

Shōbōdan

An ethnographic history of Japan's
community fire brigades

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Dedicated to the men and women of the
Shimosuwa Municipal Fire Brigade

下諏訪町消防団

in memory of
Professor Aruga Kizaemon

有賀喜左衛門

(1897-1979)

Shōbōdan: An ethnographic history of Japan's community fire brigades

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Abstract: This thesis describes Japan's modern system of community fire brigades, a federated civilian paramilitary organization dedicated to localized fire prevention and response with a current active membership of over 800,000 men and women. Auxiliary firefighting institutions in Japan have had comparatively high rates of participation vis-à-vis those of other nations, but are now facing acute recruitment difficulties in the face of increased competition from alternative venues for civic engagement since the mid-1990s. This suggests both the tractability of civil society as an extra-statal sphere of institutionalized social organization as well as the inherent pluralism of its vernacular expression.

I demonstrate that the nationalization of the fire brigade system in 1894 was predicated on the existence of an autonomous and normative sphere of age-graded practices of inter-household mutual aid in the villages of Tokugawa Japan. The gradual absorption and redirection of these practices into the nation-building projects of the Meiji state and its successors realized the creation of a functional emergency service organ with universal penetration at minimal expense. Nevertheless, drawing on Maurice Bloch's theory of rebounding violence, I argue that the secular rituals and state symbolism used to achieve this encompassment have conferred a legacy of structural ambivalence between civility and uncivility that continues to inform perceptions and representations of the brigade in public discourse. It follows that the phenomenon of organizational aging and questions of recruitment and succession should be seen as ideological in nature, rather than as simple indices of wider demographics or social transformation.

This thesis is based on data collected during twenty months of research in Japan between 2008 and 2010, including eleven months of continuous participant observation with a brigade in Suwa District, Nagano Prefecture. Extensive ethnographic interviews with local firefighters, community members, and town officials are supplemented with data from both primary and secondary historical sources, as well as online discussion forums. This thesis contributes to the literature on local voluntarism in Japan, as well as to the wider anthropological project of documenting non-western models of civil society.

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NOTES ON STYLE

Language

Japanese terms are italicized throughout the thesis. Romanization follows the modified Hepburn system favoured by *Kenkyūsha's New Japanese–English Dictionary*, in which macrons (e.g., ō, ū) indicate long vowel sounds. Diacritics are not used, however, in place names that will be familiar to English readers (e.g. Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto). Proper names are not italicized, nor are Japanese terms that have been adopted into English usage (e.g., sushi, tsunami, samurai). Loan-words or native Japanese terms based on the creative adaptation of English terms are italicized, rather than transliterated, to indicate the term's marked use in Japanese—thus '*salary man*' rather than '*sararīman* (salary man)' and '*club*' rather than '*kurabu* (club)'.

Where a Japanese term is followed by a parenthetical explanation or literal English translation, this generally indicates that the term denotes a culture-bound concept not easily glossed into English. In such cases, the italicized Japanese term will be used consistently thereafter, with no further elaboration. Conversely, where an English term is followed by the Japanese term in parentheses, the latter is included simply as a contextual aid to readers familiar with Japanese.

All translations from Japanese to English are my own unless otherwise indicated.

Names

Japanese names and pseudonyms are written in the traditional order, with the given name following the surname (though for some Japanese scholars publishing in English, the Western convention is used). I have used the proper name for the town of Shimosuwa, as it is clearly identifiable as the seat of the Suwa Shrines of Akimiya and Harumiya. I have used pseudonyms for the proper names of businesses and individuals where necessary.

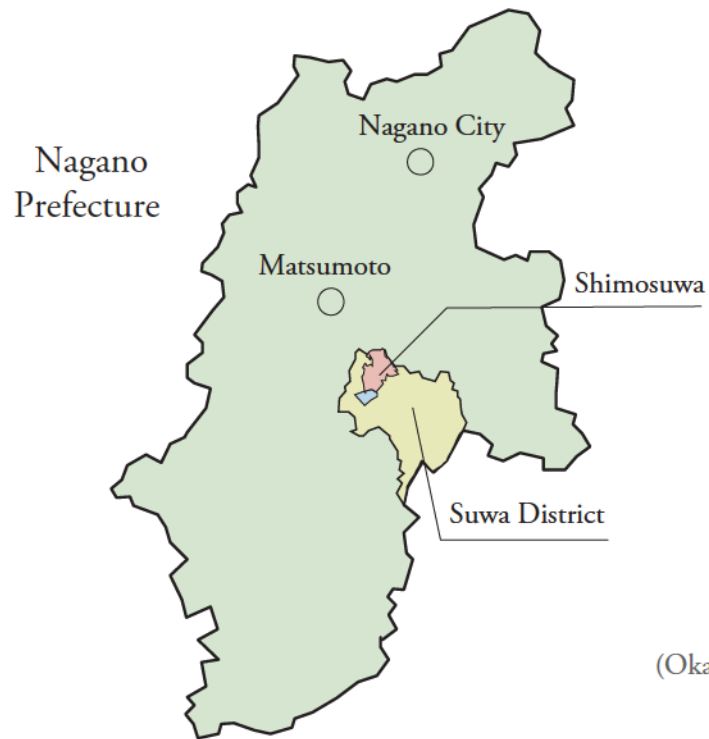
Dates

In the thesis, a few dates (written as 'year/month/day') refer to the lunisolar calendar used until Japan's adoption of the Gregorian calendar in 1873. A rule of thumb for understanding the seasonal context of such dates is to add a month (thus the old New Year began on 1 February of the modern calendar). Historical periods correspond to the spans listed in the table below (all years refer to the Common Era, unless specified otherwise). Finally, centuries are numbered in accordance with western practice.

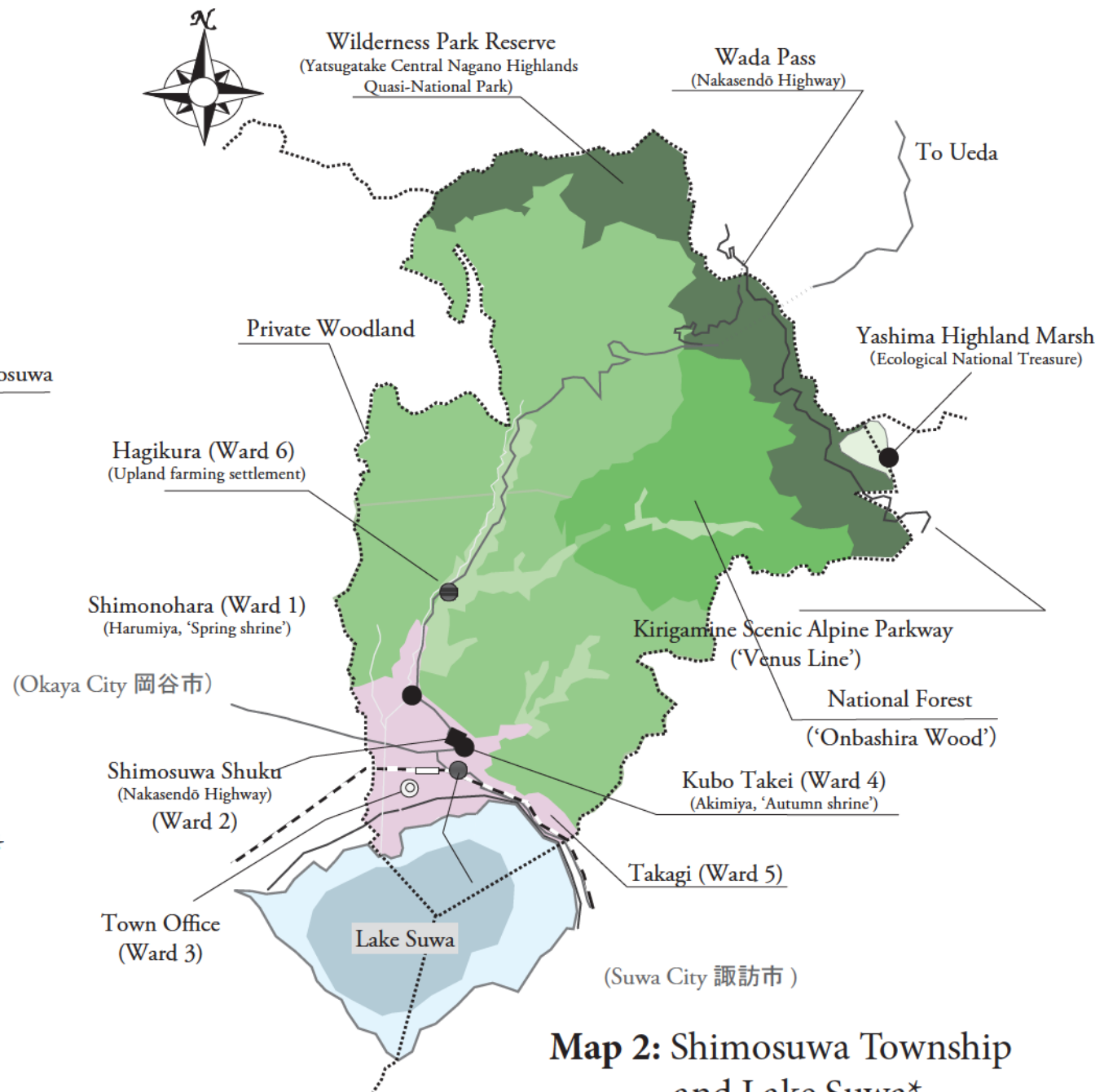
Table 0: Japanese historical periods

English gloss	Japanese Period Name		Dates*
Primitive	Pre-Jōmon		To circa 13,000 BCE
Prehistoric	Jōmon		c. 13,000–900/300 BCE
	Yayoi		c. 900/300 BCE–c. 250
Antiquity	Kofun		c. 250–c. 350
	Yamato		c. 350–593
Ancient	Asuka		593–645
	Hakuhō		645–710
	Nara		710–794
Classical	Heian		794–1185
Middle ages / Medieval	Kamakura Shogunate		1185–1333
	Kenmu Restoration		1333–1336
	Muromachi	Nanbokuchō	1336–1392
		Ashikaga Shogunate	1392–1467
		Sengoku/Warring States	1467–1573
Early modern	Azuchi (Oda Nobunaga)		1573–1582
	Momoyama (Toyotomi Hideyoshi)		1582–1598
	Edo (Tokugawa Shogunate)		1600–1868
Modern	Meiji		1868–1912
	Taishō		1912–1926
	Early Shōwa		1926–1945
Contemporary	Late Shōwa		1945–1989
	Heisei		1989–Present

*Transitional dates prior to 593 CE refer to the appearance of cultural strata in the archaeological record, rather than historical events, and may vary by geographical region. Otherwise, this table is adapted from the chronology used by Carl Steenstrup (1991: 192-95).



Map 1: Town of Shimosuwa, Suwa District, Nagano Prefecture*



Map 2: Shimosuwa Township and Lake Suwa*

*Maps 1 and 2 adapted from Hara (2004: 93)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a basic truth of scholarship that the contributions of informants, colleagues, teachers, and ancestors are an enabling condition. The substantial debts I have accumulated during the conceptualization and writing of this thesis can hardly therefore come as a surprise to its readers. Less startling still will be my admission that it could not have been completed through my own powers alone.

It has become *de rigueur* in ethnographic practice to replace the traditional term ‘informant’ (‘unfortunate word,’ wrote Evans-Pritchard) with more felicitous alternatives such as ‘interlocutor’ and ‘partner’, such words seeming, no doubt, to be more egalitarian and less freighted with nuances of duplicity or traitorousness. I remain a traditionalist, however, out of a sense that there is something inherently misguided in this tendency. For all its admirable ambition to redress the alleged sins of older, ‘unreflexive’ ethnography, I cannot sway the niggling suspicion that it risks accomplishing the opposite. Put simply, such terms serve implicitly to arrogate the foreign anthropologist to a level of cultural fluency simply not credible in a relative newcomer. The ethnographic method is not to be reconciled with the Socratic. While I will grant that career of sustained critical dialogue and participation within a given culture may bring the rewards of facility, I am too keenly aware of my own remaining shortcomings to consider myself the equal of my informants in any sense other than philosophical. Eschewing interlocution a later, happy date, I prefer instead to indulge an older sense of the term ‘informant’, as listed in the Oxford English Dictionary, as that ‘animating or vitalizing force’ which inspires (informs) the character of its object.

My foremost debt, then, is to my informants, in particular to the members of Shimosuwa’s Municipal Fire Brigade. Without the generosity of spirit, insight, humour, and—most valuably—time shown to me by this group, this text could not have taken the form that it has. Not only would my writing and thinking, but my very being would be diminished without them. It is to these men and women and their families that this thesis is dedicated, in hopes that they forgive me for having written their history in words not their own. I owe thanks to too many others in Shimosuwa to name individually, but special thanks are due to the Oguchis (all and sundry), the Kasais, the Yazakis, and the Morozumis, as well as to the residents, shopkeepers, and volunteers of the Mitamachi neighbourhood as a whole. I am thankful for hospitality and friendship from many outside Shimosuwa—I cannot forget Morozumi Shuji,

Mitsuyasu and Mayu, the Uchidas, the Hiranos, the Uekanes, or Mukoyama Michiyo—but I know that I will forever count Shimosuwa as my *dai ni furusato*. I will never repay Shigeru Kobayashi the debt I owe to him for his invitation there.

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1 INTRODUCTION: BURNING QUESTIONS

Firemen's Association.— Most *buraku* [hamlets] have a firemen's association and a fire pump run by hand. One man between twenty-five and forty from each house is a member. Their duty is to extinguish fires and to help in time of flood or crime. They are united into a village organization and, when on duty, all wear special caps and coats. They are organized into *buraku* groups each with its own head, and these groups in turn are organized into a village division with head, vice-head, and treasurer, quite unlike the native *kumi* [horizontal association] system, which has no chiefs. The village organizations are united into a national one, headed by some prince as honorary president. This official organization of firemen is a new thing. Formerly the young men from twenty-five to forty of the *mura* [village] were all volunteer firemen, and there was no separate firemen's organization.

[...] In daily life and informal associations [official] societies as such play practically no part at all. [Yet,] as a means of increasing national unity, they form part of the national policy, and, if the government and school should cease to encourage them, they would die a natural death.

—John F. Embree, *Suye Mura: A Japanese Village* (1939: 169-170)

1.1 Studying the *shōbōdan*

Few observers of Japanese society are strangers to the *shōbōdan*, Japan's national organization of community fire brigades—localized, semi-voluntary community associations tasked with responding to outbreaks of fire and other natural disasters in aid of public safety. Under a succession of names and political regimes, the brigade organization has been a near-universal element of local governance in Japan since the late nineteenth century, when its establishment in every village, town, and city throughout the rapidly modernizing Japan of the Meiji period was mandated by imperial proclamation.

One of the earliest introductions of the brigade to a Western academic readership was that given by John F. Embree, in his pioneering ethnography of the institutional structure of the Japanese community of *Suye Mura* (1939). Embree's summary of the brigade situates the organization within the social fabric of rural Japanese society, concisely identifying what he saw to be the organization's core elements: (1) a segmentary territoriality; (2) an age-graded, gendered, and hierarchical structure; (3) a symbolic costume; and (4) its instrumentality to and interdependence within the political infrastructure of a centralized state. Embree's ethnography, based on fieldwork carried out in partnership with his wife Ella in 1935-36, admirably captures the experience of village life at a singularly important moment in Japanese and global history, against the tumultuous backdrop of Japan's militaristic expansion and escalating conflict with China. Yet, while the imperial state of the 1930s that the Embrees documented has all but disappeared in the intervening three-quarters of a century,¹ his summary of the Suye fire brigade retains a curious familiarity to students of Japanese community life. With the qualification that women are now welcome as members, it could plausibly be reprinted as a current summary of the organizational form and popular image of the brigade. No doubt this is due to some extent to Embree's synchronic and ahistorical descriptions,

¹ In addition to the publication of Ella Embree's field notes almost fifty years after her initial fieldwork with her late husband (Smith and Wiswell 1982), readers interested in a longitudinal perspective on Suye Mura may consult the restudies in Japanese by Ushijima (1971, 1988; cf. the English-language review by Befu 1972), as well as a retrospective article by Wiswell (1988).

characteristic of the structural-functionalist paradigm of which his advisor and mentor, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, was a leading exponent. Yet, that this structural longevity has seemingly given the lie to Embree's qualified prediction of the organization's demise presents an interesting social and historical puzzle.

This thesis is an historical ethnography of Japan's community fire brigade system. In it, I seek to situate the organization within the changing social and symbolic structures characteristic of Japanese modernity, from the late nineteenth century to the present day. This approach contrasts with the usual characterization of the brigade in the ethnography of Japan, in which it has largely been positioned as an unchanging institutional expression of communal solidarity. Approaching the brigade through the individual motivations and experiences of its members, I hold that Embree was incorrect to argue that the 'official society' of the fire brigade played 'practically no part at all' in everyday community life. In contrast, I argue that the brigade system, which locates community members at the interface of national and local visions of moral accountability and national modernity, has been a symbolic exemplar of how Japanese citizens have understood the role of the state in society. Based on my own participant observation as a member of a brigade in a provincial Japanese town, as well as on archival and secondary historical sources, I examine how the brigade has acted as a site for the reproduction and expression of cultural norms of individual and collective responsibility.

Whereas contemporaries of Embree may have dismissed the fire brigade as too narrow a focus for dedicated anthropological study, the ethnography of organizational contexts is by now well established within anthropological tradition in general (Gellner and Hirsch 2001), and within the anthropology of complex modern societies in particular. Within the Japanese context, however, such studies have largely been situated in urban settings, rather than the countryside, and have tended to focus on the institutional experience of the workplace or school. In this context, a study of the fire brigade—a nationwide common-interest organization which, while not foreign to contemporary urban neighbourhood life, is considerably more active in rural areas—might be said to address a lacuna in the ethnographic record. What makes the brigade specifically significant for anthropological study, however, is that it offers a remarkable opportunity for examining the changing significance of representations of the state, society, and individual over an extended period. The organization's longevity, its roots in the pre-modern and age-graded social structures of generalized communal reciprocity, its modern relationship with the state, and its contemporary relevance to discourses of civil society, disaster safety, and the social reproduction of ageing communities position it at the nexus of several overlapping areas of disciplinary interest.

By narrowing the scope of analysis to the level of the organization, and examining it in comparative and historical perspective, two distinct puzzles emerge.

The first of these arises from comparatively high rates of participation in the brigade, relative to the circumstances that engender its necessity. Measured at the national level, per capita participation in Japan's auxiliary fire service is one of the highest in the world. Such comparative prominence notwithstanding, however, these rates have been in almost continuous decline since organizational reforms following the Second World War. This is hardly surprising, given the extensive technological modernization, infrastructural investment, and social changes which have marked Japan's post-war history. Yet, in the face of recent trends, its persistence suggests a second puzzle. Since the mid-1990s, in large part as a result of increasing public scepticism in the state's ability and competence to secure social welfare, but also in keeping with global neoliberal trends, Japanese public discourse has reflected a surge of interest in the burgeoning of an indigenous 'civil society'—the spontaneous engagement of Japanese citizens in new forms of civic participation. Understanding these apparent paradoxes requires a sustained organizational ethnography of the brigade that has heretofore been absent.

Before exploring these paradoxes, I will make a brief note concerning my choice of terminology. American and British authors tend to gloss the Japanese term *shōbōdan* in their respective vernaculars as either 'volunteer fire departments' or 'fire brigades'. Faced with this choice, my inclination has been to follow a slight modification of British usage, and I use 'community fire brigade' to refer to the

organization throughout this thesis.² To my mind, the word ‘brigade’ (from the Latin *briga*—‘strife’, ‘contention’) more accurately connotes the paramilitary hierarchy and occasionally pugnacious reputation of its members. The qualifier ‘community’, in turn, avoids what I consider to be a problematic usage of the word ‘volunteer’ (discussed below) in distinguishing the organization from the professional fire service, while simultaneously alluding to the social and territorial embeddedness of the organization (its membership being drawn from exclusive, contiguous residential areas).

1.2 First puzzle: auxiliary fire services in comparative perspective

At first glance, the significance of the *shōbōdan* lies in their sheer ubiquity. Volunteer and part-time auxiliaries are an essential component of fire service provision in most modern nation-states, and Japan’s community firefighter brigades represent but one expression of this organizational necessity. However, it is also true that Japan’s auxiliary fire service has one of the highest participation rates worldwide, surpassed, perhaps, only by that of Germany (see Figure 1). As of October 2009, over 850,000 men and almost 20,000 women between the ages of 18 and 54 were active members in brigades in almost every municipality nationwide. Given the gradual decline in

² Embree’s direct translation of the pre-war term *shōbō-gumi* as ‘firemen’s association’ is another option, but is problematic in that it smuggles into English a categorical confusion, inherent in the older term, between the vertically hierarchical firefighting group and the (ideally) horizontal distributed authority structure of the egalitarian village (cf. Fukutake 1972). I use ‘community fire brigade’ to gloss both the pre-war *shōbō-gumi* (lit. ‘fire-defence association’) and the postwar *shōbōdan* (lit. ‘fire-defence corps’), trusting the distinction—of which more below—to be made clear in the context of discussion.

membership that has taken place over the past three decades, it can be safely assumed that brigade veterans make up an equivalent (if not greater) proportion of older Japanese men.³ A conservative estimate, therefore, of the number of Japanese citizens with brigade experience (*shōbō keikensha*) would be approximately 1.6 million—or between three and four per cent of the adult Japanese male population.

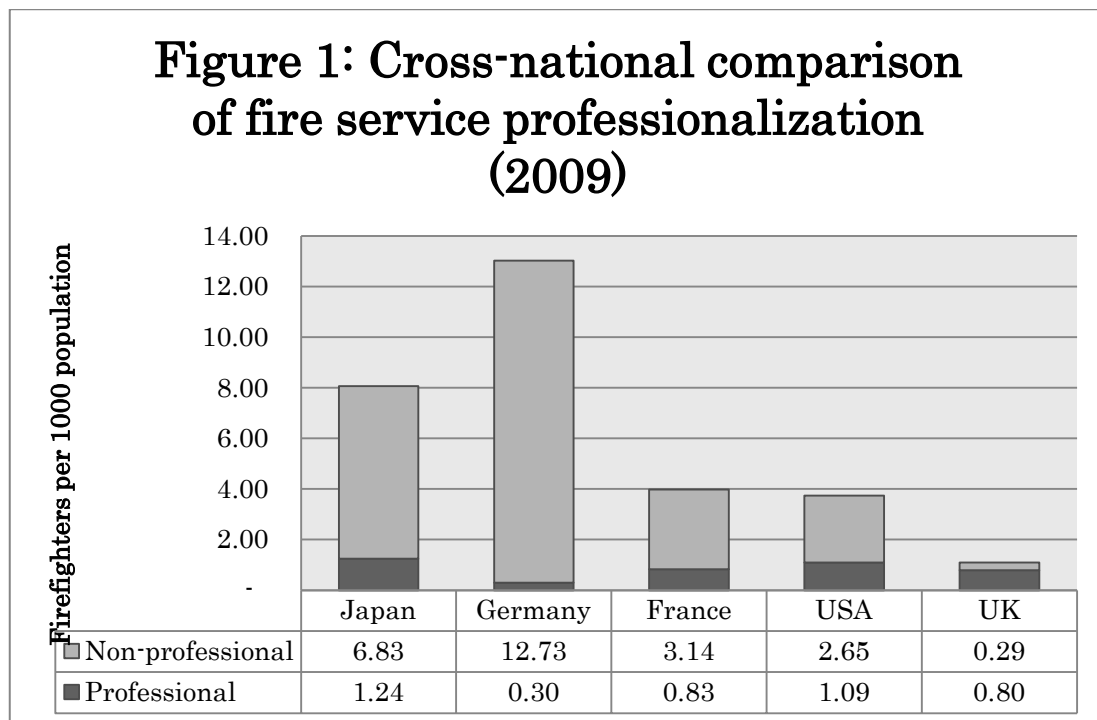


Figure 1: See Appendix 1 for data sources.

Even so, such participation pales in comparison to those of the German Voluntary Fire Brigade, the *Freiwillige Feuerwehr* (of which we will see more below). What sets

³ Although the prescription that brigade members be ‘boys of eighteen years or older’ (*18-sai ijō no danshi*) characterized the official policy for the pre-war organization, women often made up brigades in remote, coastal villages when young men were occupied with seasonal fishing. Such gendered language was stricken from the organization’s postwar regulations, established in 1947, though women have only ever represented a small minority of the national membership. In March of 1988, in part to bolster declining participation rates, the Japan Firefighter Association set a goal of enlisting 100,000 women as brigade members. In 1990, the first year women were included in the brigade’s annual statistics registry, 1,923 women members. By 2008, this number had risen to only 16,699, representing approximately two percent of the total national recorded membership (Gotō 2006: 84-89).

Japan apart, however, is the disjuncture between service provision and actual incidence of fire (the at least nominal *raison d'être* of such organizations), a perhaps surprising fact which runs counter to many popular preconceptions about Japan, a nation famous for its fires.

Early modern travellers' accounts popularized the image of Japan as what the Irish-American journalist Lafcadio Hearn called a 'country of conflagrations' (1894: 9). 'Oh!' exclaimed a practically minded American acquaintance of Hearn's on the subject of the Japanese, 'Those people can afford fires; their houses are so cheaply built' (ibid.). Several decades earlier, at the dawn of Japan's Meiji period, the British military attaché Jacob Silver had offered similar description of Japanese architecture. 'The majority of the houses are constructed of wood', he wrote, 'and such dangerous articles as paper-lanterns, small charcoal fireboxes, and movable open stoves, for household purposes, are in common use' (Silver 1867: 6). Contemporary observers noted how fires, 'the flowers of Edo' according to popular adage, regularly swept through the shogunate's capital during the cold, dry winters, and routinely wiped out smaller cities and villages by the half or whole (Bird 1888: 145, 218). 'The townspeople generally calculate on being burnt out once in every seven years', wrote Silver, adding with approval that 'whenever this calamity falls upon them, no time is lost in rebuilding' (1867: 8). Even at the end of the Meiji period, a foreign observer could still marvel at how 'the imagination is caught by the fact that [...] within a

twelvemonth fires destroy 400 acres or so of buildings' (Robertson Scott 1922). In the mind's eye of an interested foreign readership, Japan must have seemed a civilization both inflammable and ephemeral, perpetually poised to go up in flames.

More recently, during the twentieth century, the city of Tokyo was twice razed—first, following the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, and again in 1945, as a result of military firebombing towards the end of the Second World War. In the course of the nation's repeated phoenix-like recoveries from these and other disasters, a new Japan has emerged—paper, wood, and thatch have given way to glistening steel, glass, and concrete. Yet despite this extended process of change and reconstruction, the vision of Japan as a tinderbox nation remains resilient.

A survey of fire statistics from a selection of other nations, however, shows that this vision of Japan's comparative peril, however justified in the past, is no longer accurate. In 2009, emergency response teams in the United Kingdom (whose population is slightly under half that of Japan's) were dispatched to over six times as many fires as reported for the same year by Japan's Fire and Disaster Management Agency (FDMA) (Table 1).

Table 1: Cross-national comparison of fire service data from Japan, Germany, France, USA, and the United Kingdom, 2009

Country	Firefighters: Professional		Non-Professional		Annual reported fires	
	<i>n</i>	(per 1000 population)	<i>n</i>	(per 1000 population)	<i>n</i>	(per 1000 population)
Japan	158,327	1.24	870,783	6.83	51,124	0.40
Germany	24,320	0.30	1,041,978	12.73	196,713	2.40
France*	52,200	0.83	196,800	3.14	343,300	5.48
USA	335,950	1.09	812,150	2.65	1,348,500	4.39
UK†	49,200	0.80	18,200	0.29	325,000	5.26

*French professional fire services total includes soldiers ($n=12,100$)

†British firefighters as of 31 March 2008; fires from April 2008 to March 2009

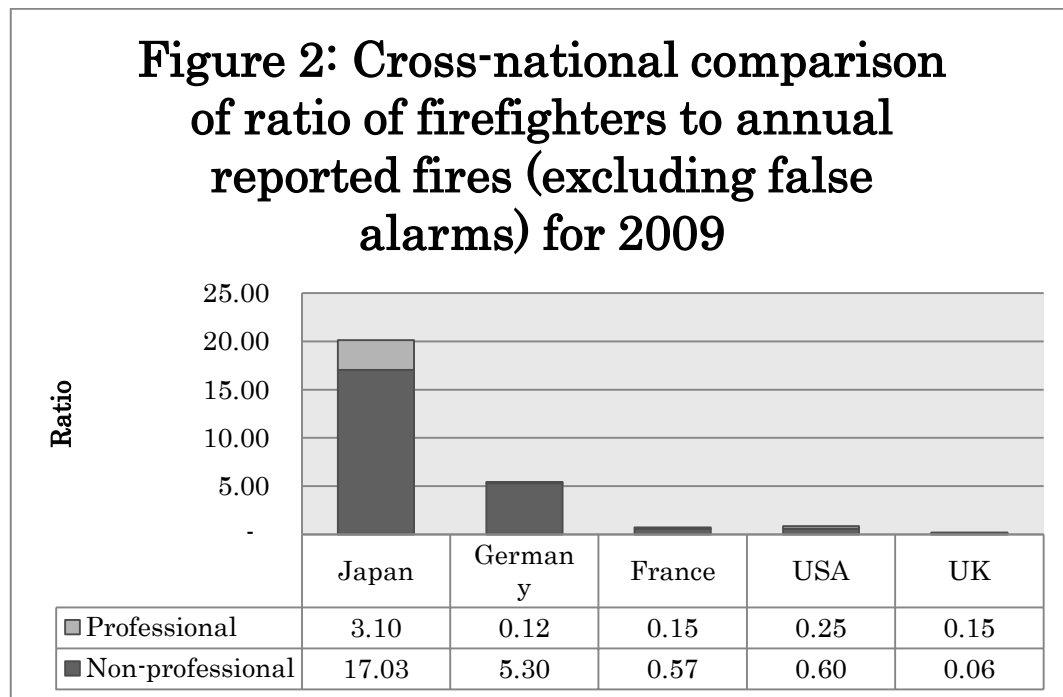


Figure 2: See Appendix 1 for data sources.

In addition, on a population-adjusted basis, not only were Japan's professional fire services half again better staffed than their British counterparts, they were assisted by almost twenty-four times as many part-time auxiliary volunteers. In terms of the ratio of fire services provision to actual incidence of fire for 2009, Japan exceeded that of Britain by a factor of almost one hundred. Admittedly, this is a

crude yardstick, and there are significant issues with the commensurability of such data. Nevertheless, given even an extremely tolerant margin for error it remains the case that Japan's fire service appears remarkably overstaffed in comparison to most other countries (see above, Figure 2).

1.2.1 Existing approaches

An in-depth comparative analysis of these phenomena is the subject of a recent study by a comparative political scientist, Mary Alice Haddad (2007), whose work stands alone as a focussed treatment of the Japanese brigade system within English-language scholarship (cf. also Haddad 2010).⁴ Haddad's political study of community fire brigades⁵ is positioned as a contribution to a growing political science literature on Japan's civil society, defined as an intermediary sphere of social relations conceptually situated between the family and the state. Haddad further qualifies this definition of civil society as being a sphere populated by organizations that 'pursue neither profit within the market nor power within the state as their primary mission' (2007: 20). This definition closely follows that used by other political scientists interested in Japanese civil society (e.g. Schwartz and Pharr 2003; Osborne 2003; Pekkanen 2006).

⁴ In Japanese, the sociologist Gotō Ichizō has written several books on the *shōbōdan* for the popular market (e.g. 2001; 2006, both published by Kindai Shōbōsha, the in-house publishers of the Japan Firefighters' Association). Despite a wealth of empirical detail, however, Gotō's scholarship is compromised by an uncritical idealism, occasionally leading him into an elegiac mode which combines the 'unsung hero' rhetoric common to firefighting memoirs (such as those written about the efforts of New York firefighters in the wake of 9/11), with a nostalgia for the rural idyll of the traditional Japanese hamlet characteristic of a certain genre of writing on Japanese society (e.g. Watanabe 1989).

⁵ Haddad, like other US-based writers, retains the North American English nomenclature of 'volunteer fire department'.

Haddad's critical contribution is to extend the analytical category of civil society to include civic organizations that exist in an 'embedded' relationship with the state. As characterized by Haddad, such organizations further their goals primarily through cooperative (and often institutionalized) relationships with state bureaucracies, rather than through the more confrontational arenas of courts and legislation—strategies favoured by the 'activist' groups more traditionally studied by civil society analysts. Auxiliary firefighting organizations, legally mandated but staffed by volunteers, are in this sense perhaps the *ne plus ultra* of embedded organizations (Japan's welfare commissioner system and parent-teacher organizations are cited as other notable examples). In this way, Haddad's formulation, while not entirely without precedent in studies of the voluntary sector in Japan,⁶ acknowledges how state practices and institutions affect the non-state sphere. This provides a useful analytical heuristic that takes into account existing concerns often raised by historians and anthropologists over the instrumental and constructed nature of the state-society boundary (e.g. Knight 1996; Garon 2003; cf. also Mitchell 1999).

The concept of civil society is discussed in more detail in the next section, and Haddad's historical account of the brigades is revisited in Chapter 4, which complements and develops the background to her study of the brigade's post-war

⁶ This characterization is similar to Masayuki Deguchi's (2001) distinction between 'institutionalized' and 'non-institutionalized' non-profit organizations.

development (2010). However, as her comparative argument is inspired by the same puzzling phenomenon under discussion here—Japan’s comparatively high proportion of auxiliary firefighters—a brief summary of her theory and method is in order.

One of Haddad’s chief theoretical aims is to understand differences in patterns of volunteerism whose institutional and demographic contexts are otherwise similar: i.e. ‘why different communities volunteer for different types of organizations at different rates’ (2007: 108). To that end, she develops a predictive model comprised of ideological and practical dimensions. The ideological dimension predicts the substantive content of volunteering practice. Perceptions of the appropriate distribution of responsibility for communal welfare between the institutional poles of state and society—what Haddad calls ‘norms of civic responsibility’—determine the type of civic organizations in which citizens choose to volunteer. Where state interventionism is considered more appropriate than spontaneous civic activism, volunteers are predicted to favour ‘embedded’ organizations, and vice versa. The model’s practical dimension informs the degree to which participation will occur: membership rates will be positively correlated to institutional practices of legitimation, organization, and funding by community and state institutions. These practices, in turn, will serve to either reify or weaken

ideological norms, creating a feedback mechanism that provides the model with a dynamic element that can be used to predict changes in volunteering behaviour.

Comparing the model's predictions with data derived from first-hand interviews and statistical sources, Haddad analyses volunteering patterns in three Japanese cities that share similar demographic characteristics (Sakata, Kashihara, and Sanda) and four nation-states (Japan, Turkey, Finland, and the USA), drawing on interview-based fieldwork data (in the city analysis) and national and international survey data (in the international comparison). In each case, Haddad is able to demonstrate that the patterns of norms and practices predicted by the model are present, and uses it to predict future developments in the volunteering experience of each context.

I am not concerned here with the relative merits of Haddad's model, which in any case reflects an essentially affirmative thesis against which objections are not easily raised.⁷ While I sympathize with the ambitions of her comparative approach, my purpose in laying out her argument is to clarify our methodological differences, since the specificity of our empirical interests will naturally invite comparisons from interested readers. To the extent that our respective disciplinary approaches diverge,

⁷ Indeed, to the extent that people volunteer at all, it is difficult to disagree with the statement that where people feel the state has a duty to address society's problems, they will assist its social support activities to the extent that they are encouraged to do so. Long ago, remarking on the sociological ambitions of Radcliffe-Brown, Alfred Kroeber lamented over 'the old dilemma of the sociologist: that by the time he finds a formula that no one can cite exceptions to, it has become so essentially logical, so remote from phenomena, that no one knows precisely what to do with it' (Kroeber 1935: 561).

this topical overlap should be seen as an opportunity to complement and strengthen the understanding of the fire brigade. Nevertheless, while our observations quite often agree at a superficial level, our conclusions differ significantly. In the interests of clarifying the distinctiveness of our interpretations, then, I briefly critique what I see to be a problematic inconsistency in her methodological approach.

One of Haddad's stated goals is to transcend the explanatory primacy given to demographic and institutional constraints in the analysis of volunteering behaviour—a bias she maintains to have been characteristic of earlier studies within political science. Implicitly, this is a call for the recognition of agency, which is a worthy goal, but which her analysis only goes halfway to achieving. In the perspective afforded by her model, we are told, 'volunteering is no longer just the passive result of demographic characteristics; *civic leadership and governmental planning can have a profound and positive influence on volunteer participation*' (130, my emphasis). Agency here would appear to remain limited to the sphere of institutional and charismatic practice, while norms of civic responsibility apparently remain the determining factor at the level of volunteer participation. This seems to be an artefact of the author's decision to discount individual motivation. In Haddad's analysis, 'volunteers' constitute an abstract analytical category subsuming anyone engaged in a service-based activity, without (significant) compensation, and without being required to do so by law (26). Although she defends this sacrifice of inner belief on

the grounds of ensuring the cross-national comparability, Haddad's is not the perspective of a rational choice theorist. Rather, it is precisely the rejection of methodological individualism, she argues, which justifies this decision ('it is important not to privilege individualistic motivations for participation over social motivations because certain kinds of motivations are likely to be more prevalent in different cultural contexts' (27)). Admittedly, inner motivations are difficult (though perhaps not, as she contends, impossible) to assess, but I would point out that one can hardly reject individual motivations on the grounds that they might be affected by cultural norms, while simultaneously arguing for the explanatory status of political norms.⁸ However they are defined, norms of civic responsibility (known to students of Durkheimian sociology as 'social facts') are surely as much a matter of inner belief as external constraint.⁹

In contrast to Haddad's study, my thesis is premised on the anthropologist's dictum that the one proper foundation of comparative study is the precise, intimate,

⁸ Haddad's repeated insistence that 'historical, institutional, cultural, [and] economic contexts' matter 'only insofar as they affect the variables specified by the model' (132) can thus be seen to be less an analytical strategy than a simple instance of moving the goal posts. This explains how she seems to be continually caught offside, prefacing each application of the model with the proviso that 'attitudes can be traced to their historical situations' (138, 143, 150, 156).

⁹ In Durkheim's definition, 'a social fact is a way of acting, whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint; [or] which is general over the whole of a given society while having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations' (1982: 59). Durkheim's student and collaborator Paul Fauconnet recognized that a given community's norms, or 'rules', of responsibility ('*règles de responsabilité*') were a prime example of such. 'Rules and judgements of responsibility are clearly facts: they fall under observation; we may describe them, relate them, situate them, and date them. They are assuredly *social facts*' (Fauconnet 1928: 3, my translation, original emphasis).

and (when possible) long-term study of the objects of its focus. While the exigencies of political science may preclude such methodologies, anthropologists have long understood the dangers of being too quick to compare superficially congruent practices which might have quite meaningful differences within their indigenous social contexts (Strathern 1987). In the context of the comparative study of civil society (however defined), I suggest, a necessary first step is the essentially ethnographic project of understanding the particular social, cultural, and historical contexts of the development of its constituent organizations, so as to thereby understand their significance in the communities and lived experience of their constituent members.

Any analytical approach that places the social frameworks which shape and enable individual agency beyond culture and history will be impotent to describe the processes of change that are very much a part of Japan's civil society. In contrast, a methodological premise of the present study is the anthropologist's article of faith that long-term, first-hand fieldwork enables the ethnographer to gain a situated and embodied understanding of social action not only as practiced, but also as understood in local discourse, 'from the native's point of view'. The next section discusses how historicized ethnography might go some way to explaining the current situation of Japan's community fire brigade.

1.2.2 An alternative: ethnographic history

My misgivings about Haddad's methodology notwithstanding, a discrepancy she identifies between her cross-analysis of volunteering patterns and values surveys and what would otherwise be predicted by the hypotheses that underlie her model offers an opportunity to illustrate the benefits of an ethnographic approach. Haddad notes that while German civic norms tend strongly towards belief in individual responsibility in contrast to Japan, where her data suggests people have traditionally favoured state intervention in society, patterns of volunteering between the two nations are broadly similar (2007: 53; cf. Table 1 above).

Although there has been very little discussion in English about the voluntary fire brigades of Germany and Austria, the *Freiwillige Feuerwehr* (FFW), a notable exception is Andre Gingrich's (2006) discussion of this organization in the context of European rightist politics. Gingrich, an anthropologist, notes that the FFW enjoy a strong position of social influence in German-speaking central Europe's more rural (and politically conservative) areas, where their membership often overlaps significantly with Veterans' Unions (*Kameradschaftsbund*). In his analysis, Gingrich is primarily interested in the themes of masculinity and charismatic leadership, and their intersection with neo-nationalist political idiom, and so with democratic governance and globalization. These themes are expressed in the language and behaviour characteristic of the 'rhetorical and semantic contexts of brave alertness, determined resistance and heroic commitment' in ritual occasions staged by such

groups (203). Gingrich's observations in Austria resonate to some degree with my own experience of the *shōbōdan* in Japan, where brigade membership is similarly marked by a strong social and political conservatism. The important point here, however, is to note that both Gingrich and Haddad, while practitioners of different disciplines, share an interest in the ways in which local ideology and practice are mutually implicated in political life of the state.

Likewise, a historically engaged approach to research indicates another source of potential influence that may go some way to explaining the similarities between patterns of volunteering Haddad identifies in Germany and Japan, namely the circulation of knowledge between Japan and Prussia during the late nineteenth century. The restructuring of the Japanese state system in the Meiji period, which followed the Prussian model, was guided by the dualistic principle of local self-government co-ordinated by a centralized and powerful bureaucracy. As a part of this process, Japanese officials travelled to Europe to observe first-hand the practices of statecraft and governance, while foreign advisors were hired to assist in the education and training of bureaucrats and public servants in Japan. The Prussian police officials who served as foreign instructors in Tokyo's Police Training School during the 1880s and 1890s were directly involved in the establishment and organization of Japan's national firefighting system (see Chapter 3).

While an in-depth comparative study of the German and Japanese firefighters is beyond the scope of this project, the above discussion should be sufficient to suggest that historicized, ethnographically situated knowledge is an important precursor to the meaningful comparative study of organizations. My approach to understanding Japan's community fire brigades takes its inspiration in part from Gingrich's reflection that the German associations 'deserve detailed ethnographies of their own that remain to be written' (2006: 202).

1.2.3 Volunteering in context

Scholars interested in the civil society of contemporary Japan have noted the comparatively recent rise to currency of the Japanese loanword '*borantia*' (or *borantea*, *boranteia*, from the English 'volunteer'), which has accompanied the emergence of an identifiable—and, it has been argued, recognizably novel—social identity. Since the mid-1990s, volunteering in Japan (and elsewhere) has become a topic of increased interest in both popular and academic discourse, seen as a previously unknown (Nakata 1996) or at least previously unrecognized (Rausch 1998) spirit of civic activism. At the turn of the millennium, anthropologist Lynne Nakano was thus able to write that, 'From a word virtually unknown twenty years ago, *borantia* has become a socially recognized identity and an accepted part of national policy, popular consciousness, and everyday vocabulary' (2000: 93).

Recognizing that it could be many things to many people, Nakano argues that an important strength of the ‘volunteer identity’ is its appeal to middle-aged women and retired men—groups that continue to exist largely outside of the extra-domestic workplace. It provided an important avenue for the pursuit of individual fulfilment and the opportunity for public self-expression (Nakano 2000, 2005; cf. also Bestor 2002). This identity did not emerge *ex nihilo*, however, and Nakano’s recognition of the impact of national policy supported the ethnographic observations of other anthropologists. John Knight, for example, noted several years earlier how official endorsements of volunteerism had long sought to establish ‘a wider sense of social solidarity, one quite different from the old, exclusive solidarity of the village’, wherein the generative force for community mobilization lay with traditional ties of obligation (1996: 220-21, 226). More recent studies (e.g. Ogawa 2009: 95-97, chapter 6; Avenell 2010a, b) have taken a historicizing approach, carefully tracking how state bureaucrats and public intellectuals have actively (though not always consistently) encouraged policies strategically designed to nurture, facilitate, and shape patterns of volunteering to assist with service delivery in such spheres as welfare and education.

With such demonstrable instrumental value to both individual and collective interests, it is not surprising that this identity has been a site of contestation. Carolyn Stevens describes how the label of ‘*borantia*’ was seen as

problematic by anti-poverty activists in Yokohama. Stevens's informants objected to the very epistemological basis of volunteer-hood, which they saw as a marker of social difference, and thus as a barrier to political and social solidarity. Even some who took less radical positions nevertheless felt that the term's lingering associations with religious groups and paternalistic overtones of class left volunteer activity 'tainted with images of suspicious motives, meddling, 'high and mightiness' and 'backwardness' and was in many cases perceived as wasted, if not self-aggrandizing, effort (Stevens 1997: 113, 230).

Despite these ambivalent legacies, however, it is nevertheless clear that, in the late 1990s, 'the conceptual expansion of the *borantia* idea' (Avenell 2010a: 82) not only fostered new activities, but rapidly subsumed pre-existing categories of community involvement. One example of this categorical rebranding is the rapid registration of autonomous disaster relief organizations (*jishu bōsai soshiki*) with an online 'Disaster Volunteer Data Bank'. Avenell notes that between 2001 and 2002, approximately 100,000 such groups throughout Japan registered with this service, including 'women's fire prevention clubs' (*fujin bōka kurabu*) and 'youth firefighting clubs' (*shōnen shōbōdan kurabu*). While 'identifying themselves as *borantia*,' he notes, 'many of the new groups clearly emerged from neighborhood associations.' This was certainly the case in my own field site, where the chairman of the local ward's Autonomous Disaster Relief Committee was a former fire brigade captain, its

officers mainly ward and neighbourhood officials, and its ‘volunteers’ either members of the Women’s Association or retired members of fire brigade. There are additional hints that this conceptual expansion was only superficial as well. The results of a 2003 poll on Japanese citizens’ disaster preparedness and willingness to volunteer, for example, suggest that ‘the observed “volunteer” spirit emerged mainly under the condition that one’s own family or business was affected’ (Ducke 2007: 33; cf. Gekkan Seron Chōsa 2003).

Yet, tellingly, aside from Haddad’s, few ethnographic or political studies within this abundant discourse have made any mention of fire brigades as an example of volunteer activity. True, the organization’s members, far from occupying the demographic and social margins targeted by the preceding discussions, are comparatively younger men (and recently women). They are usually employed, often in the process of starting a family, and their extra-curricular efforts may therefore not be so clearly at the core of their social identity.¹⁰ More importantly, I would argue, the fire brigade, legally, historically, and socially, falls outside of even the variegated categories that have been able to be reinterpreted as expressions of volunteering. Phrased differently, there is something about the position of fire brigades that has resisted this reinterpretation. A clue as to why this might be may be found by taking a

¹⁰ A demographic shift in the brigade’s membership over past decades has only reinforced this fact. Whereas in 1970, the average age of brigade members was 32.5 years (approximately forty-one percent of members under 30), by 2008 this had risen to 38.3 years (only twenty percent of members under 30) (FDMA 2009). This shift has meant that the most active members are also those whose career and family responsibilities are most keenly felt.

conceptual step back from the Japanese concept of *borantia*, as it has come to be defined. The following section examines two alternative modulations of the English term ‘volunteer’ and their respective Japanese glosses. Both are used in Japanese discussions of the fire brigade and its history, yet neither is consistent with the new cultural category of *borantia*.

1.2.4 Alternative modes of voluntaristic action: *giyū* and *yūshi*

In a recent edition of a handbook for new recruits, the fire brigade bills itself as ‘our nation’s one and only volunteer corps’ (*waga kuni yuiitsu no giyū dantai*) (Tokuda 2007: 18). The term used in this case, *giyū*, would strike many Japanese speakers as uncomfortably old-fashioned, fraught with negative associations quite distinct from those that might adhere to *borantia*. Here we may find the sense of ‘volunteer’ evoked by the English ‘army volunteer’¹¹—that is, not a self-directed spontaneous volition, but one deriving from self-sacrifice and devotion to extra-personal ideals. *Giyū* in this context is cognate with *giri* and *gimu*, the notions of obligation and duty introduced to a mass Western readership by Ruth Benedict (1946), and often maintained (by young, especially urban, Japanese) as being antiquated or even obsolete. *Giyū* is redolent of the pre-war and wartime period, not only in the context of military volunteers and volunteer brigades (*giyū-hei* and *giyū-gun*), but of the more general mobilization of civilian ‘voluntary service’ (*giyū hōkō*), and is thus

¹¹ Ogawa notes that this was also the original sense of *borantia* when it first appeared in popular Japanese dictionaries in the 1960s (2009: 95).

heavily laden, not only with moral connotations, but a strong whiff of anti-democratic authoritarianism.¹² This semantic link was implicit in an observation made by the American sociologist Ralph Braibanti. Defending the wartime neighbourhood associations (*tonari gumi*) abolished at the orders of the General Headquarters of the Allied Occupation (GHQ), Braibanti noted that ‘it can hardly be said, that [the *tonari-gumi*] existed as a potential threat to the occupation any more than Japanese ex-army officers, volunteer firemen, or other groups can be said to exist as a threat. Indeed a better case can be presented showing the potential danger of these latter groups than is commonly supposed’ (1948: 159). Although the term, for the most part, has faded from everyday usage, the categorical association can be seen in the inclusion of ‘military affairs and firefighting’ (*heiji to shōbō*) under a single heading in local histories (e.g. Imai 1977: 387-89).

Importantly, although this symbolic association is itself a historical artefact, as we will see (in Chapter 4), it is of a more recent provenance than the organization. In the late nineteenth century, as new technologies and techniques for fire prevention spread from the cities and ports of a rapidly modernizing Japan, local residents were organizing private fire brigades (*shisetsu shōbō gumi*) in towns and villages, independently of state policy. A word used to describe the men who volunteered to

¹² According to the *Kōjien* dictionary, the chief senses of *giyū* are ‘righteousness and courage’ (*seigi to yūki*), ‘courage born of a heart that loves righteousness’ (*seigi o ai suru kokoro kara okiru yūki*), and ‘to devote one’s every strength to the advancement of the common will’ (*susunde kōkyō no tame ni chikara o tsukusu koto*).

form these spontaneous associations is *yūshi* (*yūshisha*), written with the characters which denote ‘possessing aspiration.’ While *yūshi* is thus much closer to the etymological roots of the English ‘volunteer’, the connotation in Japanese is of a communal entrepreneurialism—of a group of like-minded individuals setting out to achieve something new (as was very much the case for the early brigades). As a heuristic to distinguish it from the latter, we might say that, where the spirit of *giyū*—voluntarism in its patriotic mode—suborned the individual to a collective project imposed from above, individual *yūshi*—volunteers as entrepreneurs—came together to create collectives anew from below.

To be sure, neither of these terms has the contemporary currency of the *borantia* concept, and both evoke two distinct historical phases in the organizational history of the fire brigade. There is thus no absolute reason why the brigades of the twenty-first century should not be seen as volunteers in this new sense. Yet these various modes of voluntarism are examples of Haddad’s ‘norms of civic responsibility’—in other words, people’s specific ideas and feelings about social and moral accountability—and are arguably at the heart of what social scientists (of any disciplinary stripe) mean by civil society (Hann 2003: 64). And the nuanced understanding of these norms is precisely what is lost when historically and culturally contingent patterns of civic participation are reduced to universal definitions of ‘volunteering’, as in Haddad’s model.

The first puzzle addressed by this study, then, is the comparative over-provisioning of auxiliary fire services in Japan relative to other nations, as manifested in its community fire brigade system. It asks: *Why is the fire brigade participation rate so comparatively high in Japan (when there are so few fires)?* To complement the quantitative, comparative approach taken by Haddad (2007), I pursue this question by means of situated ethnography, attempting to provide answers from within. What role does the brigade play in local communities? Who joins, and for what reasons? What benefits do members derive from their participation, and what challenges do they face because of it? In what ways are cultural norms implicitly reproduced through the brigades as a social institution? Understanding the answers to these questions is a necessary first step to any comparison of the Japanese volunteer experience with that of other nations.

1.3 Second puzzle: volunteering and Japanese civil society

If the comparative predominance of Japan's community fire brigades calls for more explanation, any answers must take into account the particular social and historical context of late-modern Japan, for it is against this important background that a second puzzle comes into view.

In January of 1995, the Great Hanshin-Awaji (Kobe) Earthquake devastated the cities of Kobe and Osaka, and the subsequent outpouring of spontaneous support by individuals (in striking contrast to the bureaucratic paralysis and indecision that

characterized official government response) accelerated an already growing body of scholarship that had started to reconceptualise norms of citizenship and activism. Even before the earthquake, however, the exhaustion of Japan's economic bubble and a subsequent barrage of political scandals (the cover-up of HIV-tainted blood transfusions, bid rigging in the construction industry, nuclear accidents, etc.) during what came to be known as Japan's 'Lost Decade' had already begun to severely undermine citizens' trust in the legitimacy of the state (Kingston 2004). One of the most significant catastrophes was the failure to prevent the release of lethal sarin gas on the Tokyo subway by the Aum Shinrikyō cult later that same year, even after the doomsday cult's 'test-run' in the Nagano Prefecture city of Matsumoto (Kingston 2004: 16; cf. West 2006: 22). In the wake of these events, millennial Japan had become a crucible of social debate in which the political dynamics of state and society, past and future, were in the process of being redefined (Iokibe 1999; Carver, et al. 2000; Najita 2004).

Against this discursive zeitgeist of systemic failure and cynicism, the promise of civil society—made manifest in the conceptual emergence of the individual, autonomous, and activist *volunteer*—offered an attractive and hopeful alternative, and became the 'shining emblem' of a new relationship between the state and the citizenry as it had elsewhere across the globe (Gellner 1994: 1). This new discourse of civic engagement seized the imagination of both public and

policy-makers, not only drawing attention to the possibility for institutional and social innovation, but also quickly expanding to subsume pre-existing social roles that had theretofore received little attention. Understanding this background is a necessary first step in identifying our second puzzle.

1.3.1 Civil society: discourses and definitions

This interest in civil society has not been unique to Japan, but reflected a global political and theoretical debate which accompanied the dissolution of the Soviet Union and authoritarian regimes of Eastern Europe and Latin America, and was concerned with the project of establishing democratic governance in newly liberalized states (cf. e.g., Keane 1988; Gellner 1994). In this context, scholars and political activists had revived an eighteenth century debate about the relationship between state authority and individual freedom. Above, I noted Haddad's definition of 'civil society' as a characteristic, but by no means definitive, example of such discussion. While the term's history and philosophical genealogies, which one influential characterization traces to the theories of John Locke, on the one hand, and Montesquieu and Alexis de Tocqueville on the other, have been extensively discussed and debated elsewhere (Taylor 1990; cf. also Seligman 1992), a brief recapitulation of the term's deployment in current debates is in order.

In the context of recent discussions of civil society in Japan, perhaps the most parsimonious definition of the term is that given by political scientist Robert

Pekkanen, who distils civil society as ‘the organized, nonstate, nonmarket sector’ (2006: 3). An underlying assumption of the debate in Eastern Europe had been that civil society was seen as a phenomenon inherently tied to the rise of democratic governance in the West, and therefore worthy of emulation (Taylor 1990: 94), and a parallel image of creating civil society anew was characteristic of early discussions of civil society in Japan. Against analyses that described Japan’s civil society as underdeveloped, or even ‘virtually unknown’ (van Wolferen 1991), however, Pekkanen was one of the first to contend that the regulatory structures which determine the institutional contours of the Japanese state have in fact shaped a ‘dual civil society.’ In this view, while a high number of localized civic groups (such as neighbourhood associations) have been able to proliferate, activist organizations at the national scale (including branches of international groups, such as Greenpeace) have been actively stultified by an inhospitable institutional environment. Community fire brigades, whose membership, like that of the neighbourhood associations studied by Pekkanen ‘is drawn from a small, geographically delimited, and exclusive residential area (a neighbourhood) and whose activities are multiple and are centered on that same area’ (2006: 87) are a characteristic example of the former pattern. Haddad’s positioning of community fire brigades, as discussed earlier, within a broadened concept of civil society which recognizes the agency of the state, thus implicitly supports Pekkanen’s analysis.

More flexibly (and from an anthropological perspective), Chris Hann has suggested that civil society be understood to refer more broadly 'to the moral community, to the problems of accountability, trust and cooperation that all groups face' (1996: 20). Hann has been a close observer of Eastern Europe's post-Soviet experience, and while being one of the first and perhaps the most prolific of civil society's anthropologist-interlocutors, has nevertheless remained ambivalent as to its significance within anthropological analysis.¹³ He is justifiably sceptical of the normative agendas of organizations and analysts who tend to equate 'civil society' with Western models of democracy and liberal-individualism, and denigrate any alternatives. On the other hand, Hann is unwilling to discount the term's usefulness altogether, and suggests exploring commonalities between traditional expressions of social solidarity as indigenous forms of civil society (1996: 18-19).

Generalizing even more widely, though without any hyperbole, Adam Seligman (1992: 204) suggests that, in its contemporary inflection, civil society (as the perceived alternative to Eastern European totalitarianism which has made even notions of democracy suspect) has in fact come to be synonymous with 'democracy' *tout court*. While Seligman's analysis has been criticized for its ideological load, it

¹³ Hann's scepticism runs deep. In the mid-1990s, acknowledging anthropology's initial (if tentative) interest in civil society as a conceptual tool, he cynically mused as to whether the term might 'take its place in anthropological dictionaries alongside such terms as caste or clan, or others like *mana* and *taboo* that originate in non-western languages? This seems unlikely' (1996: 20). It must have been with some measure of irony, then, that he later penned the entry for the term in just such a volume (cf. Barnard and Spencer 2010 s.v. 'civil society'). Even now, however, he remains agnostic as to whether civil society will remain in the disciplinary limelight, or yet be proved 'just a millennial fad'.

importantly uncovers a significant parallel between the emergence of civil society discourse amidst the social crises that accompanied Europe's industrial revolution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and its re-emergence as globalizing forces engender a similar crisis at the turn of the millennium (ibid.: 15). This parallel, also noted by anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff, who refer to the millennial debate as civil society's 'Second Coming' (2001: 44), suggests that the idea of civil society may be seen as reflective of concerns over the place of the individual in society during periods of rapid social change. In its analytical sense, then, rather than the descriptive one used by political scientists such as Pekkanen and Haddad, or in Seligman's ideological sense, civil society may be seen to transcend historical specificity. This is the basis for Robert Layton's (2006) critique of those, such as Seligman, who position civil society as a modern phenomenon. Revisiting Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, Layton paraphrases the philosopher's original concern in universal terms: 'Are the principles of altruism and egoism contradictory, or can people advance their self-interest by contributing to social relationships?' (ibid.: 51). By exploring how this logical problem has been resolved across a broad spectrum of social and historical milieux, Layton argues convincingly for the location of civil society at the centre of anthropological concern.

For the purposes of this study, then, my use of the term will reflect Layton's definition as being those 'social organisations occupying the space between the

household and the state that enable people to co-ordinate their management of resources and activities' (Layton 2006). This definition has two strengths. Firstly, as indicated by Layton (11), by redefining the private sector in terms of 'the household'—a ubiquitous institution throughout human history and society—the definition can apply cross-culturally. Secondly, the fact that the household may be considered equally as a kinship unit, an economic unit, or both, eliminates the implicit assumption that civil society may only usefully be discussed in the context of a market economy.

1.3.2 A participation paradox

Several authors have noted how institutional changes within the structure of the Japanese state, exemplified in the passage of new legislation and tax reforms aimed at facilitating public participation in the provision and delivery of social service, have come about in direct response to Japan's civil society discourse (Pekkanen 2000; Pekkanen and Simon 2003; Yamauchi and Kitora 2010). As a result of these changes, the number of non-profit organizations in Japan has rapidly increased, and the concept of volunteering has been established as a valid social identity (Nakano 2000). Despite the apparent rapidity of these changes, there is some doubt that such institutional restructuring has had significant impact on social norms. Anthropologist Akihiro Ogawa (2009), who locates this identity (which he characterizes as a 'volunteer subjectivity') within the wider discourse surrounding the Japanese state's shift towards neoliberal governance, takes a cynical position. He

describes how these new forms of civic action, ‘colonized’ by an administrative rationality, remain complicit in the reproduction of pre-existing hierarchical relations of authority between the state and society (112-14).

Within the context of civil society discourse, Japan’s community fire brigades have remained largely absent (Haddad’s focussed contribution being a notable exception). Yet their active participation in the relief and reconstruction efforts in Kobe, and their historical standing as a paradigmatic model of voluntary, local-level public participation, would seem to make them a natural touchstone in the civil society debates described above.

What makes this silence particularly conspicuous is the fact that the comparatively high participation rates noted above notwithstanding, Japan’s community fire brigades are nevertheless perceived to be in a state of impending crisis, especially in rural areas. As we will see in more detail in Chapter 5, brigade recruitment has become increasingly difficult in recent years, and the average age of the membership as a whole has been steadily rising as membership and recruitment rates decline. Across the country, recruitment and service posters issued by the Fire and Disaster Management Agency (FDMA) and prefectural fire authority are posted in government buildings, community centres, post offices, and public halls. Prominent banners reading ‘*Shōbōdan’in boshūchū!*’ (‘Now recruiting for the fire brigade!’) now provide ubiquitous accompaniment to the more traditional placards

of ‘*hi no yōjin!*’ (‘Beware of fire!’) posted outside municipal fire stations, and recruitment literature is distributed by the members themselves at their places of employment. Complying with requests from municipal officials, neighbourhood residential associations draw up lists of local young men and women who seem to be likely candidates for recruitment. But membership rates continue to decline, a trend which has been consistent through the post-war period (see Figure 3).

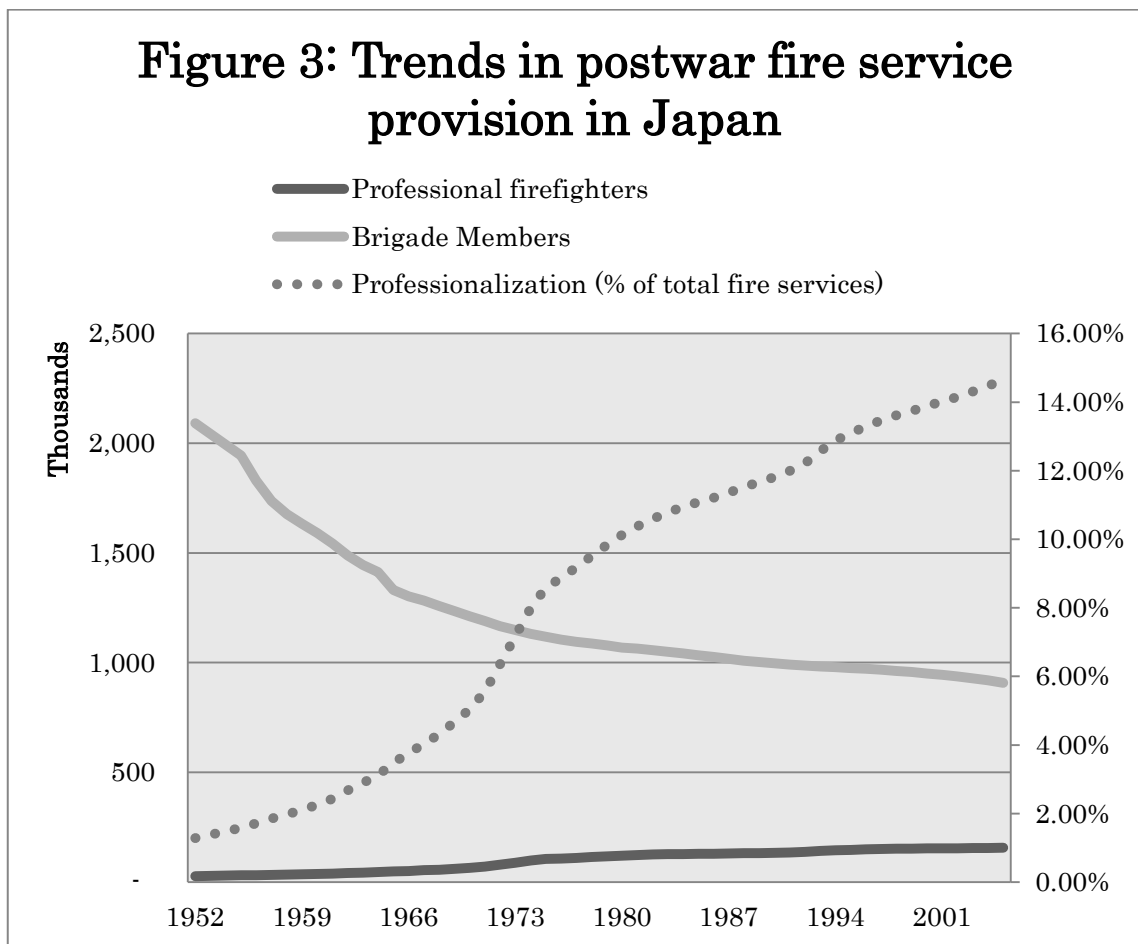


Figure 3: Data from 2005 Fire Prevention White Paper (FDMA 2005)

Post-1995 Japan has witnessed the heightening of public awareness of the need for local disaster preparation and response. Simultaneously, a broad-based

critique of the state has increased focus on volunteering in the media and public sphere. Wide-ranging and highly transparent legislative efforts by state officials have been undertaken to foster civic participation. Amidst this context, the gradual post-war decline in participation rates in local fire brigades has remained unaffected. How is this possible?

1.3.3 Further considerations

Before moving forward with any hypotheses, an as yet implicit assumption needs to be brought to the fore. While Japan's community fire brigades are staffed exclusively by members who live locally, it is also true that their existence is mandated by law throughout the country. Given this close relationship with the state, to what extent is it useful to discuss fire brigades in terms of civil society?

These questions echo similar concerns raised by the historian Sheldon Garon, who emphasises how the state-society dichotomy presumed by Western conceptions of civil society is problematic in the Japanese context. Like some northern and western European nations, such as Sweden, Holland, and pre-Unification Western Germany, interaction between state and society in Japan has often followed a corporatist model, meaning that civic groups have often worked closely with bureaucrats throughout the nation's modern history (cf. Taylor 1990: 96). Garon, a historian focussing on the early twentieth century, contends that such state-society alliances have 'served to enmesh popular groups, making it difficult for

civil society to challenge the state. At the same time, these associations could be quite assertive, and the state was forced eventually to include many societal actors in the apparatus of governance' (2003: 49). This characterization echoes the philosopher Charles Taylor's description of such relationships, wherein 'the distinction [between society and government] no longer expresses an important difference in the basis of power or the dynamics of policy-making' (Taylor 1990: 96). However, where Taylor's description was intended as a caution against the overly quick assumption that civil society was a universal characteristic of 'democratic' countries, Garon argues that such partnerships need not preclude the instrumental advancement of the independent (or even counterproductive) goals of each party. Offering an example out of Japan's wartime experience, he notes how, where the Ministry of Finance enlisted women to exhort the public to save money and abhor luxuries, feminists found they could advance the cause of sexual equality by making themselves an integral part of the war effort (2003: 55). Other scholars suggest extending the rubric of civil society even as far as the state apparatus. Noting a case wherein an activist group in South India entered into formal politics by registering an official party, David Gellner suggests that 'it would be very arbitrary, and constitute a naive acceptance of official categories, were one to refuse to continue to regard them as a part of civil society' (2009: 9).

