ROBERT M. SPAULDING JR.

Imperial Japan's Higher Civil Service Examinations

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ROBERT M. SPAULDING, JR.

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to the memory of
my father
1892-1965

Foreword

THIS is the first of a series of volumes resulting from the Political Modernization of Japan Project. The Project was supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and carried out by members of the staff of the Center for Japanese Studies at the University of Michigan. The complete series will consist of some seven volumes, scheduled for publication within the next few years.

Japan is the only non-Western society that has managed to achieve levels of political, economic, and social development closely approximating those of the major Western powers. The series of which the present volume is a part focuses on one dimension of this remarkable accomplishment—the political—and seeks to describe and analyze the processes that have made it possible. Dr. Spaulding, for example, is assuming that the character and skills of the higher bureaucracy had a great deal to do with Japan's success in this sphere and that they in turn are related to the introduction and enforcement of the "merit principle" in the system of selecting higher civil servants. Such an attempt to replace standards of birth and status by more egalitarian standards of education and achievement as the prime qualification for high public office has been a classic problem in all modernizing societies. Japan has succeeded in doing this to a most impressive degree, but only as the result of a long, difficult, and exceedingly complex struggle. Dr. Spaulding's study makes clear just how this was accomplished in the Japanese case. In doing so, his study, we hope, will take its place among the very few historically-oriented studies of the process of political modernization or development.

Robert E. Ward
Director, Center for Japanese Studies

Acknowledgments

THIS history of imperial Japan's higher civil service examinations is the unexpected product of an attempt to do something quite different: to describe the various avenues of civil service recruitment in the period of party and military rule from 1918 to 1945, as part of a study of career patterns. Groping through the incredible labyrinth of special appointment ordinances issued between 1918 and 1945, I began to see that they were misleading when considered in isolation, and that their abundance and complexity tended to obscure the central importance of an examination system created much earlier. Since no study of the origins and evolution of that system existed, it became necessary to make one, and this book is the result. The research on which it is based was made possible by a generous grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York for a series of interrelated studies on the political modernization of Japan. I have benefited from the advice and comments of Professor Robert E. Ward, Professor Roger F. Hackett, and other participants in the Political Modernization of Japan Project at the University of Michigan, and from the opportunity to relate this research to collateral work on other aspects of Japanese modernization.

The Asia Library and Law Library of the University of Michigan, the Far Eastern Law Division and the Orientalia Division of the Library of Congress, the National Diet Library in Tokyo, and the alumni associations of the major universities and higher schools of Japan have all been most generous in providing or helping to locate data for this study. On specific problems, invaluable information was contributed by Mr. Satō Tatsuo, Director of the National Personnel Authority; Mr. Tsuda Minoru, Director of the Judicial System & Research Division of the Ministry of Justice; Mr. Kanai Madoka of the Historiographical Institute of the University of Tokyo; Professor Fujii Sadabumi of the National Diet Library; and Mr. Hayakawa Shohachi of the Library & Mausoleum Section of the Imperial Household Agency. I am grateful also to Professor Miyake Tarō of Waseda University and Mr. Kanazashi Kin'ichirō of the National Personnel Authority for their review of an early draft of the manuscript and many useful suggestions.

ROBERT M. SPAULDING, JR.

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IMPERIAL JAPAN'S HIGHER CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATIONS

Introduction

SEVEN HUNDRED MILES from the sea, the Yellow River plunges down a steep gorge in a triple waterfall so turbulent that thousands of fish swimming upstream are blocked, unable to continue. Even the carp, noted for its ability to surmount waterfalls, is stopped. Since legend holds that any fish managing to pass will be transformed instantly into a dragon, the place is called *Lung-men*—the Dragon Gate. And in Japan, as in China, this name became a metaphor for the state examinations which gave or denied access to the elite profession of the higher civil service.[1]

The magnitude of ordeal and opportunity thus symbolized is one of the few shared characteristics of the examination systems of China and Japan. Among their many differences, one is particularly notable. The process called modernization created competitive examinations for public office in imperial Japan but destroyed them in imperial China. This paradox raises fundamental questions about modernization and about the Japanese and Chinese responses to Western influence. Yet the vast literature on these subjects contains little about the civil service, and the Japanese examinations (unlike the Chinese) have not been subjected to detailed historical analysis. This is regrettable, because the upper bureaucracy has been for a hundred years the most consistently successful of the elite groups competing for political power in Japan, and since the last decade of the 19th century the Higher Examinations have largely determined its composition and profoundly affected its character.

The importance of the Higher Examinations was long doubted because the persistence of Satsuma-Chōshū power at the ministerial level gave plausibility to charges that the government remained

[1] The oriental dragon is not a satanic monster to be overcome by a Saint George but a symbol of greatness and imperial majesty. In metaphoric use the simple term *lung-men* (Japanese *ryūmon* or *ryōmon*) is generally replaced by the verbal phrase *teng-lung-men* (*tōryūmon* or *tōryōmon*). The metaphor is also applied to difficult school entrance examinations and still more loosely to any barrier gate to success or eminence (e.g., "The National Exhibition is the Dragon Gate for artists"). The geographic Dragon Gate lies between Ho-ching in Shansi and Han-ch'eng in Shensi, 70 miles north of Tung-kwan.

"feudal." Later it was asserted that the examinations perpetuated "feudalism" in a new guise, by substituting a school elite (*gakubatsu*) for the old domain elite (*hambatsu*). However, the prime reasons for scholarly neglect of Japan's Higher Examinations are simply that their history is brief in comparison with 13 centuries of Chinese examinations, and that they seem to be merely a casual detail of an imported Prussian political system. The more important they became, the more they were taken for granted as the natural or inevitable basis for recruitment.

