

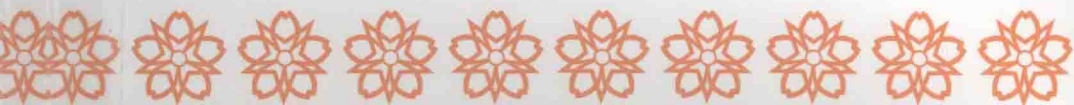
The Tales of the Heike



TRANSLATED BY

Burton Watson

EDITED BY HARUO SHIRANE





THE TALES OF THE HEIKE

Translated by Burton Watson

*Edited, with an Introduction,
by Haruo Shirane*

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THE TALES OF THE HEIKE

translations from the asian classics

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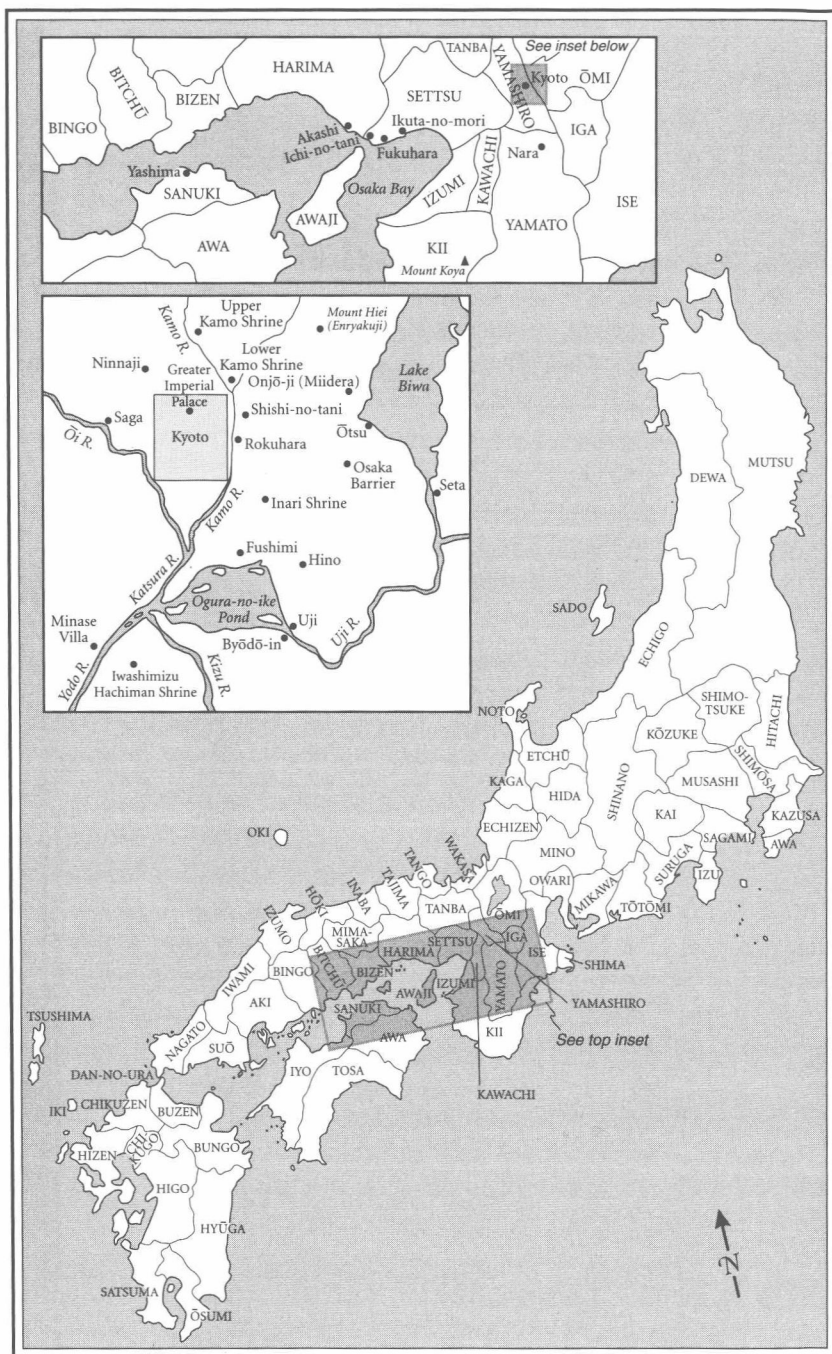
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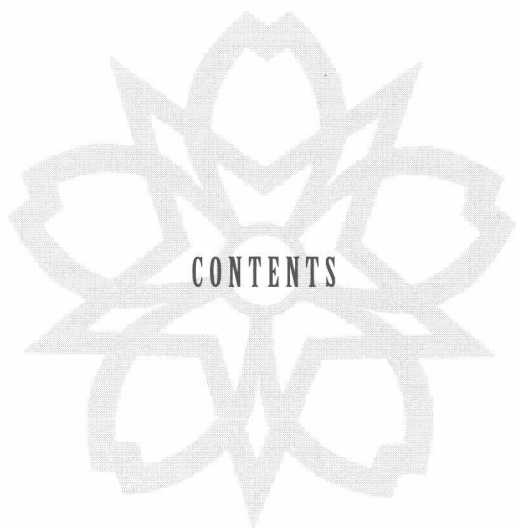
PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Tales of the Heike is one of the great literary classics of Japan, the subject of countless plays, narratives, and films, but it has not been as popular outside Japan as have such works as *The Tale of Genji*. One reason for the lack of attention is the difficulty in following the text, which is long and highly episodic and contains hundreds of names, places, and events. We hope to have overcome these hurdles with this abridged edition, concentrating on the most important and famous episodes while also linking them in such a way as to give the reader an overall vision of the extended narrative. The glossary, compiled by Michael Watson, should help identify the many minor and major characters and their relationships to both historical events and later reception. In addition, the bibliography of relevant primary and secondary sources in English, also compiled by Michael Watson, should be extremely useful to anyone teaching or studying *The Tales of the Heike* and related warrior tales.

