

ULTIMATE MEDIEVAL GUIDE



FEUDAL JAPAN



FEUDAL JAPAN

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Ultimate Medieval Guide: Feudal Japan

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MYL10410 Ultimate Medieval Guide: Feudal Japan

1st Edition July 2017

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INTRODUCTION

Islands long shrouded in mystery, with a history of nature itself stepping in to defend them from outsiders, Japan has been viewed as an exotic and enchanting place by the rest of the world since the Europeans first contacted them. Even in the era of Marco Polo, and others who contacted the Mongols or the Chinese, tales were told of the islands that lay in the sea, full of dedicated warriors and a xenophobic people.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

Japanese history has a number of idiosyncrasies associated with it. One of the most common is the tendency for the names of various individuals to change over the course of their lifetime. After major events, many samurai, daimyo, and other powerful figures would either change or adapt their name to reflect their change in status. This often results in confusing narratives; for *Ultimate Medieval Guide: Feudal Japan* we have adopted the trend that many historians use of simply referring to various figures by their most known name.

Another common problem with Japanese history is the inherent mythologizing that has gone on throughout their history. Not unlike the ancient Greeks, they elevated various heroes and figures to demigod proportions throughout their own history, and glossed over their failings. Since they were so secretive, much of their history is limited by relatively few sources and it is hard to disentangle the myths from history. To remedy this, we've attempted to present both cases where possible to ensure you can play a strictly historical or a fantastical version of Feudal Japan.

THE ISLANDS OF JAPAN

As an island nation, Japan is cut off from the rest of the world by the ocean. Japan's holdings outside of the main islands waxed and waned over time, varying with the ability for these individual islands to break free from Japanese influence, or otherwise. At the heights of their geographic control during the feudal eras, Japan's holdings even included colonies in Korea, a naming convention adapted from Japan's views on the matter.

It is interesting to note that there have been many multi-century projects aimed at recovering and maximizing the amount of usable land. The islands themselves have been shaped and changed with land being claimed from the sea, and advanced and complicated terraces built to maximize arable land. With a

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relatively dense population for so long, much of the land is inexorably shaped by the hands of many humans. It was through the Edo period, especially, that many of these projects were undertaken. The ability to take such a long view was enabled, in part, by the stability the Tokugawa shogunate provided (see **History of Feudal Japan** for more information).

[1] HONSHU

The largest of the islands of Japan, Honshu lies in the center, is home to the capital (no matter which era of Japanese history you're in), and is home to the vast majority of the population. This island alone makes up 60% of the landmass of modern Japan, and is slightly larger than Great Britain.

The island itself is both mountainous and volcanic, with a spine of mountains running down the center. A large number of rivers crisscross the island, beginning up in these mountains and flowing out to the seas that surround the island. The highest peak is Mt. Fuji, a volcano that remains active to this day. (Despite it being active, a curiosity of volcanology, there has not been an eruption since 1707-1708.) Aside from these mountainous peaks, much of the island is humid subtropical on the southern and coastal regions, while the northern and inland regions tend to be humid continental.

Throughout history, the island has been the major producer of all agricultural goods that would feed and clothe the Japanese people. Fruits, vegetables, rice, and silk are among the many agricultural goods produced. Above and beyond that, there have been deposits of zinc, copper, and oil discovered here. Many of the major battles took place on this island, and it is widely considered to be the mainland of Japan.

[2] HOKKAIDO

The second largest island of Japan, and the most northern of the main landmasses that make up the country, the Ainu people originally inhabited Hokkaido. Much of the earliest talk of barbarians to the precursors of the modern Japanese was about this group of people. The Japanese first colonized the island in the 1300s, and it was ostensibly fully conquered by 1457.

Like many of the islands of Japan, it is seismically active. There are several rainforests functionally warmed by the geothermic activity that takes place throughout. In general, Hokkaido is actually far cooler than the rest of Japan, including icy winters. Despite this, it is home to one quarter of Japanese arable land and produces grains, vegetables, and beef for all of Japan.

[3] SHIKOKU

Of the four main islands that make up Japan, Shikoku is the smallest. Nestled up against Honshu, it is similarly mountainous. The island is divided into two main geographic regions by this mountain range with a narrow northern strip that faces the inland sea and a southern one, which is considerably mountainous, that faces the Pacific. The northern strip of land is where most inhabitants of the

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island dwell now, and have done so historically. The lands are intensively worked for agriculture, capable of growing many of the same fruits and grains as on Honshu. The southern region is also home to abundant forests, the likes of which have become a boon for pulp and paper into modernity.

Wheat has been especially successful on Shikoku, and during the Edo period it became a staple product. This resulted in udon noodles becoming a cultural mainstay of the island and its cuisine, shaping it in a parallel direction in this area. Similarly, citrus fruits do especially well in the northern reaches, making some areas within the island famous for their production.

Unlike the other main islands of Japan, Shikoku has no volcanoes.

[4] KYUSHU

Kyushu is the most mountainous island of Japan, and is home to its most active volcano. The tectonic activity that has shaped the island continues to do so even into modernity. Many of the hot springs romanticized within Japanese media are on this island, warmed by the active tectonics and geothermal activity in the area.

Due to the southern location, and the reality that it is shielded by much of the other islands, Kyushu has a warm, subtropical environment. The island produces rice, tea, citrus, soy, sweet potatoes, and silk. Additionally, the island is renowned for types of porcelain produced there.

[5] RYUKYU ISLANDS

This chain of islands south of the majority of Japan, by landmass, is also known as the *Nansei* islands. These islands stretch from Kyushu in the north down to Taiwan. With climates ranging from humid subtropical to tropical rainforests, these islands add distinct variation to the rest of Japan's geography.

The northernmost islands most resemble Kyushu and other parts of southern Japan. By contrast, the southernmost islands are much more like Taiwan and the other islands of Southeast Asia.

The Ryukyu Islands were not truly annexed until after the Meiji government was established. It was in 1609, however, that the island kingdom first fell under Japanese control. Lord Satsuma sailed to the islands with a relatively small military force, and crushed what little opposition there was. They paid tribute to both the Qing Dynasty of China and the Shogunate of Japan until 1655, when their position was negotiated to be a tributary of China, an arrangement that lasted until 1874.

Ethnographically, there are three main groups that inhabit these islands. The northernmost islands are from the same group as Kyushu, sharing many traditions and other cultural commonalities with them. Okinawa and the islands surrounding it are from a different cultural group, known as the Ryukuan. They were, functionally, colonized by the rest of Japan, but retain some unique cultural notes to this day. Finally, the southernmost islands were originally uninhabited, only to be colonized during the Meiji reformation, resulting in them being functionally unused during the era *Ultimate Medieval Guide: Feudal Japan* covers. It



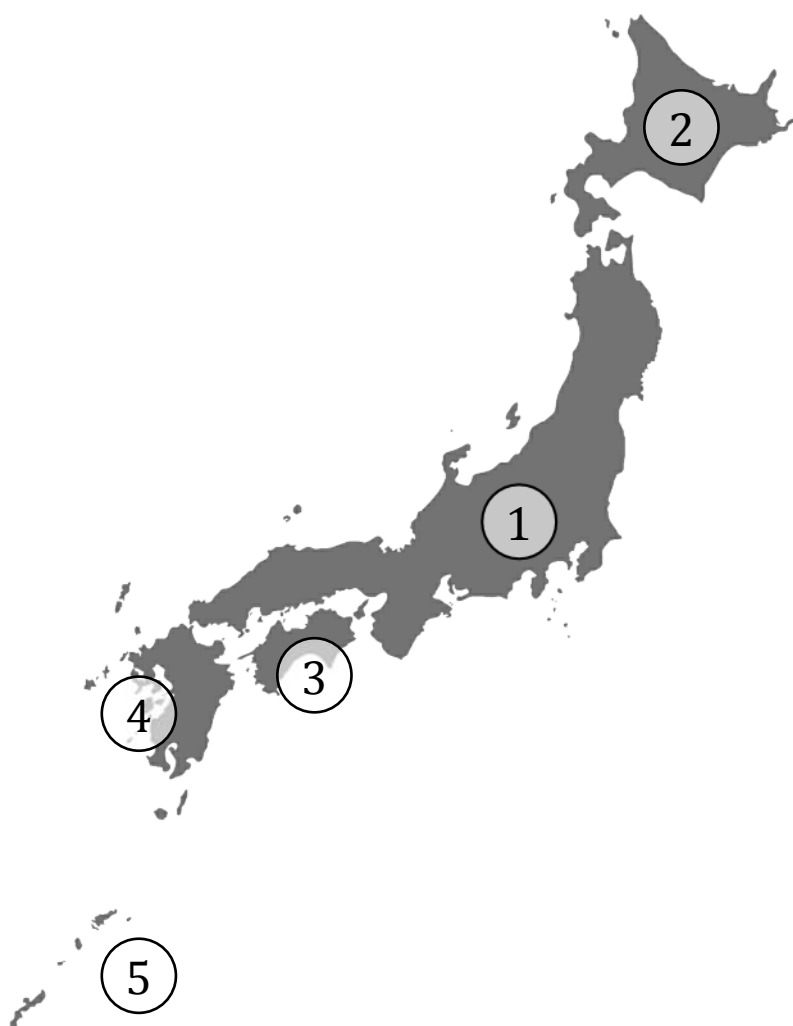
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could be argued that pirates used them as secret bases, ones that just haven't been discovered yet.

OTHER ISLANDS

There are more than 6,500 islands that comprise what is modern Japan, and many of these have their own unique and complicated histories, both as part of Japan and in trying to make their own way. The majority of these islands are tiny and located quite close to one or more of the more major islands that comprise Japan.

While it would be fascinating to go into these islands in depth, there quite simply isn't the time or pages within this sourcebook.



HISTORY OF FEUDAL JAPAN

The earliest origins of the Japanese arriving on their islands date back into ancient history. Their ancestors traveled from Mainland China over what was believed to be a land bridge in order to take over these unknown lands. They were originally the Yayoi and Jōmon people, who quickly intermingled and became the Japanese people. There is evidence that the Ainu, also known as the *Ezo* or *Emishi*, were in many areas before the Japanese arrived. Still found in many parts of Japan and Russia today, the Ainu people are often considered to be the indigenous peoples to several areas of Japan, notably the northernmost islands. The earliest colonial efforts of the Japanese, including some of their earliest militarization efforts, were against these peoples.

By 538 CE, Japan had mostly unified into a single kingdom. In essence, this kingdom will last, albeit under different dynasties and political leaders, to the modern day in a single, uninterrupted, evolution. Much of the Classical, Pre-Feudal era of Japan was spent trying to build a national identity across what had previously been over a hundred disparate kingdoms.

After 538 CE, up until about 794 CE, the new singular government reformed itself based on the Tang dynasty of China. This establishes what will be a common trend in Japanese history; technological advancements tend to come from China and Korea. These reforms included a comprehensive legal system, adopting an Imperial line for the Emperor that is said to descend from the gods, and the establishment of a centralized bureaucracy to support the Emperor. It was also during this period that Japan “officially” adopted Buddhism from the Koreans, though it included a great number of local myths and superstitions within their practice.

