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CHAPTER 2

EDOKKO: THE TOWNSPERSON

Characteristics of the *Edokko*

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the center of Edo was the shogun's castle. At least until the Genroku period (1688–1704) the city was primarily the capital of the warrior. It was a teeming metropolis, a million strong, with men outnumbering women by more than two to one. Edo bustled with warriors, craftsmen, merchants, and performers from throughout the land. The upper class amused itself at the kabuki or in the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters; the activities of the big spenders captured the public imagination.

The shogun, daimyo, and their retainers spent almost all their money in the city; Edo was a center of consumption. Originally, very little was produced there, neither daily necessities nor high-grade cultural artifacts. Instead, articles were imported from Kamigata, that is, from the Kyoto and Osaka area. Such goods were called *kudarimono*—quality products that had “come down” from Kamigata. Wares that had not “come down” were considered inferior: thus the origin of the word *kudaran* (“not come down”), meaning uninteresting or worthless. The sale of imported goods netted great profits for Edo branches of stores headquartered in Ise, Ōmi, or other provinces. From around the Genroku period these businesses, known as *Edo-dana* and located at Nihonbashi, Denmachō, and elsewhere, expanded greatly. This expansion signaled the rise of the Edo *chōnin*'s economic power.

As mentioned earlier, *Edo-dana* were staffed exclusively by men who had come to Edo only to work. These men even saw to their own cooking, cleaning, and laundry. Unable to sink their roots in the city, *Edo-dana* employees remained perennial outsiders. During the latter half of the eighteenth century, however, a new type of individual appeared: the *Edokko*, a pure Edo *chōnin*, who was rooted in the city itself. The first recorded usage of the term *Edokko* occurs in a

senryū of 1771,¹ and thereafter the word was used by many authors. Around 1788 Santō Kyōden (1761–1816) perfectly defined the character of the *Edokko* in a *sharebon* (“smart book,” witty novelettes mainly about the licensed quarters) entitled *Tsūgen sō-magaki* (Grand Brothel of Connoisseur Language) and a *kibyōshi* (“yellow-covered book,” illustrated satirical fiction) entitled *Nitan no Shirō Fuji no hitoana kenbutsu* (Nitan no Shirō Views the Caves of Mount Fuji). According to Kyōden,² the *Edokko chōnin* is typified by the following five qualities:

1. He receives his first bath in the water of the city’s aqueduct; he grows up in sight of the gargoyles on the roof of Edo castle.
2. He is not attached to money; he is not stingy. His funds do not cover the night’s lodging.
3. He is raised in a high-class, protected manner. He is quite unlike either warriors or country bumpkins.
4. He is a man of Nihonbashi (the downtown area) to the bone.
5. He has *iki* (refinement) and *hari* (strength of character).

In my reading of contemporary books I have found forty-six examples of the term *Edokko*, all illustrative of the pride *Edokko* took in their identity. The main points of pride can be summarized by the five noted here by Kyōden.

Kyōden’s five characteristics have, however, been subjected to much ridicule: it was Nagoya castle, not Edo castle, that was decorated with gargoyles; the aqueducts had only dirty water; the supposed “high-class” upbringing of the *Edokko* was nothing but an imaginary inversion of a childhood spent in poverty. Some have said that the *Edokko*’s vanity was merely a product of his feelings of inferiority toward the wealthy Kansai-based *Edo-dana* merchants; that the *Edokko* was merely a low-class, poor, uncultured *chōnin* with neither strength nor guts.

Documents of this age, however, demonstrate otherwise. *Edokko* had lived in this city from its early years and considered it home. With the passing of the Genroku and Kyōhō periods, and with the shogunal house going into its eighth and ninth generations, the true sons of Edo from Kanda, Kyōbashi, Ginza, Shiba, and the rest of the *shitamachi* (downtown) area were in fact accumulating great wealth. It was these pure-bred Edo *chōnin* who were the true *Edokko*. These men operated riverside fish markets, worked as *fudasashi* (rice brokers and financial agents) at the bakufu’s Asakusa rice granary, dealt in lumber at Kiba, or acted as receiving agents for *kudarimono* at Shinkawa or Reigan-jima.

