

SOME COMMENTS ON R. P. DORE'S
Land Reform in Japan

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The Japanese economy has passed through twenty years since the war, and has experienced the "reappearance of primary accumulation" which has renewed capitalism from the destruction of the war-economy. But after the following stage of High Economic Growth, it has entered on a new phase, "the great distress." Again, the historical significance of the Land Reform, by which the structure of the post-war economy of Japan has been subject to restrictions as to its basis, is also rendering more precise certain problems which must be looked into anew. In regard to the first stage up to 1955, production was led by direct consumers goods (secondary sector) and the producing potential of agriculture was also developed. At the second stage the leading industry shifted to producers goods (primary sector) while at the same time a stagnation of agriculture and a vast downfall of farmers supervened. At the present the problem of the "agrarian class" has come into the highlight again. The work under review, Dr. Dore's *Land Reform in Japan*, is compiled from field surveys conducted by the author, who was in Japan at the time of the transition between these two stages, 1955-1956. In the first version of this work, written in 1958, Dr. Dore criticized a type of "pessimism" which undervalued the "liquidation of the landlord system" and the "democratization of the villages," while in the introduction to the Japanese version written in 1964 he corrects in himself a second type of "pessimism" which anticipates difficulties arising from excessively small holdings supporting surplus rural population. Reading his preface, we found the necessity of looking into the post-war process of development. Of course, as has been pointed out in a number of criticisms in Japan, Dr. Dore seldom adopts a historical angle of vision which would place the Land Reform in its position in the structural development of the Japanese economy before and after the war. However, when we learn of his activities in his homeland and in international organizations, we are led to think that an evaluation of the results of Land Reform in the historical context of the Japanese economy is extremely important, especially in the light of these wider implications.

The work is in a comprehensive manner composed of five parts, I The Problem, II The Reform, III The Farm Economy, IV Social Structure, and V Politics. We confine ourselves to looking into the following major problems: landownership after the Land Reform, the meaning of the strengthening of village discipline based on the new form of landownership, and the question of local government and social control, based on the strengthened village discipline. Finally, by way of summing up, we wish to

touch on Dr. Dore's views regarding the significance of the Land Reform for the modernization of agriculture, that is, of the villages.

Generally speaking, reformation in landownership constitutes the cardinal point for conversion of social structure. The Japanese Land Reform was described in the so-called "Occupation Forces directive for the liberation of the peasants"¹ as being for the purpose of "destroying the economic bondage which has enslaved the Japanese farmer for centuries of feudal oppression," while the basic process of the Reform consisted in wiping away all "feudalistic" elements and in "the liberation of the peasants." This was inevitably prepared within the very rupture of the structure of pre-war Japanese economy. As regards this background of the Land Reform Dr. Dore's account is devoted to a very original sociological analysis, rather than seeking it in the aggravation of the historical contradictions inherent in the landlord system. That is to say, on the basis of a typology of landlords, Dr. Dore evaluates the principal type of landlord, the landlord living in the village, for his "paternalistic" and "familistic" (p. 30) relations with his tenants and his positive role in developing agricultural production. In this connexion Dr. Dore makes the important statement, "this question, of the relative advantages of landlordism and its absence in promoting the growth of agricultural production, is, perhaps, of more than academic interest for Asian peasant societies which are industrializing themselves today" (pp. 49-50), but I wish to discuss this last.

