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Abstract

Animating Heritage:

Affective Experiences, Institutional Networks, And Themed Consumption In The Japanese Cultural Industries

Heidi K. Lam

2021

This dissertation ethnographically examines a Japanese historical themed park to illuminate the cultural industries' role in shaping Japanese identity through creative labor, consumption, and institutional relationships. It argues that cultural heritage is animated through embodied experiences (*taiken*) with performative elements and contingent contexts that take place around a central organization's selective interpretation and staging of the past. This dissertation is based on 15 months of fieldwork in 2015-2017 at and around "Edo Town," the pseudonym for a historical themed park in Japan that evokes the Edo or Tokugawa period (1603-1867) in Japan's history. I explore the creative labor, institutional networks, and consumption practices around embodied experiences staged by its operating company to communicate an Edo-like Japanese identity. Such an identity recovers an alternate mode of sociality and being that aims to rehabilitate contemporary social anxieties about economic stagnation and the loss of collective Japanese identity. I demonstrate that cultural industry venues exist beyond their representations, as Edo Town is not only a historical themed park but also an employer of local residents, an actor training institution, a touristic destination, a provider of cultural knowledge expertise, as well as an alternate social space that sustain relationships outside of work and home. More broadly, I analyze how human agency is modified through theming and animation frameworks

when people develop social senses that are alternate to their everyday lives. In this case, both themed park workers and visitor-consumers merge with Edo-like characters that enable them to encounter each other differently from their usual selves. In the process, they are socialized with the meaning of Edo-like Japaneseness as a corrective to what they have taken for granted in real life. I also highlight how history-themed parks and spaces like Edo Town challenge conventional modes of cultural transmission through creative re-enactments of cultural knowledge as intangible heritage, including the use of theater, characters, and fictional social encounters as the media of communication.

Animating Heritage:
Affective Experiences, Institutional Networks, And Themed Consumption In The Japanese
Cultural Industries

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

Of

Yale University

In Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Heidi K. Lam

Dissertation Director: William W. Kelly

June 2021

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Introduction - Animating An Edo-Themed Social World

Edo-Japanese Cultural Knowledge: A Museum Of Everyday-Use Objects

A museum showcasing everyday-use objects (*nichijō yōhin*) has opened recently at Edo Town, a historical themed park in Japan re-enacting the late-17th century during the Edo or Tokugawa period (1603-1867). Many of the displayed objects are created by artisans working in Tokyo's *shitamachi* neighborhood, the “old town” of the capital city Edo before its name became Tokyo to usher in a new historical period in 1868. The museum invites visitors to experience objects such as nail clippers, kitchen knives, firework sparklers, wooden combs and rush brooms. For example, they can sweep the brooms on *tatami* (woven straw) mat and wooden floor surfaces in one installation. In another, they learn about the stylistic differences between Edo and contemporary *kiriko* (cut) glass by touch. They can buy such artisan-made objects in one of Edo Town's souvenir shop, which is staffed by townswomen wearing Edo-like kimonos and hairstyles.

The management directs employees to conduct study tours of the museum before it opens officially to visitors. During the work day, small groups of employees — also wearing Edo-like kimonos and hairstyles — follow a designated path in the building that leads them to each object installation. They read information panels about some of the artisans' workshops. At this time, there is little explanatory text in the museum about the displayed objects and their historical significance. The employees wonder how this museum will become a part of Edo Town's world. A text panel, written in Japanese near the exit, hints at what visitors should realize from the exhibition. It states that these everyday-use objects are not merely “the culture of the past but wisdom— they are the tools that let Japanese people live like Japanese people...”

Months later, Edo Town's company president tells me of his hopes that this museum will become a central part of the historical themed park. He was inspired to create it when thinking about how his nail clippers are manufactured by a company that formerly specialized in crafting *katana* (Japanese swords). Many things from Japan's past, he says, were used for war during the Sengoku era (1467-1600) when warlords fought each other to unify Japan. The Edo period, which arrived after Tokugawa Ieyasu accomplished this and established his clan as the head of a feudal military government, brought 250 years of peacetime and cultural isolation to Japan. This, he argues, caused the knowledge used to create weapons to evolve and a crafting industry has since been producing things for ordinary people's use. The company president gives me another example: the technology for fabricating gun powder for matchlock guns (*teppō*) was adapted during the Edo period to produce the fireworks that we see today. The museum would hopefully guide visitors in appreciating the presence of such Edo knowledge in everyday Japanese life, he says, since Edo culture has been providing "answers" to contemporary Japanese people.

Beyond Cultural "Text" to Animated Embodied Experience

This dissertation examines the cultural or creative industries (cultural industries from hereon) and their production of "cultural animation" (Silvio 2010, 426) around embodied experiences or *taiken* (体験) in Japanese—a word written with the characters for "body" and "test." I use Otmazgin (2013)'s definition of the cultural industries as "industries that provide the organizational framework for turning art and cultural creativity into consumer products" (11). I ask: How is heritage animated by a central organization into an embodied experience, through institutional networks, themed consumption, and subjectivities?

In an ethnographic analysis of Edo Town, I argue that cultural heritage — and by extension, identity — is animated in embodied experiences that require themed performances rather than in static cultural “text” representations that “invent tradition” (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1992). A central organization — in this case Edo Town’s operating company — curates a “themed environment” (Gottdiener 1997) involving embodied experiences, then uses this to establish its institutional relevance through cultural and economic networks, to shape individual subjectivities, as well as to guide consumption and creative labor. I dive into the embodied experiences that take place within, outside, and parallel to cultural “texts.” Their contingent contexts can only be captured through ethnographic fieldwork.

Silvio (2010) defines animation as “the projection of qualities perceived as human — life, power, agency, will, personality, and so on — outside of the self, and into the sensory environment, through acts of creation, perception, and interaction” (427). She distinguishes this from the embodied self-expression associated with performance and argues that an exclusive attention to performance “tends to hide the ontological difference between animated characters and the people who create, use, and interact with them” (Silvio 2010, 423).¹ Examining Silvio (2010)’s conception of animation in online interactions, Manning and Gershon (2013) re-interprets the “figure” — a social interaction role (see Goffman 1986) — as “any material configuration that can be animated by an actor or actress” (111).

In what follows in this introductory chapter, I explain how Edo Town presents an ethnographic case for the analysis of cultural animation and embodied experience as it imbues objects, characters, and buildings with an Edo-like Japanese identity. I contextualize the three themes that contribute to the trunk of cultural animation, which is explored in this dissertation.

¹ Silvio (2010) cites, among other sources, Hochschild (1983)’s case study of female flight attendants who perform gendered “emotion work,” Judith Butler’s scholarship on gendered performances, and the anthropological concept of performance characterizing social interactions found in the work of Erving Goffman and Victor Turner (424).

The first is place-making, the cultural framing of nodal sites such as Edo Town by institutional networks that define the relevance of its embodied experience and operating company. The historical themed park's embodied experience draws on the *jidaigeki* (Japanese historical drama) genre and other media forms that are more familiar to domestic Japanese consumers, as well as cultural branding aimed at overseas tourists. Its operating company is also established to produce Edo Town as an economic revitalization initiative in a tourist city – which I call Terada – in one of Japan's non-metropolitan regions (*chihō*). The second is how theming and embodied experience modify human agency so that workers and consumers alike can engage in the creative labor of being alternate, but fragmented versions of themselves. They alter people's physical and social senses and in Edo Town's case, mold visitors and staff into character roles that undergo affective, performative encounters within the animated cultural framework staged by the operating company. The third is the selective curation of cultural identity through the animated settings, bodies, and senses. I show how Edo Town transforms a historical period into an embodied experience based on a “pastness,” which Holtorf (2010) defines as a “quality or condition of being past” (26) that speaks to 21st-century Japanese identity and understandings of self. Rather than historical events, it selective re-enacts an “Edo-like” (*Edo-ppoi*) atmosphere of Japaneseness with stereotyped cultural characters, dramatic spectacles, and a repertoire of various Japanese cultural practices.

Edo Town: Animating Embodied Experiences and Fictional Mutual, Social Contact

Edo Town, described by an employee as a “family-owned, medium-sized business,” welcomes approximately four million visitors per year² to experience its re-enactment of the Edo

² This number was provided to me in 2019.

period within an extraordinary³ themed environment. As an ethnographic field site, it tests theories about cultural animation and embodied experiences because it is neither a state-led museum engaging in a top-down “invention of tradition” (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1992; see Vlastos 1998 volume for analyses in the Japanese context) nor a Disney-style theme park using entertainment to overwhelm consumers’ senses and to render them ideologically passive (Fjellman 1992). Hendry (2010) translates the Japanese word *tēma pāku*, a Japanized loanword, back into English as “themed park” (which I adopt here) rather than “theme park.” She explains that this word reflects their primary characteristic of “re-creating worlds” (Hendry 2010, 41), differing from theme parks in the British — and I would also say North American — context that only focus on play and entertainment.⁴ Examining the Asian context, Erb and Ong (2017) similarly argue that “themed spaces have become a form of cultural heritage as they increasingly become a way of ‘ordering’ and framing” (159). Tanaka-san, a company representative, further insists that “Edo Town is a *karuchā pāku* (culture park).” This is because the historical themed park’s visitors do *taiken*, or experience through their bodies, Edo culture.

Spectacles, performances, and museum exhibitions are concentrated, reflexive, and processual cultural forms that enable social actors to affirm, comment on, leverage, and challenge identities, meanings, and existing power structures through creative means (c.f. Adams 2010; Guss 2000; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Siu 1990). Edo Town uses theater, object-centered cultural displays, festival-like events, and characters played by human staff to transform a historical period into a participatory themed environment with an atmosphere that connects a selective interpretation of Edo culture with contemporary Japanese identity. This shared

³ My translation of the Japanese word *hinichijō*, which literally means “non-everyday”

⁴ Hendry (2010) argues that their Japanese equivalent would be *yūenchi*, a word that is closer in meaning to “amusement park” with rides and which she defines as “literally a playing place” (41).

experience of Japan's past flattens prior knowledge about Japanese history. As Hochbruck and Schlehe (2010) argue, "Experiencing the pastness of these ordinary lives inside the themed space... turns the relations between normality and adventure inside out in an ironic reversal: the ordinary is seen, viewed, or experienced hands-on as the extraordinary" (10).

Two distinguishing features animate Edo Town's social world. The first is that its embodied experience must be completed by the visitors' active participation, including their social interactions with its Edo People (*Edo Jin*) characters. The second is its use of fiction to communicate both the past and alternate, more authentic ways of being Japanese. The company representative Tanaka-san tells me that "everyone doesn't know" (*minna wakaranai*) what the past was exactly like, but Edo Town can re-enact, or make "reappear" (*saigen*) the Edo period. An office employee Ikeda-san adds, "Our customers will realize what Edo is once they come here to *taiken* our 'stance' on Edo and to do *fureai* (mutual, social contact) with the Edo People."

Japanese themed parks do not impose the same level of ideological control over consumers as that has been attributed to Walt Disney World (Fjellman 1992; Sandlin and Garlen 2018 volume; Terrell 1991; Zukin 1995). Hendry (2000) differentiates Japanese people visiting *gaikokumura* (foreign country-themed parks in Japan) from Americans going to Walt Disney World. She argues, "The Japanese visitors enter a foreign world of freedom from the kinds of obligation and constraint that they hold to be characteristic of their own Japanese lives. For the Americans, on the other hand, who make much on the importance of 'freedom' in everyday life, Disney parks are full of order and *control*" (Hendry 2000, 89-90).

As a Japanese historical themed park, Edo Town departs from this kind of control/freedom binary. While its immersive themed environment encourages visitors to role-play imaginatively and performatively, the majority of them, as well as its mostly Japanese staff,

are implicated in an Edo-themed experience forging an alternate connection rather than escape from their contemporary, everyday lives in Japan. The historical themed park's characters, settings, and objects are heavily inspired by existing media narratives and traditional Japanese cultural customs that most Japanese visitors would recognize from their own lives, which create parameters that help to animate the experience. As this dissertation will show, both visitors and staff shift between animation and performance depending on the situation.

Tanaka-san's use of the word *saigen* to describe the past's reappearance at Edo Town echoes Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998)'s argument that the contemporary heritage industry inscribes a "second life" onto historical sites reconfigured for cultural display (7). Edo Town's operating company, however, does the inverse of this because the historical themed park's space and contents are not exclusively linked to its host city Terada. It furnishes a "second life" to the Edo period by selectively re-enacting an Edo-like themed environment with fictional Edo-like characters and other contents. The staging must be activated during Edo Town's opening hours in the *fureai* between visitors and Edo People, which builds off this "second life" into subsequent iterations. Such embodied experiences renew iteratively with each visit and workday, and each iteration's *feeling*, as I discuss further in coming chapters, varies according to tourist movements, the weather, consumer motivations, and improvised social encounters.

Edo People-visitor interactions may appear similar to that between "performing staff" and "performing visitors" (Oesterle 2010) in North American living history museums and heritage sites such as Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, United States. The "performing staff" are actors and guides dressed in historical costume who communicate the past in the first-person (in character) or third-person perspective through "costumed interpretation" (Wallis 2010). "Performing visitors," according to Oesterle (2010), are participants "who not only influence and

transform performative space...but also exert a strong influence on the transactions of the performing staff” (166).

Unlike such living history museums, Edo Town’s themed environment and experience is fully inspired by fictional representations. As a “double simulation” (Ong and Jin 2017), they creatively materialize character types, scenes, and settings that are often seen in *jidaigeki*— with the Japanese historical drama genre itself as another idealized representation of Japan’s past. Edo Town offers mediated but non-digital present-day encounters with the Japanese past, as a “2.5D” site enabling “cross-dimensional travel” (Nozawa 2013) between 2D media universes and the 3D material world. In this sense, its themed environment and experience resemble Japanese maid cafés, where the servers’ character types and social interaction style with their customers mirror those between Japanese dating simulation games’ female characters and the player (Galbraith 2011). Rather than being merely costumed employees, Edo Town similarly become fictional characters facilitating visitors’ social contact with the Edo-themed environment— including conversations together, participatory scenarios, and activities.

Full reliance on fiction and friendly interactions are generally condemned by scholars and avoided in most museums. Handler and Gable (1997) warn that Colonial Williamsburg’s costumed employees are trained to communicate the past through an “interpersonal authenticity” exhibiting “a managed egalitarian and individuating friendliness” (172), which undermines the living history museum’s emphasis on education and historical fact. Oesterle (2010) and Teunissen (2010) also point out that historical character performances can reinforce cultural stereotypes and convince visitors that they are factual rather than interpretive.

When I once presented about Edo Town’s use of embodied experiences to a group of Japanese museum curators and educators specializing in interactive and sensory exhibitions, this

led to a disagreement within the audience about role-play's contribution to cultural display. One curator commented that role-play may be useful for touristic sites (such as Japanese castles) and a professor pointed out that the open-air architectural museum Meiji Mura⁵ in Gifu Prefecture, Japan already uses some elements. However, others argued that this is entertainment and has no place in museums. One curator commented sternly, "Museums, by their standards, cannot be wrong. They are not like Japanese themed parks where there can be *jidai koshō* (historical investigation)." Producers, writers, and artists do *jidai koshō* when they create fictional settings, characters, and plots that are based on or inspired by documented history.

The quick dismissal of inauthentic entertainment attributed to Japanese themed parks deflects attention away from their main premise. The Edo Town representative Tanaka-san emphasizes that Edo Town cannot recreate Japan's past as it was, nor is it a place for visitors to "study" (*benkyō*) Japanese history. He is quick to point out anachronisms, such as the electricity and asphalt roads that are necessary for the historical themed park's operations. However, he also warns that the re-enactment cannot stray too far from the actual past or "the atmosphere will fall apart (*funiki ga kuzureteshimau*)." A representative at the Toei Kyoto Studio Park,⁶ a Japanese themed park and "movie village" (*eigamura*) hybrid based on *jidaigeki*, tells me that its female actors do not darken their teeth (a practice called *haguro*) like Japanese women did in the past even though they are wearing period costume. "It doesn't look good, right?" he insists, "Our customers don't want to see that."

While fictionalization produces an atmosphere of pastness, it is also connected to reality. Edo Town re-enactment brands Japanese cultural heritage for domestic consumers and overseas

⁵ Opened in 1965, Meiji Mura exhibits buildings preserved from Japan's Meiji period (1868-1912).

⁶ Opened in 1975 in Kyoto and also known as Toei Uzumasa Eigamura

tourists, one based on an atmosphere that feels “Edo-like” in present-day Japan rather than actual historical events from past “Edo” Japan. In this additional respect, Edo Town is ethnographically distinct from *gaikokumura* that offer European and North American-themed leisure experiences to domestic consumers and from Tokyo Disneyland which re-creates American culture for Japanese consumption (Hendry 2000; Raz 1999). Its Edo-like atmosphere constantly remind Japanese visitors and staff that a simpler and friendlier Edo culture has always been an enduring part of their contemporary Japanese identity. As I discuss further in Chapter 7, Edo Town’s regulars even distinguish its familiar and communal atmosphere from Tokyo Disneyland’s showy environments and distant, polite customer service interactions. Thus, Tokyo Disneyland is not representative of all Japanese themed parks.

Framing A Cultural Node: The Cultural Industries And Institutional Networks

This dissertation treats Edo Town as a nodal site that is framed by the cultural industries and other institutional networks, like Otmazgin (2013) who conducts “a critical inquiry into the practices of these industries within a broader political and social framework” (12). Its operating company is a central organization that mobilizes the theatrical training, the selective historical and cultural knowledge, labor, infrastructure, as well as institutional relationships with the tourism and performing arts industries that are necessary for producing its Edo-themed embodied experience. Beyond a historical themed park, it plays the roles of cultural broker, a planned tourist destination, as well as a social institution that provides a “curriculum” (Sandlin and Garlen 2018) to guide the consumption of Japanese cultural heritage.

Edo Town markets its Edo-themed environment, contents, and characters as an experience of Japanese cultural identity. Like other historical themed parks, museums,

commercial ninja training *dojo* (martial arts practice spaces), kimono rentals, and other businesses, they have seized a window of opportunity created by Prime Minister Abe Shinzō's Abenomics policy in 2013 and Japan's successful bid to host the 2020 Summer Olympic Games to develop inbound tourism (overseas tourists visiting Japan) as an economic strategy.

Since the mid-1980s, Japan has exported food, fashion, media (especially manga, anime, and video games), and other cultural products abroad. This effort began in Asia to improve Japan's image and political relations after half a decade of military aggression and colonial invasion (Otmazgin 2013, 80). The Japanese cultural industries now target a wider global audience, with the Cool Japan campaign that was implemented during the 2000s and with the latest government drive to attract inbound tourists. Seaton et al. (2017) point out that the overseas consumption of Japanese popular culture, where manga, kimono, and samurai among other things are promoted as representative of Japan, has increased interest in traveling to Japan—“genre-based contents tourism, when a general interest in a destination cultivated via popular culture eventually results (perhaps many years later) in a trip to that destination” (206).⁷

Many overseas tourists arrive in Japan, expecting to recognize and experience the Japanese culture that they have previously consumed “as tourists in their own countries induced by Japanese contents” (Seaton et al. 2017, 238). Edo Town's samurai, ninjas, and *oiran* (a high-ranking courtesan that is sometimes misrecognized by tourists as a geisha) characters, as well as its re-created traditional Japanese setting, overlap with their tourist “gaze” (Urry and Larsen 2011). Its company-affiliated actors already possess the specialized knowledge to play such stereotyped characters, some of which appear in *jidaigeki*. This includes costuming, archaic speech patterns, and body movements in period dress. Some are skilled in stage fighting (*tate*,

⁷ Seaton et al. (2017) define “contents tourism” as “travel behavior motivated fully or partially by narratives, characters, locations, and other creative elements of popular culture forms, including film, television dramas, manga, anime, novels, and computer games” (3).

known as *chanbara* if involving swords) and traditional Japanese dance (*buyō*) that are necessary for playing characters like samurai, ninjas, and the *oiran*. Edo Town also employs professional kimono dressers, who help to fulfill many overseas visitors' desire to experience wearing kimono.

Although Japanese themed parks like Edo Town promote Japanese culture domestically and abroad, the Japanese word *tēma pāku* — as I discovered during fieldwork — can provoke negative or ambiguous associations for Japanese people who do not work for or visit them. They are the most unfamiliar with their social worlds and the most skeptical of their cultural “text.” They believe that Japanese themed parks offer merely superficial entertainment and “artificial things” (*tsukurareta mono*), while charging expensive admission fees. An accommodations proprietor bluntly informs me that Edo Town's operating company would only be interested in talking to me for financial motives. He advises, “They want to know how many visitors you can bring to them. One thousand? Two thousand? If you can tell them that, then they will pay attention to you.” A Japanese university professor informs me that Japanese themed parks are unworthy subjects for anthropological research, “*Tēma pāku* is not anthropology. It is business.” Another professor questions why I chose a “local” themed park like Edo Town as a fieldsite, a place that she has never heard of, although it is less popular and well-known than a place like Tokyo Disneyland.

Tokyo Disneyland, Tokyo Disney Sea, and Universal Studios Japan, are undoubtedly ranked at the top of the Japanese themed park industry in terms of popularity and revenue (Okuno 2012, 7).⁸ Additionally, other Japanese themed parks are haunted by their history as failed economic bubble era (mid-1980s - 1991) institutions since many were constructed during a time of economic prosperity and high consumption but had to close down after Japan's economy

⁸ The Oriental Land Company reports that [over 29 million people](#) visited Tokyo Disneyland and Tokyo Disney Sea during the 2019 fiscal year. Universal Studios Japan does not publicly disclose visitor statistics.

collapsed in the early 1990s. Miyazaki Hayao's animated film *Spirited Away* shows an abandoned themed park where the protagonist's parents eat so gluttonously that they transform into pigs—a commentary on the cultural loss and unrestrained consumption in postindustrial Japanese society (Napier 2006).

However, the dismissals of Japanese themed parks as superficial, artificial, and money-centered reduce them to their business transactions. They ignore the political, social, and cultural impact on people, such as the office employees, service workers, actors, temporary staff, and the local population whose livelihoods depend on Edo Town's existence. Furthermore, economic and popularity industry rankings hide the shared history of Tokyo Disneyland, Universal Studios Japan, and most other Japanese themed parks (including Edo Town) as tourist destinations that were implemented by governments and private sector businesses to economically revitalize Japan's non-metropolitan regions. They do not dive into the social significance of history- and heritage-themed spaces in Japan, another factor that makes Edo Town ethnographically distinct from Tokyo Disneyland. These issues all require careful anthropological examination.

Authenticity is an animated process of place-making. Themed parks are “sites of ongoing production” (Erb and Ong 2017, 159). Bruner (1993, 1994) and Hendry (2000) challenge the postmodern supposition that only “original” things are authentic and that any re-created “copies” are not. In his analysis of the historic village New Salem in Illinois, United States, Bruner (1993, 1994) notes that its claim to authenticity is constructed by competing academic and popular historical knowledge, visitors' subjective engagement with the space, as well as contemporary needs that must be met by historical sites. Likewise, authenticity is constructed in Edo Town's framing through the tourism industry, the performing arts industry, the media, consumption, and cultural branding. As Bruner (1994) argues, “No longer is authenticity a property inherent in an

object, forever fixed in time; it is seen as a struggle, a social process, in which competing interests argue for their own interpretation of history” (408).

A business’s social aspects are also worthy of academic scholarship and ethnographic attention. In an ethnography of a Japanese bank, Rohlen (1974) highlights its social organization and human relationships because he finds them particular to the Japanese white-collar workplace. He argues that the bank “is not regarded in everyday thought as primarily a legal entity or a complex money-making machine, but more as a community of people organized to secure their common livelihood” (Rohlen 1974, 14). Raz (1999) treats Tokyo Disneyland as a “complex institution” (7) consisting of an “onstage” performance, a “backstage” company culture, and an “offstage” realm of cultural production and consumption. I similarly focus on the social meanings that are produced by the managers, workers, consumers, and locals who each form part of Edo Town’s social world.

Furthermore, themed parks and other themed spaces make social statements on local geographies and on cultural display. Okuno (2012) maps how Japanese themed parks — as tourist destinations — have materially and infrastructurally altered the landscapes of Japan’s non-metropolitan regions. This geographer’s approach inspires Chapter 4’s discussion about Edo Town’s effects on its host city Terada’s local economy and lifeways. Hendry (2000) argues that Japanese themed parks and museums de-center in their mode of cultural display the “Western-centric” dichotomy of educational museums with “real” objects and commercial theme parks with inauthentic entertainment (155). Building on Yamaguchi (1991)’s discussion of the *mitate* aesthetic in Japanese ceremonial exhibitions and art, she interprets Japanese cultural displays as a “fabrication” and “a copy of a historical prototype, or a creation of something designed to transmit a specific meaning, in essence a ‘citation’ of something else” (Hendry 2000, 190). She

also suggests that the *gai kokumura*'s careful re-creation of foreign country settings resonates with the traditional aesthetic practice of "wrapping" foreign and distant realms in Japanese gardens (Hendry 2000, 195). Consequently, she identifies "a Japanese version of authenticity [that] requires less of a notion of 'reality' than an accurate or correct simulation of a 'real' place, and possibly also a 'faithful' experience for the visitor, but one clearly distinguished from the *honmono*, the 'original' or 'real thing'" (Hendry 2000, 156). Reviewing Hendry (2000, 2010) and other recent scholarship, Erb and Ong (2017) note that ethnic-, heritage-, culture-, and history-themed sites in Asia, including Japanese themed parks, are primarily concerned with immaterial knowledge over "original" objects as well as with the framing of contemporary social identity. Luo (2020) similarly shows that the use of participatory and experiential edutainment at a state-owned cultural park in Guizhou, China for "safeguarding intangible heritage" (11), and that this has increased public engagement, transformed heritage preservation practices, and brought into focus creative forms of cultural production.

Modifying Agency: Theming And Embodied Experiences

Theming socially organizes culture by communicating ideas through motifs and symbolic objects in material environments such as shopping malls, theme parks, casinos, and museums (Gottdiener 1997; Lukas 2007). It guides consumption in an "experience economy" (Pine and Gilmore 2011), where "a company intentionally uses services as the stage and goods as props to engage an individual" (17). Rather than providing passive entertainment, themed environments influence people's perceptions and actions, invite subjective interpretations, and claim to recover inaccessible things such as the past (Hochbruck and Schlehe 2010). As Lukas (2007) writes, "Though theming uses physical properties like architecture to establish the unique symbolic

potentials of the venue, it is through the project of cognition that theming is manifested, understood, and realized as the significance in the patron” (14).

In Japan, theming appears in retail, tourism, and leisure contexts. They provide *taiken* activities for consumers to try new things in framed embodied experiences. An article in the Japanese business magazine *Diamond Weekly* notes the recent shift from the consumption of *mono* (concrete goods) to *koto* (intangible things) in Japan, which coincides with the themed-parkization (shortened in Japanese to *pāku-ka*) of shopping malls, rest stops, airports, and other commercial establishments (Usui et al. 2014, 72-79). Many of their themes are inspired by generalized images of Europe (such as the VenusFort shopping mall in Tokyo’s Odaiba district), the Japanese past, and fictional worlds. Concept restaurants and cafés, usually located in urban areas, offer a range of themed embodied experiences involving subjects and objects such as cats, maids, the novel *Alice in Wonderland*, robots, ninjas, as well as the massive multiplayer online role-playing game *Final Fantasy XIV*. Theming has also been historically used since the 1970s to strategically develop rural towns in Japan’s non-metropolitan regions into “quasi if not actual theme parks” (Cooper and Eades 2012, 33) for increasing tourism revenue.

In a Japanese magazine catalog of places for parents to spend time with their children, Edo Town is listed with 35 other places in the *tēma pāku* section as places featuring the “latest media contents and enjoyable play equipment (*saishin no eizō kontentsu ya tanoshī yūgu*).” Readers are told that children can become Edo-era ninjas and princesses while doing activities and experiencing its Edo atmosphere with their parents. However, this section does not exclusively feature places like Edo Town that re-create immersive outdoor themed environments with fictional and romanticized cultural narratives inscribed onto attractions, shows, and cultural displays. It also lists facilities with museum-like, shopping mall-like, and playland-like qualities,

such as indoor parks with ride attractions, trick art museums, a *shuriken* (ninja star) throwing *dojo*, interactive themed playlands, and museum-like exhibition places.⁹

Japanese themed parks' distinguishing feature, according to Okuno (2012), is their “software” (*sofuto men*) of a unique themed staging that contrasts with the identical infrastructural “hardware” (*hādo shisetsu*) — such as the “ready-made” rides and games — found in amusement parks and other leisure facilities (30). He lists other differences respectively between Japanese themed parks and amusement parks. These include: location (touristic vs. urban and suburban areas), targeted customer range (wide vs. narrow), the length of time spent by visitors in the local area (overnight vs. day trip), peak visitor period (dispersed throughout the week vs. concentrated on weekends and holidays), group visitor type (longer school excursions vs. shorter school field trips), customer base (diverse vs. young children), repeater numbers (fairly high vs. many), scale (the former is bigger), and admission fee (higher for the former) (Okuno 2012, 74).

Japanese themed parks apply theming to different extents, depending on how their contents and spaces are organized. Seaton et al. (2017) identify Tokyo Disneyland, Disney Sea, and Universal Studios Japan as “multi-theme[d]” since they “use a broad range of contents,” the now-closed Canadian World as using a “mono-theme” as its world is based on “a single set of contents,” and Fuji-Q-Highland as “semi-themed” because it features modifiable themed areas and non-themed amusement attractions (150-152). Under this classification, Edo Town would be primarily mono-themed since it uses “Edo” to organize its re-created world. It has, however, occasionally ventured into multi-themed territory whenever it hosts special events and limited

⁹ These places are called *shiryōkan* (information hall) and *myūjiamu* (the Japanese English loanword of “museum”) in the magazine catalog, are not recognized by Japan’s Museum Law (*Hakubutsukan-Hō*) as official museums (*hakubutsukan*).

time attractions involving mascot characters and Japanese past-inspired popular culture media contents (see Chapters 1 and 4).

Scholars have analyzed themed environments in the North American context as marketing instruments, tracing them to the rise of mass culture consumption and the advertising industry from the early 20th century onward (Fjellman 1992; Gottdiener 1997). Frankfurt School philosophers Benjamin (1968), as well as Horkheimer and Adorno (1989), have warned earlier that mass culture enforces a cult of conformity and this reflected their concern with rise of Fascism in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s. Horkheimer and Adorno (1989) argue that mass culture, as mediated through film, television, and radio, and television, erases human agency and individual critical thinking. However, Benjamin (1968) also recognizes that the “mechanical reproduction of art” in film can lead to mass societal participation and potentially a response (communism) to Fascism.

While Edo Town relies on capitalistic mass cultural consumption to operate, its narrative and embodied experience ironically index a nostalgic, earlier time before imported western-style mass culture and capitalism altered Japanese identity, values, and sociality. In a magazine dialog format article, the writer Ōshima Yaeko similarly mentions to Nihon Taishō Mura¹⁰ Committee chairman Nakamura Haruaki that the open-air architectural museum Meiji Mura re-creates a “calming” (*ochitsuku*) atmosphere from Japan’s past. She refers to the female visitors who are seen in *yukata* (a casual, summer kimono) enjoying its annual summer festival’s evening atmosphere, an experience that she believes rarely exists in contemporary Japanese life (Nakamura and Ōshima 2011, 4). Both use this point to assert that “the path is in Meiji” and that

¹⁰ Nihon Taishō Mura, located in Akechi, Gifu Prefecture, Japan is a historical district consisting of preserved buildings and streets from the Taishō period (1912-1926).

“we must return to our origins” (Nakamura and Ōshima 2011, 5), ideas echoing Edo Town’s narrative that Edo culture is the source of Japanese cultural identity.

Embodied experiences affect the mind and body, because participant roles are simultaneously performed and animated. I discuss how human agency shifts between animation and performance as it is modified by embodied experience. Theming drives animation, making people act through things and things act through people (Manning and Gershon 2013; Ngai 2005; Silvio 2010). This framing of agency suggests that humans and non-humans act relationally to and shape each other, albeit on unequal terms (see Ahmed 2004; Haraway 2008; Satsuka 2018). *Taiken* at Edo Town is also an embodied process where staff and visitors learn how to merge with the themed environment and the Edo People in order to animate Edo-like character performances. Additionally, the media, the performing arts, Edo Town’s company workplace culture, the tourism industry, and other organizations use the historical themed park’s contents to animate additional curations of Japanese heritage and cultural identity.

Cox (2002) points out that the Japanese word for “play,” *asobi*, does not mean the opposite of work and argues that the “Japanese way of playing” requires “the creative experience of participants and also of the structural logic of certain activities” (182). Blurring work and play, Edo Town’s embodied experience causes staff and most visitors to cultivate Edo-like bodily and social senses— the former over time and the latter during one visit. However, their speech and actions can shift into full animation as they become repetitive, automatic, and even mechanical due to the labor and consumption requirement to be efficient. During peak tourist seasons, the staff revert mostly to the institutional rules pre-programming their actions and speech — reminiscent of the android hosts in the Western-themed park depicted in the HBO television series *Westworld* — so that their work pace can match the flood of visitor needs. Casual visitors

try unthinkingly to fit in as many activities as they can rather than — as Edo Town encourages them to do — exploring the themed environment, socializing with the Edo People, and role-playing Edo-like characters in response to their surroundings.

Curating Identity: Pastness and Intangible Heritage In Japan

Ebisu-san, a company-affiliated actor at Edo Town, tells me that the historical themed park re-enacts the *funiki* (atmosphere) and the *kokoro* (heart) of Japanese people who lived in the past. He elaborates, “It’s the things that cannot be seen by the eye. The Edo period was a very peaceful time. Although there were small battles, there weren’t any major ones.... In other words, it was an atmosphere in which townspeople — regular people — lived. I want customers to see and feel this.” He believes that it is important to pass down the intangible culture from Japan’s past, which exists within Japanese people’s hearts, because many buildings were destroyed during World War II. The implication is that even in 21st-century Japan, such intangible forms of heritage are actively present and can be passed down when material heritage is now scarce. At the same time, Edo Town’s focus on ordinary people is a selective interpretation of *jidaigeki* since the historical film genre also often features sword fighting and violence.

In Japan, the Edo period symbolically marks a developed Japanese culture that existed before the country was opened to foreign trade and diplomacy with the United States and Europe. During the Meiji period (1868-1912) that followed, a newly-established government borrowed from European political, educational, and economic models to establish a recognized Japanese nation-state that can re-negotiate unequal trade treaties and to implement an “official nationalism”¹¹ (Anderson 2006[1991], 101; Gordon 2003, 73-74). The Edo period provided the

¹¹ Anderson (2006[1991]) describes “official nationalism” as “an anticipatory strategy adopted by dominant groups which are threatened with marginalization or exclusion from an emerging nationally-imagined community” (101).

cultural material for the Japanese state to establish such a national identity (Gluck 1998, 266). Since then, state, academic, and popular re-imaginings of the Edo period have emphasized a commoner-led, authentic Japanese culture that flourished due to a prolonged period of peace and the *sakoku* policy that restricted foreign (mostly western) trade and diplomatic relations (Gluck 1998, 277-282).

The Edo period exists in suspended animation, reconceptualizing a Japanese identity that was an origin point of contemporary Japanese culture but that has been lost to westernization. At Edo Town, the past is re-created for present-day consumption as an atmosphere of Edo-like Japaneseness rather than the display of historical “Edo” artifacts. One of its regulars Kyokuchō explains, “Edo, or perhaps I should say its history— I like such Japanese culture. The origin of Japanese culture is from the Edo period, after all. From the Edo period, through the fast passage of time, Japanese culture has also changed rapidly, right? For example, the arts became westernized (*seiyōka*) and the changes have also been interesting.”

Heritage consumption is now market-driven throughout Asia. Lam-Knott (2020) argues that East Asian state policies “increasingly recognise the significance of intangible histories” (253) and that its rising middle classes have contributed to the increased numbers of “heritage consumers” (254). After over two decades of recession and economic stagnation, the Japanese government has been aiming to rehabilitate the country’s economy and collective identity through cultural branding and tourism. The 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games’ official emblem is based on the traditional Ichimatsu pattern favored by and named after the Edo period *kabuki* actor Sanogawa Ichimatsu. In a *Discover Japan* magazine article published in 2016, its designer Tokoro Asao expresses his hopes that the emblem will be known as “Tokyo’s family crest” and

that it will remind people that the 2020 Olympic Games were held in Tokyo (Tokoro and Discover Japan 2016).

As one of many heritage-themed spaces originating in Japan's postwar (after World War II) era, Edo Town has actively reshaped its institutional identity during the 2010s to accommodate the Japanese past's mediatization and fictionalization for popular consumption. Sugawa-Shimada (2015) points out, "Consuming history is often equivalent to consuming pop cultural products" (40). *Jidaigeki* is not as popular now with young Japanese people (Miyashiro 2017). However, historically-inspired fictional settings and characters from the Sengoku era that immediately preceded the Edo period and the late Edo period's Bakumatsu era (1853-1867) have not become obsolete in the manga, anime, video games, television series, and films consumed by Japanese children and adults in their 20s and 30s. Male characters based on the Shinsengumi¹² appear, for instance, in the *Hakuōki* video games where the player controls a female main character who can develop romantic relationships with them. The *Gintama* media franchise is set in an alternate, contemporary version of Edo that is controlled by space aliens and features characters parodying the Shinsengumi, ninjas, and samurai.

Fictionalized media representations inspire Japanese fans to engage in heritage contents tourism such as pilgrimages to character-related sites in Japan (Seaton et al. 2017, 33; Sugawa-Shimada 2015). The Japanese media call some female fans *rekijo* (history women), because they became interested in Japanese history and historical figures by playing video games such as *Hakuōki* (Seaton et al. 2017; Sugawa-Shimada 2015). Seaton et al. (2017) point out, "If we think of history as a story, with historical characters performing historical deeds in various locations, *we can think of history as contents*" (10). Elements of these virtual contents are transposed into

¹² Based in Kyoto, the Shinsengumi was a military force that protected the Tokugawa shogunate during the late Edo period's Bakumatsu era.

Edo Town's themed environment. Although it is not a designated historical site, a visit there can be considered a variation of heritage contents tourism since its material themed environment evokes the virtual worlds of *jidaigeki* and contemporary popular media that are set in or inspired by Japan's past.

Fieldwork and Writing Notes

My fieldwork took place from 2011 to 2017 over several research trips to Edo Town and other secondary sites in Japan. The latter included other Japanese themed parks, concept restaurants, businesses offering themed experiences, as well as indoor and outdoor architectural museums. I conducted participant-observation at these places, as well as semi-structured interviews and short conversations with the people whom I met there. These places wrestled with similar questions about how to attract visitors (including overseas tourists) to experience Japanese culture in an interactive environment.

Pre-dissertation fieldwork gave me the opportunity to meet and conduct semi-structured interviews with Edo Town's representatives, as well as to experience the themed environment in one-visit intervals as a casual visitor. The next year, I stayed for three weeks in Terada— a significantly longer time than the usual day-trip or weekend taken by tourists. Besides follow-up conversations with Edo Town's representatives, I obtained permission to speak with a few actors whose Edo People's social media accounts I had been following for the past year. The prolonged stay in Terada also forced me to pay attention to how Edo Town fits within its touristic landscape and how it is perceived by some locals.

Primary dissertation fieldwork at Edo Town lasted for a year and three months between 2015 and 2017. After discussing my project with the same representatives and another manager,

I submitted a resume to the operating company at their request. The representatives then proposed that I conduct my fieldwork as a volunteer staff who would assist employees with customer service involving overseas visitors. I was first asked to choose an “Edo name” for me to use inside the Edo-themed environment. Over time, I merged into the townswoman character “Momo” (to many of my interlocutors, “Momo-chan”) and relearned Edo-like body movements, speech, and perceptions of the world through several training seminars and from some employees. As an Edo Person, I became accustomed to putting on and wearing a kimono, listening to Edo-like speech, and being highly visible to visitors. Among some frontline employees and many repeaters, I was known as Momo the townswoman in the pink kimono who is also from the United States and eager to learn about Japanese culture.

My participant-observation immediately began inside Edo Town’s themed environment, because the Lunar New Year brought many Mandarin and Cantonese-speaking tourists to the historical themed park. The staff asked me to interpret in real-time and to check hastily-composed menu translations, because some of these tourists spoke neither Japanese nor English. After this peak tourist season, the frontline staff knew to find me whenever they needed my help in providing explanations to the historical themed park’s overseas visitors— something I did primarily in English, Cantonese, rudimentary Mandarin Chinese, and once in French. I also answered questions about Edo Town’s facilities and show schedules from the many Japanese visitors who approached me, since they expect (and sometimes mistakenly) that people wearing kimonos there are equally knowledgeable about the historical themed park. I eventually cultivated close working relationships with the frontline service workers and actors, both employees and temporary workers. Coordinating tasks and relying on each other to manage customers in the same themed environment was a profound bonding experience. Many of these

interlocutors agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews, because they wanted to help me after I willingly assisted them with work tasks for several months including during peak tourist seasons.

Dissertation fieldwork also brought me to Edo Town's office and communal areas. In the office, I supported employees in and spoke to them about administrative tasks relating to the historical themed park's overseas visitors. These included: an English language customer service seminar for new employee training, text translations, an opinion survey targeting overseas visitors, and brainstormed lists about the kinds of souvenirs and contents in which these visitors would be interested. I stayed in the company dormitory and ate at the employee cafeteria for most of the dissertation fieldwork period, which allowed more opportunities for conversations with Edo Town's employees.

During fieldwork, I navigated three different relationships with the people who pay to access Edo Town's experience: as visitors, customers, and consumers. When I first conducted participant-observation there, I viewed these people as fellow visitors who, like me, were also exploring Edo Town's world and discovering ways in which we can participate. At the time, I noticed that company representatives consistently used the word *okyakusan* (customer) to refer to whom I was calling visitors (*raiensha*). However, these people became customers when I became embedded inside Edo Town as Momo the townswoman. In this role, I interacted continuously with the regulars, shadowed overseas tour groups, observed casual visitors from a frontline staff's point of view, and helped visitors. When I analyzed my fieldnotes outside of Edo Town's opening hours, I perceived each group as consumers who were seeking different things from Edo Town's experience. These different relationships are reflected in my writing. I refer to these people as visitors when describing their words and actions from a first-hand observational

point of view, as customers when writing in the staff members' voices, and as consumers when examining the larger political-economic structures in which they are implicated.

I conducted many of my semi-structured interviews with Edo Town's regulars, comprising of "repeaters" (*rīpītā*)¹³ and actor fans who return repeatedly to the historical themed park in order to socialize respectively with their favorite Edo People and actors. Many repeaters were introduced to me by employees while I was on-site as Momo the townswoman. I became acquainted with actor fans as they interacted with Edo People when they were not socializing with their favorite actors or watching their shows. Since overseas tour group visits last on average only two to three hours and revolve mainly around watching shows, I did not have many chances to speak with individuals but could observe how their structured itinerary guided their activities at Edo Town.

Casual visitors presented the biggest challenge, because there was little opportunity to connect with them and their visit itineraries vary. During pre-dissertation fieldwork, I approached strangers — mostly English-speaking tourists from North America and Europe — who rode the same shuttle bus as me on their way to Edo Town. At the time, they were the largest demographic of casual visitors who took this mode of transport and most were willing to converse with another stranger going to the same destination since they were traveling alone or in small groups. These interactions resulted in several short conversations on-site, a few follow-up conversations online, and a few visits together. When I was at Edo Town as Momo the townswoman, they were customers who wanted to take photographs with characters like me, to role-play in an Edo-themed context, and to answer questions about the historical themed park's facilities such as restroom locations. I mostly observed their activities and overheard their comments, while staying in the background as part of the themed environment after an initial

¹³ A Japanese-made English word

greeting until they required my attention. I also spoke briefly to a few casual visitors who had extra time to loiter and were curious about what I was doing at Edo Town as a volunteer staff.

Edo Town is a site, as I will show, where identities — as Japanese, alternate self, local community institution, cultural broker, cultural participant, and so on — are explored and negotiated willingly and unwillingly. This process inevitably passed onto the fieldworker, as I was an Asian (Hong Kong)-American animating an Edo-like character in traditional Japanese clothing that was created by a company to re-enact an alternate Japanese present for Japanese and overseas visitors. This produced both consonances and dissonances between my other Asian but American foreignness and my presence inside a themed environment supposedly re-creating a quintessentially “Japanese” atmosphere consumed by customers. My interlocuters perceived my mastery of Japanese and several other languages as an asset, since I could help the staff communicate with the increasing numbers of overseas tourists at Edo Town. They were also interested in my opinions, from an outsider and foreigner’s perspective, about the attractions and contents there. I often “passed” for Japanese in front of visitors due to my Asian appearance, but my non-native accent gave me away whenever I spoke to Japanese visitors. Some asked me, seemingly perplexed, “You are not Japanese (*nihonjin ja nai desuka*)?” Others attempted to define my identity for me based on my appearance. A fair number triumphantly (and mistakenly) declared aloud to others in their group that I am a person from China (*chūgokujin*), but my position as an Edo-like character made it appropriate to respond to their unsolicited assumptions. Other times, my interlocuters approvingly spoke of me as “Japanese person-like” (*nihonjin-ppoi*) as I adopted more Edo-like behaviors as a character after becoming used to moving around in a kimono.

