

Panhandling, Subsistence, and Poverty Management in Meiji Tokyo¹

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Abstract

In the tenth month of Meiji 5 (1872), the Tokyo Prefectural Government issued an edict banning begging (*kanjin kinshirei*). Until then, the practice had been carefully regulated but never fully prohibited. On the contrary, from the beginning of the Tokugawa period, the city government permitted members of the *hinin* (beggar) status group to subsist by gathering alms in the city's commoner neighborhoods. That arrangement enabled the authorities to guarantee the daily survival of thousands of the city's poorest residents, while permanently shifting the financial burden for their care to urban landholders and tenants. Until the 1870s, begging was regulated via a network of neighborhood-level arrangements in which individual members of the *hinin* fraternity established client relationships (*shikiri kankei*) with specific city neighborhoods. In exchange for policing unauthorized begging in their client neighborhoods, members of the *hinin* fraternity were granted exclusive begging rights. Ownership of those rights ensured the survival of members of the *hinin* fraternity and their dependents. Accordingly, they were treated as an asset and passed down from one generation to the next. The 1872 ban on begging, however, formally abolished those relationships and reclassified the practice as a criminal offense. No longer a legitimate livelihood in which a portion of the city's poor were permitted to engage, begging was now officially cast as a practice that encouraged indolence and petty crime, and led one to eschew productive labor. This paper examines the ban's historical impact and efforts to regulate begging following its promulgation.

In the tenth month of 1872, the Tokyo Prefectural Government issued an edict banning begging. Until then, the practice had been carefully regulated but never fully prohibited. On the contrary, from the beginning of the Tokugawa period, the city authorities permitted persons of *hinin* (beggar) status to subsist by gathering alms in the city's commoner neighborhoods. Until the 1870s, begging was regulated via a network of neighborhood-level arrangements in which individual members of the *hinin* fraternity established client relationships (*shikiri kankei*) with specific city neighborhoods (*kobetsucho*).² In exchange for policing unauthorized panhandling (*warunedari*, *oshi-go*, etc.) in those neighborhoods, members of the *hinin* fraternity were granted exclusive begging rights. Ownership of those rights ensured the survival of the fraternity's constituents and their dependents. The 1872 ban, however, formally reclassified begging as a criminal offense and officially abolished the longstanding client relationships that existed between individual *hinin* and specific city neighborhoods.

The ban was the last in a series of reforms initiated in the fall of 1871, which were intended to dismantle the city's beggar fraternity and eradicate the practice of begging. Those reforms, however, failed, at least initially, to achieve their stated objectives. Lacking an alternative mode of subsistence, many former beggars were forced to

1. This presentation is based a series of articles published in Japanese in 2015 and 2016. The first is entitled "Meiji shoki tokyo ni okeru hinmin no kyusai to tosei" and appeared in the April 2015 issue of *Buraku mondai kenkyu*. The second is entitled "Tokyo no hinin shudan no kaitai katei to kaitaigo ni okeru kotsujiki tosei" and appeared in *Mibunteki shuen to buraku mondai no chiikishiteki kenkyu*, a 2016 anthology edited by Tsukada Takashi and Takenaga Mitsuo.
2. In addition to city neighborhoods, beggar fraternity constituent also established client relationships with large merchant houses (*odana*) and specific shrines and temples.

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continue gathering alms in city neighborhoods. This prompted the implementation of a series of official measures designed to eradicate panhandling by providing former beggars with an alternative livelihood. In early 1873, for example, the prefectural government established the Tokyo Day Labor Company, an enterprise designed to employ able-bodied former beggars as manual laborers. Utilizing the Company's internal records, this paper examines efforts to encourage the reintegration of former beggars into urban society during the 1870s. Thereby, it seeks to understand how the dismantling of the status system impacted the lives of former beggars and transformed their place in urban society.

