
UNIT 2 **EARLY MODERNITY: THE TOKUGAWA PERIOD 1600-1868**

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2.0 **OBJECTIVES**

After reading this Unit, you will know about the followings:

- The nature of Tokugawa feudalism and its administrative system,
- The nature of economy and culture under Tokugawa rule,
- Reasons for decline of Tokugawa rule, and
- The changes in economic, political and intellectual environment in the last phase of Tokugawa rule.

2.1 **INTRODUCTION**

The Tokugawa peace, based on what has been famously termed ‘centralised feudalism’ laid the basis for economic growth and population expansion, from somewhere between 12-18 million in the 1600’s to nearly 30 million, in the early nineteenth century. The political system was a balance of power between the central government and the han or domains. The country was closed to foreigners and, even within the country, the movement of people was controlled and society was theoretically divided into status groups.

In fact our present understanding of the Tokugawa period is that it was a vibrant time when the country had contacts with the outside world, trade and commerce was developing, merchants played an important role, as production for the market

grew, with inter-regional trade and specialization. Political stability spurred urbanization and economic growth, the spread of literacy making the government increasingly rely on merit rather than status to appoint administrators. These developments supported a vibrant culture.

2.2 THE TOKUGAWA DAIMYO-HAN SYSTEM

The system instituted by Tokugawa Ieyasu is called the baku-han system: this refers to the Bakufu or central government and han or feudal domain or fief. The political structure established a system dependent on a balance between the Tokugawa house and the semi-autonomous feudal fiefs (han). The han were allowed a degree of autonomy, the extent of which is debated by scholars, but regulatory mechanisms kept them within central control. The daimyo or domainal lords were controlled in a variety of ways: they were involved in Tokugawa projects that used up their resources, rules governed marriages and the building of forts. The degree of control exercised by the Tokugawa and the extent of autonomy of the daimyo are still a matter of debate, with some scholars even arguing that the daimyo were quite independent while others see the emergence of strong regional bonds that transcend the daimyo's domains and lay the basis for the building of a nation state in the Meiji period.

Tokugawa Ieyasu, unlike his predecessor took the title of seii-tai shogun (barbarian subduing general) from the emperor but, like them he exercised total control. In fact he controlled the imperial household. The titles by themselves carried no authority but maintained the symbolic authority of the Emperor. Regulations were laid down for each status group, the imperial household and nobility, the samurai, the peasantry and merchants. Monks and temples were also regulated. A small group of outcast were also confined to certain areas and their occupants restricted.

The Tokugawa house exercised direct power over its own territories which were over 4 million koku, (a koku was about 150 kg of rice, what was considered enough to feed one man for a year. Productivity of an area and the tax was calculated in rice. The daimyo had annual tax revenues of 10,000 koku or more, depending on the size of their domain) but that was about a one-fourth of the land available, and they directly controlled the major cities, such as Osaka and Nagasaki, as well as the copper and silver mines. Their direct retainers, the bannermen and housemen, as they were classified, were liable to military service but also manned the administration. The government employed censors (metsuke) who secretly kept a watch on daimyo and reported on their activities.

2.2.1 Categories of Daimyo

The daimyo were divided into three categories: 'shinpan or blood relations, loyal vassals (fudai), and those who had opposed the Tokugawa and were considered less loyal, the 'outside lords' (tozama). The 'shinpan' or blood relatives controlled only about ten per cent but were placed in crucial areas such as Kyoto, Owari, (present day Nagoya) Kii (Wakayama) and Echizen (Fukui). The 'fudai' or loyal vassals were given 26 per cent of the land and placed in strategically important positions, and, together with those of the Tokugawa house, their number exceeded

that of the 'tozama' daimyo. The 'outside lords', or less loyal allies controlled 38 per cent of the land. This intricate balance gave a high degree of autonomy to the daimyo but made it difficult for opposition to come together.

The daimyo swore loyalty to the Tokugawa house but in the initial years between 1600-1650 many domains changed hands, particularly of the 'outside daimyo', to underline the authority of the Shogun and establish his right to over the land. Thus, as a reward for services, 172 new daimyos were created and on 281 occasions daimyos were transferred. This transfer policy helped to weaken the links between the daimyo and the people of the province." During the 17th century over two hundred daimyo lost a part or all their territory for various offences.

