

7. Fukuzawa Yukichi, "Kyūhanjō," trans. Carmen Blacker, in *Monumenta Nipponica* 9 (April 1953), 310–311.
8. Hall, *Early Modern Japan*, 373.
9. Ronald P. Dore, *City Life in Japan*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), 103–104.
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13. Kathleen S. Uno, "Women and Changes in the Household Division of Labor," in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 27.
14. Anne Walthall, "The Life Cycle of Farm Women in Tokugawa Japan," in *Recreating Japanese Women*, ed. Bernstein, 43.
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Growth of Tokugawa Society

The Tokugawa leaders set out to create institutions that would stabilize political and social conditions in the country, thereby preventing a breakup of their coalition and a lapse back into feudal warfare. They succeeded remarkably well; the Tokugawa system endured until 1868. During this period there were very few battles to be fought: the Warring States Period had given way to an era of ordered living. The control measures, instituted to preserve the balance of forces within the coalition that brought the Tokugawa to power, proved effective in inhibiting political change.

Society, while stable, did not remain static. Although on the surface the Tokugawa political system held intact for over two and a half centuries, the entire social and economic basis of that system was quietly transformed. All classes of Japanese—warriors, peasants, merchants—underwent profound change in nature and structure. Tokugawa society grew in unexpected directions until at last a political revolution was inevitable.

Roots of Change

The very success of the Tokugawa system was in the long run responsible for its undoing. Paradoxically, the roots of revolutionary economic and social change lay in the very reforms just discussed, which were carried out in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to try to stabilize society. The control measures, especially the alternate attendance system and the removal of samurai from the countryside, effectively maintained the political status quo, but at the same time they promoted economic changes that slowly undermined the Tokugawa order.

Limitations on Japan's external relations might have been expected to retard economic growth, for several of the flourishing cities,

such as the ports of Sakai and Hakata, had depended upon foreign trade. The economy now turned in upon itself. It might have stagnated except that the requirements of the Tokugawa system provided a powerful stimulant to new economic activity.

Consider the alternate attendance system. Inadvertently, it was surely one of the most important factors contributing to the rise of a money economy. It was intended as a means to control the daimyo by requiring their periodic attendance at the capital, where the bakufu could keep them under continuous surveillance; by requiring the maintenance of residences in Edo, where families were kept as hostages to deter rebellion; finally, by draining their finances by the heavy cost of journeying to and from the capital and of maintaining residences there.

The expenses of the daimyo for the periodic (ordinarily biennial) sojourns in Edo were very great. The largest of the daimyo proceeded to the capital with as many as several thousand retainers; and costs for food and lodging, for hiring boats and porters to cross the numerous water barriers, and the like became immense. As tastes grew more luxurious the processions became occasions for competitive display. Weapons and equipage were elaborately and expensively decorated, thereby advertising the status of the daimyo. In the capital, consumption tended to be even more conspicuous. Each daimyo normally had several mansions, maintained by a permanent staff that, in the case of the largest daimyo, numbered in excess of 10,000 in the mid-eighteenth century.

To obtain specie for these enormous expenses, a daimyo took a large portion of the tax rice collected from the peasantry in his domain and sold it in Osaka and other market centers. Subsequent use of specie stimulated the growth of commercial transactions and an increased use of money. In Edo (not to mention along the main roads leading into the capital) businesses sprang up to cater to the wants of the warriors and to serve the needs of a growing population. Of negligible size before the battle of Sekigahara, Edo grew to a metropolis of about 1 million by 1720—considerably larger than London or Paris at that time. Teeming with samurai visiting from all parts of the country, it became Japan's chief consumption center. To the southwest Osaka, the chief market for surplus rice of many han, also became a great distribution center, with a powerful merchant class directing its commercial activity. Although it grew less rapidly than Edo, by 1800 Osaka had a population of 400,000, and taken together with nearby Kyoto and Sakai the area comprised an urban population in the neighborhood of 1 million people. Much of the trade of the country converged on the Edo and the Osaka-Kyoto areas.

So the alternate attendance system achieved its purpose of maintaining the political status quo only for a time. In the long run it under-

mined the political order by stimulating fundamental economic and social change that the Tokugawa system could not accommodate.

