



## Understanding Samurai Disloyalty

Joshua Archer  
The University of Sydney

### Abstract

Prevailing notions of samurai loyalty remain largely unopposed by Western scholarly literature. This should not be so. Minor efforts in recent scholarship have plainly shown that the stereotypical notion of samurai loyalty is fallacious. However, despite these assertions the myth remains a powerful and popular misconception. Clearly a greater scholarly undertaking is required. Through an in-depth historical analysis of samurai disloyalty, a more realistic conception of samurai behaviour may be achieved.

This article seeks to provide a foundation for further research, arguing that disloyalty was favoured among samurai to further their personal ambitions or interests. Disloyalty between medieval samurai was not always considered morally deplorable, nor was it considered divergent to ‘normal’ samurai behaviour. Moreover, it is erroneous to argue that the majority of samurai were ‘loyal,’ when in fact many were often being coerced or manipulated by those in power. Logic suggests that loyalty must be voluntary, thus the use of coercion undermines assertions of samurai loyalty.

Further scholarship should not merely seek to establish the frequency of samurai disloyalty, nor should it condemn such occurrences. It must endeavour to understand how and why disloyalty occurred.

### Keywords

Samurai, Loyalty, Betrayal, Bakufu, Zanshin (残心)

### Introduction

In 1914, Takagi Takeshi, a scholar in Japanese literature, compared ‘Western Chivalry’ to ‘Japanese Bushidō,’ summarising bushidō into twenty rather broad doctrines.<sup>1</sup> He wrote that in Western Chivalry, bravery was the highest virtue. Takagi argued that

---

<sup>1</sup> Takagi, *A Comparison of Bushi-do and Chivalry*, pp. 60-61.

whilst bravery was ‘respected’ by Japanese warriors, it was ‘always second to loyalty,’ which meant ‘whole devotion to the [feudal] lord.’<sup>2</sup> This notion of the loyal samurai warrior has remained quite popular, even among some modern scholars. It is however, completely without basis in fact.

## Explaining Disloyalty

One might contend that the most obvious theme to permeate medieval samurai history is not loyalty, but disloyalty. I shall show that lawlessness and treachery were in fact crucial strategic elements used by samurai to establish each military government. Moreover, examples of such behaviour cannot be limited to the few who usurped power for their own ends. Those who took power by force were acutely aware that any of their subordinates might react in kind if allowed too much power and autonomy. This brutal reality challenges popular misconceptions of loyalty, and undermines the contention that the ‘way of the warrior’ is anything like the stereotypical notion in Nitobé’s *Bushidō*.<sup>3</sup> In seeking to correct the stereotypical conception of bushidō, recent scholarship has stressed that it cannot be considered the standard medieval samurai ideology.<sup>4</sup> Frequent examples of betrayal and deceit run contrary to such ideology. The term ‘traitor,’ however, is loaded with negative imagery. One must acknowledge that this is merely a matter of perspective. Thomas Conlan explains that use of the term ‘turncoat’ by James Murdock may be erroneous, because the stigma associated with the word did not necessarily exist for samurai whose ‘loyalties shifted.’<sup>5</sup> Thus we cannot assume that ‘treachery’ among samurai was seen at the time as morally deviant behaviour. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that treachery/defection was at times considered a good strategy in either war or politics. To this regard, Friday clearly asserts that the prevailing ‘notion that certain sorts of tactics might be “fair” while others were “unfair” was... all but extraneous to *bushi* [warrior] culture.’<sup>6</sup> While loyalty is often considered synonymous with the ‘rules’ of bushidō, analysis of historical texts show that such ‘rules’ did not completely manifest until the peacetime of the Tokugawa era, whereupon the subject known as bushidō became one of debate. Moreover, it seems that governing powers found it difficult to inspire loyalty among samurai for any significant period of time until the Tokugawa period. Even then, the bakufu went to considerable effort to enforce ‘loyalty,’ perhaps the most prominent example being the *sankin kōtai* system

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>3</sup> Nitobé Inazo, *Bushidō: The Soul of Japan*.

<sup>4</sup> Popularised romantic conceptions of the bushidō ideal are fast losing favour with prominent scholars of Japanese history, particularly among medieval historians who, for many years, have been trying to dispel such fallacious notions. Here, I refer particularly to Karl F. Friday, ‘Bushidō or Bull? A Medieval Historian’s Perspective on the Imperial Army and the Japanese Warrior Tradition’, pp. 339-349, and also to G. Cameron Hurst, III, ‘Death, Honour and Loyalty: the Bushidō Ideal’, pp. 511-527.

<sup>5</sup> Conlan, *State of War: The Violent Order of Fourteenth-Century Japan*, p. 142.

<sup>6</sup> Friday, *Samurai, Warfare and the State in Early Medieval Japan*, p. 145.



(alternate attendance system).<sup>7</sup> This ensured, among other things, that the family and heir of rival *daimyō* (great lords) were kept hostage in Edo by the Tokugawa regime. For this reason, I use the term ‘loyalty’ very loosely, since it makes little sense to say someone complies because they are loyal, when in fact they are being manipulated and controlled. Furthermore, Hurst notes that if loyalty to one’s lord had been held in the extreme, to the point where all warriors were prepared to commit *junshi* (suicide) when their lord died, ‘Japan would soon have been bereft of warriors.’<sup>8</sup> We must therefore temper our conception of samurai loyalty.

In considering incidents of treachery/defection, I shall briefly examine the proposition by Sakaiya Taichi that when the typical sixteenth century warrior switched sides, he was considered in a manner analogous to the modern baseball player who is traded into a new team. This comparison, I will argue, fails to properly acknowledge the political and physical risks involved in defecting, or in betraying one’s lord. It also fails to account for the lack of security for vassals who do maintain loyalty to their lord. This lack of security was sustained by a distinct, and undeniable mistrust among the warrior class. Loyalty may have existed as an ideal, however in reality, samurai leaders did not often trust their subordinates. Since a ‘loyal warrior’ implies by definition, that he is ‘trustworthy,’ we must seriously consider this issue. I will then discuss a warrior practise that is largely ignored by scholars, called *zanshin*.<sup>9</sup> There are good grounds to suggest that the practise of *zanshin* (alertness) indicates that warriors were conditioned to have an important lack of trust in their surroundings, and of the people they encountered. By its very existence then, *zanshin* undermines the theory of warrior loyalty. Samurai were trained to expect betrayal. I shall provide examples from the war tales that, whilst often seen by scholars for their tragic circumstance or celebration of one virtue or another, demonstrate the importance of this crucial alertness, and of maintaining a distinct lack of trust for both friends and enemies. Following this, I will briefly elaborate to include the decisive factors involved in the numerous ‘crisis periods’ in Japan’s history. Starting with the rise of the Kamakura bakufu, I will demonstrate that deception, lawlessness and treachery were considered legitimate means to overthrow the ruling elite at the time, culminating in *gekokujo jidai*, an age of ‘mastery of the high by the low.’<sup>10</sup>

In his essay entitled ‘Debunking the Myth of Loyalty,’ Sakaiya Taichi sums up the code of the sixteenth century samurai as being ‘for the team.’<sup>11</sup> This is to say that samurai loyalties were dictated only by their individual affiliations at the time, which

7 The sankin kōtai system required that daimyō spend alternate years living in Edo and their home province. The daimyō’s family and heir were required to always remain in the capital as hostages.

8 Hurst, ‘Death, Honour and Loyalty: the Bushidō Ideal,’ p. 520.

9 残心 (Often translated as ‘remaining mind.’)