HEIAN PERIOD

When stories are told about Feudal Japan, the majority of them tend to refer to one of two periods: the Heian Period or the Edo Period. The Heian period marks the rise of the samurai, and while these are not the only two Feudal periods that had great events in them, they are the two periods that tend to be the most romanticized and dramatic within Japanese history.

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In 784, the Emperor finally ceased moving the capital around with each generation, moving it to modern day Kyoto, which would remain the capital until 1868. Political power moved from primarily the emperor to the Fujiwara clan. In 858, Fujiwara no Yoshifusa declared himself regent for the underage Emperor, establishing a precedent of various other figures ruling as the true power behind the Emperor. Often in Japanese history from this point, the position of emperor will be relegated to a symbolic position of only religious and bureaucratic significance.



The Fujiwara clan was able to gain power in large part due to their effective positioning within what was an incredibly stratified society. This included heavily intermarrying with the royal family, which continued to grow and sprawl with successive generations.

The decline of the imperial court was primarily from the tendency to become self-absorbed within matters of the court. By looking so thoroughly inward, they neglected much of the bureaucracy that should have extended across their lands. Tied to this was the loss of a variety of lands given, tax exempt, to various nobles around the lands. This resulted in a loss of revenues to the imperial family.

This period, however, marked the final unification of the main islands of Japan. Partially in response to this decline, the Fujiwara Shogun pushed east and north to finalize the subjugation of the Emishi people. This finalized the push to unify much of Japan by 801, extending the borders past Honshū.

Central Japan continued to become less wealthy and less powerful, with other parts of Japan becoming more powerful. By the year 1000, the Fujiwara clan was the complete ruling power, with the patriarch of the family able to enthrone and dethrone emperors at will. This allowed them to enact a variety of reforms structured around the systems of the Tang dynasty within China. This included restructuring the written language to make it more uniform, the flourishing of arts and writing, and the official decentralization of power (as opposed to the unofficial decentralization that had been occurring). The aristocracy flourished, with land management quickly becoming the primary occupation of his highest of classes.

It is also during the Heian Period that there was the establishment of an official military class. Previously there had been widespread conscription of peasants and aristocrats in an ad hoc basis. With increased decentralization, a large number of the aristocrats desired their own ways of projecting armed force throughout their lands. This, in turn, led to the rise of the samurai.

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FALL OF FUJIWARA

With the ascent of Emperor Go-Sanjō to the throne in 1068, the Fujiwara were finally ousted from their position of power. With a strong interest in returning the Imperial Court to its position of power, he engaged in various political maneuverings to oust the members of the Fujiwara clan from power.

This was not a crass mass-exile, a situation that would have undoubtedly led to revolt. Instead, the Fujiwara clan was first stopped from making new appointments to positions they tended to hold. Over time, they were replaced, most often with members of the Minamoto clan.

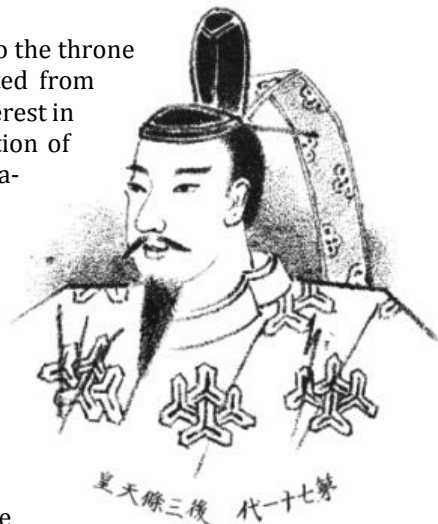
Instead of a concerted effort to retake their power, the Fujiwara clan fell into infighting, splintering into Northern and Southern branches of the family. During this period, the military class, those who would become the samurai, continued to grow in power. This lasted until the mid-twelfth century when the Fujiwara clan had a chance to regain the Imperial throne.

The Hōgen Rebellion was fought during the summer of 1156 between two abdicated emperors, each intending to manipulate future emperors from their retirement. The Fujiwara clan backed the retired Emperor, while the Taira and Minamoto clans supported the heir apparent.

This conflict was passed down primarily through *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu and is one of the first novels ever written. The battle was primarily fought over Kyoto, making it a brutal but confined revolt, and one that was quickly put down. The victory of the Taira and Minamoto clans secured the destruction of the Fujiwara, and ensured the adoption of the political and feudal structures that would define Japan for much of its history.

This conflict is also tied to some of the origin myths of the samurai. Despite one of the major battles being a nighttime assault, future versions of the tale would romanticize the roles that various figures played in these conflicts. This becomes a regular occurrence throughout Japanese history, with history being perpetually rewritten to fit the narrative of the day.

One of the major sources of the romanticization of this era comes from it serving as some of the first incidences where samurai and their nascent code of honor would be seen regularly by the cross section of Japanese society. Instead of their conflicts taking place at the “frontier” (still within what is modern Japan, remember), this was the first major conflict that took place within the heartland of Japan, and often affecting Kyoto itself.



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SEPPUKU

From this period, some of the first widespread reports of *seppuku* are heard down the ages. In these early iterations, it was not the same tradition with pomp and circumstance it would later be realized, and romanaticized, into. Instead, it was often while still bloody on the battlefield, after the army had already been defeated. The exact reasons for the rise of this behavior are muddy, but a few causes are plausible.

The tradition seems to have first arisen from Eastern Japan, with their (proto) samurai utilizing seppuku as a way out of otherwise impossible situations. It began with first being a single slash across the gut, believed to release the soul of the person inside to easily continue on to the afterlife.

As the practice became more widely adopted, there were other pressures that would certainly encourage adherence to such a final option. One such pressure was the intense gamesmanship and clan-based promotion that took place. Ensuring you died by your own sword, and in as painful a way as possible, functionally was a way of preventing your opponent from succeeding in killing you, while also denying them the opportunity to take you captive for being ransomed.

Others have suggested the cutting of one's own gut was, instead, a way for lieutenants and other, lower ranked, members of society to assist in their leader's death. Propriety would only allow them to strike their leader to prevent further pain, requiring the initial cut to create an obligation for them to cut down their compatriot. It is worth noting the alternative to seppuku, particularly for high ranking and important samurai, was torture that included crucifixion and being burned alive. Seppuku, by contrast, would spare this greater pain and the indignity of a tortured death in front of commoners.

The most likely explanation, however, is that all of these factors continued to push the meme of seppuku throughout Japanese society. Over generations after this, it would continue to evolve and become increasingly traditionalized. Eventually it would include fine silk kimonos and a death poem to be read allowed by the samurai who was to die, only to finally be co-opted by the Japanese military during World War II and right-wing nationalist parties in the country in modernity.

HEIJI REBELLION

Occurring a mere four years after the Hōgen Rebellion in 1156, the Heiji Rebellion is often referred to as being the direct result of the previous conflict. With the Fujiwara clan removed from a major political position within Japan, the Taira and Minamoto clans fell onto the precipice of a major conflict.

This rebellion encompassed a series of violent clashes between these two clans, each fighting for dominance over Japan. For many, it is also seen as a precursor to many of the civil wars that would wrack Japan throughout the medieval period.

The rebellion began with the abdication of Emperor Go-Shirakawa. In the all too common nature of Japanese emperors, this only reflected a lessening of

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official power, while unofficial powers blossomed. As many other retired emperors were able to do, he manipulated the court to a greater degree, all while being able to operate freely from the norms and traditions of the seat of emperor.

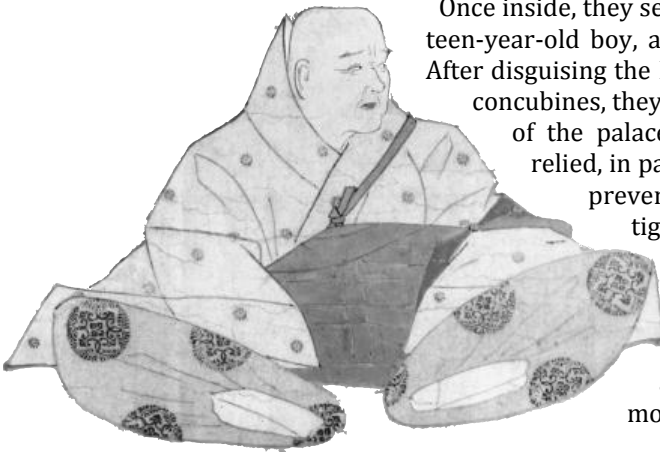
This left a strange balance of power with the new emperor, a teenager functionally under the thumb of the retired Emperor and his cronies. The Taira and Minamoto clans had been heavily punished for their involvement in the previous rebellion, regardless of which side each individual fought on. This, combined with the pressures of a manipulative emperor and an arms race between clans, led to loyalty evolving to be primarily towards the clan, rather than as it had been previously.

When Taira Kiyomori, a powerful figure in the Taira clan, left the city, the Minamoto clan moved into action. Many samurai were brought into Kyoto from outside the city, and they seized several buildings that were key to the administration. The regents were seized and placed under house arrest, keeping the handling of the royal family bloodless. Amongst the other members of rebellion, however, violence was rampant. Throughout the city, more bloody conflicts broke out. One prominent household of the Taira clan was seized and set aflame. Certain the resident they were after would attempt to escape in disguise, they killed everyone who ran from the burning building.

By the time word reached Kiyomori, the coup appeared to be all but complete. He was forced to decide whether to continue on to Taira lands, to build up a host of samurai and attempt to take the city, but give the rebellious Minamoto more time to secure their hold on the city, or to turn immediately. He chose the latter, pulling together a relatively small contingent of samurai to ride with him.

With this relatively small force, he was able to sneak back into the city and retake his mansion without incident. From there, he sent a missive to the other clan, speaking vaguely to intimate that he had accepted the coup. In reality, he was merely biding his time and hoping to lull them into a false sense of superiority. A week after his return, a fire at the Imperial Palace allowed some of his men to sneak inside.

Once inside, they secured the Emperor, a thirteen-year-old boy, and one of his concubines. After disguising the Emperor as another of the concubines, they snuck the two of them out of the palace in an ox-cart. The plan relied, in part, on the social norm that prevented the guards from investigating the imperial family too closely. Concubines were considered to be members of that royal family, and they were able to escape largely unmolested.



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While this escape occurred, the retired Go-Shirakawa disguised himself as a lowly courtier and rode out another gate of the castle. This nonchalant escape proved to be successful, though it has escaped into the realm of history how no one questioned this lone rider.

The Minamoto clan heard nothing of this until heralds made an announcement that the Emperor was now at the mansion of Kiyomori. Government officials were called to assemble at this estate, termed the new palace in the call. Even as the heads of the Minamoto family were scrambling to determine how to respond, Taira forces were already riding towards the Imperial Palace, led by Kiyomori's son. He rode at the head of approximately 3,000 troops, with red banners to signal them. This established a major thematic symbolism that would last throughout Japan's history – the red of the Taira juxtaposed against the white of the Minamoto.

Arriving at the palace, they called out the opposing side to meet them in battle. Kiyomori's son yelled out his lineage and issued a challenge. Despite the Fujiwara being the subject to this particular challenge, a group of the Minamoto rode out to fight them. Their leader responded with his own lineage before the combat began. Though some histories have suggested this was single combat, the majority of histories on the matter suggest there were multiple combatants on each side.

