JAMES L. McCLAIN

MODERN HISTORY

Japan

PART I

Traditional Japan

CHAPTER 2

Cities, Commerce, and Lifestyles

About the time that Tokugawa Ieyasu became the shogun of Japan, the Mitsui family decided to pack away its swords and become merchants. For several generations, heads of the Mitsui house faithfully had served the Sasaki daimyo of Ōmi Province, and by the middle of the sixteenth century Mitsui Takayasu, also known by his honorary title of Lord of Echigo, was ensconced in a branch castle near Lake Biwa. When Oda Nobunaga launched his campaign to consolidate control over central Japan in the late 1560s, he obliterated the Sasaki family, and Takayasu beat a quick retreat to the small marketing center of Matsusaka in Ise Province. From that location, Sokubei, Takayasu's son and successor to the family headship, watched the House of Tokugawa rise to a position of military dominance. Sensibly, according to an official family history compiled long after the fact, Sokubei soon concluded that an era of lasting peace was about to settle over Japan, and he further reasoned that the Mitsui family would enjoy a brighter future as shopkeepers than as warriors. Scraping together the necessary capital, he opened a brewery, which he named Echigo Dono no Sakaya (The Lord of Echigo's Sake Shop).

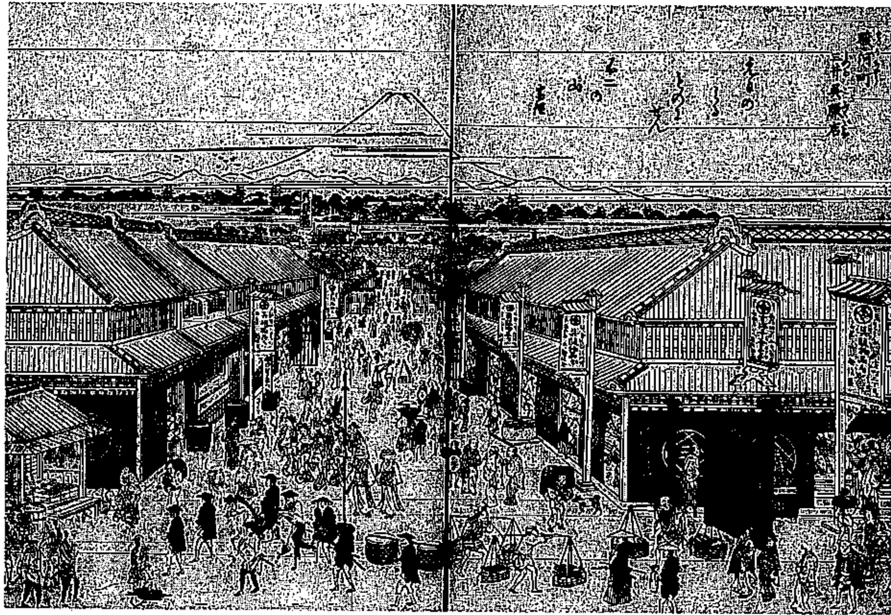
Sokubei's timing was providential, for the sake business brought in enough for the young man to marry and begin to raise a family. He was even more fortunate to take as his wife the young Shuhō, the daughter of a fellow merchant. Wed when she was just twelve years old, Shuhō eventually bore Sokubei a dozen children and still found time to contribute to

the family's business success. With an eye to earning more than just an income from brewing, Shuhō persuaded her husband to use some of their savings to open a combination pawnshop-moneylending business. The profits from that endeavor quickly overshadowed the proceeds from the Lord of Echigo's Sake Shop, and the Mitsui family became one of the leading merchant houses in Ise Province.

After Sokubei died in 1633, Shuhō sent her eldest son to Edo with enough capital to open a branch shop. Two years later she dispatched her youngest son, Takatoshi, to assist him, and not long thereafter Takatoshi took over the Edo operations from his older sibling. An adroit businessperson, Takatoshi also became a rice broker and turned the profits from the various Mitsui enterprises into a sizable sum before deciding in 1673 to open a draper's shop in Edo, which he named the Echigoya (The Echigo Shop). At first, this was a small operation, employing a dozen or so clerks who took samples of fine silks to the residences of well-to-do samurai, negotiated a price that varied according to the depth of the customer's purse, and accepted orders on credit.

When a fire destroyed his shop in 1673, Takatoshi reopened the Echigoya at Nihonbashi, where its direct descendant, the main Mitsukoshi Department Store, stands today. There Takatoshi revolutionized retailing practices when he hung out the famous signboard, still preserved in the Mitsui Museum, announcing GENKIN, KAKENE NASHI ("Cash Only, Fixed Prices"). That is, the Echigoya began to carry a line of textiles that ordinary merchant and artisan families, as well as wealthy samurai, could afford, and Takatoshi expected customers to come directly to his store, where they paid cash for goods whose prices were openly advertised and marked the same for everyone. As sales expanded dramatically, Takatoshi spread the Echigoya's fame by lending customers oiled-paper umbrellas on rainy days, each gaily emblazoned with the store's trademark, and by befriending playwrights and poets who furthered enhanced Mitsui's public image in their writings. By 1700 the Echigoya had become Japan's largest store, and Takatoshi had opened branches in Kyoto and Osaka.

The Mitsui were not typical merchants; few others could match their successes, and not many family histories accorded their women as many accolades as Shuhō received. Nonetheless, Sokubei was only one of thousands of warriors who chose to become merchants at the beginning of the early modern era, and it was not uncommon for a wife and mother to share the responsibility of running a family business, even though the husband and father stood as the official household head. Together with the Mitsui household, many of those families participated in the three great revolutions that



The Echigoya at Nihonbashi in the early nineteenth century

swept across Japan during the early modern era. A country of villages and largely self-sufficient farm families when Ieyasu received his appointment as shogun, Japan within a century became highly urbanized, and countless children of farmers, as well as the offspring of former samurai, moved into the emerging cities in search of better lives as merchants and artisans. There, as they struggled to provide for themselves and hoped even to prosper, they created a commercial economy, as exemplified by the appearance of dry goods emporiums such as the Echigoya. In turn, vast numbers of families across the entire country enjoyed substantially improved standards of living—better housing, food, and clothing—as that urban-centered economy gathered momentum and brought a diverse range of new goods to market.

An Urban Revolution

The appearance of dozens of castle towns at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries ignited an urban revolution in Japan. As daimyo consolidated their grasp over increasingly larger domains during those decades, they began to construct enormous moat and tower fortresses in the fashion of Fushimi Castle to serve as their military and administrative headquarters. In general, the regional lords located their new citadels at strategic points where they could dominate the surrounding agricultural villages that provided them with tax revenues and necessary foodstuffs. Almost immediately, new communities began to sprout up around the castles as the daimyo required their samurai to build residences near the massive stone ramparts and as prospective merchants and artisans migrated to the emerging towns to make their livings by supplying the warrior estate with a variety of everyday goods and services.

With dramatic suddenness, Japan became a remarkably urban country. In the brief span of years between 1580 and 1610, nearly half of today's largest cities came into existence as castle towns—from Sendai and Fukushima in the north, to Kanazawa, Kōfu, Shizuoka, and Nagoya in central Japan, and on to Hiroshima, Okayama, Kōchi, and Kumamoto in the south and west. The sizes of the castle towns were as impressive as their numbers. Generally, about 10 percent of all people living within a particular domain eventually congregated in the new communities. In all, approximately 140 castle towns had populations of at least 5,000 persons, and the giants Kanazawa and Nagoya topped the 100,000 mark.

