

## CHAPTER 1

## THE KAMAKURA BAKUFU

The establishment of Japan's first warrior government, the Kamakura bakufu, represented both a culmination and a beginning. Since the tenth century, an increasingly professionalized class of mounted fighting men had served in local areas as estate administrators and policemen and as officials attached to the organs of provincial governance. By the twelfth century, warriors had come to exercise a dominant share of the total volume of local government, but even after two hundred years they remained politically immature. The most exalted warriors were still only middle-level figures in hierarchies dominated by courtiers and religious institutions in and near the capital. The bakufu's founding in the 1180s thus represented an initial breakthrough to power on the part of elite fighting men, but the fledgling regime was scarcely in a position to assume unitary control over the entire country. What evolved was a system of government approximating a dyarchy. During the Kamakura period, Japan had two capitals and two interconnected loci of authority. The potential of warrior power was clear enough to those who cared to envision it, but the legacy of the past prevented more than a slow progress into the future.

Until quite recently, studies of Kamakura Japan have tended to overstate the warriors' achievement, by equating the creation of a new form of government with the simultaneous destruction of the old. As is now clear, not only was the Heian system of imperial-aristocratic rule still vigorous during the twelfth century, but also it remained the essential framework within which the bakufu, during its lifetime, was obliged to operate. In this sense, the Heian pattern of government survived into the fourteenth century – to be destroyed with the Kamakura bakufu rather than by it. The events of the 1180s were revolutionary insofar as they witnessed the emergence of Japan's first noncentral locus of authority and Japan's first government composed of men not of the most exalted social ranks. But the bakufu, as we shall see, was a military regime dedicated to keeping warriors away from the battle-

field and also to finding judicial answers to the feuds and disputes that were plaguing society .

#### THE BACKGROUND TO THE GEMPEI WAR

Despite its aversion to fighting, the bakufu was created by war, the Gempei (Genji versus Heishi, or Minamoto versus Taira) conflict of 1180–5. This was a much more complex upheaval than its name implies. Far from being a dispute between two great warrior clans, as it is so often depicted, the Gempei conflict was a national civil war involving substantial intraclan fighting and also pitting local against central interests.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the character of the violence was responsible for the type of regime that was created. Likewise, the backdrop to the conflict was a product of society's tensions and is therefore integral to the history of the Kamakura bakufu.

To understand the limitations of both the warrior victory and the resulting government, we need to trace the rise of the warrior class in the Heian period as well as the ascendancy of the Taira in the years just before the Gempei War. The original blueprint for imperial government in Japan did not envision a military aristocracy as the mainstay of administration over the countryside. Yet as the courtiers in the capital became more confident of their superiority, they began to loosen their grip over the provinces, exchanging governance over a public realm for proprietorship over its component pieces. The country was divided into public and private estates (the provincial lands known as *kokugaryō*, and the estates known as *shōen*), under the authority of governors and estate holders, respectively, who themselves made up the courtier and religious elite. The owners of land at the topmost proprietary level were thus exclusively nobles and clerics. The purpose of this privatization of land was to secure a flow of revenue that exceeded what was provided by the holding of bureaucratic office. In turn, this permitted an increasingly extravagant life-style in the capital. The division of the country was predicated in this way on the desire of *shōen* owners to be absentee landlords. Yet it was equally dependent on those owners' ability to draft into service a class of willing and obedient administrators.

<sup>1</sup> See Jeffrey P. Mass, "The Emergence of the Kamakura Bakufu," in John Whitney Hall and Jeffrey P. Mass, eds., *Medieval Japan: Essays in Institutional History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974) (hereafter cited as Mass, "The Emergence"). The older view, which underemphasizes the social implications of the war, is ably treated by Minoru Shinoda, *The Founding of the Kamakura Shogunate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).

This loosening of control from above also loosened the cement that bound the provinces to the capital. A degree of local instability ensued, which caused the lower ranks to look to one another for mutual support and protection. Leadership fell to persons of distinction whose principal source of prestige was an ancestry traceable to the capital. Thus, unlike the invaders who promoted the feudalization of Europe, local leaders in Japan were men with long pedigrees. They also retained their central connections, which meant that the developing class of provincial administrators were less members of local war bands than members of groups that were forming to secure the peace. This did not preclude outbreaks of lawlessness. But courtiers could always brand such outbursts as rebellion and enroll others as their provincial agents. In this way, at any rate, local and central remained essentially joined for the duration of the Heian period.