Regarding the question of voluntary participation, there is also some disagreement about whether 'non-democratic' organizations, such as those wherein membership is governed by ascription, should be included within analytical definitions of civil society. Reviewing contributions to the ethnography of civil society in South Asia, Gellner suggests that 'freely chosen associationalism, with the right of exit, is a key feature of modern civil society as opposed to the intermediate institutions (guilds, kin networks, age cohorts, etc.) that characterize premodern social forms' (Gellner 2009a: 9). This caveat becomes particularly problematic in the context of Japanese culture, wherein constraints of social obligation (*giri*) make it difficult to refuse an invitation to serve in 'voluntary' positions, whether on the fire brigade or otherwise.

The problem of participation in voluntary associations is hardly a novel one for anthropologists, though. The ambiguity between obligation and coercion was central to an older theoretical debate on the functional role of such groups in the context of the study of modernization and urbanization within 'traditional' societies. One influential position, argued by the Africanist Kenneth Little, interpreted the appearance of voluntary associations as an adaptive strategy for dealing with the stresses and conflicts of extensive social change, such as attended the substitution of a market economy for subsistence economies structured by traditional ideas of status and honour (Little 1965; Kerri, et al. 1976). Anthropologists of Japan, most

prominently Edward Norbeck, saw parallels between the multifarious urban associations of growing African cities and those of post-war Japan. To avoid confusion, however, Norbeck preferred the term 'common-interest associations' for such groups, noting that membership, while not compulsory on legal grounds, was nevertheless often close to being either ascribed, or otherwise coerced through social obligation or economic pressure (Norbeck 1962: 77; 1977). Another author noted that there is a difference between 'membership' and 'participation', and mechanisms of coercion that enforce the former may not extend to the latter (Kerri, et al. 1976: 24). These analytical qualifications did little to advance their authors' theoretical positions, however, as they themselves reflected the impasse between structure and agency which lay at the heart of the debate.

More recent anthropological approaches to volunteering offer a way out of this apparent trap. Even before the upheavals of the so-called 'Lost Decade', and quite separately from the burgeoning discourse on civil society, anthropologists of Japan had already begun looking more closely at volunteering practice as a form of identity (e.g. Stevens 1997; Nakano 2005).¹⁴ As opposed to the earlier, functionalist interest in voluntary association as an adaptive social form, newer studies reflected a wider shift within anthropology from a concern with organizational structures and discourse to theories of practice and agency. Practice theory privileges the ways in

¹⁴ Both authors carried out their dissertation fieldwork in Yokohama during the early nineties (Stevens in 1992-94 and Nakano in 1993-94).

which individuals are implicated in the reproduction and transformation of the social and historical conditions that shape their lives (Ortner 1984). This latter approach seeks to understand the structural constraints of social obligation (or even more intrusive forms of coercion) from the position of the actor. The resolution of tension between the individual and society is secured through the revelation of agency inherent in the choice to either accede to or resist perceived social norms and pressures, whose logic is itself the result of such action (Bourdieu 1977).

The second puzzle addressed by this study, then, is the curious absence of the community fire brigades, as a popular expression of ‘volunteer-like’ behaviour in Japan, from the wider discourse on civil society, and the concurrent reality, and popular interpretation, of a membership crisis. It asks: *Why is participation in the fire brigade in decline (when volunteering is on the rise)?* In approaching this question, it brings the insights of a practice approach to an ethnography of traditional forms of voluntary association more conventionally viewed through the lens of structural-functionalism.

1.4 Japan’s community fire brigades and ethnography: a review

Despite the proliferation in recent years of ethnographic analyses of Japanese organizations, social movements, and subcultures, there has heretofore been no dedicated ethnographic study of community fire brigades by an anthropologist. In fact, to the extent that their societal ramifications have captured the focussed

attention of scholars, firefighting organizations and practice, in Japan as elsewhere, have more traditionally fallen to social historians, rather than anthropologists or sociologists (e.g., for Japan, Ikegami 1978; Minami 1983; Suzuki 1999; and, for the United States, e.g., Greenberg 1998; Tebeau 2003).¹⁵ Where they concerned themselves with such matters, anthropologists (especially in their structuralist and functionalist registers) have traditionally sought to position firefighting associations and practices within broader divisions of social labour—both material and ideational. In contrast, the longitudinal perspective afforded historians by the material and textual record has allowed them to deploy firefighting organizations as a methodological apparatus through which to consider wider patterns of social change over the space of decades and centuries.

Firefighters have proven to be a particularly useful index of changing norms of citizenship, gender, civility, and urban social order in nineteenth-century America. Amy Greenberg, for example, has charted how the changing tone and prominence accorded to discussions of volunteer firefighters in the public sphere of antebellum America can be seen to reflect a broader ideological shift from the associational civics of the new republic to a Christian conservatism associated with the rise of the

¹⁵ An important exception is Mathew Desmond's recent sociological ethnography of wildland firefighters in the American Southwest (2009). Unlike historical treatments, however, Desmond is less interested in processes of social change than in a Bourdieu-inspired analysis of the *habitus* of a particular breed of professional risk-takers. Demonstrating resonances between the cultural construction of rural masculinity and the institutional context of wildland firefighting organizations, Desmond argues that their juxtaposition reinforces an inverse relationship between firefighters' perceptions of personal risk and professional competence.

middle-class family and professional businessman (1998: 12-16). In a similar, if more rigorously empirical study, Mark Tebeau has examined the dialectical transformation of volunteer firefighting and the fire-insurance industry in the USA of the same period, emphasizing a bureaucratic shift. Tebeau makes the key observation that because, initially, 'authority over and responsibility for fire protection lay within the community more broadly' (37), volunteer firefighters were forced to rely on social sanctions to achieve their aims, rather than on the institutional instruments of a regulatory state. As the nation's social and bureaucratic infrastructure became increasingly complex, the informal strategies relied upon to achieve these ends—including obligation, intimidation, and exclusion—became less viable. Against the backdrop of the decline of volunteer brigades, Tebeau highlights the growth of an industry of fire insurers who 'articulated a vision of safety that prioritized economic and contractual communities' (12) over the neighbourly sphere of moral sanction. Both authors thus demonstrate how the gradual shift from a moral economy of trust and tribute to a political economy of professional service recast altruism as atavism, signalling the end of the urban volunteer system (Greenberg 1998: 12).

In the Japanese context, Suzuki Jun (1999) has linked firefighting with the modernization and transformation of Tokyo. While Suzuki focuses primarily on the evolution of professional firefighting during the Meiji and Taishō periods, his work builds on that of earlier authors, such as Ikegami Akihiko (1978) and Minami Kazuo

(1983). These latter scholars represent a group of historians of premodern Japan who have focussed on the *hikeshi* brigades of historical Edo, held to be the symbolic forerunners of modern firefighters (an association taken up in Chapter 4). Importantly, Suzuki describes not only continuities with the earlier system, but the organizational innovations and borrowings from abroad enacted by Meiji officials. Ikegami and Minami also inform the social analysis of anthropologist William Kelly (1994), who establishes himself as the exception to prove the rule that firefighting is the domain of historians by adopting a trans-Tokugawa period perspective to demonstrate how the establishment and transformation of urban firefighting brigades reflected broader social changes. Kelly's summary that 'firefighting, in word and deed, was indicative of the changing political complexion and social arrangements of Edo' (315) may thus be extended more broadly to the general case.

As these authors will readily admit, the historiography of firefighting as an expression of contemporary cultural discourse owes much to the synchronic perspective of social anthropologists. Particularly influential in this regard, according to historian William H. Sewell, Jr., has been Clifford Geertz's notion of the self-contained 'cultural systems', in which are reproduced the 'moods and motivations' of a historical moment (Sewell Jr. 1997; cf. Geertz 1966). Likewise have anthropologists long since realized the importance of critical engagement with historical analysis (Silverman 1979; Cohn 1980). And yet, while Japan's fire brigades

have often featured within traditionally ‘sited’ ethnographies—both the early community studies of Japan as a ‘complex society’ (e.g. Embree 1939; Norbeck 1954; Beardsley, et al. 1959), as well as later, more reflexive (but still territorially-bounded) works (e.g. Lebra 1984; Moeran 1985; Robertson 1991)—a diachronic perspective has been lacking. Thus it seems that while historians have matured by benefitting from the insights of ethnography, anthropologists have remained innocent of the jaded realities of detailed historicism, content to languish in what Bernard Cohn once termed the ‘never never land of structural-functionalism’ (1980: 199).

The following section offers a survey of these tangential references in an attempt to build a composite picture of the brigades as depicted within existing treatments. The portrait that emerges, despite being drawn from a theoretically heterogeneous and thematically diverse body of work, suggests that textual representations of the fire brigade have been consistently informed by an essentially ahistorical, structural-functionalist view of Japanese community, which originates in the salvage ethnography and modernization sociology of mid-century and early post-war ethnographers.

1.4.1 Structure and function in post-war ethnography

For the most part, early ethnographic references to the *shōbōdan* occurred in the context of a debate that sought to predict the effects of modernization on Japan’s underlying social structure. This was in some ways both contemporary with and

subsidiary to a wider discourse which sought to understand how cultures configured individual psychology (the so-called 'culture and personality school', cf. Benedict 1946; DeVos 1973). While these two modes of analysis—structural and symbolic—were seldom kept fully distinct (nor was their essential unity recognized), interest in forms of association as such lay firmly with the former.

In this view, the brigades, despite their paramilitary hierarchy (which had in any case been imposed by the state) were seen as the organizational heirs of the village sodalities of premodern Japan. In principle, these groups were characterized by horizontal, egalitarian membership (*kōkumi*, cf. Fukutake 1967) rather than the vertical relations of patronage (*dōzoku*, cf. Nakane 1967a; Aruga 1967 [1939]). At least heuristically, *dōzoku* relations prevailed in the economic, familial, and political spheres, while *kōkumi* ties were characteristic of civil associations—village cooperatives, traditional voluntary associations, and religious confraternities (*kō*). In this context, fire brigades were discussed alongside other localized associations which had been mobilized within the state, such as Youth Associations (*seinendan*) and Housewives' Associations (*fujinkai*) (e.g. Beardsley, et al. 1959:254-259; Fukutake 1967). Such groups, according to Fukutake Tadashi, a prominent rural sociologist:

were created first in the village local government units on instructions and models provided by the central government and, utilizing the hamlet's traditional capacity for unified action, branches of these organizations were then created in every *buraku*. But these were not the kind of organizations that villagers had freedom to enter or leave voluntarily as desired. Formally one could refuse to join, but in practice, if one fulfilled the requisite qualifications one was automatically made a member. The Youth Group, for

instance, included everyone in the hamlet who had left school and had not reached a certain age. At least one woman from every household was expected to be a member of the Housewives' Association. And the same applied to the Fire Brigade. In this sense these were organizations of the whole community (Fukutake 1967: 110).

Despite his foregrounding of the extrinsic influence of the state, Fukutake's remark on the 'traditional capacity for unified action' highlights an underlying assumption of a cultural continuity with earlier social forms. Several authors (e.g. Norbeck 1953; Ikawa 1964; Hendry 1981b) have alluded to the fact that fire brigades, as a specialized type of communal labour group, have succeeded traditional age-graded associations of pre-modern rural society, in which, after gender, one's age was the overriding principle of social structure.¹⁶ Unlike the institutional forces that implicitly structure the life-courses of citizens within the modern state, these traditional age boundaries were explicitly set according to customary rules. Such regulations were governed at least in part by numerological beliefs of purity and pollution accorded to certain 'calamitous years' (*yakudoshi*) within the life cycle (Norbeck 1955; Lewis 1998), though in actual practice boundaries often varied according to local needs (Kizaemon Aruga 1953).

¹⁶ Age-graded associations are succinctly defined by Traphagan as 'the institutionalized ordering of people on the basis of age, by which membership in one graded age group precludes membership in any other and is a basis for social differentiation by virtue of membership in that group' (1998: 338). Despite extensive documentation by Japanese ethnologists (cf. Bunkachō Bunkazai Hogobu 1965, 1979, 1972, 1999), formal age-grading has received comparatively little attention in anthropological studies by non-Japanese (but see Traphagan 2000; Martinez 2004). For a classic and definitive statement on age-grade terminology, see Radcliffe-Brown (1929).

The prevalence of age-grading in Japan was first described in detail to non-Japanese audiences by Edward Norbeck (1953), who surveyed the work of Japanese folklorists and ethnographers interested in documenting 'traditional' cultural practices before they disappeared beneath the perceived 'Americanization' of Japanese culture. Among other communal responsibilities, such groups were tasked with the labour of responding to fires and storms (cf. Norbeck 1954:99). An anecdote from this period by Fumiko Ikawa, then a young archaeologist, describes how a deciding condition for the choice of field site in a rural sociological study in which she participated as a graduate student (cf. Suzuki 1956) was 'its relative isolation from recent sociocultural influence.' Describing the community, Ikawa writes that:

the age-grading system remained almost intact, though under the new name of the Fire Prevention Society (*shōbōdan*). It had an economic function in that it organized and executed such communal work as road repair, sea-weed collection and maintenance of the community-owned forest land; it had [the] political function of policing the ground and implicitly regulating the eligibility to public offices; and it had corporate continuity as expressed in its ownership of forest land apart from the communal property (1964: 1160).

Similarly, (though much later), Joy Hendry has categorized the fire brigades among other diverse age-graded associations, such as children's groups, pilgrim societies, and rotating credit associations (*tanomoshi-kō*) (1981b: 48). Elsewhere, she describes the brigade as being 'like a kind of age-grade through which all able male villagers pass for a few years' (1981a: 62).

Such characterizations cast the fire brigade in a decidedly Durkheimian mould, situating their role within a communal division of labour that transcends the simple function of guaranteeing the security of persons and property. This is consistent with the added ethnographic correlation between community firefighters and ritual service. One such example is that offered by Arne Kalland, in his description of the Gion festival in the community of Shingū (1995: 166). During the festival, local firefighters don ceremonial blue and red *shishi* (Chinese lion) masks and set off running through the neighbourhood to chase off evil influences. Kalland also notes how the event provides a convenient occasion for local households to offer the men bottles of *sake* in gratitude for their community service, hinting at the relations of exchange that underlie even seemingly ‘voluntary’ activities. Another case in point, which also alludes to the brigade’s traditional antecedents, is Takie Lebra’s description of an encounter with a procession carrying a palanquin shrine (*mikoshi*) during a local festival southwest of Tokyo:

Contrary to my assumption, the carriers were all volunteers, I was told, and had not been forced into this as a part of a young man’s obligation. A leading member of the guiding group said, ‘Everybody wants to be near the god once in life.’ He continued to say that, though young men do this sort of thing only once a year, the experience really ties them together. And this solidarity is necessary, he said, for the fire brigade to work effectively since ‘fire fighting is not a matter of technique but high-spirited cooperation.’ [...] It was further learned that these young men all used to be organized into young men’s associations (*wakamono-gumi*), and required to sleep in the association’s dormitories (Lebra 1984: 16-17).

The stylistic slip that confuses the issue of whether ‘these young men’ refers to those encountered by Lebra, or their pre-modern predecessors (*wakamono-gumi* and their dormitories being artefacts of the Tokugawa period) is as telling as the ethnographer’s leading assumption that their involvement was in some way obligatory. A fallacy shared by these treatments is their assumption of an unproblematic continuity between pre-modern associations and their latter-day counterparts. To be sure, such continuities do exist, but this is no excuse for the muddling of evidence and interpretation from different periods and different contexts. Idioms of traditionalism (and even elements of traditional social patterns) may be invoked in the symbolic creation and maintenance of institutions. Yet as noted by Theodore Bestor in his study of community institutions in a Tokyo neighbourhood, these must be understood as ‘what they are—consciously and unconsciously manipulated metaphors—rather than [as] what they are not—evidence of historical continuity or cultural stagnation of the individuals and social groups involved’ (1985: 133).

More generally, these anecdotes have all portrayed the brigade as an abstract social organ of an even wider abstract whole, rather than as a particular group of individuals united in common purpose. Even the faceless spokesperson of Lebra’s group speaks in the Durkheimian language of the sacred and of collective effervescence. There is of course no reason to doubt these accounts on a factual level. As we shall see, there are indeed strong continuities between pre-modern young

men's groups and the fire brigade, and there is a strong correlation between activity in the modern brigade and participation in festivals. Yet the underlying functionalism of these descriptions in effect hinders attempts at understanding the historical subjectivity and political agency of their object, and thereby mitigates the constructive reinterpretation of existing literature about voluntary associations in a critical discussion of civil society or social change. It privileges an etic understanding of the generation and function of social solidarity (valued for its own sake) over a critical emic understanding of such solidarity as lived experience, of what it means to the individuals who seek it, or seek to manipulate it.

1.4.2 Defining boundaries: participation as symbolic practice

In addition to fulfilling its pragmatic purpose in tackling emergencies, a subsequent generation of ethnographers has demonstrated how firefighting is also a symbolic practice by which group boundaries can be created and maintained (Cohen 1985). Jennifer Robertson (1991), for example, discusses the local brigade's historical role in the demarcation of community membership between long-term residents (natives) and recent arrivals (newcomers) in the city of Kodaira, outside Tokyo. Robertson draws on the local newspaper archive to report a heated exchange at a town meeting that occurred in 1967, in which a representative of the newcomer community (a white-collar *salaryman*) complained that, despite a membership deficit, only natives were allowed to join the fire brigade, nor were newcomers being informed about local fire drills. Newcomers interpreted this participatory exclusion from the fire

brigade as a symbolic exclusion from the sphere of the 'traditional' community inhabited by the natives, in which fire prevention was an entitlement extended even to ostracised households.¹⁷ The mayor disagreed, countering that, in actual fact, Kodaira natives 'were disappointed by the newcomers' lack of interest in these exercises' (1991: 42). Despite the one-sided nature of the participation (or lack of it), the interpretation of each party was of social exclusion by the other. This contested symbolism thus led Robertson to interpret the inclusion, during her own fieldwork nearly two decades later, of a team of firefighter-acrobats performing 'traditional' stunts in the tenth-anniversary celebration of the Kodaira 'Citizen's Festival' as further evidence of tension between the two overlapping communities (66).

In a case which parallels that of Robertson's Kodaira, Eyal Ben-Ari (1995) reports an observation made by a brigade official in a recently settled suburban housing development:

[We] have a hodgepodge of people from all sorts of places like Osaka and Kyoto and they have little awareness and commitment to the area. That's why it's difficult to get volunteers for fire fighting.... [It's] the same as areas where there are mostly apartments, big apartments, where most people live in an area only for a short time and have no attachment and little solidarity. Any cooperation between such people and the [local] area is difficult (1995: 212).

¹⁷ The anecdote implicitly references the institutionalized ostracism known as *mura hachibu* (Smith 1961). Though the expression is idiomatic, its etymology (lit. 'village eight-parts') is commonly held to refer to the eight (of ten) traditional categories of social intercourse denied to the ostracised household, with the humanitarian exceptions of sympathy visits after deaths and fires, and communal firefighting which attended the latter. Given the fact that conflagrations were (and still are) rarely confined to single households, the inalienability of firefighting might as easily have been self-interest on the part of other households (Takeuchi 1976: 77).

In both situations, the fire brigade is associated with a territorial tie that comes from historical depth, and which positions them on the 'inside' of a notional boundary between insider and outsider.

This same categorical distinction has also situated the fire brigade in struggles to resist the external agency of the state itself, as in Scott Schnell's (1999) study of ritual practice in the Hida Mountains. Schnell relates a 1929 incident in which escalating tensions between locals and prefectural police officers (appointed from outside the community) came to a head when several members of the local fire brigade were arrested in a gambling raid. Later that year, during the local festival, the brigade refused to assist police with security duties, and during the excitement of the celebration, the local police station was anonymously attacked by angry villagers (1999: 237-40). Elsewhere, Schnell notes the leadership role played by the fire brigade in a local uprising in opposition to the reforms of the newly appointed governor during the first years of the Meiji period (57-58).

These portrayals position community firefighters as defenders of 'tradition' against the transformational modern processes of urbanization and nationalization. And while these latter examples explicitly recognize the traditionalism of the brigade as symbolic metaphor, rather than casting it as a modern survival of earlier social practice, there is still an unsettling closure to their interpretations, thereby

challenging Anthony Cohen's dictum that 'symbols are effective because they are imprecise' (1985: 21).

There is a certain irony in the fact that the overt conflict in Robertson's Kodaira, where natives were in the minority (and whose latency is also expressed in Ben-Ari's case, through the minimal participation by recent settlers), is naturally amplified by the structure and idiom of the organization itself. While a limited membership is by definition exclusive, it is also suggestive of being besieged, outnumbered, and on the defensive. Likewise, the particular characteristics of the brigade—its paramilitary discipline and hierarchical command structure; its uniforms, which consist of traditional liveried *happi* coats of heavy cotton and military caps; its bugles and company standards (*matoi*)—are heavily evocative of the historical early modern and pre-war contexts of Schnell's example, and by definition old-fashioned, embarrassing, and perhaps even threatening.

Yet these ambiguities also demonstrate the essentially multivocal nature of the symbolism involved. Even in the face of their apparent overdetermination, the inherent contingency of such interpretations must be kept in mind. In my fieldwork in the central Nagano Prefecture town of Shimosuwa, where approximately thirty per cent of the population is over 65, and the brigade is facing a severe shortage of recruits, I found that many members were in fact newcomers who had been convinced to enlist as a way of establishing themselves in the community.

Contemporary difficulties with recruitment are discussed in more detail towards the end of the thesis in Chapter 8, but what must be stressed here is the contingency of how boundaries are defended and defined. In a regional community with a declining population, the strategies brought to bear on their articulation will differ from those pursued by the inhabitants of an expanding urban settlement. Any useful understanding of the brigade as a symbolic resource must therefore take into account the particular social and historical conditions of the wider community.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

In this introductory chapter, I have outlined the research questions that are to be addressed in the thesis. These have been characterized above as two puzzles: (1) *Why is the fire brigade participation rate so comparatively high in Japan (when there are so few fires)?* (2) *Why is participation in the fire brigade in decline (when volunteering is on the rise)?* The concerns of each of these questions—with origins in the former, and historical and institutional change in the latter—assume the necessity of an historical perspective. My review of existing treatments of the fire brigade within the ethnography of Japan, however, has noted that existing discussions of the organization and its members have been framed in synchronic paradigms of structural-functionalism and symbolic anthropology, neither of which lend themselves to diachronic analysis.

The following chapters represent my attempt to redress this situation by providing an ethnographically informed history that may illuminate these two puzzles. Chapter 2 takes the form of a reflexive essay concerning my period of fieldwork in the community of Shimosuwa in Japan, during which this project took shape, and underwent significant transformation from my original research topic. I lay out the methodological parameters of my approach, and try to flesh out the abstract problems discussed in this Introduction with an account of participant observation as a member of a brigade division. As a precursor to the organizational history of the brigade, I develop the background of the field site in greater depth in Chapter 3. Inspired by a recent critique of the methodological nationalism which has characterized the anthropological study of Japan, I draw on both the deep history of Suwa District, and on a rich interdisciplinary corpus of Japanese research on the region to build a carefully contextualized ethnographic foundation. Having thus set the scene, I take up the main thrust of my historical argument in Chapter 4.

In conventional accounts of Japan's national history, the transition between the military bureaucracy of the Tokugawa shogunate and the 'restored' imperial monarchy of the Meiji state offers a convenient heuristic for situating the watershed between tradition and modernity. In the first part of Chapter 4, I trace the institutional transformation of firefighting practice in Suwa and its environs through this period. The institutional establishment of a national fire service in 1894,

however, was only the first step in the inculcation of a modern firefighting identity that was closely associated with state authority. I attempt to illuminate the process by which this was accomplished in the latter half of the chapter, through an engagement with historical firefighting materials.

Chapter 5 brings the account of the brigade forward to the contemporary period. Drawing on my own fieldwork in 2008-2010, I document continuities with the past and describe the present atmosphere of institutional change. Crafted as a narrative of the seasonal experience of a brigade division, Chapter 5 is a descriptive account of the brigade's interactions with the cyclical rhythms of the community it serves.

Chapters 6 and 7 bookend a study of ritual through the brigade's history. In the former chapter, I focus particularly on the ritual context of Suwa District, where Onbashira, the notoriously dangerous 'pillar festival' of Suwa Taisha, has long been at the centre of the ritual life of the region. I construct the chapter as a case study of the involvement of the fire brigade in local festivals, which as we have seen is a phenomenon that transcends the particular geographic confines of this study. In contrast to this external focus, Chapter 7 turns the lens inward to examine the role of secular ritual within the practices of the brigade itself. Drawing on Maurice Bloch's theory of rebounding violence (1992), I suggest an explanation for brigade's ambivalent reputation in contemporary Japan.

In the penultimate chapter, I examine the brigade's role within the life histories of two informants. I argue that the vernacular models by which participation in the brigade is framed by its members both limit and enable the political and moral agency of individuals, thus complicating the relationship of the brigade to current discourses of individualistic civil society. Finally, Chapter 9 reviews the arguments made in the preceding chapters, juxtaposing the periods of institutional transition at either end of Japan's experience of modernity. By paying close attention to what I describe as 'vernacular discourses' of civil society, as a way of building on the anthropological project of challenging Western models, the space of civil society may be seen to be open to a plurality of interpretation. In light of this discussion, the puzzles noted in this introduction are resolved. I conclude by situating the brigade in the framework of contemporary anthropology of Japan, and propose an analytical paradigm of 'succession' as a way of transcending continuity and change as a research standpoint for future research.

2 FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY: DEFINING SELF AND SUBJECT

kimi hi o take / yoki mono misen / yuki maruge

[You start a fire, I'll show you something fun: a great ball of snow]

—Bashō, a poem for a friend in Suwa. Winter, 1686-87 (2004: 56)

The next two chapters step back from the thematic focus of the fire brigade and the general puzzles identified in the Introduction to develop the methodological and ethnographic foundations on which the arguments advanced in this thesis are grounded, so as to frame them within the experience of particular people in a particular place. Ethnography being, in the end, a communicative enterprise, it is important that the affinities of fieldworkers with the sites in which they practice their trade be made explicit (Marcus 1998: 16). In this spirit, Chapter 2 offers an account of my own experience of participant observation as a fire brigade member. More so than those which follow, this chapter takes the form of a reflexive essay, exploring the personal and pragmatic considerations that guided both how I situated myself and was situated by my informants in the central Japanese town of Shimosuwa, a community where I had previously lived for several years as a language teacher. In addition to these methodological details, the chapter describes the transformation of my project in the field. As a reader of ethnographies, I know well that such reflexivity must be carefully titrated, lest the ethnographic solution be turned acid or insipid by too liberal an authorial dose. In this case, however, such reflexivity has seemed to be

the only justifiable means of accurately conveying the unfolding of this research process. Such experience being one of the main instruments of ethnography, it is my hope that these methodological reflections may give the reader a gauge to the precision of its measurements.

2.1 Return to the field

Shimosuwa is a mid-sized town situated on the north shore of Lake Suwa amidst the mountains of Nagano Prefecture near the geographic centre of Honshū, the main island of the Japanese archipelago. I first visited the town in the autumn of 2003, following what for many residents is now a reverse commute, taking a local train south along Japan Rail's Chūō Main Line from the regional hub city of Matsumoto. After the thundering darkness of the rail tunnel under Shiojiri Pass, which rises from the edge of the Matsumoto Plain, the sudden aural and visual relief the passenger experiences as the train emerges into the picturesque Suwa basin evokes the sense of crossing a threshold. Rimmed by the crumbling volcanoes of the Yatsugatake Range and the highland moor of Kirigamine, the lake basin's geography has contributed significantly to the area's social and economic history, and the region has seen two distinct phases of localized industrial growth over the past century. Suwa District conforms roughly to the lake basin's watershed, which drains into the outlet of the Tenryū River, whose current once drove waterwheels powering filatures that made Suwa one of Japan's foremost silk-producing areas at the turn of the twentieth

century.¹ From 1929 however, a combination of global events—the American stock market crash and subsequent Great Depression, the invention of synthetic fabrics, and the exigencies of the Pacific War—conspired to end this dominance. In the 1950s, the factories and warehouses of the silk industry attracted new investment by electronics and precision instrument firms looking to set up new plants in pollution-free rural areas, where property and labour were more affordable than the coastal industrial zones. By the early 1960s and throughout Japan’s post-war period of rapid economic growth, a thriving specialized manufacturing industry had established the region’s national reputation as ‘the Switzerland of the Orient.’² Since the economic downturn of the 1990s, however, the region’s fortunes have again turned as the manufacturing capital that once moved from Tokyo has again pulled up its roots, with the possibilities afforded by the climate-controlled plants and more competitive labour regimes of Southeast Asia.³

¹ The region benefitted from the Meiji state’s decision to adapt European silk filature technology in the 1870s. Nagano rapidly became a nationally important centre of mechanized silk production, and by the early 1890s the balance of production in the prefecture had shifted to Suwa, outpacing more traditional raw silk-producing regions (Pratt 1999: 99-100). By 1911, Nagano was producing over a quarter of the nation’s output (Hane 2003: 173; Kawamura 1994, chapter 8). For extended historical discussion of these developments, see the chapters by Matsumura and Nakabayashi in Tanimoto (2006). Trewartha (1930) offers a contemporary report of the industry at its peak.

² This moniker was popularized by Nagano Prefecture’s charismatic socialist governor Hayashi Torao (in office from 1947 to 1959), a native of Shimosuwa. This industrial transition is documented in detail by Eyre (1963) and Hough (1968).

³ According to statistics kept by the town office, Shimosuwa’s population in 2003 was 23,284. At the time of my latest visit in 2010, this number had fallen to 21,540. Three quarters of this decline was due to socio-economic factors (residents moving away), with the remainder reflecting natural demographic change (deaths outpacing births). Current trends indicate that this pattern of negative growth will likely accelerate; although socio-economic decline has remained relatively constant since

Even had I been aware of this history, however, such thoughts would have been far from my mind on the day I first visited Shimosuwa. I was preoccupied with an impending meeting with one Mr. Kobayashi, the owner and operator of the small *juku* (a private academy or ‘cram-school’) where I hoped to find work as an English tutor. Two months earlier, quite unexpectedly and not without trepidation, I had accompanied my future wife to Japan, where she had accepted a Matsumoto-based language-teaching job advertised by a friend then on the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) programme in Chino, a small industrial city south of Lake Suwa. My initial exposure to Japan, experienced amidst the landlocked ranges of the Japan Alps and relatively unmediated by any experience of the urban landscapes that had characterized my only (vague) preconceptions of the country, was enthralling, and it had taken no further effort on my soon-to-be wife’s part to convince me to stay.

The interview went successfully—like me, Mr. Kobayashi had grown up on an apple orchard, and this connection (in combination with my university degree and easy manner with children) seemed qualification enough for the job. When our meeting was concluded, by way of introduction to the community where I would be spending my time, he took me on a short stroll to the cryptomeria-shaded precincts of a large shrine at the base of the hills that rise from the edge of the town. This was my first visit to Harumiya, the ‘Spring Shrine’ of Suwa Taisha (literally ‘The Great

at least 1989, the number of deaths relative to births has been progressively increasing since 1997, when the former surpassed the latter for the first time.

Shrines of Suwa'), a complex of four shrines that have been at the centre of spiritual life in the region for over a millennium. I was to revisit the shrine often. It was a part of Mr. Kobayashi's pedagogical practice to bring his students to pay their respects and offer prayers for safety before any field trip—whether the annual long-distance 'bus hike' outside the prefecture, or shorter excursions into the hills above the town for summer camping or cherry-blossom viewing picnics.

After moving from Matsumoto to Shimosuwa the following summer, I occasionally visited Harumiya on my own, witnessing the twice-annual *senza-sai*, the ritual transfer of the seat of the enshrined deities back and forth between Harumiya and its nearby twin, Akimiya (the 'Autumn Shrine'), held on the first days of February and August. Together, Harumiya and Akimiya comprise Shimosha, the 'lower shrines' of Suwa Taisha. Across the lake from Shimosuwa, to the southeast, the paired shrines of Maemiya and Honmiya (respectively, the 'Former Shrine', in Chino, and the 'Main Shrine', in Suwa City) comprise the corresponding 'upper shrines', known as Kamisha.⁴

The latter ritual, at the end of summer, is marked by the boisterous Boat Festival (*ofune matsuri*). During the festival, the transfer of sacred vessels (*go-shintai*) of the deities of the lower shrine by ritual specialists is accompanied by the dragging

⁴ Although currently unified, the lower and upper shrine complexes were originally separate institutions. While both shrines venerate the Great Bright Suwa Deity, or Suwa Daimyōjin, called Takeminakata-no-mikoto (see chapter 2), the lower shrines give greater honour to his estranged consort Yasakatome-no-mikoto.

of a giant ‘boat’ (actually a kind of sled) woven of brush along the same route by hundreds of parishioners (*ujiko*). Responsibility for this service alternates among ten parish blocks (*ontōgō*) that fall within the pastoral jurisdiction of Suwa Taisha. In addition to the shrine ritual and the festive service of the boat-pulling, the event is known for its parades of dancing *nagamochi* porters, neighbourhood teams of performers who commemorate the region’s history as a pre-modern transportation hub by carrying chests upon long poles of *hinoki* that creak and sway with the rhythm of movement. Normally the largest festival of the year, the Boat Festival is policed mainly by members of the town’s fire brigade, who provide an avuncular security presence amidst the celebration.

Living in the community meant that I could also be on hand to witness more intimate observances, not normally attended by tourists or merrymakers. One of these, attended every February by the fire brigade division and officials of the local ward, was a fire-quelling ceremony (*chinka-sai*, or *hibuse kigan*) which commemorated a tragic fire that burned through the village in the nineteenth century.⁵ Another event, celebrated at least since the medieval period as one of the Seven Mysteries of Suwa (*Suwa no shichi fushigi*), was the divinatory reed-gruel ritual (*tsutsugayu no shinji*) performed every February as an agricultural augury for crop performance in the year ahead. Because the ritual involves the lighting of a sacred fire

⁵ The conflagration, which occurred on 1813/1/8, consumed fifty-seven houses (over half of the village at the time) (Dai-Ikku Kushi Hensan Iinkai 1986: 253).

by the rapid friction of a hardwood rod on a softwood mortar (a process known as *hikiri*), here too, the fire brigade stood watch against the remote possibility that an errant spark might catch against the shrine sanctuary buildings, which are listed as nationally recognized cultural assets.⁶

The most spectacular event, however, and the inspiration that led me to the study of Japan through the lens of anthropology, came in the spring of 2004, when I witnessed a portion of *Onbashira*, the ‘sacred pillar festival’ popularly interpreted as the shrines’ symbolic reconstruction (cf. Gerbert 1996). Every six years, parishioners ascend into the hills around Suwa to fell and then physically haul the trunks of sixteen great fir trees down to the four shrines in the settlements of the lake basin. Midway during this journey between mountain and village, local men leap atop the pillars, riding them down precipitous slopes towards the valley below. At the base of the mountain, the pillars begin their journey anew through neighbourhood streets, until they are at last erected at the four corners of each of the Suwa shrines, all amidst colourful pageantry, feasting, and celebration. Here, too, I saw the fire brigade play a prominent role, not only maintaining order and security amidst multitudinous crowds, but also taking part in the processions, their bugles sounding a charge as the pillar processions got underway, or took their dramatic plunge. The festival’s power

⁶ In addition to the shrine buildings, the ritual itself is listed as an ‘intangible ethnic cultural asset’ (*mukeyi minzoku bunkazai*), its form (though not its social context) thoroughly documented by the Japanese government’s Agency for Cultural Affairs (*Bunkachō*) (cf. Bunkachō Bunkazai Hogobu 1981).

to unite the disparate communities of the region in common purpose captured my imagination. What motivation lay behind this seemingly archaic custom, and how did it have such pull with so many people? I resolved to learn more. My teaching responsibilities, though full time, were limited to afternoons and evenings, and I was able to enrol in full-time morning lessons in a nearby Japanese language school. By the end of the following year, I was sufficiently fluent to pass the highest level of the national language test for non-native speakers of Japanese.

2.1.1 Finding the right kind of network

The primary data for this thesis were collected when I returned to Shimosuwa for fieldwork between May 2008 and March 2009, with a subsequent field visit between April and June of 2010 to participate in and observe the celebration of the most recent Onbashira festival. During the initial period, both as a strategy for making local contacts and to some extent to repay the hospitality of my host community, I joined the town's fire brigade, which I knew to be closely associated—though I was unsure precisely how—with the shrine festivals. While this was to have significant repercussions for the direction of my research, it could hardly have been more successful as a methodological approach for securing access to a startling number of local networks.

For the ethnographer conducting situated research, I knew, such networks can be very beneficial. Theodore Bestor, introducing his ethnography of

Neighborhood Tokyo (1989), remarks on a fellow student's 'sage advice' to 'choose a network, not a neighborhood' when deciding where to settle (1989: 6). I, too, took this advice to heart, though perhaps not as carefully as I should have. With the assistance of Mr. Kobayashi, my wife and I identified an area inhabited by many of the families whose children had once been my students. It seemed ideal, as it contained both newly settled neighbourhoods as well as several of much older provenance, which I felt would give me a feel for contrast between different community patterns. By happy coincidence, the father of another *juku* teacher was an estate agent, and a relatively inexpensive flat was quickly found and let. As my wife and I re-established ourselves as community members, however, we found that our ability to rely on these ties at the outset proved to be a mixed blessing.

A consideration I had ignored in my strategy was the fact that networks do not only facilitate access to their members, but also provide a kind of shorthand by which people are able to situate each other on their social horizon. My experience in Shimosuwa as a fieldworker bore few resemblances to my earlier sojourn at the *juku*. Although I had hoped to draw on my connections with the families of my former students, this proved more difficult than expected. In hindsight, it seems obvious that this should have been the case, as the previous basis for these relationships—my role as teacher—had become obsolete. Since I did not appear to be employed, it was popularly assumed that I was looking for work, and I was often asked whether I

might offer private tuition. For the most part, I turned such offers down, feeling that this would both distract from my fieldwork and misrepresent the purpose of my return.⁷ It was difficult enough to explain my interest in Japan as an anthropologist (Japanese anthropologists, of course, study ‘other’ cultures or primates—and I tended to be introduced as either a sociologist or a folklorist), and I had no wish to further complicate matters by reprising my old identity. My initial attempts to re-establish myself in my old networks, as a researcher rather than a teacher, were thus largely ineffectual. Looking back, I see that I had mistaken my personal network of individualized relationships (or, more accurately, that of the school) for a structural one, in which members also had connections with each other (Hannerz 1980: 176-80). Nevertheless, at least a few of my former connections proved willing to assist me with my research. However, when I did finally find the ‘right’ kind of network, it was one that proved to be at significant remove (at least symbolically) from my own living situation.

2.1.2 Negotiating access, negotiating identity

When I first began making enquiries about joining the fire brigade, I learned that Masuzawa-san, the mother of one of my former students, happened to be the unit leader (*taichō*) of the brigade’s newly established Women’s Firefighting Unit (*josei shōbōtai*). Similarly serendipitously, my return coincided with the appointment of a

⁷ The sole exception being a weekly series of introductory adult language lessons I was asked to teach under the auspices of the municipal cultural centre’s lifelong learning offerings.

juku alumnus, Seki-san, to the captaincy of the same brigade division to which Masuzawa-san and her husband belonged. It was chiefly thanks to the behind-the-scenes lobbying of these two (over whether, where, and to what extent I would be allowed to participate) that the brigade commander and mayor eventually approved my request to join. Beyond securing official sanction, however, this intercession also resulted in my somewhat irregular assignment to a division whose jurisdiction was in the town's Second Ward (congruent with 'Old Shimosuwa', a cluster of settlements which had comprised an independent post-town (*shukuba*) during the Edo period), rather than the comparatively recently settled Third Ward, where my wife and I were living. Masuzawa-san, acting as an initial go-between for me with the brigade, suggested that it might be easier for me to join Second Division where I could rely on her to smooth the way. I misinterpreted this as an unnecessary expression of maternal concern, responding (perhaps naïvely and certainly ungraciously) that I had no desire to receive such special treatment. As it happened, I lived not far from the Third Division's local firehouse, and it seemed to me both reasonable and appropriate that I enlist there. What I had failed to realize, however, was that in effectively sponsoring my membership, Masuzawa-san and Captain Seki had taken me on as their responsibility. Her 'suggestion' was in fact an indirect way of informing me of a *fait accompli*—I was to be a member of Second Division.⁸

⁸ I later learned there were also instrumental reasons for my assignment to Second Division (the smallest of the brigade's seven). Several months later, I was interviewed for the prefectural newspaper

A consequence of this assignment was that my participation and ability to fully immerse myself in the local networks of both district wards was somewhat mitigated. This was a source of some regret to me until I realized that my own subjective perception of my ‘outsider’ status, in each situation, was something I felt more keenly as a *neighbourhood* outsider, than as a foreigner.

Shimosuwa is relatively cosmopolitan, and the presence of foreigners has long since lost any frisson of exoticism. Yet the town is small enough, and the opportunities few enough, that foreign residents can be expected to fall into a circumscribed set of categories. Where, as ‘unemployed language teacher’, I had filled a familiar (if somewhat awkwardly idle) categorical role, the sight of a foreigner on the fire brigade was sufficiently novel to spur people to think about how to position me more than they might otherwise have done. As a result, my social status, and to a real extent, my subjective identity, were re-interpellated by the apparatus of the brigade itself.⁹

As a member of the brigade, I was obliged to attend thrice-monthly training drills (*teiki kunren*) and to participate in various other disaster preparation

about my research. In the resulting article, I learned to my surprise that the brigade commander, a member of the town’s International Friendship Association, had felt that the internationalization (*kokusaika*) of the brigade might somehow attract a younger membership—a consideration of which I had theretofore been unaware.

⁹ I use interpellation in the sense used by Louis Althusser (1971: 162), as a subjective ‘response’ to the ‘call’ of an external ideological apparatus; in the act of acknowledgement, the subject renders itself both legible to and complicit within the structure from which the call originates.

manoeuvres. Due perhaps to the routine nature of these exercises, my 'special' status faded very quickly. Although my occasional gaffes were treated with solicitude, I was held to account for lapses in etiquette and discipline that might be expected of native recruits. On one occasion, when I offered a casual greeting to our division's vice-captain (*fuku-bundanchō*), Noguchi-san, his responding glower made me quickly repeat my salutation in more suitably respectful language. Later, when we were in the more informal milieu of the nearby Chinese restaurant, where the division often retired for drinks and *ramen* noodles after drills, he apologized with a chuckle, explaining that he had just been in a bad mood, and should make allowances for my lack of cultural awareness. The twin hierarchies of seniority and rank were carefully observed even during otherwise informal socializing, and I was usually seated 'below the salt', i.e. at the opposite end of the table from the officers. From a research perspective, this could be frustrating. Conversation along the long table in the firehouse's raised *tatami* seating area was inevitably fragmented, and it seemed the discussions in which I was most interested (such as those about neighbourhood projects and politics) occurred chiefly among the officers, while junior members preferred to shoot the breeze about more personal concerns such as work, television, women, and hobbies.

Nevertheless, as I had hoped, my position on the brigade facilitated my access to the community in other ways, positioning me to play an active role not only

in the specific disaster preparation and training drills of the brigade, but also in a wide variety of local events. While this access was not wholly without restriction (I was, after all, 'on duty' as a brigade member), I remained conspicuously positioned to make the acquaintance of a wide spectrum of local citizens. More than anything else, the exposure I gained through the brigade was evidence of my *bona fide* interest in the community. 'Ah, it's the fellow from Second Division', a senior member of a local parish association called out in greeting when I arrived to witness a ritual being carried out at a local shrine. 'Are you by any chance the individual from Second Division?' asked a municipal employee when I showed up unannounced to audit a monthly meeting of the town's ward headmen I had learned of that morning in the community newspaper (an invaluable guide to local happenings).

This acknowledgement of my status as a member of the brigade was thus, in many ways, a boon to my research. However, as time passed, I found that there were less desirable consequences to this social positioning, in that my informants' expressed attitudes towards the brigade tended to be coloured by their knowledge of my membership and interest.

2.2 The practice of ethnography

2.2.1 Positions and impositions

The concern taken by town authorities to establish my relative position on the brigade was evident well before I had even joined the brigade formally. On a Saturday

morning in late May, soon after my arrival and months before my formal induction, I encountered the brigade while out walking. I had acquired a street atlas prepared by the school board, and was intent on familiarizing myself with the newer sections of town on the reclaimed lands near the lakeshore. Before I had gone far, I paused to watch the black-and-red-uniformed figures of the fire brigade mustering on the Firefighting Grounds (*shōbō ground*).¹⁰ I recognized the officer's cap and grizzled moustache of the brigade's chief officer, Commander (*danchō*) Shigeno, standing beside a second man in blue and orange coveralls, the mark of the professional fire service.

I had met Commander Shigeno the previous week, when I had appeared unannounced at the fire station to ask about joining the brigade. As it happened, my visit coincided with the departure of a team of local officials on an inspection tour of several construction sites in the hills above town. Someone apparently thought that this type of thing would be of interest to me, and with the suddenness and grace of an abduction, I found myself in the back of a light truck trailing a convoy of similar vehicles along the access road that led into the mountains. Our group included the town mayor, headmen of several local wards, executive members of the fire brigade, and a number of town employees. Two years earlier, an unusually sustained period of

¹⁰ It is long-established practice for Japanese communities to set aside a vacant plot of as a parade ground for firefighting exercises. Touring Japan on foot during the First World War, the British journalist J.W. Robertson Scott reported that 'sometimes a piece of ground was described to me as "the training ground of the fire defenders"' (1922: 118).

heavy rain had caused severe flooding and a number of landslides in the area, and the tour had been organized to familiarize town and emergency officials with the state of measures that were being taken against the possibility of similar conditions. No one was sure what my role in all of this was (least of all me), and I was largely left to my own devices, trying to engage men who seemed as uninterested in my presence as they were in the disquisitions of the town engineers.

I must have made some impression, however, because when the commander espied me the following weekend, he gestured with a familiar air of authority for me to approach. He had heard that I wanted to join the brigade, he told me, but I was to understand that these things take time—he may be the boss of the fire brigade, but the mayor was *his* boss. In the interim, I should come by the next morning to see an outdoor workshop on flood prevention measures (*suibō kunren*). The invitation delivered, I was dismissed, and he returned to his inspection of the brigade, by then jogging in ragged formation across the field.

When I arrived the next morning, a fire service official instructed me to join others who would be part of the designated ‘observation party’, some of whom I recognized from my adventure in the hills. In addition to its nominal purpose, this workshop, in which all town divisions participate, provided one of the first opportunities for the year’s district ward headmen (*kuchō*) to observe the brigade in action. Other observers included delegates from the prefectural police, professional

fire service, and the town office, as well as a member of the local press. Together, we made the rounds of the various workshop stations, where instructors from the prefectural fire service were instructing members in various techniques, including chainsaw operation, how to fill and deploy sandbags, and how to secure slopes against erosion using brushwood. When it came time for the closing ceremony, which included a formal inspection of the ranks by the observation party, I was hurriedly pulled aside by another fire service official who, like the Commander the day before, spoke to me in a familiar but not unkindly manner. If I was serious about joining the brigade, I was told, it might be better to stand away from the formal observers, lest I be somehow associated by my future comrades with the local authority.¹¹

2.2.2 Pragmatics and polemics

Participant observation represents a key methodological strategy for this study. Equally significant, however, has proved to be what Elisabeth Hsu (2006) has described as ‘participant experience’—the acquisition of practical skills through a process of situated learning. As described by Hsu, whereas participant observation suggests an analytic engagement with social relations in the field as ethnographic object, participant experience emphasises the researcher’s move towards internalizing bodily techniques as a subject of power relations in the field. I interpret

¹¹ An equally plausible reason for holding me back on this occasion, of course, was that I simply had no business taking part in the day’s closing ceremonies.

this as being similar to acquiring a specific occupational habitus, in the sense popularized by Pierre Bourdieu (1990; 2000: 164-65). As a research methodology, this was readily understood by my informants, for whom learning through ‘bodily experience’ (*taiken*) was no more than common sense. Older men, especially, approved of my decision to join the brigade, expressing the phenomenological insight that one could not understand its meaning without ‘donning the *happi*’ (*happi o kiru*)—the black and red liveried coats of stiff cotton that still serve as the brigade uniforms in many areas (though modern coveralls have recently been making inroads, especially among urban brigades).¹²

Beyond its literal meaning, however, the concept of ‘wearing the *happi*’ can be understood metonymically as an expression of the subjugation of the self to group hierarchy, to the brigade’s organizational relations of seniority (*senpai*) and juniority (*kōhai*), and so to the service of the wider community in general. The initial phases of fieldwork (if not the process as a whole) are often described in van Gennepian terms as a ‘liminal’, disorienting, even disabling experience (e.g. Davies 2010: 15-16). In the context of this marginality, the psychic promise of the brigade as a ready-made means of ‘fitting in’ proved alluring.

In addition to extensive informal discussions throughout my time on the brigade, I conducted twenty formal interviews on the subject of the fire brigade with

¹² Many references to the traditional *happi* continue to characterize them as blue and red, harking back to the navy-dyed (*konzome*) *happi* of an earlier era.

members of my own and other divisions, as well as several more with other town citizens and officials. In all but one case, I conducted these interviews in Japanese, in most cases recording the conversation digitally with full consent of my interviewees for later review and transcription. (There were some exceptions: one interview, conducted with my former employer, was conducted in English, while on three other occasions, I either neglected to bring my recorder or else found to my chagrin that its batteries were depleted.) Where I include translations of direct quotes, they are taken either from my own transcriptions of these conversations, or from field notes based on my anxious attempts to capture those interviews which I was unable to record.

With the understanding that I did not provide access to personal information contained therein, I was also fortunate to be granted unrestricted access to the files on the division's computer. (A donation from a retired captain, the computer elicited envious admiration from other divisions on inter-divisional social occasions—my division prided itself on keeping current with the latest technology, to compensate for its underdog status as the smallest division.) These data proved helpful in fleshing out my understanding of the activities and behind-the-scenes mechanics that were not immediately evident through participant observation or deemed sufficiently interesting by my informants to mention. I was also graciously allowed to digitize the seven volumes of the brigade's hand-brushed chronicle (*enkakushi*), which records a century of the organization's activities in minute detail,

starting from its formal incorporation as the Shimosuwa Fire Association (*shōbōgumi*) in 1894 until the automation of record-keeping in the mid-1990s.

While none of my informants had any privacy concerns, I have employed pseudonyms and altered some biographical details to mask personal identities. Such measures notwithstanding, there can be no question of my disguising the communities involved. From a pragmatic perspective, I have relied extensively on Japanese scholarship that explicitly refers to Suwa, and additional clues, easily gleaned from the geographical and historical specificities of the region (the lake, the festival, etc.), would make a mockery of any attempt at obfuscation.¹³

For reasons less technical than epistemological, however, I should in any case have hesitated at such measures, as there is much to lose in the sacrifice of the individual links by which ethnographic knowledge is anchored to the historical world. I believe that F. W. Maitland had it right when he conjectured many years ago that ‘by and by anthropology will have the choice between being history and being nothing’ (1911: 295), and that the questions of anthropology, like history, are rooted in specific actions, beliefs, and places whose better understanding is (to both disciplines) both means and end. Maitland, a jurist and historian, was not arguing against comparative social study, but rather making the case that its only practical objective could be to inform our knowledge of particular problems, that we might in

¹³ In the age of tools such as Google Maps, even the most assiduously disguised field communities, such as Ronald Dore’s every-village of *Shinohata* (1978), may be pinpointed with little effort.

turn better understand other particular problems, and so on (Cohn 1987: 53). In the present context, we may see echoes of this indictment of abstract generalization in Sonia Ryang's critique (2004) of the methodological nationalism implicit within the anthropology of Japan.¹⁴ Ryang convincingly argues that the extrapolated ethnography of specific institutions (communities, factories, organizations, etc.) have reified images of homogeneity and hierarchy, which have been and continue to be used 'to make generalizations about Japan or to compare Japan with other societies' (Smith 1977: 2; quoted in Ryang 2004: 193). Such abstractions mitigate opportunities for both robust comparison and fruitful interdisciplinary collaboration, thus leaving anthropology open to the charge of self-serving obscurantism. To invoke Maitland again, '[w]hether we fix our eyes on the east or the west, on ancient or modern times, we see that new truths are being brought in and secured, and this in that gradual fashion in which a healthy body of knowledge grows, the new truth generally turning out to be but a quarter-truth and yet one which must modify the whole tale' (ibid.: 287-88).¹⁵ I cannot therefore see that the masking of such particular truths, when it is even successful, is anything other than counterproductive.

¹⁴ Though she does not explicitly frame her argument in such terms, Ryang's essay may be considered a contribution to the wider contemporary critique of methodological nationalism (i.e. the privileging and reification of the nation-state as a cultural field) in the social sciences (cf. Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003; Beck and Sznaider 2006).

¹⁵ Maitland was not himself without interest in Japan, concluding this same lecture with the lamenting aside that 'of the origin of the so-called feudalism of Japan next to nothing is known and that men who profess to know what is known say nothing' (Maitland 1911: 303).

2.3 Shifting aims, moving targets

My decision to return to carry out fieldwork in Shimosuwa was made with the ethnographic object of the Onbashira festival in mind. My familiarity with the community and its status as one of the seats of Suwa Taisha made it a logical choice for such a study. Yet as I came to realize the festival's historical scope and complexity, I began to feel that the synoptic study of the festival I had originally envisioned was overly ambitious. Indeed, in discussions with Japanese anthropologists familiar with the festival, I was cautioned to this effect. In part, this emerged from a (not unreasonable) native scepticism that a novice foreign anthropologist would be able to master the considerable philological and ethnological literature on the festival in Japanese, which must be seen as a prerequisite to any such project. More significantly, however, as anthropologists, they were warning me implicitly against following the siren song of cultural curiosity into purely antiquarian study, without due concern for broader disciplinary engagement. To paraphrase a Geertzian axiom, our conversation reminded me that anthropologists do not study festivals, they study *during* festivals (cf. Geertz 1973: 22). Thus, while I was able to assemble a considerable amount of first-hand material relating to the festival, some of which will be touched on in the following chapters, an in-depth discussion must be set aside as the topic of a future study.

To suggest that this realization came all at once, however, is something of a misrepresentation; rather it was the culmination of a vague sense of disappointment

and diffidence that grew upon me during my time in the field, and which lingered even after I returned to Oxford to write up the thesis. As weeks in the field turned into months, and I continued attending weekly training meetings and joining in exercises and post-practice socializing, I continued pushing on with my original research plan, focussing on the structures of community life with which the brigade was interrelated, rather than the organization itself.

The nature of the brigade, however, meant that there were also more serious, even sombre occasions. While I was a member, our division was called out to two major fires, where the brigade assisted the town's professional firefighters. The first incident occurred in early December, when a kitchen fire broke out that, while quickly extinguished, nevertheless gutted a local *izakaya* (a drinking establishment which also happened to be run by the former captain of a neighbouring division—an irony which prompted no little speculation on the fire's 'accidental' status). For this smaller, albeit serious fire, only two divisions were dispatched via the brigade's mobile text messaging system. The second, more tragic, fire took place in early February, coincidentally on the day following the return of our division from a weekend 'study trip' (*kenshū ryokō*) to Yokohama. Unlike the earlier incident, this second emergency required the mobilization of the entire brigade. In place of text messages to mobile phones, the call to mobilize was broadcast via the town's

loudspeaker system, which could be heard throughout the town, both by members of the brigade and the general populace.

Knowing that I did not have enough time to reach the firehouse in Second Ward before the rest of the division would have already mobilized, I quickly grabbed my coat, gloves, and safety helmet and caught a ride with the Third Division men from the firehouse near our apartment. In my haste, however, I had not taken time to don my *happi*—brigade members are instructed to show up to emergencies in uniform, but I rationalized that my own winter coat would suffice in a pinch, and in any case would be much warmer on the cold winter night. To my embarrassment, as I arrived on the scene, I found that all of the brigade members were in uniform—that is to say, they were wearing their *happi* over regular clothes (only a few had bothered pulling on the heavy *haragake* aprons, and still fewer had changed into the brigade trousers and regulation boots). Not only that, however, but the mayor and several town councillors were also present, similarly dressed in safety helmets and brigade *happi* of their own (these specially dyed with characters identifying their place in the town administration).

Amidst the commotion of the fire, my sudden appearance seemed to nonplus the members of my own division, who, as I had expected, had reached the scene before me. I had discussed the possibility of my participation in an emergency with Captain Seki at the outset of my fieldwork, and we had agreed that I should be

present, but stay out of the way, in the event of a real emergency. Neither he nor I, however, had fully anticipated the potential awkwardness of such an eventuality. Martin O'Neill, a former Welsh ambulance service employee who later returned to study the organization as an anthropologist, has discussed the ethical dilemma posed by participant observation in emergency contexts. Fieldwork, he writes, 'forces us into relationships with people: this in turn has an impact on how we behave; or, more germane to this case, actions arise through obligations in another role... as a citizen and as a human being' (2001: 229). The desperate energy and barely controlled chaos that characterized the scene of the fire called for action, with little time for thought or explanation. But the action that was called for had little to do, I felt, with my fieldwork. In the moment, I was overwhelmed by the sudden vertiginous perception of my inadequacy to contribute in any useful or immediate sense.



Figure 4: Fire hoses linking the town's water supply to fire engines near the scene of the fire. This photo was taken by my wife, who followed afterwards to the scene of the fire. (Photo credit: Skye Hohmann)

Spotting me, Vice-Captain Noguchi assigned me brusquely to a position alongside two female brigade members who were guarding a cordon which had been strung up to keep the assembled crowd of neighbourhood onlookers out of harm's way. With my arms stretched out to act as a barrier, I watched the scene unfold. The mayor and local councillors passed by, commending the brigade members individually for their efforts, seeking out familiar faces among neighbourhood officials. A solemn young man with dyed hair and hip-hop-style jeans comforted a diminutive elderly woman, perhaps his grandmother, her face streaked with tears. The crowds were overwhelming. All seven of the brigade's divisions had assembled, drawing almost two hundred men and women to assist the two dozen professional firefighters who fought the blaze at its centre. On the other side of the cordon, several hundred more citizens seemed to have collected to witness the destruction, many yelling advice to the brigade members milling about near the fire, others muttering '*Taihen, taihen*' ('It's terrible, terrible').

At length, the firefighters from the station announced that the battle was won. As we began to load the division's equipment back into the truck, Toshio, a squad leader (*hanchō*), took me aside. The brigade uniform was not optional, he reminded me. Regardless of the *happi*'s material qualities, if an accident were to occur in the line of duty, my eligibility for coverage under the brigade's insurance programme was conditional on my being in uniform. The daunting realization that

this was something that I should have known—What kind of brigade member was I? What kind of *fieldworker* was I?—only compounded my sense of inadequacy.¹

When the flames had been put out, the bugle corps sounded a muster and the brigade formed ranks and stood to attention in a car park below the gutted house, several members among us still holding the long anachronistic-looking pikestaffs (*tobiguchi*) used for tearing down unstable walls. Standing in formation, we received impromptu, but formal expressions of heartfelt thanks, first from a nephew of the victim, then from an equally emotional representative the local ward, the vice-headman (the headman being unavailable). After a final speech by the brigade commander, his words and tone sombre but suffused with approbation for the brigade's performance, we were dismissed. It was now late in the evening. Many who had been caught by the spray of the fire hoses were now chilled to the bone, and though the local division remained to continue with the clean-up, the others swiftly returned to their trucks, driving back through the winter night to their respective firehouses. When we arrived at the Second Division firehouse, word came that the *ryokan* (a traditional Japanese inn) owned by Masuzawa-san's parents had arranged for those who wished to use their hot spring bath to warm up, and food was being

¹ The necessity of rapid mobilization is one of the reasons why brigade regulations stipulate that division members be resident within their respective jurisdictions. I later found out that extra *happi* and waterproof coats (*kappa*) are kept in the back of the fire truck for members who must proceed directly to the scene of the fire. Despite my unpreparedness, whenever the fire was discussed afterwards, I was commended for having 'done the correct thing' in catching a ride, while the fact that I forgot my *happi* was never mentioned again, an example of the positive reinforcement characteristic of the brigade.

prepared for those who were hungry. While some took advantage of this proffered hospitality, I decided that I needed to return home, to exchange notes with my wife, and write down my experience and emotions.

Until that night, in the absence of any true emergency, I had been treating my time in the brigade as background to my own more sociological and historical interests in the wider community. Reflecting on my experience standing there on the side-lines, however, feeling no different than a helpless bystander as my comrades put their training into action (though often improvising when things went wrong), I realized that an anthropological problem of equal interest to and certainly more accessible than that of the Onbashira festival was playing itself out in front of me.

2.4 Discussion

That the research puzzles raised in the Introduction emerged from the experience of fieldwork itself goes some way to demonstrating the inherent suitability of Shimosuwa as a field site for this research. Nevertheless, a decision in the field such as this one, which shifts the object of an analysis from a local observance to a national organization, raises methodological questions as to the continued validity of a territorially bounded study. The Suwa area, to those who are familiar with it, may seem a rather curious locale for a study of the fire brigade; it is not the site of any recent major disaster, nor is it commonly associated with the popular iconography of firefighting in Japan, as are, say, the former castle-towns and cities of Tokyo, Osaka,

or Kanazawa. That my participation in the local brigade was merely a methodological strategy towards a study of the political economy of a local ritual is another cause for potential concern. These potential objections may be rephrased as the following questions. Firstly, could the brigade be properly studied in a single community? Secondly, as the field site was initially chosen based on a unique qualifying condition, could it remain useful in a study where it must be seen as a general representative? After careful consideration, I feel that both of these questions may be answered safely and definitively in the affirmative.

On the first point, existing ethnography suggests that a key to the first puzzle posed in the Introduction—Why are there so many volunteer firefighters in Japan (when there are so few fires)?—is understanding the brigade's institutional history and position as a symbolic resource in the production and reproduction of identity, both individual and collective. Assuming that any useful understanding of what the brigades do must be predicated on the question of who its members are, any approach which is not itself grounded within the lived communities of the brigades would seem to be fundamentally flawed.

The second question appears the thornier of the two. Many ethnographers conducting situated fieldwork in Japan spend considerable time and effort selecting a suitable field site from which to tackle their research, often receiving guidance from Japanese academics. This fact itself, however, is a reminder that any notion of

‘typicality’ has meaning ‘only in relation to the problem or interest of the researcher’ (Seshaiah 2002: 236). The point, then, is not to argue that a fieldwork site is representative, but that it is useful in addressing the questions being asked. A key to the second puzzle—Why is the fire brigade in decline (when volunteering is on the rise)?—involves the reinterpretation of traditional forms of community service in the context of late-modern Japan. The characteristic format of the Onbashira festival, which has for centuries involved the mobilization of collective labour of young men’s associations in ritual service (whose role as the institutional predecessor of community fire brigades is elucidated in the following chapters) therefore offers a ready-made heuristic framework for comparing perceptions of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ community involvement. An in-depth exploration of these two considerations is the subject of Chapter 3, which undertakes a sociological history of Suwa District and its symbolic representations in local and national discourse.

3 SUWA: NATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGY, LOCAL HISTORY, AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Suwa ga wakareba, Nihon ga wakaru. [Understand Suwa, understand Japan.]

—Suwa Proverb (Suzuka and Nishizawa 2004: ii; Kanai 1982: 374)

This chapter delves into the geography and history of Suwa District, examining the discursive representations of ‘society’ and ‘state’ implicit within local understandings of the historical connections and frictions between the networks and contexts of the region and those of the encompassing nation-state. Anthropologists are by now well aware that their work has an inherent recursive potential to become a part of the cultural traditions they purport to describe (Clifford 1986: 116-17; Marcus and Fischer 1999: 163-64). This point is particularly well taken by anthropologists of Japan, where translations of Ruth Benedict’s classic *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946) are a paradigmatic example of ‘written culture’ coming home to roost (Ryang 2002). Indeed, the mutual implication of both native and foreign academics within the construction and contestation of *Nihonjinron*—the ‘theories of the Japanese’ whose critique might itself be seen as a crisis of representation on a national scale—would suggest that, as an anthropological field, Japan has always been exemplary of what James Clifford has described as the discipline’s ‘intertextual predicament’ (1986: 117). Any previously assumed separation between the products of ethnographic knowledge and the cultural objects it seeks to describe, between text

and context, is now recognized to be arbitrary and ultimately untenable. Even more traditionally empirical approaches within the anthropology of Japan take note of the native production, consumption, and strategic management of ‘local knowledge’ (Martinez 1990: 105-106; Knight 1997: 144-45), whether it be in the form of regional studies of interested amateurs (*kyōdo kenkyū*), or of more disciplined indigenous academic scholarship.¹

Even when foreign researchers have taken native ethnological and academic traditions seriously, very few have followed the logic of intertextuality through to its inevitable conclusion: that the extent to which local knowledge is received as authoritative (in its broadest sense of guiding practice), is itself a function of that knowledge’s mediation by relations of power. Indigenous scholarship into the character and origins of local traditions—religious, kinship, and folk practices—has become part of the background knowledge, and is itself part of national identity discourse. The final section of this chapter looks into research into the social and cultural aspects of Suwa’s political and economic history.

