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Japan was ruled by warriors for the better part of a millennium. From the twelfth to the nineteenth century its political history was dominated by the struggle of competing leagues of fighting men. This paperback volume, comprised of chapters selected from volumes 3 and 4 of *The Cambridge History of Japan*, traces the institutional development of warrior rule and dominance. Among the topics discussed are the gradual nature of the shift from court aristocrats to military hegemony, the epic battles between the Taira and the Minamoto in the 1180s, the development of a new system of justice, and the fall of Kamakura – which was related to the great invasions launched by the Mongol emperor of China in 1274 and 1281. In addition to discussing the transitions between various regimes, the book describes the proliferation of Akutō, or outlaw bands; the rising level of violence, treachery, and revolt among the military leaders and contenders; and the building of a Tokugawa order. By the eighteenth century, warrior rule had come full circle. Centuries of peace brought a transformation and bureaucratization of the samurai class. Warrior values remained central to the ethical code of modern Japan, however. After the Meiji government was secure, its leaders designed their education and codes to preserve the values of loyalty and fortitude on which their warrior ancestors had prided themselves.

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# WARRIOR RULE IN JAPAN

Edited by  
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## PREFACE

Japan was ruled by warriors for the better part of a millennium. From the twelfth to the nineteenth century its political history was dominated by the struggle of competing leagues of fighting men. These centuries left a lasting imprint on the country's values and society. *Bushi*, "fighting men," and *samurai*, "those who serve," developed a rhetoric with emphases of loyalty and courage and worked out a code that came to be known as "Bushidō," the Way of the Warrior. A stern and ruthless ethic had no tolerance for compromise or defeat. Honor to name and family counted for more than life, and failure permitted only one honorable exit, the grisly self-immolation of *seppuku* or, the more vulgar term, *hara-kiri*. Leaders attracted followings of "house men," *gokenin*, who became in time their vassals and were entrusted with land and followers. The title of *sei-i-tai-shōgun*, "Supreme Commander Against the Barbarians," which had been used as a temporary commission for frontier wars in northern Japan, became a hereditary term that signified the "head of the warrior houses," *buke no tōryō*. It was vested successively in three lines, the Minamoto (1192–1333), Ashikaga (1333–1572), and Tokugawa (1605–1868).

The essays that follow, taken from volumes 3 and 4 of *The Cambridge History of Japan*, trace the institutional development of warrior rule and dominance. It is convenient to begin with the typology proposed by John W. Hall, who described a "familial" structure of rule that interacted with a more "imperial-bureaucratic" strain. From the middle of the third century to the middle of the seventh, "government in Japan was exercised by a hierarchy of ruling families whose authority, though secured originally by military force, was ultimately rationalized on the basis of lineage and exerted along the lines of kin relationship."<sup>1</sup> Although its claims were recorded only in the eighth century and then probably in response to new challenges, the imperial line, which professed descent from the Sun Goddess, came to stand at the

1 *Government and Local Power in Japan 500 to 1700: A Study Based on Bizen Province* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 6.

apex of this system. This sacerdotal and lineal priority gave it immense prestige and unchallenged legitimacy in the contention for power, with the result that not even warrior rule seriously endangered its position and priority.

From the seventh through the tenth centuries the powerful model of the bureaucratic states of Korea and especially China served to supplement this familial pattern with one of centralization and officialdom. It did not so much replace as add to the presuppositions of family and hierarchy that had existed earlier. The moral claims of the Chinese ruler as Son of Heaven were now added to divine authority. Power to administer the provinces and to regulate and tax landholdings through bureaucratic appointments, as was the case in the continental model, however, was soon altered by special arrangements that were made for great families and temples. Public land was privatized in *shōen* or estates, and at the capital high offices became monopolized by the great Fujiwara clan, whose founders had been instrumental in cloaking the sovereign with his new authority as Chinese-style ruler. At Heiankyō, or “Capital of Tranquility and Peace,” as Kyoto was called, an increasingly rigid hierarchy of aristocrats controlled the workings of government while the Fujiwara, through intermarriage with the imperial line, determined the course of official appointment and routine. This bred an aristocratic society that offered little opportunity or tolerance to those outside its inner circle, and one better qualified to cultivate the gracious life depicted in the *Tale of Genji* than to keep order in a country in which exile from the capital meant cultural dessication and social exile for aristocrats. Recent studies of the development of Japan’s warrior caste, on the other hand, make clear that Nara and Heian Japan were far from achieving the centralization that central edicts of the time suggested, and that local strongmen were accommodated by naming them commanders of the newly established militia.<sup>2</sup>

