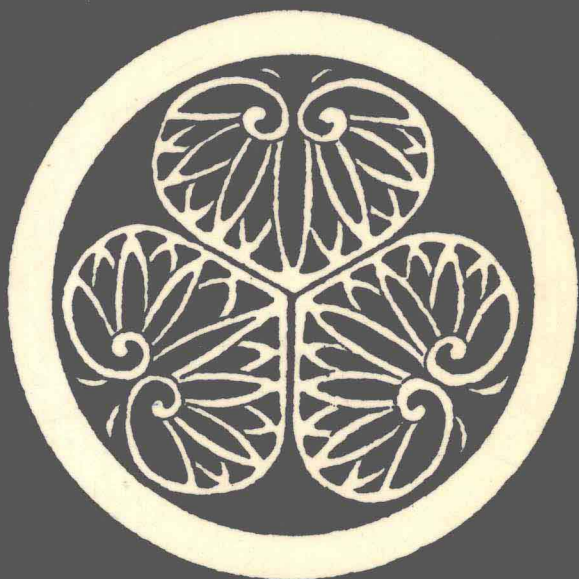


Politics in the  
Tokugawa Bakufu,  
1600–1843



Conrad Totman

*POLITICS IN*  
*THE TOKUGAWA*  
*BAKUFU* 1600-1843

*Conrad D. Totman*

University of California Press  
Berkeley Los Angeles London

University of California Press  
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

University of California Press, Ltd.  
London, England

Paperback edition, with new preface and bibliographical supplement, © 1988 by  
The Regents of the University of California

Cloth edition published 1967 by Harvard University Press

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Totman, Conrad D.

Politics in the Tokugawa bakufu, 1600–1843 / Conrad D. Totman.

p. cm.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-520-06313-9 (pbk.)

1. Japan—Politics and government—1600–1868. 2. Tokugawa family.

I. Title.

DS871.T6 1988

952'.025—dc19

88–15473

CIP

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I must first acknowledge my great debt to Professor Albert M. Craig of Harvard, my thesis advisor under whom I began the work for this book as a doctoral dissertation. While doing research in Japan I profited from the opinions of Professors Konishi Shirō and Kanai Madoka of Tokyo University. Mr. Tada Minoru of Tokyo also gave liberally of his time, helping me in the archives and solving various problems as they arose. I am grateful to the staffs of the Harvard-Yenching Institute library, the library at International Christian University in Mitaka, where I did much initial research, and the library in the Historiographical Institute (Shiryōhensanjo) at Tokyo University. The interlibrary loan staff at the Santa Barbara campus of the University of California helped me obtain valuable materials from the Oriental Collection at Berkeley. Fellowships from Harvard and through the National Defense Education Act sustained me in Japan, and a Haynes Fellowship helped me make extensive revisions at Santa Barbara. My wife's father, Mr. Ikegami Taizō, has been of great help, giving me several rare books on the Tokugawa system, offering sage advice, and

## *Acknowledgments*

x

showing unstinting interest in the project. And Michiko has been the model wife, endlessly typing, making glossaries, correcting errors, often finding order where chaos seemed complete. All these and others I thank for whatever of merit is here, but mine alone is the responsibility for those errors of fact and evaluation which surely remain.

## PREFACE TO THE PAPERBACK EDITION

This study of the Tokugawa bakufu first took shape as a doctoral dissertation during two years of research and writing in Tokyo, from 1961 to 1963. Later I made some changes when revising the work for publication, but from the vantage point of 1988, two topics seem especially to invite comment. One is a question of tone; the other, of scope. Doubtless a host of little things might be treated differently now, with better result, but this preface will focus on the two general topics of tone and scope.

The question of tone is this: the conclusion emerges from successive chapters that, all things considered, the aspects of the bakufu then under scrutiny worked commendably well. Its fiscal arrangements, its disposition of military forces, the way it managed cadet branches of the shogunal family, and its handling of powerful vassals all receive in the final analysis rather favorable assessment. Admittedly it was an imperfect government, but as regimes go, and compared to selected ones in China, Europe, or elsewhere, the Tokugawa appear uncommonly competent and effective. The sound of congratulation now seems excessive.

Somehow an American reader today, mindful of the Vietnam War, Watergate, and the rampant irresponsibility of the 1980s federal administration, looks with skepticism on a study that appears to praise

government so freely. Surely, one suspects, the analysis must be flawed. And in places it indubitably is, but the problem of tone arises mostly because the basic question underlying the study dictates an essentially favorable answer.

