

*Shugo, kokujin and akuto in 14th century Japan:  
The case of Harima Province*

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This article examines changes that occurred in the role and authority of provincial military governors (*shugo* 守護 appointed by the Muromachi Bakufu) and the interrelationships involving them, regionally-based warrior class land proprietors (*kokujin* 国人) and local society in general, taking up the case of Harima Province during the Northern and Southern Courts (Nanboku-cho 南北朝) era (1336-1392). In other words, it is an attempt to portray an overall image of social change during the period of civil unrest marking 14th century Japan by linking the evolvement of the Muromachi Bakufu's system of governance with social trend of the local society.

The author begins with a discussion of changes in the role and authority of the Akamatsu Clan, *shugo* of Harima, and its relationship with the province's *kokujin* strata, informing us that: 1) Upon the outbreak of the Kanno disturbance (1350-52), the conventional practice of the Bakufu appointing both provincial governors and military commanders was done away with in favor of the assumption in Harima by the Akamatsu Clan of the military command and confirmation of bravery in the field, in addition to its civil duties. At the same time, the chain of military command involving *shugo* and *kokujin* was firmly put in place, resulting in the subordination of many of the latter to the Akamatsu Clan. 2) After the outbreak of the disturbance, *tozama* 外様 *shugo* (i.e., those who were neither kin to the Ashikaga Shogunate or their direct retainers) throughout Japan (including Harima) are seen strengthening both their actual authority and social status, as exemplified by the language used in their petitions to the Bakufu. Such a phenomenon can be interpreted as proof of a definite change in the balance of power between the Ashikaga Clan and *tozama shugo* that existed at the inception of the Muromachi Bakufu, and the resulting homogeneity of *shugo* authority regardless of affiliation

indicates for the author a significant change in the position occupied by the institution of *shugo* within the Bakufu governance structure.

Next the author turns to the influence of the above-mentioned changes on *kokujin* and local society using the Yano-no-Sho Conspiracy (*akuto* 悪党) Incident as an example, concluding: 1) From the late Kamakura period up through the Jowa era (ending 1350), the strata of locally-based land proprietors had utilized such means to legitimize and protect their fiefs as direct action based on wide ranging alliances (referred to as *akuto*) and mutual assistance, as well as directly petitioning the Muromachi Bakufu to recognize their allegiance with rewards and proprietary guarantees. While there were also appeals to the authority of *shugo*, taking into consideration the type of intervention that would result, attempts by local proprietors to protect their holdings by sole reliance upon such authority can only be observed beginning in the Bunna era (1352-56). 2) The so-called “vassalization of *akuto* alliance members under *shugo*” was proceeding within the post-Kanno disturbance transition to a Bakufu system of governance aiming at control over regions and local land proprietors centered around *shugo*. This phenomenon observed in the case of Yano Estate was caused by the changes that had occurred in Bakufu governance due to the strengthening of the authority of *shugo* during the disturbance.