

Thicker than Blood: The Social and Political Significance of Wet Nurses in Japan, 950–1330

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WHEN customs, mores, and institutions prove unable to encompass political or social change, informal and inherently ambiguous roles take hold. Ambiguity both allows old forms to be preserved and erodes them, providing space for new modes of exercising power. In Japan, the ill-defined role and institution of wet nurse (*menoto* 乳母) provided a vital conduit for political and social change. From the tenth through the fourteenth century, court nobles, imperial princes, and, increasingly, provincial warriors relied on wet nurses rather than biological mothers to raise their children.¹ *Menoto* became a locus of affection that was equal to, and sometimes stronger than, kinship ties.

Wet nurses constituted a malleable institution of social and political power. They gained prestige in court and provincial society as

¹ Wet nurses have attracted scholarly attention but have yet to be adequately studied in Japan. For an informative overview, see Valerie Fildes, *Wet Nursing: A History from Antiquity to the Present* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1988), although Fildes only fleetingly refers to Japan (p. 248). Hashimoto Yoshihiko's (橋本義彦) invaluable discussion of *menoto* in his *Heian kizoku shakai no kenkyū* (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1976), pp. 492–96 [hereafter *Heian kizoku*], is one of the most informative articles about this topic in Japan. Vol. 2 of the *History of Women in Japan—Nihon jōseishi, Chūsei*, ed. Jōseishi sōgō kenkyū kai (Tōkyōdō shuppan, 1982)—analyzes women as wives, mothers, and widows, exploring their property rights and their professions, including those of entertainers and prostitutes, but the authors entirely ignore the role of wet nurses.

they and their kin became responsible for raising imperial princes, courtiers, and warriors. With these responsibilities came opportunities to acquire wealth and gain access to the throne, which translated into political power. Ties to wet nurses did not invariably supersede kinship ties, but they remained a significant mechanism of political, social, and emotional allegiance. The role of the wet nurse helped forge durable hierarchical relations between low-ranking courtiers and their superiors, and this social structure pervaded the court and the provinces.

It was the court rather than provincial society that provided the initial template for changes in social custom. Nurses and their families thrived because the social hierarchy of the court, though it enshrined hereditary privileges, did not ensure that talented individuals could participate in governance. Through devoted and skilled service, *menoto* and their families won the trust of emperors and courtiers. In addition, the closeness between a wet nurse and her "milk child" meant that she and her immediate relatives maintained easy access to her ward even after he became an adult. This proved to be a ready source of political influence. Nurses and their families became the most loyal supporters at the court, and this custom became common in provincial society as well, as governors and warriors also came to depend on their *menoto* "kin."

Blood kin ties were an inadequate basis for political allegiance. Most nobles and warriors chose their heirs from the ablest among their progeny, which encouraged competition among siblings.² Brothers and cousins were eligible for the same offices, and hence almost invariably became rivals. It was the rare man who could fully trust his biological relatives. In addition, with rank came personal restrictions: the court proved so formalized that parents could not easily meet sons and daughters who had achieved high rank.

The tie between wet nurses and their charges was hierarchical, encompassing, and binding. Wet nurses and their families became loyal followers because their interests hinged upon the success of their wards. A *menoto* doted on her charge and was concerned for

² G. Cameron Hurst, "The Structure of the Heian Court: Some Thoughts on the Nature of 'Familial Authority' in Heian Japan," in John W. Hall and Jeffrey P. Mass, eds., *Medieval Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 39-59, and Cornelius Kiley, "Estate and Property in the Late Heian Period," in *ibid.*, pp. 109-24.

his welfare in a way that his parents could not be, because his achievements could translate into unprecedented wealth, power, and prestige for her and her family.

Wet nurses and their kin rose to power in the eleventh-century court as retired emperors attempted to exercise authority and break the ossified customs of ritual precedent and hereditary office. The Northern lineage of the Fujiwara had gained influence through their control of ritual and their supervision of the reigning monarch; they had accomplished the latter both by providing consorts for emperors and by acting as regents for juvenile (*sesshō* 摂政) or adult emperors (*kanpaku* 関白). Ambitious emperors allowed *menoto* to raise and provide for imperial princes in their homes, thereby ensuring that trustworthy "milk kin" could move from the periphery of court society to the epicenter of politics. In this way the throne undermined the power of the Fujiwara while permitting them to continue providing consorts.

Thus *menoto* became a political resource ambiguous enough to encompass social and political change—the increasing power of retired emperors and their followers—without overtly threatening Northern Fujiwara prerogatives. The role of wet nurses became so politically significant that, although women of the Northern Fujiwara lineage had previously served only as consorts, some came to seek the role of wet nurse instead.

The role of the wet nurse allowed for upward mobility as well. After *menoto* families gained the right to raise imperial princes in their dwellings, they amassed wealth and political prestige. Nevertheless, *menoto* power remained intensely personal and situational, and hence difficult to sustain. Families that gained influence through their *menoto* attempted to establish lineages or enter into politically advantageous marriages, though they did not always succeed in doing so. Prominent provincial warriors also used their *menoto* to further their influence in the court, although they, too, met with varying success.

The institution of wet nurse functioned to override hereditary privilege, allowing new blood to enter court society. Wet nurses were the progenitors of several notable and increasingly influential courtier lineages, including the Rokujō, Tokudaiji, and Saionji families. Unlike those linked to the throne solely through marriage or

alliances of convenience, a nurse and her kin were emotionally and politically bound to their charges, making them most likely to be trusted for sensitive tasks. From the eleventh century through the early decades of the thirteenth century (when the position of “father of the wet nurse” eclipsed it), the institution of wet nurse also provided space for Japanese women to exercise political power.

The intrinsic power of the *menoto* role exacerbated tensions among families competing for appointments to this post and for a means of institutionalizing their influence. Descendants of wet nurses who later managed to marry “above their station”—and to provide, or become, consorts for emperors or prominent nobles—were the targets of such intense animosity that several such lineages were annihilated or marginalized.

During the fifty years following the Genpei wars (1180–85), the institution of wet nurse, which had been used to undermine the power of Northern Fujiwara consorts and their relatives, gradually became an empty honor. As a result, the woman who was appointed as wet nurse no longer needed actually to be a wet nurse, nor did her “family” need to have any biological relation to her. This trend toward hollow pretense checked the power of wet nurses at the court as they were supplanted by established male courtiers of high and middling rank who used the title of “father of the wet nurse” (乳父, also pronounced *menoto*)³ to gain access to the throne, wealth, and influence.

The institutionalization of the position of “father of the wet nurse” allowed administratively proficient noble families to raise imperial princes and amass revenue without destabilizing the social hierarchy. As a corporate group of these “*menoto* fathers” rose to prominence in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, they assumed the social and political prerogatives of the high nobility. One such family, the Hino, managed to go from serving as *menoto* “fathers” to providing consorts for emperors and shoguns. As the ambiguity inherent first in the role of *menoto* and then in that of *menoto* father ceased to provide any political or social advantage, each position (if not the Hino family itself) lost political significance.

³ For the pronunciation of “father of the wet nurse” as *menoto*, see Hashimoto, *Heian kizoku*, pp. 495–96.

THE ORIGINS OF THE WET NURSE AND HER ROLE
IN RAISING CHILDREN

The first documentary reference to a *menoto*, dating from 812, mentions a woman who nursed an imperial princess (*nai shinnō* 内親干) and suggests that this position originated at the court.⁴ A record of 953 explains how the wet nurse of an Ise priestess (*saigū* 齋宮) offered lands in prayer for the “long life and good health” of her ward in 946, and reveals that some nurses concomitantly possessed rights to landed income.⁵ As time passed, *menoto* seem to have become increasingly common.⁶ There are more than 109 eleventh-century references to wet nurses in courtier chronologies such as the *Shōyūki* and the *Midō Kanpaku ki*.⁷ These women tended to come from well-educated families that occupied the lower echelons of court nobility.

The number of wet nurses for each ward and their prerogatives were not regularized until late in the tenth century, with sometimes two or even four women nursing a given imperial prince. Divergent practices existed from the 900s through the 960s concerning the

⁴ Takeuchi Rizō 竹内理三, comp., *Heian ibun*, 15 vols. (Tōkyōdō shuppan, 1963–80) [hereafter *HI*], 1:25, doc. 36. In fact, wooden documents excavated from the residence of Prince Nagaya reveal that four wet nurses served in his royal household before the year 729, when he was assassinated. Yagi Atsuru 八木充, “Nagaya ōke mokkan to kōshin keryō sho,” *Nihonshi kenkyū* 353 (January 1992): 16–18.

⁵ *HI*, 1:393, doc. 265. References to wet nurses in the *Heian ibun* were accessed on the *Tōkyō Daigaku shiryōhen sanjo* database on December 22, 2003. *Saigū* were unmarried women who were dispatched to serve at Ise shrine at the onset of each imperial reign.

⁶ Only twelve references to wet nurses (*menoto*) appear in the earliest court chronicles, the *Teishin kō ki*, by Fujiwara Tadachira, in *Dai nihon kokiroku* 8 (Iwanami shoten, 1958) and the *Kyūreki*, between the years 920 and 951. The term appears only once in the *Teishin kō ki*, 1:74, urū 6.6.920. The other eleven are from the *Kyūreki*, by Fujiwara Morosuke, in *Dai nihon kokiroku* 9 (Iwanami shoten, 1958), from 1.23.938 until 10.26.951. The *Shōyūki*, by Fujiwara Sanesuke, 11 vols., in *Dai nihon kokiroku* 10 (Iwanami shoten, 1959–86) mentions this term 26 times from 982 until 999. Searched on the *Shiryōhen sanjo* database during January 2004.

⁷ The term *menoto* appears 27 times from 1000 until 1019, and 26 times from 1019 until 1032 in the *Shōyūki*, while it appears 26 times in *Midō Kanpaku ki*, by Fujiwara Michinaga, 3 vols., in *Dai nihon kokiroku* 1 (Iwanami shoten, 1952–54), from 1004 until 1019. Women writers also referred to wet nurses frequently during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. Sei Shōnagon discusses wet nurses 15 times, while Akazome Emon, the author of *Eiga monogatari*, edited by Matsumura Hiroji 松村博司 et al., in *Nihon kotan bungaku taikai* 日本古典文學大系 (Iwanami shoten, 1957–1967) [hereafter *NKBT*], mentions wet nurses 204 times. Searched on the *Kokubungaku kenkyū shiryōkan honbun* database, January 2004.

number of wet nurses and the court ranks that they would receive.⁸ The custom of using multiple wet nurses remained common for imperial princes and soon spread to ranking members of the nobility as well.⁹

As reported by twelfth-century chronicles and fictional works such as the *Konjaku monogatari*, wet nurses were largely responsible for raising the young children of their social superiors: they slept with them, comforted them when they had bad dreams, carried (and occasionally dropped) them while traveling on horseback, and educated them.¹⁰ The children of nobles commonly traveled in the same carts as their wet nurses, not those of their biological parents.¹¹ Wet nurses were expected to live with their wards to such an extent that it was believed that, when a fox attempted to abduct a child (a common fear at the time), it would assume the form of his wet nurse rather than his mother.¹²

Initially, the *menoto* of high-ranking courtiers resided with the natal families of children who were recognized as heirs (*chakushi* 嫡子). *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes* mentions that one wet nurse offered prayers for her six-year-old charge, Nobunaga, the heir of Norimichi: "She must have been keenly aware of what the nurses of Norimichi's other sons would be saying, for those ladies, eager to place their own charges in the Biwa Mansion, had been much put out when Nobunaga was chosen [as heir]."¹³ This passage shows

⁸ *Shōyūki*, 1:14, 2.17.982. For a summary of women's offices in the court, particularly that of handmaids, see *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes; Annals of Japanese Aristocratic Life in the Heian Period*, trans. and ed. William H. and Helen Craig McCullough (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), 2:818-22.

⁹ For reference to Fujiwara Yorimichi's wet nurse, see the *Shōyūki*, 2:190, 8.11.1011.

¹⁰ See Yamada Yoshio 山田孝雄 et al., eds., *Konjaku monogatari shū*, NKBT, 24:181, for a wet nurse dropping her ward from horseback; and p. 185 for her sleeping with the child. See also 24:571-72 for reference to the wet nurse raising a child who prospers "because of his wet nurse's virtue." For *menoto* and the education of their charges see *ibid.*, 26:226-30. For the Iyo "Lady of the Third Rank" Fujiwara Kenshi, comforting the young Emperor Horikawa and dispatching a letter describing his bad dreams, see *Denryaku*, by Fujiwara Tadazane, 5 vols., *Dai nihon kokiroku* 12 (Iwanami shoten, 1960-70), 2:159, 11.2.1106.

¹¹ See, for example, *Shōyūki*, 3:123, for 7.4.1013. Kujō Kanezane mentioned how a wet nurse traveled in the same cart as an emperor: see his *Gyokuyō*, 3 vols. (Kokusho kankōkai, 1906-7), 3:408, 9.18.1187.

¹² *Konjaku monogatari shū*, 25:517-18.

¹³ McCullough and McCullough, trans., *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes*, 2:742-43.

that only the heir and his *menoto* resided in a noble's mansion. Less favored progeny and any disinherited heirs lived separately with their wet nurses. According to the *Konjaku monogatari*, one heir (*wakagimi* 若君), wrongly thought to have destroyed a valuable ink stone, was disowned and forced to live with his wet nurse, where, in the straitened circumstances of her home, he died.¹⁴ In another unfortunate incident, an infant and his wet nurse perished in a fire at her abode; the biological mother, who presumably lived elsewhere, was spared.¹⁵

Wet nurses were portrayed as having compassion and unconditional love for their charges, in contrast to biological parents, who were seen as cold and calculating. For example, the parents of a beautiful girl abandoned her because she was mute, whereupon the girl's *menoto* raised her and helped her marry and prosper.¹⁶ *Menoto* came to perceive their ties as equal to, if not superseding, parental ones, even though they continued to describe those ties using parental metaphors. For example, a *menoto* named Shin-Amidabutsu wrote that she "was with [her ward] for many years, and so their thoughts were as if they were mother and child."¹⁷ Children reciprocated this affection. The author of the *Sarashina nikki*, forced to part from her nurse, wrote that she "was utterly wretched; her [nurse's] face, still vivid in my memory, made me so sad that even the sight of the moon could not console me and I went to bed wilted with sorrow."¹⁸

Wet nurses performed a vital role at the court precisely because they could comfort and calm down their charges, particularly those who had to be involved in complex ceremonies at a young age. *Menoto* provisionally participated in these ceremonies so as to placate

¹⁴ *Konjaku monogatari shū*, 25:80-85.

¹⁵ *Shōyūki*, 1:258, 1.25.993. For another example of infants living with their wet nurses, see *ibid.*, 2.29.985, p. 18.

