Construction workers’ guilds in early modern Osaka

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A B S T R A C T

This study attempts to elucidate one aspect of urban lower class society in early modern Osaka by describing the world of low-level construction workers known as tetsudai. Specifically, it examines a group of workers known as kasaku tetsudai who assisted carpenters and other skilled laborers on early modern construction sites. In particular, it focuses on the formation and functions of Osaka’s tetsudai guilds. Although tetsudai were the most numerous of all early modern construction workers, many were low-skill laborers who performed simple tasks and earned low wages. As the process of urbanization advanced in Osaka, tetsudai became an increasingly specialized trade. As a consequence, the social position of early modern tetsudai was fluid. In order to achieve occupational security and financial stability, tetsudai established trade associations known as nakama, or guilds. In the process, they gained an increasing level of autonomy from sources of official power and authority. Tetsudai guilds were unique organizations adapted to the particular manner in which tetsudai labor was managed. Their character was heavily influenced by the fact that demand for tetsudai labor constantly fluctuated. This article examines the characteristics of early modern Osaka’s tetsudai guilds. While tetsudai guilds were in many ways unique, they also existed as part of the city’s social structure.

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Introduction

This study attempts to elucidate one aspect of urban lower class society in early modern Osaka by describing the world of low-level construction workers known as tetsudai. Specifically, it focuses on kasaku tetsudai, or workers that assisted carpenters and other skilled laborers on early modern construction sites.¹ The term tetsudai was not used throughout Japan. Rather, its use was limited primarily to the western part of the country. In other regions of Japan, similar types of workers were known as tobi. However, unlike the term tobi, which is still used in many parts of Japan today, the term tetsudai no longer refers to a specific type of worker. In Osaka, assistant construction workers were referred to as tetsudai-san or tetsudai-no-tobi. How-ever, the term tetsudai-san, which is still used in many parts of Japan today, the term tetsudai no longer refers to a specific type of worker. In Osaka, assistant construction workers were referred to as tetsudai-san or tettei-san until the post-war “era of high-speed growth.” Until then, the occupation of tetsudai was relatively well known. Today, however, the term tetsudai has now fallen from use. Originally, the word tetsudai referred to the act of assisting another person with their work. It retains that meaning today. It is unclear why the word tetsudai came to refer to an occupation. It was likely used in reference to a specific group of workers that were already present on construction sites, such as laborers who assisted carpenters and plasterers. I will return to this issue below.

The term “urban lower class” (toshi kasō) refers to a diverse array of urban social groups. For instance, this special issue, which focuses on Osaka’s urban lower class, examines groups as varied as “beggars” (hinin), stevedores, and carpenters. Among the city’s construction workers, carpenters held the highest rank while tetsudai held the lowest. In early modern construction expense reports, carpenters’ pay was commonly listed as “construction costs” or “labor.” In contrast, tetsudai was listed as “construction costs” or “labor.” In contrast, tetsudai was listed as “construction costs” or “labor.” Additionally, carpenters’ or plasterers’ pay was listed in a different denomination than that of tetsudai. The former was calculated in monme, while the latter was calculated in mon. While the precise disparity in wages that existed between tetsudai and more skilled artisans is unknown, it is certain that their wages were substantially lower. While tetsudai are often described as shokunin, or artisans, it is unclear whether or not tetsudai can actually be considered a type of artisan. Of course, the term artisan itself is vague. However, there is a common understanding that the term refers to some-
one who performs a skilled trade. For that reason, individuals who are referred to as shokunin, or artisans, receive a fair amount of respect in Japan. When tetsudai referred to their own associations, they identified their work as a “craft,” emphasizing that they were skilled craftsmen. However there are no examples of anyone else referring to tetsudai as craftsmen. For example, in edicts and other official proclamations, they are referred to as “assistant laborers” (tetsudai ninsoku) or tetsudai dōjin ninsoku. The term tetsudai was commonly used to refer to an unskilled or semi-skilled laborer rather than a skilled artisan. While the term tetsudai itself is worthy of analysis, I will discuss it no further here. This study seeks only to understand the place of tetsudai in the world of early modern construction laborers.