For several weeks, I was preoccupied with creating an explanation of why I, a foreigner, was in an Edo period re-enactment — a historical period popularly believed and claimed by Edo Town to be an era of *Japanese* cultural development and isolation from foreign influences. Employees, however, did not see this as a problem since I was, like them, being an Edo Person character during Edo Town’s openings hours. Some charitably provided me with numerous potential explanations, such as “You can say that you are a merchant from Dejima¹⁴ and are trading in Edo” and “You can say that you are Momo-chan who came here from *ikoku no kuni*¹⁵ to learn about Japanese culture.” Finally, one employee told me, “It doesn’t matter. [The visitors] don’t really care.” When visitors asked him about my origins, he simply informed them repeatedly that I was an Edo Person — what Edo Town’s themed environment intended me to be at that moment.

To illustrate Edo Town’s social world during fieldwork, I write in the ethnographic present. However, all field sites constantly adapt to new circumstances. Attractions and content emphasis shift as Edo Town’s company president develops his vision for the historical themed park’s social role and as the consumer market evolves. Visitor and staff dynamics also change frequently. Casual visitors and overseas tour group visitors rarely return to Edo Town after the first time, regulars sometimes decide that they no longer want to go back, temporary staff contracts end, full-time employees have quit the company, and so on. As the COVID-19 pandemic affected institutional operations and social practices around the world from 2020, Edo Town has already closed temporarily twice. When it reopened the first time, it faced the task of enforcing contemporary public health measures such as hand-washing, social distancing, and

¹⁴ A port in Japan’s Nagasaki Prefecture that was the only place open to foreign trade (with the Dutch) during the Edo period

¹⁵ An archaic Japanese word for “foreign country”

disinfection into staff work routines and visits that are based on embodied experiences. The numbers of overseas visitors to Edo Town have also dropped drastically, since the Japanese government closed Japan's borders to foreign travelers from March 2020 onward. The future remains uncertain.

Since fieldwork, some of Edo Town's contents have changed and several interlocutors no longer work there. Nevertheless, I have obscured identifying details. Edo Town is a pseudonym and I use Movie Village for a secondary fieldsite in Chapter 6. I have also removed titles and page numbers when the source refers to Edo Town by its actual name on a specific page and where it is easy to uncover Edo Town's actual name. Terada is also a pseudonym referring to the city where Edo Town is located. I have masked specific details about its other heritage sites, because they are well-known in Japan and are visited by many tourists.

How I refer to my interlocutors depends on their relationship to Edo Town's operating company, to each other, and to me. Casual visitors are identified by pseudonyms if I conducted semi-structured interviews with them or by general characteristics such as country of origin if our interactions were fleeting. I identify some regulars by a first name pseudonym followed by a title suffix, for instance, *-san* for those who are the same age or older than me and *-kun* for younger, male regulars. When applicable, I use the fictional names that other regulars go by at Edo Town in the text (altered in one case for an interlocuter who is known as the mother of a non-adult repeater with such a name). Office employees are referred to by their company positions and/or last name pseudonyms followed by the formal *-san* suffix. My social interactions with frontline service workers and actors revolve around our fictional Edo names, which are created and used within the context of Edo Town. Since they know each other's Edo names for work, and most regulars are familiar with these names, I compose pseudo-Edo names

— following company-designated conventions for Edo Town’s character types — for them to minimize the risk of potentially revealing their identities. Many temporary workers, which includes *haken* (dispatch staff from an outside agency) service workers and *gaichū* (actors contracted from outside management agencies), do not stay long enough at Edo Town to have or to be given Edo names; therefore, I use the words “*haken* staff” and “*gaichū* actor” as identifiers. Whenever I decide not to reveal an interlocuter’s company division, I use the words “employee” to indicate a company-affiliated actor, an office staff, or a frontline service worker and the word “staff” to generally refer to someone who is either an employee or a temporary worker at Edo Town.

Overview Of Chapters

Each chapter introduces a social actor that contributes to the animation of Edo Town’s social world, which includes the operating company, the themed environment, as well as the economic and cultural institutional networks where the historical themed park is entrenched. The first part of the dissertation focuses on how Edo Town’s operating company curates a staging of Edo based on existing media representations, as well as through the socialization of workers into Edo-like characters and employees. In Chapter 1, I situate the historical themed park’s contents in postwar Japan’s mass commodification of Japanese heritage— including the theming of Edo. I analyze the influence of *jidaigeki* and other contemporary media on the conceptualization and evolution of Edo Town and other Edo-themed sites in Japan. I also show how Edo Town’s Edo-themed environment brings together real life and fantasy worlds. Chapter 2 introduces the Edo People characters that are animated by Edo Town’s staff, especially the actors and frontline service workers. Although the staff work under operating company guidelines determining their

appearances, I show that they become characters to come alive as Edo People with alternate, Edo-like senses that drive social interactions with visitors and with each other. Such character labor requires the staff to develop an alternate, Edo sense of self and to merge with their assigned character types. Chapter 3 brings the reader inside Edo Town's corporate culture, where the Edo theme is highly integrated. I analyze employees' socialization into a selective company interpretation of Edo culture through an Edo-themed hierarchical structure, body training, work tasks, and mentoring.

In Chapter 4, the dissertation turns to the institutional networks framing Edo Town's existence and its contents' meaning across political, cultural, and economic landscapes. I examine its conception as an economic revitalization initiative, as well as its current entrenchment in a tourism network of businesses and infrastructural institutions that curate Terada as a touristic area. I then trace Edo Town's insertion of its Edo-like Japanese characters, modified show excerpts, and attraction content into contemporary Edo- and Japan-themed cultural spectacles as well as popular culture events. I also consider how Edo Town's established presence in Terada defines the city's future and its local population as neighbors sharing the same local landscape.

After this transition chapter, the second half of the dissertation examines the visitor-consumers who animate Edo Town's themed environment in different ways. Chapter 5 discusses its casual visitors, mostly domestic, Japanese tourists who visit Edo Town once. They animate the historical themed park's "default experience," which offers them various interactive encounters with Edo People, objects, attractions, and shows. Many arrive with preconceived notions about how Japan *appeared* in the past, often influenced by their previous media consumption. However, Edo Town's themed environment pushes them to performatively role-

play Edo-like characters that *feel* Japan's past. Chapter 6 analyzes the growing numbers of overseas tourists at Edo Town, as the Japanese government and businesses develop an inbound tourism industry that targets especially the East and Southeast Asian market. While overseas tour groups follow an itinerary of "foreigner-friendly" shows and attractions at Edo Town, overseas visitors who arrive there individually expect to discover new aspects of Japanese culture *and* to recognize the things encountered there. I examine how Edo Town's operating company has worked to make the embodied experience understandable to these overseas visitors, who are not socialized to sense Japan's past and cultural identity in the same way as domestic consumers are. I then discuss the communication improvisations and breakdowns inside the historical themed park, sales and promotion activities abroad, as well as the operating company's hosting of special visitors to forge institutional connections across Asia. Chapter 7 focuses on Edo Town's regulars whose repeated returns animate the themed environment as their place of belonging (*ibasho*). They are concerned with maintaining a closer social distance style of relationship with certain Edo People characters and actors that can only exist in Edo Town's extraordinary context. I explore their activities at Edo Town, as well as their efforts to perform their animated intimacy with the objects of their attachment. Finally, in the conclusion, I reflect on how history-themed spaces such as Edo Town make social statements on heritage, cultural branding, and Japanese identity in 21st-century Japan and on how embodied experiences shift human agency between the modes of animation and performance.

Chapter 1 - Staging Edo Themes In Edo Town And Contemporary Japan

Animating An Edo-Themed World

When traveling to O-Edo via Edo Town, visitors first buy a ticket called a *tegata* (translated as “passport” in English) that will gain them passage through the *sekishō*. During the Edo period, *sekishō* were checkpoints where travelers presented to guards documents proving that their movements were authorized by the shogunate—the feudal military government headed by the shogun. At Edo Town, an actor dressed as a samurai-rank guard checks the tickets — enforcing the requirement to buy a contract for access to the historical themed park’s experience — and welcomes visitors through the gate. From here, the visitors are called travelers (*tabibito*) because they are traveling back in time from the present to “Edo.”

The time travelers emerge in the *kaidō* zone, which consists of a paved concrete path lined on each side with small stone *jizō* statues (a kind of Buddhist statue) and trees hiding the contemporary realm (referred to as *gendai* at Edo Town) from view. In the past, *daimyō* (feudal domain lords), their retainers, pilgrims, and other authorized people traveled through the *go-kaidō* — a travel network of five officially-sanctioned roads — to their destination. In Edo Town’s *kaidō* zone, time travelers can encounter Edo People characters. “*Ohayooo-san!*” A townswoman wearing a white and dark-blue kimono and graying hair put up in an Edo-like hair bun may call out cheerfully. They may also meet a samurai who bows to them and then says in a deep and dignified voice, “*Ohayō gozaimasuru.*”

Visitors do not fully reach “Edo” (or O-Edo, the themed environment) immediately after passing through the *sekishō* checkpoint, the service worker Ken-san tells me. They move closer to the past as they go deeper inside Edo Town. This is why the next zone, the *shukuba-machi*, is

an “ambiguous (*aimai*) space” that is neither past nor present. It reflects the new time travelers’ liminal status of no longer being in the contemporary realm and not yet merged into O-Edo. In the past, *shukuba-machi* were post station towns where travelers rested and deliveries were transferred to the next courier. At Edo Town, the Japanese past begins to reappear in the *shukuba-machi* zone. An innkeeper greets and invites visitors to stay at his inn for the night, two porters wait for clients next to a palanquin, and a merchant sells *dango* (Japanese rice dumplings) from a food stand. A small wooden building, re-created with traditional Japanese architecture, exhibits different *geta* (traditional Japanese wooden clogs) worn in the past with explanatory text in Japanese and English.¹ The *shukuba-machi* zone’s temporal in-betweenness feels the most evident at the costume rental facility, where visitors can transform — or *henshin* (literally meaning “change the body”) — into Edo-like characters through rented kimonos and accessories so that they can merge further with O-Edo the themed environment.

Time travelers arrive at the beginning of O-Edo when enter the *shōkagai* zone, a re-creation of a historical merchant district. Townspeople welcome them and hawk their wares in Edo-inflected speech. Time travelers can then venture further into O-Edo to explore samurai- and ninja-based zones, each featuring distinct character types, shows, attractions, and cultural displays.

This chapter ethnographically introduces Edo Town’s fictional staging of “Edo” as authentic Japanese cultural identity within a themed environment. It also contextualizes the Edo theme in contemporary Japan, showing that its interpretation is conditioned by national moods and consumer desires that evolve with changing political, economic, and historical conditions. I ask: How has Edo Town’s operating company used the Edo theme to *animate* an Edo-like Japanese experience to consumers?

¹ I assisted with these English translations during fieldwork.

The company representative Tanaka-san explains that Edo Town's goal is for visitors to return home with a lasting awareness of the Edo period's *and* Japan's "magnificence" (*subarashisa*). These ideas echo Prime Minister Abe Shinzō's 2012 nationalist campaign slogan *Nihon wo, torimodosu* (Let's Recover Japan). However, Edo Town's commercial operations are distinct from the state museumification of space, time, and objects to define official, nationalist narratives (Anderson 2006[1990]). Rather than promoting all things symbolizing Japanese-ness, it narrowly focuses on the connections between a commoner-centered Edo culture and an authentic Japanese identity that has been perceived as forgotten today. It uses fictional characters to communicate this alternate form of sociality. Yet, its staging of Edo does not dictate what visitors should read, say, and do every minute.

Unlike restaurants and other commercial venues that use the Edo theme as a backdrop, Edo Town's visitors undergo a process similar to the liminal phase in rituals, which Turner (1967) describes as an "interstructural position" (94). They are positioned as time travelers from an unspecified contemporary realm regardless of their different real-life names and identities, like "neophytes" undergoing rites of passages who are "that which is neither this nor that and yet is both" (Turner 1967, 99). Ideally, they would emerge from their embodied experience with a moral understanding of their Edo-like Japanese identity. However, Edo Town's operating company and the Edo People characters — due to the commercial context — do not hold the same absolute authority over time travelers as a ritual's "instructors" do over their "neophytes" (Turner 1967). Visitors can ultimately choose *when* and *how* they engage with the themed environment and its contents.

I first discuss Edo Town's origins as a Japanese themed park inspired by *jidaigeki* when it opened during the 1980s, a decade that witnessed economic prosperity and continued mass

consumption of nostalgic Japaneseness. Next, I examine *jidaigeki*'s continuing influence and the effect of later fictional media depicting Japan's past on Edo Town and other Edo-themed sites in Japan. Then, I explore how experiences guide visitors' consumption of Edo Town. I finally discuss the different ways in which Edo Town's world blurs themed fantasy and real life in activities, seasonal events, and the re-creation of an Edo-themed Nature.

Edo Town And Edo-Themed Spaces In Japan

Edo Town's visitors are predominantly middle class,² mostly from the same prefecture and neighboring prefectures. Many casual one-time visitors consist of families (including three-generation) with young children, couples, and friend groups. Its regulars are a small minority of Edo Town's customers,³ according to an employee, but their faces are well-known to the frontline service workers and actors in the themed environment. Most of them are Japanese women from their 20s to 40s, who usually visit Edo Town alone or with young children on weekdays if they can arrange for a day off from work, work part-time, are self-employed, or are full-time housewives.

Edo Town typically hosts organized group visits on weekdays when there are fewer casual visitors. These include overseas tour groups, Japanese language schools, as well as primary and secondary schools. Overseas tour groups are arranged with Japanese and overseas (mostly Asian) tourism companies. The schools are generally located within a one- to two- hour

² This qualifier is based on my calculations of the required expenditures for a visit to Edo Town. This includes an adult admission ticket costing close to 5000 yen (approximately 46 USD), as well as extra fees for the costume rental (starting from 2500 yen or approximately 23 USD) and certain attractions (starting from 200 yen or 1.85 USD). Most visitors also purchase lunch and souvenirs.

³ Although the percentage is low, it is difficult to report an exact number of regulars because Edo Town's operating company does not officially keep track of them and their numbers fluctuate.

radius surrounding Edo Town. These visits often last for only one to three hours, unlike most casual visitors who stay for an entire day at the historical themed park.

When Edo Town opened during the 1980s, several consumer “booms” (*būmu*) reflected a wave of popular nostalgia and in the Japanese population. After World War II, Japan underwent an economic high growth period that led in the next decades to major social transitions such as westernizing lifestyles and urban migration. These changes caused widespread anxiety about the loss of Japanese cultural identity and values in the postwar era. Selective aspects of the past became popularly commodified as Japanese heritage. From the 1950s to 1970s, traditional arts organization underwent rationalized mass expansion to target a growing number of middle-class female consumers (see Stalker 2017 for an analysis of postwar *ikebana*⁴ schools). The *furusato* (home village) consumer “boom” took place during the 1970s and 1980s, which invented an idealized, rural Japanese space that was affectively linked with an authentic, pre-westernized, and communal native identity and this was commodified in domestic tourism campaigns (such as National Japan Railways’ Discover Japan), department store festivals, gift packages, and municipal “old village making” (*furusato-zukuri*) initiatives (Creighton 1997; Ivy 1995; Robertson 1991).

The word “Edo” alludes to spatial and cultural connotations that transcend the years between 1603 and 1867 in Japan. Gluck (1998) characterizes Edo as “a cultural space, a repository of traditions (*dentō*) associated with Japanese distinctiveness...” (263). Creighton (2009) specifies that Edo, “in a collapse of Edo as time and place” (38), refers to the urban commoner neighborhoods and their culture in the city Edo before it became Tokyo when the Edo period ended. During the 1970s, Tokyo residents became interested in a “vernacular” Edo urban history that flourished independently of the Japanese state and this gave rise to Edo Studies

⁴ Flower arranging

(*Edo-gaku*) and later, Edo-Tokyo Studies (Sand 2013, 21-22, 41). The urban Edo-*shitamachi* “boom” during these decades witnessed consumer demand for products evoking nostalgically the traditional urban culture of the Edo period and of Tokyo’s *shitamachi* neighborhoods (its presumed inheritors), where an older and more authentic Japanese lifestyle is presented as an alternative to the global capitalist system (Bestor 1993; Creighton 2009; Gluck 1998; Sand 2013).

The Japanese historical drama genre, *jidaigeki*, was prolifically produced for television, films, and theater. Many of its stories star Edo-era folk characters and commoners, use stylized acting and character types, and draw on predictable plot devices that unambiguously distinguish between good and evil (Miyashiro 2017). *Jidaigeki* scenes also inspired Edo Town’s re-created settings such as its *shōkagai* zone, a magistrate’s court, and a samurai’s residence. The Shitamachi and Edo Fukagawa history museums, which opened in Tokyo during the 1980s, similarly re-create the kind of *shitamachi* and *nagaya* (communal tenement housing) seen in *jidaigeki* to exhibit an older Japanese way of life with roots in Edo culture. The Edo-Tokyo Museum, which opened in 1993 and was planned by the Tokyo municipal government, stages life-sized dioramas with everyday objects collected from Tokyo residents to “create narratives of identity through a common heritage” (Sand 2013, 121) that has been passed down from past Edo to present-day Tokyo. The museum’s permanent exhibition also features a miniature diorama of a merchant district, a scene that resembles Edo Town’s *shōkagai* zone.

Japanese history-themed spaces re-create cultural narratives, atmospheres, settings, and character types to which Japanese visitors can affectively relate from the recent past, rather than comprehensive accounts of political events. Japanese open-air architectural museums (such as Meiji Mura and the Edo-Tokyo Architectural Museum⁵), as Hendry (2000) observes, are

⁵ Opened in 1993, it is associated with the Edo-Tokyo Museum and also known as the Edo-Tokyo Tatemono En.

similarly “less concerned with marking a particular period of time than with expressing general cultural values...” (145-146). Edo Town’s themed environment also emphasizes everyday Edo culture and its influence on authentic Japanese values. The majority of its staff play townspeople, with many of them based in the *shōkagai* zone’s souvenir shops and restaurants to re-enact merchant activity. Edo Town’s museum of everyday-use objects also equates Edo culture with an authentic Japanese way of life, featuring the *shitamachi*-based and other Japanese artisans who uphold these values. Although more overseas tourists have visited Edo Town and other Japanese history- and heritage-themed space in recent years, I discover during fieldwork that many of their translations and experiences still convey information from the perspective of a collective “Japanese” cultural heritage rather than exoticism.

Some interlocuters compare Edo Town’s setting with the open film sets at the Toei Kyoto Studio Park and the Shōnai Eigamura (Movie Village) in Yamagata Prefecture, Japan.⁶ They, like Edo Town, serve as filming locations for Japanese historical films and television dramas. Attractions and shows can also be found at the Toei Kyoto Studio Park, with overlapping contents such as: a costume rental facility, a *shuriken* (ninja star) throwing game, samurai sword training, a ninja trap attraction, and a ninja-themed maze.

Despite common inspiration from *jidaigeki*, Edo Town is not a “movie village” like the Toei Kyoto Studio Park and the Shōnai Eigamura. While the latter two reference specific films and shows, as well as emphasize the stage sword fighting (*chanbara*) often featured in *jidaigeki*, Edo Town places a peaceful, commoner-centered atmosphere and its proprietary characters at the center of its world. Its visitors become time travelers who experience its interpretation of the Japanese past by modeling their participation and social interactions after the Edo People characters. Stage fighting can only be seen in specific venues and time slots and violent

⁶ Its filming studio was built in 2006 and its set opened for public admission in 2009.

spectacles do not permeate Edo Town's atmosphere. One *gaichū* actor remembers that he once played a *rōnin* (masterless samurai) many years ago that jumped out at and brandished his sword at visitors to surprise them, but this role has been eliminated.

After the 1980s, the Edo theme has continued to be popular in cultural spectacles and businesses in Japan. During the 1990s, Edo Town's original parent company opened several other historical themed parks in Japan that re-enact the Sengoku era (1467-1600) and the Edo period under various regional warlord clans. The Tokyo Haneda Airport hosts an annual Edo festival with historical character types found in popular culture, cultural experience attractions (such as origami workshops), traditional Japanese music concerts, street performances, and a samurai procession. Cities and municipalities regularly hold Edo-themed festivals (see Chapter 4), while businesses use the Edo theme as visual backdrops. For example, the O-Edo Onsen Monogatari hot springs resort, located in Tokyo's Odaiba district, features Edo-style architecture in its amusement and food court areas. The Onihei Edo Dokoro is an Edo-themed rest stop in Saitama Prefecture, with a re-created Edo-era merchant townscape exterior and Edo-style decor used for its indoor food stands and souvenir shops. The rest stop is also named after a crime-solving character named Onihei, who has appeared in many Japanese films, television, anime, and historical novels.⁷

A Mediated Space

Many visitors initially associate Edo Town's themed environment with a historical film set, which they conflate with an experience of Japan's past. A Taiwanese visitor (for whom I assisted with interpretation) comments on the *shōkagai* zone's re-created buildings, "This looks like a place for filming movies. Do they make them here?" Aya-san, a regular, first perceived

⁷ The rest stop's website mentions the historical novel series titled *Onihei Hankachō*.

Edo Town as like a place “used for Edo period dramas.” She names the Japanese television series *JIN*, which was first broadcasted in 2009 and tells the story of a Japanese brain surgeon who time travels to the Edo period: “[Edo Town] felt like the world of *JIN* and that I have ‘time-slipped’⁸ there. It was very enjoyable. It truly felt like I was experiencing Edo.”

Edo Town’s operating company has ties with Japan’s performing arts and media industries. A company-affiliated actor, Saburo-san, reminisces about working throughout the world with a Japanese actor agency that was formerly associated with Edo Town. Its operating company runs a film studio division, which draws up contracts with production companies for access to its film set facilities. The creators of several films, television series (including a Taiga Drama, the NHK broadcaster’s annual historical drama), promotional videos, and a music video have used Edo Town’s themed environment and film sets to portray settings based on or inspired by Japan’s past. Company-affiliated actors, especially stunts performers, are recruited to participate as extras and supporting or minor characters.

Jidaigeki remains strongly integrated into Edo Town’s themed environment. A re-created magistrate’s court serves as the theater for a show featuring magistrates such as Tōyama no Kin-san and Ōoka Echizen who are fictionalized in Japanese historical dramas as good, virtuous characters administering justice for commoners. Another show is about Nakayama Yasubei who would later become one of the 47 *rōnin* who avenged their lord out of loyalty— a historical occurrence that is also fictionalized into *jidaigeki*. Additionally, a souvenir shop is named after Echigoya, a prominent textile merchant family from the Edo period onward and a corrupt character in *jidaigeki*. The Edo Town version of Echigoya occasionally emerges from the souvenir shop, emitting a devious, throaty laugh to greet visitors. He usually tries to sell them a

⁸ A Japanese-made English word meaning “to time travel”

box of buns with hidden gold coin-shaped cookies on the bottom, referencing the character's frequent bribes to officials.

Staged encounters with these characters call on visitors' participation, even if they may not be familiar with *jidaigeki*. In the *shukuba-machi* zone, for instance, visitors are approached by the character Nezumi Kozō (a thief who steals from the rich to help the poor in *jidaigeki*) and/or three criminal-catchers for help. The former wants to hide from the criminal-catchers, while the latter wants to find the thief. Visitors can decide whether or not to help these characters, something they cannot do at most other Edo-themed venues in Japan. If they agree not to reveal the thief's location, Nezumi Kozō will reward them with a sticker illustrated with his cartoonized face. Most encounters with the criminal-catchers result playfully in the visitors' "arrest" for acting suspiciously. Their hands are loosely tied up with the criminal catchers' rope and this creates a photo opportunity together.

In recent years, Edo Town began engaging with Japanese popular culture contents that are inspired by historical narratives, settings, and characters. The historical themed park welcomes cosplayers to stage photo shoots based on anime and video game scenes. It also hosts occasional crossover "collaboration" events around animated Japanese media franchises. For a limited period of time, visitors could participate in a scavenger hunt based on the *Nintama Rantarō* anime series with the help of certain Edo People as well as rented costumes based on the anime's characters. In another event, they could purchase food and win prizes that show images from and reference the *Gintama* anime franchise. Although these anime are not set at Edo Town, they also use settings and character types inspired by Japan's past and this allows for the temporary overlapping of fictional universes.

Historical popular culture crossover events can also be found at the Toei Kyoto Studio Park. It hosts an annual event called the Jōraku Matsuri, which targets fans of anime and video games that are set in or inspired by the Sengoku and the Bakumatsu (1853-1867) eras. Cosplayers are invited to stage photo shoots from their favorite media franchise inside the Japanese themed park-movie village hybrid's open film set. During the 2015 event, its producer remarked that many cosplayers there — Japanese women in their 20s and 30s — were dressed as male characters personifying historical Japanese swords from the computer browser game *Tōken Ranbu*. I also noticed characters from the *Gintama* and *Bleach* anime franchises, as well as a few Shinsengumi and feudal warlord characters from other ones that I did not recognize. The event coordinator invited a group of special speakers with two *katana* (Japanese sword) craftsmen and a manga artist who give talks about “*katana* appreciation” (*katana kanshō*) throughout Japan. The latter is the author of *Katana*, a Japanese comic about a high school student from a *katana* craftsman family who can communicate with personified Japanese swords.

Edo Town Experiences

Michael, who is ethnically half-Japanese and who lives in Tokyo (he considers himself Japanese), is a casual visitor who went to Edo Town once with his mother, stepfather, and stepbrother. He shows me a photo on his cell phone of his mother, his stepfather, and him holding a large kettle lid inside a guard house there. In Japanese, he describes for me what happened when the photo was taken:

Michael: Because there was a...from the past...what was it? A *kamado* (hearth). We sat by it while we were resting. [Then,] we stood up and looked around.

Heidi: How were you posing in the photo?

Michael: Since there was a kettle there, we opened [the lid].

Heidi: Because [you were] curious?

Michael: Yes! And someone said let's take a photo [together].

Heidi: But why this photo?

Michael: I was told to take it.

Heidi: By whom?

Michael: My mom.

Although the *jidaigeki* genre strongly influences Edo Town's themed staging of Edo, the historical themed park emphasizes its "realistic experience" (*riaruna taiken*) as its visitors are drawn "deeply" into the Edo period and the Edo People community. Its brochures and website focus on what visitors can *do*, beyond looking around. They can *watch* theater like Edo-era Japanese people. They can *transform* into Edo People by renting the costumes of townspeople, samurai, ninjas, Shinsengumi, and other Edo-like characters. They can *eat* Japanese food that was consumed during the Edo period. They can also *play* in attractions that simulate ninja and samurai training such as *shuriken* and darts throwing, as well as bow shooting.

Edo Town's operating company has been expanding visitor activities based on "embodied experiencing" (*taiken suru*) and its president tells me that he wishes to increase social communication at Edo Town. Visitors can already explore re-created Edo-like settings and cultural displays, as well as test their balance in a "ninja training" building with slanted floors. Children can participate in ninja, samurai, and criminal-catcher training sessions.

In recent years, cultural experience attractions and interactive samurai-related sessions were added respectively to the Edo Town's *shōkagai* and samurai-themed zones. The cultural experience attractions cost 200 to 700 yen (approximately 1.92-6.73 USD) per activity, which includes carving name seals (*inkan*) and chopsticks, making sushi rolls and traditional Japanese

sweets, decorating unpainted *daruma* figures (popularly used for luck and goal-setting) and Japanese-style candles (*wa rōsoku*), as well as roasting rice crackers. The operating company has also replaced spaces formerly occupied by a tenant-run⁹ ninja goods shop and a tea store with a *shamisen* (traditional Japanese three-stringed instrument) and a *beni* (lip rouge) application experience. Furthermore, a ninja action show theater was converted into a ninja trap attraction for visitors to explore and a *jidaigeki*-based show added a participatory “actor’s experience” component.

At the samurai-themed zone, visitors can participate in short swordsmanship (*kenjutsu*) lessons, learn about samurai etiquette in sword handling, and try traditional horse-mounted archery (*yabusame*) under the staff’s guidance. (These staff members are trained in kendo and/or stage fighting with *katana*.) Kenneth, a one-time casual visitor from Hong Kong, participated in an earlier version of the archery experience and comments in our follow-up Facebook Messenger conversation that there are few opportunities in real life “to use the bow easily like an Edo person.” Doing this at Edo Town provoked him to think about the challenges that Japanese people faced. He reflects, “I cannot imagine how the people in the past can handle the bow easily and use it to kill enemies and wild animals.”

Many commercial cultural experiences in Japan now offer consumers the chance to role-play samurai and other Japanese cultural characters. At the Toei Kyoto Studio Park, visitors can similarly practice samurai sword fighting with actors who do stage fighting with Japanese swords in shows. Consumers, including overseas tourists, can also purchase an experience from a production company to star as a samurai or ninja main character in a short action film shot at

⁹ Outside businesses renting space from Edo Town to sell merchandise

Tokyo Haneda Airport among other filming options.¹⁰ They also have the opportunity to participate in a Zen meditation in a temple located in Kamakura, which is organized by a non-profit organization's SAMURAI Project and is promoted as a traditional samurai practice.¹¹

During the summer and autumn, many Japanese themed parks extend their opening hours on weekends and re-create a festive, night-time atmosphere. In Edo Town's themed environment, traditional stone lanterns (with light bulbs hidden inside) light up exterior spaces and some different activities are offered to visitors. The regular Kyokuchō remembers going to one such event. He was wearing a *yukata* (casual, summer kimono) that his grandmother sent him although he normally does not like wearing it. One of Kyokuchō's favorite Edo Town actors was being in — as he calls it — “Ikedaya mode” (*Ikedaya mōdo*), when re-enacting the Ikedaya Incident (*Ikedaya Jiken*), a historical event that has been fictionalized in manga, film, video games and even staged at a Kyoto-themed *izakaya* (Japanese pub) in Tokyo. The Ikedaya Incident occurred in 1864, when the Shinsengumi invaded the Ikedaya Inn in Kyoto to arrest imperial faction *rōnin* (masterless samurai) who supported the Japanese emperor over the Tokugawa clan-led shogunate government that ruled politically the country during the Edo period. “[The actor's] *katana* was placed in an orientation that could be easily unsheathed. That was impressive. He wasn't really in combat, but it felt like it,” Kyokuchō remembers. Visitors can also watch and participate in a traditional Japanese dice gambling game known as *chō-han* alongside actors— a spectacle that is only staged for the special event and that adds to the night-time pleasure district atmosphere in Edo Town's theater area. They can purchase alcohol and festival snacks at outdoor food and drinks stands, some of which are not sold during regular

¹⁰ See <http://samurai-film.com/>

¹¹ See <https://www.samurai-pj.com/zazen>

opening hours. Furthermore, an additional *oiran* (high-ranking courtesan) procession and a pleasure boat ride time slot give visitors a different experience of O-Edo at night.

Merging Edo Theme With Real Life

Real life often merges into the extraordinary context of tourist destinations and themed spaces. Japanese museums and themed parks often host local community events such as concerts, traditional theater performances, and crafting experiences. Although Edo Town does not organize many community events, it inscribes its Edo theme on real-life social practices, the Japanese seasons, and Japanese people's ideal relationship with the natural environment.

At Edo Town, children can participate in activities re-creating an Edo version of their education and life milestones. School groups typically join a *terakoya* (a Buddhist-run school) experience, where students, after changing into Edo-style kimonos, learn traditional Japanese proverbs in a re-created school room with staff members as Edo-era teachers. The historical themed park also offers a ninja-themed coming-of-age ceremony package, called the Ninja Shichi-Go-San, for children and their parents. The Shichi-Go-San is a Japanese life milestone celebration for three-year-old boys and girls, five-year-old boys, and seven-year-old girls, who customarily visit a Shinto shrine with their parents while dressed in a ceremonial kimono. At Edo Town, the children change into ninja clothing before visiting a shrine on the premises. They then join a ceremony with a ninja master (played by an actor), take commemorative photos, and eat a specially-prepared traditional Japanese cuisine lunch together to celebrate the occasion.

Visitors participate in special events to mark the seasons and Japanese traditions. During *setsubun*, a holiday in February to celebrate the passing of winter, an employee playing a shrine maiden guides visitors in throwing beans at a demon's image while proclaiming *fuku wa uchi*,

oni wa soto (luck inside, demon outside). This cultural custom, known as *mamenage*, also takes place annually in real life. Visitors can also make *ehōmaki* (lucky direction rolls), which are long sushi rolls that are eaten during *setsubun* while pointed in that year's lucky direction. In the past few years, Edo Town has held an Edo-themed Halloween event where visitors receive discounted admission if they arrive wearing costumes of Edo People-like characters and *yōkai* (Japanese supernatural beings that include ghosts, demons and spirits). They can do a *mononoke* (a type of Japanese spirit) scavenger hunt and rent the costumes of Japanese demons and other supernatural beings.¹²

Edo Town's themed environment not only indexes cultural customs to communicate an Edo-like Japanese identity, but also re-enacts a "naturalcultural contact zone" (Haraway 2008). The aim is to show how Edo culture symbolizes a Japanese co-existence with Nature (what is not civilization) and with each other. After giving a special lecture to its employees about the Edo period's forest culture, an environmental activist reflects in an essay that the historical themed park's surrounding forest grounds can potentially become a cultural resource for visitors to experience Edo period society's close connection with Nature. The architect Azby Brown echoes similar views in his book *Just Enough: Lessons in Living Green from Traditional Japan*, which was published first in English and later translated into Japanese. He argues that a "mentality" of "just enough" existed during the Edo period — exemplified by sustainable natural resource management, urban planning, and the samurai's "frugal" lifestyle — which "encouraged humility, considered waste taboo, suggested cooperative solutions, and found meaning and satisfaction in a beautiful life in which the individual took just enough from the world and not more" (Brown 2009, 10).

¹² The open-air architectural museum Meiji Mura and the Toei Kyoto Studio Park also hold Halloween events that incorporate Japanese supernatural beings.

Characters, animals, plants, and objects are used to curate social spaces in Japanese gardens (c.f. Hendry 2000), marine animal parks (c.f. Davis 1997; Ong 2017), and now at historical themed parks like Edo Town. Its *shōkagai* zone, though a historical merchant district re-creation, consists of traditional Japanese architecture buildings surrounded by numerous potted plants, small trees, shrubs, and rainwater collection barrels. The combination of urban architecture, human inventions for managing water resources, and greenery communicates a Japanese past when human civilization and Nature existed in harmony.

This disguises the fact that Edo Town itself is a built environment. Its operating company actively borrows from and manages the natural environment so that the themed environment evokes the Japanese seasons, which are highly commodified by the tourism industry. The hills surrounding the Edo Town are the site of paths leading to mines that were active until the beginning of the 20th century. However, they have since been overgrown with trees, shrubs, and other vegetation that visually demarcate the themed environment's boundaries. Trees growing on mountains at a distance, which are visible from inside Edo Town, turn red during the *kōyō* (autumn leaf) season and become a part of the historical themed park's seasonal atmosphere. During fieldwork, I help to take photos of the Japanese maple trees growing on a hill that appeared "beautiful," as specified by an employee, and to mark them with red spray paint so that they will not be replaced by other maple trees. After all the new maple trees are planted, the employee explains, the area will appear aesthetically pleasing for visitors passing through in autumn. The operating company has also planted cherry and ginkgo trees throughout Edo Town. During the *sakura* (cherry blossom) season in April, visitors crowd onto Edo Town's re-created bridges to photograph themselves in Edo-style costumes against the backdrop of cherry blossoms. They also do this with the Japanese maple and ginkgo trees during the fall leaf season. Several

regulars annually photograph one particular ginkgo tree with striking, large yellow leaves to commemorate their autumn visits.

The Edo People characters played by actors and frontline service workers enact a mutual co-existence with Nature. Dressed in kimonos and Edo-like hairstyles, they can be seen admiring cherry blossoms and autumn leaves— images promoted on Edo Town’s social media pages, captured by visitor cameras, and, as mentioned above, re-enacted by visitors. They converse with casual visitors about the current year’s timing for cherry blossoms and autumn leaves to appear. Visitors also photograph Edo People sweeping autumn leaves into neat piles, rainwater into a re-created canal, and snow to the side of the path with traditional Japanese rush brooms. They watch Edo People water shrubs and potted plants using bamboo ladles and water scooped from the rainwater collection barrels. The landscaping machines used to maintain the themed environment’s greenery are only visible and audible outside of its operating hours. Such care-taking of Nature is both a “front stage” performance producing a “staged authenticity” (MacCannell 1973) for visitors and a “backstage” preparation chore. Edo Town’s staff must maintain their workplace facilities, interact with visitors in character, and re-enact Japan’s past within a staged naturalcultural space.

Edo Town’s operating company has implemented more Edo-themed events and has planned projects that guide visitors’ engagement with Nature. In one fall festival event, the historical themed park’s restaurants served Edo vegetables (*Edo yasai*), which are vegetables that were cultivated historically in the city Edo and now branded as traditional, in a food experience demonstrating the connection between Edo culture and Nature. Another nascent project, according to a magazine article, is a reconstruction of the *satoyama*— a forested area or flatland that was historically used by Japanese villagers for agriculture and natural resource management.

Recent *satoyama* revitalization movements in Japan, according to Brown (2009) and Satsuka (2014), aim to recover its ecosystem as well as Japanese people's awareness of their close relationship with Nature and each other. Satsuka (2014) argues that one such project, where volunteers grow *matsutake* mushrooms to reconstruct *satoyama* forests, is "rewinding time" (91) since it revives common ecological and social space that had disappeared due to postwar industrialization. Edo Town's future *satoyama* reconstruction, according to the magazine article, will similarly allow visitors to experience Edo period society's close relationship with Nature and its ecologically sustainable lifeways. The article names several potential cultural activities, including a forest industry experience with staff nature guides, Edo vegetable cultivation, and an experience entered on the *sumiyaki*— a charcoal kiln used to burn trees that have been weeded out in order to produce charcoal. Edo Town's company president also expresses his hopes that this experience will provide a communal space for visitors to learn about the charcoal kiln's traditional role in cooking and driving away insects.

Edo As Place-Based Cultural Theme

This chapter shows that evolving interpretations and mediated representations of the Edo period have informed Edo Town's staging of its themed environment. The Edo theme is not only 264 years from Japan's past, but an organizing concept. It references several strands of historical memory and consumption practices that surfaced in postwar Japan, while symbolizing an authentic Japanese cultural identity and heritage that is alternate to westernization. This is seen in Edo Town's selective borrowing of a peaceful, commoner-centered atmosphere and specific settings from *jidaigeki*, as well as in the kind of social interactions staged between visitors and Edo People characters. Contemporary films, television series, manga, anime, and video games

with Edo elements now also condition visitor expectations and the historical themed park's hosting of popular culture collaboration events.

Edo Town offers embodied experiences showing visitors that Edo has not remained in Japan's distant past. Visitors can access and participate in Edo-themed cultural experiences, under the themed environment and the Edo People's guidance. The historical themed park allows them to engage in extraordinarily Edo-themed variations of social practices, the natural environment, and the Japanese seasons, merging together the Japanese past and present as well as themed fantasy and real life.

Chapter 2 - Animating Edo People

Kitasuke The Yo-Yo Seller: Working On And As A Character

Te-guru-guru-guru-maaaa! Kitasuke the yo-yo street seller cries out in a sing-song voice. He skips cheerfully around Edo Town's streets, holding a small wicker basket full of yo-yos (*teguruma*) and with each leg turning in exaggerated circles. Visitors, many of them children as well as women in their 20s and 30s, flock around him—amused at his antics. Edo People smile when they hear Kitasuke's sales cry from afar.

Kitasuke has become suddenly popular with Edo Town's visitors, although the *gaichū* actor has been working there for only about a month. He boasts that he has sold so many yo-yos in one day that he has to restock them from the store room, which as he heard, has not happened in a long time. "So many people have added me on Twitter since I started doing this," he tells me of his developing fan base. He updates a Twitter account for them, with announcements about his acting gigs and his personal reflections on life as a fledgling actor. Repeaters are now talking to him more frequently than when he was the samurai Kitazaemon. As Momo the townswoman, I met the *gaichū* actor when he was in this main role as Kitazaemon. I also call him by this name outside of Edo Town's operating hours and context, and it will be used from hereon to refer to him. Similarly, he calls me Momo-san both inside and outside the historical themed park.

"Why was Kitasuke so *genki* (energetic and cheerful)?" I ask him after work hours. He replies, "A street seller [must earn] money for his job, right? He's not so wealthy and wants to sell yo-yos. To get attention, he needs to be energetic. If he's not energetic, then he will have money problems. If he struggles hard, acts lively, and has fun, then I think a lot of customers will come. I play [the role] while feeling this."

The singsong sales cry and skipping movements stop abruptly after a week, and Edo Town's streets fall silent. When I ask Kitazaemon what happened, he tells me that a *senpai* (more senior co-worker) reprimanded him because his "loud" voice was disturbing the customers. I remember that before Kitazaemon's arrival, other *gaichū* actors assigned to the same role all walked quietly around Edo Town's streets and said *teguruma* lightly to nearby visitors. I wonder, is this an operating company guideline for the role? Kitazaemon shrugs and informs me proudly that a company-affiliated actor with many years of professional experience in films had approvingly told him to continue what he is doing. At the same time, he seems to understand that good acting is not always institutionally approved as good customer service at Edo Town.

This chapter analyzes the character labor that takes place at Edo Town, what the frontline service worker-townswoman O-Nori refers to as the staff's "characterization" (*kyarakutā-ka*) into Edo People. Character labor is animated, where people-as-characters cross virtual/material boundaries,¹ as well as move and speak through modified character-like agencies. Being Edo People is a basic requirement for Edo Town's staff, whether they are employed full-time, part-time, or on contract. Actors, office staff, service workers, janitors, and even the shuttle bus driver transporting visitors to Edo Town are assigned Edo-themed roles.

Nozawa (2013) calls for an analysis of "characterized people" where "character-centric perspectives" illuminate "a politics of characterization in its relation to power, to capitalism, and to technology" ("Conclusion," paragraph 5). Institutions control its workers' appearance, mindsets, and movements. Edo Town's operating company designates staff members' character types and sets the parameters for their Edo-themed names (Edo names from here). It also

¹ See Manning and Gershon (2017) on character avatars in massively multiplayer online games; Nozawa (2013) on dating simulation game characters and online video personas; and Sandlin and Garlen (2018) on the Walt Disney Company's use of Mickey Mouse and other characters in media productions and theme parks to establish relationships with consumers.

determines their Edo-like Japanese appearances, worldviews, and the guidelines for the Edo-like speech that must be used with visitors. Rather than performing their selves through externalized characters, the staff — especially actors and frontline service workers — learn to develop a *sense* of Edo-like Japaneseness for projecting to and for socializing with visitors. It must also fall within company interpretations of Japan’s past. Similar to the voice actors who are recognized as the people “inside” the licensed anime characters to which they give voice, the staff are subsumed or “effaced” (Nozawa 2013) inside their Edo People’s institutionally-defined identities and basic traits. Kitasuke exists because the actor molds himself into the character framework of an Edo period yo-yo seller that is usually assigned to *gaichū* actors. The actor’s body wears the townsman’s kimono and head cloth, while holding the basket of yo-yos. His voice vocalizes the sales cry that all come with the role.

Adopting human-like and non human-like forms, characters (*kyara* or *kyarakutā* in Japanese) are non-living communicative interfaces often used for forging social connections and shaping consumer subjectivities (Nozawa 2013). Many cross the boundary between real/material and fantasy/virtual worlds. They are ubiquitous in Japan and other East Asian countries, branding corporations, products and places as well as transmitting information on street signs (Nozawa 2013; Occhi 2012; Silvio 2010). Characters became “healing” (*iyashi*) objects in Japan from the 2000s onward, after a prolonged recession weakened the home and workplace as social support networks and the 3.11 disasters in Fukushima further exposed these fractures (Occhi 2012). Additionally, staged interactions with “characterized people” (Nozawa 2013) and anthropomorphized animals are now more widespread in commercial “third spaces” such as maid and cat cafés (also see Chapter 7).

Although the Edo People evoke *jidaigeki* character types in flesh and behavior, they are spatially and temporally bound to Edo Town. They exhibit a “character malleability across different contexts” (Nozawa 2013), as they represent Edo Town’s operating company within the historical themed park, on advertisements, as well as in cultural spectacles and tourism fairs held in Japan and across Asia. Inside the Edo-themed environment, they engage visitors in warm social interactions associated with Japan’s past, especially Edo Town’s interpretation of Edo-like behaviors as quintessentially Japanese. To accomplish this, many actors and frontline service workers are expected to animate Edo People into social existences by adding back stories and individual mannerisms into their assigned character types. As characters, the staff animate a range of roles— from those that efficiently (and sometimes automatically) fulfill specific functions from greeting visitors to those evoking Japaneseness and improvising social interactions that respond contingently to visitor behavior. Despite the word “Edo” in their appellation, these characters are not people literally “resurrected” from Japan’s past but personas that are created to fulfill present-day institutional and consumer needs.

This chapter first explores how Edo People animate Edo Town in becoming the objects of *fureai* (mutual, social contact) for visitors and their varying extents of character animacy based on the “inside” staff’s position within the operating company. It then discusses the frontline staff’s relationship to their Edo People characters, since they interact the most with visitors in character within the themed environment. Their character identities are alternate and partial versions of themselves that exist and are merged within the work context of Edo Town. The chapter next turns to the animation in character labor, which develops a character’s bodily and emotional senses that play out between scripted lines— a process overlapping with Edo Town’s flexible style of attending to customers according to their contingent needs. It then examines how

the frontline staff translate their developed Edo-like Japanese senses into social interactions as they fill in their character frameworks, while they balance their work of animating the themed environment's extraordinary qualities and of carrying out repetitive, mundane tasks. Finally, the chapter analyzes the moments when character labor reaches its limits when the unequal dynamic between service workers and customers surface and the stresses of being in character accumulate in the staff's bodies and minds, requiring them to make adaptations.