2.2.2 The System of Alternative Attendance

The sankin-kotai system, or alternative attendance, was another way to control the daimyo. This requirement was formalized in 1635 by Iemitsu, the third shogun. The daimyo had to go to Edo, (present day Tokyo) the capital, on a regular basis and live there. When they returned to their domain their families were left back as hostage. The back and forth travel required heavy expenditure, as daimyo depending on rank, travelled with between 15-300 retainers. They followed designated routes and this led to the development of roads, hostleries, temples, and businesses that supported this movement of people. A vast and fascinating literature on travel also developed.

2.3 THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The routinization of administration gradually weakened the power of the shogun who were sometimes overshadowed by their administrative officials. In the early period the Shoguns exercised power but from 1666 effective power passed to administrative heads - Grand Chamberlain and subsequently the chief Councillors. This was a reflection of the increasing importance of merit rather than status and the need for a trained bureaucracy to administer and manage an increasingly complex economic system. These officials were from the ranks of medium and minor vassals while the 'outside lords', the great vassals were excluded from office. The houses which could provide heirs to the Tokugawa house were also excluded from holding office. Officials held concurrent appointments and were also rotated so one job was carried out by multiple officials. All policy matters were dealt with in consultation and required joint approval. This system worked as an effective system of checks and balances to prevent the consolidation of opposition to Tokugawa rule and ensured that conciliation and consensus were important means of government.

The Tokugawa system of administration was at one level a national government and at another a large daimyo government. The Shogun at the top over-saw both functions. Over its long rule the centre of power shifted and sometimes individuals became powerful through their hold on important offices such as Tamuna Okitsugu (1719-88) or Matsudaira Sadanoba (1758-1829). The Tokugawa controlled the major levers of power: armed forces, control over foreign relations, coastal defence and key urban centres, as well as the gold and silver mines. This system brought about two and a half centuries of peace and stability.

Check Your Progress 1

Early Modernity: The
Tokugawa Period 1600-1868

- 1) Discuss the main features of Daimyo-Han System.

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- 2) What were the different categories of Daimyo?

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- 3) Briefly describe the system of sankin-kotai.

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2.4 TOKUGAWA ECONOMY

The Tokugawa economy while predominantly rural changed in many crucial ways. Peace and prosperity, as well as the concentration of samurai in castle towns led to a high level of urbanization, before any industrialization took place. By the end of the 18th century the capital Edo had a population of nearly a million people, making it one of the largest cities in the world. Compared to pre-industrial Europe premodern Japan had many large urban centres.

The growing demand in cities led craftsmen and shopkeepers to migrate to Osaka-Kyoto, and castle towns like Kanazawa, Sendai, Kagoshima, which had populations of over 50,000. The development of roads, like the Tokaido (eastern sea road) Nakasendo (middle of the mountain road) Sanyodo (road on sun side of the mountains) and Sanindo (road on the shadow side of the mountain) improved commerce and communications.

Urbanization and Town culture

The town culture which developed was essentially a merchant led movement. The merchants (chonin) were the early entrepreneurs of Japan. They worked hard and contributed to the development of a vibrant social system. In 1627, for instance, Mitsui Toshitsugu opened a small drapers shop in Edo called Echigaya which developed into today's Mitsukoshi owned by the Mitsui Company.

Tokugawa society was far more complex than the earlier characterization of it as composed of samurai- farmer-artisan-merchant (shinokosho) would suggest. The kuge or nobility was a small class confined to Kyoto, the warriors (samurai or bushi) about 400,000 mostly lived in towns, had hereditary pensions but many lived in poor circumstances and took up farming or teaching, or some other profession; and some of the merchants grew in wealth while artisans were mainly in the big urban centres and either self-employed or working for daimyo and rich patrons. The biggest class of farmers was actually a very diverse group ranging from wealthy landlords, who were educated and often involved in by-employment, to poor and illiterate indentured labour.

Urbanization led to the growth in urban centres of a whole class of people outside official society: shop hands, day labourers, domestic servants, and outcaste groups, who are often ignored in discussions. There was a growing number of people classified as vagrants, urban poor. On the edges of society were the pariah groups- the eta, who were confined to so-called unclean professions, the hinin or non people, who had been punished for crimes and could get back to society, after a period. There were entertainers, story tellers, and prostitutes. Tokugawa society saw prostitution not as a moral problems but one of management. It was permitted in licensed areas, such as Yoshiwara in Edo and Shimabara in Kyoto. Geisha were bought, particularly easy in times of famine, and lived confined and difficult lives but a few, because of their beauty and accomplishments could become wealthy, and even enjoy a measure of fame. Society was more complex than the usual division of would suggest.

