

Japan population changes during the medieval period



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Kangi Famine

Introduction

One of the great-unexploded topics of Japan's medieval past is its population. This Research attempts to describe and explain what happens to Japan's population during epoch between 1150 and 1600, which I am calling the " Medieval" period, and through that lens, to consider related social and economic developments. Geology has always been a valuable approach to the past because it proves one way-often the only way to study the overwhelming mass of people. From a Geology perspective, I contended that although this medieval age initially maintained a century's old stasis, a far-reaching transformation commenced from about 1280 and eventually gained momentum until it's swept throughout the Japanese. Crucial to the demographic breakthrough was the resolution of two central problems facing both the rulers and the ruled: how to supply a burgeoning population with sufficient food and how to keep the peace. The remedies worked out at this time laid the groundwork for further gains after 1600.

Beginning the kangi period (1229-1232)

The Kangi famine, possibly the most lethal in Japanese history, Moreover, while the famine struck hardest over a period of four years (1229-1232), it's social, economic, and political ramifications can be measured in decades. Finally, the origins of the Kangi famine period were different from those of the Yowa, and the Kangi famine probably killed more people in eastern Honshu than in western Japan. All in all, it comprised one of the significant turning points in the Kama- Kura history, certainly ranking with the Jokyu <https://assignbuster.com/japan-population-changes-during-the-medieval-period/>

War of 1221, the Mongol Invasions of 1274 and 1281, and CioDaigo's revolt of 1331.

"The assumption of growth starting in the middle." Yokoyama Yoshikiyo (1826-1879) established the first pillar of the prewar theory in a journal article published in the year of his death. Yokoyama, a legal and literary scholar, produced population estimates for the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, as well as for the Kamakura era (1185-1333).

Another influential figure was geographer and historian Yoshida Togo (1864-1918), who inferred a population number for the late sixteenth century." In a series of lectures in 1911 on the epochal Meiji Restoration, Yoshida argued that because the amount necessary to feed one person for a year in the late 1500s averaged about one koku of rice (approximately five U. S. bushels), the population of the islands must have been equal to what he presumed was the total koku in rice, or 18.5 million. Despite many potential problems, the calculations of these two scholars and the assumptions lying behind them were remarkably long-lived, standing unchallenged for half a century and longer. Eventually, later scholars united Yokoyama and Yoshida's estimates into what I am calling "the hypothesis of continuous and sizable growth." Irene Taube, in her classic *The Population of Japan* (1958), referred favorably to Yokoyama's estimates and, using Yoshida's total for 1600, speculated that Japan's population had jumped from 4.4 million in 1100 to 18.5 million around 1600.' In 1975, William McNeill enhanced Y'okoyama's credibility by basing his thesis about the impact of foreign-borne plagues partially on the Meiji scholar's numbers for the ancient and medieval epochs/

following a hiatus of some twenty years after World War II, research into Tokugawa-period population exploded during the 1960s and 1970s.

Mortality factors

Kangi Famine

Beginning in the 1200s, it contains repeated references to heavy rains, strong winds, hail, and frost. Drought punctuated these conditions, often leading to crop failure and regional famines, but from 1225, the unpredictably wet and windy weather seems to have become more troublesome. The year 1226 was particularly bad; the rain was so hard and continuous in the sixth and seventh months that the court sent out prayers for it to stop. The summer of 1227 was similarly wet, as noted by governments in both Kyoto and Kamakura, and in my vision the twelfth month as having a cold wind beyond his expectation for winter. Once again in 1228, temple records and Hyakuren sho are filled with notations of long and heavy rains, such that the Kamo River flooded. Materials from the Tohoku (Aizu) and Kii also complain of too much moisture. Then, in the tenth month of 1228, a typhoon destroyed homes in Kamakura “beyond counting.” In 1229, most records are silent, but it seems as if a drought struck and the harvest failed, and by the third month, three different writers state that a kangji famine had set upon the land. Hojo Yasutoki, the leader of the Kamakura shogunate, pressured the wealthy to lend money and rice to the poor to keep them alive. The drought continued into the eighth month when suddenly Mirror of the East (Azuma Kagami) began noting heavy rains and wind. There is some evidence that this condition also prevailed in Kyoto

by the tenth month. Therefore, even in 1229, both governments were aware that many commoners were on the verge of starvation. Perhaps good weather and a bountiful harvest in 1230 would have succored the peasantry and righted the dual ships of state, but instead there followed the most inclement, untoward conditions yet. So in my research diary, A Record of the Bright Moon (Meigetsu ki), that it rained all night. As an afterthought, he mentioned that " Until today this year has been cool," adding that the frigid temperatures meant that he had to wear more clothing. On the seventeenth, it rained again in Kyoto. Then on the ninth of the sixth-month Mirror of the East noted a thunderstorm accompanied by strong winds, heavy rains and gusts resumed on the fourteenth in Kamakura. Rains also fell in Musashi about the same time, then on the sixteenth, officials of Makita Estate in Mino.

Relayed to the shogunate the new news that snow had fallen. The Mirror goes on to note that the sixth month had been unusually wet and cold; there were no comparable conditions recorded as far back as the reign of Emperor Suiko in the early seventh century. Fears were expressed about the harvest, and then throughout the month more descriptions of snow filtered into both Kyoto and Kamakura from Shinano, Kozuke, Mino (several times), and other provinces. At Namatsu Estate in Mino, the snow was measured at two inches, other locales in the region estimated the snowfall at three feet (sanshaku). Yasutoki must have been heartened to know that the snow was not as deep in the provinces.