3.1 Historical and political geography

The six townships of Okaya, Shimosuwa, Suwa, Chino, Hara, and Fujimi, which collectively make up Suwa District (*gun*), stretch across 715 square kilometres on the

¹ While the engagement of native anthropologists with the disciplinary study of their own culture is not as prominent as it was when research funding was more limited, and the tradition of anthropology ‘at home’ more popular (Mathews 2008: 61), Japanese anthropologists who are primarily interested in other cultures still often maintain a sideline interest in their home society.

eastern edge of Nagano Prefecture. In comparative terms, the region is about one-third the size of the Tokyo Metropolitan Area, yet its combined population (slightly over 200,000 residents, as of 2010) corresponds to only 1.5% of that of the capital region. While the effective population densities in settled areas remain far from desolate, even in comparison to Tokyo's notoriously cramped conditions, the region's abundant mountain woodlands are never more than a few kilometres away.²

Delimited by the natural borders that form the lake basin, as a discrete politico-geographical entity, Suwa District is of considerable antiquity. The designation *gun* is derived from ancient Chinese territorial units introduced to Japan through central reforms in the seventh century, when Suwa was situated within the ancient province of Shinano (co-extensive with the present prefecture of Nagano), along the inland route known as the Tōsandō ('Eastern Mountain Circuit') that led from the Home Provinces in the Kinai region in the southwest of Honshū to the frontier lands of the northeast. Mentions of Suwa in historical texts, while fragmentary, date the region's linkages to the power networks of the wider imperial

² I use 'township' when discussing municipalities in their geographical (as opposed to social or administrative) aspect, regardless of their classification as village, town, or city. This lexical distinction also serves to gloss a tendency I perceived for informants to use the Sino-Japanese pronunciation of the 'town' morpheme (*chō*) in discussions of the municipality as an administrative unit, while retaining the native Japanese pronunciation (*machi*) for more colloquial discussions of the town as a social space. (This could well be a misapprehension on my part; informants dismissed any such distinction, adamantly maintaining the interchangeability of these terms.)

state to at least this period, though archaeological evidence dates human habitation to the Palaeolithic period (cf. Kidder 1988: 69-71).³



Figure 5: Travellers look out over a frozen Lake Suwa from Shiojiri Pass, as depicted in an *ukiyo-e* woodblock print by Keisai Eisen (1790-1848). This print is part of the series *Kiso Kaidō no Rokujūkyū-ji* ('The 69 stations of the Kiso road').

Under the governmental and legal system (*ritsuryō-sei*) of the ancient state, *gun* were subsidiary administrative territories, governed by regional administrators (*gunryō* or *gunji*) who oversaw tax collection, levied military forces and corvée

³ Suwa is noted for high quality obsidian outcroppings north and southeast of the lake. Archaeological studies have identified these as a major source of obsidian used during the Neolithic period throughout Eastern Japan (cf. Tozawa 1986). Such findings are a source of local pride, and more than once I heard the prehistoric obsidian trade referred to in the rhetoric of local businessmen as proof that 'the origins of exchange' are in Suwa.

labour, and enforced the local implementation of central mandates.⁴ In Suwa, this office was filled by the Kanazashi, an aristocratic clan of horse-riding warriors believed (on the somewhat euhemeristic grounds of official national histories and ancient genealogies) to have hereditary ties to the Izumo polity of western Japan, the ancient adversary of Yamato, the forerunner of the imperial Japanese state.

The oldest textual reference to Suwa comes from the *Kojiki*, the earliest chronicle of the Yamato clan's history.⁵ In the mytho-historical chapter known as the 'Succession of the realm' (*Kuni-yuzuri*), Suwa features as the final refuge of the deity Takeminakata, second son of Ōkuninushi, Lord of Izumo. Unwilling to stand by as his father and brother acquiesce to demands by the descendants of the heavenly deity Amaterasu to relinquish their hereditary rule over the Central Land of the Reed Plains (i.e. terrestrial Japan), the impetuous Takeminakata challenges the sky-herald Takemikazuchi to a wrestling match. This proves to be unwise, however, and in the opening exchange, Takeminakata's arm is 'crushed like a reed.' So humbled, the scion of Izumo flees as far as 'the sea of Suwa' before finally being run to ground by his heavenly foe. Yielding, Takeminakata entreats Takemikazuchi to spare his life,

⁴ Several entries in the *Shoku Nihongi* (a state history compiled in 797 CE) indicate that Suwa enjoyed a brief decade as an autonomous province between 721 and 731 CE. While little more than the mere fact of this independence is known, the historian Miyachi Naokazu has suggested that the ancient province likely encompassed much more territory than the modern district (1931: 15-16).

⁵ The *Kojiki* ('Records of ancient matters') was compiled in 712 CE. In Philippi's English translation (1968), Suwa is rendered as 'Supa', reflecting Old Japanese pronunciation. Kidder (2007: 2-3) offers a succinct summary of the provenance of Japan's earliest histories.

swearing to honour the decisions of his father and brother, and to remain forevermore confined to Suwa in exile.⁶

Local tradition, while agreeing in principle to this ‘official’ mythology, adds a parallel drama in which Takeminakata in turn seizes control of the Suwa region from an autochthonous deity known as Mishaguji, thereby recapitulating the national succession on a local scale. Just as the rulers of Izumo are commonly held to have become priests serving the Yamato, so, according to the medieval histories of the Suwa shrines (compiled much later than the national histories) were the ousted local rulers, the Moriya clan, incorporated as ritual specialists within the imposed ruling structure that became the Suwa shrines (Kawamura 1992: 77). The knowledge that can be derived from extant historical sources is limited—their own inherent contradictions additionally veiled in the vigorous interpretive speculations of a large secondary antiquarian literature. Nevertheless, a general consensus has emerged over the fact that, after consolidating power in the region, the descendants of the Kanazashi—who eventually took Suwa as a clan name—eventually split into two lineages whose spiritual and temporal authority was centred in the twin ritual

⁶ Philippi notes that Takeminakata’s conspicuous absence from both an earlier chapter devoted to Ōkuninushi’s genealogy and the later *Nihon Shoki* (completed 720 CE), suggests that the succession myth was a late addition to the cycle, intended as a charter for Suwa’s relationship to the imperial state (Philippi 1968: 129-33; cf. Matsumura 1954-58, 3:439-40). In the latter history, an entry during the reign of Empress Jitō (r. 686-697 CE) notes the dispatch of envoys to venerate an unnamed deity in ‘Suwa of Shinano’ as a measure against storms plaguing the capital (cf. Aston 1972: 404).

complexes on the northern and southern shores of the lake, now known respectively as the Lower and Upper Shrines of Suwa Taisha.⁷

Throughout the medieval period, the patronage of these shrines by both the imperial aristocracy and military court allowed Suwa to become a significant locus of regional power, extending its influence through much of Shinano.⁸ Martial and hunting rituals conducted in the highlands above each shrine attracted the particular attention of the powerful Hōjō clan, who invested many of their retainers with positions of responsibility among the shrine's faithful.⁹ This regional dominance faded with the fortunes of the central rulers, and was finally broken by the Takeda clan of Kai in the mid-sixteenth century. Echoing the conquest of the previous millennium, the Takeda did not purge the Suwa clan entirely, but secured their legitimacy by adopting the Suwa Daimyōjin ('Great Bright Suwa Deity', as Takeminakata was more widely known) as their own tutelary deity, limiting the subjugated Suwa clan to a purely sacerdotal role.

⁷ The Kanazashi (also transliterated as Kanesashi or Kanasashi) claimed descent from a legendary founding ancestor of the Shinano region (Kanai 1982: 13-14), while the more obscure Miwa lineage, who appear to have diverged sometime during the Kamakura period, favoured identification with the aforementioned Takeminakata (Kawamura 1992: 53-54).

⁸ Japan's medieval period is traditionally dated from 1192 CE, when the Minamoto warlord Yoritomo (1147–1199) established the Kamakura shogunate (*bakufu*, lit. 'tent government'), dividing the structure of state authority between the sacred, symbolic rule of the imperial line and the secular, effective rule of the military shoguns. Following Yoritomo's death, the shogunate was effectively controlled by the Hōjō clan, who acted as regents until their overthrow in 1333 (Ishii 1990).

⁹ Archaeological studies of these highlands indicate that they had been heavily ritualized spaces since the pre-invasion period (Kanai 1968). The religious and political context of this medieval hunting ritual, the *Misayama matsuri*, is summarized in detail in Lisa Grumbach's doctoral thesis (2005, chapters 4 and 5).

The interregnum suffered by the Suwa proved brief, however, and the Suwa were re-established in their ancestral territory with the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate. In 1601, Suwa Yoritada, the retired patriarch who had in his prime arranged his clan's vassalage (*fudai*) to Tokugawa Ieyasu after the defeat of the Takeda, saw his eldest son enfeoffed as *daimyō* in the clan's hereditary territory. Takashima Domain, as it became known (after the castle in Kamisuwa, on the lake's eastern shore), was thereafter held by successive generations of the Suwa clan without further interruption until the breakup of the feudal system in the late nineteenth century.¹⁰

At a national scale, the political stability of the Tokugawa period was maintained in part through the revival and formalization of a medieval system of alternate attendance (*sankin kōtai*) during the reign of the Ieyasu's grandson Iemitsu (r. 1623 to 1651). This system mandated the regular circulation of processions of feudal households along new highways constructed along older trade routes between the various regions and the new capital in Edo. The villages of Suwa, near the junction of the Nakasendō (the inland route leading between Kyoto and Edo) and the Kōshū Kaidō (an alternate route to Edo by way of the old province of Kai) took on

¹⁰ While academic historians offer more nuanced analyses, this longevity is popularly attributed to the *realpolitik* machinations of Yoritada, who, having secured his eldest son's position as *daimyō*, went on to reorganize the parish system of the Suwa shrines and install his youngest son as the high priest (*ōhōri*), thereby to some extent re-establishing the combined temporal and spiritual rule of his medieval ancestors. For a sociological analysis of the early modern shrine-parish system, see Kurosaki (1958) and Aruga and Kurosaki (1962).

new relevance as post-stations.¹¹ The villages of Shimosuwa, where the two highways joined, gained particular popularity not only as the seat of a popular pilgrimage destination in the Lower Shrines, but also (and perhaps more importantly for weary travellers) as the only hot springs on the Nakasendō. The comparative peace also allowed for the widespread establishment of homesteading settlements (*shinden*) in the upland areas in the district's southeast.

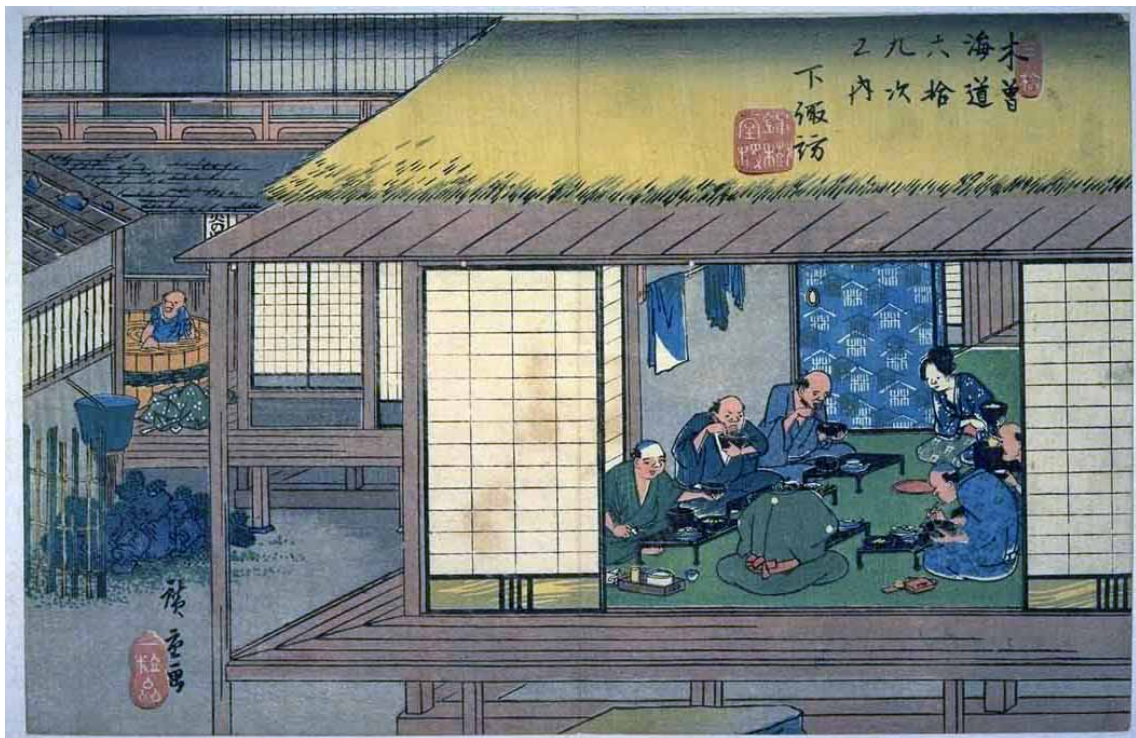


Figure 6: A print depicting customers sitting down to a meal at a Shimosuwa inn, as another relaxes in a spring-fed bathhouse. The figure facing away from the viewer, hunched over his bowl, is reputed to be the artist, Utagawa (Andō) Hiroshige (1797-1858). This print precedes Figure 5 above in the same series, on which Hiroshige and Eisen collaborated during the 1830s and 40s.

¹¹ These highways were part of the system of the 'Five Highways' (*Gokaidō*) that constituted the official Tokugawa road network. The Nakasendō ('Middle Mountain Road', about 530 km) provided an inland alternative to the coastal Tōkaidō ('Eastern Sea Road', about 490 km). Although longer, those who received permission from the shogunate to take the inland route faced fewer obstructions in the form of rivers to be forded or traffic to be negotiated, as well as cheaper transport costs (Vaporis 2008:51).

In 1872, after the final fall of the shogunate and the establishment of the Meiji state, Takashima Domain was subdivided into three districts (*daiku*). Nevertheless, after a flurry of successive administrative experiments by the central government, these districts were reconstituted once again as a revived Suwa *gun* in 1878, which served as an administrative function until the final abolition of the *gun* system in 1921.¹²

Today, *gun* retain only a vestigial relevance, mainly in the designation of postal and electoral districts. Contemporary *gun* are officially exclusive of cities (*shi*), thus the cities of Okaya, Suwa, and Chino are, strictly speaking, now independent of Suwa District, which technically includes only the towns of Shimosuwa and Fujimi, and the village of Hara. References to the area are usually, therefore, couched in other terms, e.g., referring to the region as a geographical space—‘the Suwa Basin’ (*Suwa bonchi*); as a collective political entity—‘the Six Suwa Municipalities’ (*Suwa roku shichōson*, lit. ‘Suwa’s six cities, towns, and villages’); or with the simple generality of ‘the Suwa region’ (*Suwa chihō*). The district level sets the boundaries for a number of state and political organizations, including the Regional Fire Authority or support organizations for national politicians, and civil society groups such as the philanthropic Suwa Youth Chamber (*Seinen Kaigisho*), which sponsors various environmental initiatives.

¹² See the previous chapter for a very brief summary of the region’s twentieth century history.

州羽 須波 須芳 諏方 諏訪

Figure 7: Ideographic variants for ‘Suwa’, found, from left to right, in the *Kojiki* (712 CE), the *Nihon shoki* (720 CE), the *Ryō no shūge* (920 CE), the *Shoku nihongi* (797 CE), and *Wamyō ruijushō* (938 CE). (The latter two variants distinguished independent clan lineages during the medieval and Edo periods, the last being established as the modern variant in 1873.) Composed before the emergence of any truly standardized usage of the imported Chinese script, the authors of the earliest histories selected characters to match the phonetics of native Japanese terms, often but not always following their semiotic significance. In the case of the *Kojiki* variant, the characters chosen signify ‘sandbar’ and ‘wing’ (synecdochic for ‘bird’), perhaps suggestive of the geology and fauna of the lake basin. In their respective commentaries on the *Kojiki*, the nativist historians Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) and Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843) speculate that the toponym derives from the substance of the *Kojiki* myth itself (Motoori 1997 [1790]:100-101). Such circular speculations remain unconvincing, however, and philologists have been unable to agree on any clear etymology. A laconic footnote in Basil Hall Chamberlain’s English translation concludes simply that ‘no satisfactory etymology of the name is forthcoming’ (1932: 123 n 25).

This sweeping summary reflects the popular understanding of local history up to the modern period. Of course, just as ancient Shinano cannot be conflated with Nagano Prefecture, the modern territory which has inherited its borders, so too must we be careful to avoid unproblematically linking ancient Suwa with its twenty-first century incarnation (Wigen 1997). For it cannot be said that such historical awareness ranks highly in the everyday concerns of most locals, any more than meditations on the Kingdoms of Kent or Wessex might be said to occupy the minds of contemporary Britons on their daily commutes. Nevertheless, without exaggerating trans-historical continuities, it may be said that aspects of this regional history continue to provide a strong symbolic resource for expressions of local identity when local citizens have cause to distinguish themselves from their countrymen.

3.2 The national doxa of Japan anthropology

In the writings of social scientists interested in the constitutive processes of the formation of Japanese identity, the regional and the local have often been overshadowed by an analytical focus at the level of the nation-state. This claim does not suggest that narrower scales of abstraction have been ignored, but rather simply that they have been construed in subordinate relation to an encompassing whole, whose structures they were seen to instantiate. From the earliest wartime attempts to locate Japan's 'national character' through surveys of Japanese-Americans (e.g. Gorer 1943; La Barre 1945; Benedict 1946), the extrapolation of behavioural, psychological, and cultural patterns observed in limited contexts as characteristics of the ethnic nation were seen to be unproblematic.

Even so, this tendency continued through a generation of post-war anthropologists whose in-depth fieldwork and first-hand experience of Japanese society enabled them to transcend the limitations of their forebears (cf. the review in Sofue 1960). For their successors, however, who by the late 1970s and early 1980s could no longer see culture as a satisfactory explanation for difference, the idea of 'Japanese culture' came to be seen rather as a medium of representation which concealed the manipulation and reproduction of relations of power. Some of these latter scholars sought to expose the vested ideological interests and practices within the state which served to reify notions of national exceptionalism and cultural homogeneity as *Nihonjinron* (e.g. Kawamura 1980; Dale 1986; Mouer and Sugimoto

1986). Another group, focussing on the paradigmatic concept of the ‘hometown’ (*furusato*), demonstrated the inextricable implication of central bureaucratic and commercial interests within the production and consumption of local identity discourses, which had become ‘a metonym of, and a metaphor for, the national’ (Robertson 1988: 35; Ivy 1988).

This is obviously a highly simplified account, and these latter groups—near contemporaries, but reflecting considerably divergent disciplinary traditions—might well contest the kinship suggested here. Nevertheless, a fact made strikingly evident in this schematic account is that their mutual concern to expose the interpolation of state agency into local representations of culture and identity is in fact a recapitulation (if from the opposite perspective) of the hierarchical relationship implicit in the ethnographic extrapolations of their predecessors. Whether phrased as microcosm and macrocosm, or metonym and metaphor, existing accounts have privileged the portrayal of national and local discourses in a hierarchical relation of encompassment, rather than of competition.

3.2.1 Discourses of local identity

It is perhaps for this reason that the ethnographic tradition in Japan has paid less attention to regional identities and solidarities than they otherwise might merit, largely leaving such matters to the antiquarian interests of local historians and native ethnologists. Yet in the notional *dramatis personae* on the stage of sub-national

difference in Japan, natives of Nagano Prefecture have long been cast in the role of the contrary, obstinate, and yet studious *Shinshūjin* (lit. ‘people of Shinshū’, another name for Shinano). However, Kären Wigen, perhaps the foremost Western authority on Nagano’s social and historical geography, argues that this identity is largely a recent tradition, ‘invented’ with the re-establishment of in the Meiji period as a medium for rechanneling older sub-regional loyalties into the new administrative frameworks of the modern state when the ancient province of Shinano was reinstated as Nagano Prefecture (Wigen 1997). This is a convincing argument which goes some way to historicizing the political relations of encompassment which I have suggested inform existing studies of local identity discourse vis-à-vis the state. Nevertheless, it also reveals, lest we should have had any doubt, that such processes are neither necessary nor natural, but are historically delimited, socially constituted, and subject to local variability.

In Suwa particularly, a sub-regional identity persists, coextensive with the district’s geographical borders. Despite its administrative obsolescence, colloquial invocations of ‘Suwa *gun*’ preserve its ancient, inclusive sense, especially when local citizens wish to convey a sense of long-term connections between the district’s constituent communities. This discourse is sufficiently strong that Suwa natives have a perverse pride in pointing out that, within Nagano Prefecture, only they have been distinguished, by way of an even more particularistic pseudo-ethnonym, as *Suwajin*

(lit. ‘People of Suwa’), whose defining characteristics are those of *Shinshūjin* par excellence. The folk of Suwa, it is held, are a quarrelsome lot, with a reputation for hard-headed and stubborn independence. One informant suggested that this local character may be expressively seen in the juxtaposition of the hackneyed Japanese proverb, *deru kui wa utareru* (‘The nail that sticks up gets hammered down’) with the Confucian motto of the district’s oldest (and most prestigious) high school: ‘If on looking inward, I find that I am upright, I may proceed against thousands and tens of thousands.’¹³ This identity is deeply indebted to the local antiquarian tradition, which offers a rich symbolic heritage on which to draw for pitting the local community against the state when necessary. During the early 1880s, for example, when Matsumoto became an important centre of the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement (*jiyū minken undō*),¹⁴ supporters of the movement in Suwa revived the ancient variants of the district’s ideographic representations in the titles of newspapers (*Suwa Shinbun*, *Suwa Shinpō*) in which they agitated for democratic reform (Miyasaka and Asakawa 1983, 2:20) (See Figure 7 above).

Particularly among older residents, the rhetoric of local exceptionalism was often quite strong. Sometimes this was evident in local wisdom delivered tongue-in-cheek, as when one informant alleged that the Suwa personality was the

¹³ The quote is from Mencius, English translation from Ivanhoe and Bloom (2009).

¹⁴ For an English-language assessment of the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement in the context late nineteenth-century debates about Japanese citizenship, see Ikegami (1996).

origin of a traditional preference among the men of Suwa to seek wives from the Ina Valley, south of the lake (there being no peace, goes the joke, in a marriage between locals). While younger informants tended to demur as to whether there was any substance to allegations of a local ‘type’ (especially at any supposed reputation for studiousness), there was widespread agreement among people of all ages that the ritual context of Suwa Taisha and its observances, despite a segmentary parish structure which promoted internal competition and local identification, was nevertheless a potent symbol of shared difference from the rest of Japan.

In political discussions, as well, the evidence of symbolic boundary maintenance was quite evident, and often phrased in an idiom of local resistance to perceived external meddling, though not always consistent with regard to the relationship of the region vis-à-vis state authority. An illustration may be seen in an exchange I witnessed following a lecture delivered by a local historian as part of a weekly series held at a salon run by Shimosuwa’s Women’s Association (*fujinkai*). The subject of the lecture was an 1864 battle in which Suwa forces had fought on behalf of the shogunate against an uprising of conservative radicals. Despite this political dynamic, some members of the audience interpreted the episode as a fine example of ‘Suwa backbone’ (*Suwa no kigai*).¹⁵ Much more recently, the rejection of

¹⁵ The battle in question is narrated in close detail in Shimazaki Tōson’s historical novel, *Before the Dawn* (1987: 272-79). See Victor Koschman’s treatment of the incident’s wider historical context and relevance (1987, esp. Chapter 5).

a proposed dam construction project in 2002 through a successfully mounted citizens' campaign has been nationally noted as an example of how local initiatives could oppose the state.¹⁶ However, although the anti-dam faction was organized by local activists, its ends were finally achieved only after the election of a sympathetic mayor, and with the support of an iconoclastic and charismatic prefectural governor. In addition, the personal connections between these men, who together with a leading member of the citizens' movement were former schoolmates, complicate any simple political narrative.

3.2.2 'They live for argument'

Perhaps the most well-known example from Suwa of how local identity has been used strategically can be seen in its mobilization in the context of several citizens' movements during the late 1960s. At the end of that decade, Nitta Jirō,¹⁷ a nationally popular author and a Suwa native, was commissioned to write an essay for the *Asahi Shinbun's* glossy English-language yearbook, *This is Japan!* (published until 1970), as part of a feature supplement showcasing Nagano Prefecture. Other contributors included the archaeologist Fujimori Ei'ichi (also from Suwa), and the artist Okamoto

¹⁶ Daniel Aldrich (2010: 107) touches on this incident in a recent treatise on the wider political context of locating controversial public facilities in Japan.

¹⁷ Nitta Jirō (1912-1980), was the pen name of Fujiwara Hiroto, a meteorologist and mountaineer who wrote many popular novels. His choice of pseudonym is a double pun. 'Nitta', an alternate reading of the characters for *shinden*, is a nod to his native home, a rural homestead along the upper reaches of one of Lake Suwa's tributaries. 'Jirō', meaning 'second-boy', is an allusion to the region's historical reputation for the practice of ultimogeniture, or last-child inheritance, a custom he also mentions in the essay in *This is Japan!* (See the discussion in section 3.4.)

Tarō, whose respective essays were both concerned with the Jōmon period artefacts unearthed from sites in the southern areas of Suwa District. Introducing the region and its inhabitants to his English readers in an essay entitled ‘They Live for Argument’, Nitta repeats popular stereotypes about the Shinano identity: ‘They may be social loners, but that is only a facet of an independent, enterprising, and even bellicose spirit’ (Nitta 1970: 220). In explaining the roots of this spirit, Nitta drew on the ancient history of the Suwa region as an illustration:

[... O]ne tribe—the Izumo—led by Tateminakata-no-Mikoto, stubbornly fought the invaders. After a succession of battles the Izumo tribe finally escaped into the mountains around Lake Suwa. There, a peace treaty was arranged with the people of the horse culture which gave Tateminakata self-governing rights over the area in return for a promise not to go beyond its boundaries. The original Izumo culture continued to develop in this ‘Suwa State.’ As its power grew, other tribes in the neighbouring mountains and valleys had to contend with it, and out of this interaction evolved the distinctive culture of the Shinano region. In particular, the spirit of resisting authority was still marked when Japan’s fully documented history begins.

While such an antiquarian theme might seem an odd choice for a magazine intended to re-introduce Western audiences to a revitalized and modernizing Japan, the essay’s juxtaposition of local self-governance and invasive authority should be understood as a criticism of relations between local areas and the state in the context of the 1960s. As this English-language essay went to print, Nitta’s environmentally themed novel *Kiri no shisontachi* (*Descendants of the Mists*, 2010 [1970]) was being serialized in *Bungei shunjū*, a popular literary journal. The novel is a thinly veiled history of Suwa’s Anti-Alpine Tourist Highway Movement (*sankaku kankō dōro hantai undō*), a local citizen’s movement (*shimin undō*) which had opposed the

planned extension of a highway known as the Venus Line through the ecologically sensitive and ritually sacred Kirigamine highlands. Its plot pits three local protagonists whose professions evoke the *longue durée* of Suwa's history—an archaeologist, a science teacher, and an amateur geologist and astronomer—against 'Emperor' Ōzawa, a powerful bureaucrat who is ideologically committed to a vision that equates modernization and rapid economic development with the public good.¹⁸ Although the historical movement achieved a limited success, with the highway being rerouted around the contested area, the novel's cynical conclusion is that this partial victory is insupportable, but that it has been preparation for the true battle yet to come.¹⁹

Nitta's illustration of this symbolic struggle for the legitimization of local voices vis-à-vis state authority is paradigmatic of a widespread pattern of territorially delimited anti-pollution and anti-development activism in the 1960s and 70s that Simon Avenell has recently historicized as an important antecedent for more recent expressions of civil society in Japan (2006). In a deft argument that transcends the irreconcilable tension between militant local particularism and progressive but universal ideals, Avenell suggests that such movements should be interpreted as

¹⁸ These protagonists were based on the real-life organizers of the movement, who included the archaeologist Fujimori Ei'ichi, mentioned above.

¹⁹ Nitta suggests in the novel's afterword that even the partial victory achieved by the Suwa citizens' movement was unusual for its time (Nitta 2010 [1970]: 268; cf. Kawamura 1992: 277). A contemporary account of the struggle, however, notes a number of similar occurrences (ironically, in hindsight, locating decisive agency for taking conservationist action with then-Environment Agency Director-General Ōishi Buichi, the model for Nitta's antagonist) (Anonymous 1972).

‘mobilizations for *autonomy* from both conservative and progressive institutions’ (Avenell 2006: 90, original emphasis). Under the rubric of autonomy, local activism may be seen as an attempt to recast the public good ‘from a majoritarianist and nationalistic conception to a pluralistic formulation based on the right of minority self-determination’ (2006: 92)

It is this focus on the ideal of autonomy that I wish to emphasize. Literary critic Karen Colligan-Taylor (1990) situates *Descendants of the Mists* within a contemporary literature of environmental and nature conservationism in Japan. She takes a critical stance towards Nitta’s exposition, however, when his focus on local history seems to distract the reader from the novel’s more progressive themes. Describing a conversation between Aoyama and Ushijima, two of the novel’s protagonists, she writes:

Aoyama compares the residents of Suwa to the Moriya tribe which lived in this region in the Jōmon and Yayoi periods. Just as the Moriya were overtaken by horseriders in the third century, says Aoyama, so are the people of Suwa being overridden by Ōzawa, who charges forward on his concrete horse waving the banner of tourist development. We will fight this man, vows Aoyama, to maintain control of the Holy Land of Kirigamine (1990: 196-97).

Evidently unfamiliar with the ethnological context that informs the novel, Colligan-Taylor expresses confusion at this analogy, suggesting that it is ‘inappropriate for the characters and setting’ and detracts from the novel’s thematic and political impact. Yet while the reader may certainly agree with the reviewer’s assessment of the book’s literary and political merits, this critique of the novel’s

verisimilitude underestimates the extent to which popular historical consciousness continues to inform contemporary ideas about the relationship between the locality and the state.

3.3 Long engagements: towards an ethnography of Suwa District

3.3.1 Native historiography

The popular local interest in Suwa's cultural history has developed alongside an equally sustained (if more theoretically disciplined) scholarly interest in the region, which has both benefitted from and nurtured its antiquarian counterpart. What might reasonably be seen as the initial phase of the modern historiography of the region began with archaeological and historical surveys conducted by the ethnologist Torii Ryūzō (1916). This study was later expanded, and became the initial volume in the multi-volume *Suwa-shi (History of Suwa District)* (1924), published in conjunction with a large team of local researchers, historians, and academics while Torii held the chair of anthropology at Tokyo Imperial University.²⁰ Subsequent volumes in the series included studies of the Suwa shrines by the respected Shintō historian Miyachi Naokazu (1931, 1937), and medievalist Watanabe Yosuke (1954). A final volume, to

²⁰ Along with his mentor and predecessor, Tsuboi Shōgorō (1863-1913), Torii Ryūzō (1870- 1953), is acknowledged as one of the co-founders of anthropology in Japan. Whereas Tsuboi, who attended E.B. Tylor's lectures at Oxford between 1889 and 1892, established anthropology as a physical science, Torii, who published widely in French (and was decorated by the *Académie Française*), pioneered the field of comparative ethnology. In the course of his career, Torii's fieldwork spanned the breadth of the Japanese empire, ranging from Korea, to eastern Siberia, Manchuria, and Mongolia, as well as to South America (Ko 2003; 61-63, 112-13; Nakao 2005: 21).

have been written by the folklorist Yanagita Kunio on the subject of the Suwa lineage, was planned but never produced (Itō 2004: 3-32).

In the mid-1930s, separately from (but not entirely unrelated to) the larger district history project, a series of kinship studies were undertaken by a number of academics, most prominently the rural sociologist Oikawa Hiroshi (1938)²¹ and the jurist Nakagawa Zennosuke (1937, 1938). These scholars engaged in debate conducted in a number of contemporary academic, ethnological, and legal journals over the significance of the region's reputation for the practice of a characteristic tradition of last-child household (*ie*) succession (ultimogeniture). Not only did the custom attract interest because of its divergence from the legal statute of primogeniture enshrined in the Meiji Civil Code, but because it also, in principle, contradicted a growing ideological consensus over the understanding of the national character (cf. the review by Yazaki 1952). The relevance of this debate faded with the beginning of the post-war period (having been rendered moot with the abolition of mandatory primogeniture and the household system in the postwar legal reforms, in which Nakagawa was directly involved; cf. Röhl 2005: 262-329). Nevertheless, it has had an important legacy in having brought to light a remarkably complete trove of Edo period household registries (*shūmon aratame-chō*, lit. 'records of the

²¹ Oikawa Hiroshi (1911-1945) was trained by Toda Teizo (1887-1955), whose methodological approach had been strongly influenced by a period of study at the University of Chicago in 1920-21 (Tamano 2007). For a survey in English of Oikawa's promising but tragically brief career, see Ko (2003: 185-194).

investigation of religious sects'). These documents have been of unparalleled importance in the study of the region's social history, attracting widespread, even international interest.²²

3.3.2 Native sociography

The survival of these and other documents has ensured that Suwa District has featured prominently in post-war sociological and historiographical debates regarding the character and development of Japanese modernity. The juxtaposition of the resilience of its characteristic Shintō tradition, centred on Suwa Taisha, and its primacy as a centre of Japan's silk-reeling industry during the Meiji period, has made it an important site for studying indigenous patterns of capitalistic development (Aruga, et al. 1962; Nakamura, et al. 1962; Sasaki 1961, 1962a, b, c; Ōbuchi 1966a, b, 1993; Kitajima 1970; Hayami 1973; Kawamura 1992, 1994; Watanabe 1997, 2010).²³

More often than not, this focus has taken the form of extended joint research projects conducted by interdisciplinary teams under the direction of a senior academic (a 'traditional' pattern for Japanese research projects, cf. Nakamaki 2006).

One of the earliest such projects was led by the sociological historian Hōgetsu Keigo (1906-1987), of Tokyo University, to analyse documents relating to the history of the

²² This attention has come chiefly through the efforts of the historical demographer Hayami Akira, who has devoted much of his career to the careful analysis and interpretation of these documents. Hayami's study of Suwa (published in monograph form in 1973) has featured in the French history journal, *Annales* (1969) and in an edited volume released by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure (1972; cf. Hayami's collected works in English, 2009; as well as Cornell 1981). For an entertaining account of the recovery of the *shūmon aratame-chō*, see Nakagawa (1976).

²³ See also the chapters by Matsumura and Nakabayashi in Tanimoto (2006).

Tokugawa frontier communities that became Fujimi. Hōgetsu's project, and those which followed, tended to be highly localized village studies, seeking as best as possible to understand microhistorical processes that contributed to the wider sweep of national history (cf. Nōson Shiryō Chōsakai 1952). In 1958, Aruga Kizaemon led a team of over twenty researchers from Keiō University in a multi-year study of Minami Majino, a Tokugawa period village that became a neighbourhood in the village of Konami, itself assimilated into Suwa City three years before the study was launched. Simultaneously, a team led by Aruga's sometime collaborator Nakamura Kichiji (another historically minded rural sociologist) was conducting a study of the former village of Imai, now a district in the city of Okaya. Nakamura and his colleagues from Tōhoku University had recently published a study based on several years of research in north-eastern Iwate Prefecture (Nakamura 1956), and had selected Suwa as a region suitable for comparative study. Though the teams worked independently of each other, Nakamura notes Aruga's occasional collaboration on the Imai study.²⁴ Like the demographic studies made possible by the *shūmon*

²⁴ Nakamura (1908-1986) and Aruga (1897-1979) were in fact old friends. Between 1931 and 1933, they had edited a short-lived journal of folklore studies entitled *Kyōdo* [Homeland], in which they documenting the customs and traditions of Nagano Prefecture (cf. the preface to Kyōichi Aruga 1953; Kunio and Eder 1944: 39). Both were native to the Suwa region, born almost a decade apart in the former village of Hiraide (now Tatsuno) in the Ina Valley, and both matriculated at Suwa Middle School in Kamisuwa, which retains prominence today among the secondary schools of the region (see note 13 above). While both surnames are endemic to the area, Aruga is often transliterated in non-Japanese publications as Ariga, after the pronunciation in the Kantō region. Aruga affected this latter spelling in the 1950s as more befitting a cosmopolitan university professor (Nakano 1980), but reverted later in life to preferring the pronunciation of his youth and native home. Partly out of loyalty to this *volte-face*, as well as to prevent unnecessary confusion, I use the Suwa variant exclusively.

aratame-chō, these studies benefitted from the serendipitous survival of a wealth of historical records and documents, whose survival has itself been suggested as a product of the region's social history.²⁵

In what proved a banner year for the critical historiography of the region, the findings of both studies were published in 1962. The Imai study (Nakamura, et al. 1962) took the form of a weighty monograph of almost 800 pages with accompanying genealogical charts, while the 'interim report' of the Minami-Majino team formed the centrepiece of the inaugural issue of Keiō University's in-house journal of social studies (Aruga, et al. 1962). In addition to these group efforts, a foundational study of socio-political processes that guided the formation and development of Suwa Domain was published as a series of articles by the historian Sasaki Junnosuke (1961, 1962a, b, c), then on his way to becoming an influential economic historian of Japan's early modern period.²⁶

A unifying theme in these various studies was that they all emphasized the importance of long-term social and structural historical factors over the political agency of elites, which they saw as an inadequate basis for understanding how Japan

²⁵ Historian Watanabe Takashi notes that, in contrast to economically differentiated areas where village leadership was the preserve of a wealthy landlord class, Suwa village headships alternated among village households every three to five years. A result of this rotation was that administrative documents (especially those no longer in use), rather than being left to the whims and vagaries of an individual household, were considered important communal property and filed away in village storehouses, favouring their long-term survival (Watanabe 2010: 57-60).

²⁶ Sasaki had apprenticed as a historian with Hōgetsu's project in Fujimi a decade earlier, the edited findings of which include his first academic publication (Sasaki 1952). His studies laid the basis for a joint study of the region's modern capitalistic development (cf. Kitajima 1970).

was able to modernize so rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century. Nakamura, in particular, emphasised the necessity of this synoptic, trans-historical perspective:

Even from the point of view of research, we consider not only such singular aspects as economic differentiation among farmers, the landlord system, the community, etc., but rather by establishing the mutual relations between these things, we consider the fundamental changes in property ownership among farmers. We must examine the [political system] by taking a total structural view (*zenkōzōtekina shiya*) (Nakamura, et al. 1962).

A key focus of Nakamura's study (shared by Sasaki) was the region's economic development, in particular the transition from feudalism and the development of a wage-labour economy in the premodern period. The Imai project sought to understand the conditions that had enabled the region to develop rapidly as an industrial hub through the efforts of the silk entrepreneurs of the 1870s and 1880s.²⁷

Aruga shared this emphasis on social rather than elite history. Like Nakamura, he and his colleagues sought to document the total structural conditions which had shaped village life in the area—not only at the level of political economy, but also at the ontological level of cosmology, religion, and ritual practice. Summarizing the interdisciplinary project's research agenda in his introduction to the interim report, Aruga writes:

²⁷ A detailed study of the Katakura family, the most prominent silk entrepreneurs of the region, is included in a collection of essays in English by the Japanese sociologist Kawamura Nozomu (1994, chapter 8; based on his Japanese-language monograph of 1992).

Although, on the system's surface, the union of ritual and politics within Japan's governing structures was lost long ago, their underlying connection persisted at least until the Second World War. Through the post-war reforms, it seemed that even this underlying connection had been thoroughly riven. Yet that it has recently begun to smoulder anew, amidst movements to amend the constitution and religious organizations, seems worthy of note. It is easy to condemn these as reactionary, but is this not because there is a reason for this smouldering to occur at all? Did the underlying connection between the ritual and the political exist simply within the central governing structure? Or did it radiate from within society as a whole, from within the very foundations of the social structure? (Aruga, et al. 1962: 38).

Like those of his one-time mentor, the arch-folklorist Yanagita Kunio, Aruga's writings have been criticized for a conservative national bias, and a whiff of his essentialist ambition may be detected in the research statement quoted above. Nevertheless, the explicit argument he makes for the contemporary relevance of historical ritual and social structures to the 'recent social movements' beginning to emerge in the post-war period—as what would now be phrased as civil society—remains profoundly suggestive.

While the scope of this material prohibits any easy synopsis, this wealth of scholarship (owing not least to its quiet influence beyond Suwa's provincial confines) presents an extraordinary opportunity for building a historically informed and contextually sensitive ethnographic portrait of civil society. In the previous chapter, I noted Sonia Ryang's critique of the methodological nationalism inherent within the anthropology of Japan. Too much emphasis on the national field, she argues, not only impedes the identification and study of alternative discourses of Japanese identity, but also detracts from the potential of Japanese ethnography to attract wider theoretical engagement (Ryang 2004: 204). Importantly, Ryang points to Japan's

indigenous academic traditions as a key productive site in the development of ‘national anthropology’, singling out Aruga’s influential studies of kinship and economic history (e.g. 1967 [1939]; Ryang 2004: 103-114). I am not concerned here with the particulars of Ryang’s critique so much as with highlighting its implicit acknowledgement that anthropology has long been only *one among many disciplines* actively contributing to ethnographic representations of Japan. It should go without saying, of course, that foreign anthropologists need to widen their interlocutory engagement with local academic traditions. Yet I would argue that a more important corollary, to return to the ‘intertextual predicament’ alluded to at the outset of this chapter, is that—much more so than the publications of the English-language academy—it is precisely this local production of knowledge through which generations of informants have learned to situate themselves against their own history and society.

It would probably be overstating the case to suggest a popular appetite for the fruits of these academic labours,²⁸ yet the salient process here is not consumption but production. From the earliest efforts by Torii and his colleagues through to the most recent study (by Kawamura 1992), the teams of researchers and students involved in each case further conscript local boards of education, interested local

²⁸ That said, some of the authors discussed here have published easily digestible ‘enlightenment editions’ (*keimōsho*) of their research, intended for wider consumption (e.g. Nakagawa 1976; Hayami 2001; Watanabe 2009, 2010).

researchers, and dozens if not hundreds of informants and assistants. Even if this involvement is only idle or involuntary—a community lecture, the announcement of a researcher’s project in a local newspaper, even an antiquarian uncle’s rant against the impertinence of interloping researchers or a conversation overheard in the bathhouse—the cultural detritus kicked up by such status is not without effect. Whether such narratives are accepted or rejected, they will be a reference point for self-understanding, and become thereby implicated in the presentation of that understanding to others.

This means that indigenous representations, however meticulous, cannot be accepted purely at face value, but need to be tracked back through an accumulated history of reiterations, reinterpretation, reification. Ryang has called for anthropologists to be more cognizant of ‘the weight of the state’ in naturalizing ideas about national culture. While she has in mind the role of state policy in the political economy of knowledge production (2004: 200), this reminder applies equally to didactic components of any state institution. These twin considerations—the local and the state—will inform the rest of this thesis.

3.4 Suwa in the Edo period: a state and a civil society

The final section of this chapter draws on both the historically informed narratives of local identity identified above and the legacy of scholarship on the history and sociology of Suwa District to establish a foundation for my own deployment of the

concept of civil society. As noted in the introduction, the popular currency of civil society within the social sciences over the past fifteen years has given it slippery sheen that makes it difficult to look at and hard to grasp. I will therefore clarify my usage by drawing on Adam Seligman's distinction between the term's analytic and normative uses (cf. 1992: 201-206).

Implicit in Chris Hann's call for anthropologists to 'challenge western models' of civility, is the understanding that 'civil society' may take many forms, both across cultures and through history (Hann 1996). These manifestations may be said to be united, however, by their commonality as collective expressions of reflexive moral practice. Thus, Robert Layton's (2006) conceptualization of civil society as 'social organisations occupying the space between the household and the state that enable people to co-ordinate their management of resources and activities' provides an analytic starting point for seeking out different normative variants. Authors who have recently historicized a contemporary Japanese discourse on civil society, such as Simon Avenell (2010b) and Akihiro Ogawa (2009), have noted its transformation in post-war ideological debates on the nature of democratic citizenship. They identify the concept of the *shimin*—the archetypal and eponymous 'citizen' implicit within the Japanese term for civil society (*shimin shakai*)—as a key symbol in the attempt by neoliberal ideologues to promote a subjectivity of individualized and disciplined model of public engagement. I am interested here in something other than the

concerns of these authors, however, which have to do primarily with a self-conscious discourse of civil society. As we have seen in this chapter, local expressions of communal identity have been phrased as assertions of communal autonomy. Although such assertions are not necessarily representative of historical fact, Suwa's ethnographic corpus allows us to investigate the possible forms that such autonomy may have taken in the past. After suggesting a historical locus for the emergence of a particular idea of civil society in the development of an autonomous sphere of village politics between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, I examine the implications of this autonomy on economic and family practices in the Suwa area. I conclude by positioning an idea of civil society at the outset of Suwa's transition to modernity in the Meiji Period.

3.4.1 A Japanese parallel to Habermas's public sphere

One influential account of the historical emergence of modern civil society is that of the social philosopher Jürgen Habermas, elaborated within his theory of the historical emergence and subsequent transformation of the bourgeois 'public sphere' of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe (Habermas 1989). Habermas suggests that civil society emerged 'as the corollary of a depersonalized state authority' in the modern period (ibid.: 19). In his schematic model, at the end of the medieval period, older structures of feudal authority (characterized by particularistic estates united through vertical relations of patronage and supported by limited agricultural production) became dependent on an increasingly profitable class of independent

mercantilists. Ensuring the economic success of these actors, in turn, became the overriding concern of a public administrative authority (i.e., the modern state) that was able to intervene in and to an extent regulate generalized conditions (i.e., markets) beyond their individual control. Beyond the institutional structures of this public authority, 'civil society' arose in Hegelian fashion as a discrete domain of instrumental social activity. Against the private sphere of this new domain (the arena of individualized exchanges of economic actors), Habermas proposed the public sphere as a discursive space in which the (often self-appointed) representatives of civil society's stakeholders could debate, refine, and voice their collective interests, in opposition to those of the state (ibid. 24).

There is a case to be made that the social and political unifications that marked the beginning of Japan's early modernity at the end of the sixteenth century, from the time of Hideyoshi Toyotomi (1537-1598), provide an analogous context to Habermas's European paradigm. One of the major components of Hideyoshi's administration was the separation of warriors (samurai) from cultivators, a policy intended to maintain standing military forces in an era where the country's unification was still being only gradually secured amidst internecine warfare. This process presaged the more nuanced social and economic separation and legislated ossification of the hereditary status orders (of samurai, peasants, artisans, and merchants) in the Tokugawa period.

While relatively undeveloped in Suwa for most of the latter sixteenth century, this separation was rapidly established after the region fell under the sway of Hideyoshi in 1590, when the Suwa clan (by then vassals of Tokugawa Ieyasu) were forced to withdraw to Tokugawa territory in neighbouring Musashi (Sasaki 1962b: 110-111). Sasaki suggests that the disruption of this territorial link finally broke the medieval pattern of politico-religious control through the Suwa shrines (1961). During this phase, Hineno Takayoshi, a vassal of Hideyoshi who ruled until the re-establishment of the Suwa by Tokugawa Ieyasu in 1601, undertook extensive administrative reforms, expanding the castle town of Takashima, implementing comprehensive cadastral surveys, dismantling the manorial estates (*shōen*) that had characterized land tenure in the medieval period, and encouraging the development of smallholding village agriculture. When Suwa Yoritada was rewarded for his service to Tokugawa Ieyasu by the re-establishment of his family's hereditary domain, he and his sons continued on the course of development laid out by the Hineno, which set the scene for the economic development of the area for the next two and a half centuries (Sasaki 1962b: 110-111; Hayami 1973: 38).

As a part of the administrative reforms implemented under the new Tokugawa system, samurai were legally required to reside in the castle-towns. Sasaki's study suggests that this happened in Suwa between the 1620s and 1640s, during the domain's transition from an initial economic structure of 'regional

enfeoffment' (*jigata chigyō*), to one based on stipend (*hōroku*). Under the previous system, retainers were given rights to the agricultural production of specific land grants. However, because the allocation of fiefs at the beginning of the Tokugawa period had not been based on the productive capacity of the land, but on military service, by the middle of the seventeenth century the earlier system was becoming unsustainable (Sasaki 1962c; cf. Berry 1998: 142).

This shakeup in economic governance, in which the samurai were effectively reorganized as salaried retainers, had important social consequences. To mitigate potential disruption of the peace, samurai were forbidden the personal ties of patronage with farmers, and private *corvée* service was outlawed. In Suwa an administrative edict from 1628, while emphasizing the pre-eminence and separation of samurai from farming classes, simultaneously threatens that those samurai remaining in the villages (and thus 'out of service') are to be counted among the peasantry, without any privileges of rank.²⁹ Villagers were left to the work of producing rice-rents, whose steady flow was left to the village headman. In Suwa, where there was little economic disparity at the village level, this office alternated between influential families, rather than remaining with a single dominant household.

These policies broke apart particularistic social ties, dividing the Tokugawa period countryside into two parallel societies economically dependent on the

²⁹ For the full text of the edict, see Sasaki (1962b: 19-20).

redistributive power of the central authority, i.e., the daimiate as the local expression of state practice. John Owen Haley, a legal historian, notes that the domainal administrators of the Tokugawa period practiced a 'scheme of indirect governance', allowing villages a remarkable amount of legal autonomy, as long as rice rents continued to be paid. Because it was in the interests of village authorities to retain their influence by keeping the daimiate happy, they developed an intricate web of formal and informal methods for keeping intra-village tensions from the eyes of the central authority. The Tokugawa state, as it had evolved by the end of the seventeenth century, 'fostered social cohesion as a means of maximizing autonomy, coinciding neatly with the neo-Confucian norms of loyalty and respect for authority' (Haley 1991: 62; cf. Ooms 1996, Chapter 4). With Layton's analytic definition of civil society in mind, I suggest that the Tokugawa social sphere of an autonomous, self-regulating 'village Japan' represents a convincing location in which to begin seeking a particular discourse of civility.

3.4.2 Suwa in the Edo period

Without resorting to overt environmental determinism, Suwa's geography may be said to have had significant implications for the demographic, economic, and even cultural aspects of the region's social structure. The cool, relatively dry climate of the

elevated basin meant that crops were limited to a single, short growing season.³⁰

While the alluvial plain on the northwest and southeast shores of the lake allowed for wet-rice farming, drainage was an issue in the marshy areas at the lakeshore. Conversely, irrigation was a problem in the hilly areas beyond this narrow belt. These factors limited the agricultural productivity of the land. Sasaki's analysis of domainal tax records and the *shūmon aratame-chō* from the seventeenth century onwards conclusively demonstrate that a pattern of intensive agriculture was more or less characteristic of the entire region, (despite marked differences in productivity between the upland and lake districts) (1962b).

With the establishment of relative peace under the Tokugawa shogunate, the disruptions that had plagued the area through the medieval period were brought to an end. This new social stability, in conjunction with the agricultural reforms introduced under Hideyoshi, put significant stress on existing relations of kinship and family reproduction. Akira Hayami's demographic reconstruction of Suwa's population demonstrates both a gradual normalization of family size throughout the district, and a rapid population increase through the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century (Figures 8 and 9).³¹ Limited agricultural productivity could be

³⁰ Suwa is one of the highest of the central Honshu basins; the surface of the lake is 759 metres above sea level (Eyre 1963: 489). The lake level would have been slightly higher before drainage projects at the end of the seventeenth century (Sasaki 1962b).

³¹ While Hayami has used the data generated by the Suwa documents to argue for a general population boom throughout Japan during the period of unification at the end of the sixteenth century and the first half of the Tokugawa period, a number of historians have expressed some

addressed either by finding other means of economic support, or by limiting the burden of consumption by limiting the size of the household. Both strategies were characteristic responses in the Suwa area.

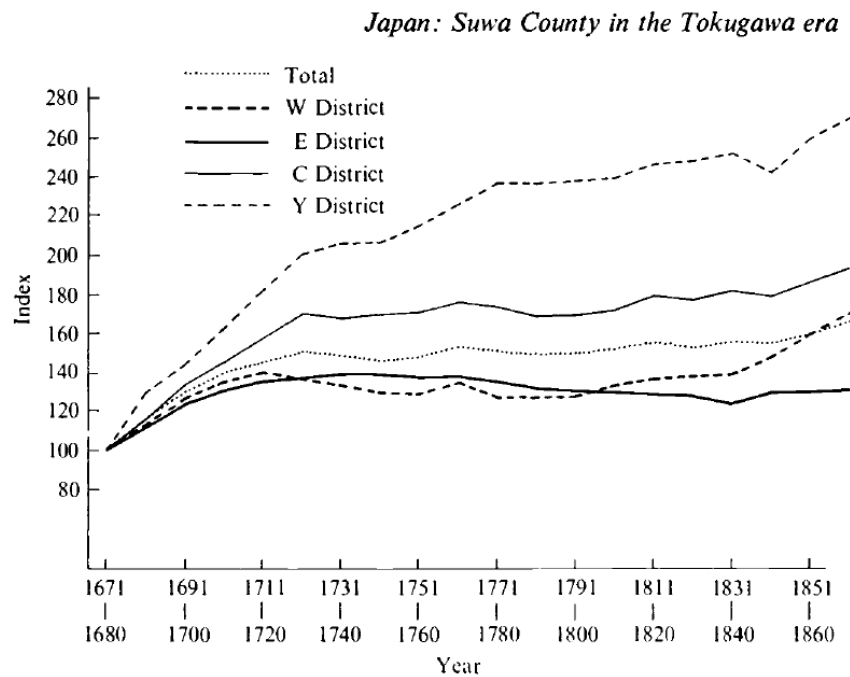


Figure 8: Population trends in Suwa, 1671-1860 (reproduction of Hayami and Uchida 1972: 477, Figure 18.1). Districts referred to in the graph are Hayami's socio-geographic divisions of Suwa District, denoting the older settlements [W]est and [E]ast of Lake Suwa, smaller mountainous villages in the [C]hino region on the Kōshū road, and newly settled *shinden* homesteads on the Western slopes of the [Y]atsugatake mountain range.

reservations. See Farris (2006: 167-68). This tentative critique among historians echoes Ryang's concerns about local data being extrapolated to the national level. Historians are less fortunate than anthropologists, however, in that their data are finite.

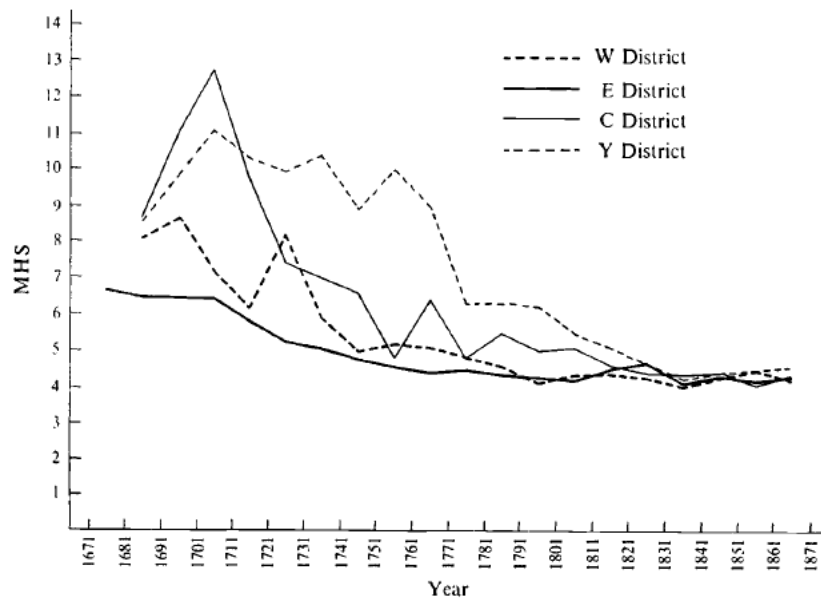


Figure 9: Mean Household Size (MHS) in Suwa District, 1671-1871 (reproduction of Hayami and Uchida 1972: 488, Figure 18.2)



Figure 10: A map of villages in the Suwa area circa 1838. Detail from a scan of Section 96 ('Shinano') of Ino Tadakata's Coastal Atlas of Japan (1873).

3.4.3 Family succession

Hayami's data for Suwa describe a response to the changing economic and social structures of Japan during the relative peace of the Tokugawa period. Amidst the warfare of the Sengoku, or Warring States period, the battles between the Takeda of Kai and the Suwa and their vassals in the valleys to the southeast of the region had destabilized settlements in the region. With the new peace, these old areas could be reclaimed, and new settlements established in the upland areas on the western slopes of the Yatsugatake mountain range. Many newly (re)settled villages were established during the seventeenth century. The drive to found these homesteading settlements (*shinden*, literally 'new rice-paddy') contributed to a distinctive regional pattern of household succession.

As Laurel Cornell notes in her thesis on peasant inheritance and succession during the Tokugawa period (1981: 235-36), household succession during the pre-modern period was largely a matter of local custom. Against the more widespread practice of primogeniture,³² households in Suwa followed a customary pattern ultimogeniture, or youngest heir succession (*basshi sōzoku*) (cf. Nakagawa 1938). In a typical situation, as elsewhere, upon retirement of the household head of (normally at the age of sixty), the headship passed to the household's eldest heir. In generational terms, however, this position was only a temporary measure, lasting

³² Primogeniture was not established as Japanese law until the promulgation of the Meiji Civil Code in the modern period.

only until the occasion of the marriage of the next youngest son, or shortly thereafter. At this point, the household would fission, and the eldest married couple (and any children) moved out to found a branch household. This pattern would reoccur in series as successive brothers married, until such a time as only the youngest son remained as the final household head of the natal household (Figure 11).³³

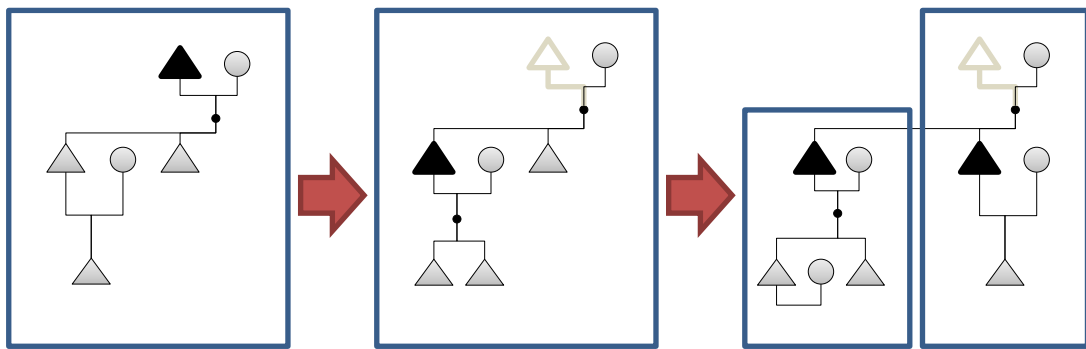


Figure 11: A minimal schematic of a pattern of serial household succession in the Suwa region during the Tokugawa period. Enclosed boxes represent independent households, while the dark triangle indicates the male household head (Based on Cornell, 1981: 70-71, Figure 4.3, which represents an actual series of successions in the village of Yokouchi between 1693 and 1734).

3.4.4 *Dekasegi*: out-labour

Another factor contributing to Suwa-style succession was the widespread practice of out-labour (*dekasegi*) as a means of seeking alternative or auxiliary income during the long agricultural off-season. The proximity of the nexus of highways represented by the Kōshū and Nakasendō highways and the smaller transportation artery of the Ina Valley, downstream from the lake along the Tenryū River, offered seasonal or even full-time opportunities in the shipping industry as porters and packhorse

³³ Laurel Cornell, who worked with Hayami on the records from Suwa District, notes that this pattern of serial succession makes the positive identification of ultimogenitural practice difficult (1981: 83). She further clarifies that cases of households where the headship passes over intermediate sons directly to the youngest 'are not prevalent, as a general rule.'

handlers. The pastures of Fujimi, a traditional horse-breeding area, provided the basis for horse-trading. In addition, the development of the castle town of Takashima and post stations of Kamisuwa and Shimosuwa generated a steady need for carpenters, sawyers, and woodsmen. Farther afield, the urban centres of Kōfu, a regional administrative of the Tokugawa shoguns, and Edo, the national capital, offered additional opportunities.

Once established, migrant labourers provided an anchor for the creation of wider networks. Natives of Yokouchi, for example, in what is now the city of Chino, followed the Kōshū road to Nihonbashi and Asakusa, where they served as clerks or apprentices in the district's kelp trade, many staying on to open their own shops (Hayami 2001: 76). In the village of Uehara, not quite a mile north, records from 1700 reveal that thirteen per cent of adult men (i.e. between the ages of sixteen and sixty) were absent, having taken service in Edo (Hayami 1973: 59). That a similar rate of labour migration obtained over a century later attests to the durability of the networks which facilitated this intercourse with the capital (ibid.: 57). The frequency of these practices gave rise to the use of *Suwa-mon* ('Suwa-fellow') as a generic term for migrant labourer in these districts (Nakagawa 1976). A related term, *Shinano-mono* ('Shinano-fellow'), and its mock-respectful diminutive '*o-shina*', had similar connotations.

The availability of these networks provided a contributing factor to the family succession patterns. As remarked by the jurist Nakagawa Zennosuke, in the pre-war period, a visitor might still see signboards on farmhouses near Fujimi advertising Nihonbashi kelp for sale, which he noted was tantamount to saying ‘ultimogeniture practiced here’ (Nakagawa 1976).

3.5 Conclusion

Suwa ultimogeniture was a source of great interest to local antiquarian and academic historians alike,³⁴ but in the context of the argument of this thesis, what is most interesting and yet frustratingly elusive are the implications of the practice for the institutional structure of village life. In the final section of this chapter, I have suggested that the legal and political makeup of Tokugawa Japan was such that it effectively established an autonomous sphere of village society in which local peasants were able to co-ordinate and manage their activities and resources largely free of oversight by state authority. This may be considered a form of civil society, though not one that would be familiar to Eastern or Western Europeans, or even contemporary Japanese.

³⁴ Against the economic reductionism of the sociologists, the antiquarian position in the debate points out that key aspects of the mythological tradition (though not the priestly practice) of Suwa Shintō concern the succession of younger sons. In addition to the aforementioned Takeminakata, the religious historian Suzuki Tōzō (1982) notes that the medieval legend of the ‘*Suwa engi no koto*’ (the ‘Karmic Origins of Suwa’), also features the apotheosis of a youngest son as the Suwa deity, namely the hunter Kōga Saburō (cf. the modern translation of the legend in Kishi 1967: 238-92; an abridged English version of which is included in Dorson 1979: 158-59).

The next chapter discusses the later evolution of one of the characteristic structures in the functional division of labour within village life—the age-graded youth association—into a new institutional form as the village fire brigade.

4 AUTONOMY AND AUTHORITY: THE BIRTH OF JAPAN'S FIRE BRIGADES

In Japanese history, the first instance of fire being thwarted in order to protect life and limb is surely the tale of the sword, Kusanagi. In the time of Keikō, the twelfth Emperor, Prince Yamato Takeru-no-Mikoto was sent to subdue the Eastern barbarians. But when he came to Yaizu in the Province of Suruga, he was deceived by brigands into entering a plain of grass, which they then set ablaze. Drawing the sword at his hip, he was able to cut his way through the grass to safety, and so it is called '*Kusanagi no tsurugi*' ('the Herb-Quelling Greatsword'). As one of the three Divine Imperial Regalia, it has been handed down from Emperor to Emperor, and yet this legend may be our first example of Japanese firefighting ...

—*Ganbare Shōbōdan!* [Go for it, Fire Brigade!] (Tokuda 2007: 8)

Soon after I joined the local brigade, Captain Seki tossed me a handbook for new recruits from among dozens of copies sitting in a firehouse cabinet. The booklet, issued by the Japan Firefighters' Association and distributed to local members on behalf of the national organization, was a heavily illustrated primer on the 'social standing and treatment of fire brigade members'. In simple, concise language, the text clarifies the responsibilities and privileges of membership, and offers a broad overview of the brigade's history and mandate, opening with the legendary episode above—thereby immediately linking the experience of the raw recruit in the local association with the founding myths of the nation state.¹

¹ For contextual discussion of the legendary lives of Yamato Takeru and Emperor Keikō (r. circa 71-130 CE), see Kidder (2007: 211-223). In another version of the tale, Prince Takeru kindles a fire of his own to burn out a fire-break (fighting fire with fire, so to speak), before the sword hacks out an escape route for him of its own accord.

Any study of the history of Japan's community fire brigade system comes immediately to this interface between state and society, which is inherent within the organization's dual structure. At the macro level, the national coordination of Japan's ubiquitous municipal brigades is inextricably tied to the political, legal, and ideological processes which have both informed and been informed by the institutional development of the state. At the micro level, the particularities of each brigade, and even of the divisional units *within* each brigade, are deeply embedded within local, kin, and cultural processes. Individual members pursue interests and act on moral beliefs which may not always be in sympathy with (or even necessarily aware of) values at either scale. Accordingly, as argued for the case of civil society more generally in the previous chapter, any attempt to understand the role of the community fire brigades over the course of the twentieth century must examine the organization from the point of view of both the nation-state and the locality.

The primary aim of this chapter is to historicize the formal establishment of specialized firefighting associations in rural Japan, and then to follow their subsequent development in the twentieth century, culminating with the creation of the post-war brigade system in 1947. A focus on pre-war Japan complements Haddad's recent article (2010) on the post-war history of the brigades. As suggested in the title of her article, Haddad documents a shift in organizational ideology from the authoritarianism of the wartime Japanese state to a value structure more

compatible with ‘democratic civil society’ of the twenty-first century. Setting aside, for now, the question of the fire brigades’ contemporary role, this chapter thus inverts Haddad’s historical thesis, seeking to understand how the particularistic and autonomous youth associations of the Tokugawa period came to be implicated within the nationalistic structures of state authority. To suggest an explanation, I draw on the experience of the Shimosuwa town fire brigade as an entry to a discussion of the national history of community firefighting.

This chapter directly confronts the first puzzle set out in the Introduction—that of how Japan came to have such comparatively high rates of participation in auxiliary firefighting organizations. Such an organizational analysis, however, must rely on tools other than those of traditional ethnography. A processual focus on institutional development, if not necessarily on ultimate origins, stipulates an historical approach. There is, however, little sense of history in the daily activities of the fire brigade or the concerns of its members. Anecdotes about the past rarely run deeper than a single generational remove. Although some hobbyists take an interest in the organizational past, I found that only career firefighters (as well as some in the upper echelons of the fire brigade) seemed to take any historical interest in professional lore. While later chapters will develop the idea of how members of contemporary fire brigades situate themselves within Japanese society, the way they themselves construe their history is not discussed here. Rather, it is my contention

that the modern history of the brigade system is inseparable from the history of antecedent social structures. In the previous chapter, I established the cultural and social context of Suwa District during the Tokugawa period. Here, I rely on that ethnohistorical context as a baseline from which to move into Japanese modernity. In this sense the thesis is an historical ethnography, rather than an anthropological study of history (Silverman and Gulliver 2005: 152-53).