The Labor Of Edo People Characters

The frontline service worker-townswoman O-Nori contrasts Edo Town's atmosphere with that of the "movie village" Shōnai Eigamura in Yamagata Prefecture. She elaborates,

There are no living people there. If [people] know that this place appears in a movie, [they] may react 'Ah, that's good.' But they would just think, *he~*. Feelings aren't possible and there aren't moving experiences (*kandō taiken*). People are looking for this.... I want to create a living place [at Edo Town]. This would pass along Japanese culture.... [I'm] thinking about the customers, the kind of people they are looking for...as a Japanese person, as a created character an Edo Person. [The customers] enjoy encountering them...

Okuno (2012) distinguishes Edo Town from other Japanese themed parks since it uses a "human labor-intensive strategy" with actors, rather than "high-tech" attractions such as roller coasters.

The Edo People's work is to socialize with visitors within the context of Edo Town's fictional world, transmitting the atmosphere of Japan's past. They often animate staged spaces and objects for visitors, becoming models in how to participate in this extraordinary Edo-themed world. I witness an actor-innkeeper approach a Japanese couple and invite them to stay at his inn for the night. He informs them that it costs 20 *ryō* (archaic Japanese currency predating the yen) and that fish is on the dinner menu. Although the visitors only chuckle, this encourages them to explore the building interior. As they reach to open a back door (leading to a staff-only storage

area), the innkeeper warns them that the *jidaigeki* character Okin-san is taking her bath inside and will be angry if they enter. Their fictional premise and their improvised interactions with visitors based on their actions and responses distinguish the Edo People from living history museum personas (based on actual people) that explain history to visitors from a standardized script and animated characters that go through media narratives with pre-determined beginnings, middles, and endings.

The Edo People's animacy depends on the staff's institutional status and sometimes on visitor responses, which differs from at the maid café where all servers are female part-time workers and act fully as maid characters with visitors (Galbraith 2011, 2013). There are three types of Edo People at Edo Town: 1) Named characters usually from *jidaigeki* (e.g. the corrupt merchant Echigoya); 2) General character types that can be developed into fuller Edo-like personas (e.g. townspeople and samurai); and 3) Positions using Edo-like appearances but where minimal character labor is expected (e.g. a janitor who wears an Edo period laborer costume in the background, speaking to visitors only if necessary). Office staff, *haken* (temporary dispatch) workers, shuttle drivers, janitorial staff exhibit the least "characterization" since they socialize the least with visitors inside the Edo-themed environment. *Haken* workers are typically employed for a week or two during peak tourist periods, mostly assigned to the historical themed park's restaurants to take visitors' food orders and to help with clean-up in the back kitchens. The office staff works in a building located separate from the Edo-themed environment, handling back-end tasks such as ticket sales, human resources, budgeting, and publicity that seldom require them to act in character for visitors. Their kimonos, Edo names, Edo-like hairstyles are merely façades for work and these staff members are rarely motivated to act Edo-like. A *haken* worker based in one of Edo Town's restaurants comments that her work is "not different from a

regular restaurant... It is only the kimono.” An office employee similarly remarks, “Inside the office, it’s just a regular company. Everyone is sitting in front of a computer. The only difference is that we’re all wearing a kimono.” She and other office employees tend to use each other’s actual, and not Edo, names when addressing each other at work.

Most company-affiliated actors and some *gaichū* actors juggle several Edo People characters, the former often over one work day. They can also be reassigned to different characters, according to Edo Town’s operational needs. Like with Kitazaemon and Kitasuke, another *gaichū* actor is being a townsman named Akakichi when I meet him at a cultural experience attraction. He tells me later that he used to be the samurai Akazaemon when staffing one attraction and the ninja Akarinmaru when helping to lead a ninja experience activity at the historical themed park. The company-affiliated actor Hattori-san acts as a ninja in one show, a *jidaigeki* character in another, and a samurai for the historical themed park’s opening and closing ceremonies. If he does not have to act these specialized roles during the day, he walks around as a townsman inside Edo Town. In separate conversations with me, he and fellow company-affiliated actor Ebisu-san point out that they can only develop *jidaigeki* character roles in a limited manner compared to what the former calls “original” roles such as samurai and ninja. They must follow the personalities and back stories that have been previously established in the Japanese historical drama genre. Ebisu-san elaborates, “If it’s Echigoya, then it’s an evil character in *jidaigeki*. If it’s Tōyama no Kin-san, then it’s an ally of justice. These are the images held by the customers and I make sure not to ruin them.”

Nevertheless, a persona can stick to an individual actor if fans express a preference for the actor in that character. The regular Aya-san has seen Hattori-san as his various characters, but prefers his ninja persona’s image. She tells me that Hattori-san as a ninja is more *kakkōii*

(cool) than his other characters. When actors are reassigned to other roles and attractions, adopting new Edo names and personas as a result, their former ones can remain with specific repeaters and staff if they have become too used to and cannot move on from the old character.

The frontline staff's character labor occurs during real-time social interactions with customers. Being Edo People involves more than acting out predetermined character traits. It is framed by an improvised Edo-themed social contact with visitors that goes beyond the "emotion work" (Hochschild 1983) performed by service workers. In his analysis of maid café characters, Galbraith (2013) differentiates the affective labor done by the Japanese maid café's female servers from such emotion work because "maids are not trained and disciplined by corporate employers to control themselves and their relations with customers. Rather, the maid articulates her own character and interacts with customers in her own way based on her own understanding of the character" (121). Edo Town's frontline staff are similarly responsible for animating their skeleton character framework into unique, fictional characters through their bodies and interpretations of Edo-like behaviors appropriate for the historical themed park. The operating company does not provide to the staff an acting manual covering all social situations nor biographical information like in the "character scores" used by actors at the American living history museum Colonial Williamsburg (see Teunissen 2010). Edo People roles come with comparatively few details, such as the character type to be, the costumes and props wear, as well as the location-specific Edo-like greetings to use with visitors.

Alternate, Partial Selves Inside Characters

Japanese characters are sometimes given human-like traits, becoming anthropomorphized (see Occhi 2012). Contrastingly at Edo Town, humans — both Japanese people from the past

and its staff — are layered with character traits to become Edo People. The operating company directs the parts of the staff's selves that fit into its “Edo-like” character parameters, more so than the Japanese maid cafés where its maid-server characters are “both a fictional character and a form of self-expression” (Galbraith 2013, 115). However, Edo People characters become less alien especially to Edo Town's frontline staff the longer they spend working in character. Galbraith (2011) describes the maid server-characters as “outside of the self that judges it” (paragraph 32) and points out that his interlocuters identify with their characters as “like themselves” (*jibun rashi*). Although Edo Town's staff do not use these exact words, many spoke about “becoming used to” (*nareru*) their Edo People personas. A service worker-townswoman Aki-chan remembers that she did not recognize herself when she first saw herself in the mirror wearing her character type's kimono and hairstyle. She eventually became more comfortable with herself in character, after repeating everyday the motions of putting on her kimono and interacting in character with visitors.

Edo Town's staff merge with their characters through their bodies. Envisioning his samurai character as one who constantly trains for his survival, Kitazaemon works to naturalize his body to the repetitive motions of swinging a foam baton or a wooden sword all day. Using the former, he competes with visitors to be the first to hit and burst paper balloons strapped to each other's arms. When there are no visitors to compete with, he practices up-and-down swings with a wooden sword for potential spectators and bodily training to inhabit his character. He remembers frequently experiencing muscle pain at the beginning of his contract especially as someone without previous kendo training, but he feels that he is “transforming into the shape” (*katachi ni natteiru*) as he becomes both physically stronger and more the character Kitazaemon.

This bodily merging enables actors to communicate with visitors through their characters and even integrate their perceptions of the Edo period. A company-affiliated actor-ninja, Oe, wants to show visitors that ninjas “live in a shadowy place” that constantly straddles the boundary between life and death. Referring to the scroll that appears in Edo Town’s ninja action show, she elaborates, “For the sake of the secret written in the scroll, [ninjas] truly risk their lives. Ninjas possess much more inner strength than [people] expect... I think about [their existence as] not for anyone’s sake, but for a mission.” Since the ninja action show features no spoken lines, Oe uses her entire body to reach her audience— for example, hiding her face when her character masquerades as a farmer in order to show them the ninja’s attempt to erase its existence.

Many frontline staff explain that they become alternate and partial versions of themselves when inside characters. O-Taru, a *haken* worker-Edo era shop girl, reflects, “I am different from my usual self, but I can’t force myself too much.... I act like my true self but try to leave a good impression when attending to customers.” The *gaichū* actor Kitazaemon explains that he “holds oneself” (*jibun wo motsu*), a Japanese expression loosely translating to being confident and self-reassured, as Kitazawa Genki (his personal name) inside his character Kitazaemon the Edo Person samurai at Edo Town.

Kitazaemon: There’s actually no one who knows everything about the samurai. There aren’t any *Edo-Jin* in the world now.

Heidi as Momo: *Edo-Jin?*²

Kitazaemon: There aren’t real, living people from the Edo People anymore, right?

Heidi as Momo: They aren’t alive.³

² I am checking whether he was talking about Edo Town’s Edo People characters or people from the Edo period in Japan’s past.

³ I repeat Kitazaemon’s words to encourage him to elaborate.

Kitazaemon: Yes... no one [now] has ever since a samurai or a *tono* (noble lord).

Heidi as Momo: Yes, there isn't.

Kitazaemon: That's right. Edo Town's samurai is created. It's not real. Even if I'm told that I'm not like a samurai (*samurai ppokunai*) and [even] if I ask, 'What's a samurai?'... there can be many answers... A 100% samurai — no one knows what that is. When I become a samurai, when I think about what to do, if [I have] to be a full samurai — I wouldn't be able to do anything... It wouldn't be interesting. It wouldn't leave an impression. My style now is: [I] "hold" 30% or 50% Kitazawa Genki [and] look at sources about samurai. [I] imagine that the samurai's motions are probably like [this certain way]. While picturing this, I'm creating — Kitazawa Genki plus samurai — the Kitazaemon now.

Like Edo Town's company representative Tanaka-san, Kitazaemon points out the temporal impossibility of present-day people to actually meet people from the past. He exposes the ambiguity contained within the word *Edo-Jin* (Edo People), which can refer to Japanese people who lived during the Edo period *and* Edo Town's characters. Existing in this ambiguous zone, Kitazaemon the samurai character becomes the medium through which the actor and visitors can together relate to the Edo-like atmosphere and to each other while inside the themed environment.

The "characterization" of Edo Town's staff into Edo People results in characters that exceed the former's partial selves. O-Nori, the frontline service worker-townswoman, feels proud of passing on traditional Japanese culture through her interactions with both Japanese and overseas visitors. When they merge into their characters, they show visitors how they can perceive and engage with the fictional Edo-themed world around them. They also demonstrate to visitors how to become their own characters inside a setting based on an idealized and extraordinary Japanese past.

Developing *Kankaku*: Animating The Space Between The Lines

The company-affiliated actor Ebisu-san is reflecting on what the frontline staff do as Edo People. They re-enact "...the part that is not written in the manual, the part that is not written in the script. Reading the space between the lines (*gyōkan wo yomu*) is a way of putting it," he says. The company-affiliated actor-ninja Oe also explains,

On a real stage, the things to do have been decided. The things that happen have also been decided. The conclusion is also decided. But here [at Edo Town], it's not like this. [Edo Town] itself becomes the stage. Something that happens at a certain time becomes the story at that moment. [We] don't know the ending and [it] becomes unfinished.

Galbraith (2013) writes about the Japanese maid café characters develop social relationships with their customers through staged contexts, including purchasable social interactions made available on an entertainment menu for patrons (110-111). However, character labor at Edo Town involves more unscripted elements since such an interaction menu does not exist. Visitors cannot purchase specific social interactions with certain Edo People, nor can they always predict what will happen during their social encounters.

Animation, as it brings characters to life, means more than acting external narratives, scripted lines, and correct emotional states adopted in the "emotion work" (Hochschild 1983) of service labor. As the people inside characters, Edo Town's staff — especially the actors and frontline service workers — learn to develop an internal sense (*kankaku*) so that they can merge into alternate existences. This alterity also frames improvised social interactions with visitors. Developing *kankaku* in animation is to move one's own mind and body, as well as that of others. The Edo People framework manipulates the staff's actions, words, emotional states, and world perceptions while they are in character. The company-affiliated actor Hattori-san, who has been an actor for more than 20 years, tells me that he has difficulty describing his acting process in

words because “[I’m] the type who does [it] by *kankaku*.... I’m not the kind of person who overthinks. I [do it] from inspiration or from how I feel... I imagine it myself. This person is probably like this.” *Gaichū* actor-traditional street performer Sane-san similarly tells me that his show, in which he plays a quack toad oil salesman, would be over in five minutes if he only spoke the words in the script. He socializes with his audience by improvising “idle stories” (*yokeina neta*). It is different every time, he explains, but for example, he would talk about the *katana* that he uses for the show at the beginning, follow the actual street performance script in the middle, and then talk again about the *katana* at the end. As the actor Stella Adler (2000) writes, “It’s not words that make a performance. Even the best actor cannot put into words everything he knows, for what the well-prepared and thoughtful actor knows about his character is a hundred times more complicated than the words in the playscript” (103).

The Edo People move visitors’ role from external spectators to Edo-like participants who are merged sensually into the fictional Edo-themed environment. Several interlocuters emphasize their efforts to “move” (*kandōsaseru*) the visitors. The *haken* worker-Edo era shop girl O-Taru explains that seeing the visitors’ excitement at, what to them are, unfamiliar scenes, sensations, people, and words motivate her to be more deeply in character and to immerse her customers further into Edo Town’s world. Frontline service worker-townswoman O-Nori aims to create a “moving experience” (*kandō taiken*) for her customers that will exceed their expectations. As an Edo Person, she speaks in a more casual tone than the one usually used by service workers in Japan. She explains, “Instead of [customers] being served, this will leave an impression as ‘ah, this is different.’”

As characters, Edo Town’s staff manipulate their tone of voice to connect with visitors and actors frequently practice voice projection to accomplish this. One strategy for expressing a

character's identity is to modulate the voice's pitch and depth. Hattori-san explains, "As a ninja, [I] speak lower. But if I'm a townspeople, [I] speak higher. A lightness or a heaviness comes out." Some frontline service workers, although they do not undergo actor voice training, also learn to enunciate their words with an Edo-like tone similar to that adopted by the actors. They describe this tone as an overly-friendly (*narenareshī*) and frank (*furanku*) way of speaking. Some of them call younger visitors *onīsan* (brother) and *onēsan* (sister), terms of address used to communicate familiarity even if the other person is not a biological family member. Others add energy to their voices. The *haken* worker-Edo era shop girl O-Hana exaggerates her speech and imitates the merchant Echigoya's loud and evil tone when greeting customers at the souvenir shop where she works, as a way of connecting with them.

This Edo-like tone is transposed from *jidaigeki* dialog to the animation of an alternate sociality in Japan. Harkness (2014) shows that the embodied human voice and its cultivated tonal qualities is framed by socialities, cultural categories, and perceptions of national identity in Christian Korea. In Edo Town's context, the Edo People's use of an Edo-like tone is a commentary on the social distance that exists between people in modern, westernized, and urbanized Japan— one missing the same warmth, familiarity, and directness evoking a communal Japanese identity like in the past. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, these feelings were also commodified through the image of the rural *furusato* (home village) and the urban *shitamachi* in Tokyo (Creighton 1997; Sand 2013). Frontline staff and regulars contrast the friendly Edo-like tone heard at Edo Town with the polite and distant tones used in everyday customer service contexts in Japan. The service worker-townswoman O-Nori distinguishes Edo People from Tokyo Disneyland's cast; the latter are employees — not characters — who treat

their customers generically and never exaggerate their speech to leave an impression as Edo People aim to do.

The friendly and casual Edo-like tone can be surprising to visitors who initially expect Edo Town's staff to use the standard polite and distant customer service tone with them. O-Nori uses the unanticipated Edo-like tone to direct unruly customers' attention towards her when she explains the procedure and tips for the shooting and throwing game attractions that she staffs. She knows from experience that these visitors are more likely to miss the target and lose the game if they do not listen to her. Then they would complain that they did not win any prizes although they have paid the attraction fee, which would require her to appease them verbally. The Edo-like tone thus serves a dual purpose for O-Nori— minimizing conflicts with customers and animating the Edo Person that she inhabits.

Using their *kankaku*, the frontline staff also contingently adjust their character's responses to their customers' actions, moods, and needs. There is no distinction between acting Edo-like as characters and attending to visitors. Ebisu-san argues that good customer service would have been equally expected during the Edo period. He contrasts Edo Town's flexible style of characterized customer service with employee manuals used by large companies such as McDonald's that dictate standardized customer procedures. "McDonald's employees always ask customers if they will eat in-store every time, even if it's one person buying ten hamburgers and no one ever eats all ten at once in the store," he contends, "There's nothing like this here [at Edo Town]. We must pay attention to the customers. There are ten [hamburgers]. This person won't eat all of them and will probably bring some home. [We'd ask,] 'How should we separate the number [of hamburgers] to be taken home?' The imagination is put to work."

Accordingly, the frontline staff match their words, behavior, and reactions to different visitors and circumstances. O-Taru acts casually with younger visitors, but gives formal and polite explanations to older visitors and to those wearing “distinguished and luxurious-looking” clothing. The service worker Ken-san initiates conversations based on the visitors’ situation. If he sees a couple returning their costumes hours before closing time, he explains, he points out that they have returned early. If they tell him that they are planning to visit Terada’s heritage sites, he advises them that it closes early. Edo Town’s frontline staff also pay special attention to visitors who are wearing costumes rented from Edo Town. The frontline service worker-townswoman O-Nori speaks in more casual speech forms with visitors in townspeople costumes than those wearing samurai-rank costumes as befitting of her character. “Ahh, ninja-san. You seem strong. You look *kakkōii*. You look cute,” Ken-san re-creates for me what he would say to a child wearing a ninja costume. He also points out that positive attention to children makes their parents happy, which is important for Edo Town’s reputation since many of its customers are Japanese families with young children.

Responding to visitors’ body movements is another way of conducting Edo Town’s flexible and characterized customer service. The *gaichū* actor-samurai Kitazaemon is uninterested in winning the paper balloon hitting contest with visitors, which he points out was the case for some of his *gaichū* actor predecessors working at the same attraction. He always waits for visitors to act first, so that he can respond to their needs through his observation of their movements. “The people who come at me [right away] are easy to figure out. I can act,” he explains, “For the people who don’t, I move and see what they do.... If they don’t move, I make sounds and see how they react. This is communication.” He then adjusts his movement style to

accommodating what he has categorized as the visitors' shy, aggressive, or concentrated approach in order to maximize their enjoyment.

Ebisu-san draws a parallel between the frontline staff anticipating their customers' desires and actors imagining their characters' motivation. He is interested in human psychology, topics such as how men and women think differently, because this helps him provide services to customers. Pointing out that actors often engage in "people observation" (*ningen kansatsu*), he asks me, "Do you know that people cry in different ways? ... There are children who go *wah!* And there are those who [do] *samezame*." He sniffs to show me what the onomatopoeia expression *samezame* in quiet crying sounds like. "It's the actor's job," he continues, "What are the circumstances right now? How is [the person] crying? What is the most fitting thing to do in this situation? We must calculate all of this."

Besides responding to visitors, actors at Edo Town use their physical bodies and movements to express their characters' inner sense. Adler (2000) calls this aspect of acting "physicalizing the emotions" (126), an idea that resonates with Hochschild (1983)'s argument that emotions are a cognitive sense linked with the bodily senses (219). Like how Ebisu-san has hinted with the different ways of crying, Kitazaemon argues that emotions inherently *move* the body, bring up the characters in the Japanese word *kandō* (感動) which means to move someone or to be moved emotionally. He explains, "Fear, sadness, irritation — these are all *kandō*. [The characters] are written as 'feelings moving (感情の動[き]・*kanjō no ugo[ki]*)' Crying is a kind of moving feeling. Being angry — your feelings become hot." Company-affiliated actor Hattori-san similarly believes that only using words in acting is "too easy" because this conveys only surface meanings without expressing the character "inside." When he is in character as a

ninja who does not speak, he, like Oe, attunes his body movements, such as his walking rhythm, to reflect his character's sense of his surrounding world.

Sometimes, Edo Town's actors behave contrary to visitors' stereotyping expectations of how certain characters should act. They do this to make deeper impressions on visitors and to possibly prolong their social contact. A company-affiliated actor who used to play the merchant Echigoya tells me that at times, he intentionally acted opposite from the popular-held image of the *jidaigeki* character as an evil and greedy person. He explains, "For example, I politely helped [visitors]. When I do this, [they thought], 'Ah, Echigoya-san isn't a bad person.'" Kitazaemon points out that it is difficult for him to simultaneously entertain customers and to maintain the stereotypical silent and serious image of a samurai. "When I'm told 'bye bye' by children with serious faces [when they leave Edo Town], instead of *saraba*, [I say] *bye bye, bye bye*." When he says *saraba*, an expression often used by samurai to say "farewell" in *jidaigeki* and other media productions, he adopts the deep, brusque tone and the unsmiling face stereotypically associated with masculine samurai. His face stays unchanged and his voice remains deep, but his tone becomes cartoonish and comical when saying the words "bye, bye." Kitazaemon continues, "With this serious face, *bye bye*. Isn't this more interesting?... [If I say] *un, ja na* (yeah, see you), it would ordinarily end there. When I make this serious face, I will be asked, 'Can we take a photo?' *II yo* (Sure). With this face.... When I do this, [the customer's] smile will appear and the photo becomes enjoyable." By transforming Kitazaemon into a comical samurai, the actor plays with the discrepancy between people's stereotypical impressions of samurai and his animation of the character. He also intensifies the mutuality of the social contact that the character shares with Edo Town's visitors, as part of his character labor at Edo Town.

Without an acting manual that can be applied to all situations, Edo Town's full-time employees and company-affiliated actors are expected to learn the *kankaku* of being and interacting with visitors in character from their senior co-workers and through work experience accumulated over time. However, this also generates ambiguity in what counts as "Edo-like." Some frontline service workers reveal that they want to have an acting manual, because it would erase any uncertainty about whether they were being the company-approved version of Edo-like, contradicting the operating company's principle of developing *kankaku* in animating characters. Part-time and temporary staff, however, encounter the most uncertainty because they undergo comparatively little institutional mentoring and training in how to be Edo People characters. Although they attempt to attune to the themed environment while at work, some only realize that they were not being Edo-like in the correct manner after negative feedback from senior company members. A part-time service worker-townswoman tells me about the time when she was directed to speak in a more Edo-like manner when a senior company member overheard her using contemporary Japanese to ask visitors about the number of people in their party so that she can seat them in the restaurant where she works. She explains, "There is no training period... I had to learn everything on-site such as word usage, kimono-wearing, and customer service. Since there is no manual, I go 'Ah, is that so? Is that so?' whenever I am told something [is wrong]. Ultimately if you don't accumulate [this negative feedback], you won't know at all." Many conclude that being Edo-like means copying whatever the actors say and do. One *haken* worker explains, "I don't know what's correct and I was taught, so I think it would be okay if I imitated [the actors]. I speak the same words [as them]." These cases highlight that the performative agency that can be possible in animation is highly dependent on institutional status. Senior operating company members have more latitude to interpret for others whether something counts

as Edo-like or not since they are seen to have developed the *kankaku* of being Edo People characters, while those ranked below them are learning to merge the animation of institutionalized character frameworks with their performative expression of characterized selves in their character labor. For non-members like the part-time and *haken* workers, being a character shifts towards a mechanical animation of movements and words rather than the full character labor that is expected of the company members.

Staying In Character

“You have to be ‘high tension’ all the time,” the *haken* worker-Edo era shop girl O-Taru warns the two nervous *haken* workers who had just arrived that evening— one who will work there for two weeks and another who will extend her contract at Edo Town for another month. “High tension” (*haitenshon*) is a Japanese-made English word that means to act energetically. The two *haken* workers appear uncertain and one groans that she does not usually act this way. O-Taru tells us that the actor who plays the corrupt merchant Echigoya at the souvenir shop once reprimanded her for speaking too softly to visitors. “This is an actor’s world,” he grumbled at her. She has since realized that it is not enough to sell the souvenir shop’s merchandise and to ring up customers at the cash register. She must also *be* an Edo era shop girl who knows about and who is potentially involved in her boss Echigoya’s unscrupulous schemes that have been depicted in *jidaigeki*.

O-Taru’s cautionary tale shows the performing arts’ influence on Edo Town’s re-enactment of the past in its themed environment. Although service workers do not have acting experience, they are still expected to do character labor as Edo People. *Gaichū* actors create Edo-based backstories for their assigned characters, even if they work at attractions that require more

customer service than acting. One introduces himself to me as the Edo period craftsman Sagi. He has named after the bird painted on the Japanese candle displayed in front of the cultural experience attraction where he works. His primary responsibilities at Edo Town are to collect attraction fees, to provide visitors with candles, paint, and paintbrushes, as well as to converse with them.

Some frontline staff mention that their characters' words and actions are inspired by the energetic *Edokko* ("child of Edo") and their urban neighborhoods in the historical city Edo, which are popularly depicted in *jidaigeki* and other Japanese media. The part-time service worker-townswoman describes, "Edo Town is the kind of place [with] *gatcha gatcha*⁴ ... where an Edo-likeness comes out. It's not quietly [saying] *irasshaimase* (welcome), *kashikomarimashita* (yes, understood), *kochira he dōzo* (please come here).⁵ It's an atmosphere of *irasshai*!⁶ *Nan mei sama* (How many people)?" She transposes the image of Edo-like noisy clattering to the casual expressions used to greet visitors who enter the restaurant where she works. Her voice switches from the soft and light tone used for uttering standard customer service phrases to loud and hearty, when she demonstrates how she addresses visitors. The company-affiliated actor-ninja Oe brings up the warm social interactions between Japanese people in the past, referencing the theme of human compassion (*ninjō*) in *jidaigeki*. She attributes this to many of their communal living situation in the *nagaya* (communal tenement housing), emphasizing "They even shared the laundry space.... People who are always living together—that's the atmosphere that I'm conscious of." She also talks about the Japanese value of

⁴ A Japanese onomatopoeia expression evoking the sound of noisy clattering.

⁵ These are common Japanese expressions that are used in contemporary customer service contexts, including in retail and at restaurants.

⁶ A casual form of *irasshaimase* (welcome)

kokorozukai (a consideration for others) in Edo *shigusa*, the social etiquette practiced and passed down by Edo period merchants. On rainy days, she says, they moved to the side in narrow alleyways and tilted their umbrellas to make way for those coming in the opposite direction.

The themed environment's theatrical hypervisibility keeps many frontline service workers and actors in character. Many mention that they are "always being looked at" (*itsumo mirareteiru*) while at work as Edo People. The company-affiliated actor Hattori-san has internalized this reality since age 15, when he learned from his *senpai* (a more senior co-worker) that *itsumo mirareteiru* is a condition for being an actor. Contrasting with the anonymous and normalizing social surveillance in modern societies (Foucault 1975), the Edo People's visibility is defined by specific social interactions and extraordinariness— something with which actors are especially familiar. The frontline staff's kimonos, props, Edo-like hairstyles, and *katsura* (wig headpieces worn by actors to play *jidaigeki* characters) instantly draw the visitors' attention. Merged into the Edo-themed environment, Edo People characters become things alongside the re-created buildings, objects, plants, and surrounding scenery for the visitors to engage with. The service worker-townswoman Aki-chan mentions that visitors frequently photograph her with the restaurant building where she works. She describes the following scene, which I reconstitute here in the third-person (as if from the visitors' perception) from my notes of our conversation together.

At the restaurant entrance, an awning extends from the building roof above an open window. This is next to the restaurant doorway, which is partially covered by a *noren* (hanging store curtain). Aki-chan stands at the open window, staffing a food stand where she sells *oden* (fish cake stew) in the winter and Japanese-style shaved ice (*kakigōri*) in the summer.

Aki-chan speculates, "The customer is probably thinking that there is something different about this [scene]...and there is a townswoman together with that.... Many of them are foreigners. It's

not *nichijō* (mundane), right?” Rather than using “I” or her own name, she refers to herself in third-person as “a townswoman.” I ask her if she thinks that the visitors photograph her specifically or as part of the scenery, and she says that she believes the latter to be the case.

Being photographed, even without being asked by visitors, is a regular part of work. Edo People must be photo-ready at all times even if they are doing mundane work-related tasks such as cleaning. One day, a visitor walks up to a frontline service employee-townswoman and I (as Momo the townswoman), commenting that she must take a photograph of our very Edo-like “atmosphere” (*funiki*). We are delivering a prop to a staff member on a rainy day and are using company-issued oil paper umbrellas to keep our kimonos dry; however, the visitor is unconcerned about the errand or the practical reason for using these umbrellas. The Edo-themed environment and the Edo People condition visitors to perceive mundane actions as extraordinary.

Several actors tell me that they treat the entire themed environment as a stage, including the streets and spaces outside Edo Town’s theaters. The *haken* worker-Edo era shop girls O-Taru and O-Hana feel compelled to socialize with visitors in character because they are surrounded by actors who do this. O-Hana explains,

At [the] Echigoya [souvenir store], there are no [other] *haken* [staff]. Because it’s mostly actors — *dana-sama* (the merchant Echigoya’s title at Edo Town) and the actors who help out... I feel that I must do it and be careful about this. I actively talk to customers, ... praise their kimonos and hairstyles,⁷ and initiate conversations as customer service.

O-Taru observes and imitates these same actors; for example, she has adopted the company-affiliated actor-Echigoya’s deep and devious tone to greet visitors and to entice them to buy souvenirs.

⁷ She is referring to the visitors who have rented costumes at Edo Town.

Carrying Out Ordinary Tasks, Animating Extraordinary Environments

As Edo People, Edo Town's frontline staff navigate a blurred boundary between carrying out pre-determined mundane tasks and creating extraordinary experiences for visitors in the moment. They are aware that their work environment differs from typical offices and that real-life work crosses into fictional play. One company-affiliated actor-townswoman comments, "Why do I like working here? *Asobi mitai* (It's like play for me)." The part-time service worker-townswoman chose to work at Edo Town, because it helps to fulfill her fantasy of wearing a kimono everyday at a job that she enjoys.

The frontline staff develop relationships with each other based on both collectively re-enacting Japan's past in similar traditional Japanese clothing and sharing duties to maintain the themed environment. Service workers and actors often work together in the same area of Edo Town. At times, they launch into spontaneous exchanges with each other about daily life in O-Edo—a scene witnessed by many amused visitors. The *haken* worker-Edo era shop girl O-Hana remembers when an actor and some children "in training" as criminal-catchers suddenly approached her at the souvenir shop and they asked her for the criminal's location. She was unprepared and embarrassed, but had to improvise an answer.

Service workers appreciate the chance to work closely with actors, often observing them and admiring their skills. O-Hana regularly watches (sometimes with me) the actors set up for the daily *oiran* (high-ranking courtesan) procession in front of the souvenir shop, because she is curious which actor is playing the high-ranking courtesan that day. Many restaurant staff also watch the procession, since it occurs when the restaurants have closed for the day. During Golden Week, a busy Japanese holiday period from the end of April to the beginning of May, the service worker-townswoman Ken-san struggles to speak loud enough so that the many visitors in

the noisy room can hear him. The company-affiliated actor Ebisu-san eventually takes over with his resonant voice and the visitors listen immediately. “This is something that only actors can do,” Ken-san says to me afterward, relieved.

At the same time, the work at Edo Town can be repetitive, monotonous, and ordinary. Unlike visitors who can move to other locations, the frontline staff’s assigned roles determine their daily tasks, the explanations and sales cries uttered to visitors, and where they must remain during the work day. They follow the same routine of setting up and taking down shop signs then cleaning the areas near their work location. In winter, everyone arrives early to shovel snow to clear the paths for visitors. Many frontline staff, especially the part-time and temporary workers, reveal their unfamiliarity with Edo Town’s overall experience since they spend their entire work day in the same place. Since most employees tour the historical themed park when they first join the company, they tell me that their impressions are often outdated and they can only repeat general information if visitors ask them about new attractions. Even wearing a kimono every day, the service worker-townswoman Aki-chan comments, eventually becomes mundane.

Waiting can take up a significant portion of the work day during low tourist seasons. Slow days are tougher than the busy ones, the part-time service worker-townswoman says, because it is impossible to act like Edo People without visitors around. On these days, the frontline staff resort to routine chores like cleaning and repairs while waiting for visitors to appear. Sometimes, the only sounds inside Edo Town are of the *gaichū* actors in character as street sellers hawking their wares to the few visitors there and to the Edo People (who never buy anything). In these idle moments, the frontline staff respond playfully and ironically— “*Iranaiiii* (Don’t need this)!”

In contrast, peak tourist periods require the frontline staff to work as fast as they can. Their character-like side disappears and their work is reduced to repeated motions and words. When it is busy, Aki-chan explains, communication issues often arise and there is no time to attend fully to customers. Employees must also supervise the inexperienced *haken* staff who are only there to work temporarily, which becomes overwhelming for her. When visitors become irritated because they do not get what they want right away, the irritation spreads to her. “I end up wanting them to understand my feelings,” Aki-chan says. Her usual smile disappears. Also, her words shift from a combination of Edo-like speech and polite customer service phrases to a standard polite form that comes out curtly.

When Characterization Fades Away

Being in character reaches its limits at Edo Town when visitors become disruptive or disrespectful. The frontline staff resort to tersely stating the historical themed park’s rules whenever visitors repeatedly ignore them, for example, eating outside of permitted areas and disturbing others while drunk. Female staff sometimes encounter harassment from the male visitors who hold sexualized images of kimono-wearing Asian women in their minds, which is exacerbated by their work as actors and service employees who entertain. A drunk Japanese man attempted to tip a female actor and I for talking to him, pressing a 1000-yen bill in our hands as we uncomfortably tried to refuse. One service worker-townswoman tells me and another co-worker (also a service worker-townswoman) that a drunk, foreign customer kissed her on the cheek and that she could only snap back repeatedly with her limited English, “No, no, no, no.” The co-worker immediately replies in a shocked voice, “That isn’t Edo-like. You could cover your face with your sleeve like this.” She demonstrates the motion with her kimono sleeve,

before saying coyly, “*Iya da* (Oh no!)” The first scoffs and adds in a disgusted tone, “He asked if he could kiss me on the lips!” She also does not like touching non-Japanese male visitors, because their fingers sometimes — due to their height difference — graze part of her chest when they put their hands on her shoulders when taking photographs together. Both employees also nod knowingly when I mention that some of these visitors encircle my waist too intimately and tightly with their arms when posing in photographs together.

As the staff navigate whether to stay in character or not in these situations, they become familiar with the ugly sides of human nature. Between waves of irritated visitors during Golden Week, the service worker-townsman Ken-san sighs, “*Yappari ningen ga deru ne* (Their humanness comes out, after all).” That week, visitors have been ignoring and arguing with the staff whenever they are told that certain services have become unavailable due to visitor volume. They have also been openly expressing their annoyance at the large crowds, long-wait times, and sold-out attractions. When the staff and I informed two Japanese visitors that they arrived too late to rent costumes per Edo Town’s rules, they demanded in rage, “Does anyone know anything here?” I personally encountered insults about my accented Japanese, foreignness, and ignorance, although they were unrelated to the information about wait times and costume availability that both the Japanese employees and I were asked to provide. Confused and somewhat naively, I ask Ken-san what his words mean. Why is it human to push one’s anger onto people who are trying to help them with the relevant information? Ken-san explains patiently,

Even though this is a themed park with Edo in it, this doesn’t matter when customers unexpectedly can’t get what they want. Their humanness always comes out when they can’t afford to be generous (*jibun ni yoyū ga nai*). Whenever something doesn’t go according to what they want, they feel like they can’t afford to have that happen and they feel frustrated. They will try to do anything to get what they want. They think they can go ask another person [and another] until they hear what they want to hear.

He then asks me to imagine myself in the position of a frustrated father visiting Edo Town with his family during a national holiday. “Think about the father who has to drive for three hours in traffic, with noisy kids, to get here only to be told that he can’t get what he wants,” he says, “Who is he going to take his frustration out on? We are the easiest for him to do this. It doesn’t matter what country [the visitors] come from. It is human nature.”

At this moment, I realize that themed environments are fragile. Character labor dissolves whenever customer desires are not met and when visitors’ attitudes become nasty, overturning the warm and familiar Edo-like atmosphere that the Edo People re-enact for visitors. Ken-san names this situation as the most difficult aspect of work. Personally, he wants to give his customers what they want but cannot do so due to uncontrolled circumstances. The unequal service worker-customer dynamic also becomes visible when visitors stop treating the staff as characters. Although the staff usually break character at such moments, they must nevertheless continue to appease their customers as service workers.

The Stresses and Adaptations Of Staying In Character

While Edo Town’s frontline staff re-enact an idealized Japanese past atmosphere for visitors, they contend with stressful real-life concerns that imprint on their minds and bodies. They must reconcile the uncontrollable natural environment that surrounds them with their animation of Edo People, while confronting the effect of their characterization on their mental states. Their invisible costs are rarely discussed openly.

Bodies In The Natural Environment

Except for restaurants, theaters, and some attractions, Edo Town's themed environment is mostly located outdoors. During winter, the frontline staff work in cold temperatures (sometimes below zero degrees Celsius) in their kimonos. I discover during fieldwork that it is possible to lose most bodily sensation due to wind chill. The frontline staff often wince painfully at the painful lashings inflicted by the harsh winds on their bodies, whenever no visitors are around to see. On these days, as a *gaichū actor*-townsman advises me, one can only endure (*gaman suru*) and do one's best (*ganbaru*).

The frontline staff must stay in character despite the weather's effect on their bodies. The *gaichū actor*-street performer Sane-san shows me the goosebumps on his arms, saying that he can barely move his fingers in the cold for his show. Although some frontline staff hide their hands inside their kimono sleeves, something discouraged by Edo Town's management, he feels that this does not match his character's gregarious personality. A *gaichū actor*-samurai also tells me that he cannot do this, while showing discomfort at the strong winds blowing around us. Samurai do not hunch over and hide their hands inside their kimono sleeves, he comments, because this would "look bad" (*kakkō warui*). Over time, the frontline staff stop feeling the cold because they became habituated to it. They teach me the best places to hide warming pads inside kimonos, but they have stopped using them since the warming pads interfere with the vigorous, physical movements required for work.

The summer vacation (*natsuyasumi*) period is a prolonged peak tourist season between June and August, bringing many visitors, hot temperatures, and fatigue. The service worker-townswoman Aki-chan believes that this is the most difficult work period in any year, because the staff must work intensely in the heat without any days off. She describes, "In one month,

there are constantly many people. Also, with the heat and the continuing work days, summer is physically tough. The toughest thing about work is not showing my tired face when attending to customers. I must control my own feelings, like being in a bad mood. That is difficult.” She believes that the summer heat, the busy work schedule, and fatigue all affect her work performance.

The frontline staff are asked to remain outdoors as much as possible to interact with visitors. In fact, the *gaichū* actors spend more time outdoors than the company-affiliated actors because they are assigned to attractions and street seller roles rather than to indoor theater shows; company-affiliated actors are responsible for performing in the latter. Although the frontline staff can spend some time indoors in the winter, the historical themed park’s re-created buildings are often poorly insulated with sliding *shōji* paper doors that do not completely keep out the cold.

Bodily Injuries And Ailments

The frontline staff manage injuries and minor physical ailments as part of their work. Many expect their allergies to trigger in the early spring, which are caused by the trees and shrubs growing on the hills surrounding the historical themed park. Some developed these allergies only after they began working at Edo Town. The frontline staff attempt to hide their itchy eyes, sniffing noses, and bottles of eye drops from visitors, when the latter’s numbers are steadily increasing after the low winter season.

Another frequent condition is losing one’s voice from the common cold and overuse. The frontline staff must project their voice all the time to animate their Edo People characters and to attract visitors’ attention. Actors learn how to project their voices over colds and sore throats. “If the voice doesn’t come out here,” Sane-san explains as he points to his throat, “I’ll stretch out

and focus consciously on the stomach.... I [place] my consciousness here and the voice will loosen. It will come out.” Another trick, he tells me, is to speak slowly so that visitors can hear more easily each word.

Additionally, stunt actors — especially those who are part of the ninja action show’s cast — regularly sustain injuries from their work. Since they cannot perform in their regular shows until these injuries heal, they are often reassigned to ushering and attraction duties that are usually carried out by the junior company-affiliated actors and *gaichū* actors. There are also employees whose injuries were so severe that they cannot continue their career as company-affiliated actors and who, as a result, were transferred to mainly office-based administrative positions or given less physically demanding performance responsibilities inside the themed environment.

Fatigue

Daily character labor causes physical and mental fatigue. Material evidence of this fatigue, and the efforts to overcome this, can be found in a break area inaccessible to visitors where a large trash can is filled to the brim with empty energy drink and coffee cans that are consumed by actors and service workers alike. While all frontline staff must be ready at all times to socialize with visitors as Edo People, actors confront additional physical demands in animating more active and complex roles. The *gaichū* actor-samurai Kitazaemon comments that swinging wooden swords and foam batons up and down all day takes a toll on the body. He copes with the fatigue by imagining himself as a samurai in training who must practice these motions for his survival. As we talk about this, I cannot help but think about how this is also relevant to his survival as an actor.

The frontline staff often experience mental fatigue from being cheerful and energetic Edo People characters all day. Some interlocutors tell me that they have “B blood type” personalities, meaning that they do not like to socialize with people all the time and that they have “my pace” (*mai pēsu*) personalities where they prefer to do things their own way— traits that are incompatible with the Edo-like warmth and familiarity that they must enact as characters for work. Hochschild (1983) shows that service workers go more into character through “deep acting” or withdraw mentally from work, whenever they confront a gap between their acting and their “real” selves. While Kitazaemon copes through the former, most frontline staff delineate a clear boundary between being “on” in character and being “off.” They turn “off” when there are no visitors nearby, during break times, and outside of the historical themed park’s opening hours even if they are doing work tasks. Some avoid talking to people during their breaks and their families after work in order to have enough alone time to recharge their energy. A *haken* worker tells me that she is surprised at the sudden contrast in some actors’ “on” and “off” state. While they are always enthusiastic and friendly in front of visitors, she says that “their eyes are dead” (*me ga shindeiru*) during their breaks. A *gaichū* actor, who often makes visitors laugh with his witty jokes, complains during his lunch break in a surly manner that he does not like his assigned character role and the actor with whom he must work.

Character Labor: Contingent Mind and Body Work Under institutional Labor Regimes

This chapter discussed character labor at Edo Town, the intensive mind and body work involved when the frontline staff develop employer-approved character senses that go beyond emotion work and scripted lines. While kimonos and Edo-like hairstyles minimally animate

characters, actors and service workers animate Edo People from character types into unique characters that are ready to respond contingently to visitors in an Edo-like manner.

When people merge with Edo People characters, they embody and learn how to enact an institutional vision of Edo-like Japaneseness. Edo People also models how visitors can fully participate so that the latter, who arrive initially as time travelers exploring Edo Town, merge with their movements, speech, appearance, and perceptions. The characters not only animate the staff's minds and bodies, but also that of visitors inside the embodied experience. As we will see in Chapter 5, visitors incorporate their interpretations of Japan's past into this animated character framework while at Edo Town even if they are not fully indoctrinated into the operating company's rules.

What happened to Kitasuke and Kitazaemon? Kitasuke's existence ended after the two week-long peak tourist period, when the actor was reassigned to his previous role as Kitazaemon the samurai. Several *gaichū* actors played yo-yo sellers after that, but they were not Kitasuke. After the actor inside Kitazaemon completed his contract and left Edo Town, another male actor soon appeared at the samurai's usual spot with the same clothing and props. He had another Edo name, looked different, and had other mannerisms.

Sotsugyō (graduation) from Edo Town means the end of an Edo Person's existence *and* employment. The character's Edo name may be used in future social media interactions between actors and the fans that they have met at Edo Town, service workers and regulars, and even by ex-coworkers if the former staff member stay in touch. Some of my interlocuters still call me Momo-chan because of the Edo Town institutional context in which we became acquainted. These names, however, can also be recycled for future Edo People characters. After all, the Edo Person with the specific individual inside no longer exists as the latter has left Edo Town.

Repeaters and staff tell me, though, that they always feel strange whenever they see a different person wearing the clothing, using the props, and playing the same role as a former staff member whom they knew closely from before.

Each character's existence is tied to institutional labor arrangements and in Edo Town's case, many are dependent on the flexible and irregular employment that is often seen in late capitalism. Many characters encountered by visitors, especially those improvising their social interactions, are played by *gaichū* actors working there on short-term, non-renewable contracts lasting only weeks and months. While the institutional category of Edo People remains (as long as Edo Town is open), characters routinely fade out of existence when these contracts end. The actors inside are quickly replaced by others, generating more short-lived but memorable characters. Ironically, unstable, temporary character labor feeds the fantasy of mutual, social contact with Edo People that also stand for an enduring Edo-like Japaneseness.

Chapter 3 - Training Edo People

A Training Seminar

It is 5:00pm, after Edo Town has closed to visitors and time for the monthly training session on traditional Japanese culture and etiquette— for which I obtained permission to participate. Regular, full-time employees (*seishain*) and company-affiliated actors working as employees on renewable yearly contracts (*shokutaku shain*) are gathering in a *tatami* (woven straw) mat floor room, which also serves as an indoor film set on other occasions. They remove their company-issued *zōri* (traditional Japanese sandals) and line them up neatly at the entrance before entering the space. They are dressed in their work kimonos or in *yukata* (a casual, summer kimono), but are allowed to take off their *katsura* (wig headpieces used by *jidaigeki* actors) and headcloths. Some have taken down their Edo-like hairstyles that they put up for work if they are not issued a *katsura*. Those with long hair (mostly women) must wear it in buns or ponytails. This is one of the few times when employees can see each other's real-life appearances without the obscuring features of their Edo-themed work clothing.

