

Temmon Hokke Rebellion Summary

•Last updated on **November 11, 2022**

The Temmon Hokke Rebellion began with the armed takeover of the capital of Japan by Nichiren Buddhist militants in 1532. Kyōto, already partly devastated by earlier sectarian conflict, was largely destroyed by fighting in 1536, when the combined forces of other sects and the civil authorities put down this rebellion.

The Temmon Hokke Rebellion had its origins in a series of conflicts among the members of three Buddhist sects in the Kyōto area. Buddhism; Nichiren The Tendai sect in Kyōto had a history going back to the eighth century, as old as the capital itself, and a long tradition of defending its own interests, by force if necessary. The Jōdo Shinshū sect had originally been established in the Kyōto area in the thirteenth century, but its founder, Shinran (1173-1262), had been banished from the capital, and Jōdo Shinshū believers throughout Japan had become militant in the face of continued intolerance. The Nichiren sect, also known as the Hokke sect, was founded in the thirteenth century by Nichiren (1222-1282) and had been a militant organization from the outset. Each of these three sects was antagonistic to the other two in varying degrees, and each was centered on a main temple as its Kyōto power base. Temmon Hokke Rebellion (1532-1536) Hosokawa Harumoto Rokkaku Sadayori Keō-bō no sō Matsumoto Shinzaemon Oda Nobunaga

The Enryakuji, the Tendai power base on Mount Hiei, had a garrison of warrior monks, or *sōhei*, trained in martial arts, who occasionally came down to Kyōto in force to assert temple interests. Buddhism; warrior monks The Jōdo Shinshū clergy, whose main temple was the Honganji, were married rather than celibate, and their protective forces were made up of militant secular believers. Nevertheless, their temple was attacked and destroyed by the Tendai warrior monks in 1465. The number of Jōdo Shinshū converts continued to grow regardless of this, and they rebuilt the Honganji temple in 1481.

The Nichiren, or Hokke, sect succeeded in gaining many converts among the merchants and artisans in Kyōto, where the sect established its main temple, the Honpōji, in 1436. Despite persecution and the destruction of the Honpōji by the Ashikaga shogunate in 1440, the Hokke faith in the capital continued to gain converts. A number of neighborhood temples were established, and the Honpōji was finally rebuilt in 1487.

The Jōdo Shinshū and Hokke sects were both winning an increasing number of converts and found themselves in a situation of mutual competition and antagonism. The well-established Tendai clergy and their conservative followers

wished to preserve their traditional practices and privileges, and they opposed the expansion of both the Shinshū and Hokke sects in the capital. Various factions among the civil authorities in the capital also attempted to manipulate the struggles among the sects to further their own schemes and ambitions.

The Hokke followers in the capital included many merchants and local officials, concentrated in the southern third of the city. They were called *machi-shū*, “townsfolk,” and formed associations for mutual defense, centering on their neighborhood temples, which they fortified. On the other hand, members of the Jōdo Shinshū sect in the capital were still recovering from their earlier expulsion by the Tendai warrior monks. Many Jōdo Shinshū believers in the countryside, however, were peasants who formed militant groups to assert their rights, and in some cases their demonstrations turned into successful rebellions.

Fearing that Jōdo Shinshū followers in Kyōto would ally with countryside militants, the Hokke *machi-shū* launched an attack on them in the summer of 1532. The *machi-shū* were supported by some of the aristocracy in Kyōto, as well as by some of the lords of domains surrounding the capital, who felt threatened by Jōdo Shinshū militants in the countryside. The aristocratic forces in Kyōto were led by Hosokawa Harumoto, the power behind the Ashikaga shogun. The forces in the countryside were led by Rokkaku Sadayori, the lord of Omi, who brought troops into Kyōto to assist the Hokke militants. Just as the Tendai warrior monks had done in 1465, they burned down the Hōganji once more and drove away the Jōdo Shinshū followers. The aristocratic forces also joined the Hokke militants in attacking Jōdo Shinshū enclaves in the surrounding countryside. This coup by the Hokke forces, aided by the aristocracy, was known as the Hokke Uprising (*Hokke ikki*). The Hokke *machi-shū* remained in effective control of most of the capital for the next four years.

Since the Hokke militants in the capital had broad support among the local merchants, their Hokke regime managed to govern the city. Nevertheless, significant friction developed with the Tendai followers and with the aristocrats as well. The presence of the Hokke regime in the capital was a symbolic challenge both to the authority of the shogunate and the imperial court in northern Kyōto and to the traditional power of the Tendai establishment on Mount Hiei. These discords gradually united all these elements in mutual hostility toward the Hokke regime.

