

Part 1



BUYŌ INSHI AND HIS TIMES

What kind of society was Japan in the early nineteenth century? Many have contrasted Japan's Edo period (1600–1868) to the Qing of neighboring China as an early modern era of progress, stressing that developments during that time prepared the country for its rapid rise in the world after the Meiji coup of 1868. Others have taken a negative view, portraying the period as an age of isolation and stagnation. These describe Edo Japan as a country caught in a time bubble, from which it could be saved only by a tidal wave of catch-up Westernization. One school of thought sees the Edo period as an era of peace that produced one of the world's great civilizations, while another stresses the price that was paid for that peace. The former holds Edo Japan up as a highly urbanized society, boasting unrivaled literacy rates and ruled by a relatively humane bureaucracy. The latter protests that Edo society was as feudal as it was modern, based as it was on the principle that power should be hereditary and on a rigid system of class and gender discrimination.

There is some truth in all these perspectives. In the later Edo period Japan was a country of as many as thirty-two million people (exceeding any state in Europe except Russia), of whom more than one million lived

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in the shogunal city of Edo. Only a limited portion of the country was ruled directly by the central shogunal government; much of the population came under the jurisdiction of semi-independent domains. Restrictions on geographical and social mobility and an approach to governance that favored self-administration meant that rural communities retained a high degree of autonomy. Yet at the same time, countless official channels and unofficial loopholes ensured that no village or domain remained unconnected to nationwide networks of trade, religion, and politics.

All societies, of course, are multidimensional; Edo Japan was perhaps even more so than most. It is little wonder, then, that contemporary understandings of Edo society were no less diverse than modern historical accounts. Writings analyzing, describing, and criticizing the society of the time were by no means rare. This volume contains the translation of one such work. Titled *Matters of the World: An Account of What I Have Seen and Heard* (*Seji kenbunroku*, or, in an alternative reading, *Seji kenmonroku*), it is among the Edo period's most sustained attempts to examine society critically in its entirety, from shogunal worthies at the top to outcasts of various kinds at the bottom. Both the prologue and the final chapter of this substantial work, which in the most accessible modern edition fills more than 440 pages, are dated Bunka 13 (1816). Little is known about the text's author, intended audience, or original purpose. The author's identity remains hidden behind the pseudonym Buyō Inshi, "a retired gentleman of Edo."¹ The text initially circulated only in manuscript, with parts of it published for the first time half a century after the time of writing.²

1. "Buyō" likely refers to the "yang" (yō, that is, southern) part of the province of Musashi (*bu*), where Edo was located. The same pseudonym "Buyō Inshi" had earlier been used by the obviously unrelated compiler of *Jikata ochiboshū*, a large instruction guide for rural administrators dated 1763. In its blandness, it offers no clues as to our author's identity.

2. Most modern editions go back to a manuscript kept at Kyoto University that Honjō Eijirō transcribed and published in 1926 (*Kinsei shakai keizai sōsho*, Kaizōsha) and again in 1930 (Kaizō Bunko). For the 1930 edition Honjō consulted two other manuscripts, one held at Kyoto University and the other at Tokyo University. Honjō's edition was later republished by Seiabō (1966) with further corrections and an introduction by Takigawa Masajirō that remains the most thorough discussion of this work. Both the Kaizō Bunko and the Seiabō editions were consulted by Naramoto Tatsuya, who prepared the widely available Iwanami Bunko

Buyō (as we will refer to him) reveals remarkably little about himself in the course of his lengthy account. There is no doubt that he was based in Edo and that he belonged to the warrior class. He identifies closely with the shogunate and has much less to say about the domains; this suggests that he may have been a retired shogunal retainer of some kind. On the other hand, Buyō reveals an intimate knowledge of many corners of society well beyond what one would expect of an elite samurai. In one passage, he recalls that for a while he “was able to make a little money” by means that he now regards as foul, but recently “stopped doing such improper things” and has “once again fallen into poverty” (see page 398). From such remarks and from Buyō’s interest in and knowledge of money lending, the handling of lawsuits, and Edo city life, researchers have surmised that he may well have had a connection with one of the protolawyers who unofficially assisted plaintiffs bringing suits (related mostly to debts and loans) in shogunal courts.³ Readers of *Musui’s Story*, the autobiography of another retired samurai written in the 1840s, may detect a certain resemblance to the multiple “fixers” on the margins of late Edo warrior society who populate its pages.⁴ Whatever Buyō’s background and earlier experiences, they evidently left him in a position of relative independence that allowed him to take an informed, if censorious, look at the world with some critical distance.

Buyō had the advantage over modern-day historians that he could describe Edo Japan firsthand. The reader will soon notice, however, that this does not necessarily make his account more objective, balanced, or even true. Buyō holds strong opinions about the way the world should

version that appeared in 1994. The text has been published as well in *Nihon shomin seikatsu shiryō shūsei*, vol. 8 (1969). This last edition is based on two manuscripts held in the Cabinet Repository (Naikaku Bunko), collated with a manuscript from the National Diet Library and the Kaizō Bunko text. It thus provides another lineage of texts. The present translation is based primarily on the Iwanami Bunko edition of 1994. Comparison with other editions revealed only nonsubstantive differences. One exception is that the Iwanami edition retains the censorship of the term *kōgō* (sexual intercourse) introduced in the Kaizō Bunko edition of 1930. A list of all published editions of *Seji kenbunroku*, both complete and partial, is included in the references at the end of this volume.

3. Takigawa, “Kaisetsu,” 8–12; Harada, Takeuchi, and Hirayama, *Nihon shomin*, 641–42.

4. Katsu, *Musui’s Story*.

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be and measures society against those standards. His agenda is not to produce a Balzac-like naturalist portrait of his time. The anecdotes and descriptions of social practices that he includes often show a moralistic, not to say reactionary, perspective on the social dynamics of Edo. One scholar of the period has aptly characterized *Matters of the World* as “an articulate loser’s view of the times,”⁵ and the book is unquestionably as much a work of ideology as of history. Much postwar historical research on the Edo period has endeavored to relativize such a view and offer less ideologically biased readings of the record. Thanks to this research, it has now become clear that a good deal of what Buyō describes should be taken with a grain (or lump) of salt. Nevertheless, Buyō’s sharp delineation of the social and economic contradictions of late Edo life remains compelling, as do the vivid details he provides of financial and legal doings, and academic as well as more popular studies continue to cite him widely.⁶

When read as a window on Edo thought, *Matters of the World* introduces us to a section of the period’s intellectual scene that has been largely neglected in the literature on Japan’s history of ideas. Buyō does not number among the thinkers whom specialists of the period’s intellectual history have typically singled out for analysis, such as his more “progressive” contemporaries Kaiho Seiryō (1755–1817) and Honda Toshiaki (1744–1821). Buyō’s language is far from sophisticated, and his use of Confucian, Buddhist, and Kokugaku (“nativist”) concepts is eclectic, to say the least. Buyō expresses disdain for intellectuals who do their studies “sitting at a desk” (417), and although he mentions various authors in passing, he stresses that his knowledge of the world derives from his own observations. “Over the years,” he writes, “I have used my free time to mingle widely with people in the world,” making a conscious effort to befriend people from all walks of life (35). In many ways, his views echo a broadly shared “common sense” that exerted considerable

5. Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 466.

6. Buyō has been widely quoted in English-language scholarship as well as in Japanese, beginning with Neil Skene Smith’s 1937 compilation of sources on Edo society and economy and Thomas C. Smith’s classic 1959 study of Edo village structure. See Skene Smith, “Materials,” xvi, 30; Smith, *Agrarian Origins*, 176–77. Corroboration for many of Buyō’s observations about Edo social and economic arrangements can be found in the translations of Edo court cases and shogunal records contained in Wigmore, *Law and Justice*.

influence on warrior politics in nineteenth-century Japan. As such, they offer something that more polished intellectual treatises may not: a picture of that common sense in action.

