

# Edo AND Paris

*Urban Life and the State  
in the Early Modern Era*

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## 13

## Incendiary Actions

*Fires and Firefighting in the Shogun's Capital and the People's City*

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About half past the eighth hour [3 P.M.] a fire broke out. . . at a bathhouse in Sakuma-machi. Owing to the strong wind, the area around Izumi-bashi soon burnt to the ground. The fire then crossed the river, and the area around the Benkei-bashi and Shitamachi became a vast holocaust, as bad as the great fire of 1829.

About the seventh hour [4 P.M.] I heard that the Kodenma-chō, Ōdenma-chō, and Abura-machi areas were burnt to the ground, including Chōjiya and Tsuruya. The area west of the Echigoya in Suruga-machi escaped the blaze because the wind was blowing from the north-west, but elsewhere the increasingly high wind fanned it all night. I could not sleep; word came that the flames had spread to Kukagawa, but it was not clear how great the damage had been.

With the fire burning unchecked late into the night, none of us could sleep. Tarō and Ohyaku finally rested at half past the fourth hour [11 P.M.], but Shima [a maid?] and I stayed awake until a little past the ninth hour [midnight]. Sōhaku and Omichi could not fall asleep either.<sup>1</sup>

Edo may have been the most populous and most built-up conurbation of the early-modern world. It was also very likely the most rebuilt metropolis of that era. Fires are, to be sure, a continual public danger in all urban settings, but Edo faced fires that were perhaps unparalleled in frequency and ferocity. Tokugawa Ieyasu formally established his headquarters at Edo in the Eighth Month of 1590. The first recorded fire was the third day of the following month, when the Founder's Hall of Sojoin in Kaizuka (present-day Kōjimachi) was destroyed. A mere ten years later the first major fire swept through half of the new city—including Edo Castle itself—reducing a decade of intense con-

1. Quoted in Leon Zolbrod, *Takizawa Bakin*, Twayne's World Authors Series 20 (New York: Twayne, 1967), pp. 126–27.

struction to ashes.<sup>2</sup> Thereafter, with a periodicity that approached the annual round of Edo festivals, the city and its residents were visited by conflagrations major and minor. Indeed, some analysts, such as Nakai Nobuhiko, believe that fires, like festivals and funerals, were conceptualized at the time as spiritually charged *hare* ritual events.<sup>3</sup>

It is no wonder, then, that a fire was known as one of the “flowers of Edo” (*Edo no hana*), the flames and sparks lighting up the city sky like fireworks (or “flower-fires”—*hanabi*—as the Japanese more aptly put it). Edo's fires were likened also to *momiji*, coloring the city with hues as vivid as the fall show of maple leaves, only to leave behind a charred and desiccated wintry landscape. The doyen of post-World War II Edo studies, Nishiyama Matsunosuke, proposed a famous fourfold characterization of Edo as a “city of warriors, men, fire, and forced moves,” the fourth chiefly a consequence of the third.<sup>4</sup>

Fires were also called *shukuyū* and *kairoku*, names of ancient Chinese personages that were adapted as appellations for Japanese “fire gods.” The *Dai-kairoku*, a nineteenth-century record of the three great fires of Edo, bespeaks that century's enshrinement of Edo fire folklore. The first of those famous fires—and the most momentous of all Edo blazes—was the great Meireki fire, in the first month of 1657. Also known as the Furisode fire, this was actually two successive conflagrations that destroyed most of Edo, including the castle and its keep, 160 daimyo estates, over 770 bannerman compounds, more than 350 temples and shrines, and nearly 50,000 merchant houses. The number of dead has been estimated at 108,000; the unclaimed were buried in mass graves at a site south of the Sumida River that became Muenji (later Ekōin), a favored site of sumo tournaments.<sup>5</sup> Over a century later, the great Gyōinzaka fire of 1772 burned a path of destruction fifteen miles long and more than two miles wide. The trio was completed by the great Heiin fire of 1806, which started in the southern section of the city and cleared a swath six miles by one-half mile in six hours, claiming 1,200 lives and destroying 83 domain estates, 86 temples, and 530 residential quarters.

Most serious fires started in late winter and early spring, often sparked by cooking fires and heating braziers and then fueled by the seasonal north to northwest winds. Fully half of the recorded Edo blazes occurred in the final and first two months of the old calendar (roughly, the first quarter of the modern year). Often in this season, the wind fanned fires from the higher elevations of Hongō, Koishigawa, Ushigome, and Komagome down into the low-lying commoner wards between Edo Castle and the Sumida River.

2. Ikegami Akihiko, “Edo hikeshi seido no seiritsu to tenkai,” in Nishiyama Matsunosuke, ed., *Edo chōnin no kenkyū*, 5 vols. (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1972–1978), vol. 5, p. 95.

3. Nakai Nobuhiko, *Chōnin*, Nihon no rekishi 21 (Shōgakusan, 1975), pp. 295–305.

4. Nishiyama discusses these four characteristics in several works; for example, “Zoku: Edokko,” in his *Edo chōnin no kenkyū*, vol. 3, pp. 1–27.

5. A book-length study of the fire is Kuroki Takashi, *Meireki no taika*, Kōdansha gendai shinsho 390 (Kōdansha, 1977). See also Ikegami Akihiko, “Meireki no taika,” in Nishiyama Matsunosuke, ed., *Edo no sanbyakunen*, vol. 1: Nishiyama and Haga Noboru, eds., *Tenka no chōnin*, Kōdansha gendai shinsho 415 (Kōdansha, 1975), pp. 72–83.

Edo Castle suffered major damage seven times after the first serious fire in 1601. As Nishiyama and Nakai note, however, it was the dense downtown merchant and artisan quarters, as well as the theater district, that were the most frequently hit by ruinous fires. Nakai's calculations indicate, for example, that major fires struck this area thirty-one times in the period from 1657 to 1834.<sup>6</sup> Even Nihonbashi Bridge, at the very center of commercial downtown, burned ten times between 1657 and 1858. Although there were periods as long as twenty-five years without a major blaze, there were eight fires in the first eighteen years of the eighteenth century, and nine within twenty-eight years in the early nineteenth century. On average, there was a major conflagration once every six years. Moreover, even apart from the so-called great fires, there were many years when a series of smaller fires did damage just as extensive.<sup>7</sup>

It is no surprise, then, to find that fire prevention and firefighting were prominent in the city bylaws and among the ordinances issued by the city magistrates. Fires placed a heavy financial burden on residents and the shogun's treasury; they influenced building materials, housing form, and urban space; and they figured prominently in the cultural imagination of the Edo populace. The need to rebuild and replenish after a fire created a significant demand for commodity of all sorts, and beneficial effects were felt throughout the national and local economy by major merchants and small artisans alike.

