Down and Out in Negishi: Reclusion and Struggle in an Edo Suburb

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Abstract: As administratively ambiguous zones, suburbs in early modern Japan (1600–1868) became favored as secluded sites conducive to self-reinvention. The community occupying Negishi in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provides an apt case study of how, in violation of segregation laws, individuals from all status groups came to live together in privatized outlying aesthetic spaces. The result was the emergence of a comparatively horizontal, egalitarian, and self-sustaining community that embraced and challenged contemporary utopian representations of meisho (celebrated spots). Documents produced by Negishi residents reveal an array of living experiences that complicate, and occasionally subvert, our view of suburban spaces and lifestyles.

In medieval Japan, the suburb was not a clearly defined entity. Outskirts were unattractive as permanent or temporary living spaces and absorbed only undesirables repelled from the city proper. Wanderers, outcastes, and beggars came to occupy urban borders as loosely formed collectives, sharing these liminal spaces with temples, shrines, and cemeteries. The urbanization, economic expansion, and cultural liberalism that characterized the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, fostered an urban restlessness that reinvented the suburb as a place of retreat and aesthetic reclusion. This reversal responded to emergent demands for more utopian residential spaces that would liberate residents from the constraints that accompanied status and official obligations. It also reformulated the dynamics of coexistence among urban status groups by accommodating a residential diversity and qualified egalitarianism that had been absent when the Edo period (1600–1868) began.1

I wish to thank Peter Nosco and the anonymous referees at The Journal of Japanese Studies for their helpful suggestions.

1. For a discussion of isolated instances of aestheticism and residential diversity in the medieval period, see Pierre-François Souyri, The World Turned Upside Down: Medi-
Negishi, also known locally as Uguisudani, was a neighborhood about six kilometers north of Nihonbashi, Edo’s center, that by the mid-eighteenth century had become a popular spot for aesthetic reclusion. The allure of Negishi no sato no wabizumai (the simple, secluded life in Negishi) attracted numerous eminent bunjin (independent literati), including the eclectic Rinpa artist Sakai Hōitsu (1761–1828), ukiyoe artist Kitao Shigemasa (1739–1820), and Confucian scholar Kameda Bōsai (1752–1826). Given its pastoral setting but also its proximity to the Sumida River, the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters, Asakusa, Ueno, and Honjo, Negishi was itself the subject of an impressive body of art and poetry and remained a favored site for retirement, retreat, and artistic practice into the twentieth century. As such, it evolved into one of Edo’s premier meisho, a discursive utopia propagated through pictures, poems, maps, essays, stories, and woodblock prints.

Suburban meisho arose, in part, as a solution to the problem of accommodating individual aspirations with a system that predetermined living spaces and limited the parameters of official and unofficial activities. Their emergence raises questions concerning the functionality of public and private, particularly how private, autonomous zones coexisted alongside official public ones. As peripheral spaces, these suburbs provided a spatial dimension to individual strategies of navigating between on-duty (public, official) and off-duty (private, autonomous) lifestyles. Negishi, for example, was home to peasants, bunjin, active and retired samurai, townsmen, and clergy and was contiguous with spaces inhabited by the imperial family, the Tokugawa family, and outcaste groups. This extraordinary diversity, clearly, rendered functionally meaningless Edo’s spatial apportionment: the administrative divisions separating high-lying inland areas (yamanote) and townsmen’s residential districts (shitamachi), and the boundaries between shinai (within the city) and shigai (outside the city). How, then, did this diversity coexist with a spatial organization and status system that could neither recognize nor account for it?

Reexamining the interplay between public and private domains, and positing the formation of free, aesthetic spaces invokes longstanding controversy surrounding the applicability of terms such as “civil society” and eval Japanese Society, trans. Käthe Roth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 171–73.

2. Official place names often did not correspond to locally used names. Officially, Negishi was a narrow belt of land on the southeast bank of the Otonashi River northeast of Kan‘eiji Temple, but locally it became an alternate name for greater Kanasugi, the larger region north of Kan‘eiji Temple and west of Kanasugi-dōri (Ura-Ōshūkaidō). I follow this usage.

3. In this article, I use the term bunjin to refer to individuals engaged in predominantly amateur artistic and intellectual pursuits. While bunjin variously supported themselves through commissions and teaching, the bunjin ethos embraced detachment from the encumbrances of commercialism and professionalism. For a full treatment of the complexities of this term, see Lawrence E. Marceau, Takebe Ayatari: A Bunjin Bohemian in Early Modern Japan (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2004).
“public sphere” to early modern Japan. Indeed, those two terms evoke one another and are occasionally used interchangeably in this context, generally to describe an array of voluntary associations and interstatus cultural networks. Standing edicts prohibited the formation of associations that could be construed as political, and, from a top-down perspective, this fact alone might preclude any possibility of emergent civil societies. Associations and networks did form around aesthetic pursuits, however, and in practice these groups amounted to an apolitical challenge to systemic power. “Enclaves of aesthetic publics,” as Eiko Ikegami has dubbed them, interactive spaces outside official duties that constituted arenas of socialization and networks of aesthetic practice, were forming in urban areas by the eighteenth century. These occupied private rather than public (official) domains inasmuch as they formed and operated through personal interest in artistic practices. While opening relatively egalitarian, horizontal interactions between members of different status groups, as private domains they also provided contexts for the temporary suspension of official identities and the formation of a “civility” based on aesthetic ones.

Ikegami avoids lexical ambiguities by deploying the term “civility” instead of civil society and “publics” instead of public spheres. In doing so she makes a crucial distinction between her aesthetic networks and the “rational-critical mode of argumentation” characteristic of Jurgen Habermas’s public. Her aversion to applying Habermas to the Edo context is understandable. For Habermas, the public sphere in medieval Europe was not merely a group of socially engaged individuals but rather a structure


6. Ibid., p. 39. Initially the erosion of status consciousness within these networks did not include egalitarian attitudes toward women. It was not until the late eighteenth century that women’s participation became widespread (ibid., p. 154).

7. Though Ikegami refers to circles that formed around the production and appreciation of art, poetry, and literature as voluntary associations—the definitive feature of a civil society—she rejects the application of the term civil society to early modern Japan. As a concept born from a European context and connoting a democratic politicization of the bourgeoisie, she argues, it is anachronistic to the relative deficiency of political agency afforded non-samurai throughout the Edo period (ibid., p. 23).
that redefined patterns of interaction between private individuals and public authorities. It represented both private and public interests, “representation [that] pretended to make something invisible visible.” The participants of aesthetic publics in Edo, however, did not interact either with or as representatives of public authority. Negishi residents sought the opposite, to render their public personae invisible not only to avoid entering or representing the public/official arena but also to establish channels of private activity outside it. Rather than escalating interaction between private individuals and public authorities, as Habermas’s public sphere did, reclusion in Negishi sought to eliminate any such possibility, to pursue artistic self-cultivation within an ethos of political impotence that had long enjoyed considerable cultural currency in East Asia.

Though privacy and reclusion can be, and often are, discussed as intrinsically political inclinations, the intellectual and cultural results of those inclinations—paintings, poetry, prints, and literature—have been largely apolitical. They tend to be located within a predominantly Chinese discourse on artistic theory and practice that defends an “art for art’s sake” detachment from status, wealth, commercialism, and public life. Such was the epistemological orientation that defined the public spaces inhabited by bunjin and suburban recluses in the last century of the Edo period. Aspiring individuals gravitated, often illegally, toward suburban meisho not only for the livability of those spaces but also, despite the ideal of independence that surrounded the bunjin ethos, to insert themselves within a fraternity of like-minded cohorts. A desire to embrace a collective private by folding inward, in other words, exceeded interest in engaging with the public and the social through political participation, and Negishi’s conceptual distance from urban officialdom afforded residents a suitable means of doing so.

Positing Negishi as an apolitical private space rather than a public sphere could be challenged on two counts. First, irrespective of its intention, reclusion—renouncing sociopolitical participation—is an act of im-


10. Much has been written on recreation zones such as the licensed and unlicensed pleasure quarters and riverside leisure centers including the Ryōgoku Bridge where status became subordinated to wealth and aesthetic connoisseurship. While important in their own right, such spaces were leisure centers for temporary recreation, not residential areas where identities and patterns of relations were permanently recast. As such, they are to be considered separately from suburban spaces as discussed here.
plicit political dissent. And second, some of Negishi’s more eminent settlers had previously been rebuffed for their unwelcome interference in political affairs. In this case, however, the latter count invalidates the former, for relocation to Negishi was an admission of defeat, a spatial disengagement that connoted sociopolitical disengagement. The absence of official redress to Negishi’s erstwhile reactionaries, moreover, affirms the bakufu’s cognizance that their reclusion embraced private aestheticism rather than continued social activism. Significantly, a forced evacuation of Negishi’s illegal residents during the Tenpō Reforms (1841–43) is explained as a governmental response to residency violations, not to the existence of any illegal voluntary associations or politically destabilizing activities.

It is important to recognize that although urban reclusion was ostensibly an ethos imported from China, the social context in which it was to be practiced could not be imported along with it. Plenty of Chinese literati, it is true, openly rejected social, political, and aesthetic norms and turned to reclusion and eccentricity as expressions of dissent. But early modern Japanese bunjin who emulated the arts and lifestyles of their Chinese counterparts enjoyed comparatively reduced means of protest. In that Chinese literati were either active or retired bureaucrats performing official duties and receiving salaries, as representatives of the official sphere their intended idiosyncrasies can only be located within that sphere. Japanese bunjin living as urban recluses, in contrast, hailed from a mixture of backgrounds and constituted an elected default status for anyone who possessed the requisite training and aesthetic accomplishment. And though some were samurai who variously continued to perform official duties, occasional retreat to one’s suburban villa intimated nothing more than a desire for aestheticism and nature appreciation. Apolitical reclusion, then, was permissible due to occupational distinctions recognized between on-duty and off-duty activities.