Back in Kyoto, " This morning the sixteenth of the sixth month was just like autumn." Complaints about the cold, wet weather fill my research for the <https://assignbuster.com/japan-population-changes-during-the-medieval-period/>

sixth month; he repeatedly lamented his need to wear more clothing. It grew so severe that the blossoms on his Chinese scholar tree withered and fell off. Later in the month the court tried to restrict the skyrocketing price of rice to one string of cash. The seventh month correlating to late summer in the solar calendar witnessed more signs of cold, damp weather, this time in the form of frost in various provinces.

The eighth and ninth months delivered the knockout punch. I found high winds and rain on the eighth of the eighth month and a "Great rain on the second of the ninth month." Since the ninth month coincided with the harvest, which lived off his share of the yield from various estates, began to report crop failures. On the third of the ninth month, I asserted that fields along the Japan Sea littoral north of Kyoto (Hokuriku do) were damaged and destroyed "because of the cold." From a messenger, he learned that his estates in Shikoku would provide nothing for him that year.

Over 1231 people, sources are unanimous in their assessment that the famine killed several people. This summer, corpses fill the streets; there has not been a famine like this since the Jisho era (1180). Soon pestilence joined famine; once again, since no disease was specified, it is likely that the epidemic was diarrhea occurring in the last stages of starvation. Statements about hunger, pestilence, and roads littered with the dead are so typical for 1231 that they do not bear repeating. Yet the weather and agricultural conditions did not improve. In the third month, in the fourth month of (1180) those who had imbibed from a dark pool in Kamakura were all found dead.

Peasants protested to their proprietor Todaiji that while no area had escaped desolation, their estate exceeded even the worst case; since the cultivators

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had mostly starved to death or fled, they pleaded for a tax remittance. In the fifth month, rumors spread around Kyoto that mobs were breaking into the homes of the wealthy and after eating their fill, walking off with cash and rice. In the sixth month, a lengthy rain resulted in a flood in Kyoto, where corpses lined the riverbanks. Prayers to halt the downpour were to no avail.

As the famine continued, civil order broke down, with reports of robber gangs and Kyoto shrines and temples providing their security. Palanquin bearers for the highborn were too weak from hunger to do their jobs and simply collapsed while bearing their esteemed riders. Eventually, it was revealed that over the last two years all but two or three of these menials had starved to death. The deceased seemed to be beyond number, recorded casually.

There is no doubt that next year people will be hungry. Although written sources are sparser, 1232 did indeed witness a continuation of inclement weather and starvation. In the second month of 1232, Kyotoites were victims of an influenza epidemic, which they named the “barbarian sickness”; on the twenty-sixth of that month, the court issued an order prohibiting the sale of wheat seedlings for cattle or horse fodder.

The proximate cause of the Kangi famine seems to have been wet, cold weather. Most Japanese climatologists are just beginning to address the thirteenth century directly, preferring to concentrate on the Warming trends apparent in the Heian era. Recently; however, authors of local history have argued that the Kamakura era witnessed a shift from the recurrent drought of the ancient age to cold, wet conditions. The sudden fall in temperatures, it

has been argued, was the result of volcanic activity and the disappearance of giant sunspots, which meant less solar activity and a reduced amount of heat energy reaching the earth's surface. Other highly regarded medieval historians are beginning to second this opinion.”

Instructive data on volcanism and climate in East Asia are available for the epoch 1200-1699. Ice core and tree ring studies help climatologists measure the prevalence of volcanism and its attendant climatic effects, and “dust veil” and “volcanic explosion” indices serve as indicators of colder, wetter weather on the affected areas of the earth's surface. Most important, such information yields specific years when volcanism played a major role in East Asian weather, and citations from Chinese, Korean, and Japanese records corroborate the scientific data. The period 1225-1233 was apparently a time of unusual worldwide volcanic activity, affecting not only East Asia, but also North America, Scandinavia, and even north Africa.’® The so-called “Northern Hemisphere Ice-Volcanic Index” reveals several spikes around 1230. It reinforces the descriptive sources to indicate that the crop failures resulting in the Kangi famine were in significant part the result of unusually cold, damp weather that may have been induced by volcanism.

Conclusion

Japan during the age usually was a crop, fishing, grain and small amount of livestock country. In the area of age supply, the Japanese people survived shorter lives due to diseases and just a harder lifestyle. One of the most significant problems of what measure officials utilized to obtain these various volumes of grain. Clearly, there was no way of knowing for sure, especially

since all the examples come from estate lands, where foremen employed differing measures and also assuming that tax collectors made their grain measurements in Senshi to a measure originating in the late, that's why families were torn apart by trading their kids or loved ones for livestock. Widely used in Kamakura times, I computed an average yield regarding "Nara grain measures." If the average harvest were 1.23 koku per ton, then in Nara units it would have been 1.85 kokus. Since the usual yield of a Nara paddy was 1.57 koku per ton, the ratio of Nara to Kamakura yields computes to 1:1.18. Another computation also seems useful. The average rice yield 1.3 koku per ton also happens to be the average of yields for medium-grade paddies cited above. I arrived at a 1:1.24 ratio between Nara and Kamakura harvests.

The beginning of deep consciousness of one's problems often causes feelings of despair, regardless of whether the issues belong to an individual, a business, a region, or a nation. However, it is also impossible to reach inside and tap into one's inner strengths until this awareness sets in. We would hope to see an energized Japan become a force in East Asia's economic development, and also use its assets to overcome the environmental, energy, and population issues which may affect media increasingly on the region in the years ahead. Only when there are Japanese archaeological studies of the type and range performed by European historians will scholars be certain whether the idea of a "Little Ice Age" might be appropriate to Kamakura Japan. At present, however, we can only assume that the Kangi famine was indeed caused by abnormally cold, wet

weather, probably induced by the dust and gases catapulted into the stratosphere when volcanoes.

Sources

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