10 Berry, Hideyoshi, p. 26.

11 Sakaiya, ‘Debunking the Myth of Loyalty,’ p. 22.

were constantly subject to change without ‘any ethical premise that one cannot serve two masters.’<sup>12</sup> By this, Sakaiya seems to argue that samurai were interested in serving their own interests, in as much as they served their lord at any given time.<sup>13</sup> In comparing the medieval samurai to a baseball player, Sakaiya fails to consider two things. The first is that samurai were never ‘traded’ as baseball players are, they were either outright traitors or defectors, depending on one’s perspective. The other point is that simply because a samurai switched sides, did not necessarily mean he would ‘give his all to his new team and give no thought to “yesterday’s friends.”’<sup>14</sup> The hesitation of Kobayakawa Hideaki during the battle of Sekigahara (1600) is one such example.<sup>15</sup>

The baseball analogy, though interesting, fails to demonstrate the full point, it fails to illustrate the politics of treachery/defection. A baseball player does not risk his life when being traded to another team. Neither would he have much reason to hesitate in his actions once traded, he merely plays the game. If one would persist with an analogy, a better one may be the position of a modern parliamentarian in a Westminster style parliament who chooses to ‘cross the floor’ of the parliamentary chamber during a crucial division. In most such cases, members who choose to cross the floor may, or may not still be accepted in their own party, nor will they always be supported by the other. The Australian Labor Party, for instance, has set strong precedent for suspending such members.<sup>16</sup> Obviously, this analogy still fails to completely encapsulate the danger. The medieval samurai took big risks whenever they decided to defect, or betray their lord. While a parliamentarian who crosses the floor may well risk his or her career, a samurai risked his land, his status, and possibly his life. Many times, those willing to betray their lord and join another were welcomed. Yet, it remains difficult to trust a traitor, no matter where his current loyalties seem to lie. For example, Oda Nobunaga ‘counselled’ Shibata Katsuie on the ‘virtues of being a samurai and on the importance of Shibata’s service to Nobunaga,’ as a warning, based on the fact Shibata had previously ‘betrayed his lord.’<sup>17</sup> Conlan outlines the danger of defection during the fourteenth century as being particularly linked to timing. Conlan shows that when Ashikaga Takauji made offers ‘enticing’ rivals to defect, those who responded, such as Yūki Chikatomō, were received well and rewarded. Not so for those who chose to surrender or defect when they realised too late their defeat was at hand. When one surrendered to another (*kōsan*),

12 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

13 This point becomes clear in context. Sakaiya goes on to mention the trend among students who are keen to find a job in the civil service, major trading company or financial institution because they are looking for jobs that ensure security and guaranteed lifetime employment. Other jobs are not as sought after because they will not necessarily be as secure. Students appear to think ‘they will be safe as long as their employer does not go broke.’ Ergo, the students are loyal to the company because it offers them lifetime employment, security and wellbeing. Thus they serve two masters, their employer, and themselves. See Sakaiya, ‘Debunking the Myth of Loyalty,’ p. 23.

14 Sakaiya, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

15 Kobayakawa appeared to side with Ishida Mitsunari, yet had secretly pledged his allegiance to Tokugawa Ieyasu. When the time came for Kobayakawa to act, he was hesitant. He had been promised reward by both sides. Tokugawa Ieyasu had to ‘inspire’ Kobayakawa to attack Ishida’s forces, by firing at Kobayakawa.

16 Parliament of Australia, Department of Parliamentary Services, Parliamentary Library, *Crossing the Floor in the Federal Parliament 1950 – August 2004*.

17 See Wakita, ‘The Emergence of the State in Sixteenth-Century Japan: From Oda to Tokugawa,’ p. 363, see also n39 pp. 363–364.



the 'law of surrender' (*kōsan no hō*) dictated that the *kōsannin* (one who surrenders) risked losing half of his homelands (*honryō*). This, writes Conlan, was a 'set rule' that was 'more in breach than in practice' (in other words, whilst tentatively considered a rule, in most circumstances it was rarely followed), yet was applied to Sōma Tanehira, who was denied half of his land when he 'waited too long to switch sides' and 'had not surrendered his weapons in accordance with the custom of *kōsan no hō*'.<sup>18</sup> However, Conlan also points out that the more power a samurai wielded, the more likely that he would be able to switch sides without major consequence.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, while switching sides was not uncommon among medieval samurai, it obviously involved considerable risk. The risk, however, would often be worth it for those who ensured they joined the winning side in a battle.

Being on the winning side, however, should not necessarily be equated with 'full security.' Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616), victor of the Battle of Sekigahara, could not feel totally secure in the 'loyalty' of his men. As a result of his mistrust, Ōkubo Tadachika, a senior bakufu official whose family had been long-time vassals to the Tokugawa house, was arrested and confined due to 'close contacts with more powerful daimyō of the west country [these were powerful daimyō in the western regions of Japan, not yet completely under Tokugawa leadership].'<sup>20</sup> Once Ieyasu had established the Tokugawa shogunate, his son Tokugawa Hidetada (1579-1632) and his grandson Tokugawa Iemitsu (1604-1651), continued the Tokugawa reign. They too, held great mistrust for their vassals. In 1619, the 'purge of rival leaders began,' ousting powerful rival daimyō houses regardless of the service they had rendered to the Tokugawa.<sup>21</sup> Not even the closest vassals to the shogunate, the *fudai* daimyō, 'could be confident of evading punishment' if they incurred the bakufu's 'displeasure.'<sup>22</sup> The system of 'loyalty' then, could often be very circumstantial, and the Tokugawa bakufu exercised a great deal of effort to manipulate their vassals, aware that even their closest allies may yet turn against them. For example, during the Muromachi period (1336-1467), Imagawa Ryōshun (1326-1430) had attempted to enforce his own harsh brand of loyalty by cutting down Shōni Fuyusuke during a banquet on the charge of 'duplicity and disloyalty.'<sup>23</sup> This occurred while Ryōshun was leading a military campaign against his enemies. As a result, a number of his supporters defected, adding to the forces

18 Conlan, *State of War*, pp. 160-161. This practise is also dealt with briefly in John Whitney Hall, 'Japan's Sixteenth-Century Revolution', p. 12.

19 Conlan, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

20 Bolitho, *Treasures Among Men: The Fudai Daimyō in Tokugawa Japan*, p. 5.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 9. Even vassal houses that had supported Tokugawa Ieyasu in major battles were targeted, and their houses eliminated as a potential threat, such as Fukushima Masanori and the son of Katō Kiyomasa.

23 Conlan, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

Ryōshun already opposed. Those who remained sought greater compensation for their troubles, and in the end Ryōshun's entire offensive 'collapsed.'<sup>24</sup>

Whilst it was consistently vital (especially during the sixteenth century) for elite samurai to '[surround] himself with skilled strategists and fighters,'<sup>25</sup> it is clear that by at least this time, vassals were often not trusted and that ruling powers sought to control, and curtail their power. During this period, Alessandro Valignano noted that the Japanese people had 'meagre loyalty.'

They rebel... whenever they have a chance, either usurping [their rulers] or joining up with their enemies. Then they about-turn and declare themselves friends again, only to rebel once more when the opportunity presents itself; yet this sort of conduct does not discredit them at all. As a result, none of the lords (or very few of them) are secure in their domains... Japan was divided up among so many usurping barons... each one trying to grab for himself as much territory as he can.<sup>26</sup>

João Rodrigues made similar observations.

The only authority or law was military might... treachery was rampant and nobody trusted his neighbour. Often the most influential servants would murder their own lord and join up in league with other more powerful men in order to be confirmed in the possession of their territory... A man could not trust his neighbour and always kept his weapons close at hand... Every man [remained] in his house like a petty king and recognising no superior so long as he could defend himself.<sup>27</sup>

Thus Katsumata observes, 'the extension and consolidation of military power by Sengoku daimyō, however, was impossible without the establishment of new lord-vassal ties,' which were 'extremely unstable.'<sup>28</sup> Daimyō issued *kahō* (house laws) to address these problems, the most pertinent among these are the *kashindan* (retainer) control laws. In extreme cases, any transgression of the *kashindan* control laws was considered to be disloyalty.<sup>29</sup> Katsumata argues that the daimyō tried to establish an 'authoritarian power structure' by transmuting 'obligations of loyalty felt by retainers' towards the group they belonged,<sup>30</sup> to obligations toward the *kokka* ('state' or 'polity,' in particular the realm

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.

<sup>25</sup> Hurst, *op. cit.*, p. 518.

<sup>26</sup> Alessandro Valignano, cited in Cooper, (ed.). *They Came to Japan: An Anthology of European Reports on Japan, 1543-1640*, p. 46.

<sup>27</sup> João Rodrigues, cited in Cooper, *They Came to Japan*, p. 31.

