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Author(s): M. William Steele

Source: *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Summer, 1990), pp. 127-155

Published by: [Sophia University](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2384846>

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# Edo in 1868

## The View from Below

by M. WILLIAM STEELE

**T**HE present article focuses on the experiences of Edo commoners during 1868. It examines the ways in which they were affected by the political, economic, and social changes that accompanied the collapse of the Tokugawa bakufu and the establishment of the new imperial regime. During this time the men and women of Edo, caught between the old and new regimes, were pulled in conflicting directions. On the one hand they were residents of Edo, the headquarters of the Tokugawa family and political center of Japan for more than 250 years. They saw little good in the country bumpkins from Satsuma and Chōshū who spoke a rough language and acted in disregard of convention and morality. And yet the Tokugawa family had been defeated; the old regime was dead and they were forced to live under Satsuma-Chōshū occupation. They had no choice but to become residents of Tokyo and bow down before an unfamiliar emperor.

The Meiji Restoration has often been portrayed as a 'soft' revolution: in a smooth if not rational manner, feudalism was replaced by a centralized nation state. Recent studies, however, have stressed the trauma of the transition.<sup>1</sup> While attention has been paid to peasant unrest during this period, little work has been done on the Edo townsmen whose political and economic fortunes were perhaps most affected by the collapse of the old regime. Here we are concerned with their plight, caught in between and yet desperately trying to understand the old and new.

Edo merchants, artisans, and laborers had long and close ties with the Tokugawa family, but the political and economic policies it had pursued after the opening of the country in 1853 increasingly diminished the enthusiasm of

THE AUTHOR is professor of Japanese history at the International Christian University. He wishes to thank Dr Mark Elvin, Australian National University, for his comments on an earlier draft of the present article. He also acknowledges the funding received from the Ray-Kay Foundation to carry out the necessary research.

Japanese dates are given in year-month-day order; *i*=intercalary.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas M. Huber, *The Revolutionary Origins of Modern Japan*, Stanford U.P., 1981. See also Tetsuo Najita & Victor Koschman, ed., *Conflict in Japanese History*, Princeton U.P., 1982.

their support. They realized that the bakufu was unable to ward off the foreign barbarians.<sup>2</sup> The Tokugawa family seemed helpless either to protect the country from foreign invasion or to provide the basis for domestic law and order. By 1868 Edo commoners had become disenchanted with Tokugawa rule.

On the other hand they were ambivalent, if not opposed, to the new imperial system and the political designs of the men from Satsuma and Chōshū. They were dismayed by the news of the defeat of Tokugawa forces at Toba-Fushimi during the first week of the new year, 1868. They feared for their city as imperial troops advanced on and finally occupied Edo in the spring. Many townsmen actively supported the resistance activities of the *Shōgitai* 彰義隊 (a band of young pro-Tokugawa diehards) and other anti-imperial forces; certainly they lamented the defeat of the *Shōgitai* on 1868.5.15. By late summer they were told that their city was to be renamed Tōkyō, the Eastern Capital, and finally in the autumn, on 10.11, they were forced to bow down to the boy emperor. A world had passed, but for a brief moment the social lid was lifted to allow a unique glimpse into some of the bottom-layer attitudes and propensities of the Edo commoners.

Naturally the sources available for research on late Tokugawa social history are limited. Commoners were not concerned to write down their political and social views in any coherent fashion. A hodgepodge of documentary evidence, however, is available: diaries, petitions, inflammatory statements, mocking rhymes, satirical cartoons, kabuki plays, popular literature, crude newspapers (both Japanese and Western), broadsheets, handbills, and even graffiti. In addition, Katsu Kaishū 勝海舟, the Tokugawa retainer who played a leading role in mediating a settlement between the former bakufu and the new imperial regime, left a diary detailing the events of 1868. As he was particularly sympathetic to the plight of the common people and often recorded his impressions of social conditions in Edo, the diary is especially helpful in helping us understand how the commoners experienced the Restoration.<sup>3</sup>

### *A Boiling Cauldron*

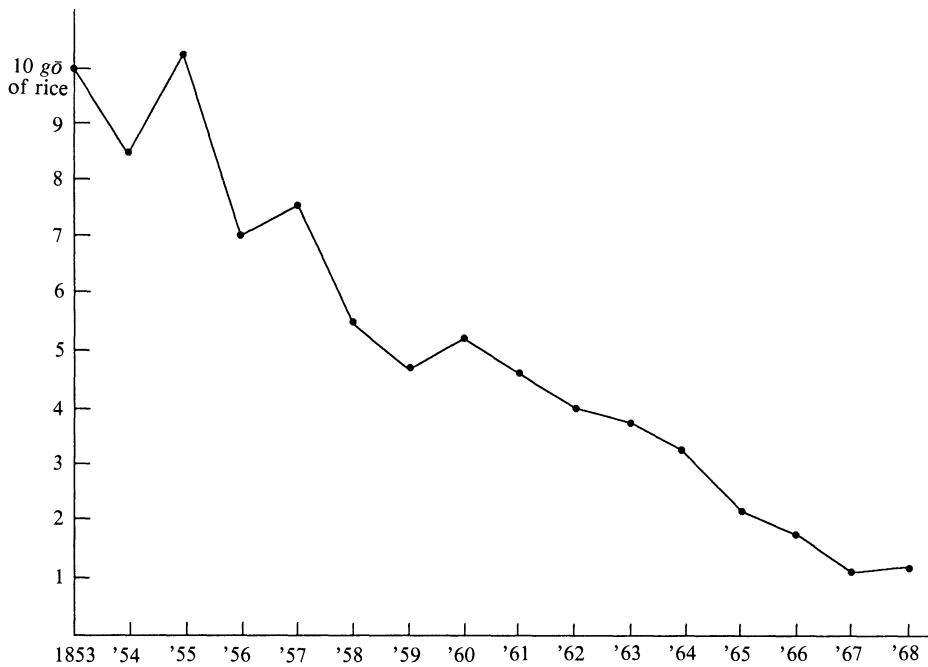
On 1868.19.2, as the imperial army was making its advance on Edo, Katsu Kaishū summed up the situation in Edo as follows:

<sup>2</sup> M. William Steele, 'Goemon's New World View: Commoner Representations of the Opening of Japan', in *Asian Cultural Studies*, 17 (1989), pp. 69–83.

<sup>3</sup> Major sources for bakumatsu social history include Sakuragi Shō 桜木章, *Sokumenkan Bakumatsu-shi* 側面觀幕末史, Gōdō, 1975; Suzuki Tōzō 鈴木棠三 & Koike Shōtarō 小池章太郎, ed., *Kinsei Shomin Seikatsu Shiryō: Fujiokaya Nikki* 近世庶民生活資料: 藤岡屋日記, San'ichi, 1987- (10 volumes planned); Suzuki Tōzō & Okada Satoshi 岡田

哲, ed., *Edo Jidai Rakusho Ruiju* 江戸時代落書類聚, Tōkyōdō, 1985, 3 vols.; and Yoshino Masayasu 吉野真保, *Kaei Meiji Nankanroku* 嘉永明治年鑑録, Gannandō, 2 vols., reprint, 1968.

Secondary sources include Minami Kazuo 南和男, *Ishin Zen'ya no Edo Shomin* 維新前夜の江戸庶民, Kyōikusha, 1980, and Yoshihara Ken'ichirō 吉原健一郎, *Edo no Jōhōya: Bakumatsu Shomin-shi no Sokumen* 江戸の情報屋: 幕末庶民史の側面, NHK Books, 1978.



The purchasing power of 100 *mon* copper coins, 1853–1868.

Compiled from *Kaei Nenkan yori Kome Sōba Jikidan narabi Nendaiki Kakinuki Daishimpan*, 1868; see also Shibahara Takuji, *Kaikoku* (Nihon no Rekishi 23), Shōgakkan, 1975, back leaf.

Edo is in great confusion. There are many rumors. The truth of the morning is false by night. Will the imperial army halt at Kuwana? Will it advance on Sum-pu? Will it come through the Hakone Pass? As a result the people are angry and upset. They run about blindly; the situation is just like a boiling cauldron.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, Edo commoners had been 'on the boil' for some time. The price of rice and other commodities had steadily risen throughout the 1860s. The predicament of the urban poor during these years is clearly demonstrated in a mid-1868 broadsheet that both reviewed the disasters (black ships, earthquakes, fires, epidemics, riots, and wars) that had disturbed their lives since 1853, and set out a neat set of statistics showing an abrupt decline in the buying power of their copper coins. The graph above is based on these figures.

