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Charlotte Ehlers
Period 1
Chapman (2014-15)

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the land of rice, chopsticks, samurai and katanas – otherwise known as Feudal Japan. Delve deep into the rich history of Japan by learning about the father of the military government, called the shogun, a man so determined to rule over all of Japan, he killed his own brothers and kin. This soap opera of history features family feuds, betrayals, heirs to emperors, and death. A lot of death. In fact, Feudal Japan was all about death and successors.

Minamoto Yoritomo. Once a name that inspired fear into the bravest of samurai, now forgotten by those most impacted by him. And so began my journey of discovery. The more I found out, the more curious I became. Why was Yoritomo so influential? How motivated would a person have to be to kill their kin? Was that ambition an admirable quality? Was his reign worth the death of those men? While I didn't have a time machine to ask him, I did have the internet, and I learned a lot about Japan that I was oblivious of.

I chose Yoritomo out of, as mentioned before, curiosity. I love Japan, but the Japan I knew was through anime only, which severely limited my view because the media polished the details to make better storylines. By going back to nearly the beginnings of Japan, I got a sense of just how amazing Japan truly was. Just from researching one person, I learned about two government systems – Yoritomo's and the empire's, how they meshed together, and the brutal yet surprisingly refined culture of Feudal Japan. The bushido, or way of the warrior, was a code samurai followed. It emphasized the importance of loyalty, honor, stoicism, and morality. I learned the importance of Yoritomo's government, which lasted 700 years. How it was possible that one man created such a powerful and vast empire astounded me.

You must keep in mind a few things while reading. Japan in the 1100s was, surprisingly, vastly different than today's society. Men were expected to learn to be fearless warriors and heads of family from a young age. Women were passive and seldom mentioned. The culture was based on honor, integrity, and loyalty. One was to honor their father or he was beaten. Yoritomo being a general at 13 was almost expected then.

I hope by reading this, not only will you learn about a man that shaped Japan forever, but you will become interested in Japan. The history of Japan is long and complex, but I hope that by giving you a springboard to start with, you will be driven to find out more about Japan. The country is a fascinating place - once a land of villages and pillages is now a staggeringly important country that leads the world in innovation of new technologies and robots, and is a pillar in the world market.

From,

Charlotte Ehlers

Banishment in the Hogen War

“Retreat! Retreat!” Yoritomo was loathed to say the words. His enemies, the Fujiwara clan, had made a decidedly better strategy than he and his brother. Coupled with their sheer manpower, they had forced Yoritomo to admit that this was an inevitable loss. This stung him not only because it was a blow to his pride, but it was his first battle led by him, at 13 years of age, and he had been determined not to fail.

His warriors, however, still fought. In the heat of battle, with katana blades clanging and drawing blood, his men refused to back down. They all battled as fiercely as tigers, but he knew it would only result in their deaths. He would need his samurai later in a counter attack and he couldn’t afford losing any more lives.

He wished he knew where his brother, Yoshitsune, was, but it was night, and his brother was supposed to be on the other side of the Fujiwara clan, so they could squash the Fujiwara army in between them like feet on bugs. Obviously, that hadn’t worked.

“Retreat, you fools! Back to base!” Yoritomo roared into the bloody Japanese mountainside, and, mercifully, his warriors listened. They took one last swipe, turned tail, and sprinted for safety. Yoritomo swiftly took count of his fallen warriors. Nearly half of his army was wiped clean. The Moritomo clan wouldn’t be happy with him.

He began to sprint through the blood-slick grass, nearly slipping in his hot and heavy armor, his katana hanging uselessly by his side. Behind him, his ears were pricked for Fujiwara warriors following in pursuit, but he only heard the crows of victory. He growled under his breath, vowing revenge.

The ruckus quieted the further he fled from the field, his men and brother, who had finally caught up with him, keeping a steady pace through the night. He could only hear heavy breathing and clanking katanas in the night, and, finally, he relaxed. Unfortunately for the brothers, the gods weren’t on their side.

Angry war cries suddenly echoed in the dense mountains, and Yoritomo leaped in surprise. The Fujiwara clan clearly wasn’t content with their surrender - they thirsted for complete annihilation!

“Run, men! Your lives depend on it!” Yoshitsune cried.