The warriors who were becoming the true captains of local society were called *zaichōkanjin*, or resident officials attached to provincial government headquarters (*kokuga*). Although the governorships themselves continued to rotate among courtiers in Kyoto, positions within the *kokuga* became hereditary. Later, during the early stages of the Gempei War, the developing cleavage of interests here was exploited by the founder of the Kamakura bakufu, Minamoto Yoritomo. However, during the two centuries preceding 1180, patrons in the capital were able to channel the energies of provincial subordinates towards mutually beneficial ends. On the one hand, the locals were given extensive powers in the areas of tax collecting and policing. But on the other hand, these same locals were obliged to work through their superiors to secure new appointments or confirmations of old ones<sup>2</sup> or to secure justice in the frequent legal battles between kin and nonkin rivals. Neither the local chieftain nor the clan head (if this was a different person) was empowered to provide these services on his own authority; he too was dependent on the support of a central patron. The result was that ownership and administration, authority and power, became separable, with little risk to the capital-resident proprietor. So ingrained was the psychology of a hierarchy in which the center dominated the periphery that in the absence of some regionally based patronage source such as the bakufu, courtiers in the capital, no

<sup>2</sup> Titles became hereditary and subject to disposition by testament. But wills, in order to be recognized, required probate by the governor. For details, see Jeffrey P. Mass, "Patterns of Provincial Inheritance in Late Heian Japan," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 9 (Winter 1983): 67–95.

matter how effete, could remain the superiors of warriors, no matter how powerful the latter were.<sup>3</sup>

But Kyoto protected its interests in other ways, too. One of the most ingenious was to promote a handful of men as career governors. These persons might then be moved from province to province, much as modern ambassadors are moved today. The origins of this practice have not been adequately studied, but by late in the eleventh century the use of such representatives, now called *zuryō*, had become interwoven with the competition between the Fujiwara and retired emperor patronage blocs in the capital. By this time, governorships had become, in a sense, commodities circulating among the elite. The proprietary province (*chigyōkoku*) system, as it was called, was designed to allow patronage groups to function on both sides of the local land ledger (*shōen* and *kokugaryō*), with the governor as the principal instrument of manipulation. What is important to us is the identity and character of the journeyman governors who now came to be employed by the ex-emperors and Fujiwara. They were from the Taira and Minamoto, particular scions of which were recognized as career troubleshooters for provinces possessed by their patrons. Thus, to cite one example, Taira Masamori received successive appointments to at least nine provinces, as did his son Tadamori after him. And the latter's son, the illustrious Kiyomori, was governor of three provinces before beginning his historic ascent in the capital.<sup>4</sup>

The leaders of the Taira and Minamoto need to be appreciated in this light. They were not, as they are usually depicted, regional chieftains chafing under courtier dominance. Rather, they were bridging figures – military nobles in the truest sense – between the great central aristocrats, who were their patrons, and the great provincial warriors, who were their followers. The leaders' dual character, born out of service to two constituencies, is essential to an understanding of the slow progress of warrior development in its initial phase. It is also basic to the incompleteness of the warrior revolution that was later spearheaded by the bakufu.

The prestige of the Taira and Minamoto names, and the restraining influence they came to exercise, are reflected in still another way. The warrior houses that dominated the provincial headquarters commonly

3 In Weberian terms, the system was maintained by a subjective feeling by subordinates that courtier dominance was natural and legitimate. See Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1964), pp. 124ff.

4 Iida Hisao, "Heishi to Kyūshū," in Takeuchi Rizō hakase kanreki kinenkai, ed., *Shōensei to buke shakai* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1969), p. 50.

