

# **Rural Economic Development in Japan**

From the nineteenth century to the  
Pacific War

**Penelope Francks**

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# Rural Economic Development in Japan

In the historical literature on Japan, rural people have tended to be regarded as the exploited victims of the industrialization process. This book is an attempt to give a different account of the role and significance of the rural economy in Japan's emergence as an economic power prior to World War II.

Using theories and approaches derived from development studies and the economic history of other parts of the world, *Rural Economic Development in Japan* describes the nineteenth-century development of a diversified, proto-industrial rural economy, focusing on the strategies employed by households as they sought to secure and improve their livelihoods. Distinctive rural economic structures, institutions and culture provided the basis on which small-scale producers, combining agricultural and non-agricultural activities, adapted to the growth of the modern industrial sector after the turn of the century. These structures also created the conditions that produced both a supportive agricultural policy environment and an industrial structure within which forms of flexible manufacturing could develop. By the inter-war period, small-scale, 'pluriactive' households were consolidating their position within the economy and society of rural Japan, embracing modernity and establishing the basis on which village communities were to prosper through the years of the post-war economic miracle. This book argues that rural people, through their 'industrious revolution', played an active part in determining the course of Japan's agrarian transition and, eventually, the distinctive features of industrial Japan's political economy, with the result that rural life still figures largely in the reality and imagination of contemporary Japan.

*Rural Economic Development in Japan* will appeal to academics and upper-level students who are studying Japan's modern history and its economic background, as well as those interested in considering rural Japan within the context of comparative economic history and development studies.

**Penelope Francks** is Honorary Lecturer in the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Leeds, where she taught on the Japanese and other East Asian economies for many years. Her previous publications include *Japanese Economic Development* (Routledge 1992, 1999) and *Agriculture and Economic Development in East Asia* (Routledge 1999).

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Penelope Francks  
*Leeds*  
*December 2004*

# Conventions

Japanese names are presented in the Japanese manner, with family name first.

Japanese words are romanized using the standard Hepburn system, with macrons indicating long vowels except in the names of places familiar in English and of Japanese authors writing in English who use a different romanization.

Weights and measures:

- measurements of area are given in hectares, one hectare being almost exactly equivalent to the Japanese unit of area, the *chō*
- the Japanese measure of volume (*roku*) is retained for quantities of rice and other grains, as it is ubiquitous in the Japanese literature and not straightforwardly convertible into the weight measures usually used for harvests and yields in Western literature. The *roku* is a volume measure equal to 180 litres or 4.92 bushels and is normally taken as equivalent to 150 kg of unpolished rice (often taken as the amount required to support one person for a year). Yields are expressed as *roku/tan* where one *tan* (one tenth of a *chō*) equals almost exactly 0.1 hectare.

Data in tables are generally rounded, so that percentages do not always add up to 100.

# Glossary

Corn Laws	British laws allowing for the imposition of tariffs on imported grain which were repealed, after considerable debate, in 1846
<i>daimyō</i>	lords who governed individual domains under the feudal Tokugawa regime
<i>dekasegi</i>	temporary employment away from home
<i>fukugyō</i>	side-line occupations carried out alongside agriculture
<i>gaimai</i>	<i>indica</i> -type rice imported into Japan which differed from the <i>japonica</i> -type grown domestically
<i>gōnō</i>	the ‘upper class’ of village households in Tokugawa and Meiji Japan who combined cultivation, landownership and business activities
<i>ie</i>	the traditional Japanese household unit, composed of family members and any others normally resident in the household
<i>kengyō</i>	‘part-time’ employment (usually off the farm) of members of agricultural households
Land Tax Reform	measures carried out during the 1870s which abolished the rural taxation system of the Tokugawa period and allocated private ownership of land, on the value of which tax was to be levied in cash
MAC	Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, divided in 1925 into the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry
Meiji Period	1868–1912; reign of the Meiji Emperor and period of reform and modernization under the government established by the Meiji Restoration
Meiji Restoration	events of 1867–8 which resulted in the overthrow of the Tokugawa regime and the establishment of the new Meiji government
<i>mugi</i>	non-rice grain crops, including principally wheat, barley and millet



<i>mura</i>	the village unit within the administrative structure of local government under the system established in the Meiji period, often composed of several traditional village settlements
Nōhonshugi	agricultural fundamentalism
<i>nōkai</i>	official agricultural associations set up to provide technical and economic advice in the villages
Nōmukyoku	the agricultural bureau within the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce
Rice Riots	widespread rioting, mainly in protest at high rice prices, in 1918
<i>sankin kōtai</i>	practice whereby feudal lords were expected to spend half their time in Edo (Tokyo), the capital of the Tokugawa Shogun, and half in their domains
Shōmukyoku	the industry and commerce bureau within the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce
Tokugawa period	1600–1868; period of rule by Shoguns of the Tokugawa family

# 1 Rethinking rural Japan

Rural Japan sounds like a contradiction. The contemporary image of Japan is as the urban industrial society and culture par excellence, a world of high-tech factories, packed commuter trains and post-modern consumerism. When told that I am writing a book about Japanese farmers and the countryside, many people express surprise that such things exist to be written about. Yet much of what we think of as inherently ‘Japanese’ derives from a rural tradition: the purity and simplicity at which the tea ceremony aims are symbolized by the fake rustic cottage in which it is performed; the rural roots of Japanese culture and social organization are celebrated each year, as the Emperor plants his rice field in the grounds of the Imperial Palace, surrounded by one of the world’s greatest urban conglomerations; airport book-stores still sell manuals telling passing business-people that the origins of Japanese company organization lie in the village. Although, for most Japanese people today, the countryside is something glimpsed through a train window or pictured in a TV documentary, the idea of the rural *furusato* or native place – and the ‘nostalgia for the experience of nostalgia’ that it evokes – remains a powerful weapon in the armoury of Japan’s advertising industry.<sup>1</sup> While the rural population ages and dwindles and few Japanese people, compared with, say, British ones, aspire to the rural idyll of life in the real countryside, agricultural interest groups seeking support for continued trade protection and subsidy have been able to draw on massive and emotional public support for the preservation of the ‘traditional’ landscape and products of rural Japan.

Meanwhile, academic analysts have created their own images of rural Japan, as they too struggle to resolve the contradictions that it presents. In work dating back to the inter-war period, Japanese and Western scholars have tried to fit Japan’s rural history into the available general models of what happens to the rural economy and society as industrialization takes place. In the long tradition of Japanese Marxist scholarship, the growth of

1 Robertson 1991: 16 and see also Creighton 1998 on the uses to which the ‘nostalgic emulation of tradition and rural life’ (p. 129) is put in contemporary urban Japan.

## 2 *Rethinking rural Japan*

a capitalist industrial sector undermines the feudal class structure of pre-industrial Japan and leads to the polarization of rural society into, on one side, a landlord class more-or-less in league with the capitalist bourgeoisie and, on the other, a rural proletariat driven into the factories by landlessness and poverty. For post-war 'modernization-theorists' seeking to explain Japan's phenomenal economic rise, the rural sector, or rather agriculture, acts as the reservoir of resources on which industrial growth is based, the passive supplier of 'surplus labour' for mobilization through industrial investment, eventually to be transformed, as the stages of economic growth proceed, into a 'modern' agricultural sector of capitalist-style farms.

However, it has not proved so easy to find evidence on the ground of the real developments which would fit either of these schema: Japanese rural households have consistently refused to act like members of a landless proletariat and persisted in holding on to ownership or tenancy rights over the tiniest holdings, continuing as cultivators even as they also engaged in industrial work alongside farming; the specialist, large-scale farms of 'modern' agriculture which should have emerged as industrialization proceeded have failed to materialize in Japan to this day. Moreover, the role as exploited victims of industrialization – rural proletariat or surplus labour – which both models prescribe for the rural population is hard to square with that which has come to be played by farmers in Japan's political economy since World War II. Can the Occupation-imposed land reform alone explain the transformation of the apparently powerless and poverty-stricken villagers of the inter-war period into some of the most heavily protected and subsidized farmers in the post-war world?

However, the fact that Japan's rural history presents contradictions that cannot be squared with standard models based on generalized Western experience of industrialization does not mean that it is therefore unique or inexplicable. This book starts from the premise that tools and concepts devised for use in the analysis of economic development in the contemporary Third World, along with ideas that have emerged from micro-level research into the economic history of other now-developed countries, can provide the basis for the synthesis of a wide range of recent research on Japanese rural history into a story rather different from that told by the standard models. In the study of developing countries today, agriculture is no longer treated as the neglected 'traditional sector' of the 'dual-economy' model, significant only as the source of surplus labour and capital to expropriate for investment in industry. The rural population have been transformed from backward and exploited peasants into small-scale producers, 'post-peasants' (Rigg 2001: 41) utilizing both the knowledge of their agricultural environment without which no improved techniques can be made to work and the scope which their household resources give them for securing and improving their livelihoods. Mean-

while, economic historians have come to recognize the significance of the rural 'proto-industrialization' that characterized the development of many parts of Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the variety in the forms of rural change that have accompanied modern industrialization. Rural people are thus no longer seen as the invisible and voiceless inhabitants of the periphery, but rather as significant participants, through their economic, political, social and even cultural activities, in the determination of the path to development and modernization.

From such a starting point, this book will present an alternative interpretation to the 'farmers as victims' paradigm that has become part of the mythology of modern Japan. This interpretation, it will be argued, can help to resolve the contradictions that rural Japan presents to academic analysis and explain why, as popular reactions attest, the countryside still matters to an understanding of how Japan's economy and society have come to be as they are. Such an interpretation is in fact more-or-less implicit in much post-war work on the rural economy in the pre-industrial Tokugawa period and on peasant rebellions and later tenancy disputes, many examples of which have challenged the idea that rural dwellers were always the passive recipients of whatever the state, the landlord or market forces might seek to impose on them. But, beyond this, it is the ways in which Japanese rural households were able to develop and follow their own strategies of survival, security and betterment, and thus to exert a significant influence over the political economy of Japanese industrialization, that needs to be explained. Undoubtedly there were times and places when rural people became enmeshed in the conflicts that economic change inevitably brings and suffered relatively and absolutely from the environmental and economic fluctuations and shocks that afflicted Japan in the course of its industrialization. Nonetheless, the book will argue, through technological and economic adaptation, flexible household strategies and the development of forms of political and cultural co-operation and resistance, they conditioned the development path not only of the rural economy, but also of the wider political economy and society with which it interacted. The remainder of this chapter will therefore set out the theories and concepts, derived from development studies and economic history, that provide the analytical basis for the story the book tells of rural change during Japan's development.

### **Rediscovering the rural: the countryside in the analysis of development**

The idea that economic development is synonymous with the growth of large-scale, urban industry, and that the 'traditional' sectors of the economy, such as agriculture and small-scale rural manufacturing, have no role in the process except to supply resources for and, in due course, be absorbed by the 'modern' sector, dominated development studies in the

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early decades of its existence after World War II. 'Two sector' or 'dual economy' models which analysed development as a process of 'surplus transfer' from the traditional to the modern sector or from agriculture to industry took pride of place in development textbooks, and development planning, in both socialist and market economies, was a matter of devising the means to 'squeeze' agriculture of the capital and labour resources required by modern industry.<sup>2</sup>

However, by the 1970s, disillusion with 'big push' industrialization strategies which, while possibly generating high rates of industrial growth, seemed to exacerbate inequalities and do little to bring about real improvements in welfare and living standards, was beginning to set in.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the spread of yield-increasing improvements in agricultural technology, eventually dubbed the Green Revolution, in significant parts of the developing world challenged the past neglect of agriculture as a source of expansion in output and employment, while the superiority of large-scale, capital-intensive industrial techniques over 'appropriate', and not necessarily urban, alternatives was coming into question. As a result, the focus of both research and policy in the development field has ever since been shifting away from the modern sector and towards the small-scale, the informal and the rural.

This shift of necessity led to change in the ways in which the activities of those who make up the rural economy are analysed. Under the assumptions about the 'traditional sector' on which the old models had been based, rural households produced for subsistence and contained more labour than they could effectively use. Markets and prices therefore hardly mattered to them and their activities were fit study for anthropologists but not economists. Once 'take-off' began, their 'surpluses' would automatically be transferred to the industrial sector as required, voluntarily through labour transfer, as soon as jobs became available in urban industry, and involuntarily through rents, taxation or other forms of expropriation. Since rural producers faced no economic choices – life was just a matter of getting as much as possible out of the land in order to survive – there was no point in devising theories or carrying out empirical research into how the economies of rural households actually worked. Equally, since rural people were perforce subject to the control of an elite that monopolized landownership and military power, they had to be assumed to be unable to develop their own autonomous sources of political, social or cultural strength. Just as economic development depended on the

2 The seminal work along these lines was Lewis 1954 and the classic working-out of the model was Fei and Ranis 1964.

3 The pioneer in exposing 'urban bias' in academic and other approaches to the rural areas of developing countries was Michael Lipton. For the complete argument, see Lipton 1976.

growth of urban industry, so the towns and cities were assumed to be the only sites of political, social and cultural modernization.

However, with the Green Revolution and the new approaches to industrial growth of the 1970s, development theorists and practitioners came to appreciate that an understanding of, for example, why farmers did or did not adopt newly available technology depended on micro-level analysis of how their household economies operated and of the wider social, political and economic structures that conditioned their decisions.<sup>4</sup> Numerous theories were developed (or revived) to explain the principles of the 'peasant economy'. For some, standard neo-classical economics provided an adequate explanation, so that the rural household could effectively be treated like any other small business in a market economy. For others, the particular conditions under which agriculture was practised within the context of Third World rural society – the high level of risk to subsistence and survival, the family-based organization of production, the salience of social and political, as well as economic, relations between the weak and the powerful within the village and beyond – necessitated different kinds of analysis. But in either case, the breakthrough had been made towards the treatment of rural households as active participants in economic change, operating according to rational and discernible principles on the basis of their own view of the world.

This breakthrough opened the way to research into a whole range of new issues related to the activities of rural producers and the political economy within which they operated. It placed the rural household centre-stage and focused new attention on its resource-allocation decisions and technological choices, within the constraints that wider economic and social relations imposed on it. As the 'black box' of the household was opened up, issues such as the gender distribution of work and the differing market and credit relationships of different kinds of household came under scrutiny. Moreover, as empirical research on the rural economies of a wide range of developing countries accumulated, it became increasingly clear that agriculture was by no means the only activity by which rural people supported themselves and engaged with the market. Rural households were observed to pursue 'livelihood diversification strategies', constructing 'a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities in their struggle for survival and in order to improve their standards of living' (Ellis 1998: 4). Such activities might include, alongside cultivation of the household's holding for subsistence or for the market, household-based

4 Lipton had also been a pioneer in this area. As Bryceson summarizes it

Lipton's work logically inferred the need for familiarity not only with peasants' production constraints, but also with how they perceive and manipulate the constraints they face, and an understanding of their social agency including shared norms of obligation and reciprocity, as well as contested arenas of power in resource allocation.

(2000: 26)

## 6 *Rethinking rural Japan*

non-agricultural work, non-agricultural work within the rural area, or wage-work away from home, involving more-or-less temporary migration and remittances back to the family in the country. Many rural households, in the developed as well as the developing world, could thus be defined as 'pluriactive', deriving income from a range of sources within and beyond agriculture.<sup>5</sup>

Diversification strategies clearly offer a means of spreading the risks to household livelihood posed by fluctuations in the agricultural environment and prices and reducing the seasonality of income flows. However, they may also have wider implications for the rural economy in general. By opening up ways for households to make better use of their resources, invest in increasing their agricultural or non-agricultural output and generally raise, as well as stabilize, their incomes, rural non-agricultural activities, alongside agricultural improvements, could lead to an expanding rural economy based on the pluriactive household, instead of the breakdown of peasant agriculture which would result from permanent migration to urban areas and the emergence of large-scale, specialized farms.<sup>6</sup> China's spectacular take-off following the introduction of the household responsibility system and the deregulation of the rural economy from the late 1970s is often attributed to the rapid expansion of rural industry, alongside agriculture, and other East Asian cases, including Taiwan's and post-war Japan's, are frequently cited as demonstrating the benefits, in terms of equality and welfare as well as output increase, of rural industrial-

5 The concept of 'pluriactivity' was originally used in the context of rural areas in present-day Europe (where the standard survey, carried out in 1987, found that over half of farm households practised it) and Fuller's original description of it as a strategy illustrates clearly the emerging recognition of the complexity and sophistication of the rural household economy, in developed as in developing countries:

The rationale of why households adopt different patterns of activity will depend upon conditions in agriculture, off-farm job opportunities, the structure of the household and changes over time. The strategy (conscious or unconscious) adopted by the household will depend on the household's perception of these 'realities', which in turn depends upon the aspirations and values of its members and the process by which decisions are made in the household. Pluriactivity is a perceived means of accommodating change, adapting to agricultural realities (e.g. minimizing risk), maximizing opportunities, raising a family and staying on the land.

(Fuller 1990: 36–7)

Rigg points out the importance of the recognition that agriculture formed only a small part of the rural economy of most developed countries, and of the consequent reorientation of rural studies, for those working on industrializing regions of the developing world, such as Southeast Asia (Rigg 2001: 1–2). For a discussion of the concept of pluriactivity (as developed in Europe) in relation to the study of Japanese rural households, see Tama 1994: ch. 1.

6 See, e.g. Rigg 1997: 187–9 for evidence of this process in southeast Asia. Hart makes the distinction between 'diversification for survival' and 'diversification for accumulation' (1994: 48).

ization as a strategy.<sup>7</sup> In parts of the world as diverse as Southeast Asia and southern Africa, non-agricultural growth is seen as producing not the 'deindustrialization' of the countryside, as the products of urban industry replace those once made by rural households themselves, but rather its 'deagrarianization', as rural households increasingly engage in industrial work (Bryceson 1996; Rigg 2001: ch. 9).

Such evidence therefore suggests the possibility of a different pattern of economic development, in the rural economy and beyond, from that implied by 'two sector' models driven by 'modern sector' growth. The original model designed to incorporate rural non-agricultural activities into a sectoral analysis of the development process, that of Hymer and Resnick (1969), was in fact used to show how a developing country's opening up to trade would result in the disappearance of rural manufacturing, as producers switched to production of agricultural export crops and substituted imports for the products they had once made for themselves. Ranis and Stewart (1993), however, reworked the model to show that there were conditions under which rural non-agricultural activities would not be wiped out, but would instead grow and develop, while food production for the domestic market was maintained. These conditions involved, on the one hand, the existence of positive linkages between the agricultural and non-agricultural activities of rural households and, on the other, a wider economic and political environment that facilitated the operation of these 'growth linkages'. Where such conditions prevailed, it was possible to envisage a situation in which an increase in, say, agricultural output generated an increase in rural household income which increased demand for the products of rural manufacturers employing workers from those households. The resulting rises in employment and incomes would in turn generate increased demand for locally produced food. Rising incomes would provide some rural households at least with the resources and security needed to undertake investment to increase output further, in response to rising demand. Thus, growth-linkage interactions could produce a cycle of rising rural employment and incomes, often described as a 'virtuous circle'.<sup>8</sup>

This recognition of the potential for growth and development within the rural economy itself, along a path determined by the strategies of rural actors, can also be seen as part of a wider movement to understand and

7 For examples, see Slater 1991.

8 This is not to imply that virtuous circles cannot have more-or-less vicious consequences. The resulting growth might be environmentally damaging, for instance, and although actual cases of rural-based growth of this kind suggest that it does tend to produce higher levels of equality and welfare than does urban-based industrialization, this is not a necessary implication of the model. Cases of 'vicious circles' of interaction between agricultural and non-agricultural activity, in which agriculture is 'squeezed out' by non-agricultural activity and the rural poor lose sources of employment in agriculture, can also be observed in the contemporary Third World (see, e.g. Rigg 2001: ch. 7).



appreciate, in its own terms, the world of those once seen as peripheral to the urban-centred, top-down development process. Given the distinctive nature of rural life – for example, its relation to the seasonal and risky business of agriculture, the location of production within small-scale and often quite isolated communities and the role within it of organizations acting as units of both production and consumption – economic text-book theories designed to explain urban-industrial activities and based on the assumption of the atomistic, asocial and acultural producer and consumer might be inadequate to explain the actions of rural households. Hence, the rural community – typically the village – and its social, political and cultural features might need to be brought into any satisfactory analysis of rural economic change, and understanding of the strategies used by rural households might need to take account of their use of community-based activity and non-economic tools and sanctions in their pursuit of economic ends. As scholarly attention in general increasingly focused on ‘other’ cultures and societies and on ‘subaltern’ voices, so rural communities were recognized as possessing valid social, political and cultural ways of their own, a ‘little tradition’ distinct from the mainstream ‘great tradition’ of the urban centres of economic and political power.

The pioneer of this kind of approach to rural communities experiencing economic change has been James Scott. In his most influential work, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, Scott argued that, where households’ goals principally involved the insurance of security and survival, rural groups were motivated by the principles of their ‘moral economy’ to resist, in the last resort by rebellion, forces, such as the spread of the capitalist market economy, that threatened the kinds of intra-village, non-market relationships through which such insurance had been guaranteed (Scott 1976). Others produced evidence that by no means all peasant communities regarded the market as threatening their insurance of subsistence, some viewing it as offering opportunities for diversification, hence improved security, and for freedom from exploitative social relationships. However, the significance of Scott’s analysis of the forms and motives behind ‘rural resistance’ lay in the fact that it had broadened the concept to include more than just the economic actions and choices of individual rural producers. In later work (Scott 1985), he looked at forms of resistance which fall short of open rebellion, coining the term ‘weapons of the weak’ to describe the many ways in which rural dwellers can make life difficult for those, ostensibly more powerful than they are, who threaten their livelihoods. While they may not possess the overt political and economic strengths necessary to confront forces opposed to their interests, their sheer numbers, and very often their control over the labour and skills necessary for agriculture, furnish them with a range of economic, social and cultural devices which can be employed in acts of small-scale resistance or in what Zhou calls ‘spontaneous, unorganized, leaderless, non-ideological, apolitical’ movements (1996: 1).

The rural sector is therefore now envisaged both as significantly and actively engaged with the overall process of development and as complex, changeable and possessed of its own ways and strengths. As a result, while simple distinctions between the rural and the urban – rural = agricultural; urban = industrial, for example – have become hard to make, the idea of the rural/urban divide has been given new meaning, in terms of both economic structures and social and cultural identities. Change and diversity in rural areas, not to mention increasing rural–urban interconnections, mean that a statistically watertight definition of the rural may not be possible: country towns which serve as centres for surrounding rural areas, although urban in terms of population densities, fit into rural economic structures; migrant workers resident in cities, or even abroad, who send remittances to their rural families continue to contribute to the rural economy; factories in villages are rural in location but may belong to the urban economy in terms of their demand and supply relationships and industrial organization. Yet, nonetheless, the direction of change in the analysis of rural areas has only served to re-emphasize the idea of a distinct rural identity.

In some respects, despite the increasing recognition of rural non-agricultural activity, agriculture still remains central to this identity. While it may no longer define the rural, the peculiarities of agriculture as a production activity – its seasonality, its reliance on land as a production input, the characteristics of its markets and so on – continue to condition the nature of rural economic and social institutions in distinctive ways. Because of their involvement with agriculture, rural communities remain of necessity relatively small and scattered and rural producers are typically small-scale, often family-based, and lacking in market power. Beyond this, however, for some at least, ‘it is the particular cultural and moral milieu that constitutes rural society which makes rural people distinctive – their concern for family and community, their “moral” economy of sharing and communal support, their conservativeness, and their self-reliance and dislocation from the mainstream’ (Rigg 2001: 3). In this light, Murdoch and Pratt advise that ‘rather than trying to “pin down” a definition of the rural, we should explore the ways in which rurality is constructed and deployed in a variety of contexts’ (1993: 423). This book therefore seeks to apply to the Japanese historical case the kinds of concept and tool that have emerged from the attempt to understand rural economies and societies, past and present, in their own terms.

### **Rural development over time and the paths to industrialization**

The principal concern of those who engage in development studies of course lies in understanding the determinants of the incomes and welfare of those who live in contemporary developing countries, in this case in their rural areas. Economic historians, on the other hand, can take a

longer view, looking at the wider ramifications of change over time in the rural economy, as it interacts with longer-term historical processes. The Japanese case presents an almost unique opportunity to analyse rural development over the course of a relatively recent but nonetheless complete industrialization process, about which a significant amount of statistical data and other information are available. Although regional variations undoubtedly exist, Japan's geography and environment have prescribed relatively uniform rural structures and institutions over the country as a whole – rice has remained central to agricultural production virtually everywhere, for example – and the long-term absence of territorial changes or flows of migration means that political identity has been consistently maintained. In Japan, therefore, we can observe rural development over the long term, using both national-level data and micro-level case studies to describe an overall process of change, and can thus place the Japanese case within the context, not only of the analysis of contemporary developing countries, but also of the economic history of the industrialization process, as it has occurred elsewhere in the developed world.

In economic history as in development studies, the idea that the dramatic emergence of large-scale urban industry was central to the process of economic development was for long a dominant one and the industrial revolution that took off in eighteenth-century Britain was seen as the key factor underlying the 'rise of the West' to predominance in the world economy.<sup>9</sup> In both Marxist and conventional economic approaches, it was large-scale capitalist industry, utilizing powered technology and factory-based labour, that was the force driving economic transformation and the technological and institutional 'modernization' of agriculture. Rural non-agricultural work, where it went on, was a reflection of the overpopulation and land poverty which drove households to need to supplement their incomes from agriculture, a 'residual', 'self-exploitative' or 'involutionary' activity which could do no more than prepare them for proletarianization. The pre-modern rural peasantry, with their feudal ways and non-economic *mentalités*, acted as an obstacle to the spread of the 'capitalist mode of production' and the early demise of feudal rural institutions, paving the way for the 'agricultural revolution' of large-scale capitalist farms, was seen as a significant cause of the 'first industrial revolution' in Britain.<sup>10</sup>

In due course, however, doubts about this approach began to emerge. It proved hard to demonstrate statistically that the emergence of the 'modern' factory-based industries that epitomized the industrial revolution in Britain contributed in the dramatic way suggested to the overall growth of the economy (Crafts 1985). The 'agricultural revolution' was increasingly shown to have been a more drawn-out and complex process than

9 For a summary of this view and of revisionist critiques of it, see Berg 1994: ch. 1.

10 See the discussion that has formed the 'Brenner debate', e.g. Aston and Philpin 1985.

once thought and evidence began to emerge of market-based and entrepreneurial activity amongst the supposedly immobile peasantries of other parts of Europe.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, from the 1970s onwards, an expanding body of research was revealing the significant growth in rural manufacturing in various parts of Europe in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that seemed to have preceded 'real' industrialization and was hence labelled 'proto-industrialization'.<sup>12</sup>

As case studies accumulated, it became clear that proto-industrialization in Europe was by no means a uniform phenomenon, in terms of either its economic, social and demographic characteristics or its relationship to subsequent 'modern' industrialization (or lack of it). However, a key common feature of proto-industries was their utilization of the labour time of rural workers, still based in households that continued, to a greater or lesser extent, to engage in agriculture, in the production of consumer goods destined for local and also increasingly national and even international markets. Although the economic and institutional forms of historical proto-industrialization varied considerably – for example, in the relations between producers, input suppliers and the market, the relative use of male and female labour and so on – it represented a quite widely experienced phenomenon, across 'pre-industrial' Europe, involving the opening up of income-earning possibilities in the countryside for often otherwise under-utilized labour time within the rural household, just as pluriactivity and livelihood diversification are now seen to do for contemporary Third World farm households. However, the historical context made it possible to explore the wide-ranging and long-term ramifications of rural non-agricultural growth, so that the concept of proto-industrialization has become the basis for 'a research strategy bringing together industrial and agrarian history, adding to them historical demography and the history of the household and the family, and also the history of everyday culture and the development of institutions' (Schlumbohm 1996: 12).

Nonetheless, proto-industrialization is still viewed through the lens of subsequent 'real' industrialization and analysed in terms of the ways in which it did or did not pave the way for the establishment of urban factory industry. At the macro level, the development of rural manufacturing appeared to bring about an eventual regional specialization into areas of proto-industry, where agriculture became more and more a matter of subsistence production, and areas of commercial agriculture meeting a wider demand for marketed food and raw materials. Proto-industrial workers, devoting a growing proportion of their time to manufacturing activity, on the one hand developed new skills and habits which might in due course fit them for 'modern' industrial employment, but on the other became

11 See, e.g. Overton 1996 and Hoffman 1996.

12 For a summary of proto-industrialization theory and evidence, see Ogilvie and Cerman 1996.

increasingly dependent on the vagaries of distant markets which turned them, as they lost the security of their agricultural bases, into a potentially footloose proletariat, primed for migration to work in urban factory industry, once it emerged. Meanwhile, at the micro level, rising incomes and changing work patterns brought about shifts in household structures and in demographic behaviour, with younger men and women typically becoming able to marry, set up independent households and produce children earlier, and therefore in greater numbers, than in areas that remained tied to agriculture. Gender relations within households changed, since it was frequently women who carried out proto-industrial work; consumption patterns altered, as households came to buy more and more from expanding consumer-goods markets; economic and political power structures within villages and regions shifted, as proto-industries offered rural workers alternatives to agricultural work for larger and more powerful landowners. Proto-industrialization is thus seen as creating the conditions – population growth, a labour force of men and women (often children too) no longer tied to the land, mass markets for consumer goods – on which subsequent industrial revolutions depended.

However, while the proto-industrialization concept can certainly be applied to Japan, where a significant expansion of rural manufacturing activity did take place, alongside agricultural growth, over a century or more from the late eighteenth century, the Japanese case appears to demonstrate some significant divergences from what was widely taken to be ‘standard’ European experience.<sup>13</sup> Regional specialization into areas of commercial agriculture and areas of proto-industry did not emerge so clearly in Japan as in parts of Europe and agriculture and industry typically remained entwined within the economies of rural households through the gender-based division of labour. At the same time, proto-industrialization in Japan did not appear to lead to the early household formation and consequent population pressures observed in Europe. Hence, although proto-industrial development may have helped to develop skills and work habits that prepared rural workers for subsequent ‘modern’ industrial employment and urban factory industry, when it began to grow, certainly relied on the recruitment of workers from the countryside, industrialization in Japan did not in due course result in the disappearance of the pluriactive rural household or of the small-scale rural industry, with its origins in proto-industrialization, that competition from factory industry appeared to destroy in much of Europe.

Moreover, it is not only Japan’s experience that calls into question the characterization of the growth of rural small-scale, often household-based, manufacturing as merely a passing stage in the industrialization process. The persistence, and indeed economic and technological dynamism, of

13 For detailed evidence, see Saitō, O. 1985: Part II or Saitō, O. 1983a, and later chapters.

smaller-scale manufacturing enterprises alongside the modern factory sector has been observed even in the home of the industrial revolution in England (Berg 1994). The continued development of small-scale craft manufacturers, producing differentiated products for niche markets, in various parts of Europe led Sabel and Zeitlin (1985) to postulate 'alternatives to mass production' as a path to industrialization. Meanwhile, the discovery of the 'flexible specialization' practised by networks of small-scale businesses in post-World War II Japan as part of the 'just-in-time' systems of larger manufacturers cast doubt on the necessary superiority of the 'Fordist' mass-production techniques to which the industrial revolution, conventionally described, gave rise (Friedman 1988). The concept of an alternative 'industrious revolution', involving the intensified utilization of male and female labour within the household in the context of increased production and consumption of marketed consumer goods, has been devised to describe the development path of both parts of Europe and Japan.<sup>14</sup> Although, as Bray (1999) argues, the tendency to define technological progress in terms derived from 'traditional' views of the Western industrial revolution – hence as embodying increased scale, capital intensity, scientific sophistication and specialization – remains dominant, though particularly problematic in the study of the development of non-Western societies, there has nonetheless emerged a growing recognition of the possibility of 'alternative paths to industrialization'.

The rural economy, and in particular the nature of its agricultural activities, is clearly a crucial factor in determining these paths to industrialization. That the direction of technological development in industry might be interrelated with that of agriculture is demonstrated in the work of Sokoloff and Dollar (1997), who show how the persistence of small-scale 'cottage' industry for considerably longer in Britain than in the United States can be related to the greater seasonality of agricultural labour demand on wheat-growing British farms, as compared with their more diversified, livestock-based, American counterparts. Postel-Vinay (1994) shows how the continued demand for harvest labour in French agriculture meant that industrial producers were obliged to shut up shop at harvest time and so persisted, until late in the nineteenth century, with water power and other less capital-intensive techniques, rather than leave expensive modern equipment idle. In parts of Northern Italy, the subject of the most detailed work relating rural change to the long-term pattern of

14 See de Vries 1993 and 1994 and Hayami 2003: 287–306. In fact, de Vries's 'European-style' industrious revolution differs in some respects from Hayami's 'Japanese-style' one, the former placing more emphasis on expansion in the demand and markets for consumer goods, the latter more on the relation between land and population, although both involve growth resulting from more intensive use of labour at the level of the household. For a recent, longer-term working-out of an industrious revolution-style, labour-intensive industrialization path in East Asia, see Sugihara 2003.

industrialization, ‘peasant worker’ households continued to combine agricultural work with manufacturing employment through into the twentieth century and thus laid the basis for the emergence of the small-scale ‘flexible’ manufacturers of the post-World War II ‘Third Italy’ (Paloscia 1991; Bull and Corner 1993).<sup>15</sup> Corner thus concludes that, in this case

the conventional passages from agriculture to industry, from peasant to proletarian worker, from country to town, were far less clear-cut than in Britain – when they occurred at all, and often they did not. Indeed, the characteristic of large sections of the rural population is precisely the extent to which – despite increasing involvement with manufacturing – they avoided making those passages.

(1996: 137)

Such conclusions thus suggest the need for greater attention to the ‘agrarian context of industrialization’ (Hart 1997: 59) and the ‘deep-seated, historically-determined roots’ (Paloscia 1991: 35) of the links between the agricultural and non-agricultural activities of rural households that condition the path of industrialization. They imply that, under certain historical circumstances at least, rural non-agricultural activity need not be ‘involutionary’ self-exploitation, nor simply part of a proto-industrial stage preparatory to an industrial revolution, but rather intertwined with agriculture in a process of technological and organizational development that can proceed alongside the growth of urban factory industry and so condition the overall nature of industrialization. Such an approach, like similar moves in development studies, re-emphasizes the strategies – economic, technological, demographic – of rural households and the conditions in the wider political economy which enable those strategies to be successfully pursued; like the ‘industrious revolution’ model, it focuses on the relationships between households’ allocation of their labour resources and their consumption patterns, as they interact with outside markets, and it does not preclude the survival and development of the pluriactive rural household and the types of manufacturing in which it can engage. In subsequent chapters, this approach will be applied to the Japanese case, in an attempt to elucidate the role played by the rural economy in determining Japan’s path to industrialization. The achievement of that industrialization, however, as in other now-developed countries, requires adjustment on the part of the rural sector, and it is to the tools and concepts that can help in the analysis of this that we now turn.

15 For a discussion of the similarities between the Northern Italian case (as described by Bull and Corner) and the Japanese one, see Francks 1995.

## **The agrarian question: agricultural adjustment and rural modernization**

The time period covered in this book and the phases into which it is divided do not altogether follow the standard periodization traditionally adopted in the study of Japanese history. The book begins in the later eighteenth century and its first part deals with the subsequent hundred years or so, crossing the mid-nineteenth century dividing line formed by Japan's opening to trade with the West and the subsequent overthrow of the feudal regime with the Meiji Restoration of 1868. The division between this and the period covered in Part II of the book is placed in the 1890s, a decade which historians are coming to regard as marking the point when industrialization and urbanization began to have a decisive impact on Japanese political, social and economic life. From then on, the economy, and in particular its industrial sector, experienced rapid growth culminating in the boom conditions of the World War I period. The collapse of this boom, after the end of the war, ushered in the more troubled times of the inter-war period, described in Part III, when the now much more heavily industrial Japanese economy struggled to adjust to fluctuations in the world economy and to the demands of imperialism and militarism, as Japan moved along the road to war in Asia and the Pacific.

The rationale behind this periodization lies in an analytical framework derived from the study of 'agrarian transitions' and of what has become known as the 'agrarian question'. The question is essentially concerned with what happens to the agricultural sector as industrialization takes place and with the institutional changes, in particular the establishment of 'capitalist relations of production' in agriculture, that accompany it. In the classic 'British' model of the agrarian transition, the communal, subsistence-based production systems of feudal agriculture are replaced by capitalist forms of farming, under which privately owned land is managed by profit-seeking farmers employing agricultural wage workers who form a landless rural labour force. The investments of the landowning class in the non-agricultural sector provide the capital resources on which industrial growth is based, while the establishment of capitalism in the countryside frees (or forces) the rural proletariat to migrate to industrial work in the towns. Meanwhile, farms come to specialize in the provision of the food required by the industrial labour force, eventually developing into large-scale, mechanized agricultural businesses.

The work of a number of scholars has demonstrated that the paths of historical agrarian transitions, in Europe and elsewhere, have in fact been diverse and have rarely followed the 'British model' exactly.<sup>16</sup> Not all have

16 The most notable recent work on agrarian transitions has been that of Byres. See in particular Byres 1991 where he argues (p. 64) that the Japanese case is so exceptional as to be irrelevant to other Asian countries.



even necessarily involved the destruction of the 'peasant economy' and, as suggested earlier, proto-industrialization led on to a variety of different development paths.<sup>17</sup> The important point, however, is that the framework of the agrarian transition places rural change within the context of a wider, and necessarily industrialising, economy. While substantial parts of this book are concerned with rural development per se, and employ the concepts and theories of scholars in the development field who would not accept that investment in urban industry is a necessary condition for the improvement of welfare and living standards in the contemporary Third World, the fact remains that industrialization did occur in Japan. Given the strong interrelationships between the agricultural/rural and industrial/urban economies, rural economic change cannot be divorced from the growth of the modern industrial sector, even if the relationship between the two is not necessarily as one-way as the standard agrarian transition model might suggest.

Part I of this book nonetheless attempts to treat Japan's pre-industrial rural economy as a functioning system in its own terms and indeed as one that generated significant growth and rising rural living standards without recourse to modern industrialization. Such growth is seen as the result of the operation of the mechanisms of the virtuous circle internal to the rural economy, which began to produce increases in both agricultural and manufacturing output from the second half of the eighteenth century. The transfer of resources to the urban industrial sector, following the installation in 1868 of a government committed to industrialization, to the extent that it occurred, did not undermine these mechanisms, which continued to generate rural growth through to the 1890s. By then, for the first time, non-agricultural growth was taking off independently of the growth of the rural economy, while the virtuous circle itself was beginning to be permeated by influences from the expanding urban industrial sector. However, the significance of the century of rural growth prior to this lies, it will be argued, not so much in the creation of the preconditions for industrialization or the generation of an 'agricultural surplus' as in the extent to which the resulting economic and institutional structures conditioned the nature of the agrarian transition and hence of the overall industrialization process itself.

In Japan, as elsewhere, the subsequent divergence in growth between the agricultural and industrial sectors produced the symptoms of the 'agricultural adjustment problem'. As urban industrial employment grows and the introduction of new industrial technology raises productivity and wages, the agricultural sector finds it increasingly difficult, in the absence of radical restructuring, to generate comparable incomes for those who work in it. Meanwhile, industrial employers, anxious not to see wages

17 For a discussion of the implications of rural industrialization for the agrarian question, see Watts and Goodman 1997.

pushed up by rising food prices in the towns and possessed of growing political clout as the industrial sector comes to dominate the economy, resist the introduction of protection against food imports from parts of the world retaining comparative advantage in agriculture. In Britain, the conflict of interest between agriculture and industry worked itself out in the course of the debate over the repeal of the Corn Laws, which had restricted imports of grain and put pressure on the real wages of industrial workers. As a result of a campaign organized by industrial interests, the laws were eventually repealed in 1846, ushering in a period of free trade in agricultural products into Britain that lasted until the 1930s. In other parts of Europe, however, especially as improvements in transport technology made the grain of North America and Russia available at ever lower prices, protectionist strategies in support of farm interests were adopted, so that, whereas in Britain farmers suffered a long period of low prices and were forced to shift out of grain cultivation and adopt new forms of larger-scale and more mechanized technology, many elsewhere in the industrial world were supported in their efforts to sustain the traditional agricultural structure (Tracy 1989: ch. 2).

In the 1890–1920 period covered in Part II of this book, Japan worked out its own initial response to the agricultural adjustment problem. Industrial interests, growing in political influence as industry came to dominate the economy and electoral politics increased in significance, challenged agricultural interests, represented by the still politically powerful larger landowners, over the issue of grain (= rice) imports and agricultural protectionism, in debates over policy which echoed, indeed consciously cited, the Corn Laws debate in Britain. However, a century of virtuous circle-style economic growth in the countryside had produced agricultural interests different from and, in some respects, more influential than their British counterparts and the solution to the problem eventually worked out – protection against imports from outside the empire but promotion of rice production in Japan’s colonies – has to be regarded as something of a compromise. In allowing for the survival of the small-scale, family-based, pluriactive, rural household, it mapped out a response to the agricultural adjustment problem, and hence a path of agrarian transition, heavily influenced by the past pattern of rural economic development and different from that observed historically in many other industrial countries.

The limitations of Japan’s chosen solution to the adjustment problem became apparent in the inter-war years, as rural producers and policy-makers sought to cope with the crisis represented by the Great Depression and the subsequent build-up to war. However, by the time of Pearl Harbor, the outlines of the rural economic structure that Japan’s agrarian transition had produced were well established. Rural households had adapted the use of their labour forces to the changing demands of industrial employment and small-scale rural businesses had developed the technological and organizational means to carve out niches for themselves

within the modern industrial economy. The inter-war years, despite all the difficulties they presented, consolidated the position of the small-scale, rice-cultivating but pluriactive household unit within the industrial economy that Japan had become. The post-war Land Reform further strengthened such households, economically and politically, but in practice they represented the legacy, to the Japan of the 'economic miracle' period, of the path of agrarian transition taken over the course of pre-war industrialization.

However, it would be wrong to think that the rural economy, and the households and villages of which it was composed, that post-war Japan inherited had not changed through the transition process. Rural households, and the policy-makers who supported them, responded to the difficulties and challenges of the inter-war period described in Part III through a strategy that can perhaps best be described as 'modernization'. The term is used here, not in the sense of necessary progress towards a 'modern'/Western model of an industrial democracy, but rather as employed by Garon (1994) in his analysis of the significance of the idea of modernity in inter-war Japan and other parts of the world at the time. For policy-makers and opinion-formers in Japan, Garon argues, the concept of modernity involved the application of science and 'rationality' to life and work, an efficient, if necessarily authoritarian, government, and a rational and organized home and family life, and it played a large part in determining government policy and the relation of the state to society. Part III will argue that modernization in Garon's sense provided rural households with survival strengths and allied them to government officials who saw the modernization of the countryside as essential to social control and the avoidance of conflict. As Tamanoi points out, since urban modernity was conceived as 'Western', the countryside became the locus for the formation of a truly Japanese, modern national identity (Tamanoi 1998: 17). The culmination of Japan's agrarian transition therefore took the form of a rural political economy dominated by modern household units and the village organizations that supported them, but one based on an agrarian structure very different from that of the large-scale, specialist, capitalist farms and businesses of the standard model.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, however, although the modernized rural economy of the inter-war years was in many ways very different from that of pre-industrial times, its adjustment to the industrial economy was accompanied by the emergence, as in many other industrializing countries, of an agrarianist ideology which harked back to a more-or-less invented rural tradition. The appeal of the 'agrarian myth', centring on the victimized

18 Terms such as 'modern', 'modernization', etc. are used throughout the book in Garon's sense, and hence, hopefully, in something of the sense applied to them at the time. If they are meant in a 'modernizationist' sense, they are placed in inverted commas.

small-scale farmer who nonetheless represented the soul of Japan, to the state and the public alike placed a new ideological weapon in the hands of those seeking to protect and sustain the agrarian structure that had emerged through the adjustment process. It was to colour policy towards agriculture and the rural economy, in Japan itself and in its colonies, through the inter-war and wartime periods, and it has continued to the present day to provide the ideological and emotional basis of public support for protection of the rural household and the 'traditional' countryside.

This book essentially seeks to argue, therefore, that the part played by Japan's rural population in the historical process of economic development encompassed much more than the passive provision of agricultural resources in response to the demands of industrialization. The changing patterns of the rural economy and rural life actively conditioned the path taken by the wider political economy and the strategies adopted by rural producers necessitated accommodations which significantly influenced the nature of Japanese development. Although the state and the ruling class, both before and after the adoption of industrialization as a goal, attempted, and often succeeded, in expropriating a substantial share of rural output, rural households used the range of economic, political and cultural weapons at their disposal to resist and devised responses which enabled them to survive, as small-scale, pluriactive producers, eventually securing for themselves a better livelihood. The rural sector necessarily declined in relative economic significance, as an inevitable part of the industrialization process, but its political and cultural influence was not concomitantly reduced and, as in many other countries, appreciation of the value of real or invented rural tradition grew in inverse proportion to the shrinking of the rural economy. Thus the power of the rural sector, and of the structures and institutions emerging out of the choices and strategies adopted by rural people in their struggle for economic survival and betterment, has remained to haunt Japan to this day.



## **Part I**

# **The nineteenth century**

The establishment of the diversified rural economy



# Introduction

This part seeks to paint a picture of Japan's rural economy and its change and development over the course of the nineteenth century as a whole. In the terms of much of the standard literature on 'agriculture's role in development', what is being described are the 'preconditions for industrialization' – the output growth, commercialization and institutional change which facilitate the mobilization of rural capital and labour resources in support of industrial growth. For economic historians, what occurred in the Japanese countryside in the nineteenth century can be viewed, in the context of work on European economies, as the proto-industrialization that preceded later 'real' industrialization. However, it is also possible to represent Japan's nineteenth-century rural economy as a dynamic and developing one in its own terms, generating growth in both agricultural and non-agricultural output and broadly rising living standards for the majority of the population who lived in rural areas. For those concerned with today's developing countries, the increases in the availability and security of food output, the interlinked growth of agriculture, manufacturing and commerce in rural areas and the generally improving quality of life which the nineteenth century brought in Japan would constitute development in themselves, whether or not they paved the way for future industrialization. At the same time, however, whatever it may have done for the overall standard of living, Japan's nineteenth-century rural development did not benefit all rural dwellers equally and the significant shifts in the balance of economic power in the countryside which it produced contributed, in their turn, to the dramatic changes in the political economy which the century witnessed.

These changes centred around the events of, and reforms resulting from, the Meiji Restoration of 1868, which marked the final overthrow of the almost two century-long regime of the Tokugawa Shoguns, and work on Japan's history has traditionally treated 1868 as a decisive break-point. As far as rural Japan was concerned, the Restoration did bring significant changes to political institutions, most notably the abolition of the feudal domains and the class of samurai, by means of which the country had been governed under the Tokugawa system, and the establishment of new



organs of local administration within a centralized national government structure, manned by appointed officials and, eventually, elected politicians. Meanwhile, the Land Tax Reform which accompanied this provided for formal private ownership of cultivated land and for the payment of fixed taxes on land in money. More broadly and more gradually, the new government's measures accelerated the spread of markets in land, labour and output and the integration of rural areas into the national and world economies which had begun in the decades before 1868. However, it is difficult to argue that, in terms of the pattern of economic change and the day-to-day socio-economic life of those who lived in the Japanese countryside, 1868 marked a dramatic turning-point and the economic growth of the post-Restoration years is now generally viewed as the continuation of a long phase of expansion in agriculture and (largely rural) manufacturing dating back to the beginning of the century, if not earlier.

The decisive break, from the point of view of economic historians, can perhaps better be argued to have occurred in the 1890s, when the 'take-off' of modern urban industry first began to exert a significant impact on the economy as a whole. As far as the rural economy in particular is concerned, the 1890s seemed to mark the end of the era of mutually reinforcing growth of agriculture and rural industry, as workers began to leave the countryside in greater numbers in pursuit of permanent employment in the towns and cities, as the attractions of urban investment opportunities lured away the capital and attention of the rural better-off and as industrial interests began to outweigh agricultural and land-owning ones in the workings of the national political economy. Prior to that, however, agriculture and rural commerce and industry remained the sources of growth and dynamism in the economy, of capital, entrepreneurship and exports, as they had done in the pre-Restoration years. The following chapters will explore the nature of rural economic development over this long phase and its implications for the rural economic, social and political structures which it bequeathed to later phases of Japan's history.

## 2 Rural economic growth in the nineteenth century

Conrad Totman, in his pioneering work on the relationship between the economy and the environment in Tokugawa Japan, divides the period (1600–1868) into two around a turning-point about 1720.<sup>1</sup> He labels the first part of the period the ‘era of growth’, with population rising, the cultivable and irrigable area extending, cities and towns growing up, and commerce, transport and trade expanding, as the rulers of feudal domains built castles, roads, ports and shrines in the effort to consolidate their control over their territories. The later part he calls the ‘era of stasis’, on the grounds that the expansion of the cultivable area had reached its limits, population ceased to grow, towns and cities declined in economic importance, and producers were forced to compete to find ways of improving the efficiency of resource use in a time of scarcity and environmental difficulty. In much of the earlier literature on Tokugawa Japan too, the mass of the population, predominantly living in rural areas, is portrayed as struggling to subsist, in the face of capricious environmental conditions and a rapacious, urban-based ruling class of feudal lords, samurai and merchants.

However, there is also now a growing body of research which paints quite a different picture of the Tokugawa economy. In this, it is seen as experiencing technological change, increases in land and labour productivities, commercialization and even rising incomes and living standards, particularly in the countryside, where agricultural growth was accompanied by a significant expansion of manufacturing and other non-agricultural activity. Hence, what Totman, from his ecological viewpoint, regards as stasis, a more strictly economic historian might see as growth and development, even if taking the form of an ‘industrious’, rather than ‘industrial’, revolution. It could even be argued that the interlinked growth of agriculture and rural manufacturing characterizing economic change in the countryside by the nineteenth century approximates to the rural-based, appropriate and relatively equitable development path which is the objective of many a planner in today’s Third World. Moreover, although

1 See Totman 1995: ch. 1. The same framework is used in Totman’s more recent textbook: see Totman 2000: chs 10 and 11.

there has been much debate and controversy as to the scale and phasing of agricultural growth in the decades around the Restoration, the pattern of mutually supportive growth of agriculture and rural manufacturing was to be maintained, despite major political and international upheavals, as the basis of the overall expansion of Japan's economy, through to the closing years of the century.

This chapter seeks to describe and analyse the nature and sources of economic growth in the countryside from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards. It will look separately at first agricultural and then non-agricultural growth, before considering the impact of economic expansion as a whole on incomes and their distribution. On this basis, subsequent chapters will go on to consider how these growth processes interrelated at the level of households, businesses and markets, within the economic structures and institutions of nineteenth-century rural Japan.

### **Agricultural growth**

Throughout the nineteenth century, agriculture remained by far the most important economic activity in Japan, employing, to a greater or lesser extent, the vast majority of the population. Despite the significant urban growth of the first half of the Tokugawa period, which produced some of the largest cities in the world at the time, 80–85 per cent of the population still lived in villages in 1800 (Crawcour 1989: 571). Almost all of these would have engaged in cultivation, to some degree at least, and a government survey of 1874 found that 61 per cent of final output was classed as agricultural (Yamaguchi 1963: 5). In what follows, the agricultural structure that had become established by the nineteenth century is described, as background to the subsequent analysis of output growth in the central crop, rice, and in the other agricultural products grown around and alongside it.

### ***Growth and change in agriculture***

As Totman points out, up to some time in the early eighteenth century, increases in agricultural output could still be achieved through extension of the cultivable and irrigable area. As peace and law and order were established under the Tokugawa system, the feudal domains that controlled local government within the framework of allegiance to the Tokugawa Shogun set about applying the knowledge of engineering acquired through military activity in earlier times to enlarging their tax-base by means of often large-scale drainage and reclamation projects, designed to make rice cultivation possible in previously uncultivated river valleys and flood plains (Satō, T. 1990: 62–5).<sup>2</sup> In due course, however, in most parts of

2 Arashi estimates that the paddy area increased by 250,000 hectares between 1598 and 1688 and by 340,000 hectares between 1716 and 1747 (1975: 84).

the country, the limits to acreage expansion were reached and village settlements could no longer accommodate increasing population through the establishment of branch settlements on newly created agricultural land. A national population which may have doubled between 1600 and the census of 1721 remained more or less stable from then until the mid-nineteenth century (Totman 2000: 247).<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, as the growth of population and cultivable area slowed up, agricultural production increasingly came to be organized on the basis of relatively small-scale household units within villages. Holdings that had been cultivated by extended family groups were broken up into main and branch units that could be managed by two-generational 'stem families', supplemented if needs be by hired-in labour.<sup>4</sup> From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, therefore, the dominant form of rural economic organization was the household composed of the house-head couple and their successors and the average household size was to remain at around 4–5 people through to World War II (Kitō 1996: 441, Hayami, A. 2003: 294–5). Although technically, under the Tokugawa system, there was no market in land-ownership, by the end of the Tokugawa period probably around a third of the cultivated area had come to be owned by someone other than the (tenant) cultivator (Hayami, Y. and Yamada 1991: 65). Rights to cultivate and to access irrigation water, vested in households over the generations, were, however, relatively strong and maintained by village institutions able to exercise significant control over the activities of member households.

By the early Tokugawa period, irrigated rice had become established as the central crop in Japanese agriculture and was grown wherever water-supply conditions permitted. However, the central function of rice was as the medium of taxation and a variable but large share of the rice crop was expropriated by the feudal rulers of each domain for use, either directly as food stipends or marketed as a source of cash income, in support of their administrations and of the samurai retainers who manned them. Meanwhile, the vast majority of the population, who, unlike the ruling class and those who served them, continued to live in rural areas, cultivated and consumed other crops, which were principally grown in unirrigated ('upland') fields, while rice occupied fields which could be irrigated. These crops included grains, such as wheat, barley and millet, which provided the staples of the rural diet, together with pulses, vegetables and non-food subsistence crops such as cotton. Although the large-scale programme of building and infrastructure development which the feudal lords and the shogunal government carried out in the first half of the Tokugawa period

3 However, estimates of the national population in the Tokugawa period are necessarily tentative and there was considerable regional variation in population growth rates. See Hanley and Yamamura 1977: ch. 3. or Shinpo 1995: 7.

4 For the full analysis of this process, see Smith 1959.

was in due course to create market networks for the supply of goods to the growing towns and cities, over much of the country rural dwellers remained largely self-sufficient, producing their own food, spinning and weaving the materials for their own clothes and growing or gathering the wood and other resources they needed to construct and maintain housing.

Nonetheless, there seems little doubt that, as a result of acreage expansion and also, to some extent, increases in rice yields, agricultural output must have increased significantly over the first half of the Tokugawa period, in support of the growth of both the overall and the urban population.<sup>5</sup> However, with the drying-up of this source of output growth after the mid-eighteenth century, increases in agricultural production could only be achieved through technical changes which permitted a more intensive use of available resources of land and labour. There are of course no national-level statistics recording the impact of such changes on agricultural output for periods before the 1870s, when official central-government data collection began, and there were undoubtedly wide variations, between and within regions, in the ability of cultivating households to take advantage of improved techniques. However, the best available estimates of output growth suggest that, despite declining agricultural area per person, agricultural output per person and per hectare increased by about 10 per cent between 1750 and 1800 and around a further 15 per cent between then and 1872, when the feudal system of tax collection was abolished (Hayami, A. and Miyamoto 1988: 44). The available official, national-level agricultural statistics for the later part of the century have been the subject of considerable debate, but on the basis of the amended data produced as a result of this controversy, total agricultural output was growing at an average rate of 2.3 per cent a year over the 1875–90 period (Shinpo 1995: 64).<sup>6</sup> Hayami and Yamada's analysis of the data for 1880–1900 shows agricultural output growing at an annual rate of 1.6 per cent, and output per worker and per hectare by 1.8 and 0.7 per cent respectively (1991: 19, 37).

Although difficult to demonstrate statistically for the first part of the nineteenth century, the main areas of agricultural output growth throughout the period appear to have lain not so much in rice as in the other food and commercial crops that farmers cultivated (Shinpo 1995: 8). These included wheat and other food grains, fruit and vegetables and, most significantly, industrial crops grown as raw materials for manufacturing industry. Table 2.1 shows this trend continuing through the later part of

5 Hayami, A. and Miyamoto (1988: 49) estimate that agricultural output increased 1.6 times between 1600 and 1720.

6 For an outline of the controversy, see Francks 1999a: 118–21. The subsequent amended data form the basis of the volume of agricultural statistics published in the *Long-Term Economic Statistics of Japan* series and referred to throughout as LTES 9 (see References for full details).

Table 2.1 The structure of agricultural production in 1875 and 1890 (% of value of total agricultural output at current prices)

	1875	1890
Rice	58.1	52.1
<i>Mugi</i> *	9.3	11.8
Other grains	3.1	2.9
Potatoes	2.7	2.9
Beans	4.5	4.3
Vegetables	3.8	5.7
Fruit	0.3	1.4
Industrial crops	9.6	7.9
Silk cocoons	5.5	7.7
Animal products	0.6	1.8
Other	2.4	1.5

Source: adapted from Shinpo 1995: Table 1.16.

Note

\* Non-rice food grains, principally wheat and barley.

the century, with the share of rice in total output declining in favour of other food crops, silk and other industrial crops, but qualitative evidence attests to the fact that it had begun many years earlier in the more advanced and commercialized parts of the country.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, given the centrality of rice within agricultural production, developments in the technology of rice cultivation represented an integral part of the overall package of technical change that underlay the growth in total agricultural output and analysis of the sources of that growth must start with them.

### **Rice**

By the second half of the Tokugawa period, growth in rice output per se seems to have ceased to represent the central element in agricultural growth. This is reflected in an apparent slow-down in the increase in rice yields which, along with acreage expansion, had produced overall output growth earlier. Arashi's compilation of regional data produces an average yield of about 0.7 *koku/tan* in the seventeenth century, rising to about 1.3 in the eighteenth but thereafter changing little until after the middle of the nineteenth century. The official data give a yield of around 1.24 *koku/tan* in the first half of the 1880s, rising to 1.39 in the 1890s (Arashi 1975: 84).<sup>8</sup>

7 See later sections of this chapter. The decline in the share of industrial crops shown in Table 2.1 is the result of decline in the cultivation of raw cotton, the most important industrial crop of the second half of the Tokugawa period but one hit significantly by import competition after the opening to trade. The share of silk, on the other hand, continued to rise.

8 Shinpo and Saitō 1989: 18–20 give similar estimates and show the same trend over time. For definition of *koku/tan* as a measure of yield, see Conventions (p. xiv).

However, there was also clearly wide local and regional variation in rice yields and documented evidence that at least some households in some regions achieved steady growth in yields over long periods into the nineteenth century (see e.g. Smith 1959: 99). At the same time, villages had every incentive to conceal from the authorities any growth in the capacity of their rice-fields. Their ability to do so appears to have increased over the later Tokugawa period (see Chapter 4), only to decline, along with the incentive, once the Meiji land-tax regime was in place, so that the available statistical evidence may not represent an accurate guide to the phasing of growth in rice yields and output.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, it is difficult to argue that rising rice yields were the major factor in bringing about overall output growth before the end of the century.

This does not mean to say, however, that changes in the technology of rice cultivation, which remained the most important production activity of the majority of rural households, were not the key to the ability to increase output overall. Given that rice remained an essential crop, in terms of its high yield of food and/or the wherewithal to pay taxes and rent, the expansion of the output of other crops depended on finding ways of fitting them in alongside rice on a limited area of land. The ideal way to achieve this was through the double-cropping of paddy land, making use of otherwise unutilized land and labour in the winter to grow another crop. This depended in part on investment in suitable irrigation facilities, but also on developments in rice cultivation techniques that created the conditions under which a second crop could be accommodated.

As rice cultivation had spread during the previous centuries, irrigation facilities had been constructed with the main aim of conserving scarce water supplies and the practice throughout much of the country had been to keep fields as far as possible permanently flooded. Double-cropping, however, required the ability to drain paddy fields so that they could be prepared for a second crop in the winter. The intensification of cultivation therefore depended on investment in the irrigation infrastructure to permit the draining of fields. For Arashi, the extent of conversion of permanently flooded rice fields (*shitsuden*) into drainable ones (*kanden*) is the key indicator of technological progress over the course of Japan's agricultural development and the wide regional variations he finds in the extent of double-cropping achieved on paddy fields clearly correlate with the standardly accepted pattern of overall commercialization and economic development. Thus, in the 'advanced' regions of the country stretching southwestwards from Osaka (Kinki, Sanyō and Kyūshū), where both climatic and economic conditions were favourable to agricultural intensification, double-cropping rates of around 45 per cent of the paddy area were

9 For the full argument, see Nakamura, J. 1966. Alternative estimates of the rice yield in *kokutan* for 1878–82 are: official statistics – 1.20; LTES – 1.29; Nakamura – 1.64 (Hayami, Y. and Yamada 1970: 108).

being achieved by 1884, whilst in the northeast rates remained below 15 per cent. Over the remainder of the century, significant increases in the extent of double-cropping continued to be made in all regions except the extreme northeast (Tōhoku), so that by 1907 no more than around 30 per cent of the paddy area remained single-cropped in the most advanced regions and around half nationally (Arashi 1975: 45). The investment in improving irrigation facilities that made this possible was largely the work of cultivators themselves, sometimes organized by higher-level feudal authorities but generally dependent on local labour, initiative and skills.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, as double-cropping spread, farmers were developing other techniques designed to raise land and labour productivity in rice cultivation and free resources for other crops. Central to these were faster-maturing, fertilizer-responsive seed varieties and there is widespread evidence that, from the Tokugawa period onwards, farmers were both selecting seeds for desirable characteristics appropriate to their local environments and acquiring new seed varieties from other parts of the country (see e.g. Smith 1959: 94–5). Arashi's work on Tokugawa-period records of the names of seed varieties, for example, shows that throughout the country, and even in the far north, 10–20 per cent of the varieties grown appear to have had the same names as varieties grown in the far south in Kyūshū (Arashi 1975: 300). The process of breeding late-planted, short-stemmed, fertilizer-responsive varieties suitable for use in double-cropping rotations culminated in the development of Shinriki, the 'miracle' variety which dominated rice cultivation in the warmer parts of the country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but which was, as Arashi shows, the product of a long history of varietal improvement in the more advanced agricultural regions around Osaka (1975: 366–72).

A necessary condition for the successful use of improved rice varieties and double-cropping was the increased application of fertilizer. Initially, farm households had to rely on local sources of vegetable and waste matter, principally grass and leaves collected in forest and upland areas.<sup>11</sup> However, the second half of the Tokugawa period saw the emergence of commercial fertilizer suppliers, marketing at first waste matter from the cities but later by-products of soya and vegetable oil production and fish-based fertilizer, the production of which had become a major industry in Hokkaidō by the Meiji period (Howell 1992). By the later part of the century for which data are available, commercial fertilizer input was growing at an annual rate of 1.6 per cent (1880–1900) and although

10 70 per cent of present-day irrigation facilities were first constructed before 1868, with peaks of activity in the late seventeenth–early eighteenth centuries and the first half of the nineteenth century (Akimoto 1996: 157).

11 There was only limited use of animal manure. Such animals as were kept were for draught purposes on larger-scale holdings only, since animal products were little consumed before the later part of the century.



farmers maintained their use of self-supplied fertilizer, increases in the provision of nutrients to crops depended on commercially supplied products, which grew steadily cheaper and easier to acquire (Hayami, Y. and Yamada 1991: 39, 161).

This 'Green Revolution' package centring on improved irrigation, high-yielding seeds and increased use of fertilizer was clearly land-saving in the sense that it was designed to facilitate a more intensive use of available land resources. It was also in many respects labour-using, as a result both of more intensive cropping and bigger harvests and of the complementary use of improved cultivation techniques, in areas such as transplanting, weeding and pest control, which depended on intense and careful labour. However, it also embodied a number of improvements which could be regarded as labour-saving ones. The increased use of commercial fertilizer falls into this category, but various new items of equipment were also adopted to speed up the labour-intensive operations that represented bottlenecks inhibiting the allocation of labour to other tasks. The most famous of these was the 'thousand-toothed' thresher (*senba kōki*), which substantially reduced labour requirements for threshing grain. Other improved tools, such as better hoes and, eventually, ploughs, on the other hand, are better regarded as parts of the package of yield-increasing techniques, enabling as they did deeper ploughing and more effective absorption of fertilizer.

Analysis of technological change in rice cultivation thus suggests that, although it probably did to some extent raise rice yields and output, especially in the later part of the century, its characteristics were equally importantly designed to facilitate diversification and the more intensive use of available resources of land and labour within the wider context of households' activities as a whole. These activities included both the cultivation of other commercial crops and non-agricultural work, and it is to these that we now turn.

### ***Other crops***

As Table 2.1 showed, as the share of rice in total agricultural production declined, those of, on the one hand, other food crops and, on the other, industrial crops for processing were rising. As far as non-rice food crops are concerned, since these were predominantly grown for home consumption rather than the market, measurable data are hard to find. However, there is evidence that, over the course of the nineteenth century, diets were becoming more secure and diversified, for example as a result of the introduction and increased cultivation of the sweet potato, and Hanley concludes that standards of nutrition in nineteenth-century Japan were probably at least as good as those prevailing in the industrializing West at the time (1997: 77–94). Data available for the later part of the century show rising per capita consumption of wheat, alongside rice, correlated with rising rural incomes (see Table 5.4 on page 123). Commercial produc-

tion of fruit and vegetables was already being practised in agricultural areas around major cities in the mid-Tokugawa period and continued to expand through to the later years of the nineteenth century and beyond (Satō, T. 1990: 74).

However, it was the increased cultivation of commercial industrial crops that appears to have been the main driving force behind agricultural growth in the nineteenth century. The particular crops grown varied from region to region but textile raw materials, raw cotton and silk in particular, together with textile dyes, such as indigo, were increasingly cultivated throughout the more developed and commercialized southwest from the mid-Tokugawa period onwards. Forestry products, together with the raw materials for other household and consumer goods – paper bark, lacquer, straw, etc. – also appear to have been produced in growing commercial quantities. As consumers, at first in the towns but later also in the countryside, came increasingly, as Chapter 4 will show, to purchase rather than make for themselves a range of basic foods and household products, including not just clothes but also saké, soy sauce, charcoal for cooking and heating, and so on, commercial cultivation of the necessary agricultural and forestry raw materials clearly increased. By the late 1870s, specialized cash crops, such as cotton, silk cocoons and indigo, are estimated to have represented just under 20 per cent of total agricultural output nationally, but a third or more in specialist areas (Yagi 1990: 118–19; Akimoto 1996: 159). In the most advanced areas, such as the Kinai around Osaka, commercial crops, in particular cotton, had already become more significant to the economies of a range of farm households than was rice by the early decades of the century (Shinpo and Saitō 1989: 19–21).

Although a very wide range of industrial crops thus came to be cultivated, raw cotton and silk cocoons can be singled out as the most important and as those most significantly affected, in their different ways, by the opening up of the country to foreign trade in the middle of the century. Cotton began to replace hemp as the raw material for basic clothing at the beginning of the seventeenth century. At first it was widely grown throughout the country, to be spun and woven for household use, but, as the market for commercially produced cotton goods increased, cultivation became concentrated in those regions, in particular the Kinai, which were environmentally and economically best suited to it. Cotton does not require as much water as rice and was grown on both upland fields and less well irrigated paddy land, sometimes in bi-annual rotations with rice. By the mid-eighteenth century, some Kinai villages were devoting half their cultivated area to cotton and farm households of all kinds were growing it (Hauser 1974: 118–20; Furushima 1991: 512). However, this could only be achieved by means of a high level of fertilizer input and a fertilizer trading network grew up to ship into the Kinai the dried sardines, oil-pressing and saké-brewing wastes and human excrement on which cotton production depended (Hauser 1974: 118; Nakai and McClain 1991: 553–4). Selective

breeding of cotton varieties, for high yield and for product differentiation, proceeded as with rice and the number of varieties recorded is estimated to have increased from six in the seventeenth century to about 50 in the 1830s (Morris-Suzuki 1994: 42).

It was to be expected that the market for cotton goods would be the one most affected by the opening up to trade with the West and indeed imports of cotton textiles were among the first and most large-scale to enter Japan in the wake of the trade treaties agreed in the 1850s. As a later section will show, Japanese cotton textile producers fought back against the competition and succeeded in retaining the lion's share of the domestic market, but they did so on the basis of a switch from home-produced to cheaper imported (and eventually Japanese factory-spun) supplies of cotton thread. As a result, cotton growing (and non-mechanized spinning) virtually died out in the second half of the century, leaving specialist production areas, which had generally been those less favoured for rice cultivation, deprived of a major source of income.

Farm households that produced silk cocoons, on the other hand, experienced continued growth in demand for their product both before and, especially, after the opening to trade. Raw silk is an agricultural product in the sense that its production requires the cultivation of mulberry orchards from which to collect the leaves on which the silkworm lives. Production up to the stage of the generation of the silk cocoon was carried out by farm households, who needed to construct sheds, or sometimes upper storeys to their houses, in which to keep silkworms until they had spun their cocoons.<sup>12</sup> Silk clothing was generally confined to the feudal upper classes and urban rich during the Tokugawa period, but as peace and prosperity became established, more were able to afford it and demand increased. The trade restrictions instituted by the early Tokugawa rulers made imported silk thread difficult to obtain and the domestic silk-weaving industry began to substitute home-produced raw materials for imported ones. Silk-producing agricultural regions thus developed, particularly in mountainous parts of central Japan not favoured for rice cultivation but environmentally well suited to mulberry growing and the rearing of silkworms. Production in these specialist areas certainly increased significantly over the course of the Tokugawa period, as farm households planted mulberry orchards and constructed silk-worm rearing facilities, alongside their other agricultural activities. Significant efforts were also made to breed faster-maturing and hardier silkworm varieties and to develop techniques, such as maintaining constant high temperatures in the rearing sheds, which facilitated greater control over the maturation period and enabled farm households to accommodate better the peak labour demands of their silkworms (Vlastos 1986: 92–6).

12 Members of farm households also engaged in the spinning and weaving of silk but this can be regarded as a manufacturing activity and will be considered below.

In contrast to its impact on cotton production, the opening of trade led to a sharp increase in the demand for and price of Japanese raw silk, which became Japan's most important export item through to the 1880s, and cocoon output approximately tripled in volume between 1874 and the end of the century (LTES 9: Table 12; see also Tanimoto and Saitō 1989: 228–31). The immediate source of this growth lay in increased acreage under mulberry but, as Wigen's case study shows, output expansion depended partly on the past accumulation of knowledge and experience and partly on technical and economic adaptations which 'made space for silk' within the already intensive agricultural activities of rural households in silk-growing regions (Wigen 1995: 143–65). Acreage expansion was achieved through the use of previously marginal pieces of land, but also through the conversion of upland and sometimes even paddy land into mulberry orchards. However, increased use of fertilizer, more intensive planting and the selection of improved mulberry varieties also produced increased yields and the main constraint on output growth to meet rising demand was not so much land as labour time.<sup>13</sup>

The silkworm made very heavy demands on those, usually the female members of farm households, who fed it and cared for it during its short life. 'Traditional' varieties hatched out in the spring, creating a peak labour requirement that coincided with the heaviest demand for labour in rice cultivation at the time of transplanting. The main thrust of technical change in sericulture, in response to the increase in export demand, thus involved efforts to develop varieties which would breed and grow at more convenient times in the overall agricultural cycle than traditional ones. As a result, silkworm production could be staggered over the spring–autumn period, enabling it to be carried out in more households and in different areas, especially where labour could also be saved at key times through the introduction of new techniques, such as the use of commercial fertilizer and animal-ploughing, in other areas of agricultural activity (Wigen 1995: 152–9).<sup>14</sup> Thus, although mulberry cultivation may have led to a reduction in the acreage devoted to 'inferior' upland food crops such as barley and potatoes, the rapid expansion of cocoon output, which was to continue through to 1930, was compatible with the maintenance, and even increase, of rice output.

The nineteenth century thus saw what appears to have been a sustained growth in agricultural output, based on changes in the systems and methods of cultivation which enabled more to be produced from a constrained supply of land and labour and in particular facilitated increases in

13 For a detailed description of technical change in cocoon production, see Smethurst 1986: ch. 3.

14 By 1890, about a quarter of the output of cocoons was produced using 'summer–fall', as opposed to spring, varieties (Nghiep and Hayami 1991).

the production of commercial food and raw material crops. Given its nature, however, this growth was by no means uniform across the country and areas away from the main commercial centres, as well as those even within developing regions that lacked suitable environmental or economic conditions, remained locked into cultivation of rice and subsistence food crops. Moreover, the technological developments that sustained the growth in output did not remove, although they may have reduced, the vulnerability of agriculture to the vagaries of weather, pests and crop diseases.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, farm households increasingly involved in production for the market became more susceptible to the impact of price fluctuations, the result, by the end of the century, of not just national but also international market trends. Nonetheless, the overall availability of food and agricultural raw materials undoubtedly increased significantly over the course of the century. We can now turn to look at the other, non-agricultural activities of the rural economy that processed this increase in crop output and at the same time helped to generate the employment and income through which demand for the resulting products was created.

## **Rural industry**

According to the government survey mentioned earlier, by 1874 around 30 per cent of final output could be classed as industrial (Yamaguchi 1963: 5). Hence, as later chapters will explore in more detail, manufacturing activity had clearly come to represent a significant part of the economy of nineteenth-century Japan. This section analyses the nature of the industrial growth on which this was based, and in particular its rural character, before describing the major growth industries of the century in more detail.

### *From urban to rural manufacturing*

The manufacture of craft products – textiles, ceramics, swords, paper, etc. – for the upper classes in Japan was clearly taking place in the centuries that predated the Tokugawa ascendancy, although imports from elsewhere in Asia were often regarded as the best of such luxury products. However, the growth of a larger market for manufactured goods was the outcome of the urban expansion which resulted from the establishment of peace and stability after 1600 and the removal of the lords and samurai into castle-towns and cities. The *sankin-kōtai* system, under which each feudal lord,

15 However, Saitō, O. does demonstrate that the incidence and severity of famines declined during the Tokugawa period, as a result of infrastructure improvements that reduced the risk of drought and permitted double-cropping, so that, after the Tempō famine in the 1840s, ‘famine, as scarcity of food accompanied by widespread hunger and starvation, disappeared from Japanese history’ (2002: 224).

accompanied by a suitable retinue of retainers, was expected to spend half his time in Edo (Tokyo), the Shogun's capital, fuelled the growth of the city, which is thought to have had a million inhabitants by the eighteenth century (Rozman 1989: 536–9). Meanwhile, Kyoto, the old imperial capital, and Osaka, the business centre of the country, similarly expanded as the hubs of the administrative and commercial networks. As the populations of towns and cities grew, they came to represent expanding markets for the manufactured consumer goods on which the urban ruling classes and those who worked for them could spend the income they derived from the taxation of their domains.

