

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 outcastes known as *hinin* 非人 (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* 陰陽師 (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* (虛無僧, *shakuhachi*-playing Zen monks), *kotobure* 事触れ (prognosticators), *miko* 巫女 (female shamans), and others. Also appearing in official inventories, usually in final position, are *gannin bōzu* 願人坊主, more succinctly known as *gannin-bō*, or even simply *gannin*, a name that may be translated either as “petitioned monks” or “petitioning monks.”² 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.³ 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 monstresses of Enma-ō 閻魔王, the Buddhist god-

² The most detailed study of the *gannin* to date is SUZUKI Akiko's unpublished master's thesis *Gannin no kenhyū* (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. ISHII 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*” (*hami, 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* 阿房陀羅經).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

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; NISHITSUNOI 1975; TAKAYANAGI 1981; NAKAMURA 1983. The mock sutras are also sometimes written *ahōdara-kyō*.

⁵ See, for example, the descriptions of Yamaga Sokō (1622–1685) and Tanaka Kyūgu (1663–1729) cited in MORIMOTO 1985, pp. 106–107. *Gannin* are characterized as *midari* ("disorderly"), *furachi* ("unlawful"), or *busahō* ("unruly") in records such as *Shisō zasshiki*, fascicle 3, p. 68; *Ofuregaki Kanpō shūsei*, no. 2398, p. 1140; STRSSB, p. 19, 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 nuishū*, 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., Vaiśravaṇa) 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 *Shisō zasshiki*, fascicle 3, pp. 67–74; “Bokkai sanpitsu,” vol. 92; *Mikikigusa*, vol. 10 (zoku 2-shū no 10), pp. 352–53 (reprinted in *Koji ruien*, *Sejibu*, vol. 3, pp. 957–60); *Kasshi 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 *Kiyūshōran*, vol. 2, p. 637. *Morisada mankō*, 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 瀧の坊 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 正安寺 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; *Fūken 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

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 大藏坊), 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 kakiutsushi,” 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.⁹ 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 shūsei*, 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.¹⁰ Other *gannin*-like itinerants close to the Kurama, known as *bōjin* 坊人, also retained much independence. In an answer to an official inquiry (probably from 1744) regarding the existence of *gannin* at Atago and Tago near Kyoto, *gannin* heads replied that they

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

¹⁰ Specifically, the *gannin* complained that such *zenmon bōzu* 禪門坊主 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 *bōjin*: men who, much like the *gannin*, offered prayers, healing rites, and magic amulets to the public.¹¹ Even though some claimed the Kurama *gannin* had themselves once been called *bōjin* (*Shisō zasshiki*, fascicle 3, p. 71, and elsewhere), nothing is said about Kurama rule over *bōjin* types. Kurama authority over independent or self-styled *shugen* remained even more problematic, since some *gannin* also affiliated themselves in dual fashion with *shugen* temples when this seemed a useful strategy. The Kurama temple was aware of such “disorder” and prohibited *gannin* from becoming disciples of *shugen* sects in a temporary or concurrent manner (*Shisō zasshiki*, fascicle 3, p. 71).¹²

Although the *bakufu* and the *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 *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 *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 *gannin* to the *bakufu*. Usually two men, one associated with the Taizō-in, the other with the Enkō-in, were selected, largely on the basis of seniority.¹³ In other parts of the land, *kumigashira* (組頭 “group chiefs”) were appointed to manage local *gannin*. Beneath the *furegashira* and *kumigashira* stood a historically and geographically variable hierarchy of *gannin* functionaries: *daiyaku* 代役 (deputy); *ōmetsukeyaku* 大目付役 (great overseer), *gonin-gumi* 五人組 (five-man group [head]), *toshiyori* 年寄 (elder), and the like.¹⁴ In the Kantō area, Edo *furegashira* were charged with touring the eight provinces to check on local *kumigashira* and other bosses who

¹¹ “Kurama *gannin* *yurai kaki-utsushi*”; and “Bokkai sanpitsu,” vol. 92. Many other versions of this document omit the reference to Atago and Tago. Perhaps the *bakufu* was thinking of the “Bishamon emissaries” (*Bishamon shisha* 毘沙門使者) at Atago. For a discussion and illustration of these beggars, who came around on the third day of the new year, see *Ichīwa ichigon*, vol. 6 (fascicle 42), pp. 114–16. For another reference to Atago see the 1696 description of Osaka *gannin* activities below.

¹² This rule was spelled out in 1744, but evidently refers to a long-standing practice. See also *Shisō zasshiki*, fascicle 3, p. 68 and elsewhere for an admission that *gannin* had long been deserting to *shugen* temples.