In the spring of 1536, when a Tendai priest from Mount Hiei, known only as the Keō Cloister Priest (*Keō-bō no sō*), came to the city to deliver sermons attacking Hokke doctrines, he was challenged by a Hokke lay preacher, Matsumoto Shinzaemon. Matsumoto overcame the Tendai priest in debate, intimidated him, and caused him to withdraw. The Tendai clergy on Mount Hiei were deeply offended, and tensions began to build. The same aristocrats who four years earlier had supported the

Hokke militants against the Jōdo Shinshū followers now joined forces with the Tendai warrior monks to drive the Hokke forces out of the city.

At dawn on July 22, the Hokke forces launched a preemptive strike that put the Tendai forces temporarily on the defensive, but on July 27 Lord Rokkaku of Omi brought his troops into the city, attacking the Hokke temples and setting fire to them. All twenty-one temples were destroyed, and tens of thousands of Hokke followers were either killed or driven out of the city. The victors also took possession of large quantities of food, clothing, and other goods that had belonged to the Hokke merchants. The southern third of the city, which had been the Hokke power base, was almost entirely destroyed. The remnants of the Kyōto Hokke followers took refuge in the Ōsaka area, until hostility against them eased enough for them to begin returning to the capital six years later. The Nichiren sect was never again capable of wielding significant power in the capital, however.

As a result of the Temmon Hokke Rebellion in 1532 and its suppression in 1536, the Nichiren faith was never again able to achieve the influence it had briefly imposed upon the aristocracy and the merchant class in Kyōto. The Jōdo Shinshū faith gradually regained popularity in the capital and even was favored by the military overlord Oda Nobunaga, who ended the power of both the aristocratic elements and the Tendai forces in the capital. In 1571, Nobunaga destroyed the entire Mount Hiei complex and killed many of the Tendai clergy there.

Under the Tokugawa shogunate, starting in 1603, the Tendai sect regained much of its traditional position in Kyōto, and the various Buddhist sects and their temples became institutionalized under state supervision. The result was the end of most sectarian strife among Buddhist sects.

- citation-type="booksimple"

xlink:type="simple">Berry, Mary Elizabeth. *The Culture of Civil War in Kyōto*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. An in-depth account and analysis of the culture of constant tension created by a century of social and religious upheaval and constant strife in Kyōto, during the Sengoku Jidai, or Warring States period (1477-1600).

- citation-type="booksimple"

xlink:type="simple">McMullin, Neil. *Buddhism and the State in Sixteenth-Century Japan*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984. A scholarly study of the political relationships among the various Buddhist sects in pre-Tokugawa Japan, and their mutual interactions with civil and military state power.

- citation-type="booksimple"

xlink:type="simple">Plutschow, Herbert E. *Historical Kyōto: With Illustrations and Guide Maps*. Tokyo: Japan Times, 1983. A semipopular account of Japan's ancient capital, useful for placing historical events in their geographical context.

- citation-type="booksimple"

xlink:type="simple">Richie, Donald. *The Temples of Kyōto*. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1995. An illustrated cultural and historical guide to the major Buddhist temples of Kyōto.

- citation-type="booksimple"

xlink:type="simple">Turnbull, Stephen. *Japanese Warrior Monks AD 949-1603*. Oxford, England: Osprey, 2003. A popular study of the role that armed Buddhist monks, or *sōhei*, played in pre-Tokugawa Japan.

1457-1480's: Spread of Jōdo Shinshū Buddhism

1467-1477: Ōnin War

1477-1600: Japan's "Age of the Country at War"

Mar. 5, 1488: Composition of the *Renga* Masterpiece *Minase sangin hyakuin*

Beginning 1513: Kanō School Flourishes

1549-1552: Father Xavier Introduces Christianity to Japan

1550's-1567: Japanese Pirates Pillage the Chinese Coast

1550-1593: Japanese Wars of Unification

Sept., 1553: First Battle of Kawanakajima

June 12, 1560: Battle of Okehazama

1568: Oda Nobunaga Seizes Kyōto

1587: Toyotomi Hideyoshi Hosts a Ten-Day Tea Ceremony

1590: Odawara Campaign

1592-1599: Japan Invades Korea

1594-1595: Taikō Kenchi Survey

Oct., 1596-Feb., 1597: *San Felipe* Incident

Oct. 21, 1600: Battle of Sekigahara

Categories: [History](#)