The growth of such markets led initially to the establishment of concentrations of artisan-type producers in the towns and cities and these came increasingly under the control of craft guilds which regulated supply, price and quality. Raw materials, on the other hand, were for the most part produced in the countryside and the growth of urban manufacturing depended on the development of a merchandising network, increasingly centred on Osaka, through which regional products could be supplied to producers in the main urban centres, alongside the rice and other food products needed to meet urban demand.

Typical of early urban craft-based manufacturing was the silk-weaving industry of the Nishijin area of Kyoto, which had its origins in the community of artisans who produced high-class silk products for the aristocracy. As urban demand for silk increased, Nishijin weavers used their monopoly on the appropriate technical knowledge to expand their output, using raw silk thread or unfinished cloth supplied to them by wholesalers who acquired it from rural producers in silk-growing areas throughout the country (Nakai and McClain 1991: 556–7). The raw materials for more prosaic kinds of consumer and producer goods were shipped from rural areas to Osaka for processing and/or onward transmission to other urban centres: rapeseed and cottonseed were processed into lamp-oil; lumber was brought in for construction work, ship-building or manufacture into household goods; cotton was processed and woven and, most importantly, the tax rice of the feudal lords was shipped to Osaka to be stored, marketed, speculated in and used to obtain credit from the financial institutions that grew up to service the expansion in manufacturing and commerce (Shinpo and Hasegawa 1988: 240–5).

In the first part of the Tokugawa period, therefore, agricultural growth, principally in the rice production that the feudal ruling class was able to expropriate as its income, fuelled the expansion of urban-based manufacturing and commerce which was stimulated by the growth of urban populations and their demands. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, a change had begun to take place in the location and structure of manufacturing industry and the commerce which supported it. Essentially, the focus of manufacturing growth was beginning to shift to rural areas where it took on new organizational forms within a network of credit and

commerce encompassing villages and local towns throughout the countryside. This shift revealed itself in the establishment of a range of rural industries, examples of which are described below, but also in stagnation in the growth of the populations of the cities and decline in Osaka's role as the trading and manufacturing centre of the country. Thus, in the hundred years from 1750, there was a 6 per cent decline in the population of a sample of 64 large towns and cities, including a 10 per cent decline in those of Edo, Osaka, Kyoto and the largest provincial cities (Hauser 1974: 46; Shinpo and Saitō 1989: 10). The early part of this period saw continued growth in the quantities and range of goods being shipped to Osaka, with trade in products such as cotton, wax, paper, indigo, salt and charcoal increasing alongside the traditional trade in rice. By the first half of the nineteenth century, however, this growth had been reversed, not because production of raw materials and the products into which they were to be processed had declined, but because trade in them was increasingly taking place within regional networks serving rural producers and consumers and by-passing Osaka (Shinpo and Saitō 1989: 46).

Some of the causes of this shift undoubtedly lay in 'push' factors within the cities and it is often attributed to rising urban wages, the restrictions imposed by guild organizations and the relative ease with which urban manufacturing could be regulated and taxed by the authorities. However, as Chapter 4 will demonstrate in more detail, the countryside also offered its own 'pull' factors which included not just lower labour costs but also expanding markets for manufactured consumer goods as agricultural growth fed through into rising disposable incomes. But, whatever the cause, the consequence was sustained growth in rural manufacturing industry and commerce which continued to drive the growth of the economy as a whole through to the end of the century. Statistical evidence to demonstrate this is hard to find for the first half of the century, but Shinpo and Saitō present data on non-agricultural output relative to the authorities' assessment of the agricultural tax base (*kokudaka*) for four different domains in the 1820–30 period which show that it was significant throughout, with proportions ranging from over 100 per cent in the most developed domain to about a quarter in the least (1989: 11–12). Given that the populations of these domains remained overwhelmingly rural, the bulk of non-agricultural output must have been produced in rural areas: in Chōshū domain, for instance, 80 per cent of commoner households were registered as farm households but only 52 per cent of the domain's output was recorded as agricultural (Shinpo and Saitō 1989: 12).

By the 1880s, when the combined share of the secondary and tertiary sectors in net national product already exceeded that of agriculture (Ohkawa and Shinohara 1979: 23), 62 per cent of establishments recorded as 'factories' were to be found in rural areas (Yamaguchi 1963: 111). Table 2.2 presents available data on the structure of manufacturing production at this time, showing it to be dominated by the food processing and textile

Table 2.2 The structure of manufacturing production in 1874 and 1889 (% of total industrial production)

	1874	1889
Food products	41.5	35.2
saké	16.6	15.7
soy sauce	4.2	3.4
Textiles	24.6	31.5
silk thread	4.2	12.1
cotton thread	0.9	2.8
cotton cloth	8.6	5.6
silk cloth	3.6	3.8
Metals	1.2	3.5
Machinery	2.7	5.9
Chemical products	15.4	9.0
oil and wax	5.6	2.2
fertilizer	2.1	1.6
paper	4.2	2.0
Ceramics	1.8	2.7
Wood products	5.9	2.0
Others	6.5	9.5

Source: adapted from Shinpo 1995: Table 1.13.

industries, both of which, as later sections will show, were predominantly rural industries. Hence, although it is difficult to demonstrate statistically at the national level,<sup>16</sup> the available qualitative and industry- or region-specific data clearly show that manufacturing output, and the commercial activity that supported it, must have expanded significantly over the course of the nineteenth century, both before and after the opening to international trade and the Meiji Restoration, and that, given the prevailing distribution of the population/labour force and the nature of the growth industries, a large part of such non-agricultural production must have been taking place in the countryside. This can be better appreciated by looking in more detail at the growth of the most important manufacturing industries of nineteenth-century Japan, brewing and textile production.

### *Brewing: saké and soy sauce*

As Table 2.2 shows, saké was the second most important manufactured product after textiles in nineteenth-century Japan. Relatively large-scale urban breweries were already in existence to meet demand in the cities by the late seventeenth century, but the industry followed the trend of

16 See Saitō, O. 1985: 182–4 for further discussion and sources on estimates of the scale of rural non-agricultural activity in the nineteenth century.



moving out to rural locations in the eighteenth century (Morris-Suzuki 1994: 49). Specialist saké-brewing districts, most notably the Nada region west of Osaka, emerged to meet large-scale urban demand, but smaller-scale breweries came to be established throughout the country and by the nineteenth century the vast majority of production was being consumed in its region of origin (Tanimoto and Saitō 1989: 270). Small-scale local breweries were typically family-owned enterprises, managed by rural households with the resources to invest in the necessary equipment and with access to rice to use as raw material (e.g. landlords receiving rice as rent). Brewing was a seasonal operation and both larger- and smaller-scale breweries used seasonally hired labour recruited from amongst the agricultural labour force, either locally or as temporary migrants from further away, in off-peak times for farming (Shinpo and Saitō 1989: 13).

Output trends over the century as a whole are not easy to discern. The larger-scale breweries in specialist areas appear to have prospered and to have developed improved techniques which enabled them to increase their scale of production, save labour and improve the quality of the product (Morris-Suzuki 1994: 49–50). For smaller-scale breweries serving local markets, growth in demand and production was a function of the extent to which rural consumers switched from home-made products to better-quality commercially produced saké. This depended on income, together with the opportunity cost of the labour involved in home-brewing, and rising incomes, especially rural ones, appear to have generated favourable conditions for the growth of the industry. Small-scale local breweries were thus able to retain the bulk of the market, although their share varied between 60 and 75 per cent, depending on the state of demand (Tanimoto 1996: 261–2). Wigen notes how rising incomes from sericulture in the region of her case-study supported the growth of a substantial local saké-brewing industry in the second half of the nineteenth century, the output of which was all apparently consumed in the region (Wigen 1995: 241).<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, demand remained volatile and if incomes fell, as for example during the Matsukata deflation in the 1880s (when in addition the tax on saké was raised), production could drop dramatically, with consumers reverting to home-made substitutes and local breweries shutting up shop (Tanimoto and Saitō 1989: 269).

A similar pattern to that in saké-brewing can be observed in the soy-sauce industry. Here again a limited number of larger-scale producers, such as the Noda soy-sauce company which was to become Kikkoman, emerged in the countryside in the eighteenth century as suppliers to the large urban markets, while thousands of much smaller-scale, household enterprises began to be set up to meet local demand (Fruin 1983: ch. 1).<sup>18</sup>

17 However, this would have amounted to 174 litres per household per year by 1921, suggesting a drinking capacity of which Wigen is sceptical.

18 According to Fruin, 14,000 soy-sauce producers were paying taxes on their output by 1910, three-quarters of which were small-scale household enterprises (Fruin 1983: 27).

The large-scale producers proceeded to develop their technology so as to improve the quality and reliability of their product but all producers, large and small, continued to rely on temporary workers hired during the slack periods in agriculture. While the large-scale 'factories in the fields' expanded to supply the urban mass market, as in the case of saké-brewing, the increase in numbers of small-scale rural producers reflects rising rural incomes and the growth in by-employment opportunities for members of farming households, both factors which lessened the incentive to put in the time required for the laborious process of producing home-made soy sauce (Fruin 1983: 27).

### ***Cotton spinning and weaving***

As previously mentioned, cotton came to be adopted as the main material for basic clothing during the seventeenth century. It also became commonly used for household items such as futons. Initially, cotton was widely grown throughout the country and ginned, spun and woven by farming households for their own use, although any surplus production could be sold. As urban demand for cotton goods increased, however, specialist cotton-growing regions emerged, as we have seen, supplying cotton spinners and weavers in the towns and cities. In due course, though, as with other manufacturing activities, rural producers began to take over more and more of the cotton-processing activity and the various stages of production through to weaving became important by-employments for agricultural households in cotton-growing areas. This was promoted by improvements in equipment which enabled small-scale rural cotton-ginners and weavers to increase their productivity (Hauser 1974: 136), but also by the profits to be made from the use of cheaper rural labour. By the mid-to-late eighteenth century, villages in the Kinai were specializing in particular stages of processing or in particular kinds of cotton cloth and an extensive rural cotton-trading network, centring on rural towns, had developed. In due course, as in other areas of rural industry, putting-out systems began to develop. Throughout the country, however, there were also rural households who continued to perform all the operations of cotton-textile production in-house, growing themselves, or sometimes buying in, raw cotton and selling the final output on to local merchants (Tanimoto and Saitō 1989: 263).

The influx of imported cotton yarn and cloth after the opening to trade dealt an ultimately fatal blow, as we have seen, to the cultivation of cotton in Japan. However, although imported cloth flooded in during the 1860s and Japanese consumers did begin to show preferences for some varieties of imported product, at their peak imports accounted for only a third of the domestic market and domestic production recovered from the initial impact of imports to grow fast during the 1875–80 period and again in the later 1880s (Tanimoto and Saitō 1989: 240–1). The domestic weaving

industry, still composed predominantly of small-scale rural producers, responded to import competition by switching to cheaper and better-quality imported yarn and on this basis was able to produce cotton goods which could compete with imports in price and quality and exceed them in reliability of supply and conformity to Japanese tastes (Sugiyama 1988: 64–71). Household producers who had performed all stages of the production process themselves had to give up growing and spinning cotton, but the key factor in facilitating the switch to imported yarn was access to the trading network through which it could be acquired (Tanimoto 1992; Tanimoto and Saitō 1989: 263–8). Many small-scale producers were already embedded in such networks, so that acquisition of imported yarn was not difficult. Consequently, import competition by no means destroyed the small-scale rural weaving industry in Japan. Eventually, the cotton-spinning companies which successfully established factory-based yarn production began to move into mechanized weaving, but much of their output was for export and small-scale rural weavers retained their hold on the domestic market for Japanese-style cotton textiles.

### ***Silk reeling***

As with cotton, the increase in the output of silk cocoons over the course of the nineteenth century, but especially after the opening to trade, necessitated expansion in the industry processing the agricultural raw material. In the case of silk, processing involves plunging the cocoons in hot water to loosen the fibres and then spinning the thread from the cocoon by turning a reeling frame. Transporting silk any distance in its delicate cocoon form was something to be avoided and, until at least the 1850s, reeling was generally carried out within farm households in silk-growing areas, using manual power or later a treadle wheel. The mechanization of silk reeling was simply a process of applying an outside power source, such as a water-wheel, to a set of reeling frames still operated by hand. Mechanized filatures remained small-scale and located close to their sources of cocoons and rural female labour. They did not achieve any great economies of scale or save labour to any significant extent, but they did produce better-quality, hence higher-priced, silk thread (Wigen 1995: 171–2).

Thus it was through the growth of the rural, household-based silk reeling industry that the large-scale expansion in demand for Japanese silk, initially at home but from the 1860s especially abroad, was met. Up to the 1870s, almost all the silk exported from Japan had been reeled by non-mechanized methods in rural households and even as filature silk began to take over in the 1880s and 1890s, the volume of hand-reeled silk exports continued to increase in absolute terms (Sugiyama 1988: 82). Moreover, until the advent of electrically powered equipment after the turn of the century, filature-reeling itself remained a small-scale rural industry, intim-

ately tied into the agricultural cycle, even though its products travelled far into the international market. Nishikawa's analysis of data on the silk industry in Yamanashi Prefecture, a major centre for silk production, shows that, at the end of the 1870s, traditional small-scale rural silk reeling operations still predominated. Thereafter, somewhat larger-scale filatures began to be established, producing mainly for export, while the traditional sector continued to produce silk for weaving into products suitable for the domestic market. The newer filatures still employed on average only about 40 employees, but they were distinguished from the traditional sector by their technological development, as they switched from water to steam and eventually electric power. Although the very small-scale traditional reeling sector eventually declined, silk-weaving for the domestic market, in small-scale rural establishments reliant on water power, saw its output growing as fast as that of the modern silk-reeling industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Nishikawa 1990: 102–3).

### ***Other industries and commerce***

Although textiles and saké-brewing grew to be the most important rural manufacturing industries of the nineteenth century, the output of a wide range of other products was also expanding. These included, for example, paper products: by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the production of paper products had become the 'commercial lifeblood' of some villages in the area studied by Wigen and the manufacture of paper hair-dress decorations increased dramatically during the 1870s and 1880s, as commoners came to adopt what had once been exclusively samurai hair-styles (Wigen 1995: 92, 144). In the same region, lacquer-ware production flourished from the eighteenth century through until the end of the nineteenth, when commercial forestry deprived producers of access to their raw material (Wigen 1995: 79–81, 249). Also developing was the ceramics industry, encompassing both producers of high-quality, artistic porcelain in specialist pottery villages such as those around Arita in Kyūshū (Morris-Suzuki 1994: 30–1), and potteries throughout the country producing ordinary household ware. The manufacture of food products, again both specialist items for the national market and basic goods such as tofu and pickles, remained an important rural industry throughout the country.

At the same time, the growth of rural manufacturing industry could not have taken place without a large-scale expansion in the commerce and service sectors to support it. Quantitative estimates of the output and employment of the tertiary sector are impossible to make for periods before the late nineteenth century, but the numerous qualitative accounts of rural economic change which form the basis for this and subsequent chapters make clear that its activities must have been expanding significantly. The transport system grew to encompass not just the coastal shipping and major road traffic that supplied the great cities, but also the

packhorse routes and river transport which connected rural producers with their suppliers and markets (see e.g. Wigen 1995: 103–7). The financing of rural industry necessitated the development of what were in effect banking networks in rural areas (Toby 1991). The expansion of putting-out systems and the growth of both national and local markets for rurally produced goods depended on the development of supplier, wholesale and retail networks throughout the country (e.g. Tanimoto 1992: 31–3). There were shops selling a wide range of household and consumer goods even in remote villages by the late Tokugawa period (Hanley and Yamamura 1977: 196–7). It was not until the end of the century, with the coming of the railway, the telegraph, the steamship and modern forms of banking, that infrastructure and commercial networks based on urban finance and employment began to resume the significant role in the economy once played by the urban merchant capital of the early Tokugawa period and even then the persistence of rural manufacturing and small-scale agriculture ensured the survival of a substantial rural commercial and service sector.

### **Income and its distribution**

If rural Japan did indeed see growth in agricultural and non-agricultural output on average through the nineteenth century, this should also be reflected in the generation of rising rural income. However, the implications of any such income growth for the rural economy and for living standards and welfare in rural areas will depend on how it is distributed between, on the one hand, rural producers and consumers themselves and, on the other, those, in particular the state, who would expropriate it for expenditure elsewhere. Although there is only scattered quantitative information on rural income and its distribution for nineteenth-century Japan, there is now a body of qualitative evidence to suggest that output growth in agriculture and rural manufacturing did in fact translate into rising disposable income and expenditure in the countryside.

Historical data on incomes in pre-industrial economies in general are few and far between and tend to take the form of records of wage rates. As Saitō argues, in his comprehensive analysis of the available historical data on wage rates in Japan, where the majority of output and income is generated through household production, the main determinants of income will be the productivity of household labour and the prices received for sales of output and paid for purchased inputs, rather than the level of wages in the market for hired labour (Saitō, O. 1998: 16). Nonetheless, in such an economy, wages determined in the labour market will be related to the income-earning potential of workers in household production: the higher the income that can be earned from agricultural or other production activity within the household, the higher will be the supply price of labour to employers recruiting in the labour market (Saitō, O.

1998: 66). Hence, rising wage rates imply rising household incomes in general.

Saitō's compilation of available pieces of data on wage rates in the nineteenth century leads him to conclude that real rural wages were rising and rural/urban wage differentials narrowing in the period up to 1820. For the next 20 to 30 years, wages in general were on a falling trend but picked up again after the opening of the ports and the Restoration, with rural wages, in agriculture and in non-agricultural work such as silk reeling, rising faster than urban wages. This suggests that the incomes of rural households were rising in general for much of the century, as a result of the growth of output and productive employment in the countryside, narrowing urban/rural differentials and raising the price of rural labour made available to the hired-labour market (Saitō, O. 1998: ch. 1).

Such a conclusion could also be inferred from the fact that the increases in output described above were not matched by increases in population growth, implying rising average incomes per capita (Shinpo 1995: 9). Kitō provides estimates that average life expectancy at birth, in the country as a whole, rose, in the 100 years up to the 1880s, from perhaps 30 years to 42.8 for men and 44.3 for women (Kitō 1996: 440), and the evidence of rising rural consumption expenditure and living standards presented in the next chapter would also suggest that disposable incomes were indeed growing. However, for this to be so, it would have to be the case that increases in income earned by rural producers were not being drained away in payments to those who might spend them elsewhere. In the context of the nineteenth-century rural economy, such payments essentially took the form of, on the one hand, taxes and, on the other, rents and other payments to landowners, merchants or financiers operating outside the rural economy.

Under the Tokugawa system, the feudal rulers (*daimyō*) of each domain were formally entitled to a share of the rice crop produced in each of the domain's villages, to be negotiated annually between domain officials and village leaders in the light of the state of the harvest. The tax income thus produced, paid in kind but subsequently converted into cash as required, was used to fund the administration of the domains and the salaries of samurai retainers, but the requirement on feudal lords to maintain establishments in Edo and to travel back and forth between their domains and the Shogun's capital meant that a significant proportion of their income was spent in urban areas outside their domain economies. Moreover, as domain finances worsened as the period progressed, the need to raise funds led to increased indebtedness and consequent interest and other payments to urban (especially Osaka) merchants and financiers.

These financial problems were, however, in part the result of the inability of domain administrations to maintain their share of what rural households produced. Tax collection could not keep up with increases in agricultural output and tax rates on the assessed production of village

land, though very variable, appear on average to have been declining from the supposed 50 or 60 per cent of the beginning of the Tokugawa period to around a third by the end of it (Miyamoto 1989: 72–82). Moreover, the more that village households moved into the production of commercial crops and manufacturing sidelines, the less easy it became for feudal rulers to tax the increase in their incomes, and villages and other rural groupings became increasingly adept at resisting or avoiding government attempts to extend the tax net. Hence, although the propensity of feudal governments to spend their tax income on goods and services produced in the urban, rather than rural, economy was probably quite high, the share of rural income that they were able to appropriate almost certainly declined, leaving more in the hands of rural producers.<sup>19</sup>

The reform of land taxation that took place after the Restoration undoubtedly resulted in a much more uniform, rational and efficient (from the tax-collector's point of view) system, with fixed taxes paid in cash to the central government replacing variable levies by domains. Moreover, the intention of the new Meiji government in carrying out the reform was to ensure a stable source of revenue to finance its programme of military, political and economic modernization. Hence, the Meiji land tax clearly siphoned off rural income for expenditure on new kinds of goods and services, produced for the most part in urban areas or imported. The new tax was initially intended not to be levied at a higher rate than the feudal taxes it replaced, but given the variability in the effectiveness of the former domain tax systems, there was significant regional variation in the impact of the reform on the tax burden of rural households. Moreover, the inflexibility of the new tax, which had to be met regardless of the state of the harvest or the market, increased the burden it represented, particularly for poorer and less commercialized farmers. However, the best estimates suggest that initially the new tax, on average, took no more than the old ones had done and that its incidence declined over time (Yamamura 1986; Tanimoto 1998: 36). Its rate was reduced, under political pressure, in 1876 and, according to Yamamura, the Meiji state lacked 'the political strength to share in the gains resulting from increases in the rice price, productivity and trade – gains that were being captured by the agricultural taxpayers' (1986: 393). Thus, although the Meiji reforms increased the efficiency with which rural income was diverted into expenditure outside the rural economy, they probably did not raise the share of rural income so diverted, which almost certainly declined over the remainder of the century.

19 For discussion of the complexity of domainal tax systems and the difficulties involved in maintaining the tax take, see Ravina 1999: 53–61. Smith 1988: ch. 2 uses village-level data to demonstrate similarly that lords proved unable to tax increases in the yields households were able to achieve. For more on the process of taxation and resistance to it, see Chapter 4.

The other drain on the incomes of rural producers took the form of the rents and interest that they paid to landlords and suppliers of credit. By the Tokugawa period, inequalities in land ownership had emerged within villages and tenancy, although technically illegal, continued to increase as larger-scale landholders came to rent out more of their land (see Chapter 3). At the same time, as commercialization proceeded, so did households' need for credit, both to finance investments and purchases of inputs such as fertilizers and to tide over those obliged to sell much of their output immediately after harvest. Better-off households therefore became involved in a range of activities, such as pawn-broking and money-lending, that diverted the incomes of poorer households towards them and enabled them to accumulate ownership of land when borrowers defaulted and became tenants. The proportion of the cultivated area farmed by tenants is estimated to have reached 27.4 per cent by 1873 and had risen to over 40 per cent by the 1890s (Shinpo 1995: 153). On the other hand, contracted rental rates, typically at something of the order of 60 per cent of the rice crop, were high but do not appear to have changed significantly before the end of the century (when they began to fall) and were subject to negotiation in the light of the harvest, so that the contracted rate represented the maximum and landlords bore some of the risks of harvest fluctuation (Tomobe 1996: 136–43; Tama 1998: 45).

The causes of the increase in tenancy that continued through into the twentieth century have been much debated (see e.g. Smethurst 1986: 61–7) and it cannot necessarily be taken to imply an increase in income (as opposed to land/wealth) inequality in rural areas.<sup>20</sup> However, from the point of view of the growth of the rural economy, it remained the case that, although a rural elite of multifunctional households engaged in landowning, cultivation and non-agricultural business certainly emerged during the nineteenth century, the vast majority of its members owned and rented out no more than a few hectares of land and continued to reside and work in the countryside, pursuing ways of life and patterns of consumption that were based in the rural economy.<sup>21</sup> Hence, even if the rural income distribution was becoming more unequal, this would not have led to a drain of income and spending out of the rural economy as a whole.

It thus seems possible to conclude that rural output growth did generate

20 Where a household becomes a tenant through losing ownership of the land it cultivates, income is redistributed towards the landlord, increasing inequality, but where tenancy increases as a result of landowners renting out land they had previously cultivated themselves or land newly reclaimed, a share of the income from the land is redistributed towards the new tenant and away from the landowning household and any workers it might have hired (*cet. par.* – in practice the yield of the land in question was likely to rise as a result of its transfer into smaller-scale cultivation). It would seem likely that different causes predominated at different times.

21 For more on the rural elite and its consumption patterns, see Chapter 3.



rising disposable incomes in rural areas.<sup>22</sup> The taxation authorities, before and after 1868, proved unable to maintain their share of increasing rural incomes and those who benefited from growth in rents, interest and profits, as output rose, typically remained part of the rural economy, spending their incomes for the most part on its products. Thus, although by no means everyone benefited equally from the rural economic growth of the nineteenth century, much of the increased income that it generated remained disposable in the hands of the rural population.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter has been to demonstrate that, from the mid-to-late eighteenth century onwards, Japan's rural economy experienced significant growth and development. This involved, on the one hand, growth in agricultural output achieved through the development and diffusion of new techniques which made possible the more intensive use of inputs of land and labour in the production of a more diversified range of crops. On the other hand, it also involved the expansion of manufacturing and commerce in rural areas, as small-scale producers in the villages and country towns proved better able than their urban competitors to meet the growth in both national demand for specialist products at the high end of the market and local mass demand for basic consumer goods. Growth was not uniform over time or place: Japan's last major famine, the result of bad weather and consequent poor harvests, hit northern parts of the country in the 1830s; the opening to trade in the 1850s had a differential impact on sectors of the textile industry, eventually destroying cotton cultivation and rural cotton-spinning; the deflationary policies of Finance Minister Matsukata placed significant numbers of rural producers in difficulties in the 1880s, as demand for their products fell. Yet there seems little doubt that, by the end of the century, the agricultural and non-agricultural output of rural Japan was on average significantly larger and more secure than it had been in the late eighteenth century and that this had been translated into rising disposable incomes in rural areas.

The impact of this growth was not simply quantitative, however. It involved the development and adoption of new technology and new forms of business organization and employment on a wide scale, so that the rural economy of the 1890s was different from that of the 1790s in much more than just the level of output and income. The next chapter therefore looks

22 For the same conclusion, see Shinpo 1995: 9. Tanimoto, discussing the period from the 1870s, also concludes that the mass of ordinary rural households saw their incomes rise, as a result of reductions in the tax burden and rising prices, both for rice and, following the opening to trade in the 1850s, for other agricultural products such as silk and tea (Tanimoto 1998: 36).

at the ways in which the rural economy changed at the micro level, in an effort to discover how and why rural households and businesses found ways to utilize the resources at their disposal more effectively and thus to produce not just increases in output but also generally widely distributed improvements in their incomes and living standards.

### **3 The rural economy and the household**

The previous chapter has brought us to the conclusion that there is strong evidence of significant output growth, in agriculture, manufacturing and services, taking place in rural Japan in the nineteenth century. This chapter explores the nature of the rural economy that produced such growth, hence the mechanics of Japan's 'industrious revolution' and proto-industrialization, within the framework of the 'virtuous circle' model outlined in Chapter 1.<sup>1</sup> It begins by looking at the wider context in the development of the commercial economy and the market demand and supply forces mediated through it. As Chapter 1 argued, however, changes in the patterns of demand and supply in the rural economies of most developing countries are now recognized as being heavily determined by the activities, responses and strategies of the households that constitute the units of production and consumption. The second section therefore brings together available evidence on households' technological responses to market growth and on the determinants of their use of the family labour which constituted the main production input that they controlled. The final section broadens the analysis of the institutional structure of the nineteenth-century rural economy to include the systems for the provision of capital, technology and business organization. This involves consideration of the strategies of the 'rural elite' and the role that they played in the functioning of Japan's proto-industrial rural economy.

#### **Supply, demand and markets**

Few would now deny that the growth in rural output described in the previous chapter was stimulated and facilitated by the spread of market relations which had begun to develop well before the nineteenth century but which were, by then, drawing rural households in many parts of the country further and further into the commercial world. This is not to

1 For a more detailed application of the virtuous-circle model to Japan's nineteenth-century rural economy, see Francks 2002.

suggest that significant elements of rural household economies did not remain largely outside the market: access to land, whether as owner or tenant, continued to be determined for the most part by heredity and custom, even after the establishment of title to land and a land market with the Meiji Land Tax Reform; although markets for hired agricultural and non-agricultural labour did exist, labour input into the household's production activities continued to depend largely on family size and structure; production for subsistence and the self-supply of inputs remained important elements in rural household economies, even in the most highly commercialized regions, and to this day Japanese farmers typically keep themselves and their friends and relatives supplied with 'home-grown' rice.<sup>2</sup> Nor should it be taken to imply that non-market or institutional factors, such as the activities of the state or of village-based organizations, played no role in determining the economic decisions of rural households or their outcomes, and these will be considered in Chapter 4. Nonetheless, it is clear that increased production for and reliance on the market, together with the specialization that that entailed, were necessary conditions for the kind of growth occurring in nineteenth-century rural Japan.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, the extent to which rural households became involved in markets varied considerably throughout the country. In rural areas within the orbits of the cities, commercial production was firmly established by the late eighteenth century; in remoter areas with poor communications production remained mainly for subsistence (together with tax and rental payments) well into the twentieth century. Figures for 1877–9 cited by Yagi give a national average for the marketed share of agricultural output of 48 per cent, but the proportion varies from 50–60 per cent in regions where commercial industrial crops, such as cotton or silk-cocoons, were widely grown to 30 per cent or less in places where production of grain and other subsistence food crops still predominated (Yagi 1990: 119). Nonetheless, as Chapter 2 showed, it was in the field of production for the market – whether in food crops or, more significantly, in the cultivation and processing of inputs into manufactured goods – that growth occurred and such growth would not have been possible without commercialization and specialization on both the supply and demand sides of the rural household economy.

2 Moreover, the idea that agriculture should not be undertaken as a commercial activity and that the *nōka* or rural household is not a business has remained influential and the development of this kind of thinking will be considered in later chapters.

3 In this, the rural market economy of nineteenth-century Japan could be seen to resemble the model of 'Smithian capitalism' that Wong argues prevailed throughout the pre-revolutionary Chinese economy, outside the foreign-dominated 'modern' sector. See Wong 1999.

***The supply side: commercial inputs and specialization***

In terms of production, the shift from a subsistence to a market orientation is likely to involve increased specialization in particular marketable products and increased use of the commercial supply of inputs necessary for the expansion of specialized output. As later sections will demonstrate in more detail, Japanese rural households never developed into the kind of specialist agricultural or manufacturing producers that emerged out of the development process in many other now-industrial countries and have persisted in combining agricultural and non-agricultural activities to this day. Moreover, the vast majority of households continued to cultivate rice, for subsistence, rent and taxes, as well as for the market. The specialization that the spread of the market produced in rural Japan therefore involved, not the specialization of production units themselves, but rather the specialization of regions and localities in particular crops or manufactured goods that could be produced within small-scale, diversified household economies. Such specialization depended in part on local comparative advantages but in many cases it was rather more the result of the development of particular skills and of the networks through which individual producers could access inputs and the market.

The broad pattern of rural specialization which emerged as the market economy spread during the Tokugawa period and into the Meiji years is typically characterized as involving four types of region: (1) the region of commercial agriculture and agricultural processing that emerged early on in the countryside around Osaka and Kyoto and spread to include areas to the south and west as far as northern Kyūshū; (2) the silk-producing region to the north of Edo/Tokyo, where the cooler mountainous conditions were particularly favourable for mulberry and silkworm-raising; (3) regions where rice remained the dominant crop, typically in the northeast but also in northern Kyūshū; (4) regional pockets of subsistence production, where environment or communications limited access to the market (Yagi 1990: 117). However, throughout the country, local specialization, especially in processed or manufactured products, was much more haphazardly determined by factors such as domain and local-government promotion policies, the development of particular skills and traditions, the availability of raw materials, the existence of appropriate commercial networks and connections and so on.<sup>4</sup> Hence localities developed niche products in the culti-

4 See Satō, M. 1988: 213–14. In Satō's list of the most important goods traded internally in 1880, rice, cloth, cotton, fertilizer, salt and sugar are followed by saké, tobacco, fish, tea, iron, second-hand clothes, lamp-oil, indigo, wax, paper and *tatami* matting, almost all of which were speciality products, often in locally differentiated forms, of particular areas. A range of case studies of local agricultural and manufacturing specializations during the Tokugawa period and beyond is now available. For examples in English, see Hauser 1974 on cotton in the Kinai, Roberts 1998 on paper production and other industries in Tosa, Wigen 1995 on silk and several other industries in Shinano, Howell 1992 on fishing and fertilizer production in Hokkaidō and Pratt 1999 on textiles, tea and saké in general.

vation or manufacture of which a range of local households engaged, alongside their other agricultural or non-agricultural activities, generating the great variety of area-specific 'traditional' products and specialities which continued to characterize the supply of consumer goods and indeed to some extent still exists.

At the same time, expanding specialized production for the market, even of this particular kind, also depended on access to a sufficient supply of appropriate inputs. Of the major non-labour inputs into rural production, land was, as we have seen, in more-or-less fixed supply by the nineteenth century and the technologies in use did not require large-scale inputs of fixed capital.<sup>5</sup> Expansion of output therefore largely depended on increases in current inputs, most importantly, for agriculture, fertilizer, but also the raw materials required for manufacturing activity. However, although reliance on commercial inputs steadily increased, it was the rural economy itself that generated their supply and supported the commercial networks through which they were made available to household producers.

As far as agriculture was concerned, the use of fertilizer to supplement the household's land and labour was a widespread practice well before the nineteenth century, and a varied range of sources could be utilized, including the household's 'night soil' and compost, together with leaves and grass collected in the forests. Inputs for the production of clothing and household goods were cultivated by households themselves or collected from the countryside around. However, such input supply methods were highly labour-intensive and limited in what they could produce. As we saw in Chapter 2, new agricultural techniques that made possible increases in output of both food and industrial crops hinged on greater fertilizer input in their cultivation. Traditional sources of fertilizer supply could not meet such demands and the only alternative was to turn to the market. As a result demand for commercial fertilizer increased, its financial cost justified by the increased yields that it could generate. Meanwhile, any expansion in the production of manufactured goods such as textiles would be severely restricted, in quantity and quality, by reliance on the producer household's own output of raw materials. Again, only the market, and the kind of specialized input supply that it made possible, could provide the inputs that manufacturing households would need, if they were to produce more.

Neither factory-produced chemical fertilizer nor imported organic fertilizer, such as the soy-bean waste imported in large quantities from Manchuria after the turn of the century, were widely available before the

5 Irrigation development and improvement might be regarded as involving large-scale investment but this continued to be provided for the most part in kind, in the form of communal work, outside the market economy.

1890s, so that output growth before then depended on domestic sources of organic fertilizer. The supply of urban night soil became a complex business, with night-soil collectors from the surrounding countryside initially agreeing to provide urban landowners with agricultural produce in return for the contents of residents' latrines. As demand for fertilizer increased, contracts to collect night soil from major cities such as Edo came to be highly contested, in the light of its value to the commercial farm households able to supply agricultural products to the urban market, and increasingly came to be made in money terms. However, although urban landlords undoubtedly benefited from the increased demand for their tenants' waste, the business of actually collecting and distributing the night soil was the preserve of rural people. Complex systems involving agents and sub-contractors were developed but night-soil collection remained an occupation carried out, like so much else within the expanding rural economy, as a side-line generating income for rural households (Walthall 1988).

In due course, however, demand for fertilizer outstripped the supply available from household-waste sources and other forms of commercial fertilizer were increasingly sought. These included the waste products of agricultural processing industries, such as rape-seed and cotton-seed oil extraction, but, as the nineteenth century progressed, it was fish-based products that became the most important source of commercial fertilizer. Systems developed for the supply of dried sardines from coastal fisheries, but this became increasingly inadequate and expensive and from the middle of the century the herring fisheries of northern Honshū and Hokkaidō expanded to supply herring-meal fertilizer to intensive commercial farming areas throughout the country (Howell 1992). However, although often located far away from the fields in which its output was used, the production of fish-based fertilizer remained a rural proto-industry until the closing decades of the century. The Hokkaidō herring fisheries, for example, were dominated by small-scale fishing households operating within what Howell describes as a putting-out system for the supply of inputs and the marketing of output and even larger-scale operations depended on seasonally hired labour recruited from the agricultural areas of northern Japan (Howell 1992: 271–3, 277). Eventually, with changes in technology and the greater competition for fishing rights which resulted from the Meiji reforms, larger-scale operators with access to more capital resources began to take over the industry, utilizing permanently employed wage labour. For much of the century, however, commercial fertilizer production in all its forms could be regarded as a rural industry, of course deriving increases in the demand for its product from agricultural growth, but at the same time generating increased income for rural households.

No other elements of the package of techniques which raised agricultural output generated backward linkages on the scale of fertilizer.

However, the new methods did sometimes involve the use of improved tools and equipment, such as ploughs, and the draft animals to go with them; the new commercial crops required bought-in seeds and silk producers had to buy silk-worm eggs. All of these inputs would have been supplied by other rural producers – carpenters in the villages, horse-breeders, silk-worm egg-card producers and so on – not necessarily from the local area, but not from a supplier outside the rural economy as a whole. Altogether, therefore, in as far as output increase in agriculture relied on more than just the intensified use of existing land and labour, it generated backward linkages into rural industry and the rest of the rural economy and created networks of input supply which themselves helped to raise output and incomes.

The same could also be said of the backward linkages generated, vice versa, by the growth of rural industry. The rural manufacturing that, as we have seen, expanded out of the cities in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries essentially involved the processing of agricultural raw materials. Thus the textile industries depended on cocoons produced in the surrounding countryside and, until the switch to imported cotton yarn later in the century, cotton grown in the Kinai and other specialist rural areas; they required vegetable dyes, such as indigo, again produced by farm households in specialist areas; saké-brewers needed rice and the numerous small-scale food-processing workshops throughout the country relied on local supplies of beans, vegetables and so on; ceramic producers used local clay; manufacturers of household goods worked with wood, mat-rush and paper. Rural producers of raw materials similarly met demand from the cities, where the same kinds of industry made up the bulk of the manufacturing sector, but by the nineteenth century, as we have seen, the locus of industrial growth had shifted to the countryside where it continued to generate increased demand for the output of farm households.

The rural output growth that began in the late eighteenth century therefore undoubtedly drew rural producers into increasing reliance on the market for the production inputs that they needed, as commercial sources supplemented and eventually superseded self-supplied. However, to a large extent, it was other rural producers, together with the agents of a supply network based in the countryside and in rural towns, who met the growing demand for purchased inputs. The backward linkages generated by the nature of the economic and technical changes that underlay the growth in output thus fuelled further rises in rural output and incomes, enmeshing rural households in the virtuous circle of the expanding rural commercial economy.

### ***The growth of the consumer market***

Both economic historians and those studying contemporary developing countries have increasingly come to stress the relationship between



expansion in the markets for consumer goods and proto-industrialization or rural-based economic growth in general. As we saw in Chapter 2, it is now generally accepted that the nineteenth century saw rising disposable incomes in the hands of at least some rural households in Japan. Given the slow-down in urban growth from the mid-eighteenth century and the relatively closed nature of the economy for much of the period, the expenditure of these rural incomes must have provided the main source of the expansion in market demand on which the output growth of the nineteenth century depended. After the opening of the country to trade in the middle of the century, demand for export products also began to grow, but, given the rural production of those products, this at the same time contributed to the increases in rural incomes which fuelled growth in domestic demand. This section therefore examines how those rural households in receipt of the rising disposable incomes that output growth generated made use of their new-found capacity to acquire goods and services.

To some extent, particularly, as a later section will show, amongst the rural elite, rising incomes were saved and invested in the means to increase output further. However, there now seems little doubt that consumption expenditure was also increasing, not just among the elite. In part, the need and desire to purchase consumer goods in the market reflected a switch from home-produced goods to commercial substitutes, as members of rural households began to find more remunerative uses for their time than producing their own clothes, furnishings and processed food to standards which could not match those of the products of more specialized producers now available in the market, and this process certainly seems to have been an element in the growth in the markets for the products of the two most important industries of nineteenth-century Japan, cotton textiles and brewing. However, there is now substantial evidence that the market not only provided consumers with higher-quality products than they could make for themselves but also enabled them to acquire a wider range and greater quantity of goods.

Evidence collated by Tanimoto makes clear that, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, most Japanese people wore clothes that were either second-hand or home-made and only the upper income groups bought cotton or other kinds of cloth to be made into clothes (Tanimoto 1998: 25; 2000: 171). Over the course of the rest of the century, however, more and more ordinary consumers were coming to substitute purchased cotton cloth and clothing in local styles and patterns for home-made items (Tanimoto and Saitō 1989: 241–3). The statistical data available for the later part of the century indicate that growth in demand for cotton cloth was particularly rapid in the 1870s, decelerating somewhat during the deflationary period of the 1880s but rising again sharply in the 1890s. Imports, which became increasingly available through the 1860s and 1870s, picked up some of this growing demand but at their peak in the late 1870s met only 34 per cent of it (Tanimoto 2000: 170–1) and the majority of

Japanese consumers continued to prefer the design and quality of locally made cloth.<sup>6</sup> Tanimoto attributes the expansion of the market for cotton cloth to both widespread increases in rural incomes and the falling relative price of cotton goods that resulted from changes in the techniques and organization of the industry in Japan. However, despite these changes, which eventually included the substitution of imported or Japanese factory-spun yarn for home-grown raw cotton, the production of cotton cloth for the domestic market remained, as we saw in Chapter 2, for the most part small-scale and rural, so that rising rural demand for a key consumption good continued to be met by a growing rural industry.

At the same time, a range of commercially processed food and drink products – pickles, tofu, fish-based products and, most significantly, the products of the brewing industry – was being substituted for time-consuming home-made alternatives. Demand for these products followed the same pattern as for cotton cloth, rising steadily with incomes through to the 1880s, falling back as a result of the Matsukata deflation and, in the case of saké, increases in tax, but picking up again thereafter (Tanimoto 1996: 256–9). As we saw in Chapter 2, although large-scale saké and soy-sauce brewers did develop, mainly to supply urban markets, small-scale rural breweries continued to spring up to meet local demand throughout the nineteenth century, supplying the lion's share of the market. Thus again rising rural incomes appear to have been spent on the products of local rural industry.

Such growth in demand for the products of the textile and brewing industries cannot, however, be accounted for solely as the result of the substitution of purchased for home-made alternatives and rising incomes clearly enabled rural consumers to acquire more, better-quality goods than they had previously had access to. Hanley's extensive research on the consumption patterns and living standards of the nineteenth-century population suggests that both rural and urban consumers were widening the range of their purchases to include household goods, food, clothing and less essential leisure and decorative goods which they would not previously have been able to afford. Even in the late eighteenth century, a village shop in Okayama sold ink and other writing equipment, teapots and cups, a wide range of processed food items, hair oil and ornaments, cotton cloth, different kinds of footwear, even funeral requisites, and much more (Hanley 1997: 17). Later survey evidence of villages in Shimane prefecture over the course of the Meiji period shows generally improving living standards in areas such as clothing, the quality of housing

6 Imported cotton cloth was relatively cheap, but it was fine and not as durable, or as suited to Japanese tastes, as the domestic product and, given the inability of import suppliers to cope with the Japanese market and distribution system, not always available (Sugiyama 1988: 64–71).

and furnishings and goods for 'public' consumption, such as at weddings and other special occasions (Ōkado 2000: 348–9).

The vast majority of the goods on which growing disposable incomes were spent thus appear to have been essentially Japanese-style consumer products which were likely to be produced, to meet local tastes, by rural manufacturing and processing enterprises. As Hanley (1986) has argued, the rising living standards which occurred especially in rural areas in nineteenth-century Japan manifested themselves in the adoption and adaptation of elements of a lifestyle once monopolized by the urban upper classes, rather than in the acquisition of new kinds of (e.g. imported or Western-style) goods. Thus, as at least some of them found themselves better-off, an increasing number of rural households came to adopt 'samurai-style' cuisine, consuming more white rice with a wider range of vegetables, pickles, fish and condiments. They enlarged their farmhouses and carried out Japanese-style home improvements, installing *shōji* screens and *tatami* matting. They began to be able to buy pottery and lacquer goods for their homes and cosmetics and hair-ornaments for their bodies. In short, they increased their demand for precisely the kinds of goods – cotton textiles woven to local designs, saké and other locally processed food products, Japanese-style household items and so on – that expanding rural industries were producing, on the basis of raw materials grown by farming households, nearby or in specialist agricultural areas further afield.

This appears to have been the case even for the better-off in rural society. As a later section will show, most of those who earned income from rents, profits or interest in the nineteenth-century countryside continued to live in their ancestral villages and their landholdings or businesses remained local and relatively small-scale. There is little evidence that they used their relatively higher incomes to finance lifestyles or consumption patterns significantly different in nature from those of their cultivating neighbours. They tended to demonstrate their superior economic status through such things as improvements to their houses, the (local) education and accomplishments of their sons and daughters, participation in, and sponsorship of, local social, cultural and political activity, and food and clothing perhaps better in quality but not essentially different in type from that of their less well-off neighbours (see e.g. Platt 2000). Waswo argues that only very substantial landowners in the nineteenth century would have been able to afford to lead an 'urban' lifestyle in the countryside and there is little evidence that Western-style or imported consumer goods had permeated much into the countryside before the end of the century (Waswo 1977: 85; Hanley 1997: ch. 7). The better-off rural households described by Nakanishi were beginning, by the 1880s and 1890s, to acquire a few Western-style items, such as watches, aspirin and other Western medical products, and Western-style hats, when and where they could buy them, but shops selling such goods were few and far between in

the rural towns where they shopped (Nakanishi 2000).<sup>7</sup> As a result, the demand created by increases in the incomes of those who appropriated a higher share of rural output would have had a similar kind of impact on the rural economy as that of the mass of 'ordinary' rural households.

Altogether, therefore, it appears that the rising incomes resulting initially from agricultural growth, but increasingly from the spread of rural industry, themselves generated much of the demand for the expanding output of the rural economy. From the demand point of view, therefore, the rural economic growth of the nineteenth century was self-sustaining, the result of mutually re-enforcing growth linkages of the virtuous-circle type. Interestingly, moreover, in the light of the impact of international trade on the agricultural sectors of some other developing countries, historically and more recently, the opening of the economy did not disrupt the process, instead producing an injection of demand for the products of agriculture and rural industry – principally silk and tea but also including a wide assortment of basic manufactured goods – and hence increases in rural incomes which were themselves spent largely on the output of the rural economy.

### ***Communications and the infrastructure of the market***

A necessary condition for the operation of the kind of growth linkages outlined above is the existence of the market institutions and communications infrastructure by means of which producers come to know about and meet any growth in demand. Studies of present-day developing countries have found that factors such as rural population density, the development of the road network and the existence of market towns in the countryside correlate well with the strength of the growth linkages which lead to rural development of the kind experienced in nineteenth-century Japan (Haggblade *et al.* 1989; Evans 1992). Initially, the growth of internal trade in early Tokugawa Japan was co-ordinated through the cities, in particular by means of the commercial network centring on Osaka, but by the nineteenth century goods were increasingly being traded within and between local supply and marketing networks, as the infrastructure of the market developed in the countryside.

Given Japan's geography and the limitations on expansion of the cultivable area that had been reached by the eighteenth century, population density in the habitable parts of the country was already high, by the standards of most other countries.<sup>8</sup> Settlements were relatively closely

7 It is also by no means necessarily the case that Western-style goods were imported or manufactured in urban factories. As later chapters will show, many small-scale producers in Japan moved into the production of 'modern' goods, or parts for them.

8 It was, for example, three times higher in 1721 than in proto-industrial areas of Flanders at the end of the eighteenth century (Saitō, O. 1983a: 32). Japan's pre-World War II population density was also higher than that of many, though not all, developing Asian countries in the 1970s (Shinpo and Saitō 1989: 52).

packed, within the networks of irrigation systems, and isolated villages without regular connections with the outside world were few. The development of road and water communications had originally focussed on the major routes which linked the provincial castle-towns of the feudal lords with Edo and Osaka, but by the nineteenth century cross-country transport which connected villages to local market centres and ports was widely available. While nineteenth-century Japan contained, in Edo/Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto, some of the world's largest cities and the castle-towns and capitals of the richest domains were important centres with substantial urban populations, small-scale country towns existed throughout the country, so that few villages, however remote from the great metropolises, were very far from a local centre of communications and trade.<sup>9</sup>

Smith calls such rural commercial centres 'country places', for want of a better name,<sup>10</sup> and analyses their rise, from the mid-eighteenth century but especially in the early nineteenth, in contrast to the decline in the populations and prosperity of the castle-towns, which had once been the centres of both feudal administration and commerce and manufacturing (Smith 1988: 17–32). Castle-towns declined especially in the commercially more advanced parts of the country well placed, through their major ports, for long-distance trade, but 'country places' prospered most in the more remote inland regions where transport was by road and shorter-distance, suggesting that their growth reflected the expansion of production and trade within their local economies. Urban residents at the time certainly put the decline of their businesses down to the growth of commerce and industry in the surrounding countryside, frequently petitioning the authorities for regulations to prohibit trade from by-passing the towns (Smith 1988: 25–7). Wigen describes the ultimately unsuccessful efforts of castle-town merchants in the Ina valley in the late eighteenth century to preserve their position in the face of competition from rural-based packhorse organizers who transported growing quantities of a wide range of raw materials and consumption goods into, out of and around the region (1995: ch. 2). Rural growth and the development of the transport network mutually reinforced one another in the creation of the communications infrastructure through which rural demand and rural production came together.

The role of towns within the expanding rural-based economy was reflected in their nature and characteristics. As Ōkado (2000) argues, rural towns and even major cities in the nineteenth century were rarely centres

9 For a description of the development of the communications network in the Tokugawa period, see Moriya 1990: 109–14 and for villagers' use of it, see Satō, M. 1990: 60.

10 Those for which Smith found data typically had fewer than 1000 inhabitants and were often legally defined as villages, despite sometimes rapidly expanding populations by the nineteenth century (Smith 1988: 27–8). For an example of a village-centred network, see the 'coastal villages' in Kalland's study of farming and fishing villages in northern Kyūshū in the Tokugawa period (Kalland 1995).

of industrial employment. Rather, they were ‘bases’, acting as the sites of local government, transport nexuses and educational and cultural centres. Rural towns remained closely connected to their surrounding countryside, providing markets at which farmers sold produce and sources of temporary employment in agricultural off-seasons. Ōkado’s example of Kanazawa saw its population expanding rapidly up to the end of the nineteenth century, as it established itself as the local administrative and transport centre and the site of a post office. Employment was available in a wide range of commercial and service occupations: trading establishments dealt in all kinds of consumer goods; inns and restaurants flourished. However, those who participated in the growth of this rural town typically retained strong connections with the countryside: investment in rental property development was carried out by local rural landowners; most employees were young and single, taking home wages inadequate to support a family but useful to the farming households to which they still belonged (Ōkado 2000: 329–34). It was thus the development and commercialization of the rural economy that provided the *raison d’être* for the growth of rural towns like Kanazawa.

Of course, the expansion of rural marketing and supply networks was not just a matter of the communications infrastructure. It also involved the establishment of the network of human relationships through which trade could take place. The growth of agriculture and manufacturing in the countryside was accompanied and facilitated by the emergence of traders, financiers and business organizers, who supplied inputs, sold output on to others within the network, provided working capital and other kinds of credit, organized transport, recruited workers and so on.<sup>11</sup> Some became specialists in their line of trade or commerce, but many ran their mercantile activity alongside landownership and cultivation, utilizing both the resources they derived from their agricultural operations and the connections which their role in the village community and the wider rural society gave them, and these members of the emerging rural elite will be considered in a later section. In the meantime, however, it can be concluded that the development of the market infrastructure of nineteenth-century Japan was both a response to the rural-centred growth taking place and a factor facilitating the further self-sustaining and interconnected development of the rural economy.

### **The economy of the diversified rural household**

Given the nature of this expanding rural commercial economy, its main participants were of necessity rural people who continued to live and work

11 For an example of such a business, see Tanimoto’s description of the Hosobuchi family, who combined farming with wide-ranging activities in the trade in cotton cloth during the second half of the nineteenth century (1992: 31–5).

in village-based households or in nearby small towns. It was such households that produced the growing quantity and range of goods and services that became available through the market, enabling them also to become, to a significant extent, consumers of the resulting output. This section examines the ways in which they were able to do this, in terms of, on the one hand, the production techniques and economic organization that they employed and, on the other, their allocation and use of the resources they controlled, principally in the form of the household's labour supply. Where Wigen (1995: 143) talks of 'making space for silk' in the late nineteenth-century Ina valley, Mazumdar (1998: 189–91), while describing another time and another country – Guangdong in China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – analyses the process of 'accommodating' sugar production within the structure of the small-scale peasant economy. Although the long-term consequences of 'making space' and 'accommodating' within the rural economies of these very different parts of Japan and China were to be sharply contrasted, conditioned as they were by wider national and international, economic, political and institutional forces, both cases demonstrate the ability of rural economic agents to define paths of technical and organizational development based on the small-scale, pluriactive household and its labour. It is these paths, for nineteenth-century Japan in general, that this section describes.

### ***The technology and organization of diversified growth***

One of the conclusions to be drawn from the specification of the virtuous-circle model is that, if mutually sustaining growth in agriculture and in rural non-agricultural activity is to take place, then technical and organizational changes on both sides must be such that improvements in labour productivity in one sector can be utilized to free labour for work in the other sector, and vice versa. Inter-sectoral competition for labour, such that increases in, say, manufacturing output depended on reductions of labour input and output in agriculture, would make virtuous circle-style rural growth or an industrious revolution impossible. At the micro level of the rural household, therefore, the pattern of technical and organizational change must be such as to generate output growth whilst ensuring the compatibility of agricultural and non-agricultural activity. In the Japanese case, this pattern produced, not increasingly large-scale and specialized production structures, but multi-functional, flexible, small-scale, household-based units within which agricultural and non-agricultural activities complemented, rather than competed with, each other.

The package of technical changes in agriculture described in the last chapter as the basis for the agricultural output growth that took place in nineteenth-century Japan was appropriate to, and in many ways favoured, the small-scale, family-based, cultivating household. Provided that adequate irrigation facilities could be provided through communal or state

Table 3.1 Growth rates of annual labour days utilized in different agricultural activities, 1880–1935 (average % p.a.)

	<i>Crop cultivation</i>			<i>Silk cocoon production</i>	<i>Animal husbandry</i>	<i>Total</i>
	<i>Rice</i>	<i>Other crops</i>	<i>Total</i>			
1880–1900	0.2	1.4	0.8	1.2	0.3	0.8
1900–20	0.0	0.3	0.1	3.2	0.5	0.6
1920–35	-1.1	-0.4	-0.7	-0.8	1.0	-0.6

Source: adapted from Shintani 1983: Table 3.

investment, it did not involve large-scale capital inputs (e.g. machines) and the increased working-capital inputs required (principally fertilizer) were scale-neutral. The intensive cultivation techniques that high-yielding varieties and double-cropping made profitable put a premium on the kind of skilled, thorough labour, based on local knowledge and careful timing and execution of operations, that family, rather than hired, workers were likely to be able to provide (Akimoto 1996: 158). However, given their intensive nature and the larger overall yields that they produced, such techniques did require increases in labour input, per hectare cultivated, which had to be met within the constraints of the fixed labour supply of the family-based production unit.

Shintani's work on the production function in agriculture, although necessarily utilizing statistical data available only for years after 1880, provides some clues as to the ways in which the characteristics of technical change enabled rural households to meet these increased labour requirements. In the period from 1880 through to World War I, the agricultural labour force changed little,<sup>12</sup> while the cultivated area grew slowly. The number of days worked in agriculture, however, grew quite substantially and days worked per person in agriculture rose from 126 in 1880 to a peak of 184 in 1920 (Shintani 1983: 5). This increase in labour input was not allocated equally among different areas of agricultural activity, as Table 3.1 shows, with relatively increasing amounts of time in the late nineteenth century being devoted to non-rice crops and silk-cocoon production. Combining this analysis with the relative growth rates of output in different activities, Shintani is able to conclude that increases in labour days per person contributed significantly to the agricultural output growth taking place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and that technical change in agriculture took a form such that labour time was diverted, in proportional terms, from rice cultivation into other areas of agricultural activity (Shintani 1983: 4–18).

12 This is also likely to have been the case earlier in the century, given the stagnation in population growth up to mid-century at least.



Hence, the expanded labour requirements of output-increasing techniques could be met within the rural household through a more intensive, year-round utilization of the time of individual agricultural workers, an increasing proportion of it outside rice cultivation. As we saw in Chapter 2, this was achieved through double-cropping and the increased use of commercial fertilizer, together with tools and techniques, such as summer/fall silkworm rearing, that eased bottlenecks in the cultivation cycle.<sup>13</sup> However, as long as rice remained central to agricultural production, seasonal peaks in labour demand at transplanting and harvest could not be avoided – and in some respects double-cropping intensified the time constraints particularly on harvesting operations – so that the whole family labour force typically continued to need to be on hand at those times.<sup>14</sup> In practice, therefore, the techniques which raised agricultural output involved the fuller employment of the central agricultural labour force without impinging on the time of other household members, provided that they remained available to help out with farm work at peak times.

Consequently, if the labour requirements for output growth in agriculture were met through increases in the days worked by core agricultural workers, assisted at peak times by other members of the household, increases in non-agricultural output would depend on a pattern of labour use that fitted in with this. There were two ways in which this could be achieved. On the one hand, technology and organizational systems could be devised which would enable manufacturing or commercial activity to be carried out flexibly at times when workers based in rural households were available, by means of production within the household or in village-based workshops. Alternatively, non-agricultural employers could employ workers on a seasonal basis, in the locality of the agricultural household or further away, on the assumption that workers would need to return to it for part of the year.

As we saw in Chapter 2, household- or village-based production remained central to many manufacturing industries through the nineteenth century. Much textile production continued to be carried out by women workers based in agricultural households or working when they could at local facilities such as silk filatures, but in a range of other industries villages specialized in particular products or stages of production on the basis of household labour. This did not, however, imply static, ‘traditional’ technology, only that technical changes needed to be compatible with household-based production, and numerous improvements were made to the equipment, such as looms and kilns, used in the home or in small-scale establishments, as well as to the design and quality of

13 For a similar argument, see Akimoto 1996: 159–60.

14 Labour exchange between households at peak times was also commonly practised. See e.g. Smith 1959: 151.

products.<sup>15</sup> Such developments depended, nevertheless, on an organizational framework which enabled rural workers to access inputs and markets, acquire technological and market information and maintain product quality. It was this framework that manufacturing entrepreneurs had to provide, if they were to tap into the supply of labour available within rural households. The putting-out systems that emerged in textiles and other industries as the nineteenth century progressed are the most obvious examples of such frameworks, although networks of household-based workers suited to the needs of a variety of industries were to develop in due course.

Tanimoto's case study of cotton-weaving in the Iruma district of present-day Saitama prefecture demonstrates in detail precisely how rural manufacturing fitted into the technological and economic structures of farming households, within the framework of a putting-out system that facilitated the market development of the product.<sup>16</sup> In the 1880s, under increasingly competitive conditions in the market for cotton cloth, Iruma cotton-textile wholesalers switched from simply buying up cloth, directly from weaver households or in markets, to using a putting-out system under which they provided the yarn to weave and paid piece-rates for the final product which they then marketed. The system involved significant capital costs and risks but enabled putting-out merchants to control the design and quality of the cloth produced, so that it could be marketed as a distinct 'brand', while still tapping into the labour supply provided by female members of rural households. The farming which such households simultaneously practised involved the production of tea and silk-cocoons as commercial crops, and Tanimoto is able to show how the piece-rates paid by putting-out organizers were correlated, not so much with how much cloth they wanted to acquire and sell at the time, but rather with the peaks and troughs of labour demand in tea and silk production (1998: 304–7). Thus putting-out merchants were able to make use of the labour of female members of rural households by bearing the costs of co-ordinating between the pattern of labour demand in their other activities and the market for the manufactured product (Tanimoto 1998: 339).<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, in those areas of non-agricultural activity in which, for technological or other reasons, work could not be carried out in the home or nearby, the employment of rural labour depended on the use of

15 For examples of developments in silk-reeling and cotton-spinning technology, for instance, in the late Tokugawa and Meiji periods, see Morris-Suzuki 1994: 37–9, 89–91.

16 For a summary of the case study in English, see Itoh and Tanimoto 1998; for full details, see Tanimoto 1998. Sashinami 2001 provides a useful review in English of the significance of this work and of Saitō, O. 1998.

17 Factory organization, using power-looms and full-time labour, was an option that producers of Japanese-style textiles did not take at this stage – see Abe and Saitō 1988 and Chapter 8.

seasonal or other temporary contracts which nonetheless recognized the worker's place in his or her agricultural household. Temporary work away from home, known as *dekasegi*, was a well-established practice in many parts of nineteenth-century Japan. However, it has come to be typified by the forms of employment used in the latter part of the century for the recruitment of young rural female workers by larger-scale textile employers, who expected their workers to return to their villages at the end of their contract and on occasion during it and to use their wage payments, in advance and as they earned them, to supplement their households' incomes (see Chapter 5). However, similar types of temporary contract, including provision for advance payments, were used in the employment of workers from rural areas, both male and female, in many types of industrial and service activity, including domestic service and seasonal employment in brewing, fishing, mining and so on.<sup>18</sup>

In non-agricultural as in agricultural activity, therefore, technical and organizational changes taking place through the nineteenth century provided the basis on which rural households were able to utilize their available labour time more fully and develop multiple income sources. The nature of their diversification depended on their particular environmental and market conditions and the forms of business organization that emerged varied with the production methods and markets for the product. But the effect was consistently to make space for more work and for increased and more varied output and income. Only rarely, therefore, did specialist, large-scale forms of production emerge and instead the nineteenth century saw the establishment of the technological and organizational basis for a diverse and pluriactive rural economy.

### ***Income diversification as a household strategy***

It is an implication of the kinds of theoretical approach proposed in Chapter 1 that the development path embodied in the changes just described – the growth of the market for rurally produced goods and the development of new agricultural techniques and forms of industrial organization – has to be understood in the context of the activities and choices of the households that made up the rural economy. These were conditioned, on the one hand, by local environmental conditions, irrigation provision and market access and, on the other, by the nature of the individual household's resources of land and labour, as well as by the relationships of households to each other to be described in Chapter 4, and they varied across the country and among different kinds of household. However, the outcomes suggest that many households chose a path that involved combining the provision of subsistence, rent and taxes and the

18 For examples in cases of the employment of male workers, see Aoki 1988: 100.

maintenance of the household with one or more of commercial agricultural production, by-employment in the home, commuting to work in a rural workshop or temporary employment away from home. It is perhaps easiest to begin by listing the paths that, in general, seem *not* to have been chosen, before going on to consider what in fact was to become the dominant strategy among Japanese rural households ever since.

First of all, it has to be said that relatively few members of rural households followed paths that led to permanent migration to urban areas. The populations of major cities were not growing in the nineteenth century and the expansion of employment opportunities was occurring, for the most part, in the countryside. Moreover, the urban jobs that were available at this time typically did not pay enough or provide suitable conditions for the establishment of an independent family and household.<sup>19</sup> Where a household had access to insufficient land and/or local employment possibilities to be able to utilize the labour of all its members, the permanent exodus of, for example, younger sons, might have been necessary, but it is clear that in many cases, better alternatives existed. Equally, as Saitō has shown, in contrast to the cases of many proto-industrial areas of Europe, expanding non-agricultural employment opportunities do not seem to have provided the basis for young people to marry earlier and set up their own independent households on the basis of their non-agricultural earnings (Saitō, O. 1985: 198–205). The number of rural households remained more-or-less constant throughout and the population growth that earlier marriage produced in proto-industrial Europe did not occur in nineteenth-century Japan. Given relatively low levels of marital fertility and no very significant decline in infant mortality before World War I, the number of non-inheriting younger sons available to move away to full-time employment was anyway not great (Saitō, O. 1998: 62) and most rural workers seem to have found ways to take advantage of economic expansion whilst remaining in the countryside.

Equally, it is also clear that few households sought to become specialist or larger-scale producers of either agricultural or non-agricultural products. In particular, there appears to have been no tendency, on the part of those who initially owned or were able to accumulate larger areas of land, towards larger-scale cultivation. Rather, households that initially, in the early Tokugawa period, controlled larger holdings which they cultivated using hired or extended-family labour came increasingly, under the impact of the spread of the market economy, to break up their holdings into family-sized units which could be worked and managed by more-or-less independent tenants or branch households (Smith 1959; Yagi 1990: 121–3). As we have seen, the direction of technical change in agriculture produced no economies of scale and put a premium on the kind of careful,

19 For more on the types of urban employment in Tokugawa-period cities, see Leupp 1992. A high proportion of the urban labour force was employed as live-in domestic servants.

well-managed labour that household workers were better able to supply than hired ones. In general, it offered the greatest gains to households who could flexibly allocate their labour to a combination of different agricultural and non-agricultural activities. Given the rising returns to labour within the household, hired labour became more expensive and difficult to recruit, while the incentive to rent in land – hence the rent that a landlord could charge – in order to create the basis for a pluriactive farm household was increasing.<sup>20</sup> As was to be the case throughout the periods covered by this book, the direction of technical and economic change in the countryside was thus biased towards the size of unit which could be worked by a non-extended, stem-family household.

What many rural households *do* therefore seem to have done is to have used the possibilities opened up by market growth and technical change to adjust the allocation and utilization of their resources of land and labour so as to diversify and increase their sources of income. Households with too little land to cultivate to employ all their working-age members could send some out to earn wages elsewhere to contribute to the household's total income. Those with more land than could be worked by family members, assisted perhaps by a limited amount of hired labour, could rent out parcels of it to those better able to take advantage of the possibilities for technical change and diversification of income sources. Those in between, the vast majority of rural households in nineteenth-century Japan, could, depending on circumstance, diversify into production of the commercial crops for which demand was increasing, engage in local wage-work or carry on by-employments within the household, whilst retaining the labour force they needed to maintain rice and subsistence crop production.

The work of Saitō, Tanimoto and others on case-studies and the analysis of the limited data available provides a variety of forms of evidence that this is what rural households were in fact doing. Saitō shows how, where opportunities existed, all members of households participated in income-earning activity, the nature of their participation depending on gender and position in the life-cycle (Saitō, O. 1998: 75–80). Rising agricultural productivity and/or the possibility of commercial agricultural production or by-employment within the home all appear to have limited the availability of wage-workers, causing difficulties in recruitment and rising wages (Saitō, O. 1986; Tanimoto 2002: 284). Data for Kaminoseki county in Chōshū in the 1840s show the vast majority of farm households undertaking some form of by-employment, with the share of non-agricultural income in total household income ranging from 20–30 per cent in the most

20 For evidence of rising agricultural wage rates during most of the nineteenth century, see Saitō, O. 1998: 25–46. For the argument that nineteenth-century rural households used the renting-in of land as a means of adjusting their holdings to their available household labour forces, see Tomobe 1998.

agricultural areas to over 70 per cent in the least (Smith 1988: 82). In other areas, seasonal work away from home was more common: in villages around Nagoya in the mid-nineteenth century, anywhere between 5 and 50 per cent of the male labour force could be away on *dekasegi* at any one time and around half of men and over 60 per cent of women born between 1773 and 1825 and surviving to age ten had had experience of *dekasegi* work (Cornell 1996: 28).

Moreover, it is clear that households at all scales of cultivation and landownership practised income diversification, though their exact strategies varied with their circumstances. Nishikawa provides evidence that households who had little land to cultivate or were tenants tended to send members out to *dekasegi* work at younger ages and for longer than members of households with more land to farm (Nishikawa 1985: 81–2). Households owning or renting in enough land to require the whole family labour force at peak times were more likely to engage in household-based by-employments and one of the advantages of the putting-out system, in fields such as cotton weaving, was that it enabled organizers to recruit the labour of women who would not have been free to migrate to full-time factory work, given the scale of their households' agricultural activities (Tanimoto 1998: 420). Initially at least, it also seems to have been households such as these who were most involved in the expansion of silk production.<sup>21</sup> Women workers from households owning even relatively large land-holdings engaged in textile by-employment but, as examples in the next section show, better-off households also typically used their ability to save to generate investment in businesses that could be combined with farming.

As will by now be becoming clear, it was largely through the intensified use of the time of the household's female members that the scope for income diversification was created. In particular, most work in the expanding textile industries was carried out by women, so that, for example, a census in the silk-producing prefecture of Yamanashi in 1879 found that over 60 per cent of those recorded as employed in industry were also working in agriculture and the majority of such workers were women engaged in silk spinning or weaving as household-based by-employments (Saitō, O. 1983a: 41).<sup>22</sup> Moreover, as Saitō shows elsewhere, within the household women's workloads were typically highest at the times of year when men's work hours in agriculture were highest, suggesting that the adoption of intensive agricultural techniques was compatible with income diversification only so long as women provided what Saitō calls the

21 See the examples in Tanimoto and Saitō 1989: 232–4. However, over time the majority of small-scale and tenant cultivators also seem to have moved into cocoon production in silk-producing regions.

22 The few men employed in the textile industry were engaged in jobs such as dyeing which, unlike spinning and reeling, were not usually carried out in the home.

‘elasticity’ in the household’s labour supply (Saitō, O. 1996a).<sup>23</sup> The complementarity of a diverse combination of household activities was thus made feasible through a gender-based division of labour, within which women members continued to be available for housework, child-rearing and peak-time agricultural tasks, while also increasingly undertaking other kinds of paid work, should opportunities arise.<sup>24</sup>

All this goes to suggest that many nineteenth-century rural households of all types were indeed able to pursue a strategy of income diversification within the framework of their agricultural activities. Some authors, including Saitō and Tanimoto, have attributed this choice of strategy ultimately to the cultural context of the landholding and inheritance system, in particular to the stem family system that came to prevail throughout Japanese society and the moral value attached to the continuing, inter-generational household unit or *ie* (e.g. Tanimoto 2002: 285–6). Under this system, the highest priority was attached to the maintenance and increase of the household’s assets (especially its land), which were to be passed on ideally from father to eldest son.<sup>25</sup> Daughters and younger sons worked for and were supported by the *ie* until they moved out to form or join (e.g. on marriage) another one, but were not expected to drain it of resources (e.g. by inheriting a share of them). Income diversification could thus be viewed as a way of utilising the labour of *ie* members in support of the household unit and the continuation of its assets, rather than simply providing for the consumption needs of individuals.

While the idea of the *ie* must indeed have provided a basis in culture and morality for the strategies of rural households, there is an element of ‘chicken and egg’ here, since these strategies could only be pursued within an economic structure that offered opportunities for income diversification around the maintenance and cultivation of the household’s land. But, be that as it may, it could also be argued that, given the economic, techno-

23 It is also interesting to note that the use of child labour in paid employment appears to have been relatively uncommon in nineteenth-century Japan. Even in rural areas, such as Yamanashi, where many women were engaged in textile work, employment of children was rare and most stayed in the home, no doubt helping out with agricultural and household tasks but not undertaking paid employment, until, by international standards a relatively late age (Saitō, O. 1996b).

24 Such a division of labour was clearly also culturally reinforced. In this light, see Francesca Bray’s discussion of the ‘moral economy’ of imperial China under which men cultivated while women produced textiles, although both kinds of activity were regarded as complementary. Bray points out, though, that there could have been a technological basis for this, given that spring silkworm production coincided with a peak point in the cultivation cycle (1997: 185–6).

25 Given that the rights of tenant households to cultivate rented land were often quite strong, the principles of the *ie* did not necessarily apply only to owner-cultivators. However, an *ie* cannot operate where there is little or nothing to pass on and it is difficult to know how far down the scale of cultivation or asset ownership the concept went. For the classic description of the *ie* system in English, see Nakane 1967.

logical and institutional context of nineteenth-century Japan, income diversification represented a rational and, in many cases, successful means to improving the income, security and welfare of the household as a whole, as well as the basis for an output-increasing path of technical and organizational development. How the benefits to be derived from the strategy were distributed within the household, between consumption and saving and amongst household members, is another matter and it could well be the case that women in particular worked longer and harder without receiving commensurate improvements in their living standards.<sup>26</sup> However, given the persistence of the strategy through to the present day, it seems not unreasonable to conclude that it delivered as far as was practically possible, under the constraints of the wider political economy and environment, what rural households sought, in material as well as spiritual and moral terms.

### **Knowledge, capital and the rural elite**

Although the technical and organizational changes which brought about rural economic growth in nineteenth-century Japan did not involve economies of scale and in many ways opened up the possibility for a wide range of households to participate in the growing markets for agricultural and manufactured goods, nonetheless their introduction into particular local economies did depend on the acquisition of technical and economic knowledge and on access to finance and commercial connections which by no means all rural households could have possessed. The extent of rural development therefore depended on the activities of those with the resources to find out about, invest in and profit from new technological and economic opportunities. In practice, given the nature of those opportunities, it was those village households with land resources sufficient to generate, given advances in agricultural techniques, the funds for investment in rural commerce and industry, and with the wider

26 Decision-making within the household was the responsibility and prerogative of the patriarchal household-head and women had few formal rights to determine their own economic and social lives. However, such studies of rural women as do exist for more recent times (e.g. Bernstein 1983; Partner 2004) suggest that, despite their formal inferiority, some at least found ways to exercise influence. Some aspects of the nineteenth-century rural growth process, in particular the increased availability of purchased food and consumer products, would have eased women's workloads, and their key economic role within household diversification strategies may have strengthened their position. Nonetheless, the principle that a rural woman's day should be filled with a wide array of agricultural, non-agricultural and household tasks seems to have persisted through to the inter-war and post-World War II times of the women studied by Partner and Bernstein. For a discussion of the historical role of women within the household, see Uno 1991; on the moral (and economic) value of 'industriousness', not just for women, see Smith 1988: ch. 9 and Tanimoto 2002: 286.



connections needed to acquire knowledge and market products, that carried out these activities. They came to constitute a distinct, though fluid, group within the expanding rural political economy of the nineteenth century, often called the *gōnō* or ‘wealthy farmers’, and their historical significance – as an emerging bourgeoisie, an incipient ‘parasitic landlord’ class, or the source of modern industrial entrepreneurship – has been much debated.<sup>27</sup> Here, however, our concern is with their role in the structure of economic linkages within which mutually supportive agricultural and manufacturing growth took place in the countryside. As, at one level, the small-scale, multi-functional rural household developed to meet the increased labour demands of rural economic growth, so, at another, the *gōnō* emerged as small-scale, multi-functional suppliers of the capital, knowledge and entrepreneurship on which that growth depended.