Even one of the rare historical surveys of the civil service suggested that "conditions in Japan at the time of the Meiji Restoration bore an extraordinary resemblance to those in Prussia after the Thirty Years War. The Restoration was a product of the decay and debilitation of the feudal system and the pressure of foreign capitalism. Because of more than 220 years of Japanese seclusion, capitalism in Japan developed much later than in the advanced states of Europe and America. Therefore the new Meiji government which replaced the Tokugawa shogunate had to control the chaotic situation accompanying abolition of the feudal system and had to prepare the structure of a modern unitary state. In addition, it was driven by the necessity of nurturing its belated capitalism under slogans of 'prosperity and military strength' and 'increasing production and industry,' in order to preserve national independence against pressure from the advanced capitalist states. The Meiji government thus came to establish a political organization of centralized authority, under which a modern bureaucratic system was created. It is consequently quite natural that Japan's modern bureaucratic system resembles that of Prussia."[2]

Those who can believe that vast events and great institutions are inexorably simple and proceed from inescapable causes will find this account sufficient to explain Japan's modern bureaucracy. Those who question whether 17th century Prussia and 19th century Japan were very similar may yet concede the possibility that in emulating Bismarck the Meiji oligarchs were really following the

[2] Yoshimura Tadashi, *Gendai seiji ni okeru kanryō no chii*, Tokyo: Maeno Shoten, 1950, p. 181. Throughout this book all Japanese names are given in the Japanese sequence, with surname first.

Great Elector. But those who recognize the Higher Examinations as the key to the Japanese bureaucracy will find all this largely irrelevant.

Prussia provided the model for imperial Japan's Higher Examinations, but did not furnish either the first or the decisive stimulus to their firm establishment. The first hesitant acceptance of examinations in 1884 owed far more to diplomatic pressure than to philosophy or economics, and the pressure was more British than German. The broader commitment to examinations in 1887 was clearly German in spirit, but within five years this system lay in ruins awaiting abolition. The reasons for its collapse and for its unexpected revival in 1893 were peculiarly Japanese, having little to do with Germany or capitalism. The Higher Examinations were the product of a few strong and many lesser stimuli, intricately intertwined with problems of extraterritoriality, constitution-making, the political party movement, and higher education. Their evolution in this context from 1869 to 1945 is the subject of the present study, which it is hoped will contribute to a more accurate understanding of the rise of modern Japan.

PART I

The Decision to Examine

CHAPTER 1

Trial of the Chinese System

HEREDITARY PRINCIPLES governed access to office from the beginning of Japanese history. Yet when Japan's first epoch of modernization began in the 7th century, a civil service examination system was one of the institutions borrowed from T'ang China. It was not then a very ancient institution. The Han dynasty had used examinations to supplement an appointment system based on recommendation by influential men, but not until the Sui (589-618) and T'ang (618-907) dynasties did examinations come to be a major avenue to office in China.

Reorganization of the Japanese state along Chinese lines began with the "Great Reform," or *Taika*, of 646. It is unclear when examinations were first used in Japan, but the Confucian college (Daigaku Ryō), which trained most of the examination candidates, was in existence by 671 at the latest. The earliest surviving legislation on examinations is found in the *Ryō no gige* (*Commentary on the Administrative Codes*) of 834, which quotes codes probably current around 728.[1] Three of these so-called Yōrō Codes, entitled "Education," "Appointment and Conferment," and "Evaluation," contain pieces of a jigsaw puzzle vaguely outlining a civil service examination system copied from the T'ang. It is by no means certain that the rules prescribed in the Codes were ever fully carried out. Surviving evidence suggests they were modified and in part ignored almost from the beginning. The following account is therefore a description of theory and not necessarily of practice.

[1] None of the early codes survives as such, though fragments are extant, chiefly as quotations or paraphrases in other works. The so-called Daihō Codes of 701 were superseded in 757 by the Yōrō Codes compiled in 718, but the two appear to have been very similar. The *Ryō no gige* text of 834 is supposedly that of the Yōrō revision. Since it does not incorporate revisions made by *kyaku* of 730 and 827 (see *Koji ruien: bungaku bu III*, Tokyo: Koji Ruien Kankō Kai, 1928, pp. 41-42), the *Gige* text probably reflects conditions around 728, when the last of the four examinations was introduced. The discussion below is based on the *Kokushi taikei* edition of the *Ryō no gige*, prepared by Kuroita Katsumi and now available in several printings.

The Japanese had a strong sense of hierarchy long before their first contacts with Chinese civilization, and the provisions of the Ryō which proved most viable in Japan were those emphasizing hierarchy. Routine identification of officials in terms of their position within the hierarchy is a salient characteristic both of the Ryō system of the 8th century and of its 19th century revival. The two differ chiefly in reversing the connection between court rank and office. In modern Japan, court rank was usually acquired as a result of appointment to office. In the 8th century the opposite was true; no one could be appointed to an office in the classified service unless he held the appropriate court rank. Promotions were made in terms not of offices but of 30 court ranks, grouped in nine divisions containing from two to four ranks each.

There were four ways in which a man could obtain the court rank essential to office: by hereditary privilege, examination, service, or purchase. The last two were "irregular" methods, not recognized in the Yōrō Codes. Rank was conferred for services as diverse as helping to suppress an insurrection and clearing trees around a palace. The sale of rank began in the 8th century and flourished from the 10th century on. Conferment of rank on the basis of hereditary privilege was elaborately regulated by the codes, as summarized in Table 1.

The ranks specified therein were available by right at age 21 to men whose fathers or grandfathers held the rank shown at the left.[2] Since periodic promotions in rank were customary, these initial ranks are well below the rank of the father but still comparatively high. Ranks 1 through 14 were "personally conferred by the Emperor" (*chokuju*), and correspond to modern chokunin civil officials or military flag officers. Ranks 15 through 26 were "con-

[2] The numerals in the table are not those of the official terminology but part of a straight numerical sequence in which the highest rank is designated 1 and the lowest 30. Ranks 1 through 6 were officially called Senior First Rank, Junior First Rank, Senior Second Rank, Junior Second Rank, Senior Third Rank, and Junior Third Rank. Ranks 7 through 26 correspond to the official "fourth" through "eighth" ranks, each divided into four levels (senior-upper, senior-lower, junior-upper, junior-lower). Ranks 27 through 30 correspond to the official *shoi* rank, also subdivided into four levels. The simple numerals are substituted to make comparison easier, both in Tables 1 and 2 and in the discussion below.