Many warriors ran in the direction of their camp, only a few miles away from where they were. Yoritomo tried to scream to his samurai to not foil their hiding place, but the forest was in turmoil, with ferocious Fujiwara warriors hailing blows on his already defeated army. Yoritomo could see nothing but blood. His young mind, unused to such massacre, caused his body to tremble in fright. His older brother yanked him roughly by the arm. “Run, Yoritomo! Into the forest! You know this forest like the back of your hand!”

“What about you?” Yoritomo managed to stutter.

"I will fight. It is the bushido, the code of our clan."

"Then...then I will too!" Yoritomo said bravely, gripping his katana blade.

"No, you won't. You're the heir, so you need to survive. Quick, before you are found!"

Yoritomo couldn't refuse his brother's imploring eyes. With tears in his eyes, he fled into the forest, sniffing, angry at himself for his obvious helplessness and cowardice.

After what felt like an eternity, Yoritomo scrambled up a tree to survey his surroundings. He gasped at the sight before him - the forest was on fire! That told Yoritomo two things - the Fujiwara clan knew there were more Moritomo clansmen in the forest, and, more importantly, that his brother may have escaped in the havoc. Forests provide cover and important materials to both clans, especially this forest. They wouldn't have set it on fire unless they were desperate to rid all of the Morimoto.

Yoritomo gingerly climbed down his hiding tree. The wind was blowing the opposite way he was facing, forcing the fire away, so now was the perfect time to sneak back to camp. He began his trek, stopping every few moments to check the wind and for pursuers.

He was only a mile out when he found his brother half dead in the brush. Yoshitsune had lacerations deep in his pale skin, his katana was speckled with blood, and Yoritomo could scarcely believe his brother was still breathing. He swiftly knelt by his brother's side, hardly noticing the blood staining his armor. He had never been more relieved to see his brother. Yoritomo did not waste his brother's strength with idle chat. Hefting his brother onto his shoulder, he began half dragging, half walking toward the Morimoto camp. Yoshitsune's labored breathing assured him that he was still alive.

The gods, it seemed, were determined to kill the duo, as not moments after Yoritomo found his brother did a man of the Fujiwara clan find them. No, not just a man, but the general of the Fujiwara samurai himself, Fujiwara Tadamichi, with a posse of bloodied samurai. He had wisely followed the path opposite of the fire, expecting Moritomo clansmen to escape away from the fire. He and his entourage were overjoyed to be proven right.

Yoritomo realized that they would not survive without a fight. With the fire blazing behind him, the Fujiwara general and his companions seemed to be made of smoldering iron. Yoritomo dropped his brother to the ground, scrabbling to free his katana. Tadamichi laughed at the small boy's attempt. He unsheathed and swiftly swung his katana, knocking Yoritomo's out of his hand. The Fujiwara clansmen laughed heartily at the young boy's defiance as Yoritomo dove for it, rolling on the ground and whipping around to face his enemies. Tadamichi sneered, "So this is the mighty Moritomo clan, is it?"

Yoritomo growled, hoping to bluff his way out of the fight. "There are more of us. Plenty more, surrounding us this very second." He mimed a hand signal to mimic the calling of his invisible warriors.

Tadamichi looked around the dense forest suspiciously. "Search the premises," he murmured to his samurai, and they slipped in between the trees like ghosts. Tadamichi turned to face Yoritomo, who was trying for a counterattack. He swung his blade, but Tadamichi effortlessly blocked.

"I like your bravery, boy, but bravery is easily mistaken for foolishness. Give up now, and I may let you live. You and your companion there." The Fujiwara general looked at them in fake pity.

"Run," rasped his brother, knowing that his brother wouldn't survive a fight against an experienced general.

"No," Yoritomo said stubbornly, emitting a war cry and swinging his katana wildly, out of control. He moved purely on instinct, like an animal.

"If you insist, little boy." The Fujiwara general parried his strikes. Yoritomo, undeterred by his failure, pressed on. The older samurai was exasperated with his efforts. It had been a long night, after all, and he was ready to finish the dogged boy off. He raised his now bloodied katana blade and readied himself for the death blow. Yoshitsune could only let out a cry of warning, which was enough to alert Yoritomo. He barely managed to block the heavy swing, but at the cost of a long, deep wound down his chest, piercing through his armor like an arrow through an apple. Blood seeped down his shirt like a river, and Tadamichi, out of respect for the young boy's fighting spirit, said, "Now, I banish you from your homeland. You aren't going to survive that blow, boy, so you might as well die alone, somewhere you won't soil your homeland." With that, the Fujiwara general abandoned them to perish.