### ***The acquisition of technological knowledge***

Prior to the establishment, some time after the Meiji Restoration, of government organizations for the promotion of agriculture and industry, the discovery and diffusion of technical knowledge largely depended on the activities of private individuals, on their own initiative or as representatives of villages or other groupings.<sup>28</sup> Methods of transmission were varied but principally involved either access to published written material or personal contact through travel and business or social contacts. Manuals on agricultural techniques, in general or in relation to specific commercial crops including silk, were published and made quite widely available during the Tokugawa period and there is considerable evidence of the activities of agricultural enthusiasts who corresponded with each other and travelled about investigating new seed varieties, tools, cultivation methods, and so on (Smith 1988: ch. 8). Similar methods of diffusion also clearly operated as regards manufacturing technology. In the textile industries, improved forms of loom spread as a result of travel and commercial contacts among weavers; regional saké-brewers went on expeditions to observe best-practice technique in other places; specialists in tea-processing were invited to visit villages to demonstrate their techniques (Pratt 1999: 53–61).

Such activities required, on the one hand, personal skills – literacy in particular – and contacts, and, on the other, the existence of incentives to seek out improved production technology. While literacy rates were in general relatively high, by the standards of the time, even in the countryside, the ability to acquire and read technical literature and correspond

27 In English, such debate goes back at least to Ronald Dore’s ‘The Meiji landlord – good or bad?’ (1959). For an up-to-date survey and in-depth analysis of the group, see Pratt 1999.

28 Some local domain governments were also active in promoting technology acquisition – see Chapter 4.

with experts remained largely confined to the rural elite until the effects of the establishment of the Meiji school system began to be felt.<sup>29</sup> Amongst better-off rural households, however, a relatively high level of literacy was widespread by the nineteenth century, as exhibited in the use and collection of documents, the writing of diaries, the reading and writing of poetry, and so on (Platt 2000). Despite formal restrictions on inter-domain travel prior to 1868, it is clear that much movement went on, for business, pleasure or edification (e.g. pilgrimages), and communication by post was also increasingly possible (Smith 1988: 193). Members of the rural elite thus in general had the means to discover and learn about ways of increasing rural production.

Their incentive to do so lay in the nature of their position within the rural economy and society. This was typically based on ownership of a larger-than-average landholding, in many cases, by the nineteenth century, cultivated in part by tenants but also still in part by the landowning household itself. Such households thus had a direct stake in agriculture, so that they could profit from technical improvements to the cultivation of their own land, but also an indirect one, since the more productive their tenants were, the more stable and secure their rental income. Less mercenary incentives for spreading knowledge of improved methods amongst local cultivators, derived from the patriarchal position that larger landowning households often still retained within village society, not to mention Confucian moral principles, have also been proposed (Dore 1960; Waswo 1977).

At the same time, given the limits on the extension of the cultivated area, the difficulties of cultivating on a larger scale and the restrictions, at least before the Land Tax Reform, on the market in land to rent out, opportunities for the investment of any spare resources in agriculture were not generally very promising. On the other hand, as rural demand for processed agricultural products and manufactured goods rose, the prospects for rural industrial ventures must have begun to look much more tempting. Hence, technological and commercial knowledge gained through the rural elite's contacts with the wider world opened up opportunities for new kinds of business activity, provided that the necessary investment funds could be mobilized.

### ***Capital and investment***

Clearly, the establishment of the kinds of commercial agricultural and manufacturing enterprise on which rural economic growth was based in nineteenth-century Japan did not depend on the mobilization of what would nowadays be thought of as large amounts of capital. Nonetheless

29 On rural education and literacy rates, see Rubinger 1986: 200 and *passim*.

they did require investment in buildings, equipment and working capital. Even the expansion of cultivation of commercial crops, such as cotton, depended on access to the funds or the credit needed to acquire fertilizer. However, as agricultural output rose and local consumption demand increased, households with adequate economic bases in landownership and cultivation in their villages found opportunities to use any surpluses they made, from either landowning/agriculture or commerce/manufacturing, in investment in either sector of their activities.

Numerous examples of this kind of investment are recorded.<sup>30</sup> Better-off households invested in the establishment of tea groves and mulberry orchards; they reconstructed their houses to incorporate upper storeys in which silkworms could be incubated; they built saké breweries and tea-processing facilities. More or less wherever cotton and silk were produced, they took over from urban merchants the business of trading in inputs and outputs, setting up often elaborate networks for supplying raw materials, including, for example, fertilizer to cotton-growers as well as raw silk and cotton to spinners and weavers, and collecting and marketing the finished products. Very frequently they also combined these production activities with pawnbroking and moneylending, using their positions as significant landowners within village society as a basis, but at the same time strengthening that basis through the acquisition of the ownership of the land of those who defaulted on their loans and became their tenants.

The mobilization of capital for this kind of investment resulted in the development of rural financial networks at times approximating to banking systems. Toby (1991) describes the activities of a landowning household in the later Tokugawa period, as it took in deposits and lent them out, through its network of connections in the neighbourhood, to finance proto-industrial and commercial activity. Such networks depended on the kind of personal relationship and face-to-face contact which made the assessment of risk possible and given that most enterprises were organized as household businesses, marriage or other kinds of family relationship were often central to them (Pratt 1999: 178). Nonetheless, throughout the country, sophisticated, if traditional, financial institutions, bookkeeping methods and systems for dealing with risk developed to meet the intertwined investment requirements of agriculture, commerce and manufacturing.

The multi-functional rural-elite household thus played a crucial role in the generation, from within the rural sector itself, of the technological and capital resources on which rural economic growth depended. It represented the institutional mechanism whereby investment funds could be mobil-

30 For the most detailed case studies in English, see Pratt 1999: chs 4–6. On the role of local capital in sericulture and the early filature sector, see Wigen 1995: 159–61, 165–6.

ized and transferred between the various kinds of expanding agricultural, commercial and manufacturing activity. Within the household business, income from rents or loans in the agricultural sector could be invested in processing or manufacturing enterprises; profits from those enterprises could be lent out to finance commercial agriculture or with a view to acquiring landownership. The result was the establishment of diversified household enterprises, firmly rooted in agriculture and their rural communities but at the same time acting as the link with the wider commercial economy. Tanimoto shows how those who owned saké-breweries were frequently also local landlords and gives an example of a brewing family that engaged both in a range of other businesses and banks and in local politics and charitable work, demonstrating the significant role of proto-industrial business in regional political economies (1996: 275–8).

Hence, as Pratt's examples also demonstrate, the success of *gōnō* businesses was strongly linked to the prosperity of the rural economy around them, depending as it did on the ability of local households to produce and to buy their goods and services. Consequently, the fortunes of such households, despite all their efforts to diversify their risks, could fluctuate widely with local economic conditions and, over the generations, the composition of the *gōnō* class in any locality could change considerably. Moreover, by the end of the century, the scale of investment required by industrial undertakings, and the competition which rural businesses faced from new forms of manufacturing and commerce, were beginning to undermine the position of the relatively small-scale *gōnō* operations. Nonetheless, their institutional role in the interlinked and mutually sustaining growth of agriculture and rural industry up to then was crucial.

## Conclusion

This analysis of the mechanisms which produced rural economic development in nineteenth-century Japan has sought to demonstrate how agricultural and non-agricultural activities were interrelated, through markets, through the organization of the labour of rural producers and through the investment and entrepreneurship of the rural elite, in a mutually sustaining growth process. Increased agricultural production generated rises in farm household incomes, in turn expanding the demand for the products of agriculture and rural industry; rural households took advantage of the resulting employment opportunities by finding ways of combining work in rice cultivation, commercial agriculture and manufacturing within their household labour forces and the resulting increases in household income generated further increases in demand for agricultural and manufacturing output; meanwhile, those households in the best position to benefit from rising output and incomes mobilized their profits from agriculture or industry for investment in diversified rural enterprises in both sectors. The influence of the great cities which had once dominated the economy, as

markets for goods and labour and centres of production, commerce and finance, steadily declined, as the locus of growth, in manufacturing as well as agriculture, shifted to the countryside. Thus it could be argued that what occurred in the nineteenth-century Japanese countryside approximates to the kind of broad-based, self-sustaining, rural-biased development process, centring on the growth of agricultural production for the domestic market and the expansion of small-scale, labour-intensive industry producing 'appropriate' products for lower-income consumers, which development planners can only dream about in much of today's Third World. At the same time, it represented a path of development, rooted in the virtuous circle created by the activities of rural households and their industrious revolution, which, as later chapters will show, conditioned the direction of change, not just of the rural economy, but also of Japan's industrialization in general.

Nonetheless, despite the strong evidence of economic growth at the aggregate level and of generally rising living standards throughout much of the country, the nineteenth century can equally be viewed as a time of upheaval, conflict and economic insecurity. The process of development described above changed the structure of economic relationships within rural communities and beyond; its basis in agriculture meant that the inherent variability of agricultural production was transmitted to the rest of the economy, while the intensified incorporation of rural producers into the commercial market economy which it involved added new elements of instability to economic lives. The next chapter therefore looks at the consequences of the century's rural development for the wider structure of economic and political power and at the strategies adopted by rural dwellers and those who sought to control them, in the face of the conflict and instability which it brought.

## **4 Power, policy and resistance in the nineteenth-century countryside**

It would perhaps be hard to tell from the description of rural development in the last two chapters that the nineteenth century witnessed some of the most dramatic change in Japan's history. It saw the end of 250 years of 'seclusion' and the opening of the country to contact with the Western developed world of the time; it contained what has been almost universally recognized as the key dividing-line between 'traditional' and 'modern' Japan in the overthrow of the Tokugawa government and the subsequent Meiji Restoration of 1868, followed as it was by a drastic programme of modernizing reform in all areas of life; it included Japan's last major famine and its last civil wars, as well as numerous peasant protests and uprisings, but also its first elections and the institution of its first centralized national government structure, education system and military organization. How, then, was the process of rural development, involving as it did the vast majority of Japan's population, related to the upheavals and conflicts that went on in the wider world?

To answer this, we need to consider how its features – for example, the expansion of rural industry and the emergence of multi-functional household units in agriculture and manufacturing – changed the political economy of rural areas and the relationship between the rural sector and the organs of state power. Rural dwellers undoubtedly had to face 'top-down' pressures, imposed on them by the power of the state and the political elite, but at the same time, their activities and responses affected the constraints on and results of the activities of those ostensibly holding the political and economic upper hand. As rural development changed the structure of the economy, groups within rural society sought to subvert and resist the power of those who would rule, tax or profit from them, sometimes covertly, using the 'weapons of the weak', and sometimes openly, using forms of protest both old and new.

The efforts of rural dwellers to cope with economic change and to resist what they saw as threats to their livelihoods and prosperity were by no means always successful. Although the scale of inequality which the development process in nineteenth-century Japan produced was almost certainly not as great as that resulting from different forms of development

elsewhere, then and now,<sup>1</sup> rural society did become differentiated in new ways, leaving those unable to benefit from growth and change at the mercy not just of disease, pests and the weather, but also of fluctuating prices and wages. Food output and living standards may on average have risen, but they remained, at times and in places, precariously close to subsistence levels and traditional forms of protest and methods of providing mutual insurance against risk could not be relied on in the new world of market relationships. Nonetheless, rural households devised strategies for coping with and resisting the ill effects of the economic and political change going on around them, so that neither the state nor those with political and economic power in the countryside had it all their own way.

### **The rural economy and the state in the nineteenth century**

The traditional view of Japan's history presents the nineteenth century as a period of tremendous political upheaval, during which the feudal Tokugawa polity was overthrown by the modernizing Meiji state. In this picture, the rural sector has little part to play in the great events of the century: for the rulers of the feudal domains of the Tokugawa period, peasants were of insignificant social status – and rural merchants were even lower – and existed solely to provide tax income for the ruling class; for the Meiji government, the rural sector meant agriculture and was only of value insofar as it could provide the resources needed for the programme of industrialization. Moreover, it is certainly true that rural dwellers were significant by their absence in the events of the Restoration, which were played out amongst members of the largely urban samurai class and were in no way comparable to the 'peasant revolutions' that took place elsewhere in Asia in the next century. A more sophisticated treatment might argue that the gradual commercialization of agriculture and the growth of rural commerce and industry were central forces in the undermining of the finances, and hence political power, of the rulers of feudal domains and that merchant capital, some of which must have been derived from rural sources, helped to fund the anti-Tokugawa forces. Moreover, the Meiji government did recognize that agricultural output growth was important, as a means of meeting the food demands of the industrial labour force and to provide exports, and that the rural population needed to be educated and incorporated into the structures of the state, if a modern nation was to be created.

More recent research, however, would suggest that this picture needs to be modified and this section will seek to show, first, that the governments

1 Shinpo and Saitō (1989: 51–3) compare the Gini coefficient for the distribution of cultivated land in Japan in 1941 with estimates for various other Asian countries in the 1970s and find it lower than all. They also point out that Japan had virtually no landless labourer households.

of many feudal domains were far from 'urban-biased' and pursued policies that in fact helped to set and promote the pattern of rural development which previous chapters have described. Second, it can be argued that those patterns were in fact little affected by the momentous events of the 1850s and 1860s, or indeed, until at least the final years of the century, by the reforming and industrializing policies of the new Meiji government. Much as the Meiji state might have wanted to use the rural sector as no more than a 'reservoir of surplus resources' for modern industry, it had no option but to recognize the strength of the rural agricultural and manufacturing economy, to the point where, eventually, influential voices began to be heard in support of the idea that the nature of the rural economy and society might provide the basis for a different form of economic development.

### ***Rural development and the feudal domains***

In theory, under the Tokugawa settlement, the relationship between the rural population and the 250 or so feudal domain governments, together with the Shogunate itself in the lands it controlled, was a hierarchical and authoritarian but relatively 'hands off' one. In most domains, administration was carried out by the lord's samurai retainers, who were required to live in his castle-town on stipends provided from his tax revenue. Taxation was levied on villages, on the basis of regular assessments of their harvests, on the principle of extracting as much as possible without causing peasants to revolt, abscond or starve. Samurai officials descended from time to time to assess taxes or demand corvée labour and villages could petition their lords for benevolence and justice but otherwise, provided they kept their heads down and fulfilled their allotted roles as rice farmers, producers were left pretty much to their own devices.

In fact, however, if domain governments ever followed this model in their dealings with the rural economy, they soon had to modify it, in the light of its costs and ineffectiveness in generating the revenue they needed to meet the heavy demands of samurai stipends and *sankin kōtai* and in response to the commercialization of the rural economy. Annual assessments of the rice harvest were time-consuming and an invitation to corruption, so many domains abandoned them, by design or default, in favour of assessments fixed for longer periods, thus handing to producers the benefits of any improvements in productivity, but reducing the costs of tax collection (Ravina 1999: 54–5). Domain governments also came to recognize that rural households were increasingly involved in the market economy and producing commercial crops in addition to rice and other subsistence grain. They began to try to levy at least some of the taxation on agricultural produce as money and to convert corvée labour to cash, and they introduced all kinds of taxes and fees on farmers' activities outside rice cultivation. Their initial response to the growth of manufacturing was to try to



control it through guilds, licensing systems and domain-run commodity agencies, all of which could be tapped for fees or loans, a method which was more or less feasible as long as most such commercial activity was confined to the castle-towns and cities. Domains thus sought to resolve the conflict between the principles of the Tokugawa system and the reality of an increasingly commercial economy in which they were struggling to meet their costs by adapting their taxation systems in any way they could to raise revenue, while at the same time attempting to restrict and control those kinds of economic activity which theoretically should not have existed (Pratt 1999: 15–27).

By the nineteenth century, however, the crisis in domain finances had become so severe and the rise of the rural economy relative to the urban so obvious that this compromise had become increasingly unworkable. Enjoining farmers to refrain from buying luxuries and not to give up rice cultivation, whilst attempting to sell monopoly rights to the very crops and products those farmers were buying and selling, involved a fundamental contradiction and domain governments began to accept that they had to find ways of benefiting from the expansion of commercial agriculture and rural industry, rather than trying to restrict and control it. As Roberts (1998) has shown, this conversion took place, in many domains, within the context of the growth in influence of the view that domain economies were effectively individual ‘national’ units trading within the wider ‘international’ economy of Japan as a whole, and that it was the duty of the domain government to pursue the kind of mercantilist policy which would increase the wealth of the domain. Moreover, since domain governments’ financial problems stemmed in large part from their obligation to spend money outside their territory – on the expenses of *sankin kōtai* and the interest on their loans from Osaka merchant houses or on the kinds of luxury consumer goods that lordly status required – a solution might lie in increasing the ‘foreign exchange’ the domain earned from ‘exports’ of domain-produced goods or from savings on expenditure on goods produced elsewhere. Feudal lords therefore began not only to excuse themselves from *sankin kōtai*, but also to adopt export-promoting and import-saving policies as regards the economies of their own domains.

Rural industry and commercial agriculture were the main beneficiaries of this policy switch. The more progressive, or financially pressed, domain governments ceased to listen to the pleas of urban producers and traders for restriction of their rural competitors and instead began to seek out and promote those local products for which there was an ‘export’ market elsewhere or which could act as ‘import substitutes’. These included, on the one hand, exportable speciality products made from local domain resources or based on particular local skills or styles, and, on the other, goods that could be produced in the domain as import substitutes for the local market, if the requisite skills and investment were available. In some respects, domain governments were simply bowing to the inevitable, in the

face of the growth of rural economic activity that they could not control, but they also came to recognize that the interests of both government and people were better served by less restriction. Rising and more diversified incomes meant that rural households were better able to meet their basic tax obligations reliably and although the state's revenue from the sale of monopolies, forced loans and state trading might fall, this could be more than offset by taxes on the expanding output of rural producers.

In the domain of Tosa, the subject of Roberts' case-study, for example, in 1787 the government abolished all monopolies and abandoned taxes on the domain's 'exports' and 'imports' (Roberts 1998: ch. 8). At the same time, it was changing its policy towards the domain's main export item. Paper was a traditional product of the region, manufactured, from paper bark grown in upland villages, by specialist village-producers in plain areas, for use either in the activities of the domain government itself or as a high-class gift to the Shogun. In the period up to the 1780s, the government had controlled production either through the granting of monopolies to urban merchants or through state purchase, at low prices, of quotas on paper-making villages. Thereafter, however, largely in response to protests from village paper-producers (see below), it gradually abandoned these policies, steadily reducing the quota, and began to encourage 'free-market' production and trading of paper. The revenue from the sales tax which it was able to levy soon outstripped the profits it had made from its sales of quota-produced paper, as output expanded rapidly, making Tosa by far the biggest supplier of paper to the Osaka market by 1870 (Roberts 1998: 187).

Meanwhile, it responded to the enthusiasm of private-sector entrepreneurs for the introduction of sugar production in the domain by reversing its previous prohibition and providing capital and moral support, and sugar quickly became another major export product (Roberts 1998: 189–93). Sugar-cane cultivation stabilized and raised the income of farmers in more marginal paddy areas, and the tax on it increased the domain's income. Pottery production, on the other hand, was encouraged as an import-substitute: the ceramics traditionally produced in Tosa had been high quality and used principally as gifts from the lord to the Shogun and other *daimyō*, while mass-market pottery was 'imported' from other domains. By the nineteenth century, however, the domain government was ordering the Tosa potters to stop producing for the lord's gifts and providing logistical support for a switch to low-cost import-substitutes (Roberts 1998: 194).

Many other domains, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, were similarly accepting the need to promote, and find ways of profiting from, the growth of rural industry and commercial agriculture in their domains. Pratt (1999: 20–1) provides many examples of attempts by officials to transfer the technology for new rural industries into their domains. Experts in weaving, brewing, sericulture, tea-processing and so on were invited to come and demonstrate their knowledge; domain governments

brought in demonstration samples of wax and lacquer trees and promoted large-scale projects for the planting of mulberry orchards and tea groves. Even intendants administering Tokugawa-controlled land distributed potatoes for experimental cultivation and ordered farmers to plant lacquer trees, although in general the Tokugawa government faced greater obstacles and fewer incentives, as regards rural economic development in its scattered territories.

At the same time, domains which did not go as far as Tosa in accepting 'free trade', nonetheless came to recognize the importance of the rural economy to the extent of incorporating rural merchants into their monopoly and state-trading systems (Pratt 1999: 21–3). This enabled them, for example, to regulate and tax all the stages of textile production and marketing down to the village level and although this substantially increased the tax-take, it did mean fees and commissions for traders in the villages and the introduction of inspection and quality-control systems which may even have benefited producers in the long run. On the other hand, official recognition of the rural elite meant that it was fair game for forced loans to domain governments. This may have increased the influence and status of the rural financiers and industrialists involved – a samurai title was often the *quid pro quo* for a loan – and it sometimes earned them interest, but it also left them vulnerable to the notorious tendency of *daimyō* to default on their loans (Pratt 1999: 28). Nonetheless, it was all part of the process whereby, by the nineteenth century, the feudal authorities had come to accept and even promote the growth of economic activity outside the towns and cities.

The role of domain governments in the promotion and support of rural economic growth should not, however, be exaggerated. In many respects it was simply their response, on the one hand, to the financial crisis that they faced and, on the other, to the demands of producers and entrepreneurs in the rural areas to which the economic centre of gravity of their domains had shifted. The emergence of an ideology which viewed the increased wealth of the domain as a legitimate and morally valuable goal owed as much to commoner thinkers and teachers as it did to samurai officials. The proposals and suggestions for projects to introduce new crops or industries tended to come from rural entrepreneurs, only to be taken up as their own by domain governments anxious for good PR and any opportunity to extract more revenue. The Tosa domain's deregulation of the paper industry came largely in response to increasingly strong opposition to, and subversion of, the quota production system on the part of producers and traders (Roberts 1998: 185–6). As Roberts puts it, 'government had to base its rule upon acceptance of the rules of exchange because (especially in the paper industry) its people had become so dependent on commercial relationships' (1998: 186).

On the other hand, however, as in later stages of Japan's economic history, the development of the mechanisms whereby officials of the state interacted with representatives of the private sector in pursuit of the goal

of 'national' economic growth might be seen as an important element in any explanation of that growth. At any rate, as Morris-Suzuki (1994: 34–6) argues, the activities of domain governments, as they fought for survival in the commercial economy of the second half of the Tokugawa period, undoubtedly helped to shape the characteristics of Japan's economic development through into the Meiji period and perhaps beyond, in particular as regards the role of rural industry and agriculture. Operating within an 'international' economy fragmented by restrictions on trade and communications into a great many small, competing 'countries', each itself economically stratified by status distinctions, success, in terms of domain government policy and the interests of producers, depended not on large-scale production for a mass market, but rather on discovering and developing niche products in which the domain, on the basis of its natural resources or particular technological knowledge and skills, had a comparative advantage. Quality and product differentiation were more important than low costs derived from mechanization and scale economies in determining the marketability of a local product and rural producers, able to cultivate and process specific local raw materials using their household labour forces, were ideally placed to produce the small-volume, distinctive, location-specific products that the fragmented market required. Mercantilist local governments, seeking to improve their domain's 'balance of payments' as well as maintain their tax revenues, thus shared common cause with rural producer interests in developing the industries and market structures within which they thrived.

### ***The Meiji state and the rural sector***

As suggested in earlier chapters, the Meiji Restoration of 1868 and the institution of a new structure of government with modernizing goals did not dramatically change the scale or nature of rural economic development. Agricultural growth may have speeded up somewhat, as knowledge of improved techniques diffused more easily, although statistical problems make this hard to confirm; some rural industries were hard hit by import competition after the opening to trade, but most continued to grow to meet rising domestic consumer demand and some, notably silk production, positively boomed as export markets opened up to them. The sources of growth – improved techniques and labour allocation within rural households – did not change in any dramatic way, until the impact of investment in modern factory industry, communications and infrastructure began to be felt towards the end of the century.

Moreover, for the first two decades of Meiji rule at least, as Table 4.1 summarizes, the rural economy must have continued to act as the driving force behind the growth of the economy as a whole. Agriculture was still producing just over 40 per cent of total output, so that the growth of agricultural output, although admittedly much lower than that of manufacturing, played

Table 4.1 The rural sector in the economy of the late nineteenth century

Agriculture's share (%) in		
1885	<i>Net domestic product</i> 43.0	<i>Labour force</i> 71.4
Real growth rates (average % p.a.) 1887–97*		
<i>Agriculture</i> 1.42	<i>Manufacturing</i> 5.92	<i>GDP</i> 3.20
Share (%) in total value of exports of		
1867–72	<i>Raw materials and raw silk</i> 94.4	<i>Small-scale factory output</i> 0.6
1888–93	84.1	5.4

Sources: Ohkawa and Shinohara 1979: Tables A10, A53 and 2.6; Howe 1996: Table 6.6.

Note:

\* 1887–97 is the first period for which long-term growth rates can be calculated using the statistical data assembled as the LTES series. The decade represented an upswing phase in growth cycles of the economy, as classified by Ohkawa and Shinohara.

a major part in the growth of the economy as a whole.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, at this stage, the vast majority of manufacturing output was still being produced in small-scale 'cottage' establishments and 'traditional' industry, much of it located in rural areas, continued to contribute significantly to overall industrial growth (Nakamura, T. 1983: Table 3.3). At the same time, the rural sector supplied virtually all of Japan's exports and of course continued to provide employment and income for the majority of its population. Although the new land tax may not have extracted a greater proportion of rural incomes than its feudal predecessors, it still provided the bulk of the Meiji government's revenue through to the end of the century (Ranis 1970: 48).

Yet, despite the still overwhelming importance of the rural sector in the economy as a whole, agriculture and rural industry clearly did not receive top priority in the Meiji government's economic policy agenda. That was accorded rather to ambitious plans for the establishment of the modern

2 The service sector supplied around 35 per cent of net domestic product, a share that remained broadly constant, alongside the decline of agriculture and the rise of manufacturing, throughout the period up to World War II. It registered a growth rate of 3.76 per cent p.a. during 1887–97 (Ohkawa and Shinohara 1979: Table 2.6). Although data on service-sector activity are hard to come by and the composition of the sector was almost certainly changing from 'traditional' to more modern forms of service, it is likely that much of the activity in the areas of commerce, finance and personal services, which constitute the sector, was still taking place in the countryside up to the turn of the century at least.

industrial production and communications infrastructure that would enable Japan to 'catch up', militarily as well as economically, with the developed Western countries of the time. Hence it was railways, shipyards, large-scale, state-of-the-art textile mills, mines and metal foundries that figured in government-sponsored technology-transfer schemes and public investment programmes. Silk, and to a lesser extent tea, mattered as key exports, but central government initiatives were more concerned with research into the high-tech methods of overseas silk industries and with efforts to wrest control of exports from foreign trading houses than with the activities of the rural households who actually produced Japanese silk exports (Howe 1996: 96–8).

Even in the case of agriculture, which was not entirely neglected in the new government's plans, the initial emphasis was on the introduction of the techniques of 'modern' agriculture from the West. Hence, following the Iwakura Mission's observation of European and American agriculture, institutions were set up to research and teach the science and technology on which large-scale Anglo-American farming was seen to be based. Mechanization was regarded as a key element in this, but efforts to introduce imported machinery into the small-scale structure of Japanese agriculture met with as little success as did schemes to establish sheep farms, olive groves and the other apparently essential elements of modern farming (Hayami, Y. and Yamada 1991: 66–8). Like the urban industry-biased governments of not a few developing countries since, 'the Meiji leaders . . . had little difficulty in acquiring or importing advanced western technology, but seemed to have much greater difficulty in understanding the realities of agriculture and craft industries in their own country' (Morris-Suzuki 1994: 98).

On the surface at least, much the same could be said of the local government institutions that replaced the often mercantilist and interventionist feudal domains. The new prefectural governments had only limited funds available for economic development and were under orders from the central government to pursue the modernizing agenda, so that their schemes tended similarly to be designed, in the eyes of the local rural elite, to promote large-scale agriculture, export industries and employment opportunities for ex-samurai (Pratt 1999: 34). Meanwhile, the abolition of the domains and the removal of samurai privileges left rural producers freer to pursue their own interests within the market economy, unrestricted by feudal rules and regulations and demands for loans to the *daimyō*. At the formal level, therefore, Meiji-instituted local-government institutions were no more willing or able than the central government to pursue the kind of local-mercantilist policies of those they replaced.

At a less formal level, however, continuities remained.<sup>3</sup> Local industrial

3 On the similarities between Meiji-period local-government policies to promote industry and agriculture and those of the former domains, see Saitō, O. 1983b, especially pp. 269–71.

and agricultural entrepreneurs were co-opted into prefectural administrations and schemes to promote local development, for example by providing funds for investment in mulberry trees or for bringing in experts in silk-weaving techniques, were adopted (Pratt 1999: 34–5). Moreover, as Morris-Suzuki points out, the activities of local government ‘shaded at the edges into’ those of a range of local producer groups and trade and agricultural associations set up by the private sector to protect and promote their members’ interests in the face of competition from other regions and sometimes from imports (1994: 94–6). These typically included local-level co-operative associations of silk farmers, silk reelers, cotton weavers and so on, as well as agricultural discussion groups. The promotional activities of these associations, in areas such as the provision of technical advice to members and the administration of quality-control checks, together with the similarities in background – better-off farmers, small-scale merchants and businessmen, local ex-samurai – between their leaders and local-government officials, gave them a semi-official colour which enabled government to work through them, and sometimes vice versa, and blurred the line between public- and private-sector promotion of industry and agriculture. Thus, despite the lack of formal recognition of the role of the rural sector, mechanisms existed whereby the resources of the state could at times be turned to the aid of local small-scale industry and agriculture.

However, for many in the rural business and agricultural elite, who had welcomed the new government and the economic freedoms it brought but been disillusioned by its urban industrial/large-scale agriculture bias, this was not enough. The final straw was the deflationary policy instituted by Finance Minister Matsukata in 1881, under which government finance for traditional industries was virtually eliminated (while big business benefited from, for example, the sell-off of government-owned enterprises) and the tax on saké, which had already been raised several times in the 1870s, was increased yet again, in a move that proved disastrous, at a time of falling demand, for small-scale breweries throughout the countryside (Pratt 1999: 41). Representatives of agriculture and rural industry used the only forums open to them to protest against government policy, voting in prefectural assemblies to slash the budgets of experimental farms and encouragement-of-industry programmes (Pratt 1999: 40). By the end of the 1880s, local-level resistance had left government policy towards agriculture and traditional industry, in Pratt’s words, ‘in complete disarray’.

Meanwhile, the idea that neglect of the rural sector in favour of ‘modern’, ‘Western’ industry had been a mistake was beginning to gain ground among influential sections of the national-level elite. The leading proponent of a policy of promoting agriculture and traditional industry through the development of what would now be called appropriate technology was Maeda Masana, who, as an official of the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, had carried out a large-scale survey of the state of the economy and published in 1884 a report recommending a switch to a

strategy based on the support and development of small-scale producers and their skills.<sup>4</sup> After having been forced out of his official post in 1890, Maeda proceeded to tour the country, helping to set up agricultural associations and producers' organizations for the promotion of 'local improvement'. He was able to mobilize members of the rural elite throughout the country, who organized silk co-operatives and agricultural discussion groups and lobbied the central government for support for their organizations. Meanwhile, as the lack of at least immediate success for the policy of 'big push', state-sponsored industrialization became clearer, support for Maeda's approach began to grow within the government itself and in particular among officials of the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, generations of whom, as later chapters will demonstrate, continued to act as guardians of the small-scale rural household through into the post-World War II period.

The producers' associations set up before and as a result of Maeda's initiative were reflections of the dynamism and organizational capacity of rural industry and agriculture. Although they made use of local-government resources where they could, they were independent bodies which aimed at protecting and promoting the production activities of their members and operated as interest groups in opposition to central government policy where necessary. The National Agricultural Association, which Maeda took over in 1895, established itself as an independent organization encompassing a pyramid of local agricultural societies at prefectural, county and village level. Gradually, however, as government came to adopt Maeda's view of the importance of rural industry and agriculture, it increasingly sought to incorporate the network of producers' organizations in the countryside into its policy implementation and control structures. By the dawn of the twentieth century, therefore, as later chapters will describe, the Meiji government had been forced into a recognition of the fact that the promotion of Japan's economic development could not be pursued without due regard for the rural sector.

### **Conflict and resistance in the countryside**

The nineteenth century was, as earlier chapters have demonstrated, an era of significant economic growth and rising living standards in Japan's rural areas. The vehicle for this was the spread of the market and the expansion of commercial agriculture, rural manufacturing and the marketing and financial services which facilitated them, and it resulted in the increasing recognition by the state of the economic power of rural producers. However, although it would be difficult to deny that the majority of the Japanese rural population were materially better-off at the end of the

4 For more on Maeda, see Morris-Suzuki 1994: 99; Crawcour 1997: 79–86; Pratt 1999: 42–5.



nineteenth century than their counterparts had been at the beginning, this did not mean that peace and harmony reigned in the countryside. Economic development was not achieved without changes in the distribution of resources and power, within rural areas and between rural dwellers and those in economic or political authority over them, which were resisted and which generated conflict. This section explores the nature of that conflict and the forms which resistance to prevailing economic and political forces took.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, in the past much of the substantial amount of research into socio-economic change in nineteenth-century Japan attempted to fit what occurred into the most readily available theoretical framework for the analysis of conflict, the Marxist one. However, while the spread of something that might be called capitalism through the countryside was surely the source of much of the conflict that occurred, the forms of 'capitalist' enterprise and employment that emerged in manufacturing and in agriculture do not fit readily into the categories of the Marxist class-conflict framework.<sup>5</sup> More recent work in development studies, on the other hand, while not denying the existence of conflicts of interest between cultivators, rural workers, landowners and employers, allows for a more complex analysis of the ways in which rural institutions work in particular contexts and recognizes strategies of resistance, on the part of the 'weak' in rural areas, to economic and political forces which threaten their livelihoods. At times and in places, the rural 'weak' of nineteenth-century Japan faced threatening forces too strong to resist, leaving some of them to succumb to hunger or to decline into landlessness, poverty and migration. But the survival, through to the end of the century and indeed way beyond, of the small-scale cultivating household, with its diversified income sources, its broadly secure subsistence, and its political and ideological recognition as a key element in the economy, suggests that strategies for coping and resisting were more often successful than not. As later chapters will seek to argue, the legacy of that success has conditioned Japan's political economy ever since.

### *The changing nature of conflict and protest*

Japan has a very long tradition of peasant protest. Aoki Kōji's standard compilation of recorded incidents of rural conflict lists 7,664 cases – one every other week on average – during the Tokugawa period (White 1995: 127). As Vlastos argues, the Tokugawa system, as originally established,

5 This has occasioned a great deal of debate amongst Japanese Marxists – see Hoston 1986. Byres attributes his inability to fit the Japanese case into a Brenner-type model of class differentiation and conflict during the agrarian transition to the 'uniqueness' of the Japanese landlord class which, he argues, blocked the emergence of differentiation within the peasantry and larger-scale cultivation (Byres 1991: 45–8).

was in many ways conducive to the organization of village residents in opposition to those who would threaten their livelihoods. In the first half of the period at least, villages were composed of more-or-less equal households, for the most part concerned with subsistence production and used to co-operating together through irrigation organizations, labour-sharing and so on. All faced the same threats, in the forms of environmentally determined crop loss and the expropriations of the feudal ruling class. That expropriating class lived away from the countryside and individual village households were generally not linked, by for example patron/client relationships, to particular members of it. Since it was the village as a whole that was responsible for the tax payment to the lord, some form of village-level organization and leadership had to exist, providing a basis not just for the allocation and delivery of taxes, but also for collective negotiation and protest. Class lines, so to speak, were clearly drawn and institutional structures effectively encouraged organized conflict across them over the division of the produce of the land.

Further encouragement to conflict was also provided by the fact that tax rates were in many ways negotiable. Even where domains gave up annual assessments of the state of the crop, lords were expected to show benevolence when harvests were bad, and it was not in their long-term interests to press villages so hard that farmers absconded. As the cultivation of commercial crops became more common, lords' attempts to find ways of taxing them opened up yet more scope for conflict and negotiation. Moreover, government officials' distance from what was going on in the countryside meant that they were in no position to verify or challenge villages' claims or to control collusive activity within and between the often hundreds of villages in their jurisdiction. Thus, although the authorities held all the military cards, they used them only in the last resort in the face of peasant resistance or protest, given the moral weapons that village groups could wield and the fact that ultimately they posed no threat to the overall structure of domain power.

Through the first half of the Tokugawa period, therefore, rural protest activity increased and took on a standardized form. The efforts of domain governments, no longer able to sustain their revenue through projects to expand the taxable area, to extract more from existing cultivators appear to have produced a sharp increase in the incidence of protests, rising from an average of 8.4 per year over 1701–50 to 13.4 per year in 1751–1800 (Vlastos 1986: 75). Protests would typically begin with a formal petition to the lord's official representative, stating villagers' grievances, claiming that these threatened the ability of households to continue as cultivators and appealing to the lord's benevolence. Given the interconnections between villages, particularly through mutual irrigation organizations, and the inability of the authorities to police inter-village communications, it was often not difficult to mobilize neighbouring villages over quite wide areas, in support of such petitions. If the lord failed to respond adequately, the

next move was to bring together a crowd to demonstrate outside official buildings. Although petitioning was legal, collective demonstration was not and the leaders of such movements could be, and indeed were, punished, even executed, on occasion. Further appeal could be made to the higher authority of the Shogunal government, but although domain governments often came down hard on the leaders of protest movements, the demonstration of unrest, in general without a great deal of actual violence, was usually enough eventually to induce concessions. The effectiveness of such activity is suggested by the decline in the overall tax-take, which peaked in the middle of the century and fell thereafter, as the frequency of protests rose (Vlastos 1986: 75–6).

By the late eighteenth century, however, much was changing in the rural economy, as commercialization and production for the market spread. The work of Vlastos and White among others has shown how, although the form and rhetoric of earlier rural protest were in many ways retained, this change was reflected in the causes and nature of the incidents that occurred through into the nineteenth century. An increasing proportion of protests demanded the commutation of taxes in kind into cash. As households in, for example, silk-producing areas devoted more and more time and land to commercial crops, the need to purchase rice in order to meet tax obligations in kind became not only an inconvenience and expense, but also a source of increased insecurity and vulnerability to market fluctuations (Vlastos 1986: 79–81). More significant, however, was the increase in the incidence of conflicts across the economic class boundaries within the rural economy. Whereas early Tokugawa protests had typically involved all village residents, under the leadership of village headmen, in action against the external threat posed by feudal tax extraction, later ones increasingly involved attacks on members of the emerging class of village-based landlords, financiers and entrepreneurs who were seen as profiting from members of their own communities. Groups of households still petitioned the lord for his benevolence in the face of threats to their survival as cultivators, but those threats now took the form of landlords who seized land or moneylenders who charged excessive interest or traders who hoarded goods when there were shortages (see examples in Vlastos 1986: 86–91).

Commercialization not only changed the nature of protests but also increased their incidence and scale and during the Tempō famine in the 1830s and the disturbed times of the 1850s and 1860s when government authority was breaking down, a number of wide-scale rural uprisings took place. The Shindatsu uprising of 1866, for example, erupted into wide-spread and quite violent rioting, as protests by larger-scale silk-producers against the proposed introduction, by the Shogunal officials who governed the area, of an inspection and taxation system for silkworm egg-cards, spread to small-scale producers and widened into a general attack on the high prices and interest rates charged by local rice traders and moneylenders (Vlastos 1986: ch. 6). The reforms that followed the Restoration

produced new triggers for conflict and protest – the new land tax, conscription, compulsory education – but they also produced a stronger state apparatus, more resistant to appeals to benevolence and better prepared to deal with unrest. Peasants in Nagano, in opposing the replacement of the complex but flexible taxes of the Tokugawa period with the Meiji land tax, employed the tactics of petition and demonstration that had worked well for them in the past, only to find their uprising ruthlessly put down by the troops of the new regime and no concessions gained (Esenbel 1998).

Nonetheless, despite the changing nature of the economic and political environment in which they operated, rural households can be seen as adapting the tactics of their protest activities to essentially the same goal of coping with and resisting the threats to their livelihoods. While in the early Tokugawa period those threats came from the environment and from the feudal authorities, by the nineteenth century they arose much more from the insecurities inherent in the market economy. Yet petition and protest remained a tactic to be used by groups of rural households on a local level, to obtain assistance or concessions in the face of threats to economic survival. Where once the village elite had led protests, by the nineteenth century they had become part of the problem and the leadership of protest action had shifted to middle-scale and sometimes even poor households. Yet the targets of protest remained the specific grievances and difficulties of small-scale producers, trying to make a living in the prevailing economic and political climate. At no time, even during the upheavals of the Restoration, did elements of rural society come together to threaten the overall political and economic order.

However, there seems little doubt that the non-revolutionary, guerrilla tactics used by the small-scale producers who made up the rural economy were in many ways rather successful. White concludes from his massive statistical analysis of Tokugawa uprisings that without them ‘taxes would have been heavier, relief would have been less, government would have been more arbitrary, merchants would have been more rapacious, and officials would have been more corrupt’ (1995: 278). Although, by the nineteenth century, rural households were using protest action to combat new kinds of market vulnerability, they did so from a securer subsistence base than that of their early Tokugawa predecessors and White suggests that the increased contentiousness of rural producers as the century progressed may reflect their increasing economic strength and confidence, combined with the declining ability of the authorities and the rural elite to resist (White 1995: 284–5). This changed with the Restoration, which significantly raised the potential costs of protest action, in the form of punishment, to participants. Nonetheless, the forms, tactics and rhetoric of pre-Meiji rural protest did not die and the use of organized, local-level protest and conflict in pursuit of the objectives of the small-scale rural household was to reappear, in the face of new threats, on many occasions in later years.

***Weapons of the weak: other forms of rural resistance***

While uprisings and other forms of more-or-less violent protest activity may thus have become relatively common in rural areas of late Tokugawa and early Meiji Japan, it nonetheless remains the case that the vast majority of villages never witnessed any overt unrest, apparently carrying on with their economic lives and suffering the effects of weather, markets and taxation without public protest. As the work of Scott and others has shown, however, for rural populations in pre-industrial Asian societies, violent protest, which is not likely to be very successful, given the military superiority of the ruling class, represents only a last resort in the war against insecurity and exploitation. Other, less overt, weapons, based on, for example, the power of numbers, local knowledge or the use of prevailing moral codes, may in practice be much more effective in guaranteeing the security and survival of the marginal or threatened. The armoury of such weapons is huge – Scott lists ‘foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage’ (1985: 29), and many more could be imagined – but evidence of their use is, by their very nature, hard to come by. Nonetheless, there seems little doubt that Japanese rural dwellers made abundant, and in many respects successful, use of these kinds of tactic against those who would restrict their ability to secure and improve their livelihoods.

During much of the Tokugawa period, the main threat to rural livelihoods against which such weapons could be applied was domain taxation and regulation, and the ‘hands off’ nature of feudal rule in the countryside encouraged and facilitated their use, just as it did more open and organized forms of resistance. As regards the taxation of the rice harvest, which remained the central element in the taxation system, methods of evading or reducing the burden were clearly well developed. Reassessment of taxable area was carried out only sporadically and official visits were not frequent, so that it was easy to conceal any expansion in the cultivable area that had taken place and to avoid taxation on increases in the yield of taxable land. The impact of villages’ ability to conceal land is apparent from Nakamura’s estimates of the under-measurement of the taxable area by the end of the Tokugawa period (Nakamura, J. 1966). The requirement on the lord to show benevolence and to ensure the survival as cultivators of those for whom he was seen as responsible gave village leaders a moral card which their petitions suggest they employed regularly in their negotiations with the authorities. Although it was not difficult for officials to assess crop losses attributable to one-off environmental problems, it was much harder to verify claims that farmers were generally under too much pressure to carry on cultivating (Vlastos 1986: 44).

At the same time, the increased commercialization of the economy and the growth of alternative sources of income provided households

with new weapons for avoiding or reducing taxation. Straightforwardly, the more heavily the authorities attempted to tax rice cultivation, the less time and land would households devote to it, where other, less heavily taxed activities were possible. Attempts to tax or regulate those activities would in turn lead farmers to switch to something new (for examples, see Pratt 1999: 30; Ravina 1999: 59). Traditional tactics of moral suasion could be employed alongside threats based on new commercial strength: attempts by the Yonezawa domain in 1760 to extend its monopsony on flax were met with a petition stating that 'We request that by his lordship's benevolence we might continue as farmers, but if this is not granted we will dig up [our] flax by the roots' (quoted in Ravina 1999: 47); farmers responded to the same domain's order to plant lacquer trees by constructing fake seedlings from twigs to fool official inspectors (Ravina 1999: 58). The conversion of taxes denominated in rice into cash, to take account of increased commercial farming and by-employment, opened up endless scope for negotiation and manipulation of the conversion rate.

Esenbel's study of villages in a territory controlled directly by the Shogunate in what is now Nagano Prefecture details the use, over the period 1832–70, of the full range of techniques to keep taxation down (Esenbel 1998: 122–30). The land survey on which tax assessments were based had been carried out in 1603 and was never adequately updated to allow for subsequent land reclamation and increases in yields, so that the villages' official tax burdens continued to represent a declining proportion of their output. At the same time, although there remained occasional years when the authorities were able to levy something approaching their officially designated amount of tax, for the most part villages typically paid much less. This was the result of the efforts of village leaders to negotiate the authorities down and their success at manipulating the rate at which rice values were converted into cash in favour of producers. Their methods included appeals to benevolence on the grounds of poor harvests, but also skilful use of delaying tactics. As a result, Esenbel argues, taxation 'depended by and large on negotiation and compromise' and the ability of the Shogunal authorities to obtain revenue was 'nibbled away' by peasant resistance (Esenbel 1998: 129).

The Meiji land tax was another matter, however, and the attempt by representatives of the new government to by-pass the traditional system of local negotiation and compromise by imposing a fixed-rate tax led to a serious and violent uprising in the villages of Esenbel's case-study. Nonetheless, although the land survey and imposition of the tax did succeed in fixing and equalising the tax rate across the country, the average tax rate, working out at around 25 per cent of the value of the rice crop, was in general no higher than the Tokugawa authorities had achieved (Yamamura 1986: 388–91). Thereafter, despite the falling real value of the tax due to inflation and its declining incidence as agricultural

output rose, opposition from farmers continued and the rate was reduced in 1876. Village leaders in Wigen's case-study area continued their campaign against what they saw as an unfairly high assessment on their region through into the 1880s (Wigen 1995: 182–8). Fear of rural opposition made raising the land tax politically impossible for the Meiji government, which was forced to shift to other forms of taxation in order to meet its revenue needs (Pratt 1999: 38).

The use of the 'weapons of the weak' may thus have been relatively successful in reducing the burden of taxation but by the nineteenth century the tax authorities were not alone in seeking to expropriate a share of rural output. Whereas leading village households were generally united with the rest of the community in opposition to taxation, the mass of 'ordinary' households were on their own in resistance to the rents and interest exacted by the rural elite. There is little record of such resistance during the Tokugawa period, except where it erupted into overt violence, typically in the form of the destruction of the houses and property of larger landowners, pawnbrokers, rice traders and so on, which accompanied other forms of protest activity (for an example, see Vlastos 1986: 123–30). At times, however, it was the failure of the better-off to respond to moral appeals for, for example, delays or reductions in payments or release of rice from store-houses that triggered violence, suggesting that in other cases such appeals did not fall on such deaf ears.

Evidence of appeals to the benevolence of landlords and other members of the rural elite is more widespread for the Meiji period, however. Since most landowners remained resident cultivators in the villages where they owned land, despite the establishment of a market in land following the Land Tax Reform, their relationships with their tenants continued to be personal ones. Landlords, like feudal lords, were expected to reduce rents at times of bad harvest and their superior economic and social position continued to be justified morally by the benevolence and protection they were supposed to show to inferior households. Thus they were expected to lend money, provide tools and equipment, employ poor relatives, offer charity and so on (Waswo 1977: 29–34). Moreover, they had to interact with other cultivators over communally controlled resources, in particular irrigation water, and might well depend on other households for labour at peak times. Although it is impossible to estimate the overall effect of day-to-day, face-to-face contact – for example, through the tactic of 'behaving unpleasantly at weddings or funerals' in the families of landlords who refused to act 'benevolently' (Waswo 1988: 577) – in restraining the activities of the rural elite, it can be assumed that the persistence of the small-scale community, which still broadly accepted a morality based on the performance of duties and responsibilities within household-based hierarchies, provided an ideal context for the employment of the

‘weapons of the weak’ in the battle to resist exploitation and expropriation.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, at a more formal level, customary practice could also offer tenants and other village households protection and weapons to use against those whose exactions threatened their livelihoods. Brown describes the custom of periodic redistribution of land among resident owner and tenant cultivators quite widely practised in Niigata and other parts of Japan during the Tokugawa period (Brown 1987). Under this custom, cultivators held a right to a share of village land, but not to a particular piece of it, making it difficult for landlords to deal directly with tenants. The rental rate was in fact determined by the village and applied to all tenanted land within it, protecting tenants from the arbitrary actions of individual landlords. Even after the Land Tax Reform, practices associated with redistribution and the power it gave to villages to protect tenant cultivators continued and Brown finds evidence of their significance in the stability of rent levels, the compensation that landlords had to pay tenants to give up their customary rights and the fact that the large-scale landholdings that did emerge in parts of Niigata were not found in areas that had practised redistribution. In general, from the Tokugawa period onwards, the principle that the village itself had rights to ensure that village land was used to the benefit of village residents placed limitations on landlords’ power over tenants (Iwamoto 2003: 222).

Rural households were thus often able to draw on the wider community and on considerable powers of organization in resisting attempts to limit their access to opportunities to secure or improve their livelihoods. As already suggested, the Tokugawa system of local government facilitated the development of intra-village co-operation and leadership and opened up the possibility of inter-village organization in petitions and campaigns which strengthened the bargaining power of participants against the authorities. Walthall’s study of the campaigns, which began in the late eighteenth century, to reduce the price of Edo night-soil to cultivators in surrounding villages shows that inter-village networks could also be mobilized to promote the commercial interests of farming households (Walthall 1988). Experience of village self-government, of intra- and inter-village co-operation and conflict over irrigation, even of social, religious and cultural organization within and beyond the village, gave rural households organizational resources such that they did not always have to employ the weapons of the weak on their own.

6 Sakane (1999) argues that it was worthwhile for resident landlords to maintain long-term relations of trust with their tenants within the village, as this reduced the transactions costs involved in the tenancy arrangement, as well as promoting rural development through e.g. the provision of credit to tenant-farmers.



***Cultural resistance***

Most of the more recent work on rural unrest in Tokugawa and early Meiji Japan now concludes that participants, both in open protest and in ‘nibbling away’ at the structures of control and expropriation, did not see the objective of their actions as lying in the overthrow of the prevailing economic and political system.<sup>7</sup> As Vlastos concludes, ‘the aim of small peasants was the preservation of their present status as small proprietors’ (1986: 167). At times, especially in the earlier part of the Tokugawa period, this aim could best be achieved by communal appeals to the lord’s benevolence – and follow-up action if necessary – on the basis of something akin to Scott’s ‘moral economy of the peasant’. By the nineteenth century, however, it was the workings of the market economy and the activities of those within village communities who restricted the abilities of others to survive and prosper within it against which protests were aimed. However, although the same rhetoric and moral principles – the right to survival and subsistence – might be employed in the context of new threats and opportunities, there is little evidence of rural resistance to the market economy as such.<sup>8</sup>

One lesson to be learned from the study of Tokugawa peasant movements is that ‘moral economy’ political behavior, that is, protests and demands made in the name of the right to subsistence, do not necessarily, or even probably, imply a desire to return to earlier modes of production. The peasants understandably wanted protection within the new relationships.

(Vlastos 1986: 157)

So, if nineteenth-century rural dwellers were not seeking to overthrow the structures within which their lives were governed, how did they view their position within them and justify resistance? Studies of the education and beliefs of members of the urban merchant class during the Tokugawa period have shown them developing philosophical and ideological positions which justified mercantile activity and demonstrated its value to society (Najita 1987). Roberts shows how arguments that private profit and national (at this stage interpreted as domainal) welfare went together were being made by rural businessmen too, as they petitioned domain

7 Bix (1986), however, does continue the tradition of regarding peasant uprisings as revolutionary.

8 The exceptions to this are the ‘world-rectifying’ uprisings which occurred during the Tokugawa/Meiji transition years which did envisage more radical reform. However, these appear to have been atypical and short-lived, the product of exceptional circumstances, and even so the goals of the small-scale cultivators who took part do not seem to have been very different from those of rural protesters throughout the Tokugawa period (see Vlastos 1982).

authorities from the mid-eighteenth century, and developed into the mercantilist ideology adopted by domain governments themselves (1998: 137–44). Agriculture – defined as the production of food – needed no new philosophical justification, being regarded as the foundation of state and society within official Tokugawa Confucian ideology. Rural industry and commercial production for the market did, however, and increasingly found it in the works of practical writers on agricultural technology which represented the rural counterpart of the emerging urban-commoner discourse on the public good of private wealth-making (Havens 1974: 23–7; Smith 1988: ch. 8).

Meanwhile, however, at the level of the village community, the elements of a more traditional morality did not just disappear. Moreover, with its emphasis on the family/household and the corporate village as the basic units of government and society, this morality in some ways ran counter to the official ideological emphasis on the primacy of class status and feudal loyalties (Havens 1974: 22–3). The idea that the cultivating household had customary rights to survival in the status of cultivator and that superiors had a moral obligation to protect that right remained fundamental, but the definition of what constituted survival changed with changing economic circumstances. Thus ‘[the common people’s] focus on guarantees of survival broadened to include the opportunity to accumulate a surplus, and they began to object not only to new obstacles to self-improvement but also to existing ones’ (White 1995: 110). Demands that the feudal authorities or the rural elite not only provide relief in the face of environmental or market-based threats to survival, but also desist from activities which limited the ability of rural households to survive in, and profit from, the market, thus came to be justified on ‘traditional’ moral grounds.

Steele’s study of ‘everyday politics’ in an area of present-day Tochigi prefecture during the turbulent times of the 1850s and 1860s (Steele 2003: ch. 4) provides an example not just of nineteenth-century rural people’s use of the full panoply of weapons of the weak, and of the political sophistication with which it could be employed, but also of the strength and vitality of this distinctively rural political culture. Here, villagers made use of petitions, negotiation, mediation, collective bargaining tactics and threats, occasionally realized, of mobilization and violence, in efforts to remedy grievances and improve their position. Where the issue involved taxation or other activities of superior political authorities, both before and after the Restoration, the leaders of groups of villages allied to petition and to pursue political and legal actions; in other cases, poorer farmers came together to organize campaigns to lower the prices and interest charged by merchants and pawnbrokers within the rural elite. Whether successful or not, the significance of these activities lies, Steele argues, in the fact that they were driven by a ‘local agenda’ and applied traditional concepts of what was right and wrong to new political and economic situations, in

defence of local interests and autonomy. As a result, 'villages maintained a life of their own; local loyalties remained strong and able to resist outside intervention' (Steele 2003: 59), and rural communities and their ways continued as an element of stability through the political upheavals that produced the modern Meiji state.

At the same time, just as a distinctive rural political culture and morality were developing as the basis for political and economic activity in the new world of the market economy, so, it could be argued, elements of a distinctly rural material and spiritual culture were also emerging as rural households got better-off in that new world. Although, as far as the material culture was concerned, it was the consumption goods that made up the urban/samurai lifestyle that rural consumers desired, it is not clear that they simply sought to ape a 'superior' urban culture. Pratt points out that, while members of the rural elite did seek to acquire formal samurai status for the 'symbolic capital' that it brought, the point was to impress other members of the rural elite and enhance their reputations in pursuit of their business interests, rather than to gain entry to the political and administrative world that the samurai inhabited (Pratt 1999: 26). The development of communications, travel and trade which accompanied the growth of the market economy brought rural dwellers into contact with not just the goods but also the forms of entertainment, literature and religion of urban society, but their selective adoption and adaptation of what they discovered were marked enough for Walthall to be able to write of a 'distinctly rural culture' emerging in many parts of the country in the Tokugawa period (1984: 371).

Clearly the emerging rural elite acted as the conduit whereby cultural influences entered village society. By the nineteenth century, many had acquired a high level of literacy and used their increased incomes and leisure time in reading classical literature, writing and exchanging poems, keeping diaries and histories, and learning and practising pursuits such as Noh chanting, the tea ceremony and even martial arts.<sup>9</sup> They placed great emphasis on the education of their sons and even their daughters and on the accomplishments of an elegant lifestyle (Platt 2000). Their mere acquisition, as commoners, of these skills and practices was in itself subversive of the status system that theoretically limited such 'high-culture' activities to samurai. However, in general, members of the nineteenth-century rural elite appear to have pursued cultural activities not as a means of equipping

9 For examples of the provincial spread, during the early decades of the nineteenth century, of cultural pursuits such as flower-arranging, poetry-writing and the tea ceremony, see Nishiyama 1997: ch. 6. Nishiyama stresses the role of internal trade and commodity production in generating both the increased incomes necessary to sustain such pursuits and the developments in communications that stimulated their diffusion. Cultural communities, such as schools of flower-arranging, in the provinces had many more members from the commercial classes – merchants, artisans, saké-brewers, weavers and so on – than samurai.

themselves or their children for life in urban society, but rather as a form of self-fulfilment and as a point of contact with other members of rural elite society – it was within their rural networks that they exchanged poems just as they did business.

Much more subversive, however, was the cultural activity in which, by the nineteenth century, even the mass of ordinary rural dwellers had time and resources to engage. Increasing peasant participation in, and expenditure on, religious activities, such as pilgrimages and local festivals, was frowned upon and from time to time prohibited by the authorities, on the grounds that farmers should be working and not congregating dangerously and enjoying themselves, but to little avail. Moreover, village festivals came to incorporate performances of traditional drama forms, such as Bunraku, and Walthall argues that rural performers and producers did not just copy the urban repertoire and style but selected and adapted plays and activities to suit their rural audiences and participants (1984: 380). While in the cities, audiences sat back and were entertained, in the countryside amateurs performed, not because travelling drama troupes were not available but because ‘in so doing, they ensured that cultural activities at the periphery would not remain a mere reflection of those at the center. Instead these pursuits took on meaning of their own within the context of rural life’ (Walthall 1984: 382).

At the same time, the adaptation of imports from the city was by no means the only source of the developing rural culture. The products of folk arts and crafts were often preferred to more sophisticated urban-style alternatives. Although elements of the white rice-based samurai cuisine were adopted by those who could afford them, rising incomes also led to rising consumption of non-rice grains and the range of local food products still to be found throughout Japan. Local songs and dances persisted and in these, as in oral and written histories produced in rural areas, local experience was recorded. At times, this involved the glorification of heroes and martyrs involved in acts of resistance against the authorities or of anti-heroes in the form of gamblers and travellers and the subversive threat which rural culture involved was increasingly recognized in attempts to ban entertainments in the villages, which villagers in turn ignored or subverted (Walthall 1984: 390). The leader of a farmers’ protest march in one of the villages studied by Steele was tried and imprisoned by the Meiji authorities in the 1870s but was still being commemorated, with the erection of stone monuments, after the turn of the century. ‘Sei’emon had come to symbolize the ability of people to take matters into their own hands and speak out in defense of their own well-being’ (Steele 2003: 58).

Thus the rural culture and morality of the nineteenth century emerged out of the combination of the cultural forms and practices which were spreading outside the monopoly control of the urban ruling classes with elements of traditions indigenous to rural areas. At this stage, rural culture, like the rural economy, was alive and vigorous, and able to resist the pull of urban interests. By the end of the century, however, urban

areas, rejuvenated as the sites of modern cultural, as well as economic, life, posed a threat of quite another order. Moreover, during the Tokugawa period, whatever the problems the rural economy in practice posed for the authorities, the official ideology had been undoubtedly pro-agriculture, viewing cultivation as the fundamental activity on which the state, and its ruling class, depended (Havens 1974: 16–22). The new Meiji government, on the other hand, appeared to have little time for agriculture, or for the rural economy more broadly, and to the extent that it did consider it, seemed intent on transforming it along Western lines. In the light of these threats, the idea that the rural culture and society that had emerged by the nineteenth century embodied distinctive values which needed to be protected and preserved first began to appear. As later chapters will show, the force of this idea, which had its basis in the successful economic strategies and the vibrant, and often anti-establishment, culture of small-scale producers in nineteenth-century villages, was to influence agricultural policy and political attitudes to the rural sector throughout the twentieth century.

## **Conclusion**

Chapters 2 and 3 sought to demonstrate the economic and institutional basis for the diversified development taking place in the Japanese countryside from the late eighteenth century and through the nineteenth. This chapter has been concerned with the relationship between that development and the political, social and cultural environment within which it occurred. In particular, it has tried to show that the form of development enabled rural dwellers to exert political influence in favour of policies beneficial to their interests; to resist and subvert those who would expropriate from them and control their activities, and to develop a distinctive rural culture and morality which gave value and meaning to their lives.

It is certainly true that the economic growth and change that took place never put the rural population in a position where it was able, or indeed perhaps willing, to overthrow the structures of a political economy within which it certainly had very little overt political power, either before or after 1868, and in which the state and the ruling class were intent on extracting everything they could from rural producers for use outside the rural sector. Ultimately, there was no way of preventing short-termist feudal lords or rapacious landlords or moneylenders from reducing rural dwellers to poverty and degradation if they so chose. But behind the official face and rhetoric of the system, rural dwellers appear to have been increasingly able to combine their new economic strengths and resources with elements of an older culture and morality in ways which enabled them to manipulate the system to their benefit. In the fragmented political economy of the late Tokugawa period, the authorities were especially vulnerable to the weapons which rural producers could wield, but even the much stronger Meiji state learnt that it ignored the subtle power of rural interests at its peril.

As a result, although there was never even a threat of peasant revolution, rural dwellers secured for themselves gains which were perhaps more important to them, in terms of the objective of securing the survival and prosperity of their households, than the seizure of formal political power. Taxes were rarely paid in full and were generally subject to a degree of negotiation and compromise; controls and regulations could be subverted or made unworkable; the rural elite remained morally obliged to provide some degree of insurance for their tenants and clients against both environmental and market-based risks; village-based organizations could be formed to strengthen producers' bargaining power, and no urban official was able to prevent rural dwellers, as they did get better-off, from achieving enjoyment and fulfilment in ways that they chose.

By the end of the nineteenth century, though, everything was beginning to change. The urban economy, and urban society and culture, were reasserting themselves, undermining the strengths of rural producers and communities. Nonetheless, a century or more of rural development had created economic structures, political and social organizations, and moral and cultural capital with which the new urban industrial economy and society had to deal. The compromises that had therefore to be struck were to condition the nature of Japan's industrialization in ways which still persist and their legacy to the political economy is still with us.

# Conclusion

Describing and analysing the rural economy of nineteenth-century Japan as a whole presents numerous problems. There are no national-level (and only scattered local-level) statistics for anything but the last few years of the century, so that the only sources of primary data and evidence are micro-level studies of individual domains, local areas and even villages. In addition, although this is changing, still relatively few of these studies, given their nature and purposes, cross the Tokugawa/Meiji divide. On the other hand, however, they do provide something like the kind of evidence with which contemporary development studies works: the village- or regional-level case-studies of how technical change in agriculture, the spread of the market, the development policies of the state and so on affect producers and their communities and how they respond. On this basis, Part 1 has sought to present a picture of the nineteenth-century Japanese rural economy as a functioning system within which rural households responded to and in turn influenced the process of economic change and development.

As such, the rural economic system by and large functioned to generate rising incomes for much of the rural population. It undoubtedly imposed costs on some; it created new forms of differentiation and conflict, and Totman (1986) in particular has cast doubts on its environmental sustainability, given the much more intensive exploitation of natural resources that it involved. But, in the terms that would be used to describe development processes in today's Third World, it created employment, raised rural living standards and probably narrowed urban/rural differentials; it did not generate the levels of concentration and inequality in the ownership of land and other forms of wealth which have been observed elsewhere and it enabled the small-scale cultivator and manufacturer to survive and develop; it involved the application of improved labour-intensive techniques to the production of 'appropriate' food and other consumer products destined for relatively low-income and predominantly rural markets, and it provided the basis on which localities were able to resist, or at least be selective about, centralizing and 'globalizing' (where the world, for much of the period was represented by Japan as a whole) economic, political and cultural forces.

This picture has been built up using concepts – the virtuous circle, livelihood diversification strategies, weapons of the weak and so on – derived from analysis of the contemporary developing world. The economic historian's concept, on the other hand, which is perhaps most useful in locating Japan's nineteenth-century rural economy within the context of the history of other now-developed nations is that of proto-industrialization. Although the concern here has been to present nineteenth-century economic change on its own terms, rather than as a stage towards industrialization, the differences between Japanese and European proto-industrialization experience do suggest that a development path which has its origins in the kind of rural industrialization now widely advocated for contemporary developing countries may travel a different route from that followed by much of the Western developed world.

Thus, the emergence of specialized agricultural and manufacturing regions and of labour-force specialization prefiguring the factory organization of 'real' industrialization were not characteristics of Japan's nineteenth-century rural growth. Although there was regional specialization into different commercial crops or manufactured goods, households everywhere continued to practise agriculture alongside whatever else they diversified into and the growth of rural manufacturing simply helped to redress the balance between agriculturally well-endowed regions and the more marginal areas within and beyond them. Moreover, rural manufacturing in Japan was carried out on the basis of a (usually gender-based) division of labour within the rural household, rather than by means of a proto-factory workforce increasingly differentiated from agricultural workers. The complementary technical and organizational changes in agriculture and rural industry which made these developments possible constituted the mechanisms of the 'industrious revolution' through which rural household members were enabled to work harder and longer, but also to produce and consume more.

The Japanese historical case also reveals something of the conditions that might lead to this kind of development path. High population density (at least in the habitable areas) and relatively good means of communication greatly enhance the scope for rural growth linkages of the kind that underlay the nineteenth-century virtuous circle. The nature of the Tokugawa system, with its fragmented markets and decentralized political control, created scope for local rural producers which a national mass-market might not have done. The Tokugawa seclusion policy, though not as tight as once thought, certainly acted to (and may have been adopted in part in order to) promote import substitution and restrict competition from overseas, in ways that ultimately favoured the rural economy. By the time that Japan was once again opened up to international trade, rural producers were able to benefit from it, whilst at the same time retaining their position as manufacturers of the differentiated Japanese-style consumer goods for which a considerable domestic market had already been



built up. It might also be the case, as some have suggested (e.g. Bray 1983, 1986; Palat 1995), that irrigated rice cultivation, with its ability to support a large population on a small land area, its marked seasonal peaks and troughs in labour requirements, and its proclivity towards small-scale, intensive and often family-based production organization, provides particularly favourable conditions for the development of the kind of pluriactive rural household that drove Japan's industrious revolution.

For whatever reason it might have occurred, however, a century or more of predominantly rural-based growth, along a path different, in significant respects, from that described in the standard model of the pre-conditions for industrialization, created in Japan an economy and a society with distinctive characteristics which were to persist and to condition subsequent development in a great many ways. These are the subject of the remainder of this book.

## **Part II**

# **The agrarian transition, 1890–1920**



# Introduction

In his introduction to the twentieth-century volume of the *Cambridge History of Japan*, Peter Duus asks when the twentieth century began in Japan and concludes that it was in 1890 (1988: 4–5). Economic historians would now broadly concur with him, viewing the final years of the nineteenth century, rather than 1868, as marking the transition-point between the long phase of steady growth, based on agriculture and ‘traditional’ industry, dating back to the late eighteenth century and the ‘take-off’ of modern industrial growth.<sup>1</sup> Thereafter, the growth of the urban industrial sector of the economy achieved a critical momentum, as imported industrial technology began to be absorbed and demand for modern industrial products started to grow. Under the stimulus of the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, the shipbuilding, metallurgical and chemical industries were established and, as the technology of machine-based textile production was mastered, the output of Japan’s cotton mills expanded to meet domestic and, increasingly, export demand. World War I, which cut off supplies of imports from the West to Japan and other parts of Asia, provided a further boost to the industrial sector, creating boom conditions in the economy by the late 1910s. The post-war collapse of this boom ushered in a period of more difficult business conditions, but the 1890–1920 era had irreversibly established the modern industrial sector as the driving force behind the growth of the economy.

Much more than in the previous century, this growth was centred on urban areas, involving as it did the establishment of larger-scale industrial facilities and the suppliers and services they required. The period thus saw rapid expansion in the urban population and in the urban industrial labour force. At the same time, the cities increasingly became the sites of new developments in politics, culture and education, and of the diffusion of new, and to some extent Westernized, ideas and lifestyles. Japan’s cities

<sup>1</sup> For Minami, for instance, ‘modern economic growth’ begins in the mid-1880s (1986: 10–11). See also Wigen’s discussion of the limitations imposed by the traditional divisions of Japanese history (1995: 18–19).

began to be able to boast of such things as department stores, cinemas, cafes, Western fashions, universities and grand public buildings.

This urban growth might be expected to drive a wedge into the virtuous circle of rural growth linkages that had generated rising incomes and consumption in the countryside over the preceding century. New forms of employment in the towns and cities would be much harder to combine with work and residence in an agricultural household. Incomes earned in the city would increasingly be spent on new kinds of product in the manufacture of which rural producers could not compete with urban factories able to take advantage of superior access to imported technology and the services of modern financial institutions. For the rural better-off, the attractions of the cities, in terms of both investment opportunities and lifestyle, would begin to outweigh those of investment and spending in the village. As the links in the virtuous circle thus began to be broken, the first steps would be taken towards the creation of a distinct urban industrial economy.

As a result, from the 1890s onwards, Japan could expect to experience the first symptoms of the 'agricultural adjustment problem' which is part and parcel of the 'agrarian transition'. As outlined in Chapter 1, this problem reflects the hypothesized inability of the 'traditional'/agricultural sector, once modern industrialization takes off, to compete, on the one hand, with the modern sector in the markets for labour and manufactured products and, on the other hand, with imports in the markets for food and raw materials. The standard 'British' solution to the problem has been taken to involve increases in agricultural labour productivity, achieved through specialization, scale economies and eventually mechanization, as 'capitalist relations of production' permeate the countryside. However, historical examples suggest that, in fact, agrarian transitions can take a variety of forms, in terms of both the kind of agriculture that results and the institutional organization that can be sustained. Moreover, the idea that, once the transition is complete, agriculture is all there is to the rural economy has increasingly had to be abandoned, in the face of the multiple uses to which developed-country producers and consumers put the countryside. Hence, although it cannot be denied that, in one way or another, change in the nature and structure of the rural economy has been intimately connected with the growth of the industrial sector, the form of that change and the factors that condition it have increasingly appeared to be particular to individual economies and their histories.

The three chapters which follow examine different aspects of the rural sector's response to the growth of urban industry in Japan and argue that it has to be seen as heavily conditioned by the economic structures, institutions and culture emerging out of the previous century's rural-centred growth process. By the turn of the century agricultural policy-makers and rural interest groups were well aware of the problems that industrial growth was posing for the rural economy and locked in conflict with the

representatives of urban industrial interests, especially over the kind of agriculture that an industrial Japan should support. This conflict came to a head in response to the serious rioting that took place in 1918 in protest at high rice prices, as a result of which the direction of policy to deal with the agricultural adjustment problem was settled. However, this policy choice represented a compromise, reflecting the nature and strengths of a rural economy whose interests no longer coincided with those of the urban one, and it created the conditions under which the small-scale, pluriactive household that the rural growth process of the previous century had produced could begin, with by now some support from the state, to fashion its strategy for survival through the agrarian transition. It was during the 1890–1920 period, therefore, that the distinctive outlines of the rural economic structure of industrial Japan first began to be drawn.



## **5 The rural economy and urban industrialization**

As Part I sought to show, Japan's economic growth over a long period up to the late nineteenth century was based on demand and supply linkages between agriculture and manufacturing which operated for the most part within the rural economy. Rising incomes resulting from increases in agricultural production generated increased demand for manufactured goods, while increases in manufacturing output generated rising demand for agricultural inputs and food. Simultaneous increases in the production of both sectors were achieved through technical and organizational changes that enabled rural households to find the labour time required, while capital and technical knowledge were accumulated within rural networks of finance and communication.

The growth of modern industry, based on imported technology involving large-scale factory production in urban locations, would break a number of the links in this circle and tie the rural periphery into new relations with the urban centre. Whilst industrial growth might still depend on the rural sector for inputs of labour and raw materials, including food for the expanding industrial labour force, demand for its new kinds of product would have to come from different sources – urban consumers desiring different kinds of goods, other urban businesses, the state, perhaps overseas buyers – and would no longer necessarily be dependent on rural income growth. The capital requirements of large-scale modern industry would draw savings and investment resources out of the rural economy as new technology and new markets generated higher returns. Modern industries would demand labour in forms which would conflict with the labour requirements of agriculture, so that, in the absence of offsetting technological and organizational change in the rural sector, increased industrial production could only take place at the expense of agricultural growth. In other words, the modern industrial sector would grow outside the agriculture/industry linkages that had sustained the growth of the rural economy, drawing away rural resources through its impact on the markets for capital, labour and goods and driving the rural sector towards an agrarian transition based on specialist agricultural producers better able to deliver labour productivity and returns on capital comparable to its own.



This chapter therefore looks at the changing interrelations between the rural and urban and agricultural and industrial sectors as modern industrial growth took off in Japan in the 1890–1920 period, and considers, from a macro viewpoint, how far the predictions outlined above proved accurate in the Japanese case. It first describes the overall inter-sectoral and urban-rural flows of people, goods and money, and then looks in more detail at interactions in the markets for consumer goods, especially food, and labour. It thereby analyses the impact of the growth of modern industry on the overall rural economy and the ways in which the distinctive economic structures that a hundred years of rural growth had produced responded and adapted to the economic forces generated by the emergence of the urban industrial sector.

### **Industrial growth and urban/rural relations**

From around the 1880s onwards, official, national-level data collection in Japan had developed to the point of producing the basis for the statistical account of the changing position of the rural sector in the overall economy which is summarized in Table 5.1. From this time, industrial growth clearly accelerated, increasingly exceeding agricultural growth, with the result that industry's share of net domestic product began to rise sharply and

*Table 5.1* The rural sector in the overall economy during the transition period

Agriculture's share (%) in		
	<i>Net domestic product</i>	<i>Labour force</i>
1890	46.1	70.0
1900	37.7	66.1
1910	30.8	63.0
1920	29.5	52.1
Growth rates (average % p.a.)		
	<i>Agriculture</i>	<i>Manufacturing</i>
1897–1904 (downswing)	1.62	4.95
1904–19 (upswing)	1.81	6.80
Factory* production as a proportion (%) of total manufacturing output		
1890	31.5	
1909	46.2	
1914	52.6	
1925	65.2	

Source: Ohkawa and Shinohara 1979: Tables A10, A53, 2.6 and 2.4.

