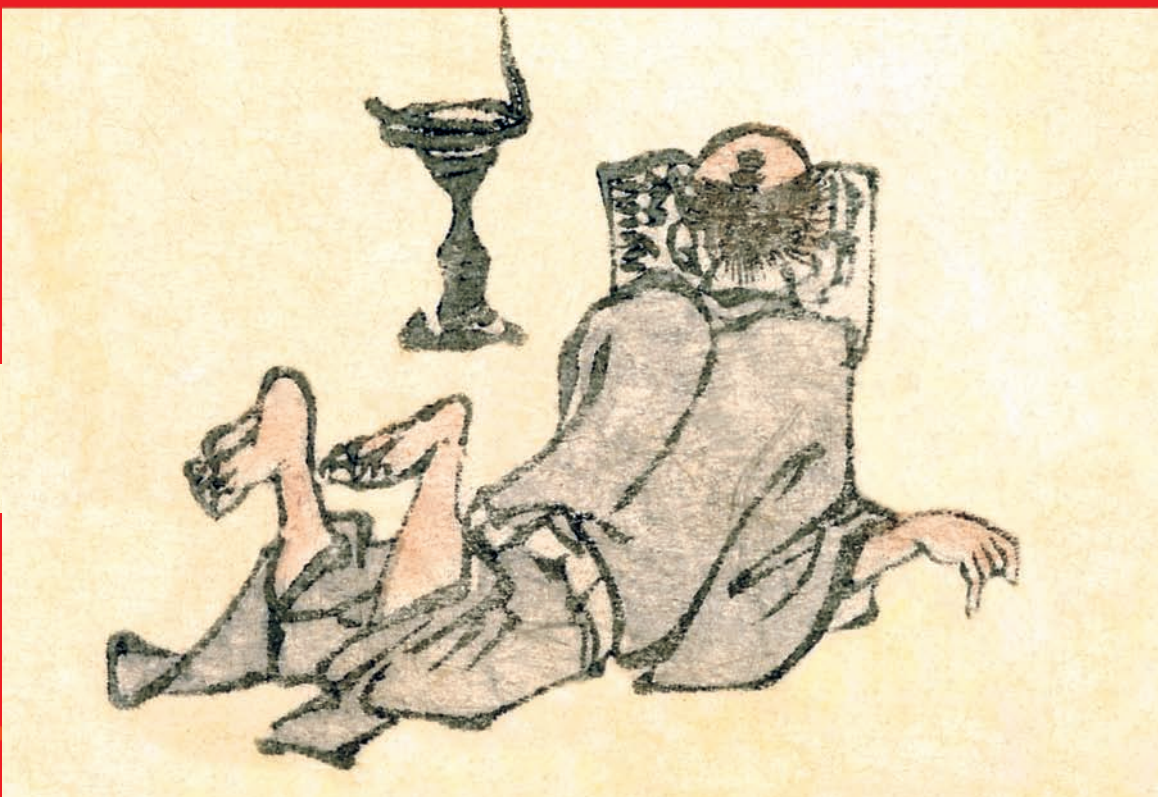
POPULAR LITERACY IN EARLY MODERN JAPAN

RICHARD RUBINGER



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Richard Rubinger

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To the Memory of Herbert Passin
(1916–2003)

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Bloomington, Indiana

Introduction

In a political cartoon some years ago, a Bill Gates look-alike stands alongside an elevated highway and motions to a group of serious-minded businessmen in dark suits to follow him along the "information superhighway" into the future. At the foot of one of the columns supporting the highway, a homeless family huddles around a makeshift campfire, trying to keep warm, roasting a single hot dog, clearly all they have to eat. While the group at the top is headed for a bright and prosperous future based on their access to the new computer technology and the ability to use it—an advanced form of literacy—the family at the bottom is merely struggling to survive, entirely outside the world of technological innovation and unprepared for any of the opportunities offered by it. The idea that the introduction of new technologies and higher literacies could push some people forward while holding others back, that is, actually increase the social distance between haves and have-nots, offers a contemporary metaphor for the multiple and often contradictory roles of literacy throughout history.

Literacy is commonly thought to be a simple, universal, and abstract good. But research over the past thirty years on literacy in the West has suggested a far more comprehensive and problematic view, even while pointing to obvious benefits to societies and individuals. One of the most important lessons of recent research on literacy is that it is not a straightforward matter, one reducible to simple national averages. It is a complex process, connected to broader social problems in complicated ways, determined by particular historical contexts, which it reflects. Indeed, Harvey Graff, one of the most prolific scholars of the history of literacy, has termed the notion of a simple, universal, and abstract literacy a "myth."[1] The real value of studying literacy resides not so much in measuring its quantifiable elements but in clarifying the contexts

of its transmission, acquisition, and use. Particularly in periods before schools became compulsory, there were multiple paths to literacy and a wide variety of motivations for it. Thus, it is the melancholy task of the historian to look at the whole story, viewing not only those who marched down the path to a brighter future, but also those who were left behind, and everyone in between.

The ability to master new forms of technology and attain ever-higher standards of literacy often became part of the accoutrements of elite status. This means it was often in the interest of elites to raise standards of acceptability and thereby limit access to elite status. Furthermore, innovations and change favored those best placed by wealth, education, or another predisposing circumstance to benefit from them. Literacy attainment is an ongoing process but one influenced by historical legacies. This book is about the who, when, and why of literacy acquisition among people outside of elite groups in Japan. But it also looks at some of the broader social implications of literacy during Japan's early modern period.

Early modern Japan generally denotes the Tokugawa period (1603–1868). I have taken a more expanded view. Popular literacy as an early modern phenomenon may be said to have begun with the separation of warriors and peasants at the end of the sixteenth century—when the burden of administering rural communities and paying taxes fell to village headmen of the agricultural class, stimulating widespread literacy among this group—and to have ended in the mid-1880s, when the newly centralized state imposed compulsory education of four years upon the entire school-age population of Japan. It should be noted, however, that despite the imposition of a standardized national system of schools, sustained attendance did not approach universal levels until the early decades of the twentieth century. Only from this later time can popular literacy levels be reasonably correlated with school attendance, as they generally still are.

The subject of this work is the period before schooling became universal and regular. Its focus is on commoners. I have dealt with the samurai leadership class only peripherally. My main attention has been on the rural farming class, the overwhelming majority of the Japanese population during the period covered. The spread of publishing in cities and the rise of readership have been covered elsewhere,[2] and although they are treated in passing in this study, they are not my primary concern.

I have not used a rigid definition of literacy to guide my work beyond the notion of some ability to read and write. Indeed, changing notions of what literacy was or was not for particular groups is part of the story told here. As I hope the data on Japan make clear, literacy is not a simple phenomenon, and the application of a single, rigid standard can only mislead. What becomes

meaningful or functional literacy takes different forms at different times for different sectors of the population. The meaning of literacy, therefore, can only be studied in a specific context. This book is concerned with describing the changing social and historical contexts in which specific levels of reading and writing skill are attained by distinct groups in the commoner population—village headmen and other village leaders, heads of households, women, shop employees, servants, and ordinary small farmers. Despite the temptation, I make no attempt to reach beyond the data and reduce the complex phenomenon of literacy to a single national figure in order to make comparisons with other countries.

Contributing to the difficulty of setting a rigid standard for literacy in Japanese history is the nature of Japanese script itself. During the period under consideration, the written language of scholarship and government was a version of classical Chinese, doctored to enable contemporary Japanese to understand it. Until late in the nineteenth century, classical Chinese occupied a position in Japan analogous to Latin in medieval Europe. It was the written language of scholarship, high literature, religion, and government. But during the Heian period (794–1185) the Japanese had also developed phonetic syllabaries, *hiragana* (cursive) and *katakana* (noncursive), by means of which vernacular Japanese could be written.

Classical Chinese remained far out of reach of all but the elevated and well-educated classes. But the existence of an alternative phonetic script that was easy to learn provided a simplified method of written communication for those who needed only the rudiments of literacy. Although students today may shudder at the idea of learning three different scripts to master modern Japanese, for those small shop owners, farmers, and others among the commoner population of Tokugawa Japan, the existence of the phonetic syllabaries, far from being an obstacle, was an aid to achieving basic literacy at a low functional level. Indeed, although scholars of Western literacy continue to tout the singular achievement of the Greeks in inventing the alphabet because its simplicity made possible general access to literacy,[3] the entirely phonetic Japanese *kana* probably made vernacular Japanese more accessible in written form than the alphabet did for any Western language. This is true, of course, only if one leaves out Chinese characters, something no educated Japanese, then or now, would consider acceptable. Nevertheless, the popularity of the *kana* script suggests a broad range of intermediary skills between total illiteracy and full literacy in Sino-Japanese. Hence the difficulty of setting a single standard for literacy and the wisdom of looking at specific literacies as they evolved according to time, place, and circumstance.

Such an accounting, needless to say, is not easy to do, which is probably

why wiser heads have not tried. As surprising as it may seem, this is the first book-length study of Japanese literacy in historical perspective in any language. Unlike Europeans and Americans, who have richly documented the rise of literacy in their societies, the Japanese, who are justifiably proud of their achievements in education, have never taken much interest in the subject of literacy. This may be because of an overwhelming focus thus far on the role of schooling in the dramatic rise of Japan as a modern state in the late nineteenth century. But research on Western societies has found school attendance to be an unreliable guide to actual literacy. Furthermore, when the modern Meiji state imposed a compulsory education system on the populace in 1872, the Japanese were already differentially prepared by region, by gender, and by occupation to take advantage of it. It took the Japanese well into the twentieth century to overcome most of the inequalities created by differing patterns of literacy attainment inherited from the Tokugawa past. So scholarly treatment of how, when, and why ordinary Japanese attained the ability to read and write is long overdue.

The historian is always restricted by the data available. But though there is a widespread assumption that materials for the study of literacy in Japan either do not exist at all or are so limited as to prevent any reasonable assessment, the contrary is true. This book utilizes a diverse array of sources from personal monograms or "signatures" in the seventeenth century, to diaries, agricultural manuals, encyclopedias of general knowledge, rural poetry contests, village literacy surveys, election ballots, family account books, and finally army conscription examinations given during the Meiji period (1868–1912). Most, if not all, of these materials are used to assess both the quantity and the quality of literacy among persons outside the elite.

There are six chapters. The first four focus on the Tokugawa period, the fifth covers the early Meiji period, and an epilogue extends the discussion into the twentieth century.[4] Each chapter looks at a particular epoch and reviews data, both circumstantial and direct, that relate to the acquisition of literacy, mainly in the countryside. Each could be read independently, but their conclusions are meant to compose a historical narrative, tracing important shifts and continuities over time. Much of the data presented here are new to the study of literacy. Every attempt has been made to explain those data within a historical context as part of an interpretation of what literacy meant to specific sectors of the common people under particular historical circumstances.

Chapter 1 traces the origins of popular literacy up to the Tokugawa period and then discusses the pivotal roles of village headmen during the early seventeenth century. This group became extraordinarily skilled in administrative literacy using the Sino-Japanese hybrid language favored by their warrior

overlords. The political structure under the Tokugawa regime required that they perform a wide range of functions necessitating high literacy—tax collections, explanation of edicts, financial accounting, maintenance of population registers, and so forth. At the same time as these advanced skills identified them as members of the village elite, high literacy separated them from the vast majority of other farmers, whose skills in that regard were minimal or totally absent, leading to what I call the "two cultures" of early Tokugawa villages.

Chapter 2 uses "signatures" on population registers and oaths of apostasy to provide empirical evidence of high literacy among village leaders in the early seventeenth century. Using the same data, this chapter also argues that literacy had begun to spread beyond the leadership class to household heads, particularly those in towns and farming communities involved in commerce. Signatures on documents, never before used for literacy study in Japan, also provide some hints of early literacy among women in commercial farming communities. Wide differences in the spread of literacy between commoners in cities and in the country can also be seen in the seventeenth century through analyses of signatures and a variety of personal marks on oaths and petitions.

Chapter 3 looks at the process by which literacy spread in the eighteenth century from cities to the countryside. This process began in the main cities of Kyoto, Osaka, and Edo (now Tokyo) in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, during the period known as Genroku (1688–1704). The vigorous popular culture of the cities attracted the interests of village leaders, who extended their reading and writing capabilities beyond matters of village administration into scholarly areas such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Chinese and Japanese poetry, medicine, and science. Some became serious contributors to these fields by networking with urban intellectuals, samurai officials, and other like-minded provincial literati.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the nineteenth-century expansion of literacy to wider constituencies of farmers and townspeople. Chapter 4 looks at conflicting ideologies of popular literacy from the perspectives of authorities at the top and ordinary farmers at the bottom. It describes the emergence of new types of provincial literati—commoners who gained a reputation as men of letters even while resident in the remotest parts of the country, those who engaged in political movements, and women who achieved new status in commercial families through their advanced literacy skills. This chapter also surveys the literature on popular writing schools that became centers for basic literacy training among commoners in the nineteenth century. Particular emphasis is placed upon the pivotal roles of village headmen as patrons and teachers in these local writing schools.

Chapter 5 looks at a range of direct measures of literacy attainment in

the nineteenth century. Observations made by foreign visitors are surveyed and assessed. A local literacy test that recorded literacy levels among farmers, classified in six specific categories of ability, is mined for indications of the meaning and distribution of literacy in a mid-nineteenth-century rural population. Because Tokugawa villagers held elections for leaders and because all voters had to write the names of their candidate, a sampling of Tokugawa period election ballots reveals specific skill levels among household heads in farming villages. The chapter concludes with an assessment of literacy achievements among smaller farmers using their account registers and among poorer women using their letters.

The final chapter is designated an epilogue because it extends beyond what is normally considered early modern Japan. By looking at data on illiteracy, the discussion will complement my earlier analysis of literacy and bring it into the early decades of the twentieth century. The chapter focuses on data generated from a survey given by the Japanese army to twenty-year-old male conscripts, beginning in 1899, that tested specifically for ability (or inability) to read and write one's own name. My analysis of this information suggests that geographical factors and local traditions of learning and culture may have been more important than school attendance in explaining why illiteracy began to fade in some areas much later than in others.

The history of popular literacy in Japan begins with a privileged few in every village who showed extraordinarily high levels of literacy attainment, roughly on a par with their samurai overlords, early in the seventeenth century. However, literacy did not expand immediately beyond that select group. It was not until the first decades of the nineteenth century that the interests of ordinary farmers in improving their lot and the interests of village leaders in protecting their power base by the inculcation of moral values (as they saw them) coalesced into widespread support for writing schools. While literacy clearly aided some farmers in geographically advantageous areas to improve their lives, it simultaneously reinforced a cultural gap of long standing between village leaders and ordinary farmers in more remote farming villages. The complex tapestry of individual skills revealed in literacy records alerts us to the fact that at the level of individual skills, populations exhibit more differences than similarities. It is a graphic reminder that even at the beginning of the twentieth century, when nearly all children were entering schools, Japanese society was nowhere near homogenous with respect to basic reading and writing skills.

This work confirms some of the findings of scholars of literacy in North America and Europe. As in the West, school attendance data, abundant in Japan, may not be as compelling a measure of actual skill levels in early modern history as data on "signatures" made by individuals. There were wide geo-

graphical and gender differences with respect to literacy; these were gradually overcome, in Japan as in much of Europe. Those engaged in business in urban areas or provincial areas with access to commercial opportunities tended to become literate earlier and faster than farmers in more remote areas. Within cities, there was a distinction between literacy development in commercial as opposed to industrial areas. As was the case elsewhere, the attainment of rudimentary literacy could empower villagers economically, socially, and politically and could function to undermine traditional power structures. At the same time, the ability to read and write could be used by those in power to enforce virtues deemed essential to their own interests. Clearly, in Japan as elsewhere, literacy had multiple, even conflicting impacts.

Of what particular value, then, is the study of literacy in Japan, beyond confirming some of the things that are already known about literacy in society? Despite the often-proclaimed advantages of the alphabet for the spread of literacy in the West, data on literacy in Japanese history suggest that nonalphabetic writing systems, particularly those that have a phonetic element, as Japanese does, may have unique advantages. Although data on literacy in history show vast regional and gender differences just about everywhere, the Japanese data demonstrate that in certain circumstances geography may be a more influential variable with respect to literacy attainment than gender. The Japanese case also suggests, quite clearly, that the spread of literacy requires an infrastructure to support it, not the other way around. That is, literacy grew out of the development of commerce, roads, transportation networks, and the spread of culture from city to countryside. Finally, the Japanese case suggests how the exploration of popular literacy can contribute to wider explorations of society and culture. The literacy data from the Japanese countryside of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century villages reinforce the notion that hierarchies within villages were buttressed by differences in literacy. Gaps in literacy attainment between leaders and followers in peasant villages were dramatic and persistent—so much so that the "two cultures" in rural communities in Japan lasted well into the nineteenth century and possibly beyond.

The study of the history of literacy can provide new perspectives on the social and cultural history of any society. It is the hope that this book on popular literacy in early modern Japan will stimulate scholars to ask some new and provocative questions about Japan's premodern history. Beyond that there is also contemporary relevance to a history of literacy. It is obvious that we are now living in a period of explosive innovation in the areas of communications and information spread. It is equally obvious that access to the new technologies of communication and facility with them are not equally distributed within any society. Social differences with respect to access to the technologies of

communications and the advanced literacies necessary to understand and make use of them are legacies of history. We cannot see into the future to help us alleviate the social problems brought on by advanced technological change. But we can look back into the past at how the process began, at the impact of literacy acquisition at its formative stages, how it both benefited some while leaving others behind, and at how differences with respect to literacy attainment proved difficult even for compulsory schooling to erase. By understanding the process in all its historical complexity, we may better understand how to create more effective social policies to ameliorate the social problems created by improvements in communications as they occur in our own time.

1

Literacy in Early Tokugawa Villages

The origins of popular literacy in Japan are obscure. The beginnings of reading and writing among members of the provincial elite may be traced as far back as the *ritsuryō* state of the eighth century, when aristocratic families in the metropolis of Nara were building a bureaucratic centralized government on the Chinese model. *Mokkan*—ancient wood or bamboo strips used for reports from the provinces and other official communications, as well as for graffiti and writing practice[1]—have been discovered in great quantities in areas as remote as the archeological site of Akita Castle in Dewa Province at the northern tip of Honshu.[2] These were written in Chinese by the emergent Japanese state's officialdom both in the central organs of government and in provincial outposts. Indeed, the central "university" (Daigakuryō)—said to have been founded under Emperor Tenji (reigned [661] 668–672), and its various provincially administered branches, meant to educate the sons of local officials—followed a curriculum based on the *Analects* and *Book of Filial Piety* as in the educational system of the Chinese empire.[3]

Family registers kept by local officials and village heads, as well as other documents in Chinese that were part of the routine of regional administration, suggest the early spread of literacy to the provincial elite even in the most remote regions of the emergent Japanese imperial state. By the ninth century, the use of written instruments in Chinese had clearly moved beyond the limited circle of the earliest monopolizers of literacy skills, a highly circumscribed civil aristocracy and Buddhist clergy in the environs of Nara and Kyoto. These were men who were either descendants or students of the Chinese and Korean scribes responsible for introducing Chinese characters into practical use on the Japanese islands from the fifth century onward.

While there is little evidence of literacy spreading in any form beyond the clergy and the political leadership, it is worth noting that its diffusion within those groups must have been extensive. Because Buddhism was a religion that depended on scriptures, the ability to read and write was essential for priests. By and large, the texts they studied were Chinese translations of Sanskrit or Prākrit sutras, which did not begin to be translated into Japanese until the Tokugawa period (1603–1868). So the medium of clerical literacy was Chinese. As far as the political leadership was concerned, the *ritsuryō* state required that documents and written communications pass back and forth between center and periphery in all areas under its command. As central and regional administration became more complex and pervasive, the need for provincial administrators who could read and prepare the documents necessary for sustaining the state's thrust increased.

By the early ninth century, techniques of abbreviating Chinese logographs were being used extensively in Japan to create the predecessors of the modern phonetic syllabaries, *hiragana* and *katakana.* Purely phonetic written characters provided a much simpler means of representing the Japanese language than had been possible with earlier methods, which retained unabbreviated Chinese characters while seeking to use them for their phonetic value only. The new *kana* syllabaries greatly facilitated the development of a native literature both in prose and poetry. Court ladies who were *kana*-literate—and, indeed, in some cases literate in Chinese—produced some of the world's greatest literature during the Heian period (794–1185) using almost exclusively the *hiragana* script.[4] Perhaps more pertinent to the subject at hand, it cannot be overestimated how important the syllabic *kana,* written by themselves or in combination with Chinese logographs, were to the spread of literacy beyond the confines of the clergy and the aristocracy.

At the end of the twelfth century, Japan came under the domination of a warrior government that had its headquarters in Kamakura. One effect was to inject a new spirit of practicality into the writing of official and semiofficial documents. The new practicality meant moving away from Chinese, which had remained the official written language, toward a more flexible, hybrid style that combined Chinese characters with the Japanese phonetic syllabaries in a way more closely reflecting indigenous linguistic forms and conventions. The trend toward mixing Chinese characters with *kana* orthography intensified over time. *Hiragana* usage mushroomed at the end of the 1200s, and even more so in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Looking at the evidence from one local area of Bitchū Province (now part of Okayama Prefecture), Amino Yoshihiko calculates that 70 to 80 percent of all surviving documents from those two centuries were written in mixed Chinese and *hiragana* script.[5]

By the late 1500s, the so-called *kana-majiribun,* a style that mixed Chinese characters with *kana,* was being used in official documents along with *sōrōbun* (epistolary style) to make the documents easier to read. These were the modes of written communication that some members of the samurai elite and the upper crust of commoners began to learn and apply during the century or so before Tokugawa rule.

The rise of a provincial warrior elite from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries led to the development of the first popular institutions for learning and literacy to arise outside the Kyoto area, the metropolitan center of culture. During the medieval period, Buddhist temples burgeoned in villages all over Japan. Some historians assert that these village temples, beyond representing sacred space and functioning as places of worship, celebrations, and ceremonial convocations, became educational institutions as well—that they were vital links between the lettered culture of the capital and the unlettered wilderness of the hinterlands. There is scattered and anecdotal evidence suggesting that early in the medieval period, prominent regional families installed their children in temples to have them learn basic reading, writing, and calculation skills. This activity could not yet be called schoolgoing and is always referred to as "temple-going" *(tera-iri).* Still, it had a distinctly secular flavor.

One example found in temple records of the early Kamakura period (1185–1333) shows a prominent farming family from Sumiyoshi Village in Settsu Province (now part of Osaka Prefecture) installing their son in a Buddhist temple in Izumi, the neighboring province, so he could acquire rudimentary literacy and numeracy.[6] Another example, from 1294, is that of a farmer named Ikeda Raiben, who devised a scheme for developing land and creating a pond in fields borrowed from a temple by village leaders of Minata Village in Izumi. As a young man, Ikeda had gone to the nearby Matsuo temple to study. From there, he went on to the great monastery of the Tendai sect on Hieizan, where he became an acolyte. He eventually returned to his village to carry out the reclamation project using the knowledge and technological skills gained from his temple learning.[7]

According to Kuroda Hideo, local temples continued to develop as centers of education and training in the rudiments of literacy throughout the medieval period. Kuroda argues that the training obtained there helped establish the preconditions for the growth in agricultural productivity and technological advancement that characterized the late medieval period. The proliferation of village documents from the late Kamakura period attests, he notes, to rising literacy among village leaders and a consequent increase not only in administrative sophistication but also village autonomy in many regions of Japan. While acknowledging the fragmentary nature of the data, Kuroda none-

theless concludes that the villagers' ability to take on local administrative tasks was founded on the basic literacy imparted by the priests of village temples and shrines.[8]

The evidence is fairly clear that the lines between the sacred and the secular were blurred in both temples and shrines when it came to matters of administration and commerce, where expertise in reading and writing, a traditional attribute of the clergy, was required. Regulations and other village documents found in the villages of Kii Province (now Wakayama Prefecture and part of Mie Prefecture) during much of the medieval period, for example, were written in *katakana,* suggesting either that priests wrote the documents or that the village administrators who prepared the documents had been the students of priests.[9]

Village documents pertaining to local administration as well as to major events and ceremonies were often kept in "village boxes" *(murabako)* that were stored in temples. There is also evidence that village temples and shrines were appropriated as offices for commercial enterprises, further linking religious institutions with secular operations requiring literacy. The archives of Imabori Hiyoshi Shrine in Ōmi (now Shiga Prefecture) provide an example of a shrine retreat *(anjitsu)* being used in 1489 for the annual collection of taxes on temple and shrine rice fields and as an office for the commercial transactions of merchants from four villages.[10]

The existence of the Imabori archives, as Hiromi Tonomura points out in her study of commerce in this medieval community, reflects the considerable administrative and commercial skills developed in some local areas in the Middle Ages. In contrast to most medieval documents, which were the creation of members of the elite and their institutions, the Imabori collection "was the product of commoners possessing neither formal political authority nor elegant handwriting." Keeping administrative and financial records locally had become an important dimension in the institutionalization and perpetuation of community organizations, known as *sō,* since the thirteenth century. Regulative documents imposed the will of the leadership (typically represented by the local shrine association, *miyaza*) on the community at large. Entrepreneurial documents reflect the intention to strengthen the area's commercial interests through market expansion.[11] These documents attest to the existence of a highly skilled village and merchant elite in some parts of late medieval Japan as early as the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. There is no doubt that by the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the membership of the *miyaza,* a decision-making body made up of local villagers and merchants, was responsible for the local documentation in communities such as Imabori.

Records from other locations also point to literacy spreading from powerful warrior families to the upper-level farmers who administered village affairs. A sixteenth-century document from Sasabuchi Hachimangū, a shrine located on lands controlled by Kōyasan, the great temple of the Shingon sect in Kii Province, shows that village boys from upper peasant families were being paid cash—two hundred coppers—to work as clerks and scribes preparing documents and that they "appeared to be extremely well educated."[12] By the middle of the sixteenth century, village demand for elementary learning had evidently reached the point where wandering priests could secure positions as instructors of writing. A 1555 report from the headman of the port village of Eraura in Echizen Province (now part of Fukui Prefecture) on the Japan Sea included a request to grant an itinerant priest named Sōkō permission to settle in the village for the explicit purpose of teaching children the *kana* syllabary *(iroha);* he was to be supplied with a house.[13] Similar notations can, of course, be found in the towns as well. The diary of the Tamon'in priory in Nara shows that in the autumn of 1565 an armorer named Junzaburō left his son, Shunshinmaru, at the temple for the express purpose of pursuing *tenarai*—literally "hand learning," that is, rudimentary writing.[14]

In the late sixteenth century, a new device for arithmetical computation came into widespread use in Japan. By the 1590s at the latest, and probably by the end of the Muromachi period (1394–1573), during a period of renewed and intense contacts with the continent, the Japanese imported the Chinese abacus *(soroban)* and the methods of calculation that came with it. This instrument was more convenient than its predecessor, the *sangi,* and its use quickly spread all over Japan. The *sangi,* in use there as early as the sixth or seventh century, was a cumbersome system of red and black calculating rods; for a long time it had been the basic, traditional tool for calculation throughout East Asia. The samurai elite looked with disfavor on the more efficient new technology. Eventually, the *soroban* replaced the rods for business purposes, as merchants snapped it up for doing speedy arithmetic and as an aid in accounting. But the *sangi* maintained its supremacy in higher mathematics for some time.[15] James Bartholomew argues that the split between the more theoretical and scientific interests of the samurai and the merchants' purely practical application of mathematics to business would help retard the integration of advanced mathematics with science that is necessary for a modern scientific revolution.[16]

Despite their distaste for the plebeian *soroban,* the samurai could not reject the use of numbers altogether. Indeed, any group that was as much and as constantly engaged in warfare as were the samurai of the Sengoku period (1467–1568) must surely have regarded mathematical calculation, for logisti-

cal and engineering purposes if not for anything else, as vital. In the family records of the retainers of the Amako family—Sengoku daimyo who for a time controlled Izumo, Aki, and Bingo provinces in western Honshu—calculation is listed along with reading and writing among the most important things to be taught early to children.[17] The reasons are clear. As the basis of surveying for castle construction and flood control, as well as for the building and maintenance of mines upon which the finances of some domains depended, calculation was indispensable for the financial and administrative management of warrior domains.

The Separation of Warriors and Peasants

The evidence that has just been presented, anecdotal though much of it may be, suggests that by the sixteenth century, literacy in hybrid Sino-Japanese styles was spreading to the upper levels of the military elite and to some influential farm families in the countryside, as well as to merchants and traders in towns and cities. The growing complexity of maintaining and supporting large armies and of managing the economies of prosperous local towns and villages fostered the spread of reading and writing both in the military and the civil sectors of society in the late medieval period.

The most important historical event in the history of popular literacy in Japan, however, was the dramatic separation of warriors and peasants undertaken by the military hegemon Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) in the last two decades of the sixteenth century. After this separation, farmers everywhere in Japan had no choice but to administer local affairs by themselves. This responsibility required the command not only of the rudiments of reading and writing, but also of skills commensurate with those of the samurai administrators who ruled over the rural populace by edict from their urban enclaves, the castle towns. The separation of warriors and peasants was the enabling event that stimulated the spread of administrative literacy to village leaders not just in a few scattered areas but throughout the country.

The process began with the so-called *Taikō kenchi,* the great wave of land surveys ordered by Hideyoshi. Initiated in 1582 in Yamashiro Province (now part of Kyoto Prefecture), the surveys had by 1598 encompassed the entire country. All arable land was measured and assessed; the putative agricultural yields were entered in cadastral registers prepared by each village and submitted to Hideyoshi and his daimyo vassals. This new national survey instituted a uniform system of taxation, eliminating the complex layering of tax responsibilities that had characterized land tenures since the Heian period.

The separation of warriors and peasants was the major cause of a flow of rural samurai into the daimyo's castle towns. It confronted rural samurai with a clear-cut choice: either remain on the land and be classified as a farmer, or preserve samurai status by moving into the castle. Hideyoshi's national "sword hunt" *(katanagari)* decree of 1588 disarmed the country farmers, striking a severe blow at the village samurai stratum. The distinction between warriors and peasants was made final in 1591, when Hideyoshi issued a decree defining and fixing the positions of four orders of society, namely samurai, farmers, merchants, and artisans. The result was an irreversible legal separation between samurai *(bushi)* and farmers *(hyakushō).* No longer would the warrior overlord live in the countryside and control the peasants by force. Local administration was entrusted to peasant officials who were given considerable autonomy. To the degree that villages were supervised from above, it was in written form—papers, documents, rules, and regulations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SAMURAI LITERACY

The regime gave new identities to samurai and peasants alike. Most military men were removed from the countryside and made to reside in the castle towns of their daimyo, where they were destined to turn into a class of bureaucratic administrators. Their conversion from landed military gentry into an urban administrative officer corps attached to national and regional centers of political authority had profound effects upon them and the nation. Samurai were no longer landowners and could not acquire landed wealth. They became officials and bureaucrats who lived on stipends received from their lord.

In theory and in their own consciousness, samurai remained warriors, but over the two and a half centuries of peace that marked the Tokugawa era, their professional lives came to depend on the pen much more than on the sword. To equip them for their function as bureaucrats in an era of peace, the shogunate and the daimyo domains established special schools for them, in some cases making attendance compulsory. By the end of the Tokugawa period, virtually all the 260 or so domains had such schools for their samurai retainers. Military training descended to the level of sporting contests (even if these were sublimated under the label of martial arts), while competence in such civil attainments as Neo-Confucian ethics, reading and writing Chinese, and the techniques of management and governance rose.

In other words, the material that constituted the core of a traditional Chinese curriculum was absorbed to some level by most samurai. Apart from the domain schools, a wide variety of private academies sprang up during the Tokugawa period, providing manifold opportunities for pursuing less ortho-

dox branches of learning, such as Ancient Studies, the philosophy of Ogyū Sorai, and the thought of Wang-yang Ming—as well as Nativism and, by the nineteenth century, Western Studies.[18] Thus it is widely believed that during the course of the Tokugawa era, the samurai class as a whole became not only literate but also accomplished in composing documents, conversant with Chinese philosophy and techniques of governing, skilled in composing Chinese poetry, and eventually familiar with knowledge from the West.

While the acquisition of such knowledge was certainly within the purview of many samurai, the learning and literacy skills of the class as a whole covered a broad spectrum. Some samurai were illiterate or at least unlearned well into the Tokugawa period; after all, many of them were descended from the families of country farmers only recently "elevated" to *bushi* status. As late as the end of the seventeenth century, the popular writer Ihara Saikaku (1642–1693) scornfully described a samurai who enjoyed a substantial stipend but could not read or write as "a retainer sadly behind the times." According to Saikaku (and surely not only him), "there is nothing more shameful than being illiterate."[19]

A comprehensive who's who of 243 daimyo written in 1690–1691 provides a uniquely critical glimpse into the culture and character of warrior leaders at the end of the seventeenth century. The author of this book, *Dokai kōshūki,* is unknown, but it is thought to have been written by three midlevel officials of the shogunate who sought to set guidelines for the elite, aiming to elevate both the moral character and the practical attainments of the vassals who served the Tokugawa.[20]

The list of daimyo critiqued in the book is set out from the largest fiefs to the smallest, with the smaller and midsized getting the harshest treatment. Many are reproached for their insufficient knowledge of *bunbu,* the civil and the military arts. A few are really taken to task. The twenty-three-year-old daimyo of Utsunomiya in Shimotsuke Province (now Tochigi Prefecture), Okudaira Masaaki, is condemned for his total ignorance of *bunbu.* According to *Dokai kōshūki,* he was a playboy who drank and partied all day and night with kabuki actors and other notorious good-for-nothings. He sought the favors of girls and boys equally and surrounded himself with retainers who were "unlearned and illiterate."[21]

A much older (fifty-three) and more important daimyo, Matsudaira Tsunamasa, lord of the large, 315,000-*koku* domain of Okayama, allegedly was dull *(ro)* and illiterate *(monmō)* despite mountains of books provided by his learned father. He was so dissolute, partying by day and night, that even his top retainers made up nasty nicknames and scorned him behind his back. How, the

authors lament, could such an illustrious father have produced such a son?[22] The book spells out the failure to live up to accepted standards in specific terms—lack of training in the Confucian classics, for example. It claims that some daimyo (roughly 5 percent) were illiterate *(monmō),* but the meaning of this term is left unspecified. Does it refer to inability to read Chinese, or some Sino-Japanese variant, or *kana?* Or does it mean the inability to read and write at all? It is impossible to tell. It is known that some daimyo of the early Tokugawa period, such as Katō Kiyomasa, wrote only in *kana.* The survey of daimyo cultural levels in the pages of *Dokai kōshūki* indicates that literacy levels among the upper warrior class nine decades farther on in the period were, to say the least, uneven.

Even much later, in the mid-nineteenth century, questions about the levels of learning attained by the warrior class persisted. The official sponsorship of military and Chinese Studies schools for samurai, for example, was not necessarily an accurate indication of the actual skills attained by the target constituency. Umihara Tōru's study of Yoshida Shōin shows that attendance at the lectures given by this notably charismatic and popular teacher at Meirinkan, the school of the Chōshū domain, could be abysmal. In 1848 the young Shōin lectured there on military arts of the Yamaga school, his family's specialty. Official attendance figures show that of the twenty-eight students registered, on the average less than five a day attended Shōin's lecture series of forty-four days. The highest number that ever showed up was nine. Often the class had only one student.[23]

As late as 1870, an official report from the Iwakuni domain school complained that "of a total of eight thousand samurai, it is not known how many can read and write *kana,* while a survey of how many can read Chinese books shows less than five in a thousand, or less than forty of the total samurai population." As far as farmers, merchants, and fishermen were concerned, "it is not known how many have the ability to read *kana* fluently; those who can read and write Chinese characters, however, would be less than one in a thousand, or less than seventy-two in the entire population of seventy-two thousand."[24] Although other data on Tokugawa education suggest that this may be an exaggeration, the kind of bitter denunciation a frustrated educator is occasionally prone to, one point can and must be made: Despite the requirements placed upon them, the samurai leadership class was neither fully nor homogeneously literate. There were probably wide variations by region, status, and individual. Because adequate data exist on the cultural attainments of this class, the topic of samurai literacy itself deserves a separate study and is beyond the scope of this study.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PEASANT LITERACY

While the formal separation of samurai and peasants gave the warrior class a new identity, new opportunities, and enormous incentives to pursue learning, the impact may have been even greater upon the rural farming population. It is widely believed that the land surveys of the late sixteenth century brought great suffering to the peasantry by increasing their tax burden. On the other hand, it has also been suggested that being listed in cadastral surveys gave peasants unprecedented security of land tenure, which spurred productivity. Whatever the case, the massive move of warriors from the land to castle towns, where they were closely followed by merchants and artisans attracted by exemptions from rents and by other privileges, stimulated a surge in urban growth but left farmers in control of the countryside. These developments had great implications for literacy and learning among the farming population, which made up at least 80 percent of the population of Japan at the time.[25]

In the sorting out of classes that took place at the end of the sixteenth century, a split occurred among the most educated and literate members of village society. Some moved into the castle towns as samurai; others remained behind as farmers. Those left behind faced a more restricted and limited world than they had known before, and their field of vision narrowed as samurai, artisans, and merchants departed. But this new world was one in which the farmers themselves would have a greater say in village affairs. A specific warning to samurai not to interfere in the commoners' control of villages is given in an edict of 1620 from Mōri Terumoto (1553–1625), the lord of the Chōshū domain, to Utada Motokatsu, the daimyo's local administrative deputy, who is ordered henceforth to entrust the responsibility for small-scale construction in the village of Idemizo to the "lower orders" *(jigenin)*—that is, the local farmers themselves.[26]

Village administrative autonomy was a pillar of the Tokugawa shogunate's and its vassal daimyo domains' political organization. Consequently, the village leadership class had to shoulder new responsibilities. It is on account of administrative requirements imposed from the top down that the spread of literacy in Tokugawa villages began.

The Tokugawa Village

The development of the so-called *bakuhan* state—the conglomerate polity of the Tokugawa shogunate and the daimyo domains—during the first half of the

seventeenth century required high levels of literacy from the groups most directly involved in its administration, that is, samurai bureaucrats in the castle towns and village leaders in the countryside. It was largely by reliance on the written word that administrators in the shogunate's capital and the castle towns maintained control over rural areas. The samurai leaders of the Tokugawa shogunate and of its vassal domains understood, argues Ishikawa Ken, that "in the management and control of the highly dispersed and complex world of commoners, the use of script *(moji)* would be useful. It would make thorough and unified control over localities possible. To that end, written instruments, such as rules and regulations *(shohatto),* official announcements *(ofuregaki),* notice boards *(kōsatsu),* and record books for neighborhood associations *(goningumi-chō)* confirmed feudal control from the top."[27]

The authorities of the conglomerate Japanese state acted in a way consistent with a much older Chinese conception of the relationship between writing and power. The beginnings of writing in China were closely tied to magical rites. Writings were talismans, suggests Julia Kristeva, and represented man's mastery over the universe. But while writing was originally connected with magic, it never acquired sacred value, she adds. On the contrary, writing was "synonymous with political and governmental power" or, rather, it was "confused with the political function. The prince-governor had as his primordial mission to arrange things by designating them correctly; it is by means of writing that he accomplished this mission."[28] Mark Lewis describes written communications as the "nerves and sinews" of bureaucratic administration in the early Chinese state.[29] Regarding early Tokugawa Japan, Herman Ooms writes that "once established, power needed knowledge (in the form of information on land, population, and tribute) more than the sword" in order to "dominate" (the word he prefers to "administer") the countryside.[30]

The profusion of records and regulations in early Tokugawa Japan attests to power being directed downward by means of written documents. One important reason was the prominent role assigned to farming villages in the fiscal administration of shogunal lands as well as of daimyo domains. Taxes in the form of rice produced by village farmers were collected and paid out as stipends to the samurai who had been moved off the land and lived in castle towns, one per domain. Maximum productivity and efficient tax collection from villages became the very foundation of samurai power and prosperity. The administration of this all-important rural base, however, was in the hands of nonsamurai farmers in virtually all the 63,000 villages throughout the country.[31]

Farmers were classified into various groupings. The most important distinction was between those who owned property and those who did not. Prop-

ertied farmers *(honbyakushō)* owned a fixed amount of arable land and were responsible for paying annual taxes. Landowners could be further divided between those (often called *otona-byakushō* or *osabyakushō*) who owned large holdings, that is, properties of more than 10 *chō* (a total of 10 hectares or 24.5 acres) of dry fields and rice paddies, and the majority of landowners, who had less than 5 *tan* (half a hectare or 1.2 acres).

The second important group consisted of those who did not own land but who worked on properties owned by *honbyakushō* or who rented land from others. These tenant farmers are often referred to as *mizunomi-byakushō* (water-drinking farmers) because of the diluted gruel that was their diet. Finally, there were workers and servants *(nago* and *genin)* who were indentured to landowners. These did not have independent status in the village but were considered subordinates of the family they worked for. It is difficult to generalize about the ratio of landowners to tenants in a "typical" Tokugawa village because there was much regional variation. It is believed that the percentage of tenants increased somewhat over the Tokugawa period as economic and political conditions worsened for the lower peasantry. One study based on census figures of twenty-six villages in the Kantō area suggests that 58 percent of the village population were property-owning farmers while the rest were tenant farmers and members of other categories, such as carpenters.[32] Thomas C. Smith cites figures for Buzen Province from a census taken during 1681–1684 that shows the proportion of tenants running as high as 50 percent. Figures for ten villages in Kawachi Province, on the other hand, indicate that tenants made up just under 25 percent of that population.[33] Tadashi Fukutake suggests that in the "typical" Tokugawa village the split may have been one-third owners, one-third renters, and one-third partial owners/partial renters.[34] Thus, between 50 and 70 percent may be a conservative estimate of the percentage of landowners and partial landowners in most Tokugawa villages.

In the early seventeenth century, the *honbyakushō* were independent cultivators engaged in small-scale, labor- and fertilizer-intensive farming. In time, many of them diversified into commercial ventures producing cash crops such as raw cotton and silk cocoons, or developed cottage industries such as weaving and clothing manufacture. They were restricted by sumptuary legislation as to their conduct, consumption, clothing, and place of residence, and they were regimented in various other ways. Because it was they who were collectively responsible for meeting village quotas, they could also rise in protest against the crushing burden of taxes. With the growth of a moneyed economy late in the seventeenth century, competition among landowning farmers became more pronounced. Successful farmers managed to acquire more and

more land and in some cases engage in business and trade, while others lost their property and were reduced to tenancy and wage labor.[35] From the middle of the seventeenth century onward, the social organization of a Tokugawa village was far more fluid than the official status system prescribed.

Tokugawa villages were under the authority of samurai administrators who served as intendants *(daikan)* or district magistrates *(gundai).* The district magistrate, the lowest link in the official bureaucratic chain of command, served as the lord's representative charged with policing, tax collecting, and judiciary functions, usually in a large number of villages. The magistrate in the Kōriyama district, for example, oversaw sixty-two villages.[36] These feudal officials required their local agents to carry out administrative functions on the lord's behalf in the villages but also to represent the villagers' interests before the higher authorities. These functions rested with the village headman, a man of commoner status who was chosen by villagers from among the more powerful landowners or older, established local families.

The most influential of the leadership group in rural localities was the senior headman,[37] who represented several villages. He oversaw village affairs and was paid a salary. In some cases, he was granted samurai status, being permitted the privilege of bearing a surname and a sword *(myōji taitō).* Frequently, the senior headman exercised great influence even over samurai magistrates. In 1713 the shogunate abolished the post in its direct domains because its responsibilities overlapped those of regular headmen and because the incumbents too often abused their authority for personal gain. Many daimyo subsequently also abolished the office, but it continued in domains such as Shōnai, Matsumoto, and Kaga.[38]

Within a single village there were three leadership categories, known collectively as the "village triumvirate" *(murakata san'yaku* or *jikata san'yaku).* This trio consisted of (1) a headman *(shōya* in western Japan; *nanushi* in the Kantō area; also *kimoiri);* (2) a vice headman *(kumigashira, toshiyori,* or *osabyakushō);* and (3) delegates *(hyakushōdai).* To be sure, these titles differed from one place to the next.[39] Like the senior headmen, other village officials were generally chosen by property owners from among the wealthy families of long standing in the village. The vice headman, as the name suggests, aided the headman in a subordinate capacity.[40] The delegates were men selected to represent village interests to outside parties, to protect ordinary peasants from abuses by other village officials, to help assure the fair allocation of taxes, and to resolve disputes between villagers and their leaders. Since they came from the same wealthy farmer group as other village officials, it is not at all clear how effectively they pursued the interests of ordinary peasants.

THE VILLAGE HEADMAN

The headman, clearly the village's most responsible official, was in charge of its overall administration. His role in the spread of popular literacy and learning in the countryside of the Tokugawa era was so critical that his responsibilities and skills require a close examination. Although his various titles (*shōya, nanushi,* and so forth) had come into being in Hideyoshi's time, the office was strictly a Tokugawa institution. As a leader of the "public, political realm created by the centralized government," Tonomura notes, he bore an official status with "formal responsibilities that had been nonexistent in the pre-Tokugawa village."[41] He was accountable for the village's fulfillment of its state-ordained functions. The appearance of his name and title on virtually every kind of village-related document reflected the headman's importance in village affairs.

His duties were both specified in great detail and defined so broadly that he was, in effect, responsible for almost every facet of the villagers' daily lives. The pre-eminence of his position was set out in any number of Tokugawa period edicts on village management. "No matter how talented a magistrate may be," proclaimed Ōishi Hisataka (1725–1794), the author of an influential 1794 tract on village management and taxes, "attending to the guidance and instruction of the multitude of farmers is not possible without the village headman. Without him the village cannot be governed." Ōishi went on to declare that even if the headman had the status of a farmer, he "stands in for higher officials and is the representative of the peasants in matters of government. He even imitates the speech of higher officials."[42]

Because of the headman's value to the system, traditional Confucian notions of filial piety were called upon to assure loyalty and devotion to him. At the beginning of the famous "Keian ofuregaki," an ordinance issued in 1649 by Shōgun Tokugawa Iemitsu (1604–1651; ruled from 1623) instructing farmers in the virtues of obedience, self-sufficiency, and frugality, villagers were encouraged to "think of the headman and village officials as your true parents."[43] In turn, like a good parent the headman was held accountable for the moral and productive accomplishments of his "children." He was responsible for lazy farmers who did not produce their share and was required to report serious lawbreakers to the district magistrate.

With respect to literacy specifically, the feudal authorities were well aware of what competencies their farmer agents could not do without. Literacy is repeatedly and explicitly mentioned as a prime requirement for village leadership. For example, Tanaka Kyūgu (1663?–1729), a commoner who became an important administrator under the eighth shogun, Tokugawa Yoshimune (1684–1751; ruled 1716–1745), described the qualities of the ideal village head

in his fifteen-volume treatise on civil administration, *Minkan seiyō,* in the following terms: "Above all else, a competent village headman manifests unaffected simplicity regarding himself. He maintains the productivity of his village, makes careful preparations, and does not covet material things from outside the village. He treats those beneath him with charity and takes his public duties seriously. He serves the official world with dedication and never fails to obey the rules that govern him. He shall not be illiterate *(bunpitsu kurakarazu).* He must not do anything of a private nature. He performs his tasks honestly and with dignity and does not go into mad frenzies. He must be considered a superior being."[44]

Like Tanaka Kyūgu, Ōishi Hisataka, mentioned above as an expert on village management, was a commoner who rose to prominence as an advisor on farm villages. He was a village headman in the Kurume domain, Chikugo Province (now part of Fukuoka Prefecture), until he became involved in a peasant uprising in 1754. Placed under arrest by domain authorities, he escaped from confinement and roamed throughout the Kyushu and Kinki areas, dispensing advice on farm management and agriculture, until he was employed in 1788 as a magistrate in the Takasaki domain in Kōzuke Province (today part of Gunma Prefecture). In 1791 the daimyo asked him to prepare a comprehensive guide to village affairs. Shortly before he died in 1794, he produced the fifteen-volume *Jikata hanreiroku.* In it, Ōishi was just as insistent as Tanaka on the necessity of high levels of literacy and numeracy for village leaders: "Since it is no simple matter to look after each and every farmer in one's village, officials who are righteous and sincere in character and do not discriminate or show favoritism must be chosen. It goes without saying that they must also have appropriate landholdings and wealth, and it is essential that they be accomplished both at figures and at writing."[45]

Not all headmen lived up to the expectations placed upon them, which might be expected in a social system based largely on inheritance. When headmen failed to carry out their responsibilities adequately, the finger was often pointed at their deficiencies in literacy and learning. In a report to the magistrate of Suzuki-chō in Edo, written in 1842, a headman by the name of Genshichi noted that whereas a colleague "will mention the arrival of notices from the government and other things which are his responsibility to pass on, he is not attentive to explaining their meaning." The reason for this "most regrettable" failure, according to Genshichi, was that the other headman "has from his youth paid little attention to learning. He merely succeeded his father as a village official. His work has been careless and inaccurate."[46]

The position of a village headman was a paid office. As its chief executive, he typically received one half of 1 percent of the village's rice yield,

although the amount differed according to time and place.[47] This salary could be collected separately from the rice tax or be taken from it; alternatively, the headman could be given a tax-exempt field *(kyūden).* In some cases, he was exempted from taxes altogether. Sometimes the privileges he enjoyed went beyond tax breaks and extended to large residences or the permission to wear fancy clothes. Typically, the headman was not elevated to full samurai status except symbolically—by being permitted to bear a surname and a sword. These symbols made it apparent to all that this farmer was a representative of the regime.

Usually, there was one headman per village, although in some cases more than one shared the administration while in others one headman held responsibilities for more than one village. In the early Tokugawa era, he was a resident of the village who was chosen for his office by the other landowners without interference from higher authorities, an indication of the degree to which village autonomy was a reality. Thus the headman was a man of the village on the one hand, but on the other he was an agent of the feudal regime, whether he served the shogunate or a daimyo. So he was, in Harumi Befu's apt phrase, a "Janus-like" character, facing two ways—a mediating agent between two conflicting sets of interests.[48] Sometimes headmen led peasant revolts against authorities, but just as often revolts were directed against the headmen themselves.

Peasants in the villages were determined to keep as much of the produce of the land as they could for their families; feudal authorities were just as determined to take away as much as they could in the form of taxes to support their samurai stipendiaries in the castle towns. Although at times the tensions inherent in such a relationship exploded into violence, order generally prevailed. To a considerable extent, the conflicts were mediated by the dispatch of documents, regulations, petitions, and various kinds of bureaucratic communications up and down the lines of authority. For such an arrangement to work, extensive skill in reading, writing, and explicating documents—that is, a high level of administrative literacy—was required on the part of the headman and the other village officials.

THE QUALITY OF VILLAGE LEADER LITERACY (CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE)

Exactly what sorts of documents were involved? And what sorts of literacy skills did the headman and other village leaders need to handle them? The materials that passed through a village headman's hands were diverse, but for the most part they can be subsumed under the following four categories: (1) tax

calculation, (2) record keeping, (3) village administration, and (4) representing peasants to higher authority.

(1) *Tax calculation.* From the official standpoint, the headman's primary responsibility was to maximize productivity and see to it that taxes imposed on the village were efficiently collected. Each village was allocated responsibility for a certain amount of tax based on an estimate of its gross annual production of rice. The estimates were based on cadastral surveys that were administered infrequently during the Tokugawa period. When they were done, an official would be sent to the village, and it was the duty of the headman to receive him properly, down to selecting the kind of dishes to be used in entertaining him. The headman would aid in the survey by providing figures for the total amount of land cultivated and the yield per unit. The tax rate would be calculated on that basis, typically in the range of 40 to 50 percent of the village's total yield.

Every fall the bakufu and daimyo sent out written notices of the land tax rate *(nengu waritsuke-jō)* to each village under its jurisdiction. Based on that rate and taking into account the annual yield (*kokudaka,* measured in *koku* of rice) of the village as a whole, the headman (often in collaboration with landowners) assigned individual peasants their share of the year's tax. Because landholding patterns changed over time, village leaders, typically the headmen, compiled their own record books for this purpose. There they listed the paddy fields, upland areas, and homesteads and entered the estimated yields for each villager. Each cultivator's tax payment in rice was delivered to the headman at a specified time. The entire village's payment was then forwarded to the district magistrate or directly to the domanial lord who acknowledged receipt with a document called *nengu kaisai mokuroku.*

The headman's input was critical at every stage, from providing figures for cadastral surveys to collecting information on landholding patterns, calculating the amounts owed by individual peasants, collecting and delivering the taxes, and then obtaining an accurate receipt. All these steps required numeracy and literacy of a high order. The language of the various communications with officialdom was couched in the hybrid Sino-Japanese that had been standard usage in such documents even before the Tokugawa era. To assure the maximum yield of rice and the full payment of the tax, the government issued detailed rules and procedures. It fell to the village headman to communicate the content of these regulations through written notices and orally at public assemblies to other farmers who were not nearly so expert in the official written language as he.

(2) *Record keeping.* Annual tax requirements were but one means by which feudal authorities controlled the countryside through written regula-

tions. There were others as well. Village heads were expected to maintain and regularly update their population records. In 1644 the bakufu ordered administrators of its lands to submit ledgers titled *ninbetsu aratame* (population surveys). In them, headmen were required to detail the peasants' names, social status (landowner, tenant, servant, and so forth), and age, as well as provide a record of their houses, domestic animals, and landholdings. This procedure eventually turned into a formal census of the village population; by the 1720s a full-fledged census was undertaken every six years. The headman was responsible for drawing up a new register every year and for having each entry properly verified with each household head's seal.[49]

In 1614 the bakufu put into effect a nationwide policy to extirpate Christianity. Toward that end it conducted surveys of religious affiliation to establish that peasants and townspeople were not adherents of the proscribed "pernicious doctrine." The daimyo domains had no choice but to follow the shogunate's example. They too adopted this practice, and eventually every person in every city, town, and village in Japan was required to become affiliated with a Buddhist temple. In turn, the temples were required to vouch for their parishioners' orthodoxy. In effect, this so-called temple guarantee system *(tera-uke sei)* co-opted the Buddhist temples into the government's system of popular control. Records called *shūmon aratame-chō* (religious investigation registers) were kept in every village and revised annually. The document itself, which listed the villagers by name, was prepared by a single hand, probably the headman or a local Buddhist priest. Headmen are known in some cases to have taken the document from house to house to secure the necessary certifications from household residents.

In the early Tokugawa era, the population surveys and the religious investigation registers were prepared separately. From the middle of the period, however, census figures were absorbed into the temple registers, and the two documents came to be known together as *shūmon ninbetsu aratame-chō.* Compiled throughout the country every spring, they listed for each household the name of its head, its members (specifying their ages and relation to the head), its *kokudaka,* and even the number of the horses and cattle owned by it. At the end of the register were entered the total number of households and the total population of the village, as well as any changes that had taken place in the course of the previous year. Population figures for the entire country were recorded in this way. One of the most complete sources for population data in the world, these records are a gold mine of information for historical demographers. More will be said in the next chapter about the "signing" of names on these documents as an indicator of literacy levels. Here it is sufficient merely

to introduce the registers as an example of the kinds of written documents the village leadership was responsible for maintaining.

At about the same time as the *shūmon aratame-chō,* the bakufu introduced another mechanism designed to strengthen control over society from the top down. The *goningumi* (five-household group) system was a neighborhood-policing scheme intended to assist the headman in enforcing joint responsibility and to assure mutual surveillance. The lowest unit in the feudal control apparatus, the five-household group was, according to Tonomura, "[o]utside the family *(ie)* the most powerful collective unit that—ideally—fostered the state ideology of a docile and productive peasantry."[50] Its records were kept in an annual register *(goningumi-chō)* maintained by village leaders. The register's preface listed various government regulations, followed by the seals of all the household heads, pledging each family to uphold them. Feudal authorities frequently revised the preface, and it was the village headman's responsibility to explain the nature of the changes carefully at group meetings *(yoriai).* The prefaces were replete with Confucian moral precepts and encouragement to cooperation and harmony; dissent was strongly discouraged. Accordingly, they eventually came to be used as important instructional materials at village writing schools.

Each *goningumi* had a leader, the *goningumi-gashira* (sometimes shortened to *kumigashira*), who was appointed or elected, usually from among the wealthiest or most prominent family in the group. He represented his group's interests in the village's councils and was an important member of its political leadership, assisting the headman in almost all communications that moved up and down the ladder of control. In this way the power base of the village was extended beyond the village triumvirate to the heads of neighborhood family groups. Because of the group leader's administrative responsibilities for his neighborhood, the *goningumi* system broadened the circle of those with a need for high levels of reading and writing skills in the typical Tokugawa village. By the middle of the seventeenth century in many places, the name of the *kumigashira* represented the entire group in the annual certification of the group register.

(3) *Village administration.* In addition to keeping elaborate and detailed records for the regime, the headman was also the local administrator responsible for responding to the villagers' myriad local needs. One aspect of this responsibility was providing explanations of the numerous sumptuary edicts that came down from above. The most authoritative and comprehensive of these was the previously mentioned "Keian ofuregaki" of 1649. In addition to calling upon farmers to be as devoted to their headman as to their parents, the

ordinance extolled self-sufficiency and frugality. Farmers were told to wear cotton instead of silk, eat grains less costly than rice, and refrain from tobacco, *sake,* and tea; they were instructed what seeds to buy, how to care for tools, and when to cut the grass. Needless to say, these measures were designed to encourage economy, maintain discipline, and enhance the tax base. Perhaps it will never be known just how energetically headmen communicated to their fellow farmers the following bit of wisdom from above: "Once he has paid his taxes, no one has such peace of mind as the peasant."[51]

The flow of paperwork in Tokugawa villages did not only run downward. It was horizontal as well, for in many important respects villages were administered locally. This measure of autonomy meant that village leaders had to create their own rules and regulations, in addition to those imposed from above, to maintain order. Typically, village rules were formulated by landowning peasants *(honbyakushō)* under the leadership of the headman at village assemblies. Regular meetings were held, with the New Year's meeting being usually the most important. The legislation coming out of the assembly could be very detailed. Tsuneo Satō cites a 1792 village code from Naka Shinden Village in Shinano Province (now Nagano Prefecture) that had twenty articles, with eight more added later.[52] Village officers enforced codes locally. Serious breaches could be punished by exile or ostracism *(mura hachibu).*

There was local legislation covering village public works such as the repair of bridges, roads, dikes, and irrigation systems and promoting land reclamation and reforestation. It was up to the headman to see that disputes over water rights and boundaries between and within villages were kept under control. To protect the interests of his village, he established written procedures pertaining to lawsuits, contracts, and loans. The headman had important ceremonial functions as well. Although in this regard he had help from *miyaza* (shrine associations, predating the Tokugawa period, in charge of religious matters), he had to be familiar with religious texts and procedures. All movement in and out of a village required "personal transfer papers" *(ninbetsu okurijō),* which were administered by the headman. In the case of departure from the village, the headman would have to locate the person in the population register for the previous year and then record the move in the register for the subsequent year.

Finally, with respect to local administration, the village leader was held responsible for keeping all village accounts and finances in order. He had to keep a record of expenses incurred for village business and the costs of maintaining roads, bridges, and canals. This information on the village's financial state was kept in a ledger called *mura nyūjō.* At year-end meetings peasants could audit the accounts, which were then submitted to the bakufu or the

domain for inspection. In practice, feudal authorities did not inspect the accounting, leaving it to the village headman. This was a particularly important part of his role, as will be seen shortly, because many controversies arose over charges of the embezzlement or mismanagement of village funds.

