

Saying Yes! to Now

The Strange Case of the Tokugawa Leap toward Modernity, c. 1600

ABSTRACT This article is taken from the author's presidential address at the annual meeting of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association, delivered on August 3, 2018. It explores the structural and personal sources of Japan's surprisingly successful transition, in the decades around 1600, to an urban-centered market economy. Particular attention is devoted to artistic innovation as one indicator of the "climate of change" that enabled radical new choices in a society loosed from the authority of old regimes. **KEYWORDS** Tokugawa, genre painting, early modern economies, urbanization, bathhouse attendants

Let me lead by drawing your attention to a provocative painting (Illustration 1) that will concern us soon. It serves as a promise, while I limn the backdrop to my subject, of colorful things to come.¹

The backdrop is Japan in the years around 1600, when three remarkable transitions were taking place simultaneously. The first was from a big war to a big peace. That war had been big in length (lasting about one hundred thirty years) and big, too, in geographical scope: it covered the breadth of the archipelago, excluding the frontier of Hokkaido, and extended for a time (1592–98) to catastrophic invasions of Korea. That war was also big in the number of combatants. As many as 500,000 men at arms participated in the final domestic campaigns, a phenomenal figure for the early modern world; as many as 140,000 Japanese troops landed in Korea, a figure almost five times larger than the Spanish Armada.²

1. I hew very closely here, with occasional amplifications, to the talk I gave to the membership of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association on August 3, 2018. It paints with a broad brush several themes I explore in detail in a book manuscript now nearing completion, provisionally titled *The Economic Culture of 17th-Century Japan*. Although the lecture was heavily illustrated with slides, I include in this published version only the principal image, Illustration 1.

2. See Mary Elizabeth Berry, *The Culture of Civil War in Kyoto* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994) and Berry, *Hideyoshi* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,



ILLUSTRATION 1. *Yuna, Women of a Public Bathhouse*, Edo Period, 17th century. Hanging scroll, color on paper. 72.5 x 80.1 cm. MOA Museum of Art, Atami Japan. Reproduced with the kind permission of the MOA Museum of Art. <http://www.moaart.or.jp/en/collections/065/>. Readers of the print version of *PHR* should visit this URL or consult the journal online to see the illustration in color.

The peace would be even bigger in length (lasting about two hundred fifty years). The Tokugawa house vanquished the last of its challengers in 1615 to establish a regime, headed by a shogun, that would continue for fifteen generations. The *Pax Tokugawa* would be as profound as it was long, for only one significant martial contest disturbed the domestic polity before the 1850s, and no foreign warfare would resume before the Meiji period (1868–1912). A large population of samurai did survive throughout the early modern period, but largely in service as bureaucrats, variously

1982). Regarding the war in Korea, see JaHyun Kim Haboush, *The Great East Asian War and the Birth of the Korean Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

underemployed or unemployed altogether, who were not systematically drilled in military exercises.³

This transition from war to peace was accompanied by a second: from a baronial to a market economy. Before 1600, monetized trade was limited and conducted, in the main, with imported Chinese coins (since medieval Japanese regimes found no reason to mint their own coinage). In the decades framing 1600, however, we find aggressive moves to commercial agriculture, sound monetary and financial institutions, and what would become a nationally integrated market.⁴

The impulse behind this market conversion was a third major shift: from meager to major urbanization. Around 1580 or so, something like 3 to 4 percent of the Japanese population lived in cities; by 1700 the figure was 15 percent (perhaps as high as 20 percent). It was dispersed, moreover, across a dense national network that included three monster cities; some seventy more over twenty thousand; and scores more of at least five thousand. The monsters were Edo (which, at over one million, was the largest metropolis on the planet) and Osaka and Kyoto (over three hundred thousand each).⁵

Such mind-boggling urban growth (unparalleled elsewhere in the early modern world) resulted from daring acts of political fiat—really acts of social engineering—that were aimed at structural pacification. Those acts, taken by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in the 1580s and enforced by the Tokugawa, required almost all samurai to leave their villages (where they had enjoyed dangerously independent access to human and material resources) and take up residence in the castle headquarters of their daimyo lords. There they would live on often

3. For a solid survey of the Tokugawa period, see Conrad Totman, *Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).

4. The best English-language introduction to economic change appears in Akira Hayami, Osamu Saitō, and Ronald Toby, eds., *The Economic History of Japan, Vol. 1: The Emergence of Economic Society in Japan, 1600–1859* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Market growth and monetization in the medieval period were highly selective regionally. See, for a still exemplary treatment, Wakita Haruko, *Nihon chūsei shōgyō hattatsu-shi no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobō, 1969).

