

Mark Cohen
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What Is the State, without War?
The Case of the Pax Tokugawa in Japan

Abstract: Taking the bellicist framework for the analysis of state-formation as a theoretical starting point, this paper develops an account of the origin and dynamics of the political structures of Japan during the Tokugawa Era (1603-1868). The theoretical salience of this period in Japanese history is that whereas before and after it, the state-building cycle of competitive military buildup, fiscal expansion, and administrative consolidation was in full force in Japan, during the Tokugawa era, unlike in Europe during the same time period, the bellicist mechanism jammed up. States stopped making war, and so war could not continue to make states. This is consistent with the bellicist framework insofar as *both* military conflict and state-building ceased, but that framework lacks the capacity to explain *why* in this period the state-building cycle ceased operating. In order to do so, this paper revises the bellicist framework with three elements that together represent a theory of the political-economic environment of state formation: 1) the determination of the positions and associated strategies of agents by the structure of social-property relations; 2) the organization-for-conflict and conflict-of-organizations among those positions; and 3) institutional path-dependency produced by the resolution of conflicts.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Japan emerged as the first, and for many decades the only, country outside of Europe and North America to embark with some success on the political projects and economic developments that seemed to set the Western imperial powers qualitatively apart from the regions they dominated politically and economically. In the decades following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, political elites in Japan built a bureaucratic, nominally parliamentary national state and began to construct an Asian empire, introducing Japan as a competitor in the West-dominated international state system. The emergence of the modern state has long been one of the major focuses of attempts to formulate theoretical accounts of the structural contours of the contemporary world, but the emphasis has more often than not been on the Western European states that have been seen as its originators. While such an emphasis is not entirely unjustified, it must not be exclusive. The original appearance of national states in Europe

rightly receives so much attention insofar as from this particular geographical and temporal origin, it exerted a much broader gravitational force on world history, such that (in large part through Western imperialism) the process of state formation was reproduced throughout the world in subsequent centuries. Yet, it cannot be assumed that the history of any one or several Western countries represents a universal model of the process of state formation. Instead, comparative research is essential, and the case of Japan stands out as a crucial one, both for its early date and its eventual role as a competitor in, not just an object of, imperialist geopolitics.

This paper will employ the Japanese case to advance revisions to existing theories of state formation. Instead of focusing on the Meiji era, during which Japan emerged as an imperialist power, I will follow the lead of the most influential studies within historical sociology of the emergence of the modern state in Europe and adopt as my subject-matter the political developments of the epoch preceding the establishment of the modern state in Japan, what is called in English the Tokugawa era lasting from the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1603 to its fall in 1868. The logic of this choice of analytical focus is that state formation is a gradual, but uneven process, which in Japan no less than in Europe had roots deep into the preceding centuries. Even if there are discontinuities—such as occurred in 1789 in France or 1868 in Japan—the forces that drove and the legacies left by the *ancien regime* remain crucial to an understanding of the process as a whole.

I adopt as a theoretical starting point the so-called “bellicist” framework of state formation that, taking inspiration from the work of Weber and Hintze, has been a powerful current within historical sociology. At the heart of the bellicist framework is the interrelation of warfare, fiscal expansion, administrative consolidation, and social alliance-building. In order to secure and expand territory against internal and external rivals, rulers need the extract resources

from the populations of their territories, and to do this they must establish an apparatus through which to exercise their rule and selectively form alliances with powerful groups within the population (Levi 1981; Tilly 1992: 96-9). Long-term military competition among states can make these interrelations into a progressive cycle, in which states at war are forced to match their competitors' improvements in military, fiscal, and administrative capacity and these war-time expansions tend not to "ratchet" down later (Finer 1975; Tilly 1992: 89; Kiser and Linton 2001). However, the exact shape this cycle takes is not at all uniform but instead depends on the prevailing scale and techniques of warfare, the availability of resources for extraction, and the social structure of the population determining the availability of allies and the potential for organized resistance (Tilly 1985: 181-4, 1992: chs. 2, 5).

What the bellicist framework provides, then, is a causal mechanism that is claimed to be a driving force behind state-building, accounting for both general trends and variations. There is, however, no one canonical "bellicist" account of how exactly this mechanism played out even in the case of early modern Europe. Whereas Tilly (1992) points to the concentration and centralization of capital and coercion, Downing (1992) emphasizes the different responses of states to the "military revolution" that began in the sixteenth century, and Ertman (1997) constructs a two-dimensional account based on differences in the timing of state-building combined with institutional path-dependency. Even Gorski's (2003) insistence on the importance of the Protestant Reformation is less a repudiation of the bellicists' central causal mechanism than the introduction of an additional state-building resource, namely "discipline" as a technology of rule.

When scholars influenced by the bellicist framework have turned their attention to times and places other than early modern Europe, they have almost never found a perfect reproduction

of the European case,¹ but they have repeatedly seen in operation the bellicist framework's mechanism linking the competitive accumulation of means of coercion with fiscal extraction, administrative organization and the formation of alliances with social groups. To give just two recent examples, Heydemann (2000), summarizing the findings of the contributions to his edited volume, notes that while actual war-making was quite rare in the Middle East, extensive *preparation* for war had deep political consequences and was determined in large part by "modes of resource extraction" (p. 23). Centeno (2002), likewise finding inter-state warfare to be relatively rare in post-independence Latin America, argues this absence is tightly bound up with the *weakness* of Latin American states and the unwillingness of elites to ally with the state.

The point is that the bellicist framework is not a general theory, let alone a single model, of state formation. This flexibility is both its strength and its weakness. It is a weakness insofar as the framework has produced few if any concrete yet general propositions. However, it is a strength because it provides a basis for bringing into comparative perspective cases—such as early modern Europe and the twentieth-century Middle East—that were, overall, characterized by vastly different political and social dynamics, without analytically effacing those differences. It could be said, then, that fundamentally the bellicist framework employs its causal mechanism as a comparative heuristic.

In what is to my knowledge the only attempt to introduce pre-1868 Japan as a case in the sociological literature on state formation, Ikegami (1995, 2003) employs the bellicist framework as this kind of heuristic starting-point for historical comparison. On one level, she observes, the endemic war among territorial lords in sixteenth century Japan was remarkably similar to the

¹ It should be noted that Tilly himself warned about this in the concluding chapter of *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*.

roughly contemporaneous military revolution in Europe. In both cases, military competition led to: 1) a larger scale of armed conflict, 2) an increased importance of tactical troop movements, 3) improvements in fortification, 4) expansion of the role of foot soldiers, and 5) the introduction of firearms (Ikegami 1995: 138-9). These developments in military technique and technology produced in Japan as well as in Europe a selection force on political units, privileging those with the material and organizational capacity to keep up with the new developments, and just as the force of military competition drove the emergence of the “national state” as the dominant political form in Europe, so did it lead to the late sixteenth-century unification and seventeenth-century consolidation of the Tokugawa Shogunate in Japan (cf. Tilly 1992: 181-3).

However, whatever the similarities in the forces that drove its construction, the resulting political structures were substantially different in Europe and Japan. The strengthened monarchical states that emerged in Europe from the late sixteenth century built larger royal administrations to increase their power at the expense of the landed nobility. The new royal administrations, especially on the continent, drew in nobles but also educated or wealthy bourgeois to become the patrimonial or bureaucratic officials of the crown (Ertman 1997). The Tokugawa-era political order in Japan, in contrast, amounted to an intensification of the principle of vassalage to neutralize fractious conflict among lords. “In short, the distinctive nature of Japanese early modern state formation may be attributed to the fact that the consolidation of the country after a long period of civil war was carried out through *a vertical reconstruction of the vassalage system on a national scale*” (Ikegami 1995: 163, emphasis in original). This reconstruction was remarkably stable. By the latter half of the seventeenth century, the hereditary positions of lords and vassals were more or less settled as they would remain until the fall of the shogunate in 1868. There were tensions inherent in the structure of the Tokugawa polity, but for

over two centuries, they were kept within bounds consistent with its continuation (ibid. 171-6).

Ikegami's account of the emergence of the Tokugawa-era political order is a valuable contribution to a comparative understanding of Japanese state formation, and it demonstrates the value of the bellicist framework as a comparative heuristic. The overall arc of the development of political institutions in Japan from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries lines up well with Tilly's account of "how war makes states and vice versa." The two great episodes of state-building in Japan that bookend this period—the sixteenth-century unification and the construction of the Meiji state after 1868—occurred in the shadow of military conflict (cf. Ikegami 2003). However, the period that falls between those two episodes of real or threatened warfare and the associated transformation of political institutions can only be puzzling from the perspective of the bellicist framework. For at least two centuries—from 1651 with the death of the third Tokugawa shogun after which the shogunate began to tone down its active exercise of surveillance and discipline over the magnate lords until the arrival in 1853 of the American Commodore Perry with his warships and demands for the establishment of diplomatic ties—Japan was largely free of military conflict and the state-building projects associated with it, despite the fact that the magnate lords (daimyo) retained their castles, their armies of hereditary vassals (samurai), and almost complete legal and fiscal sovereignty over their territories. What is even more anomalous is that this peace held even as the rulers of Japan—both the shogunate itself and the various daimyo domains—began to face chronic fiscal shortfalls in the eighteenth century. The shogunate did not seek to expand its revenue at the expense of the daimyo—for instance by taxing their lands—but neither did the daimyo try to expand their territories at the expense of their neighbors, and across the board little or no attempt was made to fundamentally reorganize state institutions in order to improve rulers' effective control and thus fiscal capacity

in the countryside.

