

WITTFOGEL'S THEORY OF ORIENTAL SOCIETY (or HYDRAULIC SOCIETY) AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDIES OF CHINESE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY IN JAPAN

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Wittfogel's theory of Oriental Society has influenced studies of Chinese social and economic history in Japan in many forms, but since the Second World War a critical tendency has predominated. In this article the author has endeavoured to show what Japanese scholars have taken over from Wittfogel, of what points they are critical, and in what ways they are attempting to surmount these, at the same time reviewing developments in studies of Chinese social and economic history in Japan since the Second World War, and in particular studies of the process of the formation of the ancient empire under the Ch'in and Han dynasties.

I

Wittfogel's studies of Oriental society have influenced studies of Chinese social and economic history in Japan in a number of ways, but there are great differences in acceptance of his influence in the pre- and post-stage of the Second World War in Japan. When Wittfogel's studies were published in the 1930's they were translated in Japan, were highly evaluated as "scientific" studies of Chinese society, and produced a large and influential body of followers. Since the war, however, a critical tendency has rather prevailed in regard to Wittfogel's theory, and while his *Oriental Despotism*, published in 1957, has also been translated, it has not produced so much of a response. If this is so, then in what parts of Wittfogel's theory were problems found? What have Japanese scholars accepted from Wittfogel, of what points are they critical, and in what ways do they intend to transcend these? We wish to consider these questions, at the same time taking into consideration the most recent developments in studies of Chinese social and economic history in Japan.

II

Wittfogel's studies published in the 1930's, his theory¹ of "Oriental

¹ K. A. Wittfogel, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Chinas*, Teil I, Leipzig, C. L. Hirschfeld, 1931; "Theorie der Oriental Gesellschaft," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Jahrgang VII, Heft 1/2 (1938); "The Foundation and Stages of the Chinese Economic History," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Jahrgang IV, Heft 1 (1935).

Society" in which large-scale state irrigation and river works are to be the decisive factor was an attempt to understand Marx's Asiatic mode of production as being, not one of a number of successive stages of historical development, but as the special mode of production supporting "Oriental Society" as a distinct type of static or stagnant society differing from Occidental society. Further, as the occasion for the specialization of this mode of production, he took up the question of the natural basis of the forces of production, that is to say, the question of water. In the arid and semi-arid regions where the water indispensable for agriculture cannot be sufficiently supplied by natural rainfall and where artificial irrigation is necessary, and further, in regions where irrigation of this kind necessitates large-scale irrigation and river works which transcend the local sphere and are beyond the technical abilities of individuals and local groups, unified states ruled by powerful despots come into being which hold under centralized control the important economic functions of irrigation and river engineering and the control of water based upon it. Since it is a matter of common knowledge there is no need to recount how his analysis of principles, which seeks the decisive factor in the natural geographical conditions, makes out that this "Oriental Society" is of a type different from the western feudal class order, with its loose nexus of combination, which comes into being in regions where agriculture is dependent on natural rainfall, and that the sovereign in this "Oriental Society," by grasping in his hands the unified social control of water, takes over and reorganizes the functions of local groups and becomes sole despotic ruler over the fate of the peasants and their products. Consequently, in terms of his understanding of the matter, "Occidental" feudal society and "Oriental Society" are considered to be two differing types produced by differences in the natural basis of the forces of production, and it is maintained that the successive stages of development represented by slavery, feudalism, and capitalism are found only in "Occidental" society, and that no occasions for such development are to be discovered in the fabric of the "Oriental Society." Even though it may happen that crises in agricultural production resulting from centrifugal movements among the hydraulic officials, and collapses of dynasties resulting from them, may be produced by it, the order of Oriental despotism, which rules peasants in a unified manner by means of powerful authority grasping the rights of control over irrigation and river works, persists as an order regardless of changes of dynasty so long as the natural basis of the forces of production which makes necessary the control of water by the state remains unchanged. It is true, however, that a number of stages had to be passed through before such a society of Oriental despotism could be formed. In regard to Chinese history, Wittfogel holds that in the Yin and Chou periods the primitive community had still not broken up and irrigation also was on a local scale, and that this was an early feudal society exhibiting Oriental features,² but that after passing

² In his *Oriental Despotism* (1957) a correction is made in regard to this point, and Chinese society of Chou dynasty times is taken to be a Hydraulic Society, and not a

through the transition period represented by the Ch'un-ch'iu and Chan-kuo periods the expansion of the productive forces by the diffusion of iron implements hastened the break-up of the community, while the development of public irrigation and river works caused the formation of the Oriental despotisms, the Ch'in and Han empires and their successors, which exercised unified rule over the small families left by the break-up of the community. Thus Wittfogel understands the Chinese society which extends over the long period of time since the Ch'in and Han dynasties as being a society of Oriental despotism, a stagnating, cyclical society of the kind we have described above.