As David Howell has shown, the horizontal hierarchy of occupation is the operative criteria in positioning individuals socially and understanding theoretically and practically their potential for sociopolitical influence. Theoretically, the private (nonoccupational) nature of bunjin status precluded politicality. Therefore, although these individuals were often associated with works of anonymous political satire, most of this satire fell innocuously into a “culture of play,” the depoliticized culture of plebian commercialism that characterized Japan’s late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Negishi’s residents, then, sought to feed from the cultural

capital afforded the urban recluse, to establish comfortable lives within the current system rather than to overthrow it.

In addition to questions surrounding the functionality of public and private, the literary and discursive construction of utopian aesthetic spaces like Negishi raises questions about the interplay between representation and experience. As cultural constructs, meisho served the function of rectifying dystopian living conditions in cramped urban centers by stimulating interest in predominantly suburban spots as aesthetic landmarks and retirement spaces. But how accurate were these representations, most of which were published by nonresident artists and writers, and how do they compare with the accounts produced by residents of these bucolic sites? This article offers Negishi as a case study of crystallizing aesthetic spaces with the purpose of illustrating the tensions between representation and praxis in suburban life. It underscores the social relevance of private space as central to the cultural field in Edo by showing that, contrary to top-down interpretations of Edo that place undue emphasis on residency laws based on boundaries such as yamanote, shitamachi, shinai, and shigai, residents of suburban meisho bore considerable agency in determining the nature of their living spaces. It also demonstrates how meisho making contributed to the discursive construction of local identities while misrepresenting the variegated life experiences within those locales. Of primary interest will be the inconsistencies between the idyllicism ascribed to Negishi as a prominent meisho and the struggle, hardship, and failure endemic to it as a suburban retreat. First, however, we contextualize these discussions by outlining Negishi’s historical development and residential diversity.

Negishi and the Demographics of Diversity

When, in the final decade of the sixteenth century, retainers of Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616) refashioned the small fishing village of Edo into a military stronghold, they situated the political center at its topographical peak. Edo’s urban planning was to assure that proper spatial apportionment reflected status and occupation, an initiative that castle towns had not previously undertaken. The western highlands, advantageous for strategic and symbolic reasons, were thereby allocated as samurai residential quarters to function as a “human buffer zone” between the Tokugawa government’s administrative center (Edo castle) and the shitamachi that sprawled over the alluvial lowlands and along the canals, rivers, and reclaimed coastal lands to the east.15

14. Socially relevant private space is to be distinguished from socially concealed activities—such as religious observances practiced by underground Christians—that had no intended social impact.

As the *yamanote* highlands were less congested\(^{16}\) and tended to fare better during the fires that regularly beset the city, they experienced relative continuity throughout Edo’s process of centrifugal expansion.

Over the course of the Edo period, but particularly during the rezoning and rebuilding that followed natural disasters, Edo’s planners continually reasserted and reinforced a class-conscious arrangement of urban space that accentuated boundaries between the stolid center and the sprawling commoner districts. Though an effective defensive measure, this scheme distanced political power from the cultural and commercial energies fomenting in *shitamachi* centers. As the gradual redistribution of wealth among samurai and townsmen subverted the economic basis of the status system, and as successive generations of heterodox Neo-Confucian thinkers explicated the contrived nature of social hierarchies, for samurai and commoners alike this enforced spatial separation came to symbolize an ossified and limiting sociopolitical order.\(^{17}\) By the late seventeenth century, samurai seeking fulfillment outside official service and wealthy townsmen pursuing cultural interests outside the market had become particularly active in carving out new means of coexistence between the official/public and the aesthetic/private.

Naturally, the praxis of urban and suburban land use involved a complexity that was not accommodated by zoning laws. Within the boundaries of the *yamanote*, the temptation for samurai to lease their residences to wealthy merchants called for persistent vigilance and enforcement of segregation laws. Especially within areas at and beyond the city limits, however, centrifugal expansion gradually rendered city borders and land-use edicts functionally meaningless. Here, spatial boundaries became defined more by private use than by official designation. But this was not an altogether deleterious development for Edo’s urban planners. The city suffered from its identity as a military stronghold long after its martial authority had lost relevance, and the fluidity of land use on the outskirts provided it with the spatial resources to begin fashioning itself as a city of culture and scenic beauty. Boundary erosion increased opportunities for mobility and facilitated access to bucolic suburban areas where occupationally diverse communities formed in violation of residency ordinances.

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\(^{16}\) In the eighteenth century, the populations of the *yamanote* and *shitamachi* districts were roughly equivalent at about 600,000 each. *Shitamachi*, however, covered only about 21 per cent of the city area. *Bakufu* and samurai residences occupied 64 per cent, and temples occupied about 14 per cent (Roman Cybriwsky, *Tokyo: The Changing Profile of an Urban Giant* [Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1991], p. 56).

Dozens of emergent suburban enclaves, many concentrated near the banks of the Sumida River, offered seasonal attractions and pastoral respite from the city. Most famously, Matsuo Bashō’s (1644–94) beloved hut in Fukagawa was a potent symbol and call for like-minded bunjin to co-opt such sites for aesthetic reclusion. While Negishi is thus only one example of a proliferating feature of urban Edo, it is particularly noteworthy for its impressive population of high-profile literati and its corresponding prestige as an access point to bunjin culture.

Negishi’s location—the greater Kanasugi area—was geographically advantaged for several reasons (Figure 1). It lay in the northern shadows of the imposing temple compound of Kan’eiji on Mt. Tōei, the Ueno plateau, and hugged the southeast bank of the Otonashi River that arced first through Yanaka to the west, skirted southeast past Kan’eiji, and then turned north, now parallel to Kanasugi-dōri, toward Senju and the Sumida River. Built in 1625 as Edo’s counterpart to the Enryakuji temple compound on Mt. Hiei in Kyoto, Kan’eiji was positioned atop Ueno hill to the northeast to protect...
the city from evil elements thought to approach from that direction. While the temple was a centerpiece of religious authority, the Otonashi River was a centerpiece of the verdant living environment that made Negishi such a desirable location. It was a natural barrier against fires spreading from the city, irrigated the rice paddies northeast of Ueno, and sustained the populations of animals, birds, insects, and flora that inspired so many literary and artistic tributes to the area.

Negishi’s proximity to Kanasugi-dōri (the Ura-Ōshūkaidō highway) was particularly important to its formative identity as a suburban hideaway. Originally the road, constructed in 1625 concurrently with Kan’ei Temple, was one of two Ōshūkaidō routes connecting Nihonbashi to the Senju bridge, where the two routes converged. After spanning the Sumida River, it proceeded north to Nikkō and Iwaki (present-day Fukushima). The road was an important thoroughfare, for not only was it the access point to all points north, it was the artery that linked Kan’ei, the Tokugawa family’s temple, with Nikkō, where Ieyasu and other Tokugawa ancestors were entombed. The stream of daimyo and other officials who subsequently journeyed to pay homage at Kan’ei required accommodation, and numerous branch temples were erected along the roadway for this purpose. Thirty-six such temples had appeared by the 1640s, their presence constituting another principal feature of Negishi’s landscape. Though still a peasant village administratively independent from the municipality, Negishi was steadily becoming hemmed in by urban development.

In 1646, rural land bisected by Kanasugi-dōri was consolidated under the name Kanasugi and placed under the control of Kan’ei Temple. A township formed along both sides of the artery, though Negishi on the west side remained predominantly agricultural. The road, then, amounted to a boundary—first unofficial and later official—separating the more residential districts to its east from the rural expanses to its west. Despite urban expansion, this road remained a marker between inside and outside, and Negishi’s position along the outer edge of this boundary was to be instrumental in its emergent identity as a place of retreat and reclusion.

Edo’s population had exceeded one million by the beginning of the eighteenth century, and centrifugal development caused by spillover of townsmen further populated areas bordering the major thoroughfares.

20. Yazaki Takeo estimates that Edo’s population reached 1.4 million by the 1720s, though most estimates fall between 1.0 and 1.2 million (Yazaki Takeo, Social Change and the City in Japan, trans. David L. Swain [Tokyo: Japan Publications, 1968], p. 134).
Theoretically, the city proper was considered to cover 16 square ri (39 square miles), extending two ri (2.9 miles) north and two ri south of Nihonbashi. At roughly 1.5 ri from the city center, technically Negishi would have fallen within these geographic boundaries. But this theoretical guideline was superseded by attention to actual land use, a more functional means of discriminating between urban and rural. Confusion was compounded by the fact that municipal affairs were overseen by three independent administrative bodies: the bakufu assumed control over the yamanote samurai, who were policed by metsuke (inspectors) and mawarikata (patrolmen) but primarily by their respective daimyo; the city magistrate (machibugyō) was the administrator for commoners in the shitemachi districts; and the magistrate of temples and shrines (jishabugyō) constituted a third administrative authority.