(4) *Representing peasants to higher authority.* As he was the principal channel of communication between high and low, it was up to the village headman to ensure a free flow of information not only from officialdom down to peasants but from villagers upward to feudal authorities. The petitioning process was the outlet most often used by farmers for grievances. In the words of Herman Ooms, "[o]ne cannot avoid the impression that lawyer-less Tokugawa Japan was far more litigious than the Japan of today." According to him, "the peasants relied far more frequently on suits or petitions than on mass protests or uprisings."[53] All such pleas, however, had to be drawn up in the appropriate official format of respectful humility, which required knowledge of a difficult grammar and script, something beyond the reach of most villagers. The language had to be framed in *sōrōbun,* the hybrid Sino-Japanese documentary or epistolary style. This style involved a variant form of Chinese with Japanese elements in the grammar, the vocabulary, and particle usage, with distinctive verb endings. It follows that supplicants had to call upon the village headman or some other highly literate member of the village who had a mastery of the administrative literacy of the day. Only with such support could the ordinary peasant adequately represent his interests before higher authorities.

The headman could censor whatever he thought inappropriate, as he might be punished for seeming to endorse an unjustified complaint. For that reason and others, villagers who had complaints about the headman could bypass him and go directly to the district magistrate.

In the early Tokugawa era, many peasant grievances were directed not against the higher feudal officials or their policies but against the perceived arbitrary rule of the village leadership. In some areas, such as Kōchi, petition boxes were set up to enable the daimyo to read peasants' pleas without interference from the domain's official bureaucracy—including village headmen.[54] In the middle of the seventeenth century, Shogun Yoshimune is known to have done the same thing in the lands he ruled directly. In many cases, however, the headman was on the side of the ordinary peasant, playing an important role in representing his interests through petitions and other litigation for which the plaintiff lacked the requisite literacy skills. That peasants sometimes circumvented the headman and either prepared the petitioning documents themselves or sought other help suggests that literacy skills were broadening beyond the inner core of village leaders, a topic to be taken up shortly.

As the chief administrator of a village, the headman assessed yields, cal-

culated taxes, compiled population records, kept all the financial accounts, communicated official edicts downward and peasant grievances upward, acted as the village scribe, and prepared all official documents. As its legal representative, he was responsible for all official and legal documents emanating from the village or pertaining to it, and he was required to affix his seal on them. These included petitions and other forms of appeal to the government, deeds of sale or mortgage, lawsuits brought by villagers, agreements with neighboring villages, and lawsuits brought against them. The headman certified every official piece of legislation involving his village. Simply put, he performed virtually every administrative function that town and village officials perform today. If he was to accomplish all that, however, the quality of his reading and writing skills had to go far beyond the rudiments of the ABCs *(iroha)* later taught children at local writing schools. He had to be a match for his samurai overlords in the castle towns in his ability to read and write the complex Sino-Japanese of official documents.

The world of the village triumvirate of the early Tokugawa period was flooded in administrative paperwork. The circumstantial evidence presented here indicates that this group of villagers had to boast impressively high levels of reading and writing skills in order to function adequately. Early on in Tokugawa Japan, the requirements of the *bakuhan* state created an elite class within the peasantry, one that combined administrative authority with extraordinarily high literacy and numeracy. Over time the cultural attainments of this group would grow beyond their mainly administrative tasks. They would become mediators between city and country, center and periphery, filling the role of an educated provincial elite at the center of the diffusion of popular learning and culture. This provincial elite—made up of those eligible to hold office as village officials and numbering on average at least two or three families in each of the roughly 63,000 villages throughout Japan—may have numbered as many as several hundred thousand out of the general population of about thirty million by the end of the seventeenth century.[55]

THE EARLY SPREAD OF LITERACY BEYOND VILLAGE OFFICIALS

As they contemplated the potential effects of commoners' engagement in learning, the authorities of Tokugawa Japan felt far less concern than their British counterparts, Ronald Dore suggests.[56] On this topic, Keith Thomas remarks that eighteenth-century conservatives in Britain "were afraid that if the poor learned to read and write they could become seditious, atheistic, and discontented with their humble position."[57]

From what has been said so far, it would appear that the Tokugawa regime

not only did not fear the common classes' pursuit of learning, it depended heavily upon it, at least insofar as it was limited to the village leadership. Even so, during the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth centuries neither the bakufu nor the domains, with a few prominent exceptions to be taken up later, made significant provisions for the creation and support of schools or other formal institutions that would guarantee quality education for either the samurai or the commoners. The Shōheikō, which eventually became the official school of the shogunate and the model for domain schools, operated as a private institution of the Hayashi family until the end of the eighteenth century. Although the Tokugawa lavished various forms of patronage upon the Shōheikō, it did not become an officially sponsored bakufu school, renamed Shōheizaka Gakumonjo, until 1797. Before the end of the eighteenth century, there were relatively few domain schools. Only about a third of the 295 founded before the daimyo institution was abolished in 1872 were in existence in 1788, and only 41 had been established before 1750.[58] Before that, the education of samurai and the upper crust of commoners was largely a private or family affair. This fact does not indicate that standards of education were low. Rather, it means that expectations—and, consequently, educational attainments—were confined to a narrow band of the population during the first century and a half of Tokugawa rule.

Nevertheless, literacy may well have reached most, if not all, of the tax-paying landowner class of peasants by the end of the seventeenth century. It has already been pointed out that village officials (often the headman himself) were formally responsible for determining the distribution of the tax burden among landowners under the village responsibility system *(mura-uke sei)* of the Tokugawa state. But it devolved upon the heads of *honbyakushō* families to arrange the payments. Extant documents point to considerable distrust and numerous disputes over the accuracy of tax allotments between feudal authorities and headmen on the one hand and landowners and their village leaders on the other.

In the "Keian ofuregaki" of 1649, previously cited for its harsh sumptuary restrictions on peasants and its appeals for frugality and attention to Confucian virtues, may also be found the less-well-known suggestion that "a commercial spirit, in moderation, will improve one's fortunes." The edict goes on to give the following advice: "In order to pay the annual tax, buying and selling various things (such as grains other than rice) may keep one from being taken advantage of."[59] That feudal authorities should have encouraged attention to business among farmers surely is worthy of notice. The context, to be sure, is meeting the required tax allotment, not improving one's standard of living, and the call for moderation was meant to be taken seriously. But, coming as it does

from feudal authorities, the warning about being taken advantage of is truly remarkable. It suggests that problems of this kind were rife and that numerous complaints had occasioned this cautionary advice. The sentence can be taken as a tacit suggestion that farmers should not only engage in commerce but also equip themselves with the ability to read and reckon so as not to be cheated in the marketplace.

Extant village petitions from the seventeenth century confirm that complaints about village headmen were being registered not just from feudal authorities who oversaw them or from other headmen, but also from other farmers. Pleas submitted by landowning farmers who challenged tax computations made by their headmen suggest advanced literacy skills on the part of petitioners. In a petition dated 1608, for example, a group of village elders from Hashiramoto village in Settsu questioned the headman's calculation of their tax assessments and presented alternative versions to higher authorities.[60] Just who wrote the petition or did the alternative calculations is unknown, so this is only a circumstantial argument for literacy. But some members of this group of elders, even at this early stage of the Tokugawa period, almost certainly had literacy skills comparable to the headman himself, for it was from this group of his peers that the headman was chosen. In considering this and other petitions cited here, it should be kept in mind that even if the petitioners did not actually write the document, they were obviously involved in the literate world, the prerequisite to literacy itself.

Public access to tax information was at issue in many of the petitions and official edicts that responded to them. To state it baldly, farmers were prone to the suspicion that headmen were not trustworthy. A petition submitted in 1624 by Shinzaemon, the newly chosen headman of Kabeta village in Shinano, describes his objections to a former headman who had not made the land survey register *(kenchi-chō)* available to public scrutiny. As a result, Shinzaemon relates, he had to travel to the district magistrate's office, where he copied the appropriate sections of the register by hand. On the basis of this information, he recalculated the tax distributions in the village and in so doing uncovered mistakes in the former headman's arithmetic and made them public.[61]

Peasants sought redress, justice, and fairness in the allocation of tax burdens. They sought ways to wrest private knowledge from village leaders and were able to do so when the bakufu supported them in their demands for more access. In 1643, an edict to villages in Tokugawa territories required "all headmen and landowning farmers without exception" to gather at the beginning of the year, when "all village records will be made public. Everyone in attendance must affix his stamp to certify inspection of the documents."[62] Early the next year, a similar notice was sent to all district magistrates in the shogunate's

direct domains in the Kantō and Kansai regions. The local magistrates were instructed to tell village headmen that they must each year "show all farmers in the village" a statement describing their "method of calculating, distributing, and collecting tax payments." In addition, the headmen were told to "have each tax-paying farmer place his stamp in a record book certifying that he has seen this. After that there should be no entries or deletions."[63]

In one response, a headman, five elders, and forty-two small (presumably landholding) farmers from Tomita Village in Settsu, one of the destinations of the above order, got together to investigate various village records. They certified that "all was in order" in the village record for the Eleventh Month of 1648 and affixed their stamps for validation.[64] Along the same lines, a group of lesser but presumably also landowning farmers *(kobyakushō)* from a village called Motai and located in Kita Saku-gun, Shinano Province, reported in a 1659 petition that because of errors made by their headman in the distribution of tax payments, "we have borrowed village account registers from the headman and are investigating them for evidence of malfeasance."[65]

In addition, a 1681 financial report *(zaijō)* from Higashi Tenkawa Village in Settsu shows a dispute between small farmers on the one hand and the village headman and elders on the other concerning "cash needed for various village purposes." The dispute was settled when two lesser farmers were permitted to take part in the calculations and then confirmed the accuracy of the financial record by placing their seals on it.[66]

Public scrutiny of tax documents made sense only if farmers outside the inner circle of village leaders were literate enough to read the materials and make use of what they discovered. While the scattered references above cannot be considered conclusive, they do suggest that some landowning farmers (roughly 50 to 70 percent of the farming population) outside the leadership group possessed literacy skills high enough to enable them to inspect the complex language of village account ledgers and financial documents. They show that before the end of the seventeenth century, landowning farmers were checking village accounts for errors, recalculating tax disbursements made by officials, and writing petitions that challenged official versions of their tax allotments. Even if not all landowners had the literacy skills to engage in such activities, the mounting demands for access to ledgers must have acted at the very least as a powerful incentive to acquire those skills. Although official edicts identified the headman and the village triumvirate as the rural governing class, these data suggest that ordinary farmers, to the extent they challenged tax disbursements, were actively engaged in the administration of villages.

There is some evidence that actions such as those cited above were not small or isolated events. When farmers examined written records and discov-

ered discrepancies that threatened their welfare, they sometimes took concerted action to protect themselves. In the Ninth Month of 1693, a coalition of farmers from seventy villages along the Sugitake River in Nishi-gun, Kai Province (now Yamanashi Prefecture), presented a petition to higher authorities rejecting the tax figures of their district magistrate and presenting an alternative calculation of tax distributions for all the villages in the coalition.[67] The existence of such a petition shows that literacy skills were used by farmers to mount substantial challenges to authority on the merits of the case. It also shows that the ability to uncover errors or wrongdoing on the part of officialdom could be followed by the political will to act in defense of the farmers' own interests.

The same point is made by Herman Ooms, who has looked at petitions not as displays of literacy but as indicators of changing power relations in villages. He makes the case that the earliest Tokugawa village suits were directed by members of the village elite against other members of their own inner circle. By the late 1640s, however, the former plaintiffs had become the targets of suits brought by those outside the leadership class. In short, petitions and lawsuits became part of an effort to shift the basis of village power and privilege away from the select few—the entrenched, pedigreed leadership—to ordinary landowning farmers.[68] Clearly, access to the written word was a fundamental aspect of this change in power relations.

According to Shibata Jun, a scholar of educational developments during the seventeenth century, by the end of that century literacy had spread to *all* landowning farmers *(takamochi).* Shibata goes on to suggest that the ability of farmers outside the village triumvirate to do independent investigations of village records and mount challenges to the authorities on that basis led to a change in the farmers' general sense of their own power. In contrast to peasant rebellions of the late medieval period, which could not expect to have any impact unless they were backed up by stronger—in many cases religious—organizations such as the militant Ikkō sect, peasant resistance of the early Tokugawa period challenged the authorities on their own terms. Literacy and the accordant ability to investigate village financial records had expanded the farmers' political and intellectual independence, making them different from their medieval counterparts.[69]

MEDIEVAL CONTINUITIES IN EARLY TOKUGAWA EDUCATION

As early as the seventeenth century, farmers had ample motivation to attain literacy. Whether it was for the sake of access to power or simply because of the desire to be treated fairly, reading and writing ability spread beyond the

leadership group of villagers to ordinary landowning peasants. How, then, did farmers gain that ability? Despite the apparent importance of literacy for maintaining the financial and administrative system upon which the Tokugawa polity rested, there is scant evidence of official support for the schooling of commoners during the seventeenth century. Indeed, in this period the shogunate and the domains had yet to take active roles in providing schools even for samurai.

The vast expansion of the local and private schools that would come to dominate the educational world of commoners in the late Tokugawa period —*tenaraisho* (basic writing schools also known as *terakoya*) and *shijuku* (private academies)—was a phenomenon in the unforeseen future. Moreover, if advanced literacy was one of the prerequisites of power in the village community, then it behooved no one to share that instrument of authority, at least not in ways that could prove deleterious to one's claim to dominance. In the early Tokugawa years, continuities with the past were strong, and what there was of formal education for farmers, particularly those outside the leadership circles, was limited to temples and shrines, as it had been in the recent medieval past. Throughout the seventeenth century, these institutions maintained their preeminent role as the centers of social life and culture in farming villages. Indeed, the noted seventeenth-century scholar Yamaga Sokō (1622–1685) identified the religious institution as the central place in village culture: "Although there are no schools, there are many temples. No place, not even the smallest village, is without a shrine or a temple. Younger children gather there without fail to learn *tenarai* (rudimentary reading and writing). Commoners gather at temples for festivals, to race horses, to have drinking parties, and to show reverence for the gods."[70]

This social setting of local temples and shrines formed the backdrop for the early development of literacy. There was no formal pedagogy, nor were there trained teachers of the kind that would become common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a result, the temples' educational function came in for criticism. Yamaga heaped scorn on the lack of a commitment to learning evidenced by the priests: "The village children gather for writing practice *(tenarai),* but because those who teach them don't know anything about teaching, they depend on examples of correspondence *(ōrai no fumi)* and diaries. No basis is provided for reforming public morality or aiding in the governing of society. The teachers merely trifle with vulgar practical books like Genkei's *Teikun* or Meikō's *Ōrai* and so forth. They have no ambitions to improve their teaching."[71]

Despite the political and military upheavals that characterized the sixteenth century, the training of priests for small village temples remained sta-

ble, as did the standards of instruction demanded by farmers. Education centered on teaching the *kana* syllabary and a few Chinese characters useful in daily life. The methodology consisted mainly of copying the syllabary in the *iroha* format out of copybooks with a brush. Here may be seen the prototype of the small rural writing school of the middle Tokugawa period—practical in its aims and outlook, lacking official patronage, and reflecting spontaneous demands from ordinary farmers who were for the most part not in the leadership group.

That there was demand for this sort of training is clear from scattered records of the period. In villages without a temple or a learned priest, attempts were made to entice traveling clerics to stay and teach village children the most basic and practical skills in reading and writing. A *kyōgen* or comic drama of the early seventeenth century, titled *Hara tatezu* (Just call me patience), portrays farmers trying to persuade an itinerant priest to remain at their village as a writing teacher:[72]

> VILLAGERS: Can you write?
>
> PRIEST: I can't really write well. My letters look like worm trails or sparrow tracks. That's about it.
>
> VILLAGERS: You're much too modest. We want you to be a writing teacher for our small children.
>
> PRIEST: A writing teacher for little kids, you say? That's right up my alley!

That such an encounter could be spoofed in a popular play suggests that it was not uncommon to hire priests as teachers and that expectations had begun to build both among teachers and among parents. Obviously, the credentials of writing teachers were not necessarily high, and not all priests were highly educated men.

It is necessary to keep in mind, however, that despite the association with what would later come to be called *terakoya*—frequently, if inaccurately, translated as "temple schools"—it is incorrect to assume that the primary mission of medieval or early Tokugawa temples was to provide ordinary commoners with the rudiments of reading and writing. At temples of this period, the educational aim was positioned higher; their main objective was training acolytes, scholars, members of the samurai class, and members of wealthy and prominent commoner families. Typical temple training went far beyond rudimentary reading and writing skills. For example, the curriculum taught by a "seventy- or eighty-year-old priest" at a mountain temple called Risshakuji in the 1670s included Chinese poetry, *waka* (Japanese poetry), and training in musical instruments such as the *taiko* drum. On describing this priest's educational

efforts in his journal, Matsumoto Isshōken, himself a *tenarai* teacher, did not fail to observe: "When learning got tedious, a time-out was taken for amusements such as *go* and *shōgi.*"[73] The primary constituency of such a temple education (still medieval in character though set in the seventeenth century) was the samurai class, Ishikawa Ken insists. According to him, the training there was "closer to the German *Gymnasium* than to the *Volksschule.*"[74]

It is in the cities and towns, of course, that one would expect the requirements of basic literacy to assert themselves first. But here, too, the evidence from the early seventeenth century is scattered. In addition to the growing constituency of townspeople who read popular literature, it was particularly the entrepreneurs and shop owners who required training in reading and writing for their livelihoods. As early as 1565, the diary of the abbot of the Tamon'in in Nara recorded that an armorer by the name of Junsaburō had left his son, Shunshinmaru, at this famous priory for the express purpose of having him learn to read and write. There are similar notations in the records of other temples. In 1615, for example, a merchant named Kōanmei (possibly a woman) came to the Rokuen'in temple in Kyoto for the purpose of "learning to read."[75]

All sorts of professions were faced with keeping records that required at least some literacy skills. A 1616 document titled "Rules for Ship Captains of Katata Village, Ōmi Province" required ship captains to keep "small diaries" *(ko-nikki)* in which they were to affix their certifying seals to all exchanges of goods.[76] The activities of merchants and traders such as these boatmen were so extensive that their exchanges of goods and services had to be regulated, adding paperwork to their many duties. An official edict sent out by the Kyoto *shoshidai* (shogunal deputy) in the early seventeenth century ordered that whenever goods were exchanged or bought and sold, "when prices are decided upon, both buyer and seller must exchange written receipts."[77]

Such regulations put pressure on every type of entrepreneur to learn the basics of literacy. As a result, particularly in the cities, the numbers of those taking in students to learn basic reading and writing skills grew. During a city-wide investigation of "suspicious persons" undertaken in Osaka in 1648, a new category of "those who took in students" was added to the city ordinances *(machibure)* for the first time. Evidently, writing teachers had become so numerous, on a par with doctors and other recognized professions, that a category in the town records had to be created for them.[78]

So there is evidence that in the first part of the seventeenth century, before official interest in educating either samurai or commoners had materialized, the requirements of literacy among the ordinary farming population and among entrepreneurs in the towns had created a demand for writing teachers. In the countryside, priests in local temples largely met this need. In the cities,

professional teachers of reading and writing had made their appearance, offering their services to the children of a growing entrepreneurial class.

Official Patronage of Learning for Commoners in the Early Tokugawa Era

Even if the *bakuhan* system's need of able village and town administrators was patent, there was no sudden push to provide formal institutions of training for them. To be sure, in a few areas of the country there was some limited official support for the idea of making education accessible to commoners, even in the seventeenth century. What is entirely clear about the early official patronage of popular education, however, is that it was not meant for everyone. Top-down encouragement of learning, material support, and the provision of facilities were specifically intended to facilitate the training of the village leadership class, that is, to develop the administrative talents that were essential to the workings of the *bakuhan* state. Even this limited support was filled with warnings about the dangers of getting carried away with book learning and neglecting one's primary occupation of tilling the fields.

The best early evidence of the official patronage of institutions of learning for commoners in Tokugawa Japan comes from the Okayama domain. The scarcity of sources from other localities suggests that Okayama may be the exception that proves the rule of official unconcern with learning and literacy among the populace in the seventeenth century. Even here, however, the domain's samurai leadership became concerned with the education of commoners not in order to provide facilities for ordinary farmers, whose ability to read, write, and calculate "was of little or no use to authorities," but to enable the children of village officials and upper-level farmers to learn the fundamentals.[79]

Okayama authorities seem to have been the first to realize that if the children of village leaders could not write and do sums, they would be unable to fulfill their responsibilities. To provide educational support for the so-called village responsibility system *(mura-uke sei),* the domain felt compelled to establish its own officially supported *tenaraisho* for the village leadership class. By 1671 the domain had built writing schools at a rate of one for every five or six villages—a total of 124 schools with 2,258 students and 129 teachers. Village headmen (55) made up the single largest group of these teachers. They were followed by doctors (47), samurai (18), ronin (2), and Shinto priests (5).[80]

In other words, the majority of writing teachers came from the village

farmer class itself. Okayama records further show that most of these instructors had received training at the domain school. Thus, in addition to providing Confucian learning to the samurai, the Okayama domain school in the late seventeenth century appears to have had the function of training the higher reaches of the village hierarchy or, more specifically, qualifying them to teach future leaders from within their own class. According to the records of the daimyo family, there were "very many" children from the village headman class at the Okayama domain school. Table 1 gives a breakdown of commoners who entered the school in its first six years of operation.[81]

Both the foundation of officially sponsored writing schools and the admission of commoners to the domain school reflected initiatives from above rather than spontaneous desires for education from below. Financial support (620 *koku*) came from domain coffers. Attendance, at least in some notable cases, was compulsory. For example, a letter from the year 1669 indicates that a village headman named Ichirobei was forced to send his younger brother to the domain school on orders from the feudal authorities. Similarly, the famed Confucian scholar Kumazawa Banzan's son, Izumi Hachiemon, is known to have entered the domain school not altogether willingly; he was reluctant to go along with the authorities' plans for his future.[82] Such stories speak highly of the domain authorities' educational imperatives, if not of the eagerness of some of their subjects to receive the blessings of formal training.

There was a second reason for the official drive to support education among commoners in Okayama. That reason was the strong desire of the daimyo Ikeda Mitsumasa (1609–1682) to reduce the influence exerted by Buddhist temples among the populace and to replace it with Confucian ideology to be instilled through popular schools under the daimyo's control. Shibata Hajime views both the growth of the domain school and the creation of writing schools for village leaders as part of a concerted push to deprive Buddhist

TABLE 1 Commoners in Okayama Domain School

Year	*Number of Entrants*
1667	11
1668	12
1669	17
1670	6
1671	15
1672	7

priests of their monopoly on educating commoners and, indeed, as part of a broader movement to secure daimyo power and consolidate control over the provinces. In the seventeenth century, Okayama and some other domains followed a deliberate policy of disestablishing temple priests, stripping them of their educational functions, and substituting strong social controls and political oversight for the religious pressures the temples had exercised. Establishing domain schools for the samurai, encouraging children of village elites to enter those schools, and providing officially sponsored writing schools for the populace were all elements of that policy.[83]

Given the political motivations of the officials who supported them, it is hardly surprising that the new writing schools did not focus on reading, writing, and arithmetic alone. They also included heavy doses of Confucian ethics, teaching the centrality of filial piety and respect for higher authority, obedience to the law (including, in particular, the rules issued by district magistrates and village heads), the need to maintain harmony in the village, and the obligation to work on the land, thereby fulfilling family responsibilities. While such concerns were uppermost in the minds of authorities, they were remote from the immediate interests of farmers, and the new writing schools of the Okayama domain lost the support of their intended constituency within ten years of their founding.

In 1675 the officially sponsored writing schools of Okayama were closed down, leaving only one, the well-known Shizutani Gakkō, still open. The reasons for their failure were not just that their curriculum primarily reflected the interests of the authorities rather than of the villagers who attended them. The financial difficulties of the domain played a role as well. Finally, the new daimyo, Ikeda Tsunamasa, was not the staunch supporter of education that Mitsumasa had been. But those who had been teachers at these schools—the village intellectuals, if one may call them that; headmen, village officials, priests, doctors, and masterless samurai—without a doubt had benefited from their experience there. They became the core around which secular, independent village writing schools were to develop, without official patronage, in the final years of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth. These new schools were devoted to training farmers in the practical skills they needed in their daily lives.

The evidence of a regulation issued by the Tosa domain in 1662 suggests that Okayama was not alone in showing an early interest in schooling its commoners. Indeed, according to this document, the Tosa authorities actually went further than their Okayama colleagues in that their encouragement of learning extended to all farm children, not just the offspring of the leadership.

But the document is also careful to warn that farmers must keep their priorities straight: "The farmers' children, both boys and girls, should be given education when they reach the age of eight or nine. Until now, for the most part, it has only been headmen and wealthy peasants who have their children learn to write and do arithmetic. Needless to say, the poor probably don't do it at all. But all the people, rich and poor, noble and common, should seek to develop their talents. Therefore, it is ordered that all be encouraged to learn writing and calculation. . . . It should be kept in mind, however, that the first responsibility of cultivators is farming. They should study in their spare time, even if it has to be at night. If this advice is followed, it will benefit all."[84]

While such advice is notable for its enlightened if not progressive outlook, it stands out as the exception during the seventeenth century. A lack of educational support from feudal authorities for their own samurai, to say nothing of commoners, was the rule. Learning outside the home took place, as it had in medieval times, within the precincts of temples and shrines in most villages—despite the desire of some, like the daimyo of Okayama, to displace Buddhist metaphysics with Confucian loyalty and filial piety at the center of popular learning.

Conclusion

The evidence, even though circumstantial, indicates high levels of functional literacy among the leadership of Japanese farming villages in the early seventeenth century and even before that. In other words, Japan's farming population had local leaders who could carry out the manifold requirements of village administration with considerable skill. How far administrative literacy extended beyond that elite group is difficult to ascertain from the circulation of documents in villages. It is known, however, that ordinary farmers, disgruntled at perceived inaccuracies in their tax accounts, filed petitions and sought information that might correct the injustices they had suffered. Accordingly, one may conclude that by the end of the seventeenth century, some ordinary farmers had attained a significant degree of literacy. Assuming that concern about inaccuracies or malfeasance on the part of village headmen indeed extended broadly, one may be justified in attributing a high functional literacy to most landowning farmers, perhaps 50 percent of the farming population or even more.

Incentives both from the top and from the bottom encouraged popular literacy. Feudal authorities needed capable administrators in villages and towns.

Landowning commoners sought fairness in the distribution of tax burdens and, in some cases, the power and influence that literacy brought. Nevertheless, there was no great rush, either from the top or from the bottom, to bring into being educational institutions designed for this purpose. No doubt the reason, at least in part, was that Buddhist temples continued to provide instructional services considered adequate by many farming families. As far as the village leadership was concerned, the kind of training required for competence in administration most likely took place within families and was not widely shared. In the early Tokugawa period, there was little inducement to provide public instruction to widen access to the kind of literacy that was one of the accoutrements of power in the village.

Despite the rise of writing schools and some limited access to domain schools, training within families continued to be the major avenue to literacy for the village leadership during much of the Tokugawa period. Early in the seventeenth century, there were hints of a split in the nature of literacy training in the countryside. On the one hand, lower-grade writing schools and temples introduced the rudiments of learning to the general populace. On the other hand, a higher grade of vocational training was maintained within elite families. The pursuit of literacy data will permit more conclusions to be made about the development of these "two cultures" in farming villages over time.

From what has been presented so far, it is clear that however skillful the village leadership class may have become in handling written documents, the material was in some ways limited. The village elite of the incipient Tokugawa period dealt mainly with administrative documents of a broad sort. The hybrid Sino-Japanese language used in those records was difficult, and mastering it was no small achievement. Compared to the many types of literacy—in Confucian texts, in poetry, in theater, and in the other arts—that developed among commoners in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, the literacy of early Tokugawa village leaders seems narrow in scope.

Finally, it ought to be reiterated that the evidence presented here is circumstantial, heavily reliant on the kinds of documents that proliferated in Tokugawa villages. It should be kept in mind that beyond the requirements of landowners who had to pay taxes on what they cultivated, there was little need for literacy of any kind. The vast proliferation of documents in Tokugawa villages that Japanese scholars have paid great attention to in recent years is not necessarily a firm basis for arguing that the constituency of literacy expanded in those villages. The explosion of documentary matter makes a more compelling case for the growing depth and administrative competence of the small, limited elite circle of village leaders.

How far did literacy extend beyond this limited group in the seventeenth century? How far down the social ladder did it penetrate? These are questions that are difficult to answer on the basis of the materials used here. Different data must be adduced before a more specific look at the spread (or lack of spread) of literacy to ordinary people can be taken. For a starter, chapter 2 presents materials that graph the actual writing ability of even the most humble members of Japanese society—the marks or "signs" they made on village documents in the early seventeenth century.

2

Signatures, Ciphers, and Seals

The history of Japanese education does not suffer so much from lack of attention as from too much attention to particular areas. For instance, a great deal of work has been done on writing schools *(terakoya* or *tenaraisho),* so much so that up to now the only serious attempts to estimate literacy in Japan have been based on the proliferation of these schools in the late Tokugawa period. As studies of the history of literacy in Europe and North America have shown, for the period prior to the mid-nineteenth century, before public schooling became compulsory—the center of children's lives that it is today—school attendance is an unreliable guide to actual literacy skills learned. Nevertheless, many scholars of Japanese educational history continue to perceive literacy primarily as a quantitative issue of numbers of schools rather than as a qualitative question of actual skills attained.

Why has this been the case? One important reason has certainly been the belief that systematic data, such the signature data widely used in Western studies of literacy, are unavailable in Japan. The extensive use of engraved seals or chops (known in Japan by a variety of terms such as *inkan, hanko, inshō*) on documents in place of individually scrawled signatures is no doubt a major reason for the paucity of literacy studies in Japan. This chapter explores the possibilities of opening up the topic of literacy in early seventeenth-century Japan to empirical study using signature data.

Scholars such as Roger Schofield have defined three elements that are essential for an appropriate standard of literacy measurement. The standard

must be (1) universal, covering all ages, classes, sexes, and occupations, (2) consistent, and (3) direct, specifically measuring ability to read and/or write in ways that the circulation of books and school attendance do not. Since personal signatures satisfy these requirements, particularly when many people have put a signature (or personal mark) on the same type of document, signature data has been highly touted and widely used to measure literacy in Western history.[1] In England and France, signatures on wedding registers are available in great quantity over many years and have been used as the standard of measurement of basic literacy among the populace.[2]

To be sure, there are problems with such a method. Signatures would seem to measure only the barest, most rudimentary skill. Furthermore, how would signatures indicate ability to read as opposed to write? In the case of wedding registers in particular, there are cases where a literate bride accompanying an illiterate groom followed the man in making a mark in the register rather than embarrass him by signing when he could not. And there is the famous case of William Shakespeare's father John, a small businessman and the holder of civic offices, who must have known how to read but who had the habit of marking documents with an "X" rather than with his signature.

Two prominent French scholars, François Furet and Jacques Ozouf, set out to test the reliability of signature data as a measure of basic literacy. They took an extensive survey of signatures on wedding registers (compulsory in France since 1667) compiled by Louis Maggiolo in 1879–1880 and compared it with data from the national census begun in 1886 and with conscription data for men compiled since 1827. Both the census and the conscription data provided information on those unable to either read or write, those able to read only, those able to read and write, and those who failed to comply (a negligible quantity). They submitted these three different yet convergent sources on French educational levels in 1866 to factorial and comparative analysis. The result was "a remarkable correlation between the ability to read and write (for men and women) and signatures on marriage registers."[3] The percentages of those who could sign and the percentages who could read and write were not identical but they did vary in step with one another from one *departement* of the country to the other. Thus, despite some inconsistency in reporting among *departements* and some apparent underrepresentation of towns, they concluded that "the ability to sign one's name does indeed refer to what we now call literacy, which in turn means reading and writing" and that "the signature is a good test of literacy."[4]

Are signature data, then, having satisfied the basic requirements of a universal, consistent, and direct measure and having been found to be statistically

valid as a measure of basic literacy, really of no use in the Japanese case? In the Meiji period (1868–1912) a few prefectures surveyed their populations as early as the 1880s, querying specifically the ability to sign. Later, the Ministry of the Army (Rikugunshō) included a category entitled "ability to read and write one's name" on its conscription exams, providing a solid database for measuring literacy and illiteracy beginning in 1899.[5] But how useful are signature data for earlier periods? Can data be found for the seventeenth century, for example? Here the answer is both yes and no.

The Database

Japan has one of the most complete databases of population information in the world, one that goes back much earlier than the French census and even predates the seventeenth-century French signature requirement on wedding registers. It consists of the *shūmon aratame-chō,* or "religious affiliation inquiry registers," used from the early seventeenth century into the middle of the nineteenth century to certify that every individual Japanese—man, woman, and child—was a member of a Buddhist temple and that none was affiliated with Christianity in any way. This system of registration eventually, in the early Meiji period, became the basis for the permanent residence registration *(koseki)* system, a bureaucratic practice still in use. *Shūmon aratame-chō* have been used extensively by demographers to examine changes in population, migration in and out of villages, and family and marriage patterns during the Tokugawa period.[6]

The Shimabara Uprising, a peasant rebellion that broke out in late 1637 in an area of western Kyushu that had once been heavily missionized by Jesuit priests from Europe, provided the impetus for a tightening of Tokugawa policy with respect to Christianity, even if the mass of the area's population had been forced into apostasy decades before and were no longer orthodox believers in that religion. In 1639 the shogunate's final Sakoku (closed country) edict ended the Portuguese trade and with it all Japanese traffic with Catholic countries. In 1640 the shogunate instituted a governmental department called Shūmon Aratame Yaku (office of religious inquisition), which became the central agency for supervising measures meant to eradicate Christianity throughout Japan. The surveillance process put into effect by this office took the form of compilation of "religious affiliation inquiry registers." At first, compilation of the registers was confined to the approximately one-

quarter of the country under the direct rule of the Tokugawa shogun. In 1665, however, the Tokugawa shogunate ordered all domanial lords to compile registers; in 1671, it made them an annual requirement. From then on all residents of Japan—samurai, farmers, and townspeople—were registered under the system every year. Not all these documents have survived, but many from different parts of the country have. According to Hayami Akira, the population registers collected and studied thus far are only a small percentage of those probably extant and still located in the storehouses of descendants of Tokugawa village officials.[7]

Religious affiliation registers listed everyone in the village or town on the day it was compiled in the sixth lunar month. The documents were prepared for each village by a single individual, usually the headman or a designated scribe, so there are no individual signatures. Furthermore, from about the middle of the seventeenth century, just as the registration system was becoming a countrywide endeavor, carved seals *(inkan, hanko)* were coming into general use throughout the country as marks of individual identification. These seals provide few clues as to the writing ability of individuals whose names appeared on these documents. Their pervasive use is one of the main reasons for overlooking signature data in studies of literacy in Japan.

However, prior to the time when seals became widely used, documents exist that list names of villagers and townspeople followed not with seals but with a variety of individually written personal marks certifying understanding and agreement with the text of the document. Very old town and village rules *(sadame)* with names of headmen, five-household group heads, and household heads are extant, some going back as far as the fourteenth century. Later, documents with the names of entire village or town populations appear—as early as 1634 in areas in and around Nagasaki and in other parts of the country where the "Christian problem" was thought to be most serious. There are apostasy oaths that predate the *shūmon aratame-chō* called *nanban kishōmon.* Typically, as is the case with later religious affiliation registers, every name in the village was attached, not just those of headmen or household heads. Unlike the *shūmon aratame-chō,* they do not indicate a person's affiliation with a Buddhist temple. The document simply required an oath certifying that one was not Christian. In addition, there are various kinds of village and town rules going back to the fourteenth century that set out regulations that "signers" are required to follow. Typically, only representatives—household heads in towns or village officials—would certify these materials, but they were individually validated by a mark in the principal's own hand.

Thus, documents exhibiting a variety of personal marks are available for

the Japanese case, making empirical judgments about levels of literacy in early Tokugawa history possible. Documents limited to the elite levels of the commoner classes go back to an even earlier time. The best materials, those that have the names of all or virtually all the residents of a village or town attached, are of a much shorter duration, a mere several decades in the seventeenth century. They can be used to assess literacy levels in selected populations of commoners during a brief window of opportunity from the first apostasy oaths until the widespread use of seals—that is, from the 1630s up to about 1650.

Ciphers (kaō)

The most reliable of the various marks from the perspective of estimating literacy is the cipher, or monogram *(kaō).* Ciphers began as signatures and evolved into unique designs used for personal identification. Typically, they were formed by combining one or two characters from a personal name into a simple but highly individual mark used for purposes of certification. In the eighth and ninth centuries, official documents emanating from the central state organ, the Dajōkan, were authenticated with a carved or engraved seal *(inkan),* following Chinese practice. Nonofficial documents, both public and private, were signed. Signatures by officials on public documents were usually in the formal, standard script and were quite legible. For private business, however, one was free to write in a more creative, cursive form, permitting stroke order and the basic shapes of characters to be altered to the point where they were no longer recognizable. These highly individualized, often illegible signatures eventually came to be called *kaō.* The word is a compound of two Chinese characters. The second means to "to impress one's signature" and the first signifies "flower." Together they convey the meaning of a signature artfully and beautifully rendered, like a flower. Although "monogram" may be the more familiar term, I believe "cipher" to be the better English approximation.

Ciphers began to appear in Japan at the beginning of the Heian period (794–1185), around the time the *hiragana* syllabary was being developed by a similar process of abbreviating Chinese characters and writing them in cursive form. During that period *kaō* were artistic signatures favored by the highly literate members of the court aristocracy and were based typically upon the actual characters of a person's name. With the rise of the military class to national power in the Kamakura period, new ciphers developed that

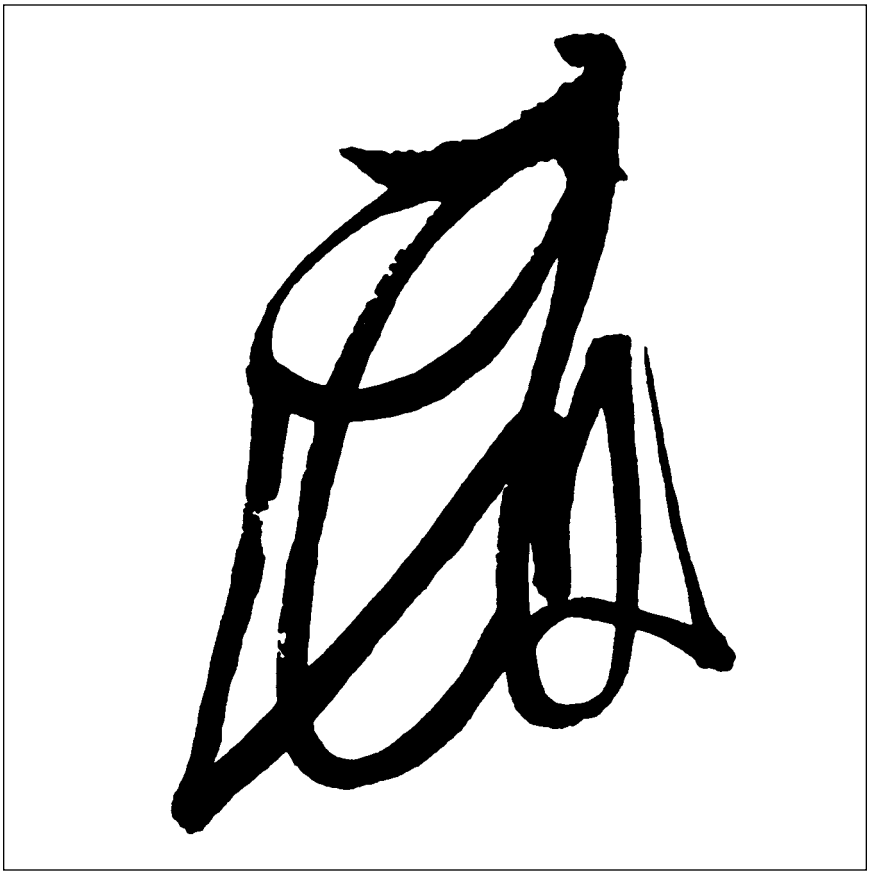


Figure 1. Cipher used by Minamoto no Yoritomo.

joined together portions of two different characters of a given name to form a new character that was written cursively. In the case of Minamoto no Yoritomo, founder of the Kamakura shogunate, for example, the left side of "Yori" and the right side of "tomo" were joined to form his distinctive *kaō* (see Figure 1).

Although no longer signatures in the formal sense, the new military ciphers were unique personal marks that were difficult to imitate—particularly so because they, like many individual marks, were written with a brush, a technique that requires considerable dexterity and leaves behind an indelible indi-

vidual trace. They were, therefore, useful as formal marks of identification. During most of the medieval period, ciphers remained the sole means of confirming the authenticity of a document, performing the same function that signatures did in the West. From the end of the Heian period, in fact, they were used to certify official documents exactly as seals had been used earlier. They were referred to as *kaki-han* or "written seals," suggesting their dual nature as both signature and seal. During the latter part of the medieval period, in the Muromachi era (1338–1573), many new styles of *kaō* appeared. Some were based on a single character. Others were based on pictures. Others yet were vehicles for expressing an idea or religious belief. Zen monks developed a uniquely Buddhist-influenced design of dots and lines, which was noted for the boldness of the brushstrokes.

The founder of the Tokugawa shogunate, Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), preferred a style of cipher that had originated in the Ming dynasty and was called Minchōtai in Japanese. Its basic feature was a simple design drawn between two parallel lines (see Figure 2). Ieyasu was followed in this practice by most ranking members of the warrior class and eventually by the upper levels of the commoners, as will be seen below. By the end of the rule of the eighth Tokugawa shogun, Yoshimune (1684–1751; ruled 1716–1745), toward the middle of the eighteenth century, it was customary to have *kaō* designs carved into a wooden seal from which rubbings could be taken. Ciphers then lost their original meaning and function and became little different in usage from seals. They had, in fact, already gone out of fashion by the middle of the seventeenth century, when feudal authorities began to insist that standardized carved seals be used to certify documents. In 1873 the Meiji government ruled that seals be impressed on important documents, and *kaō* were seldom used thereafter. They are seldom seen today except when ministers of the government, following tradition, attach their *kaō* to important legislation agreed to in committee before submitting it to the national Diet for ratification.[8]

A look at original documents of the early seventeenth century makes it clear immediately that ciphers were individually written and required considerable skill with a brush to produce. It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that ability to write a bona fide *kaō* was an indication of ability to write (and probably to read) at a fairly high level. It is, of course, possible that someone could master a cipher and not be able to write, just as someone could sign his name and be able to write nothing else. But mastery of the writing brush is difficult and requires extensive practice. Anyone who could produce a finely written *kaō* would almost certainly be able to write more extensively, although there could have been exceptions.

Figure 2. Cipher used by Tokugawa Ieyasu.

Ciphers were principally used by samurai and courtiers, but there are examples of commoners (nonsamurai) using ciphers on a variety of documents by the late sixteenth century, prior to Tokugawa hegemony. Most of these early documents, which include *goningumi-chō* (five-household group registers), town and village rules, and petitions, list only village officials, household heads, or the affected parties. A large collection of documents left by the enterprising merchants of central Ōmi Province (now Shiga Prefecture) show male leaders of village associations *(miyaza)* signing a wide variety of documents with *kaō* both before and after the beginning of the Tokugawa period.[9] Other materials, like the apostasy oath documents, which begin to appear later, list every member of every family in a village or town, making them particularly useful for the analysis of popular literacy. Patterns of cipher use, like signatures in the West, make it possible to discern patterns of literacy among members of the same family, between the sexes, between homeowners and renters, between villages and towns, and among regions. At a time when other sources of data on the literacy of ordinary farmers and townspeople outside the leadership groups is scarce, it is worth trying to squeeze as much information as possible from the use of ciphers on written documents.

Certifying Without Signatures: Seals and Other Marks

Ciphers were by no means the only form of mark used on commoner documents. The variety of marks used reflects the diversity of skill levels within villages and among villages and towns in the early seventeenth century. Officials began to use carved or engraved seals on public documents as early as the eighth century, following Chinese practice. Regional authorities became frequent users of seals in the Kamakura period, as administrative documents proliferated in warrior domains all around the country.

The earliest example of a seal on a document originating in the farmer sector of the population is reported in 1592 in Shinshū (now Nagano Prefecture),[10] but there were wide geographical differences in usage. The eastern parts of Japan picked up the practice earlier than the western areas, where the use of ciphers remained more firmly entrenched. Also, the daimyo of the eastern domains switched to seals earlier, and this trend spread to farmers—first to powerful provincial families and then to ordinary farm families. Consequently, more early Tokugawa documents are found in western Japan with commoners using ciphers. By the end of the Kan'ei period (1624–1644) the use of seals had spread widely throughout the country; by 1694 it was so common that the shogunate felt the need to issue regulations to stem the flow of rampant forgeries. The following order was included in *goningumi-chō* registers for that year: "Village headmen and farmers must not make changes in their seals on their own. If you lose or have to change an *inkan,* you must show the new one to authorities and have it registered. Ordinary farmers must show seals to their headman and have them recorded by him. Only then can they be used."[11]

Thus, whereas for most of the medieval period validating a document meant using a cipher, by the middle of the seventeenth century that function was performed by impressing one's seal or chop. By the middle of the seventeenth century, virtually all documents containing lists of the names of commoners—apostasy oaths, village and town rules, five-household registers, and various kinds of petitions to authorities—show those names certified with individual, family, or Buddhist temple seals.

Over time there were changes in style and size. The earliest seals used simple designs rather than names. They were not round but oval, rectangular, diamond, or fan-shaped. In the Manji period (1658–1661) the sizes and shapes became more regular, and characters, such as those for "large," "small," "upper," and then "treasure" and "good fortune," started to replace the rough and crude designs of the earlier years. By the eighteenth century seals had become much

like they are today—a typical one is a small, round, standardized chop with one's name engraved.

The standardization of seals became explicit government policy in the Meiji period. On July 5, 1873, other types of verification, such as ciphers, were expressly forbidden on legal or commercial documents. By February 26, 1900, the use of personal seals with one's name was extended to all commercial transactions, and this is still the case today. The system of registering one's *jitsuin* (official seal), begun in 1694, also remains in effect today. An individual's seal must still be registered with a local government office, which keeps an impression of it on permanent file. Only these registered seals are legally recognized. When impressing a seal on an official document, proof must be furnished in the form of a certificate from one's local government office that the seal being used is in fact the legally registered *jitsuin.*

The use of standardized seals has been one of the primary obstacles to the study of literacy in Japan. The question remains: Why did the Japanese move away from certifying documents with signatures or ciphers and toward the use of the standardized chop beginning in the middle of the seventeenth century? There appear to be at least two factors involved. One was convenience and speed in conducting commercial transactions. Keep in mind that until after World War II, when ballpoint pens became widespread, signatures were written with brushes that required cumbersome additional equipment—ink, inkstands, rags for cleaning, and so forth. Merchants needed a speedier and more efficient means of transacting business than the laborious process of preparing ink and brush for a handwritten cipher. Ishii points out that the First National Bank of Japan found it inefficient to follow the government's 1873 regulation to have people sign commercial documents and then seal them. The bank petitioned the government for a change, and as a result people were allowed to use seals alone to identify themselves at national banks. By February 26, 1900, presumably for the sake of convenience, the use of seals was extended to include all commercial transactions and then to all legal documents.[12]

The second factor is that by the middle of the seventeenth century, in the course of consolidating Tokugawa power under the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu (1604–1651), the authorities sought ways to ensure that everyone in all villages and towns understood the contents of the numerous edicts and regulations that were being disseminated. For this reason they encouraged everyone to use standardized and officially approved seals following their names to certify that they had understood official documents. Such usage became pervasive on all types of documents pertaining to commoners beginning in the 1650s, although the official system of seal registration was not put into effect until 1694. Because many of the people for whom the increasing volume of

sumptuary legislation was intended could presumably neither read nor write, a standardized method of certification was necessary. As this process proceeded, individual ciphers and personal marks gave way to the use of the seal.

Ciphers, abbreviated ciphers, and a range of other personal marks on documents vanished sometime in the mid-seventeenth century in favor of the nationwide systematic use of engraved seals. It has been suggested that seals were the visible sign of a rising sense of class consciousness and family cohesion among farmers and townspeople.[13] If so, this cohesion was surely offset by a lessening of individual identity associated with the personal signature, the cipher, and the other personal marks on documents used up to that time.

Marks for Illiterates

The advent of the seal and the standardization it represented obliterated from the record a diverse array of identifying personal marks used on documents up to that time. It also covered up any trace of a tradition of long standing that allowed those who could not read or write to verify their names on documents in their own idiosyncratic and personal ways. The adoption of the seal marked the culmination of a very old custom among the Japanese of providing a means for those who could not write to nevertheless certify documents. The tradition first showed itself in the earliest of all Japanese document collections, the Nara-period *Shōsōin monjo,* in a "household law" which describes how the unlettered could "sign" a divorce decree: "There are seven justifications for divorcing a wife—childlessness, profligacy, quarreling, stealing, jealousy, mother-in-law problems, and virulent disease. The husband must prepare the documents and cite the reason. If he can't write he should use a 'finger measure' *(kakushi)* along with the names of relatives (to vouch for him)."[14]

In other words, a husband could have divorce documents prepared even if he was illiterate. In such a case he had to make a "finger measure" on the document beneath or beside his name, something done by laying the forefinger on the paper and making short horizontal lines alongside it to indicate the base, tip, and each joint of the finger. By the end of the Nara period, a vertical line connecting the short horizontal lines was added, providing a clear indication of the length of the particular forefinger from base to tip. These "finger measures," used like fingerprints, were not limited to divorce proceedings but were also used for documents certifying the buying or selling of land, loan papers, and other legal matters. The method, borrowed from China, was used expressly for the purpose of enabling illiterates to certify documents. Although there are scattered examples of "finger measures" from the Kamakura period, their use

had dwindled by the end of the Heian era, when other methods came into fashion (see Figure 3).

By the Edo period, a whole range of marks had developed that could be used by illiterates. Some, like the "finger measure," were of very old vintage; others were more recent. There was considerable regional variation as well. At about the time that "finger measures" began to disappear during the Heian period, some farmers began to use what scholars now call "abbreviated ciphers" *(ryakuō).* These ranged in design from a simplified version of a cipher to a simple mark that is no more than a circle, occasionally with a dot in the center. Some of these exhibit something of the individualized character of the personal cipher. The more elaborate examples suggest a limited ability with the brush; the simple circular types probably do not.[15] Figure 4 shows part of a 1639 document from Imabori Village with villagers "signing" in four rows below their names with a few using elaborate ciphers but most certifying with a variety of simple abbreviated ciphers. Another (possibly strictly local) example of a mark requiring limited brush technique was found in Sagami Province

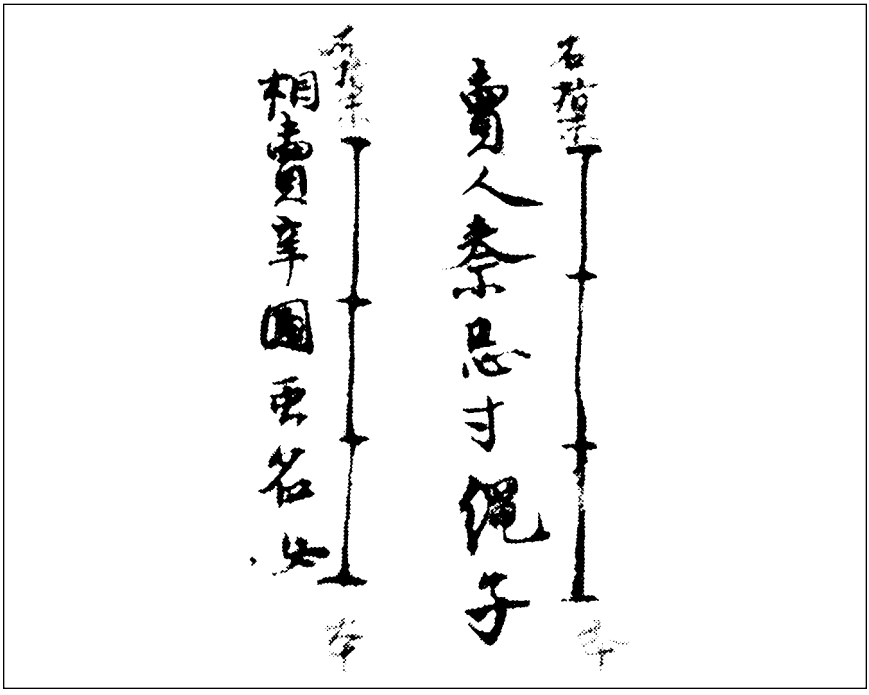


Figure 3. "Finger measure" from Takada Village, Yamashiro Province, 849. Courtesy of National Diet Library, Tokyo.

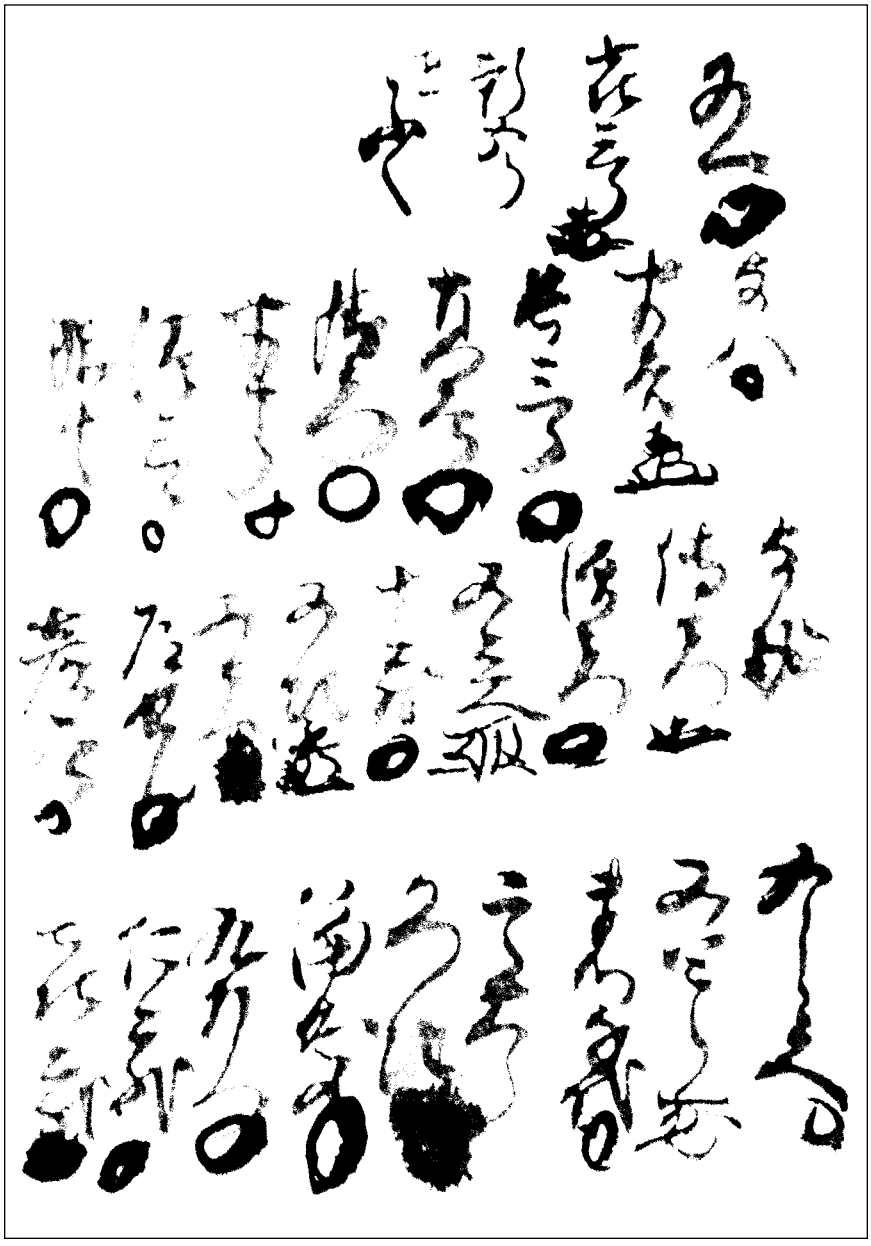


Figure 4. Abbreviated ciphers, Imabori Village, 1639. From *Imabori sōbun rensho sadamejō* #296. Printed with permission of Imabori Hiyoshi Jinja Monjo Kanri Iinkai.

(now Kanagawa Prefecture). There, husbands who could not write could satisfy the requirements for divorce merely by making three and a half lines on paper with a brush dipped in ink.[16]

From the end of the Kamakura period, a crude "stem stamp" *(fude jikuin)* method of marking began to appear beneath the names of commoners on documents, although not in large numbers at first. This was a mark made by dipping the reverse end of the brush stem (or handle) into ink and then impressing a mark of the blunt end of the brush on paper. Although some scholars claim that these marks, too, may be made with a characteristic personal touch by the way they are rolled or imprinted, it is clear that they required no ability to write. Stem stamps appear to have been used heavily by the illiterate sectors of the commoner classes, particularly but not exclusively women and children, until the early eighteenth century or so. They, too, gave way to seals around the middle of the Edo period. In Osaka as late as 1767 stem stamps were being used under the names of women and children on documents guaranteeing bank loans and on apprentice guarantee papers.[17]

Sasamoto Shōji has suggested that there was a substantial difference between the use of seals on the one hand and stem stamps on the other.[18] According to his view, stem stamps and other illiterate marks described above were used in great numbers for unspecified purposes and had no symbolic or social meaning, much like the use of "X" to sign documents in the West. Seals, on the other hand, eventually came to be identified with a particular household, and a household head could use the family seal to certify documents for all members of the group. This, he further argues, led to a new sense of identity both with one's household and with one's status as a farmer or townsperson. Ironically, it may well have been this growing sense of local independence that led feudal authorities to reassert themselves and insist that all villagers and townspeople certify their understanding of rules and regulations by means of the standardized seal.

Tsume-in (fingernail impression) was another type of mark used by illiterates. It was made by dipping the edge of a fingernail in ink and pressing it on paper. It was sometimes used in criminal cases when a commoner did not have a seal and could not write. As a rule, young girls did not carry seals and often used either fingernail marks or stem stamps. Women of the prostitute quarters often used nail marks because their inferior social status prevented them from using someone else as a proxy on official documents,[19] which suggests that numerous woodblock prints and Edo narratives portraying courtesans reading and writing letters may not tell the whole story of the literacy skills of women in the world's oldest profession.

Blood marks (*keppan;* the marks of bloodied hands) and thumbprints

(boin) are also occasionally seen as marks of authenticity on commoners' documents of the Tokugawa period. Needless to say, neither of these marks required the ability to write.

During the Tokugawa period it was possible for one person to substitute for another in signing or certifying a document, as a mother for an infant, or a household head for an underaged child. In Osaka, a proxy was used until a child reached the age of fourteen. At fifteen, the child was considered competent to "sign." When a proxy was used, however, the proxy's name also had to be indicated with a certifying stamp.

Literacy in Urban Households I: Signatures on Town Rules in Kyoto

We begin our examination of commoner signatures on documents with a look at household heads in a merchant ward of a large city in the early decades of the Tokugawa period. The Kyoto City Historical Archives (Kyōto Rekishi Shiryōkan) houses a collection of "Town Rules" *(sadame)* from the commercial inner-city wards of the city, home to wealthy merchants like the Mitsui family from the late sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries.[20] The rules were fashioned by local town councils following requirements set by higher feudal authorities and included the names of all household heads in the ward followed by a validating mark. The existence of detailed rules themselves shows how early in the Tokugawa period urban areas were developing strategies for independence and local rule. They are surprisingly comprehensive, covering many areas of city life, suggesting extensive local administrative oversight by the early seventeenth century.