5. Still alone in English as a solid survey of Japan's urban history is Takeo Yazaki, *Social Change and the City in Japan* (Tokyo: Japan Publications Inc., 1968). Also see two important books by Nakabe Yoshiko: *Chūsei toshi no shakai to keizai* (Tokyo: Nihon Hyōronsha, 1992) and *Kinsei toshi no seiritsu to kōzō* (Tokyo: Shinseisha, 1967). Japan's demographic history before c. 1700 is vexed but masterfully analyzed throughout the work of Hayami Akira. See, for example, *Rekishi jinkōgaku kenkyū: atarashii kinsei Nihon-zō* (Tokyo: Fujiwara Shoten, 2009) and *Population, Family, and Society in Pre-modern Japan: Collected Papers of Akira Hayami* (Kent, U.K.: Global Oriental, 2009). Also see William Wayne Farris, *Japan's Medieval Population: Famine, Fertility, and Warfare in a Transformative Age* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).

paltry stipends calculated in rice, the equivalent of salaries, under the surveillance of their superiors. Because samurai and their families made up something like 7 percent of the total population, a major urban migration was set in motion—one that would be joined by the equal numbers of commoners who moved to cities in the samurai wake. These were the merchants, craftspeople, and providers of myriad services who shifted from agrarian to commercial enterprises, seeking new lives as provisioners of a samurai community that was now assembled in urban barracks as a huge body of needy consumers.⁶

The growth of Edo to a million residents is a special story, resulting from another policy that focused on the daimyo lords. These were some two-hundred-plus generals who emerged from the civil wars as semi-autonomous governors of the local domains into which Japan was carved. (I call the Tokugawa regime federal, to acknowledge the shared but qualified rule of a strong shogunal center and the two-hundred-plus local daimyo jurisdictions.) One means of keeping those daimyo in check was the requirement that each spend six months out of twelve in the Tokugawa capital of Edo and permanently leave there his main consort, a formidable complement of retainers, and (usually) his heir.⁷

So, we have three fully transformative transitions—to peace, to a market economy, to urbanization—on a scale known in the past, if at all, only when Japan made sweeping changes to indigenous governance by adopting Chinese models of rule in the seventh and eighth centuries. And now I pose the question at the heart of my current work: why did things work out?

Although I could certainly gloss at length the losses and painful disruptions occasioned by the transitions, they did not eventuate in chaos—in, for example, the massive rebellion of dispossessed and deracinated samurai, or the starvation of rudimentary castle towns lacking good supply lines, or production crises throughout the villages that faced the exodus of both their martial leaders and the waves of commoner migrants who followed them. I leave it to you to imagine plenty of other disaster scenarios (from epidemic disease in the cities to failures in the urban water supply). But they did not arise.

This outcome is immensely surprising, I believe, since so little was in place for the construction of an urban-centered market economy. The litany only begins with the absence of a currency system, standard measures, and

6. Yoshida Nobuyuki, ed., *Toshi no jidai*, Vol. 9 of *Nihon no kinsei* (Tokyo Chūō Kōronsha, 1992).

7. Toshio G. Tsukahira, *Feudal Control in Tokugawa Japan: The Sankin-kōtai System* (Cambridge: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 1966).

a transportation infrastructure. Significant commercial agriculture reached only (and selectively) into the Kansai area; good commissary provisions supported only the largest daimyo armies. Again, then, the question: how was foundational change actually achieved after 1600? I find this one of the most neglected subjects in Japanese history, especially when we consider that scholars have been ardently engaged, for generations, with two similarly arresting upheavals: one is the Meiji modernization story in the latter nineteenth century; the other is the recovery story in the Occupation and post-Occupation years of the mid-twentieth century.⁸ Like these great passages, the turn of 1600 entailed profound shifts in course and affected all lives. But assessing the resources enabling it remains a neglected scholarly challenge.

Those resources were many and complex, needless to say, and included any number of the often interlocking factors important to most take-off plots. Let me mention, for starters, that (1) the Tokugawa regime was remarkably friendly to commerce (despite its mistaken reputation for physiocratic farming-first-ism). Taxation policy, for example, was deeply pro-business: taxes on land were eliminated in most major cities and taxes on commodity trade were perfunctory. We also find (2) extraordinary investments, by shogun and daimyo alike, in infrastructure (highways, ports, and urban building) as well as land reclamation, which would help double the amount of arable within a century. Such investment was made possible by (3) the new state wealth that resulted from systematic cadastral registration and agrarian taxation; extensive foreign trade, monopolized by the regime; and a boom in mining. (Japan was producing one-third of the world's silver in the early seventeenth century.) Critical to several of these developments, moreover, was (4) the generative pursuit of foreign knowledge (not least mining technology and hydraulic engineering) and the introduction of foreign crops (not least cotton and tobacco). The list of boons from imported learning is long. It would not end with the severe curtailment of foreign contact after 1640, but it would grow slowly and sporadically. One more seminal factor to economic take-off is (5) what Hayami Akira calls the "industrious revolution"—the profit-seeking commitment of farmers and workers to ever harder, ever smarter labor.⁹