By 1866 high prices contributed directly to rural and urban unrest.<sup>5</sup> At that time, the American Minister R. B. Van Valkenberg noted that 'the poor people are suffering for the want of provisions, and rice riots, like the flour and bread

<sup>4</sup> Katsube Mitake 勝部真長, ed., *Katsu Kaishū Zenshū* 勝海舟全集 [=KKZ], Keisō, 1973, 19, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Patricia Sipple, 'Popular Protest in Early Modern Japan: The Bushū Outburst', in HJAS

37 (December 1977), pp. 273–322; Steven Vlastos, *Peasant Protests and Uprisings in Tokugawa Japan*, University of California Press, 1986.

riots of more civilized countries, are frequent. Mobs at times have paraded the streets breaking into rice warehouses, and committing other crimes attendant upon such *emutes* of the people.<sup>6</sup> In fact Edo had suffered from major bouts of mob violence, beginning in 1866.5. Rice shops, pawn shops, *sake* shops, and the establishments of merchants who profited from foreign trade were raided and wrecked.<sup>7</sup>

People were quick to place the blame for their sufferings on the Tokugawa government. In late 1866 a piece of graffiti was found pasted on the door of the city commissioner's office: 'Owing to high prices, goods are in short supply and able officials are all sold out.'<sup>8</sup> Katsu also ascribed the social discontent of 1866 to a failure of bakufu leadership. In his diary he predicted that if administrative reforms were not instituted, rural and urban unrest would spell the end of Tokugawa rule.<sup>9</sup>

Edo commoners were not only aware of the economic ills of their society; they were keen observers of the political scene as well. An unsigned woodblock print issued in 1867.3 is good evidence of their understanding of the political problems of the day. Titled 'Treating Difficult Diseases', the print portrays a situation where patients (political leaders) seek cures for rather strange diseases. The daimyo of Satsuma, for example, suffers from the 'long-arm disease'. In the caption he says: 'In this condition I seem always to be wanting things that belong to others. What am I to do? Please don't let me die.' Other daimyo are similarly afflicted by rare maladies: the 'show-only-your-backside disease', the 'no-backbone disease', the 'no-face disease', the 'mouth-only disease', and so on. Tokugawa Keiki (or Yoshinobu) 徳川慶喜, who was appointed shogun in 1866.12, is suffering from depression brought on by the fetters of his office. He is made to say, 'If only I could retire and turn over these bothersome duties to my son.'

While the print is a humorous look at the problems of the political elite, it also portrays a profound cynicism felt by the commoners toward their samurai masters. The people were concerned about but also critical of the failure of their leaders to save them from economic and political confusion. As the print itself notes: 'The famous doctor who accepted these patients also gave up.'<sup>10</sup>

Any hope that the new head of the Tokugawa family would come to the

<sup>6</sup> Dispatch from Mr. Van Valkenberg to Secretary of State, dated 5 November 1866.

*Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs, Accompanying the Annual Message of the President to the Second Session Thirty-Ninth Congress*, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1867, 2, pp. 226-27.

<sup>7</sup> For the details, see the chapter on the 1866 Edo rioting in Minami Kazuo, *Bakumatsu Edo Shakai no Kenkyū* 幕末江戸社会の研究, Yoshikawa, 1978, pp. 266-324. Minami, *Ishin Zen'ya*, pp. 147-58, summarizes this chapter.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Minami, *Ishin Zen'ya*, p. 157.

<sup>9</sup> *Zoku Saimu Kiji* 続再夢紀事, Nihon Shiseki Kyōkai, 1922, 5, pp. 132-33.

<sup>10</sup> Minami Kazuo has analyzed this print in *Ishin Zen'ya*, p. 190. A copy of the original print may be found in the Shiryōhensanjo Collection, University of Tokyo.

Other collections of late Tokugawa popular prints are preserved in the Tokyo Municipal Library (Tōkyō Toritsu Toshokan) and the National Museum of Japanese History (Kōkuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan).



Shiryōhensanjo, Tokyo University.

## ‘Treating Difficult Diseases.’

rescue of the Edo commoners was confounded by his petition of 1867.14.10 for permission to return political authority to the emperor (*taisei hōkan* 大政奉還). The news caused havoc in Edo; some Tokugawa retainers declared themselves ready to carry out a coup against Keiki.<sup>11</sup> The commoners, already suspicious of his well-known infatuation with things Western, concluded that Keiki felt no concern for their safety and welfare. A mocking rhyme popular in late 1867 condemned Keiki as an ‘evil king’.<sup>12</sup> At the same time the residents of Edo were buffeted by a rash of murders, robberies, and other acts of terror. Beginning in late 1867.10 and continuing well into spring of 1868, gangs of hoodlums roamed the streets of Edo, destroying, as far as the commoners were concerned, any semblance of law and order. While some of the looting was done by the Edo poor, much of it can be attributed to Satsuma men, some of whom, it was said, had been sent by Saigō Takamori 西郷隆盛 himself. Satsuma *rōnin* 浪人, calling themselves the ‘Satsuma Advance Guard of the Imperial Army’ (*Kangun Sempō Sasshū-han* 官軍先鋒薩州藩) were clearly responsible for setting fires and instigating riots. On the one hand they urged the people to rebel against the evil Tokugawa authorities, and on the other warned them

<sup>11</sup> Shibusawa Eiichi 渋沢栄一, *Tokugawa Keiki-kō Den* 徳川慶喜公伝, Tōyō Bunko reprint, 1968, 3, pp. 256–57.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Motoyama Yukihiko 本山幸彦, ‘*Bakumatsu ni okeru Minshū no Ishiki to*

*Kōdō*’ 幕末における民衆の意識と行動, in *Kyōto Daigaku Kyōiku Gakubu Kiyō* 京都大学教育学部紀要, 30 (1984), p. 18. The original source is *Sokumenkan Bakumatsu-shi*, 2, p. 763.

to flee in order to escape injury in the upcoming civil war. One of their hand-bills declared:

In recent years evil officials of the bakufu have ignored court authorities, made pacts with Western barbarians, slighted the court, and destroyed the propriety between lord and vassal. Therefore the great lords of the western domains are cooperating in order to eradicate the evil bakufu officials. Although the shogun has returned political authority to the throne and is now simply one of the lords, evil officials in the Kantō ignore this. They secretly plot how to grasp authority once again. Therefore we propose the great plan that all determined men in the nation gather together on 11.4 and form a 'heavenly army' [*tempei* 天兵] to burn Edo Castle and set fires throughout Edo city and punish the evil officials. The only thing that we are afraid of is that the people may suffer because of this. You should quickly move your belongings and change your residence to avoid harm. We do not intend to harm the people, only to save them.<sup>13</sup>

Edo commoners were yet to turn to Satsuma for salvation. Frenzied dancing to the shout of *Ee ja nai ka, ee ja nai ka* ('Ain't it great! Ain't it great!') provided some outlet for their frustrations. The craze hit Edo in the 12th Month, just at the time when troops from Satsuma, Chōshū, Hizen, and Tosa seized the imperial palace gates in Kyoto, declared an imperial restoration (*ōsei fukko* 王政復古), and formally abolished the Tokugawa bakufu.<sup>14</sup>

### *Edo Under Siege*

News of the 1867.12.9 coup d'état added to the general state of alarm that existed in Edo. Troops from Shōnai and the *Shinchōgumi* 新徴組, a Tokugawa police force composed largely of *rōnin*, were employed in an attempt to restore law and order, but to no avail. Early in the morning of 12.23 the Ninomaru palace went up in flames. As it was the residence of Princess Seikan-in 静寛院 (formerly Princess Kazu 和, widow of the shogun Tokugawa Iemochi 徳川家茂 and aunt of the Meiji emperor) and Tenshō-in 天璋院 (widow of Tokugawa Iesada 徳川家定 and adopted daughter of Shimazu Nariakira 島津斉彬), rumors ascribed the conflagration to Satsuma *rōnin* who had previously threatened to liberate these ladies from Edo. Two days later the peace-keeping forces in Edo took their revenge: the Satsuma residence was burnt to the ground.

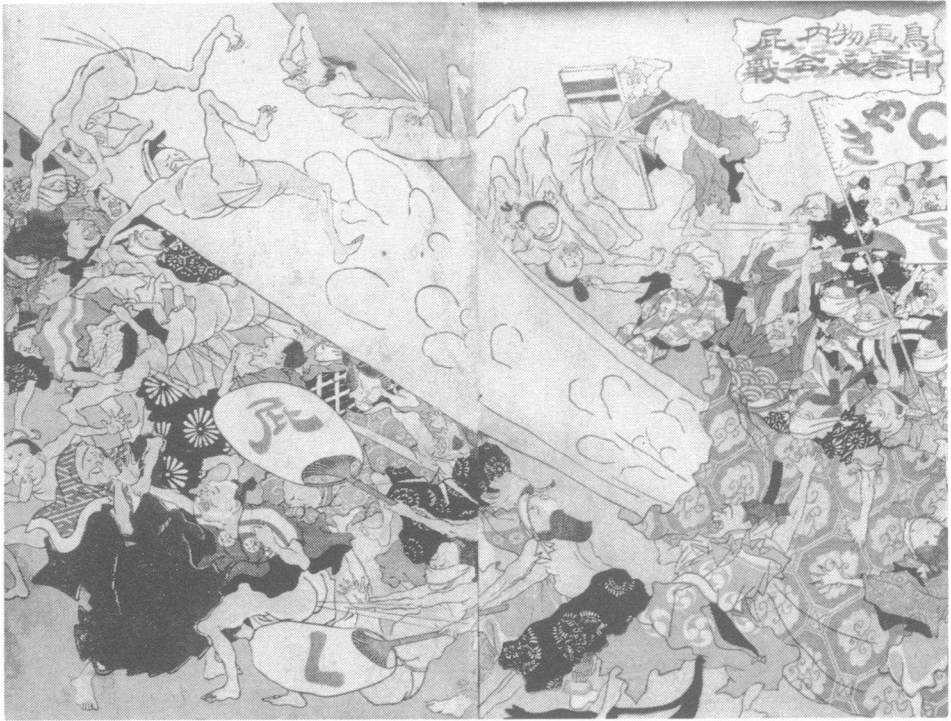
Commoners may have rejoiced when the Satsuma 'hoodlums' were driven out of Edo, but their happiness was short-lived. News of the defeat of Tokugawa armies at Toba-Fushimi reached Edo on 1868.1.12. Tokugawa Keiki had been declared an 'enemy of the court' and an army of chastisement was soon directed against Edo.

Keiki's flight back to Edo became the subject of popular ridicule. Leaving in the dead of night and losing their way at sea, Keiki's entourage was first taken

<sup>13</sup> *Teibō Zatsushūroku* 丁卯雜拾録, Nihon Shiseki Kyōkai, 1923, 1, p. 104.

