



Lust, Commerce, and Corruption: An Account of What I Have Seen and Heard, by an Edo Samurai (Translations from the Asian Classics)

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By 1816, Japan had recovered from the famines of the 1780s and moved beyond the political reforms of the 1790s. Despite persistent economic and social stresses, the country seemed to be approaching a new period of growth. The idea that the shogunate would not last forever was far from anyone's mind.

Yet, in that year, an anonymous samurai author completed one of the most detailed critiques of Edo society known today. Writing as Buyo Inshi, "a retired gentleman of Edo," he expresses a profound despair with the state of the realm and with people's behavior and attitudes. He sees decay wherever he turns and believes the world will soon descend into war.

Buyo shows a familiarity with many corners of Edo life that one might not expect in a samurai. He describes the corruption of samurai officials; the suffering of the poor in villages and cities; the operation of brothels; the dealings of blind moneylenders; the selling and buying of temple abbotships; and the dubious strategies townspeople use in the law courts. Perhaps the frankness of his account, which contains a wealth of concrete information about Edo society, made him prefer to remain anonymous.

This volume contains a full translation of Buyo's often-quoted but rarely studied work by a team of specialists on Edo society. Together with extensive annotation of the translation, the volume includes an introduction that situates the text culturally and historically.

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