A Short History of the *Gannin*

Popular Religious Performers in Tokugawa Japan

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This paper traces the emergence and development of the gannin or gannin bōzu, a group of religious performer-practitioners. The gannin, who were active in Kyoto, Osaka, Edo, as well as many rural areas, had their headquarters at the Kurama temple. Throughout the Tokugawa period, gannin engaged in proxy pilgrimages and provided the public with rites, exorcisms, and entertaining performances. Although the gannin are often portrayed in contemporaneous documents as “disorderly,” the gannin maintained a nationwide administrative apparatus supported by the bakufu. To the rank-and-file gannin, this hierarchical organization, which at first may have served the interests of the gannin themselves, appears to have become something of a burden. As a result, gannin continued to seek independence in order to better their lot, thereby irritating their social superiors.

**Keywords:** gannin — religious itinerants — Kurama temple — Sumiyoshi odori — ahodara-kyō — popular performing arts

Although only a small minority of commoners during the Tokugawa period (1600–1868) could have provided a reasonably detailed exposition of the highly syncretic doctrines that guided and justified religious practice of this age, almost every Japanese, from the most pious to the most skeptical, was familiar with performances of religious street performers. In Tokugawa Japan, such itinerants, usually claiming affiliation with some established religious order, offered incantations, recitations, exorcism, music, and dance wherever audiences appeared: before doorsteps, near major bridges, on temple and shrine grounds, or at the intersection of well-traversed thoroughfares.1 Religious performers

1 Among other benefits, religious affiliation allowed street performers to avoid being arrested and turned over to the outcasts known as hinin non人 (literally “non-humans”), many of whom also engaged in popular performing arts.
catered to the belief that fate could be influenced by a proper combination of magic amulets, prayer, and ritual; simultaneously, they appealed to the public’s insatiable appetite for amusement and diversion. If the efficacy of their practices was dubious, and if the talismans they peddled included no warranty, religious street performers could be counted on with certainty to provide both the pedestrian and the stay-at-home with a healthy dose of lively entertainment. Even the most incredulous bystanders could enjoy the sights and sounds of men and women of godly purpose parading around town with portable shrines, banging on hand gongs while intoning sutras, practicing divination, or dancing vigorously while singing popular tunes. And when it came time to collect the alms, the populace was unlikely to deny funding to anyone who might be able to issue an effective curse upon a home.

Mendicants of pious pretensions existed in chameleon-like variety: Tokugawa governmental records regularly list shukke 出家 (priests and nuns), onmyōji 隨陽師 (yin-yang diviners), yamabushi 山伏 or shugenja 修験者 (mountain ascetics), dōshinja 道心者 (Buddhist ritualists), gyōnin 行人 (wandering ascetics), komusō 虚無僧, shakuhachi-playing Zen monks), kotobure 事切れ (prognosticators), miko 巫女 (female shamans), and others. Also appearing in official inventories, usually in final position, are gannin bōzu 預人坊主, more succinctly known as gannin-bō, or even simply gannin, a name that may be translated either as “petitioned monks” or “petitioning monks.” The term gannin itself, in the sense of a religious or quasi-religious practitioner or performer, first appears in records during the mid-seventeenth century, an era of rapid and radical change in the administrative structure of Japanese religious institutions. During the early years of the Tokugawa period, gannin were widely known as monkish figures who executed proxy pilgrimages, engaged in midwinter cold-water ablutions, produced and distributed riddle prints and talismans, and marched around town with small shrines or monstrances of Enma-õ 閻魔王, the Buddhist god-

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2 The most detailed study of the gannin to date is SUZUKI Akiko’s unpublished master’s thesis Gannin no kenkyū (1994, Tōyō University). Though suffering from incomplete and confused documentation, this volume has provided me with many useful leads. More information on gannin can be found in HORI 1953, vol. 2, pp. 646–50; MINAMI 1978, pp. 151–60; NAKAO 1992, pp. 441–79, and YOSHIDA 1994. Inadequately documented but valuable data is also included in TAKAYANAGI 1981 and 1982. ISHI 1968 and 1988 discuss legal issues and bakufu policy.

3 An entry in the Japanese-Portuguese dictionary published by the Jesuits in 1603 still defines gannin as simply individuals who pray to “camis & fotoques” (kami, hotoke), or who collect alms for constructing temples and shrines. This explanation seems to refer only to Buddhist or Shinto petitioners in general, not specifically to gannin bōzu. See Nippo jisho, p. 124.
king of the underworld, or Awashima Daimyōjin 淡島大明神, a Shinto deity reputedly efficacious in preventing women’s diseases. In the spirit of asceticism, gannin regularly wore only a loincloth, offending the sensibilities of Confucian moralists and government authorities. By the eighteenth century, gannin often abandoned their Buddhist pursuits and turned to street performances of the “Sumiyoshi dance” (Sumiyoshi odori 住吉踊り), a largely secular genre vaguely associated with the Osaka Sumiyoshi shrine (though gannin showed little allegiance to this institution). Dancing vigorously beneath a large, sometimes double-tiered parasol, Sumiyoshi dancers accompanied themselves with cheerful song (often versions of “Ise ondo”) and raucous shamisen music. Later yet, gannin earned renown for their sing-song renditions of satirical ballads (chongare ちょんがれ and chobokure ちょぼくれ) and parodical mock sutras (ahodara-kyō 阿房陀羅経).⁴

In this study I shall sketch the history of the gannin and their organization, starting with the legends surrounding gannin origins and then moving to the gannin administration and the bakufu’s attempt to regulate gannin behavior. High-minded edicts and recondite scholarly Tokugawa-period disquisitions commonly describe gannin as “disorderly,” “unlawful,” “idlers,” even once as “pests that feed on the public.”⁵ Such derogatory portrayals require us to question what it was about the gannin, and, indeed, other religious mendicants, that earned them such contempt. A study of the gannin can thus serve as a starting point for understanding the social position and activities of popular religious performers in Tokugawa society in general.

Gannin Origins: Mythical and Real

Though the emergence of the gannin remains shrouded in mystery, their ancestry no doubt traces back to that amorphous mass of itinerants that had been touring the land, chanting sutras, singing hymns, and spreading the word of the Buddha since time immemorial. During

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⁴ Gannin arts are a complex subject requiring a separate study; see Groemer 1999. Useful Japanese-language accounts of gannin arts include Nakayama 1933; Misumi 1968, pp. 126–35; Nishitsuno 1975; Takayanagi 1981; Nakamura 1983. The mock sutras are also sometimes written ahodara-kyō.

⁵ See, for example, the descriptions of Yamaga Sokō (1622–1685) and Tanaka Kyūgi (1663–1729) cited in Morimoto 1985, pp. 106–107. Gannin are characterized as midari (“disorderly”), furachi (“unlawful”), or busahō (“unruly”) in records such as Shiṣō zasshi, fascicle 3, p. 68; Ofuregaki Kan’ō shisei, no. 2398, p. 1140; STRSSB, p. 1, and STRNDB (ge, 1842/11/25). In all fairness it should be mentioned that in 1839 at least one bakufu official noted that gannin were less disorderly than other types of priests and nuns (Oshioki-rei rušhū, vol. 11, p. 421).
the tumultuous years of the late medieval period, government officials only rarely treated religious beggars kindly, leading such religious itinerants to congregate and organize under the umbrella of major temples or shrines. Oda Nobunaga, for example, was said to have rounded up and summarily executed no fewer than 1,383 Kōya hijiri 高野聖 (mendicant monks of Mt. Kōya), whose practices in some ways resembled those of the seventeenth-century gannin (TAKANO 1989, p. 103). Later heads of state, though not always so demonstrative of their distaste for unproductive labor, continued to do what they could to discourage the populace from abandoning agriculture and other taxable occupations in favor of beggarly religious pursuits.

To support their claims of legitimacy with institutional might, the gannin turned to the Kurama temple 鞍馬寺, a major Tendai-sect compound near Kyoto, supposedly founded by the Fujiwara family in 796. According to an oft-repeated but highly implausible legend, the appellation “gannin” derived from an incident involving the defeated Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159–1189), who stopped at the Kurama temple before fleeing northward.6 At the temple, Yoshitsune was supposedly instructed in swordsmanship; a few resident monks also petitioned the god Tamonten (or Bishamonten; Skt., Vaśravana) on his behalf. In gratitude, Yoshitsune referred to the petitioners as gannin. Only in later years, the legend insists, did gannin move around the land, providing the public with prayers, invocations, and protective talismans.