8. The bibliographies on both the Meiji and the Occupation stories are immense. For orientation in the scholarship, see Marius B. Jansen, ed. *The Cambridge History of Japan, Vol. 5: The Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Peter Duus, ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan, Vol. 6: The Twentieth Century* (also published in 1989).

9. Although there is no synoptic treatment of these many foundational issues, an excellent departure point is Hayami, Saitō, and Toby, eds., *Economic History of Japan*. The latest of Akira

Much could be added to this elemental catalogue. Again, just for starters, I would emphasize the cultivation in popular media of a veritable religion of consumption, which helped inspire the industrious revolution and indispensably fueled market growth. I would emphasize, too, the formation of institutions of commercial and social trust: preeminently multi-generational stem households (which fused family with enterprise) and sound governing bodies in urban neighborhoods and agrarian villages (which were constructed by their members to handle almost all communal matters, from security and fire-fighting to property transactions and observations of the ritual calendar). The geometrical growth of schooling and the publishing market would figure in any amplified catalogue as well.¹⁰

Today, however, I want to address my question—how was foundational change actually achieved after 1600—by talking about the painting (Illustration 1) that I have dangled before you for some time now. If it doesn't unlock all secrets, the painting does enable us to explore what I think of as the “mind of change” or the “climate of change”—those mysteries having to do with worldview, with experimentation and competition and mobility and opportunity. These are the mysteries, I think, that help connect tax breaks and silver revenues to the leaps of imagination necessary to take chances. The work is held by the Museum of Art in Atami, a hot spring resort about an hour southwest of Tokyo by train, and is mounted as a scroll that measures just over 72 × 80 cm. (28 × 32 inches).

The painting features six figures, who loom large against a neutral ground. Seemingly caught in a walk outdoors, since they wear sandals and in one case a hat, the figures form a group, although one united mainly by proximity, just barely by the inclination of heads and bodies. Are they really together? Their attention, the focus of their eyes, is unsettlingly obscure; the figures stare past one another into the distance. Thus withholding any obvious relations among his subjects, the painter disengages them from viewers as well. They are not posing for us, whether as subjects of portraiture or models on a catwalk.

Hayami's many iterations of the “industrious revolution” thesis (a phrase borrowed by others, notably Jan DeVries) appears in Hayami, *Japan's Industrious Revolution: Economic and Social Transformations in the Early Modern Period* (Tokyo: Springer, 2015).

10. These are subjects of the book I am working on. I briefly took up neighborhood governance in Berry, “What is a Street?” in *Cartographic Japan*, eds. Kären Wigen, Sugimoto Fumiko, and Cary Karacas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 85–88. I discuss popular publishing in Berry, *Japan in Print: Information and Nation in the Early Modern Period* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006).

Some posturing is implicit, of course, in a painting alive to fashion. The hair—the bobs on foreheads, the layers on cheeks, the long manes caught in tails—captures the improvisational play that ruled the early seventeenth century. And the robes are showcases for up-to-date design. The painter gives us a small stenciled pattern in red, a plaid in blue, a jagged blocking of brown and white, and a variety of pictorial motifs (flamboyant flowers, subtle flowers, writing boxes with cords). He also gives us a sampler of sashes, linings, under-ropes, and borders. Still, the figures fall short as fashion plates by the standards of the time. The hair is careless. The robes lack the contemporary signatures of swank: the luster of figured silk, the intricacy of tie-dying, the depth of embroidery, the opulence of metal leaf. If the painter intimates occasional gold thread, he discourages a focus on what is, after all, unexceptional clothing. Except for two narrative clues.

One is the character that appears in the medallions on the red robe: *moku*(沐) means bathing and surely identifies a *yuna*, a female servant in a public bathhouse who scrubbed backs, massaged shoulders, dressed hair, and entertained male clients. The second is the motif of the writing boxes, meant to hold brushes and ink, on the kimono of the figure at the head of the group. Here, perhaps, are opportunities to “explain” the painting through story.