In sixteenth-century Japan, the state-building cycle of competitive military buildup, fiscal expansion, and administrative consolidation was in full force, but during the Tokugawa era, unlike in Europe during the same time period, the bellicist mechanism jammed up. States stopped making war, and so war could not continue to make states. Using the bellicist framework as a comparative heuristic, Ikegami's account can capture this important divergence, but it leaves open the question of why exactly Japan took its distinctive *pacified* path in the Tokugawa era. Ikegami describes European absolutism and the Tokugawa-era political order as “different solutions . . . to the crises of feudalism in the late medieval period” (ibid. 184). The problem, in both cases, was a breakdown of the ability of rulers to secure territory and revenue, and the different solutions were the form taken by reestablished, stable rule. However, while Ikegami notes the existence of the problem and describes the subsequent institutional order that is free of it, she does not explain what the *source* of the problem was and *how* the Tokugawa-era political order was able to solve it.

This is not a weakness of Ikegami's analysis in particular but instead is a limitation of the bellicist framework in general. The bellicist framework's central mechanism links the competitive accumulation of means of coercion with fiscal extraction, administrative organization and the formation of alliances with social groups, but on its own it is completely silent on the particular “values” of these “variables.” What are the units of political competition? How intense is their conflict? What organizational forms, techniques of resource extraction, and social alliances will be prevalent in any given time and place? The framework offers no basis for making hypotheses one way or another. Thus, for instance, Japan's apparent insulation from “foreign” military pressure is no explanation for the Pax Tokugawa, since with the exception of

Hideyoshi's two failed invasions of Korea in the late sixteenth century, prior to the Tokugawa era Japanese military conflict, as prolific as it was, was entirely "domestic." The puzzle is why this multiplicity of largely independent political units within Japan, which survived in the Tokugawa era, ceased fighting amongst themselves. Even as the bellicist framework encourages an emphasis on the interrelation of existing political units and on those units' competitive strategies for extracting and accumulation resources, it is not itself a theory of the origin of those units and the resources they extract. Instead, the bellicist framework is forced to take them as a given of the *political-economic environment* of state formation. The purpose of this paper is to revise the bellicist framework of the analysis of state-formation by developing a theoretical account this political-economic environment, using Tokugawa-era Japan as a test case.

At the core of the revision I am proposing is the concept of social-property relations (Brenner 2007). The structure of social-property relations defines the basic positions that agents can occupy in the political-economic environment and the array of strategies open to them. These positions and strategies are in frequent conflict, and the organization of agents in the competitive pursuit of their interests—not just or even primarily between elites and the mass of the population, but also among elites (Lachmann 2000)—is the engine of contingent and variable development in societies characterized by a particular structure of social-property relations. The organization-for-competition and competition among organizations of agents in society is, however, not limitlessly fluid. Instead, the resolution of episodes of conflict produces an institutional residue that exerts a strong influence on subsequent developments (Ertman 1997). In the next section, I will develop these three elements—positions and strategies defined by social-property relations, the organization-for-conflict and conflict-of-organizations among those positions, and the institutional path-dependency produced by the resolution of conflicts—into a

theory of the political-economic environment of state formation. The following section will consider the historical experience of the Tokugawa era in Japan in light of the theory. The closing section will summarize conclusions and general implications for the study of state formation.

STATE FORMATION AND ITS POLITICAL-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The broad outlines and dynamics of the political-economic environment in which state-formation occurred in early modern Japan—as well as the European experience that is at the center of the state-formation literature—can be understood as arising from what I will call patrimonial social-property relations. I adopt the concept, but not the name, from Brenner (1984a, 1984b, 2007), who uses the term ‘feudal.’² I take the term from Weber. “In the pure type, patrimonial domination . . . regards all governing powers and the corresponding economic rights as privately appropriated economic advantages” (Weber 1978: 236). Thus, the term ‘patrimonial’ highlights the close connection between political power and the appropriation of economic resources, indeed the central importance of the former for the latter (see also *ibid.* 237-41, 1090-1104).

The central axis in patrimonial social-property relations connects *peasants* who cultivate the land and *lords* whose income comes from *dues* paid by the peasantry. The peasants, who as the agrarian cultivators constitute the overwhelming majority of the productive population, enjoy customary access to their means of subsistence. Individually and collectively they control sufficient land, tools, and other resources to provide for themselves at a minimum level, and

2 As Brenner argues, the dynamics of the nexus of political and economic relations that characterized European feudalism are not unique, but instead “the agrarian economies that came on the scene from the time of the origins of settled agriculture until the early modern period were, almost universally, structured by variants of a single broad type of social-property relations, of which the form that prevailed in medieval and early modern Europe represented one particular example” (Brenner 2007: 62). I prefer to retain the term ‘feudal’ to refer to the *specific variant* that characterized medieval Europe, as opposed to the *general type* of social-property relations.

moreover, they are sufficiently organized on a communal level to regulate and defend this control (Brenner 2007: 63-4). Lords coercively claim some share of peasant production. That is to say that the resource they possess by definition is the political capacity to force peasants and other producers to hand over some portion of their labor or its product (ibid. 64). In the simplest form, this means that individual lords control sufficient “means of coercion”—weapons and manpower—to threaten peasants into compliance. In practice, lords take on a wider array of regulatory, judicial, and ceremonial functions in their territories of control, to reinforce their ultimately coercive capacity to extract revenue. As we will see, the independent coercive appropriation of peasant production by individual lords is actually the exceptional, limit case. First, however, it is important to take note of the internal dynamics that arise from the abstract positions of lords and peasants.

I assume that social agents in particular positions defined by the structure of social-property relations will on average adopt strategies that are designed to ensure their well-being by exploiting the resources associated with their positions in the context of the strategies of other agents in other positions. “[I]n view of the specific set of historically given social-property relations that prevails, the society’s individuals and families can be systematically expected to adopt a particular corresponding set of economic strategies—or what I would call rules for reproduction; for, in light of the possibilities and limits set by the social-property relations, those strategies or rules make the most sense” (Brenner 2007: 59). This is not an assumption of rational, self-interested maximization. All else equal, the proposition that individuals will attempt to maximize their income has some plausibility. The problem is that all else is decisively *not* equal in ways that are systematically determined by social-property relations, and strategies to increase income can run such a risk to the well-being of individuals—indeed, to their very

biological or social reproduction—as to be effectively ruled out. Patrimonial social-property relations impose strong imperatives that constrain the viable strategies of both peasants and lords.

For peasants, the decisive consideration is protection from economic precariousness. Peasants face danger both from the inherent uncertainty of premodern agriculture and from the ongoing attempts by lords to increase their share of production. Their buttress against both of these risks is their communally-guaranteed access to their subsistence, and so the primary strategy must be to defend and augment this access and the communal organization that guarantees it. This all but rules out the adoption of disruptive changes in production practices, such as specialization and investment for market production, in pursuit of maximizing productivity (ibid. 67-8). What commercial exchange peasants engage in is in supplement to the core of protected subsistence production. There are, instead, tendencies for peasant families to strive to have a large number of children, diversify the economic activities family members engaged in, and—up to a point—divide holdings among children, as a kind of insurance policy for familial reproduction (ibid. 68-9).

Lords must strive above all to defend their political claim to a share of production. A lord's claim is threatened on the one hand by the political and economic strategies of peasants and on the other by the risk of incursion from other lords. Lords thus face an imperative to accumulate, but they are pushed to accumulate *economic* resources only as a means to improved political capacity. *Extensive* growth—i.e. the promotion of and provision for bringing additional land under production—is one viable, indeed ubiquitous strategy, and the one that is relatively uncontentious with the peasantry. Ultimately however, the available area—and potential productivity—of uncultivated land is limited, and lords are pushed back into zero-sum

competition with the peasantry and each other over a relatively fixed total product. Precisely because peasant communities are sufficiently in control of agricultural production to ensure their own subsistence, lords have little leverage to induce changes in productive practices that would increase their income. Instead, lords have every incentive to “invest” in additional means of coercion, which can be used to wrest additional income from their own peasants or additional land and peasants from neighboring lords. Indeed, insofar as the potential exists for neighboring lords to pursue a strategy of military expansion, each lord is *compelled* to maximize his personal political capacity in order to simply ensure his own survival as a lord (ibid. 70-1).