bore these two surnames, along with one other, Fujiwara. These were seen at the time as connoting an aristocratic ancestry and served to bind provincials to the capital while they also awed truly native families. Not until Kamakura times did houses such as the Chiba, Oyama, and Miura, among others, come to be known by the names with which they are remembered historically.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, this profusion of Taira and Minamoto surnames has led to the view that the chieftains of these two clans were able to fashion ongoing combinations of vassals. The notion of evolving warrior leagues supported the further notion that the histories of the Taira and Minamoto were in fact the proper framework for tracing the rise of the warrior.<sup>6</sup> However, the records of the era tell a much more modest story, forcing us to conclude that what has passed for coherent history is little more than disparate images pulled taut. The chieftains of the two clans did, at times, add a layer of authority that might be effective. But their assignment to a succession of provinces (not to mention long stays in Kyoto) all but ensured that whatever ties they had formed would inevitably weaken. Thus, the unique but ephemeral success of the most famous warrior of the era, Minamoto Yoshiie, needs to be juxtaposed against the peripatetic movements of the succession of Taira chieftains and the mixed success of Yoshiie's own great-grandson, Minamoto Yoshitomo. Yoshitomo was rebuffed as often as he was accepted in the Minamoto's historic heartland region, the Kantō, and he was ultimately defeated in 1160 by an army consisting of only three hundred men.<sup>7</sup>

Even though the saga of the Taira and Minamoto may thus be a weak framework for charting the road to 1180, the histories of the great provincial houses place us on much firmer ground. Here the emphasis is on an expansion of power within the traditional system of rule, along with the lack of any means for circumventing that system. In other words, what was acceptable in the earlier stages of growth did not necessarily remain so, especially as warrior houses came to feel vulnerable to pressures from above. The Chiba, for instance, discovered that the patronage of the Ise Shrine could neither prevent a major confisca-

5 To cite but one example, the body of documents bearing on the late Heian Chiba house refers only to the Taira. See "Ichiki monjo," in *Ichikawa shishi, kodai-chūsei shiryō* (Ichikawa: Ichikawa shi, 1973), pp. 363–74.

6 For an illustration, see George B. Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1958), chap. 12.

7 Yasuda Motohisa, *Nihon zenshi (chūsei 1)* (Tokyo: Tōkyō daigaku shuppankai, 1958), p. 14; and Jeffrey P. Mass, *Warrior Government in Early Medieval Japan* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 35–44 (hereafter cited as *WG*).

tion of their holdings by a new governor in the 1130s nor protect them from further seizures by the shrine itself a generation later.<sup>8</sup> To the extent that experiences of this kind led to feelings of resentment, the environment in the provinces was being readied for change.

As we know, it was not the Minamoto who came to experience national power first but, rather, the Taira under the leadership of Kiyomori. Recent historians have amended the traditional view of his ascendancy by emphasizing both its limited nature and duration. Kiyomori is now seen less as a warrior riding the crest of a wave of support from the provinces than as a military noble who attempted, unsuccessfully, to use the scaffolding of imperial offices to achieve his hegemony. Lacking large numbers of warrior followers and also the administrative organization of a central proprietor, Kiyomori failed, until very late, to establish an identifiable “regime.” His legacy, as we shall see, was to demonstrate the vulnerability of Kyoto to coercion and to destabilize the countryside. For these reasons, the brief period of his ascendancy must be counted as a direct contributor to the outbreak of war in 1180.

The Taira episode is divisible into two subperiods. From 1160 to 1179, Kiyomori operated in the shadow of his patron, the retired emperor Goshirakawa. Though he himself climbed to the top of the imperial office hierarchy, becoming chancellor in 1167, he remained dependent on the spoils system of the ex-sovereign. Wearying, finally, of established Kyoto’s unwavering opposition to his membership in the capital elite, Kiyomori staged a coup d’état in late 1179, which removed the ex-emperor from effective power. Yet this action succeeded also in destroying the basic collegiality of the courtier class, which had always competed according to accepted rules. The damage in Kyoto was further compounded by Kiyomori’s seizure of numerous estate and provincial proprietorships. This not only reduced the portfolios of his noble and religious rivals; it also upset the status quo in the countryside. Early in 1180, Kiyomori’s own infant grandson became emperor, an event that accelerated a growing sense of malaise everywhere.<sup>9</sup>

While all of this was taking place, the Minamoto leadership was languishing in exile. Twenty years earlier, at the time of the Heiji incident, the sons of Yoshitomo, who was himself killed, were scattered throughout Japan. The eldest, the thirteen-year-old Yoritomo, was placed in the custody of the eastern-based Hōjō, a minor branch of

<sup>8</sup> WG, pp. 48–54. <sup>9</sup> For the Taira ascendancy, see WG, pp. 15–30, 54–56.



the Taira. We have little information on Yoritomo between 1160 and 1180, save for the fact of his marriage to Masako, the daughter of Hōjō Tokimasa, his guardian. From the perspective of subsequent events, Kiyomori's leniency in dealing with the offspring of his 1160 enemy seems impolitic. Yet there was no way the future could have been foreseen: The heir to the Minamoto name was powerless and had been absorbed into the Taira by way of marriage to a Taira collateral.