The Formation and Development of Edo/Tokyo's Beggar Fraternity

As Tsukada Takashi demonstrated more than three decades ago, Edo's beggar fraternity formed during the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries in parallel with the early modern city of Edo.³ Initially, it was an association of persons in a condition similar to that of the present-day homeless. In other words, the fraternity's earliest members were individuals who, for various reasons, were estranged from their community of origin and traditional mode of subsistence, alienated from all forms of ownership, and, as a consequence, were forced to beg for their survival. Under the Tokugawa and early-Meiji status systems, these individuals were officially designated as *hinin*, or licensed beggars. Edo's *hinin* had their own officially-sanctioned fraternal organization. Highly autonomous and internally stratified, it was headed by a group of four beggar chiefs (*hiningashira*).⁴ Charged with the task of governing begging in Edo, the beggar chiefs partitioned the city area into four large begging zones (*kanjinba*). Each zone was, in turn, subdivided into multi-neighborhood territories known as *kanjin mochiba* and the administration of individual *mochiba* was entrusted to beggar deputies known as *kogashira*.⁵ Although status restrictions prohibited licensed beggars from residing in commoner neighborhoods, they were permitted to live on their periphery, occupying vacant parcels of public land, such as canal sides and fire breaks.

While beggar fraternity members exerted almost absolute control over the partitioning of begging territories, ownership of a territory in itself was insufficient to guarantee a fraternity member actual begging rights. Doing so required establishing exclusive client relationships with the urban neighborhoods located inside one's territory. For members of the beggar fraternity, client relationships and the begging rights they conferred were vital assets that enabled their survival and the reproduction of their households. Accordingly, fraternity members went to great lengths to preserve such relationships and ensure that they were passed on to subsequent generations. In exchange for monopoly control of begging rights, fraternity constituents were required to perform a range of duties at the behest of both the city authorities (*goyo*) and their client neighborhoods (*choyo*).⁶ The most significant of those was referred to as *seido*, or the regulation of unauthorized begging.

Focusing on systematic barriers excluding *hinin* from commoner society, conventional research has tended to portray relations between *hinin* and the residents of commoner neighborhoods as almost completely adversarial. As Tsukada Takashi demonstrated, however, commoners and licensed beggars had a shared interest in suppressing

3. Osaka City University's Tsukada Takashi is the leading authority on Edo's *hinin*. Those interested in the topic should refer to his 1987 book *Kinsei nihon mibunsei no kenkyu*.

4. Although highly autonomous, that organization was not fully independent. Rather, it was part of a regional association of outcast status groups commonly referred to as the *Kanhashu senmin soshiki*. Led by influential eta chieftain Danzaemon and dominated by members of the eta status group, the association's authority extended to members of the *hinin* and *sarukai* status groups.

5. Edo's beggar fraternity was a hierarchical organization comprised of four distinct strata. It was directed by a group of four beggar chiefs—Zenshichi (Asakusa), Matsuemon (Shinagawa), Kyube (Yoyogi), and Zensaburo (Fukagawa). They partitioned the city into four independent begging zones. Each zone was subdivided into smaller begging territories, which were entrusted to deputies (*kogashira*). Lower-ranking fraternity members known as *koyagashira*, or hut-owning beggars, lived alongside these beggar deputies in micro-communities scattered across the city area. As full-fledged fraternity members, deputies and hut-owning beggars owned their own huts and begging rights. In addition to family members, beggar households often included dependents known as *kakaehinin*. As subordinate members of the beggar fraternity, *kakaehinin* were alienated from ownership of their own dwelling and begging rights.

6. The official duties performed by Edo/Tokyo's *hinin* can be divided into two basic categories: ①punishment-related duties, which were issued indirectly via Danzaemon, and ②those issued directly to the city's beggar chiefs by the Edo City Governor, such as duties related to the operation of the Asakusa and Shinagawa Relief Facilities, the transportation of criminal offenders, and duties linked to the operation of the city jail.

illicit begging. The residents of city neighborhoods, particularly in affluent parts of Edo, were eager to see their communities free of unauthorized and disruptive panhandling, and therefore sought to establish functional relationships with specific members of the beggar fraternity. By agreeing to supply all of their alms to a single, licensed beggar (= *tokoro no hinin*), the residents of city neighborhoods sought to exclude all other forms of begging from their communities. At the same time, by suppressing illicit panhandling in the neighborhoods they served, fraternity members were able to gain an actual monopoly over the alms supplied by city residents.