TABLE 1. COURT RANK BY HEREDITARY PRIVILEGE (8TH CENTURY)

Holders of court rank	*Court rank conferred on*	
	sons[a]	*grandsons*[a]
Imperial Prince	10	
Prince	14	
1 or 2	14 or 15	15 or 16
3 or 4	16 or 17	17 or 18
5 or 6	17 or 18	18 or 19
7 or 8	20 or 21	
9 or 10	21 or 22	
11 or 12	24 or 25	
13 or 14	25 or 26	

[a] In the second and third columns, the first figure is the rank conferred on *chakushi* and the second that conferred on *shoshi*. Even in the Nara period these two terms were imprecisely defined and loosely used. *Chakushi* usually meant the designated heir (not necessarily the eldest son) to the position of head of the family, but was often used in a broader sense, including all sons of the principal wife. *Shoshi* sometimes meant all sons except the designated heir but more often meant all sons of subordinate wives or concubines. Moreover, both terms were sometimes used to include daughters as well as sons. Neither the codes on family and property succession nor the ancient and modern commentaries are of much help in determining the sense in which the terms were intended in the code on appointment and conferment cited here.

SOURCE: *Ryō no gige.*

ferred after memorial" (*sōju*) by the highest ministers, and correspond to modern sōnin civil officials or military field-grade and company-grade officers. Initial ranks available through the civil service examinations were more modest, as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. COURT RANK THROUGH CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATIONS (8TH CENTURY)

Examination title	*Court rank given those scoring*	
	grade of "A"	*grade of "B"*
Hsiu ts'ai (Exceptional Talent)	23	24
Ming ching (Learned in Classics)	24	25
Chin shih (Presented Scholar)	26	27
Ming fa (Learned in Law)	27	28

SOURCE: *Ryō no gige.*

The highest were roughly comparable to the level of first appointment given in the 19th century to Higher Examination candidates, but the lowest were in the range of ranks (27 to 30) corresponding to modern hannin civil officials or military noncommissioned officers.

These examinations were similar to those of the same names in T'ang China, though somewhat simplified.[3] All were Confucian and therefore theoretically utilitarian in concept. Confucianism was a philosophy of government, and examinations for government office were supposed to test knowledge of the Confucian canon or statutes based on it, or the ability to apply the canon to political problems. Moreover, in Japan the classics were taught and the examinations conducted in the Chinese language, not in Japanese nor even in *kambun* (Chinese annotated for reading in Japanese pronunciation and word order). For this reason, the names in Table 2 are romanized according to Chinese pronunciation.[4]

In Japan, the "Exceptional Talent" examination required two essays on "government programs." Candidates had to complete both in a single day, beginning at six a.m., and compositions were graded both on style and on reasoning. A similar but much longer "Exceptional Talent" examination had been given in China from 618 to 651. The Japanese version appears to have become steadily less rigorous, but even so, only 65 men passed it in the course of more than two centuries (704-938).[5] The second highest examination, which drew the great majority of candidates, was the "Learned in Classics." All candidates were examined on the *Hsiao ching* (*Classic of Filial Piety*) and the *Lun-yu* (*Analects of Confucius*), with a total of three questions on the two. In addition, they had to

[3] Cf. Robert Des Rotours, *Le Traité des Examens, Traduit de la Nouvelle Histoire des T'ang*, Paris: Leroux, 1932, pp. 26-41, 146-47, 151-53, 163.

[4] The names of examinations were also used as names for curricula in the college, and as titles for students either during college or after passing the examinations. Confusion is further compounded by later use of some in still other senses. One of the most orderly compilations of the conflicting evidence concerning terminology and content of the examination system is Iwahashi Koyata, *Jōdai kanri seido no kenkyū*, Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1964, esp. Chap. 1 ("Training of Officials") and Chap. 2 ("Appointment of Officials"), pp. 1-67.

[5] *Koji ruien: bungaku bu, III*, p. 42.

qualify in at least two other classics, usually one in each of the following groups:

Classics on which four questions each were asked:
Chou li (*Rituals of Chou*)
Tso chuan (*Tradition of Tso*, treated as a commentary on the *Ch'un ch'iu*, or *Spring and Autumn Annals*)
Li chi (*Record of Rituals*, or *Book of Rites*)
Mao shih (*Songs of Mao*)—i.e., the *Shih ching* (*Classic of Songs*, or *Book of Poetry*)

Classics on which three questions each were asked:[6]
Shang shu (*Book of History*)—i.e., *Shu ching* (*Classic of Documents*)
Chou i (*Chou Divination*)—i.e., the *I ching* (*Classic of Changes*)
I li (*Ceremonies and Rituals*)

The third examination, the "Presented Scholar," originated in China under the Sui dynasty, probably between 605 and 616, but was the last of the four to be introduced in Japan, dating from around 728. Though conferring lower court rank than the "Learned in Classics," it was considered more difficult. Candidates were required to write two essays (in a single day) on current questions, and to complete 10 quotations from two Chinese anthologies. For the latter, the candidate was shown seven passages in the *Wen hsuan* (*Literary Selections*) and three in the *Erh ya* (a collection of literary glosses), each with a section concealed which he had to supply from memory. The fourth examination, called "Learned in Law," included seven questions on the Japanese penal codes (Ritsu) and three on the administrative codes (Ryō). In ironic contrast with 19th century examinations (which made legal study the chief requirement), the 8th century law examination was the least respected and carried the lowest reward in court rank.

The codes and other early documents mention several other types of examinations without making it clear whether these were college or civil service examinations.[7] In general, the two were very

[6] The Ryō says merely "the other classics." Later commentaries list the three given here, or only the first two.

[7] Iwahashi, pp. 58-62, summarizes the evidence concerning these, but is

poorly differentiated, and the disorder in which regulations were scattered through three separate codes must have created as much confusion for 8th century administrators as for 20th century scholars. The contemporary meaning of many key words is now uncertain or unknown, and while some matters were explained in tedious detail others of great importance were ignored, left ambiguous, or perhaps regulated by documents no longer extant.

Eligibility for the examinations was very poorly defined. Conducting the examinations in a foreign language automatically disqualified all but a small minority of the population. Moreover, it was intended that nearly all candidates come from the national college, and admission to this was governed almost entirely by family status, as shown in Figure 1. Enrollment was fixed at 400, and sons of men holding court rank at the fourteenth level or above were admissible without other qualifications. Sons of families with court rank at levels 15 through 26 were admissible only "upon earnest application," except that sons of a small group of hereditary scribes were guaranteed admission.

Sons of families lacking court rank—"commoners" in the broadest sense—were virtually barred from the college. They could enter only after graduating from one of the provincial colleges and passing an examination in the capital, and they were admitted to the provincial colleges only when the enrollment quota (ranging from 20 to 50) was not filled by sons of district governors. Modern scholars disagree as to whether graduates of the provincial colleges (*kokugaku*) could compete in the examinations for court rank without first attending the national college,[8] but the consensus is that regardless of route, extremely few provincial students passed the national examinations.