<sup>28</sup> Katsumata, 'The Development of Sengoku Law', p. 105.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>30</sup> Traditionally, Japanese have been reared to adhere to a collective mindset. The apparent homogeneous nature of Japanese society has persisted, lending to Japanese assertions of uniqueness, and is today most prominently discussed in the genre called *Nihonjinron* (theories on the Japanese). For an extensive overview of the variety and scope of *Nihonjinron*, see Befu, *Hegemony and Homogeneity: An Anthropological Analysis of Nihonjinron*, especially chapter two,



the daimyō controlled).<sup>31</sup> Using their power over the *kokka*, a daimyō would attempt to manipulate his retainer's loyalties by having them focused on the land he controlled, thus seeking to legitimise his rule by claiming that it is for the *kōgi* (public interest), and that for this sake, retainers should 'sacrifice personal interest.'<sup>32</sup> It is imperative to note that this 'public' good was, according to Berry, 'defined and benevolently bestowed by the powerful upon a subject public.'<sup>33</sup>

The 'unification regimes' of powerful warlords, Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598), and later Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616), eventually ended the Sengoku, or warring states era. They 'defined security as their mandate,' and they proved to be 'politically aggressive... in only one arena: peacekeeping.'<sup>34</sup> The unifiers introduced laws to achieve such effect, legitimising their rule on the principle of *kōgi*. A comparable term, which had been used by the Ashikaga shoguns and was then appropriated by Oda Nobunaga, was *tenka* ('all under heaven'), meaning the affairs of the realm, of which Nobunaga placed himself in charge.<sup>35</sup> Using the banner *tenka fubu* (the realm subjected to the military), Nobunaga set out to prove that his *tenka* was the prime authority, 'a universal public order under his own aegis, replacing the dilapidated system of the Ashikaga shogunate.'<sup>36</sup> Asao Naohiro notes that, 'subordinate daimyō were well aware that this assertion of "tenka" by Nobunaga served their own interests, and were therefore willing to accept him as the "official ruling authority" (*kōgi*).'<sup>37</sup> Later, Hideyoshi was able to make a similar play, ascribing the terms 'tenka' and 'kōgi' to himself. Berry asserts that Hideyoshi was able to use the mistrust among the daimyō, ruling for the 'public good,' and by punishing traitors on the basis that this made alliances more stable, and thus protected the realm. The 'genius' of *kōgi*, argues Berry, is that it now linked 'self-interest to a new and broad philosophy of rule.'<sup>38</sup> *Kōgi*, then, was not used just for the 'public interest,' but appropriated by the powerful to legitimate and assert their rule. This blurred perceived lines of cleavage between 'public interest,' and the person of the ruler. Thus retainers were asked to sacrifice their own personal interests in 'loyalty' to the *kokka*, for the benefit of the *kōgi*, and this 'kōgi' was the ruler himself.<sup>39</sup>

---

'The Nature of the Beast.'

31 Katsumata, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

32 Berry, 'Public Peace and Private attachment: *The Goals and Conduct of Power in Early Modern Japan*', p. 248.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 269. Berry also warns that we should not read into the term 'public' too deeply by contrasting it with ostensibly 'private' interests, yet the distinction is not particularly relevant to this discussion, and so as not to confuse the issue has been omitted.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 242. Due to length constraints, it is not possible to analyse all laws introduced in great detail. However, Berry deals with these laws in the article cited. For discussion of laws and practises that pertain to ranks and titles and their associated authority, see Wakita, 'The Emergence of the State in Sixteenth-Century Japan.' For a good overview of the period, see Katsumata, 'The Development of Sengoku Law.' For a record of the medieval laws in English, see John Carey Hall, *Japanese Feudal Law*.

35 Elison, 'The Cross and the Sword: Patterns of Momoyama History', p. 64.

36 Fujiki, 'The Political Posture of Oda Nobunaga', p. 151.

37 Asao Naohiro, cited in Katsumata, 'The Development of Sengoku Law', p. 120.

38 Berry, *Hideyoshi*, pp. 158-159.

39 It is important to note, however, that authorities did not completely ignore the concept of *kōgi* for the manner it was intended, as the public interest. McClain argues that on the basis of *kōgi*, the Tokugawa bakufu was obliged to respond to the demands of the people in Edobashi after the 1657 fires. The

Before we leave this subject, it is worth noting that Sengoku daimyō were constantly issuing laws against ‘treachery’ in the *kahō*, and were constantly promoting loyalty as an ideal. Sakaiya notes that though ‘a certain quality is considered desirable is no guarantee that it actually prevails.’<sup>40</sup> Hurst leaps on this statement, pointing out that ‘the frequency with which warrior codes stress the virtue of loyalty is due precisely to the fact that it *did not* obtain in the violent “world without center” [a reference to the sengoku era].’<sup>41</sup> As has been shown above, a ‘sure’ loyalty did not exist. Even if a retainer were ostensibly ‘loyal,’ his lord would not necessarily trust him. It remained important that the retainer was completely dependant on his lord, and feared his power.

### **Zanshin: Constant Alertness**

Key to understanding samurai disloyalty is understanding the attitude warriors held towards betrayal. The clear sense of mistrust among samurai is starkly evident through their martial philosophy and exercise. The practise of *zanshin* involves maintaining a high level of awareness at all times. Though a variety of literature on martial philosophy and practise has survived, the practise of *zanshin* is virtually ignored by scholars. This dismissal is a grave mistake. In its very essence, *zanshin* implies a severe mistrust of ones surroundings. Not only has the practise been preserved in writing, but has survived in the teaching of *koryū* (‘ancient’ or ‘classical’) martial arts styles today, such as *Yagyū Shinkage-ryū* and the *Yagyū Shingan-ryū* branches.<sup>42</sup> *Zanshin* has also been incorporated into other *iai*jutsu schools (sword schools), and to some lesser extent, other modern versions of *budō* (modern, often sports-based martial arts).<sup>43</sup> Diane Skoss argues that *koryū* styles ‘can be thought of as living history, preserving principles of combat and details of etiquette of an era long past.’<sup>44</sup> Friday, aware of the lack of scholarly attention given to *bugei ryūha* (martial arts schools), states that ‘in their neglect of samurai martial training, scholars have missed out on an important opportunity.’<sup>45</sup> Friday’s book *Legacies of the Sword* is clearly an attempt to resolve this problem, yet unfortunately

---

shogunate ‘created mechanisms that allowed voices from below to be heard,’ in order to maintain a practical, and legitimated authority. See McClain, ‘Edobashi: Power, Space and Popular Culture in Edo,’ p. 131.

40 Sakaiya, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

41 Hurst, ‘Death, Honour and Loyalty: the Bushidō Ideal,’ p. 518. (Emphasis by Hurst).

42 Traditionally, *koryū* schools are notorious for jealously guarding their traditions and teachings. *Koryū* styles have been kept within close family circles, often select students by invitation only (one cannot simply ‘sign up’), thus limiting the scope for outsiders to alter the art. For example, *Yagyū Shingan-ryū Heihōjutsu* (from the Sendai line of *Yagyū Shingan-ryū*, which still practises armoured techniques) has only very recently extended its normal practise by allowing non-Japanese to practise the art (still by invitation only), as well as supporting overseas schools (in Europe and in Australia). Nevertheless, debates continue to rage as to the validity of certain would-be *koryū* styles, and the question of authenticity is often brought up. Essentially however, it is unlikely that fundamental doctrines have drastically changed in the official *koryū* schools, though one could not deny that techniques may have been slightly altered, as a natural progression of learning and development. Karl Friday offers interesting comments to this debate, see Friday, ‘The Whole Legitimacy Thing,’ see also Friday, *Legacies of the Sword*, pp. 17-18.

43 It is to a ‘lesser extent’ because *zanshin* is more often regarded in modern martial arts as an awareness that is maintained directly after an opponent is struck, thrown down, or defeated. To samurai, *zanshin* implied more than just this.

44 Skoss (ed.), *Koryū Bujutsu*, p. 11. Diane Skoss, and her husband Meik Skoss are authorities on the subject of *koryū*, and are well known in the martial arts community. Meik was a contemporary of the late Donn F. Draeger. They are not scholars per se, yet have a good grasp of the classical martial traditions and should not be ignored.

45 Friday, *Legacies of the Sword*, p. 2.





falls somewhat short of a completely objective analysis. It is focused primarily on the *Kashima-Shinryū*, for which Friday holds a *menkyo kaiden* license (license of total transmission, allowing the bearer to officially teach the style), and is a certified *shihan* (master and model).<sup>46</sup> Whilst *Legacies of the Sword* tries to demonstrate the overall benefit that study of the *koryū* styles can lend to our knowledge of history, it is a volume too tightly focused, and does not explicitly mention the practise of *zanshin* or its wider implications. Friday does mention *zanshin* (although not by name) in his recent work *Samurai, Warfare and the State in Early Medieval Japan*, stating:

The idea that a samurai must be ever on guard, always prepared for, always expecting, an attack is expressed frequently in early modern commentaries on Japanese martial art or *bushidō*; it may be this sort of philosophy that is responsible for the apparent lack of sportsmanship in Japanese warfare.<sup>47</sup>

It is unfortunate that Friday does not capitalise on this issue to say more, since *zanshin* reveals important distinctions in samurai attitude, with wider applications than purely tactical methods. Ursula Lytton does mention *zanshin* once in her article concerning *kyūdō* ('way of the bow,' Japanese archery), yet refers to it only as 'the remaining form of mind and body,' a stage that exists after the arrow has been released.<sup>48</sup> This does not provide a full explanation of what *zanshin* really is, or was thought to be.

