

In Japanese history, the name “Hojo” is associated with two powerful but unrelated families who lived in very different periods: the Kamakura Hojo and the Later Hojo, also known as the Odawara Hojo. Although separated by more than a century and lacking any blood relation, both clans held significant political and military power and left a lasting impact on Japanese history.

The Kamakura Hojo clan rose to prominence during the early years of the Kamakura shogunate, which was established in 1185. Initially serving as loyal supporters of Minamoto no Yoritomo, the first shogun, the Hojo gradually seized real power after his death. They established a system known as shikken seiji (regency government), in which the Hojo family acted as regents (shikken) to successive shoguns—often minors or figureheads—thus exercising effective control over the government. This regency system became firmly institutionalized under leaders like Hojo Yoshitoki and Hojo Yasutoki.

One of their most notable accomplishments was the defense against the Mongol invasions in 1274 and 1281. While typhoons—later called kamikaze or “divine winds”—played a major role in destroying the Mongol fleets, the Hojo’s coastal defenses and military preparations were also crucial. However, the immense cost of these defensive efforts, combined with the lack of war spoils to distribute, caused deep dissatisfaction among the warrior class. This, along with the Hojo’s increasingly rigid and authoritarian rule, led to widespread unrest and ultimately the downfall of the Kamakura shogunate in 1333.

More than a century later, the Later Hojo clan emerged during the Sengoku period, a time of widespread civil war and fragmented authority. Founded by Hojo Sōun (originally named Ise Shinkurō) in the late 15th century, this family had no blood connection to the earlier Hojo clan. However, they adopted the prestigious Hojo name to lend legitimacy to their rule by invoking the legacy of their Kamakura namesakes. From their base at Odawara Castle, they expanded their influence across the Kantō region. Known for effective land management and diplomatic skill, the Later Hojo built a prosperous and well-governed domain, and they came to be recognized as one of the most successful daimyo families of their time.

Despite their strength, the Later Hojo could not withstand the unifying ambitions

of Toyotomi Hideyoshi. In 1590, he launched a massive campaign against them, culminating in the Siege of Odawara—one of the largest military operations of the Sengoku period. Facing overwhelming odds, the Hojo surrendered, bringing an end to their rule and completing Hideyoshi's unification of Japan. Some historians have noted that the clan's refusal to submit earlier, when more favorable terms might have been possible, contributed to their downfall.

Despite their different origins and historical contexts, both Hojo clans illustrate how political strategy, military capability, and administrative reform could elevate a family to power—but also how inflexible leadership and external pressures could lead to their fall.

- (1) According to the passage, what political system did the Kamakura Hojo create to control the government?
- (2) Why did the Later Hojo adopt the same family name as the earlier Hojo?
- (3) What is one common characteristic shared by both Hojo clans regarding their rise and fall?

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解答

- (1) The Kamakura Hojo created the shikken seiji system, a political system in which they ruled as regents (shikken) for child shoguns, effectively controlling the government from behind the scenes.
- (2) The Later Hojo adopted the name to legitimize their rule, despite having no blood relation to the earlier Kamakura Hojo clan.
- (3) Both Hojo clans rose to power through strong political and military strategies, but eventually fell due to external pressures or inflexible governance.

全訳

日本の歴史において「北条」という名前は、異なる時代に存在した2つの強力だが血縁関係のない有力家系を指すことがあります。それが、鎌倉北条氏と、後北条氏（または小田原北条氏）です。両者は1世紀以上も時代を隔て、直接の血縁関係はありませんが、いずれも政治的・軍事的に大きな力を持ち、日本の歴史に深い足跡を残しました。

鎌倉北条氏は、1185年に成立した鎌倉幕府の初期に台頭しました。彼らは当初、初代将軍・源頼朝の忠実な支持者として仕えましたが、頼朝の死後、次第に実権を握るようになります。北条氏は「執権政治（しっけんせいじ）」と呼ばれる体制を確立し、形式上の将軍（多くは幼少の子ども）を立て、自らは執権として政権を事実上掌握しました。この政治体制は、北条義時や泰時の代に制度として確立されました。

彼らの最も有名な功績の一つは、1274年と1281年に行われた元寇（蒙古襲来）を撃退したことです。嵐（後に「神風」と呼ばれる）によって元の艦隊が壊滅したことが知られていますが、それに加えて、北条氏による沿岸防備の強化や軍事的準備も勝因として重要でした。しかし、防衛のために莫大な費用がかかったうえ、戦利品も乏しく、恩賞を受けられなかった武士たちの間には不満が広がりました。さらに、北条氏の専制的な政治が続いたことで全国的な不満が高まり、1333年、鎌倉幕府はついに滅亡しました。

それから1世紀以上が経った15世紀後半、戦国時代の混乱期に、後北条氏が登場します。伊勢宗瑞（後の北条早雲）によって創始されたこの家系は、鎌倉北条氏とは血縁的なつながりはありませんでした。しかし、歴史的な正統性と権威を得るために、あえて「北条」の名を名乗り、その名声を利用しました。彼らは小田原城を本拠とし、関東地方に勢力を拡大しました。後北条氏は土地の効率的な管理や巧みな外交によって、経済的に安定した領国を築き、戦国時代における最も成功した戦国大名の一つとして知られています。

しかしその後、豊臣秀吉の天下統一事業が進む中で、後北条氏はその脅威に直面します。1590年、秀吉は大軍を動員して小田原征伐を開始し、日本史上最大級の包囲戦とも言われる小田原城の戦いが勃発します。後北条氏は最終的に降伏し、彼らの支配は終焉を迎えました。このとき、より早い段階で恭順していれば、より有利な条件で存続できた可能性もあったとする歴史の見解もあります。

このように、時代も出自も異なる両方の北条氏ですが、政治的戦略、軍事力、行政改革によって権力を握った点、そして外部からの圧力や柔軟性を欠いた統治が最終的に滅亡を招いた点において、共通する特徴が見られます。