kami-Shiojiri overcame the Tenpo Famine. Bad harvests afflicted the Eastern part of Japan in both 1833 and 1836. Many people suffered from a serious shortage of food as a result and some starved to death. In the rural areas, peasants remembered past experiences of Great Famines and they were able to deal with the terrible situation by using their local knowledge. It has been often been said that the Ueda area, which was the focus of our research, was not affected so badly.

In Kami-Shiojiri Village, the effects were not so serious in one respect but the process of overcoming and recovering from the disaster was not so easy when considered from another angle. The reason for this was as follows: firstly, the preparation for the famine derived from the food culture, secondly the quick political response by the Han government to the food shortage based on the memory of great famines of the past and lastly the advantage (profit, market channels, information) from the trading of silkworm eggs. It could be said that the main reason for the difficult circumstances endured by the less prosperous peasants was that they enjoyed none of the advantages one would get from trading or running businesses.

### 11.53 Futoshi Yamauchi – The effect of bad harvests in Kami-shiojiri on landholding and land use

The subject of this paper is a consideration about the consequences for land ownership structure and land use structure in Kami-shiojiri village resulting from bad harvests in the Tenpo period (1833-1844). Also, we can say that the bad harvest had little effect on the land ownership structure. There was already a tendency for middle class land holders to grow in their numbers in this village from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The bad harvest could not hold back this tendency.

The influence of bad harvest had little impact on land use. The percentage of tenanted rice paddies on all rice fields has remained the same. We cannot find a great change in the extent of the land under cultivation because the number of middle-level- cultivators has steadily increased during this period.

In conclusion we can underestimate the effect of the bad harvest as a whole. It was slight, temporary and limited. It did not damage the middle class which comprised the heart of rural society. The middle class could cope with and fence off the effect of the bad harvest. We can say that kami-shiojiri village was equipped with a social structure which reduced the impact of bad harvests.

### 11.54 Kouki Iwama – The provisions against bad harvests in Kami-shiojiri: a case study of the Eizoku-ko after the bad harvests of the 1830s

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the provisions against bad harvest in Kami-shiojiri village. After the 1830s, the 'Eizoku-ko' (the lasting mutual financing association) was established on the instructions of the Ueda Han domain as a precaution against bad harvest. The Ueda Han domain approved the Eizoku-ko, and part of the money was paid to it by associations. Eizoku-ko consisted of about 30 associations in Kami-shiojiri village. Each association's membership numbered about 20. All members who attend the meeting had saved money to avoid dying out as a household unit. And all members shared in the profits once a year. The transfer of the rights of the shareholder was prohibited, and the member could not withdraw any of the saved money. Each

association lent money with the land used as security. When a member inherited, he signed and stamped the ledger. Every member of the association had to submit a copy of his will. In the will, every member swore that if his descendant committed a crime or did something wrong, he would be expelled from the association. The provision against bad harvest in Kami-shiojiri village played the role in the foundation of the regional financing association.