This arrangement was actively supported by the city authorities. It enabled them to ensure the daily survival of thousands of Edo's poorest inhabitants, while shifting the financial burden of doing so to the residents of commoner neighborhoods. In exchange for officially-guaranteed begging rights, members of Edo's beggar fraternity were, as I noted above, given the official duty of regulating and providing relief to *nohinin*, or persons who were beggars by condition rather than status. By monopolizing ownership of that function, beggar fraternity members were able to maintain an official foothold in the Tokugawa status order, which, as Takagi Shosaku first described in the mid-1970s, existed as a "network/system of official obligations" (*yaku no taikai*) in which status (*mibun*) corresponded with public duties (*yaku*). Therefore, although licensed beggars were prohibited from residing in Edo's commoner neighborhoods or engaging in productive labor and revenue-generating commerce, they were by no means excluded from urban society. On the contrary, the beggar fraternity's constituents performed a range of critical functions, which contributed to the perpetuation of individual neighborhoods and urban society as a whole. At the same time, the reproduction of *hinin* households depended on the maintenance of ties with both the public authorities and the members of other status groups. Ultimately, the preservation of those ties enabled licensed beggars to maintain ownership of their client relationships and provide for their dependents.

Regulating Begging after the Meiji Restoration

These client relationships survived the Meiji Restoration, as did the beggar fraternity itself. In the fifth month of Keio 4 (1868), the newly installed City Government Office (Shisei saibansho) reconfirmed the longstanding rights and duties of beggar fraternity constituents.

In other words, the authorities granted Tokyo's *hinin* begging rights, while also ordering that they engage on a daily basis in the regulation of unauthorized panhandling inside the city.

The first major alteration to this arrangement came in the summer of Meiji 2 (1869). In the ninth month of that year, the Tokyo Prefectural Government established the third in a series of publicly-funded relief centers (*kyuikusho*). Unlike the first two in Mita and Kojimachi, which were reserved for impoverished residents of Tokyo's commoner neighborhoods, the third, located in Takanawa, was established for unauthorized beggars and vagrants captured in and around the city. Although it was government funded, its administration was entrusted to members of the *eta* and *hinin* status groups. Conventionally, unauthorized beggars captured in the city were dealt with in one of two ways. They were either sent back to their status community (*mibun kyodotai*) of origin or integrated into the beggar fraternity as subordinates (*kakaehinin*), meaning that they existed as the dependent of a full-fledged fraternity constituent. While beggar subordinates were members of the *hinin* status group, they were excluded from the various privileges granted to full-fledged fraternity members, including ownership of both begging rights and a dwelling. With the establishment of the Takanawa Relief Center, however, the authorities signaled that unauthorized beggars captured inside the city who could not be returned to their place of origin would no longer be absorbed into the fraternity or given the legal status of *hinin*. Rather, they would now be sent to a publicly-funded and supervised workhouse, where they would perform manual labor and receive vocational training.

At the same time, however, the authorities reconfirmed the right of fraternity members to continue gathering alms inside the prefecture while strictly prohibiting anyone else from doing so.⁷ Accordingly, members of Tokyo's beggar fraternity continued, as they had during the Tokugawa era, to subsist primarily by gathering alms in their cli-

7. There were a few exceptions to this rule. Religious mendicants known as *gannin bozu* and mendicant performers known as *gomune* also maintained the right to survive by gathering alms in Edo's neighborhoods.

ent neighborhoods.⁸ Notably, the specific terms governing the practice of begging, including standards of payment, were set on the neighborhood level and varied widely from place to place. In other words, even after the Meiji Restoration, there were no universal standards governing alms giving and collection. On the contrary, both practices were regulated via a patchwork of neighborhood-level agreements, which specified rules and expectations for both alms providers and recipients. Most neighborhood-level agreements recognized the primacy of the local beggar fraternity constituent, commonly referring to him as the *tokoro no hinin* (or neighborhood beggar).

The Dismantling of the Beggar Fraternity and Efforts to Prohibit Begging

This remained the case until the summer of Meiji 4 (1871). In the eighth month of that year, however, the Meiji government issued the so-called Edict Abolishing Outcast Statuses. The following month, the fraternity was officially disbanded and its former constituents were stripped of their long-held rights and duties. No longer officially licensed beggars who performed the public duty of regulating unauthorized panhandlers, the fraternity's former constituents lost their specialized place in the urban social order, as well as the official protections and guarantees that had long enabled their survival.