The rules differed from one ward to another, but there are some basic similarities. All wards had rules on the buying and selling of property, such as who could rent in the district and who could succeed to property, because permission for this was required from town officials. There were specific rules, for example, against renting to the blind, to entertainers, to *rōnin* (masterless samurai), and to Christians. There were rules prohibiting bathhouses or blacksmiths because of the fire hazard. There were prohibitions against dyers because of the smells they made, and against *eta* and *hinin* (despised, outcast groups). There were rules governing the organization and administration of the town, such as for fire prevention and safety, or how often to hold town meetings. The responsibilities of various administrative organs—*toshiyori* (elders), *goningumi* (five-household groups), and *sōdanshū* (local councils)—were also clearly set out.

Fire safety was of particular concern. One rule stated that anyone who didn't volunteer to help in case of fire would be forced to leave the town. There were rules covering personal behavior at shrine and temple festivals, how to interact with customers, and how to arrange funerals and weddings. There were also miscellaneous rules on relations with other towns and villages, special taxes and fees, such as a 10 percent levy to the town on the sale of a home. Finally, there were persistent warnings about the importance of obeying all town rules.[21]

Table 2, "Cipher Use in Kyoto Wards," shows the kinds of identifying marks made by household heads in a number of commercial wards of Kyoto over time.

Judging by this sample, cipher use among household heads in commercial wards in the years through 1624 was extremely high. In Niwatorihōkō-chō (#2 in Table 2) in 1596, out of a total of fifty-nine names, forty-seven, or 80 percent, confirmed that they had read and understood the rules by "signing" with an elegant cipher after their name. In 1620 in Shimohonnōjimae-chō (#5 in the chart), all but one household head used a *kaō,* a 95 percent cipher usage rate among household heads in that ward. In the same ward in 1634 (#6 in Table 2) the rate was still over 50 percent with ten out of nineteen using a cipher. In those wards where a distinction was made between homeowners and renters, such as in Reizei-chō in 1614 (#3 in Table 2), homeowners—who were responsible for paying taxes and for reading and understanding the various town regulations—showed substantially higher rates of *kaō* use (75 percent) than did renters who themselves had a reasonably high 55 percent rate of cipher use. Figure 5 shows a page from the Reizei-chō register in 1614 indicating extensive cipher use among homeowner household heads.

These data also provide empirical evidence for a dramatic drop in cipher use (and corresponding rise in the use of seals) by the middle of the seventeenth century. By 1656 in Nishitakeya-chō (#7 in Table 2), the rate of cipher use fell precipitously to 16 percent and thereafter only a handful of household heads (between one and three) used them into the nineteenth century. To be sure, the decrease was not tied to decreasing levels of literacy but, on the contrary, to rising levels of seal use brought on by heightened commercial activity and pressure from feudal authorities. In the Kyoto wards above, when cipher use dropped to 16 percent in Nishitakeya-chō in 1656, seal use correspondingly rose to 84 percent. In the same year in Shimohonnōjimae-chō, cipher use was down to 5 percent, but seals had gone from 32 percent in 1634 to 90 percent.

Town and village rules are useful because they provide an early record, going back into the late sixteenth century, of individualized commoner marks

TABLE 2 Cipher Use in Kyoto Wards

1. Town Rules Shimohonnōjimae-chō, 1594	
Total Names	18
Ciphers Used	11
Simple Ciphers	6
Seals	1
% Cipher Use	61%
(Revised Rules)	
Total Names	17
Ciphers Used	11
Simple Ciphers	5
Seals	1
% Cipher Use	65%
2. Town Rules Niwatorihōkō-chō, 1596	
Total Names	59
Ciphers Used	47
Seals	4
Stem Stamps	1
Blank	7
% Cipher Use	80%
3. Rules Reizei-chō, 1614	
Homeowners	
Total Names	28
Ciphers Used	21
Seals	6
Stem Stamps	1
% Cipher Use	75%
Renters	
Total Names	9
Ciphers Used	5
Seals	3
Blank	1
% Cipher Use	55%
4. Rules Reizei-chō, 1620	
Total Names	56
Ciphers Used	45
Seals	11
% Cipher Use	80%
5. Rules Shimohonnōjimae-chō, 1620	
Total Names	20
Ciphers Used	19
Simple Ciphers	1
% Cipher Use	95%
6. Rules Shimohonnōjimae-chō, 1634	
Total Names	19
Ciphers Used	10
Seals	6
Simple Ciphers	1
Not Clear	2
% Cipher Use	53%
7. Rules Nishitakeya-chō, 1656	
Total Names	25
Ciphers Used	4
Seals	21
% Cipher Use	16%
8. Rules Shimohonnōjimae-chō, 1656	
Total Names	20
Ciphers Used	1
Seals	18
Blank	1
% Cipher Use	5%
9. Rules Shimohonnōjimae-chō, 1702	
Total Names	21
Ciphers Used	3
Seals	15
Blank	3
% Cipher Use	14%
10. Rules Shimohonnōjimae-chō, 1819	
Total Names	18
Ciphers Used	1
Seals	17
% Cipher Use	5%

Figure 5. Cipher use by Kyoto ward heads, 1614. "Ward Rules" from *Reizei-chō monjo.* Printed with permission of Mr. Matsui Yoshio.

on documents. They provide impressive evidence that the upper levels of the urban merchant class were highly literate early in the Tokugawa period and for decades before that. The data here further show that this was not just true of the very top echelons of the town leadership class *(machidoshiyori),* who were roughly equivalent in status and function to village headmen. Those who could "sign" with elegant and elaborate ciphers also included a high percentage of household heads, a much more significant number than the number of town officials. It must be kept in mind, however, that this data is from a prosperous and wealthy commercial sector of the major city in the country at the time.

Literacy in Urban Households II: Rokkaku-chō, Kyoto (1635)

A fuller accounting of the population in one of these wealthy commercial wards of Kyoto is provided in an apostasy oath sworn to by every resident, not just household heads in Rokkaku-chō in central Kyoto. As in most of these documents, the oath and the names that followed were written by a single hand. The certifying marks following names, however, were individually written and allow us to make some tentative conclusions about levels of literacy among ages, sexes, and statuses both within and among households.

Since the Muromachi period, the Rokkaku-chō ward of Kyoto had been home to wealthy Kyoto merchants such as the Mitsui family. In 1635 the Kyoto deputy *(shoshidai)* ordered that all residents swear an oath or pledge that they were not Christians and affix a certifying mark below their names to that effect. These apostasy oaths *(nanban kishōmon)* were not limited to heads of households. They included the name of every resident—man, woman, and child (except those under five)—in the town. Unlike later religious affiliation registers, no Buddhist temple affiliation was indicated on the *nanban kishōmon.*

Each page of the Rokkaku-chō document (see Figure 6) is devoted to a single household.[22] Most of these households had employees and these are included on a separate line below that of family members. In addition, the status of each family member—wife, mother, older brother, and so forth—is usually indicated in the document. Gender was not indicated directly, but the names of female employees were invariably written in the phonetic *hiragana* syllabary, whereas male names were almost always written in Chinese characters. All these indicators, direct and indirect, allow us to make some inferences about literacy distinctions within families and among the population of this ward.

The format of the oaths was similar to what later would be followed in the

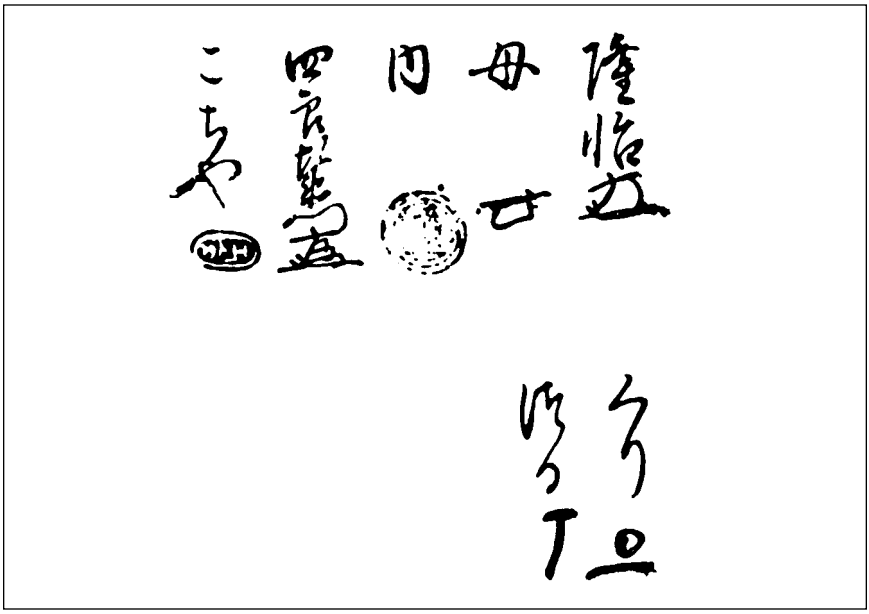


Figure 6. "Signatures" attached to apostasy oath, Kyoto, 1635. From *Kita Kannonyama-chō (Rokkaku-chō) monjo* #123. Printed with permission of Kita Kannonyama Hozonkai.

religious affiliation registers. Everyone, including servants, was listed as a member of a household. The household head was invariably listed first, followed by other members, roughly in order of their nearness to him (occasionally her), taking sex and age into account. Thus, the names of fathers and mothers immediately followed the household head, followed by the name of a spouse, then those of siblings and children in age order. Renter households in the ward were recorded separately, allowing us to make that basic but nonetheless useful distinction. Figure 6 shows the marks from one household. Reading from the top, right to left, there is the name of the male household head followed by a cipher, his mother with a simpler form of cipher, his wife with a seal, a male relative with an elaborate cipher, and another relative with a seal. On the bottom row are two employees with very simple abbreviated ciphers.

Although many commoners had family names, they were not permitted to use them on legal documents, so only given names were used. Adult women were typically entered without any name, with just their status as wife, mother, and occasionally widow *(goke)* indicated. The exception to this was female servants, who were listed by their given names, invariably written in *hiragana.* Ages were not entered, unlike some later religious affiliation registers.

Nineteen of the twenty-six heads of homeowner households in Rokkaku-chō in 1635 (or 73 percent) used a cipher *(kaō)* to certify their names. If two widows who used seals are discounted, the number would be 79 percent. In either case, this percentage is about the same as or higher than that found in other prosperous commercial wards of Kyoto at the same time. In Shimo-honnōjimae-chō, for example, 53 percent of homeowner household heads used ciphers in 1634.

But this document, unlike Town Rules, makes it clear that headmen were not the only members of the community with the literacy skill to write ciphers. In Rokkaku-chō in 1635, in addition to household heads, brothers, nephews, some employees, and a few women used ciphers. This suggests that at least in the urban areas, a much broader population than before had considerable skill with a brush in the first decades of the Tokugawa period.

Adult women overwhelmingly used seals to certify their names. Of twenty wives, eighteen (or 90 percent) preferred this method, eight of eleven mothers (73 percent) used it, and half of the fourteen daughters used seals. The two wives who did not use seals used stem stamps, but two of the mothers used ciphers, and one used a simple cipher mark made with a brush, possibly indicating some rudimentary literacy. The seven daughters who did not use seals, possibly younger girls who were as yet untutored, used stem stamps. The older girls could have followed their mothers and used seals.

The diversity of these markings clearly suggests a wide range in literacy skills among female family members, not illiteracy across the board. At one end of the spectrum of skills there were several senior women who, by their use of ciphers, were apparently highly skilled. They would in all likelihood have been trained prior to the Tokugawa period in a household that was actively engaged in commerce, as almost all these families were. At the other end were the younger girls who used stem stamps and were probably illiterate. The use of seals by an overwhelming percentage of wives could mean that many adult women were involved in commercial transactions for which the seal was becoming the certifying stamp of choice by this time. Or the seal could be an indicator of illiteracy; there is no sure way to know. In urban commercial households like these, however, it is more likely that the stem stamp rather than the seal was the mark of choice for those unable to read and write.

Two out of the three fathers in the document used ciphers; the other pressed a seal. Of the nine nephews and uncles, five used ciphers and four used seals. Ten out of twenty-three sons (43 percent) used ciphers. The rest were split between seals (30 percent) and stem stamps (21 percent). The latter group could very well have been quite young, hence the stem mark which could have been made on their behalf. The older sons who did not use ciphers could have

been shifting to the use of seals, as some merchants were probably doing. One of the sons made an abbreviated cipher of the creative type. If we assume that the stem stamp was the mark of a very young child and exclude them from our calculations, the percentage of sons who were literate cipher users goes from a respectable 43 percent to an impressive 56 percent. Of the other twelve males who were not heads of household (including nephews of indeterminate age), seven (58 percent) used ciphers. Using the 56 percent figure for sons, one might argue that the use of the cipher in this document suggests that literacy skills in commercial families were being passed down from father to son. At the same time, the 58 percent figure suggests that cipher use was extending outward beyond household heads to other adult males. A limited number of adult females were probably also literate as shown by their use of ciphers.

Of the employees working in these households, sixty-three were males and fifty-eight were females. Twenty-seven of the sixty-three males (43 percent) used ciphers, indicating a high level of writing skill. Twenty-nine percent of male employees, most likely young children, used stem stamps and were presumably illiterate. The cipher users must have been older apprentices who kept accounts and maintained written records and needed substantial literacy skills. The 20 percent who made abbreviated ciphers with a brush might have been a step above the group at the bottom but nowhere near the level of skill of cipher users. If this group had some level of literacy, albeit low, and we added their 20 percent to the 43 percent of cipher users, we get 63 percent of male employees with some level of literacy. This would leave about 30 percent illiterate if the personal mark estimates made here are roughly accurate.

By the same measure, 62 percent of female employees would have been illiterate. There were, however, two wet nurses among the female employees who were cipher users. At a far more rudimentary level of literacy skill, twelve of the fifty-eight female employees (21 percent) used abbreviated ciphers. Thus, there could have been something like 24 percent of the female employees with some degree of literacy, while the overwhelming majority were probably very young and illiterate. Eight of the girls (14 percent of the total) used seals. The percentages of high and low skills among females are roughly the reverse of the males. Among employees, as among family members, male literacy appears to be much higher. Male employees were older and more likely to be engaged in work that required some literacy, while the girls seem to be younger and were probably babysitters and mothers' helpers who did not require such skills. But indications of a diversity of female literacy skills at all levels is noteworthy. The evidence of cipher use among some women suggesting a high level of skill is particularly remarkable for this early period. Both Figure 6 (above) and Figure 7 (below) show cipher use by women, in both cases mothers. In Figure 7 both

the male household head and his mother used ciphers on the top row of the page. On the bottom are three young female employees who used stem stamps.

Renter households, in contrast to homeowner households, were smaller in size. They had fewer employees and their female employees outnumbered males two to one. Household heads were evenly split between cipher users and seal users. This is about a 30 percent lower rate of cipher use than among homeowners but still an impressive proportion. Like owners' wives, renters' wives used seals in overwhelming numbers, fourteen of sixteen, or 87 percent. Sons of renters showed a lower rate of cipher use (33 percent) and higher rate of seal use (58 percent). Surprisingly, daughters of renters used more seals (82 percent) and fewer stem stamps (18 percent) than daughters of owners. Given the premise that stem stamps would most likely have been used by illiterates, it is difficult to explain why renter daughters would have used them less often unless daughters of owners were generally younger than those of renters. This is quite possible, but the document is silent as to ages.

Surprisingly, the rates of cipher use among employees of renters and owners were essentially the same. Thirty-eight percent of male employees of renters used ciphers compared to 43 percent of owners' employees, suggesting that the talent pool and the nature of the work may have been essentially the same for the two groups. In contrast, female employees of renters had higher rates of stem stamp use at 79 percent compared to 62 percent for those of owners, suggesting that levels of learning and/or literacy expectations were lower among renter servants than among owner servants. There were no female cipher users among renters or their employees.

These data on cipher use, if our assumptions about certifying marks as indicators of literacy levels are anywhere near accurate, point to surprisingly high levels of literacy within urban commercial families at an early point in early modern Japan. Household heads, their fathers, their sons, and their employees show high levels of literacy skill by 1635, as indicated by cipher use. This confirms, at least for urban areas, our earlier judgment based on circumstantial evidence that the circle of literacy had extended beyond the narrow core of leaders early in the seventeenth century.

The extensive use of seals among adult women and their daughters makes it difficult to assess their skills, but it is worthy of note that among owner households, a few adult women, both family members and employees, showed substantial writing skills. Evidence for literacy among women this early is difficult to find, so even the few cases of cipher use among women found here must be regarded as suggestive of a phenomenon that could have been more widespread in urban commercial families.

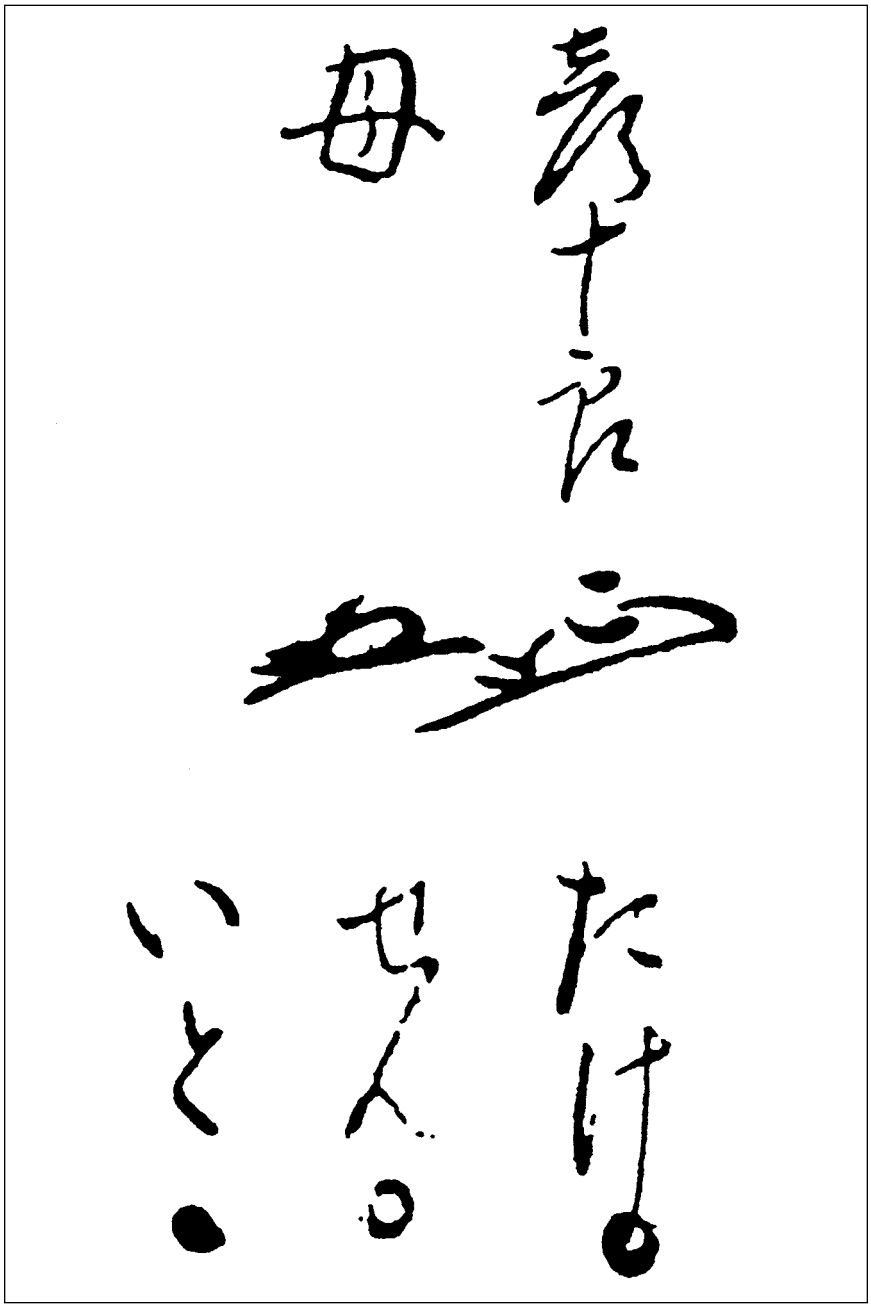


Figure 7. Cipher use by woman on apostasy oath, Kyoto, 1635. From *Kita Kannonyama-chō (Rokkaku-chō) monjo.* Printed with permission of Kita Kannonyama Hozonkai.

At the same time, however, the evidence here also strongly suggests (if stem stamps are an accurate guide) that illiteracy was generally much higher among women than men. This was particularly so among younger women employees, as might be expected. Renters showed lower levels of literacy skill than owners, but not dramatically lower, as one might expect. It is possible that some of these renters were in the process of becoming owners. It is also possible that renters in commercial districts had responsibilities for accounting and record keeping that did not differ substantially from owners, thus the motivations for achieving literacy could have been roughly equivalent. What the literacy data also suggest is that although the statuses of owner and renter in urban areas may have differed, their literacy skills (and possibly their knowledge, talents, and skills in other areas as well) could have been quite similar.

Literacy in a Regional Town: Hirado-chō, Nagasaki

Although not part of a major city like Rokkaku-chō in Kyoto, Hirado-chō in Nagasaki, on the southern island of Kyushu, was also a commercial district in the early seventeenth century. It was the focal point, in fact, of Japan's commercial ties with the outside world and thus provides a good example of a smaller regional town quite distant from the growing urban centers in the Kansai region in the early years of the Tokugawa period. Today it is part of Manzai-machi, which borders Edo-machi in downtown Nagasaki where the prefectural office is located. In the Tokugawa period, Edo-machi was the location of the bridge that connected the city of Nagasaki to the island of Dejima,[23] the hub of Japan's tightly restricted commercial ties with the outside world.

Sections of population registers from this town are available (in varying degrees of completeness) for selected years between 1634 and 1866 in the Matsuki Bunko collection maintained by the Faculty of Literature at Kyushu University. Because of their extraordinary detail and breadth and because they show signature data in a single location over a period of time, these materials help us gain a broader geographical perspective on commoner literacy and enable us to look at literacy change in some historical perspective.[24]

The entries in the "Nagasaki Hirado-chō ninbetsu-chō" (Population registers for Hirado Ward, Nagasaki) are formatted in a way similar to the Rokkaku, Kyoto, materials cited above. Entries are by household with those of homeowners and renters separated into different sections. Family members and servants are also distinguished. Like other documents described above, texts and names were written by a single hand, but each name is followed by an individually written mark of certification.

The Nagasaki materials are different in that (except for 1634) ages of all residents are provided. The text of the Hirado-chō materials also asks signers to confirm either that they have always been Buddhists or that they have turned away from Christianity and have become Buddhists. The 1642 materials provide detailed information on the backgrounds and birthplaces of residents for that year. In 1659 there are summaries of how many residents belonged to which temple, with the seal of that temple added for confirmation.

If we look first at the use of ciphers as certifying marks following names in the 1634 register, out of twenty-six household heads listed, twenty-one (81 percent) used ciphers. This is an impressively high rate of literacy, not unlike rates for household heads in Kyoto. Renter household heads used ciphers at less than half this rate, ten out of twenty-six, or 38 percent. Nevertheless, from these data it would appear that nearly all household heads, and more than a third of renters in this regional town, had high literacy skills early in the Tokugawa period.

Although cipher use among household heads seems roughly equivalent to what we found for Kyoto, there are stark contrasts with the Kyoto case upon further probing within and among families. Although the ward head, Ishimoto Shinbei, and his son, Shōzaemon, wrote ciphers after their names, his wife and all his three male and four female employees made thumbprints *(boin)* or simple circles, marks that did not require any ability to write.[25] Unlike the Kyoto materials, in which women mainly used seals, in the Hirado register for 1634 none of the fifteen wives used seals. Thirteen used either a darkened or open circle and two used thumbprints. In fact, no one in this town in 1634, including twenty-six renter households, used a seal, with the exception of two owner household heads who used both ciphers and seals. Clearly the adoption of seals as personal marks (and for commercial transactions as well) came earlier in the larger cities. The literacy implications are not clear but one might suggest that the use of seals in Kyoto could have obscured the ability to write, whereas in Hirado this was far less likely.

It is worth noting in this connection that by 1659 cipher use had fallen precipitously, not due to a fall in literacy but because seals had come into common use. Cipher use among homeowners had fallen from 81 percent in 1634 to 44 percent by the middle of the seventeenth century. Seal use went from only two in twenty-six in 1634 to over 50 percent by 1659. Similarly, over the same period of time, the cipher rate among renter heads of households fell from 38 percent to 16 percent and seal use rose from 31 percent to 75 percent. By 1702, all men listed in these documents, homeowners and renters alike, had gone over to seals, and ciphers went out of use completely. By the middle of the eighteenth century all adult women in this provincial town were using seals as well.

Cipher use extended to some sons. Of the total of seventeen sons listed in 1634, six (or 35 percent) used ciphers and the rest used some version of an illiterate mark, either a circle or a thumbprint. None of the four renters' sons used ciphers; all used circles or thumbprints. Out of the total of forty-nine male employees, five (about 10 percent) wrote ciphers after their names. It should be noted, however, that all these were from the household of Ishimoto Kurozaemon, the largest employer in the town. There were three other cipher users who were male relatives in the family of Takeyama Shichizaemon. Other than the cipher users, all other employees used either black dots, open circles, or thumbprints. Thumbprints, even though they are sometimes hard to distinguish from black circle marks, are much more in evidence in this document than in others. Fifty percent of all male employees used thumbprints. It should also be noted that the sizes of renter households were much smaller than those in Kyoto. In Hirado, households averaged only two to three members, with only about thirty employees for twenty-six households.[26]

The Hirado register for 1634 suggests that literacy was far more restricted within the populations of provincial towns than in the larger cities. Although male household heads and their sons were essentially at the same levels as their big-city brothers, adult women and employees, both male and female, appear to have been far behind their urban counterparts. In contrast to Kyoto, where women showed signs of rudimentary learning and some even of advanced literacy skills, women of all ages in Hirado in the early seventeenth century used nothing but illiterate marks on these documents. Without exception through 1659 they used only stem stamps, thumbprints, round circle marks, or darkened circles. These are the same marks made uniformly in this town by young children (as young as two), servants, and the very old (a mother, aged ninety-four), strongly reinforcing the connection between such marks and an inability to write. There are no marks that can be interpreted as midway to literacy or rudimentary learning as was the case in the Kyoto materials. There are no personal marks, abbreviated ciphers, or seals—nothing that would give any evidence of writing ability directly or indirectly. Illiteracy in Hirado, among females of all ages and statuses and among most males who were not household heads or their sons, appears to have been pervasive in the first half of the seventeenth century.

Signs of literacy appear to be restricted entirely to male heads of household, to a few of their older sons, and a very few older male employees. Those who used ciphers or made personal marks of some kind amounted to only 15 percent of the 330 people in the town, leaving 85 percent illiterate or nearly so, as indicated by their use of marks like stem stamps and thumbprints. This is quite different from the variety of skills seen in Kyoto among female family

members, among sons, and among employees, to say nothing of the possible skills obscured by the use of seals among Kyoto women.

In addition to providing evidence of literacy levels within and among families, the Hirado-chō materials are one of the few sets of documents that permit analysis of personal marks by the inhabitants of a single town over a considerable period of time. The 1634 materials are in some sense the most revealing because they appeared before seals began to overtake personal marks as the method of choice for certification on documents. But the later documents are revelatory in their own way.

Some of the later documents provide ages of residents. The ages of sons who used ciphers through 1659 show that serious writing skill began at the ages of fourteen or fifteen.[27] The onset of cipher usage would appear to coincide with the age when young men began to take on some of the responsibilities of household heads and would need practical and functional literacy. This is not out of line with what we know about the progress of training in elite households in later periods.

Ages of residents that appear in the data after 1634 also make it possible to discount the very young and make better estimates of cipher use, mainly among sons. In 1651, of the total of nineteen sons of household heads, only two (aged twenty-four and twenty-two) used ciphers, a cipher use rate of 11 percent. If, however, we eliminate children under ten years old from consideration (about half the total), the rate of cipher use nearly doubles to two of ten, or 20 percent. Among the sons of renters, the percentage also doubles if young children are eliminated. Of twenty sons of home renters that year, three (15 percent) used ciphers. Eliminating young children, however, yields three of ten or a 30 percent rate of cipher use. Even as late as 1659 the rate of cipher use among sons of homeowners remained fairly high if young children are discounted. Seven of twenty-three sons used ciphers that year. But if the seven children under age ten are subtracted, the usage rate is seven of sixteen, or 44 percent. Among the sons of renters, however, the rate of cipher use falls to 13 percent even when younger sons are not included.

Finally, the Hirado-chō materials reveal some important changes in households and in migration patterns over time, which can help tease out additional meaning from the literacy data. From 1634 to 1659 the total population of Hirado-chō held relatively steady at about 310. However, during that same period the number of households changed dramatically, from fifty-two in 1634 to seventy-six in 1659. While the number of homeowner households remained virtually fixed at twenty-six in 1634 and twenty-five in 1659, the number of renter households went from twenty-six to fifty-one. It appears that over these twenty-five years a large number of male employees of homeowner households

became the heads of renter households. Thus, owner households became smaller and renter households increased in number. It is not clear why this happened, but it is possible that the Shimabara Uprising, which created considerable turmoil in the Nagasaki region during this period, nevertheless provided economic opportunity for some who were able to leave their employers and set up independent households of their own.

Population records for 1642 provide information on the backgrounds of residents and help throw some additional light on differences between the owner and renter classes of Hirado-chō. According to the "Shussho tadashi" (Record of birthplaces) for 1642, the landlord class contained twenty-four households and 142 people; renters had twenty-five households and 83 people—a total of forty-nine households and 225 people.[28] The birthplaces of homeowner and renter heads of household were as set out in Table 3:

There is a clear distinction in the origins of the owner and renter classes. More than half of the homeowners came from commercial centers that were outside the immediate Nagasaki area. Places like Sakai (near Osaka), Kyoto, Hirado Island, Hakata, Korea, and China—where fourteen of the twenty-four came from—had long histories of commercial engagement that included foreign trade. Whatever literacy skills these homeowners had they probably brought from earlier experience in their hometowns.

In contrast, among renters, very few came from big towns, not even from nearby Nagasaki. Rural areas nearby such as Ōmura, Shimabara, and Isahaya

TABLE 3 Birthplaces of Hirado Household Heads (1642)

Homeowners		*Renters*	
Nagasaki	3	Ōmura	6
Hirado	3	Chikugo	3
Ōmura	1	Karatsu	1
Amakusa	1	Kōrai (Korea)	1
Sakai	4	Shimabara	4
Chikugo	2	Hirado	2
Hizen	1	Hakata	1
Hakata	1	Isahaya	3
Kyoto	3	Amakusa	1
Shimabara	1	Kyoto	1
Echizen	1		
Kōrai (Korea)	3		
Tō (China)	3		

account for more than half the total.[29] Apparently, the renters moved to Nagasaki from less developed areas seeking work. Although by 1636 Nagasaki had been Japan's major overseas trading port for sixty-five years, it was also a town open to immigrants, and it is possible that many with literacy skills at this time brought them from elsewhere.

Population register data from Hirado ward in Nagasaki show a high rate of ability to sign among male homeowners and to a lesser extent among renters and male employees, as measured by cipher use. Among homeowners, the level is roughly equivalent to that seen in Kyoto at the same time. But in Hirado-chō, literacy was restricted to this group with little sign of any skills throughout the rest of the population. Far fewer sons used ciphers in Hirado, fewer employees, and no renters' sons. As for women, they appear to have been totally illiterate, in contrast to the variety of skills found in the larger city of Kyoto.

Signature Data in a Tokugawa Farming Village: Tomooka Village (1635)

All the data seen so far have been from inner-city wards. What about signature data from villages in the early Tokugawa period? Religious affiliation registers and apostasy oaths for villages during the short period when personal marks appeared on them are hard to come by. An apostasy oath similar to that for Rokkaku ward and for the same year is available, however, for a farming village on the outskirts of Kyoto, Tomooka. This village, located in what is now the southernmost section of Nagaokakyō City, a short train ride from Kyoto Station, was situated just off the main highway that linked Osaka and Kyoto in the Tokugawa period. In the early seventeenth century much of the Kamigata region was bakufu territory under the control of the Kyoto deputy, but actual administrative authority was in the hands of various magistrates and *fudai* daimyo. From 1633 to 1649 Tomooka was part of the domain of Nagai Naokio (1591–1671). In 1650 Nagai was transferred to Takatsuki, and Tomooka was put under the control of the Kyoto magistrate *(daikan).* It was mainly an agricultural village but had a small commercial section, called Chaya, that consisted of a number of households that ran small businesses serving travelers along the highway and was separated physically from the main village. The physical separation of agricultural villages from small commercial sectors was not unusual for the area.[30] There is a beautifully preserved early apostasy oath *(nanban kishōmon)* for 1635 (Kan'ei 12), housed in the Nagaokakyō Library, which lists all seventy-one residents of Tomooka Village that year.[31] The anti-Christian legislation was sent out to villages by the Kyoto *shoshidai.* Since there were no

known believers in the village, the text was modified locally from three items to two, leaving out a section pertaining to those who currently followed the Christian faith. The final text, prepared by a single hand, presumably the village headman or other official, was followed by a list of the names or statuses (in the case of adult women) of every member of the village. Each villager had to certify that he (or she) understood the content of the oath and (1) was not now a believer in Christianity or would ever become one and would never encourage others to do so, and (2) if he should ever break the oath he (or she) would suffer the afflictions of both Western and Buddhist infernos.[32]

The document shown in Figure 8 shows twenty-three households in all, including one Buddhist priest. The priest (belonging to an unregistered temple, the document notes beside his name) appears to have been the only one who wrote his name himself, because both his name and his large bold cipher are noticeably different from the rest. On this particular document only household heads and a few *genin* (employees or servants) made marks; women and children did not. The number of children seems quite small (nineteen children for twenty-three households), and it is possible that the names of younger children were omitted. The names are divided into three categories: ordinary farmers, residents of Chaya (who may have been separated in the document because they were relative newcomers[33]), and *inkyo* (literally "retired" persons but best understood here to mean "irregular" households).

Of the twenty-three households, fifteen were headed by ordinary farmers, with fifty people listed in all. Four households and thirteen people lived in the Chaya commercial section, and four households comprising eight people were classified as "irregulars." This last category consisted of widows (who could not head a household) with sons not yet married, which made such a household other than "regular." The priest was also included in this group. In addition to these three categories, part of the formal organization of the village, additional status distinctions can be determined from the various individual marks made following each name.

The village headman and two of the household heads from Chaya verified their names with seals. The headman, Kuzaemon, used the oval-shaped, design-type seal without characters or name, characteristic of early Tokugawa-period commoners' seals. Kuzaemon had the largest household in the village. In addition to him, it included his wife, mother, a young son named Tori, and two *genin,* Kyūbei and Yosaku. He was obviously the leading farmer in the village and in all likelihood had both administrative responsibilities and commercial interests. Two Chaya merchant household heads also used seals that were common at this time—one a six-sided irregularly shaped seal, the other fan-shaped. The use of seals by the village headman and two of the Chaya mer-

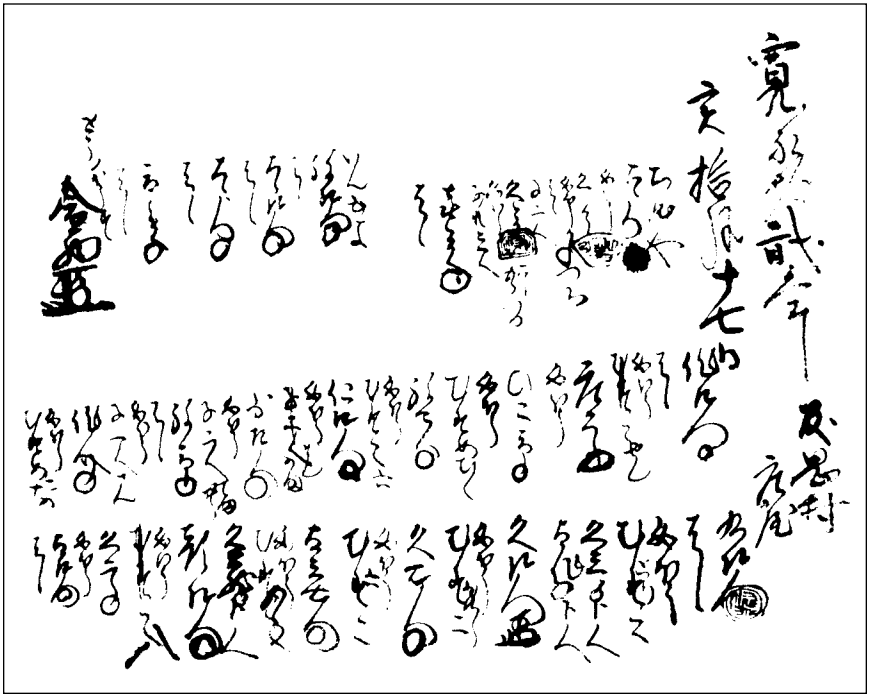


Figure 8. Personal marks on apostasy oath, Tomooka Village, 1635. *Tomooka Mura hyakushō nanban kishōmon,* 1635, from Tomooka Tatsuoke monjo. Printed with permission of Nagaokakyō City Kyōiku Iinkai.

chants in this village does not directly reveal anything about their literacy, but their occupations and involvement in commerce suggest considerable ability in that regard.

The only ones to use ciphers in Tomooka were the priest, named Nensai, and one household head, named Kyūzaemon. Priests were the intellectuals of the early Tokugawa period and it is not surprising that a priest would use a bold and powerful cipher as an indication of learning, or that it would stand apart from the marks made by ordinary farmers. Kyūzaemon, both because he is listed in the document immediately next to the headman Kuzaemon and because of the similarity of their names, is almost certainly the older son of the village headman. The document shows that he married, established a household of his own, and had a son. His use of a cipher indicates that he was a member of the village elite. In 1642, seven years later, another Tomooka village document listed him as a village *toshiyori* (elder) alongside Kuzaemon, presumably his father, who was still the headman.[34] Kyūzaemon's cipher was a

mark both of his status in the village and of the relatively high level of literacy that would accompany such a position.

The other household heads in the village, nineteen of them, used the most basic form of abbreviated cipher, a circle made with a brush. Five or six of these are so simple as to be indistinguishable from a stem stamp. Three *genin* (employees) chose to make identical marks as those of household heads, that is, simple circles following their names. Women and children made no marks at all. This is most unfortunate, for had the groups assumed here to have been illiterate used stem stamps, a higher level of skill might be ascribed to the circle drawn with a brush. This could have been the case in the Rokkaku-chō materials where illiteracy, I believe, was indicated by marks of some sort—stem stamps, dots, nail prints—where no facility with the brush was needed.

It is tempting, then, to suggest that where no mark at all was the indicator of illiteracy, the simple circle, used in this instance by household heads, marked a higher, although still very rudimentary, level of literacy. On the other hand, the case could also be made (as in the instance of the other documents) that the inscription of circles meant nothing more than that these heads of household could hold a brush and make a mark equivalent to the "X" made by illiterates in Western countries; in other words, that they had no literacy skills at all. Interpretation is difficult because the marks are circles, making it impossible to tell even whether the "writer" could set and remove the brush from paper properly. Women and children in early farming communities, it would appear, were so far on the cultural and political periphery that they did not verify documents at all. Adult women, like their big-city sisters, did not have their names on the documents, only their status as wife or mother. Children had their status—as son or daughter—plainly indicated, but their names also appeared, although less conspicuously, smaller and off to the side or beneath their status designation.

Despite the simplicity of this early village document and the difficulty of reading meaning into it, a few things are evident. There are clear distinctions of status and literacy skill suggested by the personal marks on this early rural document abjuring the Christian faith. Ciphers were used, but only by a very few, a priest and the older son of the headman; they almost certainly signified advanced literacy skills and pre-eminent status in the village. Those in the commercial sector and the headman used seals, a mark, in some cases such as this one, of entrepreneurial or administrative engagement. The overwhelming number of ordinary male household heads and the few employees listed used simple circles. Although the literacy implications of these circles may be hard to assess, the difference in writing skill between ordinary household heads in a rural community and those in large cities and provincial towns is dramatic.

Urban/rural differences with respect to female literacy also stand out. In Tomooka, in contrast to both Kyoto and Nagasaki, women made no marks on these documents, suggesting not just that they were illiterate but that they were irrelevant as far as the official world was concerned.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented some sources that are new to the study of literacy in Japan—population registers and apostasy oaths from the brief period between 1630 and about 1650, when individuals in towns and villages made personal marks certifying that they understood the content of the documents. The variety of individual marks found on these documents, left behind by communities of commoners from the early seventeenth century, ranges from elaborate ciphers to such indicators of illiteracy as dots, circles, fingernail marks, thumbprints, and stem stamps, revealing important differences in literacy skills within families, among families, between genders, and between cities and villages. Admittedly, the documentary evidence that has been adduced is inadequate and the time span covered too brief to allow for firm generalizations. The goal here is to squeeze as much meaning as possible from these limited materials in the belief that future discovery of additional signature data will help fill out this sketch of literacy among commoners in the early Tokugawa period.

Based on the signature data presented in this chapter, in both provincial towns like Nagasaki and large urban centers like Kyoto, a high percentage of household heads were not just literate but functioning at a high administrative level as measured by the use of ciphers on a variety of documents. This suggests that in urban centers, both large and small, central and geographically peripheral, literacy had spread beyond the few top-level ward leaders to the much larger group of household heads.

There were, however, differences between the smaller towns and larger cities with respect to the spread of literacy beyond male household heads. In commercial wards of Kyoto, literacy had spread to about half of the sons of household heads, to male employees, to renters as well as homeowners, to fathers, nephews, and uncles, and, in a few cases, to adult women. Although the evidence was limited to only a few examples, it is possible that the trends shown were widespread in the largest cities. If so, it argues for a high level of literacy among a significant portion of the early seventeenth-century urban population.

In the provincial towns like Hirado ward in Nagasaki, literacy spread was far more restricted. Although the use of ciphers by male household heads was

essentially the same as in Kyoto, there were far fewer sons, employees, or family members who showed any sign of even marginal literacy. Despite direct evidence of widespread illiteracy in provincial towns (roughly 85 percent in Hirado-chō), the presence of literate household heads in similar proportions to the larger cities is significant.

Consider, too, that Japan in the early seventeenth century was going through one of the greatest ages of urban development the world had ever seen. During the years of Nobunaga and Hideyoshi in the late sixteenth century, castle towns sprang up "like toadstools," with some ninety built between 1572 and 1590.[35] When Ieyasu required that each domain limit itself to one castle town, the urban population became even more concentrated. Between 1580 and 1610 nearly half of today's largest Japanese cities came into being as castle towns, and about 10 percent of the population of a given domain lived in them. By the end of the seventeenth century, 140 castle towns had populations of more than five thousand, approximately half of them artisans and merchants. Edo stood at close to one million, Osaka had 365,000, and the population of Kyoto was over 300,000.[36] Thus the core literate population of these urban centers, even if only household heads are considered, could have included a sizable number.

The apostasy oath from tiny Tomooka Village confirms that even in farming villages there were a few highly skilled community leaders who performed administrative and commercial tasks. The document also reinforces the notion that village populations were divided into "two cultures"—a very small elite who were literate and an overwhelming majority who were not. In Tomooka the latter in all probability included most male heads of households. Outside the village leadership, women, older children, employees, and servants—making up the substantial part of village populations—remained largely illiterate in the seventeenth century, judging by the marks they made on documents.

In larger villages and among more commercially oriented villagers, those nearer to large cities or closer to transportation links (for example, the Ōmi merchants), literacy may well have spread to leaders of five-household groups and to some household heads. But here, too, cipher-like marks on an abundance of rules and regulations appear to be limited to village leaders.

Nevertheless, the appearance of an elite, highly literate leadership in rural areas is significant. Not only can indications of literacy be found in a relatively early period, it was of a high functional level—not just the rudimentary skills writing schools would later produce. As pointed out in chapter 1, village leaders were reading and writing documents of various kinds much the same as their samurai betters in the castle towns. And, if Tomooka represents small villages around the country, the numbers of highly literate farmers may not

have been inconsiderable even early in the Tokugawa period. Postulating something like 60,000 farming villages in early Tokugawa Japan, and assuming three literate members in each (as found in Tomooka), there may have been as many as 180,000 highly literate members of Japanese rural households by the middle of the seventeenth century. To be sure, this is a rough (and probably a conservative) estimate, if for no other reason than because the size of villages varied considerably. The point is that there was a significant group in the countryside capable of high-level administrative tasks, a core around which localities could further enrich their cultural and commercial possibilities.

What do the high level of functional literacy among the elite of the commoner classes and the limited nature of its spread to the general populace suggest? They indicate, first of all, that the pervasive use of administrative instruments, which scholars such as Aoki Michio are continually uncovering in early Tokugawa villages, was probably restricted to the village elite and should not be taken to suggest a growing commoner constituency for literacy, at least not in the early seventeenth century. The popular base of learning and literacy almost certainly did not expand until later. The extensive use of administrative documents points not to a growing literate population but to the depth and expertise of a restricted elite.

Second, the findings presented here suggest that literacy developed in Tokugawa Japan not alongside or as a result of the growth of schools, but well before the appearance of educational institutions for commoners. Thus, just as the national school system of the Meiji era had to contend with an unequally educated populace when it was first imposed in 1872, so too were diverse patterns of literacy and learning already, to some degree, in place or in process when commoner schools first began to proliferate in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. That process is the subject of the next chapter.

3

Rural Culture and the Rise of Provincial Literati in the Eighteenth Century

The data on signatures and personal marks, however limited in scope, show that important distinctions with respect to literacy and learning among rural and small-town commoners were already evident in late medieval and early Tokugawa Japan. A highly skilled leadership class, supported by prominent local families, administered villages for their samurai overlords. Many of them signed documents with ciphers, indicating that their literacy skills may have been equal to their samurai betters. Their skills, however, were narrowly focused on administrative and commercial matters, reading and explaining edicts to other farmers, and writing petitions on their behalf, all in the Sino-Japanese hybrid script favored by feudal officials.

Outside the village leadership, however, the picture is less clear. There is little evidence of anything but the most rudimentary literacy in rural families. The marks inscribed by rural household heads in the early seventeenth century contrast vividly with the splendid ciphers of their counterparts among merchant families in cities like Kyoto. Women, children, servants, and employees of various sorts—a substantial part of the village population—were probably illiterate in the early seventeenth century, with some possible exceptions.

The argument set forth in this chapter is that from the late seventeenth century to the middle of the eighteenth century, it was not so much that numbers of provincial literates expanded dramatically beyond a small cadre of village leaders, although there was some movement among nonleaders, as shall be shown. The more dramatic story was the further enhancement of the skills of the small group at the center of village life. For the most part, a qualitative rather than a quantitative change occurred. The village leadership transcended the immediate occupational requirements of rural headmen and became not

only consumers but also producers of literate culture, until the late seventeenth century the monopoly of urban literati. They began to write moral tracts intended as aids for their heirs in providing for long-term family prosperity. Even more significantly, they moved into serious scholarly pursuits, becoming engaged in studies of Confucianism, Buddhism, the Chinese classics, *waka* poetry, Nativism *(kokugaku),* medicine, calligraphy, and other arts as both readers and writers. Indeed, later in this chapter, book catalogues and diaries left by village families such as the Sanda, Mori, and Yao in the suburbs of Osaka will be analyzed in some detail to make this point. These families (and no doubt others like them) amassed large libraries, collected works on Neo-Confucianism, Buddhism, and Japanese poetry, had extensive connections with big-city book dealers, and networked with other provincials with similar interests and very high literacy in Japanese and sometimes in Chinese as well.

What stimulated expanded literacy among the rural elite was the rise of print culture in urban centers, such as Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka, during the Genroku period (1688–1704), when economic expansion led to a culture boom among townspeople. During these decades the literate culture of the samurai first moved "down" to urban commoners and then "out" from the major cities to provincial towns and eventually to villages as well. The integration of rural and urban culture increased in the nineteenth century, but it began in the late seventeenth via cultural mediators who moved back and forth between town and country. The models for these early *chihō bunjin,* or provincial literati, could have been of samurai or of merchant origins. The great Genroku *haikai* poet and peripatetic traveler Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) was the son of a samurai. But by the eighteenth century the carriers of culture from cities to villages could just as well have been of rural origins, and most likely were the offspring of the village headman class.

Members of the local elite became not only mediators between town and country culture but also the pivots around which literacy and learning expanded dramatically among the middle and lower peasantry in the nineteenth century. Accordingly, the changing quality of popular literacy among rural leaders is the central theme of this chapter, which begins with the flourishing of popular culture in the three metropolitan centers of Kyoto, Osaka, and Edo at the close of the seventeenth century.

City Lights

The eighteenth century was in some ways a period of stasis. The country was at peace, and administrative control at both shogunal and daimyo levels had been

largely consolidated. But in terms of commercial development, urbanization, communications, the spread of information, and the rise of popular culture, change was dramatic. The urbanization that had begun in the late sixteenth century and then exploded in the seventeenth continued early in the eighteenth century to the point where Japan became one of the most urbanized societies in the world. In 1600 Kyoto was the only Japanese city with 100,000 or more inhabitants. By 1700 Edo, Osaka, Nagoya, and Kanazawa were added to that list, and 5 to 7 percent of the population lived in these larger cities. Europe, by contrast, had only 2 percent living in such large urban areas. Edo became one of the world's largest cities with a population of over one million in the 1720s. Kyoto and Osaka, at 400,000 and 350,000 respectively, were nearly the size of London and Paris, the largest cities in Europe at that time.[1]

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, urbanization was widespread, not just limited to a few large cities. Large numbers of samurai had settled into more than two hundred castle towns all around the country, forming the nuclei of urban populations from one end of the country to the other. Villagers hoping to become merchants, artisans, and laborers followed the influx of warriors into the new cities and created large civilian populations in most towns. By 1700 the provincial castle town of Tottori had a population of 35,000 people, Okayama 40,000, and Sendai 50,000. Nagoya and Kanazawa, with more than 100,000 inhabitants, ranked with major cities of Europe such as Rome and Amsterdam.[2]

During the Genroku era, urban literacy expanded dramatically for three main reasons. First was the development of a merchant class that required literacy to negotiate economic transactions at local, regional, and ever-expanding national systems of exchange. Second was the emergence of large publishing industries in the cities, catering to a composite audience of samurai, merchants, and priests who were reading and writing both for vocational needs and for pleasure. Third was the establishment of private academies, both religious and secular, in large cities, teaching not only basic reading and writing but also various ethical systems and practical knowledge of an advanced sort.

As cities grew, so did the power and influence of the merchant class. Merchant banking, warehousing, wholesaling, and brokerage services became essential to the well-being of an expanding economy. Vastly increased commerce in the castle towns brought new levels of economic prosperity. The give and take of men and goods characteristic of commercial exchange provided the initial context for the growth of basic literacy (and numeracy) in the towns. Out of this urban efflorescence grew a mass culture that included new forms of poetry, new tastes in reading, and new diversions in the arts. The term Gen-

roku serves as a metaphor for these. It signifies not just the period of time from 1688 to 1704, but the whole cultural milieu of the towns, the rise of pleasure quarters made possible by economic growth, and the leisure and entertainment that went with prosperity. Genroku saw an outpouring of literate arts like poetry and prose catering to urban commoners, and a simultaneous resurgence of oral traditions in the form of popular kabuki and puppet theaters.

Prosperous merchants with leisure time became the mainstay for the growth of printing and publishing industries and provided a new market for bookselling and book lending trades. Although it is difficult to come up with exact numbers for a given period, most scholars agree that from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries there was a dramatic increase in the number of titles published, in the number of bookstores in larger cities and eventually in provincial towns, and in the variety of subjects covered by these publications. Konta Yōzō has estimated from publishers' catalogues that there were more than ten thousand books in print by the Genroku period,[3] being sold or lent in more than seven hundred bookstores nationwide.[4] Over time the number of publishers (who often doubled as booksellers) increased dramatically. Katsuhisa Moriya cites evidence that during the seventeenth century there were 701 publishers in Kyoto, 185 in Osaka, and 242 in Edo. By the eighteenth century the number had decreased in Kyoto to 536 but nearly tripled to 564 in Osaka and more than doubled to 493 in Edo.[5] Furthermore, by the second half of the Tokugawa period provincial publishers were operating in at least fifty castle towns.[6]

The types of books published covered a bewildering array of subject areas, from serious books of Buddhist and Neo-Confucian scholarship to romantic novels and picture books, poetry collections, instructional manuals, dictionaries and encyclopedias, books on medicine, etiquette and manners, travel diaries, and many varieties of erotica.[7] By the mid-eighteenth century books had clearly become more widely available, and the demand for them was heavy, not only in big cities but in provincial towns as well.

The means for getting books into people's hands also improved. In Kyoto alone, by one calculation, the hundred bookstores of the Genroku period more than doubled to 217 by 1814 to serve a population of about 400,000.[8] This was true despite the fact that books, even those meant for popular audiences, were quite expensive. The ordinary romantic novel cost the equivalent of food for one month, and even cheap pornography cost about the same as food for two weeks. More serious books on Buddhism or Neo-Confucianism were several times more expensive than a simple novel; naturally, that was also the case with multivolume sets like the complex novels of Takizawa Bakin.[9] High prices

put these books beyond the reach of all but the upper-level samurai and the wealthier merchants, who must have been the major patrons of ordinary bookstores.

For this reason bookstores were not the most important sources of books for ordinary people. Mechanisms for borrowing and lending books developed quickly and extensively and played a major role in providing reading materials to the public. Rental libraries lent out books for five days at less than one-tenth the purchase price. There is evidence that commercial book lenders operated credit systems early in the eighteenth century,[10] making reading materials affordable even for some among the urban working class.

Osaka and Edo took the lead in making books available for rent. While there were only seventeen rental libraries in Kyoto in 1814, in Edo there were 656 in 1808, and by 1830 there were 800.[11] Most were operated by lone peddlers who wrapped their books in large pieces of cloth *(furoshiki),* slung them over their shoulders, and wandered through neighborhoods providing direct service to their customers. Edward Morse recorded their existence later in the nineteenth century with a detailed sketch of one such book peddler (see Figure 9). There were also, however, large rental shops with as many as ten thousand volumes and sometimes ten clerks employed.[12]

Scholars disagree on the exact numbers, but all agree that the proliferation of publications and the growth of bookstores and lending facilities in the

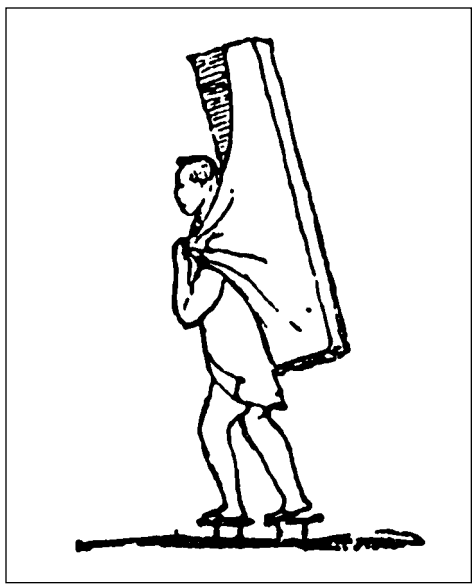


Figure 9. Sketch of itinerant bookseller. *Source:* Edward S. Morse, *Japan Day By Day,* vol. 1, p. 120.

major towns were dramatic and unprecedented phenomena. After reviewing the data for Edo in the early nineteenth century, Henry Smith suggests, "Every citizen down to the most humble lived in a world saturated with the products of print technology and (was) transformed by their effects."[13] A world saturated with print not only reflected an ability to read and write among some urban commoners, but provided incentives for reading and writing for many others.

Urban literacy was also enhanced by the rise of private academies. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, urban commoners could earn a respectable living as scholars and teachers at private academies. Schools like the Kogidō of Itō Jinsai (1627–1705) in Kyoto or the Kenen Juku of Ogyū Sorai (1666–1728) in Edo taught advanced levels of Confucian studies to a mixed samurai and commoner constituency. In the case of Jinsai's school, town doctors and merchants were the largest groups in attendance.[14] Eventually, those trained in the cities would establish their own schools in the provinces, attracting students from the small town and village leadership groups.

Rangaku—"Dutch studies"—was pre-eminently an urban phenomenon. Its original source was the Dutch trading factory established on Dejima in Nagasaki harbor in 1641. By the late eighteenth century, however, major centers of Rangaku had formed at private academies, such as the school of Ōtsuki Gentaku (1757–1827) in Edo, which drew students not only from metropolitan areas but from places as remote as Chōshū in western Honshu and Iyo on Shikoku. Itō Genboku (1800–1871) and Tsuboi Shindō (1795–1848) in Edo emulated Gentaku on a grander scale, as did Ogata Kōan (1810–1863) in Osaka. By the end of the century, rural scholars who had studied in the cities were establishing schools of their own in the provinces and attracting a largely provincial audience. Availability in the provinces for advanced learning from those who had studied at academies in the cities became one of the important preconditions for the rise of deeper and broader literacy for the provincial leader group and their children.

Town and Country Links

Town and country influenced one another from the start of the Tokugawa period, but their interactions intensified in the eighteenth century. Warrior and civilian migrants from the countryside peopled the cities of the early Edo era. Land under cultivation doubled between 1550 and 1650. This increase in productive capacity, worthy of being called a revolution in agriculture, supported an overall rise in the population from twelve million in the early decades of the seventeenth century to twenty-six to thirty million at the time of the shogun's

census in 1721.[15] Increased food production and population growth had led people in the countryside to split off from their households and to work their own land independently. Those unable to succeed moved into the towns, creating poor migrant areas on their fringes and blurring the distinction between town and village.

As the commercial activity of the towns increased and new levels of economic prosperity were reached, transportation facilities linking town and country improved. Stimulated also by the requirements imposed by *sankin kōtai* (whereby daimyo were required to reside in alternate years in Edo), communication and transportation systems that had grown up to serve the three great cities were extended to provincial towns and beyond. Even the inner-city messenger systems set up branch offices in the provinces. These developments in turn affected agriculture. Farmers were able to grow commercial crops such as cotton and tea; they cultivated mulberries so they could raise silkworms for the sole purpose of sale in urban markets. Regional specialization proliferated. Cotton, for example, became the main crop in rural areas of the Osaka region. Individual households were able to develop simple rural industries producing and selling paper, ink, pottery, and cloth. As more farmers engaged in such by-employment, merchant middlemen moved into rural areas to help assemble, process, distribute, and transport goods to urban markets.

The period from 1688 to 1735, in particular, saw both the penetration of commercial activities into rural areas and the rise of rural towns as points of exchange in the circulation and distribution of agricultural commodities. Where rural areas became integrated into regional economic spheres, considerable blurring of town and village boundaries occurred. With markets drawing nearer, farmers began to engage in commercial transactions. By the middle of the eighteenth century, a new class of rural merchant-farmers became not only economically prosperous but at the same time influential in the development of rural culture and learning.