It is this structural imperative towards political competition and accumulation that is the engine of the process of state-formation within patrimonial social-property relations, just as the imperative towards economic competition and accumulation in capitalism is decisive for its tendency towards productivity improvements and economic growth. The ability of an *individual* lord to accumulate sufficient means of coercion to claim a significant share of peasant production, overcoming resistance including the threat of flight, and defend that claim from competing lords is quite limited, and beyond that point additional accumulation of political capacity can only be accomplished by an *organization*—or, in Brenner’s words, a political community—of lords. One form of such an organization is feudal monarchy, in which lords agree to contribute resources to an overlord and to be subject to his authority in some matters in return for defending the lords’ claims to lands and revenue through mediating disputes among lords, coordinating policies to subordinate the peasantry, and organizing collective military action (ibid. 64-5). Even after the establishment of such an organization, however, lords’ fundamental imperative towards political accumulation remains, certainly between organized communities of lords but also, still, among lords within a given community. On the one hand, the

potential always exists for some group of lords to decide they could do better freed of subordination to the monarch, and on the other, since it is the organization of lords that ultimately guarantees lordly wealth, lords shift to various strategies for defending or improving their positions *within* their organizations.

The interplay of strategies of political accumulation within and between organizations of lords, in the context of the ever-present antagonism with peasants, can bring about an immense diversity of precise results. On this more concrete level of analysis, Lachmann's (1989, 2000, 2009) concept of "elite conflict" is a useful tool for explaining the formation and transformation of political institutions and policies. He defines "an elite as a group that shares control over an organization that extracts resources from a subordinate class and guards access to those resources from rival elites as well as from subordinate classes" (Lachmann 1989: 147).³ Although in general, then, elites have a shared interest in exploiting producers, their capacities to pursue these interests primarily depend on whether they are threatened by competing elites or not (Lachmann 2000: 10). Competing elite groups struggle to assert the primacy of their respective claims to resources and, if necessary, subordinate or eliminate the power bases of competing elites. Subordinate groups can play a political role as well but most often when they are either mobilized by competing elites or take advantage of elite disarray (*ibid.*: 180-9).

States are organizations for extraction and domination that claim superordinate authority over other such organizations, while in practice they simultaneously compete with the

3 The distinction between my concept of 'lords' and Lachmann's 'elites' is one of generality. Lachmann's definition ostensibly comprises all exploiters, whereas mine is limited to a specific position defined by patrimonial social-property relations. However, precisely because Lachmann insists on a close attention to the specific bases of elite power and the actual strategies different groups of elites follow, he arrives in practice to the fundamental point that the wealth of elites in early modern societies is directly politically constituted. "All three principal elites [in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England and France, namely the crown, the landed nobility, and the Church] exercised class-like and state-like authority" (Lachmann 1989: 149).

organizational bases of other elite groups and potentially can be appropriated by those other elites (Lachmann 2009: 57). Political stability results from the triumph of one elite organization or the arrival at a *modus vivendi* among multiple elites. Thus, making sense of the concrete trajectories of political development entails separating out the various kinds of competing elites, identifying their organizational bases and associated capacities and interests, and tracking the moves and counter-moves by which the various groups of elites attempt to assert superiority or reach accords for coexistence. In this way, Lachmann for instance explains the different forms taken by state-building in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England and France and shows their deep consequences for subsequent political conflict and economic development (Lachmann 1989, 2000: chs. 4, 6).

Social formations characterized by patrimonial social property relations can thus manifest a wide variety of forms of relations among lords and of their domination of subordinate classes. If vassalage and feudal monarchy constitute one possible organization, so too do venal office-holding and absolute monarchy (Anderson 1974), as well as (to move away from European examples) the balance between a tribute-extracting imperial center and local nobility in charge of administration in medieval and early modern India (Chibber 1998). These different organizations are important not just because they are major topics of historical study in their own right but also because they matter for economic issues such as the intensity of lordly extraction and the specific ensemble and extent of economic activity, including non-agricultural and non-staple production and commercial exchange (Brenner 1984a, 1984b; Chibber 1998). The difference is analogous to the one identified between “liberal market economies” and “coordinated market economies” by the contemporary “varieties of capitalism” school of institutional economic analysis (Hall and Soskice 2003). Capitalist or patrimonial social-property relations are abstract structures that can

take a wide variety of concrete form. Both levels must be taken into consideration in historical analysis.

The upshot of this perspective for the case of Japan is that the achievement of the Tokugawa-era political order was to eliminate the basis of the endemic conflict among lords of the preceding centuries. In the centuries leading up to the establishment of Tokugawa rule, the power of one type of lords—the imperial court aristocracy and religious institutions of the capital—decayed in favor of another—the feudal hierarchy of samurai directly exerting coercive control over the land. However, the feudal organization of lords was always unstable, and from the late fifteenth century—the aptly named Warring States period—Japan fell into near constant warfare among territorial lords, including in many instances vassals rising up against their erstwhile lieges. The Warring States period lasted until the “unification” of Japan under hegemonic warlords, and ultimately the Tokugawa house—at the end of the sixteenth century.

The dynamic of conflict in this period and its pacification in the Tokugawa era reflected the relations among three strata of elites asserting claims to resources from the predominately agricultural population (Table 1). At the lowest level above the agricultural producers was a class of gentry who controlled land and the labor of subordinate peasants to cultivate it. The gentry were themselves, however, subordinated to local lords who in addition to owning their own estates like the gentry also exercised political authority over a locality. These local lords were often the delegated representatives of higher political authorities, such as the imperial state or aristocratic owners of land when these still mattered, but increasingly they were the vassals of the third crucial stratum of elites in the Warring States period, regional lords who staked claims as the rulers of wider territories.⁴ The proliferation of competing claims led to substantial conflict

4 Table 1 also indicates the various terms that are sometimes used for members of each strata. Many of these terms

and fluidity among and within these strata. The gentry struggled with the local lords, the local lords with their regional liege-lords, and subordinate regional lords with their superiors in the feudal hierarchy over the shares of the revenue from production and of political authority, and each could potentially ally with their superior's competitors to advance their own claims. In this way, for instance, a member of the gentry could become the vassal of an ascendant lord and, receiving a fief, become a local lord, while a local lord who won the allegiance of neighboring local lords and gentry could become a regional lord by ousting his erstwhile liege.

In the Tokugawa era, this fundamental instability was eliminated by a reorganization of the lordly class that resolved the *competing* claims of the multiple strata of elites (Table 2). The local lords and smaller regional lords who were themselves vassals of greater lords were removed from the countryside and concentrated in the castle towns of the magnate lords, called daimyo, to whom they were vassals. Vassals retained hereditary ownership of their fiefs, but these increasingly came to be little more than claims to a fixed share of the domain's tax revenues. Vassals thus became dependent on the domain administration for their livelihood instead of having an unmediated claim to income from their coercive control of land and peasants. The gentry remained in the countryside, but though they still had conflicting interests with their political superiors, they were disarmed and could no longer ally with actual or potential competitors to those superiors. Thus, the gentry could evade taxes or mobilize local peasant protests, but they lacked the opportunity to join up with local or regional lords.

This organizational “solution” to the “problem” of the Warring States period could not have been achieved without the presence of the shogunate, the political and military hegemon that controlled by far the largest territory and to which each magnate lord formally swore fealty,

refer to the different official roles played by individuals who fall into the same structural positions over time.

since the maintenance of vassals as lords of strategic areas had been a necessity imposed by the pressure of territorial warfare among regional lords. The shogunate regulated the external and military policy of all of the domains and thus became the guarantor of each lord's claim to a specific territory, freeing them from the need to actively maintain their military capacity. At the same time, however, the shogunate took few steps to supplant the fiscal and political authority of the magnate lords within their own domains. In short, Tokugawa Japan's distinctive "integrated yet decentralized state structure" (Ikegami 1995: 165-6) worked because it simultaneously left the various levels of elites space to exercise their claims to power and resources but constrained them sufficiently to prevent them from threatening the claims of other elites.

However, even as a reorganization of lords eliminates the basis of conflicts among them and thus increases the security and prosperity of each, the resulting institutions of rule impose their own constraints on lords' political capacities (Lachmann 2003: 352). That is to say, state formation and the political struggles around it display a marked institutional path dependence. Ertman (1997) shows this dynamic in the persistence of non-bureaucratic administration in France after the Wars of Religion. During France's previous, medieval bout of interstate warfare and state-building, the pattern of the appropriation of office became entrenched in the institutional set-up of the French monarchy. Given this institutional legacy, during the wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries French absolutist monarchs could not establish a bureaucratic apparatus, as some German principalities did, but instead could only engage in "the rationalization of irrationalization," which allowed the crown to extract additional resources for warfare but enabled the further appropriation of office (Ertman 1997: ch. 3). Once entrenched as an institutional solution to the problem of reconciling lords to an enhanced monarchy in the Middle Ages, the appropriation of office was a durable constraint on French state-formation,

even to the point of defining the political and economic stakes of the Wars of Religion and the Fronde (Lachmann 2000: 123-30).