<sup>14</sup> For the *Ee ja nai ka* movement, see

Richard Minear, 'In Pursuit of the Millenium', in Najita & Koschman, pp. 177-94.



Author's collection

## 'The Toba Battle of Farts.'

aboard an American warship before being transferred to the *Kaiyō Maru* 開陽丸. A mocking rhyme in Edo clearly labeled him a coward: 'He came back in flight, afraid to fight, leaving his men behind.'<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, Edo commoners were hardly sympathetic with the imperial cause. One satirical cartoon sold on the streets of the city in the spring of 1868 ascribed the imperial victory at Toba-Fushimi to superior farting power.

Immediately following the defeat of the Tokugawa forces at Toba-Fushimi, an imperial decree charged Keiki with treason and urged an immediate attack upon his domains. A force of some 50,000 men left Kyoto on 2.11. It made rapid progress and by 3.5 the main force had reached Sumpu Castle, where headquarters were established for the final stages of the siege on Edo.

Excitement among the people of Edo increased as the imperial army drew closer. It was difficult to understand Keiki's policy of submission. On 2.11, the same day that imperial troops left Kyoto, Keiki announced that he was going into domiciliary confinement at Daiji-in 大慈院 in the precincts of Kan'eiji 寛永寺 at Ueno. The decision was not generally liked; popular lampoons called Keiki a coward and many Tokugawa troops chose to decamp. Katsu Kaishū, Keiki's choice of mediator with the imperial regime and de facto commander

<sup>15</sup> *Sokumenkan Bakumatsu-shi*, 2, p. 776.



of the Tokugawa military, was forced to cope both with institutional breakdown and popular discontent. His diary of 2.1 notes:

At present a succession of boats filled with the troops defeated at Tobafushimi is arriving in Edo. . . . They are disgruntled by shortages of food and lack of shelter. Moreover, they are angered by insufficient pay. They are forming secret bands and decamping. . . . The townsmen are daily more distressed and suspicious. Officials repeatedly order increases in financial contributions without specific purposes in mind. . . . Even if enemy troops do not come, it will not be long before Edo collapses from within.<sup>16</sup>

Troop desertions, pro-war agitation, threats of assassination, were but the beginning of the problems Katsu and other Tokugawa authorities faced during the early months of 1868. Maintaining public order in Edo and the surrounding countryside was the greatest challenge. As the imperial army advanced on Edo and existing Tokugawa institutions of government collapsed, Edo commoners and their country cousins became increasingly insecure. Peasant rioting in the villages surrounding Edo reached a peak during this time, adding to an overriding sense of doom within the city.

The city commissioners issued decree after decree in an attempt to restore a sense of security. Katsu also sanctioned the use of bands of pro-Tokugawa activists in peacekeeping functions. The attempt was to kill two birds with one stone: to restore public order in Edo and the surrounding countryside, and to assert control over potential sources of insurrection. To this end, Kondō Isami's 近藤勇 *Shinchōgumi*, renamed the *Chimbutai* 鎮撫隊, or 'Pacification Squad', was sent into the Musashi and Kōzuke regions with orders to suppress peasant rioting. Within Edo, members of the *Shōgitai* were ordered to patrol the streets at night.

These measures proved unsuccessful. Thieves and bullies had virtual command of the city streets. The Tokugawa police force was powerless; when the imperial command occupied Edo early in the 4th Month, it had been reduced to a mere forty-two men.<sup>17</sup> As Katsu confided in his diary:

Recently in Edo, beginning with the various daimyo and *hatamoto* residences, people are in the streets night and day carting their belongings out to the countryside. As a result several thousand people are rushing about, as though at a fire, paying no heed to laws, however repeatedly they may be issued. For the most part, *hatamoto* are returning to their estates or hiding out in the countryside close to Edo. Taking advantage of the situation, robbers have appeared everywhere and are stealing valuables and molesting women.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> KKZ, 19, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Tōkyō Hyakunen-shi Henshū Iinkai, ed.,  
Tōkyō Hyakunen-shi 東京百年史, Tōkyō-to,

1973-1984, 2, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> KKZ, 19, p. 36.

*The Pro-Tokugawa Press*

Beginning in 1868.2, a number of newspapers appeared on sale in Edo alongside satirical prints and broadsheets. These publications marked a short but pungent period of free political criticism that existed after Tokugawa censorship regulations had ceased but before those of the new government could be enforced.<sup>19</sup> Yanagawa Shunsan's 柳川春三 *Chūgai Shimbun* 中外新聞 was the first of these pro-Tokugawa newspapers. Its first issue on 2.24 made explicit the theme that dominated its future articles: 'At present the decisions of the court emanate wholly from the deliberations of Satsuma and Chōshū. This unprecedented change probably does not derive from true respect for the emperor; rather it results simply from the pretense of power possessed [by Satsuma and Chōshū]. Therefore it is not without reason that the northern daimyo fail to obey [the new government].'<sup>20</sup>

These newspapers were founded largely by former bakufu foreign experts. Of the five most influential papers, the *Chūgai Shimbun*, *Kōko Shimbun* 江湖新聞, *Chūgai Shimbun Gaihen* 中外新聞外編, *Ochikochi Shimbun*, and *Moshiogusha* もしほ草, all except the last fall into this category.<sup>21</sup>

The pro-Tokugawa newspapers were responsible for heightening the political awareness of the Edo commoners. Although local gossip and humorous stories were not excluded from their pages, political news and commentary were their central concern. Memorials pleading Tokugawa Keiki's innocence, requests for a generous settlement, official ordinances and proclamations, translations from foreign newspapers, topical commentaries, and reports from the battlefield informed the literate Edo populace as they had never been before of the course and significance of events.

Counterfeit memorials and exaggerated accounts of Tokugawa victories appeared frequently. This sensationalism was often motivated by profit-seeking, as the more damaging to Satsuma and Chōshū the news, the higher the sales. In most cases, however, fabrication and distortion were intended to enhance the Tokugawa position and confuse the imperial command. The pro-Tokugawa press was well received by Edo readers. Sales of the *Chūgai Shim-*

<sup>19</sup> Little work has been done on bakumatsu newspapers. In English, see selections in Albert Altman, 'The Early Meiji Adaptation of the Western Style Newspaper', in W. G. Beasley, ed., *Modern Japan*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1975, and James L. Huffman, *Politics of the Meiji Press: The Life of Fukuchi Gen'ichirō*, University of Hawaii Press, 1980.

In Japanese, the best work on bakumatsu-Meiji newspapers is still Nishida Taketoshi 西田長寿, *Meiji Jidai no Shimbun to Zasshi* 明治時代の新聞と雑誌, Shibundō, 1961. Many

of the bakumatsu newspapers have been reprinted in *Bakumatsu Meiji Shimbun Zenshū* 幕末明治新聞全集, Sekai Bunko, 1960-1961, 8 volumes.

The multi-volume project, *Bakumatsu Meiji Shoki Shimbun Zenshū* 幕末明治初期新聞全集, Pelikansha, was begun in 1987, and includes reprints of English-language newspapers.

<sup>20</sup> *Chūgai Shimbun*, 1868.2.24.

<sup>21</sup> See *Tōkyō Hyakunen-shi*, 2, pp. 310-19, for an analysis of the pro-Tokugawa press.

*bun*, the largest, often surpassed 1,500 copies per issue, and what was written in print spread rapidly by word of mouth.

As the imperial army approached and then occupied Edo, the commoners were eager to learn what the future would bring. By the beginning of 1868.5 there were almost twenty newspapers, nearly all of them pro-Tokugawa. They played upon the general sense of excitement and insecurity to fan popular support for the Tokugawa cause. For example, as the imperial army advanced, one newspaper carried a declaration by the ‘representatives of the people of Edo’:

The Mikado is a small boy of indolent character. What is more, he is a prisoner in the hands of the mutinous southern daimyo. The Taikun has the perfect right to resist . . . We advise him [Keiki] to send an army to Osaka. . . . We will show our enemies what we can do for the Tokugawa clan.<sup>22</sup>

Fukuchi Gen’ichirō 福地源一郎, a leading pro-Tokugawa journalist and later founder of the *Tōkyō Nichinichi Shimbun* 東京日日新聞, came from a family of physicians in Nagasaki.<sup>23</sup> In the contest that developed in 1866 and 1867 between, on the one side, Chōshū and Satsuma, and on the other the bakufu, Fukuchi was a firm supporter of the latter. After Keiki restored political authority to the court in late 1867, for example, Fukuchi submitted a memorial to Oguri Tadamasu 小栗忠順 outlining reforms that would replace the bakufu with a Western parliamentary form of government in which Keiki would assume supreme executive powers. Later, when the defeated shogun returned to Edo in early 1868, Fukuchi argued for the use of force to defend the Tokugawa regime.

In the end Fukuchi chose to resist the ‘treacherous designs’ of Satsuma and Chōshū by means other than force. On *i*4.3 the first issue of his *Kōko Shimbun* was published. The press was to be Fukuchi’s weapon:

I was not one bit opposed to the ‘respect the emperor’ argument. Nor was I opposed when the shogun returned authority to the court. But later I saw that political authority was not in the hands of the court, but was the possession of Satsuma and Chōshū. Thus, although the bakufu had collapsed, Satsuma and Chōshū had become a second bakufu. As this was something I disliked and was contrary to the goals of the Restoration, it became the philosophy behind the *Kōko Shimbun*.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> ‘Expression of public opinion in Edo’, in *Despatches from U.S. Minister to Japan*, Yokohama, 9:36, enclosure 3.

