

# The Formation and Development of *Hitoyado* (Employment Agencies) during the Edo Period

Ichikawa Hiroaki, curator  
Edo-Tokyo Museum

The purpose of this article is to clarify the process of formation and development of employment agencies (*hitoyado*) through the study of Komeya Tanaka House, which was, in a broad sense, a *hitoyado*.

Komeya Tanaka House was an agent that provided necessary day laborers for daimyo at times of alternate attendance (*sankin kôtai*) and for their residential estates in Edo. The Tanaka House has its roots in a wealthy peasant family in Kôtôhara Village, Echizen Province. The founder, Kyûemon was born as a secondary heir of the Tanaka family, but he was able to establish strong friendly ties with the domain lord, Makino Hideshige through his wife who had accompanied Hideshige when he was adopted into the Makino family from the bakufu retainer, Murakoshi family. This connection with the domain lord helped him establish the foundations of his family business. Kyûemon was appointed by Hideshige to become the official rice dealer for the Edo residence, and opened his shop, "Komeya," on Nihombashi Street. At the time of Kyûemon II, Komeya's business had shifted from rice merchant to employment agent that contracted and provided day laborers for the Makino family. Furthermore, his personal magnetism helped him establish friendly ties not only with the Makino family, but also with the Matsudaira, Itakura, Kuze, and Hisai daimyo families, and through them, he began to expand the business. Purchase of the shop in 1736 and laying down of household precepts that specified sole inheritance by the first son in 1746 suggest that Komeya was firmly establishing its family business in the Gembun and Enkyo eras, during the last years of Kyûemon II.

Komeya's household precepts repeatedly emphasize the importance of gift-giving to their clients. By emphasizing gift-giving, Kyûemon II probably aimed to grow out of too much dependence on direct, personal relationship with domain

lords, and sought to establish a stable, regular business with the clients.

=Reference=

*hitoyado*: a merchant who collects commissions by serving as a mediator between day laborers and the military households that were their main employers.

# The *Goze* of Edo-Tokyo

Gerald Groemer

Assistant Professor, Yamanashi University

Visually disabled women in premodern Japan, often known as *goze*, contributed greatly to the development of Japanese musical culture. Research on *goze* throughout Japan, especially the *goze* of the Niigata area, has burgeoned since the 1970s. This paper, relying on a large amount of fragmentary evidence gleaned from a variety of historical and literary sources, treats the *goze* who resided and worked in Edo-Tokyo.

Edo *goze* appear to have been highly heterogeneous: the wealthiest were in the service of high-ranking warrior families; many more worked as music teachers for the townspeople or provided musical entertainment in the pleasure quarters; the poorest plied the streets singing before doorways or on street corners. At least some of these *goze* were granted small donations from the shogunate when the Tokugawa family celebrated felicitous and sad occasions. A look at the amounts dispensed, however, indicates that *goze* received only a fraction of what was given to men associated with the official guild of the blind (the *tōdō-za*).

*Goze* living in Edo seem to have been only loosely associated with this guild. Some sources indicate that Edo *goze* maintained their own associations, but in most cases visually disabled women seem to have worked in isolation. With little ability to organize and protect themselves, Edo *goze* were exposed to the constant danger of becoming the victim of crime. Evidence of violence against *goze* can be found in judicial records of the time; moreover comic haiku (*senryū*) indicate that the image of the *goze* in Edo culture was one that saw *goze* as easy prey for sexual exploits

Even after the Meiji Restoration, *goze* continued to offer street performances of popular song in Tokyo. Yet the political and economic transformations of this era did not necessarily mean that *goze* were better off than before, for even though feudal shackles were gradually being eliminated, *goze* now had with sighted musicians.