The growth of rural distress and urban poor raised the question of how to tackle poverty. The cities mostly administered directly by the Shogunate set up relief shelters in the mid-seventeenth century. These provided temporary help after which the people were sent back to their villages. By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, rural distress led to an increase in the underclass and these became permanent facilities.

In the late eighteenth century a type of workhouse was started in Edo where the aim was to help those without a criminal background to learn new skills and become gainfully employed. This was in part a reaction to famine as well as urban riots. The inmates were also given a course of practical ethics to ensure that they were provided the appropriate moral basis to develop their lives. Along with this a fund was created for providing temporary relief during emergencies as well as on-going help for the aged, children and the ill without relatives.

The scale of the help provided can be gauged from the fact that in 1805 about 4 out of 1,000 townspeople in Edo received help. This relief system was sustained by a special tax and managed by wealthy merchants. This was then compared to Shogunal benevolence a more public and sustained relief system than the measures practised in the villages that tended to deal with specific emergencies.

2.5 TOKUGAWA INTELLECTUAL CURRENTS

It is commonly said that Ieyasu became ruler through his military powers but ran the government using Confucian ideas. Confucian ideas were known from early times but during the Tokugawa period they provided rules for government, for the economy, familial relationships and ethics. These ideas came from the Neo-

Confucian schools that emerged in twelfth century China to challenge Buddhism. The neo-Confucian ideas of Zhu Xi (1130-1200) were first introduced to Japan by a Zen monk Fujiwara Seika (1561-1617) and formalised by Hayashi Razan (1583-1657) who established a school, the Shoheiko (named after Confucius's birthplace Changping pronounced Shohei in Japanese) that became the officially sponsored centre of Neo-Confucian learning from 1797.

Buddhism was strictly controlled and sects kept apart. Births were registered in temple records so everyone belonged to a sect and funeral were conducted according to Buddhist rituals. Buddhist temples were rich but their power limited. Shinto sects also played an important role. Some argued that Buddhist deities were manifestations of Shinto gods. Ieyasu was exalted as a manifestation of Shinto and Buddhist gods.

There were other influential thinkers such as those of the school of Ancient Learning (kogaku). These scholars stressed that the original writings must be studied and not the commentaries as was the usual practice.

Ogyu Sorai, one of the most important thinkers of this period, was linked to this school but differed crucially in that in that he even questioned the superiority of the canonical texts and argued that these text have to be applied to the new circumstances. In other other words these were not immutable principles of nature but an 'invention' (sakui), and could not be taken literally but applied taking into consideration the changing times.

Christianity was also an important part of the history of pre-modern Japan. It was brought by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and by the early seventeenth century there were some 30000 converts, including people from the ruling houses. It was suppressed in the 1620s and 1630s and, for a variety of political reasons, banned. Along with this ban the entry of foreign knowledge was severely curtailed, a strict censorship was imposed on all books that entered the country, till the eighteenth century.

2.6 CULTURE IN TOKUGAWA JAPAN

One way of thinking about culture is to look at popular and elite cultures. Japanese scholars such as Nakano Mitsutoshi have identified courtly culture or aristocratic (Ga or miyabiyaka) that was largely influenced by Chinese classical texts. This would be classical poetry, such as waka or linked verse, renga, noh drama, the paintings of the Kano school and the tea ceremony. The zoku or 'coarse' (iyashi) was the common, plebian culture. This was best represented by the 'ukiyo' or culture of the 'floating world'. The 'floating world' was the world of the geisha or courtesans, entertainers, much like the tawaifs in northern India, who were trained in literary and musical arts and entertained those with wealth. They were confined to licensed areas, where swords and weapons were not allowed, and money mattered not social distinction. The writer Ihara Saikaku (1649-193) has brilliantly depicted the world of the courtesan where men squandered fortunes in the pursuit of pleasure. The 'floating world' of courtesans was depicted woodblock prints, kabuki theatre and haikai or comic poetry. Some of the most iconic productions of Tokugawa art and literature occurred during the Genroku period (1688-1704).

