

Warriors in peace: the economic life of the samurai class in tokugawa japan essay...



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University of the philippines, baguio| WARRIORS IN PEACE| THE ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE SAMURAI CLASS IN TOKUGAWA JAPAN| | ANIDA, CESNA CO| 3/20/2013| The warriors of Japanese history the samurai belongs to the upper class of the society. During the Warring States and before that samurai were used as killing machines ready to slay anyone who was against with their masters. But during this time of peace, samurai have no war to fight anymore. Despite their high status in the society their economic life is not proportional to it all.

They only depended on the rice-stipend given to them by their daimyo and was produced by the farmers. | Table of Contents Introduction2 Short History of the Samurai2 Establishment of Tokugawa Japan3 The Economy4 The Samurai of Tokugawa Japan5 Change of Perspectives6 Social and political Position of the Samurai6 Role in the Economy9 Role in the Fall of Tokugawa11 Conclusion

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Introduction This paper aims to explain primarily the economic life of the samurai class during the Tokugawa Japan.

Moreover this also covers the economic structure of the Tokugawa Japan as well as political and social feature, because discussing Japanese economy alone is impossible without covering some of the political and social facets of this country. To make this paper possible records and book archives were studied and analyze. By studying this paper the colorful and vibrant everyday life of the samurai was discovered and what did they contribute to make the modern Japan possible. The life of the samurai was full of extremes

from loyalty to the way of death, their economic life to their social status and other paradoxes of their life.

Reading this paper will help you to understand the long running history of the one of the most beautiful cultural achievement of the Japanese including their way of thinking and deep rooted sense of identity. Short History of the Samurai Originally from the old Japanese word *saburahi* which means 'to serve' (Ikegami, 1995), samurai class emerged from the Heian period around ninth or tenth century when land became the most important asset and must be protected. There were three groups were the samurai class began. First, the protectors of the aristocratic family in urban areas which also served as police evolved into warriors.

Next the *kondei* or 'stalwart youth' was bestowed by the government with power to protect their lands and borders from barbarians and lastly the private soldiers that were systematized to defend the *shoen* or estates of the local elites against bandits or the government itself. Some families that established power developed military expertise and became regional forces (Andressen, 2002). Example of this was the early samurai family from the Heian period - Taira and Minamoto. The power of the samurai class became further recognized because the establishment of the *Karakura* period in 12th century by Yoritomo Minamoto.

This was the first official government lead by the military shogun or by the shogunate which means literally 'Barbarian-Subduing Generalissimo' (Nakane, 1990). Yoritomo was able to rise up in power because he sought support from the samurai class then after usurping the power he created a

semi centralized regime with the imperial court on the other side. These were the two power structures governing the medieval Japan but eventually the shogunate was able to monopolize the power whereas the emperor became a mere symbol. This lasted until the fall of Tokugawa in 1868 which was succeeded by the Meiji Restoration. Establishment of Tokugawa Japan

The period of Warring States in Japan was the time of chaos and political instability that eventually cause scrappy political and economic control. The shogunate loses their grip in power while the regional feudal lords arose and fought each other to be on top. One of these feudal lords was Oda Nobunaga from Owari. He wanted to bring the Japan into a one nation state and use the banner Tenka Fubu which means ' extension of military rule throughout the land'. Unfortunately he was not able to bring this to reality because he was killed by his own vassal Akechi Mitsuhide. But later on he was succeed be his loyal follower, Toyotomi Hideyoshi.

By brutal force he was able to win this position by killing Oda's slayer and murdering his rivals. After the death of Hideyoshi he was succeeded by Tokugawa Ieyasu, by succeeding the seat he benefitted in the land that Oda and Hideyoshi unified. He was the one that established the Tokugawa Japan. He created the bakufu system wherein the bakufu was the central government under them was the 270 daimyo domains (Nakane, 1990). This was the political framework of this period which the Tokugawa shogunate seized the power. Tokugawa Japan lasted 265 years of peace from 1603-1868 (Tokugawa, 2009). The Economy

The early Japan was basically a feudal society which means that they were an agricultural based society. The economy depended on land-tilting and crop planting, rice was there main crop and staple food and peasant-farmers dominated the population. Before the official inauguration of the Tokugawa Japan one of the most important propellers of order and stability especially in terms of the economy was the policy that Hideyoshi delivered which was originally planned by Oda. The Taiko Kenchi which refers to the nationwide cadastral survey where the land was surveyed and a uniform official measurement for rice was created called kyo-masu.