Note

\* Factory = establishment with five or more workers.

agriculture's to fall. At the same time, the proportion of manufacturing output produced in establishments with more than five workers more than doubled between 1890 and the post-World War I period, by which time around two-thirds of workers were employed in them. There thus seems an adequate statistical basis for concluding that industrial growth, a significant proportion of it apparently based on modern technology and organizational forms, took off in the late nineteenth century.

The extent to which this industrial growth also involved urbanization is harder to estimate. The overall population growth rate began to rise from 1890, increasing steadily from around 0.8 per cent per annum in the 1880s to a peak of 1.5 per cent in the early 1920s (Minami 1986: 43). Although the interpretation of statistics on the places of residence of this growing population before 1920 is difficult,<sup>1</sup> there seems little doubt that Japan's largest cities were growing fast, with the recorded population of the six greatest<sup>2</sup> almost tripling over the 1888–1918 period and increasing from 6 to 11 per cent of the total population (Taeuber 1958: 47). However, as Table 5.2 shows, although the proportion of the population living in rural areas was certainly declining, the absolute number continued to rise, so that while the cities may have absorbed much of the increase in population over the period, rural areas were not in decline.

Labour force statistics also fail to provide a clear-cut picture of rural–urban movement. The number of households recorded as agricultural varied little from the 5.5 million mark throughout the pre-World War II period (Kayō 1958: Table E-a-1) and the number of gainful workers in agriculture remained roughly stable at about 16 million, falling only over the period of the World War I boom (Ohkawa and Shinohara 1979: 245). Meanwhile, non-agricultural employment was recorded as growing relatively fast, at an annual average rate of just over 4 per cent in the 1880s, declining to around 2.25 per cent in the 1910s (Umemura 1969: 185), with around three-quarters of the increase in non-agricultural employment before the inter-war period accounted for by outflows of agricultural labour (Ohkawa and Shinohara 1979: 246). As a result, as Table 5.1 shows, agriculture's share of the labour force apparently declined significantly over the 1890–1920 period.

However, other data suggest that this growth in non-agricultural employment did not necessarily imply a concomitant movement of labour into full-time urban industrial employment. By the time of the first full-scale national census in 1920, over 80 per cent of the employed population,

1 For example, temporary migrants to cities tended to remain registered as members of their original rural households and to fail to cancel their temporary urban registration when they returned to their villages; changes in the official designations of particular areas, e.g. villages (*mura*) being redesignated as towns (*shi*), would affect the apparent rural/urban distribution of population (Taeuber 1958: 43, 47).

2 Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya, Osaka, Kobe and Kyoto.

Table 5.2 The rural/urban population distribution, 1888–1918 (population in millions; all data rounded)

Size of place of residence	1888		1893		1898		1903		1908		1913		1918	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Total	40.1	100	42.1	100	45.4	100	48.5	100	51.7	100	55.1	100	58.1	100
Under 10,000	34.9	87.1	35.3	84.0	37.3	82.2	38.5	79.4	38.8	75.1	39.9	72.4	39.5	68.1
10,000–49,999	2.2	5.5	3.4	8.1	3.8	8.3	4.4	9.2	6.0	11.6	7.4	13.5	9.0	15.4
50,000–99,999	0.5	1.3	0.8	1.9	0.8	1.8	1.1	2.2	1.4	2.6	1.9	3.4	2.3	3.9
100,000 and over	2.4	6.0	2.5	6.0	3.5	7.7	4.5	9.2	5.5	10.7	5.9	10.8	7.3	12.6

Source: Taeuber 1958: Table 13.

including 67 per cent of those recorded as secondary-sector workers and 63 per cent of tertiary-sector workers, were still recorded as living in rural areas (see Table 5.3), suggesting that a significant part, at least, of the observed movement of labour was still taking place within the rural economy itself. Moreover, as Tussing (1969) has shown, where rural households engage in both agriculture and another occupation but are registered statistically according to their 'primary' employment, inter-sectoral labour transfer is recorded only at the point where the primary occupation changes. This results in a tendency to overestimate agricultural employment in the early stages of industrialization (when agriculture is still primary) and underestimate it later (when non-agricultural jobs have become primary), and turns what may have been a gradual shift within the rural household into an apparently clear-cut inter-sectoral labour transfer. As later sections will show, despite the growing availability of new forms of non-agricultural employment, rural households continued to find ways of combining it with agriculture.

Hence, although industrial growth was certainly taking off, it cannot be concluded that the expansion of non-agricultural production and employment necessarily involved an equivalent transfer of people and labour resources from the rural to the urban economy. A similar conclusion as regards savings and investment resources can be drawn from Teranishi's analysis of the financial assets and liabilities of farm households. This concludes that, prior to the inter-war period, the outflow of savings from farm households into investment outside the agricultural sector was insignificant and represented only a small proportion of the capital accumulation on which industrial growth was based (Teranishi 1990: 66). Karshenas uses different estimates to reach the similar conclusion that net private capital outflow from agriculture was negligible before World War I (Karshenas 1995: 143). This suggests that rural households, including rent-earning landlord ones, were still tending to use any savings they were able to make to fund investment within the household or informally within the rural economy.<sup>3</sup>

The major source of 'surplus transfer' from rural households to the urban industrial sector therefore remained the land tax. However, although agricultural taxpayers continued to be taxed at a higher rate than non-agricultural ones and contributed the bulk of the government's revenue up to at least the turn of the century, the rate of taxation consistently declined as a proportion of the incomes of rural households.<sup>4</sup> What-

3 Karshenas and the creators of the data which he uses are concerned to estimate inter-sectoral (agriculture–industry) resource flows, whereas Teranishi is analysing the savings and investment flows of (pluriactive) farm/rural households. However, Karshenas argues that, on the assumption that the proportion of household consumption financed by agricultural income is the same as the proportion of household income derived from agricultural sources, the two approaches produce similar results (Karshenas 1995: 143–4).

4 Direct taxation as a proportion of income produced in agriculture declined from 15.5 per cent in 1890 to 9.2 per cent in 1920 (Karshenas 1995: 142).

ever the contribution of agricultural taxation to the growth of the industrial sector (and there has been much controversy about this), it therefore represented a declining outflow from rural households into expenditure by the state outside the rural sector.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, to the extent that rural workers who did find work in the urban economy (for example young women working in urban textile mills or domestic service) continued to act as members of their natal households and to make remittances back to their families in the country, there was an offsetting inflow of funds into the rural economy. By the 1918–22 period for which the first macro-level estimates of the inflow of non-agricultural labour income into agricultural households become possible, it amounted to the equivalent of 35 per cent of agricultural income (Karshenas 1995: Table 8.6).

Altogether, therefore, although the 1890–1920 period undoubtedly witnessed the take-off of modern industrial growth and significant expansion of urban industrial employment, the extent to which this involved the irrevocable transfer of resources out of the rural economy is less clear. Rather, although new kinds of urban industry certainly grew, the rural economy appears to have been able to retain much of the labour force and investment resources that it had previously employed. This would suggest that elements of the diversified rural economy of the previous hundred years, and of the flows of labour and other resources within and between rural households which it involved, survived and adapted, producing a pattern of agrarian transition rather different from that predicted by the standard model outlined earlier.

This conclusion is supported by evidence of the survival and development of what are generally called ‘traditional’ industries in the Japanese literature and typically defined statistically as all establishments with fewer than five workers.<sup>6</sup> Over half of manufacturing output was still being produced in such enterprises at the time of the first proper Census of Manufactures in 1909 and, although their share had declined to around a third by the early 1920s, the absolute value of their output had continued to rise (see Table 5.1 and Nakamura, T. 1983: 80). Moreover, the industrial distribution of such small-scale ‘traditional’ enterprises suggests considerable continuity with the rural industries of the preceding hundred years. Although the textile industries, in which only around 10 per cent of output had been produced in enterprises with more than five employees in 1890, were beginning to shift towards larger-scale establishments with the

5 Although impossible to estimate, elements of government expenditure must also have found their way back into rural areas. Government expenditure on agriculture as such was not great at this time, but items such as the construction of schools or railways in rural areas, using rural labour, or the remittances to their rural families of conscripted military recruits would constitute reverse flows.

6 The use of ‘traditional’ to describe industries in which small-scale producers predominate, although widespread, is misleading since, as later sections will show, the products and technologies of such producers were often ‘modernized’.

expansion of factory-based production of cotton and silk for export, most production for the domestic market remained small-scale. In the chemical, ceramics, metals and machinery industries, the proportion of output produced in larger factories had reached around 60 per cent by 1920. However, in food processing, which contributed more than a third of total industrial output in the period up to World War I, two-thirds of production was still taking place in very small enterprises at the time of the war and in lumber and wood products even more than this. Commerce and services remained the preserve of small-scale family businesses until after World War II.<sup>7</sup>

The continued importance of, and links between, rural and small-scale/'traditional' industry are clearly revealed in Nakamura's analysis of data on the distribution of the employed labour force taken from the 1920 census (see Table 5.3). Over 80 per cent of employed workers were resident in a rural area and over 85 per cent were engaged in 'traditional' employment.<sup>8</sup> The overlap in these figures is clear from the fact that almost three-quarters of all employees – many of them of course employed in agriculture but also including not far short of half of secondary- and tertiary-sector workers – are categorized as employed in the traditional rural sector. The proportion of urban modern-sector workers remained very small, even in secondary industry, and, although the urban traditional sector was far from insignificant, the persistence of rural manufacturing and service activity into the period of modern industrialization is clear.

The ambiguity as regards agriculture–industry and rural–urban resource flows which the macro-level data present therefore leaves open the possibility that elements of the economic relationships which had generated rural-based economic growth in the century or more up to 1890 – in particular, the demand for 'traditional' food and consumer products produced by small-scale, often rural, producers and the diversified employment and income structure of the rural household – might have been sustained into the period in which industrial growth took off. The strengths that this continuity gave to the rural economy, as it confronted the market forces generated by the growth of the urban industrial sector, are reflected at the macro-level in, for example, the fact that the agricultural terms of trade (the movement of the prices of agricultural goods relative to those of industrial goods) moved consistently in favour of agriculture through to the inter-war Depression period (Karshenas 1995:

7 All the above statistics are from Nakamura, T. 1983: 80–6. See also Takeuchi 1991: 17–19.

8 For Nakamura's definition of 'modern' areas of activity, against which 'traditional' areas are measured as a residual, see the notes to Table 5.3. Underlying this categorization is a standard 'industrial revolution'-style dichotomy between 'modern' and 'traditional' technological and organizational forms and it cannot capture any elements of modernization in the traditional sector.

Table 5.3 Distribution of the employed labour force by sector, place of residence and type of employment, 1920\* (% of total and of employment in each sector)

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Tertiary</i>
Share of total employment		55.4	19.4	25.1
Rural	83.7	98.8	67.1	63.2
Traditional	85.9	97.2	66.0	76.4
Modern urban	4.5	0.1	11.6	8.8
Traditional rural	74.1	96.1	44.8	48.4

Source: Nakamura, T. 1985: Table 8.9.

Note

\* For a full description of the principles behind Nakamura's categorizations, see Nakamura, T. 1985: 190–1. However, in essence, rural = resident in a county (*gun*); urban = resident in a town (*shi*); modern = industries introduced from abroad after 1868, including larger-scale manufacturing, railways, telephone and telegraph, modern shipping, banking and insurance, education, medicine, civil service; traditional = total minus modern.

Table 8.3). At the same time, Saitō concludes from his exhaustive survey of historical data on wages that there was no tendency for urban/rural or agriculture/industry wage differentials to widen before the World War I boom period (1998: ch. 1). In this light, the remainder of this chapter looks in more detail at how the market and labour supply mechanisms that had supported rural growth in the past adapted to the first impact of modern urban industrialization to produce the macro-economic conditions for Japan's distinctive form of agrarian transition.

### **Industrialization and the market for rural output**

In standard thinking about the industrialization process, it is through demand and supply forces in the market for rural products, principally food, that the demand side of the agrarian transition is brought about. Agricultural producers, facing rising wage costs as modern-sector demand for labour increases, find themselves increasingly unable to compete with cheaper imports of basic foodstuffs, in particular grain, while rising incomes and urban industrial growth bring about shifts in the pattern of demand for food. Meanwhile, the growth of the modern sector and/or integration into the world economy destroy the market for any manufactured goods once produced in rural areas, as consumers switch to what they see as the superior products of urban factories at home or abroad. The 'deindustrialization' of the countryside takes place and rural areas are left to specialize in agriculture, shifting to larger-scale specialized production of 'high income' food crops and livestock.

As we saw in Part I, both agriculture and the rural manufacturing sector in Japan had developed and prospered under the pre-industrial, 'closed-country' conditions of the first half of the nineteenth century and survived

the opening to trade and the subsequent switch to a new industrialization strategy, in large part on the basis of rising rural demand. By the end of the century, however, as the cities grew and as competing products from the domestic urban industrial sector and from overseas became increasingly available, the markets facing rural producers could be expected to change. If, as the macro data outlined in the previous section suggest, the rural economic structure that the previous hundred years had produced was to survive, contrary to the 'standard model', through the agrarian transition, the market for its products would have to be sustained and this section considers to what extent and how this was achieved.

### ***Rural non-agricultural goods***

As we saw in Part I, rural manufacturing and commerce grew up essentially to meet demand for 'local mass-market' consumer goods – processed food and drink products, such as soy sauce or saké; everyday clothing; the wood, ceramic, paper and lacquer goods that constituted the furniture and fittings of Japanese-style housing and so on. That the market for such products was maintained, despite the progress of urban industrialization, is demonstrated by Ohkawa and Rosovsky's finding that, even in 1955, about half of consumer expenditure went on 'indigenous' products, defined as those which would have been available before 1868, and over 80 per cent of the value of assets (apart from buildings) acquired by households before 1941 was accounted for by indigenous items such as kimono or Japanese-style bedding (Ohkawa and Rosovsky 1961: 488, 492–3). Whilst modern technology and factory organization could be imported and applied to the production of basic materials and infrastructure – metals, chemicals, cotton yarn, ships – and to Western-style consumer goods – Western-style clothing, beer, electric light bulbs – it was not available for the often highly differentiated Japanese-style consumer goods that had become part of both the urban and rural lifestyle as incomes had risen in the nineteenth century. It is the maintenance of that lifestyle, in the face of urbanization and internationalization, that goes a long way to explain the continued existence of a market for rural non-agricultural products.

The stability of consumption patterns can be observed in almost all areas of Japanese life, even as, after the turn of the century, increasing numbers of people began to move, permanently or temporarily, into the cities.<sup>9</sup> Housing, in the towns as well as the countryside, remained largely Japanese-style, with Western styles of building and furnishing to be observed, before the inter-war period at the earliest, only in urban public buildings and the occasional fashionable but uncomfortable room in a rich man's house. Demand for *tatami* matting, Japanese-style furniture and bedding and so on was therefore maintained, although some new products, such as

9 Evidence for the following description can be found in Hanley 1986.



electric lighting and glass for windows and screens, were introduced. Male urban office workers began to wear Western-style clothes for work in the second half of the nineteenth century, but Japanese-style clothes continued to be widely worn, especially by women, until at least the inter-war period. Some Western-style food and drink products, most notably beer, did become popular, but for the most part non-Japanese cuisine, involving the consumption of bread, meat products and so on, was not to be found on any scale outside exotic restaurants until after World War II. Western-style forms of transport, in particular the train but also in due course the bicycle, were used by rural as well as urban travellers and new forms of communication and entertainment were becoming available even in the countryside, but much of the service sector remained 'traditional', dominated by traditional forms of catering and retailing and by domestic service. Although the 1890–1920 period, in particular the time of the Russo-Japanese War and World War I, is generally regarded as a turning point in the development of Japanese lifestyles and consumption patterns as in so much else, change remained gradual and, in important respects, limited until at least the inter-war period, if not until after World War II.

It is impossible to assess exactly how much of the demand for 'traditional' goods and services continued to be met by rural producers, as opposed to urban suppliers closer to the growing urban markets. However, many rural areas had built up specialist skills, together with supply and marketing networks, for the production of particular goods, which gave them comparative advantages over new competitors and the benefits of a differentiated product. Moreover, as later examples will show, even where production was based in or organized from urban areas, the nature of the small-scale, typically labour-intensive production systems meant that ways could be found to utilize the labour of workers still more-or-less based in rural households. At any rate, few of the 'traditional' goods and services which consumers continued to demand were produced within a modern factory environment by full-time, permanently urban workers.

This does not mean to say, however, that rural producers ignored the opportunities that modernization opened up for them, as far as markets for their goods were concerned. As was earlier the case in the cotton textile industry, the use of factory-made raw materials enabled some 'traditional' producers to improve the quality and/or reduce the cost of products such as Japanese-style clothes, thus keeping them competitive against factory-made or imported alternatives. The substantial investment in the transport system, in particular the railways, at this time principally benefited rural producers by lowering the costs of getting their goods to their markets (Crawcour 1988: 420). Meanwhile, export markets began to open up for a range of low-cost manufactured goods that could be produced by small-scale industry. Matches, a new product produced for both the domestic and export markets, were manufactured under a complex putting-out system using household labour (Crawcour 1989: 419–20). The production of buttons

made from shell, mainly for export but also to meet domestic demand as Western-style clothing and military uniforms were adopted, developed from the 1870s, similarly on the basis of a putting-out system using rural household labour in the countryside around Osaka (Takeuchi 1991: ch. 1). Flower-patterned rush mats, produced in villages in the Okayama area, became an unlikely export success in the 1890s and 1900s.<sup>10</sup> As later sections will show, small-scale rural producers adopted new techniques and moved into new products in the effort, not just to remain competitive in their traditional products, but also to tap new sources of demand.

Despite the take-off of modern urban industry, therefore, rural households continued to find a market for the products of the non-agricultural work they were able, as a later section will show, to combine with continued cultivation. A number of factors, widely discussed in the extensive literature on small-scale industry in Japan, help to account for its survival on the supply side, but the continued existence of markets for its products cannot be ignored. This is not to be explained by tariffs or other forms of protection and, although it has to be said that Western producers of consumer goods did not then possess the marketing and advertising power they have today, consumer-good imports – for example of textiles – did succeed in making much greater inroads into the domestic markets of other developing countries at the time.<sup>11</sup> It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that a hundred years and more of rural-based development had produced production and marketing skills on the side of rural producers and a pattern of tastes and demands on the side of consumers that the emergence of a modern industrial sector, the growth of trade and even the movement of people to the towns and cities were unable to break down.

### ***Agricultural goods: the domestic and international markets for rice***<sup>12</sup>

In the historical cases of agrarian transition that provided the basis for the standard analytical approach to it, it is through the market for agricultural goods that the impact of urban industrial growth on the rural sector is most strongly felt. Industrialization brings about changes in the scale and range of market demand for agricultural products and, to the extent that domestic agriculture cannot adequately respond to these changes, pressure for agricultural imports to grow. For Japan, the 1890s mark a clear point of transition into this phase of the agricultural adjustment process. However,

10 They were consistently Japan's eighth most important export product and the value of their output increased almost seven-fold over this time (Kiyokawa and Makino 1998: 208).

11 For example, British cotton textile imports were displacing domestically produced cloth in many parts of Southeast Asia from the nineteenth century (Elson 1997: 16).

12 This section draws on material previously published in Francks 2003.

the nature of that process, and of the problems to which it gave rise, bore distinctive characteristics, related in particular to the demand and supply forces in the domestic and international markets for rice, which, as later chapters will go on to show, conditioned the policy response to it and hence the agrarian structure which emerged in industrial Japan.

The impact of industrialization on the demand for food typically involves initial increases in the requirements for marketed supplies of basic grain staples, combined, as urban incomes rise, with growth in demand for a more diversified range of fruit, vegetables and livestock products. In Japan, evidence on the diet of pre-industrial households is not easy to find but it seems to have consisted of a mixture of grains, including rice, wheat and barley, together with fresh or pickled vegetables, home-grown or sometimes gathered wild, pulses and, where possible, fish, usually in preserved form. Polished white rice of the Japanese variety<sup>13</sup> was the preferred grain, consumed undiluted with other grains by the urban upper classes of the Tokugawa period, but beyond the means of many rural households.<sup>14</sup> As incomes rose through the nineteenth century, households appear to have been able to adopt more elements of the 'high-class', 'rice + side-dishes' cuisine of the samurai, but information on per capita grain consumption, when it becomes available, suggests that, although they did choose to use some of their increased spending power on increasing their consumption of rice, they consumed larger quantities of other grains at the same time (Hanley 1986: 454–61; Hanley 1997: 77–94; Table 5.4). Thus the rural-centred growth of the period up to the 1890s seems to have generated increases in demand for the elements of something nearer to the traditional rural diet in which rice was consumed in mixtures with other grains.

Table 5.4 demonstrates that this pattern began to change as urban industrialization took off from the 1890s. Per capita consumption of rice continued to grow, but that of other grains stagnated, suggesting that consumers in the new environment of urban growth were beginning to substitute rice for the other 'inferior' grains they had mixed with it back in the countryside. Demand for other food products – fruit and vegetables, eggs, meat, dairy produce – was also growing, but per capita consumption remained low, by comparison with that observed within the increasingly diversified diets of other industrializing countries.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Japanese consumers appear to have expressed their rising income and urban sophistication through the substitution of rice for other grains, rather more than through increased consumption of 'Western' food products. In due course,

13 Japonica rice varieties are short-grained and become sticky when cooked, in comparison with the long-grained Indica varieties grown and consumed in much of the rest of Asia.

14 Rice has historically been regarded as a 'luxury' food in many of the less land-abundant parts of Asia. See Latham 1998: 28–30.

15 See Kaneda 1970: 414 for international comparisons of the situation reached by the inter-war period. For further discussion, see Chapter 8.

Table 5.4 Per capita consumption of grain, 1878–1937 (*koku*; 5-yearly averages; 1878–82 = 100)

	Rice		Other grains*		Rice as % of all grain
	Quantity	Index	Quantity	Index	
1878–82	0.778	100.0	0.299	100.0	72.2
1883–7	0.822	105.7	0.355	118.7	69.8
1888–92	0.952	122.4	0.376	125.8	71.7
1893–7	0.930	119.5	0.437	146.2	68.0
1898–1902	0.969	124.6	0.455	152.2	68.0
1903–7	1.022	131.4	0.433	144.8	70.2
1908–12	1.047	134.6	0.445	148.8	70.2
1913–17	1.071	137.7	0.440	147.5	70.9
1918–22	1.128	145.0	0.445	148.8	71.7
1923–7	1.125	144.6	0.399	133.4	73.8
1928–32	1.087	139.7	0.354	118.4	75.4
1933–7	1.080	138.8	0.310	103.7	77.7

Source: Kayō 1958: Tables K-a-1, K-a-2, K-a-3, K-a-4.

Note:

\* Wheat, barley and naked barley. To the extent that other staples, such as millet, buckwheat and sweet potatoes, were consumed, these data underestimate non-rice consumption and the proportion of rice in the total is overestimated. Nishikawa's estimates for Chōshū (Nishikawa 1986) give some idea of the discrepancy.

this tendency found its way into rural areas too, as personal contact with urban lifestyles increased through the urban employment of family members, conscription, the expanding media and so on. In a survey of household expenditure in a village in Aichi in 1901, the proportion of non-rice grains (*mugi*) in the basic food consumption of better-off owner-cultivator households stood at 20–40 per cent, while that for poorer tenant households was still 50–60 per cent (Okado 200: 346–7). By the inter-war period, residents of the village studied by Embree were still consuming *mugi* but claimed not to like the taste (Embree 1964: 38) and by this stage having to dilute rice with other grains had clearly become something of an indicator of the rural poverty that many saw themselves as having escaped.<sup>16</sup>

As far as the demand for agricultural products was concerned, therefore, the impact of the take-off of urban industrialization manifested itself most significantly in an increased demand for rice, the result in part of population growth but more importantly of the substitution, as incomes

16 Toshié, the Japanese rural woman whose life forms the subject of Partner's study, similarly recalls hating the rice, *mugi* and *daikon* radish mix that she ate as a child in a relatively poor household in the 1920s – pure rice was a treat and only better-off households ate it all the time (Partner 2004: 13).

Table 5.5 Rice balance sheet, 1878–1932 (1000 *koku*; 5-yearly averages)

	<i>Domestic production</i>	<i>Imports<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Exports<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Net change in stocks<sup>b</sup></i>	<i>Domestic consumption</i>	<i>Imports as % of consumption</i>
1878–82	28,993	31	250		28,774	0.11
1883–7	31,924	31	339		31,616	0.10
1888–92	38,574	565	855		38,284	1.48
1893–7	39,351	1027	694		39,684	2.59
1898–1902	41,701	1947	575		43,073	4.52
1903–7	43,862	4781	307		48,336	9.89
1908–12	50,354	2656	393		52,617	5.05
1913–17	54,373	3386	690	–297	56,772	5.96
1918–22	57,695	6305	429	–566	63,005	10.01
1923–7	57,721	10,008	1053	308	66,984	14.94
1928–32	60,811	10,379	960	–567	69,663	14.90

Source: Kayō 1958: Table K-a-1.

Notes:

a including colonial trade.

b not recorded before 1913.

rose and ‘urban’ lifestyles began to prevail, of rice for other ‘inferior’ grains. This was clearly reflected in trends in the rice market and in trade. In the period up to 1890, growth in rice output, supplemented by expansion of the acreage and output of non-rice grains, had been more than adequate to meet the growth in demand. As a result, rice exports became a possibility and for a brief period during the 1880s, while imports were negligible, rice became a not insignificant earner of foreign exchange.<sup>17</sup> After this, however, the pattern of supply and demand in the rice market began to change quite sharply. The 1889–90 harvest was poor relative to those of the previous few years, although larger than those of the first half of the 1880s, and resulted in a sharp drop in exports and the first significant imports of rice into Japan. Thereafter imports continued to increase, while exports paled into insignificance (see Table 5.5). Meanwhile, the price of rice rose sharply in 1890 and continued on a rising trend, absolutely and relatively to other prices, until the end of the 1910s (see Figure 7.1 on page 168). 1890 therefore marked a decisive change in the supply/demand relationship in the rice market.

Hence, although, as Chapter 6 will show, Japanese farmers responded to the rising demand for rice by accelerating the rate of growth of output, as in other industrializing countries imports also began to increase as the price of the basic foodstuff rose. However, the role that imports were able

17 In 1888–9, the value of rice exports was second only to that of silk and 11 per cent of the harvest was exported (Ōnameuda 1993: 18, 38). Japanese rice exports mainly found their way to Italy, where there was a market for short-grained rice of the Japanese type.

to play in meeting the growth in demand for rice in Japan was conditioned by particular peculiarities of the market. Rice imports into Japan for the most part took the form of Indica rice from Southeast Asia and their availability reflected the growth of the international market in rice which had been expanding since the mid-nineteenth century (Latham 1986). Increasing amounts of rice from Taiwan and Korea also began to enter the market, especially after the official colonization of these countries in 1895 and 1910 respectively. However, although Korean rice, having been grown under environmental conditions somewhat similar to Japan's, was closer in quality to Japanese rice, Taiwanese rice was of Indica type at this stage and most of the imports that entered the Japanese market were thus distinguishable as 'foreign rice' or *gaimai*. *Gaimai* was regarded in the market as inferior to Japanese rice – in some ways it was seen as a substitute for *mugi* grains and was often similarly eaten mixed in with Japanese rice – and a price differential of 20–30 per cent prevailed (Ōmameuda 1993: 67).

There was undoubtedly nonetheless some substitutability between Japanese and foreign rice, since their price movements were clearly correlated (Sugihara 1986: 717; Ōmameuda 1993: 89), and Brandt has shown how, in the period up to 1920, *gaimai* imports, although never representing more than a small share of total consumption in Japan, integrated the Japanese rice market into the international one (1993: 274–6). Agricultural interests in Japan recognized that, although the quality difference between *gaimai* and Japanese rice provided some degree of protection, this was by no means absolute and imports from lower-cost production regions such as Burma, Thailand and French Indo-China did pose a threat to Japanese rice producers. However, the preference of Japanese consumers for Japanese-style rice was (and still is) clear from the premium they were (and are) prepared to pay for it and as urban employment opportunities increased and incomes rose, especially in the boom years around World War I, more and more were able to exercise this preference. Thus, as they grew better-off, consumers came not just to substitute rice for 'inferior' grains like millet and barley, but increasingly to insist that that rice was of Japanese type. By the time of the Rice Riots in 1918, emergency imports of *gaimai* proved unable to stem the rapid rise in the rice price that had triggered the disturbances and Lewis concludes that by then 'the problem ... was not one of absolute privation. Protestors did not want just any rice; they explicitly demanded Japanese rice at a fair price' (1990: 31). Thus, by the end of the 1910s, it had become clear that urban consumers at least had come to regard not just a diet based on rice, but one based on Japanese-style rice, as indispensable to an acceptable standard of living.

The agrarian transition in Japan was therefore conditioned on the food-demand side by two particular characteristics of the market for the staple grain that remained central to the diet. First, for Japanese consumers, rice, unlike the basic staples of, say, European agriculture, was regarded as a superior food, with a positive income elasticity of demand at least up to a

certain level of income. Hence the first stages of modern industrialization produced rising per capita consumption of it, rather than diversification into a wider range of food products. Second, the preference, based on cooking qualities and compatibility with the other elements of Japanese cuisine, for Japanese-style rice over the varieties available on the world market meant that, as consumers became better-off, imports became less and less substitutable for the home-grown product, providing a degree of 'natural' protection which was to be supplemented, as later chapters will show, by the activities of the state. As a result, rice cultivation, which was central to the economic structure of the small-scale, pluriactive rural household, remained a viable activity, even though Japanese rice producers were not able, with the resources and technology available to them, to meet the growth of demand.

As Part I showed, Japanese rural producers were for the most part already heavily involved in the market economy, as a result of the growth of rural manufacturing and commercial agriculture, prior to the take-off of urban industrialization, and the Land Tax Reform, which required the payment of taxes in cash, had drawn them further into the rice market. By 1888–92, agricultural sales represented 54 per cent of agricultural value-added and this figure had risen to around 75 per cent by the late 1910s (Karshenas 1995: 132). However, although the growth of the urban industrial sector clearly affected the markets for rural output, it did not wipe them out or, indeed, alter them in ways which obliged rural producers to restructure to any dramatic extent. The markets for manufactured goods and services produced by rural labour were not destroyed by competition from modern industry and demand for the crop which had been central to the agricultural activities of rural households throughout earlier phases of development was in fact, despite the growing possibility of imports, increased by the impact of rising incomes and urbanization. Thus the markets for the products of the rural economy were, in some respects, expanded to incorporate the urban sector, rather than being broken down by it.

### **Industrialization and the market for rural labour**

In the standard model, the other route by which the growth of the modern industrial sector impacts on the rural sector is via the labour market. As modern industrial enterprises expand, they seek to recruit workers to new forms of employment as full-time wage-workers in relatively large-scale factories or other kinds of industrial plant. Such workers must be resident in the vicinity of the factory and will thus tend to break their ties with the rural areas from which they originated. In as far as such workers were in some sense 'surplus' to labour requirements in agriculture or other forms of rural activity, their departure would initially have little effect on wages and forms of employment in the countryside. However, in due course agri-

cultural wages would rise, in the face of competition from higher-productivity employment in industry, and agricultural producers would be forced to adopt larger-scale, more mechanized techniques which raise labour productivity and 'industrial' forms of management and employment. As landownership becomes more concentrated and wage labour dominant, rural 'capitalist' and 'proletariat' classes will thus come to differentiate themselves and what some have described as 'Fordist' agriculture will emerge.

Through a hundred years and more of rural-based development, Japanese farm households had devised methods of combining a range of different types of employment within their operations. How, then, did they respond to the emergence of the new employment opportunities that industrial growth generated? The discussion below looks first at forms of non-agricultural employment that did involve work in the towns and cities or at any rate away from the rural household and second at the forms whereby rural households contributed labour to the expansion of industrial output alongside their agricultural activities in the countryside. The borderline between the two forms is not clear-cut, depending essentially on how temporary employment and residence away from the rural household turned out to be, but they do differ in the degree of their approximation to the standard model of rural migration to urban industrial work described above. What is striking about the Japanese case, however, is that neither resulted in the disappearance of the pluriactive rural household or the emergence of 'capitalist relations of production', at least in their standard form, in the countryside.

### ***Migration to industrial work***

Although the 1890–1920 period saw significant growth in the urban population and labour force, as we saw earlier and in particular in Table 5.3, the number of urban workers employed under what might be considered 'modern' conditions was limited. Even during the industrial boom of the World War I period, the proportion of the labour force employed in larger-scale factories, and in other kinds of 'modern' employment in the government, education, the armed forces and so on, remained very small. Employers in modern heavy industry struggled to train and retain the skilled male workers that they needed and although the wages and employment conditions offered to such workers steadily improved, they remained drops in the ocean of the overall non-agricultural labour force (Gordon 1985: Part 1). The vast majority of those who left their villages for non-agricultural work therefore found it either in textile work, which accounted for at least half of the factory labour force through to the 1930s (Hunter 2003: 46), or in the 'informal sector' of small-scale businesses, self-employment, casual work and domestic service. As in all developing economies, these forms of employment represented, for some at least, the



first steps on the road towards more permanent life and work away from the village, but for others they were, initially at least, temporary ways of supporting themselves and contributing to the multiple incomes of the rural households to which they still saw themselves as belonging. Indeed, this was explicitly recognized in some of the recruitment and employment systems that non-agricultural employers adopted.

As earlier chapters have shown, rural Japan had a long tradition, dating back into the Tokugawa period, of temporary migration to work away from home, or *dekasegi*. Male workers from northern Japan, where winter agricultural activity was impossible, spent their winters working in mining, fishing and construction away from their villages; soy-sauce brewing relied on seasonal migrant labour; gangs of workers, male and female, were recruited from poorer areas to carry out specific peak-time operations in all kinds of commercial agriculture and manufacturing. Much of this migration was rural–rural and developed to cope with the varying seasonal labour demands of specialized agriculture and agricultural processing and to enable rural manufacturing employers, such as soy-sauce brewers, to utilize the labour time of those otherwise engaged in agriculture. Off-farm work for more-or-less temporary periods was also commonly undertaken by the unmarried daughters of rural households, who were seen as contributing to household income by being contracted to work as domestic servants or in the ‘entertainment’ sector.<sup>18</sup>

It was into this tradition that some modern-sector employers, particularly those in the textile sector seeking to recruit female workers, were to tap. As is well known, the modern cotton mills that began to be set up in the Osaka region from the 1880s, finding it increasingly difficult to recruit workers from the urban areas where the mills were situated at the wages they were prepared to offer, cast their recruitment nets ever wider into the countryside, looking for sources of young female labour. The daughters of rural households were recruited on contracts to work for fixed periods in the mills, with advances paid to their household heads and promises of the acquisition of savings and useful accomplishments for the time when they would return to the village to marry. In practice, conditions in the mills were such that many girls did not stay out their contracts: some returned home voluntarily or through ill health; some escaped to other forms of employment and/or marriage in the cities; some were poached by other mills, while those who did stay in cotton-spinning work and developed skills were eventually able to command better wages and conditions as skilled workers in the industry.<sup>19</sup>

18 Leupp describes the rise in the employment of female servants in urban areas during the Tokugawa period, suggesting that this was driven not just by economic forces but also by the desire of rural households to see their daughters acquiring the experience and sophistication urban life offered, before they returned to the country to marry (Leupp 1992: 62–9).

19 For more detail see Hunter 2003, in particular ch. 4 which examines the relations between female textile workers and their rural households

Nonetheless, most girls appear to have seen their departure for cotton-mill work at least in theory as a means of helping their families and enabling them to return to better marriages in the countryside and this was the principle on which such employment was sold to rural households.<sup>20</sup> The high rate of labour turnover, and consequent difficulty in developing labour-force skills, eventually forced textile employers to improve living and working conditions in the mills and their dormitories. However, they were still utilizing the same recruitment and employment system, now offering, for example, mill-based schooling opportunities and nicer dormitories, in the 1950s and 1960s, so that the principle that the female employee was a member of a rural household, temporarily in the care of the mill, rather than an independent worker in her own right, persisted, even under the very different labour market conditions of the economic miracle period.<sup>21</sup> Similar processes occurred in silk reeling, as establishments grew larger and struggled to recruit enough female workers within commuting range.

As a result, female textile workers remained members of their rural households economically, as well as socially and legally, so that much of what they earned ended up as part of the overall household income. Their contributions took the form not only of the advances on wages that household heads were able to demand from employers' agents, in return for their daughters' recruitment, but also remittances from subsequent wages. Textile employers paid significant proportions of their employees' wages directly to their families in the country and girls themselves appear to have saved substantial sums to take back with them (Hunter 2003: 279–87). Textile workers, especially in the silk industry, also frequently returned home to help out at the busiest points in the agricultural year and employers had no choice but to accommodate this, as long as they relied on workers who were still regarded as belonging to rural households (Tanimoto 2002: 287). Hence, as Hunter puts it, although employment in the textile mills and factories took new forms, it can still be regarded as 'an extension of the by-employment that had gone on for centuries' (2003: 287).

Meanwhile, employment opportunities for girls and young women as

20 See, e.g. Tsurumi 1990: 96–102. Similarly, 82 per cent of the licensed prostitutes taking part in a survey in Osaka in 1918 said they had entered the trade in order to help their poverty-stricken families (Garon 1997: 94–5). However, Garon also points out that poverty was the only permissible reason for being granted a licence to work as a prostitute and in general the kinds of evidence available on rural girls' motives for entering urban employment may tell us more about their response to official attitudes towards acceptable female roles than about the nature of their personal choices.

21 See Macnaughtan 2005. Newer post-World War II industries that also sought to recruit female workers, such as the electrical and electronic assembly industries, did recruit, for example, older married women, though still often on a 'part-time' basis, from rural households – for examples, see Bernstein 1983: ch. 6.

domestic servants were also expanding, as the increasing number of better-off urban households came to be able to afford maids. Domestic service continued to employ a higher proportion of employed women than textiles through to the late 1920s and Odaka estimates that around a quarter of the female population in the 15–29 age bracket consistently flowed into urban employment in either textiles or domestic service throughout the period from the 1880s to the 1930s (Odaka 1993: 17–20). Textile jobs generally paid higher wages, but required better educational qualifications and presented unfamiliar and possibly less acceptable employment conditions, so that some families continued to send their young daughters out as domestic servants as a form of training or to maintain family connections. Nonetheless, during the boom conditions of the World War I period, households employing maids had no choice but to raise their wages and improve their conditions, if they were to retain them in competition with the textile factories (Ogiyama 1999).

In such ways, therefore, expanding non-agricultural employment opportunities existed, even in the modern sector, in forms which offered workers, especially female ones, ways of working away from home but, initially at least, contributing to the income of their rural households. Such migration might well, in due course, result in a permanent move to life and work away from the countryside but meanwhile a significant portion of the expansion in non-agricultural employment, even once modern industrial growth had taken off, took forms which did not conflict with, and indeed may have helped to sustain, the existence of the pluriactive rural household.

### ***By-employment in the countryside***

Meanwhile, however, it was by no means solely through the expansion of employment opportunities away from the countryside that industrial growth affected the work and incomes of rural households in this period. Aoki's survey of available regional data leads him to conclude that the proportion of agricultural households deriving income from sideline employment was rising from around a quarter in the 1880s to a third by the World War I period, with regional levels varying from below 20 per cent in the least developed areas to 50 per cent or more in the most (Aoki 1988: 28–9). In the silk-producing region of Yamanashi, the proportion of workers whose main job was agriculture but who also had a side-job rose from 33 per cent in 1879 to 63 per cent in 1920, by which time the national-level figure stood at 45 per cent (Umemura 1970: 191). Rural regions in the vicinity of the big cities had the highest rates of dual occupation, but even in more remote areas, the range of manufacturing and commercial activities which could be combined with residence in the rural household (rather than involving leaving for seasonal or permanent work elsewhere) appears to have been increasing. Nakamura's collection of prefectural statistics for the 1890–1920 period

demonstrates that dual-occupation work was widespread and increasing throughout the country but, in the most developed and commercialized regions, industrial and commercial activity was more commonly undertaken by those who combined it with another occupation, typically agriculture, than by specialists (Nakamura, T. 1983: 114–17).

The textile industry continued to represent the major source of by-employment opportunities for rural households, even though cotton spinning and, eventually, silk reeling were increasingly carried out in larger-scale, often urban, facilities. The weaving of silk and cotton cloth for the domestic market continued to be performed by the female members of rural households under putting-out systems, as were numerous other textile-related activities, such as dyeing. The output of narrow-width cotton cloth for Japanese-style clothing, for instance, increased four times between 1885 and 1910, but even in 1910, 87 per cent of the looms were hand-powered and over half of them located in 'cottages' (Crawcour 1997: 84). In the Sen'nan district of Osaka prefecture, by the 1890s, over 80 per cent of farm households had become involved in cotton-weaving, using rented looms in their own homes, and the organizers of putting-out systems were beginning to create the institutions of an 'industrial district', such as trade associations, as they sought to differentiate their local product, maintain quality and restrain the rising wage rates demanded by their weavers (Abe and Saitō 1988).

In the industrializing world of the period, however, the continued expansion in rural by-employment depended on technological and organizational developments that enabled producers to respond to the growth in demand for both traditional and new kinds of manufactured goods and in fact gave them significant competitive advantages over those attempting to establish larger-scale factories. In part, this was a matter of using improved inputs and equipment, but it also involved increasing specialization amongst producers within the complex networks of production that emerged. Production processes were broken down into ever-smaller units, each performed by particular households who passed on their semi-finished work to other households to complete further stages of production. Whereas the merchants who had organized putting-out systems in the past had simply supplied raw materials and sometimes equipment to rural households and returned to collect the finished product to market, the organizers of these more complex networks, whilst still supplying raw materials and sometimes finance to producers, themselves became parts of hierarchies of what Takeuchi calls 'organizing agents', dealing with their counterparts elsewhere in the network and less and less involved in the direct marketing of the final product themselves (Takeuchi 1991: 168–9). At the same time, rural households came increasingly to own (or be buying on credit) their own equipment and to be beginning to develop into small-scale businesses, less dependent from the capital point of view on their 'organizing agent' but more vulnerable to business ups and downs.

During this initial phase of industrial growth, this form of production was adopted in a wide range of industries producing manufactured goods for the home market and for export, and the networks of producers spread out from the rural areas around the big cities into more distant parts of the countryside. In Takeuchi's example (1991: especially 50–6) of the shell-button industry in the Osaka area, the first button factories were set up in Osaka city in the early 1890s, but their owners moved them into nearby villages later in the decade and then broke them up, encouraging the workers they had trained to set up on their own. They established small workshops, but increasingly also farmed work out to sideline workers, usually women, in local farm households. By the 1910s, the numbers of sideline workers in local villages engaged in the various stages of button production had greatly expanded; some eventually acquired their own machines; some accumulated enough capital to become organizing agents themselves and a specialist production area was clearly emerging. However, as wage-costs consequently rose, organizers began to set up rival producers further away in villages in Nara prefecture where costs were lower.

The complex and sophisticated putting-out systems that emerged in the 1890–1920 period can therefore be seen, as Tanimoto argues, not so much as evidence of backwardness and the failure to develop a 'modern' factory system, but rather as systems that made possible the continued development of the production of both traditional, highly differentiated, consumer products and more modern goods within the context of a rural economy based on the pluriactive farm household (Tanimoto 2002). Such systems enabled producers to control quality and improve design, while maintaining the competitive advantages over factory production that arose from the ability to utilize the labour and facilities of the rural household. Overheads were low because workers worked from home; capital costs were further reduced as workers came to buy or rent their own equipment; much of the risk could be passed on to the producer household, and above all it was possible to make use of off-peak farm-household labour with low opportunity cost. For the rural household, involvement in such production meant hard work and increased vulnerability to the market and to the demands of the agent, but it did represent a means of increasing income which was compatible with the maintenance of the household's agricultural base. In many cases, however, increasing involvement in sideline work was the route towards the point at which agriculture became the sideline, and the small business, working within a local network, became the more important source of income. Hence the way was set from the organizational forms under which rural industry first grew in the Tokugawa period, through to the 'industrial districts' of small businesses and the sub-contracting networks in town and country which co-exist with 'part-time' farming in Japan today.

In Karshenas' comparative study of resource transfer between agriculture and industry in a number of developing countries, pre-war Japan stands out for the scale of the inflow of non-agricultural income into agricultural households (1995: 140–1). For Karshenas, this corresponds to a transfer of labour from agriculture to industry, but one which, as we have seen, frequently did not involve permanent migration to urban industrial areas. Alternatively, the same story could be told as one in which rural households, building on the skills and organizational networks that had emerged in earlier stages of development, took advantage of growing consumer and export demand, whilst at the same time maintaining their agricultural activities. This involved costs, including often long hours of work and the increased vulnerability of overall household income to market fluctuations, but it also diversified income sources and offered the prospect at least of tapping into the income-elastic markets for non-agricultural goods without abandoning the securities of agriculture and rural life. Depending on time and place, rural households were faced with choices as to how to try to take advantage of the expansion of non-agricultural employment, which ranged from full-scale migration and abandonment of agriculture, through more-or-less temporary migration of some members, to some combination of agricultural and non-agricultural work within the household. In as far, therefore, as the majority of rural households adapted to the growth of the industrial sector by finding ways of continuing, as many of them had done for many years previously, to combine agricultural and non-agricultural work within the household economy, Japan's agrarian transition differed from the standard model on the labour-market side, as well as on the product-market side, paving the way for the networks of small-scale businesses and the part-time agriculture which came to characterize the rural economy of industrial Japan.

## **Conclusion**

The Japan of 1920 was a very different place from that of 1890 in many ways. As the locus of economic growth shifted to the towns and cities, the lives of those who moved away from the countryside began to change: while not very many of them found themselves working in a modern factory or office, their urban working lives did not have to include the agricultural tasks that would have been expected of them back in the village; although many lived in very poor-quality housing, the amenities of city life – convenient transport, schools, newspapers, cinemas, restaurants – were available as soon as they could be afforded and Western-style goods and ideas were all around. Through the interconnections between town and countryside which the movement of people and the improvements in transport and communications intensified, urban influences made their way back also to the many who remained in the village, bringing them the more-or-less dubious benefits of modernization: glass for their windows

and kerosene for their stoves; newspapers in which to read of Japan's military triumphs in the world; political parties courting their votes; schools to change the way their children thought; town-halls to try to reorganize their lives.

Yet, as this chapter has tried to show, there were many aspects of people's economic lives that did not change in any dramatic way as industrialization took off, and the structures of the rural economy which had grown up over the previous century adapted but did not disappear. As regards their food, their clothes, their ordinary household goods, consumers for the most part retained the tastes and preferences of pre-industrial times, only picking and choosing those Western-style goods which fitted in and improved their lives. To the extent that industrial growth raised their incomes, they tended to consume more of the preferred and higher-quality elements in the 'traditional' consumption pattern, including in particular Japanese-style rice, with the addition of some Western-style accessories or gadgets, rather than dramatically change their lifestyles. The markets for the kinds of manufactured goods in which rural producers had developed specialist skills and organizational networks, as well as the products of Japan's small-scale farmers, thus survived and even grew.

As a result, continuities remained also in the working lives of many rural dwellers. Those who were busy meeting the expansion in demand for traditional consumer goods, and even for some new products suited to production within networks of small-scale rural producers, remained more-or-less tenuously part of the agricultural labour force. As industrialization proceeded, rural households, not just in the advanced areas around the big cities but also in the once more remote regions now increasingly drawn into the orbit of urban growth, were faced with new choices as to how to allocate their labour time between agricultural activities and the various forms of non-agricultural work. Relatively rarely, however, did these choices involve the household in either, at one extreme, abandoning cultivation altogether or, at the other, devoting the labour of all its members to nothing but agriculture.

Thus the first steps in the agrarian transition were made, not in the direction of differentiation into specialist, capitalist, even Fordist agricultural producers and a rural proletariat of wage-workers to parallel their counterparts in industry, but rather towards a modernizing form of the pluriactive rural household of earlier stages in development. These continuities did not mean, however, that differentiation and conflict did not accompany this process in rural areas and the next chapter will thus go on to look at the micro-level development of the modern rural household and at its impact on the power structures of the rural economy and society.

## **6 The household and the village in transition**

The last chapter examined the impact of the growth of the industrial sector on the product and labour markets through which the rural economy interacted with it. This chapter looks at the ways in which rural households and the wider rural economy responded to this impact. As agricultural producers, rural households continued to try to develop their production technology, in the light of the changing market for food, without compromising their ability to take advantage of the expanding demand for their labour as producers of non-agricultural goods. At the same time, they set about adapting the internal organization of their household economies and their institutional relationships with other rural households, in the attempt to strengthen their economic and market position. In this they employed strategies honed through their long collective experience of the struggle to secure and improve their livelihoods, but now adapted to the requirements of a more modern market economy.

Needless to say, however, some were better placed than others to employ these strategies. The impact of industrial growth and the nature of the rural sector's response to it were thus not neutral, as regards the ability of different kinds of rural household to take advantage of them, and they began to produce, in subtle but significant ways, changes in the balance of economic power in rural areas. With growth and prosperity by and large maintained through to the collapse of the World War I boom, the 1890–1920 period did not witness the level of conflict in rural areas that later decades were to experience. However, it was a period when outside influences – the education system, conscription and the experience of war in Russia, the widening of the franchise and the expansion of political activity, as well as the growth of the urban industrial economy – began to disturb the social and political fabric of rural life and to pave the way for the conflict and crisis of the inter-war years. The rural dwellers who went on to engage in what they saw as their struggle for survival in those years did so on the basis of the modernized household economies and rural institutions that had begun to emerge in the happier years of 1890–1920.



### **The development of the modern rural household**

By the end of the nineteenth century, Japan's villages had come through a long process of economic development and a series of institutional and political reforms which had, on the one hand, consolidated the position of the small-scale cultivating household as the basic legal and economic unit in the countryside and, on the other, removed the local, supra-village ruling class and incorporated the countryside into a national structure of taxation and government. On this basis, rural households, of differentiated kinds, responded to the impact of the industrial take-off in ways which altered, in gradual and undramatic ways, the economic and social structure of the village. The overall picture of this changing structure is outlined below, before we go on to look in more detail at the specific nature of the technical, economic and institutional activities of rural households that produced it.

#### *The distribution of land and the structure of the village*

As we saw in Part I, by the end of the Tokugawa period, villages typically contained one or more 'elite' households, who owned more land than they cultivated, commonly engaged in commercial or financial activity and maintained some kind of patron-client relationship with their tenants and other client households. Below them were the 'ordinary' cultivating households, who owned and/or cultivated holdings of varying scales, supplementing their incomes by non-agricultural work where they could. Some households farmed only a very small holding, by choice – artisans and craftsmen, shop-keepers and so on – or necessity – the very poor mainly reliant on wage work – and more-or-less itinerant workers with no rights to cultivate land in the village were sometimes accommodated, but in general the village 'corporate group', which constituted the basic unit in the local government system, remained composed of those who cultivated the land designated, by law and custom, as being its responsibility.

The Land Tax Reform of 1872 gave title to land to whoever could prove they owned it but did not fundamentally alter the structure of cultivation rights. In the majority of cases, ownership was vested in the cultivator but the ownership of around 30 per cent of the cultivated area was allotted to someone else, with the land being cultivated by tenants. The tenanted area almost certainly increased thereafter, especially during the deflationary period of the 1880s, and although the causes and extent of this have been contested,<sup>1</sup> the proportion of the arable area that cultivating households owned themselves gradually decreased to about 50 per cent by the inter-war period. Table 6.1 presents the available data for the pre-war period on

1 The growth in tenancy at this time has traditionally been seen as evidence of increasing poverty driving owner-farmers to mortgage and eventually lose ownership of their land. However, Smethurst (1986: 57–73) has argued that it may have other causes, such as land reclamation and the efforts of cultivators to expand the area they farmed.

Table 6.1 The distribution of arable land by ownership status and scale of cultivation, 1908–1940 (%)

	Proportion of cultivated area tenanted	Cultivating households by ownership status		Households by scale of cultivation in hectares						
		Owner	Owner- tenant	Tenant	-0.5	0.5-1.0	1.0-2.0	2.0-3.0	3.0-5.0	5.0-
1908	45.4	33.3	39.1	27.6	37.3	32.6	19.5	6.4	3.0	1.2
1912	45.4	32.5	40.0	27.5	37.2	33.2	19.6	6.0	2.8	1.2
1917	46.2	31.0	40.9	28.1	36.1	33.4	20.4	6.1	2.7	1.3
1922	46.4	30.6	41.1	28.3	35.1	33.5	21.3	5.9	2.7	1.5
1927	46.1	30.7	42.1	27.2	34.7	34.2	21.6	5.8	2.4	1.3
1932	47.5	30.5	42.7	26.8	34.0	34.3	22.2	5.8	2.3	1.4
1937	46.8	30.5	42.3	27.2	33.4	34.3	22.8	5.7	2.3	1.4
1940	45.9	30.5	42.4	27.1	33.4	32.8	24.5	5.7	2.2	1.4

Source: Kayō 1958: 94, 135.

trends in cultivation scale and tenancy status, which have commonly been used to indicate changes in the distribution of economic power and the class structure in the countryside. As the table shows, no very marked change in fact took place, but there is some evidence of a 'concentration in the centre', as far as scale of cultivation is concerned, and of a rise in the proportion of households who both owned and rented in land. These tendencies were more marked in the more commercialized and developed parts of the country, with more traditional patterns of economic and status differentiation persisting in the north and other remoter regions (Francks 1984: 89–90).

Thus most villages continued to be composed of households cultivating small holdings of paddy and 'upland' fields, ranging from those working enough, through ownership and/or tenancy, to support and employ a family labour force, to those with only tiny holdings whose main sources of income were elsewhere. Location within this range was by no means fixed, however, as individual households prospered or declined in their agricultural and non-agricultural activities. The proportion of rural households that either owned or cultivated the largest areas meanwhile remained very small. As we shall see, the role of the rural elite in the village economy and society was beginning to change, but, apart from a few very large-scale landowning households still to be found in the north of Japan, landlords typically remained relatively small-scale, rarely able to live in the style to which they aspired on rental income alone (Waswo 1977: ch. 1).

The new local-government structure instituted by the Meiji government to replace the feudal domains was based on a hierarchy working down through the prefecture (*ken*) to the county (*gun*) and then to the village (*mura*). The *mura* was intended to be a larger and more efficient unit than the smaller 'natural' village and its establishment involved the administrative amalgamation of groups of traditional village settlements. Nonetheless, the traditional village remained the unit with which rural households identified and within which they operated in their day-to-day lives, and attempts to transfer ownership of communal village property to the *mura* or to establish *mura* shrines to replace traditional village ones met with considerable resistance (Tsutsui 2003: 63–8). However, access to the institutions of the state was now through the new administrative village and its political leaders, and rural households had to adapt their community-based institutions to fit into the new local government structure. Their success in nonetheless sustaining them is indicated by the fact that, as later chapters will show, by the 1930s Agriculture Ministry officials had come round to active promotion of organizations at the traditional village level for the encouragement of technological improvement and local 'self-help'.

At this overall level, therefore, it seems clear that the strategies adopted by rural households as they responded to the impact of modern industrialization on their economic world resulted in the consolidation of the position of the middle-ranking household unit, owning and/or renting

somewhere between a half and two hectares of cultivable land, and of the village unit of which such households were the backbone. Very small-scale cultivators appear to have been beginning, though only gradually, to drift away to other forms of employment, while, at the other end of the distribution, no attempt seems to have been taking place to consolidate land into larger-scale cultivation units. The following sections look at the technological and economic forces that produced this situation and at the ways in which village-based organizations were beginning to be used to support the ‘middling’ rural households who increasingly held the fate of agriculture and the rural economy in their hands.

***Technical change in agriculture and the use of land and labour***

As we saw in the last chapter, the rising incomes and urbanization of the 1890–1920 period generated increases in the demand for marketed food, in particular rice, the relative price of which was rising steadily from 1890 onwards. As Table 6.2 summarizes, farm households responded to this with an acceleration, between the 1880–1900 and 1900–20 periods, in the growth of agricultural output. The growth rate of rice production almost doubled, although that of other field crops, the most significant of which were *mugi* grains, slowed down, while the output of silk cocoons continued to grow fast. Livestock production and the output of some field crops such as fruit and vegetables also expanded quite rapidly, but this was from very low bases and, as Table 6.3 shows, the shares of such crops in the overall value of agricultural production remained small, though growing relative to those of *mugi* and industrial crops. Rice continued to account for around half of the value of agricultural output through to the late 1930s, and its share was thus not very greatly different from what it had been in the 1870s (see Table 2.1 on page 29). The share of sericulture continued to grow through to the Depression years.

*Table 6.2* Rates of growth in agricultural output, inputs and productivity, 1880–1935 (annual average rates in %; 1934–6 prices)

	<i>1880–1900</i>	<i>1900–20</i>	<i>1920–35</i>
Total agricultural output	1.6	2.0	0.9
Rice output	0.9	1.7	0.4
Other crop output	2.0	1.4	0.7
Livestock output	6.8	3.8	5.6
Sericultural output	3.9	4.7	1.7
Commercial fertilizer input	1.6	7.7	3.4
Output per worker	1.8	2.1	1.1
Output per work-hour	0.6	1.5	1.6
Output per hectare of cultivated land	0.7	1.5	1.1

Source: Hayami, Y. and Yamada 1991: Tables 1–2, 1–4, 1.10 and 1–11.

Table 6.3 Shares of selected crops in the total value of agricultural production\* (%; current prices)

	<i>Rice</i>	<i>Mugi</i>	<i>Industrial crops</i>	<i>Fruit and vegetables</i>	<i>Livestock and poultry</i>	<i>Sericulture</i>
1888–92	51.2	11.4	8.1	7.0	2.0	8.2
1893–7	50.1	10.7	7.6	7.4	2.6	10.2
1898–1902	52.8	10.7	6.5	6.7	2.7	10.0
1903–7	51.2	9.7	6.0	7.7	3.3	10.9
1908–12	51.2	10.2	5.2	8.4	3.1	10.1
1913–17	47.7	8.9	6.3	8.7	3.1	14.3
1918–22	51.3	8.8	4.3	8.6	3.5	13.7
1923–7	48.5	7.2	4.6	9.1	4.8	16.9
1928–32	45.6	7.5	5.3	10.8	6.4	15.4
1933–7	50.2	8.9	5.6	9.3	5.9	11.8

Source: calculated from LTES 9: Table 1.

Note

\* Other crop categories included in the total are: miscellaneous cereals, potatoes, pulses, manure and forage crops, straw goods.

The increase in rice output was the result of the further development and diffusion of the package of improved methods, centring on high-yielding seed varieties, increased application of fertilizer and improvements to irrigation facilities, which had provided the basis for earlier agricultural growth. The 1890s saw the take-off in the diffusion of Shinriki, the high-yielding variety which was more widely planted in western Japan in the period up to 1920 than any other variety before or since. Improved varieties for the colder regions of eastern Japan, similarly bred by practising farmers, also began to diffuse widely after the turn of the century (Hayami, Y. and Yamada 1991: 70–1, 126). The success of these varieties depended on increases in commercial fertilizer input, the growth rate of which (in real value terms) accelerated quite dramatically over the 1880–1920 period (Table 6.2). This mostly continued to take the form of increased use of organic fertilizers, such as fish-meal and oilseed cakes, and reflected the sharply falling trend, from the 1890s, in the prices of commercial fertilizers, relative to both farm product prices and the cost (largely in labour terms) of self-supplied fertilizer (Hayami, Y. and Yamada 1991: 161).

As before, the continued improvement of the land and irrigation infrastructure remained crucial to the further effective utilization of improved techniques and inputs. In the long-commercialized regions of western Japan, the necessary infrastructure conditions had for the most part already been created by the end of the Tokugawa period and by the second half of the nineteenth century little new investment was required to facilitate the continued diffusion of improved seeds and techniques. Their diffusion to other parts of the country, however, required substantial

investment to bring the level of irrigation facilities up to that in the more advanced southwest. Whereas in the past such projects had been supported and organized by the feudal authorities or the rural elite, by this stage the organization and financial resources of the state were increasingly required. Legislation passed from the turn of the century provided for the establishment and subsidy of local organizations to carry out land improvement projects and, although such schemes were at this stage relatively small-scale ones, the area covered by them was beginning to rise sharply by the 1910s (Hayami, Y. and Yamada 1991: 142).

Sources of output growth for crops other than rice appear to have been less forthcoming, however. Arashi's estimates of the proportion of the paddy area double-cropped suggest that it rose on average from 27 per cent in 1884 to 47 per cent in 1907, by which time around 70 per cent of the area was double-cropped in advanced regions such as Kinki, Kyūshū and Shikoku, but much lower proportions in the northeast. However, between then and 1933, there appears to have been little change in the proportion, either overall or regionally.<sup>2</sup> The area planted to *mugi* rose from 1.4 million hectares in the years around 1880 to a peak of 1.8 million hectares in the mid-1900s, but thereafter fell back down below 1.4 million by the late 1920s (Kayō 1958: 228–9), reflecting the change in grain demand patterns described in Chapter 5. Although the areas planted to a wide range of fruit and vegetable crops were certainly increasing by the 1910s, they remained very small, relative to the grain acreage, and the extent to which farm households used the opportunity provided by increases in the productivity of grain cultivation to become more diversified in their agricultural operations appears to have been limited.

The exception to this rule, though, was silk. Cultivation of many of the industrial crops that had been central to the expansion of agriculture and rural industry in earlier times was being abandoned, by the turn of the century, in the face of competition from imports or factory-made alternatives: cotton is the obvious example here but, for example, indigo ceased to be cultivated when synthetic alternatives became available. Silk production, however, was sustained by the growth in export demand and the acreage devoted to it more than doubled between 1890 and 1920 (Kayō 1958: 308). This could only be achieved through the continued expansion of sericulture beyond the mountainous areas, not well suited to the cultivation of rice or other crops, where it had typically been concentrated in the Tokugawa and early Meiji periods, and this was made possible by the diffusion of the summer/fall method of raising silkworms. As sericulture spread to new areas and technical improvements were made to summer/fall production, the proportion of cocoon output derived from it rose from around 25 per cent in 1890 to 50 per cent in 1920 (Nghiep and

2 Arashi 1975: 45; Kayō 1958: 72 gives slightly lower proportions throughout.

Hayami 1991: 181). Diversification of the 'rice + silk' form, principally concentrated in the regions to the north and west of Tokyo, thus stands out as the only agricultural diversification strategy adopted on any significant scale by farm households in this period.

The spread of the technical changes on which output growth was based continued to affect the pattern of input use and the relative productivities of factors of production. The changes were clearly still land-saving, in that they permitted more intensive and higher-yielding use of available land, and agricultural output per hectare continued to rise at a steady rate (Table 6.2).<sup>3</sup> The national average rice yield increased from around 1.3 *koku/tan* in the 1880s to about 1.9 by the late 1910s (Kayō 1958: 226). This was achieved in large part, as we have seen, through increases in inputs of fertilizers, and current inputs from off the farm (almost entirely fertilizers and feeds) were growing in real terms at 1.8 per cent per annum in 1880–1900 and 4.7 per cent in 1900–20 (Hayami, Y. and Yamada 1991: 39). Households were also investing to some extent in their fixed capital, and their stock of livestock and tools/implements was increasing, though at nowhere near the growth rate of current inputs (LTES 9: Table 28).

Meanwhile, although technical change was not in any straightforward sense labour-saving, it nonetheless continued to produce significant increase in agricultural labour productivity, where this is measured as output per agricultural worker (Table 6.2). However, although the overall agricultural labour force was stagnant or marginally declining, work-hours per worker are estimated to have been growing at 1.2 per cent per annum over 1880–1900 and 0.5 per cent over 1900–20, so that output per hour worked grew less fast than output per worker (Table 6.2; see also Table 8.5 on page 211). As in earlier years, this reflects the way in which technical changes were designed to make increased use of the time of the labour force available to agriculture and although they thus meant that workers in rural households worked longer hours, they also implied an increase in the value of those workers in agriculture which was reflected in rises in agricultural wage rates of 1.6 per cent per annum in 1890–1900 and 1.2 per cent in 1900–20 (Hayami, Y. and Yamada 1991: 41).

The technical change on which the significant growth of agricultural output in this period was based could thus be characterized, like that of the preceding period, as raising land and labour productivity through the increased application of current inputs and of the labour time of members of rural households. It increased the dependence of farm households on inputs from the non-agricultural sector and it required, as later sections will show, increased involvement with outside sources of technical knowledge. However, it involved nothing that would have produced economies of scale

3 The cultivable area was still expanding slowly during the 1890–1920 period, but almost all of the expansion was in Hokkaidō or other parts of northern Japan and involved very marginal land.

and indeed it continued to place a premium on the knowledge, skill and dedicated labour of the family labour force. At the same time, it also proved, as before, to be compatible with the forms of technical and institutional change taking place in the non-agricultural sector, so that increased labour demands in agriculture did not conflict with the ability of some members of rural households to take up employment opportunities in other sectors.

### ***The economies of rural households: diversification and differentiation***

This pattern of technical change in agriculture presented rural households with the means to respond to growth and change in the market for agricultural output, particularly through increases in rice output, but also through some diversification into silk and higher-income food products. Meanwhile, as we saw in Chapter 5, they were also facing growth and change in the market for their non-agricultural labour. It is clear that large numbers of rural households responded to the expanding range of choices open to them in ways which enabled them to continue as agricultural producers while taking advantage of the changing possibilities of earning income through non-agricultural work. However, the characteristics of economic and technological change meant that some kinds of household were better able than others to do this, producing the conditions for the gradual shift in the distribution of economic power in the village reflected in Table 6.1.

Data on the structure of rural household incomes, and of the role within them of non-agricultural earnings, whether from *dekasegi* work or by-employment, are rare for the period before 1920, when the first official Farm Household Economy Survey was undertaken. However, Odaka cites a survey carried out in 1890 which estimated that the proportion of farm household income derived from manufacturing by-employment ranged regionally from 11 to 21 per cent (1988: 11). There is also a good deal of evidence that the remittances of female textile-mill workers, which came as cash lump sums at useful times of the year, made a significant difference to household finances (Hunter 2003: 283–6). Nishikawa's data for 1909 from a district of Yamanashi in which rural households combined farming with silk production show female workers earning more than enough to pay for an annual subsistence level of rice through three months' work in silk spinning or reeling (1990: 87–8, 105–7). The Farm Household Economy Survey data available from 1920 are based on a sample generally taken to be somewhat biased towards the 'core' middle and upper-middle households cultivating 1–2 hectares. However, even these solid agricultural households were, by the early 1920s, deriving on average around 30 per cent of their income from outside agriculture (Kayō 1958: 438).<sup>4</sup> Rural

4 For further discussion and use of the Farm Household Economy Survey data for later years, see Chapter 8.



households of all scales and ownership types therefore appear to have been utilizing at least part of the increase in the productivity of their labour in agriculture to release work time into non-agricultural occupations.

The means to do this essentially involved the continuation of the income diversification strategy, based on the gender division of labour within the household, that had been established over the preceding century. Both agricultural diversification into silk and household-based by-employment continued to involve activities carried out by women, including all the stages in the care of silkworms as well as the spinning and weaving of cotton and silk for the domestic market. However, new products, such as the shell-buttons discussed earlier, were also often produced by means of female household-based labour and the growth in opportunities for *dekasegi*-type work was, as we have seen, largely concentrated in areas of female employment, notably in textiles and domestic service. The stagnation in the spread of double-cropping mentioned earlier may reflect the beginnings of a trend, to become much more marked in the inter-war period, towards efforts to ease the release of male agricultural workers for off-farm employment, but at this stage it was still largely through the utilization of the time of female household members, on and off the farm, that rural households took advantage of the changing opportunities for earning non-agricultural income.

Meanwhile, the technical changes in agriculture which enabled rural households to respond to the growth in demand for agricultural products, in particular rice and silk, continued to facilitate this form of income diversification. Although increases in the labour input of core family workers and peak-time help from others were still required, the off-peak time of older women workers and younger sons and daughters remained available for non-agricultural work, provided that it took a form compatible with membership of a rural household. Households with very small holdings, especially where much of the land they cultivated was not their own, might find themselves gradually abandoning commercial agriculture in order to maximize their non-agricultural earnings, but for the majority of households, it appears to have remained possible to put together a combination of income-earning activities adapted to their prevailing family structures, land availability and local employment opportunities.

For households owning or cultivating the largest areas, however, the diffusion of high-yielding rice cultivation techniques and the household diversification strategies linked to them continued to present a number of problems. Yagi, analysing available farm household economy data for 1890–1912, found landlord households reducing the area they cultivated themselves, in the face of rising costs, while middle-scale owner and even tenant households were improving their positions through agricultural improvements, of which they were now the pioneers, and increasing non-agricultural income (Yagi 1990: 148–51). Data on agricultural wages and

rents further confirm the impact of such trends. Brandt's calculations using LTES data demonstrate that, between the late 1880s and the late 1920s, daily and annual wage rates in agriculture approximately doubled in real terms, reflecting the increased productivity of family workers as members of their household labour forces and the growing competition for labour from the non-agricultural sector (Brandt 1993: 270; see also Napier 1982: 346). Larger-scale cultivators could respond to the increasing difficulty in securing the labour they needed to farm their holdings, as they had been doing in the most commercialized parts of the country from Tokugawa times, by reducing their scale of cultivation and renting out land to the smaller-scale cultivators better able to take advantage of improved techniques and diversification strategies. However, Napier's model shows how the effects of rising wages and demand for labour also worked their way through to the rental market. Real average rents stagnated after the turn of the century, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of output per hectare, so that, as the impact of industrial growth spread, the relative economic returns to larger-scale landownership were clearly declining.<sup>5</sup>

Thus it was the small-to-medium scale, diversified rural household that appears to have had most to gain from advances in agricultural technology and the impact of modern-sector employment on the countryside. However, taking advantage of these changes required the ability to acquire and adopt more complex and 'scientific' agricultural techniques; it meant increased dependence on outside supplies of inputs and access to the financial resources or credit to pay for them; for many households it led to greater involvement with outside employers or 'organizers' and perhaps the acquisition of manufacturing equipment and other attributes of non-agricultural small businesses, and in general it made the household's income more dependent on the ability to deal with the fluctuations in prices and wages that the growth of the non-agricultural economy imposed. In this context, smaller-scale rural households were likely to suffer from weaknesses and vulnerability but, as the next section will show, they were able to draw on both their own organizational resources and, to a growing extent, the support of the state, as they began to emerge, during this period, as modern multifunctional rural households.

### ***Organizing for the new economy***

As previous chapters have shown, Japanese rural communities had been using local organizations to promote their security and interests since the Tokugawa period. At the same time, however, as the commercial economy

5 Brandt 1993: 270, Napier 1982: 357, both using LTES data. Rents on paddy land continued to rise in absolute terms until the end of the 1910s but rents on non-paddy land had begun to fall quite sharply before this. In general, rents fell relative to output throughout the period up to 1937 (Napier 1982: 357).

spread, it had been through the activities of the local elite that rural producers' access to technical knowledge, finance and markets had typically been organized. The impact of industrial growth in the 1890–1920 period presented rural households with new challenges beyond the capacities of the existing structures through which interaction with the outside world had been managed and of the rural elite which had largely managed them. Nonetheless, new or adapted forms of rural organization provided households with weapons to use in the fight for security and prosperity in the new situation, just as earlier forms had done for their pre-industrial counterparts. In particular, they provided access to the resources of the state, even as the state itself sought to co-opt such organizations into its structures for control of the countryside.

The technological developments on which agricultural output growth was based depended for the most part, as in previous periods, on the experimental activities of practising farmers. By the turn of the century, the agricultural authorities had abandoned their initial flirtation with large-scale, Western-style farming techniques and had begun to turn, on the one hand, to chemistry and plant-breeding science and, on the other, to indigenous knowledge, in their programmes to promote technical improvement in Japanese agriculture. The National Agricultural Experiment Station was established in 1893 and a law of 1899 provided for state subsidy for prefectural experiment stations. However, the resources devoted to agricultural research and education, and the scientific capacities of those engaged in them, remained limited (Hayami, Y. and Yamada 1991: 69–70).<sup>6</sup> The technical advances of the period, including, for example, the development of Shinriki, continued therefore to come from the private sector and hence, as we have seen, to reflect the economic needs and technological capacities of the mass of practising farmers in the villages. It was rather in the mechanisms for the diffusion of such advances that the main moves to organize and professionalize local-level activities were to be seen.

Local-level organizations for the diffusion of agricultural knowledge and improvements date back to the early Meiji period (if not earlier), in the form of agricultural discussion groups, seed-exchange societies and so on. The initiative behind these was often that of the local elite who continued to act as the main channel for the introduction of new methods into the villages through the second half of the nineteenth century. However, as the economic returns they could reap from direct involvement in agriculture, and in rural life more widely, began to decline, the interests of the elite turned increasingly to matters such as quality control for rental rice and the other agricultural products on which their rural businesses

6 The Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce's entire budget for agriculture in 1900 amounted to ¥1.2 million, when in the same year it spent ¥7.1 million on setting up the Yahata steel mill (Imamura 1978: 84).

depended (Waswo 1977: 35–56). Nonetheless village-level organizations for the dissemination of new agricultural techniques continued and were increasingly encouraged by agricultural officials in the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce. Maeda Masana's National Agricultural Association, reorganized as the Imperial Agricultural Association in 1910, became the vehicle whereby the state was able to co-opt such local groups into a semi-official national organization reaching down, through a hierarchy of prefectural and local-level associations, into the villages. The Association itself is generally taken to have been landlord-dominated and to have acted at the national political level as an interest group in favour of, for example, tariff protection for agricultural goods. However, membership in its local branches was legally compulsory for farm households and associations also worked, for example through the employment of extension officers, for the diffusion of improved methods to practising farmers.

This kind of formalization of local-level organizations for the purposes of state support/control was also taking place in other areas of the economic and wider social life of villages. Under legislation of 1890 and 1902, traditional intra- and inter-village irrigation organizations were permitted to become legal bodies (*suiri kumiai* = irrigation unions) with formal rules on membership, operation of facilities and so on. Once organized in this way, they were able to apply for subsidized credit under government schemes to promote irrigation and other land infrastructure improvements. More widely, a range of traditional village groupings, such as young men's groups and women's groups, were formalized into official organizations, particularly under the Home Ministry's campaigns of the 1900s for 'local improvement' and 'self reliance' (Gluck 1985: 189–204; Waswo 1988: 571–6).