The irony of the examination system, as originally designed, was that the men most eligible to compete had little incentive to do so. Those whose fathers held court rank 14 or higher, or whose

more willing than many other scholars to conclude that they were part of the civil service examination system.

[8] Cf. Takikawa Seijirō, *Nihon hōsei shi*, Tokyo: Kangen Sha, 1949, p. 132; Nomura Tadao, "Ritsu-Ryō kanjin no kōsei to shutsuji" in *Ritsu-Ryō kokka no kisō kōzō*, Tokyo, 1960, p. 242; and Taga Akigorō, *Tōdai kyōiku shi no kenkyū*, Tokyo: Fumidō Shoten, 1953, p. 155.

FIGURE 1. APPOINTMENT SYSTEM, EARLY 8TH CENTURY

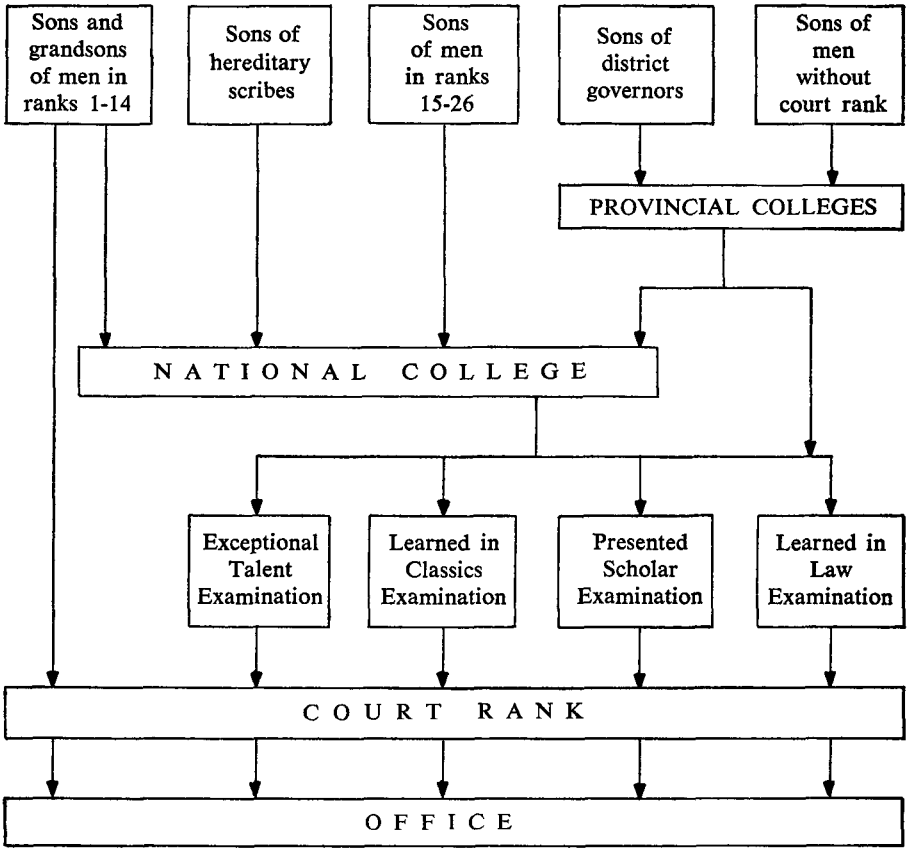
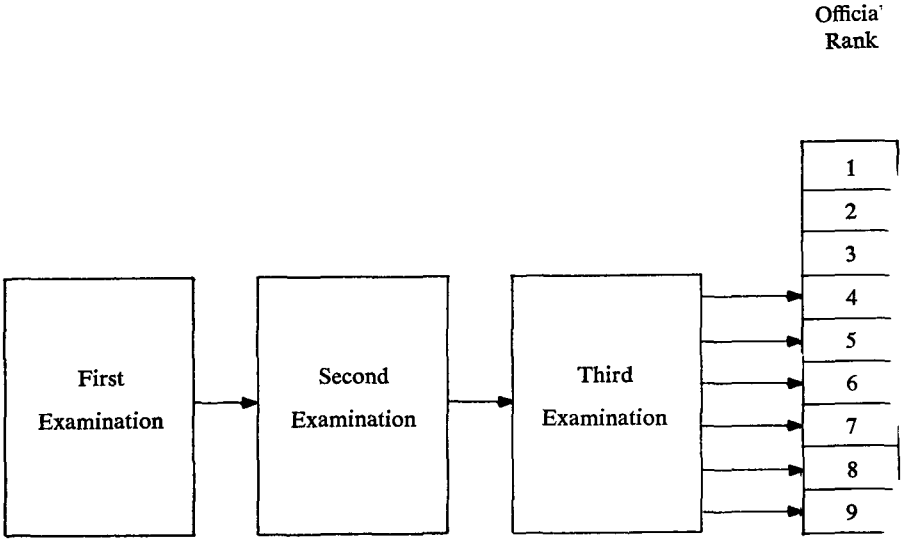


FIGURE 2. KANDA'S "CHINESE" PLAN, 1869



grandfathers held rank 6 or higher, were assured admission to the national college to prepare for the examinations. On the other hand, they were assured of court rank at age 21 even if they ignored the college and the examinations. In fact, the latter rule entitled some to higher rank than they could win through the examinations. By passing either the "Exceptional Talent" or the "Learned in Classics," men with hereditary privilege could obtain rank one level higher than otherwise, but there were easier ways of achieving this.

One recent study concludes that there were something like 100 or 125 men holding court rank at level 14 or above (including princes and imperial princes), about 500 in ranks 15 through 26, and perhaps 6,000 in the lowest government positions, holding ranks 27 through 30 or no rank at all (the unclassified service).[9] If so, those with first claim on the 400 openings in the national college were the sons of 100 or 125 families. Whatever openings remained were available to sons of another 500 families before anyone else. These were presumably the ones for whom the examination system was most meaningful, since they were theoretically not eligible for court rank by hereditary privilege. Japanese scholars agree that few sons of men with lower rank, and practically no sons of men without rank, could enter the national college or participate in the examinations.[10]

Early in the 9th century, men with hereditary privilege were required, rather than merely allowed, to enter the national college. This tended, however, to weaken rather than strengthen the examination system. It reduced the number of openings for men lacking hereditary privilege, and made it more difficult than ever for them to gain access to the examinations. Moreover, it reinforced other pressures which were making the examinations progressively more lenient and formalistic. Even in the 8th century the codes specified that "students who, though not proficient in reasoned exposition, have learned to write well can be sent up" to take the civil service examinations. Later revisions in the college curriculum and in the

[9] Murao Jirō, *Ritsu-Ryō sei no kichō*, Tokyo: Hanawa Shobō, 1960, pp. 50-59.

