

30 Anonymous: *Tale of the Heike* (ca. 1371)

Introduced by Christoph Kleine

Introduction

The *Tale of the Heike* is generally regarded as the most important of so-called *gunki monogatari* 軍記物語, or “war tales,” of the Kamakura (1185–1333) and Muromachi (1333–1568) periods. It deals with the rise and fall of the Taira clan (*heike* 平家), which defeated their former allies, the Minamoto clan, in 1160, and subsequently also ousted the Fujiwara clan from its dominant position at court. The war between the Taira and the Minamoto reignited in 1180, ending with the defeat of the Taira in 1185. The central figure in the first part of the tale is Taira no Kiyomori 平清盛 (1118–1181), who is depicted as arrogant, evil, and ruthless.

Kiyomori held military control of the capital, and dominated the court for twenty years. When he tried to enthrone a prince from his own clan, however, opposition to his dominance arose. Finally, even his patron – the retired but still powerful Emperor Go-Shirakawa 後白河天皇 (r. 1127–1192) – turned against him. The major Buddhist institutions became involved in the ensuing power struggle. In 1180, Prince Mochihito 以仁王 (1150–80), a son of Go-Shirakawa, joined forces with Minamoto no Yorimasa 源頼政 (1104–80) against Kiyomori and the Taira, also gaining the support of the warrior monks of Onjōji 園城寺 (or Miidera 三井寺) – the main temple of the Jimon branch of Tendai Buddhism. This is the historical background to the selection of letters reproduced in the *Heike monogatari*, which are presented in translation below. This revolt against Kiyomori was crushed, and Prince Mochihito sought refuge in the Onjōji. When Kiyomori's troops advanced against the temple, the monks turned to their brothers from the rival Sanmon branch of the Tendai school for help. The letter they sent to the Enryakuji, headquarters of the Sanmon branch, is reproduced below.

Regarding the Jimon branch as secessionists, the monks of the Sanmon branch refused their request for support. So, the hard-pressed monks of Onjōji turned instead to the Kōfukuji in Nara, which had a powerful army of warrior monks. The corresponding letter is also reproduced here, as is the response of the monks of Kōfukuji.

The Jimon monks justify their opposition to Kiyomori by referring to the paradigm of the interdependence of Buddha Dharma and ruler's law. Since Kiyomori has illegally usurped power, he does not represent the ruler's law, but rather violates it. In light of the mutual responsibility of the two nomospheres to each other, the Buddhist institutions were virtually obliged to revolt against illegitimate usurpers, in order to restore the law of the ruler.

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Bibliographical Information

Ichiko Teiji 市古貞次, ed. *Heike monogatari* 平家物語. Shinpen Nihon Koten Bungaku Zenshū 新編日本古典文学全集 45. Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1994; 300–307.

Page numbers given in square brackets refer to this edition.

The translation adopted here can be found in:

McCullough, Helen Craig, trans. *The Tale of the Heike*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988; 145–49, 239.

For the sake of terminological consistency and better comprehensibility, a few minor alterations have been made, and some annotations were added by Christoph Kleine.

Translation Adopted from Helen Craig McCullough

The Letter to the Enryakuji

The Miidera^I monks blew the conch horns and tolled the temple bells to convene a general meeting. There they reached unanimous agreement:

When we consider the recent state of affairs [p. 300/301], it is clear that ours is a time when the Buddha's Law is declining and the ruler's law is being set at naught. If we do not punish the Novice Kiyomori^{II} for his tyranny now, when will there be another opportunity? Wasn't it a sign

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I CK: The Miidera 三井寺, also known as Onjōji 園城寺, located at the foot of Mount Hiei, in the city of Ōtsu in Shiga Prefecture. After the late tenth-century split of the Tendai order into the Sanmon 山門 branch (head temple Enryakuji on top of Mount Hiei) and the Jimon 寺門 branch, the Miidera became the head temple of the latter.

II CK: Kiyomori Nyūdō 清盛入道. Taira no Kiyomori is the central figure in the *Heike monogatari*. Son of Tadamori of the Ise Taira clan, he was a military commander at the end of the Heian period (794–1185). During the Heiji Rebellion, which broke out while he was on a pilgrimage to Kumano, he quickly returned to Kyoto, and defeated Yoshitomo of the rival Minamoto clan. Thereupon, Kiyomori became the first court noble from the ranks of the samurai. Later he was appointed Minister of the Grand Council of State at the third rank. However, at the age of fifty-one, he was taken ill, and left the family, taking the Buddhist name of Jōkai – this is why he was called a *nyūdō* (lit. “Entering the Path [to Awakening]”), a common term for a person who shaves their hair like a monk or nun, and devotes themselves to the practice of Buddhism. The term is not limited to those who have officially become monks, but also includes those who practice as lay people, which is the case with Kiyomori, who by no means turned his back on politics, but eagerly sought to strengthen his and his clan's position in the following years. In 1172, he made his daughter Tokuko a princess at the court of Emperor Takakura. In 1179, he staged a coup d'état, expelling the anti-Taira forces that had allied themselves with the cloistered emperor Go-Shirakawa 後白河 (r. 1155–58), whom he even imprisoned. Because the Miidera had taken sides with the Minamoto clan, Taira no Kiyomori ordered the destruction of Miidera,