My many thanks go to Burton Watson for agreeing to join me in this project, for his superb skill as translator, and for his patience. I am particularly indebted to Michael Watson, who helped me with the historical research and who volunteered to compile the glossary and the bibliography.



The provinces of Japan, with enlargements of the Inland Sea area and the Kyoto area. The circles indicate important battlegrounds.



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INTRODUCTION

The Genre of Warrior Tales

The Tales of the Heike is the most famous example of a warrior tale (*gunki* or *gunki-mono*), a major genre in medieval Japanese literature. Warrior tales first became popular midway through the Heian period (794–1185) with the appearance of the *Record of Masakado* (*Shōmonki*, ca. 940) and the *Record of the Deep North* (*Mutsuwaki*, ca. 1062), both of which were written in *kanbun* (Chinese prose) by Buddhist monks or middle-rank intellectuals. The *Shōmonki* describes the uprising by Taira no Masakado (d. 940) and the attempt to save his spirit from hell.

The second major period of warrior tales, from the beginning of the medieval, or Kamakura, period (1185–1333) through the fourteenth century, begins with *The Tales of Heiji* (*Heiji monogatari*, 1221?), *The Tales of Hōgen* (*Hōgen monogatari*, 1221?), and *The Tales of the Heike* (mid-thirteenth century). During this period, the aristocratic court society changed into a warrior society. Both the *Hōgen monogatari* and the *Heiji monogatari* describe the military conflicts leading up to the Genpei war (1180–1185) and thus resemble the *Shōmonki* and the *Mutsuwaki* in being narratives about warriors who caused great disturbances. But in contrast to the *Shōmonki* and the *Mutsuwaki*, which are “records” (*ki*) written in *kanbun* with a documentary focus, the *Hōgen monogatari* and the *Heiji monogatari* have the quality of Heian vernacular

tales (*monogatari*) in trying to re-create the participants' interior life. Unlike the *Shōmonki* and the *Mutsuwaki*, whose perspective is that of those at the center looking out at the rebels in the provinces, the military narratives in this second period are written from the perspective of those who had experienced the war personally or who sympathized with the defeated warriors. These texts also are written in the so-called mixed Japanese–Chinese style, which is a combination of Japanese prose and Chinese compounds and phrases, including allusions to Chinese classics and history.