[10] *Ibid.*, and Ishii Ryōsuke, *Nihon hōsei shi gaisetsu*, Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1948, p. 91; Nomura Tadao, p. 242; Taga, p. 155; and Takikawa, pp. 128-32.

examinations shifted the emphasis steadily toward literary ability and away from reasoning or even memorization of the classics. Children five or six years old were eventually admitted as "literary students."[11]

Although there has been a recent renaissance of classical studies in Japan, using modern statistical and analytical methods, often with impressive ingenuity, this has not yet touched the examination system. From what is now known, we cannot reliably evaluate the effect of the examinations on government recruitment, but there is little to suggest that they ever attained the importance they possessed in China. In Japan they appear never to have been much more than an elaborate ritual for sanctifying appointment of men already marked for government service, and they soon degenerated into an empty formality. The *Koji ruien* contains references as late as the 15th century to examinations of one sort or another, but most scholars believe Japan had abandoned civil service examinations as such by the 11th century if not well before.

The Chinese and Japanese systems differed more in spirit than in detail. In China there was a will to recruit by examination which never developed in Japan. The Sui and T'ang found the merit plan useful in consolidating power and bringing the aristocracy into line. The T'ang succeeded not only in making examinations a major avenue to office, but in giving them enough institutional strength to survive a thousand years of dynastic upheavals and foreign conquests. The success of the system in China and its failure in Japan resulted from many factors, such as differences in financing of education, balance of national and regional power, and philosophy of government. Japan's much smaller population and area, combined with greater decentralization of authority, undoubtedly helped to make examinations seem unnecessary. But the insurmountable obstacle was Japanese inability to reconcile examinations with hereditary privilege.

Inherited privileges were also recognized in T'ang China, where they extended one generation further than in Japan but were apparently confined to eldest sons and conferred much lower rank than in Japan. For example, sons of men in ranks 1 and 2 were

[11] *Koji ruien: bungaku bu, III*, 42.

given rank 19 in China but rank 14 or 15 in Japan.[12] Differences of this magnitude in initial rank made lifelong differences in career progress. As one Japanese historian puts it, the son of a high-ranking father was assured of high rank virtually without effort, unless he was "outstandingly stupid," and he did not have to compete against sons of men without rank, since he started well above them on the career ladder.[13]

The *Ryō no gige* indicates that Japan also imported the Chinese system of military examinations, and this too was soon overwhelmed by tradition. It was not the passing of power from aristocrats to soldiers which destroyed the civil and military examinations or prevented their revival. The system died under the Fujiwara, long before military skill or vassalage became the key to civil and military office. Throughout the centuries that followed, access to office was nearly always hereditary. Some offices were the possession of a specific family, passing from generation to generation, and eligibility for others depended on birth into a social class rather strictly closed to all born outside it.

Recurring power struggles, national and regional, caused repeated suspensions of hereditary appointment and the elevation of new men whose chief qualifications were military. These suspensions always proved temporary. One of the first concerns of each new regime was reassertion of the hereditary principle to safeguard its own position. This is not to say that "merit" was disregarded, or that "family" and "merit" were mutually exclusive criteria. On the contrary, the slogan *jinzai tōyō* (appointment of men of ability) had become an ancient platitude long before the Meiji oligarchs were born. Appointment based on merit was frequently discussed, especially in the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), but the significance of this fact has three major limitations. First, Tokugawa writers mentioned merit appointment usually as an ideal, not as a characteristic of contemporary government. Second, despite extensive use of examinations in shogunal and domain schools for samurai, hardly any writers advocated creation of civil service examinations as a basis for merit appointment, and many explicitly

[12] Maki Hidemasa, "Shion kō," *Ōsaka Shiritsu Daigaku hōgaku zasshi*, quoted in Nomura Tadao, p. 242.

[13] Takikawa, p. 128.

opposed this.[14] Third and most fundamental, eligibility for higher education and for merit appointment presupposed inherited class status.

The search was not for the ablest men in the country but only for the ablest within an elite class whose eligibility was hereditary. The fact that few if any outside this class could have competed successfully in an examination system shows merely that higher education, as well as office, was the monopoly of an hereditary class. It would be inaccurate to deny that "merit" was considered in Tokugawa appointment, but equally inaccurate to ignore the very narrow limits defining "merit." Persistent demands for merit appointment in Tokugawa Japan reflected problems arising from stratification within the elite class, and from the excessive size of that class in comparison with the number of government positions.

The hereditary principle was not all that survived the changes of a thousand years. The de facto government, whatever its origin, recognized the technical authority of the 8th century codes long after the government prescribed in them had vanished. Obsolete official titles were sought not only by nobles at the imperial court but also by military men holding real authority under other titles and in other places. The codes were still theoretically in force when the emperor was "restored" to power in 1868, and the leaders of the Restoration deliberately resurrected many parts of the ancient system. They incorporated ideas from the Yōrō penal codes into the Provisional Penal Code of 1868, and made still greater use of the Yōrō administrative codes. The elaborate court ritual and court ranks of the 8th century were studied and slavishly copied. The Meiji government adopted the titles and structure of the Yōrō bureaucracy, and managed the tour de force of prolonging this archaic system for nearly two decades. Some Yōrō titles, including *daijin* (minister of state) and the names of several ministries and bureaus, survive even today. Finally, the Restoration brought back to life the Yōrō classification of officials on the basis of appointment protocol:[15]

[14] R. P. Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan*, Berkeley: University of California, 1965, pp. 81, 85-87, 182, 187, 194-97, 201-202.

[15] These terms must be used constantly in any discussion of the modern bureaucracy, and are retained here because there are no adequate English

Chokunin—"personally appointed" (by the Emperor)
Sōnin—"appointed by memorial" (that is, on recommendation of the highest minister or the ministers as a group)
Hannin—"appointed by seal" (of a minister holding delegated authority)

This terminology survived until after World War II, and its spirit is still evident.