Donn F. Draeger and Gordon Warner argue that *happō zanshin*, awareness in all directions, was 'not only a battlefield necessity for the warrior but was also maintained on a round-the-clock basis.'<sup>49</sup> An example of how this was demonstrated while bowing can be seen as follows.

In recognition of proper rules of etiquette in greeting others the warrior might make his bow either in *ritsurei* (standing) or *zarei* (kneeling-sitting) fashion but more likely from a semi-crouching posture. When appearing before a superior, he crouched down with his right knee touching the ground or floor, a posture implying that he had no aggressive intentions, since a sword worn or carried at his left side would be difficult to bring into instant action from that position. But the warrior might also choose to crouch down on his left knee in *iai-goshi* posture [right knee raised slightly, both feet well under buttocks]. This posture announced his mistrust of the person or persons whom he faced

<sup>46</sup> To a large extent, Friday's intention was to focus on the *Kashima-Shinryū*, primarily through participation. Though his close affiliation with the school has no doubt been the cause of his focus, and thus lack of certain objectivity, this is not necessarily a bad thing. It is honestly to be expected, and Friday's close association with the school adds credibility to the book as a study of the *Kashima-Shinryū*. However, *Legacies of the Sword* does not cover as wide an arc as perhaps the work could have done, had Friday investigated *koryū* traditions by incorporating a broader basis to his research.

<sup>47</sup> Friday, *Samurai, Warfare and the State in Early Medieval Japan*, p. 144.

<sup>48</sup> Lytton, 'Aspects of Dual Symbolic Classification: Right and Left in a Japanese Kyū-Dōjō', p. 286.

<sup>49</sup> Draeger and Warner, *Japanese Swordsmanship: Technique and Practice*, p. 56.

and served as fair warning to them that his *zanshin* was unbroken. In all cases, when crouching down, standing, or sitting, the warrior took great care to bow only so low as to maintain visual contact with his surroundings.<sup>50</sup>

It is important to consider the practise of *zanshin* in context. An important tactic used by medieval samurai was to ambush his enemy. This was done by feigning goodwill towards him, showing ‘much affection and familiarity, laughing and joking with him.’ They then wait until their enemy is ‘completely off his guard,’ and attack him with their sword, then calmly acting as if ‘nothing had happened.’<sup>51</sup> João Rodrigues had observed such behaviour:

They reserve treachery for affairs of diplomacy and war in order not to be deceived themselves... when they wish to kill a person by treachery (a strategem [*sic*] often employed to avoid many deaths), they put on a great pretence by entertaining him with ever sign of love and joy—and then in the middle of it all, off comes his head.<sup>52</sup>

The strategy of deception fostered the need for *zanshin*. Deception may seem ‘unfair,’ yet was little different to attitudes concerning actual combat. John Rogers demonstrates that the Western concept of a ‘fair fight,’ where each combatant is purposely armed with exactly the same weapon, did not really exist in Japan. Instead, ‘the Japanese model sees fairness in each swordsman being allowed to maximise his advantages.’<sup>53</sup> Thus, if one warrior decided to enter a duel with a short sword, his opponent may wield a longer sword allowing him to slay the first warrior at a distance. It was either bad luck for the first warrior if he had intended to fight under those circumstances, or poor planning if he had not, and had simply been caught at the disadvantage.

An ambush may occur at any time, thus Yagyū Munenori warns his readers to constantly maintain *zanshin*:

Even when you are sitting indoors, first look up, then look left and right, to see if there is anything that might fall from above. When seated by a door or screen, take note of whether it might not fall over. If you happen to be in attendance near nobles of high rank, be aware of whether something unexpected might happen. Even when you are going in and out a door, don’t neglect attention to the going out and going in, always keeping aware.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>51</sup> Alessandro Valignano, cited in Cooper (ed.), *They Came to Japan*, p. 45.

<sup>52</sup> João Rodrigues, cited in Cooper (ed.), *They Came to Japan*, p. 45.

<sup>53</sup> Rogers, ‘Arts of War in Times of Peace. Swordsmanship in *Honchō Bugei Shōden*, Chapter 6,’ p. 177.

<sup>54</sup> Yagyū, ‘Martial Arts: the Book of Family Traditions. Book 3: No Sword,’ p. 89. There are a number of stories concerning Yagyū Munenori, praising his flawless *zanshin*. In one such story, the shogun and Yagyū Munenori are among those watching a Noh performance with an actor named Kanze Sakon, who was reputed to have great concentration and *zanshin*. The shogun asked Munenori to observe Kanze’s *zanshin*, to see if it was ever broken. During the play, for



The use of deception and the practise of ‘maximising the advantage’ was considered by the samurai to be valid, fair, and essentially good strategy (*heihō*). Concerning the strategies employed by Miyamoto Musashi, Cleary writes that they ‘are in themselves amoral, from the point of view of the art of war.’<sup>55</sup> Famous stories of Musashi’s duels show that he would often implement ‘deceptive’ strategies. For example, on one occasion he arrived early for a duel and hid in a tree. When his opponent arrived, Musashi ambushed him by jumping down and killing his opponent. On another occasion, Musashi arrived late to a duel, allowing his opponent to grow restless over time and thus, easier to defeat in battle. On both occasions, Musashi attacked when his opponent’s *zanshin* was weak. Similarly, night attacks are commonly found in the war tales. Varley describes a discussion found in the *Hōgen Monogatari*, whereupon the famous warrior Minamoto no Tametomo ‘proclaims that no strategy in warfare is superior to the night attack (*youchi*).’<sup>56</sup> According to Draeger and Warner:

Whether or not the warrior-enemy was ready for combat was immaterial, inasmuch as it was the professional warrior’s duty to be prepared at all times for combat. Any lapse of alertness (*zanshin*) in an enemy was recognised as a just opportunity for dealing him a fatal and deserved blow in retribution for his failure to carry out his manifest professional duty.<sup>57</sup>

As mentioned, it was common practice for samurai to ‘always [keep] his weapons close at hand.’<sup>58</sup> This was both a matter of mistrust, and one of maintaining *zanshin*. It is common to find incidents described in the war tales where a warrior is caught without *zanshin*, though this point is often not the focus of the narrative. In many cases, scholars who have been focused on the more romantic elements in the war tales have failed to read between the lines.

One story worth considering is found in Ihara Saikaku’s *Buke Giri Monogatari*, first published in 1688. The first story from the third volume recounts the travels of two samurai, Takeshima and Takitsu. Travelling home from Edo, the pair rent a boat, and as they cast off, are joined by an older samurai, a child, and a monk. Takeshima insulted Takitsu (for the second time during their journey), and Takitsu challenged Takeshima to a duel right there on the boat. Takeshima accepted the challenge, yet when he reached for his sword, it was gone. Takeshima had been caught without *zanshin*. Takitsu waited

---

a brief moment, Kanze loses his concentration when passing near a pillar, and he sees a man smiling at him in the audience, as if he has seen something that others had not. Of course, he later discovers that it was lord Yagyū, who had noticed this brief lapse. See Yagyū, *The Life Giving Sword*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>55</sup> Cleary, *The Japanese Art of War: Understanding the Culture of Strategy*, p. 80.

<sup>56</sup> Varley, *Warriors of Japan as Portrayed in the War Tales*, p. 53. In this particular situation, however, Yorinage, a court official, overrules Tametomo and the Sutoku army waits until daybreak to engage. This decision proves to be disastrous, and their enemies, fighting for Goshirakawa (including Taira no Kiyomori) attack the Sutoku army before dawn, defeating them decisively.