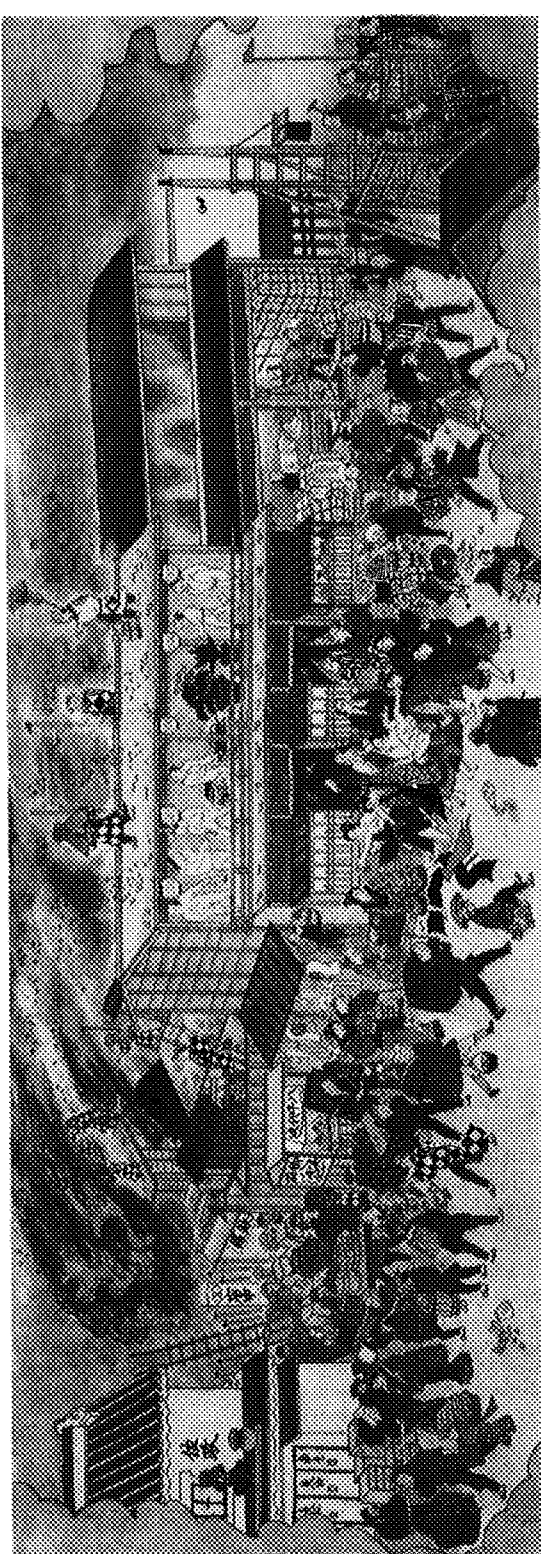
Furthermore, the frequency of arson and of fights at the scenes of fires continued to pose significant threats to urban order. In one famous incident, Bakin's contemporary, the satirist Shukitei Sanba published a thinly disguised fiction about a brawl between two rival fire companies. Angered, a compatriot company of one of those involved in the fray then attacked the houses of both Sanba and his publisher. The city magistrates not only ordered jail terms for the firefighters but also levied a heavy fine against the publisher and sentenced Sanba to fifty days in manacles.<sup>8</sup>

Given fire's multifarious significance, it is surprising that the techniques and technology of firefighting changed so little during the two and a half centuries of Tokugawa rule. Throughout the period, firefighting was directed not toward extinguishing the fires in buildings but rather toward limiting the fire's further spread. Thus the roof of a flaming building was ripped off in order to turn the flames upward, and its walls were collapsed inward on all four sides. Meanwhile, buildings surrounding the fire site were torn down to create

6. Nakai, *Chōnin*, p. 304.

7. For example, in 1716, 1717, 1721, and 1771: Yoshiwara Ken'ichirō, "Edo saigai nenpyō," in Nishiyama, *Edo chōnin*, vol. 5, p. 439. This work reorganizes and supplements a massive Taisho collection, *Tōkyō shishikō: Hensai-hen*. The most convenient source for Edo fire statistics, Yoshiwara's chronology gives, for each entry, time and place of the fire's origin, wind direction, and the nature and scope of its destruction. He also indicates any subsequent nicknames and stories about the major fires. In addition, he discusses some of the problems of the statistics, and gives examples of the language and form of the official shogunate fire reports.

8. Robert Leutner, *Shukitei Sanba and the Comic Tradition in Edo Fiction*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Monographs 25 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 29-31.



Fire at the bathhouse. Source: Chinka anshin zukan. Courtesy of Kokuritsu Kokkai Toshokan.

a firebreak. There were few changes in this kind of "demolition firefighting" (*hakai shōbō*) before the late nineteenth century. Pumps, hoses, and other extinguishing equipment remained crude and largely ineffective. The tool kit for Edo firefighters was primarily that of the building trades: ropes, saws, mauls, and, emblematically, the *tobiguchi*, the famous "fireman's hook," which was associated with the aerial-acrobatic and rough-living roofers (*tobi*) who came to dominate firefighting in fact and in reputation by the mid-Tokugawa period.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, as with other dimensions of societal management, Tokugawa firefighting was marked by a curious combination of technological stasis, organizational transformation, and cultural elaboration. In exploring the place of firefighting in the political processes and cultural productions of Edo, I focus on three moments—in the early seventeenth, early eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries—when its character fundamentally shifted.

The initial provisions for firefighting in the early seventeenth century reflected the often contradictory ambitions of the early state for its new capital, including the competing demands of military defense and a regulated monumental architecture together with the imperatives of segregated residential space and immiscible social status. The sharp separation of jurisdictions, procedures, and organization only increased the hazards of fire.

In the early eighteenth century, the Tokugawa state was struggling to adjust its administrative procedures and apparatus to the twin realities of a highly commercialized economy and a dense, mobile population in the largest city in the world. Its well-known initiatives of the Kyōhō era (1716–1736), the first of three organized reform programs to be undertaken during the early-modern period, constituted a grand attempt at both renovation and retrenchment, an effort to curb official and warrior class expenditures, raise state revenues, streamline administration, and reassert shogunal prerogatives over warriors' and commoners' conduct. As part of this extensive set of measures, Edo authorities sought to expand the responsibilities of city commoners as residents while restricting their roles and opportunities as merchants and artisans. De-

9. Two developments of note were fire towers and portable pumps. Fire towers (*hinomi yagura*) were first built in 1658; typically, they were about nine meters high, with lacquered, wood-latticed shutters. There was a large drum in the tower, and fire bells were suspended at the four corners. The fire towers that were subsequently built on the daimyo estates and by the entrance gates to commoner wards were slightly shorter and black-lacquered. The daimyo towers used wood clappers, while the towers in the commoners' residential quarters had fire bells. In the Kyōhō era, such fire towers were mandated for every ten residential quarters; quarters without a tower maintained walking watches (*jishinban*). See Nishiyama Matsunosuke et al., eds., *Edogaku jiten* (Kōbundō, 1984), s.v. Ikegami Akihiko, "Hikeshi," pp. 581–82.

In 1764 the shogunate distributed portable pumps known as *ryūdōsui* throughout the city. Although these pumps did not help much in extinguishing the main blazes, they were useful in wetting roofs against flying sparks. Nakai cites several documents from officials within the residential quarters who complained vociferously about the pumps; they found them expensive, unreliable, wasteful of manpower, and hard to use in the confusion of a fire site. See Ikegami, "Meireki no taika," pp. 96–97; Minami Kazuo, "Shōbō: Edo machi hikeshi o chūshin to shite," in Toyoda Takeshi et al., eds., *Nihon no hōken toshi*, vol. 2 (Bun'ichi Sōgō Shuppan, 1983), p. 467; and Nakai, *Chōnin*, pp. 306–8.

spite an obvious self-interest in effective urban fire control, Edo residents—especially property owners and their agents—adamantly resisted the reforms. They were successful, however, only in mitigating the more onerous demands of the new system, and by mid-century Edo firefighting was shifting to a citywide organization of plebeian professionals.

By the early nineteenth century, this transition to a commoner organization was nearly complete. Fires, both large and small, remained a constant danger and frequently lighted up Edo's skyline. The squads of brusque, swaggering roofers and construction workers who fought them were glamorized by a populace increasingly self-conscious of itself as Edoites. Even the coolies who assisted the firefighters became colorful elements in the reflexive construction of an Edo identity. Thus firefighting, in word and deed, was indicative of the changing political complexion and social arrangements of Edo.