The *Edokko* was branded as “mediocre” and “low-class” only because he was mistaken for a mediocre type of individual who appropriated this label for himself after the Kasei period (1804–1830). Later yet, around the turn of the century, rural inhabitants thronged to what is now the Bunkyo ward of Tokyo. A modern version of the “insider” and “outsider” arose; within this context a modern, inferior type of *Edokko* was able to attract attention. Such people were doubtlessly also a type of *Edokko*, but they should hardly be confused with the real *Edokko* of an earlier era. For the real *Edokko* had strength of character, economic power, and a highly developed culture. In fact, *Edokko* covertly wielded much authority in Edo society.

One finds no label corresponding to the *Edokko* in Osaka and Kyoto. No concept of an “Osakakko” or a “Kyotokko” exists; nor is there any parallel in Nagoya, Kanazawa, or Hiroshima. Thus we must ask why the idea of such a native arose solely in Edo. The answer to this question is simple. In Osaka, Kyoto, and other cities, almost the entire *chōnin* population corresponded to what the *Edokko* was in Edo. In the capital, however, a huge number of unassimilated provincials remained “outsiders,” providing a contrast to the distinctly native *Edokko*. During the city’s early years, this heterogeneous population grew larger and developed evenly; but by the second half of the eighteenth century a marked contrast between natives and non-natives begins to appear. This contrast was not entirely missing in other large cities such as Osaka or Kyoto, but in Edo a much larger part of the population remained nonnative.

Within Edo there existed yet another distinction: the sharp contrast between the uptown (*yamanote*) and the downtown (*shitamachi*) areas. These terms can already be found in the *hanashibon* (story-book) known as *Eda sangoju* (Beads of Coral) published in 1690.³ The *yamanote* area was a diluvial terrace packed with warrior residences; the *shitamachi* area was an alluvial area with a concentration of *chōnin* dwellings. Since the *chōnin* class was further split between *Edokko* and a large population of *Edo-dana* “outsiders,” *Edokko* were constantly confronted with a large number of people unlike themselves. The unmistakable character of the *Edokko* developed within this social context.

The *Edokko*’s sense of nativeness that emerged during the second half of the eighteenth century fostered the efflorescence of *Edokko* culture. This unique culture was, however, not created by *Edokko* alone. Instead, it resulted from the interaction of three groups, each of which complemented the others: the warriors, the provincial *chōnin* “outsiders,” and the *Edokko*.

Edokko culture was rooted in the Edo language. But it went far beyond this language. It included, as we shall see in Chapter 3, the aesthetic of *iki* (refinement) and *tsū* (*savoir faire*) as elaborated in the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters. This aesthetic was also displayed on the kabuki stage. Another example of *Edokko* culture was the *ukiyo-e* woodcut—also known as *Edo-e* (Edo pictures) or *azuma nishiki-e* (eastern brocade pictures). Such prints were produced in tremendous quantities and circulated throughout the land. *Edokko* literature blossomed with the production of *kibyōshi*, *sharebon*, and *yomihon* (“reading books,” usually historical novels). Illustrated books known as *akahon* (“red books”) were a significant innovation in children’s literature. *Edokko* issued many collections of comic poetry in both Japanese and Chinese. In addition, a tremendous number of *chōnin* participated in the great *senryū* craze, and many more learned various narrative or musical genres. Let us examine some of these phenomena in more detail.

Edokko Culture and the Japanese Language

As mentioned earlier, *Edokko* culture had at its base the Edo language, which became not just one city’s dialect but the core of today’s standard Japanese. Early examples of Edo *chōnin* speech appear in Jōkanbō Kōa’s *Imayō heta dangi* (Clumsy Modern Sermons), published in 1752. This work, highly regarded in its day, offers penetrating commentary on numerous fads and social issues. Another remarkable work in the Edo language is the drama *Shinrei yaguchi no watashi* (Spirits at the Yaguchi Ferry), written for the Edo Geki-za puppet theater in 1770 by Hiraga Gennai (1729–1779). Both Jōkanbō and Hiraga were “outsiders” originating from other parts of Japan. Yet they observed Edo impartially, shaping what they saw into literary or dramatic works. That this was possible shows that the *Edokko*’s social life, cultural forms, and creative activities had undergone tremendous development since the city’s early days.