In Japan in the 1930's, when these studies of Wittfogel were published, the state of studies of Chinese social and economic history, with two or three exceptions, was as yet not at so high a level, considered as a whole. Studies of Chinese history in Japan at that time had produced a quantity of superior work in the field of political history and the history of the official apparatus and had attained a considerably high level, but in comparison with these, studies in the fields of social and economic history were in a backward condition. Monographic positivistic studies of individual economic institutions were being pressed forward by Shigeru Katō and a number of other writers, but the history of Chinese society employing the methods of the social sciences—attempts to arrive at a systematic understanding of history—were still in a backward condition, both theoretically and positivistically. It was just at this time that under the influence of the "Asiatic mode of production controversy" and the "debate over social history" in China people of the younger generation who felt dissatisfied with the studies of Chinese history conducted by historians hitherto and who were interested in the social sciences felt a strong desire for a systematic understanding of the history of Chinese society by means of the social sciences and were at last beginning their first attempts. It was at such a time that Wittfogel's studies were published and introduced into Japan. Consequently, it was among this younger generation that his studies were made much of, and produced a large number of followers at this time. Unfortunately, however, the state of these studies in Japan in the 1930's was such that the younger generation of this period which was interested in these methods of the social sciences ran off on their own track insufficiently equipped with the knowledge required in understanding the written sources of Chinese history, such being their impatience to gain a systematic understanding of the history of Chinese society, and on the other hand the established historians, who possessed a rich fund of documentary knowledge and rested at ease on textual examina-

feudal society. His regarding the society of the Chou period as being a feudal society differs from our understanding of that society, and his designation of it as Hydraulic Society is even still further removed from our understanding of it. In comparison with his pre-war writings, despotism and stagnation in Oriental society are stressed uniformly and generally in his *Oriental Despotism*, so that he is at a still greater distance from our understanding of the matter, but on this point we shall say more later.

tions of individual historical facts, exhibited not the slightest interest in attaining a systematic grasp of the history of Chinese society by means of the methods of the social sciences, so that the two parties engaged in mutual recriminations and there was no common ground for debate between them. It was after the war that the problem-orientations of these two parties moved closer to one another and that monographic positivistic studies based on rich source material were pressed forward under the head of attaining a systematic grasp of the history of Chinese society, that the methods of the social sciences employed for the purposes of attaining this systematic grasp were proved in the positivistic verification of individual historical facts, and that through mutual debate a common ground for scholarly studies was formed and the opening up of a new field of studies in Chinese social and economic history undertaken. Thus we may say that as far as Japan is concerned it was after the war that Wittfogel's theory was subjected to serious examination, both positivistically and theoretically.

Before we enter upon a concrete examination of Wittfogel's theory we must first take some account of the difference between post-war Japanese researchers' interest in Chinese studies and those of Wittfogel in the same subject.

III

As we have noted above, the basic point of view running through Wittfogel's studies of Chinese society published in the 1930's was that "Oriental Society" was taken to constitute a special type of society typologically different from the development of Occidental society, that the occasion for the specialization of this Oriental society was sought in the difference in the natural basis of forces of production, that is, in the natural conditions which necessitated large-scale irrigation and river works, and the attempt was made to elucidate the special social structure of Oriental despotism and the laws of movement governing the cyclical changes in this stagnant society. What we must note here, however, is the fact that this special character of Oriental society as typologically conceived by Wittfogel is one which is arrived at by taking Occidental society as the standard of comparison. What Wittfogel follows up is the special character of the Orient as conceived from the point of view of how the Orient differs from the standards set by Occidental values. In this sense, the view of Oriental society which has been traditional among Occidental scholars since the 18th century is still powerfully at work in him. This view is a product of the course followed by the consciousness of self in modern Occidental thought, and in it "despotism" as opposed to "freedom" and "stagnation" as opposed to "development" are already antithetically thought of as characterizing Oriental society, this being done, not from within China itself, but from the outside, that is, from the point of view of the standards set by Occidental values. In this sense, again, we can say that his angle of vision in relation to Oriental society is genealogically connected with Max Weber's theory of Chinese society, a theory by which he has been

much influenced, in spite of having criticized it as being bourgeois idealism. In Wittfogel's case, however, the attempt is made to elucidate systematically the concept of Oriental society traditional among Occidental scholars with the help of Marx's concept of the Asiatic mode of production as being a special Asian structure of society, and to do so not "idealistically" but "materialistically," not "arbitrarily" but "scientifically," that is to say, to elucidate it systematically with reference to the natural basis of the forces of production. Consequently, in terms of his theory of stagnant society, it is impossible to explain the actual process of change in modern China as being the development of Chinese history from within. According to his theory it is implied that the occasions which produced collapse and change in Oriental society did not stem from internal forces, but were given for the first time by the invasion of the Orient by western European capitalism and the influence exerted by it.

However, the new problem-orientation among post-war Japanese students of Chinese history faced in a different direction. In the face of the awesome facts of Japan's defeat in war and the success of the revolution in China, stern self-examination was carried out regarding the received view of China and the studies of China conducted hitherto. A need to understand the new process of change in China correctly as a part of the total process of development of Chinese history was pressingly felt. The demand that Chinese society should be understood as a process of change and development, and not as a stagnant society, was strongly emitted from among research workers. It is of course true that we cannot ignore the influence of the thought and institutions of western Europe in the process of modernization of Oriental society. But when such foreign thought and institutions were transplanted, took root, and exercised continuing effects in practice as settled forces, it was always because there were provided, on the side of the countries importing these things, the formative energies and historical conditions which made possible their permanent settlement. These formative energies and historical conditions are things which are born out of the internal social development in the history of the country in question. From such a point of view as this, the demand that the spontaneous process of development in Chinese society should be elucidated from within Chinese society became the common interest of post-war Japanese students of Chinese history.

