Chapter One

The *Heike monogatari* and Narrating the Genpei War

The Genpei War of 1180 to 1185 stands as one of the most prominent markers on the landscape of Japanese historical memory. Conventionally viewed as the turning point at which cultural, political, and economic power passed from the central aristocracy to provincially based military houses, it has been acclaimed variously as a manifestation of the end of classical culture, the rise of feudalism, and the world’s entry into the latter days of the Buddhist law. Although historians point out that social and institutional change was not nearly so radical or sudden as such characterizations suggest, it is nevertheless indisputable that the war began to be memorialized almost as soon as it ended, and the devastation it had wrought became the subject of numerous text and performance narratives that continued to develop over ensuing centuries.

The records emerging from this watershed period in Japanese history introduced a new modality for how Japanese remembered their past. Operating as histories in the broadest sense, they encompassed the traditional roles of both narrating past events and placating the restless spirits of the war’s victims. But most importantly, these stories also exhibited a new degree of social and geographical mobility unknown in the canonized texts we associate with the Heian period (794–1185), since they were carried by performers and storytellers between the capital and the provinces. The inclusion of residents of remote locales formerly isolated from the culture of the center contributed to a sense of shared cultural identity. That the tales from the *Heike* described a specific historical event helped to shape a sense of the past that further reinforced that shared identity.

This narrative organization of the actions and actors into “history” reached an apex in the *Heike monogatari* (Tale of the Heike), the monumental tale about the war, its causes, and its immediate aftermath. Its nearly one hundred variants recount diverse aspects of that experience,
and all identify the war as the end of an era. Thus the tale’s most prominent recensions all focus on the relentless and complete destruction of the Taira clan, who epitomize the excesses of the aristocratic period, and the resultant rise of the warrior class under the Minamoto clan, who set the new direction social organization would take.

The Heike had a tremendous impact on the cultural production of the ensuing medieval age. A host of additional new literary works—indeed, entirely new narrative and performance genres—drew both inspiration and narrative content from the Heike’s episodes, while simultaneously affecting the perception and interpretation of their Heike precursors. Most prominent among these were other long monogatari, tales specifically focused on the lives of individual warriors; the ballad-drama kôwakamai, which enacted some of the period’s most memorable military moments; the placatory nô drama; and histories, particularly the Azuma kagami. All these new genres articulated and expanded individual Heike episodes, bringing them to life in multiple forms.

The retelling of episodes across works and genres is a hallmark of this period, as exemplified by the wholesale movement of storyline, character, and even verbatim text from work to work. So too are synergistic, combinatorial relationships among tales: as a group, they created, recreated, and revised the historical stories they told, and this process became a driving force in historical narration. The following study focuses on these concomitant trends in medieval narrative: the centrifugal movement of individual stories into other works and genres (that also traveled geographically and socially) and the centripetal pull of the sheer volume of stories retold (often in the same terms) about the same people and events. The following chapters explore how these elastic yet coherent histories, which accrued cultural weight as they permeated different geographic and social spheres during the Nanbokuchô (1336–1392) and early Muromachi (1333–1573) periods, brought a newly complicated historical perspective into being.

All of the works I consider here tackled the project of representing a difficult past in such a way as to ensure authority and legitimacy. They did so in a cultural milieu in which historiography was inseparable from fiction, religion, superstition, and performance art. This co-mingling of elements we now segregate into distinct disciplines forces us to reconsider our notions of the very concept of historical narration. My approach represents a reassessment of how we know what we know about the past, and what motivations shaped that knowledge. In addition to reconstructing the fullness and texture of medieval historical awareness about the Genpei period, therefore, I also reflect on historicity itself, and how medieval interpretations of the war’s meaning reshaped historiographical inquiry and continue to do so even today.
Late Heian History and the *Heike monogatari*

It is impossible to overstate the significance of the Genpei War in Japan’s history. Lasting from 1180 to 1185, it was the first prolonged military conflict in generations to affect the region around the capital. Further, as is often the case with civil wars, it pitted family members, friends, and colleagues against each other in deadly combat. Although the war did not bring about immediate change for much of the population, it nevertheless rent the political and social fabric of the country, and, in retrospect, it came to be seen as the turning point in a transition from aristocratic to warrior domination of the social and political orders. As embodied in the monumental *Heike monogatari*, as well as a number of other works and genres partially or wholly engendered by the *Heike*, the Genpei War is one of the most significant premodern events to have shaped the history of the realm, and it continued to serve as a template for nation-building into the modern era.

The ostensible impetus for the war was a call to arms in the name of the disenfranchised prince, Mochihito, who, at the instigation of Minamoto Yorimasa, urged the remnants of the Minamoto to oust former Chancellor Taira Kiyomori and his kin from their positions of power. The Minamoto had been fragmented and almost obliterated following the defeat of their clan head, Yoshitomo, by Kiyomori in the Heiji Uprising (1159–1160). In narrative accounts, Mochihito’s call to arms was followed by a pardon from Retired Sovereign Go-Shirakawa that released Yoshitomo’s oldest surviving son, Yoritomo, from exile and charged him with punishing Kiyomori. Yoritomo and his younger half-brothers Noriyori and Yoshitsune responded; their rise in the eastern provinces was complemented by that of Kiso Yoshinaka, a cousin, and Yukiie, an uncle, in the north. Following the Taira’s hasty retreat from battle at the Fuji River in 1180, things were relatively quiet, with only intermittent skirmishes in the provinces. But in late 1182 the Minamoto under Yoshinaka began to turn back the Taira forces dispatched to Hokuriku (the “north country,” here, specifically Echizen, Echigo, and Etchû provinces) to subdue him. Yoshinaka’s campaign culminated in a victory at Kurikara, followed by a successful drive to the capital (present-day Kyoto). The Taira were forced to flee to the west, taking with them the child sovereign Antoku and the key symbols of royal authority: the “Three Sacred Regalia” (*sanshu no jingi*)—a mirror, a bead strand, and a sword.

In 1184 what had seemed like a minor rift between Yoritomo and Yoshinaka became a serious rivalry. On the one hand, Yoshinaka’s attempts to ingratiate himself with Retired Sovereign Go-Shirakawa in the capital suggested that he had his eyes on becoming the Minamoto hege-mon. Simultaneously, however, he allowed his men to wreak havoc on
the capital and environs, terrorize the populace, and indiscriminately appropriate goods and personnel, a situation worsened by the fact that the area was suffering from a famine. The embattled but still savvy retired sovereign gave an order for Yoritomo to punish his cousin. Yoritomo sent forces under the leadership of Noriyori and Yoshitsune to the capital to attack Yoshinaka, who was finally killed in battle on 1184/1/21 by Yoshitsune’s forces on the shores of Lake Biwa at Awazugahara (in present-day Shiga Prefecture).16

Yoshitsune and Noriyori pushed westward, driving the Taira forces further toward the edge of the realm. The final defeat of the Taira came at the hands of Yoshitsune at Dan-no-ura, in the swift-flowing strait between Honshū and Kyūshū. Taking with him the sword Kusanagi, one of the Three Sacred Regalia, the child sovereign drowned, as did many of his Taira kin. His mother was rescued and spent the rest of her life in seclusion as a nun, praying for the repose of her dead. Taira males were executed over the next several years in accordance with the orders of Yoritomo, who had established himself as warrior hegemon in Kamakura (in present-day Kanagawa Prefecture). Rule by warriors through the shōgunal house had finally begun.

