Purveyors of Power: 
Artisans and Political Relations in Japan’s Late Medieval Age

Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis explores the socioeconomic and political significance of artisans in late medieval Japan from roughly the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries. Despite their varied representation in historical, literary, and artistic works as skilled individuals ranging from performers and religious figures to manual laborers and craftsmen, artisans are primarily perceived as producers and traders of commercial goods. However, many artisans in late medieval society fulfilled a far more consequential role as bridges between local and central authorities; recognizing the importance of artisans and their services, provincial warlords and the court aristocracy utilized artisans to navigate political relationships to their benefit. To demonstrate the extent to which figures of authority valued and used artisans within medieval polity, I examine the investiture of provincial carpenters and other artisans as well as the courtier Matsugi Hisanao’s efforts to gain control over taxation of provincial metal casters. I focus on carpenters because regional lords utilized those with prestigious appointments to manipulate political competitors and create ties with the aristocracy. Aristocrats like Hisanao also negotiated with provincial lords for control over metal casters to gain influence over taxation and material sources of income located in the provinces. Beyond serving as mere purveyors of goods, artisans functioned as an effective medium through which various rulers communicated with and controlled one another during the late medieval age.
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Table of Contents

Abstract .............................................................................................................................................................................ii
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................................................iii
Vita .............................................................................................................................................................................iv
List of Figures ..............................................................................................................................................................vi
Introduction ...............................................................................................................................................................1
Defining the “Artisan” ......................................................................................................................................................4
Defining the “Artisan”: Literary accounts as evidence of the artisan class .................................................................12
The Medieval Power Structure and the Coveting Artisans ............................................................................................24
The Medieval Economy, Specialization, and their Impact on Artisan Relations ............................................................29
Guild Systems and the Involvement of Authorities .....................................................................................................33
Artisans as Purveyors of Power:
   Investiture and the facilitation of control in the provinces .........................................................................................38
Artisans as Purveyors of Power:
   Matsugi Hisanao uses artisans to reassert court authority ........................................................................................44
Conclusions .................................................................................................................................................................49
References .....................................................................................................................................................................51
List of Figures

Figure 1. *Satakebon sanjū rokkasen emaki*, Minamoto no Saneakira portrait..................21

Figure 2. *Tōbokuin shokunin uta-awase emaki*, metal caster............................................22

Figure 3. *Shokunin uta-awase emaki (Takamatsu miyakebon)*, metal caster and

bellows..............................................................................................................................22
Introduction

In 2006, four Japanese researchers from Nagoya University and Aichi Bunkyō University analyzed an early Kamakura document, the “Minamoto no Yoritomo Sodehan Migyōsho” using accelerator mass spectrometry for radiocarbon dating. This document, supposedly issued in 1189 by the first Kamakura shogun, Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147-1199), asserts the management rights of Ki no Takahiro (dates unknown), a courtier, to levy taxes on metal casting craftsmen known as imoji. A low-ranking courtier named Matsugi Hisanao1 (politically active since at least 1532, d. 1598) who was adopted into the Ki family used this document to legitimize his claim to a legacy of authority over casters. Empowered by this right, Hisanao then contacted numerous regional warlords in the provinces to negotiate his control over the imoji in their territories. Scrutiny of the paper, ink, signatures, and the radiocarbon dating of the document established that it was a forgery created in the sixteenth or early seventeenth century by the Matsugi family. The researchers concluded with certainty that the record could not predate the fifteenth century, let alone be a product of Yoritomo’s age.2

The “Minamoto no Yoritomo Sodehan Migyōsho” highlights the complex relationship between the court and regional military leaders during the late medieval age in Japan.3 In the

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1 Matsugi Hisanao 眞継久直 held the rank of mikura 御蔵, or storehouse keeper. Mikura maintained storehouses of valuables or rice belonging to the court or shogun.
3 Japan’s medieval period is considered by many to stretch from 1185 to 1603, spanning the Kamakura period (1185-1333) and Muromachi period (1336 – 1603), with subsequent periodic subdivisions such as the Sengoku (1467-1603, or sometimes 1467-1568) and Shokuhō, or Azuchi-Momoyama (1573-1615) periods. Here, reference to the late medieval age implies from the Sengoku period until the end of the Muromachi period. The early modern period, or Tokugawa period (1600-1868), immediately followed.
capital, the court, largely nominal in power since the middle of the fourteenth century, and the shogun, whose position of authority declined since the tumultuous Ōnin War of 1467-1477, lacked substantial political influence. The locus of power shifted increasingly to provincial military administration from the thirteenth century, culminating in the emergence of daimyō (powerful military warlords) at the forefront of political and economic affairs in the Sengoku (Warring States) period (1467-1603). Though figures such as the prominent daimyō Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582) instituted a limited revitalization of the court to legitimize his rise to power, they never gained full control of provincial and local administration nationally.

In the case of the Matsugi family, the efforts of individuals such as Matsugi Hisanao demonstrate attempts by aristocrats or the court to gain a measure of political and economic leverage using whatever means necessary. Hisanao petitioned for rights over metal casters in order to assert his family’s influence. But why would the court be interested in control of metal casters? What unique advantages did possession of their services offer? Utilized in nearly every aspect of daily life, metal workers created agricultural tools, religious ceremonial implements, weapons, and even minted local currency. Figures of authority, such as imperially sanctioned court members, the shogunate, religious institutions, and dominant regional bushi (warriors), sought control of such artisans in order to profit from taxation rights and acquire necessary commodities. Although the nature of relations between the central and regional rulers is a topic hotly debated, artisans’ roles in such exchanges have until now been somewhat understudied, particularly in English language materials.

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4 The Ōnin War was a period of civil warfare instigated by succession disputes over the position of Ashikaga shogun (the highest military commander). In 1464, the childless Ashikaga Yoshimasa (1435-1490) retired, naming his younger brother Yoshimi (1439-1491) his successor. Unexpectedly, a year later, a male child was born to Yoshimasa, leaving the inheritance of the shogunal seat in question. Two major warrior houses, the Yamana and Hosokawa, were engaged in a long standing personal rivalry that manifested in military conflict in the capital when each chose to back a different candidate as the rightful shogun. The Yamana and Hosokawa called upon branch houses and allies to support their military conflicts, resulting in widespread warfare and devastation in and around the capital over the following decade.
In this paper, I seek to illuminate the roles artisan groups fulfilled as a bridge between local and central authorities in late medieval Japan. Specifically, I will explore how and in what context provincial warlords and court aristocracy utilized artisans and their services to navigate political relationships to their benefit. Mid- to late medieval period urbanization was linked to the growth of free markets and new municipal centers throughout Japan, and the incessant warfare and subsequent reconstruction prevalent during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries provided a continuous demand for practical artisan services.

That being said, it is inaccurate to imply that the utility of the artisan class was limited solely to the production and purveying of goods. Artisans acted as managers of market affairs, administrators over their own people, intermediaries in financial negotiations between patrons and workers, engineers on civil projects, and even valuable guides and reconnaissance scouts during war. Thus, artisans affected local lords and central elites alike, and their political and economic importance influenced relationships between provincial warlords and traditional political figures in the capital.

I reconsider the role of artisans in medieval polity and analyze evidence that artisans, particularly carpenters and metal casters, were a more consequential component of political relations than previously assumed. I focus on carpenters because regional lords utilized carpenters with prestigious appointments to manipulate political competitors and associate themselves with the aristocracy. Aristocrats, on the other hand, negotiated with provincial lords for control over taxation of metal casters to restore a measure of their weakened political and economic influence. Figures of authority recognized artisans as assets significant beyond their role as mere purveyors of goods, also valuing them as groups that influenced the ability of central and local rulers to communicate with and control one another.
Defining the “Artisan”

Establishing the significance of medieval artisans to local and central figures of authority first requires an examination of how the term “artisan” is used here and how it was defined in medieval society. In this paper, artisans are defined as a class of people who employ a specific skill as a profession; these skilled individuals are highly varied in nature, including but not limited to craftsmen, performers, certain religious figures, and manual laborers such as carpenters and metal workers. They also engaged in a degree of market exchange as merchants of their own goods, often with attachments to organizations, locations, or patrons. This definition acknowledges the breadth and fluidity of artisans’ individual activities, but espouses a need to identify artisans as a group (if only a marginally cohesive one) to distinguish their roles as producers with substantial connections with members of the elites. Similarly, scholars often choose broad definitions for the “artisan” because of the corresponding ambiguity found in contemporary records of their lives. The treatment of artisans in medieval historical, literary, and artistic materials illustrates the varied and changing nature of these commoners over the course of the medieval age. These sources provide valuable historical information concerning artisans that reflects their increased number and diversification. These developments contribute to the uncertainty concerning their definition.

Scholars frequently confront issues of ambiguity by embracing equally imprecise terminology, using shokunin 職人, or “artisan,” as a blanket term for a variety of craft and trade professions with unspecific boundaries to its meaning. In English language scholarship, art historian Melinda Takeuchi suggests the most operational definition for medieval artisans is
“tradespeople,” since the meaning connotes fluidity between an artist’s trade specialty and the marketing of that skill, and the word *shokunin* was applicable to many different professions at different times, some including entrepreneurial aspects. Historian Mary Elizabeth Berry also emphasizes the idea of artisans maintaining professional expertise. In her study of late medieval Kyoto, Berry states:

> Alternatively, the term *shokunin* framed the very general to focus on the completely specific. It meant workers, but it also meant the individual holder of a closely defined skill. *Shokunin* designated the drum teacher or the player of the horizontal flute, not the generic musician.6

This description indicates a particular skill as a prominent factor in defining artisans, a characterization that allows for a comparatively flexible definition of *shokunin*.

