

The ashikaga
(muromachi)
shogunate vs. the
minamoto (kamakura)
shogunate essay sa...



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Introduction

The theme of this paper is medieval Japan, straddling the three and a half centuries between the concluding decades of the twelfth century when the Kamakura bakufu was established and the mid-sixteenth century during which civil wars fumed following the effectual failure of the Muromachi bakafu. The chronological events and improvements of these lively centuries depict medieval Japan's polity, economy, society, and civilization, as well as its associations with its Asian neighbors. This was the period of warriors. Throughout these centuries, the power of the warrior class continued to rise, and one political result of this development was the formation of two warrior governments, or bakufu (Hall).

The Minamoto (Kamakura) Shogunate

The founding of Japan's first warrior administration, the Kamakura bakufu, characterized both a termination and an opening. Since the tenth century, an increasingly professionalized class of mounted fighting men had served in local areas as estate administrators and policemen and as officials attached to the organs of provincial governance. By the twelfth century, warriors had come to exercise a dominant share of the total volume of local government, but even after two hundred years they remained politically immature. The most exalted warriors were still only middle-level figures in hierarchies dominated by couriers and religious institutions in and near the capital. The bakufu's founding in the 1180s thus represented an initial breakthrough to power on the part of elite fighting men, but the fledgling regime was scarcely in a position to assume unitary control over the entire country. What was

evolved was a system of government approximating a diarchy. During the Kamakura period, Japan had two capitals and two interconnected loci of authority. The potential of warrior power was clear enough to those who cared to envision it, but the legacy of the past prevented more than a slow progress into the future (Varley).

The Kamakura shogunate was sorely tested when the Mongols attempted twice to conquer Japan with the largest naval armada ever assembled. On both occasions, the Mongol navy was destroyed off the coast of Kyushu by typhoons, which were called *kamikaze* (divine winds). The cost of building military fortifications in Kyushu contributed to the downfall of the Minamoto clan. It was succeeded by the Ashikaga clan, which moved its military capital to the Muromachi area of Kyoto. As a result, Kyoto became the capital of both the imperial court and the military shogunate (Young and Young).

The Ashikaga (Muromachi) Shogunate

Ashikaga Takauji founded the Muromachi shogunate in 1336. Relative latecomers to Kyoto, the Ashikaga warriors fundamentally changed the power balance in the city by establishing their headquarters there. Unlike the Kamakura shogunate, which had maintained only a limited presence in Kyoto, for a time the Muromachi shogunate made Kyoto the very base of the warriors, who were primarily a provincial phenomenon. Despite their military capabilities, however, they were not able to have their way in Kyoto completely. In the medieval balance of multiple elites, both the aristocracy and the religious establishment continued to be forces to contend with. Nevertheless, the warrior impact on Kyoto was soon evident.

The Ashikaga and their supporters were not merely the latest rulers to arrive in the city. The important functional difference between them and the other elites was based in part on their military capacity: city administration, including adjudication and the enforcement of law and order, often involved the use of force, or at least the threat of force. Their application of existing warrior legal conventions to a broader social spectrum was also a significant factor in their ability to administer the city. Eventually the Muromachi shogunate came to adjudicate disputes not involving warriors: two aristocrats, for example, or an aristocrat and a temple might turn to the shogunate as the only entity whose authority carried enough weight to decide a dispute. By the early fifteenth century the shogunate, like the imperial court in early times, was recognized as the city's administrator (Gay).

The Muromachi shogunate was the weakest of the three shogunates - Kamakura, Muromachi, and Tokugawa - of pre-modern Japan (Kanno). Even at its peak under the third Ashikaga shogun, Yoshimitsu, at the end of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth century, the shogunate's enforceable authority extended only partially beyond the central and western provinces of Honshu and the island of Shikoku. The Kanto was never firmly under central Ashikaga control, and in the early fifteenth century this important region lapsed into disunion (Embree and Gluck).

The gradual waning of the centralized power of the Ashikaga shogunate came to an end in Kyoto with the Onin civil war (1467-77) caused by the rivalry between two noble families closely related to the house of Ashikaga.

The shogunate was so weakened that it could not control the rival factions or <https://assignbuster.com/the-ashikaga-muromachi-shogunate-vs-the-minamoto-kamakura-shogunate-essay-sample/>

prevent the war, which disseminated the population of Kyoto and caused the destruction of innumerable age-old monuments. With the end of the Onin war in 1477 began Japan's ' Hundred Years' War' in which warfare among the daimyo was endemic. It was a century of feudalism without any central authority. Even the old imperial system which had maintained some administrative jurisdiction over outlying regions became defunct (Fletcher and Cruickshank).

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