¹⁶ *Konjaku monogatari shū*, 24:471. The character for the girl's malaise is hard to decipher, but apparently is read as "ofushi," which is synonymous with being mute. No evidence exists, however, of the notion prevalent in Europe that children "drinking in strange milk, drink in also strange manners and another nature." For this quote, see Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 70.

¹⁷ *Kanagawa kenshi shiryōhen 1 kodai chūsei 1* (Kanagawa, 1970), pp. 572-73, doc. 330, 4.1238 *Ankimon'in chō mandokoro kudashibumi*.

¹⁸ Ivan Morris, trans., *As I Crossed the Bridge of Dreams* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1975), p. 34.

distressed young crown princes, princesses, and emperors.¹⁹ Some concurrently served in the Sacred Mirror Repository (*naishi dokoro* 内侍所) as holders of the imperial regalia, and thus were well placed to comfort infant emperors and crown princes should the need arise.²⁰

In court society, parents appear to have been stigmatized when they were perceived as being too close to their children. For instance, Kujō Kanezane complained that empresses were belittled for spending too much time with their children, though he later criticized Emperor Antoku's mother, saying that she "should not appear as if she were a wet nurse, carrying the emperor in the same carriage."²¹

Of course, not all wet nurses maintained close relations with their wards. Tensions arose, for example, between Lady Nijō and her wet nurse. Nijō thought her nurse and her nurse's family to be uncouth and vulgar, while her nurse was upset by her ward's conceit, fickleness, willfulness, and untrustworthiness. After hearing of Nijō's illicit relations, which harmed the prospects of all, the nurse complained: "As usual, you don't pay the least bit of attention to what I say."²²

A glimpse of the closeness of breast brothers and sisters, or "children of the wet nurse" (*menotonogo* 乳母子), appears in Fujiwara Nagako's diary. This younger sister of one of Emperor Horikawa's four wet nurses (who, because of her youth, was called a wet-nurse daughter) described meeting him as follows: "The Emperor came running up into my room and peered into my face. 'Who is this?' he asked. 'This is the daughter of Emperor Horikawa's nurse' was the reply, and he accepted it as truth. I observed that he was more grown-up than when I had seen him before."²³ As this passage

¹⁹ *Gyokuyō*, 3:427, 10.23.1187.

²⁰ For two out of four court ladies (*naishi no suke* 典侍) serving as wet nurses, see *Chūyūki* by Fujiwara Munetada, 7 vols. (Kyōto: Rinsen shoten, 2001), 2:139, 12.8.1098.

²¹ *Gyokuyō*, 2:383, 3.11.1180.

²² Karen Brazell, trans., *The Confessions of Lady Nijō* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973), pp. 35-38.

²³ Jennifer Brewster, trans., *The Emperor Horikawa Diary* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1977), p. 89. The felicitous translation of "breast brother" comes from Brewster; see p. 31.

reveals, even young siblings of a *menoto* could be designated a "wet-nurse child" (*menotonogo*). Nagako later mentioned how she spent the night with the young emperor "lost among the bed clothes," although, according to her diary, it passed most innocently.²⁴

The close proximity of a *menoto*'s biological children and the child being nursed meant that illicit affairs could occur. Provincial society does not seem to have stigmatized the offspring of such dalliances, particularly in cases where the ward was male, but for a female, particularly one of high rank, to bear the child of her breast brother was scandalous.²⁵ According to court gossip, one imperial princess, Lady Shinsemmon-in, "died suddenly after being impregnated by her nurse's son, Takayasu, who had visited her in secret while she lived in his parents' house."²⁶

By the fourteenth century, noble women rarely reared their children. Shortly after Saionji Kinmune's execution, his wife Hino Meishi managed to save her newborn son by refusing to hand him over to a messenger who ostensibly was to give the infant to a wet nurse. That the messenger, who intended to kill the baby, did not search for him more thoroughly reveals that few thought that high-ranking mothers would actually raise their children.²⁷ Lady Nijō, too, did not nurse her first son and daughter but had both taken from her immediately after birth.²⁸ She seems to have had little concern for her children, admitting that until hearing of her daughter's illness, she "had never thought of her with either affection or sorrow. . . . Occasionally I thought about how old she would be, but it puzzled me that I could never recapture the longing I felt when I glimpsed her that first night [of birth]."²⁹

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

²⁵ In contrast, the breast sister of Minamoto Yoriie, the second Kamakura shogun, gave birth to his heir Ichiman. No stigma seems to have arisen from such parentage.

²⁶ George Perkins, trans., *The Clear Mirror* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 125.

²⁷ Gotō Tanji 後藤丹治 et al., eds., *Taiheiki*, *NKBT*, 35:27.

²⁸ Karen Brazell, trans., *The Confessions of Lady Nijō*, p. 50, describes how Lady Nijō's daughter by Saionji Sanekane was immediately taken by him after birth and raised "to be an empress" in his household. See also pp. 109, 111-12. Her son, raised as an imperial prince, was under the care of her uncle; see p. 51.

²⁹ Brazell, trans., *The Confessions of Lady Nijō*, p. 109.

REWARDS FOR WET NURSES AND THEIR KIN

Wet nurses and their families were devoted to the welfare of their wards, and through their devotion, they prospered. *Menoto* were rewarded with rice, lands, and, at times, horses.³⁰ Some *menoto*, particularly those who nursed imperial princes, were known as “honorable wet nurses” (*onmenoto* 御乳母) and used their connections to gain entry to the lowest echelons of the court nobility. As early as 938, some “honorable wet nurses” had been given the prerogative of wearing the “forbidden colors” associated with the imperial family, and on occasion wet nurses even received the honorary first rank.³¹ Nevertheless, these promotions were not standardized.³² On 3.27.1005, the grant of the third rank to an “honorable wet nurse” was unusual enough as to cause contemporary courtiers to search court records and chronicles for adequate precedent for such a promotion.³³

As their prestige grew, wet nurses received increasingly substantial rewards for their services. Promotions to the third rank or above for “honorable wet nurses” became commonplace.³⁴ This trend paralleled the increase in the prestige of palace women, or ladies of the court (*naishi no suke* 典侍), some of whom concurrently served as wet nurses.³⁵ According to Emperor Juntoku, writing in the thirteenth

³⁰ For the gift of ten *koku* of rice, see *Shōyūki*, 9:88, 12.24.1032; for grants of lands, see *Shōyūki*, 3:2, 4.4.1012. A *koku* constituted the amount of rice needed to feed one man for a year. For Fujiwara Michinaga's reference to an *onmenoto*, the wife of a provincial governor, who received a horse to aid her journey to the province of Owari, see *Midō Kanpaku ki*, 3:128, 12.8.1017.

³¹ For the wearing of forbidden colors, see *Kyūreki*, 1:141, 1.23.938. For a wet nurse receiving the first rank, see the *Midō Kanpaku ki*, 1:68–69, 1.27.1004. See also *Gyokuyō*, 2:374, 2.21.1180, for an admittedly highly irregular case in which a wet nurse was allowed to wear the “forbidden colors.”

³² Courtiers would complain how, in 982, ranks and promotions occurred haphazardly. *Shōyūki*, 1:14, 2.15.982.

³³ *Shōyūki*, 2:104, 3.27.1005.

³⁴ Fujiwara Kōshi, an *onmenoto* for Horikawa and Toba, would reach the second rank. See *Gonijō Moromichi ki*, by Fujiwara Moromichi, 3 vols. *Dai nihon kokiroku* 7 (Iwanami shoten, 1956–58), 2:167, 5.10.1091. For other examples of *onmenoto* reaching the third rank, see *Chūyūki*, 2:73, 1.12.1098, and *Gyokuyō*, 2:105, 11.11.1177.

³⁵ These women would serve in the imperial bedchamber, and were given ranks ranging from the fifth to the third. Some would become low-ranking consorts. See Wada Hidematsu, *Kanshoku yōgai* (Kōdansha, 1991), pp. 226–27. They would be responsible for transmitting imperial documents, and also for holding the regalia. Many served concurrently as wet nurses. For

century, the post of *onmenoto* was not originally a popular one for the children of grand ministers (*daijin* 大臣), who preferred marrying their daughters to emperors and other princes, but became desirable after 1157, when such women were given the third rank,³⁶ which provided their kin with access to the high court. Intense competition then arose for the “bright future” associated with this appointment.³⁷

Relatives of wet nurses acquired both lands and responsibilities. The precise nature of the relationship between these two benefits is unclear. In one case, according to an early twelfth-century document, the husband of an infant's *menoto* was to go to Tanba province in order to supervise provincial lands.³⁸ In another, a man received lands because he was a relative (*enja* 縁者) of a wet nurse.³⁹ Often the husbands and sons of wet nurses became trusted supporters of major nobles and were rewarded with the post of provincial governor.⁴⁰ For example, a certain Yasumichi, husband of the wet nurse for Fujiwara Michinaga's fourth daughter, was appointed governor of Mino.⁴¹

The sons and daughters of *menoto* became increasingly visible and likely to receive important posts. The first mention of a wet nurse's

example, in 1190, two women were appointed as wet nurses, with one of those two serving in the Sacred Mirror Repository (*naishi dokoro*). See *Gyokuyō*, 3:612, 4.26.1190. For other examples of wet nurses serving as ladies of the court (*naishi no suke*), see *Chūyūki*, 2:73, 1.12.1098.

³⁶ *Kinhitsushō*, Zoku gunsho ruijū kanseikai, comp., *Zoku gunsho ruijū*, vol. 26 (1932), pp. 394–95. Juntoku was incorrect because honorable wet nurses were awarded the third rank before 1157. Kujō Kanezane would later discuss the precedent whereby *onmenoto* were granted the third rank. See *Gyokuyō*, 3:442, 11.8.1187.

³⁷ This is explicitly stated in *Eiga monogatari* 75:346. For reference to gifts bestowed on wet nurses, see p. 201. Indeed, much of “Tsubomi hana,” a chapter of *Eiga*, describes marriage, birth, and the importance of choosing a wet nurse; see 75:343–57.

³⁸ *HI*, 9:3685, doc. 4678.

³⁹ *Shōyūki*, 3:184, 2.3.1014.

⁴⁰ The post of provincial governor was prized because those who were appointed to it had the right to skim off excessive tax revenue from their provinces for their personal use. For an informative study of the provincial governors and proprietary provinces, see Uejima Susumu 上島亨, “Kokushi seido no henhen to chigyō kokusei no keisei,” *Nihon kokka no shiteki tokushūsu* (Shibunkaku, 1997), pp. 433–60.

⁴¹ *Eiga monogatari*, 75:251. See also the note on p. 511, which describes this relationship in more detail. Fujiwara Michinaga mentions that his daughter's wet nurse and her family later returned to Mino. See *Midō Kanpaku ki*, 3:147, 3.14.1018 and pp. 242–43, for reference to Mino Yasumichi and his consort leaving for the provinces.

children (*onmenotonogo*) occurred late in the tenth century.⁴² References to *onmenoto* children and husbands increased over the course of the eleventh century.⁴³ Sons were appointed provincial governors,⁴⁴ and the daughters of provincial governors served as wet nurses.⁴⁵ The precise definition of wet-nurse children (*menotonogo*) remained ambiguous. All close relatives of the wet nurse who were of sufficiently youthful age could be called “breast brothers” or “breast sisters” (*menotonogo*).⁴⁶

In addition to securing appointments as provincial governors, the relatives of *menoto* gained influential posts in the capital. In 997, an *onmenotonogo* of the emperor served as a messenger for the imperial police.⁴⁷ Fujiwara Michinaga likewise described how a certain Minamoto Yasutō was appointed secretariat (*kurōdo* 藏人) of the fifth rank, and implied that this stemmed from the “virtue” of his being the son of a wet nurse (*menotonogo*).⁴⁸ By the twelfth century, the notion had become widespread that the *menotonogo* of notable court figures should receive appointments as provincial governors.⁴⁹

This increasing influence of *menoto* relatives engendered criticism. Sei Shōnagon, when compiling a list of “hateful things” in her *Pillow Book*, acidly remarked:

How I detest the husband of the wet nurse.⁵⁰ It is not so bad if the child in that maid’s charge is a girl, because then the man will keep his distance. But, if it is a

⁴² Searched on the *Shiryōhen sanjo* database, January 2004. For “children of the wet nurse” (*onmenotonogo*), see the *Shōyūki*, 2:32, 4.17.997, and p. 76, 12.5.999.

⁴³ See the *Shiryōhen sanjo* database and the *Kokiroku Kokubungaku kenkyū shiryōkan honbun* database, searched on January 2004.

⁴⁴ The son of an “honorable wet nurse” (*onmenoto*) could serve as a provincial governor. See *Eiga monogatari*, 76:437. For a reference to another wet nurse being the daughter of the governor of Tajima, see Matsumura Hiroji 松村博司, ed., Okagami, *NKBT*, 21:300. For another appointment to court rank and provincial governorship for children of “honorable wet nurses,” see *Shōyūki*, 8:229–30, 2.17.1031.

⁴⁵ For example, in maki 39 of the *Eiga monogatari*, 76:517, we see that, of three wet nurses, the first was the daughter of Toshisuke, the governor of Mino; the second was the daughter of Kiyozane, the governor of Shinano; and the third was the daughter of Yoshitsuna, the governor of Suō.

⁴⁶ Brewster, trans., *The Emperor Horikawa Diary*, p. 89.

⁴⁷ *Shōyūki*, 2:32, 4.17.997.

⁴⁸ *Midō Kanpaku ki*, 2:196, 1.15.1013.

⁴⁹ *Konjaku monogatari shū*, 25:321, implies that a man should have been appointed governor of Echizen by virtue of being a breast brother.

⁵⁰ *Menoto*, translated by Ivan Morris as “husbands of nurse maids.” Ivan Morris, trans., *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon* (Penguin Classics, 1971).

boy, he will behave as though he were the father. Never letting the boy out of his sight, he insists on managing everything. He regards the other attendants in the house as less than human, and, if anyone tries to scold the child, he slanders him to the master. Despite this disgraceful behaviour, no one dare accuse the husband; so he strides about the house with a proud, self-important look, giving all the orders.⁵¹

Sei’s passage illuminates how the husband of the wet nurse could become a sort of surrogate father who spent considerable time with his charge and who used this relationship, and its concurrent access and influence, to “slander” others. Her characterization also implies that the “lord” trusted the *menoto*’s husband as his son’s guardian. Moreover, Sei Shōnagon’s note that “the husband of a wet nurse (*menoto no oto*) is most intelligent” suggests that the husband had leveraged his influence into political power and financial rewards.⁵²

Wet nurses, already influential in Sei Shōnagon’s day, continued to exercise profound institutional, social, and political power during the course of the eleventh century as several emperors “retired” and governed Japan through house organs of government. These institutions tended to be staffed from a sovereign’s trusted followers, many of whom were drawn from their *menoto* families.