Discussing the uses of history in anthropology in her analysis of the historical development of the *palio* horse races of Siena, Sydel Silverman remarked that the historically minded anthropologist must ‘use much the same standards in evaluating historical information as he does in evaluating information from living informants, and as in ethnographic work he must recast the information into the terms of his own analysis’ (1979: 423). Just so, this chapter critically engages with historical materials to construct an account of the formation and subsequent development of the national fire brigade system in Japan. In the first half of this chapter, I rely mainly on secondary sources, drawing on both local and scholarly histories to support a discussion of the reorganization of autonomous youth organizations into a nationally coordinated fire service at the end of the nineteenth century. In the second half of the chapter, which moves the historical lens forward into the Taishō period (1912-1926), I offer a textual analysis of pre-war firefighting manuals published both for organizational and popular use to account for the ideological transformation of the

firefighting identity. This analysis of the formation and institutionalization of Japan's firefighting associations contributes to a wider literature concerned with how the practices and mechanisms of state authority have been able to shape local idioms of civil society through the twentieth century.

4.1 Cooling the embers

Broadly speaking, the history of Japan's modern fire brigade system can be broken into four discrete historical periods, each separation punctuated by national policy implementations initiated by Imperial Decrees in 1894, 1939, and 1947. Following an initial period of spontaneous but uneven local organization, these dates mark the nation-wide implementation, respectively, of the firefighting associations of the Meiji-Taishō period (*shōbōgumi*), the war-time civil defence unit (*keibōdan*), and the post-war fire brigade (*shōbōdan*) systems. This sweeping periodicization, however distinct at the institutional level of the official state, nevertheless obscures a more or less unbroken continuity in social function at the community level, as well as eliding structural and functional differences between qualitatively different geographic areas.

Prior to 1894, urban and rural settlements had been marked by distinct differences in the organizational approach to disaster prevention (which included responses to fires, flooding, storms, and earthquakes). In rural areas, this responsibility fell to age-graded associations of young men in which membership was both compulsory and territorially exclusive. This obligation was part of a broad range

of communal labour which, although specifics varied by situation, included not only such mundane duties as road maintenance, commons management, and the succour of travellers, but also often staged musical, dramatic, or athletic performances, which were themselves often a facet of ritual service on behalf of a given settlement's Shintō shrine. Among the documents of the Majino youth group studied by Ōbuchi, for example, are included instructions on holding a ritual *sumō* performance as a purificatory counter to an outbreak of contagious illness (1966a: 45-46).

By contrast, in the castle-towns, most famously Edo, but also Osaka and Kanazawa, institutional firefighting systems evolved slowly but significantly out of specialized fire guards established in the mid-seventeenth century. Under the magistrates of the Tokugawa shogunate, the task of urban fire prevention was assigned to firefighters (*hikeshi*, lit. 'fire-extinguisher') who were further subdivided among the samurai and commoner orders. Throughout the Edo period, these townsman firefighters (*machibikeshi*) of Edo developed an iconic urban subculture marked by a colourful, rowdy masculinity that became entrenched in the popular culture of the period (Kelly 1994). Even today, the firefighters of Edo remain a vivid symbol of local identity in Tokyo, and firefighters throughout Japan are referred to as *tobi*, after the specialized class labourers from whose ranks the townsman firefighters were drawn.²

² *Tobi* (from the name of the black kite, a bird of prey) referred specifically to plasterers, daubers, and carpenters in Edo who were used to working at height. A detailed discussion of the relationship between these professions and firefighting subculture is included in Suzuki (1999: 16-26).

The popular elision of the legacies of this double heritage—notably the romantic figure of the urban firefighters of Edo, and obligatory service in village youth associations—require that a study of the modern brigade organization keep a constant and considered awareness of these distinctions between community and nation, city and countryside. Only by clearly separating the structural and ideological histories of firefighting can the role of state be kept in view. With this in mind, we turn to the establishment of firefighting associations in the Japanese countryside, focussing on communities of the Suwa District.



Figure 12: 'Shimono Suwa (Tea House) and Fire Bell at Nakasendo', from a collection of images of the Nakasendō taken by the documentary photographer Kusakabe Kimbei (1841-1934) during the early Meiji period.

4.1.1 The organization of fire brigades in the Suwa area

The promotional flyer for the Shimosuwa History and Folklore Archive features a hand-tinted photograph of the old post town's Meiji Era streetscape. Framed by the inns and tea houses of the hot spring district, the viewer's eye is drawn to the quiet intersection at the centre of the image, where a stout wooden ladder, the predecessor of the steel fire-towers (*hinomi yagura*) which are today found attached to most divisional firehouses, soars from street-level to the upper edge of the frame. Two-thirds of the way up the structure, a bronze bell hangs ready to be sounded as an alarm. Lacking any lateral support, the ladder appears to be constructed from the trunks of two trees, joined at regular intervals with horizontal planks to form rungs. While there are no records of its engineering, local authorities aver that the technique by which it was erected was identical to that used for the pillars in the Onbashira festival: the bases of each trunk sunk deeply into the earthen street, secured by rocks, and then covered by earth subsequently pounded flat by mallets.³ The barefooted figure of a man standing at the base of the ladder gives some idea of its scale. It rises perhaps fifteen metres into the air—easily high enough to survey the village and its environs. Only a few other figures are visible. A trio of people sit in a shop entrance, expressions bemused, perhaps by the novel spectacle of the unseen photographer. In the foreground, opposite the ghostly, slightly sullen face of a hardware shop

³ While there is no reason to doubt this engineering, the analogy to the Onbashira pillars is likely spurious, as such ladders were a common feature of villages during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (cf. Robertson Scott 1922: 118).

attendant, a European style gas lamp stands modest witness to Japan's embrace of global modernity, while in the distance, gently looming beyond the ladder and the stone-weighted roofs of the wooden buildings, the sacred grove of Akimiya stands testament to a millennium of ritual tradition. In the aesthetic composition of the photograph, as in the technical and symbolic qualities of its subject, the fire ladder appears to bridge these icons of modernity and tradition, linking and transcending both.

Although undated, the photograph was likely taken in the late 1870s or early 1880s, in the second decade of the Meiji period. Despite its current promotional usage as a glimpse into the town's early modern past, the significance of the image at the time of its creation would have been as a document of transition, with the fire ladder a symbol of modernity and change, rather than tradition.

At the opening of the Meiji period, Shimosuwa was a collection of hamlets and villages clustered around the lower shrines of Suwa Taisha at the junction of its two national highways, which converged at hot springs located on the north shore of Lake Suwa. Following the first of several rounds of state-led mergers, these villages were amalgamated between 1872 and 1874 to form the new administrative village of Shimosuwa. Nominal leadership of the new municipality fell to a state-appointed reeve, or 'census chief' (*kochō*). In practice, however the centralized village office was little more than a conduit which collected taxes and distributed prefectural edicts.

The former Tokugawa era villages, reclassified as sub-districts (*shōku*), remained functionally independent, and administrative policy (as regarded, for example, education, agriculture, or firefighting) continued to be enacted at the lower level by local deputies (*fuku-kochō*). Accordingly, the local identity and self-image of the old villages remained largely unchanged, and traditional local associations and networks continued under the new framework.⁴

After slight modifications in subsequent municipal reshufflings by the Meiji authorities in 1878 and 1884,⁵ the arrangement was finally given a measure of stability in 1889, with the inauguration of the nation-wide *shichōson* (city-town-village) municipal system which remains in force today. Under this system, the town administration is made up of a democratically elected mayor and municipal assembly who are responsible for the establishment and enactment of municipal policy. In Shimosuwa, the former hamlets were reclassified again as district wards (*ku*), which have their own assemblies for matters of parochial concern, but which act primarily as agents of municipal policy. The village of Shimosuwa was reclassified under the new system as a town (*machi*) in 1893.

⁴ While administrative reeves were in principle publicly elected, the position quickly became a *de facto* prefectural appointment. Persistent local loyalties turned municipal elections into occasions for parochial rivalry, and elected officials found it difficult, if not impossible, to establish legitimacy outside their own areas (cf. Aruga Kizaemon, 1953:4-5).

⁵ Between 1884 and 1889, Shimosuwa was briefly the administrative centre for three additional hamlets-turned-sub-districts which thereafter became the neighbouring village of Osachi.

Table 2: Villages amalgamated to form the administrative village of Shimosuwa, Nagano Prefecture in 1874

District Ward (<i>ku</i>)	Settlement name	Description
1	Shimonohara	A rice-growing settlement below Suwa Taisha's Harumiya shrine, along the Nakasendō on the Edo road. Shimonohara also incorporated the upland hamlets of Hagikura, Odaira, Toyohashi and Mochiya, along the mountain road towards Wada Pass.
2	Shimosuwa (village)	A highway inn settlement (<i>shukuba</i>) located around natural hot springs, itself a collection of several smaller hamlets (Yokomachi, Koyu, Tatsumachi and Yunomachi) amalgamated in 1872.
3	Tomonomachi	This merchant community also served as a <i>kashuku</i> , an overflow district for busy seasons when the inns of Shimosuwa were unable to cope with demand.
4	Takei, Kubo, and Tonbe	Villages near Akimiya shrine with a heavy sericulture industry. The Takei clan served as high priests of the Lower Shrine from the mid sixteenth century until the unification of the shrines in the Meiji period.
(5)	Takagi	A lakeside fishing community (initially part of Fourth Ward)

Through these decades of administrative experimentation, firefighting responsibilities remained organized at the hamlet level. The stone-laden roofs of the image above notwithstanding,⁶ more flammable thatching remained the norm, and a growing silk-reeling and sericulture industry made outbreaks of fire—irregular but inevitable—an increasingly costly proposition. With the opening of the Meiji period,

⁶ *Teppeiseki*, a locally found andesite with a lateral cleavage, was a characteristic roofing material used in the Suwa area to weigh down wooden shingles.

new firefighting technologies and techniques began circulating through the countryside. As in many other villages, young men who had spent time in the cities returned to Shimosuwa with new ideas to improve local firefighting strategies. Records indicate the purchase of firefighting equipment (eight water cannons and a two-man suction pump⁷ for fifteen *yen*) by the new village assembly in 1879, but it is unclear whether these were for the exclusive use of any particular group. The first dedicated firefighting associations were mustered independently by the former hamlets of Tonbe, in February of 1887, and Kubo, in March of 1888. Similar autonomous firefighting associations were established independently in the former villages of Shimonohara, Yunomachi (Shimosuwa), and Tomonomachi in 1890. In 1893, the Shimonohara association purchased a Western-style pump for the princely sum of 165 *yen* and 55 *sen*, and the other districts, anxious not to be outdone, soon followed suit with similar investments (Imai 1977: 388).

The fact that these incipient associations remained independent of one another, as well as autonomous from central village authority, despite Shimosuwa's incorporation over fifteen years earlier indicates the persistence of older territorial identities during this period. It is unsurprising, then, that the establishment of the first town-wide association was a result of central policy, rather than local mobilization.

⁷ The *ryūdōsui* [lit. water-spitting dragon] was a large wooden water pump based on a Dutch design, and a mainstay of nineteenth century Japanese firefighting.

On 11 May 1894, this autonomy was ended when a bulletin signed by the prefectural governor communicated the terms of Imperial Decree No. 15, which formally brought authority for firefighting policy within the remit of the Meiji state. The Decree mandated that the disparate firefighting associations were to be rationalized within a truly nationwide organization. Chapters of this new national association were mandated to establish coverage ‘in every town, village, and district’ in the country. Under the new policy, existing associations and their equipment were brought under the direct jurisdiction of the prefectural police system, while the creation of new groups was mandated in communities which had previously lacked formal fire brigades, or which had had only nominal such groups (FDMA 2009).

In Shimosuwa, the structure of this new municipal association was decided at the July meeting of the village assembly in 1894. The Shimosuwa Fire Association (*shōbōgumi*) would be comprised of four divisions with memberships corresponding to the district wards into which the old villages had been reorganized.⁸ Table 3 below offers the approximate demographic breakdown of the various town districts at this time.

⁸ Shimosuwa’s original brigade ‘districts’ (*ku*) were revised in 1899 to ‘departments’ (*bu*), and then to ‘divisions’ (*bundan*) after 1947. Despite such terminological evolution, the organization’s essential structure remained constant, and I have simply used the English ‘division’ for all periods.

Table 3: Household data for Shimosuwa, 1894

Old Village	Households, 1894 (approximate)*	Men aged 15-44 (approximate)†	1894 Fire Association District	New division (active roll)
Shimonohara‡	205	232	1	55
Shimosuwa	367	415	2	55
Tomonomachi	233	264	3	55
Kubo	(75)	(85)	4	55
Takei	(39)	(44)		
Tonbe	(81)	(92)		
Takagi	(95)	(108)		
	} 291			
	} 330			
Total	1096	1240		220

* Estimates assume a uniform population increase based on household distribution in 1888, and population data from 1894.

† Estimated age and gender distributions are proportionate with national census data (Ministry of Affairs and Communications—<http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/chouki/02.htm>).

‡ Data for the upland hamlets of Toyohashi, Hagikura, and Nishimochiya are assimilated to Shimonohara.

Although control of the firefighters now lay with the prefectural police organization, the expense of maintenance remained a local burden. ‘As funds are provided from village dues and donations,’ instructs a note in the brigade records, ‘expenses must be meticulously monitored.’ These expenses included the provision of firefighting uniforms, ‘limited to the association *happi*, a cowl, and straw sandals (*waraji*),’ and equipment. Each division was initially provided with four wooden

hand pumps, ladders, a *matoi* (the division colours), *tobiguchi*⁹ and water barrels (*genba-oke*). The donation of a bond worth 200 *yen* in 1909 by a wealthy innkeeper began a tradition of support by influential locals that continues today (Shimosuwa Shōbōdan n.d.).¹⁰

In its pre-emptive formation of organized firefighting associations in advance of the Imperial Decree, Shimosuwa was not an isolated case. A brief examination of the experience of nearby towns and villages demonstrates that a similar pattern can be seen throughout the area. In Hiraide Village, for example, downriver from Lake Suwa in what is now the town of Tatsuno (Kamiina District), one historian dates the formation of independent firefighting associations to 1884, when three local headmen organized twenty like-minded volunteers (*yūshisha*) and purchased a water cannon to form the Uemachi Firefighters Union (Nakamura 1981: 47). Their efforts prompted neighbourhood discussions about the formalization of the union as a hamlet-wide association, and donations in excess of 8 *yen* were collected for the purchase of neighbourhood firefighting equipment. A fire tower (*hinomi yagura*) and warning bell were constructed in 1887. That year, each of the hamlet's sixty-four households was obligated to participate in case of fire or disaster

⁹ *Tobiguchi* (lit. kite-mouth), which resemble long pikestaves affixed with beak-like steel crooks, were (and sometimes still are) used by firefighters and workmen in demolition work.

¹⁰ In 1914, a powerful family group in the former village of Takagi lobbied successfully to create an independent Fifth Ward, and Fourth Division was divided accordingly. First Ward followed suit in 1929, when the old hamlets above Harumiya formed a Sixth Ward, along with a corresponding Sixth Division. Finally, in 1958, the old village of Higashi Yamada seceded from Okaya to join Shimosuwa as Seventh Ward, folding its own division into the Shimosuwa brigade as Seventh Division.

by contributing at least one able-bodied man. The association's efficiency, put to the test against a fire later that same year, inspired the formation of similar associations in adjacent neighbourhoods, which were ratified by their respective New Year meetings in 1888. These three associations were formally recognized by village officials and received 5 *yen* each in support funds from the village coffers, for the purchase of equipment (Nakamura 1981: 47-49). Similar projects were undertaken in the nine villages that today make up the city of Chino, where firefighting associations were mobilized in 1881. In November of 1896, a youth association in the village of Osachi, in preparation for the dry winter months ahead (when outbreaks of fire were most common), purchased a water pump and assigned one of their members responsibility for its safekeeping (Kyōichi Aruga 1953: 74).

Each of the above instances follows a similar pattern, whereby a local individual or group proactively adopts new methods and technologies, which are soon after adopted independently by neighbouring settlements and groups. Significantly, the authority of these instigators was articulated exclusively through and within localized networks, rather than by officials within the state's new municipal apparatus. Recognition of the widespread institutionalization of firefighting associations, well underway in rural areas during the 1880s, clarifies the national policy introduced via the 1894 Imperial Decree as a response to spontaneous local organization, rather than the other way around. By subsuming such associations

within the remit of the prefectural police, the Meiji state can be seen to have reified an ideological vision of the relationship between local autonomy and state authority. To understand the political context of this transfer, however, we need to revisit the social history of the preceding decades, to examine the origins of the fire brigades in the youth associations of the Edo period.

4.1.2 Situating the 1894 Imperial Decree

While the firefighting and fire prevention measures undertaken by the urban administrators of the castle towns of the Edo period has been of considerable interest to historians and historical sociologists, comparatively little attention has been given to such topics in the countryside of the period. Yet despite their comparatively sparse population density, fires were as much a fact of life for villagers in rural settlements as for their urban contemporaries. A study made by Takeuchi Toshimi, a folklorist and rural sociologist, of the history of a hamlet in Takatō Domain (spanning the upper Ina Valley, southwest of Suwa), estimates that its inhabitants were burnt out every six years on average.¹¹ Similarly, an examination by a local historian of circulars (*yōkaijō*) issued by the rural domain's samurai administrators shows repeated edicts for the inhabitants of villages and post stations to 'be wary of fire' (*hi no yōjin o subeshi*)

¹¹ This exactly the same frequency calculated by William Kelly for the fires of the capital (1994: 313). Interestingly this number, or close to it, seems to have been long attested within Japanese folk wisdom. Compare Silver's report, from Yokohama, that '[t]ownspeople generally calculate on being burnt out once in every seven years' (1867: 8).

(Nakamura 1981). Such attention suggests that the successful governance of such areas was predicated on controlling the economic devastation that fires could wreak.

Before the emergence of specialized firefighting associations in the early Meiji period, in Suwa, as in Takatō and throughout Japan, responsibility for community firefighting and fire prevention lay with localized youth associations, known locally as *wakamono nakama*. Although data are scarce, a number of historical materials pertaining to the Suwa region's youth associations are collected in publications (Kyōichi Aruga 1953; Ōbuchi 1966a, b).¹² Ōbuchi Hideo, now professor of sociology at Keiō University, was a research student when he participated in Aruga Kizaemon's study of Minami Majino in the early 1960s. His study of the transition notes that when these associations were reorganized as fire brigades at the outset of the Meiji period, they specified that village youth would be members. According to the registry (*keiyakubo*), of the Majino fire brigade, young men were to join 'regardless of whether they were the second son or the third, between the ages of fifteen and thirty' (Ōbuchi 1966a: 48). Aruga Kyōichi offers the following account of the activities of a youth association from the Kaneko district of Nakasu Village (later Suwa City):

¹² Regional nomenclature for such associations differs, but most variants are broadly synonymous: the most popular—*wakamono-gumi*, *wakashū*, and *wakamono-nakama*—translate respectively as 'young-person-association', 'young-crowd' and 'young-person-companions' (cf. Varner 1977: 464; Norbeck 1953: 376). Hereafter, I refer to such groups of the pre-Meiji period simply as '*wakamono* groups'.

In cases of fire, members of the youth association were to come running with their wooden fire buckets or small pails of water. Groups from different settlements would each take charge of a location to use as a staging area (*keshiguchi*, lit. quench-mouth) for organizing the firefighting effort. When the fire was extinguished, each group would post a wooden placard marked with the name of their neighbourhood or village (*keshibuda*) at their site before returning home, usually after being served rice balls and warm sake by neighbours whose property, in theory, had been saved from harm. It became the custom for groups to leave the placards at the site to prevent later arguments, as quarrels at the *keshiguchi* were common (Kyōichi Aruga 1953:73-74).

Fires necessarily involved immediate neighbours and kin in the firefighting efforts and cleanup activities (*haikatazuke*), as well as implicating them within institutionalized patterns of sympathy payments and support (*yaki-mimai* and *nogare-mimai*) to the afflicted families.¹³ Members of *wakamono* groups, however, were obligated to assist simply by virtue of membership within the community, regardless of any personal or kinship connection to the afflicted households. Youth associations were also responsible for fire watches and night-time patrols, as well as village security (*keibi*), all of which became responsibilities of the firefighting associations once they were established.

¹³ This custom is behind the idiomatic Japanese phrase *yake-butori*, meaning ‘to profit after a fire’. An excellent discussion of such sympathetic exchanges, based on fieldwork and historical documents from the upper Ina Valley, south of Lake Suwa, is Takeuchi (1976). A more contemporary example, from Kyushu, is briefly noted by Moeran (1985: 228-9), who reports the structural ideal of such practice (determination of the amount of condolence money depending on territorial proximity to the afflicted household), but does not offer concrete examples (which would likely also involve support from personal and kin networks [cf. Takeuchi 1976: 86-87]).

While the ages delimiting membership in *wakamono* association varied by district,¹⁴ records of such groups in the Suwa area demonstrate a broadly similar pattern. In Chino's Yagasaki District, for example, firefighting duties were set by local ordinance as being the duty of men between the ages of seventeen and thirty. A clause from the *Youth Regulations Register* of the Shimosuwa hamlet of Koyunoue (*wakamono kisoku renmeibo*, January 1884 revision) notes a similar age-graded structure:

Clause 1: Persons between the ages of 15 and 35 shall have fire watch duties, and in turn be housed in the youth association's hall. By mutual agreement, those who do not participate shall be fined 10 *sen*. As the hall is naturally within the village precincts, should the *matoi* holder be absent, he shall be fined 10 *sen*. Excursions due to family visits or sickness are permissible if the Association Representative is notified.

Clause 2: When the call goes out for meetings of the Youth Association, by mutual agreement those who do not participate shall be fined 1 *sen*, regardless of the time of day or night.

In the former Konami Village (now part of Suwa City), within the youth association of the Nishizawa brigade, there was a concerted discussion on the matter of firefighting, including the questions of what measures should be taken for

¹⁴ Whereas the lower age limit of such associations was fairly universally set at fifteen to sixteen years old, upper limits varied widely, even in neighbouring hamlets, as a function of the amount of communal labour required by a given community's political, economic and ritual structures (Kizaemon Aruga 1953; Varner 1977)

maintaining order, and what the extent of such duties would be. These essentials were laid out in written statutes in 1858.¹⁵

In many cases, therefore, the establishment of specialized firefighting associations during the second and third decades of the Meiji period, both in the Suwa area (Kizaemon Aruga 1953: 74; Ōbuchi 1966a), as well as throughout Japan (Segawa 1972: 171; Ushiomi 1968: 100), can be understood as a reorganization of earlier localized groups. Additionally, as noted in the previous section, these newer groups demonstrated both organizational and technological competence that surpassed those of their predecessors.

Given these ongoing reorganizations, the significance of the national coordination of firefighting associations under the auspices of the 1894 Imperial Decree would appear to lie less with increasing the efficiency of local provisions for the protection of safety and property, and more directly with expanding the control of the Meiji state. This impetus is made particularly evident in the transfer of firefighting responsibility to police (and therefore state) jurisdiction, and the rationalization of associational membership, as we shall see in the sections below.

¹⁵ From a collection of historical documents collected and edited by Aruga Kyōichi (1895-1952), a poet, educator and folklorist who spent much of his career documenting the folkways and traditions of the Suwa Basin. This and other examples of the regulations of the youth associations of Suwa can be found in his *Suwa no wakamono-nakama* (1953:74-77).

4.1.3 The establishment of police control

The transfer of firefighting responsibilities from local to state authority completed a transfer of accountability for public security that had begun with the creation of the national police system in 1872. Under the 1894 system, firefighting associations were both accountable to, and subject to inspection by, local police officials in their capacity as representatives of state authority. On the subject of the new policy, the historian Suzuki Jun cites a memorandum circulated by the Police and Security Office (*keiho kyoku*) of the Home Ministry, dated 15 March 1894:

Whether in times of calm, or of fire and flood, do not delay in admonishing rough behaviour. The duties of the firefighting association are to secure defence against floods and fires, and nothing else. To exploit this power for other activities—to rally, to riot, to commit mischief by force of strength—is incompatible with the duties of the firefighter (cited in Suzuki 1999:147).

The state's ideological attempt to isolate firefighters from activity in the political sphere was further supported by the rationalization and restriction of organizational membership. For pragmatic reasons, participation in the association continued to be age-graded in the manner of the traditional *wakamono* groups, which limited membership to young, able-bodied men. Unlike its organizational predecessor, however, membership in the fire brigade was no longer universal. Under the autonomous firefighting system, community leaders appear to have been able to draw on structures of generalized obligation which allowed them to mobilize labour from most, if not all, households to assist during local emergencies. As in other

spheres of traditional village life, failure to comply could result in fines or even ostracism. In contrast, the institutional structure of the 1894 system was much more limited. In Shimosuwa, for example, the full complement for each of the initial four divisions of the town firefighting association was limited to fifty-five men, despite the populations of their respective jurisdictions being capable of mobilizing four times as many able-bodied men. The demographic data in Table 3 above suggest that, on average, each district should have been able to muster as many, if not more, men as there were households.

As the financial responsibility for equipment, infrastructure, and maintenance remained with municipalities, unassisted by state support, it might reasonably be argued that limited membership was necessary to enable communities to support their associations. Yet the fact that some communities had been able to organize and maintain larger groups prior to the state intervention suggests that this is not the entire story.¹⁶ Consequently, the limitation on the number of people subject to ‘official’ firefighting obligation may be seen, along with the explicit delimitation of legitimate firefighting activity, to further the state’s interests in containing local opposition.

¹⁶ Municipalities in fact opposed the ceding of authority over firefighting to the prefecture, and the tabling of legislation in the House of Representatives returning this power to municipalities became an annual occurrence. A later amendment stipulated that municipalities might apply for such authority, but I have not yet determined whether any such applications were made or approved (cf. Fujino 1922: 30-31)

4.1.4 The impetus for legislation

In fact, the promise of mitigating the influence of firefighters in local political activity proved to be the very stimulus that set the national policy in motion. In his account of the modernization of the Tokyo firefighting services, Suzuki communicates a sense of how events at the periphery reverberated in the political centre. Two weeks before the proclamation of the Imperial decree (which was promulgated on 8 February), Meiji Japan's third general election had been announced for 1 March 1894. It was the coming election, Suzuki argues, that provided enough political impetus to realize the nationalization of the fire service, a long-term goal of police administration. The Tokyo firefighting associations, systematically revamped in 1870, had been under the jurisdiction of the Home Ministry since 1873 and under police authority since 1874. Yet, although modernizing voices within the police force had advocated the replication of this command structure at the national level,¹⁷ the realization of such a policy required a confluence of motivation, capacity, and political opportunity (Suzuki 1999: 147-148). Favourable conditions apparently evaded administrative officials during the tumultuous first decades of the Meiji period, resulting in the continued autonomy of firefighting associations in rural areas.

¹⁷ Such voices included the ex-samurai Kawaji Toshiyoshi (1836-1879), the first head of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Board, who advocated strongly in favour of a European style police system, and the Prussian Wilhelm Höhn, a captain with the Berlin Metropolitan police who served Japan's Home Ministry as an advisor between 1885 and 1891 (Ames 1981: 23; Aldous 1997: 24).

At the time of the second general election in February of 1892, however, firefighters had been conspicuously involved in several violent incidents, within a wider pattern of political unrest which had claimed twenty-five lives and resulted in 338 injuries nationwide. Suzuki cites several examples of these disturbances, drawing on reports circulated in the popular press. In Saga Prefecture, citizens rallying for the People's Party (*mintō*) had organized a 'fire watch' (*hi no ban*) to guard against election interference by government interests. This sparked a confrontation with the police escort of the governing party's candidate which had led to bloodshed. A separate incident in Ishikawa Prefecture, where a man calling himself the 'Chief Fireman' (*shōbōfu no kashira*) had assaulted a prefectural assemblyman, was later raised at a meeting in the Imperial Diet's House of Councillors. In Shiga Prefecture, sword-wielding police had broken up an altercation between firefighters and another pair of political candidates (Suzuki 1999: 147).

With the spur of the impending election, the appeal of increased state control over firefighting associations that would accompany their reorganization under police authority may thus be seen as a step by the state to control a known vector of local political unrest. Of course, with only a matter of weeks between the Imperial proclamation and the election, the implementation of the new firefighting system may be seen as simple political opportunism, rather than a measure against the possibility of immediate unrest (the chronicle of the Shimosuwa Fire Brigade, for

instance, records that the prefectural announcement of the Imperial Decree was not even received until May of that year, two months after the election (Shimosuwa Shōbōdan n.d.)). Nevertheless Suzuki's deductive interpretation would appear to be authoritatively confirmed by a contemporary account included in a series of lectures on the fire service by Fujino Shijin, an editor-in-chief of the *Shōbō Shinbun* (Firefighting Newspaper) in the Taishō period. Fujino reports the account of Arimatsu Hideyoshi, a member of Japan's Privy Council and former Home Ministry secretary, who had been personally involved in the drafting of the 1894 regulation:

[Home Minister Kaoru] Inoue recognized that the clout of voluntary firefighting associations in rural areas was not to be underestimated; in view of precedent, he was of the opinion that electoral interference by such groups had had no little influence in some places. It was therefore above all necessary to take the line that the firefighting associations, as public service volunteers, could not be permitted to participate in the election process (1922: 29-30).

Nevertheless, we must ask why it was specifically *firefighters* that came to be at the symbolic centre of so many otherwise unrelated incidents. The question presents an enticing puzzle. As noted earlier, the firefighting responsibilities of the pre-Meiji *wakamono* groups were one part of a wider portfolio of communal responsibility, among which had been the enforcement of local custom as ersatz 'officers of the peace'. The memorandum noted above acknowledges the likelihood that firefighters could be involved in incidences of 'riot' or might 'commit mischief' when local mores or interests were seen to be compromised. This lends strength to Scott Schnell's suggestion that the participation of firefighters in popular uprisings in

the communities of Furukawa and Takayama in the early Meiji period may have been stoked by the antagonism of local interests whose influence had been dislodged by the imposition of state authority (1995: 309).

A complementary possibility—satisfyingly direct—is suggested by the fact that the same period was characterized by a sharp (and therefore suspicious) rise in the incidence of house fires. Kevin Doak cites the observation, by Japanese social historian Makihara Norio, of a coincident increase in newspaper reports of arson and rising prices of rice in the early 1880s.¹⁸ ‘What is striking,’ notes Doak, ‘is that none of the newspapers at the time seemed inclined to criticize those who were setting the fires.’ This is not to say that the sympathies of the popular press were against the victims. Rather, because victims of fire were compensated by state authorities with financial and rice allowances, Makihara suggests an instrumentality to such victimhood, which he interprets as a form of political agency: ‘No longer satisfied with passive status [of imperial subjects] and not yet recognized as a sovereign nation, [citizens] were acting on the notion that their status as ‘society’ gave them certain rights vis-à-vis the government’ (Doak 2007: 143-44; cf. Makihara 1998: 22-25).

There are limits to what we can conclude from the juxtaposition of Suzuki’s and Makihara’s data, drawn as they are from a diversity of cases whose individual

¹⁸ In Tokyo, Home Ministry statistics indicate that of 514 fires in 1880, forty-four per cent were arson, and a further seven per cent were suspected arson; in 1881, fifty-eight per cent of 495 cases were arson, with an additional four per cent suspected (Doak 2007: 143).

contexts remain obscure. Nevertheless, their apparent resonance is deeply suggestive of a valuable direction for further study. While youth associations no doubt provided a focussed medium for the expression of local dissatisfaction with state fiat, both through organized protest and in less visible forms of everyday resistance, the specific and ubiquitous mobilization of firefighting as a symbolic instrument by anti-establishment interests (as opposed to more idiosyncratically localized referents) requires some explanation. One may hypothesize that if arson were truly being deployed, as implied by Makihara, as a form of strategic resistance by destitute or disaffected individuals seeking to leverage political or economic recognition, then the sympathies of community firefighters—whose own visibility and symbolic status would thereby have been heightened—may well have been with the arsonists.¹⁹ For the purposes of the present argument, however, it is sufficient to demonstrate that, in a period of rapid political and social change, the discursive mobilization of the practice of firefighting became a site of conflict between social and state interests. Thus, while the influence of European models of state bureaucracy was no doubt influential, it was the increased symbolic weight of firefighters within the

¹⁹ The instrumentality of arson has been argued in a recent thesis by Steven Wills (2010), who situates the crime within the social and administrative framework of historical Edo. Drawing on police and legal records, Wills suggestively argues that incendiarism in early modern Japan was resorted to exclusively by weak and isolated members of disadvantaged social classes, unlike in other contemporary contexts, where such criminal tactics were used by a wider (if equally uncivil) spectrum of society. Insofar as Wills identifies profiteering as a motivation for arson, however, the crime remains purely an individualistic act.

autonomous public sphere of Meiji Japan that provided the driving impetus for their envelopment by the state.

4.2 Fanning the flames

The creation of the *shōbōgumi* system in 1894, then, can be seen as part of a wider contemporary field of centralizing policies aimed at the systematic undermining of regionally and locally based state opposition. The Meiji state's early reorganization of its municipal system resulted in an approximately seven-fold reduction in the number of autonomous villages (Norbeck 1954: 93). That the authorities wished to mitigate local assertiveness as the structure of government changed is perhaps understandable, and the proliferation of organized groups whose allegiances were first and foremost to their home villages must have been seen as an undesirable state of affairs.

Just as the localized firefighter associations had been folded into a national structure in 1894, the following decades saw the gradual expansion of state-sponsored youth associations. With the creation of the Greater Japan Youth Alliance (*Dai Nippon Rengō Seinenkai*) in 1925, the parochial *wakamono* associations of the older hamlets (already in many cases amalgamated into youth groups co-extensive with the newer administrative villages) were officially disbanded. They were replaced by a federal organization designed to inculcate national identity in accordance with the state's modernizing and expansionist aims. This reorganization

drove another wedge between the fire brigades and the traditional youth associations. Whereas the brigade's composition continued to reflect the traditional age-grades—young, often unattached men in positions to take over households—membership in the new youth organizations was limited to adolescents under the age of military conscription, who had not yet gained a voice or personal stake in community politics. Thus, through the Meiji state's penetration and colonization of a previously politically autonomous sphere of Japanese society, the traditional channel to local communal identity was redirected towards wider horizons.

Nevertheless, firefighting associations remained a latent symbolic threat within the new order. While their potential as crucibles of political resistance had been tempered under police authority, organizational divisions continued to correspond to the territorial divisions which systematic reorganizations had sought to erase. The second half of this chapter brings the story of firefighting forward into the Japan of the Taishō and early Shōwa periods, when the Home Ministry sought to create a new firefighter identity, rebranding it as a vocation (*shimeikan*) whose spirit transcended local, and even national, boundaries.

4.2.1 The citizen firefighter

A key individual in this process of ideological change was police bureaucrat and educator Matsui Shigeru (1866-1945). A graduate of Tokyo Imperial University,

Matsui began his career in the Home Ministry's Metropolitan Police Department. He had specialized in the study of German law, and was one of the first Japanese to pursue graduate study in police law, in which he received a degree in 1895. He went on to serve as the chief of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department's Fire Division from 1898 to 1902 (and again for most of 1905). During his tenure he toured fire and police stations in Europe, and arranged for the importation to Japan of new technologies, such as emergency ladder vehicles and other modern firefighting equipment. Between 1907 and 1910, as the Director of the Korean Bureau of Police Affairs (*Kankoku keimukyoku*), Matsui oversaw the training and development of an indigenous police force under the direction the colonial Japanese government. Matsui's later career was spent as a police educator, serving as the Director of the Police Training School in Tokyo from 1919 to 1924, and from 1934, was a member of the House of Peers (cf. Tipton 1991: 74-95, *passim*; Suzuki 1999: 143-44).²⁰

Throughout his career, Matsui maintained a close connection with Japan's firefighting profession. He wrote prolifically on the subject of Japan's policing and firefighting systems, often in an expressly ideological mode, stressing the concepts of both a 'people's police'—in service of citizens rather than the state—and of the 'citizen firefighter'—who would emerge with the universalization of fire prevention

²⁰ Suzuki, from whom this biographical sketch has been drawn, notes that this career track was unprecedented. Before Matsui, Tokyo Imperial University graduates with eyes on the Home Ministry had either entered the ministry's Police Bureau (*keihoryō*), or became superintendents (*keibuchō*) in regional police departments. Matsui, who was the first to take a position on the force where he could put his learning into practice, represented a new style of modern, scientific policing (1999: 143-44).

and awareness. His major written contribution to firefighting was a popular manual dealing with the essential problems of fire prevention, entitled *Kokumin Shōbō* (Citizen Firefighters) (Matsui 1926). More than a technical treatise, the book anticipated a mass readership, not only among members of the professional police and fire services, but also among women's groups, young men's and military reservist associations, schools, factories, and individual citizens.

Matsui's ambition was to recast 'the problem of firefighting' as a matter of national concern, to remove it from the limited frame of local concern. In a chapter entitled '*Bōka to kokkateki seishin*' ('Fire prevention and the National Spirit'), Matsui proposed the philosophical observation that, whereas the loss of property to theft was no more than a redistribution of resources within the framework of the nation, the loss of property to fire was a more serious matter, because it represented a net loss to the national economy. Fighting fires thus contributed directly to the national weal, and was therefore a citizen's duty, on a par with military service and the payment of taxes (1926: 20-21). Implicit within this argument is a rejection of the particularism that had characterized firefighting associations prior to their nationalization. In Matsui's view, because municipalities were legal extensions of the state, there could be no contradiction between local loyalties and patriotism for the nation. It followed that firefighting, in its most basic sense, was a defence of the state, and therefore a necessary component of civic pedagogy. 'In summary, fire prevention is bound up

with patriotism, and to inculcate the general population with this belief, we must devote ourselves to the cultivation of the idea of fire prevention from earliest childhood' (ibid.: 21).

4.2.2 The *real* flowers of Edo

This professionalizing rhetoric extrapolated the object-loyalty of firefighters from the local to the national scale. This telescoping was embraced by Matsui's contemporaries, who similarly sought to refashion firefighting as a national endeavour retroactively. To this end, they recruited the symbolic image of the *machibikeshi*, the fearsome and fêted townsman firefighters of Edo, recasting these urban fire gangs as the symbolic forerunners not only of firefighting groups in Tokyo, but throughout Japan. A vivid example of this repurposing may be found in Fujino's collection of lectures, *Kabō shōbō kōwa* (Discourses on Fire Prevention and Firefighting) (1922), which includes a short but telling homily on the origins of the storied expression that '*Kaji ha Edo no hana*' ('Fires are the flowers of Edo').²¹

In Fujino's estimation, the popular interpretation of the phrase as a celebration of the seeming ubiquity of fires in the Tokugawa capital was a regrettable misinterpretation. He lamented that '[i]n any other nation, surely there are not such fools heartless enough to take pride in fires as the "flowers" of the capital'. For Fujino,

²¹ Of uncertain origin, this phrase had become common parlance by at least the early nineteenth century (Kelly 1994: 328). It is occasionally elaborated as *kaji to kenka ha Edo no hana* ('fires and fights are the flowers of Edo'), attesting to the rambunctious reputation of the Edo firefighters.

the true meaning of the ‘flower’ in question was the blossoming of the firefighters’ valorous spirit. In old Edo, ‘in times of fire, the firefighter forgot his own house, his own body; he devoted himself utterly to the quenching of the fire.’ In particular, Fujino noted how the ‘vigorous chivalry’ of the commoner:

overwhelmed [that of] the limp-wristed samurai, grown tame in an age of peace... The people of Edo extolled these common firefighters as ‘men among men.’ Their valorous spirit, risking life and limb in hand-to-hand battle with the flames, was unanimously praised. In other words, the expression *Edo no hana* was self-praise, born of the fact that, in times of fire, the *Edokko* spirit was shown at its best (Fujino 1922: 27).

This revisionist interpretation established, Fujino went on to argue that the contrast between the samurai firefighters and commoner firefighters of Edo was analogous to that between the professional firefighters of Japan’s six great cities (Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Nagoya, Kobe, and Yokohama) and the voluntary firefighting associations of the rural heartland. By virtue of this spiritual lineage, therefore, the phrase ‘the flowers of Edo’ should no longer be seen as the exclusive property of the *Edokko* (as natives of Tokyo were known), but had become a symbol that honoured ‘that grand spirit of voluntary sacrifice’ throughout the entire nation (Fujino 1922: 26-29).

4.2.3 Firefighter as international identity

Importantly, this ‘grand firefighting spirit’ was not limited to Japanese firefighters, but united them with an international brotherhood. Continuing his homily, Fujino relates an anecdote concerning an American engineer and former firefighter named ‘Mr. Bruce’, who had assisted efforts to contain a fire that broke out during his stay at

Tokyo's Imperial Hotel in the late 1910s. Through his efforts, the lives of several other foreign guests were saved, at the cost of his own travelling money (of 'nearly a thousand yen', a considerable sum.) With this confirmation of the spiritual unity of firefighters worldwide, Fujino concludes his lesson: 'Trust the blood and muscle of a man who has served as a firefighter to spur him to action, forgetting all else in service of that life-revering, life-saving firefighter spirit' (1922: 28-29)

The anecdote is significant in that it demonstrates the global flows not only of ideological approaches to public service provision, as stressed by Matsui, but also of technology and practical technique. Even comparatively isolated Japanese communities were increasingly connected to the rest of the world through professional and commercial networks linked to firefighting practice. The American hero, Mr. Bruce, was an employee of La France, a US-based commercial purveyor of firefighting equipment, and had been in Tokyo to deliver firefighting equipment to the Metropolitan Police Department and instruct the professional firefighters in its proper usage. Many of the earliest pumps purchased by the firefighting associations of rural municipalities were of European or American manufacture. Just as the administrators of Japan's police forces kept up with international developments in policing, working to achieve a level of professionalization in line with a global standard, similar efforts were invested in the establishment of a professional

firefighting identity.²² Manuals such as those by Matsui and Fujino, whether intended for specialized or mass consumption, thus devoted entire sections to the description of firefighting techniques in other countries.

Nor was this appeal to international fraternity among firefighters cast only as a function of Japan's newfound modernity. As demonstrated at the outset of this chapter, even contemporary firefighting manuals mention the extreme antiquity of the uses and abuses of fire. Likewise, in their respective treatises, both Fujino and Matsui take time to discuss the comparative mythology of fire, noting in particular the cross-cultural attribution of causality for conflagrations that threaten human settlements to vengeful or capricious deities: Kairoku and Shukuyū, deities from Chinese classical literature whose names in Japan became synonyms for tragic fires; the indigenous Japanese *kami* Kagutsuchi, venerated at Kyoto's Atago Shrine;²³ the ancient Roman cult of the hearth-goddess Vesta: and finally the male principle embodied within the Indian deity Vishnu (Fujino 1922: 37). These expansive

²² As director of the colonial Bureau of Police Affairs for Korea, Matsui had looked to the British experience in Egypt as a model for the establishment of an indigenous Korean force (Matsuda 2000). Elise Tipton also notes the attention with which officials monitored the professionalization of policing in America, including the particular efforts of the German-American police chief of Berkeley, California, August Vollmer (1876-1955), who as a youth had been one of the organizers of the North Berkeley Volunteer Fire Department (Tipton 1991:75-76; cf. Douthit 1975).

²³In the *Kojiki*, the fiery birth of Kagutsuchi drove his mother Izanami into the underworld in death. An alternate version, from the *Engishiki*, tells that Izanami goes into seclusion before she dies, giving birth to four more children: Mizuhame (a water *kami*), Haniyasuhime ('Clay Princess'), a gourd *kami*, and a reed *kami*. According to Ashkenazi, 'the water, the gourd to transport it, and wet clay and reeds to smother fire were traditional firefighting equipment. In many places in Japan today there is a midwinter ritual of placing reed and evergreen bundles in the eaves to control fires' (2003: 186).

references demonstrate the ambitions of their authors to locate Japanese firefighting within a universal framework, not only as technique, but also as cosmology.

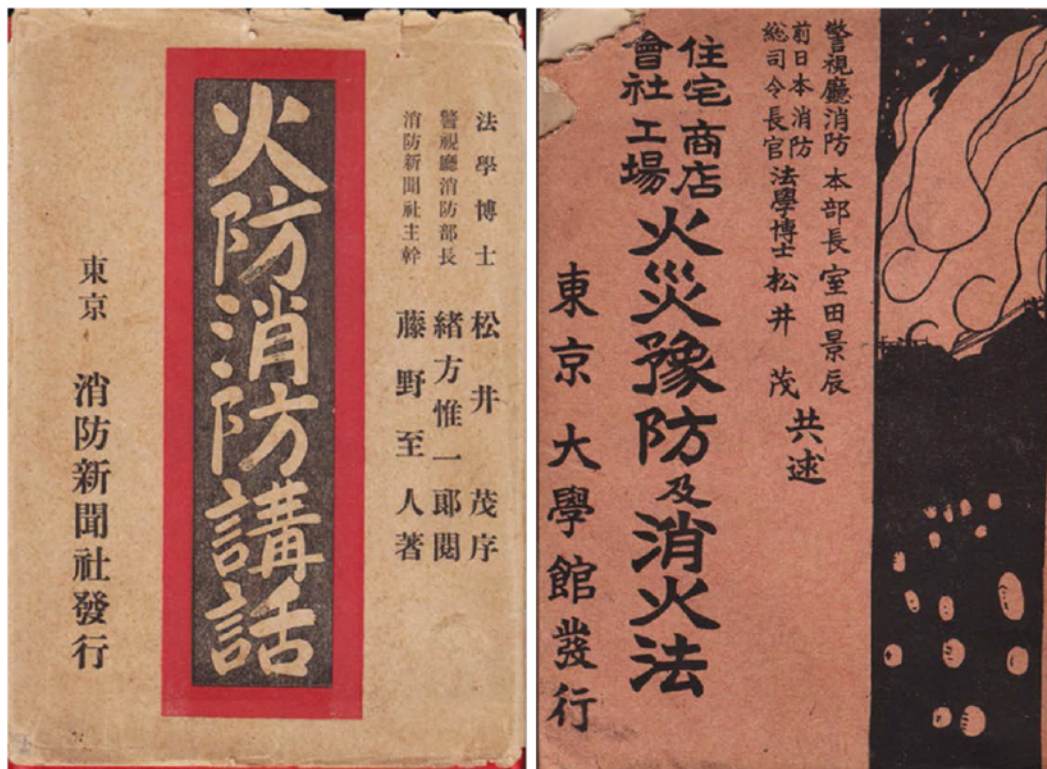


Figure 13: Taishō period fire prevention manuals: *Discourses on Fire Prevention and Firefighting* (Fujino 1922, left), and *Fire Prevention and Firefighting Methods* (Murota and Matsui 1915, right)

As the Taishō years gave way to the increasingly nationalistic Shōwa period, the conceptualization of firefighting as a community function was thus further redefined. No longer were community firefighters the stewards of the communal traditions and particularistic morality of mutual aid that had characterized the *wakamono* groups of the pre-Meiji period. They had become the successors and worthy stewards of the spirit of the commoner firefighters of the Edo capital, itself revealed as an expression of a universalistic ethic of self-sacrifice that united community firefighters with their colleagues throughout both Japan and the world.

4.2.4 Institutional development: from prevention to defence

The final steps in the pre-war evolution of the fire brigades are inseparable from the militarism which pervaded the Japanese state after 1930. In September of that year, Tokyo's military authorities authorized the establishment of civil defence brigades (*bōgodan*) as civilian air defence.²⁴ As the Japanese military committed itself to the theatres of China and the Pacific, these brigades (which supplemented the existing firefighters, but were 'voluntary' associations established by local authorities) took increasing prominence in daily life as domestic resources were mobilized to support military expansion. Tokyo's brigades were soon mimicked elsewhere, and by July of 1937, when the so-called 'Marco Polo Bridge Incident' sparked the Second Sino-Japanese War, over four million Japanese belonged to such groups. Because such brigades were filled by the same men who made up the firefighting associations (though many women were also members), in 1938 the Home Ministry announced plans to consolidate both groups into a single organization. An Imperial Decree to that effect was issued in January of 1939,²⁵ legally dissolving the Meiji-era firefighting associations and reforming them as 'civil defence brigades' (*keibōdan*) responsible for supporting police, fire and disaster fighting and prevention, and air raid response.

²⁴These three authorities were the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Bureau, the Tokyo Military Police, and the Imperial Army's Tokyo Security Command Post, established with the declaration of martial law after the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, and still active seven years later.

²⁵ Imperial Decree #20, the Civil Defence Brigade Order (*keibōdan rei*).

With the end of the war, Japan's police force underwent extensive reforms under the Occupation government. The Fire Bureau was separated from the police force, and a new Imperial Decree, the Fire Brigade Order (*shōbōdan rei*) of 30 April 1947, replaced the wartime civil defence brigades with autonomous fire brigades under municipal authority. The legal status of these new brigades was carefully reviewed by the Allied Command's General Headquarters (GHQ), which was concerned with establishing the new fire brigades as truly democratic organizations. Several rounds of negotiation between GHQ and the Japanese legislature resulted in the Fire and Disaster Management Organization Bill (*shōbōsoshiki hōan*), which was finally passed into law on 23 December 1947. This bill formally severed the ties between the police and the community fire brigades, though it retained a legal restriction against firefighters standing for public office. A Cabinet order in March of 1948 formally rephrased the brigade from an obligatory institution (*gimu setchi*) to a voluntary one (*nin'i setchi*)—i.e. established at the discretion of individual municipalities. The most important subsequent revision of this legislation was the passage of two amendments in 1951, at the end of the Occupation Period, which removed the legal barrier against firefighters' political activities, and which overturned the language that had rendered the organization 'voluntary.' These final changes ensured that the fire brigade would (at least in theory) have a universal and

democratic presence in Japanese communities (FDMA 2009) (Nihon Shōbō Kyōkai 2008: 332).²⁶

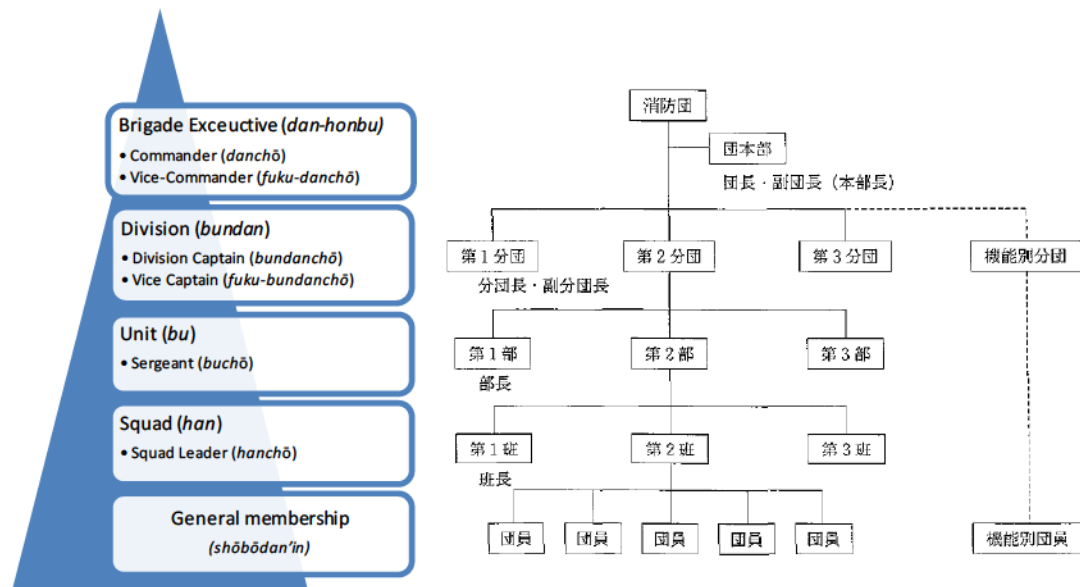


Figure 14: Organizational schematic of the community fire brigade hierarchy, post-1947 (Shōbō Gakkō Shōbōdan'in Kyōiku Kenkyūkai 2003)

4.3 Discussion: from moral to social governance

The analysis presented above shows how Japan's firefighters have been historically situated at the interface of state and society. In either sphere, their role has been subject to ideological manipulation, and they have been mobilized as symbols of both national authority and local autonomy. As state policy, providing protection for the lives, livelihoods, and property of citizens from the vagaries of disaster is a hallmark of modern governance. In this respect, the foundation of a national network of community associations dedicated to responding to and extinguishing fires promptly

²⁶ The explicit affirmation of the right to freedom of political association contained in educational materials distributed by the organization (e.g. Tokuda 2007: 18) suggests, however, the persistence of what may be seen as a normative restriction against the conversion of social capital within the community into political status at the level of state politics (cf. Bourdieu 1986).

and efficiently was an important advance for Japan's national infrastructure. Conversely, the autonomous organization of associations prior to their nationalization by the 1894 Imperial Decree—as well as their role in local political unrest that marked the second general election—suggests that firefighting has simultaneously been an important local symbol of moral and political legitimation.

A concern with the symbolic legitimation of firefighting, so evident in the potted histories included in the firefighting manuals noted in this chapter, may also be seen in municipal firefighting yearbooks and chronicles often published by municipal brigades to mark organizational milestones. Thus, included in the opening pages of the Fiftieth Anniversary chronicle of the post-war Tatsuno fire brigade (Tatsuno-machi 1999: 18), we find a reference to a sixteenth century moral edict on the appropriate treatment of fire as an example of how the practice of fire prevention is woven into cultural heritage:

In the evening, the fires in the kitchens and the living quarters should be inspected. You should issue strict orders to that effect and go the rounds in person. Further, inculcate the habit of watching out for spreading fires. Every evening you should enjoin the above rules upon your people. [...] Though you employ servants, do not imagine that that you can just issue orders to them [and then relax]. No, you must become personally acquainted with the facts; only then will you be able to decide which matters can be delegated to others.²⁷

²⁷ Attributed to Hōjō Sōun (1432-1519), an influential *daimyō* of Japan's Sengoku period, the Twenty-One Articles are a list of precepts composed for the guidance of his clan and retainers. The quoted passage is from Steenstrup's English translation (1974: 300). The text redacted by the ellipsis in the Tatsuno text (perhaps for reasons of political correctness) reads: '[Remember that] the women of the household, both high and low, lack understanding of these matters and are prone to be negligent,

This reference and others follow allusions to the penalties for arson in the *ritsuryō* codes of the early eighth century and to records of fire bans in the palaces of the ancient Heian capital. As with the reference to the legendary Prince Takeru's escape from the brigands, and the comparative mythology of fire deities, these invocations of Japan's pre-modern legal traditions serve a legitimating function for modern firefighters. They are less a history than 'a warrant of its truth, a pedigree of its filiation, a charter of its claims to validity' (Malinowski 1948: 64).

Nevertheless, such pedigrees contain hints that a more rigorous history of firefighting codes and practice may demonstrate a shift in techniques of social and political governance at the outset of the modern period. In the earlier traditions, where concern with fire prevention is suggested through the prescription of punishments for arson in the ancient codes of the Heian period, or in the didactic morality of the medieval house codes, fires appear to have been seen as the result of either criminal intent or negligence. Outbreaks of fire in settled areas were principally understood as social, rather than natural occurrences, and were controllable in that they could be prevented by individuals through right action. While obviously of interest to the governing power from an economic point of view, fires did not seem to result in perceived crises of state legitimacy.

and so they leave household effects and clothes scattered about [i.e., easy to catch fire, and difficult to rescue].'

William Kelly, in a thoughtful account of the evolution of urban firefighting in Edo (1994), indicates a distinct change in the style of city governance during the Tokugawa period. He points out that firefighting edicts through the first decades of the seventeenth century appear to have been less concerned with organizing fire control efforts than with banning members of the samurai order from participating in efforts to contain fires in commoner neighbourhoods (1994: 315). Although fires were a considerable burden on urban livelihoods, the disorder that might erupt from open conflict between elites and commoners was seen to be a much more serious danger to state legitimacy. Not until the second decade of the eighteenth century, with the Kyōhō Reforms, did the city's governing officials begin to take responsibility for fire prevention, encouraging the organization of a city-wide firefighting system as a technique of governance.

Within the limited setting of urban Edo, this removal of firefighting from the responsibility of local jurisdictions to within the city administration is suggestive as an analogy for what happened at a national level in the nineteenth century. Against the pre-modern understanding of disaster as either divine force or criminal act, and thus beyond the preventative power of mortal authority, can be contrasted a modern view that such phenomena are within the reach of technological and social manipulation. A thematic focus on fire prevention is thus a window into more

general and specifically modern questions concerning the balance of responsibility for human security between individual, society, and state.

4.4 Conclusion

The experience of Japan's pre-war period demonstrates how prevention and response to fires can be construed as a symbolic indication of the legitimacy of the temporal state. The corollary of such an interpretation—that autonomous firefighting came to represent a challenge to the state's absolute authority—suggests that the state's envelopment of early autonomous groups was therefore overdetermined, and perhaps inevitable. However, the social manifestation of firefighting groups, rooted within a territorial ideology of mutual aid and common interest, had an important influence on how that process was accomplished. This explains why the administrators of the Meiji state pursued a different developmental strategy than, for example, the American process of professionalization (cf. Greenberg 1998; Tebeau 2003).

As the historical ethnography undertaken in this chapter has illustrated, the first step in the actuation of this strategy was the consolidation and rationalization of local municipalities through successive waves of the great Meiji era village amalgamations, culminating in the 1889 *shichōson* system. It was exactly during this period that territorial youth associations, who had held a position of moral and political influence, began to transform themselves by creatively appropriating new

organizational and technological strategies. Independent firefighter associations sprang up throughout the countryside during the 1870s and 1880s, and in some areas entire hamlets could be mobilized for mutual aid under the moral authority of local leaders.

To secure its legitimacy, the modern state needed to limit such claims to authority, which it sought to accomplish by bringing these organizations under police control through the 1894 Imperial Decree. Importantly, while the new system relied on the age-graded structure of the old *wakamono* groups to ensure continuity and maintain local legitimacy, it also legally restricted membership in the firefighting associations to keep a firm hand on the potential inherent within such groups for giving voice to local resistance.

The creation of the modern state-sponsored youth associations at the beginning of the twentieth century drove a further wedge between Japan's specialized firefighting associations and the general youth groups, using a dual strategy. Firstly, the new *seinenkai* were younger than the older *wakamono* groups and so without political influence. Secondly, as membership was drawn from the new administrative towns and villages, rather than insular hamlets, participants were exposed to an imagined community which transcended local interests, and whose values were structured by the modernizing state.

Despite these strategies, the effective operation of the firefighter associations continued to require a pool of labour which for pragmatic reasons remained limited to the parochial limits of the traditional youth associations. To transcend local identities and loyalties, a modern 'citizen' firefighter identity was gradually inculcated. A reflexively imagined pedigree united the abstract mythos of the nation state to the intrinsically modern idea of firefighters as an elite international brotherhood of like-minded servants of the national interest. This was accomplished through the medium of professional manuals and trade newsletters drafted by officer-bureaucrats such as Matsui Shigeru, and distributed to association through the channels of technical pedagogy enabled by a coordinated national system. This new charter of firefighting identity was largely successful, rendering obsolete the older parochial lineages, and tying local firefighters tightly into a nationalist narrative. Even so, the persistence of traditional community structures in which they have their roots cannot be underestimated. These twin legacies—of state authority and local autonomy—continue to echo in the contemporary brigade, which forms the subject of the following chapters.

5 THE FIRE BRIGADE IN THE COMMUNITY

Anthropology, eh? So you study humanity (*ningen*). Look here. The character for ‘person’ (*hito*) consists of two strokes—you would think one, right? But no. You write the first stroke at an angle—as if it is about to fall over. Then you draw in the second, as a support for the first, keeping it upright. That’s the basis of humanity, right there. That’s family (*katei*). That’s community (*chiiki*).

—Matsukura-san

I met Matsukura-san, a retired corporate salesman and the former ward headman, at a feast organized by the parish in conjunction with the spring ceremony known as *honmitate*, in which the selection of trees to be felled for the next celebration of the Onbashira festival was confirmed through Shintō ritual. It was only a week after we had moved to Shimosuwa, and my wife and I had been seated opposite Matsukura-san and other ward luminaries at what I only later came to realize was the table reserved for honoured guests. After our introductions, and before his attention drifted to other faces and conversations, he invited me to drop in on him at the town’s History and Folklore Archive, where he volunteered his time twice a week. In retirement, both from his career and the formal responsibilities of community politics, he was now free to devote himself to an abiding interest in the history and ecology of the local area, around which themes he had organized two separate hobby clubs for like-minded acquaintances.

When I met him in the archive's small office, he bade me sit at the heated *kotatsu*, and immediately began ruminating on my project, opening with the observation used as the epigraph for this chapter.¹ As we spoke, he wrote furiously with his pen, scratching out lists of terms and ideas on scraps of note paper, appearing to relish playing the simultaneous role of both informant and ethnographer:

But you look around this neighbourhood; there are no kids, just a few young people. We're all oldsters (*otoshiyori bakari ja*). And young people these days don't help out with the needs of the community (*chiiki e kyōryoku shinai*). Take the fire brigade. No one joins any more—there's no one left to join! Everyone is working at their companies out of town—too far away to be of any use. But they don't just put out fires, you know. These days, we've got the professionals at the fire station as first-responders, so the brigade has had to diversify (*level-up*). There's prevention, emergency services, life-saving, search-and-rescue, flood watch....

(He punctuated this enumeration by writing out the Japanese terms: *yobō*, *kyūkyū*, *kyūmei*, *sōsaku*, *kyūjo*, *suibō*.)

They go out looking for the old granddads and grannies who get lost up in mountains on their way back from their garden plots. A couple years back, there was a monkey on the rampage, so we got the brigade after it. They work hard for the community (*chiiki no tame ni kurō shiteiru*).

Although our conversation soon digressed from the topic of the fire brigade, Matsukura-san retained the floor, offering his own thoughts about what I might study in the town, and insisting that my wife and I join his nature club's next outing, a guided archaeological tour of a Neolithic obsidian works in the nearby hills. When

¹ This folk-etymology for the character for *hito* (人) does not address the fact that the word is also a homonym for the number one, but this contradiction appears to be his point.

at length it was time to leave, I realized that I had not asked him whether he had been a member of the fire brigade himself. ‘Me?’ he seemed taken aback at the question, and then chuckled, explaining, ‘No, I was a businessman.’ He clasped his hands together, mimed a swinging motion, and grinned. ‘I played golf.’

Chapter 4 discussed the origins and establishment of community fire brigades in the Suwa area, building on the ethnographic framework established in Chapter 3 to contextualize the social bases in which it took root. Together, these chapters laid out a historical basis that might explain the first puzzle which this thesis addressed, i.e., explaining Japan’s comparatively high rate of fire brigade participation. This historical focus, however, does not adequately explain the contemporary strength of the organization’s membership, nor how it has been responding to more recent social changes. While the continuities between the autonomous institutions of Tokugawa village society and the Meiji period *shōbōgumi*, and the strategic policies of the Meiji state explain the initial ubiquity of community brigades, they do not explain the reasons why this organizational form has persisted essentially unchanged into the contemporary period, nor directly illuminate the contemporary structures within which the brigade is implicated. These questions are the respective subjects of the present chapter, which offers a contemporary portrait of the day-to-day activities of the Shimosuwa brigade based on my own participant observation.

Matsukura-san's account of the fire brigade confirms its deep implication within community life, but also hints at the structural division of labour by which this implication is informed. As suggested in his monologue, 'fire brigade' is in many ways a misnomer (in the original Japanese as much as in translation), since firefighting represents only a fraction of brigade responsibilities. Though fires and other catastrophic disasters, such as floods, landslides, typhoons, and earthquakes, are irregular but inevitable and all-too-unpredictable, becoming a member of the fire brigade is a serious commitment of time and energy that must be diverted from other spheres of activity. In the main, studies of Japanese 'after-hours' pursuits (e.g. Roberson 1998: 137-189; Hendry and Raveri 2002; cf. Plath 1964) have tended to oppose workplace-related social activities (work being the implied referent of 'after') to what is essentially a negative category wherein the pursuit of individual interest, community participation, and family commitment are conflated. This heuristic scheme, however, masks the tensions that arise within the extra-work sphere when these interests are forced to compete, as well as the creative strategies adopted to allow them to coexist. The fire brigade is a case in point. While some members may have an understanding with their employers regarding certain non-emergency activities, most regular brigade events, such as training and drills, are scheduled in the evening and on weekends to minimize competition with employers, in which organization officials realize it must come up the loser. For the same reason, however, this pits the brigade directly against its members' families, which necessitates that

there be both an ideological justification for privileging time away from the household, and, to the extent that this justification is contested, strategic practices for mitigating this conflict.

This chapter is an exploration of the way that such ideologies and practices are actuated in the contemporary brigade, which takes the form of a narrative account of the business of a brigade division over the course of a typical year. A hallmark of classic ethnographic monographs, of course, was their authors' ambition to document an entire annual cycle of the social, ritual, and economic life of a given cultural community. This was enabled by the social anthropologist's preferred methodology of long-term embedded fieldwork (early on a pragmatic necessity, given considerations of travel, access, and language, but later a disciplinary signature). Fieldwork and participant observation offered the ethnographer some opportunity for empirical corroboration of the stories of informants, who occasionally described cultural ideals, rather than lived realities, or who were for whatever reason unable to account for the entire year. By portraying a year in the organizational calendar of the fire brigade, I can demonstrate the extent to which it is implicated and entwined in the community's economic, political, and ritual spheres. Before beginning such an account, however, I devote a preliminary section of this chapter to a quantitative discussion of the brigade's distribution throughout Japan.

5.1 *Chiiki o mamore!* The geographical distribution of community fire brigades

The *chiiki*, or ‘local community’, featured heavily in conversations about the fire brigade. Written with ideographs meaning ‘earth’ and ‘range, region, limit, level’, *chiiki*, like the English word community, denotes an abstract but territorialized sphere of social relations. But whereas English speakers may speak abstractly of ‘imagined communities’ at national and international scales (one may speak of ‘the Brazilian community,’ for example, in reference to a localized immigrant minority, a nation-state, or a worldwide diaspora), usage of the Japanese term resists such deracination. To the extent that it remains a social space, *chiiki* is necessarily local, rooted in a specific place. It is located at the level of day-to-day existence, where people live, though not necessarily where they work or study.

Firefighting activities (*shōbō katsudō*) are considered in Japanese communities to be a subset of ‘local activities’ (*chiiki katsudō*) or ‘local service’ (*chiiki hōshi*). This category includes any (usually organized) activity perceived to be done for the collective good. Other examples might include participation as an officer in a neighbourhood association, or serving on the PTA of the local school board. Setting out to study volunteers in a Japanese neighbourhood, Lynne Nakano was told that what she was studying was ‘merely’ *chiiki katsudō* (Nakano 2005: 3) —that is, humdrum stuff—hardly of interest to a scholar. I encountered similar confusion among Japanese informants with regard to the fire brigade. In fact, as Nakano’s

research demonstrates, the *chiiki* is a key site for anthropological study, located precisely at the intersection of individual and society. Matsukura-san's phrasing in his lament on the fading of community solidarity, (*'chiiki e no kyōryoku'* translates literally as 'cooperation towards the community') suggests prestation, the rendering of a service and the acceptance of the imposition of collective concerns on individual interests. The following sections are intended to be a practical demonstration of what that imposition signifies, which in turn will highlight the contemporary situation of the brigade.