This study attempts to recreate the historical world of urban tetsudai guilds. Tetsudai associations were completely different from carpenters’ associations. Due to their strategic military significance, carpenters’ associations were generally established from above and fell under the direct authority of the Tokugawa shogunate. In contrast, tetsudai guilds were neither created from above, nor founded in an effort to obtain official recognition or special rights and privileges. Why, then, did tetsudai form guilds? What did they want to achieve? The following section attempts to answer those questions by examining the origins of Osaka’s early modern tetsudai guild.

The formation and development of early modern Osaka’s tetsudai guild

The origins of early modern testudai

Workers known as tetsudai appeared in Osaka during the first half of the seventeenth century. As the city expanded and the urban economy became increasingly monetized, wage labor, in the form of day labor, assumed a more prominent role in many sectors of the workforce, replacing both conscripted and collective labor.

The earliest documents that reference tetsudai are a series of expense reports composed between 1639 and 1642 during the reconstruction of Nangū Shrine. Nangū Shrine was built by the Tokugawa shogunate after its predecessor, Ichinomiya Shrine, was burned down during the Battle of Sekigahara. It was a massive construction project, so the Tokugawa had to hire various types of artisans and construction workers. Two Kyoto residents—Minoya Tahe and Maruyama Kahe—were specifically contracted to supply tetsudai (Nangū Jinja, 1946, 42). Unfortunately, little else is known about Minoya and Maruyama. As their example indicates, tetsudai were treated as a distinct category of worker. Despite the fact that they spent the majority of their time assisting skilled artisans, they were contracted independently.

During the early modern period, tetsudai performed a wide range of tasks. Records indicate that they assisted a diverse array of skilled artisans, including carpenters, sawyers, steeplejacks, framers, roofers, and joiners. Although tetsudai sometimes worked alone, they usually labored in large groups and performed manual tasks. Tetsudai were commonly hired to “transport construction materials, clean and level construction sites, and lay building foundations.” In addition, they sometimes performed relatively technical work, such as building sheds and setting the foundation for walls. In summary, during the seventeenth century, tetsudai work was extremely varied. While tetsudai spent most of their time assisting skilled artisans and performing low-skill occupations, there were instances in which they worked independently and executed more complex tasks.

In order to elucidate how the character of tetsudai work changed over the course of the early modern period, let us analyze the 1886 Guild Regulations for Tetsudai (Miyamoto, 1976). According to the regulations, tetsudai were hired to “erect scaffolding, level building sites, lay foundation stones, construct building frames, clean construction sites, lay brick, dig wells, sink pillars, dig ditches, lay ditch stones, paint walls, thatch and tile roofs.” As the regulations indicate, by the late nineteenth century, tetsudai no longer spent most of their time assisting skilled artisans. In addition, their duties had come to include well digging and roof thatching. Generally, therefore, it can be said that tetsudai work became more independent. In other words, tetsudai came to perform relatively autonomous jobs, which were originally beyond the scope of their work.

In the foregoing analysis, we examined the emergence of the early modern tetsudai trade. Tetsudai appeared in Osaka during the seventeenth-century urbanization process and gradually increased their influence in urban society by assimilating tasks that were previously performed by other types of workers.

The formation of tetsudai guilds

The first historical record that mentions Osaka’s tetsudai guild is the 1782 Petition Seeking Regulation of the Construction Tetsudai of Osaka’s Three Districts (Honjo and Kuroha, 1967, vol. 12, 44). It was filed during the so-called “Tanuma era” (1767–1786), a period in which scores of previously unsanctioned trade associations received official recognition and became kabu nakama, or “licensed guilds.” Osaka’s tetsudai were no exception. During this period, they too attempted to secure recognition as a licensed guild. The above petition was filed in the name of Kiya Zenbe, a tenant of Komamoneya Chūbē.

According to the 1782 petition, the City Magistrate had never issued any official regulations for tetsudai. Consequently, until then, tetsudai had issued their own licenses and formed their own associations. However, because those associations were not officially sanctioned, there were also scores of unlicensed tetsudai who were unaffiliated with existing tetsudai associations. In addition, con-
temporary records mention many disputes and fights involving individuals who worked as tetsudai. The occurrence of such events indicates that unofficial tetsudai organizations were unable to sufficiently regulate their members. In the above petition, tetsudai asked for recognition from the city authorities and requested that the magistrate issue official regulations for their trade. They argued that the creation an officially sanctioned guild would enable the authorities to verify the identity of all of the city’s tetsudai and help to prevent the theft of clothing, money, and materials from construction sites.

