Samurai Corruption

21H.154, Session 17
Tsuneno in Edo
Nihonbashi (Japan Bridge)
House of Mitsui

- Mitsui Takayasu, “Lord of Echigo” (Ōmi)
- Son, Sokubei (?-1633): opens “Lord of Echigo’s Brewery”
- Shuhō, Sokubei’s wife: the real brains
- Rise of Mitsui in Ise
Mitsui Takatoshi (1622-94)

- From pawn shop to rice brokerage
- 1673: opens Echigoya (kimono shop)
Echigoya=Mitsukoshi
Tsukiji Honganji
Tsukiji Honganji Today

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Iwai Hanshirō V (1776-1847)
A Tale of Two Economies

- 1560-1710: dramatic change and growth
  - Key dynamic: role of politics in growth

- 1710-1850s: stagnation and adjustments
  - Key dynamic: role of economy in politics
Tokugawa Village

- Inherent inequality
- Taxation as unit on fixed volume (koku) of rice
- Autonomy + technology = massive growth
  - Paddy acreage increase
    - 1450-1650: +70%
    - 1600-1720: +140%
“Sesame seeds and peasants are very much alike: the more you squeeze them, the more you can extract.”
-attributed to an 18th century Tokugawa official

From 1721 letter to domain officials:

“You relentless thieves! Monstrous exploiters! From now on we shall do as we please. If your punishments are severe, we won’t pay taxes.... We shall choose under whom we shall serve according to the severity of his punishments.”
Undeniable Growth

- **Proto-industrialization:** “increased scale of operations and specialized production networks serving long-distance markets” (Gordon, p. 31)

- **Change in social relations and increased inequality**
Demographic Growth

• 12 million Japanese in 1600
• 30~33 million in 1720
• Edo: from 1000 (1590) to 1 million+ (1750)
• Kyoto, Osaka, London, Paris: ~350,000
• Mutually reinforcing trends
• Agricultural output, population growth, increased production
Other Developments

• Literacy: as high as 50% of men and 20% of women by early 1800s
• Mobile population: social and physical
• Erosion of status system
• Emergence of a dynamic but increasingly volatile society
Samurai Consumption

- Commercialization > production and consumption of specialized goods
- Daimyo and samurai as consumers
- Rise of Osaka rice merchants
  - Emergence of rice futures market
Tokugawa Paradox

- Efficient use of resources
- Financial institutions > commercialization
- Transportation and information networks
- Improvement of living standards (including villages)
- Emerging money economy
  - BUT
- Ruling class paid in rice
- Growing merchant power beyond status
内憂外患
(Naiyū gaikan)
“Troubles at Home, Dangers from Abroad”
Samurai Corruption

• Luxurious Living of Samurai (1816)
• Corruption of Samurai (1855)
• Family Budget of Hatamoto (1845)
• Decline of Samurai Morale (1796)
• Honda Toshiaki (pro-western scholar): Economic Conditions in Edo and in the Countryside (1798)
• Matsudaira Sadanobu: Tax Burdens Suffered by the Farmers (1781)
Oshio Heihachirō’s Rebellion (1837)
21H.154 / 21G.554 Inventing the Samurai
Fall 2022

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