Japanese scholarship also reflects this flexibility, although historian Amino Yoshihiko proposes that his own terms, *hinōgyōmin* 非農業民 and *shokunōmin* 職能民, most completely encompass the medieval “artisan.” *Hinōgyōmin* refers to “non-farmers,” a term Amino believes is more accurate than *shokunin*, as it includes people whose livelihoods come from work by the sea or in the mountains, people in trade and commerce, and performers. In other words, artisans were those people not formally tied to farm lands as their means of survival.7 He further differentiates artisans from cultivators in that artisans typically were not responsible for land taxes (instead paying taxes through their services) and obtained exemptions from barrier and other travel tolls.8 For *shokunōmin*, or “people of occupational skill,” Amino asserts that

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shokunin and hyakushō (farmers or peasants) cannot be neatly delineated, since peasants must have also possessed a high level of practical skill in areas considered to be artisan professions.9

On the whole, researchers characterize artisans as a group of people that occupied a vague space between skilled peasant, self-reliant merchant, and skilled artist. Amino’s arguments are not without merit; people outside of the ambiguous definition of the “artisan class” possessed technological and craft skills. However, this approach precludes a workable definition to evaluate a very large category of people. Berry’s assertion that a specific skill defines an artisan also tentatively excludes some individuals Amino reasonably includes, such as skilled peasants. Takeuchi, recognizing the ambiguity between possession of a skilled trade and the promotion of that trade as a way of life, maintains perhaps the most exclusive but formative definition, but this seems too narrow in light of the Amino and Berry approaches.

Why do scholars employ these diverse and flexible definitions of artisans, and what historical precedents exist for such diversity? This disagreement derives in part from broad categorizations of and terminology referring to artisans in historical and literary works. Contemporary language highlights a number of complex ambiguities concerning artisan classification and origins. Just prior to the early modern period (roughly 1600-1868) and continuing to the present, artisans were referred to as shokunin 職人, shoku 職 meaning one’s post or job and nin 人 to a person. Alternate, often interchangeable terms such as saiku 細工, takumi 匠, or kōshō 工匠, all meaning roughly “artisan” or “craftsman” and the character 匠

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meaning “skill,” were also used.\(^{10}\) Thus, artisans were not simply any “person of employment,” but one who made a living through a distinctive skill.

The concept of the “artisan” was intimately connected with the term *geinō* 芸能.\(^{11}\) In its modern conception, the word *geinō* means “entertainment” or “performing arts” but had a broader meaning in the medieval age, closer to that of “talent” or “practiced skill.” One of the earliest references to artisans’ skills (*geinō*) is found in Fujiwara no Akihira’s *Shinsarugaki* (A New Account of Sarugakku), written around 1050. The author lists items of *geinō*, including tools used or produced by artisans such as hatchets or saws, as well as swords, armor, and arrowheads.\(^{12}\)

As early as the thirteenth century, *geinō* was particularly associated with a skill that a person practices as a “way” or “path” 道 (*michi, dō*).\(^{13}\) In a 1213 document of the Imperial Chamberlain’s Office reporting on the activities of artisans, individuals identified as having *geinō* are labeled *shodō no saiku* 諸道の細工, or “craftsmen of various paths.”\(^{14}\) The concept of a “path” or “way” is significant in Japanese culture; in addition to referring to a manner or method of doing something, it may also be a “custom or convention upon which a society

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\(^{10}\) Terms such as *saiku* 細工, *takumi* 匠, and *kōshō* 工匠 were used as early as the eleventh century. See Amino, *Chūsei*, 544.

\(^{11}\) Yoshihiko Amino 網野善彦, “‘Shokunin’ to ‘geinō’ wo megutte 「職人」と「芸能」をめぐって,” in *Chūsei o kangaeru: shokunin to geinō* 中世を考える: 職人と芸能 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan 吉川弘文館, 1994), 1.

\(^{12}\) Kae Iwasaki 岩崎佳枝, *Shokunin utaawase – chūsei no shokunin guzō* 職人歌合—中世の職人群像 (Tokyo: Heibonsha Limited 平凡社, 1987), 22. Although the *Shinsarugakuki* text begins with an account of a *sarugaku* or “monkey music” performance, it then turns to numerous vignettes that include various lists such as this one on items of *geinō*. For a brief background and translated text, see Joan R. Piggot’s translation “An Account of New Monkey Music.” In *Traditional Japanese Literature: An Anthology, Beginnings to 1600*, Haruo Shirane, ed. 491-497. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

\(^{13}\) The word *geinō* was also used as early as the ninth century to describe the studies, entertainment, or special talents cultivated by courtiers. *Nihon kokugo daijiten* 日本国語大辞典 (1980), s.v. “芸能.”

operates.”\textsuperscript{15} A “path” not only constitutes a meaningful practice or way of life, but at times carries spiritual connotations that add to the depth of its pursuit. One finds examples of such dedication in everything from \textit{shinto} (the way of the gods) or \textit{bushido} (the way of the warrior) to \textit{shodō} (the way of writing) and \textit{sado} (the way of tea).\textsuperscript{16} Therefore, as of the early medieval period, making one’s livelihood through commitment (via a “path”) to a skill (\textit{geinō}) distinguished artisans from other commoners, such as land cultivators, but still embraced a measure of ambiguity; nearly any nonagricultural “path of skill” qualified an artisan’s occupation.

The character 道 is also used in other terminology to refer to people of skill. The medieval \textit{shokunin uta-awase}, painted scrolls accompanying imagined poetry competitions between artisans, are a particularly rich source of information about artisan life and classification. However, the word \textit{shokunin} used in the title is retroactively applied; in fact, many \textit{shokunin uta-awase} existed without such an appellation into the early modern period.\textsuperscript{17} Instead, the preface of the \textit{Tōbokuin}\textsuperscript{18} \textit{shokunin uta-awase (The Tōboku Temple Poetry Contest between Artisans, 1214, authorship unclear)} uses the term \textit{michimichi no mono} 道々の者, or “people of the road” or “people of the path.”\textsuperscript{19} Similarly, the \textit{Tsurugaoka hōjō-e shokunin uta-awase (The Tsurugaoka Life-releasing Gathering Poetry Contest between Artisans)}\textsuperscript{20}, ca. 1261, authorship unclear) uses

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 3.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Iwasaki, 34.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Also read Tōhokuin.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Tōhoku-in shokunin utaawase emaki (kyūmanjuinzōbon) (1214), in Mori Tōru 森暢, \textit{Ise shinmeishoe utaawase, Tōhoku-in shokunin utaawase emaki, Tsurugaoka hōjōe shokunin utaawase emaki, Sanjūniban shokunin utaawase emaki} 伊勢新名所絵歌合・東北院職人歌合・鶴岡放生絵巻・三十二番職人歌合絵巻, vol. 28, Nihon emakimono zenshū 日本絵巻物全集 (Tokyo: Kodokawa shoten 角川書店, 1979), 57. Hereafter referred to as ITTS.
\item \textsuperscript{20} A \textit{hōjō-e} 放生会 is a Buddhist ceremony in which the respect for life and Buddhist prohibition against killing is honored by releasing captured animals.
\end{itemize}
the word *michimichi no tomogara* 道々の輩 to refer to artisans in the preface, *tomogara* meaning “fellows” or “group.” Amino suggests that this use of *道々* to refer to medieval artisans indicates the *michi* 道 pursuit of *geinō*, a “way” of skill by which artisans were considered to earn their living. A somewhat contrasting view is proposed by art historian Sandy Kita, who asserts that the other meaning of *michimichi*, “along the road” or “while walking,” more closely identifies these artisans with itinerancy. Many artisan itinerants in the medieval age had religious connections, and thereby also may be connected to a spiritual “path”; a number of artisans featured in the *uta-awase* scrolls were strongly religious in nature. However, these meanings are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily connected; the application of terms such as *shodō* and *michimichi*, using the *道* character, could imply skill, itinerancy, or both.

To return to *shokunin*, this term may have been applied to the *uta-awase* at a later date, but it does in fact appear in documents as early as the Heian period (794-1185). In records concerning the administration of *shōen* 荘園 estates (land owned by aristocrats and cultivated for tax-free income), it is possible that *shokunin* 職人 was also read as *shikinin*, *shiki* 職 being the title of or rights to a *shōen* administrative office. One argument asserts that artisans labeled *shikinin* were craftspeople operating under various estates, different from the itinerant artisans without landed attachments. However, also frequently found in Kamakura period (1185-1333)

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21 Tsurugaoka hōjōe shokunin utaawase (1261), in ITTS, 67.
22 Amino, Nihon chūsei, 113. The *Shichijūniban shokunin uta-awase* also discusses paths of skill, making a connection between the *michi* of artisans and the *michi* of poetry on which the artisan “poets” have modeled their contributions to the collection. For an annotated version of this text, see *Shichijūniban shokunin utaawase* (1500). In Iwasaki Kae 岩崎佳枝, et al., *Shichijūichiban shokunin utaawase, Shinsen kyokashu, Kokon ikyokushu*. 七十一番職人歌合・新撰狂歌集・古今夷曲集 Vol. 28, *Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 新日本古典文学大系, 2-146 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten 岩波書店, 1993). Hereafter referred to as SSK.
24 Ibid., 192. For further discussion of the changing relationship between local artisans and *shōen* lords, see Haruko Wakita’s “Towards a Wider Perspective on Medieval Commerce.” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 1, no. 2 (Spring, 1975): 321-345.
documents, this term may have been used for some shōen officials who were typically low-ranking bushi or high-ranking cultivators. Even so, these shikinin were distinguished from administrative shōen figures, as they likely utilized particular skills or talents for the estate, such as drawing up documents, performing and recording land surveys, or illustrating land maps. Therefore, in spite of the possibility that early shikinin or shokunin may have been employed for aspects of land cultivation, they can still be considered to be classified as artisans by an inherent connection to a specified skill.

A lawsuit from 1367 is one of the earliest known sources to treat artisans not only as a substantial group using the word “shokunin,” but as a class specifically associated with craft skills. In this case, peasant farmers of the temple Tōji brought suit to lower taxes on particularly unproductive areas of land that were former residences of shokunin (specifically dyers, coppersmiths, and people who treat ceruse burns). Here, artisans of various skills are not only grouped together, but sharply distinguished from the farming population and shōen proprietors.

Although the decline of the shōen system from the thirteenth century separated artisans from the concept of shikinin, by the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the term shokunin became narrowly associated with crafts and engineering occupations due to the dramatic rise in trade, product specialization, and construction projects. The Nippo jisho, a Japanese to Portuguese dictionary compiled by Jesuit missionaries in 1603 lists shokunin as “Xocunin. Official mecanico.” “Official,” having the connotation of the office of a functionary,

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26 Ibid., 107. The word oshiroyake 白粉焼 given for an artisan literally means “damage to the skin from ceruse.” Ceruse was a white lead powder often used in makeup that could burn the skin from frequent use. I can find no references to 白粉焼 as a person’s title or occupation other than Amino’s inclusion here, and the assumption that 白粉焼 treated such burns is my own.
can also mean a craftsman or a workman.\textsuperscript{28} Similarly, “mecanico” suggests a workman, artisan, craftsman, or commoner.\textsuperscript{29} A translation of the \textit{Nippo jisho} into Japanese states that a \textit{shokunin} is someone who does \textit{kōsaku} 工作, “workmanship” or “construction” as his or her employment.\textsuperscript{30} Thus, one can see that by the conclusion of the medieval age and the dawn of the early modern era, people conceived of the artisan class as primarily consisting of commoners who possessed handicrafts and practical skills in construction and engineering.

