

An interesting period
of japanese specific
political system in the
form of tokuga...

[History](#)



The Tokugawa Shogunate

Use this URL to view the essay with the pictures

The Tokugawa Shogunate has gone down in history as a repressive feudal police state. The Tokugawa Shogunate, or Bakufu, (also known as the Edo bakufu,) ruled at a time when an economy based on agriculture and commerce had fully developed to give Japan complete stability. (1. Sword Arts Wiki).

Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu The Tokugawa period began in 1603, this was when the warring states period of history is about to end (3. Tokugawa). Tokugawa Ieyasu consolidated his control of Japan at the battle of Sekigahara (1). In 1603, Ieyasu was appointed Shogun by the emperor. The administration of Japan was a task given by the imperial Court in Kyoto to the Tokugawa family. The Tokugawa continued to rule Japan for 265 years. This period is known as the Edo period and gets its name from the capital city of Edo, now Tokyo (2 Dynasty of Tokugawa Shoguns), they ruled until the Meiji Restoration when the Shoguns were stripped of their power and reduced in rank to Ronin. (2.)

Unlike any of his predecessors, Ieyasu was able to establish a dynasty (2). He redistributed land among the daimyo: more loyal vassals received strategically more important domains accordingly. Every daimyo was also required to spend every second year in Edo. The Tokugawa Bakufu maintained power through absolute control. The Daimyos were prevented from rebelling through the use of hostages held by the Shogun and by a system known as alternate attendance. A Daimyo was required to be in

<https://assignbuster.com/an-interesting-period-of-japanese-specific-political-system-in-the-form-of-tokugawa-shogunate/>

attendance at the Shogun's court in Edo for several months out of a year (1).

This statue of Ieyasu stands on the grounds of the Okazaki Castle Park

He was required to spend the remainder of the year at his estates while leaving his family in Edo. This gave the Tokugawa Shogun hostages and diverted the Daimyo's wealth from military investment to maintaining two residences in a style befitting his position as well as paying for regular lavish processions between Edo and their fiefs.

Okazaki Castle

The Tokugawa Bakufu also forbade any maintenance or improvement of fortifications without its express permission. Not only were the Daimyos forbidden from maintaining their own fortifications, they were also required to maintain public works. These public works included the fortifications of the Tokugawa (2.)

The Tokugawa Shoguns also maintained surveillance over their subjects. The Metsuke, or censors, supplied intelligence to the Shogun concerning the activities of the Daimyos. (1.) The peasants were controlled by the creation of five man groups. The five man group consisted of the heads of five farming households. These groups were responsible for seeing that their members paid their taxes and behaved appropriately. They also took on additional responsibilities such as supervising religious affairs and controlling firearms (1).

Samurai warrior There was class system that divided people into four categories: samurai, farmers, artist and merchants. Only samurai were

allowed to carry the swords. When high-ranking officials walked down the <https://assignbuster.com/an-interesting-period-of-japanese-specific-political-system-in-the-form-of-tokugawa-shogunate/>

street all the peasants had to kneel to give him respect (4. Academic Kids).

Farmers came after samurai because they provided people with food.

Merchants were all the way at the bottom because they were considered greedy and samurais saw them as dishonest people. In 1612 full persecution of the Christian faith is started, and in 1637-1638 because of the persecution and poor economic conditions and poor local government, there was a peasant uprising, in which

Christians take a leading role. All together, 37,000 peasants and assorted Ronin or masterless Samurai made a stand in an old fort. The Bakufu defeated the rebellion but it took three months (3), 100,000 troops, and Dutch naval bombardment to do so (2). Tokugawa Shoguns, were determined to maintain the status quo. To this end they closed Japan. Ships were limited to those that were capable only of coastal travel. Any Japanese who traveled abroad were subject to the death penalty. Chinese merchants were closely watched while the Spanish and Portuguese were expelled. Of the European merchants, only the Dutch were allowed to maintain a presence in Japan, and they were confined to a small, artificial island in Nagasaki bay called Dejima (2).

In 1640 a group of Portuguese diplomats arrive to request the reopening of trade and are promptly executed (2). The Tokugawa Bakufu limited travel within Japan as well, making communication between the Daimyo very difficult. Travel within Japan was even further restricted. Peasants were tied to the fief on which they lived. They had to seek permission to travel. A peasant who left his fief could be imprisoned.