The first clue has long led art historians to label the group as bathhouse attendants (possibly excepting the discordant figure in plaid). The second clue, combined with the stares of the subjects, has led Satō Yasuhiro to an inspired projection.¹¹ The painting we have now, he argues, is the surviving part (mounted as an incongruously wide hanging scroll) of what was once a two-panel (or even a four-panel) screen. Almost certainly, he continues, it is the left member of a two-screen pair that, when intact, staged a coherent drama. Our fragment suggests some exchange between the two figures covering their mouths with their sleeves and a subsequent reaction by the two lead figures who, interrupted in their walk by a disturbance, pause to look back over their shoulders at something outside the pictorial frame. If we imagine a screen on the right, their seemingly blank stares become fixed on whatever provoked them. Guided by a theme in other paintings of the period, Satō concludes that the figure in plaid has been sent to deliver a message to the figure in the headscarf; that the message comes from a party of male figures on

11. Satō Yasuhiro provides a masterfully detailed analysis of all aspects of the painting and its immediate context in Satō, *Yuna-zu: Shisen no dorama*, Vol. 11 of *E wa Kataru* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1993).

the lost companion screen; and that the eyes of the lead and scarfed women are meeting the gaze of those men. The motif of the writing boxes conjures a written message (perhaps a love letter?) and may identify its intended recipient (and presumptive, if apparently unwelcoming, respondent).

While Satō's analysis may reduce the puzzle of the painting, it does not reduce its power, which belongs to the figures themselves. Whatever story may be enacted here appears a pretext for the study of the subjects, who so dominate a space cleared of props that even the context of "street" remains inferential. The robes, too, blur as focal points, since, treated as drapes rather than carapaces, they serve chiefly to evoke the bodies beneath them—the shoulders, hips, thighs, and pelvises of women, not mannequins. If the painter has enhanced this sensuality by casting his characters as bathhouse attendants, he nonetheless rejects a voyeuristic approach. Self-possessed in bearing, his figures invite no condescension. Obstinate eyes and sullen mouths reinforce their independence from a spectator's control. The mask-like white of the makeup, although typically a scrim for blandly pleasing features, highlights here the large, somewhat distended faces that disclaim any available prettiness. So, even as the painter may use a plot to launch a figure study, he refuses to convert his subjects into objects, or even into "types" we can file for forgetting.

Here, then, is the first reason this painting bears historical notice, in my judgment. (For the careful counters among you, let me note that I shall adduce four such reasons.) The painting is, in itself, an unprecedented treatment of commoner female workers (probably sex workers) who are represented as commanding subjects, with a dignity and autonomy never ventured before in the repertoire. The closest approximations, which are really not very close at all, occur in the medieval handscrolls that punctuate the histories of storied monks and temples with illustrations of everyday life.¹²

But the painting is also part, as a second point of historical significance, of an explosion, dating from 1580 or so, of what we have come to call "genre" art (*fuzokuga* in Japanese)—the representation of the lifeways of disparate subjects (of all callings) in contemporary society. Certainly there were at least putative antecedents, a point suggested by my allusion to the medieval handscrolls. Yet it was only in early modernity, I argue, that artists made daily life itself—the Here and the Now of their living audiences—into a radical focus of

12. My lecture included an illustration of bare-breasted women working near a well that appears in the *Shigisan engi emaki*. To explore the representation of commoner women in classical and medieval picture scrolls, leaf through virtually any volume of Komatsu Shigemi, ed., *Nibon emaki taisei*, 26 volumes (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1977–79). *Shigisan* appears in Vol. 4.

concentration. No longer were vignettes of the everyday just complements to landscape studies or ballast for literary narration. Nor were they so archetypal as to connote a realm of timelessness. The Now of story and history ceded to the Now of witness.¹³ (This was true, too, of course, in early modern Holland and England. Think Breughel and Hogarth. A defining feature of early modernity, I believe, is the ascendancy of commoner subjects in the arts of painting, drama, and fiction.)

The Now of the bathhouse attendants is conveyed partly through the details of contemporary fashion, more emphatically through the attention to contemporary icons. Bathhouses, which had begun to spread in the medieval period, took off around 1600, when public steam rooms became common throughout the wards of new cities and roaringly popular thanks to their female attendants. By the 1620s, the numbers of these usually young servants were large (reputedly twenty to thirty at major establishments) and their services splendid. For extra fees, they offered clients tea, sake, and tobacco; for further fees, they entertained them in gracious rooms with shamisen music, dancing, and other favors. So competitive did they become with officially licensed courtesans that, in 1627, the Tokugawa administration limited bathhouses in Edo to no more than three attendants each. The painting appears to belong to this moment when the near-forbidden fascination of the attendants made them a hot subject, although one best removed from the bathhouses themselves, where painters had formerly pictured them at work, to the anonymity of the street. Almost certainly, the painting dates from this moment of containment and popular curiosity about the bathhouse attendants.¹⁴ Their Here is no literal place, of course, suspended as the subjects are on the brown-ish ground of anywhere. But the evocative space of the street locates them in the Here of a plausible reality rather than the “there” of an obvious fantasy. We are not in neverland.