This does not necessarily mean that studies in the history of Chinese society conducted in Japan since the war have been carried out merely by applying, as formulae, the Marxian concepts of developing stages by slavery, feudalism, and capitalism. As many new facts were revealed by the controversy and some of them proved the inadequacy of such formulae, there appeared those who denied the formal identity of the social components in each stage in China with those of Europe, even in the camp of the dialectic materialists. For this reason the specific Chinese type of development has also been discussed with reference to the theoretical problems. Through repeated controversies, both theoretical and positivistic, over the elucidation

of the developmental process of Chinese society, analysis of these questions has been progressively deepened.

On the other side, and without any connexion with the influence of the methods of Marxism, one of the finest students of Chinese history in Japan, Torajirō Naitō (Konan Naitō), had shown before the war from the point of view of cultural history in the broad sense that great development took place in the course of Chinese history, even in the period dating from the Ch'in and Han dynasties, and that there were great social and cultural changes, which must be distinguished one from another, between the Chinese society of the T'ang and pre-T'ang period and that of the Sung and later periods. Receiving such an academic inheritance the post-war Japanese students of Chinese history directed their efforts to the elucidation of the process of development in Chinese history, mainly from the social and economic side under the influence of the methods of the social sciences. We may say that their efforts were concentrated on the elucidation of two great turning-points in Chinese history. The one was the investigation of the process of transition from the Ch'un-ch'iu and Chan-kuo period to the formation of the unified empire under the Ch'in and Han dynasties, and the other the investigation of the transition from the T'ang period to the Sung period.

In the studies published in the 1930's by Wittfogel, too, the Chinese society of the Ch'un-ch'iu period and earlier is distinguished from that dating from the Ch'in and Han empires as being characterized by obvious differences. In these studies he thought of the Chinese society of the Ch'un-ch'iu period and earlier as being a feudal society exhibiting Oriental features, in which the community had not yet broken up and irrigation also was on a local scale and he explains that what made possible the establishment of the Oriental despotism of the Ch'in and Han empires, which deprived the local feudal nobilities of their rights and power and brought the small peasantry left behind by the break-up of the clan community under direct unified rule, was the development of large-scale irrigation and river works at the hands of the state which controlled the products and destinies of the peasantry.

As we have noted above, the elucidation of the transition from the Ch'un-ch'iu and Chan-kuo period to the formation of the unified empire under the Ch'in and Han dynasties was one of the fields in which post-war Japanese students of the history of Chinese society concentrated most of their efforts. Taking the historical relations clarified in these research works as our basis, let us look into Wittfogel's theory.

IV

The first question is whether large-scale state irrigation works were a factor decisive for the establishment of the Ch'in and Han unified empires. Or again, were large-scale state irrigation works indispensable for the agricultural production carried on by the peasants of the Ch'in and Han unified empires? These questions mean an examination of the core of Wittfogel's

theory, in which Oriental despotism and large-scale state irrigation are regarded as being in an indivisible unitary relation.

First, it has been established that from the point of view of agricultural technology large-scale state irrigation is not indispensable for agriculture in north China.³ As conditions making possible agriculture dependent on natural rainfall in this area, attention was drawn to the special nature of the crops grown in north China, which are drought-resistant, and to the development of methods of dry agriculture, greater importance was attached to the standard variation of seasonal rainfall than to total annual rainfall, and attention was also drawn to the existence of a large number of small-scale irrigation installations set up by non-government gentry and not requiring any state supervision. On the other hand, however, it is also the case that the carrying out of numerous large-scale state irrigation works from the Ch'iao period on into the Han period is clearly recorded in the written historical sources. This would mean that the Ch'in and Han empires had under their rule two kinds of cultivated land, land dependent on large-scale state irrigation works, and a considerable area of land which did not require such irrigation works, and in such a case there arises the question of the manner in which these two differing kinds of cultivated land, each in its own sense, prescribed the character and the formation of the despotic power of the Ch'in and Han empires. Studies in Japan⁴ set out from an elucidation of this point.

Of course, Wittfogel does not say that all the cultivated land in the Ch'in and Han empires required large-scale irrigation under state supervision either. In his *Oriental Despotism*, published in 1957, he renames "Hydraulic Society" the concept of "Oriental Society" used in his earlier works, and this Hydraulic Society is divided into the two types 'compact hydraulic society' and 'loose hydraulic society' in accordance with the hydraulic density. That is to say, a society in which cultivated land dependent on large-scale state irrigation may comprise more than half of all arable land, or in which, even if this proportion is less than half, it is estimated that the returns from such land occupy half or more of the yield from the all arable land, is called a 'compact hydraulic society,' and this society is divided into the two types 'compact 1' and 'compact 2' in accordance with whether such hydraulic agriculture is spatially continuous or not. Next, a society in which the cultivated land dependent on large-scale state irrigation, even if it is inferior

³ Motonosuke Amano, "Chūgoku Kodai Desupotizumu no Shojōken (The Conditions for Despotism in Ancient China)," *Rekishigaku Kenkyū*, No. 223 (1958).