Though the battle began near the palace, it soon moved away from these buildings. Neither side was willing to use fire within the city, a common tactic within cities at the time. Since both the Emperor and Retired Emperor had been vacated from the palace, the Minamoto also abandoned it. It eventually reached the so-called new palace near the river.

Throughout the history on the matter, there is the sense that both the Taira and Minamoto were upstarts compared to the Emperor and his family. It is also from the poetic histories that the romantic view of Japan is built. These histories discuss not only the color of the armor of the warriors who ride out, but also the landing of a single butterfly on the helmet of Kiyomori's son, who wields a family heirloom that was three centuries old. It is from this poetic interpretation of history, often favoring narrative over fact, that we receive much of this history.

Taira forces ultimately win this battle, bringing the revolution to a close. The Minamoto forces are heavily weakened after this, with this reflecting what is ultimately the low point of their historical fortune. Many were exiled from the capital, and many others were put to death. Kiyomori was ultimately made into the new regent, without any Minamoto forces or leaders in place to oppose it.

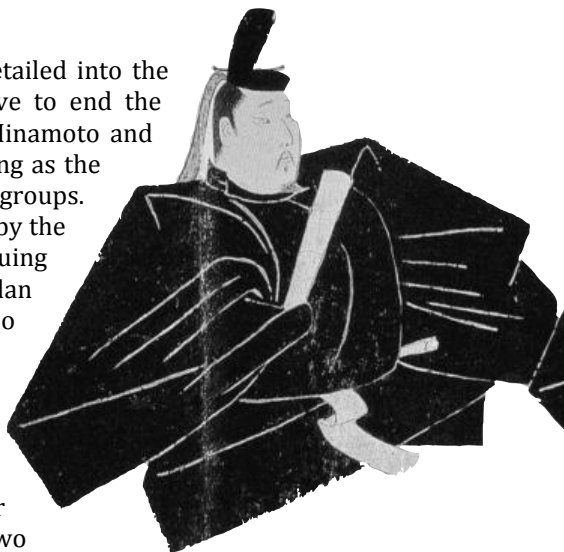
After this conflict, the Taira clan spent a great deal of time and effort securing their hold over the Imperial Palace and the Imperial Court. Despite this effort, history would repeat with the Minamoto clan ousting them from power.

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GENPAI WAR

The previous conflicts dovetailed into the Genpai War. This would serve to end the period of war between the Minamoto and Taira clans, functionally serving as the final battle between these two groups.

The war began with a coup by the Taira clan in 1179 and the ensuing call to arms by the Minamoto clan in response. In 1180, Taira no Kiyomori succeeded in installing his two-year old grandson to the throne after the abdication of the former emperor. Prince Mochihito felt this was an improper order of succession between these two members of the royal family.



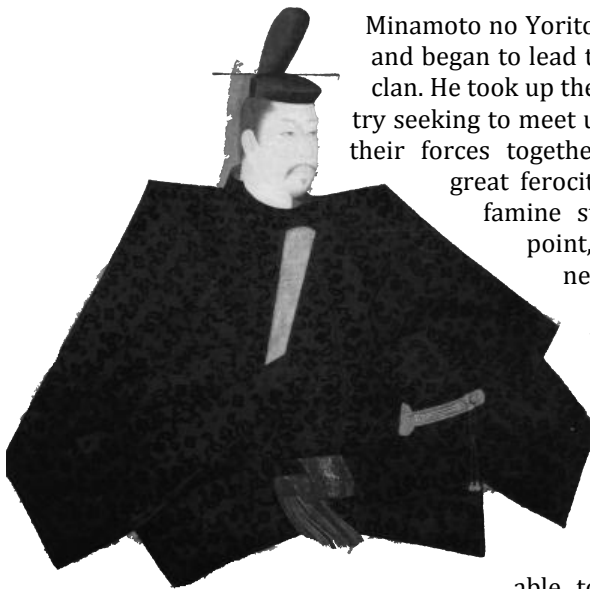
As was regularly the case between the Taira and Minamoto clans, they were primarily just looking for an excuse to return to conflict. Minamoto no Yorimasa and the Prince began to travel the countryside, attempting to call others to their cause. As they journeyed on their quest, they were pursued by members of the Taira clan. The new Emperor, a puppet for Taira interests, had called for the arrest of the Prince.

The first main battle of the war became known as the Battle of Uji, with some historians arguing this was the true start to the war proper. The Prince and his entourage had been chased by Taira samurai and troops to a temple just outside of Kyoto. Members of the Minamoto clan rushed to save them, but they were hindered by monks sympathetic to the Taira cause.

The Prince and his allies were forced to flee the field of battle, heading south across the river Nara. They tore up the bridge behind them, hoping to prevent or hinder the Taira from following. This battle is reflected back to us as one with extensive editorializing by those who told the story of it. Tadamasa, a member of the Minamoto family who remained loyal to his oath to the Taira clan, is remembered as a near mythological figure from this battle. He is described as having the strength of a hundred men, a voice that echoed more than five kilometers, and teeth more than three centimeters long. He led the battle line and was one of the first to make contact with the enemy. He began the battle by proclaiming his name and lineage before riding into battle. This, combined with greater numbers, led the Taira clan to victory. Yorimasa went on to commit seppuku at this battle while his sons died defending him as he took this last act, denying the enemy from taking his life. Historians would observe that it may have been this specific battle that served as the standard for generations to come.

Prince Mochihito was captured soon after and killed by Taira forces.

HISTORY OF FEUDAL JAPAN



Minamoto no Yoritomo then took up the mantle and began to lead the Minamoto forces and the clan. He took up the cause of traveling the country seeking to meet up with other allies and bind their forces together. Fighting continued with great ferocity until about 1181 when a famine struck all of Japan. By this point, the city of Nara had been nearly razed to the ground. Meanwhile, Yoritomo, allied with the Takeda and other friendly families, fought back and forth with Taira forces.

The war essentially had a break until the spring of 1183 due to insufficient food and supply lines unable to support the marching of armies. With the resuming of armed conflict in 1183, the Minamoto forces pushed forward and fought an incredibly successful battle at Kurikara.

Minamoto no Yoshinaka, yet another member of the family, commanded the forces in this battle. Despite infighting within the Minamoto clan between Yoshinaka and Yoritomo about who should lead the clan, and the forces of the Taira marching from Kyoto itself, the Minamoto were able to achieve a decisive victory. The Minamoto forces were divided into three by their general when it became clear they would be meeting their enemies in a series of mountain passes. One group was sent to sally around the enemy forces and attack from the rear, a second group was sent as an ambush group to hide and strike when the enemy forces were not expecting it.

All of this was masked by two major activities by the Minamoto. The first was displaying a large number of banners on the hills near where they were camped, suggesting more troops than were actually there. The other was the third group meeting the Taira in a highly ritualized and formal battle, including archery exchanges of whistling-bulb arrows and a large number of the Minamoto samurai riding forward to fight in individual duels, instead of a pitched battle. These two activities gave the other two groups time to get into position. The group tasked with ambushing the Taira forces was able to gather a herd of oxen together, then set them to stampede into the Taira forces, tying lit torches to their horns to increase the chaos they would sow. Taira forces were confused, broken, and few in number. They fled, allowing the Minamoto to take Kyoto.

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Yoshinaka, having won this great victory, continued to fight with Yoritomo for control of the Minamoto clan while Taira forces tried to regroup. They attempted to set up a temporary court on the southernmost of Japan's main islands, only to be ousted by rioting locals. They continued to flee, while Yoshinaka split his forces to both pursue the Taira and attack Yoritomo.

Yoshinaka was, however, betrayed by a member of his inner circle, allowing the Minamoto clan to recover from inner power struggles, and cementing Yoritomo as head of the clan. While the problems of resolving internal conflicts became a major task for Yoritomo, Yoshitsune, his half-brother, was tasked with continuing the fight against the Taira.

The Battle of Dan-no-ura would mark not only the end of an era for Japan, but would also become one of the conflicts to influence Japanese history. In the stylized version of history, where myth trumps facts, this is represented as a battle of titans and drastically different ways of life. The Taira are portrayed as knowing the sea better, of understanding the tides, and of being more natural sailors. By contrast, the Minamoto are portrayed as being more comfortable upon land.

In portraying the battle, it cannot be overstated how important the tides would be. Their fleets met in relatively shallow water, and shifting tides and riptides helped determine who would emerge victorious. The Taira split their fleet into three squadrons, while the Minamoto kept theirs together in what some historians describe as a single mass or a single wall of ships. The Taira would then attempt to use the tides to surround the Minamoto, resulting in brutal hand-to-hand combat as ships were boarded.

One of the Taira generals, however, had been approached by the Minamoto and used this opportunity to break ranks, turning against the rest of the Taira and attacking them from the rear. Through this betrayal, he also conveyed to the rest of the Minamoto which ship the child Emperor was upon. As the Taira began to see the battle turning against them, many committed suicide through seppuku or jumping into the sea.

With a loss seeming to be imminent, the Taira began to toss the Imperial Regalia from their ships, but only succeeded in dumping the sword and the jewel before they were captured. Divers recovered the jewel, and many presume the sword to have been lost at this time. The official story, however, states it was recovered and is now enshrined at Atsuta Shrine.

This marked the end of the wars between the Taira and the Minamoto, and the end of Taira dominance of Japan. The Minamoto were able to secure their control, and Yoritomo became the first Shogun. He established a military government (bakufu) in Kamakura, establishing what would be the long tendency for there to be a parallel government for each, the Shogun and the Emperor.

HEIKE CRABS

Heike crabs represent one of the many beautiful oddities of Japan the rest of the world has become enamored with. The species, native to Japan, has a shell that looks a great deal like either a human face or at least the approximation that

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is often seen on samurai masks. Local beliefs and myths suggest these crabs are the reincarnation of spirits of members of the Taira clan who died in this great battle.

To add to the mystery, there has not been a definitive explanation for why this has come about. Some, such as Carl Sagan, suggested locals had once eaten the crab and would throw back any that looked like samurai. This would create a form of artificial selection where the animals that most closely resembled samurai would be better suited to their environment. Others have pointed out the species of crab is not eaten for food, averaging only a little more than an inch across, and suggested it never had been. Under this theory, the ridges exist for the musculature underneath, and the patterns that look like faces are a coincidence combined with the tendency for humans to find faces and patterns where there may be none.

Whatever the reason, the species has inspired local reverence and a large number of ancient legends. Some still believe these faces are ancient samurai warriors, still somehow watching over Japan.

HEIAN TIMELINE

Year	Events
794	Emperor Kanmu moves the capital to modern day Kyoto.
804	Buddhist Monk Saicho introduces the Tendai School.
858	Emperor Seiwa begins the rule of the Fujiwara Clan.
895	Imperial embassies to China are halted.
1000 – 1008	Murasaki Shikibu writes <i>The Tale of Genji</i> .
1050	The rise of the samurai military class.
1068	Emperor Go-Sanjō overthrows the Fujiwara clan.
1087	Emperor Shirakawa abdicates the throne and becomes a monk, starting a tradition of the “cloistered emperors” ruling from beyond the throne.
1156	Taira no Kiyomori defeats the Minamoto clan and seizes power.
1179	Coup by the Taira sets the stage for the beginning of the Genpai war.
1180	The capital is moved from Kyoto to Kobe in June, then back to Kyoto in November as a result of the Genpai War. It continues for several years.
1185	Taira is defeated at the end of the Genpai War and Minamoto no Yoritomo, with the backing of the Hōjō clan, seizes power. The position of shogun is established and the emperor becomes little more than a figurehead.