Understandably, the fluidity of urbanization made suburban meisho like Negishi subject to jurisdictional disputes between the city, temples and shrines, and the Tokugawa government. When large portions of Negishi burned down in 1737, reconstruction initiatives prompted a reevaluation of land use and administrative jurisdiction. Eight years later, the built-up areas along Kanasugi-dōri, which had been under the control of Kan'ei Temple since 1646, were placed under the authority of the municipal government. This land reallocation divided Kanasugi-dōri into Kanasugi-kamicho (the southern section) and Kanasugi-shimocho (the northern section), thereby absorbing roadside establishments into the municipality and administratively severing them from the paddy fields behind, which, as farmland subject to taxation, remained under bakufu jurisdiction. Edo planners sporadically expanded the two sets of boundaries that corresponded roughly to the yamanote and shitemachi districts, but at no time did these extend west of Kanasugi-dōri to encompass Negishi. Throughout the Edo period, therefore, urban and suburban space continued to be designated along status lines, or, in economic terms, as either residential, commercial, or agricultural.

Ordinances prohibiting urban dwellers from keeping houses in agricultural areas were rarely enforced, and from the late eighteenth century Negishi attracted samurai, merchants, and bunjin seeking detachment from their officially designated spaces. Daimyo villas constituted the more glaring examples. During their alternate attendance in Edo, all daimyo lived in kamiyashiki, their primary estates near Edo castle, but also maintained middle villas (nakayashiki) in more remote regions of the city and lower villas (shimoyashiki, kakaeyashiki) located even further afield, often on agricultural land purchased from peasants. Even if daimyo themselves visited only occasionally, the palanquins of family, guests, and retainers coming and going to these suburban villas would have been a common sight. Since the mid-seventeenth century, Negishi had been a favored site for such residences. Most notably, Mínōwa-chō in northern Kanasugi contained a block of spacious lower villas belonging to five daimyo: the Ikeda from Harima domain, the Sō from Tushima, the Ōzeki from Shinano, the Katsu from Iyo Ōzu, and the Ishikawa from Hyūga. Merchants making fortunes in the nearby Yoshiwara entertainment district also maintained villas in Negishi to accommodate family members, mistresses, and pregnant or convalescing geisha. A survey during the Bunka-Bunsei period (1804–29) recorded 220 such estates in the greater Negishi area, an explosive rise from a generation earlier. Bunjin constituted another unauthorized de-
mographic, and this loose contingent of reclusive or retired amateur literati best exemplified Negishi’s identity as a *meisho*.

Negishi’s diversity was not limited to samurai, merchants, and *bunjin*; it also accommodated resident enclaves representing extraordinarily disparate social strata. A shogunal presence issuing from Kan’ei-ji Temple and the Tokugawa’s adjacent hawking grounds in Mikawashima was further sanctified by members of the emperor’s extended family who served as head priests at Kan’ei-ji. Located in the southwest corner of Negishi, north of Kan’ei-ji, the Goinden pavilion was a retreat built for these imperial family members who were compelled to reside in Edo as hostages of the bakufu. The grounds of the Goinden encompassed a tree-lined pond known for moon viewing as well as some of the adjacent paddy fields farmed by local peasants. As landlords, these Goinden priests received tributes and conferred monetary gifts on tenants who displayed loyalty and filialness and to this extent maintained a resident presence within the Negishi community. The Goinden was but a short walk from central Negishi, and equidistant in the opposite direction—and nearly adjacent to the daimoyo villas in Minowa-chō—lay the execution grounds and *hinin* (outcaste) community at Kozukappara. Though outside Negishi proper, Kozukappara, as well as a second *hinin* compound adjoining the nearby Yoshiwara district, added an earthiness to the diversity of this district.

Studies of early modern Japanese urban space have relied exclusively on zoning ordinances based on status. Judging from the artistic and literary representations of Negishi, however, administrative spatial divisions were reflected in neither the community’s local identity nor its residential demographics. By all indications, Negishi’s diversity and suitability for aesthetic retreat had the effect of dissolving status consciousness and nullifying zoning initiatives.

*Meisho Making (Meisho-zukuri): Literary and Artistic Representations of Negishi*

By the late seventeenth century, Edo had ballooned into a metropolis whose size and dynamism matched its political power, yet it did not match Osaka’s commercial strength or Kyoto’s cultural heritage. As an importer and consumer of both material and cultural goods, Edo possessed an abundance of political capital which could not, however, compensate for its scarcity of cultural capital. This fact did not sit well with Edoites, who set about

30. Hayashi et al., eds., *Edo machikata kakiage*, pp. 304–5. The Goinden was constructed in 1753 and burned down in 1868 during the Boshin War.

31. It was at Kozukappara that Dutch Learning pioneers Sugita Genpaku (1733–1817) and Maeno Ryo-taku (1723–1803) famously observed and documented an autopsy in 1771, the event that presaged the ensuing Dutch Learning movement. Maeno later retired to a house in Negishi.
rectifying this imbalance by reinventing Edo as a city of beauty and cultural depth. “Edo culture” thus formed as a counterculture to Kyoto, still the nation’s primary locus of aesthetic taste.

In part, Edo’s reinvention was carried out through designations of meisho, each possessing its particular meibutsu (celebrated flora, fauna, and natural features). Meisho making was a direct attempt by Edoites to vie for aesthetic currency by going head to head with the sites, flora, and fauna in Kyoto that had stood for centuries as unchallenged exemplars of taste. The guidebook Zoku Edo sunago (Gilded Edo, Vol. 2, 1735) declared that the fireflies in Edo’s Ochiai were larger than the famed fireflies in Kyoto’s Uji. Seedlings from Mt. Takao near Kyoto, famed for its brilliant autumn leaves, were transported and transplanted at Ryūsenji in Edo, where they were said to flourish with equal splendor.32 Negishi’s most noted feature, the bush warblers (uguisu), were cherished principally because they were brought from Kyoto and released, their supposed Kansai dialect incurring more cultural capital among Edoites than the allegedly clumsy chirpings of local birds.33 Thus it was by drawing relationships and comparisons to Kyoto that Edoites elevated the cultural sophistication of their city.

Early guidebooks from the seventeenth century focused on suburban sites, many lining the Sumida River, and this trend was perpetuated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by an ensuing explosion of meisho making through a sizable body of maps, pictures, gazetteers, guidebooks, and other accounts. Edo meisho hanagoyomi (Floral calendar of famous sites in Edo, 1827), for instance, paired illustrations with textual passages that chronologically arranged 154 attractions around Edo according to their seasonal peaks. In the gazetteer Tō to saijiki (Annual festivals of Edo, 1838), this number grew to 253 sites, each celebrated for a specific seasonal flower, bird, insect, or some other natural attribute.34 Such publications transformed perceptions of Edo as a brutish military stronghold into a metropolis whose urban landscape, while lacking the cachet of tradition, at least boasted an impressive array of natural attractions.

The attractions themselves were held to the same standards that for centuries had guided aesthetic practice in Kyoto. It was not enough for a site to boast beautiful wisteria; its environs must be conducive to viewing the wisteria in a fūryū (aesthetically refined, elegant) manner, to staging a deeply fūryū experience. For this purpose, seasonal observation was fundamental. Seasons punctuate meisho, for instance, in Shiin getsurei (Calendar of an urban recluse, 1815), a diary containing brief reflections and observations of neighborhoods in eastern Edo—Ueno, Negishi, Yanaka, Asakusa,

33. Negishi takes its alternate name, Uguisudani (valley of the bush warblers), from these birds.
34. Higuchi, Kōgai no fūkei, pp. 21–22.
Muko¯jima, Ōtsuka, Sakamoto, Senju, Ryōgoku—throughout one calendar year. The author, Murata Ryōa (1772–1843), was a poet and National Learning scholar who had taken Buddhist vows, an act that justified his self-styled designation as an urban recluse. Most entries in the diary are lyrical descriptions of seasonal progression at those plebian recreation sites near the Sumida River, and they are drenched with a pathos emphasizing the lonely quietude permeating these spots. No matter that these were populated areas prone to the turmoil endemic to any residential space; Murata saw in each only beauty and bucolic charm.

There was considerable precedent for literary representations of this sort, for meisho-zukuri had long been embedded in Japan’s cultural tradition, particularly in waka and painting iconography. And not only were the patterns of literary representation underlying meisho making blind to ugliness, they took advantage of literary practices that for centuries had been used to convey aesthetic appreciation. Poetics was especially effective in this regard: once a place or object was fitted with widely recognized associated words (engo) and pillow words (makurakotoba), for example, its aesthetic prestige was all but assured. The construction of a meisho, in other words, was the discursive fabrication of an aesthetic space made widely recognizable by an assortment of meibutsu that were then fed into the poetic machinery of associative rhetoric. Any mention of warblers or wabizumai thereby triggered positive associations with Negishi. The ukiyoe print titled simply “Negishi” by Utagawa Kunisada (1786–1864) in his Edo meisho hyakunin bijo (Famous places of Edo, one hundred beauties, 1857–58) is indicative. The work portrays a wife dozing in the afternoon who is awakened by the call of a bush warbler outside, the sound reminding her of Negishi where evening visitors arrive for poetry, painting, and calligraphy parties.