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Novo Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa} (1955), s.v. “official."
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., “mecanico.”
Defining the “Artisan”: Literary accounts as evidence of the artisan class

Although the somewhat limited early modern conception of artisans as craftsmen and manual laborers persists, medieval artisan occupations were far more diverse and colorful. Due to a paucity of historical documents, artisan representations in literary and artistic sources between the twelfth and the late sixteenth centuries provide some of the most valuable information on the breadth and richness of the medieval artisan class, as well as reasons for the difficulty in determining a definition for the “artisan.” Although scattered references to and depictions of artisans exist in literary works such as librettos from the noh theater and setsuwa tales (short stories often based on folklore or anecdotes), two types of work in which artisans feature prominently, imayō, a type of “modern style” song, and shokunin uta-awase, illustrated fictional poetry competitions between artisans, will be examined here.

Thought to originally be composed by commoners, imayō are that enjoyed a measure of popularity from the Heian period to the early medieval age and illustrate how representations of artisans occupied a niche in literary arts. While the commoners in imayō are not referred to as artisans, many of them appear in the later shokunin uta-awase and can be clearly categorized as “people of skill (geinō).” The presence of these commoners in literary works, as well as the popularity of imayō with some members of the aristocracy, highlight the court’s awareness of and interaction with artisan activities and lifestyles.

In contrast to the traditional waka poetry patronized by the imperial court that adhered to strict rules of composition and theme, imayō were songs typically written by and about the commoner class. Imayō presented various poetic voices, including priests, peddlers, potters,
courtesans, female puppeteers, and wandering priestesses; many of these individuals may be considered artisans. There was little if any attempt to conventionalize their poetic imagery to the elegant waka standards, a characteristic that further reinforces their earthy and realistic portrait of common people.\textsuperscript{31} In spite of this, the emperor Go-Shirakawa (1127-1192) became a devoted admirer and performer of imayō and personally compiled the 1179 imayō collection Ryōjin hishō (Treasured Selections of Superb Songs). Although Go-Shirakawa’s interest in and patronage of such an “improper” art was frowned upon, it gave voice to and enhanced the visibility of many artisans.\textsuperscript{32}

In fact, Go-Shirakawa “played a crucial mediatory role” in the interaction between the high and low classes; he sponsored many humble imayō performers and invited them to the palace for performances and discussions of imayō as an art.\textsuperscript{33} Women such as shrine maidens (miko), female puppeteers (kugutsume), and courtesans (asobime) (all of whom appear in the later shokunin uta-awase), participated in these events and were mainly responsible for the dissemination of imayō.\textsuperscript{34} These women vividly captured the everyday lifestyle and personalities of many commoners by adopting their voices in song and frequently, perhaps unsurprisingly, coloring such representations with erotic insinuation.\textsuperscript{35} The imayō practice created a medium for the aristocracy to imagine the lives of some artisans. Although these performers of humble station were not considered refined by courtly standards and their lowly nature often precluded widespread fame,\textsuperscript{36} the imayō vogue facilitated by Go-Shirakawa gave aristocrats a relatively candid peek into the lives of and brief interaction with some artisans.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{31} Yung-Hee Kim, Songs to Make the Dust Dance (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 137.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., xiii-xiv.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 116.
\textsuperscript{36} There are some notable exceptions found in the literary arts, such as the fame of Shizuka Gozen, Gio, and Hotoke, female shirabyōshi performers written about in the Heike monogatari (Tale of the Heike), the thirteenth
While *imayō* provide depictions of some artisans and evidence of contact between the late Heian and early medieval commoners and the aristocracy, the *shokunin uta-awase* also suggest specific changes in the medieval artisan class over the course of the medieval age. Often illiterate, artisans themselves did not author the *shokunin uta-awase*, but the variety of artisans included, their categorization as a group, and pictorial representations provide insight into the transformation of the artisan class as witnessed by the capital elites. Many of the professions featured are seemingly disparate, from the highly prized diviner utilized at courts to the lowly gambler, but all are categorized as “artisans” based on the possession of a characteristic skill.  

As previously stated, *shokunin uta-awase* are imagined poetry competitions between artisans with accompanying illustrations. In the Heian period, members of the aristocracy participated in *uta-awase*, or poetry competitions, as a popular pastime. Two teams, a left and a right, competed with one another to compose poetry in response to a determined theme. A separate judge or judges then evaluated the poems against one another to decide the merits and faults of each piece and declared a winner. In the case of *shokunin uta-awase* compilations, the poems were then copied onto paper scrolls with corresponding paintings of the artisans in each match. There are four main textual lineages of *shokunin uta-awase*, though variant texts and illustrations of each version exist. The main lines, their approximate dates, and the number of artisans depicted are as follows:

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37 It should be cautioned that Go-Shirakawa, as the compiler of the *Ryōjin hishō imayō* collection and *imayō*’s primary patron, personally selected and arranged the songs compiled. Therefore, although the *imayō* provide a frank view of the artisans depicted, they should be understood as somewhat subject to his aristocratic tastes as well.

38 Amino, “‘Shokunin’,” 1.

39 Setsuko Ito, *An Anthology of Traditional Japanese Poetry Competitions* (Bochum, Germany: Brockmeyer, 1991), 2. It is possible that the *shokunin uta-awase* were produced not merely for entertainment, but as a way for courtiers to acquire karmic merit on the behalf of artisans (often illiterate and unable to devote their lives to Buddhist studies) by depicting them. See Iwasaki, 134.
One should note that the approximate dates of the uta-awase do not necessarily correspond to their pictorial images, many of which were added later. For example, painters likely added the paintings of the earliest surviving text, the Manjuinbon of the 1214 five-pair Tōbokuin contest, to the scroll at the start of the fourteenth century.\(^{41}\)

The shokunin uta-awase present certain limitations as sources of historical information. Uta-awase strictly adhered to the poetic standards of traditional poetry; thereby, the writers depicted artisans through a courtly lens and colored their representations with poetic conventions. Courtiers may have used an artisan “theme” with uta-awase as a kind of satire or parody on the classic uta-awase genre, encouraged by the popularity of haikai (comic poetry).\(^{42}\) Poets balanced the “vulgarity” of unsuitable themes like artisan professions with the elegance of the imagined artisans’ emotions expressed towards set poetic topics like the moon or love.\(^{43}\) Whether comic,

\(^{40}\) For a useful chart of all the artisans included in the five shokunin uta-awase, see ITTS, 47.

\(^{41}\) Information on each individual variant and separate dating of the text and its illustrations, see Moto’o Endō 遠藤元男, Shokunin no tanjō 職人の誕生, vol. 1, Bijuaru shiryō nihon shokuninshi ビジュアル資料日本職人史 (Tokyo: Yūzankaku 雄山閣, 1991), 2-4.

\(^{42}\) Iwasaki, 274. Iwasaki refutes the idea that all shokunin uta-awase are meant as satire, stating that only one set, the Sanjūniban shokunin uta-awase (ca. 1494, possibly authored by court nobles Sanjōnishi Sane (1455-1537), Konoe Michioki (1429-1501), Konoe Masaie (dates unknown) and other aristocrats), maintains a format chiefly patterned on haikai. Iwasaki notes that the introduction of the Sanjūniban text is unmistakably done in the haikai comic manner and the poems are also more humorous than other shokunin uta-awase. Furthermore, she evidences a disapproval of the haikai manner in the other texts, such as a judge’s comment in the Tōbokuin uta-awase that a poem loses the round because it “resembles haikai and does not have the elegance of the day 俳諧の歌の姿にて当世の風情にあらず.” For further discussion, see Iwasaki, 37-39 and 267.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 262. Iwasaki asserts there is a formulaic pattern to poetic composition in the shokunin uta-awase in which the untraditional artisan topics are made elegant by creating a kind of preface to draw out the elegance from the inelegant topic. For details, see Iwasaki, 261-266. Also notable are the views of actor and playwright Zeami Motokiyo (c. 1363 – c. 1443), who stressed the need for actors to be careful not to imitate “laborers and rustics” (many of whom were artisans) too realistically. Rather, “they should be imitated in detail insofar as they have traditionally been found congenial as poetic subjects.” See On the Art of Nō Drama: The Major Treatises of Zeami, trans. J. Thomas Rimer and Yamazaki Masakazu (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984), 10.
traditional, or containing elements of both, the scrolls conventionalized renderings of artisans to a certain degree, and the illustrations of artisans also exhibit stylistic variation.

Furthermore, the circumstances behind the creation of the *shokunin uta-awase* are various and uncertain, though the number and types of artisans included may reflect religious associations and influence from contemporary literature. The *Tōbokuin* text, for example, has twelve artisans, which could suggest another name of the Amida Buddha, *jūni kōbutsu*, the Buddha of Twelve Lights.\(^4^4\) The thirty-two artisans of the *Sanjūniban (Thirty-two Artisans)* text may point to the thirty-two that came to the sickbed of the enlightened Buddhist layman Yuima (also known as Vimalakirti).\(^4^5\) The structure and number of pairs in the *Shichijūichiban (Seventy-one Artisan Pairs)* *shokunin uta-awase* resemble that of the *Hakushi monjū*, a seventy-one volume collection of writings by the Chinese poet Bai Juyi (772–846). Published in Japan in 1485, this collection was divided into two sections of fifty and twenty volumes, with an extra volume at the end making seventy-one. The *Shichijūichiban* also appears to make this division at artisan pairs number fifty and seventy through the use of religious figures and entertainers; *renge* (linked verse) and *haikai* poetic traditions often included religious figures or performers to close compositions on a celebratory note. Like the Bai Juyi collection, the *Shichijūichiban* text has an extra pair at the end to make seventy-one.\(^4^6\) It is possible that these spiritual and secular elements influenced the content and presentation of *shokunin uta-awase*.