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ASCENT OF *MENOTO*

A Retired Emperor’s Menotonogo: The Case of Rokujō Akisue

Menoto gained prominence during Shirakawa’s long domination of the court as emperor (1072–86) and retired emperor (1086–1129). Shirakawa, building on the “archive of knowledge” created by his father Go-Sanjō, relied on the revitalized imperial chancellery (*in no chō* 院序) to determine the legality of estates.⁵³ As Shirakawa

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵² Ikeda Kikan 池田龜鑑, ed., *Makura no sōshi*, by Sei Shōnagon (Iwanami shoten, 1962), dan 187, p. 236, and Hashimoto, *Heian kizoku*, p. 492.

⁵³ See G. Cameron Hurst, *Insei: Abdicated Sovereigns and the Politics of Late Heian Japan, 1086–1185* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976); idem, “Insei,” in the *Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 2, ed. Donald H. Shively and William McCullough (Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 576–643; and Thomas Keirstead, *The Geography of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). For important studies on provincial governors during this period, see Hashimoto Yoshihiko, *Heian jidai no kizoku* (Heibonsha, 1986), pp. 209–33; Toda Yoshimi 戸田芳美, *Chiyūki: Katsudō suru Insei jidai no gunzō* (Soshiete, 1979), pp. 197–248. See also n. 34.

attempted to formalize this new basis of power, he went to great lengths to ensure that siblings and descendants eligible for the throne did not marry into the dominant Northern Fujiwara lineage. He even married his son, Emperor Horikawa, to an aunt twenty-one years his senior.⁵⁴

Attempts to curb Fujiwara influence by finding non-Fujiwara consorts for emperors remained intermittent and inadequate. Astute enough to realize that the Northern lineage of the Fujiwara might regain its strength, Shirakawa and his confidants created a social system that would systemically check the political power of the Fujiwara. Previously, Fujiwara regents had provided consorts and so had raised their grandsons—imperial princes—in their own residences.⁵⁵ Under Shirakawa, an *onmenoto* would raise an imperial prince in her own abode, thereby marginalizing the political significance of a prince's mother. Once princes were raised in the homes of their wet nurses rather than in those of their biological mothers, one pillar of authority for the highest-ranking Fujiwara collapsed. Thereafter, sovereigns such as Toba were free to seek Fujiwara consorts without fear that any prince born from such a match could revive Fujiwara fortunes.⁵⁶

Late in the eleventh century, the family of the wet nurse even became responsible for providing food for the emperor. Emperor Juntoku, who was deposed in the Jōkyū war of 1221, would later write in his *Kinhitsushō* that provisions, which had been the responsibility of the "household ministry," came to be provided by the emperor's wet nurse (*onmenoto*).⁵⁷ In addition, during the reign of Emperor Horikawa (1086–1102), the "father of the wet nurse" (*onmenoto* 御乳父) had begun taking over functions of the bureaucratic state, becoming institutionally responsible for providing the emperor's wardrobe and, by extension, for "raising" the imperial prince in his

⁵⁴ After this match failed, Shirakawa arranged another between Horikawa and the daughter of his uncle. Hurst, "Insei," p. 600.

⁵⁵ This process has been admirably elucidated by William McCullough, "Japanese Marriage Institutions of the Heian Period," *HJAS* 27 (1967): 103–67.

⁵⁶ As Hurst has shown, Shirakawa had no qualms about his grandson Toba seeking a Fujiwara consort. See Hurst, "Insei," p. 603.

⁵⁷ *Kinhitsushō*, pp. 378–79.

own house.⁵⁸ This necessitated the direct control of considerable resources, thereby causing the wet-nurse father's house to function as a provisional palace. This social transformation, which historians have heretofore overlooked, contributed to the political eclipse of the Fujiwara and can be considered of equal importance to the more familiar changes, namely, the creation of a retired emperor's chancellor (*in no chō*) and the policy of confiscating landed estates (*shōen* 荘園). Each of these three innovations supported the other two and contributed to the increase of imperial power—and that of the emperors' close retainers—at the expense of the Fujiwara. The policy of confiscating estates weakened the Fujiwara's economic prosperity and strengthened the provincial governors' control over public provincial lands. As already noted, members of *menoto* families served as provincial governors; they also staffed the retired emperor's *in no chō*. These wet nurses and their families appear frequently in contemporary sources, for they exercised considerable influence over Shirakawa's policies.⁵⁹

Thus the father of the wet nurse supplanted the maternal grandfather as the key adviser to young princes. Because members of the Northern line of the Fujiwara were of too high a status for this position, their power was checked by this innovation. Indeed, Emperor Juntoku would later reveal how the father of the wet nurse had an advantage over his social superiors, for his immediate access to the emperor had become an established prerogative.⁶⁰ Juntoku explained that even the regent could not gain an audience with an emperor, although men such as Saionji Kintsune could, in Kintsune's case by claiming to be the son-in-law (*muko* 婿) of the father of the wet nurse.⁶¹

Wet nurses provided an important mechanism for bringing new blood into the court. The influence and wealth that accrued to

⁵⁸ For *onmenoto* fathers (御乳父) being responsible for clothes, see *ibid.*, p. 391. Some doubt exists as to whether this is a copyist's error for "wet nurse" (御乳母). The diary of Fujiwara Nagako, a "breast sister" of Horikawa, reveals her closeness, and that of her family, with the young emperor. Brewster, trans., *The Emperor Horikawa Diary*, p. 89.

⁵⁹ For the influence of these "retainers" on policy, see Hurst, "Insei," pp. 602–3.

⁶⁰ "Protector priests" (*gojisō*) shared this immediate access to the emperor. See *Kinhitsushō*, pp. 387–88.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 387, and Hashimoto, *Heian kizoku*, pp. 493–94.

onmenoto enabled some to ensure that their sons, the breast brothers of emperors, had the resources to found their own independent court families. Fujiwara Kōshi, the wife of Fujiwara Kinzane, served as an *onmenoto* for Horikawa and Toba.⁶² Two of her sons established courtier families that occupied the second tier of court society. Her son Michisue founded the Saionji family, while her son Saneyoshi became the progenitor of the Tokudaiji, a less influential but still significant family of court administrators.⁶³ Although neither of these families could compete directly with the hereditary privileges of the Fujiwara, both families remained politically astute, ultimately achieving court rank and influence in thirteenth-century Japan.

Some wives of regents recognized that the position of *onmenoto* was a new locus of political power and source of wealth, and preferred serving as nurses to emperors over being consorts to them. Kujō Kanezane, who served as regent himself, complained that the wife of a ranking Fujiwara regent acted as an *onmenoto* for the young emperor Antoku, and even had the temerity to ride in the same cart as he did. According to Kanezane, it was “unprecedented for the wife (*shitsu* 室) of a regent (*shissei* 執政) to serve as wet nurse and throw away [her] status (lit., body) for power (*kensei* 權勢). . . . Even though it is the end of the [Buddha’s] law (*matsudai* 末代), one must still be careful not to throw away one’s name or cause [the status of] one’s house to drop.” Although Kanezane lamented this “highly unseemly situation” (*hanahada migurushiki koto nari* 太見苦事也),⁶⁴ his protests reveal that some regents preferred the political power of

⁶² *Sonpi bunmyaku*, by Tōin Kinsada, 5 vols. (Yoshikawa kobunkan, 1957–64), 2:63, for Fujiwara Kōshi’s status as *onmenoto*. For a contemporary reference to her as an *onmenoto*, see *Chūyūki*, 2:110, 1.1.1094; for other references to her status and influence, see *Gonijō Moromichi ki*, 2:167, 5.10.1091. Kōshi’s husband achieved the rank of grand minister (*dainagon*) as well as *naidaijin*, one of the highest offices of state.

⁶³ *Sonpi bunmyaku*, 1:146, for Michisue, and 1:177 for Saneyoshi. The Saionji, who specialized in lute playing, would later marry into the Taira, another *onmenoto* family of the eleventh century, and not achieve prominence until 1221. The Tokudaiji would become noted courtiers and ideologues in the thirteenth century, with Tokudaiji Sanemoto becoming grand minister of state.

⁶⁴ *Gyokuyō*, 2:238, 12.30.1178. For another comment by Kujō Kanezane about the unprecedented nature of the wife of a regent (*shissei*) serving as wet nurse, see *ibid.*, 2:269, 2.10.1179. *Matsudai* refers to a “latter age” of corruption in which people were no longer able to achieve salvation through their own efforts.

onmenoto to the increasingly hollow prerogatives of precedent-based status.

Onmenoto and their fathers and husbands gained power because they had more contact with imperial princes than did a prince’s mother and maternal grandfather, who had maintained immediate access through the mid-eleventh century. The Fujiwara regents were forced to admit that they no longer monopolized the trust and affection of a young emperor. Fujiwara Tadamichi, who served as regent from 1121 to 1158, explained to Emperor Nijō (1158–65) that the regent (*kanpaku*) for an adult emperor, protector priests (*gojisō* 御持僧), and the emperor’s wet nurse (*onmenoto*) were closest to the emperor, and by inference constituted his most trusted advisers.⁶⁵

Tadamichi’s acknowledgment that regents shared influence with wet nurses would have been inconceivable to his forebears, such as Fujiwara Michinaga, who had dominated the court, and reveals the extent to which *onmenoto* had supplanted regents by this time. By the late twelfth century, the support and loyalty of nurses and their kin were perceived as axiomatic by courtiers.⁶⁶

In contrast to the Fujiwara regents, who were divided into several competing factions, Shirakawa’s wet nurse and her family were unusually united and influential. Go-Sanjō acceded to the throne as an adult and designated his son Shirakawa as heir. Few courtiers had considered Shirakawa a likely candidate to the throne. This explains why he had only a single wet nurse (*onmenoto*), Fujiwara Shinshi,⁶⁷ who was ultimately appointed to the second rank.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ *Daikai Hisshō*, in *Gunsho ruijū*, comp. Hanawa Hokiichi 埴己一, 28:3. The *kanpaku* was, of course, the father-in-law of the emperor, who in this case was Fujiwara Motozane. Nijō’s wet nurse was the wife of Taira Kiyomori. See Gomi Fumihiko 五味文彦, *Taira no Kiyomori* (Yoshikawa kobunkan, 1999), pp. 146–47.

⁶⁶ Kujō Kanezane described how a wet-nurse husband “provided special support” for his wife’s charge in conducting ceremonial duties that proved so unpopular that no other nobles attended them. *Gyokuyō*, 1:256, 12.11.1172.

⁶⁷ *Chūyūki*, 1:93, 10.21.1093, provides an obituary of Fujiwara Shinshi. Shirakawa was born at a time when the lineage of imperial mothers shifted from the Kujō house to the Kan’in house, which also explains why his candidacy as a crown prince was not foreseen. See the translation from Okami Masao 岡見正雄 et al., eds., *Gukanshō, NKBT*, in Delmar Brown, *The Future and the Past, A Translation and Study of the Gukanshō, An Interpretative History of Japan Written in 1219* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 77, 90.

⁶⁸ This relationship is clearly enunciated in *Chūyūki*, 1:93, 10.21.1093.

Shirakawa proved deeply concerned for her welfare. He rushed to her side when she became mortally ill, and grieved inconsolably when she died.⁶⁹

Even after Shinshi's death, her descendants, who came to be known as the Rokujō family, continued to wield influence at the court. Graced by Shirakawa's patronage, Shinshi's son Akisue gained ranks, office, wealth, and political power. Akisue served as governor for Iyo, Tanba, Harima, and Mimasaka provinces,⁷⁰ and he received a variety of influential posts.⁷¹ On 12.13.1114, he became the chief director (*bettō* 別当) of Shirakawa's chancellery (*in no chō*).⁷²

Onmenoto prerogatives translated into high court rank for the Rokujō, a process that helped undermine the criterion of heredity in determining court ranks. Shirakawa promoted his breast brother Akisue into the highest echelons of the nobility, which would have been inconceivable in the tenth and early eleventh centuries. This power was contingent upon service to the emperor and was unrelated to Northern Fujiwara prerogatives. Later, *onmenoto* husbands would explain that from the time of Shirakawa's hegemony, those who served the retired emperor had not needed to pay the Fujiwara regents any particular respect (see the next section).⁷³

The powers and prerogatives that had accrued to an emperor's wet nurse (*onmenoto*) were not monopolized by any one member of her family but were diffused to a coterie of relatives. Rokujō Akisue

⁶⁹ *Chūyūki*, 1:90, 10.4.1093, for Shinshi's appointment and 1:91, 10.10.1093 for the retired emperor's journey to her bedside. For her death, see 1:93, 10.21.1093.

⁷⁰ For a reference to Akisue as governor of Iyo from 1089 until 1094, see *HI*, 4:1300, doc. 1334; for Akisue as governor of Tanba in 1103, see *HI*, 5:1931, doc. 2281; for Iyo, see *Chūyūki*, 1:58, 8.10.1090; for Tanba being his "old" province, see *Chūyūki*, 1:195, 1.25.1093, and 1:243, 10.18.1093; for his 1107 appointment to Harima, see *Chūyūki*, 2:180, 2.8.1107; and for Mimasaka, see *Denryaku*, 1:82, 11.17.1101, and 1:141, 7.22.1102. See also *HI*, 10:55, doc. 6039 (hoi 39), for a surviving letter of Akisue which complains of his problems in securing revenue from one of his estates in Izumi province that he had held "for a number of years."

⁷¹ Akisue attained the third court rank before ultimately being invested with the office of the Daizai [fu] Daini on 1.23.1111. For Akisue's promotion, see *HI*, 11:289-90, doc. hoi 296.

⁷² *HI*, 5:1640-41, doc. 1814, and Takahashi Masaaki 高橋昌明, *Kiyomori izen* (Heibonsha, 1984), p. 237.

⁷³ Yoshida Sadafusa, an *onmenoto* husband, stated this in his *Kikkuden*, *Zoku gunsho ruijū* kansei kai, comp., *Zoku gunsho ruijū*, 11.2: 907-16. The regents criticized what they perceived to be gross disrespect.

and his many able sons helped Shirakawa administer his lands, serving both in the capital and as provincial governors. As early as 1109, Akisue and his eldest son Nagazane served together in Shirakawa's *in no chō*.⁷⁴ By 1120, Akisue and Nagazane had been joined in the *in no chō* by two more of Akisue's sons, Ieyasu and Akisuke, who were concurrently appointed provincial governors.⁷⁵

Mastery of the practical knowledge of administration contributed to the success of Akisue and his sons. They were able to secure enough funds to construct a variety of important buildings. When Akisue was appointed governor of Harima, he helped build a palace for Shirakawa. Later, when Akisue's son Ieyasu was appointed governor of Harima, he in turn built a Tahōdō for the Kamigamo shrine in 1116; Shirakawa's palace at Sanjō Karasuma in 1126; an eastern pagoda for the Shimogamo shrine in 1128; and also an Amida hall, a three-story pagoda, and a statue of Amida for Shirakawa in 1129.⁷⁶ In addition, Akisue's residences were palatial enough to serve as provisional palaces. After Emperor Toba's residence, the Kayanoin (賀陽院), burned on 5.10.1111, Akisue lodged both Toba and Shirakawa in two of his own abodes.⁷⁷

Personal bonds of trust and access to the sovereign also accounted for the influence of *onmenoto* families. On separate occasions, both Akisue and Nagazane served Shirakawa alone: Akisue traveled with Shirakawa when court promotions were announced, at a time other courtiers dared not leave their residences for fear of missing the announcement; Nagazane journeyed to Hōsshōji in the midst of a rainstorm to meet Shirakawa and perform a "North Star" (*Hokuto hō* 北斗法) ritual with Ninnaji priests.⁷⁸ Frequent processions by the

⁷⁴ *HI*, 4:1553-54, doc. 1714. See also Takahashi, *Kiyomori izen*, pp. 296-97.

