

Hired Swords: The Rise of Private Warrior Power in Early Japan. By Karl F. Friday. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992. Map. Illustrations. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. ix, 265. \$32.50.

Although the martial component in Japanese culture has been the topic of countless popular publications, very few Western scholars have deigned to examine *bushi* (warrior) history on its own terms. In *Hired Swords*, Karl Friday reexamines common assumptions about the rise of

the warrior class during the Hei'an period. After the establishment of the *ritsuryō* state at the end of the seventh century, so goes the common view, the provisions in the codes for a large infantry army, as adopted from China, proved to be hopelessly inadequate for the administrative structure and economic environment of Japan. This development caused these military institutions to decline during the eighth and disappear by the beginning of the ninth century, leaving a power vacuum in the provinces that was filled by the rise of the warrior class. By the twelfth century this class, then, was ready to take over the government of the country, which it did in a series of wars starting in the 1150s.

Essentially, then, this view holds that the court and the provincial *bushi* were each other's opponents. It is Friday's great achievement to have given a definite rebuttal of this simplistic point of view. Starting with a description of the Japanese army as it was organized in the *ritsuryō* codes (the first such description in Western literature since Oskar Nachod's [1930]), Friday shows that rather than abandoning the military institutions of the *ritsuryō* state, the Court sought to further adapt them to changing conditions. The author further illuminates these adaptations by placing them in an international context, and stresses that the Japan's military requirements of the second half of the seventh century were radically different from those one hundred years later. In the first period, the Court had been concerned about a large scale invasion by T'ang China and also about local competitors for power in the countryside who might resist the centralizing efforts of the noble houses from the Kinai. The threat from T'ang China required large forces, whereas the internal threat obliged the government to try and monopolize the available manpower. Both threats, then, required large, i.e. infantry, forces, made up by general conscription among the nation's peasantry. After the rebellion of An Lu-shan (755), it was abundantly clear that the threat from T'ang China had disappeared, while the provincial nobility had by this time been coopted into the Yamato polity. The disappearance of both threats, then, eliminated the necessity for the large army as provided in the codes. Disturbances inside the country were now best quelled by highly mobile mounted warriors who could be sent from the center to the trouble spots when required.

Wherever possible, Friday cites contemporary sources to prove his argument. Moreover, he is well read in the voluminous Japanese secondary literature on his topic, and he deftly summarizes the most important issues discussed among Japanese scholars. However, it may be that Friday, in his enthusiasm for his innovative approach, is going a bit too far and sees central control where there was none. A weakness of the book, for example, is that it concentrates exclusively on the rise of the warrior class as related to the provincial government, but does not address the question of the relationship between the proliferation of both *shōen* (tax-exempt estates) and *bushidan* (warrior bands) during the Hei'an period. This is caused primarily by the author's use of sources compiled at the court itself. Maybe, if we concentrated on peripheral sources, Friday's picture might have to be

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modified again somewhat. Still, this is a solid contribution to *bushi* history and is warmly recommended.

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