of future protection by [the god] True Hachiman^{III} and the Great Luminous God of Silla^{IV} that the Prince^V should have come to us? Can there be any doubt that the gods of heaven and earth will manifest themselves and that the power of the Buddhas [*butsuriki* 佛力] and the power of the gods [*jiriki* 神力] will help encompass the enemy's surrender? Now, the Northern Peak [Hokurei 北嶺] [of Mount Hiei] is the fountain of the doctrine of the Perfect School of the One Taste [*Enshū ichimi no gaku* 圓宗一味の學; i.e. Tendai], and the southern capital [Nanto 南都] [Nara] is the place where postulants receive training and ordination [*tokudo* 得度]. They will be sure to join us if we send them letters.^{VI}

The monks proceeded to dispatch letters to Mount Hiei and Nara. The one addressed to the Enryakuji said:

From the Onjōji to the Enryakuji^{VII} Temple Affairs Office:

A Request for Assistance to Prevent the Destruction of This Temple

It has been a source of infinite distress to us that the tyranny of the Novice Jōkai^{VIII} threatens to nullify the ruler's law [*ōbō*] and destroy the Buddha's Law [*buppō*]. At this time of deep concern, the second son [Mochihito] of the first Retired Emperor [i.e., Go-Shirakawa] has come to us in secret during the night of the Fifteenth. In what they call a Retired Emperor's decree, the Taira have demanded that we expel him, but we cannot comply. If rumor is correct, their next step will be to send a military force against us. The hour of destruction approaches; our monks despair.

Although the Enryakuji and the Onjōji have established two separate branches of the faith [p. 301/302], we are identical in our adherence to the doctrine of the single taste of the perfect and immediate [*endon ichimi no kyōmon* 圓頓一味の教門] [Tendai teachings]. We may be likened to the left and right wings of a bird or to the two wheels of a cart.^{IX} would it not be cause for lament if either were missing? If you will help save our temple by lending us your strength,

and of some temples of Nara. This is the background of the exchange of letters between Miidera, Enryakuji and Kōfukuji, which is presented here. The *Heike monogatari* primarily deals with the rise and fall of the Taira clan, under the ambitious and reckless Kiyomori.

III CK: Hachiman 八幡 is one of the most famous Japanese deities. In the late eighth century, he received the Buddhist epithet Great Bodhisattva (*daibosatsu* 大菩薩). He is regarded as the ancestor god of both the Tennō house and various warrior clans. Accordingly, he was venerated as a god of war, especially by warriors who hoped for his assistance in battle.

IV CK: *Shinra daimyōjin* 新羅大明神, i.e. the guardian deity of Miidera, whose place of origin is the Korean kingdom of Silla 新羅.

V CK: That is, Mochihito 以仁 (1151–1180), the second or third prince of Emperor Go-Shirakawa. In April 1180, at the suggestion of Minamoto no Yorimasa, he decided to raise an army to defeat the Taira clan, who had imprisoned his father and enthroned Antoku 安徳 (1180–1185) as emperor. When his plans were discovered, he fled to Miidera to seek protection. Realising, however, that the soldier monks of Miidera could never defeat Kiyomori's troops he escaped in the shade of night and headed for Nara, where he was killed by a stray arrow.

VI CK: The national ordination platform, where all state-sponsored ordinations of monks took place, was located at the Tōdaiji 東大寺 in Nara.

VII CK: That is, Enryakuji, headquarter of the rival Sanmon Branch of the Tendai school, located on Mount Hiei.

VIII CK: *Nyūdō* Jōkai 入道淨海; i.e. Taira no Kiyomori.

IX CK: Note that the same metaphor is used to describe the relationship between the Buddha's Law and the ruler's law.

our long-standing differences will be forgotten; all will be as in the days when we dwelt together on Mount [Hiei]. The foregoing transmits the agreement reached by our soldier-monks [*shuto* 衆徒] in general assembly.

Eighteenth Day, Fifth Month, Fourth Year of Jishō [i.e. 1180/6/12] From All the Monks

“What’s this?” said the monks’ assembly of the Mountain Gate when they read the letter. “How dare they insult us by saying we and they resemble the left and right wings of a bird or the two wheels of a cart? They are nothing but a branch of our temple.” They sent no answer. [. . . p. 302/303 . . .]