Unlike the playful improvisation that takes place inside Edo Town during opening hours, these training sessions are conducted in a disciplined and orderly fashion. The *sensei* (teacher), a woman neatly dressed in a soberly-colored kimono, kneels at the front in *seiza* form with her legs folded underneath. Facing her, the employees are also kneeling— with men on the right, women on the left, actors (as *Geinō-bu* or Performance division employees) in front, and *Gyōmu-bu* or Operations division employees (including office staff and frontline service workers) in the back. When employees practice the session's topic in pairs and trios, the *sensei* observes and corrects each group. She is blunt. During a *hina* doll origami session for the Doll Festival (*Hina*

Matsuri) in March, she tells me, *nigate desu ne* (You aren't good at this). The employees (and I) thank her deferentially for her feedback, bowing deeply and saying *arigatō gozaimasu* (Thank you very much). At the end, everyone returns to their *seiza* positions, bows to the *sensei*, and thanks her again this time in unison — *arigatō gozaimashita*. During the whole time, the high-ranking management employees observe quietly from a side area.

This chapter discusses Edo Town's socialization of its staff, particularly how the operating company trains employees to internalize its institutional vision of Edo as Japanese heritage and cultural identity. The office employee Ikeda-san informs me that these monthly training sessions are a chance for me to learn about Edo Town's "company employee culture" (*kaishain no bunka*). It is taught by an instructor from the Ogasawara Ryū School of etiquette and martial arts (mounted archery), which originated from the late 12th-century in Japan and has trained many Edo period samurai.¹ However, the Ogasawara Ryū School training sessions at Edo Town focus on traditional samurai-class etiquette and practices rather than martial arts.² Besides *hina doll* origami, we learn how to fold kimono and *hakama* (traditional loose trousers worn on top of the kimono), play a traditional incense game called *kō asobi*, and perform correct postures and movements (including greeting people of different social ranks) in standing, walking, and sitting stances while wearing kimono. The last session takes place shortly after the new employee cohort joined Edo Town.

Theming permeates workplace cultures. Edo Town's employees undergo a "lived theming" where "the thematic constructs of the corporation become internalized, even personalized in the individual" (Lukas 2010, 140). When employees participate in training

¹ See <http://www.ogasawara-ryu.gr.jp/english/about.html>

² A few employees practice mounted archery and are also students of this School.

sessions, are mentored by senior co-workers, or engage in work tasks, they learn to internalize a mode of *being* Japanese that goes beyond customer service and costuming. Complementing the cultivation of *kankaku* (sense) involved in animating characters, the employees develop movements, social perceptions, and knowledge in a selective repertoire of Japanese traditions that correspond to Edo Town's vision of Edo-like Japaneseness and that is felt as extraordinary—a situation similar to being reborn in another universe, with this universe's parameters determined by the operating company. Since employees are obligated to internalize the Edo theme for work and as institutional members, they differ from the Edo Town regulars who proactively adopt Edo-like vocabulary and roles to demonstrate their attachment to Edo People and to the place (see Chapter 7).

Edo Town's socialization of its employees animates a mindset and consciousness inspired by the past—an embodied Edo-like ideology. Like with the Edo-themed environment's atmosphere, the operating company is more concerned with implementing in its employees a selective present-day understanding of Edo-likeness that defines the feeling of being Japanese rather than the literal past. It draws from a variety of sources from different schools, social classes, and even time periods. This echoes the company vision that (certain) past values and knowledge can inspire “answers” to present-day needs, which is defined in its employee training as the need for younger generations to learn how to *be* authentically Japanese. It is another iteration of the postwar inward-looking consumer nostalgia for the past to rediscover and *maintain* a Japanese identity in a rapidly changing Japan (see Chapter 1).

Postwar Japanese companies, against the background of economic growth, adopted the institutional role of socializing their salaryman employees into productive workers and society members (*shakaijin*), including “spiritual training” (*seishin kyōiku*) for developing mental

strength and values (see Kondo 1990 and Rohlen 1974). In the post economic bubble-era (early 1990s to present), however, recession, economic stagnation, and subsequent corporate restructuring have weakened their role as social safety nets. Long-time Edo Town regulars tell me that the historical themed park is now employing more temporary staff than before to work in inside the frontline themed environment. The operating company continues to train approximately 100 employees in Edo culture and traditional Japanese practices, but this is to shape the people who are inside cultural characters that evoke its interpretation of Japaneseness. It uses the Japanese past to redefine an alternate present that could temporarily respond to, but not necessarily change, current conditions. At the same time, such company-wide education establishes Edo Town's authority to disseminate its interpretation of Edo-like behavior and Japanese identity as an accepted social identity— with a nationalism based on the rehabilitation of cultural consciousness rather than economic high growth and development.

In this chapter, I first describe the structured and on-the-job contexts where employees inevitably encounter Edo Town's curated vision of Edo-like Japaneseness. Next, I analyze the implications of employee affiliation with Edo Town as well as the Edo-themed organization of institutional staff identities and company spaces. Then, I examine the body training that teaches employees how to properly put on and move in kimonos while at work. Finally, I discuss employee responses to their company education as well as Edo Town's selective interpretation of the Edo period and its links to Japanese identity.

Working With The Edo Theme

The company-affiliated actor Ebisu-san argues that knowing about Edo period history and customs is necessary for actors to correctly play their roles. He explains,

Because [we] must portray (*hyōgen*) things that are related to Edo, which are different from the regular and the everyday, the role is work. This is why [we] study things related to the Edo period...even how we say time is different... If we keep on studying and accumulating [this knowledge], [we] will get better. This is why fifth-year [employees] are better [at this] than the first- and second- years. And tenth-years are better than the fifth-years. From [their] deepened knowledge about Edo, [they] are able to do more profound portrayals on the surface (*hyōmen*).

From Edo Town, actors accumulate knowledge about how to link Japan's past with their work. This increases with their employment duration and seniority. Many employees reveal that they have acquired most of their Edo-related knowledge after beginning to work at Edo Town. Several were once questioned by a high-ranking company member about what they had "learned from Edo" in the past year.

In his ethnography of Tokyo Disneyland, Raz (1999) notes that regular employees (which he calls *shain*) undergo a "Japanese" style of socialization in office etiquette and protocols while part-timers (which he identifies as *pāto* and *arubaito*) are trained in "American-style" appearance management and Disney philosophy (see his Chapter 3 "Working at TDL"). However, this distinction is not as clear-cut at Edo Town since its employees all appear and work as Edo People characters. Regardless of whether they work in the office or in the frontline themed environment, the employees are all trained in Edo period history and popularly-recognized traditional Japanese practices.

Edo Town employs a variety of sources for employee training, besides the Ogasawara Ryū School of samurai etiquette. Employees attend *kitsuke* (kimono dressing) classes, which I will discuss in more detail, because its mastery is a prerequisite for work; office employees are not exempt from this requirement although they interact less with visitors. Actors also learn to costume themselves for their various Edo People roles, mostly following *jidaigeki* conventions. They take lessons from senior actors and invited professional instructors in the skills that are

necessary for performing in shows, such as in stage fighting and in traditional Japanese dance. During their trainee period, new employees attend a seminar on Edo Town's interpretation of the Edo period that emphasizes the era's lengthy period of peace and urban commoner-led cultural development. They also learn about Edo *shigusa* (the Edo period merchant code of conduct).

Edo Town's facilities and work tasks become teaching tools. Employees consult websites and an office library of reference books about Edo period practices and terms when tasked with the implementation of seasonal and special events. Additionally, the museum exhibiting Edo-inspired everyday-use objects provided several educational occasions for employees. Besides touring the exhibition, employees attended a special guest lecture on Edo period ecological practices. This reinforced the operating company's interpretation of Edo culture as an enduring element of Japaneseness and its emphasis on the historical period's peace, cultural isolation, and ordinary commoners. To further mark the occasion, management also directed restaurant employees to develop *iri zake* — an Edo period seasoning made from sake, pickled plums, and bonito fish — as a potential product for visitors. During fieldwork, I witnessed the staff taste-testing and discussing various recipes that they had researched online for this work task.

It may seem inconsistent that the majority of Edo Town employees work as townspeople characters but must also learn about traditional samurai etiquette or that actors who play ninjas and other characters are trained in the Edo merchant code of conduct. However, this mismatch is irrelevant to the operating company's goal of socializing employees into productive workers who also practice its interpretation of Edo-like Japanese identity regardless of their nationality. (All the employees except a few are Japanese nationals and ethnically Japanese.) Employees are simultaneously socialized as company and society members with an understanding of Japanese heritage. They gradually acquire the work knowledge that is essential to Edo Town's operations,

eventually embodying the operating company's interpretation of how to *be* Edo-like.

Additionally, they are exposed to cultural knowledge and practices that the operating company define as Japanese heritage and that they themselves perceive as often ignored and forgotten by Japanese youth. Several tell me, for example, that many young Japanese people no longer know how to put on a kimono by themselves. The frontline service worker O-Nori tells me from time to time that she feels proud about knowing how to do this and how to move around correctly in a kimono. Several Japanese employees also describe the training as an opportunity for the foreign employees and for me (as a foreign volunteer staff) to learn about Japanese culture and values.

Company Membership At Edo Town

My Edo name, Momo, identifies me as an Edo Town affiliate and as someone who interacts directly with customers. Many Japanese employees create an easy-to-remember Edo name by attaching parts of their actual names (to which they refer as *honmyō*) to the company-designated prefix or suffix corresponding to their assigned character type. Due to my non-Japanese name, I use a senior employee's suggestion. She tells me that many women during the Edo period were named after flowers; the Japanese word *momo* means "peach" but can also refer to peach blossoms. The flower's pink color also matches the color of the two kimonos provided to me by the operating company.

Having a recognized Edo name symbolizes full company membership or de facto acceptance into the frontline staff community. The company's employees, including office staff, service workers, and affiliated actors, must all adopt Edo names. Some *gaichū* actors adopt Edo names if they work at Edo Town for more than a few days, because they must inevitably interact closely in character with visitors. They must use their Edo names with each other inside the

frontline themed environment. Edo names can become more familiar to these frontline co-workers than their actual names. Sometimes, the staff call each other and respond to their Edo names out of habit outside of Edo Town's opening hours. They may not even know or easily recall the other person's actual name.

In contrast, most *haken* (temporary dispatch workers) staff do not possess Edo names. Their contract length is comparatively short, ranging from a few days to several weeks, and they interact minimally with visitors at work. The *haken* worker playing the Echigoya shop girl role is the exception. Her contract usually lasts for several months and she interacts frequently with visitors in character. The company-affiliated actors supervising her give her an Edo name.

Themed parks such as Edo Town and the Toei Kyoto Studio Park, as well as theater companies like the Takarazuka Revue (see Robertson 1998), are the few institutions in Japan that train affiliated actor members and develop their careers. Although Edo Town's operations are on a smaller scale than well-known themed parks such as Tokyo Disneyland and the Takarazuka Revue, it is a work institution that provides relative social stability to its affiliated actors. The actor Hattori-san began his career from age 15 at another themed park previously operated by Edo Town's former parent company before ending up at the historical themed park. He believes that Edo Town is "a place that has raised me, probably [where I feel] the most comfortable" and is "really like my home." He has known for more than ten years the cast of actors with whom he performs in the ninja action show. He describes them as like his brothers in a family. He belongs to an older generation of employees who began working for Edo Town's former parent company during the 1980s and early 1990s. They say that they now do not plan to work elsewhere. Several began their careers with no prior acting experience, contrasting with the current generation of affiliated actors who enter the company as professional acting school graduates. Hattori-san

reveals that his admiration for stunt performers such as Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan led to his initial decision to seek employment at Edo Town's former parent company. Ebisu-san remembers that he was taking a university correspondence course when he saw an actor recruitment advertisement for Edo Town. He believed that becoming an actor would be more interesting than working full-time in a company as a salaryman.

During the 2010s, Edo Town's company-affiliated actors still highlight the stability of working there as a *shokutaku shain* with renewable yearly contracts and being considered a company employee even though their pay is calculated at a day rate and on a different scale from the Operation Division's regular, full-time employees. An actor who joined the company a few years ago remembers, "Before [I was] in Tokyo acting in films and television. But acting [work] isn't necessarily available everyday. [I] was looking to [act] as my main job, to be able to do that everyday, and [I] found it at Edo Town. The actor Oe tells me that she had the choice between working at Edo Town as a *shokutaku shain* or a *gaichū* actor employed under a temporary, short-term contract. She ultimately decided to become "a *shain* with stability" and has since realized that this status allows her to participate in company training sessions in stage fighting, acting skills, and traditional Japanese culture that are not typically open to *gaichū* actors, *haken* workers, and part-time staff.

Hattori-san returned to Edo Town after leaving for several years to work as a freelance actor based in Tokyo. His lack of affiliation with an actor management agency caused him to miss film casting opportunities since producers maintain close relationships with these agencies. Becoming tired of this situation, he began working at Edo Town again first as a *gaichū* actor and then rejoining its operating company as an affiliated actor. He reflects, "Before, I wanted to

become successful (*jibun ga uretai*)³ and to become major. Now, I want to ... contribute to Edo Town with everyone ... I think if I became primarily major at Edo Town, that would be good.” Hattori-san is often recruited to appear in historical television series and films that are shot by production companies on Edo Town’s premises. Describing himself as “Edo Town only,” he says that he does not mind not receiving monetary compensation for the extra work since this helps to circulate Edo Town’s name, to increase its popularity, and to bring more customers.

A few service workers transitioned into full-time employment at Edo Town, despite beginning as a part-timer. Aki-chan began in a part-time position as a restaurant staff when she could not secure full-time employment after university graduation. She had visited Edo Town during her university years, liked the atmosphere, and thought it would be interesting to work there. She did not want to work in a restaurant at first because the job seemed difficult and busy, but it was the only option available because she also wanted to work on weekdays. Although she intended to stay temporarily at Edo Town, she decided to become a regular, full-time employee. She believes that she has matured from an unemployed person to someone who can handle customers and talk to people during hectic work periods. She also appreciates the chance to meet many kinds of people whom she would not have met otherwise, including actors.

Contrasting with employees, Edo Town’s temporary workers experience relative instability or are in an in-between phase of their lives. While some *haken* staff decide to work at Edo Town for several days or a week during their university breaks, others who stay there for a month or more do not have immediate career plans, are in between jobs, or have simply worked as temporary dispatch workers for a long time. One woman in her 40s has continually worked as a *haken*, including several times in Edo Town’s restaurants during peak tourist periods. She explains that she once planned to seek regular, full-time employee at a company, but remained a

³ This expression translates literally into English as “I want to sell.”

haken worker because previous employers continued to request for her to work another peak season through her temp agency. Another *haken* worker had graduated university two years ago and had recently returned to Japan after studying English abroad the past year. She decided to work at Edo Town for several months, because she became obsessed with a video game based in the late Edo period's Bakumatsu era (1853-1867) that is a spin-off from the Japanese *Yakuza*⁴ video game franchise. Although she has developed good relationship with Edo Town's restaurant staff, she expresses that she does not want to work there as a regular, full-time employee. She explains,

I still don't want to work or look for a job. I want to do the things that I like at the time I like. I can't find a good job anymore. Since I want to go back [abroad], I don't want to become a *seishain*. But I also don't feel motivated to have a part-time job. I just wanted to be at Edo Town for a while, [with] a *ryokō kibun* (travel feeling). Since I don't want to become a *seishain*, it's just right. If it's boring, I can go back home and if it's fun, I can come back.

She believes that she will never have a good future in Japan and that her foreign language skills would not help her, because she was unable to secure full-time employment immediately after university graduation. She feels unmotivated, because she believes that she has fallen off the rigid life trajectory expected in Japanese society where stability is largely based on securing regular employment at a certain life stage. She finally went abroad on a holiday working visa, after taking a "rest" period and working at a part-time job to raise money for the trip.

Gaichū actors depend highly on management agency assignments to businesses like Edo Town in order to develop their acting careers. Their acting profile pages on their agency websites report such work as "performance experience." One veteran *gaichū* actor at Edo Town tells me, however, that life is *taihen* (tough) for these actors. It is especially *taihen*, he says, when actors are paid a few weeks late — which happens sometimes. His management agency's president

⁴ She refers to this video game by its Japanese name *Ryū Ga Gotoku*.

talked to him about this when he was younger and he now gives the same speech to new actors so they will not be surprised at the challenges. Sane-san chooses to remain a *gaichū* actor at Edo Town, however, because he wants to avoid the responsibilities that are assigned to company-affiliated actors. This includes the supervision of junior actors, work preparations, meetings, costume maintenance, and company paperwork, he says. Before coming to Edo Town, he had already lost his job as an actor at another Japanese themed park when its new operating company did not renew his contract during the early 2000s and he had subsequently worked at several temporary non-acting jobs. As a *gaichū* actor unaffiliated with any actor management agency, Sane-san tells me, he must take personal responsibility for all his actions and he knows that he can be easily fired if he causes any problems for Edo Town. He has accepted that he will never enjoy the stability that accompanies company employee status. When I ask him if he is worried about this, however, he replies, “Of course I do worry because there are no guarantees. I have to do everything by myself. But because this is my calling [and] this is a part of my personality, it’s not a big deal.”

Another potential frustration for *gaichū* actors is uncertainty about whether their acting skills are being used, and some frontline staff have also wondered about this. Except for those with adequate skills in stage fighting and stunts, Edo Town often assigns these actors to merchandise sales, ushering, attractions, and other customer service tasks. *Gaichū* actors respond differently to this issue. Some, like Kitazaemon, perceive these tasks — always carried out in character — as a necessary stepping stone toward their goal of succeeding as an actor.

Kitazaemon acknowledges that the work is physically demanding and that his financial situation is not always stable. At the same time, he believes that he has gained unique experiences as an actor such as meeting people he would not have met otherwise. Others wonder how doing

customer service work at Edo Town is related to their career dreams. A *gaichū* actor, who is assigned to work an attraction booth for two weeks, vents to me that she was criticized for not acting Edo-like but that no employee bothered to explain to her what that actually means. Her management agency directed her to work at Edo Town as a condition for performing in a theater production. She adds that she could have earned more money working at a part-time job elsewhere, because two management agencies are deducting fees from her daily wages.

After Edo Town, the *gaichū* actors' fates depend on luck, personal initiative, and institutional circumstances. Some continue to perform at theaters, cultural spectacles, and other Japanese themed parks, updating their fans on their social media profiles on their whereabouts. Others, after several months or a year, are assigned again by their management agencies to work temporarily at Edo Town when, as one *gaichū* actor puts it, "Because there is no other work (*shigoto ga nai kara*)." A few *gaichū* actors have continuously worked at Edo Town for several years and are considered regular presences in the themed environment. Other former *gaichū* actors have quit or have thought of quitting the profession. One now works in the construction business, after a year working as a *gaichū* actor at Edo Town. According to him, his former management agency led him to believe that it would help him acquire work in television shows and films if he agreed to work for a year at the historical themed park. When this did not happen, he felt deceived and quit his management agency — and ultimately acting — in frustration. Quitting an actor management agency with an institutional relationship to Edo Town can potentially bar individual actors from seeking employment at there as a company-affiliated actor. Another former *gaichū* actor has been entertaining thoughts of leaving his management agency, but he tells me that he can never become a company-affiliated actor at Edo Town because he

does not want to cause trouble for both organizations. If he quits, the only option for him is to return to his hometown and to give up his dreams of being an actor.

Despite differentiated company membership and outsider statuses, Edo Town integrates its staff into the Edo theme and its interpretation of the Edo period so that they can interact with visitors inside the themed environment. The level of training in the operating company's Edo knowledge varies due to these disparate statuses. On one hand, regular, full-time employees and affiliated actors become the most disciplined in being Edo-like and possess an Edo name that institutionally symbolizes their membership status at Edo Town. Part-timers, *haken* workers, and *gaichū* actors receive little systematic training and possess the least knowledge of what counts as Edo-like, because of their temporary or non-membership status at the company. As a result, they are reprimanded more often for not acting correctly. The last's situation especially reveals the tension between the operating company's expectations for them to embody a character reflecting Edo Town's ideological messages and the minimal training received since their work involves interchangeable customer service work.

An Edo-Themed Corporate Organization

Besides defining institutional status, the Edo theme organizes company spaces and hierarchy at Edo Town. Regulars, service workers, and actors often refer to the frontline themed environment as "O-Edo" or "the town" because it is where the Edo-like atmosphere is re-enacted. Employees call the office "Honmaru," which is located outside the themed environment and is the site of back-end operations (e.g. overseas promotions, human resources, and publicity). It shares the same name as the main building where shoguns and feudal lords historically lived in their castle complexes.

Edo Town borrows selectively from the Edo period's social and political hierarchy to classify its employees within the company hierarchy. Character designations and the particular or generic qualities of their associated costuming reflect the employees' institutional division, rank, and status. Most Operations division employees, junior company-affiliated actors, and *gaichū* actors belong to the townspeople category not only because townspeople characters reflect Edo Town's nostalgic focus on commoner culture but also because it does not require extra acting skills. When actors enter the company through its Performance division, they begin as townspeople with the same simple customer service responsibilities assigned to *gaichū* actors. More senior company-affiliated actors play additional specialized roles in shows and street performances that require extra skills, including ninjas, entertainers, and the daughter of a merchant family. Several mid-level employees are internally called *dōshin*, a samurai-rank title above commoners that was historically affiliated with Edo-era police institutions. At the top of Edo Town's institutional hierarchy is its president, who holds the Edo-themed title of shogun. His private office is located in Honmaru and is called the *shogun no ma* (shogun's chamber). The company's division chiefs, who are ranked below the president and who oversees daily operations, are known as *rōjū*, a title used historically for the shogun's councillors who were situated at the highest level of the Edo period's military government.

The assignation of specialized roles can be determined by the Performance Division's authority to typecast roles — illustrating another instance of the institutional classification of physical characteristics into Edo-like categories. The *oiran* (high-ranking courtesan) is a role played by only three company-affiliated actors. They must be female, young, and tall. Furthermore, they must have trained and worked at Edo Town for long enough to acquire skills in *oiran* makeup and costuming, traditional Japanese dance, as well as speech styles and

movements that are specific to the role. The *kamuro*, the *oiran*'s attendant who is also a young courtesan-in-training, must be played by shorter, female actors. Women cannot become *fukumen* ninjas, characters completely covered in black clothing except for the eyes. One actor points out that female *fukumen* ninjas existed in Japan's past, but speculates that the operating company decided that women do not have enough physical gut strength to cry out loudly and deeply during performances if their faces were covered.

Employees maintain the most unique appearances and Edo identities, while temporary workers the most generic with no Edo name. Employees wear costumes that make it easy to distinguish each other by sight, even at a distance, since the *Bishō* or Costuming department assigns each of them kimonos with different colors and patterns. Furthermore, no two employees can adopt the same Edo name which helps to avoid confusion in internal identification and which contributes to their image of distinct Edo-like personas. In contrast, the majority of *haken* staff are all assigned identical male shop apprentice (*decchi*) clothing regardless of their gender since they are assigned to work in the historical themed park's restaurants involving little character interaction with visitors. The costume is simple and somberly-colored compared to the townspeople kimonos worn by Edo Town's employees, consisting of a striped, dark green kimono worn on top of a traditional worker's loose navy-blue colored pants (called *momohiki* in Japanese) and an undershirt with a white and navy-blue Edo-style known as a *koikuchi*. Although one *haken* worker is initially disappointed not to have a chance to wear a kimono for work, she later feels relieved that the *decchi* clothing took half the time and was easier to put on than a kimono. *Gaichū* actors assigned to work at Edo Town from a few days to two weeks similarly have no Edo name and wear identical costumes — the same *momohiki* and *koikuchi* but with a

navy-blue apron called a *donburi*. Their generic and plain appearances, although Edo-like, reflects their interchangeable status at Edo Town.

While the *haken* staff working as the Echigoya souvenir shop girl wears a yellow-patterned kimono and uses an Edo name, her costuming, Edo name composition, and interactions with Edo Town's employees still reflect the generic qualities of temporary workers at Edo Town. The frontline staff usually remember the character's yellow-patterned kimono rather than the person inside, since the *haken* worker changes every few months. They also tend to forget the person's Edo name, simply referring to her out of expedience as "the *haken* at the Echigoya souvenir shop." Finally, one actor decides that all future *haken* workers assigned to that position will use O-Hana as their Edo name because it will be easier for everyone to recall.

Gaichū actors working at Edo Town for several months, like the Echigoya souvenir shop girl, adopt Edo names and wear distinct costumes in their various assigned roles. Many play Edo-era street seller roles such as a spice seller, a book lender, a glasses seller, and a fish seller for merchandise sales, which are not replicated by Operations division employees and played less often by company-affiliated actors. However, employees also do not always recognize their individual appearances since they are used to seeing the same role and costume replaced every few months by another *gaichū* actor. The only exception is the long-time *gaichū* actors who have worked at Edo Town for several years and who have used the same Edo names and costumes.

The Edo theme institutionally and spatially structures Edo Town's operating company. It borrows selectively from the Edo period's social hierarchy and place names to classify the staff's rank and to determine their work areas. Using character types inspired by the Edo period, it allows the operating company to typecast and determine costuming appearances that define Edo-likeness and visually reflect the staff's institutional status at Edo Town.

Training Visible Edo-like Japanese Bodies

On my first day at Edo Town, I meet Costuming department employee Yamada-san in the office changing room to learn how to put on a kimono and to do my hair in the style of an Edo-like townswoman. Two female office employees are also there to review the process, because they are assigned to assist me. Yamada-san says that she first brought a casual *jinbei* — traditional Japanese clothing consisting of loose pants and a shirt that closes with a cloth tie — since it is easier to put on, but was informed that my upcoming frequent interactions with customers means that I must learn how to wear a kimono.

I clumsily attempt to replicate each step that Yamada-san shows me in front of a mirror. Meanwhile, she cheerfully explains Edo Town's rules regarding Edo-like dress as well as some trivia about Edo period beliefs regarding appearances. "In Tokyo, there are many ways of putting on kimonos," she says, "But here *kaishatekini* (company-wise), everyone wears the 'normal' *kitsuke*." I later summarize in my fieldnotes some of her advice about kimono dressing. (My explanatory notes here are in parentheses.)

1. You should bring a towel to wrap around my waist in order to create a straight body shape while in kimono. If your bottom and breasts were too visible during the Edo period, it would have sent the "wrong message" to men.
2. Japanese people did not wear underpants during the Edo period. This is why women walked around in small steps to not expose their unmentionable parts. (And why you must do the same thing when wearing kimono.)
3. Yamada-san advised the two office employees and I not to wear our hair buns too low. Otherwise, "it will look like a butt. You must be careful." (She was using my hair as an example, when I unsuccessfully attempted to style it in the required horizontal figure eight shape for the townswoman role.)

Yamada-san also warns me that to be careful of how I wear my kimono and accessories, because things at Edo Town must appear as if from Japan's past. She explains, "In the old days,

people didn't have much to do. The *katachi* (form) counts for everything." On the surface, she seems to be emphasizing that my appearance must conform to Japan's past image. However, she is also hinting at the image that I must project as a townswoman character at Edo Town — that more importantly, my appearance should match Edo Town's specific definition of Edo-like *company-wise*.

Socialization in Japan deeply integrates body management, which begins in daycare and continues in the workplace (c.f. Ben-Ari 1997; Raz 1999; Spielvogel 2003). At Edo Town, more senior employees often judge junior employees on whether they appear adequately "Edo-like"—their conformity to company rules standardizing bodily appearances, movements, and speech. I hear that employees were previously allowed to wear their personal kimonos for work, but the operating company ceased this practice some years ago. Actors and service workers alike explain that they must embody the correct *tachifurumai*, a holistic combination of behavior, comportment, and movement. As a townswoman, I learn to maintain a straight posture that accentuates the body's straight lines and to walk with small semi-circular steps where each foot sweeps to the side (as opposed to one foot in front of the other)—things that supposedly make female kimono-wearers appear aesthetically pleasing.

Employees undergo bodily and mental transformations when re-learning, under Edo Town's guidance, how to be Edo-like social beings. They must move within and perceive the world in a different way from what they have taken for granted in the present, developing Edo-like senses that will be applied to character labor. The company-affiliated actor Ebisu-san argues that it is not enough to only wear a costume. A deeper alternate self-consciousness is necessary. He elaborates,

The time period— [we] have to act the past and not now... [We] can't act present-day things, and the way of acting is different depending on the [past's] living environment...

To act a person from the Edo period, [we] must know things about Edo... [We] must care about the role's invisible depths. Anyone can put on a costume. But if [we] don't study, we can't settle into [the role]. After all, the *tachifurumai* is different from the present-day. Depending on the kimono, the movements change. The length of one's stride is also different. It's a different person according to the role. [We] have to create this inside us... We have to express things about Edo as if it were ordinary.

Becoming a person who moves and thinks as if in the past is necessary. A fundamental difference, which extends to body movements and subjectivities, thus exists between the past and present.

Structured training sessions teach Edo Town's employees into embodying Edo-like Japaneseness. I have already mentioned that company-affiliated actors take traditional Japanese dance lessons. This class is also open to Operation division employees. One office employee tells me that the instructor constantly corrects everyone's posture in class. Additionally, all regular employees — even those who have worked at Edo Town for years — must attend an annual *kitsuke* review session where an instructor walks everyone through each step of putting on a kimono. Its purpose is to refine the employees' kimono dressing techniques, including how to fold and place certain the kimono onto the body. I also suspect that the step-by-step review helps to correct erroneous habits that develop when employees must quickly put on their kimonos everyday so that they can begin their daily preparations in time. (Most female employees finish putting on their kimonos and styling their hair within 20 minutes. Some can even do this in 15 minutes if they are extremely pressed for time.) The service worker O-Nori believes that the traditional dance class and the *kitsuke* review session has made her more conscious of her posture and body movements especially when wearing kimono, and this has helped her with being in character for work. A long-time *gaichū* actor tells me that he would have liked to attend the *kitsuke* review session, because it would systematically teach him the steps of putting on his

kimono for work. However, these sessions are reserved for company members. He resorts to imitating the company-affiliated actors as they dressed themselves for work.

Surveillance and guidance manage bodies at Edo Town. While peer influence affects character labor (see Chapter 1), co-workers — especially senior employees — often check junior employees' "kimono appearance" (*kimono no sugata*). For example, they look for extra pieces of cloth bulging out of the *obi* (something that frequently happen to me) because they break up the idealized straight body shape. They do not hesitate to tell each other, including taking junior employees aside to do so, that their kimonos are crooked and must be fixed immediately. Junior employees recount the times when senior employees make them put on their kimonos again from the beginning because of their unsatisfactory appearance. I, too, was asked several times to do this and in the process, learn from experienced actors how to reset a loose kimono collar without spending an additional 25 minutes redressing myself. Loosened kimono collars are a common issue, because the frontline staff are constantly moving around at attractions, in participatory scenarios, and in the restaurants. As the service worker Aki-chan comments, working in a kimono is different from going out in a kimono.

Co-workers observe whether accessories, makeup, and general appearances appear Edo-like. O-Nori once warns me that the *furoshiki* (wrapping cloth) that I use for hiding anachronistic personal items (such as my cell phone, my fieldwork notebook, and my pen) is printed with a contemporary pattern rather than an acceptable Edo-like one, and that senior employees will reprimand me if they notice this. One *haken* worker becomes annoyed when she was scolded for wearing too much mascara by a senior employee belonging to a different department. "It's not mascara. These are fake eyelashes," she vents to me, irritated. "I can't physically take them out." She later discovers that the employee thought that her eyes appear too flamboyant, like a

courtesan, for her assigned shop's apprentice character and commented that it did not appear correctly Edo-like for that role. I also encountered the gendered comparison with courtesans several times when I had not yet mastered how to put on a kimono. Whenever my kimono became crooked and showed too much of the underskirt or undershirt, employees jokingly compared me to a courtesan that deviates from my townswoman persona.

Kimonos and other Edo People character clothing affect employees' subjectivities, beyond their transposition to work mode. Several frontline staff comment that wearing a kimono forces them to understand and to use their bodies differently from their everyday lives. Ebisu-san explains this difference for himself:

Normally, [I wear] jeans and shoes... the length of the stride is different. It's easier to walk around with shoes and the legs can open more while wearing pants. If I do this [in kimono], the kimono will become loose. If [I] don't do this, it won't become loose even if [I] wear a kimono from the morning... As a result, for example, if [I] open [my] legs one meter [wide], I can probably [only] do 50 centimeters if wearing a kimono. At first, I thought it was difficult to walk, but I'm not conscious of this anymore since I can [now] do it.

He has internalized an alternate body consciousness for work, which includes minute and quotidian movements that are not ordinarily thought about.

Other employees discover previously unnoticed parts of themselves. Aki-chan associates kimono with women's clothing, believing that it is impossible to be "boyish" while wearing kimono. She regularly wears pants outside of work. She explains, "Although I'm not girlish (*onna no ko rashikunai*), I want to wear [my kimono] cutely [and] to have it fit me as a girl." After being assigned a pink kimono for work, a color that she does not wear in her regular clothing, she became conscious of her feminine side. She reflects, "The kimono was decided for me and I had to wear it... there's a consciousness of being a girl with the kimono. As a girl, what should I do to wear it? How [do I] make it match my shape? ... I've thought about it in front of a

mirror. Like adding another towel [below the chest]. If [I] did this, then I can wear [the kimono] beautifully.” For Aki-chan, wearing a kimono properly means to become more conscious of her body as female.

The bodily habits adapted from wearing a kimono daily for work can spill into non-work life. Ebisu-san describes his work kimono as “something attached to the body” (*mi ni tsuita mono*). While not at work, he often pushes aside an imaginary kimono sleeve when reaching for things since this is what he has done for many years while wearing a kimono for work. He has stopped thinking about the motion as the two separate steps of first pushing aside the sleeve and then reaching out with his hand. I ask Ebisu-san if he “remembers this with his body” (*karada de oboeru*) and he replies, “Remembering with the body is a natural thing. It becomes a habit.”

Edo Town’s employees are not freely performing Japan’s past with their bodies, nor are they replicating literally the Japanese people who lived during the Edo period. Borrowing from Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998), I argue that the employees’ training injects their body with a “second life” that reconfigures their movements, their identity consciousness, and their social perceptions with a modified agency based on an institutional ideology of Edo-like Japaneseness. Their company body training animates them as Edo-like and Japanese in the operating company’s vision, going beyond a dress code. The operating company extends *taiken* to the employees’ internal work culture. Edo Town’s employees are re-tuning their bodily and subjective senses when they experience — through their training — how to be Edo-like through their body. Additionally, animation can slip outside immediate work contexts although these employees are seemingly trained to act Edo-like only at the historical themed park, which is reflected their subconscious bodily habits and their culturalized, alternate understandings of their selves.

Responding To Corporate Edo-Like Comportment And History

As the staff learn about Edo Town's interpretation of Edo-like comportment and Edo history, they respond to their themed workplace culture. Some distinguish between the variety of cultural practices and physical appearances that existed during the Edo period and their standardization into a company's contemporary interpretation of Edo-likeness. Some point out that the operating company's focus on Edo *shigusa* — the merchant's code of conduct — erases other sources related to traditional Japanese culture. One employee comments, "Traditional culture [here] ... is only Edo *shigusa*. It's a shame. Besides Edo *shigusa*, it would also have been good to consult *jidaigeki* and [other] films." She is talking about the internal company culture, rather than the contents aimed at visitors inside the historical themed park. She and another employee believe that the staff overuse stereotypical Edo-like speech, which simplifies grossly how Japanese people spoke during the Edo period. They point out that the staff repeatedly end their sentences with the archaic copula verb *degozaru* (meaning "to be"), like samurai customarily do in *jidaigeki*. Disparagingly calling this "*degozaru* language," the two employees believe that visitors will ultimately treat what the staff say and Edo Town's experience as only entertainment and as something unrelated to Japan's past.

Some frontline staff note the historical inaccuracies and temporal inconsistencies that are allowed inside the Edo-themed environment, although Edo Town's operating company strictly dictates what counts as Edo-like in their own physical appearances and speech. One employee points out that the townspeople's "plain" (*jimin*) appearances contradict history since many commoners indulged in luxuries and wore "flashy" (*hade*) clothing during Edo period when the economy prospered. I ask him why he thinks this is the case at Edo Town and he speculates that this is due to the popular influence of *wabi sabi* culture— the subdued Japanese aesthetics

primarily practiced by samurai households. *Haken* workers, perhaps due to their temporary stays and outsider statuses, often wonder about, as one of them describes, the “strange” rules governing Edo-likeness there. During our conversation together, the *haken* worker O-Hana rhetorically asks why so many contemporary products, such as cigarettes, can be sold in the souvenir shop but that she must act and speak in an Edo-like manner all the time. When freshly-painted trash cans and brightly-colored *noren* (hanging store curtains) appear overnight to replace the old, faded ones inside the historical themed park, many frontline staff believe that the new appearance will ruin the Edo-like atmosphere. Another *haken* worker questions, “It’s Edo so older things should be better. But why are there new things?”

Despite their personal opinions, the staff must respond to visitors who point out these inconsistencies. O-Hana tells me that many visitors ask her why there are touch screen cash registers although they are supposedly in the past. She tries to avoid answering these questions, because she does not know what to say. The service worker Ken-san says that visitors have occasionally asked him why there are iPads at the costume rental facility when everything should be “Edo.” He ultimately decides to inform visitors that these are “mechanical boards” (*karakuri no ita*) for helping them browse through costume options.

While these concerns raise the issue of historical authenticity, many staff members seem more preoccupied with the senior employees’ power to decide what counts as Edo-like for everyone. During fieldwork, I notice that gaps sometimes exist between management visions and employee understandings regarding what can be Edo-like. Some employees express concerns that the management do not fully solicit their input. When the employees tour the museum of everyday-use objects and carry out the educational work tasks that their superiors directed them to do, for example, I do not notice much follow-up discussions about these activities’ purpose.

Others complain about the requirement to attend training seminars, which they perceive as unpaid overtime work.

An office employee also tells me, “Many people in [O-Edo]⁵ don’t want to tell us about the issues.” He is aware that the two different work locations (O-Edo the themed environment and Honmaru the office) and the institutional hierarchy exacerbate this issue. The frontline staff — including temporary workers — usually turn to each other first when problems arise, because they are reluctant to bring them up to the office-based management employees and risk causing trouble for themselves and their co-workers.

Animating Productive Workers And Edo-like Japanese People

While the previous chapter examined character labor’s performed animation, this chapter analyzes the themed animation found in employee training and socialization that institutionally controls the people inside characters. The operating company stages an embodied experience of Edo-like pastness that enforces employees’ conformity to its Edo-like Japanese authenticity, which is reconstructed from multiple sources with varied social and temporal origins. It also allows for temporal slippages in inert objects such as touch screen cash registers, iPads, new trash cans, and concrete roads that contribute to a 21st-century historical themed park’s operation. The goal is to discipline employees into good workers and society members who internalize, embody, and communicate the operating company’s interpretation of the Edo period and its cultural legacy for contemporary Japanese people. Edo Town’s repertoire of Edo-like knowledge and behaviors is aimed towards a core audience of regular, full-time employees and company-affiliated actors who count as company members. Several of my interlocuters reveal that most

⁵ Meaning inside the themed environment

visitors cannot tell whether something or someone appears Edo-like or not (according to Edo Town's standards).

As employees learn to animate their bodies and senses according to Edo Town's standardized ideology of Edo-like Japaneseness, they are also socialized into a themed company structure. They undergo the institutional insider version of *taiken* that answers to Honmaru—Edo Town's Edo-themed hierarchical space. This contrasts with the embodied experience offered to visitors that encourages them, as I will discuss in Chapter 5, to freely role-play Japan's past through the themed environment's parameters. This institutionalized social knowledge purportedly increases with deepened company membership. As developing society members, these employees are molded into both productive workers *and* people who appreciate Japanese (their) traditions and Japan's (their) past in their company's image.

Chapter 4 - Edo Encounters Beyond Town

Locating Edo Town

Every morning, approximately 30 minutes to an hour before Edo Town opens for visitors, frontline staff dressed in kimonos walk to work on a public road adjacent to the historical themed park. They politely greet the same neighbors everyday, who are walking their dogs and going on their morning strolls — *ohayō gozaimasu* (good morning). After passing by several homes, some hidden behind gates, walls, and trees, they turn left to enter a wooden gate into Edo Town. Tall white walls enclose the historical themed park, hiding its inside world from view. However, the neighbors outside these walls can still hear a cheerful traditional Japanese music soundtrack playing in the background during Edo Town’s opening hours.

A red shuttle bus printed with an *oiran* (high-ranking courtesan), a ninja, and Edo Town’s name winds through Terada’s quiet roads everyday. It passes by nondescript single-family homes, woods, fields, one or two soba noodle restaurants, and empty lots overgrown with weeds. Dressed as a palanquin bearer, its driver’s job is to pick up tourists from a local train station and to drop them off at Edo Town’s main entrance. These two locations are not directly connected by public transportation. The tourists chuckle at the unusual sight of a driver in Edo-like clothing operating a modern bus.

A pop idol group affiliated with a major talent management agency in Japan arrives at Edo Town. The four women appear to be in their late teens and early 20s and they are entertainers who sing, dance, and interact with their fans, each performing a distinct personality. The pop idols tour Edo Town in the morning, accompanied by their manager, a camera crew, and several Edo Town-affiliated actors. In the afternoon, they participate in ninja training. While they stand in line wearing identical-looking gym clothes, a ninja warns them that the training will be very “strict (*kibishī*)” since this is what all ninjas experience. He and several assistant ninjas lead and supervise the group in forward rolls, backward rolls, hurdle jumping, and other acrobatic maneuvers. Although not all the pop idols can keep up with the lead ninja’s pace, they try their best while their camera crew photographs them. Several days later on their online blogs, the pop idol group members share photos of their visit to Edo Town and thank the staff for their hospitality.

This chapter examines the cultural and economic networks in which Edo Town is institutionally entrenched and the ways in which they frame its cultural animation. I argue that its

operating company's active participation in its host city Terada, the tourism landscape, and the larger cultural industries animate its existence beyond that of a regional themed park and a representation of Japan's past. Anthropological sites operate beyond the bounds of a single "village" — or a "town" in this case — as a central node where transnational mobility, media flows, virtual networks, temporary spectacles, multiple meanings, and imaginative realms intersect. As Appadurai (1996) writes,

As group pasts become increasingly part of museums, exhibitions, and collections, both in national and transnational spectacles, culture becomes less what Pierre Bourdieu would have called a habitus (a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions) and more an arena for conscious choice, justification, and representation, the latter often to multiple and spatially dislocated audiences. (44)

Examining several historical iterations of a southern Chinese market town's Chrysanthemum Festival, Siu (1990) notes that different groups of local elites "recycle" cultural contents to establish their positions among changing state institutions of power. I also examine the most recent iteration of "recycling" for Edo Town's cultural contents as consumer markets and government agendas shift, showing how the manipulation of the past reveals present realities. I map out the "imploded histories" (Dumit 2014) to reveal the forces and affects maintaining Edo Town's everyday and seemingly ordinary presence in Terada and in the cultural industries (also see Stewart 2007).

I analyze how Edo Town's existence crafts multiple realities over time for those who encounter its operating company as consumers, neighbors, staff, and collaborators. As an economic revitalization project, Edo Town has rewritten Terada's local landscape as an employer, economic developer, and as a touristic destination with cultural experiences and heritage sites. After discussing the economic context of Edo Town's origins in Terada, I situate the historical themed park within Terada's tourism landscape as it adds a fictional re-enactment

of Japan's past as a "tourism resource" (*kankō shigen*). I also show how the operating company coordinates with other businesses and transportation companies in Terada to attract and to serve tourists. Next, I turn to Edo Town's participation in the larger cultural industries. I show that the operating company has adapted its contents to regional and national cultural branding efforts, contributing human resources, props, and expertise that animate Japaneseness in events and spectacles for domestic and overseas consumers. The last part of the chapter analyzes Edo Town's and Terada's closely-linked futures, digging into questions about economic survival and community. I demonstrate that Edo Town's existence imprints deeply on locals' everyday experiences even if the latter do not visit the historical themed park as customers. While some work there full-time or part-time, others own businesses that provide goods and services for the historical themed park's staff, the operating company, and the tourists who visit.

Waking Up A Non-Metropolitan City's Economy

During the 1980s, a Tokyo-based corporation's regional development division acquired land in an area that would be incorporated into Terada in the future. The land, on which Edo Town was constructed, is located next to former copper, lead, and zinc mines that were once connected by an ore transportation railroad network, but many of these railroad lines were shut down by the 1950s and their operators increasingly focused exclusively on tourist transportation (Okuno 2012). The corporation's tourism entertainment division operated Edo Town in its early years. Terada is known for its heritage sites, but the city had been facing decreased numbers of tourists at the time. The company representative Tanaka-san tells me that Edo Town was established in Terada for *machi okoshi*, an economic revitalization initiative to literally "wake up the town or city." Furthermore, its founder wanted to create a place where "Japanese people can

play.” Tanaka-san asks me rhetorically, “Japanese people have this image of working hard, right?”

Edo Town’s origins coincided with the postwar Japanese government’s agenda to redevelop economically the non-metropolitan regions that were facing depopulation due to outward urban migration and to stimulate domestic consumption through tourism (Cooper and Eades 2012; Sōrifu 1983, 1-2). Other municipal governments faced decisions about housing nuclear plants and accepting power companies into the local community; these proposals promised jobs and modernization while furthering the government’s interest in maintaining economic growth and establishing a stable energy sector in the wake of the 1973 Energy Crisis¹ (see Dusinberre 2012 and Kainuma 2011). Local governments also reinvented towns and villages into themed touristic sites that were imbued with images of nostalgic *furusato* (home villages), heritage, and technology among other things (Cooper and Eades 2012; Ivy 1995).