⁷⁵ Akisue's sons Nagazane, Ieyasu, and Akisuke were three out of seven men of the fourth rank who were appointed to the chancellery (*in no chō*). See *HI*, 10:3859-63, doc. 4975, and Takahashi, *Kiyomori izen*, pp. 297-98. See also *Sonpi bunmyaku*, 2:360, 363, 380-81. Nagazane was governor of Iyo, Ieyasu of Tanba, and Akisuke of Mimasaka province. *HI*, 10:3859-63, doc. 4975, and Takahashi, *Kiyomori izen*, pp. 297-98.

⁷⁶ For the best overview, see *Hyōgo kenshi* (Kobe, 1974), 1:842.

⁷⁷ Kawano Fusao 河野房男, "Shirakawa inshidan no ichikōsatsu-Fujiwara Nagazane o chūshin to shite," *Nihon rekishi* 152 (2.1961): 34, 38. Another sign of the remarkable power of provincial governors is that Tadataka, the governor of Tanba, managed to build a new palace in exactly five months; see *ibid.*, p. 38. See also Hurst, *Insei*, p. 271.

⁷⁸ Kawano, "Shirakawa inshidan," pp. 31-32, and *Chūyūki*, 3:13, 1.28.1105, for Akisue; and *Chūyūki*, 5:276, 1.7.1127, for Nagazane and the North Star ritual.

retired emperor to Akisue and Nagazane's residences also suggest the closeness of their ties.⁷⁹ Shirakawa also engaged in special ceremonies for the Buddhist rites (*kuyō* 供養) for Akisue's family,⁸⁰ while Nagazane received Shirakawa's final instructions concerning his burial and faithfully carried them out.⁸¹

Being so closely tied to the sovereign, *onmenoto* power remained unstable and insecure. Hence wet-nurse families attempted to solidify their status and court privileges by intermarrying with exalted members of the court. Akisue married his daughter into the Northern Fujiwara lineage.⁸² Nevertheless, these marriages could not adequately compensate for the tensions between Akisue's progeny and ranking members of the Northern Fujiwara, who still considered them to be upstarts. For example, when Rokujō Nagazane was appointed to the rank of provisional middle counselor (*gon chūnagon* 權中納言), Fujiwara Munetada castigated him as "lacking ability, intelligence, heroism and hard work" and characterized him as "an extremely fortunate (*daikō* 大幸) person . . . who owed his success to how he disposed of Shirakawa's remains."⁸³ Even when Nagazane died prematurely, Munetada criticized him for rising to high rank "without any abilities" (*muzai no hito* 無才之人), thereby revealing his intense antipathy for his brother-in-law.⁸⁴ Munetada also belittled Fujiwara Tadataka, the brother of the wet nurse to Emperor Sutoku, who received the governorship of Tanba province at the tender age of ten, as one who "received great favor (*dai'on* 大恩) merely as a result of the profound affection (*shuchō* 殊寵)" of Shirakawa.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ See Kawano, "Shirakawa inshidan," pp. 30-31.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32; see also *Chūyūki*, 3:208, 4.18.1107.

⁸¹ See *Chōshūki*, 7.16.1129, reproduced in Toda, *Chūyūki: Katsudō suru insei jidai no gunzō*, pp. 241-43.

⁸² One of Rokujō Akisue's daughters married Fujiwara Munemichi and gave birth to five sons—Nobumichi, Tadamichi, Suemichi, Narimichi, and Shigemichi. One of these sons, Tadamichi, emphasized the importance of the wet nurse as an adviser in his *Daikai hisshō*. See Toda, *Chūyūki: Katsudō suru insei jidai no gunzō*, p. 240.

⁸³ *Chūyūki*, 6:234, 10.5.1130, and Kawano, "Shirakawa inshidan no ichikōsatsu-Fujiwara Nagazane o chūshin to shite," pp. 20-21, 34.

⁸⁴ *Chūyūki*, 7:61-62, 8.19.1133. Fujiwara Munetada was closely related to Rokujō Akisue's lineage. Munetada's oldest son, Muneyoshi, married Rokujō Nagazane's daughter. She gave birth to their heir, Muneie. For the best summary of the relations between the Rokujō and Fujiwara Munetada, the author of the *Chūyūki*, see Toda, *Chūyūki: Katsudō suru insei jidai no gunzō*, p. 240.

⁸⁵ *Chūyūki*, 4:94, 10.25.1111, and Takahashi, *Kiyomori izen*, pp. 242-44.

In most cases, *onmenoto* and their families were eclipsed upon the death of their patron. Akisue's descendants were fortunate because no competing family of wet nurses could arise during Shirakawa's long rule. The venerable Shirakawa had outlived the father of the wet nurse of Toba (in power from 1129 to 1156), his successor as sovereign (*jiten no kimi* 治天ノ君).⁸⁶ Akiyori, the son of Toba's wet nurse, exercised moderate influence, serving as a provincial governor to Izumo and as secretariat (*kurōdo*), but he took the tonsure in 1148 and died the following year.⁸⁷ Likewise, although the sons of Fujiwara Kōshi, breast brothers to Horikawa and Toba, founded their own families, they remained overshadowed by the Rokujō.

Under the hegemony of Retired Emperor Toba, Rokujō Nagazane prospered because his daughter Bifukumonin became a consort for Toba. This match enabled Akisue's progeny to formalize their influence as blood relatives rather than as milk kin. Even Nagazane's premature death in 1133 did not hinder the fortunes of his lineage. Instead, his daughter Bifukumonin and his younger brother Ieyasu basked under Toba's patronage. Bifukumonin, who was favored by Toba above all other consorts, gave birth to the Konoe emperor (1141-55) and became known as "mother of the nation" (*kokumo* 国母)⁸⁸—a remarkable rise by the great-granddaughter of a wet nurse.⁸⁹

Bifukumonin also proved adept at amassing rights to landed income (*shiki*) that had belonged to her ancestors, thereby demonstrating how the means of securing landed income had changed between Shirakawa's rule and Toba's.⁹⁰ Instead of relying on governors to

⁸⁶ Akitaka, the father of Toba's wet nurse, died in 1129, at the age of fifty-five, shortly before Shirakawa died, also in 1129. See *Sonpi bunmyaku*, 2:91. For the reference to him as "father of the wet nurse," see *Denryaku*, 2:253, 12.1.1107, and 3:99, urū 7.1.1110. See the *Shiryōhen sanjo* database, searched on January 2004. The senior reigning or retired emperor became *jiten no kimi*, which implied the sovereign authority to make appointments and policy. Sometimes the *jiten no kimi* was a reigning emperor, but more often he was a retired emperor.

⁸⁷ *Sonpi bunmyaku*, 2:91. For Akiyori's taking of the tonsure in 1148, see *Denryaku*, 2:260, 12.9.1107.

⁸⁸ *Sonpi bunmyaku*, 2:261-62, 360-62.

⁸⁹ The powers of Nagazane's daughter Bifukumonin proved fleeting, for her son, the Konoe emperor, died without an heir.

⁹⁰ *HI*, 5:1982-83, doc. 2339, and *Hyōgo kenshi shiryō hen kodai* (Kobe, 1986), 3:215-16. Nagasue, who was reappointed governor of Harima in 1094, received a commendation for these lands by a certain Hata Tametatsu, who was appointed *bettō* of these lands in 1098. See

extract revenues from public lands, Toba converted many of these "public lands" into private estates. Provincial governors such as Akisue and Nagazane had never been able to independently maintain a landed base; rather, the viability of their land rights had hinged upon their ties to political authority.

Few *menoto* families could sustain court influence over several generations unless they translated their encompassing milk ties into more enduring, if less binding, marriage ties. The Rokujō succeeded for four generations because Shirakawa's longevity allowed them to solidify their position and become established members of court society. Marriage into the Northern lineage of the Fujiwara and into the imperial line itself, coupled with the astute amassing of landed revenue, secured political influence for Akisue's grandchildren.

Successful *menoto* further consolidated power by establishing alliances with competing families. The Rokujō engaged in a twofold strategy: providing consorts for retired emperors and marrying into the Taira, another upstart family of provincial governors. For example, Ieshige, the son of Ieyasu and grandson of Akisue, solidified his influence two years after Shirakawa's death by establishing marriage ties to the Taira's competing *menoto* lineage.⁹¹ At the tender age of twenty-three, Ieshige was described as the center of "all affairs in the realm."⁹² Nevertheless, because the Rokujō could not monopolize the role of *onmenoto*, they remained vulnerable to the vicissitudes of marriage alliances, and to the increased influence of other *menoto* families. After the death of Toba, the Taira would supplant Akisue's line.

Competing Menoto Lineages

As the twelfth century progressed, *menoto* and their relatives achieved increased political and social prominence. Nevertheless, they were forced to rely on kinship ties to solidify their newly enhanced position, which had been achieved through milk ties. The advantages and limitations of this approach are epitomized by the

Hyōgo kenshi, 1:834-37, and *Hyōgo kenshi shiryō hen kodai* (Kobe, 1985), 2:621-22, for the Hata's 2.10.1098 commendation.

⁹¹ Ieshige's father Ieyasu resigned his important posts in 1136. Takahashi, *Kiyomori izen*, p. 302. For their ties to the Taira, see *ibid.*, p. 194.

⁹² Mentioned in Takahashi, *Kiyomori izen*, p. 193.

career of Fujiwara Shinzei, the husband of a wet nurse for Go-Shirakawa, Toba's successor as sovereign (*jiten no kimi*). Shinzei was probably the most famous, if not the longest-lived, *onmenoto* husband. Although he is remembered for his erudition and administrative skill, both his contemporaries and later Japanese thinkers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries attributed his power to his relationship with Go-Shirakawa.

With the consolidation of Go-Shirakawa's authority, his *onmenoto* and their families came to occupy a central role in determining policy and advising the sovereign. Accordingly, they came to deserve mention in histories of Japan. Kitabatake Chikafusa, writing in his fourteenth-century *Jinnō shōtōki*, characterized Shinzei as follows:

The husband of Go-Shirakawa's wet nurse, the priest and minor counselor Michinori (also known as Shinzei), was a member of the Confucian scholarly branch of the Fujiwara. Although a man of vast talent and learning, he had not met with good fortune and had taken holy vows. But Michinori came into great favor during Go-Shirakawa's reign and was able to conduct the affairs of state behind the scenes as he saw fit. From the time of Shirakawa, the imperial palace had been in a state of ruin, and successive emperors had been obliged to live in temporary residences. Michinori, however, managed somehow to have the palace rebuilt at no cost to the public treasury. He also revived various functions and ceremonies that had long been discontinued and beautified all the streets of the capital, providing the city with an appearance it had not had since much earlier times.⁹³

Jien, a high-ranking Tendai priest from the Northern Fujiwara lineage, wrote his *Gukanshō* within living memory of Shinzei's life. His account also mentions that Shinzei offered blistering critiques of Go-Shirakawa, suggesting that he was not overawed by the sovereign.⁹⁴

Contemporaries perceived Shinzei's authority as stemming directly from his position as the husband of Go-Shirakawa's *onmenoto*. Reinforcing this view, *The Tale of Heiji* stated: "Because he was the husband of Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa's wet nurse, Ki of the

⁹³ Iwasa Masashi 岩佐正 et al., eds., *Jinnō shōtōki*, *NKBT*, 87:147, and Paul Varley, *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 208. For the extract given here, I relied on the Varley translation. For other references to Shinzei as the husband of Go-Shirakawa's wet nurse (*onmenoto*), see the *Hōryaku kanki*, in Hanawa Hokiichi, comp., *Gunsho ruijū* (1983), 26:2.

⁹⁴ For the *Gukanshō* depiction of Shinzei, see, 86:217. This has been translated in Brown, *The Future and the Past*, pp. 105-9. For Shinzei's criticisms of Go-Shirakawa, see *Gyokuyō*, 3:16, 3.16.1184; 735-37, 11.5.1191.

Second Rank, ever since the first year of Hōgen (1156) he handled all matters in the realm, great and small, just as he wished."⁹⁵

The basis for *onmenoto* authority remained precarious, despite the increasing influence of advisers such as Shinzei. Shinzei tried to consolidate his authority by relying on marriage alliances but was unable to maintain lasting political influence. He matched his daughter with the Taira heir, Kiyomori,⁹⁶ but in doing so engendered opposition from Minamoto Yoshitomo, who wanted to marry her. This contributed to the outbreak of the Heiji disturbance of 1159, in which the slighted Yoshitomo and Fujiwara Nobuyori, another Go-Shirakawa favorite, killed Shinzei and banished his sons.

Competition among wet-nurse families intensified during the reign of Go-Shirakawa. Shinzei and Fujiwara Nobuyori, the husband of another wet nurse of Go-Shirakawa, were allied in 1156, but both were killed during the Heiji disturbance. This violence was personal and systemic. The families of wet nurses gained power through their access to powerful princes and courtiers, and, following the precedent of Rokujō Akisue, they translated these relatively ephemeral bonds into court ranks and marriage alliances. Tensions arose among *menoto* kin, some of whom were content to use their influence from behind the scenes, while others used their ties to marry into the older nobility, or even into the imperial family, so as to gain power and prestige.

Men who exercised authority through the wet nurses in their families seem to have enjoyed a good reputation throughout contemporary society, whereas those who tried to raise their status through marriage to their social superiors were viewed as aggressive and arrogant. These different attitudes account, in part, for how two members of the Taira family, Shigemori and his father Kiyomori, achieved such opposite reputations in *The Tale of the Heike*, in which Kiyomori is castigated as an arrogant villain, in contrast to his idealized son.

Menoto fathers who did not explicitly try to amass political power by marrying their children into the highest nobility were generally

⁹⁵ Marisa Chalitpatanangune, "Heiji Monogatari: A Study and Annotated Translation of the Oldest Text" (Ph. D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1987), p. 56.