Such revivals of a heritage which even historians had all but forgotten were partly sentimental but served three practical purposes. They lent credibility to the idea of a "restoration" and to the new government's claim of legitimacy. They reassured influential men within the anti-Tokugawa coalition who mistrusted the upstart Westernizers around them. And in a government lacking consensus on any point except overthrowing the Tokugawa, they forestalled immediate controversy over the form and character of the governmental structure. Since no one living in 1868 had any idea how the Yōrō government had really operated, the oligarchy enjoyed considerable freedom for maneuver and experimentation within the venerable shell of its dead structure. It is in this light that we should consider the conspicuous omission in the list of revivals. The Meiji leaders carefully ignored the numerous sections of the Yōrō codes which provided for civil service examinations.

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equivalents. In the forms shown above, they refer to appointment; the word *kan* is suffixed to mean "official(s) thus appointed." In modern Japan they apply to military as well as civil appointments, but in practice military officers were usually identified only by rank; consequently, in the present study these three words are to be understood as referring only to civil office. Their places in the hierarchy can be illustrated most conveniently by the corresponding military ranks: flag officers (chokunin-kan), field-grade and company-grade officers (sōnin-kan), and warrant and noncommissioned officers (hannin-kan). The modern Higher Examinations regulated access to sōnin positions, and after 1900 eventual access to chokunin positions.

CHAPTER 2

Kanda's "Chinese" Plan, 1869

THE EARLY Meiji government made no public commitment to any one system of appointing officials. Direct inheritance of office was abolished, and the traditional stratification among samurai was largely ignored. But senior posts were open only to daimyō (feudal lords) or kuge (court nobles), and feudal or court status of some kind was still essential for appointment to any post of consequence. Within these broad limits, the new government proceeded in much the same way as earlier ones had in their first years. Appointment purportedly based on ability was actually much influenced by feudal or family connections. This was hardly revolutionary. Transfers of power from the highest samurai stratum to men of lower samurai strata had often occurred before, and men of lesser rank were rising within the key domains of Satsuma, Chōshū, and Tosa even before the Restoration.[1]

Given the empirical and experimental character of the Restoration as a whole, it is not surprising that the appointment system remained poorly defined throughout the first two decades of the Meiji era. However, this nebulous quality no doubt reflects also a deliberate choice of priorities. The lack of consensus within the government on a specific political program, and the certainty of controversy over projected major social, legal, and economic changes made flexible procedures essential.

The Seitaisho (Government Structure Law) of 17 June 1868, based on American ideas, provided for the election of officials for four-year terms, but this was never implemented. The one election of this period, held on 22 June 1869, was designed not to bring men into the government but to remove them from it with a minimum of rancor. The number of Councillors had grown so rapidly that an 80 percent reduction was desired, and Ōkubo Toshimichi, characteristically valuing practical over theoretical arguments, pro-

[1] W. G. Beasley, "Councillors of Samurai Origin in the Early Meiji Government, 1868-1869," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, XX (1957), 89-103, esp. 97-101.

posed a collegial election to decide which Councillors should remain. Nothing very untoward could have come from a plan which made qualifications for voting even more stringent than those for election. However, critics were pacified only by a promise that the heretical experiment would not be repeated.[2]

Two weeks before the 1869 election, the current national assembly, the Kōgisho, asked the government to institute annual national competitive examinations for government office, on the Chinese model. The memorial originated with the vice-chairman of the Kōgisho, Kanda Takahira (Kōhei) (1830-98). Like most educated Japanese of his generation, Kanda was well versed in the Chinese classics, but he was by no means an antiquarian. As one of the most prominent exponents of Western learning, he had taught mathematics and other subjects in the Tokugawa "Office for Study of Western Writings" (*Bansho Shirabesho*), and succeeded in making the awkward transfer from shogunal to imperial office. In the early Meiji years, he was one of the two or three most prolific translators of Western publications.

On the other hand, Kanda was more eclectic than most of the pioneer Westernizers. Chinese civil service examinations and Western parliaments, he said, were "the twin glories of East and West," and Japan should adopt both.[3] He made no appeal to antiquity, either Chinese or Japanese. The "Chinese appointment system" (*Kando kyūdaihō*) was good not because it was ancient or Chinese, but because it was based on examinations. Japan, he said, had never had such a system—though it is reasonably certain that Kanda was familiar with the Yōrō Codes. Whether he knew of the fairly recent institution of examinations in western Europe is uncertain. If he did, he may well have considered them an echo from the Chinese, as some modern Western scholars do.[4]

[2] Ishii Kendō, *Meiji jibutsu kigen*, rev. edn., I, Tokyo: Shun'yōdō, 1944, 242-43.

[3] *Kōgisho nisshi*, 23 May 1869 (Meiji 2/4/12), as published in *Meiji bunka zenshū: kensei hen*, Tokyo: Nihon Hyōron Sha, 1929, pp. 44-45.

[4] Ssu-yu Teng, "Chinese Influence on the Western Examination System," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, VII (1943), 267-312; H. G. Creel, "The Beginnings of Bureaucracy in China: the Origin of the *Hsien*," *Journal of Asian Studies*, XXIII (1964), 156-57, 162-63.

Kanda did not propose a very close copy of the Chinese system. He freely conceded that in China serious abuses had arisen because of the content of examinations and the bias of examiners. His plan provided for three examinations annually, with examiners chosen by the executive branch and regulations prescribed by the legislative assembly. The examinations would begin with "Japanese studies" (*Wagaku*) and "Chinese studies" (*Kangaku*), and proceed through economics, composition, astronomy, geography, military studies, law, medicine, and natural history.

In each of the three examinations, grades on the various subjects would be averaged. Candidates with superior scores on all three would be given official appointments in one of the six lower ranks of the current nine-rank scale—that is, in rank 4 or below (see Figure 2). Names of candidates would be concealed during the grading to prevent favoritism, but subsequently the government would publish the name, province, and score of each of the candidates, including those who failed, and the rank given to each of those appointed.