Typical of the dramatic transformations that occurred during this period was the village of Kurashiki in Kuboya County, Bitchū Province (now the western part of Okayama Prefecture). In 1695 there were 912 households in the village, which had a total population of 3,857. Nearly all the households (889) were engaged in farming; the other 23 were families of priests, carpenters, or officials. By 1733, however, the number of households had grown to 1,454 and the population to 5,330, an increase of 38 percent. By 1772 what had once been a farming village was transformed into a beehive of activity characteristic of a prosperous small town. Although the same number of households (888) were engaged in farming, now 135 households were artisans, 491 were engaged in commerce, and 319 were involved in a range of occupations more appropriate

to an urban setting: boatmen, wagon drivers, daily wage earners, baggage handlers, proprietors of inns, barbers, sewer cleaners, and doctors.[16]

Behind this shift in the character of Kurashiki from a farming village to a thriving commercial town was the development of cotton production in the surrounding villages. From these villages a group of farmer-merchants emerged as major players in the local market—wholesalers and forwarding agents not only in cotton but in grain, soy sauce, fish, *sake,* and so forth. These rural entrepreneurs were almost certainly of the village leadership class. Although the full extent of their cultural activities is not known, documents from one of the families show that the level of their learning had expanded beyond that needed either for commercial or for local administration.

A group of these local notables hired a Confucian scholar to travel from nearby Mimasaka Province (the northern section of Okayama Prefecture) to provide daily lectures on the Confucian *Four Books* at a local temple, the Hon'eiji in Kurashiki. It is clear that their purpose was not professional. They were not training to become scholars. Nor were their aims merely practical; they had more on their minds than picking up tips on doing business. They attended lectures on Confucian thought apparently in the hope of developing an ethical framework for operating their businesses and managing their family affairs in an age of rapid change, a time when the ground rules for the daily life of a new class of farmer-entrepreneurs had not yet come into existence.[17]

Improvements in travel and communications, designed initially to benefit commerce and business, also functioned to spread culture and information and to enhance literacy in the countryside. Possibilities opened for the spread of knowledge through books and greater travel, for exposure to education and entertainment of the cities. Villagers began to read popular literature and perform kabuki and puppet plays in village shrine compounds. Some provincials learned the genteel arts and accomplishments that the townspeople themselves had borrowed from samurai culture.

It is important to note here the critical role played in the early eighteenth century by the infrastructure development that preceded (or perhaps complemented) the advance of literacy in the countryside. The growth of cities and commerce led to improved methods of communication, book publishing, transportation networks, and so forth. As provincial areas were brought more and more into regional commercial linkages with towns and cities, as roads, communication systems, transport, and delivery facilities moved outward, opportunities to enhance literacy skills became increasingly available.

In part this process was simply the growth and maturing of commercial enterprise and the seeking of wider markets in the hinterlands. Infrastructure development was also, however, stimulated by political and economic crisis.

The shogunate's Kyōhō reforms of the 1720s, which sought to tighten fiscal policy, aimed among other things at increasing agricultural output. Large-scale land reclamation projects were instituted to increase land under cultivation as a way of increasing output and tax revenues. Concern with improved production in turn led to greater concern with agricultural efficiency: how to collect information on better farming methods and make the information widely available. Thus, motivations for greater access to agricultural knowledge clearly existed among the feudal elite, and they also existed for farmers caught up in commercial exchange. The same process that linked farmers more and more to the potential prosperity of the marketplace, however, also made them susceptible to its vagaries. It was out of such insecurities that the desire for broadened learning—both practical and ethical—was born.

Had the roads, messenger networks, mail systems, and urban book publishers not existed to support the spread of culture and information in the countryside, it is unlikely that the enhanced quality of rural literacy outlined in the following pages would have developed as early or as extensively as it did. These developments in the infrastructure made it possible for the rural elite of the early eighteenth century to develop from being merely village administrators and passive consumers of literacy into artists, writers, poets, and scholars. What did the culture of the countryside look like in the eighteenth century?

Rural Writings

AGRICULTURAL MANUALS

There is a category of writing, known generically as *nōsho* and made up of texts principally composed by farmers for other farmers, which includes books, tracts, diaries, prose poems, chronicles, memoranda, and catalogues. These agricultural manuals or handbooks ranged from scholarly tracts meant for officials to illustrated leaflets designed for the semiliterate. They varied a great deal in format and style, but they all focused on agriculture and rural affairs. Moreover, they all shared the basic "rational" attitude, held in common with scholars of *jitsugaku* (practical studies), which stressed that observing and recording natural phenomena could lead to greater efficiency in agricultural methods and practices. The manuals might contain bits of wisdom on running a family or ethical advice, but their main focus was on practical, down-to-earth, useful information for improving agricultural output.

In some ways *nōsho* were for farmers what Saikaku's works were for townspeople. If Saikaku's stories could be read profitably by the elite, even if they were aimed at a lower level of readership, so could the *nōsho.* The look of

the page, too, was quite similar to that of Saikaku's novels. Although the preface might be in classical Chinese, the main text, printed on engraved woodblocks, was in cursive Japanese, mixing Chinese characters and *kana.* Some of the better-known *nōsho* writers, such as Miyazaki Yasusada (given name also read Antei; 1623–1697) or Ōkura Nagatsune (1768–?), used large numbers of Chinese characters. Virtually every character, however, was glossed with phonetic *kana* (called *furigana*) so that even those who could only read the much simpler *kana* could make sense of these books. Furthermore, the *kana* glosses made these works ideal for oral presentation, enabling the content to be communicated by those with only *kana* literacy to those who could not read the phonetic script themselves.[18]

In addition, the agricultural manuals were profusely illustrated, showing the material described in the text in what often was extraordinary detail—proper angles for the teeth of hoes or rakes, methods of grafting branches, innovative schemes for irrigation, new kinds of tools—leaving no doubt that they were meant for people actually engaged in agricultural pursuits. No doubt their practical value was most appreciated during times of crop failure, famine, and unrest, because they also gave advice regarding food preservation, storage, and coping with natural disasters. Even if they were not actually read by field workers, the style of writing and the copious illustrations in most *nōsho* texts made it possible for the information contained in them to be communicated easily. The look of these works—small, slim volumes, richly illustrated, on soft rice paper, using the most accessible form of Japanese script in an aesthetically pleasing cursive style—also made them ideal instructional material, bringing farmers into the literate world.

One of the first and most popular writings aimed at farmers was *Nōgyō zensho* by Miyazaki Yasusada, a man who resigned his samurai stipend in the Fukuoka domain at the age of thirty and took up the life of a farmer on land granted him in the village of Myōbaru. He read Chinese works on agronomy and he traveled extensively, especially in western Japan, studying farming techniques and talking to experienced farmers everywhere he went. His findings were written up in 1696 and published the next year in ten folio volumes. The introduction was written in Chinese by Kaibara Ekken (1630–1714), a Neo-Confucian scholar who followed Chu Hsi's injunction to "investigate things" and advocated practical studies *(jitsugaku)* of a wide range, including agricultural science.[19]

Nōgyō zensho was the first systematic work of its kind in Japan. It dealt with agronomy in general but entered specifically into methods of cultivating grains, vegetables, fruit trees, and other cash crops, as well as animal husbandry. It came to be regarded as a model *nōsho,* even if it overtly exhibited a

scholarly bent, referring frequently to Chinese works of the Ming Period (1368–1644). Miyazaki does not stint with practical advice on how to improve agricultural methods. At the same time, he is unrelenting in promoting proper discipline and ethics, which he considers necessities for successful farming. "One should cultivate fields with an awareness of oneself and one's limits and not do more than one can," he cautions the reader. "Cultivate only valuable crops in order to reap the profits from them."[20] Just as Saikaku's stories were filled with helpful hints for merchant success, so agricultural manuals such as Miyazaki's provided country folk with advice on how to make a better life on the farm.

In both style and content, *nōsho* reflected the interests of an audience predominantly made up of farmers, but they were also read by samurai officials for information about agricultural conditions and by townspeople who read them as a kind of pastoral literature. The Nagasaki merchant-scholar Nishikawa Joken (also known as Kyūrinsai; 1648–1724), an advisor to Shogun Yoshimune on matters relating to astronomy, had high praise for the book, noting in his 1731 miscellany of agricultural information and instruction, "Recently, a work called *Nōgyō zensho,* written by a Japanese scholar of agriculture, has been published. Farmers must by all means read it."[21]

On the basis of such statements, scholars typically refer to *nōsho* as works meant for "ordinary farmers."[22] Sometimes it is added that the difficulty of the text reflected the high levels of literacy among the farming population. Such general statements require elaboration. The Chinese preamble to Miyazaki's book, as well as similar prefaces to the works of Ōkura Nagatsune and other popular *nōsho* writers, suggest that samurai officials and the village leaders were part of the audience. From all that has been said above about the accessibility of the texts—vocabulary and syntax in Japanese, Chinese characters glossed with *furigana,* abundant illustrations (sometimes on every page)—it is clear that they were meant for farmers lower on the social scale as well; how far down the ladder is hard to say. But anyone able to read *kana* in cursive script could have made sense of these pages.

In terms of the dissemination of agricultural information and technology, it does not matter much whether "ordinary farmers" actually read the books themselves or had the books read to them. In terms of the expansion of literacy, the difference is important. If "ordinary farmers" of the early eighteenth century means the village leadership group and their families as well as landowning, taxpaying, middle-level farmers, the statement is reasonable. It is unlikely, however, that literacy extended at this time to the lower levels of the farming classes, that is, very poor "water-drinking" farmers *(mizunomi),* who

were by definition nonlandowning tenants, as well as servants of various kinds, both male and female.

When one considers that one of the Tokugawa era's most popular works of serious nonfiction, Kaibara Ekken's *Yōjōkun* (Precepts for health), published in 1713, went through ten editions and that *Nōgyō zensho* went through at least seven separate printings, one must conclude that the audience of actual readers was reasonably large.[23] Even so, that audience could still have been limited to the leadership groups in the countryside that were developing their own literature, which was aimed at improving their material well-being.

FAMILY PRECEPTS AND LAST WILLS

In addition to practical, scientific, rational agricultural manuals, village and small-town leaders began in the early eighteenth century to produce a literature of ethical and moral guidance directed mainly at their own families. *Kakun* (family precepts) and *isho* (testaments) were drawn up by heads of households for their descendants. Such documents have a long history in Japan, going back to the court aristocrats of the eighth century, and they proliferated among medieval warrior families. Merchant house codes began to appear in the early seventeenth century and burgeoned during the eighteenth century. At about the same time, in the early Tokugawa era, similar documents began to be produced in farmer households, especially during periods of economic upheaval in villages. Intended as personal testaments for the guidance of families, they are based on personal experience and show sensitivity to the vagaries of market forces. Like the agricultural manuals, family precepts reflected expanded literacy skills among the upper levels of the farming population. Unlike the manuals, they also offer a unique glimpse into this group's attitudes toward learning and literacy.

Shibata Hajime cites the example of an early eighteenth-century farm family whose written precepts included a family history illustrating some of the broader changes in literacy among upper-level farmers. The Hiramatsu family of Futsukaichi Village in Bitchū Province (now part of Okayama Prefecture) were wealthy farmers and village headmen who traced their ancestry back to military commanders of Fukuyama Castle. Throughout the seventeenth century they kept adding to their wealth by reclamation until they had about 125 hectares of new land, which they rented out. They employed eleven apprentices and servants to work five and one-half hectares for their own use. Despite the considerable wealth they amassed from rental lands and from interest income from loans, the uncertainty and instability of the rural economy in the early

eighteenth century compelled the household head, Ban'emon, to compile a series of rules and procedures for proper house management. The work was handwritten and left in the author's home for the guidance of his descendants.[24]

This work makes it clear that Ban'emon and presumably other wealthy farmers like him were delving into diverse areas of higher learning. He was of course interested in agronomy, but he also studied the Confucian *Four Books* and *Five Classics* and attended daily lectures on Confucianism at the Hon'eiji in Kurashiki. He also studied the rules of divination and calendar making. But it was Buddhism that particularly caught his fancy. He was able to cast the Buddhist notion of "getting along in the world" *(yowatari no dōri)* into an ideology that suited his own circumstances. He transformed the Buddhist sense of resigning oneself to one's fate, an idea inimical to garnering wealth in this life, into the basis for aggressive achievement in the world of commerce. Farmers like Ban'emon were apparently borrowing freely from Confucianism, Buddhism, popular religion, and divination in formulating a vocabulary that would reinforce the ideology of family success in a time of flux and uncertainty.

Family precepts incorporated detailed advice on the education and training of children within the context of maintaining the family's prosperity. A farmer named Shikano Koshirō, the native of a village in what is now Kaga City, Ishikawa Prefecture, set down basic precepts for the success of family commerce and farming in his *Noji isho* (Agricultural matters for posterity) as early as 1709:

> A parent's teaching is as important to a growing child as snow is to growing wheat. From as early as five or six years of age, the child should not be indulged; from eight or nine he should gradually be taught necessary skills; from fifteen or sixteen he should be instructed in the essentials of farm management. When he gets still older the farm will be turned over to him, and he should be encouraged to take this responsibility upon himself. He should be guided and taught in such a way that the idea of leaving the farm and working on his own is out of the question. Only those trained in this way can maintain the fortunes of a farm family.[25]

In this passage the economic viability of the household is premised not so much on improved technology as on the education of the children who will eventually be in charge. This training included not only basic skills (presumably reading, writing, and arithmetic) but attitudes and ethics appropriate to peasant entrepreneurs.

In an anonymous work of the Genroku period, a villager makes manifest the long-term investment benefits of educating children:

> We should as a group invite to the village a person who can read and pay him to teach our children, beginning with the *iroha kana* syllabary. Training children in reading and writing will make them wise and capable. This is a legacy all parents owe their children. Those who can't keep a diary, though their eyes may be open, are blind. . . . It is not necessarily wise to leave a lot of land and cash to one's offspring; for it is said that such wealth never lasts for two generations. Children can be careless and use up land and cash, depleting parents' hard-earned assets. On the other hand, when one educates children and makes them wise, the benefits are long-lasting and extend beyond one's own family to all of one's relatives and eventually to the wider world. This is because such children will assume public positions of responsibility and will be rewarded for doing so. It goes without saying that they will become wealthy. While old books in storehouses are valuable commodities that can be lost, learning is a treasure that lasts forever. Spending money for learning appropriate to one's status is essential for the prosperity of farmers.[26]

Here again the link between family prosperity and learning is explicit. What is particularly noteworthy is the long-term view, concern for the future, and the setting of goals and plans, characteristic of this genre of peasant writing. The notion that educational benefits were not just immediate or narrowly practical, but broad in impact and long-lasting, reflects a communal concern of the village leadership group that often transcended their own family needs.

The antecedents of what rural entrepreneurs of the nineteenth century commonly called a "house style" *(kafū),* that is, the effort to impose a set of values and standards on family members, clearly existed in *kakun* and *isho* of the early eighteenth century. Anne Walthall shows that women who were rural entrepreneurs were using their literacy skills to distinguish themselves from lower peasant women in the nineteenth century.[27] Their male counterparts were doing the same thing a century earlier to maintain their wealth, their status, and their influence in villages and small towns across the country.

It is important to point out that while family precepts advised farmers what to do and how to do it (and, indeed, tell them what they must not do), such prescriptions emanated from farmers themselves, not from feudal authorities. The rural commoners' advocacy of basic literacy and education—as well as their call for agricultural expertise, knowledge of farm management, and proper attitudes for commercial behavior—reflected a profoundly new vision of farm life, mediated through the written word. This was an attitude based on experience of the rational management of assets—land and otherwise—on the part of rural entrepreneurs who viewed themselves as largely autonomous actors, responsible for their own successes or failures. The enhancement of

literacy skills and the expansion of learning opportunities among the upper levels of the farming population, brought about by the spread of urban culture, both reflected such an attitude and were at the same time essential ingredients in its promotion.

HOME ENCYCLOPEDIAS

In addition to agricultural manuals and family precepts, many other extant written materials illustrate the enrichment of country culture among its elite strata during the eighteenth century. Among the most important are home encyclopedias, *setsuyōshū,* which this group used for reference purposes.

These reference works abounded in the homes of village and town leaders. They were consulted for such necessary tasks as the writing of obscure characters, the proper phrasing of seasonal letters or greetings, and the form and style of petitions. They gave advice on the correct days for rituals and celebrations and on how to perform certain rites properly. They provided explanations of mysterious natural phenomena such as thunder and lightning. According to Yokoyama Toshio, the author of extensive studies of *setsuyōshū,* their value was not limited to their use as practical reference guides for the village headman; they also functioned as civilizing agents in towns and provinces by providing a standard for rules of behavior and methods of expression.[28]

All-purpose encyclopedias were first used in the fifteenth century by Buddhist monks, court nobles, members of the military aristocracy, and those involved in artistic pursuits. In the early seventeenth century, they began appearing in the homes of village and town leaders. Originally, they were used as dictionaries of Chinese words, indexed in *kana.* Eventually, their contents came to include many sections useful for local reference, even if the bulk continued to consist of the Japanese-Chinese dictionary section, which typically made up 60 to 70 percent of the entire volume. Since official documents and formal letters incorporated Chinese forms of expression, it was necessary to have a reference work that listed Chinese characters for Japanese vernacular terms. Furthermore, since people with only a rudimentary education tended to write Chinese in a simplified and cursive style, it was important to have a reference work for correspondence or official purposes where the more formal versions of the logographs could be found.

Yokoyama believes that these encyclopedias' most important function was that of setting standards and providing proper models for all sorts of social behavior—from writing to offering condolences, holding chopsticks, placing fish on a platter, and blowing one's nose according to the Ogasawara school of etiquette. This, he argues, was an important civilizing function. Because the

home encyclopedias were widely used by warrior families, tradesmen, and craftsmen in urban areas, their use in the countryside by Buddhist monks, Shinto priests, wealthy farmers, and other local men of importance almost certainly brought rural families into closer touch with the standards of behavior practiced in the cities. The proliferation of the *setsuyōshū* also suggests the growing knowledge base possessed by the upper strata of society in small towns and villages.

The Rise of Provincial Literati

The rise of provincial literati *(chihō bunjin)* in rural areas all over Japan by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was stimulated by the flourishing culture of cities during the Genroku efflorescence. But it could not have occurred had there not been a village elite that was already highly literate and sought connections to the advanced culture of the cities. The rise of highly literate men of culture in the provinces came about through the spread of books and printed information from city to country, by personal travel between city and country, by village leaders connecting with booksellers and literati in the cities, as well as through networking among rural scholars.

If the Genroku era (1688–1704) was the period of an urban publishing revolution, Kyōhō (1716–1736) was the period during which readership spread to the provinces. Indicators of the enrichment of country culture among its elite strata are found in catalogues and lists of books left in their homes and in their personal diaries. Some of these materials were literally unearthed after the Kobe earthquake of 1995, when storehouses collapsed and their treasures surfaced. In the homes of local notables, histories and medical and scientific reference works of many kinds were discovered, along with diaries invaluable in reconstructing the cultural lives of village leaders.

In the seventeenth century, the village leadership class had used practical reference works like agricultural manuals and *setsuyōshū,* written petitions for farmers, composed family precepts, and kept village accounts. All these activities were in some ways vocational necessities for the village leadership class in their multifaceted roles as town or village heads, all-purpose consultants, and scribes. By the eighteenth century, however, rural elites also began to take up serious scholarship. Cheap works of fiction were probably the first to penetrate rural areas from the cities in early Genroku. But more serious works of Confucian studies, Buddhism, poetry, and medicine also made their way to the provinces. Furthermore, the rural elite's interactions with booksellers and book lenders from the cities were expanding, and private networks of book

borrowing and lending were active in many rural areas by the early eighteenth century.

Book catalogues and diaries left by the village leadership class in the suburbs of Osaka in the eighteenth century reveal that by the Kyōhō period, literacy skills and intellectual interests among the local elites had extended considerably beyond a primary concern with administrative tasks that characterized their reading and writing habits in the early seventeenth century. Indeed, some provincial families pursued scholarship of considerable sophistication in Confucian studies, Chinese poetry, Japanese *waka* and *haikai* poetry, Buddhism, and medicine. They exhibited literacy in Chinese and high standards of scholarship in specialized subjects. They had extensive interactions with big-city book dealers and scholars. Weekly (sometimes daily) exchanges of serious books took place among like-minded members of the provincial leadership.[29]

Some prominent examples include the Sanda family from Kashiwara Village, Shiki County, in the suburbs of Osaka. In 1736 the Sanda had amassed a library of 1,054 volumes with 239 different titles in their home. The Mori family, headmen of Kusaka Village, Kita Kawachi County, also near Osaka, owned 121 titles in 394 volumes in the early Kyōhō period. The headman of the Sugiyama family of Tondabayashi Village in Ishikawa County (in southeastern Osaka Prefecture) had 72 titles in 414 volumes before 1750.[30] The diary of Yao Hachizaemon, the scion of a family of small-town *sake* brewers and *haikai* poets from Itami, Kawabe County, Settsu Province, on the outskirts of Osaka, reveals that he had 169 categories of books in 939 volumes in the 1730s.[31]

The Sanda specialized in Buddhism. Nearly one-third of the collection consisted of works on Buddhism, including a prized forty-volume set entitled *Gosho.* Other than the *Four Books* and reference guides to them, there were few Confucian works. Books of Chinese and Japanese literature and poetry, military works, and *ukiyozōshi* (popular fiction) were included. There were various works of a practical nature—medical books, *setsuyōshū,* cookbooks, and works on flowers and herbs by Kaibara Ekken. With the exception of *Nōgyō zensho,* local geography and agriculture books were conspicuously absent, suggesting that the cultural activities and interests of this family of village heads had moved beyond those of a typical farmer. The Sanda also had numerous books on the education of children, such as texts for basic writing practice and books for instructing girls. That these were systematically collected suggests that instructing their children at a time before the appearance of local schools was of great importance to such families.

In contrast, Confucian works dominated the Mori family collection. Beginning with the Confucian *Four Books* and *Five Classics,* there were many high-quality Chinese and Japanese commentaries, indicating careful selection

and systematic organization. There were collections of Chinese and Japanese literature and poetry as well as dictionaries and reference guides to the composition of Chinese poetry, such as *Inkyo.*[32] Repeated references in the Mori family diary to borrowing this work, buying it, agreeing with it, and finding fault with it suggest repeated use and the likelihood that Chinese poetry was not only read but also written.[33] Beyond the main collection were scattered examples of *waka* poetry and Japanese literature and history, including *Kokinshū, Nihon shoki,* and *Hyakunin Isshu.*

More than a quarter of the Mori collection was devoted to the works of Kaibara Ekken, evidence that the work of a serious Confucian scholar had spread to the provincial leadership class early in the eighteenth century. Many of Ekken's works were Japanese translations or, rather, transcriptions of Chinese works into Japanese *(wabun),* and this undoubtedly accounts for their popularity in the countryside. That the Chinese originals (to which Ekken directed serious readers) were also present in these collections, however, suggests that some readers were reading Chinese as well as the more accessible Japanese-language editions.[34]

The presence of works on practical subjects edited and translated into Japanese from Chinese originals—in particular works related to medicine, such as obstetrics, gynecology, acupuncture, herbs, medicinal drugs, and hygiene—suggests that some provincial families were beginning to use information from books as guides to everyday life. Some headmen even did scientific experiments at home and used books as reference guides to improve their technique. The printed word, one might argue, was beginning to move provincial medical practice away from magic, superstition, and the traditional home remedies that continued to guide the health practices of the great majority of people. Indeed, later pronouncements from feudal authorities to improve medical practice and hygiene probably would not have been effective had there not been a class of provincial leaders who were already familiar with the ideas and the texts they came from.

Early eighteenth-century book catalogues and diaries of village headman families also point to intense interactions with city booksellers and itinerant book peddlers, as well as to significant networking with other provincials who had similar interests in scholarship, the arts, or some other aspect of culture. The diary of Mori Choemon, written in *sōrōbun* (Japanese epistolary style) between 1727 and 1737, records his visits to bookstores in Osaka as well as Osaka book peddlers' travels to his village. In 1730, when the shogunate was promoting a new medical book for its samurai retainers, Choemon went to Osaka and immediately bought two copies.[35]

The diary also reports many book transactions with other provincial

literati. On the 6th day of the Fifth Month of Kyōhō 12 (1727), for example, Choemon records, "I lent Tanjirō a copy of *Shisei iroha in* (a reference dictionary for constructing Chinese poems)." Again, on the 15th of the Eighth Month the same year, he writes, "I lent Ueiji a twenty-one volume set of *Taiheiki.*" Both Tanjirō and Choemon were members of a provincial Chinese poetry salon that had hired an instructor from Osaka. The diary makes numerous references to Choemon's lending Chinese works on medicine, Japanese classics like *Taiheiki,* and Saikaku's *ukiyozōshi* to other villagers to help them prepare for special visits of scholars from the big city.[36]

Yao Hachizaemon's diary, which covers the years 1730 to 1734, describes many trips from his home in Itami to Osaka and Kyoto. He was the son of a small-town headman named Kikuin who was a local *haikai* poet of some renown. The father had studied Confucianism in Osaka with Goi Ranshū, who later became an instructor at Kaitokudō.[37] So Hachizaemon grew up in the family of a cultured small-town leader. In 1730 and 1731 he recorded that peddlers of books often came to his home. One of them was Yoshinoya Jūrōbei, the same bookseller who dealt directly with the Mori family in Kusaka Village in Kawachi Province.[38] This dealer, then, would have been covering a fairly wide area in at least two provinces.

Like Mori Choemon, Hachizaemon was both a lender and a borrower of books. He notes, for example, "I borrowed a book on calligraphy, *Sankoku hitsukai*, from Kanshirō."[39] Or he records, "I lent Kanshirō the book entitled *Nanpa senki.*"[40] This Kanshirō was the head of the Uejima family, the most prosperous *sake* brewer in Itami. A *haikai* poet and acupuncturist on the side, he came from the same family as Onitsura, the most famous *haikai* poet in Itami.[41] Hachizaemon also borrowed books on herbs, history, and military matters from leading doctors in the area.

Village leaders who had large book collections often made them available to others. Buying, selling, lending, and borrowing went on not just with Osaka book dealers but among villagers as well, making the network of book users considerably wider than that of book buyers. Furthermore, when bookstores restricted the availability of a book or set a time limit on borrowing, farmers and small townsmen made hand copies of the book before returning it to the city. Hachizaemon, for example, had his son Rokusaburō copy by hand an official book on law *(Kōgi ofuregaki)* that he needed.[42] Hand copying, along with borrowing and lending, increased the book flow probably far beyond the mere listing of numbers of books available.

As these diaries indicate, cultural activities in small towns and villages were not limited to the circulation of books. Chinese poetry salons, *shōgi* chess clubs, and *jōruri* (dramatic narrative chanting) groups encouraged cultural

contacts among provincials. Among the elite of towns and villages there were also scholarly meetings where all those in attendance were expected to have read certain materials in advance and be prepared thoroughly for the study sessions. Hachizaemon reports going to one of these *kōdan* on the *Greater Learning* at a temple called Mantokuji, where *jōruri* recitations and festival music performances were also held.[43] Elsewhere it is indicated that a group of seventeen or eighteen physicians faithfully attended a *kōdan* on the *Greater Learning* held for four straight nights at one of the Yao family's residences.[44]

Indeed, Hachizaemon appears to have been the local patron of a Confucian study group that included many physicians in the area. In 1733 he arranged for a physician named Yamaguchi to come to Itami to run a study group on the *Analects.* Hachizaemon arranged a home for him and provided copies of texts. The group discussed the *Analects* on even nights and a Chinese medical text on odd nights. This arrangement appears to have lasted about nine months. After that another series of meetings began, using different texts.[45]

In Yokota Fumihiko's judgment, some of the Chinese medical texts were so difficult that Hachizaemon had to rely on Japanese commentaries, such as *Igaku bengai,* read alongside the Chinese text, to prepare for the discussion.[46] Whether he read the original Chinese or only the Japanese commentaries is unknown, but the knowledge he gained from the study of Chinese texts helped improve his home medical experiments. Many notations in Hachizaemon's diary are devoted to his work on developing new and practical medicines.[47]

Physicians, as noted above, were a frequent presence in serious scholarly activities in the countryside. Medical texts were well-represented in the book collections of the Sanda and Mori families and in the reading circles attended by Yao Hachizaemon. Although the populations of Tokugawa period villages were mainly composed of those engaged in productive agricultural activities, feudal laws forbidding residency to other than peasants made exceptions for doctors and priests. From the beginning of the eighteenth century onward, the number of doctors residing in villages increased to the point where, Tsukamoto Manabu suggests, the percentage of doctors in villages may have been higher in the mid-nineteenth century than it is now.[48] Many doctors probably came from the cities, but local village physicians were not uncommon. For example, Totsuka Seikai (1799–1876), who became a well-known Western medical specialist and physician to the shogunate, came from a family of village doctors from Nita Village, Haibara County, in what is now Shizuoka Prefecture.

For both priests and doctors, the ability to read Chinese texts was essential. In addition, as noted above, there were many influential village and town families not known as physicians who owned medical texts and experimented with pharmaceuticals and herbal medicines. What is known about the book

collections and reading habits of provincial literati in the early eighteenth century suggests that rural scholars tended to be generalists who combined medical interests with Confucianism, Buddhism, or possibly Nativism. Priests often became familiar with Confucian texts and Chinese poetry in addition to works in the Buddhist canon. In other words, those who had access to Chinese and advanced Japanese used it to read a variety of texts.

It is particularly noteworthy that doctors were involved in Confucian study groups and that Confucianists both collected medical texts and were active in groups that discussed them. Doctors, even if they had not yet emerged as an organized profession, were clearly among the intellectuals of provincial society. It is quite possible, furthermore, that the increase in medical practitioners from the beginning of the seventeenth century also meant an increase in those interested in other scholarly pursuits requiring Chinese and advanced literacy.

What is far more certain than the quantitative rise of literacy at this time is that the quality of literacy had been enriched among the leadership of farm villages and towns in the vicinity of large cities like Kyoto or Osaka. Booksellers and lenders were active in the provinces. The upper crust of farmers were accumulating books that did not deal primarily with agriculture fields. They read Confucian, Buddhist, and Nativist works as well as literature—poetry and prose, Chinese and Japanese—along with reference materials to guide their studies. Networks for borrowing and lending books and cultural associations for lectures and discussions had formed, and the members of the provincial elite themselves led them. Many were reading Confucian and medical texts in the original Chinese. Many more became acquainted with such works through translations into vernacular Japanese by Kaibara Ekken and others.

No longer were village leaders limited to administrative tasks assigned them as village heads. They were moving into areas of thought and knowledge long thought to be beyond them and irrelevant to the peasantry. While they drew closer to the literati of the cities and to their samurai overlords, however, the members of this elite group moved further away from the ordinary tenant farmers who did not have the advanced literacy skills that made scholarly accomplishments possible.

Female Bunjin *in the Eighteenth Century*

Literacy among women in provincial families in the eighteenth century remains largely unexplored territory. Anne Walthall and others have made a compell-

ing case for the postulate that the level of literacy among some women in merchant families in the nineteenth century was high, but data remain skimpy for the earlier period.[49] Even Tsukamoto Manabu, the author of a well-known book on provincial literati, had trouble coming up with persuasive data on the cultural lives of women in the eighteenth century and had to rely on some unorthodox sources, such as gravestone inscriptions, to make his point.

One of Tsukamoto's examples is the mother of Kan Chazan (also Sasan, 1748–1827), the noted Confucian scholar. Chazan was the master of Ken Juku, a Confucian academy, and a close associate of the famous historian Rai San'yō (1780–1832). The mother, whose name is not known, came from Ihara Village in Bitchū, married at sixteen, and raised three boys and three girls; Chazan was her oldest son. An inscription on Chazan's gravestone is the only information available about her. San'yō used it as the basis for writing that Chazan's early interests in reading and in history derived from his mother's encouragement and that she liked to hear him read aloud to her. When the son asked her names or details he didn't know, for example, she always had the answer, it is reported. Tsukamoto suggests that the burdens placed on wives and mothers in literati households were especially heavy. They included not only household chores but the education of children, responding to inquiries from students when husbands were away, and keeping books and accounts.[50]

It is, however, not just on the basis of their support roles as the wives and mothers of male literati, as important as these may have been, that the literacy of upper-level female commoners or their impact on the spread of popular culture should be evaluated. The scarcity of data does not necessarily mean that these women were undistinguished by a high level of literacy. No doubt the contrary is the case. Recall the elegant ciphers produced by a few female commoners as early as the seventeenth century. Because men generally did not write about the accomplishments of women, and women did not typically write about themselves, data are hard to come by. But someone such as Kikuchi Sodeko (1785–1838), a *haikai* poet from the village of Kumasaki in the shogunal territory administered by the Izu Mishima magistrate in what is now Shizuoka Prefecture, surely represents a particular type of accomplished female, the literata.

Sodeko was born into a wealthy family that had once been samurai but remained in the village following the separation of peasants and warriors in the late sixteenth century. One of the founding families of the village, they had remained at the pinnacle of power and influence ever since. Like other children of local notables, both male and female, Sodeko was trained at home in the Confucian classics under the tutelage of her father, Kikuchi Takenori, who

traveled a great deal in his capacity as a village official in shogunal territory. He often took his daughter with him, exposing her at an early age to the culture and energy of cities like Edo.

Takahashi Satoshi argues that headmen on lands controlled by the shogunate, like Kumasaki, traveled more than their colleagues in other territories. It was their responsibility to respond to calls from Edo for assistance. In particular, there was the need to see that the Edo residences of daimyo were maintained in the luxurious style these local lords had come to expect. When they ran short, village leaders in the surrounding region were frequently called upon to send supplies. Thus, village heads in the immediate vicinity of the city spent much time and effort traveling to and from Edo in response to urgent requests from the residences of daimyo.[51]

Frequent opportunities for travel to Edo brought village leaders in contact with the city's lifestyles and culture. They met with scholars and other persons of culture and higher learning and in many cases arranged to study with them. Sodeko's father studied with Shibano Ritsuzan (1736–1807), a professor at Shōheikō, the shogunal college, and a contributor to Matsudaira Sadanobu's "Ban on Heterodoxy" of 1789. With this connection and training, Takenori became a recognized Confucian scholar in his own right and carried advanced urban culture back to his village.

The primary and most immediate beneficiary of the father's learning was his daughter Sodeko, who studied the Confucian *Four Books* with him as a child. Showing a precocious independence of spirit, she became interested in Japanese classics such as *Ise monogatari* and the *Tale of Genji* at an early age. Accompanying her father on one of his trips to Edo, she came under the influence of Katō Chikage (1735–1808), an important *haikai* poet, and began the serious study of poetry. Sodeko returned to Edo frequently. It was her involvement with *haikai* poetry groups in Edo that catapulted her into the ranks of respected poets. She eventually took in students, one of whom was a Kyoto aristocrat of the Kazahaya family,[52] but she is best known for writing first-rate *haikai* with a distinctive provincial flavor.

A scroll preserved by the Kikuchi family as a prized possession nicely illustrates the world of provincial literati at the end of the eighteenth century.[53] It commemorates a celebration held in 1813 for three elders of the family who were all leading *bunjin* of their time—Takenori's father, an uncle, and one other. The scroll depicts the lavish lifestyles they led and the honors bestowed upon them. Pictured are fine swords, elegant writing brushes presented as gifts, and beautiful musical instruments like the *koto* that accompanied the festivities.

The scroll is mainly devoted to Chinese and Japanese poems written by the principals and some of the fifteen guests at the celebration as well as by well-wishers from far away. The Kazahaya family sent one from Kyoto, as did the prominent nativist Motoori Ōhira (1756–1833), Norinaga's son and successor as headmaster of Suzu no Ya. Others wrote from Edo and from surrounding villages and towns to commemorate the occasion. The scroll is visible evidence of the cultural interchange between the political center of the country and the provincial periphery through the medium of poetry. Yet despite the lavishness of their surroundings and their intense interactions with urban culture, many provincial literati remained firmly rooted to the land and to village life.

The world out of which Kikuchi Sodeko emerged reflected the cultural connections beginning to form between provincial elites and urban literati by the end of the eighteenth century. Her career as a poet also reveals that it was not just in commercial families that women pursued literacy—and were rewarded for their efforts—prior to the nineteenth century, but in the world of the arts as well. This world offered opportunities not just for the children of provincial elites but also for those lower down on the social scale.

Literacy among Ordinary Farmers in Eighteenth-Century Villages

Family diaries and book catalogues point to literacy of a high quality and specialized scholarly pursuits among the rural elite of the Osaka region by the early eighteenth century. Although the evidence is less persuasive, among those who participated in cultural events there were undoubtedly some who were less socially prominent than the village leaders described above. The popularity of Kaibara Ekken's translations of Chinese books into Japanese has already been noted. These works almost certainly expanded the constituency for written works on practical affairs, hygiene, and home maintenance. They might also have encouraged some to participate in academic lectures or discussions of serious books even if they could not read the Chinese originals.

Those dwelling at lower social levels might have participated passively as latent or potential readers. In the countryside, as in the cities, many cultural activities could be enjoyed by total or near illiterates. Games, festivals, parties, religious rites, and the like remained the dominant forms of village cultural association. In the time-honored way, a great deal of information was communicated orally by village leaders to assemblies of farmers, many of whom

undoubtedly continued to press their seals on documents without being able to read.

It is always difficult to demonstrate illiteracy, because those who can't read or write leave few traces. By the middle of the seventeenth century, as pointed out in chapter 2, illiterates were no longer leaving personal marks on documents as testaments to their inability to write; engraved seals had replaced personal marks. Illiterates do turn up again more than two centuries later in Meiji period surveys undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of the Army. That story will be told in the epilogue. For the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, before widespread popular schooling opened a window of opportunity to the marginally literate, one of the most compelling sources of information on limited literacy among common villagers is the spread of a debased form of *haikai* poetry known as *"mae-zuke."*[54]

Haikai poetry was one of the earliest cultural forms to penetrate the countryside. Many members of the village elite were involved in poetry groups; the examples of the Sanda family and of Kikuchi Sodeko have just been noted. *Mae-zuke* began as an elementary instructional form of the seventeen-syllable *haikai,* incorporating the longer 5-7-5-7-7 structure of the traditional *tanka.* But soon it became an end in itself for those who sought amusement and did not necessarily have literary aspirations. To play *mae-zuke* (literally, adding lines at the beginning) a teacher provided the two final (7-7) lines of a traditional *tanka* and the student wrote the 5-7-5 "haikai" poem to "front" it.

Because two lines were given, the challenges of poetic inspiration—meter, rhyme, season, and so forth—were lessened. For this reason *mae-zuke* spread quickly and had many practitioners. By the Genroku period, it could no longer be called poetry; it clearly was more like a game, something to be done casually as friendly competition in one's spare time. Village leaders with artistic pretensions disparaged the popular variety almost immediately. Tsuboi Gohei, a village headman from Daigatsuka Village, Ishikawa-gun in Kawachi Province, who was a *haikai* associate of Sanda Jōkyū, bemoaned the overpopularization of *haikai* in the late seventeenth century. He wrote in his diary that the flourishing of *haikai* in villages had "reached the point where everyone in the country was playing at it—women, children, even mountain bandits."[55] Consequently, he gave up *haikai* entirely and took up more serious pursuits, such as *waka* poetry and *nō* chanting *(utai).* But he soon complained that these too had "spread to the lower levels of villages"[56] and warned farmers not to indulge in such pastimes to the point of neglecting their farm work.[57] In the Twelfth Month of Genroku 10 (1697), the shogunate even stepped in when it appeared that villagers were betting on poetry contests. Officials forbade any kind of

haikai activity that involved gambling and meted out harsh punishments for violations.[58]

It is unlikely that everyone, down to mountain bandits, was dabbling in *haikai* as Tsuboi claimed, but the extent of *mae-zuke* competitions does seem to indicate extensive cultural networking among the commoners in rural areas as early as the turn of the seventeenth century. *Mae-zuke* contests are mentioned extensively in an early diary written by Yamashita Yasubei, an elder of Tsuda Village, in Katano County, northern Kawachi Province (now part of Hirakata City near Osaka). Yasubei, who was an elder in Tsuda Village from 1693, began writing the diary when he was twenty-three; it covers the years 1689 through 1695 and 1701. He refers both to small-scale contests—such as those centered in Tsuda Village itself, where somewhere between 130 and 300 poems might be submitted—and large-scale events, such as that administered by nearby Tenno Village, where as many as a thousand poems were entered.[59]

It is not just the number of villagers involved but the process of administration of these contests that suggests widespread cultural networking by ordinary peasants. A supervisor, typically a highly regarded *haikai* teacher, was sent out from Osaka or Kyoto to a village to present the problems or tasks for the particular contest.[60] These were disseminated to each contestant (how is not clear). A designated person (very likely Yasubei in the Tsuda case) collected all submissions at a specified location: "At night 300 submissions were delivered to Kyūbei's place—150 from Tsuda Village and the other 150 from Tanoguchi and Katahoko."[61] Final drafts were edited and collected in an anthology *(seishobon)* at the Sonkōji temple and sent to Osaka for evaluation. In about two weeks the material was evaluated and returned to the village. In this particular case, Tsuda had six "winners" who got prizes of a fan or a tea bowl. Their work was distributed and there was a reward ceremony for them at the Kōgenji temple.[62]

Examination of the names on lists of winners in these contests shows clearly that those who were repeatedly judged to be especially meritorious were *toshiyori, kumigashira*—peasants in second-tier leadership positions, not at the very top—or priests.[63] There were no names of village headmen among those rewarded, suggesting that the constituency for cultural activities had broadened at least a bit below the headman class.

It is also true that there were many more submissions than there were winners. In the Ninth and Eleventh months of Genroku 5 (1692), 150 and 102 poems respectively were submitted from Tsuda Village. Since typically four problems were presented, then, assuming that each contestant submitted one poem for each problem, roughly twenty to thirty contestants participated.

Even if these assumptions are off and the numbers varied, it is still reasonable to speculate that there were more participants than winners. It is also apparent that the other participants were not necessarily members of the village triumvirate, as the winners were.

Yasubei's diary also provides further confirmation that through the end of the seventeenth century, Buddhist temples continued to play the same central role in the cultural activities of villages they had filled in medieval times. At the same time, it is clear that certain villages, such as Tsuda, had become centers of wider regional cultural networks formed by farmers.

Tsuda was not the only village in the area submitting poems to *mae-zuke* contests. In Tanoguchi and Kataboko, too, there was active participation. But Tsuda was the home of the mediating agent (almost certainly Yasubei himself) and the site of Senkōji temple, where the anthologies were compiled for submission to Osaka. It was apparently the hub of a small regional network, centered on *mae-zuke* activity, in which a relatively large number of people were engaged. No doubt such regional hubs operated elsewhere as well.

An examination of some of the rare extant anthologies of poetry contests confirms the geographic distribution of local cultural centers. An anthology sent to Konishi Raizan for evaluation contained a collection of poems submitted in the Kawabe area near Amagasaki during the Genroku period.[64] There were 1,284 poems submitted in response to five problems for this particular contest. Because the names and residences of the authors of the ninety-three top-ranked submissions are provided, it is possible to plot the locations of the home villages from which participants came. Represented were twenty-five villages from Muko-gun and Kawabe-gun, located on the outskirts of the larger town of Amagasaki, along with other towns and villages in Western Settsu, such as Itami, Nishinomiya, and Ashiya. This suggests that Amagasaki was the hub of a large-scale cultural network in Western Settsu that operated alongside the smaller network centering on Tsuda in Kita Kawachi.

The village of Namazu, which had a total population of 144 in 1699, had the largest number of winners in this particular contest. In this village, eleven of the twenty-four households participated. In other words, just under half the households and just under 10 percent of the population of this village submitted *mae-zuke.* This rate of submission, which matches the roughly 10 percent of the population of Tsuda that participated,[65] is further evidence that participation in these contests extended beyond the small number of leadership families.

As early as the late seventeenth century, then, networks of villages and towns in suburban Osaka had formed for the purpose of participating in cul-

tural activities such as *mae-zuke.* The activity was at a lower scholarly level than the Buddhist, Confucian, and Nativist studies or the *waka* poetry that engaged the top leadership of the suburban countryside, but the art of formulating a *haikai* poem (even with the help of two lines and even if largely written in phonetic *kana* script) must be considered a creative act and a cultural advance from the more restricted uses of literacy (or failure to use it) characteristic of a hundred years earlier. *Mae-zuke* poetry contests are early indications of writing in phonetic script by farmers who were not just outside the top positions of leadership (such as headmen) but quite likely entirely outside the upper strata of villagers. Many of the contests would have been held not much farther from Osaka than Tomooka Village was from Kyoto. They clearly show a rise in literacy, even if only in the phonetic *kana,* from the simple marks made by village household heads a century earlier.

The Seeds of Public Instruction

The enhanced skills of village and town leaders was the most important development in the history of popular literacy during the eighteenth century. These qualitative changes came about with little or no oversight or encouragement from feudal authorities. At the same time, however, the eighteenth century marks the beginning of official interest in education for commoners, what later would be called "public" education.

The penetration of the marketplace into villages produced a merchant farmer elite that looked for practical knowledge to improve their lives and sought moral training to guide their families in a threatening and unstable economic environment. Competition may have meant new opportunities for farmers, but it produced concerns among the more traditional village heads of smaller and less advanced regions about maintaining stability in communities upset by economic upheaval and cultural changes emanating from the cities. The need to restore order and stability led to calls for the moral training of village children, and it was this concern, first voiced by village leaders, that persuaded feudal officials to "support"—some might say "interfere with"—learning among the populace.

Contemporary documents reveal the nature of the problem. It was a good deal more serious than earlier worries about errors in tax computations, because it concerned dissent among farmers that in some cases led to rebellion in the countryside. "Among farmers there are those who are able and those who are devious," wrote the author of *Nōka kankō* in 1736. "They can read,

write, and calculate. They can prepare petitions to authorities and can insinuate themselves with leaders. They use people and stir up less able farmers to rebellion."[66]

Various types of moral exhortation had already been tried and found insufficient. Village officials read aloud from prefaces to *goningumi* registers, and farmers made their marks or pressed their stamps to documents signifying that they agreed to follow established procedures. The minimal practical training carried out in a few village writing schools, consisting of learning to write one's name, the *kana* syllabary, and some simple Chinese characters from copybooks, was clearly insufficient for the larger public purpose.

In more turbulent times, explicit calls for the moral training of commoners could be heard. From the author of *Hyakushō bukuro* came the following advice: "In response to current circumstances, farmers should learn, to the extent of their abilities, not just basic skills, but also how to purify their hearts, as well as loyalty and filial piety." In response to questions from farmers as to which books they should read, this writer instructed the headmen to tell them that the first priority was to learn "the various rules and laws that helped establish the state. These should be passed on to everyone, young and old, in villages everywhere. They should be read and explained to everyone down to the last wife, child, and servant. Reading the same thing over many times is not a problem since the acolytes of the Ikkō sect chant the same thing over and over from morning to night and no one gets tired of it."[67]

Village officials, hoping that moral training would aid in quelling village disturbances, took the first initiatives toward popular education, an area in which they had not previously been involved. It was they who started to read prefaces from *goningumi* registers aloud to assembled villagers, and it was they who first used the ethical maxims contained in those preambles as materials for basic writing classes, in the hope that the moral messages might seep into young minds as they practiced writing characters.[68]

The exception to the laissez-faire attitude toward popular education that prevailed in the samurai regime until at least the Tenpō period (1830–1844) was the eighth shogun, Tokugawa Yoshimune (1684–1751; ruled 1716–1745). A chance encounter between the shogun, who was on a falconry expedition, and a local writing teacher and doctor, Yoshida Jun'an from Shimane Village in Adachi County, Musashi Province near Edo, apparently sparked his interest. Yoshimune selected the doctor's house as a place to rest and noticed desks and other school materials. The shogun was particularly pleased to learn that the doctor was using official notices as the basis for lectures to students and approved of his selections on ethics from *goningumi* registers as materials for reading and writing practice.[69] The next day, as Ronald Dore retells the story,

Yoshimune sent the doctor a bound copy of *Rikuyu engi taii,* a Confucian moral treatise that had just been published in 1722. A month later the Edo township magistrate issued instructions to writing teachers in Edo recommending that they use government ordinances as text materials.[70]

Yoshimune's Kyōhō reforms, which aimed at increasing the financial resources of the shogunate and encouraging the samurai to live within their means, used popular ethical instruction as one way to achieve these goals. The shogun's efforts did not stop at rewarding outstanding teachers. As mentioned above, he was also involved in the publication and promotion of texts for moral instruction at popular writing schools. On Yoshimune's orders, the noted Confucian scholars Ogyū Sorai (1666–1728) and Muro Kyūsō (1658–1734) reworked the Chinese text of the Ming-period treatise *Rikuyu engi taii* into a more accessible Japanese form. Yoshimune considered this book, which had entered Japan by way of the Ryūkyūs, to be appropriate as a morals text for writing schools. It consisted of precepts for strengthening harmony and peace and maintaining good family and social relations. Sorai was asked to provide *kunten* guide marks so the Chinese could be "read off" in Japanese. Then Muro Kyūsō rewrote the text in Japanese, using *kana* for inflections and grammatical markers, and simplified the content to make the moral message sharper.

In all likelihood, *Rikuyu engi taii* was widely used at least in the Edo area because of the shogun's active promotion. Yoshimune ordered the Edo township magistrate, Ōoka Tadasuke (1677–1751), to gather writing teachers at the magistrate's office and hand out copies of the work for them to use in schools. At the time of publication Yoshimune issued the following order to district magistrates: "We have instructed farmers to obey the letter of the laws that have previously been sent out. But because ordinary commoners who can understand the meaning of the laws are few, there are those who do not obey. There are even those who are unaware of violating the law. In villages there are writing teachers among farmers and temple or shrine priests. These teachers should use the copies of our laws as texts for their writing lessons. Writing teachers should also use the prefaces to *goningumi* registers for writing lessons so they can be memorized by ordinary people."[71]

Although little is known about how extensively these orders were carried out, it is possible to say several things about Yoshimune's efforts. First, they are the earliest indications of serious official interest in the education of commoners. The interest is overwhelmingly ethical, controlling, and defensive, and it is part of a larger effort to control thought that included tightening requirements for book publication. Prohibitions on books "containing unorthodox thought" and pornographic materials "not fit for popular consumption" were also sent out at this time.[72] But this was also a period in which text materials specifically

directed to lower-level writing schools were published. There were titles such as *Chika-michi kodaka* (A child's treasury of shortcuts), *Shoshoku ōrai* (On various occupations), *Shimin ōrai* (On the four classes), as well as dictionaries and elementary reference works like *Bunrin setsuyō hikkai ōrai*. The inclusion of morals texts like *Rikiyu engi taii* along with these more practical works in the curricula of writing schools suggests that ethical training had become part of popular education from the onset of official encouragement.

In a broader sense, the initial official attention to the moral instruction of commoners began a process of taking what had heretofore been essentially an oral tradition and putting it into writing through the media of official notice boards *(kōsatsu)* and prefaces of *goningumi* registers. Eventually, moral messages appeared in textbooks and were used as lessons in popular writing schools. Official interest from the top stimulated interest in popular education—from the shogunate to the daimyo, then to district and town magistrates, then down to village officials.

But the official role in stimulating popular culture and literacy during the eighteenth century should not be overstated. Recall that Yoshimune's first involvement happened by chance, not through a systematic or carefully constructed plan of interference. Until the early nineteenth century the number of schools was low. Only in Edo, where the impact of shogunal initiatives would have been direct and immediate, are there indications of a large number of writing teachers. Some eight hundred writing teachers in Edo are thought to have responded to Yoshimune's directives on moral instruction during the Kyōhō period,[73] but the figure is impossible to confirm. Ishikawa Ken's detailed computations show only 406 writing schools established prior to 1800 out of a total of 11,237 writing schools established during the Tokugawa period.[74] Furthermore, there were no further shogunal initiatives in the education of commoners for a century after Yoshimune's reforms, until the moral value of popular instruction was again reasserted by feudal leaders as part of a broad retrenchment effort during the Tenpō reforms of Mizuno Tadakuni in 1843.

Conclusion

Even though feudal officials generally pursued a hands-off policy with respect to the education of commoners, the quality of literacy in provincial villages and towns changed dramatically in the eighteenth century. Literacy in the countryside, however, did not expand dramatically outward to include broad new constituencies. For the most part, literacy remained, as it had been in the seventeenth century, the prerogative of the village leadership class. What changed

decisively was the quality of cultural life and literacy among the provincial elite. Initially, village leaders were no more than administrative specialists expert in the language of edicts and tax documents. During and after the Genroku period, they used their literacy to seek greater access to the rapidly developing culture of the major cities. They became scholars of Confucianism, Buddhism, Nativism, medicine, and poetry, and in the process emerged as important links between the culture of the cities and the provinces. As patrons and teachers of local writing schools, these provincial literati eventually facilitated the spread of literacy outward to ordinary farmers in the nineteenth century.

The rise of *chihō bunjin* in the eighteenth century brought provincials closer to the culture of the major cities but at the same time widened the gulf between the highly literate in villages and ordinary farmers. By the middle of the eighteenth century, two distinct cultures, intellectually distant and qualitatively different from each other, were apparent at the extreme ends of the literacy spectrum in Tokugawa villages. At the top were members of the rural elite, defined by wealth (either agricultural or commercial), political influence (they were often local officials), and substantial learning (Confucian, Buddhist, Nativist) or artistic accomplishment (particularly in poetry and calligraphy). At the bottom was everyone else—particularly those without power, without wealth, and without land of their own.

The quality of learning and literacy among the elite group was altogether different from the kind of rudimentary instruction *(iroha)* that formed the basic training of writing schools for the broad masses of the population in city and country during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was also qualitatively different from the skills, mainly administrative, that were manifested by the same village leadership stratum throughout most of the seventeenth century.

Over time and in response to the flourishing culture of the cities, the administrative skills of the leadership class in villages had expanded to include broad aspects of culture. Serious scholarship in Confucian works and Nativist thought, the reciting of *waka* and the writing of *haikai,* mastery of art forms such as calligraphy and painting, once the preserves of aristocrats, were now part and parcel of the accoutrements of a village leader. Indeed, they were expected of him. This being the case, it is reasonable to believe that the talents and accomplishments evident in the Kamigata region were widespread among the village leadership throughout Japan by mid-eighteenth century if not before.

Although it may be of some use in making a point, the idea of two separate and distinct cultures operating within farm villages, manifest by widely divergent levels of literacy, is doubtless something of an exaggeration, especially

since some level of literacy undoubtedly existed among those situated between the extremes. But that there was a literacy gap is beyond question, and the gap was recognized by contemporary writers. Tsuboi Gohei's contempt for the lower orders' taking up *haikai* poetry is notorious. He undoubtedly saw it as a threat to the dominant position of the leadership class of which he was a member.

Literacy and advanced cultural attainment, along with the networking that was a natural concomitant, had by the eighteenth century become an indispensable requirement of village leadership and influence. Learning, to a large extent, remained a family affair, largely confined to the leadership class and not widely shared. That is part of the reason why it is only relatively late, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—when their cultural superiority was beyond reach—that provincial literati began to share their reading and writing skills with the lower orders in villages in the form of support for reading and writing schools. That topic, the spread of mass popular literacy, is the next subject of this study.

4

The Expansion of Popular Literacy in the Nineteenth Century

In the first half of the nineteenth century, popular literacy began to expand beyond the limited confines of the provincial leadership group, whose advanced skills have been outlined in previous chapters. Because of their high literacy, village leaders and provincial literati left behind records that make it possible to confirm their abilities. Source material is far more problematic when the objective is to trace the path of literacy to the lower levels of provincial society. This chapter presents materials to set the context for the analysis of direct measures of popular literacy in chapter 5.

Ideas of Popular Learning: Bottom Up and Top Down

Ideas praising the value of popular learning and culture, hesitant and scattered in the eighteenth century, burst into full bloom in the nineteenth. Among literate farmers there was continued support for learning for practical purposes in response to growing commercial opportunities in the countryside and in smaller towns. The educational philosophy developed by a scholar of National Studies or Nativism *(kokugaku),* Miyaoi Yasuo (also known as Miyaoi Sahei, 1797–1858), represents this trend. Miyaoi was the son of a village headman from Matsusawa Village in Shimōsa Province (now Chiba Prefecture). In 1826 he became a student of the influential Nativist Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843). Apparently, Miyaoi's thought caught on among farmers.

The first volume of his *Minka yōjutsu* (1831) included a section on learning and the arts that posited a strong link between learning and commercial success: "Possessing a variety of skills is like having a treasure. Developing these

talents provides a livelihood for one's entire life. In other words, learning is the seed of a prosperous life," Miyaoi insisted. "Rather than turning over money to them, it is wiser for parents to impart basic literacy to their children."[1] He went on to outline the proper order of learning to gain literacy skills. Children should begin, he stated, at a young age with the *kana* script in *iroha* order, and then move on to personal names, village names, and provincial place names. Reinforcing a dualism of long standing between higher learning for the upper classes and rudimentary literacy for the lower, Miyaoi added that there was no need for farmers and merchants to advance to works in Chinese. Humming songs or reciting poems to oneself would make normally tedious farmwork more pleasant, he suggested.[2]

By the nineteenth century the rural leadership group had produced its own educational philosophers and cultural leaders, men such as Ninomiya Sontoku (1781–1856), who developed ideologies of self-help and practical morality that encouraged the spread of basic literacy among the rural populace. Sontoku believed that great things grew out of humble beginnings and that farmers had to rely upon themselves, not on top-down initiatives: "Even if you have many books, they are useless unless you study them," he pointed out. "If you intend to read books, you must begin at the beginning with the ABCs *(iroha).* If you intend to bring prosperity to your home, you must begin by accumulating coppers. There is no other way."[3] The following dictum expresses the essence of Sontoku's conviction: "Human morality is not located in nature; it must be cultivated from within oneself in obedience to the will of heaven *(tenri)."*[4]

One of the ways to implement this advice was by supporting local writing schools. Yuyama Gonzaemon from Takenoshita Village in northern Suruga Province (now Shizuoka Prefecture), a man much influenced by Sontoku's thought, believed that to restore and maintain prosperity in their villages, farmers had to acquire a tenacious sense of independence, endure abstinence, and exhibit self-control. In his view, prosperity depended entirely upon the sacrifices and discipline of the farmers themselves, not on outside agencies such as assistance from the domains or bakufu. Yuyama was dismissive of the popular morality espoused by the Shingaku movement, which was based on the syncretic philosophy of Ishida Baigan (1685–1744) and aimed to establish a merchant-based ethic for townsmen.[5] Following Sontoku's self-help ideas, Gonzaemon sought to plant the seeds of future prosperity in the countryside by training the children of wealthy farmers in basic literacy *(shikiji narai),* and he opened a writing school in his village for that purpose.[6]

Other villagers in commercially active farming communities also worked out homegrown educational philosophies that supported the establishment of

writing schools. One was Funatsu Denjibei in the village of Haranogō in Kōzuke Province (the east-central portion of what is now Gunma Prefecture),[7] a region of advanced silkworm cultivation. Denjibei's thought reflected his roots in a commercially developed and prosperous village, advocating techniques with which to nurture the special talents of a variety of people in the community. In the call for attention to individual needs and different techniques for diverse talents, it reflected a philosophy quite unlike that of feudal authorities: "Educating children is like farming. To grow fatter radishes you need to use rice husks. To make greens grow luxuriantly you need to use wheat husks. To cultivate mulberry seedlings you need to use a reed mat. You must be attuned to the special needs of the place, the nature of the seed, and the right season for sowing. So it is with the education of children."[8]

As a teacher, Denjibei was dissatisfied with merely transmitting available information and traditional lore; he sought to discover new information and new ways of communicating it to others. He wrote up his experiments and used them as text materials for teaching, and he developed popular methods of instruction. For example, he presented his scientific data on raising silkworms to assembled farmers in the *chobokure-bushi* format, a style of oral presentation that drew on rhythmic chants, something like chanting sutras although in more of a "patter-talk" style, which appealed greatly to his audience.[9] Popular techniques of transmitting information to assembled groups in the countryside, like Denjibei's use of chants, no doubt derived from oral traditions, Buddhist or otherwise, during this period. Neither Denjibei's idea of nurturing children by focusing on their different talents nor his tradition-laden pedagogical techniques survived into the Meiji period.