The here and now of contemporary genre painting seems to me exemplified in Japan by a large body of panoramic cityscapes, perhaps most elaborately in a representation of Edo around 1630 that was executed in a mighty handscroll almost ten meters in length.¹⁵ Just so you know, most space in this

13. I make this argument in Berry, “(Even Radical) Illustration Requires (Normalizing) Convention: The Case of ‘Genre Art’ in Early Modern Japan” in the *Journal of Visual Culture* 2010:9:347–59.

14. Satō discusses bathhouse culture, the competition with licensed brothels, and Tokugawa policy throughout Satō, *Yuna-zu*.

15. For illustrations of the scroll (which I included in the lecture), see Ogi Shinzō and Takeuchi Makoto, eds., *Edo meisshozu byōbu no sekai* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1992). Although

shogunal capital—about 70 percent of it—was zoned for the martial elite: for a great castle, daimyo residences, samurai barracks, and fields for sport. Another 15 percent was zoned for temples and shrines, many of them objects of military benefaction. And, yes, the painter does gesture toward this reality by portraying the recently rebuilt castle keep (which hovers, rather quietly, in the distance), one ornate gateway to a daimyo mansion, and several mortuary temples of the Tokugawa family. Otherwise, rooftops are left to evoke the elite presence as the painter flips the physical facts to concentrate on the 15 percent of the city assigned to the commercial quarters of commoners (who made up half of Edo's population).

Most of the scroll is given over to thousands of figures buying and selling, entertaining and being entertained. The bounty of trade effectively becomes the subject of a cityscape that fuses urbanity with material opportunity. And with novelties, many of them associated with foreign encounter. We find snapshots of tobacco pipes, exotic birds for sale, musicians playing the Okinawan shamisen, and swells in the stovepipe hats introduced by the "Southern Barbarians." Entertainment comes particularly to the fore in depictions of two theaters presenting kabuki performances. A form of burlesque developed around 1603 by a woman known as Okuni, this dance-drama was taken up by troupes of courtesans throughout major cities, until they were banned for inciting raucous behavior. The kabuki of the scroll reflects the resilient substitution, in the late 1620s, of beautiful young men (who played both male and female roles).

Again and again, the painter acts as a sort of reporter whose job it is to make a new urban world visible. His report is certainly sunny: the city is for him a good place. He does sometimes linger over violent rowdies and poor beggars. He intimates the grueling labor required to haul stone and unload rice bales. Nonetheless, the general portrait remains an enticing one, partly as a result of heavy editing (of laborers' longhouses, execution grounds, abandoned children), largely as a result of the emphasis on bounty. The variety of enterprises, employments, roles on offer, goods for sale, diversions, fashions—all speak to opportunity and choice. And novelty is always near—not least in the very depiction of citiness, something once familiar to very, very few yet now a lure for many.

What's important, I think, in this genre painting—whether in the proud treatment of the bathhouse attendants or the celebration of the urban

focused on a pair of screens depicting the city, this volume offers a notably extensive treatment of the scroll as well.

marketplace—is a particular *orientation* toward a changing world: an opening up to, a curiosity about, and a rootedness in today and its surprises. I believe the painters are effectively saying “yes” to now.

So, let me invoke a third point of historical significance about the painting of the bathhouse girls. Yes, it is an unprecedented treatment of commanding female subjects. And, yes, it reflects an extraordinary focus on contemporary subjects in painting. It also belongs, more generally, to a moment of seminal invention throughout the arts and other domains.

A shortlist of innovations in painting would include the many experiments of artists such as Tawaraya Sōtatsu, who pooled his pigments, introduced printed and stenciled patterns into paintings, and, with his collaborators, produced technically brilliant moveable-type books. It would also include the monumental treatment of fauna and flora on the walls and screens produced for elite reception rooms; the prolific use of gold leaf and powder; the exploration of western perspective, pigments, and subject matter; the preoccupation with the female figure; and the social diffusion of portraiture. Innovation elsewhere in the arts was no less pervasive. Among calligraphers stylistic improvisation went together with bold shifts in format as artists such as Konoe Nobutada scaled their work to the dimensions of large screens. The flower maestro Ikenobō Senkō turned once compact arrangements into soaring sculptures. Textile artists learned how to weave figured silk satin and tie-dye thrillingly flamboyant patterns. Lacquer workers used slashed contrasts of black and gold to mimic the motifs of contemporary kimono; they played with incision and molding techniques. Potters experimented with high-fired porcelain, low-fired *raku*, and daring processes for throwing and modeling clay; they also used new colors, glazes, and painted designs.¹⁶ I could go on for quite some time, particularly regarding the performance arts of music, theater, and the tea ceremony.