At the same time, new forms of rural organization were also being promoted to meet the needs of households operating in the commercial economy, and to provide an alternative to the functions of the patron/landlord household which the rural elite were increasingly less willing and able to perform. Credit for agricultural investment was made available through various central- and local-government banks, such as the Hypothec Bank set up in 1897, and through the agricultural associations. Although initially this was mainly directed towards larger-scale infrastructure projects, by 1911 over a third of rural household borrowing was coming from 'modern' sources, including the specialist banks and credit associations, which were gradually replacing 'traditional' sources – mainly family and friends and professional moneylenders (Teranishi 1990: 52). The widespread establishment of the post-office savings system, in rural as well as urban areas, also provided rural households with a safe deposit for any savings they could make and, in 1909, the Deposit Bureau of the Ministry of Finance, which received the postal savings deposits, instituted a scheme for recycling some of the large amount of rural deposits – by the end of the nineteenth century, around 30 per cent of deposits came from

rural households – into low-interest credit for agricultural organizations (Kato 1970: 336–7).

In addition, this period saw the establishment of the first rural co-operatives in Japan. These grew out of traditional village-based mutual aid societies and quality-control and marketing organizations set up by producers of specialist products such as tea and silk (Kawagoe 1993) but were formalized under various pieces of legislation passed around the turn of the century permitting credit, purchasing, marketing and production co-operatives.<sup>7</sup> A national organization for co-operatives was set up in 1905 and their numbers increased rapidly thereafter (Gluck 1985: 190). However, although by the inter-war period co-operatives were beginning to play a significant role in, for example, the provision of inputs to farmers and the marketing of output, before then most households continued to rely on private-sector suppliers and traders. These were nonetheless quite heavily regulated, through measures introduced from 1899 onwards, in an effort to protect farmers from fraud, and rural households continued to benefit from the steady decline in the relative price of fertilizer.

The 1890–1920 period thus saw the establishment of a range of local-level organizations, many formalized and supported by the state, through which practising rural producers grouped together, more or less voluntarily, to strengthen their position in their dealings with the increasingly modern and industrial outside world. Through agricultural associations they learned of new farming methods and, in due course, of the results of the work of experiment stations and agricultural research institutes; through irrigation co-operatives and producers' associations, they gained access to credit from the modern financial system; eventually rural co-operatives would provide a whole range of services through which households could deal with the market economy. The formalization and co-optation of rural groupings which this involved created a semi-official and to some extent state-run organizational structure intermediating between rural producers and the wider economic world.

Yet, for all the efforts, by the Home Ministry in particular, to organize rural groups in the interests of 'efficient' local government and control, this structure can also be seen as providing the framework within which the traditional village adapted to the new economy and lived on. Although the official versions of village organizations were all based in the new administrative village centres, it was soon recognized that, if they were to be effective, they had to have branches in the traditional villages (Waswo 1988: 575). Some traditional village groupings survived even without official status and funding, as mutual aid societies, agricultural discussion groups and so on, eventually to be recognized, in the 1930s, as essential agents for agricultural improvement in the villages (Waswo 1988: 598).

7 These were known, under the law, as industrial co-operatives (*sangyō kumiai*), although in fact most were agricultural.

Traditional forms of small-scale, rotating savings associations continued to be widely used to provide mutual credit outside the formal financial system (Izumida 1992). Moreover, although officials initially seemed to have hoped that the old elite would continue to supply the leadership of rural organizations and act as the state's agents in the countryside, they increasingly came to recognize that the effectiveness of government programmes depended on the involvement of the core practising farmers in the villages. Thus, although the insitutionalization of rural groups in the interests of the modernization of the countryside might have served the interests of the state, it was also, as later chapters will describe, eventually to provide another route whereby the strength and influence of the middle-scale diversified farm household could make themselves felt.

This chapter has so far traced the processes of technical, economic and organizational change whereby rural households sought to adapt to the impact of industrial take-off in the wider economy. It has also argued that, through these processes, the economic position of the diversified rural household cultivating a small-to-medium-sized holding was strengthened: the technical changes generated by practising farmers and rural producers fitted its needs and capabilities; they also enabled it to utilize its resources of land and labour more effectively, so as to take advantage of both growing demand for food and expanding non-agricultural employment opportunities, and, meanwhile, local-level organizations were beginning to emerge to provide such households with the services they needed to operate effectively in the modern market economy. As has been hinted in various places, these changes implied a decline in the role and economic status of the former rural elite in the countryside, and the gradual disappearance, or rather increasing non-agricultural specialization, of the very marginal cultivating households who had once provided wage labour in agriculture. The next section goes on to look at the consequences of these gradual shifts for the balance of power in the wider political economy and society of rural areas.

### **The rural political economy in transition**

In Part I, we saw how the virtuous-circle style growth of the century or so up to 1890 was crucially facilitated by the emergence of the rural elite of multi-functional, larger-scale landowners who combined cultivation with a range of commercial and manufacturing activities in the countryside. Their emergence was also reflected in the changing nature of conflict in rural areas, as poorer households began to see their share of output and income as more significantly threatened by this commercial elite than by the state. We have already begun to see how, in the 1890–1920 period, the growth of the modern sector was undermining the economic position of the rural elite in the countryside and generating competition, for labour and for

markets, which it was not in a strong position to meet. This section first of all charts the decline of the rural elite, under the influence of the technical and economic changes outlined above, and then considers the wider social and political context within which the relative strengths of the middle-scale rural household took effect. It looks finally at the first signs of the open conflict that the changing balance of power in the countryside was to produce.

### *The decline of the rural elite*

The rise of the rural elite in the nineteenth century depended on their position within the rural economy and society. They cultivated land, which gave them a basic income, a status within, often headship of, the communal organizations of cultivators and, in some cases, raw materials for their manufacturing activities. They often also rented out land and acted as moneylenders or pawnbrokers, which gave them further income but also placed them in a patron/client relationship with other households in the village. This involved a range of ceremonial and more-or-less charitable functions, predicated on the assumption that, in return for rent, interest and deference, the patron household assumed some responsibility for the continued survival of the client household. Thus, employment should be provided for members of poor households, tools or draft animals lent out to those who needed them and, most importantly, rents should be reduced when harvests were bad. Meanwhile, the growth of the economy in the nineteenth century opened up opportunities to invest any surplus income in new forms of commercial and manufacturing activity: putting-out systems, silk-reeling mills, saké breweries, banking services and so on. These investments could be located in the countryside, given the growth of rural demand and the availability of labour, and managed alongside the cultivation and landlord activities that provided security and a base in rural society.

Developments in the 1890–1920 period, which had their origins in responses to the growth of the urban industrial sector, undermined this position in a number of ways. First of all, as we have seen, the direction of progress in agricultural technology, combined with the growth in employment opportunities outside agriculture and consequent rises in wage rates, rendered cultivation on a larger scale increasingly difficult and unprofitable. At the same time, although rental rates were not rising, the relative attractions of renting land out were in other ways increasing: the tenant would thereby become the one to provide the technical knowledge and management skills, together with the costs of increased fertilizer input, required by advancing technology; the higher and in some ways less volatile yields now possible with improved techniques and better irrigation facilities meant that smaller-scale cultivators would still be prepared to pay substantial rents in order to increase their scale of cultivation up to the

limits of their available household labour force and the need for rent reductions in bad years would be lessened; the incentive for tenant households to continue as cultivators of as much land as they could manage, as well as their rent-paying ability, would also be enhanced by the fact that they, unlike their larger-scale counterparts, had the labour capacity to take advantage of the increased scope for non-agricultural employment. As a result, as Waswo's data show, over the 1900s and 1910s, the majority of households owning more than three hectares reduced the area they cultivated themselves to the point where, by the 1920s, especially in the more advanced regions of the country, the cultivating landlord had almost become a thing of the past (1977: 71–2).

Even so, although renting land out might have become more profitable than cultivating it, landownership and other forms of rural investment were losing their attractions relative to other avenues of investment that the growth of the urban industrial economy was opening up. In the decades up to the 1890s, larger landowners appear to have been accumulating land at a steady rate, as a safe investment made increasingly available by the mortgaging and default of post-Land Tax Reform owners in difficult times such as the 1880s. However, although conclusive statistical data are not available, the tendency of larger landowning households, from the 1900s onwards and especially in the more advanced regions of the country, to hold back from acquiring more land and to switch their portfolios into new kinds of investment is clear.<sup>8</sup> In the more consistently prosperous times for cultivators after the 1880s, less land was becoming available to acquire, but equally, where once the alternative had been investment in a local commercial or manufacturing enterprise, it was now possible to place money much more easily and securely than in the past in expanding urban industrial businesses.<sup>9</sup> Where once surplus funds were lent out to rural borrowers through household-based financial networks, they could now be invested in the shares of modern banks through the stock exchange.

At the same time, as rural industry itself developed technologically and economically, its capital and managerial demands began to exceed the capacities of the rural elite. The post-1870s mechanization of silk-reeling filatures in Wigen's case-study region involved capital costs that the local financiers and entrepreneurs who had developed the industry up to then were increasingly unable to meet. Initially the prefectural government stepped in to organize an investment fund that mobilized savings throughout the region for investment in new enterprises. By the 1880s, however,

8 For example, over half of the landlords registered as owning more than 50 hectares in the Kinki and Chūgoku regions in the 1890s had ceased to be included by 1924 (Waswo 1977: 80).

9 See Waswo 1977: 76 for a comparison of the returns to investment in land to rent out and in shares in the Kanegafuchi textile company in the early 1920s. The latter was much the better investment.



producers' organizations had access to national banks operating in the prefecture, so that the capital for the expansion and mechanization of the silk-reeling industry was increasingly drawn from national-level sources, shifting control away from the local elite (Wigen 1995: 171–9).

The changing investment patterns of the rural elite were part of a wider shift in their interests away from their rural bases, as the accessibility and attractiveness of urban life increased. As urban lifestyles changed, under the influence of new forms of transport, communications, entertainment and so on, the rural/urban divergence widened and it became increasingly difficult to live a life comparable to that of the urban well-to-do in the countryside. Education opened up opportunities for the sons of the rural elite to pursue new kinds of career away from their rural homes and smaller-scale landowners, though they might continue to own and receive rent on their holdings, found their incomes and prospects as, for instance, teachers or civil servants much better. The new local-government system drew members of the elite into the wider world of regional and national politics, as they found themselves elected to local and national assemblies. Moreover, as the balance of power shifted, even if only gradually, towards the practising farmers who were coming to play the leading role in the technical and economic development of the village, the gratifications of rural elite life – the gifts, the ceremonies, the status – were beginning to lose their edge, especially when, as later sections will describe, open conflict between landlords and tenants erupted.

Thus the 1890–1920 period saw the emergence of the absentee landlord, widely portrayed in the literature as the wicked exploiter of poor tenant households but in some ways, as Waswo points out, easier to deal with than the resident landlord who was more dependent on rental income and had a much better grasp on local conditions (Waswo 1977: 88–9). In some cases, absenteeism meant physical relocation to the towns, where landowners' financial, business and political interests increasingly lay. In others, it simply implied a shift of focus, away from active involvement in cultivation and the life of the village towards other activities and employments. In either case, however, it made larger-scale landowners less willing and able to perform the role within the village economy and society which, following Scott's moral-economy approach, might in the past have justified their extraction of rent and their superior status, on the basis of the insurance that it provided for vulnerable smaller-scale cultivators. 'Business-like' absentee landlords, or indeed smaller-scale landowners struggling to maintain an urban lifestyle on their rental income, were less likely to offer help in hard times, to give good banquets or to provide advice on new cultivation techniques. Landlords might thus come to be regarded as 'parasitic' and whereas in the past it had been possible to see their interests as in harmony with those of the village as a whole, they were now increasingly viewed as in conflict with it.

To some extent, however, the modernization of the agricultural and

non-agricultural activities of the mass of small-to-medium scale rural households described in previous sections meant that they no longer needed the services which their larger-scale, cultivating-landlord patrons had once provided. The decline of the rural elite was thus mirrored in the rise of the middle-scale cultivating household. Previous sections have outlined the technological and economic basis on which this occurred, but the next section will describe its wider socio-economic causes and consequences, as the background to the emergence of new forms of conflict in the countryside.

***Modernizing the village: socio-economic change and the strengths of the middle-scale cultivator***

By the 1890–1920 period, as we have seen, the growth of the modern industrial sector had reached the point where it was beginning to have a significant impact, through product and labour markets, on the economic life of rural areas. However, modernization, as interpreted by, for instance, the Meiji government, was not simply an economic phenomenon and its achievement implied change in a whole range of aspects of Japanese life, in the countryside as well as the towns. Such change was to be brought about through programmes of political, educational and social reform, aimed at creating the basis for a modern nation-state, but, as has not always been the case in more recently developing countries, these programmes reached down to the village level, in the effort to mobilize the rural as well as the urban population in the pursuit of national ends. The result, however, inadvertent or otherwise, was that the mass of rural households were provided with new weapons and new strengths in their struggle to ensure their survival and prosperity.

Education was viewed as a key element in the programme to create a nation-state the equivalent of those of the West and four years of enrolment in elementary school became compulsory after 1886 (six years from 1907). Actual attendance rates amongst school-age children were by no means 100 per cent before the 1910s: the national average was 85 per cent in 1910, but attendance was almost certainly lower in the countryside than in the towns, given the fees that had to be paid and the opportunity cost of children's labour to rural households (Waswo 1988: 560). The children of middle-scale households were nonetheless likely to be the ones attending and acquiring a level of functional literacy, at least adequate to be able to read the newspapers and magazines and official documents that began to reach the villages in greater numbers after the turn of the century. Beyond elementary school, although such children were unlikely to be able to aspire to university or to the agricultural colleges which trained students for jobs in the government agricultural services, they made up the majority of pupils at three-year technical colleges providing vocational education for farmers (Waswo 1988: 562). As a result, by the 1900s and 1910s, the old

rural elite no longer held a monopoly on the ability to find out about and communicate with the outside world and growing numbers of the younger generation from middle-scale households were becoming able to read and understand both practical information of relevance to their economic activities and news of life and events beyond the village.

The widening of horizons brought about by education, even of the limited form available to most rural young people, was further promoted for many by the impact of conscription. For many rural conscripts, military service meant a first experience of Western-style clothes, food and living conditions and the training provided not only developed personal skills and offered chances of promotion but also induced a greater sense of identification with the nation as a whole (Waswo 1988: 562–3). So many were called up, as soldiers or reservists, for the Russo-Japanese War that few villages escaped involvement and, as Waswo argues, those returning, with promotions and medals, found it difficult to settle back into the deferential hierarchies of village society (1988: 564–6). Some indeed came back with ‘dangerous thoughts’ from revolutionary Russia and the authorities’ fear of the disturbing influence of former soldiers on their villages led to the establishment of local reservists’ associations through which in due course middle-scale households were to find a new route to status and influence in the villages.

In fact, the reservists’ associations were just one of a whole range of local-level organizations set up or co-opted by the authorities in their efforts to control and educate the rural population. As illustrated by Gluck’s long lists of organizations apparently operating in two particular villages in 1911, these included not just the agricultural and economic groups described earlier, but a whole range of social, religious and educative associations – the Custom Reform and Youth Association, Respect for the Aged Association, Education Association and so on. The Home Ministry, the Education Ministry, the Army and other elements of the government bureaucracy made strenuous efforts to use these, sometimes pre-existing and not always co-operative, organizations to promote patriotism, good behaviour and local ‘self-reliance’, initially relying on members of the old elite to provide local leadership.<sup>10</sup> However, some compromise was necessary in the face of, on the one hand, the declining influence of the old elite in the villages and the rise of representatives of the middle-scale households and, on the other, the spread to the villages of what Gluck calls an ideology of ‘striving and success’, based on individual education and achievement, which ran counter to the official stress on community and co-operation (Gluck 1985: 204–12). As a result, village-based organizations and community ideology survived but they increas-

10 Similar efforts at ‘social education’ in the cities appear to have had a lower priority and met with little success (Gluck 1985: 201–2).

ingly became vehicles through which the modernizing influence of the middle-scale household could make itself felt.

Conspicuous by their absence in the discussion so far have been political organizations. By 1890, Japan had an elected parliament and elected local assemblies and political parties were acquiring greater power and influence. However, the number of those eligible to vote grew only slowly and universal male suffrage was not instituted until 1925. Electoral power therefore rested with higher-level tax-payers and in the countryside this meant that political representation tended to remain the preserve of the old rural elite of larger-scale landowners. Party politics, at prefectural and national level, was a field where traditional patron/client relationships could still provide a basis for power and influence and the votes of village electorates tended to remain in the pockets of local notables. Organizations such as the agricultural associations came to be used, instead of political party branches, as the electoral machines of politicians from rural constituencies and although the number of Diet members who held official posts in either agricultural associations or co-operatives increased, they still tended to represent larger landowning interests in the countryside (Mulgan 2000: 165). These agricultural interests were in fact quite strongly represented in both the upper and lower houses of the Diet but it was not to be through such conventional political routes that the representatives of middle-scale households sought to pursue their essentially parochial aims of survival and prosperity.

### ***The first stirrings of landlord/tenant conflict***

The shift in the balance of economic power within the countryside which the technological and economic responses of rural households to the growth of the urban industrial sector brought about was thus reinforced by social change, itself in part the result of the modernizing efforts of the state. The extent of the shift varied considerably from region to region: it was clearly greatest in the advanced southwest, where commercialized agriculture and non-agricultural employment were most developed and where opportunities for investment outside the rural sector were also more attractive, and least in the northeast, where advances in agricultural technology were hard to adopt and by-employment and alternative investment opportunities fewer, so that the traditional larger-scale, patriarchal landowner still held sway. Wherever it occurred, however, the shift produced, as we have seen, the beginnings of a divergence in interests and strategies between the old rural elite of landlord-cultivators/local businessmen and the practising, diversified, small-to-medium-scale household in the village. While the elite were coming to concentrate on the rental returns to landownership and on their outside interests, 'core' rural households were concerned with the technical and economic development of their agricultural and non-agricultural production activities, as they always

had been, but now with greater capacity to pursue their ends independently of cultivating-landlord patrons.

Across much of rural Japan, throughout the pre-World War II period, rural households and the old rural elite got on with their business, compromising where necessary, without overt conflict. However, as we have seen, Japanese rural communities already had long experience of organized protest activity in pursuit of their interests. Even in the late Tokugawa period, such protests were being directed less at the state and more at the elite commercial activities which rural households saw as threatening their interests but, where the local elite continued to play a personal role in their village communities and to provide still-needed assistance and insurance to less well-off households, the potential for open conflict continued to be contained. By the 1890–1920 period, however, the mutual relationship between the local elite and the mass of rural households was, as we have seen, beginning to break down. Moreover, that mass now contained individuals with knowledge of the outside world and with practical and educational skills that once only the elite possessed. For some, the acquisition of that knowledge and skill also involved a new belief in the possibilities of achievement through individual effort or by means of the kinds of modern group organization then proliferating, under state auspices, in the villages. For a few, it even meant the opening of eyes to the possibilities of socialism and revolution.

It was in this context that the first attempts were made to organize rural households, not as cultivators or taxpayers or village communities, but as tenants. There had no doubt always been some degree of collusion, wherever possible, amongst tenants in the process of bargaining for rent reduction when harvests were poor, but this would have been surreptitious, so as not to appear to be upsetting village harmony, and tenants would have continued to deal deferentially and individually with their landlords (Waswo 1988: 576). By the 1910s, however, open and formally organized tenant unions were beginning to appear. Although there are many problems with the available statistics on all aspects of the tenancy dispute movement, it is reckoned that by 1908 around 50 tenant unions had been formed and 173 by 1917. Thereafter, the number rose fast: there were 681 in 1921 and over 3,000 by the mid-1920s. The first available figures for the number of tenancy disputes record 408 in 1920 and 1,680 in 1921 (Waswo 1982: 367; Waswo 1988: 585).

It is generally agreed that it was from amongst members of the middle-scale group in the villages, many of whom rented in land as well as owning some, that the initiative for and leadership of tenant unions, and hence tenancy disputes, came.<sup>11</sup> Unions often involved an alliance between such

11 See, e.g. Smethurst's summary of Japanese scholars' evidence (1986: 350) or Waswo 1988: 583.

middle-scale owner-tenants and the smaller-scale and more marginal tenants who suffered most from rental demands, and in due course urban socialists and intellectuals became involved in trying to push the tenants' union movement in a more revolutionary direction. However, the objectives of unions and their tactics in disputes clearly reflect the needs of the rising middle-scale group for whom landlords and tenancy represented a barrier to the achievement of secure and rising incomes as diversified rural households. Hence unions were usually organized at the level of the traditional village where the influence of middle-scale owner-tenants was greatest (Saitō, H. 1989: 263–6). They were democratically governed but those elected to leadership positions had to have the time and educational qualifications to be able to collate and present tenants' demands and so tended to come from the upper strata of tenants (Waswo 1982: 371). Although the main objective was the organization of tenants' collective bargaining with landlords, unions also engaged in self-help and mutual-aid activities, acting like other village-based groups to provide the services and support that larger-scale landowners would once have offered. Especially in these early years, unions, and disputes, were much more likely to be found in areas where advanced, commercialized agriculture and by-employment were well developed and where landlords were absentees (Waswo 1982: 376–7). The nature of disputes will be considered in more detail in a later chapter but they do not appear to have been aimed at the destruction of property or the overthrow of tenancy. Their concerns were the pragmatic ones of practising farm households, such as security of tenure and the reduction of rents, although resentment at the failure of landlords to play their traditional role in the village also seems commonly to have played a part.

The high tide of tenancy disputes did not occur until the inter-war period. However, the significance of the first stirrings of tenant discontent and union organization lies in the evidence it provides of the changing nature of the rural economy and society and of the aims and capacities of the core, middle-scale households who were coming to the fore as a result of the technical and economic changes induced in rural areas by the growth of the industrial sector. For the authorities at the time, too, they provided worrying evidence of the potential for unrest in rural areas and encouraged the search for policies which would combat what was seen as incipient class conflict in the countryside and create a stable, harmonious and productive rural basis for the modern Japanese economy. That search, and the policy debate to which it gave rise, are the subject of the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

The responses of rural households to the growth of the urban industrial sector in the 1890–1920 period in many respects followed the lines of the strategies employed, at least in the more advanced and commercialized

regions, during earlier stages of economic development. The technical changes whose diffusion generated the agricultural output growth of the period had their roots, almost literally, in advances made by experimenting farmers in the Tokugawa period and their characteristics were such as to continue the process of intensifying land and labour use in ways complementary with household diversification into other crops or non-agricultural activities. Hence it continued to be possible to take advantage of both growing demand for agricultural output and expanding non-agricultural employment opportunities within the structure of the pluriactive, family-based, rural household.

In some other respects, though, things had changed. The growth in demand for agricultural output now increasingly arose from the changing diet of the urban population and from the overseas market, and was focused on rice and silk, and to a limited extent higher-value food items, rather than on the range of raw materials and processed foods that had constituted local specialities in earlier times. Outside employment opportunities were becoming more 'industrial', requiring longer-term migration to a factory or, where work could still be performed in the village, a larger investment in equipment and skills and involvement with a more complex trading network linked to urban markets. As a result, manufacturing demanded greater time and specialization, so that, for more marginal cultivators, agriculture was beginning to be relegated to the side-occupation. Meanwhile, for those with holdings sufficient to justify the investment in fertilizer and the acquisition of new knowledge and skills which productivity-enhancing technical change required, the household division of labour became more marked, as daughters and younger sons spent more time away and those who remained 'professionalized' their farming.

These changes began to undermine the mutual linkages between the rural elite and the mass of households in the village that had helped to generate the rural growth of the previous hundred years. For the elite, the returns, both economic and social, to cultivation combined with local investment in business and landownership began to decline, relative to new alternatives, as technical change and rising wages made larger-scale cultivation difficult and as small-scale rural industry changed. Meanwhile, the small-to-medium, core cultivators were beginning to be able to master new techniques and take advantage of the growth of the wider economy on their own and in some respects rather better than their larger-scale landowning patrons. On this basis, with their rising educational levels and their increasing use of local state-sponsored group organizations, they were just beginning to question the role and status of the increasingly 'absentee' and 'parasitic' elite and to set out on the road towards confrontation, rather than harmony, in the village.

In the years of relatively stable growth and indeed, towards the end, boom conditions for rural producers between 1890 and 1920, when in addi-

tion the regional impact of industrial growth was still varied, open conflict between the landowning elite and the core producers in the countryside remained rare. However the potential for unrest was sufficiently clear to induce mounting concern about the rural sector on the part of the state and of the political representatives of the rural elite. As a result, the period saw an increasingly intense debate over the kind of rural sector industrial Japan should maintain, against the background of a growing conflict of interest between the agricultural and industrial sectors, as rising food prices demonstrated the inability of Japan's farmers to meet expanding urban demand. The next chapter describes this debate and the policies eventually adopted to try to square the no longer virtuous circle of economic interrelationships in the countryside.



## 7 The agrarian question

### The rural economy and the state

It seems to have been almost universally the case, in the histories of the now-developed countries of the world, that when the rural population is large and agriculture the most important production activity, governments, along with the rest of the political, social and intellectual elite, have shown little interest in the countryside and it is only when the industrial sector has grown to dominate the economy that concern for the dwindling rural sector begins to increase. Certainly, in Japan, once a modernizing government had come to power in 1868, rural development dropped down the list of priorities and the resources of the state were concentrated on the promotion of modern industry. In practice, as we saw in Part I, before 1890 the industrial sector remained too small to disturb the mutually reinforcing pattern of rural industrial and agricultural development and rural growth continued along the lines it had been following for a half-century or more before the Restoration. As a result, at that stage it hardly mattered if the state's only real interest in the countryside was as a source of taxation, exports and soldiers.

However, 1890 represented a turning-point in the state's relation to agriculture and the countryside, as in so many other aspects of Japan's political economy. Thereafter it was no longer possible to ignore the issue of what sort of rural sector was to exist in an increasingly urban, industrial Japan, as the 'agrarian question' forced itself into policy-makers' attention from two different angles. First of all, as we saw in Chapter 5, it manifested itself in the inability of domestic agriculture to meet the growing food demand of the urban population and the consequent rise in food (especially grain) imports in response to increasing prices. Thus Japan began to have to face the standard agricultural adjustment problem that earlier-industrializing countries in Europe had confronted some decades before, with the added complication of the increasing preference of Japanese consumers, as they grew better-off, for Japanese-style rice which differed in quality from rice available on the world market. The 1890s therefore saw the beginning of Japan's version of the 'Corn Laws debate' over the extent to which domestic food producers should be protected from import competition, in the interests of sustaining agriculture at home

but at the expense of higher food prices and hence industrial wages. This debate was to come to a head with the Rice Riots crisis of 1918, when rising food prices appeared ultimately to be threatening the social stability on which industrialization itself depended.

At the same time, however, the Corn Laws issue was part of a wider debate, triggered by the threat which industrial growth from the 1890s appeared to pose to rural life as it was perceived to have been lived up to then. At a political level, the emerging conflict of interest between the core rural households and the increasingly absentee elite presaged a breakdown in the harmony of the village and unrest in the countryside; at a social level, the departure of both the elite and the cream of rural youth, lured away by the dangerous attractions of urban life, could be seen as leading to the decline of rural institutions and social values, not to mention the weakening of the physical and moral fibre of potential military recruits, and at an intellectual and ideological level, as Japan became a more-and-more modern industrial society, nostalgia for a vanishing rural utopia, where 'true' Japanese values still resisted the tide of Westernization, began to colour approaches to rural policy.

This chapter therefore looks first at this wider debate over the nature of rural society and its place in modern Japan and at the eventually largely victorious line of argument within it in support of the small-scale cultivating household as the basis of an essentially Japanese rural life. This provides the background against which the policy developments of the 1890–1920 period took place and the second section looks at the trends towards trade protection and the promotion of domestic agriculture which began to emerge. Complicating the issue here, however, was Japan's acquisition in this period of an empire, principally in the form of the colonies of Taiwan and Korea, both potential sources of rice and other agricultural goods for the Japanese mainland. However, as the final section will show, the role of the colonies in helping to meet the demand for food in Japan provided the basis for the compromise solution to the Japanese version of the agricultural adjustment problem which was forged out of the Rice Riots crisis.

## **The agrarian debate**

In traditional Tokugawa thinking, with its basis in neo-Confucianism, agriculture was a respectable and morally valuable profession, inferior to the intellectual and martial pursuits of the samurai elite, but superior to other forms of economic activity, partly because it produced essential food but also because of what Vlastos describes as its 'presumed innocence of profit seeking' (1998: 81). Farmers could be good, though not as good as samurai, as long as they cultivated the land to produce the nation's food, paid their taxes and remained peaceful and law-abiding. Nonetheless, as earlier chapters have shown, this did not prevent growing numbers of

thinkers and practitioners from coming to regard efforts to improve the technology of rural production and the economic well-being of rural households as legitimate and morally valuable. By the mid-nineteenth century therefore, not only were many rural households heavily involved in making the most of production for the market, but also confidence in the value of rural life had risen to the point where a rural culture and society distinct from those of the supposedly superior urban areas could be said to be beginning to emerge.

In the context of the drive for 'civilization and enlightenment' which the Meiji Restoration ushered in, however, rural life could not but appear backward and unenlightened. Moreover, as far as agriculture was concerned, the enthusiasm for all things Western extended not just to technology but also to organizational structures and the nature of farming as an economic activity. Inoue Kaoru, a senior member of the Meiji government and Minister of Agriculture and Commerce in the 1880s, thus advocated, on the basis of his own study overseas and the advice of Western experts, the establishment of large-scale, 'business-like' farming wherever possible (e.g. in Hokkaidō) in Japan.<sup>1</sup> For him, the small scale of farms in Japan not only precluded the introduction of the technology that would produce the agricultural output the nation needed, but also locked the rural population into low-productivity occupations and prevented them becoming efficient, modern, agricultural and industrial workers. The Land Tax Reform and other measures to promote the spread of market relations in rural areas reflected the general official acceptance of the 'British model' of agricultural change during industrialization, whereby free-trade conditions produced the consolidation of land into larger-scale, specialized farm units and the departure of rural labour to higher-productivity employment in the factories.

The 'big-farm theory' (*dai-nō ron*) was thus associated with the drive for modernization and dominated official thinking about the countryside, such as there was, through the early Meiji years.<sup>2</sup> Its free-trade aspects were also taken up, as their voices came more and more to be heard in the 1880s and 1890s, by the representatives of business interests, who followed their British counterparts in the Corn Laws debate in arguing for the importance of low food prices, hence low wages, for the profitability and growth of industry. However, the obvious impracticability of large-scale farming under Japanese conditions (at least without massive investment in re-arranging the infrastructure) could not be ignored and there was continuous scaling-down of what was to constitute a large-scale farm in Japan.

1 Ogura 1979: 26–9; see also Havens 1974: 38 on the views of other members of the Meiji government.

2 Ogura describes a play called *Dainō* by a Japanese follower of Ibsen, in which the destruction of an area's small-scale holdings by a flood is taken to prove that 'God will protect and favor large-scale farming' (1979: 31).

Meanwhile, as the last chapter demonstrated, despite some consolidation of landownership in the 1880s, larger landowners themselves resolutely refused to become large-scale cultivators, in the face of the superiority of the small-to-medium scale unit under prevailing economic and technological conditions. Hence, unlike the case in some other countries facing the agricultural adjustment problem, no political support for large-scale farming was to emerge. Although the Imperial Agricultural Association and the political representatives of the 'landed interest' in the Diet continued to act on behalf of larger landowners, since virtually all of them rented out much of their land to small-scale cultivators, in most areas of policy, with the obvious exception of those to do with tenancy conditions and rents, their interests did not greatly conflict. Agricultural protection, in particular, benefited all producers, except perhaps the most marginal cultivators who had to buy in more agricultural produce than they grew and retained after rent.

The abandonment of the attempt to introduce large-scale farming in Japan however also reflected the emergence of an ideological backlash against the *dai-nō ron* and the Westernized modernization of the countryside which it seemed to embody. This backlash had a basis in the work of leading agronomists, Yokoi Tokiyoshi in particular, who sought to demonstrate that the labour requirements for rice cultivation could only be met by small-scale farms that utilized their family labour up to the limit without the motivation of profit (Vlastos 1998: 86). However, as the influence of the cities and their different ways began to spread into the countryside, and as rural young people left to join the ever-expanding industrial labour force, advocates of the 'small farm theory' (*shō-nō ron*) began to view the small farmer not just as the most effective agricultural producer but also as the embodiment of all the Japanese virtues and values that industrialization appeared to be threatening. Thus, not only was agriculture the basis of the economy, but the small-scale farmer was the basis of society, living an honest, hard-working life, in harmony with man and nature, physically and morally ready to fight for his country. In a paper published in 1897, Yokoi coined the term 'Nōhonshugi' (agriculture-as-the-base-ism) to describe what Havens calls 'that strange chemistry of history and nostalgia' (1974: 85) which was eventually to dominate thought and policy on rural areas through into the post-World War II period.

That domination was not, however, by any means complete during the 1890s and 1900s, when vigorous debate continued over what should happen to the rural sector as industrialization continued. With the acceptance of the fact that, whatever the possible economic merits of British-style, large, mechanized farms, for practical purposes there was no alternative to the small-scale unit in Japan, the focus of the debate shifted on to the question of how far those small-scale farms should be protected and supported by the state. This was the subject of heated argument at, for instance, the first conference of the Imperial Agricultural Association in

1910 and at a conference on 'The Problem of Protecting Small Farmers' organized by the Social Policy Association at Tokyo University in 1914 and attended by Yokoi (Nōrinshō Hyaku-nen Shi Hensan Iinkai 1980: 282–5; Vlastos 1998: 83–5). In such debates, the standard argument that agricultural protection raised wages and hindered industrialization was pitted not so much against the view that domestic agriculture needed to be protected for the usual strategic reasons, but rather against the belief that Japanese agriculture meant small-scale farming which had to be preserved because the small-scale farmer was the basis of all that was good in Japanese society.

As the next section will show, the actual policies adopted towards agriculture and its protection over the 1890–1920 period represented attempts at compromise between what were now recognized as the conflicting interests of agriculture and industry. However, within agricultural officialdom, the victory of Nōhonshugi and small-farm protectionism was almost complete. Belief in the value of agriculture and the rural economy within the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce (MAC) can be traced back to the influence of Maeda Masana, even after he left his official post in 1893 to pursue his efforts to shift attention back to rural development from within private-sector organizations. Senior bureaucrats who remained in the Ministry continued to believe in agricultural fundamentalism and the virtues of the small farmer and to pursue, through the 1890s and beyond, what Havens calls 'bureaucratic agrarianism' (Havens 1974: ch. 3). Thus bureaucrats such as Shinagawa Yajirō and Hirata Tōsuke promoted the legislation that established rural credit institutions and the first law on co-operatives in 1900, and in general sought to provide state support and the means of 'self-help' for what they saw as the 'backbone owner-cultivators' in the countryside struggling against the encroaching forces of industrial capitalism (Havens 1974: 64).

To the extent that the issue of support for small farmer-based agriculture became focused on protectionism, however, agricultural bureaucrats found themselves in an increasingly difficult position within their Ministry, which had been set up in 1881 as an economic ministry responsible for both agricultural and industrial policy. The Ministry was divided into an agriculture section (Nōmukyoku) and an industry section (Shōmukyoku) and the areas of conflict between them multiplied, as industrial and agricultural interests increasingly opposed each other over the issue of agricultural protection and prices.<sup>3</sup> Within the Nōmukyoku, however,

3 The agriculture side was, however, the dominant one within the Ministry, according to Johnson, since there was not much for the industry side to do at this stage (Johnson 1982: 87–9). As later sections will show, however, some key policy areas for agriculture, notably rice price policy, came to be controlled by the industry side. Agriculture bureaucrats mainly came from a technical agronomist background, whereas law graduates tended to gravitate to the industry side.

Nōhonshugi views on support for the small farmer continued to hold sway, under the influence of rising officials such as Ishiguro Tadaatsu who became head of the agricultural policy section of the Nōmukyoku in 1919 and went on to become Nōmukyoku head in 1924 and Vice-Minister for Agriculture in 1934. Ishiguro believed in an essentially non-commercial agriculture, based on the virtues of the small farmer (Havens 1974: 150–1) and, according to Johnson, ‘during the period of World War I he and his followers imbued the ministry with a mission to protect the small tenant farmer’ (1982: 89). The impact of this intra-ministry conflict, which was not finally resolved until the Ministry was split into the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MCI) in 1925, on the development of policy through the 1890–1920 period will be considered in the next section but, as Part III will show, Nōhonshugi thought, focused on support for the small farmer, became increasingly dominant, as the ideology driving approaches to the rural sector through the inter-war period.

At the same time, Nōhonshugi was more than just an approach to agricultural policy and the Japanese agrarianist reaction to industrialization came to embody not only a belief in the value of the small farm, but also an amalgam of political, social and cultural elements derived from the idea of ‘traditional rural Japan’.<sup>4</sup> It came to encompass a glorification of folklore and ‘rural customs’, at least where these could be shown to involve harmonious communal activity and the purity of being close to nature. By the 1890s and 1900s, Japan had its Wordsworths and ‘back to the village’ followers of Tolstoy. The countryside became the *kyōdo*, the spiritual home of the Japanese. In due course, as later chapters will show, for radical civilian and military groups, it was in the suffering and exploited villages, not in the corrupt capitalist cities, that the true spirit of Japan was to be found.

Much of this was, however, ‘invented tradition’ which in practice served the purposes of the modernization of the rural economy and society, though in a particular form. Agrarianist bureaucrats, ‘modern men with modern assumptions, living in an industrializing age’ (Havens 1974: 85), sought to make the small-scale farm efficient and self-reliant through the provision of modern forms of credit and technical advice, developing ‘defensive, pro-farm doctrines that smacked romantically of traditional village life without recapturing the premodern ethos that encompassed it’ (Havens 1974: 85). Communal village groups became the vehicles for the control and education of the rural population and their ideological glorification a means of combating potential conflicts within the village. The apparent decline of the traditional rural household (*ie*), as young people

4 On the role of the ‘agrarian myth’ in the Meiji-period creation of the ideology of modernizing Japan, see Gluck 1985: 178–204.

migrated to the cities, led to increasing stress on the importance of the 'home' (*katei*), with its patriarchal father and wise but efficient housewife/mother, as the basis of the nation and the 'family-state' (Gluck 1985: 186–9). Customs that turned out to be a bit too close to nature were subject to 'custom reform' in the interests of such modern virtues as punctuality, hard work and saving.

Out of the debate triggered, from the 1890s, by the widening divergence in interests between agriculture and industry as Japan became an industrial economy, there thus emerged an approach to the countryside which justified support for the small farm by means of an agrarianist ideology utilising rural romanticism and nostalgia in the interests of the modern Japanese nation-state. This approach was to have its greatest impact on agricultural policy, and on wider aspects of Japan's polity, in the inter-war period, but meanwhile the next section traces the interrelationship between the debate out of which it came and the first stages in the development of an interventionist policy for rural areas in the period leading up to the crisis of the Rice Riots.

### **The development of rural policy<sup>5</sup>**

Before 1890, the Meiji state had been able to go about its reforming business largely without an economic policy for rural areas as such. Reform of taxation and local government and the expansion of the education system had of course focused on the countryside, but although the first steps were being taken towards state involvement in the development and diffusion of agricultural technology and in systems of promotion and quality control for rural export products such as silk, it was modern urban industry that received the lion's share of the state's concern and support. After 1890, however, the rural sector began to force itself on the government's attention, as agricultural growth became increasingly inadequate to meet the expanding demand for food and as the stirrings of social change and unrest in the countryside first became apparent. More broadly, as Waswo argues, the civil and military bureaucracies came to accept that the national unity and social stability on which the achievement of their political and economic goals depended could not be maintained without consideration of, and support for, the still predominant rural population. Thus, 'by promoting the countryside's material and spiritual health, they believed that a bulwark against social disruption could be maintained' (Waswo 1988: 570).

Underlying these worries was the emerging breakdown in the mutually supportive relationship between agricultural and industrial growth which had prevailed up to then. What was good for agriculture and the rural economy was not now necessarily good for industry and the urban sector,

5 This and the next section draw on material previously published in Francks 2003.

so that economic policy had become a zero-sum game that could not comfortably be played out under the roof of one ministry. However, although the continuation of a laissez-faire approach might facilitate continued industrial growth in the short term, the pointers were beginning to suggest that, given the scale and strengths of the diversified rural economy which a century of growth had produced – epitomized by the increasingly assertive middle-scale rural households – a smooth and conflict-free agrarian transition was unlikely. Thus, over the course of 1890–1920, the first steps were taken in the direction of state intervention to protect and support the emerging structure of the rural economy, in the interests of the economic and social stability on which continued industrial growth depended.

The focus of these first steps was on policy to deal with the food problem which emerged after 1890 and on the classic issue of free trade in agricultural goods. The agriculture/industry conflict over this produced, on the one hand, a growing reliance on imports to meet food supply shortfalls, but also, on the other, the first steps towards state intervention in the determination of the market price for rice. Meanwhile, less controversially, agricultural bureaucrats were beginning to be able to secure the resources for state-funded programmes to promote agricultural growth, while their industrial colleagues were coming to recognize the need for central and local government involvement in the technological development of the kinds of smaller-scale industry which had come to play such a big role in the rural and small-town economy. While the resources that the state was able to put behind these policies remained limited, given the many other conflicting demands on it, the gradual shift in direction was a reflection of the significance that the rural sector retained in Japan's political economy and in the wider Japanese consciousness.

### ***Trade and the rice market***

As we saw in Chapter 5, after 1890, growth in the output of rice, still far and away the most important crop that farmers grew, though faster than in previous decades, was insufficient to match the growth in demand, as urban consumers substituted rice for other 'inferior' grains in their diet and increased their per capita consumption. As a result, as Figure 7.1 shows, the price of rice began a steady rise, relative to other prices, from 1890 onwards, while the shortfall in supply was increasingly made up from imports (see Table 5.5 on page 124). Although these were of the Indica type which was less preferred by Japanese consumers and sold at a lower price than Japonica-type, home-grown rice, there was still at this stage a degree of substitutability between imported *gaimai* and domestically grown rice which would constrain to some extent the rise in the rice price produced by the increase in demand in excess of supply.

The growth in imports thus became both a matter of concern to rice producers and a means whereby the state, through the use of tariffs or



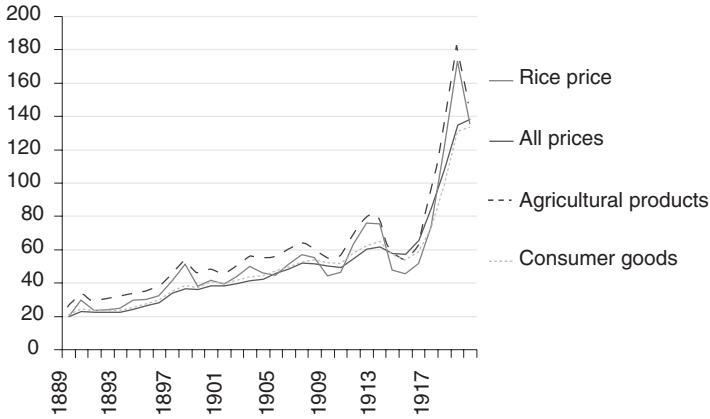


Figure 7.1 Price indices for rice and other goods, 1889–1920 (1934–6 = 100) (sources: LTES 9: Table 8; Ohkawa and Shinohara 1979: Table A50).

other forms of border control, could influence the price of rice on the Japanese market. From around the turn of the century, landlords, who had most rice to sell, began to make use of their political influence, through their representation in the Diet and their domination of the Imperial Agricultural Association, to press for controls over rice imports (Hayami, Y. and Yamada 1991: 78). Meanwhile, industrial interests, who were also increasingly well organized as a pressure group,<sup>6</sup> countered with the argument that a high rice price, hence high wages, would constrain industrial growth. From the government's point of view, however, the value of a tariff on rice imports as a means to buy off the landed interest outweighed the arguments in favour of free trade. The tariff was first imposed in 1905, as part of a deal to offset an increase in the land tax to help meet the costs of the Russo-Japanese War. However, it was not removed after the end of the war and although its rate continued to be varied in the light of political pressures and what was happening to the rice price, foreign (non-colonial) rice has never since entered the Japanese market on a completely free-trade basis.

At the same time, there is little evidence that the government was at this stage particularly concerned by Japan's increasing reliance on imported rice. From the 1890s, the MAC had been making regular projections of future demand and supply for rice, which demonstrated that the shortfall was not just a temporary phenomenon, and within the

6 The leaders of big business eventually formed the Japan Industrial Club which formally came into existence in 1917 (Johnson 1982: 90).

Nōmukyoku, as in other organizations representing agriculture, concern was beginning to grow as to the impact of cheaper imports on Japanese farmers (Ōmameuda 1993: 75). On the other hand, supplies of imports were readily available, as intra-Asian trade grew in the years up to and including World War I. Rice exports from the main suppliers in Southeast Asia (Burma, Thailand and Vietnam in particular) had started to expand from the mid-nineteenth century, at first going primarily to European markets but increasingly, after the turn of the century, to other parts of Asia, including Japan (Latham 1986). Japan's involvement in the rice trade was in fact part of its growing integration into the network of intra-Asian trade that developed during the 1900s and 1910s, driven by its growing exports of manufactured goods to the Asian mainland and imports of Asian primary produce (Sugihara 1986). Concerns about security of supply were not therefore pressing, nor, with exports growing, was the need to save foreign exchange as great as in the past, and the Ministry of Finance's earlier pressure to maintain the tariff began to carry less weight than industrialists' worries about the impact of the rise in the rice price, which was broadly accelerating through the late 1900s and 1910s (see Figure 7.1), on industrial wages.

Another element in the equation was represented by the potential for imports of rice from Taiwan and Korea, once they had become Japanese colonies. Such imports did not cost foreign exchange in the same way as imports from outside the empire, but a number of factors made it unlikely at this stage that colonial imports would be adequate to meet the supply shortfall on the mainland. Taiwan was a significant rice producer but of Indica types and its different climate and relatively underdeveloped irrigation infrastructure more or less precluded, at this stage, the cultivation of high-yielding Japanese varieties. Hence, although the colonial government engaged, from the 1890s, in programmes to expand rice output, this was mainly with a view to earning foreign exchange for the empire through exports to other parts of Asia (Ōmameuda 1993: 87–101). Korean rice was a better, though by no means perfect, substitute for Japanese rice and, as the rice price began to rise in Japan in the 1890s, exports from Korea grew to the point where the Korean government became concerned about supplies on the domestic market and tried, with little success, to limit the outflow (Ōmameuda 1993: 64–6). After colonization, efforts were made to introduce high-yielding Japanese varieties, but the low level of irrigation facilities in Korea meant that their diffusion would depend on substantial infrastructure investment and, in the meantime, exports could only be increased at the expense of rice consumption in Korea itself.

Government recognition of the role that colonial imports could potentially play in resolving the policy dilemma that it faced was signalled in the decision to allow colonial rice into the Japanese market tariff-free from 1913, and Korean and Taiwanese rice did begin, in their different ways, to increase their share of overall imports (see Table 7.1). However, it

Table 7.1 Sources of rice imports into Japan, 1903–32 (1000 *koku*; 5-yearly averages)

	<i>Korea</i>		<i>Taiwan</i>		<i>Elsewhere</i>		<i>Total quantity</i>
	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>%</i>	
1903–7	306	6.4	603	12.6	3,872	81.0	4,781
1908–12	364	13.7	877	33.0	1,415	53.3	2,656
1913–17	1,144	33.8	815	24.1	1,427	42.1	3,386
1918–22	2,446	38.8	968	15.4	2,891	45.8	6,305
1923–7	4,709	47.0	2,027	20.3	3,272	32.7	10,008
1928–32	6,561	63.2	2,597	25.0	1,221	11.8	10,379

Sources: Ônameuda 1993: Tables 2.1, 3.1, 4.2 and 5.8; Kayô 1958: Table K-a-1.

remained the case that neither satisfied the demand for real Japanese-style rice, and without substantial long-term investment in infrastructure and technology, there was little prospect that increases in colonial output alone would be enough to meet the growing supply shortfall.

Given all these pieces in the jigsaw, dealing with the rice-supply problem, and the political pressures surrounding it, required a complex balancing act on the part of the government. Through the 1900s and 1910s, as the shortfall of domestically produced rice steadily grew and imports continued to take a small but growing share of the market, it began to make increasing use of the weapons at its disposal to intervene in the rice market in response to changing political and economic conditions. While growing amounts of colonial rice came in freely, variation in the *gaimai* tariff remained the chief means by which to respond to agricultural or industrial concerns about the rice price. Meanwhile a growing body of regulations was introduced to permit government sales or purchases of rice and the placing of restrictions on its use for, for example, saké-brewing, when prices were high (Nōrinshō Hyaku-nen Shi Hensan Iinkai 1980: 25; Mochida 1990: 102).

The use of these market interventions was not the responsibility of the agriculture side of the MAC, who were thus not able to use rice-price policy as part of their strategy of agricultural support.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, although industrialists' concerns did from time to time necessitate a reduction in the tariff, by and large, as the role of electoral politics and political parties grew more significant, the political clout of the landlord interest obliged governments to adopt a broadly pro-agriculture stance in their intervention in the rice market.<sup>8</sup> In the spring of 1915 for instance, the

7 Some were operated by the industry section of the MAC, but others fell within the territory of other ministries, such as the Finance Ministry.

8 One of the two major political parties, the Seiyūkai, is always regarded as having represented landed interests.

government authorized substantial government purchases of rice to push up the price and so attract landlord support in an upcoming election (Omameuda 1993: 148–9). Despite occasional concessionary tariff reductions, the rice price continued on a rising trend and Lewis argues that, even on the eve of the Rice Riots, politicians still regarded a low rice price as more worrying than a high one (1990: 13).

By the time of World War I, the first cracks were beginning to appear in the complex edifice of rice-price policy. Although supplies on the international market continued to be abundant and the increased export opportunities opened up by the wartime absence of developed-country competition in Asian markets were generating the foreign exchange to pay for them, MAC officials, observing Germany's wartime difficulties in securing food supplies, were beginning to express concern over the strategic dangers of reliance on imports (Omameuda 1993: 141–2). As incomes rose in the wartime boom, evidence began to emerge of growing consumer resistance to *gaimai*, suggesting that *gaimai* imports might no longer work as well as before to reduce pressure on the rice price. The only immediately available policy alternatives appeared to involve efforts to reduce consumption, such as the campaigns for 'rice-free days' launched by some prefectural governments (Mochida 1990: 114). The rice price had shot up during 1911–14 and, although it fell back somewhat in 1915, by 1916 it was again rising on what turned out to be a dramatic upward trend, in the generally inflationary atmosphere of the time (Figure 7.1).

Up till then, however, the strategy of relying on a combination of *gaimai* and colonial imports to cope with industrializing Japan's agricultural adjustment problem appeared to be working. Negotiating a way through the political tensions produced by the conflict of interest between agriculture and industry necessitated a rising level of state intervention in the rice market, not just via the tariff but also through more direct forms of intervention and regulation. But, as long as *gaimai* remained available and, to some extent at least, still substitutable for Japanese rice, the government's weapons appeared adequate to keep the rise in the rice price more or less under control, in the interests of agriculture/industry harmony. For the Nōmukyoku, however, *gaimai* imports and price regulation were not being used to tackle the fundamental problem: what was really required, in the national as well as the agricultural interest, was the investment, protection and support necessary to enable Japanese farmers, if needs be with a little help from their colonial counterparts, to meet the demand for the Japanese-style rice on which consumers increasingly insisted and which the small-scale core cultivator was uniquely qualified to produce. For the time being, the tools of market intervention were out of their reach for use in pursuit of this goal, but other possibilities were developing, as the next section will show.

***Supporting the rural economy***

From a national political point of view, therefore, the problem of the rural sector's adjustment to the growing dominance of urban industry focused on the issue of the price of the major food crop, rice. For policy-makers on the agricultural side of the MAC, and for their Nōhonshugi allies in the private sector, however, the problem was a wider one, necessitating the development of much more comprehensive policies to protect and support the small-scale cultivator who represented the backbone, not just of agriculture, but of Japanese society as a whole. Moreover, even the industry side of the Ministry was beginning to accept that economic growth did not depend solely on modern urban industry and that something needed to be done to enable the mass of smaller-scale producers, many of them with factories and workshops in rural areas, to continue to provide the basis of the national industrial economy. The divergence between the interests of industry and agriculture at the national level, symbolized by the eventual division of the MAC itself, meant that policies for agriculture and rural industry were never co-ordinated, but the continued prevalence of the pluriactive rural household meant that the rural economy was affected by more than agricultural policy alone.

As far as the technology of agricultural production was concerned, as we saw in Chapter 6, the first steps were being taken towards the establishment of a national network for the development and diffusion of improved techniques. This centred on national and prefectural experiment stations set up around the turn of the century, but also incorporated the extension services provided by the agricultural associations and prefectural governments. The focus of research within the experiment stations shifted towards work on intensive techniques suited to small-scale cultivators and work began on the breeding of new high-yielding rice varieties adapted to different environmental conditions. However, significant results from this work did not emerge until the inter-war period and output growth continued to depend largely on the spread of methods developed by practising farmers (Hayami, Y. and Yamada 1991: 81–2).

Meanwhile, as Havens points out, much of the agriculture-related legislation that passed through the Diet in this period was intended to placate landlord interests and maintain their political support for the government (1974: 72–4). This included laws which recognized landlords' (but not tenants') customary rights and established rice-inspection schemes which largely benefited landlords. The establishment of the Hypothec Bank and other funding for land improvement was only really of use to those with sufficient property to put up as security for loans. The Agricultural Association Law of 1899 effectively provided state sponsorship for a nation-wide organization to represent landowners' interests. Such legislation was often described as involving measures to promote output increase in the light of the food supply problem but, in practice, as larger-scale landowners

increasingly distanced themselves from cultivation per se, it reflected rather more their interests as landowners and landlords faced with increasingly fractious tenant-cultivators.

Nōhonshugi-influenced bureaucrats in the MAC and elsewhere in the government, on the other hand, were fighting for the means to support the core cultivators in the villages, arguing both that it was they who held the key to the output increases required to deal with the food-supply problem and that such households represented the basis for a harmonious and moral society, capable of producing the human and other resources needed to achieve Japan's wider goals.<sup>9</sup> Much of the bureaucrats' attention was focused on proposals for a law to permit the establishment of co-operatives, the brainchild of Hirata Tōsuke, a rising bureaucrat and protégé of the leading Meiji oligarch Yamagata Aritomo, who became MAC minister in 1901. A bill proposed to the Diet in 1897, stressing the failure of existing financial institutions to provide credit to any but 'great capitalists' and the need for co-operatives to support the efforts of small producers, was defeated by opposition which regarded it as inimical to the capitalist development of the countryside (Havens 1974: 78–9). However, by 1900, political concern about restlessness among smaller-scale cultivators had grown to the point that a revised version of the bill was passed, opening the way for credit and other forms of co-operative to be established. Hirata promoted the formation of co-operatives with missionary zeal and a significant number, almost all credit co-operatives, had been established by 1920. Co-operative credit still depended on adequate security, so that it did not extend to the poorest members of rural society, and it remained for the time being a drop in the ocean compared with other forms of rural credit. However, bureaucratic support for co-operatives is indicative of the agrarianist tendency within parts of the government and the importance increasingly attached to measures to help the smaller-scale cultivator.

The balancing act required between appeasement of the interests of the politically powerful larger landowners and support for practising smaller-scale cultivators is also evident in other areas of policy. While rice-price policy, the rice-inspection system, the provision of finance for land improvement and so on tended to benefit the larger landowner, MAC schemes to expand vocational education in agriculture and to provide technical guidance of practical use to small-scale cultivators – they 'required no money, just hard work', as Havens puts it (1974: 90) – reflected underlying support for core farmers in the villages. The village

9 For instance, Havens quotes a speech made in the Diet in 1898 by General Tani Kanjō, in which he argued for support of small-scale owner-farmers as the means to achieve self-sufficiency in food but also as potential soldiers and as a bulwark against the spread of socialism (1974: 76–7).

self-help groups promoted and supported by various ministries provided vehicles for bureaucratic control and influence but also mechanisms by which to contact and assist the rising small-to-medium households in the villages. Altogether, although the impact of agricultural policy on output growth and rural socio-economic change still remained relatively limited, the first stages in the trend towards bureaucratic agrarianist support for the core cultivator, which was to become the dominant policy approach in the inter-war years, were there to see.

This shift is also discernible in approaches to the wider economic activities of rural households. Before the 1890s, such rural policy as there was emphasized the promotion of grain production, and any other activities that rural households might undertake were regarded by policy-makers simply as something to do in the off-season from agriculture (*yogyō*). However, from around the turn of the century, Arahata argues, officials began to use a new term – *fukugyō*, meaning supplementary work – to describe such activities and to view them increasingly as a means to help support the incomes of rural households while they continued to supply the rice the cities needed (Arahata 1997). *Fukugyō* policy included the promotion of both non-rice agricultural activities and non-agricultural work on or off the farm and represented official blessing for the pluriactive strategy that rural households had devised. However, as Arahata points out, the policy was not concerned with improving the suitability or efficiency of rural households' diversification and non-agricultural activity; rather, it simply represented acceptance of the fact that they might not be able to make what they regarded as an adequate living from rice cultivation alone.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, industry-side bureaucrats in the MAC were also experiencing a gradual, perhaps less messianic, conversion towards the small-scale, indigenous and local and away from the large-scale, modern and urban, and were beginning to pursue policies which, unwittingly perhaps, did seek to enhance the non-agricultural activities of rural households. This shift dated back to the 1880s and the Maeda Report's advocacy of technological support for 'craft' industry at the local level. By the turn of the century, the MAC was establishing a network of industrial research facilities, similar to the agricultural experiment station system. This centred on its own Industrial Research Laboratory in Tokyo, which provided support for prefectural research facilities specialising in local industrial technologies (e.g. textiles in Yamanashi, ceramics in Kyoto), which also received some financial support (Morris-Suzuki 1994: 101). These in

10 Arahata therefore regards the new policy as a retrogression, since earlier approaches had at least emphasized efficiency and output expansion as the means to develop agriculture. He also notes, though, that sericulture, the most important area of rural diversification, was too important an export activity to be regarded as just a *fukugyō* and was given technical and other support (1997: 221).

turn were closely associated with local trade associations which, although generally formed on the basis of private-sector initiative, were becoming increasingly regulated and evolving, like the agricultural associations, into semi-official organizations through which the stick of quality control and the carrot of technical and other kinds of support could be administered. Local initiatives for the establishment, with prefectural government support, of vocational training institutes specializing in local industries – for example, a ceramics college in the rural pottery town of Arita in Kyūshū, a college to teach dyeing in the Iruma cotton-weaving district – were brought together within a national network of support and regulation (Morris-Suzuki 1994: 100–1; Itoh and Tanimoto 1998: 63). By no means all the local industries involved in this process employed rural labour, but many did (for example, the Arita ceramics industry, the Iruma weaving industry and the Yamanashi silk industry), so that the state's policies could be seen as attempting to contribute, through regulation and the application of science to traditional technologies, to the modernization of the industrial activities of the pluriactive rural household, just as with its agricultural ones.

This is not to suggest, however, that the MAC was way ahead of its time and pursuing a comprehensive rural development policy. For the agriculture side, the emphasis was on cultivation and the solution of the food-supply problem. Given the ideological context within which many agricultural bureaucrats worked, it was as farmers that core households were valued and anything else they did was merely supportive of that. For industrial policy, local industry was increasingly viewed as important, both politically and economically, as an element in the network of industrial capacity that was being built up. Nonetheless, in the bureaucratic response to the impact of the growth of urban industry on the rural economy, it is possible to see, emerging from different angles, the beginnings of a system of state regulation and support for the small-scale, rice-cultivating but pluriactive household and the local industry which helped to sustain it.

### **The Rice Riots crisis and imperial self-sufficiency**

The first phase of Japan's modern industrial take-off culminated in the boom conditions experienced in the economy during World War I. The disruption to exports from the developed world which the war caused created the conditions for import-substitution in Japan itself and a free hand for Japanese exporters in other Asian markets. Industrial investment boomed and workers were drawn into the cities at an unprecedented rate to take up employment in newly created or expanding factories. The acceleration in the growth of demand for basic consumer goods in the cities, in a generally inflationary environment in which speculation in goods like rice was likely to pay off, ultimately resulted in the spectacular rise in the price of rice visible in Figure 7.1. Wage increases failed to keep pace with price rises, labour militancy intensified and resentment at the nouveau



riche, profiting as the cost of living for ordinary people soared, filled the media.

By the summer of 1918, this atmosphere had triggered a wave of violent protests throughout the country which were eventually only brought under control by the intervention of the military. As Lewis' detailed analysis has shown, the riots in different parts of the country were by no means all the same, in their causes or their nature, but they did typically echo, in their rhetoric and their forms, the rural and urban protests of earlier eras – Lewis speaks of a general concern with a 'moral economy' (1990: 32) – and they commonly focused on the demand that rice be made available at an affordable price. Rural rioters attempted to stop exports of locally grown rice to other areas; urban rioters attacked the warehouses of speculating rice traders. The demand to be able to consume Japanese rice had come to symbolize the popular reaction to the apparent inequities that industrialization had brought.

The policy response of the government to the emerging crisis was, as we shall see, belated and ineffective. As tension mounted, it remained trapped within a policy framework in which the rising food prices that pleased the agricultural interest were sporadically mitigated by *gaimai* imports and market regulations. Although, with the end of the war, the rice price dropped back and *gaimai* imports continued to meet the shortfall in domestic and colonial supplies, the crisis convinced the government and business interests that the failure of past policy to deal with the underlying problem of the inability of domestic agriculture to meet the food demands of an industrial economy threatened economic and social stability at the national level. In the years following the crisis, a new approach was formulated, involving expensive programmes to expand the production of Japanese-style rice in Taiwan and Korea, so that the shortfall in the domestic market could be met without recourse to *gaimai* imports. At the same time, however, the crisis also played into the hands of those agricultural bureaucrats who had been insisting that neglect of the rural households who produced the Japanese-style rice which the industrial labour force demanded threatened the nation's future. It thus opened the way for a less fettered pursuit of the Nōhonshugi-influenced policies of support for the core cultivators which agricultural bureaucrats had come to espouse over the 1890–1920 period. 'Imperial self-sufficiency' thus represented a compromise solution to the agricultural adjustment problem under which the demand for rice was met, though not at the cheapest possible price, and the small-scale and necessarily pluriactive cultivator survived as the backbone of the rural economy.

### ***Policy failure and the riots***

As Figure 7.1 showed, the price of rice, though volatile, had been on a rising trend, absolutely and relative to the prices of non-agricultural goods,

since 1890. This rise was mitigated only by the inflow of imperfect substitutes for Japanese rice, in the form of tariff-free imports of colonial rice and tariff-controlled imports of *gaimai*, combined with some attempts at regulation of the way the domestic market worked. In fact, over the first half of the 1910s, supplies on the domestic market were reasonably satisfactory, with good harvests at home, expanding colonial imports following the abolition of the tariff on them and easily available *gaimai* imports (Ōmameuda 1993: 135). In 1915 a committee (Beika Chōsetsu Chōsa Kai) was set up to examine ways of regulating the rice price, but largely with a view to limiting the effect of price falls on farmers rather than dealing with price rises resulting from supply shortages (Ōmameuda 1993: 149). Agricultural interests continued to demand the re-imposition of the duty on colonial imports and the government issued an ordinance, opposed by the Finance Ministry, allowing it to buy up rice to support the price.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, however, with the wartime boom beginning to make itself felt, the MAC's 1915 estimates of the growth in per capita rice consumption were significantly above previous ones and it began to predict substantial and growing supply shortages. The growth in colonial imports had been the result of diversions, against the resistance of the colonial governments, from exports elsewhere and rice consumption in the colonies, rather than of increases in output, so that it seemed unlikely that Korean and Taiwanese rice could fill the gap. There were discussions about the establishment of granaries to hold government-purchased stocks for sale when prices rose and co-operatives were encouraged to construct their own granaries (Kawagoe 1993: 255). Local campaigns were launched to encourage the consumption of *gaimai* and other substitutes for Japanese rice (Mochida 1990: 113–14). Regulations against speculation were issued. But the *gaimai* tariff remained in place and the government's basic policy stance did not change.

This was against the background of the increasingly dramatic rises in the rice price that set in after 1916 and the resulting stirrings of unrest among consumers. The government responded with tougher measures against speculators, but few were ever prosecuted and the penalties were anyway trivial compared with the potential profits to be made (Lewis 1990: 12–13). Eventually, as the price continued to rise and tensions mounted, increased *gaimai* imports began to appear as the only option. The government of Prime Minister Terauchi considered reducing or even abolishing the *gaimai* tariff but, although it could be altered a certain amount by imperial edict, more than this required Diet approval. This was unlikely to

11 This was for electoral purposes, as mentioned earlier. The intention was to export the rice, but this proved impossible because of wartime shipping problems, and it was eventually resold on the domestic market in 1916 and 1917 when prices were rising again (Ōmameuda 1993: 148–9).

be forthcoming quickly, as the Diet was dominated by the Seiyūkai party, led by Hara Takashi, which strongly represented landowner interests (Ōmameuda 1993: 169–70). The Terauchi cabinet therefore decided to take direct action itself to increase the supply of *gaimai* and under an ordinance of April 1918 set up the Temporary *Gaimai* Management Bureau within the MAC to carry this out.

The Bureau in fact commissioned a number of major trading companies to acquire rice on the international market on its behalf, agreeing to compensate them for any losses they made. Between April and July of 1918 over three million *koku* was released on to the domestic market at a subsidized price (Ōmameuda 1993: 171). However, this had no noticeable effect on the rice price, which by July was rising at a truly alarming rate. On the 22nd, rioting broke out in a small coastal village in Toyama, as a protest by fishermen's wives against the rising cost of living symbolized by the rice price. From there, demonstrations spread, as Lewis (1990: 15) puts it, 'like wildfire' to towns and villages throughout Japan, taking a variety of more-or-less violent forms, through to the end of September. Over 8,000 people were prosecuted for riot-related crimes, though many more were arrested, and it is clear that a wide cross-section of the urban and rural populations took part in the protests.

Government and private funds were used to provide relief rice to those in need, but it was police suppression and an eventual fall in the rice price from its August peak that put an end to the protests. The Terauchi cabinet fell, to be replaced by the Seiyūkai government of Hara Takashi, whose appointment as the first party-political prime minister of Japan reflected the establishment's recognition of the significance of the popular unrest demonstrated in the Rice Riots. However, the failure of government to be able to do anything to stem the rice-price rise and prevent the riots also demonstrated the breakdown of the conditions on the basis of which past policies to deal with the food supply problem had worked. In particular, it made clear that *gaimai* imports, in whatever quantities, no longer had any significant impact on the domestic rice price. Despite strenuous efforts to promote *gaimai* consumption, resistance to it was by now such that *gaimai* was even reportedly refused by poor households offered it as aid, and claims that it smelt and tasted bad were widespread (Lewis 1990: 75; Ōmameuda 1993: 204–8). For the mass of consumers in Japan's rapidly urbanizing and industrializing society, an adequate supply of Japanese-style rice at an affordable price had come to symbolize the acceptable standard of living to which they now had a right and a government which failed in its responsibility to deliver the 'staple food' would face unrest which threatened both economic growth and political stability.

Meanwhile, just as *gaimai* was losing its efficacy as the means to deal with the food-supply problem, events occurred in the wider world that undermined past confidence in the easy availability of imports as and when required. With the end of the war, and also a bad harvest in India,

demand for rice on the international market increased sharply. Prices rose and governments in the main Southeast Asian exporting regions, concerned about the availability of supplies for the home market, placed restrictions on exports. The trading companies charged with acquiring the *gaimai* Japan needed therefore faced difficult market conditions and a diplomatic offensive was necessary to obtain sufficient amounts in 1918 and 1919 (Ōmameuda 1993: 157–61). Although in fact the problem was short-lived and the international market soon returned to normal, the government's blithe acceptance, on the eve of the riots, that imports would always be available had been undermined, confirming the doubts that the MAC had held for some time as to the security of reliance on non-colonial imports.

The riots had thus exposed the flaws in the policies that had been used to deal with the agricultural adjustment problem up to then. The new Hara government therefore sought a new solution which could more satisfactorily reconcile the conflicting interests it faced, ensuring a secure supply, at an acceptable price, of the Japanese-style rice that consumers could no longer do without, whilst sustaining the structure of small-scale cultivators which agricultural bureaucrats and wider agricultural interests believed was fundamental to the survival and development of the rural economy. Imperial self-sufficiency appeared to offer just such a solution.

### ***The adoption of imperial self-sufficiency***

In the immediate aftermath of the riots, there was no alternative to continuation of existing policies to ensure adequate rice supplies in the market, and the incoming Hara administration immediately proceeded to reduce the *gaimai* tariff to zero, so as to allow supplies to enter freely, effectively privatizing the business of *gaimai* importing. In the short term, *gaimai* imports were hard to obtain on the international market, as just discussed, and the government was forced to conduct direct purchases again in August and September of 1919 to avoid supply shortages in the period before the 1919 harvest came on the market.<sup>12</sup> The volume of *gaimai* imports continued to increase through the first half of the 1920s, despite the eventual re-imposition of the tariff, peaking in 1925, when they represented 7 per cent of the total rice supply (Ōmameuda 1993: 200). With the collapse of the wartime boom, growth in demand slowed up; the 1919 harvest turned out to be good and the 1920 one a record. As a result, the rice price dropped back, though it remained well above pre-crisis levels (Figure 7.1). The crisis was over and the old policy seemed to be working again.

12 This proved very costly, given the high price on the international market, and produced criticism from the Army and Navy Ministries (Ōmameuda 1993: 175).

However, politically things had changed. The shock of the crisis itself, and the evidence it provided of changing consumer attitudes towards rice, combined with the sudden demonstration of the risks of relying on the international market, created the conditions for government acceptance of the proposals of a committee, set up under the previous government but reporting in July 1919, for the adoption of a policy of imperial self-sufficiency in rice. This would involve, on the one hand, investment to expand production in Korea and Taiwan and, on the other, policies to promote domestic output growth, including intervention in the market to sustain prices at an adequate level (Ômameuda 1993: 179–80).

Hence, in 1920, a 15-year plan for the expansion of Japanese-style rice production in Korea was launched, along with a similar scheme for the promotion of a newly developed variety capable of producing Japanese-style rice under Taiwanese conditions. In both cases, substantial investment was required to create the irrigation and infrastructure conditions necessary for the cultivation of high-yielding, fertilizer-intensive Japanese varieties and government expenditure on agriculture more than doubled in Taiwan and more than tripled in Korea over the course of the 1920s (Mizoguchi and Umemura 1988: Tables 55 and 58). Eventually, as these investments began to pay off in the later 1920s, colonial imports duly came to replace *gaimai* ones and to play a significant role in the market for rice in Japan (see Table 7.1 on page 170 and Table 5.5 on page 124). Meanwhile, at home, government expenditure on agriculture also rose sharply, as new schemes to provide subsidies for land improvement and further investment in research and extension services were put in place. By 1921, the Diet had passed the Rice Law (Beikoku Hō), under which a Food Bureau, set up within the MAC, was enabled to buy and sell rice in the market so as to manage the price on a permanent basis (Ômameuda 1993: 186, 220).

The MAC Minister in the Hara cabinet at the time of the adoption of the self-sufficiency strategy was Yamamoto Tatsuo. He had been recruited from the Mitsubishi zaibatsu and was held to represent the industrial interests of the Ministry, for whom the expansion of colonial imports, hence lower domestic food prices and wages, has generally been interpreted as a triumph. In fact, the continued use of the tariff on *gaimai* imports meant that the rice price in Japan remained significantly above the international price throughout the inter-war period but business interests which had opposed increased protection and subsidy for domestic agriculture before the Rice Riots were now prepared to accept this (Nōrinshō Hyaku-nen Shi Hensan Iinkai 1980: 29). However, the mechanisms for government intervention to influence the rice price remained in the hands of the industry side of the MAC, with the Food Bureau dominated by Shōmukyoku men (Ômameuda 1993: 220). The Nōmukyoku, along with the agricultural pressure groups with which it was connected, became increasingly concerned that rice-price policy would not be operated in the way they thought it should, as a means to support the small-scale domestic rice producer.

The conflict between the two sides of the Ministry, which mirrored the wider conflict between agriculture and industry in the agricultural adjustment process, thus intensified, in the years following the Rice Riots, and became increasingly focused on rice-price policy. As agricultural prices fell from their crisis peaks and unrest in the countryside, in the shape of tenancy disputes, increased, the demand for a co-ordinated and committed policy of support for domestic agriculture, recognizably distinct from, and perhaps in conflict with, policies to promote industry, became ever stronger. As a result, in 1925, the MAC was finally split into separate agriculture and industry ministries. The new Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry took over the Food Bureau, alongside its responsibilities for promoting domestic agriculture, and was henceforth increasingly able to use market intervention and the tariff as part of its strategy to support rice cultivation, and its core practitioners, in Japan.

The new ministry could do nothing about colonial imports, which were beginning to have a significant lowering effect on the domestic market price by the second half of the 1920s, but at least imperial self-sufficiency excluded the much cheaper *gaimai* and preserved the Japanese market for producers of Japanese-style rice. Given that domestic farmers had proved unable, within their prevailing institutional and technological structure, to meet urban consumers' growing demand and hardening preference for Japanese-style rice, it represented a solution to the food-supply problem which did not fundamentally threaten the continued existence of the small-scale rice cultivating household to which agricultural bureaucrats were committed. It involved not inconsiderable costs, at home and in the colonies, but in the light of the Rice Riots' demonstration of the serious threat to economic and political stability which failure to deal with the food problem posed, industrial interests and the government were now prepared to accept this. Moreover, Japan's was not the only government adopting protectionist measures in pursuit of self-sufficiency, and the intra-Asian trading system was beginning to break down, as empires and trading blocs were consolidated.

In this light, the adoption of imperial self-sufficiency appears not so much as a triumph for industry but more as a compromise solution to the food problem which industrialization had brought. It provided the supply of the 'staple food' of the industrial labour force, at a controllable, if not minimum possible, price; it ensured for consumers the Japanese-style rice they had come to regard as their right, but it also guaranteed Japanese small-scale rice producers a market for their output at a price agricultural bureaucrats now had the means to try to ensure was adequate for their survival as cultivators. However, the legacy of the policy decisions thus taken in response to the food problem which emerged after 1890 and its culmination in the Rice Riots crisis has haunted Japan's rural economy and the consumers of its products ever since.