The growth of urbanization and economic prosperity fuelled the growth in literacy and the creation of a large reading public which sustained a vibrant publishing industry. Japan has a long history of printing, in fact the one of the oldest printed text dates back to between 764-770. The vitality of Tokugawa culture was sustained and invigorated by a sophisticated printing industry. Print culture was as complex and varied as in Western countries. Every year some 3,000 new titles were published. This does not include the regular reprints of Chinese and Buddhist texts. At the peak there were 6,747 publishing houses spread across in the country. Classical Buddhist and Confucian texts, and Japanese histories were published alongside, plays, poetry and fiction, primers for reading and writing, as well as a range of single sheets showing leading sumo wrestlers, courtesans, and actors.

Theatre was a popular among all classes. Kabuki, (the word means 'to tilt or look askance' implying irreverence) plays first had women actors. These plays attracted a diverse social crowd and were seen as provocative and flouting social norms. In 1642 the authorities clamped down on them and banned women actors. Kabuki then developed roles for men playing women and became a vibrant theatrical form patronised by the rich merchants of cities such as in Osaka. Samurai were banned from attending but many went incognito.

Among the visual arts the development of 'pictures of the floating world' are perhaps the most distinctive representation of the Tokugawa period. Ukiyo-e were woodblock prints carved on blocks of cherry block, each block used for one colour. By the eighteenth century polychrome prints, sometimes single sheets, at others a series of prints, were being produced depicting landscapes, famous actors, courtesans, and book illustrations. One of the more famous is Hiroshige's Fifty-Three Stages on the Tokaido highway (1833-4).

2.7 THE REGULATION OF FOREIGN CONTACT

The work of scholars, such as Ronald Toby in English, has altered our picture of Japan as a closed country to a more nuanced view. Japan restricted contacts in the 1630's not because of anti-foreignism, or because they did not want to trade but because they did not want to be in a subordinate position within the Sino-centric world order. Restrictions on foreign trade in the early seventeenth century were introduced because the export of silver to finance silk imports had led to the depletion of the silver mines and this, in turn, led to a currency crisis. To stem this flow the Tokugawa took measures to restrict imports and support domestic silk production. These measures introduced sericulture and the production of high quality silk. Kyoto emerged as one of the major centres for silk production. As this domestic production grew foreign trade declined till ports were opened to foreign trade in 1859.

The Dutch Trading Station at Deshima

The Dutch were given a small trading station in Deshima, Nagasaki and from the eighteenth century they began to import books as well. Some Japanese scholars who became interpreters for the Dutch, studied Dutch and became known as 'Dutch scholars' or rangakusha. They studied and translated books on Western medicine, science and mathematics and spread this new knowledge. Their work turned attention away from China as a source of knowledge to the West. In 1771 when the Dutch scholar Sugita Genpaku (1723-1817) participated in a dissection of a human body he realised that the Western books accurately showed the working

of the human body and that Chinese medicine had nothing to offer. His translations communicated these ideas to a wider public. Other scholars, like Honda Toshiaki (1744-1821) advocated economic development and foreign expansion and Kaiho Seiryō (1755-1817) urged the government to engage in trade and commerce. These ideas were derived from their reading of Western works and studies of Western societies.

It was only in the end of the eighteenth century that anti-foreignism becomes important. Japan maintained different relations with foreign countries. Korea regularly sent diplomatic delegations and Japan traded with China. Books were an important component of trade, and these along with reports based on information given by captains of ships that came to trade became an important source of information about global developments. For instance Japan became aware of Indian colonization by the British by the early nineteenth century. India became a powerful example of the dangers of colonization. Similarly, the work of scholars on Hokkaido and Okinawa has raised questions about the boundaries of Japan, and the premodern relationship between these peripheral areas and the main islands.

2.8 TOKUGAWA DECLINE

The decline of the Tokugawa order has its roots in a contradiction which lay in the structure itself when it was built in the seventeenth century. The contradiction was between the ideal which visualized a hierarchic status divided society based on a simple agrarian economy and the reality of a more complex commercial economy along with a social order which again was much more complex. The changes brought about by a long period of peaceful development generated such social and intellectual forces which questioned and undermined the basis of Tokugawa rule.

The growth of a cash economy and cottage industries increased commercialization and led to the diffusion of new technologies such as better seeds, planting techniques, greater use of fertilisers to increase production.

The commercialization of the economy and a fairly constant tax base, because of the Tokugawa Bakufu's inability to effectively manage the new sources of wealth, led to financial problems for both the Shogun and the Daimyo and their samurai retainers. In 1830, for instance the domain of Satsuma owed thirty-three times its annual revenue and by 1840 Choshu owed twenty-three times its annual revenue. This deterioration in finances affected the samurai whose incomes were low even in the seventeenth century and who were now faced with rising prices and an inability to satisfy their increasing demands.