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KAMAKURA PERIOD

Beginning with Minamoto no Yoritomo consolidating power and choosing to rule from outside of Kyoto, the Kamakura Period marks a brief age of decentralization. Yoritomo established what he called a *bakufu*, meaning “tent headquarters”, to reinforce the idea that the shogun’s role was military and deferential to the emperor. In 1192, the Emperor declared Yoritomo shogun, thus establishing the first shogunate. This began what would, in effect, be almost exclusively military rule for Japan until 1868.

While the court, still in Kyoto, maintained bureaucratic and religious functions, this event marked the beginning of the shogun ruling concurrently and holding the majority of the *de facto* power. Some argued the Imperial Court’s continuation of bureaucratic functions was primarily a function of tradition, rather than providing much in the way of practical assistance.

Yoritomo would rule as shogun until 1199, and with his death the office of the shogun’s power eroded. His wife, Hōjō Masako, ruled the government from behind the curtains, with her father quickly appointed to the position of regent for Yoritomo’s son serving as regent. Under his rule, the relatively decentralized feudal society was developed. Various provincial governors were appointed and entrusted to maintain their own military forces, though only underneath the power of the Kamakura shogunate.

In 1221, the retired Emperor Go-Toba began a revolt, in what would become a tradition of retired emperor’s being more important as political players than sitting ones. The revolt was aimed at returning power to the Imperial Court instead of in the position of the shogun. It was quickly crushed, and Go-Toba was exiled.

FIRST MONGOL INVASION

It was in 1274 that Japan unified to face what appeared to be one of the greatest threats that had ever been posed against them. The court of Kublai Khan of the Mongols was planning an invasion of Japan. The Mongol forces outnumbered the Japanese and had better equipment. This is where one of the bodies of myth begins to influence and disagree with the actual history. Some myths suggest Yoshitsune, Yoritomo’s younger brother, had faked his death and gone to mainland Asia to convince the Khans to attack Japan. Though this has been discredited, these types of myths persist to inform much of Japanese culture.

Kublai had sent a message to Japan, pretending friendly relations and merely asking the “King” of Japan to bow down to Kublai as emperor. The letter ends with the vague threat of war, reading “who is there who likes such a state of things?” Crucially, this letter was addressed and sent to the Emperor instead of the Shogun, where in turn it would have been handed off to the Hōjō regent who was the real power behind the shogun. The lack of understanding of the intricacies of Japanese politics may have cost Kublai his opportunity for peace. The

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Japanese delayed and neglected to give a final answer, knowing that until Korea was pacified the Mongols were no threat, and hoping the situation in China would change.

During this period, Hōjō put the samurai to work building extensive defenses including forts, walls, and other preparations around where the 'Mongols' (actually much of them were Chinese and Koreans pressed into the Mongol military, but the Japanese viewed them all as Mongols) were likely to land. When the Mongols finally arrive in the strait, myth rears its head again within the narrative. Some have argued it was a flock of portentous doves that alarmed the local samurai, while others have said a flame spontaneously lit within a shrine to a god of war in the nearby city. Skeptics have pointed out it was likely little more than sighting the Mongols that launched this entire defense.

In the choreographed and traditional samurai fashion, the battle opened with the youngest samurai firing humming-bulb arrows at the Mongols, hoping to dissuade any dark spirits that might be with them and as part of a traditional opening to a battle. The Mongols laughed, and sloshed ashore, firing poisoned arrows at the assembled Japanese forces while advancing in a phalanx with metal shields. It was not until later in the day when the phalanx broke up and the battle became a general melee that the samurai were able to come into their own.

Despite their victories at this small scale, the entire battle is tinged with a melancholy humor with incidences like that of one of their leaders. Having dispatched a large Mongol, he stood atop the body and called the Mongols cowards who were unwilling to face him in single combat. Instead of responding, he was quickly felled by several poisoned arrows.

The battle would be lost, and things would look dark for Japan over the next few battles as well. The Mongols had better technology and were continuing to press them back. It was not until the Japanese planned a major nocturnal assault that the tides were turned. Their forces were very obviously mustering and planning for an assault, which the Mongols presumed would be from the land. In actuality, the Japanese were going to attack at night, but from the sea.

Knowing the Mongols had various forms of gunpowder weapons still aboard their ships, the Japanese forces had a number of boats they planned to light on fire and ram into the ships. They quickly went up in flames and killed many of the Mongolian invaders through flames, drowning, and then the subsequent butchery while the Mongolians attempted to escape. As the message was relayed back across Japan to the Shogun and the Emperor, it became like a game of telephone. Each telling raised the number of people who were invading and evolving the method with which they were stopped to match it. Eventually it evolved to the divine wind that assisted with their defense of the city that is often bandied about to this day.

SECOND MONGOL INVASION

Not to be deterred, the Mongols immediately set about planning a second invasion of the island of Japan. By 1275, Japanese forces under the Shogun, and

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naturally his regent, increased their efforts to defend against future invasions. A coastal watch was instituted, shrines were rebuilt, and efforts were made to continue to reinforce common landing sights. There was even a plan developed for a raid on Goryeo, modern day Korea, though it was never acted upon.

Kublai Khan was growing increasingly irate at the refusal to allow his emissaries to land upon Japanese lands. He sent five emissaries in 1275, telling them not to return without a reply from the Japanese. They were all beheaded by Tokimune and their graves can still be visited to this day. Four years later, another five emissaries were sent, and they befell a similar fate.

The second invasion involved two separate forces setting out from Mongol lands in 1281. The fleets transported 40,000 men on 900 ships (from Korea) and a further 100,000 men on 3,500 ships (from China). The plan was for the two fleets to launch a coordinated attack at two separate locations. The Chinese fleet, however, was delayed. The first fleet pushed forward, causing the plan to already fall apart.

The developed and solidified Japanese fortifications were able to push the Mongol forces back to their ships. It was then that the now famous *kamikaze* battered the Japanese shores, sinking much of the Mongol fleet.

While the Japanese of the day were keen to point out this only proved their hallowed status under the gods, modern historians have identified another likely factor. Records from China during the day suggest that many of the boats utilized to transport troops were flat-bottomed boats designed for travelling rivers, rather than the more robust curved keel that would have had a better chance of surviving the typhoon. While this does serve as a stroke of luck for Japan, it is likely that it is not preference of the gods that was once suggested.

Even with these invasions, Japan was entering a period of prosperity. Spurred on by greater use of iron tools and fertilizer, especially with lessened internal conflicts, farm yields were drastically increased. Also during this period, Buddhism was brought to the masses by travelling monks, with Zen Buddhism especially spreading amongst the samurai.

KAMAKURA TIMELINE

Year	Events
1185	End of the Genpei War results in the installation of a shogun, beginning this era.
1192	Emperor appoints Yoritomo as shogun with a residence in Kamakura and establishes the bakufu system of government.
1199	Minamoto no Yoritomo dies.
1207	Hōnen and his followers are exiled from Kyoto or executed, spreading his doctrine.
1221	The Kamakura army defeats the Imperial army in the attempted revolt by Go-Toba.
1274	The first attempted Mongol Invasion.
1275	The Second Mongol Invasion.

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SENGOKU PERIOD

The Sengoku Period has had a lasting effect on modern culture and viewpoints from the rise of the ninja alone. Standing as the Warring States period of Japan, this period was marked by several *daimyo* across Japan fighting for control of the shogunate. Despite romanticization of Bushido and the honor of the samurai, during this period there was rampant use of ninja as assassins and spies, the hiring of monks and others to distribute bribes and act as messengers, and more.

As with many other parts of the Japanese culture, there are contentious views and interpretations of this portion of history. The division chosen here is by no means the most illuminating for true historians, but is rather chosen because of the pacing for a book of this type.

This period is one of upheaval and confusion. Not only were their widespread uses of all sorts of untoward political operations often hidden from the history books, but also the upheaval of how the Japanese conducted themselves in war. It was during this era that the *ashigaru* became commonplace, supplanting the samurai as the foot-troops in many armies. In many ways, this era has been viewed through the lens of progress versus tradition, honor versus Machiavellian approaches, and more. It is no wonder this conflict is one of the most common for writers and creatives from Japan and around the world to revisit.

One of the most common themes used to examine this era is the comparison before the incredibly skilled samurai, who spent years honing themselves, being defeated by lines of *ashigaru* armed with nothing more than rifles. Suddenly, a peasant could be trained in a matter of weeks, and the monopoly of military force the samurai had was destroyed. When recontextualized in modern times, it is easy to see why the individual and dedicated samurai are viewed as the tragic and romantic figures compared to the replaceable lines of uniform soldiers who make up the *ashigaru*.

The *daimyo* from around Japan were all grabbing for whatever power they could gain. Even the houses that knew they would not make it to the position of shogun knew it was during this era that they could make gains or best position themselves for what came next.

For the average person living in Japan, these were difficult times. Stories handed down from the era tell about many samurai acting as little more than bandits or brigands, abusing their monopoly of many weapons.

The Ashikaga shogunate had failed to win the loyalty of many of the *daimyo*. When nobles far from the capital began to fight among themselves for lands and resources, and the shogun was unable to cease this infighting, it became apparent the position of the shogun was not secure. Trade was increasing with both China and Europeans, resulting in new ideas and weapons slowly flowing in. The rampant fighting, however, led to famine and increasing debts, often resulting in peasant uprisings and conflicts.

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THE ŌNIN WAR

Often viewed as the onset of the Sengoku period, this civil war began in 1467 and lasted for ten years. The conflict began, as Japanese conflicts so often do, with attempting to determine who would be the next shogun.

The previous shogun had persuaded his younger brother, Ashikaga Yoshimi (hereafter Yoshimi), to abandon his life as a monk in order to be his successor. Within the next year, however, the unexpected birth of a son, Yoshihisa, cast the entire situation into doubt.

Hosokawa (one of the shogun's deputies and a high ranking member of his familial clan) supported the brother's claim to the shogunate, pointing out that he was an adult and that the shogun, who was considering retirement, had specifically planned for him to be his successor. Yamana (Yamana Sōzen was head of his clan), more to oppose Hosokawa than for any moral reasons, backed the son.

This conflict erupted mostly in the area surrounding Kyoto, and their conflict destroyed the city. It was not long before the battles erupted across the country with various forces interested in siding with one side or another to settle old grudges or be rewarded should their side be victorious.

Many of the tales from this period neglect the sheer amount of underhanded skullduggery that took place. Samurai and clans would swap sides based on changing winds of battle, and an entire castle fell solely because a monk was bribed to open the doors to invaders. Rather than being a time of great honor and propriety in battle, it was more like wars from around the world were.