Families of daimyo, forced to lead lives of hostages within the city, played a particularly important role in the formation of the language used both by warriors and the townspeople. The language of the aristocratic warrior class was fully formed by the Genroku period. By the end of the eighteenth century this language had spread throughout *Edokko* society.

According to Ogawa Kendō’s *Chirizuka dan* (A Mound of Dusty Tales, published in 1814), from the 1760s to the 1780s the everyday

language of the *shitamachi* merchants was changing dramatically. *Chōnin* began to address their wives with the respectful term *goshinzō-sama* rather than the hitherto usual *okamisama*; even the children of day laborers added the honorific prefix “o” to the terms used in addressing their parents and elder siblings. The wealthy rice brokers and financial agents of the Asakusa area, imitating the stiff formalities of the warrior houses, were also calling their wives *goshinzō-sama* and their daughters *ojō-sama*. Ogawa interprets this usage as the baneful influence of the merchant, who needed to show deference to even the lowliest customer.⁴

Here one witnesses the emergence of, not just another dialect, but a language that would eventually become the common tongue of the entire land. *Chōnin* women played an especially large role in disseminating this language. For after the 1750s it was highly fashionable to send one’s daughters into the service of an influential warrior family as a precondition for a good marriage. In such surroundings, young women were initiated into upper-class etiquette and culture. *Chōnin* daughters with such experience often became the wives of influential Edo merchants and assumed important positions in social life. Such an education was limited to the wives and daughters of the *Edokko*, for the provincially based *Edo-dana* merchants usually did not bring women with them to the city.

Edokko Culture and the Spirit of Cooperation

Cultural production was often a collaborative effort—and the heterogeneity of the Edo population allowed disparate social groups to complement each other. Edo-period comic poetry, both in Japanese and Chinese, is a good example of collaborative efforts taking place within a cultural community of bakufu retainers, samurai from various domains, and Edo *chōnin*.

Associations for writing the thirty-one-syllable comic poems known as *kyōka* figured largely in contemporary society. Such groups, known as *kumi* or *ren*, appeared during the Meiwa period (1764–1772) when Karakoromo Kitsushū (1743–1802) established the Yotsuya-*ren*. Meetings of this group were attended by Yomo no Akara (Ōta Nanpo, 1749–1823), Tobuchiri no Batei, Hezutsu Tōsaku (Tatematsu Tomo, 1726–1789), Ōya no Urazumi, Ōne no Futoki, and others. During the An’ei period (1772–1781), when the *kyōka* movement was in full swing, many more *kyōka* groups appeared in rapid succession. Some of these groups are listed here along with the individuals around whom they gathered:



The *kyōka* poets Akera Kankō, Yomono Akara, Yadoya no Meshimori, and Shikatsube Magao. From *Azumaburi kyōka bunko* (A Collection of Eastern-Style *Kyōka*). Drawings by Santō Kyōden, published in 1786. (In the possession of the Tokyo Metropolitan Central Library.)

Akera-ren (Akera Kankō)
 Asakusa-ren
 Bakuro-ren (Yadoya no Meshimori [Ishikawa Masamochi], 1753–1830)
 Funamachi-ren
 Gohyakuzaki-ren
 Hiyoshi-ren
 Honchō-ren (Ōya no Urazumi and Harakara no Akindo [Nakai Tōdō], 1758–1821)
 Misuji-ren
 Mokuzai-ren
 Ochikuri-ren (Moto no Mokuami)
 Shakuyaku-ren
 Shiba-ren (Hamabe no Kurohito)
 Shinba-ren
 Sukiya-ren (Shikatsube no Magao)
 Yamanote-ren (Yomo no Akara)
 Yoshiwara-ren (Kabocho no Motonari)

Kyōka parties were also highly fashionable. One of the most lavish parties was a moon-viewing *kyōka*-fest, lasting five days and five nights, held by Moto no Mokuami in 1779. Another example of a *kyōka* group was the association surrounding Ichikawa Danjūrō V (1741–1806), the top star of the Edo kabuki. This group extended its influence to lovers of *kyōka* throughout the country. Danjūrō, the model *Edokko* and pride of the city, thereby found himself supported by cultured individuals throughout the land.