Four years after the war’s conclusion, Yoritomo succeeded in having Yoshitsune, who had won fame as a victorious general, killed by his own allies in Hiraizumi (in present-day Iwate Prefecture), following a manhunt that had begun shortly after the war. Noriyori was killed in 1193, after a dispute with Yoritomo.17

Articulating the Heike

Narrative accounts portray the Genpei War as the culmination of a power struggle begun more than twenty years earlier between the scions of the Taira (or Heike) and Minamoto (or Genji) clans.18 The war, fomented during the Hōgen and Heiji uprisings, is depicted at once as the conclusion of a feud and the beginning of an era in which political authority was attenuated and military affairs came to be overseen by the shōgunal house and its regents based in Kamakura.

The war was a devastating past event that gave rise to complex motivations for telling stories. Among other imperatives, this storytelling sought to “impose a unified meaning upon history”19 while also serving what we might term a religious function of assuaging the potentially malevolent spirits of the war dead. It is in fact as the placatory recitational art performed by biwa hôshi (lute-playing blind male performers) that the Heike is most often thought of today.20

Problems at the heart of any study of narratives representing this distant period stem from our general inability to grasp their cohesive-
ness, how they simultaneously served what in modern contexts are differentiated and often oppositional needs or functions. We consequently tend to discuss the *Heike* and particularly its variants in oppositional terms: each variant is marked as history or fiction, written or performed text, official “Chinese” history or popular “Japanese” tale, the product of the religious elite or of the masses. While scholars add nuance to this bifurcated model by characterizing both individual variants and the composite text of the *Heike* as existing (and often moving) along a spectrum that stretches between one binary term and the other, the fundamental, two-dimensional model of a line stretched between two poles is rarely challenged. At best, these paired qualifiers define vectors that intersect in the narrative equivalent of three-dimensional space; at worst, they are collapsed into one line, with “Chinese,” history, high culture, and writing at one end and “Japanese,” fiction, popular culture, and speaking/performance at the other. This study constructs a model in which such linearity is discarded and the network of semantic relations it has been used to represent is reconfigured in more complex and contextually appropriate terms. But first we need to understand the textual history of the various works we call the *Heike*, as well as the critical approaches that have been brought to bear on them in the past. How did the texts of the *Heike monogatari* emerge, how are they connected to one another, and how did later versions derive from earlier ones?

The variant texts of the *Heike monogatari* differ significantly in length, style, and narrative focus. Based on these differences, each has been given a name that refers to some salient identifying characteristic. The Kakuichibon variant, for example, is said to be a transcription of the performance of the *biwa hôshi* Kakuichi;\(^{21}\) the Enkyôbon is dated to the Enkyô era,\(^ {22}\) etc. Within each variant line, there are often a number of extant physical texts, each of which is further named, generally according to the individual or institution currently in possession of it. Throughout this study, I will be referring to texts by their variant line.\(^ {23}\)

The organization of *Heike* variants differs from text to text and is often inconsistent even within one variant line. The texts generally are divided into *maki* (scrolls, often translated as “chapter,” a convention used by McCullough that I follow here). Many are then further divided into *dan* (episodes), also known as *shôdan*, which can also refer to a part of an episode. In texts associated with performance, individual units are traditionally referred to as *ku* (individual performance pieces of significantly varied length),\(^ {24}\) which correspond more or less to a *dan* or *shôdan*. Ku are further divided into *kyokusetsu* (patterned melodic sections),\(^ {25}\) units of particular importance in describing the performance style of small sections of text.\(^ {26}\)
This modular organization allows significant structural flexibility, and in fact there was apparently a good deal of rearrangement of *ku* during the medieval period, both in major *Heike* variants as they have come to us today and in peripheral works based on the *Heike*. We often find a lack of rigid ordering, chronological or otherwise, as well as a striking autonomy at the level of the episode or even in parts of episodes. *Ku* usually have descriptive titles; the same is true for *dan* within the written texts for these traditions. The malleability and mobility of episodes are significant for this study, as it is often these pieces—*dan* or *ku*—that are moved to other texts or reworked in other genres.

Many of the texts not so divided are organized in general chronological order, sometimes with dated entries under which the events of that day and other commentary are recorded. Interestingly, this commentary often encompasses narrative material found within a corresponding *dan* from another variant—a citation of precedent or peripheral accounts about a primary character within the *dan*, for example. Still other variants have descriptive titles for pieces resembling *dan*, often added at a later date. These added features have been important markers for the systematic modern categorization of the texts, as we shall see below. But this taxonomic effort has made rigid organizational structures of material whose arrangement was originally fluid and changeable. Narrative pieces originally served as modules that could be used with great flexibility, rather than as prescribed components of a generically defined larger whole.

The *Heike* and the Academy

The *Heike* began to receive scholarly attention as early as the Tokugawa period (1600–1868). The *Sankô Genpei jôsuiki*, an annotation of the *Genpei jôsuiki*, for example, was collated in 1689, and this text became a vital resource for scholars of literature who took up the *Heike* and its variants during the Meiji period (1868–1912). Throughout the Tokugawa period and into the early Meiji, the *Heike* was considered a work of history when, that is, its nature was thought of at all. Once the Meiji was under way and well into until the early Showa period (1926–1989), Japanese intellectuals focused their attention on situating the *Heike* in the context of world literature. The work’s potential as, by turns, an epic or lyrical poem, a folk epic, and a national epic captured the imaginations of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century academics as they labored to create a canon of Japanese literature that would help establish a place for Japan in the cultural landscape of modern nations.

Early literary studies of the *Heike* and other war tales by the pioneering scholars Haga Yaichi and Tachibana Sensaburō identified them as
works of literature in their *Kokubungaku tokuhon* (Reader of national literature, 1891); so too did Mikami Sanji and Takazu Kuwasaburō in *Nihon bun-gaku shi* (The history of Japanese literature), published the same year. In their discussions of the *Heike*, these men focused primarily on the recitational texts, and the Kakuichibon in particular. Their work thus largely reflects the assessment of a single text, thought to be fictional, albeit based on historical events. That text contained elements that did not coincide with nineteenth-century ideas about things that could be considered “historical”: prophetic visions, heavenly and otherworldly beings, and hyperbolic description. Like its premodern equivalents in Europe, the *Heike* was at this juncture scrutinized, recategorized, and dismissed from the realm of historiography, and it fell to scholars of literature to define its parameters and its place in Japanese cultural history.

Among the topics of early debate was the *Heike*’s status as an epic, which engaged prominent thinkers including, for example, Tsubouchi Shōyō. In his 1893 *Bijironkō* (On rhetoric) he argued that it was not an epic, but an important precursor of something comparable to the Western epic. The idea of the *Heike* as a “folk epic” was put forth by Ikuta Chōkō in his 1906 *Kokuminteki jojishi to shite no Heike monogatari* (The Tale of the *Heike* as national popular epic). This characterization fed a growing interest in the study of folklore under the leadership of scholars like Yanagita Kunio and Orikuchi Shinobu, who looked at individual narratives (either a dan or several dans about the same character or event) as precursors to a unified, longer tale. Their focus on the hypothesized folk origins of the *Heike*, which continues to influence our understanding of the work even today, helped mobilize the attribution of a somewhat misinterpreted “warrior ideal” to the spirit of the folk in support of Japan’s imperial project in the early twentieth century. This period, however, also saw the beginnings of a “literary” approach to the *Heike* texts, illustrated most importantly in Yamada Yoshio’s foundational *Heike monogatari kō* (Study of the Tale of the *Heike*, 1911), a careful philological investigation of the *Heike*’s numerous variants that aimed at creating a genealogy for them.

One primary goal of early scholars was determining textual lineages for *Heike* variants in an effort to find the origin of the work, an “ur-Heike” (gen-Heike, still a term found in Japanese scholarship). To this end, a handful of contemporary records and references to *Heike* performance and composition are staples of *Heike* studies. The most famous of these is dan number 226 in Yoshida Kenkō’s *Tsurezuregusa*:

> During the reign of the Emperor Go-Toba, a former official from Shinano named Yukinaga enjoyed a reputation for learning. But when commanded to participate in a discussion of *yuefu* poetry, he forgot two of the virtues in the “Dance of the Seven Virtues,” and consequently acquired the nick-
name “Young Gentleman of the Five Virtues.” Sick at heart, he abandoned scholarship and took the tonsure.