*Historical Documents Relating to Japan in Foreign Countries: The United States*, Shiryōhensanjo, University of Tokyo, 1968, microfilm 6951-10-9.

<sup>23</sup> Fukuchi’s proficiency in Dutch (he was translator at the Nagasaki Naval Training Center at the age of seventeen) led to official employment as a retainer of the bakufu in

1859. Through the 1860s he worked under the Commissioner of Foreign Affairs as a translator and foreign expert. He traveled to Europe twice, first in 1862, when, along with Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉, he accompanied a bakufu mission as translator, and later in 1865 as a bakufu-sponsored student of French and international law.

<sup>24</sup> Fukuchi Gen’ichirō, *Shimbunshi Jitsureki* 新聞紙実歴, in *Fukuchi Ōchishū* 福地桜痴集, Chikuma, 1966, p. 326.

The *Kōko Shimbun* appeared thereafter every three or four days. Written in an easy style so that ‘even women and children’ could understand current affairs, its news was strongly biased in favor of the Tokugawa position. Inflammatory statements by decamped Tokugawa troops and Aizu rebels, memorials urging lenient treatment of the Tokugawa family and the folly of civil war, as well as some twenty-three major commentaries by Fukuchi, laced its pages. In the very first issue, for example, there was news of ‘the punishment of heaven’ that was meted to two retainers who had betrayed the Tokugawa family. The third issue contained an analogy to the American Civil War in which the north, by reason of its righteousness was eventually victorious, despite initial setbacks.

Fukuchi’s article, ‘On Strength and Weakness’, covering some eight pages of the eleven-page sixteenth issue (5.5), was his most explicit justification of resistance and expression of faith in the ultimate victory of the northern league. The article caused the imperial command to suppress the *Kōko Shimbun* and imprison Fukuchi. It was written in the form of a dialogue:

A: Now that the former shogun has surrendered there is no reason not to expect peace to reign. There should be no reason for strong *han* such as Aizu and Shōnai to resist imperial orders.

B: No. There is reason for such *han* to resist imperial orders. The southwestern *han* are despotic; someone must rise up and chastise them before peace can ensue.

A: But that will surely lead to a second *senigoku* period. And this time, who can possibly unify the country?

B: I don’t know. But I can say this—when you look at Japanese history, no one from the west has ever unified Japan. All the great unifiers, Minamoto Yoritomo, Nitta Yoshisada, Ashikaga Takauji, Oda Nobunaga, Hideyoshi Toyotomi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu, came from the east. In the present situation, moreover, the northeastern league, led by Aizu, is more united than the southwestern league. While Satsuma, Chōshū, Hizen, and Tosa squabble among themselves, Aizu has no such fear about its leadership. Aizu should advance south. This would bring on a second Sekigahara, but the advantage is clearly with the northeastern league.

A: If Aizu does succeed in uniting the country, should it restore the hegemony of the Tokugawa family?

B: One hundred years ago this would have been proper; today, however, it is not. . . . It would be a disgrace to intelligent men here and to the countries of the world for Japan to possess a disputable form of government in which two rulers exist, a revered emperor with an empty title and a despot wielding actual power.

A: I understand what you say. But if Satsuma and Chōshū restored authority to the emperor, why didn’t peace ensue?

B: Satsuma and Chōshū failed to abolish the feudal system. The emperor does nothing. Therefore, since military strength is the source of political authority and the control at present is splintered, a hero is required. Only after the feudal

system is abolished, the country unified, private interests abandoned, the throne given assistance, and a parliamentary form of government established, can true peace ensure.

Fukuchi did not name his hero, but it was obvious that his allegiance lay with the pro-Tokugawa forces. He described at some length the northern league's military and financial strengths. For example, Japan's two most important export items, tea and silk, were produced in the northern half of Japan. 'My hope', he concluded, 'is that the nation will be at peace, united in strength and thus able to rank among the powers of the world.'<sup>25</sup>

The pro-Tokugawa press was shortlived. After the surrender of Edo Castle on 4.11 the imperial command issued regulations outlawing criticism of the new regime. These laws were largely ignored. But after the defeat of the *Shōgitai* on 5.15, the new government gained firm and undisputed possession of Edo, and the imperial command was able to enforce its will upon the populace. New and stricter censorship regulations were issued. Fukuchi Gen'ichirō was arrested on 5.23 and briefly imprisoned; the *Kōko Shimbun* and other pro-Tokugawa newspapers disappeared.

### *The Surrender of Edo Castle*

Edo Castle, the symbol of Tokugawa power for almost three hundred years, was surrendered to the new imperial regime on 1868.4.11. Foreign journalists who witnessed the event noted, 'The capital of the Shogoons is held for the Mikado. . . . Ohara Sakino Gijiu, the Kuge and Envoy of His Imperial Majesty . . . took possession of the castle at Yedo in the name of his master. All along the Envoy's route the houses were closed and strips of paper pasted across the junctions of the windows and doors, and the people out in the streets prostrated themselves as he passed.'<sup>26</sup> Tokugawa Keiki, the last shogun, left Edo that same day, bound for exile in Mito.

The surrender of Edo and its occupation by the imperial command took place without incident. Katsu Kaishū, Ōkubo Ichiō 大久保一翁, and other Tokugawa men had been hard at work to pacify anti-imperial sentiments in the city and carry out negotiations with leaders of the new government. Katsu's famous meetings with Saigō Takamori on 3.13 and 3.14 were but the beginning of a series of tough negotiations designed to avoid bloodshed.<sup>27</sup> Katsu wrote in his diary on 4.11:

From the 8th to today I have kept busy running in all directions; even at night I made rounds to keep a watch out for disturbing conditions. Today from the roof

<sup>25</sup> *Bakumatsu Meiji Shimbun Zenshū*, 4, pp. 61–64. Huffman, pp. 47–63, describes Fukuchi's fledgling career as a 'fighting journalist'.

<sup>26</sup> *Japan Times' Overland Mail*, 16 May 1868.

<sup>27</sup> For the surrender of Edo Castle, see M. William Steele, 'Against the Restoration: Katsu Kaishū and the Attempt to Reinstall the Tokugawa Family', in MN 36:3 (Autumn 1981), pp. 299–316.

of the Hama Naval Station I kept alert for the sound of cannon fire. Fortunately, perhaps due to fate, there was no incident. If something irregular occurred, it was my intention to gallop off to the imperial army and declare myself responsible for the mistake.<sup>28</sup>

The surrender of Edo Castle was largely a formality. A great part of the castle was in ruins, having burned down five months earlier. Moreover, possession of the castle by no means meant possession of Edo. The imperial command was suddenly saddled with the responsibility of maintaining law and order in a city hostile to its intentions. Decamped Tokugawa troops, as a contemporary report noted, 'formed themselves into bodies of guerrillas and harassed the troops of the Mikado throughout the country around Yedo.'<sup>29</sup> Within Edo itself, the *Shōgitai* and other bands of Tokugawa diehards carried out sporadic attacks on anyone who wore the imperial armband (*kingire* 錦切れ), forcing the imperial command to report to Kyoto that they had control only over the area around the castle—'the rest of Edo is like enemy territory.'<sup>30</sup> Indeed, when Supreme Commander Prince Arisugawa 有栖川 finally took up residence in the castle on 4.21, orders were issued to the former Edo city commissioners to continue their duties as before. The administration of the city remained, for the time being, entrusted to Tokugawa officials.

The citizens of Edo were not eager to have the rough outsiders from Satsuma and Chōshū as their masters. One merchant complained that the occupation of Edo had prevented him from enjoying the cherry blossoms,<sup>31</sup> others saw the end of Tokugawa rule in a more serious light. The *Japan Herald Market Report and Mail Summary*, for example, carried a report on 26 March 1868 about the great sympathy in Edo for the head of the Tokugawa clan. It specifically mentioned the case of a rich merchant named 'O-MIAH' who visited the admiralty office in Yokohama, 'where he spoke in favourable terms of the policy of making a movement at the south against the Southern Daimios; he spoke of the wish of the people . . . [and] concluded by urging the admiralty authorities to send down the Kayo-mare [sic], Eagle and other vessels, adding that the hour the expedition weighed anchor, he would pay into the treasury 200,000 rios.'<sup>32</sup>

In fact rich Edo merchants did suffer as a result of the occupation of Edo by the imperial army. Bad business, theft, and the constant threat of war caused many to close their establishments and leave Edo. According to the *Overland Mail* of 30 May:

<sup>28</sup> KKZ, 19, p. 44.

<sup>29</sup> Dispatch from Harry S. Parkes to the Foreign Office, Yokohama, 13 June 1868, no. 139.

*Historical Documents Relating to Japan in Foreign Countries: The United Kingdom*, Shiryōhensanjo, University of Tokyo, 1968, microfilm 6951-3-48-2.

<sup>30</sup> *Boshin Nikki* 戊辰日記, Nihon Shiseki Kyōkai, 1925, p. 336.

<sup>31</sup> Nishiyama Matsunosuke 西山松之助, 'Saitō Gekkin Nikki no Meiji' 齋藤月峯日記の明治, in *Shichō* 史潮, 106 (1969), p. 47.

<sup>32</sup> *Japan Herald Market Report and Mail Summary*, 26 March 1868.