The book seeks to explain how this regime “really worked.” How it worked is worth knowing, presumably, because the Tokugawa polity lasted so long, longer than most governments, despite the extensive socioeconomic change that occurred during its 265-year tenure. To assure its survival, moreover, it resorted to overt force much less frequently than most regimes. The book asks, in effect, how the bakufu could have kept the peace—the “Great Peace,” as it was called—so effectively for so long.

The “successful” character of the story is thus predetermined by the question that guides it. The qualities the study highlights are not those that made the bakufu a socially or ecologically “good” regime—or demonstrated that it was not, which actually may be easier to do—but simply those that helped it survive as long as possible with minimal resort to overt coercion. To an author whose childhood was dominated by World War II, who later saw what warfare did to Korea, who then watched the American government blunder into a purposeless war of savage brutality in Southeast Asia, and who sees no long-term hope for humankind in a world where governments regard constant military escalation as basic to their survival, the question seemed, and still seems, entirely legitimate.

This focus on surviving by keeping the peace, however, means that other issues are not addressed. If one wishes to know how socially or ecologically “good” the Tokugawa regime was—that is, how well it cared for Japan’s people or ecosystem—then one must ask questions and explore dimensions of performance disregarded by this study. Doing so would surely alter the book’s tone. There is ample room for such inquiry and rich documentation to support it; one hopes that imaginative scholars will pursue it.

One interpretive theme that contributes to the congratulatory tone now seems overstated. The book argues that the bakufu underwent a process of “bureaucratic rationalization” that enhanced its peace-keeping ability. Certainly rules and regulations proliferated, and without question administrative posts multiplied. But it is not at all clear that either of those processes served to “rationalize” administration by improving either the “fit” of means to ends or the consistency

of decision-making procedures or priorities. What now seems more striking is the persistence of ad hoc decision making, particularistic accommodationism, or what one might simply call "muddling through."

A different treatment of Ieyasu, the founder, would reduce the stress on rationalization, highlight the Tokugawa penchant for muddling through, and mute the tone of satisfaction. Ieyasu emerges from this study as the methodical, if unidimensional, builder of ever more efficient institutions, who established the essential characteristics of his regime by 1600. The story of his life after that year is nearly ignored. When examined, however, it reveals other equally instructive aspects of his influence. It shows, in particular, that he improvised policy as he went along, attempting to cope with dilemmas when they arose. He dealt as best he could with a variety of difficulties involving particular daimyo, clerics, court nobles, and foreigners, muddling through peacefully whenever possible, resorting to force only in 1614 when he saw no other way to solve his problem of the moment.

Moreover, the domain Ieyasu forged during those years was not so much a bipolar Kantō-Kinai structure, as this study argues, as a pragmatic and practical assemblage of forested mountains and arable plains that sprawled across central Japan. It was anchored in a meandering string of fortresses that was established in piecemeal fashion and controlled through a mixed group of Ieyasu's vassals, sons, and their advisors, and that eventually ran from Mito to Himeji.

Ieyasu's post-Sekigahara actions and their catch-as-catch-can quality now seem to foreshadow the bakufu's subsequent performance more satisfactorily than does the imputed rationalization of his domanial organization. They also suggest that adequate treatment of the book's central question—how the regime kept the peace for so long—involves aspects of Tokugawa history that lie beyond its current scope.

Turning, then, to the topic of scope, in its examination of how the regime "really worked" the study purposely limits its inquiry to the political elite, scrutinizing that elite in terms of its inner groupings—types of daimyo, liege vassals, and other categories of people—and pointing out the fissures and tensions among them. In consequence the study is unable to confront the implications of a more basic truth: that the highborn constituted, in the final analysis, an integrated whole set apart from the general public and held together by an all-encompassing institutional matrix and by shared interests and



convictions. It is not accidental, for example, that no significant literature demanding political rights for commoners developed among Tokugawa-era samurai and other high-status people. Nor is it accidental that even minor samurai clung to titles that carried little socio-economic value or that commoners yearned for those same titles even when they knew, as they surely did, that they were of little material worth.

Instead of seeing the bakufu as a cluster of conflictive interest groups whose relationships and roles were mediated by a rationalized bureaucratic structure, it may be more fundamentally sound to see it as the key instrument of a ruling elite whose capacity to govern in an orderly fashion derived basically from the existence among its members of a largely unspoken but deeply shared understanding of how society should function and how duties should be handled. It was this consistency of behavioral premises, achieved with little reference to specific regulations and precedents, that gave government a predictability which helped make it acceptable to the general populace. Commoners might not have appreciated where they stood, but at least they knew where their position was, and hence what they could expect from their rulers and get away with themselves.

