THE AGRARIAN HISTORY SOCIETY

The Agrarian History Society consists of four sections, which pursue research into economic theory, current economic analysis, economic history of Japan and of foreign countries. The Society organizes two conferences a year, the Spring Symposium and the Autumn Conference while other meetings are held locally. To commemorate the bicentennial of the French Revolution, it was decided that the main theme of the year should be The Changing Structure of European Societies after the Bourgeois Revolutions: From the Aspect of Role of Intermediate Social Associations.

The Spring Symposium was held at the University of Tokyo on June 24, 1989. The topic especially chosen for this meeting was Toward a New Historical Perspective: From the World of The French Revolution. Yoshihiro MATSUURA (Niho University) and Eiichi AKIMOTO (Chiba University) read the papers titled respectively The New Trend in the Historiography of the French Revolution and Theory of Comparative Social Revolutions Revisited under the co-chairmanship of Hiroyuki NINOMIYA (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) and Ken-ichi SAKAI (Tokyo University of Economics). In his appraisal of recent studies of the French Revolution, MATSUURA emphasized that these studies focused mainly on the politico-cultural aspects of the Revolution rather than on the socio-economic perspective on which previous researches concentrated. By using of the analytical tools of structuralism and symbolism, recent monographs successfully explained the difference between the intention of the participants in the events and its results.

AKIMOTO developed the theory proposed by Theda SKOCPOL. By comparing three social revolutions, French, Russian and Chinese, SKOCPOL noted the common characteristic of revolutions to breakout under the severe military rule and/or political pressures from outside. AKIMOTO stressed the importance of the autonomous role of the state which could not be explained solely by socio-economic factors.

The Autumn Conference was convened at Tohoku University on October 14 and 15, 1989. Tadami CHIZUKA (The University of Tokyo), Hisashi WATANABE (Kyoto University), and Tateshi MORI (The University of Tokyo) presided over the symposium held on the second day of the Conference. The common theme was The Changing Organizational Structure of Capitalist Society after the Bourgeois Revolutions: Focusing on the Intermediate Associations. The papers read at the Symposium included: “The Reestablishment of the Intermediate Groups in Post-Revolutionary France” by Akira HIROTA (Hosei University), Government Strategy for Organizing Industrial Relations in 19th-Century Britain by Koichi OGASAWARA (Yamagata University) and The State and Intermediate Organizations in Imperial Germany by Shuuichi YATSUBAYASHI (Senshu University).

CHIZUKA explained that the main topic was chosen in order to allow the opportunity to compare the social structure of Japan with that of modern western society. In France, for instance, people argued that the state consisted only of
individual citizens exclusive of social organizations. As a result, privileged social groups such as artizan guilds were officially banned. The Japanese society, by contrast, the traditional connection between officialdom and intermediate private organizations like trade associations has been perpetuated.

HIROTA's paper was concerned with the aspirations of the socialists and sociologists in 19th century France. Worrying about the emergence of an atomized civil society after the French Revolution, they tried to reorganize society by reviving the intermediate social groups. Frederick Le Play was among the most prominent and systematic thinkers in this social movement. He started from the sociological research of industrial workers and later widened his perspective so as to conceive communities and regions as strategic plateaux to reorganize French society. HIROTA explained, in detail, how the main framework of Le Play was constructed and how his social thought was put into practice by his followers.

The paper read by OGASAWARA criticized the established collectivist view of the industrial relations of the 19th-Century Britain and tried to put more emphasis on the liberal individualistic tradition of British Society. He insisted that the basic idea for legislation on industrial relations was that of market individualism which assumed every British subject as an independent and 'respectable' citizen. Since legislators thought that workers should be trained to become good citizens, the trade union was acknowledged as an organ for cultivation of the manner and mentality of workers. OGASAWARA concluded by saying that on the British scene industrial relations were not collectively formulated in terms of legislative control.

In marked contrast to French and English experience, modern German society retained and protected the intermediate social organizations through both legislative and private means. In the process of industrialization, cartels and other interest groups exercised strong influence over the economy with the help of bureaucracy. In his analysis of the public law on the handicraft industrial organizations (Innungen and Handwerkkammern), YATSUBAYASHI indicated the importance of the educational function of these organizations. When no vocational training school existed, handicrafts organization was the sole institution for educating young apprentices. After reviewing the changing functions of these organizations before World War I, he concluded that their efforts were successful enough to make the handicraft industries one of the most distinctive aspects of German industrial scene.

Lively discussions followed these three papers. Osamu YANAGISAWA (Tokyo Metropolitan University) asked why the social movement of handicraftsmen was unique to Germany. He also pointed out that the increasing role of intermediate pressure groups could be explained by the reform of parliamentary system and development toward monopoly capitalism. Kanji ISHII (The University of Tokyo) explained the role of intermediate social groups in modern Japanese history. AKIMOTO commented that in the United States the emergence of modern associations such as trade unions eventually caused state intervention. Akihiko YOSHIOKA (Tohoku University) stressed the importance of the capitalist organizations like Manchester Chamber of Commerce in influencing state policy.