My point, dear audience, is not to impose on you my own curriculum of Japanese art history around 1600. My point is to put these formidable departures—and my bathhouse attendants—into a shared context of wild creativity

16. For discussion of Sōtatsu, see the catalogue prepared for a major exhibition at the Freer Gallery: James T. Ulak and Yukio Lippit, eds., *Sōtatsu* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2015). The other innovations mentioned here (which I illustrated with slides during the lecture) are the subject of many discrete scholarly studies but are brought together partially, if at all, only in exhibitions (typically outside Japan) and their catalogues. See Julia Meech-Pekarik, ed., *Momoyama: Japanese Art in the Age of Grandeur* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975); and, although the time period is different, Robert T. Singer and John T. Carpenter, *Edo Art in Japan 1615–1868* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1998).

that tends to get lost in a scholarship divided into ever-narrower specialties. If we lose it, we also miss, I think, critical clues to Japan's economic take-off in the early modern period. Before coming back to this matter, let me mention that ferment in the world of art found counterparts in many, many arenas of thought and activity. So, I offer another abbreviated catalogue of novelties.

The breakthroughs in contemporary technology, for instance, involved the deep tunneling for metal ores, and the advanced refining processes that generated immense returns of silver and gold. Developments in hydraulic engineering were enabling the heady reclamation of farmland. Initiatives among market-minded farmers were making cotton and tobacco into standard cash crops. (Other newly introduced crops included corn, spinach, pumpkin, celery, and cayenne pepper.) New processes for producing clear sake and clear fuel oil were transforming both of those industries. A commercial publishing trade was taking off as printing moved from monasteries issuing canonical texts to urban entrepreneurs focused on secular titles. Scientific wizards were redesigning the Chinese abacus and working out the inspired popular texts on arithmetic that would lead to independent advances in calculus. Celestial navigation was another subject of new and serious publishing.¹⁷

Now, why does putting these catalogues together matter? Can they help answer my opening question: how was foundational economic (and social) change actually achieved after 1600? Their virtue lies, I believe, in shifting the spotlight. Change certainly was a matter of new state wealth and investment, access to foreign knowledge, tax incentives for commercial enterprises, and the like. But wealth can be squandered, knowledge ignored, and incentives exploited by rapacious insiders. What I slackly called the "mind of change" or the "climate of change" is the mysterious variable that remains indispensable to connecting opportunity with the leaps in imagination necessary to take chances. What my bathhouse attendants and my catalogues illuminate, I think, is this individual chance-taking; and a broad context of astonishing fecundity; and an equally broad investment in novelty and experimentation.

I am, of course, making a case here for the centrality of humanistic inquiry to economic history. But I am also making a case for the ways in which cultural activity can tell economic stories with singular clarity. Let me elaborate with a fourth point of historical significance concerning the bathhouse

17. The authoritative survey remains Kodama Kōta, Toyoda Takeshi, and Furukawa Toshio, eds., *Sangyōshi*, Vol. 2, which is Vol. 11 of *Taikei Nihonshi sōsho* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1965). Also see Hayama Teisaku, ed., *Seisan no gijutsu*, which is Vol. 4 of *Nihon no kinsei* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1992).

attendants. Perhaps the most interesting thing about the painting is the fact that we have no idea who painted it. The issue is not the absence of a signature or a transmission record (which is hardly unusual), but the impossibility of narrowing the attribution to any particular circle. Usually reliable exercises in connoisseurship prove futile for much of the painting of the decades bracketing 1600, since artists became chameleons who ingeniously swapped styles and subject matter in heady fusions and confusions of discovery.