Like Edo Town, Tokyo Disneyland was planned during the 1980s by its operating company to become a leisure destination for economically revitalizing its host city Urayasu (see Raz 1999). It and Nagasaki Holland Village opened in 1983, the year now known in Japan as “the themed park’s first year” (*tēma pāku gannen*). Its economic success inspired a generation of themed park construction in Japan in the next two decades in what became known as the “themed park boom” (*tēma pāku būmu*). Two other themed parks also opened in Terada during this time and Edo Town’s first operating company planned to open several other historical themed parks throughout Japan (Okuno 2012). The Comprehensive Recreation Facilities Law (shortened to the Resort Law or *Rizōto Hō*), which passed in 1987, provided government subsidies and interest-free loans for the construction of “resort” leisure facilities which not only include themed parks but also hotels, golf courses, and ski resorts in non-metropolitan regions

¹ Also known as the “oil shock” in Japan

(see Leheny 2003). Local governments considered partnerships with private corporations to build themed parks, with the Resort Law cementing the government-private sector partnership model in economically redeveloping non-metropolitan regions (Cooper and Eades 2012; Gilman 2001; Okuno 2012).² Although Edo Town was established before the Resort Law was passed, its first operating company nevertheless benefited from a political climate that welcomed private sector development of leisure infrastructure and that perceived this as economically beneficial for Japan's non-metropolitan regions. Okuno (2012) points out that the operating company could build on Terada's existing tourism infrastructure, unlike the many other themed parks that must create new tourism industries for their host towns and cities.

Leheny (2003) argues that such leisure infrastructure development reflects the Japanese government's goal of transforming Japan into a "lifestyle superpower," with a population pursuing leisure activities as members of an advanced nation. The 1983 White Paper on Tourism notes that consumer expenditure has increased after the five-day work week was implemented and concludes that it is necessary to expand the variety of leisure facilities to meet consumer demand (Sōrifu 1983, 4, 19, 119). Three years later, the 1986 White Paper on tourism describes domestic tourism as "an important measure to relieve stress and retain tomorrow's drive" in a society that was becoming more complex, fast-paced, and stressful (Sōrifu 1986, 4).

The Resort Law ultimately led to drastic increases in land prices, which was later perceived as a factor leading to the collapse of Japan's economic bubble during the early 1990s (Leheny 2003). Like many municipalities in Japan during the recession, Terada fell into economic crisis during the 2000s. Its regional bank went bankrupt and caused many inns and onsen (hot spring) hotels to close since it could not longer finance their operations, and one

² Gilman (2001) notes that this strategy is not limited to Japan during the 1980s and 1990s, in a comparative study of theme park/themed park planning in Flint, Michigan, USA (AutoWorld) and Ōmuta, Fukuoka Prefecture, Japan (GeoBio World).

themed park closed down due to a lack of funds (Okuno 2012). Facing financial difficulties, Edo Town's parent corporation at the time shuttered its tourism entertainment division and as a result, the historical themed park became its own operating company after restructuring (Okuno 2012).

Almost two decades later, Edo Town's current operating company is a defining feature of Terada's local identity and economic landscape. This is symbolized by the daily sight of its red shuttle transporting tourists to the historical themed park in a route connecting two touristic areas that used to be separate towns.

Operating As A Node In Tourism Networks

I ask Edo Town representative Tanaka-san how a historical themed park fits into Terada, a touristic area known for its historical heritage sites. He uses a family of tourists as an example to answer my question. According to him, the parents experience Japanese history and culture by visiting the historical heritage sites while their children do this at Edo Town. As a leisure facility, Edo Town must carve out a place for itself within Terada's tourism landscape while distinguishing itself from the other tourist attractions there. Its operating company is a member of the local tourism association, consisting of touristic sites and attractions, accommodation businesses, transportation companies, as well as other businesses providing touristic services that collectively operate and promote Terada as a tourist area. Tourists can experience a variety of leisure and cultural experiences besides at Edo Town. According to tourist pamphlets published by a travel agency and a transportation company, they can visit another themed park, engage in outdoor nature activities, as well as participate in wood carving, candle making, pottery, and Japanese pickled vegetable (*tsukemono*) making experiences (advertised with the Japanese word *taiken*) with local artisans. A local kimono shop also advertises one-day kimono rental services.

Since Edo Town must fit into Terada's touristic circuit, its employees must be familiar with its other tourist attractions and their customers' likely touristic activities. Every spring, its incoming employees attend a seminar at the local chamber of commerce and visit other touristic sites during their training period in order to learn about Terada's tourism landscape. Around that time at Edo Town, I encounter new employees from a hotel and another themed park in Terada on similar training study tours. The historical themed park's frontline employees, as well as part-timers, some *gaichū* actors, and a few *haken* workers, eventually learn how to answer visitors' questions about local train and bus schedules, Terada's other tourist sites and attractions, as well as the best transportation to take. Many also become familiar with patterns of tourist movements. One day during the low tourist winter season, a long-time *gaichū* actor reassures several junior service workers, relatively new *gaichū* actors, and I when he sees us fretting about the small number of visitors at Edo Town just before 10am on a Sunday morning. He confidently tells us that there is another hour before most visitors arrive because they usually check out of their hotels around this time.

Terada's transportation companies coordinate their schedules, routes, and services with the operating hours of Edo Town and other local tourist destinations. The city's bus company runs a route taking tourists and a few locals from one of Terada's major train stations (where many tourists disembark) to Edo Town, the other themed park in the area, and residential areas in between the two. The first bus of the day arrives at Edo Town moments before it opens. While this is convenient for the historical themed park's visitors, its employees cannot take public transportation to arrive at work on time. The last bus departs 20 minutes after closing time, which accommodates regulars who linger to talk to the historical themed park's staff and the few casual visitors who lose track of time. Office employees always call the same local taxi

companies for the visitors who miss this last bus. On days with extended opening hours, Edo Town's operating company arranges with the city's bus company to pick up visitors at the later closing time — several hours after the last time indicate on the schedule at the bus stop.

Hotels, inns, and hostels in Terada coordinate guest visits and promotions with Edo Town's operating company. Occasionally, a Sales and Promotion department employee leaves the office in his work kimono to deliver admission tickets for nearby hotel guests. A youth hostel proprietor often offers suggestions on places to visit, including Edo Town, to his non-Japanese guests. However, he sounds slightly frustrated for an instant when he tells me in English, "They keep asking me to get foreigners to go there and gave me these coupons. But I can't just make them go there." He gestures to a stack of coupons on a lobby table, which offer a small admission discount to Edo Town. I wonder if he feels obliged to promote Edo Town to the many overseas tourists who stay at his hostel. I have also seen other hostel owners cheerfully guiding their non-Japanese guests to Edo Town's shuttle bus stop.

Edo Town participates in local activities to promote Terada to domestic and overseas tourists. The youth hostel proprietor says that he interacts the most with Edo Town's employees at an annual tourism exposition in Tokyo, where they represent Terada and its prefecture. The city also hosts an annual Lunar New Year Spring Festival in front of a major train station. A green Chinese dragon display greets tourists in the plaza and the nearby bus stop is decorated with red paper lanterns and red pieces of paper with new year wishes written in calligraphy. When waiting for the bus to Edo Town, I see two Sales and Promotion department employees — one speaks English and the other Mandarin Chinese — setting up a booth to represent the historical themed park. They tell me that tourists with foreign passports receive free admission to Edo Town on one day and the other themed park in Terada on another. They also receive

admission discounts for other tourist attractions, special gifts, and free hot springs entry at select hotels during the festival period. Many of the tourists are from Taiwan and Hong, they say. I also encounter others from China, Korea, and Malaysia at Edo Town during the Lunar New Year season.

Furnishing Edo-Like Cultural Expertise, Resources, And Settings

It is the first day of the Yuru Kyara (Quirky Character) Festival at Edo Town. *Yuru kyara*, quirky characters that represent various Japanese cities and prefectures, are interacting with visitors and Edo People. All morning, Koa Kuma, a pink bear mascot from Hokkaido with a heart on its chest, has been hugging anyone that it encounters. Melon Kuma, another bear mascot from Hokkaido with a head resembling a Yubari cantaloupe,³ has been doing its signature move— placing its large, gaping mouth with sharply-shaped plush teeth over people’s heads. When it reaches Edo Town’s *shōkagai* zone, he competes with a samurai to be the first — using foam batons — to pop the paper balloons strapped to their arms. After winning, it attempts to bite the samurai’s head. The actor suddenly abandons his dignified samurai character image, gingerly inching away from Melon Kuma as fast as he can. The audience laughs because they think that the samurai is afraid of Melon Kuma, but this is because the bear has dislodged the actor’s topknot wig headpiece. Fans gather to take photographs of the *yuru kyara* interacting with an Edo Person.

Besides hosting historical popular culture crossover events on site, Edo Town’s operating company inserts its characters and cultural contents off-site in events, spectacles, the media, and the performing arts. It carves out social contexts for them beyond the Edo period, Japanese history, and on-site visits to the historical themed park. Besides arranging for its themed

³ Also known as the Yubari melon

environment to be used in music videos, promotional videos, films, and television series (see Chapter 1), the historical themed park has also hosted entertainers such as the idol group mentioned at the beginning of this chapter who then document their experiences online to their own fans. Michael, the one-time casual visitor from Tokyo, remembers watching a tag game show that was filmed at Edo Town several years before his visit. The show is completely unrelated to the Edo period or Japanese history, but the historical themed park stood out in his memory because it was where it took place. “That was another thing that made [Edo Town] more interesting for me,” he comments, “...then when I actually got there, I was like oh this place was really cool.”

Edo People travel outside the themed environment, physically and virtually. Numerous visitors transfer their captured images of Edo People, alongside Edo Town’s setting, to social media platforms as they curate their impressions of Japan. They upload short video footage of these characters in Edo Town’s shows and when they interact with each other on YouTube. Their Instagram posts of Edo People and the historical themed park’s scenery are accompanied by captions identifying things stereotypically associated with Japan (e.g. sakura, calligraphy, Japanese traditional costume, samurai), bracketing Japan as a social media image (e.g. Japan, jp_landscape, realjapan, instajapan), and indicating imaginative movements into Japan’s past (e.g. edo, edoera, edonofuke,⁴ timetrip, japanese_history).

Besides appearing as images on Edo Town’s red shuttle bus, the *oiran* and ninja can be found (not only as images, but also played by humans) at tourism fairs and cultural spectacles held throughout Japan. One year, an aquarium in Tokyo held an Edo-themed New Year’s event in collaboration with Edo Town where ninjas performed an action show and the *oiran* re-enacted a procession with her attendants. Edo People also played traditional New Year’s games with the

⁴ Edo scenery

aquarium's visitors. Edo Town's *oiran* walked in a similar procession at an Edo-themed festival in Tokyo that showcased artists using contemporary technology to reinterpret the Edo period artist Hokusai's *ukiyo*e paintings and aesthetic style.⁵ This procession also took place at an Edo festival held by a city in a neighboring prefecture, where its shopping street was redecorated with an Edo theme. Additionally, Edo Town's ninjas appeared in an action show at a JTB travel agency promotional event at an Ito Yokado chain store and at a character booth sponsored by a Japanese entertainment company at the Moshi Moshi Nippon Festival (an annual Japanese popular culture event held in Tokyo).

Edo Town's shows and activities also travel outside the historical themed park's physical boundaries. At the same Edo festival hosted by a neighboring prefecture's city, visitors could watch the historical themed park's actors stage fight and do traditional street performances. They also had the chance to ride in a palanquin, play the *shamisen* (a traditional Japanese three-stringed instrument), participate in a traditional fan-tossing game, and to role-play thief-catchers. Additionally, children could change into ninja costumes, throwing *shuriken* (ninja throwing stars), and write calligraphy.

These events rely on the performing arts to reproduce an Edo-themed atmosphere. Edo Town contributes its human, cultural, and material resources, including actors, props, and activities, to them and in return, gains influence and publicity. The *oiran* procession and the ninja action show are modified by the historical themed park's performances, while the Edo festival's fan-tossing game is excerpted from the *oiran* show. The palanquin activity and the *shamisen* experience are also attractions found at Edo Town.

⁵ A traditional paper lantern craftsman and a visual artist were also at this festival, who coincidentally also gave live demonstrations of their work at the Toei Kyoto Studio Park's Edo Sakaba evening event, where the themed park-movie village was transformed into an Edo-themed drinking and entertainment district.

Edo Town is not the only themed park that participates in outside cultural spectacles. During fieldwork, I learned that the Toei Kyoto Studio Park provides the costumes, samurai armor, weapons, and other equipment used in Kanazawa City's⁶ annual Hyakumangoku Festival procession and that it has maintained an institutional relationship with the festival organizing committee for over 20 years. Social media photographs also show actors affiliated with the Toei Kyoto Studio Park participating in cultural festivals and historical re-enactments, dressed in period costumes. By transplanting their actors, characters, and contents into off-site Japanese cultural landscapes, these themed parks' operating companies establish themselves as experts and resource providers in the cultural industries.

However, loosening cultural characters and contents from themed environments can deviate from initially-staged narratives. Let us return to the encounter between Edo Town's samurai and the Melon Kuma mascot at the Yuru Kyara Festival. When the samurai tries clumsily to escape from the plush bear, instead of fighting honorably to the end, he becomes a comical character that has "loosened" from the stereotypical image of Japanese masculinity that has been attributed to samurai—a "quirky character" version of the samurai. Edo Town's cultural characters and contents are no longer locked into Japan's past and a historical themed park's physical boundaries, consumed as part of fluid fictional universes in contemporary popular culture.

Taihen: Tough Realities And Uncertain Futures Together

What will happen in the future? This question is on the minds of managers, employees, and even regulars who have been visiting Edo Town for several years. Interlocuters at other Japanese themed parks have also wondered about this. My interlocuters use the word *taihen*

⁶ Located in Japan's Ishikawa Prefecture

(tough) to describe the challenging circumstances faced by many themed parks in Japan. “It’s *taihen* for everyone,” sighs another Japanese themed park’s representative.

Leisure facilities in Japan, including themed parks, constantly maneuver unpredictable conditions that also affect the cities in which they are located. Fixed cultural and touristic sites, such as museums and themed parks, must maintain long-term financial sustainability and retain visitors in order to survive (Okuno 2012, 16; Seaton et al. 2017, 34). According to Okuno (2012), many Japanese themed parks lose large numbers of visitors after a successful first year— a phenomenon that he calls “the themed park’s 2nd-3rd year jinx” (*tēma pāku 2~3 nen no jinkusu*) (16). After the Japanese economy collapsed in the early 1990s, many leisure facilities and their host communities confronted tough trajectories (Leheny 2003, 127-128). Mute but visible reminders of Terada’s economic struggles can still be found near Edo Town. An empty building with faded pink signs used to be a pachinko parlor, a kind of gambling establishment in Japan. Cloth dolls stand silently among weeds in front of a closed supermarket. Edo Town’s shuttle bus used to pass by an abandoned themed park with decrepit buildings and signage.

When I first met Tanaka-san, it was five months after the 3.11 triple disasters and visitor numbers to Edo Town — and Terada — had fallen drastically. Although Terada was located outside the disaster zone, he worried whether the local economy would recover since many overseas tourists were avoiding travel to Japan at the time. The year 2020 did not turn out to be the highly-anticipated marker of economic recovery for Japan. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics was postponed to the next year, foreign tourists are banned from entering the country, and the inbound tourism is at a standstill. At the end of 2020, the Japan National Tourism Organization reports a 87.1% drop in overseas tourists with only 4.1

million visiting Japan that year— far from the government’s goal of 40 million tourists by 2020.⁷ Edo Town closed for three months from spring to summer that year after the Japanese government declared a state of emergency and reopened to decreased visitor numbers for six months with staff measuring visitor temperatures at the entrance, hand sanitizers (with their bottles covered in Edo-patterned cloth) placed at every building, enforced social distancing. Since the Japanese government declared another state of emergency for several prefectures in early 2021 during the pandemic’s next wave, it has extended its second temporary closure.

Such unpredictable circumstances aside, Japanese themed parks often fall under the shadow of Tokyo Disneyland in terms of name recognition, popularity, and economic success. Writing in the 1990s, Raz (1999) observes that Tokyo Disneyland’s visitor numbers and revenue alone surpassed that of all other themed parks in Japan despite an ongoing recession (3-4). While some people living in Terada’s prefecture and in nearby prefectures recognize Edo Town’s name as well as vaguely recall school trips there as well as its television commercials, an average Japanese person is more likely to bring up Tokyo Disneyland when they hear the word *tēma pāku* although there are numerous other themed parks in Japan. The regular Aya-san tells me that no one will understand why she returns weekly to Edo Town to watch its ninja action show because it is not a “famous” themed park like Tokyo Disneyland.

Some Terada locals are uninterested in visiting Edo Town, although they share the same city. An accommodations proprietor informs me that Edo Town is “more for tourists,” especially foreigners, and is a place that locals “do not really care about.” A man in his 60s living in a quiet apartment building near the Terada train station where many tourists arrive remarks that he will never visit Edo Town because he is uninterested in themed parks and the admission price is too high. According to local statistics, Terada is a small city with a population of about 80,000

⁷ See https://www.jnto.go.jp/jpn/statistics/since2003_visitor_arrivals.pdf

people with a decreasing and aging population. This is also reflected in the number of signboards advertising nursing home and funeral packages that dot the landscape. Thus, it is fair to say that not all locals are targeted as potential Edo Town customers, since the historical themed park welcomes primarily domestic, Japanese families with young and school-aged children. The historical themed park once initiated a week of discounted admission for the prefecture's residents, but it remains to be seen whether this has increased locals' interest in visiting.

I suspect, however, that many of my interlocuters at Edo Town would counter such negative local perceptions by pointing out the historical themed park's institutional integration into the local community and its economic contributions to Terada. Its company president, in multiple interviews, emphasizes the founder's wish to help Terada's economy and his work to continue this legacy by developing Edo Town's facilities and contents into "tourism resources." Okuno (2012) notes that the themed parks formerly operated by Edo Town's original parent company have always contributed to their host community through taxes, local resident employment, and contracts with local businesses. At Edo Town, part-time service workers and some full-time employees grew up in and now commute from Terada and its neighboring towns. Employees from other prefectures now reside in the company dormitory or have relocated with their families in Terada. Edo Town's operating company is also active in some local community events. Employees help to carry a *mikoshi* (portable shrine) at an annual summer festival. Its company president and several employees once organized a cherry tree planting event with a local kindergarten, teaching children about the trees' historical function in preventing riverbank erosion and the spread of fires in the city Edo. Although it may be convenient to imagine an outsider corporation at odds with a local community, Edo Town is entrenched, if not fully integrated, into local lifeways and social networks.

This chapter's opening scene of employees, dressed as Edo People, politely greeting the same locals in the vicinity every morning best sums up the relationship between Terada's residents and Edo Town's operating company— that of neighbors co-existing in the same community. Since Terada is a small city, the historical themed park's employees are regular customers at the same local grocery stores, convenience stores, coffee shops, restaurants, and family-run business located nearby. The owner of one such coffee shop, a retired man who appears to be in his 60s, tells me that he recognizes by face Edo Town's company president and several senior management employees because they have eaten there a few times although he does not know their names. Other locals exhibit familiarity and kindness towards Edo Town's staff, not distinguishing between employees and temporary workers. Whenever staff members and I go out to restaurants, hot springs, or public bathing facilities in Terada, their proprietors and employees usually ask if we are "Edo Town people" and will make friendly conversation if we answer in the affirmative. The owner of a nearby public bath facility offers to extend his opening hours for several *haken* workers and I, because he knows that Edo Town's closing hours will not allow us to arrive before his regular closing time. The husband-and-wife proprietors of an inn located a few minutes away by foot from Edo Town, once they learn of our affiliation, give us discounts for using their public bathing facilities and treat us to ice cream from their own freezer. A convenience store employee, whose shift is often scheduled around Edo Town's closing time, push a large stack of napkins and disposable chopsticks in my hands when ringing up my dinner purchase after she discovers that I am "from" Edo Town. Many Edo Town staff stop by this convenience store after work to buy food and drinks and it is Golden Week, a peak tourist season bringing many temporary staff from outside the prefecture to work at Edo Town.

She must have known that these supplies are in demand since they do not take housing supplies, kitchenware, and eating utensils with them to the company dormitory.

Such business relationships and local community initiatives, along with tourists, allow Edo Town and Terada to continue together into the future. One or two tour buses are often seen in the parking lots of the city's souvenir centers, one of which is located near the historical themed park. While at a local soba noodle shop for lunch (while in our Edo-style kimonos and hairstyles), an Edo Town employee tells me that Terada can potentially develop into a place with trendy and artistic neighborhoods. Artists and artisans based in Terada and a neighboring town exhibit and sell their work in touristic areas, with the latter — as I mentioned earlier — offer crafting cultural experiences to tourists. A *haken* staff working at Edo Town is, on her days off, a professional photographer who traveled to Terada to take photographs of the prefecture's scenery for an art portfolio project. Several coffee shops have also opened recently near the two major train stations in Terada where tourists arrive, including one run by a former Edo Town employee who have maintained ties with the historical themed park. Two other former Edo Town employees, who grew up in the vicinity, have formed an amateur music group and they sometimes travel to Terada's businesses and tourist sites in order to promote the city. They occasionally appear on local television and radio to perform the songs that they have composed. Edo Town is entrenched in Terada's local, multi-layered landscape, which is shared by abandoned buildings conjuring ghosts of past prosperity, nursing home billboards reflecting partially the demographic of the present population, as well as tourist infrastructure such as Edo Town's shuttle bus providing a future-oriented vision of economic and community development.

Edo Town As A Central Node In Economic And Cultural Networks

This chapter revisits the central anthropological question of what constitutes a site. Not only a place for leisure, Edo Town's operating company exists as a central node, framed by institutional cultural economic and cultural networks that intersect locally, regionally, nationally, and virtually. After more than 30 years as an economic revitalization initiative to boost tourism in one of Japan's non-metropolitan areas, the operating company has become a local employer, a force for attracting tourist revenue, and a community member collaborating with other businesses to promote Terada as a touristic region. While the operating company initially sought to re-enact a *jidaigeki*-inspired late 17th-century Japanese town, it is now an enterprise providing cultural expertise and resources for spectacles and events that brand Japanese culture to domestic and overseas consumers. Additionally, it markets its samurai, ninjas, and *oiran* as Japanese characters that can be transferred into different media formats, universes, and contexts.

Market forces and economic transitions have pushed culture outside the rigid context of nation-state and ethnic boundaries. Variations of "Japan" can be found in mediated spectacles, tourist promotion, and local communities. While some may charge that Japanese themed parks are businesses based on mass culture entertainment and thus can never be considered Japanese culture (or a part of Japanese studies), this chapter has shown that the definition of culture is constantly animated through processes. Cultural themed parks negotiate the meaning of their identities, existence, and contents at the center of the institutional networks where they are embedded.

Chapter 5 - Engaging Immersively With Edo: Casual Visitor Experiences In Edo Town

A Farmer's Tragic Tale In O-Edo

After visiting Edo Town, an Instagram user uploads a post with ten images and a short text to tell the tragic tale of her as a Japanese farmer who lived in the past.

Once upon a time, there was a hardworking farmer.

First three images: The visitor is the farmer. She is dressed in a farmer's costume, with a tan head covering and a woven basket strapped to her back, that can be rented at Edo Town.

She touches an unstaffed vendor stand displaying traditional masks and smiles in the camera's direction.

She touches the wheel of a wooden cart loaded with a hay bale.

Every day, she likes to eat dango (rice flour dumplings) while doing farm work.

Next three images: The farmer, with a fully made-up face, is seen close-up eating a stick of *dango* in front of a restaurant at Edo Town.

She looks to her left at a building decorated with baskets like the one on her back and with brooms made of rush.

She pulls on a rope connected to a bamboo bucket, placed on top of a re-created well covered with bamboo slats.

One day, this farmer sneaked into a store and stole a radish.

Next image: The farmer peers inside a wooden building, with one hand pushing aside a white *noren* (hanging store curtain). [However, a sign indicates that this is a blacksmith's workshop.]

The farmer was caught by okappiki (criminal catchers) who were passing by, and was tried in court.

Next three images: The farmer is bent over, with one *okappiki* holding her wrist and the other brandishing a long, wooden stick at her.

The two *okappiki* look straight at the camera, each standing on one side of the farmer. They hold the ends of a rope looped around the farmer's wrists. The farmer has a look of despair.

The farmer is kneeling on a woven straw mat in a re-created magistrate's court at Edo Town, bowing in submission in the camera's direction.

[The farmer] was taken to prison.

Last image: The farmer looks out, wide-eyed, between the wooden beams of the re-created Edo-era prison where she is confined.

(End)

This chapter transitions readers to an ethnographic analysis of three categories of visitors at Edo Town, beginning with casual visitors. The next two chapters continue with a discussion of overseas visitors and regulars. Casual visitors are the principal target of Edo Town's embodied experience, and they are meant to discover its themed environment for the first time during one memorable visit. Recall the office employee Ikeda-san's assertion that visitors can find out what the Edo period could have felt like by doing *fureai* (mutual, social contact) with the Edo People and their surroundings. Regardless of their country of origin, they are encouraged to actively use Edo Town's initial staging – characters, objects, and settings – to create their own experiences. I ask: How do casual visitors participate in an experience based on *fureai* with Edo Town's world?

While all visitors share the same Edo-themed setting, their experiences turn out differently based on their perceptions of Japanese culture and the Japanese past. At Edo Town, the difference in perception is mainly divided between domestic, Japanese visitors and overseas tourists. More of the former relate to the historical themed park's *jidaigeki* (Japanese historical drama) elements since they have childhood memories of their parents and grandparents watching the genre's films and television series. They tend to recognize Edo Town's objects and cultural contents as part of their own identity, since they have already encountered similar-looking

cultural objects, practices, roles, and occasions in their own lives. Overseas visitors engage more often with stereotyped cultural characters, such as ninjas and samurai, that have circulated widely abroad in mediated cultural exports. Many recognize these characters and their surroundings at Edo Town as generally Japanese, rather than as part of a specific media genre or as things from their mundane lives.

Scholars have criticized living history museums, heritage sites, and theme parks for reproducing normative, mainstream perspectives toward the past, national and cultural identities, and the natural world, consequently erasing alternate, minority voices (c.f. Davis 1997; Fjellman 1992; Handler and Gable 1997; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). Edo Town can be similarly critiqued for simplifying 264 years of Japanese history into a fictionalized, romanticized, and nationalistic portrayal of Japanese identity. However, its staged official narrative forms only one part of the visitor experience there.

Edo Town's visitors animate their experiences through *fureai* with the material objects and characters found in the themed environment, a controlled process of co-creation with contingent outcomes. Co-creation is a common business practice where companies "provide[e] managed and dynamic platforms for consumer practice" (Zwick et al. 2008, 165). Unlike characters and narratives animated in television and film, Edo Town's visitors – like many Edo People – do not strictly follow a pre-determined middle and end in their embodied experiences. They use the themed parameters provided to them, often the time traveler role and the re-enacted Edo setting, to contingently animate social experiences with the Edo People and the staged objects.

Such co-creation enables companies to use and contain consumers' unpaid creative labor within their institutional frameworks (Zwick et al. 2008, 182). The *dango*-loving, radish-stealing

farmer's tragic story on Instagram is an example of how a visitor spontaneously used the materials found at Edo Town to animate an experience without the same systematic training and preparation that employees undergo to become Edo People characters. Its publication on a social media platform is also an unpaid promotion of Edo Town.

This chapter examines casual visitors' engagement – their doing of *fureai* – with Edo Town's themed environment. First, I discuss how visitors are encouraged to move beyond their initial images of *jidaigeki* and other media inspired by Japan's past. Next, I analyze their social contact with the Edo-themed environment's characters and objects, which occur through exploration, role-play, and photography. Turning to the visitors who rent costumes to become Edo-like characters, I discuss how props and traditional Japanese clothing animate their role-play and uncritical exploration of alternate selves inside Edo Town. Finally, I identify the unpredictable circumstances that, despite the operating company's best efforts to stage an extraordinary embodied experience, cause visitors to deviate from their officially-given roles of time travelers leisurely exploring Edo to experience Japaneseness.

Activating The Extraordinary

Edo Town's themed environment is an interactive and a participatory exhibition. Objects are placed in the open for visitors to photograph, touch, and even use as props when they role-play Edo-like characters. Older male Japanese visitors often play *shogi* (Japanese chess) together on a board that has been placed near a guardhouse just outside the *shōkagai* zone. Visitors can also discover about 30 stone slabs placed throughout the historical themed park which are printed

with short factoids, like exhibition text, in Japanese and English¹ about Edo period customs, sayings, and representative objects.

The extraordinary and unfamiliar encourage visitors to explore actively. I ask Michael, the one-time casual visitor from Tokyo, about the things that drew his attention during his visit. He replies, “First, the people who work [there]. Another thing is listening to the conversation, the way that people spoke. And the *funiki* (atmosphere) of the buildings.” I also see many visitors, expecting to encounter Edo-related things, poke their heads into every building, touch everything that they see, and read every sign. A woman feigns to read her companion’s palm at a fortune teller’s table, which is placed in front of a fortune-telling chart— an action that is replicated by many other visitors.

Edo Town’s re-created buildings and objects can provoke conversations about Japanese culture within the same group of visitors. A Japanese visitor points out a *kura* (a storehouse for rice and valuables) in the *shōkagai* zone and explains in English to her friend, who seems to be visiting from outside Japan, “These things can’t be seen in houses [in Japan] anymore. We used to have them.” She then begins to explain what a *kura* is.

Non-humans are also made into participants. Visitors can meet a dog who is part of the Edo People community. They can also bring their pet dogs to the historical themed park and the frontline staff will address the latter in loud voices as *O-Inusama* (Lord Dog) in reference to a dog that historically served as a *daimyō* (feudal domain lord). Edo Town also hosts an occasional cat and dog festival where visitors can rent Edo-style costumes for their pets. These animals are then staged by their owners in photos that use the Edo-themed environment as a background.

Visitors’ role-play can deviate from Edo Town’s official narrative about the connection between Edo culture and contemporary Japanese identity. While inside the museum of everyday-

¹ I assisted with these translations during fieldwork.

use things one day, I see a woman directing a man's attention – as he films her with a video-camera – toward the exhibited objects as if she were a tour guide or a television program reporter. “And what do we have here? We have some Edo fireworks,” she says, not addressing the museum's message. They walk to the next installation without looking closely at the fireworks or the exhibition text.

Curiosity often leads ironically and comically to mundane endings. A common occurrence is when Japanese visitors see the archaic Japanese word for “toilet,” *kawayu*, printed on a store curtain in a doorway, but do not recognize its meaning since they are more used to the contemporary versions of the word *otearai* and *toire* (the Japanized English loanword “toilet”). They walk through the doorway expecting to see an attraction and seconds later, realize that it leads to the restrooms.

Visitors have also mistaken purely customer service-related actions with themed role-play. One visitor asks me what I was looking for, adding the archaic copula ending *degozaru* (meaning “to be”) ending to his sentence in imitation of how *jidaigeki* characters speak, when he seems other staff members and I (all dressed as townswomen) suddenly scrutinizing the ground together. Incapable of improvising spontaneously like actors do, I simply answer that I am helping a customer look for her lost earring. “I thought you were acting,” he tells me sheepishly, his face showing his disappointment.

During fieldwork, I notice that the recently-implemented cultural experience attractions help to initiate, and sometimes prolong, social interactions between the Edo People and visitors since many involve the former guiding the latter in crafting cultural objects. Different visitor groups, however, do not interact more with each other. Visitors often solicit the staff's advice, such as the best colors for decorating their *daruma* figures (traditional dolls popularly used for

setting goals), the right moment to turn over their rice crackers on the grill, and the exact technique for carving their name seals.

When the staff perceive an opening, they ask visitors about their experience at Edo Town and other tourist destinations in Terada. Their work personas as Edo People inevitably become a conversation topic, because many visitors have, out of curiosity, questions such as whether it is difficult to put on a kimono for work everyday and whether their *katsura* (wig headpieces) are “authentic.” Some also ask *gaichū* actors about the theater productions, commercials, television series, and films in which they have appeared. One visitor, as she decorates her Japanese candle at a cultural experience attraction, even attempts to guess the *gaichū* actor Sagi’s age and asks him to guess hers. She then compliments his good looks and speculates that his parents must also be good-looking.

Some of these conversations can only take place in Edo Town’s context. They feel extraordinary to visitors, because they take longer and are more involved than the standard customer interactions. Casual visitors who are willing to pay an extra fee to do a cultural activity (and who speak at least conversational Japanese) can now participate in staged 30- to 60-minute-long social situations with the Edo People.

Photographing Experiences

Visitors use photography (and sometimes video) to document their experiences at Edo Town. Many of these images are posted to Instagram, where more than 14,000 public ones use Edo Town’s name in their hashtags. Although Edo Town regularly updates an official account on the social media platform, most of these images are uploaded by visitors.

While some photos predictably depict scheduled events and performances, many are close-up shots of material objects— a sign that visitors took the time to explore the themed environment. They include: *ema*² written with visitors' and Edo People's wishes, a row of *geta* (traditional Japanese wooden clogs), paper umbrellas, traditional Japanese masks, a handwritten restaurant menu on a wooden board, and partial views of traditional Japanese architecture. Visitors also document their participation in the cultural experience attractions, showing, for example, rice crackers on a grill and a painted *daruma* figure. Japanese visitors post photos of seasonal dishes and snacks, such as a meal made from autumn ingredients, a grilled eel rice bowl (in the summer), shaved ice (also in the summer), as well as *dango* and pudding decorated with Halloween motifs. Overseas visitors tend to share photos of food that, to them, represent Japanese cuisine such as soba noodles, Japanese curry, green tea ice cream, and *yakitori* (grilled chicken skewers). Re-created street scenes are also recorded. The Instagram images include an unstaffed street seller stand with traditional Japanese toys, the *shōkagai* zone's townscape view, Japanese gardens, the surrounding hills' autumn colors, as well as Edo Town's re-created Ryōgokubashi and Nihonbashi Bridges.

Visitors often take photos with Edo People and of themselves as Edo-like characters especially if they have rented costumes. They pose in photographs with ninjas and courtesans after shows, samurai and townspeople in the re-created streets, as well as *jidaigeki* characters in specific locations. They insert themselves as Edo-like characters in the themed environment, which they document photographically and then upload the images to Instagram. A group of visitors sit in a wooden cart pushed by an Edo Person. Inside a wooden pagoda, a group of swordswomen and townswomen serve each other tea using a large teapot and several teacups. A

² Wooden plaques usually purchased at Japanese shrines and temples, where visitors write their prayers and wishes to be hung up in designated areas

visitor, dressed as a samurai, stands in a Japanese garden with moss-covered rocks, Japanese maple trees, a small stone bridge, and a steam that was built in a re-created samurai's residence. For the Instagram caption, the user writes in English, "I was trying to catch fish with my sword."

Unfamiliar things tempt visitors to photograph them. Tour group members from Vietnam, much to the chagrin of their leader and the Edo Town employees responsible for guiding them, stop excitedly every few seconds to photograph everything and everyone that evoke "Japan" for them. To the employees' consternation, one tour group member poses for several photos with a rush broom that she had discovered— first in front of a re-created canal, then next to a beverage vending machine that is partially hidden by a wooden shed and a rush hanging. One of the employees, who – like me – has already been subjected to numerous photos as townswomen, wonders, "Why is she taking a photo with a broom?" Another employee sighs exasperatedly, "This is a *vending machine*."

Photography also occurs for specific purposes. Edo Town's regulars use photography to further social relationships with certain Edo People and actors (see Chapter 7). Cosplayers use the themed environment to re-create scenes from their favorite historically-inspired manga, anime, and video games, which are then captured by the camera operators accompanying them. I also met a visitor, appearing to be in his late 20s or early 30s, who arrived at Edo Town with a suitcase filled with several delicate female dolls. He did not go to any shows or attractions. Instead, he spent approximately one hour inside a building posing the dolls on a *tatami* (woven straw) mat then taking close-up photographs of them.

Role-playing Edo-like Characters And Clothing Alternate Selves

Casual visitors respond to the themed environment by merging with how the Edo People look and speak. Japanese visitors occasionally attempt to communicate with the frontline staff with words reflecting their interpretation of the Edo People's Edo-like speech. They imitate the Edo People's use of the word *ryō* (rather than the contemporary Japanese currency *yen*) when referring to Japanese currency and the expression *hino, funo, mi* instead of the customary *hai chīzu* (say "cheese") when taking photographs. A few Japanese visitors have asked me for the *kawaya* when looking for the restroom. Some visitors (most of them Japanese) attach the *degozaru* suffix at the end of every sentence, reflecting their impression of what *jidaigeki* "sounds" like. Contrasting with the staff's intensive character labor (see Chapter 2), these visitors use select elements of Edo-like language that they have heard before to initiate conversations with Edo People. Service workers usually respond with the Edo-like greeting corresponding to their work location. Actors, along with a few long-time service workers, begin to socializing with these visitors through their Edo People characters.

Additionally, many visitors rent costumes – many consisting of kimonos – to role-play alternate versions of themselves. For the regular *Kyokuchō*, changing into his costume at the costume rental facility is the first step to his transformation from a regular person into his *Shinsengumi* persona at Edo Town. He describes, "After changing, [the costume rental facility proprietor] places two *katana* (Japanese swords) into my *obi* (kimono sash), tells me *itterasshaimase*,³ and then taps my shoulder as a send-off. That's when I'm already *Kyokuchō*."

At the costume rental facility, many casual visitors act as if they will soon undergo physical and mental transformations. They spend five to ten minutes choosing the costume that

³ A Japanese expression used when people leave their homes, workplaces, or a place where they are based to go elsewhere

best fits what they want to become, concerned with the kimono's color and the image that they will project as Edo-like characters. Sometimes, female visitors hesitate when they notice the townswoman's and the princess's "feminine" appearances on the costume rental's iPads that show them the available options. When the service worker Ken-san notices this, he directs them towards the swordswoman character to show them a "cool" (*kakkōii*) choice. I also overhear a male visitor fretting to the kimono dressing staff that he does not know whether he "fits" the samurai costume – the samurai's strong, *kakkōii* image – or not. His worries are alleviated shortly after a staff member brings him a prop *katana*. As he looks at himself in the mirror, he perceives himself as a samurai character for the first time.

Sometimes, children's transformation into Edo-like characters are used as a means of socialization. Japanese parents and staff frequently tell young children (a majority are boys) who are dressed up as ninjas not to cry when they have fallen down. They admonish, "Ninjas don't cry. They are supposed to be *kakkōii*, right?" The children usually pick themselves up, after being guided through their ninja roles to react in a more "adult" manner.

Additionally, rented costumes enable visitors to act out their perceptions of the Japanese past. A British visitor walks into Edo Town's costume rental facility and asks the staff in English whether he can dress up as Takeda Shingen, a feudal lord who was active during the Sengoku era (1467-1600) that preceded the Edo period. As I interpret his request into Japanese for the staff, who look perplexed, he explains, "I love Akira Kurosawa's movies."⁴ He agrees to rent a samurai costume, because no Takeda Shingen costume is available.

Kenneth, the one-time visitor from Hong Kong, was thrilled to have the opportunity to wear samurai clothing at Edo Town. He comments that it appears similar to what he has seen in

⁴ He must have been inspired by the film director Akira Kurosawa's *Kagemusha* (1980), which Takeda Shingen and a thief who becomes his double are the main characters.

the Japanese historical television series *JIN* about the Japanese brain surgeon who time travels to the Edo period, saying, “In fact, I thought I was one of the Samurai, like Sakamoto Ryōma.⁵”

Kenneth also enjoyed discovering “the [sic] differences between my imagination and the fact.”

When I ask him in a follow-up message about what he meant by “differences,” he writes,

The clothing was tight in order to keep the good shape so it is not easy to have flexible movement when you want to walk or even run on the streets. Secondly, the accessory, for example, the sword was heavy to be carried. More importantly, the straw sandals were not comfortable for walking. Wearing sneakers is very comfortable to walk or run anywhere but the straw sandals were thin but rigid, so I was not able to walk a lot and I could not imagine how people in the Edo period can walk one month by those sandals from Osaka to Edo LOL. I felt pain in fact.

Although Kenneth experienced pain and clumsiness, wearing a samurai costume at Edo Town helped him to fill in the Japanese past’s imaginative gaps. This would not have been possible from watching Japanese historical dramas alone.

Character role-play depends on the length and quality of social interactions with Edo People. It can be as short as visitors in Shinsengumi costume declaring deeply and authoritatively to costume rental staff, *itemairu*— a line often uttered by Shinsengumi characters before they go out on patrol. It can also be two-way interactions, like with the British visitor who wants to be Takeda Shingen at Edo Town but who finally settles for a samurai costume. We later see each other in one of the historical themed park’s restaurants and I point out “Takeda Shingen” to a nearby *gaichū* actor who is dressed as a townsman. This actor is always in character whenever visitors are nearby, even if he is eating his lunch. He recoils immediately in shock as Edo period commoners would if they suddenly learned that a powerful feudal lord was sitting across from them. Laughing, “Takeda Shingen” points to his girlfriend – who has rented a

⁵ Sakamoto Ryōma was historically a *rōnin* (masterless samurai). The character appears as a character in many contemporary Japanese films, television series, anime, and video games.

swordswoman costume – and tells us that she is Tokugawa Ieyasu (the Edo period’s first shogun ruler). This prompts the actor to stagger back again.

Sometimes, Edo People provoke visitors in costume to improvise longer scenes together. One *rōnin* (masterless samurai) calls out obsequiously to a visitor who is dressed as a noble lord. Although the visitor appears surprised for a split second, he soon gazes at the *rōnin* with the affected disdain of his character. He notices another employee and I, both dressed as townswomen, next to the *rōnin* and admonishes the latter for chasing townswomen around instead of working. When he speaks, he animates the exaggerated tone and archaic-style of speech used by the nobility-class characters in Japanese historical films and television shows. The *rōnin* then dramatically flings himself onto the ground and begs the noble lord to forgive him. The noble lord then orders the two townswomen to return to his castle with him, as his friends – visitors dressed as samurai and swordswomen – giggle. The visitor places his arms over the two townswomen’s shoulders to role-play a noble lord taking possession of his commoner women, much to at least my silent annoyance. One of his friends seizes the opportunity to photograph this scene.

Yet other visitors use rented costumes to play in ways that do not conform to Edo Town’s character framework. Occasionally, male Japanese visitors request to become *machimusuko* (“town son”)– a character that is not officially recognized at Edo Town. This is a wordplay on the Japanese word for “townswoman” used at Edo Town, *machimusume*, which literally means “town daughter.” In this context, a *machimusuko* refers to a man dressed in a townswoman’s kimono, *obi*, and hair accessories. The costume rental staff privately express their exasperation at these visitors’ attempts to bend the facility’s procedures and publicly try to discourage these visitors by warning them that women’s kimonos only go up to a certain size and that the *obi* will

feel uncomfortably tight. In all the instances that I have witnessed, the visitors reply with bravado that they would not mind this. When they walk around Edo Town as *machimusuko*, they laugh at each other's appearances and enjoy the startled attention that they receive from the staff and other visitors.

Based on their behavior and the clothing that they wear to Edo Town, it seems unlikely that these visitors cross-dress or question gender binaries regularly in real life. The extraordinary themed environment, however, encourage them to temporarily play with gendered appearances. It also enables them to create an Edo-like character that does not exist as part of Edo Town's re-enactment.

Mundane Realities

Despite Edo Town's best efforts, visitor participation is dependent on how they feel and other unpredictable variables. Some visitors ignore its re-enactment and its message about Edo-like Japanese identity, paying more attention to its commercialism, their individual interests, or their immediate needs. Although Edo Town's setting reminds Kenneth, the visitor from Hong Kong, of the Japanese historical television series *Jin*, he draws a clear distinction between the performing arts and the historical themed park's business operations. He explains,

In fact, although the scenes were the same, I still felt it was quite different between *Jin* and Edo Town. *Jin* undoubtedly was a TV drama in which characters and cast would do their best to perform as the Edo people, while the performers in Edo Town were doing business. They wanted you to give money to buy souvenirs, food, photos, and experience selling [sic] there. Only few live performance [sic] on streets and or I would say most of the [Edo People] ...were the salespersons of shops in my opinion.

The overlap between the performing arts and business operations at Edo Town is not always apparent to casual visitors. The presence of service workers in costume also reinforces the

impression that visitors are paying for services, rather than performances that showcase the actors' skills.

A themed environment's animation is subject to consumer expectations and unequal access. The extent to which visitors can do this depends on their ability and willingness to pay more than the admission fee, so that they can interact more with Edo People (such as at a cultural experience attraction), role-play Edo-like characters by renting costumes, and bring parts of the experience back home by purchasing souvenirs. The deliberately-animated aspects of their experience become apparent when visitors look past or ignore the layers of theming. The staff's character performances, originally an actor's craft, is seen as diluted animated labor that is carried out to deepen consumer experiences.

Understanding this, the frontline staff do not always push Edo Town's initial staged experience on visitors. For example, they quickly understand why overseas tour group members lose interest in the cultural experience attractions once the latter learn that many of these activities take at least 30 minutes and cost an additional fee. They agree that the tour group members' time and money are better spent on watching the shows (which are already paid for in their tour package) since most have only a few hours allotted for their visit.

The frontline staff is sympathetic to casual visitors' and some repeaters' complaints about the high admission price and the extra fees required for some attractions. The staff and I, for instance, overhear many visitors scoffing at the high costume rental fees. In our follow-up conversation on Facebook Messenger, a visitor from the Netherlands writes that he enjoyed Edo Town's archery experience (the same one in which Kenneth participated) and that he took numerous photos of "the people and houses" that showed him Edo culture. However, he did not do the other activities "because of the extra price you have to pay" and did not buy anything

because “the souvenirs were too expensive.” Kenneth similarly comments that “foreign visitors” may feel negatively about the costs at Edo Town since they must both purchase admission and pay extra fees.