The rural economy was rapidly changing in character and by the nineteenth century regional specialization had produced a variety of economic activities. In central and southern Honshu commercial activity had spread widely with many villages specializing in growing cotton, oil seeds, and other products for the market. In the area around Edo nearly a quarter of the rural population was by now employed in commerce and handicrafts. The cities had become the production centres of textiles, lacquer and pottery. As these activities shifted from rural areas the cities became commercial and administrative centres and continued to attract immigrants from rural areas.

The Failure of Reforms

The Bakufu had taken recourse to various steps to alleviate these problems but these measures failed because of the lack of a clear understanding of the nature of the problems. In 1705 the Bakufu had confiscated the wealth of merchants, like the rich and powerful Yodoya, but this was of no use. In 1720's Tokugawa Yoshimune (1684 -1751) took measures to reform the fiscal and administrative system in which he licensed the merchants but he also took measures to reduce consumption and money supply, a traditional prescription.

The only attempt which was substantially different was by the Bakufu official Tanuma Okitsugu (1719-1788) who sought to encourage commerce and by taxing it raise government revenues. But these attempts were foiled and he was removed from office. His successor Matsudaira Sadanobu (1758-1788) sought to repeat the steps taken by Yoshimune and in 1841 Mizuno Tadakuni went so far as to abolish government sanctioned trading rights. These measures merely served to complicate and confuse the already grave situation and they had to be withdrawn.

The inability of the Bakufu to implement effective and suitable policies was matched by a growing increase in unauthorized trade between producers and local merchants, a trade which the domains were forced to accept or even actively support to overcome their own financial difficulties. In Choshu, for instance, in 1840 gross non-agricultural income was the same as net agricultural income but while agricultural income was taxed 39 percent non-agricultural income was taxed only 10 per cent. By 1840 in the commercialized regions in Honshu and Shikoku villagers were firmly linked to a cash economy.

2.9 THE TOKUGAWA ECONOMY: A CASE OF PROTO-INDUSTRIALIZATION?

Current scholarship uses the concept of 'proto-industrialization' which looks at how commercialization of agriculture leads farmers to produce goods through cottage industries and sell these in far off markets. This happens in Japan from the mid-eighteenth century. How this worked is debated. Karen Wigan has shown that farmers in Shimoina valley, in central Japan, began to produce textiles, hardwood products, and paper craft for the market. David Howell has argued, in studies of Hokkaido, that proto-industrialisation far from being linked to the commercialization of agriculture actually developed where agricultural productivity was low as in Hokkaido. Here the fishing industry grew by supplying fish fertilizer to the Osaka region and this trade transformed the way the fishing industry had been organized- from a contract based system it became more capital intensive with rich merchants controlling proletarianised labour. Similarly in other areas rich farmers (gono) began to emerge as they made their wealth as money lenders, by producing sake or tea, and in inter-regional trade.

The major cities developed, farmers produced more for the market, inter-regional trade expanded. Far from being overtaken by commercial developments or not understanding them officials began to change their policies to encourage and tax this rural production. Susan Hanley, for instance argues that material life increased

for the better: houses were bigger, people ate better and lived longer, even by Western standards in Tokugawa Japan.

In studies on the han of Tosa it has been argued that merchants developed the idea of Kokueki 'the prosperity of the country or domain'. Public officials incorporated this idea into their thinking and made policies to support commercial activities such as to encourage production of eggs, sugar, paper production, and gun powder. They would reduce or waive taxes for a period of time to encourage merchants to move into these areas.

2.10 FAMINE, DISTRESS AND PEASANT PROTEST

The other side of these developments was that there were major famines in the 1730s, 1780s and 1830s that led to the death of hundreds of thousands indicating the precarious lives of farmers. Stratification of rural society and the uneven benefits of growth are also reflected in rural protest and peasant uprisings, which were in the latter part of the period directed against the rural rich. Peasant rebellions and the rich literature around them underline the different ways people benefited from economic growth.

The growth of a cash economy and the consequent changes in social relations generated tensions and conflicts. The divisions within the samurai, status difference between lower and upper, prevented the formation of a community of interests. The merchants too were not a monolithic bloc but divided by their interests. The Osaka merchants favoured by the Bakufu were closely tied to the Tokugawa structure and when it collapsed they too were finished. The Mitsui house was an exception. It survived because of the farsightedness of its founder, who had ruled that they must always maintain a large reserve fund.