⁹⁶ Varley, *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns*, p. 209.

praised. For example, Fujiwara Kunitsuna, whose wife served as wet nurse to a young heir as regent, Fujiwara Motomichi, had an excellent reputation.⁹⁷ Although Kunitsuna himself was of relatively low rank, he served as the "father of the wet nurse" for emperors Rokujō, Takakura, and Antoku.⁹⁸ His eldest daughter, Seishi, nursed the short-lived Rokujō emperor (1165–68), while another daughter, Hōshi, served as an *onmenoto* for the Takakura emperor (1168–80), and, finally, his adopted daughter Hoshi became an *onmenoto* for Antoku in 1180. Kunitsuna did not arrange for his children to marry above his status. Instead, he married Hoshi to Taira Shigehira, a son of Kiyomori who was a Middle Captain of the third rank.⁹⁹ Also, according to the *Heihanki*, the Rokujō emperor, who was installed after the Heiji disturbance, had two wet nurses—Kunitsuna's daughter Seishi and the wife of Taira Shigemori, Kiyomori's heir, who was installed after the Heiji disturbance.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, influential wet nurses were drawn from the families of skilled court administrators. Described as a "useful man" who had served in several important posts—as the head secretariat (*kurōdo no tō* 藏人頭) for the Fujiwara regents, as governor of Iyo and Harima, and as "Assistant Master of the Secondary Empress's household"—Fujiwara Kunitsuna became a prominent *onmenoto* husband and father after Shinzei's downfall.¹⁰¹ His exemplary service earned him

⁹⁷ *Gukanshō*, 86:241–42, and Brown, *The Future and the Past*, pp. 120–21. Kunitsuna's wife (*mandokoro*) is described as a guardian (*on ushiromi ni te*) for Fujiwara Motomichi, but the implication is that she was his wet nurse. Kujō Kanezane also refers to Kunitsuna as "husband of [Motomichi's] wet nurse." *Gyokuyō*, 2:518, 7.23.1181.

⁹⁸ *Gukanshō*, 86:242–43, and Brown, *The Future and the Past*, p. 121. For Hoshi, Kunitsuna's adopted daughter, who was Torikai Korezane's daughter and wife of Taira Shigehira, see *Gukanshō*, 86:267, Takagi Ichinosuke 高木市之助 et al., eds., *Heike monogatari*, *NKBT*, 33:372 and *Sonpi bunmyaku*, 2:54. The other *onmenoto* of Antoku was the wife of Taira Tokitada, who was exiled to Noto after the Taira defeat. *Heike monogatari*, 32:271, 331.

⁹⁹ *Gukanshō*, 86:267, and Brown, *The Future and the Past*, p. 145.

¹⁰⁰ For Shigemori's wife serving as Rokujō's wet nurse, see Zōho shiryō taisei kankōkai, comp., *Heihanki*, by Taira Nobunori, 4 vols., *Zōho shiryō taisei* 18 (Rinsen shoten, 1965), 3:111, 10.10.1166. This passage also refers to Kōshi, one of Kunitsuna's daughters who, according to the *Sonpi bunmyaku*, 2:54, served as an *onmenoto* for Kenreimon'in, the future empress of Takakura and mother of the Antoku emperor.

¹⁰¹ *Heike monogatari*, 32:337–38, for how Fujiwara Kunitsuna was famed for his great wealth and magnanimity. This praise mirrors that of the *Genpei jōsuiki* (see n. 102 below), but it also suggests that Kunitsuna gained control of Suo province, which was a lucrative source of lumber.

the favor of the Northern Fujiwara. He also helped the emperor after his palace burned down, was instrumental in rebuilding another, established a reputation for broad-minded generosity, and made a "great name" for himself by successfully improvising when a fierce storm disrupted ritual festivities.¹⁰²

Ranking members of the Fujiwara criticized Kunitsuna repeatedly because they resented his authority and considered him to be an upstart. The Tendai priest Jien berated him for using his ties as husband of the wet nurse to Konoe Motomichi, a Northern Fujiwara heir, and father of the wet nurse to emperors Rokujō and Takakura to rise to the second rank.¹⁰³ Kunitsuna also managed to extract several states and a considerable amount of revenue from the Konoe family.¹⁰⁴ His skill in divesting this regent's family of their lands earned him the lasting ire of other ranking nobles. Kujō Kanezane would call him "the greediest (*hinyoku* 貪欲) man in the realm."¹⁰⁵

Wet-Nurse Warriors: The Rise of the Taira

Though influential, Kunitsuna was nevertheless completely overshadowed by the Taira, a provincial warrior family who rose into the highest echelons of the nobility at the court from the 1160s through 1182. The Taira are a prime example of a wet-nurse family using its position to gain court office. At the same time, the history of the Taira reveals the tensions and dangers inherent in relying on wet-nurse affiliations as a means to power. Some members of the

¹⁰² Summarized from Kokumin bunko kankōkai, ed., *Genpei jōsuiki* (Kokumin bunko kankōkai, 1911), maki 26, pp. 638-40. The *Genpei jōsuiki* praised Kunitsuna, and recounted how he raised his house through his intelligence and exemplary service in the secretariat (*kurōdo*), whereby he gained the favor of Fujiwara Tadamichi. Accordingly, Kunitsuna was a broad-minded person who helped others and gained prosperity both through his intelligence and through his mother's fervent belief in the Kamo avatar (*daimyōjin*). See also Ibid., p. 484-85, and the *Hōryaku kanki*, p. 22, for a reference to the palace that Kunitsuna built (which was burned by the Taira when they fled the capital in 1183).

¹⁰³ Jien would comment that even though the regent Tadamichi, who had died, had favored Kunitsuna, "he had no intention of seeing him advanced as high as third rank," but that once Kunitsuna's daughter became Takakura's wet nurse, he advanced to the second rank. *Gukanshō*, 86:242-43, and Brown, *The Future and the Past*, p. 121.

¹⁰⁴ *Gukanshō*, 86:241-42, and Brown, *The Future and the Past*, pp. 120-21.

¹⁰⁵ For this characterization, see *Gyokuyō*, 2:518, 7.23.1181. For Kujō Kanezane's criticism of Kunitsuna's actions, see *Gyokuyō*, 3:7.24.1184. Kunitsuna died in 1181. *Sonpi bunmyaku*, 2:53-54.

Taira were content to emphasize their *menoto* links and marriage ties to other, comparable families, while others attempted to change their status from one of providing nurses to one of providing consorts. Competition among the Taira factions contributed to their violent destruction.

Through marriage alliances, the Taira solidified their position at the court. Longtime confidants of the retired emperors, they remained provincial governors and low-ranking court officials. Taira Tadamori married his sons into eminent *onmenoto* lineages. His eldest son, Kiyomori, was related through marriage to Shinzei and to Fujiwara Nobuyori, the husbands of Go-Shirakawa's two *onmenoto*. These alliances, coupled with close ties to Go-Shirakawa's successors to the throne, caused Tadamori and his sons to gain prominence at the court. Tadamori's marriage to Shūshi, a niece to Rokujō Ieyasu (Akisue's son) and first cousin to the influential Rokujō Ieshige, helped the Taira leader when he joined the ranks of the nobility late in life. Shūshi, who became known as Ike no zeni, served as the *onmenoto* for ex-emperor Sutoku's eldest son and was the mother of Taira Yorimori.¹⁰⁶

With the death of Toba in 1156, the Hōgen disturbance erupted, pitting the forces of the reigning emperor, Go-Shirakawa, against those of the retired emperor, Sutoku. On the eve of the conflict, Tadamori, who had close ties to both major factions, also perished. His eldest son, Kiyomori, born of a different woman than Yorimori, chose to side with Go-Shirakawa. Yorimori had close ties to Sutoku and advocated fighting with his forces but was overruled by his mother, Ike no zeni, who accurately predicted that the forces of Go-Shirakawa were likely to triumph.¹⁰⁷ Go-Shirakawa's victory did not resolve the tensions among competing *onmenoto* families. After Sutoku's

¹⁰⁶ For information on Taira Tadamori's marriage to Shūshi (Ike no zeni), the daughter of Fujiwara Mune Kane and niece to Rokujō Ieyasu who served as the wet nurse for Sutoku's heir, and on their son Yorimori, see Takahashi, *Kiyomori izen*, pp. 193, 242-44, and 278-79. Other families of *onmenoto* origin, such as the Saionji, also married into the Taira during their period of prominence. See Taga Munehaya 多賀宗集, *Ronshū Chūsei bunkashi*, 2 vols. (Kyōto, Hōzōkan, 1980), 1:190-91.

¹⁰⁷ See Takahashi, *Kiyomori izen*, pp. 278-85, and *Gukanshō*, 86:251-52. See also Brown, *The Future and the Past*, p. 129, for the suggestion that Ike no zeni was responsible for causing her son Yorimori to side with his brother Kiyomori in 1156.

banishment, dissension arose between Shinzei and Nobuyori, leading to the Heiji disturbance of 1159, which resulted in the demise of both men.

In the aftermath of the Heiji disturbance and the annihilation of Shinzei's and Nobuyori's families, the Taira and their allies monopolized the position of *onmenoto*. Taira Kiyomori's wife served as the wet nurse for the short-lived Emperor Nijō (1158–65), while his son Shigemori was husband of the wet nurse for the Rokujō emperor.¹⁰⁸ Taira Yorimori's wife also served as *onmenoto* for the Hachijōin princess.¹⁰⁹

Marriages between the Rokujō and Taira proved only partially successful in linking the fortunes of the two lineages. Taira Yorimori and Shigemori remained closely allied with Rokujō Akisue's heirs Ieyasu and Ieshige, who married a succession of nieces and daughters to members of the Taira lineage.¹¹⁰ Shigemori's wife was, for example, the great-granddaughter of Rokujō Akisue. These marriages did not prevent Kiyomori from attacking and executing some of Ieshige's heirs for plotting against him in 1177.¹¹¹ This irony was not lost on his contemporaries, for Ieshige had helped to raise the infant Kiyomori, whose mother had died when he was three.¹¹²

With the deaths of Shinzei, Fujiwara Nobuyori, and Rokujō Akisue's heirs, no rival *menoto* lineages could compete against the Taira. Once these competitors had been displaced, Kiyomori married his daughters into the imperial family, thus becoming the maternal grandfather of the emperor.¹¹³ Instead of exercising power as

¹⁰⁸ For Taira Kiyomori, who is described in the *Sankaiki* as both the husband and the father of the *onmenoto* for Emperor Nijō, see Gomi, *Taira no Kiyomori*, pp. 146–47. Kiyomori was in fact the husband of Nijō's wet nurse. For Shigemori, see *Heihanki*, 3:111, 10.10.1166.

¹⁰⁹ *Heike monogatari*, 32:318.

¹¹⁰ Rokujō Ieshige's cousin was Shūshi, the wife of Taira Tadamori. In addition, Ieshige's daughter married Taira Shigemori, Tadamori's grandson and Taira Kiyomori's heir. Ieshige's grandson, Takafusa, married one of Taira Kiyomori's daughters and one of Ieshige's granddaughters married Taira Koremori, who was Taira Shigemori's son. Takahashi, *Kiyomori izen*, pp. 192–95.

¹¹¹ *Hōryaku kanki*, pp. 4–5.

¹¹² Taira Kiyomori executed Moromitsu (Saikō), one of Ieshige's sons. Takahashi, *Kiyomori izen*, pp. 193–95. For Kiyomori visiting Ieshige's residence as a child "until he was 14 or 15 years of age," see *Heike monogatari*, 32:155.

¹¹³ This earned scorn and derision in some quarters—indeed, Kujō Kaneyane's criticism of the empress riding in the palanquin "like a wet nurse" was lost on none, for contemporaries were aware that she was of a status more appropriate to being a wet nurse than an empress.

husband of the *onmenoto*, Kiyomori went on to provide consorts for another emperor, mimicking the already obsolete Fujiwara pattern of relying on personal authority.

Dissension over Kiyomori's treatment of the Rokujō family, coupled with his decision to support Go-Shirakawa over Sutoku, fractured Taira unity. Yorimori and his mother Ike no zeni helped Sutoku's supporters. In the aftermath of Heiji, Ike no zeni intervened to save the young son of defeated ringleader Minamoto Yoshitomo. Her act of mercy would profoundly affect later events, for Minamoto Yoritomo would later destroy the Taira in 1185, sparing Yorimori, alone of Kiyomori's Taira kin, and would create a "warrior government," the Kamakura bakufu, in eastern Japan.

Tensions continued because the Kiyomori faction of the Taira favored Kiyomori marrying his daughters into the imperial line and allowing close allies such as Fujiwara Kunitsuna to serve as an *onmenoto* husband and father, whereas the Yorimori faction, which included Kiyomori's son Shigemori, favored having their wives appointed as *onmenoto*. As we have seen, Taira Kiyomori, although initially serving as husband to an *onmenoto*, ultimately chose to exercise authority not through his wife but in his position as grandfather to an emperor. In doing so, he undercut his half-brother Yorimori and son Shigemori, who favored wielding influence through the wet nurses in the family. Kiyomori also undermined other wet-nurse families, such as the descendants of Rokujō Akisue, in 1177, and then encouraged clients such as Fujiwara Kunitsuna to serve as *onmenoto* fathers instead. These families, too, would be swept aside with the Taira defeat in 1185.

The latent animosities between Yorimori and Kiyomori became manifest once civil war erupted in 1180. The Taira were forced to flee the capital in 1183, but both Yorimori and Shigemori's son Sukemori stayed behind. The hapless Sukemori, who had "prospered because of the favors extended to him by the Retired Emperor and therefore decided to ask the Retired Emperor for help,"¹¹⁴ found that he "had no one to intercede for him. Receiving no reply to the message he had sent to the Retired Emperor, he fled with the

¹¹⁴ Brown, *The Future and the Past*, p. 132. Hachijōin was a daughter of Toba, and thus a half sister to Go-Shirakawa.

Taira.”¹¹⁵ In contrast, Go-Shirakawa protected Yorimori because his wife had served as Hachijōin’s wet nurse.¹¹⁶ Breast brothers and sisters also proved instrumental in protecting *menoto* kin from ruin.¹¹⁷

The upheavals of 1156, 1159, 1177, and 1180 to 1185 ruined the fortunes of notable *menoto* families, including the Rokujō and the Taira. The downfall of the Taira in particular created a political vacuum. When Go-Toba was enthroned in 1183, no position of *onmenoto* was established.¹¹⁸ This temporary absence did not, however, cause courtiers to question the necessity of wet nurses or whether these women should exercise political power. Instead, *menoto* were selected by provincial warriors as the guardians for their heirs. These guardians became in turn a warrior’s most faithful followers.