The layout of the castle towns followed a common logic that adhered closely to the needs of the daimyo and their samurai retainers. In principle, each overlord situated his castle at a militarily defensible point, such as along the ocean's shore, as at Kagoshima, or on a rise of land between two rivers, as at Kanazawa and Hiroshima. The lord and his family lived inside the central enceinte, safely sheltered by the soaring walls and a concentric network of moats and canals. The daimyo settled his major retainers on estates adjacent to the castle. That was a location of considerable prestige and security, and convenience as well since those higher-ranking samurai increasingly spent their working hours in administrative offices inside the castle ramparts. Next came a belt of residential quarters for merchants and artisans, who made up 50 percent or so of the population in most castle towns. The families of foot soldiers and other low-ranking samurai lived farther away, in an outer ring of barracks-style apartments. Finally, most daimyo instructed Buddhist sects to locate their temples at strategic approaches along the perimeter of the city. The daimyo could garrison the expansive halls of worship in case of attack, and the graveyards created open spaces that an advancing army could cross only at risk.

Kyoto, Osaka, and Edo—three national cities administered directly by the shogunate—hovered above the network of regional castle towns. A city

of sovereignty, nobility, and cultural achievement for hundreds of years, Kyoto added a commercial dimension to its silhouette during the early modern era as daimyo, upper-level samurai, and other people of means began to prize the luxury handicrafts produced by its artisans. A population register dated 1685 reflects the diversity and richness of Kyoto's inhabitants. Alongside physicians, dentists, poets, men of letters, and "masters" of the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and noh acting, the document lists hundreds of famous shops whose owners enjoyed national reputations for making and selling fine silks, porcelain, folding fans, writing paper, and fixtures for Buddhist household altars. By the date the register was completed, Kyoto's total population numbered well over 300,000 persons, many of whom made a living producing and selling high-quality crafts across Japan.

Nearby Osaka had a storied and sometimes tragic past. As early as the sixth and seventh centuries, a settlement on the shores of magnificent Osaka Bay served as a terminus for diplomatic and trade missions arriving from the continent via the Seto Inland Sea, and the new monarchy settled there briefly after the Taika coup d'état in 645. In subsequent centuries a thriving port and marketing community grew up slightly inland on the banks of the Yodo River, which ran from Kyoto to the ocean. A much larger merchant settlement came into being in the sixteenth century, after the prelates of the Honganji branch of the True Pure Land sect had established their temple-fortress, the Ishiyama Honganji, on the site. Those families suffered greatly when Oda Nobunaga overwhelmed the temple-fortress in the 1570s, and although the merchant community enjoyed a renaissance after Hideyoshi built majestic Osaka Castle in 1584, it nearly was obliterated once again in the ferocious battles of 1614 and 1615.

Aware of the military and political significance of the Osaka region, the House of Tokugawa rebuilt the castle to serve as its defense anchor in western Japan. By the end of the seventeenth century, the merchant and artisan population of the surrounding community had soared to approximately 365,000, rendering nearly invisible the 1,000 or so samurai stationed at the castle. As Osaka underwent a metamorphosis from military redoubt into a bastion of commercial activity, it emerged as the country's leading center of production for many goods used in daily life. By 1700 Osaka's artisans were famous for squeezing rapeseeds into lamp oil, fashioning raw cotton into finished cloth, and refurbishing used household goods for resale in secondhand stores. By that date the Sumitomo family and other copper smelters were among the city's largest employers; with seventeen refineries in the city, approximately ten thousand households depended on the copper trade for their livelihoods.

It was inevitable that Osaka, home to so much manufacturing, would become a major shipping and distribution center, a transition encouraged by its proximity to the Inland Sea. By the 1710s more than two thousand ship's carpenters resided in the city, as did thousands upon thousands of wholesalers, distributors, jobbers, and forwarding agents. Somewhat later one respected city official wrote that Osaka "lies at the intersection of the great sea routes of the country and is congested with goods and traffic. Thus, people commonly say that Osaka is the 'country's kitchen,' a storehouse of provisions for all Japan. Indeed, the eaves of the affluent and of wealthy merchant families line the streets of the city, and ships from many provinces always lie at anchor in the harbor. Rice, the necessities of daily life, even goods from abroad; all are brought to this place and put on sale. The people lack nothing."[1]

The shogun's direct retainers, the bannermen and housemen, provided the nucleus for Edo's growth. Most of those twenty thousand or so families employed attendants, valets, and households servants, jobs that drew tens of thousands of rural immigrants to the shogun's capital. After Iemitsu institutionalized the system of alternate attendance in the 1630s, the members of the daimyo's immediate families who resided permanently in Edo together with their extensive entourages added perhaps another one-third of a million to the city's population; bringing the total warrior count to approximately 500,000. Like Rome, Edo was built on seven hills, and the elite daimyo located their estates on verdant hillsides that rolled away to the south of the castle. The shogunate settled its trusted bannermen and their families on Kōjimachi Rise, to the west of the castle. Military considerations entered that decision since the area fronted onto the Musashi Plain, a natural avenue of attack on the castle. Still, the undulating hilltop was considered a choice location since most bannermen could find sunny spots upon which to situate their homes and gardens.

Throughout the seventeenth century, construction workers, craftspeople, and dealers in all manner of goods poured into Edo to cater to the needs of its burgeoning samurai-administrator population. The heart of merchant Edo was Nihonbashi, about halfway between the shores of Edo Bay and the main entry gate to Edo Castle. From that center, artisan and merchant neighborhoods spread out, nestling in the valleys that twisted through the sunlit hillsides dominated by daimyo estates and samurai residences. By the 1720s, as many merchants and artisans resided in the city as did samurai, and with a total population well in excess of one million, Edo had become the world's largest city.

With Edo leading the way, Japan became one of the most urbanized countries in the world. At the beginning of the early modern era, Kyoto

Construction crews build merchant houses in the Nihonbashi area

was the only Japanese city with more than 100,000 residents. By 1700 Edo, Osaka, Nagoya, and Kanazawa also exceeded that mark, and approximately 5 to 7 percent of all Japanese lived in such large metropolises. That compared with a figure of 2 percent in Europe, where only fourteen cities were as large, and where only the Netherlands and England-Wales had urban concentrations greater than Japan's. It was a period of urban construction unparalleled in world history, and Japan's remarkable century of urban growth profoundly affected the country's economic and social development.

Cities and Commerce

The robust vitality evident in the Three Metropoles of Edo, Osaka, and Kyoto helped spark a great commercial revolution that swept across the entire country. Although the daimyo and shoguns originally conceived of the regional castle towns and the cities of Edo and Osaka as defensive enclaves, the mass migration of merchants and artisans transformed those communities into pulsating nodes of consumption and production, so that ultimately their commercial significance exceeded by far their original military purpose. In turn, the geometrically expanding volume of handicraft production and trade depended on the development of a highly integrated nationwide marketing system, the elaboration of reliable transportation facilities, and the creation of an infrastructure of banking, insurance, and other business services. Japan entered the early modern period as an agrarian society; by the nineteenth century nearly every Japanese family to some extent was participating in the urban-based commercial economy, and all felt the touch of its consequences.

Ironically, the extraordinary commercial expansion achieved during the era of the Great Peace originated in the crucible of sixteenth-century warfare. Armies required provisions, and even in the midst of widespread destruction and turmoil, farmers sought to boost yields by improving their tools, devising new strains of seeds, and formulating richer fertilizers. At the same time, innovative engineering techniques enabled daimyo and rural communities to undertake major irrigation, flood control, and land reclamation projects that nearly doubled the amount of land under cultivation between 1550 and 1650. The enhancements to the country's productive capacity supported an accelerating growth in population, so that in the century and a half after 1550 the total number of Japanese leaped from approximately ten or twelve million to thirty-one million and simultaneously made it possible for many children to leave the farm and seek their futures as merchants and artisans in the city.