With the publication of each guidebook, block print, poem, diary, story, and map, Negishi’s sights and sounds were recast on the minds of Edoites. They made no mention of Negishi’s administration or local power structure; their remarkable representational consistency eclipsed all other identity markers. Zoku Edo sunago, which records Edo’s natural features during each season along with the locations best noted for those natural features, lists Negishi as the site known for warblers and wisteria. Both Edo meisho hanagoyomi and Tōto saiiki include Negishi as a site for warblers, fireflies, marsh hens, and insects and the Otonashi River for fireflies. The story “Edo no Negishi nite onna no sumika o motome arikishi jō” (Walking the neighborhoods of Negishi in search of a woman) by bunjin Takebe Aya-
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Tari (1719–74), from his *Oriorigusa* (Tales from this time and that, 1771), provides one of the initial literary depictions: “Negishi lies to the northeast, away from bustling districts, and since it is a hamlet like a mountain's droplets, its water is pure in essence and its dwellings are comfortable. The homes depend only on bamboo and brushwood hedges for protection and put up only rough-hewn woven gates as barriers.” Takebe’s list of minor *meibutsu*—the “mountain” of Ueno, water, and bamboo hedges, must have resonated with later writers for all are standard inclusions in subsequent depictions. The brushwood hedge was particularly ubiquitous for its suggestiveness of a utopian living environment where walls were unnecessary to secure one’s solitude.

These same *meibutsu* and the ideals of *wabizumai* figured in a collection of essays compiled under the title *Hitomotosō* (Single blade of grass, 1806) by the eminent *bunjin* Ōta Nanpo (1749–1823), who lived in Negishi in 1804 and signed the preface *Uguisudani shiin* (Uguisudani urban recluse). The entry “Negishi uguisu” was written by the samurai Yamamichi no Takahiko (d. 1816) under the pen name Yamaguchi Barantei.

A stone’s throw from the dreary hilltop [of Ueno], which has neither aesthetic refinement nor style, lies the town of Negishi, known for its sweet fragrances. . . . Winds blow through the Ogyō Pine, while the voices of palanquin bearers are so faint that one might confuse them for distant *koto* plucking. The residences of those who have forsaken the world are deeply tucked away, like the dwelling in Saga where Giō settled into *wabizumai*. Here, amidst residences for mistresses and comfort women, shabby gardens are mixed in with illustrious ones. . . . From morning, smoke billows from the cauldrons and stoves of elegant teahouses. Like moonlight, glow from garden lanterns emanates like the whistling of the deer at the Kasuga Shrine. . . . All these are the villas of those with swollen pockets—or swollen bellies!

Barantei then proceeds to relate the story of Negishi’s imported warblers, without which no account of Negishi is complete. His quip about swollen bellies alludes to the proliferation of mistress houses in Negishi. More no-

39. This work is a collection of writings by members of a study group that Nanpo organized in 1797 and that convened monthly at his house.
40. The Ogyō Pine (Ogyō no Matsu) was one of Negishi’s foremost landmarks and was believed to mark the spot where eminent monks Kūkai (744–835) and Mongaku (1139–1203) once meditated. The name originates from the Kan’ei era (1624–43) when the Tendai patriarch Jigen Daishi (1536–1643) practiced religious austerities (*ogyō-hō*) under the tree. It was designated a National Monument in 1926.
41. Giō is a *shirabyōshi* dancer in the *Heike monogatari*. Humiliated by Taira Kiyomori, she takes Buddhist vows and retires to Saga.
table, though, are his references to the Kyoto-Osaka region—to the Kasuga Shrine and Saga—which lend their prestige to this new community, and his description of the high and low as “tucked away” but living happily side by side. We are to understand that this is a community unencumbered by status consciousness or neighborly competition.

Such literary representations are consistent with inscribed illustrations from various volumes of meishozue (illustrations of celebrated spots). The tribute to Negishi in Edo meisho hanagoyomi, for instance, focuses on the leisure of the wealthy (Figure 2). Here, four women, whose attire marks them as geisha, tend to the indulgences of a reclining host as he awaits the arrival of his guests. The residence is luxurious and the extravagant grounds exhibit the requisite meibutsu: plum trees and warblers. The work’s inscription is typically formulaic:

Negishi lies at the northern foot of Mt. Tōei. The bush warblers in this village sing superbly, and people delight to hear them [heralding spring]. “Ink guests” [bunjin bokkyaku]\(^{43}\) in their grass huts invite acquaintances to compose verse, recite poetry, and partake in tea ceremony.

\(^{43}\) In keeping with the meisho-zukuri practice of borrowing from Kyoto, most serious Edo bunjin traveled extensively in the Kansai area to insert themselves into the network there. Prior to the late eighteenth century, nascent haikai and nanga painting circles in Edo looked to their Kansai counterparts for friendship and instruction, and through those associations brought cultural capital back to Edo.
Brecher: Down and Out in Negishi

saki niō
the fragrance of blossoms

iroka nomi ka wa
is it merely scent and color?

uguisu mo
bush warblers

ume ni koso nake
chirp amidst plum petals

asana asana ni
morning after morning

In the 1850s, the prolific woodblock print artist Andō (Utagawa) Hiroshige (1797–1858) produced several representations of the Negishi area. “Minowa, Kanasugi, Mikawashima” from Meisho Edo hyakkei (One hundred views of Edo, 1857) looks west or northwest from Minowa and Kanasugi toward Mikawashima village. Mikawashima was a designated hawking ground of the Tokugawa family and the location of the shogun’s annual crane hunt. Migrating cranes wintered there between October and April, and with the exception of the one or two birds taken annually as gifts for the emperor, the birds were protected. Edicts prohibited loud noise and kite flying in nearby areas, and local villagers were hired to monitor the sanctuary to assure the birds’ safety. Hiroshige also portrayed Negishi in separate prints in his Ehon Edo miyage (Picture souvenirs from Edo, 1850), as well as in his Negishi hakkei (Eight views of Negishi, date unknown). Both of these are less ambitious works that highlight specific natural features such as the Otonashi River and the Ogyō Pine. The conspicuous absence of a human presence in this series reveals a clear intention to underscore the rusticity of Negishi’s landscape.

The meisho-zukuri phenomenon was also inherently egalitarian, for it considered physical space without regard to official designation. In Shiin getsurei, as in other such texts, there is no recognition of the class hierarchies that underlay the residential and occupational organization of urban space. All is rendered equally as aesthetic space. The irises blooming at the hinin center near Senju are placed in the same passage alongside the hydrangea in aristocratic Ueno, for example. To this extent, aesthetic space was constructed as a leveling device that members of all social classes could enjoy together. It invited voluntary congregation for the purpose of seasonal observance through nature appreciation. In other words, the emergence of suburban meisho and the publications that formalized them not only reformulated Japan’s aesthetic topography, they helped generate comparatively open, egalitarian venues for congregation.

While the bakufu implemented city-making policy from above, therefore, meisho making served the interests of would-be city makers below. Sustained by the popularity of tourism, it effected a codified utopianism by showering uncritical acclaim on suburban space. It is unimportant whether

44. Henry D. Smith surmises that this scene is just outside the feeding areas and that the figure in the background is the full-time feeder carrying baskets of rice for the birds (Ando Hiroshige, One Hundred Famous Views of Edo, commentaries by Henry D. Smith [New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1986], plate 102).
these were firsthand or imagined accounts; their function was the aestheticization of the local landscape and the creation of a vocabulary for aesthetic spaces that subsequently became a recognized, patterned means of representation. This making of suburban, off-duty meisho continued resolutely, unhindered by official divisions between urban and rural space.

Negishi as a Homegrown Living Space

Shoka jinmeiroku (Biographical records from numerous households, 1836) lists some 30 bunjin living in Negishi, and it was this resident demographic that most actively constructed and exemplified the community’s image as a pastoral retreat. Among these bunjin were some of Japan’s most important aesthetes: most notably the artist, poet, and Rinpa revivalist Sakai Hoitsu; calligrapher and Confucian scholar Kameda Bosai; and woodblock print artist Kitao Shigemasa (see Table 1). The bunjin salon was aesthetic space outside commercial or official space and shared neither philosophical

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ogata Kenzan</td>
<td>1663–1743</td>
<td>Ceramicist; younger brother of Kôrin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toriyama Sekien</td>
<td>1714–88</td>
<td>Ukiyoe artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maeno Ryôtaku</td>
<td>1723–1803</td>
<td>Dutch Studies pioneer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tani Rokkoku</td>
<td>1729–1809</td>
<td>Poet, Chinese scholar; Tani Bunchô’s father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitao Shigemasa</td>
<td>1739–1820</td>
<td>Ukiyoe print artist; founder of Kitao School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ōta Nanpo</td>
<td>1749–1823</td>
<td>Writer and poet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kameda Bosai</td>
<td>1752–1826</td>
<td>Painter, poet, calligrapher, heterodox Confucian scholar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakai Höitsu</td>
<td>1761–1828</td>
<td>Poet, painter, Rinpa revivalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hirata Atsutane</td>
<td>1776–1843</td>
<td>Nativist thinker and popularizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzuki Kitsu</td>
<td>1796–1856</td>
<td>Rinpa and landscape painter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terakado Seiken</td>
<td>1796–1868</td>
<td>Zuihitsu writer, Confucian scholar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katsu Kokichi</td>
<td>1802–50</td>
<td>Author of Musui dokugen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiga Risai</td>
<td>1762–1840</td>
<td>Confucian scholar, poet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yanagawa Shigenobu</td>
<td>active ca. 1824–60</td>
<td>Woodblock print artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hara Tokusai</td>
<td>active ca. 1825–63</td>
<td>Confucian scholar, author of Zentetsu zôden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
nor economic ground with meisho-making initiatives. To do so would violate principles of aesthetic reclusion. While meisho continued to be favored motifs for artists of all genres, for the classically minded these included only those Chinese or Japanese sites with historic or aesthetic notoriety. Negishi was not one of these and thus for Hoitsu, Bosai, and Shigemasa was unsuitable as a theme of serious art. Its function, rather, was to serve as an inspirational site to meditate upon those motifs that were.