This petition is believed to reflect the content and historical conditions of tetsudai work. Accordingly, it contains several points of interest. First, the petition contains a request for 3000 officially recognized tetsudai licenses. In early modern Japan, carpenters were the most common type of artisan (Kawakami, 1997, 216–219). In the 1780s, there were 1754 carpenters in Osaka. The above requested figure of 3000 indicates that tetsudai were even more numerous than carpenters. However, the petition also asks the authorities to grant members of the guild the right to issue temporary licenses during times of increased demand for tetsudai. If that request had actually been approved, it would have enabled the tetsudai guild to issue a virtually unlimited number of licenses. In exchange for official recognition from the authorities, the petition states that the guild would mobilize ten tetsudai at the time of fires to assist the city’s fire bridges. Furthermore, the petition notes that injured, sick, and impoverished tetsudai would be cared for at Kiya Zenbē’s residence. Lastly, it states that the funeral and burial costs for deceased tetsudai would be paid for by the guild.

As the above description indicates, the 1782 petition envisioned an organization that transcended the boundaries of a conventional trade association. It was also intended to serve as a mutual aid organization. In addition, by the time the petition was filed, it is likely that Kiya Zenbē was already the head of an existing albeit unsanctioned tetsudai guild. Therefore, the organization described in the petition was not an imaginary body. Rather, it was one that already existed.

Although Kiya’s petition failed to secure official sanction, he was not the last tetsudai to seek recognition from the authorities. In 1785, a second individual by the name of Funabashiya Kichiemon filed a petition in which he asked the authorities to issue officially sanctioned tetsudai licenses.8 Like Zenbē, Kichiemon was likely a leader of an existing tetsudai organization. However, his vision for a tetsudai guild was much different than the one outlined by Kiya. Kichiemon’s petition was unique in that it called not only for official recognition from the City Magistrate’s Office, but also for an increase in the daily wages paid to tetsudai. In the mid-1780s, tetsudai were paid a daily wage of 136 mon. Arguing that most tetsudai were deeply impoverished, Kichiemon’s petition requested an increase of 12 mon per day. Of that 12 mon, the petition noted that 4 mon would go directly to the tetsudai, while the remaining 8 mon would be used to hire 50 laborers to assist local fire brigades. In addition, the petition stated that the city’s tetsudai would be grateful for the added compensation. It also notes that increased wages for tetsudai would help to prevent the theft of construction materials and other valuable items from construction sites. While this petition also contains valuable insights about the historical condition of early modern Osaka’s tetsudai, it too was rejected.

The petitions analyzed above raise two key issues. The first concerns the issue of trust in the execution of tetsudai work. Although Zenbē and Kichiemon were already the heads of existing trade organizations, the licenses that those organizations issued lacked legal authority. By petitioning the City Magistrate’s Office, both Zenbē and Kichiemon aimed to imbue the licenses that they issued with actual legal authority and secure a trustworthy reputation for their organizations. Yet, unlike the petition submitted by Zenbē, Kichiemon’s petition does not include a request for a specific number of licenses. Nor does it mention the leasing or renting of licenses. Furthermore, none of the petitions submitted during this period include a request for monopoly control over the tetsudai trade. The second issue is that both Zenbē and Kichiemon viewed guilds as more than just occupation organizations. They also saw them as mechanisms of mutual assistance, which existed to provide financial stability to members. Although these two petitions were rejected, tetsudai did eventually establish a guild that performed the basic functions mentioned above. Next, let us examine the process whereby the tetsudai guild received official recognition.