The worst feature in the present situation is the guerrilla warfare which is now carried on by bands of masterless men, conveniently disowned by their hereditary chiefs. . . . They keep the whole country immediately north of Yedo in a disturbed state and make that capital by no means a pleasant residence for the Mikado's representatives and quite untenable for traders, who have accordingly deserted the place *en masse*, much to the detriment of our commerce.'<sup>33</sup>

Satirical cartoons (*fūshiga* 諷刺画) provide much information on how commoners in Edo understood the political changes taking place around them. The prints were produced throughout the late Tokugawa period, some of the better ones signed and meant as works of art; others, unsigned and of inferior quality, were sold cheaply on the streets and intended more as political and social comment. They reached a peak in production in 1868, particularly in the months around the surrender of Edo Castle, and can be seen as a popular corollary to the pro-Tokugawa press described above. One source has estimated that some three-hundred different prints were in circulation at that time, and, given at least a thousand copies per print, a total circulation of around 300,000 prints. This phenomenon has not been extensively studied, although Minami Kazuo's work on late Tokugawa social history puts them to good use.<sup>34</sup>

Since the prints were sold on the city streets and as people usually buy what they want to read, the prints can be assumed to be reasonably accurate reflections of the political and social concerns of Edo commoners. They tell us a great deal, for example, of commoners' reactions to the end of Tokugawa rule.<sup>35</sup> A good example in this regard is a print whose text involves numerous puns on the word for 'tree'. It is titled 'The People Wood Be Shocked', and appeared shortly after the surrender of Edo Castle.<sup>36</sup> In its tragicomic format, the print vividly portrays many of the difficulties felt by the commoners

<sup>33</sup> *Japan Times' Overland Mail*, 30 May 1868.

<sup>34</sup> Minami, *Ishin Zen'ya no Edo Shomin*, pp. 206–22.

For a convenient collection of late Tokugawa popular prints, see Konishi Shirō 小西四郎, *Bakumatsu Meiji Nishiki-e Zenshū* 幕末明治錦絵全集, Kōdansha, 12 vols., 1985; the first five volumes are especially relevant. The prints in this series largely derive from the private Asai Collection in Osaka.

<sup>35</sup> There is no comprehensive study of bakumatsu political cartoons. Anonymous artists used the medium to poke fun at the samurai and their warring.

A whole genre of prints dealt with 'war games'. Children were often shown in two groups fighting each other, sometimes with toy guns and cannon, throwing mud, hitting with brooms, fighting on stilts, engaging in sumo, or simply playing tug of war. The contestants in these play-wars were easily iden-

tifiable at the time.

Patterns on kimono or other symbolic objects indicated identity. Tokugawa Keiki, formerly a member of the Hitotsubashi 一ツ橋 family, is usually shown wearing a kimono with a pattern involving the character 一 (*hi-totsu*); it looks much like a brick pattern.

Supporters of the Tokugawa can be identified: Aizu is connected with candles, Sendai with bamboo, Kuwana with clams.

On the imperial side, Satsuma is denoted by a *kasuri* 緋 pattern; Chōshū by a pattern made up of *hagi* 萩 leaves; Tosa is often depicted with a triad of biwa-oak leaves or a *katsuo* 鰯 fish, Owari by a *daikon* 大根, and so on.

A rudimentary list of these symbols of what was once common knowledge is found in Iijima Kagetsu 飯島花月, '*Ishin no Gūga*' 維新の寓意画, in *Edo Bunka* 江戸文化, 4:3 (1930), pp. 145–53.

<sup>36</sup> This print is discussed in Minami, *Ishin Zen'ya*, pp. 207–09.



Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan

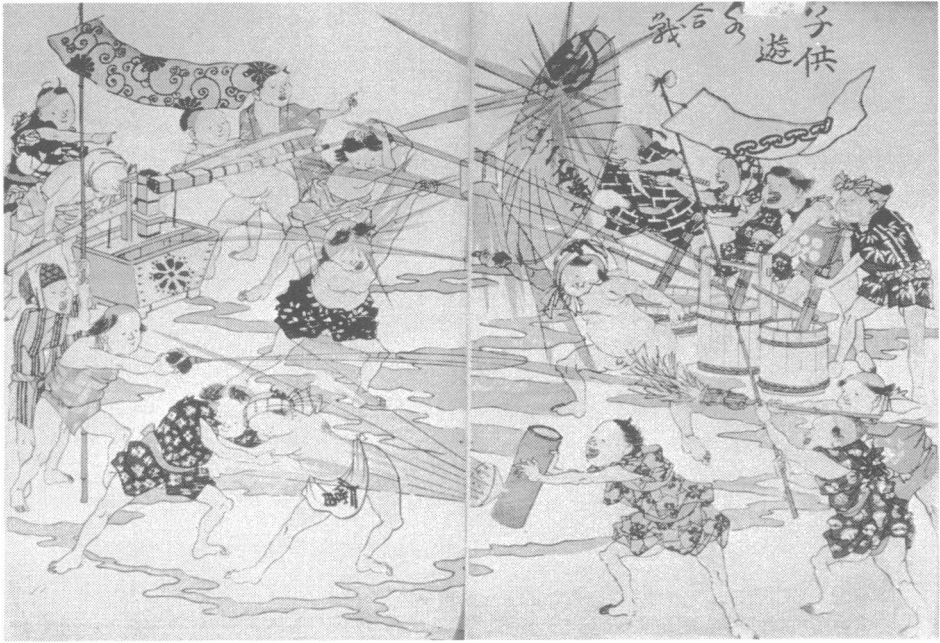
'The People Wood Be Shocked' (*Banmin Odoroki* 万民おどろ木).

at that time. Seated beneath a large cherry tree a group of ruffians enjoy the pleasures of wine, women, and song. The trunk of the tree is composed of large characters that read: 'A money tree has suddenly appeared and creates "difficultrees" in the city.' The money tree is a caustic reference to the ill-gotten gains of the occupiers of Edo. Their gold and cannon make them suddenly masters of the city, and the populace is forced to suffer. Their problems are detailed in the small script making up the branches of the tree: 'no industree', 'the rich treemblem', 'people flee to the countreeside', 'commidtree prices high and exchange rates low'. One branch takes the former shogun to task: 'the big head has retreated home.' Beneath the tree, men representing Satsuma and Chōshū loudly boast of their prowess and their imperial connections. Angered by their disorderly behavior, men from Aizu and Sendai tell them to shut up and challenge them to fight.

The prints also tell us much about the attitude of Edo commoners toward the Tokugawa family, ostensibly their political superiors. It is usual to assume strong popular feelings of indebtedness if not loyalty. After all, Edo commoners had lived and prospered under Tokugawa rule for nearly three hundred years. The prints, however, portray a much more ambivalent relationship. Some prints, to be sure, give Keiki a leading role in the defense of Edo. Note, for example, the determined look on Keiki's face as he and his retainers fend off a vicious watergun attack.

The majority of these satirical prints, however, were less positive in their





Shiryōhensanjo, Tokyo University.

## 'Boys Playing at a Water Battle.'

evaluation of the Tokugawa family. As noted above, Keiki failed to play the role of savior. As the imperial army approached, he went into hiding and openly proclaimed his submission to imperial rule. Prints undated but probably from the period after the surrender of Edo Castle on 4.11 poked fun at Keiki's indecisive and cowardly behavior. One damning print portrays Keiki turning his back on the difficult situation into which the people of Edo had been placed; he is reading a book on which is written, 'I'll be in a real fix if I act now; better wait till later.' Another depicts him as a young boy too scared to take part in a battle on stilts; he flees from the scene muttering, 'It's better to run away.' Commoner disenchantment with Tokugawa rule was complete, but they were yet to enter into a new covenant. As a satirical compendium current at the time of the surrender of Edo Castle put it:

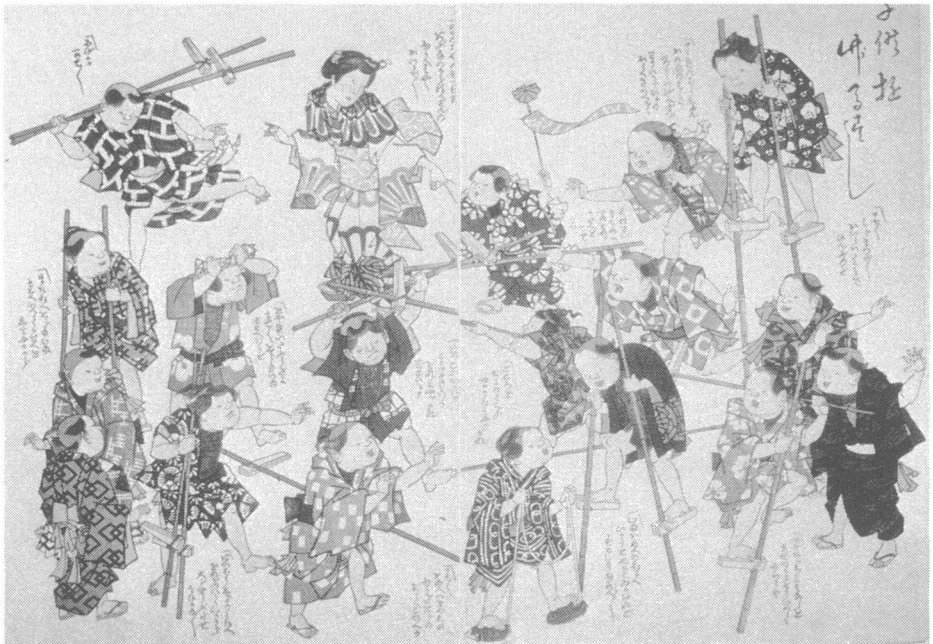
Are we afraid of being called an enemy of the court? NO!  
 Is there a way to escape humble submission? NO!  
 Does the emperor know anything? NO!  
 Is honor due to the pseudo-princes? NO!  
 Is respect due to wearers of imperial armbands? NO!  
 Does the wicked army have any money? NO!  
 Has Edo ever known greater misery? NO!  
 Does wisdom exist among our leaders? NO!  
 Does righteousness exist between high and low? NO!  
 Is there a path leading to loyalty and fealty, benevolence and virtue? NO!<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Suzuki & Okada, 3, pp. 176-77.