Painters of the Kanō school, for example, specialized in a Chinese-inflected repertoire of monochrome landscape and figure painting. Yet their stars produced numerous polychrome screens of contemporary merry-making and urban life. Painters associated with the Tosa tradition concentrated on classical illustrations of canonical texts but also moved readily into populuxe genre subjects and depictions of huge flora. Iwasa Matabei, a polymorphous original, concentrated on lofty subjects (imperial poets, medieval warriors) but with such physicality and facial expression that he (or his circle) is routinely implicated in great genre work. (The bathhouse attendants are often attributed to him.) But if you consider almost anybody with an authenticated corpus, you will run into virtuoso variety. The most dazzling example is Hasegawa Tōhaku, who moved so adroitly from Buddhist iconography to monochrome ink washes to gigantic trees against gilded backgrounds that art historians continue to grapple with attributions.¹⁸

The most prolific “anybody,” of course, is that storied person, the “town painter” (the *machi eshi*, who is usually credited with the bathhouse attendants). This is a generic label for anonymous artists of the seventeenth century that acknowledges, on the one hand, that countless unnamed professionals were supplying one of the biggest art markets ever known (given the exhaustive rebuilding of a war-torn Kyoto, including some thousands of religious sanctuaries and elite residences, as well as the prodigious building of so many new castle towns, not least Edo). It also acknowledges, on the other hand, that nobody—not even the major artists with attested works—had so clear a hallmark that conclusive attribution of unattested pieces is really possible.

So, what are the takeaways from my riff on this expert-trouncing versatility? There are a number of them, which will lead me to my final observations. Most obviously, the versatility reveals both synergy and competition among

18. Again, the lecture included representative slides. For Hasegawa Tōhaku, see Masatomo Kawai and Miyeko Murase, *A Giant Leap: The Transformation of Hasegawa Tōhaku* (New York: Japan Society, 2018). For others, the sources cited in note 16 are a start.

artists who watched one another. They worked not in isolated coteries but in the vortex of a market attuned to innovative exchange. (Think, of course, about any combustive art market, from Rembrandt's Amsterdam to Picasso's Paris to Pollock's New York.) In several cases, we can confirm that the painters travelled widely and formed dynamic networks stretching beyond the cultural capital of Kyoto to at least a dozen centers of art production, such as Kanazawa, Nagoya, Edo, Yonezawa, and Nagasaki. Hence, another takeaway, as this list of art hubs suggests, is that the painters' achievements were abetted by the federal form of a polity, with multiple nodes, in which daimyo lords were also competing with one another. Rivalries among them helped fuel development in any number of industries (textiles, papermaking, lacquer work, brewing). Rivalries among them for cultural prestige further multiplied choices for artists, who were released from purely local patronage and available for showcase commissions.¹⁹

But rivalry and choice are no sure recipe for innovation. So, let me also note the uprooting from tradition that the paintings express. Their departures into new themes (from commanding women to contemporary social witness) and new styles (from massive scale to gold-laden framing) speak to a striking independence from convention. And such independence speaks, crucially I think, to the radical dislocations occasioned by long civil wars that—in art and all domains of experience—had all but erased the past to put new men on new stages. Here we need to forget all those Tokugawa stereotypes about clear hierarchies and rigid rules (which pertain, if at all, to the years after 1650 or so) to focus on the tumult of the transitional years.

Consider the composition of the daimyo fraternity in the Tokugawa federation. Wave upon wave of conquest had washed out so much old blood that by the 1620s, when the Tokugawa polity began to settle, 70 percent of those lords came from the Tokugawa ranks—new men all. Many of the remainder had thin pedigrees, and almost all were relocated away from ancestral lands. No *ancien regime* here. (Survivors from the medieval Muromachi polity were particularly few, those from the briefly ascendant polities of Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi were somewhat more numerous.)²⁰ One result was a radical break with past policy—from the abolition

19. Sandy Kita discusses one of best “networked” artists of the time in *The Last Tosa: Iwasa Kastumochi Matabei* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999).

20. Fujino Tamotsu exhaustively itemizes and documents changes in the daimyo fraternity in *Bakuhau taiei no kenkyū: kenryoku kōzō no kakuritsu to tenkai* (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1975). Also see his *Daimyō ryōgoku keiei* (Tokyo: Shinjinbutsu Ōraisha, 1978).

of manorial privileges to the cancellation of urban land taxes—by rulers little-invested in the old order. So, too, warfare had wiped out most of the artistic establishment, leaving only the Kanō house of painters with an old and viable atelier. (The once venerable house of Tosa was struggling for traction in the outpost of Sakai and quarrels raged over legitimate succession to the lineage of the great medieval painter Sesshū.)²¹ One result, focusing here only on painters, was the absence of reputable institutions disposed to enforce standards and censor innovation. Enter iconoclasm. Enter the bath-house attendants.

