

1. The Rise of the Samurai

The military government established by Minamoto Yoritomo was led by a **shogun**, or commander-in-chief. Although emperors continued to rule in name, the real power shifted to the shoguns.

Samurai Under the Shoguns Shoguns, such as Yoritomo and his successors, rewarded warriors, or **samurai**, with appointments to office and land grants. In return, the samurai pledged to serve and protect the shogun.

The rise of the samurai brought a new emphasis on military values in Japanese culture. All samurai trained in the arts of war, especially archery. During this period, women, as well as men, could be samurai, so girls and boys alike were trained to harden their feelings and to use weapons. One samurai wrote,

Of what use is it to allow the mind to concentrate on the moon and flowers, compose poems, and learn how to play musical instruments? . . . Members of my household, including women, must learn to ride wild horses, and shoot powerful bows and arrows.

Shifting Loyalties By the 14th century, Japan's warrior society resembled the lord-vassal system of medieval Europe. The shogun now ruled with the help of warrior-lords called **daimyos** (DIE-mee-os), who, in turn, were supported by large numbers of samurai. The daimyos expected to be rewarded for their obedience and loyalty with land, money, or administrative office, and the samurai expected the same from the daimyos they served.

Over time, the position of the shogun weakened as daimyos became increasingly powerful and began to view their lands as independent kingdoms. Samurai now allied themselves with their daimyo lords.

In the late 15th century, Japan fell into chaos as daimyos warred with one another for land and power. Samurai fought fierce battles on behalf of their lords.

After a century of bloody warfare, a series of skilled generals defeated rival daimyos and reestablished a strong military government. In 1603, the last of these leaders, Tokugawa Ieyasu (TAW-koo-GAH-wah EE-yeh-YAH-soo), became shogun and established a new capital in Edo, present-day Tokyo.

For the next 250 years, Japan was at peace. Samurai served under shoguns and **administered** the government. It was during this time that the samurai ideal came to full flower. Let's look now at the samurai way of life.

10. Comparing Japan and Europe in the Middle Ages

The Japan of the samurai period was both like and unlike Europe during the Middle Ages. In both societies, ties of loyalty and obligation bound lords and vassals. Both had rulers who rose to

power as military chiefs. However, in Europe, a military leader like William the Conqueror ruled as king; whereas in Japan, the shogun ruled in the name of the emperor.

The daimyos of Japan were like the landholding lords of medieval Europe. Both types of lords built castles and held estates that were worked by peasants.

Both the samurai of Japan and the knights of Europe were warriors who wore armor, rode horses, and owned land. Just as European knights had a code of chivalry, the samurai had the code of Bushido. The samurai code, however, was much stricter, because it demanded that a samurai kill himself to maintain his honor.

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