

The shogun dynasty essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The term Shogun means general. Later, it referred to the leader of the Shogunate (Samurai's government). From 1192-1867, the Shogun ruled Japan. The Emperor reigned but did not rule. The Shoguns were a type of warlords that governed provinces and states as a type of Japanese check and balance of the 16th century. The name of that form of government was called Shogunate. The Shogunates ruled as a military dictatorship for over a span of almost 700 years: they fought the Mongolians in 1281, fought in a civil war during 1467-1477, fought for Osaka in 1615, and saw Commodore Perry in 1853.

The samurai are one of the most recognizable and most renowned warriors of the ancient times. They were members of a unique military class called the Japanese warriors. They emerged and grew more and more important during the Heian period (794-1185) when powerful land owners hired them for their personal safety and protection of their property. In the later times of the Heian period the most powerful military families, the Minamoto and Taira, had taken over political power over Japan and fought wars and battles for supremacy. When shogun Minamoto Yoritomo established a new government in Kamakura in 1192, the shogun (the highest military officer) became the ruler of Japan.

The samurai were pinched at the top of the social hierarchy and had many privileges. On the other hand, they were supposed to set a good example for the lower classes by following the principles of Bushido (the way of the warrior). The samurai's most important principles or duties were to be loyal to his master, use self-discipline and respect and also to use ethical behaviour. After a defeat or other dishonourable event many of the samurai

chose to commit suicide by cutting their abdomen with a sword in order to preserve their honour. Such ritual suicide is called seppuku or harakiri.

During the Edo period, which was mainly a peaceful time, most samurai had no motive or need to fight or do battle. In light of their situation many of the samurai chose to dedicate themselves to intellectual studies such as literature, history or the tea ceremony. In the 17th century, masterless and unemployed samurai caused some problems to the government because of their increased intellect. After the Meiji Restoration (1868), the samurai class disappeared. The samurai sword, the katana, is still today the distinguishing mark of the samurai. Please see the sword section for info on Japanese swords.

The Kamakura military leader ruled as a shogun, or “supreme general.” Evidently, the job of the bakufu was simply military administration; in reality, the shoguns and their “tent” government eventually came to run the country. The Heiji War, then, marks the beginning of “feudal Japan”, for the relationship of various provincial generals and lords to the shogun was the relationship of vassals to a lord. The single provinces were more or less self-reliant; their lords, or daimyo, took oaths of allegiance to the shogun.

The Heiji War is also crucial in Japanese culture for it is the subject of the greatest work of Japanese literature, the Heike monogatari (Tales of the Heike). One of the two great classics of medieval Japan (the other being Genji monogatari by Lady Murasaki) the Heike monogatari captivated the Japanese imagination like no other story or history ever did. Told by professional storytellers, biwa hoshi, whose job it was to establish different

versions of various tales and commit them to memory, the stories of the epic struggle between the clan of the Hei and the clan of the Gen became so popular that some biwa hoshi became specialists in the story and their profession came to be known as heikyoku (“ Tales of the Heike Narration”). By the thirteenth century in Japan, heikyoku became known among the upper classes and soon constituted the leading contemporary performing art form in fourteenth and fifteenth century Japan, only falling off during the carnage of the Warring States Period (16th century). During this period, the various tales were written down; so the composition of the Heike monogatari can be said to have taken place between 1200 and 1600. On the other hand, after the outbreak of the Onin War (1467-1477), other types of performance art displaced the heikyoku : Noh theatre, kyogen plays, and the narration of the Taiheiki (Chronicle of the Great Peace); the latter, of course, makes perfect sense in a society being surpressed by civil war.

The defining moment, and the most famous in Japanese history, is the final battle of this great civil war, the battle at Mikusa. The Heike installed themselves in an unpenetrable fort near the ocean. The Genji laid siege to the Heike who were barracated in this fort; however, the Genji were unable to advance further, for the fort had three sides that were literally impossible to storm, and its fourth side was a long and steep cliff. The Genji decided to descend the cliff with surpreme bravery on horseback; this cliff was a long steep decline ending in a seventy foot vertical drop, and the army descended this cliff on horseback. This legendary action spelled the end of the Heike and their power as the Genji warriors demolished the Heike and forced the survivors to swim to their boats anchored in the harbor,

effectively ending Heike dominance forever. This story is perhaps the most famous and best known event in Japanese history.

The main religion of the time of the Shogunate was Buddhism, the Shogunates worshipped Buddhist gods but around the end of the Shogunate reign Christianity started to arise among some of Japan. Although religion is an important essence in any civilization, and especially in those times, the Shogun were a very highly militarily oriented society and based much of their time on military aspects.