⁴ Tatsuo Masubuchi, *Chūgoku Kodai no Shakai to Kokka* (Society and State in Ancient China), Tokyo, Kōbundō, 1960, especially Part III, "Kodai Senseishugi no Seiritsu to Sono Keizai-teki Kiban (The Formation of Despotism in Ancient China and Its Economic Foundations)," Chapter 1, "Senshin Jidai no Sanrin-sōtaku to Shin no Kōden (The Mountains and Marshes of the Pre-Ch'in Period and the Kung-t'ien of the Ch'in Dynasty)." Masao Kimura, *Chūgoku Kodai Teikoku no Keisei* (The Formation of the Ancient Chinese Empire), Tokyo, Fumaidō, 1965.

both in acreage and yield to the remaining arable land, may nevertheless be sufficient to stimulate despotic patterns of *corvée* labour and government, is called a 'loose hydraulic society,' and this is further divided into the two types 'loose 1' and 'loose 2' in accordance with whether the irrigated land is spatially continuous or not. Wittfogel goes on to classify the state of Ch'in on the eve of the unification of China as 'compact 2,' and the Ch'in and Han unified empires as 'loose' hydraulic societies. In the light of these classifications it is inferred that Wittfogel thinks of the large-scale irrigation works in Shensi Province (the Kuan-chung region) centred on the Chêng-kuo Canal (Chêng-kuo *ch'ü*) as being the basis supporting the despotic power of the Ch'in and Han empires, and Wittfogel himself naturally recognizes that apart from this the Ch'in and Han empires comprehended under their rule a large area of arable land which did not require large-scale state irrigation works. However, he does not raise, far less follow up, such questions as how the social systems formed on the basis of these two differing types of cultivated land differ among themselves, whether or not these differences among them manifest themselves as difference in the degree of autonomie in relation to the state power, or how these differences among them operate on the development of the Ch'in and Han empires and their successors. All that Wittfogel does on the "core areas" is to classify the many hydraulic societies into 'compact' and 'loose,' and to say that the development of despotic bureaucracy in these several countries correlates with the degree of hydraulic density in these countries, and in holding that within each of these countries a strong unilateral despotic bureaucratic rule is exercised over both the cultivated land which is dependent on large-scale state irrigation and the remaining arable land which does not require this, he merely places a generalized emphasis on the despotic rule of hydraulic society and the stagnant nature of that society. Since the Ch'in and Han empires contain these two differing types of land, the tendency in recent Japanese studies of the Ch'in and Han empires, which we will describe below, has been to raise and follow up such questions as those which we have mentioned above, and in this point the basic difference between the interests of Wittfogel and those of the Japanese research workers is revealed.

V

I have previously drawn attention to the conversion of 'mountains and marshes' into his family property by the sovereign in the Chan-kuo period which provide the economic bases for strengthening the power of the sovereign. By means of this conversion of 'mountains and marshes' into his family property, on the one hand the sovereign secured vast sums in dues levied on the mountains and marshes from the mercantile and industrial entrepreneurs who were dependent on the natural products of these mountains and marshes (including iron and salt), and on the other hand, by bringing these marshes and scrubland under cultivation, he opened up large areas of *kung-t'ien*

(land privately owned by the sovereign as his family property), and while gradually expanding this strengthened economic base, he repressed the feudal nobility, and gradually strengthened his centralized administrative system (the *chün-hsien* system). This bringing of marshes under cultivation at the hands of the sovereign was made possible only by the digging of canals for the purposes of large-scale irrigation which resulted from the diffusion of iron implements, and hereupon waste-land or saline soils in marshes and scrubland which it had been impossible to bring under cultivation with the technology previously available was now made into cultivated land by means of state irrigation works, and this newly cultivated land, as his own family property, became, together with the vast sums in dues levied on the natural products of mountains and marshes, an important economic foundation for strengthening and centralizing the power of the sovereign. State reclamation of marshes by such large-scale irrigation works was still being actively carried on under the Han dynasty, and I have also described in detail how the significance of the *kung-t'ien* as an element in the economic base of the sovereign, developed further into the *t'un-t'ien* system of the Wei dynasty in the age of Three Kingdoms and the *k'o-t'ien* system of the Western Chin dynasty.⁵

What we must note in these cases is that from the Chan-kuo period on into the Han period the majority of large-scale state irrigation works were carried out on waste-land in the marshes and scrubland which had hitherto been uninhabited, and poor people, vagrants, and criminal offenders were compulsorily moved into these areas from other parts, townships were built, they were supplied with land and caused to engage in reclamation and cultivation, and this newly opened up land, at least at first, was designated as state-owned land (land privately owned by the sovereign). The Chên-kuo Canal to which Wittfogel attaches importance was dug for the purposes of irrigating and converting into cultivated land the saline soils in the great marsh called Chiao-huo. Since in these newly opened-up areas the inhabitants were people who had been collected promiscuously from all parts and who were supplied with the means of production by the state, we may easily imagine that their degree of dependence on the state power would be great, and that consequently in the course of the establishment of the despotic power these lands newly brought under cultivation at the hands of the state would be one of the important economic bases sustaining the state power. However, circumstances were not necessarily the same as this in the large areas other than these where people had been settled from aforetime and were practising agriculture without the need of large-scale state irrigation. In these places, vestiges of the old clan system survived, and they were in the disintegrating process transformed into new types of kin-relationships. These were strengthened by new personal relations supplementary thereto, namely the

⁵ T. Masubuchi, op. cit. Also T. Masubuchi, "Characteristics of the Unified State of Ch'in and Han (b), in *Rapports II Histoire des Continents*, Comité international des sciences historiques, XII^e Congrès International des Sciences Historiques, Wien, Verlag Ferdinand Berger & Söhne, 1965.

patron-client relationship, which constituted the new private power base of local influential families. These families formed a peculiar self-regulating order, in some cases standing in the way of the uniform penetration of the state power.