The inexhaustible consumption demands of the mushrooming urban population for food, clothing, and building materials stimulated the rapid growth of interregional trade and the development of a nationwide marketing system. Clearly, no one domain could produce all the different goods and foods gobbled up by the residents of its castle town, and it took the entire nation to supply the nearly insatiable appetites of the men, women, and children of Edo and Osaka. Responding to the call of the urban market, producers in different regions became famous for certain specialties: Camphor and shiitake mushrooms from southern Kyūshū, lumber and charcoal from Tosa domain, Toyama medicines, and Kōfu grapes were only a few of the many items that fetched handsome prices in the Three Metropoles.

Daimyo policies contributed to the expanding exchange of goods nationwide. The regional lords needed considerable sums of cash: to keep their castles in good repair and carry out irrigation and land reclamation projects within their own domains, to pay the periodic levies imposed by the shogunate, and to finance their annual journeys back and forth to Edo and to cover

the costs of maintaining residential estates and supporting the retinue of relatives and retainers living permanently in the city. Since daimyo derived the overwhelming proportion of their income from agricultural taxes paid in rice, they needed to convert the collected grain into cash in order to pay all the bills that came their way. Beginning in the 1620s, the lords from central and western Japan began to ship their tax rice to Osaka, where rice brokers arranged to have it sold in various urban centers. In the beginning, perhaps one million koku of rice annually passed through Osaka's warehouses, a figure that increased more than fourfold by the 1720s. The flow of such enormous amounts of grain—the nation's principal dietary staple—into and out of Osaka helped transform that city into the economic hub of Japan, the "country's kitchen" in the parlance of the day.

In their quest for revenue, many daimyo eventually enacted policies designed to promote the development of cash crops and local specialty products that could be marketed in consumer centers such as Edo and Osaka. Such schemes assumed a variety of forms. The Maeda daimyo paid a handsome stipend to a famous Kyoto potter to spend a year training local craftspeople at kilns in the villages of snowy Kaga domain. Farther to the north, in Yonezawa, the Uesugi daimyo house brought in experts from other parts of the country to establish indigo plantations, used to produce one of Japan's favorite dyes, and to teach techniques of weaving cotton cloth to local farmers. In the final decades of the eighteenth century, domain officials again invited outside specialists to Yonezawa, this time to advise farmers about planting groves of mulberry, whose tender, young leaves were fed to silkworms. The lord of Yonezawa also funded the establishment of twelve nurseries to propagate mulberry seedlings and published handbooks to teach rural families the secrets of raising and marketing silkworms.

The daimyo hoped to profit from the domain-sponsored enterprises in several ways. In some instances, the officials authorized only certain merchants or villages to participate in the new endeavor and then charged them an annual licensing fee for that privilege. In other cases, the regional lords levied new taxes, such as a set payment for each mulberry tree grown or bale of ceramics shipped out of the domain. In still other instances, officials compelled producers to sell their output to designated wholesalers, who then shipped the goods to dealers in Osaka and turned over a portion of the proceeds to domain coffers. In addition to increasing domain revenues, most daimyo hoped that successful intervention in the economy would work to the advantage of ordinary people and contribute to the perception of benevolent lordship. As one early-nineteenth-century manual on sericulture explained, "The immediate benefit which silk farming brings to society is that it enables unused land along river banks, in the mountains and by the edge of the sea to be planted with mulberries, and silk spinning and weaving to flourish. Needless to say, when the products of the region are exported to other areas, the domain will become rich and its people prosperous."[2]

The shogunate further facilitated the flow of goods across the country by encouraging the standardization of weights and measures and by establishing a national currency. With most of the nation's mines under its control, the shogunate began to operate mints in several cities, and the silver mint, or *ginza*, in Edo reached such prominence that the term eventually became used as the place-name for the section of the city where it was located. Quickly the shogun's coins became the country's currency; while most daimyo issued paper money valid for business dealings within individual domains, merchants calculated payments for commodities that crossed domain borders and for transactions consummated in Edo, Osaka, and other major marketing centers in terms of the gold, silver, and copper coins issued by the shogunate.

The shogunate aided the development of transportation and communication facilities. Since overland transport was difficult in mountainous Japan, most merchants preferred to trust their goods to oceangoing barges and cargo boats. To aid waterborne commerce, the shogunate commissioned Kawamura Zuiken, a wealthy Edo lumber merchant, to institute measures that would reduce existing dangers to coastal vessels. Kawamura immediately set about charting dangerous waters, erecting beacons and lighthouses, and providing lifesaving and rescue facilities from Edo to ports along the northern Pacific coast. He then did the same for the entire coastline along the shores of the Sea of Japan, through the Shimonoseki Strait, and up the Seto Inland Sea to Osaka. When the Kamigata Circuit completed the gap between Osaka and Edo in the 1670s, the so-called Eastern and Western Shipping Circuits linked the most remote regions of Japan to the country's major consumption centers.

The shogunate also undertook a systematic program of road improvement, with an emphasis on the Five Highways that radiated outward from Nihonbashi, the hub of merchant Edo. The most heavily traveled of the great roads was the Tōkaidō, which generally followed the Pacific for nearly three hundred miles from Edo to Kyoto, with an extension continuing to Osaka. The graded roadbed, a deep layer of crushed gravel covered with packed-down sand, averaged nearly twenty feet in width. Markers placed atop mounds planted with pine trees showed travelers how far they had journeyed from Nihonbashi, or how much farther they still had left to go,

and stone guideposts kept them from turning the wrong way at crossroads. Strung out along the Tōkaidō Highway were fifty-three post towns where weary travelers could replace their sandals, enjoy a snack and cup of tea, and check into an inn for dinner and a night's lodging.

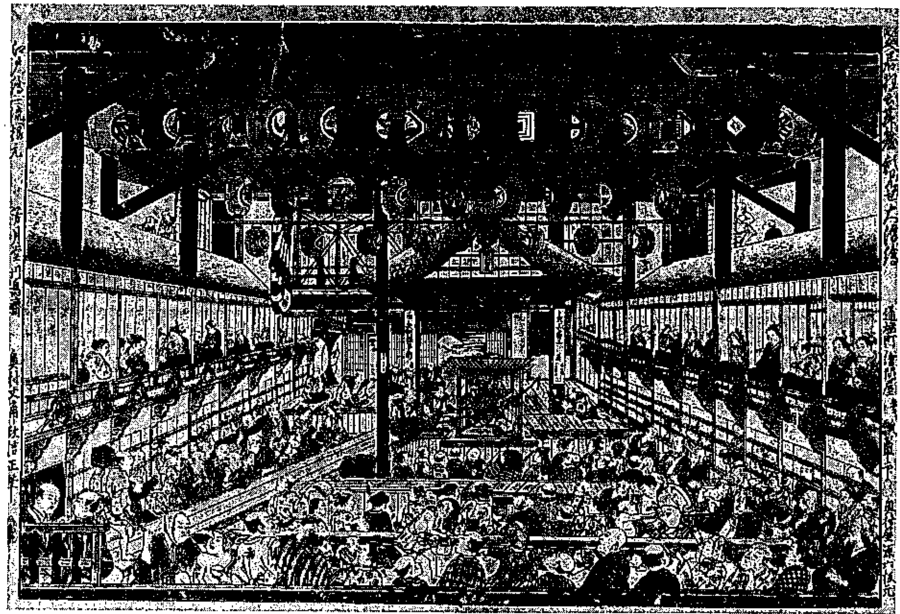
Since most bulk cargo went by sea, the daimyo processions that filled the Tōkaidō Highway encountered only a few packhorses, shod in straw leggings and led by hostlers who often as not appeared as ornery as their animals. Express couriers, in contrast, sped up and down the road in great numbers. From the very beginning of the seventeenth century the shogunate dispatched official messengers three times a month between Edo and Osaka. In 1664 merchants in Edo, Osaka, and Kyoto established express services for the private sector, and runners carrying small packages, business documents, and cash departed each city almost daily. At first, it required six days for couriers to complete the run between Edo and Osaka, but by the beginning of the nineteenth century expensive superexpress operations had cut the time to just two days. By then couriers had extended the communications network to cities like Nagasaki, Kanazawa, and Sendai.

