

Sankin kotai

[History](#)



SANKIN KOTAI The Sankin kotai was a military service to the shogun and helped ensure that the daimyo of the period did not gain too much power. It kept the daimyos wife and children as hostages for part of the year and limited the wealth the daimyos could maintain. This was done by forcing the daimyo to travel to different residences throughout Japan. Its added benefits were the establishment of Japan's extensive road network during the Edo period as well as ensuring the daimyo was visible in various regions of the country and not only in capital. Because of this policy's central position at the heart of the Japanese nation, it had an extensive influence on the lives of Japanese during the Edo period.

To begin with, the daimyos during this period led lives that were very circumscribed by the shogun and this policy of alternate attendance. Their wealth was extensively accounted for and they were only allowed a certain number of attendants, which would depend on the amount of rice generated in their fief. These rules were often strictly enforced. Daimyos were also forbidden to build new fortifications in their regions without the permission of the shogun. They weren't even able to repair existing castles. The shogun's watchful eye was always on them. Additionally, they were unable to enter into marriage alliances without the shogun's permission. This was considered to be a treasonous act.

This law had a huge effect on all of Japan, in particular on the economic growth of the various regions ruled by the daimyos. They had very little say in any of the important decisions that needed to be undertaken. Any rebel captured in their fief had to be turned over to the shoguns. Reports of conspiracies in other fiefs were to be written by daimyos and sent to Edo to be examined—thus encouraging a culture of spying amongst the daimyo. In <https://assignbuster.com/sankin-kotai/>

exchange for following these rules, daimyo did have an extensive amount of prestige. They traveled to Edo in vast military pageants and received huge amounts of rice from the people in their fiefs. It was indeed these pageants and the fact they were required to leave their regions so frequently that the roads between Edo and the regions became so developed during this period. To some extent these policies can be said to have been responsible for the stability of Edo era Japan. Daimyos who one would expect to be competitive and to develop rivalries—thus perhaps precipitating internal crisis and conflicts—were kept strictly in line by the watchful eye of the shogun. Perhaps this could be equated to the contemporary American system of cheques and balances or perhaps to a Mexican standoff. The shoguns and other elements in the Japanese government of the day realized that much of the disunity had been papered over and could again spread if things were not closely watched. The unity of Japan at the beginning of this period was delicate and needed to be closely pruned if it was to solidify.