Similarly, in Japan, the institutional form of the vassal band *pulled off the land*, requiring the delegation of rural governance to members of the gentry, limited the administrative capacity of the various domain governments. Over the course of the Tokugawa era, lords attempted to rationalize the “irrationalization” of their vassal bands. They expanded their fiscal administrations immensely, but they filled the new offices with vassals. They loosened the status requirements of offices so that relatively low-level vassals could rise to important positions on the basis of merit, but they almost never recruited officials from outside their vassal bands. Through to their replacement by the imperial state after the Restoration, they maintained their hereditary vassals despite the expense, which put pressure on domain budgets, and even though there were far more of them than there were useful offices and military positions. Furthermore, they kept their vassals concentrated in their castle towns even as peasant resistance to taxes and other domain policies grew beginning in the eighteenth century, often led by the gentry who were supposed to control the peasantry for the lords.

In short, even when the decision-makers are rulers with few legal constraints on their arbitrary authority, such as French absolutist kings or the lords of Tokugawa-era Japan, political decisions often cannot be based simply on what, in the abstract, the most effective conceivable approach would be. Instead, political institutions display significant path dependence, such that the legacy of earlier institution-building constrains what is actually feasible. The concentration of vassals in the castle towns and their conversion from independent lords into stipended retainers were at the heart of the Tokugawa-era pacification, but these achievements themselves became durable constraints on the political capacities of the domains and the shogunate.

To summarize, in order to address the question of how the military competition-fiscal expansion cycle of state-formation is broken and with what consequences, it is necessary to go beyond the bellicist framework as a comparative heuristic and present a theory of the political-economic environment in which state formation occurs. The theory presented describes the positions within patrimonial social-property relations and the strategies associated with those positions. The tendency towards the proliferation and conflict among organizations of lords arises directly from the fundamental importance of the strategy of political accumulation. The resolution of such elite conflict produces institutions that form a path-dependent constraint on further political developments. From this perspective, it is possible to identify the specific fault lines among competing elites that give rise to military conflict and the consequent build-up of fiscal, administrative, and coercive capacity through state-building. This likewise makes it possible to point out the conditions for the resolution of that conflict and thus the cessation of ongoing state-building and, crucially, to show in what ways the resulting political institutions constrain elites' capacities. In the course of my theoretical explication, I have previewed how the theory will account for the case of Tokugawa-era Japan. I will now turn to an elaboration of that historical account.

AN HISTORICAL POLITICAL ECONOMY OF TOKUGAWA-ERA JAPANESE STATE FORMATION

In the closing decades of the sixteenth century, the three so-called unifiers—Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu—each succeeded in turn in asserting military hegemony over the large number of feudal lords who were struggling amongst themselves for territory in Japan. Finally, Ieyasu, after proving himself to be the country's dominant military power after the decisive battle of Sekigahara in 1600 and thereby forcing all of

the remaining lords to swear loyalty to him, presided over the founding in 1603 of the “shogunate” that would rule in Japan until the Meiji Restoration in 1868. In the historiographical literature, the Tokugawa-era polity is known as the *bakuhan* system. The term refers to the coexistence of the military hegemony and feudal overlordship of the Tokugawa shogunate—known as the *Edo Bakufu* in Japanese for the city in which it was headquartered⁵—with the continued sovereignty of the 280-odd magnate lords in the internal affairs of their domains—called *han* in modern Japanese. *Both* the shogunate and the various domains were organizations of lords directed at securing a claim to the production of subordinate classes—primarily both quantitatively and in emphasis, the agricultural product of the peasantry. In line with the theoretical argument of the previous section, this section will show that the origin, form, and developmental tendencies of the *bakuhan* system arose from lords’ competing strategies for political accumulation in the centuries leading up to and into the Tokugawa era. This section will proceed in three parts. The first will answer the question, what was the origin of the endemic warfare among lords in Japan through the sixteenth century? The second, how was it that the establishment of the *bakuhan* system eliminated the root of the conflict of the preceding centuries? The third, what were the political consequences of the way in which conflict among lords was pacified?

1. The “Problem” of the Warring States Period

As summarized above, the structural basis of the endemic political conflict that preceded the pacification achieved by the *bakuhan* system lay in the interrelation of gentry, local lords, and regional lords. The so-called Warring States period, usually said to begin with the Ōnin War (1467-77), was merely the intensification of the dynamic that had been in place at least since the

5 Edo was renamed Tokyo when it became the capital of the newly established Imperial state in 1868.

authority of the imperial government was supplanted by the feudal hierarchy. It is necessary, then, to begin with the organization of property under the system of *shōen* estates that proliferated in the twilight of imperial rule in the tenth through the twelfth centuries (Nagahara 1990b: 301). Every actor in this drama was following strategies of political accumulation to secure revenue from peasant production, and the interplay of those strategies drove the transition from imperial rule to the emergence of *shōen* and the rise of the shogunate.

In its heyday, the imperial state was the predominant political power, drawing the existing lordly class into its own apparatus of administration and tax collection (Hall 1999[1966]: chs. 2-3). As early as the ninth and tenth centuries, however, the superiority of the imperial state over its own provincial officials was eroding (ibid. ch. 4). Aristocratic families, religious institutions, and in the eleventh century even segments of the imperial house exploited this situation to assemble large landholdings, exempt from imperial authority and taxation, that they controlled with their own political apparatuses. These landholdings were organized into estates called *shōen*, and they were typically formed and expanded when a provincial landholder commended his land to a courtly patron, who guaranteed protection from imperial taxes in return for the payment of dues (Nagahara 1990a: 262-3). Figure 1 illustrates the organization and pattern of obligations in a typical *shōen*. Gentry who commended their land were confirmed in their holdings (called *myōden*), which they cultivated with the labor of subordinate branch families, servants, and tenants. They owed the proprietor annual agricultural dues (*nengu*) as well as various other goods and services (Nagahara 1990b: 306). Most *shōen* in central Japan consisted of several *myōden* holdings, and the proprietor delegated authority to ensure the payment of dues to a local lord who possessed the coercive capacity to maintain control in the *shōen* (ibid. 319). Like the *myōden*-holding gentry, the local lord owned land cultivated by subordinate peasants, but the

lord owed no dues to the proprietor on his land and instead received a share of the total income of the *shōen* as payment for his services. In addition, the local lord controlled an area of land on which the cultivators only owed *nengu* to the proprietor but paid other dues to the lord (ibid. 304-5). The rest of the land in the *shōen* was cultivated by smallholders who usually owed only an augmented *nengu* to the proprietor and occasionally worked the lands of the gentry and local lord as well (ibid. 307).

The fundamental source of instability in the *shōen* arose from the double position of the local lord. He was theoretically the delegated official of the proprietor, but apart from the local lord, the proprietor had very limited capacity to exert authority on the *shōen*. Since he was the actual possessor of the means of coercion in the *shōen*, the local lord was well-placed to increase dues and labor services on the peasantry and claim greater authority over the distribution of land (ibid. 319-21). Over time, the local lords' power grew at the expense of the proprietors and in many cases came to be formalized in a division of the *shōen* between lord and proprietor or a agreement for the lord to deliver a fixed annual payment to the proprietor in return for complete authority over the estate (Nagahara 1990a: 267-8). For gentry and local lords—many of whom had been local imperial officials—court patronage offered political protection from what remained of imperial authority. Yet the same logic that led local lords to turn from the imperial state to the courtly *shōen* proprietors pushed them to enhance their own independence at the expense of their aristocratic patrons, and in the long run the strategies of the court aristocracy only served to exacerbate the decay of imperial fiscal and coercive capacity.

This created an opening for the provincial lords—the “warrior families”—to build up an alternative organization for territorial control and the accumulation of coercive capacity, which was institutionalized as the Kamakura shogunate in 1192 (ibid. ch. 5). The military governors

appointed in the provinces by the shogunate gained the power to appoint their subordinates as local lords in the *shōen*. Compared to proprietor-appointed officials (*shōkan*), these stewards (*jitō*) had an even stronger basis of resistance to proprietors' claims by virtue of being linked into the feudal hierarchy (Hall 1999[1966]: 183; Nagahara 1990a: 265-7). Moreover, military governors themselves, like many local lords, negotiated divisions of *shōen*, and they granted the land acquired in this way as fiefs to vassals (ibid. 273-4). The shogunate, however, instead of obliterating what remained of the imperial system and its aristocracy set itself up as the system's protector and attempted—with more success in this period (1192-1333) than later—to guarantee the rights of *shōen* proprietors against incursions by local lords and the military governors (Nagahara 1990a: 277).