The transformation of firefighting organization was symptomatic of a more general process—what one may call a negotiated desamuraization of the shogunal capital. That is, firefighting is richly suggestive of the cultural, political, and economic dimensions of the Edo commoners' reluctant appropriation of the city as their own.

#### STATUS FEARS IN A NEW CAPITAL: THE COMPARTMENTALIZATION OF FIREFIGHTING IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY EDO

From its very beginning, the shogunate feared fires as much for their social disorder as for their physical destruction. Disorder, in official minds, resulted from status mixing, and it was exacerbated by Edo's special character as the capital, attracting commoner migrants and large numbers of warrior contingents from all parts of the country. Misunderstandings and rivalries were frequent. Arson was a not uncommon means to settle scores, and the swirling confusion and inflamed passions of fire scenes always threatened to set the crowds against one another. Ikegami, for instance, cites a 1613 directive (then reissued in 1616, 1619, 1622, 1625, and 1632) that prohibited the use of samurai servants for fighting fires in the commoner areas. He interprets this and related orders as evidence of official fears of another kind of fighting that might break out at fire sites.

Perhaps this is why, throughout the seventeenth century, there was no formal citywide organization for fighting fires. Instead, both warriors and commoners were held responsible for firefighting in their respective areas of the city. The shogunate's principal concern was obviously Edo Castle, and within its precincts firefighting was handled by its military organization. The senior councilors (*rōjū*) and junior councilors (*wakadoshiyori*) directed the various bannermen (*hatamoto*) who captained samurai companies. In 1639 the shogunate created two fire guard positions, one for the castle perimeter and the other for its interior. Each was given a complement of constables and subordinate patrolmen. The same year it began to make individual daimyo responsible for fire prevention at particular sites, such as the Tokugawa mausoleum at Momijiyama.

Further steps toward specialized organization were taken in the aftermath of the so-called Oki-chō fire of 1641, which broke out in the residential quarter of that name (in Kyōbashi) and destroyed over half of the city, including 97 commoner neighborhoods and 121 daimyo and bannerman mansions, despite a concerted response by the shogunate; the shogun himself appeared at the main castle gate to direct the daimyo and bannerman squads personally. The inspector in direct charge of firefighting committed suicide. Two years later, the government ordered sixteen lesser daimyo to support four permanent firefighter brigades.<sup>10</sup> They were known as the daimyo brigades (*daimyō-bikeshi*), although their jurisdiction included both commoner and warrior areas. A martial esprit de corps was fostered by colorful uniforms and precision formations when the brigades responded to fires.

This organization, however, proved grossly inadequate in the devastating Meireki fires of 1657. Among the wide range of shogunal reactions was the creation in 1658 of an all-samurai all-Edo fire guard (*Edojū jōbi no ban*, or what came to be known as the "regular firemen," *jō-bikeshi*). Four bannermen were assigned this duty and ordered to establish firefighting headquarters at separate locations around the city. Each commanded 300-man squads and was assisted by six constables and thirty patrolmen. Generally their assignments were to the north and west of Edo Castle, reflecting the direction of greatest danger to the shogun's citadel.<sup>11</sup> The authority structure of the brigades was visible in the processional order. The bannermen wore leather (later heavy patterned-cotton) fire jackets and battle-dress helmets, with protective hoods that fastened under the chin. They rode horses, as did their assistants, who also sported leather hoods and fire jackets. The patrolmen trotted behind, followed by the actual firefighters.<sup>12</sup> While on call, the squads spent their time in a large room at the firehouse. If a night alarm sounded, the foremen awakened the sleeping men by pounding with hammers on the small hollow logs that the firefighters used as pillows. They were a rough lot, heavily tattooed, given to gambling and hostile to townspeople.

Two other types of fire squads developed in this early period. One was based on the shogunate's continued need for daimyo to provide fire guards at strategic sites, especially temples, bridges, castle gates, and granaries. These groups became known as the "dispersed brigades" (*shosho-bikeshi* or *tokorodokoro-bikeshi*). Because the regular firemen and the daimyo brigades responded to the main fire sites, these dispersed brigades frequently had the

10. All of these daimyo had registered domains of less than 60,000 *koku*, and each daimyo had to contribute 30 men per 10,000 *koku*. The four brigades contained 120 men each and were rotated on ten-day duty assignments. The four brigades were reduced to three the following year and several times thereafter the assignments of particular lords were rearranged. See Ikegami, "Edo hikeshi seido," p. 98, for a list of assignments and further details on the 1641 fire.

11. Appointments of six more bannermen raised the total to ten brigades by 1662, leading to the alternate term for the system, the *jūnin-bikeshi*. For details of appointments, locations, and subsequent developments, see *ibid.*, pp. 100–101.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

duty of tracking down flying sparks when their own assigned areas were not threatened.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from the interests of the shogunate, individual daimyo were obviously concerned about fires that started in the commoner neighborhoods surrounding their mansions. Thus in the 1680s a number of major daimyo successfully petitioned for authorization to send squads to fires that broke out near their estates (and after the regular fire squads arrived, to move downwind to track sparks). These new domain lord squads were known as *kakuji-bikeshi* ("individual brigades," also *sanchō-bikeshi* or *kinjō-bikeshi*). In 1717 after a blaze destroyed 72 daimyo mansions and 349 bannerman compounds (in addition to much of the downtown commercial area), the shogunate ordered such units to be formed around all domain estates. Even as it was acceding to this expansion of warrior duties, however, the government was embarking on a new pattern of Edo firefighting, which would eliminate warrior participation and create a citywide commoner organization. The commoners protested, but the new organization was eventually accepted and ultimately celebrated by Edo townspeople.

#### FROM STATUS ANXIETY TO FISCAL CRISIS: COMMONER FIREFIGHTING AND THE KYŌHŌ REFORMS

At the same time as it was forming the daimyo *kakuji-bikeshi*, the city magistrates also undertook some tentative measures to systematize commoner units that would prove decisive in transforming the character of Edo firefighting.<sup>14</sup> Initially the magistrates aimed at better organization of the commoners' own firefighting, but they soon went so far as to dismantle the existing warrior units and began to order commoner squads to protect bannerman, daimyo, and shogunal lands and buildings. Seizing the initiative for this major organizational reform was the new city magistrate, Ōoka Echizen no Kami, who took office in the early spring of 1717. Then thirty-one years old, he began what was to stretch to forty-five years of official service, becoming the most celebrated and mythologized city magistrate in Tokugawa history.<sup>15</sup> Ōoka was the principal

13. The first assignments were made in 1639, and by the end of the century, a total of thirty-six units were recorded in the *Genroku bukan*. For details about subsequent reorganizations, see *ibid.*, p. 102.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 120–37; Minami, "Shōbō," pp. 457–71; Nakai, *Chōnin*, pp. 308–21; Yoshioka Yuriko, "Kyōhō-ki Edo machikata ni okeru sogan undō no jittai: Bōka seisaku o meguru chōningawa no taiō o chūshin to shite," in Chihōshi Kenkyū Kyōgikai, ed., *Toshi no chihōshi: Seikatsu to bunka* (Yūzankaku, 1980), pp. 108–58.