Possibly in hope of achieving wider consensus, Kanda left many basic questions unanswered or in doubt. He did not specify whether all candidates were to be examined in all subjects, or different subjects required for different offices. He did not say whether the same subjects would appear in all three examinations, nor did he differentiate the three in purpose or character. He even left some doubt as to whether candidates must pass three examinations in one year, or one in three successive years. Most important, he failed to say whether the examinations would be open to all or only to samurai.

The natural consequence of these ambiguities was that Kōgisho delegates construed the plan in various ways. This is clear from the statements recorded in the official journal.[5] In addition to an unspecified number who merely said they supported the proposal,

[5] *Kōgisho nisshi*, 23 May 1869, pp. 45-50. Uncertainty was compounded by the assembly's procedures. Delegates read prepared statements, and the journal mentions subsequent "debate" (*tōron*) but does not record it or indicate whether it resolved the divergencies in interpretation. Only one vote is recorded and this was on the original proposal, not on the numerous amendments which had been offered.

delegates from 86 domains offered comments and interpretations, which were often contradictory. Many suggested specific changes or additions. Four major topics recur again and again in the prepared statements: examination content, eligibility, scholastic preparation, and regional selection.

The scope of the proposed examinations was already immense, but delegates wanted to expand it still further. A successful candidate would have needed catholic curiosity if not catholic knowledge. It may be that Kanda did not intend that each candidate be examined in all subjects, but his colleagues evidently thought so; some of their comments would otherwise be pointless. They proposed many additions, including history, ethics, ceremonies, mining, commerce, farming, and even "government" (*minsei*). Several made contemptuous reference to the decadent literary emphasis of the examinations in China. One gave a sharp twist, perhaps unknowingly, to the 8th century Japanese provision for admitting candidates who could write but not reason. He argued that those who were proficient in economics should be appointed to office even if they did poorly in composition.

By including military studies (*heigaku*), Kanda had been faithful to the Japanese tradition that bureaucrats must also be soldiers. In effect, his plan seemed to combine the Chinese examinations for civil and military office. Many delegates were not content with this, and called for dividing "military studies" into several more specific subjects to insure that candidates deficient in samurai skills would be eliminated. One of the most comprehensive lists, proposed by the representative of the *fudai* daimyō[6] of Karatsu in Hizen Province, included military drill, tactics, artillery, mechanics, castle-building, ship-building, and navigation.

Despite this talk of military subjects, there was confusion about the eligibility of commoners to take the examinations. Some dele-

[6] Daimyō in 1869 were feudal lords of domains whose taxable rice yield was at least 10,000 *koku* of rice (49,600 bushels). *Fudai* daimyō were heirs of those who recognized the first Tokugawa shogun as overlord before 1600. *Tozama* daimyō were all others, except for the branches and relatives of the Tokugawa, here referred to simply as "collaterals" for convenience. The distinction between *fudai* and *tozama* daimyō had lost much of its meaning by 1869, but as will be shown below, it had some bearing on the examination proposal.

gates criticized the plan because they understood it to mean that commoners would be eligible, though very few commoners in 1869 could have passed an examination on military science. Others thought commoners were not eligible but ought to be. Several objected to publishing the names of candidates who failed, because the danger of public disgrace would deter students from participating. The representative of the *tozama* daimyō of Hiji in Bungo Province, carried this objection a step further, revealing a fear probably shared by more reticent colleagues. The public shame of failing, he said, would prevent samurai from competing, and make the examinations the exclusive property of farmers and merchants (who were presumably shameless).

The wide range of examination subjects and the possibility of admitting commoners caused considerable discussion of expanding the school system. This would be particularly necessary if commoners were to compete, since educational facilities for them were rudimentary. Those who raised the question of education seemed to have various motives. Some merely wanted concurrent action to develop new schools to support the examination system. Others implied that school expansion must precede adoption of examinations, and at least some of these appeared to use this argument as a cloak for hostility toward examinations.

Many delegates also raised questions about the role of the daimyō. Several wanted to hold regional examinations (as in China) either before or in lieu of a centralized examination. With or without such preliminary examinations, several thought the daimyō ought to screen or select candidates for admission to national competition. Since there were 284 daimyō in 1869, this would have made it extremely difficult to maintain uniform criteria for selection.[7]

[7] This figure, and subsequent data on rice yield and classification as *fudai* or *tozama*, are based on Education Ministry, *Ishin shi: furoku*, Tokyo, 1941, separately paginated table titled "Shohan Ichiran." Slight variations appear in other published lists, due chiefly to the frequent changes in daimyō status and location after the civil war of 1868. Osatake Takeki, *Ishin zengo ni okeru rikken shisō*, Tokyo, 1925, pp. 449-73 (cited hereafter as *Rikken shisō*), lists 285 domains represented in the Kōgisho, but this list includes two duplications and omits Bitchū Matsuyama, for the same net total of 284.

Finally, one isolated comment deserves mention as a truly heretical idea which must have angered many officials. The representative of the *fudai* daimyō of Ashikaga in Shimotsuke Province, viewing a government staffed almost exclusively by samurai, saw many officials who "possess neither learning nor skill." Examinations, he said, should not be confined to new applicants for office; they should be administered at once to all incumbent officials. Only after driving out those who had obtained "windfall" appointments would the government be composed of men of true ability.

There is nothing in the official journal to show that any of the suggested amendments were voted on, or that Kanda made any statement to clarify the many ambiguities. However, the original proposal carried on 7 June 1869 by an overwhelming majority, 146 to 9 with 33 abstentions,[8] and more than two-thirds of the delegates who had made formal statements voted with the majority. This was the first clear-cut action by a governmental body in favor of an examination system in modern Japanese history. Moreover, in the long evolution of the decision to examine candidates for office, this vote was the only thing approaching a measured sampling of national opinion, and it therefore merits close analysis.

The Kōgisho was not really representative of the samurai class, much less the whole population. It was, however, as the government said, an "assembly widely convoked"[9] from every feudal domain in the country. Each domain, regardless of size, importance, or past political ties, had a single delegate, and only senior administrators from the domain governments (*shissei* and *sansei*) were

[8] *Kōgisho nisshi*, 7 June 1869 (Meiji 2/4/27), pp. 56-57. What I have described as "abstentions" are actually recorded in two categories: 28 domains "without settled views" (*muteiron*) and 5 "equally divided for and against" (*kahi aihan*). The latter situation was technically anomalous, since each domain had only one delegate and one vote. However, domains could send up to ten "auditors" (*sanchōnin*), with whom the delegate conferred before voting. In other words, the delegate was not a free agent, and some domains determined their response to a Kōgisho question by internal vote rather than by fiat of the daimyō.