Jeffrey Mass’s essay on the Kamakura bakufu emphasizes the gradual nature of the shift from court aristocrats to military hegemon. The early warrior leaders, he points out, were “military nobles” who were

2 Two recent works, though they differ sharply on many specific points, agree that there were important continuities between the Nara-Heian and Kamakura military developments. See Karl E. Friday, *Hired Swords: The Rise of Private Warriors in Early Japan* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992), and William Wayne Farris, *Heavenly Warriors: The Evolution of Japan’s Military, 500–1300* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993). Reviews highlight their differences: See Farris on Friday in *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 19, No. 2 (Summer 1993):456–9, and Friday on Farris in *Monumenta Nipponica*, 48, No. 2 (Summer 1993):261–4.



allied with provincial interests that felt discriminated against by the central hierarchy, and sprang from junior lines of houses hardly less illustrious than those at court. In the mid-twelfth century they were called upon by the Kyoto aristocrats to settle disagreements and disturbances, but once conscious of their power they did not return to subordinate positions. Yet their goals were more often to substitute themselves for their superiors than to reform the entire system. Taira Kiyomori was able, and Minamoto Yoritomo wanted, to place a daughter as imperial consort the way the Fujiwara had. Yoritomo placed more value on the high rank he received from the court than he did on the title of shogun, which he received in 1192 and soon passed on to his young son. It was the function of the Hōjō, who came to dominate the Kamakura regime, in their “need of an object for a regency, to invest the title of shogun with both a future and a past.”

The warfare between the Taira and the Minamoto in the 1180s led to a new order, one dominated by the military. The epic battles of the two hosts, each led by aristocratic warriors, became the subject of legend and romance. In the aftermath of war Yoritomo, having eliminated possible dangers from within his clan and from rivals in the north, established his own military headquarters, or *bakufu*, at the eastern coastal town of Kamakura. From there he consolidated his dominance over the Kyoto court by seeing to it that lines of authority led from Kamakura to the provinces. The central device in this development was to force from the court permission to appoint *jitō*, or stewards, to private estates or *shōen*. The office served both as reward for his followers and as a device to control the warriors. Next came the appointment of *shugo*, provincial-level figures who were expected to perform guard duty at Kyoto, survey local order and crimes, and serve as officials of the new system of justice that was established.

In 1219 the murder of Yoritomo’s heir brought new changes. Fictive relatives continued to be appointed to the office of shogun, but the Hōjō line of regents now came to dominate the Kamakura regime. In all of this the wishes of the emperor, reigning or retired (as *in*, or “cloistered emperor,” so called because he usually took Buddhist vows in a nominal withdrawal from active contention) counted for little. In 1221 the retired emperor Gotoba challenged Kamakura dominance by attempting to pass out rewards to military figures on his own, but the force he raised was speedily defeated and he himself exiled.

The shuffle of grants of land that followed this incident contributed to important developments in the dispensing of justice, as the aggrieved and newly appointed made their way to Kamakura to plead for

justice. Recently appointed stewards needed policing. In a society that was, as Mass puts it, “lawless yet litigious, restive yet still respectful of higher authority,” the bakufu’s efforts to regularize procedures and guard against flagrant miscarriages of justice brought codes of procedure, new standards of evidence, and provision for face-to-face confrontation between litigants.

All Kamakura institutions coexisted with the Kyoto administrative structure, and the profusion of claims between estate managers, proprietors, *jitō*, and *shugo* guaranteed a complex structure of decision and appeal in which litigation could often go on for years. Most *shugo* resided in their original base or in Kamakura, so that opportunities for troublemakers in the provinces were plentiful.

In time Kyoto and Kamakura procedures came to resemble each other. Shadow shoguns dealt with shadow emperors. *Jitō* positions were hereditary, and Kyoto took on some of the devices of Kamakura in legal procedures and institutions. In Kamakura days the bakufu remained an overlay, albeit an increasingly powerful one, on the aristocratic pattern of earlier government. In future centuries it gradually became an alternative.<sup>3</sup>

Professor Ishii’s essay treats the fall of Kamakura. He relates this to the great invasions launched by the Mongol emperor of China in 1274 and 1281. The defeat of those attempts, which were probably the largest amphibious operations in history up to that time, contributed to the mystique of Japan as a land whose valiant defenders were favored by the gods, who had sent the “divine wind” (*kamikaze*) to destroy the invading hosts.