The devolution of power from *shōen* proprietors to local and regional lords in the provinces accelerated in the fourteenth century, as the collapse of the Kamakura shogunate was followed by a brief imperial restoration and the establishment of a new shogunate in Muromachi by the Ashikaga house. Yet even as the military governors who ostensibly sat at the top of the hierarchy of lords in the provinces increasingly supplanted what remained of imperial and aristocratic fiscal authority, they too found their power over their own subordinates to be precarious (Hall 1999[1966]: chs. 7-8). Open conflict among local and regional lords, often at the expense of the shogunate-appointed governors, broke out in areas farther from Kyoto by the early fifteenth century, and central Japan followed in the latter half of the century (Imatani 1990). Higher-level lords were repeatedly overthrown by those of their vassals who were better able to organize compact bands of subordinate lords and gentry with tight control over the land and sufficient military capacity to defend it (Hall 1986b). The fundamental problem facing lords in this period of “Warring States” was that as long as their vassals were ensconced in the

countryside, with their own weapons and land, the potential existed for them to challenge the lord's authority by consolidating their own vassal bands or allying with the lord's enemies. The lords' organizational dilemma was thus how to secure control over their territory while maintaining the loyalty of their band of vassals. Enfeoffment rewarded vassals for service, and placed a watchful eye over the land, but it also threatened to strengthen the vassals' independence.

The result was an intensive cycle of warfare and state-building among regional lords in the sixteenth century. In order to augment their military capacity against their competitors and assure their supremacy over their subordinates—in other words, to prevent them from becoming independent competitors—regional lords needed to build more effective administrative and fiscal apparatuses. The most successful lords adopted a strategy of asserting rule as the “public” (i.e. sovereign) authority of a consolidated, defensible territory within which every possessor of substantial economic or coercive resources, from lesser regional lords through local lords and many of the gentry, was subordinated to the lord as a vassal (Hall 1968a: 44; Nagahara 1990a: 296-7, 1990b: 341-2). Many lords who successfully established such domains undertook cadastral surveys in order to precisely determine tax revenue and set vassals' military service on the basis of their landholdings (e.g. Brown 1993: 60-1; Hall 1999[1966]: 318-9; Totman 1967: 21-2). In addition, they adopted a number of techniques to reduce their vassals' political independence. For instance, as the Ukita daimyo who ruled the province of Bizen in the late sixteenth century consolidated his domain, he ordered the destruction of many outlying fortifications in favor of a paired down, stronger network of castles at strategic locations and frontiers. In addition, he attempted to prevent entrenchment of lords in specific territories by not granting consolidated territories to his vassals as fiefs (Hall 1999[1966]: 305-10). Similarly, as

Tokugawa Ieyasu (then just a rising regional lord) expanded his territory through military conquest, he offered local lords a chance to swear allegiance to him, but if they did he transferred them away from their home territories and granted the conquered land to established vassals in non-contiguous plots (Totman 1967: 14). In sum, the vassal bands of the most successful regional lords came to be organized more as a standing army than a collection of independent knights, kept whenever possible around the lord's castle instead of scattered throughout the territories, and the lords, accordingly, collected revenue and administered their territory on a more centralized basis (Hall 1968b: 71-4; Totman 1967: 18-20).

It was from the ranks of regional lords employing these strategies that the so-called unifiers emerged in the latter half of the sixteenth century. However, the process of territorial consolidation did not extend without limit. Instead, Nobunaga, Hideyoshi, and Ieyasu were, in addition to the rulers of their own domains, the leaders of coalitions of similar lords, including both independent lords who allied with them and vassals who they established in their own large, independent domains. These coalitions were fragile, in large part predicated on the exceptional authority of the leader, and twice, the death of the leader set off the members of the coalition on a new bout of conflict. In other words, lords were willing to temporarily suspend their independent strategies of political accumulation to come under the umbrella of one of the great coalitions, just as their vassals agreed to submit to them, but they, like their vassals again, always held the threat to defect, allying with other lords or striking out on their own. What happened in the early decades of the Tokugawa era was that the upward spiral of warfare and military build-up through state-building was broken. Thus, the reason that the subordination of the remaining regional lords under the Tokugawa became permanent whereas the coalitions led by Nobunaga and Hideyoshi had ultimately broken was not that the military and political hegemony of the Tokugawa was

stronger than, at least, Hideyoshi's, but instead that the various lords were able to stop building and indeed let decay their coercive potential. The next section will show how this shift in lords' strategies arose from the reorganization of rule not just of the shogunate over the lords but also *within* lords' domains that occurred in the early decades of the Tokugawa era.

2. The "Solution" of the Tokugawa Era

In the formative decades of the Tokugawa era, the relationship between the lords of domains and the shogunate had two prongs: subordination of the lords to the shogunate and support of the shogunate for the authority of lords within their own domains. The Tokugawa, sought to subjugate the magnate lords, which included strategically eliminating some of them, but not to supplant their position within the organization of rule in Japan, and they accordingly retained the capacity to rule their own domains (Asao 1991; Hall 1968b, 1991; Susser 1985). To be precise, this applied to lords of daimyo status, who held fiefs officially assessed to produce 10,000 *koku* of rice or more, and from this point further I will refer to daimyo to distinguish them from lords of smaller fiefs—samurai—who had considerably less political independence (see Table 2).⁶ On the one hand without the solidification of a national political hegemony, individual daimyo would never have succeeded in fully neutralizing the threat posed by their own enfeoffed vassals (Wakita 1982). It is also true, however, that the national hegemony of the Tokugawa would never have been as stable as it actually was if the daimyo had not been able to maintain their authority *even as their coercive capacity decayed*.

The subjugation side—one could even say downright humiliation—should not be minimized. The Tokugawa shoguns reserved the right to remove or transfer lords from their

⁶ A *koku* is a unit of volume equivalent to 5.1 bushels. The assessment of domains also, to some extent, took into account other products by converting them into rice equivalents.

domains for the flimsiest pretexts of misrule or disrespect to the overlord, and until the end of the seventeenth century, they exercised that right liberally (Hall 1999[1966]: 362-3; Odo 1975: 11-24).⁷ They claimed the authority to regulate the daimyo in their personal behavior and, above all, their relations with each other, as well as the power to definitively settle boundaries and disputes. Though the shogunate never demanded regular fiscal contributions, it issued orders to provide goods and labor for expensive construction projects, especially the building and upkeep of castles, that strained domain budgets (Asao 1991; Hall 1991; Ravina 1999: 69; Robert 1998: 52-5). Finally, in an institutionalization of a practice common among vassals and their lieges in the preceding period, from 1642 onwards all daimyo were forced to spend every other year in “attendance” at the shogunal capital of Edo and were required to permanently keep their families there as hostages (Tsukahira 1966).

Yet, for all of that, and especially once Tokugawa regulation and surveillance eased up in the latter half of the seventeenth century, the daimyo enjoyed an unprecedented level of security and prosperity (Bolitho 1991). Individual daimyo could not expand their territory by conquest, but neither were they threatened by invasion. Despite keeping their large armies of hereditary vassals, they transitioned from the preparation and execution of warfare to the extraction and enjoyment of revenue from their domains within the framework of the *bakuhau* system. The military capacity of the ruling class was allowed to decay, the massive notional armies of the shogunate and domains becoming paper fictions, without serious consequences (Totman 1967: 49-53). As early as the suppression of the last major armed rebellion in the era, at Shimabara in 1637, the lack of training and equipment for the “warrior class” was an unavoidable—and for the

⁷ By Odo’s count, in the first fifty years of Tokugawa rule 213 daimyo were stripped of their holdings and 281 were transferred (Odo 1975: 11-2).

neighboring daimyo charged with putting down the rebellion, highly embarrassing—fact (Odo 1975: 173-6).

The appeal of this development for the lordly class, especially its highest reaches, should be obvious, since it freed them from the imperative to expend resources on military preparedness and maintain constant vigilance for threats of invasion and opportunities for conquest. Instead, they could indulge in the luxurious lives and status competitions of what amounted to a court aristocracy (Bolitho 1974: 134-5; Roberts 1999: 67-8; Tsukahira 1966: 73-80). What is less obvious is how they could get away with it. The recurrent theme of Japanese political history from the decline of imperial state to the Warring States period was that when one set of lords allowed their coercive capacity to decay, a new cohort of lords accumulated their own means of coercion to supplant the political and economic claims of the erstwhile rulers. The political triumph of the unification from the perspective of the highest reaches of the ruling class was removal of this threat, which was achieved in large part through the so-called division of warriors and cultivators (*heinō bunri*).