Groups devoted to other forms of light verse also flourished during this age. In particular, the genre of seventeen-syllable comic verse known as *senryū* constituted one of this era's most noteworthy creations. These highly refined verses depicted all the faults and foibles of humanity with extreme sensitivity and piercing wit. One finds no languorous depictions of mountains, no nostalgic impressions of the sea or pastoral villages. Instead, *senryū* thrive on portrayals of human differences and contrasts, on sharp thrusts at political corruption, and on flashes of insight.

The originator of this genre of comic verse was Karai Senryū (1718–1790), who came to Edo in 1757. Karai functioned as a ward representative (*nanushi*) in Asakusa. Not long after arriving in the city he became a teacher and judge (*tenja*) of comic verse. Disciples presented their work to him for assessment and correction; he then published anthologies of his students' best efforts. Every ten days, during summer and fall, Karai collected verses for evaluation. From

these “collections of ten thousand verses” Karai selected the best and awarded prizes to their authors.

The *senryū* fad peaked during the 1770s and 1780s, when participants formed groups throughout the city. *Senryū* associations included the Sakuragi-ren at Nakachō in Yamashita (Ueno), the Hōrai-ren at Onandomachi in Ushigome, the Takasago-ren and Ume-ren at Kōjimachi, the Ryūsui-ren at Azabu, and the Chikudoren at Ushigome. Karai *Senryū* was by no means the only *senryū* teacher in Edo at the time; some twenty other renowned masters were active as well, judging and improving the verses offered by disciples.⁵ Most *senryū* poets were from the Edo *chōnin* class; but some were warriors from the *yamanote* (uptown) area.

Edo cultural groups often spread their influence over a broad geographical area. A typical example is found in Chiba Ryūboku’s Genji school of flower arranging (*ikebana*). Since the mid-eighteenth century, this school had found many adherents in the Asakusa area. In 1784 the Genji school staged an elaborate exhibition of several hundred flower arrangements at the Baion’in, a temple in Asakusa. To commemorate this event a stone monument was erected at the Akiba Shrine, near Ryōgoku, listing the names of all the students who had taken part in the exhibition. This list was reproduced in the *Genji sōka himei sho* (Record of the Names on the Monument of Genji School Flower Arrangers), a publication printed with woodblocks. Here one finds a record of 1,147 students from various Kantō provinces (listed by time of entry into the Genji school), as well as 154 members from more distant areas, for a grand total of 1,301 individuals. The Genji school, of course, had no monopoly on the teaching of flower arranging. Schools such as the Ikenobō and the Senke-ryū had existed for generations; newcomers such as the Senke-shinryū, Koryū, Enshū-ryū, Yōken-ryū, Enchūrō-ryū, Doku-ryū, Shōfū-ryū, Shōgetsudō-koryū, Mishō-ryū, and Hachidai-ryū also earned widespread support.

Such examples show that by the eighteenth century Edo cultured society had expanded tremendously and was attracting a broad range of followers, especially members of the *chōnin* class. An almost infinite variety of arts was pursued by contemporary cultural groups. A 1775 publication presents an inventory of no fewer than seventy-four types of leisure activity: acting, martial arts, *shakuhachi* (an end-blown bamboo flute), *shōgi* (Japanese chess), *kowairo* (mimicry of kabuki actors’ lines), various styles of vocal music, appraising (*mekiki*), fortune telling, genres of street music and performance, and much else.⁶

Edokko Culture and the Spirit of Resistance

The people of Edo wish to be rude; showing respect seems to them a shame. The worst offenders are those of the lowest rank. Some Edo people even make malicious remarks that one mustn't be afraid of samurai and lice. Such people lack all discretion.⁷

Thus lamented Jōkanbō Kōa in his *Kyōkun zoku heta dangi* (Didactic Clumsy Sermons, Continued) of 1753. Here “Edo people” (*Edo-shū*) could only have meant the Edo *chōnin*. Jōkanbō's observation that the *chōnin* lacked respect and were generally rude implies that they displayed a spirit of resistance, a desire to strike back at their oppressors.