Archbishop Jien [The Enryakuji Abbot] made a point of summoning and looking after anyone, even a servant, who could boast of an accomplishment; thus, he granted this Shinano Novice an allowance. Yukinaga wrote the *Heike monogatari* and taught a blind man named Shōbutsu so that the man might narrate it. His descriptions of things having to do with the Enryakuji were especially good. He wrote with a detailed knowledge of Kuro Hōgan Yoshitsune’s activities, but did not say much about Gama no Kanja Noriyori, possibly for lack of information. When it came to warriors and the martial arts, Shōbutsu, who was an easterner, put questions to warriors and had Yukinaga write what he learned. People say that our present-day *biwa hôshi* imitate Shōbutsu’s natural voice.\(^{35}\)

As the earliest statement specifically about the origins of the *Heike*, Kenkō’s assertion implies that by his time (ca. 1330), recitation of the *Heike* was an established practice worthy of note by a prominent cultural critic. Although the approximate date claimed by Kenkō is not verifiable, this account does point to the *Heike*’s existence in some form by that time and makes a case for Tendai, and particularly Enryakuji, stewardship of early texts. Moreover, it describes the *Heike* as a work with both written and performance manifestations, an unproblematic claim here but one that would fuel future debates about the *Heike*’s origins and fundamental nature, as we will see below.

Other evidence also supports the *Tsurezuregusa*’s assertion about the textual presence of the *Heike* by the thirteenth century. First, the last date discussed in the *Heike* itself is in 1219, which suggests the *Heike* was codified thereafter. It is also conceivable, however, that there may have been a text sharing that name if not the same content circulating earlier. Also from the thirteenth century, Kujō Kanezane’s *Gyokuyō* mentions a *Heike ki* (Heike chronicle) in an entry from 1220, and Fujiwara Teika’s copy of the *Hyōhanki* contains a note on the back dating from 1240 referring as well to a *Jishō monogatari* (Tale of the Jishō era\(^{36}\)), which might indicate the *Heike*.\(^{37}\) There is some debate about whether other records containing reference to “Heike” written closer in date to the actual events of the Genpei War in fact refer to some early form of the tale or not.\(^{38}\)

Although a definitive answer about a general date or author(s) for the *Heike* will probably remain unknowable, there is clear evidence that it had entered the cultural sphere by the middle of the fourteenth century as both written and recitational forms. Somewhat less certain is the connection between the texts referred to above and specific variants, as well as the various authors, performers, and/or patrons involved with each, although extensive research has led to some general conclusions about textual genealogies.
The cohort of prolific and influential scholars whose careers spanned World War II and its aftermath built upon Yamada Yoshio’s philological project. Most prominent among them were Takahashi Sadachi, Tomikura Tokujirô, Sasaki Hachirô, Atsumi Kaoru, and Nagazumi Yasuaki. From this generation emerged the most significant paradigm for organizing and analyzing *Heike* variants, which divided them into the read lineage (*yomihonkei*) and the recited lineage (*kataribonkei*), a system that separated all variants into two broad categories based on the oppositional presentation modes of reading (*yomi*) and performing (*katari*).39 *Yomihonkei* implies a reader (and hence a writer), while *kataribonkei* implies instead a listener (and a performer). This paradigm has been profoundly influential in all subsequent scholarly engagements with the *Heike*, and it has further influenced the way medieval performance “literatures” (with the important exception of *nô*) have been treated. It is also the framework upon which other bifurcations are hung and simplified. The most common of these pairings include: Chinese versus Japanese writing, writing versus speaking, documentary versus lyrical style, and high versus low literature.

**Textuality, Lineage, and other Critical Paradigms and Problems**

On the surface, the division of variants according to performance mode seems like a useful descriptive model for classifying them. Broadly defined, the *kataribonkei* texts are the constituents of the performance repertoire of the *biwa hôshi* and the *tôdôza* (blind guild),40 or variants seemingly related to the performative texts;41 the *yomihonkei* consists of texts that were read rather than recited in performance. *Katari*, however, is a polyvalent term with links to a wide range of narrative traditions: the *monogatari* of the Heian period (including especially the *Genji monogatari* and the *Ise monogatari*, etc.), storytelling in the *setsuwa* (short narrative) vein, and many other forms of non-official narrative. Thus the term, in addition to meaning “performed on a stage,” also evokes “stories that are not official history.” The *yomihonkei* implies an opposition to the broad idea of *katari*. While on the one hand, the terms *katari* and *yomi* distinguish speaking from reading, juxtaposing the two in this context further exerts a fiction versus history delineation as well. This distinction, while originally descriptive, has tended to become prescriptive, and texts from each line are considered to be basically historical or fictional simply by their classification in one category or the other.

A number of factors contribute to the misleading dichotomy between the read and recited lineage, perhaps the most fundamental being the modern interpretation of premodern textuality. While on the one hand a diversity of writing styles is immediately evident when one looks
across the Heike variants, the consequent characterizations of each work grow from more general, longstanding ways of treating early texts: they are either “Japanese” (wabun) or “Chinese” (kanbun) writing. Kataribonkei texts are generally thought of as embodying a wabun style: they employ the kana syllabaries liberally, and they present their tales in a written form that can mostly be read as-is, without significant manipulation of syntactical or lexical units to render them into conventional Japanese. Yomihonkei texts, on the contrary, are typified by a much greater reliance on kanbun, a writing system imitating Chinese word order that requires particular interpretive skills to facilitate reading it as conventional Japanese. These texts often contain more kanji (Chinese characters) and Chinese compounds generally; some are written entirely in kanbun. The degree to which kanbun is employed, however, differs dramatically from variant to variant and even within variants in both lineages: kataribonkei variants use kanji as well, and most contain phrases or even long passages (often in the form of embedded documents, such as those discussed in Chapters Three and Four) in kanbun. This orthographic difference is, of course, highly marked in the written texts. When read, however, kanbun texts would be manipulated to allow them to be read in Japanese, rendering them in a language and form very similar to that of texts written in wabun.

The wabun/kanbun dialectic is one of the most important framing devices not only for delineating medieval Heike variants but also for talking about Japanese writing (and, by extension, literature) generally from its inception through the Tokugawa period. The relationship between the two in early writing in particular has been the subject of much recent scholarly inquiry both in Japan and abroad. Conventionally, wabun and kanbun have been lined up with other pairings to create a framework for premodern Japanese writing that, on one level, characterizes Japan in relationship to continental culture. China is represented by kanji, and Japan by its own written language derived from kanji but designed to accommodate the native language. Kana (and wabun) thus often are treated as a native reaction to and against kanji (and continental forms generally). In addition, however, this framework simultaneously—and perhaps more significantly—represents a mapping of those differences onto Japanese (aristocratic, literate) culture and the changes that occur within it, with specific focus on writing, writers, and readers in early Japan. In this sort of configuration, writing is generally divided into public or official (kanbun) versus private (wabun), and male (kanbun) versus female (wabun), as are authorial voices and audiences. It is clear that there was some sort of differentiation between styles early on; evidence for named juxtapositions (onnade and otokote for “female” and “male” writing, for example) exists from the Heian period. What these terms meant in practice, however, is a matter of contention.
Current work on these delineations emphasizes the ways in which their boundaries were permeable and performative, issues that will come into play in later chapters with discussion of (male) lineage and identity within the clan unit. Moreover, some scholars argue that the relationship between writing systems (mania, often glossed as Chinese or kanji; versus kana, rendered as Japanese or syllabic writing per se) is not fundamentally oppositional. Rather, it reflects a correlation between an original (mania) and a simplified form (kana) patterned on it.\textsuperscript{45} Mana were full forms, kana simplified patterns of them; the example of simplified Chinese characters used in China today in relation to their original forms would perhaps represent a more accurate corollary for the relationship between mana and kana in the Heian context. This model is complicated by the various syntactical gradations between Chinese and Japanese, what we include today under the rubric of kanbun or various forms considered nonstandard kanbun (hentai kanbun), all of which would have been comprehensible to erudite early readers and writers in Japan.\textsuperscript{46} The idea that the Heian period writer saw him- or herself as choosing between Chinese and Japanese, in other words, reflects modern constructs of early language use, not necessarily actual early practice. The multiplicity of conglomerate and hybrid styles from the Heian period and well into the medieval age further points to a greater complexity than conventional interpretations allow; the process of exploring the intricacies of early writing within its contemporary context is an ongoing scholarly project, and one that dovetails productively with the general issue of orality versus writing, which I will be addressing shortly.