The Tokugawa-period intelligentsia, little more convinced of the veracity of this fable than scholars are today, devised more believable explanations of gannin origins. According to one popular theory, some time after Tokugawa Ieyasu arrived in Edo (1590), Kurama monks came to the city to tender a lawsuit. Though claiming to know a thing or two about auspicious amulets and lucky charms, the gannin proved to be thoroughly unsuccessful in harnessing fortune for their own purposes: they lost their case, ran out of funds, and, with nowhere else to turn, took to begging on the streets.7 This explication may take its cue from the fact that the term gannin can also refer to appellants

6 “Kurama gannin yurai kaki-utsushi.” Yoshitsune did, in fact, spend some time at the Kurama temple on several occasions, but these stays probably had no relation to the appearance of the gannin. Versions of this tale and much other information on gannin can be found in Shisõ zasshiki, fascicle 3, pp. 67–74; “Bokkai sanpitsu,” vol. 92; Mikikigusa, vol. 10 (zoku 2-shù no 10), pp. 352–53 (reprinted in Koji ruien, Seijibu, vol. 3, pp. 957–60); Kashi yawa, vol. 4, pp. 320–23; and Sunkoku zasshi, vol. 1, p. 289. To avoid excessive repetition in documentation below, I have usually indicated only one source and added the words “and elsewhere” to cover identical or nearly identical versions found in other sources.

7 See Hyakugi jutsuryaku, p. 237; and Kiyûshûran, vol. 2, p. 637. Morisada munkô, vol. 1, p. 219, identifies the petitioners as priests from Mt. Taigaku (i.e., Hiei-zan) in Kyoto.
in legal proceedings. Tokugawa-period writers knew that early Edo gannin commonly lived at Bakuro-chō 馬喰町, a famous quarter of inns catering to litigants arriving from the countryside to press their claims before the magistrates.

Yet another theory cites testimony of the headman of Hashimoto-chō, the ward of Edo harboring the majority of gannin during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to an apparently lost document from the Jingo-ji 神護寺 (a Shingon-sect temple at Mt. Takao in Yamashiro Province), during the bakufu’s 1615 Summer Campaign, the high-ranking priest Takinobō 滝の坊 served as a road guide for the victors. After being granted an official certificate for his valiant efforts, he headed to the capital to petition for the construction of a branch temple. He died before a decision was made, but his successor also traveled to Edo to sustain the appeal. As usual, the bakufu was in no hurry to respond. During the early 1640s, after spending some five fruitless years in the city, Takinobō’s successor finally turned for help to the Kan’ei-ji 寛永寺 (also known as Tōei-zan 東叡山), a Tendai-sect temple utilized by the bakufu to transmit edicts to Tendai institutions throughout the land. While waiting for the priests of the Kan’ei-ji to make up their minds, the successor and some thirty of his liegemen made themselves at home on the grounds of the Shōan-ji 藤安寺 at Hashimoto-chō 橋本町, from where they worked the town begging and praying. Although the request to build a temple was eventually denied, Takinobō’s descendants continued to dwell at Hashimoto-chō until the late nineteenth century. Here they even enshrined the god Fudō in an edifice adorned with the insignia of the Kan’ei-ji (Hyakugi jutsuryaku, pp. 237–38). Whatever the merits of this tale may be, it does appear that Edo gannin were placed under the guardianship of the Kan’ei-ji (though probably at a later date, and probably because of a bakufu order rather than a gannin appeal), since the Kurama temple could hardly be expected to control directly the activities of gannin residing hundreds of miles away (Wasure nokori, p. 124; Tankai, p. 474; Futen gūki, pp. 101–102).

The Kurama Temple and the Gannin Furegashira

Until the Meiji period, the Kurama compound comprised some nineteen sub-temples.8 At first, only one of these, the Taizō-in 大蔵院 (also

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8 HASHIKAWA 1926, pp. 160–62. An unpublished map entitled “Nihon yochi” (Shinbyō bussetsu no bu, Yamashiro no kuni, Kurama-zan no zu, Atagi-gun) shows the Kurama multiplex as it stood in 1755. The Enkō-in, Taizō-bō, and Kichijō-in are indicated immediately to the inside right of the main entrance gate (niōmon), long before one arrives at the main temple buildings up the mountain.
known as Taizō-bō 大蔵坊), functioned as the gannin headquarters. Taizō-in administrators maintained that from the 1570s their temple had fallen on hard times, inspiring gannin to seek protection from shugen sects and elsewhere. Around 1674, the Taizō-in apparently transferred some of its gannin to the Shōsen-in 勝泉院, another Kurama sub-temple (later it was apparently renamed Kichijō-in 吉祥院). In 1690, for reasons unknown, the latter entrusted its gannin to the Enkō-in 圓光院, which, together with the Taizō-in, administered the gannin for the remainder of the Tokugawa period (“Kurama gannin yurai kaki-utsushi,” and elsewhere).

This chronology suggests that from the late sixteenth century, a heterogeneous group of religious itinerants had been seeking protection from Kurama-based sub-temples and had begun to form loose-knit confraternities. The bakufu appears to have acknowledged this affiliation during the Kanbun period (1661–1673), when a magistrate of temples and shrines, Ogasawara Yamashiro no kami 小笠原山城守, commissioned an investigation into all unregistered religious itinerants. As a result of this inquiry, the gannin were recorded as official wards of the Kurama temple, specifically the Taizō-in. References to a gannin guild (gannin nakama 願人仲間) are found as early as 1672 (HASHIKAWA 1926, p. 221; see also Ofuregaki Kanpō shōsei, no. 2398, p. 1140 [1692]).

Gannin officials at the Kurama temple were granted specific rights and powers by the bakufu in return for keeping underlings in line. Who exactly was included in the Kurama-based hierarchy continued to be a subject of debate for much of the Tokugawa period. Kurama administrators asserted the right to control not just gannin, but also certain penurious Zen monks, non-gannin Tendai-sect priests, and yamabushi who refused to affiliate themselves with either of the two shugen sects the bakufu had officially approved in 1613. Friction between gannin types, and Zen beggar-monks, sometimes said to be predecessor of the gannin themselves, continued for much of the Tokugawa period. Other gannin-like itinerants close to the Kurama, known as bojin 坊人, also retained much independence. In an answer to an official inquiry (probably from 1744) regarding the existence of gannin at Atago and Taga near Kyoto, gannin heads replied that they

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9 “Chishi oshirabe ni tsuki kakiage-chō.” This document presents the history of the gannin as recorded by the gannin official Hōsenbō 智泉坊 in 1813/9.

10 Specifically, the gannin complained that such zenmon bōzu 禅門坊主 had no authorized temple affiliation; that they rented houses in townsman quarters or lived in outcaste huts (hinin-goya 非人小屋); that they went around begging in a fraudulent manner (nise kanjin 似せ勧進); and that they wore surplices and acted just like gannin. See Shisō zasshiki, fascicle 41, pp. 946–47.
knew only of individuals known as \textit{bōjin}: men who, much like the \textit{gannin}, offered prayers, healing rites, and magic amulets to the public.\footnote{“Kurama gannin yurai kaki-utsushi”; and “Bokkai sanpitsu,” vol. 92. Many other versions of this document omit the reference to Atago and Taga. Perhaps the \textit{bakufu} was thinking of the “Bishamon emissaries” (\textit{Bishamon shisha} 比礫門使者) at Atago. For a discussion and illustration of these beggars, who came around on the third day of the new year, see \textit{Ichiwa ichigon}, vol. 6 (fascicle 42), pp. 114–16. For another reference to Atago see the 1696 description of Osaka \textit{gannin} activities below.} Even though some claimed the Kurama \textit{gannin} had themselves once been called \textit{bōjin} (\textit{Shisō zasshiki}, fascicle 3, p. 71, and elsewhere), nothing is said about Kurama rule over \textit{bōjin} types. Kurama authority over independent or self-styled \textit{shugen} remained even more problematic, since some \textit{gannin} also affiliated themselves in dual fashion with \textit{shugen} temples when this seemed a useful strategy. The Kurama temple was aware of such “disorder” and prohibited \textit{gannin} from becoming disciples of \textit{shugen} sects in a temporary or concurrent manner (\textit{Shisō zasshiki}, fascicle 3, p. 71).\footnote{This rule was spelled out in 1744, but evidently refers to a long-standing practice. See also \textit{Shisō zasshiki}, fascicle 3, p. 68 and elsewhere for an admission that \textit{gannin} had long been deserting to \textit{shugen} temples.}