Japan's leading merchant houses created a host of other business services that enabled economic expansion to continue. In Osaka the Kōnoike family and its wealthy colleagues started to operate what amounted to banks. At times the Ten Exchange Houses, as they were known collectively, advanced substantial loans to daimyo to cover current budget deficits, meet the costs of the alternate attendance obligations, and finance development projects. On other occasions the financiers made loans to individual wholesalers. Those entrepreneurs, in turn, re-lent the money to rural families that needed the funds to cover the cost of planting commercial crops or producing textiles and crafts for sale to urban customers. In addition, bankers in Osaka and elsewhere offered insurance to shippers, held cash on deposit, issued promissory notes secured by real estate, and issued letters of credit and bills of exchange to expedite transactions between merchants based in different cities.

Japan's commercial revolution changed the face of the country's cities. If the castle towns and the great metropolises of Edo and Osaka began as cities of lords and samurai, by the end of the early modern era they had become the domain of commoners. That transformation can be seen clearly in wood-block prints that celebrated life in the merchant quarters. Hiroshige, often considered Japan's finest print artist, produced more than a thousand scenes of Edo, and he began his most famous work, *Tōkaidō gojūsantsugi* ("Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Highway") with a view of Nihonbashi, the center of merchant Edo. In similar fashion, popular guidebooks, such as *Naniwa suzume* ("The Naniwa Sparrow") and *Edo meisho zue* ("An Illustrated Guide to Places in Edo"), depicted shops in Osaka and Edo overflowing with customers contemplating the purchases of an almost endless variety of goods.

The guidebooks also directed the curious to the Kabuki theaters that flourished in the Three Metropoles and to the puppet theaters that were especially popular in Osaka from the end of the seventeenth century until well into the eighteenth. Since authorities placed the theater districts off limits to samurai, who were supposed to satisfy themselves with the more refined and edifying productions of noh drama, playwrights for the popular theaters concentrated on topics that excited the imagination of well-to-do merchants and artisans. One genre known as *sewamono*, or domestic plays, showcased semifictional accounts of horrendous murders or other spectacular scandals, such as the double suicide of a prostitute and her merchant lover, who lacked the money to buy out her contract with the brothel. In contrast, period pieces, or *jidaimono*, dealt with historic events, especially the heroic struggles of the Taira and Minamoto in the twelfth century, and with the warriors involved in the more recent wars of reunification, whose ex-

A packed house enjoys a Kabuki production in Edo



ploits exemplified values, such as loyalty and bravery, that everyone could appreciate.

Commercial Agriculture and Protoindustrialization

Japan's commercial revolution also changed patterns of agricultural production in the countryside. In every region of the country, farm families turned to cultivating tea, tobacco, and a wide range of fruits and vegetables for sale to the emerging urban population. In some cases, commercial crops could be grown successfully on marginal land not suited for rice production. In other instances, farmers planted a second crop after the rice harvest. Early in the seventeenth century, to take one example, merchants in Osaka discovered an inexpensive method for pressing lamp oil from rapeseed, and urbanites across the country began to enjoy the comfort provided by dependable oil lamps, whose light reassured and enchanted even as it enhanced security by discouraging thieves and other ne'er-do-wells. With demand soaring, farmers in the villages surrounding Osaka grew so much rape as a second crop that fields in early spring seemed to be dyed a brilliant yellow.

Rural industries appeared in increasing numbers throughout the Tokugawa period. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, country workshops were turning out an extensive list of commodities: from silk and cotton fabrics to straw hats, paper, tatami mat facing, charcoal, nails and tools, and lacquerware and crockery, as well as such food products as salt, sugar, vinegar, soy sauce, and miso. In some places, domain officials took the lead in founding businesses in rural areas, as in the production of pottery and crockery in Kaga domain. More often, prosperous urban merchants and peasant families who had accumulated a nest egg from engaging in commercial agriculture supplied the capital and organizational know-how for such enterprises. In all instances, however, the spread of rural-based production of marketable commodities represented the protoindustrialization of the Japanese economy. That is, the emerging rural industries reflected a nascent entrepreneurial spirit in which individuals risked their capital to establish ventures that produced for distant markets in hopes of realizing a profit on their investment. In that sense, protoindustrialization differed both from ordinary household production, in which families made for themselves the clothing and tools they needed in daily life, and from traditional artisanal trades, where craftspeople fabricated goods for sale locally and seldom contemplated expanding their operations or earning more than was needed to support their families.

The new rural firms varied enormously in size. At one extreme were large-scale workshops that brought together as many as six or seven hundred men to brew soy sauce or to smelt iron and forge tools. Small village enterprises employing five to twenty workers were common in the production of charcoal, sugar, salt, tea, and textiles. Sometimes there might not even be a central workshop at all; in various parts of Japan village women wove cotton cloth at home in the evenings and turned it over to wholesaler-distributors who had advanced them money to purchase looms and thread.

Some workers, such as the rural women who stole a few hours or days from farm chores whenever they could to do their weaving, labored irregularly. Others spent considerable lengths of time away from home. Women from villages scattered along a mountainous peninsula in Chōshū domain in western Japan often worked at seaside salt fields in the summer months, returning home to resume their roles as wives and mothers only when the salt-making season was over. In northern Japan it was not uncommon for all the men from an entire village to spend the snowbound winter months at a distant sake or soy sauce brewery. In all those diverse cases, however, the workers had begun to sell their labor in exchange for some form of wage, another defining characteristic of protoindustrialization.

Silk production was an especially prominent form of protoindustrial activity in the early modern era. The manufacture of finished silk cloth was a complicated process that began with hatching and rearing silkworms, which farm families cultivated on flats spread out across ceiling rafters in their houses. After boiling the resultant cocoons, workers pulled away gossamer-thin fibers of silk, twisted them together to form long strands, and reeled the filaments onto bobbins. Operatives then plaited several filaments together in a variety of patterns to create different kinds and grades of thread, a process known as throwing. At that point, dyers and weavers turned the silk thread into finished cloth ready to be cut and sewed into kimonos and other forms of apparel.

At the beginning of the early modern era only a smattering of Japanese households produced a limited amount of low-grade silk cloth for their own use or sale locally, and the single major center of production was located in Kyoto, where weavers in the Nishijin section of the city turned out high-quality silk for aristocrats and wealthy daimyo. From the middle of the seventeenth century, profit-minded entrepreneurs began to encourage sericulture, rationalized the manufacturing process, improved the quality of finished cloth, and started large-scale production for markets nationwide. Innovators first focused on the earliest stage of production, growing silk-

worms from eggs. Those creatures were vulnerable to disease and sensitive to even slight changes in temperature. After decades of experimenting with selective breeding, farmers developed hardier strains, and by the early eighteenth century prized silkworm eggs from the Fukushima region in northern Japan were in demand across the country. At the same time, other farmers found ways to produce hybrids whose fibers had just the right hue and luster to meet current fashion trends. As an index of how busy and successful the experimenters were, the first manual on sericulture, dated 1702, described five varieties of silkworm, while an encyclopedia published in the mid-1860s listed nearly two hundred. Moreover, a comparison of various texts on silk farming shows that the amount of usable fiber on each cocoon had increased by some 25 percent.

One of the most striking technological advances was the introduction of water-powered throwing machines. In the second half of the eighteenth century, about sixty years after the first silk mills opened in England, a Japanese wheelwright named Iwase Kichibei devised a means of applying waterpower to the large multispindled wheels used to throw silk. Although few others adopted Iwase's breakthrough, it made his hometown of Kiryū, located in a rugged area of Kōzuke Province to the northwest of Edo, a leading center of silk production. Tinkerers also improved the reeling process. At first silk producers relied on simple equipment that required reelers to twist silk filaments together by hand and then wind them around a wooden roller or frame. In the middle of the eighteenth century, however, reeling devices employing gears and drive belts started to appear in various parts of the country, and in some places the new machines were driven by waterpower rather than by hand.