With differences of degree, such large-scale state irrigation works were carried out in most of the states of the Chan-kuo period, but the state in which they were carried out on the largest scale was Ch'in, and at the end of the Chan-kuo period, Ch'in, which was favoured by the social condition of having a less powerful hereditary nobility than the other states, gradually set up a political organization for the direct rule of the people by the sovereign by means of a bureaucracy and *chün-hsien* system. However, the first difficult problem faced by Ch'in when it had overthrown six other states, formed a unified empire, and proceeded to apply to the whole of the conquered area under its rule its severe governmental principle of ruling the people directly, was the problem of the multitude of small local powerful families possessing a social influence among the people in all the extensive areas where people had been settled from of old and were practising agriculture without the need of large-scale state irrigation. The Ch'in empire put this political principle into effect with the backing of force, and collapsed in the face of their reaction to it. The Han empire, which arose after that of the Ch'in dynasty, and particularly during the Former Han period, strove to enlarge as far as possible the economic base under the direct control of the Imperial power, by opening up new land to cultivation by carrying out a number of large-scale state irrigation works centred on the Shensi region, and also by striving to reclaim and maintain low-lying land by means of a series of river works in the lower reaches of the Yellow River. As for the proportion of the total area of cultivated land under the rule of the empire occupied by the cultivated land newly produced by these large-scale state irrigation works or river works, we have no accurate figures which would enable us to estimate it. However, as a result of recent studies of the history of the Han period in Japan having advanced to regional studies, material which will make possible a rough general estimate has gradually been prepared. Masubuchi⁶ has proved that in the regions where people had been settled from of old, such as those in which old townships of the Ch'un-ch'iu period had become the seat of the *hsien* government of Han empire, there were local powerful families which maintained autonomic social orders in their peculiar structure, and which in some cases resisted the local governors with their social powers, and Nishijima⁷ has given examples

⁶ T. Masubuchi, "Kandai Gunkensei no Chiikibetsu-teki Kōsatsu—Sono Ichi: Taigen, Jōtō Nigun wo Chūshin to shite (A Regional Study of *Chün-Hsien* System of the Han Empire—Part I: with Principal Reference to T'ai-yüan *Chün* and Shang-Tang *Chün*," in *Chūgoku Kodaishi Kenkyūkai, Chūgoku Kodaishi Kenkyū* (Studies in the Ancient History of China), Tokyo, Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1960; *Chūgoku Kodai no Shakai to Kokka*, especially Part III, Chapter 2, "Senshin Jidai no Hōken to Gunken (*Fengchien* and *Chün-Hsien* in the Pre-Ch'in Period)."

⁷ Sadao Nishijima, *Chūgoku Kodai Teikoku no Keisei to Kōzō* (The Formation and Struc-

which show that the new *hsien* established in the regions newly brought under cultivation at the hands of the state in the Ch'in and Han periods were extremely dependent on the central power. Further, Kimura,⁸ who continued this line of research, has investigated the date of establishment and the origins of all the *hsien* of the Former Han empire, and has made clear the following facts. The long-established *hsien*, which had been townships in the Ch'un-ch'iu period, continue, for the most part, through the dynastic change between the Former and Later Han periods without being disestablished. In contrast to this, among the new *hsien* newly established in the Chan-kuo, Ch'in, and Han periods, approximately half of the new *hsien* in north China are disestablished as a result of the dynastic change and do not persist into the Later Han period, but the greater part of the new *hsien* in south China persist into the Later Han period. As for why, Kimura infers as follows. He supposes that the disestablishment of the *hsien* as a result of a dynastic change shows that the *hsien* is very greatly dependent on the power of the dynasty, and from the fact that the *hsien* disestablished during the period of dynastic change are numerous in the Wei basin in Shensi Province and the area lying between the lower reaches of the Yellow River and the Hwai River he considers it probable that these were new *hsien* which had been established on land newly brought under cultivation which had been created by river works and large-scale irrigation works carried out at the hands of the state. He infers that these *hsien* were disestablished as a result of the abandonment of cultivated land and the flight of peasants due to the dilapidation and failure of the irrigation systems by the decline and extinction of the state power in the latter years of the dynasty, and to the breaking of its banks by the Yellow River in the latter years of the dynasty. Further, he infers that among the new *hsien*, those which persist without being disestablished even as a result of the dynastic change are probably due to the fact that they were established on newly developed land brought under cultivation by small-scale irrigation works at the hands of local powerful families and were not dependent on large-scale state irrigation. It is true that Kimura is the scholar who puts the greatest emphasis on the relation between irrigation and river works and despotic power, but even if his inferences are correct the number of *hsien* supposed to have been established on newly developed land created by state irrigation and river works is much less than one-fourth of the total number of *hsien*.

In this way research workers in Japan also recognize, on the basis of a more positivistic manipulation of source-material than Wittfogel and in spite of differences among themselves as to the degree of importance of the fact,

ture of the Empire in Ancient China), Tokyo, Tōdai Shuppan-kai, 1961, especially Chapter 5, Section 3, "Gunkensei no Keisei to Nijūtō Shaku-sei (The Formation of the Chün-Hsien System and the Twenty-Rank System)."