<sup>57</sup> Draeger and Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>58</sup> João Rodrigues, cited in Cooper, *They Came to Japan*, p. 31.

briefly, yet there was nothing to be done. The sword was lost. Takeshima felt deeply ashamed. He expects the ‘deserved blow in retribution for his failure,’ he even tries to kill himself. The older samurai, however, demonstrates good *zanshin*. He was distinctly aware that the monk was missing a gourd from which he had been eating peppers earlier, and thus proves that the monk had stolen the sword. The gourd was later discovered in some reeds among the shallow waters. Sure enough, hiding beneath the surface of the water was the missing sword, attached to the gourd, which acted as a float. The younger samurai were amazed by his keen awareness, his *zanshin*. By solving this mystery, the older samurai was able to reconcile Takeshima and Takitsu.<sup>59</sup>

The *Heike Monogatari* (written circa early thirteenth century), records numerous accounts where warriors used deception for personal gain, showing the importance of awareness and mistrust. A good example is found in chapter 9.13. ‘The Death of Etchū no Zenji,’ where Etchū no Zenji Moritoshi (from the Heike army) battles Inomata no Koheiroku Noritsuna (from the Genji army). At first Noritsuna is bested by Moritoshi, and is completely at his mercy. Noritsuna employs a tactic that sounds utterly shameful to Moritoshi, he begs for his life. Noritsuna persuades Moritoshi to spare his life, promising to help save Heike men from execution in the future, since the Genji were winning the war. Moritoshi relents, convinced it would be disgraceful to behead Noritsuna after he had already surrendered. Shortly thereafter, Noritsuna’s friend Hitomi no Shirō arrived on horseback.

At first, Moritoshi tried to keep an eye on both men, but the one on horseback engaged his full attention as he gradually approached, and he lost track of Noritsuna. Noritsuna seized his opportunity.<sup>60</sup>

Moritoshi was right to be wary of both men, yet when his *zanshin* was focused only on Shirō, Noritsuna quickly killed him in a surprise attack. Once he had the opportunity to kill his foe, the bargain struck only moments before meant nothing to Noritsuna. For his efforts, ‘his name led that day’s list of exploits,’ and there is little doubt that he would have been well rewarded for taking the head of such an important enemy.<sup>61</sup>

In briefly considering the *Taiheki* (composed during the fourteenth century), scholars have concluded that it does not suggest any overarching theme of loyalty or trust among the warrior class. Varley notes that by the third part of the narrative, ‘Fighting is ceaseless, and those who clash with one another are seldom motivated by lofty goals. They contend for selfish ends, often ignoring the most fundamental standards

<sup>59</sup> This story is paraphrased from Callahan, Ihara Saikaku, ‘Tales of Samurai Honor: Saikaku’s Buke Giri Monogatari,’ pp. 12-15. I have drawn attention to the displays of *zanshin*.

<sup>60</sup> McCullough, *Genji and Heike: Selections from The Tale of the Genji and The Tale of the Heike*, pp. 392-393.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 393.



of civilised behaviour.<sup>62</sup> McMullen differs little in his assessment:

The authors of the *Taiheki* seem, however, less interested in questions of political legitimacy than in the professional ethos of the warrior and his conduct in battle. Loyalty is an important concern, but it is primarily parochial, professional military loyalty on the battlefield, rather than political loyalty. Loyalty may be the highest value for warriors, but the ultimate political ends to which it is extended are not necessarily subject to searching scrutiny or constraint.<sup>63</sup>

Overall, the war tales do not necessarily give the impression that samurai were overtly loyal, or trustworthy in their behaviour. This reflects the pattern of behaviour during the periods of Japanese history where the need for loyalty, in a political, as well as military sense, seems most crucial. During times of crisis, when rulers had to rely on 'loyal' supporters, samurai proved time and again that they could not be trusted to act accordingly, often seeking to gratify their own personal interests.

### Bakufu Origins: Crisis and Control

The very first military government was founded on the basis of rebellion, not on loyalty. The eastern rebel kingdom was called Tōgoku, centred at Kamakura. Tōgoku was established in 1180, and was led by the exiled Genji leader, Minamoto Yoritomo (1147-1199).<sup>64</sup> At the time, the imperial court had been dominated by Taira Kiyomori (1118-1181), who by using his position within the court as a 'personal dictatorship,' succeeded in upsetting the imperial prince, Mochihito. Prince Mochihito issued a 'call to arms' against the Taira, yet Kiyomori quickly defeated him.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, his call 'offered Yoritomo a cause in which to cloak his personal ambitions – an excuse for reasserting what he believed to be his patrimony.'<sup>66</sup> Thus Friday argues,

Yoritomo exploited his outlaw status, declaring a martial law under himself across the eastern provinces, and promising any and all who pledged to his service confirmation (under his personal guarantee) of lands and offices. At the same time, he took pains to style himself as a righteous outlaw, a champion of true justice breaking the law in order to rescue the institutions it was meant to serve.<sup>67</sup>

62 Varley, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

63 McMullen, 'Ashikaga Takauji in Early Tokugawa Thought', p. 330.

64 Hurst, 'The Kōbu Polity: Court-Bakufu Relations in Kamakura Japan', pp. 5-6.

65 Mass, 'The Early Bakufu and Feudalism', p. 124.

66 Friday, *Samurai, Warfare and the State in Early Medieval Japan*, p. 45.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Yoritomo was not fighting for ‘king and country.’ He was fighting for himself. He brooked no resistance, and even ‘recalcitrant’ family members were not free from Yoritomo’s grasp.<sup>68</sup> When the Genpei War (1180-1185) ended, Yoritomo was the undisputed champion. Those samurai who signed up under Yoritomo’s banner of alliance reaped the rewards of his success. Those who became direct vassals (*gokenin*) to Yoritomo ‘gained a critical advantage within their local communities,’ and with considerable territory conquered, enemy lands were awarded to Yoritomo’s allies as he saw fit.<sup>69</sup> The imperial government gave Yoritomo the right to appoint *shugo* (constables), and *jitō* (land stewards). Yoritomo took the title shogun (*sei-i taishōgun*, meaning ‘barbarian-suppressing general’) in 1192, adding legitimacy to his military regime. Though Mochihito’s call had been of imperial origin, Yoritomo originally showed little interest in affiliating with the court once the Taira were defeated, preferring instead to maintain his base at Kamakura.<sup>70</sup>

After Yoritomo’s death in 1199, the Hōjō family gradually took control of the Kamakura bakufu. Yoritomo’s widow Masako, known as the nun-shogun (*ama shōgun*), decided that the second Kamakura shogun, her own son Yoriie, was unfit to rule. Yoriie was estranged from the Hōjō. At Yoritomo’s insistence he had been raised by the Hiki family, and Yoriie eventually married a Hiki woman. Masako and her father, Hōjō Tokimasa, manoeuvred to have Yoriie ousted, and his allies among the Hiki family massacred.<sup>71</sup> Yoriie was later ‘brutally murdered by Tokimasa’s agents.’<sup>72</sup> In 1203, Masako’s second son, eleven-year-old Sanetomo, was then made shogun, however Tokimasa pulled the strings as a regent (*shikken*) to the shogun. Masako and Tokimasa’s son Yoshitoki, turned on Tokimasa, and in 1205 conspired to remove Tokimasa from power in favour of Yoshitoki. Sanetomo proved to be ineffectual, and was assassinated in 1219 by his ‘deranged’ nephew Kugyō (son of Yoshiie), who in turn, was executed for this crime. Souyri notes that evidence concerning this topic is vague, and aptly poses the question, ‘who manipulated Kugyō?’<sup>73</sup> The question stands, as Varley states that while many historians believe Yoshitoki to be the mastermind, there is as yet, no conclusive evidence either way.<sup>74</sup>

Ultimately in the years that followed, the Hōjō family continued their rise to prominence, establishing themselves as permanent regents to the shogunate. Duus explains that ‘the obligation to serve the “lord of Kamakura” passed from the head of the *gokenin* family to his successor, and it was through this hereditary transmission of loyalty

68 Mass, ‘The Emergence of the Kamakura Bakufu’, p. 141.

69 Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan*, p. 81.

70 Yoritomo did later take an interest in the court, yet his forays into this area proved to be more damaging to his rule than he could afford.

71 Souyri, *The World Turned Upside Down: Medieval Japanese Society*, p. 50.

72 Varley, ‘The Hōjō Family and Succession to Power’, p. 151.

73 Souyri, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

74 Varley, ‘The Hōjō Family and Succession to Power’, p. 158.



that the bakufu maintained the support of its vassals.<sup>75</sup> However, the Hōjō proceeded to ‘pick one *gokenin* family after another that appeared to be a serious competitor or threat, and destroy it.’<sup>76</sup> If the *gokenin* were truly loyal, one should think that the bakufu would trust them. However, the impression we are left with is one of power and manipulation. In this brief outline of the early Hōjō years, the Kamakura bakufu does not stand out as an organisation ruled with an ideology based on ‘loyalty,’ either from within the Hōjō family or without.