Thru this nationwide standardization the process of calculating the rice production by means of koku was introduced. This system was called kokudaka system where a certain locality was manage by a daimyo and in that village it was required to produced 100, 000 koku of rice measured in kyo-masu (Nakane, 1990). After the death of Hideyoshi which marked the inauguration of Tokugawa Japan by Tokugawa Ieyasu the kokudaka system remained a policy on the economy. Ieyasu benefited in what Oda and Hideyoshi established and accomplished. Tokugawa Japan was the last stage of agricultural society of Japan.

Villages that engage in agriculture were called noson aside from them there were the mountain villages the sanson in which upland and forest production was their mode of production and lastly the villages that depend on fishing the gyoson (Nakane, 1990). But still the main source of income came from the agricultural sector and rice production which can be pointed in the richness of the land of the provinces that generated massive agricultural making. More than agricultural economy of Tokugawa Japan also another <https://assignbuster.com/warriors-in-peace-the-economic-life-of-the-samurai-class-in-tokugawa-japan-essay/>

phase that defined this period was their closed-door policy or sakoku jidai that was implemented by the bakufu.

This solidarity significantly contributed to Japan's peace and stability by focusing in the internal affairs of the country. The Samurai of Tokugawa Japan In general there was a paradigm shift in the life of the samurai class in the Tokugawa Japan. This transformation happened in their different facets of life. From political, economic and social there were changes in which gave more color and life in the history of samurai. From the brutal and violent warriors they became administrative officers that planned and over looked the lands in where their daimyos was taken post.

Samurai now were not allowed to tilt the land and became a farmer at the same time. Instead of learning the art of killing they became also scholars and artist that contributed in the cultural history of Japan. These very men that were once only used as soldiers in war became the leaders that govern and guide Japan in their building of a strong and firm nation. Change of Perspectives Like what had been said above change became an element of this period for the samurai. Historically the samurai class was established to become human machines that will be used to protect and to serve their lords with lifelong loyalty.

But from the transition of the Warring states to Tokugawa era their identity will change and transform into a simple foot soldiers into leaders that will build an empire. Because of Hideyoshi's ' Sword Hunt' in 1588, the samurai class became a pure samurai class. Sword Hunt restricted peasants to hold swords and other weapons while samurai were not allowed to become

farmers. This policy resulted to the rigidity of the social structure in Tokugawa Japan which was only fully executed in the term of the 3rd shogun Iemitsu (Sansom, 1963) where he considered this policy hereditary and fixed. Social and political Position of the Samurai

The military class includes all weapon-holding family which starts from the warlords to the poorest samurai. Inside of the classes there were sub-structures. Clear distinctions were between upper and lower class samurai. Upper class rode horses while lower class travels only using their feet (Kublin, 1973). Koshogumi were the personal attendants to the daimyo belongs to the upper class and other samurai belonging to this class were chief minister, high officials, Confucian scholars as well as doctors. After that, were the lower samurai class and on top of it were calligraphers and then the stable keeper the nakakosho.

Other attendants of the daimyo were the tomokosho and those who do the duties of patrolling and guarding the gate and the estate. The lowest of the class were the ashigaru the common foot soldiers (Bellah, 1957). Mobility between these sub-structures was so small that within the 265 years of Tokugawa only hand-full movements in these sub-structures were recorded. Despite these micro-distinctions inside this class, the samurai were highly privileged people. In Tokugawa Japan the basis of the social hierarchy was not wealth but power.