Not all *hinin*, however, were immediately displaced from their traditional role in urban society. For example, on the fifteenth day of the ninth month of Meiji 4, several dozen former *hinin* who, during the Tokugawa and early-Meiji periods, transported criminal offenders to and from the city's judicial and penal institutions, were hired by the prefecture's Office of Judicial Affairs to perform the same duties. When announcing the policy, the Office noted that doing so was necessary because the tasks were quite complex and would pose a serious challenge for individuals lacking the requisite skills and experience. Citing the recent edict abolishing outcast statuses, official policy mandated that the former *hinin* be paid "wages equivalent to that of other laborers."

Many former beggars, however, struggled to find an alternative mode of subsistence following the beggar fraternity's dismantling. Guidelines issued by the Tokyo Prefectural Office in the ninth month of Meiji 4 mandated that former *hinin* be "placed under the authority of their neighborhood of residence" (*kyocho shihai*). In practice, this meant that former client neighborhoods were ordered to take responsibility for former beggars and their dependents. Specifically, neighborhood officials were instructed to enter former *hinin* into neighborhood population registers, thereby giving them legal status as residents of neighborhood communities. In addition, they were ordered to help former beggars secure an alternative livelihood. The authorities neglected, however, to offer any financial assistance and many neighborhoods failed to provide sufficient support. Accordingly, scores of beggars were forced to exist on the margins of urban society, surviving as dependents rather than self-sustaining, fully-integrated members of neighborhood society.

A series of grievances filed by city residents in the months after the beggar fraternity's dismantling shed light on the situation. In the eleventh month of Meiji 4, for example, Natsume Shobe, a district administrator (*nakadoshiyori*) from Tokyo's fourth ward, filed a lengthy complaint in which he discussed the major issues confronting his district. Near the end of the document, he writes, "Although large numbers of *hinin* have, in accordance with the recent edict, now been registered as commoners, many continue, as they have traditionally done, to gather alms in their former client neighborhoods on both auspicious and inauspicious occasions. In addition, I have heard reports that there are panhandlers who think nothing of accosting city residents and demanding handouts. In fact, large numbers of city residents have already been adversely affected. This is an extremely serious issue. Accordingly, I urge the prefectural authorities to take swift action."

Natsume's complaint paints a stark picture of the situation facing many former *hinin* in the months after the promulgation of the Edict Abolishing Outcast Statuses. Although status restrictions prohibiting *hinin* from residing in commoner neighborhoods and engaging in productive labor had been lifted, many former beggars experienced severe economic insecurity following the beggar fraternity's formal dismantling. Accordingly, many former

8. Generally, Tokyo's *hinin* engaged in two types of begging: *kikkyo kanjin*, or begging that took place on auspicious and inauspicious occasions, such as wedding and funerals, and *joshiki kanjin*, or seasonal begging, which occurred during fixed periods each year, such as the New Year's festival and fall harvest.

fraternity members continued, with the support of city residents, to engage in traditional begging practices, visiting the homes of their longstanding clients on special occasions, such as weddings and funerals. Without official protection from the authorities and a fully-functioning, prefecture-wide system dedicated to policing unauthorized begging, however, former licensed beggars faced intensified competition for alms from a range of traditional and non-traditional competitors, including impoverished members of a social stratum that Yoshida Nobuyuki termed the *hiyoso*, or day labor stratum. Under the status system, members of the day labor stratum survived by selling their labor in exchange for a wage and were strictly prohibited from begging for alms (=an act referred to as *sodegoi*). From as early as the summer of Meiji 2, however, periodic surveys conducted by the city's beggar chiefs indicate that thousands of impoverished members of the day labor stratum from neighborhoods on the city's southeastern and northeastern peripheries survived each day by gathering alms in more affluent parts of Tokyo. Records from the Tokyo Day Labor Company suggest that this situation intensified following the beggar fraternity's formal dismantling. With longstanding measures to regulate unauthorized panhandling no longer in place, traditional and non-traditional beggars took to the streets in great numbers, causing significant distress for the authorities and inconvenience for city residents.

Despite that fact, the prefectural authorities failed to immediately implement any measures to provide former beggars with an alternative mode of subsistence. Nor did they advance any measures to prohibit or significantly curtail begging inside the city. In fact, the prefectural authorities waited until the fall of Meiji 5 (1872) to move forward with such measures. In the tenth month of that year, the Tokyo Prefectural Governor prohibited both begging and almsgiving, thereby formally rejecting the longstanding client relationships binding Tokyo's beggars to specific city neighborhoods. As a result, almsgiving, an act that the public authorities had systematically encouraged since the early Tokugawa period, was reclassified as both an act that encouraged idleness on the part of the urban poor and a petty crime punishable by a fine. At the same time, begging, which, for members of the *hinin* status group, had long represented a legally permissible livelihood, was categorized as a criminal act and individuals caught engaging in the practice were to be captured and handed over to the authorities.