In 1331, Emperor Go-Daigo (r. 1318-31, 1333-36) launched a rebellion against the Kamakura bakufu. He failed. Kamakura mobilised a massive number of troops to quell the uprising, and Go-Daigo was exiled. Efforts by Kusunoki Masashige and Prince Moriyoshi, loyalists to Go-Daigo’s cause, continued to agitate on his behalf in Kyoto. Kamakura failed to properly mobilise against the threat, and in 1332 the Rokuhara *tandai* (an arm of the Kamakura bakufu responsible for guarding the capital) was utterly crushed.<sup>77</sup> Ashikaga Takauji, sent by Kamakura with an army to aid the Rokuhara, betrayed the bakufu by siding with Go-Daigo. Like Yoritomo, Takauji sent out messages to other warriors ‘[enticing them] to fight with promises of compensation.’<sup>78</sup> By 1333, the Kamakura bakufu was no more, and Go-Daigo took charge. Three years later, a dissatisfied Ashikaga Takauji turned on Go-Daigo, forcing him to abdicate. Takauji was then appointed the shogun by Kōmyō, the new emperor.

The early fourteenth century was a particularly violent period in Japan. The main reason for this was ‘the intense land hunger of the local warriors, who were under many pressures to increase their holdings.’<sup>79</sup> Warriors who had a number of sons were obliged to bequeath to their sons a reasonable, and equal, proportion of land. Duus explains:

When a warrior died, his property was shared by all his sons... as a result, landholdings were broken into smaller and smaller portions with each generation, and often these parcels were too small to maintain their holders in warrior status. Primogeniture or indivisible inheritance was slow in developing, and local warriors looked for other means to aggrandise their landholdings. The easiest method was to expropriate land from the estate proprietors at Kyoto... the lands of the warrior’s neighbours, or even those of his personal lord.<sup>80</sup>

Warfare was a strategy of survival. Warriors needed something tangible for their efforts.

<sup>75</sup> Duus, *Feudalism in Japan*, p. 55.

<sup>76</sup> Varley, ‘The Hōjō Family and Succession to Power,’ p. 154.

<sup>77</sup> Conlan, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> Duus, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Thus Conlan notes, 'Promises of reward underpinned fourteenth-century military power.'<sup>81</sup> The extent of 'loyalty' became subject to the extent of reward. It is for this reason that Varley states:

In historical reality, pure *kenshin* loyalty [Watsuji Tetsurō's idea of 'absolute self-sacrifice'] was impossible – except perhaps in isolated cases – because the lord/vassal relationship in warrior society was not unilateral but bilateral: A vassal served his lord as a fighting man in return for various rewards, including benefices (usually land). Warrior society would not have held together very long if warriors had simply given their existences for their lords without thought of reciprocity for themselves or their families... We can surmise from the nonexclusiveness of the relationship and the frequency of disloyalty and betrayal among warriors over the centuries... that self-sacrificing loyalty was at the very least an oft-violated ethic.<sup>82</sup>

Ashikaga Takauji was not able to dominate the network of warrior families in the same way Yoritomo had. Instead, his power was derived from 'the network of family and feudal relationships which Takauji and his successors managed to put together.'<sup>83</sup> Takauji established a 'coalition' with members of the *shugo* governors who became his 'chief vassals.'<sup>84</sup> *Shugo* then attempted to recruit as many *kokuji*n families (local samurai) to be their own private vassals as possible.<sup>85</sup> Many *shugo* were Ashikaga family members, who also held the rank of military commander, *taishō*, allowing them sufficient status in order to command *tozama* (autonomous warlords).<sup>86</sup> *Tozama* who were not appointed as *shugo*, operated as freelance warlords who refused to fight under the direction of any commander that did not have higher status than themselves.<sup>87</sup> *Tozama* that were too powerful for Takauji to dominate were recognised, however Takauji made efforts to place either a 'clansmen or close ally' next to them, and awarded both with 'joint powers of military command.'<sup>88</sup> Similarly, the powers of *shugo* may be split between different commanders, in order to weaken their overall authority.<sup>89</sup> Conlan identifies two types of lordship that developed during the fourteenth century. There were those who 'aspired to regional lordship...[by] attempt[ing] to amass lands and increase their bands of hereditary followers.'<sup>90</sup> Alternatively, there were those who styled themselves as national 'hegemonic' lords, by enticing autonomous warriors to serve them in return for

<sup>81</sup> Conlan, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>82</sup> Varley, *Warriors of Japan as Portrayed in the War Tales*, p. 32.

<sup>83</sup> Hall, 'The Muromachi Power Structure', p. 40.

<sup>84</sup> Kawai, 'Shogun and Shugo: The Provincial Aspects of Muromachi Politics', p. 65.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>86</sup> Conlan, *op. cit.*, p. 146. Eventually, the term *taishō* came to mean essentially the same thing as Ashikaga shugo. However, shugo who were not *taishō* did not command the same power.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>88</sup> Nelson, 'Bakufu and Shugo Under the Early Ashikaga', p. 80.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>90</sup> Conlan, *op. cit.*, p. 144.





‘confirmations, grants of lands [*sic*] rights, and other gifts.’<sup>91</sup> The support of autonomous warriors was ‘conditional,’ and depended on the proper rendering of rewards such as land grants, in return for service (*chūsetsu*).<sup>92</sup> However, this system could not be maintained. Hall notes that it was the ‘independent shugo ambitions that destroyed the Muromachi political system.’<sup>93</sup> The *shugo* proved more loyal to their own interests, than to the Ashikaga shogunate. The Ōnin War of 1467-1477, virtually destroyed the *shugo* class, and it was the regional *kokujin* samurai who were able to replace ‘their former shugo masters,’ becoming the daimyō that dominated the sengoku era.<sup>94</sup> Thus began the age of *gekokujiō jidai*, mastery of the high by the low.

Daimyō were still required to provide their retainers with rewards, primarily still in the form of land grants. Yet Duus states, ‘treachery was common and often profitable to vassals [who were] promised larger fiefs or stipends by the rival leaders of their lord. Despite the constant protestation that loyalty was the highest virtue, the vassalage tie was tinged with suspicion and uneasiness.’<sup>95</sup> Of the three great ‘unifiers,’ Oda Nobunaga was no exception. Nobunaga used his relationship with the Ashikaga shogun Yoshiaki to his advantage, yet when the affiliation was no longer useful, he did away with him.<sup>96</sup> The mighty Oda Nobunaga himself was felled in 1582 by one of his closest vassals, the famous traitor Akechi Mitsuhide. Berry notes that Nobunaga died ‘unlamented,’ as a kind of poetic justice.<sup>97</sup> In general, there has been a common tendency among scholars, and in popular culture, to deride Nobunaga as a tyrant. This is a gross misunderstanding, not only of Nobunaga, but also of the word ‘tyrant.’<sup>98</sup> Elison’s suggestion that Nobunaga resembles Machiavelli’s ideal prince has since inspired further academic work.<sup>99</sup> Lamers article ‘Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582): A Japanese Tyrant,’ builds on Elison’s suggestion yet seems to remain critical of Nobunaga’s ‘cruel’ policies.<sup>100</sup> Yet since then, Lamers has conducted further research.<sup>101</sup> Lamers states, quite rightly, that Nobunaga is more accurately described as a pragmatist rather than a tyrant.<sup>102</sup> In many ways, Nobunaga epitomised the perfect sengoku samurai. He was as efficient as he was powerful. He was a ruthless winner. Nobunaga’s ruthlessness drew attention to the fact that ‘only one survivor would emerge’ from the number of daimyō who vied for ‘national conquest.’<sup>103</sup>

---

91 *Ibid.*, p. 144.

92 *Ibid.*, p. 144.

93 Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

94 Kawai, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

95 Duus, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.

96 See Fujiki, ‘The Political Posture of Oda Nobunaga,’ pp. 149-162.

97 Berry, *Hideyoshi*, p. 41.

98 A tyrant, by definition, is a person who misuses the power at their disposal. Nobunaga had used conquest and brutality to assert his power, yet arguably his life was ended before he had sufficient chance to exercise a ‘tyrannical’ rule.

