

Introduction to the Hinin Taiheiki: The Paupers' Chronicle of Peace

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In the Edo period, famines occurred frequently, imposing disaster. Major famines occurred in roughly thirty to forty or fifty to sixty year cycles, with minor famines interspersed. Typically in Kansai (western Japan), the direct cause was drought, while in Tōhoku (northeastern Japan) it was cold, but floods could also wreak havoc in many areas. Famine was also the product of the political and social system.

Two severe famines occurred during the Enpō (1673-81) and Ten'na (1681-83) eras, although neither is ranked among the four or five major disasters of the Edo period (1603-1868). Repeated storms and floods in the summer and fall of the second year of Enpō (1674) led to a nationwide disaster known as the Enpō Famine. Just six years later, in the eighth year of Enpō (1680), inclement weather caused crop failures in many provinces, and in the spring of the ninth year of Enpō (1681, renamed first year of Ten'na on the 29th of the ninth month), starvation spread across western Japan. The weather was unfavorable in 1682, raising the price of rice and leading to mass starvation in western provinces. Known as the Ten'na Famine, this disaster lasted well into the early summer of the following year. In Kyoto and surrounding provinces, epidemic diseases raged.

By the early seventeenth century, the *kaimai* system of compulsory shipments of rice (and often soy beans) to supply large cities had been imposed. Rice was measured by *koku* or *hyō*. One *koku*, 1,000 Japanese cups or approximately 180 liters, was said to be the amount that fed one person per year. One *hyō*,

a straw bagful, was 0.35 to 0.4 *koku*. Among fiefdoms in northern Japan in the 1650s, Sendai was already shipping 150,000 to 160,000 *koku* of rice. In the 1670s, Hirosaki shipped approximately 25,000 *koku* to Kansai alone, and in 1670 Akita sent 11,000 bags to Osaka.¹ This meant that following a bad crop, there was no rice at home, and the price jumped in cities. It was impossible to buy rice from nearby provinces, as each attempted to secure its own provisions by *kokudome*, prohibiting shipment of grain to other domains.² Occasionally, rice was borrowed from the shogunate, but it typically arrived too late or not at all, due to shipwreck or plunder. Even if monetary payments were made to facilitate such borrowings, there was no guarantee that rice would be included in the delivery.

The government responded with a few measures, including relief and restrictions on processed foods and rice storage. If a boat carrying rice was shipwrecked, it was to be helped; plunder was to be reported.³ Stockpiling rice during times of famine was forbidden and distribution of rice gruel was encouraged.⁴

The Enpō 9 (or Ten'na 1, 1681) section of the *Jōken'in zō daishōkokukō jikki* (Factual Account of Shogunal Lord Tsunayoshi Who in Death Was Given the Title of Grand Minister) volumes of the *Tokugawa jikki* (Record of True Events of the Tokugawa Period)⁵ notes that the three *bugyō* (magistrates) and *ōmetsuke* (government inspectors) were summoned before the shogun and told that each should organize relief activities for their localities because "the peasants were reportedly experiencing

hardships due to frequent rain storms” the previous year.⁶ In En’pō 8 (1680), the shogunate issued a directive that sake brewing be reduced to half that of the previous year and sake not be sold until the second month of the following year.⁷ A directive the following year ordered that sake brewing in all provinces be reduced to half of the previous year until the following fall.⁸



Edo Period Hinin Beggar, from Illustrated Sino-Japanese Encyclopedia (Wakan sansai zue, 1712).

Because of the *kaimai* system, large cities had an abundance of rice, even in times of famine. Consequently, large numbers of people left their farms and drifted to Edo, Osaka, and Kyoto. These refugees were called *kinin* (飢人, also pronounced *uenin*), the starved, or *komokamuri* (薦被, literally “mat-wearers,” because beggars often dressed in mats). Together, they constituted a class of *hinin* (非人, also written 貧人 and 疲人), or paupers.

(They were also called *nohinin* 野非人, [literally “field paupers”].) The word *hinin* originally signified something that was nonhuman, such as a god or demon in human disguise, but later referred to people who looked different from the general population, such as monks, recluses, and the poor in general; as explained below, in the Edo period, *hinin* was used to refer to people who were unusual or lowly in a broad sense, and it came to designate the discriminated who came to cities from the countryside. Thus *nohinin* meant unsettled vagrants.