⁸ Masao Kimura, *Chūgoku Kodai Teikoku no Keisei* (The Formation of the Ancient Chinese Empire), Tokyo, Fumaidō, 1965, especially Chapter 4, "Gunkensei no Seiritsu to Sono Seikaku (The Establishment of the Chün-Hsien System and Its Character)."

that new cultivated land created by large-scale state irrigation and river works in the Ch'in and Han periods was one of the important economic bases of the Imperial power. However, the respects in which they differ from Wittfogel's point of view are that the differences which can be seen between the newly developed land created by large-scale state irrigation and river works and the extensive regions in which agriculture was carried on without the need of such state care, that is to say, the relatively antithetical nature of the total dependence on state power on the part of agricultural production in the former case, and, in contrast with this, the entrenched position of the local powerful families and the autonomic social order maintained by them based on kinship solidarity and patron-client relationships in the latter case, are taken up as questions which should be followed up. Further, Japanese scholars intend to follow up in a dynamic manner the structure and subsequent development of the Ch'in and Han empires by making clear, with respect to the differences between these two regions, the processes of interaction constituted by the ways in which the unified rule of the state power was responded to, and the ways in which the differences in social organization between these two regions prescribed the actual working of the state power.

Through its bureaucracy and *chün-hsien* administrative organization, the Imperial power of the Han empire sought to apply to the whole area under its rule, including the extensive area which did not need large-scale state irrigation and river works, the new principle of ruling all the people directly and individually, which it had received from the Ch'in dynasty, standing on the strengthened economic bases by the means above-mentioned. But the Han empire did not seek to enforce the nation-wide institutionalization of this new governmental principle merely by means of the relations of force constituted by the expansion and strengthening of the direct economic base of the Imperial power. In order to secure the stability of the ruling power of the Emperor it was necessary to obtain the co-operation of petty local powerful families who were deep-rooted in all parts of the empire and formed a self-regulating social order among the people in the extensive regions which did not require large-scale state irrigation and river works. The form in which these self-regulating social orders maintained by local powerful families supported the uniformly institutionalized rule of the *chün-hsien* administrative system of the unified empire, or promoted its fall, thus became a particularly important question in explaining the structure of the Ch'in and Han unified empires.

VI

Since the historical source material which is given us is compiled from the point of view of the governing classes, it is easy when drawing a historical image of the Ch'in and Han empires to place general emphasis on the unilateral rule of the people by a strong state power possessing a fully

equipped governmental organization and bureaucratic system because of the nature of this source material, in which there are many notices of the legal systems and policies of the state for ruling the people and few connected accounts, as such, of the actual state of social relations among the people. When this characteristic nature of the source material is combined with the concept of Oriental despotism, a stereotyped idea traditional among western European scholars constructed as being at the opposite pole from western European standards of value, this tendency is further strengthened, and it is easy for a very drab image of China to be drawn. The state administrative system for the rule of the people described in the historical records in all things represent the legal frameworks which the unified state power intend to prescribe uniformly the whole area ruled by it. The important question is in what way, in the event, these legal systems laid down by the state were realized in terms of actual social relations. For these legal systems laid down by the state to have some sort of reality, the question was what kind of social order was it necessary to have at the base of these legal frameworks, to support their rule and co-operate with them.

In his work *Oriental Despotism*, Wittfogel says that under the powerful Oriental despotism found in hydraulic society the various social collectivities among the people possessed no self-regulating institutions but were under the unilateral subjection of the despotic power, and at the best succeeded in producing a species of "beggar's democracy." Assuredly we do not find here "rights of autonomy" recognized in law, of the kind found in the cities, guilds, and village communities of western European pattern. We can countenance speaking of such a thing only if we would seek to measure the degree of "freedom" in Chinese social relations solely by the standard of European concept of "freedom." However, if we go about investigating this question by entering China and working at it from the inside, this will not necessarily negate the proposition that popular social collectivities in China have possessed a species of self-regulating social order in the peculiar forms of being inherent in China, that they have exercised an important influence on the actual working of the bureaucratic administration of local government, and on occasion have stood in the way of a uniform penetration of state power.

Considering the Han period we cannot find already at this time communities based on collective ownership of land. But the powers which were exercising all manner of social control, great and small, over the common people of these times who had some land in their private possession and were split up into individual households, were not confined to those of the state power. In the regions which did not require state irrigation and river works the existence of powerful families as a body bringing powers of social control to bear upon the common people is conspicuously evident. On the basis of their large landholdings and kinship solidarity they brought powers of social control to bear not only upon their kinsmen and dependents but also, through their peculiar patron-client relationships, upon the peasants

around them, and in this way formed and maintained a species of self-regulating social order. For this reason the unified states of Ch'in and Han would in fact have been impossible to exercise local government, if it had ignored the function of these petty local influential families as the keepers of individual social order in *chün* or *hsien*, and it had no alternative but to employ that method of government in which the state made use of the private powers of social control which these local influential families possessed over their kinsmen and the common people around them, in such a way as to make them to participate in the local government of the provinces and in this way to take steps to ensure the penetration of the state ruling power.

