

## PREFACE

The core of this volume is a translation of a late Edo account of the ills of the day titled *Seji kenbunroku* (*Matters of the World: An Account of What I Have Seen and Heard*; 1816). It was quite by coincidence that a pocket edition of this work caught my attention in a Tokyo bookshop. I knew the text, by an unknown author presumably of samurai background, as a favored source of juicy quotes, with passages from it brightening up many books and articles on Edo-period history, and was immediately attracted by the notion of a social critique written by a samurai who thought it best to stay anonymous. It had to be worth its 860 yen.

Back at my university in Oslo, I decided to use *Seji kenbunroku* for an MA course on Japanese history. I expected that the book's close examination of all levels of the status order that defined Edo society would make it a superb introduction to that period, and that its obvious biases would provide many openings for further discussion. This proved correct, but as I got to know the book better, I found other unexpected qualities. It wasn't only an informative historical source; it was in fact a very good read.

The author, who calls himself Buyō Inshi, is at times tiresome in his hammering at what he sees as the decline in people's customs and moral

disposition. But in contrast to many of his contemporaries, he does not stop there. Buyō is at his best when he reveals the concrete details of the corruption that in his view permeated life in Edo. In these passages he gives the reader a vivid taste of the inner workings of his society. He writes, for example, about contractors who put in formal offers for construction work at daimyo domain compounds, in what appears to be fair competition for a contract; but behind the scenes, jobs have been shared out beforehand, and all parties make a good profit—while the samurai officers who handle the paperwork enjoy evenings out in the pleasure quarters and a cut of the proceeds. Builders' groups in the townspeople's blocks double as firemen, and they make sure that those house owners who fail to pay their protection fees are on their own when the next blaze occurs—accidentally, or otherwise. In the countryside, wealthy village leaders shift tax obligations to the low-quality fields left in the hands of the poor, so that the good fields in their own possession become less burdened with taxes and can be sold for a higher price. And so on and so forth. Buyō describes in revealing detail how some people were doing very well, while others paid the price.

Buyō's analyses are premised on the traditional understanding that the economy is a zero-sum game, a view that was becoming old-fashioned even in his own time. His opinions on class and gender are, from a modern perspective, prejudiced to the point of bigotry. Yet at the same time, he consistently argues that moral indignation should be directed at the system that corrupts, rather than at the individuals who have no choice but to let themselves be corrupted. Buyō makes a convincing analysis of the systemic impossibility of living up to warrior-like ideals of principled uprightness and decisiveness in dealing with injustice. In this, he offers insights that are not easily found in other Edo-period materials.

The translation and the introductory essay that precedes it are the products of teamwork among five historians who individually have written extensively on various aspects of the Edo period. Each undertook an initial translation of specific sections: John Breen did "Warriors" in chapter 1 and the section "Pariahs and Outcasts" in chapter 7. Miyazaki Fumiko did "The Way of Yin and Yang" in chapter 4 and "Lower Townspeople" in chapter 5. Kate Wildman Nakai did "Lawsuits" in chapter 4 and "On Japan Being Called a Divine Land" and "The Land, People, and Ruler" in chapter 7. Anne Walthall translated chapters 2 and 6. I translated

the “Prologue,” the introductory section of chapter 1, chapter 3, “The Blind” in chapter 4, “Townspople” in chapter 5, and “Rice, Grains, and Other Products,” “Mountains and Forests,” and “Untimely Deaths” in chapter 7.

All translations were discussed by the team as a whole and commented upon in word-by-word detail by other team members. Especially valuable was the contribution of Miyazaki Fumiko, who solved many riddles in all parts of the text. Kate Wildman Nakai and I are responsible for the overall editing of the translation and have added subheadings and paragraph divisions (the original has neither) to enhance readability. The introductory essay, “Buyō Inshi and His Times,” is a cooperative piece by the two editors but also incorporates corrections and additions by the other team members. It has benefited as well from comments made by the anonymous readers of the manuscript. The maps were produced by Kirsten Berrum of Oslo University.