These *nohinin* drifters were often arrested, placed in temporary relief sheds, and then sent home. On some occasions, those who could walk received food as well. The earliest known written record from the Edo period of *segyō* (almsgiving; in this context, cooking and distributing rice porridge) was by a private man of virtue in Kyoto in 1626 during the great famine of the Kan’ei era (1624-43).⁹ The shogunate in 1669 organized a 100-day distribution of rice gruel for the starved in Kyoto. In the second month of 1675, the shogunate engaged in relief activities in Yamato, Settsu, and Kawachi provinces and prepared sheds in Yanagiwara in Edo and distributed rice gruel. Between the third and fifth month that year, the shogunate offered gruel and money to the starving who had swarmed into Kyoto. In addition to gruel distribution, *osukui bushin* (relief construction work) was sometimes created. According to *The History of Osaka City* (Ōsaka-shi shi), in 1670 refugee sheds to accommodate the city’s *nohinin* were built at two places behind the Kōzu Shrine; more sheds were constructed in Takahara during the Kan’bun era (1661-73).¹⁰ A document records the repatriation of *nohinin* from Osaka in 1675.¹¹ In 1684 a big roundup collected 612 *nohinin*.¹² In En’pō 8, beggars in Edo were prohibited from sleeping under people’s eaves, and a directive that year ordered: “From now on do not let a single beggar stay in town; if they have made shacks

and the like, tear them down within three days and send the beggars away.”¹³

To facilitate relief work, *nohinin* refugees were organized, or were encouraged to organize themselves. For example, during the great famine of Kan’ei, merchant Enomoto Yazaemon’s *Memoranda* (Oboegaki) recorded that a “*taishō*” (leader) emerged from among the mat-wearers sheltered in an approximately 400-yard-long shed erected by the shogunate.¹⁴

Cities had their own *hinin* who lived just outside the city, unlike other *eta*, discriminated lower-classes, who lived in rural areas. For these resident *hinin*, Osaka designated *kaito* (literally, “inside the fences”) tax-exempt areas outside the city confines; one *kaito* was found in each of the districts of Tennōji (established in 1594), Tobita (1609), Dōtonbori (1622), and Ten’man (1626).¹⁵ Historical records portray the *hinin* in these *kaito* as highly organized groups with fairly strict rules and duties. A hierarchy existed that consisted of a *chōri* (chief), *kogashira* (junior headman) or *kumigashira* (team head), *wakakimono* (young men), and *deshi* or *kakae no deshi* (underlings or underlings for hire).

Although the size of these four *kaito* in the Enpō and Ten’na eras is unknown, in the Dōtonbori *kaito*, there were fifty-two *wakakimono* in the second year of Genroku (1689). To cite later headcounts, at the time of the Kyōhō famine (1728), 6,000 beggars were in Osaka, of whom more than 2,000 lived in one of the four sheds; the rest were *nohinin*. A record from the sixteenth day of the first month of 1733 counts 6,082 newly emigrated and long-term *hinin*, of whom 4,212 were *hiningashirano teshita* (underlings of *hinin* headmen) and 1,770 were *ōrai-hinin* (street paupers). The *kaito* population in 1789 was 1,158.¹⁶ The population fluctuated and tended to increase when street paupers joined *kaito*, as occurred in 1684, when 612 street *hinin* were distributed to the four areas. The 153 *hinin*

sent to Dōtonbori *kaito* had already been under its jurisdiction.¹⁷ This not only indicates that the local authorities wanted to keep the lowly out of the city but also that the four *kaito* had control over some people who lived outside.

The four *kaito* maintained village *hinin* guards in Settsu and Kawachi provinces, as well as in some areas of Harima province, making the organization quite extensive, although not as large as that of eastern Japan, where the Danzaemon (a hereditary name taken by the head of the *hinin*, *eta*, and other lower classes) was responsible for the *hinin* population in all eight Kantō provinces, among other areas.