Yoritomo clutched his chest, blood seeping, heart pounding painfully. He felt light headed, but more than that, he was outraged. Tears of helplessness and pain rained down his face.

And still the fire raged.

On those flames, Yoritomo vowed for revenge. He would forever remember this offense. As he sat, he promised to avenge both himself and his brother. No one would ever best him ever again. That would be the last time anyone would win against him. Yoritomo was determined to become the most feared samurai and general anyone had ever cowered before.

But for now, he would retreat, rest, and wait.

The Bakufu Government – New Lawmakers and Enforcers

By Torimono Shiro, the Izu village scribe

Villagers of Izu, welcome our new leaders – the shoguns, handpicked by our glorious shogunate, Morimoto Yoritomo. He has instructed all of the scribes of the villages to explain his new government and branches of it. I have been honored to clarify the new Bafuku, or militarily controlled, government Yoritomo has blessed us with.

Of course, the emperor will always hold the most power. As grand as Yoritomo is, the emperor is still the emperor. The emperor expects us to follow his rules. Think of Yoritomo's government like the executor of the Emperor's laws.

Secondly, you may have realized that your head village leaders have been replaced with government-issued shoguns. They will help assimilate your village to the new Bakufu government system, where the shogun's military will oversee your protection. Do not be suspicious – the military samurai in your village will be directly controlled by your shogun. None are ronins, or deadly samurais without masters. To prove this, Yoritomo is permitting you to write a letter to your shogun if you see the samurai out of line or acting inappropriately. Your shogun, Fushiwara Tomodira affirms this promise. "I am here to protect this village. It is my duty to the emperor and Yoritomo to do my upmost to create a peaceful environment for the villagers of Iza."

The military samurai under Tomodira's control, called shugo, are the military peacekeepers. They are as their name implies - present to keep other villages from attacking each other, and to keep your local military in line and disciplined. They will help settle

territory disputes and stop feuds between families. The shugo, like the shogun, will live on the outskirts of your villages, in military outposts. Do not approach the outposts unless given permission or in dire emergencies. The shugo are samurai, battle scarred but honorable men. They are ordered to work for their food, and not disrupt your set lifestyles. However, regard them with the same respect as you would a foreign village leader. They are, after all, dispatched directly from your government. And again, they are the start of the new governing system, so do not hesitate to voice your opinions to your shogun through letters.

Lastly are the deputies of the shogun, called jitou, and will be in charge when he is unavailable. Regard them as you would an heir to the throne. They are meant to personify shoguns, yet they will live in your village. They are your go-to men for problems related to money and property ownership. However, they have the power to enforce taxes and spread new laws of both the emperor and Yoritomo. They can enforce those laws in any way they see fit, even if that means resorting to physical force. They also have the power to distribute money that the bakufu government will allocate to the Izu village on a monthly basis. "We do not want to force you to comply. We believe in this government, and I know that it will improve this village significantly," adds our jitou, Andou Nirakami.

To restate, these men are not only to guarantee your safety and the safety of you and beloved, but to ease you into the transition of the new, improved, Bafuku government. Treat them kindly, everyone!

Blood Brothers

Three brothers born and bred
Raised on a kingdom of bloodshed
All were vying for the throne
All together yet fighting alone

The first brother was proven a coward
Lost in a war, easily devoured
The second was full of power
Never showing a weakest hour

The third was fierce and clever
Known to all as the transgressor
He quietly usurped the emperor's reign
Spinning it into his new domain

Never before had Japan seen
A leader as cold as a machine
A leader as heartless as a devil
A leader as ambitious as a rebel

When the second brother claimed his birthright
The third killed him with a swipe
The scarlet katana enveloped by the moonlight
A herald of the coming of a new night

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Charlotte Ehlers
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English 1, Pre-AP
February 2, 2015

The First Shogun of Japan

In the rugged Japanese mountainside, the first military dictator of Japan was born. Minamoto no Yoritomo, the man who would eventually establish the first militarily-based Japanese government, was a great leader, but under his rule, thousands of innocents were killed. Was he a hero of Japan, despite many killed for his ambitions?