**Certification of the tetsudai workers’ guild**

The tetsudai guild finally secured official sanction from the Osaka City Magistrate’s Office in 1796. In addition, the authorities also officially recognized the right of Shitennoji Temple to issue official tetsudai licenses. Purportedly founded by Prince Shōtoku in 593 CE, Shitennoji Temple is one of Japan’s oldest Buddhist temples. Carpenters and other construction workers have long worshipped Prince Shōtoku (Shōtoku Taishi). In addition, it is well known that carpenters and other artisans commonly formed social organizations known as Taishikō, which were named after Prince Shōtoku. It is also widely recognized that Shitennoji Temple historically provided relief to the poor.

While it is unclear why Shitennoji Temple received the authority to issue tetsudai licenses, it is clear that the new arrangement was beneficial for all parties involved. For the tetsudai, affiliation with Shitennoji provided their guild with a trustworthy reputation. In turn, the temple gained the ability to collect licensing fees from tetsudai and won the right to use tetsudai to make daily repairs to temple buildings. Furthermore, it also reduced the amount of funding that the Tokugawa shogunate had to provide to Shitennoji for construction and maintenance. Much of the work could now be done for free by tetsudai who held temple-issued licenses. Importantly, workers that possessed licenses issued by Shitennoji Temple did not hold a monopoly over all tetsudai work in Osaka. In addition, the authorities never issued any edicts or proclamation prohibiting unlicensed tetsudai from working inside the city. Fur-

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8 Hotatsu 197 (Osaka-shi shi, Vol. 3, 1979). Strictly speaking, this is not the original application. It is an advisory issued by the City Magistrate’s office after receiving the original. At the very least, this shows that it was not the sort of application that was summarily dismissed by the Magistrate’s office.
thermore, because the tetsudai guild was under the control of Shitennōji Temple rather than the City Magistrate, guild members did not have to make financial offerings to the Magistrate’s Office.\(^9\) All of these features serve to distinguish Osaka’s tetsudai guild from other early modern trade associations. Unlike the tetsudai guild, those associations commonly held an officially recognized monopoly over their trade and had to pay an annual fee to the City Magistrate.

In 1834, Shitennōji Temple issued a new set of tetsudai licenses. As before, temple-issued licenses were only valid inside the city and were not recognized in surrounding villages. In addition, individuals possessing licenses did have a monopoly over tetsudai work inside the city. Although the tetsudai guild was temporarily dissolved during the Tenpō Reforms (1841–1843), it was reformed in 1851. Licenses issued at the time of the guild’s reestablishment list “well digger” as an official tetsudai occupation. Like many of the merchant and artisanal guilds reestablished in the 1850s, Osaka’s tetsudai guild was combined with existing tetsudai organizations in communities surrounding the city. In 1855, the City Magistrate issued an edict banning the employment of all tetsudai unaffiliated with Shitennōji Temple and Yamamura Yosuke.\(^10,11\) With that edict, tetsudai holding temple-issued licenses won the right to exclude unlicensed tetsudai from employment as construction laborers in the city’s three districts and neighboring villages. In other words, they at last secured an officially recognized monopoly over the tetsudai trade in Osaka. Yet, as I describe below, the members of Osaka’s tetsudai guild never actually attempted to gain exclusive control over the tetsudai trade in Osaka. Their monopoly was the result of actions taken by the City Magistrate’s Office.

In 1867, the Tokugawa shogunate ordered 30 major guilds to reduce their prices (Osaka-shi shi, 1979, vol. 2, 970). The shogunate selected the 30 guilds whose commercial activities had the biggest impact on commodity prices. The tetsudai guild was one of the 30 organizations targeted.\(^12\) Lacking their own distinct trade at the beginning of the early modern period, tetsudai took longer than most other laborers and tradesmen to obtain official recognition from the authorities. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, the tetsudai guild had grown into a powerful professional organization that exerted a significant influence over national commodity prices.

**Guild administration and functions**

The **guild organization**

The tetsudai guild was reformed in 1851 under the name The Great Guild of Construction Assistants and Well Diggers. This section examines the administration and functions of the tetsudai guild. In the 1850s, Osaka’s tetsudai guild possessed an internal body of rules known as the General Guild Regulations.\(^13\) Through an examination of those regulations together with separate records from Shitennōji Temple, I will attempt to elucidate the tetsudai guild’s organizational structure (Fig. 1).