Author's collection

'Enjoying the Shamisen' (detail).



Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan

'Children's Battle on Stilts' (Keiki is featured top left.)

*The Battle of Ueno Hill*

The wealth of the Tokugawa family had always been a matter of speculation. Rumors of fantastic storehouses of gold proved chimerical when Edo Castle was passed into imperial hands. Members of the new government were disappointed: ‘Not one piece of gold was turned over; this all seems very strange; perhaps they have hidden it somewhere.’<sup>38</sup> The gold and silver reserves of the Tokugawa mints surrendered on 4.17 amounted to a mere 200,000 *ryō*. Altogether the financial gain resulting from the possession of Edo was minimal.

Moreover, the administrative tasks involved in governing the city and maintaining an occupying army proved a substantial drain on the imperial command’s already meager financial reserves. A series of pleas to Kyoto proved fruitless. As food and other supplies could not easily be commandeered, the imperial command was, largely as a result of its own success, plunged into financial crisis.

Edo merchants were reluctant to contribute to the war effort of the imperial army. As noted above, many rich Edo merchants had chosen to close their doors and leave the city as quickly as possible. Not a few of them were financially dependent upon the Tokugawa feudal order and could see no viable alternative. One merchant house, Mitsui, did contribute 30,000 *ryō* 兩 to the imperial army, but it donated equally to the Tokugawa side. According to a contemporary report, ‘Around 4.20, when the battles at Utsunomiya began, the imperial army’s military expenses were immense. It became obvious they were having difficulties paying; moreover, as popular sentiment in the environs of Edo was not yet settled, Mitsui, Shimada, Ono, and others refused when asked to contribute to military expenses.’<sup>39</sup> The Edo merchants were playing it safe. The imperial command’s hold over Edo was tenuous and as the pro-Tokugawa guerrillas won victory after victory, often reported in exaggerated fashion in the local press, the merchants were hesitant to finance what might well turn out to be the losing side.

Kyoto officials were aware of their weak military and financial grip over Edo. Matsudaira Yoshinaga 松平慶永 summed up the situation as follows:

The situation has become truly difficult. The imperial command does not have even 10,000 *ryō* and the *Shōgitai* is increasingly violent. It is said that the imperial army cannot go beyond Nihonbashi along the Tōkaidō, that keeping order in the city has been entrusted to former bakufu officials, and that administration is carried out under the old laws. Prince Arisugawa is reported to have entered Edo Castle, but he is a solitary figure there with no authority whatsoever.<sup>40</sup>

Following the surrender of Edo Castle, police duties had remained the responsibility of the Tokugawa family. They issued a stream of ordinances,

<sup>38</sup> *Boshin Nikki*, p. 374.

<sup>39</sup> *Edo kara Tōkyō e no Tenkai* 江戸から東

京への展開, Tōkyō-to, 1953, pp. 25–31.

<sup>40</sup> *Boshin Nikki*, p. 388.

but proved unable to maintain law and order. The *Shōgitai*, originally employed to keep the peace, became instead a major source of unrest. The imperial command sought to improve the situation on *i4.2* by appointing Katsu Kaishū and Ōkubo Ichio as joint governors of Edo and giving them full responsibility for maintaining order within the city.<sup>41</sup> Katsu quickly refused the appointment:

I am utterly powerless to pacify Edo. . . . Only one person in my opinion is fit to discharge that important duty and that is Keiki, whose earnestness . . . has secured the affection of the people who will follow wherever he leads. I feel sure that if the emperor in the liberal exercise of his clemency would order him to return to Edo and reside there, the people would follow in his wake and stability would gradually be restored.<sup>42</sup>

Katsu was hoping to use the financial and military difficulties of the imperial command to restore some dignity, if not political influence, to his liege lord, Tokugawa Keiki. The imperial command was not willing to accept such a solution. As Katsu predicted, unrest in Edo intensified. Katsu's diary entry for *i4.13* lamented:

Not only has my petition been rejected, but the people in the capital [Edo] are seized with apprehension and follow blindly any wild argument. Because of this, noisy ruffians loot and commit murders—they are unable to wait calmly for the imperial terms of settlement as true *bushi* should. Merchants have closed their doors and the impoverished people have lost their means of livelihood. The streets at night are deserted. Is this a sign of the degenerate world?<sup>43</sup>

Katsu continued his grievance in a memorial to Tayasu Yoshiyori 田安慶頼, who had been given the responsibility of policing Edo following Katsu's refusal:

The once great castle is today overgrown with weeds; its towers are crumbling, and its enclosures have become a den for beggars and outcasts. This is indeed a situation difficult for a retainer to bear. All of the retainers, your humble servant included, have lost their fiefs—their means of livelihood. More than 370,000 men are starving. Because of this, the 300,000 merchants of the capital [Edo] have also lost their means of livelihood. At night thieves wander about and cut down the unfortunate, the aged are left to die on the streets, and bands of young men gather in the outskirts of the city to pillage and plunder.<sup>44</sup>

The actions of the *Shōgitai* placed the imperial command in a quandary.<sup>45</sup> Katsu noted in his diary on *i4.29*, 'There are nearly four thousand men camped at Kan'eiji. They have murdered some imperial soldiers and take delight in sporadic careless and rash acts.'<sup>46</sup> Still, Saigō Takamori was sympathetic to

<sup>41</sup> KKZ, 19, p. 50.

<sup>42</sup> KKZ, 19, pp. 51–52.

<sup>43</sup> KKZ, 19, p. 57.

<sup>44</sup> KKZ, 19, pp. 55–56.

<sup>45</sup> For the *Shōgitai*, see M. William Steele, 'The Rise and Fall of the Shōgitai: A Social Drama', in Najita & Koschman, pp. 128–44.

<sup>46</sup> KKZ, 19, p. 67.

Katsu's argument that the outbreak of war in Edo would cost the lives of countless civilians; he was also well aware of the limitations of the imperial army in controlling pro-Tokugawa dissidents in Edo and its environs. On the other hand, Ōmura Masujirō 大村益次郎, a Chōshū retainer and military tactician, argued for a stronger military stance. He and Etō Shimpei 江藤新平, a Hizen retainer employed by the new government to gather information in Edo, were highly critical of the conciliatory attitude the imperial command had adopted with regard to the 'defeated' Tokugawa family. 'If we do not renew our military spirit and proceed to sweep away the *Shōgitai*, imperial authority will collapse.'<sup>47</sup> Their case was strengthened when imperial envoy Sanjō Sanetomi 三条実美 arrived in Edo on 4.24 with news that money and reinforcements were on their way from Kyoto.

Etō Shimpei had constantly argued that the key to national unity lay in establishing Edo as the capital of a centralized policy (*gunken seiji* 群県政治).<sup>48</sup> On 5.1 he submitted an ambitious nineteen-point memorial outlining how this could be realized, beginning with the reassertion of control over Edo. On that day the imperial command relieved Tayasu Yoshiyori of the responsibility for policing Edo and assumed these duties itself.<sup>49</sup> On 5.6 it ordered all noticeboards that had been set up by the bakufu to be removed and replaced by those of the new government. Two days later, the *Shōgitai* retaliated with an attack on Hizen and Satsuma troops stationed in Edo. On 5.11, the administration of Edo was reorganized as a metropolitan district, or *fu* 府, separate from the imperial command. Ōmura Masujirō was appointed chief of the new administrative unit he was instrumental in making the final decision to attack the *Shōgitai* on the morning of the fifteenth.

The motivation behind the attack on the *Shōgitai* was not simply a matter of restoring order in Edo. As Ōmura and Etō argued on 5.8, control of the city was the key to control of the entire nation: 'Since Edo is the center of the nation, it should become established as the permanent national capital in the future. Therefore it is necessary to attack the *Shōgitai* as soon as possible.'<sup>50</sup> Later Gotō Shōjirō 後藤象二郎 put it more colorfully. 'Japan may politically be compared to a body of which Kyoto is the foot, Edo the belly, and Ōshū, to the north, the head. If no remedy is taken for Edo, the belly, the whole body will become fatally diseased.'<sup>51</sup> Gotō, it should be noted, was not speaking with reference to the *Shōgitai*, but for the necessity of the emperor's presence in Edo. Nonetheless the point was clear: control of Edo and its establishment as the national capital were necessary for the success of the new government.

<sup>47</sup> Matono Hansuke 野半介, *Etō Nam-paku* 江藤南白, Nampaku Kenshōkai, 1914, 1, p. 318.

<sup>48</sup> Matono, p. 347.

<sup>49</sup> *Tōkyō Shishikō: Shigai-hen* 東京市史稿: 市街編, Tōkyō-to, 1960, 49, pp. 55-56.

<sup>50</sup> Matono, p. 329.

<sup>51</sup> A. P. Mitford, Memorandum, Yokohama, 6 August 1868, included in a dispatch by Harry S. Parkes, no. 208.

*Historical Documents Relating to Japan in Foreign Countries: The United Kingdom*, Shiryōhensanjo, University of Tokyo, 1968, microfilm 6951-3-49-2.

At dawn on 5.15, the imperial army opened fire on the *Shōgitai* stronghold on Ueno Hill. Heavy rain fell as young Tokugawa loyalists fought for the honor of their deposed lord. By nightfall, Kan'eiji lay in ashes and the northeastern section of Edo was in flames. The *Shōgitai* had fled the city, leaving their dead comrades behind. According to *The Japan Times' Overland Mail*,

The moral result of this victory of the Southerners is immense. They are, for the time being, so completely masters of the situation than men are even afraid to bury the dead Tokugawa men, whose bodies are allowed to lie, the prey of the wild dogs and the fowls of the air, in the sacred precincts of one of the holiest places of the defeated clan. The Tokugawa men are literally swept out of Yedo and no man dare harbour one on pain of death.<sup>52</sup>

The Battle of Ueno Hill made the people of Edo, some for the first time, realize that the old regime was truly at an end.