The paternalism was "paternalism within the context of traditional Japanese family institutions with the accent on authority rather than affection. Status distinctions were maintained with rigidity..." (p. 39), while even the gulf which separated landlord and tenant could be regarded as "a hallowed part of the order of nature" (p. 161), and the village was always a community in which "neighbourhood ties inevitably took precedence over class ties" (pp. 79-80). Consequently, "they [most tenants] did not think of the reform as the expropriation of the expropriators" (pp. 167-168) and on the whole the implementation of the Land Reform was carried out in a manner of "the split-the-difference solution" (p. 165). Dr. Dore considers that "in all aspects of the reform, hamlet solidarity, with its generally hierarchical pattern and its traditional emphasis on the harmony of the hamlet, operated to clog, or if one prefers to lubricate, the process of transferring the land from owner to cultivator" (p. 166). Thus one powerful reason for the Reform being "a peaceful and orderly one" (p. 172) is found in "the very fact that it was imposed from outside" (p. 172), and it is said that for the small peasants it "came as a surprise gift from the gods" (p. 439). The Land Reform thus "was filtered through the old power structure from above" (p. 160), but in spite of this Dr. Dore evaluates it as follows; "the new wine which was pumped in may eventually have had a disintegrating effect on the old bottles..." (p. 160). This is a natural conclusion of his criticism of the first type of "pessimism," which contends for the liquidation of the landlord

¹ "Memorandum for Imperial Japanese Government through Central Liaison Office, Tokyo, on the Subject of Rural Land Reform," December 9, 1945. See, pp. 208-209.

system, but it is merely a comparison of the *types* of landownership before and after the reform, and since it lacks any characterization of landownership the argument is not persuasive.

I do not necessarily wish to reject as invalid the process of the implementation of the Land Reform as indicated by him, and his analysis was probably valid in the villages at a certain stage after the Reform. In this sense, the Land Reform, considered as a reform of landownership and in the light of the socio-historical character of the landownership which it produced, is not to be considered either a bourgeois democratic type of reform or analogous to the reforms accompanying a people's democratic revolution. Whether or not the peasants have been able to liberate themselves by their own hands will, as the promising condition in the matter of *free peasant proprietorship*, determine the response of the peasants to the situation in which they will be involved after the land reform has been effected. These situations—the existence of minute-scale agriculture under control of monopolies in the highest stage—will at length press the peasants to abandon their land. As Lenin pointed out,² “the emancipation of the peasantry accompanied by a grant of land *with the aid* of state compensation” leads inevitably to the emancipation of the peasantry “*from* the land...” (Italics as in the original). No insights into the realities of the present day are forthcoming from Dr. Dore. He states, “at any rate there is no immediate danger to the post-reform land system” (p. 443).

Of course Dr. Dore does not entirely disregard problems of the peasants after the Reform. He points out that the Land Reform, which consisted merely in transfers of the ownership of the existing units of cultivation, produced practically no levelling of incomes, and that there are “ominous signs” (p. 241) in the individual peasant economy. Under a system of agriculture in which an even greater degree of fragmentation has been brought about by the Land Reform, he finds “a recent advance towards prosperity” (p. 201) on every hand. In the “division of infinite graduations” (p. 240) of family holdings, he recognizes the existence of the poor stratum as the “submerged tenth of Japanese villagers” (p. 180) who were ruled outside the provisions of the Reform because of the legal recognition of residual tenant land. Again, in pointing out that the root of the family holding is dependent on “family workers” who “are ready to accept a reward for their labour below the (still low) wage rates which have to be paid to hired workers” (p. 300), and thus touching upon the low-wage structure based on minute-scale land-holding, he does not regard it as the characteristic mechanisms of the post-war Japanese economy, and consequently he cannot develop it as a question of differentiation within the peasant stratum. As a matter of fact, at the time when he was carrying out his surveys a structural reorganization of agricultural potential was under way with the help of public schemes for the improvement of agricultural land, using the introduction of powered culti-

² V. I. Lenin, “The Workers’ Party and the Peasantry,” in *Collected Works*, Volume 4, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960, p. 420.

vators as a lever in the agricultural advanced zone. At the same time mechanization of agriculture and formation of labour force in agricultural sector caused a new differentiation within the peasantry. Its tempo was accelerated by the policy of high-rate accumulation centred on the primary sector. When he conveys to us his optimistic opinion in opposition to the second type of "pessimism" (Introduction to the Japanese version, original in Japanese), even the economists on whom Dr. Dore relies draw attention to the fact that the differentiation within the peasantry expanded to include the upper stratum of farmers and the whole peasant stratum could not make a living from agriculture.