Buyō's thesis is a simple one. In 1600, after over a century of endemic warfare, Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616), whom he refers to as the Divine Lord (Shinkun), established a near-perfect society through his mastery of the military Way. Seventeenth-century Japan was, in Buyō's eyes, an era when frugal farmers supported a benevolent regime of enlightened warriors. These two classes, which together form the "foundation of the state," were bound together by a mutual sense of duty, respect, and even understanding. Over time, however, the superb order created by Ieyasu and maintained by his immediate successors gave rise to wealth. As the world filled with "splendor," merchants and "idlers" (*yūmin*) grew in number and consumed more and more of the state's resources. As a result, money took over the world, corrupting even the warriors and the farmers. The Way of duty and righteousness succumbed to the Way of greed. For every merchant or idler who grew rich, hundreds if not thousands of farmers and even warriors were thrown into poverty. As money entered into people's social relationships, natural intimacy and solidarity gave way to heartless calculation and alienation. A return to the golden age of the Divine Lord might no longer be possible, but at least it should serve as a guide to those currently in authority. To prevent the impending collapse of the realm, the number of townspeople and idlers—including nonproductive people such as popular writers, artists, and entertainers—should be reduced and the warrior class should restore its grip on the world. The key to such essential reform, Buyō argues, is to reassert the primacy of the military Way.

To understand Buyō's anger, his analyses, and his proposed solutions, we need some sense of the historical context in which *Matters of the World* was written. To that end, here we first take a closer look at the larger structures of society in mid-Edo. Then we address some of the events in the age that must have formed Buyō's worldview: the decades around 1800. Finally, we trace Buyō's major concepts and categories and sketch the intellectual landscape that informed his outlook.

SOCIETY IN MID-EDO

How was society organized in Buyō's day? Traditional theory divided the population into four classes: warriors, farmers, artisans, and merchants

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(*shinōkōshō*). Reality was more complicated. In the broadest terms, one can arrange these different segments of society into two categories: the ruling and the ruled. The former included shogunal and domainal warriors (*bushi*), the court nobility in Kyoto, and the temple clergy. The latter can be divided into farmers (*hyakushō*), townspeople (*chōnin*), and outcasts (*eta* and *hinin*); “artisans” did not constitute a social category of their own in any meaningful sense. These groups were clearly distinguished from one another, entered into different census or household registers, and subject to different laws and rules. Less easy to categorize were free vocations, such as physicians and performers of different kinds. There was also a considerable number of “unregistered persons” (*mushuku*), people who had fallen out of the register system and thus were no longer incorporated in the basic framework of social control. Buyō designed his work around a simplified version of this social hierarchy: warriors, farmers, townspeople, and idlers.

WARRIORS

Warriors of the Edo period differed fundamentally from their forebears in that, after the initial decade or so, they were not called upon to fight. Further, policies adopted by national and regional leaders in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had resulted in warriors’ being removed from their landholdings in the countryside and gathered in the castle towns that consequently sprung up throughout Japan. The largest such castle town was Edo, built both literally and metaphorically around the shogunal castle, which occupied the large area that today serves as the imperial palace. In Buyō’s time its resident was the eleventh shogun, Tokugawa Ienari (r. 1787–1837), whose reign was the longest of the fifteen Tokugawa shogun. The shogun held directly lands producing some four million *koku*;⁷ controlled the main cities, harbors, and mines; had a monopoly on minting coin; and supervised the largest markets in Osaka and Edo. A further three million *koku* of land were distributed as fiefs (*chigyōsho*) among the upper ranks of some fifty-two hundred shogunal retainers called bannermen (*hatamoto*), although almost all the holders

7. Land was measured in terms of putative yield. One *koku* corresponded to approximately five bushels (180 liters) of rice, or the amount consumed by one adult male in one year.

of these fiefs resided permanently in Edo.⁸ Bannermen filled most civil and military positions in the shogunate, except for the very highest. Below them were some seventeen thousand housemen (*gokenin*). As a rule, these men did not hold fiefs but received fixed stipends of rice; the same was true for more than half the bannermen. What distinguished housemen from bannermen in formal terms was that housemen did not have the privilege of attending an audience with the shogun; Buyō often refers to them as “below audience rank.”

Both bannermen and housemen were organized in units under a chief (*kashira*) of higher rank or placed under the supervision (*shihai*) of some office. Appointments to official duties were channeled through these chiefs and supervisors, as were disciplinary matters. Such duties, which could involve both extra income and extra costs, were far fewer than there were hopefuls: even among bannermen, less than half held administrative positions. Living on fixed stipends, payable in rice, in a large city was far from easy, and many warriors faced structural economic problems. Possible solutions included cutting costs and relinquishing the symbols of one’s status; engaging in piecework and a variety of side jobs; borrowing money; renting out one’s official accommodation and moving to cheaper lodgings; or even “selling” one’s warrior status, via the adoption of a commoner heir in exchange for money.

Warriors with fiefs of more than 10,000 *koku* were known as daimyo. In the late Edo period there were some 260 daimyo, who, taken together, held around 22.5 million *koku*, or about 75 percent of all productive land. Daimyo kept their own armies, issued their own laws, collected their own taxes, and enjoyed a large degree of autonomy in governing their domains. At the same time they were kept under close surveillance by the shogunate, which had the authority to confiscate, reduce, or increase domains; move daimyo from one location to another; and impose extraordinary obligations. Daimyo were categorized on the basis of their relationship to the shogunate. Pre-1600 hereditary vassals of the Tokugawa (*fudai*) occupied strategically situated smaller domains, many in the vicinity of the Tokugawa heartland. Daimyo drawn from this category

8. It should be kept in mind that for a fief or stipend calculated in *koku*, the figure indicated the total putative yield of the landholding, not the feudal holder’s actual income. The latter, which depended on the tax rate, was generally about one-third of the total yield.

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filled the highest posts in the shogunal administration. Major collateral branches of the Tokugawa house (*gosanke*) occupied large domains in Mito, Kii, and Owari, while other Tokugawa-related houses (*kamon*), large and small, were dispersed throughout the country. Finally, the so-called outside (*tozama*) daimyo, who had pledged fealty to the Tokugawa only after 1600, held some of the largest domains, located in more peripheral regions.⁹

In principle, only hereditary vassal daimyo held positions in the shogunal government; daimyo in the other categories were expected to concern themselves solely with the administration of their own domains. The main source of daimyo income was rice taxes and other levies on farmers in their domains. Many domains, particularly those situated in the western provinces, sent their rice to Osaka, where it was traded at the country's largest rice exchange. Compared with the shogunate, which had the option of trying to manipulate the price of silver and gold through recoinage and debasement, daimyo were more exposed to fluctuations in the price of rice. From the mid-eighteenth century onward, many larger domains developed local monopolies, stimulating the growth of industries within their lands whose products were sold in the cities by domain merchants. When facing deficits, domains "borrowed" money from their retainers by cutting stipends or from villages through special levies, printed rice bills that served as local currency, and took loans from city merchants.

All daimyo were obliged to spend part of their time in Edo, generally every other year, and to leave their heir, consort, and a support staff there permanently. Traveling back and forth between their domains and Edo and maintaining multiple Edo residences was a tremendous drain on daimyo finances. The roughly six hundred compounds kept by daimyo in Edo dominated the city landscape and added a substantial number of domainal warriors to the shogunal retainers of various ranks who resided permanently in the city.¹⁰ There were also numerous *rōnin* (masterless warriors), who, having lost or failed to secure a regular vassal position,

9. The complete picture was rather more complicated; for a map showing the situation in 1865, see Wigmore, *Law and Justice*, vol. 1, following the preface and editorial notes.

10. From the shogunate's perspective, samurai who served the daimyo and bannermen as retainers were rear vassals (*baishin*). For an account of daimyo compounds in Edo and the circumstances of those living in them, see Vaporis, *Tour of Duty*.

had to survive on their wits without a stipend from a lord. Scholars estimate that approximately half of Edo's one million inhabitants were warriors of one kind or another.