The radical dislocation of civil war, as well as the erosion of traditional authority, brings me to a final remark about the versatility apparent on the cultural scene: many of the strivers whom we can identify were shape-shifters trying out new identities. Many were “men of the waves” (or *rōnin*), members of that vast population of former samurai who were cast adrift by the conquest or discipline of their daimyo lords. (They numbered at least two hundred thousand in the early seventeenth century.) These self-fashioning mavericks included, for example, the founders of many of the mega-merchant houses of early modern Japan (such as the Chaya, Mitsui, and Kōnoike). They also included the celebrity painters Iwasa Matabei and Kaihō Yūshō. Many others switched or multiplied family métiers to exploit opportunity and pursue interest. They included, for example, other merchant maestri (such as the Suminokura) and cultural trailblazers (such as Tawaraya Sōtatsu and Hasegawa Tōhaku).²²

Now, shape-shifters don’t lead us to the end of the road. There is no end of the road. But they do return us to the interplay between structures and persons that has really been my subject throughout this discussion. Hence, to some concluding observations. Japan’s economic take-off after 1600 was certainly founded on the sort of structural stimulation I began with: the policies of a regime friendly to commerce; the formidable investment in infrastructure by shogun and daimyo alike; the deployment of new wealth

21. Quitman E. Phillips explores this issue in *Practices of Painting in Japan, 1575–1600* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

22. One fascinating collection of merchant biographies from the early seventeenth century (Mitsui Takafusa’s *Chōnin kokenroku*) notes the *rōnin* origins of many of them. See a translation in E. Sydney Cawcours, “Some Observations on Merchants” in *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, 3rd Ser, Vol. 8 (1962): 1–139. For additional biographies, see Miyamoto Mataji, *Gōshō retsuden* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2003).

garnered from systematic taxation, foreign trade, and mining revenue; the exploitation of foreign knowledge; and the recruitment to an “industrious revolution” of peasants who could increase profit by maximizing gains from fields that tax collectors rarely re-surveyed to detect improved productivity. I nonetheless switched focus, then, to emphasize the personal factor—the mysterious variable I call the mind or climate of change—that was no less essential to the take-off. Exemplified by the painting of the bathhouse attendants, bold experiments and startling novelty defined not only the arts of the Tokugawa transition but multiple arenas of industry, technology, and science. Each depended on a singular vision. Yet once we assemble together the many individual breakthroughs of the period, a context of wild and mutually provocative creativity becomes apparent. Ambitious seekers of invention embraced opportunity in a hectic moment of change to say “yes” to now—whether in depictions of the urban marketplace or fields planted to the risky new commercial crop of cotton.

Still, once again, I switched focus. The synergistic versatility in style among painters, which precludes authoritative attribution of the portrayal of the bathhouse attendants (and much else), led me back to the structural stimulants that encouraged initiative: from the deracination of civil war, which erased both the old order and many old identities, to the creation of a federal system of rule, which encouraged the competitive patronage by disparate daimyo of rising talent in all fields. An irreducibly critical factor, I think, is the sheer number of dislocated former samurai. They were, on the one hand, a source of periodic violence, persisting anxiety over resurgent uprising, and—in their often poverty-ridden visibility—mixed shame and antipathy. They were also, on the other hand, a source of generative shape-shifting and innovation.

Where do I come down? Structures never foretell outcomes. The painting of the bathhouse attendants was a product of the imagination, not a new tax system. The rise of the Mitsui house to entrepreneurial renown was a product of enterprise, not the founder’s identity as a dispossessed samurai. Even so, in grappling with what happened in Japan around 1600, the structural circumstances—particularly the infusions of new wealth and new knowledge and a new pool of displaced strivers—appear to me paramount. Tellingly, these circumstances would change profoundly by the mid-seventeenth century, with fiscal crises and constrained foreign contact, for example, as well as a hardening of establishment authority in everything from politics and commerce to the arts, where branding and consistency and tradition came to the

fore in leading ateliers.²³ And with those structural changes, the explosion of innovation would quiet profoundly. This is not to say that daring personal invention ever ceased or that its role in the early modern transition can ever be downplayed. Nor is it to say that structural formulas for breakthroughs can ever prove decisive. It is to say, however, that while profligate talent is a social staple, periods of profligate innovation are rare. The structures enabling innovation matter. But a last conundrum: one stimulus that was indispensable to Japan's economic take-off c. 1600 (and in the Meiji and Occupation periods) was the reservoir of anxious and ready actors, disoriented yet freed by convulsion, who were loosed from the past to face a now and a future. Do we count their contributions as structural or personal? ■

MARY ELIZABETH BERRY is Class of 1944 Professor of History Emerita at the University of California, Berkeley.

23. Mid-century change, and trouble, is brilliantly discussed in Yamamoto Hirofumi, *Kan'ei jidai* (Tokyo: Yshikawa Kōbunkan, 1989).