## Conclusion

Through the 1890–1920 period, Japan’s rural policy-makers pursued a trial-and-error course as they sought a solution to the manifestations of the agricultural adjustment problem. Some flirted with the idea of a wholesale restructuring in favour of large-scale, specialist farm businesses. Most, however, balked at the practical difficulties and huge investment costs of such a strategy and accepted that the small-scale cultivator had to provide the solution. Moreover, for influential opinion-formers reacting to the rapidly increasing dominance of urban industrial society, the rural household was taking on new meaning, as the repository of ‘traditional’ and distinctively Japanese customs and values. However, although, in the post-World War II period, in a context of newly available science and technology, declining per capita rice consumption and much richer consumers and taxpayers, Japan’s small-scale farmers proved more than able to meet the nation’s demand for rice, the same conditions did not hold in the 1890–1920 period. Policy-makers therefore had to grope for a solution that would ensure the supply of food, increasingly taken to mean principally rice, to urban industrial workers at an acceptable price, whilst providing an environment within which more and more restive small-scale cultivators, and the politically influential landlords who depended on them, could survive.

For much of the period, a policy of reliance on *gaimai* imports to meet supply shortfalls, combined with market interventions via the tariff and other forms of regulation to keep price rises under control, seemed to fit the bill. However, the shock of the Rice Riots crisis and subsequent difficulties in obtaining imports on the international market undermined confidence in the viability of the strategy. Imperial self-sufficiency, while a much more costly strategy for governments at home and in the colonies, appeared a safer compromise between industrial interests and the supporters of small farm-based Japanese agriculture, and in addition one which offered a long-term means to ensure consumer demand for Japanese-style rice could be met.<sup>13</sup>

The implications of the trial-and-error search for a Japanese solution to the agricultural adjustment problem, and of the eventual adoption of imperial self-sufficiency as that solution, are many. The process in general, and the Rice Riots crisis in particular, resulted in the enshrining of Japanese-style rice as ‘the staple food’, the birthright of Japanese consumers and the fundamental element in agricultural policy. Ever since, food policy in Japan has been rice policy, and although there have always been some efforts made to promote diversification, rice cultivation has

13 For estimates of the costs of imperial self-sufficiency and the *gaimai* tariff that it implied, see Anderson and Tyers 1992, who argue that the policy was economically inefficient and considerably more costly than alternative ways of supporting farmers.

overwhelmingly dominated thinking about agriculture on the part of both policy-makers and the general public. Even in the 1990s, when Japan had become the world's largest importer of food and consumers' diets were much more diversified, rice self-sufficiency remained a political shibboleth.

At the same time, the process which culminated in the adoption of imperial self-sufficiency resulted in the ultimate recognition of the small-scale, rice-cultivating but pluriactive, family-based household as the fundamental unit of the rural economy. The economic and technological superiority of such units, derived from a century of rural economic growth, meant that larger landowners depended on them and used their political power in ways which supported their continuing viability, while Nōhonshugi-influenced bureaucrats fought for them for perhaps different reasons. As a result, the industrial side in the Corn Laws debate was forced into a compromise which precluded the structural transformation of Japanese agriculture. Although small-scale rural households struggled through the much more difficult economic times of the inter-war period, they were increasingly able to draw on state support in their role as producers of the staple food and to dominate the village political economy. Thus the Japanese policy response to the agricultural adjustment problems of the 1890–1920 period put the seal on the structure of small-scale, part-time and predominantly rice-cultivating farm households which still conditions the rural political economy.



# Conclusion

The 1890s are now generally agreed to mark the turning point at which the modern industrial sector began its march towards domination of Japan's economy. By 1920, after three decades of relatively rapid industrial growth under the stimulus of the wars that made Japan an imperial power, the line had been crossed: the interests of agriculture and industry were acknowledged no longer to coincide and the achievement of Japan's national goals, together with the welfare of its population, were now seen to depend more on the non-agricultural than the agricultural sector. The developments and policy decisions of the 1890–1920 period therefore determined the pattern of Japan's agrarian transition and conditioned the nature of industrial Japan's rural economy through to the present day.

The growth of the modern industrial sector which brought about the agrarian transition was bound in many ways to break the mutual links between agriculture and industry in the countryside on which earlier rural-centred growth had been based. As the urban industrial economy expanded, it drew away both rural workers and the rural elite to life and work in the towns, where they began to spend their incomes on the new kinds of product and service produced and consumed in urban areas. Urban-centred organizations began to take over the networks of rural manufacturers and modern kinds of financial institution absorbed rural savings and supplied investment funds, replacing the rural financial systems of the past. Through the activities of the state – creating a national education system, conscripting into national armed forces, establishing a centrally controlled local government hierarchy – the rural culture and institutions that had prospered during the previous century of rural-centred growth were forced to confront the power and influence of centralized national organizations.

However, that century of growth had left the rural economy and society not without the strength to resist, or at least force a compromise with, the increasingly dominant urban industrial sector. Rural manufacturers combined their long experience of working within production networks and their ability to tap supplies of household labour with technological and organizational advances that enabled them to survive and compete against

large-scale factory industry. Although the products of modern industry did begin to find a place in the lifestyles of urban and rural consumers, they did not replace those of traditional manufacturing and agriculture. Indeed, as consumers became better off, they grew even more dependent on the product in which, above all else, small-scale rural producers had a comparative advantage, Japanese-style rice. Thus rural households continued to be able to combine agricultural and non-agricultural employment and although some elements of the rural-based economy – especially those that depended on the role of the rural elite – began to break down, others were developed and expanded to incorporate relations with the modern industrial sector.

In this context, it soon became clear that the agrarian transition could not involve the kind of structural transformation of agriculture predicted under the standard model of industrialization. In fact, as technical change in agriculture continued to progress along the lines it had been following in earlier stages of development, its characteristics consistently favoured the small-to-medium cultivating household able to provide the skilled and careful labour required but also to combine grain cultivation with other agricultural or non-agricultural activities. Larger-scale landowners therefore found it increasingly more economic to rent out their land to smaller-scale tenants and devote their time and resources to more rewarding activities in the urban industrial sector. However, in abandoning their patriarchal responsibilities in the countryside, they laid themselves open to resentment and eventually organized resistance on the part of the now better-educated, more confident, core cultivators, who controlled agricultural production but who could also take advantage of growing non-agricultural employment for themselves or members of their households.

As agricultural and industrial interests increasingly came into conflict, over the period, in Japan's version of the Corn Laws debate, agricultural policy-makers came to recognize that, although larger-scale landowners might control the political influence of the agricultural sector, it was the practising, smaller-scale cultivators in the villages who needed supporting, if rice-cultivating agriculture was to survive as the basis of the rural economy. Moreover, as rural harmony apparently began to break down and the influence of modern ways began to permeate more widely, the small-scale rural household, and the village that supported it, took on the ideological mantle of the preserver of 'traditional' customs and values, though in modernizing forms. Industrial interests might have liked to benefit from the lower food prices which the competition of the international rice market would have brought, but both larger-scale landlord interests and much of the agricultural bureaucracy were prepared to fight for the protection of the small-scale rice cultivator in Japan. Moreover, in due course the Rice Riots convinced even industrialists and their political representatives that economic and social stability depended on the ability to provide consumers with the Japanese-style rice which producers outside

the empire could not supply. Thus, while imperial self-sufficiency undoubtedly meant lower prices for Japanese rice producers than complete protection, it was nonetheless a recognition of the strengths of the small-scale cultivating household and a guarantee of its survival.

The adoption of imperial self-sufficiency has often been interpreted as a victory for industrial interests in Japan's Corn Laws debate.<sup>1</sup> However, the argument presented through Part II has suggested that it could alternatively be seen as the result of a more complex compromise between the now conflicting interests of agriculture and industry, as Japan became an industrial economy. In dealing with the food-supply problem within the context of a rural economy based on the small-scale, pluriactive rural household, it enabled the economic structures and institutions that virtuous-circle growth had consolidated to survive and develop through Japan's industrialization. The adjustment path thus mapped out meant that rural producers faced new difficulties in the much less stable times of the inter-war period, but by means of the economic, social and organizational strengths that had brought them through the initial crisis of adjustment, and the bureaucratic support they had now gained, they survived to become the mainstays of wartime agriculture and indeed of the Japanese rural economy ever since.

1 See e.g. Hayami and Ruttan 1970; Teruoka 2003: 68–9.

## **Part III**

# **The inter-war years**

Crisis and modernization



# Introduction

The years between the Meiji Restoration and the end of World War I have been viewed by historians of Japan as an era of more-or-less unremitting progress. Economic growth proceeded steadily, as producers in both the 'traditional' sector and new areas of production utilizing modern technology increased their output in response to rising domestic and export demand. Meanwhile, democratization progressed, as the influence of elected politicians increased, and the spread of imported ideas, together with the impact of urbanization and the greater social freedoms resulting from the Meiji reforms, brought about a flowering of political, social and cultural debate. Japan had become an imperial power, increasingly integrated, economically and politically, with the wider world and the Japanese delegation to the negotiations for the Treaty of Versailles returned home optimistic about the prospects for continued growth and prosperity, based on free trade and international co-operation. In less than twenty years, however, Japan was to be embroiled in war on the Asian mainland, maintaining its economic growth and industrialization through militarization in a world of protectionism, while political and social freedoms were curtailed in the interests of the nationalist project to secure Japan's interests in the world.

The inter-war years have therefore always presented a historical puzzle. For historians of the modernizationist school, writing in the light of Japan's subsequent defeat in World War II and phoenix-like rise in the post-war period, they invite the question 'what went wrong?' For them, the events of the inter-war years have to be seen as an aberration, waylaying Japan on its path towards economic development and democracy, only to be explained as the result of the hi-jacking of political and economic institutions by those with different objectives. More recent reinterpretations, however, have begun to break down the discontinuities between the developments of the inter-war period and those of the preceding and subsequent eras of growth and democratization. In particular, they have shown how the origins of many of the institutions and practices on which the post-war economic miracle was based lay in the build-up to war in the later 1930s and in the organizations of the war economy itself (see e.g.

Okazaki and Okuno 1993). Moreover, for scholars such as Garon (1994), the inter-war years can be seen as witnessing the triumph of modernity, but in a different form from that towards which post-war modernizationists saw society moving.

There is no doubt, however, that the countryside represents a major element in the puzzle of the inter-war years. This was recognized at the time, as rural areas attracted public and media interest as never before, and as the 'rural problem' rose to the top of the political agenda in the early 1930s. In contrast to the preceding decades of output growth, expanding employment opportunities and relative prosperity, the inter-war years saw rural households apparently struggling with slower growth, fluctuating prices and a relatively declining position in the economy as a whole. The rural problem was picked up as an issue by right-wing civilian and military groups, who saw it as highlighting the decadence and anti-Japanese values of urban capitalist industry, and rural distress and resentment have frequently been seen as providing a basis of support for the rise of fascism in the countryside (e.g. Dore and Ōuchi 1971).

At the time and since, a number of explanations have been offered for the turn-around in the fortunes of rural areas. Contemporaries, including agricultural policy-makers and the increasingly vocal leaderships of farmers' organizations, blamed low prices, especially the dramatic fall in rice and silk prices at the time of the Great Depression, high rents and the exploitation of producer-households by the more-and-more dominant world of big business. Left-wing commentators theorized the problem as part of the class struggle between the landowning and capitalist classes, on the one hand, and the peasantry or proletariat on the other.<sup>1</sup> Right-wing thinkers and activists idealized rural society as the bulwark of 'true' Japanese values, its harmony threatened by the corrupt, Westernizing forces of urban capitalism. Post-war non-Marxist interpretation of the causes of the agricultural problem, much influenced by the seminal analysis of Hayami and Ruttan (1971), has focused on the disincentive effect of colonial imports on the rice price and the slow-down in technological development in rice cultivation. However, the common thread in these interpretations is that all view the rural sector's problems as caused by the vulnerability of farm household incomes to falls in agricultural prices and to victimization at the hands of landlords, industrial capitalism and the outside world.<sup>2</sup>

However, Japan is not unique in suffering a period of agricultural crisis and depression, as the rural economy comes to terms with the impact of

1 A long-running and influential debate has gone on between different schools of Marxist thought on rural history, as to the precise nature of the classes and the struggles going on in the inter-war period. See Hoston 1986.

2 Brandt (1993), however, presents an alternative interpretation which uses macro-level data and econometric techniques to come to conclusions which in many ways complement the arguments of subsequent chapters.

industrialization and of integration into the world economy. Much of Europe, and in particular Great Britain, experienced agricultural depressions in the second half of the nineteenth century, at what might be argued to have been similar points in the industrialization process to that reached by Japan in the inter-war period. Improvements in transport technology and infrastructure opened up European grain markets to import competition just as competition for labour from the now well-established urban industrial sector was driving up farmers' costs. Given the relatively low income elasticity of demand for food, and especially for the basic grains in which many European farmers had specialized, farmers faced markets for their traditional products which were much less buoyant than those for industrial products, while the constraints posed by infrastructure and technology restricted the speed with which they could respond, either through diversification into new crops with higher income elasticities of demand or through the adoption of labour-saving techniques. Agriculture's relative decline, symbolized by relatively low agricultural prices and farm incomes, led to the development of political resistance on the part of landowners and cultivators, and to demands – more successful elsewhere in Europe than in Britain – for protection and support of the traditional agricultural structure (Koning 1994). Meanwhile, however, rural economies continued to suffer depressed conditions, attributable to the agricultural adjustment problem.

Subsequent chapters will argue that, fundamentally, the rural crisis of the inter-war years was the result of Japan's experience of the same problem. In Japan's case, however, rural producers faced, in the midst of their adjustment, the impact of the Great Depression which hit the world economy in the years following the Wall Street Crash of 1929. Farmers throughout the world were affected by price falls which were typically more severe, given the generally greater volatility of agricultural markets and prices, than those experienced by industrial producers (Rothermund 1996: ch. 4). The macro-economic policy of the Japanese government in the late 1920s, in particular the attempt to return to the Gold Standard at the pre-World War I parity, also depressed demand, although the policy response to the Great Depression, both at the macro level and in terms of specific support for the rural sector, helped to stimulate an earlier recovery in Japan's rural economy than that experienced elsewhere.

If the underlying nature of the problems facing Japan's rural producers in the inter-war period can thus be interpreted as resulting from the industrialization process itself, nonetheless the responses of farm households and agricultural policy-makers have to be seen as heavily conditioned by the particular forms taken by rural economic development over the course of a growth process going back, as we have seen, into the eighteenth century. The small-scale, rice-cultivating, pluriactive rural household, with moral, administrative and political support from agricultural policy-makers and increasingly influential elements in the political power



structure, coped with the crisis by adapting and, to some extent, modernizing its activities, while at the same time eventually obtaining the protection and support it needed to resist the forces which threatened its viability. In the process, it consolidated the economic structures and institutions by means of which small-scale rice cultivation, part-time farming and intensive agricultural protection and subsidy came to represent the dominant features of the rural economy through the economic miracle of the post-war years.

## 8 The 'rural problem' of the inter-war period

The years up to 1920 represented in many ways the golden age of the Japanese rural economy: agricultural prices were rising, non-agricultural employment opportunities were abundant and the threat which the burgeoning cities, with their new kinds of industry, might pose to the traditional ways of rural areas was as yet a relatively distant one. The collapse of the World War I economic boom brought an end to this golden era and ushered in a decade punctuated by downturns and crises, which culminated in the Great Depression. Although the industrial economy also experienced fluctuations, caused by, for example, a series of banking crises and the Great Tokyo Earthquake, the inter-war years saw the industrial structure steadily shifting in the direction of larger-scale urban industry, as advanced technologies in the steel, shipbuilding, chemical and machinery industries were acquired and absorbed, and lighter industries too, most notably cotton spinning and weaving, continued to shift towards factory-based methods. Larger-scale forms of business organization emerged within the conglomerate *zaibatsu* groups and their increasingly professional managements began to develop the features of the 'Japanese employment system' as a means of maintaining permanent, skilled labour forces. By the 1930s, military demand was leading the recovery from depression and economic activity was increasingly redirected towards meeting the needs of Japan's expansionist strategy in the empire and beyond.

In this context, the plight of rural households, especially those in the northeast and other areas badly hit by the collapse in world demand for silk during the Depression, received large-scale media attention and resulted in substantial legislation to provide aid and support to rural areas at what became known as the 'village rescue' Diet session of 1932. The 'agricultural problem' (*nōgyō mondai*), or sometimes the 'rural problem' (*nōson mondai*), came to be viewed as a consequence of the contradictions and evils of Westernized, capitalist, industrial development, against which both the revolutionary left and the, ultimately triumphant, fascist/militarist right saw themselves as struggling. However, the problem was broadly characterized in terms of its immediate manifestations, in the form of low

prices for agricultural goods, rural indebtedness and intensifying landlord/tenant conflict.

This chapter seeks to examine the economic nature of that problem, within the framework of analysis of the agricultural adjustment problem of industrializing countries. Thus it looks first at the demand and supply factors which determined the prices of agricultural goods – the product market side of the adjustment problem. It then turns to the employment/labour market side of the problem and the factors that influenced the relative income position of rural households in the economy as a whole. However, Japan's agricultural adjustment problem was complicated by the coincidental occurrence of the Great Depression, and the final section examines the impact of events in the global and national economies on the scale and nature of the rural problem, and on perceptions of it, then and since.

### **Supply, demand and prices in agricultural markets**

By the inter-war period, there can have remained few Japanese rural households, even in the most remote and under-developed regions, who produced solely for their own subsistence (or to pay rent in kind) and the vast majority were involved in production for the market.<sup>1</sup> Although many households, as we have seen in previous chapters, derived income from a range of agricultural and non-agricultural sources, the centrality and commonality of agriculture – rice cultivation in particular – to their economic activities meant that the quantity of marketed agricultural output they could produce and the prices they received for it remained the most significant determinants of rural prosperity. It was thus through what had already become national markets for the major agricultural products that rural households felt the impact of the agricultural adjustment problem and framed their responses to it.

The supply side of these markets continued to depend on the technology available to, and production decisions of, cultivating households, but, as we saw in Part II, imports, initially from the Asian rice market but increasingly from colonial sources, had also come to play a significant role in determining the supply of rice in Japan. The demand side of the market depended on the incomes and tastes of consumers, a growing majority of whom, by the inter-war period, lived and worked in the cities. The growth of urban industry would be expected to increase the demand for marketed food in general and the price rises of the 1890–1920 period, especially in the rice market, clearly reflected this. However, the demand for food typically rises less fast, with increases in income, than does the demand for

1 Marketed sales represented 77.3 per cent of the value of agricultural output in 1918–22, rising to 84.9 per cent in 1933–7 (Karshenas 1995: 132).

manufactured goods and services: that is, the income elasticity of demand for food is lower than that for other kinds of product and the proportion of household income spent on it (the Engel coefficient) tends to decline as incomes rise. At the same time, as household income increases, consumers typically substitute higher-quality food for lower and diversify their consumption into a wider range of fruit, vegetables and animal products. As the economy becomes a predominantly industrial one, therefore, agricultural suppliers can expect, in the absence of any interference in product markets, to face prices which generally rise less fast than the overall price level, with relatively greater rises for 'higher-income' food products and lower ones for grain and other staples. Hence the agricultural adjustment problem, in its product-market aspect, presents itself as relatively, though by no means necessarily absolutely, declining demand for domestic agricultural output and as market pressure to diversify out of basic grains.

### ***The supply of agricultural output***

Central to most discussion of the rural problem in inter-war Japan is the observed slow-down in the rate of growth of total agricultural output. As Table 6.2 (on page 139) shows, the growth rate of total agricultural production more than halved between the 1900–20 and 1920–35 periods. The decline in the growth rate of rice production was even more sharp but striking also was the slow-down in the growth of non-rice crop production which, as Brandt points out, was virtually stagnant during the 1920s, although picking up in the 1930s (1993: 262). Growth in sericultural output also declined but this was largely the result of the drop in production following the price falls of the Great Depression period and prior to this cocoon production had continued to increase in quantity and quality, in response to improvements in both sericultural methods and reeling and processing technology. The growth in livestock production was consistently higher than for other agricultural products and within the crop category, production of fruit and vegetables grew steadily. However, as Table 6.3 (on page 140) shows, these 'higher-income' agricultural products continued to represent only a relatively small share of the value of total agricultural output and diversification into higher-value crops did little to offset the decline in the output growth of grain and, eventually, silk.

The causes of the slow-down in domestic output growth are usually argued to have lain in, on the one hand, constraints on the further diffusion of improved technology and, on the other, the depressing effect of colonial imports on the price of rice. In the period up to 1920, the area planted to improved rice varieties had expanded rapidly, reaching around 40 per cent of the rice acreage (Hayami, Y. and Ruttan 1971: 158 and Appendix D; Brandt 1993: 265). However, for much of the inter-war period, before improved varieties suited to the colder parts of the country became available and investments to improve irrigation facilities there

began to come on stream, the scope for the diffusion of intensive, yield-increasing technology in rice cultivation was not as great as it had been in the years up to 1920 (see Chapter 9). At the same time, the double-cropping rate on paddy land, which had risen steadily through the 1900–20 period, marginally declined during the 1920s, only recovering its 1920 level in the late 1930s (Kayō 1958: Table C-c-4). As a result, the area planted to wheat, the main second crop on paddy land, peaked in the late 1910s and declined during the 1920s, recovering only later in the 1930s under a government scheme to promote it (Kayō 1958: Table G-b-1).

Meanwhile, according to Hayami and Ruttan's hypothetical estimations, Japanese rice production would have been around 7 per cent higher in 1935 than it actually was had imports remained at their 1913–17 level and not depressed prices as they did (1971: 224). However, as later sections will show, although agricultural prices were volatile, there was no long-term tendency for them to decline in real terms, relative to the prices of non-agricultural goods. Brandt (1993) argues that the constraint on farmers' ability to continue to increase output lay rather on the labour input side, as alternative employment opportunities drew workers away from agriculture and pushed up labour costs (in wage or opportunity cost terms). We will return to these issues in Chapter 9, in the context of analysis of rural household economies.

For the time being, however, the fact remains that domestic output growth slowed up sharply and imports contributed an increasing share of supply in the markets for agricultural products. By the 1920s, Taiwanese farmers, using the new cross-bred, Japanese-style variety adapted to their conditions, were able to increase their production of rice exclusively for the Japanese market. Meanwhile, as the decade progressed, the government's programme for expanding the production of Japanese varieties in Korea also began to yield results. Colonial imports had therefore replaced *gaimai*, as intended, by the mid-1920s and thereafter continued to grow, increasing their share of total supply on the Japanese rice market from 10 per cent in 1910 to almost 20 per cent by 1935 (Table 7.1 on page 170; Hayami, Y. and Ruttan 1971: 220). By the mid-1930s, 40 per cent of the wheat supply was imported, principally from Australia, and almost all the barley and soya beans (Kayō 1958: Tables R-b-4, R-c-1 and R-b-2), so that overall national self-sufficiency in food is estimated to have fallen from 98 per cent in 1911–15 to 82 per cent by 1935 (Shinpo 1995: 216). Industrial development was bringing about a shift in Japan's trade structure away from the import of manufactured goods towards that of food and raw materials, so that, as Howe puts it, 'by the 1930s, the functions of imports had become those of providing the food and raw materials for an economy that was relatively poorly endowed to produce them' (1996: 126), laying down the pattern for a trade structure that was to persist throughout the post-World War II period.

Thus the contribution of domestic output growth to increase in the

Table 8.1 Growth rates of population, national income and consumption, 1904–38 (average % p.a.)

	<i>Population</i>	<i>Gross national expenditure</i>	<i>Per capita gross national expenditure</i>	<i>Expenditure on personal consumption</i>	<i>Per capita consumption expenditure</i>
1904–19	1.19	3.30	2.11	2.99	1.80
1919–30	1.51	2.40	0.89	2.60	1.09
1930–8	1.28	4.88	3.60	2.23	0.95

Source: adapted from Ohkawa and Shinohara 1979: Table 1.2.

supply of agricultural goods was significantly lower during the inter-war years than it had been previously and Japan became increasingly reliant on imports of basic grains and other agricultural products in which Japanese producers could not develop comparative advantage. Diversification into higher-value products was taking place, but at a limited rate and rice, with silk as a distant second, continued to dominate the production structure on which the supply side of agricultural markets was based.

### ***Demand for agricultural goods***

The overall demand for agricultural goods depends on the size and growth of the population and its income level, together with the distribution of consumption expenditure between food and other goods and services.<sup>2</sup> As Table 8.1 shows, population growth in Japan speeded up in the inter-war years, under the influence of industrialization and urbanization. On the other hand, the overall growth of the economy was somewhat slower in the 1920s than it had been during the 1900–1920 boom, although it picked up again to a higher rate in the 1930s. These trends combined to produce relatively slow growth in per capita national income in the 1920s, but a much higher rate in the 1930s. However, the increase in per capita consumption expenditure slowed up throughout the inter-war period, as growth was increasingly used to support investment and military expansion. At the same time, as urban industrial growth proceeded apace, more and more of that consumption was taking place in urban areas: the population of towns and cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants doubled between 1920 and 1940, increasing from 31.9 per cent to 50.4 per cent of the total population (Taeuber 1958: 71).

2 The picture is complicated where the agricultural sector in question produces substantial amounts of either exports or raw materials for manufacturing industry. Silk falls into both categories and changes in demand for it are considered separately at the end of this section.

Such trends would be expected to produce an increase in the proportion of expenditure on non-food products and services, and a decline in the share of food in households' expenditure. Through the whole period between the 1870s and the end of World War I, the proportion of consumption expenditure devoted to food changed relatively little, falling slowly from 65.7 per cent in 1874–83 to 60.4 per cent in 1912–21. In the inter-war years, however, it dropped quite sharply, reaching 49.5 per cent in 1931–40.<sup>3</sup> This implies a reduction in the income elasticity of demand for food between the pre- and post-World War I periods and a number of studies have concluded that, by the inter-war period at least, the Japanese elasticity was relatively low, compared with that of consumers in other countries at similar levels of income, suggesting that Japanese consumers used increases in their incomes to shift into new, higher-value food products rather less than their counterparts elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

Ohkawa and Shinohara (1979: 169) dispute this interpretation, however, and it is certainly the case that changes in food consumption patterns were taking place in the inter-war years in the expected directions, even if the continued dominance of rice in the diet somewhat restricted their scope. In particular, the increase in per capita consumption of rice, which had been such a marked and problematic feature of the years leading up to the Rice Riots, came to an end. The figure peaked at 1.128 *koku* per person in 1918–22 and thereafter declined to reach 1.080 in 1933–7 (see Table 5.4 on page 123). Per capita consumption of other grains, which had peaked earlier in the 1910s, declined even more sharply, as rice continued to be substituted for them. Altogether, therefore, as Table 8.2 shows, the proportion of 'starchy staples' in food consumption consistently declined, while those of animal products and other foods (including, for example, fruit and vegetables) increased. Cross-sectional data, derived from surveys of the expenditure patterns of urban-worker households in the 1920s and 1930s, reveal very similar trends, in terms of both the declining share of food in total expenditure and the relative shift away from basic grains and into animal products and other foods (Kaneda 1970: 413).

Hence, although it may be the case that industrial growth did not induce quite such marked changes in the demand for food as occurred in other industrializing countries, nonetheless Japanese producers were, by the inter-war years, facing broadly similar trends. The overall demand for

3 Ohkawa and Shinohara 1979: 160, measured in current prices. See also Kitō (1996: 432), according to whom the Engel coefficient remained at around 60–70 per cent up to 1920 and then fell sharply to reach 46 per cent by 1943.

4 See the discussion in Kaneda 1970. The extent of the decline in the income elasticity between the pre- and post-World War I periods depends on estimates of agricultural output in the earlier years. These have been highly contested and Kaneda argues that, if agricultural output levels in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were higher than the recorded data suggest, the change in income elasticity would appear less marked.

Table 8.2 Shares of major components in food consumption, 1911–40 (% of total expenditure on food per capita in 1934–6 prices)

	<i>Starchy staples<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Animal proteins<sup>b</sup></i>	<i>Other foods</i>
1911–15	56.0	8.8	35.1
1916–20	53.5	11.2	35.2
1921–5	48.1	14.3	37.6
1926–30	45.8	14.3	39.9
1931–5	43.8	15.4	40.8
1936–40	43.7	17.5	38.8

Source: adapted from Kaneda 1970: Table 2.

Notes

a rice, barley, naked barley and other cereals; wheat flour, starch and noodles; potatoes.

b meat, milk, eggs, fish and other marine products.

food, though still growing, was not increasing as fast as demand for other kinds of goods and service. Growth in per capita consumption of rice, now almost exclusively of Japanese-type varieties produced at home or in the colonies, had reached its limits, and in as far as consumers did spend increases in their incomes on food, it was animal products, fruit and vegetables that they demanded.

Finally, there remains one agricultural product demand for which was not determined by the forces discussed so far and that is silk cocoons. Demand for cocoons was largely dependent on demand in the export markets for Japanese raw silk and silk thread, which had expanded so dramatically in the decades following the opening of the country to trade with the West. Although, by the 1920s, silk was facing competition from rayon in its most important market in the United States, rayon could not substitute for silk in some of its main uses, notably in the manufacture of stockings, and the high income elasticity of demand for such products meant that US imports of silk, the majority of which came from Japan, continued to grow through the 1920s (Hemmi 1970: 313). However, the export market for silk was a volatile and competitive one, and collapsed in the aftermath of the Wall Street Crash, when American consumers found themselves unable to afford the luxury of silk stockings. Although there was some recovery thereafter, the approaching war eventually cut Japanese silk producers off from their main market and opened the way for synthetic fibres to drive silk out of most of its uses.

### *Prices*

The absolute and relative prices of agricultural goods will be determined by the kinds of long-term supply and demand factors described above, together with short-term factors, such as the weather, and its impact on harvests, and



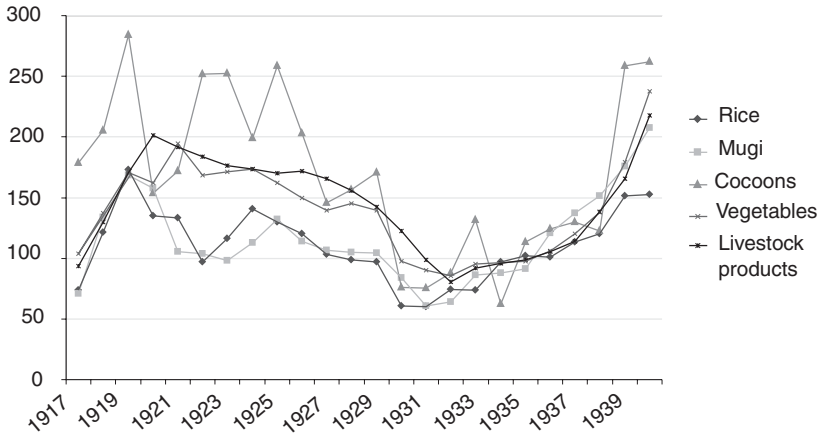


Figure 8.1 Price indices for major agricultural products, 1917–40 (1934–6 = 100) (source: LTES 9: Table 8).

fluctuations in the employment and incomes of consumers.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, for rural households whose incomes depend heavily on sales of agricultural goods, prices need to be considered in terms of the buying power they represent, hence relative to changes in the prices of consumer goods and production inputs, most importantly fertilizer. Figures 8.1 and 8.2 use LTES data to illustrate the changes in the price indices for the most significant agricultural products and for agricultural products as a whole, relative to those of the other prices that mattered to rural households.

As far as individual crops were concerned, the prices of rice and *mugi* fluctuated more than those of ‘higher income’ crops such as vegetables and livestock products and were on less of a rising trend, taking the inter-war period as a whole. Grain prices had risen most dramatically during the World War I boom and the Rice Riots crisis and fell more sharply than other prices through the 1920s. Cocoon prices continued to rise through the first half of the 1920s and vegetable and livestock-product prices also remained at relatively high levels, until all prices were hit by the Great Depression. Grain prices recovered to their pre-Depression levels rather more quickly than other prices but the cocoon price remained low, relative to its earlier levels, until after the outbreak of war with China. Overall price trends appear to confirm the relative rise in demand for non-grain food products, even as they remained a relatively small part of total agricultural output.

In fact, as comparison of the two graphs and Brandt’s more sophisticated calculations show, the real price of rice, using the general price index

5 Prices will also be affected by changing institutional factors, such as the activities of traders in the market or government intervention. These are considered elsewhere.

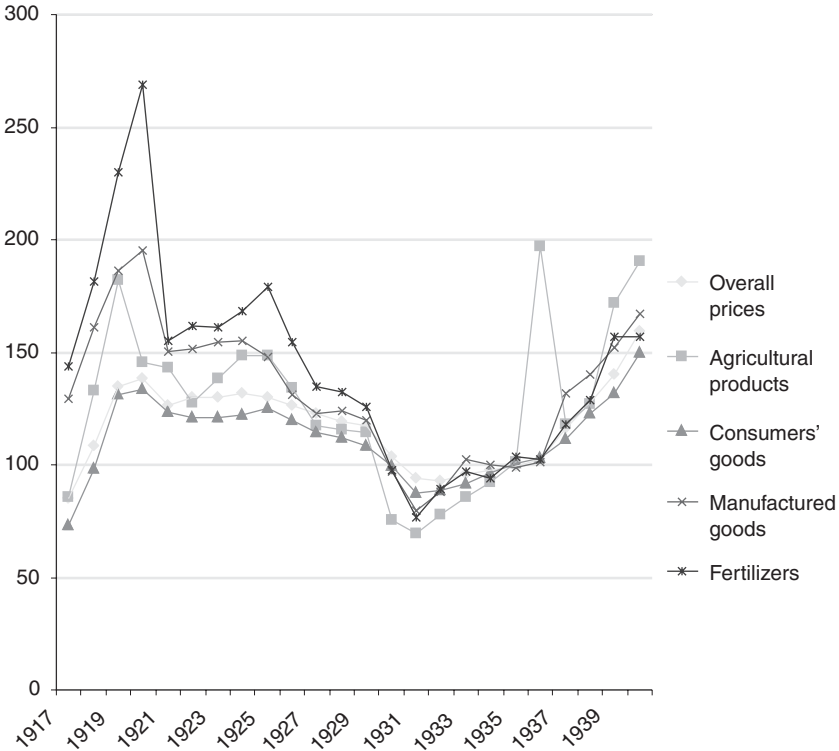


Figure 8.2 Aggregate price indices, 1917–40 (1934–6 = 100) (sources: Ohkawa and Shinohara 1979: Table A50; LTES 9: Tables 17 and 18).

as deflator, fluctuated widely over the inter-war period but showed no overall tendency to rise or fall (Brandt 1993: 267). Given the relatively greater rises in prices for other agricultural goods and the declining relative prices of manufactured goods and agricultural inputs as industrial productivity rose, agriculture's terms of trade with the rest of the economy generally improved, taking the period as a whole, although they declined during the immediate Depression years. In terms of manufactured goods alone, the index of agriculture's terms of trade (1934–6 = 100) improved from around 80 at the end of World War I to over 100 by 1937 (Nakamura, T. 1983: 96–7). This is reflected in the improvement in agricultural prices relative to those of all current inputs, but especially fertilizers, as cheap sources of organic fertilizer became available in the empire and as the technology of chemical fertilizer production was mastered (see Figure 8.3 and also Brandt 1993: 267). Karshenas provides estimates of changes in the prices of goods sold by the agricultural sector relative to those in the

prices of all goods (production inputs and consumer goods) purchased by it (1995: 132–3). These show agriculture's terms of trade continuing to improve significantly from the 1880s through to the early 1920s, thereafter stabilising and then falling sharply during the Depression, but recovering quite quickly during the 1930s.

These data, taken together, thus suggest that, although by the inter-war period agricultural prices were not rising as fast, in real or purchasing-power terms, as they had done in earlier decades, they did not, except during the immediate Depression years, experience the decline which would have reflected the relatively slow growth in demand for food products. Even the price of the basic grain, rice, did not decline in real terms over the long term, despite falling per capita consumption and competition from cheaper colonial imports. The exceptional period was the Depression, when the greater variability of agricultural prices, compared with industrial ones, caused a sharp fall in agricultural purchasing power. However, even then, the decline in agriculture's terms of trade in Japan was not as great as that experienced in the international economy, indicating that Japanese farmers were to some extent shielded from the falling world prices that hit their counterparts in some other countries so badly (Karshenas 1995: 135).

The long-term maintenance of agricultural prices must be explained partly by the slow-down in supply growth, compared with expanding output and productivity in other sectors of the economy, and the limited extent to which rural households were able to respond to the growth in demand for non-rice food products, the prices of which remained relatively high. A necessary condition for this, however, was protection against cheaper imports, of rice and of other food crops, from outside the empire. Anderson's estimates of the nominal rate of protection for agricultural products<sup>6</sup> show it rising from 26 per cent in 1928–32 to 84 per cent by 1938 (1994: 19).<sup>7</sup> This reflects both tariff and non-tariff barriers, and later chapters will show how the state increasingly intervened in the markets for, and production of, agricultural products, in order to support agricultural prices and incomes. To some extent, therefore, Japanese agricultural producers were protected from the full blast of the price effects which the agricultural adjustment problem brings about and were thus able to maintain the production structure and technology on which their form of small-scale household economy was based. At the same time, as the next section will go on to show, they also utilized and adapted the labour employment strategies which had served them well in the past, to meet the new requirements of survival in a predominantly industrial economy.

6 The extent to which domestic prices exceed world market prices, measured as a percentage.

7 Brandt's estimates are higher for the 1920s (1993: 287–8).

## **Employment, incomes and the labour market**

The impact of the growth of the industrial sector on the rural economy is felt of course not only via the demand and prices for agricultural output, but also via the demand and prices for rural labour. In particular, the expansion of the urban industrial sector during the inter-war period produced changes in the kinds of non-agricultural employment opportunity open to rural workers. As the towns and cities expanded into the countryside and as the development of the communications network increasingly integrated rural and urban areas, a growing range of urban employment opportunities was opened up to members of rural households. Taking advantage of such opportunities necessitated adaptations in the employment of agricultural labour as well but, through adjustments to their employment patterns and changes in their relations with the outside labour market, rural households responded to the relative rise in the productivity and incomes of those able to benefit from the absorption of new technology in the industrial sector.

### *The changing nature of non-agricultural employment*

There is no doubt that, from the time of the World War I boom onwards, the leading role in industrial growth was increasingly being taken by the urban heavy-industrial and factory-based sector, importing and absorbing the technology of industrial production developed in the advanced economies of the time. Such technology involved the use of machinery on a new scale, implying rising capital intensity, economies of scale and the development of a labour force with the skills and habits required for mechanized factory work. The diffusion of this technology is reflected in the widening divergence between productivity growth in agriculture and in modern industry: Odaka's calculations of the indices of total factor productivity in agriculture and the modern sector of industry show both rising gradually in parallel in the years up to 1920 but then diverging sharply as industrial productivity growth takes off (Odaka 1989: 148). The central feature of the labour-market side of the agricultural adjustment problem – agriculture's inability to match the growth of labour productivity (hence wages) made possible by technical change in industry – thus clearly emerged after 1920.

However, as other developing countries have discovered since, the capital intensity of modern forms of heavy industrial technology limits the extent to which such industrial growth generates employment. Manufacturing-sector employment grew less fast in the inter-war years than it had done over the 1910s and its share of the employed labour force, although still rising, remained at less than a third.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, employment in the

<sup>8</sup> The manufacturing labour force grew at an annual average rate of 3.38 per cent in 1911–20, 1.02 per cent in 1921–30 and 3.06 per cent in 1931–8. It increased as a proportion of the total labour force from 23.9 per cent in 1920 to 28.7 per cent in 1938 (Minami 1986: 272, 273).

modern sector (as defined in Table 5.3 on page 118) remained limited, accounting for only around 12 per cent of all employees even by the 1930s (Nakamura, T. 1983: 28). The growth in non-primary employment, and the declining share of primary-sector employment, was therefore largely accounted for by expansion in the numbers employed in 'traditional' industry and services.<sup>9</sup> Inter-war industrial growth in Japan was characterized primarily by the generation of a range of employment opportunities in small-scale manufacturing and services, meeting the needs of both large-scale industry and the expanding population of urban consumers, outside the modern sector (Nakamura, T. 1983: 218–20). The period therefore saw the emergence and consolidation of the 'dual structure' within Japanese industry, as small-scale producers expanded into the niches left vacant by firms employing the imported technology of large-scale production.

The survival and expansion of 'traditional' manufacturing and service activities depended nonetheless on the ways in which small-scale producers, many still connected to the rural economy, were able to adapt and develop, in the context of the growth of urban industry. A key element in this process was the electric motor which, unlike earlier mechanized power sources, came in forms small enough to be applied to production equipment within the home or a small workshop. Rural electrification occurred early in Japan, by international standards, and by 1920 seven million out of a total of 11 million Japanese households had access to electricity (Partner 1999: 17). As a result, in cotton weaving, for example, the 1920s saw the rapid spread of power-looms driven by electric motors among small-scale producers, working in the home or in small-scale local factories (Abe and Saitō, O. 1988: 146–7). Minami argues that the use of the power-loom in cotton weaving raised labour productivity, total factor productivity and the quality of the product and that, in general, profit rates were as high in small as in large businesses, if electric power was used, so that, in this and a range of other industries, the electric motor enabled small businesses to compete with large (1987: 252, 325). Moreover, the flexibility of electricity as a power source, as well as the small scale and relatively low cost of electric motors, made it particularly suited to the needs of workers producing to meet small and not necessarily regular orders and on whom agriculture and housework imposed periodic demands.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, the use of more expensive and sophisticated equipment necessitated an investment in capital and skill that was likely to push

9 The primary sector's share of employment continued to fall, from 53.4 per cent in 1920 to 44.7 per cent in 1938 (Minami 1986: 273).

10 For an, admittedly urban, example of how this worked within the household, see Hareven's study of the silk weaving industry in the Nishijin area of Kyoto, in particular Hareven 2002: chs 3 and 4 and 286–302.

small-scale producers towards greater specialization, within small-scale factories and/or more complex producer networks. In cotton-weaving, rural electrification and the spread of the power-loom led to concentrations of small-scale enterprises within industrial districts located in the rural areas traditionally associated with particular styles of cloth (Abe and Saitō 1988: 155). Producers continued to make use of household-based weavers as well, though, and putting-out systems survived and adapted in many areas of the textile industry, into the post-World War II period (Itoh and Tanimoto 1998: 63–7; Dore 1986: 158–78). In a range of more ‘modern’ industries too, such as the production of bicycles, machine tools, electrical goods and so on, in which the product can be broken down into many individual parts, output continued to expand, through the inter-war period, on the basis of increasingly complex networks of specialized small-scale producers able to call on a flexible supply of labour to meet irregular orders (Takeuchi 1991: 175–7). Elsewhere, in areas such as the processing of Japanese-style food products, the manufacture of household goods, the supply of catering and retail services and the construction industry, small-scale, often family-based, businesses continued to predominate as suppliers of the consumer goods or services in the production of which large-scale producers lacked technical or commercial advantages.

In the context of present-day developing countries, such small-business activity is typically conceptualized as belonging to the ‘informal sector’ and hence as characterized by ease of entry and exit, relatively low requirements for formal educational qualifications or specific skills, and, of course, poor wages and employment conditions. In Japan, as larger-scale businesses gradually came to offer higher wages and more secure employment conditions as a means of recruiting and retaining the skilled and experienced white- and blue-collar workers that they needed, the differentials in pay and conditions according to scale of enterprise, which have been such a marked characteristic of the ‘dual structure’ of the labour market ever since, became established (Nakamura, T. 1983: 220). On the other hand, as far as workers in rural households were concerned, while the chances of obtaining a high-wage job in the modern sector remained limited, the survival and development of the small-scale sector meant continued opportunities for non-agricultural work, offering lower wages and poorer conditions to be sure, but also easier access and greater flexibility.

At the same time, the nature of such opportunities, as small-scale producers came to utilize improved technologies and equipment, higher levels of skill and more sophisticated production networks, meant that they nonetheless tended to require ever-greater specialization on the part of the individual worker. Shinpo shows how, as powered machinery was introduced into rural enterprises, employers started to shift away from the use of part-time female workers from local farm households to more full-time workers. These often still came from rural households, but had moved from further away on a more full-time basis, so that production was

less affected by seasonal labour demands on the family farm and the close link with agriculture was gradually eroded (Shinpo 1995: 158–9).

The pattern of industrial growth that became increasingly dominant over the inter-war period therefore meant that, despite the expansion of the urban economy, rural households did not, for the most part, face competition in their non-agricultural activities from high-productivity, modern industrial enterprises offering permanent employment under good conditions. Instead, it allowed for the continued availability of less secure and less well-paid but more flexible forms of non-agricultural employment that could still be combined with membership of a rural household. The difference between the inter-war period and earlier stages of economic development was that such opportunities had become more and more predominantly linked to the expansion of urban manufacturing and the urban market for consumer goods and services and required a greater commitment of time and investment in skills and equipment than earlier forms of rural non-agricultural activity. Households therefore needed to adapt their patterns of labour use to the changing nature of non-agricultural employment opportunities, if they were to continue to sustain themselves through the pluriactive strategy of combining agricultural and non-agricultural work and income.

### ***Rural households and the changing employment structure***

It is striking, and perhaps unexpected, to note that, despite the change in the scale and nature of industrial growth that the inter-war years saw, the stability of earlier years in the number of rural households and the size of the rural labour force was largely maintained. As Table 8.3 shows, although the labour force did begin to fall somewhat from 1930 onwards, both the number of households recorded as agricultural and the total agricultural labour force changed little until the late 1930s, and it was only once the impact of conscription and the expansion of war-related industrial production began to kick in after the outbreak of war in China that significant change began to occur in the overall availability of rural workers. Despite the inter-war emergence of modern industry as the dominant force in the economy, the small-scale rural household and its family labour force persisted.

Nonetheless, the relative stability in the total agricultural labour force conceals two types of trend going on within it. On the one hand, it reflects a balance between growth in the rural population and the outflow of workers to the non-agricultural sector. As a result of rises in population growth rates as industrialization took off, the rate of natural increase in the agricultural labour force was significantly higher in the 1920s and 1930s than it had been earlier.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, however, the rate of outflow

11 It rose from an average annual increase of 86,000 in the 1890s, to 94,000 in the 1910s and 121,000 and 135,000 in the 1920s and 1930s respectively (Minami 1986: 287).

Table 8.3 Agricultural workers and households, 1920–40 (thousands; 5-yearly averages centred on years shown)

	<i>Gainful workers in agriculture</i>			<i>Agricultural households</i>
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	
1920	13,940	7,591	6,350	5,550
1925	13,941	7,586	6,356	5,545
1930	13,921	7,507	6,414	5,612
1935	13,750	6,972	6,778	5,610
1940	13,535	6,326	7,210	5,501

Source: calculated from LTES 9: Table 33.

remained high: although it declined, during the 1920s, from the rapid rates of the 1910s, it picked up to reach those levels again in the 1930s (Ohkawa and Shinohara 1979: 246; Minami 1986: 287). By the inter-war period, the agricultural sector was only contributing about half of the increase in non-agricultural employment, compared with around 80 per cent in the 1900s and 1910s, but this still meant that 1.2 million people left the agricultural labour force during the 1920s and 2.5 million during the 1930s (Ohkawa and Shinohara 1979: 246). The scale of this outflow and the fluctuations in it reflect the pattern of growth in non-agricultural job opportunities and the growing integration of rural workers into labour markets dominated by modern-sector employment (Minami 1986: 287–90).

Amongst those left behind, on the other hand, the constancy in the size of the agricultural labour force concealed a quite marked shift in its structure, with a steady decline in the number of male agricultural workers being offset by a rise in the number of female ones. This shift becomes marked, as might be expected, from 1937, but Table 8.3 makes clear that the gender balance of the agricultural labour force was shifting throughout the inter-war period. In contrast to the period up to 1920, when the expansion of off-farm job opportunities for rural workers was principally the result of the growth of light industries, such as textiles, whose workers were typically female, in the inter-war period it was increasingly in forms of industry requiring male workers that employment expansion was taking place. Nishikawa's analysis of data on *dekasegi* workers during the 1928–36 period concludes that one in three were by then finding work in industry, and although textiles was still the main employer of such workers, by the end of the period evidence is appearing of the heavy industrial employment of male *dekasegi* workers (Nishikawa 1981: 340–2). Hence, although female workers continued to be in demand in textiles, domestic service and other areas of the informal sector, the changing nature of industrial growth after 1920 created the opportunities for male workers to withdraw from agriculture in increasing numbers.



Table 8.4 Annual work-hours per worker in agriculture, 1880–1940 (5-yearly averages centring on years shown)

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
1880	1,668	1,296	1,495
1885	1,790	1,397	1,608
1890	1,931	1,515	1,738
1895	2,035	1,608	1,838
1900	2,108	1,673	1,908
1905	2,158	1,721	1,958
1910	2,288	1,832	2,079
1915	2,377	1,911	2,164
1920	2,335	1,884	2,130
1925	2,177	1,753	1,984
1930	2,188	1,767	1,994
1935	2,307	1,599	1,958
1940	2,152	1,585	1,850

Source: Hayami, Y. and Yamada 1991: Table A5.

Rural households therefore had to adjust their employment patterns to the fact that non-agricultural employment increasingly meant male workers (though also female ones as before) working away from home on a more long-term basis. The old ways in which households had combined agricultural and non-agricultural work and income – rural by-employment, putting-out work and so on – while not disappearing, were becoming less and less workable. This is reflected in the fact that, although, during earlier stages of development, work-hours per worker in agriculture had continued to increase, despite the concurrent increase in non-agricultural employment, they peaked in the late 1910s and thereafter steadily declined, for both male and female agricultural workers (see Table 8.4). Under the labour-market conditions of the inter-war period therefore, it appears to have become increasingly difficult for individual workers to combine agricultural and non-agricultural employment, so that continued participation in the non-agricultural labour market was coming to require a reduction in the contribution to farm work.

Nonetheless, given the constancy in the number of rural households, it is clear that this did not result in the abandonment of the pluriactive household strategy and the shift of whole households to reliance on non-agricultural employment and incomes. Instead, it produced the clear establishment of part-time farming of the form whereby one or more members of the rural household earn income off the farm. By the inter-war period, official statistics on the extent of part-time farming were being collected. These show a consistent proportion of around 30 per cent of farm households as part-time (*kengyō*), with a slight rise in the full-time (*senkyō*) proportion during the Depression years of the early 1930s (Kayō

1958: Table e-a-4). However, the definition of a full-time farm in these series is not clear and statistics collected from 1938 use a much more precise formulation.<sup>12</sup> These give the proportion of part-time farms in 1938 as 54.8 per cent, compared with 33.1 per cent using the definition of the old series. In that year, 30.6 per cent of farm households were categorized as class 1 part-time, that is earning more from agriculture than non-agriculture, and 24.2 per cent were class 2, earning more from non-agriculture than agriculture (Misawa 1970: 252). Inter-war-period trends in pluriactivity cannot be derived from these data but they do indicate that, by the late 1930s, over half of rural households were earning significant income from off-farm employment.

The internal strategies which households used – in particular shifts in the gender-based division of labour within the household – in order to remain pluriactive will be considered in more detail in Chapter 9. However, for the time being it is clear that the adjustments made by Japanese rural households to the changes in labour demand and employment patterns that industrialization increasingly brought about did not involve the abandonment of pluriactivity. As more and more male workers moved into non-agricultural employment, households did not give up farming and divert all their labour into higher-productivity industrial work. Instead they found ways of continuing to cultivate, while adapting to new forms of non-agricultural labour demand, which prefigured the part-time farming strategies to be perfected in the post-World War II period. Even though this involved some reduction in the number of hours households were able to devote to agriculture, cultivation appears to have remained worthwhile. While later chapters will describe the technological, organizational and other factors that made this possible, the next section will consider the economic returns to pluriactivity and its impact on the price of labour.

### ***Wages and incomes***

Estimating the changes in the absolute and relative levels of rural households' incomes that resulted from the developments described above is not a straightforward matter. Households' receipts depended on their agricultural output and the prices they received for it, together with their income from non-agricultural sources, while their outgoings depended on the amount and prices of agricultural inputs used, taxes and interest payments, and the costs of the labour they employed.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, the distribution

12 Households in which at least one member is earning income off the farm.

13 The evaluation of the costs and returns to family labour employed in farm households is controversial. Should the household be regarded as a form of small business, in which case the upkeep of family workers is a cost and the income of the household is measured as its profit above these costs? Or should work on the family farm be regarded as equivalent to other forms of wage-work, in which case the upkeep of family members is a form of income?

of income amongst households was bound to be heavily dependent on the distribution of landownership and rental payments.

The only data on rural household incomes which take all these factors into account are those derived from the Farm Household Economy Surveys, carried out annually from 1921. Although a range of different types of household, including both owner-farmers and tenants and larger- and smaller-scale cultivators, was surveyed, the area cultivated by households in the survey tended to be somewhat above average and the results may not reflect altogether accurately the position of the poorest in village society.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, they provide some idea of the trends in rural household incomes, as indicated in Table 8.5. They suggest that average real rural household income, from agricultural and non-agricultural sources, while fluctuating, continued on a generally rising trend until the later 1920s. It dropped sharply during the Depression years but then recovered to pre-Depression levels in the second half of the 1930s. Odaka uses real net agricultural value-added per agricultural household as an indicator of rural income levels (taking no account of non-agricultural income) and this fluctuated around a broadly constant level over the inter-war period, not dropping so drastically during the Depression and generally rising during the 1930s (1993: 32–3).

Another way of approaching the question of the returns to rural labour is via the wage rates prevailing in the labour markets open to members of rural households. Although hired labour was by no means as important as family labour in the organization of agricultural production, the level of agricultural wage rates represented the floor to farm incomes and Napier has shown that it was correlated with the factors, such as agricultural prices and levels of rents, which determined the incomes of tenant farmers, the next level up on the rural income distribution (1982: 353–4). Real wages for agricultural workers, whether male or female, on long or short contracts, continued to rise steadily up to the late 1920s. They dropped significantly in the Depression years, only gradually recovering to their pre-Depression levels by the late 1930s (Napier 1982: 346; Brandt 1993: 270). Meanwhile, wages in the alternative non-agricultural occupations open to members of rural households followed a similar pattern. The wages of maids, for instance, shot up during the World War I boom and maintained their level until the second half of the 1920s, although they never completely recovered their pre-Depression levels in the 1930s; female textile workers' wages, which had more than doubled in real terms during World War I, similarly maintained their peak levels through to the end of the 1920s, though again not fully recovering in the 1930s (Odaka

14 In the early years of the Survey, only around 50 households were included, although the number had risen to about 200 by the 1930s, and the methods used are not always clear. The results of the pre-war surveys are summarized in Kayō 1958: Tables N-a-1–3 and presented in more detail in Nōrinsho Tōkei Jōhō-bu 1974.

Table 8.5 Farm household economy survey data on rural household income and expenditure, 1921–40 (average per household in the survey)

	<i>Net agricultural income<sup>a</sup></i> (¥)	<i>Non-agricultural income</i> (¥)	<i>Household expenses (including food)</i> (¥)	<i>Household surplus<sup>b</sup></i> (¥)	<i>Consumer price index (1934–6 = 100)</i>
1921	1,057	147	904	208	124
1922	831	295	923	126	121
1923	805	259	799	205	121
1924	1,325	300	1,176	371	122
1925	1,372	266	1,234	336	125
1926	1,162	270	1,170	215	120
1927	934	251	983	161	114
1928	1,005	356	1,095	223	112
1929	922	279	996	181	109
1930	590	220	749	16	100
1931	414	137	543	-2	87
1932	512	133	566	63	89
1933	590	140	590	120	92
1934	576	157	639	86	96
1935	695	170	685	156	101
1936	759	157	750	156	103
1937	850	189	806	232	111
1938	947	210	869	306	123
1939	1,398	271	1,105	604	132
1940	1,498	316	1,280	582	150

Sources: Kayō 1968: Table N-a-1; Ohkawa and Shinohara 1979: Table A50.

Notes

a receipts minus agricultural costs (including rent).

b income from all sources minus taxes and household expenses.

1993: 32–3). This suggests that competition for the labour of rural households persisted until the Depression hit, maintaining, if not increasing, the incomes that rural workers could command through their agricultural and non-agricultural work.

This trend was also indirectly reflected in the declining ability of landlords to maintain their rental share of income from agriculture. The real value of rents on paddy land peaked around 1920 and thereafter declined gradually, recovering slightly in the early 1930s but thereafter resuming its decline (LTES 9: 220–1; Brandt 1993: 270). Rents on non-paddy land fell further than those on paddy (Napier 1982: 357). The bargaining power of landowners, relative to that of the tenant households who supplied much of the labour for agricultural production, appears thus to have been declining throughout the period and, despite the Depression, enabling cultivators to benefit proportionately more from any increases in the real value of agricultural output.

Over the inter-war period as a whole, therefore, rural households appear to have experienced at least some increase in their real incomes,

though disrupted by the Depression, and a strengthening of their position in the labour market, as might have been expected from the overall increase in the demand for labour in the economy. However, labour productivity in agriculture was rising much less quickly than that in industry: in real terms, output per person in agriculture was 46 per cent of the average for the economy as a whole, and 34 per cent of that of the manufacturing sector, in 1920, but 36 per cent and 20 per cent respectively in 1938 (Minami 1986: 279). In as far as this was reflected in relative wage rates, although those in industry had been rising faster than those in agriculture up to 1920, the differences in growth rates were not large, whereas they became much wider after 1920.<sup>15</sup> As a result, there was a steady decline in the value of agricultural wage rates, in real and nominal terms, relative to those in manufacturing and in industry as a whole (Ohkawa and Shinohara 1979: 233–4; see also Saitō, O. 1998: 53).

For agricultural households, the relative decline in income position resulting from their relatively slow productivity growth would have been offset to some extent by the improving terms of trade for agricultural products, but Minami's estimates of real income per capita in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors still show a widening differential in favour of non-agriculture from 1920 (1996: 44–5). Rural households able to earn non-agricultural income could of course themselves benefit from rising industrial productivity but that this was not enough to change the trend is suggested by Ono and Watanabe's estimates of urban/rural real and nominal per capita income differentials.<sup>16</sup> These show the real differential changing little and the nominal differential narrowing between the 1880s and the late 1910s, with a sharp shift to widening differentials, both real and nominal, between then and 1930 (Ono and Watanabe 1976: 364–8). Hence, the available data on productivity, wages and incomes suggest that, although rural households' real long-term incomes were not declining, there was a substantial basis for the rural perception that the urban population was increasingly prospering, relative to those left behind in the countryside.

Taking the inter-war period as a whole, therefore, the relative rise in agricultural prices, resulting from the slow-down in output growth and increased border protection, helped to offset slower productivity growth and thus to sustain agricultural incomes, while rising wages and employment opportunities off the farm continued to provide a significant addition. However, 1920 marked the beginning of a decisive shift in the income position of rural households relative to urban ones, which the

15 Although these trends are generally consistent, the precise differences depend very much on which price deflator is used to produce the real wage series. See the discussion in Ohkawa and Shinohara 1979: 229–33).

16 Ono and Watanabe compare per capita urban household income with per capita farm household income, including income from non-agricultural sources.

improvement in the terms of trade could not offset. The perception of this relative decline was crystallized during the period of the Great Depression, in ways which were to colour attitudes to the rural economy and agricultural policy through into the post-war period.

### **The Great Depression and the rural sector**

In October of 1929, prices on the New York Stock Exchange plummeted. What appeared to contemporary observers to be a temporary financial crisis, albeit in a major economic power, was to precipitate a collapse in international trade and a wave of bankruptcies, unemployment and falling prices throughout the world economy. By this time, Japan was very much part of that world economy and the collapse transmitted itself to the domestic economy through falling export demand and prices and the financial turmoil triggered by global capital flows. However, its impact was intensified in Japan by its coincidence with the government's attempt to resolve the balance of payments disequilibrium and financial instability which had plagued the economy through the 1920s by returning the yen to the Gold Standard at the by now unrealistically high level it had reached before World War I. The decision was implemented in January 1930, to the accompaniment of the deflationary monetary and fiscal policies necessary to bring Japanese prices down to a level compatible with the new exchange rate. The combined result was dramatic price decline, the collapse of vulnerable businesses and unprecedented falls in employment and money incomes.

In the rural economy, the impact of the Depression was experienced primarily through sharply falling prices. The prices farmers received for agricultural products had in fact started to fall from 1925 but their collapse in 1930 was much more marked (see Figures 8.1 and 8.2). The good rice harvest of that year nipped any hope of recovery in the bud and in the trough of 1931 prices were lower, in absolute terms, than they had been at any time since before the World War I boom. Cocoon prices had held up better in the later 1920s, so that their fall, as a result of the collapse in the export market in the US, was even more dramatic, the cocoon price index (1934–6 = 100) falling from 171 in 1929 to 75 in 1930 and 1931 (LTES 9: Table 8). The prices of fruit, vegetables and livestock products were less severely hit than those of grain and cocoons but still suffered significant falls.

In real terms, of course, with prices falling throughout the economy, the collapse in agricultural prices appears less disastrous.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless,

17 Nishikawa argues that the flexibility of prices in Japan, compared with those in the US and UK, meant that the impact of the Depression on real GNP and real wages was smaller, and the rise in unemployment less severe, than elsewhere (Nishikawa 1985: 264–8). However, for agricultural producers whose money income depends directly on the prices of agricultural goods and who do not necessarily rely on the market for as much of what they consume as non-agricultural producers, falling prices do not necessarily correspond to rising real incomes.

neither the overall price index nor the prices of manufactured and consumer goods fell as far, in 1930 and 1931, as those of agricultural goods and the terms of trade between agriculture and industry, which moved in favour of agriculture over the inter-war period as a whole, temporarily shifted in favour of industry during the Depression (Karshenas 1995: 132–3). Given the price inelasticity of demand and supply for agricultural goods, compared with those for manufactured goods, a sharper relative fall in agricultural prices in response to a downward shift in demand is to be expected. So also is a sharper rise in response to a recovery in demand and the relative position of agricultural prices had more-or-less recovered by 1935 (Figures 8.1 and 8.2).<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, in the immediate Depression years, agricultural producers experienced a decline not just in the nominal prices they received for their output but also in the real and relative value of their sales, which ran counter to the trends they experienced both before and afterwards.

What this meant for the real income position of rural households is open to interpretation. Output of the main crops was maintained and even increased during the Depression years but not by anywhere near enough to offset the effect of falling absolute prices. The nominal value of agricultural sales therefore fell. On the other hand, the prices of fertilizers and other agricultural inputs, which had been declining steadily throughout the 1920s, dropped as sharply as output prices (Figure 8.2) and, since rents were typically paid in kind, the fall in the real value of rental rice was borne by landlords not cultivators. However, the price index for consumer goods, and indeed the overall price index, did not drop as far as agricultural prices and while the net agricultural income of households in the Farm Household Economy Survey had fallen, by 1931, to 45 per cent of its 1929 level, the consumer price index had only fallen to 80 per cent (Table 8.5).<sup>19</sup> Agricultural wage rates, reflecting rural income levels, fell sharply, in real and nominal terms, from 1930 onwards, while industrial wage rates held up much better (Ohkawa and Shinohara 1979: 230–1).

Meanwhile, the non-agricultural income of Farm Household Economy Survey households fell almost as much, in percentage terms, as their agricultural income. There is little evidence that unemployed urban workers returned to their rural families in any great numbers (see Nakamura, T. 1983: 28–9; Smethurst 1986: 99–100): although employment in secondary industry certainly fell, especially for women, that in the tertiary sector expanded and Nishikawa argues that unemployed workers for the most

18 Since demand and supply of agricultural goods are less responsive to changes in prices than are those for non-agricultural goods, it takes a bigger change in prices to restore demand/supply equilibrium in the market, following an exogenous change. As a result, agricultural prices are always bound to be more volatile than non-agricultural ones.

19 Moreover, consumer prices in rural areas appear to have fallen less fast than urban consumer prices and the national average (Ohkawa and Shinohara 1979: 223).

part stayed in the cities, picking up work where they could in the informal sector or domestic service (1981: 337–8). However, the remittances they were able to make to their rural families would clearly have declined and fewer workers were able to leave the countryside for non-agricultural work.<sup>20</sup> The more that non-agricultural income was linked to the expansion of urban industry, the more vulnerable it became to fluctuations in the national and international economies.

For the households in the Farm Household Economy Survey, therefore, the overall result of the impact of the Depression on prices and incomes was a sharp decline, over 1929–31, in the surplus they made over and above their costs and living expenses, and in 1931 they found themselves, on average, very marginally in the red (Table 8.5). That the situation was probably worse than this for poorer households is indicated by the frequently cited levels of rural indebtedness over the Depression years. For the first time, data on rural debt was collected and publicized and although, in the absence of earlier data, it was not possible to estimate how far rural indebtedness had been increased by the Depression, nonetheless the level of debt itself appeared shocking (Smith 2001: 64).<sup>21</sup>

In practice, households with smaller holdings had always easily become trapped in cycles whereby they had no choice but to sell much of their rice crop immediately after harvest, when prices were lowest, in order to meet debt repayments and other obligations, leaving themselves having to borrow further in order to buy food crops in the lean period before the next harvest, when prices were likely to be highest. The use of informal types of short-term credit, ranging from pawning through loans from landlords/patrons to mutual savings clubs, had therefore always been common within village economies (Teranishi 1990; Izumida 1992). Consequently, whatever the Depression did mean for rural livelihoods, it did not represent a ‘crisis of entitlements’, since credit was available to tide households over their shortfalls. Rural financial and social institutions were, by this stage, sufficiently well developed to be able to cope with short-term falls in prices and incomes and levels of indebtedness did indeed subsequently fall, as the rural economy recovered.

At the same time, the rural population also found other ways, in addition to borrowing, of resisting the impact of the Depression on them. In the years following the crash, they succeeded in increasing agricultural output significantly, through both growth in rice output and shifts into higher-value crops, now including wheat which the government was promoting, so that the value of agricultural output increased by 77 per cent

20 For a discussion of the complex impact of the Depression on the employment of female textile workers from rural areas, see Hunter 2003: 292–6.

21 Smethurst argues that rural indebtedness did not in fact increase during the Depression (1986: 89–90).



over 1931–6 (Sugihara 1989: 163–5). Although there was some increase in expenditure on inputs, this growth must mainly have been achieved through increased labour input in agriculture (see Table 8.4), and similarly, although manufacturing wages were stagnant, households' income from non-agricultural sources recovered, as they put in more hours at whatever work was available (Sugihara 1989: 163–5). Hence, as Mori puts it, households basically got through the Depression by intensifying their work (1999: 47).

They also clearly cut back on expenditure on items that had become accepted elements in the standard of living and, when forced to sell all their available rice to meet expenses before the end of the year, reverted to the dietary patterns of earlier decades.<sup>22</sup> More threateningly, tenant households continued to organize to resist landlords' efforts to maintain their rental incomes or, when the Depression hit them too, to take land back into their own cultivation (see Chapter 9). Local governments faced resistance and delay, as they sought to collect the taxes needed to meet the costs of schools and other community facilities, expenditure on which had increased considerably over the 1920s (Smith 2003: 69–71).

If rural households thus found ways of coping with the impact of the Depression, its significance, for contemporary observers and ever since, might be argued to lie in the extent to which it epitomized and crystallized not so much a subsistence crisis as, to use Smith's term, a 'crisis of community'. On the one hand, at the national level, as the Depression appeared to hit rural families harder than urban ones, it symbolized the growing divergence, and indeed inequality, between the rural and urban economies that industrial growth since World War I had brought about. On the other hand, within rural society itself, it made apparent the threats to village harmony and co-operation that agricultural adjustment to the industrial economy involved. The political and media interest in the countryside which the Depression consequently brought forth, and the resulting policy response, will be considered in detail in Chapter 10.

This response, however, formed part of a package of government measures which helped to bring about recovery, in both the urban and rural economies, more rapidly than in most of the other Depression-hit countries. The attempt to return to the Gold Standard was abandoned and the resulting devaluation of the yen stimulated renewed export growth. The programme of Keynesian-style fiscal expansion initiated by Finance Minister Takahashi Korekiyo stimulated demand in the economy as a whole and even agricultural prices had recovered to their pre-Depression levels

22 Teachers inspecting the Depression-period packed lunches of schoolchildren in the village studied by Smith were horrified to find them containing only barley/rice mixtures, the staple rural diet of the pre-World War I period but now an indication of poverty and deprivation (Smith 2003: 72). Tanimoto notes that the home-brewing of saké revived during the Depression (1996: 268–9).

by the mid-1930s. In many ways, the economic impact of the Depression, on farmers and on industrial producers, was less severe and more short-lived in Japan than in many other parts of the world. Yet, as later chapters will suggest, it represented a key turning-point in attitudes to and perceptions of the rural sector amongst policy-makers and the wider public, paving the way for the growth of support for agriculture through to recent years.

## **Conclusion**

By the inter-war period, Japan's industrial sector had expanded to the point at which it was industrial growth that drove the growth of the economy as a whole and determined, through its nature and location, the patterns of change in labour and product markets. Japanese rural households, like their counterparts in other industrializing economies before and since, were thus obliged to adjust their production activities and their use of labour, in the light of the changing demand and supply conditions brought about by the establishment and growth of urban factory industry and of the urban market for goods and services. In some respects, however, adjustment pressures were less intense in Japan than elsewhere. In the markets for agricultural products, the relatively slow change in food consumption patterns, as incomes rose, combined with rising levels of protection against non-colonial imports to limit pressure to shift out of grain cultivation, even if there was little incentive to increase its production. The real value of agricultural prices and the terms of trade between agriculture and industry were broadly maintained, if not to some extent improved, enabling farm households to sustain and even increase the real incomes they derived from agriculture. At the same time, the nature of urban industrial growth meant that opportunities to supplement household income through non-agricultural employment continued to exist, even if their exploitation involved changes in the way households used their labour forces. Although the agricultural adjustment problem had begun to rear its ugly head, the economic conditions of the inter-war period were not such as to force rural households out of their pluriactive strategy of combining rice-centred agriculture with non-agricultural work.

Nonetheless, the ineluctable fact remained that labour productivity in an industrial sector increasingly able to make use of larger-scale, more capital-intensive forms of technology was bound to be rising faster than labour productivity in agriculture. Rural households still tied to agricultural production could not therefore avoid seeing their relative income position in the economy declining, as industrial wages and the demand for industrial goods rose faster than their agricultural equivalents. As later chapters will detail, it was this that the period of the Great Depression, when the offsetting improvement in agriculture's terms of trade was temporarily reversed and the vulnerability of the rural economy revealed,

brought home, both to rural households themselves and to politicians, the media and the wider public. The Depression thus brought Japan's agricultural adjustment problem to a head, and the rural crisis that resulted, together with the policy solutions adopted in response, reflect the conflicts and compromises generated in resolving the clash between the strategy rural households had been pursuing since the nineteenth century, with all the strengths and resistance tactics that it gave them, and the demands of adjustment to an urban industrial economy.

## 9 The rural household and the agricultural adjustment problem

In the standard model of the industrialization process, the rural economy must eventually and inevitably face the agricultural adjustment problem, as it presents itself in its various guises. On the one hand, it manifests itself in the relatively slow growth in demand for agricultural products, in increasing competition from imports of basic grains and in shifts of demand towards a range of food products beyond the traditional staples. On the other hand, it takes the form of a widening in wage and income differentials between those who work in industry, benefiting from its faster-rising productivity levels, and those still earning their living from agriculture in the countryside. Rural producers, assumed to be farmers, have no choice, in the absence of any interference with market forces, but to respond, either by abandoning agriculture and moving into whatever industrial employment they can find or by adjusting the technology and economic organization of their agricultural production in an attempt to raise the real productivity of their labour. Those who succeed in remaining farmers will therefore be those able to diversify into higher-value crops and/or raise their labour productivity by means of increased scale of cultivation and the substitution of capital for labour through mechanization.

Logical as this argument may be, it is clear that, in many parts of the industrial world, the extent to which it has been followed by farmers faced with the agricultural adjustment problem is somewhat limited. In part, this has to be explained by state intervention which has provided protection and support for existing forms of agriculture, but it must also reflect the alternative strategies pursued by rural households, as they sought to adapt to life in a predominantly industrial economy. In Japan, as Chapter 8 showed at the macro level, rural households confronted with the changes in product and labour markets which industrial growth brought about continued to specialize in small-scale rice cultivation, while adapting the pluri-active strategy they had long espoused to the new conditions they faced. This chapter explores, at the micro level, the ways in which they went about this.

Although growth in agricultural output slowed up, during the inter-war years, and farm households did not go down the technological route

towards larger-scale cultivation, this does not mean to say that technical and economic change did not play a part in the strategy adopted. The first section of the chapter therefore looks at the technical and associated economic adaptations made by rural households, as they attempted to maintain cultivation while continuing to derive income from the changing forms of non-agricultural employment. However, at the same time, as the second section will show, they drew on the institutional resources of rural society to provide the support which smaller-scale cultivators needed, if they were to survive in and adapt to the industrial economy without taking the 'big farm' route. Meanwhile, to the extent that these strategies succeeded, they brought practising cultivators increasingly into conflict with a rural elite that had largely lost its function, both as the source of technical knowledge and investment resources for agriculture and as the provider of entrepreneurship and capital to rural industry, within the context of the modern industrial economy. The final section therefore looks at the organized attempts of tenant cultivators to exercise their growing economic power within the rural economy, as part of the survival strategy of the small-scale pluriactive household in the industrial world.

### **Technical change, labour utilization and the rural household economy**

As Chapter 8 showed, rural households in the inter-war period faced, on the one hand, something of a slow-down in the rate of growth of demand, and hence prices, for their central agricultural crops and, on the other, continued demand, through the 1920s at least, for their labour in the more informal areas of industrial- and service-sector employment. They attempted to respond to this through inter-linked technological and economic means which would enable them to sustain their existing pattern of cultivation, centred on rice, while releasing those family workers able to take advantage of non-agricultural employment opportunities. On the technological side, they were increasingly able to draw on the assistance of the scientific and extension services of national and local governments in the search for the means to alleviate the points of conflict between agricultural work and the demands of employment off the farm. At the same time, this conflict could also be lessened through reorganization of work within the household, in particular to enable women to take over the tasks of the male workers increasingly in demand in the industrial sector.

The ultimate solution to these problems, which involved the mechanization of the key peak operations in the rice-cultivation cycle and the intensified use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, together with the provision of the institutional support necessary to sustain part-time farming, was not fully developed until after World War II and in some respects the slow pace of its emergence during the inter-war years might be seen as contributing towards the failure to maintain the relative income position

of rural households. However, those households whose scale of cultivation and labour force characteristics made it possible to begin to move in this direction found themselves in a relatively stronger position and the impact of the pattern of technical and economic change on the distribution of economic power, and of the other kinds of influence that go with it, was becoming increasingly apparent through the 1920s and 1930s. By this time, therefore, it was clear that the accumulated heritage of technical and economic development in the countryside, with its origins in the virtuous circle of the nineteenth-century rural economy, having precluded the emergence of the technology and economic organization of larger-scale cultivation, had finally resulted in an agrarian structure in which the pluri-active small-scale cultivator held the dominant position.

