

What Metzger does is equate the behavior of poor peasants who are largely dependent on the produce of their land to that of large land owners who, as he correctly points out, could or did use the proceeds for more profitable ventures, and, I might add, who had enough accumulated wealth and other sources of income to live on. Although Metzger recognizes the reason why a poor peasant may sell his land (i.e., indebtedness), it is definitely not clear whether becoming a tenant was an improvement in his “economic lot” given the general onerous conditions of tenancy. It may have been the case for some peasants, but as I try to show in this study, the sale of land by poor peasants was not a matter of “free choice” or “preference” but because of their inability to hold on to their land as pressures mounted on them by money lenders as market relations intensified, especially in the case of the market for land.

As for those poor peasants who sold their land, but did not become tenants, the question is how could they have improved their “economic lot,” when a meaningful alternative source of income (e.g., regular or permanent wage labor) was lacking until the early 1940s. Another possible alternative would have been sharecropping on someone else’s land, but the income from that depended on the nature and size of the land, and the terms of the sharecropping agreement. At any rate, it is not clear how widespread was sharecropping during the Mandate, but it seems that it was a declining option as many of the larger estates were being sold to European settlers. It seems that a poor peasant given “free choice” (i.e., not pressured to sell) would “reveal his preference” for holding on to his land with