This spirit of resistance began to emerge during the middle of the eighteenth century. Its appearance can to some degree be attributed to the peculiar nature of the city of Edo. Most early modern Japanese cities were castle towns centered on a feudal lord. Strong master/servant bonds and feelings of solidarity marked the relation between the lord and the commoners. In Edo, however, little solidarity existed within the highly heterogeneous population. *Edokko* felt themselves opposed by the warriors, the provincials, or even the whole of the Kamigata area. Such a social structure greatly fostered the desire to resist.

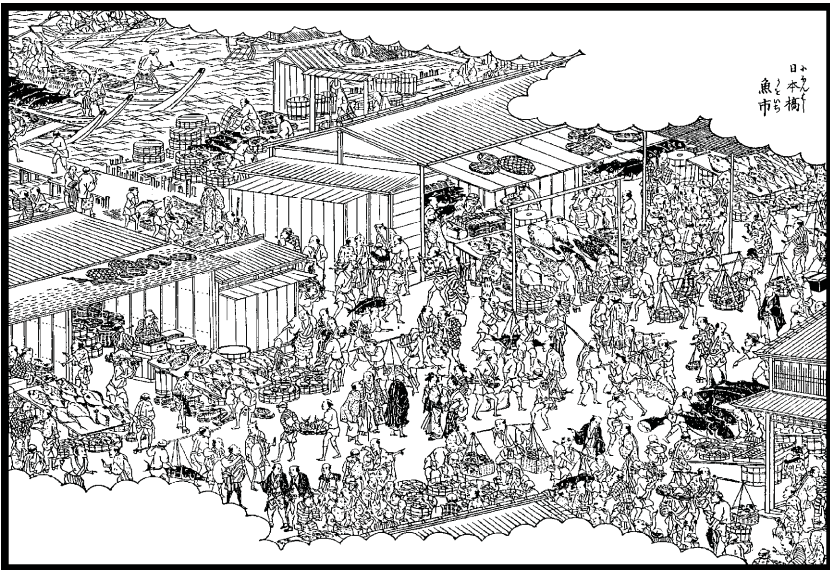
The spirit of resistance is incarnated in the *aragoto* acting style of the kabuki. This “muscular” style appeared during the Genroku period in the bravura acting of the first Ichikawa Danjūrō (1660–1704). *Aragoto* style can be seen in the play *Shibaraku* (“Wait a Moment!” first performed in 1697) and in plays depicting the deeds of the Soga brothers. Both *Shibaraku* and the Soga plays were tales of revenge that were produced annually until the very end of the Edo period. New Soga plays were performed at the start of each year by all three major Edo theaters. That such long runs were possible demonstrates that the deeply held antiauthoritarian sentiments of the commoners here found their ideal expression.

Yet another *aragoto* play perfected at an early time was *Sukeroku*.⁸ This play also gave a subtle rendition of the *Edokko*'s temperament. The character of Sukeroku, created by the Ichikawa family, was none other than the younger of the two Soga brothers, costumed as a swashbuckling dandy. In scenes in which Sukeroku argues with his rival, the wealthy samurai Ikyū, or in which Sukeroku's courtesan lover Agemaki heaps scathing abuse on Ikyū, the *Edokko*'s spirit of resistance is transformed into the very essence of kabuki. In fact, the

play *Sukeroku* may have put on stage the style of the prototypical *Edokko*—the *fudasashi* rice brokers and financial agents of the Asakusa Kuramae area. Some scholars, however, hold the opposite to be true, claiming that Ichikawa Danjūrō’s portrayal of Sukeroku itself influenced the *fudasashi*’s bold style. In any case, *Sukeroku* appealed greatly to *Edokko* associated with the pleasure quarters of Yoshiwara and the Nihonbashi fish market.