The governors of the *chün* and *hsien* in the Han empire were appointed and sent out by the centre, but the subordinate officials who undertook the actual administration of the provinces were drawn from among the native powerful families of the province. As for these local powerful families, by being appointed as subordinate officials in the *chün* and *hsien*, the private powers of social control which they traditionally possessed, operated, through joint action with the state power, as an intermediating factor in the realization of the principle of government embodied in the severe rule of the people characteristic of the Han empire. However, this fact does not mean the reduction of these local powerful families to a position of unilateral dependence in relation to the state, nor does it mean the negation of the self-regulating social order maintained by them. Their appointment as subordinate officials in the *chün* and *hsien* local government brought about the converse result of preserving and enlarging the self-regulating social order which they formed and maintained, and there are many instances of them refusing the orders of their superiors or resorting to resistance against them in cases when power-holders at the centre, or the governors of *chün* or *hsien*, applied arbitrary tyrannical pressure to them in excess of the legitimacy of state rule as recognized by them in such manner as to negate their self-regulating social order.

Among the subordinate officials in these *chün* and *hsien* local governments the most powerful official was one who occupied the post called *kung-ts'ao*, and the governor of the *chün* sometimes entrusted him with the actual prerogatives of rule in the *chün*. Usually a member of a powerful native family in the province was appointed to the post of *kung-ts'ao*. The histories record that under the Han dynasty local governors of *chün* undertook small-scale irrigation works such as those of the type called *p'i* (reservoir) in the valleys of the Han and Huai, and thus created a large area of new cultivated land, but actually members of the powerful native families appointed to the posts of *kung-ts'ao* and other subordinate offices were the actual promoters of these works, and there are many cases in which we may infer that the services which they performed in this way have been ascribed to the local governors in the history records. As a matter of formal institution, appointments of subordinate officials in the *chün* and *hsien* were made by the governor of the *chün*, but actually this power of appointment was delegated to the *kung-ts'ao* drawn from among the members of the powerful native families

in the province, and their evaluation of the character of candidates, which was the standard employed in appointing these subordinate officials, included the aspect of being prescribed by the collective opinion of the immediate circle of the person in the province. We know many instances in which *kung-ts'ao*, with the support of collective opinion of their immediate circles, boldly refused to accept the appointment made by the governor, or were censured by their immediate circles for being unable to do so, in cases in which governors of *chiin* acting on instructions from power-holders at the centre attempted to make appointments at their own will. We may say that this is evidence of the continued vitality of the self-regulating social order maintained by the local powerful families covered by the subordinate administrative mechanisms of the *chiin* and *hsien*, even in cases in which they themselves were subordinate officials of these *chiin* and *hsien*. Further, in cases when the governor of the *chiin* attempted to crush the social forces possessed by those subordinate officials as members of the local powerful families by strong measures, there is no small number of instances in which he met with counter-attacks employing force of arms from these native officials and their kinship groups and followers. Further to this, when at the end of the dynasty the large-scale irrigation works fell into dilapidation because of insufficient maintenance and the cultivated land which had been created went back to waste, or when the area of cultivated land which had been created by river works sank beneath the waters as a result of the breaking of its banks by the Yellow River and a body of vagrant people, separated from this large tract of land, was discharged over the countryside, or when, with the addition of reasons other than these, large-scale peasant revolts arose in all parts of the empire, it frequently happened that these subordinate officials of the *chiin* and *hsien* took advantage of the situation, and, placing themselves at the head of the social power which they have preserved and strengthened, transformed themselves into centres of rebellion.

In the above manner the ruling power of the Han empire is not to be gauged solely by the strength of the economic base which was created by means of the state irrigation and river works which were the direct supports of the state power, for at the extremity of its power-hierarchy it was also backed up by the co-operation of the self-regulating powers of social control possessed by the local powerful families of various sizes which we have described above. As we have noted, however, this did not mean their unilateral subordination to the state power, nor the negation of the self-regulating social order which they maintained. It may be said that the unity of the unified Han empire came into being with this dual function of the social power of local powerful families enclosed within it. When the system for the appointment of high officials became fully developed in the middle of the Former Han period and thereafter, and in particular after the beginning of the Later Han period, the majority of the candidates for high office recommended to the centre by the *chiin* included many subordinate officials of *chiin* and *hsien*. As a result of this, these local powerful families became

the source of supply of high officials, and they went on enlarging and strengthening more and more their local social power of influence, at length growing to such proportions as to function as one of the factors producing the disruption of the Later Han empire. And beyond this went on to grow into a powerful hereditary aristocracy which continued for some dynasties thereafter, a fact which is connected with the contraction of state irrigation under the Wei and Chin dynasties.

VII

Wittfogel's studies in the 1930's, which sought the basis for the despotic bureaucratic state in China in the natural conditions which rendered indispensable large-scale state irrigation and river works, exerted a great stimulus and influence on Japanese research workers, who earnestly desire to attain a systematic grasp of the social history of China. However, the Japanese research workers, who, under this stimulus, have gone forward with the elucidation of the formation and structure of the ancient empires in China, have delimited large-scale state irrigation and river works not as something necessarily prescribed by the natural conditions of Chinese agricultural society which rendered them indispensable, nor as the decisive factor prescribing the stagnation of Chinese society, but as a historical condition which came into being at one period of time in the course of the development of Chinese history, and they have elucidated the social and economic significance of this delimitation. This is gradually being made clear by following up the question of the difference in social structure between the two regions as mentioned above—the areas of cultivated land opened up with the help of large-scale state irrigation and river works, and the land which had been brought under cultivation from of old, or with the help of small-scale local irrigation works which were within the capacity of the local powerful families, and which did not require state irrigation. This question is also being followed up in the new field of studies of the gradual development of the area south of the Yangtze which took place after the beginning of the Six Dynasties period, the marked economic development which took place in this region under the T'ang and Sung dynasties, and the shift of the main economic region from north China to the area south of the Yangtze. As studies from the point of view of economic history of the irrigated rice cultivation which developed in the area south of the Yangtze have made it clear that irrigated rice cultivation in this region did not necessarily require state management of large-scale irrigation works and that local forms of irrigation which had been built up by landlords predominated, and as the new relations of production which came into being in that area have made clear, the fact that the power structure of the ancient empire, which had one of its direct economic bases in large-scale state irrigation and river works and developed with its centre located in north China, was obliged to change its nature, has been taken up for discussion as an important question. This is the question of the transition