15. Ōoka served as city magistrate for twenty years and then as a commissioner of shrines and temples for another twenty-five years (1736–1751), until he was seventy-five. For part of that time (1722–1745) he was the rural affairs officer for the Kantō region, and for the entire forty-five years of service, he served as a judge at the shogunate court. His diary for 1737–1751 has been published in Ōishi Shinzaburō and Hayashi Reiko, eds., *Ōoka Echizen no Kami Tadasuke nikki*, 3 vols. (Ōoka Monjo Kankōkai, 1972–1775). See also the biography by Ōishi Shinzaburō, *Ōoka Echizen no Kami Tadasuke* (Iwanami Shoten, 1974).

architect of the Kyōhō reforms, which formed the immediate political context for the major reorganization of Edo firefighting.<sup>16</sup>

The eventual result was a more unified, citywide firefighting system, but the concentration of responsibility on the commoners greatly increased the financial burdens borne by the merchants, who resisted vigorously with many petitions throughout the eighteenth century. Indeed, fire organization proved to be only one of the increased burdens imposed on—and protested by—commoners. Changing policies toward firebreak zones and building codes were also widely—though ultimately unsuccessfully—resisted. The eighteenth-century reorganization of fire procedures and prevention was a protracted and negotiated accomplishment, resisted by a broadly skeptical but increasingly differentiated commoner population.

In addition to the general fiscal crisis of the shogunate, some specific factors lie behind the firefighting reforms that began in 1717, including a string of serious fires of suspicious origin. Nakai Nobuhiko has suggested that directives from the city magistrates to the neighborhood chiefs (*nanushi*) reveal an unusual anxiety among officials. He quotes an early 1717 directive that complained of large numbers of commoner firemen who were increasingly out of control (*wagamama*) and given to extortion and intimidation. The directive worried, too, about an increasing population of unregistered persons (*musatsu no mono* or *mushukunin*), which fueled speculation that the recent spate of fires was due to arson. Later, officials ordered all commoner firemen and unregistered persons to report to the Day Laborers' Exchange; this registration was made the responsibility of the firemen bosses and the firemen recruiters. Subsequent memoranda demanded a citywide inventory of muskets, ordered a review of census registers in commoner neighborhoods, and outlined other efforts to arrest what the government saw as a deteriorating social order.<sup>17</sup>

These actions by the city authorities reveal a concern that they could no longer rely on the merchant and artisan quarters to monitor their own needs. This form of local organization had dated from the great Meireki fires of 1657, when the twenty-three downtown neighborhoods agreed to staff a small rotating fire-duty force.<sup>18</sup> Ikegami discusses at length the subsequent stream of directives from the city magistrates instructing the downtown quarters to organize local duty units and to keep on hand a quota of equipment such as buckets and ladders. His point is a familiar one: the repeated issuance of such decrees only indicates how difficult it was for the shogun's officials to orchestrate and enforce these efforts. The total duty complement was only 167 men, and often, it seems, there were many no-shows. Those sent by the quarters frequently

16. On the Kyōhō reforms, see Tsuji Tatsuya, "Politics in the Eighteenth Century," trans. Harold Bolitho, in John W. Hall et al., eds., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 4: John W. Hall, with James L. McClain, ed., *Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 445–56. The relationship between the reforms and firefighting is detailed in Nakai Nobuhiko and James L. McClain, "Commercial Change and Urban Growth in Early Modern Japan," *ibid.*, pp. 575–79.

17. Nakai, *Chōnin*, pp. 308–10.

18. Ikegami, "Edo hikeshi seido," pp. 117–18.

included the aged, the infirm, and children. Even the able-bodied adults were unskilled at the necessary roof demolition, and many were quick to flee the fire scene.

Near the end of 1718, then, Ōoka ordered the neighborhood chiefs to organize what became the first citywide fire organization. The essential element in his plan was the requirement that each residential quarter maintain a permanent requisition of thirty men. Whenever a fire was reported, the two quarters downwind of the blaze and the four at its sides were to send their men to the fire site, so that a total of 180 men would be available; a constable and patrolmen would be dispatched from the city magistrate's office to ascertain that the full complement actually showed up. Other conditions included injunctions against fighting with the bannerman and daimyo squads and charges to keep ladders, axes, ropes, firehooks, and other tools on hand and to carry small banners identifying their home quarters.<sup>19</sup>

In an endorsement to the directive, the city elders (*machidoshiyori*) added that only residents of a quarter should be used in its squad. This prohibition on hiring nonresidents is puzzling in view of the fact that the shogunate and daimyo had been using hired firemen for some time. Nakai, though, interprets this directive as another manifestation of the authorities' longstanding view that urban problems were preeminently those of social order. To officials, any local organization should strengthen local self-policing practices.

Ōoka's plan was given official sanction by a late 1718 map drawn up by the city magistrates, who outlined in vermilion the jurisdictions of the new commoner firefighting squads. Weaknesses of the new system were quickly exposed, however, when another major fire in the Second Month of the new year destroyed large sections of the downtown. Responding to subsequent questioning by the city elders, the neighborhood chiefs agreed that the quarter squads were inadequate to extinguish major blazes driven by strong winds. It would be better, they noted, to mobilize several downwind wards to attempt to stop a fire's progress. The city magistrates considered this proposal and ordered some minor adjustments, but did not essentially change the previous arrangements.

Nakai notes, interestingly, that in 1719 individuals twice petitioned to contract for firefighting work. The first petition was a proposal by six men to maintain fifty-five fire watch posts, each staffed by twenty-five men on twenty-four-hour call. Money for their meals and wages would be raised by an assessment on house owners (*iemochi*) within the jurisdictions. The petitioners claimed that they could thus provide far cheaper fire service than assessments under Ōoka's plan. The city magistrates referred the petition to the neighborhood chiefs, who responded negatively. They argued that the existing system promised a faster response time; that it would be too difficult to coordinate responses to multiple fires; that residents who bore responsibility for their own quarters were more conscientious firefighters; and so on. Their opinion car-

19. See *ibid.*, pp. 121–22, for the full text. The two-four system appeared in directives from at least the late seventeenth century.

ried, and the petition was rejected. The second proposal was from two commoners who offered to contract for a 200-man force to track the flying sparks that were such a problem in urban blazes. This idea, too, the neighborhood chiefs rejected, on the grounds that the present system was working and the additional costs would be burdensome to residents.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, the system was not functioning very well, and in the Third Month of 1720 yet another blaze swept the central wards, destroying about one thousand houses. This disaster strengthened the determination of city officials to fashion firefighting, as Katō Takashi suggests in Chapter 2 of this volume, around a direct line of delegated authority that ran from the city magistrates through the neighborhood chiefs to the residents of the commoner quarters. In short measure, Ōoka promulgated a reorganization that created the famous *i-ro-ha* structure of commoner firefighting. Dividing quarters west of the Sumida River into forty-seven precincts, he mandated a company for each precinct, to which all constituent quarters were to supply squads of thirty men, led by the neighborhood chiefs. In practice, each company was formed by men drawn from about twenty quarters, though some precincts included as few as four commoner neighborhoods. The precinct companies were named by the forty-seven characters of the syllabary; hence the new organization became unofficially known as the *i-ro-ha kumiai*. Complaining that there was still confusion and lack of direction at fire sites as the various groups mixed together, Ōoka also ordered new company banners bearing rules of conduct written out in simple language and large company standards, both to be erected to mark the assembly points for the firefighters.

Still, problems continued to plague the system. In the First Month of 1721, for example, the magistrates raised the possibility of hiring men to serve as firefighters. The neighborhood chiefs responded by noting that most squads were made up of servants (*hōkōnin*) and tenants (*tanagarinin*), a practice that was not without its costs. They argued that the problem of absences and incomplete squads occurred largely in quarters that were downwind from a fire. That is, many servants and tenants were being retained at home or at the shop to protect family or business property. The chiefs countered with a suggestion that the quotas be reduced to fifteen men per quarter, drawn from bachelors and the marginal poor, and that only if fire reached the quarter were the servants to be sent out. When the chiefs brought this proposal before their own residents, however, it drew many complaints: it was unfair to those landlords who did not have servants, and it would require the payment of wage supplements to those who were sent; the result would be as expensive as a hired squad.