WET NURSES AND REGIONAL LORDSHIP

During the twelfth century, the custom of engaging wet nurses permeated the upper echelons of provincial society. Governors who had risen to power through their status as wet-nurse kin used this same institution to forge ties to provincial warriors. Wet nurses and their relatives acted as guardians who defended their “lords” (*nushi* 主) and who were willing, if need be, to die for them. As early as 1072, the son of a wet nurse and third child of Yamato no kami Arisuke shot a bewitched fox so as to protect his mother’s charge, the Ise priestess (*saigū*).¹¹⁹ Provincial governors such as Minamoto Yorinobu also established their authority by appointing the daughters of local confederates to serve as wet nurses for their children.¹²⁰

The bond between nurse and child was hierarchical, as well as more durable than more direct kinship ties, such as the notion of family chieftain (*sōryō* 惣領). Siblings and close relatives were rivals

¹¹⁵ *Gukanshō*, 86:255–56, and Brown, *The Future and the Past*, p. 132. Sukemori was the second son of Shigemori, who had died in 1179, and thus the breast brother of the late emperor Takakura. He incorrectly assumed that this would help him, but it did not.

¹¹⁶ *Gukanshō*, 86:255–56, and Brown, *The Future and the Past*, p. 132.

¹¹⁷ Similarly, these ties saved the priest Nōen; see *Gukanshō*, 86:258.

¹¹⁸ *Gyokuyō*, 2:623, 8.20.1183.

¹¹⁹ *Gyokuyō*, 2:164, 5.16.1178.

¹²⁰ *Konjaku monogatari shū*, 25:390–92. This has also been translated by William Ritchie Wilson, “The Way of the Bow and Arrow. The Japanese Warrior in *Konjaku Monogatari*,” *MN* 28.2 (Summer 1973): 218–20.

for offices and viewed one another as threats as much as sources of allegiance—particularly in cases where members of a single lineage were in competition for estate ownership and imperial patronage. In contrast, *menoto* kin were loyal supporters who were not eligible for the same offices as their wards, though they stood to gain power and prestige through the successes of their charges. Already by the twelfth century, hereditary retainers (*rōtō* 郎等), relatives by marriage, and the children of wet nurses (*menotonogo*) constituted the core of a warrior’s followers.¹²¹

Breast brothers became synonymous with loyal followers, and even came to represent a literary trope. Later embellished versions of *The Tale of the Heiji* describe how Kajūji Mitsuyori visited the palace after a coup and “had his wet nurse’s son Noriyoshi . . . wear *haramaki* (腹巻 armor) . . . and fitted him out in a nondescript (*zōshiki* 雑色) robe. ‘If the expected should happen,’ he said, ‘let no other hands do it but hasten and take my head with your own hands.’”¹²² Other sources reveal that breast brothers were most likely to serve as the most confidential and trusted advisers, both within the capital and in the provinces. Rokujō Munenobu, Prince Mochihito’s breast brother, incited him to rebel in 1180, while Fujiwara Nobuyori’s breast brother tried to protect him from the fists of Minamoto Yoshitomo in 1159.¹²³ Hida Kagetsune died to save his *menotonogo*, Taira Munemori; moreover, in an act epitomizing these bonds, Taira Tomomori chained himself to his breast brother Iga Ienaga, and together they drowned when the Taira faced annihilation at the battle of Da-no-ura in 1185.¹²⁴

Menoto relatives constituted the core supporters for prominent regional warriors. Milk kin proved more reliable than confederates

¹²¹ *Konjaku monogatari shū*, 25:419.

¹²² Edwin O. Reischauer, “The Heiji Monogatari,” in Edwin Reischauer and Joseph Yamagiwa, eds., *Translations from Early Japanese Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), pp. 422–23. That Noriyoshi was a *menotonogo* seems to have been added to this text. Chalitpatanangune, in her translation of “*Heiji Monogatari: A Study*,” p. 74, merely refers to Noriyori as Mitsuyori’s “man.”

¹²³ *Heike monogatari*, 32:284, for Mochihito and Munenobu. For how Shikibu Tayū Sukeyoshi tried to protect Nobuyori from being pummeled by Minamoto Yoshitomo, see Chalitpatanangune, “*Heiji Monogatari: A Study*,” pp. 121–22. Another example of his devoted service appears in *ibid.*, pp. 125–26.

¹²⁴ For both cases, see *Heike monogatari*, 33:339.

whose bonds of allegiance were established through land grants. For example, Minamoto (Kisō) Yoshinaka achieved some prominence by ousting the Taira from the capital in 1183, but he was killed in 1184. Only members of his *menoto* family, the Imai, who had raised him, remained loyal to him: his final followers were his breast brothers Imai Shirō Kanehira and Higuchi Kanemitsu, and his breast sister Tomoe.¹²⁵ Tomoe is well known as a female warrior, but that she was Yoshinaka's breast sister and lover has been largely overlooked.¹²⁶ Just before her brother Imai Shirō Kanehira died, he proudly proclaimed that he was Yoshinaka's breast brother.¹²⁷ After the destruction of the Taira in 1185, however, the *menoto* kin of prominent warriors, particularly those associated with the victorious Minamoto Yoritomo, would be systematically destroyed.

THE RISE OF THE HŌJŌ AND THE ANNIHILATION
OF MINAMOTO YORITOMO'S *MENOTO* LINEAGES

Wet nurses acted as crucial intermediaries in political negotiations during the Genpei wars. *Menoto* relatives allowed the Oyama to join Yoritomo's forces early in the war,¹²⁸ and *menoto* interceded to save a few children from being executed.¹²⁹ Contemporary accounts reveal that wet-nurse children commonly fought on behalf of their mothers' wards.¹³⁰ So close were wet nurses to their charges that in one case the husband of a capital criminal's wet nurse had to go into hiding before ultimately being pardoned.¹³¹

Minamoto Yoritomo, the first Kamakura shogun, trusted *menoto*

¹²⁵ See Ichiko Teiji (市古貞次) et al., eds., *Genpei jōsuiki* (Miyai shoten, 1991-), 6:194-209. A reference to Kanehira as Yoshinaka's *menotonogo* also appears in the *Heike monogatari*, 33:61. For insight concerning Yoshinaka, I am indebted to Elizabeth Oyler.

¹²⁶ Ichiko et al., eds., *Genpei jōsuiki*, 6:195.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 207. Kanehira fought valiantly, and when he heard that Yoshinaka had died, he committed suicide. His brother Higuchi Kanemitsu, upon hearing that Yoshinaka had died, launched a futile attack on Kyoto but was captured and killed; *ibid.*, p. 209. See also the *Azuma kagami*, edited by Kuroita Katsumi 黒板勝美, 4 vols. (Yoshikawa kobunkan, 1989-92) [hereafter *AK*], 1:97, 1.21.1184, and Ichiko et al., eds., *Genpei jōsuiki*, 6:335 n. 44. Other relatives of the Higuchi, with ties to Suwa shrine, died as well; see *Genpei jōsuiki*, 6:209.

¹²⁸ *AK*, 1:48, 10.2.1180.

¹²⁹ *AK*, 1:57-58, 11.26.1180.

¹³⁰ *AK*, 1:68, urū 2.23.1181.

¹³¹ *AK*, 2:631, 11.3.1205.

as confidants. He was unusually solicitous of his father Yoshitomo's wet nurse, who lived in exile to advanced age.¹³² He was also extremely attached to his own wet nurse, who was of the Hiki family, and kept in his hair a statue of the Kannon bodhisattva that she had given to him.¹³³ Even though the Hiki family had followed the thirteen-year-old Yoritomo into exile in 1160, they maintained close ties to the court and could be trusted in sensitive matters: for example, in 1180, a nephew of Yoritomo's wet nurse transmitted Mochihito's edict advocating rebellion to Yoritomo.¹³⁴ These ties also enabled Hiki Yoshikazu, the adopted heir of Yoritomo's *menoto*, to become especially influential.¹³⁵ Yoshikazu's wife served as wet nurse for Yoritomo's heir Yoriie, and her daughter, Yoriie's breast sister, became Yoriie's wife and the mother of his heir Ichiman.

Yoritomo attempted to achieve influence over the court in 1186 by having his sister, the wife of Ichijō Yoshiyasu, his "eyes and ears" in the capital, made an *onmenoto* for Go-Toba.¹³⁶ In the immediate aftermath of the Genpei wars, the court dared not directly oppose the will of the triumphant Kamakura chieftain. Nevertheless they thwarted Yoritomo's attempt to influence the throne by appointing Ichijō Yoshiyasu's young unmarried daughter an *onmenoto* instead.¹³⁷

¹³² *AK*, 1:264, 6.13.1187. This woman remained at Hayakawa *no shō* in Sagami until the ripe age of 92. *AK*, 2:460, 2.5.1192.

¹³³ *AK*, 1:39, 8.24.1180.

¹³⁴ See *AK*, 1:30, 6.19.1180.

¹³⁵ *AK*, 1:91, 10.17.1183, reveals the relation between Hiki Yoshikazu and Minamoto Yoritomo. Yoshikazu was another nephew of Yoritomo's wet nurse, who had adopted him as her heir. Yoritomo was attached to his wet nurse because she had gone into exile with him some twenty years before. See also Paul Varley, "The Hōjō Family and Succession to Power," in *Court and Bakufu in Japan: Essays in Kamakura History*, ed. Jeffrey P. Mass (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 147, for a summary of the ties between the Hiki family and Yoritomo's wet nurse.

¹³⁶ This represented a unique opportunity because Go-Toba was enthroned on 8.20.1183 in the midst of a civil war, and in the turmoil, no "official" wet nurse had been appointed. *Gyokuyō*, 2:623, 8.20.1183. On Yoritomo's attempt to get his sister, Yoshiyasu's wife, appointed as an *onmenoto*, see Hashimoto, *Heian kizoku*, pp. 493-94. For Yoshiyasu's characterization as Yoritomo's "eyes and ears," see *AK*, 1:251, 1.19.1187, and Jeffrey P. Mass, *The Development of Kamakura Rule* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), p. 6. Yoshiyasu was married to Yoritomo's full sister. See *Sonpi bunmyaku*, 3:303.

¹³⁷ *AK*, 1:199, 2.6.1186. See also *ibid.*, 1:265, 7.4.1187, *Gyokuyō*, 3:610, 4.26.1190, and 737, 11.9.1191. According to the *Kinhitsushō*, Yoshiyasu's son Takeyoshi was known as "son of the *onmenoto* father," while Saionji Kintsune, who married Yoshiyasu's daughter, became known as "the son-in-law of the *onmenoto* father." See *Kinhitsushō*, p. 387.

This increased the ambiguity of the role of *menoto* by making it at times an empty honor. Because Yoshiyasu's daughter failed to nurse the young emperor effectively, she was unlikely to have close contact with or exert personal influence over him. Ichijō Yoshiyasu was politically ineffective and was dismissed as the last active *shugo* "protector" of Kyoto in 1196, dying two years later.¹³⁸

Go-Toba's court witnessed the last powerful *onmenoto*, Takakura Kenshi, who was from a family of scholars of the politically weak and relatively low-ranking Southern lineage of the Fujiwara. Kenshi and her family achieved court rank and political power.¹³⁹ The Takakura were influential for two decades, but with Go-Toba's defeat and banishment in 1221, their power waned.¹⁴⁰ Thereafter, the authority of wet nurses was more explicitly wielded by masculine relatives. Even though Ichijō Yoshiyasu had been thoroughly eclipsed, his son-in-law Saionji Kintsune adopted the title "son-in-law of the father of the wet nurse" because he was married to Yoshiyasu's daughter.¹⁴¹ Kintsune used these *onmenoto* ties and his loyalty to Kamakura to ensure that his descendants would dominate the court.

The weaknesses of *menoto* ties in maintaining regional lordship were demonstrated in the east after Yoritomo's death. Even before his death, tensions between those who served as *menoto* for Yoritomo's progeny and his wife's family, the Hōjō, had surfaced. Yoritomo had sought a member of a warrior family to serve as wet nurse for a daughter he had had by a concubine, but three candidates refused, fearing the anger of his wife Masako.¹⁴² Their premonitions proved prescient, for the Hōjō systematically murdered all of Yoritomo's sons' and grandsons' wet-nurse families.

Control over the Minamoto heirs, and marriage into their line, proved inadequate in confronting blood relatives who compensated for a relatively weak position with murderous resolve. When Yoritomo died, members of the Hiki family appeared to be more

¹³⁸ See Mass, *The Development of Kamakura Rule*, pp. 9, 85.

¹³⁹ Taga, *Ronshū Chūsei bunkashi*, 1:168-79, 194.

¹⁴⁰ On Fujiwara Kenshi, see William McCullough, "Shōkyūki: An Account of the Shōkyū War of 1221," *MN* 19.1-2 (1964):184.

¹⁴¹ *Kinhitsushō*, p. 387, and Hashimoto, *Heian kizoku*, pp. 493-94.

¹⁴² *AK*, 2:462-63, 4.11.1192.

likely candidates for political success than the Hōjō. They served as *menoto* for Yoritomo's eldest son, Yoriie, and provided the most loyal supporters for the short-lived second shogun. As already noted, the wife of Hiki Yoshikazu, the adopted heir of Yoritomo's *menoto*, served as Yoriie's wet nurse, and Yoriie's breast sister (Yoshikazu's daughter) became his wife and the mother of his heir apparent, Ichiman.¹⁴³ Although Hōjō Masako had given birth to both of Yoritomo's sons, Yoriie's allegiances were firmly with the Hiki, while the prospects of Yoritomo and Masako's second son, Sanetomo, were not great, since Yoriie had already fathered an heir.

During his short reign as shogun, Yoriie tried to protect his relatives and close supporters, making five of them immune from criminal prosecution "even if they should commit acts of illegal violence." Of the five, two were from the Hiki family.¹⁴⁴ But these statutory protections did little to save the Hiki. In 1203, when they congregated at the residence of Yoriie's heir Ichiman, they were suddenly attacked and destroyed by the Hōjō.¹⁴⁵ Yoriie then asked Nitta Tadatsune and Wada Yoshimori to attack Hōjō Tokimasa, Minamoto Yoritomo's father-in-law, but neither could act in time to save Yoriie.¹⁴⁶ Not content with destroying the Hiki, the Hōjō extinguished the *menoto* families for all of Yoriie's sons—the Nitta, the Wada, and eventually, the Miura.

The Hōjō dominated Yoritomo's only surviving son, Minamoto Sanetomo, both through blood ties via his mother Masako and through milk ties via his maternal aunt. Sanetomo had no *menoto* support outside of the Hōjō. Because his wet nurse was Hōjō Masako's younger sister,¹⁴⁷ he had no opportunity to act independently of his mother or uncles. Even though he attained high court rank,

¹⁴³ Varley, "The Hōjō Family," particularly pp. 147-48. See also *AK*, 1:302, 7.10.1188.

¹⁴⁴ Varley, "The Hōjō Family," p. 148, and *AK*, 2:556-57, 4.20.1199.