In the country as a whole, warriors numbered between 1.5 and 2 million in all, which amounted to 6 to 7 percent of the total population. In legal principle, warriors represented a hereditary class that was strictly separated from all others. The cities were divided into separate quarters for warriors and commoners. Warriors were not supposed to engage in either agriculture or trade and were expected to marry within their own class. Theoretically, they had the right to cut down obstreperous commoners at will (*kirisute*); Buyō refers to this privilege more than once and laments the fact that it is no longer practiced. As Buyō sees it, warriors should have free rein in exercising their heavenly calling to administer the affairs of the realm.

In practice, however, the dividing line between warriors and commoners was increasingly opaque. Warrior status had become almost a commodity, purchased by or bestowed upon many commoners who, in Buyō's terms, lacked "pedigree." Buyō bemoans the formally illegal use by commoners of luxury goods and status symbols that were supposedly reserved for high-ranking warriors alone. Not only did commoners impinge on warrior privileges but they also benefited from the freedom that came with nonwarrior status. Buyō was particularly disconcerted by the impunity with which commoners filed lawsuits against warriors over financial matters—and, even worse, the tendency of shogunal officials to uphold commoners' claims and force warriors to compromise and humiliate themselves. Whereas commoners were free to pursue their greed with impunity, Buyō argues, warriors carried the burden of pride and risked damaging their reputation, which constituted their essential capital. The fact that commoners could treat warriors with such contempt was a sure sign of the decline of the world, and Buyō feared that in the long run this might "come to their even bringing the warriors down" (217).

COURT NOBILITY

We can be brief regarding the imperial court, because Buyō has little to say about it. He never refers to Emperor Kōkaku (r. 1781–1817), the long-ruling imperial monarch of his time. The main functions of the court in Edo Japan were confirming the shogun's legitimacy and authority,

awarding—conditional on prior approval by the shogunate—court rank to leading warriors and titles and privileges to religious institutions, and performing ceremonies for the protection and prosperity of the state. The court maintained close ties with important temples by providing imperial and noble offspring as their heads. Such temples were known as imperial and noble cloisters (*monzeki*). The court included some 150 houses of nobility. Many of these houses specialized in specific court traditions, ranging from poetry composition and a highly ceremonial form of football to yin-yang divination, and they derived an income from performing, teaching, and certifying those arts. In addition, most held fiefs granted by the shogunate and corresponding in size to those of a mid- or lower-range bannerman.

Few of these functions met with Buyō's approval. He was not impressed by courtly arts, lamenting that even warriors and townspeople had begun to waste their time and money on them. Even more dubious were the financial dealings that court lineages engaged in. The house crests of court nobles inspired awe, and the nobility, Buyō argues, abused this asset. They lent money against exorbitant interest, or leased the right to use their crest to other lenders. The Tsuchimikado house rubber-stamped licenses of yin-yang diviners against annual fees, without educating them or supervising their activities; the Shirakawa and Yoshida houses gained an income from shrine priests in much the same way. Buyō is even more appalled by the fraudulent way in which court nobles dispensed licenses to monks; according to him, the Kajūji house, for example, systematically secured imperial edicts for a modest bribe, allowing monks to become abbots without fulfilling the official requirements. The court, then, features exclusively in a negative light, as a useless institution that gives idlers a semblance of respectability in exchange for bribes.

CLERGY

Monks and priests are a matter of special concern to Buyō. Temples were involved, if only formally, in the shogunal and domainal administration of the populace. From the 1660s onward, all sectors of the population were required to affiliate with a particular temple, and these temples were called upon to guarantee that their parishioners (*danka*) were not Christians but Buddhists. Annually, local officials compiled census lists

and had them stamped by temple priests. By various routes, census information from all domains and territories ended up in the office of the shogunal magistrates of temples and shrines. Even landless farmers and urban poor, who often led floating lives, were included in these temple registers. Sooner or later, those who fell out of this net of social supervision were likely to run into trouble.

The temples involved in this system were organized in mutually exclusive sects with strict hierarchies, from head temples in western and eastern Japan at the top to regional intermediary temples and local branch temples at the bottom. Head temples educated, certified, and appointed priests to branch temples, collected various fees from them, and stood responsible for their conduct. Buyō is less concerned with shrines than with temples, although he senses that the former were even more numerous. Most shrines were small and controlled by temples, and they had no role in the administration of the populace.

Temples typically were endowed with land. The largest temples held so-called vermilion-seal lands (*shuinchi*), land granted by the shogunate in the same manner as a warrior or noble fief and left to the temple to exploit. However, few temples had sufficient land for their needs, and most raised additional funds by various other means. Most important were funeral and memorial services for parishioners, which were more or less obligatory; others included prayer ceremonies, public displays of sacred images (*kaichō*), solicited donations, lotteries, and money lending. Although most temples were underfunded or even destitute, Buyō expresses disdain at the money flow generated by these activities. He decries the enthusiasm with which parishioner households of all classes embraced Buddhist ritual and laments the fact that many gave precedence to temples' fund-raising activities over their duties to lord and family.

Even though temples were integrated into the Tokugawa administration, many intellectuals were critical of Buddhism and of the role played by temples and priests. Buyō goes so far as to argue that faith in Buddhism is an obstacle to performing one's duties as a warrior because it replaces loyalty and courage with an overriding concern for the afterlife. Buddhist temples might be useful if they concentrated on teaching the lowly some basic self-control, but, he contends, this was not what temples did. Quite to the contrary, they acted as parasites, sucking up enormous wealth while inspiring in the faithful selfish greed and a fancy for extravagance. Even more damage was done whenever Buddhism infected warrior

leaders, as it had already in the days of the first shogun, Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199). When it was allowed to meddle with matters of the state, Buddhism would destroy the military Way and plunge the realm into chaos; this explained the dire state of Japan in the centuries before Tokugawa Ieyasu restored order.

Buyō displays a particularly aggressive distaste for priests. Not only were they idlers; they were idlers with an official status, ranks, fiefs, and a guaranteed income. In Buyō's view, giving public recognition of this sort to idlers added insult to injury.¹¹

FARMERS

In contrast, Buyō underlines the central importance to the state of the farmer class. Farmers are the foundation of the realm, together with the warriors who tax them so as to provide benevolent government. This perspective is clear from the alternative term he applies to the farmer class: *kokumin*, meaning “people who sustain the state.” Needless to say, Buyō's conception of the state as a hierarchical system of classes has little in common with the modern nation-state (*kokumin kokka*) of “equal” citizens that defined Meiji Japan. Yet his usage of the term *kokumin*, to denote productive people who form the state's foundation and thus deserve its protection, seems to point forward to that later transformation of the word.

In late Edo, Japan's countryside consisted of some sixty-three thousand villages, in which resided about twenty-five million of the overall population of approximately thirty-two million people. The majority of villages were agricultural, although a substantial minority engaged in fishing, lumbering, or other trades. Whereas all villages came under the jurisdiction of the shogun, a daimyo, a bannerman, or, in a few cases, a temple or court noble, they were managed without too much interference from such higher authorities by a farmer elite, consisting of the village officials (*mura yakunin*)—the headman (*shōya* or *nanushi*) and a small group of leaders—and a larger body of landowning farmers (*hon-byakushō*). Below these were small-scale farmers (*komae-byakushō*) and a class of landless laborers, who in the seventeenth century had typically

11. For an analysis of Buyō's views on religion, see Teeuwen, “Early Modern Secularism.”

survived as hereditary subordinates of major farmers but in the later Edo period were more likely to enter into tenancy contracts or to engage in temporary wage labor.

Villages had their own regulations, managed their own common lands, and were taxed collectively, with the allocation of the tax burden among cultivating households left to the village officials. Most substantial was the annual land tax (*nengu*), consisting nominally of 40 to 50 percent of rice and other crops (the latter mostly payable in coin); in practice, as a result of discrepancies between putative and factual productivity, actual taxes were in the range of 20 to 30 percent. Public duties and corvée works were assigned to villages, which either divided the work among locals or paid wages to others to do it; not a few of these duties were in effect additional annual levies thinly disguised as corvée. Villages also made contributions to infrastructural work on rivers and roads, as well as paying extra levies to cover projects or deficits as and when they occurred. In sum, these various taxes, corvée duties, and levies constituted a considerable burden on most villages.