The character of landownership after the Reform determines the nature of discipline in the village and the forms of political control. It is considered that "it is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers—a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity—which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state,"⁸ but in the agriculture, that is, the rural society, of the post-Reform period it has been no easy task to grasp accurately the manner in which these relations (between landownership and production) reflect the total structure of society now that these relations have been directly fixated by the appearance of the peasants themselves as landowners and by the fragmentation of land-holdings.

Part IV, "Social Structure," and in particular Chapter XV, "The Hamlet: Status, Dependence, and Class" (pp. 364–387), is often said to be one of the best parts of this book. However, it includes a good number of discussable points and it is not consistent with the analysis of political control set out in Chapter XIII, "Village Politics" (pp. 315–350). (Part V, "Politics," lacks any structural grasp of the subject, which is treated merely at the level of the social consciousness of the peasantry.) It exhibits confusion in the theoretical framework and makes clear the existence of something beyond the range of sociological analysis in tackling such grand social changes introduced by Land Reform.

By way of summary, let us piece together Dr. Dore's argument. In his analysis of the structure of the village Dr. Dore first puts forward the idea, based on the typology of family-status type villages (villages in which certain families possessed a distinct status) and non-family-status type villages produced by the old legal sociology, that the class hierarchy of statuses in the family-status type villages relaxed under the influence of the weakening of "economic dependence" (p. 371) which resulted from the Land Reform, and that these villages passed through a transition to the non-family-status type village. In these cases, on the whole, "it [the Land Reform] has also by its redistribution of wealth brought greater equality of opportunity to occupy

⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume III, Chapter XLVII "Genesis of Capitalist Ground-Rent," II. Labour Rent, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959, p. 772.

positions of leadership" (p. 385), and this fact had the counter-effect of strengthening village solidarity. Without seeking the basis for the manifestation of this village solidarity in the form of community compulsion, the strengthening of community compulsion and the burying of the individual in the group are pointed out as a challenge to "the accepted view." He says that "on balance it would seem that the effect of the land reform has been rather to strengthen the solidarity of the hamlet—by reducing the number of second-class citizens and making the individual's identification with the hamlet more positive and his acceptance of hamlet constraint more spontaneous" (p. 386). Village authority of this kind is said to be supported by "the exercise of leadership" (p. 383) based on "leadership functions" (p. 384) "exercised in a manner which accords with the farmer's sense of fairness" (p. 384) and on "a regard—often a consciously paternalistic regard—for the weaker members of the community" (p. 383). The village is thus a mutual aid system ruled by the principles of *equality* and *pietät*, and according to Dr. Dore the possibility of its cohesion being weakened comes not from "the equalization of wealth" (p. 386) such as that brought about by the Land Reform, but from "other extraneous factors" (p. 386). New developments since the Land Reform are found precisely in those remote villages characterized by strong community feeling which had been evaluated as "backward," and Dr. Dore raises a question by saying, "one often wonders whether the 'community consciousness of the hamlet,' so often deplored by contemporary Japanese writers as a survival of a feudal age and a mark of the backwardness of Japanese social development, is really such a bad thing as they make out" (p. 387). We shall remark later on the significance of the raising of this question.

It is not true that "economic dependence" (p. 371) has ceased to exist since the Land Reform. Regarding such "remaining economic dependence" (p. 371) Dr. Dore cites, first, tenancy relations centred on the residual tenant land, second, socio-economic relations of ownership of forest land and pasture land, and third, "the fact that many households with not enough land of their own rely for extra income on the opportunity to work for their richer neighbours" (p. 374), that is to say, the relations of employing and being employed. "Where there is more surplus labour than work in the village" (p. 377), the third of these, employment relations, "can be a powerful source of dependency relations" (p. 377). Further, as a general trend Dr. Dore draws attention to the important fact that "there are nowadays more farmers who can afford to buy a little additional leisure by hiring labour and... an increasing substitution of wage labour for traditional labour exchange at rice planting" (p. 376). It is certainly true that at the time when he carried out surveys there was a general temporary increase in hired labour. After Higher Economic Growth which followed on from it there was seen an increase in *intra-village hired labour* and exchange labour (*yui, temagae*) in the form of supplementing such parts of the labour-force as could not be flushed out in the process of the increase of the proportion of family labour and a *general flushing out of hired labour* which took place in the total context of a greater