The position in the society was based on value system: prestige correlates directly with power (Bellah, 1957). Position in the society was legal and hereditary; wealth has less importance than status. The samurai class does

not belong to the common people unlike the other classes- farmers, artisans and merchants. Samurai class was above these classes and had the right in using their swords against the people belonging in the lower class in any chance they disrespect a samurai. Even though Tokugawa Japan was a time of peace the swords of a samurai was not just for decoration but a sign of their social status.

Also samurai was the only asides from the nobility that were allowed to use surnames. Politically just like their social status the samurai hold much of the power and control in governing the Japanese people. The very fact that the bakufu or shogunates belong to the warrior class was an evidence of their political domination in Tokugawa Japan. After the bloody war during the Warring States the samurai class have no wars to fight and peace was almost everywhere therefore they were the ones that filled the government position and became officials.

This undertaking can be narrated in correlation to the education of the samurai in this period. Because of the problem in unemployment in the samurai during the beginning of Tokugawa Japan the shogunates educated the warrior class and see the potential of them working as officials and government workforces. Ieyasu stated that learning and military arts should be equally pursued (Kublin, 1973). These resulted to the employment of the samurai as teachers in military arts and sciences, officers and clerks in the feudal and bakufu government. Moreover some became intellectuals and artist.

These war soldiers became steward of the lands of their daimyo being more than just their soldier but their loyal attendees and personnel. These teachings that the samurai class undertake, especially by the upper echelon, came from Song Neo-Confucianism. The change in the system required new models and values to be applied in the military government. Therefore, the scholars and intellectuals develop beliefs system which will work for this kind of regime. The Bushido or “ the ethics or the way of the warrior” was a code created and harmonized only in the early Tokugawa period, during the middle of 1660’s.

Though the way of the samurai already existed on the early periods, the samurai were expected to have a life of discipline and loyalty, it was rarely expressed consciously as a structured ideology centered around a preoccupation with moral behavior (Ikegami, 1995). It was only during the time of Tokugawa that the need for a national philosophy has to be established and it was the bushido. In this philosophy the samurai were projected as leaders by showing the people the example of life-long loyalty. Civil officers charged with the moral and intellectual guidance of the masses.

It was also credited that a samurai not doing his ‘ moral obligation’ was no different to ‘ bandits and drifters’ (Tokugawa, 2009). Also the samurai were also expected to not to think about money or anything that concerns it. The responsibility of the samurai was more than a fighter but he should be a model of morality in doing his duty as a loyal servant to his master, to be wise and a man of character wherein he will lead the people. From the beginning of the; feudal society it was the ethics of loyalty, discipline and obedience that held it together. It was the foundation.

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Samurai were expected from the beginning to sacrifice their lives for their masters. This is how the samurai culture became really unique and a foundation to the Japanese wholeness. The samurai distinctive belief in honor was the basis of unique cultural style and identity. Samurai were called *haji aru mono* which means “those men with a sense of shame”. This was also another factor that separated them with other classes- they would sacrifice and give their lives for by doing this was an honorable act (Ikegami, 1995). The way of the samurai or bushido became the national ethic of Tokugawa (Bellah, 1957).

Its basis in the new interpretation of the Neo-Confucianism developed the Tokugawa Japan's civil service with a strict code of moral values. All in all the social status and education of the samurai which help them to hold the political position in nation building became their way in creating a national identity and a sense of unification, for the samurai were the nation's leaders that guided their people by showing example of loyalty, discipline and morality which resulted in building a strong and unified country. Role in the Economy

It may be said that this paper already focus on the wrong direction, but let me clarify again the reason why spending a notable pages in explaining the social and political role of the samurai in Tokugawa Japan. I believe by narrating these aspects the reader will able to see the real position of the samurai in the Japanese society. It will shed light in understanding the significance of the samurai class in the nation building of Japan. So as I take to the main study of this paper I would like to keep in mind everything that was already discussed and told about the samurai.