In general, neither educational theories that circulated among commoners nor unique local styles of teaching were of much interest to feudal authorities. Learning was encouraged as long as it was rudimentary, related to farm management, or inculcated ethical precepts. Overdoing it, indulging one's literary interests, and knowing too much were objects of constant warnings. "Those who do not practice the occupations of samurai, farmer, artisan, or merchant and pursue nothing but literature are nothing more than frivolous do-nothings."[10] To be sure, some amusements were permissible—as long as they were not indulged in too heavily. Warnings such as the following, however, may well have reflected the fact that it was becoming increasingly possible for farmers to become teachers, enticing some off the land: "It is fine to learn games like *go* and *shōgi* but one should not become a *go* or *shōgi* teacher. That is, one should not make these games one's occupation. One might also learn *waka* or *haikai* poetry if one does not take these things on full time."[11]

In 1834 the noted Confucian scholar Asaka Gonsai (1791–1860)

described appropriate levels of literacy and learning for the various classes. Asaka was appointed Confucian scholar to the Nihonmatsu domain (now part of Fukushima Prefecture) in 1836 and taught in that domain's school in 1843. In 1850 he received a shogunal appointment and taught at the bakufu college, Shōheikō, so his views were probably representative of those current in official circles. During the final decades of the Tokugawa period, he published a great deal and gathered a large number of students to his private academy, among them prominent "men of action" of the period—not only Sakamoto Ryōma from Tosa but also Yoshida Shōin and Takasugi Shinsaku from Chōshū. No doubt this scholar's views on appropriate learning for the various classes were widely held.

All classes, Asaka asserted, had the primary responsibility to sustain their family occupations. Classes other than the samurai, he believed, would have a difficult time engaging in serious book learning, and it could lead to inappropriate behavior if they did. Accordingly, he recommended limiting nonsamurai to basic Confucian texts such as the *Analects, Greater Learning, Teikun,* or the *kana* writings of Kaibara Ekken or Muro Kyūsō. Furthermore, "writing poetry and prose and reading widely are occupations for the samurai class and not for farmers or merchants. The latter have no time for Confucian studies. Those who take a liking to serious study soon become snobbish and take on airs and neglect their responsibilities."[12]

For Asaka and much of the official world at this time, reading widely and seriously was appropriate only for the samurai class. The primary responsibility of farmers and merchants was to maintain their family occupations. For farmers, this meant cultivating fields; for merchants, engaging in basic commercial transactions. Serious reading and writing, whether poetry or prose, were viewed as inessential frills. Exceptions were made for village headmen and those whose responsibilities included governance and leadership. For those few, the broader study of Confucian works was recommended and encouraged.[13] A domain order from the late eighteenth century sums up the feudal authorities' general attitude toward literacy and learning among commoners at the beginning of the nineteenth century: "We expect the farmers to learn some basic reading, writing, and calculation up to age fourteen or fifteen. After that they will have to work intensively in agriculture while practicing loyalty and filial piety. This is essential."[14]

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the same laissez-faire attitude adopted by officials toward the commoners' pursuit of learning that had characterized the eighteenth century prevailed. What caused a change in the official attitude was the appearance of serious and potentially threatening peasant uprisings during the Tenpō period (1830–1844). In the view of many feudal

authorities, threats to the system, prominently including the Ōshio Heihachirō uprising in Osaka in 1837, resulted from the unchecked spread of vulgar popular culture among the samurai and antifeudal sentiments among the populace. In the context of perceived dangers to the status quo, officials began to consider local schools (much more conscientiously than before) as mechanisms by which popular sentiments could be controlled and proper morality imposed.

In 1843, as part of its Tenpō reforms, the bakufu issued the following proclamation to teachers of writing schools, calling upon them to support moral training in the public interest:

> Teachers who run schools both within the city of Edo and without should instruct children enthusiastically and treat them equally. Everyone—boys and girls, high and low—should be able to read and write appropriate to their station. This charge should not be taken lightly. The samurai teach their children the civil and martial arts *(bunbu),* whereas townsmen and those of the lower orders have no special traditions of learning. Since bad behavior has become habitual, it may be that parents are training children inappropriately. This greatly disturbs public order. Therefore, teachers of writing schools must be the ones to train children of the towns properly. Beyond simple writing practice it should also be your concern to improve public morals, teach good manners, and instruct children in loyalty and filial piety. Since those who can write can also read, don't just practice writing, but use public notice boards *(kōsatsu)* and official announcements *(ofuregaki)* for reading practice. You might consider reading from primers such as *Teikun* [an elementary reader for children] or *Jitsugokyō* [simplified excerpts from Confucian classics] and from books like *Daigaku* (Greater learning) and *Shōgaku* (Lesser learning). For women *Onna Imagawa* [an illustrated primer in *kana* for girls], *Jokai* [a Chinese Confucian reader for girls], and *Onna kōkyō* (Filial piety for women) are recommended along with writing practice.
>
> Even among parents who are illiterate or disreputable, there are none who do not wish success for their children. So, if those who are teachers instruct children with sincere hearts and a no-nonsense attitude, this will be greatly appreciated. If writing teachers follow this advice it will enhance public morality and greatly benefit the governance of the realm. We expect you to understand our intentions and keep this advice in mind when you teach.[15]

Not only does the writer reveal a certain ignorance of traditions of learning among the commoner classes, perhaps typical of the elite, but the message here is clearly self-interested. It reveals a top-down concern with the "governance of the realm" that differed dramatically from the more individualized training proposed by educators who were commoners, for example Funatsu

Denjibei. But it must also be said that for some patrons of writing schools and some town and village leaders at the local levels, particularly during the disruptions of the Tenpō period, keeping the peace and maintaining public order were exactly the primary considerations.

Provincial Literati in the Nineteenth Century

In addition to the different ideas that members of the elite and commoners espoused about the goals and purposes of popular learning, there were other transitional phenomena that became increasingly important across the nineteenth-century divide. Provincial literati, already evident in the eighteenth century, became so numerous in the nineteenth that considerable historical records, including personal diaries, from that circle are available, not just in Japanese but in English translation as well. Since extensive scholarship already exists on nineteenth-century literati, it will be sufficient to give a few examples of provincial men of letters who illustrate new types that appeared not just in the suburbs but in the remotest parts of the country. These include persons engaged in political movements, women who achieved new status through their literacy skills, and merchants for whom the pursuit of learning became more important than their businesses—all of them commoners. A key component of the expansion of provincial culture and the opening of new areas of interest among commoners was the continuing growth of the publishing industry.

Book circulation increased not only within the three great metropolises of Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka, but also between these cities and major provincial towns. Although Kyoto had been the center of the book publishing industry in the seventeenth century, by the nineteenth, "culture's march eastward," to borrow Katsuhisa Moriya's phrase, had put Edo in the dominant position. Moriya cites 494 publishers in Kyoto, down from 536 during the previous century; 504 in Osaka; and 917 in Edo, a near doubling in the number of print entrepreneurs in Edo.[16] Books already circulated widely in the eighteenth century through commercial lending libraries, but by the nineteenth century publishers were "consciously aiming at a national public."[17]

In addition, the publishing industry in Edo began to specialize in materials specifically intended for use at popular writing schools. By the Tenpō period, book publishers like Saheiya had begun to produce specialized catalogues restricted to titles of textbooks for popular use. Some of the titles were *Shoka hitsuyō* (Essentials for the family), *Shōsoku ōrai* (On letter writing), *Inaka ōrai* (Provincial miscellany), *Nōka daigaku* (Greater learning for farm

families), and *Shōbai ōrai kōshaku* (Lectures on commercial matters).[18] Commercial publishing started to aim exclusively at a provincial audience. The growing numbers of publishers and book lenders meant greater access to books not just on the part of city dwellers but members of rural society as well, extending beyond the limited constituency of the eighteenth century.

The greater availability and circulation of books meant that by the nineteenth century *bunjin* began to appear not just in the suburbs of large cities but also in remote sections of the country. Suzuki Bokushi (1770–1842), a wealthy merchant of farm background from Echigo Province (now part of Niigata Prefecture), that is, from "snow country" on the remote backside of Japan, engaged in activities that might have been expected of literati in the Osaka suburbs in the eighteenth century. His detailed diary[19] shows that he was part of a local cultural circle that met regularly and was connected to regional groups that were in turn connected to the urban centers of Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka. He was a poet and used his cultural connections to maintain literary and commercial bonds. He was trained in both Japanese and Chinese literary classics but also had a scientific frame of mind and tried to depict his natural surroundings accurately and in detail. He traveled widely and was known to many of the leading literary figures of the day. Suzuki Bokushi represents the rural literati whose erudition enabled them to cross class lines and interact virtually as equals with the leading artists and writers of the time, both samurai and wealthy townsmen.

Probably the best-known provincial man of culture in the late Tokugawa period is a semifictional character. Aoyama Hanzō, the protagonist of Shimazaki Tōson's *Before the Dawn,* was modeled closely on the author's father, a village headman of Magome, a post station on the Tōsandō road in the Kiso River district of what is now Nagano Prefecture in central Honshu. His story provides a compelling narrative of an important nineteenth-century phenomenon—local men of culture whose learning compelled them to become active in local and then national politics, until then the exclusive preserve of the samurai class.[20]

One of the novel's goals is to describe the vigor, creativity, and sophistication of traditional Japanese culture as practiced in the nineteenth century by local leaders like Hanzō. Like other provincial *bunjin,* Hanzō came from a prominent family. He was of samurai origin; one of his ancestors had founded his village in 1588. Like the family of Kikuchi Sodeko in the eighteenth century, and typical of most provincial literati, Tōson's family remained financially secure and produced prominent leaders in the village for two and a half centuries.

Magome, as a post station, was in touch with metropolitan advances in

science, medicine, and the arts. The Tokugawa period's travel boom kept major roads filled with people going back and forth between major metropolises and remote provinces. The spread of culture that had begun in the eighteenth century in the suburbs of large cities like Osaka had broadened out to more remote regions by the nineteenth. Traders, pilgrims, and private travelers like Hanzō became instruments for the interchange of ideas, technologies, and fashions. Hanzō traveled to cities like Nagoya and Edo and to neighboring towns and villages both on village business as well as to pursue his cultural interests.

Hanzō grew up in a village with no writing schools, but under the tutelage of his father at home, he became not only highly literate but learned, one well-read in the thought and politics of his day. At a young age he became a devoted follower of Nativism, a major source of inspiration for provincial leaders. In the face of threats from the imperialist countries and stimulated by the rising restoration movement, Hanzō and like-minded colleagues tried to make sense of their world by studying and discussing the works of major Nativist scholars like Motoori Norinaga and Hirata Atsutane. Networking through travel, correspondence, and study groups was an important part of this activity. Ultimately, the hopes of the advocates of Nativism to return to a pristine past, one unclouded by either Chinese or Western thought, through the study of classical Japanese texts proved futile. Hanzō, like the Nativist movement itself, died frustrated and unfulfilled, a man overwhelmed by the modernist policies of the Meiji oligarchy. Even so, *Before the Dawn* is a compelling narrative of the vigor, creativity, and sophistication of traditional Japanese culture as practiced by local leaders like Shimazaki Tōson's father.

By the nineteenth century, provincial family diaries paid increasing attention to the literacy skills of women, particularly in the better-off merchant families. Such diaries are used in an essay by Anne Walthall to show that "female literacy characterized the style of life that set the rural entrepreneurs apart from ordinary peasants."[21] Unlike boys, who were educated at home or sent to private academies in cities, girls in these households were sent as maids to the homes of daimyo or other samurai families. Typically they did not study Confucian morality or military matters, but they did attain the skills to marry well and to conduct the business of their families.

The content of education for women of higher-class farm families is illuminated in the Tenpō-period diary of an affluent weaver, Yoshida Seisuke (also known as Yoshida Akinushi; 1794–1857), who lived in the Kiryū region of what is now Gunma Prefecture. His diary focuses on the education of his daughter, Ito.[22] Both his son and his daughter began their training at the nearby writing school run by a woman familiar with Nativism. Then they were both sent to Edo to study under a well-known scholar of the subject, Tachibana Moribe

(1781–1849), and to soak up the manners and customs of the big city. But whereas Moribe instructed the son in Chinese studies, *waka* poetry, and his own studies of Nativism, for the daughter he constructed an entirely different curriculum consisting almost exclusively of etiquette and proper manners, the polite accomplishments befitting the daughter of a wealthy provincial merchant. Indeed, he came up with an elaborate and personalized tract, entitled *Suminawa,* which was intended to correct her many personal "defects," such as her apparently strong and independent personality.[23]

Despite such traditional training, the literacy skills eventually attained by many women went far beyond the local schools' rudiments of reading and writing. To be sure, what they learned was in all likelihood heavily laced with *kana,* but they were able to exchange letters with their samurai host families or Edo teachers, write poetry, and do basic accounting, as well as understand household management and appreciate the prescriptions of female gentility. They traveled, were exposed to urban culture, and were sometimes introduced to leading cultural and political figures of the day. A few women who began this way, like Matsuo Taseko (1825–1894), even played important roles in late Tokugawa politics. The daughter of a rural headman who owned many books, she learned to read and write in the traditional way, from her relatives at home. Then, in 1862, she traveled to Kyoto, studied poetry, got involved in the radical Hirata school of Nativism, and eventually became "a go-between and information conduit for the revolutionary underground" during the restoration movement.[24]

More typical for daughters of rural entrepreneur families was the opportunity to take on the function of a "deputy husband" when the men were off on trips, enabling some of the women to pursue their own economic enterprises on a grand scale. In one family studied by Walthall, the wife lent money to rural merchants, day laborers, renters of family property, village officials, relatives, and her own son. She donated money to charity and to temples and shrines. She acquired land, had storehouses built, and took her family on a pilgrimage.[25] The literacy skills attained by such women on the job enabled them to perform tasks that were essential to maintaining and enhancing their family enterprises. Thus they were highly valued if seldom extolled in print. Despite their commoner status, Walthall argues, the achievements of these women, many of which required literacy, were an essential part of the "family ideologies" that rural entrepreneurs developed to distinguish themselves from samurai no less than from ordinary peasants.[26] Assigning real responsibility to educated women, a characteristic of the families Walthall studied, may be said to be another "road not taken" by Meiji modernizers.

Although in some of these diaries the contributions of women to the

prosperity of the family were recognized, more commonly their commercial achievements were neglected or only sparingly mentioned. This is one reason why data on the literacy of this group remain anecdotal and scattered. A glimpse into the cultural lives of small-town merchants and the role played by entrepreneur wives comes from an extraordinary diary written by an apprentice in a rural oil extracting shop in a town on the western outskirts of Kyoto.

The diary, which bears the title *Ohinamichō* (cover and pages shown in Figure 10), was kept for a little more than a year beginning in 1815 by a twenty-two-year-old shop clerk, Yodoya Tomekichi.[27] The young man made daily notations not about himself but about the cultural life of Tada Kuroemon, the much-admired master of Tobaya, a shop that extracted lighting oil from rapeseed, located in the town of Mukō, the first stop on the main road from Kyoto to Osaka. The family had become prosperous—the dominant oil extractors in the region—by purchasing rapeseed from some fifteen neighboring villages at a low price. Their wealth made them prominent in local politics and town governance, but it was as local men of culture that the proprietors of Tobaya stood out.[28]

The diary spells out the shop master's daily cultural life in great detail. He was a master calligrapher of the Jōdaisama style, a school founded in the Heian period. As the diary points out, he practiced virtually every day, usually in the early morning from dawn, sometimes additionally in the afternoons, and sometimes at night. He taught occasionally, not the mere characters but the "way" of the brush. Accordingly, one student, Gen'ichirō, is recorded as doing nothing but practicing the single horizontal line for the number "one," making sure of the proper form and attitude. Taking on a private student was unusual, however, as the master repeatedly turned students down and did not run regular training sessions. He did not take fees for teaching, but he occasionally did call his apprentices and family members together to lecture them on love poems from *Hyakunin isshu,* teach them folk songs, and chant ballads from *nō* plays.

He owned scholarly books, mainly of the Nativist persuasion, and several hours of his day were apt to be spent reading *Nihon shoki* or other works in the tradition of pristine Japanese learning. In addition, he did archery and played the classical flute. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, the family living quarters had become a well-known gathering place, a small-town cultural salon for Nativist studies, *waka* poetry, and above all calligraphy. It was also a center for gossip about the rich people of Kyoto and Osaka, a place for consultation on town matters such as fire prevention, and a haven where locals fled to request financial support for themselves or their relatives.

Particularly striking is the diary's lack of attention to business activities.

Figure 10. Merchant diary, “Ohinamichō,” Mukō City, 1815. Courtesy of Mukō City Kyōiku Iinkai.

Much of the family business seems to have been left to the four or five apprentices or relatives in the household. Consultations with townspeople were frequent, and it is clear that the master was a person of great local importance. But it is equally apparent that his main interests and passions were study and calligraphy. When they did appear in the diary (no more than five or six times over a period of six months), references to household finance, bookkeeping, and borrowing or lending money unfailingly involved the master's wife.

The wife's main activities, in addition to visiting relatives or temples and shrines, related to the business and finance of the shop and the home. A typical reference to the wife is this notation for the 5th day of the Third Month of 1815: "Calligraphy in Ichi no Ma from 8 a.m. At 3 p.m. the master scrutinized old account books in the Waki no Ma with his wife. He then studied from dusk until bedtime." Then again over a period of three days in the Sixth Month, there was a sudden flurry of record keeping. "2nd day: Calligraphy from 8 a.m. At ten the master went over accounts with his wife in the San no Ma. In the evening he visited Mukō Jinja [the local shrine]. 3rd day: Calligraphy from 8 a.m. At ten the master again went over accounts with his wife. 4th day: Calligraphy from 8 a.m. From eleven the master went over accounts with his wife."

Clearly this wife's role in household management was central. It included keeping the complicated financial accounts of a family involved in local enterprise and a wide range of charitable work, lending money to relatives and friends, financing local projects, and so forth. Nevertheless, her presence is never emphasized or highlighted. It is quite possible that the bookkeeping and financial functions of women in wealthy and entrepreneurial provincial families had become a routine matter extending back at least to the seventeenth century (recall the cipher of the merchant mother in Kyoto). It had in all likelihood become regularized and standardized to the point where wifely business acumen and facility with accounts was not seen as warranting anything more than passing mention in records of nineteenth-century merchant families.

Unlike many provincial *bunjin,* the master of Tobaya did not take in many regular students and often rejected the earnest pleas of mothers that he give special instruction to their children. Even if the Tobaya master successfully resisted the mixed pleasures of tutoring children, it is true that one of the most important roles played by local men of culture in the nineteenth century was as patrons and teachers of local writing schools.

In terms of popular literacy and learning, nothing distinguishes the nineteenth century from the eighteenth century more than the surge of interest in popular writing schools in the new century's first half. The diary of the Ozawa family from Ono Village in Shinano Province (now Nagano Prefecture) covers three generations of village headmen schoolteachers from the middle of the

eighteenth to the late nineteenth century. It helps to illustrate important changes in the activities of provincial literati over this period, particularly their assumption of the function of patrons and teachers of local writing schools.[29]

Like many provincial literati families, the Ozawa began the Tokugawa period with economic and social advantages that they used to attain cultural prominence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1582, after defeating the Takeda daimyo family, which had dominated Shinano in the sixteenth century, the hegemon Oda Nobunaga had assigned the area to Tokugawa Ieyasu. The Ozawa family, which had samurai roots, relinquished their warrior status at the time of Toyotomi Hideyoshi's separation of warriors and commoners in the 1590s. Like many former retainers of the defeated Takeda, the Ozawa family chose to remain as farmers on the land where they would remain rural leaders and be well-situated. They were in a position to maintain power in the village in spite of a change in status by securing a hereditary hold on the position of headman.

As in most rural areas, village schools were virtually unknown in Shinano until the nineteenth century. Children from privileged families were educated at home by family members or a tutor. In exceptional circumstances, they were sent away to study in the cities, as in the case of the Kikuchi and Yoshida families. Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, the Ozawa made a concerted effort to invest in formal education outside the home. A younger brother traveled to Kyoto to learn poetry, and an older brother was sent to Nagoya to study medicine. Another son was sent away to learn *nō,* Shinto, flower arrangement, and poetry from a series of private teachers in southern and northern Shinano. All these cultural pursuits went far beyond the more practical vocational needs of the previous century's village headmen.

By the middle of the eighteenth century cultural and aesthetic pursuits had become vocational necessities for the rural leadership class. In a word, culture was one means of preserving status in the village. Contacts with other village leaders as well as city dwellers could be initiated and maintained through scholarly activities, and eighteenth-century *bunjin* did just that. Beginning in the eighteenth century, and increasingly so in the nineteenth, extensive connections and networking within regions and with urban areas became essential to the commercial, political, and social welfare of this class. As a result of the popular demand for rudimentary literacy, careers as schoolteachers became part of the support mechanisms for the village leadership.

The Ozawa neither became *haikai* poets nor pursued Chinese studies, and they did not take the Nativist route to politics, as Shimazaki Tōson's father did in the nearby Kiso region of the same province. The Ozawa men became village teachers, although it took several generations for them to establish

themselves in full-time teaching careers. Ozawa Shisan became a teacher as early as 1750, but probably not on a full-time basis, as demand was still very limited. His son Kameharu was hired as a teacher by several villages at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when schooling for commoners was expanding. In Shinano alone, thirty new schools were opened each year, ten times the rate as when Shisan began.[30] Even so, the number of students was so small that four or five families from the village had to band together to supplement his income. Brian Platt persuasively argues that this "suggests that the number of teachers increased due to the efforts of village elites before the general population began demanding formal schooling."[31] Eventually, the number of students increased to around forty, but they came from at least six different villages, with only a handful from each village. In other words, even at the beginning of the nineteenth century, ordinary farmers did not experience a local surge of interest in writing schools. In fact, Platt concludes that Kameharu's school was quite exclusive, taught by a village notable and attended by the children of the wealthier parents, who wanted their offspring to achieve a certain level of literary and aesthetic expertise.[32]

By the time of Ozawa Shisan's grandson Watoku at the middle of the nineteenth century, the environment had changed substantially, and a career and livelihood as a village teacher were distinct possibilities for an educated member of the village elite. From the 1830s, the number of new schools increased dramatically, more than a hundred a year in Shinano. Presumably, the constituency had broadened, extending beyond the village leadership to the middle and possibly even the lower levels of the populace. Platt suggests that Watoku's journals for the last years of the Tokugawa era show that "many" of the children attending local writing schools did not come from the wealthier families. But this proposition is far from clear, and many ancillary issues concerning popular literacy and schooling in this period are no clearer. Why did the lower orders begin to attend? What did they take out of the experience? Is it generally true that as late as the Tenpō period, writing schools were primarily for children of the village elite? If so, why did village leaders hold off training others so long? What exactly did exposure to writing schools mean in terms of literacy skills? Did periods of attendance at the village schools continue to reflect class or status distinctions (rudimentary literacy for the poor, functional for the wealthy), as Platt suggests?[33] Or did school attendance break down the "two cultures" characteristic of village society in an earlier period? In short, what exactly is known about the dynamics of school attendance in the first half of the nineteenth century? What role did village leaders play? And how did their roles influence the spread of popular literacy to the broad mass of farmers and the inhabitants of small towns?

The Writing School Debates

No subject has attracted so much attention in the history of Japanese education as the measurement of school attendance beginning roughly in the Bunka-Bunsei era (1804–1830). As a result, there is a huge accumulation of school attendance records for the early modern and modern periods. What do school attendance data have to say about the dynamics of popular literacy in early modern Japan, and what do they not? The issue is complex. A brief overview of the work of Japanese scholars may help to clarify it.

Although not the first study of popular education in Japan, Ishikawa Ken's 1929 work *Nihon shomin kyōiku shi* was undoubtedly the most influential.[34] Ishikawa set out mainly to dissociate popular writing schools of the Tokugawa period—commonly referred to as *terakoya,* alluding to their medieval origins in Buddhist temples[35]—from their beginnings in the Middle Ages and to emphasize their secular, local, and popular character. He viewed these institutions as pre-eminently rooted in local circumstances, reflecting the needs of towns and villages throughout Japan during the Tokugawa era. He further believed that, as such, writing schools reflected a popular energy as well as a drive for independence and autonomy that was part of the spread of a commercial economy in the countryside. Therefore, Ishikawa argued, these schools eventually became important precursors of the modern society that emerged in the Meiji period.

Although his views became the subject of much debate among later scholars, Ishikawa's most important contribution to the history of Japanese education was to set the field of study firmly on an empirical and scientific footing it had lacked until his time. A large part of his effort in this regard centered on calculating attendance rates during the Tokugawa period on the basis of Meiji government surveys of prefectures in 1883. The survey results were reported in the "terakoya" (writing school) and "shijuku" (private academy) charts in volume 9 of *Nihon kyōiku shi shiryō,* the vast collection of sources of Japanese educational history compiled by the Ministry of Education.[36] Ishikawa's extensive analysis of these data, including calculations of total numbers attending school and breakdowns of the figures by gender, region, and period, influenced generations of Japanese scholars to move their studies in a quantitative direction. Ishikawa's work almost certainly was behind Ronald Dore's reliance on *Nihon kyōiku shi shiryō* in making his famous estimates of 40 percent male and 15 percent female school attendance by the end of the Tokugawa period.[37] Although Dore himself made no claim for his data reflecting literacy, his came to be viewed as the best available literacy estimates for premodern

Japan. The same year, using different survey data compiled by Ototake Iwazō, Herbert Passin linked almost identical estimates of schoolgoing directly to literacy rates.[38]

The publication of figures for national literacy based on attendance at writing schools in premodern Japan encouraged local Japanese historians to discover new schools in the hope of upping the literacy rates for their areas. Since 1965, local historians, often in preparation for their centennial histories, have uncovered hundreds of previously undocumented writing schools, amounting to thousands of new schools nationwide. In Toyama, where *Nihon kyōiku shi shiryō* recorded only seventeen schools, 350 were discovered in the 1980s. More recently, in a survey undertaken for a public television (NHK) broadcast on Tokugawa schooling, Umemura Kayo charted thousands of writing schools undocumented in the Meiji government survey. In Nagano, where 1,341 were reported by *Nihon kyōiku shi shiryō,* 6,163 were newly identified. In Aichi, where *Nihon kyōiku shi shiryō* showed 977 writing schools, new studies showed 4,111, and so forth.[39] If one simply links more institutions with higher national rates of literacy, it would be justifiable to raise Dore's and Passin's estimates of literacy considerably.

But direct correlations between increased numbers of popular writing schools and higher rates of literacy are problematic for several reasons. First, writing schools opened and closed with great frequency. Some lasted for years, others a few weeks only, so total numbers alone are an unreliable guide to the availability of schooling over an extended period. How much exposure to school one had could be an indicator of the achieved level of literacy if attendance was regular over a period of time. In rural areas attendance was seasonal—up in winter, when there was little farmwork to do, and down during the seasons of planting and harvesting. In other words, the number of those who signed up to attend is not an accurate indicator of actual skills learned. Second, the attendance data are based on registration lists, and these often did not distinguish between casual guests at a teacher's home and bona fide students. Finally, even if registration data do provide a general sense of school enrollments, they do not give sufficient information on how long students stayed, what levels of instruction they reached, or what sort of skills they took away with them.

It may be, too, that even those students who attended faithfully did not gain much from the experience. One student who entered a new elementary school in 1872, a converted Buddhist temple that could not have been much different from a Tokugawa-period writing school, recalled that "in the Eighth Month of Meiji 5 (September 1872), the School Law was promulgated and I entered school. I must have been eight at the time. The school was in a temple

in our village. The main hall was used as a classroom. Desks were lined up on the wooden floor in front of the Buddhist altar, and we sat on cushions. Although we were supposed to be doing penmanship *(tenarai),* we mostly just fooled around, painting one another's faces black with ink and playing ghost behind the altar."[40]

On the other hand, in individual cases even minimal involvement with a teacher at a formative age can have transforming consequences for an ambitious student who has access to books. One need only recall that Abraham Lincoln's formal schooling in southern Indiana in the early nineteenth century was haphazard and did not amount in the aggregate to one year.[41]

The real problem with Tokugawa attendance data is that even when the numbers of institutions and numbers of students attending them are known, the important questions of the quality of learning pursued and the levels of skills attained in those institutions remain unanswered. Dore himself reflected on the problems in an article written some years after his book came out: "A book I once wrote on education in Tokugawa Japan will be quoted for one thing and one thing only: R. Dore estimates (or sometimes calculates; or sometimes, baldly, 'states') that in 1870, 40 to 50 percent of Japanese boys and 10 to 15 percent of girls were attending school. Apart from the fact that when I recently had occasion to go over the estimates, I found it hard to follow the logic of the reasoning which led to this guess, I have come to realize in recent years that the fault was as much mine as my readers' for putting so much emphasis on the *amount* of education that went on in Japan in the mid nineteenth century. It is the *kind* of education that went on which deserves greater attention."[42] While Professor Dore is being overly modest about his classic work, the suggestion to turn the focus of literacy study from quantity to quality is helpful.

The Japanese preference for quantitative studies of school attendance is not Ishikawa Ken's only legacy. Two of his major themes unleashed vigorous debates that erupted after World War II and continued to dominate debates on education history well into the 1970s. The first was writing schools as precursors of modernity. The other was writing schools as unique expressions of the commoners' culture, representing a drive to improve one's life chances, a popular "energy" directed from the bottom up and distinct from any top-down inducements. Challenges to these views—and support for them—have to a large extent defined the issues in writing on Japanese educational history for much of the postwar period.

While Ishikawa generally supported the idea of writing schools as "portents of modernity," as did Dore and Passin, others have raised challenges to that notion. Hirooka Ryōzō believed that beginning with Shogun Yoshimune

in the eighteenth century, authorities had used popular schools mainly for the purpose of strengthening the traditional feudal state. In this view, the rise of writing schools reflected less a modern trend than a traditional feudal practice.[43] Tsuda Hideo, a harsh critic of Ishikawa, saw writing schools as an integral part of the conglomerate feudal state, reflecting the educational imperatives of authorities rather than the aspirations of plain folk.[44] Shibata Hajime also argued that village leaders used writing schools to re-establish a tradition of communal ties and to lessen resistance among lower farmers during a period of "feudal crisis" at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century.[45] More recently, Brian Platt has suggested that village leaders supported local schools because the content of the curriculum stressed diligence, obedience, filial piety, and so forth—virtues that served their effort to maintain order.[46]

On the other hand, a number of established scholars (see the discussion of Aoki Michio and Takahashi Satoshi below) have built careers arguing that the spread of writing schools reflected a growing sense of independence and autonomy among the commoners. Some specialists in educational history have long supported this view. In observing the Tenpō period's spurt of popular writing schools, Komatsu Shūkichi saw a desire by urban merchants and upper-level farmers to break out of restrictions placed upon them by the feudal order.[47] Ishijima Tsuneo went even further, arguing that as the economic and political conditions in villages worsened toward the end of the Tokugawa era, writing schools often acted not just independently of feudal authority but also in opposition to it and in conflict with its schemes.[48] Both Komatsu and Ishijima viewed writing schools of the late Tokugawa period as institutions representing the desires of commoners for greater, more modern, and less class-based opportunities.

Similarly, the 1995 NHK documentary referred to earlier, which was composed and edited by some of Japan's leading historians of education,[49] strongly implied that the distinction between contemporary support for public education and the rise of popular schooling in the Edo period was essentially seamless ("it all began back there"). This docudrama emphasized the grassroots initiatives of the writing school phenomenon that reflected purely local energies and needs. Thus, the bottom-up/top-down argument continues and the debate over the "modernity" of Tokugawa schools, initiated by Ishikawa Ken, goes on.

If anything, Ishikawa's idea that writing schools reflected particular local circumstances garnered even greater scholarly support. Early empirical studies based on national surveys tended to obscure this facet of Ishikawa's work, but during the 1980s and 1990s there was an outpouring of detailed case stud-

ies of individual writing schools that pointed to enormous diversity among institutions precisely because they were so embedded in local contexts.

Among the best qualitative accounts of writing schools is that of Tone Keizaburō, who distinguished types of popular writing schools in the Kantō region according to the socioeconomic circumstances of their localities and came up with three categories. The first was the simple and more traditional village, where leaders with economic and political power clearly dominated local culture. The second was the post station village (like that of Shimazaki Tōson's father Hanzō), where some farmers benefited from commerce and communications brought along major roadways and may have attended writing schools at the end of the Tokugawa period. The third type in Tone's scheme was the village actively engaged in commercially based agriculture, where education had spread to middle and possibly even lower peasants. Tone found 20 percent school attendance in traditional farming villages, 38 percent in post town types, and a 50 to 70 percent turnout in commercially active villages. Tone's work was one of the first to establish a link between writing school attendance and socioeconomic circumstances of a village or town, doing so through extensive local documentation.[50]

Tone found school attendance to be dependent on the economic circumstances of a village or town. Irie Hiroshi, however, looked at changes over time, studying villages in what is now Tochigi Prefecture, also in the Kantō region. He found that the 1830s, the first ten years of the Tenpō period, were the turning point in the dynamics of popular learning. Until then, village leaders took it upon themselves to provide basic education to the children of the village elite as part of their sense of civic duty. This function lay entirely outside the feudal authority structure; rather, it derived from a paternalistic sense of responsibility to others of the same stratum of educated commoners. This view coincides with Platt's argument that writing schools, at least early in the nineteenth century, were essentially run by and for members of the village elite.

In response to the economic dislocations of the Tenpō period, popular education in villages of the Kantō region became "professionalized," according to Irie. With increased demand from villagers for practical literacy for their children, full-time teachers were hired for local schools from outside the village. The constituencies of schools also changed as trained teachers attracted students not just from one village but from villages throughout a region. By the 1830s, the idea of the village-centered writing school with local leaders patronizing and teaching other elite commoner children from the locality was gone.[51]

By the 1980s, historians of education like Tone and Irie had begun to move away from Ishikawa's quantitative methods, adopting a more structural and functional approach to local schooling. In the 1990s, the initiatives in pur-

suing the spread of popular culture were taken by social and cultural historians whose interests extended beyond schools and education. They wrote extensively on the problem of *moji shakai,* literally "lettered society," which generally has to do with the spread of print and documents. Their work on the penetration of print to the countryside has tended to reinforce the view that farmers of the Tokugawa era were energized and active participants in improving their life chances by championing and defending themselves in a wide variety of activities that literacy made possible.

Aoki Michio, a prolific scholar, has looked at the many ways that written documents penetrated the remotest villages during the Tokugawa period. His work on the spread of written instruments suggests that all levels of Tokugawa society, including women and children, were affected.[52] In his most comprehensive piece on literacy he has touched on urban literacy and learning at the end of the Tokugawa era, the writings of itinerant poets like Kobayashi Issa, peasant rebellions and political literacy, and the roles of provincial literati—all with an eye to describing literacy-related cultural activities that emerged from local people rather than at the initiative of feudal authorities.[53]

From a slightly different angle, Takahashi Satoshi has emphasized the role of popular schools and literacy in putting power in the hands of ordinary farmers. As evidence of local writing schools in the Kantō area, Takahashi has extensively used grave markers erected by children to honor their teachers *(fudeko zuka).* Including the names of students engraved on these monuments vastly elevates the number of children getting some kind of rudimentary education as the Tokugawa era drew to its conclusion. Takahashi's investigations show schooling extending to all classes in villages of Kantō by the period's end. Of particular interest is his estimate of the roles of village leaders who patronized writing schools during the Tenpō period as a way of enhancing discipline and frugality in response to economic turmoil.[54]

Currently, in the most salutary development in educational history in decades, a number of younger scholars are picking up the methods and ideas of the best social historians and are applying them to the history of education in Japan. Stimulated by Western studies of literacy, they are raising questions about established approaches to popular learning in premodern Japan and breaking new ground in the study of literacy. Kimura Masanobu and Yakuwa Tomohiro, working outside the traditional centers of educational history in Japan (Kimura in Kyushu and Yakuwa in Niigata), are breathing new life into a nearly moribund field of study. Both have broken away from the quantitative study of schooling to probe the qualitative aspects of literacy in premodern Japan. Yakuwa has written an extensive review of literacy studies in Japan, not only surveying the past and present scholarship related to literacy in Japan but

raising important issues for further study.[55] In a recently published essay, he analyzes new data on the ability to sign.[56] These data, which deal with Yamaguchi Prefecture during the early Meiji period, provide more detail than are extant for any locality with the exception of Osaka (see epilogue).

Kimura Masanobu was the first to raise the possibility of using personal marks on registers of religious affiliation *(shūmon aratame-chō)* and apostasy oaths for the measurement of literacy in early modern Japan (see chapter 2). In addition, through in-depth case studies of writing schools in the Chikugo area of Fukuoka in southwestern Japan, he has described historical patterns of their development that differ substantially from that of Irie's Tochigi schools in the eastern region. Like Irie, Kimura found that by the 1830s, teachers in Chikugo were establishing schools to make a living and students were coming to those schools from outside a particular village. That is, there were hints of the "professional" development that Irie found so pervasive in Tochigi. Nevertheless, from Kimura's research it appears that the key historical turning point for writing schools occurred much later in rural Kyushu than in Tochigi.

In Chikugo the major shift away from village schools for the elite to popular schools for all occurred only in 1860, when, in response to economic and political threats to traditional village life, writing schools were set up by village leaders who sought to protect their communities as well as their own status in the village. Despite the belated widening of the constituency, Kimura argues, the post-1860 schools were characterized by clear-cut status distinctions between the middle-to-lower-level children who sought basic literacy and the learned village leaders who taught them.[57]

Kimura's analysis suggests that at least in some areas, the commitment of the highly literate and cultured village leadership group to broad-based education for all came very late in the Tokugawa period. It indicates, too, that at least in the more remote parts of the country, social distinctions reflecting great disparities in the attainment of literacy remained despite the rapid growth of writing schools. Thus the "two cultures" that characterized farming villages during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries remained firmly entrenched in the rural parts of the country. Writing schools may in fact have solidified the distinctions between higher and lower culture in some villages rather than bringing them closer together.

Writing School Enrollment Patterns

Great regional variation marked the rise of popular writing schools throughout the Tokugawa era. Schools had spread virtually everywhere in Japan by the

end of the period, but their distribution was uneven. There were concentrations of schools in urban areas such as Osaka, Edo, and Kyoto, as well as in certain provinces, such as Nagato in westernmost Honshu and Nagano in central Japan. Other areas, such as Kagoshima in the extreme southwest and Echigo in the northeast, had comparatively few.[58] Generally speaking, the more remote areas had fewer schools. City schools were larger and more systematic, and attendance at them was more regular than at country schools, where the requirements of agricultural work for children were the highest priority. All the data on late Tokugawa writing schools nationwide show that attendance was not uniform throughout the country and there were vast geographical disparities in access to schools.

Different patterns of school attendance between the sexes and among the social classes are also evident in writing school enrollment data. Table 4 shows the number of females enrolled at writing schools per 100 males both in urban areas (where numbers are higher) and rural areas (where they are lower). The numbers suggest extreme variations between urban and rural female school attendance at the end of the Tokugawa period.

Table 5 shows a similar calculation of female enrollment at writing schools within the city of Edo. Evident are differing patterns of enrollment by residential area according to social class. In the predominantly merchant areas, females attended schools at nearly the male rates (94.8 females to 100 males). The farming areas of the metropolis sent a lower percentage but still a relatively high proportion for the Tokugawa period. Looking at the percentages for farmers in both Tables 4 and 5, the urban-rural differences are dramatic, with 63.8 calculated for Edo as opposed to only 2.1 for Akita (a remote northeastern region presumed to be mostly inhabited by farmers). Table 5 indicates clear class differences in enrollment but shows also that regional differences were even more compelling. That is, the school enrollment figures among females

TABLE 4 Female Enrollment at Writing Schools by Region

	Region	*Female Enrollment at Writing Schools (Per 100 Males)*
	Tokyo	88.7
Highest	Kyoto	74.4
	Osaka	53.4
	Aomori	4.9
Lowest	Kumamoto	4.1
	Akita	2.1

TABLE 5 Female Enrollment at Writing Schools by Class

Residential Area of Edo (Tokyo)	*Female Enrollment at Writing Schools (Per 100 Males)*
Predominantly merchant	94.8
Mixed merchant and samurai	82.8
Predominantly samurai	73.3
Predominantly farmer	63.8

Source: Data in Tables 4 and 5 adapted from materials in Fukaya Masashi, *Gakurekishugi no keifu* (Nagoya: Reimei Shobō, 1969), 46–48.

of the farm population in Edo approximated those of samurai children much more closely than they did those of other farmers' daughters in rural areas such as Akita, Aomori, or Kumamoto.

Conclusion

To consider the nineteenth century's continuities with the past is important in evaluating the ideas and attitudes of the commoners no less than of the feudal authorities regarding popular education. Although provincial literati had appeared in the eighteenth century, by the nineteenth entirely new types had emerged. These included highly literate and cultured commoners not just in the suburbs but from the remotest parts of the country. Newly emergent rural literati also included political activists, women whose literacy skills supported their family businesses, and merchants who had become more or less full-time men of culture.

What really distinguishes the nineteenth from the eighteenth century in terms of popular learning and culture is the rise of popular writing schools. Although these schools were so makeshift and unsystematic that their enrollment data are unreliable even as measures of basic literacy, the quantitative and qualitative work done on these schools by Japanese scholars provides an essential context for understanding literacy patterns.

In terms of access to writing schools, geography clearly mattered. Proximity to urban areas, access to roads and means of communication, and commercial activity could stimulate interest in writing schools both among farmers (seeking access to better lives) and their leaders (often in the interest of quelling complaints and disturbances). The patronage of village schools by the educated upper crust was apparently shaped in large measure—both in terms

of how early they were opened and who attended—by geographical concerns, as the case studies of Tochigi in eastern Japan and Chikugo in Kyushu have shown.

Gender mattered, even if it is entirely neglected by Tone and other authors, and so did class. Where extant, Tokugawa-period school enrollment data show far fewer opportunities for women, particularly in rural areas. But in merchant-dominated areas of big cities, women enrolled at writing schools at a far higher rate than their rural sisters, higher even than the rate for many rural males, and virtually on a par with the rate for males of the merchant class.

By themselves, official data on writing school enrollments in the Tokugawa period are an insufficient indicator of the skills attained by their students. To be sure, they do provide an index of disparities by region, gender, and class for schooling. As such they form an essential context for studies of the development of literacy. To understand the nature of literacy in Japan during the first half of the nineteenth century, however, more direct measures of what skills were actually attained must be adduced.

5

Direct Measures of Popular Literacy in the Nineteenth Century

The intent of this chapter is to go beyond school attendance records and analyze data on actual skills of lower-level farmers, middle- to lower-class urbanites, and rural women. Systematic national data for assessing literacy and illiteracy rates only become available in the 1890s and that material is described in the epilogue. The assessment here is based on observations by foreign visitors, a village literacy survey, and village election ballots, and it concludes by looking at two groups whose literacy and cultural lives have eluded extended examination up to now—small farmers and women.

Foreign Observers

The travel literature of Europeans and Americans who flocked to Japan following the opening of the country to travelers after 1856 has never been adequately explored for what it reveals about the literacy of ordinary people.[1] The ability of Japanese to read and write was one of the things that struck these early travelers, and they often noted it. Their contacts were necessarily of a limited kind, and their accounts, impressionistic as they often are, may reveal more about their comparative framework than about the reality on the ground in Japan, but they do provide direct and corroborating witness to some of the major issues under discussion in this book. In any event, the foreigners' first-person narratives provide an otherwise unseen perspective on popular literacy.

Friedrich Albrecht Graf zu Eulenburg (1815–1881) visited Japan at the end of the Tokugawa period as part of an official Prussian government mission.

He was impressed by the pervasive spread of books and bookstores in Edo, commenting on that phenomenon with some astonishment: "In their spare time the first thing that Japanese of all classes do is read. In bookstores not only are there Japanese and Chinese books, but books on geography, customs, astronomy, and other natural sciences. One also sees translations of European books on medicine, military arts, strategy and so on. Bookstores line the streets wherever you go and books are unbelievably inexpensive. The large number of them for sale suggests that they are probably read."[2]

Edward Sylvester Morse, employed as a scientist by the Meiji government between 1877 and 1883, observed that books were circulated in Tokyo by door-to-door runners who carried libraries with them, a practice that had been common in the cities for some time: "One sees often on the streets a man with a huge pack on his back; this pack covered by a blue cloth reminding one of a hand organ. The bundle is a large stack of books; in truth, a circulating library. The books are carried everywhere, and as there is no illiteracy in Japan these books go to every house, new books being left and old ones taken away."[3] (See Figure 9, page 84.)

Henry Faulds (1843–1930), a Scottish medical missionary and amateur scientist, lived in Japan from 1874 to 1886 and helped establish education for the blind in Japan. While examining finger marks on pieces of ancient pottery uncovered by Morse at the Ōmori archaeological site in Tokyo, Faulds helped develop the fingerprint technology first introduced into police work by Scotland Yard in 1901. His writings on Japan and his remarks on learning and literacy are fairly typical of the times: "During my whole residence in Japan I was meeting daily with large numbers from the lower strata of the people, but I can only recall one or two clear instances in my experience of Japanese people having been unable to read and write. The fact struck me very much even in the first year of my sojourn that the people have all had at least a fair elementary education. On the authority of the American Consul General Van Buren, and which my limited experience quite confirms, the smallest peasant farmers can nearly all read, write, and keep accounts."[4]

Aimé Humbert (1819–1900), minister plenipotentiary of the Swiss Republic, who resided in Japan from 1863 to 1864, was equally struck by the early Meiji education system. He commented in 1874 in a similar vein: "No one ever thinks of depriving his child of the benefits of instruction. There are no scholastic rules, no measures of coercion for recalcitrant parents, and nevertheless the whole adult population can read, write, and calculate. There is something estimable in the pedagogic regime of Japan."[5]

What these observers and many others like them saw were the results of at least a century of development: the widespread exchange of books in Japa-

nese cities and the high levels of literacy among those with whom they were most likely to associate, that is, townspeople and government officials. But they also stretched their views to cover those, like the "smallest peasant," with whom they probably had little if any contact. Ranald MacDonald (1824–1894) concluded on the basis of his limited experience on the remote coast of Hokkaido, where he was cast away in 1848 and kept as a prisoner until he returned to America in 1849, that "all persons in Japan—men, women, and children of all classes from highest to lowest carry—or have at hand borne for them—paper, pen (brush) and ink. All are educated to read and write: and the people, even the lower classes, habitually write—their communications by letter being more general than among ourselves."[6]

The Russian captain Vasilii Mikhailovich Golovnin (1776–1831) spent three years in captivity in Japan from 1811 to 1813, but nevertheless had high praise for the Japanese. Observing that the soldiers who guarded him liked to read, he generalized about the entire nation: "In respect to the degree of knowledge to be found in the people, the Japanese, comparing one nation with another, are the most enlightened people in the world. Every Japanese is able to read and write, and knows the laws of his country."[7]

Eulenberg's claim that "all classes" in Japan read, Morse's diagnosis of "no illiteracy in Japan," Humbert's reference to the literacy of the "whole adult population," MacDonald's assertion that "all are educated to read and write," and Golovnin's declaration that "[e]very Japanese is able to read and write," may have been exaggerations intended to make a point. Maybe such comments reflected how stunned these observers were at Japan's rapid advances. Or perhaps they were inspired by the all-too-natural desire to stimulate reform in one's own society by exaggerating successes elsewhere (a phenomenon that reappeared in writings on Japanese education in the 1970s). That these observers may have been stretching the point does not invalidate their reports of widespread literacy, particularly among the urban population. But there is no doubt that their view of the spread of literacy in Japan was overly generalized.

Following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, steps were taken to abolish the decentralized structure of the Tokugawa polity and construct a centrally controlled unified national state. Great effort was put into ending the disparities in school enrollment that had characterized the Tokugawa period. In July of 1871 an Office of Education was established, and within a year a Fundamental Code of Education (Gakusei) that included compulsory school attendance was imposed uniformly on the entire country. But for some time attendance beyond a year or so was low and dropouts continued to be a problem. Prefectural data for 1874 show the persistence of regional disparities that had marked the Tokugawa period. The larger cities and areas such as Nagano showed strikingly high

attendance, whereas the turnout in the country's northeastern and southwestern extremities was very low.[8]

Gender distinctions in school attendance persisted far beyond the time when these observers were on the scene. In 1878, while Tokyo and Osaka had comparatively high female school enrollments (56.4 percent and 66.8 percent), Aomori and Kagoshima were low (6.6 percent and 10.4 percent respectively). The graph of school enrollment exhibits an upward slope from 1873 until 1905, when male and female rates reached nearly universal levels.[9] The realities of school attendance (and almost certainly basic literacy) for females, in particular, were more complex.[10] Hijikata Sonoko's meticulous study of school attendance in a single village in Nagano Prefecture between 1899 and the 1930s shows that although virtually all children were enrolling in schools by 1905, girls were dropping out after only a year or two to join the newly emerging industrial labor force as factory workers. In 1920 this pattern abruptly changed when factory owners began making graduation from lower elementary school a requirement for employment.[11] Thus, in this particular village (and probably elsewhere as well) universal literacy should probably be pushed back from 1905, the date of universal enrollment, to about 1920, when actual attendance included nearly everyone.

It is not surprising that there was a gap between the levels of literacy that actually prevailed in Japan around the middle of the nineteenth century and the observations of foreign visitors. Clearly they were impressed with what they saw of book publishing and the reading habits of ordinary citizens. There are dangers, however, in taking their comments too literally. The most egregious misrepresentations are probably those of Heinrich Schliemann (1822–1890), whose comments have been used by at least one author to confirm high literacy rates in Japan around 1865.[12] Schliemann, a German archaeologist who was to become famous as the discoverer of the ancient city of Troy, wrote a little-known travel diary of his trip to China and Japan while still a young man. It was published in French in 1867 and has been translated into Japanese, but never into English. In an entry dated June 29, 1865, Schliemann had this to say: "If one means by the word 'civilization' material civilization, then I would say that the Japanese are very civilized because they reached the highest degree of perfection in the technical arts without the aid of steam engines. Furthermore, education is even more widespread than in the most civilized nations of Europe, and whereas all the other nations of Asia, even the Chinese, have left their women in total ignorance, there isn't in Japan any man or woman who doesn't know how to read and write in his country's language in characters both Japanese and Chinese."[13]

Schliemann, who visited Edo in 1865 after a disastrous trip to China,

had immediately become enamored of things Japanese and raved about Japan while denigrating the Chinese. The China section of Schliemann's travelogue has been carefully analyzed by Robert Payne, who believes the work as a whole to be full of inaccuracies and wild speculations, most of which could have been verified for accuracy had the author only tried. In Beijing, Schliemann described the remains of white granite paving stones, the ruins of ancient sewers everywhere, mutilated cornices of columns, pieces of sculpture half buried in the mud, and magnificent granite bridges in ruins. In other words, this was an ancient civilization in ruins. But according to Payne, none of these things had ever been there, and Schliemann's observations on Beijing are instructive only because "they show the manner of man he was: in love with ruins, seeing them even when they were not there, hasty in judgment and not unusually inquisitive. A few years later, when engaged in excavating Troy, he would improvise theories in the same reckless way."[14] His views on Japanese literacy also seem exaggerated and even fanciful, reflecting what he wished to see rather than what he probably did see.

A useful contemporary corrective to the fancies of Western writers in the late Tokugawa era and the early Meiji period is a statement about how well the school-age population was doing with the Japanese language at the turn of the twentieth century made by one in a position to know—Kikuchi Dairoku, minister of education from 1901 to 1903:

> The result of four years' education with an average child in an average school is such that it is able to read, though perhaps not with very great facility, what is written in either form of *kana,* and also to write in it simple things that it may wish to say. The trouble, however, is that as almost everything is written with admixture of Chinese ideographs, and as children learn only 500 of them, they cannot read most ordinary prints. This is still the case, after they have passed through the higher elementary course, and in a less degree even with those who have received a secondary education. This is the reason why in newspapers and others written for popular reading, there are generally put by the side of Chinese ideographs their Japanese sounds or meanings in *kana.* I have no doubt that such a state of things cannot last very long in this busy world and that the Chinese ideographs commonly used must become less and less, even if we do not come at once to use Roman letters.[15]

Kikuchi's prediction of the eventual reduction of the number of Chinese characters in common use was right, but it did not become true until after World War II. His description of the difficulties children had in reading and writing their own language after four (or more) years of school, thirty years after the national system was imposed, is undoubtedly more accurate for the

country as a whole than the observations of foreign visitors. Yet despite the excessive language sometimes employed by foreign observers of the late Tokugawa and early Meiji educational scene, they do provide a useful perspective on culture, education, and literacy patterns in the major cities to which they were largely restricted. Books were circulating in large quantities and many children (including girls) of the urban middle and lower classes were in all likelihood attending writing schools, although data on working-class school attendance is hard to come by. One recent study of a writing school in the small castle town of Murakami in northern Echigo (now part of Niigata Prefecture), however, provides confirmation of how early and how far down the social scale school attendance could have been even in smaller cities in rural areas.[16]

In 1737, Isobe Junken inherited from his father a school that had first opened during the Kyōhō period (1716–1735). The attendance register recorded 1,181 names between 1738 and 1790 for an average of about twenty-three per year. Residential maps indicating the occupations of households in the Aramachi and Komachi sections of the town make it possible to trace school attendance by family occupation. In 1760, 45 percent of households in Aramachi and 64 percent of households in Komachi sent children to the school. These included children of *tatami* makers, carpenters, dyers, lamp oil dealers, clothiers, innkeepers, *sake* dealers, tub makers, hardware store owners, paper makers, candle makers, pharmacists, and confectioners.

Children of day laborers had the lowest percentage of school attendance. In Aramachi there were twenty such households, and only four sent children to the school. In Komachi one of three day laborer households sent children to the school. But it is noteworthy that five out of twenty-three households at the low end of the urban social scale—that is, 22 percent—sent children to school as early as the middle of the eighteenth century.[17] The register makes it clear that a broad spectrum of artisans and small store owners were investing in their children's education. This being the case, it is not unreasonable to expect that a high percentage of the urban working class was sending children to writing schools over a century later, when foreign observers wrote their impressions.

Tokiwa Village Literacy Survey

Although reports from foreign observers point to widespread literacy among the urban middle and working classes, they are not valid scientific samples. And as has been noted repeatedly, school attendance prior to the implementation of compulsory education in 1872 (at the earliest) is not a good direct measure of skills attained. Much more reliable is a survey aimed at measuring

actual skill levels of a limited sample of Japanese in the late Tokugawa and early Meiji years.

In 1881 a literacy test was given to all 882 males in the village of Tokiwa in the Kita Azumi district of what is now Nagano Prefecture in central Japan.[18] The test results are extremely suggestive because, unlike other literacy surveys undertaken by the Meiji government (see epilogue), this test provided more than competencies measured by school grade. It ranked examinees by specific levels of skill in a six-stage hierarchy defined in ascending order of competence as shown in Table 6.

Not only do they indicate specific skill levels, the test results are also unusual in that they provide information on the ages of the examinees. On the assumption that examinees achieved their particular level of literacy during school-going age either from writing schools or elementary schools, that is, from the ages of six to thirteen, calculations can be made that demonstrate the changes in specific levels of literacy attained over more than half a century, from the 1810s to the 1870s. This provides a perspective on literacy changes across the Tokugawa-Meiji transition in a single document, without changes in the standards of measurement. The Tokiwa survey is also important because it provides a record on specific levels of literacy achieved by rural farmers, limited though the sample may be. Other materials that have been looked at, including the observations made by foreigners, have all suggested that writing schools were predominantly an urban phenomenon until very late in the Tokugawa period. The Tokiwa survey makes it possible to look inside a rural farming population.

What do the data show? Clearly the male population of Tokiwa in 1881 was characterized by a broad range of skills, from total illiteracy to functional

TABLE 6 Results of Tokiwa Village Literacy Test (1881)

Literacy Level	*Number of Examinees at Each Level*
1. Unable to read or write name, address, or numbers	312
2. Only able to write own name and address	363
3. Able to keep daily accounts of revenue and expenses	128
4. Able to read ordinary materials and to fill out simple financial forms such as deeds and bonds	39
5. Able to handle ordinary business transactions	18
6. Able to read official proclamations, documents, edicts, and newspaper editorials with full comprehension	15

fluency with government documents and the mass media. But the overwhelming numbers are at the bottom of the scale—either totally illiterate or minimally literate, with only the ability to write one's own name. The numbers drop off precipitously at the more functional levels, ability to read ordinary materials and to fill out forms (levels 4 and higher).

Table 7 shows percentages of age groups arranged by the decade in which literacy is presumed to have been achieved. Several trends are clear over the span of most of the nineteenth century. For one thing, the language of the test categories suggests that the standard for measuring literacy was related to commerce, business, or entrepreneurial activity. That is to say, this is the language used by Japanese contemporaries to measure literacy attainment.

The percentage of those who could not read or write at all drops steadily throughout the Tokugawa period and into the early Meiji period. At the same time, the percentages of those who are minimally literate—able to write their own name and address and keep daily accounts (levels 2 and 3)—steadily increase. The rise in such skills correlates with increasing attendance at writing schools, for it was skills at this level that writing schools instilled in their pupils. The patterns produced here also suggest that rather than a sudden jump in basic literacy in the late Tokugawa period and early Meiji period, the growth was steady and incremental over a long time, that it went back at least as far as the early decades of the nineteenth century, when writing schools began to have an impact.

At the more functional levels of literacy attainment (levels 4, 5, and 6), the percentages are very low and no clear pattern emerges over the span of the

TABLE 7 Percentages of Males at Specific Literacy Levels by Age (and Decade)

	Ages (Decades)			
Literacy Level	*70–79 (1810s)**	*50–59 (1830s)*	*30–39 (1850s)*	*10–19 (1870s)*
1. Unable to read or write	51	48	35	24
2. Able to write name and address	25	33	39	48
3. Able to keep daily accounts	9	12	19	20
4. Able to read ordinary materials and fill out simple financial forms	9	1	5	3
5. Able to handle ordinary business transactions	0	3	1	2
6. Able to read government documents and newspaper editorials	6	3	1	3

*Decade figures in parentheses indicate the period when examinees were of schoolgoing age (6–13)

nineteenth century. This tends to confirm one of the main themes observed throughout the early modern period: the continuity of a small but highly trained elite leadership who monopolized tasks that required advanced literacy skills. The data here suggest that the monopoly of higher, functional literacy in this group—made up of village officials, teachers, doctors, and priests—did not spread much further over time. This means that higher literacy skills were achieved largely outside any formal institutional setting, such as writing schools. Advanced literacy may have been fostered by experience in hereditary positions of leadership, through apprenticeships, or through family traditions of learning, such as tutorials given by relatives or travel to private academies or private teachers in the cities. Thus, it would have been difficult for those outside the leadership group to attain advanced literacy skills within the village until very late in the Tokugawa period, if at all. The Tokiwa survey provides empirical confirmation (on a small scale, to be sure) of the persistence of "two cultures"—advanced literacy among the top leadership and much lower levels among the vast majority of the people in this rural village for a good part of the nineteenth century.