The essay makes it clear that the fighting weakened the bakufu because the fact that it was waged against a foreign foe meant that there were no lands with which bakufu vassals could be rewarded for their valor. Loyalties were further weakened because the bakufu took the occasion of the emergency to try to increase its power over the southwestern island of Kyushu. These considerations pose interesting questions for the impact of Japan’s isolation from continental politics on its failure to develop a stronger central government before modern times. Historians often credit the early development of nation-states in Europe to the emergencies created by foreign war, and it is interesting to see how, in this case, considerations of defense combined with power plays by the regime. Equally interesting, however, is the re-

<sup>3</sup> For discussions of the *bakufu* model of government in each of the three shogunates, see Jeffrey P. Mass and William B. Hauser, eds., *The Bakufu in Japanese History* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985), 264 pp.

minder that the bakufu felt it needed authorization from Kyoto to establish a regional governmental center on Kyushu to strengthen its control.

With rising dissatisfaction over the inability of the Kamakura bakufu to reward its vassals came an increase in lawlessness. *Akutō*, or outlaw bands, proliferated. Professor Ishii's essay portrays the rising level of violence, treachery, and revolt among the military leaders and contenders. In response, the Hōjō regents arrogated more and more provincial governorships to themselves and their followers, alienating others by their increasingly autocratic and high-handed behavior. Familial interests were once again proving stronger than bureaucratic considerations.

The collegial harmony and cooperation that is often ascribed to Japanese society was not conspicuous in Japan's medieval era. In Kyoto a shadow emperor often chafed against the restrictions posed by his retired but more powerful predecessor. In Kamakura a shadow shogun was dominated by his regent, and sometimes overshadowed by his retired predecessor as well. The bakufu intervened at will in Kyoto to settle disputes, and ended by ordering that imperial succession alternate between two lines and that no sovereign's tenure should exceed ten years. This understandably alienated Emperor Godaigo, who was able to rally enough discontented warriors to bring the Kamakura bakufu to its final crisis.

John W. Hall's discussion of the Muromachi bakufu carries the story on to the second shogunate. The Ashikaga, who emerged victorious over both Emperor Godaigo and their rivals in the Kamakura camp, chose to establish their headquarters in the Muromachi section of the imperial capital of Kyoto. The office of shogun was now formally linked with the title of leader of the military houses (*buke no tōryō*). In theory the delegation of power by the emperor remained essential, but the growing weakness of the imperial court in the face of territorial and economic aggrandizement by the provincial *shugo* governors, many of whom were now only nominally responsive to the shogun, raised new questions about the legitimacy of warrior rule. After the defeat of Emperor Godaigo's revolt an alternate line of emperors had been placed in "power" in Kyoto, while Godaigo's erstwhile followers maintained a rival court in the mountainous area of Yoshino, a beautiful area rich in cultural and historical associations. The struggle between the "northern" and "southern" courts was resolved a half century later by a settlement calling for alternation between the two lines in the future, though it was not long maintained.

The fourteenth-century warfare, however, proved decisive in the weakening of aristocratic and clerical control over provincial estates, and as a result the real power of the military governors grew steadily. The era also came to assume critical importance in the future history of imperial loyalism. Apologists for the southern, or Yoshino, line became regarded as paragons of moral excellence and military valor; Kusunoki Masashige, who commanded southern forces at the battle of Minatogawa, and Kitabatake Chikafusa, the author of a celebrated tract that related the imperial cause to gods and heroes, became fixtures of the textbooks of imperial Japan. Early in the twentieth century a dispute grounded in imperial ideology was waged over the question of which line of emperors should be considered legitimate, and a leading student of the “Kemmu Restoration” of Emperor Godaigo, Professor Hiraizumi (whose name can be discerned in several footnote references), was an inspirational teacher of young army officers in the perfervid nationalism of the 1930s. Thus debates about the process described here were charged with meaning for modern Japan.

Professor Hall points out that even for Yoshimitsu, the third, longest ruling, and most powerful of the Muromachi shoguns, court titles were all-important. Yoshimitsu came ultimately to possess all the formal rights of rulership, and he even styled himself “King of Japan” in correspondence with the Ming dynasty emperor of China in his eagerness to acquire Chinese recognition and goods. For this he was predictably excoriated by twentieth-century nationalist historians.