Although the \textit{bakufu} and the \textit{gannin} frequently stood at cross-purposes, by the latter decades of the seventeenth century the cornerstones of a hierarchical system designed to allow the Kurama temple to oversee the \textit{gannin} throughout the land had been set in place. At top stood high-ranking officials of the Kurama temple, specifically the Taizō-in and Enkō-in. From the early 1680s, bosses known as \textit{furegashira} (触頭 “proclamation chiefs”) were appointed in the city of Edo in order to transmit edicts from the magistrates of temples and shrines and to relay petitions from the \textit{gannin} to the \textit{bakufu}. Usually two men, one associated with the Taizō-in, the other with the Enkō-in, were selected, largely on the basis of seniority.\footnote{\textit{Yoshida} 1994, p. 91 gives a table of Edo \textit{furegashira} based on newly-discovered, unpublished records at the Kurama temple. Another \textit{furegashira} was stationed in Suruga, but it is unclear from when this position existed. See \textit{Sunkoku zasshi}, vol. 1, p. 288.} In other parts of the land, \textit{kumigashira} (組頭 “group chiefs”) were appointed to manage local \textit{gannin}. Beneath the \textit{furegashira} and \textit{kumigashira} stood a historically and geographically variable hierarchy of \textit{gannin} functionaries: \textit{daiyaku} 代役 (deputy); \textit{ōmetsukyaku} 大目付役 (great overseer), \textit{gonin-gumi} 五人組 (five-man group [head]), \textit{toshiyori} 年寄 (elder), and the like.\footnote{A convenient chart can be found in \textit{Suzuki} 1994, p. 109. Explanations of each rank of the Edo \textit{gannin} affiliated with the Taizō-in are given in \textit{Yoshida} 1994, pp. 99–102. Titles differed for the Enkō-in \textit{gannin} (see “Bokkai sanpitsu,” vol. 92).} In the Kantō area, Edo \textit{furegashira} were charged with touring the eight provinces to check on local \textit{kumigashira} and other bosses who
ruled over the *gannin* in one province (*Shisō zasshiki*, fascicle 3, p. 68). Every three years, senior *gannin* officers traveled to the Kurama temple to report on the situation in their area (*Shisō zasshiki*, fascicle 3, p. 73). Funding for the *gannin* organization came both from *gannin* members and from daimyo and rich merchant houses (YOSHIDA 1994, pp. 92–94, 98).

One of the *furegashira*’s chief sources of power derived from the right to conduct in-house juridical proceedings against *gannin* charged with a crime. Records probably dating from 1744 explain that when an Edo *gannin* had broken a rule of the association, a general meeting was held at the home of the *furegashira*. An inquiry was made, and if it was determined that the accused behaved in a manner contravening *gannin* law, he was expelled. A *gannin* convicted of a crime was also prohibited from becoming a *yamabushi* or *gyōnin*. After being sentenced, he was led to a post station (Shinagawa, Senju, or Itabashi, depending on the culprit’s request) and told not to return to the city. The incident was then duly reported to the magistrates of temples and shrines (*Shisō zasshiki*, fascicle 3, p. 70).

Before being judged by his superiors, however, *gannin* suspects were apparently first subject to justice meted out by the *bakufu*. In one case from 1791, for example, a *gannin* pupil was caught pickpocketing in Edo. For this misdeed, *bakufu* officials sentenced him to fifty days in jail; after serving his sentence he was handed over to his master, who presumably reported the incident to the *furegashira* for another round of proceedings (*Oshioki-rei ruishū*, vol. 4, no. 1918, p. 261). In 1823, yet another *gannin* acolyte was caught pickpocketing and stealing. His crime was more serious than that of the 1791 offender, for he had brazenly entered warrior residences and walked off with several pairs of shoes. Once caught, the hapless lawbreaker was also turned over to his superiors, but only after being flogged and tattooed by the authorities (*Oshioki-rei ruishū*, vol. 8, no. 356, p. 131).

When *gannin* became the victims of crimes, the *furegashira* also wielded much discretionary power. In the eighth month of 1849, for example, a *gannin* had gone to beg at a major Edo sake shop. The occupants evidently did not donate enough; in a fit of rage, the *gannin* kicked a nearby sake barrel, provoking a shop apprentice to deliver a lethal blow to the irascible *gannin*’s head. Normally such an act of violence required a coroner’s inquest, but the owner of the shop, probably frightened of the consequences, opted for a softer approach. After rounding up a squadron of local carpenter-fireman toughs, he set out for Hashimoto-chō, where the incident was disclosed to the *gannin*

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15 Procedure was not always clear. See *Hennen sabetsu shi shiryō shūsei*, vol. 11, p. 358 (1792/10) for discussions on what procedure to follow in capital offenses committed by *gannin*. 

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furegashira. The furegashira, however, knew nothing of the victim. The shop head then sent a messenger to Shiba Shin’ami-chō (芝新網町), another notorious gannin slum, where the furegashira responsible for the victim was eventually located. After much debate, the case was settled by the payment of 25 ryō (large gold pieces) to the furegashira. Though the furegashira may have been satisfied by this payoff, the spirit of the murdered gannin was not so easily appeased. The incident, it was rumored, resulted in a curse being placed on the shop, which went to ruin a decade later (Fujiokaya nikki, vol. 9, p. 273).

Gannin throughout the Land

RURAL GANNIN

The majority of gannin resided in Edo and Osaka, but significant numbers also made their homes in rural areas. Even in the remote northern Morioka domain, enough gannin existed in 1702/2 that dominal authorities, always on the lookout for potential troublemakers, demanded that bona fide gannin appear and obtain a wooden license. Any unlicensed gannin or other suspicious beggar was henceforth to be arrested (Hennen sabetsu shi shiryō shùsei, vol. 7, p. 593). In 1777/6, authorities in the Yonezawa domain (today Yamagata Prefecture) also stipulated that all gannin, itinerant performers, blind men and women, medicine vendors, beggars, outcasts, actors, and yamabushi lodge only at specially designated inns. In the province of Kai (today Yamanashi Prefecture), gannin guarded mountains for the peasantry, engaged in cold weather austerities, and performed jōruri or saimon recitation (Urami kanwa, p. 416). In nearby Suruga (today Shizuoka Prefecture), gannin living in row houses (nagaya) measuring fifteen by eighteen feet were controlled by the furegashira Myōkōbō 妙行坊 affiliated with the Enkō-in. These gannin worshiped the god Seimen Kōshin (青面庚申), for whom they held all-night vigils every other month (Sunkoku zasshi, vol. 1, p. 288). Some 100 gannin with no specific temple affiliation resided in the province of Owari (today Aichi Prefecture) (“Kurama gannin yurai kaki-utsushi,” and elsewhere). During the nineteenth century these gannin earned a reputation as providers of secular entertainment, for they often exhibited their talents on stages set up at temple grounds. In the fall of 1826, for example, gannin played at the Nagoya Seiju-in (Kouta no chimata, 清寿院).

16 Hennen sabetsu shi shiryō shùsei, vol. 10, pp. 443–44; see also vol. 12, pp. 129–30 of this source for an 1807/8 law from the same domain banning unauthorized lodging of gannin and hinin.
p. 431; and *Misemono zasshi*, p. 59).17 Their show featured the “Sumiyoshi dance,” performed by six dancers, one joruri reciter, one shinnaï 新内 reciter, and two shamisen accompanists. Later both this troupe and copycat versions gave many encore performances to a delighted public (*Misemono zasshi*, pp. 59, 67, 72–73, 79, 88, 108, 114, 148–49).

**KANSAI GANNIN**

*Gannin* may also have been active in eighteenth-century Kyoto, for as one chronicler notes, in 1731, on the occasion of an eclipse, Kyoto vendors took a rest, the theaters closed, and “even gannin bōzu were nowhere to be seen” (*Getsudō kenbunshū*, *ge*, p. 196). Later, however, the number of Kyoto gannin dwindled so drastically that in 1842 even the Kyoto town magistrate did not know who gannin were or what they did.18

Most Kyoto gannin probably stemmed from nearby Osaka,19 where a hierarchical organization must have been in place by 1672, when a gannin named Nishinobō 西之坊 ordered prospective members to receive clearance from the two kumigashira before joining the guild. Nobody suspicious, and nobody without a guarantor was to be accepted. Becoming a gannin must have spelled considerable advantages, for gannin were being impersonated by others. Nishinobō thus demanded that impostors be arrested (HASHIKAWA 1926, pp. 219–20).