Therefore, it is necessary to be cautious when viewing *shokunin uta-awase* as historical evidence. However, despite their somewhat biased perceptions of artisans, examining broad

\(^4^4\) Ibid., 133. The setting for the *Tōbokuin shokunin uta-awase* is a gathering of artisans at a *nenbutsukai*, a congregation to chant the name of Amida Buddha.

\(^4^5\) Ibid., 94-95.

\(^4^6\) SSK, 568-569. It is thought the use of a vinegar maker to complete the last pair is included as a pun, since the character for vinegar, *su* 醤, can also be read as *amari*, with the homophone *amari* あまり meaning “too much” or “to have in excess” to indicate the extra artisan pair.
changes in *shokunin uta-awase* over the course of the medieval period reveal that the court witnessed the evolution of artisans into a larger, more diverse class that had substantial interaction with and significance to the aristocracy. In many cases, these illustrated poetry scrolls are some of the best, if not only, evidence of many medieval artisans.

The number of artisans depicted in each version of the *shokunin uta-awase* consistently increased in versions produced between the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. Although religious and literary sources may have influenced writers’ decisions to include certain numbers of artisans, this change also mirrors the drastic rise in non-agricultural trade professions over the course of the medieval period as a result of the expanding trade economy. In the first five-pair texts, the ten figures grouped together as artisans are: a doctor, a diviner (*onmyōji*), a blacksmith, a carpenter, a sword sharpener, a metal caster, a priestess, a gambler, a fisherman, and a merchant. With the exception of the *Sanjūniban shokunin uta-awase*, the artisans featured in later texts and their variants have substantial overlap with the original *Tōboku* text; each successive version continues to build upon this core group as it adds a larger number of artisans to the milieu. These additions culminated in the numerous new craftsmen, performers, religious figures, and peddlers (such as armor makers, mountain ascetics, *dengaku* field music entertainers, blind *biwa* players, tofu sellers, etc.) included in the largest set, the one hundred and forty-two artisan *Shichijūniban* text.47

The increased number of artisans in the *shokunin uta-awase* also reflects a greater stratification of the artisan class into professional trades. For example, whereas a metal caster appears in the *Tōbokuin* text seated with a cast kettle at his side, in the *Shichijūichiban* text, in

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47 Iwasaki, 114-115. The *Sanjūniban shokunin uta-awase* features a far larger number of performers and religious figures that straddled the line between the religious and secular as itinerant professionals than any other *shokunin uta-awase*, its content quite divergent and with stronger religious overtones than the other scrolls. For more information on the religious and secular in the *Sanjūniban* text, see Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures: Buddhist Propaganda and Etoki Storytelling in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 121-133.
place of a caster, we find an iron pot seller; presumably the caster is no longer the vendor of his own goods and a specialist in the sale of iron pots has appeared.\textsuperscript{48} Similarly, instead of the blind musician depicted in the twelve-pair Tōbokuin text, in the Shichijūichiban version there is a biwa hōshi (blind biwa minstrel), a far more specific type of musician with his own musical and oral tradition.\textsuperscript{49} Courtiers may have re-paired poetic artisan partners in later shokunin uta-awase scrolls as a result of either the profession itself changing over time or because the emergence of new artisan professions created the opportunity to make more appropriate poetic matches.\textsuperscript{50}

Courtiers depicted artisans in shokunin uta-awase in greater numbers and in more detail over the centuries, indicating that artisans were a consequential and increasingly prevalent component of medieval society. Although the circumstances surrounding the creation of the first Tōbokuin text are unclear, the aristocracy may have produced subsequent shokunin uta-awase to resolve public unrest caused by spiritual disturbances. One theory holds that Emperor Go-Toba (1180-1239) and the Tendai monk poet Jien (1155-1225), great patrons of the arts, authored the 1214 Tōbokuin text. Historically, Go-Toba staged a political rebellion shortly thereafter, the Jōkyū Disturbance of 1221, which resulted in his exile to Oki, where he died. Beginning with the Tsurugaoka scrolls, later shokunin uta-awase compilations roughly coincide with anniversaries of Go-Toba’s death; therefore, some scholars assert that in order to honor Go-Toba and expiate his vengeful soul, authors composed their own shokunin uta-awase. Since many artisans, particularly those in religious and performance professions, were thought to facilitate connections between this world and the next, they were also ideal subjects to depict for expiatory purposes.\textsuperscript{51} The Muromachi period shokunin uta-awase, following the massive destruction of the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{48}{Amino Yoshihiko, “Nabeuri 鍋売” in SSK, 490.}
\footnotetext{49}{Iwasaki, 159.}
\footnotetext{50}{Ibid., 149.}
\footnotetext{51}{Ibid., 26.}
\end{footnotes}
Önin War and beginning of the tumultuous warring states period, may have also served this kind of religious function to quiet spiritual and social unrest.\textsuperscript{52}

However, the destructive setting of the post-Önin period suggests another explanation for the increased importance and prevalence of artisans found in the later shokunin uta-awase texts; the court members in Kyoto who produced the shokunin uta-awase also bore witness to the incredible efforts to rebuild the ravaged capital. During this time, artisans repopulated the capital, their construction and trade a very visible and essential part of restoring Kyoto. In particular, the Shichijūban scroll was created in 1500, the year Kyoto’s famous Gion festival was finally revived after the civil warfare. It was therefore likely that artisans factored quite prominently in the consciousness of the capital dwellers of the time; this final scroll features the largest and most varied group of artisans.\textsuperscript{53}

The increasingly realistic detail found in shokunin uta-awase literary and artistic representations also reflects the gradual increase of artisans’ prominence in the public eye. As stated, courtiers gave poetic voices to artisans that were subject to courtly literary conventions. Take, for example, the second match of the earliest shokunin uta-awase, the Tōbokuin contest between a blacksmith and a carpenter:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{l}
\textbf{Left (Blacksmith)}

People must wonder
“Is yours a dwelling that loses sleep over the moon?”
There is always the unceasing sound of banging hammers.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{Right (Carpenter)}

Though I am one who checks the straightness of carpenter squares,
I don’t have the kōbari\textsuperscript{54} I need to stop the slanting of the moon.\textsuperscript{56}
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., Shokunin, 134.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., Shokunin, 121.
\textsuperscript{54} A kōbari 勾張 is a type of pole used to keep holes dug for pillar foundations from collapsing. Super Daijirin 3rd ed., s.v. “勾張(り).”
\textsuperscript{55} ITTS, 57. The use of “あひつち” here implies a rhythmic beating of a master and apprentices’ hammers in synch. Super Daijirin 3rd ed., s.v. “相鎚.”
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 57.
The sentiments of the artisans above are immersed in poetic standards; both utilize traditional composition and primarily express attitudes that are ironic laments over their own inelegance, suggesting a courtier’s interpretation of the artisan.\(^{57}\) For example, the blacksmith notes that people must believe he spends the evening gazing at and appreciating the moon, but he laments that his work keeps him busy the whole night through, unable to engage in such elegant pastimes. Although the courtly elements of their representations are most prominent, these verses treat artisans with a surprising amount of detail and accuracy, referencing their tools and sketching an image of the hardships of their lifestyles.

Later writers stress more realistic depictions via the additional insertion of casual conversations that give greater depth and detail to artisan life. In the Shichijūichiban text, colloquial phrases in which artisans hawk their wares, comment on their lives, or interact with one another generate more rounded personalities for the artisans.\(^{58}\) The carpenter, for example, the man who eloquently finds fault with his skills because he cannot stop the moon from sinking in the Tōbokuin poem, states his mind in the Shichijūichiban set: “Once again today we’ve been called to Shōkoku temple. It will probably be dark before we go home.”\(^{59}\) It should be noted that the creators inserted these casual comments to match the portraits, not the poems, underscoring an interest in a more accurate depiction of artisans in both written and illustrative forms.\(^{60}\)

The images in the shokunin uta-awase scrolls further reflect this growing interest in and awareness of the lives of artisans. The portraits accompanying the Tōbokuin poems (though likely added somewhat later) are simplistic; although they include basic renderings of each

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\(^{57}\) Iwasaki, 18.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 214.

\(^{59}\) 我ゝもけさは相国寺へ又召され候。暮てぞかへり候はんずらむ。SSK, 4.

\(^{60}\) Iwasaki, 214-215.
artisan’s tools or products, their uncomplicated, triangular composition resembles the conventional famous poet portraiture genre (kasen-e) popular in the Heian period (figure 1).61

For example, the fourteenth century Tōbokuin (Manjuinbon) scroll’s metal caster (imoji) is painted sitting, the contours of his figure triangular, with his iron and bronze kettles at his side (figure 2).62 In contrast, in the Takamatsu no miyakebon variant of the Tōbokuin text, illustrated in the late sixteenth century, the metal caster is executed in dramatic action, operating flaming

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61 Ibid., 20. The kasen-e tradition is thought to have originated from idealized portraits of the famous poet Kakinomoto no Hitomaro (act. late 7th cen) and been further popularized by the “Thirty-six Immortal Poets” Sanjūrokkasen emaki 三十六歌仙絵巻 illustrated scroll from the eleventh century, of which the earliest extant version is the mid-thirteenth century scroll which features the triangular composition in its figures as seen in figure 1. For further information on this portrait genre, see JAANUS: Japanese Architecture and Art Net User System, s.v. “kasen-e 歌仙絵,” http://www.aisf.or.jp/~jaanus/deta/k/kasene.htm (accessed April 10, 2011).

62 Tōbokuin uta-awase (Manjuinbon), painting, early 14th century, as reproduced in Endō, Shokunin, fig. 140.
bellows (a late medieval technological development) with the help of an assistant (figure 3). By painting more complex, detailed compositions and subjects in the later shokunin uta-awase, courtiers displayed a greater consciousness of and interaction with artisans (and their production methods) than is portrayed in earlier versions.

![Figure 2](image2.png)  
**Figure 2.** Tōbokuin shokunin uta-awase emaki, metal caster. Kamakura period, 14th century. Ink and light color on paper, 29.1 cm x 544.5 cm. Tokyo National Museum.

![Figure 3](image3.png)  
**Figure 3.** Shokunin uta-awase emaki (Takamatsu miyakebon), metal caster and bellows. Muromachi period, late 16th century. Ink and color on paper. National Museum of Japanese History.