In addition to the alternate attendance system, the removal of the samurai from the countryside and their settlement in the castle towns also had ironic and unexpected results in the long run. The original purpose, as we have seen, sprang from the daimyo's determination to diminish the "independence" of his vassals, thereby stabilizing the political system at the domain level. But the settlement of samurai in the castle towns created local consumption centers and brought into being a merchant class that was of considerable size and influence. A market system grew up to supply the wants of the samurai class and in the long run came to occupy a position of great economic importance. At the same time, the growth of a market network around the castle towns fundamentally altered the social order in the countryside. What had been intended as a measure to control the lord's retainers ended by contributing to a vast change in local society.

Transformation of the Samurai Class

The new circumstances of society also immensely changed the nature of the samurai class. As warfare ceased to be a way of life and a sedentary style took its place, the samurai were compelled to adjust to conditions of peace. In essence their transformation was from a feudal military class to a bureaucratic elite, and though warrior traditions were kept alive, the reality of their daily life had little in common with that of their predecessors in the Warring States Period.

Living in the castle towns on stipends paid them by their lord, the warriors manned his expanding and rapidly differentiating bureaucracy. Rules were established, regularizing their behavior in patterns befitting bureaucrats. Codes were issued, standardizing bureaucratic procedure by providing rules for office hours, for procurement and purchase of office supplies, for systems of guard duty, and similar subjects. Gradually the foundations of civil administration were laid, as the daimyo promulgated codes regulating many aspects of political and economic life and as he clarified procedures of government and chains of administrative responsibility. By the end of the seventeenth century, the daimyo's government had become a complex and elaborately structured bureaucratic organization with a finely graded officialdom that had charge of rural, town, financial, temple and shrine, and social affairs.

Under the peaceful conditions that prevailed, effective governance depended upon an orderly civil administration and the rule of public law. The lord therefore had very different expectations of his retainers than was the case earlier. One lord, writing in 1714, "lamented the

tendency of officials to ignore administrative precedent; henceforth, he states, they should consult the office diaries kept by predecessors and conduct all business accordingly, calling this strict observance of precedent the 'highest loyalty.'"¹ To samurai of the Warring States Period such a conception of loyalty would have been unimaginable!

The contradictions between their living martial traditions, symbolized by the two swords they wore, and the new position of samurai as a civil administrative elite were not easy to reconcile. The most dramatic illustration of this tension occurred in 1702 when forty-seven masterless samurai (*rōnin*) determined to avenge the death of their lord in accord with the traditional warrior code. Their vendetta, however, transgressed shogunal law, and after anguished controversy—in which they were praised in some quarters for their high ideals and condemned in others for their illegal behavior—they were at last required to commit *seppuku* (ritual suicide).

Confucian scholars, writing on the code of the warrior (*bushidō*), sought to reconcile these tensions by urging the samurai to strike a balance between military training and book learning. The latter, however, tended to loom larger in the warrior's new role as civil administrator. One of the most interesting and important aspects of the transformation was the increasing literacy and education of the samurai. At the beginning of the Tokugawa Period warriors were a rough, unlettered class, but by the end nearly all were literate and schooled. From the outset Tokugawa Ieyasu stressed that pursuit of learning must be given the same consideration as the military arts. Learning was necessary in order to acquire the practical techniques of operating a bureaucracy as well as the moral principles upon which samurai government was founded.

Rule by a hereditary military elite was justified with the assertion that samurai governed by virtue of their ethical example. Therefore study of the Confucian classics was essential. The bakufu led the way in educational development by establishing a Confucian academy in Edo early in the period, and the domains followed this example by also founding schools in the castle towns. Domain-sponsored schools proliferated in the latter half of the Tokugawa Period and by the end there were nearly 200.

Change in Agrarian Society

At the outset of the Tokugawa Period a pattern of self-sufficient, cooperative farming prevailed over nearly all the countryside. Consciousness of individual and class interests tended to be submerged in the cohesiveness and solidarity of village society. Physical isolation and the rudimentary state of the market imposed a self-sufficiency

whereby the typical village produced simply what it needed to feed and clothe its own members and to pay the land tax in kind. Any surplus was stored for future use in time of crop failure and famine. There was very little occasion to buy and sell.