Ah! How sad and deplorable is this day! The most sacred spot in all of the Kantō has been, in but an instant, reduced to flames. Fleeing from the disaster, the aged, the young, and the womenfolk of the city wander aimlessly on the roads, filling them with cries of pity. The working of heaven seems to know no right or wrong.<sup>53</sup>

### *Edo in Ruins*

In the period following the Battle of Ueno Hill, Edo's fortunes reached their lowest point. On 5.19 the city was absorbed into the new government's administrative network as a 'military garrison' (*chindai* 鎮台), ranking alongside other strategic cities such as Osaka, Hyōgo, and Yamato, and placed under the control of the Bureau of Domestic Affairs (*naikoku jimukyoku* 内国事務局) in Kyoto. The last Tokugawa offices still in nominal operation, those of the Edo city commissioner, the temple and shrine commissioner, and the finance commissioner, were abolished, placing the administration entirely in the hands of new government men.

On 5.24, less than ten days after the expulsion of the *Shōgitai*, the imperial regime finally made clear the fate of the Tokugawa family and its retainers: the size of their feudal revenue was reduced to a mere 70,000 *koku* 石 and they were required to leave Edo and settle in Suruga. The *hatamoto* 旗本 and *gokenin* 御家人 began the arduous move in 1868.7. Nearly 12,000 households—over 100,000 people—were uprooted within a month. Men, women, and children on foot, accompanied by carts loaded with personal possessions, crowded the avenues leading out of the city. Merchants and menials followed in their wake and Edo assumed the appearance and atmosphere of a deserted city.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> *Japan Times' Overland Mail*, 11 July 1868.

<sup>53</sup> *Soyofuku Kaze* そよぶく風, no. 7, n.d., in *Bakumatsu Meiji Shimbun Zenshū*, 3, p. 408.

<sup>54</sup> For the Tokugawa exodus to Shizuoka, see Haraguchi Kiyoshi 原口清, *Meiji Zenki Chihō Seiji-shi* 明治前期地方政治史, Hanawa, 1972, vol. 1.

Some Tokugawa men chose to remain in Edo and serve the new government as minor bureaucrats. Most, however, jobless and financially ruined, had no choice but to follow their lord into exile. Katsu Kaishū played a key role in orchestrating the move. Finally, early in the Tenth Month, he too was forced to abandon the city of his birth.

Henry Smith has studied the issue of Edo's depopulation during the Restoration years and notes, 'No city in Japan was so profoundly affected by the collapse of the Tokugawa regime as its political capital. In the space of less than seven years, Edo lost half of its population of more than 1 million, with a final exodus of more than 300,000 in 1868 alone.' Smith outlines three stages of population decline: a sudden drop of 100,000 following the relaxation of the *sankin kōtai* 参勤交代 in 1862; then a more gradual decline of 50,000 domain samurai until early 1868; and finally a precipitous decline of 300,000, some two-thirds of whom were shogunal retainers, in the course of 1868. In the winter of 1868-1869 the city's population reached its lowest figure. Smith estimates it to have then been about 650,000.<sup>55</sup>

By the end of the summer Edo was in ruins and little was expected of its future as a national capital. At nearly the same time as the Kyoto government decreed that Edo was to be renamed Tōkyō and serve as the nation's capital, foreign observers concluded that Edo had been left 'to go to the dogs'. According to the *Japan Times' Overland Mail* on 5 September 1868 (7.19):

The Northern rebels are reported to be waiting for the winter, to which they trust for starving the Mikado's troops out of Yedo and judging from the recent changes in the appearance of that city, the possibility of the Imperialists abandoning it is not altogether chimerical. The mint and arsenal have both been transported to Osaka, the greater part of the palaces of the Daimios are dismantled, the hinges and heavy bronze ornaments torn off the doors, and in many cases the inner houses pulled down and their stone and timber sold to builders. A landslide has occurred at an important point in the second wall of the castle, where a breach now exists of some forty or fifty rods in width, the *debris* from which has fallen down and shallowed the moat. No attempt is being made to repair this, nor the many minor damages which the walls and guard-houses suffered during the heavy rains of July. Very large numbers of people have been sent down to the South, merchants, artisans and labourers, and crowds of others have left on their own accord.<sup>56</sup>

One month later, the *Hiogo and Osaka Herald* for 17 October (9.2) warned that Edo was soon to become like Kamakura, an abandoned city.

Yedo, for scores of years has been the capital of Japan, the centre of the government and the metropolis of the island; it has been unfortunate enough

<sup>55</sup> Henry Smith II, 'The Edo-Tokyo Transition: In Search of Common Ground', in Marius Jansen & Gilbert Rozman, ed., *Japan in Transition: From Tokugawa to Meiji*,

Princeton U.P., 1986, p. 347.

<sup>56</sup> *Japan Times' Overland Mail*, 5 September 1868.

to be plunged into poverty and to lose its former prestige through the war which raged within its walls not a long time since, and in fact to be looked on by its children as being partially ruined in prospects by the ravenous, sluggish and dronish usurpers who have appropriated to themselves with grudge the once flourishing Paris of their country, now converted into a den of depredators of the worse kind.<sup>57</sup>

The article concludes that Edo's only salvation was to follow through with plans to transform it into Japan's seat of national government and the permanent residence of the emperor.

### *From Edo to Tokyo*

Whatever optimism existed among the leaders of the imperial regime after the defeat of the *Shōgitai* quickly evaporated. Ōkubo Toshimichi and others realized that there was no guarantee that they would succeed in asserting their authority over the nation. The northern league, led by the daimyo of Aizu, Sendai, Yonezawa, and Shōnai, and other anti-imperial guerrilla forces fought hard, and not always to their disadvantage. Moreover, social conditions in Edo grew worse; the imperial command failed to restore law and order, and commoners complained that the occupying troops were but an extra burden to their already impoverished state.<sup>58</sup>

As late as 8.22, foreign observers urged 'the chiefs of the southern confederation' to adopt a more conciliatory policy toward the north. 'We want peace—and as peace cannot apparently be obtained by the subjugation of one party to another, our interest is to promote that amalgamation of both which appears possible and which would certainly tranquillize the country.'<sup>59</sup> But the new government persisted in its attempt to place all of Japan under its control. By the end of the Eighth Month, its military fortunes had begun to improve. Nagaoka fell to imperial troops early on 7.29, and after stiff resistance, the Yonezawa forces were defeated on 9.4, followed by Aizu on 9.24, and Shōnai on 9.26. Thereafter, Enomoto Takeaki 榎本武揚 and the remnants of the formidable Tokugawa navy at their stronghold in Hakodate posed the only major military threat to the new regime.

From the outset Ōkubo Toshimichi maintained that military might was not itself sufficient to create the basis for a new national government. He had consistently argued that the emperor could be used creatively toward these ends. In the face of dogged opposition, Ōkubo sought agreement to send the emperor to Edo. In line with advice received from Etō Shimpei, he proposed to move the imperial residence to Edo and establish it as the new regime's national headquarters, renamed Tokyo, the eastern capital. This plan was accepted on 7.17 and on 8.4 plans were announced for an imperial progress

<sup>57</sup> *Hiogo and Osaka Herald*, 17 October 1868.

<sup>58</sup> *Tōkyō Hyakunen-shi*, 2, pp. 329–33.

<sup>59</sup> *Japan Times' Overland Mail*, 7 October 1868.



along the Tōkaidō. The strategic advantages of the move were apparent. The presence of the emperor would stabilize the situation and conciliate the people of Edo as well as strike a decisive blow against the ‘rebels’ in the northeast.

It is uncertain when news that Edo had been renamed reached its inhabitants for the imperial decree of 7.17 was not immediately made public in either Edo or Kyoto. In its issue dated 9.9, the *Moshiogusa*, a Yokohama-based newspaper, mentioned the possibility of an imperial visit to Edo, at the same time lamenting the woeful state of the city. The first issue of that newspaper to use the name Tokyo came out on 10.9 in a notice giving details of the visit by the new emperor. He was said to have left Kyoto on 9.20 for the overland trip to ‘Tōkyō-fu’. Thereafter ‘Tokyo’ was used in place of ‘Edo’, but not without exception.<sup>60</sup>

By and large the official renaming of the city had little immediate impact on the commoners; they continued to live in Edo. The change in era names, however, affected them more directly. On 8.27 the emperor came of age; the event was considered auspicious enough to merit not only a change in the era name, from Keiō to Meiji, but an overhaul of the entire system of counting years. Thereafter there would be only one era name, which would change at the ascension of a new emperor. The new era, the era of ‘bright rule’ (Meiji 明治) began on 9.8. A mocking rhyme popular in Edo at the time laughed at the new name: ‘Read from above it may mean bright rule, but read from below, it means ungoverned by anyone [*osamarumei*].’<sup>61</sup> This pun is often interpreted to demonstrate residual pro-Tokugawa sentiment among the people of Edo. To be sure they resented being under imperial control, especially as it in effect meant under the control of boorish men from Satsuma and Chōshū. At the same time they had lost faith in the Tokugawa family. In saying, ‘We are not under the control of anyone,’ Edo commoners were expressing their contempt for any form of political authority.