Figure 15: The header for '*Chiiki o Mamore! Kennai no shōbōdan*' ('Protect [your] community! Fire brigades around the prefecture') a regular weekend feature in the *Shinano Mainichi Shinbun*, Nagano Prefecture's daily newspaper. The title's imperative echoes the terse commands used by the brigade. The human-interest column carried stories about strategies undertaken by local brigades to attract membership and excite interest in the organization. The mountains along the top of the banner suggest the geography of Nagano Prefecture, and the figure saluting in the centre of the image wears the member's traditional field cap and *happi*.

Although their existence is legally mandated, the absolute size and relative participation rate among individual community fire brigades varies considerably among Japanese municipalities. Haddad, for instance, reports FDMA statistics which demonstrate that in 2000, brigade memberships in Japanese cities with populations

of between 100,000 and 150,000 ranged from 25 to 1627 members (2010: 42).² In bringing attention to this enormous variability, Haddad's implication, drawing on her earlier research (2006), is that membership levels are largely contingent on local institutional contexts, and that membership rates reflect the extent to which brigade participation is legitimated, organized, and financially supported by the respective communities. While this is surely true, the simple statement of upper and lower boundaries of membership ranges masks an underlying pattern of socio-geographic differentiation.

As noted in the Introduction, community fire brigades have often been associated with areas where the echoes of 'traditional' livelihoods—e.g. agriculture, forestry, and fishing in rural areas, or the mercantile and craft shop industries in urban settlements—retain an important symbolic if not economic significance in discourses of local identity. Anthropologists recognize that such 'local' discourses are inextricably bound up with the wider socioeconomic trends of the metropole, and the Japanese experience is no exception. Convincing analyses, for example, of the cultural ramifications of domestic tourism campaigns (Ivy 1988; 1995: 29-65; Creighton 1997) and the so-called 'hometown boom' of the 1970s which 'appropriated the individual's homeplace as the nation's heartland' (Kelly 1986: 613; Robertson 1988; cf. Ardener 2007[1987]) attest to the wider interests implicated

² A similar sample measure, taken in 2010, would include 110 Japanese cities. In 2000, however, this number would have been much lower, a result of municipal amalgamations during the interceding years. The number of cities that would fit this sample in 2003, for example, would have been 81.

within the symbolic construction of rural identity. Recognition of the essential facticity of rural or remote identities, however, should not be confused with a denial of their lived reality. Brigade data in fact demonstrates that this association is borne out as much in practice as in discourse.

5.1.1 The national level

Cross-referencing the organization's membership statistics for 2003 with contemporary population and geographical data demonstrates a significant negative statistical correlation between the brigade membership rates and population, as well as between membership rates and degree of urbanization.

Table 4: Correlations with prefecture-wide fire brigade participation rates (members per 1,000 citizens) in 2003

	(Pearson correlation)	(<i>n</i>)
Prefectural Population	-0.578**	47
Physical Area	0.027	47
Prefectural Population Density	-0.513**	47

(Indicator of statistical significance: ** <.01)

Figure 16 below offers a graphical representation of this relationship at the prefectural level. Among community brigades, participation rates are lowest in highly urbanized regions, such as the metropolitan centres of Osaka and Tokyo (as well as the urban prefectures neighbouring the capital on the Kantō plain, Saitama and Kanagawa). At the other end of the spectrum are regions traditionally seen as Japan's hinterlands—the northeastern prefectures of the Tōhoku region (Yamagata, Akita,

Iwate, and Aomori)³ as well as the western prefectures of Shimane and Tottori. Brigade participation rates are particularly high in the rural Kyushu prefectures of Kumamoto and Saga. Most interestingly, perhaps, and certainly worthy of more detailed consideration than is given here are the social implications of the spread. Postwar Japanese ethnologists and rural sociologists, most famously Fukutake Tadashi (1967), proposed a social structural divide in Japan, along a northeast-southwest axis, separating regions respectively characterized by vertical and horizontal principles of social organization. Village structures of the latter type, structured by egalitarian sodalities rather than by kinship and patronage, would have been more likely to have the type of generalized mutual aid associations that preceded the Meiji fire service. While one might hypothesize that some echo of this divide be visible in the brigade data, no such distinction is evident on the graph, and the upper right of the scale is populated by representatives of both regions. This could be interpreted to mean that there is no relation between older social structures and the contemporary brigade. It is worth noting, however, that Hokkaido and Okinawa—two prefectures with extraordinary historical, cultural, and political relationships to the central state—are significant outliers with regard to brigade membership.⁴

³ This region was devastated by the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan on 11 March 2011. I touch on this disaster in my Conclusion, in Chapter 9.

⁴ These results appear to contradict those published by Haddad (2006: 60, Table 3.1), which demonstrate an only negligible negative correlation between participation and population density.

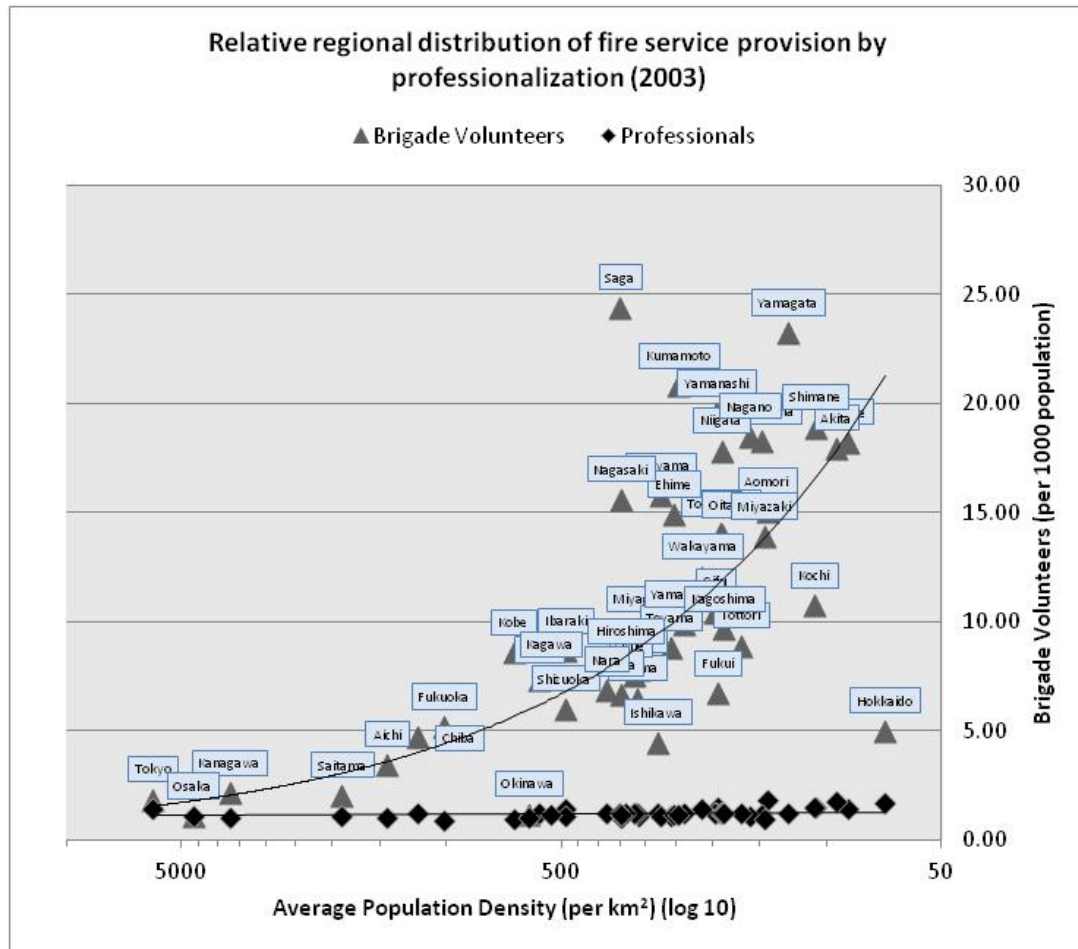


Figure 16: Membership concentration of fire services (community brigades and professionals) by Japanese prefecture, 2003 (Data compiled from FDMA 2004 and <http://uub.jp/index.html>)

In general, this correlation between population density and brigade participation makes intuitive sense. Many smaller villages (at least in 2003) were not furnished with a locally staffed fire station (*shōbōsho*), but were rather protected under the auspices of regional fire authorities (*kōiki shōbō renmei*) which covered multiple municipal jurisdictions. In such areas, local brigades serve as first-responders in public emergencies, rather than awaiting the arrival of

However, her text makes it unclear whether she was analyzing *relative* or *absolute* participation. Measuring the correlation in my own data set between population density and the *absolute* number of volunteers achieves a similar negligible negative result (Pearson coefficient -0.013), suggesting that this was also the measure she used.

professionals from neighbouring communities. Other brigade duties, notably search and rescue, require more bodies in rural areas to cover more ground quickly. One therefore expects brigades to be larger where populations are smaller and hence for relative participation rates to be higher. However, it will be noted that there appears to be no direct correlation between participation rate and physical area.

5.1.2 The municipal level

Because the averaging of internal heterogeneity at the national scale leaves some room for doubt regarding the local situation, it is worth investigating whether the correlation between population density and membership rates holds true at the municipal level. An examination of brigade participation rates across the 118 municipalities that made up Nagano Prefecture in 2003 demonstrates that this is so.

Table 5: Correlations with community fire brigade participation rates in Nagano Prefecture (members per 1,000 citizens) in 2003

	(Pearson correlation)	(n)
<i>Nagano Prefecture</i>		
Municipal Population	-0.447**	118
Physical Area	-0.095	118
Municipal Population Density	-0.669**	118

(Indicators of statistical significance: ** <.01)

Analysis at this scale also reveals that membership rates have a much stronger negative correlation with population density, while that with population, though still significant, is weaker. Once again, there is no apparent relationship with the actual area of coverage. While considerable variability remains, participation

rates are, on average, highest in rural villages and lowest in urbanized communities.⁵ Figure 17 shows the relative position of each municipality on a graph. One outlier, the village of Yasaka (amalgamated within the city of Ōmachi in 2009), represents an extreme case. In 2003, when the village's population was reported to be 1,253 (in 407 households), the village fire brigade consisted of 148 members. If we assume that the demographic makeup of the village mirrors the national average,⁶ this means that in 2003, approximately 2 in 5 young adult men were active members of the fire brigade (note that even this extreme outlier does not approach the myth of universal compulsory participation). Shimosuwa, and its neighbouring municipalities in Suwa District, can be seen to occupy a position on the left side of the scale, reflecting the comparatively industrial nature of the region's economic base.

⁵ This is consistent with the significant relationship evident in Haddad's municipal-level data (2006: 62, Table 3.3), which notes *per capita* participation as the unit of measurement. Haddad underplays this relationship, however, given its inconsistency with weaker correlations between population density and other forms of volunteering (e.g. welfare commissioners, PTA) measured at the prefectural level. While it is unclear whether these other correlations are based on relative or absolute data (see previous note), this inconsistency suggests a difference between patterns of involvement in community firefighting and other forms of volunteering, thereby further challenging Haddad's blanket definition of voluntary participation.

⁶ This is a conservative estimate, to be sure, given the fact that demographic aging is much more pronounced in rural areas.

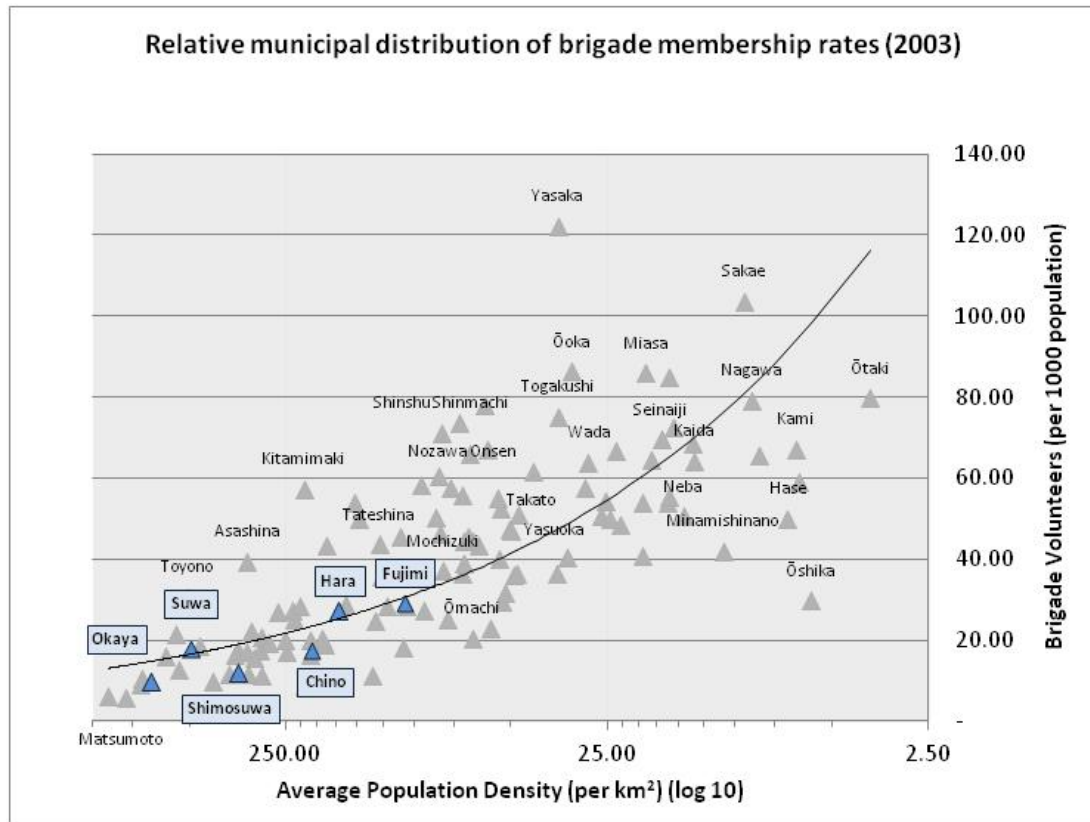


Figure 17: Membership concentration of community fire brigades in Nagano Prefecture, 2003 (Data compiled from FDMA 2004 and <http://uub.jp/index.html>). The six municipalities of the Suwa area are highlighted, amidst markers denoting other municipalities.

The analysis of other prefectural datasets will be necessary to confirm further this finding at a nationwide level (i.e. that relative population density offers the most meaningful basis for the comparison of participation rates). There are nevertheless other reasons to suspect that population alone is a misleading basis for the comparison of brigades, or indeed of local-level Japanese institutions in general. Under the current system of municipal designation, what counts as a ‘city’, ‘town’, or ‘village’, while ostensibly determined by population, is more a reflection of administrative ideology than an index of urban development or concentration. Especially following the most recent period of nationwide municipal amalgamation

(which officially ended in 2005),⁷ what might be termed ‘classificatory cities’ may nevertheless contain some of Japan’s most sparsely populated and wilderness areas. Conversely, the population density of some towns and villages may surpass that of many cities (Ertl 2007: 3). In most cases, geographic considerations mean that population densities are far from homogeneous, even within smaller municipalities. Even in the comparatively urbanized township of Shimosuwa, for example, which in 2003 encompassed 66.9 square kilometres and had a population density of about 350 people per square kilometre (ranking it seventy-third largest and sixteenth highest, respectively, within Nagano Prefecture), only 4.2% of this land was used for residential or industrial purposes. The remainder is divided among rice paddies (1.1%), fields (1.6%), private mountain forest (51.1%), protected upland forest (23.4%), lakes and marshes (4.2%) and other state-owned lands (14.3%) (Shimosuwa Municipal Revenue and Property Tax Division 2010).⁸

This correlation, of course, does not contradict (and might even be construed to support) Haddad’s contention that local institutional frameworks can

⁷ The so-called ‘Great Heisei Amalgamation’ (*Heisei daigappei*) was a period of nationwide administrative rationalization that encouraged Japanese municipalities with populations of 30,000 or fewer citizens to merge with adjacent municipalities to pursue budgetary efficiencies (cf. Rausch 2006).

⁸ It would no doubt be interesting to see what light might be shed, if any, by a systematic consideration of such internal breakdowns (ideally including the territorial jurisdictions of internal brigade divisions) on the correlations observed at the more general scale. While many local governments publish zoning statistics on municipal websites, I have not located any centralized database. Additionally, as municipal mergers have also entailed the amalgamation of previously independent brigades, the resultant data pooling makes such granularity increasingly difficult to achieve.

be a positive force in encouraging civic participation. As demonstrated in Figure 16, above, in contrast to community brigades, professional deployment appears to be almost perfectly consistently correlated with population nationwide (between 0.91 and 1.85 professional firefighting employees per 1000 citizens averaged at the prefectural level). Although I have yet to confirm these suspicions, it seems likely that this consistency is an indication of explicit state policy, while the variability seen in the brigade data reflects the contingencies of local level planning.

Nevertheless, the obvious difference in participation rates between urban and rural areas appears to contradict Haddad's related thesis—that participation in embedded volunteer organizations like the fire brigade is highest in areas where people locate responsibility for communal welfare with the state. While many Japanese would agree that the state (as well as the market, in the form of insurance) should provide support to victims of disaster or emergency, local capacities to make up for the inevitable sluggishness and shortcomings of bureaucratic response are much more salient in discussions of community. Certainly, as we shall see, the idea that the state is responsible for the immediate welfare of community members would strike many of my own informants as an odd, even shameful abdication of local responsibility in the short term. Moreover, in Shimosuwa, there was a popular and deep-seated sense that this theme of local autonomy was even more pronounced in traditionally 'frontier' areas—locally exemplified in the upland areas southeast of Lake Suwa.

Remote areas, of course, do not really lie ‘outside’ the state—perhaps especially in Japan, where peripheral territories were targeted for public works development as a form of internal wealth redistribution for much of the post-war period (Johnson 1982). But as Robert Layton has noted, in his discussion of civil society, ‘frontier-like’ situations may nevertheless exist in the middle of otherwise well-regulated nation-states (Layton 2006: 70). Layton cites the private policing of contemporary nightclubs in Britain as an example of a sphere of activity where the state has abdicated responsibility by releasing its monopoly on the use of force to maintain social control to market forces (nightclubs and bouncers). More general examples are easily found in the Japanese context. The informal dispute resolution and social control exercised in village hamlets, for example—a legacy of the village autonomy of the Tokugawa period— has been suggested by John Owen Haley to be pervasive in state institutions more generally, in practices which Haley characterizes as the exercise of ‘authority without power’ (Haley 1991) (cf. Smith 1961). In some cases, a general division of labour between state and society is explicit; the technical term for local residents’ associations, *jichikai*, in its literal sense, is ‘self-government association’ (Hendry 2003: 70). The clear support that community fire brigades receive from the state notwithstanding, it would seem tempting to hypothesize, *contra* Haddad, that participation in the fire brigade is actually higher in areas where people locate responsibility for communal welfare with society, *as opposed to* the state.

This argument must be developed later, however. What is important for us to note here is that the contrast between professional and auxiliary fire service in Japan is not only institutional, but also ideological. Whereas the principle governing deployment of the former is abstract, externally imposed, and (within the confines of the nation-state) universal, that which underlies the latter is rooted in the particular exigencies and experience of the local context. We now turn to the main section of the chapter, which is devoted to an exploration of that context as it exists in Nagano's Suwa District.

5.2 The annual cycle

The account given below is based primarily on data derived from first-hand participant observation over an eleven-month period. Yet while many activities recur on an annual basis, the vagaries of circumstance dictate that the calendar of a given year is filled with a mix of both regular observances and incidental business. Of course, unpredictable emergencies are the brigade's ultimate *raison d'être*. But these are not the only events of interest to the brigade and its members; weddings, and funerals are as inevitable and irregular as storms and disaster.

To compensate for such contingency, and to make up the remainder of the full calendar year from my own time on the brigade, the account given in this chapter is of a *potential*, rather than actual year of events. In addition to my own observation as a participant, it draws on log entries and annual reports drawn up by my own

division for the ward and town office for the period from 2000 to 2008 (excepting 2003, for which the relevant records had been misplaced), accounting for 419 separate mobilizations.

As significant as it may seem, this number—fifty events a year, on average—represents activities over and above the thrice-monthly divisional training meetings (*teiki kunren*, usually abbreviated as *teikun*) that represent the core of brigade activity. It is difficult, from the brigade records, to estimate with complete accuracy the amount of time a member might devote to the brigade over the course of a year, as the annual duty reports tend to over-report their activity, through the practice of simply adding thirty-six regular practices a year to the total of other activities. In practice, however, when *teikun* dates overlap with brigade-wide events,⁹ the general event may double as *teikun* (in Second Division, such overlap accounts for forty-four events over the 2000-2008 period). This is further complicated by the fact that individual division sergeants, whose responsibility it is to set the schedule, may decide to extend this ‘overlap’ to events occurring within a few days of, or in the same week as *teikun*. Finally, many events—especially purely social occasions—are optional, which means that the time a member may spend with the brigade will be subject to circumstantial variability, according to individual interest and availability.

⁹ While schedules will vary, the Shimosuwa brigade allocates *teikun* such that drills for each of its seven divisions will overlap as little as possible. *Teikun* thus falls customarily on dates containing a given division’s number (thus Second Division regularly holds training on the second, twelfth, and twenty-second day of the month, Fifth Division on the fifth, fifteenth, and twenty-fifth, and so on).

Keeping these factors in mind, a rough estimate from the data available for Second Division suggests that members are likely to be involved in *some* form of brigade-related activity every four to five days on average, provided they take part in the baseline number of events. Opportunities to participate in half again as many occasions are available for the fully active member. It should also be noted that many activities, such as planning meetings, official duties, and the like may require only the participation of the executive officers (*sanyaku*, lit. ‘three officers’, i.e. the sergeant, vice-captain, and captain). Taking into account these possible variations in commitment, scheduling, and rank, Table 6 estimates of the amount of time the members of Second Division devote to brigade activity.

Table 6: Average frequency of annual events in Second Division, 2000-2008

	Baseline Commitment		Full Activity	
	Annual events	Frequency	Annual events	Frequency
<u>Relaxed schedule</u>				
Regulars	66.8	(every 5.3 days)	104.4	(every 3.5 days)
Officers	87.8	(every 4.1 days)	125.4	(every 2.9 days)
<u>Upper limit</u>				
Regulars	91.9	(every 4.0 days)	129.5	(every 2.8 days)
Officers	112.9	(every 3.2 days)	150.7	(every 2.4 days)

Accordingly, the following account should be understood to describe the fullest possible year.

5.2.1 Spring

5.2.1.1 *Changing of the guard*

The start of the fiscal year on 1 April is the traditional date for municipal employees and newly elected officers in the town's various organizations to take up new posts and new responsibilities. In Second Division, for the first time in over two decades, the appointment of a new captain has coincided with this official calendrical ideal. In the firehouse stairwell, the calligrapher's ink is still fresh on a new wooden plaque painted with the name of the newly minted Captain Seki Tadashi, twenty-ninth of that rank in the Second Division of the Shimosuwa Town Fire Brigade (established 1947). Seki-san, the fifth-generation manager of a neighbourhood liquor store, had in fact been asked to relieve his predecessor, Captain Hayashi-san, the previous October, but had begged off the appointment until he could see out his term as chairman of the Youth Division of the town's Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which he completed in March.

The idiosyncrasies of divisional succession notwithstanding, a ceremonial changing of the guard for the captains and vice-captains of the town brigade's seven divisions is held every April at the local fire station. At the ceremony, officers new and old who have either been appointed or stepped down over the past year join their divisional counterparts in solemnizing the transition in the presence of the local fire service executive and town officials. These include the mayor, councillors, ward chiefs, and a few neighbourhood officials. In the months leading up to this event, the

ward chiefs (who unlike others take office in January) have been reminded by the station officials at their monthly council meeting to spread the word of the event among office holders at the neighbourhood level.

This is in fact the third time Seki-san has attended such a ceremony, having ten years ago stepped down as vice-captain. This evening he has once again donned the firefighter's *happi*. The striped sleeves and dyed livery of the captain's coat, and a metal badge (three stylized *sakura* blossoms, the symbol of the national brigade) testify to his new rank. Hayashi-san wears a dark business suit and tie, as befits the official occasion. Like others stepping down into civilian life, he has brought an artfully wrapped bottle of *sake* with which to present his successor.

Both men were recruited to the captaincy by the ward's branch of the Firefighter's Camaraderie Association (*shōyūkai*), a group comprised of former executive officers, now 'old boys' of the brigade. At forty-eight, Captain Seki is much younger than his predecessor. Hayashi-san, now sixty-three, accepted the captaincy only after retirement from a large corporation in Suwa City, on the other side of the lake. He had served with the brigade as a young man, between eighteen and twenty-five, but like many of his contemporaries, had withdrawn after marrying and starting a career, never serving as a junior officer. While neither marriage nor out-of-town employment is any longer considered to be a barrier to active participation (a result both of declining membership and the proliferation of car

ownership), in the 1970s, Hayashi-san contented himself by joining his company's in-house fire brigade (*jiei shōbōtai*).¹⁰ Captain Seki, whose family's shop is within shouting distance of the firehouse, faced no such difficulties. Although he had initially left the community to study near Tokyo, staying on to work for several years, he had joined the brigade when he returned to succeed his father in the family business. After twelve years in the brigade, he stepped down after serving a term at the often terminal rank of vice-captain. Although the twin responsibilities of work and the captaincy are an inescapable double burden, the ability to both set his own schedule and rely on the assistance of his family (his retired father, wife, and, in a pinch, three sons) have provided much-needed flexibility.¹¹

5.2.1.2 *Neighbourhood politics*

The evening's ceremony will be recapitulated twice more during the coming weeks, firstly at parties hosted by individual divisions at their respective firehouses, in the company of local ward officials, and then once more in a municipal celebratory send-off-and-welcome banquet (*kansōgeikai*), exclusive to officers and town officials.

¹⁰ Many companies have their own in-house fire brigade on the model of the municipal brigades, complete with *happi*, bugles and regular *kunren*. Hayashi-san's employer provided free breakfast to employees on the brigade. For legal reasons, it seems, only full-time employees (*seishain*) are allowed to join. The company had invested heavily into its in-house brigade, and its private stockpile of disaster relief supplies for its internal use far surpassed that of the group's municipal counterpart.

¹¹ Among the division's twenty-eight captains since 1947, it has been just as likely for a captain to be chosen who had not previously been an officer (n=12) as one who had previously served as vice-captain (n=14). Only 25% of captains had served as both sergeant and vice captain. Previous service also seems to have little effect on the average length of the term in office. The only exceptions to this observation were two men, father and son, who appear to have compensated for the fact by hanging on to the captaincy for much longer than usual: an additional two years in the case of the elder, and one year for the son.

These events, which follow a staged and formalized order of speeches, presentations, and feasting (usually itemized on a poster hung near the front of the venue) also provide a setting for discussing the business of the days and months ahead.

Situated near a Buddhist temple against the ridge of hills that borders the town, the two-story structure of the Shimosuwa Brigade's Second Division firehouse (*tonsho*)¹² adjoins the ward office near the intersection of the old Tokugawa highways, its dark façade of wooden slats paying architectural homage to the ward's history as a post station (*shukuba*) in the Edo Period. Climbing the reinforced structure of the steel fire-tower, one has access to a splendid view of the town below, spread across the narrow expanse of the alluvial plain of the lake basin. To the west, a steep decline drops off along the old Nakasendō through a district of hot springs, inns, and restaurants. To the east, the shrine of Akimiya sits just past the beginning of the Kōshū Road, which two centuries earlier offered an alternative route to Edo. South, the main road through town descends the slope of Emonzaka¹³ to the shopping districts (*shōtengai*) established in the first decades of the twentieth century. Although the much more recent history of this once-central location, as the site of the old town office, is already fading from living memory, its situation

¹² Such firehouses are known variously as *tonsho* and *tsumesho*, both terms translating alternately into English as 'barracks.' The Shimosuwa brigade favours the latter usage.

¹³ The name translates as 'Primping Hill', after the approach to the more famous pleasure district of historical Edo's Yoshiwara, where prospective customers of the district's courtesans took pause to adjust their appearance before heading in search of an evening's entertainment (Seigle 1993: 64). Shimosuwa's Emonzaka once led to the inns and hot springs of the Tokugawa post town. An eponymous pub at the foot of the slope is popular with many local associations.

opposite the ancient tumulus (*kofun*) said to mark the burial chamber of an ancient clan chieftain testifies its antiquity as a public space. The ward building was extended to include the divisional firehouse in 1992, following the demolition of an older structure near Akimiya, which had housed the division since the Meiji Period. Consisting of an open-plan meeting hall above a vehicle and equipment bay, it is seen by all as a comfortable improvement on its predecessor, whose ramshackle character once reminded local children of a haunted house.

Tonight, the red light above the vehicle bay, a silent reminder of the brigade's watchfulness, is a more accurately an indicator of the night's impending revelry. Inside, those not busy preparing a meal of hearty *tonjiru* (a *miso*, or soy bean paste-based pork and vegetable soup) are setting places and *zabuton* cushions along low tables arranged on the *tatami* seating area against the eastern wall. Placards around the head of the table in the corner opposite the door identify those for whom places of honour are reserved: Nakamura-san (ward headman), Saitō-san (chairman of the district ward branch of the Camaraderie Association), Fujimori-san and Tajima-san (town councillors based in the ward) and Okumura-san (the deputy ward headman, who will take over as head next year). While the brigade officers sit off to the side, Masuzawa-san, unit captain of the Women's Firefighting Unit (*josei shōbōtai*) sits to the right of Saitō-san. After remarks by the captains and VIPs, the feast begins with a collective toast ('*Kanpai!*'). During the meal, junior members of

the brigade attend to the others, ensuring that beer and *sake* glasses are replenished when necessary.

Conversation flows smoothly, but at the head of the table there is business to attend to. Fujimori-san, an active member of the Japan Communist Party, takes the opportunity to plumb Hayashi-san's opinions as an engineer regarding municipal environmental policy. Saitō-san entreats Nakamura-san to remind the ward's neighbourhood association chairmen to make time for a meeting next month about the persistent problem of divisional recruitment. Speaking of ward business, Nakamura-san broaches the topic of meeting with Captain Seki later in the week about the schedule for the upcoming gutter cleaning (*sokkō sōji*).¹⁴ After an hour or so, the meal wraps up with final remarks from Saitō-san, and after a single ceremonial clap (*oshime*),¹⁵ the local worthies take their leave. There is still plenty of food and drink, however, and Masuzawa-san makes a call to invite members of the Women's Unit, who had a training event that evening, to come join the group for a second round of conviviality.

¹⁴ On a specified day each year, local residents are asked by their respective neighbourhood associations to clear the gutters near their homes, after which the fire brigade makes the rounds of the ward's various fire hydrants, directing their flows into the gutters to flush out any remaining detritus.

¹⁵ This is one variation among several ceremonial forms of closure used during social occasions in the Suwa area. Another example is three repetitions of three quick claps, followed by a final clap and shout of *Banzai!* An acquaintance from western Japan who had moved to Suwa for work remarked to me that this aspect of social gatherings in Suwa seemed uncomfortably old-fashioned.

The weeks ahead are busy ones for Captain Seki. The event planning and strategy sessions with the Camaraderie Association and the ward council are followed by a meeting with the local branch of the Crime Prevention Association (volunteers who stage intermittent patrols of the evening streets with the chief of the local police division). In addition, the fiscal year's first meeting of the brigade captain's council will be convened mid-month to meet with the town's fire officials and the brigade Commander to set policy and plans for the weeks and months ahead. The town-wide feast for the executive officers is held mid-month, and regular training drills for the division continue as usual.

5.2.1.3 Inductions

Spring training workshops, at both the municipal and regional level, are scheduled to provide a forum for regional and prefectural authorities to instruct new officers and recruits in the protocol and responsibilities expected of them.¹⁶ The first of these is a day-long workshop for new members, who rehearse training drills, watch technical videos, and attend a lecture by the Commander on the role of the brigade in the community. Second Division has sent two new recruits this year: Mitsui-kun, twenty-five, is an enthusiastic young man, lately returned from a cooking

¹⁶ As outlined in the Local Public Service Act (*Chihō Kōmuin Hō*, 1950), brigade members, regardless of rank, are legally considered to be 'specially appointed local public service personnel' (*tokubetsushoku no chihō kōmuin*), a status also held by elected public officials, as well as officers in publically held enterprises, agencies, committees, or commissions. As might be expected, this legal equivalence in no way corresponds to social status positioning of members. Nevertheless, it does place them within a publically delimited sphere of behaviour more constrained than that inhabited by average citizens. This is discussed further in Chapter 8.

apprenticeship in Kyoto to work in his family's *ryokan* (a traditional Japanese inn). Ōwa-kun, a diffident nineteen, works nights at a *pachinko* parlour in Suwa. Both men have already sworn and signed an pledge in the presence of Captain Seki. During the workshop, they and a number of other new members are formally presented with inked enrolment certificates by the Commander in front of the rest of the brigade. All have run through the presentation several times already with their own divisional officers, practicing the disciplined salutes, responses, and parade comportment involved in the presentation.

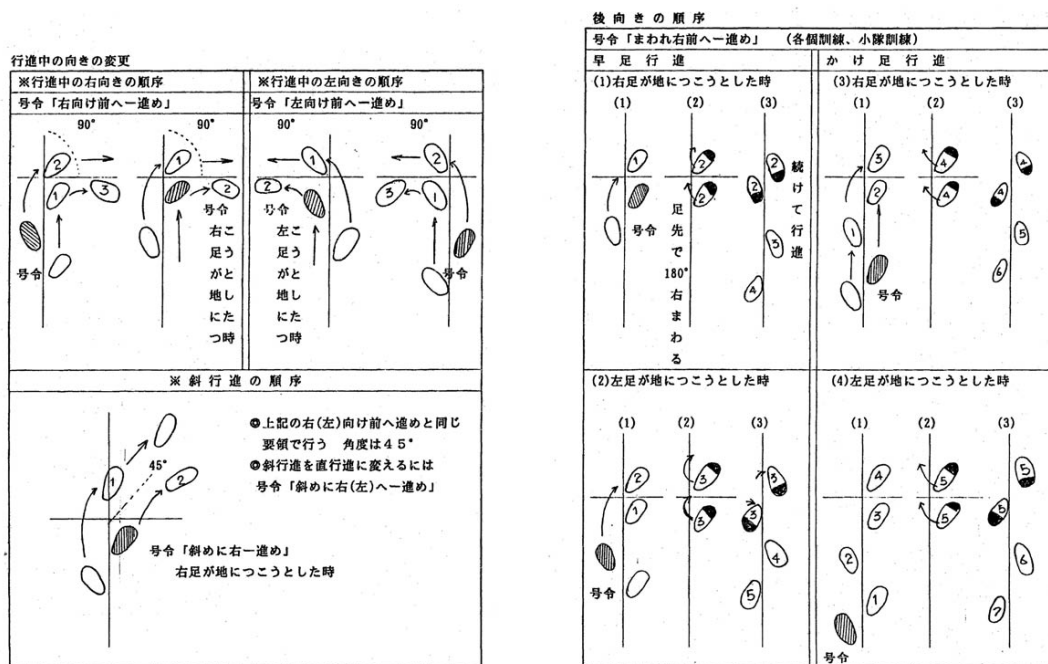


Figure 18: Illustrations from a photocopied handbook distributed to new recruits detailing marching form to be used during brigade manoeuvres.

A regional workshop for officers, held this year in Suwa City, coincides with a similar introductory workshop for the brigade's buglers, who join their regional counterparts for a day of practice. Bugle signals and calls are a component of all

brigade activities. Although no longer retaining their pragmatic function of relaying orders during times of emergency, the bugle corps (*rappa-tai*) remains an iconic symbol of the brigade, contributing to the organization's somewhat martial character.

Most, if not all of these events end with some manner of socializing, either at their individual divisional firehouses, or, in the case of smaller meetings, at a local eatery or *izakaya*. The sight of a firefighter's *happi*, I was told, was a sure testament to the quality and affordability of any restaurant, and a sure sign that the business of firefighting activities for the day has come to an end.

5.2.1.4 *On the line: security detail*

In Suwa, four years out of six (three among the upper shrine parishes), late spring is an occasion for the parishioners (*ujiko*) of Suwa Taisha to head into the mountains to select, consecrate, fell, and ultimately remove the trees to be used in the region's notorious festival, Onbashira. The relationship between the shrines and the fire brigade is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, but it is enough to note here that the brigade invariably serves as a security (*keibi*) and first-aid (*ōkyū*) detail at such festive events. The fire brigade is tasked to guard against (and, failing that, deal with) any overzealousness or inattention on the part of the scores of attendees.

The *bassai* (tree-felling) ceremony is observed by the lower shrine parishes one year before the main festival. The brigade arrives in the mountains two hours before the first parishioners, hiking up from the mountain access road below the

national forest (*kokuyūrin*) from which the trees are selected. Preparations begin as usual, with a muster into parade formation, attendance report, and orders from the commander, followed by dismissal with an entreaty for all to take care at this dangerous event. It does not take long to string up the cordons around each of the eight giant firs, to ensure that the crowds are kept well back from each tree's fall zone. During the festival year culminating each sexennial cycle, visitors number in the tens of thousands, and security ropework takes an entire day to string, and brigade members and police spend three full days in both April and May attending to crowd safety during the festivities.

Working as they do at the interface between the circumstantial dangers of the ritual and the crowd, the brigade is seen by many as being 'closer to the action' at festivals—in senses both physical and categorical. (This opinion may be felt more strongly, perhaps, by those eager to see or photograph the event, than by the members themselves.) While on duty, the brigade is expected to maintain strict professionalism, and is thus forbidden from indulging in alcohol or undue familiarity, both of which flow liberally among the parishioners. Members take these responsibilities seriously. A few exchange words with the ritual team who will be cutting down the tree—most of whom are former brigade members. Focussed as each group is on their respective tasks, however, there is little time for camaraderie.

The shrine's priest is officiating at the site of eight different fellings today, and the assembled crowd settles in to wait for their turn. Interactions between the crowd and brigade members are polite, but mutually restrained. Some boisterous younger parishioners are clearly annoyed at being consistently told by the captain to stay back from the felling site, but there is no sign of any resentment of (or false deference to) the brigade's authority. Joining the brigade, two prefectural police officers stand idly by; *yakuza* involvement in local festivals has become a concern in recent years, but they are evidently not expecting any trouble. When the high priest and his deputies arrive, prayers of purification are invoked in turn over the ritual team, the woodcutting tools to be used in the ceremony, the fire brigade, and the parishioners. Excitement builds as the cutting gets underway, and especially the younger members of the crowd press to get as close as possible to the giant fir, the better to leap on to the trunk at the auspicious moment just after it crashes to the ground. Until then, the brigade members entreat the crowd (mostly ineffectually) to remain '*Back! Back!*' When the great tree finally topples, the young men of the crowd surge past, clambering to join their fellows atop the still-quivering trunk, shouting a triumphant '*Yoi-sa!*'¹⁷ With the safe conclusion of the event the crowds depart to

¹⁷ I served on the security detail at this event, but my position as a brigade member meant that my freedom to solicit information from the locals was restricted. Instead, I found myself on the receiving end of questions, usually about the schedule, which was running late, and a few about the details of the tree itself. In the aftermath, I distributed sticking plasters to several men who had cut their hands in the excitement. During these and several similar exchanges throughout the year, my obvious status as a foreigner came as a surprise only after I had been accosted (if then), my interlocutor not having

banquets prepared in community centres throughout the town below by the local ward Cultural Association (*bunkan*) or Women's Association (*fujinkai*). The brigade is left to clear the site of debris and litter before they may descend to join the revelry of their fellow parishioners. When they do, they are greeted with enthusiastic cheers and applause, in gratitude for their efforts.

5.2.2 Summer

5.2.2.1 Before the floods

As spring matures into summer, an outdoor training flood-response workshop (*suibō kunren*) anticipates the onset of the rainy season (*tsuyu*) in late June and early July and the typhoons of early autumn, whose effects are keenly felt in the Suwa basin, where rainfalls drain from the surrounding mountains into the lake. Significant flooding is uncommon, but concentrated periods of heavy, sustained downpours (*gerira gōu*, lit. 'guerrilla downpours') can be dangerous. In May of 2006, Shimosuwa's Togawa River—usually a shallow, gentle stream—became a roaring torrent. Several of the town's upper streets became temporary rivers, flooding neighbourhoods. Mud- and landslides resulting from the downpour claimed the lives of five citizens in neighbouring Okaya. For four days, the region's community brigades filled sandbags, cleared flotsam, built floodbreaks, and assisted elderly householders in shifting waterlogged furniture and finding shelter. During the rescue

bothered to look past the *happi*. The on-duty brigade member is seen categorically as approachable, in the know, and there to help.

effort, a forty-five year old brigade member died in a sudden landslide. His funeral the next week drew an honour guard of hundreds of brigade members in full uniform.¹⁸

Rain or shine, on the day appointed for the training exercise, the brigade's divisions assemble early to gather equipment for transport to the Firefighting Grounds, the multi-purpose expanse of empty parkland near the lake. The black and red of the firefighters' *happi* are joined by the white jackets and red caps of volunteers from the Red Cross Society, the dark blue coveralls of the Disaster Relief Auxiliary Corps (whose members are, to a man, former brigade members), and the pale green work clothes of town employees. Yet another group of uniforms are the blue and orange of the professional firefighters from the town station, who are here in a mainly supervisory role. The town employees and brigade members wear protective safety helmets, on which patterns of coloured stripes identify rank and organization.

Throughout the morning, the assembled groups cycle through various stations—each prepared by a different division—which simulate some aspect of a flood situation, where they receive coaching by an instructor from the Prefectural Firefighter's Association. At one station, saplings dug up from the hills above Higashi Yamada (Seventh Division's district) have been replanted for chainsaw practice. Elsewhere, teams receive instruction in *kinagashi*, a technique whereby potential

¹⁸ Firefighters and brigade members who die in the line of duty are commemorated each year at a national memorial service at in Tokyo. See Chapter 10.

flotsam is secured to the shore at particularly turbulent points in a river to prevent its being pulled downstream, as well as to mitigate erosion. While this is happening, volunteers from the Auxiliary Corps fill sturdy canvas sandbags for the (mostly) younger brigade members to relay in a human chain to the water's edge. Sandbags, an instructor announces, triple in weight when wet, making them an effective flood barrier. A demonstration of this principle prompts murmurs of impressed appreciation from the younger men. In other years the brigade has practiced deploying gabions (*jakago*)—wire frames which are filled with rocks to create a stable flood barrier. At a final station, members use metal stakes to secure large blue vinyl groundsheets, which can be unfurled to prevent erosion on steep riverbanks where the use of brush is impractical. The instructor gives pointers on tying knots securely, warning that 'When it's the real deal (*honban*), people are usually too excited, so take care to get it right.'

Many of these techniques are modern adaptations of—or at least connote—traditional skills and methods. Reusable blue vinyl sheets have replaced mats of woven reeds, while wire-framed *jakago* were originally constructed from bamboo. One division's increasingly frustrated attempts to start a recalcitrant chainsaw drew both laughter as well as thoughtful remarks that the job could be done much more quickly with an axe. *Kinagashi* (lit. 'floating wood'), originally signified the early modern technique by which firewood cut in mountain camps over the

winter was transported downriver to inhabited areas during spring flooding, a practice which lasted well into the twentieth century in many of Japan's upland communities.

Throughout the morning, local officials tour the grounds to observe the training. Commander Shigeno and Ex-Commander Nakano (Shigeno's predecessor as commander, and now chairman of the Camaraderie Association) discuss where particular strategies might be employed around town, while the charismatic Mayor Aoyama and the headmen of the various wards joke with the officers and men. Across the field, Red Cross Volunteers practice emergency food preparation under the direction of four members of the Women's Fire Unit, using the mobile emergency kitchens usually kept in a shed near the town office. Specially designed bags marked with measurements for rice and water are sealed and boiled, creating individually packaged rice balls. It is hard to miss the gendered division of labour—the brigade is experimenting with the Women's Unit, still considered 'new' after four years, and they do not participate in the rest of the day's training. This is a source of frustration to some of the women on the brigade, who have joined in expectation of getting their hands dirty alongside the men.¹⁹

¹⁹ See Chapter 1, note 3 for discussion of the participation of women in the brigade at the national level. In Shimosuwa, the role of women on the brigade was still being debated during my time in the field. The position of Masuzawa-san, who founded the women's unit, was that women were perfectly capable of serving in the same capacity as the men. However, she faced some opposition by the (male) division captains, who felt that women were better suited to an outreach function, providing home

The event closes with an official inspection by the mayor and other local officials. After remarks by the Commander, the divisions are dismissed to pack up their equipment and return to their respective firehouses. It is unlikely the day will end here; the sun is warm, the air is fresh, and spirits lively. Though the mood might have been different had the weather been unkind, even those who might have begrudged spending a Sunday morning with the brigade have enjoyed themselves. Second Division will stay behind to run through drills for the upcoming Firefighting Technique Tournament (*sōhō taikai*), then return to the firehouse for a communal lunch, and no doubt a few drinks. In the absence of pressing business, there is every chance that this carousing will continue through the afternoon, and into the evening, and that the sun will have set before many of the men arrive home, to finally rest before the working week begins.

5.2.2.2 *Sōhō—‘techniques of the corps’*

Early summer is the busiest time of the year for members of the town divisions. Between the end of April and the beginning of June, they take advantage of the season’s early sunrise for daily dawn practice drills in preparation for the fire brigade’s annual Firefighting Technique Tournament (*sōhō taikai*).

The firefighting tournament is the premier event on the brigade’s summer calendar. In both ideal and form, *sōhō* resembles a performance sport. Physical

visits to the elderly and serving a public relations role for the brigade. At the time I left the field, Commander Shigeno had tentatively decided to back Masuzawa’s position.

strength and endurance do not matter so much as competitors' conforming as closely as possible to an ideal of physical celerity. The tournament is not a test of firefighting ability, so much as a formal display of synchronization, discipline, and finesse. The competition itself is also framed in a sporting idiom. Organized by the Japan Firefighters' Association (*Nihon shōbō kyōkai*) and its prefectural branch organizations,²⁰ competitions at the municipal, regional, and prefectural levels serve as elimination heats for an annual national competition. At each stage, performances are scored by specialist judges according to stringent guidelines set by the FDMA (1972).²¹ Members wear the numbered vests of athletic competitors (*zekken*) and drill relentlessly during the period their divisions devote to the competition in teams of four, with a fifth acting as 'conductor' (*shikisha*).

The men of Second Division train each morning on the grounds of the Shimosuwa's central junior high school. Captain Seki films the event on his digital video recorder, and the results are watched and re-watched over beer and snacks after the regular evening training sessions that continue to be observed, even as division members' mornings are devoted to *sōhō* practice. When the municipal

²⁰ These organizations hold legal status as incorporated foundations (*zaidan hōjin*) under Article 34 of Japan's Civil Code (cf. Pekkanen and Simon 2003: 78).

²¹ These standard practices are also used by firefighting squads at private companies. The multinational corporation where Hayashi-san worked organized in-house brigades not only in branch plants throughout Japan but also in its overseas factories (see above, note 10). Every year, the company brings members of these brigades to Nagano for a firefighting tournament judged by local brigade members. In 2008, 46 teams (26 of men, 12 of women, and 10 of buglers) participated, including teams from Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore.

tournament finally comes, however, Fourth Division takes first place. Yet, while the loss is poignantly felt, no one is overly disappointed. Where a division is lucky (or unlucky) enough to win their municipal round, this rigorous schedule will continue until they are either eliminated or victorious, and an early loss is not unwelcome. As one of the men noted, the winning team feels a lot of pressure from the retired members of the brigade in their neighbourhood. An additional criticism was that too much attention to the idealized ritual of the *sōhō* competition detracted from training that is more practical in a real emergency. With the tournament over, the focus could be devoted to the development of flexibility and problem-solving. Despite these concerns, a video of the event is again one of the highlights of the lavish after-party, held at Mitsui-kun's family's *ryokan* that evening (the second most important social occasion of the year, after the New Year's Party, described below). Even now, when it is all over, the division members watch with interest, critiquing their own performance by the standards of the organization, and thinking about the possibility of victory next year.

5.2.2.3 *Bon, Festival of the Dead*

While most brigade activities throughout the year are for their members only, the age-grade demographics of the organization are such that many of the men in the brigade are married with young children. This year, in partnership with the ward's Cultural Association, the brigade has organized a family outing aboard one of the

lake's large pleasure boats (*yūransen*) to take in a display of fireworks on the final night of the Buddhist festival of *bon*.

The *bon* festival (often referred to in the honorific as *O-bon*) is a family-oriented observance that honours the spirits of deceased members of the household who are held to return to mingle with their descendants in this world for several days in the middle of August, and its attendant ceremonies, celebrations, and rituals are closely associated with fire. In Suwa, as elsewhere in Japan, the dead are welcomed and sent off by small fires (*mukaebi* and *okuribi*, respectfully) kindled at the threshold of the home, usually using small coils of birch bark as tinder, which, if not collected personally, are seasonally available at convenience and grocery stores. Larger displays are also common, as with the burning of bonfires on the hillsides above Kyoto. In Suwa, the fireworks display on 15 August above the lake has become a large tourist draw, and the Suwa city brigades provide security for the throng. For the duration of the observance, the Shimosuwa fire brigade has been on high alert, although this has in practice meant little more than spending extra time at the firehouse in the evenings, to be ready in case of emergency.

5.2.3 Autumn

5.2.3.1 *Nursing home drill*

After the '*hard schedule*' set by the early morning *sōhō* practices, weekend activities continue at a more leisurely pace through the summer and into the autumn. First and

Second Division work together to stage an evacuation drill at the nursing home (a former corporate dormitory) on the heights bordering both districts. Several weeks before the event, officers and staff meet to ensure that the simulated rescue runs smoothly. Some concessions against verisimilitude are necessary—the brigade has no actual interaction with the residents, who remain in the familiar care of the nursing staff during the event. (This is perhaps for the best, as most of the home’s elderly residents seem annoyed, resigned, or oblivious to the drill). After a closing ceremony and dismissal, both divisions retire to the First Division firehouse in Shimonohara, where a genial inter-divisional pizza party doubles as a decommissioning ceremony for the old firehouse, due to be demolished and rebuilt later in the year. Commander Shigeno attends as well, drinking only tomato juice, a symbolic reminder that the brigade must be ready to serve at any moment.²²

5.2.3.2 *Temple drill*

Later in the month, the division is invited to hold a disaster-preparedness drill (*bōsai kunren*) at Raikōji, the town’s sixteenth-century Pure Land Buddhist temple. The afternoon event begins with a planned call to the emergency hotline, 119, which is quickly relayed by wireless from the town fire station to the local firehouse. At the captain’s signal, the division musters into the fire truck for the short drive to the

²² The Commander was a teetotaller within the brigade’s jurisdiction, a practice he adopted after having been forced to have his wife drive him to the scene of a fire soon after taking command. Other members respected this exemplary sacrifice, but few, if any, followed it.

temple (less than a hundred metres away), where they quickly deploy on-site hoses, activate the water supply and make ready to douse imaginary flames. All occurs under the approving gaze of the temple priest and volunteers members of the parish (*dankai*), who for the occasion have donned safety helmets stencilled with the temple's name. The same characters are also visible on the bright red fire buckets lining the edge of the spring-fed pool in the courtyard. These were donated by the division in gratitude for a sizeable contribution to the annual budget at the New Year (about half of which went back into the purchase of the buckets). There are other material indications of preparedness; one brigade member remarks that the new hoses in the box beside the fire hydrant—one of many such installations throughout the town—are in better condition than the division's own.

Once the initial mock operation has concluded, the officers guide the temple volunteers through a short course of practical instruction. Temple volunteers are run through the use of fire extinguishers, the proper technique for rolling and storing the fire hoses when dry, and then—to the evident enjoyment of the elderly pupils (many well into their seventies)—a bucket brigade, relaying buckets from the courtyard pool to the temple's main hall entrance. During dry periods, the buckets are kept full and placed along the walkways of the temple grounds, ready for use at any time. 'The old

folks like the bucket brigade,' Captain Seki observes, a little patronizingly but not without kindness. 'It makes them feel useful; reminds them of the old days.'²³

After the excitement, the volunteers and division members arrange themselves to hear the captain offer a few closing remarks for the day on the ties between the temple and the community (*chiiki*). The old temple priest sermonizes briefly over the ever-present dangers of fire. ('One year, in late autumn, I contemplated the first snow of the year falling near the temple belfry. I realized it was actually the ash from a brush fire (*takibi*) up on the hill, and wondered what I would do if a cinder caught on the roof....').

5.2.4 Winter

5.2.4.1 *The New Year*

On 31 December, when thousands of visitors flock to Akimiya, the seasonal house of the *kami* of Suwa Taisha, to pay simultaneous midnight homage to the old and New Year, the fire brigade is called upon to provide crowd control. The New Year season is one of the shrine's busiest—earlier in the day, a few dozen older parishioners will have joined in the annual ritual purification (*oharai*) performed on the deacons of the shrine parish (*ujiko ōsōdai*). The midnight crowd, by contrast, is large and young;

²³ Captain Seki's comment indicates both a professional's scepticism of the amateur (an ironic indication of the brigade's self-image) and recognition of the nostalgia that attends to bucket brigades as an expression of lost community solidarity. Such cynicism may be undeserved however, for as noted by Inge Daniels (2008; 128-29), recording the successful mobilization of a community bucket brigade during fieldwork in a Kyoto residential neighbourhood, buckets may yet retain utility beyond the symbolic.

the atmosphere is much more like that of a festival than the sleepy ritual of the afternoon. Parishioners and revellers alike visit the shrine to pray for health and good fortune in the year to come, or even just to take in the festive crowds, or see first-hand the local celebrities taking part in the live New Year's Eve television broadcast for the local cable media. Sheets of vinyl plastic protect the main sanctuary of the shrine from the wind, and will serve to funnel enthusiastically thrown offerings of cash into collection chests. A warm bonfire blazes in the open area before the *kagura* hall where shrine dances take place, but the heat does not reach far, and people crowd the fire, some teens daring each other to jump across the edges of the pit. Their risky behaviour however goes unmentioned—the weather is frigid, and the brigade members huddle to keep warm under their *happi* jackets on the sidelines of the crowd, where they man the cordon to make sure the crowds keep to a constrained area within the shrine precincts, and to guide the heavy flow of pilgrim traffic. Toes quickly lose sensation in the brigade's regulation steel-toed boots, and two hours is a long time to stand in the cold. It is a busy evening, and upon their arrival, the shrine priests will have rushed the brigade members through a ritual purification, with the minimum of ceremony, before returning to their other tasks.

Hoshina-san and Nakata-san, who work for the town office, are the only division members not here this night, as they have been assigned by the town to oversee traffic in car parks near the shrine. Traffic Safety Volunteers redirect cars

around the road closures that will last, to varying extents, until the afternoon of the third day of the New Year, when the shrine festivities cease. Most visitors, however, will come tonight or tomorrow, during which time approximately 100,000 people will pay their respects by throwing a few coins (or a more significant sum) into the offertory box. Many might purchase souvenirs or charms from the dozens of ‘shrine maidens’ (*miko*) on duty this evening, mostly junior high and high school students hired to work as part time shrine attendants to meet the rush. In addition to the various souvenirs, paper fortunes (*omikuji*) and protective amulets (*omamori*) available throughout the year, the shrine also does brisk trade in seasonal talismans—arrows (*hamaya*) and *daruma* (papier-mâché effigies of Bodidharma), which betoken luck and achievement in the year to come. A ‘limited edition’ series of amulets commemorates the Onbashira festival, to be celebrated in the following year, and many brigade members are already wearing these, which are carved of wood from pillars replaced in the previous celebration. The shrine’s regular kiosk has been extended to more than double its usual length, to accommodate demand.

Not long after midnight, when the crowds have thinned and the younger revellers have moved on in search of other forms of entertainment, perhaps at a *karaoke* club, the fire brigade, too, begins to pack up. When the cordons have been cleared, the ranks form up in a space away from the crowd, and the brigade commander offers a small speech of thanks. Vice-captains for each division are asked

to remain for a few minutes afterwards to accept a token of appreciation from the shrine for the night's work, and with a salute, the brigade is dismissed. There is a relieved stamping of feet and clapping of hands—all are excited by the prospect of getting out of the cold. The divisions disperse, each, no doubt, to its own post-midnight party. As we are exiting the shrine's precincts, Vice-Captain Noguchi catches up and hands us each a small wafer-sized package, carefully wrapped in *washi* paper. The shrine has presented the volunteers with a unique version of the *Onbashira* amulet, marked with the *nagigama* (the stylized scythe-blade which is a symbol of authority for the shrine). All seem quite pleased at the gift—the mere fact that this particular design cannot be bought providing a pleasant sense of entitlement.

5.2.4.2 *Celebration with the Ward*

On the final Sunday of January, the division act as hosts for the ward's General New Year's Party at the Tōmeikan, one of the neighbourhood community centres. In many ways, the party is a microcosm of the town-wide *dezome-shiki* held two weeks earlier.²⁴ For the individual divisions, however, this local celebration is just as important. Whereas *dezome* is meant to be a performance for the mass public and government officials, the New Year's Party is targeted at the men and women who

²⁴ Held shortly after New Year's in communities nationwide, *dezome*, the ceremonial 'first outing' of the brigade (often glossed in English as the 'New Year's Parade of Firefighters') is the most important winter event on the brigade calendar. This ceremony is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.

most closely interact with the brigade on an official local level, namely the ward and neighbourhood association executives. In addition to the division members who regularly turn out for activities, the event also draws senior members who have not yet retired, but who no longer participate in training exercises. The brigade division are hosts for the affair, arriving at the hall several hours ahead of time to set up dinner tables and sound system, go over the programme, and make everything ready for the arrival of the guests.

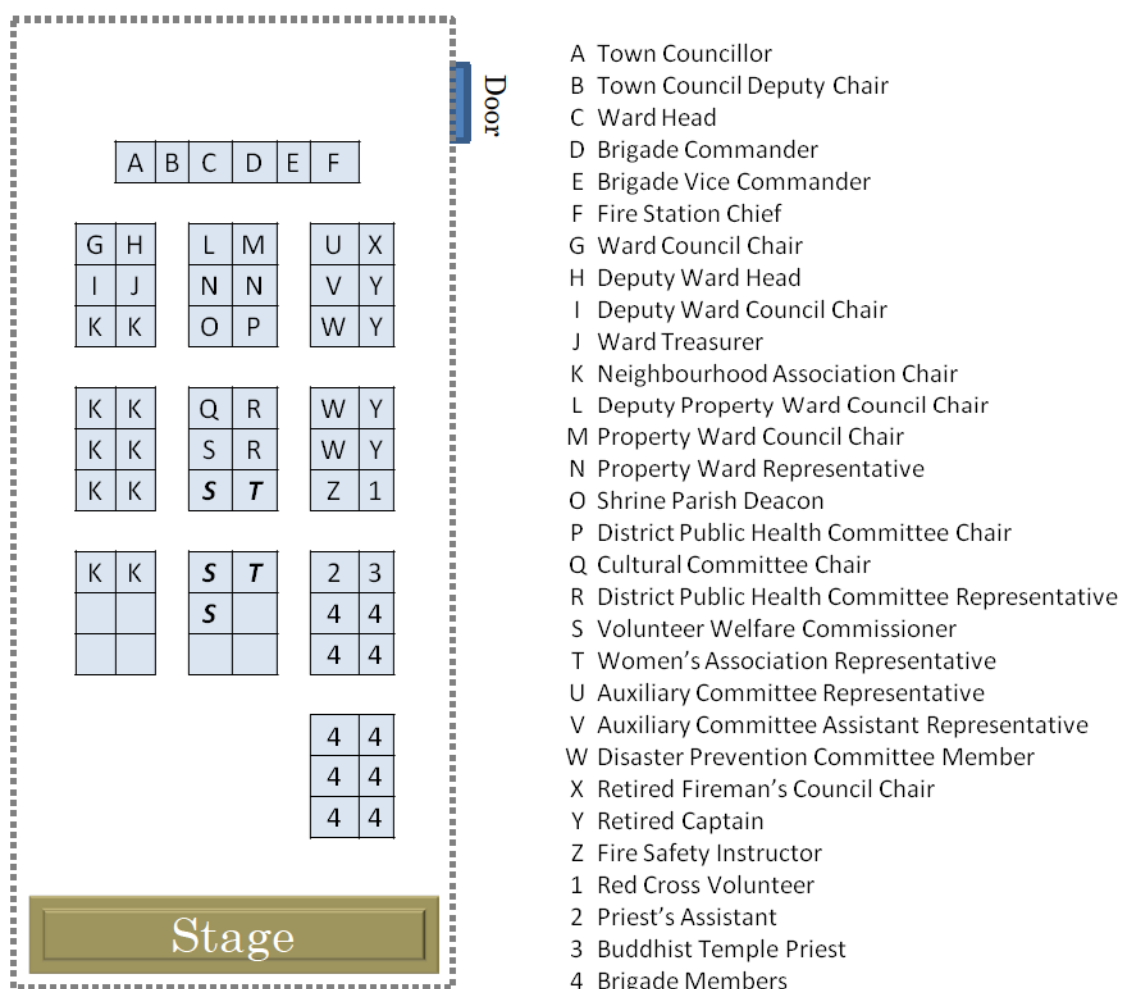


Figure 19: A list of attendees and seating arrangements for the 2009 Divisional New Year's Party. Seats marked in bold type (S, T) indicate women guests.

5.2.4.3 *Weather watch*

A sudden snowstorm on a late January afternoon prompts a call from the fire station to the brigade commander to have the brigade clear snow from water access points around town, as they need to be easily accessible in the event of fire. The commander, in turn, notifies the division captains, who pass the word to the sergeants in charge of sending out the call to the rest of the division. Although there is a communications tree diagram for emergencies, this is usually done via a mobile text message or e-mail to an electronic bulletin board. Throughout the neighbourhood two dozen mobile phones simultaneously vibrate, or more likely burst into the latest in J-Pop ringtones, and, after pulling on warm clothes and insulated winter boots to stave off the winter chill, with perhaps a winter coat over the essential *happi*, the available members convene at the fire house. Two regulars are missing; Ōwa-kun, who works at a pachinko parlour in Okaya, is working a shift tonight and will not make it. Nakata-san is in Matsumoto, carousing with co-workers after a business meeting—he will not be back until the last train.

Still, there are enough to ensure that the job goes quickly. Shovels and several buckets of road salt, and the men set out to tour the streets. The snow has let up, but the cold has deepened, and everyone has somewhere else to be. To save time, the members split into teams of two and three, each group taking the neighbourhood they know best. Vice-captain Noguchi knows the fire hydrants and cisterns of

Mitamachi like the back of his hand and Shinya and I follow his lead. Although Shinya has grabbed a street map marked with all of the spots to hit, Noguchi-san affects an air of mock contempt that he would need such a thing. Before long, however, he is stumped, unable to locate an access point in the street, which he is sure is nearby. The snow-blanketed street offers no clues, and in surrender to Shinya's ribbing, he allows us to refer to the map. We have overshot, but now find it quickly and brush away the snow. As we are sprinkling it with road salt to prevent it from being covered again, the fire engine pulls up with the others in tow. Hoshina calls out to ask what has been taking us so long. As we catch a ride back to the firehouse, Shinya, tongue firmly in cheek, caricatures Noguchi-san's momentary confusion as a grave dereliction of duty to everyone's amusement. Back at the firehouse, there is a brief debate about whether or not to go for beer and *ramen* at the local Chinese-style diner, but it is late and cold, and so we disperse and head home. Noguchi-san will come by the firehouse tomorrow after work to make a note in the division ledger about the occasion, incrementing the number of deployments for those who contributed.

5.2.4.4 *The Bus Trip*

In late February, the division is set to go on their annual 'firefighter's trip' (*shōbō ryokō*). The trip for many is one of the highlights of brigade membership, a chance to get away from both family and community. Our senior squad leader, Nakata-san, has

been researching two possible itineraries since the autumn, and the officers will make a decision between them. For months, speculation on the degree to which Nakata-san, who has a master's degree in mathematics, might have been able to work his genius to secure unimaginable luxury at a reasonable price has been a source of amused discussion during post-practice conviviality. In the end, no such fantastic dreams are realized, and the captain decides on a visit to the Disaster Prevention Centre in the city of Yokohama, by way of a sightseeing visit to the old Japanese capital of Kamakura. An affordable (but certainly nontrivial) fee of 25,000 yen will cover the price of the bus, an overnight hotel, and food and drink for the duration of the two-day tour.

Just as group travel by company employees, neighbourhood associations, and other groups offers the prospect of refreshing organizational identity and objectives through recreational activity in a context where intra-group hierarchies are temporarily relaxed, annual getaways are seen as an integral component of the brigade's organizational calendar. While the ostensibly instructive purpose implied in the slightly more distinguished name of the 'fire brigade divisional study trip' (*shōbō bundan kenshū ryokō*) is justified by a visit to a disaster prevention centre, firefighter museum, or recent disaster site (where recovery or prevention measures can be seen in action), professional edification is only a nominal objective. Older men note that brigade trips once offered one of the only opportunities for the younger,

self-employed men who had once formed the backbone of the brigade to take a vacation, though most granted that ‘in this age of the salaryman’ this is no longer the case. For their own part, younger members uniformly suggest that the trips were a chance to relieve stress and to foster group solidarity. In any case, brigade excursions follow a well-worn cultural trope in Japanese leisure travel, combining elements of pilgrimage, vacation, and tourism with gustatory, alcoholic, and frequently sexual indulgence.²⁵

Such trips are well established within the organizational infrastructure. In addition to journeys taken with their respective individual divisions, captains and vice-captains of all divisions also take a collective trip each year, as do sergeants, buglers, and the Women’s Unit. All such trips are planned in collaboration with the fire station and the town office, and are scheduled at different times of the year. In addition to overseeing this schedule, which ensures that no two divisions from the brigade are away simultaneously, the town office also provides a bus and driver. This is to ensure that all are free to indulge in the excesses of the trip while also keeping the journey within the ambit of the municipal government, rather than involving a private charter company, which might confuse the chain of communication and responsibility in the event of necessary alterations to the carefully planned schedule.

²⁵ Bestor (1989: 158-59) and Nakano (2005: 48-49) offer ethnographic examples of such trips by neighbourhood groups. For a discussion of historical antecedents, see Formanek (1998).