¹⁴⁵ *Shizuoka kenshi* (Shizuoka, 1989), 5:294. Hiki Yoshikazu was killed on 9.2.1203 by Amano Tokage and Nitta Tadatsune. See *ibid.*, 5:292-94.

¹⁴⁶ See *AK*, 2:606, 9.5.1203, and *Shizuoka kenshi*, 5:294.

¹⁴⁷ Sugihashi Takao has revealed that the Hōjō favored Minamoto Yoritomo and Hōjō Masako's second son, Sanetomo, because his wet nurse was Awa no Tsubone, the trustworthy younger sister of Hōjō Masako. Sugihashi Takao 杉橋隆夫, "Maki no kata shusshin to seijiteki ichi-Ike no zeni to Yoritomo to," *Kodai Chūsei no seiji to bunka*, ed. Inoue Mitsuo 井上満 (Kyōto: Shibunkaku 1994), p. 174. Awa no Tsubone had the same mother as Hōjō Masako, and she presumably resided in Hōjō Tokimasa's mansion.

Sanetomo devoted himself to poetry above all else, and he remained a Hōjō cipher until he was assassinated in 1219 by Yoriie's surviving son Kugyō.

The only *menoto* family of Yoriie's heirs that managed to survive through the mid-thirteenth century was the Miura, which did so by abandoning its wards. Miura Yoshimura's daughter was the *menoto* for Yoriie's son Kugyō, but unlike the Hiki, the Nitta, or even the Wada, Yoshimura chose to forsake this child.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, Miura Yoshimura established a reputation for repeated betrayals: as the *Meigetsuki* has shown, he tipped off the Hōjō about the Wada attack; though he was the *menoto* "husband" (but actually father) for Yoriie's son Kugyō, he chose not to aid him;¹⁴⁹ and after Kugyō assassinated his uncle, Sanetomo, Kugyō appealed in vain to Yoshimura for support through his breast brother, Yagenda Hyōe no jō.¹⁵⁰ As a result, Miura Yoshimura successfully navigated the political turbulence of the 1220s, though the Hōjō annihilated his heirs in 1246, thereby extinguishing Minamoto Yoritomo and Yoriie's *menoto* kin.

So completely did the Hōjō destroy the political power of wet nurses that references to them diminished significantly. The *Azuma kagami*, a pro-Hōjō historical compilation, contains twenty-five references to *menoto*, four to breast brothers and sisters, and seven to wet-nurse husbands prior to 1221.¹⁵¹ For the period from 1221 until 1266, it mentions *menoto* or their kin only twice, reflecting how they lost influence in Kamakura after the death of Yoritomo and his sons.¹⁵²

We have seen that wet nurses, who were originally women on the fringes of court society, achieved power and prestige with the rise of charismatic nurses and their kin in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. However, their influence remained transitory and unstable because of its intrinsically personal nature. Some husbands and bio-

¹⁴⁸ AK, 2:634, 10.20.1206, for Miura Yoshimura being the *menoto* "husband" (but actually father) for Kugyō.

¹⁴⁹ According to the *Jōkyūki*, Miura Yoshimura's brother Taneyoshi sided with the court and fought against Yoshimura in 1221, accusing him of treachery. See William McCullough, "Shōkyūki," pp. 438-39.

¹⁵⁰ AK, 2:752, 1.27.1219.

¹⁵¹ *Azuma kagami* database, searched on April 8, 2002.

¹⁵² AK, 3:57-58, 6.18.1227; 409, 6.10.1248. These data were searched on the *Azuma kagami* database, April 8, 2002.

logical sons of wet nurses used their ties to advance themselves, but they elicited resentment from their social superiors. In 1221, all court *onmenoto* families except for the Saionji were eclipsed, as were all prominent Kamakura *menoto* families except for the Hōjō. Nevertheless, the Hōjō's displacement of these competing wet-nurse families in the east did not lead to societal change, for they used *menoto* to raise their own children and were eventually dominated by *menoto* kin themselves.

THE RESURGENCE OF *MENOTO* POWER IN THE EAST

Late in 1285, the Hōjō became beholden to their *menoto* as their milk relatives destroyed their blood kin rivals. Hōjō Sadatoki, the Kamakura regent, relied on Taira Yoritsuna, the husband of his *menoto*, to destroy his maternal "grandfather" Adachi Yasumori.¹⁵³ Although Sadatoki's behavior might seem to be counterintuitive, in that he killed a dynamic leader devoted to strengthening the bakufu, he acted against Yasumori because he trusted Yoritsuna more than his natal kin.

Other sources reveal that children of the Hōjō were, like those of courtiers, raised by their *menoto*. During the disturbance of 1285, Kanezawa Akitoki, the son-in-law of Adachi Yasumori, feared for his life, so he had Tomigaya Saemon nyūdō, the husband of his son's wet nurse, spirit his son Sadaaki to safety.¹⁵⁴ Tomigaya Saemon nyūdō raised Kanezawa Sadaaki and "held the infant [Sadaaki] during the night, and spent the day playing with him on his knees."¹⁵⁵ Once the Kanezawa were rehabilitated, the Tomigaya were rewarded for their support by becoming the managing officials (*mandokoro* 政所) of Rokuura, the Kanezawa's main estate. According to a contemporary record, "not only did they receive numerous estates, and administer them for the lord [Sadaaki,] but also his sons

¹⁵³ Adachi Yasumori was actually Hōjō Sadatoki's maternal uncle because Yasumori's younger sister was Sadatoki's mother. But Yasumori had adopted his younger sister as his daughter, making him Sadatoki's putative maternal grandfather. See Thomas D. Conlan, *In Little Need of Divine Intervention* (Ithaca: Cornell East Asia Series, 2001), p. 3.

¹⁵⁴ Nagai Susumu 永井晋, *Kanezawa Sadaaki* (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2003), pp. 5, 159-60. Kanezawa Akitoki abandoned Adachi Yasumori and survived, revealing again the relative weakness of blood ties.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, and *Kanezawa bunko*, doc. 6165, "Tomigaya ga tame ni ishū kie kōmon."

and grandsons all served together" and, indeed, "were buried together with their lord."¹⁵⁶

The disturbance of 1285 is a watershed, for it reveals that Hōjō wet-nurse kin had gained control over the bakufu. Taira Yoritsuna, the husband of Hōjō Sadatoki's wet nurse, and his younger brother Nagasaki Mitsutsuna dominated the later Hōjō regents until Kamakura's destruction in 1333.¹⁵⁷ The power of Taira Yoritsuna and Nagasaki Mitsutsuna has been widely recognized by historians, who nevertheless portray these men as mere retainers (*miuchi* 御内), thereby obscuring the closeness of their bonds. Ironically, the Hōjō, who had ruthlessly exterminated all the families that had provided wet nurses for Minamoto Yoritomo and his eldest son Yoriie, subsequently became beholden to their own wet nurses. The post-1221 court, in contrast, limited the personal power of wet nurses.

DISPLACING NURSES: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CORPORATE MENOTO "FATHERS"

After Go-Toba's Jōkyū defeat in 1221, the position of wet nurse (*menoto*) came to be monopolized by men of several prominent and middling noble lineages who were not necessarily directly related to these women but who nevertheless became known as their *menoto* "fathers." In turn, those women appointed as *menoto* did not necessarily even nurse their wards. This innovation enabled a corporate body of courtiers to share access to the emperor, and to regularize and institutionalize the formerly personal ties enjoyed by wet nurses. It also prevented women appointed as *menoto* from gaining the affection of their wards and thus exercising political power, while ensuring that the institutional and fiscal prerogatives associated with raising princes and ranking nobles accrued instead to their *menoto* "fathers."

Whereas the husbands and sons of wet nurses had wielded infor-

¹⁵⁶ Nagai, *Kanezawa Sadaaki*, pp. 159-60, and *Kanezawa bunko*, doc. 6165, "Tomigaya ga tame ni ishū kie kōmon."

¹⁵⁷ The importance of this post of *menoto* father is evident in Kanezawa Sadaaki's letter of 1.17.1326, in Takeuchi Rizō 竹内理三, comp. *Kamakura ibun*, 51 vols. (Tōkyōdō shuppan, 1971-97), 38:42-43, doc. 29313. For the power of Nagasaki Takatsuna and his son Takasuke, see *Hōryaku kanki*, p. 54.

mal power, after 1230 men designated *menoto* "fathers" were not the biological fathers of the wet nurses in question.¹⁵⁸ Late in the thirteenth century, Saionji Kinpira would learn how appointments as "father of the wet nurse" in the 1240s were "in name only" (*meidai bakari nari* 名題許也). For example, even though Muroōmachi Sanetō was a wet-nurse "father," it was his sister who actually served as *onmenoto* for the crown prince Go-Fukakusa. (Sanetō's sister did not initially nurse Go-Fukakusa, for she began serving in this capacity only when Go-Fukakusa was made crown prince at the age of two months.)¹⁵⁹ Other *menoto* "fathers" had no blood relationship at all to the actual wet nurses.¹⁶⁰ Thus, from being a biological tie, the position of "father of the wet nurse" became what Saionji Kinpira described as "the role of *onmenoto* father for crown princes" (*kōshi onmenoto yaku no koto* 皇子御乳父役事).¹⁶¹

In many ways, the rise of *menoto* "fathers" represents the first major infringement on female prerogatives, for the 1230s were a "golden age" for warrior women, many of whose rights to alienate property were enshrined in Kamakura law. Yet at the court, men came to check the power of individual wet nurses and to dominate *menoto* as a political resource. This transformation arose not in response to a military crisis but simply as a reordering of authority within the court after Go-Toba's 1221 Jōkyū defeat.¹⁶²

The Jōkyū war transformed the court, for nearly all the major courtier families had sided with the ill-fated Go-Toba. But Saionji Kintsune, Ichijō Yoshiyasu's son-in-law, had remained allied to Kamakura, and because of his singular loyalty he was appointed to

¹⁵⁸ Reference to the "father" of the wet nurse appears on 11.11.1230 in the *Sadatsugu kyō ki*, when Hino Iemitsu served as the "father" of the wet nurse for Horikawa's empress (*chūgū* 中宮), even though the wet nurse was Iemitsu's wife. The empress was a mere twenty years of age, but Iemitsu's wife was even younger. Hashimoto, *Heian kizoku*, p. 493, and Kokusho kankōkai, ed., *Meigetsuki*, by Fujiwara Sadaie, 3 vols. (Kokusho kankōkai, 1907-12), 3:228, 7.23.1230.

¹⁵⁹ Hashimoto Yoshihiko 橋本義彦 et al., eds., *Kinhira kō ki*, 4 vols. to date (Zoku gunsho ruijū kanseikai, 1968-), 3:60, 4.30.1303. Go-Fukakusa was born on 6.10.1243 and became crown prince two months later. See also Perkins, trans., *The Clear Mirror*, pp. 73-74.

¹⁶⁰ *Kinhira kō ki*, 3:60, 4.30.1303.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3:62, 4.30.1303.

¹⁶² For a contrasting study of how the Mongol invasions influenced the status of warrior women, see Hitomi Tonomura, "Women and Inheritance in Japan's Early Warrior Society," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32.3 (July 1990): 592-623.

the post of "mouthpiece" (*mōshitsugi* 申次) of the court. Accordingly, he transmitted court edicts to Kamakura and provided consorts for nearly all the post-1221 emperors.¹⁶³

The Saionji solidified their power by marrying their daughters into the imperial family, thereby becoming the actual grandfathers of emperors, and by simultaneously serving as *onmenoto* "fathers." This latter practice ensured that they could continue to exercise power even when none of their daughters bore a prince, as was the case, for example, with the child-empress provided to Emperor Kameyama.¹⁶⁴ Thus, after his father Kinsuke died early in Kameyama's reign, Saionji Sanekane managed to wield power by acting as the "father" of Kameyama's *onmenoto*.¹⁶⁵

"Fathers" of the wet nurse gained prominence in the post-Jōkyū court, supporting and promoting the interests of most major courtiers and priests. In 1327 Kujō Tadanori advised his son not to become overly reliant on his *menoto* "father,"¹⁶⁶ but such injunctions were observed more in theory than in reality. For example, Takashina Kunitsune, *menoto* "father" to Ichijō Uchizane, helped his "milk son" receive the post of middle captain (*chūjō* 中将).¹⁶⁷ It was the *onmenoto* "fathers" for imperial princes who became most prominent, however, for if their wards achieved the throne, they were guaranteed political power and wealth.

PROPRIETARY PROVINCES AND *MENOTO* TIES

Post-Jōkyū *onmenoto* "fathers" for imperial princes continued to receive rights to the public income from proprietary provinces scat-

¹⁶³ The Saionji provided consorts for Go-Saga, Go-Fukakusa, Kameyama, Fushimi, Go-Fushimi, Go-Daigo, Kōgon, and Kōmyō, while the Tōin, a branch lineage, provided a consort for Kameyama (who became the mother of Go-Uda), one for Go-Fukakusa (who became the mother of Fushimi), and one for Fushimi (who became the mother of Go-Fushimi).

¹⁶⁴ Saionji Kinsuke's daughter, although only nine years old, became Kameyama's empress. Her youth precluded her from bearing an heir. Tōin Saneyo's daughter gave birth to a prince who became Go-Uda. See also Perkins, trans., *The Clear Mirror*, p. 91.

¹⁶⁵ Kondō Keizō 近藤圭造, comp., "Hino Toshimitsu dainagon kyō ki," *Kaitei Shiseki shūran* (1902), 24:337-38, 10.2.1317, describes Saionji Sanekane serving as an *onmenoto* "father" during the reign of Kameyama.

¹⁶⁶ *Kamakura ibun*, 38:231, doc. 29788, 3.25.1327.

¹⁶⁷ *Kinhira kō ki*, 1:173, 1.19.1289.

tered throughout Japan. Since 1219, and again in 1246 and 1325, the court had attempted to confiscate "new" estates and assimilate them into "public" provincial lands. These sporadic efforts to enhance the public revenue of each province emphasized the fiscal importance of public lands and provincial authority, something that earlier retired emperors such as Toba had ignored.¹⁶⁸ Although we cannot reconstruct how much revenue accrued to each proprietary province, the amounts must have been considerable, for these revenues could be used to fund major temples and the Kamakura bakufu.¹⁶⁹

Saionji Sanekane, for example, served as *onmenoto* "father" for Emperor Fushimi, and in 1288 was assigned rights to revenue from Mikawa province.¹⁷⁰ Proprietary provinces allowed such men to fund the emperor's ceremonial activities. Sanekane provided, as his *onmenoto* levy (*onmenotobun* 御乳父分), two dancers and their full wardrobes for Fushimi.¹⁷¹ In addition to providing such material goods, *onmenoto* "fathers" raised princes and princesses in their own residences.¹⁷²

Proprietary provinces were granted to nobles, emperors, and religious and political institutions. Unlike landed rights, these rights were frequently reassigned. Thus the Mikawa province that was

¹⁶⁸ As early as 1219, the expenses of building a palace were so great that they could not be covered with revenues from existing estates. Inaba Nobumichi has suggested that the court at this time adopted a policy of assimilating "new" estates into public provincial lands. Inaba Nobumichi 稲葉伸道, "Kamakura kōki no 'kokuga kōgyō kokuga kanraku,'" *Nagoya Daigaku bungakubu kenkyū ronshū shigaku* 37 (March 1991): 214-15. In 1325, the Daikakuji emperor Go-Daigo noted that "all new estates [created] since the Jōō era (1222-23) were to be returned to the public realm." *Kamakura ibun*, 38:6, doc. 29220, 10.9.1325.