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As told by history before the establishment of the Tokugawa Japan, samurai were also farmers, they were peasant-warriors. They avoided battles during the harvest time or in the plantation itself. Throughout the Warring States, 15th and 16th century there was a risk that a village would become a battleground for the samurai (Tokugawa, 2009). This problem was solved by the Sword Hunt of Hideyoshi by that unemployment flooded the population of the samurai. Mostly those who belong to the low ranking samurai, that sparked the ronin (samurai that were master less or free samurai) revolt of 1651 (Sansom, 1963).

The population of the samurai was only a 5 to 7 percent of the total population of Japan (Tokugawa, 2009). Their economic life was really unique versus with their other contemporaries in other countries that also belonging to the warrior class, the knights of Europe for example. The mode of production of the Tokugawa Japan was feudal which means that they rely highly on agricultural means in producing their resources. The land was rich and Japan feudal society was a rice economy. Rice was the primary commodity and it was not monetized.

Surprisingly, samurai did not own any lands and belongs to the “ parasitic class” (Bebedict, 1946). This is why it was said above that the samurai class was different in other warrior classes of that time. Their economic wealth did not reflect their social status at all. Samurai class was said to be “ parasitic class” because they were pensioned by the daimyo and received only stipends from the rice production that time which was produce by the peasant-farmers. Their houses and lands were basically not their property

but only given to them by their daimyo. This stipend was fixed for the family of the samurai (Bebedict, 1946).

During the Tokugawa Japan the feudal lords or daimyo were subjected to the bakufu government wherein to subdue them their han (the land they were conducting) were not given to them permanently but daimyos were in a continual rotation. After sometime the shogun will send another daimyo in change of the daimyo that was posted on that land. This system affected the samurai that they will follow wherever their daimyo will go. They were both living in the castle town 'assigned' to the daimyo. These factors now clearly show how the samurai is dependent to his daimyo.

The loyalty between the samurai and to his lord Tokugawa Japan was based on the unending war that were happening that time but after that their relationship became primary economic in nature. It was also mentioned earlier about the micro-structure inside the samurai class. This discrepancy in position also affects how much the stipend of a samurai was. The higher the rank of the samurai the larger amount of rice was given to him and vice versa. Higher class samurai receive sufficient amount to support his family while the lower did not receive enough.

Therefore, some have to supplement themselves by creating handicrafts and some engaged in secretive trading enterprises (Bellah, 1957). Another implication of this stipend-system in the samurai was that some part of their stipend was converted to money in order by selling it to merchants to buy commodities other than rice. But this doing became only eminent during the later years of Tokugawa. Higher ranking samurai were the ones that collect

tax in terms of rice and their share in the harvest was about 40 percent (Tokugawa, 2009).

While high ranking samurai were taught polite accomplishments the lower class learned writing and arithmetic to prepare in clerical work. Because of this the lower class became very influential in actual administration (Bellah, 1957). Now it was described how poor the economic position of the samurai class can get no matter how high their social status. This crisis became worst when the rice-dependency declined in the later years of Tokugawa Japan in 18th century. Japan was slowly becoming a money economy and the value of rice started to deteriorate.

Moreover, wealth rested on the hands of the merchants that were the lowest in the social structure. The variety of goods or commercial commodities that can be bought by money increased, the importance of the rice within the national economy dropped (sharp) (Tokugawa, 2009). The implication of this to the samurai as well as to their daimyo was they became poorer and some were suffers with large debt. Merchants became richer and samurai became poorer, moneylending became of part of their life were the borrowers were the samurai and those who lend the money were the users that were mostly merchants too.

Furthermore, some samurai were able to acquire money by selling their statuses and rights (Bellah, 1957). Also when they arranged with a merchant an adoption of the merchant's son in the samurai family the samurai family will be able to attain wealth while the merchant will be able to obtain status. Samurai were poor people that only depended on the rice stipends given to

them by their daimyo and produce by the farmers. They were expected to be contented with everything that they have for they were perceived not to live in a comfortable way of living.