The idea of a kanbun/wabun dialectic has had a profound effect on Heike studies operating within the yomihonkei/kataribonkei paradigm. Formality and “Chineseness” tend to be identified as defining stylistic forces behind yomihonkei texts, and informality and “Japaneseness” as those behind kataribonkei texts. There are correlating assumptions concerning content: We tend to associate public, official, documentary style with the yomihonkei, and private, narrative, lyrical style with the kataribonkei. This permits a slippage, in which we read “historical” onto the yomihonkei and “fictional” onto the kataribonkei, a misinterpretation tending to further push the kataribonkei Heike texts into the realm of storytelling. Since these texts then meet our expectations of “literature,” they become representatives of the (literary) Heike as a whole. This characterization operates circularly. The Heike is literature because it (or a representative text) looks like literature. As a result, variants less resembling literature, such as the enormously important Enkyôbon, were for many years relatively unstudied.\textsuperscript{47} This categorization, therefore, has had the unfortunate side effect of masking the important role the Heike in its various forms played as history in its contemporary context.

Beyond these formal elements, narrative style has also been used to distinguish the yomihonkei from the kataribonkei. Generally speaking, the
The written/oral paradigm is further complicated by the idea of performance within the *kataribonkei*. The most common image associated with the *Heike* is that of the *biwa hôshi*, literally “*biwa* priest,” a male who recited episodes from the *Heike* to the accompaniment of the *biwa* lute; this iconic image far overshadows any conceptualization associated with the reading of the *Heike* as text. Numerous depictions of blind itinerants populate the margins of medieval picture scrolls and lists of professions; twentieth-century scholars have identified these as reciters of the *Heike*, placing the custodianship of the work in the hands of itinerants, implicitly marginal, poor, blind, and putatively illiterate figures, a characterization that only bolsters the idea that the *Heike* represents the voice of the folk. But documentary evidence also reveals that something referred to as the *Heike* was performed in the homes of aristocrats by named performers (including Kakuichi), which suggests control and dissemination
of the work by highly literate religious figures whose institutions served the highest levels of society.

Researchers of the *Heike* today tend to lean toward one of two models for early *Heike* development. Those focusing on the predominance of the *Heike*’s role as historical narration see it as the product of a tradition linked to wandering entertainers and improvisational storytelling, while those emphasizing its religious role believe it emerged within the milieu of placatory ritual in the upper echelons of the Shingon and Tendai establishments and probably developed from a formal written tradition, if not from a specific text.

Both of these paradigms involve an extrapolation backward through Tokugawa period *tôdôza* practice, from which current ideas about performing the *Heike* evolved. Although it is clear that there were blind *biwa hôshi* before the Tokugawa age, the actual origins of performance (and therefore the nature of early *Heike* recitation), and whether or not the earliest performers were exclusively blind, remain obscure. Moreover, the early role of textual fixity and the relationships between textuality and performance are extremely difficult to assess, since texts were associated with performance as early as the late fourteenth century. That is why questions regarding the identity of the *Heike*’s performers and the nature of their performance often bring us back to the larger questions of the *Heike*’s origins: Was it folk or elite? Was it oral or written?

Scholarly research reveals nuances that render these categories ever less sufficient. There is some movement toward the redefinition of terms, but these new alternatives offer refinements of the model rather than significant change. Although throughout this investigation I call the validity of these categories into question, I do not dispense with them entirely. They remain the most prevalent designations used in scholarly discourse, and, more importantly, they represent a backdrop against which to articulate the issue of presentational mode so central to my inquiry.

In sum, then, the description of *yomihonkei* and *kataribonkei* lineages has proved useful to scholars as an initial organizational tool for defining genetic relationships among extant texts. At the same time, however, it obscures other kinds of relationships among texts, particularly those that problematize the ideas about the written and the spoken that form the basis for this opposition. Fundamentally, the scholarly work that invented these concepts involved modernist readings of the past. This work could not help but read back onto the past the twentieth-century implications for the issues of writing and speaking, Chinese and Japanese, official and popular, and fact and fiction. My method will be to set aside the idea of textual lineage, and instead examine *Heike* variants together with other narratives sharing their style and content. We will return again and again
to questions of orality and textuality, recasting them as overlapping categories in a newly defined interpretive framework.

**Heike variants**

Of the numerous variants in the *Heike* corpus, I will be focusing on several prominent texts representing a wide range of narrative structures and thematic foci. They are seen variously as constituents of *kataribonkei* and *yomihonkêi* categories. The Enkyôbon is currently considered to be among the earliest *Heike* variants. The colophon of the oldest extant text dates it at 1309, which makes it the oldest *Heike* manuscript of any sort available today. It consists of six books (*hon*) further divided into sections, and it is classified as a *yomihonkêi* text. Recently published in annotated and indexed form, it has received significant scholarly attention in Japan over the past several years, in part because of its relative age and also because of its distance, both stylistically and in terms of cosmological and narrative structure, from the Kakuichibon text. In English, the most important work on this text has been that of David T. Bialock, who provides a comprehensive and provocative treatment of, among other things, the Enkyôbon’s internal polyvocality and its differences from recited-line texts.

Most familiar to the Western reader of the *Heike* is the Kakuichibon text, since that is the version most often translated into Western languages. It is also the variant most often chosen to represent the *Heike* in Japanese canonizations of classical literature, and it is typical of the *kataribonkei* in structure. The oldest dated manuscript has two colophons, the first dated 1370 and the second 1371. The first colophon, attached to the end of the twelfth chapter, reads: “Twenty-ninth day, eleventh month, third year of Ôan.” The second, appended to the “Initiates’ Chapter” (*Kanjô no maki*), elaborates:

> On this, the fifteenth day of the third month of the fourth year of Ôan (year of the boar), I hereby convey the twelve books of the *Tale of the Heike* plus the “Initiates’ Chapter,” the teachings of the masters of our school (*ryû*), and the secret teachings I have received, to Master Shôichi. From mouth to brush it has been passed and written down without missing a character. My age exceeds seventy, and the final years of this fleeting existence have arrived; my life is at its end. Although I pass each *ku* to our disciples, there are those among them who are ill or forgetful, so I set these down to avoid debates. For proof to further generations, I am having this recorded. This book should not be circulated to the outside; the eyes of others may not see it. Further, this text must not be taken by those other than our own apprentices, even if they are close affiliates. If anyone should...
turn his back on these precepts, he will be subject to the punishment of the Buddhas. Signed Master Kakuichi.58

The 1371 colophon reveals a number of important issues about Kakuichi’s personal, social, and even political contexts as a performer. First is the very need for a text: clearly, it was not intended solely as a teaching tool, but also as a record of Kakuichi’s art. Contemporary accounts reveal that Kakuichi was much in demand as a performer,59 so it is not surprising to find his name listed as something resembling an authorial voice of this text. It is likely that he also maintained a high enough socio-economic place to enable him (or someone acting in his name) to undertake what was certainly the time-consuming and expensive project of recording the text. Beyond this, we can speculate as well about reasons for committing the text to writing: competition, perceived or real, among Heike performers or between them and performers of other similar arts; the patron temple Enryakuji’s need to establish formal control; the desire on the part of Kakuichi or some listener to record a particularly good version of the tale; and the aspiration to author and/or edit a definitive work. But which of these motivations were most significant is hard to tell. We can assert with certainty only that by 1371, there was a written text of the Heike, identified with the performed Heike of Kakuichi.