Osaka’s tetsudai guild was comprised of 2000–3000 members. As the above figure indicates, the guild was divided into 48 sub-guilds. The guild’s primary duties included adjudicating disputes between tetsudai and mediating relations with the authorities and other external groups. While the number of sub-guilds was strictly limited to 48, there was no restriction on the number of licenses that could be issued to licensed tetsudai craftsmen (tōryō). Securing a license was primarily a financial matter and unlike carpenters, there were no skill-related restrictions or term limits. Licensed craftsmen were permitted to accept work directly from clients. Yet, they were not allowed to hire others to perform jobs that they were contracted to carry out. Unlike craftsmen, who were core members of the guild, assistants (sukekata) were prohibited from accepting jobs directly from clients. Instead, licensed craftsmen employed them on a job-by-job basis.

**The functions of the tetsudai guild**

The functions performed by Osaka’s tetsudai guild can be divided into two basic categories: administrative functions and livelihood-related functions. The most important administrative function performed by the guild concerned managing relations with clients and assistants.\(^14\)

**The management of relations with clients**

Let us look first at the management of relations with clients. In relations with clients, the tetsudai guild, the 48 sub-guilds, and individual craftsmen all played different roles. While craftsmen were permitted to accept work directly from clients, guild regulations placed a range of restrictions on their right to do so. Relations with individual clients who provided craftsmen with work were managed on the

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9 The petition filed by Zenbē indicates that the tetsudai guild would make annual payments to the City Magistrate’s Office.

10 During the Edo period (1603–1868), the individual bearing the hereditary name Yamamura Yosuke served as daikugashira, or “chief of carpenters.” Together with Amagasaki Mataemon and Terashima Tōemon, Yamamura was considered one of Osaka’s “three great townspeople.” Like Amagasaki and Terashima, he served as one of the city’s high-ranking general administrators, or sidōshōyori, and the bakufu authorities granted him the highest possible rank for a commoner and various special rights. Yamamura Yosuke Masahiro was the founder of the Yamamura clan. Tokugawa Ieyasu appointed Masahiro “Lead Carpenter” when he was living in Fushimi Castle. In 1616, the Yamamura clan relocated to Osaka, where it served as head of the city’s carpenters, wood sawyers, roofers, cooper, plasters, and stonemasons.

11 Together with the roofer’s guild and carpenters’ guild, the tetsudai guild was one of only three construction-related organizations that were forced to lower their rates.

12 The Great Guild of Construction Assistants and Well Diggers.

13 Osaka City University Media Center Archives, Nihon keizai shi shiryō [Japanese Economic History Documents], 8–5. This is a collection of 30 documents related to Osaka’s tetsudai guild. They were written by members of the guild and submitted to the City Magistrate’s Office. In terms of content, the documents primarily reflect the opinions and attitudes of the tetsudai guild. However, in some instances, they reflect the opinions of Shitennōji Temple.

14 Put simply, an “assistant” was any tetsudai who was not a “craftsman.” Assistants were not apprentices. According to the 1886 Guild Regulations for Tetsudai, a tetsudai assistant could become a craftsman after securing the necessary tools. Unlike the division between tetsudai and carpenter, the distinction between tetsudai assistant and tetsudai craftsman was not based on a disparity in skills. While it is unclear how numerous assistants were, an 1862 petition filed by the Osaka Roofers’ Guild indicates that they already existed during the latter stages of the Tokugawa era.
The early modern period is quite significant. That this sort of employment system existed during the various craftsmen affiliated with their sub-guild. The fact that craftsmen could avoid the financial risks associated with full-time employment. By pooling their labor resources, individual craftsmen could perform jobs for the private employment. Examined from the opposite perspective, the arrangement also provided assistants with a stable income by allowing them to perform jobs for the various craftsmen affiliated with their sub-guild. This fact is quite remarkable.