These taxes and levies formed the main source of income of both the shogunate and the domains. It was therefore of overriding importance to keep farmers in their villages and to make sure that they obeyed orders from their absentee warrior lords. This function fell to the village officials, who transmitted orders from above, reported on irregularities and incidents, and, on occasion, conveyed villagers' needs to the warrior authorities. Collective responsibility was an important mechanism for keeping order in the countryside, and farmers were organized in five-household groups (*goningumi*) that were supposed to see that their fellows did not step out of line. In the early Edo period, in particular, warrior governments also set restrictions on the sale of land, the kinds of crops that could be grown, trading activities, and crossing domain boundaries.

Legal constraints of this sort could be real enough whenever fief holders saw themselves forced to intervene in village affairs. In normal times, however, many of these measures were riddled with loopholes. Selling land, or at least the right to cultivate it, was a common practice. By the late eighteenth century, much agricultural land was the private property of a farmer elite that took rents from those who actually tilled the fields and invested its capital in commercial crops such as cotton, tobacco, and vegetables, or in the production of consumption goods for sale in the cities. This undermined the ideal of a coherent village community in which

landholding farmers shared responsibility for production, taxes, corvée work, and order on a basis of relative equality. Other restrictions were equally ineffective. Villagers traveled widely, even across domain borders; many sent their sons and daughters into service in city households. Many poorer farmers abandoned their fields and drifted into towns and cities, looking for employment as day laborers, peddlers, or servants. Especially in the Kantō area, fief holders struggled to keep village populations up and fields in cultivation.

By Buyō's time, village life was a far cry from the ideal envisioned by the warrior government. For Buyō, the farmer should be a humble person who eats coarse food, dresses in rough clothing, exposes himself to the winter cold and the summer heat, tills the soil in the company of oxen and horses, obeys the fief holder's rules, performs his corvée labor, and "nurtures everyone" with his produce. Buyō laments the fact that the urban vices of calculation, extravagance, and greed had infected the countryside. As a result, a small number of rich farmers monopolized the wealth and plunged all around them into destitution. To make things worse, the evil habits that follow money's trail had made farmers wayward and stubborn in their dealings with fief holders, fostered crime and murder, and obfuscated class distinctions. On the other hand, Buyō is critical of what he saw as the oppression of farmers by greedy fief holders. He argues that fief holders should strive to reduce the numbers of destitute, or at least grant them the freedom to leave and find a livelihood somewhere else.

TOWNSPEOPLE

Edo-period Japan had three large cities: Edo, Osaka, and Kyoto. In Buyō's time, Edo was still growing at the expense of the other cities. Osaka had topped at around 500,000 inhabitants but was now declining; Kyoto had been shrinking for a longer time and had fallen below 300,000. In addition, there were some two hundred castle towns, as well as a fair number of temple, harbor, post-station, rural market, and mining towns. In total, the urban population may have reached some 3 to 4 million people—*excluding* the warrior class, which also, as noted, lived almost entirely in the towns and cities. This means that some 15 percent of Japanese were urban, a percentage higher than in most of contemporary Europe, with the exception of the Netherlands and England. Only London, Paris, and

Naples were larger than Osaka in 1800; Edo was probably more populous even than London.

The warriors, townspeople, and temples and shrines in towns and cities fell under different administrative jurisdictions and tended to be situated in physically separate districts. In Edo, almost 70 percent of the city area was taken up by daimyo compounds and warrior housing, and of what remained, half was temple land (see map 1). This left approximately half a million townspeople cramped into a very small space. Initially some 300 blocks (*chō*) were laid out for townspeople use; by Buyō's time these had increased to 1,678.¹² Shogunal officials of warrior status presided over the top echelons of each jurisdictional pyramid and adjudicated matters involving people from different jurisdictions via the Supreme Judicial Council (Hyōjōsho). In the case of Edo, the shogunal officials primarily responsible for overseeing commoner matters were the two town magistrates (*machi bugyō*). Among other things, they received lawsuits lodged by townspeople, although if the person being sued was of a different status (such as a warrior) or from a different jurisdiction, the case would be referred for ultimate decision to the Supreme Judicial Council, on which the town magistrate sat together with other warrior officials, such as the finance magistrate (*kanjō bugyō*), responsible for overseeing shogunal lands classified as rural.

Underneath this supervisory and policing apparatus, townspeople, like the farmers, largely ran their own affairs. Edo had three commoner town elders (*machi-doshiyori*) who took turns managing city matters. Below them were about 260 headmen (*nanushi*), each of whom was responsible for from two to four or, in some cases, as many as ten-plus city blocks. The headmen performed specialized tasks under the town elders as well. These positions were hereditary and came with salaries; also, fees were payable to town elders and headmen for various administrative procedures, such as the sale of house plots.¹³ In Osaka, the system was different in its details but not in its overall conception.

Blocks typically consisted of a street with facing shops, enclosed at both ends with gates that were closed at night. Although the term is often

12. Osaka, in contrast, had only a few warrior blocks around the castle to the east and a temple district to the south, leaving some 90 percent of the city for the townspeople.

13. For the Edo town administrative system, see Katō, "Governing Edo."

used more loosely, “townspeople” (*chōnin*) proper, comparable to the major landowning farmers (*hon-byakushō*) in the villages, were the house owners. Renters, many living in rows of tenements behind the houses that faced the street, constituted the main body of the city population—in Edo in Buyō’s time, approximately 70 percent.¹⁴ House owners were organized in five-household groups that played a central role in the block’s self-administration. They paid fees and levies covering the costs of city and block administration, were responsible for keeping an eye on their tenants, and assisted the headman on a rotating basis in overseeing block affairs. In contrast to farmers, however, townspeople paid no regular taxes on the fruits of their labor and were not subject to the many restrictions applied to villagers.

Trade guilds (*nakama*, *kumiai*) were another important element of urban administration. From the mid-Edo period on most branches of trade were monopolized by such organizations, in many cases with shogunal sanction. Guilds paid annual license fees to the warrior authorities or provided services in return for protection of their monopolies. The members of such guilds held shares (*kabu*), which could be transferred or sold to others only with the guild’s permission. Members shared access to the guild’s trade network, rendering business more secure.

Merchants belonging to the largest guilds were closely integrated in the daily running of warrior affairs. Much of the rice collected as taxes by western domains and some from shogunal lands was channeled through Osaka, where it was bought and sold by rice brokers and converted into money. Through shipping and wholesaling guilds a substantial amount of this rice was then sent to Edo, as were other items marketed through the Osaka exchange. The operations of Osaka merchants thus had a major impact, both direct and indirect, on the warriors’ financial circumstances.¹⁵ In Edo a comparable role was played by the rice agents (*fudasashi* or *kurayado*) who handled the disbursement of stipends to shogunal bannermen and housemen. Three times a year, warriors of this level went through such townsman agents to have their stipends, allocated in rice, converted into coin. Rice brokers and agents frequently acted as financiers to daimyo and lesser warriors, advancing loans against the security

14. This number is taken from *Ōedo happyaku yachō*. Kitō Hiroshi cites a number of “over 60 percent” (*Bunmei*, 98).

15. On Osaka’s role in the national economy, see McClain, “Space, Power.”

of incoming tax rice, sometimes for years to come. As a consequence, it was by no means rare for merchants of townsman status to manage the financial affairs of daimyo compounds, and if a storehouse agent refused to renew a loan to a daimyo at the end of the year, when bills needed to be settled, this could mean economic disaster for that domain and its retainers. Similarly, how much income an individual warrior received from his stipend depended on rice prices and the amount of deductible interest on his debts. Buyō is outraged that such important matters as the pricing of rice and supply of provisions were left to market mechanisms and argues that it would be impossible to rule the realm effectively unless such matters were brought under shogunal control.

Of course, not all townspeople wielded such power. The cities also attracted paupers and fortune seekers from the countryside and housed a large number of unregistered persons, people no longer included in one of the census registers either because they had absconded or because their families had formally expelled them as a punitive or self-protective measure. Buyō shows some sympathy for those who had been forced to flee to the city by hardships beyond their control. He sees preventing such eventualities as a test of the government's benevolence (a test that, in his eyes, the shogunate did not pass). Fortune seekers, of course, were a different story altogether. And ultimately the poor, too, were certain to be corrupted by city customs. Even those who tried to survive by honest labor soon ran into trouble with guild monopolies, fell prey to moneylenders, and were forced into crime.