There were, however, moments of honor notable for their archaic approach to the situation, referring back to a past that never truly existed. Samurai and daimyo would occasionally meet on the field of battle and recite poetry at each other prior to combat, continuing to rebuild and reimagine their shared history. Stories like this were glorified, even within their own day, despite it being a rare occurrence.

RISE OF THE IKKŌ-IKKI

Often viewed as powerful warrior-monks by imaginative interpretations, the Ikkō-ikki were somewhere only slightly above armed rioters. If they had any central organizing force, which is debatable, it was a combination of adherence to the "True Pure Land" sect of Buddhist belief, and various loyalties to Rennyo, the leader of said sect. Rennyo's attitude, by contrast, was a pragmatic one of using them when necessary and decrying them at other times. He would regularly push for the Ikkō-ikki to be used in the defense of temples, for example, but decried offensive violence of any kind.

The Ikkō-ikki followers were formed from the unification of small-landowners, in contrast to the nobility who owned vast lands, to create leagues for mutual defense. In a war-torn country, bandits and looters were both rampant with local lords often unable to enforce the peace.

Though there were several Ikkō uprisings prior to the Ōnin War, it was during this particular conflict they were somewhat unified and began to affect what

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happened within their nation. By the conclusion of the war, they would often mass in Buddhist Temples and ring bells, hoping to strike fear into the hearts of nearby nobility.

Rennyō served as an important figure for understanding the group – they organized largely around his teachings, at least in word if not in deed. One of his key beliefs was an advocacy in pacifism except in self-defense. During their tumultuous times when daimyō, samurai, and others were fighting to tear the nation apart, his views were both understandable, as well as the reason they were so unpopular.

The naginata, a long spear-like weapon with a curved sword-like blade on the end, became emblematic of the Ikkō-ikki. Though it was amongst the more common weapons for them to use, they utilized almost any weapons and armor they could secure.

Due to their sheer numbers and weight of numbers, it was not long before groups began to control nearly every route to the capital from the western territories. This, combined with their roots in the peasantry and landholders, resulted in it not being long before they held significant economic power. Nobunaga and Tokugawa, in particular, were keen to remove these groups from holding any power.

The military training these groups had was similarly mixed, with landed warriors being amongst the core that started these groups. As peasantry and others joined their ranks, numbers grew, but the average began to regress. As with any large group, particularly one joined through voluntary efforts like these, the net result was a wide mix of individuals who joined and partook in the organization for vastly different reasons. Whether they were there to fulfill some pious calling, or merely for the relative safety these numbers awarded them, their weight was felt within this conflict.

TOKUGAWA'S PATH TO POWER

The end of the Ōnin War and the Sengoku period would mark the end to civil wars for Feudal Japan. This came at a great cost; Kyoto was demolished and left in ruins after the Ōnin War, and it wasn't long before the conflict spread across the rest of the country. Another result was the reduction of power of the emperor and shogun after the war.

It was as a result of this power vacuum that several daimyō stepped down. Many prominent clans, such as the Takeda and the Imagawa, were in positions to take a great deal of power. Others found their power and positions being quickly eroded. The Ikkō-ikki were one such group, finding they could effectively organize sufficient resistance to the order of things and stand up to the more powerful. Small houses and clans that were highly effective were able to stand up to the establishment, and there was a form of meritocracy throughout the country. This was unique compared to the eras both before and after it, as this shifting of power within a single generation was highly destabilizing.

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In the most extreme cases, individuals with no familial or clan-based backing would take over lands or clans, resulting in a drastic redrawing of structures of power. The lands outside of Kyoto were wracked with fighting between the clans as many sought to unify the country. The phenomenon became known as *gekokuujō*, translating to “low conquers high”.

The final phase of the Sengoku period began around 1573, though some observers disagree with this to suggest earlier dates. One such suggestion is 1568, when Oda Nobunaga entered Kyoto to install a new head of, and the final member of, the Ashikaga Shogunate.

During this period, the shogun had become similar to the earlier days of the emperor, manipulated and controlled by outside powers. The Imagawa clan was one such power, who would go on to attempt to overthrow the Ashikaga Shogunate. Their leader was defeated and killed by Oda Nobunaga. By 1562, the Tokugawa clan, who were adjacent and to the east of the Oda clan, had become independent of the Imagawa. In order to ensure their safety, they allied with the Nobunaga.

As another alliance of houses marched on Kyoto to install another shogun, this one that could be controlled by their interest, Nobunaga moved to intervene. Delayed by infighting, they were not able to secure their choice for shogun's claim to power. This, coupled with an inability to bring their choice of shogun to Kyoto to be legitimized by the Imperial Court, enabled another group, with Nobunaga as a key player, to gain support for another choice for shogun, namely the younger brother.



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This situation was one that Nobunaga had planned for, making key alliances and conquering the provinces that allowed him a direct route to Kyoto, unassailed as they marched. With his choice in the capital, and both political and military might to back it up, the Emperor recognized what would be the final shogun of the Ashikaga Shogunate.

Given the power that Nobunaga already had, he had no intention of kowtowing to a man he put into power. Instead, he returned to tightening his grip on the regions of Japan he controlled. Rival daimyo, rebellious Buddhist monks, and merchants that were resistant to his power were all swiftly eliminated. Within his realm, he instituted radical economic reforms. This included the removal of barriers that propped up guild- or religious-based monopolies, creating a form of free market capitalism.

With this level of power, and gaining more by the year, the shogun Nobunaga installed, and ostensibly served, began plotting against Oda almost immediately. This was done through the creation of complex alliances with everyone adjacent to Nobunaga and Tokugawa lands. Included within those arrayed against Nobunaga and his growing power was his own brother-in-law, Azai Nagamasa.

Led by Takeda Shingen, they marched on Nobunaga's home base of Owari. In a clever maneuver, they waited until Nobunaga's forces were preoccupied with rebellion and dealing with other daimyo. Tokugawa Ieyasu, the ally to Nobunaga, led the only forces that sought to interfere and the allied forces easily crushed him. The result was the continued, and unimpeded, march towards Owari. As he neared it, and the end of the Nobunaga-Tokugawa alliance appeared to be in sight, Takeda Shingen died under mysterious circumstances. To this day, historians have argued over the cause of his death, with possible explanations including being shot by a sniper during the night, stomach cancer, pneumonia, complications with an old war wound, ninja assassination, and more all being suggested. Portrayals of this moment in history often suggest that Tokugawa Ieyasu was somehow behind it, particularly if they want to portray the man as either dastardly or ingenious. The historical record doesn't appear to lend much credence at all to his involvement.

With the death of Takeda Shingen, the alliance quickly crumbled. His death led to limited infighting, which in turn slowed the anti-Oda alliance. Nobunaga was able to bring his troops around to defeat some of the opposing armies. With their alliance crumbling and some of the armies removed from the field, Nobunaga was able to not only hold Kyoto, in a de facto sense, but was also able to oust the shogun from Japan. Though there were powerful daimyo around Japan who might have been able to stand up to Nobunaga, they were far away and unable to make their position felt.

These growing difficulties for Nobunaga were, in part, a result of his growing power. Buddhists across the country rebelled against him, and he began to support Christianity in response. As an added bonus, improving ties with Christian powers gave Nobunaga and his allies access to European weapons. He em-

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braced the relatively new technology of the arquebus and it wasn't long before both Tokugawan and Nobunagan forces would be seen with firing lines.

During this period, Nobunaga spoke of unification. He directed the construction of a new residence for himself, but also saying it would stand as a symbol of unification of Japan. Between solidifying his own power over his region of Japan and the increased cosmopolitanism within his region, he was able to begin the arduous task of unifying Japan by force.

After a series of quick and decisive victories against other forces, Oda Nobunaga appeared to be in a powerful position to unify Japan. During a difficult campaign in 1582, Hideyoshi, one of Nobunaga's generals who had his start as a sandal boy, requested his assistance. Nobunaga began to travel to assist his general, but made a brief stop-over in Kyoto with only a small guard. During this brief respite, one of Nobunaga's generals turned on him and he was assassinated. The man who many believed would unify Japan lay dead.

The immediate aftermath was a chaotic scramble of individuals attempting to both avenge Nobunaga and seize power for themselves. When it emerged that not only had Oda been killed, so had his son, leaving the clan without a readily apparent heir.

Hideyoshi, that rare individual in Japanese history who rose through the ranks to his position in life, quickly made peace with the clan he was fighting and rode to deal with the situation. Instead of backing the next eldest of Nobunaga's sons, he backed Nobunaga's infant son, who would go on to become Oda Hidenobu, and managed to install him as the new head of the Oda clan.

The political intrigue didn't stop, however, and it wasn't long before there were more people stepping up to resist or move against Hideyoshi. He had put himself in a position where he was the de facto shogun. There were major confrontations between him and other forces, both politically and militarily. Hideyoshi was adopted to the Toyotomi clan, and within a few short years he finished Nobunaga's work of unifying Japan.

Under Hideyoshi's rule, a number of innovative administrative changes occurred. These included better mapping how the entire country was and ensuring boundaries were understood and agreed to. These surveys also included determining how much rice was produced within Japan, and took steps to make travel within Japan somewhat easier. Along this were a series of steps to help crystallize the social strata of Japan. This included forbidding most people from carrying or bearing weapons and limiting where various individuals could live.

Hideyoshi's concerns didn't end here. He had a goal of conquering the Ming dynasty in China, ostensibly continuing to unify the entirety of lands he believed should be under one ruler. Talks with Korea were unable to secure his troops to be able to cross Korea to reach China. There were only two attempted invasions as a result, including Hideyoshi viewing himself on equal footing to the Ming dynasty despite drastic power differences. Neither invasion was successful, and with the death of Hideyoshi leaving only a five year old heir behind, the situation back in Japan posed threats for a return to internal struggles.

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On his deathbed, Hideyoshi appointed five elders to govern until his son came of age. Tokugawa Ieyasu was among those left to govern, though it did not take long until the group collapsed into infighting. Ieyasu was accused of being disloyal by one of the other members of this group, culminating in a major battle between this group – the Battle of Sekigahara. As the most senior and respected member of the group left as a de facto regency after the death of Maeda Toshiie, members of the bureaucracy began to wonder whether he would take over, just as Hideyoshi had. Some pushed for this, and others believed it due to rumors that Ieyasu had agitated Toyotomi's former vassals.

When a conspiracy to assassinate Ieyasu came about, and it was found out, Ieyasu demanded they submit to his authority. One of the other regents defied this edict and began to build up and prepare his military. The two men engaged in various demands and allegations against each other, culminating in an enraged Ieyasu marching north with his host to deal with the challengers.

This military action gave the parties involved the cover they needed to rise up again and many feared there would be another set of military conflicts that would threaten to tear the country apart. Some of Ieyasu's allies were delayed, resulting in him having only 75,000 soldiers compared to his enemy's 120,000. Ieyasu, however, had brought a large number of arquebuses, the weapons that had served Nobunaga so well. In addition, Ieyasu had been courting a great many of the daimyo, suggesting lenient terms and benefits for switching and joining his side.