Historical, literary, and artistic records offer progressively more diverse characterizations of artisans that understandably confound scholars and lead to disagreements as to the “best” way to identify artisans and group them as a class. However, while Takeuchi, Amino, and Berry present definitions that differ on the finer points, they all produce descriptions that are

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63 Tōbokuin uta-awase (Takamatsu miyakebon), painting, late 16th century, as reproduced in Endō, *Shokunin*, fig. 143.
necessarily broad and flexible. Textual evidence from literary sources substantiates this tendency, illustrating the gradual development of artisans from a marginally visible group of skilled commoners to a larger, more stratified population. Although this diversity makes it difficult to reconcile a satisfactory definition of artisans as a “class,” they occupied a social position recognized as unique in many ways and interactive with the figures of authority. Berry notes that “these workers made up many particular groups that were defined not only by employment but by organization, the geography of the market, and the attachments of patronage.”64 Not all artisans were members of organizations or attached to elite patrons.65 However, as artisans increased and diversified, such assemblies were extremely common and facilitated the growing connection between rulers and artisans by allowing powerful authorities to exert influence over a particular organization or profession.

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64 Berry, 176.
65 Since not all artisans were directly associated with organizations or clients, documentation of their activities is scarce. However, evidence that many artisan organizations attempted to formally secure their market positions as the primary suppliers to or sellers of specific goods to various areas or patrons indicates that they were in some cases responding to competition from unaffiliated artisans.
The Medieval Power Structure and the Coveting of Artisans

Why did politically powerful individuals focus on gaining control over artisanal groups? What contexts made such rights consequential to figures of authority? The sixteenth century political order was fragmented and intensely combative, a result of the gradual deterioration of court-centered power structures. This decentralization emboldened the warrior class and weakened the aristocracy, creating a volatile, competitive environment for traditional and emergent rulers struggling to survive. Control over artisans and their services offered attractive political and economic benefits for these figures of authority in the form of income from taxation, influence over trade, and the acquisition of important commodities, ultimately making artisans an object of contention, influential to the medieval power structure.

The decentralization of power began with the compromise of the Taika proprietary systems of direct government control over land and was completed with the rise of medieval military governance in the sixteenth century. By the Heian period, the court aristocracy and religious institutions were based largely in the capital region, but had obtained increasing private control of lands via the shōen (estate) system of tax-free ownership. Shōen holders remained in the capital while chartering administrative authority to land cultivators. These courtiers negotiated the rights (shiki) of their estates to lower ranking bodies, typically bushi, creating a tiered system of land tenure in the provinces. The transition to medieval Kamakura military rule began as early as the tenth century through government representatives supplanting shōen control. During this time, the provincial governors (kokushi), appointed by

aristocrats to administer shōen increasingly seized control over provincial administration. Meanwhile, local lords formed alliances with the tenurial gentry and began to maintain local warrior groups.67

The Kamakura administration, or bakufu, attained political power officially in 1192 and eclipsed the court in provincial proprietary control. Bushi elites encroached upon the properties of the nobility and previous landholders by appointing their own officers, such as shugo (military governors), to administer estates and rule the provinces in concert with the shogun.68 Shugo took on more military roles during political disputes in the mid- to late fourteenth century, persuading warriors within their lands to ally against other local forces. The bakufu awarded shugo control over the collection of certain military taxes, which shugo then used to negotiate the loyalty of local warriors as subordinate retainer groups. Shugo gradually became hereditary and gained more independent control over internal provincial affairs.69 However, local landed warriors, known as kokujin (“men of the province”), supported by the bakufu and shugo increasingly rose to prominence and further complicated control over property and financial resources. By the fifteenth century, these landed administrative bushi became powerful enough to dispute control over individual properties, often competing with their own superior shugo.70

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68 Ibid., 57.
69 Ibid., 122-123.
The majority of daimyō that emerged after the Ōnin War were kokujin who successfully gained independent control of their lands.  

The Ōnin War, which ushered in the Sengoku period (1467-1603) of civil warfare, raged for roughly a decade, starting in 1467. The complex bureaucracy and vassalage system that thus far sustained the rise of the warrior class crumbled under the pressure of volatile succession disputes and questions of alliance. The resulting chaos and destruction that began in Kyoto and spread outside the city was beyond the shogun, the court, or any one powerful military family to control. This turmoil underscored the relative impotence of central powers like the shogunate and the court, weakened previously powerful provincial shugo and lords, and facilitated the rise of local kokujin and other landed warriors. Various warrior administrators large and small rose to power as daimyō rulers in their own territories, using systems of vassalage and fief recognition to gain the loyalty of other kokujin and village chieftains.

As late fifteenth and sixteenth century daimyō, shugo, and kokujin competed for territorial control in the provinces, securing a place in local markets became imperative to maintain strong economic foundations within their domains to support the military and political conquest of their neighbors. They invested in and competed for commercial relations with various merchant and artisan groups to assure a steady flow of supplies and financial support. Provincial lords of the Sengoku period often accomplished this by sponsoring local trade centers

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72 Berry, 16-17.
73 Souyri, 182.
and artisans in and around their residential mansions and defensive castle towns, both of which served as bases of production, market exchange, and consumption. 75

Although the marked degradation of traditional power structures allowed military lords to rise to power, the aristocratic and religious elites did not entirely fade from political and economic affairs. Far from disappearing into a completely vestigial role, the aristocracy continued to maintain prestige as a vessel of political and cultural legitimacy. 76 This role enabled them to compete with military lords for commercial influence, particularly through patronage of artisanal groups. No longer controlling the majority of landholdings and unable to contend militarily, the court found it necessary to refocus their efforts on these organizations. Desiring to revitalize their dwindling income and reassert their own importance, the capital elites also provided patronage to commoners in the commercial sphere through guild monopolies and other organizational arrangements in exchange for taxation rights and commercial goods. 77

Despite the formal governance enjoyed by the warrior class at the forefront of affairs, medieval power was, in fact, quite plural, a complex matrix of various power holders. Many aristocrats and military figures vying for control over commercial and artisanal groups ended up with overlapping rights to taxation and other trade privileges, cooperating with one another as much as competing. 78 Furthermore, in areas where provincial rule was weak or circumstances fertile for commoners to band together, village and merchant communities such as the sō also organized and managed their own forms of local government, capable of negotiating commercial

76 For an in-depth exploration of the significance of the imperial court during the late medieval age, see Butler, Lee. Emperor and Aristocracy in Japan, 1467-1680. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
77 Suzanne Gay, The Moneylenders of Late Medieval Kyoto (Honolulu, University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 3.
78 Ibid., 3-4.
relations with local or central authorities. Artisans, primarily using guild organizations as a platform, engaged in similar negotiations. The decentralized state of authority in the late medieval age thus produced malleable commercial conditions and created a demand for artisans that allowed them to become an integral component of the political power structure.

The Medieval Economy, Specialization, and their Impact on Artisan Relations

The shift of power from Kinai, the capital region, to the provinces and subsequent competition over artisan resources reveals how changes in administration and land ownership enhanced perceptions of artisan services as valuable commodities. In addition, concurrent changes in the medieval economy in areas such as agriculture, trade, urbanization, and technology facilitated the expansion and specialization of the artisan class by providing more market opportunities and demand for their skills. This ultimately contributed to the growing importance of artisans to society and promoted the formation of artisanal trade organizations (such as dyers, miners, or leatherworkers, to name a few) that negotiated with the overlords seeking to control them.

The rise in agricultural production beginning around the thirteenth century allowed many individuals to break free of shōen land-based forms of living and pursue trade skills as artisans. Innovations in land cultivation as a result of better fertilizers and the availability of iron farm tools prompted successful double cropping and the introduction of new, more resilient strains of plants. An increased yield led not only to a surplus to sell, but an increased population cum labor force into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries capable of specializing in specific skills outside of agriculture and entering market trade. Greater productivity also stimulated greater solidarity amongst farming communities protecting cultivation and market interests; these communities formed corporate bodies (like the sō) that effectively engaged in economic negotiation with

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80 The Kinai region surrounding the ancient capital at Kyoto consisted of Yamato, Yamashiro, Kawachi, Settsu, and Izumi provinces.
81 William Wayne Farris, Japan to 1600: A Social and Economic History (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009), 144-145.
figures of authority and furthered the development of new trade areas.\textsuperscript{82} Both agricultural commoners and non-agricultural commoners became increasingly aware of their ability to assert their rights as organizations such as village sō communities or artisan guilds (\textit{za 座}).

Greater numbers of artisan organizations also formed in response to the appearance of more commercial markets over the course of the medieval period. Many of these trade areas formed via commoners in villages and estates who benefited from increased agricultural productivity and destabilized aristocratic authority; having more flexibility with their surplus yield, they routed it into private markets and engaged in commercial trade.\textsuperscript{83} The markets established in the early and mid medieval period were relatively small in scale and scattered, held several times a month.\textsuperscript{84} However, they gradually increased in size and number, and the advances in agricultural production also allowed many locations (as well as people) the freedom to specialize in specific goods or talents, creating more opportunities for artisans to develop and promote their skills.\textsuperscript{85} For example, while farm cultivators required moderate carpentry skills to support their daily lives, they did not possess the expertise necessary to pursue carpentry as a profession until economic circumstances and the expansion of markets allowed them to withdraw from a land-based lifestyle and further develop marketable talents in outside areas.

Though local lords desired to exercise control over the numerous markets developing, in the thirteenth and fourteen centuries, these trade environments were largely resistant to any one specific influence and rulers found private arrangements with artisan and merchant groups more

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 147.
\textsuperscript{84} Yazaki, 102.
beneficial. In order to generate such relations, powerful figures sponsored emergent trade centers and involved themselves in market affairs however possible. Temples and shrines in particular became prominent centers of trade, struggling to regain influence over taxation and commodity distribution by hosting markets on their grounds. Bushi warlords, desiring secure financial support for their political and military ambitions, encouraged regional production and commercial markets in their provincial domains. In addition, these local rulers exercised tenuous control over markets circuitously by manipulating distribution by means of controlling toll barriers and roads as well as engaging in patron-client relationships with artisan and merchant guilds to gain influence over specific areas and commodities.