More obscure local artists did not cling to the lofty classicism embraced by Hoitsu and his cohort and were less averse to adding their own voices to commercial print culture. Their works were more apt to follow representational precedents set by professional meisho makers. Getsugai’s (dates unknown) Negishi ryakuzu (Rough map of Negishi, 1820) is one such case (Figure 3). Though not drawn to scale, the map is especially useful in showing the proximity of Negishi’s most famous residents. The proximity of the residences marked Hoitsu, Kiitsu,46 Kitao, and Bosai indeed suggests

46. Suzuki Kiitsu (1796–1856) was Hoitsu’s student and a central figure in Negishi’s community of bunjin.
an artist’s commune of sorts. The map’s inscriptions, brushed by the painter Karasuyama Matsu (whose residence appears just north of the Ogyō Pine on the map), begin by listing Negishi’s three representative trees and birds (san-boku san-chō), followed by a kanshi:

I enjoy merely lounging
beneath the pine at Shiguregaoka47
and the wild cranes there are my friends.
Who ever could deny that
I am but a local hermit?

The map’s listing of meibutsu and its poetic allusions to a familiar ethos of aesthetic reclusion clearly follow representational patterns of meisho making in more commercial works. Shimo-Yanaka Naka-Negishi Kanasugi ezu (Sketch of Shimo-Yanaka, Naka-Negishi, and Kanasugi), published in Myōmyō kidan (Heavenly tales, 1838), was also a collaborative work by local artists.48 The illustration by woodblock print artist Yanagawa Shigenobu II (active ca. 1824–60) provides a bird’s-eye view of Negishi that gazes toward the Ueno hills from the northeast, and the road running from left to right stretches from Sakamoto Kanasugi, through Negishi, and toward Nippori. Shigenobu marks Kan’eiji Temple in the background, as well as other temples, cemeteries, and landmarks. The centerpiece of the work, however, is the juxtaposition of its various inscriptions—added by Shigenobu’s father Shiga Risai, Hara Tokusai,49 and Risai’s second son Miyakawa Seian. Risai’s caption and playfully vulgar kyōka (comic verse) read:

The place called Shimo-Yanaka50 north of Mt. Tōei is secluded and quiet. Mountain foxes and wild tanuki [Japanese raccoon dogs] frolic in the garden there by day, and by night the marsh hens and horned owls call from the fields. I plot and fashion a small grass hut not five feet square to keep off the rain and dew, and there I bathe in the blessings of peace and quiet, singing:

Though big enough for me to drum on my belly, this hut is no larger than a tanuki’s scrotum!51

Earthly witticisms like Risai’s would have been unimaginable a century earlier, but by the nineteenth century populist currents in cultural forms had

47. Shiguregaoka is another local name for Negishi; the pine referred to here is the Ogyō Pine.
49. Hara (or Gen) Tokusai is best known as the author of the Sentetsu zōden (1844), a chronicle of prominent Confucian thinkers.
50. Shimo-yanaka lies in the southwest corner of Negishi.
developed alongside increasing devotion to Chinese classicism. Training in the arts continued to rely heavily on Chinese manuals, and adherence to those orthodox styles permitted playfulness like Risai’s only if qualified by a requisite classical sophistication. Here, Tokusai’s kanshi titled “Kankyo” (Idle living) fills this need.

Having dressed myself in poor clothing to replace luxurious jade,
I read beneath my window, embracing laziness.
Visited by the cool breeze blowing across the pond
I long for the bright moon shining through the pine trees.
My hall is cramped but spacious enough to afford me the pleasure of stretching my legs,
And though I am poor I possess the wealth of lying on my arm.
What a pity that honors and disgraces alike all disappear in a second.
Here, no one knocks on my bamboo door all day long.52