During the same month that the begging ban was issued, the prefectural authorities outlined a series of policies designed to discourage former beggars from panhandling by providing them with an alternative means of survival. Specifically, the prefectural authorities announced three related projects: a workhouse, day labor company, and public relief center. The first two projects were intended specifically for beggars capable of engaging in manual or low-skill labor, including canal dredging and road and bridge maintenance. The third project, however, was designed to provide long-term, institutionalized relief to former beggars and vagrants, who were physically incapable of engaging in manual labor or petty commerce, and thereby achieving self-sufficiency.

Although all three policies were unveiled in the late fall of Meiji 5, the day labor company was the first to actually materialize. In the first month of Meiji 6, two subcontractors, Fukuju Kiheiji of the Minamihashicho neighborhood and Tsuruma Yujiro of Honjo's Yokoamicho neighborhood, won the bid to lead the newly-created company. Labor brokers by trade, the two men were charged with the duty of arranging housing and employment for hundreds of former beggars, and engaging in their daily regulation. That included not only providing them with food, bedding, and clothing, but also acting as their legal guardian and managing their household registration. In exchange for executing these duties, Fukuju and Tsuruma were contracted to carry out a range of public maintenance duties. In addition, they were given the right to supply laborers to private employers and collect a commission from the laborers for whom they arranged employment.

Upon entry into the Company, former beggars lived and labored under the constant supervision of Company directors and foremen. They resided in housing arranged by the Company and supervised by Company staff. Lacking an official place of residence, former beggars were registered as wards of the Company. In other words, the Tokyo Day Labor Company served as a permanently functioning regulatory mechanism into which former beggars could be integrated and through which they could be controlled.

Conclusion

This presentation examined how the dismantling of the status system impacted the lives and subsistence modes of persons of *hinin* status. As detailed above, *hinin* were deeply integrated into the Tokugawa and early-Meiji status orders, possessing a publicly-sanctioned fraternity and unique set of official rights and duties. The abolition of *hinin* status and subsequent dismantling of Tokyo's beggar fraternity, however, deprived former fraternity constituents of their specialized position in the urban social order. No longer licensed beggars who carried out the official duty of regulating unauthorized begging inside the city, former *hinin* were targeted for reintegration into urban society. Initially, the prefectural authorities attempted to place former beggars under the authority of the urban neighborhood, which, in the early 1870s, remained a status organization of urban landowners. While some former beggars were successfully absorbed into city neighborhoods, scores struggled to find a place in urban society and were forced to exist on its margins, begging in order to survive. This remained the case until early 1873, when the prefectural authorities acted to provide former beggars with an alternative mode of subsistence and thereby discourage them from gathering alms.

Although the status system's collapse liberated *hinin* in the sense that it freed them from the longstanding status restrictions that prohibited beggars from engaging in productive labor and residing in commoner neighborhoods, it deprived them not only of their traditional mode of subsistence and unique position in the social division of labor, but also the official protections, inter-status relationships, and communal privileges that enabled their survival and reproduction. In that sense, the dismantling of the status system was a deeply jarring and disruptive experience for many *hinin* households.

As noted above, the beggar fraternity's dismantling was accompanied by a parallel effort to integrate former beggars into an alternative social framework like the neighborhood (*cho*) or the Tokyo Day Labor Company. Both the neighborhood and Day Labor Company were stratified, self-regulating associations, possessing their own unique rules and internal hierarchy. Rather than assuming direct responsibility for the welfare of former beggars, the prefectural authorities attempted to utilize the self-governing capacity of these organizations in order to ensure their regulation and guarantee their survival. As this suggests, even after the dismantling of significant portions of the status order, urban society continued to exist as a composite of stratified, self-regulating social groups. In that sense, the status system's abolition did not immediately result in the emergence of a unitary civil society. On the contrary, as Tojo Yukihiro has argued, self-regulating social organizations like those mentioned above continued to mediate the individual's relations with other social groups and the public authorities.