Centered as they were in Kyoto, the Ashikaga shoguns became leading sponsors of the arts. Their era and patronage proved of immense importance for a revival of classical culture – Chinese-style ink painting, the tea ceremony, the Nō drama, and the splendid “Golden” and “Silver” pavilions they constructed all marked a high point in Japanese aesthetics. Kyoto was also the center of Japan’s most developed economy, and currents of commercialization, urbanization, and commerce helped to make possible a scale of aristocratic life that Japan had not known before. In the provinces, however, warrior chiefs were taking more and more land and authority for themselves and treating taxes as their private right. In consequence there was an increasing gap between the periphery and the capital, where the shoguns ordered their *shugo* to take up residence.

The fifteenth century witnessed an alarming increase in unrest and rebellion. From 1467 onward most of Japan was embroiled in a war that began as a dispute about imperial and shogunal succession. The

influence and prestige of the imperial court was now at a low ebb, but before long that of the Muromachi shogun was only marginally higher. In 1500 a new emperor, Gokashiwabara, had to wait twenty years for formal enthronement because funds were lacking. Not one of the Ashikaga shoguns of the sixteenth century served out his term without being driven from Kyoto at least once, and the only one to die in his capital was murdered there.<sup>4</sup> Real power was beginning to lie with regional commanders who were consolidating their holdings and followers while their more aristocratic predecessors fought themselves to a standstill at the center.

It was a century and a half before order was restored in Japan. The intermittent warfare of the sixteenth century was termed Sengoku, or Warring States, by Japanese who compared it with the violence that preceded the emergence of the unified empire in China two milleniums earlier. Yet beneath the smoke of war economic change, trade and piracy, and regional consolidation were changing the face of Japan. The Tokugawa shogunate that emerged in 1600 inherited the fruits of this social change.

There was first of all a marked rise in internal trade and commerce. Many local warrior chiefs, like their counterparts in Europe earlier, established toll stations to profit from this exchange. There was also a considerable amount of trade with the continent. A tide of piracy launched by bands based along the western coast of Japan had ravaged coastal cities of Korea and China as early as the fourteenth century; the Ashikaga shogun Yoshimitsu had secured trading privileges with the Ming dynasty as reward for controlling that brigandage. His fifteenth-century successors, however, partly from choice and partly from weakness, failed to maintain that control, and as a result the continent again knew the scourge of pirate bands. The disorder in western Japan made its ports an inviting base for such groups, but in makeup they included Korean and Chinese as well as Japanese buccaneers. After the Ming rulers banned Japanese ships from their shores, trade for Chinese goods continued through the network of trading stations established by Chinese merchants throughout Southeast Asia. European traders, first Portuguese and Spanish and, after 1600, Dutch and English, fitted into this trading pattern from their bases in Macao, Manila, Indonesia, and India, respectively, and participated in a vigorous competition. Enmities grounded in European wars intensified rivalry and

<sup>4</sup> George Elison, "Introduction," in Elison and Bardwell L. Smith, eds., *Warlords, Artists, and Commoners: Japan in the Sixteenth Century* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1981), p. 1.

provided openings for Japanese choice, just as Japanese disunity offered opportunities for Westerners.

The Portuguese, who arrived in the 1540s, brought with them firearms and missionaries of the Society of Jesus. Both were welcome to Japanese local lords, many of whom were vexed by Buddhist sectarian rebellions and all of whom were eager for weapons and wealth to strengthen their position against their neighbors. In 1580 a local daimyo who had become a convert made a donation of the port town of Nagasaki to the Jesuits, and it quickly became the center of the Catholic effort in Japan. The Jesuits, a semimilitary order that included members from late-feudal origins in Iberia and Italy, soon learned to work among the Japanese samurai and daimyo. Firearms were more welcome still. In a remarkably short time they were being produced in quantity in central Japan, and their use revolutionized warfare. The aristocratic and splendidly armored samurai of earlier times proved no match for disciplined infantry in carefully selected positions who loaded and fired by ranks in sequence. By the 1580s, though the Ashikaga shoguns still clung to position and rank in Kyoto, the future lay with regional leaders who preferred to draw on the resources of substantial units of land to organize significant numbers of men armed with muskets.