In the end, Buyō has no use for city dwellers. Townspeople produced nothing and wallowed in unlimited consumption, easily becoming parasitical idlers. They were “worms” that devour the state's wealth and “fester in the flesh of the warriors and farmers” (308, 376). As followers of the “inverted Way” (*gyakudō*)—greed and calculation—they undermined the martial virtues that formed the foundation of the realm.

OUTCASTS

Unregistered people who made their way to the city soon found that even at the bottom of the heap Edo life was strictly regimented. Various groups on the periphery of mainstream society laid claim, with shogunal sanction, to exclusive begging turfs, for example. Such groups included, among others, different categories of outcasts, known as *eta* (pariahs),

hinin (“nonhumans”; translated in the following as “outcasts”), *koyamono* (hut dwellers), and similar terms.

Eta and *hinin* were denied townsman status and were physically segregated from the rest of the population, but they were by no means cut off from society; in fact, they constituted an important link in the system of social control. There were major regional differences, but in most places outcasts were organized in hierarchical structures under a designated chief (*kashira*). In Edo, chiefs carrying the hereditary name Danzaemon supervised the *eta* of the city and the surrounding provinces. The *hinin* were divided among smaller bosses, the most important of whom were called Zenshichi and Matsuemon. By the 1800s, both had fallen under Danzaemon’s authority. The prototypical trade of the *eta* was the production of leather goods from horse and cow hide, but they also acted as prison guards, executioners, and police assistants; worked at graveyards and as cleaners; and engaged in more ordinary activities such as making and selling lamp wicks and straw sandals and cultivating marginal land. *Hinin* made periodic door-to-door alms-collecting rounds, performed dances and sketches on street corners, did jobs dealing with sanitation, acted as guards, and formed a general workforce that could be ordered out by their bosses at the authorities’ request. Whereas *eta* was a hereditary status, *hinin* were not necessarily born such. By origin many were unregistered vagrants who had drifted into the city and resorted to begging on the streets. *Hinin* bosses sent out regular patrols to round up such “unofficial” beggars and often then enrolled them among their number.¹⁶

Although the large majority of *eta* and *hinin* lived in a state of abject poverty and exploitation, those at the top did not necessarily do so badly. Danzaemon received a large compound and a stipend of three thousand *koku* from the shogunate, a great deal more than the average bannerman. (His case was unique; no other *eta* or *hinin* leader enjoyed such treatment.) *Eta* monopolies on leather goods were also profitable. As semiofficial guards and watchmen, the outcast bosses were in a good position to collect bribes and kickbacks. Yet outcasts confronted many obstacles to raising their living standard even when they had the means to do so. In a famous case from 1805, a middle-ranking *hinin* was sent into exile when it became apparent that while officially living in a ghetto hut he ran a wealthy household in another part of town, complete with a garden, tea

16. Howell, *Geographies*, 30–31.

ceremony room, and large staff of servants. The scandal was such that it resulted in the arrest of many dozens, including two block headmen.¹⁷ To Buyō, rich outcasts provided another example of the age's blatant incongruity between hereditary status and real-life wealth and power.

IDLERS

Priests and various town residents were the major representatives of what Buyō sees as the inverted Way of idlers. Another problematic type was what he refers to as “troublemakers” (*akutō*), people akin to the yakuza of later times who formed gangs, promoted gambling, and engaged in extortion and other unsavory activities. Still others may have posed less of an immediate challenge to the preservation of law and order but likewise exemplified the ills Buyō attributes to idlers. Three groups that stand out in *Matters of the World* are blind moneylenders, prostitutes, and Kabuki actors.

Many blind people were organized in yet another guildlike group, called Tōdōza (the Guild of Our Way). The major occupation of guild members was playing the *biwa* (Japanese lute) and singing the medieval warrior epos *The Tale of the Heike*; others served as acupuncturists and masseurs. As with the *hinin*, the shogunate recognized the Tōdōza as having the prerogative to collect alms on a regular basis. The guild claimed ancient links with the imperial court, and members paid annual dues to a house of nobility in Kyoto (the Koga); in Edo, this proved helpful in resisting attempts by Danzaemon to incorporate the blind into his empire. Buyō cites as historical facts the origination legends that the guild developed in its struggles to maintain its independence in the mid-Edo period.¹⁸ He shows little interest in the majority of blind persons in Edo, who were either outside the guild altogether or filled its lowest echelons. His concern is with the highest ranks, who were close to warrior leaders and who secured official backing for their financial dealings.

Already in the seventeenth century, Tōdōza members began to lend funds to warriors and merchants. The income from such loans provided

17. Groemer, “Edo Outcaste Order,” 291–92.

18. On the development of these legends, which had medieval roots, see Fritsch, *Japans blinde Sänger*. On the Tōdōza's struggles with Danzaemon, see Groemer, “Guild of the Blind,” 352–55.

the blind with the means to obtain higher rank (*kan*) in the guild, and, as a charitable measure, the shogunate granted special protection in its courts to loans made from guild members' "rank funds" (*kankin*)—a term that also carried the connotation of "official funds." The shogunate exempted Tōdōza rank funds from the "edicts ordering the parties to resolve matters on their own" (*aitai sumashi rei*) it issued periodically to clear out the backlog of old debt cases clogging shogunal courts. Basically, such orders stated that the parties should handle current disputes over debts by themselves rather than rely on official adjudication and enforcement. The protection of Tōdōza rank funds from the danger of becoming subject to such an order drew nonblind lenders to try to funnel their money through them as well, even if this meant they had to pay a cut to the Tōdōza. The shogunate moved to stop such irregular practices on several occasions (e.g., in 1765 and 1815), explicitly censuring the noisy techniques of harassment that the blind sometimes adopted to shame debtors into paying. Even so, banking became the main occupation of Tōdōza members. In 1779, an investigation triggered by the flight from Edo of a shogunal retainer of considerable rank revealed that the guild's outstanding loans amounted to no less than 360,000 *ryō*, a sum corresponding to the annual income (in *koku*) of a major daimyo.¹⁹ To Buyō, the blind represent a blatant case of idlers of the most evil sort, who, like priests, enjoyed official protection. He even diagnoses blindness as a heavenly punishment for greed. The blind epitomized the inverted Way, and they certainly did not deserve a better fate than *hinin* beggars and street performers.

An even more blatant example of that evil Way was the prostitution business. Brothels of various kinds were ubiquitous in Japanese towns and cities; Edo, which had a considerable surplus of males, was no exception. The city sported the country's largest authorized red-light district (Yoshiwara), as well as scores of unauthorized but often tacitly tolerated brothel areas known as *oka-basho* (a term meaning something like "side place"). Unauthorized prostitution also took place at tea shops, restaurants, pleasure-boat inns, bathhouses, and in the street. In Buyō's time, some five thousand girls and women were confined within Yoshiwara's moat alone; unauthorized brothels housed as many again. Occasional

19. This case backfired on the lenders, with some dying in custody and others exiled, fined, or thrown out of the guild; see Groemer, "Guild of the Blind," 358.

crackdowns hardly put a dent in this business. The authorities closed more than fifty *oka-basho* in 1795, but at least thirty appear to have survived, and in the first decades of the nineteenth century new ones popped up, especially on the far side of the Sumida River. Stern action against illicit brothels was limited to short periods and tended to dissipate at Edo's boundaries. Yoshiwara burned down completely in 1800, 1812, 1816, and 1824; but the number of prostitutes continued to grow.²⁰

For Buyō, sexual misconduct was a central component of the inverted Way of money. Those he accuses of greed are also often charged with debauchery, and it is clear that for him material and sexual desire are two sides of the same coin. Yet toward those who were sold into prostitution Buyō shows unexpected sympathy. He sees them as innocent victims or even as paragons of filial piety, submitting to a life “in hell” so as to enable their impoverished parents to survive. The real villains of this trade were the brothel keepers, who lived lives of extravagance and depravity by exploiting hapless girls. On the other hand, Buyō leaves little doubt that once they had become professionals, prostitutes could never redeem themselves. He describes their transformation, mediated by a debilitating sickness, in almost metaphysical terms. Through their exposure to men's desire, prostitutes depleted the “roots” of their feelings and ceased to be human beings endowed with heavenly virtue. They became barren “beings that are no longer human” (*ninpinin*), unable to do even the simplest kind of productive work. Forcing a woman to violate her “natural chastity” in this fashion was as bad as a warrior abandoning loyalty: prostitution destroyed the very foundations on which society was built (324, 319).