During the consolidation of the *bakuhan* system, the daimyo gave gentry and lesser local lords a choice. If rural samurai chose to remain on their lands, they became, officially, peasant cultivators and had, at least in principle, to give up the weapons that were the mark of warrior status in the “swords hunts” first initiated on a general scale by Hideyoshi in 1588 (Asao 1991; Furushima 1991). If, instead, they wished to retain their status as members of the military ruling class, they had to move to the castle town and accept that they enjoyed a right to revenue from the land not as private property but instead mediated through the daimyo’s claim of sovereignty (Asao 1991; Wakita 1975, 1982). In this way, daimyo gathered their vassals into the single castle

town permitted them by the Tokugawa shogunate and, in most of Japan⁸, left the administration of individual villages to the disarmed gentry, loosely supervised by agents of the domain government based in the castle town (Befu 1968). In the early seventeenth century, many samurai retained direct management of their fiefs, but over time the daimyo and shogunate employed accusations of misrule and abuse of the peasantry by the samurai as a justification to take rural administration into the hands of domain officials (Asao 1991; Hall 1968c, 1999[1966]: ch. 13; Ravina 1995; Brown 1993: ch. 9; Totman 1967: 133-41). The samurai became less and less masters of specific fiefs and more and more something in between a standing army and a hereditary corps of officials for the increasingly bureaucratic administration of the domains and the shogunate, receiving stipends out of tax revenue (Bolitho 1991, Hall 1968a: 45).⁹

What this achieved was an ironing out of the class of lords. By the end of the seventeenth century, the intermediate strata of regional and local lords had been effectively eliminated to be replaced by the direct rule of daimyo who, even if caught up themselves in the shogunate's control apparatus, had absolute authority over their own domains. As will be discussed below, the gentry who remained as the rural elite were not completely powerless, but they no longer had the opportunities they saw in the Warring States period to arm themselves and make strategic alliances in the conflict among local and regional lords. The daimyo could largely forgo continued political accumulation because there remained no *alternative sites* of such accumulation that could potentially come to threaten their position and thus no overlapping

8 The major exception was Satsuma, on the southwestern corner of the island of Kyushu. There, rural samurai remained the petty lords over villages or even fractions of villages, supervised by a network of small outpost forts throughout the countryside (Sakai 1968; Brown 1997). It deserves note only because its exceptional social and political structure persisted right up to the Restoration, in which Satsuma played a central role.

9 Though by no means did it proceed to the total elimination of vassal fiefs, this was the overwhelming trend, and even where fiefs remained, they were often reduced and the authority of the daimyo was increased at the expense of the vassals (e.g. Odo 1975: chs. 3, 7). Nonetheless, the retention of fiefs with considerable independence by the greatest vassals of each daimyo, including "branch" daimyo domains to the largest domains, was the rule (ibid. ch. 6).

claims to revenue from production that could drive conflict.

The cessation of warfare created the conditions for a massive expansion of population and area under cultivation, often financed by domains but also by commoners with or without official support (Yamamura 1981; Jansen 1968). In total, it is estimated that the land under cultivation in Japan increased by 82% from 1600 to 1720, thereby expanding the tax base for the shogunate and the domains (Bolitho 1991: 217). The shogunate and domains reaped the fiscal benefits of the expansion of cultivation in the seventeenth century, but evidence of the limits of lords' capacity for extracting revenue also became apparent before long. When extensive expansion stopped and increases in revenue depended on taking a greater *share* of agricultural production, lords frequently proved incapable of overcoming peasant resistance. In other words, once the area of arable land leveled off, so did tax revenues, which were chronically outstripped by the costs of infrastructural maintenance, samurai stipends and, for the domains, the requirements to maintain a household in Edo and to contribute to the shogunate's construction projects. This limitation in the capacity of the shogunate and domains to project power into rural areas was itself a side-effect of the reorganization of rule that enabled the pacification that characterized the Tokugawa era.

3. The Downside of Pacification

There were two major constraints imposed on lords by the institutional form taken by the resolution of the political instability of Warring States period. First, there was the vassal band itself. Even as its capability as a military force decayed and the domain increasingly took over for the private rule of fief-holders, the vassal band survived, taking on the various administrative and policing duties required for rule in the pacified conditions of the Tokugawa Era as officials of the domains and shogunate. There were, however, far too many vassals for the necessary

positions, and providing for their stipends was a massive fiscal drain on both the shogunate and daimyo (Bolitho 1991: 218-20; Totman 1967: 142). Nonetheless, attempts to reform domain and shogunate administration invariably stayed within the organizational bounds of the vassal bands, at most loosening the status requirements for offices or giving officials temporary boosts to raise their stipends to the appropriate level (Sippel 1994: 81-97; Totman 1967: 150, 218-9; Tsuji 1991). Yet, even as the *form* of the vassal band persisted, vassals' political leverage was sufficiently weak that they felt the brunt of domains' fiscal shortfalls in the form of "temporary loans" or reductions in stipends and fief income that became endemic from the beginning of the eighteenth century (Bolitho 1991: 225).¹⁰ In this way, they were analogous to the venal officials of Bourbon France who, even as the crown could not do without them, became a captive and much-abused source of credit for the monarchy (Ertman 1997: 98-103, 138-9).

The flipside of the persistence of the vassal band—and the second constraint—was the delegation of local governance to gentry in the countryside. In order to grasp the significance of this, it is important to note what the unification did and did *not* change about rural social and economic structure. It is often claimed that the separation of warriors and cultivators, formalized in cadastral surveys that listed only the claims of the latter, effected a shift from large-scale farming of estates to small-scale intensive farming by independent peasant families (Yamamura 1981; cf. Brown 1993: ch. 1).¹¹ In reality, however, lords implicitly acknowledged the various

10 Indeed, the incomes of even the relatively well-off enfeoffed vassals of the shogun, who never had to make "loans" or "contributions" to cover budget shortfalls, were insufficient to cover living expenses, especially the requirement to maintain rear vassals (Yamamura 1971).

11 Specifically, Hideyoshi's initiation, and model of, such surveys is pointed to as a watershed. As mentioned above, cadastral surveys were an important tool used by lords in the sixteenth century to solidify their control of territory and authority over their vassals. There is reason to doubt that Hideyoshi's calls for cadastral surveys had much force behind them independent of the strategies adopted by lords across Japan on their own initiative. Hideyoshi's edicts "nicely symbolize the trends of the time, but in many parts of Japan, these processes were well under way before his rise, and they continued without his direction or that of the [shogunate] because they were stimulated and conditioned by local needs and circumstances" (Brown 1993: 237).

relations of inequality and exploitation within the commoner population (Wakita 1991: 108). The surveys usually recognized the erstwhile local lords as the “cultivators” of their former demesnes, and even if the local lord and his household went off to the castle town, relatives could take over his personal lands (Furushima 1991: 481-2; Wakita 1975: 314-7).¹² Well into the seventeenth century, the dominant pattern remained not independent smallholding but instead the existence of one or several clusters, each centered around a large gentry estate. The gentry landowner managed the cultivation of his land by the labor of indentured or hereditary servants housed in and around the owner's homestead and of independently housed peasant families who owed labor services to the landowner (Smith 1959: chs. 1-3).¹³ The sword hunts and cadastral surveys carried out during the unification turned the lowest rung of vassals officially into peasant cultivators, but they—that is to say, the gentry—retained much of their economic and political power (Furushima 1991: 478-483).

As the samurai were pulled into the castle towns, the gentry were given official recognition by the *bakuhan* authorities as being responsible for maintaining order in the villages and ensuring that the yearly tax levy was paid. Village offices, especially the position of headman, were, if not in the hereditary control of the dominant family, then at least restricted to the heads of the “old” families, i.e. the gentry (Smith 1959: 54; Befu 1966: 32-3).¹⁴ The amount

12 Confusion arises from misreading the significance of the surveys, especially by taking too much at face value the format of the documents themselves (Brown 1997).

13 At the beginning of the Tokugawa era, typically between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ of the village population belonged to one or another of these subordinate groups, with the lower levels relatively unique to the area called the Kinai around the cities of Osaka and Kyoto (Smith 1968a: 274). Even beyond these aggregate estimates, however, the independence of smallholding peasant families, who were often branch families or emancipated servants or their descendants who had been granted small plots of land from the margins of the estate, was a continuum ranging from servants with garden plots to almost complete separation with only the occasional, largely ceremonial expectation of labor service (Smith 1959: 49; Furushima 1991: 486).

14 These offices, in addition to often being accompanied with status prerequisites such as the right to have a surname and carry swords, had real economic benefits, such as special tax-free land set aside for officials, the right to dues from the rest of the village, and, far more universally and most importantly, the power to distribute tax and labor corvee obligations among the peasants (Befu 1966: 28-32).

of the village's annual obligations to the lord was transmitted in the form of a lump sum to the village officials by the district intendants—the farthest rung of the samurai administration, often responsible for thousands or, in the case of the shogunate, tens of thousands of peasants each (Totman 1967: ch. 3; Sippel 1994: ch. 4).¹⁵ The village officials then assessed and collected the tax owed by individual peasant households and arranged for it to be delivered into the domain storehouses.