Seeing the rulers as an elite with deeply shared interests leads, in turn, to seeing the political structure as an entity whose internal linkages were at least as important as its internal fissures in shaping government behavior. The term *bakuhansei*, or *bakuhan taisei*, which Japanese historians have coined, expresses this sense of wholeness by viewing the bakufu and *han* as integral parts of a single system. Viewing the Tokugawa political order as a system, and the bakufu as an element within it, helps one understand why the system collapsed as it did—not piecemeal or in part, but completely, in one fell swoop. And more to the point here, it helps one get beyond a reductionist tendency, quite common in the English-language literature, to picture the structure in dyadic terms of *han* versus bakufu when the more elemental truth is that the governing activities of bakufu and *han* contributed to each other's survival. In this study that basic interdependency is only occasionally noted, as in the brief and oblique discussion (pp. 85–86) of the *bakuhansei* as an “experimental farm” network that helped Edo wrestle with its financial difficulties.

The book's concentration on categories of daimyo, lesser shogunal vassals, and aspects of bakufu administration results in undue neglect

of one broader political linkage that was central to the regime's ability to rule with minimal coercion. That was the awkwardly incestuous relationship of merchants and rulers, which helped sustain a condition essential to all stable ruling systems: the linkage of wealth and power. Because of the segregation of ruling and producing functions, the hereditary nature of samurai status, the role of samurai as an urban consumer group, and the shortcomings of the regular agricultural tax system, this linking of rulers and merchants was crucial to the regime's survival. It was critical to government finance, central to the administration of cities and towns, and convenient even for the maintenance of government influence in rural areas and was thus an important part of the overall peace-keeping process.

Officially, of course, the economic base of the regime was agriculture, which the book treats essentially in terms of taxable rice production. Unfortunately, this treatment conceals the two-legged nature of Tokugawa agriculture and skews our understanding of the fiscal situation. To flourish, farmers certainly needed sufficient arable land for both paddy and dry-field crops. They needed even more acreage in untilled land, however, and their success in extracting yields from the arable was generally predicated on their success in obtaining essential materials—green fertilizer, most notably, but also fuel and fodder—from forest and “wasteland.” Rulers, like tillers, recognized the two-legged nature of agriculture, and they devised ways of taxing most types of nonarable production, such as charcoal, paper, lacquer, dye, silk, and tea. They also tapped into other rural resources, particularly direct labor service, and levied a plethora of taxes on consumption. By misperceiving the character of Tokugawa agriculture, the book oversimplifies the tax system, which led me to understate the level of general taxation and probably to misread regional variations and long-term trends in that level.

Woodland, which blanketed fully three-fourths of the country, was important to the rulers not only for generating tax income but also in more direct ways: its fuel wood cooked their food and its timber built their monuments, cities, and towns. Recognizing the importance of woodland to the rulers leads one to reassess why Hideyoshi, Ieyasu, and other leaders claimed and reassigned territories as they did and to reconsider long-term trends in the bakufu's domain.

Finally, and most significant in its implications, this study presumes that the environmental context was essentially static and can, there-

fore, be treated as a stable framework whose role in shaping government behavior did not change and need not be examined. It now appears, however, that environmental changes were crucial to the evolution of bakufu political priorities and administrative procedures. The extraordinary population growth, land clearing, and deforestation activity of the seventeenth century created nationwide problems that caused the bakufu to intrude further into the affairs of daimyo domains and (along with the *han*) to set up and repeatedly tinker with new organs and policies of domainial administration and engage in ever more frenetic fiscal manipulation.

Ironically, perhaps, when one does incorporate these ecological aspects of the broader history into the political story, the picture emerges of an ecosystem subject to extremely intensive exploitation, with rulers and ruled becoming deeply enmeshed in a competition for scarce resources that served to escalate tax manipulation, social protest, and public disorder. Against that background the fact of the regime's peaceable survival seems all the more remarkable. One wonders anew: how did the bakufu, or better yet, the *bakuhau taisei*, manage to survive so long despite the complications and hardships arising from the massive social growth and environmental overexploitation of the seventeenth century? And the unasked questions then force themselves upon our consciousness: at what price was this peace kept, and what are the larger implications of such an outcome?