Another important issue raised in the colophon’s first line is the assertion of the unproblematic translatability of speaking into writing. Kakuichi’s voice is transmitted to paper via brush, not missing a single character. Rather than sounds or even vocalization patterns, what is noted here are words, and specifically words represented textually, as characters. And yet the entire colophon is written in kanbun, a patently written style. This general topic will be central in later discussions, but it is significant at this juncture to note the number of presentational modes invoked to give the text authority: it is the faithful transcription of a spoken and sung performance piece of a blind performer, recorded by a sighted non-performer, who wrote in kanbun, a formal, documentary style. This kind of provocative interaction between writing and speaking will recur in each of the ensuing chapters. What is more, the colophon’s claim of total transmission is possible only through omitting any indication of the musical elements of the performance pieces, thus bifurcating music from word.

Next, the colophon states that the text is to be accessible only to the disciples and close affiliates of the master; the textual object delineates a group of performers and the boundaries of their art and their organization. It is around this time, scholars believe, that the guild which would become so important in the regulation of Heike biwa performance was first beginning to take shape.60 It was patronized first by the Murakami Genji61 and then by the Ashikaga shōgunal house. The Ashikaga made efforts to
trace their roots to the same Seiwa Genji clan of which Minamoto Yoritomo, the victor of the Genpei War and the first shōgun, had been head. Hyōdō Hiromi argues that this Minamoto (and specifically Seiwa Genji) custodianship of the *Heike* as placatory performance points to the important connection between soothing of restless spirits and control of the country (and its history). This assertion buttresses the centrality of placatory ritual as part of the function of history, and further suggests the important role of shōgunal patronage of at least the Kakuichibon and the reciters associated with it.62

In addition to these two early texts, another important *Heike* variant included here is the *Gentei jōsuki*, a forty-eight scroll work.63 It is now generally considered to be a *yomihonkei* variant and is one of the most complex and lengthy recensions. The oldest extant manuscript dates from the Tokugawa period, but it is thought to have existed in some form during the early Muromachi years. The *Gentei jōsuki* is marked stylistically by its inclusion of several variant versions of individual episodes, a historical discursive practice reminiscent of histories like the *Rikkokushi*.

I will also make less frequent reference to several further variants. The Nagatobon *Heike monogatari*, generally classified as a *yomihonkei* text, exists only in a Tokugawa manuscript, but is thought to be of early Muromachi origin. It comprises twenty chapters, within which there are subdivisions by episode. The Yashirobon *Heike monogatari*, a *kataribonkei* text extant only in a Tokugawa era manuscript, is thought to be representative of the oldest *kataribonkei* form.64 It is composed of twelve chapters (with the fourth and ninth missing in extant texts) and is divided into *ku*. The Hyakunijukkubon *Heike monogatari* shares many features in common with the Yashirobon, including the fact that neither contains the “Initiates’ Chapter.” It is classified as a *kataribonkei* text. As its title suggests, it consists of 120 *ku* arranged in twelve chapters. The *Genpei tôjôroku* is a work in eight chapters only five of which are extant; its colophon dates it to 1337. It contains significant material about eastern warriors, and it is classified as a *yomihonkei* text. These texts are included where they provide counterpoints to narratives found in the three primary *Heike* variants discussed above.

Other Texts and Genres

Although the *Heike* variants comprise the bulk of the narratives for this study, they share extensive material with a wider set of texts and performance genres. This sharing is something other than a diachronic intertextual relationship of influence, allusion, imitation, stylization or parody. The way these other texts also repeat verbatim or near-verbatim content complicates the boundary definitions of both individual text and genre. For instance, the *Gentei jōsuki* has been considered both an independent
work and a variant text of the *Heike*, this is just one example of how hard it is to determine where to draw the line between variants of a textual line and discrete, if similar, texts. Works with their own textual traditions—the *Gikeiki* or the *Soga monogatari*, for example—nevertheless contain long passages very similar to those in one or more of the *Heike* variants. Although the texts as a whole may be unique, these parts create links with other works and emphasize particular moments that bridge both. The question of genre poses another set of concerns. *Kōwakamai*, for example, seems to be a genre, since it is a performance art with a defined repertoire sharing stylistic and thematic characteristics. Yet in their specific content, individual *kōwakamai* pieces represent yet another variation on other texts—while they may be expansions of episodes in longer works, they nevertheless recount the same story in much the same language.

This kind of intertextual relationship is often identified as reflecting oral composition, or, in the case of written texts, residual orality. Thus each variant operates like a performance, with material transformed slightly in each performance or text, but remaining essentially the same; significant scholarship on all the texts considered here emphasizes the importance of short oral tales as source material for longer works. Yet this model is somewhat too simple. As we shall see in Chapters Three and Four, one category of material often repeated nearly verbatim is a document embedded within the narrative, composed in *kanbun* and presented as a written text. Although the presence of a document in a performance piece does not undermine the orality of that piece, it does pointedly introduce the importance of writing and documentation even in the performance milieu. Thus, far from cutting such narratives off from the world of text and writing, works that employ the document device point to the limitations of the oral-versus-written binary.

Indeed, the reiteration of these documents arguably confounds another of the binaries so central to conventional genre definitions: history versus fiction. Embedded documents are recorded in a written style identified with history writing, and they are presented in apparently original form (including dates and signatures). Their inclusion gives the entire work the feel of an eyewitness account, and the fact that they are mostly evidentiary (letters, oaths, records) further evokes the realm of history rather than fiction. That sections containing embedded documents often turn up in nearly identical form across texts and genres points to the significance of the moments they describe within the narrative tradition. The multiple appearances of something looking like an official document in turn works to affirm the document’s assertions: if it is included so consistently in so many accounts of an event, it must be true. The chapters of this book look at several places where this truth claim is most important—moments when it is necessary to assert a particular version of a potentially
contentious event. Although the dubious historicity of the embedded documents raises questions about the truth claims made, the need to add the flavor of historical accuracy through them points to the significance of the moment in the historical consciousness of the performers, writers, audiences and readers.

The way the Heike makes us reconceptualize textual and generic individuality challenges our conventional conceptual tools. In particular I hope to demonstrate the why the modern notion of genre is extremely problematic in considering many medieval arts. This is particularly true for works classified as rekishi monogatari (historical tales) and gunki monogatari (war tales), where the unifying element is subject matter, and not the kinds of stylistic, formal, or even thematic concerns that we tend to group together under a genre rubric. This study thus focuses on these works primarily as productive elements working in dynamic relationship to create a medieval narrative consciousness about important moments from the Genpei period. From that basis, I proceed to look at the ways in which genre can and cannot be defined for the works I address here.