The nature of the Tokugawa system transformed this pattern of farming; rural life began to change markedly, especially by the eighteenth century. As cities grew and communications improved, the peasant began to find a market to dispose of whatever surplus goods he produced. In addition to the great urban centers of Edo and Osaka, new castle towns were scattered across the countryside, and nearly every village was within reach of those growing population centers. Villages were thereby drawn into market networks that soon changed both their pattern of farming and their structure of social relations.

Commercial farming spread rapidly and widely during the Tokugawa Period. Villages began to grow crops that would fill the needs of the cities and towns; they began to specialize in the crops that their soil, climate, and market favored. Those necessities that they no longer produced could be purchased in the nearby market. Regional specialization in commercial crops therefore steadily increased: the Osaka area became famous for its mandarin oranges, cotton products, and fish fertilizers; central Honshu was known for its cultivation of mulberries and raising of silkworms; sugar cane was grown mainly in Kyushu; Shikoku produced paper, salt, and lumber. Small village enterprises such as sugar, salt, tea, oil, sericulture, and textile industries spread rapidly, as in fact did more substantial forms of rural enterprise, including the production of wine, soy sauce, ceramics, and iron. Peasants found in these rural industries sidelines to supplement their farm incomes.

With the commercialization of agriculture, the use of money spread. Buying and selling became a common aspect of village life. How commercial rural Japan had become by the end of the Tokugawa Period is suggested by the economic historian Sydney Crawcour. He estimates that "over half and probably nearer [to] two-thirds of output" in Japanese agriculture was marketed in one form or another. He cites a village shopkeeper in an economically advanced area of western Japan who as early as 1813 was selling "the following impressive list of commodities: ink, paper, writing brushes, *herasaki*, cauldrons, cutlery, needles, smoking pipes, tobacco, tobacco pouches, teapots, casserole dishes, rice-wine bottles, oil containers, vinegar, soy sauce, bean paste, salt, matting, noodles, kelp, hair oil, hair strings, hairpins, cotton cloth, socks, towels, bamboo trellis, carrying baskets, *zōri* [thongs], straw sandals, wooden clogs, tea, teacups, lucifers [matches], wicks, incense, fire pots, lanterns, oil, candles, rice wine, timber, hot water bottles, cakes, *sembei* [crackers], trays, funeral requisites, grain, and other everyday necessities!"²

With the rising productivity in the countryside there went an increase in the average standard of living, but it was by no means evenly divided among the peasants. The farming class was every bit as stratified as the others. Most noticeable was the emergence of a class of wealthy peasants (*gōnō*), who clearly benefited the most from the commercialization of the agrarian economy. It was on their land that the greatest increases in productivity usually occurred, for they could afford better fertilizers and improved farm implements. They used their growing wealth to invest in the widely spreading rural industries—*sake* (rice wine) brewing, dyeing, silk and cotton weaving, and the like. Still another outlet for *gōnō* wealth was money lending, which permitted them to foreclose on mortgaged land in times of general economic distress and thereby to become large landholders.

Concentration of landownership and the spread of tenant farming was very noticeable in many of the more economically advanced sections of the country during the late Tokugawa Period. In many villages landless peasants constituted a significant group. The development of the market economy was bringing about new class relations in the village, as the cooperative nature of farming and the cohesiveness of the village declined. One result of this growing consciousness of the disparity of wealth in the villages was a sharp increase in the number of peasant uprisings in the last century of Tokugawa rule—a subject to which we shall turn in the next chapter.

Finally, we should not leave the topic of change in the countryside without noting one of the most intriguing aspects of the Tokugawa Period, that is, the leveling off in the rate of population increase after a sharp rise in the seventeenth century. The population of Japan is estimated at upwards of 18 million at the beginning of the Tokugawa Period. During the succeeding century, as a result of peace and the increase of arable land and agricultural productivity, population grew dramatically so that when the first national population survey was conducted in 1721 it revealed a population approaching 30 million.