Although such a limited sample cannot be extended to suggest national or even regional trends, it is possible, at the very least, to see here empirical evidence for the assertion that literacy rates depend upon what particular levels of literacy are meant. That is to say, literacy rates are closely related to how one defines literacy. Take another look at this sample. If all those from level 2 and higher in what may be considered the minimally literate group are included, the claim that in the 1850s, at the end of the Tokugawa era, literacy had reached 65 percent of males would be justified—and, similarly, that it had reached 76 percent of males in remote Tokiwa Village at the beginning of the Meiji period. Such a conclusion might not be inconsistent at all with similar claims made on the basis of writing school attendance for those periods. If, on the other hand, literacy is defined in functional terms as the ability at least to read ordinary materials and fill out simple forms (levels 4 and higher)—the kind of skills that would enable a farmer to engage in commerce successfully—the percentages in this remote village dip way down to 7 percent of males in the 1850s and rise to only 8 percent by the 1870s.

If one assumes that the kind of literacy required for significant economic development would be the functional kind, this sample would suggest that connection between official data on writing school attendance and economic development in the Meiji period is tenuous at best. It should be kept in mind, however, that figures for urban areas (the areas foreign observers commented upon) would likely be considerably higher than those for a small farming village such as the one measured here.

The data from this literacy test also confirm the special and quite separate world of village leaders. They appear to have kept their learning very much in-house, or at least within their stratum of prominent families. They must have trained their own children either in schools or at home and then sent them, as many provincial literati did, to urban areas for advanced training. Meanwhile, the opportunities for ordinary children in villages like this one apparently were restricted to lower-level writing schools or nothing at all toward the end of the Tokugawa period. The gap between the highly trained village leadership and the minimally literate great majority of the population is clearly indicated by the numbers from this unfortunately unique survey of literacy skills in a single farming village.

Tokugawa Village Election Ballots

Surveys that measure specific abilities are extremely helpful in the effort to directly assess literacy skills among the rural population. Equally valuable would be written materials penned by farmers. As Japanese scholarship has made abundantly clear, the Tokugawa period saw an enormous proliferation in the spread of documentation and written instruments of various kinds.[19] But most of these documents were prepared by feudal officials, village headmen, or local priests. Ordinary village documents, such as sales receipts for land, deeds, bonds, promissory notes, and so forth, tended to be drawn up by village leaders, the traditional scribes, and are of little use in assessing literacy among the nonleadership sectors of village populations.

The same is true of petitions for grievances and political protests. Circular petitions, characteristic of peasant protests, were almost always penned by a single scribe. This is obvious because the "signatures," which appear like spokes of a wheel, are identical. They were fashioned in a circle with no beginning and no end points, so that ringleaders (presumably the first or last names on a linear list) could not be identified (see Figure 11). Because so few documents were actually signed by villagers, it is extremely difficult to locate evidence that points directly to the literacy skills of the broader population.

Among the most interesting and potentially useful remnants of the Tokugawa past are ballots, called *ire-fuda,* which were apparently used for two main purposes: to finger thieves and miscreants and to elect village leaders. In most cases, "voters" had to write the name of a person on a small piece of paper. Because ballots were inscribed individually, complete sets of these records that included voting preferences for an entire village could be of considerable use in assessing levels of literacy. Unfortunately, complete sets of Tokugawa village

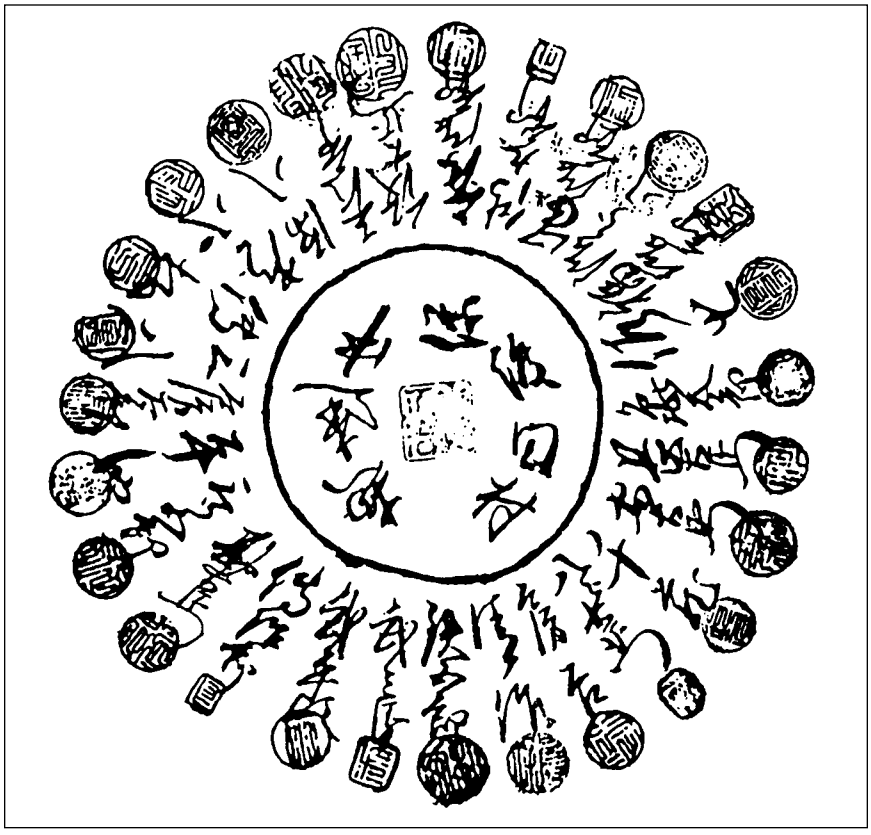


Figure 11. Circular peasant petition *(kuruma renpan-jō).* Reprinted from *Ikki: Social Conflict and Political Protest in Early Modern Japan,* by James W. White. Copyright 1995 by Cornell University. Used by permission of the publisher, Cornell University Press.

ballots are rare. Many libraries and archives in Japan have only scattered examples rather than complete sets, diminishing their value to researchers.

Part of the reason ballots have been overlooked as historical materials is their extraordinarily humble appearance. Ballots consisted of tiny folded slips of paper, about one inch by two inches in size, folded up and inserted into an envelope which was then further inserted into a sealed paper packet (see Figure 12). To the casual viewer the packets look like crumpled up and discarded writing paper. Consequently, much of this material was probably thrown out by village authorities after an election, or, if retained, is still hidden away in family storehouses. Nevertheless, as a result of recent interest in popular history, a number of collections of village ballots have been discovered in family

Figure 12. Muramatsu Village election ballots, 1834. Reprinted courtesy of Asahi Shinbunsha.

storehouses and analyzed. Three of these collections form the basis of the following discussion.

In some villages, such as Muramatsu in Niigata Prefecture, canvassing a local population through secret ballots to identify thieves or other miscreants went back to medieval times and continued into the twentieth century. Not only did individuals name allegedly guilty parties, their ballots included their own names as well. In the Kaneko family documents studied by Fujiki Hisashi, the entire population of the village, down to landless peasants and even servants, was eligible to fill out these "burglary ballots" *(tōnan ire fuda).* But no doubt because of the broad constituency, many ballots look identical, suggesting either that a designated scribe (probably the headman) was inscribing the

ballots for those who could not write or that ballot-box stuffing was pervasive. In either case, the usefulness of such "burglary ballots" for literacy study is undermined.[20]

This was not the case with elections for village officials in Niigata and Saitama. To be sure, the constituency for elections of officials was more limited than that for "burglary ballots" and was usually restricted to household heads of landowning families, but the handwriting on ballots makes it clear that each voter individually wrote them.[21] The tradition of writing the names of candidates, it should be noted parenthetically, has literacy implications even in the present day. Japanese voters still write the names of their candidates on ballots. There are no levers to pull or "chads" to punch as in the United States, where (even when the machines function properly) no one is required to write a candidate's name. Consequently, one notices that in present-day Japanese local elections, candidates who don't have common or easy-to-write names like Tanaka or Kawaguchi use advertising posters that provide phonetic *kana* written alongside relatively difficult Chinese characters. Sometimes candidates use only *kana* to ensure that voters can properly enter the right names on the ballot (see Figure 13).

As noted in chapter 1, Tokugawa villages had diverse systems for selecting leaders. In some cases the position rotated among prominent families, in others it was hereditary. In still others the tradition of elections went back at least to the early Tokugawa period and probably earlier. It is likely, however, that elections became more frequent toward the end of the Tokugawa period as one means of satisfying increasing demands to be heard within villages, as economic and political conditions grew more contentious. In this sense local election ballots may be indications of incipient "village democracy" in Tokugawa Japan, as at least one prominent scholar has suggested.[22]

Complete sets of election ballots for headman *(nanushi)* and peasant representative *(hyakushōdai)* in 1856 and 1857 respectively were discovered in Mishuku Village, Suruga Province (now Shizuoka Prefecture), during the compilation of that area's local history.[23] Mishuku was a moderately sized Tokugawa village of sixty-three households located in the foothills of Mt. Fuji near the post town of Mishima along the Tōkaidō Road, the main artery of communications between Edo and Osaka.

Ballots inserted in a small paper packet for the election of a Mishuku Village headman on the 6th day of the Second Month of 1856 were sorted by candidates' names. The winner, with thirty-four out of fifty-one votes cast, was a farmer named Jinbei. The spelling of "Jinbei" on his ballots varied considerably and provides some hints of the varying quality of literacy among his supporters. There was a very proper and formal "aiyaku nanushi Jinbei sama" written

Figure 13. Contemporary election poster.

entirely in Chinese characters with names and terms spelled correctly, suggesting that the writer was a learned member of the village leadership.[24] There were far simpler ballots with just the candidate's name, "Jinbei," sometimes misspelled; still others contained just about every permutation of the words "nanushi" (headman) and "Jinbei" it is possible to make using combinations of Chinese characters and the phonetic *kana* script. Some used the honorific suffix "sama," others did not. A sampling of the variety follows:

相役名主甚平様	aiyaku nanushi Jinbei sama
名主甚平様	nanushi Jinbei sama
名主甚兵衛様	nanushi Jinbeii sama
甚平	Jinbei
なのし甚兵衛様	nanoshi Jinbeii sama (kana)
なし甚へい衛	nashi Jinheii (kana)
なぬし甚ん兵衛	nanushi Jinbeii (kana)
名主し甚兵衛	nanushi Jinbeii (kana)
名ぬししん兵衛	nanushi Shinbeii (kana)

There can be no doubt that these were written by individual farmers themselves—presumably the household heads, as they were the voters in most village elections.

Seven ballots for Jinbei included some phonetic *kana* script rather than Chinese characters, suggesting a lower level of skill than the more learned household heads. But all thirty-four ballots included Chinese characters. There were orthographic errors in both "nanushi" and "Jinbei" that ranged from minor to major. The Japanese term for "headman" produced errors such as なのし *(nanoshi)* and なし *(nashi)* instead of なぬし *(nanushi).* Spelling errors as well as handwriting quality suggest a spectrum of skills, from easy acquaintance with Chinese and considerable experience with the brush (such as the already elected headman) to heavy reliance on *kana.* Assuming that literacy skills correlated with economic or social status, the variety of skill levels among the ballots for Jinbei also suggests that he received support from household heads from a broad spectrum of circumstances.[25]

The ballots also reveal one of the important social functions of the *kana* syllabary throughout the Tokugawa period. Where important decisions, such as the selection of officials, were made by written votes, the phonetic characters made it possible for even the less literate, presumably those at the lower ends of the social and economic scale, to make their choices count. If a voter was illiterate, someone else had to step in as scribe, as was likely the case with the "burglary ballots." Unlike seventeenth-century marks on population registers or apostasy oaths, personal marks would not do. The availability of the *kana* syllabary enabled many more people to engage in politics and decision-making than would have been the case without it. On ballots for some other candidates, evidence of illiteracy appears on three blank or unreadable ballots where the writer's choice could not have been tallied.

With fifty-one ballots cast out of a possible sixty-three, the voting rate in Mishuku for the selection of a village headman in 1856 was 79 percent, assuming that those who did not vote failed to do so because they could not write. If

those who did not vote were combined with those whose ballots were indecipherable, the literacy rate would be slightly lower, 76 percent. Was illiteracy, however, the cause of the failure to vote? There could have been other reasons, such as absence from the village at the time of the vote. The literacy rate could also be calculated as the percentage of readable ballots (all but three) among the total ballots cast, and that would yield a literacy rate of 94 percent. But this approach would omit twelve household heads, or 19 percent of eligible voters.

However the rate is calculated, it is quite high, as one might expect for household heads at the end of the Tokugawa period in a village located near a post town on the Tōkaidō Road. The actual ballots reveal again what has already been seen repeatedly, namely a great variance in actual skills within village populations and even within the status of household head—from people who wrote in an indecipherable scribble, to those relying to some extent on the phonetic syllabary, to those (like the village head) who were highly skilled in formal Chinese script. There were all kinds of individual idiosyncrasies in between, reflecting a broad spectrum of abilities with a complex script. The overwhelming majority of household heads in Mishuku Village during the 1850s, however, had attained a level of basic literacy that enabled them to participate in making important village decisions. Their ballots contrast dramatically with the mostly illiterate marks made by household heads in Tomooka Village near Kyoto in the early seventeenth century, more than two centuries earlier.

At the same time, handwritten ballots from Mishuku in the 1850s indicate that literacy patterns in that village had become more complex than the simple "two cultures" structure found in Tomooka in the early seventeenth century and Tokiwa in the nineteenth. Even within the single status of household heads, differences in literacy skills are evident. At the top were those who showed a mastery of Chinese characters and of formal language. This group participated in village politics as leaders. They engaged actively in commerce, kept accounts and records, and probably pursued learned activities. This group provided the candidates in village elections. They didn't just vote, they got voted in. Jinbei himself and the headman who voted for him were members of this group.

The vast majority showed full *kana* literacy and considerable ability with Chinese. They were able to participate actively in village affairs and were no doubt at ease with basic accounts and simple forms. Compared to earlier centuries, the large proportion of household heads in rural areas appear to have moved from rudimentary skills to much more functional skills of the sort that enabled them to participate actively in village affairs and presumably also to engage in commerce.

At the bottom was a very small number of the marginally literate, who

had to rely mainly on *kana* and had at most a basic ability in Chinese. There were also a few who appear to have been totally illiterate and who could not participate directly in village elections. Among household heads this group had become almost insignificantly small in Mishuku by the 1850s.

There were no women represented in the Mishuku sample, but three women household heads appeared in another sample of 144 ballots from Akao Village in Saitama in 1852. Judging from voting records, the women's skills, like the men's, ran the gamut from rudimentary to fully functional literacy.[26]

The mere existence of election ballots in nineteenth-century Tokugawa villages suggests a movement on the part of their households toward greater independence and away from the traditional authority of village elders. Literacy, it would appear from this small sample of election ballots, could empower individuals and households. Literacy made it possible for people to make choices and to participate in village affairs. Almost certainly, it functioned to weaken traditional village associations and the dominance of powerful families.

Small Farmers

The expansion of literacy of a fully functional, even if not learned, kind beyond the large landowners—the powerful, influential, and learned leadership group—is one of the more significant developments in the history of Japanese education in the nineteenth century. Some direct indicators of functional skills expanding among a broader segment of the farming population beyond those at the very top have already been seen. The Tokiwa Literacy Survey, which reviewed conditions prevalent in the first half of the nineteenth century, revealed that about 21 percent of male farmers in a middle range of levels 3, 4, and 5 were able to keep daily accounts of revenues and expenditures, read and fill out deeds and bonds, and conduct ordinary business transactions. The examination of election ballots from several villages at the end of the Tokugawa period showed that below the top level of farmers who were comfortable with Chinese there were other farmers who exhibited a range of intermediate skills. Some ability in Chinese was evident among the latter, descending to different degrees of reliance on *kana.* But even these lower levels of literacy enabled smaller farmers to participate in political decision making.

Just who were the smaller farmers who formed the majority population in late Tokugawa villages? What is known about the quality of their literacy skills and cultural lives? One of their number, Funatsu Denjibei, whose ideas about commoner learning were described in the previous chapter, provides a useful perspective on this group. In the "family precepts" he wrote as a guide

for his descendants, he listed the defining characteristics of his class. Small farmers, according to Denjibei:

> do not engage in money lending or business of any kind;
> do not own large tracts of land;
> have no more than two workers and one horse at their disposal;
> send children to writing schools only in winter and spring, after farm work is completed.[27]

Denjibei, who believed in the value of productive farming by the sweat of one's own brow, worked lands of one *chō* (about two and a half acres). He had one horse and no servants. As far as Kōzuke Province (Gunma Prefecture) in the mid-nineteenth century was concerned, he was a typical small farmer. The region had gone through difficult economic times, and small farmers such as Denjibei were venturing into silk cultivation and the production of thread and silk goods, although rice production remained central to the family's livelihood. To survive in difficult times, small farmers had to develop efficient systems of management, including innovative techniques and careful bookkeeping. Thus the ability to read and write and keep accounts became essential for this group.

At the age of twenty-four, Denjibei began to keep family records in account books called *kazai saijiki* (record of family economy). His first entries were in 1833 and they continued until 1857, when he transferred the responsibility to his son, who maintained records until 1864. The books themselves were standard long and narrow registers, kept by many small farmers. They recorded family events and rituals—births, deaths, sicknesses, weddings, and funerals—and listed important dates when gifts were given or received. But they also recorded the details of the family economy—the locations, sizes, and types of wet and dry fields held; yearly tax accounts; details of buying and selling records with amounts and dates; daily records of travel expenses; and so forth.[28] Accounts such as these were crucial for the economic survival of families like Denjibei's. They indicate that functional literacy of a practical kind had spread among ordinary farmers by the middle of the nineteenth century.

Denjibei's family record suggests another important way in which attitudes and skills that had earlier been characteristic of wealthy farmers and village leaders had spread to smaller farmers. The *kazai saijiki* indicates that Denjibei eventually ran a small writing school as a business to bring in side income. This was unlike the earlier paternalistic writing schools run by village leaders, described by Irie Hiroshi. Nor was it an effort at ideological control, something that became a characteristic of schools patronized by village leaders later in the nineteenth century.

Denjibei's educational enterprise shows that demand for literacy among middle- to lower-class farmers had risen by the mid-nineteenth century to the point where running a school might be a profitable venture for a literate farmer. The institution he ran was probably typical of the kind of rudimentary writing school that flourished in villages all over Japan beginning around the Tenpō period. It was very small; it had a total of sixty-four students (four girls) from 1837 into the early Meiji era. The curriculum began with the phonetic *kana* syllabary. Then Chinese characters for personal names, beginning with one's own, were introduced, followed by place names, beginning with one's own village and then extending to the thirty-six county names within the district of Maebashi domain, where the school was located. Later, students were taught the characters for the sexagenary cycle used to indicate the time of day, the heavenly directions, and calendar dates. After that, they learned the Chinese characters for the names of the sixty-eight provinces of Japan, beginning with the five provinces of the Kinai region.[29]

This sequence describes how rudimentary literacy was taught to small farmer children almost everywhere in Japan in the nineteenth century. For children whose family situations or abilities allowed them to go further, there were additional materials available at Denjibei's school for advanced reading and writing practice. These included legal documents involved in borrowing money or buying and selling land, calendars and almanacs, prefaces to *goningumi* (five-family group) registers, and guides to letter writing. In commercially active regions the content of writing school texts might also include methods of calculating taxes and explanations of tax burdens and responsibilities. Advanced practical learning required reading the *Thousand Character Classic.* Then students would move on to works of higher learning such as *Tsurezuregusa, Man'yōshū,* or the Confucian classics, depending on their own and the teachers' interests. It is conceivable that some children from smaller farm families made the transition to higher learning, but for the most part higher levels remained accessible only to wealthier families who had the time and resources to support such training.

How far down the social scale in farming villages can the ability to read and write be traced? Needless to say, it was the highly literate who left the preponderance of records and whose traces are easiest to follow. The surge in writing school attendance that occurred during and after the Tenpō period is one indirect indicator of an increase in rudimentary learning at lower levels almost everywhere in Japan. A recent study by Shibata Jun suggests how extensive school attendance could have been in certain areas.[30] A detailed entrance register kept between 1814 and 1873 for a writing school in Kita Shō Village in Ōmi Province (now part of the town of Gokashō, Shiga Prefecture), an area

known since medieval times for intense commercial activity, showed that 91.4 percent of all residents, male and female, had attended the school.[31] This is an extraordinarily high figure, virtually the entire population. Even if the calculation is a bit off, it clearly points to children who did not come from elite families, indeed children of virtually every small farmer family, attending writing schools over a considerable period of time. The Ōmi area may not be representative of villages in the more remote countryside, but the high enrollment at this school is another indication of a strong correlation between writing school attendance, commercial activity, and literacy.

But writing school data also suggest that the average length of stay was only one or two years and that the attendance was haphazard and seasonal at best, making access to really functional literacy a stretch for farmers engaged mainly in cultivation. The Tokiwa Literacy Survey showed that the largest category out of the 882 males tested were those who were minimally literate and only able to read and write their own name and address—precisely the focus of the beginning level at writing schools. Numerous sources have commented upon the ad hoc and limited access to writing schools found in the remoter regions, particularly those in the northeast. One authoritative source has summarized the situation:

> Among commoners in Tokugawa Japan, children helped with work both inside and outside the home. But because they were especially important to the livelihoods of farming and mountain villages, even those children who received some education could not attend writing schools all year long. During the periods of intensive farm work, from spring to autumn, children had important responsibilities connected to family enterprise. During such times writing school attendance would dwindle to three children, then two, then to no children at all. Teachers, too, were out in the fields so naturally they would absent themselves. When fall harvests were concluded and they were no longer needed for help, children would return to schools. Thus, writing schools were available in accordance with the patterns of children's lives and ran from fall to spring of the following year.[32]

Aoki Michio has charted attendance at a remote village writing school each month over the course of the year in Shinshū (now Nagano Prefecture) at the end of the Tokugawa period. During the dead of winter, in the first and second months of the year, attendance was remarkably high, virtually 100 percent. By the third month it was down to 20 percent, and it went farther down, below 5 percent, during the spring and summer months. By late autumn it was back over 30 percent.[33] In remote rural areas, where farmwork was essential to fam-

ily life, opportunities for basic literacy were reduced and results were in all likelihood correspondingly low.

It is apparent that in such areas, whatever learning occurred was carried out during the winter months either in local writing schools or at home. References to basic peasant literacy are dotted throughout the work of the renowned haiku poet Kobayashi Issa (1763–1827), known for his down-to-earth observations of peasant life. Although born and reared in the small village of Kashiwabara in Shinshū, Issa himself was not poor. His mother was the daughter of a village official, and the family was in the top third of taxpaying farm families.[34]

In 1777, at the age of fourteen, Issa went to Edo. After working as an apprentice for some years, he began the study of haiku poetry. From 1790, he spent ten years traveling in the Hokuriku, Tōhoku, and Kansai areas as an itinerant teacher and preacher of Jōdo Shinshū, the True Pure Land sect of Buddhism. Although the students who gathered around him and supported him during his travels were primarily of the merchant and upper farmer classes, he had ample opportunity to observe the daily lives of ordinary farmers and to record his impressions of them in some twenty thousand extant poems. *Shichiban nikki,* written from 1810 to 1818 after Issa had returned to his village in his late forties to settle down, contains most of his observations of learning activities related to basic literacy. Among them:

hara ue de	During long winter nights
ji o kaki narau	Writing characters
yosamu kana[35]	On my stomach
iroha de mo	In winter hibernation
shiritaku narinu	I look forward to
fuyu gomori[36]	My ABCs
furu bon no	Ashes on an old tray
hai de tenarau	Writing practice
samusa kana[37]	In the cold
mamakko ga	Leaves of trees
tenarai (o) suru	For practicing ABCs
ki no ha kana[38]	Poor stepchild!
yuki no hi ya	Snowy days
ji o kaki narau	Writing practice
bon no hai[39]	Ashes on a tray

bon no hai	Ashes on a tray
iroha o narau	Learning letters
yosamu kana[40]	On cold nights
hatsu yuki ya	With the first snow
i-ro-ha-ni-ho-he-to	A voice reciting
narau koe[41]	The ABCs
namakeru na	Falling cherry blossoms
i-ro-ha-ni-ho-he-to	Don't neglect
chiru sakura[42]	Your ABCs

Most of these poems describe the seasonal nature of writing practice during the long hibernation season between the first snow of winter and the cherry blossoms in spring. They point to learning not at schools but at home, presumably under the guidance of parents, older relatives, or siblings. They suggest further that the usual paraphernalia of schoolgoing—writing paper, brushes, and so on—were lacking. This dearth of school supplies may reflect poverty at worst or frugality at best. In any case, it indicates a strong desire to learn despite considerable obstacles. Children practiced the basic *kana* syllabary (their ABCs, or *iroha*) on trays using ashes from the hearth fire written presumably with a stick or a finger. When even trays were lacking, a father could lie on the floor and ask his children to practice their letters in ashes on his midsection, as in the first poem above. Characters could be written in ashes, then conveniently erased and practiced over and over again in the manner of a chalkboard. While providing a romantic vision of snowbound peasants overcoming all obstacles to improve themselves through basic literacy, these poems also suggest the very rudimentary levels at which many rural farmers were operating with respect to literacy.

Rural Women

And what of ordinary farm women? Writing school data show that a smaller percentage of girls attended schools than boys and that these gaps were greatest where overall attendance was low. In commercially active rural areas and in cities, females attended schools in far greater numbers than their counterparts in the countryside. By the nineteenth century, women in commercially active town and village families had become account keepers and even managers of business affairs. Among village leaders, girls were given extensive educations in ceremonies, etiquette, music, and so forth, and they were trained in reading

and writing so they could be sent off to samurai families as apprentices and maids. In the few cases where women became household heads they also became voting members of their communities and had the writing skills to participate in elections for village officials. Even for lower-level farming families, literacy could open opportunities that were not otherwise available in the countryside.

An interesting case is that of a young woman named Hatsu, who worked as a maidservant at a roadside inn in Kizakijuku, a post town in what is now Gunma Prefecture. This daughter of a poor *(mizunomi)* farmer came from Nishino Shinden, a village in Kanbara County, Echigo Province (Niigata Prefecture).[43] In Tenpō 11 (1840) she left home to seek employment in the faraway post town, where apparently many young women from her area sought employment. She secured a contract for eight years to work at a roadside inn owned by one Tanekichi. But after two years there things became so unbearable for her that, in desperation, she wrote a letter to the daimyo explaining her situation with an urgent request that she be allowed to cancel her contract and return home.

In the letter Hatsu explained that her parents and younger sister had become ill and the family had gone into debt, forcing her to seek employment to support them. She had obtained a contract with an inn to be a maidservant (which may have included prostituting herself). She had become sick but was nevertheless forced to continue work without letup. When she asked to rest she was physically abused. Eventually she ran away and hid in a farmer's house, but the farmer, after negotiating with her employer, returned her to the inn. At this point she sought official help to cancel her contract and return home. The letter is extensive (the equivalent of more than three printed pages) and detailed and was clearly written in her own hand.[44]

The letter, which was written in cursive style with a brush, is mainly in *kana,* but Chinese characters are used for most place and personal names. In many cases, *kana* are used for simple vocabulary that called for Chinese characters, such as "year" *(nen),* "mountain" *(yama),* "afternoon" *(hiru),* and so forth. There is a strange blend of conversational style, local dialect (Ichigo for Echigo), and imperfect use of the standard epistolary form *(sōrōbun).*

Because Hatsu worked full time, making study improbable, she almost certainly reached her level of literacy as a child at a local writing school. So it would appear that in some poor farming families, a desire to seek better opportunities led to sending children to school for rudimentary training. The result reflected here was a woman who was able to gain low-level employment in a post town. Most significantly, her literacy was sufficient for Hatsu to be able to explain her unfortunate situation and make an appeal to officials in writing.

Although the outcome of her appeal is unknown, the letter is an indicator of how literacy could be put to use to improve the circumstances for lower-level farming women.

Migration from farming villages by young people (like Hatsu) to seek employment in towns was apparently not unusual in Japan by the end of the eighteenth century. Because such opportunities presumably required some basic literacy, they became motivational factors in the spread of rural literacy. The entrance register at Jukendō, a school run from 1772 to 1822 in Tsukamoto Village, Iidaka County in Ise Province (part of Matsuzaka City in Mie Prefecture today) shows that 25 percent (159 of the 643 names on the entrance register) got employment in cities and towns upon leaving. An unusually large number of students at this school (165, or 26 percent) were girls. Nineteen of these, or 12 percent, sought employment after school. Of the boys, 29 percent of the 478 migrated from the village for employment after leaving the school.[45]

These students did not seek employment only in the immediate Ise area. More than eighty went to Edo, others worked for the Mitsui Company in Osaka, and still others went to Kyoto.[46] It appears that the school had developed a kind of premodern recruitment network with certain employers like the Mitsui, who regularly hired graduates from the school. It is not hard to imagine that students went to the school with the preconceived idea of seeking employment in one of the shops in a city or town where the school had connections. If true, it suggests that by the beginning of the nineteenth century rudimentary literacy was already seen as basic preparation for later employment. Thus, literacy enabled farmers to travel and widen their cultural horizons. It was an avenue to jobs not available in their smaller and more constricted local worlds.

Conclusion

Despite the lack of systematic data for the direct measure of literacy in the first half of the nineteenth century, a variety of sources point compellingly to a considerable spread of popular literacy among both urban and rural populations. Qualitative differences in the attainment of literacy remained, however, between city and country and between higher and lower sectors of the populace. Comments made by foreign visitors and what is known of working-class attendance at writing schools suggests that by the nineteenth century a relatively high percentage of the urban working population may have had at least *kana* literacy.

In rural areas the spread of literacy beyond the most rudimentary levels produced by a year or two at a writing school was slower. The Tokiwa Literacy Survey makes it clear that "two cultures" continued to persist in rural villages, with only the slightest hints of people outside the leadership group making inroads into more advanced literacy. A small number of village leaders demonstrated very high levels of literacy, while the overwhelming numbers of ordinary farmers showed only the most rudimentary skills or none at all. The observations of the poet Kobayashi Issa in the remote northeast indicate how much the ordinary farming family struggled with learning the basic *kana* syllabary.

In villages that had better access to cities and commerce, on the other hand, the situation was different. Election ballots in a village just off the Tōkaidō Road showed that literacy involving the use of Chinese characters had spread to virtually all household heads, enabling a broader sector of the population than before to participate in village governance. Small farmers in commercially active villages, like Denjibei, were developing rational methods of management, keeping accounts, and even running small schools on the side to survive in the economically difficult Tenpō years. Women from rural areas with access to towns were using rudimentary literacy to secure better futures and even to contact authorities to seek redress for unjust treatment. The spread of literacy is reflected in all these political, economic, and social changes. The ability to read and write was the critical tool that made all these fundamental shifts—greater political participation, a more prosperous future and standard of living, greater freedom and human rights—possible for ever greater numbers of Japanese in the early nineteenth century.

Data from foreign observers to literacy surveys to rural poetry, election ballots, and letters of small-town maidservants show that literacy had spread beyond the rural leadership group to the lowest levels of provincial society by the nineteenth century. But like other complex societies, even by the twentieth century literacy had not spread to everyone. This study concludes with an analysis of those who fell through the cracks, who were not part of the spread of literacy that has been detailed in the preceding five chapters.

Epilogue: Illiteracy in Meiji Japan

At the end of his long and fact-filled book on the Kennedy assassination, Norman Mailer finally asked, "Did Oswald do it?" In response he stated that if one's answer is to come out anything larger than an opinion, "it is necessary to contend with the question of evidence." Realizing that the evidence in the case amounted to "a jungle of conflicting estimates," Mailer arrived at a disheartening truth: the evidence itself would never provide a satisfactory answer to the mystery, "for it is the nature of evidence to produce, sooner or later, a counter interpretation to itself." In his quest for a final judgment, Mailer moved away from the mountains of empirical data he had surveyed toward broader questions of circumstance and character, the special province not of the statistician or accountant but of the novelist's or historian's imagination.[1]

This historian's aim at the end of a book is to evaluate a large and systematic set of data on levels of illiteracy found among ordinary Japanese people from the middle to the latter part of the Meiji period (1868–1912). Illiteracy has been referred to repeatedly throughout the previous five chapters within the context of widening literacy among townsmen and villagers, but it was purely speculative in some cases and based on difficult to interpret personal marks on selected pieces of local data in others. At the end of the nineteenth century, for the first time, a national database can be applied to the analysis of literacy and illiteracy in Japan. The prominent Japanese scholar Katō Hidetoshi claimed in 1958 that "there are no materials on the extent of illiteracy in the Meiji period."[2] The data presented here refute that contention. They reveal the actual skill levels of a significant sector of the population, over an extended period of time, covering all areas of Japan during the Meiji period.

One ought to be wary of those who respond to empirical data with what might be called a religious intensity. The data shall be treated here, as through-

out this book, not as an end in itself but as something suggesting patterns of natural, social, and historical circumstance that influenced the attainment of literacy. Problems and pitfalls in the data shall be emphasized; the multiple layers of meaning and perspective that they reveal shall be explored. Hopefully, the questions raised and the hypotheses suggested will stimulate historians and social scientists to engage in further exploration.

In East Asia, literacy has always been associated with power and prestige. To the ancient Chinese, writing was like a talisman; it represented man's mastery over the universe. Knowledge of script was synonymous with political power. The technological mastery of writing was one of the attributes that separated rulers and the ruled during most of the classical period throughout Asia. No doubt this set of values traveled to Japan in the early fifth century or thereabouts along with the Chinese script carried there by immigrants from the Korean peninsula (including some of Chinese origin) seeking refuge from political turmoil on the Asian continent.[3]

For centuries of Japanese history, literacy remained the exclusive prerogative of aristocrats, specialist scribes in their service, and scholarly members of the Buddhist priesthood. It was not until the Tokugawa period that literacy spread in a significant way beyond the limited circles of the political and clerical elite to a broader population—to a rising urban bourgeoisie and to rural leaders and landowners. By the end of that period, functional literacy had come to extend to smaller farmers, including some women, in commercially active areas of the country. There are signs that rudimentary literacy was beginning to reach even poor farmers in remote regions, as suggested earlier. But it did not spread everywhere, and pockets of illiteracy remained.

It is not until shortly after the establishment of a centralized state in the early 1870s, however, that systematic data on school attendance and literacy attainment make it possible to look with some precision at patterns of skill attainment within specific sectors of the Japanese population. Both the Office of the Army (Rikugunshō) and the Office of Education (Monbushō),[4] for their own quite different reasons, sought data on literacy and school attendance. Both offices initiated systematic surveys and published their findings in annual reports. Both scored testees according to the level in the school system with which their skills correlated. Both also incorporated categories below elementary levels of school, including one designated "completely unable to write one's own name." Using the upper brackets of the test results would make it possible to describe patterns of basic literacy among the population tested. It may be preferable, however, to look at the literacy glass as half empty rather than as half full and to inspect the "completely unable" category in order to find and describe patterns of illiteracy. There are a number of reasons for doing this.

First, "illiteracy" is burdened with fewer ambiguities and problems of definition than "literacy." It may be worthwhile to repeat the truism that rates of literacy depend upon what levels of literacy one is speaking of. If people are considered literate because they can sign their names, a vast spectrum of higher skills is left undifferentiated. In the data under discussion, brackets above "completely unable to write" are tied not to specific skills but to levels in the school system. This makes distinguishing actual abilities difficult. In Europe (where signature data are widely used to measure literacy and illiteracy), learning to read usually preceded training in writing, so inability to sign one's name did not necessarily mean inability to read. In the Japanese case, however, the pedagogy of popular education in the first half of the nineteenth century (when many of the adults tested would have attained literacy) called for writing and reading to be taught simultaneously or, in some cases, gave precedence to instruction in writing.[5] Students were typically asked to copy from texts and then read what they had written. Thus, in the Japanese case, the inability to write at all might well indicate the inability to read too.

Second, the sources of the impressive outpouring of studies on literacy in North America and Western Europe have in the main been data indicating the ability or inability to sign one's name to documents—wills, marriage registers, and so forth.[6] The data on Japan presented here provide a comparative measure because they, too, query the ability or inability to write one's name. It must be noted that the complexity of the Japanese script introduces some ambiguity here. Would a person who failed to write his name using Chinese characters but could write it in the phonetic *kana* script be categorized as "unable to write one's name"? There is no easy answer to this question, but since Japanese generally wrote their family names and male given names in Chinese characters, it is reasonable to assume that the answer might be yes—unless, that is, the person's given name was ordinarily written in *hiragana* or *katakana.* Often that was indeed the case, especially among women. Note, however, that in the very earliest primers used in Tokugawa Japan, the Chinese characters for everyday use—one's name, one's village, the four cardinal directions—came first, as noted in chapter 4. Accordingly, the inability to sign would seem to indicate a lack of ability to write rudimentary Chinese characters, and quite possibly the *kana* syllabary as well.

Finally, an examination of the data on "illiteracy" is more than warranted because the concept is rarely discussed in the history of Japanese education, in either the Japanese or the Western literature on the subject. Instead, the overwhelming emphasis has been on the success of the school system in achieving near-universal attendance soon after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905. Differences among the population with regard to schoolgoing, with the possi-

ble exception of gender differences, are played down in the desire to describe a nation becoming unified under a central regime. Data on illiteracy and the regional and gender differences that are evident in them have been largely ignored until now. So it is time to examine the data showing an inability to write. This chapter will not only highlight the persistence of pockets of hard-core illiteracy during the Meiji period but will also try to account for some of the factors that inhibited acquisition of literacy among some sectors of the population in Japan.

Patterns of Illiteracy as Seen in Monbushō Records

About a year after the central Office of Education was established in the summer of 1871, it put out the first volume of what was to become an annual report. Published yearly since 1872, these official records, entitled *Monbushō nenpō,* are a major source of statistical information on Japanese education. The early issues reflect the prevailing concern of the 1870s with setting up an educational system and getting children into schools. While the Monbushō itself did not attempt to assess the specific skills of those children, it did state that "nothing is more important than assessing the cultural development of the people and measuring the extent of participation in the new school system," and it urged local offices to undertake systematic surveys of their constituencies. But, as the annual for 1880 laments, regional offices were overwhelmed by other priorities despite the urgency of the task, and that year only two prefectures—Gunma and Shiga—could respond to requests for survey data.[7] With the administration of surveys left to localities, the results were haphazard and disappointing.

The earliest Meiji-period data on literacy and illiteracy come mainly from three prefectures: Shiga Prefecture from 1877 to 1893 (the most complete set), Okayama Prefecture from 1887 to 1893, and Kagoshima Prefecture from 1884 to 1889. Although Gunma was one of the earliest prefectures to report, it did so for only one year; Shimane and Aomori reported in such an unsystematic manner that the information is not included here. The Aomori records, for example, were not clear about who was included in the sample tested. The small number of prefectures reporting and the fact that comparative data are scarce, since those that did give an account did not necessarily submit information for the same years, are obvious limitations. But the materials have some positive features as well. Notably, the three prefectures represented distinctly different geographical regions of Japan. Located in central Honshu near Kyoto, Shiga was a commercially active area on the Tōkaidō road connecting the economic

hub of Osaka with the political center in Tokyo. Okayama, located on a less-traveled road farther west, was on the coast of the Inland Sea, the main trade route between Osaka and western Japan. Kagoshima was situated at the southern tip of Kyushu, far from major routes of commerce and communication.

In each of these prefectures, people were tested specifically on the ability to read and write their names. The sample population was extremely large, including everyone over the age of six, young and old, male and female, within the particular jurisdiction. In Shiga the sample size ran from 510,000 to 575,000 people over the period when the test was given, some seventeen years. In Okayama it was just short of one million during the seven years of testing. In Kagoshima it varied between 600,000 and 800,000 testees. At least for these localities, the data would appear to be a measure of the ability and inability to sign across virtually the entire population.

Figure 14 shows patterns of illiteracy (the inability to write one's name) over time in the three prefectures from which useful reports are available. Clearly there is great regional variation, but it can be safely said that if other prefectures were included, the gap would be even wider. This is because Kagoshima was clearly at the high end of the illiteracy spectrum, but other materials (to be considered below) show that Shiga was not lowest in illiteracy, as it is in this graph. In all cases the general trend is downward over time. Compulsory schooling eventually had an impact on illiteracy rates, although that effect appears to have occurred much later than has been thought. In areas such as Kagoshima, a dramatic reduction in illiteracy rates probably did not occur until the second or third decade of the twentieth century.

If extrapolation ahead to the period when illiteracy disappeared is permissible, then is it not likewise allowable to (tentatively) extrapolate back? The relatively high levels of illiteracy observed in the early Meiji period, along with the wide geographical differences, were almost certainly influenced by the late Tokugawa period's patterns of culture and learning. Although the precise pattern or extent is unknown, it is likely that the levels of illiteracy shown here were higher in earlier periods. At the least these materials suggest that recent attempts to inflate literacy rates for Tokugawa Japan by upgrading estimates of the number of writing schools are misleading.[8]

In the same way national estimates of literacy or school attendance can mask important regional differences, prefecture-wide numbers, as in the graph above, can hide glaring distinctions within local populations. Figure 15 presents the same data broken down into male and female rates in the same three prefectures over the same periods of time.

As the graph shows, the trend over time is downward for both males and females. The exception is Shiga males, whose level of illiteracy was low at the

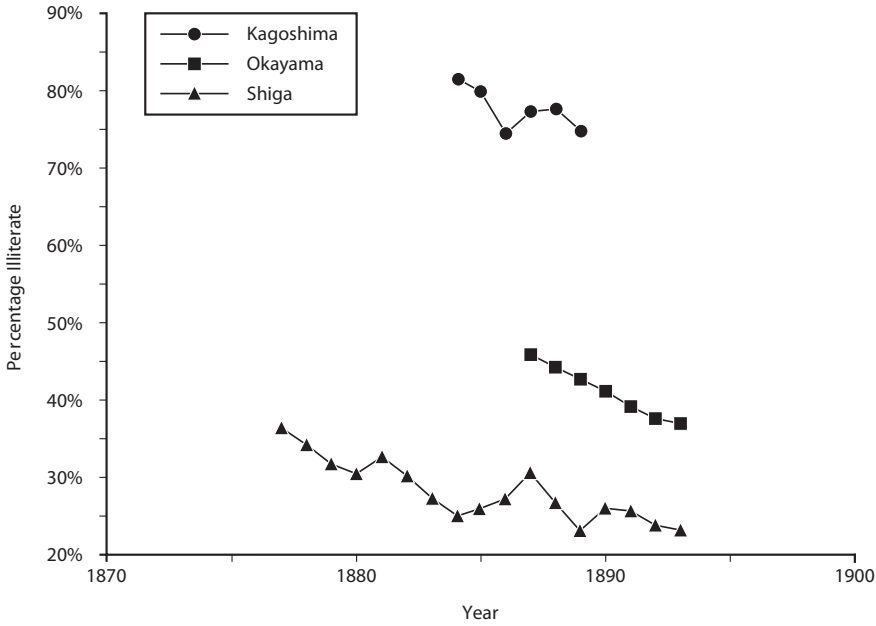


Figure 14. Illiteracy in three prefectures. *Source: Monbushō nenpō.*

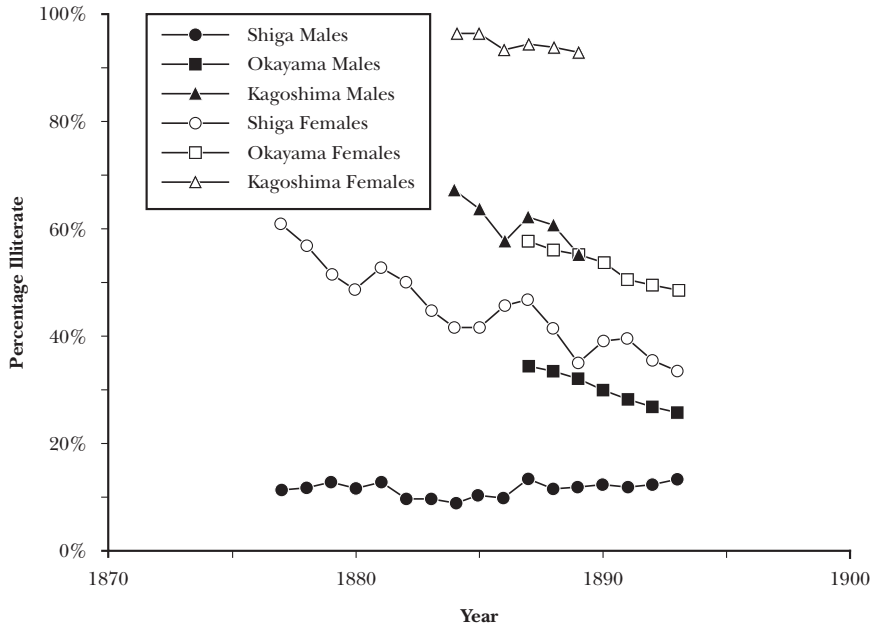


Figure 15. Male/female illiteracy compared. *Source: Monbushō nenpō.*

start (10.8 percent in 1877), but then increased slightly to 13 percent by 1893. The most striking pattern is the gap between male and female illiteracy in each prefecture. In the first year of reporting, Shiga showed a 50 percent differential between male and female rates; in Okayama the spread was 23.5 percent; and in Kagoshima it was 30 percent. Notably, only in Shiga, where males show consistently low rates, does the gap between males and females narrow during the years for which data are available. It would appear that despite attempts to remedy the problem, obstacles placed before women, carried over from before the Meiji period, impeded their access to literacy and learning until the end of the nineteenth century, if not beyond.

At the other end of the scale, the extraordinarily high rates of both male and female illiteracy in Kagoshima in the first year of its survey are noteworthy (66.5 percent for males and 96 percent for females in 1884). This gap between the sexes widens over the period for which records exist. The data reveal some important regional differences in Kagoshima. For the year 1885, illiteracy rates of males and females were broken down according to the three former provinces of which Kagoshima Prefecture was constituted. This information shows that patterns of illiteracy were not homogenous throughout the prefecture. In 1885, male rates of illiteracy were generally similar across the three provinces: 62.6 percent in Satsuma, 63.6 percent in Ōsumi, and 68.3 percent in the portion of Hyūga that had been incorporated in Kagoshima Prefecture. But the female rates show variation and are considerably lower in southern Hyūga (86 percent) than in Satsuma (95.6 percent) or in Ōsumi (97.1 percent).[9]

The first thing to be said about these data is that the highest female illiteracy occurred in areas where the rates were also high among males. School attendance records similarly show that areas with low female attendance had correspondingly low male attendance. In such localities, there may have been general disincentives to school attendance and literacy affecting both sexes instead of particular obstacles that barred women from learning.

The comparison between male and female illiteracy in Shiga, Okayama, and Kagoshima also indicates that regional disparities may have been more powerful than gender as determining variables with respect to illiteracy. While females showed higher rates of total illiteracy than males everywhere, there was wide regional variation in the extent of the gap between males and females. Figure 15, for instance, shows that females in Shiga and Okayama had lower illiteracy rates than males in Kagoshima. Or, to put it another way, females in Shiga and Okayama (and presumably other areas as well) were more likely to become literate than males in Kagoshima. Data on school attendance in the Tokugawa period also supports the conclusion that gender was not the barrier

to learning and literacy that geography was, and that regional differences were a more compelling factor than gender distinctions.[10]

This information on illiteracy in three prefectures obtained from *Monbushō nenpō* indicates first of all that total illiteracy was found in some parts of Japan until at least the end of the nineteenth century, decades after the initiation of compulsory mass education in 1872. It also suggests that there was wide geographical divergence with respect to illiteracy. Although this gap narrowed by the 1890s, it remained significant with regard to these three prefectures, which represented different parts of the country. Insofar as literacy is concerned, it is clear that the several regions of Japan entered the Meiji period with distinct legacies. Consequently, they were variously positioned for the task of adapting to the imposition of the modern school system in the 1870s. Not all prefectures, moreover, made the same commitment to putting children in public school in the following years.

Shiga was a particularly conscientious prefecture, one that actively developed special programs to encourage attendance for the indigent and females who resisted the prefectural authorities' best attempts to enroll them in school. Other regions, like Kagoshima, apparently did not make such efforts, at least not at first. Early reports from Shiga accompanying the literacy data were unusually frank and specific regarding the problems to be overcome and the prefectural government's policy initiatives. "Education is not yet seen as useful by people, and parents are complaining," local officials reported in 1877. As reasons for this state of affairs they pointed to a perception of schools as "irrelevant" and offering no benefit, poverty, and "stupid and obstinate" *(gangu)* parents. Noting that poorer families tended to be isolated in the larger cities of Ōtsu and Hikone, the report went on to state that policies to aid them were already in effect. Those who could not afford school fees would be exempted from them and would be lent necessary school supplies, such as textbooks. Special attention was paid to encouraging young girls and the poor to attend, with efforts made to persuade parents not to hire daughters out as babysitters but send them to school instead. There were plans to develop better textbooks —to make them more appropriate to age levels and abilities as well as readily affordable. Such efforts to identify and overcome impediments to school attendance undoubtedly had a causal effect on the relatively low rates of illiteracy seen in Shiga.[11]

Given the regional differences in the materials from these three prefectures, the kind of national integration regarding literacy attainment that was attributed above to members of the Tokugawa-period elite does not seem to be reflected at the level of basic literacy across the overall population. This is

another way of saying that the "two cultures" noticed in the early Tokugawa period persisted at the very end. But reliable generalizations concerning the national picture cannot be made from three prefectures alone. For that we must turn to data with a national base. Fortunately there is an additional source that permits a comprehensive view of illiteracy patterns across Japan, in every region, for a far longer period of time. This invaluable source consists of examinations given to conscripts by the Ministry of the Army.

Conscription Examinations and National Patterns of Illiteracy

With the abolition of domains and the creation of prefectures *(haihan chiken)* on August 29, 1871, the Meiji government moved rapidly to implement centralizing reforms. Four days later, on September 2, 1871, a national Office of Education was created, followed six months later by the establishment of an Office of the Army and an Office of the Navy. Less than six months after the Chief Executive Office (Dajōkan) promulgated the national school system law, Gakusei, on September 4, 1872, the government took steps to conscript young men for military service. On January 10, 1873, the Dajōkan issued the Conscription Law *(chōheirei),* and it was put into effect in April.

That the Conscription Law should have come on the heels of the new school system was more than coincidence. Conscription and education were measures viewed as essential to the successful modernization of Western European societies, and both were regarded as equally necessary for Japan. Some viewed the principles of universal education (clearly set out in the preface to the Gakusei) and universal male conscription as complementary parts of a new concept of civic instruction, an updated form of the old samurai notion of *bunbu,* training in literary and martial arts. One of the architects of the modern Japanese military, Yamagata Aritomo (1838–1922), the man who was largely responsible for the Conscription Law of 1873, described the ideal education for boys as follows: "When they reach the age of six, they will enter elementary schools. At thirteen they will move to middle schools. At nineteen they will complete their studies. At the age of twenty they will enter the military and spend several years there. Thus, throughout the country there will be no one who is not a soldier, and everyone will be literate."[12]

The conscription system underwent many changes during the early Meiji years. At the outset, so many exemptions were allowed that only a small group carried the burden of military service, seriously undermining the principle of mass conscription. Exemptions were granted not only to the physically

unfit but also to students at army or navy officer training schools, middle school students and graduates, and officials at certain national schools. Heads of households, direct heirs, those with "other" family reasons, and criminals were all freed from military service. Most inimical to the system, and the cause of greatest outcry, was the exemption for those who could pay 270 yen for a substitute. This meant, in effect, that the leadership class and anyone who was relatively well off—the middle and upper classes—could buy their way out of military service.[13] One scholar has calculated that in 1876, 82 percent of the nearly 300,000 eligible males were exempted and just over 3 percent of those in the age group actually served.[14] In response to widespread draft evasion, the Conscription Law was revised in 1879, 1883, and 1889 to reduce exemptions and increase the fairness of the system.

Promulgated in the same year as the Meiji Constitution, the Conscription Law of 1889 completely revised earlier laws and remained in effect until 1927. With the aim of establishing universal conscription by the turn of the twentieth century, most exemptions were abolished. Every male who had reached the mandatory conscription age of twenty was subjected to a physical and, on top of that, an academic examination. These tests were given every year in each military district in the country. Beginning in 1899 and for each year thereafter until 1937, the Ministry of the Army recorded the results of the academic test in its statistical annual, *Rikugunshō tōkei nenpō.*

Section 5 of the original Conscription Law of 1873 had in fact called for academic evaluations of the new recruits' reading and writing skills. Recruits were to be required to write two or three lines of "ordinary correspondence" and to do figures using division related to problems of everyday life. Results were to be recorded in prefectural personnel registers and sent to local army headquarters. Later, revised versions of the Conscription Law do not explicitly call for exams, but records left by recruits indicate that evaluations of academic skills were carried out. A Tokyo document dated 1890 categorized recruits according to whether they had graduated from upper elementary school, ordinary elementary school, or had no education at all.[15]

Systematic data do not become available, however, until April of 1899, when the Ministry of the Army ordered each military district *(rentai-ku)* in the country to prepare a "chart of the educational levels of recruits" *(sōtei futsū kyōiku teido hyō).* The results are recorded in the "Education" section of *Rikugunshō tōkei nenpō* each year beginning in 1899 (volume 13). Uniform methods for administering the tests were apparently not established for some time, because four years later, in 1903, brigade commanders in Nagoya, Yamaguchi, Himeji, and elsewhere were still calling for such standardization.[16]

In 1905, the Ministry of Education, seeking independent data on the

effectiveness of the school system, sought to use these exams for its own purposes. It sent a notice to regional educational officials requesting that they cooperate with local military officers in the implementation of the academic tests and ordering them to report the results. The same year, cooperation with the military in administering conscript exams became part of the responsibilities of county school inspectors *(gun shigaku),* a position first established by the Elementary School Law of 1900.

This cooperation undoubtedly enhanced the effectiveness of the conscription system because it was the schools, not the military, that had officials in virtually every town and village. Indeed, information provided by school officials became the basis for personnel registries used in the examination process. Yet from the kinds of information recorded in their annuals it is also clear that the two ministries had different attitudes regarding the examinations. What the army most wanted to know was whether its recruits could read and write and how many characters they knew, so that training programs could be made more effective and training manuals keyed to appropriate levels.

Monbushō nenpō indicates that the Ministry of Education was primarily interested in school enrollments rather than in measuring specific skill levels of the population, a matter clearly considered to be of much less importance.[17] In 1925, responsibility for the academic testing of recruits was nevertheless transferred to it, bringing about, for the first time, the long-sought-after standardized systematic nationwide process of evaluating recruits. But under the aegis of the Ministry of Education, the method of ranking test results changed. The army tests had included categories that indicated skill levels below equivalence to elementary school graduation—"some ability to read and write" and "total inability to read and write at all." In line with the Ministry of Education's interest in promoting school attendance, these categories were replaced by a simple distinction between attendance and nonattendance at public schools.[18]

Eventually, during the early years of the Shōwa period (1926–1989), the Ministry of Education converted these conscription exams into full-scale school achievement tests on a nationwide basis. This was the first time, according to one scholar, that military testing of recruits became the foundation of a national system of educational achievement tests.[19]

The Nature of the Conscript Examination Data

From 1891 to 1898, *Rikugunshō tōkei nenpō* recorded nationwide data from conscription tests given to those who were actually recruited into the military, that is, a far smaller number than of those who reached draft age (the sample

size increases from about 18,000 in 1891 to about 50,000 in 1898). From 1899 to 1937, however, the same source recorded the results of tests given to all males throughout the country who reached the age of twenty. The large sample (419,416 in 1899), the inclusion of every military district in the nation, and the fact that the categories listed incorporate reading, writing, and calculation skills below elementary school equivalence makes the information particularly valuable.[20]

The examinations evaluated the testees according to a ranking that corresponded largely, but not exclusively, to levels in the public school system. In 1899 the top category was "graduate of middle school." In time, additional categories were added at the top, including "graduate of higher school" and eventually "graduate of university." Below the rank of a middle school graduate was "graduate of higher elementary school" and "graduate of ordinary *(jinjō)* elementary school," the lowest rung of the school system. For the period under scrutiny here, the ordinary elementary level covered the compulsory education years, rising from four years to six in 1907.

Below these school equivalence levels were two additional categories: "those with some ability to read and write" *(yaya yomi-kaki o nasu mono)* followed by "those totally unable to read or write" *(mattaku yomi-kaki o nasazaru mono).* From 1900, calculation was added to reading and writing in these two categories. These are the most comprehensive data available for revealing patterns of illiteracy on a national scale in Meiji Japan. Unlike school attendance data, these tests include direct measurements of minimal skills (and the lack thereof) in reading, writing, and arithmetic, making them useful in assessing actual achievement levels in at least part of the national population.

The conscript data have serious drawbacks. They provide no information whatever about women, so information on literacy patterns among women remains tied to school attendance. They are limited to a specific age group in the population—twenty-year-old males—and do not follow their progress over time, because the tests were given only the year a man entered military service. Finally, information is presented not by prefecture of residence but according to the regimental district *(rentai-ku)* to which the recruits were assigned on the basis of their family registers, which makes patterns of migration and its possible impact difficult to detect.

There were fifty-four regimental districts from 1899 to 1904 and seventy-four in 1909. In 1899 they represented geographical units either identical with or smaller than the prefectures. Over time, as military administration improved, they became smaller and more numerous. This is an advantage, of course, in that it makes it possible to look at geographical entities smaller than prefectures and trace regional differences with greater precision than inspect-

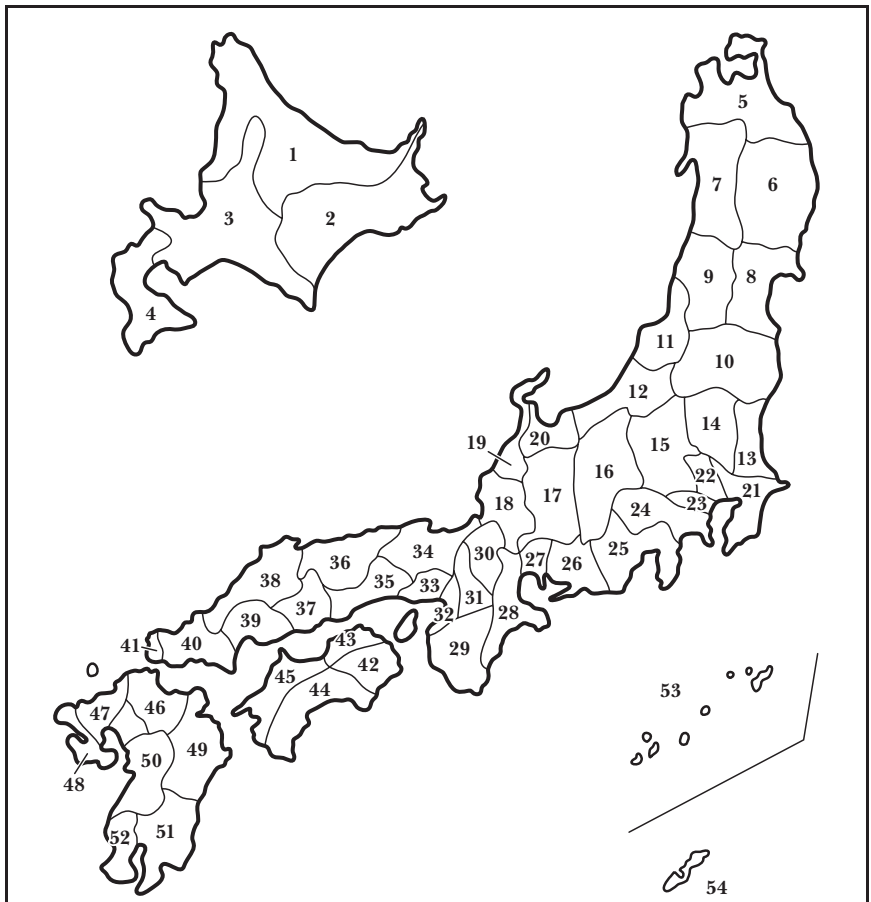
ing the larger prefectural unit would allow. For each year that it provides the results of examinations, *Rikugunshō tōkei nenpō* includes maps of district borders, so the data can be arranged in a way that accurately reflects the shifting boundaries. Map 1 shows district borders for 1904. Unfortunately, the data are not accompanied by full explanations of how the tests were administered, what the questions were, and whether they were the same from region to region or year to year. Reliance on town, village, and prefectural authorities without strong central guidance made the process of administering the tests inconsistent in the early years. The wide discretion of local officials in implementing the examinations meant that consolidation and systematization took time and was not fully brought about until the Ministry of Education took over the administration of the tests in 1925.