The advances in reeling and throwing increased productivity enormously and facilitated the development of large-scale weaving workshops. Kiryū and surrounding communities emerged as a national center of silk production in the 1760s, after local weavers had mastered the refined dying techniques that famous textile houses in Kyoto's Nishijin district previously had kept as family secrets. As Kiryū silk gained a national reputation for its fine quality, other master weavers moved into the area, purchased additional looms, and employed upward of one hundred workers each. According to one document dated 1835, "Weavers who came to make a living hired women operatives to spin and weave, and people came crowding into the town from other provinces, renting houses there and even in surrounding hamlets."[3]

The functional specialization of the productive process, maximizing output for sales to regional and national markets, and the use of wage labor and rudimentary machines also came to typify the manufacture of cotton cloth. Although the Japanese grew some cotton from ancient times, hemp and associated fibers, such as flax and ramie, provided the most important clothing materials for ordinary men and women until soldiers returning from Hideyoshi's invasion of Korea brought home with them a type of cotton plant that was specially suited for cultivation in the Osaka region. Durable, cool in summer, comfortable in winter, and increasingly affordable, cotton quickly became the clothing material of choice for most ordinary Japanese during the first half of the seventeenth century. So fashionable did it become that farm families in the provinces around Osaka dedicated as much as 70 percent of their acreage to cotton, alternating that crop with rice on one- or two-year rotations.

Although cultivation was concentrated in central Japan, entrepreneurs in even far-off regions purchased raw cotton or thread, which they turned over to weaving specialists for finishing into cloth. In many areas, farm women wove at home in their spare hours and received their pay on a piecework basis. As consumer demand and the scale of production increased, however, weaving specialists began to work full-time at their craft. Some of them remained independent producers, but other master weavers employed wage labor in workshops that contained twenty, thirty, or even more looms. As was the case with the processing of silk, innovators introduced a host of technical improvements: Selective breeding increased the varieties of cotton plants, new spinning machines produced stronger thread, more efficient looms boosted productivity, and developments in weaving and dying resulted in an amazing array of patterns, textures, and colors.

As commercial agriculture and rural industry took hold across the countryside, scores of villages grew into rural towns that functioned as nodes of industry, trade, and transport. Kiryū, for example, tripled in size between 1757 and 1855, when nearly all its households worked at some aspect of the silk trade. Similarly, in 1843 only 14 percent of the 277 households in Uda-ōtsu, a village in Osaka's hinterland, still farmed, whereas 46 percent held jobs related to the cotton industry, and a census of the village Okashi in Owari Province taken two years later found that 20 percent of its 262 households were engaged in agriculture, 31 percent had jobs involving cotton production, and 22 percent worked in transportation-related occupations. The transformation of tiny, dusty settlements into bustling communities of several thousand inhabitants fleshed out Japan's urban hierarchy and formed new links in the production-distribution network that tied together the rural hinterland with Japan's ports, post towns, castle towns, and the Three Metropoles.

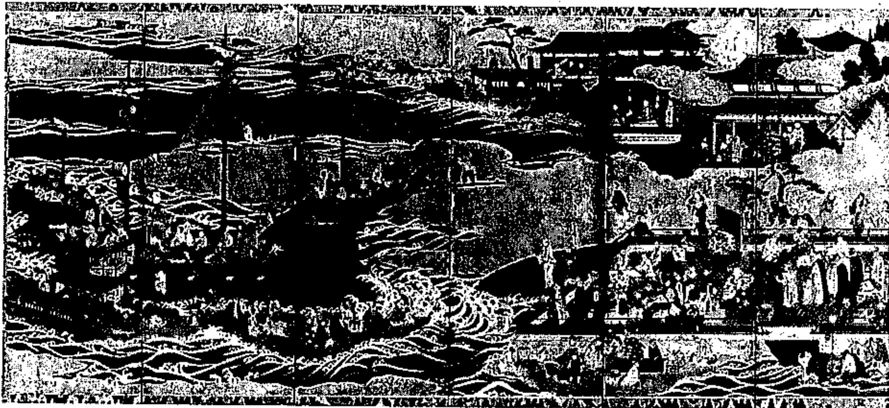
Foreign Trade

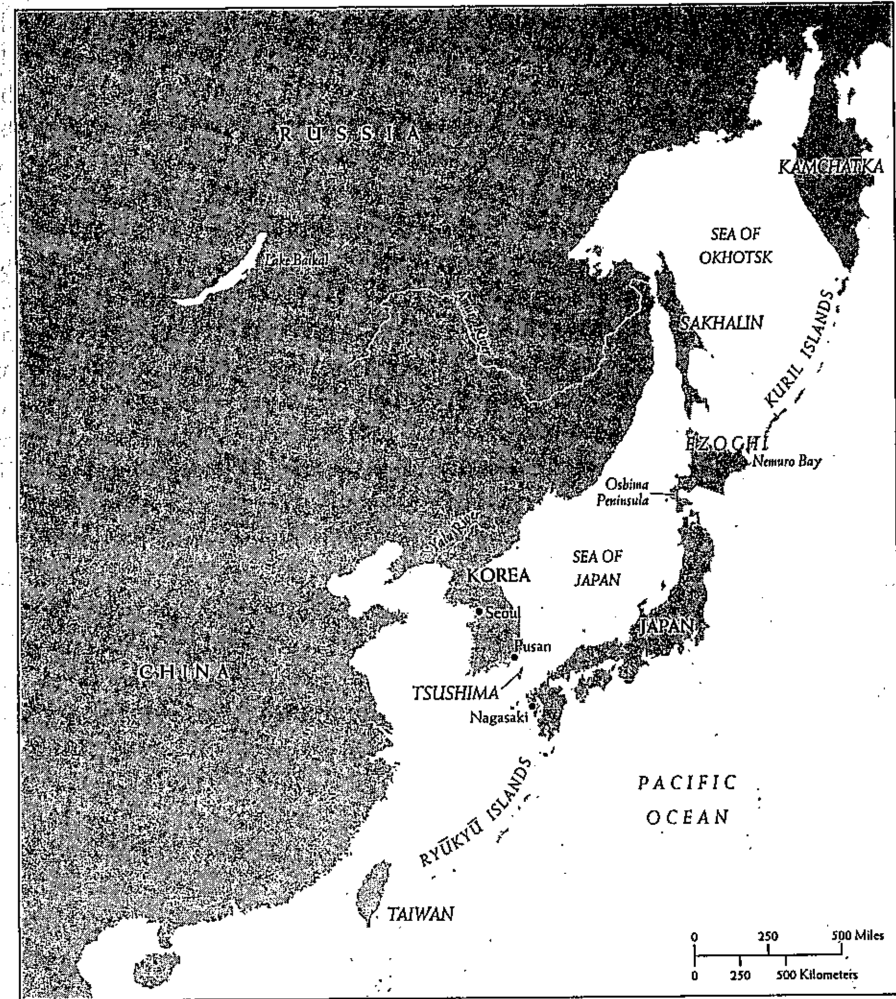
When the shogunate promulgated the so-called seclusion edicts in the 1630s, its goals were to affirm its prerogative to direct Japan's foreign relations, exert control over the conduct of foreign trade, and rid the country of what it saw as a sinister religion. That accomplished, the government in Edo did not intend to terminate all relations with the outside world. Rather, throughout the early modern period the shogunate continued to receive ambassadorial embassies from Korea and the Ryūkyū Islands, and its officials oversaw what sometimes was a brisk trade with Chinese and Dutch merchants, conducted under the general oversight of shogunal officials stationed in Nagasaki. In addition, the shogunate allowed the daimyo and merchants of Satsuma, Tsushima, and Matsumae domains to trade with the Ryūkyū Islands, Korea, and territories to the north of Japan.