degree of wage-labour in part-time work by peasants. Grasping these developments by means of the differentiation taking place within the peasant stratum and exposing the relations of political control subsisting between the various strata of the peasantry in all the complexity of their class character constitutes the essential of a structural analysis of rural society after the Land Reform. However, the relations of employing and being employed are not clarified by Dr. Dore from the point of view of differentiation within the peasant stratum, and by dint of discovering "the element of personal paternalism" (p. 377) in the conditions of employment these relations are reduced to relations of quasi-moral "obligation" (p. 377).

In this way he holds that all "remaining economic dependence" consists in "personal relations of dependence" (p. 377) without any general spread over the whole, and they have no class significance whatsoever. Thus problems of political control are denoted merely by the vague abstraction "the general dependence of all the poorer strata on all the richer strata" (p. 377). Logically speaking, it would seem that the principle which causes this hierarchy of strata to be made into a mechanism of political control should be said, on the basis of what has been set out by the author, to be the compulsion exercised by the community organization. In this way we arrive at the question, "what is it which operates at the base of community compulsion, and is the standard for determining the hierarchy of strata in the village community?" In these matters Dr. Dore does not undertake the logical development of his own ideas, but he does draw attention to the facts. The facts to which he draws attention would seem, at first glance, to be in contradiction with his view that "the equalization of wealth" (p. 386) has resulted in strengthening village compulsion, namely that "it is apparent, however, . . . that there is a far better correlation of office-holding with *present* landownership than with pre-land-reform landownership" (p. 335). In this situation, "the more involved in village politics one wants to be, generally speaking the more land one has to have" (p. 335). Although it differs as to its *type* from landlord landownership, in the event the hierarchy of status strata based on landownership has not, in his view, crumbled away. In it the traditional community lives on. As is a natural conclusion from Dr. Dore's analysis of the process of implementation of the Land Reform, and as is pointed out in his analysis, this may have been the real picture of the villages as up to a certain stage after the Land Reform. However, the point which should have been considered was the process of decline in the community in the context of the differentiation of the peasant stratum under the impact of the structural reorganization of agricultural potential, the first evidences of which were already apparent at this time.

If we consider that the structure of political control in the village, at the extremities of the national power structure, was of such a nature as this, then what was the substance of the democratization of the villages after the Land Reform of which Dr. Dore speaks? The gap between the democratization of local government dispensed from above after the war and the villages at

the extremities of the national power structure can scarcely be considered to be a question concerned solely with the policy aspect of the process in which, in the context of progressive steps in the direction of the revival of monopoly, the democratization line gradually shifted to the concentration of administrative powers in the interests of state monopoly capitalism, a development which Dr. Dore has described as the transformation into "the new collectivism" (p. 322). This is one of the important points made by the author, and we shall quote his views at some length.

"Perhaps Japan started too late in her attempt to make local government into the basis of a healthy democracy. In the older democratic countries, traditions of local self-government were developed before the new collectivism took hold, before it came to be considered the duty of the nation to ensure that all its children received education and all its citizens were guaranteed a minimum standard of living and security, and before the full emergence of a national market, a national economy, and a national culture. And the residual strength of these traditions has provided a countervailing drag on the process of centralization of control. In Japan, the discontinuity of the Meiji reorganization largely destroyed such traditions of local autonomy as existed, and it was from the beginning under a highly centralized, authoritarian régime that the new collectivism took shape. Traditions for which there is no fundamental social or economic base cannot easily be created." (p. 322)