### ***Technical change***

As earlier chapters have shown, in the years up to World War I the efforts of practising farmers had produced a package of improved agricultural techniques which centred on high-yielding rice varieties and involved intensive use of labour and fertilizer, alongside the controlled irrigation necessary for double-cropping. By 1920, this package had diffused widely in the southwestern parts of the country where irrigation facilities were best developed and where commercial agriculture, often combined with rural by-employment, had become the way of rural economic life. However, the diffusion of Shinriki and other high-yielding varieties bred by farmers tailed off in the 1910s (Hayami, Y. and Ruttan 1971: 158) and the spread of the package of intensive, double-cropping techniques that combined with it stagnated in the inter-war years. Farmers continued to apply increasing amounts of commercial fertilizer to their land (see Table 6.2 on page 139) but, in the absence of the complementary improvements in seed varieties and cultivation techniques of earlier years, this did not produce the level of yield increase that had been achieved, albeit with much more rapid increases in commercial fertilizer input, earlier. As a result, the index for the national average rice yield (1934–6 = 100), which had risen from 80.7 in 1898–1902 to 102.6 in 1918–22, declined slightly through the 1920s, recovering thereafter only to reach 106.9 in 1933–7 (Kayō 1958: 226).

The slow-down in the rate of yield-increasing technical change is generally attributed to lags in the development of the seed varieties and infrastructure conditions that would have permitted the wider diffusion of high-yielding technology in regions, particularly in the northeast, where climatic conditions and the absence of highly developed irrigation facilities made available techniques inappropriate (see e.g. Hayami, Y. and Ruttan 1971: 160–2). Suitable seed varieties were developed only as a result of the application of the scientific techniques of hybridization within the network of national and regional state-funded agricultural experiment stations that had begun to be established after the turn of the century. However, it took

until 1931 for the breakthrough to be achieved, in the form of a high-yielding, fertilizer-responsive variety (Nōrin No. 1) suitable for cultivation in the colder northeast.<sup>1</sup> As a result, Hayami and Ruttan's 'seed improvement index', which reflects the proportion of cultivated area planted to improved varieties, stagnated during the inter-war period and did not exceed its 1920 level until the mid-1930s.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, though, investment to create the land infrastructure conditions for intensive rice cultivation was accelerating. The Arable Land Replotment Law of 1899 had provided the framework for small-scale, landowner-organized projects to improve field lay-out, irrigation and drainage, and some subsidies were made available to the associations undertaking them. New legislation introduced in 1923, however, provided for much more substantial central-government subsidy for large-scale irrigation and drainage projects undertaken by prefectural governments. Investment in land-infrastructure improvement thus increased in real terms from an annual average of just over ¥20 million in the early 1900s to ¥88 million around 1920, thereafter more than doubling over the course of the 1920s to reach a pre-war peak of ¥175 million during the Depression years.<sup>3</sup> The proportion of the total cultivated area (paddy and upland) classified as 'improved', which had remained more-or-less constant from 1890 to 1920, thereafter increased from 39 per cent to over 50 per cent by the late 1930s (Hayami, Y. and Yamada 1991: Table 4.1). Since most land-improvement projects involved paddy land, this implies that the vast majority of the paddy acreage must have been 'improved' by the time of World War II.

Government funding and support for technical development in agriculture therefore continued to work in the direction of yield-increasing improvements in rice cultivation and the infrastructure developments that facilitated double-cropping. However, as Brandt points out, the proportion of the rice acreage planted to available improved varieties remained consistently lower than the proportion deemed to have been improved in land infrastructure terms and the double-cropping rate stagnated during the inter-war years (Brandt 1993: 264–6, 280). This may reflect in part the lag in the development of high-yielding varieties suitable for colder regions, but it also suggests that infrastructure conditions may not have been the only other constraint on the adoption of yield-increasing rice-

1 Successive improvements to the Nōrin line provided the basis for the development of rice production in northeastern regions such as Niigata which were to become the major specialist rice-producing areas of post-World War II Japan.

2 With 1890 = 100, the index had risen to 106.2 by 1920. It remained at slightly below this level until recovering to 107.4 in 1935 (Hayami, Y. and Ruttan 1971: 222).

3 Hayami, Y. and Yamada 1991: Table 4.2. The government's share of this expenditure rose from around 17 per cent in 1920 to 40 per cent by the late 1930s. The political background to this sharp rise in government expenditure on agriculture will be discussed in Chapter 10.

cultivation techniques and double-cropping. Farm households faced with, on the one hand, slower growth in the relative price of rice and other grains and, on the other, increasing relative returns to non-agricultural wage employment might not have viewed yield-increasing techniques as necessarily worth adopting, especially in the absence of the means of mitigating any resulting impact on peak labour demand.<sup>4</sup> In such a situation, other directions of technical and economic change might have offered alternative and better solutions to the problem of raising the overall labour productivity and income of the rural household.

One such option would have involved diversification into the higher-value crops and food products increasingly demanded by better-off urban consumers. As we have seen, the share of fruit, vegetables, meat and dairy produce in total agricultural output was beginning to rise and examples of active village-level promotion and support for the cultivation of new crops are easy to find. However, the impact of such efforts, which involved a greater household commitment to the business of agriculture, on the overall structure of production was not great (see Table 6.3 on page 140) and it is clear that the majority of households continued to specialize in rice, even becoming, as the demand for and cultivation of non-rice grain crops declined, less diversified than they had been a generation earlier. During the immediate Depression years, households put in the extra work needed to grow other crops and keep animals, but tended to abandon this, once economic recovery and conscription began to hit their labour supply (Mori 1999: 47).

The alternative route was towards improving the household's ability to diversify its income sources alongside rice cultivation and it was during the inter-war years that the first steps were taken towards the labour-saving mechanization of those tasks in the rice-cultivation cycle that constrained the ability of family members, especially male ones, to work on a more full-time and permanent basis at other activities, if needs be away from the farm. The technological difficulties involved in mechanizing field operations, particularly transplanting, in the Japanese context were not overcome until well into the post-World War II period,<sup>5</sup> but the application of motor power to static operations, such as pumping, threshing and polishing, made considerable progress from the time of World War I onwards. Table 9.1 shows the growth in the numbers of such machines in use, as at first steam engines but in due course, and much more conveniently, electric and oil-powered motors were acquired to power tools traditionally manually driven.

4 Increased use of commercial fertilizer could, however, be worthwhile as a labour-saving measure, even if its impact on yields was not as great as it had once been.

5 Transplanting could be carried out by women, however, and was therefore in some ways a less urgent object of mechanization than the heavier 'male' tasks such as field preparation.



Table 9.1 Numbers of machines in use in agriculture, 1920–1942

	<i>Electric motors</i>	<i>Oil-powered motors</i>	<i>Power-tillers</i>	<i>Irrigation pumps</i>	<i>Powered threshers</i>	<i>Powered hullers</i>
1920	683	1,785				
1923	2,033	9,265				
1925	4,690	24,849				
1927	11,603	39,406		17,413	29,820	
1931	28,306	63,459	98	26,940	55,954	88,637
1933	37,861	80,491	120	31,858	67,259	106,754
1935	47,138	96,353	211	32,586	91,735	118,247
1937	66,718	125,583	537	44,189	128,620	117,738
1939	91,053	202,046	2,819	83,115	210,579	145,966
1942	144,649	316,544	7,436	92,512	357,129	204,548

Source: Kayō 1958: Table F-a-1.

The development of agricultural machinery was principally the work of individuals, farmers' groups and small-scale businesses, though sometimes with support from local extension services, and the direction which it took clearly reflected the needs of households seeking to combine rice cultivation with other activities.<sup>6</sup> The spread of electric and oil-powered motors in the 1920s was largely the result of their use in irrigation and drainage, partly as an element in land-improvement projects but also to save labour in areas where irrigation water had to be pumped into fields.<sup>7</sup> Motors were initially imported but before long local producers were able to supply smaller-scale and more appropriate versions. Powered hulling machines were developed in the 1910s but, since hulling can be more flexibly timed and does not put the same sort of pressure on the labour force, these relatively large-scale machines were typically acquired by landlords or groups of farmers with the aim of improving the quality of rice for the market. Threshing, on the other hand, was a bottleneck activity, which clashed with field preparation for second crops or drew labour away from other activities. A pedal-driven thresher became available and was widely diffused in the late 1910s, but this was easily connected to a motor and by the

6 For case-studies, see Francks 1983 and 1996. National-level research and extension institutions did undertake some experiments and trials with agricultural machinery but these were largely unsuccessful and it was at the local level that real progress was made in developing machinery appropriate for use by Japanese farmers.

7 In the region that pioneered the use of electric motors for irrigation pumping, the stimulus to innovation was provided by rising wage rates for the hired workers needed to operate treadle-driven water wheels. This in turn resulted from the expansion of employment opportunities, around the time of the World War I boom, in nearby urban industrial areas. See Francks 1983.

1930s purpose-built power-threshers also began to spread.<sup>8</sup> By this time, some progress had even been made in the development of the small-scale power-tiller, the key to labour-saving in field preparation – a time constrained and largely male activity – in the post-World War II period. This was concentrated among farmer-inventors in Okayama prefecture, an area with experience of the use of motors in irrigation but also one profoundly affected by the growth of non-agricultural employment opportunities in the industrial cities to which it had easy access (Francks 1996).

The result of such developments was that, as the growth rate of yields (land productivity) slowed down in the inter-war years, it was overtaken by growth in labour productivity. In particular, although the growth in output per worker in agriculture was not as high in the 1920s and 1930s as it had been in the years up to and including World War I when yields had been rising much faster, output per hour worked grew marginally faster than it had been doing, despite the drop in the rate of yield increase (see Table 6.2 on page 139). The labour days devoted to agriculture, especially rice cultivation, began to decline in the inter-war period (see Table 3.1 on page 63) and the labour hours required per year to cultivate 0.1 hectare of rice are estimated to have started to decline from the mid-1920s, falling at around two hours per year from then until the war years (though much faster in the post-war period) (Nōrinsuisanshō 1993: 312–13). This suggests that farm households sought technical changes which would not just raise yields but would also enable them to complete agricultural tasks more quickly. However, the effect of such changes was not such as to bring about a large-scale permanent release of farm workers and an increase in cultivation scale. Rather, they served to ease the points of friction between rice cultivation and other activities, on and off the farm, and hence to facilitate the diversification of rural households' sources of income.

### *Utilizing the household labour force*

Technical change in agriculture thus continued to offer rural households a way out of the problem of the relative decline in their incomes, not so much through output increase as through the means to take advantage of changing employment opportunities whilst continuing to cultivate rice. However, given the nature of those opportunities, this would require changes in the ways in which family labour was allocated and utilized

8 The Nishiyama family, the detailed diary of whose head, Nishiyama Kōichi, Nishida has used as the basis for analysis of rural change and tenancy disputes in the inter-war period, who farmed around two hectares in Niigata, began using pedal-driven threshing machines in 1916 and then, once an electricity supply became available in 1927, shifted to power-driven threshers and hullers. This contributed, Nishida argues, to the ability of the household's younger brother to spend more and more time away working as a day-labourer in the construction industry, especially in the winter (1997: 82–3).

within the household. In particular, as we saw in Chapter 8, the kinds of non-agricultural work available to members of rural households were increasingly not such that they could be undertaken by female household members, alongside their tasks in the house and on the farm, as sideline work or as temporary employment away from home. As the urban industrial and service economy grew, employers increasingly required full-time workers and although opportunities for female workers continued to exist, especially in the textile industries, they now predominantly involved factory work. Meanwhile, the demand for male industrial labour grew relatively faster, as the heavy industrial sector continued to expand and as small-scale businesses mechanized and became more specialized.

An example of the impact of such changes on the rural household economy is provided by Ushiyama's detailed study of labour and population movements in the northeastern prefecture of Niigata. Rural communities in Niigata had a long tradition of seasonal *dekasegi* work, with both male and female workers undertaking spells of work away from home in industries such as fishing, textiles and construction. However, the number of Niigata residents away on *dekasegi* work peaked in the mid-1920s and thereafter those who left increasingly went in search of permanent employment in Tokyo, Osaka and other big cities. When the Depression struck, it was female *dekasegi* workers who returned unemployed to their villages, while male migrants stuck it out in the cities and, as the 1930s progressed, more and more younger sons and other male workers from rural households were recorded as permanently away pursuing industrial jobs (Ushiyama 1975: ch. 2).<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, as we have seen, the number of rural households generally remained almost constant, despite such trends and the significant outflow of male labour from the agricultural labour force that they produced (see Table 8.3 on page 207). The resulting change in the composition of the remaining agricultural labour force meant that, by 1940, the average rural household contained more female workers than male. By this time, conscription was taking its toll of younger male agricultural workers but Nakayasu's study, using census data, shows that throughout the inter-war period, though especially in the 1930s, the outflow of labour from rural households was concentrated in the younger male age groups (Nakayasu 1983). Meanwhile, although women in the 15–19 age group – the prime group for recruitment as, for example, maids – were still finding employment outside agriculture, female agricultural employment was rising in all other age groups, including the over-50s. Women no longer able to find work off the farm were remaining in the agricultural labour force into

<sup>9</sup> The younger brother of the house-head of the Nishiyama family in Niigata (see note 8), after his years of periodic off-farm work as a construction day-labourer, obtained a salaried job in a fertilizer company in 1936 and left permanently for Kawasaki in 1938. One of his sisters continued to work in the fertilizer company, however (Nishida 1997: 98–9).

middle age and even returning to the workforce in old age. Thus the younger sons of rural households, who would once have expected to combine temporary work away from the farm or locally as agricultural labourers with help on the family holding, were leaving on a longer-term basis and being replaced by what Nakayasu calls a 'general mobilization' of female and older workers within the rural household.

As long as the employment opportunities open to male workers were concentrated in the cities, migration was restricted to younger sons and brothers and the post-war situation under which, as a result of the increasing availability of non-agricultural jobs within commuting distance of villages, household heads were also able to take up full-time non-agricultural employment was yet to emerge. Nonetheless, by 1938 almost a quarter of farm households were recorded as receiving off-farm income in the form of wages or salaries (Misawa 1970: 252) and the post-war pattern whereby the majority of day-to-day work on the farm came to be carried out by women and the elderly while men worked full-time off the farm was already perceptible in the pre-war period. This was beginning to be reflected in the direction of technical change as we have seen, with efforts being made to save labour time in heavy operations that had to be carried out by men, and also in the extent to which new agricultural sidelines were coming to be regarded as the province of women.<sup>10</sup> The re-division of labour within the rural household therefore represented another adaptation to the demands of the industrial sector which enabled the small-scale cultivation unit to develop and diversify its income sources.

### ***The household economy and rural stratification***

The overall direction of technical and economic change in rural areas in the inter-war period had implications for the distribution of resources, most notably land, and incomes within the rural economy. It favoured those households that had available to them a combination of land, labour and capital inputs such that they could continue to combine rice cultivation with other forms of employment, and it did nothing to solve the problems of those who might have wanted to manage land on the basis of hired, non-family labour. For households with the smallest land-holdings, the increasing technical and, to some extent capital, requirements of intensive rice cultivation, when combined with the relative increase in non-agricultural wages and employment opportunities, could produce the final push out of non-subsistence farming, but for the majority of rural households relying on family labour, agriculture, centring on rice cultivation,

10 For example, when the Nishiyama family began producing vegetables to sell in the morning market in Niigata, this was the work of the househead's elderly mother (Nishida 1997: 80).

remained viable, especially if it could be combined – to a greater or lesser extent depending on available land and labour – with other income-earning activities.

The impact of these trends is clearly visible in the data on the distribution of households by cultivation scale and ownership status. As Table 6.1 (on page 137) showed, change in the structure of landownership and cultivation scale was very gradual but nonetheless the trends, first visible in the 1910s, towards concentration in the middle of the size distribution (0.5–2 hectares) and in the owner-tenant category clearly persisted through the inter-war period. The proportion of households cultivating very small holdings declined relatively markedly, while the small proportion cultivating more than two hectares also fell. Meanwhile, the proportions of both pure tenants and pure owners gently declined over the inter-war years. Thus, as small-scale tenant cultivators with little real stake in agriculture gradually abandoned cultivation in favour of full-time non-agricultural employment, the land they had cultivated was taken on by the slightly larger-scale owner and owner-tenant cultivators for whom it was still worthwhile to employ family labour time in agriculture, alongside anything else family members might do.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, the direction of technical and economic change appears to have provided no openings for the expansion of cultivation scale above the two hectares or so which represented the maximum a family labour force could typically manage.

Wataya's detailed analysis of the available statistical and survey data on rural household economies reveals something of the mechanisms whereby these trends occurred, as households with differing access to land and labour adapted to available agricultural and non-agricultural opportunities. By the later 1930s, households cultivating small areas (typically less than half a hectare), whether as owners or tenants, tended to contain relatively small numbers of people, with fewer members of younger generations present than in households in the 0.5–2 hectare bracket (Wataya 1959: 229). This suggests that the successor generations were leaving and that the smallest cultivators were on the way towards abandoning farming altogether, while households able to gain access to adequate holdings to cultivate attempted to maintain the two-generational family structure of the continuing farm household.

Hence, while pluriactivity was to be found at all scales of cultivation

11 See Wataya 1959: Table 4.28 which shows that, by 1938, those cultivating less than half a hectare were much more likely to be pure owners or pure tenants, whereas owner-tenants predominated in the 0.5–2 hectare bracket. In the more advanced and commercialized Kinki region, an increasing number of small-scale owner-cultivators also seem to have been abandoning agriculture and renting out their land to those remaining as cultivators (Wataya 1959: 229). Meanwhile, the Nishiyama family gradually increased the area they cultivated from 1.5 hectares in 1911 to 2.4 hectares in 1938 by renting in more land from various different landlords (Nishida 1997: 77).

and tenancy status, the function of the non-agricultural employment of rural household members varied according to the trajectory the household was following. For small-scale cultivators, agriculture had often, by the end of the inter-war period, been relegated to side-employment, as house-heads and successors became increasingly involved in non-agricultural work, while it remained the main occupation for those with a little more land, who tended to send only their younger sons and daughters out into the labour market. However, among small-scale cultivators, the kinds of outside employment undertaken by members of poorer tenant households tended to be less stable and secure than those undertaken by owner-cultivator households (Wataya 1959: 232). Those from households that owned land typically found work in the public sector or in self-employment in commerce or industry, using their superior educational and other resources to earn stable incomes which enabled them eventually to give up farming and rent out their land. Those from tenant households, on the other hand, had to rely on wage work.<sup>12</sup> In areas of industrial growth, employment opportunities were abundant enough to provide a route out of tenant-agriculture for those that wanted it but, in more remote areas, casual employment in or outside agriculture was all that was available to supplement income from cultivation.

Meanwhile, those households who had or could now acquire access to enough land to employ a two-generational family found that the technology available was increasingly making it possible both to raise output per hectare and per hour worked in agriculture and to retain the option of sending younger sons and daughters out to more-or-less permanent non-agricultural employment where possible. Using survey data collected by the Imperial Agricultural Association in 1937, Wataya is able to show that, compared with both larger- and smaller-scale cultivators, households in this category used more inputs of fertilizer, machinery and animal power per hectare, cultivating their land more intensively but also achieving a more effective use of their labour time and higher labour productivity (1959: 239). Moreover, within this category, it was those who both owned and tenanted land who applied the highest levels of inputs, per hectare and per worker, and who typically achieved the highest land and labour productivity (Wataya 1959: 241). Thus, Wataya argues, it was the middle-scale, owner-tenant household who led the way, as far as technical progress and economic adaptation were concerned, and whose relative position within the rural economy was most strengthened by the developments of the inter-war period.

For those owning and managing larger areas of land, on the other hand, the inter-war period saw only a continuation of the trends of the 1900s and

12 For example, in Partner's case study (see ch. 5: n. 16), Toshié's household, farming only a very small rented land-holding in the inter-war period, relied on day-wage work undertaken by both male and female household members (Partner 2004).

1910s which had made the life of the rural landlord increasingly difficult and unrewarding. Competition from the non-agricultural sector continued, throughout much of the period, to drive up the cost of hired agricultural labour, but progress towards the kind of labour-saving mechanization that would have been required to make larger-scale cultivation feasible and profitable under these conditions was minimal. On the other hand, as small-scale tenant cultivators found alternative employment, reducing their involvement in agriculture, and technical progress increasingly favoured the middle-scale pluriactive household, the bargaining position of landowners seeking to rent out land weakened. Hence, as the rental share in output declined, larger landowners continued the process of shifting their assets and their attention away from the rural economy and towards more lucrative investments and activities in the cities.<sup>13</sup> In the northeast, where alternative employment opportunities for tenant farmers were fewer and where technological development lagged, full-time, larger-scale landlords hung on, but in the developed areas of the southwest, the rural elite of the virtuous-circle era continued its steady disappearance into the industrial economy of the great cities.

As Chapter 8 showed, the inter-war period was a time of slower rural growth, relatively slower rises in agricultural prices and incomes, and a crisis for the rural sector's position in the overall economy. However, they were not years of complete stagnation in the rural economy and rural households continued to seek out ways of coping with the problems and opportunities which industrialization presented to them. Although the progress in technology, infrastructure investment and economic adaptation described above was uneven, it consolidated the position of the medium-scale, often owner-tenant household, enabling it to continue to diversify its income sources, even though this now involved the more-or-less full-time employment of family members off the farm. At the same time, however, as the rest of this chapter will seek to show, the relative strengthening of their technological and economic position provided the basis on which such households were able to mobilize institutionally in support of their strategy and to challenge further the position of the landowning elite.

13 The share of their rice crop that the Nishiyama family paid as rent declined steadily. Their yields rose significantly, as a result of investment in land improvement and technological improvements, while their rents stayed much the same, with landlords under pressure as a result of tenancy disputes in the area (Nishida 1997: 77–8). For an example of landlords moving out of investment in land, see Waswo 1977: 125.

### **Mobilizing through co-operation: rural organizations, core cultivators and the state**

The rice-cultivating, pluriactive, middle-scale, owner-tenant households favoured by the technological and economic developments in agriculture and the wider economy during the inter-war years were at the same time heirs to a long history, described in earlier chapters, of village-based organization and co-operation in pursuit of survival, resistance and betterment. Already, from around the turn of the century, as the rural elite of village headmen and more substantial landowner/businessmen began to lose interest in agriculture and rural industry, the remaining cultivating households in the villages were starting to provide the initiative for more modern forms of organization which would give them access to the technical, economic and financial support that they needed and that the elite were increasingly unable and unwilling to offer. In the more difficult times of the inter-war years, the solid core of cultivating households in the villages began to turn more and more to such organizations to provide resistance and strength in the face of market forces now increasingly determined by developments in the urban industrial sector. At the same time, these organizations, which brought 'modern', 'scientific', 'rational' forms of finance, marketing, technology and even housekeeping to the village, provided a new route of access to the authorities of the state, whereby the representatives of the core medium-scale cultivators began to be able to exercise influence and to take over the leadership roles in the countryside vacated by the old elite. On the other hand, however, the co-optation of village-based groupings by the state was to provide the means whereby the rural economy was mobilized for the war effort and eventually the institutional and organizational basis for the agricultural support policies of the post-war period.

Nonetheless, in this process of interaction between the modernizing state and the rural economy and society, households were to adapt and develop, but not abandon, the workings of 'traditional' groupings based on the natural village. As various Japanese scholars now argue, in a world increasingly determined by market activity and private ownership, they continued to treat village land and other assets as possessing a 'public' aspect, the result of generations of investment by continuing household units and the communities to which they belonged, and to require that co-operation with the organs of the state be based on the negotiation of a fair distribution of the costs and benefits of development schemes amongst those with a stake in the village as cultivating households.<sup>14</sup> The headman who had once haggled with the samurai officials of the feudal domain on

14 See in particular the conclusions of Ōkama's case-study of a Niigata village (1994) and the work of Saitō (e.g. 1989) and Sakane (e.g. 2002).



behalf of the village group now represented it in co-operatives and agricultural associations, while using his political skills and connections to ensure co-operation and organization in the pursuit of schemes of rural improvement. Tenant farmers came together within village-based groupings to oppose outside landlords and to shame resident ones whose exactions threatened them. Thus the communal resources of the village were mobilized in the pursuit of modernization, at least as defined by the increasingly dominant group of core cultivators, paving the way towards the modern village unit that came through the land reform and went on to play such a key role in support of the political and economic interests of the rural sector in the post-war period.

### ***Rural organizations and the state***

Both of the major, official forms of organization which came to predominate in the village economy in the inter-war years had their origins in legislation and regulation which went back to the pre-World War I period, but both grew, in terms of functions, numbers and membership, during the 1920s and 1930s and both came to constitute units within hierarchical structures which reached from the national level to the village. The formal existence of the Imperial Agricultural Association dates back to the turn of the century and by World War I its pyramidal organization, with branches at each level of local government down to the administrative village (*mura*), was already in place. However, the 1922 revision of the law governing it on the one hand widened the functions of agricultural associations (*nōkai*) and on the other strengthened regulatory control over them and increased their reliance on government subsidy (Yamamoto 1987: 56). *Nōkai* officials were expected to play a role in mediating and resolving conflicts between landlords and tenants, while their technical staff were to provide both commercial and technical advice to farmers. By 1928 all prefectural- and county-level *nōkai* had technicians/extension workers, as did 60 per cent of village-level ones, their salaries paid from a combination of membership fees and national and local government subsidy (Yamamoto 1987: 57). They provided advice on farm management and commercial projects – market surveys, for instance – as well as technical guidance and their mission seems increasingly to have become that of promoting the growth of agricultural production and the securing of farm incomes.

Meanwhile, the other arm of the organizational network of the rural economy, the hierarchy of agricultural co-operatives, was also expanding and consolidating. The legal basis for the formation of co-operatives again goes back to the turn of the century, but a series of revisions to the laws governing them were made through into the 1920s to expand the range of their functions and to establish national and regional organizational structures for them. By the inter-war period, therefore, co-operatives were able to provide credit and to engage in sales and purchases and were increas-

ingly taking on the role of agents of government agricultural policy. Government subsidies for the construction of agricultural warehouses went almost exclusively to those run by co-operatives; priority in government purchases of rice was given to rice-trading co-operatives. Low-interest credit enabled co-operatives to enter the fertilizer trade and the threat they posed to traditional fertilizer merchants was reflected in the establishment of an anti-co-operative organization to try to protect the interests of private traders. By the second half of the 1930s, co-operatives managed over 40 per cent of the rice trade and of fertilizer sales and almost all rural households belonged to one (Yamamoto 1987: 55; Kawagoe 1993: 255–6).

When the provision for the establishment of both the *nōkai* and the co-operatives was first made in the 1900s and 1910s, such organizations were clearly seen as functioning to support the interests of landowners and other members of the rural elite: the Imperial Agricultural Association represented the landlord interest politically and co-operatives were originally set up to promote quality control and the marketing of the products of rural agro-industry, such as silk and tea. The inter-war period thus witnessed a change in their role, as they came increasingly to operate as the network through which government policy to promote output growth and, at the same time, to ensure stability in the countryside was put into effect. Such a role could not be performed, however, without involving practising cultivators in the villages. Hence, while the lowest level in the networks of *nōkai* and co-operatives had originally been the administrative village, established and promoted by the Home Ministry in its battle against rural ‘parochialism’, by the inter-war period, and especially after the Great Depression, the Agriculture Ministry increasingly sought to incorporate agricultural groups at the level of the natural village.

Thus, as part of the programme to ‘revitalize’ the countryside after the Depression (see Chapter 10), the law on co-operatives was revised yet again in 1932 to enable smaller groups of farmers at the natural village or even sub-village level to become branch members of higher-level co-operatives. Pre-existing village associations – mutual credit associations, groups working on new technology and so on – were able to take on legal status as ‘agricultural practice unions’ (*nōji jikkō kumiai*), join co-operatives and gain access to their resources (Yamamoto 1987: 58). In due course, the Home Ministry responded to the Agriculture Ministry’s move to expand its organizational network into the villages by establishing its own system of village associations (*burakukai*) (Waswo 1988: 601) and through these and other measures, as the 1930s progressed, the state reached down to the actual cultivators on whom the food and raw-material supplies essential for the emerging war effort would depend.

However, as Ōkama argues, since it was practising farm households in the villages who put in the work and bore much of the financial burden involved in implementing the policies pursued through rural organizations, the consent and co-operation of village residents was essential to the

success of any programme and something which local political leaders had to strive to obtain (Ōkama 1994: e.g. 367–74). In recognizing the power of practising cultivators, as against that of landlords and the old rural elite, the authorities also committed themselves to dealing with them. As a result, the incorporation of village-level groups into the national hierarchy of state-sponsored rural organizations provided a mechanism whereby the core cultivators in the villages could exercise influence over the direction of technical and economic change in the countryside.

### ***Rural organizations and the rise of the core cultivator***

Co-operatives and other forms of local-level farmers' organization were thus coming to play a greater role, through the inter-war period, in the economic lives of rural households. Meanwhile, as earlier sections have shown, the core middle-scale cultivators were attempting to adjust to the challenges and opportunities of the industrial economy. This meant producing and marketing more, and a wider variety of, produce; it involved access to credit and the provision of commercial inputs, especially fertilizer, and it depended on technical advances which raised family labour productivity, if necessary by speeding up operations so as to free time from cultivation for other activities. Rural organizations could help to meet these needs, especially as the core middle-scale cultivators lacked the resources which larger-scale landowners might have been able to mobilize, but this would require such households to be able to influence the direction of their activities. Increasingly, therefore, rural organizations came to reflect the needs and influence of the middle-scale cultivators, more and more, as the period progressed, in alliance with a state bureaucracy concerned to ensure the productive base necessary to the pursuit of national ends.<sup>15</sup>

In the more advanced and commercial parts of the country, such developments were evident as early as the 1920s. In the village in Hyōgo prefecture, not far from Kobe, studied by Mori, plans were drawn up for the introduction of a range of new crops and livestock to be produced alongside the rice which remained central to the agricultural structure. Village-based organizations were heavily involved in the development and implementation of these plans: the co-operative invested in a flour mill which would process the wheat to be grown as a second crop; the young men's association collaborated with a trading company to develop commercial sales of fruit, vegetables and flowers; the *nōkai's* technical officer was a leading light in the promotion of the plans. However, Mori also shows how the leadership of these organizations increasingly came to be

15 For this argument see in particular the work of Mori, e.g. as collected in Mori 1999. For an excellent analysis of the Japanese scholarship on this issue, see Waswo 1988.

dominated by representatives of the middle-scale, owner-tenant group, rather than the now-absentee landlords of the village (1999: 192–3). In the Saga Plain area, irrigation associations were the vehicle for an ambitious scheme, carried out in 1923, to introduce small-scale, electrically powered irrigation pumps as a solution to the problem of rising wage costs faced by middle-scale cultivators competing for labour time with industrial employers in nearby cities. Again, the leadership of these organizations, and increasingly the political leadership of villages too, came to be dominated by middle-scale owner-tenants (Francks 1983: ch. 7).

In areas of the country less favoured from the point of view of commercial production for urban markets, such developments were slower to get going in the 1920s and rural organizations continued to reflect the power and interests of larger landowners. However, the rural revitalization policies adopted by the authorities in response to the Great Depression provided the opportunity middle-scale farmers in such regions needed to begin to take over local organizations and turn them in the direction of their economic needs.<sup>16</sup> The movement mobilized the whole range of rural organizations – co-operatives and *nōkai*, but also cultural and religious organizations, young people's groups and so on – at national and local level, down to the agricultural practice unions in each natural village, in pursuit of schemes to revive the rural economy and society. Villages that qualified for 'revitalization status' – almost all by the end of the 1930s – were eligible for subsidies and assistance for projects to establish or develop co-operatives and to improve farm management and finance through the *nōkai* (Yamamoto 1987: 58–9). There was also provision for training courses designed to 'nurture' the 'mainstay elements' who would ensure the future of agricultural production in the villages.

Even in villages, such as the one in Gumma prefecture that Mori uses as a case-study, where larger-scale landlords had dominated village organizations, the committees and other organizations set up under the revitalization programme were soon taken over by members of the cultivating middle-scale group (1999: 25–34). Members of landlord households, even if they still engaged in some cultivation, did not qualify as 'mainstay' elements, who had to be earning their living as practising cultivators and ready to provide the practical leadership of the movement. Hence the majority who went on the training courses came from owner or owner-tenant, middle-scale, cultivating households. They returned to take over leadership of the agricultural practice unions and to play a growing role in village-level political organizations such as the Home Ministry's *burakukai*. Although in the less commercialized northeast large-scale landlords retained their grip on political power and continued to use village organizations to that end, in much of the rest of the country, as the

16 For more on the political background to the movement and its activities, see Chapter 10.

revitalization movement spread and as the build-up to war progressed, middle-scale cultivators took control of their local groupings and used them in support of the development of the small-scale, commercial and often pluriactive cultivating household.<sup>17</sup>

To some extent at least, the growing role of village-based organizations in the economic lives of cultivating households reflects the efforts of the state to control the rural economy and to counteract the unrest and division in rural society that the upsurge of tenancy disputes in the 1920s revealed (see next section). However, it also reflects the state's recognition that, if the agricultural sector was to meet the needs of Japan's industrial economy in an increasingly threatening environment, it was with those who controlled production and its increase that it had to deal. Given the path that technical and economic change had taken in agriculture since at least the Meiji period, these were the small-to-medium scale, owner and owner-tenant households best able to take advantage of improved methods of cultivation and economic organization. While, in Mori's view (e.g. 1999: ch. 1), such households were to some extent 'bought off' by the lure of subsidies and of an ideology that portrayed them as the foundation of the nation – even former tenancy-dispute leaders were trained as 'mainstay elements' (Mori 1999: 29–30) – it can also be argued that the state's response to the exigencies of the inter-war agricultural adjustment crisis simply provided them with the opportunity to take control of the rural organizations they needed to support their own strategy of technical and economic development. By the time of the outbreak of war with China, the old rural elite was effectively being shunted aside, as the network of rural organizations now dominated by middle-scale cultivating households was mobilized to plan wartime agricultural production. When the 1942 Food Control Law established a higher price for rice requisitioned from cultivators, as compared to that from landlords, as an incentive to producers, the writing was on the wall for the old rural elite and the path that led to the post-war Land Reform beckoned.

### **Mobilizing through conflict: tenancy disputes in the inter-war years**

The 1910s and 1920s – the era of 'Taishō democracy' – witnessed not just economic changes and fluctuations but also considerable political and social ferment in Japan. In industry, unions began to be formed and the strike weapon was brought into play; in politics, socialist, communist and anarchist groups emerged, inspired by revolutionary writing and activity in the West; in urban society, 'modern' young people rebelled against tradi-

17 For a detailed account of this process in a 'transitional' case, see Smith 2001, especially ch. 9.

tion in their reading and writing, their social activity and their refusal to conform to prescribed roles. The state responded with a combination of repressive legislation and ideological campaigns that by the later 1930s had crushed dissent and co-opted and mobilized civil society in pursuit of national and imperial ends. It was in this context that, in the countryside, the rise of tenants' unions and of conflicts between landlords and tenants took place.

In literature written on rural Japan into the 1970s, tenancy disputes are typically portrayed as expressions of class conflict between an impoverished and oppressed tenancy, mobilized by urban socialists, and a powerful and oppressive rural elite. Since then, however, interpretations of tenancy disputes have changed and although there has been considerable, often acrimonious, debate as to their nature, detailed studies have placed them much more firmly within the context of the economic and social changes taking place in the countryside which this and earlier chapters have described. Moreover, in the light of, on the one hand, the long tradition of group organization in pursuit of the interests of rural dwellers in Japan and, on the other, the academic recognition, in the study of the rural Third World, of the nature and force of rural resistance, the tenancy disputes of the inter-war period can be seen as another element in the struggle of rural households to protect and promote their livelihoods and to work out a *modus vivendi* in the industrial economy. The evidence on which this kind of argument is based has emerged from studies which recognize and analyse the differences – in geographical location, scale and characteristics – between the disputes that occurred in the still relatively prosperous times before the Great Depression and those that occurred during and after it, and these will be considered separately below.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Conflict as strategy: disputes in the 1920s***

As we saw in Chapter 7, unions of tenants first began to be formed around the time of World War I. The number of unions thereafter rose steadily to peak at around 4,800 in 1933. The number of disputes recorded annually rose from fewer than 500 in 1920 to 4,000 by 1933 and continued to rise through the 1930s to peak at over 6,000 in 1937. Disputes in the first half of the 1920s were relatively large-scale, involving on average 70–80 tenants and 10–20 landlords per dispute. They were also heavily concentrated in the more developed and commercialized regions of central and southwestern Japan. From the mid-1920s onwards, however, the scale of disputes declined and by the 1930s they typically involved fewer than 20 tenants

18 Smethurst, however, argues that these differences have been overstated (1986: 35–6).

and no more than three or four landlords. By this time too, far fewer disputes were occurring in the centre and southwest and most took place in the less developed regions of the northeast. While most disputes in the 1920s concerned rents and their reduction, disputes during and after the Depression focussed on tenants' rights and threats of eviction (Waswo 1977: 94–102; Waswo 1988: 585).

The immediate causes of the upsurge in organized dispute activity after World War I were no doubt many. Tenants, who typically paid their rents in rice, had seen their landlords profit much more than they, with less rice to sell, from the rise in the rice price during the wartime boom, but the collapse in agricultural prices thereafter nonetheless put pressure on those trying to make a living from commercial farming. The rapid expansion in demand for non-agricultural labour had lessened rural households' dependence on employment on the land and improved their bargaining position. Even though the collapse of the boom threatened job prospects, opportunities remained, as we have seen, and wages continued to rise through the pre-Depression years. The growing numbers of rural dwellers, especially in the commercial southwest, who had knowledge and experience of the urban industrial sector would have observed union activity and labour militancy in action during the wartime boom. At the same time, although leadership in disputes typically came from within the tenant community, urban-based militants and intellectuals provided logistical support, in particular through the national organization of tenants' unions (Nichinō) formed in 1922 (Waswo 1988: 583–4). Meanwhile, with the growth of the urban market for rice, local governments tightened their rice inspection and quality-control regulations and landlords' demands for higher-standard rental rice provided a trigger for many early disputes (Waswo 1988: 581–2).

What underlay all these developments, however, was the situation faced by cultivating households, brought up on the path of rural technical and economic development set during the nineteenth century, as they sought to adapt to what the World War I boom had revealed to be an economy now predominantly driven by urban industry. As we have seen, the direction of technical change had favoured the small-to-medium cultivating household and enabled it to increase the returns to its family labour force, either through increased yields or through reallocation of labour time to other activities. However, by the 1920s, and especially in the advanced southwest, the scope for improving household livelihoods through intensive technical change in agriculture and rural industrial by-employment was narrowing, while the growth in the demand for and price of rice as a commercial crop was slowing down. For the tenant or owner-tenant cultivator with access to a middle-sized holding, what was needed were the resources to diversify and meet the changing market demands of urban consumers and/or to invest in the land improvements, fertilizer and even machinery that would make it possible to combine cultivation with the

opportunities for increasingly full-time employment off the farm.<sup>19</sup> For tenants with holdings too small for such strategies to be viable, the option of sustaining cultivation by supplementing household income through local wage-work or by-employment was becoming less and less feasible, as the nature of off-farm job opportunities changed. For both sets of tenant households, therefore, the rental demands of landlords could be seen as draining away the resources needed to survive and develop as a cultivating unit in the world of the industrial economy.

Meanwhile, for all tenant households in this new world, the risks associated with challenging rental payments were reduced. By the 1920s, middle-scale owner-tenant households had control of their own technological destiny; they had better access to modern financial institutions to meet their credit needs and they were increasingly able to draw on the support of co-operatives and other rural organizations to supply them with inputs and market their produce. For more marginal tenant households, the growth of non-agricultural employment, even if not in particularly desirable or well-paying forms, meant that the alternative to tenant cultivation was not starvation.

At the same time, while the core cultivating households found themselves less and less in need of the services and subsistence insurance once provided by the resident landlord, the rural elite found the returns to their own cultivation less and less attractive, relative to those of non-agricultural activity, and offered less and less, from their increasingly absentee position, to the economies and societies of the villages where their tenants lived. Rental payments thus became not only more of an obstacle to the achievement of a viable farm business, but also less justified, within the moral economy of the village community, in terms of the benefits they brought. This was particularly the case with absentee landlords, who were increasingly seen as taking income away from cultivators without contributing to the welfare of the village and as ignoring the 'communal' nature of village land (Saitō, H. 1989: e.g. 269–70).

Under these circumstances, through the 1920s, growing numbers of tenant households came together to form unions in what is generally agreed to have been an alliance between core middle-scale owner-tenants, who provided the organizational leadership, and smaller-scale tenants,

19 The Nishiyama household became involved in tenancy disputes in their area in the 1920s, not, as Nishida argues, because harvests were bad or rents particularly high (in fact they were quite low), but rather because their growing commitment to the commercial production of rice made them increasingly unwilling to pay rent in kind. As a result, their tenants' union demanded, and achieved, a range of modifications to rental payments, including such things as standardization of the ways in which rent was paid and, in particular, the conversion of rents from rice to cash. As Nishida also points out, this was all very different from the way landlord/tenant relations had operated in the Meiji period, when paternalistic landlords had benevolently, although also regularly, granted rent reductions on the grounds of bad harvests (1997: 158–64).



who provided the numbers (see e.g. Waswo 1988: 578–84). Disputes were typically initiated by the tenant side and involved demands for rent reductions, couched in terms of allowances for ‘bad harvests’. Few involved any significant violence and tenant union tactics included collective bargaining, demonstrations, threats to ‘strike’ (i.e. not cultivate landlords’ land the following year) and the weapons-of-the-weak style ‘withdrawal of deference’, as Waswo calls it (1977: 116), which discomfited and embarrassed landlords used to respect and harmony. The basic unit of tenant organization was the natural village and open conflict was much more likely in cases involving land owned by absentee landlords.<sup>20</sup> Most disputes ended in some form of compromise but this typically involved at least some degree of rent reduction and hence of gain for the tenant participants.

At first at least, landlords were taken off guard by the upsurge in tenant militancy and were ill-equipped to deal with it. Since in most cases tenant unions faced a relatively large group of relatively small landowners, often including absentees with no stomach for a fight, resistance was difficult to organize. Eventually landlord unions were formed and larger landowners attempted to wield the political influence they still possessed to force the government to take action against the threat to their interests. However, the attitude of the government remained somewhat ambivalent. Within the Agriculture Ministry, tenancy seems to have been viewed, almost as it was by the tenants themselves, as restricting the development of the core middle-scale farm households whom bureaucrats like Ishiguro Tadaatsu wished to foster and support as the basis of rural society and of the nation.<sup>21</sup> But above all disputes were a threat to stability and harmony, presaging the spread of ‘urban ideologies’ into the countryside.<sup>22</sup> The fundamental problem lay, as the Ministry saw it, in the nature of the tenancy system itself and it proposed a new tenancy law which would clarify and strengthen both landlords’ and tenants’ rights (Yamamoto 1987: 48–50). Landlord interests in the Diet were still strong enough to be able to prevent the passage of this law and all that was passed was a bill for the establishment of conciliation and arbitration procedures and a very limited scheme of assistance for tenant farmers to acquire ownership of their land. However, although urban radicals continued to be rounded up and arrested, there was very little police involvement in tenancy disputes on the ground (Smethurst 1986: 36–7) and the state appeared to place more

20 Saitō, H. 1989: 267–9. Saitō argues that disputes should be viewed not so much as tenants vs landlords as village tenants vs non-resident landlords. Open conflict with resident landlords was exceptional, constrained on both sides by the networks of relationship between households and day-to-day contact and interaction.

21 Ishiguro apparently donated part of his salary to assistance for tenant farmers during the 1930s (Johnson 1982: 89).

22 See Waswo 1977 118–19 for the views of Yamamoto Tatsuo, Minister of Agriculture in the 1920s.

emphasis on the avoidance of conflict than on the upholding of landlords' interests.

The upsurge of tenancy disputes in central and southwestern Japan in the 1920s can thus be seen as part of the process whereby cultivating households, especially the middle-scale owner-tenant ones whose position had been consolidated by the path which technical and economic change in the countryside was taking, attempted to adapt to the industrial economy. The old rural elite had no real part in the economic life of the small-scale, pluriactive but commercial, rural household and rental payments to them could now be much more safely challenged, given the economic and technological strengths of cultivators and the alternative employment opportunities available outside agriculture. Rents represented a drain on household resources that seemed less and less justifiable and moves to reduce them one of a narrowing range of options for ensuring survival as a cultivating unit. As we have seen, through the 1920s the share of rent in agricultural output continued to decline and agricultural wage rates, which, following Napier (1982), can be seen as a kind of proxy for tenant incomes, to rise. Nonetheless, although economic forces might have been steadily undermining the position of landlords, the tenancy system remained in place and, with conditions in the rural economy deteriorating after 1929, especially in the northeast, the character of disputes shifted as they began to be used as a weapon of resistance against the threats posed by the fluctuations in the national and world economies to which rural households were now subject.

### ***Conflict as resistance: disputes in the 1930s***

The impact of the Great Depression on rural Japan was by no means uniform. Its effects were particularly severe in the specialist silk-producing regions to the north and west of Tokyo, where households heavily dependent on cocoon production and on wages from work in silk filatures suffered sharp drops in their incomes. Further to the north, where irrigation and climate were less secure and the adoption of intensive rice cultivation and double-cropping technology was less feasible than in the more developed south and west, the effects of falling prices were magnified by harvest fluctuations – bumper crops in the early 1930s, which depressed prices further, and a disastrous harvest failure in 1934, which drastically reduced what farmers had to sell. The lower level of commercial and industrial development in the northeast meant that members of rural households had to go further afield in search of forms of non-agricultural employment which proved particularly vulnerable to the effects of the Depression. Such workers were therefore more liable to become unemployed and return to their villages, reducing household income, increasing the number of mouths to feed and expanding the pool of potential tenant-farmers.

At the same time, the lower level of industrial development in the northeast meant that the rural elite there had not experienced the kinds of pressures and challenges that had led to its gradual decline or transformation elsewhere. Although most of Japan's few very large-scale landowning families were to be found in the northeast, in many cases landlords there remained of the small-scale cultivating kind, still resident in the villages where they owned land, farming some of it themselves and performing their traditional social and economic functions. It was landlords such as these, rather than their more sophisticated, diversified and increasingly absentee cousins in the south and west, who were particularly hard hit by the Depression. The market value of their rental rice collapsed; such alternative employment opportunities as they might have had disappeared and the savings they had made had had nowhere else to go but into deposits in just the kind of local bank that went bust in the Depression. When they hit hard times, such landlords had little option but to turn to the security of the land they owned. This meant securing the eviction of existing tenants in order to take land back into their own cultivation or sell it to someone else to do the same or to bring in a new tenant who would pay more.<sup>23</sup>

As Smethurst points out, in terms of numbers of participants, dispute activity even in the 1930s remained concentrated in the southwest (1986: 332). However, in terms of numbers of incidents, the years following the Depression saw a shift towards the northeast. Whereas only 8 per cent of disputes occurring between 1917 and 1931 were in the northeastern Tōhoku region (while over a third occurred in the most developed southwestern Kinki region), just over a quarter of those occurring in 1932–41 were in Tōhoku and the total number recorded there over those periods rose from 2,000 to over 12,000 (Waswo 1977: 96–7). While relatively large-scale disputes over rents continued to occur in the southwest through the 1930s, the growth in the number of incidents in the post-Depression years is thus accounted for by the kind of much smaller-scale conflict, typically over issues to do with the continuation of tenancy, that occurred in the northeast.

In these disputes, tenants in the northeast borrowed the tactics of their counterparts in the southwest but in this case to resist the actions of landlords seeking to evict them. Most of these disputes also ended in some form of compromise, but this would still typically represent a worsening of tenancy conditions, from the tenant's point of view. Nonetheless, resistance, like that which the rural population had been able to mobilize over the generations, even if now in a more modern form involving unions and the courts, did serve to place limits on the ability of the rural elite to exercise power over cultivators. It was the difficulties faced by this elite,

23 For a more detailed analysis, see Waswo 1977: 127–34.

operating within a rural economy that had gone much less far along the road towards adjustment to industrialization than was the case in the southwest, in coping with the effects of macro-economic fluctuations that the Tōhoku disputes of the 1930s symbolize.

The government's response to the problems of Tōhoku landlords, made abundantly clear by the organizations representing their interests in the Diet, became embroiled in the wider policy programme adopted in the face of the agricultural crisis of the Depression period. Just as the more militant middle-scale owner-tenants in the southwest began to draw back from further pressure on landlords, either because they had achieved as much as they could hope for or because, under the conditions of the Depression, they no longer felt able to take the risk, so the state drew back from any attempt to reform the tenancy system which might threaten the stability of an already fragile rural economy.<sup>24</sup> The survival of both tenants and landlords, in Tōhoku at least, depended on the recovery of prices and employment in rural areas, and government policy and expenditure were directed towards this. As we shall see in Chapter 10, in the atmosphere of the rural revitalization movement, the talk was of self-help and self-reliance, of debt relief and of supporting, materially and spiritually, the cultivators who represented the core of Japanese rural society, not of land reform.

For some, this conclusion means that the tenancy-dispute movement ultimately failed, defeated not so much by repression as by the 'petit bourgeois' nature of its driving force of commercialized middle-scale households, seduced by the role held out for them as leaders of a glorious rural community serving the national end. Waswo suggests that, had the Depression not come, proposals for land reform which were being made in the 1920s even by landlords' representatives, might have stood some chance of success (1977: 127). The legal recognition of the small-scale, owner-farmer household as the basic unit of the adjusted rural economy of industrial Japan would not then have had to await the post-defeat Land Reform. But be that as it may, the evolving tenancy dispute movement of the inter-war period has to be seen as part and parcel of the process whereby rural households, whether positively pursuing the goal of viability as commercial cultivators or resisting the attempts of 'unreconstructed' landlords to go back to the past, tried to find a place for themselves in an economy now dominated by industry.

24 The Nishiyamas and their fellow tenants pressed much less hard for rent reductions in the 1930s, possibly because their landlords were resident and they owed them money. As we shall see later, their strategy in the face of the Depression was to diversify and this tended to undermine the unity of interest among tenants (Nishida 1997: 163–4).

**Conclusion**

The response of rural households to the agricultural adjustment problem which had been gestating since the 1890s but which hit with full force during the inter-war years was thus varied and complex, but it did not involve launching out in the new direction of larger-scale, specialized farming. Instead, it took the form of technological adaptations, where necessary in a direction which saved labour time, to make it possible to continue intensive rice cultivation alongside a changing range of agricultural and non-agricultural activities. Technical and economic support for small-scale, household-based units pursuing this strategy was increasingly provided by village organizations which, through the regional and national hierarchies to which they belonged, could provide the access to markets, credit, input supplies and technical advice, as well as government aid, that such units could not secure on their own. As a result, the village community, with its approach to land and to the economic and political relationships surrounding it, became involved in the process of modernization, acting as an agent of the state in its rural development programmes but at the same time conditioning the implementation and effects of those programmes on the ground.

The chief beneficiaries of these developments, and increasingly also the driving force behind them, were those households with access to a holding big enough to support the family labour force necessary for intensive rice cultivation, but not so big as to require hired labour or to inhibit the ability of family members to take advantage of opportunities to earn additional income off the farm. As owners and tenants with holdings below this level gradually left agriculture, so their land was taken over by those consolidating their position as such middle-scale, often owner-tenant, units. Meanwhile, those who owned holdings larger than could be cultivated in this way continued to abandon an active interest in agriculture, as their share of agricultural output and their role and influence in village life declined, in the face of the direction of technical change and the lessening bargaining power of landowners in competition with the industrial sector for the services of rural labour.

This gradual shift in the balance of economic power within the rural economy was observable earliest in the most commercialized and developed areas of central and southwestern Japan, where it was reflected in the upsurge in tenancy disputes in the 1920s and in the steady takeover of rural organizations and institutions by representatives of the core practising cultivators in the village. Its spread to the less developed areas of the northeast became enmeshed with the impact of the Depression, which triggered tenancy disputes for different reasons and which produced a policy response in some ways supportive of practising cultivators within the rural political economy. As core cultivators became more influential within rural organizations, so those organizations were increasingly mobil-

ized to serve their technical and economic needs – credit and marketing facilities, fertilizer supplies, new high-yielding rice varieties, the technical means to save labour at peak times and so on – rather than those of the larger-scale landowners or cultivators who might have driven them along a different development path.

At the same time, however, it is also clear that it was the core practising cultivators who increasingly had the support of the state. In pursuit of the means to deal with agriculture's problems, and especially the 'agricultural crisis' brought on by the Depression, the network of *nōkai* and co-operatives became the means not just of implementing policies and regulations, but also of providing support for the core cultivators in the villages. As the authorities came to incorporate agricultural organizations at the level of the natural village, they demonstrated their recognition of the increasingly central role of the middle-scale, owner-tenant, rice-cultivating household in the rural political economy of industrial Japan. Their less than unambiguous support for the landlord class in the face of the tenancy-dispute movement similarly implies a growing acceptance that peace and stability in the countryside depended on the well-being of practising cultivators. How and why the state came, in the inter-war period, to sustain and promote a rural economy and society founded on the middle-scale, pluriactive but rice-cultivating household as the solution to the agricultural adjustment problem in Japan is the subject of the next chapter.

## 10 The rural dream

In Japan, as in other countries which have experienced industrialization, the difficulties faced by rural households confronting the agricultural adjustment problem focused public and political attention on the countryside as never before. In particular, the impact of the Depression on rural areas served to crystallize both public concern about the position of farmers in the urban industrial society that Japan was becoming and pressure from within the rural community for state support for agriculture. As the Depression worsened, journalists bravely departed the capital for the backwoods in search of stories of rural hardship; petitions flooded into government and newspaper offices in support of the suffering farmers; Diet members were regaled with impassioned speeches on the agricultural question (see, e.g. Partner 2001: 494). And perhaps most worrying of all, 'rescuing the countryside' became part of the agenda of the radical civilian and military groups whose terrorist activity threatened the political institutions of Japan's uncertain democracy.

As we saw in Chapter 7, agricultural policy-makers within the government bureaucracy had begun, even before World War I, to formulate a vision of the rural economy that they believed would provide the social basis for a modern, industrial, imperial Japan. This vision was centred on the small-scale, rice-cultivating household, healthy, frugal and hard-working, embodying the values of the traditional continuing family unit and participating in a harmonious and co-operative, self-reliant village community, but applying rational and scientific methods to cultivation and farm management. In many respects, this vision reflected the rise of the middle-scale owner-tenant group within the rural economy, although the commercialism, pluriactivity and organized resistance to traditional authority that this group also practised may not have been part of the plan. At any rate, the agricultural problem of the inter-war years, and in particular the crisis of the Depression years, provided the opportunity to put in place measures in support of the rural economy which embodied this vision and in many ways established the policy and institutional basis for state support of agriculture into the post-war era.

The agrarianism embodied in this dream of what rural Japan should be,

both within and outside government, has typically been viewed as backward-looking, an attempt to revive 'traditional Japan' and the rural power structures that went with it and intimately linked up with the expansionist and nationalistic fascism eventually adopted by government and the military. Certainly, in its anti-Westernism and anti-urbanism it harked back to an earlier, purer time before the corrupting influence of industrialization began to permeate the countryside. But in other respects it embodied modernity, in Garon's sense: farmers would operate in the market, albeit one guided by the state, use chemical fertilizers and keep accounts, while their wives would learn to manage a healthy and hygienic household. It was also a vision that attempted to embrace Japan's wider imperial role in the world through the promotion of emigration, in order both to free land in the home islands for the core cultivators who remained and to carry the mission of Japanese-style rural society to the colonies.

This chapter therefore explores this dream, as the ideological basis for policy measures which provided support for the adjustment path that rural households had taken. Once war broke out, these measures, and the institutional structures through which they were implemented, were turned to the task of mobilizing the rural economy to supply the manpower, food and raw materials required by the war effort. They were to remain in place, however, after the war, as the framework for the system of agricultural support which sustained the small-scale, part-time, rice-cultivating household through the economic miracle. The route taken by rural households during the pre-war years, as they carved out, with growing support from policy-makers, their role in the industrial economy, thus found its apotheosis in the rural political economy of the post-war miracle years.

### **'Agriculture as the base': agrarianism in government and beyond**

In many societies in the developed world, industrialization and urbanization have produced a cultural, social and political reaction which regrets and glorifies the vanishing countryside and its ways. Romantic poetry, 'back-to-nature' rural communes, rural tourism, the glorification of traditional food products and cuisine and so on all embody the attempts of those made rich by urban industrial development to recapture (chosen elements of) the rural culture and way of life that have thereby been marginalized.<sup>1</sup> In Japan, as we saw earlier, this kind of reaction had become apparent in thinking about agriculture before World War I, in the form of the agricultural fundamentalism known as *Nōhonshugi*. However, as *Nōhonshugi* developed through the inter-war years as the most influential

1 For examples of this phenomenon in present-day Japan, and discussion of the influence on it of the agrarianist tradition, see Knight 2000.



line of thinking about the role of the rural in industrial Japan, it emerged as more than just nostalgia, producing a prescription for a form of agriculture which, while preserving what was seen as the best of 'traditional' rural society and morality, would also secure the supply of rice as the 'staple food' of the Japanese and ensure the welfare and livelihoods of rural households on which social and political harmony depended. Within the agricultural bureaucracy, such thinking was already established by the time of the Rice Riots crisis, but it continued to develop and inform the policy measures adopted in the face of the agricultural adjustment problem and, especially, the Great Depression, as it permeated wider political circles, the media and significant elements in the armed forces. Meanwhile, however, out in the countryside, Nōhonshugi ideas were being picked up by a new generation of farmers and village leaders for whom such 'popular agrarianism', as Waswo calls it, provided a rationale and justification for the role they were creating for rural society within modern industrial Japan.

### *Agrarianist thinking and its influence*

Chapter 7 has already traced the growing influence, in the years up to World War I, of the idea that the small-scale, household-based farm represented not just the economic but also the moral and spiritual bedrock of Japanese society. The agricultural crisis of the inter-war years encouraged the further development of agrarianist thinking and although, as Smith points out, there was 'no single dominant discourse of agrarianism' and its ideologues and leaders differed and fell out over a range of issues (2001: 94), certain broad themes can be discerned, running through the work of those, including Gondō Seikyō, Tachibana Kōzaburō and Katō Kanji, who represented the leading agrarianist writers and activists of the inter-war period.<sup>2</sup> These themes serve to characterize both the distinctive nature of Japanese agrarianism, rooted as it was in the agricultural structure that had emerged out of Japan's development process and the invented traditions it was possible to create about it, and the intellectual context within which government policy-makers and more radical activists in the military and beyond sought a practical solution to the rural crisis.

Most agrarianist thinkers were agreed, first of all, that the capitalist mode of production was unsuited to Japanese-style agriculture and indeed that its spread into the countryside was the source of many of the evils to be observed there. Earlier writers had developed the idea that Japanese-style, small-scale agriculture worked on the principle of the maximum utilization of household labour for the production of the basic requirements

2 For a full-scale account of their work, see Havens 1974. For shorter and more recent discussions of inter-war agrarianist thinkers, see Vlastos 1998 and Smith 2001: ch. 4.

of existence, so that production for profit, on the basis of privately-owned resources, was not part of it. Inter-war writers and activists, in particular Tachibana, took this further, arguing that it was the evil influences of urban capitalism that lay behind the rural crisis. The capitalist cities sucked the life-blood from the countryside, exploiting it through economic means and luring away its younger generation (see e.g. Vlastos 1998: 89). Where once city and countryside had been able to develop interdependently, now the greed engendered by the money economy of the cities fed upon and destroyed the non-capitalist economy of the villages (Havens 1974: 256–7).

However, it was not just the rural economy that urban capitalism destroyed. It also undermined the political principles on which Japanese rural society was held to be based. The ‘traditional village’, according to Gondō for instance, was an autonomous group that practised ‘self-rule’ within the overall harmonious hierarchy of the nation, symbolically presided over by the emperor. Its internal organization was based on communalism and mutual aid in the interests of the welfare of all (Havens 1974: 195–7).<sup>3</sup> Urban capitalism was destroying this, as witness the effects of the Depression, and it was only by means of a radical reassertion of village autonomy, self-help and self-sufficiency that rural society could be saved. Gondō argued that the bureaucratic structures of the modern centralized state must be abandoned, as he ‘used the past to refashion agrarianist teachings by emphasising above all the political necessity of preserving small village farming’ (Havens 1974: 211).

For Tachibana, however, the traditional village was more than just an alternative to capitalism as a means of organizing the rural political economy. It was also the essence of the Japanese nation. It embodied the unique Japanese family system and the principles of harmony within a social and gender-based hierarchy which underlay the Japanese imperial state. Village communalism was thus the foundation of the national essence: ‘isn’t the spirit of patriotism protected and nourished by farmers?’ (quoted in Havens 1974: 251). Moreover, if the village was the essence of the nation, then that essence could and should also spread out into the extensions of the nation in the colonies. Advocates of rural emigration to Manchuria, most notably Katō, proposed sending ‘farmer soldiers’ out to create colonial versions of the self-sufficient, harmonious, Japanese village. This would spread the message of Japanese-style social

3 Writers such as Ōkama argue that this kind of view of the ‘autonomous’ village as a timeless, ‘uniquely Japanese’, spiritual *kyōdōtai* (communal body) is not necessary to an explanation of its survival. The development of the village’s institutional assets could equally be seen as a rational way of dealing with, for example, the investment in land-related infrastructure or the free-rider problem – see Ōkama 1994: 15. Sakane describes the accumulation of village-level activities as ‘social capital’ (2002: 412).

organization and its spiritual value, whilst at the same time easing rural overpopulation at home and freeing up land for precisely those self-reliant cultivators who constituted the basis of village society at home. Colonization was therefore a matter of 'national destiny, spiritual fulfilment and population pressure on the land' (Havens 1974: 290).

The principle, as advocated by Nōhonshugi thinkers, that the countryside should be preserved as a non-capitalist island, inhabited by self-reliant, small-scale cultivating families, within the wider sea of urban industrial Japan was impractical and utopian from a policy point of view. But the idea that industrial growth now conflicted with the interests of agriculture and posed a threat to the survival of the small-scale household which continued to control cultivation was an influential one. Civilian and military activists frequently cited the plight of rural areas as evidence of the evils of the present system of government and Tachibana, together with other members of his agrarianist group, was among those tried and imprisoned for participation in the attempted coup of May 15, 1932 (Smith 2001: 80–3). Agrarianist bureaucrats had begun, in the 1920s, to take tentative steps towards policies which would provide support for the core cultivating household in its struggle with the capitalist industrial economy but, as later sections will show, the Depression, and the publicity given to its impact on rural areas by agrarianist activity, provided the opportunity to go further. The policies thus devised to promote the economic regeneration of rural areas involved support for just the kind of self-reliant, small-scale cultivating household, within its co-operative village structure, that agrarianist thinking viewed as the basis of the rural, and indeed national, economy of modern, industrial, imperial Japan. Meanwhile, however, those very households themselves were devising their own version of agrarianism as the ideological backing for the economic and political strategy they were adopting in their effort to survive and prosper in the now-industrial economy.

### ***'Popular agrarianism', the village and the small-scale cultivator***

While Gondō, Tachibana and other agrarianist thinkers were publishing and disseminating their ideas in the media and beyond, out in the countryside itself the emerging conflict between agriculture and industry was also generating movements for change. As Waswo describes, by the 1920s, members of the younger generation who had stayed in the village, increasingly literate and aware of developments in the country as a whole, were beginning to resent what they saw as the inferior and exploited position of agriculture and the countryside and to organize themselves to raise the status and strength of the rural political economy in which they lived and worked (1988: 590–3). One outlet for this was the young men's associations (*seinendan*). These had traditionally existed in Japanese villages but were increasingly promoted and organized by the state, as it sought to

incorporate local-level groupings in the 1900s and 1910s. However, as Wilson shows, young men's associations, in their activities and their publications, by no means always toed the government line and they provided a forum for both left-wing views of the nature of the rural problem and, increasingly, a brand of agrarianism which, while not incompatible with the state's version, was not dictated by it and did reflect the middle-scale rural household's search for recognition in the industrial economy (Wilson 1997).

This 'popular agrarianism' was, like its more theoretical 'elite' counterpart, fundamentally anti-urban and anti-capitalist. For the middle-scale owner-tenants and their sons, trying to make a living from commercial agriculture, the cities were enticing the young away from the villages and denigrating the rural way of life. What was more, when agricultural prices fell during the 1920s, it appeared as though the position of farmers within the economy was declining relative to that of urban workers, with rural producers suffering disproportionately as urban capitalist middlemen and fertilizer traders exploited them. Through taxation, the postal savings system and the relative weakness of agricultural prices, rural resources were being drained away for the benefit of the industrial economy (Waswo 1988: 594). As Waswo points out, the relevant issue here is not whether or not agricultural prices and incomes actually were declining relative to urban industrial ones – as Chapter 8 showed, in some respects and at some times they were, but by no means consistently. What matters is that crucial sections of opinion in the countryside believed that they were (Waswo 1988: 591). Popular agrarianism was therefore, at one level, as in other industrializing societies, a reaction to the perception of agriculture's relative decline, in income and status, as industry came to dominate the economy.

At another level, however, in the positive and practical measures that its proponents advocated, it reflected and reinforced the particular strategy adopted, since Tokugawa times, by small-scale cultivating households in Japan, as they sought to adapt to and benefit from growth and change in the economy as a whole. In the situation in which farmers perceived themselves to be, little was to be expected of the state, dominated as it apparently was by urban capitalist interests. Practical agrarianists in the villages, therefore, like their elite theoretical counterparts, stressed self-help and the strength of communal village organizations. This was not a matter of nostalgia for the 'beautiful rural customs' of the past, but rather a recognition that, if core cultivators were to survive and prosper in the industrial world, they had to work together to resist the power of urban capitalism. Hence, they needed village-based agricultural practice associations to provide technological support and co-operatives to strengthen their hand in their dealings with the capitalist market economy outside the village. The autonomous, united village would provide an alternative to capitalism and the basis for a rural culture distinct from that of the cities. In this sense, such 'agrarianism from below' did represent a challenge to the state

and a positive and active attempt to carve out a political and economic role for farmers, and especially for the core middle-scale cultivators, within industrial Japan.

As we saw in Chapter 9, rural activism and dissent from the left, principally in the form of tenancy disputes, gradually lost momentum during the 1930s and were undoubtedly repressed by the state. Grass-roots agrarian activism, however, was spurred by the rural crisis of the Depression years and gained political support as a result of, for example, widespread campaigns to produce petitions demanding help for farmers.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, since much of the agricultural bureaucracy was already converted to agrarianism and what it advocated in many respects chimed in with the government's desire to reduce conflict and promote harmony and stability in rural areas, it had to be accommodated and co-opted, rather than repressed. Thus, as we shall see, the measures adopted to try to deal with the rural crisis reflected popular agrarianist thinking and utilized institutional structures within which the middle-scale household, whose interests such thinking in many ways represented, could play an increasingly significant role. Although the state was to take over popular agrarianism as the ideological basis for the mobilization of rural society, it continued at the same time to reflect and promote the strategy adopted by the rising core of cultivating households in the face of the agricultural adjustment problem.

### **Dream and reality: policy in the face of the rural crisis**

As we saw in Part II, in the years leading up to the Rice Riots crisis the central problem facing agricultural policy-makers was that of how to ensure an adequate and secure supply of the 'staple food' – increasingly defined as Japanese-style rice – to consumers at a price they could afford, without undermining the economies of the core cultivating households on whom both agricultural production and peace and stability in the countryside depended. The solution eventually worked out, imperial self-sufficiency in rice, involved significant investment costs but did appear to ensure the supply of rice on the domestic market at a price sufficiently higher than the international price to enable Japan's small-scale cultivators to stay in business. As the 1920s progressed, however, with unrest in the countryside spreading, in the shape of tenancy disputes, and resentment at the declining relative position of the rural sector in the economy and society beginning to take an active ideological and political form, the

4 See Smith 2001: ch. 4. Smith points out (p. 101) that the use of petitions to seek redress for rural grievances had a long tradition and was common during the Tokugawa period (see Roberts 1998). This suggests an interesting continuity in the methods used by the rural population to make itself heard.

focus of the problem facing policy-makers changed. Increasingly the issue became one of how to support and sustain core cultivators, in order both to minimize rural conflict and to develop the kind of rural political economy seen as fundamental to the new order of industrial, imperial Japan. The Depression turned the problem into a crisis and provided the political momentum policy-makers needed to put in place policies strongly coloured by the rural dream of elite and popular agrarianists.

### *The shift to rice-price support*

As we have seen, in the years up to the Rice Riots, the fundamental agricultural problem facing policy-makers in the combined Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce was the imbalance between the growth in demand for food, especially Japanese-style rice, and the growth in supply. This manifested itself in rises in the rice price, hence in urban living costs, and the market intervention powers that bureaucrats had acquired by 1920, essentially involving manipulation of the tariff on *gaimai*, were designed to enable them to act to curb price rises. With the collapse of the World War I boom and the slow-down in the rate of growth of per capita rice consumption, pressure on the rice price relaxed. However, MAC forecasts continued to predict supply shortages well into the future and, while investment to increase production at home and in the colonies would take time to bear fruit, the focus of agricultural policy remained on measures to increase output and control price increases. Hence the Rice Law passed in April 1921, which allowed for state purchases and sales of rice alongside variation of the *gaimai* tariff, was intended as a means of controlling price rises and preventing further consumer protest, until the imperial self-sufficiency policy had had time to take effect (Ōmameuda 1993: 186).

However, through the early 1920s, this goal continued to seem remote. Moreover, although *gaimai* imports were still growing, they were becoming increasingly hard to sell, as consumers exercised their preference for Japanese-style rice (Ōmameuda 1993: 195, 205). By 1924–5, therefore, food policy was in crisis again, as officials realized that reliance on *gaimai* to ensure supply and control the rice price was no longer effective. The Nōmukyoku within the MAC had believed for some time that the objective of increased domestic production could not be achieved as long as price policy was determined by the desire of industrial interests within the Ministry and outside to keep food prices low. Faced with the realization that imperial self-sufficiency was still some way off, as a solution to the food supply shortage, the government was converted to the view that rice-price policy would have to be used to promote output increase at home (Ōmameuda 1993: 210).

However, this would be hard to achieve in practice as long as price policy was under the control of the Shōmukyoku of the MAC, who, while agreeing that production needed to be increased, at the same time viewed low food prices as necessary to industrial development. Ōmameuda argues

that the conflict within the MAC over the goals of food-price policy was the fundamental factor leading to the decision to split it into separate agriculture and industry ministries in 1925 (Ōmameuda 1993: 209–27). Following the passage of the 1919 law to subsidize land improvement and the 1921 Rice Law, all aspects of food policy had been brought together within the remit of the Ministry's Food Bureau, established in 1921. However, within the Food Bureau, officials from the industry side of the Ministry continued to dominate price policy, while agriculture-side members were 'technicians' who only dealt with areas such as land improvement (Ōmameuda 1993: 220). As the government moved in favour of the split through 1924, battle raged over which of the new ministries would get the Food Bureau, with victory eventually going to the agriculture side, supported as it was by the politically influential Imperial Agricultural Association (Ōmameuda 1993: 229–30). With the establishment of the new Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in 1925, agriculture bureaucrats thus gained control over government intervention in the rice market.

For agrarianist bureaucrats such as Ishiguro Tadaatsu, however, the battle for control of rice-price policy had never been solely about its use as a means of promoting output increase. For them it was also a matter of supporting the incomes of the small-scale farmers they saw as the backbone of Japanese agriculture (Ōmameuda 1993: 223). As long as supply shortages remained the central problem with which agricultural policy had to deal, intervention in the rice market could be used to serve both ends. By the later 1920s, however, this was no longer the case. At long last, the investment in infrastructure and technology in the colonies was beginning to pay off, with a substantial expansion of imports of Japanese-style rice from Taiwan and Korea (see Table 5.5 on page 124 and Table 7.1 on page 170). This, combined with good harvests at home and the slow-down in the growth of per capita rice consumption, meant that by the late 1920s the goal of imperial self-sufficiency had been achieved and *gaimai* imports virtually ceased. Instead of a problem of supply shortage and upward pressure on prices, policy-makers now faced supply surpluses and downward pressure.

Meanwhile, as the new Ministry began to flex its muscles, a series of revisions to the 1921 Rice Law were enacted to increase the scope and effectiveness of state intervention in the rice market. These increased the amounts that the Food Bureau could buy and sell and streamlined the mechanisms of intervention so that seasonal price fluctuations could be countered. Minimum and maximum levels for the rice price were established, with intervention permitted to keep the price within this band, and ways were increasingly found of linking the minimum price to estimates of farmers' costs (Ōmameuda 1993: 272). However, budgetary constraints still limited the extent to which purchases could be made and, in as far as interventions did succeed in supporting the price on the domestic market, they also served to encourage more colonial imports. On a number of

occasions, the Agriculture Ministry, representing domestic farm interests, was to come into conflict with the Japanese and colonial governments and press for restrictions on the scale of imports (Ōmameuda 1993: 293–5). Nonetheless, the process of revision through the second half of the 1920s resulted in acceptance of the principle that price policy should be used to support the price, increasingly with the aim of maintaining it at a level at which small-scale cultivators could continue in production.

When the Depression hit, it acted as the final straw in convincing the government that surplus not shortage was now the fundamental problem facing Japanese agriculture. As prices collapsed and consumption fell, the food problem disappeared, to be replaced by the rural income problem. By 1933, legislation permitting unlimited state purchases and sales to maintain the rice price within a band determined by overall price increases and farm production costs was in place and restrictions were being imposed on colonial production and imports (Yamamoto 1987: 59–62). When the rice price began to fall following the good harvest of 1933, the government moved in to buy up 10 million *koku* out of a harvest of 70–80 million, pushing the price back up towards the maximum level during 1934 (Yamamoto 1987: 61). In fact, with poor harvests in Japan and the colonies in 1934 and 1935, consumption rising again and increasing mobilization for war, the spectre of food shortage soon returned to haunt agricultural policy-makers, but by this stage agricultural bureaucrats had already won their battle to turn state intervention in the rice market from a means to constrain consumers' living costs into a weapon to support farm incomes.

### ***Supporting the core cultivator***

In the years of industrialization up to 1920, such agricultural policy as there had been was directed, as we have seen, towards the promotion of output increase, in line with the dominant view that the provision of an adequate food supply was the key issue facing policy-makers. Hence state support for agriculture was concentrated on the establishment of experiment stations and systems for promoting technological diffusion, land improvement to increase the drained and irrigated cultivated area and so on. Although agricultural bureaucrats had become convinced even before World War I that policy should at the same time be directed towards supporting the livelihood of the core small-scale cultivator, the resources at their disposal and their influence over rural policy remained limited. As the 1920s progressed, however, with rural unrest intensifying, the food-supply problem moving towards solution and the independence of the agricultural bureaucracy increasing, it became possible to begin to develop policies designed to strengthen the position of the small-scale but commercial cultivator, in his battle with urban capitalism. Thus, as the objective of intervention in the rice market shifted from price control to farm-income support, so that of other areas of agricultural policy began to move



towards the development of a system of support for the cultivating rural household and its survival strategy.