99 See Elison, ‘The Cross and the Sword: Patterns of Momoyama History,’ p. 58.

100 See Lamers, ‘Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582): A Japanese Tyrant,’ pp. 36-37.

101 See Lamers, *Japonius Tyrannus: The Japanese Warlord Oda Nobunaga Reconsidered*.

102 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

103 Berry, *Hideyoshi*, p. 42.

While Nobunaga's death offered the competing daimyō a reprieve, it was not a long one. His close vassal Hideyoshi Toyotomi soon capitalised on Mitsuhide's betrayal. Hideyoshi vanquished the traitor, presenting 'Mitsuhide's head before Nobunaga's dead body.'<sup>104</sup> Hideyoshi's behaviour indicates that he may have truly held a 'loyal' attitude towards Nobunaga, and his actions to this regard, gave him grounds to 'chastise' Oda rivals.<sup>105</sup> However, we must remember that Nobunaga was now dead. Whether Hideyoshi was truly acting out of 'loyalty' to Nobunaga or not is uncertain. Hideyoshi may have determined that by taking such a stance, his own political prospects may increase. Moreover, we cannot be sure that Hideyoshi would not have harboured disloyalty towards Nobunaga had the ruler yet lived. In any case, Hideyoshi was certainly not loyal to Nobunaga's memory for long. He emphatically blocked Nobunaga's sons from assuming control. Hideyoshi became the guardian of Sambōshi (Oda Hidenobu), Nobunaga's three-year-old grandson. He convinced the Oda vassals to 'take an oath of loyalty to Sambōshi,' which alleviated concerns among them that the balance of power may rapidly start to shift.<sup>106</sup> Ultimately however, it was an oath favourable to Hideyoshi, who was able to maintain control despite pressure from rival warlords Shibata Katsue and Tokugawa Ieyasu. The cadastral land surveys (*kenchi*), and Hideyoshi's policies such as freezing of the social classes, the 'sword-hunt,' prohibiting movement, and removing soldiers from their regional fiefs exemplified Hideyoshi's intentions to limit opposition to his power.<sup>107</sup> These policies made the now landless samurai more dependent upon their daimyō, and thus easier to manipulate. Berry also notes, 'to secure the obedience of his daimyo in times of crisis, Hideyoshi did not simply rely upon the general threat of military reprisal or attainder... He took bodies as sureties of the peace.'<sup>108</sup> Taking hostages was not a new practice, yet it shows that Hideyoshi still viewed many daimyō with mistrust.

After Hideyoshi's death in 1598, the council of regents he had set up to protect his six-year-old son Hideyori collapsed. In this, the regents betrayed Hideyoshi's trust, and oaths they had taken to protect Hideyori. One of the regents, Tokugawa Ieyasu, victor of the Battle of Sekigahara, soon defeated his rivals and established his own government in Edo. As mentioned above, the Tokugawa bakufu did not trust rival daimyō, be they *fudai* or *tozama*. One prominent Tokugawa policy used to maintain the loyalty of the daimyō was the *sankin kōtai* system. The system included a crucial hostage component, and bore a great financial cost to the subservient daimyō. Bolitho records that 'after vassal stipends, expenses related to sankin kōtai obligation accounted for the

---

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>107</sup> See Berry, *Hideyoshi*, pp. 99-146.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.



greatest part of the expenditure of every domain.<sup>109</sup> In many ways, it ensured that rival daimyō would never be sufficiently willing, or practically able, to challenge Tokugawa rule. The bakufu ‘had no wish to allow its permanent hostages – the wives and children of the daimyō – to leave Edo,’ and inspection barriers were set up in order to police this rule.<sup>110</sup> Jennifer Amyx has argued that the *sankin kōtai* system was one of ‘interest convergence’ based on the subsequent economic development, and ‘institutionalised trust.’<sup>111</sup> However, Amyx has neglected to note that the bakufu was a military institution, attempting to enforce military directives in order to maintain its own hegemony. The ‘unilateral coercive power’ theory that Amyx argues against is popular because it acknowledges this point appropriately. Amyx’s argument that *sankin kōtai* ‘spurred a metamorphosis from a feudal economic structure... into a capitalistic economic structure within a feudal system,’<sup>112</sup> goes unexplained, and in any case cannot negate the aforementioned point that the bakufu is, by definition, a military government.<sup>113</sup> *Sankin kōtai* was first and foremost a military directive, any economic developments were of secondary importance to the bakufu, which as explained above, maintained a high level of mistrust for its rivals. The *sankin kōtai* system was a logical step in asserting Tokugawa control, ensuring the nominal ‘loyalty’ of the daimyō.

It was the mistrust held by Hideyoshi, and later the Tokugawa, that also led to the ‘reduction of the castles of the daimyo, [and] the surveillance of their domains by spies and inspectors.’<sup>114</sup> In 1615, ‘the “one castle per province” order was announced, calling upon the daimyo to destroy all fortresses in their domains, with the exception of that in which they resided.’<sup>115</sup> Inspectors in the Tokugawa era, such as *metsuke*, were an obvious reminder of the shogunate’s authority.<sup>116</sup> We also know that the bakufu used samurai as *shinobi* (secret investigators) based on family occupation records.<sup>117</sup> The need for both ‘visible,’ and ‘invisible’ inspectors (albeit the latter were likely fewer in number), serves to highlight the effort required to maintain order post-sengoku. Regardless of how effective inspectors may have been at their job, the possibility of inspection provided a potential deterrent to any daimyō that may have considered trying to violate shogunate law.

109 Bolitho, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

110 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

111 Amyx, ‘Sankin Kotai’: Institutional Trust as the Foundation for Economic Development in the Tokugawa Era.’

112 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

113 Morris Low argues that by stimulating the growth of cities, the *sankin kōtai* system facilitated the development of ‘merchant capitalism’ based on the three types of production, ‘craft guild production; domestic industry; and the beginnings of a factory system.’ See Low, ‘Stagnation or Development: Japanese Science and Technology Before Perry’, p. 34. In any case, this still offers no direct practical gain for the daimyō who were forced to serve the Tokugawa. In fact, the daimyō often fell into bankruptcy, which undermines Amyx’s argument of ‘interest convergence.’

114 Berry, ‘Public Peace and Private attachment’, p. 247.

115 Bolitho, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

116 See for example Beerens, ‘Interview with a Bakumatsu Official’ pp. 369-398.

117 Imakita Sakubei was one such samurai, see Roberts, ‘A Petition for a Popularly Chosen Council of Government in Tosa in 1787’, p. 580.

## Conclusion

It is illogical to argue that loyalty developed as a firm ideological base among samurai during the medieval period. I have shown that behaviour to the contrary was the ‘norm’ rather than the exception, and that an undeniable mistrust permeated samurai social relations and political policy. I have argued that the samurai did not arbitrarily switch sides. Rather, switching sides achieved strategic personal and political goals for samurai, who were often keen to ensure their allegiances were personally profitable. Defection or betrayal involved substantial risk, and samurai had to minimise such risks by timing their defection carefully. Moreover, it was not always considered unethical for a warrior to change allegiances, in many cases, a samurai’s ability to switch sides freely depended on the individual power he held. Samurai lords rarely trusted their vassals, and constantly manoeuvred to place greater controls on their behaviour. During the medieval period, laws were constantly issued promoting loyalty under the pretence of *kōgi*, yet instead, it was for the ruler’s sole benefit. Samurai were often not exclusively loyal, so long as political means (i.e. defection) existed as a means to material prosperity, even though it required treachery on their part.

By introducing the combat attitude *zanshin*, I have shown that the typical boundaries of scholarly investigation can logically extend further into martial philosophy. *Zanshin* reveals the importance of a critical, perhaps even cynical state of awareness that makes greater sense of the widespread mistrust within samurai society. I have shown that the term has survived through reliable transmission in the *koryū bugei* schools, and have provided sufficient examples from primary source material where the practical ideology implicated by *zanshin* is demonstrated.

Finally, I have covered the breadth of samurai history, and highlighted that each military government was founded on the basis of rebellion and/or treachery. From the origins of Kamakura to the creation of the Tokugawa hegemony, betrayals were frequently perpetrated by samurai concerned for their own personal interest. Samurai were not always fighting from a position of greed, rather their ‘hunger’ for land was for some, a matter of family survival. As Japan became unified, samurai freedoms were eroded and greater controls were placed on their behaviour. To a large degree, this undermined autonomy that many vassals had previously held. By eroding samurai autonomy, warriors were eventually denied the ability to choose even their place of residence. In principle, this negates the existence of any true ‘loyalty,’ since loyalty inherently requires the existence of autonomous choice. Anything other than this cannot be conceived as true ‘loyalty.’ It is control.