Most *hinin* of the four *kaito* belonged to *machimawarikata* (the patrol office) and *tōzoku ginmiyaku* (burglar inspectors of particular districts within central Osaka). They worked as spies or assisted in investigations, arrests, and security work at execution sites. The task of executions was assigned to the leather-producing village of Watanabemura.¹⁸ *Chasen* (tea seller) underlings were dispatched to various districts and rich urban households to serve as *kaitoban* (guards); their duties included preventing theft and disturbances. Some may have also worked as low-level policemen. These guards were considered *machigakae* (district employees) and received monthly payments from the jurisdictions they served. Apparently, there were no fixed payments from the city to the four *kaito* for their public functions until 1788. Instead, *kaito* were exempt from taxes and given licenses to publicly beg, especially on special seasonal occasions, through such street performances as *sekizoro* (yearend well-wishing) and Daikoku-mai (the Daikoku dance in the first month of the year. Daikoku is one of the seven gods of fortune). Performers went from door to door in groups of two to four, collecting contributions. In addition, the four *kaito* received contributions from their districts on other occasions, like weddings and funerals. Contributions, which were either collected by

hinin leaders and redistributed at *kaito* or were given directly to individuals, provided their main source of income, along with payments from local magistrates for services rendered. For example, at the Dōtonbori *kaito*, they collected and recycled used rice paper and cloth remnants, as well as ran teahouses near the cemetery.¹⁹

The History of Osaka City distinguishes these resident *hinin* from ordinary homeless and especially migrant beggars.²⁰ Resident *hinin* belonged to the *nakama* (fellows) organization of the four places, and they were registered in a special *hinin ninbetsuchō* (*hinin* census) or in ordinary household registers. Housed in shelters adjacent to Osaka's three districts (south, north, and Ten'man), there were restrictions on their residences, so that many had no fixed abodes, however humble or temporary.

The four *hinin* areas in the En'pō and Ten'na eras were most likely organized similarly to these earlier *kaito*. It is easy to imagine that the influx of rural refugees to the city could antagonize the resident *hinin* and touch off territorial wars. This idea inspired the *Hinin Taiheiki*, or *The Paupers' Chronicle of Peace*, written anonymously in 1688.

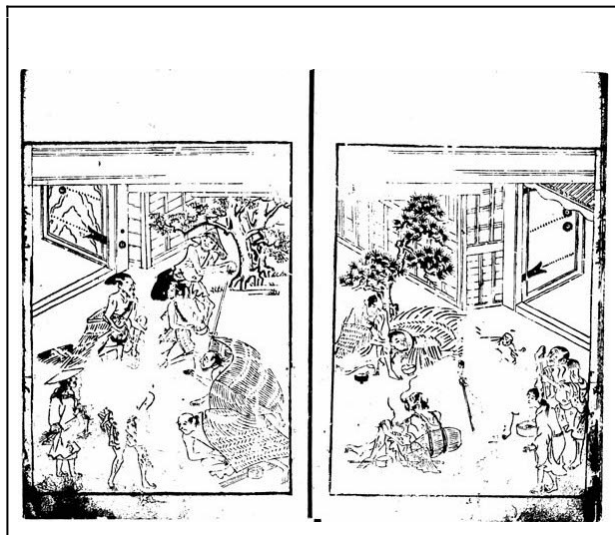


Illustration from the *Hinin Taiheiki*, 1688 edition. Scanned online at University of Tokyo Digital Library.

The *Hinin Taiheiki* is a mock-heroic tale based on Osaka scenes from 1681 that draws from the battles and other passages from the warrior tale the *Taiheiki* (*The Chronicle of Great Peace*) from which it takes its title. This is not the first *Taiheiki* parody; it was preceded by other anonymous tales about plants or animals, including *Tale of Vegetables and Fish* (Shōjin gyorui monogatari, c. 1425), *Tale of the Battle of Heron and Crow* (Aro kassen monogatari, perhaps before 1556), *Cherry in Nun's Robe* (Sumizome no sakura; also called *Plant Chronicle of Peace*, Sōmoku-Taiheiki, 1653), *The Chronicles of Peace* of fish, insects, and beasts (*Uo-Taiheiki*, *Mushi-Taiheiki*, and *Kedamono-Taiheiki*). *Uo-Taiheiki* (*Fish Chronicles of Peace*) may have been written by Komiyama Jikyū, c. 1673). *Hinin Taiheiki* is contemporary with *Zen-Taiheiki* (Earlier Chronicle of Peace, c. 1681), a historical novel depicting battles of the Heian period (794-1185). *Hinin Taiheiki* is unique, however, in its inclusion of famine and city paupers at a time of actual famine (1681-82). A tale that appeared some dozen years later, *Nōmin Taiheiki* (Peasants' Chronicle of Peace, c.1712-13) portrays a peasant uprising. However, *Inu-Hōjōki* (Dog *Hōjōki*), a parody on the *Hōjōki* (Kamo no Chomei's 1212 *Account of My Hermitage* that describes famine, fires, earthquakes, and other disasters befalling Kyoto) using mongrels as characters chronicles the same famine.