It is not immediately evident just how attention to these added dimensions of Tokugawa history would reshape an answer to this study's basic question about bakufu durability. But closer attention to human motives and interests might, for example, lead to a more subtle understanding of what constituted "coercion," "force," and "compromise" in Tokugawa Japan, and that, in turn, might lead one to argue that the Great Peace was substantially less "peaceable" than this book implies. Consideration of ecological factors might lead one to conclude that during the seventeenth century the ruling elite was able to flourish because the realm was still capable of providing enough material goods to sustain both the burgeoning populace and its luxury-loving rulers. By the eighteenth century, however, the realm no longer could meet their demands as easily, a situation that fostered social and political tension and disorder. The new conditions prodded the general public to modify its behavior, particularly in terms of procreation—for example, by practicing abortion and in-

fanticide—but also in terms of resource utilization—by intensifying tillage practices, exploiting woodland and sea more completely, and making do with less. The change in environmental context also induced rulers to postpone the day of reckoning by lowering their levels of consumption, gradually cannibalizing their own positions (usually by sacrificing one another's interests), and adopting concessive strategies that appeased the discontented when the rhetoric of virtue and threats of force no longer sufficed.

This combination of policies below and above managed to avoid irreparable upheaval until the 1860s. And then, in a twist of history that still disconcerts scholars, it was exogenous complications—"Western imperialism"—that finally forced politically conscious and politically influential Japanese into a basic reconsideration of priorities and possibilities, thereby precipitating at long last the domestic upheaval that destroyed the *bakuhau taisei* and ushered in a new political era.

In such a view, the internal adaptations of the ruling elite, which loom so large in this study, become less important in explaining the Great Peace. And the way the bakufu "really worked," that is, the political process that preserved the Peace for so long, proves no less "successful" than before, but looks less heroic and more like a commentary on the ad hoc and inelegant ways the privileged few in one society maneuvered historically to preserve their advantages vis-à-vis their fellow creatures.

## CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	ix
Preface to the Paperback Edition	xi
Introduction	1
I <i>Early Growth and Organization of the Tokugawa House</i>	8
II <i>Formal Tokugawa House Organization</i>	32
III <i>Tokugawa Military Organization</i>	43
IV <i>Tokugawa Finances</i>	64
V <i>Chiyoda Castle: Home of the Shogun</i>	89
VI <i>Related Daimyo and the Tokugawa House</i>	110
VII <i>Liege Vassals</i>	131
VIII <i>Vassal Daimyo</i>	153
IX <i>The Vertical Clique</i>	179
X <i>The Stages of Bakufu Leadership</i>	204
Conclusion	234

## Appendices

A <i>Vassal Daimyo—1868</i>	264
B <i>Abbreviated Table of Tokugawa Bakufu Officials</i>	270
Notes	278
Bibliography	315
Bibliographical Supplement	328
Glossary	337
Index	349

## MAPS

1 <i>Origins of the Tokugawa House</i>	10
2 <i>Fiefs of Related and Vassal Daimyo: 1616</i>	60
3 <i>Fiefs of Related and Vassal Daimyo: 1865</i>	61
4 <i>Tokugawa Domains: 1664</i>	71
5 <i>Edo: 1849</i>	91
6 <i>Chiyoda Castle: Overall</i>	94
7 <i>Chiyoda Castle: Main Enceinte</i>	96
8 <i>Council Rooms</i>	98
9 <i>Hotta Land in Dewa Province</i>	160

## TABLES

1 <i>Matsudaira Families</i>	12
2 <i>Ieyasu's Government Officials</i>	17
3 <i>Principal Bakufu Officials</i>	41
4 <i>Tokugawa Military Organization</i>	44
5 <i>Bakufu Land Taxes</i>	79
6 <i>Tokugawa Related Houses</i>	112
7 <i>Liege Vassal Categories According to Income Type and Amount: 1705</i>	134
8 <i>Mikawa Matsudaira Vassal Daimyo</i>	171
9 <i>Miscellaneous Matsudaira Vassal Daimyo</i>	172

## *INTRODUCTION*

This study was originally meant to focus on the decline and fall of the Tokugawa bakufu. As I began reading, however, it very shortly became evident that one could not understand why the bakufu fell without understanding how it really worked. Accordingly the inquiry was directed further into the past and it now attempts to explain how the bakufu functioned during the days of its maturity.