As described in the previous section, the appeal of this arrangement was that it eliminated intermediate accumulations of political capacity that could potentially break the peace of the Tokugawa era. However, the gentry who served as village officials inhabited a politically highly ambiguous position. On the one hand, they were effectively deputized by the lords to maintain order locally and ensure the payment of taxes, and their position was, under normal circumstances, defended by the lords. Individual peasants were encouraged to submit complaints about wrongdoing by village officials, but domain officials who received such complaints almost never ruled against the gentry (Befu 1966: 40-1). Moreover, village officials could in theory expect the support of the domains' and shogunate's coercive apparatus if necessary, but at best they could invite the intervention of, but never command, samurai forces (ibid. 39-40). In fact, headmen were only useful to lords insofar as they were a tool to circumvent the need to maintain active coercive control of the countryside (Smith 1959: 59). Thus, on the other hand, the day-to-day power of the village elite had to come from inside the village itself. The village community investigated misconduct and enforced punishments, which ranged from small fines through ostracization and banishment (Befu 1968: 310-2). Officials were supposed to report crimes to the

15 Like the *shōen* proprietors before them, daimyo levied an annual tax (*nengu*), which in theory was a fixed proportion of each year's harvest, augmented by special fees and a labor corvee or tax equivalent for public works.

samurai officials, but in practice they tended to shield the village from samurai scrutiny (Befu 1966: 43-4).¹⁶

After all, the entire tax-paying rural population, including the gentry, shared a strong interest in resisting lords' fiscal impositions. The cooperation of the entire village was needed to conceal increased output from more intensive cultivation or new land brought under cultivation (Ooms 1996: 236). Political protests *against fiscal policies* were frequently led by gentry officials, even as they increasingly became themselves the targets of protests by poor peasants (Befu 1966: 45; White 1995: 256-8). Thus, the interposition of the gentry as the lowest rung of domain authority in the countryside created considerable opportunities for peasant avoidance and official corruption, which from the very beginning of the era cut into lords' revenues. Although the land tax has the appearance of a grievously heavy exaction— $\frac{2}{3}$ of the annual yield was a common nominal rate, and there are no shortage of statements by officials of the shogunate and domains expressing the sentiment that the peasantry should be milked for every last surplus grain—the evidence points to the inference that in practice the authorities struggled to construct an administrative apparatus that could efficiently collect taxes at anything near this rate (Brown 1988, 1993: chs. 8-9; Sippel 1994: chs. 3-4; Smith 1968b).

These limitations began to bite into lords' budgets as the extensive growth of the seventeenth century petered out but expenses, especially those associated with lords' households in Edo, continued to grow. Serious problems first began to appear in the late seventeenth century, but especially from the mid-eighteenth century onward, attempts to resurvey the land and raise taxes met a wave of peasant unrest that simmered well into the Meiji era, ranging from peaceful

¹⁶ Befu draws this inference from the frequency of implausible protestations of ignorance by village officials when samurai officials did somehow catch wind of peasant misconduct.

delivering of petitions to massive, well-organized, violent uprisings that swept through entire domains (Burton 1978: chart of eighteenth-century uprisings p. 141, examples of organized revolts pp. 159, 161-2). “Given rising government expenses, new revenues were essential; a spate of governmental reforms during the 1720s attempted to increase and regularize revenues, but they set off a string of protests which largely negated them” (White 1988: 22). The shogunate's total tax revenue increased by 29% from the 1720s to a peak in 1744, before falling back by the end of the century to a level only 11% above its starting point (Furushima 1991: 495-7).¹⁷ Domain revenues also “level[ed] off” in the eighteenth century (ibid. 498).

The crucial point for the path-dependency generated by the institutional constraints of the *bakuhau* system is the kinds of responses adopted by lords to fiscal pressure. The first response was to attempt to increase the rate of taxation, but although in many cases this augmented revenues in the short run, lords were unable to maintain the higher rates. At this point, as lords came up against institutional constraints, it is conceivable that they could have acted to transform the institutional arrangement. Lords could have (1) streamlined their vassal bands, (2) worked to supplant the importance of the ambiguous position of gentry official, or (3) sought to grab resources at the expense of other lords. Almost all daimyo followed the first strategy to an extent by reducing their vassals' incomes through “loans,” but more ambitious schemes, such as encouraging some vassals to return to the countryside were rare and unsuccessful when attempted (Ravina 1999: 128-40). The reason for the failure of one such policy in late eighteenth Hirosaki is instructive. Recognizing it as an attempt to reduce the fiscal burden of maintaining them, vassals showed little enthusiasm for the program. Moreover, even when it tried to return

¹⁷ The efficiency of shogunal taxation had been, compared to the domains, unusually low at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

vassals to fiefs, the domain sought to strictly curtail their power over the peasantry and was sensitive to gentry complaints that the return of vassals to the countryside represented a threat to *their* prerogatives.

This points again to the salience of the position of the gentry, but attempts to undercut them were likewise few and ineffective. The shogunate never restructured the basic pattern of Edo-centered samurai officials set against gentry-led rural self-administration, even as it repeatedly shuffled the personnel of its tax collection administration (Sippel 1994: 102-8). Lords lacked the capacity to focus the incidence of new taxes on the gentry, who instead were able to push a significant share of any increased burden on poorer peasants who simply could not afford to pay any more (Ōguchi 2004: 200). Indeed, the initial attempts to increase taxation had the unintended consequence of strengthening the economic position of the rural elite, who accumulated land by lending to and eventually foreclosing on peasants who could not cover their tax obligations in hard years (Kwon 2002: 54-64). The shogunate, for instance, tried to forestall this trend by reinforcing its prohibition of the permanent alienation of land by peasants in 1721 but rescinded its decree after poor peasants actually tried to use it to reclaim foreclosed property by filing suits against headmen (*ibid.* 64-5; White 1995: 77-8). More often, domains turned to the gentry as a source of loans, frequently involuntary and rarely repaid, in return for granting them samurai status symbols, such as the right to a surname or to wear a sword (Pratt 1999: 23-6 and numerous examples *passim*).

The third option includes the hypothetical possibility that the bellicist cycle of war and state-building could have restarted. However, no domain attempted to expand its revenue through military expansion. At least in the eighteenth century, the quantitative superiority of Tokugawa resources, the demilitarization of the vassal bands and the entanglement of daimyo in

the Edo court all weighed heavily against it. On the other hand, the shogunate made occasional gestures towards consolidating its dominant position to improve its finances. The powers of the shogunate were formally absolute, and thus there were few *legal* barriers to ambitious policies by assertive shoguns or by officials with strong backing from the shogun. However, the daimyo—including the so-called “hereditary” (*fudai*) daimyo who were in theory the bulwark supporting the shogunate—had various ways to make their opposition felt and successfully won the repudiation of expansionist officials and their policies, holding the power of the shogunate in check from the latter half of the seventeenth century onwards (Bolitho 1974: ch. 5). By the 1840s, the shogunate could not even enforce orders transferring fiefs against daimyo opposition (Hauser 1974: 54-5).

What domains *did* do, with of course highly variable degrees of success, was to turn the era’s economic developments to their fiscal advantage. In the seventeenth century, a national commercial network centered on the city of Osaka grew up to transport and market, on the one hand, the domains’ tax rice to finance their residences in Edo and, on the other, the (often regionally produced) consumer goods the daimyo and samurai in Edo purchased with their income from taxes and stipends (Hanley and Yamamura 1977: 92-4; Miyamoto 2004: 74-9; Roberts 1998: 17-21). In the face of the fiscal crisis of eighteenth century, domains attempted to improve their positions in this Japan-wide commercial network, promoting their own “exports” to the concentration of demand in other castle towns and especially Edo and developing their own systems for financing and marketing to eliminate the cut taken by the Osaka merchants (Bolitho 1991: 224; Crawcour 1968: 199-201; Nakai and McClain 1991: 588-9). Taking Tosa, a mountainous territory comprising most of the southern half of the island of Shikoku, as a typical though especially successful example, the policies domains adopted involved three main

components.¹⁸ First, in response to widespread peasant protest, the domain relaxed the existing monopolistic purchasing privileges for rural paper production granted to castle town merchants (Roberts 1998: 182-4, 187-8). This served both to augment rural income, thus dampening unrest, and to promote the further expansion of an export industry. Second, the domain partnered with local merchants to offer financing and, using experts brought in from other regions, technical support to gentry who were willing to promote new cash crops or handicraft industries—in Tosa, sugar was an early and highly successful example (ibid. 189-90). Third, in addition to trading on its own account, the domain loosened restrictions on trade and instead collected taxes on imports and exports and even helped build a marketing network for Tosa products in Edo and other regions, independent of Osaka (ibid. 186-7, 190-1, 193-5). Revenue from commercial taxes came nowhere near supplanting the centrality of agricultural dues, but combined with the easing of rural economic distress enabled by increased exports and with policies to restrain domain expenditures—especially on the household in Edo and on the shogunate’s construction projects—commercial policies made the difference between a more or less balanced budget and a financial sinkhole with destabilizing political consequences.