The imagery in this poem—of trading official dress for humble clothing, communing with the moon, pines, wind, and water, and living happily in idle solitude—is taken directly from collections of Chinese and Japanese reclusion poems and contains familiar tropes from Tao Yuanming (365–427), Bai Juyi (772–846), and Kamo no Chōmei (1153–1216). It is this very conventionality that the author wishes to invoke, for these associations will lend their prestige to his own living space. Tokusai and Seian add some final verses.

```
subete korobu wa Yanaka michi
sono ue funpun tari hikuso no kaori
sarinaagara shokun moshi ga o magenaba
myōga ni kanau shōga o kenzu beshi
... sumika kaete mite mo
ukiyo so kōkō shi
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Everyone slips and falls on the Yanaka road
And the whole place smells of dried dung
But when gentlemen come calling in their palanquins
I will present them with pickled ginger
... herein wherever one may dwell
all is a floating world53
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Following these appear poetic tributes to Negishi’s 12 seasonal meibutsu—birds, flowers, insects, and vistas—each corresponding to a month in the lunar calendar. Collectively, the sentiments expressed in Shimo-Yanaka, Naka-Negishi, Kanasugi ezu aim at capturing a contemplative yet playful ambience. They convey an isolated, pastoral space where even locals slip on the dung-covered road but also where the comings and goings of aristocrats merit no special attention. The comparison to a float-

52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., p. 19.
ing world evokes the ephemeral nature of reclusion, for it is no accident that both this work and Negishi ryakuzu include poems and inscriptions that identify the author as a recluse. Both mix Chinese and Japanese verse, underscore local meibutsu, and highlight the positive aspects of rustic living. Though unapologetically lowbrow, they follow the spirit of meisho-making documents by showcasing idealized views of private space.

**Kanasugi nikki: The Economics of Privacy**

The mountain of art works and literary accounts glorifying Negishi as a meisho encourages the perception that wabizumai constituted an existence free of life's usual encumbering necessities. It also overlooks reclusion's primary logistical requirement: economic independence. Many of Edo's active bunjin were samurai who balanced artistic pursuits with official obligations, a situation that afforded them the economic freedom to enjoy the pleasures of amateurism. Economic independence was also of little concern to Höitsu, Bósai, and Shigemasa, all of whom garnered sufficient sales, commissions, and students to live detached from the vulgarities of commerce. For the remaining majority of Negishi's resident bunjin, to whom basic necessities were a daily concern, devotion to the aesthetic life raised practical concerns, though to acknowledge this would be to compromise the very ideals of aesthetic practice. Artistic activities that did not transcend commercial pressures (that catered to market demand) could thus be renounced. Aesthetic reclusion, therefore, constituted a detachment from both the responsibilities of status and market demands. While limited possibilities for attracting patrons, commissions, and students did exist within the bunjin's artistic field, this was a market that was largely sustained internally among fellow literati.54

Yamazaki Yoshishige (1796–1856) was a pharmacist, zuihitsu writer, and nativist thinker from the samurai class. At one time a popular author, he later fell into economic decline and survived only by trading his books and other property for food. His lengthy Kanasugi nikki (Kanasugi diary, 1837–38) reminds us that there is suffering in reclusion, that for obscure bunjin life remained a struggle, and that for some people reclusion was less a conscious decision and more an unfortunate economic circumstance. Written in 1837–38 during the throes of the Tenpō famines (1833–38), when economic hardship had penetrated nearly all social levels, his diary illustrates the vulnerability of the market for cultural products. The austerity and torment of daily existence confessed in this document offers a fresh perspective of Negishi as a living space rather than as a meisho. The text merits extended quotation:

From four or five years ago until now, the spring of 1837, the price of rice has been high. Poor harvests caused the people to go hungry and their hearts to grow restless. I too was poor and privation restricted my daily activities, like everyone else’s. Throughout the spring, economic hardship has kept me from participating in social affairs. Dust accumulates on my desk, and I have been trading my books for rice and money for two or three years now. . . . Increasingly the cold filters through my thin robe and penetrates my body, and as I sit idly on rainy evenings remembering the past and speculating about the future, I wonder what is to become of me. . . .

This year I have stopped being concerned with things, and so everything has taken on a certain emptiness. My constant companions have grown distant. In the deep winter, I have no revenue to rely on and am extremely lonely. What is more, it is my forty-second year, the most inauspicious of years [according to the horoscope]. At this point when everything is going badly, I try to remind myself that things aren’t really as bad as they seem and decide to seek out a grass hut in Kanasugi to spend time in seclusion and wash away my troubles. . . .

On New Year’s Day of 1838, morning mist lingered peacefully in the sky. . . . The gate of plum blossoms is already in bloom, the calls of the warblers on the eves are pacifying, and though I have no income again this spring my heart feels young and is filled with a sense of well-being. . . .

Though this year I did not follow the custom of decorating with pine and bamboo New Year’s adornments, to my house spring will also come. We had nothing but boiled mochi [rice cakes] on which to harden our teeth this season, but soon it would be noon and—though I worried about my lack of money—one cannot be fixated on such things when others are observing New Year’s customs. How delighted I was when a man brought over a New Year’s gift of mochi. I traded a few pieces of furniture lying around for money and arranged our Buddhist statue for the noon prayer.

On the second day, I celebrated with boiled mochi again, but once again on this day there was no rice to cook at noon. What was I to do? Haggard figure though I was, I wished to go visit someone’s house that day, but in the end I didn’t go. I waited and in the evening went to see Tōbunsai Kanshichi in Kobunecho. I received some coins and some rice, which I cooked and ate when I returned late that night. I was in the same state from the third day on, living with my heart in utter distress, virtually unable to go anywhere. . . .

Around the second month a block print appeared on the signboard on Hara Tokusai’s street in Shimo-Yanaka. It was a picture scheme of Shimo-Yanaka, Negishi, and Kanasugi marked with the names of resident bunjin and where they lived. . . .

The second month ended and on the first of the third month, my five-year-old boy Tetsusaburō contracted smallpox, and from the evening of

55. The grass hut should be taken not literally but as the trope developed by Saigyō, Kamo no Chōmei, Bashō, and others.
56. The practice of hardening one’s teeth (hagatame) on tough foods was observed at New Year’s as a measure to ensure longevity.
57. The document referred to is the Shimo-Yanaka, Naka-Negishi, Kanasugi ezu.
the same day my two-year-old girl Teru also became ill. There was little I could do for them there at home, but feeling pity for them I sold my extra sword for medicine, which I had them drink. To my great surprise, Shinbei from Chōjamachi sent over some of his extra rice and this put me more at ease. A few days later, my seven year old, Ryōnosuke, caught smallpox too, though Tetsusaburō was the worst off. All three couldn’t get out of bed all month. . . .

On the twenty-sixth day, Yanagawa Shigenobu held a painting and calligraphy party [shogakai] at the Kawachiya teahouse at Ryōgoku Yanagibashi. Hara Tokusai, with whom I have long been close, insisted that I attend. Not wishing to use penury as an excuse, as they say, there was little I could do and so I attended the gathering that day. As I knew most everyone in attendance, this occasion had the effect of temporarily liberating me from my daily worries. From that party, I received an invitation from Amano Masanori to join him at another riverside teahouse for more entertainment, and after that we all went over to Shimizu Miyuki’s place. Presently I became nicely drunk and returned home in a daze.58

In the final entry, dated the sixth day of the eleventh month—midwinter—Yamazaki is experiencing extreme hardship once again and confesses that it is only the hopefulness in his heart that sustains him. We must recall that Negishi throughout the nineteenth century was not a country club. The limited market for commissions, sales, and students was dominated by a few celebrated individuals, forcing many bunjin to support themselves by other means. Wabizumai was the luxury of a select few; to Yamazaki it was a euphemism for the adversity and sacrifice that accompanied the bunjin condition. While detachment and solitude were hailed as desirable, suburban areas were favored locations for aesthetic reclusion precisely because of the reduced chance of finding long-term income in more rural areas. Economic necessity made community critical, and it is both his joyful participation and the obstacles preventing his participation in the community that most preoccupy Yamazaki. Friendship with Yanagawa Shigenobu II, Hara Tokusai, and Shiga Risai, those who collaborated on Shimo-Yanaka, Naka-Negishi, Kanasugi ezu, sustains his social identity and avails him of the humanitarian assistance he requires to survive.

Yamazaki’s work is a reality check; while there is no reason to believe that the utopian descriptions in meisho-making documents are apocryphal or disingenuous, common sense calls for a measure of skepticism. Because Negishi was, in most cases, a refuge for those who gazed upon their own surroundings through rose-colored glasses, we have little reliable information about its actual living conditions. It is certain that, by the mid–nineteenth century, encroaching urbanization was besmirching its image as an idyllic

living space. Night-soil collectors came and went with their carts, and waste disposal was a problem. Some Negishi residents relied on variously contaminated communal well water or on water vendors. Some townsfolk near Kanasugi-dōrī lived in machiya or cramped nagaya with entire families occupying a six-mat room and sharing a common latrine, well, and garbage disposal trough with other families. Glimpses provided by Meiji writers help bring Yamazaki’s hardships further into focus. The novelist Oda Jun’ichirō (1851–1919) describes the place as quiet and remote but inconvenient, and Takahama Kyoshi (1874–1959) relates Masaoka Shiki’s confessions about the hardship and inconvenience of rusticity:

Though Uguisu yokocho, the road outside my gate, has a lovely name, in fact it is so dreadful in winter and spring that even specially elevated clogs get stuck in the mud. It is not unusual that by the time visitors arrive, their white split-toe socks are filthy. In the summer the long rains make ruts and gullies so treacherous as to cause passersby to trip and fall. It is truly a sorry state of affairs.

As Yamazaki’s example illustrates, aesthetic reclusion was an attitude projected through a public persona, separate from the economics of privacy. Wealth and aestheticism were forms of capital that were not to be mixed, for economic failure was no indicator of artistic talent. This did not mean, however, that other forms of failure did not float beneath the surface of aesthetic reclusion.

**Resignation and Failure**

The economic uncertainties of reclusion problematize utopian representations of aesthetic space. An aura of failure surrounding the ethos of reclusion can do the same. Successful reclusion must be a personal choice, for forced withdrawal intimates failure. Several scholars have offered comparative interpretations of aesthetic reclusion and concluded that the arts and the lifestyles of early modern Japanese nonconformists were not as subversive as their counterparts in China and the West, that these nonconformists failed to produce anything genuinely new, and that they failed

60. The poet and essayist Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902) moved to Negishi in 1894 and was the central member of the Negishi Tanka-kai, a poetry circle that convened regularly in his house.
to achieve their presumably subversive objectives. John Rosenfield notes that numbers of eccentric artists increased so rapidly in early modern Japan that by the 1820s or 1830s “they seem to have constituted virtually a new orthodoxy.” Nonconformity was simply a means of becoming commercially noticeable, and “by comparison with their Western counterparts Japan’s eccentric artists appear far less subversive.”\textsuperscript{63} Saeki Shōichi adds that these individuals were unable to effect any sort of sociopolitical change because, unlike eccentric artists in Europe, “Edo Japanese did not develop any definite idea of civil liberty.”\textsuperscript{64}