The Nagasaki Meeting Office, a semiofficial merchant organization licensed and regulated by the shogunate, organized and conducted the Nagasaki trade. Formed in 1604 and granted a monopoly after the promulgation of the seclusion edicts, the Meeting Office took orders for various domestic commodities desired by foreign traders and purchased goods off-loaded from Chinese and Dutch vessels at Dejima, the artificial island in Nagasaki Harbor where officers of the Dutch East India Company resided year-round and maintained a permanent trading station. Japanese merchants were especially happy to import silk thread and fabrics, herbs, spices, sugar, and medicines, and they filled the outgoing ships with copper, camphor, sulfur, swords, pottery, and lacquerware.

The total volume of the Nagasaki trade swung back and forth during the late seventeenth century, but the Japanese often bought more than they sold. The severing of relations with Portugal in the 1630s temporarily halted

A Portuguese ship arrives at Nagasaki





MAP 2.1 *Japan and Its Neighbors*

the hemorrhaging of precious metal that had so worried Tokugawa Iemitsu and his advisers, but the renewed outflow of bullion to cover trade imbalances at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries once again alarmed the shogunate, which in 1715 issued the New Regulations on Ships and Trade. Provisions in that ordinance specified that only thirty Chinese and just two Dutch ships could dock at Nagasaki annually and limited the value of trade to the equivalent of 11.3 metric tons of silver for the Dutch and 22.5 metric tons for the Chinese annually.

After Satsuma domain exerted its suzerainty over the Ryūkyū Islands in 1611, the shogunate authorized the daimyo of Satsuma to resume what already had become lucrative trade relations with the islanders and through them with private merchants along the coast of China. The trade between Satsuma and the Ryūkyūans flourished for several decades, until the shogunate imposed restrictions on the amount of silver that Satsuma could export in the 1680s. Trade flows shrank markedly after that date, but the islands remained an important source of sugarcane and refined sugar, which the domain marketed in Osaka and other major cities.

In the seas between Kyūshū and Korea, the Sō daimyo ruled over Tsushima. Long entrenched on that rugged island, the Sō family had maintained amicable relations with Korea from the fifteenth century and regularly dispatched trading missions to the peninsula. After Sō Yoshitomo brokered the peace settlement between Edo and Seoul in 1607, the shogunate authorized the resumption of commercial relations. Trade accords permitted the Sō to send twenty ships a year filled with goods to be sold to the Korean government and also allowed the Japanese to staff a trading station at Pusan, where they negotiated private deals with Korean merchants. Eventually the volume of trade reached considerable proportions, with the Japanese exchanging bullion principally for silk and ginseng, as well as lesser amounts of tin, buffalo horn, pepper, sappanwood, and such artistic wares as ceramics and ink paintings. In the middle of the eighteenth century, however, the old problem of silver outflows prompted the shogunate to impose restrictions that crippled official trade between Tsushima and Korea.

To the north, the Japanese also traded with the Ainu. The origins of that culturally and linguistically distinct indigenous people are lost in the mists of time, but by the ninth century two discrete cultures flourished on what is modern-day Hokkaidō. One, the Satsumon people, occupied most of the island, while the bearers of Okhotsk culture lived along the northeastern coastline of Hokkaidō and on nearby islands of the Kuril chain and on southern Sakhalin. By the thirteenth century a more inclusive Ainu culture had evolved out of the Satsumon tradition, and the indigenes included in their number former Emishi peoples who had fled north to escape Japanese rule. Since the Japanese had come to refer to the Emishi as Ezo, an alternative reading for the ideographs used to signify "Eastern Barbarians," it is perhaps natural that they called the Ainu homeland Ezochi, or the Land of the Ezo.

When Tokugawa Ieyasu received his appointment as shogun, the Ainu numbered about thirty to forty thousand. Although they spoke different dialects and displayed some regional cultural variations, the Ainu shared a common lifestyle and material culture. Living in permanent villages that usually consisted of a dozen or so households, Ainu families cooperated to support themselves by hunting deer, bear, and other game, fishing Ezochi's rivers and harvesting kelp and other bounty of the coastal waters, gathering fruits and vegetables, and cultivating sorghum, millet, and a variety of edible plants in riverside gardens. The Ainu took pleasure in a rich oral tradition that centered on epic poems, and they worshiped phenomena of the natural world that they personified as *kamuy* ("deities").

The rich hunting and fishing grounds of Ezochi yielded a surplus of furs and sea products, which the Ainu for some time had traded with the Japanese to the south and shipped to the Asian continent through Sakhalin and the Kurils. As the volume of trade expanded during the sixteenth century, Japanese established trading communities along the shores of the Oshima Peninsula, on the extreme southwestern tip of Hokkaidō. Eventually the Kakizaki family of warriors emerged as the leader of the Japanese on Oshima, and in 1599 they took the surname Matsumae. Five years later the shogunate recognized the head of the Matsumae family as the overlord of a domain on the southern half of the peninsula and confirmed his right to control all trade with the Ainu.

From their castle town headquarters at the tip of Oshima Peninsula, the Matsumae samurai set up a chain of trading posts scattered along the coast of Ezochi, where they swapped rice, sake, tobacco, clothing, ironware, and other household utensils for salmon, trout, kelp, and such exotic items as bear gallbladders, the pelts of sea mammals, and live falcons used for sport hunting. Many Ainu resented the intrusion of the Japanese samurai-traders since the natives lost their political autonomy and their former prerogative to trade freely with whomever they pleased. Ainu ballads expressed a growing sense that their neighbors had betrayed them. "I had heard the Japanese called honorable people, people with truly good hearts," ran one set of lyrics, "but how evil your hearts must be!"[4] Such resentment turned into violence in 1669, when a sizable force commanded by the regional leader Shakushain attacked Japanese settlements in Ezochi and prepared to march on Matsumae domain.

A startled shogunate mustered an army of samurai and musket bearers drafted from several domains on northern Honshū, and several hundred Japanese settlers and probably even more Ainu died before hostilities ended. Defeated in Shakushain's War, the Ainu ultimately found themselves subjected to even greater economic exploitation. In 1717 merchants from the Japanese mainland began to pay the Matsumae lord an annual fee in exchange for charters giving them the right to manage specific trading outposts. By century's end new trading districts had spread across the lower Kurils and onto Sakhalin, and as they advanced further into Ezochi, some Japanese merchants created commercial empires that dominated fishing operations in the bountiful northern seas. Eventually herring-meal fertilizer became the region's greatest revenue producer. Venturous entrepreneurs from the ranks of the Japanese merchant community spearheaded the development of that industry by introducing advanced fishing methods that hauled in great catches of herring, building processing plants and barracks for Ainu workers (who generally received meager wages and lived in poverty), and shipping the cakes of fertilizer to rice-growing villages on the main Japanese islands.

The shogunate became involved in the northern trade in the eighteenth century. As Japanese officials at Nagasaki searched for substitutes for silver and copper, they were delighted to find a market in China for sharks' fins, dried abalone, tangle, sea slugs, and other marine products used in cooking. Since the merchants who ran the trading outposts in Ezochi packed such goods in straw bags, those commodities commonly went by the name of baled goods. After experimenting with several different kinds of marketing arrangements, in 1785 the shogunate established a Baled Goods Office at Nagasaki to collect the marine delicacies from merchants in Ezochi and northern Honshū and sell them to Chinese traders.