The Tokugawa bakufu grew directly out of the Tokugawa family's earlier private government and owed its overall form to this prior experience. It was a new political form in Japan, not a refurbished version of the preceding bakufu of the Minamoto and Ashikaga families. Even when it had grown into such a sprawling bureaucracy that the role of the family was scarcely visible, no one ever forgot that this was the bakufu of the Tokugawa family and none other. And so our study has its necessary starting point in the historical emergence of the Tokugawa family.

The family can be traced back through more than four hundred years of Japanese history. These years include over one hundred fifty of violent warfare and social instability and over two hundred fifty of peaceful Tokugawa hegemony. The political

system during the era of Tokugawa peace has been called the *bakuhan* system. *Baku*, obviously short for bakufu, means the government (that is, the administrative structure) of the Tokugawa house (*Tokugawa ke*), whose lands covered about one fourth of Japan. The *han*, or feudal baronies, were the fiefs belonging to the daimyo, the two hundred and eighty great warrior lords who controlled the remaining three fourths of Japan. Our interest shall be directed toward the "government of the Tokugawa house." The "Tokugawa house" is a somewhat troublesome concept and can perhaps best be identified by eliminating those segments of Tokugawa society which were not embraced, conceptually or operatively, by the "house."

During the course of the Edo period the population of Japan rose from about twenty to thirty millions, and of this number nearly two millions were warriors. The rest, excepting some nine hundred thousand clerics, Kyoto aristocrats, and underprivileged persons, were commoners.<sup>1</sup> Tokugawa doctrine officially embraced the four-level Confucian hierarchy of scholars, agriculturalists, artisans, and merchants by conveniently equating warriors with scholars. But in fact, in Japan as in China, only one division was politically important, the one between rulers and ruled.<sup>2</sup> In China the ruled could hope to ascend on a private family basis into the ranks of rulers by acquiring the necessary scholarly degrees and a government position. In Tokugawa Japan, however, the cleavage between rulers (*bushi*) and ruled (known variously as *heimin*, *chomin*, or *heinin*) was hereditary. It was sustained by statutes whose enforcement preserved distinctions of employment, customary privileges, and habits of daily life. And although the borderline between low ranking warriors and commoners was fuzzy and frequently crossed, commoners did not thereby gain a significant role in the control of the *bakuhan* system. Accordingly, although commoners resident on Tokugawa lands were conceptually a part of the great Confucian "family" of the Tokugawa house, they were not operatively involved and need detain us no further.

The underprivileged are of course beyond the scope of our inquiry. The power of the clerics had been broken in the course of the civil wars before 1600, and during the Tokugawa period they,



like the commoners, were excluded from a role in political affairs.

The Kyoto court and its affiliated aristocratic families long antedated the Tokugawa house, but the imperial institution played a great role in legitimizing the dominant position of this house. To retain imperial support and to make its sanction all the more convincing, the bakufu accorded the two thousand-odd privileged elite of Kyoto great honors and flattery. But to do so was as dangerous as it was necessary, for it tended to excite imperial pretensions and increase imperial influence. To compensate, the bakufu excluded the aristocrats completely from a role at Edo and created several institutional devices to control them at Kyoto. These controls will be discussed in more detail later; suffice it now to note that the Kyoto elite too was external to the Tokugawa house.

Foreigners also were excluded from the Tokugawa house; indeed they were excluded from Japan. There were no foreign mercenaries in the Tokugawa employ. During the first forty years of the seventeenth century, the bakufu drove from Japan almost all the foreign missionaries and traders then in the country. The Christian religion was proscribed, and almost all foreign trade was stopped. Japanese were forbidden to go overseas; those who left could not return. The Dutch were permitted to continue a limited trade at Nagasaki, but no other Europeans could enter the country. Daimyo were forbidden to have foreign contacts, with two exceptions: the Sō daimyo of Tsushima who had contact with Korean traders and the Shimazu lord in southern Kyushu who carried on some Chinese trade in the Ryukyus with tacit Edo consent. This policy of national isolation or *sakoku* contributed to *bakuhau* stability by keeping out any new military technology which might upset the power relationship between the Tokugawa house and the great daimyo.

This leaves us with the rulers, the *bushi*, the men who controlled the *bakuhau* system. Towering over all other *bushi* was the shogun, the official head of the bakufu. Tokugawa Ieyasu had received this greatest traditional military title from the emperor in 1603, and it was thereafter transmitted peacefully to his descendants for two hundred sixty-four years on the basis of primogeniture or familial affinity. The daimyo were all technically vassals of the shogun, but of them, only the *fudai* or vassal daimyo, whose