

## Part 2



# MATTERS OF THE WORLD: AN ACCOUNT OF WHAT I HAVE SEEN AND HEARD

## Buyō Inshi

### PROLOGUE

Ever since I reached the age of discretion, I have noticed that people's dealings with one another are not straightforward. Some win and others lose, some make a loss and others gain. People's desire to win and their competition for gain troubled me, and many a time I thought to find out the source of this mental disposition and to clarify where it might end.<sup>1</sup> Over the years, I have used my free time to mingle widely with people in the world. From farmers I learned about their hardships, and I reflected on profit by investigating market prices. I consciously sought to make friends with those idlers who exemplify the manners of our age, and I came to know the fickleness of their feelings. Seeing derelicts,<sup>2</sup> I

1. "Mental disposition" (*ninjō*); Buyō uses this and related terms (*kishō*, *jinki*, etc.) to refer to people's moral, mental, and spiritual orientation or mood, rooted in their *qi* (Jp. *ki*), the East Asian notion of a fundamental psychophysical endowment.

2. *Haijin*, which is translated as "derelicts" throughout, refers to those who, as a result of degenerate behavior or otherwise, are no longer able to lead a normal life.

found out what had brought them to their present condition and gave thought to their future fate. As I observed the customs of the present and compared them with the good times of the past, it became clear to me that people's dispositions have grown corrupt and their conduct negligent, that the principles of the Way have become hidden, and that the indiscriminate struggle for profit has created an extraordinary imbalance between rich and poor. As a rule, the strong and the shrewd win and the weak and the stupid are duped. Here I will give an unvarnished account of such matters, though they are unbearable to watch and insufferable to hear.

Peace has reigned for more than two hundred years, and from one generation to the next the minds of the people have grown lax, their spirits have deteriorated, their commitment to trustworthiness and uprightness has worn thin, and they concern themselves solely with extravagance and lust. To be sure, that this is an age of peace also has its advantages, and some people behave in a calm and moderate way. However, it is hardly necessary to elaborate on such advantages, and here I will record only the evil aspects of our age. There is much more that is not at all well, but some of it involves the shogunate, and I will omit all points where it might appear as if I were castigating the shogunal government. Also, I will not touch upon those evils that it would in fact be detrimental to the state's interests to correct. Vulgar matters of little importance will also be passed over, since they are limitless. I will concentrate on the larger outlines and focus especially on those below middle rank and the baseborn.

The period from the Keichō and Genna eras until the Genroku and Kyōhō years was an enlightened age of supreme peace, sincere courtesy, and warm magnanimity. After that time, however, things appear to have gone awry, and although we may well revere that age of goodness today, we are unable to recover it. Yet it is hardly satisfactory to spend one's days in resignation, abandoning all concern for the present situation, and therefore I have noted down the evils of the world wherever they have caught my eyes or reached my ears. Indeed, I have a distant hope that the world will be rectified once again. I am neither knowledgeable nor lettered. My account is bound to stray from the rules of logic, there will be mistakes in the characters I use, and my choice of words will be coarse and rustic. This work will remain the profound secret of my life; it hardly bears showing to others, nor passing down to my descendants. Therefore

I will leave it to those wiser than me to decide what should be kept and what discarded, and I will simply let my brush run to my heart's desire, without embellishment or ornamentation.

Bunka 13 [1816]

A certain retired gentleman of Musashi