Adopting policies like these did not require a major restructuring of domain administrations. They tended, moreover, to increase the political role and, if successful, the economic power of the gentry who produced and traded the promoted products and often administered the programs locally (Pratt 1999: 19-23). They were predicated, moreover, on the near-complete sovereignty of daimyo in their own domains. The shogunate repeatedly attempted to regulate or prohibit such policies, but despite a few instances of effective enforcement, daimyo

¹⁸ Nishikawa and Amano 2004 and Ravina 1999 survey the initiatives adopted by several other domains, following similar outlines, though of course with much variation in the particulars.

managed to continue their programs in defiance of the shogunate's orders, or else to bring down the officials who too-avidly attempted to restrict domains' commercial activities in the name of the shogunate's authority and economic interests (Bolitho 1974: 190-8, 216-21; Nishikawa and Amano 2004). The opposition of activist officials of the shogunate did not reflect an ideological opposition to commerce but instead an awareness that, as is generally the case when mercantilist policies fight over a relatively fixed market, one domain's gain was the loss of another domain or of the merchants of the shogunate's cities. This too can be seen in Tosa's promotion of sugar. As sugar exports from Tosa grew in the first decade of the nineteenth century, established sugar-exporting domains protested to the shogunate, which obliged the complaints by issuing a decree forbidding conversion of rice paddy to sugar in Tosa in the name of protecting staple rice cultivation, but by all evidence the domain simply ignored the decree (ibid. 190).

In these ways, the commercial policies that domains increasingly used to improve their fiscal positions in the latter half of the Tokugawa era *complemented* instead of *challenged* the constraints of the era's political institutions. Such policies were not a magic bullet, especially since they were in competition with one another. However, the preceding near-century of domain commercial policies formed a distributional background of resources that could be directed towards a fresh accumulation of means of coercion in the final decades of the Tokugawa era. At the very beginning of Tosa's fiscal reform program in 1787, one of the first things the domain did with the at that point relatively small amount of money it had freed up was to buy new weapons and build two warships (Roberts 1998: 100). And even before Perry's arrival, some daimyo including Tokugawa Nariaki of Mito—one of the senior branch families of the Tokugawa house, no less—began calling for official permission and encouragement by the shogunate for military reconsolidation by the domains (Bolitho 1974: 211-4). When, in the 1850s, Nariaki's renewed

calls for relaxation of the shogunate's restrictions on military naval construction were successful, the result was an arms race among domains in ships, cannon, and small arms funded in large part by the proceeds of their commercial ventures, which several domains augmented further by taking advantage of new opportunities for foreign trade (*ibid.* 226). Not all domains had successfully developed commercial policies as a fiscal strategy and so could participate in the renewed military build-up, but that is precisely the point. The domains who would come to lead the anti-Tokugawa movement, Satsuma and Chōshū, had built up cash reserves—primarily through sugar exports for the former and a domain-owned shipping company in the latter—but other domains were not so lucky and as such lacked the resource base to play prominent roles in the struggles of the 1850s and 60s (Craig 1967: 69-75; Sakata and Hall 1956: 39).

The political constraints described in this section should not be taken as showing the “weakness” let alone the “decay” of the rule of shogun and daimyo. The institutions that produced those constraints were primarily an arrangement to eliminate the endemic military conflict of the Warring States period—in other words, a truce of lords. The brilliance of the system from the perspective of the daimyo and shogun was that it granted them security both from each other and from the formally subordinate but potentially independent accumulations of coercive potential represented by their vassals. In terms of their own coercive potential, lords in the Tokugawa era were anything but “strong,” but that is because the pacification gave them cover to stop making the investments necessary to maintain military strength. The price was the institutional path-dependence that pushed against reconstructing the arrangement on which the Tokugawa-era pacification was based and instead encouraged lords to adopt fixes—reduction of vassals' income but not their elimination, forced loans from the gentry, and export-promoting policies—that fit within the existing institutional framework, even if they contradicted some of

its ideological self-representations.

Despite the limits to lords' fiscal capacity, despite the imposition of a large portion of the costs associated with those limits on the samurai vassals who supposedly sat at the top of the caste hierarchy, despite the ideologically anathema expansion of commerce and involvement of "warrior" rulers with it through commercial policies, despite the proliferation of social unrest in the latter half of the period—despite all of these things, and others that are cited in historical accounts of the shortcomings of the Tokugawa-era rule, the political system of the Tokugawa era cannot, on its own terms, be judged a failure. As I have argued here, that system was an organizational "solution" to the "problem" of the political conflict, and the associated bellicist state-building cycle, of the Warring States period. Its beneficiaries, from the beginning, were the magnate lords who successfully built their domains into small-scale states and who survived as the shogun and daimyo of the Tokugawa era. They became in effect a court aristocracy who were able, for over two centuries, to devote an immense part of their income from taxes—augmented by reducing the income of their vassals and taking out loans from commoners—to luxury consumption and competitive status displays. The political order they ruled did, in a sense, prove unable to meet the "challenge" of Western imperialism in the mid-nineteenth century, and it was replaced by a centralized imperial state that had the capacity and motivation to implement a program of industrialization and rapid military modernization. That the daimyo and shogun themselves were unable to implement this transformation perhaps could be called a failure of governance, but even if intellectuals and some pronouncements from lords made reference to the ethical duties of good rule, the principle that most lords followed most of the time in their actions was not good governance but instead the efficient extracting of income in order to live like the aristocrats they were. In the end, although the shogun and daimyo lost their political power in the

aftermath of the Restoration, they were never made to suffer for their failure of rule but instead received hefty economic compensation for their lost domains in the form of government bonds (Norman 1975: 204, 393).

CONCLUSION

So what is the state, without war? In a society characterized by a predominately agrarian economy in which resources are extracted from the producing population by directly political means, the state is an organization for the coordination and guarantee of lords' claims to resources. Warfare, indeed the entire bellicist fiscal-military-state building cycle, is a manifestation of lords' competing strategies of political accumulation. Fiscal and coercive capacity concentrate in the hands of the state to which individual lords are subordinated because such concentration is necessary for the political control of territory and subjects that is the basis of the position of every lord (Anderson 1974). To put it in less functionalist terms, states establish superiority over lords, including smaller state-like organizations of them, when the central authority is able to set itself up as indispensable to the survival of lords as lords, whether that survival is threatened by the intractability of subordinate classes, the invasion by other lords, or the overwhelming military superiority of the state itself. The first is the mechanism that promoted the solidification of French absolutism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Lachmann 1989). The power of the second is shown by the what happened when the Polish nobility failed to heed it: they were conquered by neighboring states (Anderson 1974: 288-98). The third was the path taken to rule by the Tokugawa house in Japan.

However, as inherent a part the bellicist cycle is of the political dynamics of patrimonial societies, it does not necessarily operate at all times and places. Tilly is correct that there is a

seemingly constant logic of warfare:

“[R]ulers normally tried to establish both a secure area within which they could enjoy the returns from coercion and a fortified buffer zone to protect the secure area. When the effort worked well, the buffer zone became a secure area, which encouraged the wielder of coercion to acquire a new buffer zone surrounding the old. So long as adjacent powers were pursuing the same logic, war resulted” (Tilly 1992: 184).

As he notes, however, the specifics—for instance, the scale and technological conditions—vary immensely. What is more, it is possible for this logic to be overridden. The appeal of doing so—that is to say, of rulers of adjacent territories in effect mutually agreeing to break Tilly’s “so long as” condition—is that it frees up the resources otherwise dedicated to maintaining and expanding “secure buffer zones.” This was what the military hegemony of the Tokugawa shogunate—and the various mechanisms of control it exercised over the daimyo—accomplished in Japan.

There is, however, a further constraint, for if the dominant organization of lords allows its coercive capacity to flag, it creates an opening for currently subordinate lords to accumulate their own political power at the expense of their ostensible superiors. This constraint was broken in the formative years of the Tokugawa era in Japan by the elimination of the independent power—that is to say, territorial bases and coercive capacity—of the local lords who were subordinated to the stratum of magnate lords of daimyo status. Yet, this “solution” to the “problem” of the preceding period, like all institutional achievements of state formation, was not without consequences for subsequent political developments. The concentration of hereditary bands of vassals of daimyo and the shogun in the castle towns of Tokugawa-era Japan and the consequent delegation of local administration to a disarmed class of gentry put limits on lords’ fiscal and administrative capacity in the countryside, even if it all but eliminated the danger of armed rebellion.

The upshot of this paper’s analysis of Tokugawa Japan is that in order to understand why

and with what consequences states sometimes *stop* making war and vice versa, the bellicist framework must be augmented with a theory of the political-economic environment of state formation. The theory developed here shows how the strategies of political accumulation, and hence competitive organization-building among elites, arise from the position of lords within patrimonial social-property relations. As much as the history of Japanese state-formation leading *up to* and *following* the Tokugawa era fits well with the bellicist framework, that era's two-and-a-half century break in the cycle of military build-up, fiscal consolidation, and state building requires an attention to the deeper social forces that determined that cycle. Thus, while I have focused on this single case instead of being explicitly comparative, the particular salience of the Japanese case—both its parallels with and divergences from the expectations of theories based on the European experience—has made it possible to achieve the deepening of theoretical understanding that is the goal of comparative analysis.