[9] Government statement of 17 Jan. 1869 (Meiji 1/12/5), quoted in Osatake, *Rikken shisō*, p. 438. The phrase is from the so-called Charter Oath of 1868.

eligible to serve as delegates.[10] Not only *tozama* but also *fudai* domains and even the Tokugawa houses were represented. Only the territories formerly under direct control of the shogun were excluded, since they had been taken over by the new central government and were being reorganized as prefectures (*ken* and *fu*).[11]

The total number of domains eligible to participate was 284; when the assembly convened for the first time on 18 April 1869, some 227 delegates were present. For the vote on the Kanda proposal, delegates from 187 domains were present.[12] Some of those missing had not yet arrived in the capital (chiefly from recently rebellious northern Japan), but at least five had spoken in the debate two weeks earlier and their absence was presumably intentional. Table 3 shows the distribution of attendance and voting, by the three principal categories of domains.

TABLE 3. VOTE ON KANDA PROPOSAL, BY PERCENT OF DOMAINS

Category	*Eligible to vote*			*Present for voting*			
	present	*absent*	*total eligible*	*voting "yes"*	*voting "no"*	*abstaining*	*total present*
Tokugawa collaterals	78%	22%	100%	72%	17%	11%	100%
Fudai daimyō	66	34	100	79	1	20	100
Tozama daimyō	63	37	100	77	7	16	100
All domains	66	34	100	77	5	18	100

SOURCE: Computed from roll call vote in *Kōgisho nisshi*, 7 June 1869.

These figures show remarkable support for creation of civil service examinations. Collateral, *fudai*, and *tozama* domains alike voted for the Kanda proposal by very large majorities. However, the "one domain, one vote" principle of the Kōgisho bore no resemblance to political reality. The power and influence of a domain were correlated rather closely with its size and wealth, subject to

[10] For regulations governing the Kōgisho, see Osatake, *Rikken shisō*, pp. 423-49, 477-82.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 442.

[12] Government schools in Tokyo were also allowed to send delegates. The only one represented at the time of the Kanda vote was the Shōhei Gakkō (later part of Tokyo University), which voted "yes." The statistical tables in this chapter deal only with the votes cast by domains, and omit the one vote cast by the Shōhei Gakkō.

accentuation or attenuation by its location, family connections, political skill, alliances, and other independent variables.

It is therefore advisable to translate the vote into *kokudaka* or taxable rice yield of the various domains. The *kokudaka* figures were in varying degrees out of date by 1869, but continued to be the official standard of measurement and give at least an approximate idea of domain importance. Table 4 records aggregate figures (as of 1869) for the territories represented in the Kōgisho.

TABLE 4. DOMAIN RESPONSE TO THE KANDA PROPOSAL
(in thousands of *koku* of assessed valuation of domains)

Category	*Voting "yes"*	*Voting "no"*	*Abstaining*	*Total present*	*Total Absent*	*Total eligible*
Tokugawa collaterals	2,083	536	699	3,318	260	3,578
Fudai daimyō	2,790	10	918	3,718	2,073	5,791
Tozama daimyō	3,127	161	1,652	4,940	4,392	9,332
Totals	8,000	707	3,269	11,976	6,725	18,701

SOURCE: Computed from roll call vote in *Kōgisho nisshi*, 7 June 1869, and domain valuations in Education Ministry, *Ishin shi: furoku.*

Table 4 still shows "yes" votes as representing a large majority of the domains participating, but it also shows that absentees were considerably more important than Table 3 suggested. Before pressing the analysis further, we should emphasize three characteristics of the vote which cannot be seen in summary tables. First, the Kōgisho delegates did not regard examinations as involving a class issue. They were hypersensitive to any tampering with samurai privilege or tradition, but evidently saw no threat in Kanda's proposal.[13] The probable reason was that most samurai had never been eligible for national office, but only for appointment to their own

[13] Less than a month after approving Kanda's proposal, the Kōgisho rejected by a vote of 200 to 3 a proposal to outlaw ceremonial suicide. Four days later, the assembly was enraged by Mori Arinori's modest proposal for a slight relaxation of rules on wearing two swords. This was unanimously rejected, and the hapless Mori was hounded out of office despite efforts by Iwakura and Ōkubo to save him. Later in the year, the sponsor of the suicide resolution, who was also suspected of secretly supporting Mori's proposal, was assassinated.

domain governments.[14] The proposal thus seemed to enlarge rather than diminish opportunity for most of them.

Second, there was no geographic pattern in the voting. Both supporters and nonsupporters were spread rather evenly over the country. Of the 57 traditional provinces 44 contained one or more domains voting "yes," and 45 contained one or more abstaining or staying away. Thirty-two provinces had domains in both categories. The nine "no" votes were scattered from the northern edge of Honshū to the western tip of Kyūshū, and eight came from provinces which also produced "yes" votes. Adjacent to the four most powerful domains staying away or voting "no" were provinces in which every domain voted "yes."

Third, political philosophy had only very marginal influence on the response. No speaker in the Kōgisho opposed the merit principle. None criticized—or praised—the examination proposal as a break with tradition. None pronounced examinations the only means of identifying able men, and several implied that other acceptable means existed. Only in trying to link the examination system with regional governments still based on inheritance and feudal allegiance did the delegates raise a philosophical issue of any consequence, and this was evaded in the voting.

The size of the favorable vote in the Kōgisho and the absence of objections based on class, region, or political philosophy make it all the more remarkable that the government ignored the Kanda memorial. Reasons for this must be sought in a closer examination of the domains which withheld support in the Kōgisho. In Table 4 there are signs of a significant difference in response between the large Tokugawa collaterals and the large *tozama* domains. This becomes more apparent when domains voting "yes" are compared with all domains rather than only with those present and voting, as shown in Table 5.

The difference in attitude of Tokugawa and *tozama* domains is clearest among the 22 domains which had an estimated rice yield in excess of 175,000 *koku* each, as shown in Table 6. The com-

[14] *Fudai* daimyō, and a few *tozama* daimyō, from all parts of Japan had served in senior national offices under the shogunate, but rank and file positions were filled primarily by direct retainers of the shogun (who were not represented in the Kōgisho).