

The role of the locally-based warrior class in the Muromachi Bakufu's control over regional society

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This article discusses the control exercised by the Muromachi Bakufu over regional society during the Nanboku-cho period (1336-1392), while focusing on the movements among the powerful members of the regionally-based class of warrior-proprietors, called *kokujin* 国人. This *kokujin* class on which Bakufu regional control depended had established and maintained a fixed sense of presence in regional society since the Kamakura Bakufu had empowered its vassals (*goekenin* 御家人) through appointments as local estate managers (*jito* 地頭).

On the other hand, the Muromachi Bakufu was not completely and perpetually dependent on the *kokujin* class, since it also relied on the deployment of military governors (*shugo* 守護) and commanders from the ranks of the Ashikaga Shogun Family and its direct vassals to take charge of provincial law enforcement. Therefore, while the *kokujin* class continued to make a constant contribution to Bakufu control over local affairs both politically and militarily, local control exercised by the *shugo* class, in particular from the civil unrest of the Kanno era (1349-1352) on, steadily increased in importance during the last years of the Nanboku-cho on into the Muromachi period. This predominant role of the *shugo* class in local control led to a deepening of relationships between these Bakufu appointees and certain local political forces, as well as to others directing their activities towards the sphere of the Muromachi shogun's power and influence.

In contrast, there were regions where the rise of the *shugo* class did not occur, and consequently where powerful members of the *kokujin* class continued to independently support Bakufu control over their localities. Moreover, there were those among these *kokujin*, who, even in absence of the officially appointed *shugo*, wielded territorial power in a manner similar to

shugo class style regional hegemony. In this way, even those who had not been officially appointed by the Bakufu were able to tie themselves directly to the Bakufu and exercise control over their local regions with the power and authority equivalent to that of the *shugo* class.