The Rise and Fall of the Genji and the Heike (*Genpei seisuiiki* or *Genpei jōsuiiki*, thirteenth to fourteenth century), a Kamakura-period warrior tale, describes the *Hōgen monogatari* and the *Heiji monogatari* as “diaries [*nikki*] of the Hōgen and Heiji period,” showing that in the Kamakura period they still were considered to be reliable records of events despite their *monogatari* character. Like other military narratives, the *Hōgen monogatari* and *Heiji monogatari* draw on *setsuwa*, or anecdotes, following a tradition dating back to the late-Heian-period *Tales of Times Now Past* (*Konjaku monogatari shū*, ca. 1120), which devotes one volume to warrior stories. Most of the military narratives are in three parts, describing the causes of the military conflict, the conflict itself, and the aftermath, with good examples being *The Tales of Hōgen* and *The Tales of Heiji*. The second period of warrior tales climaxed with the *Record of the Jōkyū Rebellion* (*Jōkyūki*, ca. 1222), which describes the failed attempt in 1221 (Jōkyū 3) by the retired emperor, GoToba (r. 1183–1198), to seize power from the Kamakura *bakufu* (military government), and the *Chronicle of Great Peace* (*Taiheiki*, 1340s–1371), which describes the collapse of the Kamakura *bakufu* in 1333 and the subsequent rule by the Ashikaga clan.

Although the military narratives in the second period are heavily influenced by the Heian *monogatari*, they differ in revealing the impact of various forms of recitation or oral performance practices (*katari*). The oral or musical performance of the military narratives had an important ritual function, to celebrate (*shūgen*) the preservation or restoration of order and to pacify the souls (*chinkon*) of those warriors who had died terrible deaths on the battlefield. To celebrate the restoration of order, the warrior tales affirmed those who had established or preserved order and peace; at the same time,

they tried to console the spirits of the defeated, hoping to calm their angry and sometimes vengeful spirits and to offer them salvation by incorporating them into the new social order.

The third, late medieval, period of warrior tales produced texts that focus on war but are more about the fate of a single warrior or small group. For example, the *Record of Yoshitsune* (*Gikeiki*, 1411) describes Yoshitsune's flight to the Tōhoku region, concentrating on Yoshitsune, his family, and his retainers. *The Tales of the Soga Brothers* (*Soga monogatari*, mid-fourteenth century), which was recited by *goze*, or blind female singer-musicians, likewise tells the story of the Soga brothers as they avenge their father's death.

Many of these warrior chronicles have no identifiable authors but are the product of multiple writers. For example, *The Tales of the Heike* draw on numerous *setsuwa* and have many, greatly differing, variants. Likewise, the *Taiheiki* also had many editors. Because they did not know how the events were going to end, they had to make the *Taiheiki* into an open and unfinished work. Moreover, the authors of these military tales did not write the narratives from beginning to end; instead, they edited and rewrote the transmitted texts, much as the editors of *setsuwa* collections did, to suit their own needs. Another major characteristic of warrior chronicles like *The Tales of the Heike* and the *Taiheiki* is that they constantly refer to Chinese history and Chinese texts. They compare the disorder and dangers of the present with those of the past and draw lessons from this comparison or point to similarities. In this regard, they belong to a larger tradition of historical narrative.

The military narratives were transmitted in two fundamental ways: as "read texts" (*yomihon*), which could be used for sermons and other functions, and as "recited texts" (*kataribon*), performed by *biwa hōshi* (blind lute minstrels) or *monogatari sō* (storytelling monks) attached to armies. The *Hōgen monogatari*, the *Heiji monogatari*, and the *Heike monogatari* were recited by *biwa hōshi*, and the *Taiheiki* and the *Record of the Meitoku Rebellion* (*Meitokuki*, ca. 1394) were recited by *monogatari sō*. These warrior tales, which belonged to performative traditions, were later used and absorbed by other genres such as *nō*, *kōwaka-mai* (dramatic ballads), *otogi-zōshi* (Muromachi tales), *jōruri* (puppet plays), kabuki, Edo fiction, and modern novels.