It is in part owing to this absence of any political activity by Yoritomo that historians have found it difficult to interpret the tumultuous events that lay just ahead. The impediment to understanding can be removed only by minimizing the importance of the Taira–Minamoto rivalry, a sentiment evidently shared by Kiyomori as well. Thus, when Yoritomo raised his banner of rebellion in the eighth month of 1180, the support he attracted was determined by issues other than memories of some idealized past. The background of the Gempei War can be traced to two sources – the perception of vulnerability at court and the condition of warrior houses locally.

## THE GEMPEI WAR

Belying true motivations, wars in Japan are waged under strict categories of symbols, none more important than devotion to a higher cause. In 1180, rebellion was justified on the basis of a call to arms against the Taira by a prince left out of the imperial succession. Though the prince himself was dead within several weeks (5/26), his overture retained great significance. The forces of Yoritomo later cited it as a pretext for their uprising (8/19), and so did the bakufu's later history of itself (the *Azuma kagami*) in its opening paragraph.<sup>10</sup> The broader context encouraging widespread violence yielded in this way to an official explanation.

Yet just as rectification of the succession had little to do with the outbreak of war, the outburst also cannot be explained as a spontaneous rallying to the Minamoto. As Yoritomo himself discovered, loyalty proved a singularly noncombustible element. Before a challenge might be mounted, the warriors of the east required time to gauge their current situations. The Chiba, with their recent history of setbacks, joined early (6/17), even though they bore a Taira surname. But for

<sup>10</sup> *Azuma kagami* (AK), 1180/4/9. The most accessible edition of the *Azuma kagami* is that edited by Nagahara Keiji and Kishi Shōzō (Tokyo: Jimbutsu ōraisha, 1976–7), 6 vols. The *Azuma kagami* covers the period 1180 to 1266 and was prepared in the early fourteenth century. The later sections are considered to be more reliable.

many other houses the issues were more complex, normally centering on inter- and intrafamily relations within their own home provinces. As part of the process, houses segmented into new alignments and subunits, and the provinces themselves became the staging grounds for a series of incipient civil wars.<sup>11</sup> To prevent the east from disintegrating into internecine conflict, Yoritomo was obliged to seek some new common denominator that would bind rather than divide the families under his leadership. The program he evolved was made part of his war declaration on 8/19. Rather than organize a war party to defend the court by dislodging the Taira, Yoritomo designed policies to satisfy the most deep-seated desires of the warrior class in general. The Minamoto chieftain promised what had never before been contemplated: a regional security system that bypassed Kyoto and guaranteed the landed holdings of followers. The vision was revolutionary – and led ultimately to the creation of the Kamakura bakufu.

Though Yoritomo couched his program in procourt and anti-Taira language, the effect of his plan was to disengage the east from central control, by converting its public and private officers into his own vassals. Specifically, he authorized the men of the region to assume possession over the holdings long associated with them and to petition Yoritomo for confirmations. The temper of the program was set when the governor's agent (*mokudai*) of Izu Province, the site of Yoritomo's long exile, was attacked on 8/17 by forces of the Minamoto. Similar campaigns followed (for instance, that of the Chiba against the Shimōsa *mokudai* on 9/13), and this rapidly became a movement to eliminate all representatives of the central government. At the same time, the tide of support, which had been sporadic to this point, now became a ground swell. Resident officials from various provinces pledged themselves to Yoritomo, as did a number of estate-based personnel. The effect of this was to deliver into his hands the potential for rulership over vast areas. This in turn was bolstered by the chieftain's assumption of a protector's role over the region's leading temples and shrines. Yoritomo achieved this latter goal by issuing public directives to the provincial headquarters, in effect, an assumption of the authority – without the title – of the governor. The issuance of such documents began on the same day that he declared war.<sup>12</sup>

11 For details, see Mass, "The Emergence," pp. 134–43.

12 "Mishima jinja monjo," 1180/8/19 Minamoto Yoritomo kudashibumi, in Takeuchi Rizō, comp., *Heian ibun* (Tokyo: Tōkyōdō, 1947–80), 15 vols., 9:3782–83, doc. 4883. This is the earliest document bearing Yoritomo's name.