In addition to the Heike variants that provide the focus of this study, I consider four other sustained narratives about the Genpei period, as they contribute to what I will call the works’ synchronic intertextuality. The Hōgen monogatari and Heiji monogatari have textual and performance histories closely tied to the Heike, and they seem to have also been part of the biwa hōshi repertoire. Dates of composition and authorship are unclear, although both texts have in the past been attributed to various authors, including Fujiwara Tokinaga (dates unknown, but a participant in Yoritomo’s 1189 campaign against the Ōshū Fujiwara) and the priest Genyu (dates unknown, Kamakura period Tendai priest). Although prominent figures may have been involved in collating the text, the likelihood of anonymous joint authorship here, as with the Heike, is high. Dates for the texts are also hard to establish, and there are enough substantial differences between variants that they range as broadly as those for the Heike. The general theories about the date for the earliest Hōgen monogatari place it either between 1190 and 1219 (the period in which the Minamoto clan still occupied the position of shōgun), or after 1230, following the composition of the Gukanshō, whose author, Jien, is traditionally attributed a part in Heike composition. The clearest early evidence for the existence of both texts is found in an introduction to the Futsushōdōshū (1297), which notes that they, along with the Heike, were performed by biwa hōshi. An entry for 1321 in Sovereign Hanazono’s diary, Hanazono tennō shinshi, comments on a biwa hōshi performance of the “Heiji and Heike monogatari, etc.” By the end of the thirteenth century, all three pieces were circulating and thought of as a group; most scholars think that this reflects an early to
mid-thirteenth-century composition date for both the Hôgen and Heiji monogatari.66

Scholars also divide variants of these war tales into textual lineages in an attempt to define genealogical relationships. They have had less interest than with the Heike in separating them into read and recited lineages, although the general parameters set in Heike studies tend to be imposed in readings of these works as well. The Hôgen has over thirty extant variants.67 The oldest of these, the Bunpôbon, has a colophon dating it to 1318; this text consists of only the second of the three scrolls. The Nakaraibon, considered part of the same lineage as the Bunpôbon, has three scrolls and shares passages with the Bunpôbon. The Kotohirabon exists in numerous editions and is thought to be a reworking of the earlier variants; it is the basis for annotated versions included in collections of Japanese classics and is considered the most literary.68 In addition to these main Hôgen variants are the Kamakurabon, which is missing its second scroll but seems to be related to the Kotohirabon, and the Kyotobon, apparently also descended from the Kotohirabon. There are later rufubon (vulgate or “widely circulated”) variants of the Hôgen monogatari as well. All of these date to the early modern period.69

The Heiji monogatari is generally thought to have eleven variant lines consisting of thirty-three texts.70 The oldest of these, the Yômei bunkozo manuscript, is incomplete. One notable feature about this text is the relative prominence of Taira Kiyomori and unimportance of Minamoto Yoshihira, the main protagonist of later versions, particularly the Kotohira line.71 The Kotohira text is the basis for early biwa hôshi performances and later popular rufubon versions. In addition to these variants, there is an illustrated Heiji monogatari ekotoba, which dates from the Kamakura period, and six other variants that reflect significant mixing of the earlier texts. The Gikeiki is an account of the life of Yoshitsune.72 Its origins are unclear, but it seems to be the compilation of a number of shorter narratives about Yoshitsune’s life before and after the Genpei War. The war itself receives only a cursory mention within the text. Most variants are divided into eight scrolls, each of which contains named episodes which, for the most part, are longer than their equivalents in the Heike. Although the authorship is unknown, it is possible that some of the narratives in the Gikeiki were part of the biwa hôshi repertoire.

Scholars generally divide the Gikeiki into two parts: Yoshitsune’s youth and Yoshitsune’s flight from Yoritomo after the war. The first episode in Chapter Four (“The Meeting Between Yoritomo and Yoshitsune”) is seen as the dividing point. Unlike most other texts classified as war tales, the Gikeiki focuses consistently on a single character and, notably, on aspects of his life that are peripheral to the events in which he achieved his-
torical significance. The episodes in the first half of the work emphasize his bravery and uniqueness as a youth, while the later chapters recount his pathetic flight and death. In this second part he is a much weaker character, and his famous retainer Musashibō Benkei emerges as the most forceful figure. This portion of the text is often cited as the first consistent source of the theme now labeled hôgan biiki, or “sympathy for the lieutenant” (Yoshitsune). Manifest more generally as “sympathy for the underdog,” this concept would come to be identified as an aesthetic ideal for tragic heroes in Japanese performance arts and literatures throughout the medieval and early modern periods. I use this term cautiously, however, since it plays a role in claims for the uniqueness of Japanese culture and suggests that sympathy for Yoshitsune and other Japanese tragic heroes is qualitatively different from sympathetic portrayals of tragic heroes in other cultures.

The major variants of the Gikeiki are conventionally classified into three types. The first, considered to represent the oldest variant line, consists of texts lacking both a table of contents and markers for the individual shôdan. The most significant extant texts in this category include the Akagi bunko Yoshitsune monogatari, the Tanakabon Gikeiki, and the Tenri Library’s Yoshitsune zôshi. In the second category are the rufubon, dating from throughout the Tokugawa period, which differ from these earlier texts by inclusion of a table of contents, individually named shôdan, and, as the first episode of Chapter Eight, “The Memorial Services for Tsuginobu and Tadanobu.” Finally, there are the printed book (kanpon) texts, which include recitational notation and describe the Battle of Koromo River in Tôhoku dialect. There is textual consistency across all variants, although there are numerous small differences in the rufubon texts suggesting minor transcriptional discrepancies.

The Soga monogatari (Tale of the Soga brothers) recounts a legendary vendetta that occurred shortly after the Genpei War but still during Yoritomo’s lifetime. It was a wildly popular tale and most famously is the basis of numerous Tokugawa adaptations for the kabuki stage, but even during the medieval period it inspired nô, kôwakamai, otogizôshi, and other tales as well. The Soga monogatari relates the revenge taken by the Soga brothers, Jûrô and Gorô, on their father’s killer, a close relative who had usurped the position of head of the clan. It is of particular interest for this study because of its similarities to and differences from other accounts of the rise of the Minamoto, as well as the way Minamoto control is articulated within larger narratives about Yoritomo’s rise to power, the subject of Chapter Five.

The Soga monogatari differs from the other tales and dramatic pieces considered here because it relates a set of events that technically occur during the peaceful early years of the Kamakura government. Yet its themes
are close to the hearts and minds of the warrior class: lineage, inheritance rights, family honor, and loyalty that reaches even beyond death.

There are four main variant lines of the *Soga monogatari*. The Manabon, written in a *kanbun*-based form known as *hentai kanbun*, consists of ten *maki*, and is thought to be the oldest text. Scholars think it was composed in the eastern (Kantō) region and was in the stewardship of Agui preachers and monks associated with Hakone shrine. It probably dates from the early to mid-Muromachi period, although there is no definitive author or date of authorship. Scholars believe that its apparently more coherent construction reflects a stronger organizational hand in its editing.

The Taisekijibon seems to be a descendent of the Manabon, but it is written in *kana*. Murakami Manabu suggests that the Manabon and Taisekiji lines evolved more directly from the *shōdō* (Buddhist chant) and *sekkō* (sermon) traditions, as suggested by textual similarities to works like the *Shintōshū* and by their compact and complex narrative structuring. The Taisekijibon contrasts with the Taisanjibon, which is similarly written in *kana*. The Taisanjibon is also comprised of ten books, but they are much shorter and missing many of the temple histories and episodes devoted to citing historical precedents so common in the other versions. The fourth main variant line is the *rufubon*, the latest and largest lineage; this is also the line included in annotated collections of the Japanese classics and translated into English. It has received considerable attention as well because the antecedents for all later derived texts and performances about the Soga brothers are found in it. The Taisekijibon, Taisanjibon and *rufubon* are referred to by some scholars collectively as *kanabon* (texts written in *kana*) to contrast them with the Manabon. The *rufubon* texts consist of twelve books, and, although like the others they are thought to have originated in the east, their Jōdo sermonizing and episodes about Mt. Hiei link them as well to the Kyoto region; the *rufubon* may have reached its final form in or near the capital.