As the battle continued, one such daimyo, Kobayakawa, was holding his troops back, undecided about which side to back. As the battle wore on, Ieyasu ordered his troops to fire upon Kobayakawa's position, forcing a choice. He decided, despite this, to side with Ieyasu and charged the opposing forces. This overwhelmed a buffer of troops in a key part of the battlefield, resulting in their forces turning and fleeing. This resulted in an exposed flank that Ieyasu was able to take advantage of. In quick order, the opposing forces were destroyed. In this one fell swoop, Ieyasu destroyed most of the resistance that stood between him and power.

As he distributed the spoils of this battle, including giving the majority to himself, Ieyasu effectively redrew the map of Japan yet again. Over the next three years he would solidify and grow his power and position. Once the emperor declared him shogun, he was in that much better of a position to finalize the details of his reign. Within three years of this battle, he had solidified his power as shogun and unified Japan under his banner. Unlike Hideyoshi and Nobunaga, he took pains to ensure his legacy would be secure, and that his heir was able to properly step into his shoes upon his death.

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SENGOKU TIMELINE

Year	Events
1467	Beginning of the Ōnin War.
1477	End of the Ōnin War.
1488	The Kaga Rebellion.
1493	The Coup of Meio results in Hosokawa Masamoto seizing power. Meanwhile, Hōjō Sōun seizes the Izu Province.
1507	The succession war within the Hosokawa family begins.
1520	Hosokawa Takakuni defeats Hosokawa Sunimoto.
1531	Hosokawa Harumoto defeats Hosokawa Takakuni.
1543	The Portuguese land on Tanegashima becoming the first Europeans to contact Japan and introducing the arquebus into Japanese warfare.
1549	Hosokawa Harumoto is betrayed.
1554	The tri-partite pact between Takeda, Hōjō, and Imagawa is signed.
1560	Battle of Okehazama: Oda Nobunaga defeats and kills Imagawa Yoshimoto in a surprise attack.
1568	Oda Nobunaga marches on Kyoto. The result of his efforts is the installation of a new member of the Ashikaga Shogunate who is under his control.
1573	Ashikaga Shogunate ends with Nobunaga turning on his installed member of the Shogunate and open warfare spreads across much of Japan. In the same year, Nobunaga defeats Takeda cavalry through innovative use of the arquebus.
1582	Nobunaga is assassinated. In the same year, Hideyoshi defeats Akechi in the Battle of Yamazaki.
1585	Hideyoshi gains the title Kampaku and is recognized as the predominant authority in Japan.
1590	Hideyoshi defeats Hōjō clan, unifying all of Japan under his rule.
1592	First invasion of Korea.
1597	Second invasion of Korea.
1598	Hideyoshi dies.
1600	The Eastern Army led by Tokugawa defeats the Western Army of Toyotomi loyalists.
1603	The Tokugawa Shogunate is established.
1615	The last opposition to the new Shogunate is stamped out.

HISTORY OF FEUDAL JAPAN

LANGUAGE

Prior to the Tokugawa Shogunate, there were a variety of local dialects and variations throughout Japan. Further pursuing his all-encompassing goal of stability and security for Japan, Ieyasu and his family laid down the edicts standardizing both the written and oral versions of Japanese.

Despite the official changes, many subset languages continued to exist. Okinawan, for example, exists to this day, though it is now becoming endangered. Poetry and a great number of other written activities in the Ryukyuan islands continued despite their vassalage to Japan (through feudal realities).

There continued to be other languages at the peripheries of Japanese society; languages from Korea during the periods that Japan had holdings or colonies there, Ainu from the Northernmost portions of Japan, and Ryukyuan languages. With the advent of the language edicts of Tokugawa, many of these holdings transitioned to Japanese, at least for official business.

EDO PERIOD

An era of relative peace, the Edo Period is often viewed as one of the most romanticized eras of Japan. The new shogun enacted sweeping reforms that at once both ensured the country would not match European technological development while also ensuring peace and stability within the nation itself.

Culturally, it is often referred to as a golden age for Japan. There was also, however, drastic isolation and strict societal rules developed. Like many powerful strongmen (and women) from history, Tokugawa quickly removed the very methodologies that had brought him into power. This included limiting the capacity for others to advance socially, reinforcing and redoubling social stratification. Further, he banned gunpowder weapons, attempting to enforce his power upon the society.

The final factor that cemented his power and position was the weakening and abolishing of many of other great houses. Any daimyo not loyal to Tokugawa quickly found themselves either removed from their positions or their lands and resources seized. The spoils of war were carefully redistributed between his allies, also ensuring he would remain unchallenged should any turn against him.

This created a new feudal hierarchy, though it may be fairer to characterize it as an alteration to the pre-existing feudal structure. The daimyo became ranked by their proximity to the Shogun, literally in terms of the lands they were rewarded nearest to the holdings of House Tokugawa. These were the families with direct relations to Ieyasu. The next group was gifted the next closest set of lands,

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rewarded for their loyalty and faithful support of the new shogun. The third group was placed the farthest away and was made up of new allies and former enemies.

These groups were further stratified by who could hold government positions. Only those closest to clan Tokugawa could hold high government offices and those of the farthest group were prevented from holding any government offices.

The final limit on the powers of the other daimyo was the strict system of laws established. Rules were handed down that regulated dress, use of weapons (types and numbers allowed), marriage (both who and how), required feudal lords to reside in Edo every second year (reminding them of the shogun's power), prohibited the building of ocean-going vessels, persecuted Christianity, and more. Though there were no taxes per se, each daimyo was required to contribute manpower and money to public works projects the Shogun undertook; a fact Tokugawa would use to ensure no daimyo gained too much power or wealth.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND CHRISTIANITY

Tied to the Edo Period was a strict limiting of foreign involvement in Japanese affairs. Foreigners were limited in where they could port and trade, with stringent limitations on what they were allowed to trade. To the shogunate, Christianity, Europeans, and foreign involvement were all destabilizing forces, and were all intertwined. These limitations became imposing, and became more so over time.

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1612 | All of the shogun's retainers and residents of their lands had to forswear Christianity. |
| 1616 | Foreign trade restricted to Nagasaki and Hirado. |
| 1622 | The execution of 120 missionaries and converts. |
| 1624 | The expulsion of the Spanish. |
| 1629 | Thousands of Christians were executed. |
| 1635 | Closed Country Edict was issued, prohibiting any Japanese citizen from leaving Japan, and if they did they would never be allowed to return. |
| 1636 | Dutch are restricted to Dejima, an artificial island in Nagasaki's harbor. |
| 1641 | Foreign contacts limited to Dejima and some parts of Korea or the Ryukyu Islands. |
| 1660 | Foreign contact officially limited to China, England, and the Dutch, so long as they landed at Dejima. All other foreigners who landed in Japan were put to death without trial. |

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Despite these stringent rules for society, there were still rebellions. In 1637-38, the Shimbara Rebellion was one such destabilizing event. Christian samurai and peasants, frustrated from their lower and persecuted status in society, attempted to stage a revolt and enact demands for further tolerance. The Shogun responded by calling on the Dutch to use their ships to bombard and destroy their base. By 1660, nearly all of Christianity was removed from Japanese shores.

There were still some underground groups that continued to practice, though they could be fined or otherwise persecuted if anyone discovered them. Shinto and Buddhism again ruled Japan.

CHANGING SOCIAL ORDERS

One of the major changes to this era of feudal Japan was the decoupling of samurai from land ownership. After Tokugawa took over, samurai were no longer allowed to own land, only the daimyo were. As a result, they were offered the opportunity to become peasants or retainers to either the shogun or a daimyo. This cemented the samurai within their place, and helped solidify the unchanging society of Japan.

Under Tokugawa rule, the social order resembled a pyramid in the way that many feudal societies did, albeit with some differences. At the top was the emperor and the court nobility, though the power they held was mostly symbolic. There were some power they continued to hold, and some limited political maneuvering that took place. During this era, however, they largely lived as they often had, within the walls of Kyoto in a charmed and disconnected life.

Below them, and wielding the real power within Japan, were the shogun, the daimyo, and the samurai. They were the military classes, the only ones allowed to wield weapons or train with them.

Curiously, peasants and workers of the land came next. Though largely unskilled, they were recognized by their daimyo and others as being integral to the operation of the country. They had quasi-reciprocal agreements with their landholders, though they were rarely codified outside of social contracts. This also recognized the fact food was the most important commodity within Japanese society, limited as it was by the lack of trade. It is especially important to note that in this era approximately 80% of Japanese citizens were rice farmers. It was also during this era that the daimyo and shogun would begin to demand increased wood for ships and major projects. It was from these demands, that major projects to plan, plant, and care for forests emerged.

The bottom two layers of Japanese society were craftsmen and merchants, in that order. Strict taxes, limits on movement, and severely curtailed trade kept merchants from amassing the wealth they often did elsewhere. These groups were kept within the cities, forming an effective lower class compared to the peasants who would come and go from the rural regions. As can be supposed, this system didn't last forever. The merchant and craftsmen classes grew first in monetary wealth, then in political power, as samurai would become indebted to them to support their consumption despite a lack of rising pay.

FEUDAL JAPAN

There was another class outside of the entire system, those professions that broke taboos of Buddhism. Referred to as *eta* and *hinin*, meaning filthy and non-humans respectively, this “class of the others” included butchers, tanners, undertakers, town guards, street cleaners, executioners, prostitutes, beggars, and entertainers. These groups often lived separately in special neighborhoods or in villages that weren’t even on maps.

Buddhist and Shinto priests formed another outsider class, though with more recognized rights than the *eta* and *hinin*. The entire system, by and large, was organized around theories of morality. Peasants were above craftsmen because of the increased value and ‘honesty’ of their work. Merchants were at the bottom, because they didn’t create anything, merely made trade easier. To the Japanese, this was something of a moral deprivation. Those outside of the hierarchy were functionally unclassifiable upon the regular rubric of society, for good or ill.

An interesting factor concerning the legal system of the era is the lack of any rights for the individual. Underneath the Tokugawa Shogunate, the smallest legal unit was the family, and everything was structured around that reality.

TECHNOLOGY AND ARTS

The Edo period was one of technological advancement for Japan, rooted in Confucian ideals that had continued in Japan, as well as the limited trade that took place with European powers. There was, for example, the creation of Dutch studies, an academic discipline around interpreting and adapting European technologies. A great many of these came from documents shipped across the sea and had to be both translated and reinterpreted by local scholars.

The reality of these studies was that they kept society caught up more on a theoretical basis than on a practical one. Much of Japanese society, especially the political system, didn’t stay up to date with these developments. Instead, there was a corps of members of the bureaucracy, especially those who lived near Dejmina, who were up to date with Western and European technology in a theoretical sense. Since this didn’t spread across Japan, it created another layer of difference among Japanese society.

This further developed the myths about Japan within European courts. They saw the stability and societal structure of Japan and tended only to engage in discussions with people who were up to date with their own technologies. To many, this set them apart from other nations around the world, establishing themselves as something different from the rest. What glimpses were caught of the rest of Japan were functionally through a lens of propaganda, limiting exposure in both directions.

During this era the samurai attempted a codification of *bushido*, as well as developed much of the romanticization of Japanese history. Even stories and legends from previous times went through the lens this era presented, further reinforcing the value of the samurai in society. Now in a position that required less fighting, but also gave them significant status in society, they regularly sought ways to reinforce and justify their position in society. This was especially

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true as samurai tried to out compete each other in terms of who was living up to the ideals or who had succumbed to the more aesthetic style that had grown with the time of peace and stability.