For annotation we have utilized a broad range of materials, starting with the invaluable *Kokushi daijiten* (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1979–1997, 15 vols.). Buyō touches on so many different subjects that a full list of references to further reading would have ballooned to unmanageable proportions; therefore we have limited citations to sources that seemed to us particularly relevant to the issues Buyō raises or that refer directly to his text. We have also tried, so far as possible, to identify the sources of the quotations and anecdotes that he introduces, often without specific attribution. Following the conventions of his time, Buyō frequently refers to people by their honorary court title or a “common name” rather than their formal given name. Instead of adhering literally to his usage, we have adopted the names by which the people in question can be found most readily in modern reference works. To ensure consistency, the translators compiled and utilized an extensive list of terms. For readers wishing to know the Japanese originals of key terms, we have appended a brief extract from this list to the end of the volume.

Mark Teeuwen

## ERA NAMES

Buyō refers to dates and spans of time by era name (*nengō*). Those he mentions are as follows:

Genki: 1570–1573  
 Tenshō: 1573–1592  
 Bunroku: 1592–1596  
 Keichō: 1596–1615  
 Genna: 1615–1624  
 Kan'ei: 1624–1644  
 Shōhō: 1644–1648  
 Keian: 1648–1652  
 Manji: 1658–1661  
 Kanbun: 1661–1673  
 Genroku: 1688–1704  
 Hōei: 1704–1711  
 Shōtoku: 1711–1716  
 Kyōhō: 1716–1736  
 Tenmei: 1781–1789  
 Kansei: 1789–1801  
 Bunka: 1804–1818

## MEASURES

Buyō uses the following measures (the U.S. and metric equivalents are approximate):

1 *sun*: 1 in; 3 cm  
 1 *shaku*: 1 ft; 30 cm (10 *sun*)  
 1 *ken*: 6 ft; 1.82 m (6 *shaku*)  
 1 *ri*: 2.4 miles; 3.93 km  
 1 *tsubo*: 36 ft<sup>2</sup>; 3.3 m<sup>2</sup> (1 sq. *ken*)  
 1 *tan*: 0.25 acres; 1,000 m<sup>2</sup> (300 *tsubo*)  
 1 *chō*: 2.45 acres; 1 ha (10 *tan*)  
 1 *shō*: 1.6 quarts; 1.8 L  
 1 *koku*: 5 bushels; 180 L (100 *shō*)

One *hyō* (bale) varied in quantity regionally between one-fifth and one-half of a *koku*; Buyō counts 1 *hyō* as roughly equivalent to one-third of a *koku*.

## CURRENCIES

In the Edo period, gold, silver, and copper cash served as the basic mediums of exchange. Gold and silver were used for larger transactions, copper cash for smaller ones. The shogunate tried to maintain a stable rate of exchange between the different mediums. Official rates established in 1700 set the value of 1 *ryō* in gold (also known as 1 *koban*) at 60 *monme* in silver, or 4,000 *mon* in copper coins. In practice, exchange rates varied over time and in different locales. Most notably, the value of copper cash relative to gold and silver declined steadily, so that by Buyō's time, 1 *ryō* in gold was equal to about 6,500 coppers. Silver fluctuated less; between 1800 and 1816, 1 *ryō* equaled between 61 and 67 *monme*.

Rice prices were in principle geared to the basic currency units, with 1 *koku* (theoretically the amount consumed annually by an adult male) equal to 1 *ryō* or 60 *monme*, but they too fluctuated, and in times of famine the value of 1 *koku* could easily top 100 *monme*. Between 1800 and 1816, the value of 1 *koku* varied between 50 and 70 *monme*.

The major monetary units in late Edo were as follows:

gold: 1 *ryō* (or *koban*) = 4 *bu* = 16 *shu* = 400 *hiki*

silver: ca. 60 *monme* = 1 *ryō* gold

copper: ca. 6,500 *mon* = 1 *ryō* gold

1 *kanmon* = 1,000 *mon* (coppers)