

The Weak Body of a Useless Woman



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In 1862, 51-year-old Matsuo Taseko left her old life behind by travelling to Kyoto, the old imperial capital. Peasant, poet, and local political activist, Taseko had come to Kyoto to support the nativist campaign to restore the Japanese emperor and expel Western "barbarians". Although she played a minor role in the events that led to the Meiji Restoration of 1868, her actions were nonetheless astonishing for a woman of her day. Honoured as a hero even before her death, Taseko has since been adopted as a patron saint by rightist nationalists. In telling Taseko's story, the text gives both the biography in English of a peasant woman of the Tokugawa period (1603-1868) and fresh perspectives on the practices and intellectual concerns of rural entrepreneurs and their role in the Meiji Restoration.

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