Judging from the limited extant sources, early eighteenth-century Osaka was home to some 100 gannin, many of whom lived at Nagachō Makihonbō 長町牧本坊, an area known for its cheap inns and flop-houses.20 Such gannin are vividly described in a volume published in 1696.

They look like yamabushi but are not shugenja, and are not controlled by the Tōzan or Honzan [shugen] orders. They live in

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17 *Misemono zasshi* lists the show as running from 8/6 to 12/2.
18 See STRSSB, p. 64. According to Kitagawa Morisada, a nineteenth-century encyclopedist, Kyoto and Osaka gannin made pilgrimages to Konpira shrines (*Konpira gyōnin* 金毘羅行入), held proxy vigils on kōshin 庚申 days and performed the “Sumiyoshi dance.” Unlike their Edo counterparts, they did not give satirical or humorous performances. In “the old days,” other gannin-like figures such as the suta-suta bōzu すたすた坊主 (“shuffling monks”) could also be found in Kyoto. See Morisada *mankō*, vol. 1, p. 219.
19 *Setsu meisho zue* (vol. 1, p. 106), written in 1794, notes that Sumiyoshi dancers (probably gannin), came from Sumiyoshi Village (near Osaka) and circulated throughout Kyoto and Osaka.
20 *Kokkei zōdan*, vol. 1, fascicle 9, p. 442. This record (from 1713) refers to beggarly Sumiyoshi dancers, who are described as performing exorcisms while wearing straw hats with strips of red cloth attached, and dancing to invoke the gods. Such people were probably gannin. The presence of 100 Osaka gannin is also noted in “Kurama gannin yurai kaki-utsushi” and elsewhere.
isolation, perhaps because they were expelled by lowly, bad-tempered yamabushi. Sometimes they walk around in high clogs; at times they engage in cold-water ablutions; or else they perform all-night vigils for the god Kõshin on the seventeenth and twenty-third days of the third month. They also go on proxy pilgrimages to Atago and Karasaki, or costume themselves to look like ermines or badgers, changing what they do every day of the month. All of them are itinerants. Puzzled about all of this, someone called in a so-called Kõshin vigil practitioner [kõshin machi 庚申待, i.e., gannin] and asked him: “From morning to night you wander around in all directions; aren’t you exhausted in the evening?” “That’s right,” the man answered. “When I return to my inn, I am extremely fatigued. I just wish to sleep soundly for a night; I don’t even bother to take off my sandals before going to bed. The next day, when the others notice it, we all laugh!”

(“Jinrin chõhõki,” vol. 5, section 3)

The population of Osaka-based gannin probably increased thereafter. Census figures that are difficult to date, but perhaps from the eighteenth century, mention the presence of 208 “Kurama gannin” in the region.\(^{21}\)

**GANNIN IN THE CITY OF EDO**

By far the best records of gannin are available for the city of Edo. According to nineteenth-century documents, certain priests in Edo were selected to become gannin furegashira as early as the Keichõ period (1596–1615) (“Kurama gannin yurai kaki-utsushi,” and elsewhere), but this is unlikely: the earliest documented furegashira appeared in the 1680s (YOSHIDA 1994, p. 91). Slightly more credible records state that during the Kan’ei period (1624–1644) gannin supposedly came to Edo “from all provinces, lodged at temples and diligently distributed talismans, amulets, and petitions [sic] to parishioners” (“Chishi oshirabe ni tsuki kakiage-chô”). A document dated 1646 lists daisan, proxy pilgrims who may well have been gannin, along with yamabushi, beggars, and other individuals not permitted within the Edo castle outer enclosure (Tenpō fûsetsu kenbun hiroku, p. 234). A law from 1649/7/12 dictates that during the obon season monks were permitted to perform segaki, a rite in which religious practitioners, often gannin, carried a

\(^{21}\) *Hennen sabetsu shi shiryô shûsei*, vol. 6, p. 197. This document includes figures from as early as 1626 but was revised several times thereafter. It also catalogues 48 *Kumano hikuni* 能野比丘尼, 97 Honzan-sect yamabushi, 36 Tözan-sect yamabushi, 4 Rokusai nenbutsu 六倉念仏, 30 yin-yang diviners, and numberless unregistered beggars and hinin from other areas.
litter of food offerings around town while sounding gongs and cymbals (Shōhō jiroku, vol. 1, p. 12 [no. 37]). Such hints remain tantalizing, but the earliest reliable reference to Edo gannin (in the sense of an itinerant religious performer) is found in a law from 1652/2/3 that notes the existence of only 13 gannin in the capital (Kiyūshōran, vol. 2, p. 637). Thereafter, gannin are mentioned in numerous government ordinances and other records, often in conjunction with other religious mendicants. Available population statistics are presented in Table 1.

Though numbers varied considerably, probably rising when times were bad and dropping when good, during the latter half of the Tokugawa period, between 400 and 900 Edo gannin must have been active at any given time. In addition, many Edo gannin lived together with wives and children, probably not included in statistics.

Edo gannin were organized into groups (kumi 組) affiliated with either the Taizō-in or Enkō-in. Late Tokugawa-period records name four kumi, each headed by a boss (tōban 当番 or sōdai 総代); the Kanda-gumi 神田組 at Hashimoto-chō 建本町 and Egawa-chō 江川町; the Shitaya-gumi 下谷組 at the second block of Shitaya Yamazaki-chō 下谷山崎町; the Yotsuya-gumi 四谷組 at Yotsuya Tenryū-ji Monzen 四谷天竜寺門前; and the Shiba-gumi 芝組 at Shiba Shin’ami-chō (Yoshida 1994, p. 103). Each kumi organized its own hierarchy of officials. Population statistics for 1862 indicate that one out of five or six gannin held some

| YEAR | NUMBER | SOURCE |
|------|--------|--------|
| 1652 | 13     | Kiyūshōran, vol. 2, p. 637 |
| 1672 | 21     | HSHIKAWA 1926, p. 221 |
| 1759 | 250    | “Kurama gannin yurai kaki-utsushi” |
| 1781 | 105 Enkō-in-based office holders | YOSHIDA 1994, p. 92 |
| 1843 | 800–900 lodgers at gannin inns | STRGHTK, vol. 1 |
| 1860s? | 400–500 | Hyakugi jutsuryaku, p. 237 |
| 1862 | 500–600 Taizō-in-affiliated gannin (includes 100 office-holders) | YOSHIDA 1994, p. 102 |
| 1869 | 550 at Kanda Hashimoto-chō | Shiryō-shū: Meiji shoki hisabetsu buraku, p. 70 |

Table 1. The Edo Gannin Population
rank or office in the Edo gannin organization.²²

Annually on 3/20 and 7/20, Edo-based Taizō-in gannin officials held a general meeting at which a registry of gannin officials was drawn up and sent to the Kurama temple. This ledger included documentation of new positions, changes in rank, and retirement of members. When a gannin was promoted to a new position, the Taizō-in received a fee of fifty coppers. Moreover, all gannin officials offered a semiannual donation of 300 coppers.²³ Enkō-in gannin functionaries presumably scheduled similar meetings.

Like most Tokugawa-period citizens, Edo gannin dwelled in close quarters, fostering the exchange of information and the protection of communal interests. The main locations of Edo gannin domiciles mentioned in contemporaneous records are given in Table 2.²⁴

As this table shows, during the nineteenth century the principal gannin quarters were located roughly in the north, south, east, and west of the city (see also STRNDB, jō [1842/10/26]). Of these four locations, the Kanda area functioned as the gannin’s base (bônai ぼんい). Though most of the Kanda gannin lived at Hashimoto-chō, having moved here from Bakuro-chō some time in the late seventeenth century, some perhaps remained at their old location at Bakuro-chō. According to a volume published in 1735, Bakuro-chō Tsukegi was populated with “what is known in Kamigata area as iwau”—door-to-door performers of celebratory religious arts (Zoku Edo sunago, p. 347). Such artists were probably simply gannin by another name.

The Gannin as Hostlers and Spies

Hashimoto-chō, the Shin’ami-chō section of Shiba, the second block of Yamazaki-chō, and Samegahashi, were all known as haunts of beggars, unlicensed prostitutes, and assorted riff-raff that made city administrators nervous (STRGTK, vol. 1 [1843/1]; Tankai, p. 474; Ten-gen hikki, p. 217). In each of these neighborhoods gannin ran flop-houses, officially catering exclusively to sacred itinerants, but in fact

²² More detailed statistics can be found in YOSHI DA 1994, p. 97. From 1847 to 1872 the number of office-holders ranged from 147 (1855) to 60 (1871 and 1872).