Yoritomo was born in the year 1147, and, by the time he was twelve, received his first court title and, shortly after, became an administrator of the court. Keiji Nagahara described his opinion about court, “Yoritomo was impatient with the court’s cultured and precious subtleties. He wanted power and was jealous, suspicious, and coldhearted, even in his own circle [his family]. He even went as far, in fact, as to liquidate several near relations. But once in power, he proved an excellent administrator.” Already, even at such a young age, Yoritomo was revealing his dual personality – a wise leader yet one impatient for more power.

Yoritomo’s greatest threat was the Taira clan. The Taira and Minamoto clans were startlingly similar – they were both military families that craved power, control, and dominance over the rest of Japan. It was because they hungered for the same things that they were mortal enemies, and their feud spanned many years, consuming them both.

Yoritomo, at first, was not very successful leader. Years after Yoritomo was chosen as an administrator, the Minamoto and Taira clan were locked in yet another war, called the Hogen War. The Minamoto clan, led by Yoritomo, lost to the Taira clan. Yoritomo was banished by the Taira clan to a small village called Izu. He escaped where he was imprisoned by seducing the jailor’s daughter, and married a woman from the Houjou clan, a clan that also had a vendetta against the Taira clan. They eventually had a son.

Yoritomo’s reign did not really begin to shine until the Gemppei War. After Yoritomo’s escape from banishment, the head of the Taira clan used his power to threaten the imperial family, thus isolating the emperor. In 1180, the imperial prince, Mochihitou, called the Minamoto clan and other military clans to defeat the Taira clan and regain power for the throne. Yoritomo answered the call eagerly, katana raised, but

he had major setbacks, most of them concerning his inability to convince others to follow him and help him defeat the Taira. Jeffery P. Mass worded his problem perfectly. "As Yoritomo himself must have realized, he had neither a program designed to overcome traditional rivalries. For every partisan of whatever background who swore loyalty, another of similar provenance was likely to swear enmity." (p. 69) Yoritomo knew that even if families swore loyalty to him, other clans would detest him for it.

Luckily for Yoritomo, he had many loyal followers, and even some men from the Taira clan who were bitter at their relatives for not rewarding them for their work joined his cause. He immediately set his base at Kamakura (about 10 miles south of modern Tokyo). To help control his now-vast army, as Keiji Nagahara eloquently stated it, "Yoritomo tried to organize the Minamoto followers under his direct control. He was loathed to relinquish control to any of his carious relatives, and to his end he established the Samurai-dokoro [Board of Retainers, men who were the lieutenants to his general]." The Samurai-dokoro were the beginnings of a new government in Japan. Mr. Nagahara's statement also highlights an important trait of Yoritomo – he was unable to share his control with any person besides himself.

Yorimoto's first task was to stop Yoshinaka, Yorimoto's own cousin, from carrying out his plot of taking over the imperial power. Yorimoto's silent attack was successful, proving that he was willing to kill his own family in war. Afterwards, Yorimoto established two other branches of his government, the Kumonji (Board of Public Papers) and Monchuujo (Board of Questioning), which set up a military and independent government in East Japan, where he had been fighting.

Yorimoto was not the only man in the Gumppei war from the Minamoto family. His half-brothers, Yoshitsune and Noriyori, were also present. Yoshitsune was renowned for his military prowess, even more so than Yorimoto. Yorimoto was overwhelmingly jealous of his half-brother, but he knew it wasn't wise to act on his emotions in war. By 1184 both Yorimoto and his brother's samurai armies were considerably larger than when they had started. Sir George Bailey Sansom described the brother's dynamics, "While urging his brother to take resolute military action at the right moment, Yoritomo was careful to dwell upon the need for calm and caution." (p. 301) Sly Yorimoto was using his brother's power while he stayed safely behind him, guiding Yoshitsune's katana like a puppeteer.

Finally the three brothers defeated the Taira clan. However, Yoritomo had a different agenda, as explained by Walter Wallace McKaren, “Yoritomo was not only not content with completely destroying his Taira rivals, but turned almost immediately on his brother Yoshitsune, his greatest general and caused his death to secure his own son’s the succession to his great office.” (p. 26) He then forced the emperor to create the shugo (military peacekeepers) and jitou (tax enforcers and land owners), which helped him grow and maintain his new government. Both the shugo and jitou became feudal lords, capable of administering justice on how they see fit, even if it ended in death. Through them, Yoritomo was able to steal the imperial power and tried to branch out and rule far-distant lands in Japan.