These disagreements continued through much of the decade. The Edo city administration clearly was moving toward a policy and organization that assigned citywide responsibility to commoner units.<sup>21</sup> City residents, for their part, resisted the reforms, for various reasons. The *chōnin*—that is to say, the

20. Nakai, *Chōnin*, pp. 313–14.

21. Further evidence can be seen in other directives of the early 1720s that greatly expanded the commoner units' ability to enter warrior compounds to fight fires—which previously had been severely restricted. See Ikegami, "Edo hikeshi seido," p. 126.

house owners and their agents—opposed reforms that would increase their financial burden; the propertied benefited from a system whereby all households, from the large houses fronting the main streets to the small back rooms of the menials, rotated in sending out men to the squads. The other ward residents—the tenants and poorer residents—were not well served by the *i-ro-ha* system, but expressed their resistance simply by not showing up for or absconding from fire duty.<sup>22</sup>

At the end of 1729 the city magistrates undertook yet another review of the commoner firefighting organization, and they proposed to group the forty-seven companies into a smaller number of large brigades while halving the quotas of the individual quarters. The new brigades were intended to address the difficulty of collecting firefighters from the wards downwind of a fire; the larger groups were to be a framework for drawing from a wider area to either side and upwind of a fire site. After negotiations, the forty-seven companies were grouped into ten brigades in early 1730 (the number was later reduced to eight), and the quota for each residential quarter was dropped from thirty to fifteen men. Even so, this arrangement still required some 9,378 men—or as Ikegami notes, about 1 in every 50 Edo commoners.<sup>23</sup>

Initially the commoner firefighters were prohibited from responding to fires at samurai dwellings, but as we have seen, this regulation was amended in 1722. Then in 1747 commoner groups were ordered into the Edo Castle precincts to extinguish the embers of a fire in the Second Enceinte, a sanctioned intrusion of symbolic importance. By the late eighteenth century, the commoner firefighters were so superior to the samurai regulars and the daimyo squads that they came to predominate in all city firefighting.<sup>24</sup> As early as 1736 the dispersed brigades were confined largely to fighting blazes within Edo Castle, and in 1828 the samurai regulars too were limited largely to fire duties within the castle compound. Even these responsibilities attenuated, and during the major fires of 1838 and 1844 the great majority of the commoner squads were ordered into the castle compound.

Along with this restructuring, the composition of the squads underwent a fundamental shift in the early and mid-eighteenth century. As we have seen, originally they were formed from residents of the quarters themselves—in particular, the tenants and servants dispatched by the homeowners and their agents; indeed, a common term for the units was "tenant firefighters," or *tana-bikeshi*. The authorities quickly realized, however, that such amateurs were of little use, except for operating the small pumps and hoses; the roof work and demolition required of most firefighters were well beyond their skills. Despite the expenses involved, many squads gradually began to hire local roofers and

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 125–26; Nakai, *Chōnin*, pp. 317–18.

23. Additionally, the sixteen small squads in the districts east of the Sumida River were reorganized into three large companies. See Ikegami, "Edo hikeshi seido," p. 128.

24. This development did not sit well with the remaining warrior squads. Ikegami (*ibid.*, pp. 145–48) discusses an incident in 1782 between a squad of the Satake domain lord and three commoner companies, during which both sides suffered serious injuries. The case came before the city magistrates, who rendered a mixed verdict that somewhat favored the town side.

construction laborers, the so-called *tobi*. It appears that by the 1780s, the *tobi* had become the core of the Edo firefighting squads.

Ikegami cites a document from early 1787 that clearly illustrates this shift. In defense of an official reprimand that they were not supplying their full quotas, a group of neighborhood chiefs described their use of two types of *tobi*. Several "regulars" in each quarter were paid a fixed allowance, and "occasionals" were given temporary allowances.<sup>25</sup> Because they were using such professionals, the chiefs petitioned to halve again their quarters' required quotas. The city magistrates denied this request but did agree that for most blazes the quarters could dispatch half-complements of *tobi*; "tenant firefighters" would be required to respond only to major fires. This concession merely seemed to prompt a series of other requests from various precincts and quarters, pleading fiscal constraints and seeking quota formulas that in one way or another would reduce their requirements. One can see just how far the shift from ordinary residents to the *tobi* had progressed by examining the detailed listings of company compositions in a 1787 document.<sup>26</sup> By the end of the century, a fairly standard and ranked order defined the commoner companies, to which ordinary residents were peripheral. The ranks included the company leader (the *tōdori* or *tobigashira*); the standard-bearer (*matoimochi*); the laddermen (*hashigomochi*); and the ordinaries (*hira ninsoku*), a category that included both regulars and occasionals.<sup>27</sup>

The radical reforms in Edo firefighting were thus generally unwelcomed by the commoners. What might be thought to have provided real self-control over a strategic area of urban life was in fact experienced as a delegation of onerous responsibilities and exactions. These financial burdens on the quarters only increased through the eighteenth century, and they generated sustained opposition to the initiatives of the city magistrates. Especially revealing is a 1767 communication from neighborhood officials to the city elders citing ten reasons for rapidly escalating local expenses, fully eight of which were fire-related:

1. The replacement of ordinary residents in the fire brigades by roofers and unskilled construction workers had required increases in wages.
2. Firefighting expenses that in the past were limited to ladders, jackets, banners, and so forth were now required to cover fire patrols, standards, and other equipment.
3. Expenses were rising for assignments of companies to sites beyond the company boundaries.

25. The wage arrangements actually seem to have varied by residential quarter and period. One local compromise was to finance the regulars from the quarter's budget (assessed on all homeowners) and to pay the occasionals from assessments to all households. See, for example, Yoshioka, "Kyōhō-ki Edo machikata," p. 116.

26. See Ikegami, "Edo hikeshi seido," pp. 133-36. This record includes illustrations of the firefighters' standards and banners. See the color reproduction in Matsunosuke et al., *Edogaku jiten*, pp. 580-81 interleaf.

27. Minami, "Shōbō," pp. 460-64; for the standards themselves, see Nishiyama et al., *Edogaku jiten*, s.v. Ikegami Akihiko, "Kenka," pp. 582-83.

4. Expenses were rising for the labor requisitions by the shogunate for fire-related work, including patrolling of firebreak zones.
5. Expenses were now required for the extra preventive measures ordered by the shogunate, including special fire patrols, extra buckets, and so forth.
6. Fire patrols and special officers had now been made the responsibility of the commoner residential quarters.
7. The two to four fire towers per company that were ordered in 1723 were expensive to build, maintain, and staff.
8. The costs of reconstructing buildings to make them more fire-retardant were enormous.<sup>28</sup>

We may read from this petition the residents' sharp protest to two other fire policy changes that were proving as burdensome as firefighter compensation. The first of these policies was an aggressive expansion of firebreak zones. Since at least the great Meireki fires, the shogunate had asserted the prerogative of claiming urban land destroyed in large fires as "official land" (*goyōchi*). It did not permit reconstruction within these sites. They were to become future firebreaks (*hiyokechi*) and temporary retreats for fire victims, and they were used by the shogunate for such purposes as military practice and hawking. The shogunate actually exercised this prerogative of eminent domain only infrequently in the late seventeenth century. This situation changed dramatically during the Kyōhō decades, however, when the shogunate ordered extensive areas to be set aside in the downtown sections of the city. Yoshioka Yuriko documents the seizure of land in eighty-three quarters in the years 1722 to 1732.<sup>29</sup> In analyzing the particular locations, she found that they were not seen as firebreaks for the commoner residential areas but rather served to protect adjacent shogunal properties, especially its warehouses and rice granaries. Moreover, the shogunate prepared detailed regulations for disposing and managing these firebreak zones that placed onerous responsibilities on bordering residential quarters. As McClain shows in Chapter 5, these neighborhoods were held responsible for keeping the lands clean of debris and for reporting all dumping and any vagrants or other unauthorized entry and use to city authorities. Cleanup and guard costs were to be borne by the quarters themselves. Furthermore, at times of fires, the firebreak areas could be used for temporary refuge, but people were not permitted to bring family or business belongings, nor were the areas to be used for temporary living or storage after the fire.