Buyō also worries about sexual norms beyond prostitution. He notes that more and more men had taken up the custom of installing “kept women” (*kakoimono*) in houses around the city. Sometimes they even bought these women from their proper husbands, destroying families for the sake of private lust. Instead of keeping it a secret, Buyō observes, they bragged about it as a status symbol. All sense of discretion appeared to have been lost, and as people's taste for luxury spilled over in a general

20. According to Amy Stanley (*Selling Women*), prostitutes in both Yoshiwara and the entertainment districts enjoyed some protection by the ruling authorities because they worked under contract, their earnings going to a parent or guardian. Streetwalkers did not deserve protection because they worked for themselves.

decay of sexual morals, “the Way of men and women has become a matter of buying and selling, and sometimes even stealing” (360). As an obvious cause of this decay Buyō points to the world of entertainment: Kabuki theater, popular light novels (*gesaku*), samisen songs, puppet shows, and erotic prints (*shunga*) all conspired to promote lasciviousness and corrupt people’s sense of propriety. The only pastime that is to Buyō’s liking is sumo wrestling; yet even this admirable sport was in decline because people no longer liked something as clear-cut as a fight for victory or defeat, preferring instead “something sexy” (338).

All in all, Buyō perceives the world as a place where idlers thrive while honest warriors and farmers fall into poverty. The straight Way of martial uprightness was being undermined by its inverse, the Way of money and sex. Even warriors were presented with the choice between honest ruin and corrupt prosperity. Only the appearance of “a virtuous and able figure” who could correct the age’s “deleterious customs,” “restore the ancient style [of the Divine Lord], and establish a regime of good rule, peace, and order” could turn the tide (433). How exactly such a savior might achieve this, however, Buyō fails to clarify.

BUYŌ’S HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Buyō is quite specific about his dating of the world’s decline. As he puts it in his prologue,

The period from the Keichō and Genna eras [1596–1624] until the Genroku and Kyōhō years [1688–1736] 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. (36)

What above all led Buyō to point to the early eighteenth century as a watershed was his belief that from this time, warrior government had become inextricably caught up in an increasingly commercialized economy. Fundamental to his perspective was his acceptance—widely shared by Edo-period thinkers and policy makers—of three related premises of classical Chinese political thought. One was the assumption that as the state was built on agriculture, its prosperity depended on its ability to realize the ideal pithily expressed in the *Book of Rites* as “no abandoned

fields, no idlers.”²¹ The second was the identification of excessive consumption as the root cause of impoverishment: “Let the producers be many and the consumers few. Let there be activity in the production, and economy in the expenditure. Then the wealth will always be sufficient.”²² The third was the conviction that, as Mencius put it,

If the people have a steady livelihood, they will have a steady heart; if they have not a steady livelihood, they have not a steady heart. And if they have not a steady heart, there is nothing they will not do in the way of self-abandonment, moral deflection, depravity, and wild license.²³

Buyō refers repeatedly to this notion, which in his eyes fit exactly the circumstances he saw around him: farmers and warriors should in principle belong to the category of people with a “steady livelihood,” while townspeople and idlers fell by definition outside it.

Buyō does not conceptualize economy, politics, morality, and nature as separate domains, each with its own dynamics; for him, they are all subsumed in a single “Way of Heaven” that is inextricably tied to moral practice in human society. He does not look for ways to promote progress or growth; rather, he yearns for the state of equilibrium that, he imagines, existed in the past. Blaming excessive commerce for the increasing disparity between rich and poor, he disapproves of the ever more pervasive circulation (*yūzū*) of money, which, he believes, had spread the evil habit of calculation (*rikan*), a mode of behavior that was antithetical to loyalty, sincerity, and all other virtues. If commerce meant more circulation and calculation, it would only worsen the imbalance between rich and poor, corrupt social morals, and undermine the warrior control on which the social order depended.

Looking at the first two hundred years of Tokugawa rule from this perspective, Buyō sees the “splendor” that resulted from the orderly and peaceful environment established by the Tokugawa founders as having given rise to a proliferation of “evil customs” that had thrown the world out of kilter. Until the Genroku-Kyōhō years, even the lowliest had had

21. *Book of Rites (Liji)*, chap. 5, “Royal Regulations.”

22. *The Great Learning* 10:19; Legge, *Chinese Classics*, 1:379.

23. Mencius 3.A.3; Legge, *Chinese Classics*, 2:239–40; the translation has been modified slightly.

a sense of moral obligation, but from this time on, greed, extravagance, and deceit had taken hold and corrupted society. Beginning in the reign of the fifth Tokugawa shogun, Tsunayoshi (r. 1680–1709), the wealth accumulating in the hands of townspeople had caused all others to become ever more impoverished, while under the eighth shogun, Yoshimune (r. 1716–1745), the government itself had come to adopt a mercantile outlook. It was in the Kyōhō period that the shogunate began to offer loans from government coffers (a practice that Buyō likens to the government engaging in usury), recognized the monopolies of the rice agents, and—in a reversal of previous policy—began to encourage the formation of closed merchant guilds, guaranteeing their monopolies against the payment of annual fees. As Buyō sums up the situation, “On the occasion of the Kyōhō reforms, the shogunate openly decided things on the basis of the calculation of profit” (393).

Buyō thus does not subscribe to the characterization, still found in some history textbooks and general historical studies, of the Kyōhō period (1716–1735) as marking the first great effort at restoration in an alternation of eras of “rout and rally.” Such a view, now widely criticized as an overstatement, structures Edo history as a succession of waves of excessive consumption, commercialization, and corruption (rouths), followed by reforms that restored feudal order through strict sumptuary laws, attempts to strengthen agriculture and reduce commerce, and anti-corruption measures (rallies). Buyō presents Yoshimune as a promoter rather than an enemy of commerce. All in all, Buyō sees the Kyōhō years as a time when, although there was still a degree of decency in the world, the Way of profit was rapidly gaining ascendancy.

Buyō takes a similar view of what has traditionally been regarded as the second great rally, the Kansei reforms of 1787–1793, which were enacted during his lifetime. Led by the senior councilor Matsudaira Sadanobu (1759–1829), Yoshimune’s grandson, the Kansei reforms were carried out in the wake of a series of disasters in the preceding decade. Bad weather caused a sustained series of crop failures, exacerbated by a catastrophic volcanic eruption of Mount Asama in 1783. Hundreds of thousands died of malnutrition or starvation, rice prices exploded, and refugees from northern Japan flooded into Edo. In 1787 three days of rioting shook the city, with mobs plundering and destroying up to one thousand rice-dealer shops and pawnshops; Buyō must have lived through this time of turmoil as a young man. In response, Sadanobu sought to strengthen

shogunal control over “gold and grains,” to stabilize rice prices, and to bring down the prices of other commodities. To increase rice production, farmers who had fled their villages for Edo were encouraged to return. Sadanobu also took measures against the rice agents and other brokers who had invited the wrath of both commoners and retainers in Edo. The agents were ordered to cancel long-standing debts owed by bannermen and housemen and were forced to reduce the interest rates of more recent loans. Together with these economic measures, Sadanobu launched an attempt to improve public morals, because, like Buyō, he saw moral corruption as the root cause of the crisis. New sumptuary laws aimed at reducing consumption and clarifying class differences. There was a clampdown on “decadence,” including illegal brothels, mixed bathing, popular prints, and novels of an “immoral” nature.