Military warlords who sought to rebuild war-ravaged areas, increase the productivity of agricultural land, and protect the lucrative economic centers within their territorial holdings required artisan services for frequent construction and maintenance projects such as residential mansions, weirs, and castle fortifications. This exponential rise in construction was stimulated by technological developments in areas such as mining, architecture, and civil engineering; reciprocally, the high demand for building projects further facilitated the maturity of required technology. By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, technological advancements produced higher quality materials and increased the demand for labor utilizing these improved processes and products. These changes enabled artisans to practice exclusive skills and increase

86 Ibid., 331-332.
87 Yazaki, 96.
89 Tonomura, 98-99.

Artisans thrived in the fertile environment created by the marked and varied expansion of the economy. Furthermore, they gained a measure of freedom in markets by seeking the patronage and protection of powerful overlords. What began as a trend, if not struggle, towards broad political decentralization based on land in the early medieval period ultimately resulted in a contrary movement by the latter half of the age towards local centralization based on economic resources. For many prominent figures, the key to this consolidation of power was not achieved by simply securing vassalage systems or agricultural tax revenues, but by creating and controlling a stable economic foundation through market systems using artisans and their services. This impetus put potential patrons in competition with one another for the material resources artisans provided, and artisans, threatened by their fellow market rivals and lacking traditional forms of protection from the aristocracy, entered into mutually beneficial relationships with these overlords via guild organizations in order to ensure their own survival. These organizations played a vital role in maintaining the late medieval matrix of political and economic power.
Guild Systems and the Involvement of Authorities

Organized associations of artisans served as an essential hub of interaction between powerful figures and the commercial sphere in the late medieval age. These groups developed alongside the medieval market economy, gaining increasing independence from but also accepting reliance on the aristocracy, provincial lords, and religious institutions in order to survive. Metal casting groups in particular illustrate changes in the internal structure and management of artisan associations from the Heian period through the sixteenth century. Caster organizations reflect a movement from aristocrat-dominated service to freer guild organizations, or za, which entered into complex and plural relations with various figures of authority; ultimately, these relationships impacted not just commercial transactions, but political relationships between powerful overlords.

Artisanal associations took root as early as the Heian period in the form of court-employed groups known as kugonin 供御人, or “purveyors to the imperial household.” Kugo refers to the food served to or utensils used by the emperor, kugonin being people who provided rations and goods to the imperial house. However, the meaning eventually extended to other artisan groups; metal casters, for example, obtained a special place as hiro(灯炉) kugonin, or purveyors of cast lanterns. Well into the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, emperors and aristocrats awarded these groups stipendiary lands, tax exemptions, free passage through barriers and tolls across the country, and the ability to pay annual taxes in goods and services. These privileges were a benefit of their affiliation with and service to the court.92 The aristocracy often
managed these groups, casters in particular, through officers known as nenyo (a court officer), sōkan 懐官 (a general supervisor), or satamono 沙汰者(another type of supervisor). 93 However, around the mid fourteenth century, nenyo control waned as provincial bushi came to power and new market opportunities arose. Though some figures such as sōkan remained, they were weakened, and the shugo seizing control of provincial territories began to make their own appointments of sōkan or daiku 大工, 94 a type of head artisan, to control caster organizations. As the trade economy shifted outside the capital, caster organizations, like many artisan groups, began to dismantle into localized subgroups that operated at a provincial level and sought the support of local government rulers. 95

As many kugonin organizations moved into the provinces, they restructured themselves as za 座, a form of guild composed of workers with similar occupations that also existed in the capital region since the Heian period. 96 Artisan za first appear in historical evidence in the late eleventh century, often in the form of “service guilds” that served elite overlords in the capital much like kugonin. One such example is the woodcutter’s guild recorded in 1097 as belonging to the temple Tōdaiji. Many za obtained protection in exchange for dues and free passage through

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92 Shōji Sasamoto 笹本正治, Ikyō wo musubu shōnin to shokunin 異郷を結ぶ商人と職人, Vol. 3 Nihon no chūsei 日本の中世 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shuppan, 2002), 50-51. Especially in the early medieval period, and in the Kinki region, depending on whom artisans served and their purpose, they were grouped according to different names. Those in service to the emperor were kugonin, for regents, denka saiku or denka niebito, for temples, inujin, etc. Amino, Nihon chūsei, 127.

93 Ibid., 50-51. It is unclear whether some of these positions were courtiers or bushi closely associated with the court. The latter two ranked above nenyo.

94 The term daiku has been used somewhat flexibly, referring originally to official carpenters of the court’s Civil Engineering Office but eventually used alternatively for either carpenters or any artisans involved in construction projects. Sasamoto, Ikyō, 77.


96 The first recorded reference to metal caster organizations using the term za appeared in 1450. Amino, “Chūsei,” 67.
the patronage of court families and religious institutions.\textsuperscript{97} Into the thirteenth century, these groups gradually grew in number and many expanded outside the capital into rural areas, similar to the \textit{kugonin} who also left the capital and called themselves \textit{za}. In both cases, as court members lost their landed income they increasingly valued securing profit from relationships with these artisan guilds. The Kamakura bakufu coming to power also sought control of \textit{za}, though it did not entirely impede the aristocracy’s claims, in part because acknowledgement of and cooperation with members of the traditional political system still held significant meaning as legitimation for medieval warlords.\textsuperscript{98}

By the fourteenth century, many of these artisan “service \textit{za}” (and the migratory \textit{kugonin}) transformed into “trade \textit{za}” that engaged in a different type of interaction with elite overlords. As artisans gained more freedom in the market, these organizations, no longer dedicated solely to service of the capital elites, were primarily concerned with their own trade, business, and monopoly rights. They therefore entered into contractual patron-client relationships with aristocrats, religious institutions, and military figures, who acted as useful sources of protection. Patrons guaranteed security from rival market figures and excessive taxation by competing lords.\textsuperscript{99} In the case of metal casters, by the fifteenth century many \textit{kugonin} groups referred to themselves as \textit{honza} (“original \textit{za}”, perhaps referring to those early service groups), acting as prominent guilds sponsored by a variety of overlords. The breadth of the market allowed new, smaller metal caster groups (\textit{shinza}, or “new \textit{za}”) to form in the localities and compete for the patronage of provincial lords.\textsuperscript{100} The Kawachi and Izumi caster organizations, longstanding and

\textsuperscript{97}Kozo Yamamura, “The Development of \textit{Za} in Medieval Japan,” \textit{The Business History Review} 47, no. 4 (Winter, 1973), 441-443.
\textsuperscript{98}Ibid., 445-446.
\textsuperscript{99}Gay, 57-58.
\textsuperscript{100}Takao Ichimura 高男市村, “Chūsei no imoji no shūdan to shūraku 中世鋳物師の集団と集落,” in \textit{Chūsei o kangaeru: shokunin to geinō 中世を考える: 職人と芸能} (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan 吉川弘文館, 1994), 65.
influential kugonin, called upon the legitimacy of their honza status in 1449 and 1451 respectively to request that the bakufu stop shinza caster business in the Kantō area. This situation suggests that while artisan groups proliferated independently in the provinces, many za still relied on their powerful overlords to protect guild legitimacy and activity from new groups.

As guild organizations grew more independent into the fifteenth century, aristocrats, religious institutions, and provincial warlords such as daimyo and kokujin struggled to increase their influence over area or trade guilds’ affairs. Overlapping rights to guild taxation were quite common, and in many cases, these various authority figures intervened in guild conflicts as arbiters to protect their own interests. Many merchant za encountered the same honza/shinza difficulties as artisans; a fifteenth century example of mediation in a merchant za conflict illustrates the multiplicity of involvement in guild affairs by influential figures. Between 1463 and 1464, the Honai and Yokozeki merchants of Ōmi quarreled over honza and shinza statuses in the cloth trade. In this argument, each group desired the benefit of unequivocal trading rights and monopoly privileges over the other by claiming themselves as the honza. As the dispute progressed, bakufu magistrates, shugo, priests of Higashitani, and the temple Enryakuji, many of whom were in disagreement, all managed various aspects of the negotiations between the merchant parties. Although various figures of power deliberated the situation, ultimately they reached no satisfactory conclusion.

The Honai/Yokozeki conflict highlights how overlords involved themselves intimately in the economic affairs of artisan and merchant za, and that the overlapping influence of authorities

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101 Nagoya daigaku bungakubu kokushi kenkyūshitsu 名古屋大学文学部国史研究室, ed., Chūsei imoji shiryō 中世鋳物師史料 (Tokyo: Hōsei daigaku Shuppankyoku 法政大学出版局, 1982), 221. [1-27 and 1-28]. Hereafter referred to as CIS, the Chūsei imoji shiryō is a collection of documents concerning the Matsugi family and metal casting policies. Because topically related documents are already grouped within the collection and sometimes take identical names, it would be repetitive to label each by its respective title where multiple records are cited. Therefore the page number of the collection will be followed by brackets indicating the original numeric designation of each document in the compilation.

102 Tonomura, 131-133.
incited interaction amongst overlords and competition over these commercial figures. By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, a large number of artisan groups entered provincial markets under military warlords. Many daimyō used regional za not only as economic resources, but as a way to counter the influence of the capital, where traditional elites still held a measure of influence.103 Daimyō therefore chose to sponsor specific guilds (or sometimes independent artisans) as goyō shokunin, artisan purveyors to the daimyō, in order to secure local control over their services.104 The late medieval commercial environment was thereby entrenched in a tradition of independent and semi-independent artisan organizations for which authority figures vied for control. Contending central and local overlords ensnared artisans in their struggle for resources and influence over one another, often using them as subjects of dispute, negotiation, and manipulation.

104 James McClain, Kanazawa: A Seventeenth-century Japanese Castle Town (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 29. This practice was particularly prevalent in castle towns in the late sixteenth century and continued into the early modern period.
Artisans as Purveyors of Power: Investiture and the facilitation of control in the provinces

Politically and militarily ambitious warriors in the provinces utilized relationships with key artisans to both associate themselves with the aristocracy and to cement their authority over local rival warriors. They achieved these ends primarily through two methods: acquiring titles for artisans that connected them to the traditional authority of the court and establishing artisans in retainer (hikan) roles to bushi as managers of other, lower ranking artisans. These methods were not mutually exclusive; daimyō readily incorporated artisans with court-endowed titles into the vertical lord-retainer power structures. Daimyō acquired prestigious artisan titles such as Hida no kami 飛騨守, appointed artisans to the position of tōryō 棟梁, and manipulated the artisan office daikushiki 大工職 in order to maneuver their political relations with other figures of authority.