These and other aspects of the policy prompted a considerable outcry and a large volume of petitions from the affected quarters, which continued through much of the eighteenth century. Yoshioka's detailed study of forty-five petitionary protests suggests that many quarters were able to secure exemptions from

28. Yoshiwara, "Edo saigai nenpyō," pp. 443-44. The two other causes cited by neighborhood officials were the rising costs of day labor and the expenses of disposing of unclaimed corpses.

29. Yoshioka, "Kyōhō-ki Edo machikata," pp. 118-20.



some of the more demanding requirements of management.<sup>30</sup> More important, in the manner of Edobashi, by the early nineteenth century many fire-break lands were simply invaded and appropriated by all manner of commoners and elites. They became important arenas of late Tokugawa popular culture, frequented by outdoor entertainers and itinerant peddlers, and they also suffered encroachment by domain lords and temples seeking increasingly scarce sites for building expansion. McClain shows in Chapter 5 how the shogunate continued to make its authority felt in Edobashi, but others have celebrated commoners' appropriations of firebreaks. Hidenobu Jinnai, for instance, has the following to say about Edobashi:

It is noteworthy that what the bakufu had set aside merely as a fire protection area was used by the people for their own purposes, and that it assumed a variety of meanings and functions in relation to its new identity as an entertainment area. Also significant is its location: the open area, bustling with activity, was formed at the base of a bridge, the intersection of water and land. In European cities, it was common for the city square to be symbolically central and permanent, set off by an imposing cathedral or government office building. It is suggestive, therefore, that in the Japanese city such a public area formed rather at the nexus of mobility among people and things, in a neighborhood filled with spirited activity.<sup>31</sup>

A second area of official concern and reform that drew strong protest from Edo commoners during the eighteenth century was the effort to enforce fire-retardant building codes. William Coaldrake has noted that the post-1657 sumptuary prohibition on commoners' use of tile roofs and the continued reliance on thatch and wood shingles proved a serious fire hazard in the downtown merchant quarters throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>32</sup> The shogunate's efforts to encourage mud daubing of commoners' roofs went largely unheeded, and it was only in the 1720s that the magistrates made a concerted effort to promote use of a new, lighter-weight terra-cotta roofing tile and of lacquered timbers and clapboard siding.<sup>33</sup> Again, however, the officials encountered heated resistance as commoners protested the costs of such changes. Yoshioka's study indicates that in the three decades from 1720 to 1750, the city magistrates alternated between exhortation and forced adoption of these and related measures before eventually compromising with a plan to

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 128–54.

31. Hidenobu Jinnai, "The Spatial Structure of Edo," trans. J. Victor Koschmann, in Chie Nakane and Shinzaburō Ōishi, eds., *Tokugawa Japan: The Social and Economic Antecedents of Modern Japan*, translation ed. by Conrad Totman (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1990), pp. 130.

32. William H. Coaldrake, "Edo Architecture and Tokugawa Law," *Monumenta Nipponica* 36:3 (1981), pp. 253–61. Ikegami ("Meireki no taika," p. 94) argues, to the contrary, that the prohibition of tile roofs was an antifire measure because the collapsing tiles caused grave injury. This was no doubt the case, but Coaldrake's more general point about the status symbolics of roofing is more compelling.

33. Coaldrake, "Edo Architecture and Tokugawa Law," pp. 259–61.

require postfire reconstruction in accordance with these codes, compensated with small subsidies and duty exemptions.

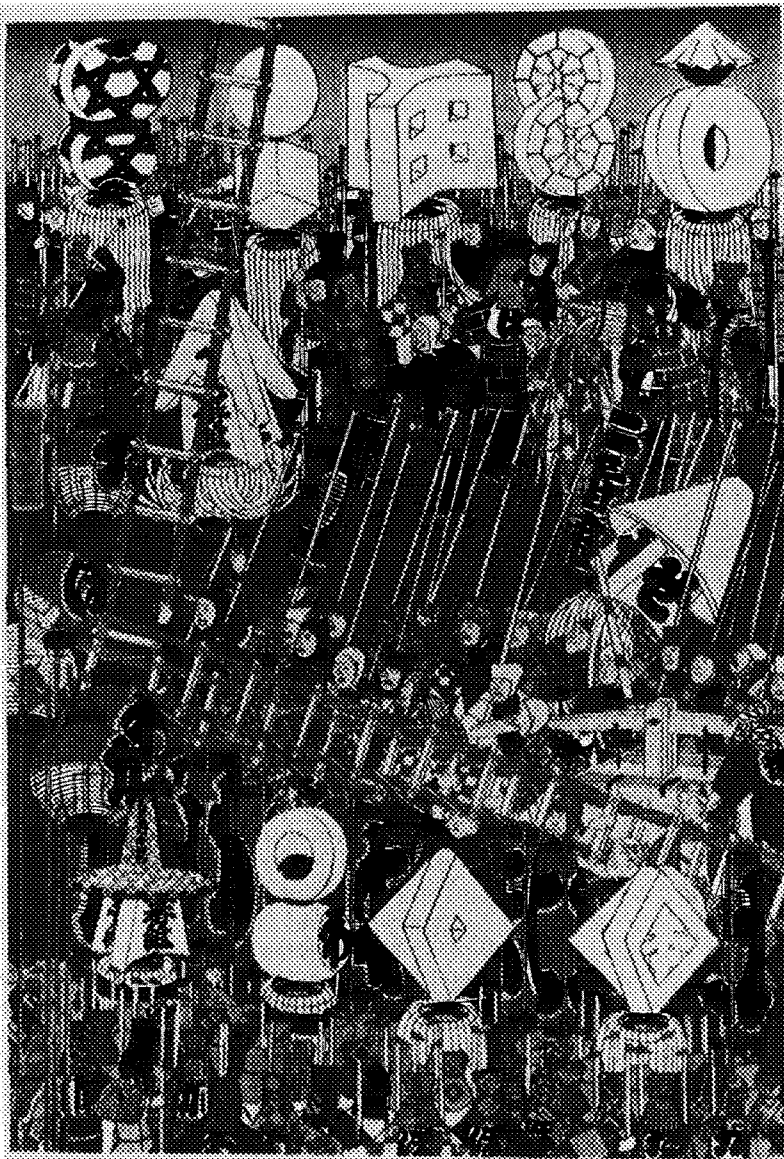
In sum, the creation of a citywide commoner firefighting organization in the 1720s was part of a fundamental administrative restructuring of the capital in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This effort had been set in motion by the 1657 Meireki fires, then given urgency by the shogunate's increasing fiscal difficulties. It culminated in the Kyōhō reforms of the 1720s, which recognized the commercialization of commoner property and attempted to devolve significant responsibilities on the resident population. The shogun's capital was becoming the people's city, although the people of Edo—never homogeneous and increasingly less so—strenuously resisted the terms by which the shogunate tried to effect this transformation.