That *Sukeroku* and other plays could become vehicles for expressing defiance rested on the existence of strong cultural groups that had absolute control over “house arts” or family traditions (*iegei*). In Edo, almost all artistic traditions surrounding the kabuki were passed down for generations. Even Edo theater managers—Nakamura Kanzaburō of the Nakamura-za, Ichimura Uzaemon of the Ichimura-za, and Morita Kan’ya of the Morita-za—all passed on their names to their descendants. Hereditary actor names included Ichikawa Danjūrō, Ichikawa Danzō, and Iwai Hanshirō. *Nagauta* musicians included the hereditary name Kineya Rokuzaemon; kabuki instrumental music, Tanaka Denzaemon; dance, the names Shigayama, Nishikawa, and Fujima; stage settings, Hasegawa Kanpei. Even signboard art was hereditary and monopolized by the Torii family.

Most of these traditions were established at the time of the



The Nihonbashi fish market. From *Edo meisho zue*.

Edokko's first appearance. Edo practices differed markedly from those of the Kamigata area. In Kyoto and Osaka the families of theater managers and actors showed little continuity, for people were hired on a one-year contractual basis. In Edo, however, the strength of tradition allowed a spirit of independence and ultimately of resistance to emerge from the kabuki theater.

An attitude of defiance appeared in Edo literature as well. Baba Bunkō (1718?–1758), for example, who was active during the 1750s, was savagely critical of contemporary political authority. The authorities rewarded his efforts by sentencing him to death by crucifixion. Later, in the 1780s, Santō Kyōden also contributed to the spirit of resistance. In the previously mentioned book *Nitan no Shirō Fuji no hitoana kenbutsu*, Kyōden satirized the social and political reforms of the bakufu elder Matsudaira Sadanobu (1758–1829). During the same year Kyōden wrote a volume entitled *Jidai sewa nichō tsuzumi* (Two Drums: Contemporary and Ancient Events) in which he modeled his plot on the murder of Tanuma Okitomo (1749–1784), another bakufu official. Again in 1789 Kyōden cleverly mocked Matsudaira Sadanobu's policies in a *kibyōshi* entitled *Kōshi-jima toki ni aizome* (Blue Stripes in Tune with the Times). During the same year another writer, Koikawa Harumachi (1744–1789), also criticized Matsudaira's reforms in a *kibyōshi* entitled *Ōmugaeshi bunbu no futamichi* (Parroting the Ways of the Pen and the Sword). Then, when Santō Kyōden drew the illustrations for Ishibe Kinkō's *kibyōshi* entitled *Kokubyaku mizu-kagami* (Black and White Reflected in Water), the authorities struck back and sentenced Kyōden to a heavy fine. Undaunted, Kyōden published three more satirical books three years later; this time he found himself manacled for fifty days. Increasingly severe censorship in the following years put a temporary damper on the *Edokko's* critical spirit; but by the 1830s stinging political satire had again found its way into the drawings of Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797–1861). Even when defiance did not appear in print, wild rumors and slander were rampant in the streets. This was as true of Edo in the 1780s as it was true of the city in the 1840s and 1850s.

Paralleling such strong feelings of defiance were new, more passive trends arising within various Edo cultural communities. Practitioners of countless contemporary artistic endeavors assumed "artist's names" (*geimei*) that allowed them to transform themselves into cultured members of an artistic world with no distinctions of feudal rank or wealth. Such freedom made it possible for initiates to devote themselves fully to the pleasures of calligraphy, writing, or other leisure pursuits.

Many other notable achievements of *Edokko* culture remain to be explored: phenomena such as fashion and culinary trends; the opening of new sights and scenic spots; a “culture of activity” in general, including pilgrimages to various temples and shrines; and, finally, developments in popular performing arts. These topics and others are the subjects of the chapters to follow.