Sugiura Minpei takes this argument further, asserting that compared to those in China, Japanese recluses lived comparatively poorer, more austere lives. They were the individuals who lacked the ability to compete and, having lost the fight for social survival, had retreated to isolation. Chinese recluses such as the Julin Xizian (Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove; Chikurin Shichiken) and the Shangshan Shihao (Four Greybeards of Mt. Shang; Shōzan Shikō), in contrast, were counted among their country’s elites. They did not experience hardship, did not want for food, and did not practice celibacy. Comparatively, Japan’s noted recluses appear to be disenfranchised and socially defeated. They generally represent poverty, lack vitality and inspiration, and have neither the wherewithal to enter the social struggle nor the will to protest against it. Furthermore, Sugiura continues, as they do not adopt any ideological position—neither embracing nor renouncing loyalty, filial piety, or morality—they fall victim to depravity.\textsuperscript{65}

Sugiura’s argument appears to fit in some cases, such as that of Kamo no Chōmei, whose reclusion intoned both a resignation to the vagaries of worldly events and a purposive retreat from them. And indeed recollections of the famished artist-monk Yokoi Kinkoku (1761–1832) begging his relatives for food or of the wandering monk Kashiwagi Jotei (1763–1819) freezing to death in an abandoned temple belie the obvious point that Japanese recluses experienced different financial circumstances than their bureaucratic counterparts in China. Yet it is not hard to find opposing examples—Japan’s aristocratic Kinoshita Chōshōshi (1569–1649) and China’s failed


\textsuperscript{65} Sugiura offers the example of the monk Tōsui, who lived in reclusion in the Kyoto suburb of Takagamine where he tended to ailing beggars. Tōsui was so indigent and irreverent to decorum that he thought nothing of eating defiled food left by a dead vagabond (Sugiura Minpei, “Nihon no inja, chūgoku no inja,” \textit{Kokubungaku: Kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū}, Vol. 19, No. 14 [1974], pp. 74–75).
Tao Yuanming\textsuperscript{66} (365–427) certainly do not fit—and clearly Sugiura’s point can at best be considered a rough simplification. It is more useful as a reminder of the historiographical consensus that in the Edo period recluses embodied an inability, voluntary or not, to live comfortably within the mainstream.

Life in Negishi contextualizes this view, for in contrast to the pastoralism advanced by the meisho-making works already discussed, we do find that wabi\textsuperscript{umai} in Negishi is variously accompanied by an aura of qualified failure. Yamazaki Yoshishige shares some illustrious company in this regard. Both Sakai Hōitsu and Kameda Bōsai, for example, wrote critical intellectual or political treatises that went ignored, and with the promulgation of the Prohibition of Heterodox Studies in 1790 both suffered rebuffs that cast them adrift from the sociopolitical mainstream. Hōitsu was a family embarrassment but was tolerated at home until 1790, when he personally handed to shogunal chief councilor Matsudaira Sadanobu a statement he had written renouncing Sadanobu’s prohibition edict. High-profile samurai were particularly subject to the heightened vigilance prescribed by Sadanobu’s Kansei Reforms (1787–93), and the Sakai family, fearing repercussions of Hōitsu’s indiscretion, responded by moving him to one of its villas remote from the city center.

As a young man, Bōsai opened an academy of heterodox Confucian thought that enjoyed immediate success. An outspoken critic of the bakufu, Bōsai pushed for economic reforms to aid victims of the Tenmei famines (1782–87) and wrote treatises condemning Ogyū Sorai’s philological studies and advocating scholarly attention to contemporary concerns. Leading by example, in 1783 Bōsai sold his personal library to raise money for victims of Mt. Asama’s volcanic eruption, a disaster that claimed 40,000 lives. His academy was highly reputed and produced cultural icons such as Takizawa Bakin (1767–1848) and Maki Ryōko (1777–43), but following the Prohibition of Heterodox Studies it became the target of bakufu scrutiny and an unwise association for students hoping to secure positions in the bureaucracy. When enrollments fell, Bōsai closed the academy and retreated to a life of aesthetic reclusion. The identities that Hōitsu and Bōsai later cultivated as bunjin in retreat were thus tinged with a resigned cognizance of political impotence.

Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843) acquired widespread notoriety as a National Learning thinker and proselytizer, but much of his thought had been dismissed or suppressed because he had failed to produce a nativism that was literary and philological enough to satisfy followers of the Norinaga

School who were prevalent in urban centers. As a result, his teachings were considerably less popular in Edo than they were in the countryside, causing him to be viewed more as a grassroots proselytizer than an innovative thinker. This was a problem that Hirata was unable to rectify throughout his life, though he was still writing when he moved to Negishi with his family in 1835. Years earlier he had absconded from his native Akita domain and been denied status as a domainal retainer because of his failure to return. Three years after moving to Negishi, where he lived as a political refugee and frustrated teacher, Hirata was reinstated as an Akita domain samurai but simultaneously ordered back to Akita. Once again he chose to ignore the order. On the last day of 1840, however, Hirata received a mandate from elder statesman Ōta Suketomo informing him that he had been expelled from Edo and that he must return to Akita at once. Leaving his family, he departed immediately and spent his remaining years in a remote Akita community corresponding with his family and pining for his Negishi home, where his wife and children lived in privation, isolation, and shame.

The year Hirata died, Negishi acquired a similarly disgraced resident. Katsu Kokichi (1802–50) was an unemployable hatamoto who in 1843 “retired” to Negishi and wrote the autobiographical Musui dokugen, known to readers of English as Musui’s Story. Katsu’s was a forced retirement; he was a victim of the fallout from Mizuno Tadakuni’s Tenpō Reforms which sought to streamline government expenses by eliminating extraneous hatamoto. Given that he spent much of his time in the Shitaya, Asakusa, and Yoshiwara areas, it is natural that he opted to withdraw to adjacent Negishi, that area’s premier retirement spot. The tone of Katsu’s autobiography alternates between regret for a life of indiscretions and a promise of atonement. Rebellious and antiauthoritarian as a youth and an irascible hoodlum throughout his adult life, the retired Katsu confesses a sense of humiliation for failing to secure an official position. The work also betrays a suspicious celebration of quiet aestheticism, suspicious given the author’s lack of any such inclination prior to his relocation in Negishi. To this extent, his retired identity follows his choice of living space.

The embattled writer Terakado Seiken (1796–1868) offers yet another example. Born in Edo to a low-level samurai from Mito and orphaned in his

71. Katsu’s case provides a reminder of the functionalism governing status and the use of urban and suburban space in Edo. Mizuno’s Tenpō Reforms reasserted and enforced the edict prohibiting samurai from inhabiting Negishi. The fact that Katsu was permitted to reside there indicates that his was an officially recognized retirement that severed him from bureaucratic ties.
youth, he spent his early years in a manner characterized as “incipient delinquency.” In his twenties he opened a Confucian academy (which failed) and then was unsuccessful in efforts to obtain a position in his domainal administration. Embittered, he penned the satirical *Edo hanjōki* (An account of the prosperity of Edo, 1832–36) which described the hair salons, public baths, and back-alley shops of Yoshiwara, Sagami, and other noted plebian spots in Edo. His satire targeted the self-important, outdated Confucian doctors and the degenerate clerics and administrators who claimed authority and moral rectitude, while his heroes were those, like himself, whose true learning and moral upstanding excluded them from social recognition. The work enjoyed immediate success but his lampoons of social conditions incited the ire of the *bakufu*. In 1835 the work was censored, which prompted Seiken to pen more openly critical condemnations of the ruling order. Rigorous enforcement during the Tenpō Reforms resulted in his permanent banishment from official service, effectively stripping him of samurai status, and he wandered for several years afterward as a self-described *muyōsha* (useless person). When the great earthquake of 1855 devastated the *shitamachi* neighborhoods but left Negishi miraculously intact, some who could afford to relocate there did so. Seiken one was of these; he lived near the Shingon Saizōin Temple not far from the Ogyō Pine in 1855–56. Negishi was to display an even stronger aura of failure in the coming years. A popular residential neighborhood for Meiji-period *gesaku* writers and intellectuals who had retreated underground after the restoration, it became a kind of skid row hosting the leftovers of late Edo culture who rejected the newfangled tastes of the early Meiji period. For others, particularly those who had been defeated in the Boshin War (1868–69), withdrawal to Negishi was a means of dodging military conscription after its implementation in 1873.

Hōitsu, Bōsai, Kokichi, and Seiken had all been rebuked for adding their voices to an inhospitable political arena; this experience precluded any possibility of future participation in either intellectual or bureaucratic service. Recognition of political irrelevance engendered for each a new social identity that was subsequently actualized, in part, through relocation to Negishi. In their case, any politicaity implicit in dropping out and turning to asocial aestheticism was eclipsed by the depoliticizing intentions of the act. Negishi was a private sphere that, as Hōitsu’s case aptly illustrates, opened an array of opportunities and relationships impossible within the city proper.

73. Ibid., pp. 10–11.
74. Ibid., pp. 2–3.
Empowerment, Play, and Aesthetic Reclusion: The Case of Sakai Hōitsu

In part, aesthetic reclusion in places like Negishi was enabled by the close correlation between status and living space. The functionality of urban space was intended to correspond with the status of those who lived and worked in that space, meaning that liberation from status permitted relocation to functionally different surroundings. By extension, status could be permanently or temporarily “deactivated” through retirement or retreat, by going off duty. Just as bunjin used sobriquets to establish new identities within the artistic field, then, they were able to use off-duty (private, autonomous) spaces for the same purpose. Officially, Negishi was an agricultural zone where peasants shared space with status-ambivalent individuals, and though authorities usually turned a blind eye toward resident off-duty samurai and townsmen, it was ill-suited to on-duty personae. The preeminent literatus Tani Buncho (1763–1840), for instance, was born and raised in Negishi where his father Rokkoku (1729–1809) was active in local bunjin circles, but Tani later moved a mile or so south to Nichōchō, just east of Ueno. This positioned him within the city proper and on soil that was more consistent with his growing wealth, status as a quasi-official painter, and close association with the shogunal councilor Matsudaira Sadanobu. Residence in a pastoral suburb, clearly, was spatially inappropriate for his professional aspirations.

The functions and potentials of off-duty space are further illuminated by the example of Sakai Hōitsu, Negishi’s most prestigious resident. Hōitsu was the second son of the daimyo of Harima domain (near Kobe) but was born and educated at the family compound in Edo. The Sakai family was at the center of an active push to aestheticize Edo at the elite level, to cultivate within the bakufu a refinement that rivaled its courtly counterparts in Kyoto. As an “inner” (fudai) daimyo that maintained close relations with the Tokugawa family, an influential elder in the bakufu administration, and the hereditary head of the bakufu’s gagaku (classical court music) group, the head of the Sakai house was in a prime position to initiate within bakufu circles the sorts of artistic patronage being practiced in bunjin circles. The Sakai carried out this initiative by bringing to Edo some of Kyoto’s greatest artists and introducing them to other interested daimyo, thereby forming a salon-type association among bakufu officials. The numerous visiting scholars, poets, and painters staying at the Sakai estate left an impressionable young Hōitsu with an idealized vision of the artist’s life.

As the second son, Hōitsu was marginalized within official circles,

77. Buncho was hired by Sadanobu and given a salary of 150 koku, essentially symbolic considering that Buncho’s estimated annual income exceeded 10,000 koku.