## References

- Amyx, J. A., "Sankin Kotai": Institutional Trust as the Foundation for Economic Development in the Tokugawa Era,' (A/ PARC Working Paper, Asia-Pacific Research Center, Stanford Institute for International Studies, 1997).
- Beerens, A., 'Interview with a Bakumatsu Official: A Translation from the Kyūji Shimonroku,' *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 55, No. 3. (Autumn, 2000), pp. 369-398.
- Befu, H., *Hegemony and Homogeneity: An Anthropological Analysis of Nihonjinron* (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2001).
- Berry, M. E., *Hideyoshi*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
- Berry, M. E., 'Public Peace and Private attachment: The Goals and Conduct of Power in Early Modern Japan,' *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2. (Summer, 1986), pp. 237-271.
- Bolitho, H., *Treasures Among Men: The Fudai Daimyō in Tokugawa Japan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).
- Callahan, C. and Ihara, S., 'Tales of Samurai Honor: Saikaku's Buke Giri Monogatari,' *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 34, No. 1. (Spring, 1979), pp. 1-20.
- Cleary, T., *The Japanese Art of War: Understanding the Culture of Strategy* (Boston: Shambhala Publications Inc., 1991).
- Conlan, T. D., *State of War: The Violent Order of Fourteenth-Century Japan* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2003).
- Cooper, M. (ed.), *They Came to Japan: An Anthology of European Reports on Japan, 1543-1640* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965).
- Draeger, D. F. and Warner, G., *Japanese Swordsmanship: Technique and Practice* (New York: Weatherhill, 1982).
- Duus, P., *Feudalism in Japan*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976).
- Elison, G., 'The Cross and the Sword: Patterns of Momoyama History,' in Elison, G. and Smith, B. L. (eds.), *Warlords, Artists, and Commoners: Japan in the Sixteenth Century* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1981).
- Friday, K. F., 'Bushidō or Bull? A Medieval Historian's Perspective on the Imperial Army and the Japanese Warrior Tradition,' *The History Teacher*, Vol. 27, No. 3. (May, 1994), pp. 339-349.
- Friday, K. F., *Legacies of the Sword: The Kashima-Shinryū and Samurai Martial Culture*, with Seki Humitake (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).
- Friday, K. F., *Samurai, Warfare and the State in Early Medieval Japan* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
- Friday, K. F., 'The Whole Legitimacy Thing,' Retrieved 2 June 2007, from <http://www.koryu.com/library/kfriday1.html>.
- Fujiki, H., 'The Political Posture of Oda Nobunaga,' trans. Elison, G. in Hall, J.W. and Yamamura, K. (eds.), *Japan Before Tokugawa: Political Consolidation and Economic Growth, 1500 to 1650* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
- Hall, J. C., *Japanese Feudal Law* (Washington: University Publications of America, 1979).

- Hall, J. W., 'The Muromachi Power Structure,' in Hall, J.W. and Toyoda, T. (eds.), *Japan in the Muromachi Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).
- Hall, J. W., 'Japan's Sixteenth-Century Revolution,' in Elison, G. and Smith, B. L. (eds.), *Warlords, Artists, and Commoners: Japan in the Sixteenth Century* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1981).
- Hurst, G. C., III. 'The Kōbu Polity: Court-Bakufu Relations in Kamakura Japan,' in Mass, J. P. (ed.), *Court and Bakufu in Japan: Essays in Kamakura History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).
- Hurst, G. C., III. 'Death, Honour and Loyalty: the Bushidō Ideal,' *Philosophy East and West*, Vol 40, No. 4, Understanding Japanese Values, (Oct., 1990), pp. 511-527.
- Ikegami, E., *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).
- Katsumata, S., 'The Development of Sengoku Law,' trans. Collcutt, M., in Hall, J. W. and Yamamura, K. (eds.), *Japan Before Tokugawa: Political Consolidation and Economic Growth, 1500 to 1650* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
- Kawai, M., 'Shogun and Shugo: The Provincial Aspects of Muromachi Politics,' trans. Grossberg, K. A., in Hall, J. W. and Toyoda, T. (eds.), *Japan in the Muromachi Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).
- Lamers, J., 'Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582): A Japanese Tyrant,' *IIAS Newsletter No.13*. (Summer, 1997), pp. 36-37.
- Lamers, J., *Japonius Tyrannus: The Japanese Warlord Oda Nobunaga Reconsidered* (Leiden: Hotie Publishing, 2000).
- Low, M., 'Stagnation or Development: Japanese Science and Technology Before Perry,' *Asia-Pacific Magazine*, May 1996, pp. 33-37.
- Lytton, U., 'Aspects of Dual Symbolic Classification: Right and Left in a Japanese Kyū-Dōjō,' *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 2. (1989), pp. 277-291.
- Mass, J. P., 'The Early Bakufu and Feudalism,' in Mass, J.P. (ed.), *Court and Bakufu in Japan: Essays in Kamakura History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).
- Mass, J. P., 'The Emergence of the Kamakura Bakufu,' in Hall, J. W. and Mass, J. P. (eds.), *Medieval Japan: Essays in Institutional History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).
- McClain, J. L., 'Edobashi: Power, Space and Popular Culture in Edo,' in McClain et al (eds.) *Edo & Paris: Urban Life and the State in the Early Modern Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) pp. 105-131.
- McCullough, H. C., *Genji and Heike: Selections from The Tale of the Genji and The Tale of the Heike*, trans. McCullough, H. C. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).
- McMullen, I. J., 'Ashikaga Takauji in Early Tokugawa Thought,' in Mass, J. P. (ed.) *The Origins of Japan's Medieval World: Courtiers, Clerics, Warriors, and Peasants in the Fourteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
- Nelson, T., 'Bakufu and Shugo Under the Early Ashikaga,' in Mass, J. P. (ed.), *The Origins of Japan's Medieval World: Courtiers, Clerics, Warriors, and Peasants in the Fourteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
- Nitobé, I., *Bushidō: The Soul of Japan* (Tokyo, Japan: Teibi Publishing Company, 1907).



- Parliament of Australia, Department of Parliamentary Services, Parliamentary Library, *Crossing the Floor in the Federal Parliament 1950 – August 2004*. Research Note, 10 October 2005, no. 11, 2005–06, ISSN 1449-8456. Retrieved 29 May 2007, from <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/Pubs/RN/2005-06/06rn11.pdf>.
- Roberts, L. S., 'A Petition for a Popularly Chosen Council of Government in Tosa in 1787' *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 2. (Dec., 1997), pp. 575-596.
- Rogers, J. M., 'Arts of War in Times of Peace. Swordsmanship in *Honchō Bugei Shōden*, Chapter 6' *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 46, No. 2. (Summer, 1991), pp. 173-202.
- Sakaiya, T., 'Debunking the Myth of Loyalty' *Japan Echo*, Vol. 8, No. 2, (Spring, 1981), pp. 17-29.
- Skoss, D. (ed.), *Koryū Bujutsu: Classical Warrior Traditions of Japan, Vol. 1* (New Jersey: Koryu Books, 1997).
- Souyri, P. F., *The World Turned Upside Down: Medieval Japanese Society*, trans. Kätke Roth. (London: Pimlico, 2002).
- Takagi, T., *A Comparison of Bushi-do and Chivalry*, trans. Tsuneyoshi Matsuno. (Osaka: TM International Academy, 1984).
- Varley, H. P., 'The Hōjō Family and Succession to Power,' in Mass, J. P. (ed.), *Court and Bakufu in Japan: Essays in Kamakura History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).
- Varley, P., *Warriors of Japan as Portrayed in the War Tales* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).
- Wakita, O., 'The Emergence of the State in Sixteenth-Century Japan: From Oda to Tokugawa,' *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2. (Summer, 1982), pp. 343-367.
- Yagyū, M., 'Martial Arts: the Book of Family Traditions,' trans. Cleary, T., in Cleary, T. (ed.), *Soul of the Samurai: Modern Translations of Three Classic Works of Zen and Bushidō* (Rutland, Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2005).
- Yagyū, M., *The Life Giving Sword: Secret Teachings from the House of the Shogun*, trans. Wilson, W. S., (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2003).