Additionally, the Edo-like atmosphere fades out of visitors’ consciousness whenever they formulate strategies to maximize their time at Edo Town—contrary to the historical themed park’s invitation to become exploring time travelers. During peak tourist periods, visitors compete with each other for theater seating and attraction participation slots. While eating lunch, many plan afternoon visit schedules that will allow them to watch as many of the remaining shows as possible. The service worker Ken-san once stops me from promoting Edo Town’s shows to a group of visitors who arrive two hours before closing when he realizes that their goal is to photograph themselves wearing rented kimonos with the Edo-themed environment as the background.

Uncontrollable circumstances also destroy the communal and familiar Edo-like atmosphere. It is more difficult for the frontline staff to animate the themed environment during the low tourist period in winter when there are few visitors and when the weather is unpleasantly cold. One staff member remarks that the atmosphere feels “lonely” (*sabishī*) on these days. Visitors generally focus more on the cold temperature than on their surroundings. Once, a costume employee and I overhear a Japanese couple attempt to guess how Edo Town’s frontline staff manage to wear only kimonos in the winter. “They must be wearing HEATTECH⁶ under their kimonos,” one remarks in a self-satisfied tone as if he has just exposed the Edo People’s anachronistic secret of wearing contemporary thermal underwear.

Other incidents brusquely lift the veil of fantasy and idealism from Edo Town. One day, the frontline staff notice a young Japanese woman dressed in the rented costume of a lord’s

⁶ A brand of thermal underwear sold by the Japanese clothing retailer Uniqlo

concubine (*ōoku*) who is walking alone with her headphones and a sad smile on her face while ignoring the Edo People. That day, she repeats her path across the length of the historical themed park and returns to the costume rental several times because she has knocked loose her *katsura* (wig headpiece) from constantly fidgeting with it. The staff do not know what to do. They only notice that she is pregnant when she changes back into her regular clothes near the end of the day and they guess she must be suffering from pregnancy-related depression. One person sighs, “We sometimes get people like this, people who aren’t right in the head.” It is clear that the woman needs help, but Edo Town is not the right place to provide it.

On another day, the themed environment becomes the site of an unwanted spectacle when a visitor from Singapore is heard screaming in pain from inside the ninja maze attraction. He has fallen on his back and cannot move. The company-affiliated actors immediately go out of their Edo People characters and search for the visitor. One looks for me so that I can help interpret for the visitor, who does not speak much Japanese. Nearby, several *gaichū* actors stare uncertainly at the scene and as I learn later from someone else, they do not want to become too involved as “outsiders” (*soto no hito*).

Activating Embodied Experiences As Consumer Labor

This chapter examined the basic experience that is targeted at Edo Town’s one-time casual visitors, which is the historical themed park’s most general and largest customer category. Although customer service and *omotenashi* (Japanese-style hospitality) is important in Japanese retail and tourism, Edo Town’s visitors must also “work” to activate their embodied experiences in the themed environment. They do this by engaging in *fureai* with its objects and characters, through role-play, photography, and various modes of participation.

Despite visitor participation, Edo Town's themed environment standardizes what Japan's past looks and feels like as an atmosphere and a setting in relation to the present. A one-time visit does not leave enough time and reflective opportunities to examine the limits of this staging. Most casual visitors plan their actions with the guide provided to them at the ticket window, so that they can most efficiently use their time at Edo Town. Their "work," after all, is learning how to merge with Edo Town's world after paying for access.

Chapter 6 - Gazing And Responding Back At Foreignness In Edo Japan

Tourist Encounter Local Gaze: A “Surprise” Scenario For Foreign Travelers

Two bandits jump out from behind a tree to ambush a tour group from Vietnam. “Give me your money!” One bandit roars in Japanese. The tour group members turn around in surprise. They have been busy taking photos of their surroundings and of the employees (dressed as townswoman) who are guiding their visit. The second bandit holds up a scroll for them to read. They chuckle when they realize that the Vietnamese translation of the first bandit’s spoken words is written on the scroll. The first bandit lunges towards the tour group with his *katana* (Japanese sword) with a menacing expression on his face.

A swordswoman strides purposefully towards the bandits, appearing from behind another tree. She also holds a translation scroll that indicates what she is saying. “You killed my father ten years ago. Prepare to die!” she declares to the bandits. She unsheathes her *katana* and faces the two bandits, signaling to the tour group to stay back.

The sword fight begins and the actors, as characters, grunt as they skillfully fight each other. The tour group members take photos and videos of them with their cameras and cell phones. After approximately ten seconds, the swordswoman falters and staggers back. *Herupu Mi* (Help me), she gasps in Japanized English at one tour group member. She holds out her *katana* to him.

The chosen volunteer hesitates, but takes the sword. The two bandits advance towards him slowly. Crying out fiercely, they lift their swords up in slow motion to show the tour group member that he can strike their chests with the swordswoman’s *katana*. The tour group member gingerly places the sword there and the two bandits reel back dramatically. As they stumble

away to show that they have lost the fight, they tell curious Japanese visitors passing by that they must go to the hospital.

The swordswoman, who was quietly watching the fight, approaches the tour group member. He returns the *katana* to her. She thanks him gratefully in Japanese for his help and gives him a 500-yen coupon that can be redeemed at one of Edo Town's souvenir shops.

This chapter discusses overseas tourists' experiences at Edo Town and their impact on the historical themed park's cultural animation. Within the themed environment, Edo People often call them *ikoku no kata*— an archaic way of saying “foreigners” in Japanese and literally meaning “people from foreign lands.” Several frontline staff tell me that they did not encounter so many foreigners until they began working at Edo Town. While overseas visitors account for less than one percent of Edo Town's visitors,¹ its operating company has been actively promoting the historical themed park overseas for more than a decade. It has modified its services to be more foreigner-friendly and has mandated that employees be able to carry out customer service for foreigners. The participatory scenario with the bandit and the swordswoman was modified from an original Japanese version to stage a “surprise” for overseas tour groups. Besides in Vietnamese, the translation scrolls also exist in English, Chinese, Thai, Indonesian, Korean among other non-Japanese foreign languages.

Tourists perform a “gaze” that define what, for them, “is visually out-of-ordinary, what are relevant differences and what is ‘other’” (Urry and Larsen 2011, 14). Nishijima (2017)

¹ I was provided with statistics for Edo Town's overseas visitors from 2016 (the year I conducted fieldwork) to 2018, with each fiscal year beginning in April and ending in March of the following year. In 2016, there were 20,466 total overseas visitors with 14,566 visiting in tour groups and 5901 visiting independently. In 2018, the total number has increased to 27,986 overseas visitors with 17,268 visiting in tour groups and 10,718 visiting independently. The data for April 2019 was not yet available, but an employee believed that the total number for 2018 would be significantly higher due to the high number of tourists for the cherry blossom season. He also pointed out that these statistics do not include overseas visitors who went to Edo Town with their Japanese friends as well as children six years old and under. Although the latter are not generally counted in company statistics, he estimated that they would add 20% to the total number.

argues that overseas tourists to Japan and the media reinscribe a “distinctively Japanese cultural odor” on select things that have drawn their attention (70).² Edo Town’s overseas visitors tend to view their experience at the historical themed park as more generally Japanese than historically Edo, distinct from the official narrative that places equal emphasis on past Edo and contemporary Japanese identity. They expect to encounter things that they associate stereotypically with Japanese origin. For example, many ask me whether Edo Town’s restaurants serve ramen and sushi, two kinds of Japanese food that are popular outside of Japan but did not exist in its current form during the Edo period. Some erroneously refer to any woman wearing a kimono as a geisha, although most staff are dressed as townswomen or an unmarried female member of a samurai household.

The subjects of the tourist gaze, in this case Edo Town’s staff, respond back at overseas visitors with a “local gaze” (Maoz 2006) when they learn what things exude a Japanese “cultural odor” to foreigners. Management and frontline staff confront the question of how to communicate Edo-themed contents that will be understandable to overseas visitors who are interested in experiencing Japanese culture through tourism. They often ask me about their foreign customer’s needs, motivations, and behaviors, as if I — the on-site foreigner — can help decipher for them the “foreigner” category of visitor. While the operating company recognizes that overseas visitors approach Edo Town’s re-enacted world differently from domestic visitors, its goal continues to be the communication of its official narrative— that Edo culture is emblematic of Japanese identity today. While the language barrier makes verbal communication difficult with overseas visitors, the historical themed park still aims to merge its overseas visitors

² Nishijima (2017) gives the example of the TOTO Washlet bidet toilet and contrasts this case with the “culturally odorless” (Iwabuchi 2002) qualities of popular exported Japanese products.

with the Edo People's actions and appearances. When overseas visitors experience Edo Town, their bodies are animated into a temporary role-play of Japaneseness.

I first discuss Edo Town's overseas promotional efforts, which take place primarily in Asia, and hospitality initiatives adopted to make services more "foreigner friendly" to overseas tourists. I then situate the historical themed park's experience within the cultural branding efforts aimed at non-Japanese overseas audiences, which are channeled through the Japanese government, businesses, and online media platforms. The next section focuses on the operating company's forging of connections with media and entertainment organizations, business enterprises, as well as foreign dignitaries, many of which are based in East and Southeast Asia. The chapter then discusses how overseas visitors respond to their experiences at Edo Town in the collaborative surveys and short conversations that I conducted during fieldwork. Finally, I analyze the frontline staff's strategic use of mixed communication methods involving their bodies, single words, short phrases, as well as props whenever they encounter language barriers that prevent them from fully re-creating Edo Town's experience for overseas visitors. The last part of the chapter discusses the operating company's deviation from some existing inbound tourism marketing practices and individual employees' vexed efforts to grapple with their foreign customers' cultural differences.

Overseas Visitors At Edo Town

After the "surprise" participatory scenario with the bandits and the swordswoman, overseas tour group members change into townspeople or samurai-rank character costumes³ if they have purchased the costume change package. They then watch several "foreigner-friendly"

³ Men dress up as samurai and women dress up as unmarried female members of a samurai household (*bukemusume*).

shows in succession, including the ninja action and *oiran* (high-ranking courtesan). According to employees, these shows rely more on visual spectacles and movements than Japanese language dialog to advance their plots. Overseas tour group members also photograph themselves in the Edo-themed environment in between shows and during their allotted free time (typically 30 minutes to one hour) in the historical themed park. Many groups spend only an hour or two at Edo Town, but some stay for up to three or four hours if the tour group package includes a served lunch.

At Edo Town, overseas tour groups exceed domestic tour groups. On weekdays, the historical themed park typically welcomes two or more overseas tour groups per week and even up to three groups in a day during peak tourist periods. During low tourist periods, overseas tour groups can make up the majority of visitors inside Edo Town. On average, each overseas tour group consists of ten to 12 people including the land operator and the tour group leader who travels to Japan with its members from their home country. I have also seen up to 90 people from the same travel agency, who were divided evenly into three groups. Besides school group visits, I only witness from afar one domestic group visit consisting of elderly Japanese men and women while assisting with an overseas tour group.

Overseas tour groups are categorized as group (*dantai*) visitors because their visits are booked through travel agencies that arrange for their land operator guides (Japan-based tour guides) and charter bus transportation to Edo Town. Most are organized through travel companies in Asia, although a JTB Corporation tour group package regularly brings English-speaking tourists from North America, Australia, and Europe. Many are from Taiwan, but those from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam have been growing steadily in the last decade. Edo Town's operating company has already been conducting overseas promotions in Hong Kong

and Taiwan for several years and it has begun to focus on the Southeast Asian countries where visa restrictions have been relaxed for certain countries since 2013 (see JMLIT 2014, 22).

At this time, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games has become a temporal time marker for Edo Town and other businesses that are frequented by overseas tourists. One Edo Town employee comments that 2020 is like a “deadline” for overseas promotional efforts. A manager at the Toei Kyoto Studio Park refers to the global mega-event as an impetus to “internationalize.” In 2016, the Japanese government revised the target inbound tourist goal from 20 million to 40 million by the year 2020 after the former number was attained, envisioning that tourist revenue will reach eight trillion yen (approximately 73.9 billion USD) per year and that the number of overseas “repeater” tourists (on their second or subsequent visit) can grow to 24 million people (Ashita no Nippon wo Sasaeru Kankō Bijon Kōsō Kaigi 2016, 2).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic drastically reduced inbound tourist numbers in 2020, Asian tourists,⁴ according to the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), represented 85.2% (about 24.1 million) of almost 28.3 million inbound tourists that visited Japan in 2019.⁵ Tourists from mainland China, Hong Kong, Korea, and Taiwan make up 70.1% (22.3 million) and those from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam make up 12.0% (3.8 million) of that year’s numbers.⁶

Social media pages show employees promoting Edo Town at tourism fairs and cultural spectacles in the operating company’s targeted Asian cities and regions. Employees from the

⁴ The Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) counts South Korea, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, India, Macau, Israel, Mongolia, Turkey, and other (Asia) in the Asia category.

⁵ See https://www.jnto.go.jp/jpn/statistics/data_info_listing/pdf/2019_december_zantei.pdf

⁶ See <https://statistics.jnto.go.jp/graph/#graph--breakdown--by--country>

Sales and Promotion, as well as the Overseas Development, departments represent their company at booths that are grouped by prefecture. Company-affiliated actors perform short spectacles on stage. One of these actors explains, “When we perform ninja shows, we hope that [people] will become interested. There is a booth representing our company. They watch [the show], come to our booth, and we give an explanation— always in this order.” One employee reveals, however, that participating in these overseas tourist promotion events is costly and therefore, it is harder for small cities such as Terada to be as well-presented as larger cities such as Tokyo and Kyoto. While abroad, employees also make sales calls to travel agencies. They want to measure and attract the latter’s interest in including Edo Town on tour itineraries. They also want to learn about which land operators in Japan, with whom they often interact at Edo Town, are connected to specific travel agencies.

Recently, Edo Town’s operating company is paying more attention to overseas “free and independent travelers” (abbreviated as FIT in the tourism industry) who organize their own trip and transportation to the historical themed park. While the operating company has tracked overseas tour groups’ countries and numbers for several years, according to an employee, it only began to count overseas FIT visitors from mid-2016 onward by asking them to fill out ticket window surveys asking them about the number of admission tickets to be purchased (also because of the language barrier). The employee explains that the percentage of overseas tour groups have dropped although they still form the majority of Edo Town’s overseas tourists. Overseas FIT visitor numbers have been rising every year, especially those from Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines. He has also noticed more European tourists, mainly from France and Spain, in Terada. The operating company is also expanding its overseas promotions to Europe and Australia.

The employee emphasizes that the decrease in overseas tour groups is related to changes in tourism industry trends and consumer preferences, rather than a negative reflection on Edo Town's contents. More overseas FIT visitors have been purchasing e-tickets to Edo Town through third-party websites, such as Tripadvisor, that hold business agreements with the operating company. These e-tickets are technically group tickets because they are booked through a travel organization, he continues, the contracts appear in Edo Town's ticketing system as if they are for individual visitors. As a result, these visitors are counted as FIT visitors when they exchange their vouchers for admission tickets at the historical themed park.

Attracting overseas FIT visitors is challenging. One reason, the employee claims, is Terada's "day-trip image" that has circulated in the tourism industry. Consequently, overseas tourists allocate less time to their visit to Terada and most only visit its heritage sites, which are marketed, according to him, as "the main attraction." (Domestic tourists often stay overnight to dedicate a full day for the heritage sites, another for Edo Town, and possibly another for nature hikes and other activities.) He acknowledges that it is easier to reach Edo Town by a charter tour bus that leaves from the tourists' hotels than by Terada's public transportation system. Although it is possible to take a local bus to Edo Town from a train station, the bus and train tickets are not covered by the Japan Rail (JR) pass that overseas tourists in Japan often use during their travels since they do not have to pay too many extra transportation fees. A Japan Railway (JR)-run train station is located slightly farther away, but no local buses go directly to the historical themed park from there. To remedy this situation, Edo Town operates shuttle buses that leave from that train station several times an hour.

Developing Foreigner-Friendly Japanese Hospitality

During a trainee seminar, the company-affiliated actor Ebisu-san tells the incoming cohort of Edo Town employees that it is important to know how to handle (*taiō suru*) foreign customers since overseas tourists have been increasing in Japan every year. I am there to help him teach them English customer service expressions. In Japanese, I present expressions for several common scenarios such as when overseas visitors appear to need help, when they ask for directions, and when the employees do not understand what the visitors have just said to them in English. The employees then role-play each of these scenarios together. At the end of the seminar, Ebisu-san reassures the new employees that they should not worry if they forgot all the expressions that they had just practiced. “The most important thing,” he advises, “is to show the customers your *kokoro*.” In this context, *kokoro* means both the Japanese heart and the care that Edo People must show to their customers.

Omotenashi, the Japanese style of hospitality, has become an important concept for showcasing Japan to the world. In Tokyo’s Olympic Games bid presentation, the television announcer Christel Takigawa introduces *omotenashi* as “a spirit of selfless hospitality, one that dates back to our ancestors and since then has remain ingrained in Japan’s ultra-modern culture.”⁷ The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games’ website states that, “All Japanese citizens, including Olympic and Paralympic volunteers, will employ their utmost resourcefulness as hosts to welcome visitors from around the world with the best Japanese *omotenashi* (hospitality).”⁸ This concept has translated into the governmental recognition that tourist infrastructure and accommodations must be developed, such as tourist information centers, public wireless Internet

⁷ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?t=1548&v=frLZeeU9760&feature=youtu.be>

⁸ See <http://tokyo2020.org/en/games/games-vision/>

access (to assist the increased numbers of FIT tourists from Asia), as well as halal-certified food and prayer spaces for the predominantly Muslim tourists from Indonesia and Malaysia (JMLIT 2013, 43-44, 52). During the 2010s, multi-lingual translations have quickly appeared in public spaces and touristic areas.

While my interlocuters did not use the word *omotenashi* in our conversations together, Edo Town's operating company has added translations and accommodations for overseas visitors. It updates official social media pages in English, Thai, and traditional Chinese. The most recent cultural displays all have translated exhibition text. During fieldwork, I also assist with several English text translations. In recent winters, Edo Town has been providing visitors with, according to its official Japanese Facebook page, "warm pocket warmer *omotenashi*" so that they can keep warm while admiring the scenery at the historical themed park. An Overseas Development employee specifies that tourists from Southeast Asian countries are unaccustomed to Japan's lower winter temperatures and they would appreciate this extra touch at Edo Town since many things are located outdoors.

One day, I meet a representative from a non-profit organization that helps Muslim (mostly Indonesian) tourists in Japan who has brought a group of them to Edo Town. Employees coordinate to convert a theater — in the time slot between scheduled shows — into a temporary, makeshift prayer room for these visitors. (Some of them, however, decide to spend more time at attractions and to pray later.) Thinking that I am an Edo Town employee, he attempts to convince me that the historical themed park's souvenir shops should stock halal-certified sweets and he offers to message me with some recommendations. In a later Facebook Messenger conversation, I reveal that I am a volunteer staff conducting dissertation fieldwork and that one component involves inbound tourists to Japan. He writes back that tourism management must accommodate

diverse needs (*tayōsei no taiō*) regarding entertainment, food, and souvenirs, and that the adoption of such a mindset will make money for businesses.

Additionally, Edo Town's operations revolve around an institutional familiarity with overseas tourists' travel patterns. Employees tell me that tourists from Asia typically take shorter vacations than those from Europe, North America, and Australia. They do not have their weekly day off during peak tourist periods, such as the Lunar New Year that brings tourists from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea and parts of Southeast Asia and the Songkran new year in April that brings large numbers of tourists from Thailand. April also coincides with the *sakura* season, when overseas tourists flock to Japan to see its cherry blossoms. The summer vacation (*natsuyasumi*) season, as the service worker Aki-chan has hinted (see Chapter 2), is a prolonged peak tourist period and this is when tourists from Europe, North America, and Australia often travel to Japan.

Edo Town's management has directed employees to use foreign language greetings (*aisatsu no kotoba*) on specific occasions with overseas visitors. The employees responsible for guiding overseas tour groups know how to say "hello" and "thank you" in the language corresponding to the groups' home countries; in many cases, this is in Mandarin Chinese, Thai, and Indonesian. During the Lunar New Year, the management instructs frontline employees (via a printed announcement) to learn Mandarin Chinese expressions such as *nihao* (hello), *xie xie* (thank you), and happy new year (*xin nian quai le*). These expressions are written in traditional Chinese characters and are accompanied by the Japanese *katakana* script for loanwords that indicate the approximate pronunciation.

One company-affiliated actor, Saburo-san, has memorized greetings in several languages including English, French, Russian, and Thai as a form of customer service. He says, "We must

memorize [these greetings]. If it's a *gaijin* (foreigner), we have to say *sawatika*⁹ and other [foreign language greetings]." Whenever he sees overseas visitors, he explains, he asks them in English which country they are from. If they respond in Japanese, he praises their language skills before greeting them in their home country's language. Saburo-san acknowledges that it is technically acceptable for Edo People not to know foreign greetings, because most people were not allowed to travel outside Japan during the Edo period. However, he pivots away from Japanese history and towards Edo Town's Japanese-style hospitality when justifying foreign language greetings in an Edo-themed environment. He believes that a positive and closer social dynamic occurs whenever foreigners meet a Japanese person who knows words in their country's language. "It is okay for the Edo People to [only say] *irasshaimase* (welcome) like Edo People do," Saburo-san says, "but [the customer] will think, 'They spoke to me in my own country's language.' The *shitashimi* (sense of closeness) is different."

Forging Overseas Connections

Edo Town's operating company hosts special guests from abroad, including entertainment industry professionals, the media, business owners and employees, as well as overseas dignitaries. I was initially categorized as a student doing *shuzai* (interviews and information gathering) for an academic project, but the operating company engages more often with bloggers, television, writers, and producers who do *shuzai* at Edo Town for magazines, television shows, blogs, online video logs, and documentaries. The Japanese government and businesses use media engagement as a cultural branding strategy. Officials recommend that the

⁹ A Thai greeting

Japanese government further support organizations and platforms such as NHK World TV¹⁰ that promote Japanese tourist destinations and culture to overseas audiences (Ashita no Nippon wo Sasaeru Kankō Bijon Kōsō Kaigi 2016, 17). Besides the national broadcaster, many other organizations, freelance writers, influencers, and social media users produce and curate content for travel sites, web portals, web magazines, blogs, and vlogs that are published in English, Japanese, traditional and simplified Chinese, Thai, Indonesia, as well as in other languages.¹¹ They cover topics such as Japanese popular culture, regional customs and products, shopping, festivals, food culture, and suggested regional travel itineraries. During fieldwork, I meet overseas visitors from Europe and North America who learned about Edo Town from web portals that provide information about travel and life in Japan (such as Japan Guide, Tripadvisor, and GaijinPot). Web magazines, such as Compathy, publish different language editions that organize content according to their audience's interests. For example, the traditional Chinese version of Compathy divide travel information by prefecture¹² while its English edition highlights travel in Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka and groups remaining content into its "Japan Travel" and "Rest of Japan" categories.¹³

Shuzai guests use Edo Town's props, characters, and settings to create media productions where they star as the main characters. Two YouTube content creators from Thailand produced a video episode about Edo Town as part of a vlog series about traveling in Japan. In the video, they

¹⁰ See <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/live/>

¹¹ See, for example, Nishijima (2020)'s analysis of the PTT Japan Travel board that is used by Taiwanese tourists to exchange information about their travels to Japan including for "Japanese Drama Pilgrimage."

¹² See <https://zh.compathy.net/magazine/>

¹³ See <https://en.compathy.net/magazine/>

are first seen buying their tickets and reading Edo Town's English language pamphlet. They arrive at the costume rental facility, where a shopkeeper and a townswoman welcome them, and they transform into an Edo-era princess and swordswoman. They make small talk in short, rehearsed Japanese phrases with several samurai, examine *shuriken* (ninja throwing star) and *katana* (Japanese sword) exhibits, as well as watch the ninja action and *oiran* shows. The swordswoman also battles a group of ninjas who attempt to kidnap the princess. After the YouTubers do something at Edo Town that requires payment, the price is indicated on screen in Japanese yen and the equivalent Thai baht currency.

An Indonesian pop idol stars in several episodes at Edo Town, which are part of a longer television series (also uploaded online) about her travels to Japan as a Muslim woman. At Edo Town, she appears lost and confused while dressed in the costume of an unmarried female member of a samurai household and her *hijab* covering her hair. She asks the Edo People for help. However, they cannot communicate since she speaks to the Edo People in Indonesian and they answer in Japanese that they do not know what she wants to say. During a break in the narrative, the pop idol advertises several beauty products.

These media productions depict stereotyped cultural images of Japan that would draw their respective audience's attention—perhaps even those contemplating an overseas trip to Japan. The main characters are always shown changing into kimonos and other traditional Japanese dress, which possibly reminds viewers of Japan's kimono rental shops for overseas tourists. The videos also show scenic shots of traditional Japanese architecture, Edo People, and if in season, of Edo Town's cherry blossoms. Although these media productions do not mention Edo Town's official narrative of Edo-Japanese identity, they potentially benefit their creators and Edo Town. The former produce new content for their followers, reinforcing their charismatic

power as entertainers and expert travelers to Japan. The historical themed park gains publicity from the videos' online circulation to overseas audiences, increasing its reputation as a foreigner-friendly place for experiencing Japanese culture.

Though their numbers are fewer than *shuzai* guests, overseas dignitaries and business guests — especially those from Southeast Asia — are equally as important to Edo Town's efforts to establish overseas institutional connections. One year, its host city Terada welcomes government officials from several ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries in a cultural reception sponsored by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the prefectural government, and local media organizations. The event's poster advertises cultural performances such as Thai dancing, traditional Japanese dance, and a ninja action show featuring Edo Town's actors. One Edo Town employee serves as an interpreter for the Vietnamese ambassador to Japan. After the event, the ambassador's wife visits Edo Town with her son and her friends. Several employees accompany her group during the visit, as well as to other tourist destinations in Terada.

On another day, Edo Town welcomes a group of visitors from an Indonesian subsidiary of a company headquartered in Japan. The company president's wife, an employee tells me, is a fan of the historical themed park. A female employee and I are chosen to hold up a welcome banner, because some employees believe that the sight of young women wearing kimonos will appeal to these visitors.

Although these special guests visit Edo Town in unofficial, non-work capacities, employees are always alerted in advance of their connections with overseas governments and businesses— particularly in the Southeast Asian countries where the operating company is actively doing overseas promotions. Allison (1994) writes, in an ethnography about Japanese

hostess clubs, about the hostesses' work in smoothening social interactions between company representatives and their clients which then maintain institutional relationships. Edo Town's staff (as Edo People) and the Edo-themed environment perform a similar labor of facilitating relationships between the operating company and overseas institutions. Special guests are usually accompanied by employees with foreign language skills (English or the special guest's native language) and the employee who had initiated the connection, for example at a tourism fair abroad. Unlike regular overseas tour group members who are limited to townspeople and samurai-rank costume rental packages, special guests can dress up as noble lords and princesses— high-ranking Edo period characters that visually mark their elevated social status within the Edo-themed environment.

Measuring And Interpreting Foreign Customers

What are foreigners interested in? Why do foreigners do this? What kind of souvenirs do foreigners want to buy? My interlocuters at Edo Town frequently ask me these questions to discover my non-Japanese foreigner's perception of the experience there and of their overseas customers' behavior. An employee of a *jidaigeki* (Japanese historical drama)-themed movie village, to which I refer hereon as Movie Village and where I conducted secondary fieldwork, also tries to find out my opinion on these questions. They tell me that they know foreigners are generally interested in samurai, ninjas, and Japanese culture. However, they also want to learn about the reasons for these interests as well as how attractions and facilities can accommodate foreigners' desired experiences. *What do they want to experience beyond seeing ninjas and samurai?*

These brief, informal conversations at both sites lead to tasks that draw on my foreign positionality. An employee at Edo Town asks me to brainstorm a list of 20 things that foreign customers would want to learn about Edo, based on existing things and contents inside the themed environment. Movie Village's employee proposes that I collaborate on a survey for overseas customers. "You want to interview customers too, right?" he asks me. An Edo Town employee who is familiar with my dissertation project informs me that he would like to "use" me in a more productive way than having me doing customer service inside the historical themed park. Conducting an exit survey for overseas FIT customers comes up as an idea during a brainstorming session.

As I collaborate with each interlocuter during different phases of fieldwork, they both request short surveys with concise questions and if possible, pre-written answer choices. In Edo Town's survey, visitors first indicate their country of origin and then rate on a scale of four: customer service, cultural experience attractions, ease of navigation, and the extent to which they would recommend the historical themed park to a friend. Movie Village's longer survey consists of a multiple-choice and a short answer section. The first section asks for the visitors' country of origin, group composition (e.g. solo, family, friends), and the means by which they discovered Movie Village. The second section requests visitors to write down the attractions that they enjoyed most and least, as well as additional comments about their experience.

Although Movie Village's employee emphasizes our mutual desire to talk to visitors, the process of collaborating on the survey reveals differences between ethnographic and business approaches. The survey questions are designed for brief interactions and seek data pinpointing specific issues for which concrete solutions can be proposed, which contrast with the extended, semi-structured interviews in ethnographic fieldwork. Both interlocuters work under the

assumption that the surveys interrupt visitors' activities and that visitors will not have time for longer conversations. The Edo Town employee argues that a simplified survey format better measures spontaneous visitor response. He has proposed using the numerical rating format because he wishes to capture the visitors' reactions when they are "not thinking too hard." He references the Likert Scale questionnaire method with a one to five numerical model that is used in the social sciences. However, he decides to eliminate the middle "neutral" option because he wants the visitors to "pick a side" in their responses. I learn to balance ethnographic attention to meanings and ambiguities with the corporate restraints on time and human resources.

At both fieldsites, I notice that the overseas visitors sometimes hesitate at the survey questions. At Edo Town, some are unsure which option to select because the numbered ratings and isolated subjects to be rated do not adequately reflect their experience inside the historical themed park. At Movie Village, overseas visitors cannot always clearly decide on the shows and attractions that they enjoyed most and least. While attempting to answer the questions, many at both sites prefer to discuss instead their overall impressions, specific characters and settings that drew their attention, as well as their difficulties with the Japanese language barrier. Although these spontaneous conversations last for only five to 15 minutes, they create an ethnographic opportunity for me to speak with my interlocutors beyond collecting customer data.

After the survey periods, my interlocutors ask me to submit reports interpreting the collected data which they will then pass on to higher levels of management at their respective operating companies. The quantifiable data is tabulated into tables and graphs, while the visitors' short answers are compiled into lists for my examination. I submit the report to Movie Village in Japanese, with my analysis limited to the survey responses. I compose the Edo Town report in Japanese and English. Since I have spent a longer time at the historical themed park, I also

include a few observations drawn from overseas visitors during the entire fieldwork period. Both interlocutors request that I outline my opinion on why foreign customers are interested in their respective themed parks, common issues, and solutions that can potentially resolve these issues. The Edo Town employee also asks that I propose for each issue, immediate short-term solutions, realistic medium-term ones, and “ideal” long-term ones.

Taiken, as embodied experience, and its understanding shifts with different audiences (Japanese vs. foreign). Overseas visitors at both themed parks comment that the attractions and facilities were not foreigner-friendly enough even if they were interactive, impeding their desire to fully experience Japan’s culture and past. The language barrier, including the lack of translations, is a major reason. An overseas visitor at Movie Village remarks, “We don’t understand what we are looking at because there were no [translated] explanations.” At Edo Town, one Asian overseas visitor — who speaks some Japanese — notices that the historical themed park’s explanations were only available in Japanese. He believes that overseas visitors cannot fully enjoy their experience if they do not understand the language. Another Edo Town visitor from Austria, who was chosen to role-play a feudal lord during a show, recalls that he was directed to read off cue cards with romanized Japanese words while on stage. He did not know what was happening, what he said, what the actors were saying back to him, and why the Japanese audience laughed when he uttered the syllables. The gap in knowledge and dearth of cultural translation potentially divides visitors into those who can perform characterized personas and those who mimic a repertoire of movements and sounds meant for non-Japanese speakers in a limited and mechanically-animated experience.

A similar division can also be seen in the larger Japanese tourism industry, where native Japanese are separated from foreign (also usually meaning non-Japanese speaking) audiences.

The Ninja Dojo and Store in Kyoto offers consumers the chance to participate in ninja training sessions where they could wear ninja clothing and engage in activities (depending on the package purchased) such as practicing ninja body movements, meditating, throwing *shuriken*, as well as trying out darts and other weapons used by ninjas. Boasting its ranking on Tripadvisor as one of “the best 11 popular Japanese experiences for foreigners,” the business’s website indicates that 5000 foreigners visit per year. Its proprietor, introducing himself as a descendant of the Iga Ninja School’s practitioners, reveals that most of his clients are overseas tourists as he walks me through each activity. However, the Ninja Dojo and Store also markets on its Japanese language website a version of ninja training for Japanese people. It recognizes that the image of ninjas held by Japanese people nowadays come from anime, movies, and other entertainment media, but states that the training focuses on the “original *shinobi*”¹⁴ and that their “ancestral wisdom” enabled them to develop their skills and spirits for surviving a “harsh era” of war— lessons from the past for the current “chaotic era.” The different focus of the ninja training sessions Japanese people and overseas tourists receive distinct cultural messages. Foreign cultural participation is action-oriented, while Japanese participation — similar to at Edo Town — involves the internalization of their heritage.

Despite the language barrier, Edo Town’s operating company uses embodied experiences to draw its visitors back to its core message of Edo culture representing present-day Japaneseness. This message is re-enacted through participatory immersion and translated into English inside a few of the historical themed park’s exhibition spaces, including the museum of Edo-inspired everyday-use objects. Whether visitors animate limited actions due to the language barrier or perform full role-plays in context, most if not all eventually associate the Edo Town’s Edo-like

¹⁴ Another word for “ninja”

appearance and atmosphere with Japanese culture— a connection made by most of Edo Town’s overseas visitor survey participants.

Improvising Social Communication

At the beginning of my dissertation fieldwork at Edo Town, my interlocuters tell me that the staff in the themed environment are “weak” in English knowledge and foreign customer service. I find out that the frontline staff cannot look up words in front of visitors, since they must respond immediately and they are not allowed to take out their cell phones while at work. They explain that they can actually communicate in English for common situations, but find it difficult whenever overseas visitors speak too quickly or with an accent to which they are unaccustomed. Sometimes, they understand an overseas visitor’s questions but cannot respond with the correct English words. The service worker Aki-chan, who works in one of Edo Town’s restaurants, points out that it takes extra time to explain the food menu’s contents to foreign customers and to take their order; this becomes challenging during peak tourist periods when time is limited.

Edo Town’s operating company prioritizes English as the universal language for foreign communication, although most of its overseas visitors come from Asian countries that do not always use English as an official language. The frontline staff have been noticing, however, that increasing numbers of overseas visitors can communicate in conversational Japanese. Before, they say, the only non-Japanese visitors who can speak Japanese were mostly older Taiwanese and Korean people who had learned the language under Japanese colonial rule during the first half of the 20th century. Now, conversational Japanese speakers have expanded to tourists from Hong Kong, Southeast Asian countries, and to some extent, from North America and Europe.

Nevertheless, most staff members first greet foreign-looking visitors in Japanese and observe their reactions before continuing the social interaction. The *gaichū* actor Sane-san knows that overseas visitors do not understand him if they only smile back at his greeting. When this happens, he tells them in English “Hello, go straight” to direct them onward to Edo Town’s *shōkagai* zone.

With increasing numbers of tourists from Asia in recent years, Edo Town’s staff have encountered more visitors who speak neither Japanese nor English fluently. Some complain about the many *chūgokujin* (Chinese people, but often referring to people from China) who arrive during the Lunar New Year and speak to them in only *chūgokugo* (Chinese language). They do not distinguish between dialects, nationality, and culture, although most Lunar New Year visitors at Edo Town are from Hong Kong and Taiwan. (I have also met Cantonese and Mandarin speakers from Malaysia and Vietnam.) One staff member vents, “They come up to us and *ba—*. It would all be in Chinese. We don’t know what they are saying at all and they would still go *ba—*.” She uses the prolonged syllable *ba—* to represent the overwhelming flood of incomprehensible Chinese words that are directed at the frontline staff.

Memorizing standardized sets of foreign language customer service phrases is not always effective or practice for the staff. When directed to learn Mandarin Chinese phrases during the Lunar New Year, one frustrated staff member exclaims that she does not have time to remember the words and to focus on her work at the same time. Some admit that it is faster for them to memorize the sounds than to understand sentence structures and word meanings; this is why they often forget foreign language expressions if they do not use them everyday. Furthermore, each attraction requires its staff to give different extended explanations. The service worker Ken-san points out, for instance, that customer interactions are more complex and unpredictable at the

costume rental facility than in the restaurants. Customers often ask him open-ended questions, which is unlike ordering food in most cases. He must frequently explain the costume rental facility's rules and procedures to placate irritated visitors. It is difficult for him to anticipate all the necessary foreign language expressions needed for work.

Instead of studying foreign languages systematically, many frontline staff improvise communication with non-Japanese-speaking overseas visitors through body language — what they call *miburi teburi* (moving their body and hands) and “gestures” (*jesuchā*) —, the English words that they know, and props. They also adopt a piecemeal approach to learning the relevant English expressions for their work location. The service worker Aki-chan memorizes a simplified English form of what she wants to say so that she can remember the words more easily. She refers to the *karaage* (Japanese fried chicken) listed on the restaurant menu as “chicken.” When she served Chinese-speaking visitors who could not communicate fluently in Japanese nor in English during one Lunar New Year period, she showed them the actual food items and relied on their shared knowledge of *kanji* (Chinese characters). When the need arises, the staff contact the office employees who are fluent or advanced in English and other foreign languages. They also ask me to teach them the correct English expressions to use in specific situations.

One day as I am inside Edo Town as Momo the townswoman, I hear the *gaichū* actor Sane-san modify a traditional street performance — where he plays a toad oil quack salesman — for a non-Japanese-speaking family from Australia. While the original script relies on fast-paced wordplay using archaic Japanese words, he enthusiastically shouts single English words and voices loud sound effects to show his audience what is happening. Later, Sane-san re-creates what he was trying to communicate to the Australian family, “... look in this direction. You

probably know [what this is] — a *katana*. I'm cutting this piece of paper. [Do you] understand this? But this [piece of paper] ... [I've] wiped [the *katana* with it]. It cuts through. [You] see and understand this, right?" Although the resulting show departed from the street performance's original script and mood, his priority was to show his foreign audience what he is doing through bodily movements and props.

Despite their efforts, the frontline staff recognize that cross-cultural communication remains incomplete. Sane-san acknowledges that he has significantly simplified the street performance for the Australian family because many Japanese words in the script that do not translate easily to foreign languages. He comments, "Traditional street performances are difficult. Japanese and foreign visitors gather [to watch me] and take many photos, but there are many explanations [in Japanese]. It's all explanations. *Gomen* (I'm sorry). Look at this, laugh, and go home." Difficult-to-translate terms pose a similar issue for a frontline service worker, who approaches me one day to ask how to say the word *jutte* — a metal stick-shaped weapon used by criminal-catchers — in English. A foreign customer had asked her what is this metal stick-shaped weapon in her hand, but she could not quickly think of an English word equivalent. We also realize that a one-worded English equivalent does not exist, because the exact weapon does not exist elsewhere. I explain that it would be necessary to explain the cultural context in English. When she appears uncomfortable about doing so, I finally suggest that she can simply say in English that it is a "weapon"— a simplified foreign language description of *jutte*.

The frontline staff also claim that it is difficult to communicate Edo Town's full experience to overseas visitors, even if they already know common customer service expressions in English. The service worker Ken-san carefully writes down each English expression that he has learned, including those from me, but admits that he cannot convincingly explain to overseas

visitors that changing into Edo-like character costumes is transformative. He wants them to understand that, “You’ve become Edo People. The feeling’s different from before By changing [your clothing], you’re no longer an American. You’re an Edo Person.” He wishes that he can say this naturally in English while sounding friendly, unlike how he stiffly utters his memorized English expressions to Edo Town’s overseas visitors.

Although embodied experiences are meant to facilitate cross-cultural communication from the operating company’s perspective, there are unresolved issues. Objects and cultural meanings do not have simple linguistic equivalents in other languages, even if the staff learn the translated English name of attractions. Actors employ comedic poses and voices when interacting with overseas visitors, because these elicit laughter and other responses. While these social interactions exhibit Edo Town’s customer service “heart,” they do not always communicate the Japanese *kokoro* as it is inspired by people from the past.

Grappling With Foreignness And Cultural Difference

Edo Town’s frontline staff frequently notice whenever overseas visitors exhibit what they call “cultural differences” (*bunka no chigai*), such as departing from the historical themed park’s staging, not following their sense of Japanese etiquette, and acting alternatively to what they would do in a certain situation. One staff member notices that overseas visitors take more photos of women in kimono — including herself — than of men and conjectures that foreigners tend to associate kimono with Japanese women. Two idly watch several dark-skinned overseas visitors outside a theater, as they change into garishly-colored *yukata* (casual, summer kimonos) that they have brought with them to Edo Town. They speculate that the *yukata* were purchased in another city’s touristic area. Others point out that foreign customers often left food on their plates,

something that they are not used to as Japanese people. Several complain that the *chūgokujin* visitors, not distinguishing between Han Chinese ethnicity and Chinese nationality, leave messes in Edo Town's restaurants and restrooms— sometimes without knowing if this is actually the case. After two consecutive days involving two groups of non-Japanese Asian visitors who attempted to negotiate for discounts and special accommodations, a staff member comments that Japanese people would never do this because it is considered rude. These reactions, although they range from neutral observation to private disapproval, reveal that tensions exist when foreigners consume Japaneseness in a commercial experience about Japanese identity.

While the Japanese government and businesses generally promote inbound tourism due to its generated revenue, individuals are concerned about the impact of overseas tourists on local community dynamics and on heritage sites. The Japanese media uses the term “tourist pollution” (*kankō kōgai*) to describe, in Kyoto's case, overwhelmed hospitality infrastructure, massive littering, and the destruction of local shrines and temples' atmosphere caused by large numbers of tourists (Brasor 2018; Ikado and Takayama 2018). My interlocutors at Edo Town discuss the phenomenon of *bakugai*, a Japanese buzzword coined in 2015 referring to the “explosive shopping” done by mainland Chinese tourists in Japan who cleared store shelves of cosmetics, electronics, and other goods (Ryall 2015).

Cultural participation at Edo Town is split in a double binary between the expectations of domestic and foreign consumers, who recognize different things that represent Japaneseness. The operating company must re-create an immersive experience based on the Edo period to which domestic visitors can relate and one that is also familiar enough to overseas visitors. My interlocutors at Edo Town are concerned that catering exclusively to overseas tourists can make the atmosphere less enjoyable for domestic (Japanese) visitors. They also say that this is

impractical. The historical themed park's regulars complain that the operating company is prioritizing overseas visitors over its loyal customer base when more cultural experience attractions were implemented, including one that replaced a ninja action show that they loved (see Chapter 7). Employees, however, are also cognizant of this issue. When I point out to an employee that many commercial cultural experiences in Japan use similar contents as Edo Town, such as ninjas, samurai, and kimono, to appeal to overseas tourists, he comments that these businesses "are not shaping but following the consumers' wants." He explains that Edo Town cannot afford to alienate the domestic, Japanese market and the historical themed park must maintain "a certain atmosphere" for its Japanese visitors. Due to this, he states bluntly, the operating company has chosen not to target "easy money markets" such as in mainland China. However, he speculates that Edo Town would enjoy the same amount of commercial success as a samurai experience in Tokyo if the historical themed park were located in a large metropolis that is easily accessible to overseas tourists.

These issues occur at a time when tourists from Asian countries with fraught colonial and war-time histories with Japan have been increasing exponentially in the last decade, including those whose cultures have been the object of colonial and post-colonial cultural consumption (c.f. Carruthers 2004). Disputes over Japan's negative historical legacy have also spilled into the hospitality industry. In 2017, the APA hotel chain's operating group refused to remove from guest rooms a book authored by its president that denied the Nanjing Massacre. This led numerous angry tourists from mainland China and calls from the Chinese government for travel agencies to boycott the hotel chain (Jourdan 2017; Nakano 2017).

***Taiken* As Communication**

The increased presence of overseas tourists at Edo Town has led its operating company to reconsider the differing contexts communicated by *taiken* (embodied experience) and its limits. While the operating company, the frontline staff, and overseas visitors gaze and respond to each other at the historical themed park, they are also affected by the images of Japaneseness promoted by the inbound tourism industry, media platforms, and government policies. Edo Town and other businesses have employed embodied experiences to immerse overseas tourists into Japanese culture, but this chapter has shown that the cultural details that are ultimately communicated can still vary by domestic and overseas audiences.

Edo Town's central goal is to communicate the core message that Edo culture has created Japanese identity today, which sensually reaches its visitors through staged Edo-themed settings, characters, exhibitions, spectacles, and activities. However, details relating to cultural context may not all reach overseas visitors because they do not experience their everyday lives as Japanese. It is enough for the operating company to immerse overseas visitors to this core message through their active and animated role-play and perhaps even learn about some of details in the process.