On the road

We meet at the firehouse on Saturday ready to be on the road by eight. In contrast to the semi-formal decorum adopted by some group travellers, such as those of the community *karaoke* club described by Lynne Nakano (2005: 48), the men are dressed casually, many in jeans and sweatshirts. Those few who have made an effort have chosen younger fashions (or at least fashions which are younger for them), as though dressed up for a night out (which is, in a sense, the point). Yet this casual dress represents the same quality of exception noted by Nakano; as a rule, uniforms are worn at every other division event, so the chance to dress in mufti is something special.

At training the week before, Nakata-san had issued formal reminders (both orally and in writing) to be sure to prepare for the trip by bringing mobile phones fully charged, the fee, a change of clothes, and personal necessities. In addition to individual contributions, the trip was subsidized by the division, which has set aside 200,000 yen for this purpose. As only active members tend to go on these trips (older, legacy members leaving such pursuits to the younger men),²⁶ this amount represented a considerable subsidy for those who joined. While participation is

²⁶ In many brigades, recruitment difficulties have resulted in a state of affairs whereby men who would under normal circumstances wish to retire from the brigade are unable to do so without creating a hole in the roster, which in addition to any personnel issues, also has funding implications. Many brigades solve this problem by asking older members to re-enlist after having served as officers, simply to make up numbers. Such 'legacy members' rarely participate in the brigade's regular activities.

passively encouraged (mainly by way of stories about adventures past), there appears to be no pressure to take part, and other commitments are quite acceptable excuses for not joining. In some cases, however, there may be financial disincentives to staying home—larger divisions often maintain a kitty to which members contribute monthly or bimonthly throughout the year, which will be devoted to the collective trip regardless of their individual plans to participate.

In the end, we are a party of eleven, including the driver and myself. Of the twelve active members in our division, only three have abstained. Two of these are our new recruits, who have work commitments. Mitsui-kun, who runs the kitchen at his family's *ryokan* is often unavailable on weekend evenings, a busy time. Nor can Ōwa-kun afford to miss a shift at his pachinko parlour. Among the older members, only Yanagidaira-san is absent, as the trip conflicts with his monthly participation at a religious meeting of Gedatsu-kai in Tokyo.²⁷ He maintains that he will rendezvous with us in Yokohama, but the plan's impracticability is obvious even to him. Still, such protestations indicate that he is missing the occasion only with great reluctance.

Once we are seated and underway (save Nori, who is to be collected from his company dormitory en route), Nakata-san rises, clutching the vehicle's PA microphone, to give us a run-through the day's itinerary. He is quickly shouted down by a chorus of high-spirited jeers, telling him to save such seriousness at least until

²⁷ Gedatsu-kai is one of Japan's many so-called 'New religions' (cf. Earhart 1989).

after the first toast. Cans of beer are quickly distributed, and after a brief welcome speech by the captain, who enjoins the group to enjoy themselves, not to overindulge, and to remember that they are representatives of their community, a shout of ‘*Kanpai!*’ rings through the bus. Hesitantly recovering the microphone, Nakata-san offers his own welcome, runs through the itinerary, and proceeds to itemize the gifts provided for the journey.

Chino-san, the previous vice-captain (and still a legacy member) has contributed three bottles of *daiginjō* (a high-grade variety of *sake*), an unexpectedly impressive contribution from a *senpai* with a rather rough-edged reputation. ‘Island Love’, the Filipina karaoke bar that serves as the final destination of many a post-training drinking bout, has sent along a case of *chū-hai*, provoking a round of appreciative laughter (*chū-hai*, cocktail coolers made from fruit juice and *shōchū*, a distilled Japanese liquor, are seen as a typically feminine drink, an appropriate gift from ‘the girls’). Hayashi-san, the former division captain, has thrown in a case of beer, and further financial contributions have been made to the communal travel chest by both the captain and sergeant. In addition, a case of beer and three more large bottles of *sake*, left over from the New Year’s Party the month before, have been brought along. Finally, this liquid bonanza had been supplemented by a wide variety of salty snacks—dried and shredded cuttlefish, beef jerky, rice crackers, peanuts, and squid-flavoured cheese sticks—to provide ballast. Masuzawa-san, our senior-most

member, appoints himself quartermaster, and as we hit the highway interchange, revelry is well underway.

Conversations which run a gamut of topics wax and wane, interspersed with spontaneous laughter as otherwise innocuous incidents become the object of humour. Some speculate on the recent announcement by the vice-commander, that he would be stepping down due to ill health. ('There must be more to it than that—remember how disorganized he was at *dezome*? Disgraceful.') Hayashi-san, it seems, is tapped as his replacement. Others confer on what was known about the relative merits of the Yokohama red light district (Quite inexpensive). The captain nurses a bottle of whisky that he shares gruffly with those who want something harder than what is available in the communal stash. Noguchi-san, at the back of the bus, cradles a bottle of Napoleon brandy. A brief exchange on the coming summer's Firefighting Technique season gives way to a discussion about ward politics, and the captain, vice-captain and sergeant are soon sharing gossip and predictions about (as well as frank personality assessments of) local characters and their suitability (or not) for different roles. The others return to their own conversations. The subject of the upcoming Onbashira festival comes up several times, and at one point the captain insists that everyone start thinking seriously about their plans. Although the festival was still more than a year away, it is not too early to start drawing up duty rota according to members' anticipated availability.

During the journey, only Nakata-san remains somewhat aloof, sitting in the seat beside the driver often occupied by the guide on sight-seeing tours. Despite calls to join in the fun, he joins conversation only occasionally, and makes a show of pretending to aloof detachment. To general amusement, some take to communicating with him by mobile phone, and speaking to him in the politest honorific language. Although the executive officers are present, Nakata-san alone is tasked with ensuring that the trip goes smoothly, and his playful attempts to put on airs corresponding to this elite status had singled him out for good-natured ribbing. Particular sport is made of his eschewing the communal snacks in favour of mackerel eaten straight from the tin, which idiosyncratic behaviour earns him the moniker ‘Sabakan Hanchō’ (‘The Tinned Mackerel Squad Leader’) for the rest of the journey.

Our first destination that afternoon would be Kamakura’s largest Shintō shrine, Tsurugaoka Hachimangū. As the others began to drowse and stare out the windows at the passing scenery, Captain Seki relates stories of the twelfth-century connections between Shimosuwa and Kamakura, about the famed *yabusame* archer Kanazashi Morizumi, and his grandniece, the brave heroine, Princess Manju.²⁸ I

²⁸ One of Shimosuwa’s great culture heroes, the warlord Kanazashi Morizumi (also known as Suwa Morizumi) was a contemporary of Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147-1199), the historical founder of the Kamakura shogunate. Local tradition holds that Morizumi, an unparalleled horseman and archer, first went to the capital as a vassal of Yoritomo’s cousin and rival ‘Kiso’ Yoshinaka (1154-1184), and later became a low-ranking vassal (*gokenin*) of the shogun. In a celebrated episode, Yoritomo is said to have sentenced Morizumi to death when the latter postponed answering a summons to the capital in favour of observing the Misayama ritual of the Suwa shrines, which involved the performance of *yabusame*. Through the intercession of Yoritomo’s ally Kajiwaru Kagetoki, Yoritomo consented to a reprieve on the condition that his prisoner demonstrate his skill, allowing that if Morizumi’s archery was truly

recognize these stories from the town's official website, as I had helped proofread their English translations upon first moving to Shimosuwa as an English teacher. Years earlier, as a member of the Town Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Captain Seki had organized demonstrations of *yabusame* (a ritualized form of mounted archery, a medieval martial art), inviting athletes from Kamakura to demonstrate their skills to a local audience. A local beauty pageant, had also adopted the historical figure of Princess Manju as a latter-day 'Miss Shimosuwa.' He is pleased that we are making this visit, and points out that understanding the connections between Shimosuwa and the rest of Japan is one of the purposes of the trip.

worthy of the *kami*, then as shōgun he would forgive the slight. Morizumi proceeded to give what is now related as a legendary performance, and Yoritomo, conceding that such skill must indeed be divinely inspired, released him. A slightly elaborated version of this legend is cited in Guttman and Thompson's history of Japanese sport (2001: 50), but for a more historically sensitive contextualization of *yabusame* performance in the Kamakura capital, see Grumbach (2005: 25-26, 141-42).

The second tale, which dates from the same period, concerns the daughter and granddaughter of another of Yoshinaka's retainers, Tezuka no Tarō Mitsumori, said to be Morizumi's younger brother. Mitsumori, who also features in the Japanese classic *Heike monogatari* (Shirane 2006) had as a daughter an accomplished musician named Karaito, who had joined the court at the age of eighteen. Her tale, as related in the *Otogi-zōshi*, a collection of tales from the Muromachi Period, has been summarized as follows: 'In 1183, Yoshinaka was general of one of the two main branches of the Minamoto army. Karaito, daughter of Tezuka no Tarō Mitsumori, Yoshinaka's retainer, served at Yoritomo's headquarters in Kamakura. Having informed Yoshinaka of her lord's plot against him, she was given a sword with which to assassinate Yoritomo. The sword was discovered under her robe, but Karaito insisted that she was carrying it simply as a memento of Yoshinaka. Unconvinced, Yoritomo ordered that she be held at Matsugaoka until the matter could be investigated. When a retainer was later sent to the convent to fetch Karaito, the abbess refused to surrender her, claiming sanctuary. For the time being Yoritomo relented, but later Karaito was captured by the arch-villain, Kajiwaru Kageyoshi (d. 1200), as she attempted to flee to her native province of Shinano. Yoritomo imprisoned her in a cave, but Karaito was eventually released through the help of her daughter, Manju, whose dancing pleased Yoritomo' (Morrell and Morrell 2006: 41; cf. also Minaishi 1931 2: 41/106; and Merritt and Yamada 2000: 47).

At length the conversation fades as the effects of the alcohol and the drive lull us into companionable silence. As we reached the ocean, however, and the sparkling blue of Sagami Bay becomes visible, a collective cry of excitement erupted throughout the bus, ‘*Umi da! Umi da!*’ (‘The sea! The sea!’). Then, after a brief, self-conscious silence, Nori’s wry voice remarks: ‘Boy, we really are a bunch of Shinshū hicks (*inaka no Shinshūjin*), aren’t we?’



Figure 20: Horseplay during a visit to Kamakura's Tsurugaoka Hachimangū shrine (photo by author).

5.3 Conclusion

In the context of Japan, attention to seasonal variation and cyclical observances brings to mind folkloric studies of *nenjū gyōji*, the ‘annual observances’ of traditional culture. A study of the Suwa shrines by the folklorist Miyasaka (1992) is only one of

many examples. Cyclical observances have featured in village studies, in conjunction with phases of agricultural production (cf. Hall and Beardsley 1965: 104), as well as in more contemporary contexts. Millie Creighton, for example, discusses the commercial reinterpretation of *gyōji* in the context of the seasonal marketing campaigns of Japanese department stores (1998: 131). However, in a general sense, *gyōji* is used in the sense of a fixed event on a social calendar. A young man from the northern part of the prefecture, recently posted to the Suwa area as a reporter for a regional newspaper, once remarked to me in exasperation that whereas he had looked forward to a quiet posting, he was, much to the contrary, feeling overworked from of all the *gyōji* on which he was expected to report.

Gyōji is also used to reference to the regular activities of the brigade, which are in many ways similar to cyclical observances in the traditional vein. Not only do they vary with the changing seasons, but they also tend to coincide with the customary public festivals that are a part of the wider community calendar. At the end of each year, a tentative schedule outlining brigade business for the year ahead (*nenkan gyōji*) is drawn up by each division, in consultation with the town fire station, allowing division members to update their diaries accordingly.

However, when drawing up the yearly operations report which summarizes the organization's activities for the benefit of the ward's body politic, and which is formally delivered as part of the programme of the ward's General New Year's Party

hosted by the division, the resulting document is entitled, ‘Activities Report’ (*gyōmu hōkoku*). In contrast to *gyōji*, the word *gyōmu* (business, services, activities) implies a more active relationship with events—whereas *observances* have a transcendent social reality, and can be planned in advance, *activities* exist only in their actuation, and belong to the past. This distinction is not intended to suggest any untranslatable nuance (indeed, it is unclear to me that *gyōji* necessarily brings to mind folk tradition in the sense noted above, unless contextually marked to do so), but rather to note that the lexical shift, from *gyōji* to *gyōmu*, is also a shift from an acknowledgement of structure to a statement of agency, from the timelessness of tradition to the immediacy of action. It is a public reaffirmation of the brigade’s presence, its dependability, and its necessity, and it is in that sense *political*. The next chapter will explore the contemporary context of these statements, and their import in a changing world.

6 PILLARS OF THE COMMUNITY: FIREFIGHTERS AND THE ONBASHIRA FESTIVAL

This chapter examines the role of the fire brigade in the context of the community festival associations that have coalesced around a characteristic regional festival complex in Suwa known as Onbashira. After an introductory summary of the festival context, its associational forms, and expressive content, I describe the contemporary role played by the fire brigade in the context of the festival. Ritual activity is well known to be a traditional vector for recruitment into the brigade, and I note a strategy employed by the Shimosuwa brigade to restrict access to ritual contexts to encourage membership. The latter half of the chapter looks at the history of firefighters in the festival, and suggests an explanation for a pattern of violence involving firefighters and the festival at the turn of the twentieth century.

6.1 Onbashira, the Sacred Pillar Festival

The twin ritual centres that comprise Suwa Taisha, the Great Shrines of Suwa, have been at the centre of religious life in the Suwa basin for over a millennium. For both the upper and lower parishes alike,¹ the shrine's ritual calendar is dominated by the sexennial celebration of Onbashira, the Sacred Pillar festival of the Suwa Shrines.²

¹ The contours of the shrine's modern parishes correspond to twenty-four administrative villages, subsuming the 150-odd villages of the former Takashima domain (*han*) in 1874-75, now politically amalgamated within the six municipalities of Suwa District. See Chapter 3 for more on this history.

² The official name of the festival is *Suwa Taisha shikinen zōei mihashira taisai* ('the Grand Festival of the Fixed-Year Construction of the Sacred Pillars of the Grand Shrines of Suwa'). It is, however, most colloquially known simply as *Onbashira-sai* ('Sacred Pillar Festival' or simply Onbashira—a term that

Following the dual organization of the shrine complex itself (see Chapter 3), Onbashira is perhaps best understood as a conglomeration of two separate festivals, each held in successive stages by their respective parish communities. Central to both is the periodic reconstruction of the shrine sanctuaries (*hōden*, lit. ‘treasure hall’) within the precincts of three of the four compounds.³ The festival is thus an example of a ‘fixed-year construction’ (*shikinen zōei*) ceremony, a variation of the more well-known periodic reconstruction observed at Ise Jingū, the Grand Shrine of Ise, which is renewed every twenty years (cf. Coaldrake 1996: 36).

For the majority of the participants, and certainly for the hundreds of thousands of tourists who come from across the country to observe the festival, however, the reconstruction of the shrine sanctuaries is of limited interest. The most celebrated aspect of Onbashira, rather, involves the progress of sixteen fir pillars as they are hauled by throngs of shrine parishioners (*ujiko*) out of the mountains, over precipices, across rivers, and through the village before finally being erected at the corners of each of the four shrine compounds. This multi-stage procession takes place over April and May, and is broadly divided into two major phases. The first, Yamadashi (the ‘bringing [of the pillars] out of the mountains’) is celebrated over the first two weekends of April. For many observers, the highlight of this stage is to

also refers to smaller cognate festivals at local shrines throughout the region, as well as the pillars themselves. In the text, my use of ‘Onbashira’ refers to the main festival unless otherwise noted.

³ Maemiya, believed to be constructed on or near a site sacred to the region’s pre-Suwa inhabitants, has no sanctuary, holding nearby Mount Moriya as the body of its enshrined *kami*.

watch as groups of men sit astride the pillars as they are sent plummeting down inclines known as *kiotoshizaka* (literally, ‘tree-dropping-slopes’), a feature of both upper and lower festivals. At the upper festival, this is followed by the ferrying of the pillars across the Miyagawa River in an event called *kawagoshi* (‘river-crossing’). A month later, Yamadashi is followed by Satobiki (the ‘pulling [of the pillars] through the village’) over the first two weekends in May. During this latter stage of the festival, community members traditionally invite friends and relatives to great feasts as the pillars are paraded through the streets to their destination at the shrines, where they are finally installed for a six-year vigil until the next festival.

The complete festival cycle of rituals and ceremonies is actually much larger and more complex than this simple description implies. At the lower shrine, the first event of the cycle actually takes place only two years after a festival, when parish representatives enter the designated woods that are the traditional source of the trees for the lower shrine, where they tentatively choose the mature fir trees of the appropriate size to become the shrine pillars in the next festival. A year later, with the festival still three full years away, these trees undergo a ceremonial inspection and provisional selection (*kari-mitate*) in front of members of the local community. The eight trees are identified with *shimenawa* (a rope of woven straw demarcating a purified space) and wooden placards denoting the respective shrines and relative ranking of each tree (a standby is also identified should any of the others prove

diseased or be damaged in the felling).⁴ A year later, a ceremonial confirmation (*hon-mitate*) formally establishes the trees as viable pillars. After another year of anticipation, the spring of the year immediately preceding the festival year signals the launch in earnest of Onbashira-related preparations. At the lower shrine, this activity is centred on the ceremonial felling of the trees (*bassai*) which are cut, stripped of bark, and transported to a staging area where they sit, exposed to the elements to dry for the year. At the upper shrine, this cycle of events is offset by a year, and the *bassai* ceremony is observed only a month before the core festival.

Japan's ethnographic record attests to the highly visible involvement of community fire brigades in local festivals nationwide—either as parish *ujiko* or on official duty as keepers of the peace. Onbashira is far from an exception to this pattern, and its visual universe is replete with firefighting symbolism. When the strident cry of the ritualized woodcutter's song (*kiyari*) signals the resumption of efforts to haul the pillars forward during their emergence from the mountains, the sudden surge of hundreds of straining parishioners is accompanied by a chorus from the brigade's bugle corps, sounding a charge (*totsugeki rappa*).⁵ Atop the upper

⁴ The trees are numbered one through four for each of the four shrines. Parish allocations of the pillars are set for Shimosha, and decided by lottery at Kamisha. Reflecting the local shorthand, I use Roman numerals to distinguish the pillars (e.g. Aki-I, II, III and IV for Akimiya's respective pillars, etc.). Each pillar is cut to an established measurement—the largest (I) for each shrine is set at five *jō* and five *shaku* (traditional measurements totalling about eighteen metres), with length decreasing each in turn by one *shaku* (about thirty centimetres) for the other three pillars.

⁵ Many Japanese feel that the prominence of the bugles in the festival's soundscape (cf. the recording by Nakamaki 1991) is out of place in the traditional context (but cf. Malm 2000: 62, regarding the

shrine's *kiotoshizaka* before a pillar run, a daring performance of *hashigo-nori*, the ladder acrobatics famously associated with the firemen of Edo, showcases the skills of a local brigade division which doubles as a preservation society (*hozonkai*) for the art.⁶ Firehouses overlooking the route of the procession (in addition to seizing an opportunity to advertise fire safety with bold, colourful banners proclaiming '*hi no yōjin!*') become hives of activity, filled to bursting with buglers, singers, and revellers who encourage the passing pillar teams. More than nostalgic allusion, these emblematic representations continue to provide a stirring affirmation of the role of the brigade in the community, and are wrapped up in a general spirit of 'collective effervescence' (cf. Durkheim 1995[1912]: 218-20) which infuses the festival atmosphere. I return to discussion of this aspect below, after looking to the practical, social, and historical factors that have given this odd pride of place to firefighters.]

6.1.1 Festival Associations

Central to the festival are young men belonging to one or more of a multitude of territorially and functionally differentiated associations, who co-ordinate and carry out festival activities at varying scales of organization. The scale of the festival

'authentic' snow festival in the Nagano Prefecture village of Niino). Gerbert suggests an American influence (1996: 341, 367), but this rings false with local informants, who associate the bugles with both the fire brigade and early twentieth-century militarism. Lower Shrine bugling is performed by uniformed (usually male) members of the brigade bugle corps, while the Upper Shrine festivities involve larger parish-wide squads of both sexes, which include the cheerleading squads (*ōendan*) of local high schools, unaffiliated with the brigades. Even so, the *happi* of these groups are often decorated with characteristic patterns of flames, suggesting a symbolic association with the brigade.

⁶ See the discussion of *hashigo-nori* in the next chapter.

implicates a wide variety of such groups. Shimosuwa's Second Ward's *Yasaka no kai* ('Yasaka Society'), for example, is the organizational successor of a nineteenth-century ritual confraternity.⁷ This group of men of roughly between thirty-five and fifty carry out ritual activities for Onbashira and take on the ritual duties of smaller festivals in interceding years. Oikawa Districts' *Onbashira tomo no kai* ('Friends of Onbashira Society'), in contrast, represents an example of a relatively recently organized association for those of all ages and co-ordinates training workshops on rope- and woodworking, as well as festival history. These and other localized, permanent groups participate in wider municipal and regional federations co-ordinated at the highest level by an executive committee (*jikkō iinkai*) which includes representatives from the shrine, municipalities, and prefectural officials.

6.1.2 The pillar teams

While the hundreds of neighbourhood *ujiko* certainly ease the task of shepherding the pillars out of the mountains, ultimate responsibility falls to the men from the formal festival associations, who are assigned into special teams during the initial months of a festival year (though sometimes much earlier).⁸ The largest of these are

⁷ The *Yasaka no kai* is the successor of the nineteenth-century Hachiman *kō*, or ritual confraternity, who honoured their eponymous deity (another Shintō *kami* associated with war and battle) at an ancillary shrine near Akimiya. *Taisha-dōri* (Shrine Street), the main approach to Akimiya, is also known as *Hachiman-zaka* (Hachiman Hill). *Yasaka* refers in this case to the *kami* enshrined at Shimosha, Yasakatome, the female consort of Takeminakata who is venerated by the lower shrine.

⁸ Although women now participate equally in the festival as parishioners, the festival associations are still comprised predominantly of men. Women have begun to participate in larger numbers in the festival of the upper shrine, however.

the *motozuna-shū* (rope teams) of between fifty to eighty men who provide the bulk of the sheer physical strength necessary to initially get the pillars moving, and guide the progress from their position directly in front of the pillar. At points along the pillar route marked by sharp corners, these men are responsible for forcefully keeping the ropes in position at the angles necessary to allow continued forward motion, while ensuring that the main crowd of *ujiko* keep well back. The tension in the heavy ropes is such that a sudden release could cause serious injury to the unwary bystander.

Another group, comprised of between fifty to eighty *teko-shū* or *teko-gakari* (pry-bar holders), wield stout hardwood staves up to two metres in length (*tekobō*, cut from acacia, oak, or crepe myrtle). These staves are used in concert to pry up the heavy pillars, jostling them back and forth to reduce friction as the pillar moves along the route, thereby increasing the efficiency of the pullers' efforts. Additionally, they serve to assist the *motozuna-shū* in managing the operations required to manoeuvre the pillar through the hairpin turns that serve as milestones along the pillar route.

Finally, for the pillars of the lower shrine, the role of banner-man (*gohei-mochi*) is perhaps the most prestigious. A handful of men nominated to this role take shifts standing atop the pillar throughout the procession, holding aloft the traditional Shintō streamers that symbolize purity. This role is reserved for men who have contributed meaningfully to the parish, and may be assigned as much as a full

festival cycle in advance. Unlike the pillars of the upper shrine, those of the lower shrine lack the large outriggers known as *medo-deko* (lit. ‘prominent levers’),⁹ which mark prestige in a similar fashion. These men do not take turns as *motozuna* or *teko-gakari*.

6.1.3 Nagamochi associations

Accompanying the pillars on their procession through the neighbourhoods during the Satobiki phase of the festival are parades of *nagamochi* dancers, who practice a characteristic form of cultural performance, involving the stylized portage of chests attached to long poles, to the accompaniment of virtuoso singing (cf. Gerbert 1996: 345). *Nagamochi* associations, which see themselves as cultural ‘preservation societies’ (*hozonkai*), are fielded by neighbourhoods, as well as large businesses (especially local banks). Each group may be composed of as many teams of ten to fifteen men and women as they are able, though they are of course limited by the number of poles and chests available.

Unlike the rigorously hierarchical division of labour among the pillar teams, the *nagamochi* performers have a relatively egalitarian and free-flowing structure. The end of the pole to which the masks and chest are affixed is supported by two (sometimes four) men or women who must be of relatively equal height, to keep the

⁹ See Gerbert (1996: 340) for a complete description. Her translation of *medo-deko* as ‘loach-lever’ (in reference to a type of fish, which is an important symbol in another of Suwa Taisha’s festivals) appears to stem from a misunderstanding about the holes in the main pillar into which the *medodeko* are inserted, which are known as both *medo-guchi* (‘mouths for *medo-deko*’) and *dojō-guchi* (‘loach-mouths’).

chest and pole balanced. At the rear, someone is needed who is slightly taller, with a spotter to offer relief if necessary and ensure a steady progression. During the parade, these rear positions provide the forward momentum of the group by leaning to drive the pole forward. The members at the front, conversely, lean back, leading with their feet in a stylized strut, synchronizing their foot movements with the brandishing of sturdy wooden staves, which are also used as props for the chest during brief rests between songs. So long as these pragmatic aspects are addressed, members are free to rotate through positions as they please, and take turns singing, hoisting, or simply dancing alongside. The physical desiderata for each position often provide occasion for the men and women to make wry jokes and teasing comments about each other's bodies and builds, adding a visceral physicality to the convivial atmosphere of the procession.

6.2 'If you would see people...'

Onbashira has long been as notorious for teeming masses of *ujiko* pulling the pillars as for the particularities of the ritual itself. A festival slogan, 'If you would see people, the Onbashira of Suwa,' (*hito o miru nara, Suwa no Onbashira*) derives from an entry in an early nineteenth century gazetteer.¹⁰ With the dramatic development of the

¹⁰ From *Shinano no mukashi sugata* ('Old customs of Shinano Province') (Hoshimizu 1819; cited in Miyasaka, et al. 2009: 88). Variations of the saying contrast the Suwa festival with those of branch shrines in nearby communities; 'If you would see finery (*kira o miru nara*), the Onbashira of Ono!' (a reference to the resplendent *happi* worn in the celebration in a district of what is now the town of Tatsuno), or 'If you would see brawling (*kenka o miru nara*); the Onbashira of Ina!' Despite such contenders, the overwhelming ascendance of the latter-day Suwa festival may be acknowledged to have overtaken these erstwhile claims to sartorial and pugilistic primacy.

festival as a tourist spectacle over the post-war period, however, the saying could as easily refer to the hordes of sightseeing festival aficionados who descend on the region over the twelve days of the festival. Attendance has almost doubled since 1980, and the most recent celebration in 2010 saw over 1.9 million visitors to the communities of Shimosuwa and Chino (usual combined population of approximately 79,000) (SMS 12 May 2010).

A necessary concomitant of such crowds in a contemporary context is the provision of measures to ensure public security and safety. An event the size of Onbashira thus requires significant investment in both labour and logistics, and the festival is the major focus of public resources for the short period of its observance. Limited local capacities require the dispatch of a considerable number of outside personnel, such as police and emergency professionals. Festival organizers also enlist many public volunteers, including (among many others) traffic wardens, the Red Cross Society, and student medics. Dozens of extra staff are dispatched to the town rail station, and extra trains are added to accommodate the temporary bustle.

By far the largest mobilization of labour, however, is by the region's six community fire brigades, whose members form an integral part in the organizational infrastructure. Brigade members act as liaisons between this outside staff and local parishioners. Local welfare volunteers such as welfare commissioners (*minsei iin*), members of the women's association (*fujinkai*) and local eldercare practitioners are

also involved during the festival. These volunteers, however, are concerned primarily with their usual roles in the context of the festival, facilitating its enjoyment by their charges. I witnessed an elderly woman, whom I learned was from the town's nursing home, taking in the festival atmosphere from a wheelchair, assisted by a woman who volunteered at the home. The fire brigade is left to bridge the gap with outsiders, to keep professionals informed as to local procedures and customs, and to assist with the policing the crowd barriers, the safeguarding of the pillars from unwanted attention by *yakuza*, and the co-ordination of first aid provision.

6.2.1 To serve or protect?

This reliance on the fire brigade for the staffing of festival events creates complications for many of its members, since many would rather be participating in the festival on the pillar teams, or with cultural performance clubs, such as the *nagamochi* dances. Festival service (*matsuri hōshi*) thus came into direct conflict with brigade security duty (*keibi*).

Although technically open to any who wish to participate, community and festival authorities restrict access to key festival roles to those who demonstrate commitment to the community. Anyone wishing to participate on a pillar team, for example, must attend regular practices, preparation meetings, and shrine events, or otherwise demonstrate civic-mindedness through some form of commitment to the local community. Because of the territorial principle that organizes both the brigade and

the parish, brigade service is one way of symbolically demonstrating such commitment, and their participation would normally be approved without reservation.

Participation in the brigade can therefore be seen instrumentally by those seeking access to positions of prestige within the festival associations. Shinji, an older brigade member, attests to this:

[the community leaders] are trying as much as possible to choose men who've been in the brigade for key roles, they've told us. And not just the brigade, but people involved in ward activities, like the cultural association (*bunkan*), the shrine associations... There are lots of different groups—groups who put their effort into that sort of thing, and, if possible, into the brigade, too. It's not a rule, but those who get involved—everybody knows their faces, they have lots of friends—they'll be at the centre of it. Someone will say, 'Hey, Onbashira's coming up next year—let's put a team together.' It will be that type of person and their friends who get things moving.

With six festival days for each of the upper and lower shrines, those who wish are able serve both the brigade and the shrine. Duty rosters are negotiated among members and drawn up by the executive of each division according to customary principles, though particulars may vary with individual personalities and by ward division or community brigade.

Among the brigades of the lower shrine communities, for example, the members of many divisions contribute two days out of three during Yamadashi, and one during Satobiki (the less potentially dangerous of the two phases), leaving three days to devote to festival activities or other pursuits. From what I could learn from informal discussion with brigade members at the upper shrine festivities, a similar

principle obtained there. In Chino, I was also told that new members (i.e., those who had joined within the last six years) were free to commit themselves fully to Onbashira, leaving the staffing role to those who had served the last time around.

The security crews tended to be simply a part of the backdrop, though some jobs were more prominent than others. For apparently the first time, during the lower shrine festivities, the brigade posted a security detail to the base of the *kiotoshi* slope, issued with what looked like large police riot shields, emblazoned with the stylized paper mulberry leaf crest of the lower shrine. Front and centre in the lead-up to the *kiotoshi* run, the efforts of the team to protect onlookers by catching rocks and debris dislodged by the scrambling of the *ujiko* and pillar teams on the slope was both pragmatic and entertaining. Footage of the team, as well as a brief interview with Shimosuwa's brigade commander, was featured as part of an NHK special feature on '*Onbashira o sasaeru ningen*' ('The people behind the festival') (NHK 2010). The brigade executive relayed the time of the broadcast using the town's newly installed e-mail announcement system to ensure that its members could see their festival and their fellows on the national network. Public recognition through affirmative gestures such as these contributes to a public narrative of service and duty that provides an important source of self-justification for the volunteers.

Most brigade members I talked to felt that *keibi* duty is a necessary trade-off for a festival which may be enjoyed by all, and explanations to this effect were usually

couched in platitudes which echoed creating a ‘safe and secure’ (*anzen anshin*) atmosphere for a ‘festival which everyone can enjoy’ (*minna ga tanoshimeru matsuri*). It is also clear, however, that some would privilege participation in Onbashira as members of the pillar teams if they were able. Mr. Nakamura, a retired member from my brigade division, told me that fights often erupt between groups of firefighters when disgruntled brigade members encounter those of another division who are not seen to be taking their duties seriously enough, or (as is more often the case during the festival) are drinking while on duty. From what I witnessed, however, the attitude of most of the men and women on duty during the festival was quite professional, and most seemed to fulfil their positions as security personnel with almost grave earnestness.

The common heritage of the brigade and the young men’s associations continues to inform this synergy in part because, as both the shrine parish and community brigade are defined territorially, brigade members are also *de facto* parishioners, regardless of whether they or their families have any interest in religious activities. And while parish borders encompass a geographically much larger area than those of the ward-based brigade divisions, each ward is represented within the parish association by a deacon nominated by the parish. In many cases,

these local worthies will have served as captain or vice-captain in their local brigade, as was the case with the parish deacon in Second Ward.¹¹

One assertion, more specific than the vague platitudes mentioned earlier, was the contrast between the respective regulatory roles played by the fire brigade and the police, which were seen to be quite different. ‘People don’t like the police very much—they don’t understand Onbashira, and they don’t really do much anyway,’ observed one of my fellow brigade members. ‘They’re here mainly for the benefit of the tourists. They don’t get involved in local trouble.’ Indeed, this had been the position explained to me by the division chief of the local police when I had asked him whether any arrests were ever made at Onbashira or other festivals. The police, he told me, keep a strict policy of non-intervention in fights, and unless someone is seriously injured, it is highly unlikely that any arrests or charges will be made. Given the almost overwhelming presence of police dispatched to the festival, this was difficult to understand. Brigade members, on the other hand, feel no such compunction, and often intervene freely (if not always constructively) in the small-scale altercations which occasionally break out between groups of *ujiko* in the heat and excitement of the festival. The comments reflect a commonly held distinction between the police and the fire brigade, which stand in metonymically for the state (*kan*) and the people (*min*), respectively (cf. Schnell 1999).

¹¹ Dore describes a similar nested relationship between ward and shrine parish boundaries in his study of the pseudonymous Tokyo ward of Shitayama-chō (1958: 256).



Figure 21: Firefighters atop an Onbashira pillar during festival celebrations in 1938

6.3 Of fights and firemen

Elaine Gerbert, in her introductory account of the Onbashira festival (1995), notes the involvement of firefighters in the Onbashira festival in the Meiji period. Discussing the lottery system by which pillars began to be allocated in 1890, she reports the adoption of increased security measures, which were intended to calm the belligerent atmosphere that pervaded the festival during the Meiji period:

That year ... detailed regulations governing the procedures to be followed were issued. These measures were intended to help maintain social order at a time when local communities were keenly engaged in acrimonious quarrels with each other. These quarrels were so intense that for a while during the Meiji period, the Pillar Festival was known as a 'fighting festival' (*kenka matsuri*). ... From the beginning of the Meiji period most of the participants were firemen who identified the units they belonged to by wearing their firemen uniforms; in 1914 the mayor of Suwa limited the number of firemen who could participate and ordered the same new uniforms for everyone to discourage partisan fighting (1996: 351).

The anecdote is curiously decontextualized in Gerbert's account, and no explanation is given of the reasons why firefighters and their symbols were mobilized in this way (noted elsewhere in Gerbert's account only in conjunction with their role as festival security). Isolated as it is from any other discussion of the political tensions, the restructuring of municipal politics, this statement invites a number of questions. Why were the communities quarrelling and why did these quarrels erupt during the festival? What lay behind the involvement of firemen?

In the first place, it is important to note, if only briefly, that Onbashira's reputation as a so-called fighting festival was not primarily a Meiji phenomenon, but rather appears to have been a commonplace of the late medieval period. Shrine records report instances of brawls such as one in 1464, when during a heavy downpour during the Upper Yamadashi, a clash was triggered when one group trampled another's ropes in the mud. In 1470, a fight which left two or three dead resulted in the annalist's comment that Mae-III and Mae-IV had to be dragged through 'pools of blood'. Trouble arose again in 1482 when due to an alteration in the festival schedule by the shrine priests, Honmiya's pillars were set up before those of Maemiya. This angered the Maemiya groups, who pulled down Honmiya's pillars, setting off another huge fight which left three dead. Just over a century later, overeager *ujiko* dragged Hon-I into a crowd of onlookers, resulting in a punch-up that left ten or more wounded (Yokouchi 1993: 36-38; Ueda 1987: 224). Such conflict

seems to have been absent during the early modern period, when the parishes serving the shrine were reorganized as village federations under the Suwa daimyo. While it is certainly possible that brawls simply went unrecorded, the fact that this kind of inter-community violence begins to be remarked upon again in the historical record only from the mid-nineteenth century leads us to a second point.

It is significant that the role of the fire brigades in the festival dates from the Meiji period. Chapter 4 related how the *wakamono* youth associations were reorganized during the Meiji period, from 1894, as official community fire brigades under the jurisdiction of the prefectural police. In the area around Lake Suwa, young men's groups provided a source of communal labour for the building and repairing of roads, the harvesting of reeds from the lakeshore, and maintaining communal woodlands, as well as guarding against the theft of timber. Another function of such groups in village life was to provide entertainment, as with dramatic performances (*murashibai*) and sumō, as attested by the records of a local youth association from 1867, which records the request by the local landed farmer's representative (*hyakushōdai*) to stage a sumō performance for the village, in exchange for two casks of sake. Such performances were also a part of the ritual calendar of the shrines (Shimosuwa Chōshi Zōhoban Hensan Shingikai 1985-90, 2: 664-5).¹²

¹² Though not discussed here, *sumō* performances by a cultural preservation society in Suwa City remain annual observances at both the upper and lower shrines.

The observance of Onbashira united these labour and ludic aspects. The corvée necessary to transport the pillars from the mountains to the village was a spiritual observance as much as it was a physical one, and *wakamono* associations were mobilized by the shrines, with the support of the daimiate, to provide the labour necessary for their symbolic reconstruction. Knowing that this practice continued during the Meiji Period, as well as understanding the violent expression during the festival of inter-village conflict, allows us to begin to put Gerbert's episode into proper perspective.

In 1872, which was to be the first festival year of the modern era, the continuation of the festival was in question amidst the waves of change that had come with the creation of a new state under the Meiji Emperor. Nevertheless, that year, the Takashima office of the then Chikuma Prefecture¹³ issued an order that the pullers be assigned to transport the pillars according to established custom.¹⁴ During the Tokugawa period, the division of labour for Onbashira among the older *han* villages had been assigned to fifteen hierarchical federations known as *ontōgō*, within which certain communities had 'parent' status, supported in turn by 'branch' villages

¹³ A short-lived prefecture which existed between 1871 and 1876, comprising much of what is now central and southwestern Nagano Prefecture, as well as the Hida area of Gifu Prefecture (cf. Wigen 1995).

¹⁴ The Japanese term used at the time for the 'pullers' was *hiki-ninsoku*, which translates as 'pulling coolies,' though this term is no longer used, connoting as it does forced labour (cf. Schnell 1999: 234n12 for a related usage in a similar context, which has not fallen out of use). Also, regarding the celebrations of Onbashira during the early Meiji period, Gerbert suggests that the festival was not celebrated between 1868 and 1890 (i.e., the festival years 1872, 1878, and 1884) but this appears to be a mistake (Gerbert 1996: 350).

according to complex relations of kinship and patronage. With the municipal reorganization of Suwa District in 1874-75 into twenty-four new administrative villages, this older system was abolished, prompting the redrawing of parish boundaries for the newly united shrine. Unlike the older federations, which had been affiliated through networks that had accreted over centuries, the new communities were formed on the simple principle of territorial contiguity.¹⁵ Despite this shakeup, the segmentary principle by which the festival was structured was maintained, and the administrative villages became the new unit for inter-community rivalries (Shimada 1988: 47-48; Kizaemon Aruga 1953: 21-23).

These pre-existing relationships and rivalries vis-à-vis the shrines and their festival had unforeseen consequences for Suwa's administrative amalgamations, which had played out slightly differently there than elsewhere in Japan. Discussing the early years of the twentieth century Ann Waswo suggests centrifugal and centripetal forces as a lens through which to identify social pressures in rural areas (1988: 557-58). Using the same heuristic to examine Suwa in the early Meiji years, we may note that the shrines' parish system was reorganized following the new municipal divisions, thereby encouraging parishioner associations (including youth

¹⁵ One example of the relations by which the *ontōgō* federations had been united is suggested by Shimada (2007: 50), who refers to records which indicate the relocation in 1586 of Shōsenji temple from the frontier 'branch' village of Kami-no-hara to the 'parent' village of Naka-Kaneko, two communities which continue to play a special role in the Kamisha Onbashira. Aruga Kizaemon (1953: 23), stressing the mutual implication of political, economic, and ritual spheres, suggests that the Meiji municipal restructuring also resulted in the rationalization of the parish representative system, which had previously been a hodgepodge of idiosyncratic ritual associations.

organizations) to reform along the lines of these newer administrative units, thus freeing them from the older hierarchies of village federation. Continued identification with the shrine, however, also provided a symbolic locus for localized identity at the district level, which counteracted the state's centralizing aims. In these terms, the symbolic power of Onbashira can be seen to have supported a more complete centrifugal identification with the new 'parish villages' while centripetal pressures exacerbated the pattern of violent competition between the new communities.

In 1878, during the lead-up to the first festival under the new system, the reeves of the three Suwa sub-districts (*daiku*) summoned leaders from the new villages to a meeting to discuss how best to continue the tradition in the new era. It was decided that each village would assign a delegation of roughly ninety men (2120 in total), both tradition and practicality mandating that these groups be comprised of the young men of the community (many of whom were now involved in the organization of community fire brigades). The firefighter *happi*, emblazoned with the names of the new villages, thus became a convenient festival uniform. There were practical benefits to this, as it would turn out. During the Yamadashi festival of 1902, when a violent melee between *ujiko* from two upper parish blocks (Shiga-Toyoda and

Tamagawa-Toyohira) left two dead, and a third with a cracked skull, police officials were said to have rounded up villagers in the *happi* of the respective parishes.¹⁶

After the 1902 brawl, the mayors of the participating towns and villages convened to discuss measures to ensure the prevention of such incidents in future, in conjunction with officials from the Suwa Police Station. One of these measures was that fire brigade members were instructed to wear their *happi* during the festival (Miyasaka, et al. 2009: 138). While the substance of other measures goes unmentioned, a recent festival guidebook describes a similar meeting of a municipal executive convened in February of 1914, in advance of the festival of that year: among the upper parishes, pullers were to maintain a distance of five *chō* (about sixty metres) between pillar processions. Additionally, for every twenty-five parish households, a ‘procession supervisor’ (*eikō torishimari no yakuin*) was delegated to assist the parish deacons in the management of the festival. These procession supervisors were issued with white flags with which to conduct the procession of the pillars, as well as lanterns to ensure that they would be able to continue after dusk. Regulating the procession, it was evidently hoped, would prevent any tension-inducing mishaps. These measures appeared to be successful, as 1908 Yamadashi festival seems to have occurred without major incident.

¹⁶ The deaths were probably accidental. One local chronicler, for example, attributes the deaths of the men from Shiga to a fall (Yokouchi 1993: 37).

Later that year, however, during the Upper Shrine's Satobiki festivities, disaster struck. In a vacant lot along the pillar route below the Kikyō-ya (the Bellflower Inn) in Jingūji District, Arita Toyuki's Travelling Circus had erected a sideshow pavilion to entertain festival goers. Trouble began when, by chance, members of one of the pillar teams, who had paused to rest nearby, decided to take in the show. Tempers flared when the men were charged an additional fee after having already paid the entry fee at the wicket. Allegations of fraud broke into full-blown hostilities, and the fire brigade fetched up their wooden pry bars and charged the pavilion. As the story goes, Arita responded by brandishing an air rifle and threatening violence, but the situation was not to be defused. To the consternation of those already inside, the marquee was ripped down and the pavilion set alight. During the fracas a troop of chained monkeys were released while some locals were reported to have entered a cage and set to bear baiting. The circus troupe, unwilling to face their attackers, fled. (Miyasaka, et al. 2009: 91; Yokouchi 1993: 37)

According to festival lore, police found the firefighter *happi* useful for identifying and rounding up the instigators. In the aftermath, over a dozen members of the brigade executive were arrested, but although a suit was lodged by Arita for damages, no charges were laid over the affair.

By the time of the 1914 festival, independent associations were beginning to design their own festival wear. Thus, the 1914 move to limit the participation of

firemen and distribute *happi* Gerbert reports for Suwa (Kamisuwa at the time) is preceded by an explicit attempt to have the firemen identify themselves *as firemen* in the festival. Rather than interpret this as a reversal in police policy, it might better be seen as yet another step towards furthering the functional differentiation of firefighters from other ritual sodalities.

7 SOCIAL AMBIVALENCE AND SECULAR RITUAL

The fire brigade were a bad lot, they said, all right as individuals, but when three or four were gathered together in their braid caps and their *happi* the devil got into them.

—R. P. Dore ‘The day the fire brigade went fishing’ (1956: 353)

One and all feel the desire to reach out a hand to those in need that is the essence—the heart—of the firefighting spirit. Wherein, then, lies the allure of the fire brigade? Wherein its negative image? Is not pursuing these questions our first step forward?

—Shimosuwa Fire Brigade, Second Division
(Report to the Shimosuwa Ward Executive Council, April 2008)

The previous chapter examined the fire brigade’s role in the traditional ritual life of the community. This chapter retains a thematic focus on ritual, but reverses the perspective to examine the internal rituals of the service as they have evolved through history. My point of departure is a vignette that describes an incident which occurred near the outset of my membership with the Shimosuwa fire brigade, and through which I began to be aware of an unsavoury stereotype that competed with more positive discursive representations of firefighters—specifically fire brigade members—within the contemporary Japanese public sphere. I elaborate this negative stereotype and briefly discuss how such mutually inconsistent images may nevertheless occupy the same social symbolic universe. The second part of the chapter traces the historical origins and local development of the firefighters’ *dezome* ceremony as a secular ritual of state. The third section of the chapter develops the idea of invented traditions, and suggests that anthropological theories of ritual may offer insight into the particular practices of Japanese firefighters.

7.1 An unsettling introduction

My formal induction as a member of Second Division was conducted on a Saturday afternoon in late July. I arrived early to the divisional firehouse, where Masuzawa-san had arranged for me to meet Captain Seki. Within a few minutes of my arrival, I saw the stocky figure of the captain turn the corner from the street that led to his home, dressed in pale coveralls with a shopkeeper's apron tied around his waist. After we ascended the staircase to the cool shade of the meeting room on the first floor of the firehouse, Seki quizzed me on my interest in the brigade.

It was a hot afternoon, and our discussion was punctuated by the pulsing drone of cicadas in the giant zelkova outside. As we talked, we were joined one by one by several other men: Masuzawa-san (a senior member of the brigade who had re-enlisted after serving a term as vice-captain), Yanagidaira-san (a squad leader), Hoshina-san (sergeant), and Noguchi-san (vice-captain). Each arrival prompted a new round of introductions and questions. This group, I later realized, represented the divisional executive, which gathered to meet recruits. Before long the discussion was whetted with a few convivial cans of beer.

At length, Captain Seki announced his decision to allow me to join, and I was led through the firefighter's pledge, to seal the arrangement.¹ Hoshina-san and Yanagidaira-san voiced their approval. I had been fortunate, they agreed, to have

¹ See Appendix 2 (Section 12.2.1)

joined Second Division (chance, of course, had had very little to do with it, as I noted in Chapter 2). Although the smallest of the brigade's seven companies, it was certainly the most hospitable. 'We like to maintain a friendly atmosphere,' Captain Seki gestured at the beer dispenser in the corner.² As Yanagidaira-san and Masuzawa-san retrieved a plausibly sized uniform from the firehouse wardrobe (so I could keep up appearances while a new one was ordered), the captain proceeded to fill me in on the schedule for the upcoming weeks. As it happened, the regional finals of the annual Firefighting Technique Tournament were scheduled for the following day. I was therefore to report to the town's baseball stadium, in uniform, at five o'clock the next morning, to meet with the rest of the brigade.

Thus, as dawn broke, I dutifully donned my new uniform and made my way to the appointed venue, self-conscious about the conspicuous *happi* and cap but excited at the prospect of finally undertaking participant observation. The baseball stadium was a step up from the schoolyard of the local junior high where the local round of the tournament had been held the previous month. While Fourth Division, who had won the town tournament, readied themselves, other divisions were assigned various logistical duties to prepare the grounds, check the equipment, and set up marquee tents for the judges and invited dignitaries. The mayors of the six

² The dispenser was often mentioned when the relative merits of the Second Division firehouse were discussed with other divisions. Casks were supplied by a contract with the liquor shop around the corner, of which Seki happened also to be the proprietor.

municipalities and representatives from the prefectural assembly and national Diet had been invited to attend. Our division was tasked with guiding the buses and fire service vehicles of visiting teams into the carpark of the town's central municipal building, which had been made available to the visiting teams. This meant apologetically redirecting local residents who had come to take part in a tennis tournament at the grounds adjoining the stadium. Few seemed happy at this importunity. Fortunately, a nearby ramen shop had agreed to catch the overflow (perhaps in canny anticipation of athletes' post-tournament appetites).

As we waited for the delegations to arrive, the captain instructed us on protocol—as rank would not immediately be apparent, all incoming vehicles should be saluted. As I jotted this into my notebook, he continued without hesitation in the same informative tone. We were to expect only four teams, as it appeared that Hara brigade had pulled out of the tournament. Three members of the brigade had been arrested for attempting to sexually assault a hired *companion* after their post-tournament celebration earlier in the month.³ Although the assailants would not in any event have been competing for their brigade (their division had lost the

³ As a loan-word, *companion* originally referred to attractive women employed as guides and presenters at events such as trade fairs, exhibitions, etc., and has become a polite euphemism for escorts and bar hostesses. Recent discussions of female hostessing in regional and rural Japan (e.g. Mock 1996; Faier 2009) are an important supplement to more familiar urban treatments (e.g. Jackson 1976; Allison 1994). Particularly noteworthy is Lieba Faier's discussion of how Filipina hostesses in southern Nagano Prefecture help rural Japanese farmers and labourers project (and thereby confirm their exclusion from) an identity more in keeping with urban, white-collar masculinity (2009: 41-42).

local heat), the village authorities felt that under such circumstances it would be best to withdraw from competition.

I was shocked at this news, but its reception by my comrades was not one of surprise, and there was little immediate discussion. One of the men muttered a disparaging comment about ignorant farmers (Hara having a heavy agricultural base). When the captain left to attend to other business, silence fell as the men smoked cigarettes and we waited for the brigade's guests to arrive. I was unsure what to make of this news. When I hesitantly probed, I learned that my comrades had already known of the incident in question, which had been reported in the local press the week before. The others dismissed the incident as the regrettable actions of a few bad apples. Quite apart from the nature of the alleged crime itself, I was told, the worst thing was that the scandal would only confirm negative stereotypes about the brigade. A cynical remark by Yanagidaira-san served as a coda to a discussion that was quickly cut short by the arrival of the first teams of the day: 'Of course, you can be sure that no one ever says anything when we actually do something positive!'

After learning of the alleged assault, I reviewed recent newspapers to find out more about the incident at the municipal library, but found only a brief notice of the incident. An online search yielded a discussion on an Internet bulletin board service, but little else. At a press conference two days after the arrest, it seemed, the village mayor expressed a public apology for the incident: '[This incident has] significantly

damaged confidence in the fire brigade, and has caused a nuisance for all of society (*yo no naka ni go-meiwaku o kaketa*). I express my heartfelt apologies (*owabi shimasu*)' (Shinano Mainichi Shinbun 2008).⁴

7.2 Parallel discourses

The semi-official status and public role of the fire brigade in Japanese communities means that they are often on the receiving end of speeches by politicians and officials. In humble remarks by a deputy ward chief at a festival event, or in the bombastic speech of a member of the national House of Representatives on state occasions, the men and women of the fire brigade are often characterized as selfless volunteers committed to their communities' safety and security. In contrast to this official discourse, the internal discourse of the firefighters themselves described participation in the pragmatic terms of collective self-help and of strategic self-development, i.e., as the practical expression of a philosophy of enlightened self-interest. My informants on the brigade suggested that I should not really be looking for any abstract 'sense of responsibility' (*sekininkan*), as descriptions of the brigade in those terms were just political talk, rather than a representation of things as they really were.

At times, however, I encountered a third, parallel discourse, sometimes as little more than a conversational nuance, but at other times impossible to ignore, as with

⁴ After a week, the three were released after reaching a negotiated settlement with the victim. I did not follow up the incident directly with informants, and can add nothing more. It has been argued, however (as by, e.g. Burns 2005), that the prosecution of sexual assault cases in Japan remains strongly biased in favour of the male defendants.

the vignette that opened this chapter. In this discourse, the fire brigades and their members were evaluated in a negative, embarrassing light, as anti-social elements; a necessary burden—or even an unnecessary one. A passage from my field notes describes such an encounter, which occurred during my participation in a Christian bible study group organized by members of a Catholic congregation in a neighbouring community:⁵

As I described my project with the fire brigade, one woman's face took on a look of consternation, which gave way to a wry grin. After the meeting, she approached me to ask me how I was finding life in Shimosuwa (where she also lives). After we each worked out where the other lived, I asked her about the reaction I had perceived earlier. She laughed, and then lowered her voice, conspiratorially, explaining that 'When you said you were studying the fire brigade, I wasn't sure what to think, you know? My idea is that they're a rough lot who spend their time drinking, fighting, and womanizing. But when you talk about service to the community (*chiiki e no hōshi*), I guess I know what you mean.'

Hardly an artefact of prim sensibility, this frank confession gave voice to an undertone of unease I had sensed elsewhere, particularly in conversations with younger, more urbane Japanese. One young man I spoke with about the brigade described them, in a tone laced with disdain, as a bunch of fools (*baka yarō*), and other informants' dismissive attitudes towards the brigade suggested similar disapproval. More times than I cared to record, upon mentioning the fact that I was a member of the brigade, I was asked whether I enjoyed *sake*, confirming that the

⁵ This particular group met to discuss an inter-denominational Christian programme known as the 'Alpha Course.' I was aware that Christian groups had been in the forefront of social activism in Japan, particularly in the spheres of education, medicine, and provision of social services (cf. Stevens 1997: 69-74; Goodman 1998: 141). In stark contrast to this outreach, the group I met with was engaged in an inwardly focussed project of self-development.

hard-drinking image of the firefighter was well established.⁶ Although I sensed that my membership on the brigade predisposed informants to avoid overtly critical remarks, confirming evidence of this stereotype comes easily to hand. Consider the following passage from an online bulletin board discussion:

A: After working a late night, I dropped into a convenience store on my way home. In the car park, in one of those bright red fire engines they are so proud of, I saw four or five fire brigade guys messing about in their stupid (*dasai*) *happi* jackets, loading up on liquor, cigarettes, and snacks. I didn't get a look at the receipt, but ... those brigade guys drink even on weekdays! It must have totalled about 10,000 yen's worth—and that's coming out of peoples' ward dues! I see these guys a lot. They're nothing but barely educated dumbasses. Can't you join if you have a real job? At my company, the squaddies (*shōbō yarō*) among the labourers can't do their work. Seems like they can get up early enough for their fire brigade events, though.

B: Well, I understand what you are saying about their education. Still, I wouldn't tell them to stay away if my or a friend's house was on fire. I just wish they were not so conspicuous outside of their basic activities.⁷

Although historical accounts of Edo *hikeshi* suggest that premodern firefighters enjoyed a similar notoriety,⁸ inasmuch as contemporary fire brigades have featured in academic studies of Japanese communities, this negative discourse has rarely featured. Writers have tended to focus on the brigade as a functional element within the wider social structure (as by anthropologists), or else on the organization's positively evaluated civic potential (as political scientists have done). A singular exception is a

⁶ Interestingly, a comparative study of brigade members' (self-reported) drinking habits hints that this reputation may not be entirely deserved. A medical survey of 142 brigade members in Yokohama noted only moderate consumption, compared to police officers (Toyoda 1986). Against the negative stereotype, the physician who conducted the study concluded that brigade members' moderate drinking habits suggest their constant readiness to respond to emergencies.

⁷ <http://www2.machi.to/bbs/read.cgi/kousinetu/1213098880/150>

⁸ William Kelly describes the townsman firefighters of Edo (*machibikeshi*) as 'a rough lot, heavily tattooed, given to gambling and hostile to townspeople' (1994: 316; cf. Hendry 2002: 25).

memorable article by Dore (1956), which offers one of the earliest (and certainly most vivid) descriptions of a community fire brigade in action. In a reconstructed account, Dore relates the muster of a brigade division in rural Yamanashi Prefecture to attend to a fire in a neighbouring hamlet. Receiving the all-clear before they are even half way to the scene of the fire, the brigade decides to make the most of their sudden leisure with an impromptu barbeque, and sets to blocking a small river to catch some fish for the occasion. Dore describes the scene from the point of view of a pair of diffident village officials who have been sent to investigate the matter:

They had not gone far upstream when the sound of raucous singing gave them an inkling of the cause of the trouble. When they arrived on the scene and peered from behind a tree there was no need to use their electric torches to recognise in the light of the fires the braid caps and the blue and red *happi* of the Kamigawa Fire Brigade. They noted also the presence of the Chief, the two Vice-Chiefs and one or two of the ex-Chiefs, now Advisors, of the Kamigawa Fire Brigade.

They considered the situation. They were two and sober. The enemy was fifteen and intoxicated. Discretion and optimism both suggested that the dam would soon be removed in any case and the best thing would be to go home and sleep on it (Dore 1956: 349).

Dore's use of the word 'enemy' in this instance is apposite. While perhaps exaggerating the antagonistic dynamic of the situation in the interests of dramatic tension, his prose captures the ambivalence I noted. The continuities between this image, Dore's portrait of a half-century ago, and the frustrated rant of the anonymous online poster above suggest that the negative aspects of firefighters' public image—as frivolous, indolent, uneducated, potentially belligerent, and even debauched—has been a hard one to

shake. Yet how might it be that brigade members are seen as both servants of the community and potential threats, both paragons and parasites?

7.3 Legitimizing contradiction

The existence of seemingly contradictory interpretations, of course, is hardly surprising to students of Japanese society. Many observers have noted the explicit role given to opposing categories by which contradictions between expressed norms and realities may be excused or even simultaneously accepted as true, a phenomenon the sociologist Yoshio Sugimoto refers to the ‘legitimizing of double codes’ (2010: 32). Overlapping dyadic pairs such as *tatemae* / *honne* (external façade / true intention), *omote* / *ura* (front / back), and *soto* / *uchi* (outer / inner) are well-attested emic distinctions acknowledging and affirming an inherent duality in social reality (Doi 1986: 35-40). At times, this duality has prompted cynicism among critics who have derided the external, apparent, and superficial as the ideological obfuscation of exploitative social relationships.⁹ Such critiques run the risk, however, of falling into the trap of affirming ideology through the very process of exposing it. After all, from the Japanese point of view, *honne* presupposes *tatemae* and vice versa.

To return to the vignette at the outset of this chapter, it is easy to read the story of the Hara village fire brigade scandal through a lens of *honne* and *tatemae* (or more correctly, *ura* and *omote*). Although I made a note to follow up on the matter later in

⁹ This is the case with the critics of *Nihonjinron*. See the discussion in Chapter 3.

my fieldwork, once I had established more trust with people and grew less diffident about broaching uncomfortable topics, for various reasons I did not return to the topic directly. However, revisiting the online references to the incident I alluded to above, one may see how such an incident is framed within Japan's cultural discourse.

I have translated the relevant discussion:

- 46 I'd like to say something about this. Please try to understand the feelings of the girl who was hurt. Fire brigade members are supposed to protect citizens from fires and disasters. For them to drink and carouse is an outrage. Three guys? It's a pathetic story. I want these guys to be more self-aware. As someone from the same area, I'm embarrassed. If they want to go so far, they can go to the sex trade or something. Don't you think so?
- 47 Ugh. Let's give this topic a rest. It's a real bummer.
- 52 [responding to #46] If I were her father (*oyaji*), I'd mess them up. Totally! I might not even stop at that. And yet, and yet... there's something odd here. Is it the fire brigade that's out of line? The fire station? The ministry? The village office? The state? How far does the group's responsibility go? How far the individual's? And then there's the difference between a *companion* and a sex worker (*fūzoku-san*).
- 61: [responding to #52] Just because some fire brigade members broke the law, it doesn't mean that all of them are criminals. In other words, there's no collective responsibility—only individual responsibility. It's not the group that should be condemned, but the individuals.
- #87: There needs to be a talk about the attempted rape by these three. It touches on every brigade division, and on the upper ranks all the more ... don't you think?
- #88: Let's give that story a rest.
- #89: Surely, there is no reason for their supervisors to have any responsibility. In rape, random assault, and murder-type crimes, where someone is injured or killed, the criminal acts on his own. It is wrong to assign responsibility to others for the actions of these criminals. We must not forget that responsibility for our own actions lies with us. External accountability (*shūi no kanri sekinin*) only arises for children at the (mental age of) kindergarten level, who can't

distinguish between good or bad—not with adults who still think at the kindergarten level.¹⁰

The dynamics of this online conversation are interesting in that they not only engage with the questions of personal and collective responsibility for members of certain groups, but that they also indicate the tendency to push unsavoury conversations into the background (47, 88).

As anthropologists will recognize, such legitimization of contradiction is hardly limited to Japan, and most cultural contexts have discursive techniques for reconciling social inconsistencies. Michael Herzfeld's conceptualization of 'cultural intimacy' within the context of the nation-state (2005), as developed through his fieldwork in Greece, provides one such example, in its recognition of how national stereotypes can be simultaneously sources of external embarrassment and mutual reassurance (2005: 3). A similar example is provided by Gerd Baumann's (1996) identification of Londoners' ability to maintain mutually contradictory 'dominant' and 'demotic' discourses about what community and culture mean in the London suburb of Southall.¹¹ These are only two examples of many that remind us that the Japanese categorical dyads are simply a particular response to a general problem.

¹⁰ Kōshin'etsu Machi BBS, URL: <http://www2.machi.to/bbs/read.cgi/kousinetu/1215447766/> [Accessed 10 August 2008]. A number of other posts referring to the incident speculate over organized criminal involvement. In addition to allowing a free exchange of views, the anonymity of Japan's online bulletin board communities also fosters conspiracy and rampant speculation.

¹¹ See also A. M. Hocart's note that 'In Fiji, two contradictory statements are not necessarily inconsistent. They appear to us to be contradictory, because we do not understand the shades of

There would seem to be little intellectual value, therefore, in simply attesting to the social ambivalence of Japanese firefighters in the idiom of *ura* and *omote*. My aim for this chapter, rather, is to attempt to explain the form that this ambivalence has taken. To look at this discussion, the next section begins a study of one of the most well-known ceremonial occasions of the fire brigade, the New Year's ceremony known as *dezome*.

7.4 Secular ritual: *dezome*

The most important event of the New Year is the *dezome-shiki* ('first-appearance ceremony', often glossed in English as the 'New Year Firefighter's Parade').¹² Especially for urban Japanese, *dezome* is most commonly associated with the Tokyo edition of the event, held annually on 6 January near the city harbour in Chuō Ward and televised nationwide on NHK. The event combines live demonstrations of cutting edge firefighting techniques and search-and-rescue technology with traditional displays of *hashigo-nori*, the characteristic ladder acrobatics of the Edo *hikeshi*, dramatically re-enacted by members of the Tokyo-based Edo Firefighting Preservation Society.¹³ In addition to its intrinsic value as public spectacle, the

meaning, and because we do not know, without much experience, the points of view from which each is made' (1952: 61).

¹² Although popularly associated with the fire brigade, the term *dezome* is also used to describe similar New Year's functions by other service organizations, such as local traffic safety committees.

¹³ The *Edo Shōbō Kinenkai* was incorporated in 1939 following the reorganization of community fire brigades as civil defense units (*keibōdan*). Its founding members (240 former brigade members) first performed their 'traditional' acrobatics in Tokyo on 6 January 1940, as part of the celebration of 2600 years of Imperial Rule. That year, the *dezome-shiki* of the professional Tokyo firefighters was renamed

broadcast also fills a didactic role in promoting fire prevention and disaster preparation awareness to viewers nation-wide.

Dezome may be one of the most popularly recognized markers of the ‘traditional’ firefighter identity. More than once, upon learning I had joined the fire brigade, friends and informants would quip that they would look for me on television at New Year’s, and then laughingly jut their arms out at right angles, miming one of the dramatic poses of the firefighter-acrobats.¹⁴ Formerly the confident mark of the skilled *tobi* firefighter, whose contortions were a signal to coordinate firefighting operations, the practice of such acrobatics is now primarily the reserve of specialist groups who maintain the tradition as pure performance. These acts feature not only at New Year *dezome* events, but may also be part of community festivals throughout the year (cf. Robertson 1987:132). Sometimes the tradition is maintained by brigade divisions themselves, who double as preservation societies (*honzonkai*).¹⁵ Such local groups draw appreciative crowds to their performances, but few regional troupes match the athletic prowess of the Tokyo acrobats. Even so, these symbolic displays are a testament to an ideal of physical virtuosity, a model for contemporary firefighters to emulate in spirit if not in body.

the Imperial Capital Firefighter Inspection Ceremony (*teito shōbō ken’etsu shiki*), and not celebrated until later that month, indicating the symbolic separation of tradition and modernity (Suzuki 1999: 198-202).

¹⁴ This stance is intended to resemble the ideograph *dai*, (大) meaning ‘large’ or ‘great’.

¹⁵ While not every brigade member is an acrobat, the obverse is true almost without exception. In the Suwa district, fire brigade divisions in both Fujimi and Suwa City maintain such preservation societies.



Figure 22: Members of the Chino fire brigade perform *hashigo-nori*, circa, l-r: 1958, 1973, 1988 (Chino-shi 1988)

In communities outside the metropolitan capital, however, the televised Tokyo event is less immediately relevant than local instances of the ceremony held around the same time, usually within the first two or three weeks of January. Much smaller in scale than their Tokyo counterpart, these cognate events perform the same function of proclaiming the continued presence of the brigade, and thus the eternal need for vigilance. A parade of firefighters through community neighbourhoods precedes a symbolic inspection by officials from the local and prefectural governments. This may be followed by manoeuvres or technical demonstrations of fire hose technique—a visual spectacle for those who brave the cold to attend, especially in sunny weather, when the diffuse spray creates a multitude of rainbows in the crisp January air. These exercises are followed by an official ceremony, and the day's events are concluded with a New Year's banquet.

7.4.1 *Dezome* in Shimosuwa

In Shimosuwa, *dezome* is held on the second or third Sunday of the New Year, rather than on a set date, to avoid work conflicts. As a result, it often coincides with the annual Coming of Age Ceremony (*seijin-shiki*), which is held by the town to honour young men and women who have turned twenty—the Japanese age of majority—that year (or who will do so by the end of the current school year in March).¹ It is a carefully planned event; the schedule is discussed in careful detail at meetings of the captain's council leading up to the New Year, and a dress rehearsal is held on the eve of the event to ensure that all are familiar with the roles they have been accorded. On the morning of the ceremony, the brigade's executive ranks join town officials (including the chairmen of the chamber of commerce and the board of tourism), district ward heads, and parish deacons at Akimiya, for a ceremony of ritual purification (*oharai*), and to partake in a communal prayer for the safe passage of the coming year (*anzen kigan*).