It is also from this era where the quasi-artistic phenomenon of the geisha comes from. With rising economic fortunes across several aspects of society, there was a growth in the aesthetic and the recreational. Before long, an area near Edo, called Yoshiwara, soon became the center for culture in Edo. Many women lived and worked within this secluded area. Employment contracts, such as they were, combined with rent and expenses, ensured that many women who fell into the realm of Yoshiwara were soon trapped. As part of their employment, these women would be expected to sing, dance, or provide companionship to guests. In turn, these women became trendsetters for fashion and culture across Japan. Even in this era, there was the blind eye turned to the prostitution that was often part and parcel with the rest of the Yoshiwara lifestyle. This created the earliest forms of the geisha, along with much of the other pieces of Japanese culture.

MEIJI PERIOD

Beginning in 1868, according to most counts, the Meiji period began as a result of a series of factors that put the emperor back into power in Japan. It was, despite the increased power of the monarchy, the end of feudal Japan. The country would continue under the emperor and a series of oligarchs, mostly politicians became friendly to rapid industrialization and adopting a relatively Westernized empire. It would last until World War One.

The period reflected an end to the samurai and the modernization of their military. The samurai class, however, was a significant force in Japanese society, numbering approximately ten times the size of the nobility when France went through their revolution. Many transitioned into various professions, maintaining their sense of elitism. Some fought against it, even attempting to create a new, independent state that retained Japan's old feudalism. It was not successful, and time marches inexorably on.

SHINTOISM AND KAMI

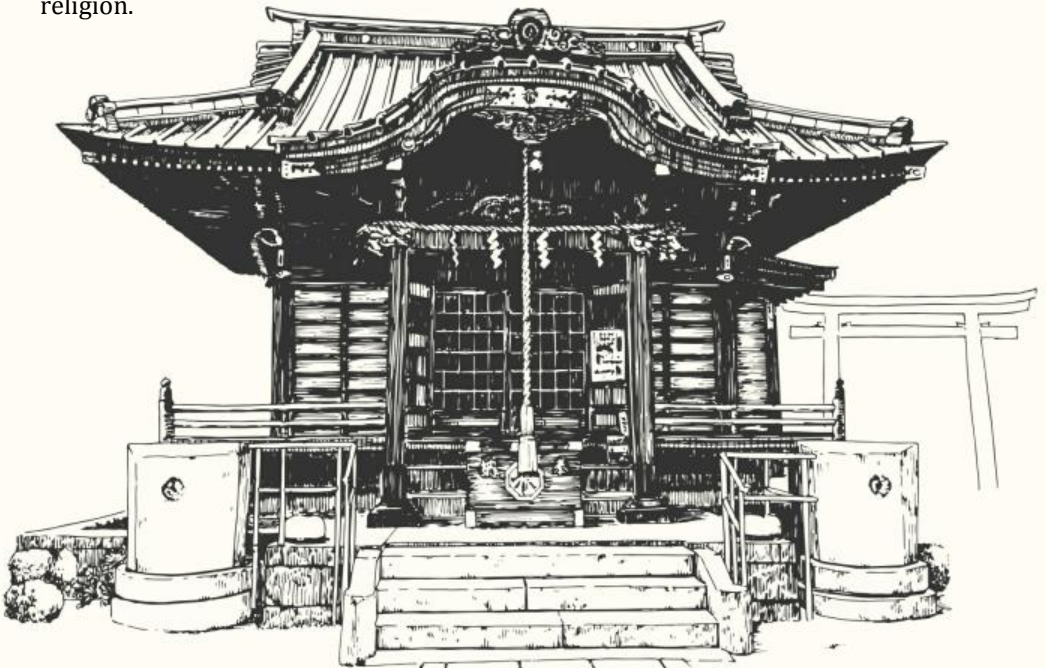
Though there was Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism, and Christianity that threaded throughout Japan, their belief in kami through the practice of Shintoism is one of the unique factors to Japanese culture. Shinto beliefs were often adapted to other religions, reflecting the previously existing traditions that existed within Japan. Early anthropologists portrayed it as a form of animism, and though this is a wrong portrayal, it is somewhere understandable.

FEUDAL JAPAN

Key to the cosmology was the belief in *kami*, which lacks a direct translation to English. They are, in terms of a gross simplification, the energy or spirit of various things in the world. The determination of if a *kami* was present was primarily if there was a feeling of sacredness or otherness to them. They could be anything including a natural location that felt sacred or otherworldly, though it was often felt that each thing had a *kami* to it. A river, a mountain, or a tree could easily have a *kami* behind it.

One of the overarching themes of Shintoism is the narrative of linking the present to the past. Through the belief system of both honoring *kami* and recognizing the continuation of the spirit of the individual, they were tied inexorably to their past and to the land around them.

As a result, there is a focus on purity and impurity within the belief system. There is the belief that wrong deeds create impurity, a consideration that is reflected in an almost Victorian fashion in their view towards the environment. A polluted river, for example, would be considered impure and it would be a reflection of both the spiritual and the physical realms. This created a need and regularity to purification rituals. Called *harae*, these rituals could be performed on a daily, weekly, seasonal, lunar, and even annual basis. Some consider the *harae* to be roughly analogous to an exorcism of malignant spirits, though it is more complex than that. The rituals themselves can range from hanging of charms, to washing and cleansing the body, to reciting a liturgy, and more. Water and salt are common purifiers throughout Shintoism and it is easy to see how many of these behaviors became superstitions and rituals above and beyond the religion.



FEUDAL CLASSES OF JAPAN

FEUDAL CLASSES OF JAPAN

Japanese society was incredibly strict throughout the feudal eras. Despite many stories about individuals finding one way or another to overcome these structures, it was a seldom-achieved feat. Even the nature of the shogun, ruling as the military power within Japan and the de facto ruler, kept the emperor above him as the official head of state.

RANKS IN JAPANESE SOCIETY

EMPEROR

Emperor was the highest position in Japanese society, at least in name. In the early eras of Japanese feudalism, the emperor was an integral position, control of which was desperately fought over. During that early period of time, the position had more power and was involved in specific politicking. There was a tendency for emperors to abdicate the throne for young relatives in order to have further political power as retired emperors. Combined with the manipulation of young emperors by regents, the position's power was eroded significantly throughout history. With the advent of the Tokugawan Shogunate, the power became almost entirely symbolic.

IMPERIAL COURT

The Imperial Court was the nominal power within Japan. Despite their nominal power, they had very little in actuality. Much like the Roman Senate in the era of strongmen, they continued to go through the motions of running the Imperial Court, despite the fact the emperor's edicts meant little to nothing.

SHOGUN

The real power behind Japan for much of its existence, the shogun was the de facto ruler of Japan, especially after the Tokugawa Shogunate was established. This power was so stark that despite being nominally appointed by the emperor, many Western powers would mistake the shoguns for the highest power within the country.

The position of shogun was one of absolute power, controlling the entirety of Japan through edicts and military might. Though the position translated to "Commander-in-Chief of the Expeditionary Force Against the Barbarians", very seldom

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in its history was the position oriented around facing off against who the Japanese considered to be the barbarian peoples.

Surrounding the shogun was the *Bakufu*, a government that served as the shogun's administration. Their job was to carry out the shogun's edicts, advise him, and undertake the normal activities required for any government. Many of these individuals were functionally samurai, or in a similar social class to them, but their proximity to the shogun granted them higher status.

DAIMYO

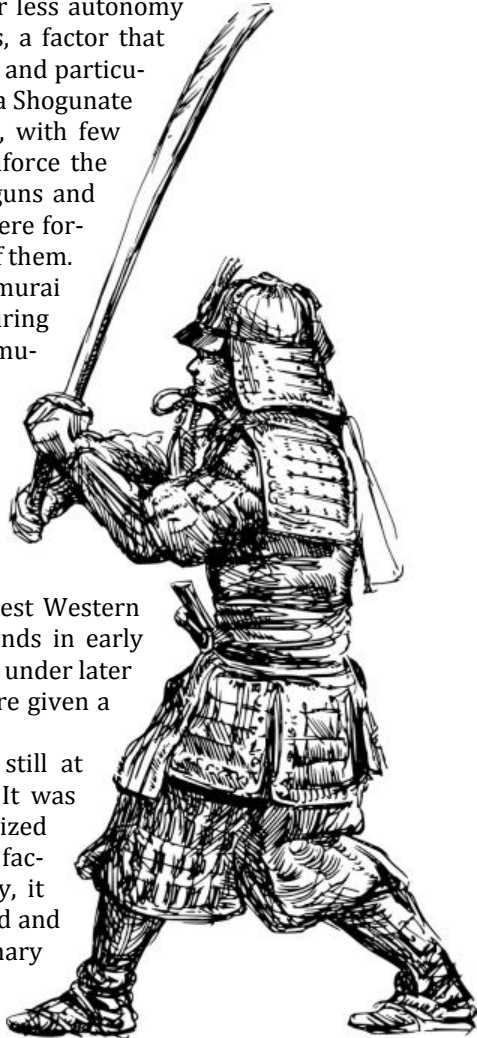
Regional rulers, the daimyo were the feudal lords responsible for a specific area underneath the shogun's rule. Depending on the era, these individuals would have more or less autonomy over the law and taxes of their lands, a factor that waxed and waned with the shogunate and particular shogun. It was under the Tokugawa Shogunate that their power waned significantly, with few being able to do much more than enforce the edicts of their lord. Many of the shoguns and regents that rose and fell over time were formerly daimyo, or within the families of them.

It was to the daimyo that most samurai swore fealty and served, especially during the Tokugawa Shogunate when the samurai primarily served them. This helped to maintain the monopoly of military power and force they had, as well as enforcing their own edicts.

SAMURAI

Samurai were the individual lords and knights of Japan, to find the closest Western analog. They often held their own lands in early eras, though this was taken from them under later administrations. At all times, they were given a stipend for their service.

At the highest, the samurai were still at most one tenth of Japanese society. It was their position of power and romanticized nature that they have become a major factor in the Japanese identity. Similarly, it was their position of being able to read and write as well as serving as the primary audience for most of the artistic endeavors throughout the feudal era.



FEUDAL CLASSES OF JAPAN

Nearly every city in feudal Japan was created around the backbone of the daimyo's castle and the samurai that swore fealty to them. Within their class, there was further social stratification, between those at the top with direct access to their lord and those who held key positions. Then the rest of the structure was arrayed below them. This made its way down to the lowest samurai, who would serve as clerks, messengers, and guards.

As a result, it should not be surprising that some samurai, given the maintaining of their martial arts and highly limited social mobility, became ronin, forsaking their income from a daimyo and stepping outside of the society structure. Many ronins became gamblers, bandits, and other ne'er-do-wells.

PRIESTS

Depending on the period of time, priests practiced Christianity, Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism, or Shintoism. Occasionally, their practices would adapt some practices from each other. They often lived in temples aside from the rest of the hierarchical society that made up Japan. These temples or shrines could be within cities or villages, or off in the wilderness.