The earliest guide to test procedures was outlined in the Conscription Law of 1873: "For the test of reading and calculation skills, an appropriate tester and test site will be chosen. Candidates will be placed in higher or lower groups according to their ability to read and calculate. Each candidate will be asked to read two or three lines. Those who can read fluently will be placed in the higher groups; those who err on two or more characters will be put in the lower. Those who can do all four arithmetic skills will be put in the high calculation group; others will go into the low group."[21]

By 1899, however, grading had become considerably more sophisticated, reflecting the stabilization of a national school system, the development of village, town, and regional systems of administration, and the cooperation of local education officials. Testees were now sorted not just into higher and lower rankings but also into categories equivalent to levels in the school system.

The best information on how standards and procedures developed comes from reports by Osaka and Kyoto school officials. A summary of tests given in Osaka Prefecture in 1900 explains that each young man would be summoned to the test site by a county or town head and asked to write his own name and address. If he was able to do that, he would be tested separately for further skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic. By 1903 the test questions were coming directly from textbooks used in the Osaka public schools.

The report goes on to vent the frustrations of officials over the poor performance of these twenty-year-olds. Authorities complained that some men seemed to have no respect for the correct rendering of their names as they appeared in family registers. That is, testees would resort to incorrect simplifications of even the most common characters in their names, such as "jirō" and "suke." Graduates of elementary schools "could not do much," it was alleged, and few of those with only two years of schooling could read such common place names as Settsu, Kawachi, or Izumi. Many recruits were unable to read



1	Asahikawa	**15**	Takasaki	**29**	Wakayama	**43**	Marugame
2	Kushiro	**16**	Nagano	**30**	Ōtsu	**44**	Kōchi
3	Sapporo	**17**	Gifu	**31**	Kyoto	**45**	Matsuyama
4	Hakodate	**18**	Sabae	**32**	Osaka	**46**	Kokura
5	Hirosaki	**19**	Kanazawa	**33**	Kōbe	**47**	Fukuoka
6	Morioka	**20**	Toyama	**34**	Fukuchiyama	**48**	Ōmura
7	Akita	**21**	Sakura	**35**	Himeji	**49**	Ōita
8	Sendai	**22**	Hongō	**36**	Tottori	**50**	Kumamoto
9	Yamagata	**23**	Azabu	**37**	Onomichi	**51**	Miyazaki
10	Fukushima	**24**	Yokohama	**38**	Hamada	**52**	Kagoshima
11	Shibata	**25**	Shizuoka	**39**	Hiroshima	**53**	Okinawa
12	Kashiwazaki	**26**	Toyohashi	**40**	Yamaguchi	**54**	Tsushima
13	Mito	**27**	Nagoya	**41**	Kokura		
14	Utsunomiya	**28**	Tsu	**42**	Tokushima		

Map 1. Military Districts in 1904. *Source: Rikugunshō tōkei nenpō.*

whole sentences and could merely pick out individual characters, while those with only one year of school were no different from nonattenders. Abilities in arithmetic were equally low, it was reported. There were graduates of elementary schools who could not do division. Although they could do computations from the multiplication tables, demands to reverse the process and divide using the same numbers "were met by blank stares."[22]

Kyoto reports for 1909 and 1910 indicate a greater systematization of the testing process. Whereas from 1900 to 1903 each county had given its own tests, by 1904 Kyoto Prefecture had centralized the design of tests and had school inspectors monitoring procedures in every county. Elementary school principals were asked to compile personnel registers giving the educational background of each testee, and the tester, with this information before him, would set out problems appropriate to the level of schooling reached. Achieving 80 percent success would lead to more difficult questions; managing no more than 20 percent would result in easier questions. Eventually the candidate would be placed in a ranking commensurate with his actual skills. By 1909 Kyoto testers were supplied not only with standardized questions and answers but also follow-up questions as well as guidelines on how to correct common errors.

By that year, Kyoto's standards of reading, writing, and arithmetic were impressively high (see the appendix to this chapter). Interestingly, the reports for that year indicate that the tests were not used solely for the purpose of surveying basic skills but also as the basis for further training, political propaganda, and ideological indoctrination. Students might be asked, for example, to read some characters or sentences from the Imperial Rescript on Education. This would be followed by instruction in correct interpretations of the document. Examiners also asked broad, leading questions such as, "What ought to be done to improve the wealth and strength of the country?"[23] The 1910 report for Kyoto makes it clear that the questions were carefully considered and prepared in advance, with personnel designated to lead the discussions. Evidently, the tests were being used for moral guidance and "adult education" of young men who had not been to school for some time. In 1910, the subject matter recommended for this training included information about foreign countries. It was also suggested that the issues be discussed in such a way as to "create a pleasant and optimistic attitude about the future."[24]

The categories used to evaluate conscripts pose the question of whether or not to include the "some learning" category among illiterates. The lowest level scored on conscript exams, "total inability to read, write, and calculate," would seem to be straightforward enough and can properly be described as "illiteracy."[25] But what about the next higher category, "some ability to read

write and calculate" *(yaya yomi-kaki sanjutsu dekiru mono)?* This presumably would indicate skill levels below that of ordinary elementary school (four years in 1899, raised to six in 1907) but not total disability. Should those in this category, nevertheless, be considered "illiterate"?

The problem is real because in one study of Meiji illiteracy based on the army materials, that of Kurosaki Chiharu, the "some learning" figures are incorporated in the category of illiteracy, vastly inflating its size.[26] In a few cases the "some learning" numbers are large and thus have a considerable impact on the interpretation of the data. In 1899, for example, Azabu (today an upscale section of central Tokyo) recorded only 9.9 percent in the "totally illiterate" category but had 36.1 percent in the "some learning" group. From one perspective, Azabu might be considered to have been a place where illiteracy was low. In the Kurosaki study, however, the inclusion of the "some learning" category among "illiterates" led to its being listed among the highest in illiteracy. To cite another case that could mislead, in 1899 Akita in the rural northeast had 18.6 percent in the "totally illiterate" category and 41.3 percent with "some learning." In general, most areas would have their percentages of "illiterates" increased by about 20 percent if the "some learning" category were included.

In seeking to solve this problem, I have looked carefully at the test questions and the standards set for different levels, although these are not always clear for each year and a full set of test questions for each region is not available. Examples of test questions at various levels used in Kyoto in 1909 are provided in the appendix to this chapter. The questions show that the content of materials required both for reading and calculation was practical rather than theoretical or speculative. As one would expect, the degree of difficulty decreased from higher elementary to two years of elementary, but the norm at every level was quite high by today's standards. *Sōrōbun* (epistolary style) was required of graduates of elementary school, and after only two years of elementary schooling, students were expected to know both of the *kana* syllabaries and some Chinese characters for everyday use. Assuming that two years of elementary schooling was the standard for the "some learning" category (and for 1909 there is reason to believe it was), it seems inappropriate to lump those with some reading and writing skills in all three systems of writing with those totally unable to read and write. Unlike the Kurosaki study cited above, the "some learning" group is therefore not included among the "total illiterates" in this chapter. For comparative purposes, however, the extent of the "some learning" category is shown together with the percentages of "total illiterates" in Figure 16 showing "Areas of Highest and Lowest Illiteracy in 1899."

A final consideration is that in 1907 compulsory schooling was extended from four to six years. If "some learning" was regarded as equivalent to what

would be acquired in more than two years but less than full elementary schooling, by 1907 it might have included up to five or six years of learning. Despite the grumbling of education officials of the time, this is another reason to reject the notion that persons in this category ought to be judged "illiterate."

What Do the Data Show?

What, then, do the conscript examination records reveal about patterns of illiteracy among twenty-year-old Japanese men between the years 1899, when almost the entire age group was first included, and ten years later, in 1909, when compulsory schooling had reached virtually the entire school-age population?

The 1899 examinations clearly show great regional differences with regard to total illiteracy. The bar graph in Figure 16 compares military districts with the highest and lowest illiteracy rates to highlight the extent of these differences. The gaps are wide, with 76.3 percent of recruits in Okinawa and 57.6 percent in Kōchi (Shikoku) "totally unable to read and write." At the other end of the scale, only 7 percent of recruits in Sendai (northeast Honshu) and 9 percent in Tsu (central Mie Prefecture) fell into the illiterate category.

The graph shows that adding the "some learning" category to the illiteracy percentages would raise levels of illiteracy substantially, by 20 percentage points or more. If the category of "some learning" were included, Fukushima (northeast Honshu) or Toyohashi (central Honshu)—among the lowest in total illiteracy—would have rates close to the illiteracy levels of the highest areas such as Marugame (Kagawa Prefecture on Shikoku) or Matsuyama (Ehime Prefecture). Such are the ambiguities of categorization in even so apparently straightforward a matter as illiteracy.

Over time, illiteracy rates declined and the wide regional differences narrowed. The chart "Illiteracy in Japan: 1899 and 1904 Compared" (see Figure 17) lists military districts from northeast to southwest, from Hokkaido to Okinawa. Notable in the overall pattern are the higher rates of illiteracy in 1899 in the western sections of the country—western Honshu, Shikoku, and Okinawa. The areas with the highest rates tended to be located on the extremities of the Japanese archipelago, relatively far from urban centers, such as Kōchi on the island of Shikoku or Kagoshima at the extreme southwestern tip of Kyushu. By contrast, between 1899 and 1904 regional disparities flattened out across the board. Almost everywhere illiteracy rates dropped. Only in the regimental districts of Asahikawa (Hokkaido), Hirosaki (Aomori Prefecture), Hongō (Tokyo), and Sabae (Fukui Prefecture) did the rates increase over time. The

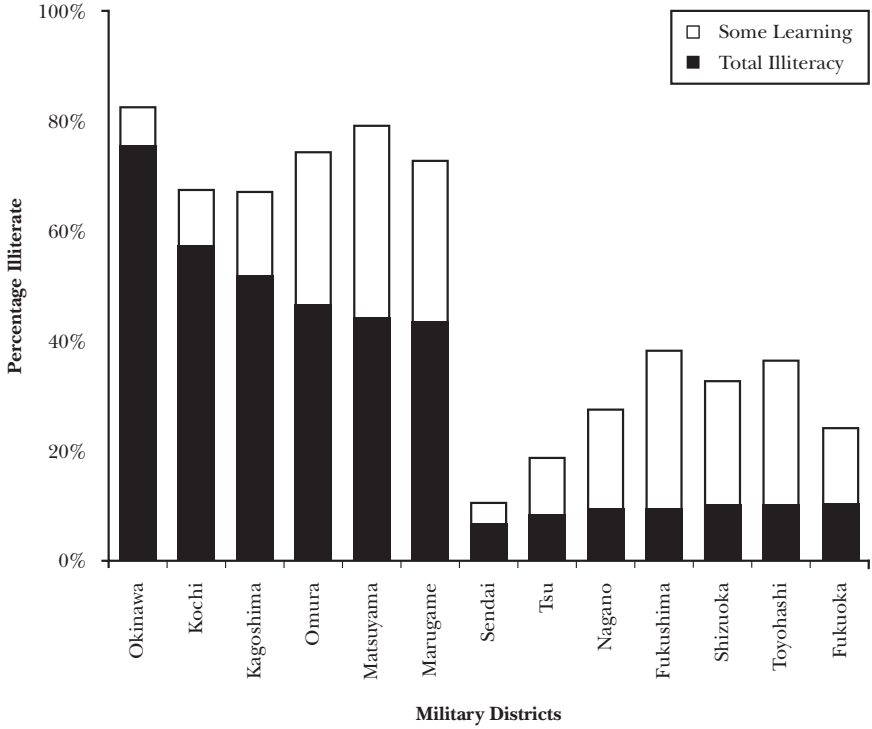


Figure 16. Areas of highest and lowest illiteracy in 1899. *Source: Rikugunshō tōkei nenpō.*

most dramatic declines were in the areas with the highest rates in 1899. These were mainly rural parts of the country—Sakura (Chiba Prefecture), Onomichi (southeastern Hiroshima Prefecture), Ōmura (Nagasaki Prefecture), Kagoshima, Morioka (Iwate Prefecture), Gifu (central Honshu), Marugame, Matsuyama, and Kōchi (all three in Shikoku), and Kokura (now part of the city of Kitakyūshū in northern Kyushu; in 1904, however, this military district included sections of western Honshu as well as northern Kyushu).

In districts that included urban areas, the declines were less spectacular. Azabu and Hongō, now sections of metropolitan Tokyo, both started out quite low in illiteracy and showed no change (Azabu) or a slightly higher rate five years later (Hongō). Substantially larger than the residential quarters that bear these names today, the military districts incorporated rural areas as well as downtown parts of the city. The Azabu regimental district encompassed the commercial center of Nihonbashi and the Kyōbashi industrial area and also rural sections of Kanagawa Prefecture; in the Hongō district were Tokyo Impe-

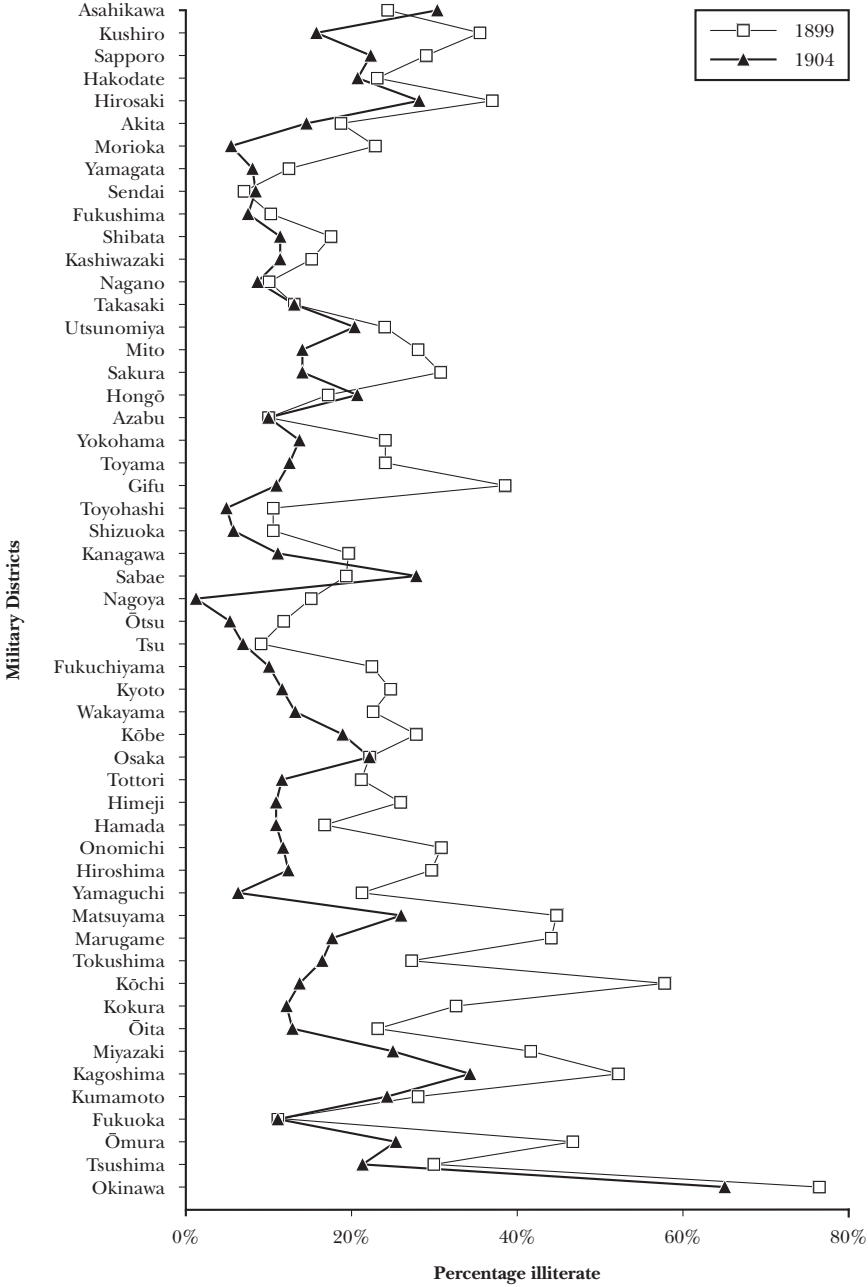


Figure 17. Illiteracy in Japan: 1899 and 1904 compared. *Source: Rikugunshō tōkei nenpō.*

rial University, the private schools of Kanda, the industrial areas of Honjo and Fukagawa, and the entertainment district of Asakusa as well as the countryside of Saitama Prefecture.[27] Without a more detailed breakdown of the data it is impossible to determine the urban-rural dynamics of illiteracy in these areas.

Among other regions, both Fukuoka and Sendai followed the typical urban pattern of low illiteracy in 1899 with little change by 1904. Mito, like Sendai a Tokugawa-period castle town and later a northeastern prefectural capital, followed the more rural pattern of high illiteracy in 1899 with a significant drop by 1904. Several reasons may be cited for the difference. One of the three collateral domains of the shogunal family, Mito was the center of an influential emperor-oriented school of learning at the end of the Tokugawa period. Long and bitter factional disputes within the domain culminated in the Mito Civil War (1864), which ruined the domain's finances and decimated its manpower. The bitterness of internal quarrels continued for decades after the Meiji Restoration, leading to a difficult relationship with the Meiji government and an uneven beginning for the prefectural public school system. In Sendai, a defeated territory taken over by the new government, there was by comparison with Mito a more united effort to establish public schools in the early Meiji years, when the recruits in the data pool under consideration would have been of school age.

Geographical factors also help explain the differences in illiteracy rates between these two prefectural capitals. Sendai sits on the Pacific coast, within a large protected bay that was and still is a major port for sea commerce with the industrialized areas of lower Honshu. As a main link in the east-west rail system put in place in 1889, it was connected with major industrial and commercial centers as far west as Himeji. Mito, on the other hand, is set inland from the coast and remained relatively isolated from central transportation links until much later. Both political and geographical factors probably played a role in the differences in illiteracy rates.

There are some exceptions to the patterns of rural and urban illiteracy set out here. Nagano, a rural area, showed low illiteracy in 1899 and little change by 1904, more like urban areas. The same was true of Shizuoka on the heavily traveled Tōkaidō linking Osaka and Tokyo. It is not clear why Nagoya rates went from an already low 15 percent in 1899 to 1 percent by 1904, far lower than any other district. The classification of degrees of illiteracy may be a factor since the "slight learning" group in Nagoya for 1904 was a relatively high 20 percent. Osaka shows the most unusual circumstances of all. An urban center and major marketplace since before the Tokugawa period, Osaka maintained relatively high illiteracy rates over the span of time measured here. Fortunately, it

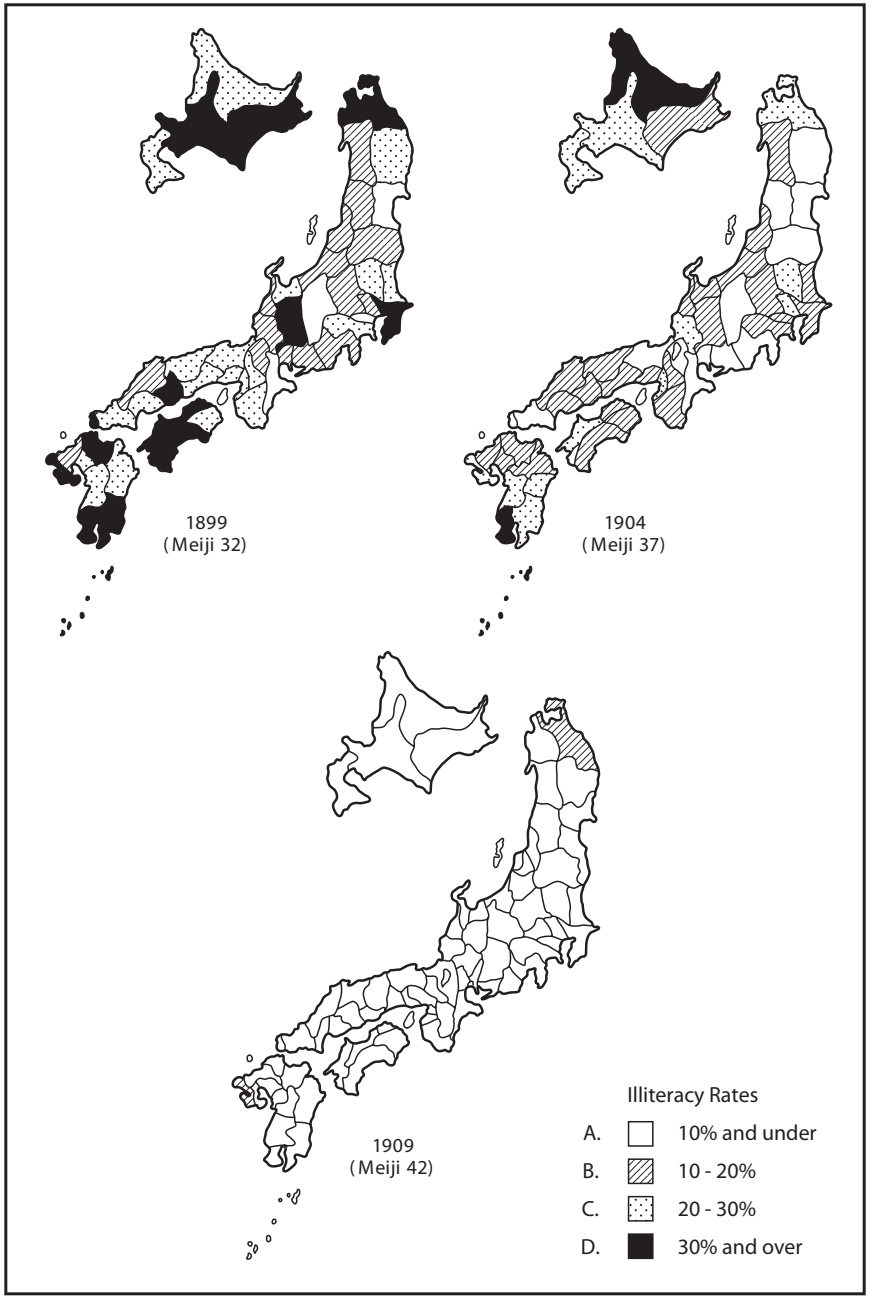
is one of the few areas where illiteracy data were broken down into geographical units smaller than military districts, making a more detailed analysis possible. Some potential reasons for high illiteracy in Osaka will be taken up below, after a consideration of nationwide changes over time.

Around 1905, perhaps related to the wave of patriotic fervor that swept through Japan at the time of the war with Russia, school attendance figures for the first time shot up to nearly universal levels for both boys and girls.[28] One would expect to find illiteracy virtually vanishing everywhere among recruits who were of school age then—that is, those who reached the age of twenty around 1920. This is confirmed by army illiteracy records for 1919. But the regional differences that characterized this process are noteworthy.

The three national maps in Map 2 show declines in illiteracy rates among recruits by military district in five-year intervals, illustrating the situation that obtained in 1899, 1904, and 1909. The map for 1899 shows the persistence of wide regional differences in illiteracy among the population of twenty-year-old males. It makes clear that while there may have been considerable cultural unification among members of the elite of the late Tokugawa era—that is, samurai, wealthy merchants, and some rural landowners—the general population in late Tokugawa and early Meiji Japan did not share consistent patterns of literacy attainment.

The 1899 map shows that, as noted above, in most cases the highest rates of illiteracy were found at the country's peripheries, in the northeast areas of Aomori and Hokkaido and the southwestern regions of Shikoku and Kyushu. If, using the scales indicated on the maps, categories A and B are combined as the areas of lowest illiteracy (0 to 20 percent) and categories C and D as the highest (20 to 30 percent and above), there is a clear distinction between the eastern and western parts of the country, almost as if a line had been drawn from the Japan Sea to the Pacific along the western borders of Shiga and Mie Prefectures. Higher levels of illiteracy predominated in the western part of the country, lower levels in the eastern. The regions with the highest measured illiteracy rates—Kōchi (57.6 percent), Kagoshima (52 percent), Ōmura (46.5 percent), Matsuyama (44.6 percent), Marugame (44 percent), and Okinawa (76.3 percent)—were all in the west, which as a whole fell almost entirely into categories C and D, with twelve districts in category D 30 percent or higher. With the exception of extreme northeastern Honshu and Hokkaido, most of the eastern part of the country was in categories A and B. If we include Tsu in Mie Prefecture, the only four areas nationwide in category A (0 to 10 percent illiteracy) were all in the east.

By 1904 levels of illiteracy had dropped dramatically. While the extremities of the northeast and southwest continued to show comparatively high rates,



Map 2. Decline in illiteracy by district (1899–1909). *Source: Rikugunshō tōkei nenpō.*

all other sections of the country improved, with a few exceptions. Much of northeastern and eastern Japan moved from Category B to Category A, that is, under 10 percent illiteracy. Apart from the remotest part of Hokkaido, Category D regions vanished from the map of eastern Japan. In western Japan many locales moved from Category C to Category B, under 20 percent illiteracy. With the exception of Kagoshima and Okinawa, Category D areas disappeared, and only southern Kyushu, Okinawa, Matsuyama (Shikoku), and Osaka remained in the over 20 percent category.

Osaka showed the highest illiteracy in the Kansai region in 1904, but there were other urban anomalies. The Azabu district regressed from Category A to B. The Hongō district similarly went from B to C. What accounts for these patterns? The arbitrary nature of the categories I used may have overdramatized relatively small fluctuations in the numbers. But the realities of literacy attainment in military districts like these two were particularly complex. For although in the case of Azabu or Hongō the data do not permit pinpointing recruits as coming from one part of the district as opposed to another, these districts included both areas of commercial activity (which usually correlate positively with the growth of literacy) and sites of early industrial factory development (which often correlate negatively), as well as rural locations (where illiteracy was characteristically higher).

The relatively large size of the military districts may also account for the higher levels of illiteracy seen in western Japan. While it is generally accepted that this part of the country was more developed economically than eastern Japan in the late Tokugawa era and the early Meiji period, commercial activity presumably followed the roads and sea lanes on the Honshu side of the Inland Sea to the market center at Osaka. Most of Kyushu and Shikoku remained backward and isolated. But while one might expect to find lower rates of illiteracy in the coastal areas of Honshu along the Inland Sea, where commercial traffic was heavy, and higher rates in the interior sections, the military data do not permit such distinctions. A preliminary investigation of prefectural data on Okayama recruits does, however, confirm lower rates of illiteracy in coastal areas. Oku County bordering the Inland Sea on the east and south had a port that was active in the trade of ceramics, fish, and salt. For 1902 it showed the lowest illiteracy rate among recruits in the prefecture, at 6.6 percent. In most of the interior counties, illiteracy was over 20 percent; in Kibi County it reached as high as 50 percent.[29]

The 1909 map shows that all regions moved below 10 percent illiteracy among twenty-year-old male recruits except for three districts at the extreme ends of the country—Aomori in the northeast and Okinawa and Ōmura in the west. Two of these improved from Category C to Category B. All were far from

major cities or major routes of communication and commerce. Although Ōmura was in the Nagasaki area, which had been a vital commercial and strategic link between Japan and the rest of the world in the Tokugawa era, by the middle of the Meiji period the situation had changed, and the major ports had shifted to the Osaka-Kobe region and Tokyo.

Rikugunshō tōkei nenpō makes it possible to trace the geographical patterns of illiteracy in Japan over time on a nationwide basis, illustrating broad trends on the one hand and identifying regions that do not fit the general picture on the other. Conscription data is broken down into units smaller than military districts for only a few localities, but in these areas more precise analysis of illiteracy patterns is possible.

Illiteracy in Localities: Osaka and Kyoto

For Osaka and Kyoto, detailed breakdowns of conscript data are available in readily accessible published form.[30] This information illuminates local variations hidden in the prefectural or military district records and helps explain the apparent anomaly of Osaka, an urban area with comparatively high illiteracy rates among conscripts. Regional variations with respect to illiteracy in Kyoto suggest the importance of geographical variables in determining patterns of illiteracy.

OSAKA ILLITERACY PATTERNS

The previously cited data from *Rikugunshō tokei nenpō* relative to Osaka cover not just the downtown metropolitan area of the city but also outlying rural regions of Osaka Prefecture. Figure 18, "Comparison of Illiteracy in Osaka by City and County (1900)," breaks down the illiteracy numbers into smaller geographical units that make it possible to distinguish between the urban and suburban or rural areas. The separation of Osaka City figures from the rest of the prefecture makes clear that the inner-city rates of illiteracy were far lower than those in other areas. The outlying parts of the prefecture accounted for the higher rates.

Maps distinguishing commercial and industrial parts of Osaka show that the downtown areas (corresponding to Nishi-ku, Higashi-ku, Minami-ku, and Kita-ku) were sites of commercial activity, while industrial development and the construction of factories took place in urban fringe areas.[31] By 1882 there were more than twenty-six thousand small retailers in the central core of the city, and by 1890 some forty thousand.[32] By 1896 factories were concentrated

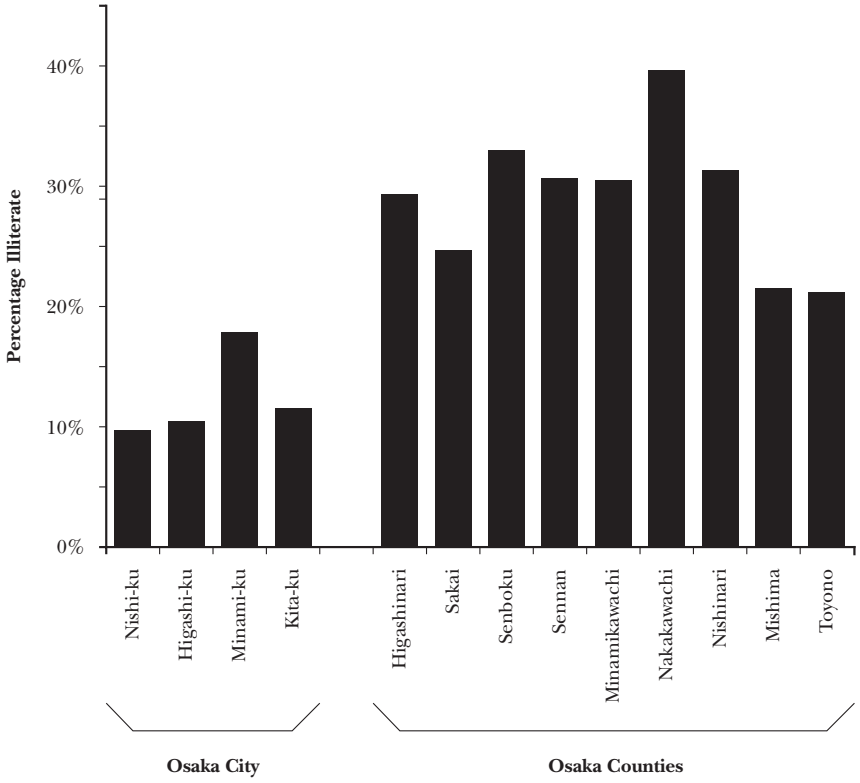


Figure 18. Comparison of illiteracy in Osaka by city and county (1900). *Source:* Ōkubo and Kaigo, eds. *Sōtei kyōiku chōsa* 5.

mainly in outlying Nishinari and Higashinari Counties. That year Nishinari had nearly twice the number of factories (243) as did the city of Osaka (130).[33] The Osaka case would thus appear to parallel the situation in many European cities, where lower rates of illiteracy were found in commercial sectors and higher rates in industrial areas, presumably because children were being pulled into factory work and away from schools or other opportunities for acquiring basic literacy.[34]

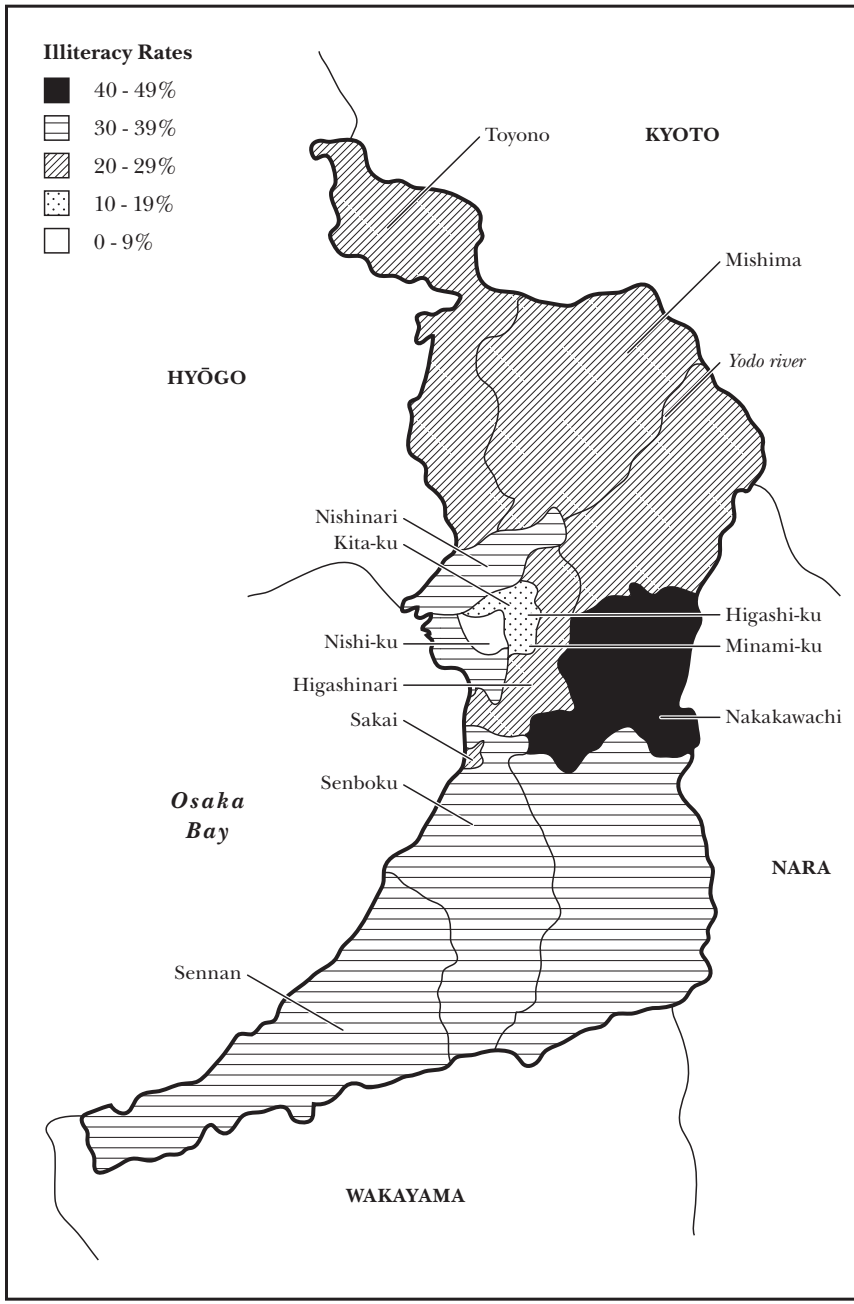
Differences in illiteracy rates between inner-city Osaka and the surrounding counties may also be observed by referring to Map 3, "Illiteracy in Osaka by county (1900)." Rates in the inner city (white and dotted areas) are significantly lower; they are the only ones under 20 percent. The western district (Nishi-ku) of the inner city (white on the map), located near Osaka Bay and the mouth of the Yodo River, had a rate under 10 percent; the northern, eastern, and southern districts of the city (dotted on the map) had rates only

slightly above 10 percent. This downtown area was most involved in trade along the Inland Sea to the west and in commercial development along the Yodo River.

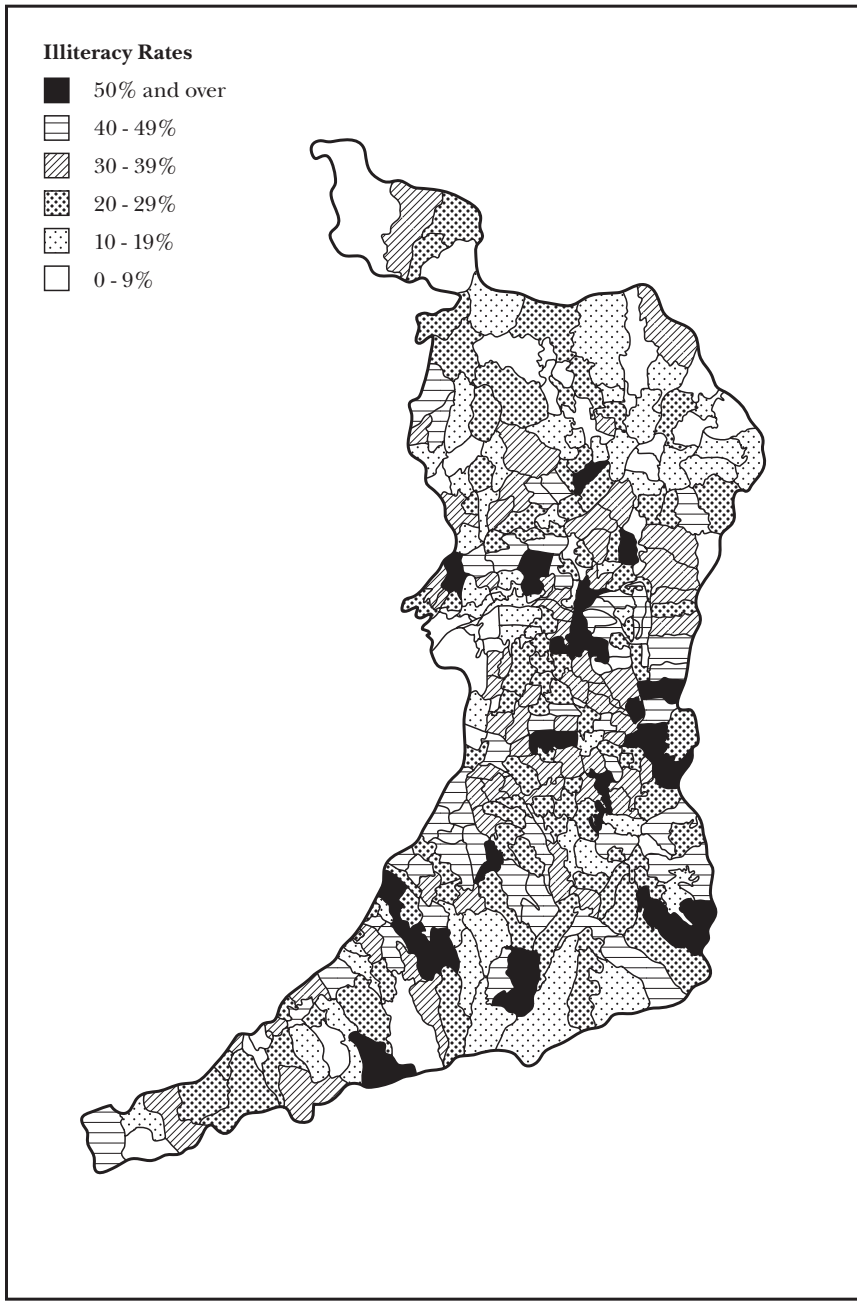
The low rates of illiteracy in the commercial areas of the inner city stand in stark contrast to the metropolitan fringe surrounding the city, where industrial development began. Nishinari County on the north, west, and south had the highest concentrations of factories and reported illiteracy in the 30 to 39 percent range. Higashinari County to the east, also a site of industrial development, was in the 20 to 29 percent range. The figures for rural areas of the prefecture were also high, with the highest rates of illiteracy (over 40 percent) in the interior Nakakawachi region, where there were few major rivers or highways for communication or the transport of goods. Even though it lies along the coast of Osaka Bay, the southern part of the prefecture likewise shows relatively high illiteracy. The coast here is rugged, with no protected harbors; even today it lacks major roads and is unsuitable for shipping. The northern part, lower in illiteracy than the south, was likely influenced by commercial activity along the Yodo River, which cuts through it. Rates may also have been affected by contiguity to southern Kyoto, where, as discussed below, illiteracy was low.

Osaka is one of only a few prefectures in Japan where conscription data are available broken down into the smallest geographical units of towns and villages.[35] A map of illiteracy rates for Osaka Prefecture by town and village (see Map 4) reveals a patchwork so complex that it defies generalization. An intricately differentiated web is seen in place of the simple block patterns of the county map. The lowest rates of illiteracy are in the center of Osaka City and in some of the suburban areas to the northeast. The rural northeast along the Yodo River and locations close to Kyoto also show low rates. High rates of illiteracy (over 50 percent) appear scattered throughout the prefecture with no obvious pattern, except for the absence of such areas in the northern region.

In line with the view that commercial enterprise was centered in the city and not in villages along the coast, areas outside the city along Osaka Bay do not show particularly low rates of illiteracy. Districts near the city with relatively high rates of illiteracy may be *burakumin* (outcast) villages or other pockets of extreme poverty or discrimination, as no obvious geographical factors such as mountains or an unmanageable distance from urban areas and rivers appear to be involved. Or they could be sites of early industrial enterprise with factories that used child labor. In those locales that have been identified as areas of particularly high illiteracy, the precise determinants of low human skill levels can only be uncovered by careful village studies that seek social and cultural answers to the problem.



Map 3. Illiteracy in Osaka by county (1900). *Source:* Ōkubo and Kaigo, eds., *Sōtei kyōiku chōsa,* 5.



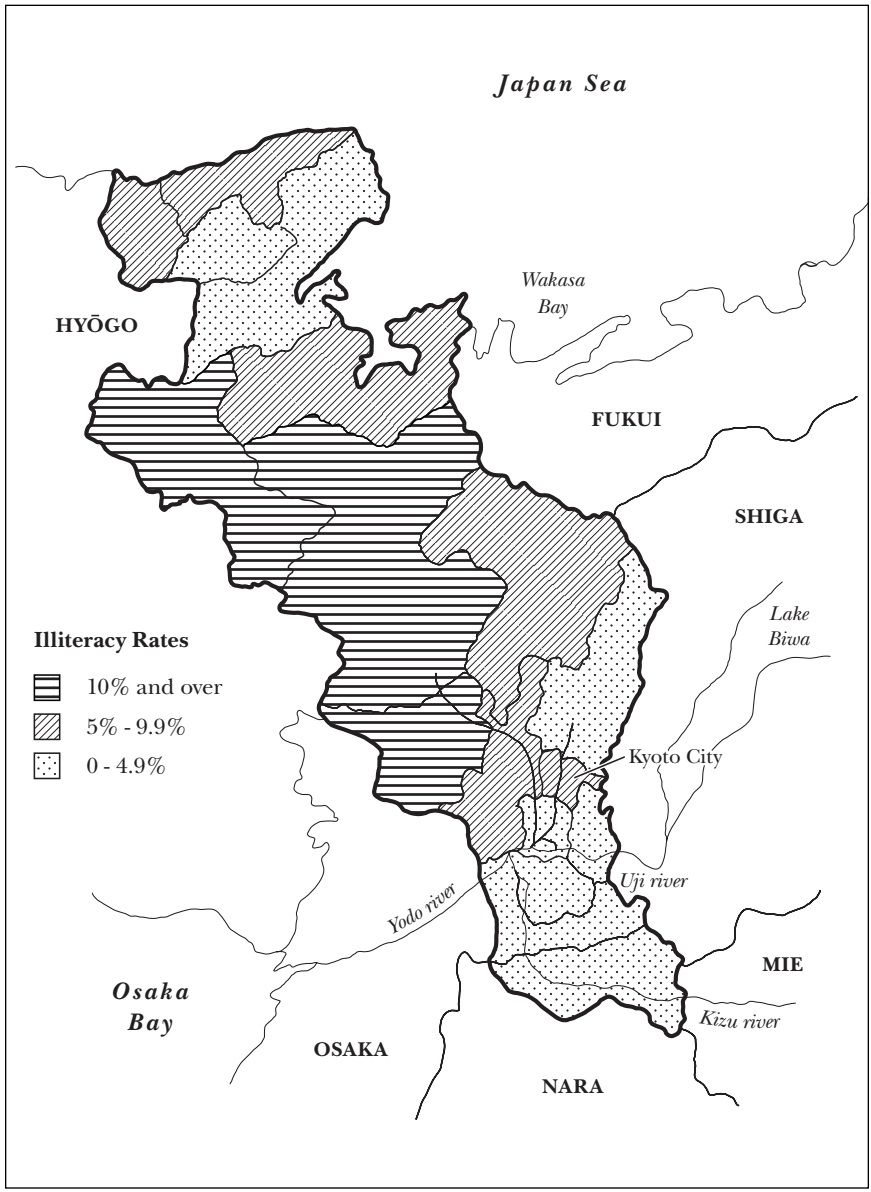
Map 4. Illiteracy in Osaka by town and village (1900). *Source:* Ōsaka-fu Naimubu Daisanka, comp., *Meiji sanjūsan nendo sōtei futsū kyōiku teido torishirabesho.*

ILLITERACY IN KYOTO

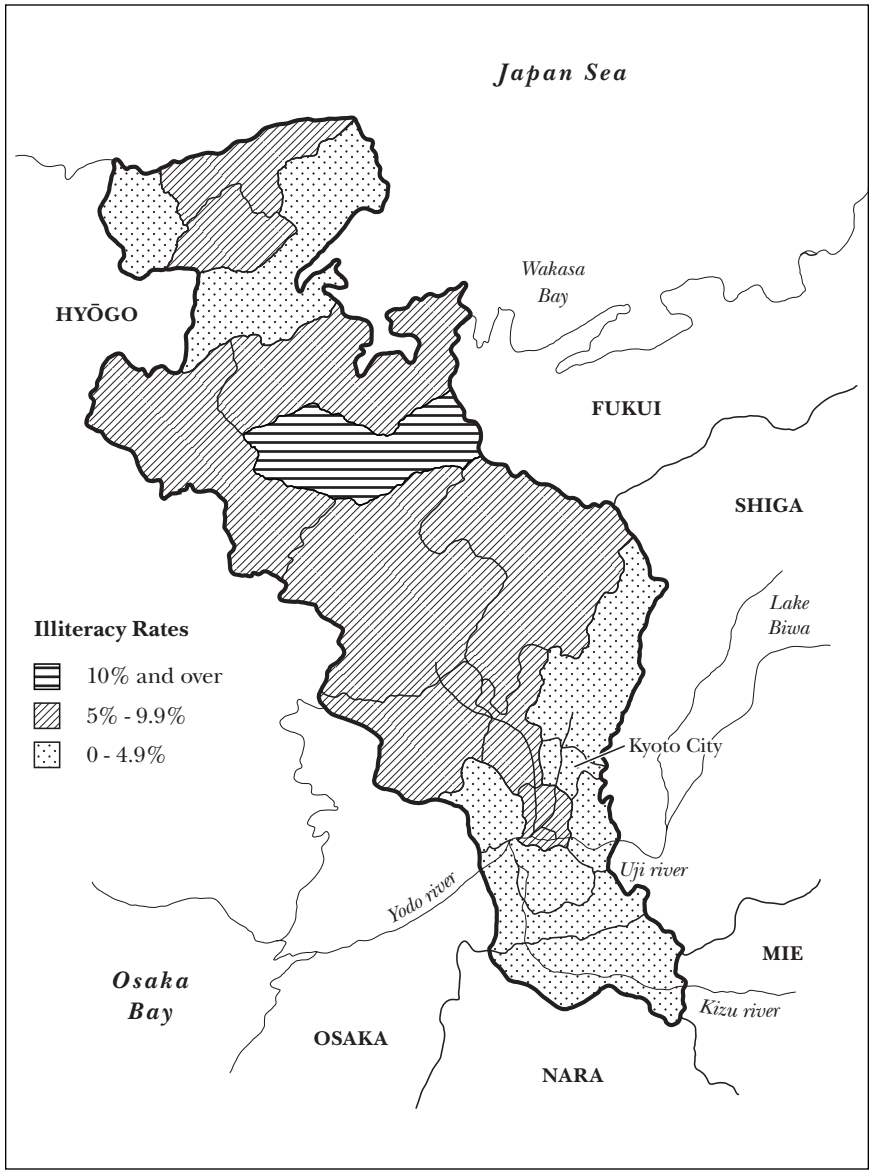
The analysis of illiteracy data for Kyoto Prefecture illustrates how these records can be used to generate new and useful hypotheses about the geographical determinants of literacy and illiteracy. Maps of Kyoto for 1902 and 1906 (see Maps 5 and 6) show conscript examination data broken down by county. Note that Kyoto illiteracy rates are far lower than Osaka's and that the scale used on the Kyoto map is substantially lower than that of the Osaka maps. The highest level for the Kyoto map is 10 percent and over illiterate; the other categories all represent fractions under 10 percent. The objective here is not to compare Kyoto and Osaka (although this could readily be done by adjusting the categories), it is to try to account for differences within Kyoto Prefecture.

The map of Kyoto for 1902 shows lowest illiteracy at the northern and southern extremities of the prefecture and the highest rates, relatively speaking, in the central region. Kyoto Prefecture is divided geographically into northern and southern regions by the Tanba mountain range. The northern region extends to the Japan Sea. There, Wakasa Bay forms a heavily indented coast with a number of good natural harbors where fishing communities and boat repairers flourished. But most important, from the standpoint of literacy, was the commerce in textiles that took place in the coastal communities in the northern part of the prefecture. Because the Tanba mountains formed a serious obstacle to travel and communication with the rest of the prefecture, the flow of this trade was directed not southward at the city of Kyoto but along the Japan Sea coast. An important trade route ran from Hokkaido in the north around the tip of western Honshu into the Inland Sea and then northeast to Osaka. To the extent that literacy followed commercial development, it is along this path that one would expect to find lower rates of illiteracy. These circumstances may account for the low rate (under 5 percent) in the Wakasa Bay area of northern Kyoto Prefecture. The converse would also seem to be true; the interior of the prefecture, where the Tanba mountains interrupted transportation and communication, shows higher rates of illiteracy, 10 percent and above.

Southern Kyoto Prefecture was highly developed both commercially and culturally. Established in the eighth century as the imperial capital, the city of Kyoto became the center of traditional culture and learning for the entire country. In the Tokugawa period, when the shogun's headquarters was moved to Edo, Kyoto became the terminus of the Tōkaidō, the main land artery of commercial transport and communication that ran some 303 miles to the new shogunal capital. A complex of rivers—the Uji, Katsura, Kamo, and Kizu—offered access to the Inland Sea. Converging on the Nara side of the city at the Ogu-



Map 5. Illiteracy in Kyoto by county (1902). *Source:* Ōkubo and Kaigo, eds., *Sōtei kyōiku chōsa,* 5.



Map 6. Illiteracy in Kyoto by county (1906). *Source:* Ōkubo and Kaigo, eds., *Sōtei kyōiku chōsa,* 5.

raike,[36] they flowed into the Yodo River that entered the sea at Osaka. These rivers in the southern region of the prefecture, particularly the Kizu, saw considerable boat traffic as commercial enterprises, mainly in textiles, grew up along the riverbanks. Both commercial and cultural reasons, then, explain why the southern part of Kyoto Prefecture fell in the lowest category of illiteracy, under 5 percent. Despite being the center of traditional culture and learning, the city of Kyoto had higher rates. As with Osaka, low-wage industrial sections —such as the Nishijin textile center—probably employed children, depriving them of opportunities for schooling. Unfortunately, detailed data that would make it possible to distinguish rates of illiteracy in commercial and industrial sections of the city do not exist for Kyoto, as they do for Osaka.

Although largely cut off from one another, the northern and southern regions of Kyoto Prefecture both became commercial centers of textile manufacturing—one in the Japan Sea trade, the other in the river trade to Osaka. Illiteracy rates correlate nicely with the prefecture's geography—low in the textile regions of the north and south, higher in the relatively inaccessible and less developed mountains of the interior.

Map 6, "Illiteracy in Kyoto by County (1906)," shows developments four years later. Areas that were highest in illiteracy in 1902 are lower, but the overall pattern remains the same: higher rates in the rural and relatively remote central regions of the prefecture, lower ones in the more commercially developed sections bordering trade routes on the Japan Sea in the north and along rivers flowing to Osaka in the south. Levels of illiteracy in Kyoto City, as well as in some of the suburban districts to the south, show slight increases that might be related to expanded industrial activity. Not all prefectures yield data that correlate so readily with geographical configurations. But such factors are almost certainly one ingredient in the complex history of literacy and illiteracy in Japan.

Conclusion

The argument presented above in no way is meant to convey the impression that illiteracy was rampant in Japan at the beginning of the twentieth century. On the contrary, the five chapters preceding this one looked at evidence in every nook and cranny of Japanese society over three centuries to portray the spread of basic literacy widely within many (but not all) sectors of the commoner population. In order to complete the picture it is necessary to account for those left behind, to the extent that the data permit.

So what has this analysis shown? First and foremost, it has drawn attention to the existence of abundant data for research on literacy and illiteracy in Meiji Japan. Both Ministry of Education and Ministry of the Army data provide empirical evidence for the persistence of total illiteracy among male conscripts well into the twentieth century. The rates eventually go down, but not evenly. Wide regional differences (as seen in the Tokugawa period) are manifest. Significant gaps between males and females are evident, with female illiteracy lowest where male rates are also low, suggesting that females were at a correspondingly greater disadvantage where cultural environments were poor. Gender alone is thus not sufficient to understand the patterns. Discussions of illiteracy—male and female—must take into account geographical location, local educational levels, and the general cultural environment.

The data on illiteracy in Japan during the Meiji period confirm some general conclusions derived from studies of Europe and North America in the nineteenth century. As with the Western countries, the evidence for Japan suggests that variables other than school attendance need to be assessed in measuring skill levels. The mere fact of enrollment in school is not a good measure of skill attainment in Japan during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, not only because many dropped out but also because what students actually learned is unknown. The analysis of conscript data suggests that the development of popular literacy in Meiji Japan may have had as much to do with the geographical environment of a community—proximity to large cities, the existence of roads or rivers for commerce and communication, traditions of learning and culture—as with school attendance. School attendance may not be the only, or even the best, measure of how and why literacy began to expand among the populace in the early twentieth century.

As with recent studies of literacy in the West, the information derived from the tests to which conscripts were subjected points to the need to distinguish the impact of different types of modern growth—industrial as opposed to commercial, for example. Overall, it indicates links between commercial activity and lower rates of illiteracy, and the Osaka data tentatively confirm the correlation between lower levels of illiteracy in commercial sections of the city and higher ones in those undergoing early industrialization.

Some cautions are necessary. Conscription data should not be seen as an entirely accurate measure of skills, nor should the interpretive comments be taken as conclusive. For one thing, the data are not complete and some serious questions can be raised about them. It is unknown, especially for the early years, whether identical problems were given on tests in every military district, and it cannot be assumed that identical standards were used everywhere to assess the reading and writing levels of conscripts. The materials nevertheless

pose queries, offer hypotheses, and suggest new lines of inquiry into the nature of literacy and illiteracy in Japanese history. Can more systematic study of other urban areas confirm, for example, the apparent impact of commercial and industrial development noted for Osaka? How exactly were literacy skills transmitted in areas of commercial activity along major rivers, seacoasts, or roadways? Can patterns revealed in the Meiji conscript data suggest types of localities that might be subjected to further scrutiny to illuminate historical, geographical, commercial, industrial, social, religious, or political factors that induced or obstructed the development of literacy skills?

And finally some methodological ruminations. The results of army conscript examinations are arranged by different geographical units—military districts throughout Japan, prefectures, counties within prefectures, and towns and villages (in the case of Osaka alone). Consideration of the data in terms of one unit as opposed to another presents different perspectives. Not unlike turning a kaleidoscope to reveal new arrangements of the pieces of colored glass inside, the "reality" of illiteracy in Japan is transformed as the geographical units of analysis change. At a national level of analysis, Osaka stood out as an urban area of high illiteracy, but the prefectural map showed important distinctions—lower illiteracy within the urban center and higher rates in the urban fringe and rural parts of the prefecture. The complex tapestry of human skills revealed by the map of villages and towns in Osaka alerts us to the fact that at the level of individual skills, populations commonly exhibit more differences than similarities. It is also a graphic reminder that at the turn of the twentieth century the Japanese population was not yet homogenous with respect to basic reading and writing skills.

Appendix

Sample Test Questions (Kyoto, 1909)

1. Graduates of higher elementary school (eight or nine years of education)

Read:

我が神聖ナル祖宗ノ遺訓ト我が光輝アル国史ノ成跡トハ炳トシテ日星ノ如シ

Calculate:

Twelve workers take twelve days to finish a certain job. If the number of workers is reduced by one-third, how many days will it take to complete the job?

2. Completion of two years of higher elementary school (up to eight years of education)

Read:

知能ヲ啓発シ徳器ヲ成就ス

Calculate:

A person owns seven twenty-five yen bonds with 5 percent annual interest rates. How much interest will she/he get after one year?

3. Graduates of ordinary elementary school (six years of education)

Read:

(A) 拝啓、本日午後一時より学校に於て報徳講演会開会候間御出席相成度候也

(B) 売捌所は、韓国及満州にも設けたり

(C) 勅語、呼吸、加藤清正、米価下落、京都府知事

Calculate:

If a man sells 2 *koku* 5 *to* of rice combined with 1 *koku* 8 *to* of rice he has half of what he started with. What did he start with? (10 *to* = 1 *koku*)

4. Completion of two years of elementary school ("some learning")

Read:

(A) カラダ、おほさかし

(B) 人、赤十字しゃ、青年会

(C) 日本のこっき、金銭出入帳、無用のもの入るべからず

Calculate:

A person earns 4 *yen* 20 *sen* a week. How much does she/he earn per day? (100 *sen* = 1 *yen*)

Source: Kyoto, Meiji 42, in *Sōtei kyōiku chōsa* 5, 3–7.

Notes

Unless otherwise indicated, the place of publication for all works in Japanese is Tokyo.

Introduction

1. See Harvey J. Graff, *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City* (New York and London: Academic Press, 1979. Reprinted with a new introduction, New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1991). A useful summary of lessons to be learned from Western studies of literacy along with an up-to-date bibliography on the subject can be found in Graff's "Assessing the History of Literacy in the 1990s: Themes and Questions," in *Escribir y leer en Occidente,* ed. Armando Petrucci and Francisco M. Gimeno Blay (Valencia, Spain: Universitat de València, 1995), 13–46.

2. See in particular Peter Kornicki, *The Book in Japan: A Cultural History from the Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Leiden, Boston, and Kohl: Brill, 1998); Henry D. Smith II, "The History of the Book in Edo and Paris," in *Edo and Paris: Urban Life and the State in the Early Modern Era,* ed. James L. McClain, John M. Merriman, and Ugawa Kaoru (Albany, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), 332–352; and Donald H. Shively, "Popular Culture," 706–769, in *Early Modern Japan,* vol. 4 of *The Cambridge History of Japan,* ed. John W. Hall and James L. McClain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

3. Most recently Thomas Cahill, *Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea: Why the Greeks Matter* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 59.