Provincial warlords, having obtained power primarily by sheer force, considered there to be a political advantage to aligning themselves with the traditional power of the court through court titles conferred to artisans. They eagerly sought to gain these prestigious aristocratic appointments for their artisans to bolster their reputations. Rulers could then use their enhanced prestige to exert influence over local political affairs. The court long valued carpenters in

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105 The use of artisans in hikan roles is primarily found in the eastern provinces. The rise of the bakufu in Kamakura in the twelfth century created a tentative dichotomy in organizational patterns amongst commercial groups in Western and Eastern Japan that emphasized hierarchical relations where bushi dominated. In Western Japan, particularly in and around the Kinai region, artisan and merchant za typically developed with horizontal relations at the core of their structure; members of the za shared equal rights and a (typically non-commercial) sōkan oversaw the group’s interactions with overlords. In the East, the influence of the bakufu and military figures suppressed the development of egalitarian guild membership and led to a higher prevalence of vertical hikan relations that echoed lord/retainer systems. This polarizing West/East tendency can also be seen in documents tracing the lineage and commercial rights of many artisan groups to either the emperors in the West or the bakufu, particularly Minamoto no Yoritomo, in the East. For more on this East/West division, see Sasamoto, Ikyō, 75 and Amino, Nihon chūsei, 143.
particular, whom they sponsored for centuries for major building projects in the capital region such as palaces, temples, and shrines. Workers of merit often held positions within the naishōryō 内匠寮 (Office of Artisans) or the mokuryō 木工寮 (Bureau of Carpenters), which encompassed a number of honored positions for its members. The court appointed carpenters of particular excellence to Hida no kami 飛騨守, or Hida no takumi/Hidakō 飛騨工.  

Originally, this title referred to carpenters of the Hida province (today northern Gifu) said to be so talented that in ancient times they were presented to the court to offer labor services in lieu of material tax dues. Records indicate that Hida carpenters served the court since at least the eighth century and were particularly active throughout the Nara (710-794) and early Heian periods. By the eleventh century, the title of Hida no kami or Hida no takumi began being regularized as an honorary name for carpenters of merit even if they did not originate from the Hida province.

Throughout the medieval age, the Hida no kami title was considered one of the highest of carpenter honors, and the presence of artisans holding this rank during the sixteenth and even seventeenth centuries in Kai, Shinano, Yamanashi, and Sagami demonstrates that the appointment continued to be influential in a variety of areas outside the capital even beyond the medieval age. The influence of the Hida no kami appointment originated from its association with the time-honored authority and approval of the court.

To have this honor conferred on provincial artisans, warlords in the provinces needed to negotiate with the aristocracy in Kyoto. One example from the Takeda family in the Kai province (modern day Yamanashi prefecture) illustrates this interaction. In the Kōyō gunkan, a

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107 Ibid., 220.
109 Ibid., 141.
110 Sasamoto, Sengoku, 219.
military history of daimyō Takeda Shingen (1521-1573) and his son Katsuyori (1546-1582), one entry comments on Shingen summoning various artisans to celebrate a victory in battle and consulting with the court to award the *Hida no kami* title:

The [artisan guests] arrived, and seeing that [their presence] would cause a disturbance, Lord Shingen was continually gracious in his abundance of words and praised his warriors. Also, he looked favorably upon his carpenter and gave him some hundred ryō in gold coin. Shingen sent him to the capital, where Lord Kikutei sponsored him and made this carpenter a *Hida*, whereupon the *Hida* [carpenter] no doubt thought [his recognition] might be a slight to the warriors, so he anxiously made excuses even to the lowest of them. Having summoned him like this, [Shingen] established the *Hida* [carpenter] in [the town] Banshō kōji.  

The Kikutei in this document is most likely Kikutei Harusue (also known as Imadegawa Harusue, 1538-1617) or his father, Imadegawa Kinkō (1506-1578). Both served as court nobles their entire lives. Kinkō, at his height of service, attained both the distinguished positions of the Minister of the Right (1545) and the Minister of the Left (1546). Similarly, Harusue reached the level of Minister of the Right (1586), indicating that both men were very high ranking courtiers during their time.

Since high ranking courtiers conferred the *Hida* title, it was a great professional honor and asset to both artisans as well as the daimyō who employed them, as such an endowment implied a close connection to the aristocracy in the capital. With these government service titles, the daimyō who had seized control of their provinces by disregarding conventional political structures found a way to reincorporate themselves into the traditional framework of authority and legitimize their own power through contact with the court. Artisans, closely connected to the court in the past but now residing in the provinces, were a convenient medium for this connection.

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111 *Kōyō gunkan (jō)* 甲陽軍鑑(上) vol. 3, *Sengoku shiryō sōsho* 戦国資料叢書 (Jinbutsu ōraisha 人物往来社, 1965), 244. Words in brackets added for clarity.
112 Ibid., 244, f.6.
113 *Kugyō bunin* 公卿補任, vol. 3 *Kokushi taikei* 国史大系 (Yoshikawa kōbunkan 吉川弘文館, 1942), 413-416.
114 Ibid., 491.
In addition to the advantages of using artisans to reconnect to the old political structure in the capital, provincial military lords utilized these individuals within their own provincial spheres of influence. Daimyō added their own certified positions of artisan headship to place these individuals in subordinate retainer (hikan) relationships. In doing so, daimyō exploited artisans to exercise influence over the affairs of lower ranked bushi within their domain. For example, in 1581, the Takeda ordered a carpenter under the rule of Anayama Nobukimi, a lesser lord and retainer, to obey the instructions of the Takeda’s carpenter Takayama Hida no kami.¹¹⁵ The court-endowed Hida no kami outranked Anayama’s artisan, giving him the power to directly manage the inferior carpenter’s projects and supersede Nobukimi’s authority. This ability gave the Takeda a measure of influence over construction processes and the mobilization of artisans in Anayama land.

Similarly, daimyō also appointed artisans to the position of tōryō 柱梁, or “pillar,” to exert indirect influence over the artisans of other lords.¹¹⁶ The tōryō appointment secured a mutually beneficial relationship whereby an artisan obtained authority in exchange for allegiance to the daimyō. As tōryō, artisans maintained control over all other artisan workers within their profession or involved in a specific project; tōryō typically maintained authority over a broad area of land, such as a whole district or province.¹¹⁷ In the above Kōyō gunkan reference concerning the Hida no kami carpenter, the document states, “Having summoned him like this, [Shingen] established the Hida [carpenter] in [the town] Banshō kōji.” Banshō kōji was a town below one of the Takeda castles where carpenters lived. It is likely that the carpenter appointed

¹¹⁵ Sasamoto, Sengoku, 71.
¹¹⁶ The tōryō position often appears in the context of architecture construction during the fifteenth century indicating a title for carpenters, but there are also examples of tōryō of different professions, such as a metal caster tōryō in Etchu province in 1413. Amino, “Chūsei,” 72. Alternatively, the position of shokunin kashira 職人頭 (artisan head) was used in a similar (if not sometimes interchangeable) capacity to tōryō, being placed in charge of all artisans within a specific area of land, sometimes entire provinces. Sasamoto, Sengoku, 94.
¹¹⁷ Sasamoto, Sengoku, 80.
to Hida no kami was already a tōryō prior to receiving his new title.\textsuperscript{118} The operative verb compound uketamawaritatsuru 承りてたつる implies both the carpenter being commanded to (uketamawari) and set up in (tatsuru) the town. In this sense, the Hida carpenter is being ordered to take control over a new area of land, establishing his authority there. Already a tōryō of one area, the court title was a greater honor that expanded the carpenter’s influence. As with Hida no kami, daimyō gave tōryō control over other artisans of a district to interfere with the operations of lesser lords and secure their own power. For example, during a conflict between artisans, Shingen sent a letter to Anayama Nobutomo informing him that anyone who disrespected the dyer Shingen appointed to tōryō was to be severely punished; Shingen thereby established the precedence of his own artisan over others of the same profession within the domain.\textsuperscript{119} For low ranking artisans to resist the orders of a tōryō was equivalent to defying the daimyō himself; therefore, daimyō could use artisans to circuitously exercise power, actively interfering with the political and economic affairs of other influential lords in their lands.\textsuperscript{120}

Daimyō found artisan investiture advantageous not only to manipulate the artisans of lesser lords, but to wrest high ranking artisans themselves from competing figures of power and assure daimyō authority. Warlords often negated or certified the appointment of daikushiki 大工職 (carpenter/artisan office)\textsuperscript{121} in order to manipulate political conditions and relationships with artisans within the domain. The daikushiki was a hereditary management position and, like za, afforded artisans a contracted monopoly over a specific trade or buying and selling in an area.\textsuperscript{122}

It most likely originally existed as a part of the shōen shiki system, controlled by the aristocrats and religious institutions. However, shugo, benefitting from the early medieval decentralization

\textsuperscript{118} Kōyō, 244-245, f. 7, 9.
\textsuperscript{119} Sasamoto, Sengoku, 175-6.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 206.
\textsuperscript{121} See footnote 94 for information on the changing usage of the term “daiku.”
\textsuperscript{122} Endō, Kodai, 351-2.
of power, gained the ability to personally assign artisan heads in the provinces. Shugo appointed daikushiki with the aim of maintaining an essential relationship with artisans as a military and economic resource. For this same reason, the conquering daimyō of the late medieval age judged it vital to take control of a shugo’s daikushiki; after seizing a shugo’s lands, daimyō often stripped shugo of their artisans by rescinding daikushiki appointments and replacing shugo artisans with their own. Or, alternatively, daimyō reappointed the current daikushiki in order to forge ties with valuable artisans in the area and break their allegiances to former shugo.

For military figures in the provinces, whether they appointed artisans to Hida no kami, tōryō, daikushiki, or any other number of elevated positions, the objective was the same: to secure one’s authority. Military lords guaranteed their control by maintaining relationships with the court in the capital and local artisans or by controlling the political and economic affairs of one’s political rivals; artisans were a unique conduit for these highly political interactions to take place. Even the aristocracy, whose authority waned in the late medieval age, did not stand by idly while military figures disputed artisan control, but actively participated in the pursuit of artisans as tools to gain political and financial influence.