but his elite status also threatened his relationships with artists from lower groups. His friendship with the lower samurai Ōta Nanpo was scorned by his family, which allowed Nanpo to visit the Sakai estate only in secret. Nanpo jokingly referred to the front gate as the Kinbamon—the gate outside the imperial palace in Han Dynasty China where unemployed literati would gather in hopes of being summoned and granted an official position. This became a joke between him and Höitsu, who occasionally used the appellation throughout his life. In using this term, Nanpo was invoking a place where he and his associates could indulge freely in literary and artistic pursuits, where the pretensions of status were overshadowed by those of art.

In 1797, at the age of 35, Höitsu turned away from his family, hereditary rank, and their attendant obligations to enter the Nishi Honganji monastery in Kyoto, accepting a consolation salary of 1,000 koku and 50 attendants. After only two weeks of monastic life, now feeling adequately severed from the encumbrances of status, he left Kyoto for a leisurely life of aesthetic pursuits back in Edo where his ambiguous status of lay monk afforded him the dual benefit of evading bakufu scrutiny while receiving continued financial support from his family. Exiting official space enabled Höitsu to access aesthetic space and qualified him to follow the recluse’s established practice of writing about feeling alienated, solitary, and without friends.

Höitsu’s choice of living space was deliberate, for Negishi had long been known to him as an artist’s retreat. Through Tani Bunchō, a former resident, he had met Kameda Bōsai there in 1802, and his friend Ōta Nanpo had also lived there. These four individuals were unquestionably among the most esteemed of Edo’s practicing artists (a Who’s Who of Edo from 1812 ranked both Bōsai and Bunchō first among Edo’s bunjin). They were a cultural center of gravity that for the next two decades attracted admirers and collaborators and functioned as a core of Edo’s cultural energies. Therefore, although they lived in self-professed wabizumai, Negishi’s cultural icons were not isolated; rather, they formed the hub of elite bunjin activity that attracted others, who in turn contributed to the cultural cachet and corpus of cultural products associated with Negishi.

Change of status and location for Höitsu thus fully recast his identity as a bunjin, an identity that he sought to augment by taking up residence in a “grass hut,” a virtually mandatory accoutrement for self-styled recluses. The grounds of his Ugean (Rain flower hut) extended about 250 tsubo (roughly 8,250 square meters, or 90 meters by 90 meters), marvelously spacious for one in retirement from the world, and included a studio where he worked and once a month taught his student Tanaka Hōji, a room for viewing artworks.

79. Ibid., p. 106.
80. Ibid., p. 57.
a vegetable field, and a lotus pond. It also bordered the large residence of his chief retainer, Suzuki Kiitsu (1796–1856). The Ugean's spacious garden made it well suited to entertaining, and Hōitsu's guests included bakufu officials, geisha, kabuki performers, and artists from around Japan. The eminent kabuki actor Ichikawa Danjūrō VII (1791–1859) and the Katōbushi masumi-kai, a group of shamisen performers used in kabuki, visited Hōitsu’s residence. The fact that Hōitsu included among his friends members of such status-ambivalent and traditionally defamed occupations reveals the extent to which the trappings of status had all but disappeared.

The regulars at local functions, however, were members of the Shitaya-gumi, a poetry society based in Negishi whose core members were local bunjin. In addition to Hōitsu, Bōsai, Nanpo, and Bunchō, the association included important figures such as Confucian scholar Ichikawa Kansai (1749–1820), his student Ōkubo Shibutsu (1767–1837), the kanshi poet Kikuchi Gozan (1769–1849), and Kansai’s son Ichikawa Beian (1779–1858). Gatherings were usually small, intimate shogakai (predominantly male get-togethers for the purpose of poetry, painting, and drinking), though gatherings of guests numbering in the hundreds were not unusual.

83. Taketani Chōjirō and Kitano Tayuru, Edo Rinpah-gajin: Suzuki Kiitsu shojo (Musashi Murayama: Seishōdō Shoten, 1984), pp. 206–10. Kiitsu, the son of a dyer, became Hōitsu’s student in 1813. When Hōitsu’s retainer and fellow Rinpah artist Suzuki Reian died four years later, Hōitsu arranged for Kiitsu to marry Reian’s elder sister and take Reian’s place and post as the Suzuki family heir, a remarkable advancement for a commoner. Throughout Hōitsu’s life, Kiitsu remained his personal attendant as well as an active artist in Negishi bunjin circles.
85. Kansai had been a principal at the Shōheikō, the bakufu-sponsored college of Neo-Confucianism founded by Hayashi Razan (1583–1657), but was released from service in 1791 after the Prohibition of Heterodox Studies severely restricted the school’s curriculum. He lived a short walk from Negishi in Chōja-machi, just east of Ueno (Nakamura Shin’ichirō, “New Concepts of Life of the Post-Kansei Intellectuals: Scholars of Chinese Classics,” Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 18, No. 4 [1984], pp. 620, 627).
86. The participation of women in bunjin circles is well documented, particularly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when the popularization of nativism and waka inspired the formation of commoner-centered literary salons and study groups open to women. These were active in centralized locations but less so in suburban retreats. Legally, women were unable to own property or act as household heads (though exceptions did occur) and thus were unable to determine their place of residence. For much of the Edo period, moreover, Edo’s female population was disproportionately small. Women resided in Edo either to work or because they were stationed there under the alternate attendance laws. In either case, only a fraction would have enjoyed the social or economic freedom to live in aesthetic retreat.
From Hōitsu’s example, we find that the practice of aesthetic reclusion in the late Edo period contradicts our expectations of what reclusion should be. It was not necessarily isolated (urban sites were easily accessible from Negishi); it was not an unqualified liberation from responsibility (suburban recluses retained membership within a local administration—gonin-gumi for instance—that included certain communal obligations); it was not solitary (it did not preclude commiseration with a circle of friends); it need not involve a true rejection of commercialism (many resident artists, Bōsai and Shigemasa in particular, sought and accepted lucrative commissions while in residence at Negishi); and it need not be either austere or frugal (for some, aesthetic reclusion amounted to self-indulgence rather than self-denial). Paradoxically, the praxis of detachment involved creating networks of associations based on shared aesthetic values and practices. If wabizumai in Negishi bore no commitment to autonomous isolation, then how best to interpret this form of suburban, aesthetic retreat? While the diversity of practices in Negishi belies easy summation, two features emerge as significant. First, aesthetic retreat was a strategy of acquiring and maintaining cultural capital. Pierre Bourdieu has argued that acquisition of cultural (aesthetic) capital serves as a means of empowerment and social maneuvering, and clearly Negishi’s resident bunjin used it as such. Second, retreat to off-duty space involved a redirection of energies from social interests to self-interests, from public to a communal private. Terakado Seiken’s self-designation as a “useless person” is pertinent. The use of the useless, as Zhuangzi put it, lies in accomplishment that does not pretend to have social value. It is the establishment of a private, self-determined utopia within an idyllic setting that is functionally extraneous from the mainstream. The objective of aesthetic reclusion, then, is not absolute detachment but rather the creation of a space with the potential for conducting and expanding self-interested associations.

Conclusion

Beneath early modern Japan’s vertical hierarchies, status divisions gave way to variously horizontal associations based on off-duty intellectual and aesthetic practices. We have seen that the extraordinary diversity of social groups sharing the suburb of Negishi forged a multifaceted local identity based on such practices. Lying in the shadow of the Tokugawa family tomb at Kan’ei-jı, bordering the shogun’s private hunting ground in Mikawashima, contiguous with the imperial family’s Goinden, and accommodating several daimyo estates, Negishi was by no means distanced from political author-

88. Yazaki, Social Change and the City, pp. 232–33.
ity. And yet, as samurai, *bunjin*, and recluses shared space with peasants, townsmen, and clerics, they transformed this suburb into a privatized community whose collective identity coalesced from shared values rather than administrative spatial boundaries.

Negishi’s example demonstrates how aesthetic sites touted as public spaces by *meisho* makers were appropriated by self-marginalizing elites for private purposes. But scholarship has been skeptical of claims to socially relevant private spheres in the Edo period. Victor Koschmann has recognized the inextricability of the public and the private: the public is a product of the prevailing extant values of the collective private. Yet his conclusion that Edo-period society did not recognize any appreciable separation between public and private follows altogether too closely historiography’s excessive attention to laws and institutions. “Japan had not developed this private quality, which is a prerequisite of publicity, prior to modernization,” Koschmann writes. In pre-Meiji Japan, “the two realms are considered to be qualitatively different, indeed mutually incompatible,” with the result that the prevailing view judged the private to be “paltry and unworthy.”

The private is also variously described as internal, temporary, and hidden, due in large part to the ban on citizen associations and to Neo-Confucianism’s hostility toward private interests. Such claims overlook the numerous free zones functioning in off-duty spaces in ways that were neither hidden nor “paltry.”

While the matter is easily overstated, consistency within the corpus of illustrations, inscriptions, essays, and verses reveals a solidarity among Negishi residents that originates in part from shared values such as privacy. There is a paradoxically collective component in privacy, namely, it becomes shared at the community level and unites the community against perceived threats of public invasiveness. And as it quietly grounds a neighborhood’s collective identity, privacy here does not denote an antisocial selfishness: it espouses commitment to one’s respective social affiliations, to remaining a responsible social participant. Peter Nosco has demonstrated that for centuries “underground” Christians were able to privately practice outlawed Christian beliefs under the noses of neighbors and local authorities not because they were especially secretive about doing so but rather because as members of society their behavior was beyond reproach.

Though privacy is inherently antisocial, then, it is not socially disruptive. Paradoxically, its antisocial nature is a call for the communalism of a shared private sphere.

As a utopian exercise, this attempt to convert living spaces into ideal-

ized aesthetic spaces echoed the exhortations of weary scholar-bureaucrats in early China who sought justification for reclusion at court and in urban areas (“great reclusion”; tain 大隠). But before long the appeal of “great reclusion” was replaced with the even greater appeal of “middle reclusion” (chu¯in 中隠), a retreat to aesthetic spaces lying between the city and the country. Discursive tributes to middle reclusion may have begun with the Chinese scholar Bai Juyi (772–846), whose sentiments were to be reiterated regularly by subsequent generations of Japanese: “The great yin (reclusion) is at court or in the city (market 市), the small yin is inside the hillside plot. A hillside plot is too solitary a place; court and city are too turbulent. Best of all is the middle yin.” 92 Practices of reclusion in China, therefore, erased any doubts among Edo-period bunjin about the functional legitimacy of privacy in suburban aesthetic spaces, where they did not hesitate to adopt their own version of middle reclusion. Negishi was particularly effective in this regard because it lay in administratively ambiguous territory but squarely within Edo’s cultural sphere.

Middle reclusion in early modern Japan was experienced at the intersection of idyllicism and struggle. Negishi’s residents produced poetry, pictures, diaries, and essays that reflected pride in their living space, but few claimed to be living the clichés depicted in gazetteers and guidebooks. Suburban aestheticism was a self-determined proposition that meant different things to different people, as we have seen in the disparate experiences of Sakai Hōitsu, Shiga Risai, and Yamazaki Yoshisige. What they shared was devotion to local friendships and liberation from obligation—liberation won, in part, from failure to exist comfortably within officialdom. Middle reclusion in Negishi thus afforded opportunities for self making and space making which, while unable to fully alleviate the struggles of aesthetic retreat, was at least sympathetic to them.

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