Oda Nobunaga (1534–82), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–98), and especially Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616) were the three who understood and utilized these possibilities to unify Japan. Nobunaga, born the son of a Nagoya lord, had a shrewd sense of politics, a quick grasp of the possibilities of firearms, and such complete ruthlessness in the extirpation of enemies that it struck fear into his opponents. His base, a large rice-producing area in central Japan, was both strategic and productive. He separated his forces from the peasantry and relied on the use of the new military technology, including guns and armored ships. His land surveys gave him confidence in what he could demand from the countryside, and his abolition of toll barriers undermined the power of earlier authorities. He had none of the compunction his predecessors might have shown toward religion, and was utterly merciless in his extirpation of Buddhist opponents, massacring the entire community of monks and their defenders and dependents on Mt. Hiei outside Kyoto; he was equally unforgiving of rural sectarians who resisted his commands. In 1568 he entered Kyoto in pretended response to the pleas of the Ashikaga shogun, but once there he speedily brought him to heel with strict orders not to make independent overtures to other military leaders. In 1582, as he was about to set out on a campaign to

add western Japan to his conquests, he was attacked by one of his vassals and took his own life.

Hideyoshi, after dealing with Nobunaga's enemies, continued his conquests and brought the rest of Japan under his governance. His rise, despite his obscure peasant origins, stamps him as one of the most remarkable individuals in a turbulent era. In contrast to Nobunaga's ruthless treatment of those he had defeated, Hideyoshi tended to draw his rivals into the circle of his allies, allowing them to redeem themselves by valor in his service. As Nobunaga's lieutenant he had absorbed his tactical and strategic techniques, but he was more thorough still in ordering the compilation of a national land survey, ordering that samurai leave the countryside to become standing armies at the castles of their lords, and disarming the commoners through edicts ordering them to surrender all swords. After 1590, with the unification of Japan achieved, Hideyoshi developed grandiloquent thoughts of continental conquest and demanded that Korea give free passage to his armies in an assault on China. On being rejected, he launched a massive invasion of Korea in 1592. Initially successful, his forces proved inadequately supplied by sea, and when Ming dynasty armies entered the war to defend China's tributary state of Korea the Japanese commanders were hard pressed to maintain their gains and tried to convince Hideyoshi that the Chinese had capitulated. Furious when he was undeceived, Hideyoshi launched a second, punitive attack in 1597. When he died the following year his vassals and allies rushed back to take part in the renewed conquest for power in Japan. Like Nobunaga, Hideyoshi never took the title of shogun. He preferred the distinction of a title in the old court hierarchy.

Hideyoshi's plans for the succession of his young son were quickly undone by his most important ally, Tokugawa Ieyasu, who led a coalition of lords from eastern Japan to victory at the great battle of Sekigahara in 1600 before taking Hideyoshi's castle of Osaka in 1615. With this came a consolidation of power that was to last until the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

The Tokugawa order is the subject of the essays by John W. Hall and Harold Bolitho that complete this volume. Ieyasu, building on the work of Nobunaga and Hideyoshi, built a system that was at once centralized and decentralized. Historians have long debated its characteristics, and the term *bakuhau* state reflects the compromises of a system that was feudal in its allocations of lands to vassals, but centralized in the impositions the shogun was able to demand from them. Daimyo could be, and were, moved by the shogun, though the great

historic houses, “outside” (*tozama*) lords, possessed of larger domains on the periphery, were seldom challenged. “Hereditary” (*fudai*) daimyo vassals held lands that were smaller in income, but more strategically located. They were also more numerous, and could be called upon to staff the higher offices within the bakufu structure. All lords came to be required to maintain residences at the shogun’s capital; they were expected to house their families and those of their chief retainers there, and their alternate years of residence served as a substitute for the military service that had been expected of them before the Tokugawa peace. The bakufu reserved for itself the most important lands and all metropolitan centers, and dispatched lesser vassals to govern as part of a bureaucracy that involved some seventeen thousand men in hundreds of positions.

In addition to its hold on the metropolitan centers of Nagasaki, Osaka, Kyoto, and Edo and the most important mines, the bakufu reserved to itself rights of coinage (through the silver and copper guilds, the *ginza* and *dōza*) and of violence, calling on its feudatories when action was required for the suppression of rebellion or coastal defense. Feudal lords’ succession, and their matrimonial alliances, were monitored, and related houses and collaterals were honored by permission to use the Tokugawa (and Matsudaira, an earlier house name) appellations.