123 Amino, Chūsei, 497.
124 Sasamoto, Sengoku, 51-52. There is also evidence that a priest at Mount Kōya held a daikushiki position in the late sixteenth century. Since temples, politically influential and traditional patrons of various construction and art projects, employed many artisans, this is not surprising. It is likely that daimyō also enfranchised or disenfranchised the daikushiki of certain religious institutions within their domains to strategically control their power. See Endō, Kodai, 353.
Artisans as Purveyors of Power: Matsugi Hisanao uses artisans to reassert court authority

Members of the aristocracy, much like provincial warlords, actively engaged in political and economic negotiations of authority with artisans at the crux of their dealings. Although courtiers lacked the tangible strength of military daimyō, they utilized their importance as political and cultural figureheads to exert influence over how provincial lords taxed their artisans. By demanding taxation privileges, courtiers obtained material wealth to supplement their own dwindling incomes.

The low ranking aristocrat Matsugi Hisanao was one of the most tenacious and successful courtiers to engage in negotiations for artisan taxation rights with provincial lords during the mid to late sixteenth century. Hisanao spent decades establishing and securing the Matsugi family’s control over metal casters (imoji) outside of the capital, often by means of forged political documents. He began his quest for imoji control by maneuvering himself into an adopted position in the Ki family, a lineage of noblemen that traditionally held control over casters in the court as nenyo, managers of artisan group affairs. Hisanao targeted the Niimi, a branch family of the Ki that had fallen into decline due to poor financial decisions and scandal.125 Hisanao and his father Shinkuro (dates unknown) bought out the debts of the Niimi in 1536, and in doing so acquired inheritance of the Niimi family headship.126 With this position, Hisanao could claim the Matsugi descendants of the Ki line, thereby rightful claimants to caster management. He solidified this right via the aforementioned forgery, the “Minamoto no Yoritomo Sodehan

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125 Amino, Chūsei, 523.
126 CIS, 30-37. [1-37 – 1-40].
Migyōsho,” a document (supposedly) from 1189 in which the Kamakura shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo authorized Ki no Takahiro’s control over metal caster taxation.\footnote{Ibid., 196. [3-5].}

Although the impoverished imperial court, likely seeing an economic advantage for themselves, legally supported Hisanao’s ventures, Hisanao contended with provincial daimyō in order to secure these rights. Since around the fourteenth century, metal casters began to migrate into the provinces, seeking new trade opportunities in free markets as za and the patronage of local lords. It is also possible that the decline of the Niimi in the early sixteenth century and their weakened control over casters encouraged further relocation to the provinces.\footnote{Sasamoto, Sengoku, 230.} Hisanao, once certified by the emperor as the Niimi heir in 1543, earnestly contacted daimyō outside the capital; without their cooperation, Hisanao could not collect court taxes from casters within the provinces.\footnote{CIS, 43-44. [1-51].}

Matsugi Hisanao wrote prolifically to powerful daimyō around the country, pressuring provincial lords to exact court taxes and arrange special licenses for metal casters per his request. In the third month of 1543, Hisanao obtained recognition as rightful inheritor of the Niimi headship, and by the sixth month he entered into negotiations over casters with one of the most powerful daimyo of the time, Imagawa Yoshimoto (1519-1560). A surviving document from the exchange states Yoshimoto’s intention to comply with Hisanao’s requests:

As the imperial palace has commanded, in the matter of the metal casters, the various taxes—barrier taxes, property taxes, barrier and horse taxes, trade taxes, etc.—will all have exemptions through the zahō. In accordance with the emperor’s command, I will order that in my lands there shall be no deviance [from these policies] and I will see to it this is fulfilled properly. Humble regards,

Yoshimoto
12th year of Tenbun [1543], 6th month, 12th day\footnote{Ibid., 186. [2-14].}
Here, the zahō, or za laws, refers to the policies put in place by Hisanao for caster guilds. Although other conflicts in the Imagawa lands prevented this compliance from being executed, it is clear that Hisanao initiated, with some measure of success, political communications with powerful military leaders, using metal casting artisans as a means to acquire his desired financial assets.

Hisanao often established his legal rights to metal caster control by working his way down the political hierarchy. First, he acquired taxation rights via certification from the current emperor. Even when a new emperor was enthroned, such as Emperor Ōgimachi in 1557, Hisanao requested a reconfirmation of his headship position to ensure his authority remained intact.131 Hisanao’s contact with the Ōuchi clan (who ruled an extensive area of southwestern Japan) in 1548 illustrates his next step, communicating with provincial daimyō. Although Hisanao exchanged letters with some daimyō such as Imagawa Yoshimoto directly, in the case of the Ōuchi, he exchanged letters with a retainer, Numa Takakiyo (dates unknown). As with obtaining court titles for artisans, daimyō likely considered this connection to the aristocracy advantageous for political reasons. However, bushi did not simply yield to Hisanao’s demands; as his first order of business with Hisanao, Numa Takakiyo demanded documentary proof of the courtier’s caster rights. Hisanao replied with the request that he be allowed to send a copy due to dangerous roads.132 Upon approval of this request, Hisanao took this opportunity to send forged papers to the Ōuchi, and subsequently received permission to exact court taxes and arrange licenses for metal casters.133 Believing Hisanao’s documentation authentic, administrative retainers then sent joint signature documents throughout the Ōuchi territories, each document asserting that Hisanao, who was entrusted with the emperor’s orders concerning the court taxes of the metal casters,

131 Ibid., 93. [1-139].
132 Ibid., 50-51. [1-61].
133 Amino, Chūsei, 525.
should be obeyed in their respective areas. Following this acknowledgement, Hisanao himself then traveled around the Ōuchi domain, visiting shugodai (the chief representatives of shugo) and kokujin lords in Suō, Aki, and Echizen provinces to personally confirm that his rights were being enforced. A similar process occurred with negotiations between Hisanao and Oda Nobunaga, although Hisanao’s rights were not implemented by Oda retainers until Emperor Ōgimachi commanded, “Concerning the matter of iron pot casters in various provinces: Nobunaga should be ordered that in his lands there be ever fewer deviations from the imperial command whenever a license is granted according to tradition.” Once this order was given, Oda retainers began to recognize Hisanao’s policies since they were directly sanctioned by imperial orders.

However, Hisanao did not limit his dealings with metal casters to only the imperial court that granted his rights and the daimyō who enforced them. Hisanao recognized the importance of communication with the imoji themselves in order to secure their compliance to his taxes and maintained contact with these artisan organizations. In particular, Hisanao may be responsible for a forged document describing the origins of metal casters as hiro kugonin ordered to produce iron lanterns for Emperor Konoe (1139-1155) by Ki no Motohiro (dates unknown). Believed to be distributed by Hisanao himself, the lineage document was circulated to casters in a number of provinces. This text provided political and economic legitimation for both casters, connected to a history with an emperor, and Hisanao, since the Ki family was yet again implicated as maintainer of caster authority. If Hisanao did distribute this forgery, it was for

134 CIS, 56- 60. [1-73 – 1-78]
135 Ibid., 60-74. [1-80 – 1-91, 1-93 – 1-106]
136 Ibid., 183. [2-9].
137 Ibid., 108-109; 123; 127; 236. [1-166; 1-188; 1-195; sankō shiryō 54]
138 Ibid., 242-244. [sankō shiryō 68]
139 Amino, Chūsei, 522.
mutually beneficial means, assuring the prestige of casters in order to endear them to him. Such efforts may have been necessary, as other courtiers occasionally attempted to encroach on Hisanao’s caster authority.  

Although the extent to which caster groups exerted political and economic leverage in negotiations surrounding their taxation is unclear, Matsugi Hisanao’s pursuit of imoji control highlights their significance to figures of authority and usefulness in facilitating contact between them. While the members of the court desired to increase their wealth and influence over provincial affairs, for daimyō, concession to the emperor’s will via Matsugi control may have been a way to connect themselves to the traditional administration and avoid conflict, or it may have carried other financial benefits; the relative scarcity of documents leaves much to interpretation. Nevertheless, control over metal caster groups evidently provided a channel through which political and economic connections were created and maintained.

140 Sasamoto, Sengoku, 232.
Conclusions

In her discussion of artisans within the Chinese social hierarchy, Takeuchi describes artisans as “those purveyors of necessities and luxuries that enriched the lives of people more powerful than themselves.” In Japan as well, this characterization of artisans as primarily producers, suppliers, and transporters of goods for the financial gain of the elites persists. However, contrary to this conservative view of artisans as facilitators of trade and commerce, even literary sources such as imayō and shokunin uta-awase clarify that artisans encompassed a variety of figures from manual laborers and specialized merchants to performers and religious figures, their functions not limited to the production or trade of commercial goods.

The medieval period, a half millennium in which centralized power dissipated and the market economy proliferated, provided a rich environment for artisans to increase in number, diversify, and become economically and politically consequential to central and local figures of authority. This significance was, in part, commercial; while aristocrats sought to regain assets lost and rising warriors desired to monopolize commerce to secure their newly acquired territories, both looked to artisans and their organizations to provide these necessities. However, this perspective neglects another important product gained from the acquisition of artisan services: power.

Artisans, as purveyors to the imperial court and daimyō, produced and conveyed not only trade goods, but authority. Artisans provided economic advantages for central and local leaders as well as a route for the manipulation of and communication between influential power holders.

Takeuchi, 5.
Daimyō utilized the investiture of artisans for this purpose in a number of ways, using carpenter titles like *Hida no kami* to maintain contact with traditional sources of authority in the capital. Daimyō also placed individuals designated *Hida no kami* and *tōryō* appointments in strategic positions of authority over other artisans employed by lesser lords to encroach upon the affairs of political rivals within their domains. Similarly, they instated or removed *daikushiki* offices to deliberately strip conquered *shugo* of the power that came with the allegiance of high ranking artisans. The court also recognized the influence artisan control had over political and economic affairs and maintained contact with provincial warlords employing artisans; the courtier Matsugi Hisanao aggressively negotiated with powerful military figures in the provinces to obtain rights over metal caster taxation.

Although artisans played a significant role in the varied interactions between powerful overlords in the capital and the provinces, scholars often overlook the relationships figures of authority maintained with this large body of diverse commoners. While it is difficult to generalize about such a broadly defined class, the fact that members of the elites recognized carpenters and metal casters as essential components of political order demonstrates the need for further research into the unique benefits gained from interaction with various artisans. The vital presence of artisans in political relationships afforded them a consequential place in late medieval polity that allowed artisans to transcend the role of simply purveyors of goods, enabling them to also function as purveyors of power.
Primary Sources


*Tsurugaoka hōjōe shokunin utaawase* (1261). In Mori Tōru 森暢, ed. *Ise shin meisho-e utaawase,*
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