¹³ YOSHIDA 1994, p. 91 gives a table of Edo *furegashira* based on newly-discovered, unpublished records at the Kurama temple. Another *furegashira* was stationed in Suruga, but it is unclear from when this position existed. See *Sunkoku zasshi*, vol. 1, p. 288.

¹⁴ A convenient chart can be found in SUZUKI 1994, p. 109. Explanations of each rank of the Edo *gannin* affiliated with the Taizō-in are given in YOSHIDA 1994, pp. 99–102. Titles differed for the Enkō-in *gannin* (see “Bokkai sanpitsu,” vol. 92).

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 *füregashira*'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 *füregashira*. 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*.¹⁵ 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 *füregashira* 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 *füregashira* 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*

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*.

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 domainal 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 shūsei*, 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 *yama-bushi* lodge only at specially designated inns.¹⁶ In the province of Kai (today Yamanashi Prefecture), *gannin* guarded mountains for the peasantry, engaged in cold weather austerities, and performed *jōruri* 浄瑠璃 or *saimon* 祭文 recitation (*Urami kanwa*, p. 416). In nearby Suruga (today Shizuoka Prefecture), *gannin* living in row houses (*nagaya* 長屋) 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 Kōshim (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 清寿院 (*Kouta no chimata*,

¹⁶ *Hennen sabetsu shi shiryō shūsei*, 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 *jōruri* reciter, one *shinnai* 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

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* 金比羅行人), 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 bozu* すたすた坊主 (“shuffling monks”) could also be found in Kyoto. See *Morisada mankō*, vol. 1, p. 219.

¹⁹ *Settsu 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-tusushi” 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 *Kōshin* 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 *Kōshin* vigil practitioner [*kōshin 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 chōhōki*,” 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 Keichō 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-chō*”). 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 fusetsu 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 shiryō shūsei*, vol. 6, p. 197. This document includes figures from as early as 1626 but was revised several times thereafter. It also catalogues 48 *Kumano bikuni* 熊野比丘尼, 97 Honzan-sect *yamabushi*, 36 Tōzan-sect *yamabushi*, 4 *Rokusai nenbutsu* 六齋念仏, 30 yin-yang diviners, and numberless unregistered beggars and *hinin* from other areas.

Table 1. The Edo *Gannin* Population

YEAR	NUMBER	SOURCE
1652	13	<i>Kiyūshōran</i> , vol. 2, p. 637
1672	21	HASHIKAWA 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 <i>gannin</i> inns	STRGTK, vol. 1
1860s?	400–500	<i>Hyakugi jutsuryaku</i> , p. 237
1862	500–600 Taizō-in-affiliated <i>gannin</i> (includes 100 office-holders)	YOSHIDA 1994, p. 102
1869	550 at Kanda Hashimoto-chō	<i>Shiryō-shū: Meiji shoki hisabetsu buraku</i> , p. 70

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 橋本町 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

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 (*bōnai* 坊内). 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 Shim'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; *Tengen 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 YOSHIDA 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 YOSHIDA 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 *fungashira* 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.

Table 2. Edo *Gannin* Domicile Locations

LOCATION	DATES	SOURCE(S)
Kanda		
Bakuro-chō	“from 1661–1673”	“Chishi oshirabe ni tsuki kakiage-chō”
	ca. 1676	<i>Sabishiki za no nagusami</i> , p. 136.
Hashimoto-chō	“from 1688–1704”	<i>Gofunai bikō</i> , vol. 1, p. 454; <i>Edo masago rokujutchō</i> , p. 156; <i>Edo machikata kakiage (Shitaya/Yanaka)</i> , p. 218; <i>Wasure nokori</i> , p. 124; STRSSB, pp. 5, 30.
Toshima-chō	ca. 1796	<i>Tankai</i> , p. 474.
Yanagiwara-chō	1780s	<i>Mimi-bukuro</i> , vol. 1, p. 319.
Egawa-chō	ca. 1826	<i>Gofunai bikō</i> , vol. 1, p. 454; <i>Edo machikata kakiage (Shitaya/Yanaka)</i> , p. 218; STRSSB, pp. 5, 30.*
Yamato-chō	ca. 1826	<i>Gofunai bikō</i> , vol. 1, p. 454; <i>Edo machikata kakiage (Shitaya/Yanaka)</i> , 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	<i>Tankai</i> , p. 474.
Shitaya		
Yamazaki-chō	“from ca. 1717”	<i>Edo machikata kakiage (Shitaya/Yanaka)</i> p. 218; <i>Gofunai bikō</i> , vol. 1, p. 454; STRGTK, vol. 1.
Toyosumi-chō	1873	<i>Shiryō-shū: Meiji shoki hisabetsu buraku</i> , p. 416.
Yotsuya		
Tenryū-ji Monzen	ca. 1759	“Bokkai sanpitsu,” vol. 92.
Samegahashi	ca. 1796	<i>Tankai</i> , p. 474; <i>Hyakugi jutsuryaku</i> , p. 237.
Fukagawa		
Umibe Daiku-chō	“from 1764–1772”	<i>Tōkyō-shi sainin enkaku kiyō</i> , 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*).