According to most assessments, the grand total of the combined trade with the Ainu, Ryūkyūans, Koreans, Dutch, and Chinese did not represent a significant proportion of the Japanese economy at any time during the early modern era. Nonetheless, export opportunities provided employment for many Japanese, including the potters in Kyūshū, whose wares sold well in Holland, and the Sumitomo and other copper merchants and artisans in Osaka, who by the beginning of the eighteenth century were shipping nearly their entire output to Nagasaki. Moreover, some imported goods contributed to the expansion of agricultural output; by 1740 herring-meal cakes from Ezochi were fertilizing nearly half of all rice paddies in western Japan. Other imports enriched lives and improved living standards. The well-to-do prized Korean art objects and luxury silks from China, and many Japanese enjoyed healthier lives because the Nagasaki Meeting Office transferred all medicines imported from Asia to an association of pharmacists in Osaka that assessed their content, relabeled them with Japanese names, and sold them in conveniently sized packages to druggists throughout the country.

Class, Status, and Standards of Living

Squid, eels, and octopus; sardines and mackerel; rice and barley; sugar, salt, vinegar, and soy sauce; burdock, turnips, and lotus root; tangerines and persimmons; tea and sake; fine silks and durable cottons; footwear, umbrellas, and rain gear; hair decorations and all sorts of personal accessories; tools and lumber to build new houses and keep them repaired; books and woodblock prints; pots, pans, and lacquered bowls and chopsticks: Even a cursory glance at guidebooks to Japan's larger cities and decorative screens portraying the merchant quarters in various castle towns reveals the abundance of food and other goods found in urban markets by the late seventeenth century.

Families from different economic classes reaped the benefits of the growing commercial economy in contrasting ways. It was common in major cities to see the servants of upper-level samurai and merchant barons like the Kōnoike poke the sea bream to test for freshness, sniff the tea leaves to judge their quality, and pick out only the finest brocaded silks for their masters' pleasure. At the opposite extreme, unskilled artisans, day laborers, and tenant farmers lived in a far different world; they got their protein from tofu instead of fish, drank plain water with their meals, and could afford only the cheapest cottons, often acquired from dealers in secondhand clothing.

Social status too was a consideration. Throughout the seventeenth century the shogunate and regional daimyo governments sought new ways to create more meaningful and readily evident distinctions among the four status groups that made up the Neo-Confucian social order. Several motives inspired that attempt to institute a system of rule by status. Among other things, officials believed that placing people in segregated containers would make it impossible for them ever to mount a unified challenge against the hegemonic order. Moreover, the process of defining more precisely the social order provided the government with ample opportunities to lecture people about the formal obligations that accompanied membership in any particular social estate. In that regard, officials seemed especially determined to impress upon Japan's commoners—the peasant, artisan, and merchant statuses—the need to obey laws, pay taxes, and enrich society by consum-

ing little and producing much. Finally, by finding ways to privilege the samurai as society's elites, the overlords hoped to win the warriors' eternal gratitude and ensure their service as loyal, unquestioning agents of state authority.

The shogunate and daimyo regimes enforced the concept of rule by status in numerous ways. The construction of castle towns at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries created geographical distinctions, with farmers dwelling by themselves in the countryside while in the newly emerging communities the samurai lived in exclusive neighborhoods separate from the merchants and artisans. In addition, a series of decrees initiated by Hideyoshi and elaborated upon by the Tokugawa hegemons instructed people to follow the occupations of their parents, forbade marriage between offspring of samurai and the other estates, and gave warriors the sole right to bear arms. As the new polity took shape, the shogunate and daimyo conferred upon the samurai the prerogative of serving as policy makers and important government functionaries. Further, only the samurai carried surnames; peasants generally assumed just personal names, and merchants customarily were known by their occupation or shop names, such as Tabakoya Shichibei, "Shichibei the Tobacconist."

Beginning in the middle of the seventeenth century, the shogun and individual daimyo domains issued a stream of edicts that regulated consumption patterns as a means of further reinforcing status distinctions. In that spirit, a decree promulgated by the Maeda daimyo of Kaga domain in 1660 specified that upper-level samurai could wear thirteen kinds of silk, which it defined with minute precision, and limited lower-ranking warriors to four lesser grades of silk, such as pongee. The same statute, as was becoming common practice everywhere, collapsed the merchants and artisans into a single category of *chōnin* ("townsperson") and restricted them to plain silks and cotton. Similarly, a shogunal ordinance of 1683 instructed Edo's *chōnin* to use only pongee, cotton, and ramie as clothing materials. Nor did officials ignore the peasants. The 1649 Instructions of the Keian Era admonished villagers to wear clothing made only of cotton, a provision repeated in the prohibitions circulated in Kaga domain eleven years later and in similar decrees issued by daimyo across Japan.

The historical record has left contradictory accounts about how people observed the regulations. Clearly, disobedience was not uncommon. Reports from Kanazawa, the castle town of Kaga domain, suggest that well-to-do townspeople, happy to pay a small fine or sit through an official's sermon about social responsibility in exchange for the satisfaction of showing off their finest to admiring neighbors, often disregarded the regulations about clothing. Even in Edo, according to Buyō Inshi, a keen observer of life in the shogun's capital at the beginning of the nineteenth century, "The shogun's proclamations and ordinances are called 'three-day laws.' No one fears them, and no one pays any attention to them. They are disregarded after that short period of time. Since everyone knows that the government merely issues laws whenever it feels it needs them, it is no wonder that the lower orders do not take the time to learn them, do not obey them."[5]

Buyō's cynicism notwithstanding, other evidence indicates that the combination of status regulations and economic wherewithal did shape lifestyles of individual families to a considerable degree. Not only did the affluent dine on fresh sea bream, but they also sampled such delicacies as crane, goose, pheasant, wild boar, and venison. In Kanazawa some samurai became such gourmands that the daimyo feared they might lose their martial spirit. Consequently, in 1663 the domain issued a proclamation that began "Recently there have been reports of samurai holding lavish parties," and then limited meals on holidays and ceremonial occasions to two soups, a fish, five vegetable side dishes, two flasks of sake, rice, pickles, and cakes and green tea.[6] Merchant families, the Maeda lord continued, should serve more modest meals befitting their status: one soup, three side dishes, two decanters of sake, rice, pickles, and tea with a sweet.

As might be surmised from the guidelines in Kanazawa, a diet of steamed rice accompanied by soup, side dishes, and tea was becoming the preferred style of dining for many during the early modern era. Still, for persons of middling economic means—people, that is, judged to be neither wealthy nor poor by their contemporaries—daily fare could vary considerably, depending on region, the time of year, and just how well-off one felt at any particular time. Entries for 1837 in the diary of one middle-level samurai from Kaga domain indicated that he ate fish daily and had steamed rice with every meal, while a journal kept by another samurai from western Japan revealed that his family in the 1830s and 1840s typically ate rice mixed with barley, a vegetable or tofu, and miso soup, with fish appearing on the dinner table only a few times each month. Some years before that, in the Second Month of 1817, one scholar traveling along the Tōkaidō Highway fondly recorded in his travel diary exactly what he ate each day. At noon on the nineteenth, he stopped at an inn with a view overlooking Lake Biwa and enjoyed a meal of clear soup, a dish of finely sliced carrots tossed with burdock and kelp, and trefoil dressed with a white sesame sauce. Toward evening, as thick snow began to fall, he checked into a hostelry at the post town of Kusatsu and warmed himself with a supper consisting of a soup of greens and dried bean curd; a dish of daikon, persimmon, and greens fla-

vored with vinegar; a small bowl of mixed vegetables served with slices of boiled and molded fish paste; and grilled salted mackerel.