²³ Relations of Edo gannin officials to their superiors at the Kurama temple are discussed in detail in YOSHI DA 1994, pp. 94–99. According to the Kasshi yawa, vol. 4, pp. 322–23, a regular gannin traditionally paid a fee to the main temple (i.e., the Taizō-in or Enkō-in) and to the Edo furegashira under whose control he was, but not to lower-ranking members.

²⁴ Dates in quotation marks are mentioned in at least one of the sources indicated; other dates refer to the date of writing or publication of the source.
| LOCATION       | DATES                   | SOURCE(S)                                                                 |
|---------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Kanda**     |                         |                                                                           |
| Bakuro-chō    | “from 1661–1673”        | “Chishi oshirabe ni tsuki kakiage-chō”                                    |
|               | ca. 1676                | *Sabishiki za no nagusami*, p. 136.                                        |
| Hashimoto-chō | “from 1688–1704”        | *Gofunai bikō*, vol. 1, p. 454; *Edo masago rokujutchō*, p. 156; *Edo machikata kakiage (Shitaya/Yanaka)*, p. 218; *Wasure nokori*, p. 124; *STRSSB*, pp. 5, 30. |
|               | ca. 1676                |                                                                           |
| Toshima-chō   | ca. 1796                | *Tankai*, p. 474.                                                         |
| Yanagiwara-chō| 1780s                   | *Mimi-bukuro*, vol. 1, p. 319.                                            |
| Egawa-chō     | ca. 1826                | *Gofunai bikō*, vol. 1, p. 454; *Edo machikata kakiage (Shitaya/Yanaka)*, p. 218; *STRSSB*, pp. 5, 30.* |
| Yamato-chō    | ca. 1826                | *Gofunai bikō*, vol. 1, p. 454; *Edo machikata kakiage (Shitaya/Yanaka)*, p. 218.§ |
| **Shiba**     |                         |                                                                           |
| Shin’ami-chō  | “from 1716–1736”        | *STRSSB*, pp. 5, 30; “Chishi oshirabe ni tsuki kakiage-chō;” *MITAMURA 1958*, p. 274. |
| Kanesugi-chō  | ca. 1796                | *Tankai*, p. 474.                                                         |
| **Shitaya**   |                         |                                                                           |
| Yamazaki-chō  | “from ca. 1717”         | *Edo machikata kakiage (Shitaya/Yanaka)*, p. 218; *Gofunai bikō*, vol. 1, p. 454; *STRGTK*, vol. 1. |
| Toyosumi-chō  | 1873                   | *Shiryō-shū: Meiji shoki hisabetsu buraku*, p. 416.                       |
| **Yotsuya**   |                         |                                                                           |
| Tenryū-ji Monzen | ca. 1759              | “Bokkai sanpitsu,” vol. 92.                                               |
| Samegahashi   | ca. 1796                | *Tankai*, p. 474; *Hyakugi jutsuryaku*, p. 237.                           |
| **Fukagawa**  |                         |                                                                           |
| Umibe Daiku-chō | “from 1764–1772”   | *Tokyo-shi saimin enkaku kiyō*, p. 641; *STRGTK*, vol. 1.                |

* Around 1842, the *bakufu* proposed to drive the *gannin* out from Egawa-chō but whether this relocation took place remains unclear (*STRSSB*, p. 30)

§ See also the license reproduced in *Fūzoku gahō*, vol. 47 (1892), p. 22. For an almost identical inscription on a license from the 1790s see *Mikikigusa*, vol. 2, p. 52 (*5-shū no 9*).
admitting nearly anybody who paid the requisite fee. According to one source, the first gan nin flophouse was created during the Meiwa period (1764–1772) by a gan nin named Shoryu 龍 from Fukagawa Umibe Daiku-chô (Tokyo-shi saimin enkaku kiyô, p. 641). This inn may have been modeled on hostels of “wandering ascetics” (gyönin), which catered to taka-ashida, an occupation of religious itinerants (often gan nin) who paraded around on stilt-like footwear. Such inns are already mentioned in an Edo law of 1672/2/6 (Shôhô jiroku, vol. 1, p. 166 [no. 496]). In any case, by 1843 even gan nin flophouse operators themselves admitted knowing nothing about the origins or early history of their boardinghouses. They could only recall that a quarter century or so earlier, the prices of regular townsman inns at Bakuro-chô had skyrocketed, forcing beggars and itinerants to turn to flophouses for room and board (STRGTK, vol. 1). By 1843/1, a total of 83 gan nin flophouses, catering to some 800–900 people, flourished at five Edo locations (see Table 3).

When spending the night at a flophouse, a boarder paid some 24 mon (coppers) for a space of one tatami mat (approx. 3’ x 6’); children lodged for free. Innkeepers, known as “dormitory priests” (ryō bôzu 寮坊主), provided pots and pans with which guests cooked the rice col-

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### Table 3. Gan nin Flophouses

| LOCATION     | NUMBER | MANAGER | AFFILIATION |
|--------------|--------|---------|-------------|
| Hashimoto-chô| 28     | Enkyô   | Taizô-in    |
| "            | 18     | Taninobô| Enkô-in     |
| Shiba Shin’ami-chô | 4     | Kyôdô   | Taizô-in    |
| "            | 21     | Myôkai  | Enkô-in     |
| Shitaya Yamazaki-chô 2-chôme | 7     | Ritsuen | Taizô-in    |
| Yotsuya Tenryû-ji Monzen | 2     | Nenshin | Taizô-in    |
| "            | 1      | Kangen  | Enkô-in     |
| Moto Samegahashi Kita-chô | 2     | Ganzan  | Enkô-in     |

* Based on STRGTK, vol. 1 (1843/1); and Tokyo-shi saimin enkaku kiyô, p. 650. Maps of the various areas in which the gan nin lived can be found in Takayanagi 1981, pp. 14, 15, 17, and 29–31. See also Yoshida 1994, pp. 119–20 for a discussion.

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25 STRGTK, vol. 1. This document, from 1842/11, is useful in assessing the discrepancy between official rules and real conditions.

26 Nearly identical flophouses were run by the gômune 乞胸, townspeople considered hinin on the basis of their occupation as street performers.
lected on their daily rounds. At night, one oil lamp was dispensed to each room; bedding was rented at the rate of 10–16 mon, depending on the quality. In the morning, innkeepers brewed tea for anyone who wanted it. Some gannin stayed for just a night; anyone who lingered needed to provide the name of a guarantor (STRGTK, vol. 1).

Gannin flophouses provided a convenient first stop in Edo for penniless or stealthy new arrivals from the countryside. The bakufu, presumably operating on the principle that one should set a thief to catch a thief, enlisted gannin to keep track of suspicious or undesirable elements entering or leaving the city. Edo gannin furegashira were notified of wanted suspects; the former then sent a message to their counterparts throughout the eight Kantō provinces. On occasion, they even dispatched members to the provinces for official purposes, presumably to track down criminals. As a result, gannin earned notoriety for spying.27 “We serve in an official capacity and have been granted official rewards,” one gannin head boasted.28 Perhaps he had reason to be proud. In 1721, gannin succeeded in capturing a fugitive as far north as Sendai and had been amply rewarded by the magistrates of temples and shrines (“Chishi oshirabe ni tsuki kakiage-chō”). The gannin admitted, however, that “recently [ca. 1744?] things have become disorderly and such requests are often put off” (Shisō zasshiki, fascicle 3, p. 68, and elsewhere). Nevertheless, well into the nineteenth century, some gannin continued to function as petty law officers.

Controlling the Gannin: The Bakufu’s Efforts

Besides supporting the administrative system headed by the Kurama temple, the bakufu issued a large number of edicts and directives designed to keep the gannin and other mendicant religious performers in line. Promulgations of regulatory legislation peaked during times of social and economic reform: between the 1660s and the 1690s, when the city of Edo was being rebuilt after the disastrous “Meireki fire” of 1657; during the “Kyōhō reforms” of the 1720s; during the “Kansei reforms” of the 1780s; and in the decades surrounding the “Tenpō reforms” of the 1840s.

27 See NHK 1992, 241. Mitamura 1958, p. 274 offers the theory that the Kurama gannin were originally called to Edo by the bakufu to act as spies.