Thereafter, for the remainder of the Tokugawa Period, the population leveled off. It used to be thought that population was held in check in Malthusian fashion by disease, famine, and other natural disasters and the consequent resort in desperation to infanticide and abortion. Recent research suggests an altogether different interpretation. Study of Tokugawa epidemics demonstrates a much lower incidence of epidemic diseases than in Europe and other parts of the world.³ Cholera, typhoid, and bubonic plague were not problems, perhaps partly because of geographic isolation, partly because of the careful inspection of ships arriving from other parts of Asia, and partly because of customary sanitation measures. Although Japan suffered epidemics of measles and smallpox, their effects were no worse than in Europe. Japanese life expectancy of more than forty years in the late

Tokugawa Period was similar to that in Western Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁴

The question then presents itself: If health and life expectancy were good, the economy and living standards improving, why did population level off in the second half of the Tokugawa Period? Recent studies suggest that the population stability was more the result of social controls designed to limit the size of families and the number of households within a village than it was of disaster and social demoralization. A village case study directed by Thomas Smith finds, for example, that infanticide was practiced by “the most respectable and stable part of the population” in order to achieve “overall family limitation; an equilibrium of some sort between family size and farm size; [and] an advantageous distribution of the sexes in children. . . .”⁵ Susan Hanley elaborates the social practices that farm families took to optimize their size:

The average number of children in the completed family from the end of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth was only three and a half children. This would have ensured a male heir for most but would have prevented numerous children who would have been a burden on the family and village when grown. Families used a number of means to regulate family size, of which birth control was only one. . . . Women married in their early to mid-twenties, which delayed and reduced the number of child-bearing years. It was also the custom for only one son in each household to marry. . . . Descriptions of abortion, abortionists, and the effects of this practice are abundant, and this form of birth control is known to have been widely practiced throughout Japan. Abortion was an undesirable practice but not a “sin.” Infanticide was even condoned by the euphemism that it was a means of “returning” an infant at birth before it had become an individual and part of society. . . . The measures taken to lower to the minimum the number of nonproductive members in the household lead us to conclude that Japanese were seeking to create a population favorable to economic production.⁶

In short, such behavior bespeaks a surprising foresight and “rationality”—an attitudinal change that may well have conduced to Japan’s subsequent industrialization. In fact, two scholars of this problem have concluded that “Tokugawa Japan as a whole was clearly not trapped in a low-level economic equilibrium with a high rate of population growth ready to sap whatever surplus the economy was able to generate. . . . In short, the pre-industrial population and economic development of Japan can be compared most readily with that of England. Japan, like England, experienced a rate of population increase

well under one-half of 1 percent per annum, while output increased steadily at a higher rate."⁷

We may sum up our discussion of change in agrarian society during the Tokugawa Period by pointing out how recent scholarship has revised our view of the countryside. Traditional scholarship tended to stress the plight of the peasantry, its exploitation by the other classes, the oppressive rate of taxation, the increase of tenancy, and the corresponding concentration of landownership. The "stagnation" of population growth and the waves of peasant uprisings were seen as evidence of the farmers' hardship. In contrast, we now speak of a rising standard of living and of a land tax rate that was frequently not nearly as oppressive as was once thought, with the majority of farmers engaged in part-time jobs that added much to their income. The easing off in the rate of population growth is attributed less to famine and hardship than to deliberate measures that manifested an increased economic rationality on the part of the peasantry. All of this is not to say that there was not much backbreaking hardship. There was. Conditions varied from region to region—even from valley to valley. There was discontent in the countryside, some of it the result of specific policies of government and some of it of the new class relations in the village.

But if we limit ourselves here to economic developments—increased agricultural productivity, commercialization of the countryside, a relatively low rate of population increase—we have factors that help us explain Japan's rapid industrial development in modern times. Conditions in the villages were preparing the way. Although the political system was heading for trouble, society and the economy ought not to be thought of as declining; rather, we should think of them as growing so strikingly that they could scarcely be held within the bounds of the rigid system established at the outset of the Tokugawa Period.

Growth of the Merchant Class

We have already discussed some of the ways in which the new institutional structure of the Tokugawa system gave rise to a growing commercial economy. We should now consider the emergence of a sizable merchant class in the cities and the difficulties the Tokugawa system found in trying to accommodate it within its structure. This is a development of immense importance for understanding the tensions that were developing within the Tokugawa system by the eighteenth century.

Within the merchant class that grew up there was of course (just as in the other classes) a great deal of disparity. It was not a homogeneous group; rather it ranged from the Osaka financiers at the top,

who held the purse strings of many of the daimyo, all the way down to the small shopkeepers, pawnbrokers, journeymen, and peddlers. In between these extremes were wholesalers and shippers who specialized in a variety of commodities and presided over the development of interregional trade. Within local areas there were retailers, brokers, and rural businessmen, some of whom worked in association with han governments to promote commercial development.