The *Soga monogatari* was part of recitational repertoires as well, and it is most closely associated with the *goze* of the Hakone region, who were blind female peripatetic narrators. Orikuchi Shinobu posits that the earliest form of the *Soga* was recitational, performed by women, and dedicated to placating the spirits of the brothers; but stylistically, the Manabon suggests to most current scholars that, from early on, this line was part of a tradition of written texts.

We see in *Soga* scholarship a method of categorization reflecting some of the same conceptualizations present in *Heike* classification. Lineages are organized according to two general tendencies apparent in extant texts, one towards the compact *kanbun* style of the Manabon and Taisekijibon variants, and the other towards the more lyrical, “dramatic” (*engekiteki*) *kanamajiri* style of the *rufubon* and other “performance”
texts. These categories closely resemble the read and recited lineages, respectively, in *Heike* scholarship, and they seem as well to exemplify some of the common assumptions of the literacy/orality dialectic: the Manabon-derived texts are drier, use more complex terminology (in Chinese), and create a somewhat less coherent individual narrative, while the *rufubon* variants are more lyrical, less clearly ideological, and more dedicated to narration of the brothers’ lives. As with the *Heike* divisions, these have relatively permeable borders, and numerous exceptions and outright contradictions can be found within individual texts of both classes; so the distinctions, again, should be viewed with caution.

*Kôwakamai*, translated as “ballad-drama” by James Araki in the only published monograph in English on the genre, is a performance art from the Muromachi period containing as its mainstay narratives about the military class. We do not have sufficient records to understand how it was performed in its earliest forms in the late fourteenth century, and there is contention about whether or not it started specifically as the warrior art that it became during the Tokugawa period. *Kôwakamai* seems from early on to have involved two performers, both adult males, who recited and danced to minimal rhythmic accompaniment. Although *kôwakamai* contains dialogue, it is narrated rather than performed; individual actors do not fulfill the roles of specific characters. We do not know if this was true of medieval performance as well. In contemporary performance costumes are consistent for all players in all pieces of the repertoire—all wear long hakama trousers, and they do not wear masks. The *tayû* role (primary character, similar to the *shite* of *nô* drama) is differentiated from the *waki* (secondary character, similar to the *waki* of *nô*) only by the hat each wears. Scholars believe that early performances were more focused on performative elements, including costuming and movement, than Tokugawa period *kôwakamai*, and that performers included boys and women, whereas adult males would come to dominate the art as it became codified.

Current scholarship tends to link early *kôwakamai* (at least in name) to other medieval popular entertainment. In the late fifteenth century, recognizable references to such pieces come into the written record, where they are identified as *kusemai*. It should be noted, however, that the connection between this nascent *kôwakamai* form and earlier *kusemai* (including that identified as part of the *nô* tradition) is tenuous at best. During this period something resembling the *kôwakamai* repertoire we have today was beginning to emerge as short pieces were consolidated into longer narratives and published as libretti and as texts to be read. By the sixteenth century, some amount of narrative overlap appears between the *kôwakamai* repertoire and that of *jôruri* and *otogizôshi*, an indicator of the continued flexibility among the categories of narrative and performance arts.
Although kôwakamai is first and foremost a performance tradition, texts or libretti of individual pieces were also published and illustrated with wood-block prints under the title Mai no hon (Book of [kôwaka]mai) as early as the Kan’ei period (1624–1644). Many of the stories within the repertoire derive from episodes from the Heike, Gîkeiki, or Soga monogatari. Scholars generally categorize them primarily according to subject (and specifically to narrative subject—Yoshitsune or the Soga brothers, for example). There are two primary textual lineages, the Kôwaka or Echizen line and the Daigashira line. For the most part, differences between texts are minimal and relatively inconsequential for the transmission of overall meaning, but for two of the narratives considered in Chapters Two and Five, they are sufficiently different that I have included both in my analyses.

The Azuma kagami differs fundamentally from the other texts in this study because it was compiled specifically to serve as an official history of the Kamakura government. Although its date of composition is unknown, it covers activities of the shôgunate through 1266, making it necessarily posterior to that year. Scholarship generally places it somewhere between 1266 and 1301 and credits its sponsorship to the Hôjô family, who served as shôgunal regents following the deaths of Yoritomo’s heirs. Several years are missing from extant manuscripts, including 1183 (Juei 2), the year in which the events discussed in Chapter Three occurred.

The Azuma kagami is written in the style of an official history, a genre originating with the Rikkokushi. Official history as a discursive form was originally developed to celebrate and justify the authority and grandeur of the imperial house; the Azuma kagami replicates this effort on behalf of the warrior government. It mimics historical discourse both in its format (organized around dated entries that include replicas of official documents and reports on the activities of the ruling class for that day) and in its style—it is written in kanbun. Like earlier histories, it is involved in the project of justification, of providing “the raison d’être for the Kamakura government,” an undertaking which necessarily influenced its portrayal of both the current regime and its path to power.

This sort of intentional ideological discourse makes using the text as a historical source problematic, and researchers today do not treat it as a reliable historical record—even as early as the Tokugawa period (1600–1868) scholars were unwilling to take its account of the activities of the Hôjô at face value. Regarding its description of the Genpei War period and its immediate aftermath, the situation is further complicated because there was no meticulous official record of daily events in Kamakura available to the compilers, forcing them to look to sources as diverse as the house records of eastern military families, temple records, the diaries
of court nobles, and, perhaps not surprisingly, early variants of the *Heike monogatari*. Yet, since the *Azuma kagami*’s very form suggests historical veracity, its inclusion of materials borrowed from legendary or fictionalized sources likewise lends them an air of veracity. Its incorporation of a wide variety of documentary and narrative sources is what makes the *Azuma kagami* of such interest for this study: it very clearly illustrates the ease with which documents, battle accounts, journal entries, and legends were equally woven into the “history” of the period, a topic that will remain a central concern in the following chapters.

**Methodological Considerations:**
**Medievality, Textuality, Performance**

In the chapters that follow, I explore how narratives drawn from the above texts and genres collectively create a deep and sustained account of the Minamoto consolidation of power, a tradition that emerged and grew stronger throughout the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. In doing so, I situate these narratives not only as representatives of individual works or repertoires, but also as constituents of a larger, culturally shared body of ideas about how to interpret the past. The practices that created these narratives blurred many of the borders conventionally associated with Heian period writing and performance: genre, language and writing style, class, and geographic region.

This study focuses on key episodes of internal Minamoto strife from narratives retold across texts and genres during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods. Multiply told tales raise the critical problem of how best to evaluate them as both discrete episodes in larger self-contained works and as a sort of legendary element whose sheer presence exceeds the bounds of those works. Studies of this corpus have tended toward either imminent or genetic interpretive approaches. Both presume a high degree of integrity on the part of any individual text; the boundaries between one text and another are considered fairly clear, and each is treated as a circumscribed, discrete set of written words. This characterization is reflected especially in the naming and categorization of variants within the *Heike* repertoire; their differentiation has been a primary goal of scholarly inquiry. Intertextuality is an important consideration for diachronically situating the work, but ultimately the unit of comparison remains the individual text itself. Questioning these written texts and their autonomy, I believe, will provide a better understanding of the works as a gateway to the broader, more complex cultural space and processes in which the text participates and which endow it with meaning. This loosening of textual boundaries also begins to open up some of the paradigms that circumscribe our understanding of this crucial and complex body of historical
narrative. What do we mean by “text,” and what is the relationship of one text to others sharing much the same content?

The first issue to consider is the status of the texts available to us for study today. This concern has been productively addressed by scholars of literature, but most fully by those of medieval and less chirographically oriented cultural contexts. These researchers identify several problems with a model based on investigation of the written works per se in cultural situations where the meaning of “text” is extremely fluid and often only loosely connected to written textuality. They provide viable guidelines for defining texts, contexts, and the strategies used for deriving meaning in cultures quite different from our own.