28 Another official link to the Tokugawa is recorded by a gannin furegashira of the Shiba area during the early nineteenth century, who claims that during the time of Tokugawa Ieyasu’s Osaka campaign, the priest Myōhōbō of the Kurama temple presented the army with a talisman for luck in battle. Even during the nineteenth century, this priest’s successor still offered a talisman annually to Edo castle. Whether this was true or not remains obscure. See “Chishi oshirabe ni tsuki kakiage-chō.”
THE LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

In the decades following the great Meireki fire, city administrators seized the opportunity to reorganize the sprawling metropolis Edo had become. Religious mendicants and street performers were also targeted for reordering, but in this regard they were not alone: in 1665, day laborers were cast into guilds and subject to increasingly stringent control; in 1674, hinin became targets of an official investigation, though for the time being they were still allowed to live where they wished (Ofuregaki Kanpō shüsei, nos. 2389, 2390, p. 1138).29

The first new regulations concerning gannin appeared on 1658/8/15, almost before the last embers of the Meireki fire had cooled. Gannin (along with other religious practitioners) living in the townsman quarters were ordered to fashion a register of names for submission to the town elders (Shōhō jiroku, vol. 1, p. 70 [no. 208]). On 1661/9/17, city administrators told the gannin not to operate on or near bridges, one of the prime sites for drawing crowds (Shōhō jiroku, vol. 1, p. 99 [no. 296]; repeated on 1661/11/15, see ibid., vol. 1, p. 101 [no. 302]). The following year, on 1662/9/18, the location and appearance of residences occupied by many types of religious mendicants, including gannin, were subject to detailed guidelines that provided the backbone of bakufu policy for the centuries to come. Rented domiciles in the city proper were henceforth restricted to back-street dwellings, which were not to be remodeled as temples or inns. When renting a house, religious practitioners and performers first needed to obtain certification from their main temple and provide the name of a guarantor. Anybody lacking official affiliation to an acknowledged religious institution was prohibited from leasing a home. To make sure that religious itinerants did not congregate within the city, Buddhist temples were disallowed from harboring religious mendicants for only a night (STRSSB, p. 67; and Shōhō jiroku, vol. 1, p. 108 [no. 324]; for a translation see Wigmore 1983, part 8B, p. 120).

Laws also attempted to curb extravagant gannin activities, particularly ones that might compete with the pursuits of members of more powerful religious institutions. Edo gannin and other religious mendicants had evidently been displaying signboards and sacred standards (bonten 梵天) announcing their willingness to provide services. Buddhist altars had been set in place; houses were adorned with paintings of religious import (STRSSB, pp. 68–69). A 1684/7/16 edict complains that gannin and others, including even townspeople, were parading

29 In 1680/8 Edo hinin and beggars were told they could no longer live in the city proper, supposedly because their numbers had increased, and because they were suspected of thievery (Ofuregaki Kanpō shüsei, no. 2391, p. 1138).
around town in groups with images of buddhas and tall lamps. Noisily chanting the *Lotus Sutra* or invocations to the Amida Buddha, they went wherever they pleased.\(^{30}\) During the late seventeenth century all such activities were banned. The *bakufu* must have judged that a front-street abode outfitted with standards, signboards, altars, iconography, and artwork could easily turn into an unauthorized temple or shrine. Interdicted activities in the streets, such as preaching, loud praying, chanting, music, dancing, and parading around with lavish props might function as missionary work for such unofficial religious institutions.

THE KYÔHÔ REFORMS

In 1723, the authorities again attempted to crack down on “disorderly” *gannin* by requiring *gannin* to carry on their person a wooden license at all times.\(^{31}\) Additional regulations apparently drafted in 1728 but lost, suggest that trouble continued (*Shisô zasshiki*, fascicle 3, p. 73); a year later, on 1729/4/26, the *bakufu* outlawed the *gannin* activity of passing out riddle-prints, which had evidently turned into a form of gambling.\(^{32}\) Perhaps because *gannin* law and order still remained at best a distant ideal, on 1744/10/25, Ōoka Echizen no kami 大岡越前守 (1677–1751), a magistrate of temple and shrines and one of the main architects of the Kyôhô reforms, demanded an in-depth probe of the *gannin* order.\(^{33}\) Ōoka, evidently puzzled about the nature of the group he was investigating, first demanded an explanation of *gannin* origins and an outline of the *gannin* organization. The *gannin* responded almost immediately, providing Ōoka with the tale about Yoshitsune’s stay at the Kurama temple. After presenting some facts about their relation to Kurama temple, the *gannin* emphasized that they worked

\(^{30}\) *Ofuregaki Kanpô shûsei*, no. 2392, p. 1139. A law regulating *gannin* behavior and registration was apparently issued by the magistrates of temples and shrines in 1692, but seems not to have survived. See *Shisô zasshiki*, fascicle 3, p. 72; and *Ofuregaki Kanpô shûsei*, no. 2398, p. 1140. In 1694/10 another law again dictated that religious meetings such as *nenbutsu-kõ* 念仏講 and *daimoku-kõ* 頌仏講 not be held in front houses. Priests were not to bang on bells or drums while reciting *nenbutsu*, an act that caused crowds to form. Renting a front-street city house was again banned. Anybody who wished to collect proceeds for temple fairs or exhibits of holy treasures was to first receive clearance from the magistrates of temples and shrines. See STRSSB, p. 69.

\(^{31}\) *Ofuregaki Kanpô shûsei*, no. 2398, p. 1140 (1723/6). Pictures of licenses can be found in *Mikikigusa*, vol. 2, p. 53 (5-shû no 9); *Fûzoku ga hô*, vol. 47, p. 22; STRSSB, p. 60; and *Tôkyô-shi shîkô*, sangyô-hen, vol. 29, p. 146.

\(^{32}\) *Sen’yô eikyûrok*, cited in *Tôkyô-shi shikô*, sangyô-hen, vol. 13, p. 50; “Ruisha sen’yô,” vol. 14, cited in NAKAO 1992, p. 449; and *Shûhô jiroku*, vol. 2, pp. 391–92 (no. 2120).

\(^{33}\) “Bokkai sanpitsu,” vol. 92. Ōoka’s initial query was answered three days later, and the legitimacy of Taizô-in control reaffirmed.
for the bakufu as petty law enforcement officials. Shortly thereafter, gannin bosses spelled out the rules and regulations governing their guild. It was noted that fees were collected from underlings, that precedent was followed in providing services to parishioners, that bakufu laws were properly obeyed, and that nobody was allowed to support unorthodox beliefs (such as Christianity). Begging was not permitted in bizarre costumes or tattered clothing; nor was medicine vending allowed. Gannin were not to mingle with yamabushi, nor take a leave of absence from their organization to become a yamabushi pupil. They were also prohibited from competing with each other in the acquisition of pupils or parishioners. Apparently satisfied with these assurances, Ōoka ordered the Kantô furegashira and kumigashira to tighten control over their charges. He seems not to have taken up the issue again (“Kurama gannin yorai kaki-utsushi”).

THE KANSEI REFORMS

Social instability in Edo and elsewhere increased greatly during the famine years of the 1780s. Rural hardship had caused an explosion in the population of urban vagrants, not a few of whom joined the ranks of the gannin. After experiencing large-scale riots in 1787, Edo city administrators keenly felt the necessity of keeping the urban population, in particular the lowest classes, under control. On the last day of 1788/10, the bakufu mandated that gannin conform to the earlier-issued ordinances, in particular ones concerning the renting of property (“Ruishū sen’yō,” vol. 14, cited in Nakao 1992, p. 446). In 1789, the jurisdiction of the furegashira Hōsenbô was broadened to include gannin wives and children, to whom he issued licenses and begging satchels. Gannin were not alone in being targeted for renewed restrictions. Laws also applied to vagrant Buddhist priests and nuns (1791/5), Shinto priests, yin-yang diviners, and others (Ofuregaki Tenpô shûsei vol. 2, no. 4283, p. 17, translated in Wigmore 1983, part 8B, pp. 123–24; Takano 1989, pp. 107, 110).

THE TENPÔ REFORMS

After the demise of the Kansei reforms, urban Japan saw several decades of relatively light-handed governance. From the 1830s, however, as a string of bad harvests again spawned much social unrest, bakufu officials once more turned to zoning laws, property rental requirements, and census registration as a means of securing stability and order. In Edo, domicile and status registration requirements frequently differed

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34 STRSSB, pp. 59–61. An illustration of these licenses and satchels can be found on p. 60.
slightly from ward to ward. Though gannin had traditionally been placed under the rule of the office of the magistrates of temples and shrines, from at least the early nineteenth century, they were sometimes recorded in townsman registries. As a result, gannin status remained highly ambiguous. This state of affairs was the by-product, if the volume Füken gûki is to be believed, of an 1807 lawsuit by townspeople wishing to stop the gannin’s minatory behavior toward the stingy (Füken gûki, p. 102 [1804–1810]). In any case, by the 1820s gannin were in fact often recorded in town census registries, though they otherwise maintained no role in townsman quarter administration.