Such policies might be expected to meet with Buyō’s approval, and indeed he praises Sadanobu’s establishment of granaries as a buffer against famine as an example of “benevolent governance”—although he also adds that “the fact that things cannot be managed without such a policy is a sign that the world is coming closer to the end” (306). On the other hand, Sadanobu also pursued further the accommodation with the commercial economy that Buyō decries as a negative legacy of the Kyōhō period. The Kansei reforms utilized the financial power of a select group of Edo financiers, and public funds were loaned to rural investors, who were ordered to use the proceeds for measures to support destitute farmers and return abandoned fields to cultivation. The shogunate expanded the policy of trying to regulate supply and pricing through the formation of closed guilds. Both in cities and villages, the shogunate depended on the investment skills of designated merchants to finance measures intended to underwrite a warrior-led rice economy. As a consequence, in Buyō’s eyes, the reforms failed to bring about any real improvement. His general assessment can be gleaned from a passage where he ridicules the shogunate’s attempt to ban extravagance in Edo’s theaters:

Ever since the Kansei reforms, there have been so-called clothing inspections, with officials occasionally coming to make an examination. On that single day the actors deliberately wear old and plain clothing to pass the inspection. Because the actors have to wear ugly rags when the officials come to inspect their clothing and the officials get in the way of the performance, the latter just peer in for a little while and leave almost

immediately. When they come to see the spectacle for their private enjoyment, they bring along their wives and concubines or entertainers and see it through to the end. What was supposed to be an inspection by the public authorities ends up being nothing of the kind, and the actors are left free to indulge in their usual splendor. (332)

If anything, the measures adopted in the Kansei years contributed, Buyō holds, to a tendency for warrior authorities to become more “weak-kneed.” The reforms “did no more than stress ordinary proper manners” and in that way ended up aggravating the imbalance between rich and poor (417). It is by no means certain what Buyō means by the term “manners” (*sejō no gyōgi*) here, but other passages make it clear that he had serious doubts regarding what he saw as the age’s stress on protocol and propriety, based on a predilection for Confucianism. Rather than as proof of order, he takes the imposition of Confucian rites on warriors to be harmful to Ieyasu’s true legacy. Although the government had managed to gain control over the rioters in 1787, he was not at all convinced that this would still be possible in his own time.

THE BUNKA YEARS

Buyō finished *Matters of the World* in Bunka 13 (1816). By this time, the shogunate was facing a quite different range of problems from the Kansei years. A long spell of largely favorable weather produced bountiful harvests, which sent rice prices down. The prices of other goods did not decrease proportionately, leaving both individual warriors on stipends and the shogunate as a whole with growing deficits. To resolve this problem the shogunate continued the policy of trying to concentrate trade in the hands of merchants’ guilds. In the same decades, however, emerging rural producers who linked up with nonguild traders succeeded in opening new channels into Edo’s markets, frustrating shogunal attempts to gain control over pricing. The shogunate then resorted to increased lending of public funds against interest, new sumptuary legislation, and, in 1818, the minting of new coins and the debasing of others.

The Kantō area was particularly vulnerable to the economic changes of these decades.²⁴ The countryside around Edo had remained relatively

24. Howell, “Hard Times.”

backward for multiple reasons. It was fragmented among countless small fiefs (including the holdings of thousands of bannermen), it suffered badly in the 1780s, and it profited relatively little from proximity to Edo because the bulk of goods consumed in the city was shipped in from Osaka. The latter situation began to change in the early nineteenth century, when the region developed its own Edo-linked networks of production and trade. Well-to-do villagers took part in and benefited from these developments, but commercial growth had an adverse effect on the traditional village structure and agriculture. The farming population shrank, and taxable harvests dwindled away. As noted, Buyō makes frequent mention of floating groups of troublemakers and unregistered persons; these groups included many people who had abandoned their villages and agriculture, and they emerged in part because of the vacuum of authority characteristic of the region. Administrative fragmentation made it difficult to deal with any of these problems. By 1827, the situation had grown so serious that the shogunate created a range of new administrative policies, regulations, and offices (the so-called Bunsei reforms) to restore order in the Kantō countryside.

When Buyō was writing *Matters of the World*, many of the problems specific to the Kantō were already apparent. Buyō's horizon was limited largely to the city of Edo and its surrounding provinces, and his analyses project the problems of the Kantō on Japan as a whole. His sense of crisis over the powerlessness of warrior authorities in the face of falling rice taxes, rising prices, extravagant and guileful farmers, and increasing numbers of "floaters" is best read as a reflection of realities on the ground in the Kantō area in the first two decades of the nineteenth century.

INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES

Matters of the World falls into a category of works known loosely as "discussions of government and society" (*seidōron*). Buyō states that he is not learned and, as mentioned, takes conventional scholars to task for being overly attached to abstract theory of one sort or another. Nevertheless, he also indicates a familiarity with the central works of such scholars, from Kumazawa Banzan's (1619–1691) *Daigaku wakumon* (*Questions and Answers Regarding The Great Learning*) to Ogyū Soraï's (1666–1728) *Seidan* (*A Discourse on Government*) and *Taiheisaku* (*A Policy for Great Peace*) and Motoori Norinaga's (1730–1801) *Hihon tamakushige* (*The Jeweled*

Comb Box: A Private Memorial). Echoes of these writers' observations on contemporary ills can easily be detected in *Matters of the World*. Buyō, for instance, criticizes Ogyū Sorai for focusing excessively on forms of social propriety (*kaku*), but he also reprises Sorai's concern about the vacuum of authority in the Edo hinterland and praises his diagnosis of the problematic consequences of the accumulation of wealth in the hands of townspeople: "Considered from the present state of affairs, [Sorai] indeed hit the mark. On many other points also things are just as he said" (393).

Despite such parallels, *Matters of the World* differs in a number of regards from other well-known Edo-period discussions of government and society. Above all, whereas other authors set out often elaborate proposals for rectifying the problems they identify, Buyō makes virtually no specific policy recommendations.²⁵ His idiosyncratic modification of a term central to Sorai's discourse, *seido*, meaning "regulative institution" or "system," encapsulates the difference. Holding that the lack of appropriate *seido* was the root cause of the problems of the time, Sorai called for the adoption of a wide range of new institutional arrangements. Buyō, by contrast, frequently uses the term *seido* as a verb, meaning something akin to "control" or "clamp down." Seeing the recommendations of Sorai and other scholars as overly abstract and visionary, Buyō argues that to correct the current sorry state of affairs and restore a truly benevolent regime, what was essential was to implement "the military Way" (*budō*):²⁶

The Way of benevolence is to bring benefit to others without harming oneself. To benefit those below without diminishing those above can be called benevolent government. This is the benevolence of the great Way. This great Way cannot readily be established without the military Way. (417)

What does Buyō mean by the "military Way"? He contrasts it to Confucianism, noting that warriors were unable to act effectively and easily fell victim to the machinations of townspeople, idlers, and farmers "because the shogunate has sidelined the military Way and placed the

25. At various points in his narrative Buyō notes cryptically that he has a plan that he will set out "elsewhere." If he did so, though, it is not known to us today.