It is said that the Shoup Recommendations of 1949 were shot through with the ideal of the classical forms of local government. The classical ideal of local government had as its background the stratum of small independent producers created by the bourgeois revolution. It is already clear that the stratum of peasants created by the Japanese Land Reform is not to be compared with the classical yeomanry. Consequently, questions of local government are to be analysed in terms of the conflict of interests inherent in the stage difference constituted by the intensified rule of monopoly in the highest stage and the minute-scale form of agriculture. In the midst of a situation in which the differentiation of the peasantry was becoming conspicuous in the form of large-scale defections from the peasantry, the pushing through of centralized bureaucratic control to the extremities of the power structure was occasioned by the large-area administration instituted by the amalgamation of units of local government around the year 1955, and from that time onward it exhibited even greater development.

So far we have conducted fairly searching criticism along the lines of the three problems which we listed at the beginning of our review, and finally I wish to draw attention to what there is in this book in relation to a question concerning which Dr. Dore himself displays deep interest: the significance of land reform for the modernization of Asia. Within the mechanisms of the United Nations Dr. Dore is concerned with surveys of land reform in the growing countries, and it would seem that the views elicited by his surveys in Japan will have a definite weight in this context. In this work Dr. Dore has touched on the subject of the role played by the landlord in the development of agriculture and has viewed the question of the existence or non-existence of a landlord system in "Asian peasant soci-

eties" (p. 50) which are making their way towards modernization, and in direct contrast to the prevailing view he has found positive aspects in the strengthening of "community compulsion" which has appeared after a reform, which cannot be said to have created landownership by *free* peasantry. The Japanese Land Reform, as a question of socio-economic history, is, as one might expect, comparable with the land reform of China, to which Dr. Dore refers in passing in this work. It has been made clear above all else that the decisive difference between them consists in difference of the stage of development preceding the two land reforms, which were carried out at more or less the same time. Insight into the way by which a peasantry isolatedly and fragmentedly *liberated* has arrived at the present day under the highest stage of monopoly has not emerged from the points made by Dr. Dore in his book. Throughout his book he speaks of the "holism" and "harmony" (p. 393) associated with the traditional community. In connexion with China, he says that this is "perhaps most obvious of all in modern China where the old face-to-face collectivism of the village has been fitted into the vaster collectivism of a Communist State" (p. 401). We may well suppose that in the process of the communalization of Chinese agriculture, that is, of Chinese rural society, too, the customary forms of labour organization of pre-revolutionary times have provided the groundwork. But nevertheless this communalization has been carried out through a reorganization of the peasantry under the principles of voluntarism and mutual profit which has been shot through with a mass line of a thoroughly class character and set on the foundations provided by the firm establishment of peasant landownership by a People's Democratic Revolution, and it is in a category different from, and indeed is entirely unrelated to, "the old face-to-face collectivism of the village" (p. 401). Just as in former days Japanese rural sociologists set before the public the results of very good field surveys of rural China, but were unable to gain possession of any insight into the course of the Chinese Revolution which had its bases in the villages, so from the opposite point of view I feel that there is no reason for me to refrain from pointing out a deficiency in the work of Dr. Dore, a deficiency which consists in the fact that his treatment of the subject is unhistorical, that is, is devoid of any definition of category. We must give particular attention to the theoretical framework of rural sociology and the dangers inherent in its role as employed in dealing with the modernization of agriculture, or rural society, with this unhistorical mode of treatment, devoid of any definition of category, unchanged to the present day. The fact that throughout Dr. Dore's book we find strange coincidences between the points made and the views expressed in the introduction to W.W. Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth*—"in relation to the problems and possibilities of modernizing traditional societies which possess strong cultures peculiar to themselves in the world of the underdeveloped countries of the present day the experience of Japan is much more rich in suggestion than that of western Europe" (Preface to the Japanese edition)—will no doubt bring a feeling of uneasiness to many more than myself.