About *The Tales of the Heike*

The Tales of the Heike (*Heike monogatari*) is about the Genpei (Genji–Heike) war (1180–1185), fought between the Genji, or Minamoto, clan, headed by Minamoto no Yoritomo, and the Heike, or Taira, clan, led by Taira no Kiyomori. The Taira's initial, rapid ascent to power was followed by an extended series of defeats, including their abandonment of the capital in 1183 (taking with them Antoku, the child emperor). By 1183 Yoritomo had gained control of the Kantō, or eastern, region; Kiso Yoshinaka, another Minamoto leader, had brought Kyoto under his power; and the Taira had fallen back to the Inland Sea. During an interlude of fighting within the Minamoto clan, Yoshinaka was defeated and eliminated by Yoritomo and his half brother (Minamoto) Yoshitsune in 1184. Then, in a decisive battle at Ichi-no-tani, also in 1184, near the present-day city of Kobe, Yoshitsune, leading the Minamoto forces, decisively defeated the Taira, driving them into the Inland Sea. Finally, in 1185, the last of the Taira forces were crushed at Dan-no-ura, in a sea battle on the western end of the Inland Sea. In the same year, Rokudai, the last presumptive heir of the Taira clan, was captured and eventually executed.

These wars between the Taira and the Minamoto, which mark the beginning of the medieval period, became the basis for *The Tales of the Heike*, which describes the lives of various warriors from both military houses, particularly those of the defeated Taira. The narrative also includes numerous non-samurai stories based on anecdotes (*setsuwa*), many of which deal with women and priests and were frequently transformed by the composers of the *Heike* into Buddhist narratives, much like the anecdotes in Buddhist *setsuwa* collections. So even though *The Tales of the Heike* is a military epic, it has strong Buddhist overtones, which are especially evident in the opening passage on the law of impermanence, in many of the stories of Buddhist disillusionment and awakening (such as those of Giō and Koremori), and in the final “Initiates’ Book” (Kanjō no maki) leading to the salvation of Kenreimon’in, the daughter of Kiyomori, who has a vision of the fall of her clan.

The first versions of *The Tales of the Heike* were probably recorded by writers and priests associated with Buddhist temples who introduced

Buddhist readings and other folk material into an earlier, chronological, and historically oriented narrative. These texts in turn were recited from memory and sung to a lute (*biwa*) by blind minstrels who entertained a broad commoner audience and in turn had an impact on subsequent versions of *The Tales of the Heike*, which combined both literary texts and oral material. Of the many variants of *The Tales of the Heike*, which differ significantly in content and style, the most famous today is the Kakuichi text, which is the one translated here. This text was recorded in 1371 by a man named Kakuichi, a *biwa hōshi* who created a twelve-book narrative of the decline of the Heike (Taira) clan. At some point, the “Initiates’ Book,” which gives the *Tales* unity and closure as a Buddhist text, was added, as were sections inspired by Heian *monogatari* and centering on women and the private life of the court.

Thanks largely to Kakuichi, the oral *biwa* performance of *The Tales of the Heike* eventually won upper-class acceptance and became a major performing art, its popularity peaking in the mid-fifteenth century. After the Ōnin war (1467–1477), the *biwa* version of *The Tales of the Heike* was performed less often, replaced by other performance arts such as *nō* and *kyōgen* (comic theater). Nonetheless, *The Tales of the Heike* continued to serve as a source for countless dramas and prose narratives. Indeed, most of the sixteen warrior pieces (*shuramono*) in today’s *nō* drama repertoire are from *The Tales of the Heike*. Heike heroes appear in sixteenth-century ballad dramas (*kōwaka-mai*), and in the Tokugawa (Edo) period, stories from *The Tales of the Heike* became the foundation for a number of important kabuki and *jōruri* plays, thus making them one of the most influential works of premodern Japanese culture.

The first half of the *Heike*, books one through six, is centered on the history of Kiyomori, the head of the Taira (Heike) clan, who comes into conflict with the retired emperor GoShirakawa and then with various members of the Minamoto (Genji) clan. The second half, books seven through twelve, is dominated by three important Minamoto (Genji) leaders: Yoritomo, the head of the Genji in the east; Yoshinaka, who becomes the leader of the Genji farther to the west; and Yoshitsune, Yoritomo’s brother. The real focus of the narrative, however, is not on the Genji victors (Yoritomo, the ultimate victor, plays almost a peripheral role) but on a series of defeated Taira figures: Shigemori, Shigehira, Koremori,