26. *Budō* is the usual term; *bushidō* (Way of the warrior) occurs once (see page 72).

circumspect ways of Confucianism at the center” (73). He does not, however, define the military Way in concrete terms. One clue to his understanding of it comes from the character of a work that he sets apart from “scholarly” discussions of government and society and praises as coming “very close to hitting the mark on this great Way”: *Honsaroku* (*The Records of Lord Honda*), attributed traditionally to one of Ieyasu’s advisers, Honda Masanobu (1538–1616). As Buyō puts it, “Masanobu may have been unlearned, but since he was accomplished in the military Way, the Confucian scholars mentioned above could in no way match him” (417). Unlike the other works Buyō mentions, *Honsaroku* does not prescribe specific measures. Rather, it offers the ruler more general, no-nonsense advice—advice that corresponds quite closely to Buyō’s own view. Rulers should keep a distance from Buddhist priests, townspeople, and idlers. They should choose advisers carefully, keeping on guard against people likely to prove sycophantic, self-serving, or unreliable and seeking those who would unswervingly take the steps necessary to ensure the ruler’s welfare and that of his regime. They should deal with farmers and agricultural resources in such a way as “to see that farmers are left with neither an excess of wealth nor an insufficiency.”²⁷

Buyō often prefers a telling anecdote to a theoretical argument. It is just such an anecdote, about Ieyasu and his trusted adviser Itakura Katsushige (1545–1624), that provides perhaps the best clue as to how Buyō imagined the military Way should be practiced:

When the Divine Lord traveled to Kyoto in the Keichō years, he was received by the Kyoto governor, Lord Itakura Katsushige, who had an audience with him at the Awata entrance to the city. The Divine Lord asked him, “Now you have been governor for three years. How many criminals have you had executed?” Lord Itakura replied, “Three criminals have been condemned to death and executed.” “Three people in three years is a lot,” the Divine Lord said, and next he enquired whether everything was all right at the court. Lord Itakura’s reply, that there had been just three executions, was a lie. In reality, the number of executions was several score, and “three” was nowhere near the truth. Lord Itakura’s lying in this manner was an expression of his loyalty to the Divine Lord. A number of low-ranking Kyoto townspeople [known for

27. *Honsaroku*, 289.

being assertive toward their governors] were present when the Divine Lord asked this question. When they heard his exchange with Lord Itakura, they thought, “His Majesty is a merciful person indeed to imply that even a mere three executions in three years is too much. And how gracious of him to ask about this even before he enquires about the court itself. In contrast, Lord Itakura is truly callous to say that he has had only three persons executed, while in fact he has killed scores. He is a man one should be wary of!” Due to their fear of Lord Itakura, the city was peaceful and orderly. The loyalty of people of that age was of a different caliber. (419–420)

Through this tale from shogunal lore, Buyō offers a model for the balancing of military and civil means, for the intelligent loyalty that the shogunate should inspire in its retainers, and for the attitude that government leaders should take toward the populace.

Such references suggest that, for Buyō, the military Way meant a capacity to gauge the situation from a broad perspective and act in a tough-minded and decisive manner. It also meant a readiness to employ force when necessary. The current age, in his eyes, was one of virtual “war,” in which people preyed on others without any restraint; soon, he feared, matters would deteriorate into an “actual clash of weapons and a renewed age of upheaval.” Since the ultimate cause of the crisis at hand was unlimited consumption by townspeople and idlers, the only real solution was to reduce their numbers. To do so, a bold “attack” (*kōgeki*) was needed; and “unless one uses the force of the military Way, it will be difficult to carry out such an attack” (401, 407).

BUYŌ IN HISTORY

An outright military attack on townspeople and idlers was, of course, not a realistic option for shogunal policy makers. Many of Buyō’s arguments resonate, however, with the thinking behind a string of measures that the shogunate would adopt three decades later. In the Tenpō reforms of 1841–1843, it tried forcibly to dissolve merchant guilds and monopolies, return people who had gathered in Edo to the countryside, and sharply reduce the place of theaters, brothels, and popular entertainments in Edo life. The results were highly mixed; the dissolution of guilds, in particular, disrupted economic life and long-standing administrative mechanisms.

That the reformers were prepared to push such measures suggests that they looked at the situation from a perspective not so different from Buyō's. Similarly, the hostility Buyō shows toward the Buddhist priesthood as greedy and corrupt was widely shared and anticipates the anti-Buddhist measures adopted in the last decades of the Edo period and following the Meiji Restoration.

If in these ways Buyō's views may be taken to illustrate a quite general samurai "common sense," it is also revealing that he pays little attention to new ideas that by 1816 must have been readily accessible to an avid observer like him. Notably, he demonstrates no interest in the place of the imperial court in Japanese life, an issue that was attracting increasing attention from a range of thinkers. Buyō represents a worldview that placed the Tokugawa shogunate squarely in the center. He never refers to the shogun as the emperor's deputy, a notion that gained currency from the late eighteenth century onward; for him, the "present reign" began with Ieyasu's pacification of the realm. The Tokugawa regime was legitimated not by imperial commission but by the Way of Heaven, which had responded to Ieyasu's benevolence and mastery of the military Way by giving him the realm. Buyō's frequent allusions to the Way of Heaven (*tendō*, *tentō*) hark back to a discourse with roots in the seventeenth century—*Honsaroku* is an important exemplar of the genre—in which the Way of Heaven appears as the "lord of Heaven and Earth," a semipersonalized, ultimate source of authority that rewards the worthy and punishes those who ignore its commandments.²⁸ In Buyō's view, the military Way and the Way of Heaven are two sides of the same coin. The Way of Heaven would back those who, like Ieyasu, employed the military Way appropriately, and without such use of the military Way it would be impossible to secure the Way of Heaven's lasting support.

Together with his focus on the shogunate and disdain for the imperial court, Buyō keeps a distance from matters that animated a number of contemporary thinkers, including the growing Kokugaku movement, such as the nature of Japanese antiquity as an age of divine perfection and the character of the Japanese polity compared with that of other countries. He titles one chapter "On Japan Being Called a Divine Land" and, in an apparent nod to Kokugaku concerns, begins it with the statement

28. For more on this notion in Buyō, and also the significant differences with seventeenth-century *tendō* discourse, see Teeuwen, "Way of Heaven."

“I have heard it said that Japan is a Divine Land and that in ancient times the feelings of its people were clear and bright, without duplicity and never obscured by a single cloud or wisp of mist. Those times are thus called the Age of the Gods” (381). In what follows, however, he finds no use for that divine age, the imperial ancestor and sun goddess Amaterasu, or any other of the ancient deities.²⁹ Neither does he show an interest in the theories of warrior-scholars who trace Japan’s martial essence back to the islands’ formation from the brine that dripped from the creator deity Izanagi’s spear in that same “Age of the Gods.”³⁰

Buyō also fails to touch on another issue that was already looming in the writings of some of his contemporaries: the potential danger of Western economic and territorial ambitions. Russian military action in the north in 1806 and 1807 and the appearance of a British warship in Nagasaki in 1808 caused a minor panic even in Edo, and the Western threat became a topic of some debate. For Buyō, however, Japan remained a closed system, unaffected by what might be going on in the rest of the world.

Buyō’s lack of concern for matters such as those in the preceding suggests the need for a degree of caution in estimating their weight in the general discourse of the day. Preoccupied with identifying the seeds of the ideas on which the Meiji state was founded, historiography of Edo-period thought has tended to focus on thinkers who sanctified the imperial line or who saw beyond “feudal” understandings of class and the economy. In English, the 2005 revised edition of *Sources of Japanese Tradition* is a good illustration of this tendency: it introduces imperial loyalists, untraditional economic thinkers, critics of the class system, and “forerunners of the Restoration.”³¹ To the student who has read this selection of sources, Buyō might appear as an anachronism, an eccentric relic out of tune with his own time. We argue that he was not. The modern reader may query Buyō’s proposed response to the contradictions of Edo economy and society

29. Pilgrimages to Ise, where Amaterasu is enshrined, figure primarily as regrettable occasions for wasting money (see pages 258, 334) or committing crimes (323), although Ise itself is associated with laudable frugality, in contrast to the extravagance of Buddhist temples (160).

30. For this discourse on Japan as a “martial land” (*bukoku*), see Maeda, *Heigaku*.

31. De Bary, Gluck, and Tiedemann, *Sources*.

but cannot but admire the acuteness with which he observed them. Beyond that, the interest that others took in his indictment of the ills of the day reminds us of the danger of reading history backward, in the light of later events. *Matters of the World* seems to have secured a substantial audience by the end of the Edo period. An undated printed version of the first two chapters appeared late in the period, and a manuscript copy of the first chapter with reading notes attributed to the daimyo Tokugawa Nariaki (1800–1860), who was a major presence on the national political scene in the 1840s and 1850s, exists in the former archives of the Mito domain.³² Surely the thinkers who did make it into *Sources* should be situated in an intellectual context that continued to find much of Buyō's worldview congenial.

32. Aoki, "Seji kenbunroku no sekai," 34.

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