The parade

At noon, brigade members assemble at their respective divisional firehouses for a commemorative photograph, and then pile into the fire engine for a ride to the

¹ In view of the fire brigade's traditional place as a role taken up by young men reaching adulthood, Shimosuwa town officials have begun to explore the recruitment potential of this juxtaposition. During my fieldwork, the brigade commander mooted the possibility of making a presentation at the *seijin-shiki*, and the programme for the 2010 event included a fire hose demonstration as a salute to the town's youth. For additional discussion of *seijin-shiki*, see Goldstein-Gidoni (2005: 157-59, *passim*).

staging ground for the parade, an open carpark at the lakefront. As the divisions drift in, the men idle and chat, smoking cigarettes (each truck carries a dedicated ash bucket for this ubiquitous habit) as organizers from the fire station finalize details—coordinating with the volunteer traffic wardens manning the parade route and officials at the town office. Accompanying the brigade are professional firefighters in full dress uniform, volunteers from the Red Cross Society, and the Disaster Prevention Auxiliary Corps (see Chapter 6). At the signal to muster from the bugle corps, the brigade divisions and auxiliary companies form up and report attendance. The brigade commander offers a short speech, reminding all of the importance of *dezome* for the brigade and for the community, and then cedes the floor to the vice-commander, who gives the order to dismiss and start the parade.

As a spectacle, the parade has a decidedly martial air. Each division marches separately in rigid step formation behind a nominated squad leader, who carries the divisional flag high. Behind the brigade, auxiliary volunteers and professional firefighters follow in turn, all to the musical accompaniment of the bugle and band corps. Fire service vehicles from each division, and the ambulances and larger fire engines from the station bring up the rear.²

² In other communities, ‘junior firefighter clubs’ (*shōnen shōbō*) of kindergarten and elementary school children may also be represented, in addition to other auxiliary volunteer corps (such as search and rescue mountaineers in upland areas, or coast guard volunteers in fishing communities).

Observing the Shimosuwa *dezome* parade, one feels strongly that its main audience is not the community at large, but rather its participants. The parade route runs along a modest thoroughfare leading from the South Elementary School to the town's administrative district—the intersection where the fire station, town office, library, gymnasium, and cultural centre are clustered. In spite of the commander's insistence on the importance of *dezome* to the community, the parade attracts few onlookers. Although town authorities previously closed the route for the duration of the parade, this year a lane has been left open to traffic. Traffic safety corps volunteers direct vehicles as the brigade proceeds towards the cultural centre. A few (mainly elderly) residents emerge from doorways along the parade route, smiling and nodding momentarily as the divisions march by in turn, before returning once again to their Sunday leisure. Only when the procession reaches the main intersection do spectators take on any semblance of a throng. Spouses, children, and a few older couples—perhaps six or seven dozen people in all—have gathered to watch the parade's conclusion. Yet there is not much to see other than the brigade itself; there are no spectacular exercises on the schedule this year (the Shimosuwa brigade alternates yearly between hose demonstrations and an inspection by officials). When the mayor has delivered his brief public address, and the final fire service vehicles are rounding the corner to the inspection point, the few onlookers disperse; having caught the eye of a husband or parent, it is time to attend to their own afternoon plans.

Inspection and ceremony

The inspection of the brigade is carried out by government officials and dignitaries who are invited every year to participate in the municipal ceremonies. This invitation is more than simply a formality, however, and presents difficulties for those who must schedule official representation. In 2009, of Nagano's seventy-eight municipalities, seventy-five held their own ceremony, and the governor and two deputy-governors attended four each. As most municipalities hold the event on the same day, this official presence is often delegated to functionaries who deliver remarks on the prefecture's behalf. These special guests all dress in crisp black and red firefighter *happi*, emblazoned with their organizational affiliation and rank, and wear the peaked caps of the fire service executive, symbolically suggesting their common membership with the local brigade in an organization that transcends the town borders, and claiming their position of status within it.

The inspection itself is a formality, little more than a circuit by officials of the carpark where the brigade has assembled in formation. The squad leaders responsible for each division's fire engine (*kikan hanchō*) turn the key in their respective vehicles, as a symbolic demonstration that all equipment is in working order. The programme advances under the direction of the Vice-Commander Ōwa. At one point, betrayed by nerves, he fumbles his lines, mixing up the order of events. This generates a brief bout of confusion that is soon set right, however, and this phase of the day's events

concludes. The divisions are dismissed to file inside for the ceremony proper (*shikiten*) to begin.

Inside, the stage is laid out in a format characteristic for public events in Japan. The occasion is identified by a title banner suspended above the national and municipal flags,³ with a *bonsai* tree set at the side of a table to add to the air of formal dignity (see Figure 23). The flags of the various divisions line the back of the stage, with the brigade flag and *matoi* (the traditional signal standard of Japanese firefighters) in the innermost positions. Town officials are seated at the right of the stage facing the audience, while invited dignitaries are on the left. Although technically a public event, very few attend who are not directly involved, save for a smattering of spouses with children who have come to watch their father (or sometimes mother) accept an award of recognition for meritorious or lengthy service. At this year's ceremony, a member of Second Division (Shinji, whose story is discussed in greater length in Chapter 8), is to be recognized for twenty-five years of continuous service, a rarity within the age-graded organization. The audience is rounded out by local dignitaries—council members and ward heads—who, having

³ In some municipalities, a third flag featuring the cherry blossom insignia of the national brigade may be seen on the other side of the national flag from the municipal flag. Although Nagano Prefecture also has an official flag, it is only used for events at the prefectural level. Despite an otherwise strong sense of regional cultural identity (see the discussion in Chapter 3), prefectural symbols play little part at the local level, where their municipal and national counterparts are predominant.

attended the Coming of Age Ceremony in the same auditorium that morning, are no doubt beginning to feel the day drag.



Figure 23: The stage is set for the *dezome* ceremony in this still from a recorded video of the event. The banner reads: 'Shimosuwa Town Fire Brigade *Dezome* Ceremony'. Volunteers from the Red Cross (in red caps) and Disaster Prevention Auxiliary Corps (in blue) join members of the black-capped fire brigade in the auditorium.

The ceremony, like the rest of the day's events, is heavily scripted and the sergeant of the Women's Firefighter Unit acts as master of ceremonies. After the official opening declaration by the vice-commander, all stand to show respect to the flags of the town and nation as the band plays *Kimi ga yo*, Japan's imperial national anthem.⁴ A second salute is addressed to the brigade's own flag. The duty sergeant (a

⁴ Together with the national flag, the national anthem—derived from a classical poem whose title may be translated as 'His Majesty's Reign'—remains politically divisive in Japan, and critics maintain that both symbols are emblematic of the militarism of Japan's wartime state. Although their *de facto* usage as state symbols dates from the late nineteenth century, their official adoption as such was only enacted in 1999. See Cripps (1996) for a succinct historical account of the controversies surrounding these symbols.

position which rotates twice yearly through the sergeants of the seven divisions according to seniority) mounts the stage, saluting first the national and town flags, next the town officials (including the brigade commander) and third the invited guests. Taking up the flag from its stand, he mounts it into a belt-cup attached to his uniform, turns about face, and carries it to the front of the stage. All stand to attention to a call by the bugle corps, and remain standing to recite the precepts of the Brigade Creed (*kōryō*) en masse, reading from the printed programme, and echoing the prompts of the duty captain.⁵ Those members of the audience who are not formally members of the brigade are obviously excused from this, and nor do they stand to sing the brigade anthem, which is sung thereafter. As with the Creed, brigade members read the lyrics of the anthem from the programme, though I note that some have evidently memorized the four verses.

Over the course of the two-hour ceremony, the audience hears speeches by the mayor, the brigade commander and chairman of the Town Council, as well as representatives on behalf of the prefectural governor, the prefectural assembly's Joint Fire Council (*shōbō giin renmei*), and the chief of the Suwa City Police Station. Before mounting the podium to give his address, the mayor salutes his colleagues, the flag, the dignitaries, and the audience, a bugle call attending to this last as the brigade stands to attention to accept the salute. Like those that follow, the mayor's speech

⁵ Although the Brigade Creed is particular to each municipal branch of the organization, they follow a uniform thematic pattern. See Appendix 2.2 for a text of the Shimosuwa version.

follows a set pattern, opening with a New Year's Greeting, then presenting a review of the statistics and significant events for the previous year: ('There were fewer fires than the year before, but more emergencies... Two elderly townsfolk were lost in the mountains and died of exposure... The typhoon season was quiet, and so thankfully floods were avoided—could this be the result of climate change? ... An earthquake in Iwate Prefecture is a reminder that disaster could strike at any time...'). This leads into a short soliloquy on architectural reinforcement of the town's nursery schools (one of the main platforms of his mayoral policy during the election of the year before). Other speeches by the assembled dignitaries follow in turn, each putting similar emphasis on recent trends and statistics and reminding the brigade of their importance as a bulwark against the ever-present threat of disaster, occasionally resorting to exhortations that they are needed now more than ever.

Nothing distracts from the formality of the occasion: the honorific language of the speeches are read from elegant manuscripts brushed on large white sheets of paper folded accordion-style, unfolded from one hand and folded with the other as the speech is read. (A single exception is an unscripted address by the Council Chairman—an aged veteran of such functions—that more than equals the formality of the prepared remarks of his colleagues.) Each speaker ends by solemnly announcing the date and proclaiming his own name and title. A number of dignitaries are present who forego any remarks, including a representative from the

office of the Liberal Democratic member of the House of Representatives, the Communist Party member from the Prefectural Assembly, the secretary of the regional construction safety board, and the Duty Chief from the Shimosuwa police post (*kōban*). Finally, the ceremony concludes with the reading of remarks sent on behalf of the national and prefectural fire commissioners, and the various greetings and congratulations sent by representatives in the national assembly, and from the commanders of the brigades from neighbouring municipalities within Suwa District.

Awards

Following the speeches, various commendations and medals are awarded under the auspices of the different administrative levels within the organization in recognition of lengthy and exemplary service. The Japan Firefighters' Association, for example, authorizes brigades to award medals in recognition of three levels of continuous service—for fifteen years or more (as a regular member or at the executive level; *i.e.* as commander or vice-commander), and for thirty years or more. Similarly, medals for length of service are also authorized at the prefectural level by the Nagano Firefighter's Association. The number awarded each year is restricted to a set ratio within the brigade. One division also receives prefectural recognition for meritorious service, chosen by the brigade commander. Similar awards are authorized at the regional level where, in addition to those listed above, a 'Special Award for No Fires' is authorized to be awarded for one brigade (of the six district municipalities).

Finally, brigade-specific awards (carrying municipal recognition) are presented to individuals identified by the commander as deserving of appreciation.⁶

Next, the mayor announces the recipients of commendations of gratitude (*kanshajō*) from the town. The neighbourhood associations of two districts are given recognition for having been fire-free for forty years, and three more for twenty years. Fourteen citizens receive awards for acting quickly or heroically to help prevent fire damage, and one household receives particular mention. These latter presentations are simply read out, rather than accepted in person, but the final awards—recognition for service to those (ranked sergeant or above) who have retired from the brigade in the past year—are accepted as a group by those stepping down. Ten men, dressed soberly in suits and ties, take the stage to accept their awards from the mayor, who reads out the announcement of each award. In all, 117 individual awards are given out, almost exactly half of the members of the brigade receiving recognition of one form or another.

After a short break, and performances by the bugle band corps, the final event of the afternoon is a closing word from the Chairman of the Camaraderie Association—a position filled by the former brigade commander—who leads the audience in a ritualistic chant of '*Hi no yōjin*' ('Beware of fire'). As with the rest of the event, this final touch is carefully choreographed. The Vice-Commander musters the

⁶ See Appendix 1.3.

sergeants of each division, who will act as flag bearers during the ceremonial chant. Forming a line, they turn sharply at the Vice-Commander's signal, and march with exaggerated formality onto the stage, where they salute the flags before taking them up and securing them in their belt loops. This done, they turn sharply once more to face the audience, and the Chairman takes the floor:

To correctly do the *Hi no yōjin*, there are some rules. Please allow me to explain. First, stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Put your left hand firmly on your hip, and clench the fist of your right hand. Get ready to punch it into the air. At my signal, I want your voices to reach the ceiling.

With a melodramatic show of great effort, the old commander winds up his fist and punches upward, his arm fully extending at the final syllable of '*hi no yō-JIN!*' The audience follows the action, which he does three times, with increasing ferocity. As the third cry echoes through the hall, it is joined by the celebratory call of the bugle corps, and the sergeants march off the stage with the flags to take their positions with the division captains. There is one more salute, the vice-commander closes the ceremony, and then the commander offers a final thanks to the audience and dismisses them. The sergeants put away their flags, the bugles sound a call, there is a final salute, and it is time to adjourn to a local hotel by minibus or truck for the much anticipated New Year's banquet.

The banquet

The joint New Year's banquet that follows the *dezome* ceremony, also attended by off-duty professionals, is the brigade's largest social function of the year, and is held

at the town's grandest hotel, opposite Akimiya. Spatially, the hall is set up much as the divisional celebration described in Chapter 5, though on a much larger scale; attending officials and dignitaries sit at a high table, while rank and file members sit at rows of tables, seated by division and according to rank.

After the *kanpai* and a mercifully abbreviated mayoral speech—once again welcoming and introducing the guests from the various levels of government—the meal begins: a catered selection of deep fried *okazu* (side-dishes), *nigiri-zushi*, *tempura*, pickles, with ample quantities of *sake* and beer. As the brigade eats, the politicians descend from the high table, bottles of beer or pitchers of *sake* in hand, and begin circulating among the tables, pouring drinks and greeting the divisions, bantering with the men and sharing jokes, and occasionally exhorting a gruff 'We're counting on you' (*tanomu, ne*) to the younger men before moving on. Although the circulation appears natural, each politician makes sure to spend time with the captain of each division, making sure that none are left out.

The communal banquet is only the first of a series of increasingly raucous stages that the evening will take, and some divisions will leave before the formal closing of the event which is marked by an exuberant thrice-shouted '*Banzai!*' Our own division is among the first to leave, moving on to a local restaurant for a more intimate feast, followed by a final round of drinks at a nearby bar.

7.4.2 *Dezome* in historical perspective

Although it is now a seemingly indispensable celebration of firefighter identity, a recent historical thesis on firefighting in Edo by Steven Wills (2010) points out that the earliest documentary references to *dezome*, from the late eighteenth-century, indicate official opposition to such public assemblies. Concerned that the gatherings would grow rowdy and erupt into disorderly brawls, city magistrates repeatedly issued ‘strictly worded’ edicts proscribing the New Year’s event (in 1795, again in 1800, and sporadically over the following decades).⁷ Such edicts followed a pattern of state disapprobation towards activities by firefighters felt to be peripheral to their legitimate function. *Dezome* was one such example, though the necessity of such reiteration suggests that the practice continued despite official censure.

Neither were such concerns limited to the capital, as noted in an influential article on the history and development of firefighting in Edo by historian Ikegami Akihiko. Ikegami notes that, as early as 1805, the shogunate had directed its vassals and senior retainers (*hatamoto*), as well as independent *daimyō* in the outlying districts of the Kantō plain to take a strict approach with obstreperous firefighters. Specifically, officials were instructed to act against ‘peasants who emulate the commoner firefighters of Edo, and under the pretext of outbreaks of fire gather in great numbers to destroy the residences of those whom they begrudge, or otherwise

⁷ For examples of such edicts see #10299 and #10793 in the tenth volume of *Edo machibure shūsei* (Kinsei Shiryō Kenkyūkai 1998; cited in Wills 2010: 103)

name a captain, form a gang, or take to fighting and quarrelling.’⁸ As William Kelly notes, it was during this period that firefighting practice was beginning to have some cultural traction within the Edo capital’s incipient public sphere (Kelly 1994). These warnings were primarily aimed at authorities on the outskirts of the capital, but they may nevertheless be seen as evidence that the unruly behaviour of the firefighters had begun to diffuse through the countryside. The channels of communication represented by both samurai returning to their domains from Edo and villagers returning from *dekasegi* out-work were not limited to the Kantō plain, after all. There is thus the possibility that *dezome* celebrations, as well, may not have been limited to the confines of Edo.

In any event, the situation in the capital changed rapidly in the wake of reforms at the beginning of the Meiji Period. Although he does not speculate as to its basis, Wills notes a reversal in official policy following the creation of the Metropolitan Police Department in 1874, under whose aegis the Tokyo fire services had been reorganized (cf. Suzuki 1999: 70-72). *Dezome* was reinvented as an official public celebration by the Tokyo prefectural government in 1875, thus prefiguring the ceremonies that would come to be celebrated by community brigades nationwide following the creation of the national organization two decades later.

⁸ 「百姓共之内、江戸町方火消人足之身体をまね、出火ニ事よせ、大勢ニて遺恨有レ之者杯之家作を打こはし、或ハ頭分と唱へ、組合を立て、喧嘩口論を好ミ候もの共有レ之由。。。急度相慎」(Takayanagi and Ishii 1942 vol 2, doc 6290 pp. 742-43; quoted after Ikegami 1978: 168). I am indebted to Steven Wills for drawing my attention to this passage.

7.4.3 Dezome in the local historical context

In Shimosuwa, *dezome* has been observed as an official ceremony since the brigade's inception in 1894. It is unclear, without any records, whether the event was celebrated by the autonomous village brigades mustered in the 1880s, to say nothing of whether such observances were consistent with anti-authoritarian sentiment. Although the question of pre-1894 *dezome* ceremonies outside of Edo/Tokyo must remain an open question, what is clear is that, from its inception in Shimosuwa, and very likely throughout the rest of Japan, *dezome* was a ceremony of the state.

It was also a modern one. From its very first observance in Shimosuwa, on 20 January 1895, *dezome* was inscribed within the institutional and architectural spheres of Meiji Japan. The entry for the initial observance is brief, perhaps owing to the fact of its celebration only a few months after the brigade's ceremonial inauguration the previous October.⁹ That first year, rising early to the reveille in the darkness of a winter morning, the four original companies mustered at the new village office, constructed five years earlier in front of the old tumulus at the junction of the two highways. Assembling in orderly fashion according to rank and company, the brigade marched the short distance to the village school—another recent edifice, built

⁹ Judging by the hand, the first volume of the chronicle, covering the period from 1894 to 1938, has almost certainly been transcribed from an earlier document. This earlier source appears either to have been incomplete, or for some reason redacted, as the first recorded instance of fire—at the town's Shin Buddhist temple—does not appear until 1904. Before this time only ceremonial events are recorded, which may be interpreted as demonstrating the relative importance of these observances over the actual business of fighting fires.

on the site of the former stable yards of the old post-town in 1875—where they were inspected and then dismissed. Although the inaugural entry is mute on the matter, it is likely that such inspection, elaborated in subsequent entries as calling of the roll and the scrutiny of uniforms and equipment, was carried out by the station chief of the local branch of the Suwa district police. The Shimosuwa police office, set into the main gate of the former *honjin* (the inn reserved for the use of travelling *daimyō*) occasionally served as the assembly point for the Meiji association, during the first few years of the event. At length, the school grounds were rapidly established as the ceremony's customary setting, serving this role until the construction of alternatives—the municipal gymnasium in the 1970s, and cultural centre from 1989.

Situating the tradition of *dezome* as an imposition by an external state apparatus, however, does not mean that the symbolism of its paramilitary discipline was not welcomed, accommodated, and even sought out by local interests. Firefighting, after all, was (and remains) an onerous and dangerous task, and the appeal of procedural and technological advances by which its effectiveness and efficiency might be improved guaranteed a healthy interest. In Tokyo, the historical translation of the distinction between townsman and samurai firefighters into the idiom of modernity resulted in newer organizational dichotomies. Urban brigade volunteers adopted and celebrated the symbols of the traditional *machibikeshi*; modern professionals, on the other hand, drew on symbols more consistent with a

new sense of technical competence, exemplified in the late nineteenth century by the steam-powered water pump. At times this tension erupted into open conflict, as when a group of brigade members charged the professional ranks during the Tokyo *dezome* ceremony in 1881, resulting in a brawl that left many injured and one professional firefighter at death's door before it was broken up by police (Suzuki 1999: 92-93).

Outside of Tokyo, however, occupational disenfranchisement followed a different pattern, and the salient distinction became that between of firefighters (territorial insiders) and police (incoming agents of an external state). In the regional context, this lack of professional specialization meant that community firefighters were not prejudiced against modern innovation, and despite a formal parallel to the situation in the capital, rural firefighters identified much more with the new breed of urban professionals than the traditionalists.

Contemporary observations by rural firefighters who participated as observers in the Tokyo *dezome* in 1928 suggest quite the opposite; they felt that the anachronistic displays of ladder acrobatics and *kiyari* chants were unrepresentative of—even humiliating towards—the modern firefighting identity. One account, reprinted in the newsletter of the Greater Japan Firefighters Association, expresses this frustration:

The manoeuvres of the urban volunteer firefighters (*giyū shōbō*), as well as their parade drills, were what we observers from the rural brigades wanted to see. Different from those last urban volunteers—we were expecting something more disciplined (*seiton*). In truth, I couldn't help feeling quite unsatisfied. If those urban volunteers are what the citizens of Tokyo associate with volunteer firefighters, they must hold them in contempt. That is because of their complete ignorance of rural volunteer firefighters (quoted after Suzuki 1999: 187-88).

Historians interested in the extraordinary social elaboration that characterized Japanese firefighting in the early modern era have often remarked on the relative absence of technological innovation in firefighting technique during the contemporary period. The rapid modernization and reforms of the Meiji government broke this stasis, however, and as Japan modernized, it was crucial that firefighters—and the community—were educated on the implications of these changes. As a public event attended by all community firefighters, *dezome* offered a convenient vehicle for such didactic knowledge (though only one of many). In the entry for 1901, for example, is a note that, following the *dezome* inspection, the Shimosuwa brigade heard a lecture by an invited representative of the Suwa Electricity Company, on the subject of the relationship between electricity and incidence of fire.

Despite the rapid and fundamental changes that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the picture that builds up of *dezome* appears consistent with the contemporary ceremony in both form and substance—a fact which appears even more remarkable given the organizational reinventions of the intervening decades. From 1901 begins the recording of routes marched during the review

parade; from 1905 the presence of local officials and worthies; from 1906 the presentation of individual awards of recognition for merit, attendance, and service. The 1910 celebration coincided with the presentation of a ceremonial tassel by the prefectural governor for the brigade's *matoi*, the iconic symbol of Edo firefighters, and notes the first post-ceremony banquet. The presence of the press is noted in 1916. Finally, with the record of a symbolic inspection of the brigade documents in 1917—ironically recursive evidence of the enshrinement of bureaucratic practice—the model is complete.

Significantly, while *dezome* appears from the beginning to have been redolent with the symbolism of the modern Japanese state, this symbolism has not only been pre-eminent, but completely divorced from the signifiers of territorially specific folk or religious tradition (although a few of the larger ceremonies were held on the grounds of religious institutions). The Shimosuwa brigade's inauguration, for example, was held at the Pure Land Buddhist temple and its fifteenth anniversary celebration took place at the Rinzai Buddhist temple. However, these venues were likely chosen by virtue of their architectural capacity rather than their religious function (the former temple had also temporarily housed the municipal office until the construction of the first village office in 1889). Even the initial use of the public square dominated by the great gate (*daimon*) of the spring shrine, as the customary

testing ground for the brigade's hand-powered water pumps, appears to have been driven by the logic of opportunity, rather than as an invocation of Shintō symbolism.

Explicit references to *religious* symbolism do not become apparent until the beginning of the Shōwa period, as with the observance of a fire-quelling ceremony (*chinka-sai*), included in the agenda for *dezome* in 1928. From that point until the end of the war, visits to the two shrines were a regularly observed component of *dezome*, and while there is a hiatus in entries to this effect for just over a decade, ritual purification¹⁰ of the brigade's fire engines and upper ranks, and prayers for a disaster-free year to come, once again appear from 1956. While these post-war rites are noted separately from *dezome*, they usually appear to have taken place as the preliminaries to a day of meeting to discuss brigade business, before the fire service executive's New Year's Party. From 1989, in fact, these rites have been observed on the morning of the *dezome* celebration.

Other changes are more subtle. Although there seems to be no identifiable pattern with regards to date, the fourteen entries for *dezome* between the brigade's inauguration and the end of the Meiji Period (three years have no entry) are nevertheless evenly distributed throughout the week. In contrast, during the Taishō and early Shōwa Periods, approximately half of the ceremonies are held on a Sunday,

¹⁰ In 1975, the terminology used by the brigade changes from 'purification' (*shūbatsu*) to the current 'prayer for safety' (*anzen kigan*), though the substantive elements of the ritual, to the best recollection of the former commander, did not change.

while celebrations on days other than Sunday disappear altogether after 1956. This transition is suggestive of both the importance attached to such ceremony in the organization's initial years, and a gradual shift towards privileging (or at least not burdening unnecessarily) commerce and industry. Interestingly, this shift appears to have predated the oft-lamented 'salaryman-ization' of the organization as employment patterns have shifted.¹¹

A more apparent, though equally gradual, shift concerns the actual route of the procession. Although the parade from the village office to the school noted in 1895 is barely half a kilometre, entries from 1901 onwards refer to the procession making a circuit of the village centre—a distance of about four kilometres—with occasional references to longer forays through the outlying wards that meant a doubling of this distance. More important than the distances involved, however, is the fact that this orderly procession regularly passed through the most densely populated areas of town, following the route still used today for the ritual Shintō processions that move between the two shrines. As the town expanded towards the lake, and rice paddies were converted into residential blocks, the parade route was extended to pass through these newer districts. Around 1980, a new pattern began, in which the parade started around or near each of the two shrines in alternate years. This lasted only two decades, however, and by 2000, the route had shifted completely away from

¹¹ See Appendix 5 for a breakdown of employment among members of the Shimosuwa brigade.

both the shrines and the older residential neighbourhoods to one that traced a shorter loop around the town's train station. By the time of my own participation in early 2009, the route had contracted to a short path through a semi-industrial area and then a run-down shopping district that borders the municipal centre. One can see in this spatial history a manifestation of the organizational atrophy that many fear the brigade is undergoing.

It is tempting to read the geographical parallel in the choice of initial route, tracing the same geography as the religious procession, as evidence of a structural continuity between traditional community and modern society. While such a suggestion is not completely without merit (see the previous chapter), I feel that this is incorrect. Shintō processions were not replaced, after all, as we saw in the previous chapter. It seems more appropriate to say that the state was using the procession route for *the same reasons* that the Shintō processions chose it. By taking the route through the centre of the settlement, the prefectural authorities directing the brigade could ensure the maximum public visibility of the transcendent presence of the state in the professionalized routines of local men, whose physical comportment (*shisei*) was itself one of the objects of review and display.

7.5 Revisiting the invention of tradition

As it exists today, *dezome* may be interpreted as an invented tradition as defined in Eric Hobsbawm's classic formulation.¹² Hobsbawm notes that invented traditions fall broadly into two types: 'actually invented, constructed, and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period [...] and establishing themselves with great rapidity.' Based on the above evidence, *dezome* appears to be 'invented' in both senses. For while the spontaneous emergence of public gatherings of firefighters amidst celebrations of the New Year, replete with displays of acrobatic virtuosity, appear to have emerged spontaneously during the late eighteenth century, such traditions only became 'official' (i.e. state approved) following the domestication of the firefighters within the policing infrastructure of the modern state. After the establishment of the national fire brigade system, such traditions would have been propagated to brigades throughout the nation.

The interdisciplinary aftershocks of the concept of 'invented traditions' have ensured that the historicization of 'tradition' has become a basic touchstone for scholars interested in Japanese modernity. Anthropologists in particular have revealed how the discursive mobilization of culture has supported entrenched political interests (e.g. Goodman 1998 on the delivery of social services) or been a

¹² An invented tradition, in this sense, is a 'set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past' (Hobsbawm 1983: 1).

tool in resisting them (e.g. Schnell 1999 on festivals). Despite this fruitful collaboration, however, these contributions have largely remained within an illustrative rather than explanatory paradigm. While the fundamental paradox of invented traditions, which historian Stephen Vlastos cogently renders as ‘the disjuncture between the rhetorical posture of invariance—the strong claim at the heart of every tradition to represent ‘time-honored’ beliefs and practices—and their actual historicity’ (1997b: 7) has been revealed in almost endless permutation, it has rarely addressed as a problem in and of itself.

This failure (if it may be characterized as such) could simply be the result of a blithe assumption on the part of anthropologists that the problem of invented traditions was, if not false, then at least a familiar one—a reworking of Malinowski’s mythical charters (Malinowski 1948: 64), Weberian legitimation (Weber 1968: 954), or yet one more indication of the socially constructed character of everything (Berger and Luckmann 1966; cf. Hacking 1999). A more pointed critique is that of Marshall Sahlins, who notes that an overzealous enthusiasm to ‘debunk’ invented tradition as instrumental mystification —as so much ‘serviceable humbuggery’ and ‘ideological smokescreen,’ as Sahlins puts it (1999: 402-403)—is in fact rather shoddy anthropology. Such cynical practice not only implicitly arrogates the observer to a position of enlightenment vis-à-vis those for whom such traditions hold meaning,

but also unnecessarily restricts (or else denies) both the polysemic potential of such traditions as symbols, and the historical agency of those who give meaning to them.

Without contradicting this forceful criticism, a less tendentious analysis, which I advance here, might also suggest that the analytical deployment of Hobsbawm's original programme has remained too firmly ensconced within a historical mode. It has privileged analysis of tradition as a diachronic, historical problem, rather than devoting attention to it as a synchronic, structural one. Both of these perspectives, I think, were implicit in Hobsbawm's original formulation, though it is clearly the former that has received the most attention, becoming almost axiomatic. Certainly it is the one adopted by contributors to a collection exploring the invention of tradition in the Japanese context (Vlastos 1997a).¹³ In his introductory essay, Vlastos goes so far as to suggest that the primary value of the invention of tradition is heuristic, rather than theoretical. It suggests new questions for historical research, but in his estimation 'does not in the end produce criteria capable of sustaining a new, or rigorous typology' (ibid: 5). In adopting this position, Vlastos and his co-contributors are able to exploit the semantic breadth of the word 'tradition,' and apply it to such

¹³ Although the volume came together in part to realize Hobsbawm's original call for an interdisciplinary dialogue in the analysis of invented traditions, it remains a batch heavily seeded by historians; among its contributors are to be found: one representative each from the disciplines of law, anthropology, and geography; three Japanese sociologists; and twelve historians.

divers topics as Japanese non-litigiousness, cultural representations, martial arts, and even geographical consciousness.¹⁴

It seems to me, however, that such an expansive interpretation of tradition takes a significant step away from the original formulation, and that Hobsbawm in contrast appears to have been interested more narrowly in tradition as practice, rather than as collective representation. It also has the unfortunate effect of making Vlastos's point into a circular argument, since it is precisely through such a move that any theoretical applicability is lost.¹⁵ In any case, given the quality of the fruits of this interpretive reading, Vlastos and his co-contributors can hardly be faulted. Nevertheless, I would argue that to focus overzealously on the *historiographical* problem of the disjuncture between rhetorical claims to invariance and the historical contingency of substantive practice (Vlastos 1997b: 4) distracts from the equally important (and for anthropologists perhaps more engaging) *ethnographic* puzzle of why such claims are so frequently accepted at face value.

A more anthropologically informed reading of invented traditions, I feel, would note Hobsbawm's repeated emphasis on the *ritualistic* aspect of tradition, by which he distinguishes it not only from custom (substantive practices), but also from the

¹⁴ These topics are the respective contributions of chapters by Upham, Hashimoto and Harootunian, Thompson, and Wigen and Gluck (cf. Vlastos 1997a)

¹⁵ Of course, Hobsbawm's definition was not unambiguous; even the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes the inherent vagueness of the word 'tradition' (cf. *OED*, s.v. 'tradition, n.' sense 5b).

conventions of routine (instrumental practices). Offering an illustrative example of these distinctions, Hobsbawm explains that:

'Custom' is what judges do; 'tradition' (in this instance invented tradition) is the wig, robe and other formal paraphernalia and *ritualized practices* surrounding their substantial action. [...] A second, less important, distinction that must be made is between 'tradition' in our sense and convention or routine, which has *no significant ritual or symbolic function* as such, though it may acquire it incidentally. [...] Inventing traditions, it is assumed here, is essentially *a process of formalization and ritualization* (1983: 3-4, emphasis added).

For Hobsbawm, then, the difference between custom and (invented) tradition is not that between changeability and stability, but rather between substance and form. In the ideological terms that the argument was intended, this is the difference between dogma (beliefs placed beyond question) and ritual (the practices through which such elevation has been realized). The importance of ritual in this narrower understanding of tradition thus suggests, *contra* Vlastos, that there is significant theoretical value to be derived from the concept of 'invented tradition'.¹⁶

Taking up 'invented traditions' in this light offers, I argue, significant insight into the particular historical and cultural case of *dezome*, and perhaps of the fire brigade more generally. In order to develop this point, however, it is necessary to turn to anthropological approaches to ritual. The next section, therefore, takes up the work Maurice Bloch, who has developed a theory of ritual that suggests that the obfuscation,

¹⁶ Vlastos notes (somewhat snidely, it seems to me) that Hobsbawm does not develop criteria by which to distinguish 'tradition' from 'invented tradition', as though this were a logical flaw in the original typology. As I have already noted (note 22, this chapter), Hobsbawm's definition is quite explicit. 'Invented traditions' are a subset of the more general class—there is no formal distinction, only a historical one.

even denial, of historicity characteristic of invented traditions (though he does not refer to this connection himself) is made possible through ritualized practice.

7.5.1 Japan, secular ritual, and ‘rebounding violence’

Bloch’s theory of ritual is based on a careful study of the history of a particular circumcision ritual among the Merina of central Madagascar, which he also observed first-hand on several occasions during fieldwork (Bloch 1986). Examining the history of the ritual, Bloch was intrigued by the ‘amazing stability’ of its symbolic component over two centuries of otherwise tumultuous history.

In a monograph on the subject, Bloch argues that certain aspects of the rituals within the Merina complex should be seen as constituting structural constants. In particular, the rituals are formalized and repetitious, and possess a ‘fixity’ of style that limits their substantive content. Ritual, he suggests, combines the qualities of statement and action in a ‘weakly propositional’ manner—neither completely empty of meaning, nor serving explicitly to channel political value. This allows them to appear timeless, obscuring the specificity and contingency of practices to the extent that they come to be understood as expressions of a general, even natural (and therefore unchanging) order (1986: 184-91). Bloch writes:

Rituals reduce the unique occurrence so that they become a part of a greater fixed and ordered unchanging whole; this whole is constructed identically by every ritual performed in a hazy, weakly propositional manner; it appears to have always existed, and will always exist. Because of this, ritual makes the passage of time, the change in personnel and the change in situation, inexpressible and therefore irrelevant (1986: 184).

One may interpret this effect as what another author has called the ‘mythicisation’ of history (Connerton 1989: 42).

A corollary of this time-defying characteristic is the establishment of the pre-eminence of the imaginary, eternal, transcendent whole over the evanescent, fragmented here-and-now, which creates an authorizing principle for a hierarchical order in which all participants of the ritual may find their place. Noting this relationship as characteristic of traditional authority (169), Bloch argues that the existence of an all-encompassing order—in which superior and inferior are subordinate (if to different degrees)—offers sufficient emotional security to participants such that even those of the lowest rank are enthusiastic participants (189). A final implication of the ritual, made necessary by the impossibility of realizing the eternal ideal in this life, is the demonstration of the superiority of the transcendent principle through violent force, one of whose manifestations is consumption (173).

Although this summary does little justice to Bloch’s rich presentation, we can see that he has described an iterative model in which ritual acts to reify a particular pattern of social relationships, and legitimate the use of social violence in its defence. This latter aspect, which he styles as ‘rebounding violence’ is developed by Bloch in a second book, *Prey into Hunter* (1992), testing his model against a spectrum of case studies selected from across the ethnographic record, including Japan.

The ritual theory Bloch advances represents a further refinement and development of such earlier treatments of ritual, as by Arnold van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner (1967), which posit that ritual is characterized by a stage of (often violent) transcendental liminality whose overcoming ends with the ritual subject's reintegration with and reaffirmation of the profane world. Bloch's contribution is to suggest that the third stage is achieved through an aggressive 'rebounding' characterized by acts of consumption by which the vitality lost during the initial stage of the ritual might be restored (1992: 6).

It should be noted that Bloch's use of evidence from the corpus of Japanese ethnography by its author has not been without controversy. Several reviewers have argued forcefully that his analysis diverges wildly from native understandings (e.g. Ohnuki-Tierney 1992; Van Sant 2006). These critiques focus on how Bloch gets the details wrong. Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, for instance, suggests that Bloch fundamentally misinterprets the Japanese data, mistakenly equating Japanese ancestor worship (a misnomer, as the souls of the departed may be children or siblings from the same household) with similarly named institutions in other cultures. A review essay by David Gellner (1999), however, by and large excuses such errors as the inevitable slippages that come of applying such broad theory to particular ethnographic cases. In contrast to the nit-picking of Japan specialists, Gellner suggests that the greatest strains in Bloch's model derive from the mistaken

conflation of three inherently different ‘types’ of ritual, each corresponding to a religious orientation—namely soteriological (salvation-oriented), communal, and instrumental—into an all-encompassing unity.¹⁷ Offering supplemental ethnographic data from his own work in Nepal, Gellner demonstrates that Bloch’s theory applies most convincingly in the second case (1999: 142).

I suggest that Gellner’s proposed refinement allows the Japanese case to fit quite comfortably into Bloch’s model, but there is one more point to make on the subject of ritual before we return to the case of *dezome* and the fire brigade. To explore what such a restriction would mean in practice, it is useful to review in summary a critique offered by an insightful undergraduate paper by a student of Japanese religion (Van Sant 2006), which echoes (if in a more excoriating tone) Gellner’s general concerns about Bloch’s overly simplistic theology. Van Sant claims that Bloch chooses his data in a tendentious fashion, ignoring those aspects of Japanese belief that do not fit his model. In particular, the author suggests three possible critiques of Bloch’s focus on Japanese religion, specifically Shintō and Buddhism. Firstly, it ignores the influence of Confucian and Taoist beliefs in the history of Japanese religion, as well as that of indigenous religious alternatives such as shamanism and the New Religions, as well as exogenous ones, e.g. Christianity.

¹⁷ This critique is given implicit support in a remark by Graeber (2001: 239) that the only thing about Merina ritual Bloch’s work fails to address is its magical element, which corresponds to the instrumental component of Gellner’s scheme.

Secondly, neither of the dominant traditions to which Bloch does refer can be said to be monolithic, as each encompasses a diversity of doctrine which (if we are to apply Gellner's categorization) serves all three ritual functions—soteriological (Zen meditation), social (oversight of community funerals and festivals), and magical (the sale of protective amulets). Related to this second point is the fact that the mutual independence of Shintō and Buddhism itself is of comparatively recent vintage, dating only from the Meiji era (cf. Grapard 1984). Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, Bloch likely overstates the influence of religion in Japanese society, while virtually ignoring its widely reported secularism.

Given that Bloch's essay is specifically framed as an attempt to develop a theory of religion, this last criticism might seem misdirected. Yet, Bloch's ambition is clearly to argue the centrality of religion even in secular contexts, or rather, at a cognitive level,¹⁸ so this last criticism is valid. Yet while it is true that Japan is often characterized as a secular country, such statements tend to refer to surveys of belief, rather than practice. I would argue that Bloch could in fact have *strengthened* his theory by drawing on secular rituals in the application of his model to the Japanese case. Many community festivals, for example, are seen by Japanese as secular rituals 'largely lacking explicit religious significance but replete with social meaning' (Bestor

¹⁸ More recently, Bloch has developed his argument in such a way that the transcendental role filled by 'religion' has been replaced by 'the capacity to imagine other worlds' (2008).

1985: 131).¹⁹ At a larger scale, the ritual veneration of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu at household shrines, New Year decorations, shrine visits at New Year, funeral dress (all recognized by Japanese as traditions of a national culture) have recently themselves been argued to be ‘invented traditions.’ Iwamoto argues that they were the result of specific cultural initiatives by the Meiji government in the first decades of the twentieth century, paving the way for public displays of loyalty and patriotism (2008).

In fact, the only practice approaching ‘secular ritual’ status in Bloch’s treatment is the commensality involved in the consumption of meat or raw fish ‘in certain types of restaurants or bars mainly patronised by men.’ He refers to this as ‘a kind of secular aggressive ritual’ (Bloch 1992: 60), calling to mind the concluding feasts of the initiation rituals he explored earlier in the book, among the Orokaiva of Papua New Guinea.²⁰ As will be clear from the earlier discussion of the consumption that attends the feasting after the *dezome* ritual (and, indeed, following most firefighter events,

¹⁹ Gellner does not explicitly treat secular ritual in his scheme. However, as he ‘does not define religion in terms of belief, but in terms of what is done’ (1999: 142), there seems to be no difficulty to its inclusion. Following Moore and Myerhoff (1977), secular ritual may be said to have the same functional, or ‘operational’ efficacy of establishing *communitas* and containing conflict, and therefore be congruent with Durkheimian ‘social’ ritual of Gellner’s categorical division of ritual labour.

²⁰ Bloch’s adaptation (from ornithology) of the term ‘piscivorous’ as a culturally appropriate gloss for the carnivorous consumption of this-worldly vitality found in his other examples has been seen as one of his more procrustean suggestions (though the ‘rizzivorous’ alternative proposed by Ohnuki-Tierney (1992: 18) hardly seems less so). Although it lies outside the scope of this thesis, I suspect that an application of Bloch’s model to the historical case of the Suwa religious cult, through whose practices meat-eating was reconciled with Buddhist tenets, would yield interesting insights for understanding medieval Japanese society and religion (cf. Grumbach 2005).

whose training practices, I have suggested above as being heavily ritualized), Bloch's formal parallel between ritual feasting in New Guinea and Japanese consumption may not be so far-fetched as his critics have suggested. Of course, such commensality is not limited to Japanese firefighters—feasting and drinking is an important corollary to most organized associational practice in Japanese community life, as well as characteristic of much semi-obligatory after-hours socializing (see Atsumi 1975). Bloch makes the general case. It is nevertheless worth noting that the context of such consumption is not a completely generalized activity, but tends to follow heavily regimented contexts, (e.g., meetings, ceremonies, training exercises, or simply the workplace) which need not directly implicate religion.

Bloch's mistake, I believe, was to situate such feasting within a Shintō frame, instead of situating Shintō within a social frame. My suggestion that the *dezome* parade drew initially on the route used by the Shintō procession is a way of saying that both practices attempt to play the same social function, through the same techniques of ceremony. Other parallels may be made between the firefighters' ceremonies and those of the Merina, if only by analogy. Although we have seen the changes that have occurred in the ceremony over time, they are nevertheless, like the Merina circumcision ritual, 'perceived as totally non-creative; for the participants it is a matter of following a formula' (Bloch 1986: 104). Where the Merina ritual emphasises that this-worldly existence is 'seen as one of dirt, chaotic disorder,

unpredictability, and immorality' (1986: 170) , the speeches of the authorities emphasize the ever-present danger of chaos in the form of disaster, the transience and precariousness of the status quo. The Merina ritual, above all, implicitly supports and legitimates authority.

If ritual legitimises political authority, and is therefore utilised by those in power, then we need to explain the imperative behind the relatively powerless taking part. To understand this we have to come to terms with 'identity' and 'self'. Bloch suggests that among the Merina 'Traditional authority implies a total order of which both superior and inferior are a part though in different degree ... [in accepting traditional authority] one is aligning oneself with a virtue that is believed to be, in the end, the source of one's own true self' (1986: 169–70). Within the ritual, all Merina, rulers and ruled, are depicted as conquerors as well as conquered (1986: 192–3). In *dezome*, the state symbols of the flag and national anthem are situated within a totalizing hierarchy through the etiquette and protocol of salutes and bowing. Less abstractly, politicians at the municipal, prefectural, and national levels all wear the same organizational *happi*, asserting their own organizational kinship with the men and women of the brigade, and situating themselves in positions of relative seniority and authority.

8 ENTANGLED INDIVIDUALS: VERNACULAR MODELS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY, AND THEIR LIMITS

Rekishi-jō jibun no ishi de nyūdan shita hito wa imasen. [In all of history, there's not a person who has joined the brigade of their own volition.]

—Post to a firefighter's web forum by YASASHII_HIKESHI, 4 November 2006¹

[A neighbor] received fish and a bottle of sake as compensation for volunteer labor, tried to refuse it on account of she couldn't go herself, upon which one of the neighborhood association workers told her sarcastically that if passing up a bottle of sake would let her off volunteer labor everyone would go without it.

—Hirabayashi Taiko (1905-1972), Suwa diary (2009 [1945]: 400)

The membership practices of ostensibly 'voluntary' associations in Japan have often challenged description as such. To some extent, this is a legacy of Japan's authoritarian past. 'Perhaps only China since the revolution (using the same Confucian-culture box of tricks),' wrote Dore, 'has ever perfected to the same extent as Japan in the 1930s the art of the "voluntary" organization that everyone automatically belongs to' (1978: 49). The wartime anecdote, quoted in the epigraph above, of the radical author Hirabayashi Taiko,² during evacuation to her childhood home in Suwa to escape raids over Tokyo, while far removed from the contemporary

¹ From a post on a board inviting brigade members to share their experiences on the popular 2-channel bulletin board [<http://nsvip.blog53.fc2.com/blog-entry-243.html>]. The poster's online identity might be translated as 'KINDLY_FIREMAN'.

² 'Volunteer labour' (*giyū rōdō*) here refers to the efforts of the Citizens' Volunteer Corps (*kokumin giyūtai*), which subsumed Japan's various wartime labour mobilization associations in March 1945. This translation stretches the English usage of 'volunteer' (even in its patriotic mode) to accommodate the Japanese *giyū*, as membership was legally mandatory for all males between the ages of fifteen and sixty, and all females between the ages of seventeen and forty (Shillony 1981: 82-83).

experience of civic engagement in the twenty-first century, continues to speak to the essential paradox of private participation in public life: the reconciliation of the individual interest with that of the collective. Even today, the practices of such *de facto* civic groups as local parent-teacher associations, in which ‘all guardians are “automatically” considered members’ (Nakano 2005: 105), and neighbourhood residents’ associations, whose membership rates often exceed ninety per cent (Pekkanen and Tsujinaka 2008: 707), can blur the lines between formal and informal institutional structures to the extent that membership can only be actively rejected at the risk of social reproof. The relatively recent recognition of the possibilities of public engagement to address social problems has generated widespread interest in innovative models that assert their dissimilarity from existing associational norms. Such exceptions, however, only prove the wider rule of an orthodox civic sphere of local ‘voluntary’ practices that are ironically characterized not by freedom but constraint.

There is a widespread belief that the fire brigade, too, once followed this normatively ascriptive model, but that the ‘good old days’ of such universal participation are past. Participation in the brigade, this view holds, was informed by an autonomous politics of mutual aid and self-reliance. An eldest son’s failure to join was said to have had a negative reflection on his household’s community standing. This notion came up regularly not only in conversations with brigade members, but

also with informants in the wider community. In the explanation of one local educator, who himself had no direct experience of the brigade:

I'm no expert mind you, but when you became of age, every young man (women didn't serve in the past)... was supposed to join the fire brigade, unless he suffered a disability or something—in such a case, it was automatically admitted that you could not belong to the fire brigade.³ We believed, you see, that we should defend ourselves, take care of ourselves, through our own efforts.

This idealistic if frank explanation echoes the nostalgic recollection of one of Haddad's informants, a brigade chief who recalled that 'when he was young, all the men joined their volunteer fire department. Becoming a volunteer firefighter had high status and was pretty automatic. Everyone felt a responsibility to join' (Haddad 2010: 53). Both men felt that this previous spirit of responsibility was on the wane, on its way to becoming if not already replaced by an individualistic ethos that did not appreciate the common good. As argued in Chapter 4, however, membership has been limited since the nationalization of the brigade system in 1894. There are thus strong grounds for doubting that this ideal of universal membership has ever been realized in practice. Such claims, rather, arise from social norms whose origins predate the organization itself, and whose cultural ramifications reach far beyond it.

Yet while informants often drew on this nostalgic trope to reflect on such abstractions as 'the spirit of the age', it had little relevance to their own particular situations. For every lament about the passing of 'the good old days' when joining the

³ Present regulations continue to exclude from membership individuals who do not satisfy standardized physical and mental requirements; see Appendix 3, Article 4.

brigade was a matter of course, there is a practised anecdote about waking up after what was to be an innocent evening of friendly drinks with a hangover, a *happi*, and a hazy recollection of someone's spontaneous suggestion of a firehouse visit. Such familiar clichés are probably related more often than they are personally experienced (though they are certainly not unknown, as attested by the personal experience of at least two informants). Nevertheless, in the repetition of such stories to each other, there is an implicit recognition among brigade members that the choice to participate had not been theirs alone, but bound up in ties of mutual obligation to family, friends, and neighbours. There is a sense, moreover, that it was ever thus—hence the wry acknowledgement above, by the anonymous YASASHII_HIKESHI, that the brigade has always been a mug's game.

Their mutual incongruities notwithstanding, both narratives are used by moralists who see the brigade's current recruitment crisis as a symptom of a wider cultural decay: either today's youth are no longer sufficiently civic-minded to join the brigade on their own initiative, or they are so far gone that they cannot even be press-ganged into service. Yet while the institutional changes effected by wider social transformations have been felt gradually over many decades, it is only recently, as the pool of potential recruits in many communities has dwindled to the critical minimum for basic organizational replacement, that the brigade's status—as a legally

mandated voluntary organization—has suddenly been recognized as a contradiction in terms.

The revelation of this paradox at this historical juncture speaks to the second puzzle addressed by this thesis: *Why is the fire brigade in decline (when volunteering is on the rise)?* When this puzzle was identified in the Introduction, I noted the apparent discrepancy between the widely reported renaissance in civic engagement in Japan and the ongoing decline in participation rates in fire brigades. As a longstanding expression of community involvement, I wondered, why should it not benefit from this general trend? Yet the foregoing suggests that perhaps this is not a puzzle at all. In Chapter 7, I proposed that the brigade's historical and ongoing ties to the state are a source of deep ambivalence. Despite the devolution of the brigade to municipal control (see Chapter 4), and its attempts to embrace new strategies and redefine its role in the face of a changing society, the rituals and symbols by which the brigade defines itself reinforce an authoritarian ideology that many Japanese feel belongs to another era. Given these inclinations, with the advent of real choice and diversity in forms of volunteering engagement, it seems likely that those who once might have been most likely to seek out the brigade have made other choices.

In the context of concerns over the organization's future in a changing society, it seems that it would be a constructive contribution to attempt to clarify the dynamics of organizational membership. At a more theoretical level, the brigade's

situation presents a touchstone for ethical questions of freedom and responsibility, and the position of the individual vis-à-vis the group—questions central not only to the anthropology of Japan, but to the discipline as a whole. This final chapter therefore takes up the question of the extent to which membership in the brigade should be considered ‘voluntary’.

8.1 Voluntarism and civil society

This question has particular implications for studies of civil society, whether defined negatively as ‘the organized nonstate, nonmarket sector’ (Pekkanen 2006), or more positively as ‘social organisations occupying the space between the household and the state that enable people to co-ordinate their management of resources and activities’ (Layton 2006). Both definitions are founded on implicit or explicit assumptions regarding the institutional mechanisms by which collective practices are co-ordinated and controlled. In these two definitions, Pekkanen, the political scientist, locates such constraints in the formal legal apparatus of state bureaucracy; Layton, the anthropologist, in the informal realm of customary practice and social structure. Both authors argue that it is within the limits defined by these institutions that specific traditions of civil society take shape. Yet, the *substantive* content of what is called civil society, ultimately, is its constituent practices. As framed by David Gellner in a recent discussion of its expression in the context of South Asia, civil society is a sphere of ‘associative (self-chosen) action that is neither part of the state nor undertaken for economic reasons. Associative action *is individually chosen and*

may be freely renounced: no one should be forced to belong or act on the grounds of ascribed characteristics' (Gellner 2009b: 8-9, my emphasis).

This tension—between institutional constraint (whether formal or informal) and individual freedom (both positive and negative)—reminds us that discussions of civil society are fundamentally discussions about structure and agency, and prompts us to look more closely at two key assumptions undergirding the idea of civil society as constituted by relations freely chosen and renounced. The first of these, of course, is how freedom is defined. In Gellner's statement, which may be taken as representative, this seems to mean freedom from 'force'—which common sense would hold to be the threat of physical violence, either immediate or as latently embodied in the state (e.g., through laws, the military, the police). Upon reflection, however, this definition seems inadequate on at least two counts. On the one hand, as a technique for compelling behaviour, violence is the least subtle of many options. In Japan, moreover, where interactions are marked by acute awareness of interpersonal obligation (and thus, an understanding of its manipulation) violence may even be seen as the clumsiest and most ineffective means of exerting pressure. On the other hand, civil society is by definition 'outside' the state. While this does not imply that its arenas are necessarily extra-legal, the examples of the fire brigade's (sometimes violently expressive) regulatory function (discussed in Chapter 7) as well as the examples cited earlier of nightclubs and frontier areas (Layton 2006: 70, see Chapter

5), demonstrate that state institutions can be willing to pull back when informal means of social control prove effective and publicly acceptable. It follows, then, that any useful conception of freedom must account for types and vectors of compulsion beyond the physical or legal threat of force.

One such definition, which seems to provide a useful way of approaching this problem, is the classic sociological model of freedom advanced by Georg Simmel (2009 [1908]). For Simmel, freedom was neither an *a priori* nor a permanent state, but rather a capacity—a ‘reserve of strengths, commitments, interests’—which emerged from and was maintained through the constant interplay of competitive interests. Subjective freedom was not passive, but had to be actively defined and defended against the variegated, relentless, and indifferently exploitative demands of external interests, regardless of their compatibility with a subject’s own desires. From an objective perspective, because all subjective interests were equally aggressive towards and dominating of other subjects, freedom could only have meaning as the subject’s continuous struggle for independence from external obligations, and for the right to exert its own—that is, in the power relations of bound and binding subjects. ‘[Freedom] rises above and against a bond, and remains then as a reaction against this meaning, consciousness, and value’ (Simmel 2009 [1908], 1: 80-82). While this sociological idea of freedom is surely at odds with normative definitions of political freedom current in much of civil society discourse, its basis in intersubjectivity rather

than individualism suggests that it may help clarify the analytical deployment of civil society in settings where cultural norms differ from those characteristic of the West. In this sense, it seems particularly relevant to the case of Japan, where the notion of freedom (*jiyū*), insofar as it is positively valued, is understood relationally, while the concept of absolute freedom—if not dismissed as illusion—is seen as selfishness (cf. Doi 1973: 84-95).

A second assumption underlying the idea of civil society as a voluntary sphere of activity concerns the analytic fiction that separates it from other spheres. For his own part, Gellner rightly acknowledges that politics informs action at all levels of analysis, and that ‘the messiness of everyday life’ will inevitably trump the (comparatively) neat models of social scientists. However, the inherently activist nature of civil society, as an ethical—and therefore transcendent—project, would seem to present special difficulties. Because its practices are grounded in ongoing, mutually overlapping interpersonal relationships, they are necessarily informed by moral positions which cannot themselves be segregated from other spheres of activity. This suggests that the normative values which inhere to specific instances of ‘civil society’ cannot be derived from (and are irreducible to) those presupposed by its analytic definitions. It follows that ‘civil society’ cannot be understood in isolation from the family, market, or state, i.e. those spheres of activity against which it is defined—any alternative would require a model of sociality in which the will of the

individual is somehow construed separately from social identity. That this is impossible is suggested by the fact that, even in the limiting case of a purely bilateral, non-overlapping relationship, an agent's decision to enter into or withdraw from an associative relationship has a transformative impact not only on the external relationship, but also on that of the subject with itself.

A coherent picture of civil society, then, must do more than simply acknowledge the embeddedness of its practices within the total social field; because they necessarily happen over time, these practices must also be recognized as ongoing exercises in self-formation. To illustrate these issues more concretely, this final chapter will take up the situations of two members of the fire brigade, both of which challenge any easy categorizations.

8.2 Two stories

8.2.1 Shinji

Nakamura Shinji, a metallurgist in his early forties, is the longest-serving member of both Second Division and the town brigade in general (though not the oldest). His family has deep roots in the local area, and to any inhabitant of Suwa District of a certain age, his surname places him as a Shimosuwa native (a Nagano almanac confirms the town to have the highest concentration of Nakamuras in the prefecture). Due in equal parts to his extended family's ubiquity and his youthful, even puckish character, Shinji was known to the brigade and the community at large

primarily by his first name, and only formally referred to or addressed as Nakamura-*san*.

While I was with the division, Shinji was publicly recognized at the New Year's *dezome* ceremony (see Chapter 7) with an award for twenty-five years of continuous service. He was a legacy member, having served as vice-captain eight years earlier, but the dearth of recruits necessitated that he re-enlist. Even though he had been promoted to a management position at a nearby metallurgical plant, and often travelled abroad to Southeast Asia for his employer, he was happy to continue his association with the brigade, which had become a significant part of his social identity. He often wore T-shirts emblazoned with the logos of fire departments in various American cities, and maintained an online blog called 'Put out the Fire', after a popular song by the British rock band, Queen.

Shinji had joined the brigade immediately upon graduating from a local technical high school at the age of eighteen. This decision, he explains, was heavily influenced by his father, a local tailor who had also served on the brigade:

My father was in the division before I was born. His father had died when he was a young man, so he'd had to work hard. He still joined though. He rose as high as squad leader, but then there was some sort of disagreement—I'm not familiar with the details. It wasn't that he didn't get along with his teammates, but in any case he didn't become an officer, and he quit.

From the time I was a junior high school student, my father was telling me that I should join the brigade (*shōbō yatta hō ga ii zo*). So, when I graduated, I enlisted straightaway—I was pumped (*yaruki de ii*). But I was the only one to join that year. I tried it out, but, well, my classmates from high school—those guys thought the brigade

was pretty lame (*shōbō nanka-tte iya da*). Still, I'd been told by my father to join, and so I did. But there I was, eighteen, and the rest of the division were all oldsters. Not just older—ancient! Not a man under forty, no one even close to my age. It wasn't enjoyable, then, at the beginning, so I didn't really participate. My friends teased me about that, too, after I'd talked so much about joining.

For the next four or five years, Shinji attended brigade activities only sporadically. He preferred to involve himself in the social life of the community by participating in his neighbourhood's *nagamochi* club during local festivals (see Chapter 6). Eventually, however, circumstances conspired to pull him back into the brigade:

One day at *nagamochi* practice one of my old classmates casually mentioned that he'd joined the brigade. He was going to the training! At eighteen, they were too good for it, but at twenty-two, twenty-three, three guys joined. I'd joined right after high school, but hadn't been going the whole time, but when they joined, I felt that I had to start going again.

Comparing his original impetus for joining the brigade with his decision to return, Shinji's stated motivations seem mixed, if not contradictory. On the one hand, while his father's influence was sufficient to override the derision of his schoolmates, neither it nor his own inclinations were sufficient to inspire dedication to the brigade for its own sake. The deciding factor in his eventual change of heart, no doubt alleviated by the prospect of the society of age mates and the realization in practice of his father's desires, seems to have been his concern not to be found wanting by his peers. He phrased his situation as a question of confidence:

Until I'd graduated high school, I'd been just a kid, you know? When I graduated, it wasn't like I was suddenly a fully-fledged adult (*shakaijin*). Back then, I had no self-confidence. That's why I joined the fire brigade—same as with the *nagamochi*.

Joining meant I was able to get to know my *senpai* in the community. I wanted to quickly be able to take my place as a member of the community (*chiiki no naka de ichininmae ni naritakatta*), but I lacked confidence. It wasn't like I didn't have a lot of friends, though. But you see... my grandfather died when my father was quite young, and so my father had a hard life, right? His own father had died, so he'd had to make his own way from a young age. That's what he taught me. Those were the stories I'd listened to. Maybe I was overly concerned about it for that reason.

Shinji's twin desires to measure up in the eyes of both family and community were thus interrelated. As we continued our conversation, family took on greater salience, especially as we discussed his perceptions about why recruitment levels were falling.

In this community, as with anywhere else, there are naturally people whose families have lived here for generations—parents, grandparents, and so on. Even me, if I couldn't join the brigade, or if I were someone who didn't like the brigade—because, to each his own, right? Some people hate the brigade without a clear reason. —Even then, if something were to happen, I think people would naturally expect that it's the brigade's job to help out. Others, however—young couples who move in from outside, from a different place—if you ask them they might not really get involved (*nakanaka kyōryoku shite kurenai*). They also aren't caught up in their parents' social entanglements (*oya no shigarami mo nai*).

This was a word with which I was unfamiliar. Noting my confusion, Shinji asked me if I understood what he meant by *shigarami*.⁴ Grasping at the context, I asked if they might not be like *kizuna* (bonds of friendship). He opened his mouth to agree, and then paused, evidently dissatisfied with the analogy. He allowed that the two were similar, but there was a significant difference, easier to illustrate than explain:

⁴ This word is discussed in more detail below.

So, I joined the brigade because my father told me to, right? And I joined my father's division, serving under people who were junior to him when he was in the brigade. [If I hadn't joined] people would be saying to him 'So why isn't that son of yours pulling his weight on the brigade?'

You know the saying 'give your father face' (*oyaji no kao o tateru*)? It means that you want to make him happy. When he goes out, when he's drinking with his mates, I wanted him to be able to say, 'My boy's joined the brigade, I'm counting on you [to take care of him].' That's what I mean by *shigarami*. But newcomers, they don't have that problem—if they don't participate, nobody is going to complain.

As Shinji saw it, newcomers to the community were free to involve themselves, or not, as they chose, without having to worry about how their actions reflected on these wider networks of family obligation. While *shigarami* were, in his estimation, a fact of existence, they were relevant to the brigade only insofar as they overlapped with other territorial relationships. Newcomers to the community, whose ties were primarily to discrete concerns in the world outside, were thus able to enjoy a relatively private life, free of the entanglements that might pull them into relationships they might otherwise avoid. This did not mean that newcomers necessarily shunned local community associations, of course, and we both knew men who had joined the brigade out of their own interest. The flip side of such individualistic engagement, however, was that there were no guarantees that such men would stick it out. ('If you join on your own,' advises a veteran to a prospective recruit in an online forum, 'whether you decide to quit or not depends on your character. If you join because of *shigarami*, though, you're stuck in until you retire.') To Shinji's mind, however, that this was an issue at all was a direct result of the

brigade's numbers continuing to fall. In his father's day, Shinji told me, the brigade had had no problems securing new recruits.

Back then, well, you couldn't just sign up for the brigade at will—everybody wanted to join. Men would come by with a gift of *sake* and ask to be allowed to join. That's what my father said, at least. The old brigade was strong—If you were in the brigade, you were strong—in the town, you know? Those guys were... how should I put it.... The town, the community, everyone relied on them. Yes, there was strength in the brigade then, sure enough....

In the old days, the older guys back when I was young, I feel like they knew more about firefighting—awareness, technique, that sort of thing. There were more fires back then, right? The buildings were constructed with different materials. But, well, lately the fire brigade has its own role, and we're not supposed to do the same as the firefighters from the station—it's too dangerous. But back then... back then even if it was a little dangerous, well, I think the brigade played more of a part (*unto yatta yō na ki ga suru*). Now, we're more like support... basically volunteers. If there's an accident, if someone is injured or dies, it's a real problem. Someone has to be held responsible. In the old brigade, even if something like that were to happen, it wouldn't go to the courts or whatever, the way it might now. Not that it's a bad thing—it's better, I think. If it weren't [the way it is now], it would be troubling—these are different times. Nobody would take the job.

It struck me that this pragmatism rather contradicted the surrogate nostalgia with which he had described the brigade in his father's day. When I asked Shinji how he felt that the present brigade measured up to its antecedents, however, he remained positive.

The spirit (*seishin*) is still there, I think. That alone remains. For example, a few years ago we had severe rains and flooding, remember? It was pretty rough—for our own households, as well. But even so, we put on our *happi* and went out for the brigade, right? Suppose a big earthquake hit. Houses would collapse, the power would be cut, the waterworks would be suspended—it would be rough for everyone. Even so, the fellows on the brigade would first make sure their own families were safe—either get their siblings to look after the kids, or ask the neighbours for their help. Every one of the guys, even if their own houses had collapsed, once their families were out of danger, they'd put on their *happi* and head out.

I asked Shinji whether he considered the fire brigade to be an instance of enlightened self-interest, a way to help both himself and the community. However, while he allowed the possibility that some might have joined out of such an abstract desire (though he knew of no one who fit this description), Shinji was quite clear that his had been no such intentions:

I didn't join the brigade to *accomplish* anything. I don't think that if I work hard as a firefighter the town's going to get any better—when something happens, I just do the job. I didn't join out of any particular desire to help the community. I'm not in the brigade to be a volunteer. I joined because my father told me to. I joined because I wanted to make friends and drink *sake*. And while I was a member, I learned how to handle the hose, how to work the fire engine... and somehow, imperceptibly, it came to be that when the need arises, I just feel that it's our duty to take care of it—like it's my job. But I didn't think about any of that when I joined. That came later.

Shinji's account complicates what has already become a murky distinction between voluntarism and obligation in its acknowledgement that he has been changed by his experience on the brigade—that the reasons for which he had joined were not, ultimately, those which maintained his commitment. For Shinji, the brigade is no longer simply a means to an end, either personally or collectively. Rather, as a symbolic identity, it has become an end in itself. He feels no sense of contradiction between his initial hesitancy towards the brigade and his sense of himself as a man who honours the wider obligations of family, because, in hindsight, through an interpretive lens that sees family and community as inextricable, it is not a contradiction at all.

8.2.2 Shinohara-san

Towards the end of my fieldwork, during a final visit before I was to leave the field, my friend Kimiko, a high school teacher whom I had known since soon after my first arrival in Japan, urged me to meet an acquaintance of hers who had recently joined the fire brigade in a rural community to the south of Lake Suwa. The man in question was the husband of a friend and former colleague of hers. Kimiko told me that I might find his situation interesting, as he was not the type she normally associated with the brigade. I agreed, and she arranged for us to meet at a local family restaurant, which would also give her a chance to catch up with her old friend, who had recently given birth.