This chapter has shown that the feelings intended for domestic Japanese consumers have not always translated into the experiences of Edo Town's overseas visitors. There are fewer expectations for them to affectively sense nostalgic familiarity with a simpler, Japanese way of life that is inspired by the Edo period. Howes (2005) argues that "...perception is a shared social phenomenon — and as a social phenomenon it has a history and a politics that can only be comprehended within its cultural setting" (5). Unlike domestic, Japanese consumers who learn how to feel "Edo" through transmitted memories, education, and the media, many overseas

visitors at Edo Town are conditioned to sense “Japan” through select popular cultural exports which are then transposed onto their expectations toward touristic experiences in Japan. While they are aware that Edo Town is a re-creation of the Edo period, many also hope to have a Japanese — and not specifically an Edo — cultural experience there. For example, overseas visitors often refer to Edo Town’s costume rental as a “kimono rental), a popular cultural experience marketed extensively to inbound tourists, although the historical themed park does not rent out the same kimonos and accessories with contemporary motifs.

The reliance on *taiken* or embodied experience alone to communicate the Edo period’s *kokoro* (heart) and atmosphere assumes prior cultural knowledge, which many staff and visitors link with native Japanese-speaking ability and Japanese ethnicity. Despite sharing the same themed environment with domestic visitors, Edo Town’s overseas visitors undergo a different set of experiences that are mediated by the staff’s interpretation of their needs and by their ongoing consumption of Japanese culture. While the staff rely on body language and memorized sets of foreign language (mostly English) phrases, the surrounding cultural contexts and feelings are not easily translatable. When the experiences are not accompanied by real-life experiences socializing or text explaining cultural meanings, they cannot communicate with physical immersion alone.

Many commercial cultural experiences currently offered to Japan’s inbound tourists do not always distinguish between passive immersion and active participation. However, *taiken* can only communicate effectively through the latter. Edo Town’s operating company faces the challenge of curating experiences for the increased numbers of FIT overseas visitors with the same amount of time as casual visitors to engage actively with the themed environment and its contents. As the overseas visitors’ survey responses have indicated, language is necessary — and

perhaps the fastest and most effective method — for translating cultural meanings into embodied experiences. Language communication does not substitute for lived experience, for course, but it can animate cultural experiences with participants who can truly engage with its content rather than replicating predictable stereotypes that have been separately curated for foreign outsiders — increasingly an undesired experience for overseas tourists.

Chapter 7 - Returning To A Place of Belonging In O-Edo

Aya-san and Kyokuchō: Two Different Regulars At Edo Town

Edo Town's frontline staff recognize the actor fan Aya-san as the visitor who is always at one of the ninja action show theaters on weekends. She is often waiting at the front of the queue for the next showing or near the cast entrance for the actors to come out and to talk to her after the showing. She always makes sure to sit in the front row of the theater for every showing. "I only come here for the ninja show," she confides in me when we have gotten to know each other over time at Edo Town. She refuses to tell me her age, only that she is "older" than me and that she has been going to the ninja action show for almost a year. She struggles to describe the intense feelings that well up in her when she watches the ninja action show that draws her to the historical themed park. *Doki doki*. She finally manages to utter a Japanese onomatopoeia expression that communicates a beating heart's sound and movement. After we watch a show together, I can see that these sensations involve more than the heart as an organ. After we exit the theater, she appears in a daze and her body is shivering with thrills.

Aya-san knows of the "repeater" who goes by the name Kyokuchō at Edo Town and has seen him during her visits. They barely interact because he is a different type of regular than she is. The leader of the Shinsengumi, a military police squad based in Kyoto at the end of the Edo period, partially inspired the Edo persona Kyokuchō within the Japanese man. Kyokuchō has been returning for the past three years to patrol O-Edo and to "protect the peace" (*heiwa wo mamoru*) there, as the Shinsengumi did in Japan's past and still does in *jidaigeki*, anime, manga, and other Japanese media productions based in the late Edo period. A company-affiliated actor playing a townswoman introduces me to Kyokuchō after he changes into his Edo-like persona's

clothing at the costume rental. “This is Momo-chan,” she tells him, “She is from America and is writing her thesis on Japanese culture.” I greet him with a demure bow, conforming to my image as a young Edo townswoman in a pink kimono. Kyokuchō then asks us to take a photograph with him and requests that we lean on his shoulder, one on each side. He hands his cell phone to nearby Edo Person, played by a *gaichū* actor with whom he has never talked. The actor-townswoman jokes, *ryōte ni hana*; she is saying that he has a “flower” by each hand. *Kocchi yotte* (come closer), he urges me. As a character named after peach blossoms, I put my hands on his shoulder, lean my head in, and produce a smile on my face. Our first photo together appears soon after on Kyokuchō’s Facebook page, in his virtual album for photos of him with Edo People and in O-Edo.

This chapter discusses how Edo Town’s regulars animate the historical themed park’s social world as their *ibasho*, which they describe as a place that *feels* like home although it is not their actual home and that provides them with a sense of belonging. Their *ibasho* comes alive through their affective attachment to its atmosphere, spaces, and characters, as fans who interact with the objects of their attachment as “an activity, a way of being-in-the-world” (Kelly 2004, 4). The friendly and casual Edo-like sociality implemented at Edo Town, along with the emotional rush of theatrical performances, animate an “alternate intimacy” (Galbraith 2011) that regulars nurture within the historical themed park’s extraordinary context because fills an affective, social void in their everyday lives. Contrasting with the casual visitors who tend to explore the whole of Edo Town in one visit, regulars concentrate their energy over repeated visits on interacting with their favorite Edo People characters and actors in the places where they can be found at the historical themed park.

There are two distinct categories of regulars found at Edo Town. “Repeaters” (*rīpītā*), a Japanese-made English word referring to fans who engage repeatedly and intensely with a place (including themed parks) or event, can be seen in a regular like Kyokuchō. They are drawn to the historical themed park’s atmosphere, their “O-Edo,” and the close, social relationship that they share with the Edo People. I describe visitors like Aya-san as “actor fans,” who portray themselves as *okyakusan* or patrons supporting one or several particular actors. The majority of them are women who visit Edo Town regularly for a short but intense period of time to experience its ninja action show and to interact with the actors (all male, some of them *gaichū*) who perform there or are assigned to work there as ushers while training with the cast during off-hours. Actor fans do not always view these actors as Edo People, since the latter, for them, are performers who animate internal sensations that they cannot experience elsewhere. I have therefore chosen to use the word “actor,” rather than Edo People, when I discuss actor fans’ activities at Edo Town. Unlike the repeaters, actor fans — especially those there to support *gaichū* actors working temporarily at the historical themed park — do not feel deep loyalty to the re-enacted Edo-themed world and its characters. However, the distinction between these two types of regulars is not always clear. Many repeaters are also fans of specific company-affiliated actors. I have also met several actor fans who initially followed a *gaichū* actor to Edo Town, but has grown to enjoy spending time at the historical themed park and with certain Edo People.

As Momo the townswoman, my interactions with regulars depend on whether my connections with the staff coincide with their established, social relationships with the Edo People that these staff members inhabit. The majority of my interlocutors are long-time repeaters whom actors and frontline service workers introduced to me. They eventually include me in their routine of greeting and socializing with the Edo People with whom they have become friendly.

When we speak together on-site or off-site while I am in my researcher role, they still call me “Momo-chan” because they see me as part of Edo Town’s world. Other regulars recognize me from these repeaters’ social media postings, and some actor fans are familiar with my face, but they go no further than acknowledging me with a smile since no official introduction was made.

Several scholars have analyzed the fans clubs revolving around the Takarazuka Revue Company, a famous and popular theater troupe based in Takarazuka, Hyōgo Prefecture, Japan that is composed of female performers. Female official and unofficial fan club members are the most visible type of fan despite demographic variety, and these fan clubs strictly regulate their members’ access to star performers, organize their fan activities, and determine acceptable fan behaviors (Nakamura and Matsuo 2003; Robertson 1998; Stickland 2008). Unlike the Takarazuka Revue, Edo Town does not sponsor an official fan club where members gain preferential access to its Edo People and actors. To my knowledge, it is also not involved with unofficial ones. Like any visitor, regulars must wait their turn to socialize with their favorite Edo People and actors.

In the Takarazuka Revue context, fan attachment to performers have been characterized as expressions of sexualized desire to be controlled (Robertson 1998) or as fantastically mediated through “asexual agendered spaces created through the actor-fan relationship” (Nakamura and Matsuo 2003). The sight of female fans waiting near the ninja action show theater entrance to talk to the all-male cast seems, to some frontline staff, a spectacle of gendered romantic desire. Reflecting some staff’s occasional musings about whether these fans are in love with or have developed unhealthy obsessions with the actors, a frontline service worker once even commented sarcastically, “Sometimes, the customers think it’s a host club¹ here.” Unlike the Takarazuka Revue, however, character typecasting at Edo Town is strictly divided by gender in most cases.

¹ A kind of Japanese night club where the male staff drink with and entertain female patrons

Actors are affiliated with an all-male or all-female theater subdivision within the historical themed park that assigns them most of the time heteronormative masculine or feminine Edo People roles. The lone female actor who regularly plays a ninja role does not attract the same level of fervent attention (male or female) as that received by male ninja actors from their female fans.

Rather than the exploration of sexuality and gender, Edo Town's regulars are motivated by the need to experience healing — or *iyashi* as understood in the Japanese context — in a place alternate to their everyday lives. While cafés (*kissaten*) have long been considered in Japan as “not-work, not-home” places for patrons to be and act differently (White 2012, 159), commercial alternate social spaces such as cat and maid cafés became popular with Japanese consumers during the *iyashi* or healing boom during the 2000s. Targeting Japanese consumers who came of age in the 1990s and early 2000s, they offer the chance to develop commodified, fictional social relationships when a prolonged recession has weakened nuclear family ties and the social stability provided by life-time company employment (see Allison 2013).

Edo Town continues this trend in a historical themed park's extraordinary context. Its regulars' sense of belonging is similarly bound to commodified, social contact with people as fictional characters, rather than personal identification with Japanese history and nationalism. While repeaters are directly drawn to specific Edo People characters, actor fans are attracted to specific actors as their ninja characters. Additionally, Aya-san feels that Edo Town's staff “take care of” (*oseiwa wo suru*) both casual visitors and regulars so that everyone enjoys themselves. This includes many happy-looking multi-generational families and friend groups, a sight that she rarely encounters at her work in a hospital. She explains, “It isn't an escape from reality, but it is

enjoyable since it is a different world.... This feeds back into work whenever I interact with patients.”

This chapter first explores how Edo Town’s regulars understand their feelings of belonging, as they sense the ninja action show, their return to a place that could be their home or hometown, as well as family-like relationships with certain female Edo People and even other repeaters. It next examines the diffuse regular circles that are found at and around Edo Town, which come together through attachments to its re-enacted alternate world and its Edo People or the social landscape of its ninja action show. Repeaters perform their unique Edo personas on-site and online to demonstrate their status of belonging, the subject of the next section. The chapter then examines repeater and actor fan activities in their repeated routines of developing social relationships with Edo People and actors through small talk, photography, and occasional gifts. Next, I discuss the negative consequences if these relationships excessively blur the boundary between Edo Town’s extraordinary context and the private lives of staff and regulars. Finally, I discuss the repeaters and actor fans who begin to feel that their *ibasho* has weakened because the historical themed park’s operational changes have reduced their feelings of belonging and who consequently are considering gradual or abrupt exits from Edo Town.

Returning To O-Edo

Repeaters and longer-term actor fans describe Edo Town as a place where they return (*kaeru basho*), rather than the time travel destination that is promoted by its operating company. They do not parrot its narrative about Edo-like Japanese identity. However, their characterization of Edo Town’s themed environment — or its “O-Edo” space — resonates with early postwar

consumer discourse about the rural Japanese *furusato* (home village) as an extraordinary, past-inspired place for returning to an authentic self.

Kaiya-san, who is both an actor fan and a repeater of a year, explains, “It is not home, but I feel *ochitsuku*.” The word *ochitsuku* refers to a calm and comfortable feeling. She says that she feels relief (*hotto suru*) when she arrives every month at the train station near Edo Town, which is distinct from the excitement (*waku waku*) that occurs when traveling away on a trip (*ryokō*). Hanano’s Mother, a repeater of six-years with a daughter known as Hanano at Edo Town, describes her visits as like a *sato kaeri* (homecoming). She, along with the repeater Kyokuchō, point out the seemingly quotidian things that make O-Edo feel like their second hometown. She talks about the townswoman who hangs up persimmons on the re-created buildings’ rafters every winter, a familiar and personal action rather than an impersonal, staged performance. She comments,

If this were at Disney and there were persimmons, it would be artificial (*tsukurareta*) persimmons. They are simply hung up when there are no customers around and are objects made for exhibition. But here [at Edo Town], we can see the scene of people taking the skin off the persimmons and hanging them up— like what was done in the past. I enjoy being able to see this.

Kyokuchō mentions the old buildings, the wooden bridge, and the canal found in O-Edo, the last reminding him of the small stream where he played as a child. Additionally, other repeaters talk about certain Edo People as if they could have been neighborly characters like “the interesting middle-aged man” (*omoshiroi ojisan*) and “the tea shop granny” (*ochaya no obāsan*).

Rather than expressing nationalistic sentiments, these regulars’ relationship to Edo Town is similar to that of *rekijo* (history woman) fans embarking on pilgrimages to heritage sites to establish “relationships/connections (*kanseikei*) between fictional characters, readers and actual historical figures” (Sugawa-Shimada 2015, 44). Their personal feelings are similarly based on

affective social interactions with the fictional Edo People (and the actors who play them, in some cases) inside a fictional past-inspired setting. Edo Town's themed environment evokes familiar and comfortable things, rather than the exotic and the spectacular that are sought by overseas visitors and some domestic casual visitors. They expect their visits' *repetition* to deepen the intimacy that they sought in the historical themed park's alternate, extraordinary context, modifying the duration of the staff's character labor from the intended one-time visit to an ongoing process.

To non-fans, fans may seem pathologically obsessive, extreme in their actions, and selfish to the point of ignoring societal needs (see Kelly 2004 and Robertson 1998). The actor fan Aya-san feels self-conscious about her weekly Edo Town visitors to watch only its ninja action show. Only a few of her real-life friends, who are also actor fans, know about this. She says, "People will ask, 'Why? What is the point?'" When I mention that many people are obsessed with celebrity entertainers, she explains sadly, "This will leave a negative image, probably. Even if people watch theater performances — if someone watches the same performance over and over again — they will be asked, 'Why are you watching this over and over again?' In Japan, there is a lack of interest in such performances."

Some staff members speculate that the regulars must be wealthy if they can afford to visit so frequently and many do not understand why they would spend so much money on a themed park. However, this is not the case for most of my interlocutors. Some work as office ladies (female pink-collar workers in Japan who are usually clerks and secretaries) and at vocational jobs, while others are housewives. The regulars can be more accurately described as consumers who consciously allocate their disposable income to, what to them is, a meaningful, social experience.

The staff also use the word *jōren*, which means “regular,” to refer to repeaters and actor fans. It is commonly used to describe the regular patrons of bars, restaurants, and even maid cafés (see Galbraith 2011). However, the word can conjure up negative connotations for actor fans themselves. Tomoko-san, who has gone to Edo Town a few times over several months to support a *gaichū* actor, calls herself a “fan”² because the word *jōren* makes her think of an exclusive group of people with whom it is difficult to talk and who blocks other fans’ access to actors — someone she is not. She wishes to experience every interaction with her favorite actors as if they were occurring for the first time, rather than being locked into a predictable routine and identity as a *jōren*.

Many repeaters did not become Edo Town regulars on their first visit. Some vaguely remember previously going there on school trips or on excursions with friends. The repeaters Eri-san, Mayu-san, and a third friend³ initially decided to visit Edo Town because they, also Tokyo Disneyland and Disney Sea fans, generally enjoy spending time at themed parks and like their mascots. Very few are also interested specifically in the Edo period or Japanese history, even if they like ninjas and Shinsengumi characters from manga and anime.

The turning point occurs when Edo People and the targeted actors recognize visitors as regulars. They are no longer anonymous casual visitors who experience only the default Edo-themed experience at Edo Town. The repeater Kyokuchō remembers when the Edo People first recognized him, “The people were very kind and they spoke to me, like ‘Hello’ and ‘Where are you coming from?’ That made me happy. When I first went [to Edo Town], it was more ‘Hello’ but the second and third time they were already saying *okaeri* (welcome back) to me They

² She says the Japanized English loanword of “fan.”

³ When I spoke to them at Edo Town, their friend who usually visits with them was not there. They did not share how long they have been repeaters, but I estimate that they have been going to the historical themed park for at least three years based on their familiarity with some actors’ former roles.

remembered my face. This seeped into my heart and I felt warm.” Hiroshi-kun, who has been visiting Edo Town for three years, began to consider himself a repeater after a company-affiliated actor reminded him of his one-year visit anniversary. The actor fan Aya-san acquired her identity as a regular when the ninja action show’s actors remarked one day, “Ah, you have come again.” Regular status also means social acceptance into the Edo Town fan circle. The repeater Hanano’s Mother reflects, “I wasn’t conscious of being a repeater. In terms of the number [of visits], we only stay overnight in the [Terada] region twice a year. There are only four to five occasions per year when we can come. But when we began to know other people [through Edo Town], we were called ‘repeaters’ and ‘repeater friends.’ I felt, ‘Ah, so now we have also entered the repeater circle?’”

Although service workers and actors describe any visitor interaction as customer service, the regulars place special significance such social acknowledgment. Yano (2004) argues that the fan-performer relationship is based on uneven interactions; in Edo Town’s case, the performers include both actors and service workers that animate Edo People characters. She describes, “Practices of fan intimacy on the part of fans may be individual, spontaneous, and contextual, as well as ritualized and predetermined. Star practices of intimacy, typically one generated to provide for the needs of many, by contrast are formulaic and generalized— one size fits all” (Yano 2004, 47). Galbraith (2011) compares maid café regulars’ continual consumption of social interactions with the maids with the “level building” that players do in role-playing games (paragraph 22). Edo Town’s regulars similarly construct social identities that are acknowledged over time by the Edo People, while actor fans “level up” by continually watching the ninja action show and supporting its cast.

Fans desire to move beyond the staged performance (Kelly 2004, 9), to an attached belonging. The actor fan Tomoko-san describes herself as an “outsider” (*soto no hito*) in relation to Edo Town, since she is only there due to her interest primarily in the *gaichū* actor and secondarily other *gaichū* actors there affiliated with his management agency— one that trains its actors in stage fighting. Although the *gaichū* actor is assigned to ushering duties at Edo Town, she does not mind taking the overnight bus from her city to see him. When he finally debuts in his first ninja action show performance there, she wants to cry because she feels so proud of his hard work. Tomoko-san compares her emotions and actions toward the *gaichū* actor with her obsession with the Sanrio character My Melody; she collects character goods and travels frequently for related events. She admits, “I’m probably someone who would even go overseas. If I want to see something, I’ll go there regardless of the place. Because if I don’t go to see it, I’ll regret it Because I’ve never regretted it after I’ve seen it, because I don’t like the feeling of ‘I should have gone to see it at that time.’”

In attaching themselves to certain female Edo People, some repeaters use fictive female kinship terms to characterize their strong bond together. Referring to female Edo People as mothers, sisters, and grandmothers evokes the feminine domesticity and care that are also associated with service labor (see Hochschild 1983). Contrastingly, repeaters rarely use kinship terms with male Edo People. Several repeaters, who are in their 30s and younger, consider one actor as their *Edo no okāsan* (Edo mother) because she readily talks to, listens to, and takes care of them during their visits. Hanano’s Mother remembers, “After we talked a few times, [she] said that [Hanano] is like a daughter, that she is like a mother because she is *Edo no okāsan*.” Another repeater bases the name that she uses at Edo Town on this actor’s Edo name, highlighting their close fictive mother-daughter relationship.

Sister kinship terms, *onēsan* (older sister) and *imōto* (younger sister), are used for both young, female repeaters and staff playing Edo People. Hiroshi-kun thinks of another repeater, who is a few years younger than him, as like an *imōto*. Hanano's Mother considers the seventh-year repeater Haruko-san, with whom they socialize in Edo Town's context, as like an *onēsan* to her daughter. When she and Hanano first became friendly with Edo Town's female actors, they consider the latter to be like approachable *onēsan* to be admired.

Kyokuchō's use of female fictive kinship terms for certain Edo People mirrors his own family relationships. Describing himself as an *obāchan-ko* (child close to his grandmother), he tells me that he always chatted with two older female Edo People who ran a tea shop and a ninja goods store that used to be open in the *shōkagai* (merchant district) zone. They were tenants who rented space from Edo Town's operating company for their businesses, but their institutional outsider status did not matter to Kyokuchō (and several other repeaters) as long as they could socialize together at the wooden benches in front of their stores. For them, the two women were as much a familiar part of O-Edo as the Edo People played by the company-affiliated actors, full-time service workers, and the *gaichū* actors who work at Edo Town for several months or longer.

Diffuse Regular Circles

Being a fan is both a solo and a social activity. Kelly (2004) writes, "...solitary fans may not sustain a sociable community, but even they comprise a social network" (11). Edo Town's regulars are individuals and small groups of people who are linked by their common attachment to specific Edo People and/or actors in what Galbraith (2011) characterizes in his analysis of maid cafés as a "circle" that "exists to ensure the continued existence of the love-object, the source of personal pleasure" (paragraph 25).

Repeaters and actor fans often know of each other through social media or by word of mouth even before they meet in person. Haruko-san first connected with other Edo Town repeaters through MIXI and GREE, social networks that were popular in Japan when she began visiting the historical themed park regularly. Nowadays, repeaters' online interactions with the Edo People and each other take place on Facebook while fans interact with their actors via Twitter and LINE.⁴ Hanano's Mother created Twitter and Facebook accounts initially to follow Edo Town's official announcements, but this also led to friend requests from and online conversations with other repeaters. She explains, "What Facebook means is that everyone comes to know each other's faces although they've never spoken [in person] before." Kyokuchō tells me that he can ascertain the "personalities" of Edo Town regulars from their social media postings, whether they "truly" like the historical themed park or only one actor.

When meeting each other for the first time, Edo Town's regulars re-introduce themselves as if they did not know each other before although they have already shared friendly online interactions such as commenting on each other's posts and photos about the historical themed park. Acknowledging each other on-site is not the same as becoming friends, they say. Although the regulars may be drawn to the same Edo People and actors, they can possess different "senses" (*kankaku*) and they vie with each other for socializing time. Repeaters Eri-san and Mayu-san only visit Edo Town with the same friend, because as the former bluntly states, "We already know each other, so there is no need to meet new people." In separate conversations with me, the actor fans Aya-san and Tomoko-san reveal that they do not want to talk with visitors who are uninterested in stage fighting and in the ninja action show. "I will talk if someone begins talking to me," Tomoko-san explains while laughing self-consciously, "I do not start talking myself ...

⁴ A communications application used for texting, talking, and video chatting on mobile devices

because I'm not the talking type. It's my personality. To be honest, I'm not a person who is suited for *tēma pāku* (themed park).”

Each repeater develops friendly connections with only a few others, including when their favorite Edo Person brings them together. Kyokuchō and Hanano's Mother meet each other for the first time at an off-site stage fighting dojo led by a *gaichū* actor. They have already commented on and clicked “like” on each other's Edo Town-related posts several times. Kyokuchō later recalls feeling impressed when he had seen on Facebook that Hanano's Mother and her daughter had attended a theater performance about the Shinsengumi, historical characters that he also admires. He sent them a friend request, because he wanted to meet them eventually. “And [the townswoman] told me that they are good people,” he adds, referring to an Edo Person with whom they both frequently socialize at Edo Town as if she were a character reference.

While actor fans often go to Edo Town individually, they sometimes make small talk with those supporting the same actor. Aya-san and Tomoko-san are previously acquainted, because they regularly attend the same shows that are produced by the management agency that trains actors in stage fighting. Whenever they encounter each other at the same venue, Tomoko-san says, they always end up talking about the performance and the cast of actors.

Additionally, repeaters and actor fans gather off-site at cultural spectacles where they can see Edo Town's company-affiliated actors and former *gaichū* actors perform. They can be found, for example, at the Tokyo Haneda Airport's annual Edo festival. These actors, especially the former *gaichū* actors, form a performing arts labor network that span Edo Town, other Japanese themed parks, and cultural spectacles as work sites. Although the repeaters and actor fans (sometimes former) share the same space in these cases, their social interactions are still restricted to their own social units.

Merging with Edo Town Identities and Roles

Some regulars craft unique Edo-like identities to be used in Edo Town's context, as they work to develop intimacy with Edo People and actors. The repeater Hanano's Mother tells me that many Edo People already recognize the name "Hanano" or "Hanano-chan" even though they have never spoken together before. Haruko-san adds that the mother-daughter group is well-known among Edo Town repeaters. Although Eri-san, Mayu-san, and their friend do not use Edo-like names, they are still recognized as "the group of three women who visit together" by the staff and other repeaters. Even the actor fans Aya-san and Tomoko-san, who mostly linger in front of the ninja action show theater, are identified by the staff as particular actors' patrons.

Fans embody or attach themselves to star performers in order to reinforce their shared relationship and experiences (Nakamura and Matsuo 2003; Yano 2004). Nakamura and Matsuo (2013) discuss the female Takarazuka Revue fans who "suture" themselves to *otokoyaku* stars (female actors playing male roles) so that they can live the fantasy of existing as a "female masculine/masculine female fictional construct" (67) within the theater performance's extraordinary context. Edo Town's themed environment and ninja action show perform a similar function for the regulars. Attaching themselves to the Edo People, repeaters also share a stage with them while the distinction between audience and performer is blurred. Actor fans vicariously feel the thrills of stage fighting as they experience the ninja action show actors' body movements and emotions inside the theater.

Some repeaters feel admiration (*akogare*) for certain Edo People and this inspires them to merge into similar Edo-like roles. Clothing also animates and personalizes adopted Edo-like roles. Kyokuchō has always admired the Shinsengumi and its leader Kondō Isami, who is also called Kyokuchō—the Japanese word for "squad leader." He is also intrigued by the late Edo

period's Bakumatsu era (1853-1867), when the Shinsengumi was active. He began to merge into his Kyokuchō persona when he saw a photo at the Edo Town costume rental facility of a company-affiliated actor modeling what he calls a “Kondō-san” costume. He vividly recalls, “At the costume rental, I requested, ‘I want to become this person,’ not just ‘This person is good’ This [actor] is already someone I strongly admire and being able to walk around dressed like that in a *tēma pāku* re-enacting *jidaigeki* (Japanese historical dramas)— I definitely want to become [him].” While wearing the Kondō-san costume, Kyokuchō became aware that the Edo People must call out “Kyokuchō!” and say *o-mimawari gokurō sama desu* (thank you for your patrolling efforts) to visitors who are wearing Shinsengumi costumes. Although he knows that these are scripted lines, he still feels happy that they address him this way. He explains, “From the perspective of someone who was told things like *gokurō sama*, it felt good. [The Edo People] truly get into it and that was very enjoyable.”

Hanano's Mother remembers that her daughter has admired the “*kamuro-chan*” character, the *oiran* (high-ranking courtesan)'s young attendant in training, since seeing her in one of Edo Town's shows several years ago. Her daughter was roughly the same size and age as what a *kamuro* would. She also had a similar hairstyle as the character in the show. Hanano's Mother later shows me a photograph of her daughter wearing an elaborate red *kamuro* costume with a wide black *obi* (kimono sash) and the bottom of her *kedashi* (underskirt) visible under her kimono. The costume rental staff offered to dress her daughter in this costume, which is unavailable to casual visitors, because they said that “today is special.” That day, they explained to the Edo People that she likes the *kamuro-chan* and an actor who was playing Edo Town's *oiran* character at the time suggested that the daughter adopts a name. She told them about Edo Town's naming conventions for the character. Mirroring the *oiran*'s practice of bestowing names

on their *kamuro*, she gave the name Hanano to the daughter. The mother then became Hanano's Mother to the Edo People and other repeaters. The *kamuro*'s historical context as a courtesan-in-training becomes lost in this narrative. Rather, Hanano's Mother uses the character to tell a story about her daughter, who like Kyokuchō, who has unearthed a contemporary social connection.

Since the Kondō-san costume was a limited time offering, Kyokuchō now brings his own Shinsengumi headband, traditional Japanese straw sandals, and white *haori* (overcoat worn over the kimono) to Edo Town. He wears them with the historical themed park's standard rental kimono and *hakama* (loose trousers worn with the kimono) for the Shinsengumi character. His white *haori* appears distinct from the bright blue ones that are rented out to casual visitors, identifying him as Kyokuchō and not a generic casual visitor wearing a Shinsengumi costume at Edo Town. He explains, "If there is no white pattern, it wouldn't be me ... It's already similar to my uniform [at Edo Town]."

Kyokuchō remembers renting a *rōnin* (masterless samurai) on one visit as a change from his usual routine. However, the Edo People kept on asking him, "Kyokuchō, what happened [to you] today?" He realized then that his Kyokuchō identity had already been firmly established at Edo Town.

Extraordinary Repetitions

During the ten-minute ninja action show at Edo Town, two ninjas in an old Japanese-style room — one dressed in black and the other dressed in brown to indicate opposing factions — fight each other hand-to-hand and with various weapons to acquire a scroll containing secret information. After the show, the casual visitor Michael asks the actors how they became ninjas for their careers because he was impressed by their stunts. The interaction ends after this

conversation. When overseas tour groups exit the theater after the show, their members always appear excited from the spectacle. However, they have little time to interact with the actors before they are ushered away by their leader and Edo Town's staff to the next foreigner-friendly show on the schedule. Actor fans, unlike casual visitors and overseas tour groups, feel compelled to return and to watch the ninja action show repeatedly. The show is their *ibasho*, because they belong through their absorption into the actor's bodily movements and emotions. They feel extraordinary, intense sensations that cannot be experienced elsewhere.

Several actor fans explain that there is no other stage fighting show in Japan that puts them so close to the action, because Edo Town's ninja action show theater is a small space. Others emphasize the intensity of experiencing ten full minutes of stage fighting. The actor fan Tomoko-san enjoys hearing the live sounds of weapons clashing together during the ninja action show, because this differs from the pre-recorded audio effects that are normally played during stage fighting performances.

The ninja action show also inspires their fans to dig deeper into the narrative, its characters, and the actors animating them. The actor fan Aya-san speculates about the two characters' back stories in her mind, while she watches the ninja action show. Her words tumble out quickly, when I ask her what she thinks about.

When the show begins, where do the other characters live besides the brown ninja?⁵ When did he start to live there? Why is he living such a life? What happens to him afterward? Why is he attacked by the [ninja] in black? Why does he have to protect the scroll? He probably doesn't have family When [the black ninja] was killed, why did [the brown ninja] choose that method of killing [him]? Why did [the black ninja] die that way?

Tomoko-san likes to tell individual actors about how their performances that day have affected her that day and to see their responses. The actors usually do not affirm or refute their fans'

⁵ She assumes that the brown ninja lives in the old Japanese-style room that is portrayed on stage.

interpretations, as both Aya-san and Tomoko-san reveal, because they believe that their performances should be open to the audience's interpretation. Nevertheless, the fans enjoy how the actors' performances kindle their interpretations and questions.

Regulars only linger in spaces and socialize with those that make them experience belonging at Edo Town. Tomoko-san always rushes to the theater as soon as she enters the historical themed park, politely but impatiently declining the Edo People's invitation to participate in activities. She uses Edo Town's map to show me the different locations (or obstacles, as she sees it) that she must navigate before reaching the ninja action show theater. "Here, I'm asked, 'Would you like to take a photo?' 'I'm not taking photos, sorry. Not taking photos.' Around here, I'm told 'You are arrested' ... Also, not here and I say *hai*," she explains of her desperate attempts to ignore the Edo People near the entrance. These same staff members also learned to allow Aya-san to pass by without soliciting her participation, after weeks of her walking quickly by and avoiding eye contact with them— something I directly witnessed several times. When I visit Edo Town in my fieldworker role with Aya-san and her friend (who also enjoys stage fighting performances), I discover that her routine strictly revolves around the ninja action show schedule. We time our lunch and bathroom breaks between showings. We also spend a lot of time waiting for the actors to talk to us and to open the queuing area so that we can rush to the head of the line and ensure front row seats in the theater.

Repeaters cover wider ground than the actor fans at Edo Town, but their visit routines are equally selective. They only socialize with the Edo People with whom they have formed social connections. As the actor fan-repeater Kaiya-san describes, "I talk to the Edo People and hang around." When I accompany Haruko-san, Hanano's Mother, and her daughter on their visit, I learn that they do not plan their trajectory in advance because they never know which Edo

People they will meet and the amount of time available for conversations that day. Their conversations last from one minute to hours at a time, depending on the Edo Person's availability. Laughing self-consciously, they admit that they can spend hours talking to a townswoman at her "home" (the re-created building that is her assigned work location).

Regulars generally prefer to visit on weekdays and during low tourist seasons, when there are few casual visitors. While visiting on weekends, Haruko-san feels obliged to let "foreign customers and customers who look like they are here for the first time" speak first with the actors. She prefers to avoid this situation, because she wants to talk to the Edo People for long periods of time. The regulars tend to feel the loss of Edo Town's "original" atmosphere during peak tourist periods, when there are many visitors and mostly unfamiliar *gaichū* actors. Whenever Aya-san sees a long line of people waiting at the bus stop to go to Edo Town, she always grimaces and complains to me⁶ that this means less time with the actors. Hanano's Mother remarks that the short term *gaichū* actors during peak tourist seasons seem more like regular part-time service workers as they attend to visitors at a fast pace. The friendly atmosphere disappears because she cannot make "natural conversation" with the Edo People when everyone is so busy.

The routine of Edo Town's regulars may seem dull and puzzling to non-fans. However, both repeaters and actor fans argue that each performance of a theater show is unique despite the same narrative and character types. They explain that the performance changes according to individual acting styles, the actors' physical and mental state that day, and the actors' spontaneous decisions made on stage—the kind of things that would become noticeable to people who are familiar with theater shows and who watch them repeatedly. The repeater Kyokuchō specifically points out that the actors' breathing, responses to each other, and ad-lib

⁶ I took the same bus to commute to Edo Town during fieldwork.

lines vary with each individual. Aya-san comments that each actor interprets the story differently, which is reflected in their emotional displays and body movements.

These observations about unique performances can be extended to the regulars' repeated, but distinct and iterative, experiences at Edo Town. Aya-san compares her regular Edo Town visits to a work commute, but emphasizes that this is not a mechanical act of going repeatedly to the same place. She explains, "Between the time I go [to Edo Town] and return home, I end up thinking about various things There are new things and I feel refreshed before I go back." With each familiar iteration of returning to their *ibasho*, where they feel belonging, the regulars discover alternate feelings of renewal and novelty in non-conventional ways.

Working for "Loose" Personal Relationships

The repeater Hanano's Mother believes that Edo Town's staging of a communal town based on Japan's past allows visitors and Edo People to interact more closely with each other than at other Japanese themed parks. She emphasizes that visitors can encounter the Edo People's human qualities, because Edo Town re-creates everyday life in Japan's past:

If you go [to a place] like Tokyo Disneyland, [any conversation] will end at only *konnichiwa* or a short greeting when walking by a cast member. But here, everyone completely becomes Edo People. I'm actually not a time traveler but because this place sets us up as if we were time travelers, [the Edo People] don't only say *konnichiwa*. They really get into [the conversation] The things held by *gendai-jin* (contemporary people) are unusual for them, so they poke their noses into it. This kind of conversation wouldn't begin at Disney. Lively conversations happen here, because the staff starts talking. The distance becomes closer.

In the same conversation together, the repeater Haruko-san reminisces fondly about seeing the merchant Echigoya constantly bickering in public with the same townswoman in Edo Town's *shōkagai* zone. She recalls,

Of course, the arguing was a joke. It was obvious, but seeing this was extremely enjoyable for me. I could feel how the people at this *tēma pāku* was living in this kind of Edo [-era] town. We can see everyday life here There isn't a feeling of customers and employees. Everyone seems like friends The arguing with Echigoya-san and [the townswoman] really appears to be a scene between two people in an Edo period *nagaya* (communal tenement housing). This cannot be seen in other places.

Both Hanano's mother and Haruko-san highlight the Edo People's closer "heart distance" (*kokoro no kyori*) when interacting with visitors and each other, something that cannot be experienced at Tokyo Disneyland.

Edo Town's regulars describe the intimacy that they share with Edo People and actors as "loose" personal relationships (*yurui ningen kankei*). They feel less constrained by the social rules dictating the appropriate distance between service workers and customers, as well as among strangers. Haruko-san, Hanano's Mother, and her daughter speak with the Edo People as if they are friendly acquaintances. Their conversation topics include a company-affiliated actor's injury that had been announced recently on his Twitter page, Hanano's school trip, and jokes about Haruko-san's love of alcoholic beverages.

Actor fans say that Edo Town does not limit social access to actors as much as at other performance venues. Tomoko-san divulges that she became acquainted with her favorite actor when he was working as a *gaichū* actor at Edo Town. Since he played a spice seller based in the *shōkagai* zone for most of his time there, they could spend time walking and talking together. When she next followed him Universal Studios Japan, the staff warned her not to talk to the actor when she moved in his direction and attempted to address him. The practice of regulating actor-fan distance is a norm in Japan's performing arts industry, as I have previously discussed with the Takarazuka Revue's official fan clubs.

Edo Town's regulars feel healing in O-Edo, where their sense of *iyashi* derives from the mental capacity to be oneself without trying too hard (Plourde 2014, 125). The actor fan-repeater Kaiya-san explains, "When I come [to Edo Town], I become more myself. It is effortless." She distinguishes social interactions at Edo Town from real life:

This is different from ordinary life. At work, we must be proper. In our neighborhoods, we must acknowledge people. For friends, it's different and there's a feeling of closeness. But to some extent, there is a boundary. Although it's friendly, we cannot become overly friendly In Japan — and I hate this — we pretend to get along with each other. We say bad things behind each other's back.

Kaiya-san is aware that the staff act as Edo People characters for work, but believes that this staged characterization facilitates the natural development of intimacy. She begins, "I'm not very good at socializing with others so I end up acting *omote* (exhibiting a socially-expected exterior façade). Normally, [this is everyone's] personality. *Yoroshiku onegaishimasu*⁷ from the beginning." She draws two circles with the letter "P" inside of each, standing for the true "personality"⁸ that must be hidden inside when two people meet each other.

When talking to visitors, however, the Edo People harness both the work character roles and the individual personalities of the staff inside the characters. Kaiya-san draws another circle with the letter "P" and then a circle with the *hiragana*⁹ character *shi* (し) to abbreviate the Japanese word for "work" (*shigoto*). Due to the work context, she does not feel obligated to continue speaking to them with her *omote* façade on but can also form relationships without the same kind of real-life pretense with the Edo People with whom she gets along. She explains,

⁷ A standard formal greeting that establishes a social relationship when two people meet each other initially and subsequently.

⁸ Kaiya-san uses the Japanized English loanword of "personality": *pāsonariti*.

⁹ A Japanese syllabary used for native Japanese words

“Regardless of whether we get along or not, it’s not ‘P-P.’¹⁰ We don’t have to talk to each other and that’s easy.”

When she becomes friendlier with an Edo Person, then their social interactions can accommodate more of the staff’s actual personality and not only the work character. “Since I’ve become a little friendlier with you now, Momo-chan,” she tells me. “The ‘P’ part has become bigger.” She draws a circle between the circle with the letter “P” and the circle with the *shi* character, with the “personality” portion taking up three-quarters and the “work” portion a quarter of its area.

“Loose” personal relationships at Edo Town begin through what they call “idle talk” (*seken banashi*) with the Edo People. The repeater Eri-san explains, “How has your health been recently? How have you been recently? We cannot do small talk like this at Disney. Idle conversations like these — they are enjoyable.” She remembers feeling surprised during her when a townsman approached her, Mayu-san, and their friend to talk. Because he initiated this first conversation, they continue to seek him out to socialize together during their visits. Eri-san and Mayu-san also remember that another townsman tried to sell them Japanese spinning tops. To their astonishment, he gave them an impromptu performance when they told him that they do not know how to play with the top.

Regulars take photographs with Edo People and actors to act out their connection together. While Takarazuka Revue fans in the audience use photography during performances to connect with their favorite performers on stage (Stickland 2008, 171-172), performers and fans are not always separated by a stage at Edo Town. The historical themed park’s regulars co-produce photographic moments with the Edo People and actors in a manner similar to the *cheki*

¹⁰ She is referring to her first diagram with the two circles and “personalities” that represent two people meeting in real life.

photographs that are staged publicly together at the maid café by the maid and patron (Galbraith 2011, paragraph 28). Such co-produced photography at Edo Town forms part of the social encounters that take place between regulars and the Edo People as well as actors at a particular moment. The actor fan Aya-san asks actors to take photographs together as an excuse to begin talking together. The actor will then remember her face, she says, the first step to cultivating a social relationship together.

Regulars often request their favorite Edo People and actors to take “two-shot” (*tsūshotto*) photographs together, with the regular and the staff in question as the two beings captured in the camera image. The point of *tsūshotto*, Haruko-san explains, is that “[you are] definitely going to be there together.” The image with the repeater and the Edo Person, or the actor and his fan, becomes visual proof of the intimacy that they share. As Yano (2004) argues, “In fact it is the very coupling, the fiction of the two-ness that beautifully masks the lopsidedness of the relationship. Intimacy inheres within a dream of exclusivity performed by the photo” (46).

Repeaters and actor fans ask the staff to act and to pose in specific ways. Kyokuchō shows me 30 physical reprints of the photograph that he has carefully curated using the Edo People, himself in character and costume as Kyokuchō at Edo Town, and the historical themed park’s various settings. He has tried to match the seasonal mood and colors that he perceives at Edo Town with his poses and facial expressions as well as those he requests of the Edo People portrayed in the images. He gives a few examples of these requests:

It’s winter. A cold face please.
Please make a slightly scary face.
Since it’s cold, please make this face.
Because it’s spring, please smile.

Kyokuchō's repeated visits to Edo Town have undoubtedly inspired him to project his feelings about the four seasons onto the historical themed park's atmosphere. His repeater status has made him comfortable with directing the Edo People for constructing his photographs as if they are working on a theatrical production together. As Momo the townswoman, I become one day involved in an impromptu photo shoot that was directed by an actor fan who is there to primarily see a *gaichū* actor. She has some extra time on a slow weekday and has been photographing the historical themed park's many blooming cherry blossoms. When she sees another *gaichū* actor (playing a townsman) and I nearby, she asks us if we could play the roles of an Edo-era husband and wife for her photographs. When we say yes, she requests that we pose in several places with cherry blossoms and re-created traditional Japanese architecture in the background. As she tests the angle and photographic composition on her SLR camera, she specifies when we are to freeze.

Regulars take photographs that capture moments with the Edo People that are likely never to reoccur. Aya-san elaborates, "On that day at that time, since people cannot be in the same state again, it's the same as not being able to go back to that time. This is why even if it's the same people in the photograph, it isn't that moment at that time. This is why I take photos of that day at that time — the moment that I want to cut out." Kyokuchō chooses to commemorate every visit near closing time when he gathers as many Edo People (both actors and service workers) as he can on one of Edo Town's re-created bridge for a group photograph. He wishes to record the Edo People who were inside Edo Town at that particular moment: "...the actors who are and aren't there, the people who have since left, the new people — I want to take [the photo] properly and be able to see their faces." Hanano's Mother makes sure to photograph what she calls "interesting combinations" of Edo People that she meets in a given place at Edo Town; for

her, the combination is interesting if the Edo People are regularly stationed in different areas of the historical themed park and are thus rarely seen together.

These photographs have public and private afterlives, depending on the regular's preferences. As I discuss more in the next section, many repeaters share their photographs of and with Edo People on Facebook and Instagram. Some prefer to keep certain "two-shot" photographs only in their mobile phone's photo gallery. Hanano's Mother purposely transferred the first "two-shot" photograph that she took with one townswoman several years ago from her digital camera to her mobile phone, so that such an important photograph can stay close by her. Aya-san's entire photography collection of the ninja action show's actors and a few Edo People remains private in her mobile phone. She explains that she does not need to upload her photographs on social media. Besides using photography as a personal interaction with the actors, the photographs also reflect her personal memories of the social world around the ninja action show. She only shares her photographs with the actors in one-on-one conversations that take place through the LINE application, because she believes that the actors may be interested in seeing as Edo People.¹¹

Edo Town's regulars occasionally give gifts to Edo People and actors to reinforce and have the latter openly recognize their shared connection. Some Edo People receive individualized presents to reflect the deeper intimacy that had developed over time with the regular. *Haken* and some *gaichū* actors rarely receive gifts from repeaters, because they do not stay long enough at Edo Town to develop personal relationships with the latter. The only exception is the *gaichū* actors who have returned to work temporarily at Edo Town several times or who have been working there for several months or more.

¹¹ Edo Town's staff are not allowed to photograph themselves while at work, and some are curious about what they look like in character as Edo People.

I never witnessed staff being reprimanded for accepting small, non-monetary gifts from regulars. If the gifts were food, they usually share with co-workers in the same department. Repeaters often give small packages of snacks to their favorite Edo People on special occasions, such as chocolates and cookies on Valentine's Day and Christmas as well as souvenir sweets after recent trips away. They are simply extending their real-life gift-giving circles to the Edo People with whom they have bonded. Fans often present their favorite actors with *sashiire*, an offering that helps to cement the actor-patron relationship that exists in the performing arts world. Aya-san distinguishes a *sashiire* from a present, since the former is intended for an entire cast of a show while the latter is given to a specific person. I have seen her walking inside Edo Town while holding several department store bags packed with boxes of confections, packages of snacks, cans of energy drinks, and handwritten notes addressed to the ninja action show's cast. However, according to another actor fan, some fans are openly devoted to one actor and would compete with each other for the actor's recognition through the giving of *sashiire*. Some perform their favored status on social media by bragging that they have learned about particular performances and events from the actor before other fans are notified. She reveals that actors often compare the quantity and the *sashiire* that they have received from their fans.