The shift towards agricultural support is reflected in part straightforwardly in the growth and distribution of government spending on agriculture, as shown in Table 10.1. Agriculture-related expenditure, which was running at an annual rate of under ¥1 million in the 1890s (Yamamoto 1987: 28), had risen to ¥3–4 million by the end of the 1910s and thereafter multiplied to over ¥60 million by the mid-1930s. This was reflected in a steady increase in the share of agriculture, forestry and fishing in the overall government budget. Most striking, however, is the growth, during the inter-war years, in the proportion of the agriculture-related budget taken up by subsidy expenditure, which had reached 80 per cent by the 1930s. Meanwhile, whereas at the end of the 1910s half of all agriculture-related expenditure was devoted to policies to promote output increase, by 1933, in the depths of the Depression, over 60 per cent went on rural public works and only 12.5 per cent on output increase. By the later 1930s, expenditure on output promotion was again taking about a quarter of the total, but public works and village-support policies continued to take over half.

At the same time, the content of expenditure programmes was also changing. Through the 1920s, a significant part of the increase in agriculture-related expenditure was devoted to subsidy of land-improvement projects intended to create the infrastructure conditions for increasing and stabilising output. However, the growth in such expenditure had stagnated by the later 1920s and its focus was shifting towards the subsidization of projects which reduced costs of production, rather than increased output (Ômameuda 1993: 269–71). Meanwhile, subsidy schemes to improve the commercial basis of small-scale cultivators continued. These included a substantial programme to construct state- or co-operative-run granaries, providing access to storage space for cultivators and reducing the necessity to offload supplies on the market immediately after harvest when prices were lowest (Ômameuda 1993: 240–3). There were schemes to promote diversification and improvements in the marketing of fruit and vegetables, promotion of wheat cultivation, subsidies for training and education and so on. As private-sector traders and fertilizer merchants began to discover to their cost, the state appeared increasingly to see itself as the protector of the small-scale cultivator in his commercial dealings.

In similar ways, state-organized provision of credit to agriculture was beginning to play a bigger role in rural finance and to become more accessible to the smaller-scale cultivator. Funds from the Deposit Bureau of the Ministry of Finance and the Post Office life-insurance scheme were increasingly made available to rural borrowers through new or reformed financial institutions. In 1921 the Hypothec Bank absorbed the existing agricultural banks, which had proved ineffective in supplying credit to smaller-scale borrowers, and used Deposit Bureau funds to supply low-

Table 10.1 The structure of government expenditure on agriculture, selected years 1903–41

	Total agriculture-related expenditure (¥m)	Agriculture, forestry and fisheries expenditure as a proportion of total government budget (%)	Subsidies as a proportion of agriculture-related expenditure (%)	Share (%) in agriculture-related expenditure of		
				production expenditure	rural revitalization expenditure	public works
1915	2.1	2.9	37.5	49.1	—	17.8
1917	2.8	5.6	36.9	30.8	1.0	15.4
1919	4.4	10.7	35.5	51.2	2.7	11.2
1921	7.8	3.6	n.a.	50.8	1.8	11.5
1923	17.1	4.0	35.1	30.3	0.8	17.7
1925	20.8	2.9	38.5	21.6	13.0	23.8
1927	22.7	2.9	65.4	20.0	14.6	46.4
1929	24.7	3.4	63.3	22.9	12.6	44.2
1931	25.8	3.7	66.9	19.7	13.0	48.2
1933	67.6	5.4	83.4	12.5	14.5	63.2
1935	64.7	4.7	76.2	25.5	10.0	48.5
1939	161.0	5.0	82.6	34.3	26.2	27.7
1941	453.5	6.7	92.5	24.5	49.4	13.2

Source: adapted from Yamamoto 1987: Table 1-2-2.

interest credit for rural agricultural and industrial projects, but also for living expenses, debt recycling and so on (Yamamoto 1987: 53–4). In 1923 the central bank of the agricultural co-operatives was set up and came to play a major role, through its network of credit unions and co-operatives, in the government's plans for the allocation of Deposit Bureau and other subsidized funds to smaller-scale borrowers in rural areas. By the time of the Depression, the credit infrastructure existed by means of which 'policy finance' could be used, no longer so much to fund output-increasing investment, but rather as a mechanism of social policy to alleviate the 'rural crisis' (Yamamoto 1987: 54).

However, it was not just for the provision of credit that the state was beginning to make increasing use of farmers' organizations as its agents in gaining access to cultivating households in the villages. Rural co-operatives acted as the channel through which subsidy was provided for granaries and warehouses, fertilizer provision and marketing advice, as well as serving as the state's agents in rice purchases and sales under price stabilization schemes. Meanwhile the *nōkai* received growing amounts of subsidy to support technicians and agricultural extension services but also for the provision of advice on improved farm management, the marketing of agricultural and non-agricultural products and so on (Yamamoto 1987: 56–7). By the time of the introduction of programmes for rural recovery from the Depression, local *nōkai* technicians were in a position to play a key role in the development and implementation of schemes to revive village economies and rural household income. As the scale of agricultural subsidy increased, therefore, farmers' organizations, with their networks reaching down into the villages, began to take on the role they were to perfect in the post-World War II period as the state's semi-official agents in the provision of support to the small-scale cultivator.

In one area, however, pre-war agricultural bureaucrats' schemes for supporting small-scale cultivators were less successful. More radical bureaucrats such as Ishiguro appear to have been committed not just to support for the small-scale farm and improvements in tenancy conditions, but also to the idea that the community had rights over the utilization of land which constrained the activities of private landowners.<sup>5</sup> Here, however, they met increasingly concerted opposition from the still politically influential landlord organizations and their plans for a tenancy law and for substantial funding for schemes to enable tenants to acquire ownership of the land they cultivated were watered down into insignificance. Regulations of 1926 offering Deposit Bureau funds to local governments to set up programmes of 'owner-farmer establishment' had very little effect on the scale of tenancy and the problems of tenant farmers

5 See Sakane 2002: 415–18. The tenancy section of the Ministry was apparently regarded as 'red'.

(Yamamoto 1987: 49–52). Nonetheless, although landlords were still able to use their political influence to prevent significant reform, policy on landownership and tenancy, like that on other aspects of agriculture and rural life, reflected the increasing commitment of the agricultural bureaucracy to support of the small-scale commercial cultivator and the institutional structures that could sustain him.

### ***The Depression and rural revitalization***

In almost all industrializing countries, as the urban population becomes better-off and more and more dominant, it has appeared increasingly willing to see some of its income redistributed towards the dwindling band of farmers who embody the rural dream. However, for such a redistribution to be achieved, governments have to become sufficiently concerned about the potential for unrest and opposition in rural areas to devote resources to it and political and popular support for it has to be mobilized. Although the agricultural bureaucracy was already committed to policies of subsidy and support, the impact of the Great Depression on rural Japan created the conditions, and the sense of crisis, needed to bring about a wider conversion to the cause of the rural sector and resulted in the establishment of ambitious programmes to revive the rural economy and society on the basis of the self-reliant but co-operative rural community of small-scale cultivators envisaged in the rural dream.

As earlier sections have shown, by the late 1920s the problems faced by the farm sector, and in particular the apparent decline in rural household incomes relative to those of urban households, were beginning to attract the attention of both thinkers/ideologues and policy-makers. However, the Depression-induced fall in agricultural prices, which began in 1929 and became dramatic from 1930, resulted in the focussing of national attention as never before on the 'rural problem'. Local-level petition movements expanded into national campaigns to force the rural crisis on to the government's agenda. These were eventually picked up in the national press and there ensued widespread public discussion of the state of the rural economy and society and of measures to improve it (Smith 2001: 94–113). The trial of the military and civilian participants in the attempted coup of May 15, 1932 gave more publicity to the agrarian crisis, as the defendants took the opportunity to expound in public on their concerns, linking rural poverty to the issue of Japan's, as they saw it weak, political and military position in the world (Smith 2001: 81).

By the summer of 1932, therefore, political and media pressure on the government to respond to the rural crisis had become intense and was orchestrated from a wide range of sources, both within the political establishment and outside in civil society. Agrarianist thinkers organized local petition campaigns and mobilized the support of Diet members. Political parties took up the cause of the poverty-stricken village. Much discussion

focused on the newly revealed extent of indebtedness in the countryside and the Imperial Agricultural Association began to campaign for a scheme for rural debt relief (Smith 2001: especially 134–5). However, the current Diet session was coming to a close, with a new cabinet having just taken office, and there was no consensus on the policies which might be undertaken to deal with the crisis. Under pressure, therefore, the Diet passed a resolution to hold an extraordinary session devoted exclusively to the rural problem later in the summer. This so-called ‘village rescue’<sup>6</sup> Diet session, which opened in August 1932, set out the legislative framework for the programme of ‘rural revitalization’ that represented the state’s response to the immediate problems of the agricultural depression, and their political expression, but also mapped out the direction which the government saw the rural economy and society taking in the mobilizing Japan of the 1930s.

Immediate relief for Depression-hit rural areas was provided in the form of a substantial programme of public-works expenditure, through direct central-government schemes and the provision of subsidies and low-interest finance to local authorities. Projects typically involved improvements to irrigation and drainage facilities, roads and other infrastructure, and the major element in their costs was wages. During 1932–4, over 100 million man-days of employment was provided (Yamamoto 1987: 63) and, although the wages received by individual households did not amount to a great deal on average, they may have served to tide some of the poorest in rural society over the worst.<sup>7</sup> What was striking about the programme, however, compared with previous subsidy and public-works schemes, was its emphasis on small-scale, local-level projects. Whereas previous schemes had tended to be organized by and of benefit to larger-scale cultivators and landlords, the Depression-era programme broke new ground in allowing local authorities to use government funds in ways which were seen as benefiting the village economy as a whole (Smith 2001: 137–45).

A similar sort of approach was adopted in the measures taken by the government to try to deal with the rural debt problem.<sup>8</sup> Growing amounts of Deposit Bureau funds were made available to co-operatives and other

6 Smith’s translation of ‘*kyūnō*’. More formally, it was the 63rd Diet session.

7 The family of Partner’s Toshié was sustained through the Depression by wages her father earned working on a government-funded river-management project, although this was in fact a long-term scheme dating back to 1915. When the project was completed, he was able to take over tenancy (at a nominal rent from the prefecture) of a plot of the new land created, doubling the area the family cultivated. Unhappily, with the deaths of both of Toshié’s brothers in the Pacific War, the household lacked the manpower to continue cultivating the holding and had to give up most of it (2004: 51, 71–2, 111–12).

8 Nishida’s Nishiyama family got massively into debt as a result of their efforts to cope with the Depression by diversifying into the agricultural equipment supply business, and they were on the verge of bankruptcy at one time (causing Mr Nishiyama to stop keeping his diary properly). However, the recovery during the 1930s enabled them to wipe off their debts almost completely (Nishida 1997: 88–92).

agricultural organizations to provide loans to finance local projects and increasingly to help with the rescheduling of debts (Yamamoto 1987: 65–6). Meanwhile, the Diet eventually passed, in 1933, a law providing for the establishment of ‘debt reorganization unions’ at local level. These were intended to bring debtors and creditors together to negotiate agreements for the rescheduling and repayment of loans, with central and local governments sharing the burden of providing low-interest credit and loan guarantees to back the agreements made. In practice, the number of unions formed was relatively small and the impact on rural indebtedness limited.<sup>9</sup> However, as Smith argues, the approach of the bureaucrats who designed the legislation emphasized less the repayment of debts (hence the benefit to creditors) and more the value of co-operative, village-level efforts to ease the financial difficulties of rural households (2001: 130).

This kind of approach found its full expression in the measures adopted for the longer-term resolution of the rural problem through the Rural Economic Revitalization Campaign.<sup>10</sup> The original ideas behind the campaign were developed and in places put into practice by various local-level organizations, in particular the Agricultural Association of Hyōgo prefecture, but some time in 1932 they were picked up by officials in the Agriculture Ministry, within which a Revitalization Bureau was set up, and developed as the basis for a nation-wide programme (Yamamoto 1987: 58). The basic philosophy of the campaign was that villages should be helped to help themselves: government measures should provide a framework within which rural communities could plan and organize their own ‘self-revitalization’. Villages would receive help and support as they worked out their own schemes for economic survival and development, based on improvements in the utilization of their labour and other resources in production and in the commercial aspects of their economic activities. Before long, the Home and Education Ministries also picked up on the idea of ‘revitalization’, developing programmes that stressed the ‘spiritual’ aspects of self-help, self-sufficiency and self-reliance. In general, the Revitalization Campaign came to embrace existing programmes for public works, debt reorganization, the establishment of co-operatives and so on, as well as its own schemes, and to embody both the practical and ideological approaches of the state towards the rural economy.

In concrete terms, under the various pieces of legislation passed at the ‘village rescue’ Diet and later, the campaign involved institutional arrangements under which administrative villages (*mura*) could apply to be designated as participants in the programme and hence eligible for financial

9 According to Smith (2001: 129), by 1939 only 4 per cent of the farm population had joined a union and the amount of farm debt adjusted represented no more than 7 per cent of the estimated total.

10 Again, Smith’s translation of ‘Nōson Keizai Kōsei Undō’. Waswo (1988) translates it as ‘rural economic rehabilitation programme’.

support. To qualify, villages had to be able to demonstrate their commitment and solidarity and establish Revitalization Committees to draw up their plans. Committees were expected to include representatives of what were seen as the ‘four pillars’ of rural life: the village office (to provide administrative support), the *nōkai* (to provide technical input), the co-operative (to provide commercial support) and the village school (to provide social and spiritual strength) (Yamamoto 1987: 58). They thus had the potential to by-pass the traditional landlord-based political leadership in the countryside, emphasizing skill rather than status as the basis for membership (Smith 2001: 208). By 1934, just over 41 per cent of all villages had been designated as participating in the campaign and by 1940 over 80 per cent (Yamamoto 1987: 58).

The first task of the Revitalization Committees was to carry out a detailed survey of the resources and household economies of their villages. On this basis, they then had to draw up plans for the improvement of life in their communities. These could include schemes to raise or diversify output, but they might also involve measures to ‘rationalize’ farm household economies and reduce production costs or strengthen the marketing position of producers. They were expected to stress co-operation, frugality, self-sufficiency, education and in general the ‘rationalization’ and ‘modernization’ of village life. The task of implementing the plans largely fell to the *nōkai* and the co-operatives and the campaign included measures to promote the establishment of more co-operatives and to enhance their capacities. However, the Ministry officials who ran the campaign also recognized that its effectiveness would depend on organization and participation at the level of the natural village and used the Revitalization Campaign to legitimize community-level agricultural organizations and incorporate them into a structure of authority and communications that reached from the national government through the prefectures, counties and villages down to the level of the practising cultivator (Mori 1999: 30–3).

Where the Campaign did not perhaps reflect and incorporate the approaches of ‘ordinary’ rural households to the solution of their problems, however, was in its policy on their non-agricultural activity. Village revitalization schemes were certainly expected to include plans for diversification, particularly into new crops and livestock but also into ‘side projects’. However, these typically involved household-based production of the kinds of product traditionally manufactured as *fukugyō* sidelines – home-produced cloth, straw and bamboo products, processed food items and so on (see e.g. Smith 2001: 261). The development of off-farm wage employment does not seem to have been part of the plan, even though it was being proposed at the time in other quarters. Ōkōchi Masatoshi, founder of the Riken group of companies, advocated the establishment of rural factories in modern, ‘scientific’ areas of industry, employing workers commuting from rural households, and set up a number of them in rural

regions such as Niigata and Gumma badly hit by the Depression (Cusumano 1989). Although *kengyō*-type employment in factories such as these was in fact the route that rural workers, and the businesses that employed them, were taking, as they moved towards the model of the part-time farm of the post-World War II era, this conflicted with the anti-capitalist, anti-urban, Nōhonshugi-based philosophy embodied in the Revitalization Campaign, under which diversification activity had to be village-based and co-operatively organized (Ushiyama 1975: 230–44).

Nonetheless, revitalization continued to develop as an all-embracing campaign, incorporating a wide range of activities. It had no fixed targets and it is virtually impossible to say what part it played in bringing about the recovery from the Depression and the improvement of rural incomes and living standards. Expenditure on rural relief was cut sharply in 1934 and it seems plausible to argue that much of the appeal of revitalization to Finance Minister Takahashi and the rest of the government, faced as they were with growing demands for increases in military expenditure following the take-over of Manchuria, lay in its emphasis on self-help and hence its cheapness as a means of keeping the countryside and its supporters quiet. The significance of the campaign must therefore be sought, not in the scale of government expenditure that it involved or in any demonstrable impact on agricultural output or rural incomes, but rather, on the one hand, in its embodiment of the rural dream now endorsed by policy-makers and, on the other, in the institutional structures that it formalized and the opportunities that they presented for recognition of the shift in power and influence within the rural political economy.

The inter-war years thus saw the step-by-step establishment of a policy structure for the rural political economy which sought to support and promote the bureaucratic version, at least, of the rural dream of a village society composed of self-reliant, farm-based households embodying essentially Japanese values of family, community and nation. Support of the rice price at a level high enough to enable such households to sustain their role as suppliers of the nation's 'staple food' was central to this structure, but at the same time state aid in the provision of the physical and institutional infrastructure which core cultivating households needed, if they were to survive in what was perforce a market economy, also came to occupy a growing role in the plans and budgets of the government's rural agencies. Where agrarianist thinkers and their followers in military, civilian and bureaucratic groups had paved the way for the political support the creation of such a policy framework required, the impact of the Depression on the rural sector, and the publicity given to it, mobilized public opinion behind it. Whatever impact government measures and associated, in practice relatively limited, expenditure had on the incomes and economic activities of rural households, they represented the first stages in the creation of the institutional structure of state intervention in the rural



economy, and agriculture in particular, which made possible initially the mobilization of the rural population for war, but later the support and protection of the small-scale farming household through into the post-war period.

### **The rural dream and the road to war**

In 1931, the Japanese army stationed in Manchuria launched the attack on Chinese forces which was the prelude to full-scale invasion and the establishment, in 1932, of the Japanese-controlled state of Manchukuo. In the years that followed, Japan's imperial interests in northeast China and its neighbouring regions brought it increasingly into conflict, not just with China, but also with Russia and other European powers and eventually the United States. As the need to mobilize the economy and the population for the inevitable war intensified, so the influence of the military and their sympathizers in the bureaucracy over the government increased. While, on the political front, campaigns were launched to generate and organize the support of communities throughout the country, economic planning increasingly focussed on the mobilization of the resources and the manpower which war would require. While overseas Japan's soldiers and colonists fought to preserve and expand the interests of Japanese civilization, on the home front the structures were put in place through which urban and rural communities could organize, socially, politically and economically, in support of the nation's goals.

The countryside, as the source of both vital food and raw-material resources and much of the manpower required for the armed forces, the industrial labour force and the supply of colonial settlers, of course figured largely in the planning for war. However, the officials who now sought to mobilize the rural sector were able to draw on and co-opt elements of the rural political economy that had been emerging through the process of adjustment to industrialization and the crisis in that process that was crystallized by the impact of the Depression. For the core middle-scale owner and owner-tenant cultivators whose position within the village economy and polity had been strengthened by the technical, economic and policy changes that agricultural adjustment produced, preparation for war opened up further opportunities to enhance their position, as the key group that could deliver both food production and rural mobilization for the state. At the same time, the emigration to the colonies of those whose position within the village economy had been made more precarious by the adjustment process could be seen as a means to promote the self-reliant rural household and the Japanese values it embodied, both at home, through the freeing up of land for such households, and in the new settlements of the empire.

Views of the nature of that household, though heavily influenced by agrarianist philosophies that looked back to the 'pure', 'traditional' and

essentially non-commercial rural producers of the mythical past, were, however, evolving, under the influence of the ideas of modernity embodied in the science and technology that the growth of industry, and especially of war-related heavy and scientific industry, of necessity brought with it. Rural households, though supposedly immune to modernizing influences disruptive of traditional Japanese community and family values, were not exempt from trends towards the scientific management of their household economies and family lives. The 'model' rural households that emerged out of the Rural Revitalization programme and the campaigns for economy, efficiency, frugality and hygiene of the 1930s were thus in many ways modern, in comparison to their pre-industrial forebears. Equally, although they were forced to abandon the tactics of organized dispute and conflict and the culture of resistance they had employed to defend and improve their livelihoods in earlier times, as the controllers of the production of the nation's food supply, armed with the technical and commercial knowledge that that required, they were by no means powerless, within the emerging structures of control and government in the countryside.

As Japan became immersed in 'total imperialism' and then 'total war', the hierarchy of village-based organizations that had increasingly come to provide support for the core cultivators was transformed into the institutional mechanism for the requisition of the rural resources and output required for the war effort. In the process, the authorities had no choice but to accept, as they had already been moving towards doing, that it was producers – especially the core middle-scale rice cultivators – with whom they had to deal, if they were to secure what they needed, driving a further nail into the coffin of the old landlord elite. As in other areas of the Japanese political economy, the agricultural '1940s-system', set up to deal with mobilization for war, was to survive the defeat and carry on to provide the institutional structure of state support for agriculture, and in particular for the small-scale, part-time rice cultivator, through the economic miracle years.

### ***Inter-war modernity and the rural community***

The Japanese villages that were hit by the Depression of the 1930s, and that sought to engineer their own recovery from it, were populated by people who had come through very different economic experiences and socialization processes from those undergone by the preceding generation who had determined the rural response to growth and change in the economy up to World War I. Most were products of the Meiji education system, which had sought to provide its urban and rural school graduates alike with the skills of literacy and numeracy required to access modern forms of information and knowledge, as well as a sense of national identity that reached beyond the local community. The widening of horizons that

this made possible was enhanced by the development of the media and communications system, conscription, experience of work away from the village and the expanding network of political, governmental and social institutions. The rising generations in the countryside were thus, like their urban counterparts, increasingly exposed, on the one hand, to the idea of self-improvement through education and hard work and, on the other, to the values of modern life and scientific rationality.

Nonetheless, rural lives still exhibited features that struck urban observers at least as far from modern. Toshié, in Partner's case-study, growing up in a poor tenant household in the inter-war years, had access to education, modern medical services (at a cost), bus and train connections to nearby towns, a wide range of purchased consumer goods – books and magazines, medicines, clothes, kitchen utensils and so on – and a reasonably good diet, including rice at most meals, which would not have been available to her parents in their youth, all paid for from cash earnings, not so much from cultivation of the family's small holding as from sideline work raising silk-worms and wages from day-labour (2004: ch. 1). However, their living conditions – in particular their kitchen facilities – and standards of clothing, hygiene and social etiquette would have proved as shocking to modernizing urban activists as did those of most of the rural areas such reformers sought to aid during the Depression years. Although country-dwellers themselves often appeared unaware of their benighted state, the idea that the countryside needed purging of a rural culture that appeared to involve idleness, low levels of hygiene and too much spending on weddings and other festivities, in the interests of its modernization, gained widespread acceptance (Partner 2001).

To some extent, it was the government itself that had encouraged this, through campaigns, dating back to the Local Improvement Movement of the late 1900s, to promote frugality, efficiency, punctuality and reform of traditional practices that encouraged ostentatious spending, superstition and 'immorality' (see e.g. Gluck 1985: 184–5, Garon 1994: 352–3). By the inter-war period, campaigns for 'daily life improvement' were widening from their middle-class urban roots to encompass the countryside, promoting hygiene, improvements in diets and in general a rational and scientific approach to household organization of life and work (Garon 1994: 356–7; Partner 2001). However, by this time, literate country-dwellers also had access to a range of other sources of information and ideas about modern means to improve their living standards, welfare and prospects. A wide range of publications, aimed at a rural mass audience, was becoming available, from improving fiction and self-help manuals to the radical local newspapers produced by young men's groups (Wilson 1997; Smith 2001: 215; Smith 2003). The most widely available publication in rural areas, though, was *Ie no Hikari* (The Light of the Home), the magazine produced and distributed by the association of co-operatives, which was reaching almost one in three rural households by the mid-1930s (Smith 2001: 216).

Using formats designed to appeal to a mass rural readership, *Ie no Hikari* provided news, information and advice on ways to improve rural life, ranging from technical developments in agriculture, though budgeting, household organization and recipes to hobbies and leisure activities. At the same time, Smith argues, the magazine stressed the superiority of the countryside over the towns and the prospects for a good, modern life there; its readers 'were encouraged to think of a modern countryside, but one in which the modernity was of the countryside's own making' (Smith 2001: 218).<sup>11</sup>

If the co-operatives' magazine was the central media vehicle for promoting a vision of modernity to rural households, the practical achievement of it was very much the responsibility of the co-operatives themselves, as their numbers and network developed through the inter-war years. As we have seen, increasing numbers of farm households used their co-operative as the source of their main modern input, commercial fertilizer, as the means to market both rice and new commercial crops and as a source of modern forms of financial service. Mori argues that co-operatives were neither anti-capitalist nor the vehicles by means of which landlord-dominated capitalism sought to permeate and control the countryside. The ideology behind them was 'country vs town', rather than anti-market, and their role lay in strengthening the position of farm households through the rationalization of the distribution network and the provision of modern inputs, credit and marketing services (1999: ch. 3, especially p. 77).

The trend, in both state policy and the approaches of rural households and their organizations, towards what might thus be termed 'agrarianist modernization' was visible from the time of World War I, if not before, but the Depression and the Rural Revitalization Campaign gave it considerable further impetus. The policies of the Revitalization Campaign encouraged rural households to seek a route out of the Depression through rationalization and modernization, though within the framework of co-operative and hopefully harmony-inducing village-based organizations. Under the incentive of the government funds available to villages obtaining revitalization status, households were expected to work out their accounts and to draw up plans to improve their efficiency and their commercial prospects. Co-operatives were expected to form an integral part of such plans, alongside the other agents of modernization in the villages, the

11 Wilson points out that *Ie no Hikari*, although published by the co-operatives association, was heavily influenced by the Agriculture Ministry and the Army and tended to promote 'official' views of what the countryside should be like, alongside patriotism and support for government policies such as emigration to Manchuria. Wilson sees the need of the government and military to engage in this sort of propaganda as evidence that they were not entirely confident of their ability to carry with them a rural population that still exhibited signs of diversity and resistance (1997: 105, 115).

village office, the *nōkai* and the school. Together, through debt reorganization, diversification plans and the efficient supply and utilization of inputs, they would develop a strategy of support for the self-reliant rural community and the households that composed it.

The accomplishment of such a strategy depended, however, on leadership and management that it was clear could only be provided by those with practical local knowledge and a commitment to agriculture and the local economy. While the old landlord elite tended to retain their hold over the political and economic organizations of the countryside at the level of the administrative village and above, at the level of the natural village modernization opened up new opportunities for leadership roles that increasingly fell to members of middle-scale, core cultivating households. As full-scale war drew nearer, it was more and more through the agricultural practice unions and other organizations at natural-village level that the mobilization of rural resources was carried out, drawing the local leadership into the structure of government control (Kawagoe 1993: 256–7). On the other hand, however, it was the technical and economic strengths which middle-scale cultivators possessed, within the context of the path of agricultural adjustment pursued in the industrializing economy of the inter-war period, that made them central to both the modernization of the countryside and the war effort. As Waswo (1988: 603) puts it, bureaucrats ‘ratified’ rather than ‘formed’ the direction of change in the rural political economy, which itself reflected the strategies adopted by core cultivators as they sought to carve out for themselves a sustainable role within the industrial economy. The vision of the modern rural household and the organizations that supported it was thus as much the product of rural responses to economic and political change, as it was of the state’s efforts to control and mobilize the countryside.

### *The countryside, the army and the empire*

From the time of the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars around the turn of the century, the links between the countryside at home and the expansion of the empire, together with the military forces that sustained it, had become ever clearer and stronger. The rural population supplied the bulk of the conscripts used in the pursuit of the nation’s imperialist interests, along with many of the supplies needed for them, while those who remained at home were increasingly incorporated into what became empire-wide markets for food and raw materials. At the same time, however, the importance of the countryside to the military, along with the increasing irrelevance, from the military’s point of view, of the old rural elite and the political parties with which it was associated, led to the forging of direct links between the forces of imperialism and militarism and the achievement of agrarianist modernization. The countryside bore many of the domestic costs of Japan’s ill-fated expansionism but at the

same time its key role in the project provided leverage and opportunities to those, in the villages and in the bureaucracy, who sought to achieve the rural dream of self-reliant but modern rural households and communities.

Formal links between the military and the rural population date back at least to the formation of the reservist associations, run by the army, in the villages in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War. Thereafter, reservist associations began to play an increasingly important role in their villages, organizing healthy and patriotic activities, especially for schools and youth groups, as well as disaster relief and community services. However, the army pursued its own policy, independent of the Home Ministry, as regards the membership and leadership of the associations, restricting involvement to those who had been active soldiers and allocating roles according to former military rank. As a result, many of the local political elite – typically having been able to avoid conscription – were excluded and leadership posts in the associations offered opportunities for influence and prestige to those who qualified on the grounds of merit and achievement (Waswo 1988: 575–6).

Meanwhile, as the problems of rural areas became more prominent through the 1920s, radical elements in the military, as well as civilian groups, began to express concern about the plight of the villages and the implications of a weak and divided rural economy for national security and military goals. However, it was not until the Depression and the debate over rural relief at the time of the ‘village rescue’ Diet that the army leadership itself began to voice concern about the state of the countryside. As Smith points out (2001: 166–70), this may have been in part to divert attention away from the conflict between the military’s burgeoning demands on the budget and expenditure on rural relief but, for whatever reason, the Army Minister, General Araki, began to issue statements of concern over the rural crisis and to engage in direct discussions with the Agriculture Minister and his officials. The army line, emphasizing the links between a strong agricultural economy and national security, appeared to follow the policy stance of the agricultural bureaucracy in favour of support for domestic producers and rural relief. In its own activities in support of rural society too, the army increasingly utilized direct purchases of products from producers or their co-operatives, rather than merchant middlemen, and even, in some cases, used its buying power to promote crop diversification under the revitalization programme (Smith 2001: 169). Thus the response to the Depression helped to consolidate the alliance between the army, the agricultural bureaucracy and the middle-scale commercial cultivator, supported by his co-operative, by-passing the political parties and the rural elite in the effort to promote the kind of self-reliant rural community of producer households envisaged in the rural dream as the basis, not just of a strong national economy and society, but also of the empire.

With the conquest of Manchuria in 1932, however, the connection

between the domestic political economy of the rural dream and the imperial mission acquired a new dimension. As army and bureaucratic planners set about developing Manchuria as an integrated part of the wider imperial economy, plans were devised to send millions of settlers out to cultivate the supposedly wide open spaces of the newly acquired territory and establish a permanent Japanese presence there. The recruitment of the potential emigrants was to be achieved through a nation-wide campaign, targeted at rural areas, to encourage poor and tenant farmers to cross the sea to acquire their own landholdings in what would be parallel villages in Manchuria and 'a new heaven on earth' (Young 1998: 5). Thus the rural dream would be exported to the empire, while further relief was provided to the Depression-stricken countryside at home.

The government's initial plan of 1936 envisaged the settlement of one million households, equivalent to a fifth of the Japanese rural population, in Manchuria within twenty years. In practice, only around 300,000 families had resettled there by 1945, representing 1.2 per cent of all rural households and 3.7 per cent of those farming less than half a hectare (Mori 1999: 219), and, despite the inducements offered to potential settlers, Japanese rural people proved reluctant emigrants. The impact of the Manchurian settlement campaign was significant, therefore, less for its actual effects on conditions in Japan's villages than for its consolidation and development of the emerging image of a rural political economy of self-reliant, modern, rural households. As Young points out, the idea that emigration might provide a solution to the rural crisis did not originate with the state's plan of 1936, but rather with agrarianist social reformers earlier in the 1930s, who began to view Manchurian colonization as opening up 'an alternative path to agrarian modernity in their communities' (1998: 308). Support for emigration was one of the demands of the agrarianist groups that organized the petition campaign leading up to the 'village rescue' Diet and with which the perpetrators of the May 15 coup attempt were associated. However, faced with the apparent lack of success of their revitalization policies in bringing about the establishment of the kind of conflict-free rural political economy that they desired, Agriculture Ministry officials eventually latched on to emigration as a key element in the solution of the rural problem and incorporated emigration promotion schemes into the revitalization campaign itself.<sup>12</sup>

The marriage of emigrationism and agrarianism was based on the vision of a self-sustaining agrarian sector within Japan's industrial economy, centring on the independent, middle-scale, owner-cultivating household and

12 Mori (2003: 181–2) points out that many Agriculture Ministry officials remained sceptical of the benefits of emigration, and even of the legality of the land acquisition in Manchuria on which it depended, but in the end went along with the army and the Colonial Affairs Ministry. Some influential officials, such as Ishiguro Tadaatsu, did, however, support it.

the co-operative organizations that supported it. If those with holdings too small to survive as such core cultivating households were shipped off to Manchuria, land would become available to enable those who remained to establish themselves as ideal units of this kind. The problems of Depression-induced rural poverty and indebtedness and of landlord/tenant conflict would be simultaneously solved and the self-sustaining rural communities of independent, non-capitalist, farm households envisaged in the rural dream would be created. And all this could, of course, be seen as contributing to national empire-building goals as well. As the organizational structures of the countryside – the co-operatives, the *nōkai* and the institutions of local government – were mobilized to recruit emigrants, local authorities set about calculating exactly how many would need to leave to enable remaining households each to gain access to the magic area – officially 1.6 hectares – deemed necessary for self-sustaining independent cultivation (Young 1998: 335–41).<sup>13</sup>

The mechanism of emigration involved the creation by villages in Japan of ‘branch villages’ in Manchuria in which poor families and younger sons would set themselves up, just as had happened when there was still ‘frontier land’ in Japan to reclaim for cultivation. The planning process at village level was, however, dominated by those who would benefit by remaining and in the village in Yamagata used as a case-study by Mori, for example, the emigration promotion committee was led by the larger-scale core cultivators who were also heavily involved in the wider aspects of the revitalization campaign (1999: 161–2). As Young argues (1998: 341), once emigration was adopted as part of the strategy for achieving the rural dream, policy became ‘fixated’ on land shortage as the obstacle to the establishment of a rural political economy of viable core cultivators. Manchuria’s supposed land abundance seemed to open up the possibility of a kind of painless land reform, desirable both to officials and to the rising class of middle-scale farmers in the villages. Landlords were generally opposed, fearing a further decline in the already diminishing supply of tenant farmers, and in the limited areas where significant numbers did emigrate, the process appears to have been driven by a combination of Depression-induced economic problems, compounded by lack of alternative non-agricultural employment opportunities, with the existence of local enthusiasts committed to agrarianism and rural reform (Mori 2003: 183–93).

Meanwhile, although the reality which agricultural planners knew well in Japan stubbornly refused to conform to their dream, there remained much more scope for imagining the creation of the ideal modern rural community in remote and unknown Manchuria. Ignoring the existence of

13 The Ministry calculated that a third of the rural population would have to leave to achieve the ‘standard optimum holding’ nationwide (Young 1998: 335).



Manchuria's Chinese population and of an agricultural environment very different from that with which potential settlers would have been familiar, the Colonial Ministry's 'Proposed Standards' for Japanese villages established there envisaged self-sufficient communities of independent farm households, cultivating co-operatively outside the market economy, driven not by the profit motive but by the values of the modern Japanese rural society – efficiency, frugality and hygiene, self-help and mutual co-operation (Young 1988: 342–5). In fact, Japanese colonists in Manchuria, lacking access to the machinery they would have needed to cultivate their much larger holdings on their own, had no choice but to hire local Chinese labour and to engage in commercial production to meet their costs, and in due course they demanded the privatization of their land to enable them to escape the constraints of co-operative cultivation. This was not, however, the story fed back to the 'home villages' in Japan, and agrarianist campaigners and officials continued to use the image of the pioneering colonial farm household and community as models of what they sought to support at home (Wilson 2003).

By the late 1930s, therefore, the countryside had been incorporated into the militarist and imperialist project on which Japan had embarked. However, the form of that incorporation reflected the shifting structure of the rural political economy and the vision which both officials and the rising leadership within the villages held of the nature of a modern rural economy within industrial Japan. Militarism and imperialism removed obstacles to, and opened up new routes for the promotion of, that vision and of those whose interests it reflected. Thus, as Young puts it, empire helped agrarianism to 'make peace with modernity' (1998: 351).

### *The rural economy in wartime*

Before long, the campaign to promote emigration to Manchuria was being conducted against a backdrop of the real warfare that broke out in China in 1937. The mechanisms for planning and mobilizing the war economy were therefore already in place by the time of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the outbreak of full-scale war in the Pacific, and thereafter more and more of the resources of the domestic economy were redirected towards the war effort. By the early 1940s, the officials of the war economy were allocating resources by means of almost Soviet-style planning systems but of necessity in co-operation with the representatives of the private businesses that still organized production. In so doing, it is now increasingly argued, they created many of the systems of government/business co-ordination, as well as many of the distinctive features of business organization in Japan, which were to persist into the post-war period and play a major role in bringing about the economic miracle. Similarly, agricultural planners, in mobilizing the labour and production of the rural economy, developed institutional mechanisms for state intervention in

agriculture that were to carry on to form the basis of the system of agricultural support and protection of the post-war years. However, in agriculture at least, officials were able to co-opt and build on the structure of rural institutions that had been emerging through the inter-war years of agricultural adjustment, a structure which reflected the needs and growing economic and political significance of the core cultivating class in the villages. This, combined with the increasing acceptance that they controlled the agricultural production on which the national war effort depended, meant that, by war's end, middle-scale cultivators had all but achieved the control of their land and the recognition of their status as the basic units of a modern, commercial, rural economy for which they had been fighting for more than half a century.

By 1935–6, the prices farmers received for most agricultural products except silk had recovered to their pre-Depression levels. They continued to rise thereafter and were on average by 1945 almost three times their 1937 level (Mori 1998: 201). The households in the Farm Household Economy Survey were back in profit by the mid-1930s and remained so throughout the war period (Table 8.5 on page 211; Mori 1998: 200). The problem of the inability of domestic agriculture to meet the demand for food, which had bedevilled agricultural policy before the Depression, reappeared and bad harvests in Taiwan and Korea in 1939 brought on a renewed food crisis. At the same time, conscription was taking an increasing share of the rural labour force, as the military continued to view the younger sons of poorer rural households as a reservoir of soldiers and war-related industrial workers (Mori 1998: 231–3).<sup>14</sup> As a result, more and more agricultural work fell to women, who came to constitute almost 70 per cent of the agricultural labour force by the time of the surrender (Ōkado 2003: 50). Growing shortages of fertilizer, draft animals and equipment intensified the problems these workers faced and although the peak production levels of 1939 were just about maintained until 1942, they could not be sustained thereafter.

Faced with the mounting threat of food shortages, more and more of the Agriculture Ministry's budget was devoted to subsidies for land-improvement projects and schemes to raise technical levels and improve distribution. However, agriculture officials were also increasingly confirmed in their belief that core cultivators were the key to sustaining production and that tenancy stood in the way of the achievement of their potential. Tenancy disputes persisted, despite the war, and agricultural organizations continued to demand rent reductions and improvements in tenants' rights (Mori 1998: 209–10). In a series of legislative measures from 1938 onwards, the rights of tenants were strengthened and controls were

14 Toshié's elder brother was called up in 1937 and again in 1942, when her younger brother also joined the army (Partner 2004: 65, 93). Neither was to return.

placed on the levels of rents and land prices. By the time of the third programme to promote the establishment of owner-farmers in 1943, a new formula for calculating the purchase price of land, which used the controlled rent and land price figures, for the first time made acquisition of ownership of their rented land a viable proposition for significant numbers of tenant households (Yamamoto 1987: 72–3). Thus landlords' rights were increasingly worn away and the needs of the war economy forced the final recognition of what Mori sees as the contradiction between the landlord system and the productive power of agriculture, but too little and too late to prevent the ultimate collapse of food production (1998: 232–3).

At the same time, war required, not just sustained production, but also the requisitioning and rationing of food supplies. Following the food crisis of 1939, the Rice Distribution Law imposed regulations on rice trading and from 1940 producers and landlords were required to provide quota deliveries to the state, as food rationing was introduced (Kawagoe 1993: 256–7). The 1942 Food Control Law further strengthened the state's powers, giving it complete control over the production and distribution of key crops. Producers were required to deliver their entire output (less their own rationed consumption) to the state's agents, in return for a state-controlled producer price, different from the state-controlled consumer price.<sup>15</sup> Rental rice was to be handed over to the state, which paid landlords in cash. In order to provide incentives to producers, the price paid to cultivators increasingly came to diverge from that paid to landlords, producing in effect an eventually drastic reduction in rental rates.<sup>16</sup> Thus, as with policy on landownership, through the institution of what came to be known as the Food Control System, wartime necessity combined with the recognition of the economic power that core cultivators had come to possess to produce the beginnings of land reform by the back door.

The operation of the Food Control System and the other organs of wartime control and mobilization in the countryside depended on an organizational structure that reached down from the central agricultural administration to producers in the villages. For this purpose, the Agricul-

15 As the war went on and conditions for consumers worsened, a significant black market in food developed and there is evidence of farmers (illegally) selling rice directly to urban consumers at prices much higher than the official ones (see Scherer 1999: especially 110–11). It is impossible to know how widespread this practice was but Scherer concludes that at least some farmers profited and that wartime living conditions were significantly better in the countryside than the towns. Partner describes the resentment of rural households at the requisitions required of them and the methods used to conceal rice from neighbours and authorities, although Toshié's family, like most others, met their quotas, whatever it cost (Partner 2004: 82–3). A black market in rice traded outside the Food Control System continued to operate through the post-war years – see Francks 1998.

16 Yamamoto estimates that, for a rent of 1 *koku* out of a yield of 2 *koku*, the rental rate would have been 45 per cent in 1941–2, falling to 38 per cent in 1943–4 and 9 per cent in 1945 (1987: 69).

ture Ministry turned to the organizations that it had begun to foster and develop through the Rural Revitalization Campaign, making the co-operatives, and through them the agricultural practice unions at the natural village level, its agents in the collection and distribution of key crops, notably rice. However, these were organizations increasingly dominated by the rising middle-scale cultivator group and other sections of the bureaucracy, in particular the Home Ministry, sought instead to create a structure of wartime control in the countryside in which the old landlord-dominated political interests could still play the leading role (Mori 1999: 227–30). They therefore pressed to develop the *nōkai*, as well as political institutions based on the administrative village, as the state's organizational arm. *Nōkai* were made responsible for organizing production and allocating labour and equipment and the Home Ministry proposed that administrative village heads should double up as heads of *nōkai*. The result of this inter-ministerial conflict was the Agricultural Organizations Law of 1943, under which the co-operatives and *nōkai* were merged into new bodies called *nōgyōkai*, within a national hierarchy of agricultural organizations acting as both the agents of state control of agricultural production and distribution and the source of the supply of state funds and technical assistance to agriculture.

However, although at a formal level this structure sidelined the farmers' groups in the natural villages, in practice, as the Agriculture Ministry recognized, they were essential to the implementation of the Food Control System and the mobilization of resources for the war effort. While formal leadership positions in the organizations that made up the system typically remained in the hands of members of the old political elite in the countryside, their actions were constrained on the one hand by organizational dependence on state funds and on the other by the power of practising cultivators. The state-funded technical staff who worked in the system were primarily concerned, not with enforcing landlords' interests, but with promoting production, and hence worked with and for those they saw as representing the cultivating village as a whole. Core cultivators were drawn into the system by the technical and financial help it could offer them and, as the producers of the nation's food, their voices and their interests could not be ignored (Mori 1999: 261–3). Once the mobilization of food supplies became the state's top priority, it was the old elite that finally had to be sidelined, within the organizational structures established in the countryside, and cultivators' groups that became the key elements.

The 1942 Food Control Law remained in force until 1994 and with it, in many respects, the system put in place during the war years, under which the state sought to ensure the supply of 'staple food' and the existence of the conditions under which those who produced it could survive and prosper. Under the Occupation, the *nōgyōkai* were abolished but their organizational assets were handed over to revived agricultural co-operatives which, although supposedly now independent farmers'

organizations like co-operatives in the West, continued to act as the agents of the state's intervention in agricultural markets under the continuing Food Control System. However, once the 1946 land-reform legislation had finally removed the landlord class and confirmed the position of the 1–2 hectare owner-cultivating household as the overwhelmingly dominant agricultural production unit, the economic and political power of the agricultural co-operatives, as the representatives of both the nation's rice producers and the mass of the rural electorate, continued to grow. Thus the system created, out of rural structures that had begun to emerge during the inter-war years of adjustment and depression, to control and mobilize the country for war – a system which linked the state and producers' groups together in mutual dependence – survived as the mechanism for protecting and supporting agriculture, and the small-scale, increasingly part-time rural households who performed it, for almost half a century more.

### **Conclusion**

The rural dream of a pure, Japanese-style agricultural economy, based on a solid core of small-to-middling scale cultivating households and the co-operative village organizations that supported them, had begun to emerge in the minds of agrarianist thinkers and agricultural bureaucrats before World War I. Through the inter-war years, however, many obstacles remained to hinder the process of turning the dream into reality. Development of the modern technology which would enable small-scale cultivators to produce enough, in quantity and variety, to meet the nation's changing food demands remained slow and patchy; landlords retained significant social and political power, generating conflict within the rural community, as middle-scale cultivators sought to build on their relative strengths in the prevailing economic and political climate, and the Great Depression dealt a blow to hopes of establishing the rural economy as a whole on a sound and harmonious footing.

It was developments through the 1930s and the wartime period that in many ways enabled these obstacles to be overcome. The Rural Revitalization Campaign and its related policy measures provided, on the one hand, a framework for the diffusion of both the ideological approach and the modernizing practical elements of the rural dream and, on the other, an institutional vehicle by means of which the rising middle-scale core cultivators could exert their growing influence. As the national economy recovered and moved increasingly on to a war footing, the problem of ensuring an adequate food supply re-emerged and government and industry were finally forced to acknowledge that support for agriculture was essential to national goals, thus accepting both increasing levels of subsidy to rural areas and an intensified concern for the interests of those who practised and controlled cultivation. Ultimately, under the exigencies of war, the interests of the landlord class were abandoned and the road to the post-

war establishment of the 1–2 hectare, cultivating household as the basic unit of Japan's rural economy was clear. At the same time, the mobilization of the institutions of rural revitalization to create the framework within which the state and farmers' organizations interacted to manage the collection and distribution of key crops produced the system under which the small-scale, rice-cultivating household continued to survive and prosper long after the end of the wartime conditions that had produced it.

Nonetheless, the rural political economy that came through the war also bore the marks of the many ways in which it had refused to conform to the pre-war rural dream. Rural households' growing reliance on off-farm wage income served only to emphasize how small-scale rice cultivation as a 'self-reliant' activity was unable to provide rural people with living standards comparable to urban ones. The growing significance of women as agricultural workers revealed the difficulties involved in meeting the labour requirements of intensive small-scale agriculture within the context of an industrialized and increasingly militarized economy. Overcoming such difficulties more and more meant the utilization of modern inputs derived from outside the rural economy, even in the absence of significant labour-saving mechanization. Above all, perhaps, the inter-war years made clear the extent to which the maintenance of co-operative rural communities of small-scale rice cultivators within an industrial economy depended on state support and subsidy. While the rural dream may have provided the image needed to generate public support for the 'traditional' countryside, households operating in the real world determined by the past path of rural development and the present undeniable dominance of the industrial sector had carved out the structures and systems of small-scale, part-time, heavily subsidized agriculture on which their post-war prosperity would be based.

# Conclusion

It was during the inter-war and wartime years that the path rural Japan was to take in the face of industrialization and the agricultural adjustment problem was finally mapped out. This path was necessarily heavily conditioned by the nature of development in the rural economy over the preceding years of relatively rapid growth and change. At the same time, events of the inter-war period largely exogenous to the rural sector, in particular the Great Depression and the triumph of nationalism, imperialism and fascist-style modernization over the liberalizing and democratizing forces that had begun to emerge by the time of World War I, were also to have a significant impact on the rural economic and political structures that post-war industrial Japan was to inherit. However, the 'rural problem' of the inter-war years, long interpreted as arising out of the contradiction between an oppressive and exploitative, 'feudal' landownership system and the demands of rising monopoly capitalism, with tenant farmers and other members of the rural proletariat as its victims, can also be viewed as representing a crisis-point in agriculture's long-term adjustment to industrialization, as rural producers struggled to develop a survival strategy, in the face of changing labour markets, shifting demand patterns and growing incorporation into the world, or at least imperial, economy.

The inter-war period marked Japan's transition into a predominantly urban industrial economy and society and, like agricultural producers in earlier industrializing countries, Japanese rural households experienced the consequent changes in the markets for their output, as diets diversified and competition from imports increased. The ability of rural households to respond to the changing pattern of demand for food was constrained in various ways. The slow-down in the rate of development and diffusion of yield-increasing technical change reduced the rate of growth of grain output and the scope for reduction in land and other input costs per unit of output. Meanwhile, the growth of employment opportunities and wages outside the rural economy raised the opportunity cost of increased labour input in agriculture. Progress in the development of appropriate mechanization was slow and the path towards cost reduction through increased scale of cultivation had long been cut off by the strategic decisions of pro-

ducers and policy-makers. Diversification into crops in growing demand proceeded only slowly, except in the case of silk, upon which farmers in some parts of the country had become increasingly and dangerously reliant.

The responses which rural households instead undertook involved the adaptation of the strategies for survival and betterment that they had used with a degree of success in earlier phases of Japan's economic development. On the one hand, they continued to seek non-agricultural employment opportunities for household members that were compatible with, and could contribute to, the development of the rural household economy. This increasingly meant more-or-less full-time employment for male as well as female household members away from the farm and required, in the absence of significant mechanization, adaptation of labour use in agriculture, in particular greater use of female workers. On the other hand, rural households also attempted to strengthen their economic position through strategies of resistance to those who would take a share of their income, the by now increasingly absentee and vulnerable landowning elite. This involved the modernizing of village groupings and their techniques, for the purposes both of pursuing tenancy disputes and of providing the services and support which had once come from cultivating landlords.

The nature of this response to the agricultural adjustment problem – technological, economic and political – was such that it provided continued scope for strengthening the relative position of the middle-scale, owner and owner-tenant, core households within the village economy and community. In this, it had the broad support of key elements in the agricultural bureaucracy and of significant intellectual and political influences, even though compromise was often necessary, in the face of the conflict generated with the old rural elite and its political representatives and the need to preserve social and political harmony and stability in rural areas. However, it also left the rural economy particularly vulnerable to the impact of the Great Depression, given the continued dominance of rice and silk within agricultural production and the dependence of rural households on what proved to be insecure employment in the non-agricultural sector. Those without the security of substantial landownership had no recourse but to fall back on borrowing and on traditional strategies of self-help and group-based resistance to rent and taxes.

However, in the world of industrializing, modernizing, empire-building inter-war Japan, the plight of rural households hit by the Depression and the subsequent poor harvests had a meaning which relative rural poverty had not had before. For many in the now urban intellectual, political and military elite, it symbolized the threat posed to a (largely imagined) rural idyll, and the distinctive Japanese values which it was held to embody, by a Westernized form of industrial capitalism. The 'rural crisis' thus triggered the mobilization, through the tools of the modern mass media, of popular and political support for the rural dream of a countryside populated by



self-reliant, co-operative village communities of small-scale, rice-cultivating households following true Japanese ways.

The resulting campaign probably did little, in concrete terms, to bring about 'rural revitalization', as compared to the impact of recovery in the wider economy and intensifying mobilization for war. In practice, too, it was modern, rather than traditional forms of institution and practice that middle-scale producers sought to utilize, through the revitalization campaign and otherwise, with the support of agricultural bureaucrats increasingly concerned to develop commercially viable producers who could ensure the nation's food supply. However, the powerful image of a pure and traditional rural society suffering as a result of the greed of the Westernized capitalist cities could be mobilized, not just in support of increased government spending on agriculture, but also as the inspiration for the creation of a new economic and social order at home and in the empire.

As the war to establish that new order intensified, the agricultural bureaucracy constructed a system of state intervention in agricultural production and distribution which finally recognized the core cultivating household, and the organizations through which it worked, as the key elements in the rural economy. During the war, under the influence of the last remnants of the view of the countryside as no more than a reservoir of resources to fuel industrialization, the system was used to drain agriculture of the labour and output required by the war effort, ultimately undermining its productive capacity. But thereafter it revealed itself as the means whereby the state and the organizations of the 1–2 hectare cultivating household, now secure in the ownership of the land it cultivated, co-operated to support and protect the rice-based but pluriactive economic structure of the countryside which represented the culmination of the Japanese rural economy's adjustment to industrialization.

Nevertheless, the rural economy that emerged out of the inter-war adjustment process and the crises of depression and then war was ultimately to expose the contradictions which the rural dream involved. The wartime period finally demonstrated that the labour demands of the industrial sector on which the national economy now depended were such that small-scale rural households, however hard their members worked, could not simultaneously maintain their relative income position through diversification and meet the national demand for food without the introduction of the significantly labour-saving technology which only the industrial sector could provide. In the last resort, mechanization, albeit via machines designed to operate within the confines of small-scale cultivation, and the intensive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides were essential to the continuing role of the small-scale household in agricultural production. The vision of a rural community uncontaminated by the capitalist industrial sector proved ultimately unworkable and post-war farm households became ever more dependent on inputs supplied by industry, not to mention, given the inefficient use of capital which small-

scale cultivation implied, massive subsidies from urban industrial workers and consumers.

At the same time, however, the fulfilment of the rural dream was also undermined by rural households' own continued pursuit of the strategies by means of which they had been adapting to the growth of the industrial sector ever since the nineteenth century. The post-war recovery and the economic miracle, alongside the development of labour-saving technology, generated many more opportunities for combining agricultural and non-agricultural income within the household and the by-employment and pluriactivity of earlier generations were transformed into the part-time farming on the basis of which small-scale cultivating households continued to prosper through the second half of the twentieth century. As the wartime rural economy had so vividly demonstrated, the nature of non-agricultural employment by this stage meant that this could not be achieved without the mobilization of female labour on the farm, as much as in the factory, and the part-time strategy came to depend on the growing role of women as agricultural workers and, even if not formally, managers (see e.g. Bernstein 1983). Instead of the modern housewife and mother of the rural dream, there emerged the farmer's wife who juggled farm and family duties with a part-time job, while her husband commuted to work in town, a role which fewer and fewer of Japan's increasingly well-educated female population were to find attractive.

Meanwhile, rural households continued to make their own uses of the village-based, co-operative organizations that had played such a significant role in their strategies of resistance and betterment ever since the nineteenth century. The mobilization of such organizations, and the networks into which they were organized, as the mechanism for state intervention in the rural economy, while intended as a means to control and harmonize the countryside and to manage the supply of food to the majority urban population, was opening up, even before the war and the Occupation, new avenues by which rural households could exercise political and economic influence. By the time of the economic miracle, of course, the hierarchy of agricultural co-operatives was acting, not just as the operating arm of the Food Control System, under which the consumer rice supply was guaranteed by means of growing price support and subsidy, but also as a vehicle for the exercise of the political power of rural voters, the strength of which was an essential condition for the continued redistribution of income towards farmers.

The rural dream that was realized in post-World War II Japan was thus the outcome of the conjunction of the state's needs, in its pursuit of economic development, national security and imperial power, with the strategies of those rural households who had increasingly come to control cultivation, under the economic and technological conditions of the rural economy in industrializing Japan. The final realization of the dream brought the dwindling rural population the income, security and political

influence for which they had been fighting for generations. Within it, in its technological limitations, its dependence on subsidy and protection and its unattractiveness to the new generations, especially of women, required to sustain it, perhaps lay the seeds of its ultimate destruction, but for half a century or more after World War II it was to provide rural Japan with unprecedented prosperity and urban Japan with not just its distinctive diet but also a vision of the countryside that it desired and was prepared to pay for.

## 11 Rural Japan rethought

Through the war years, Japan's rural population sacrificed and suffered alongside their urban counterparts, struggling increasingly vainly to maintain supplies of basic food and raw materials, in the face of ever-depleting manpower, tools, fertilizer and energy. Women and children worked the fields to produce the grain requisitioned and rationed under a system of bureaucratic food control reminiscent of a planned economy. With defeat and occupation, the recovery of food output became a top priority, as starvation in the cities in the winter of 1945 was only averted by food aid. Agricultural producers had priority access to scarce inputs and while prices were kept low in the still highly regulated food market, the thriving black market offered opportunities for better returns. Meanwhile, the Occupation authorities, almost as much in thrall to their version of the rural dream as had been the radical pre-war bureaucrats and activists who had tried to solve the agrarian problem before them, set about drawing up and implementing the land reform which they saw as freeing backbone tenant cultivators from the oppression of a parasitic landlord class. In transferring the ownership of land from non-cultivating, especially absentee, landlords to cultivating tenants and severely restricting the market in land, the Land Reform cemented in place the structure, dominated by the small-scale, pluriactive, rice-cultivating household within its village community, that the long process of rural development dating back to the nineteenth century had brought forth. As economic conditions for rural households improved, their spending, on consumption and on newly available small-scale machinery, was to prove a vital factor in the post-war revival of the economy as a whole.

Thereafter, despite the large-scale movement of rural people into the cities to take up the industrial employment opportunities generated by the economic miracle, the small-scale rural household held its own. Although diets diversified as never before and reliance on imports for the range of food products increasingly well-off and sophisticated consumers demanded turned Japan into the world's biggest food importer, national self-sufficiency in the high-quality Japanese-style rice that only small-scale Japanese farmers could produce became an article of faith for government

and public alike. At the same time, while continuing as rice cultivators, with the help of technical changes which took small-scale mechanization and fertilizer- and pesticide-intensive agriculture to new heights, the vast majority of rural households found it possible for much of their labour force to work more-or-less full-time off the farm. Whilst 'traditional' industries such as textiles, construction and ceramics continued to offer employment to members of rural households, new employers, such as electronic-goods assemblers, set up in the countryside to tap the supply of rural labour. Following trends begun in the inter-war period, agriculture became more and more the province of women and the elderly, while the young got educated and left the countryside, and men, with the help of machines, looked after the heavy cultivation tasks at weekends.<sup>1</sup>

However, as had begun to be the case from the time of the Rice Riots onwards, the maintenance of an agrarian structure based on the small-scale, part-time cultivator was dependent on government support, in the form of subsidies and protection against imports, in particular of rice. The network of rural institutions that had begun, before the war, to provide the symbiotic linkage between the state and the village came into its own in the environment of the political economy of the miracle period. The reformed and revived network of agricultural co-operatives acted, on the one hand, as the government's agent in operating the Food Control System, under which the production and marketing of rice were regulated to maintain prices and self-sufficiency, and, on the other, as the vehicle through which the subsidies and other forms of support necessary to ensure the co-operation and continued survival of cultivating households were distributed. The political activities of the co-operative network on behalf of the governing Liberal Democratic Party at the same time guaranteed the maintenance of support policies, while the hangover of the rural dream ensured that the Japanese public remained prepared to pay for their vision of the countryside.<sup>2</sup>

This book has argued that it is only through analysis of the long process of rural development that dates back to the first acceleration of economic growth in the Tokugawa period that the post-war culmination of Japan's path of agrarian adjustment to industrialization can be understood. Whilst there is no doubt that, in some respects, the pre-war growth out of which the post-war economic miracle was to arise was based on resources created by rural labour and saving, the rural activities that generated these resources themselves conditioned the form that Japan's industrialization took. In particular, rural households devised, on the one hand, forms of

1 For a more detailed summary of developments in the post-war rural economy, see Francks 1999b: ch. 4. For more vivid accounts of post-war rural life, see Dore 1978 or Bernstein 1983.

2 For summaries of post-war agricultural policy, see Francks 1998, 1999b or Calder 1988: ch. 5.

technology and economic organization that enabled them to diversify their income sources and employ their labour resources more productively and, on the other, ways to utilize their institutional and cultural strengths to resist threats and circumvent obstacles to their security and betterment. The result has been a process of industrialization and agrarian transition significantly conditioned by the actions and responses of rural people.

### **The diversified rural economy and Japan's development**

Central to that process, in Japan as in a range of other industrializing economies, has been the rural diversification that has formed an integral and indispensable element in the development of the countryside. Under the rather curious conditions of the Tokugawa political economy, as the market economy spread, cultivating households in significant parts of the country discovered income-earning opportunities, both in new areas of agricultural production and in non-agricultural work in manufacturing and services, which could be combined with the rice cultivation that environmental conditions and the tax demands of the ruling class made mandatory. In more progressive, mercantilist domains, this process was encouraged by local authorities, who saw the production of specialist agricultural and manufactured products as a means of raising the incomes and tax-paying capacity of the rural population and as a source of the domain 'exports' that would fund necessary expenditure on goods and services produced elsewhere in Japan. The strength of the diversified rural economy thus generated enabled it to come through, and even take advantage of, the mid-nineteenth-century opening of the country to trade with the West and the eventual abolition of the feudal structures that had limited the development of national markets. It was not until the growth of the urban industrial sector began to take off in the 1890s that the 'virtuous circle' of diversified rural development began to be undermined.

Even so, as earlier chapters have described, despite the changes in product and labour markets that the growth of the urban industrial sector brought about, rural households did not abandon the pluriactive strategy that had enabled many to improve their livelihoods in the past. Instead, they adapted to the new forms of employment opportunity available to them, while maintaining their foothold in agriculture and receiving increasing support from the state to do so, as the food-supply aspect of the agricultural adjustment problem began to make itself felt. As non-agricultural income, increasingly from wages and salaries earned in off-farm factories and workshops, became ever more indispensable to the achievement of anything approaching rural/urban income equality, the pluriactive rural household of the Tokugawa era evolved into the part-time farm of the economic miracle years.

As suggested in Chapter 1, the growth of rural non-agricultural activity and income – the expansion of rural industry and increasing marginaliza-

tion of agriculture, the migration of sons and daughters to urban areas and the growth in the remittance income of rural households – is a phenomenon observed in significant parts of the contemporary developing world. Alongside this, the historical Japanese case provides the opportunity for long-term analysis of how this deviation from the standard model of what happens to the rural sector during industrialization took place and what its consequences were. Japanese rural households adapted to the requirements of pluriactivity in a changing external environment both technologically and economically. The path of technological development in agriculture was determined by households' efforts to increase their incomes through a compatible combination of agricultural and other employment, rather than through raising their labour productivity in agriculture by means of economies of scale and mechanization. Meanwhile, non-agricultural employers who wished to tap into the supply of rural labour resources devised technologies and forms of business organization that took account of the parallel demand for labour on the farm, thus enabling the rural household to take advantage of industrial growth, even if not in standard modern factories, without sacrificing agricultural income. For the household, this typically required adjustments that altered gender roles within the structure of the two-generational 'stem family' and eventually produced the modernization of household activities and organization.

As a result, the implications, for both agriculture and industry, of a development process founded on a diversified rural economy persist in Japan to this day. It could be argued that the origins of, on the one hand, the part-time farm, which has come to bedevil Japan's national and international agricultural policy, and, on the other, the 'small-and-medium business sector', which played such a key role in the development of the 'flexible manufacturing' underlying the economic miracle, lie in the efforts of rural households, back into the nineteenth century, to defy the logic of agricultural specialization and economies of scale.<sup>3</sup> In so doing, they created the economic basis for the survival of the small-scale, 'stem-family' household in rural areas, of the cultivation of the kind of rice Japanese people like and the landscape they appreciate, and of forms of business management and co-ordination which have come to influence economic organization well beyond Japan's borders.

### **Weapons of the weak, or how the farmers changed Japan**

As was pointed out in Chapter 1, the image of 'farmers as victims' remains part of the mythology of modern Japan and a recurring trope in the

3 See, for example, Friedman's study of the post-war development of flexible manufacturing in former silk-producing rural areas of Nagano, where 'some of the world's most sophisticated computer-controlled machine tools can be found in the front gardens and back yards of what were formerly marginal agricultural holdings' (1988: 182).

general literature. This is despite mounting evidence that rural livelihoods were improving over much of the period of Japan's development from the nineteenth century onwards and that rural people were far from passive in devising forms of resistance and in making the most they could of a changing economic and political environment. At the extreme, they were driven to use organized violence – in peasant uprisings or tenancy disputes – to resist threats from rural or non-rural elites to their security and betterment, and such headline-grabbing incidents are what have been most extensively studied. However, as this book has sought to illustrate, much more widely and typically, the mass of rural people found ways to protect their interests and make their voices heard that were small-scale, subtle, local and often, to a degree at least, successful.

The strength of Japanese rural households' 'weapons of the weak' was in large part based on the ability to retain control of cultivation and the knowledge on which it depended. The urban-dwelling samurai officials of the Tokugawa period did not have the knowledge, though they certainly had the military and administrative power, to ensure the maximum tax-take and relied on the village itself to organize the imposition of taxation on cultivators, opening up a range of possibilities for concealment, evasion and inter-village collusion. The cultivating landlord/entrepreneur that emerged as the commercial economy spread in the nineteenth century had knowledge of cultivation techniques – indeed, in some cases, advancing them – but only as applied to the land his household could farm for itself. Hence, he relied on tenants to cultivate any land he accumulated above this, and on the village to manage, for example, the irrigation infrastructure, while he pursued his wider interests. The absentee landlord of later years left even more of the control of cultivation to small-scale households in the villages. Eventually, even the modern state came to recognize that it had to deal with those who actually practised cultivation, if it was to achieve its objectives.<sup>4</sup>

Lying behind the ability of the small-scale household to retain control over cultivation was the influence it was able to exert over the direction of technical change in agriculture. Through the Tokugawa period, cultivators themselves had devised ways of increasing and diversifying their agricultural output which were appropriate to the resources of land and labour that they managed and compatible with their pluriactive strategy. Given this, Meiji agricultural policy-makers soon recognized that technical change of the form observed in the agricultures of their 'model' industrial countries would face insuperable obstacles in Japan and that, as a result, the provision of the food supply that the urban industrial sector required must depend on the small-scale cultivator. As the state became more and more involved in technological development in agriculture, the direction

4 For the argument that states in general have difficulty in recognizing the accumulation of practical knowledge embodied in working agricultural systems, see Scott 1998: esp. ch. 8.



of change continued along lines appropriate to an agrarian structure increasingly dominated by small-scale, pluriactive households. Even mechanization, when it eventually began, had to meet the needs of such producers.

This direction of technical change in agriculture had important consequences for the distribution of economic power in rural areas. It gave no advantages to larger-scale cultivators and all the evidence suggests that, while its requirements in terms of commercial inputs and farm-management skills may have made it not worthwhile for those with access to only very small areas of land, it was the 1–2 hectare cultivating household and its stem-family labour force that were best able to take advantage of it. Alongside the growth in non-agricultural employment opportunities, it therefore strengthened the bargaining position of the core cultivating household in its dealings both with larger-scale landowners and with the state. In due course, it was representatives of such households that came to play the leading role in agricultural organizations and although, in the pre-war period, political power remained largely in the hands of the landowning elite, the co-operation, and hence consent, of cultivators became an increasingly essential ingredient in the achievement of political ends.

Enhancing the technological and economic power that cultivators were able to wield, however, were other weapons that proved effective in the Japanese context. In particular, rural households made use of community and custom to strengthen their ability to deal with outside forces. The Tokugawa system had encouraged the development of village autonomy and organizational capacity and had helped to generate the principle that the village community had rights over the land its members cultivated, the product of generations of investment in it and in the infrastructure that supported it. In the context of the commercial economy and modern state structures, however, the capacities of the village community could be turned to other ends, both in resistance to those seeking to exploit village land and labour for their own private purposes and as a means of enhancing the ability of rural households to take advantage of the market and other modernizing forces. The strength of the village community and its customs thus provided cultivating rural households with weapons to employ in fields as diverse as the pursuit of tenancy disputes against landlords, irrigation and land-improvement projects, the marketing of crops, the mobilization of votes, the application for and utilization of government subsidies and the modernization of economic and family life. Even in cultural terms, the village provided the basis on which rural dwellers could assert their own values, in resistance to urban influences, and develop a way of life distinct from and, for some, superior to that of the cities.

The strength of the weapons that rural dwellers were able to employ, as they responded to the outside forces that industrialization generated, is ultimately evident in the compromise that the rural elite, the industrial sector and the state, despite holding all the big guns, were obliged to

make. The feudal authorities could not, when it came down to it, prevent rural households from engaging in economic activities which ultimately undermined their tax-raising capacity and authority, the most viable local governments being those which accepted and in the end promoted such activity. Landlords, especially non-cultivating ones, were progressively forced into compromise with their tenants which gradually nibbled away at their share of agricultural output. Industrial employers were obliged to devise institutional adaptations – putting-out networks, industrial districts, dormitories and advance payments for female textile workers – if they were to take advantage of the rural household labour supply and could not simply transport modern factory organization into Japan. Even the state was forced to accept that, if consumers were to be supplied with the rice that they wanted, the small-scale rural household had to be given protection and support and, in due course, it too came round to the view that the rural communities of small-scale cultivating households possessed moral and spiritual qualities distinct from and superior to those of the city.

In open battle, of course, weapons of the weak must remain inferior to those wielded by the strong. At times, the rural economy was undoubtedly subject to heavier taxation, higher levels of vulnerability to economic and other fluctuations, and greater neglect and disdain than the urban one. In a long-running guerrilla war, however, they come into their own, sniping from below at obstacles to the achievement of the limited, local aims of those who employ them. Using one means or another, and perhaps against all the odds, the small-scale, pluriactive rural household survived the industrialization process and lived to continue as a thorn in the side of urban industrial authority into the post-industrial age.

### **Agrarian transformations**

Nonetheless, as Chapter 1 also suggested, the survival of a rural economy composed of small-scale pluriactive households into the industrial era cannot be regarded as something unique to Japan. As research into both historical and more recent cases has increasingly come to demonstrate, the paths to agrarian transition are many and varied and a rural economy dominated by large-scale, specialist agricultural producers is probably the exception rather than the rule among industrial countries. In this light, then, the persistence of the small-scale, pluriactive rural household in Japan can be seen, not so much as a mysterious hangover of ‘tradition’ and ‘feudal remnants’, but rather as reflecting its ability to develop and adapt to the changing conditions which industrialization and modernization bring. The rural political economy that emerged from Japan’s transition was certainly different from those of many parts of the industrial West, but it was also different, despite the persistence of the small-scale, pluriactive unit, from its pre-industrial self, adapted and modernized to fit into the industrial economy that Japan had become.

The rural households that came through the transition, despite continuing to cultivate only what would be considered by most standards extremely small landholdings, as viable economic units capable of providing their members with improving livelihoods, did so through the combination of technological, economic and institutional means that constituted their 'industrious revolution'. Small plots were made more productive through the development and adoption of improved techniques which increased the returns to skilled and intensive labour and involved the application of practical science and purchased inputs. However, these techniques were also designed to be compatible with household income diversification. As outside labour markets changed, as markets for consumer goods expanded and as rural people acquired education and knowledge of the wider world, rural households adapted their activities and organization so as to be able to take advantage of change in the wider economy. All this required involvement with markets, with money and credit, with technical knowledge, with industrial organizers and employers, and with a wide range of organizations within and beyond the village. By the time that the Great Depression hit them, rural households were assumed to be able to plan their way out of trouble through analysing their household accounts for potential savings, identifying and exploiting commercial opportunities and reorganizing their debts, as well as working harder. Although the Japanese state continues to be loath to regard the *nōka* (rural household) as a commercial business, it has nonetheless proved a form of organization capable of developing and modernizing in pursuit of a better livelihood for those who belong to it.

Meanwhile, the same could be said of the wider rural institutions and organizations with which rural households have been involved. The village community which the Tokugawa system helped to form evolved as the basis of communal and co-operative organizations which brought to the village marketing skills, modern forms of credit, subsidies and price supports, as well as information and ideas about how to improve and modernize rural life. They also provided the link to the institutions of the state, which reached down into the village through them. As state support became an increasingly essential condition for the continued viability of the small-scale cultivator, so the network of co-operative rural institutions, through to the agricultural practice unions in the villages, became the means whereby the representatives of cultivating households made their voices heard in the administration of rural policy.

The dream of a self-supporting rural community composed of viable modern farm households operating within the market economy, which inter-war agrarianists and policy-makers adopted and sought to export, died in the face of war and defeat. But its post-war reincarnation was to enable rural households pursuing the pluriactive strategy finally to achieve the security and prosperity they had sought. Meanwhile, their co-operative organizations went on to mobilize and wield, on the one hand, the over-

weighted political influence of the rural vote in Japan's modern democracy and, on the other, the massive rural savings that made the Agricultural Co-operatives Bank one of the largest financial institutions in the world. The organizations forged through a century and a half of rural development and adjustment thus demonstrated their continued viability in the world of the modern industrial economy.

That viability has, however, come increasingly to hinge, on the one hand, on state support and, on the other, on the willingness of rural people, especially women, to continue to sustain it. As the Japanese economy has 'internationalized' since the end of the miracle, the ability of the state to protect and subsidize the agricultural activities of small-scale rural households has steadily eroded under the impact of foreign pressures and growing budget costs. Although the Japanese public appears willing to continue to pay the high price of 'real' Japanese rice and agricultural bureaucrats have proved adept at finding ways of minimizing the effects of agricultural trade liberalization on farm households, it is now accepted that the future of Japanese agriculture must lie in specialized lines of production beyond 'mass' rice cultivation and in larger and more 'business-like' units of organization. Meanwhile, in a world now dominated by urban culture and lifestyles and the opportunities they present, the demands of life and work as part of a pluriactive rural household hold few attractions for members of the younger generations to whom full-time, urban-based careers are now open. As a result, the rural 'stem family' organization appears to be breaking down, as a growing proportion of househeads find themselves without successors and those dutiful sons who remain prove unable to find brides willing to take on the role of rural daughter-in-law. As more and more rural families spend more and more of their time away pursuing non-agricultural work, keeping their plots going simply to provide themselves and their friends with rice and granny with something to do, the rural community itself becomes harder and harder to maintain.

Nonetheless, as in almost all other industrial countries, ways will surely be found to sustain domestic agricultural production and preserve the familiar landscape of the countryside. Whether it be through organic farming, tourism, speciality products or larger-scale rice cultivation, however, there can be no doubt that the path will be conditioned by the past activities of rural generations which have created the infrastructure, institutions and culture of the rural economy of industrial Japan.

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