Management of relations with assistants

Another important function of the tetsudai guild concerned managing relations with tetsudai assistants. When a member of the tetsudai guild was contracted to carry out a construction project, he had to hire assistants to help with the labor. Assistants were vital due to the nature of the tetsudai guild. Because they handled a wide array of tasks and could be readily employed during times of increased demand for construction labor. At the same time, they could be released from their duties when a project was finished. Some individual tetsudai retained personal assistants, most were affiliated with specific sub-guilds. Each sub-guild had its own labor provisioning system known as the yoseba. That system enabled craftsmen affiliated with a specific sub-guild to hire assistants on a temporary basis in accordance with their needs. In other words, it was a system that enabled craftsmen to obtain the necessary amount of labor power when they needed it. This freed them from the burden of having to employ laborers on a full-time basis. By pooling their labor resources, individual craftsmen could avoid the financial risks associated with private employment. Examined from the opposite perspective, this arrangement also provided assistants with a stable income by allowing them to perform jobs for the various craftsmen affiliated with their sub-guild. The fact that this system of employment system existed during the early modern period is quite significant.

Fig. 1. The Great Guild of Construction Assistants and Well Diggers' Organizational Structure.

The tetsudai guild also performed a range of mutual assistance functions. Those functions helped to ensure the survival of tetsudai assistants. When assistants were injured or fell sick, the guild provided them with aid. In addition, the guild’s yoseba system guaranteed all tetsudai assistants equal access to employment. Assistants were the lowest ranking members of the tetsudai hierarchy. Most were unmarried. The petitions filed in the 1780s by Kiya Zenbē and Funabashiya Kichiemon offer an early glimpse of the mutual assistance functions performed by the tetsudai guild. Proper execution of those functions helped to ensure the guild’s continued existence. The fact that the guild focused so much attention on assisting needy tetsudai assistants is at least in part a reflection of the fact that hierarchical relations within the guild were fluid. It was possible not only for assistants to rise to the level of craftsmen, but also for craftsmen to fall to the rank of assistant. Therefore, measures to protect assistants served more broadly to protect higher-ranking members of the tetsudai guild, including craftsmen.

Summary of the tetsudai guild

In addition to the official framework of guilds, early modern carpenters formed unofficial mutual aid associations called kō. Although knowledge about carpenters’ mutual aid organizations is still limited, it is clear that they performed fundamentally different functions than guilds. Namely, guilds served as professional organizations for licensed carpenters. Their primary function was to administrate business agreements. In contrast, mutual aid associations were organized around the principles of beneficence and mutual aid. They were concerned more with issues related to the welfare of individual carpenters. They played a role in the everyday lives of carpenters through the management of local festivals and the operation of mutual loan associations. More than just a business association, the tetsudai guild also performed the function of a mutual aid association. For example, in historical documents from the 1830s, tetsudai identified themselves to the City Magistrate as “members of a mutual aid association.” In addition, members of Osaka’s tetsudai guild claimed that they would continue operating as a private aid association even if the authorities were unwilling to officially recognize the guild and the validity of the licenses issued to guild members by

15 Tetsudaishoku yokan [Tetsudai Work Reference], Shitennoji Document Collection, Document No. 1.
Shitennoji Temple. Thus, the tetsudai guild appears to have functioned as both a professional association for persons employed as tetsudai and a mutual aid organization for fellow artisans.

The character of the tetsudai guild can be discerned by comparing it to two other types of early modern guilds: those for merchants and those for carpenters. For merchants who established shops, guilds can be seen as a union of merchant households. In such cases, the household serves primarily as a corporate body. Merchant guilds were formed primarily to support the business activities of those involved. To put it another way, the primary objective of merchant guilds was to preserve the continuity of merchant houses as businesses. In the case of carpenters, in particular high-ranking carpenters, as well, guilds functioned centrally as professional associations. As a rule, carpentry techniques and client relationships with customers were passed down from one generation to the next on the assumption that individual carpenter households would persist. In that sense, the client relationships and techniques that carpenters passed down from one generation to the next were similar in character to the property and possessions handed down by merchant houses.