The rural merchants who had begun to play a dynamic role were excluded from the benefits of privilege and they were responsive to the need for change. As in the cities so also in the rural areas too, economic changes disrupted the social fabric and disorders became both frequent and increasingly violent.

The Tokugawa peace had been enforced with vigour over the peasantry. As early as 1637 the Shimabara rebellion had been put down with great severity. In the 1780s and 1830s famine, price rise, and excessive taxation resulted in peasant protests. Over the intervening years protests developed from mass petitions to violent actions involving thousands and spread over many villages.

Scholars have calculated that in the seventeenth century peasant rebellions averaged one or two a year while after 1790 they had gone up to over six a year. The early peasant actions had been as village solidarities, largely peaceful and concerned with reduction of taxes. But in the latter period they were often against the advice of village elders, violent and often destructive of property. Peasant protests also evolved, at times, a millennial character. Thus, for instance, even in urban centres protests increased in the last years of the Tokugawa. The most representative of these urban protests were called Yonaoshi (world renewal) which drew their inspiration from folk traditions and sought a restoration of righteousness. Rural unrest was as much a product of economic changes as it was of increasing education and awareness.

2.11 A CHANGING INTELLECTUAL ENVIRONMENT

The end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century brought changes to the East Asian environment, the increasing interventions of the Western powers in China and Southeast Asia was known to the Japanese.

One of the more influential ideas came from the National School of Learning, whose influence continued into the modern period. Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) is one of the major representatives of this school. He studied the *Kojiki* (712), a text that narrated the divine origins of Japan and its imperial dynasty, to argue against Confucian ideas and assert that Shinto (the Way of the Gods) was the basis for Japanese civilisation. The emperor as the direct descendent of the Sun Goddesses marked the superiority of Japanese civilization and its difference from China. These ideas were further developed by Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843) and provided the basis for conservative nationalism in modern Japan.

Translations of books and plays showed the dangers of colonization to the Japanese. An often translated section of a book by Wei Yuan, an influential Chinese scholar who wrote on how to combat the West, was his chapter on the colonization of India. It was translated multiple times in Japan and India became an example of a 'lost country'.

There were other critical voices arguing against the prevailing political order. Some turned to the past and looked to resurrect the old imperial state built around the emperor, other questioned the legitimacy of the right of the samurai to rule.

The loyalist ideals inspired by the imperial institution which sought to reassert the purity of Japanese culture and at times to incorporate Western technology to reinforce and strengthen these native concepts was further strengthened by other intellectual currents. The growth of historical scholarship around the Mito school also played an important role by sponsoring a study, *The History of Great Japan* (*Dai nihon shi*) that stressed on the central position occupied by the Emperor in Japan. At a time when Tokugawa rule was being questioned this became an important intellectual support for imperial loyalists calling for a return to imperial rule.

Among the critical voices, perhaps the most wide ranging criticisms of the basis for Tokugawa rule was that of Ando Shoeki, (1703-1762), a medical doctor by training, who went beyond administering to the needs of the sick to think about what ailed society. His response to the rifts that economic and political changes had created led him to make a thoroughgoing critique of feudal society grounded in a rejection of the rule of the samurai but also of the foundational teachings of the Neo-Confucians and Buddhists.

Ando Shoeki wrote, 'All people are one person' and advanced an ecological philosophy of nature to realize true autonomy and freedom. Shoeki's major surviving work, *The Way of the Operation of the Self-Acting Truth* (*Shizen Shin ei do*) was begun in 1750 and published in October 1752. Shoeki defined what he called the World of the Law (*ho no yo*) where people were held in thrall, and in opposition to this world he posited the world of Nature where writing (artifice) had not alienated human beings from Nature (speech). This domination, he argued,

was maintained in three ways, through military force, through the medium of economic exchange, that is 'gold and silver' and, equally importantly, through the medium of thought, that is words.

Shoeki's writings were only discovered in 1899 but became an important text for modern scholars to think about the many ways the Tokugawa order was being criticized.