Another thorny problem resulted when gannin or other religious mendicants from rural areas lodged in Edo for extended periods of time. Legally speaking, such visitors were not considered residents, since they remained registered in their area of origin. Their Edo abodes, often conveniently named “town preaching stations” (machi dôjô 町道場), supposedly functioned as temporary offices used for spreading the word of Buddha and for soliciting contributions. Yet such people had often resided in the city so long that even ward headmen could no longer ascertain whether their stay was legal or not (WIGMORE 1983, part 8B, p. 122).

In 1842, as the Tenpô reforms proceeded in earnest, domicile location, registration requirements, and activities of religious performers and practitioners once again became a topic of concern. On 1842/6/25 (26?), the government issued a series of commands that consolidated and reinforced provisions that had been in effect, though rarely heeded, for almost two centuries. Gannin, yin-yang diviners,

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35 Such double affiliation was not unique to the gannin. In 1835/2/25 Edo city authorities required Shinto priests, shugen, and yin-yang diviners also to register with ward heads if they lived in the townsman quarters. Tokugawa kinrei-kô, vol. 5, zenshû, no. 2570, p. 17. Gömune, too, were registered both as townspeople and as hinin.

36 Edo machikata kakiage (Shitaya/Yanaka), p. 217. According to a document from 1826, the temple/shrine registry of gannin was first handled by the gannin furegashira, who then turned it over to the office of the magistrates of temples and shrines. In discussions during the 1830s concerning how best to treat gannin registration, opinions among the town magistrates at first differed. Eventually, on 1835/4/9, gannin were ordered to register in the same manner as Shinto priests, who were also permitted to live within the city while registering with the magistrates of temple and shrines. In a proposal of 1842/11/25, one magistrate suggested that the town registry of a new gannin be submitted to the ward head (nanushi), and that the head be informed of gannin deaths or abscondences. See STRNDB, ge.

37 Osaka gannin had apparently been subject to new laws already during the Bunsei period (1818–30). See Ukiyo no arisama, p. 774.

38 Tokugawa kinrei-kô, vol. 5, zenshû, no. 3107 (pp. 334–35); Tenpô shinseiroku, pp. 54–55. Various drafts of the law are reprinted in STRSSB, pp. 4–16, 27–31. For discussions see MINAMI 1978, pp. 151–52; SAKAMOTO 1992, pp. 62–64. The same edict was issued in Kyoto in 1842/11 and in Osaka in 1845/4. See SAKAMOTO 1992, p. 66.
shakuhachi-playing mendicant priests (komusō), Buddhist beggars and ascetics (dōshinja or gyōnin), and female shamans (miko) controlled by Tamura Hachidayū were again instructed to obtain documents certifying their temple or shrine affiliations. Gannin were to supply the name of a guarantor and remain housed in back-street abodes that were not to resemble temples. The authorities also demanded that laws should be properly transmitted to gannin, and that the gannin obey such laws and behave in an orderly fashion (STRNDB, ge). The wearing of only a loincloth was banned, apparently effectively for a few years. By 1843/2/9 the pertinent edicts were sent to Osaka, where similar reforms were enacted (Ukiyo no arisama, pp. 773–74).

The bakufu was hardest on those who had taken the tonsure on their own accord, resembling priests or nuns but remaining unregistered with any approved temple or shrine. These types were now told to join a state-sanctioned religious institution and provide evidence of this relation. Anyone who could not do so was to return to secular life, moving back to a home village, or, if Edo-born, become an apprentice and register in the townsman registry. But since many self-styled monks and nuns, including pseudo-gannin, had spouses and children for whom they provided, the magistrates knew that simply banning traditional activities would lead only to an increase in the number of penurious, homeless beggars. At a loss for what to do, officials merely demanded that gannin inns be put in order, and that gannin take no disciples without official authorization. Expanding gannin control over other indigent religious practitioners was again briefly considered, since some bakufu officials believed that if ailing, kinless religious practitioners were placed under the Kurama gannin and moved to gannin quarters at Hashimoto-chō, Egawa-chō, or Shiba Shin’ami-chō, they might earn a more secure living. This plan, however, ran into difficulty because of a lack of empty dwellings at suitable locations.

Perhaps the most significant anti-gannin legislation of the Tenpō reforms concerned gannin arts and practices. Sentiments that lay

39 Hyakugi jutsuryaku, p. 237. Contemporaneous writers often note that after the Tenpō reforms, gannin garb became more priestly. See Edo fūzoku sōmakuri, p. 33; Wasure nokori, p. 124; Kanten kenbunki, p. 333. Yet by 1848 the gannin had reverted to their traditional near-naked appearance (Tengen hikki, p. 255).

40 See the 1842/10/26 missive from the town magistrates to the bakufu elders in STRNDB, jō.

41 STRSSB, p. 6 (1842/5). Ironically, in 1858 Edo gannin petitioned to leave Hashimoto-chō and three other areas (which had become dilapidated) to move to the precincts of the Kan’ei-ji. This appeal, however, was turned down by the Taizō-in. See YOSHIDA 1994, p. 125, note 50.
behind such measures can be felt in a missive from a magistrate of temples and shrines sent to the *gannin furegashira* of the Taizō-in.  

In recent years *gannin* behavior has become disorderly. *Gannin* parade through the city, dancing in groups. They do not even wear priestly robes. [Instead], they cover [only] their heads, and stand naked [i.e., wearing only a loincloth] in front of doors and forcefully beg for alms, obstructing traffic. In addition, they chant lascivious, satirical verses, or pass out riddle prints, thinking only of how to curry favor with little boys and girls. This manner of collecting donations is most unbecoming, not worthy of a Buddhist. Because of this situation, many torpid, prodigal individuals who despise labor become disciples [of *gannin*], thereby resembling *gõmune* or *hinin*. This is outrageous. In particular, the gestures of those who engage in recent fads such as proxy pilgrimages to Handa Inari and in Sumiyoshi celebrations [*sic, probably “Sumiyoshi dancing”*] have lost all semblance to Buddhist priests, and merely try to be modish.  

(STRSSB, p. 19)

To counteract such baneful trends, *gannin* were ordered to dress properly, to refrain from acting like *hinin* or *gõmune*, and to carry their licenses at all times.

Like earlier attempts at reform, the Tenpō reforms proved to be unrealistic and ineffective. By the late 1840s, their impact had almost entirely worn off. Thereafter, the *bakufu* had its hands full with the arrival of Perry, rampant inflation, the earthquake of 1855, and finally the events that led to the Meiji restoration. Yet even as the *bakufu* was nearing its collapse, attempts to regulate *gannin* were not simply abandoned. As late as 1868/1/12, immediately after the battles at Fushimi and Toba, the *bakufu* still found time to tell *gannin* that suspicious individuals were not to be harbored at flophouses (*Fujiokaya nikki*, vol. 15, p. 402).

*Gannin* faced their own problems during the last few decades of the Tokugawa period. Bosses complained that many of their pupils were leaving the fold, becoming day laborers to make ends meet (*YOSHIDA* 1994, p. 121). *Gannin* hostels at Hashimoto-cho and Shiba Shin’ami-cho remained profitable mainly thanks to the patronage of secular vagrants and beggars (*NAKAO* 1992, pp. 240–41). A few short years later, on August 23, 1873, the Meiji government abolished the *gannin* organization and the *gannin*’s special status. All *gannin* were now to

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42 STRGTK, vol. 1; *MINAMI* 1969, p.161; and *Fujiokaya nikki*, vol. 2, p. 302; see also the document of 1842/11/25 in STRNDB.
enter their names into commoner registries (*Shiryō-shū: Meiji shoki hisabetsu buraku*, p. 416), effectively putting an end to their long history.

**Resisting Order: Gannin Responses to Control**

The *bakufu*, through the offices of the Kurama temple, intended to keep a tight rein on the *gannin*, but many rank-and-file *gannin* must have sensed that the hierarchical administration set in place during the seventeenth century produced tangible rewards mainly for the upper echelon of the institution; for lower-ranking members it held little but drawbacks. That *bakufu* laws met with resistance is suggested by frequent repromulgations: much of what was included in the 1662 law regulating domiciles, for example, was repeated in edicts of 1665/10/14 and 1665/11/4 (STRSSB, p. 68). A 1723 edict notes that governmental directives were still not being properly conveyed to *gannin*, some of whom remained indistinguishable from vagrants (*mushuku* 無宿) (*Ofuregaki Kanpō shisei*, no. 2398, p. 1140 [1723/6]). That the situation hardly changed in later years cannot be attributed to accident. Did *gannin* challenge the system? And if so, how? Several telltale cases recorded by Tokugawa bureaucrats provide a fleeting glimpse behind the scenes.