Their top priority should be their loyalty to their master and guiding the people with their discipline and moral values. Their duty in the government should not be motivated by any compensation per say. But this was not the whole picture. Tokugawa Japan started to decline and the rice based economy was starting to be not able to support the growing demands of the country. Money became powerful and merchants became richer while those who were sitting in the government itself were becoming poorer. These challenges piled up in front of the bakufu and to add to these pressures were the external factors.

Other countries like the Dutch and Americans were finding their way in this close country of Japan. Role in the fall of tokugawa Shift in the economic system of Tokugawa Japan during the middle to the last years cause the gradual fall of it. Rice production was still important and rice still remained as Japanese staple food but its role as the basis of wealth and means of acquiring commodities eventually decline when the economy became more monetized. More commercial commodities were being produce and consumed that implies a more sophisticated urban living.

This marked the end of the agricultural society of Japan and modernization was already peeping in the horizon. Though in the late 18th century the economy of the Tokugawa was changing the main schema of power shifts still remain political. This was where the role of the samurai came in. There

was a huge discrepancy between the wealth of the classes those merchants that belongs to the lower class were the richest and most economically stable rather than the daimyo with their samurai who manage the land and the government itself.

Order was able to maintain because of the strong authoritarian principle leading the country. Also the economic revolution in Japan did not trigger war but instead it created more unity between the rising merchants and the government. The Shingaku movement led by Ishida Baigan was an economic movement membered by many merchants in the late Tokugawa. Instead of stratification between the bakufu and the merchant class this movement parallels its ideology to the existing moral principles that time.

The way of the warrior or the bushido should be also the way of the merchant as Baigan implies. Merchants should become greedy industrialist. But like the samurai should serve the people but assistance with the empire and the profit they acquire is just a reward of their services (Bellah, 1957). The samurai honesty and loyalty should as be modeled. More than being a role model of the merchants, the samurai class worked and moved in the coming modernization of the old Japan. It was the lower samurai class that was responsible for the restoration of 1868 (Bellah, 1957).

Because the lower samurai was the one assigned in the doing the clerical and government jobs they were the ones that know the real situation and seeing that poverty became rampant and the system was no longer effective, the coup d'état was launched and they were able to overthrow those in power and established back the meaning of the emperor, that it was

in his name that the people of Japan will be unified. This was popularly known in history as Meiji Restoration and from the ranks of the lower samurai the new government was formed.

The restrictions between classes were abolished and the samurai class was encouraged to enter industry. Samurai were the Meiji architects; they were the one that provided the initiative and leadership that the merchants were not able to develop (Bellah, 1957). The economic change indeed propelled the change in Tokugawa Japan but the primary tool and reason remains political. The young leaders of the Meiji Japan were able to see the need for more national power that could be paralleled with the Western countries. By them we saw an uprising of an Asian power that shook the whole world in the upcoming years.

Conclusion The history of Japan cannot be complete without knowing the samurai. Samurai were not just simple foot soldiers but eventually they became the unifiers and leaders of Japan. It was the warrior class that pacified every people in Japan. We saw in the history of Japan how samurai took part in shaping every periodization in Japan. Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and finally Ieyasu Tokugawa were an example of the role played by the samurai in the shaping of Japan. Interestingly though samurai held a very high position in the society and respected, their economic life was not that prestigious.

Samurai were taught to be disciplined and simple in the way that they live. That is why they just depend on the stipend given to them by the daimyo and farmers. It was against in their morals to be associated in money. Aside

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from their financial mentality, samurai were expected to have loyalty more than everything. They were expected to give their very lives to their masters. This was where the control and monopoly of the samurai came from. This kind of social upbringing and rigidity in the life of the samurai cause him to be a man of ambition and achievement.

Samurai should grab every opportunity to keep his word and morals. This is the kind of leaders the Meiji Restoration had and the secret to the success of the Japan. People were taught of discipline and loyalty. Morality that will serve not only themselves but to properly embody the role they have for the society. By this it is clearly see how a samurai was created our time and this was shown in the very history of Japan. These warriors are not motivated by money or wealth and it is very obvious in their economic status. But these warriors were propelled by their sense of loyalty and morality.

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