#### FROM FISCAL BURDEN TO FOLKLORE EMBLEM: FIGHTING AND FIREFIGHTING IN EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY EDO

It is tempting to view Edo firefighting as a useful metonym of an uneasy triangular balance of political tensions that characterized the capital for much of the Tokugawa period. Despite the usual assumptions of a capital divided roughly equally between commoners and a warrior elite, that elite was in fact continuously divided between the shogunate elite and its supporters and the great majority of domain lords and their retainers, whose interests were more regional than central. It was this shifting triangle of forces that the distinct shogunal, daimyo, and commoner fire squads represented, and the continual altercations between them reflected the antagonisms of this peculiar capital. The commoner squads, for their part, were the pride and the protectors of the downtown residents. Beginning with the Genroku era (1688–1704), they were celebrated in the themes of the plebeian kabuki theaters, and perhaps even inspired the "rough style" (*aragoto*) of performance that the Danjurō line of kabuki actors made into the quintessential Edo stage style. Indeed, the Danjurō family line, the firefighters, and the wharfmen of the Tsukiji fish market were jointly renowned as the "Three Men of Edo," direct spiritual descendants of the roving bullies of earliest Edo, the *machi yakko* and *kabukimono*.

As I have argued, more careful historical analysis does not bear out this inviting model. At all times, though for different reasons, the multiple divisions within the Edo elites and among Edo commoners were as important as whatever solidarities they represented vis-à-vis one another. The institutional developments sketched above indicate that the eighteenth-century decades when Edo firefighting was divided among shogunal, daimyo, and commoner squads was quite brief and transitional. To be sure, fights and rivalries seemed to be an enduring characteristic of Edo firefighting.<sup>34</sup> And the rough-and-ready commoner companies did seem to capture the Edo imagination, at least by the early nineteenth century. The unruly conduct that made the firefighters a

34. On fights, see Ikegami, "Kenka," pp. 582–83; Nakai, *Chōnin*, pp. 304–6; Ikegami, "Edo hikeshi seido," pp. 137–63.



Firemen on review at New Year. Source: *Edo no hana kodomo asobi*. Courtesy of Shōbō Hakubutsukan.

problem to officials made them a feature of such late Tokugawa kabuki plays as *Kami no megumi wagō no torigumi* and of popular literature such as the Shikitei Sanba story mentioned earlier. The firefighters' argot, their preference for rolling their tongues to trill their speech, and their favorite posture of crouching awkwardly with one heel upon the other, a hand towel tossed casually over the shoulder, were all depicted in the theaters, in storytelling at local vaudeville halls such as those at Edobashi, and in the woodblock prints of these decades.

Yet the popular valorization of the firefighters seems to have been rather specific to the first half of the nineteenth century. It was only then that a lineage of commoner bravado was constructed retrospectively, linking them to the famous bullies of early Edo, the *yakko* and *kabukimono*, and to the quick-tempered foot soldiers jostling and challenging one another around the entrances to the castle.<sup>35</sup> It was during this half-century that the idea of Edo as a distinctive urban society was literally—and dramatically—invented. It was at this moment that the firefighters were included among the *Edokko*, the true sons of the capital. In short, the characteristic development of Edo firefighting in the early nineteenth century was its role in Edo culture-building, its place in an exuberant and proliferating public sphere of cultural productions that claimed a distinctive Edo identity. Their battles, against fires and each other, not only were incidents in the city's everyday life but also embellished events in its public culture. They took their place with the wrestling and freak shows at the Ryōgoku entertainment center, the glitterati tea ceremonies, and other happenings in what Nishiyama Matsunosuke has characterized as a new *kōdō bunka*, or "culture of movement and performance," in Henry D. Smith's felicitous gloss.<sup>36</sup>

Of particular notoriety was a series of early nineteenth-century incidents at the Shiba Shrine, which began with the famous "Me Company brawl" (*Megumi no kenka*) at the end of the 1804 New Year's holidays. On this occasion, a firefighter of that company tried to barge into a subscription sumo meet and was stopped by some of the wrestlers. The confrontation escalated the next day at an outdoor theater event, and it precipitated a fight elsewhere in the shrine precincts between some 381 firefighters and 60 sumo wrestlers. The brawl soon was featured in a kabuki play. Five years later, the shrine was again the scene of a mass fight, this time between two fire squad rivals, the Yo Company (the squad for that area) and the neighboring Ka Company of Yushima. This rivalry apparently reflected larger, enduring animosities, which broke out again at the shrine in the spring of 1811 in violent fighting between firefighters from No. 1 Brigade (including the Yo Company) against large numbers from No. 8 Brigade (including the Ka Company). The fight drew support-

35. Ikegami, "Kenka," p. 582.

36. Smith insightfully discusses the significance of this culture of movement and performance in "The Edo-Tokyo Transition: In Search of Common Ground," in Marius B. Jansen and Gilbert Rozman, eds., *Japan in Transition: From Tokugawa to Meiji* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 347–74. Nishiyama develops his concept in several works; see, for instance, his "Edo bunka to chihō bunka," in Iwanami Shoten, ed., *Iwanami kōza Nihon rekishi*, vol. 13, *Kinsei 5* (Iwanami Shoten, 1964), pp. 161–207.

ers from other brigades as well; in fact, there seem to have been recurring antagonisms between several brigades.<sup>37</sup> Such public brawling led early nineteenth-century Edoites to coin a phrase that lives yet today: "Kaji to kenka wa Edo no hana" (Fires and fights are Edo's flowers).<sup>38</sup>

In Chapter 16 of this volume, however, Takeuchi Makoto suggests deeper reasons for the association of flowers and fights than merely flamboyant and destructive violence.<sup>39</sup> By the early nineteenth century, "fights" (*kenka*) had developed in official legal parlance the particular meaning of private disputes nonadjudicable in shogunal tribunals; they were specific altercations between commoners. The authorities might apprehend the participants to break up the violence, but under the principle that both sides were presumed to be at fault, the disputants were generally released without punishment (especially if they had caused no serious injuries, loss of life, or destruction of "innocent" property). Moreover, the authorities refused to mediate the dispute itself.

This notion of fights provided a major conceptual opening in the nineteenth century for broad commoner actions that were barely containable by authorities. Throughout the eighteenth century, the shogunate had gradually systematized and strengthened regulations against unlawful assembly and collective protest under the generic term *totō*, or conspiracy against authorities. Takeuchi's point is that by instituting guidelines to police their own actions and by then insisting to authorities that the actions had been directed at a particular individual (a rice dealer, say, or a landlord), people remained able to take effective collective action against local targets of grievance.

Takeuchi's example of the frustrations of rural officials in the districts around Edo, who in 1805 tried to curb crowd attacks against local elites in actions that officials saw as mimicking those of Edo firefighters, demonstrates the exemplary power of the firefighters' behavior. Without further evidence, however, I am less persuaded than Takeuchi that the Edo firefighters' brawling was the main template for the widespread *kenka*-style actions of the late Tokugawa period, including the increasing number of violent collective actions in both urban and rural areas. It seems, rather, that the increasing frequency of violence at fires and the apparent inability of city magistrates to contain it were as much a result as a cause of the popular ability to exploit this distinction in shogunal procedure.