Whatever their preferences, peasants had to endure a barrage of injunctions about what they might eat and drink. In a series of decrees issued in the 1640s, the shogunate banned the consumption of sake and tea in farm villages and further instructed rural families to consume less rice and more wheat, potatoes, and millet. The effectiveness of such laws remains unclear, but many farm families made do with a coarse diet. "Peasants who reside in areas with rice paddies," noted one official in the 1720s, "sometimes eat rice, but only as a porridge containing other edibles. Many who live in the mountainous regions or where other grains are grown cannot even eat rice during the three festive days of the New Year. Even when cooking millet or wheat, they mix in so many turnips, potato and bean leaves, and other greens that one can hardly see the grain. Moreover, they eat such food only once a day and supplement their meal with watery gruel."[7]

As described earlier, the built environment of Edo and Japan's castle towns—monumental fortresses that proclaimed the preeminence of shogun and daimyo, preferential locations for the residences of elite samurai, and neighborhood segregation—physically embodied the chief principles underlying the concept of rule by status. So too did housing styles vary according to status and economic standing. Wealthy samurai employed skilled carpenters and used the finest building materials to construct their spacious residences. The grandest samurai home typically sat behind a wall and elaborate gate, whose size and decorative features accorded with the owner's place within the samurai hierarchy. The house itself usually included a formal entry where people removed their footwear, a sitting room for entertaining guests, and several other rooms where family members could gather for conversation during the day and sleep in the evening. Tatami covered the floors of most rooms, which were separated by shoji partitions and *fusuma*, sliding doors consisting of wooden frames covered with thick paper. In the best of homes, paintings adorned the *fusuma*, and the sitting room featured a built-in writing desk, shelves for displaying books and ceramics, and a tokonoma, the alcove designed to accommodate a hanging scroll, an arrangement of flowers, or some valued art object. The families of lower-ranking samurai lived in houses that were similar but smaller, shedding rooms and decorative features as one moved down the scale of income and prestige.

Merchant and artisan houses typically had a shop in front, opening onto the street, where business was conducted, with living quarters for the family and employees located to the rear. Most such shop-residences were simple, unadorned structures featuring few interior amenities; at the beginning of the early modern era, for instance, nearly all families sat and slept on plain wooden floors with only bags filled with straw to ease their discomfort. Later in the period townspeople with the means to do so laid down tatami, copied the embellishments found in the homes of well-to-do samurai, and added second and even third floors where local ordinances permitted. At times affluent merchants found creative subterfuge a necessary evil if they wished to construct the home of their dreams. In Kanazawa and many other cities, regulations stated that the façades of merchant and artisan residences be no higher than one and a half stories, thus prompting some townspeople to build houses whose roofs measured exactly that height in front but then slanted steeply upward to permit full second floors in the rear. When it came to furnishing such a home, even outright deception was not out of the question; how else was a successful merchant to deal with annoying regulations that forbade someone of his status from using gold and silver leaf for decoration or from having household possessions finished in gold lacquer?

Many poorly paid artisans and day laborers lived in back-alley tenements known as *nagaya* ("long houses"). The front door to each apartment usually opened onto a cramped earthen-floored kitchen equipped with a clay stove for cooking, a bin to store firewood, pegs driven into the wall to hang pots and pans, and not much else. The individual, or family, lived and sometimes even worked in a single tatami room measuring approximately nine feet by nine feet. The apartment dwellers sweltered in Japan's hot and humid summers and in winter drew what warmth they could from the cooking stove. No running water was piped into the individual units, and the residents shared a well, an outhouse, and a garbage bin.

Although farmhouses varied considerably in size and design, most contained distinct sections for living and working. The family used the earthen-floored work space for farm tasks and sometimes sheltered animals there. Commonly, that room also contained a clay stove for cooking and a sink for cleaning up after meals. In the homes of the poorest farmers, the living sections had plain earthen floors, covered with bagged straw and separated from the work spaces by low dividers. Families with more income added rooms, built raised wood floors, and gathered around interior hearths for meals and for warmth in winter. As might be surmised, the residences of village elites boasted several rooms and many of the amenities found in the houses of well-to-do merchants and samurai.

In general, material well-being and living standards improved substantially during the early modern period. Reliable statistics are a scarce commodity, but sufficient evidence exists to conclude that merchant and artisan

families in the early nineteenth century dressed better, ate a more interesting variety of food, and lived in more spacious dwellings than their ancestors had two hundred years earlier. Houses also became more comfortable as people increasingly sat on tatami rather than wooden floors, slept on futon stuffed with cotton wadding, stored their bedding in built-in closets, and placed their other belongings in chests specially crafted to hold spare clothing, medicines, writing implements, cosmetics, business papers, and cash. Diets changed considerably as sweet and white potatoes, squash, carrots, green beans, watermelon, and other foods introduced from the West became more widely available. Restaurants featuring tempura, grilled eels, and other specialties appeared in Edo, Osaka, and other leading cities in the eighteenth century—another sign of rising levels of prosperity—and sushi became all the rage after a chef in Edo invented the dish at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Similar trends were evident in the countryside. Largely self-sufficient at the beginning of the seventeenth century, even families in remote villages could purchase a variety of food and clothing, and sometimes small luxuries as well, by the midway point of the early modern period. At first peddlers crisscrossed the countryside, hawking such items as dried fish, kitchen utensils, and hoes and other farm implements. Later the demand for goods expanded to the point that many villages began to sport permanent "general stores," where local residents could buy a full range of what they had come to consider daily necessities: bean paste and tofu, kelp, noodles, *senbei* ("rice crackers"), lamp oil and candles, thread and needles, zori, geta, and straw sandals, tobacco and pipes, and paper, ink, and writing brushes. As one observer noted in the early nineteenth century, "Year after year the retail trade in country districts increases. Sake, dyes, dry goods, toilet articles, hardware, lacquerware—everything you can think of—are sold in villages."[8]

Of course, not every individual or family prospered: Merchants and artisans who were incompetent or simply unlucky slipped down the scale of well-being, while farm families unprepared to take advantage of the opportunities offered by commercial agriculture and protoindustrialization continued to live in substandard housing and eat rice gruel for generation after generation. Samurai faced a different problem: They received fixed annual stipends from their lords that generally did not increase after being set at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Since status regulations prohibited them from participating in the commercial economy, most samurai did not benefit from rising standards of living to the same degree as other Japanese.

Like most exceptions, however, such observations confirm the general rule: For most Japanese, lifestyles and standards of living improved significantly between 1600 and 1850. Indeed, living conditions for most Japanese families in the middle of the nineteenth century probably were comparable to those in England and the United States on the eve of their Industrial Revolutions. In that context, it is worth noting that the life expectancy for Japanese born at the end of the early modern era seems to have been nearly the same as for western Europeans born in 1840 (39.6 years for men; 42.5 for women) and somewhat better than for Americans born in 1850 (37 years for men; 39 for women).

Certainly, the impressions that the intrepid globe-trotter Isabella Lucy Bird recorded in her *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* after she traveled nearly fifteen hundred miles on horseback from Tokyo to northern Honshū in 1878 stack up favorably against her experiences twenty years earlier in the United States. When the Englishwoman visited Chicago in the 1850s, her innkeeper first tried to stick her into a room containing four beds, five women, and a sick child. After registering a strong complaint, Bird settled for a tiny chamber but was dismayed to discover that the single narrow bed was covered with a "dirty buffalo-skin" that played host to "swarms of living creatures." Later the filth in the dining room appalled her, and Bird had little appetite for the "boiled legs of mutton, nearly raw," the "antiquated fowls, whose legs were the consistence of guitar-strings," or the baked pork "swimming in grease."[9]

In contrast, when Bird visited Nikkō, she stayed at a "middle-class" rural home that "delighted" her. "I don't know what to write about my house," she began. "It is a Japanese idyll; there is nothing within or without which does not please the eye." After admiring the polished stairs, tatami mats ("so fine and white that I almost fear to walk over them"), and the painting of "a blossoming branch of the cherry on white silk" that hung in the tokonoma, she confided, "I almost wish that the rooms were a little less exquisite, for I am in constant dread of spilling the ink, indenting the mats, or tearing the paper windows." For her meals, Bird thoroughly enjoyed trout, eggs, rice, and tea served in "fine Kaga porcelain."