In the *Hinin Taiheiki*, the city beggars, disturbed by the arrival of famine refugees from the countryside, attempt to drive them out of the Osaka areas they deem to be their own territories. The *kanji* characters for "poor people" (貧人, *hinin*) are used for the rural refugees, although the *kanji* for "nonhuman" is also used twice. The resident *hinin*, an

organized group controlled by four *chōri*, are referred to as *kotsujiki* (乞食, beggars; modern pronunciation *kojiki*). The translation here uses “paupers” for famine refugees and “beggars” for the hired Osaka pariahs. Although the author burlesques both rural paupers and urban beggars, his sympathy is clearly with the former.

A fight breaks out between the two sides. The paupers from outside rise up against the beggars and win a few battles. When the beggars augment their strength by incorporating the poor from neighboring districts and villages, the battle is stalemated. Two events then occur: first, a monk in a vigil overhears three figures discussing the new Ten’na era as a happier time; second, another monk dies but returns from the underworld with the message that people should give charity food if they do not wish to die in the next famine. This prompts everyone to cook porridge for the poor.

The *Hinin Taiheiki* ends with the celebration of the change of era to Ten’na (literally, peace under heaven) and the official distribution of rice gruel in 1681. According to the *Tokugawa jikki*: “Starting in the beginning of winter this year, the price of grain rose sharply and many people starved. Thus 30,000 bags of rice was given to the people of the domain.”²¹

Like the *Taiheiki*, the *Hinin Taiheiki* uses double phrases in the chapter titles. It gives detailed descriptions of the outfits warriors wore in combat scenes and records their self-introductions. It renders the number of warriors, both friends and foes, with typical exaggeration. It frequently refers to Chinese precedents. It interweaves love stories. The most pronounced echoes from the *Taiheiki* are found in the scenes of (1) the Battle of Kōzu, which draws on the Battle of Chihaya; (2) the vigil of the Dragonhead drummer, the Daikoku-mai dancer, and the Noh performer; and (3) the monk Gufutoku’s visit to the underworld. Thus

the *Hinin Taiheiki* suggests that distributing rice gruel only provides temporary relief and that more fundamental preparations for famine are necessary. The story can be interpreted as a satire on government failure. Disasters continued: for example, cold weather in 1695 brought about famines that caused widespread starvation in northeast Japan; in the fall of 1699, northern Japan was struck by wind and water damage.

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Notes

- ¹ Kikuchi Isao, *Kinsei no kikin* (Tokyo: Yoshikawakō Bunkan, 1997), 74-75.
- ² *Ibid.*, 79.
- ³ Kuroita Katsumi, ed. *Tokugawa jikki*, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Yoshikawakō Bunkan, 1981), 384.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 398.
- ⁵ This section of the *Tokugawa jikki* pertains to the fifth shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (1646-1709) and covers the years of his reign, 1680-1709.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 425.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 384.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 427.
- ⁹ Kikuchi, 44.
- ¹⁰ Ōsakashi-shi Hensanjo, *Shinshū Ōsakashi-shi shi*, vol. 3 (Osaka: Osaka-shi, 2009), 851. Kikuchi, 45.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 851.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 852.
- ¹³ Kuroita, 368, 374.
- ¹⁴ Kikuchi, 43.
- ¹⁵ Ōsakashi-shi Hensanjo, 845-66.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 865.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 852.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 860.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 864.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 846.
- ²¹ Kuroita, 434.