Munemori, and Kenreimon'in—all descendants of Kiyomori—who, bearing the sins of the forefather, suffer different fates on their way to death. In short, the first half of *The Tales of the Heike* centers on the Taira and Kiyomori, the clan's leader, and the second half is about the various defeated Taira, almost all of whom die or are executed. (Also important in the second half is the fall of the former Genji leader Kiso Yoshinaka, who is defeated by Yoritomo.) It is not until the "Initiates' Book" that the tragedy of the Taira becomes an opportunity for reconciliation, between Kenreimon'in (Kiyomori's daughter) and the retired emperor GoShirakawa, who was victimized by Kiyomori.

The translation is based on Ichiko Teiji, ed., *Heike monogatari*, 2 vols., in *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1994), which is based on a variant of Kakuichi's text. This Kakuichibon is the main example of a "recited" lineage and owes its final form to Akashi no Kakuichi, the leader of the Ichikata school of reciters, who had a disciple write down an official version in 1371. The illustrations are from a 1656 Meireki woodblock edition, by permission of Shōgakukan.

Key Figures

Imperial Family

ANTOKU (r. 1180–1185): emperor and son of Emperor Takakura and Kenreimon'in; is held by the Taira clan and drowns at Dan-no-ura.

GOHIRAKAWA (r. 1155–1158, 1127–1192): retired emperor, head of the imperial clan, and son of Retired Emperor Toba.

KENREIMON'IN (1155–1213): daughter of Kiyomori and Tokiko (Nun of the Second Rank), consort of Emperor Takakura, mother of Emperor Antoku, and full sister of Munemori, Tomomori, and Shigehira; is taken prisoner at Dan-no-ura and dies a nun.

MOCHIHITO, Prince (1151–1180): second son of Retired Emperor GoShirakawa and leader of an anti-Taira revolt in 1180; also called Prince Takakura.

NUN OF THE SECOND RANK: principal wife of Kiyomori and mother of Munemori, Shigehira, and Kenreimon'in; dies at Dan-no-ura.

TAKAKURA: emperor and son of Emperor GoShirakawa.

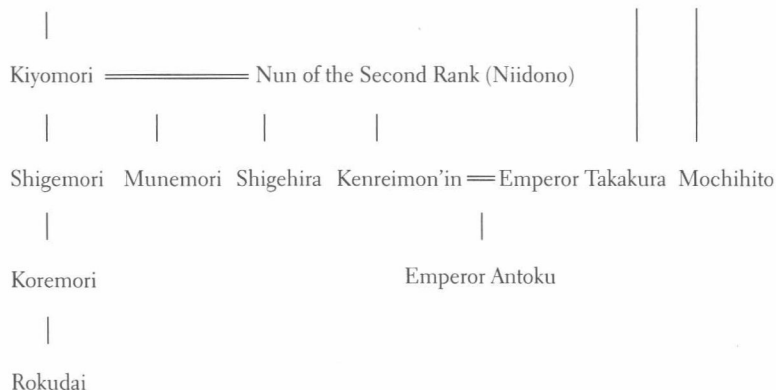
TOBA: retired emperor and father of Retired Emperor GoShirakawa.

Taira (Heike) Head Family

Imperial Family

Tadamori (Taira clan head)

GoShirakawa



Genealogy of key figures in *The Tales of the Heike*. For the identification of all the characters, see the glossary of characters.

Taira (Heike)

ATSUMORI: nephew of Kiyomori; dies at Ichi-no-tani.

KIYOMORI: son of Tadamori and, after his father's death, Taira clan head; dominates the court even after taking vows.

KOREMORI: eldest son of Shigemori; commits suicide after taking vows.

MUNEMORI: son of Kiyomori and Nun of the Second Rank and, after Shigemori's death, Taira clan head.

ROKUDAI: son of Koremori, grandson of Shigemori, and presumptive Taira clan head after Genpei war.

SHIGEHIRA: son of Kiyomori and Nun of the Second Rank; a Taira leader largely responsible for the burning of Nara; captured at Ichi-no-tani and later executed.

SHIGEMORI: eldest son of Kiyomori and, until his early death, a restraining influence on Kiyomori.

TADAMORI: father of Kiyomori and a former Taira clan head.