At first glance, tetsudai guilds appear similar to carpenters’ guilds. Namely, like carpenters’ guilds, the primary duties of tetsudai guilds included ensuring the perpetuation of business arrangements and collectively managing client relationships. However, in reality, the two types of guilds were quite different. In the case of the tetsudai guild, there was no need to consider the survival of tetsudai households because tetsudai had no property or titles to pass down to subsequent generations. Rather, it was more important that the tetsudai guild function as a mechanism of mutual assistance, which guaranteed the survival of individual tetsudai. For example, when a licensed craftsman lost a valuable client, guild regulations stipulated that measures should be taken to protect the livelihood and status of that craftsman. The loss of a valuable client no doubt made it difficult for individual craftsmen to maintain their position within the guild. While tetsudai craftsmen and their assistants sometimes clashed over relations with clients and employment conditions, in most cases, the financial interests of guild members were aligned. The tetsudai guild administered relations with clients collectively because those relations impacted the livelihood of all guild members, including both craftsmen and assistants.

**Authority and the tetsudai guild**

The tetsudai guild played a major role in the economic lives of tetsudai and helped to ensure their welfare and stability. The tetsudai guild’s official relationship with Shitennoji was important because it helped to secure a trustworthy business reputation for the guild. At the same time, by forming a guild, tetsudai were able to assert their interests in relations with Shitennoji Temple and the Tokugawa shogunate. Yet, there were instances in which groups of craftsmen rebelled against the tetsudai guild. For example, in the 1830s, a group of tetsudai from the city of Osaka and surrounding villages became involved in a dispute with Shitennoji. The tetsudai involved in the dispute opposed attempts by temple officials to restrict the areas in which they could work. In an effort to force temple officials to abandon the proposed restrictions, the tetsudai threatened to leave the guild and either work without licenses or go to work for the Osaka carpenter boss Yamamura Yosuke. In the end, the temple acquiesced and tetsudai affiliated with Shitennoji won permission to work not only in the city, but also in surrounding towns and villages.

In addition, in 1855 and 1867, the Osaka City Magistrate issued proclamations banning local employers from hiring tetsudai who were unaffiliated with Shitennoji Temple or Yamamura Yosuke (Honjô and Kuroha, 1967, vol. 22, 343; vol. 25, 28). These proclamations seem to represent a manifestation of the monopoly rights of members of the tetsudai guild. However, an examination of records from Shitennoji Temple reveals that the members of Osaka’s tetsudai guild appealed for assistance from the City Magistrate because so many employers in Osaka were hiring unlicensed tetsudai. At first glance, this example appears to indicate that the tetsudai guild was unable to fulfill its basic functions. However, that was not the case. The guild continued to play a vital role in lives of Osaka’s tetsudai into the late nineteenth century. This is evidenced by the fact that the city’s tetsudai guild continued to exist during the early Meiji period as a trade union (Taketani, 2002). In other words, as long as the guild’s basic functions could be internally maintained, it did not matter whether or not individual tetsudai actually held temple-issued licenses. The guild’s licensing system was actually more important to Shitennoji Temple because it enabled the temple to collect fees from guild members. For tetsudai, the guild was significant because it served as a mutual aid association and provided guild members with a trustworthy reputation. If those functions could be fulfilled without depending on the temple, then the tetsudai guild could exist without external backing.

**Conclusion**

This study examined the significance of early modern Osaka’s tetsudai guild. While demand for construction labor in agrarian villages was low, construction projects were plentiful in the city of Osaka. Steady demand for labor power made tetsudai an indispensable part of urban society. However, many tetsudai were poorly paid and lived in a constant state of financial instability. The early modern tetsudai guild made it possible for individual tetsudai to earn a stable livelihood. The governmental authority of the Tokugawa shogunate and the religious authority of Shitennoji Temple helped to guarantee the survival of guild members. Yet, the guild was not subordinate to the political and religious authorities. Instead, it emerged as a strongly independent entity. In addition, the occupation of tetsudai, which was open to almost anyone, made it possible for new migrants to settle in the city and subsist.

The tetsudai guild was organized around a completely different set of principles than other types of professionals organizations, such as those maintained by the carpenters of Osaka and Kyoto, which were established from above by the Tokugawa shogunate and often had a purely economic character. In order to elucidate the historical character of tetsudai guild a range of additional studies are
required. Scholars need to compare Osaka's *tetsudai* guild not only to other types of guilds, but also to associations formed by *tobi* in Edo and guilds in Europe. Lastly, additional research is required on the relationship between the *tetsudai* guild and the local communities in which it operated. However, I will leave these issues to another day.

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