Table 3. *Gannin* Flophouses

LOCATION	NUMBER	MANAGER	AFFILIATION
Hashimoto-chō	28	Enkyō	Taizō-in
"	18	Taninobō	Enkō-in
Shiba Shin'ami-chō	4	Kyōdō	Taizō-in
"	21	Myōkai	Enkō-in
Shitaya Yamazaki-chō 2-chōme	7	Ritsuen	Taizō-in
Yotsuya Tenryū-ji Monzen	2	Nenshin	Taizō-in
"	1	Kangen	Enkō-in
Moto Samegahashi Kita-chō	2	Ganzan	Enkō-in

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

admitting nearly anybody who paid the requisite fee.²⁵ According to one source, the first *gannin* flophouse was created during the Meiwa period (1764–1772) by a *gannin* named Shōryū 昌龍 from Fukagawa Umibe Daiku-chō (*Tōkyō-shi saimin enkaku kiyō*, p. 641). This inn may have been modeled on hostels of “wandering ascetics” (*gyōnin*), which catered to *taka-ashida*, an occupation of religious itinerants (often *gannin*) who paraded around on stilt-like footwear. Such inns are already mentioned in an Edo law of 1672/2/6 (*Shōhō jiroku*, vol. 1, p. 166 [no. 496]). In any case, by 1843 even *gannin* 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-chō had skyrocketed, forcing beggars and itinerants to turn to flophouses for room and board (STRGTK, vol. 1). By 1843/1, a total of 83 *gannin* flophouses, catering to some 800–900 people, flourished at five Edo locations (see Table 3).²⁶

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 bōzu* 寮坊主), provided pots and pans with which guests cooked the rice col-

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 *gōmune* 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 妙法坊 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 shūsei*, 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 shūsei*, 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 KYŌHŌ 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 (*Shisō 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 Kyōhō 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 Kanpō shūsei*, 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 *Shisō zasshiki*, fascicle 3, p. 72; and *Ofuregaki Kanpō shūsei*, no. 2398, p. 1140. In 1694/10 another law again dictated that religious meetings such as *nenbutsu-kō* 念仏講 and *daimoku-kō* 題目講 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 Kanpō shūsei*, no. 2398, p. 1140 (1723/6). Pictures of licenses can be found in *Mikihigusa*, vol. 2, p. 53 (*5-shū no 9*); *Fūzoku gahō*, vol. 47, p. 22; STRSSB, p. 60; and *Tōkyō-shi shikō*, *sangyō-hen*, vol. 29, p. 146.

³² *Sen’yō eikyūroku*, cited in *Tōkyō-shi shikō*, *sangyō-hen*, vol. 13, p. 50; “Ruishū sen’yō,” vol. 14, cited in NAKAO 1992, p. 449; and *Shōhō 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 Taizō-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 Kantō *furegashira* and *kumigashira* to tighten control over their charges. He seems not to have taken up the issue again (“Kurama *gannin* yurai 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* Hōsenbō was broadened to include *gannin* wives and children, to whom he issued licenses and begging satchels.³⁴ *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 Tenpō shūsei* vol. 2, no. 4283, p. 17, translated in WIGMORE 1983, part 8B, pp. 123–24; TAKANO 1989, pp. 107, 110).

THE TENPŌ 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

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.³⁵ This state of affairs was the by-product, if the volume *Fūken gūki* is to be believed, of an 1807 lawsuit by townspeople wishing to stop the *gannin*'s minatory behavior toward the stingy (*Fūken gūki*, 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.³⁶

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 dōjō* 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 Tenpō reforms proceeded in earnest, domicile location, registration requirements, and activities of religious performers and practitioners once again became a topic of concern.³⁷ 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.³⁸ *Gannin*, yin-yang diviners,

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-kō*, vol. 5, *zenshū*, no. 2570, p. 17. *Gōmune*, 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-kō*, vol. 5, *zenshū*, no. 3107 (pp. 334–35); *Tenpō 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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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 fuzoku somakuri*, 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 *gōmune* 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 *gōmune*, and to carry their licenses at all times.⁴²

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-chō and Shiba Shin’ami-chō 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

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 shūsei*, 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:

Tōjirō, 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* (万度豊年踊, "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* 辻勧進 to *tsuji gōmune* 辻乞胸 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 弾左衛門 (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 *bōjin* 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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