The letter to the southern capital [Nara] said:

From the Onjōji to the Kōfukuji Temple Affairs Office: A Request for Assistance to Prevent the Destruction of This Temple

The great virtue of the Buddhist Law [*buppō*] is that it guards the ruler’s law [*ōbō*]; the ruler’s law endures because of the Buddhist Law. Now, the Former Chancellor-Novice Taira no Kiyomori, known by his Dharma name Jōkai, has tyrannically usurped the powers of state [*koku’i* 國威] [p. 303/304], thrown the imperial government into confusion, and caused resentment and sorrow both within and outside the court; and in consequence the second son of Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa has suddenly come to our temple, arriving on the night of the Fifteenth of this month, in the hope of escaping an undreamed-of calamity. In what they call a Retired Emperor’s decree, the Taira have demanded that we hand him over, but our soldier-monks [*shuto* 衆徒] are determined to keep him, and Kiyomori intends to send warriors into our temple. The Buddha’s Law and the ruler’s law are threatened with simultaneous destruction. When the Son of Heaven Huizhang [Huizhang Tianzi 會昌天子; i.e., emperor Wuzong 武宗; r. 840–6] of Tang tried to destroy the Buddha’s Law by force of arms long ago, the monks of Mount Qingliang [i.e., Wutaishan] went into battle and frustrated him. That is what Buddhist monks did in the face of imperial authority [*ōken* 王權]. We can scarcely do less against a renegade like Kiyomori! Let the southern capital remember the unprecedented exile of a guiltless Fujiwara clan chieftain.¹ When, if not now, is that insult to be avenged? It will be a matter for mutual congratulation, and a deep satisfaction to us, if your soldier-monks will save fellow Buddhists from destruction and defeat the forces of evil. The foregoing transmits the agreement reached by our soldier-monks in general assembly.

Eighteenth Day, Fifth Month, Fourth Year of Jishō [1180/6/12] From All the Monks

Upon reading the letter, the monks of the southern capital replied at once. [p. 304/305]

From the Kōfukuji to the Onjōji Temple Affairs Office:

We have received the letter informing us that the Buddha’s law [*buppō*] of your esteemed temple faces destruction at the Novice Kiyomori’s hands. Although we represent two separate doctrinal schools [i.e., Tendai and Hossō], the golden chapters and the golden paragraphs [of the Buddhist scriptures] both stem from [the same] precious fountain and [the same] precious flower [i.e., the teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha]. Whether southern capital or northern, we are all dis-

1 [note ‡ on p. 147 in the original] The Regent Motofusa. The Kōfukuji, as the Fujiwara tutelary temple, was concerned with the clan’s welfare.

ciples of the Thus-Come-One, and our own temples and others' temples must act together to put an end to deeds as wicked as those of Devadatta.^X [. . . p. 305/306 . . .]

Flushed with success, Kiyomori took away the Retired Emperor's residence and exiled the Regent in the last Eleventh Month, two supremely treasonable deeds the like of which has never been known in the past or present. We ought to have acted then to confront the traitors and demand to know what crimes had been committed, but we were troubled by the possibility of divine displeasure [*shinryo* 神慮], and by the fact that Kiyomori had cloaked his actions in the Emperor's authority, and so we allowed time to pass, swallowing our unhappiness. Now another force mustered by Kiyomori [p. 306/307] has surrounded the house of the Retired Emperor's second son, and the three deities of Hachiman and the Great Illustrious Gods of Kasuga, in secret manifestation, have safely conveyed the Prince to your esteemed temple and left him at the Silla Shrine door—a plain indication that the ruler's law is not fated to disappear. What mortal could fail to rejoice in your resolve to protect the Prince at the risk of your lives? While we were admiring your noble spirit from afar, we received intimations of an armed attack by Kiyomori on your temple, and we began to make preparations. During the first part of the Hour of the Dragon on the Eighteenth, we rallied our forces by calling up our own monks, dispatching letters to other temples, and issuing orders to our branches. Then, just as we were about to inform you of our actions, a messenger arrived with your letter, which instantly restored our drooping spirits of the past few days.

The [monks of] Mount Qingliang drove back [Wuzong's army in] the Tang. Why should not the combined southern and northern soldier-monks of Yamato rout a traitorous subject's depraved followers? Guard the Prince well and await news of our departure. Understand the contents of this letter; have no doubts or fears.

Twenty-First Day, Fifth Month, Fourth Year of Jishō [1180/6/15] From All the Monks

X CK: Chōdatsu 調達; a cousin and brother-in-law of Gautama Siddhārtha, the Buddha Śākyamuni. Devadatta tried to bring the order under his control, and even tried to kill the Buddha. When he failed to do so, he proposed five ascetic rules that should become obligatory for all monks. The Buddha refused to accept these additional rules, but a number of monks followed Devadatta, thereby causing a schism. Accordingly, Devadatta personifies all attempts to destroy the Buddhist order.