The bakufu also claimed all foreign relations as its province. Hideyoshi had issued, and the Tokugawa enforced and strengthened, prohibitions on Christianity, which had gained numbers of daimyo and several hundred thousand commoners as converts. Nagasaki, once the Jesuit base, had come into Hideyoshi’s hands in 1587 and became a shogunal city to which all foreign trade was directed. In 1637 the outbreak of a rebellion that took on a Catholic cast was followed by a ruthless extirpation of missionaries and their converts. Spain and Portugal, as Catholic powers, were thereafter expelled and Western contact was restricted to the Protestant Dutch, who were ordered to take up residence in an area in Nagasaki that had been prepared for the Portuguese. Japanese trading missions to Southeast Asia, which had flourished in the early Tokugawa years, were ended; Japanese were forbidden to go abroad, and, once gone, denied reentry on pain of death. Private junks from maritime China were directed to Nagasaki, where their goods were exchanged for Japanese products and bullion through representatives of merchant guilds in the great Tokugawa cities. Additional access to Chinese goods, especially the silk thread that was in great demand throughout the seventeenth century, came via Ryūkyū



(Okinawa), a dependency of the southern domain of Satsuma, and through Korea, with which relations were restored and which permitted the daimyo of Tsushima to maintain a trading station at Pusan. The attenuated nature of these foreign contacts led in time to the term “seclusion system,” although cultural, economic, and intellectual contacts of many sorts were possible.<sup>5</sup>

Harold Bolitho’s discussion of the *han*, or daimyo domains, shows that the bakufu policies were in many ways mirrored in miniature in the 260-odd daimyo domains throughout the land. Daimyo too collected their principal vassals and collaterals in the castle towns that dotted the coastal routes throughout Japan; they were the lords of semiautonomous states with armies of samurai, now urbanized; the states had their own tax systems, and sometimes paper and copper currency that circulated inside their borders, and they had their own codes of procedure and law, though they were administered in patterns that resembled those at the center. The domains were subordinate to the bakufu, but they were not taxed, except as their metropolitan estates, guard duties, and contributions to shogunal projects depleted their resources.

Throughout all Japan the farmers remained disarmed. The village was almost a world apart, a self-contained community ruled by its land-holding farmers who selected local elders and met in councils to discuss common problems. Its contact with the samurai world came at the county magistrate’s office, where tax assessments were levied on the village as a unit and allocated by the elders. Village headmen, whether hereditary, appointed, or elected, were the fulcrum of political power; they bargained with the samurai authorities at the county seat. They were likely to be held responsible for whatever happened in the village, and in case of emergency it was they who would present protests and lead protestors.

The economic role and needs of the castle towns, and especially of the metropolitan centers, brought decisive social change as the Tokugawa peace continued. A resourceful class of townsmen catered to the needs of urban samurai. They ranged from great concessionaires who managed the transport and sale of rice, transfer of coin, and production and sale of the ever growing needs of the cities to petty tradesmen who lived on the edge of poverty. A popular culture of prints, books, and theater developed, not only in the bakufu’s great urban centers,

<sup>5</sup> Marius B. Jansen, *China in the Tokugawa World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

but on smaller scale in the castle towns of the domains. In the eighteenth century daimyo schools for domain samurai began to dot the land; with them came private academies for commoners able to afford instruction, and parish schools for the sons, and often the daughters, of commoners.

Warrior rule had come full circle. Centuries of peace brought a transformation and bureaucratization of the samurai class, who began as full-time fighters and ended as an underemployed peacetime army of occupation. Overall, the samurai share of the national produce became relatively smaller, until many of the commoners, once scorned by Hideyoshi, seemed to match or surpass all but the senior ranks in confidence and education. Samurai moralists felt obliged to explain their special position in society by an emphasis on duty and morality. At upper levels military perquisites continued, and samurai contempt for “stupid commoners” (*gumin*), as the stock phrase had it, shielded awareness that they were dependent on their labor. In the nineteenth century a renewed sense of foreign danger helped rekindle warrior consciousness and samurai spirit, but once it was clear that Japan’s structure of society and government was incapable of responding to the West the Meiji state disarmed the samurai and armed the commoners as conscripts for the imperial cause.

Warrior values, directed now toward the sovereign, remained central to the ethical code of modern Japan. For a decade samurai malcontents threatened the stability of the Meiji government, but once it was secure its leaders, most of them former samurai, designed their education and codes with an eye to diffusing among the people at large the values of loyalty and fortitude on which their ancestors had prided themselves.