To demonstrate his newfound power, “Yoritomo crushed the powerful Fujiwara family of Northern Japan [so he could control their land] on the grounds that they had killed Yoshitsune, albeit on his own orders”. (Encyclopedia of World History, p. 161) Yoritomo had killed two birds with one stone with his clever move. He could blame the Fujiwara clan for the death of his half-brother, and he was able to seize their lands and expand his empire. He then, in 1192, titled himself the ruler of all shoguns (military leader), jitou, and shugo.

Yoritomo died in 1199, leaving a legacy of new government run by the military, which lasted almost 700 years. Even though his reign was a bloody one, forged from the death of close family members and many Japanese men, his government changed Japan for the better. He is remembered as a respected, cunning, violent leader; the most loved and feared military dictator in Japan’s history.

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Unifying elements/Notes

There were a few yet symbolic elements in these pieces. I mention katanas in all of the stories. Katanas, to samurai, were their life. Depending on how a samurai wore his and whether he had a katana with a shorter version of it (tantou), it showed his rank, social status, and power. The bushido, or way of the warrior, is only mentioned once in word, but the laws of it are spread throughout the pieces, especially dedication, loyalty, and honor. Lastly, Yoritomo's ambition and bloodthirstiness unifies all of the pieces.

Third Person Narrative (Banishment in the Hogen War)— This was a scene from the Hogen war, a battle that established the feud between the Taira Clan and the Moritomo clan. Before the feud with the Taira clan began, the Moritomos and Fujiwara fought to gain control of the emperor's throne, which, at the time, was shaky because it was choosing its successor. I did take some creative license with the story – it was never mentioned who banished Yoritomo and his brothers, but it was most likely the general of the Fujiwara clan. The katanas, of course, come to play during the battle scenes. The bushido is hinted twice – once when Yoshitsune stays behind to fight off the Fujiwara, and again when Yoritomo refuses to leave his brother, even when he knows he won't win the fight. Yoritomo begins to find the ambition that made him famous from his banishment to Iza. In fact, one could say the banishment was a blessing – he became the bloodthirsty man I learned about from that banishment. He even took revenge on the Fujiwara by taking their lands away later on.

Newspaper Article (The Bakufu Government) – I wanted to explore how the new government would look like to those under Yoritomo's new rule. By writing out some of the jobs, I hoped to gain an inkling of what it would be like to suddenly have a new leader forced upon you. How did the villagers feel when suddenly their leader was a stranger from the government? Their bushido must have changed – their loyalty, once just for their emperor, had to have been split between him and Yoritomo. I also wanted to learn about the different jobs Yoritomo created for his government. He made more than what I mentioned, such as the Board of Retainers, Board of Public Papers, and Board of Questioning, but the three that I talked about interested me the most.

Narrative Poem (Blood Brothers) – I seldom mention the first brother. His name was Morimoto Noriyori, and favored by Yoritomo due to his passive personality. He was an average man – he was a mediocre general, a fair man, and an unexceptional fighter. He always heeded Yoritomo's orders, except for one occasion. Yoritomo ordered him to kill Yoshitsune, but he refused at first. However, he eventually conceded, cornered his brother, but didn't kill him. In the end, Yoritomo killed the both of them. The poem also focuses on the dynamics of the brothers – in the prose piece, Yoritomo shows his loyalty to his older brother, but in the end, he kills him. I wanted to show contrast from what he was like to how he ended up using the two mediums.

Drawing (The Red Night) – The three men symbolize the Fujiwara clan, the Taira clan, and the emperor. They also symbolize his brothers and his younger self. The samurai

helmet resting on the katana is a mock version of people's heads impaled by a stake and the bloody start to the militarily controlled government. The red moon echoes the present-day Japanese flag, and the ribbon, which was tied to the man reading for it, represents the bushido. His loyalty is as shaky as the ribbon, once tied securely to his hair. The poem is a haiku, from the Japanese poet Matsuo Basho, a famous poet from the 1600s. The poem tells the story of the rival clans, how they wanted to be in power, but it was only a dream they desired.

Expository Essay (The First Shogun of Japan) – Yoritomo's whole life was very complex, and it dealt with the aftermath of his regime. However, I decided to stay with the creation of his government rather than the results of it, or the paper would have turned into a book. I was able to quell my curiosity and elaborate on his government in my newspaper article.