Because Tokugawa Bakufu closed the borders of Japan and made travel within Japan difficult to maintain political stability and prevent rebellion. An unintended side effect of these policies was periodic famine. When a harvest failed, there was no international trade to allow for the importation of food. Even when the crop failure was regional it was often difficult to move surplus food to where it was needed. There were severe famines during 1732 and 33, 1783 through 1787, and 1833 through 1836 (2).

The amount of taxes that the peasants paid did not take into consideration inflation; this resulted in a decrease in the money's value and the samurai landowners' buying power. This led to confrontations between the samurai and the peasants and sometimes outright rebellion (4. Citizenship). Tokugawa coinage

Traditionally, wealth in Japan was measured by how much land was owned and what it produced. This was the same during the Tokugawa, the Samurai who had been living in rural areas and dealing directly with the peasants were withdrawn from their lands. Most of these samurai were incorporated into the Bakufu's bureaucracy (2). They were given a set pension in exchange for the income that they had from their lands. Instead of living in rural areas they lived in towns and cities. These towns and cities became the administrative centers. The Tokugawa succeeded in separating the Samurai from the peasants. This move was intended to maintain social stratification and to prevent peasant uprisings led by Samurai. It also effectively separated the peasants from the centers of administration and power. Taxes were charged on land holdings and the fixed incomes on which the samurai

class lived (6. The Tokugawa Economy). Merchants were taxed only lightly which gave them an advantageous position.

The Tokugawa political structure was organized along Confucian lines, which required all the daimyo located on their large estates or han centralize their governments like in Edo. This led to urban growth throughout Japan which aided in commercial growth and accumulation of wealth (6).

This growth led to outrageous prices throughout Japan and had a severe impact on samurai living far from Edo. When they ran short of funds to maintain their lifestyle, they had to borrow money. The merchant class became moneylenders to the samurai, ensuring a transfer of wealth from the samurai class to the merchant class. Things got so bad some samurai voluntarily discarded their privileged class status and re-registered as common people in order to engage in small business or the production of cottage goods, types of commercial activities that were prohibited to samurai because they were beneath the dignity of the class (6). This caused resentment among the samurai who saw merchants as beneath them.

The growth of the agricultural sector made the growth of the rest of the Japanese economy possible. The Tokugawa era saw the rise of a new and prosperous merchant class (6. Economy). Merchants were considered to be the lowest class of Japanese society by the Neo-Confucian Bakufu. They produced nothing and were considered to be parasites. Even so, merchants were responsible for the cultural character of the Tokugawa period. The merchant class set up rural industries that provided extra income for rural peasants. They also set up the Dojima Rice Exchange in 1697. By 1710, this

<https://assignbuster.com/an-interesting-period-of-japanese-specific-political-system-in-the-form-of-tokugawa-shogunate/>

exchange was dealing in rice futures and trading warehouse notes rather than physically trading rice. The merchant class also provided banking services that were greatly needed by the government. Confucius

In spite of the disdain in which they were held, the merchant class allowed upward social mobility. They had the wealth to live like Samurai (6). They even had the opportunity to become Samurai if they were wealthy enough. By giving money to the government a merchant could buy the right to pass on a family name and wear the two swords of a Samurai. This newly wealthy class had money and time. They needed somewhere to spend both, and something to spend them on. This new class gave rise to tea houses, taverns, theaters, and tourism. While these institutions existed before, they had never existed in such numbers. Kabuki and puppet plays were eagerly attended by the merchants (6). They provided a market for novels, poetry, and woodcuts. The merchant class created a cultural flowering known as the Genroku era.

The new merchant class was not limited to the major cities but scattered throughout Japan. They showed the peasant class that wealth and leisure were both possible and desirable (6). The peasants began to want wealth and the freedom and luxury it bought. They also began to resent those institutions and people that were barriers to the acquisition of wealth.

The monopolies of the government were another thorn in the side of the peasant class. While the prices of the goods they needed were continually rising, the prices that farmers received for their goods remained artificially low. The monopolies were seen by the government as a means of raising

<https://assignbuster.com/an-interesting-period-of-japanese-specific-political-system-in-the-form-of-tokugawa-shogunate/>

much needed revenue. To the peasants, they were one more barrier to wealth and the freedom that goes with it.

The growing complexity of the economy, including the development of a cash economy, reduced differences between peasant classes of different villages or regions. The peasants in mountain and fishing villages were taxed as were those of farming villages. The only real difference is that farmers could pay their taxes in kind. All peasants who grew cash crops, fished, or mined, could suffer from monopolies.

The Tokugawa Shogunate came to an end in 1868 with the Meiji Restoration. They were overthrown by an alliance of several powerful daimyo and imperial rule was restored (1).