4. An earlier version of this chapter was previously published as "Who Can't Read or Write? Illiteracy in Meiji Japan," *Monumenta Nipponica* 55, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 163–198.

Chapter 1: Literacy in Early Tokugawa Villages

1. Tōno Haruyuki, *Sho no kodai shi* (Iwanami Shoten, 1994), 79–80.

2. Amino Yoshihiko, *Nihon no rekishi o yominaosu* (Chikuma Shobō, 1991), 36.

3. Robert Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane and the Early Heian Court* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1986) chapters 2 and 3.

4. Japanese court ladies wrote Chinese poetry as early as the seventh century. Murasaki Shikibu reveals in her diary that she could read Chinese books. It is clear from Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book* that she, too, was familiar with Chinese.

5. Amino, *Nihon no rekishi,* 29.

6. Recorded in "Hasedera reigenki," vol. 2, section 33, in *Dai Nihon Bukkyō zensho* 85, ed. Zaidan Hōjin Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan (Zaidan Hōjin Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan, 1972) 223.

7. Tanaka Fumihide, "Chūsei zenki no jiin to minshū," *Nihon Shi kenkyū* 266 (1984): 22.

8. Kuroda Hideo, "Sengoku/shokuhō-ki no gijutsu to keizai hatten," in *Kōza: Nihon rekishi* 4: *chūsei* 2, ed. Rekishi Kenkyūkai and Nihon Shi Kenkyūkai (Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1985), 302.

9. Ibid., 303. Amino, *Nihon no rekishi,* 19–24, also notes the predominant use of *katakana* by the Shinto and Buddhist clergy from early in the thirteenth century into the Tokugawa period.

10. Nakamura Ken, *Chūsei sōson shi no kenkyū: Ōmi no kuni Tokuchin-ho Imabori-gō* (Hōsei Daigaku Shuppankyoku, 1984), 202.

11. Hitomi Tonomura, *Community and Commerce in Late Medieval Japan: The Corporate Villages of Tokuchin-ho* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992), 3–4.

12. Kuroda, "Sengoku/shokuhō-ki no gijutsu," 303.

13. The report is written in epistolary style *(sōrōbun)* with Chinese words and syntax intermingled with *hiragana* and *katakana* particles as well as Japanese word order, verbal inflections, and other native elements. "Eraura tone gonjō jō" [Report of Eraura village head], dated 7.22 Tenbun 24 (1555), *Tsuruga-shi shi: shiryō hen,* comp. Tsurugashi-shi Hensan Iinkai (Tsuruga: Tsuruga Shiyakusho, 1982) vol. 4 (1), 360–361. The *iroha* poem, a mnemonic verse dating back no later than 1079, was originally a device to systematize *kana* usage. Consisting of forty-seven syllables, it became an inventory of *kana* in use as one character stood for each syllable of the language. The *iroha* poem became widely used as a technique for teaching elementary writing. An additional syllable, a final *n,* was added some centuries later.

14. Shibata Jun, "Kinsei zenki ni okeru gakumon no rekishiteki ichi," *Nihon shi kenkyū* 248 (April 1983): 116.

15. David Eugene Smith and Yoshio Mikami, *A History of Japanese Mathematics* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1914), 47.

16. James Bartholomew, "Why Was There No Scientific Revolution in Japan?" *Japanese Studies in the History of Science* 15 (1976): 111–125.

17. Kuroda, "Sengoku/shokuhō-ki no gijutsu," 307.

18. See Richard Rubinger, *Private Academies of Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982).

19. R. P. Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan* (London: The Athlone Press, and Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1984), 20.

20. Kanai Madoka, comp., *Dokai kōshūki* (Shin Jinbutsu Ōraisha, 1985). From the "Introduction," 23–56.

21. Ibid., 207–213.

22. Ibid., 182–186.

23. Umihara Tōru, *Yoshida Shōin to Shōka Sonjuku* (Kyoto: Minerubua Shobō, 1990), 94.

24. "Gakusei no gi" (On the school system of Iwakuni domain school), dated 1870.12, in *Nihon kyōiku shi shiryō* 2, ed. Monbushō (Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 1980 reprint ed.), 782.

25. See Tsuneo Satō, "Tokugawa Villages and Agriculture," in *Tokugawa Japan: The Social and Economic Antecedents of Modern Japan,* ed. Chie Nakane and Shinzaburō Ōishi (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1990), 37.

26. "Sadame" (Edict), dated 1.26 Genna 6 (1620), in *Hagi han batsu etsuroku* 4, comp. Yamaguchi-ken Monjokan (Yamaguchi: Yamaguchi-ken Monjokan, 1971), 409–410.

27. Ishikawa Ken, *Terakoya: shomin kyōiku kikan* (Shibundō, 1960), 62–63.

28. Julia Kristeva, *Language: The Unknown* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 78.

29. Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 1.

30. Herman Ooms, *Tokugawa Village Practice: Class, Status, Power, Law* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 110.

31. The precise number of villages in Tokugawa Japan is difficult to establish because the number fluctuated over time. In 1888, when towns and villages were consolidated, there were 12,002 towns and 58,433 villages. *Kokushi daijiten,* vol. 13, p. 663. One recent estimate of the number of villages has 63,257 in the Genroku period (1688–1704) and 63,562 in the Tenpō period (1830–1844) indicating only incremental change over time. Tsukamoto Manabu, ed., *Mura no seikatsu bunka,* vol. 8 in *Nihon no kinsei,* ed. Asao Naohiro (Chūō Kōronsha, 1992), 17.

32. Nomura Kanetarō, *Mura meisaishō no kenkyū* (Yūhikaku, 1949), 73–75.

33. Thomas C. Smith, "The Japanese Village in the Seventeenth Century," in S*tudies in the Institutional History of Early Modern Japan,* ed. John W. Hall and Marius Jansen (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 272.

34. Tadashi Fukutake, *Japanese Rural Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 138.

35. This process is brilliantly described by Thomas C. Smith in his classic *Agrarian Origins of Modern Japan* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1959).

36. Yasuzawa Shūichi, "Kinsei kōki nōson no shakaiteki seikatsu no ichirei," *Shakai keizai shigaku* 20 (1954): 68–78.

37. Known variously as *ōjōya, okimoiri, ōsōdai, tomura, warimoto,* and *kendan,* depending on time and place.

38. Harumi Befu, "Duty, Reward, Sanction, and Power: Four-cornered Office of

the Tokugawa Village Headman," in *Modern Japanese Leadership: Transition and Change,* ed. Bernard Silberman and Harry D. Harootunian (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1966), 27.

39. For example, *kimoiri* were headmen in Echigo but second in command in Imabori Village in Ōmi Province.

40. Because the term *kumigashira* often referred to both an elder of the village who served as assistant headman and to the group leaders of *goningumi,* there can be confusion since these two positions could be held by different people.

41. Tonomura, *Community and Commerce,* 172.

42. Ōishi Shinzaburō, ed., *Jikata hanreiroku* 2, in *Nihon shiryō sensho* 4 (Kondō Shuppansha, 1969), 90.

43. "Shokoku gōson e ōse-idasare" (Orders to villages in the various provinces), dated 2.26 Keian 2 (1649), in *Tokugawa kinreikō: zenshū* 5, comp. Ishii Ryōsuke (Sōbunsha, 1959), #2789, 159. This well-known ordinance is conveniently translated by Ooms in *Tokugawa Village Practice,* appendix 4, 363–373.

44. Tanaka Kyūgu, *Minkan seiyō, in Nihon keizai sōsho* 1, ed. Takimoto Seiichi (Nihon Keizai Sōsho Kankōkai, 1914), 339.

45. Ōishi Shinzaburō, ed., *Jikata hanreiroku* 2, 91.

46. "Torishimari no gi mōshi-age sōrō kaki-tsuke," in *Dai Nihon kinsei shiryō—shichū torishimari ruijū: shichū torishimari no bu,* comp. Tōkyō Daigaku Shiryō Hensanjo (Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1959), 239.

47. Befu, "Duty, Reward, Sanction, and Power," 30–31.

48. Ibid., 47.

49. Ooms, *Tokugawa Village Practice,* 13–14.

50. Tonomura, *Community and Commerce,* 176.

51. "Shokoku gōson e ōse-idasare," in Ishii, ed., *Tokugawa kinreikō: zenshū* 5, #2789, 164.

52. Satō, "Tokugawa Villages and Agriculture," 51–52.

53. Ooms, *Tokugawa Village Practice,* 8.

54. Luke Roberts, "The Petition Box in Eighteenth-Century Tosa," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 423–458.

55. Actually the population was in considerable flux, going from ten or twelve million in 1550 to thirty-one million by 1700. James L. McClain, *A Modern History of Japan* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 2002), 55.

56. Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan,* 298–299.

57. Keith Thomas, "The Meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England," in *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition,* ed. Gerd Bauman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 118.

58. Umihara Tōru, *Gakkō* (Nihon shi shōhyakka #15) (Kondo Shuppansha, 1979), 20–26.

59. "Shokoku gōson e ōse-idasare," in Ishii, ed., *Tokugawa kinreikō: zenshū* 5, 161.

60. "Zaisho nengu mai sanyō tō de-iri ni tsuki—toshiyori shū mōshi-awase kishōmon" (Appeal from group of elders concerning calculations of local taxes on rice), dated 1.23 Keichō 13 (1608), in *Takatsuki-shi shi: shiryōhen* 3, ed. Takatsuki-shi Hensan Iinkai (Takatsuki: Takatsuki Shiyakusho, 1979) vol. 4 (2), 305.

61. "Shinshū Takai-gun niman-goku no uchi Katada mura Shinzaemon onsoshō mōshi-age sōrō koto" (Appeal from Shinzaemon of Katada Village, Shinshū Takai Prov-

ince), dated 11.1 Kan'ei 1 (1624), in *Shinano shiryō: hoi* 2, ed. Shinano Shiryō Kankōkai (Nagano: Shinano Shiryō Kankōkai, 1969), 408.

62. "Gōson ofure" (Village regulations), dated 8.26 Kan'ei 20 (1643), in Ishii, ed., *Tokugawa kinreikō: zenshū* 5, #2788, 158.

63. "Kamigata-Kantō godaikan e shirase kudasaru" (Announcements to intendants of the Kansai and Kantō regions), dated 1.11 Kan'ei 21 (1644), in Ishii, ed., *Tokugawa kinreikō: zenshū* 4, #2105, 122.

64. "Tomita mura menjō dangō ni tsuki renpan-jō" (Joint statement on conference on tax allocations in Tomita Village), dated 11 Keian 1 (1648), ed. Takatsuki-shi Shi Hensan Iinkai, in *Takatsuki-shi shi: shiryōhen* 3, 266–267.

65. "Motai mura kobyakushō menkatsu de-iri sojō" (Petition on disputed tax allocations from small farmers of Motai Village), dated 10.13 Manji 2 (1659), in *Nagano-ken shi: kinsei shiryōhen: Tōshin chihō* 2 (1), ed. Nagano-ken (Nagano: Nagano-ken Shi Kankōkai, 1971), 266.

66. The petition, dated 11.21Tenna 1 (1681), is reproduced in Nakabe Yoshiko, "Genroku/Kyōhō-ki ni okeru nōgyō keiei to shōhin ryūtsū," in *Kinsei Ōsaka heiya no sonraku,* ed. Kimura Takeo (Kyoto: Minerubua Shobō, 1970), 39–41.

67. "Nishi-gun Sujitakegawa suji nanajūka mura nite gososhō tsukamatsuri sōrō onkoto," *Hennen hyakushō ikki shiryō shūsei* 1, ed. Aoki Nijiji (San-itsu Shobō, 1979), 411–412.

68. Ooms, *Tokugawa Village Practice,* 79.

69. Shibata Jun, "Kinsei zenki ni okeru gakumon," 119.

70. "Gakkō o mōke dōgaku o tatsu" (Providing schools and establishing moral learning), section 64 of *Yamaga gorui: jikyō-jō* 7, in *Yamaga Sokō zenshū* 5, comp. Hirose Yutaka (Iwanami Shoten, 1941), 46.

71. Ibid.

72. "Hara tatezu," in *Kyōgen-shū* (2) in *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 43, comp. Koyama Hiroshi (Iwanami Shoten, 1961), 236.

73. Matsumoto, "Yamadera-jō" (Record of a mountain temple), cited in Ishikawa Ken, *Nihon shomin kyōiku shi* (Tamagawa Daigaku Shuppanbu, 1972), 213–214.

74. Ibid., 214.

75. Both of the above examples are cited in Shibata Jun, "Kinsei zenki ni okeru gakumon," 116.

76. "Ōmi Katata sendō chū okite," dated 1.11 Genwa 2 (1616), in *Chūsei seiji shakai shisō* (2) in *Nihon shisō taikei* 22, comp. Kasamatsu Hiroshi, Satō Shin'ichi, and Momose Kesao (Iwanami Shoten, 1981), 230–231.

77. Ishii, ed., *Tokugawa kinreikō: zenshū* 6, #3454, 18. The document is a revision of an earlier one. Although undated, both documents were issued during the terms of Itakura Katsushige (1545–1624) and Itakura Shigemune (1586–1656) as Kyoto deputy. The terms of the father and son ran from 1603–1654.

78. The document, "Ishi jūtaku no koto," dated 9.14 Keian 1 (1648), is reproduced in *Ōsaka-shi shi* 3, ed. Ōsaka-shi Sanji-kai (Osaka: Sanji-kai, 1911), 29; for interpretation of it, see Shibata Jun, "Kinsei zenki ni okeru gakumon," 117.

79. Taniguchi Sumio, *Okayama hansei shi no kenkyū* (Hanawa Shobō, 1964), 565.

80. Shibata Hajime, *Kinsei gōnō no gakumon to shisō* (Shinseisha, 1966), 399–400.

81. Ibid., 398.

82. Both examples from ibid., 398–399.

83. Ibid., 400.

84. "Kunijū okite" (Domestic laws), dated 12.2 Kanbun 2 (1662), in *Tosa no kuni chihō shiryō,* in *Kinsei sonraku jiji shiryōshū* 2, ed. Kinsei Sonraku Kenkyūkai (Nihon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai, 1956), 341.

Chapter 2: Signatures, Ciphers, and Seals

1. R. S. Schofield, "The Measurement of Literacy in Pre-Industrial England," in *Literacy in Traditional Societies,* ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 318–319.

2. The classic study of literacy in England is Lawrence Stone, "Literacy and Education in England 1640-1900," *Past and Present* 42 (February 1969): 69–139. The work on France that has influenced me the most has been François Furet and Jacques Ozouf, *Reading and Writing: Literacy in France from Calvin to Jules Ferry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

3. Furet and Ozouf, *Reading and Writing,* 16.

4. Ibid., 17–18. There was actually a negative correlation between signatures and "reading alone" as opposed to "reading and writing." This causes more problems of interpretation in the French case, where reading tended to be taught two or three years prior to writing, than in the Japanese case, where reading and writing were usually taught simultaneously or writing was taught first.

5. See epilogue for extensive analysis of these data.

6. See especially Akira Hayami, *The Historical Demography of Pre-Modern Japan* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1997).

7. L. L. Cornell and Akira Hayami, "The shūmon aratame-chō: Japan's Population Registers," *Journal of Family History* 11, no. 4 (1986): 315.

8. Professor Kasaya Kazuhiko, conversation with the author at Nichibunken in Kyoto, November 2000.

9. The original documents are housed in the archival museum of the Faculty of Economics at Shiga University. The material is available in printed form in Nakamura Ken, ed., *Imabori Hiyoshi Jinja monjo shūsei* (Yuzankaku Shuppan, 1981).

10. Sasamoto Shōji, "Kinsei hyakushō inshō no ichi kōsatsu," *Shigaku zasshi* 89, no. 7 (July 1980): 47.

11. Ishii Ryōsuke, *Inkan no rekishi* (Meiseki Shoten, 1996), 31.

12. Ibid., 34.

13. Sasamoto, "Kinsei hyakushō inshō no ichi kōsatsu," 49.

14. Ishii, *Inkan no rekishi,* 66.

15. The term "ryakuō" in Japanese printed texts includes both types. Therefore it is essential to look at the original document to ascertain (or to estimate) the likelihood of literacy skill from these marks.

16. Ishii, *Inkan no rekishi,* 67.

17. Ibid., 189.

18. Sasamoto, "Kinsei hyakushō inshō no ichi kōsatsu," 50.

19. Ibid., 33.

20. The catalogue of this collection is available in published form as Kyōto-shi

Rekishi Shiryōkan, comp., *Kyōto machi shikimoku shūsei: sōsho Kyōto no shiryō* 3 (Kyoto: Kyōto-shi Rekishi Shiryōkan, 1999). The catalogue provides not only lists of original documents in the collection, but translations into modern Japanese of the texts with all names and marks in printed form, vastly simplifying the task of deciphering them.

21. *Kyōto machi shikimoku shūsei,* 4–6.

22. The original document is part of the Kita Kannonyama-chō (Rokkaku-chō) monjo (file #135) housed in the Kyoto Historical Archives (Kyōto Rekishi Shiryōkan).

23. Dejima was an artificial island constructed in Nagasaki harbor by the Tokugawa shogunate between 1634 and 1636. After the Shimabara Uprising in 1637 and following the completion of the so-called seclusion laws in 1638, the Portuguese residents of Dejima were forced to move to Macao. In 1641 the Dutch trading concession (factory) on Hirado Island was demolished and the Dutch (now the only Westerners permitted to trade with Japan) were eventually removed to Dejima, which remained the sole conduit for commerce and exchange between Japan and the West until 1854. The former home of the Dutch concession on Hirado Island in the rural northwest region of Nagasaki Prefecture is quite distinct from Hirado-chō which, as indicated above, was a commercial section of Nagasaki City located near the entryway to Dejima.

24. I have been greatly aided in dealing with these documents by Kimura Masanobu, "Kinsei shikiji kenkyū ni okeru shūshi jinbetsu-chō no shiryōteki kanōsei," *Nihon kyōiku shi kenkyū* 14 (August 1995): 43–64. This article initially called my attention to the possibility of using religious affiliation registers for assessing literacy. The material for the years 1634, 1635 (partial), 1637 (partial), 1641 (partial), 1642 (partial), 1651, and 1659 is available in an unpublished handwritten reprint, "Nagasaki Hirado jinbetsu-chō," compiled by Kyūshū Shiryō Kankōkai in the Kyūshū shiryō sōsho series #37 of the Faculty of Literature at Kyushu University. However, because the various marks following names have been hand copied from the originals housed in the Kyūshū Bunka Shi Kenkyūjo of Kyushu University, all the data here have been confirmed against copies of the original materials, kindly made available to me by Professor Kimura.

25. It is difficult even on a copy of the original document to distinguish between round marks made by a brush and stem stamps. It is also sometimes difficult to determine whether a black dot was made by a brush or by a stem stamp. In this family, the wife's mark was a black dot, the others were either thumbprints or circles. In none of these cases can it be said that facility with a brush was required.

26. This is only an estimated figure because employees were not clearly designated in this document. All those who had no specific designation I have assumed were employees.

27. There is a fourteen-year-old cipher user listed for 1637 who is not designated a son but who probably is. There is a fifteen-year-old cipher user in 1659 who is clearly designated as the son of the household head.

28. The total figures as well as the birthplace figures below are based on Kimura, "Kinsei shikiji kenkyū," 59.

29. Ōmura shows up later on conscription data (see epilogue) as one of the areas of highest illiteracy in Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

30. Igeta Shōji, professor emeritus of Doshisha University, conversation with the author, February 25, 2001.

31. "Tomooka mura hyakushō nanban kishōmon," is part of "Tomooka Tatsuoke monjo," and housed in the Nagaokakyō City Library. The document can be found in

printed form in Nagaokakyō-shi Shi Hensan Iinkai, ed., *Nagaokakyō-shi shi: shiryōhen* 3 (Nagaokakyō: Nagaokakyō Shiyakusho, 1993): 83–84.

32. The Buddhist persecutions were spelled out in the document and included "the five marks of decrepitude of heavenly beings before they die" *(gosui)* and "the three torments" *(sannetsu),* namely having skin and flesh seared by hot winds and sand storms, evil winds strip their bodies naked, and flesh torn apart by *garuda,* mythological birds know for eating dragons. Hisao Inagaki, *A Dictionary of Japanese Buddhist Terms* (Union City, Calif.: Heian International, 1989). My gratitude to Professor Paul Groner for this reference.

33. Nagaokakyō-shi Shi Hensan Iinkai, comp., *Nagaokakyō-shi shi: honbuhen* 2 (Nagaokakyō: Nagaokakyō Shiyakusho, 1997): 41.

34. "Tomooka mura hattō" (Rules of Tomooka Village) 1642, in "Tomooka Tatsuo-ke monjo" in Tomooka City Library and available in printed form in *Nagaokakyō-shi shi: shiryōhen* 3, 85–86.

35. Conrad Totman, *Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993): 63.

36. James L. McClain, *A Modern History of Japan* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2002), 51–54.

Chapter 3: Rural Culture and the Rise of Provincial Literati in the Eighteenth Century

1. Nakai Nobuhiko and James L. McClain, "Commercial Change and Urban Growth in *Early Modern Japan,"* in *Cambridge History of Japan* 4, ed. John W. Hall and James L. McClain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 519.

2. Ibid., 526. Also, Peter Nosco, *Remembering Paradise: Nativism and Nostalgia in Eighteenth-Century Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1990), 19.

3. Konta Yōzō, *Edo no honya-san: Kinsei bunka shi no sokumen* (Nihon Hōsō Shuppan Kyōkai, 1977) NHK bukkusu #299, ii.

4. Donald H. Shively, "Popular Culture," in *Cambridge History of Japan* 4, 726.

5. Katsuhisa Moriya, "Urban Networks and Information Networks," trans. Ronald P. Toby, in *Tokugawa Japan: The Social and Economic Antecedents of Modern Japan,* ed. Chie Nakane and Shinzaburō Ōishi (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1991), 115.

6. Kornicki, *The Book in Japan,* 205–206.

7. Munemasa Isoo, *Kinsei Kyōto shuppan bunka no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Dōhōsha Shuppan, 1982), 5 provides an extensive list of book types.

8. Ibid., 9.

9. Moriya, "Urban Networks and Information Networks, 117.

10. Kornicki, *The Book in Japan,* 391–397.

11. Konta, *Edo no honya-san,* 152.

12. Ibid., 153.

13. Ibid.

14. Rubinger, *Private Academies of Tokugawa Japan,* 53–54.

15. Nakai and McClain, "Commercial Change and Urban Growth," 539.

16. Horie Eiichi, ed., *Hansei kaikaku no kenkyū* (Ochanomizu Shobō, 1955), 304–305.

17. Shibata Hajime, *Kinsei gōnō no gakumon to shisō* (Shinseisha, 1966), 405–406.

18. In perusing original copies of works by Miyazaki and Nagatsune in the libraries of Kokusai Nihon Bunka Kenkyū Sentaa and Kyoto University's Jinbun Kagaku Kenkyūjo, I found that all characters had phonetic readings provided. Even simple characters like those for "person" *(hito)* had *kana* readings. Only numbers were not fully glossed.

19. See Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Moral and Spiritual Cultivation in Japanese Neo-Confucianism: The Life and Thought of Kaibara Ekken (1630–1714)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 41–48.

20. Miyazaki Yasusada, "Nōji sōron," *Nōgyō zensho* (1) in *Nihon nōsho zenshū* 12, ed. Yamada Tatsuo et al. (Nōsan Gyōson Bunka Kyōkai, 1978), 47–48.

21. Nishikawa Kyūrinsai, *Hyakushō bukuro* in *Nihon keizai sōsho* 5, ed. Takimoto Seiichi (Nihon Keizai Sōsho Kankōkai, 1914), 179.

22. Jennifer Robertson points out that most *nōsho* were aimed at ordinary farmers and used simple vocabulary and plenty of *kana.* See "Sexy Rice: Plant Gender, Farm Manuals, and Grass-Roots Nativism," *Monumenta Nipponica* 39, no. 3 (Autumn 1984): 233. T. C. Smith writes that Ōkura Nagatsune "wrote in a language farmers could understand." See "Ōkura Nagatsune and the Technologists," in *Personality in Japanese History,* ed. Albert M. Craig and Donald H. Shively (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), 131.

23. Calculated from lists of printing editions found in *Kokusho sōmokuroku* 6 (Iwanami Shoten, 1989 rev. ed.): 468–469.

24. "Nōka tsune ni futai shō," cited in Shibata, *Kinsei gōnō no gakumon to shisō,* 407–410. The original is in the private archives of the Hiramatsu family.

25. Shikano Koshirō, *Nōji isho* Hōei 6 (1709) in *Nihon nōsho zenshū* 5, 127.

26. "Gojō no maki," in *Hyakushō no denki* (2), ed. Oka Mitsuo and Morita Shirō. in *Nihon nōsho zenshū* 16, 52.

27. Anne Walthall, "The Family Ideology of the Rural Entrepreneurs in Nineteenth Century Japan," *Journal of Social History* 23, no. 3 (Spring 1990): 463–483.

28. Yokoyama Toshio, "Setsuyōshū and Japanese Civilization," in *Themes and Theories in Modern Japanese History,* ed. Sue Henny and Jean-Pierre Lehmann (London and New Jersey: The Athlone Press, 1988), 78–98. The following discussion is based largely on Yokoyama's pioneering work on this subject, most easily accessed in the English version cited here.

29. Material based largely on Yokota Fumihiko, "Ekken-bon no dokusha," in *Kaibara Ekken: Tenchi waraku no bunmei-gaku,* ed. Yokoyama Toshio (Heibonsha, 1995), 315–353.

30. Ibid., 331.

31. This diary is available in printed form with notes by Kobayashi Shigeru in "Yao Hachizaemon nikki," in *Nihon toshi seikatsu shiryō shūsei* 10, ed. Zaigōchō (Gakushū Kenkyūsha, 1976), 180–299. I also rely upon Yokota Fumihiko, "Kinsei minshū shakai ni okeru chiteki dokusha no seiritsu: Ekken-bon o yomu jidai," in *Edo no shisō* #5: *Dokusho no shakai shi,* comp. Edo no Shisō Henshū Iinkai (Perikansha, 1997), 48–67.

32. *Inkyo* was a Sung-period dictionary of Chinese-character rhymes useful in composing Chinese poems.

33. Yokota, "Kinsei minshū shakai," 61.

34. Yokota, "Ekken-bon no dokusha," 341–342.

35. Ibid., 326.

36. Ibid., 326–327.

37. Kaitokudō was a school opened in Osaka in 1719 primarily for the Neo-Confucian training of merchants. Under Nakai Chikuan (1730–1804) it became an important center of learning for townspeople and received some official support.

38. "Yao Hachizaemon nikki," 276 (4.14 Kyōhō 19).

39. Ibid., 193 (8.17 Kyōhō 15).

40. Ibid., 281 (7.20 Kyōhō 19). In the text the volume is indicated as *Nanpa* followed by a blank square indicating that the page was torn and unreadable. At several other places in the diary, however, the author refers to going to lectures on *Nanpa senki,* a military work, and this is almost certainly the work referred to here.

41. Kamijima Onitsura (1661–1738), a native of the *sake*-brewing town of Itami, was one of the best-known provincial poets of the mid-Tokugawa period.

42. Ibid., 267 (12.8 Kyōhō 18).

43. Ibid., 237 (6.14 Kyōhō 17); and ibid., 203 (2.6 Kyōhō 16).

44. Ibid., 245 (11.20 Kyōhō 17).

45. Ibid. 252–255. Information is scattered about in notations from Third to Fourth Months of Kyōhō 18.

46. Yokota, "Kinsei minshū shakai," 57.

47. Ibid., 59.

48. Tsukamoto Manabu, "Mura no moji bunka," in *Nihon no kinsei* 8: *Mura no seikatsu bunka,* ed. Tsukamoto Manabu (Chūō Kōronsha, 1992), 352–371.

49. See Walthall, "Family Ideology of Rural Entrepreneurs in Nineteenth Century Japan," passim.

50. Tsukamoto Manabu, *Chihō bunjin* (Kyōikusha Rekishi Shinsho #84, 1977): 146–147.

51. Takahashi Satoshi, *Nihon minshū kyōiku shi kenkyū* (Miraisha, 1978), 123–124.

52. The individual is not known, but the family was descended from Fujiwara Saneyuki (1083–1162). See ibid., 138.

53. Ibid., 140–141.

54. Other terms are also used: *ikku-zuke, kan-zuke,* etc. Here *mae-zuke* refers to all simplified forms of *haikai* used as games and amusements.

55. Nomura Yutaka and Yui Kotarō, eds., *Kawachiya Kashō kyūki* (Osaka: Seibundō, 1970, rev. ed.), 103. The author served his village as headman from 1636 to 1713 and kept the diary, a mine of information about popular culture, from 1688 to 1711.

56. Ibid., 37.

57. Ibid., 124.

58. Takahashi, *Nihon minshū kyōiku shi,* 148.

59. Yamashita Yasubei, "Kenbun yokaku-shū," in *Hirakata-shi shi* 9, ed. Hirakata-shi Shi Hensan Iinkai (Hirakata: Hirakata-shi Shi Hensan Iinkai, 1974), 266–457. Numbers of poems submitted are from Nakako Hiroko's fine analysis in "Genroku-ki sonraku shakai ni okeru maeku-zuke bunka," *Rekishi hyōron,* no. 606 (Sept. 2000), 21.

60. "Kenbun yokaku-shū" (6.15 Genroku 4), in *Hirakata-shi shi* 9, 314.

61. "Kenbun yokaku-shū" (9.8 Genroku 5), ibid., 350.

62. "Kenbun yokaku-shū" (11.27 Genroku 5), ibid., 354; also Nakako, "Maezuke bunka," 23.

63. Nakako, "Maezuke bunka," 25.

64. The original, titled "Uta no Nakayama," is housed in the Amagasaki City Archives.

65. Nakako, "Maezuke bunka," 30.

66. Mino Kasanosuke, *Nōka kankō* (1)(1736) in *Nihon keizai sōsho* 5, 335.

67. Nishikawa Kyūrinsai, *Hyakushō bukuro* (2), ibid., 182. Ikkō is another name for the Jōdo Shin (True Pure Land) sect of Buddhism.

68. Hozumi Nobushige, *Goningumi seido ron* (Yūhikaku, 1902), 126. Cited in Aoki Michio, "Bakumatsu-ki minshū no kyōiku yōkyū to shikiji nōryoku," in *Kaikoku: kōza Nihon kinsei shi* 7, ed. Aoki Michio and Kawachi Hachirō (Yūhikaku, 1985), 248.

69. "Yūtokuin dono gokanki," vol. 15, dated Seventh to Twelfth months of Kyōhō 7 (1722) in *Tokugawa jikki* (8) in *Kokushi taikei* 45, ed. Kuroita Katsumi (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1965), 289.

70. Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan,* 245.

71. "Odaikan e ōsei watase (no) bu," [Orders sent to magistrates] #1319 dated Eleventh Month Kyōhō 7 (1722) in *Ofuregaki kanpo shūsei,* ed. Takayanagi Shinzō and Ishii Ryōsuke (Iwanami Shoten, 1958), 695–696.

72. Arai Akimichi, ed., *Bokumin kinkan* 2 (Seibundō Shinkōsha, 1935): 374. The order is dated Eleventh Month of Kyōhō 7 (1722) and is included in the section marked "shoseki" (books/publications).

73. Ishikawa Ken, *Nihon shomin kyōiku shi* (Tamagawa Daigaku Shuppanbu, 1972), 221, 261.

74. Ishikawa, *Terakoya: shomin kyōiku kikan,* 86–87.

Chapter 4: The Expansion of Popular Literacy in the Nineteenth Century

1. Miyaoi Yasuo, "Shūgei no maki," (1831) *Minka yōjutsu,* vol. 1, section 7 in *Kinsei jikata keizai shiryō,* vol. 5, ed. Ono Takeo (Kinsei Chihō Keizai Shiryō Kankōkai, 1932), 279.

2. Ibid., 280.

3. Ninomiya Sontoku, "Ninomiya Ōyawa," in *Ninomiya Sontoku/Ōhara Yugaku,* ed. Naramoto Tatsuya and Nakai Nobuhiko, in *Nihon shisō taikei* 52, book 1, section 15, ed. Ienaga Saburō et al. (Iwanami Shoten, 1973), 129. Also quoted in Takahashi, *Nihon minshū kyōiku,* 205.

4. Ninomiya Sontoku, "Ninomiya Ōyawa," 124.

5. See especially Janine Anderson Sawada, *Confucian Values and Popular Zen: Sekimon Shingaku in Eighteenth-Century Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993).

6. Takahashi, *Nihon minshū kyōiku,* 164–165.

7. See Tone Keizaburō, *Terakoya to shomin kyōiku no jisshōteki kenkyū* (Fuzankaku Shuppan, 1981), 97–120.

8. Ibid. 106.

9. Ibid. 102.

10. Nishikawa Kyūrinsai, "Hyakushō bukuro," in *Nihon keizai sōsho* 5, 189.

11. Tone, *Terakoya to shomin kyōiku,* 208.

12. Shōji Kichinosuke, *Kinsei minshū shisō no kenkyū* (Azekura Shobō, 1979), 116–117.

13. Ibid., 117.

14. "Kan hasshū goryōshō hyakushō domo e ofuregaki," in Arai, ed., *Bokumin kinkan* 1, 295.

15. "Bakufu no bu: Gakusei," Monbushō, ed., *Nihon kyōiku shi shiryō* 7, 10–11. The original date on the document is 1711 but Ishikawa Ken suggests it was sent out in 1843. See Aoki, "Minshū kyōiku no shikiji," note #80, 268.

16. Katsuhisa Moriya, "Urban Networks" in Nakane and Oishi, eds., *Tokugawa Japan,* 115.

17. Ibid., 193.

18. Konta Yōzō, *Edo no honya-san,* 189–190.

19. Suzuki Bokushi, *Snow Country Tales: Life in the Other Japan,* trans. Jeffrey Hunter and Rose Lesser from the original *Hokuetsu seppu* (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1986), with a useful introduction by Anne Walthall.

20. Shimazaki Tōson, *Before the Dawn,* trans. William E. Naff from the original *Yoake mae* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987).

21. Walthall, "Family Ideology of Rural Entrepreneurs in Nineteenth-Century Japan," 463–483.

22. The diary along with interpretive comments by Takahashi Satoshi is found in Takai Hiroshi, ed., *Tenpō-ki shōnen shōjo no kyōyō keisei katei no kenkyū* (Kawade Shobō, 1991).

23. Tachibana Moribe's "Suminawa" is translated along with extensive comments in Charles A. Andrews, "Knowing One's Space: Networks and Necessities in Late Tokugawa Commoner Education," (M.A. thesis, Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, Indiana University, 1998).

24. Anne Walthall, *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman: Matsuo Taseko and the Meiji Restoration* (Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press, 1998), xiii.

25. Walthall, "Family Ideology of Rural Entrepreneurs in Nineteenth-Century Japan," 473.

26. Ibid., 471–473.

27. The unpublished handwritten diary "Ohinamichō" by Matsudo Yakuninzō (one of Tomekichi's pseudonyms) is kept in the Mukō City Historical Archives. A printed version, prepared by local historians, was half finished when I was permitted access to it in the spring of 2002. Thus, my discussion pertains to the first six months of 1815. Pages of the manuscript are not numbered and citations can only be made by dates.

28. Both master and apprentice appear on a list of seventy-one men of culture from the town called "Mukō no sato no jinbutsu shi." This was modeled on the well-known "Heian jinbutsu shi" (Guide to the famous people of Kyoto) that became an important guide for those seeking teachers in the fields of *waka* poetry, Nativism, Confucian studies, etc. in the capital. In the Mukō version more than half those listed were

merchant families, indicating that cultural activities were second to the family business. But the existence of such a list suggests the prestige attached to scholarly or artistic endeavors even in smaller towns.

29. For the discussion of the Ozawa family diary I am relying extensively on Brian W. Platt, "Elegance, Prosperity, Crisis: Three Generations of Tokugawa Village Elites," *Monumenta Nipponica* 55, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 45–81.

30. Ibid., 56.

31. Ibid., 57.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., 60.

34. Ishikawa Ken, *Nihon shomin kyōiku shi* originally published by Tōkō Shoin in 1929, reissued by Tamagawa Daigaku Shuppan-bu in 1972 in the "kyōiku no meicho" (Famous works on education) series #10, edited by Ishikawa Matsutarō.

35. Some scholars, whose opinion I share, prefer a different term entirely to sever the medieval connection. "Tenaraisho" and "tenaraijuku" simply mean "writing school" or "writing place" and more accurately reflect the nature of the institution than does "terakoya."

36. Monbushō, ed., *Nihon kyōiku shi shiryō.* The original was published in 1890–1892. Relying heavily upon the memories of people concerning their schooling prior to 1872, the reports are incomplete and skewed toward the later Tokugawa period. Indeed, Ishikawa's many works show insignificant numbers of schools established prior to the nineteenth century. The terms "terakoya" and "shijuku" used in these charts had never been used generically before and became established institutional types from this time.

37. Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan.* See especially the discussion of attendance rates in Appendix I, 317–322.

38. Herbert Passin, *Society and Education in Japan* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1965). Reissued in 1985 by Kodansha. See pages 43–49 and 310–313. For his literacy estimates, Passin relied on the work of Ototake Iwazō in *Nihon shomin kyōiku shi* (Meguro Shoten, 1929), 3 vols. Ototake interviewed three thousand people between 1915 and 1917 who reported going to school prior to 1872.

39. The Nihon Hōsō Kyōkai (NHK) broadcast aired in 1995 titled "Benkyō būmu koko ni hajimaru: Edo terakoya jijō," (The study boom began here: *terakoya* of the Edo period). Prof. Umemura Kayo kindly provided me with a draft copy (unpublished) of the nationwide survey of recently discovered schools she compiled.

40. Honda Seiroku, *Honda Seiroku taiken hachijūgonen* (Kōdansha, 1952), 16.

41. David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 29.

42. Ronald Dore, "The Importance of Educational Traditions in Japan and Elsewhere," *Pacific Affairs* 45, no. 4 (Winter 1972–73): 491.

43. Hirooka Ryōzō, "Hōken handō no kyōiku: Nihon hen," in *Kindai kyōiku shi I: shimin shakai no seiritsu katei to kyōiku,* ed. Kaigo Tokiomi and Hirooka Ryōzō (unpublished conference volume of Kyōiku Kenkyūkai, 1951), 289–330.

44. Tsuda Hideo, *Kinsei minshū kyōiku undō no tenkai* (Ochanomizu Shobō, 1978).

45. Shibata Hajime, *Kinsei gōnō no gakumon to shisō,* 417.

46. Platt, "Elegance, Prosperity, Crisis," 59.

47. Komatsu Shūkichi, "Bakumatsu-ki no terakoya oyobi gōgaku ni okeru kindaika ni tsuite," *Kanazawa Daigaku kyōiku gakubu kiyo* (1964): 181–200.

48. Ishijima Tsuneo, "Bakumatsu ichi terakoya no tenkai: Mōkata Machi Seikōdō no ichirei" (Parts 1 and 2), in *Tochigi shiron* nos. 6 and 7, ed. Tochigi Shiron Henshū Iinkai (1970 and 1971 respectively): 1–13 and 24–34.

49. Among them Umemura Kayo, Emori Ichirō, and Ishikawa Matsutarō.

50. Tone Keizaburō, *Terakoya to shomin kyōiku no jisshōteki kenkyū.* The 20 percent and 38 percent figures are found on page 186; the 50 to 70 percent calculation for commercial villages is found on page 83.

51. Irie Hiroshi, "Kinsei Shimotsuke nōson ni okeru tenarai juku no seiritsu to tenkai," *Tochigi-ken shi no kenkyū* 13 (1977): 21–46.

52. Aoki Michio, "Kinsei no chihō monjo to kinsei shi kenkyū: murakata monjo o chūshin ni," in *Kinsei shi e no shōtai: Kōza Nihon kinsei shi* 10, ed. Aoki Michio and Satō Shigerō (Yūhikaku, 1992): 51–56.

53. Aoki Michio, "Bakumatsu-ki minshū no kyōiku yōkyū to shikiji nōryoku," in Aoki and Kawachi, eds., *Kaikoku: kōza Nihon kinsei shi* 7, 219–269.

54. Takahashi Satoshi's most comprehensive and accessible work is *Nihon minshū kyōiku-shi kenkyū* (Miraisha, 1978).

55. Yakuwa Tomohiro, "Kinsei minshū no shikiji o meguru shomondai," *Nihon kyōiku shi kenkyū* 12 (August 1993): 101–109.

56. Yakuwa Tomohiro, "Kinsei shakai to shikiji," *Kyōikugaku kenkyū* 70, no. 4 (December 2003): 54–65.

57. Kimura Masanobu, "Bakumatsu-ki Chikugo no nōson ni okeru terakoya no kyūzō to mura yakunin-sō," *Kyūshū Daigaku kyōiku gakubu kiyo* 34 (March 1989): 45–59.

58. Numbers of writing schools and private academies from the Meiji government's survey *(NKSS)* are charted by prefecture in Rubinger, "Problems in Research on Literacy in Nineteenth-Century Japan," in *Nihon kyōiku shi ronsō,* ed. Motoyama Yukihiko Kyōju Taikan Kinen Ronbunshū Henshū Iinkai (Kyoto: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 1988): 8 (561).

Chapter 5: Direct Measures of Popular Literacy in the Nineteenth Century

1. Excellent discussions are found in Peter F. Kornicki, "Literacy Revisited: Some Reflections on Richard Rubinger's Findings," *Monumenta Nipponica* 56, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 381–394, and in Aoki Michio, "Bakumatsu-ki minshū no kyōiku yōkyū to shikiji nōryoku," in Aoki and Kawachi, eds., *Kaikoku,* 225–235.

2. Nakai Akio, trans., *Oirenburuku Nihon enseiki, Shin ikoku sōsho* 12 (Yūshōdō Shoten, 1969): 342. This book is a translation of the Japan sections from the record of the official Prussian expedition to Japan, 1860–1862, titled *Die preussische Expedition nach Ostasien, nach amtlichen Quellen,* 4 vols. (Berlin, 1864).

3. Edward Sylvester Morse, *Japan Day By Day 1877, 1878–79, 1882–83,* vol. 1 (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1917), 120.

4. Henry Faulds, *Nine Years in Nipon: Sketches of Japanese Life and Manners* (Boston: Cupples and Hurd, 1888), 208.

5. Aimé Humbert, *Japan and the Japanese* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1874), 44.

6. William S. Lewis and Naojiro Murakami, eds., *Ranald MacDonald* (Portland: The Oregon Historical Society, 1990), 205.

7. Captain Vasilii Mikhailovich R. N. Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan, 1811–1813,* vol. 3 (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 27.

8. Annual prefecture reports are available in Monbushō, ed., *Monbushō nenpō,* for appropriate years.

9. Ibid.

10. I have discussed many of the general problems with school attendance data at greater length in "Problems in Research on Literacy in Nineteenth-Century Japan," 13–14.

11. Hijikata Sonoko, *Kindai Nihon no gakkō to chiiki shakai: mura no kodomo wa dō ikita ka* (Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1994). See especially chapter 3.

12. Aoki, "Bakumatsu-ki minshū no kyōiku yōkyū to shikiji nōryoku," 229.

13. Henry Schliemann, *La Chine et Le Japon au Temps Present* (Paris: Libraire Centrale, 1867), 191–192. This section is translated from the French by Lisa Rubinger. The full Japanese version is Fujikawa Tōru and Itō Naotake, *Shuriiman: Nihon Chūgoku ryokō-ki/Panperii: Nihon tōsa kikō: Shin ikoku sōsho* 6 (Fushōdō Shoten, 1982). The above section appears on page 114.

14. Robert Payne, *The Gold of Troy: The Story of Heinrich Schliemann and the Buried Cities of Ancient Greece* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1959), 81–82.

15. Baron Dairoku Kikuchi, *Japanese Education* (London: John Murray, 1909), 172–173.

16. Yakuwa Tomohiro, "Kinsei Echigo no minshū to moji manabi," in *Bakumatsu ishin to minshū shakai,* ed. Aoki Michio and Abe Tsunehisa (Kōshi Shoin, 1998), 125–155.

17. Ibid., 147–149.

18. The data that follow can be found in *Nagano ken kyōiku shi* 4: *kyōiku kateihen* (1), ed. Nagano Ken Kyōiku Shi Kankō Kai (Nagano: Nagano-ken Kyōikushi Kankōkai, 1979), 143–144. The material was originally reported by Kobayashi Yoshitsugu in "Meiji jūyonen-nen no shikiji shirabe: tōji no Kita Azumi-gun Tokiwa mura no baai." *Nagano-ken kindai shi kenkyū* 5 (1973): 51–57. The author kindly showed me the original documents he had used and I spent a day at his home discussing them with him. I am most grateful to Mr. Kobayashi for sharing his expertise with me.

19. See especially Aoki, "Kinsei no chihō monjo to kinsei shi kenkyū: murakata monjo o chūshin ni," in Aoki and Sato, eds., *Kinsei e no shōtai: kōza Nihon kinsei shi* 10, 51–56.

20. Fujiki Hisashi has looked at the documents of the Kaneko family, village heads of Muramatsu Village in the Nagaoka region of Niigata Prefecture for 1831, 1834, and 1851 in "Mura no ire-fuda: tasūketsu shūzoku," in *Bunken shiryō o yomu: kodai kara kindai,* ed. Aoki Michio, Satō Shin'ichi, Takagi Shōsaku, and Sakano Junji (Asahi Shinbunsha, 2000), 29–31. Illustrations of actual "burglary ballots" are not provided, further hampering their usefulness for literacy study.

21. In Muramatsu Village in Niigata, cited above, the constituency for "burglary ballots" was 153, that for election ballots was less than half at 72. This is further evidence that in a "typical" village, landowners may have constituted about 50 percent of the village population.

22. Takahashi Satoshi, "Mura no shikiji to 'minshū shugi'—kinsei monjo 'mura yakunin ire-fuda' o yomu," in *Atarashii shiryōgaku o matomete,* ed. Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1997), 137.

23. Ibid., 135–187 is a study of ballots left in Mishuku Village in what is now Shizuoka Prefecture from the elections of 1856 and 1857. It forms the basis of the discussion that follows.

24. The use of "aiyaku" (my honorable colleague) indicates that this was a vote for a second headman who would act as "colleague" to the present headman, in all likelihood the voter.

25. Takahashi Satoshi's article includes photographs and print versions of each individual ballot, making characterizing the skills of the writer possible. Takahashi, "Mura no shikiji to 'minshū shugi'," 142–143.

26. See Takao Yoshinobu, "Kinsei kōki hyakushō no shikiji no mondai: Kantō sonraku no jirei kara," unpublished report of the Kantō Kinsei Shi Kenkyūkai Taikai (October 29, 2000), 4.

27. Takahashi Satoshi, *Kunisada Chūji no jidai: yomi kaki to kenjutsu* (Heibonsha, 1991)(Heibonsha sensho #136), 118.

28. Ibid., 121.

29. Ibid., 130–131.

30. Shibata Jun, "Kinsei chūgo-ki Ōmi no kuni Zai mura ichi terakoya no dōkō: monjinchō no kyōryōteki bunseki o chūshin ni, in *Nihon shakai no shiteki kōzō: kinsei, kindai,* ed. Asao Naohiro Kyōju Taikan Kinen Kaihen (Kyoto: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 1995), 205–233.

31. Ibid., 226.

32. Nagano Ken Kyōiku Shi Kankōkai, ed., *Nagano-ken kyōiku shi* 1: *sōsetsuhen* (1) (Nagano: Nagano-ken Kyōiku Shi Kankōkai, 1978), 130.

33. Aoki Michio, *Issa no jidai* (Kōkura Shobō, 1988), 55.

34. Joy Norton and Katsuyuki Yaba, comps. *Five Feet of Snow: Issa's Haiku Life* (Nagano: Shinano Mainichi Shinbun, 1994), xiii.

35. Kobayashi Issa, *Shichiban nikki* in *Issa zenshū* 3: *kuchō* (2), comp. Shinano Kyōikukai (Nagano: Shinano Mainichi Shinbunsha, 1976), 323. Dated Seventh Month Bunka 11 (1814).

36. Ibid., 177. Dated Fifth Month Bunka 9 (1812).

37. Ibid., 456. Dated Eleventh Month Bunka 13 (1816).

38. Ibid. Dated Eleventh Month Bunka 13 (1816).

39. Ibid., 500, Dated Eleventh Month Bunka 14 (1817).

40. Ibid., 554. Dated Eighth Month Bunka 15 (1818).

41. Ibid., 562. Dated Tenth Month Bunka 15 (1818).

42. Ibid., 564. Dated Eleventh Month Bunka 15 (1818).

43. Her story is told in Mizukami Tsutomu, *Ryōkan o aruku* (Shūeisha Bunko, 1990), 9–23.

44. Yakuwa, "Kinsei Echigo no minshū to moji manabi," 125–129. Professor Yakuwa, who had access to the original copy, comments here on the quality of the lan-

guage and handwriting in the letter. I rely on his acknowledged expertise in handwritten farmer documents.

45. Umemura Kayo, *Nihon kinsei minshū kyōiku shi kenkyū* (Azusa Shuppansha, 1991), 63–65.

46. Ibid., 59–50.

Epilogue

1. Norman Mailer, *Oswald's Tale: An American Mystery* (New York: Random House, 1995), 775–778.

2. Katō Hidetoshi, "Meiji nijūnendai nashonarizumu to komyunikeishon," in *Meiji zenhanki no nashonarizumu,* ed. Sakata Yoshio (Miraisha, 1958), 317.

3. Christopher Seeley, *A History of Writing in Japan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 6.

4. Ministries were established with the creation of the modern cabinet system in 1886. Prior to that they are properly referred to as offices or departments

5. The distinction between European and Japanese sequencing of reading and writing instruction was noticed as early as the sixteenth century by Luís Fróis, who resided in Japan for thirty-one years. See Sakuma Tadashi et al., eds., *Abira Hiron, Nihon Ōkokuki/Ruis Furoisu, Nichiō bunka hikaku,* in *Daikōkai jidai sōsho* 11, chap. 3 (Iwanami Shoten, 1965), 538. For the European preference for teaching reading before writing in the eighteenth century, see Isser Woloch, *Eighteenth-Century Europe: Tradition and Progress, 1715–1787* (New York: Norton, 1982), 225.

6. I have gone into greater detail on the nature of the European and American studies of literacy in history and the usefulness of this material for studies of Japanese literacy in "Literacy West and East: Europe and Japan in the Nineteenth Century," in *Senri Ethnological Studies* 34 Japanese Civilization in the Modern World VII, ed. Umesao Tadao, J. Marshall Unger, and Osamu Sakiyama (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 1992), 77–92.

7. Monbushō, comp., *Monbushō daihachi nenpō* (1880) (Senbundō, 1974 reprint ed.), 9. Hereafter all references to *Monbushō nenpō* are to this reprinted edition of the original.

8. The best example is the previously mentioned NHK documentary of the late 1980s, "Benkyō būmu koko ni hajimaru: Edo terakoya jijō" (The study boom started here: Writing schools of the Tokugawa period).

9. *Monbushō daijūsan nenpō* (1885), 210.

10. See also Tables 4 and 5, pages 134–135.

11. Shiga authorities' attempts to understand the resistance of young girls and the poor to school attendance and to develop special incentives for them are reported in some detail in *Monbushō daigo nenpō,* 204.

12. Matsushita Yoshio, *Chōheirei seiteishi* (Nagai Shobō, 1943), 121.

13. Yui Masaomi, Fujiwara Akira, and Yoshida Yutaka, eds., *Guntai heishi,* vol. 4 of *Nihon kindai shisō taikei* (Iwanami Shoten, 1989), 464.

14. Fujiwara Akira, *Nihon gunji shi* 1 (Nihon Hyōronsha, 1987), 57.

15. Endō Yoshinobu, *Kindai Nihon guntai kyōiku shi kenkyū* (Aoki Shoten, 1994), 554–555.

16. Ibid., 557.

17. The early Meiji government viewed public elementary schools as a primary mechanism for training Japanese citizens in a new civic morality essential to the interests of the Meiji state. See Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), especially chapter V, "Civic Morality."

18. It might be noted in the same vein that it was the Army Weapons Office, not the Ministry of Education, that made the most eloquent pleas for language reform early in the twentieth century. The Weapons Office called for the limitation of Chinese characters and the standardization of *kana* usage for reasons of military efficiency and even personal safety. Were difficult Chinese characters used, it was pointed out, recruits could not read the names of their weapons or instructions on how to use them. Hoshina Kōichi, *Kokugo mondai gojūnen* (San'yō Shobō, 1949), 207–208.

19. Kiyokawa Ikuko, "'Sōtei kyōiku chōsa' ni miru gimusei shūgaku no fukyū: kindai Nihon ni okeru riterashii to kōkyōiku seido no seiritsu," *Kyōiku shakaigaku kenkyū* 51 (October 1992): 114.

20. There are also data from physicals given to recruits. Some historical demographers have used the materials on height and weight to measure health and living standards in Japan by region from 1896 to 1936. See Ted Shay, "The Level of Living in Japan, 1885–1938: New Evidence," in *Stature, Living Standards, and Economic Development: Essays in Anthropometric History,* ed. John Komlos (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 173–201. Gail Honda has used army physicals and educational data for a single village, Toyooka in Shizuoka Prefecture, where local historians have collected the data, to study the relationship between health, birth order, and education; Honda, "Short Tailors and Sickly Priests: Birth Order and Household Effects on Class and Health in Japan, 1893-1943," paper presented at the Indiana University Economic History Workshop, February 2, 1996.

21. "Chōheirei," quoted from Yui, Fujiwara, and Yoshida, *Guntai heishi,* 79.

22. "Ōsaka sanjūsan nendo Ōsaka-fu sōtei futsū kyōiku teido torishirabe-sho," in *Sōtei kyōiku chōsa* 5, ed. Ōkubo Toshiaki and Kaigo Tokiomi (Senbundō Shoten Shuppanbu, 1972), 1–2. Additional anecdotal evidence supports the view of initial low levels of literacy among some recruits. One young man who had never gone to school volunteered for the new conscript army in 1873. He was required to sign his name but had only learned *katakana* from a village priest. He signed in *katakana* but subsequently studied to the point where he could write his own autobiography. Aoyagi Jirō, ed., *Aoyagi rikugun gochō seinan no eki jūgun-ki* (privately printed, 1967). I thank Professor Ishizuki Minoru for this information.

23. "Kyōto-fu kannai chōhei sōtei kyōiku teido chōsa hōkoku," (Meiji 42) in Ōkubo and Kaigo, eds., *Sōtei kyōiku chōsa* 5, 1.

24. "Kyōto-fu kannai chōhei sōtei kyōiku teido chōsa hōhoku," (Meiji 43) in ibid., 5.

25. Even here, however, questions arise. Would one who could sign his name, for example, not in Chinese characters but in *hiragana* or *katakana* be moved out of the lowest category? The Aoyagi diary that has just been cited suggests that some, knowing no Chinese characters, did sign in *kana.* In addition, then as now, some names were meant to be written in *kana* script. Assuming these signers passed, the lowest category

presumably applied to those who were unable to write their names even in the phonetic syllabary.

26. Kurosaki Chiharu, "Monmō-ritsu teika no chiikiteki dōkō," *Rekishi chiri gaku kiyō* 25 (1983): 21–42. Other useful studies of literacy in Japan using army conscript data are Yamamoto Taketoshi, "Meiji kōki no riterashii chōsa," *Hitotsubashi ronsō* 61, no. 3 (March 1969): 67–76; and Koji Taira, "Education and Literacy in Meiji: An Interpretation," *Explorations in Economic History* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1971): 371–394. J. Marshall Unger provides a useful discussion of pre-Occupation literacy largely based on Yamamoto's data in *Literacy and Script Reform in Occupation Japan: Reading Between the Lines* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), chap. 2. None of these authors had access to the recently published material used here.

27. Characterizations of the wards of Tokyo in the early twentieth century are taken from Edward Seidensticker, *Low City, High City: Tokyo from Edo to the Earthquake: How the Shogun's Ancient Capital Became a Great Modern City, 1867–1923* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), passim.

28. Official school attendance rate figures can conveniently be found in Umihara Tōru, *Gakkō,* appendix, 32. They are shown in chart form in Rubinger, "Education: From One Room to One System," in *Japan in Transition: From Tokugawa to Meiji,* ed. Marius B. Jansen and Gilbert Rozman (Princeton. N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 212.

29. *Okayama-ken tōkeisho* (1902), 96–98 in the microfilm set *Meiji nenkan fuken tōkeisho shūsei* (Yushōdō Fuirumu Shuppan Yūgen Kaisha, 1963). Illiteracy data for many prefectures broken down by county for selected years are available in prefectural statistical annuals that are available in this microfilm set. There is also an accompanying catalogue that lists the prefectures and the years for which data are available. The microfilm set is available through the Center for Research Libraries in Chicago as well as in major university East Asian collections.

30. The previously cited volume edited by Ōkubo and Kaigō, *Sōtei kyōiku chōsa* 5 consists of conscript data information for two prefectures—Osaka from 1900 to 1913 and Kyoto from 1909 to 1911—with detailed reports on how tests were given, examples of test questions, and other information about the tests that is not provided in the army materials themselves. Although the Osaka data are unique in being categorized by units as small as town and village, the Kyoto data are not.

31. Maps for a later period (the 1950s) are clear on the distinction between industrial and commercial areas. *Nihon no chiri 5: kinkihen* (Iwanami Shoten, 1961): 26, 59. Other sources suggest that the trend was clear already by 1925. *Meiji Taishō Ōsaka-shi shi* 1: *kaisetsuhen:* 65 states clearly that "the central parts of the city were commercial areas," and that "the surrounding areas were industrial regions."

32. *Meiji Taishō Ōsaka-shi shi* 2: *keizaihen* (1): 133.

33. Ibid., 856–858.

34. See, for example, the discussion of the obstacles placed in the way of basic literacy attainment by the early industrialization process in parts of France, in Furet and Ozouf, *Reading and Writing,* chap. 5. Regarding the same situation in Lancashire in England during the Industrial Revolution, see Michael Sanderson, "Literacy and Social Mobility in the Industrial Revolution in England," *Past and Present* 56 (August 1972): 75–103.

35. Ōsaka-fu Naimubu Daisanka, comp., *Meiji sanjūsan nendo sōtei futsū kyōiku teido torishirabesho* (1900). *Sōtei kyōiku chōsa* cited above reprints some of the information from this report, but not the breakdown by town and village. In addition to this set of data for 1900, copies of that for 1901 and 1902 are available in Jinbun Kagaku Kenkyūjo library at Kyoto University.

36. The Oguraike was a large pond situated at the confluence of the four rivers south of Kyoto City (see Maps 4 and 5). From 1935 to 1941 most of the pond was filled in for use as rice fields. In the postwar period it became the site of a housing development.

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About the Author

Richard Rubinger received his bachelor's degree from Amherst College in 1965 and the doctorate from Columbia University in 1979. He has taught at Vanderbilt University, the University of Hawai'i, and Columbia University; since 1989 he has been professor of Japanese at Indiana University. He has written numerous articles on the history of education in Japan, including an article on "Meiji Education" in the *Sources of Japanese Tradition,* vol. 2 (rev. ed.). He is author of *Private Academies of Tokugawa Japan* (1982); (with Edward R. Beauchamp) *Education in Japan: A Source Book* (1989); *An American Scientist in Early Meiji Japan* (1989); (with Yasuko Watt) *Readers Guide to Intermediate Japanese* (1998); and is co-editor, (with Jurgis Elisonas) of *Proliferating Talent: Essays on Politics, Thought, and Education in the Meiji Era* (1997).

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