Emperor Meiji left Kyoto on 9.20, accompanied by a retinue of some 2,300 persons. The trip to Edo took twenty-two days. The road was carefully renovated and bridges were repaired; peasants along the route were ordered to sprinkle water on the route to settle the dust before the young emperor passed. Upper stories of houses were closed and their windows sealed; no one was allowed to look down upon the man who was increasingly more than a man. As one foreign observer put it,

The young Mikado, closely shrouded from the vulgar gaze in the simple *norimon* which contained him, was the incarnation, not so much of the force of

<sup>60</sup> The new name did not immediately replace Edo, for there was an intermediary period when it was common to refer to the city as Tōkei. To what extent this was a form of resistance to the new government is open to question.

Ogi Shinzō 小木新造, *Tōkei Shomin Seika-*

*tsu-shi Kenkyū* 東京庶民生活史研究, Nihon Hōsō, 1979, pp. 1–23, and its abridged version, *Tōkei Jidai: Edo to Tōkyō no Hazama de* 東京時代:江戸と東京の間で, NHK Books, 1980.

<sup>61</sup> *Tōkyō Hyakunen-shi*, 2, p. 310.

matter, as of the benigner power of law, of religion, of custom, and of a *prestige* dating from antiquity so remote that its origin was lost in the Shadow of the Past, centuries before European polities emerged from it.<sup>62</sup>

The emperor, recently no more than a fairy tale to the Edo commoners, had suddenly become an omnipresent reality. He arrived at Shinagawa on 10.12; on the following morning a procession wound through the streets of the new eastern capital, approached and finally disappeared into the castle of the former shogun. Crowds of people lined the streets and bowed low as the emperor passed. And for those who could not witness the event, cheap woodblock prints were available for sale. Enterprising artists had anticipated the scene and prepared prints commemorating the event. The best description of the reception given the emperor, however, comes from the foreign press. The 2 December 1868 issue of *The Japan Times' Overland Mail* contains a long and detailed account:

All classes of Japanese, high and low, were present, most of them in holiday apparel. . . . And now a great silence fell upon the people. Far as the eye could see on either side, the roadsides were densely packed with the crouching populace . . . . And as the train had moved between them, kuges and Daimios, troops and warriors and statesmen, they had looked on in comparative quiet, a murmur of conversation in an under tone and constant slight restlessness of movement betokening the general interest. But as the Phoenix Car, with its strange crest shimmering in the sunlight and with its halo of glittering attendants, came on, circling it like the sun-rays, the people, without order or signal, turned their faces to the earth, the Foreign-Office officials, who had hitherto stood upright beside us few Europeans, sank into the same position and no man moved or spake for a space, and all seemed to hold their breath for very awe, as the mysterious Presence, on whom few are privileged to look and live, was passing slowly by.<sup>63</sup>

On 10.23, two weeks after the emperor had taken up residence in Tokyo Castle, a decree was issued that created much excitement among the populace. In order to commemorate his arrival in Tokyo, the emperor had decided to distribute *sake* throughout the city and declare a two-day holiday on the 6th and 7th of the following month.<sup>64</sup> Whose bright idea this was is not known, but the astute move proved successful in making Edo commoners sympathetic toward the cause of the new emperor. Detailed preparations were made for the huge drinking party. Early in the morning of 11.4, headmen of wards (*machi* 町) throughout Tokyo gathered at Tokyo Castle to receive the imperial *sake*. Some 2,563 barrels had been prepared as a present to the 1,592 wards.<sup>65</sup> Large

<sup>62</sup> *Japan Times' Overland Mail*, 2 December 1868.

<sup>63</sup> *Japan Times' Overland Mail*, 2 December 1868.

<sup>64</sup> *Moshiogusa*, 29, 1868.11.13, in *Bakumatsu Meiji Shimibun Zenshū*, 4, p. 352.

<sup>65</sup> Concerning the *sake* celebrations, see

Minami, *Ishin Zen'ya*, pp. 225–26; *Tōkyō Hyakunen-shi*, 2, pp. 63–65; *Edo kara Tōkyō e Tenkai*, pp. 113–15.

Documents related to the event are included in *Tōkyō Shishikō: Shigai-hen*, 50, pp. 175–202.



Asai Collection

‘The People Express Their Gratitude as They Receive the Imperial Wine.’

wards with more than a hundred households received three barrels; medium-sized wards of over fifty households received two; small wards of less than fifty households received one. In addition, each of the headmen personally received two flasks of *sake* served on a tray bearing porcelain cups and dried squid.

The next task was to transport the *sake* back to the wards and this was done with great jubilation. The barrels were placed on platforms and carried in the manner of *mikoshi*. They were decorated and large banners proclaimed in bold characters that the imperial *sake* had been bestowed on such-and-such a ward. Wearing bright yellow and red headbands, coolies paraded the *sake* through the city streets with gusto. Drums were beaten, bells were rung, and onlookers joined in the procession. Some wards even managed to enlist scores of local geisha to guide the *sake* home.

The festivities began two days later. Shops were closed for the holiday and the people used the occasion to cast off the cloud of gloom that had hung over the city throughout the year. According to a contemporary account, the merrymaking rivaled the great Sannō Festival. The streets were decorated with fresh-cut bamboo and pine, and music and dancing were performed everywhere. Sweet rice was pounded and made into *mochi* as if for the New Year. On the 8th, the empty *sake* barrels were returned to the Castle; those who accompanied this procession bowed deeply in gratitude to the imperial beneficence. A new covenant had been sealed.

*Conclusion*

The year 1868 was a time of trauma and change in Japan, and this was perhaps nowhere more keenly felt than in Edo. Historians look back and find the stuff of revolution: the end of the old feudal regime and the birth of a new centralized national state. But how did the people at that time interpret the course of events? The answer hinges on who 'the people' are. To be sure, the political elite, members of the Tokugawa and imperial side alike, had a fair idea of what was taking place. But what about the so-called common people? It is their story that this article has attempted to tell: how commoners experienced the Restoration.

We may conclude from available sources that Edo townsmen were not unaware of the nature of the political changes taking place around them. They read newspapers and broadsheets; they laughed and cried at each turn of events. They were not, however, participants in the drama. Commoners played no creative part in the Meiji Restoration; instead they were interested, witty, and above all, cynical spectators. We know that the people of Edo, the merchants, artisans, and laborers, suffered from the economic consequences of political unrest. Many left the city to seek their fortunes elsewhere; others remained behind complaining of their impoverished condition. They were grateful to whomever could restore peace and prosperity.

What, then, about their political loyalties? In this regard it is important to remember that commoners were not imbued with the same sort of political morality that was drummed into the warrior elite. The Tokugawa family had ruled over Edo for over 250 years. But it is difficult to speak of a lord-vassal relationship existing between the shogun and 'his people'. Instead, a sort of popular pragmatism governed the political allegiance of the townsmen. They were shrewd enough to bow down to anyone who provided them with the conditions necessary to keep their businesses going.

Immediately after the arrival of Commodore Perry in 1853, commoners in Edo realized that the shogun was powerless to ward off the red-haired barbarians. Gradually, as commodity prices shot up and social order decayed, a certain disenchantment with Tokugawa rule set in. By 1868 it seemed that Tokugawa Keiki had abandoned them; first, the townsmen looked to Aizu and later to the emperor for 'salvation'. They were not ideologically minded, but would give their allegiance to whomever could restore peace and prosperity.

In the final analysis, the search for commoner political consciousness and loyalties may be futile. Evidence presented in this article suggests that resignation was more common than indignation. Commoners muddled through the Restoration as best they could. There was some vague talk of 'social renovation' (*yonaoshi* 世直し). The imperial wine distributed to the people of Edo in late 1868 was commonly termed 'the wine of renovation'. But more often than not, 'renovation' for the people meant the restoration of good times. It meant good money, good work, good food, and good fun.



Asai Collection

‘Tradespeople Offer Their Prayers to Prince Shōtoku.’

A print published in Edo at the end of 1868, after the emperor had arrived and the city had been renamed, demonstrates the daily-life concerns of the commoners in a situation that later historians have termed revolutionary. Commoners of all occupations send up their prayers to the emperor (represented by Prince Shōtoku) floating above them in the clouds. By the end of 1868 political and economic stability was, to some extent, secured; the civil war was nearly over and the new imperial regime seemed as if it would succeed. For Edo commoners, the worst was over. What, then, were the prayers on their lips?

A young worker in a lumber yard wants ‘a bellyfull of *tempura* and dumplings’. The wife of a tile-maker wants her laziness cured and some good clothes. A woodworker wants to improve his skill, but also wants a chance to go out and have a good time eating and drinking. A stone-mason complains that his son drinks too much and prays that the boy may lose his love of *sake* and work harder at the family’s business. Another shopkeeper wants to escape his debts, while a day laborer simply wants work: ‘I want to be so busy that my eyes will go around.’ The carpenter in the center also wants work, while the plasterer to his left wants to get rich and live the good life. A woodcutter wants sharp saws to make his work easier; he also wants a bride who will take care of him and save money. A maid wants to stuff herself with sweet potatoes and eggplants. A mother wants her son to lose his good looks so that the neighborhood girls will not keep him from his work. Finally, the daughter of a hardware shop wants her father to drink less (‘He drinks for three or four days in a row and we can’t get any work done at all’); she also wants a new kimono and a chance to go flower-viewing.

How was it to be a commoner at the time of the Restoration? It is hazardous to make generalizations, but most men and women responded with remarkable resilience to a year filled with an extraordinary amount of hardship and trouble. Edo townsmen were aware that a political revolution had taken place; their major concern, however, was to make the best of a difficult situation. The restoration of the emperor meant simply that the shogun was no more and prayers had to be directed to a new lord. The contents of those prayers, as shown in the print above, remained basically unchanged: a chance to work hard, prosper, and enjoy life.