Other thinkers who were critical of the samurai class emphasized the importance of the merchant, traditionally looked down upon. One such person was Ishida Baigan (1685-1744). His ideas drew on traditional Confucian and Buddhist concepts to advance the idea of 'heart learning' which taught you how to align your thinking with the universe. During this period his disciples developed and spread his teachings. They spoke not to the intellectual elites but the ordinary people. They established nearly two hundred schools by 1800 and had developed a well thought out teaching programme aimed not only for adult males but was also for women and children. These teachings were supported by the bakufu as they did not aim to over turn the political order.

The problems of rural distress and peasant uprisings inspired ideas about how to alleviate poverty and reduce radical opposition. Ninomiya Sontoku (1787-1856) was the most famous of the philosophers coming out of a prosperous farming family who advocated self-help. He and other reformers like him preached Confucian ideas of filial piety and diligence but they did not see the social order as static. They argued that even poor peasants by working hard, being thrifty and improving productivity by using new agricultural methods could improve their lot and become wealthy.

Exposure to ideas from the West, from the late eighteenth century also influenced intellectual explorations. The Bakufu itself while was not united on what policy to pursue took measures to understand these new challenges. Using the expertise of the Dutch scholars the Bakufu established a school to study Western books and this by 1857 became the Institute for the Investigation of Barbarian Books. Many of the Dutch scholars, familiar with the activities of the Western nations in China and other parts of Asia, advocated reform measures, particularly of the Tokugawa's military capabilities to meet the foreign threat. For instance, as early as 1784 Hayashi Shihei (1738-1793) published *A Discussion of the Military Problems of a Maritime Nation* advocating extensive military reform.

One of more influential ideas about how to meet the challenge of the West was expressed by Aizawa Seishisai in 'The New Thesis' (Shinron, 1825). Aizawa, (1781-1863) aware of the advances of the Russians in the north saw that the strategy that could counter the Western threat required military strength as well as a cultural regeneration. The West used Christianity and conscription and hence Japan must modernize its weapons and revive its kokutai national essence. He wrote "The sun rises in our 'divine Land: and the primordial energy originates here. The heirs of the Great Sun have occupied the Imperial Throne from time immemorial." Aizawa was thus drawing on various traditions to put forward a new programme for meeting the challenges posed by the Western threat and he was using Western knowledge to reassert the primacy of Japan and Japanese values.

Sakuma Shozan (1798-1866) another influential scholar, who had studied gunnery and other Western subjects coined the slogan “Eastern ethics and Western science”. This became an important way for people to accept certain areas of this new knowledge, such as in medicine, where the efficacy of vaccination to combat smallpox was evident.

In the components of the new ideas prevalent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the awareness that the state must combine administrative, entrepreneurial and military skills to create a new and stronger Japan. Also suggested was the central importance of the Imperial institution.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Briefly discuss the nature of economy under Tokugawa.

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- 2) Does the Tokugawa economy represent a case of Proto-industrialization?

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- 3) Analyse the Changes in intellectual environment towards the end of Tokugawa rule.

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2.12 LET US SUM UP

These trends coalesced and came together when political criticism of the Bakufu increased. The Bakufu was increasingly unable to tackle the problem of coping with the Western powers who were demanding that Japan open her doors and allow free access to trade and diplomatic relations. How the Bakufu dealt with the Western powers will be dealt with in Unit 3 on the Meiji restoration.

The long Tokugawa rule saw remarkable changes transforming the country from a largely rural economy and a traditionally status divided society to one where the commercialization of agriculture could support a large urban population.

The demand for skilled manpower in the economy and administration led to the spread of education and encouraged social mobility. The social and intellectual vitality of the country allowed it to respond to the new challenges posed by the threat of Western imperialism and the new ideas that they brought with them. The Tokugawa rulers made unsuccessful attempts to meet the challenges. Ultimately a coalition of domains managed to carry out a relatively peaceful political change even as they claimed to be restoring the rule of the emperor.

2.13 KEY WORDS

Bakufu: Central government dominated by military commander under Tokugawa rule.

Baku-Han: Division of powers between central government and domains of Daimyo.

Daimyo: Feudal lords Under Tokugawa rule.

Hinin: Socially out-cast social group in Tokugawa Japan.

Koku: A unit of revenue or tax calculated in kind (a koku was equivalent of 150 kg of rice).

Proto-industrialization: Production of commodities under craft-techniques for sale in distant markets.

Sankin-Kotai: System of alternate attendance for daimyo under Tokugawa to control them.

2.14 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See section 2.2
- 2) See sub-section 2.2.1
- 3) See sub section 2.2.2

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 2.4
- 2) See Section 2.9
- 3) See Section 2.11