The Osaka financiers took advantage of the unique structure of the Tokugawa system to build great merchant houses. They based their strength, in the first place, on the rice-brokering business that was the backbone of Osaka's economy. The major daimyo of central and western Japan, needing cash principally for their alternate attendance requirements, marketed huge amounts of rice in Osaka, and they were dependent on the great merchants of the city to handle all aspects of the transactions. Those merchants began extending to the daimyo long-term loans at high rates of interest. They formed the Osaka banking system in 1670 and eventually dominated the credit system not only of the Osaka area but of all the major trading centers of Japan. Surprisingly sophisticated credit mechanisms and advanced methods of exchange bills developed in order to facilitate trade between these major centers.

Crawcour sums up the influence of these great financiers this way:

Through their exchange and remittance business, they controlled the market in which the relative values of gold and silver—and thus in effect the rate of exchange between Edo and Osaka—were set, and acted as financial agents of the Shogunate. They thus collectively performed some of the functions of a central bank. As commercial and financial agents and major creditors of the various han, they had considerable influence on han economic policy and a practical monopoly of the main exports of the han. Through their handling of tax rice, which amounted to about three-quarters of the supply, they controlled the Osaka rice market and thus the wholesale rice market for the whole country.⁸

Because of the importance they had acquired to the functioning of the Tokugawa system, these financiers were often given quasi-samurai status, sometimes with stipends the equivalent of minor daimyo. Thus although official ideology was often opposed to the growth of the merchant class and commerce in general, in reality government (at all levels) was dependent on merchant groups for their special knowledge in conducting the financial affairs of the system. These groups were often licensed by authorities: given special monopolistic privileges in the expectation that they would stabilize prices, ensure adequate distribution, and make an annual fee payment.

Urban growth, the spread of a money economy, and the emer-

gence of a vital merchant class were reflected in a vibrant new culture of the townspeople. This development is most closely associated with what is known as the Genroku Period: strictly speaking, only a fifteen-year period from 1688 to 1704, but sometimes designating a fifty-year period stretching roughly from 1680 to 1730, the most brilliant flowering of Japanese culture during the Tokugawa era.

The tenor of this culture was expressed by the term *ukiyo* (floating world), which was applied to certain facets of Genroku culture: for example, *ukiyo-zōshi* (stories of the floating world) or *ukiyo-e* (pictures of the floating world). Originally *ukiyo* was a Buddhist term referring to the sad impermanence of all earthly things, but during the Genroku Period it shed that religious connotation and came to suggest, rather, a life of pleasure that one accepts without thinking what might lie ahead. One writer in this period defined *ukiyo* as "living for the moment, gazing at the moon, snow, blossoms, and autumn leaves, enjoying wine, women, and song, and, in general, drifting with the current of life."⁹ One might say that both the Buddhists and the townsmen of the Genroku Period agreed that life was fleeting; they simply disagreed as to what one should do about it.

Genroku culture was concentrated primarily in the pleasure quarters, the teahouses, the theaters, and even the bathhouses of Osaka, Kyoto, and Edo. The castle towns may have shared in Genroku culture, too, but they were certainly far behind. Despite the fact that official ideology put the trading classes at the bottom of the social scale, it was primarily they who were behind this cultural explosion, which included *kabuki*, the puppet theater, the wood-block print, and *ukiyo* literature.

Officials spent their time drawing up lofty Confucian exhortations or devising piecemeal laws in an attempt to control the ostentation, opulence, and extravagance of the trading class and the disruptive influence it was thought to be having on society. *Kabuki* is a case in point. For almost the entire Tokugawa Period (but especially during Genroku days) there was a running duel between the bakufu and *kabuki*, the bakufu trying to restrict it and the *kabuki* always responding with some ingenious evasion. Regarding *kabuki* as destructive of Confucian morality, the bakufu banned women from the stage in 1629, and in succeeding years issued regulations designed to segregate *kabuki* actors from the rest of society and to preserve an austerity of costumes and theater architecture thought to be appropriate for townspeople. Most important was the attempt to eliminate from plays subject matter that might have baneful political influence. Nonetheless some playwrights were able to get away with political satires. For example, one of the most famous playwrights, Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1725), wrote a highly amusing satire of Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (1646–1709), the fifth shogun, who had an idiosyncratic attachment to

dogs. Perhaps it was because he had been born in the zodiacal year of the dog. In any case Tsunayoshi was responsible for a stream of legislation protecting the canine family, which earned him the epithet "dog shogun": there were censuses of dogs, dog taxes, dog commissioners and physicians, public kennels, and much more. In a play written in 1714 Chikamatsu seized on Tsunayoshi and his pet projects as splendid objects of satire and by recasting these events in the earlier Kamakura Period was able to evade the censors.