Yoritomo still had many problems to overcome. On 8/23, an army under his command was soundly defeated at the battle of Ishibashi in Sagami Province. His opponents were not forces recruited and sent out by the central Taira but typically were local houses that were opposing other local houses. They called themselves Taira for the same reason that Yoritomo's men from Sagami called themselves Minamoto. Rather quickly, however, the Taira label became obsolete. Owing to Yoritomo's presence in the region, the appeal of his program, and a general rallying to his side, families that had remained neutral or had taken initial positions against him now sought to reverse themselves. Although this necessitated a submergence of hostile sentiments on the part of traditional rivals, the alternative was probably extinction. For his part, Yoritomo showed great leniency in welcoming earlier enemies and showed great understanding by dividing and recognizing new families. By the end of 1180, only the tiniest residue of a "Gempei" War remained in the east, with the task now one of purging and purifying rather than facing an enemy. Kamakura, with historic ties to Yoritomo's forebears, was selected as the seat for his government.

A Taira policy approximating quarantine actually encouraged Yoritomo's preoccupation with the east. A by-product was to make the Chūbu and Hokuriku regions, which were closer to the capital, the next arenas for conflict. Already by 1181, provincial warriors in these areas were seeking to expel Kyoto's representatives by using the same pretext as their eastern counterparts did. They postured themselves as Minamoto engaged in a crusade against the Taira. That Yoritomo was probably ignorant of most of the activities of those invoking his name suggests that the battleground, now of its own momentum, was rapidly expanding in size. At this stage – and until 1183 – Yoritomo was content to limit his personal involvement strictly to the east. For regions beyond the east he delegated a loose authority to two relatives, his cousin Yoshinaka and his uncle Yukiie.

In the meantime, the chieftain in Kamakura was identifying a new enemy. These were the collateral lines of his own house who were refusing to recognize his authority. Even before the end of 1180, Yoritomo demonstrated his unconcern with the Taira by marching east against the Satake, relatives who a generation earlier had refused to submit to his father. The differences between father and son (in effect, between the 1150s and 1180s) are instructive. Whereas Yoshitomo the father had been unable to subordinate recal-

citant Minamoto branches, Yoritomo the son used superior military strength to force the issue. The Satake were destroyed in battle on 1180/11/5. Other lineages were more prudent. The Nitta, for instance, reversed their earlier intransigence (9/30) and submitted to Yoritomo without a fight (12/22). Yet the chieftain in Kamakura remained vigilant. When another collateral, the Shida, showed signs of vacillation, Yoritomo rejected their submission and moved to destroy them (1181/int. 2/20). As we shall see, enmity toward kinsmen continued to be a much stronger inducement to action than did the nonthreatening Taira.

Between 1180 and 1183, Yoritomo worked assiduously to mold the eastern region into a personal sphere of influence. He did this by converting the existing officialdom into a private vassalage, by attempting to make himself the source of all patronage in the area, and by transforming a simple village, Kamakura, into a great center of government. Now when he prohibited local outrages, authorized fiscal exemptions, assigned new lands, or issued orders to provincial officials, he was doing so from a stationary base that he could realistically call his capital. Yet the Minamoto movement could not continue indefinitely to develop in isolation, because the contagion of violence under the Minamoto banner was rapidly spreading. Yoritomo eventually saw this development as an opportunity to inflate his own chieftainship. But he also recognized the danger to his fledgling authority of inaction in the face of warrior outlawry. Though the Taira in Kyoto and the Minamoto in Kamakura were reluctant to confront each other, developments in the provinces eventually forced the issue. They also forced the country's two governmental centers to seek an accommodation.

The years 1183 to 1185 witnessed a convergence of events on several levels. The Gempei War, desultory from the beginning, heated up and reached a sudden climax. The Kamakura bakufu assumed its basic form. The imperial court, with Kamakura's help, began to revive itself. And the warrior class, by means of sustained violence, achieved unprecedented new goals.

The inertia of the war's second and third years was broken in mid-1183 when Yoritomo's Chūbu deputies, Yoshinaka and Yukiie, broke through the Taira defenses and occupied the capital. For their part, the Taira leaders, carrying the child emperor with them, fled westward in an attempt to regroup. Though after the outbreak of war the Taira had made certain modest efforts to establish closer ties with the prov-