Fan Productions

Repeaters are often inspired to create things reflecting their relationships to Edo Town's world. Kelly (2004) argues that "fans... really are the guerrilla vanguard of consumption, turning their 'reception' of commercial entertainment into a resourceful, often irreverent, 'production'" (7). While Hello Kitty fans express their identity by collecting consumer goods (Yano 2013) and Takarazuka Revue fan clubs produce "copycat" theater performances (Stickland 2008), these

repeaters curate individualized occurrences and objects involving the Edo People and their experience of O-Edo. Many create digital archives of each visit, which they then share on their Facebook profile pages for Edo People and other repeaters to see. These photos of and with Edo People, organized in photo albums and collages, are accompanied by lengthy texts thanking those pictured for welcoming them back again. Some repeaters mention individual Edo People by Edo name, while others leave out any names and assume that their audience will recognize the faces in the photographs.

Repeaters sometimes role-play during their visits in ways that only the Edo People can understand, which playfully differentiates them from casual visitors. One day, Kyokuchō decides to surprise the Edo People by visiting Edo Town in a costume that appears similar at first glance to a particular actor's. All day, the confused staff believes that the actor seems to be everywhere at once until they see Kyokuchō's face. When the actor finally encounters Kyokuchō, he jokes that he thought for an instant that he has been looking at himself. Later, I ask Kyokuchō how he came up with this idea and he brings up Edo Town's ninjas. "With ninjas, when I'm thinking 'It's over. The show is over' and feeling relaxed... *sū-to*," he explains, using an onomatopoeia expression to illustrate how the ninjas silently ambush people, "I was surprised... Instead, I will [now] do the surprising. That is also fun." In this subversive role-play, Kyokuchō turns the actors' surprising of visitors back onto Edo Town's staff.

Other repeaters create objects that are inspired by the personal relationships that they have forged with the Edo People. Mayu-san always wears a backpack pinned with numerous small circular badges of Edo People faces when she visits Edo Town. The badges always catch the frontline staff's attention, especially the many actors who recognize their faces pinned onto her backpack. Mayu-san used a printing shop service to reprint her photographs of Edo People

onto badges, having done the same with the image of Edo Town's mascot; she had felt that many of the mascot merchandise sold in the historical themed park's souvenir shops did not appeal to her. She hesitates when I ask her whether she considers her badges to be souvenirs (*omiyage*) of Edo Town. "Everyone likes them," she says, "[When the Edo People] see them, they comment 'wow' and '[you] often come here.'" These badges, rather than commercial goods reminding her of past experiences at Edo Town, express her present identity as a repeater who is linked to the Edo People printed on them.

The repeater Hiroshi-kun has gifted handmade scrapbook albums to several Edo People (so far, all female actors) before they "graduated" from Edo Town (effectively quitting the company). He wished to show his gratitude to them before they left for taking care of him (*oseiwa ni natta*) since his early days as a repeater. For each album, he spent weeks — and sometimes months — coordinating with other repeaters and Edo People to gather and organize photographs of the Edo Person and handwritten well wishes for them. On his Facebook profile page, Hiroshi-kun always posts his photographs of the moment when he presented the albums to these Edo People and of the album's pages — a public performance of his labor as a loyal and grateful repeater as well as his acknowledgment of the Edo Person's appreciation for his gift. As farewell presents, the albums were not given to continue personal relationships with soon-to-be former Edo People; in fact, most employees almost never interact with the repeaters once they quit Edo Town's operating company. Contrasting with the merchandise generally sold to casual visitors in the historical themed park's souvenir shops, the albums are a material curation of Hiroshi-kun's memories of and emotions that he directs at specific Edo People as an Edo Town repeater.

Corporation respond to such fan initiatives with antagonism, neutral co-existence, or a collaboration that appropriates consumer voices (including dissenting ones) under their brands (c.f. Condry 2013; Yano 2013). Discussing the unlicensed Japanese anime episodes with fan-written subtitles that are circulated online, Condry (2013) describes a “dark energy of fandom as a collection of social forces that enliven the connections between content and desire, which in turn helps drive the circulation of media products” (163). So far, Edo Town allows employees to individually respond to the repeaters’ productions as long as this occurs within the historical themed park’s context. Although these repeaters do not directly promote the historical themed park’s narrative about Edo-like Japaneseness, they — like the overseas visitors — also do not refute this ideological message. Their curated photo albums, social media posts, and inspired role-play show that the historical themed park retains loyal customers who regularly bring in revenue and promote positive commentary.

Blurred Boundaries

Edo Town’s regulars eventually discover that their feelings of the mundane (*nichijō*) and extraordinary (*hinichijō*) overlap the more they visit and that its fictional world can slip into their everyday lives. Several happily tell me that O-Edo now feels *nichijō*, because they visit so often and they now know everyone there. The repeater Haruko-san confesses that she used to take photos of everything in Edo Town when she was a newer repeater, but has since stopped doing so. Now, she spends most of her time talking to rather than photographing the Edo People. However, feeling *nichijō* is not the same as experiencing monotonous real-life routines. It is a routine that they have chosen to carry out in their place of belonging.

Some regulars enjoy adopting staff-like roles, whether they do so on their own initiatives or are led to do so by the misrecognition of casual visitors. Kyokuchō tells me proudly that casual visitors mistake him for an employee 90 percent of the time whenever he is wearing his Kyokuchō costume at Edo Town. They ask him for photographs together and some speak to him in archaic Japanese as if he were an actual Shinsengumi character. This happened so much that he concluded, “I have to perform.” Consequently, he has developed his character’s signature grim and frowning expression for photos with casual visitors and with the Edo People. The actor fan Aya-san sometimes steps in to answer casual visitors’ questions about restroom locations and to give directions to specific theaters, things that she knows as someone who has visited Edo Town weekly for several months. She does this whenever she notices that the staff appears occupied with other tasks and wishes to help them. She also began to copy the Edo People’s manner of counting off *hino, funo, mi* (an archaic Japanese way of counting one, two, three) when she offers to take photographs of casual visitors and Edo People together, much to the former’s confusion and the latter’s amusement. Although staff and customer roles are blurred in these circumstances, Edo Town’s regulars — unlike the staff — are still customers who can choose to role-play Edo People and to help casual visitors at the moments that feel convenient to them.

Edo Town’s world can also slip into the repeaters’ real-life identities and actions, reflecting the “lived theming” (Lukas 2010) experienced by consumers. The repeater Hanano’s Mother jokes that the name “Hanano” has “already sunk in more than the real name” of her daughter. Kyokuchō uses his persona on the annual New Year’s greeting cards that he sends to his family and friends. He also tells me about the time when he accidentally performed his “Kyokuchō mode” at work. “When you go and pick up a customer at the train station, [saying]

ittekimasu (I am going out and coming back) is normal,” he begins. He then adopts the deep voice that he uses when in Kyokuchō mode, continuing “[I said,] *itemairu. Ittemairu*. I was extremely surprised. I was stuck...” Kyokuchō had accidentally a standard, contemporary phrase for going out (*ittekimasu*) in the Shinsengumi language form (*itemairu*) that he uses in character at Edo Town.

Regulars also develop their intimacy with Edo People and actors in online spaces. Unlike the Takarazuka Revue’s regulation of social contact between fans and performers (Robertson 1998; Stickland 2008), Edo Town’s employees are individually responsible for complying with company rules forbidding personal contact with customers outside of the historical themed park’s context. However, online platforms can blur the social boundary between public performances in character and private interactions as individuals. Performing arts and entertainment industry laborers do not stop working after their staged performances. Takeyama (2010) writes about the “entrepreneurial” hosts in Japan who, outside of the host club’s operating hours, engage in “body work” and the consumption of expensive goods to construct a “desirable self” for their customers. Stickland (2008) also points out that Takarazuka performers must accept their admirers’ gifts and acknowledge fans at the stage door, as well as socialize with their fans in their “stage gender” after their theater performances. Some of Edo Town’s company-affiliated actors similarly post messages using their characters’ Facebook profiles (with their Edo names) and others their individual Facebook profiles (with their actual names) in order to promote Edo Town’s events and initiatives as well as to communicate with customers (many of them repeaters). Actors also use social media and communications applications such as LINE to announce their future performances and to sell tickets to their fans in some cases.

Many repeaters recognize that they must distinguish between the world of O-Edo that they experience at Edo Town and the employees' private lives from which they must maintain a personal distance. Some may fantasize about, even talking about this openly during their visits, socializing with the actors together outside of Edo Town, but most know that this can never happen in real life. While they know about the company rules that prohibit personal contact between employees and customers, they also realize that this distinction is necessary for sustaining the intimacy that they experience with the Edo People — one that can only be animated within Edo Town's extraordinary context. Hanano's Mother always makes sure to interact with Edo Town employees on social media pages as their Edo People characters. Kyokuchō has deleted other repeaters from his Facebook friend list when they posted photos of Edo Town's employees in their non-Edo clothing while they were not at work. He explains that these repeaters' actions betrayed his "dream," elaborating, "A Japanese culture themed park does not really exist in real life, but...when I am at [Edo Town], especially on a day off, I have fun and forget unpleasant things. I don't like this 'backstage' information — this dirty thing." As consumers of belonging in their *ibasho* at Edo Town, both Hanano's Mother and Kyokuchō justify their separation of the O-Edo context from private life.

This is not to say that unsavory and transgressive practices never occur off-site, although it is impossible to prove definitively as a fieldwork researcher who crosses different social communities in and around an ethnographic fieldsite. There will always be rumors about fans and staff meeting secretly. The main issue that I wish to highlight here is that online spaces — especially those with private chat and forum functions — facilitate the exchanging of institutionally unsanctioned information and gossip. I choose not to discuss specific instances here for ethical reasons, but will note that petty gossip regarding the actors' private lives and the

trash-talking of other regulars have circulated online under pseudonyms. Even if the posters do not write actual and Edo names in their entirety, it would be easy for other regulars to deduce the subject's identity since they are very familiar with the people who work at and regularly visit Edo Town. The nastiness of these comments flagrantly disrespects people's private lives, overturning the positive, affective atmosphere that repeaters claim to draw them back to Edo Town.

Losing One's *Ibashi*

The *ibashi* disappears when consumers no longer feel belonging due to changed conditions. Edo Town's regulars — especially the long-time repeaters — readily emphasize their strong connections to O-Edo and the Edo People, but this is highly dependent on the operating company's fulfillment of their consumer desires. Regulars feel out of place and gradually return less or stop going back to Edo Town due to its operational changes, including show cancellations, the addition of and modifications to attractions, as well as personnel reassignments.

Changes to the ninja action show and its subsequent cancellation deeply affect Edo Town's regulars. When the show's plot is eliminated to feature only stage fighting, Aya-san, Tomoko-san, and other actor fans complain amongst themselves. Then, Edo Town announces the show's cancellation on its Facebook page and *gaichū* actors replace its veteran cast of company-affiliated actors. In a flat, dissatisfied voice, the repeater Haruko-san comments, "They decreased the number of performers and the time [duration], and it has become less interesting. The performers aren't even the people from [Edo Town's operating] company, right? They're *gaichū-san*, right? I end up thinking that the company's people are more interesting." Edo

Town's regulars generally believe that *gaichū* actors possess inferior stage fighting skills compared to the company-affiliated actors.

Regulars plead with Edo Town's operating company to listen to their customers' opinions via messages on its Facebook page. The repeater Hanano's Mother has heard about a fan who directly called the operating company's office to complain about the show's cancellation. While the actor fans abruptly stop visiting Edo Town after the show's last week of performances, the repeaters' negative sentiments continue to intensify especially after the operating company announces that the ninja action show's theater set will be converted to a "ninja trick house" experience attraction.

When we discuss this, Haruko-san suddenly interjects that she wants Edo Town's management to "listen to this interview" and to pay attention to the repeaters' needs. Like many other repeaters, she questions the operating company's decision to prioritize experience attractions over a unique ninja action show that cannot be experienced elsewhere. Some repeaters believe that this attraction type is developed to target foreign tourists, another sign that their needs are being ignored. Haruko-san believes that these changes waste the company-affiliated actors' talents because she only knows of one other management company that trains actors in stage fighting skills (the same one followed by Aya-san and Tomoko-san). She does not understand why Edo Town's operating company made this decision, since the ninja action show has many fans and "ninjas are popular worldwide." She is not visiting Edo Town as frequently as before since it is less interesting for her and her sense of enjoyment (*gorakukan*) has lessened considerably; her visits have decreased from twice to now approximately once a month. Hanano's Mother adds that she understands Edo Town's operating company must rationalize their business operations in order to survive, but argues that she has not noticed any drops in the

ninja action show's audience numbers and hence the show's closing seems unjustified. The actor fan-repeater Kaiya-san similarly questions the operating company's business decisions in a separate conversation, saying, "There are already many sales attractions. There'll be even more when the number of *taiken* increases." These comments show the hardening of business-customer lines that occurs whenever consumers feel that their expectations are no longer met.

The regulars' emotional responses can implode as shock and loneliness. Several weeks before the official ninja action show cancellation announcement, I witness the actor fan Aya-san's visceral reaction when she learns about the news from another repeater. She becomes visibly agitated and continually interrogated the other repeater for details until the latter becomes visibly uncomfortable and flees the premises as soon as she can. Aya-san cannot think about anything else afterward and tells me that she feels betrayed that the actors did not discretely tell her about this although she has been their *okyakusan* for close to a year. She confides to me later, her voice breaking, that her *kaeru basho* — the place where she can return — is now gone: "It felt like a hole has opened in my heart. My place to return to has disappeared. To me, [the ninja action show] wasn't actually my home but a place where I can return. If I go [to Edo Town], there won't be any places for me to be able to meet the actors. Yes, the actors will be there but the stage is gone. It's like my place to return has gone away."

Aya-san continues to return to Edo Town for several months to see the company-affiliated actors who used to be part of the ninja action show's cast, but has since been reassigned to perform in other shows. She claims that her experience is not the same since her reason for going to the historical themed park has disappeared. She complains bitterly that she feels lonely (*sabishī*) and that she no longer has anyone to talk to because the *gaichū* actors have left and some company-affiliated actors with whom she has become acquainted have also quit the

company. Her visits then dwindle from twice a week to every other week to every few weeks. Finally, months will pass by before she goes back to Edo Town.

Personnel reassignments generally affect actor fans less than long-time repeaters. This mostly occurs when a *gaichū* actor leaves after his contract ends. Actor fans such as Tomoko-san do not return to Edo Town since their priority is to follow the actor that they have been supporting. Although Tomoko-san would have liked to meet Edo Town's affiliated actors again, she lacks the money and time to plan a long-distance trip there especially because the historical themed park does not publicly disclose cast information in advance.¹² However, she is not concerned about missing the *gaichū* actors that she has met at Edo Town because she will inevitably see them again in other theater performances and events such as the Edo Festival at the Tokyo Haneda Airport.

While Edo Town's employees are accustomed to management-mandated operational changes, regulars feel shocked when they realize that the atmosphere and social interactions that they take for granted are actually ephemeral. When a long-time *gaichū* actor tells Aya-san that staff coming to and going from Edo Town "is normal," she finds his attitude cold. The repeater Kyokuchō clarifies that he does not wish to meet the historical themed park's former employees again in real life; rather, he wants to interact with them again in O-Edo as the way things once were. Haruko-san longs for the bickering scene between Echigoya the merchant and the townswoman in the *shōkagai* zone, because it involves specific actors playing Echigoya and the townswoman together in a certain space at Edo Town. This exact scene and social dynamic between the two characters cannot occur again, because a different actor now plays Echigoya the merchant and the townswoman are no longer based there.

¹² Some company-affiliated and *gaichū* actors at Edo Town announce their schedule on their Twitter pages on the same day of their performances. Actor fans feel that this is too last-minute for planning their excursions to see the actors.

Some repeaters notice that human interactions at Edo Town have become shallower, which they attribute to an increase in *gaichū* actors and the gradual disappearance of O-Edo's intimate atmosphere. Hanano's Mother describe the latter as Edo Town's "soft aspect" (*sofuto men*), which is produced by the spontaneous, community-like social interactions with Edo People. Hanano's Mother and Haruko-san tell me that the company-affiliated actors now rarely come out of the theaters to spend time with the visitors including their fans. The latter remembers nostalgically that there were hardly any *gaichū* actors at Edo Town eight years ago and that the company-affiliated male actors who performed in the ninja action show were very popular. Without taking breaks, they always took the time to take photographs together and to talk with their mostly female fans — even ten of them at a time — who always waited for them after performances. Now, *gaichū* actors' fans outnumber these company-affiliated actor fans.

Long-time repeaters discuss operational changes at Edo Town in terms of losing affective, social connections. They also tend to focus on the *gaichū* actors' lack of Edo Town affiliation, what they perceive as less developed acting skills, and the negative social effects of their temporariness. Kyokuchō criticizes many of the *gaichū* actors for not acting sufficiently like Edo People, pointing out as an example that they do not approach visitors first and do not act as if they are from Edo. He has seen *gaichū* actors offer to take photographs for visitors while saying the word *kamera*, the contemporary Japanized English loanword for "camera." He insists, "But in the Edo period there was no *kamera*, right? It would have been [a] very mysterious [thing]. Surprise— I want them to express that."

However, these comments about the *gaichū* actors' inadequacy do not consider the fact that these actors' relationships with Edo Town's operating company differ significantly from that of the affiliated actors. They seem unmindful of the trend towards temporary and flexible

employment conditions faced by actors and workers. With fluctuating touristic periods, it is also likely more affordable for Edo Town's operating company to temporarily hire more *gaichū* actors on an as-needed basis who receive lower daily salaries than company-affiliated actors who also receive benefits. As outsiders contracted to work temporarily at the historical themed park, for a few days or for several weeks in many cases, most *gaichū* actors receive little, if any, training before beginning their work. Even if they stay long enough to learn how to act like Edo People as company-affiliated actors do, most *gaichū* actors are hired mainly to fulfill specific functions such as selling merchandise, ushering for shows, and staffing attractions rather than socializing with visitors as fully-developed Edo characters.

The majority of *gaichū* actors do not stay long enough at Edo Town to recognize which visitors are repeaters (a service that repeaters seem to expect) and for the repeaters to become acquainted with them. Haruko-san explains, "If they know you are a repeater, they will talk to you. But if they think that they are meeting you for the first time, their treatment of you will be different after all. When there are a lot of *gaichū-san* at the *taiken* attractions, it's difficult for conversations to gain momentum." My interlocutors also associate the presence of *gaichū* actors generally with long weekends and peak seasons, when they cannot socialize exclusively and at length with the Edo People. Hanano's Mother notes that with so many unfamiliar actors interacting with much more casual visitors during those times, the *gaichū* actors seem more like part-timers rather than Edo People with whom she can interact. "Instead of coming to an Edo-like town, it felt like I am at a themed park," she says. "It felt like a place that is made for show."

Hanano's Mother worries that Edo Town will become like another Edo-themed park, which is located in a different Japanese prefecture. She describes it as a place where visitors can

only interact passively with the staff in staged photo opportunities and shows, without the type of spontaneity that she has been experiencing at Edo Town. She remembers of her visit there,

There wasn't any connection with people. You could take photos [with the staff] but it really felt like an assembly line — *hai*, next, *hai*, next. Because you only take the souvenir photo, there was hardly any involvement. Here [at Edo Town] ... wandering around aimlessly... there are theatrical appearances [like] Nezumi Kozō and the [balloon bursting competition with the samurai], right? There weren't these people at [the other themed park] ... it wasn't interesting. When it's like that, it's an artificial place (*tsukurareta basho*). It just felt like walking around a film set.

She draws attention to the social contact and improvisation that has been animating Edo Town's world, which she feels should not be sacrificed to the rationalization of business operations.

For Edo Town's regulars, O-Edo is *not* a generic Japanese themed park with staged shallow entertainment. It is also not another Japanese themed park aspiring to be a Tokyo Disneyland clone. Instead, it is a meaningful *ibasho* to them where they continually develop alternate, social relationships. Operational changes, however, can threaten the atmosphere where they can develop "loose" relationships that can only occur in Edo Town's extraordinary context. They overturn the *ibasho* that they have always believed will be there whenever they return to experience their feelings of belonging in an alternate, fictional world.

Animated Senses In The *Ibasho*'s Embodied Experience

This chapter examined how Edo Town's regulars animate the themed environment as an *ibasho*, their place of belonging that they call O-Edo and where they experience a fictional intimacy that seemingly does not conform to real-life social conventions. They discover *iyashi* — or healing — at Edo Town because of its alterity, which is similar to the cat and maid cafés in Japan that evoke atmospheres of home and return despite being commodified non-home, non-work spaces (Galbraith 2011; Plourde 2014). These enterprises stage the extraordinary

parameters by which fictional social interactions and shared intimacy can occur; in Edo Town's case, this is with Edo-like characters and actors-as-characters found in specific places inside the larger space of a historical themed park.

It is up to consumers to animate a place as their *ibasho* through repeated engagement. Edo Town's regulars feel belonging because they animate, through their continued consumption, the kernel of social alterity that they have felt there. Repeaters and actor fans must purchase access to Edo Town every time they return, so that they can develop and maintain their recognized identities there. During their visit, they invest their time into a social routine of small talk, photography, and occasional gift-giving that renews their fictional ties with their favorite Edo People and actors. The recurring financial expenses are considerable, when the cost of transportation, food, souvenirs, attractions, and overnight accommodations (in some cases) are calculated with admission ticket prices. Nevertheless, these regulars go back because they perceive an alternate sociality inspired by a historical themed park's interpretation of Japan's past that temporarily fills an affective, social void that they feel in their everyday lives. While many describe this void as a modern "social distance," this can also be widely attributed to the rhythm of urban life (most come from cities) and even the loss of the family and the workplace as institutional safety nets over the past few decades.

The *taiken* of an *ibasho*, or the embodied experience of an alternate world of belonging, animates all the senses as consumers learn to attune their performative selves to their surroundings. This includes the physical and affective senses as Edo Town's regulars spend time inside the places that produce, for them, an extraordinary feeling of belonging, whether they are absorbing the sights, sounds, and smells of the areas where they interact with their favorite Edo People or the rhythmic music and intense movements by actors as ninjas during the ninja action

show. Furthermore, they develop social senses as they learn how to build unconventional relationships with certain Edo People characters and actors within Edo Town's context. They even cultivate a modified sense of self when they merge with the object of their attachment as actor patrons and personas inspired by the Edo People.

Despite constant performative and animation work, the *ibasho*'s embodied experience can nevertheless slip from the consumers' grasps when their priorities do not align with institutional ones. Operational changes abruptly dislodge the physical, affective, social, and self senses that they have learned to cultivate for their place inside the *ibasho*. As a result, this dislodges their efforts in animating their chosen place of belonging. Furthermore, operational changes expose business' real-life concerns with revenue and other customer demographics that may be more important for their economic survival. This consequently tears apart the delicate web of alternate social relations and affective place-making that compel regulars to return. When the sought combination of characters, place, and atmosphere no longer exists, even the most fervent regulars will leave. The physical site remains, but the *ibasho* fades away when it cannot be animated in a way that tells these regulars that they belong.

Conclusion - Animating Edo-Themed Social Statements And Japanese Identity In 21st-Century Japan

Although Edo Town has closed twice temporarily since early 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has swiftly adapted its Edo-themed contents to these unforeseen circumstances. It has been promoting social responsibility, as exemplified by its Edo-like world, primarily to domestic audiences in virtual realms and on-site after reopening the first time. Its operating company posted a YouTube video featuring a ninja who walked viewers through the “ninja way of hand washing” that would help defeat the coronavirus and “protect” the people around them. Social media posts showed summer scenes in O-Edo the themed environment, while telling viewers to “stay home” when the Japanese government recommended that people limit close, physical contact as a public health measure. After Edo Town reopened the first time, it held a daily traditional festival event for dispelling pandemics with male employees in white face coverings carrying a *mikoshi* (portable shrine). Its operating company also publicized two pieces of news about its involvement with Terada’s community during the pandemic. The first is a story about Edo commoners (inhabited by employees) who delivered Edo cuisine *bentō* (meal boxes) made with local ingredients to some Terada residents, including those in single parent households, when the historical themed park was closed and COVID-19 cases were beginning to spread throughout Japan. These commoners were demonstrating the Japanese value of mutual aid in troubled times, the story indicated. The second was an announcement about an evening drive-in theater that would open in Edo Town’s parking lot, primarily for local residents. Edo Town would continue its mission to revitalize its host city Terada, by providing a socially-distanced activity.

Curating Japanese Cultural Identity Through *Taiken*

In this conclusion chapter, I highlight the social roles that history-themed spaces like Edo Town can play in 21st-century Japan as they transform the past into materials for heritage, cultural branding, and the assertion of Japanese identity. I re-examine how *taiken* (embodied experience) mediates animation and performances, while modifying its participants' agencies so that they can be alternate selves. Although its theatrical and fictional themed environment may be the most visible to consumers, Edo Town is also a corporate workplace, an employer of local residents, a performing arts institution and jobs provider, a tourism industry developer, as well as an alternate non-work and non-home social space. Its operating company at the center of a web where multiple social processes converge: the communication of Japanese identity through themed staging, the socialization of Japanese cultural knowledge through character labor and consumption, the development of regional economies, as well as the merging of the performing arts, tourism, and cultural industries.

This dissertation examined how human actions, social identities, and meanings are animated through *taiken*. By highlighting the significance of these embodied experiences, it goes beyond economics and marketing-centered analyses of themed environments and of the “experience economy” (Gottdiener 1997; Pine and Gilmore 2011). Animation is “a possible mode of performative (real, social) world-making” (Silvio 2010, 434), and I have shown the ways in which *taiken* merges animation and performance. While theming steers appearances, interpretive narratives, and behaviors, its animation allows room for human agencies to be modified— especially through the transformation of people into characters. Themed environments are incomplete as initial staged curations. They require animation through embodied participation in affective, social experiences as well as performative improvisation

during social encounters, what is known at Edo Town as *fureai* (mutual social contact) between Edo People characters and visitors. These experiences cast a temporary but extraordinary lens over the mundane; Edo Town, this is the everyday atmosphere of “ordinary” people in Japan’s past, mundane work tasks, as well as the selective consumption of goods, services, and commodified intimacy.

Furthermore, Edo Town’s current social world is a microcosm of Japanese societal transitions and contemporary anxieties after 30 years of recession and economic stagnation—which will be detailed further in this chapter. The operating company and its historical themed park promote timely social statements about Japanese identity by means of its narrative about Edo culture’s presence in contemporary Japanese identity, which intersects with national governmental efforts to rehabilitate Japan’s image domestically and overseas through cultural branding and the economic development of the inbound tourism industry. Its themed environment also enables domestic consumers to explore alternate social relationships that can only take place outside of home and work.

The dissertation chapters explored the creative labor, institutional networks, and consumption practices that collectively produce Edo Town’s ongoing social world. Each analyzed a curator with a different and partial relationship to Edo Town’s operating company and/or the historical themed park’s commodified experience. The first part of the dissertation (Chapters 1-4) examined the structural perspectives that impact its themed staging, while the second part (Chapters 5-7) analyzed the various performative consumption modes that animate its embodied experience. Chapter 1 discussed the historical conditions that influenced the Edo period’s meaning over time throughout Edo Town’s existence, as it is used by its operating company to create and evolve its social role in providing “answers” about Japanese identity

through an Edo-themed narrative and re-enacted environment. Chapters 2 and 3 explored its themed company structure and culture, which maintains this staging by socializing employees into merging their selves into Edo People— characters that embody and animate Edo Town’s message. Chapter 4 examined the larger political economy landscapes that have enabled Edo Town’s institutional existence and that have preserved its relevance in the tourism industry, in the local community, and in the cultural industries. The second part of the dissertation shows how meanings are animated through the performative consumption of Edo Town’s embodied experience. It analyzes how its mostly domestic casual visitors, overseas visitors (especially overseas tour groups), and regulars engage selectively with the things and characters that are the most perceptible and desirable to them (Chapters 5-7).

The Social Roles Of History- And Heritage-Themed Spaces In 21st-Century Japan

This dissertation portrayed Edo Town as a historical themed park that transmits cultural heritage through a themed environment facilitating animated social contact. Edo Town, along with other history- and heritage-themed spaces in Japan, contribute to the national project of defining a Japanese identity. Their institutional existences also define the image of their host Japanese municipalities and cities, including those located in non-metropolitan areas. Edo Town’s operating company has magnified a small touristic city’s identity and its local population’s labor through participatory Edo-Japanese heritage. Here, I re-examine the larger social statements that such history-themed spaces make about the meaning of heritage in 21st-century Japan, the forms that heritage can take, and effective modes of heritage transmission.

As I have indicated, Edo Town shares a similar approach to re-enacting Japan’s past with many other history-themed indoor museums and open-air architectural museums in Japan. Their

spaces are themed around a central concept, re-creating affective, nostalgic atmospheres and cultural knowledge as intangible forms of heritage that can be transmitted through their visitors' collective, social experiences. Their often-interactive settings stimulate visitors to feel connected to Japan's past and for the domestic Japanese visitors, to their social selves as Japanese. Historical artifact and re-created object arrangements function as the starting point for communication and knowledge-sharing, which are mediated through museum guides, fictional characters, and the visitors' subjective associations.

Although Edo Town features several exhibition spaces, it leans heavily on fictional and experiential interpretations of Japan's past to communicate what Japanese cultural identity *can be*. It converts factual research on the Edo period — the *what was* — into theatrical social interactions, atmosphere, and role-play that invite creative and imaginative participation. Edo Town pushes immersive experiences further by transforming visitors into co-participant characters and by training its staff into fully embodying fictional characters that transmit cultural heritage through alternate social interactions.

Edo Town's differences from traditional museums reveal a debate about the legitimate and effective means of cultural heritage transmission, as well as the forms that heritage can take. They show that cultural displays are situated on a spectrum between object-centered informational displays and creative social encounters that extend the imagination. The question arises whether heritage should be passed on through actual historical artifacts or socially-shared intangible cultural knowledge. Museums and cultural festivals worldwide are becoming more interactive and some even use historical re-enactments (c.f. Schlehe et al. 2010 volume). The Hyakumangoku Matsuri in Kanazawa, the Jidai Matsuri in Kyoto, and the Ieyasu Gyōrestsu in

Okazaki are three examples of the many festivals in Japan that re-enact processions with people in historical costumes, including those playing well-known historical figures.

History- and heritage-themed spaces use historical elements to create an idealized alternate present that is different but still recognizable. Edo Town's embodied experience frames an alternate present that shows how a culture of ordinary people inspired by the Edo period provides "answers" to contemporary Japanese people. While the historical themed park never poses a specific question to these "answers," the narrative's premise is that contemporary circumstances are never ideal— an ahistorical anxiety that is made relevant to any historical moment and that produces a social role for Edo Town's vision of the alternate. The embodied experience's alterity is based on social interactions and relationships with Edo People, characters into which the staff are required and visitors are encouraged to merge. The visitors' merging allows them to temporarily encounter non-familial, non-work social connections, many of which have been commodified and consumed after 30 years of economic recession and stagnation in Japan weakened nuclear family and company ties as social safety nets. Edo Town's commodified experience of alternate relationships with Edo People is congruent with the wider collective search in Japan for alternate forms of social belonging and stability that took place well into the 2010s and is still continuing today (see Allison 2013).

Besides staging alternate affective interactions between individuals, Edo Town's embodied experience suggests that a *collective* Japanese social connection still exists— one inspired by selective aspects of Edo culture. During the 2010s, Edo Town — having survived the recession's effects in the previous decade — communicated a rehabilitated vision of Japanese heritage and identity to employees, domestic consumers, and overseas tourists. Meanwhile, the Japanese government was doing the same thing on a national level. Recall the 2012 campaign

slogan used by former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō: *Nihon wo, torimodosu* (Let's Recover Japan). In collaboration with businesses, the Abe administration promoted tourism and Japanese culture internationally as part of the Abenomics policy to rehabilitate Japan's economy, image, and sense of collective identity. It also submitted the bid to host the now-postponed 2020 Tokyo Olympics in order to showcase Japan to the world.

Edo Town is participating in this national effort as a cultural content producer in a tourist destination. Adapting its content to the current consumer market, it uses performing arts labor to stage social experiences that require people to engage with its interpretation of Edo-like Japanese cultural identity at the historical themed park, cultural spectacles, and tourism fairs. Theming is not inconsequential surface entertainment. It is used to re-enact a nationalist vision of Japanese identity, as well as to socialize workers and consumers into internalizing Edo-like Japanese identity. The creative arts, as we saw with Edo Town's use of performing arts labor and media references, now have an emergent role in heritage transmission and cultural branding— a mission that has long been associated with the Japanese traditional arts schools such as in tea ceremony and *ikebana* (flower arranging). Furthermore, Edo Town's institutional existence produces a highly-regimented tourism circuit that markets Terada as a destination partially based on heritage participation— one that accommodates overseas tourists and families with young children. These developments must lead to a re-examination of the assumptions about *who* and *what* can authoritatively legitimize cultural heritage. As a Toei Kyoto Studio Park manager comments, “*Goraku* (entertainment) has been a part of Japanese culture since ancient times.”

The re-enactment of idealized and alternate social connections as cultural heritage inevitably excludes many things that do not fit chosen themes and institutional goals. As a fictional experience, Edo Town's themed environment leaves out inconvenient historical details

that overturn its narrative and its visitors' expectations to suspend their mundane lives. While poverty and wars (and until recently, punishment for crimes) are openly depicted and performed there, constant suffering is never its central focus. At Edo Town, the first two can be overcome through ordinary people's *kokoro* (hearts). Edo People commoners can find happiness, despite their poverty, due to their own kindness that will reward them one day and to the kindness of others in their community. Wars and battles are in the past, because the first shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu brought over 250 years of peace in a unified, isolated Japan where ordinary people like the Edo People and their authentic Japanese culture could flourish.

Theming And Modified Agency: Merging Animation And Performance In *Taiken*

Cultural animation plays out through managed staging and character-like performances. Recall Silvio (2010)'s definition of animation as "the projection of qualities perceived as human outside of the self and into the sensory environment" (427). Edo Town's *taiken*, its embodied experience, merges human qualities identified as Japanese into an Edo-themed environment and into its Edo People characters that guide individuals in their development of Edo-like Japanese senses. This experience consists of: 1) an animated, themed staging organizing a corporate interpretation of the past as alternate contemporary Japanese identity; and 2) a characterized performance unfolding through social interactions between participating visitors and staff that cultivate specific senses— what is understood by many of my interlocutors in Japanese as *kankaku*. These two components together shape the institutionalized socialization and consumption of an Edo-like Japanese identity as heritage.

Theming curates an interpretive foundation for social interactions. It empowers institutions to enforce and shape people's understandings, behaviors, senses, and movements. It

also guides consumer actions, as well as control workers' perceptions and bodies. Edo Town's operating company determines its social statements, stages its Edo-themed environment, as well as enforces its staff's Edo-like appearances and behaviors. Edo Town's employees undergo body management training in an Edo-themed company culture that seek to have them internalize a selective interpretation of Edo culture as the heart of contemporary Japanese identity. A visit is set up as a one-time consumer experience (although iterations are repeatable) that is constrained by schedules. Furthermore, visitors' interpretation and role-play of the Edo period and its cultural legacy are mediated through the Edo-themed environment's contents and characters.

Themed parameters animate characterized performances. Silvio (2010) argues that animation and performance, though analytically distinct, "in practice...are even harder to separate" (432). She points out that, for example, animation "remediates" performances of the self in virtual and online interactions using avatars and emoticons (Silvio 2010, 432), while cosplay "remediat[es] digital animation into embodied performance" (Silvio 2010, 433). Non-digital social spaces such as Edo Town similarly do the work of remediation by transposing virtual images and narratives into embodied experiences, as well as merging performance and animation into social interactions. While most history- and heritage-themed spaces in Japan primarily feature re-created, interactive material settings, Edo Town promotes *fureai* — mutual social contact — with characters as the heart of its experience. Characters such as Edo People connect the managed staging and characterized performance components of experience. *Fureai* with the Edo People requires both the visitors' performative engagement with the Edo-themed environment *and* the staff's character labor.

Animated performance and performed animation are the most entangled in character labor, because they test the performative limits of animation in experiential work and play. Staff

and visitors learn how to be alternate, character-like versions of their selves as they respond to managed themed parameters *and* creatively improvise in social encounters with each other. These animated performances and performed animation are also remediated into digital arenas such as social media accounts and private photo archives, allowing individuals and companies to further perform their identities in virtual form.

The merging of the performing self with the animating framework creates a modified agency that enables people to act alternately to their usual selves. Although scholars have argued that theming overwhelms the senses (c.f. Fjellman 1992), Edo Town’s visitors and staff are expected to consciously use their senses when animating its themed experience in their respective roles. Merged into the Edo-themed environment and company culture, the staff’s “characterized” personas project magnified presences that exceed their individual selves as they provide a performative model for visitor role-play and action. Visitors transform into participants when they merge their selves into the Edo-themed environment and with the Edo People characters. This enables them to experiment with alternate social interactions and identities based on Edo-like Japaneseness in an extraordinary, temporary, and non-binding context. As the previous chapters demonstrated, this includes circumventing normally-expected social distances, adopting Edo-like personas and traits, as well as re-enacting embodied experiences that were previously encountered in digital media.

Such modified agency transgresses mind and body boundaries. As the previous chapters showed, Edo Town’s visitors and staff modify their bodies to speak with Edo-like words and tones, to pose stereotypically as one-dimensional cultural character types, as well as to accommodate movements in kimono and other traditional Japanese clothing. Undergoing vigorous company socialization, regular employees and affiliated actors learn to merge their

words, behavior, voice, and movements into their designated Edo People character types. The more they internalize being Edo-like, the more they merge with a socialized themed workplace identity. While visitors are not contractually obliged to become Edo People characters, the themed environment still influences how they merge with fragmented Edo People poses, words, and personas in a performed animation of Edo-like alternate selves.

At the same time, some staff and visitors do not completely merge with the Edo-themed environment. The sociologist Emile Durkheim (1979[1897]; 1997[1893]) argues that anomie occurs when the social bonds linking individuals to society have lost their equilibrium. Considering Edo Town as a social ecosystem, the balance between Edo-like performance and animation is lost when visitors and staff are too detached institutionally and ideologically from the Edo-themed environment/workplace to accept the themed parameters of its embodied experience. Institutional outsiders and quasi-outsiders with little company training such as part-timers, temporary workers, and grounds staff, as well as staff who — after several reprimands — become aware of the hierarchal influence on what “Edo-likeness” means and are more likely to point out that the “Edo” at Edo Town is a selective, one-dimensional corporate interpretation of Japan’s past. They feel forced to animate an Edo that they cannot perform, due to their outsider or junior institutional status. Visitors feel distanced from Edo Town’s social world if they wish to perform different roles and things from the time traveler roles that are proposed to them. This is seen, for example, in the actor fans who are concerned by only the ninja action show, the repeaters who do not want to partake in the cultural experience attractions, and the casual visitors who only want to do as many activities as possible during their visit rather than slowly and sensually explore the Edo-themed environment as suggested by the historical themed park. Other visitors refusing to do any Edo-themed animation or performance, because they are more

interested in exposing the backstage business-run side of Edo Town rather than engaging with their Edo-themed surroundings— for instance, the casual visitors who speculated that the Edo People are wearing thermal underwear hidden below their kimonos to stay warm in the winter. Overseas visitors feel disconnected from the Edo People and their experiences when they do not understand the meaning of their participation due to the language barrier and differing cultural understandings. In these cases, the pre-staged *taiken* does not communicate completely to its audience.

Taiken is ultimately a shifting horizon. The extent of animation and performance allowed in embodied experiences depends on structural status in relation to the central organizing institution, which is, in this case, Edo Town's operating company. Although visitors and staff seem to equally share the same experience as co-participants, the latter must always conform to set animated parameters while the former have more flexibility for performances. Visitors cannot experience Edo Town fully as a staff playing an Edo Person, while the staff cannot adopt the same time traveler role that is marketed to visitors. Workers and consumers can only relate to each other through the intermediary fictional characters and contexts that stage the experience.

Ironically, the animation of alternate presents is sustained by the reality of status quo— in this case, a capitalist system based on unequal social relationships. Edo Town's themed environment re-enacts a warm, egalitarian, and communal atmosphere that is associated with Japan's past, but its experience is animated through tiered consumption and social hierarchy. Visitors must pay extra fees to participate, such as renting costumes to access more of the Edo People perspective and returning regularly in order to cultivate relationships with select Edo People or actors. The staff's animation of Edo People is based on the unequal relationship between service worker and customer, as well as with a themed corporate hierarchy that

socializes their worldviews and supports their livelihoods. The embodied experience's animation is also premised on the flexible employment of actors and to some extent, part-time and dispatch workers. Furthermore, Edo Town's existence is locked in an economic revitalization relationship with a non-metropolitan host community that is facing depopulation and that relies on tourism revenue for its survival.

Cultural Animation As Process

The cultural industries connect the individual subjectivities used in consumption with the institutionalized and nationalist framings of social identities. Commercial entities aspire to fill the role of social institutions to shape identities and define a nation's image. Companies such as Edo Town accomplish this by staging commodified, embodied experiences that animate participating minds and bodies into a specific cultural mode of being— in this case, the perception of Japan from an Edo-like character's perspective.

One may ask whether cultural animation is sustainable, when this process occurs around commercial enterprises — including Japanese themed parks — that are subject to economic uncertainty and rapid changes in cultural understandings that threaten their survival and relevance. A further question to explore is: Which parts of cultural animation can endure without the central socializing institution and despite these fluctuations? Even when/if Edo Town's operating company no longer exists, I suspect that its former employees — with already-internalized institutional knowledge — would perpetuate its image of Edo-like Japanese cultural identity consciously and subconsciously. Several former company-affiliated and *gaichū* actors continue to work at various cultural venues and events as ninjas and other cultural character types similar to those found at Edo Town. Former visitors have already participated in an Edo-

themed social experience that added a sensual, visceral, and even a memorable element to role-playing alternate identities. Many re-narrate their experiences on social media with images, words, and videos, contributing Edo Town's curation of Japanese heritage and identity to public or semi-public ones that already exist. Mediated, affective experiences thus feed into existing institutional networks and consumption practices in the cultural industries, animating heritage and their sites of re-enactment as an enduring, continual process.

Glossary Of Terms

<i>Anime</i>	アニメ	Japanese animated films and television series
<i>Daimyō</i>	大名	Japanese feudal domain lord
<i>Edo-Jin</i>	江戸人	Japanese people who lived during the Edo period. In Edo Town's context, its Edo People characters
<i>Edo shigusa</i>	江戸しぐさ	Edo period merchant code of conduct
<i>Eigamura</i>	映画村	“Movie village” or a film set that visitors pay admission to walk through
<i>Funiki</i>	雰囲気	Atmosphere
<i>Fureai</i>	触れ合い	Mutual, social contact

<i>Furusato</i>	故郷・ふるさと	Imagined rural “home village” nostalgically evoking Japan’s past
<i>Gaichū</i>	外注	Actor working on a temporary contract, often short-term
<i>Gaikokumura</i>	外国村	Foreign country-themed parks
<i>Geta</i>	下駄	Traditional Japanese wooden clogs
<i>Haken</i>	派遣	Temporary worker dispatched by an agency
<i>Hinichijō</i>	非日常	Extraordinary; “not everyday”
<i>Ibasho</i>	居場所	Place of belonging

<i>Irasshaimase</i>	いらっしやいませ	Welcome (Japanese expression used in retail contexts to greet customers)
<i>Iyashi</i>	癒し	Healing
<i>Jidaigeki</i>	時代劇	Japanese historical dramas
<i>Kakkōii</i>	格好いい	Cool image
<i>Kandō</i>	感動	State of being emotionally moved
<i>Kankaku</i>	感覚	Sense
<i>Katana</i>	刀	Japanese swords
<i>Katsura</i>	鬘・かつら	Wig headpieces made with human hair, often worn by actors to play Japanese historical drama characters
<i>Kitsuke</i>	着付け	Kimono dressing

<i>Kokoro</i>	心	Heart
<i>Manga</i>	漫画	Japanese comics
<i>Nagaya</i>	長屋	Communal tenement housing
<i>Natsuyasumi</i>	夏休み	Summer vacation
<i>Nichijō</i>	日常	Mundane; everyday
<i>Noren</i>	暖簾	Hanging store curtain
<i>Obi</i>	帯	Kimono sash
<i>Oiran</i>	花魁	High-ranking courtesan
<i>Okyakusan</i>	お客さん	Customer; an actor's supporter or patron
<i>Omotenashi</i>	おもてなし	Japanese-style hospitality

<i>Rīpītā</i> , “repeater”	リーピーター	A Japanese-made English word referring to fans who return regularly to a place
<i>Rōnin</i>	浪人	Masterless samurai who did not serve a feudal domain lord
<i>Ryō</i>	両	Archaic form of Japanese currency predating the yen
<i>Sabishī</i>	寂しい	Lonely
<i>Seishain</i>	正社員	Regular, full-time employee
<i>Shinsengumi</i>	新選組	Military force based in Kyoto with the task to protect the shogun’s government during the late Edo period’s Bakumatsu era (1853-1867)
<i>Shitamachi</i>	下町	Urban neighborhoods of the capital city Edo that still exist in modern-day Tokyo

<i>Shōkagai</i>	商家街	Merchant district
<i>Shokutaku shain</i>	嘱託社員	Non-permanent employee working on a renewable yearly contract
<i>Shuriken</i>	手裏剣	Ninja throwing star weapons
<i>Soto no hito</i>	外の人	Outsider
<i>Taihen</i>	大変	Tough
<i>Taiken</i>	体験	Embodied experience
<i>Tēma pāku</i>	テーマパーク	Themed park

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