¹⁶⁹ On the proprietary provinces, see Inaba, "Kamakura kōki no 'kokuga kōgyō kokuga kanraku.'"

¹⁷⁰ *Kinhira kō ki*, 1:121, 2.13.1288, for Sanekane's role as *onmenoto* "father." For his rights to revenue from Mikawa province, see *ibid.*, 2.12.1288.

¹⁷¹ *Kinhira kō ki*, 1:167, 1.16.1289.

¹⁷² Shijō Takaaki served as an *onmenoto* "father" for Fushimi when he was a crown prince, and provided him with clothes during ceremonies. See Kunaichō shoryōbu, ed., *Tsunetoshi kyō ki* (1970), p. 477, 6.25.1276, for Shijō Takaaki's identity as the Zenshōji Dainagon, and p. 465 for his duties of supplying a wardrobe. For a 6.15.1273 reference to the *onmenoto* "father" providing clothes for a crown prince, see *ibid.*, pp. 457-58. This passage also reveals how courtiers such as Kazan'in Morotsugu were divested of their proprietary provinces. Kadenokōji Kanenaka, the *onmenoto* "father" of a young princess, was also responsible for her wardrobe. See the *Kanchūki*, by Fujiwara Kanenaka, 3 vols. (Kyōto: Rinsen shoten, 1965), 3:245-46, 2.25.1300.

granted in 1288 to Saionji Sanekane, the “father” of Emperor Fushimi’s *onmenoto*, would by 1301 become the possession (*bunkoku* 分國) of the retired emperor Fushimi.¹⁷³ Rights to Mikawa were later granted to Hino Toshimitsu, who was, however, divested of these rights on 6.25.1321, in favor again of Saionji Sanekane.¹⁷⁴

The role of fictive, non-biological “father” of the wet nurse enabled well-educated and administratively proficient men drawn from the ranks of middling courtiers to start serving as wet-nurse “fathers” for both imperial candidates and ranking nobles. The Saionji were invariably appointed *onmenoto* “fathers,” so they were not threatened when middling court families such as the Hino and the Yoshida also achieved prominence, developing close relations with nobles and emperors that spanned several generations. Mid-ranking families that gained influence and high court rank through *onmenoto* ties prospered as long as they were considered to be loyal servants by “their” emperors.

THE UNEASY COEXISTENCE OF COURT *MENOTO* AND THE RISE OF THE HINO

Some families managed to gain prominence based almost solely on their intellectual abilities and their skill in providing wet nurses. The Hino, a highly educated branch of the Southern lineage of the Fujiwara, had a long history of serving as wet nurses. In the eleventh century, when an imperial consort died after giving birth, the son of her wet nurse took religious vows even though he was only twenty-one years old, and later constructed a temple at a place called Hino.¹⁷⁵ This temple became the patrimony of the Hino, who, under the tenure of Hino Toshimitsu (1260–1326), raised their status to that of the high nobility.

An able and invaluable supporter for the Jimyōin lineage of emperors, Hino Toshimitsu was favored by the ex-emperor Go-Fukakusa. He served as a “father” of the wet nurse for the Go-

¹⁷³ *Kinhira kō ki*, 2:278, 2.8.1301.

¹⁷⁴ Murata Masashi 村田正志, ed., *Hanazono tennō shinki*, 3 vols. (Zoku gunsho ruijū kanshikai, 1982–86), 2:152, 6.25.1321.

¹⁷⁵ *Chūyūki*, 1:371, 8.8.1096, and 2:65, 11.26.1097, for references to the temple built at Hino. See also Toda *Chūyūki: Katsudō suru Insei jidai no gunzō*, pp. 266–75.

Fushimi, Hanazono, and Kōgon emperors¹⁷⁶ and played an important role in Go-Fushimi’s governance, as did his son Sukena.¹⁷⁷ Contemporary accounts ascribe his power to his appointment as wet-nurse “father” for successive emperors.¹⁷⁸ His role as *onmenoto* “father” gave him unusual personal, political, and ritual access to Go-Fushimi,¹⁷⁹ potentially allowing him to overshadow the Saionji, who had no comparable links to this emperor. This proved so threatening to Saionji Sanekane that he engineered Go-Fushimi’s abdication and strove to prevent Go-Fushimi’s progeny from acceding to the throne.¹⁸⁰

Because the political prospects for Go-Fushimi’s descendants were dim for the remaining two decades of Sanekane’s life, Go-Fushimi depended on Toshimitsu for support, and had several of his sons live with their *onmenoto* “father.”¹⁸¹ Unlike the Saionji, who were so powerful they retained *onmenoto* links to all emperors (with the exception of Go-Fushimi), Toshimitsu remained closely associated with this emperor of the Jimyōin line, one of two competing imperial lineages that arose late in the thirteenth century. Ultimately, the three sons of Go-Fushimi who ascended the throne—Kōgon, Kōmyō, and Go-Kōgon—had either Hino Toshimitsu or his son Sukena as their wet-nurse “father.”¹⁸² After Toshimitsu’s death, his son Sukena ably continued his legacy. Go-Fushimi informed his son Kazuhito, the future Kōgon emperor, that he should consult with Sukena concerning all things.¹⁸³ Toshimitsu and Sukena were, in turn, appointed

¹⁷⁶ *Kinhira kō ki*, 2:245, 10.13.1298.

¹⁷⁷ Kunaichō, comp., *Kōshitsu seidō shiryō, Dajō tennō* (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1978–80), 2:244–46.

¹⁷⁸ *Kinhira kō ki*, 2:245, 10.13.1298.

¹⁷⁹ For an explicit statement to this effect, see *Hanazono tennō shinki*, 1:126, 11.16.1313.

¹⁸⁰ None of Go-Fushimi’s sons would accede to the throne as long as Sanekane lived. His brother, Hanazono, however, served from 1308 until 1318.

¹⁸¹ *Hanazono tennō shinki*, 2:201, 3.26.1322.

¹⁸² This is evident in the *Takemukigaki*, written by Hino Meishi, the daughter of Sukena and wife of Saionji Kinmune, found in Iwasa Miyoko 石佐美代子, ed., *Shinnihon koten bungaku taikai, Chūsei nikki kigyōshū* (Iwanami shoten, 1990), p. 335, which refers to a young prince, raised in Sukena’s house, who would become the future Go-Kōgon. Also see the analysis of Itō Kei 伊藤敬, *Shinhokuchō no hito to bungaku* (Miyai shoten, 1979), p. 19, for assertions that Hino Toshimitsu was the *onmenoto* “father” of Go-Fushimi, and Hanazono and Sukena the *onmenoto* “fathers” of Kōgon and Kōmyō.

¹⁸³ *Hanazono tennō shinki*, 3:184, 12.19.1329.

to offices, such as provisional grand minister (*gon dainagon* 権大納言), that had previously been considered too illustrious for someone of their middling rank.¹⁸⁴

The Hino were not the only family that was able to rise to the highest echelons of the nobility through their wet-nurse ties. Yoshida Sadafusa served as the *onmenoto* “father” for Go-Daigo of the competing Daikakuji line and was granted the first court rank.¹⁸⁵ Sadafusa served in the same capacity for Go-Daigo’s oldest son, while Kitabatake Chikafusa, another prominent administrator and ideologue, would serve as *onmenoto* “father” for Go-Daigo’s second oldest son.¹⁸⁶

The institution of the wet-nurse “father” was flexible enough to allow nobles of different statuses to share personal access to and political influence over the emperor. It also ensured that emperors would have loyal and supportive followers, while allowing the Saionji both to provide emperors with consorts and to have oversight as *onmenoto* “fathers.” That several men could be appointed as “father” of the wet nurse allowed educated nobles from the Hino, Kitabatake, and Yoshida families to attain access to the imperial line, and thus maintain influence that would have been otherwise impossible. Saionji preeminence continued until 1333, though the family’s close ties to Kamakura and lack of loyalty to any specific imperial line ensured its eclipse in 1333, culminating in 1335 with the execution of Saionji Kinmune.

Yoshida Sadafusa’s influence with the competing Daikakuji lineage mirrored that of Hino Toshimitsu. Nevertheless, Sadafusa erroneously believed that the bakufu’s demise was not imminent, and in 1331 he betrayed Go-Daigo by informing Kamakura officials about Go-Daigo’s rebellion.¹⁸⁷ Within two years, however, Go-

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 3:191, 12.28.1329.

¹⁸⁵ See *Gogumaiki*, by Sanjō Kintada, 4 vols., *Dai nihon kokiroku* 17 (Iwanami shoten, 1980–92), 1:220–21, 3.16.1370. Perkins, trans., *The Clear Mirror*, p. 168, also records how Sadafusa was close to Go-Daigo. For more on Yoshida Sadafusa’s rank, and the Hino, see *Gogumaiki*, 1:213.

¹⁸⁶ Perkins, trans., *The Clear Mirror*, p. 168. For Yoshida Sadafusa and Kitabatake Chikafusa as *onmenoto* “fathers” for two of Go-Daigo’s sons, see *ibid.*, p. 180.

¹⁸⁷ Yoshida Sadafusa notified Kamakura of Go-Daigo’s conspiracy. Takeuchi Rizō 竹内理三, ed., *Kamakura nendai uragaki* (Rinsen shoten, 1979), p. 64, 2.22.1331. Go-Fushimi appointed Sadafusa to his council (*hyōjo* 評定), and Sadafusa attended the council on

Daigo destroyed Kamakura. Once Go-Daigo emerged triumphant, the Yoshida were eclipsed by their rival *onmenoto* family, the Kitabatake. Ultimately, Kitabatake Chikafusa became a most trusted adviser for Go-Daigo’s heirs.

In contrast to the Yoshida family, the Hino became more influential with the Jimyōin emperors after Go-Daigo’s 1336 defeat, gaining positions at the top of court society and providing consorts for emperors and for the Ashikaga, who succeeded the Kamakura bakufu in 1338. Perhaps the execution of Saionji Kinmune in 1335 was a harbinger of this change in fortunes. His wife, Hino Meishi, survived and raised their newborn son herself (as mentioned earlier), enabling the Hino to monopolize the Saionji family as well as the Jimyōin imperial line.¹⁸⁸ With the onset of endemic civil war, the age in which political power had accrued to wet nurses and their families came to an end. A new era—characterized by the social, political, and intellectual domination of the Northern Jimyōin court by the Hino, and by the domination of the ephemeral Southern Daikakuji court by the Kitabatake—was about to begin.

CONCLUSION

Wet nurses (*menoto*) constituted a mode of allegiance equal to, and at times more powerful than, kinship ties in Japanese state and society from the tenth through the fourteenth century. They were responsible for raising, educating, and ensuring the welfare of their wards. The appointment of these women provided a mechanism for determining regional lordship, and also a means of establishing a coterie of loyal ministers for sovereigns (*jiten no kimi*). The eleventh-century shift whereby *menoto* families provided for the welfare and wardrobes of crown princes contributed to the eclipse of the Fujiwara

12.28.1331. *Hanazono tennō shinki*, 3:227, 12.28.1331. Once the precariousness of Go-Fushimi’s rule became evident, Sadafusa claimed to be ill and did not attend some later meetings; see *ibid.*, 3:253, 2.2.1332.

¹⁸⁸ Two of Hino Toshimitsu’s sons achieved the same illustrious rank of provisional grand minister, a most unusual distinction. Fujii Sadafumi 藤井貞文 et al., eds., *Moromoriki*, by Nakahara Moromori, 11 vols. (Gunsho ruijū kanseikai, 1968–82), 3:189, 9.8.1345. Tōin Kinkata would criticize the Hino as having “excessive glory” and rank. Iwahashi Koyata 岩橋小弥太, *Entairyaku*, by Tōin Kinkata, 4 vols. (Taiyōsha, 1936–40), 4:347, 7.27.1353.

regents, and thus accounts for the sudden desirability of this post in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. From the mid-eleventh century onward, the retainers of a retired emperor were drawn from the ranks of his *menoto* kin, and these families, including the Taira, furthered their influence through this position.

Menoto and their kin served their "lords," whether those lords were retired emperors or prominent provincial warriors. *Menoto* families were largely loyal agents of authority, but this loyalty made them vulnerable to factional infighting in the twelfth-century court and thirteenth-century Kamakura. In the thirteenth century, two patterns of *menoto* influence emerged. In the east, Minamoto Yoritomo used *menoto* to bolster his rule, as did his son Yoriie. After Yoritomo died, the Hōjō annihilated all of Yoritomo and Yoriie's *menoto*. After 1285, the Hōjō would become beholden to their own *menoto*, relying on them just as much as Yoritomo and twelfth-century retired emperors had done before them.

In contrast, the court managed to institutionalize the office of wet nurse, and then that of wet-nurse "father." By making the position of wet nurse a fictive tie, the court fundamentally weakened the power of the women who served as *onmenoto* to imperial princes. The political prominence of these "honorable wet nurses" declined precipitously after Go-Toba's defeat and exile in 1221. After the Jōkyū war, *onmenoto* "fathers" became more significant than the nurses themselves. After 1230, a stable system arose whereby several nobles of mid- to high rank shared the office of *onmenoto* "father." Instead of being a personal bond, these ties became formalized, malleable, and impersonal. This allowed competing nobles to serve simultaneously, functioned as a mechanism of patronage, and provided a means of funneling income into mid-ranking noble families. The ambiguity of this role enabled the court to countenance change with a minimum of turmoil.

Yet the very pliability of the wet-nurse role contributed to its eclipse. By allowing men of varied statuses to serve as *onmenoto* "fathers," emperors were able to pick reliable advisers from the middling nobility, men who strove to promote their interests—while also enabling dominant court families such as the Saionji to maintain their access to reigning and retired emperors. Some mid-ranking *onmenoto* "fathers" chafed at the status quo and contributed to

the 1333 destruction of the Kamakura bakufu. The Hino used their position of trust—and their innate abilities—to advise, to aid, and ultimately to provide consorts for the Jimyōin lineage of emperors (particularly the descendants of Go-Fushimi) and the Ashikaga shoguns. Thereafter, the role of *onmenoto* "father" withered. The court had been instrumental in establishing both wet nurses and wet-nurse "fathers" as significant social and political institutions in Japan, yet it also became the midwife for their descent into obscurity.