This popular culture, its leading historian observes, marks "the first time commoners, the nonelite, became culturally important."¹⁰ In part, it was made possible by the spread of literacy, the leisure for reading, and the rapid growth of a large publishing industry. Before the Tokugawa Period, printing was almost nonexistent except in Buddhist monasteries. Now it became a commercial enterprise, relying on woodblocks. At first the books were for serious readers: the Chinese classics, Buddhist works, and classical Japanese literature. Then publishers turned to practical guidebooks for a larger audience: flower arranging, garden design, clothing design, and travel accounts. By the mid-1600s publications written in simple language with few Chinese characters and relying mainly on the Japanese syllabary were published for a growing audience of urban commoners; stories and plays about everyday life in the cities became a popular art form. In more than twenty such books written during the Genroku Period, Ihara Saikaku, the son of an Osaka merchant, dazzled readers with stories on making love and making money. Saikaku was only the best known of many authors who wrote for the new audience in the cities. By the 1720s, Osaka had 24 publishers, Edo 47, and Kyoto 200. "While the shogun and daimyo continued their patronage of the higher culture and learning, the most original and lively developments," concludes Donald Shively, "took place among the populace of the cities."¹¹

Notes

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3. Ann Bowman Janetta, *Epidemics and Mortality in Early Modern Japan* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987).
4. Susan B. Hanley and Kozo Yamamura, *Economic and Demographic Change in Pre-Industrial Japan, 1600–1868* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), 317.
5. Thomas C. Smith, *Nakahara: Family Farming and Population in a Japanese Village, 1717–1830*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1977), 83.

6. John Whitney Hall, ed., *Early Modern Japan*, vol. 4 of *The Cambridge History of Japan*, ed. John Whitney Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 699–700.
7. Susan B. Hanley and Kozo Yamamura, "Population Trends and Economic Growth in Pre-Industrial Japan," in *Population and Social Change*, ed. D. V. Glass and Roger Revelle (London: E. Arnold, 1972), 485–486.
8. E. Sydney Crawcour, "Changes in Japanese Commerce in the Tokugawa Period," in *Studies in the Institutional History of Early Modern Japan*, eds. John Whitney Hall and Marius B. Jansen (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 196. Copyright © 1968 by Princeton University Press; Princeton Paperback, 1970. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.
9. Howard Hibbett, *The Floating World in Japanese Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 11.
10. Donald Shively, "Popular Culture," in *Early Modern Japan*, ed. Hall, 706.
11. *Ibid.*

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Crisis in the Tokugawa System

The bakufu's difficulty in coping with the culture of the townsmen was indicative of the much larger problem that officials were having in dealing with the new social and economic conditions that the development of cities and commerce had created. It is useful to think of the Genroku Period as a kind of divide. On the one side, prior to it, the Tokugawa system was becoming established; its political, social, and economic institutions were being systematized. The samurai elite was adjusting to its new role as an administrative bureaucracy and to its new life in the castle towns. Population surged, city life sprang up, land under cultivation was greatly extended, and a new sedentary lifestyle took hold.

On the other side of the divide, the years after Genroku to which we must now turn our attention, faults were beginning to appear in the political system. "Since the Genroku period," lamented one scholar in the 1730s, "... the life of the country has deteriorated."¹ Contradictions emerged between the ideological premises that underlay the system and the reality of the way it was in fact operating. There is always a gap between the ideals of a social system and its actual behavior, but after Genroku the gap in Japan was too wide to be overlooked. Behind the facade of political stability, immense social and economic developments occurred that gradually transformed the system. In many different areas these developments created strains. Let us examine them rather arbitrarily under the headings of economic, social, and ideological problems.

Economic Problems

The fundamental problem creating strains within the Tokugawa political system was the transformation of its economic basis and consequent undermining of the premises upon which the system had been