From 1781, the *gannin* were involved in a long-running dispute with the *hinin*, with whom they shared the streets of Edo. Trouble started when *gannin* wives and children whose husbands or fathers were ill or missing, or who at any rate claimed as much, were discovered begging in city areas the *hinin* considered their own turf. This finding led Kuruma Zenshichi 車善七, the head of the Edo *hinin*, to contact the *gannin* furegashira Ichimeibō 一明坊 and discuss barring *gannin* dependents from such activities. Zenshichi, who clearly ranked higher in the official hierarchy than Ichimeibō, wished to put such women and children under his own rule, but the *gannin* balked at this suggestion. Since an all-out ban would have deprived the most needy *gannin* dependents of their only viable source of income, a compromise needed to be reached. It was decided that *gannin* women and children should henceforth obtain a license from Ichimeibō to testify to their non-*hinin* status. On the surface, this agreement appears to signal Ichimeibō’s victory, but Ichimeibō may well have secretly promised Zenshichi that no such licenses would be granted, or that a portion of the payment for licenses would be handed to Zenshichi. The latter, in any case, did not trust the *gannin*’s word; he demanded (and apparently received) written assurances that the offending practices would cease. His apprehensions turned out to be well founded. On
1785/3/17, at Asakusa Tawara-chō 田原町, gannin women were once again spotted illegally tailing warriors and other passers-by. Outraged, two hinin officials lodged a complaint with Ichimeibō the following day. This time it was agreed that the offending gannin dependents should obtain a license from the head of the gōmune. What happened next remains unclear, but during the fourth month Ichimeibō’s assistant Kanshū 寒宗 pledged again that disorderly behavior would not reoccur. A written agreement was again promised but never delivered. When hinin officials returned to exact the document, Kanshū turned them down, claiming to be ill. Zenshichi was promised a visit by Kanshū once the latter recovered, but nothing was heard of him thereafter (“An’ei sen’yō ruishū,” vol. 29 [jō, furoku]).

The manner in which the gannin reacted—or failed to react—to hinin complaints suggests that gannin wives and children, and even their bosses, saw little benefit in putting an end to “disorderly” behavior. Gannin did not, however, overtly refuse to obey laws or precedent. Instead, they utilized more subtle forms of resistance: interminable negotiation leading nowhere, vague promises, ambiguous compromise, feigned illness, and endless procrastination. Gannin knew that rules and regulations did not favor their side of a dispute. As a result, they turned to more devious, though no less effective, modes of resistance.

Conscious duplicity and subterfuge continued to irritate officials during the sunset years of the Tenpō reforms. In 1847, a bakufu document explains one case in some detail:

The [Tenpō] reforms have put a stop to gannin who wandered the streets performing the “Sumiyoshi dance.” This practice once died out, but recently has recommenced. We have been requested to find out whether the individuals listed below are working as gannin, or as hinin or gōmune street performers. We have discovered the following:

Under the control of Nidayū, the head of the gōmune, living at Asakusa, outside the gate of the Ryūkō-ji 龍光寺門前:

The following individuals are ex-gannin who have become gōmune:

Jirōkichi, Ginzō, Kinu (shamisen)

Below, Torakichi and Kaneyoshi are ex-gannin who have become gōmune:

Torakichi, Kanekichi, Sadakichi, Kane (shamisen)

The following individuals work as assistants when [the above performers] do not suffice:

Tojirō, Masakichi, Kisaburō, Yasu
[The following] reside with Kumajirō at Yonezō’s house on the fourth block of South Shinagawa. These individuals have been issued licenses by Nidayū, the head of the gōmune.

Mankichi, Denjirō, Denkichi, Kane

The above four groups walk around the city performing the “Sumiyoshi dance.” The gōmune do not, however, call this dance the “Sumiyoshi dance” but rather, mendaciously, the Mando hōnen odori (度豊年踊, “bounteous harvest dance”). Besides the above, we have not heard of any other gannin or hinin who appear in the same way.

11th day of the seventh month, [1847]

Circulating spies

(STRGTK, vol. 4)

Rather than giving up the arts that had been deemed immoral and disorderly, gannin evidently simply rechristened them, much as the gōmune had changed the name of their begging activities from tsuji kanjin 退勘進 to tsuji gōmune 退乞胸 some three decades earlier, when the gannin complained to the magistrates of temples and shrines that the term kanjin carried religious associations inappropriate for the practices of the gōmune (“Ruishū sen’yō,” vol. 15). In the 1847 incident, gannin discovered that by renaming their art and by purchasing a gōmune license, arrest could be avoided. Their activities thereby became fully legal, tying the hands of stymied bakufu administrators, who could only suggest that the trend of switching occupational status should be checked. Nidayū 仁太夫, the head of the gōmune, was called to the town magistrates’ office on 1847/7/22 and “counseled gently” that performers under his control should not masquerade as gannin. Nidayū promised compliance in a deposition endorsed by his boss, Kuruma Zenshichi, and by a deputy of Danzaemon 弹左衛門 (Zenshichi’s boss, and the head of Edo outcastes). With this bureaucratic whimper the incident came to a close (STRGTK, vol. 4). We can be sure, however, that gannin continued to present their attractions on the streets, outwitting city administrators whenever established rules proved to be more trouble than they were worth.

Conclusion: Whose Order?

After the end of the period of civil wars, the futility of isolated and individually enacted attempts to counter the increasingly heavy-handed rule of centralized governmental authority must have been painfully
clear to most popular religious performers and other types of beggars. Scattered and nearly powerless religious mendicants thus turned to influential temples and shrines for protection, realizing that organization and affiliation strengthened their cause and might even lead to monopoly privileges over certain arts. The movement to organize turned out, however, to play directly into the hands of the Tokugawa bakufu, which sought to designate major temples as intermediaries responsible for law and order among the gannin. It did not take long for those on the bottom rung of the officially approved gannin hierarchy to discern that proper organization and registration served mainly their social betters.

Once the official gannin order had been set in place, however, no penurious itinerant could hope to dismantle it singlehandedly. Indeed, resistance easily became counterproductive, giving the bakufu an opportunity to display its power in quasi-theatrical shows of force, or to demonstrate its legitimacy through the use of legal proceedings stacked in favor of the status quo. Instead of risking a dangerous confrontation, gannin turned to guerrilla-like, ad hoc strategies such as deliberate procrastination, intentional ambiguity, conscious mendacity, or irreverent chicanery to fight oppressive measures of control. By the eighteenth century, the disadvantages of “order” must have been as obvious as its advantages had been a century earlier. The impoverished street preacher or religious singer-dancer now knew that “order” meant chiefly paying fees, obeying reactionary laws, and fulfilling pointless duties. By contrast, “disorder” did not simply imply destructive chaos and discord, despite the efforts of warrior officials to portray it as such, but rather an antidote to an inequitable system, a temporary and expedient means to circumvent what stood in the way of business.

Though outsmarting the authorities may well have occasioned feelings of sardonic glee, disorder per se was never touted as a gannin value to be upheld and defended. In fact, order was always present in gannin society, though the average gannin’s vision of it must have differed radically from what was praised as peace and harmony by bakufu ideologues. Order for the low-ranking gannin implied a flexible network of relations and affiliations that allowed one to learn an art from a teacher or even a non-gannin, to accept one’s own disciples or boarders when the possibility arose, and to send one’s wife or children out to work the streets when illness, old age, or other hardships turned life into hell. This type of order included options such as affiliating oneself with a yamabushi temple when making the rounds in the countryside, maintaining a domicile in the city, utilizing the money-making
potential of new fads or trends, or renaming oneself bōjīn or “bounteous harvest dancer” to avoid burdensome regulations. Though largely unacknowledged by Tokugawa-period intellectuals and bureaucrats, this informal, pragmatic order was certainly no less just, rational, or humane than the static scheme the bakufu deemed good and right. It did not, of course, easily lend itself to the transmission of official edicts and the prompt arrest and punishment of gannin wrongdoers. But this hardly justifies the view, common enough among eyewitness chroniclers and still echoed in much scholarship today, that gannin and other religious street performers became increasingly corrupt and disorderly throughout the Tokugawa period. So it may have seemed to members of the ruling class at the time, but we should not uncritically accept their judgment.

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