In his early forties, Shinohara Yukio is the eldest son of what may be seen as a fairly traditional Japanese family. Though he has two elder sisters, he soon expects (is expected) to succeed his father in managing the household business, a *sake* brewery founded by his great-great-grandfather in 1864. His marriage, to the eldest daughter of the owner of a locally prominent *miso* (soy bean paste) manufacturer, was arranged by their respective families through the traditional practice of *omiai*, a former teacher and family friend acting as a go-between (*nakōdo*).⁵

⁵ *Omiai* marriage privileges the family relationship (and, by extension, that of family enterprise) over individual sentiment (Tokuhiro 2010: 93-99) and is increasingly rare. Between 2000 and 2005, only 6.2% of (first) marriages were arranged in this way, having steadily declined in frequency since the 1930s, when well over half of registered marriages were *omiai* (IPSS 2006).

During our interview, conducted in Japanese, I was struck by Shinohara-san's quiet, contemplative demeanour. Whereas his family background conforms closely to the traditional stereotype of the 'old middle class' of small business families, tightly knit into the fabric of local social hierarchies,⁶ his educational background is atypical. Halfway through our interview, I was startled (perhaps naively) to learn that not only was he a graduate of one of Japan's most prestigious private universities, but that he had also taken a postgraduate degree in history at an elite British institution. Misinterpreting my surprise, he explained his reasons for his choice of discipline:

Many sons in my position end up studying business management or economics, but I knew that I'd be coming back to take over the business anyway, so I could learn that sort of thing on the job. I was really interested in Japan's wartime experience and I wanted to study history. After graduating in Tokyo, I wasn't quite ready to go home. I also wanted an outside perspective on Japan—that's important, I think. I was in the English debating club in university, and I wasn't enthusiastic about America, so I went to England.

When I remarked that it must be unusual for someone with his experience to join the fire brigade, Shinohara-san admitted that until he returned to Japan following his stay in England, the idea of enlisting in the brigade was never something that had entered his mind. He rather described the process by which he was enlisted as being 'sort of automatic' (*jidōteki na koto datta*). When he returned

⁶ The popular sociological distinction between a 'new middle class' of (most recently) white-collar salaried employees and an 'old middle class' of self-employed and small-business and land-owners is longstanding in the social science of post-war Japan (cf. Fukutake 1962: 28-29; Vogel 1971). In practice, however, the class and community boundaries described by 'new' and 'old' are symbolic, rather than temporal (Bestor 1989: 261-66), better understood through contingent discourses of 'modernity' and 'tradition' than any objective economic or vocational criteria. See, e.g. Ambaras (1998) for a discussion of a 'new middle class' in Meiji Japan.

home in the autumn of 2000, and word spread quickly that he had moved back to stay, within a matter of weeks he received a visit from the sergeant of the local division asking if he would consent to putting his name in for the brigade. ‘They were very apologetic about it, and didn’t really expect me to participate. I didn’t have to do anything, in fact—they just wanted to register me to make the numbers up, so that others could retire from the brigade.’

Unsure of whether or not he was obliged to join, Shinohara-san consulted with his father:

My father’s position was that it was fine by him if I didn’t join (*hairanakute ii*). In the old days, if you tried to avoid this kind of community association, your parents would tell you to rethink your decision, but my father has always gone his own way. In fact, he hated the brigade. He had joined for a few months when he was younger but decided that it wasn’t for him—he didn’t even stay a full year. He didn’t get on with the other members (*nakayoku narenakatta*).

This was not surprising. As a student at the same prestigious university attended by his son, the elder Shinohara had been politically active in the student movements of the late 1960s, and found himself ill-suited to the hierarchical, authoritarian structure of the brigade. His radical principles brought about communicative problems with the other men on the division as well. As Shinohara-san put it, ‘They had completely different interests. My father wanted to

talk politics. He didn't know how to relate to the others. They only wanted to drink, talk farming and share gossip. In his opinion, it wasn't constructive in the least.⁷

Despite his father's disinclination, the younger Shinohara consented to become a nominal member of the brigade. For almost seven years, he had little to no direct involvement, devoting his time to his own interests and taking night courses in business administration. His lack of interest in the brigade notwithstanding, however, he involved himself in other areas of community life, and was involved on several committees of the local branch of the Japanese Junior Chamber (*Nihon Seinen Kaigisho*), a nationwide philanthropic service association for young entrepreneurs similar to Rotary.⁸ Nevertheless, he explained, after several years, he still felt an uncomfortable sense of being treated as a *de facto* outsider in more quotidian community affairs:

I'm a *sake* brewer, so I need to be accepted locally—I mean, in a sense this is good business because the locals are also my customers. But I felt that I was a step removed from local leaders, from the people who get things moving at local events, you know?

⁷ The elder Shinohara's experience was shared by others of his generation who had similar political backgrounds. Another informant, who had returned from university in the 1960s to take over his family business after his father's death, told me that when he returned home, he had assumed that he was honour-bound to join the brigade, and so had asked a relative to arrange it. However, when his uncle mooted the prospect with the commander, he was rebuffed, the implication being that the presence of a university graduate would disrupt the camaraderie of the brigade. For a contemporary account of Zengakuren, the All-Japan Federation of Student Self-Governing Bodies, see McCormack (1971).

⁸ Unlike the Youth Division (*seinenbu*) of a municipal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in which participants are representatives of corporate members, participation in the Junior Chamber is on a personal, individual basis. In many communities, the organization promotes local environmental initiatives, promotes candidates' debates during election campaigns, and organizes self-development activities for young people, such as camping trips and speech contests.

It's not that I didn't want to get involved, but I just didn't feel that it was my place. I guess it was a lack of confidence. It was a kind of complex—a problem within myself (*watashi no kimochi no mondai*). I felt that, without the acceptance of others, I wasn't able to engage. I couldn't take the lead even if I wanted to because I wasn't fulfilling my duties as a member of the community. The difference between the fire brigade and the Junior Chamber is that with the fire brigade, you participate physically—not just by paying money.

This feeling of alienation was a concern for Shinohara-san, who dreams of reinvigorating what he fears is becoming a moribund community. 'The number of children that enter school each year has dropped by more than half from when I was young,' he observed. 'Everybody leaves, but they can't help it—there's nothing for them here. Once people leave, it's only those who have family businesses that end up coming back. Everyone else is in Tokyo.'

When Shinohara-san discussed these concerns with the company's vice-president (a close friend of his father's, but not otherwise related to the family), he learned that this man disagreed with the elder Shinohara's position regarding the fire brigade. 'He said my father had learned the wrong lesson from his experience. My father saw it as a waste of time, but it's also an opportunity.' Armed with this insight, Shinohara-san approached the brigade about participating in earnest, rather than simply as a paper member, and began showing up to training meetings, which in his division's case were little more than equipment inspections, held twice a month. 'In principle, we could basically get through what we need to accomplish in about ten minutes, but then we end up eating and drinking and talking for hours. It's often midnight by the time we come home.'

More than the time commitment, however, it was participating in the banter at the brigade practices that Shinohara-san ranked as the most challenging aspect:

So far as conversation goes, I still think it's a waste of time—it's usually nothing but gossip and complaints about people who don't show up. I think most people probably want to leave themselves, but nobody wants to be the first to go. But even though it's not interesting, the time we spend talking is still important—it's not a reason not to join.

Young people who haven't joined feel that talking with people that they might not like presents a problem. They don't like vertical relations (*jōge kankei*) and they don't like personal ties of obligation (*hitodzukiai*). In the brigade, you have to socialize with your superiors, and with people you might not get along with. Younger people avoid such situations, I think.

Although he had only been participating in the brigade for two years, Shinohara-san was cautiously optimistic about his time on the brigade being a wise investment. He felt that he had won a measure of respect by making the decision to participate actively, and while he was still a junior member (though by no means the youngest), he felt more confident in his interactions with the community, and had recently helped organize a local fair in conjunction with the arrival of cherry blossom season. Though he had admitted that he had yet to be called to the scene of a fire, Shinohara-san suggested that 'being on the fire brigade has almost nothing to do with fires—it's mostly about learning to interact with people (*hitodzukiai ni nareru tame*).'

Despite this positive conclusion, a brief message I received from Shinohara-san's wife, via Kimiko, several days later serves as a necessary postscript:

I thought that it might have been good if I had told you a little more about the state of mind of a fire brigade member's wife. Things like... not to spend so much time 'training', which is just what they call their drinking parties. I want him to help out with the household chores and with raising our son. When he's out, I can't even take a bath

because I'm taking care of the baby alone. I could accept it if they pursued their training and inspections efficiently and with purpose—this could even be done with only a few people. These may be just gripes (*tada no guchi kamo shirenai*), but they give insight into some problems facing rural society in Japan.

Mrs. Shinohara's concerns are representative of many in her situation, and serve as an important reminder of the conflicting demands that subjective commitments to participation in public life must negotiate, whether they are pursued instrumentally or otherwise.

8.3 Discussion: Entangled by shigarami

Although the experiences of Shinji and Shinohara-san are uniquely their own, each has many similarities to those of other brigade members, and both demonstrate the inadequacy of any simple distinction between instrumentalism and identity on the one hand, and between voluntary and ascriptive involvement on the other. Importantly, they resist these labels not only as matters of degree (we may expect some promiscuity of the 'messiness of everyday life'), but by remaining simultaneously faithful to opposite analytic categories. It would be easy, for example, to suggest that Shinji's heavy sense of obligation—of his own to his family, and of his family's to the neighbourhood—together with the educational and employment circumstances that led to his remaining in his native community, almost predestined him to joining the brigade. Yet his decision to participate in earnest only came when his immediate enjoyment became guaranteed. By contrast, Shinohara-san, while it is true that he was actively solicited by the brigade, nevertheless joined despite the fact

that he felt no such obligations towards the brigade, and indeed had every excuse to ignore its entreaties. Yet Shinohara-san's decision to begin participating in earnest, at least in part, was prompted by *his sense of the very absence of reciprocal ties*, and his perception that such ties could be instrumental both for self-development, and towards achieving political ends.

Shinji's invocation of *shigarami* is worth exploring here. Technically meaning 'weir' (i.e. stakes spanning a river to regulate water flow and obstruct flotsam), *shigarami* more often refers metaphorically to personal relationships which restrain, intercept, or otherwise check subjective agency or impartiality.⁹ Although he was the first to describe it to me, I later heard it used by the informants in the context of their own circumstances. Among my informants, the word seemed redolent in equal parts of fatalism, resentment, and also, as in Shinji's case, a sense of pride. Interestingly, this contrasts with the sense in which it is used by other Japanese. While younger and more cosmopolitan informants were unequivocal in evaluating such relationships negatively, older Japanese tended to be more philosophical, considering such ties to be inevitable. That the term is subject to such

⁹ One of many suggested etymologies suggested by Shōgakukan's *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten* (Japan's answer to the OED) derives from the combination of *shiba* (brushwood) + *karamu* (entwine). Although commonly written in the *hiragana* syllabary alone, *shigarami* can be written ideographically using a *kanji* also meaning 'fence,' 'fort,' or 'palisade'—giving some idea of the term's structural and restrictive connotations. In political discourse, *shigarami* threaten impartiality, and the word often appears in the context of allegations of influence-peddling or patronage abuse. In 2007, a celebrity comedian ran a successful gubernatorial campaign in Miyazaki Prefecture as the 'candidate without *shigarami*'. Nevertheless, in a recent poll of elected officials, only a third of respondents (11 of 33) disagreed with the contention that *shigarami* are an inevitable in politics, one respondent going so far as to note that 'Human society stripped of *shigarami* would be unfeasible' (Asahi Shinbun 2011).

value judgements explains the seeming incongruity between other descriptions of *shigarami* in Japanese ethnography, where they have been variously described as both unwelcome ‘emotional tangles’ interfering with the ideal of ‘smooth’, conflict-free relationships (Borovoy 2005: 96), and as a metaphor for the delicate ‘underlying structure of Japanese relationships’, which individuals protect ‘for fear that they will be excluded, or that they will not serve the good of the whole’ (Lo 1990: 48-50). These ties of obligation are distinct from *kizuna*, the ‘ties of friendship’ and identity which emerge from shared experience. My original guess that the two were synonymous was mistaken in that *kizuna* are not a cause, but an effect of associationalism.

The sociological truth which is neatly encapsulated in the idiom of *shigarami*—that the individual acts not alone, but with others, and in time—sits uneasily with models of civil society that presuppose what Ernest Gellner (1995: 41-42) referred to as the ‘modularity’ of modern individuals, i.e., their ability to enter into ‘specific, unsanctified, instrumental, [and] revocable’ relationships in order to achieve their desired ends. The ethnographic cases of Shinji and Shinohara-san might even be interpreted as evidence that *shigarami* are the antithesis of such modularity. Yet to arrive at such an interpretation requires the maintenance of the twin assumptions identified at the outset of this chapter—i.e. on the one hand, a normative definition of freedom that privileges the individual vis-à-vis the social; on the other, an instrumental focus on transformative practices that suffers an inverse

bias—privileging social transformation while discounting self-formation. By curbing these assumptions, and turning again to the cases described above, we may be able to use the analytical frame of civil society to understand the dynamics and limits that have characterized Japan's orthodox associationalism.

8.3.1 Confidence and joining behaviour

In these accounts, both men recollected their decision to join the brigade in terms of a perceived lack of self-confidence, which they felt they might overcome at least in part through participating in the group activity of the brigade. I found that this was also the case with other informants, many of whom independently described their motivations in similar terms, citing *jishin ga nakatta* ('I had no confidence'), *kimochi no mondai* ('a problem of disposition'), and *rettōkan* ('inferiority complex').

A particularly suggestive explanation of why this might be was suggested to me by Zeniya-san, a craftsman who had retired many years earlier as captain of his own division. Following his father's profession, Zeniya-san had lived his entire life in Shimosuwa's Seventh Ward as a carpenter, and although he had (in his own opinion) not enjoyed a very lucrative career, he had been heavily involved in the community, had served in almost every capacity during a lifetime of Onbashira festivals, and had no regrets. In his experience, he suggested to me with authority, a sense of inferiority (*rettōkan*) was central to the human empathy that was at the heart of the fire brigade. He illustrated this idea by way of a hypothetical contrast:

I'd say it's a sense of insecurity, know what I mean? Take a fellow who can't do much for himself—he looks at another and thinks, 'That guy has it pretty rough.' But a fellow who can get things done, who can do pretty much anything, when he looks at someone else, he just thinks 'He'll be fine.' Now, this guy who can't do anything—even when he's talking to you, he'll keep asking if you understand what he means, just to make sure.... [Communication could occur] because he felt like he was in trouble himself. If you're not in trouble yourself, you won't understand people's needs. I think that firefighting is a bit like that.

Zeniya-san alludes to the human condition of mutual dependence as the basis of the firefighting ethos. For him, the diffident, insecure individual is not only the recipient of mutual aid, but also ensures the possibility of its provision to others, and the consequent creation of interpersonal relationships of obligation. The confident, self-sufficient individual, conversely, is able to transcend these bonds, but does so only at the cost of denying their protective potential to both self and others.¹⁰

Few informants phrased their interpretations in such thoughtful or evocative terms as Zeniya-san, yet even those who offered more mundane or concrete discussions often attributed a sense of self-confidence to their experience in the brigade. One such example is that of Matsuzawa-san, a tyre salesman who had joined a division of the Okaya City brigade after moving to Suwa District from his family home in Iwate Prefecture:

¹⁰ Segawa Kiyoko, a folklorist who wrote extensively on young men's and women's associations in the pre-modern period, suggested that inferiority was a natural state for village youth, who 'never had enough strength to be independent; strong self-confidence was the sign of an inferiority complex' (1972: 52; quoted in Varner 1977: 460). When the appearance of self-confidence is proof of its own falsity, one may wonder whether Zeniya-san's hypothetical confident individual could ever exist in practice.

When I moved here, I mostly socialized with my work mates. One day, after going out for *ramen*, one guy on the brigade suggested we go to the firehouse—they had *sake*. While we were there, a few other guys from the division came around, and I stayed a bit longer... I drank too much, and thought I should go. But when I said I wanted to leave, I was told to look behind me. I looked, and someone neatly had laid out a *happi* and cap. My heart sank. I tried to back out, but everyone started clapping. There was nothing for it. I really didn't want to do it at first. I just wanted to keep my head down. But looking back, it's a great way of becoming known—I'm much more confident now. Now, in the groups around town, there will be someone there who already knows me, who will vouch for me.

The brigade offered a structured way of improving their personal self-confidence and preparedness to engage in social situations not just with the brigade, but with the community at large.

I may qualify these interpretations by saying that they were for the most part exclusive to those who had been in the brigade for decades, or had since retired. Only one of my younger informants, Nakata-san, who likened the *happi* to the donning of a mask, and the brigade to a 'school of life' (*jinsei no gakkō*) ever approached such psychologically inflected terms, and even he had been in the brigade eleven years.¹¹ Given this tendency, it is difficult to judge whether such interpretations have been made after the fact, as part of a self-ascribed and internalized identity narrative, as I have already suggested concerning Shinji's story above. They may, however, be seen to have some explanatory power—the associationalism of the brigade and cognate organizations being the structural expression of a psychological tendency. A general

¹¹ To suggest such a pattern, it is true, Shinohara-san's case must be seen as exceptional, but in many ways it is. Unlike those who for whom the brigade was simply another chance to get together, get some exercise, and have some fun while serving the community, Shinohara-san's motives were much more introspective.

argument along these lines will not be advanced here (and should in any case be left to the investigations of psychologists). An anthropological study, however, may justifiably draw on psychological insights in an attempt to contextualize the willingness of these men to advance such explanations as a social fact in and of itself.

The psychological concept of the ‘inferiority complex’ is associated with the work of the pioneering psychotherapist Alfred Adler (1870- 1937), whose school of ‘individual psychology’ provided the first systematic alternative to the tenets of his erstwhile teacher, Sigmund Freud. In the formal sense proposed by Adler, ‘inferiority’ (*Minderwertigkeit*) refers to the essential inadequacy of the individual in society, who is driven therefore by an ‘intensive striving for power’ over environment and peers—an existential state rooted in the earliest experiences of childhood (1927). These insights inform an essayistic attempt by philosopher Tzvetan Todorov to find strategies for the realization of individual fulfilment through coexistence, a project suggested in the title of his essay, *Life in Common* (2001). Todorov finds the Nietzschean phrasing in which Adler describes the behavioural dynamic of inferiority to be at odds with his equal, and more hopeful focus on cooperative actions ‘that do not arise from rivalry and that cannot be reduced to group plots against a superior’ (2001: 29-30). Todorov’s reading seeks to recover Adler’s vision of cooperative action from its strident idiom, suggesting that the motivations behind inferiority—which should be understood more correctly as ‘incompleteness’—stem

not from a drive for power, but for acknowledgement, renown, recognition (2001: 32-33). Todorov is content simply to identify this contradiction before salvaging Adler's ideas from their Nietzschean idiom and moving on. It is interesting, however, to note the essential complementarity of Adler's incomplete self with Simmel's sociological conception of freedom,¹² and of the symmetry of both with the Japanese concept of *shigarami*—all concepts guided by the recognition by the individual of the existence and desires of others. Todorov summarizes the position of Adler's colleague, Sándor Ferenczi, that 'No matter how profoundly we delve into the human spirit ... we never find an isolated being but only relationship with others' (39).¹³

Anthropologists should be justifiably suspicious of any attempt to shoehorn the experience of contemporary Japanese volunteers into the formal categories of early twentieth century Viennese psychoanalytic thought; even in English, the phrase 'inferiority complex' has long since entered idiomatic usage. This brief excursus into these ideas has been undertaken only to position an emic understanding of the dynamics of traditional civic engagement in Japan.

¹² Simmel, like Adler, was significantly influenced by the work of Nietzsche. For developed discussions of the latter's philosophical exegesis of freedom, see Gemes and May (2009).

¹³ Suggestively, Ferenczi's pupil Michael Balint, whom Todorov recognizes as one of the most significant representatives of this position, had a direct influence on the formulation of the theory of *amae* (interpersonal dependence) by Doi Takeo (cf. 1973, 2005), whose discussion of relational freedom has already been noted.

9 CONCLUSION

Ah, the elite, gathered by the bugles
Sounding in the morning breeze,
Take up the shining tradition,
With your creed in your hearts, in splendour,
Advance!—Shimosuwa Fire Brigade!

Opening verse of the Shimosuwa Fire Brigade Anthem

(lyrics, Kaneko Sadayoshi)

In the Introduction, I set out to address two puzzles observed in the attempt to situate Japan's community fire prevention institutions and practices within two separate contexts. The first puzzle turned on the comparative historical question of why, given a relatively low incidence of fires, the Japanese state continues to maintain comparatively high rates of membership in auxiliary firefighting institutions. The second puzzle, in turn, dealt with the cultural and sociological question of why, given increased attention to both the rhetoric and practice of civic voluntarism in Japan since the mid-1990s these same institutions have been facing organizational decline. In light of the historical and ethnographic arguments outlined in the preceding chapters, the answers to both of these puzzles may be seen to lie in the inherent continuity and mutual implication of informal (structural) institutions with formal (legal) ones, and so with the interactions of the state with the extra-statal social sphere of civil society. As the ethnography of their contemporary situation suggests, however, Japan's fire brigades do not fit easily into Western (although increasingly global) discourses of civil society that conceptualize a plural, contractual sphere of

social relations between individuals united to oppose, reform, or supplant the state. Nor, moreover, can the organization's relationship to the state be characterized consistently throughout its history, though its institutional structure may itself be more stable than its official histories suggest.

After summarizing the arguments by which these twin puzzles have been resolved, this concluding chapter situates the thesis within the broader context of the anthropology of what might be called vernacular (i.e., non-Western) models of civil society. Drawing a parallel with a well-known culture-bound anthropological concept developed in Japanese anthropology, I finally offer some thoughts on the concept of 'succession' as an alternative to continuity-and-change approaches to the ethnography of historical social transitions.

Although the temporal scope of the thesis has been extensive, its focus has most clearly coalesced on two periods of historical transformation. In the first place, Japan's transition to modernity, often associated narrowly with the 'opening of Japan' in the mid-nineteenth century, is more convincingly seen to have occurred as a gradual transition over a longer period, with its origins in large-scale social and institutional stages beginning as early as the mid-sixteenth century. A study of this first transition illuminates the first puzzle, which is essentially an historical one. After surveying the historical sociology of Suwa District, Chapter 3 drew on this timescale to suggest that the structural conditions that shaped the forms taken by the Meiji

state firefighting policy are located in the development of an autonomous rural sphere during the Tokugawa period. In contrast to specialized urban firefighting associations mandated by city authorities, rural firefighting practices and customs developed in the context of youth associations within a wider age-graded system by which the social division of labour was institutionalized. The emergence of fire brigades in the late nineteenth century, then, is to be understood in terms of the dialectic of structural and political transformation through which Japanese social forms worked themselves out over the preceding period.

Chapter 4 identified the proximate cause of the first puzzle in the policies of the Meiji state during the late nineteenth century, specifically the decision to institute a national firefighting association system in 1894. A survey of historical writing on the period suggests that this policy had two levels of instrumentality. Firstly, it established a modern firefighting system on the German model, following on from earlier police reforms. Secondly, it asserted state control over firefighting symbolism, which had become implicated in local anti-government sentiment. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, before the central bureaucracy matured, village youth associations began to modernize and specialize as autonomous firefighting groups under the sponsorship of wielders of local influence. I speculated that the technological modernity of these groups increased their potential as symbols through which to legitimate authority, suggesting a reason why expressions of local autonomy

may have been phrased in a firefighting idiom. By the 1890s, the administrators of the Meiji state had only to assert their authority over this ready-made system to tap into a wider social legitimacy, a strategy realized through the 1894 nationalization of the fire service by imperial proclamation. Chapter 7 described how this process was further institutionalized through the appropriation of firefighting symbols, as with the nationwide reinvention of the *dezome* ceremony of the townsman firefighters of Edo as a secular ritual of state. The records of the Shimosuwa fire brigade provided a case study on how these symbols have remained central to the brigade through its history.

The key to the first puzzle, then, is to understand the organizational history of the fire brigade in the context of the evolution of the interface between civil society and the Japanese state. By gradually reconstituting the localized obligations of village society as generalized obligations to the state, the 1894 Imperial Proclamation established the basis for Japan's large auxiliary firefighting force. The fact that the organization was left essentially intact in the post-war period is an extension of the instrumentalism of the original strategic policy of ensuring the widest protection for the lowest cost.

If the first puzzle is in temporal terms the reflection of the historical transition to modernity, the context of the second is by contrast a contemporary one, situated against the transformative confluence of social, economic, and political accelerations

of a late, perhaps end-stage of that self-same modernity. What has been exposed in the latter, primarily ethnographic chapters of this thesis, however, is that as a puzzle, it is inherently flawed. Specifically, it is fallacious in that it begs the question of why one would expect increased civic awareness in Japan to correspond to a *generalized* increase in associationalism, rather than a *selective* increase in certain forms thereof. Anthropologists and historians have linked the rise of civil society discourse to the atmosphere of neoliberalism said to be characteristic of this latter phase of global modernity, in both Japan and elsewhere. Such characterizations notwithstanding, the fact that I have been able to apply it analytically to a discussion of an organization not usually included within explicit discussions of civil society in Japan is a reminder that the concept is not monolithic, but is rather open to a plurality of normative discourses. Once Japan's civil society landscape is understood to be populated by variegated and competing discourses, the truth of the situation snaps into focus and the puzzle vanishes. The account of the preceding chapters implicitly suggests in fact that the 'crisis' of decreasing membership in the fire brigade, as well as in other traditional 'voluntary' associations, is likely exacerbated by the rise of alternative modes of civic engagement more in keeping with explicit discourses of civil society actively promoted by academic theorists, political analysts, and media commentators.¹

¹ As noted earlier, the emergence and dynamics of explicit discourses of civil society in Japan have recently been the subject of at least two monographs (Ogawa 2009 and Avenell 2010b).

The necessity of the brigade's authoritarian paramilitary structure, its time commitments (both day-to-day and year-on-year), and the organization's questionable reputation and concomitant ritual and symbolic association in the public imagination with a suspect state have become more problematic for the institution as it has begun to compete increasingly with alternative forums for civic engagement. What is more, the interrelationships between these individual factors mean that they cannot be addressed individually, and that it will thus likely prove difficult for the brigade to adapt quickly to a changing political context. The pragmatic requirement of individual subordination to a command structure, the necessity of repetitive, physical practice to internalize technical knowledge, and the efficacy of ritual in naturalizing authority and containing conflict represent a particularly tenacious constellation of mutually reinforcing characteristics. In an atmosphere of increasing egalitarianism, individualism, and public cynicism towards the state, not to mention vague suspicions as to the organization's redundancy, the crisis facing the organization is more than simply apparent.

My interpretation of the fire brigades' situation is thus much more reserved than the fervently optimistic position taken by Mary Alice Haddad in her own study of the same organization (Haddad 2006). I do not have her faith in the ability of organizations to foster social norms of civic responsibility, which I fear is a case of the tail wagging the dog. Yet it would be wrong, I think, to conclude that the choice

facing Japanese citizens is one between a vernacular model for civil society inimical to individual freedom, and an extrinsic one that promises to reconcile individual and social justice. On one hand, as argued in Chapter 4, the history of the fire brigade has not been static, and nor has its position vis-à-vis the state. On the other hand, studies of Japanese civil society in its more reflexively contemporary manifestations—e.g., non-profit and volunteer associations—have suggested that the complicity of these groups with neoliberal political interests in fact suggests that their autonomy is largely illusory, and that their egalitarianism in fact obfuscates the reproduction of older patterns of authority.² Simply put, ‘vernacular’ civil society is not merely a legacy of the past, and ‘new’ civil society may in fact be rather less than the expression of revolutionary transcendence as which they appear. The final section of this chapter lays out a suggestion for overcoming this impasse, rooted in the project of considering civil society ethnographically.

Challenging Western models

As implied in the critique of Haddad’s approach laid out in Chapter 1, one of the goals of this thesis has been to demonstrate how the experience of Japan’s fire brigade system may be seen to fit within the larger project of ‘challenging Western models’ of

² This is the argument of Akihiro Ogawa (2009). See above, p. 34. Similarly, Victor Koschmann (2008: 759) notes a ‘fundamental reversal in the locus and directionality of the discourse on citizenship and civil society’ in Japan since the mid-1990s. Under this new model, the responsible citizen, once an icon of democratic resistance, has been reborn as an entity whose ‘proactive voluntarism and even collaboration with the state [has become] the embodiment of truly civic values’ (Avenell 2008), in other words, an individualized subject consistent with specifically neoliberal models of governance, based on personal responsibility and spontaneous volunteerism.

civil society. As noted earlier, this has been an explicit undertaking within European social anthropology for some time (Hann and Dunn 1996; Knight 1996). Unlike the comparative political scientific perspectives adopted by more recent civil society theorists, this approach has attempted to identify vernacular discourses of civil society rather than apply those seen to derive from the Western European tradition.³ In the Japanese case, this explicit project may be said to have taken up a more implicit goal already existing within Japan's indigenous anthropological tradition.

Discussions of interpersonal relationships and group cohesion in Japan, especially as they pertain to rural or pre-modern settings, often draw on the native distinction made between the principles of *ketsuen* ('blood relationships', i.e. consanguinity) and *chien* ('territorial relationships'). Strictly defined, these terms denote relations characterizing biological family and close neighbours, respectively. In colloquial usage, however, these categories are much more elastic and subject to metaphorical extension. Affinal or fictive kinship relations (e.g., with spouses or adoptive heirs) are modelled on, and may connote, biological ties of consanguinity, while the state may in turn be seen as the territory occupied by the 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991) of the ethnic nation. Importantly, the morpheme signifying 'relationship', *en*, has overtones of fate or destiny (Varner 1977: 461). To

³ What I term 'vernacular' discourses of civil society are not necessarily those explicitly aware of themselves as such. It is worth noting, however, that the term 'civil society' (in either of its Japanese forms, whether *shimin shakai*, or transliterated directly as *shibiru sosaietei*) never came up in my fieldwork, except in a few cases where I introduced it into discussions myself.

say that *en* exists in a given situation is to suggest a mysterious, pre-existing, and inevitable affinity that transcends and precludes the idea of individual human agency.⁴ As much as or even more so than any other local associations, community fire brigades are held to be an institutional expression of *chien*, and much of the weight behind the perceived *de facto* status of its membership (expressed in the idea of *shigarami* discussed in Chapter 8) derives from this sense of fate.

In 1963, in a paper read to the Japanese Society of Ethnology, the cultural anthropologist Yoneyama Toshinao suggested a third term, *shaen* ('associative relationships', approximating the abstract sense of the English noun 'sodality'), to refer to voluntary and instrumental ties not covered by the existing dyad (Nakamaki 2002b: 2; cf. Yoneyama 1994, chapter 4).⁵ Yoneyama typified the older, ascriptive relationships as characteristic of traditional forms of social organization that had been superseded by modernity. Modern life, he observed, was no longer lived primarily (or even significantly) within the limited spheres of family and neighbourhood. Relationships between people as co-workers; as members of labour

⁴ The colloquial status of these terms suggests the strength of primordialist narratives in the discursive construction of Japanese ethnicity, but it must be remembered that the categories themselves are historically and ideologically contingent. Jennifer Robertson, citing the cultural historian Nishida Tomomi, notes that *ketsuen* (along with other blood-related genealogical terms, such as *kettō* [bloodline] and *ketsuzoku* [blood relations]) only came into widespread usage from the seventeenth century, in concert with the normalization of the patrilineal rule of household succession beyond the limited sphere of the samurai class (Robertson 2005: 330-31; cf. Nishida 1995).

⁵ The morpheme *sha* has both economic and religious connotations, appearing both in the words for company (*kaisha*) and Shintō shrine (e.g., *jinja*, *taisha*) and. It refers in the general sense to "a group of people united under a shared purpose" (cf. Yanabu 2011 [1982]: 56).

unions, religious groups, political associations, and leisure clubs; even as consumers, increasingly had more immediacy and importance to daily experience. *Shaen*, he proposed, were in some ways homologous to Tönnies's (2001 [1887]) formulation of the open-ended and mechanical relationships of complex modern society (*Gesellschaft*), which had taken the place of the exclusive ties which had bound the inhabitants of the traditional organic community (*Gemeinschaft*). Like Tönnies, Yoneyama was simultaneously concerned with providing an ahistorical analytical framework for examining types of relationships, while at the same time providing an ambitious evolutionary heuristic for understanding the changing patterns of human relationships at different historical stages of social development, moving from hunter-gatherers (*ketsuen*), through the emergence of agriculture (*chien*), into modernity (*shaen*).

Although the concept has ultimately enjoyed a mixed reception within Japanese anthropology,⁶ Yoneyama's insistence to work within the emic categories of colloquial Japanese, rather than simply translating classical sociological concepts is the key to understanding its potential. Importantly, Yoneyama wrote many of his

⁶ Such critiques (summarized by Moon 2002: 26-27) argue that since *most* modern relationships are extra-familial and extra-territorial, and since the ubiquity of the institutional and market relationships of education and employment cannot usefully be described as *purely* non-ascriptive and voluntary, the term is analytically barren. Proffered alternatives, however, are equally unsatisfying, seeming either naïve (e.g., 'elective' and 'compulsory' ties, Ueno 1987) or to cover old territory (e.g., 'purpose-oriented' and 'value-oriented' ties, Inoue 1987; cf. Gordon and Babchuk 1959). Nakamaki Hirochika, who after Yoneyama has been the chief proponent of the *shaen* concept, has favoured refining it to refer specifically to social relationships that occur within Japanese companies (Nakamaki 2002a, 2009).

books for a lay audience, and was concerned to bring the insights of anthropology into the public sphere. His conceptualization of *shaen*, as elucidated in one such publication (Yoneyama 1994) was part of a wider strategy to combat what he saw as an insidious and unrealistic *Blut und Boden* discourse of nostalgia in Japanese society. The semantic continuity between his neologism and its precursors, he claimed, offered an ‘innovation in conceptual apparatus’ (*shikō sōchi no kakushin*) and provided a ‘design for self-emancipation’ (*jiko kaihō no ito*). ‘By considering the three elements in juxtaposition with one another,’ he wrote, ‘we become able to speculate freely on the modern world from a standpoint bound by neither the ties of family and relations nor the framework of the nation state’ (1994: 117-18). In other words, Yoneyama aimed to redress a normative bias within everyday social and cultural discourse by a) putting its own terms to analytical work, and then b) deriving a necessary theoretical foil from equally emic categories. Yoneyama’s popular anthropology was in effect a radical cultural critique.⁷

There is much more to be said, I suspect, about the normative significance of Yoneyama’s tripartite model for the study of vernacular models of civil society in

⁷ A similar example, already mentioned, is Fukutake Tadashi’s coinage of *kōkumi* (confraternity/association) as a horizontal principle of social organization (Fukutake 1949). Fukutake proposed the term as a counterpart to the vertically structured *dōzoku* (descent group), whose axiomatic status in Japanese sociology (a legacy of pre-war sociological theorists and fieldworkers such as Aruga Kizaemon) he found to be both empirically unjustified and ideologically suspect (Kawamura 1984: 16-17; cf. Ryang 2004, chapter 4). Despite his efforts, however, the concept of Japan as a ‘vertical society’ later achieved international influence through the work of Chie Nakane (1970; cf. 1967a, 1967b, 1978), heavily influenced by the studies of Aruga and others.

Japan. And while its *analytical* significance is probably limited, barring an unforeseen deracination of its conceptual vocabulary from its native cultural context, it nevertheless remains highly instructive as an example of how vernacular models might be made explicit, rethought, and provide a basis for social change.

Succession: Beyond continuity and change

The impasse described above between divergent models for civil society, at a glance, seems to be that between an orthodox state-led associationalism practiced by organizations like the fire brigade and, as an alternative, the contractual individualism ostensibly offered by the Western (if increasingly global) neoliberalism. So defined, the choice is not a hopeful one for those who aspire to a sociality that safeguards the autonomous, subjective interests of citizens while simultaneously holding the state to account for the facilitation and preservation of such a safety net. Yet the historical focus that has been brought to the former model in this thesis demonstrates that the ostensible choice between Japanese and Western, between continuity and change, is a false one. Rather than emphasizing the promise of extrinsic theories of governance by looking to the promise of Western-style civil society, it would seem much more practical to look to the inherent transformative potential of vernacular discourses. As suggested by Yoneyama's project, this is a project to which anthropology, whether 'at home' or otherwise, is ideally suited.

Such a project remains predicated, however, on equal consideration of diachronic and synchronic perspectives. As noted in the Introduction, anthropological treatments of the fire brigade in the English-language ethnography of Japan have tended to emphasize their social structural and symbolic functions alone. This ahistorical approach obscured an understanding of the way that these structures change over time, their contingency, and the role of individual agency within them. The attention paid to ethnographic history in this thesis is a necessary first step in this larger project of social transformation. In addition to illuminating possibilities for organizational futures, however, such an approach may also be seen to have a wider significance for the study of contemporary Japanese society.

The crisis facing Japan's community fire brigades can be—indeed is—described as a crisis of succession. That the idea of a crisis begs the question of the necessity of the offices within any particular organization is clear. But insofar as the needs that those offices were designed to meet are an inescapable component of the human condition, perhaps this can be forgiven. Who, then, will continue the work of a previous generation? How will those who follow draw on the resources, whether material, intellectual, or symbolic, of those who have gone before? The idea of *succession*, I suggest, represents a powerful lens for future approaches towards understanding the reproduction of civil society in Japan. Succession brings together continuity and change in a single paradigm.

A focus on this aspect of reproduction through recruitment will bring a study of the fire brigade in line with the anthropological study of broader social trends that have been a dedicated focus of the social sciences in Japan. That Japan's rural communities are facing a demographic crunch is well known, and the rapidly aging population (the result of both a declining birth rate and selective urbanization of younger Japanese) has grim repercussions for social and institutional reproduction, whether of family structures (Ronald and Alexy 2011), communities (cf. Knight 1995; Rausch, et al. 2011), or even religion. A recent review of contemporary Shintō, for example, cites a 2007 survey that 26 per cent of shrine priests lack a successor (Breen and Teeuwen 2010: 219), while another study offers a similarly dire prognosis for Buddhist temples (Covell 2005: 189).

A focus on succession as practice also brings together structure and agency. As was noted in Chapter 3, however, in the discussion of the kinship debates that centred on the practice of ultimogeniture in pre-Meiji Suwa, succession, although a structural practice subject to social norms, is nevertheless both plural (having many forms) and contingent, open to strategic manipulation by actors as necessitated by exigency or suited to opportunity. Extending its usage as metaphor, it does not obviate the consideration of novelty, as the creation of new offices is a predicate to future succession. However, looking at succession can avoid seeing novelty where it is not—thus evading the criticisms often attributed (if mistakenly, in my view) to

discussions emphasizing ‘the invention of tradition’ (See Chapter 7). To focus on succession is to keep one eye on antecedents with the other on the political context of recruitment, redeployment, and reinvention.

Finally, through its ramifications in the study of kinship, institutions, and social structures, an analytical focus on succession lends itself naturally to the wider comparative project of general anthropology. I have argued elsewhere (Robertson 2007) that a fuller account of Japan’s traditional age-graded structures and associational practices would benefit the comparative analysis of such systems in the context of existing models, which have relied primarily on African and North American data (Stewart 1977; Bernardi 1985).⁸ This is increasingly a historical question, given the dynamics of Japanese modernity. However, organizations such as Japan’s community fire brigades demonstrate that the legacy of these patterns continues to inform organizational life in rural Japan, suggesting their continuing relevance and the desirability of a comprehensive statement for the benefit of anthropologists whose primary interests lie elsewhere.

Postscript

Since 1982, an autumn memorial service for firefighters has been observed annually in Tokyo at Nisshō Hall, the headquarters of the Japan Firefighters’ Association

⁸ Stewart notes that “a good deal has been published on the subject” in Japanese, but regrets that his unfamiliarity with the language prevents him from giving due consideration to this body of work.

(*Nihon shōbō kyōkai*). The ceremony honours those who have died in service during the preceding year, whether professional firefighters, members of community fire brigades, or auxiliary volunteers. In similar fashion to the dead soldiers enshrined at Japan's Yasukuni Shrine, fallen firefighters are deified as *kami*, venerated for their public sacrifice. By ancient convention, *kami* are numbered as pillars (*hashira*), supporting the house of the nation.⁹

On its most recent observance, this ceremony took on unprecedented solemnity. The 2011 memorial, held on 29 November, was dedicated to those who had perished in the wake of a single calamity, namely the Great East Japan Earthquake, which devastated the coast of Japan's north-eastern Tōhoku region on 11 March of that year. Attended exceptionally by the Emperor and Empress, as well as by the Prime Minister and the Speakers of both houses of the National Diet, the 2011 event honoured 239 firefighters, 226 of whom had been victims of the disaster. The vast majority were members of fire brigades from stricken coastal communities in the Tōhoku Prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima.¹⁰

⁹ Ohnuki-Tierney argues that the deification of dead soldiers as *kami* is a strictly modern phenomenon (2002: 111-15). For speculation on the origins of the synecdoche by which *kami* are also pillars, see Aston (1972: 3n6).

¹⁰ Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima Prefectures respectively lost 90, 82, and 24 brigade members to disaster response efforts, many in attempts to secure tidal floodgates and sound *tsunami* alarms. Iwate and Miyagi lost a further 7 and 19 professional firefighters, respectively, with 4 additional fatalities from auxiliary organizations. A full breakdown is included in the JFA newsletter (*Nihon Shōbō Kyōkai* 2011: 9). For a sense of the immediate organizational impact of this disaster, FDMA statistics indicate that a total of 24 brigade members died on duty over the five years preceding the disaster (FDMA 2006-2010).

If Japan has no monopoly on catastrophe, it might nevertheless by virtue of its particular geology and climate lay claim to a special relationship. Yet without disparaging the struggles of those directly affected by the Tōhoku disaster, this thesis has suggested that the proper study of Japan's community fire brigades is the study of disasters that *do not* happen. Fires, earthquakes, and floods are periodic but (necessarily) unpredictable and irregular events. While momentary crises—the Kobe earthquake of 1995, or the terrorist attack on New York City on 11 September 2001, or the rioting that swept England in August of 2011—bring the efforts and training of firefighters to public acclaim, such valorisation can be as fleeting as the situation that necessitates it is unwelcome. For professional crisis responders, and no less for auxiliary organizations such as community fire brigades, however, such moments are interspersed with the day-to-day routine, conflicts, and negotiations of organizational life. Thus, whatever the character of its social and political dynamics through the modern period, the development of Japan's community firefighting system has been first and foremost an attempt by the citizens, communities, and nation of Japan to anticipate and—through prevention, readiness, and, if necessary, response—mitigate the collective and arbitrary effects of disaster and misfortune.

Still, I would be remiss to conclude this thesis without acknowledging the traumatic impact of this most recent tragedy, which has affected so many so keenly.

Chapter 2 described the evolution of my project from a study of ritual association in Suwa to a more general ethnography of Japan's *shōbōdan*. The Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami struck at the point in my writing up process when I had finally committed myself to the latter project. The sudden perception of urgency for the project was tremendous and, at least initially, paralyzing. In conversations with my peers and family, the question of how these events would affect my project was a recurrent theme. At the annual meeting of the Association of Asian Studies in Hawai'i a month later, debates as to whether academic engagement with what was still the raw trauma of catastrophe was a moral requisite or unethical opportunism erupted even in unrelated panels.

There is no inherent ethical contradiction, I think, in attempting to bring the insights of scholarship to the facilitation of the recovery process, nor in the illumination of its social and political dynamics. And yet, however justifiable the claims that crises such as the Tōhoku disaster makes and will make on the agendas of academic research, I have been hesitant to engage directly with the continuing crisis in Japan within the scope of this project. Partly this has been a pragmatic decision, but one also informed by more abstract questions of temporality and ethnographic engagement.

While crises such as 3/11 provide can provide a useful opening into valid, important, and even urgent research areas, the intense gravitational fields of such

singularities inevitably distort the view of their social and historical contexts. As we saw in the Introduction, the efflorescence of volunteerism after the Hanshin earthquake of 1995 was initially hailed as the birth of an indigenous civil society, a political rupture that marked the end of bureaucratic hegemony over public policy and heralded a new era of public-private partnership in Japan. In the intervening years, however, more considered historical research has demonstrated the long period of strategic ideological debate that shaped the cultural discourses of citizenship that came into play in the 1990s. The trajectory and forms taken by civil society in recent years have been shown to owe as much influence to these pre-existing discourses as to institutional change. Careful ethnographic study has also demonstrated the continuities within the public sphere between newer structures of neoliberal civil society, and older configurations of state authority (Avenell 2010b; Ogawa 2009; cf. Koschmann 2007; 2008).

Such historically minded studies correct temporal biases that result from the sympathetic conflation of social crises with seismic ones. It is too early to predict the effect of the Tōhoku disaster on community brigades, but organizational changes will no doubt be made in conjunction with a reconstruction effort that may take a generation. The analysis contained within this thesis, however, suggests that the direction such change takes will be influenced by the brigade's relationship with the state.

Despite an initial optimism about lessons learned since the Kobe earthquake, the manifest scandal of the Japanese government's inability thus far to coordinate and fund relief and reconstruction efforts in north-eastern Japan has further sapped public confidence. Such failures may damage the fire brigade's legitimacy, and encourage prospective recruits to put their energies towards any number of other volunteer initiatives. On the other hand, as noted in Chapter 5,¹¹ the brigades of the sparsely populated Tōhoku region have historically had the highest rates of participation in Japan. Conceivably, they are thus well placed to distance themselves symbolically from bureaucratic ineptitude, and so remain effective as a structure through which to address local needs and give voice to local concerns.

Either option, however, suggests that the legacy of 3/11 will be informed by the deeper continuities that only situated and historical ethnography can reveal. Anthropologists are perhaps uniquely well situated to contribute to such understanding. Chapter 3 surveyed the wealth of sociological, ethnological, and historical data by which the ethnography of the Suwa District may be informed. The corresponding corpus of such material for Tōhoku dwarfs the Suwa corpus. The accumulation of more than three-quarters of a century's worth of studies in both

¹¹ See Figure 16 above, p. 186.

Japanese and English represents an invaluable resource.¹² Any discussion with anthropological significance will need to engage—and remain engaged over time—with both this ethnographic legacy and with local actors, and must be the topic of future work.

¹² As noted above in Chapter 3, one impetus for some of the major studies of social structure in Suwa District by Aruga and Nakamura was the possibility of comparison with earlier studies of the Tōhoku region (Aruga 1967 [1939]; Nakamura 1956).

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11 APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix 1: Data sources for Chapter 1¹

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France	Ministère de l'Intérieur, de l'Outre-Mer et des Collectivités Territoriales. Fédération nationale des sapeurs-pompiers de France. [http://www.pompiers.fr/index.php?id=7756]

¹ All sites accessed May 2011

11.2 Appendix 2: Shimosuwa Municipal Fire Brigade Pledge and Creed

11.2.1 Shimosuwa Municipal Fire Brigade Pledge (消防団宣誓書)

I solemnly swear faithfully to uphold the constitution and laws of Japan, to observe its ordinances, rules, and regulations, to avoid unfairness and prejudice, and, in fear of no one and according to my conscience, faithfully to execute my firefighting duties. [私は忠実に日本国憲法及び法律を擁護し、法令、条例及規則を遵守し、不公平並びに偏見を避け何人をもおそれず良心に従って忠実に消防の義務を遂行することを厳粛に誓います。]

11.2.2 Shimosuwa Municipal Fire Brigade Creed (下諏訪町消防団綱領)

- The fire brigade member understands the significance of his personal duty; heir to a shining history and traditional spirit, he fulfils this charge in the fierce spirit of the firefighter. [消防団員は、自己の職責の重大なことを自覚し、光輝ある歴史と伝統精神を受け継ぎ、熾烈な消防精神を以てその本文を尽すこと。]
- The fire brigade member fighter values moderation and order, always obeys the orders of his superiors, and never violates the public's trust. [消防団員は、節度と秩序とを重んじ、常に上長の命令を遵守し、いやしくも大衆の信頼に背かぬこと。]
- The fire brigade member fighter takes to heart that he is at all times a guardian of life and property. In an emergency, he performs his duty with promptness and

courage, and is entirely without cowardice or negligence. [消防団員は、常に生命財産の保護者であることを銘肝し、一旦有事に際しては勇敢機敏に職務を遂行し、苟もきょうだ怠まんの所為なきこと。]

- The fire brigade member fighter applies himself to the cultivation of the skills and techniques required in his usual labours, as well as to the fosterage and improvement of his own character.[消防団員は、平素職務に必要な学術技芸の錬磨に勤め、品性の向上と人格の陶冶に努むること。]
- The fire brigade member fighter always holds friendship and camaraderie as the core of harmonious cooperation, and takes the initiative to maintain peace and order in the pursuit of his duties.[消防団員は、和衷協力常に親睦友愛を旨とし、任務の存するところ卒先治安の維持に努めること。]

11.2.3 Award guidelines

Minimum service	Award	Number awarded per year per brigade
5 years	Medal for Regular Attendance (<i>seikin-shō</i>)	1 per 25 members
7 years	Medal for Technique (<i>gijutsu-shō</i>)	1 per 150 members
8 years	Medal for Accomplishment (<i>seiseki-shō</i>)	1 per 100 members
10 years	Medal for Effort (<i>doryoku-shō</i>)	1 per 150 members
13 years	Medal for Service (<i>kōrō-shō</i>)	1 per 130 members
25 years	Medal for Service (<i>einen kinzoku kōrō-shō</i>)	No restriction
15 years	Medal for Accomplishment (<i>kōseki-shō</i>)	Limited to 80 in the prefecture

11.3 Appendix 3: Shimosuwa Municipal Fire Brigade Regulations

(Municipal Regulation no. 66, 18 September 1953)

11.3.1 Object

1. This regulation aims to set out the necessary provisions relating to the organization, etc. of the Shimosuwa Municipal Fire Brigade (hereafter, ‘Fire Brigade’), as provided for in Article 15, Clause 2 of the Fire Defence Organization Law (1947, Law no. 226).

11.3.2 Administration (honbu) and Divisions

2. The Fire Brigade shall be comprised of an executive and divisions.
 - ② The names of the executive and the divisions, and their respective districts shall be as according to the attached Table 1.

11.3.3 Executive (kanbu)

3. The Fire Brigade, in addition to a Fire Brigade Commander (hereafter, ‘Commander’), shall include the following executive posts:
 - a. One (1) Vice Commander (*fukudanchō*).
 - b. Eight (8) Division Captains (including the captain of the Band Corps).
 - c. Ten (10) Vice Captains (including the captain of the Bugle Corps and the captain of the Women’s Firefighting Unit, as well as the vice-captain of the Band Corps).
 - d. Thirteen (13) Sergeants (*buchō*)
 - e. Twenty-five (25) Squad Leaders (*hanchō*)

11.3.4 Appointment of the Executive

4. The Vice-Commander, Captains, Vice-Captains, Sergeants, and Squad Leaders shall be appointed from within the brigade by the by the Commander, subject to approval by the Mayor.

11.3.5 Duties of the Commander

5. The Commander as appointed by the mayor, shall supervise the affairs of the brigade, and direct its members to undertake their duty as set out in laws, ordinances and regulations.
- ② In the event that an accident befalls the Commander, the Vice-Commander shall undertake the professional duties of the Commander (in the event that accidents befall both the Commander and Vice-Commander these shall be undertaken by members of the executive in the order set by the Commander). However, in such cases, unless the Commander should die, be discharged, retire, or be unable to accomplish his professional duties due to physical or mental breakdown, the Vice-Commander, Captains, Vice-Captains, Sergeants, and Squad Leaders may not appoint or dismiss brigade members.

11.3.6 Term of Office

6. The term of office for Commander, Vice Commander, Captain, Vice-Captain, Sergeant, and Squad Leader shall be two years. However, there is no bar to reappointment.

11.3.7 Pledge

7. New members may commence their professional duties until they have signed the separate pledge form in front of the appointing party.

11.3.8 Mobilization during floods, fires, and other disasters

8. When firefighting vehicles are proceeding to disaster areas, in addition to abiding by the speed limit as laid out in traffic regulations, they must employ the siren to maintain proper traffic flow. However, when leaving the scene, they may use the vehicle's horn or bell as a warning signal.
9. When mustering or leaving the scene of a disaster, the ranking member

aboard the vehicle must strictly observe the following points:

- (1) The ranking officer shall ride in the seat beside the member entrusted with the vehicle.
 - (2) The member most skilled at driving should be appointed as driver.
 - (3) To prevent accidents, a warning signal should be given when passing in front of hospitals, schools, theatres, etc.
 - (4) Individuals who are neither members of the Fire Brigade nor professional firefighters are not to ride on the firefighting vehicle.
 - (5) Firefighting vehicles are not to be overcrowded.
 - (6) Firefighting vehicles should proceed in a single column, while maintaining a safe distance from each other.
 - (7) Do not overtake other vehicles while proceeding except when the first vehicle signals to overtake.
 - (8) While strictly observing other traffic laws and regulations, direct other riders so as to prevent accidents.
10. The Fire Brigade shall not be dispatched to floods, fire, or other disasters outside the town limits without the permission of the Suwa Regional Fire Service Chief or the Shimosuwa Fire Department Chief (hereafter 'Fire Authority'). However, in the event of dispatch, regardless of whether it is accepted that you are inside the jurisdiction, when it transpires that while proceeding to the disaster scene, you are outside the jurisdiction, this shall not apply.

11.3.9 Fire Extinguishing and Flood Prevention Activities

11. Fire brigade members arriving at the sites of floods, fires, or other disasters must apply themselves to the prevention and suppression of disaster, employing machinery, equipment, and materials to the fullest extent to minimize damage and rescue human life and property.

12. When Fire Brigade members are dispatched to the site of a flood, fire, or other disaster, they must strictly observe the following points:
 - (1) Act under the supervision of the Commander.
 - (2) Firefighting activities should be undertaken in a serious manner.
 - (3) While using water outlets to extinguish fires with maximum effectiveness, fire damage and water damage should be minimized.
 - (4) Divisions should communicate and collaborate in a mutual fashion.
13. When a corpse is discovered at the site of a flood, fire, or other disaster, the ranking member must report this to the Fire Authority and preserve the scene until the arrival of police or coroner.
14. The ranking member at the site of a flood, fire, or other disaster must take the following measures:
 - (1) Periodically report the circumstances of the disaster to the Fire Authority.
 - (2) At the site of a fire, work to preserve the scene as required for the investigation of the cause. However, in case of suspected arson, immediately notify the Fire Authority and police. Handle the incident with discretion and refrain any from official announcement.
 - (3) In the case of an order by the Fire Authority, cooperate with the investigation into the cause of any fire.

11.3.10 Document Register

15. The Fire Brigade shall prepare the following documents, and must keep them in order at all times.
 - (1) Membership register
 - (2) Brigade history
 - (3) Daily journal
 - (4) Dispatch register
 - (5) Education and training implementation register

- (6) Equipment and materials ledger
- (7) Comprehensive map of the brigade jurisdiction
- (8) At least three copies of a document listing routes, water supply, and non-flammable as well as important structures.
- (9) Geographical overview of water supply
- (10) Ledger of issued and loaned items
- (11) Bound copies of various mandates
- (12) Bound copies of disaster reports
- (13) Bound copies of fire services codes and regulations
- (14) Bound copies of fire prevention inspections
- (15) Bound copies of other assorted documents

11.3.11 Equipment and Materials

16. The Fire Brigade shall prepare the following equipment and materials, and must keep them in working condition at all times:

- (1) Brigade flag
- (2) Brigade standard (*matoi*)
- (3) Brigade firehouse facilities
- (4) Communication and signalling equipment
- (5) Firefighting pumps
- (6) Storage housing for machinery and apparatus
- (7) Flood prevention materials, and storage housing for same
- (8) Lanterns, lighting and signal flags
- (9) Megaphone, siren, bugles, and other warning implements
- (10) Alarm bell
- (11) Water hose wheel
- (12) Fire extinguishers
- (13) Ladders

- (14) Demolition tools, fireman's crooks (*tobiguchi*), pike poles (*sasumata*), axes, wooden mallets (*kakeya*), saws, rope, spades and shovels
- (15) First aid medicines
- (16) Stretchers
- (17) Workmen's tools
- (18) Fire brigade uniforms
- (19) Drafting board, tape measure, folding rule, magnets
- (20) Basic wind gauge, humidity gauge
- (21) Musical instruments

11.3.12 Education and training

- 17. The Commander shall apply himself to the cultivation of members' character and the exercise of practical and useful skills, and must regularly hold training to this end.

11.3.13 Annual Calendar

- 18. As part of firefighting affairs, the Commander must ensure that members are annually made aware of the following:
 - (1) The methods of and location for assembly
 - (2) Anticipated lines of defence for local fires and floods
 - (3) Water supply plans and flood prevention and control for designated areas
 - (4) At-risk areas for flooding and plans for the collection of flood prevention materials
 - (5) Plans for inspection of preventative measures and management of hazardous materials
 - (6) Support plans

11.3.14 Awards

19. In cases of merit, and especially in cases of outstanding service in the execution of duties by the brigade and its members, such may receive commendation by the mayor.

② The preceding paragraph notwithstanding, when necessary such commendation may be made by the Commander.

20. Commendation as mentioned in the foregoing Clause shall be of two types:

(1) Accolades

(2) Certificate of Merit

② Accolades shall be awarded to members, while Certificates of Merit shall be awarded to the brigade.

21. In recognition of meritorious service on the part of an individual, or of the entire group, a Certificate of Gratitude may be awarded by the mayor in the following instances:

(1) Prevention or containment of flooding or fires

(2) Cooperation in the strengthening and expansion of fire prevention infrastructure

(3) Saving of a life at the scene, etc. of flooding or fires

(4) Effective cooperation with regard to the firefighting activities of the Fire Brigade

11.3.15 Training, Comportment, and Uniform

22. Members' training, comportment, uniform shall be according to the Firefighter Training and Comportment Standards (FDMA Bulletin no. 1, 1965), Firefighting Pump Technique Standards (FDMA Bulletin no. 2, 1972), and Fire Brigade Uniform (National Public Safety Commission Bulletin, no. 1, 1950).

11.3.16 Supplementary Provisions

① This regulation shall be effective from the day of proclamation.

② Shimosuwa Municipal Fire Brigade Regulations (Municipal Regulation no. 66, 18 September 1953) is hereby repealed.

- Amended 25 Dec 1956, effective 1 January 1957
- Amended 1 July 1958, effective from the day of proclamation
- Amended 24 May 1967, effective from the day of proclamation
- Amended 25 June 1969, effective from the day of proclamation
- Amended 10 July 1974, retroactively applied from 11 April 1974
- Amended 1 April 1976, effective from the day of proclamation
- Amended 22 March 1979, effective from 1 April 1979
- Amended 25 December 1981, effective from the day of proclamation
- Amended 22 March 1984, effective from 1 April 1984
- Amended 24 March 1987, effective from 1 April 1987
- Amended 5 March 1993, effective from 1 April 1993
- Amended 22 March 1994, effective from the day of proclamation, and applies from the term of office for those taking office on or after 1 April 1994
- Amended 25 March 1997, effective from 1 April 1997
- Amended 24 December 1997, effective from 1 January 1998
- Amended 24 March 1999, effective from 1 April 1999
- Amended 26 December 2005, effective from 1 April 2006
- Amended 18 September 2006, effective from the day of proclamation
- Amended 24 December 2008, effective from 1 April 2009

11.4 Appendix 4: Ordinance Relating to Membership, Appointment and Dismissal, Remuneration, Duties, Etc. of the Shimosuwa Municipal Fire Brigade

(Shimosuwa Municipal Ordinance #19, 24 March 1966)

11.4.1 Content

1. This ordinance stipulates the necessary articles relating to the membership, appointment and dismissal, remuneration, duties, etc. of members of the part-time fire brigade (hereafter ‘members’).

11.4.2 Membership

2. Full membership shall be 281 members.

11.4.3 Appointment

3. The Fire Brigade Commander (hereafter Commander), based on the recommendation of the brigade, shall be appointed by the mayor. Other members, with the approval of the mayor, shall be appointed by the Commander, provided they meet the following conditions:
 - (1) They are resident within the jurisdiction of the brigade.
 - (2) They are 18 years of age or older.
 - (3) They are reliable and sound of body.

11.4.4 Conditions for Disqualification

4. Those to whom any of the following conditions apply are ineligible for membership:
 - (1) Adult dependents or warrantees.
 - (2) Any person subject to a sentence of imprisonment, until such time as the sentence is completed, or ceases to apply.

- (3) Any person who has been dismissed from service within the past two years.
- (4) Any person who lives away from home for over six months of the year.

11.4.5 Exclusion

- 5. Authorities may demote or dismiss a member to whom any of the following apply:
 - (1) A poor service record.
 - (2) By virtue of physical or mental breakdown, either an impediment has arisen which prevents the execution of duty, or the person is unable to cope.
 - (3) In addition to (2), where a member no longer meets eligibility requirements.
 - (4) Where surfeit members arise by reason of a reduction in the established full complement or budgetary restriction.
- ② Members will lose their status where any of the following apply:
 - (1) Any of the items listed in Article 4, excepting (3).
 - (2) He or she moves residence outside of the brigade district.

11.4.6 Discipline

- 6. In the case that any of the following items apply to the member, authorities may take disciplinary measures to reprimand, suspend or even dismiss that member.
 - (1) Contravention of laws, ordinances or regulations which relate to fire prevention
 - (2) Violation or neglect of professional duties
 - (3) Misconduct or comportment in a manner unbecoming of a member
- ② Suspension will be decided and take place within a period of one month.

7. Procedures relating to exclusion or disciplinary matters are set out according to the 'Procedures and Efficacy Rules for Punishment for employees of the Shimosuwa Town Office' (Shimosuwa Municipal Ordinance no. 76, 1953).

11.4.7 Duty Regulations

8. Members will mobilize and fulfill their duties upon summons from the Commander. However, even when not summoned, upon learning of the event of flooding, fire or other disaster, they are to muster to the appointed location to engage in their duties.
9. If a member plans to be away from his or her home for ten days or more, he or she must report to the Commander, just so the Commander to the mayor. However, excepting extraordinary circumstances, half or more of the members may not be away from home at the same time.
10. A member must not reveal any confidences learned in the pursuit of his or her duty.
11. The commander must not engage in group activities that may obstruct the normal running of the fire brigade or otherwise notably impede the efficiency of its activities.

11.4.8 Remuneration and reimbursement

12. Remuneration for members (excepting full time employees) shall be as set out in 'Ordinance relating to the reimbursement and remunerations of part-time employees in special services' (Shimosuwa Municipal Ordinance no. 3, 1970)

11.4.9 Compensation for accidents in the line of duty

13. Should a member die, be injured, or fall ill in the line of duty, or else die, become disabled, or become invalid due to injury or illness contracted in the

line of duty, that member or that his or her family or dependents will be accorded compensation.

- ② The amount and manner of official disaster compensation shall be as set out in the 'Shimosuwa Municipal Fire Brigade Member Official Disaster Compensation Ordinance' (Shimosuwa Municipal Ordinance no. 35, 1966).

11.4.10 Compensation upon retirement

- 14. When a member retires, he or she (or his or her family, should retirement be due to death) will be accorded retirement compensation.

- ② The amount and manner of retirement compensation shall be as set out in the 'Ordinance Relating to the Payment of Retirement Compensation for Shimosuwa Municipal Part-Time Fire Brigade Members' (Shimosuwa Municipal Ordinance no. 26, 1964).

11.4.11 Supplementary Provisions

- 1. This ordinance is to take effect on the day of proclamation.
- 2. The 'Shimosuwa Municipal Fire Brigade Ordinance' (Shimosuwa Municipal Ordinance no. 41, 1953) is hereby annulled.

20 June 1967

- 1. This partially amended ordinance is effective from the day of proclamation.

25 December 1981

- 1. This ordinance is effective from 25 December 1981.

24 March 2000

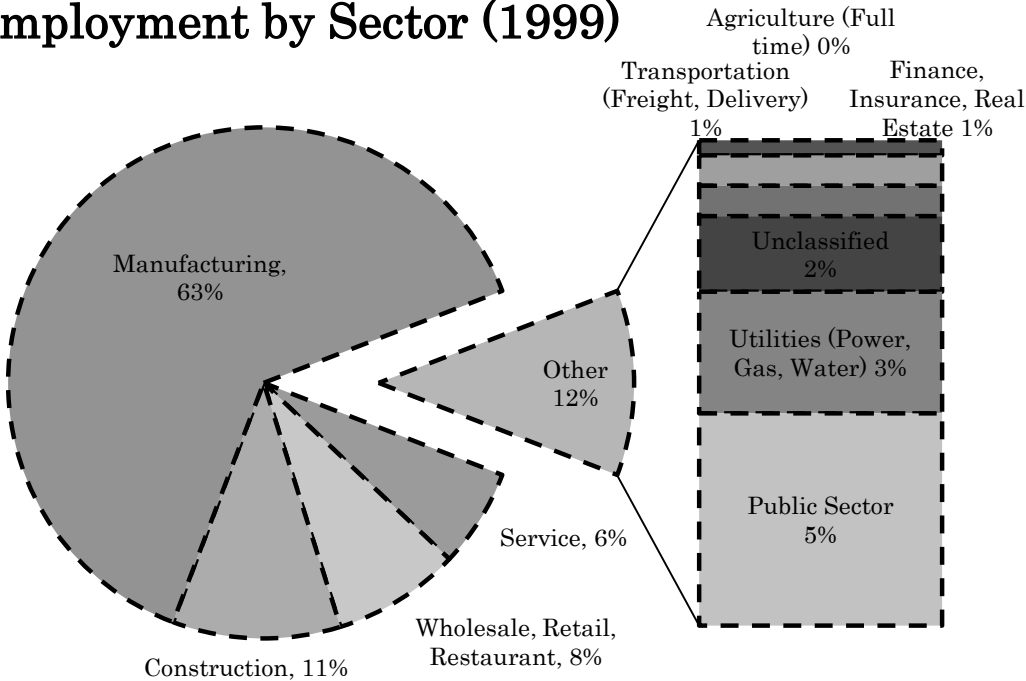
- 1. This ordinance shall be effective from 1 April 2000.
- 2. Individuals pronounced 'incompetent' as defined by the Civil Code reformed by Bill 149 of 1999 (hereafter the 'Old Code') will be regarded as 'adult

dependents' as adjudicated by the guardianship rules of the post-reform civil code (hereafter the 'New Code').

3. Individuals pronounced 'quasi-incompetent' by reason of diminished capacity as defined by the Old Code will be regarded as 'warrantees' as adjudicated by the conservatorship rules of the New Code.
4. The application of basic ordinances related to 'quasi-incompetent' individuals other than those stipulated in the previous article shall be according to established precedent.

11.5 Appendix 5: Brigade member employment by sector in comparison with town employment by sector for Shimosuwa (1999)

A: Shimosuwa Brigade Member Employment by Sector (1999)



B: General Sectoral Distribution of Employment in Shimosuwa (1999)