period between the T'ang and Sung dynasties.

As we have pointed out above, Wittfogel holds that the many peasant revolts which occurred in Chinese history may have brought about changes of dynasty, but brought about no change in the basic structure of Oriental despotism, and by seeking the basis for this in the unalterable natural conditions which render indispensable large-scale state irrigation and river works, he would explain the laws of the movements of cyclical change and stagnation in the Chinese society. But his observation that in his eyes there is no change in the social order in Chinese history, merely means, in concrete terms, that the changes which occurred in Chinese history did not produce a society having a structure identical with that of modern western European society, and does not amount to a denial that development and change took place in Chinese history in its own essential forms. It would seem that in the sight of those who take as their standard of values and comparison the western European type of society, the fact is stressed that the various countries of Asia, in all their variety of character and structure, each have in common, the tendency of being "Oriental," prior to their several essential character and structures. Just like this, for those who take the type of development found in western European society as their standards of value and comparison, it is the tendencies common throughout the history of Chinese society which differ from the western European pattern, which are stressed and conceptualized, rather than the aspects of spontaneous development and change in Chinese history. However, when we attempt to take up this question from inside Chinese history we find that it has a number of aspects of marked spontaneous development and change, although not in the same forms as in the development of western European society. The state of studies of Chinese social history in Japan today has not yet reached the stage at which the history of this kind of development in Chinese society can be set out in orderly form, built into a theoretical system covering the whole process, and at present a number of hypotheses are being put forward in regard to this question, but at least this is the problem-orientation of Japanese students of Chinese social history.

VIII

Wittfogel's *Oriental Despotism*, published in 1957, is an amplification of his pre-war theory of Oriental Society in which the basis for Oriental despotism was located in state management of irrigation and river works. In this work, he has carried out comparative analysis of Hydraulic Society in a truly astonishing variety of countries, and has developed a series of theories on Hydraulic Society and on their political and social structure. Thus, he stresses the strong total power of Oriental despotism, in which no social body is found possessing political and social significance. The total power of Oriental despotism and its administrative bureaucracy are depicted as the characteristic form of Hydraulic Society, in a manner which is more unilat-

eral and unvaried than in his pre-war writings. It would appear, however, that in his new work the proposition which was basic to his pre-war studies—that this kind of Oriental despotism was based on the natural conditions which rendered indispensable large-scale state irrigation and river works—reveals its own faults. For example, in his new book, he calls in question not only the hydraulic “core area”, but also the margin and submargin of hydraulic societies. Hydraulic core area is societies in which state management of irrigation and river works is clearly to be found, regardless of whether these societies are of the “loose” or “compact” types as defined above. As we have seen, China during the periods of unification belongs to the “loose” type of hydraulic society. However, he draws attention to the development of Oriental despotism and a high degree of bureaucratic organization even in regions in which this kind of state management of irrigation and river works is wholly or almost wholly absent. These regions he calls “marginal” hydraulic societies. He holds that such were Russia since the times of the Dukes of Muscovy, Byzantium, etc. Further, since there is no trace of any supporting large-scale irrigation or river works, he explains the formation of Oriental despotism in these regions as being the result of dissemination from a hydraulic core area. For example, he explains the formation of Oriental despotism and bureaucracy in Russia since the times of the Dukes of Muscovy as being due to the transplantation of the despotic bureaucratic system of the hydraulic core area as a result of the invasion and conquest by the Mongols. Nevertheless, this theory of dissemination alone will not suffice. Even if we allow that the institution may have been transplanted from another country, its taking root and continued persistence in a country are due to the existence on the side of the receiving country of some inherent historical conditions which are such as to support and continue such an institution, and are not to be explained merely as being due to dissemination alone. This is because the inherent conditions, which are such as to cause the transplanted institution to take root and persist, exist within the country adopting the institution. If, now, we take it that the bureaucratic structure of Oriental despotism has developed, in spite of there being no sign of state management of irrigation and river works as found in the hydraulic core areas, and if we take it that this cannot be explained, as Wittfogel explained it, as being the result of dissemination from a core area, then we must conclude that there is some other condition, apart from large-scale state irrigation and river works, which is supporting this bureaucratic structure of Oriental despotism. Conversely we may say that the Oriental despotism of which he speaks is not necessarily to be explained as being due to solely to state management of irrigation, and that he himself implies that there may exist other conditions making possible the formation of Oriental despotism. From this point of view, too, the political and social structure of the Oriental despotism depicted by him should be examined theoretically.