Medieval historian Brian Stock describes the “text” in the medieval European context as: “both physical and mental. The ‘text’ is what a community takes it to be.”96 For him, it is not only a physical object but also the evaluative and interpretive apparatus an audience brings to bear on it; comprehension of its meaning is not necessarily linked to reading or literacy generally. What constitutes a text depends on an agreed-upon understanding of the text’s parameters. Its meaning can be derived from written content, but it is also strongly dependent on other layers of meaning conferred by a specific group of interpreters in a specific context. The text can be itself a ritual object, a record of the holy (spoken) word, a finely crafted written narrative, or all of the above.

These multiple dimensions of textuality are of particular interest in connection with the Heike and the other works considered in this study, all of which manifest both performative and ritual elements. Even when read rather than heard, voice, music, and ritual context remain inscribed in them and evoke a realm beyond, and to a degree separate from, the written word. The domain of performance is a world where reception of a text is mediated by yet another level or translation as it is interpreted (enacted or vocalized) by a performer (or performers). Through this translation the text is more firmly located in the mind (and on the stage) than it can be by its inscription on a page. Moreover, unlike in the modern context, the meaning of the medieval textual object is merely a starting point for the “text” it preserves, not its full embodiment: it is an artifact that reflects the “text,” but that “text” itself cannot be fully articulated without performance. That performance in this context involves a ritual dimension adds yet another layer of complexity, to which I will return. Crucially, the content shared among various works telling the same story enables the medieval “text” to create a memorable cultural narrative.

The non-self-sufficiency of the literary text has been underlined by every generation of literary studies since the heyday of the new critics, but the context I am describing points to an additional complication. The texts in question here most certainly overflow the boundaries of the
written page, since most of them have several appropriate articulations, often as both performance and written works. And each one stands in close relation to other versions of the same story, which indicates the potential for a composite narrative extending across individual versions. The works in this study are not only not constrained by two covers, but further, not bounded by any sort of textual autonomy: wholesale movement of large narrative segments among versions is extremely common; there is rarely authorial attribution for any work; and there is little sense of an authoritative originary text from which the others have descended. These texts rely on interpretation using both hierarchical as well as lateral paradigms: hierarchically (diachronically), they require the reader or audience to be able to interpret them based on shared cultural and linguistic norms; laterally (synchronously), they also require knowledge of texts that share their story, characters, and often close-to-verbatim narrative. This study explores the interactive dimension of these works in both directions. As we shall see, one vital concern is the idea of interpretive frameworks. In this complex context, logical coherence depends on the ability of the audience or reader to interpret meaning not simply within an individual work, but also across the spectrum of other works with which it interfaces. Thus interpretation itself becomes a vital concern as a new set of hierarchical and lateral relationships is created in emerging and interrelated genres. The interpretive act, in fact, exceeds its role as tool to become a narrative subject as well.

Interpretation is a particularly compelling issue for reasons related to the nature of the texts in question: they are either clearly performance pieces themselves or parts of textual traditions with close ties to performance. An element of aurality is implicit in the experience of a written text with such ties, and thus interpretation tends to rely to some degree on the aural and visual imagination to amplify and color the experience of interpreting. This altering of the reading experience complicates ideas about reading practices. In the conventional (if idealized) case of decoding in written versus performed texts, differing paths to comprehension in each give rise to different parameters for interpretation. Folklorist John M. Foley explains this difference in terms of “referential modes,” where in the case of performance, shared traditional knowledge, the performance, and audience fulfill the roles of author, text, and reader in the case of reading.

Foley’s comparison is based on a perceived difference between reading and listening experiences. And to an extent, this is valid: the interpretation of a written text depends on our ability to read and re-read, to refer to other texts, to pace ourselves, to derive meaning by visualizing complex sentence structure, and to revel in the beauty of a well-turned phrase. In the reading process, temporality is not entirely linear; it is subject to reversals and looping back to a degree that is much less feasible in a performance
arena, where the “text” moves ahead at its own pace regardless of whether the listener chooses to move forward with it or not. By not following the movement of the performance, the listener risks missing part of it.

Foley argues that the mode of referentiality differs for written and oral (or performed) works, with what he refers to as the “immanent tradition” representing the touchstone for the interpretive act in oral traditions. The “immanent tradition” represents interpretive schemes immanent in a culture (rather than an individual text) at the disposal of an informed audience at any given performance of a “text” from a familiar repertoire. His model is based on Wolfgang Iser’s reader-response theory, with Foley’s “immanent tradition” functioning as the equivalent of the author in Iser’s paradigm. Although there are problems with this model for the medieval Japanese context, the idea of a shared corpus of stories and characters serving as an interpretive touchstone for multiply told tales is useful.

The most important of Foley’s insights for this analysis is his focus on the metonymic relationships among works sharing significant content. The audience knows a body of stories to which particular references in a performance will necessarily point; association is made by virtue of contiguity in the cultural space. Yet Foley invests this metonymic dimension with metaphoric significance. Metonymic association points to “[t]raditional structures . . . [that are] cognitive categories. Reality is configured and expressed, interpreted and reinterpreted, exclusively through the categories set and maintained as the traditional idiom.” What appears as metonymic, or accidentally associative, is guided by the metaphoric—cognitive categories that bring meaning to individual tellings. And they are framed, as we shall see, by a constellation of structural tropes embedded in each story: prophetic dreams, symbolic objects, and, perhaps most important in the emergent medieval age, the inherent connection between such established tropes and the idea of documentation. How this set of interpretive parameters is constructed will be the primary focus of this study.

While structure implies hierarchical relationships and static configurations, these are, as Foley indicates, stimulated by lateral relationships between tales—each adds layers of meaning (and weight generally) to the structure, while at the same time altering it to accord with expectations and understandings of the past as time goes by and stories change. One important contention of this study is that these structures and concerns are connected to the idea of an incipient national, or at the very least cultural, identity, as described by Barbara Ruch in her discussion of “audience-oriented repertory literature,” works that form the basis for a “national literature.” These works constitute a “combination of themes, heroes and heroines, predicaments, ethical dilemmas, resolutions. . . . A national literature is a certain core of literary works the content of which is well
known and held dear by the majority of people across all class and professional lines, a literature that is a reflection of a national outlook. Tales from the Heike are at the heart of this literature, and as works mobilized in creating narrative frameworks for interpreting history, they were also at the heart of the medieval audience’s engagement with its own past.

Ruch’s definition points importantly to key features of the audience that increasingly defined the direction of cultural developments: these works were experienced and interpreted by people from a broad range of backgrounds, who, by making connections between their own contemporary reality and the world within the tales, developed shared critical tools to interpret them both. Brian Stock’s description of “textual communities,” or groups that “have some way of registering semantic and social relations that are understandable to the speakers, listeners, readers, and writers,” brings one name to this concept. This community is not dependent on literacy, nor are the categories of writing/reading and performing/auditing mutually exclusive or even necessarily useful. What is essential to render a text the property of a given community is a shared set of interpretive skills, deployed within a common interpretive framework.

Below I will examine several ways in which interpretive structures from earlier periods were integrated with others more firmly grounded in the post-Genpei experience and articulated in this group of narratives. I hope to demonstrate the often cooperative relationship between writing and speaking as modes of expression in creating these structures. The interplay between these two is of course vitally important in the Japanese context, where writing had already enjoyed a long history and was the object of sustained critical inquiry, and where the audiences for written texts and performed ones were not mutually exclusive. People with lower levels of literacy were read to, and highly literate people were part of audiences for performances. This diversity in audiences, performers, and texts was made possible by, and also contributed to creating, a narrative that was and is dynamic in form and accessible. We shall see that another significant factor in creating that accessibility was the encoding of interpretive schemes within texts themselves.