Takeuchi's point also helps to explain why Edoites came to be fascinated not only by the violent rivalries among firefighters but also by the increasingly elaborate fight mediations. If officials refused to intervene to adjudicate, disposition devolved to participants and to those whom they might invite to medi-

37. Ikegami, "Edo hikeshi seido," pp. 148–52.

38. Although hardly unique to the late Tokugawa period, the idiom of *hana* became very popular in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was at that time that the Danjurō line of Edo kabuki actors came to be known as *Edo no hana*; see Nishiyama Matsunosuke, *Nishiyama Matsunosuke chosakushū*, vol. 7: *Edo kabuki kenkyū* (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1987), pp. 35–49.

39. See also Takeuchi Makoto, *Edo to Ōsaka*, Taikei Nihon no rekishi 10 (Shōgakkan, 1989), pp. 320–22.

ate. Ikegami Akihoko cites Takizawa Bakin's contemporary account of the intricate formality of these procedures for resolving disputes. Bakin describes an enormous mediation ceremony in the early fall of 1818 between two companies of No. 10 Brigade. For the occasion they rented the stately Mikawaya Hall, not far from Ryōgoku Bridge. Members of over half of the Edo companies attended. Some 1,648 persons offered formal presentations, and despite inclement weather, the proceedings continued for the entire day. Even the closing handclapping was done with elaborate protocol in twenty-five rounds. From the crafted mediators' speeches to the clothes and proffered gifts, it was a grand, "stylish" (*iki*), and much-remarked happening.<sup>40</sup>

Such formalities also became increasingly elaborate at the more prosaic level of the townspeople's etiquette concerning fires and their aftermath. The constant danger of small fires in the dense neighborhoods of homes, tenements, public baths, and shops had long prompted local agreements to ensure collective responses from neighbors, to offer assistance in the aftermath of a fire, and to resolve the inevitable conflicts about responsibility. Nakai Nobuhiko has illustrated this process with the agreement among residents of Sawara Hashimoto-chō, which affirmed local protocols for weddings, funerals, fires, and other "ritual" (*hare*) occasions. Its clauses placed a premium on neighborly self-help, disciplined group behavior, and avoidance of contact with outsiders, even persons from nearby quarters. Yoshiwara Ken'ichirō has offered an extended example from a residential quarter in Shinjuku, detailing the local conventions for a range of fire contingencies. They include several levels of compensation for properties demolished to create an emergency firebreak, which varied according to whether the firebreak was necessary, whether the blaze was extinguished before it reached the firebreak, whether the fire jumped the firebreak, and so forth. Yoshiwara also notes the letters of apology that were sent around by the people deemed responsible for the numerous accidental fires in this area caused by braziers, tobacco, foot warmers, and other household items. It is not clear when after-fire condolence visits and gifts became common and expected, but such *kaji mimai*—and the obligatory thank-you gifts for such gifts—figured prominently in the gift exchange registers of all Edo shops by the late Tokugawa decades. Social disorder was as great a concern as physical destruction, and given the extralegal status of fires (except arson), resolution was a local responsibility.<sup>41</sup>

There was therefore a curiously inverse relation between these two emerging emblems of late Tokugawa fires—the rowdy, disorderly, brawling firefighters, whose passions were as inextinguishable as the blazes that attracted them, and the obligatory and ceremonial expressions of sympathy and assistance that attempted to restate orderly relations among neighbors, clients, and

40. Ikegami, "Edo hikeshi seido," pp. 153–54.

41. Nakai, *Chōnin*, pp. 298–304; Nishiyama et al., *Edogaku jiten*, s.v. Yoshiwara Ken'ichirō, "Kaji," pp. 575–76. The *Meguro gyoninzaka kaji emaki*, a late eighteenth-century scroll of a major fire in 1772, has several scenes that depict postblaze condolence gift giving; reproduced in Takahashi Sei'ichirō and Narasaki Sōjū, eds., *Kinsei fūzoku zukan*, vol. 1: *Edo fūzoku* (Asahi Shinbunsha, 1973), pp. 249–63.

business partners. The nineteenth-century culture of Edo fires and firefighting was elaborated on two levels: both through the etiquette of everyday practice, in the commoner neighborhoods and in the shops, and through the more formal productions of popular culture, which were taken self-consciously as a vehicle for and expression of an Edo urban identity. Neither rituals nor reputations, however, necessarily testified to a greater effectiveness of preventive measures or of firefighting itself. Like popular protests, fires seem to have been even more frequent in the nineteenth century, though in both cases, one wonders how much must be attributed to better record keeping.<sup>42</sup> Still, how ever-present a danger in the daily experience of Edoites, fires remained extraordinary events, in their occasional blinding fury and in the extralegal behavior they sparked and permitted. The shifting pattern of response over the Tokugawa centuries is indicative of the degree to which the seventeenth-century shogun's capital had become the nineteenth-century people's city.

This characterization, however, by no means endorses a simple trajectory of progressive empowerment and popular solidarity. To the contrary, the people of Edo were more diverse and more stratified in the nineteenth century than they had been earlier. Both organizationally and procedurally, the shogunal administration had largely divorced itself from direct jurisdiction over fire affairs. Yet this step proved to bring onerous fiscal burdens and complex organizational demands, felt and resisted by all strata of the population, albeit for different reasons. Indeed, the key significance of fire in Edo was the shifting and often unpredictable ways in which it could conjoin and divide the interests of the poorest laborers and the wealthiest merchants, the house agents in the established quarters and the hawkers peddling in parklike fire zones.

Fire was an accidental or intentional act by an individual that immediately became a public event of grave but mixed consequences. The ease of arson and the dangers of urban firefighting subjected residents to the intimidation and even extortion of the firefighters, yet one might easily exaggerate their leverage over the propertied. They were still daily wage laborers and back-alley tenement renters, and they were constrained by the limits of *kenka*-style conduct. All residents, as a fire gained strength and approached their own neighborhood, must have faced the difficult choice of fleeing with their belongings, remaining to try to protect their home or shop, or turning out to help at the main fire site. The conflicts of personal and collective interest were at least as difficult for the managers of the larger shops and businesses; one of the deterrents to sending shop employees to fire squads was that it left the store itself less protected. Detailing procedures of conduct and drilling employees became important to the large houses. The 1768 shop regulations of the Ōdenma-chō cotton merchant Hasegawa had sixty-seven clauses, to be memorized and chanted by all employees. Fully one-quarter related to fire—prevention, safety, and response.<sup>43</sup>

42. Ogi Shinzō, *Tōkei jidai: Edo to Tōkyō no aida de*, NHK bukkusu 371 (Nippon Hōsō Shuppan Kyōkai, 1980), pp. 45–53.

43. Yoshiwara, "Kaji," p. 574; idem, "Edo saigai nenpyō," pp. 445–46.

The greater fire dangers of Edo encouraged the many large Osaka merchant houses to keep their headquarters in Osaka even after the Edo market had eclipsed that of Osaka. They kept minimal stock on hand in the Edo stores. Most also had residential compounds and reserve storehouses on the island of Tsukuda in Edo Bay, which provided shelter for family and employees during and after serious fires, and where building supplies could be stockpiled as a hedge against postfire reconstruction costs. The commodity inflation and labor demands that inevitably followed major blazes obviously could be both costly and profitable to Edoites of all classes and to businesses of all scales, from humble roofers to the local rice dealers and large houses such as Shirokiya.<sup>44</sup> Fire both ruined and enriched individuals and the city. That was the source of its compelling fascination and continual terror. It reflected the commoners' appropriation of urban space and organizational responsibility, but it also inflamed the deep antagonisms that ran through that population.

44. Hayashi Reiko, *Edodana hankachō* (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1982); Yōtarō Sakudō, "The Management Practices of Family Businesses," trans. William B. Hauser, in Nakane and Ōishi, *Tokugawa Japan*, pp. 147–66.