PEASANTS

Peasants within Japan were stable, rural, and largely unchanging. It was rare that one would ever leave the village that was their home. The young would occasionally seek seasonal work elsewhere, but this was often only in a nearby village. When the Tokugawa Shogunate required strict paperwork to move from one village to another, it was not met with much resistance for this very reason.

Villages were close, and families were closer, amongst the peasantry. They owned their own land, though their lord owned taxation rights. Despite familial ownership of the land, villages were highly collective in nature. Social pressures kept conflict to a minimum and maintained strong customs. Any deviation from accepted behaviors was met with hefty social pressures. It is interesting to note that peasants within Japan not only owned their own land, but they farmed it on a family basis instead of a plantation or *hacienda* model that other nations adopted.

As with the other classes within Japanese society, there were various levels within the peasantry class. A family could make a great deal of money if their land was profitable, but they could never change their social status into a different class. By contrast, an individual who was struck by famine or another problem could suffer greatly. Camaraderie and collectivism came, in part, from the fact that taxes were levied on the village as a whole instead of on the individual. As a result, villages would come together to meet tax burdens and survive disasters.

MERCHANTS AND CRAFTSMEN

The merchants and craftsmen group was often a minority and stayed at the bottom of society. Strict rules and regulations existed that prevented them from conspicuously displaying their wealth. Over time, their wealth grew because of

FEUDAL JAPAN

the strange realities of economics. Despite this, they remained highly limited in what they could do; including preventing them from buying land, cementing their position within society. As time marched forward, they were doing far better economically than the samurai, despite being a lower social class.

ETA AND HININ

Eta and hinin individuals stood outside of Japanese society, making up everyone whose lifestyle went against Buddhist principles. As a result, they were viewed as being amongst the lowest of the low, regardless of how much money they might make through their jobs. It was also through this lower position that a great deal of corruption could seep in, especially considering guards were considered to be within this group of untouchables.

NINJA

Often the subject of myth, ninja did exist within Japanese society. Frequently the product of disenfranchised peasants and priests, ninja were functionally a secret society within Japan. Known for assassinations and sabotage, it is difficult to know how they actually operated as they continued to spread myths about themselves. Many of the beliefs about them that continue into today are based on myths they spread; everything from climbing sheer walls to controlling the elements to being taught by the tengu.

In reality, they were often much like the assassins and experts in sabotage from areas around the world. They included arquebus-armed sharpshooters, poisoners, arsonists and more. Their primary purpose, however, was espionage.

Whether it was through using the element of disguise or serving as double agents, ninja were able to move information around, providing it to people they worked for. Within the Edo period, it was believed all ninja were servants of the Tokugawa government, though it is uncertain if this is true.

Due to the realities of a feudal society, ninja were able to take advantage of the fact an unrecognized person who bore the proper seals was likely to be accepted. They were able to steal the proper symbols, either lanterns or symbols of office, and employ forgers to create copies. One such story tells of them stealing lanterns that would provide access to a castle. Once inside, they started a number of small fires around the castle, which was quickly consumed by the conflagration.

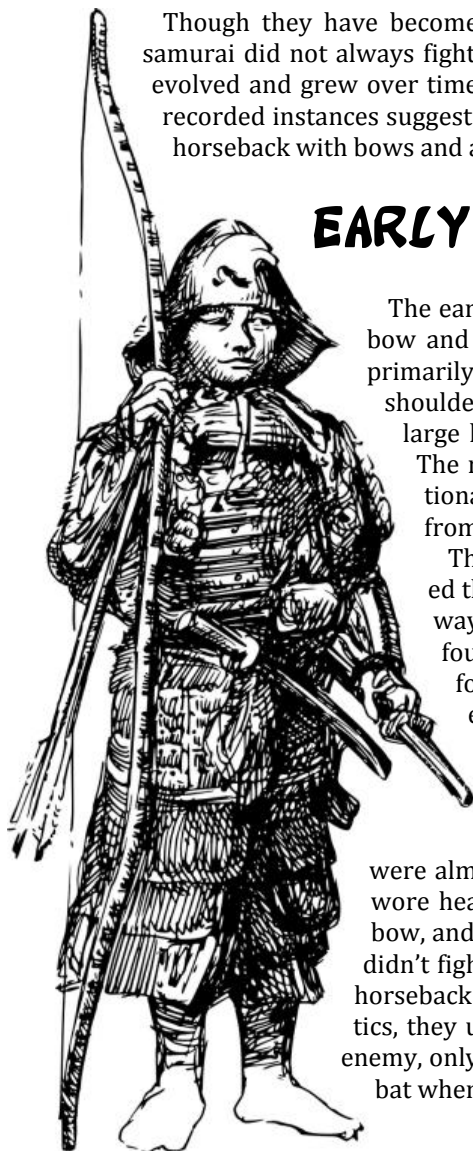
With such a small team able to utterly destroy a castle, ninja represented an incredibly successful intelligence service. This led to drastic measures to develop countermeasures. Castles were rigged with complex traps to ensure individuals sneaking about at night would not be able to do so without injury, or at least they would alert the guards. To serve as another countermeasure, castles were built in confusing and labyrinthine ways. If you were not intimately knowledgeable about the castle, it was easy to get lost within it. Backtracking and moving back and forth made it easier for guards to find the intruders.

EVOLUTION OF SAMURAI WARFARE

EVOLUTION OF SAMURAI WARFARE

Though they have become famous for the use of the *katana*, the samurai did not always fight with two swords. Their style of fighting evolved and grew over time, like many military endeavors. The first recorded instances suggest the earliest version of samurai fought on horseback with bows and arrows.

EARLY SAMURAI WARFARE



The earliest samurai fought on horseback with a bow and arrows on their back. Their armor was primarily large layered plates that covered their shoulders and thighs. Coupled with this was a large helmet to protect them from enemy fire. The net effect was presenting what was functionally an armored front, protecting them from fire as they rode past their enemies.

This earliest iteration of the samurai reflected the wealth and capacity of the nobility in a way that mirrored Western feudalism. They fought on horseback with customized armor for each individual. During this earliest of eras, members of the peasantry were brought along as foot troops to supplement the military actions.

Taking place largely during the Heian era, the earliest versions of the samurai were almost akin to tanks on the battlefield. Each wore heavy armor, wielded a large and powerful bow, and rode on horseback. Even in this era, they didn't fight in the way other groups that fought on horseback did. Instead of employing hit and run tactics, they used their bows while they closed on the enemy, only to switch to close-ranged mounted combat when necessary.

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THE GOLDEN AGE OF SAMURAI WARFARE

Though there is not a bright line difference between the earliest iterations of the samurai and the golden age; one such widely cited incident is the first major incident of seppuku during military action. Happening around the time of the fall of the Fujiwara, it was by this period that defined much of the famous version of the samurai. During this period they began to adopt a wide array of weapons, primarily from Japanese influences including the widespread adoption of the katana as the most famous and primary weapon of the samurai.

RISE OF THE ASHIGARU

Tokugawa's rise was in part mirrored and enabled by the rise of the Ashigaru. These individuals were unlike the trained and honed samurai. Where the samurai were carefully honed to be a one-man weapon, the ashigaru were trained and designed to operate as a unit. Each step of their system was designed to be idiot proof. Most often armed with bows, spears, or guns, they would fight in organized formations.

One of the largest ways they diverged from the samurai was in the standardization of their arms and armor. They were most commonly used to assist around the samurai, but became the backbone of the armies during the rise of Tokugawa. Despite their use in securing Tokugawa the shogunate, they were all but abolished immediately after Ieyasu took power. By the time he had cemented his control, they had disappeared from the Japanese military.

TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE AND BEYOND

The rise of Tokugawa and their rule could be argued to be the high water mark for feudal Japan. In terms of stability and economic growth, at the least, this is certainly the case. Despite this, there has been an ongoing re-examination of the trends, forces, and personalities that led to the rise of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Many video games, television shows, and movies have re-examined this event and speculated on how Japan could have been different.

Within the era the Tokugawa Shogunate stood, there was a strange state of affairs for the military and samurai warfare within Japan. With none able to wield weapons other than the samurai, and a lack of major military engagements, the samurai themselves evolved into some strange places. Many continued to pursue their military duties in a manner that evolved into a martial art that was more about theory than real application, while others continued to be in a position where they regularly used their skills on a day to day basis. Still others became,

EVOLUTION OF SAMURAI WARFARE

in effect, members of the bureaucracy with limited capacity to wield the weapons they were permitted to bear.

With inflation and economic growth continuing throughout much of the Tokugawa regime, but the pay of samurai remaining stagnant, many found themselves slowly losing ground in stature. They continued to be used as a military force, despite these shifting economic realities, and it was in part due to the peasantry's and merchants' limited access to weapons that the samurai were able to maintain the stable nature of society in Japan. It was during this period that many samurai went on to become ronin, often teaching others martial arts or hiring themselves out as bodyguards.

The Tokugawa Shogunate fell, in the end, due to the mounting pressures that faced Japan both internally and externally. Foreign powers forced Japan out of isolation, and the mercantile class continued to grow in wealth and power. In the end, the shogun stepped down and the emperor took over.

Militarily, the romanticized notion of the samurai has continued to shape some aspects of Japan's culture. One of the most famous was the so-called kamikaze pilots, though in more recent times the imagery has been co-opted by nationalist movements within Japan.



JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY

Japanese mythology and folklore is intrinsically tied to the Shinto beliefs. Even when Shintoism isn't practiced, many of the beliefs are imported into other religious practices. The various forms of Buddhism, Confucianism, and even Christianity that were practiced in Japan include, at the least, adaptations into their own religious practices.

SHINTOISM

Shintoism represents a uniquely Japanese creation. It is a combination of Buddhism, Confucianism, and a spirituality focused on spirits and ancestors. Practice changes from place to place, and in many ways this is a catch-all name for the various local beliefs in each place. The Japanese worshipped a number of different *kami*, or spirits, found in various places. Practice included worshiping or paying homage to the Imperial Household's spirits, one's sect practices, and folk practices.

Shinto is based on the belief that Nature's expressions, in the form of everything from trees, to rivers, to mountains, to animals, and even stones are, or are inhabited by, spiritual beings. This belief traces back to before the introduction of Buddhism, which caused some reorganization. With the introduction of Buddhism, some of the most powerful *kami* (spirits and gods) became represented by Buddhist-like figures. Some practices are adaptations of Buddhist theology, while others are hold-overs from the Shinto beliefs from ancient Japan.

Tied to these ideas of spirits being everywhere is the focus on purification; whether it is the purification of one's own spirit and body or in the purification of places on behalf of their *kami*. These purification rites include water, magical chanting, and misogi. Misogi is the practice of lustration, various exhaustive activities including going without sleep, breathe training, standing under waterfalls, and more. Included are a number of other activities such as purification by salt, swishing sake through one's mouth and spitting it out, and more.

The Imperial Household spirits and practices are done exclusively by the members of the Imperial family and their central guards. There are three shrines all within the Imperial palace that represent key parts of Japanese culture.

By contrast, the sect practices are oriented around various individualized practices. They are found all over Japan and represent various codifications of shintoistic beliefs. They are a relatively more modern phenomenon, though some date back to the 1500s. One such group is the Jikkōkyō Sect, which is based on the mountain cult for Mount Fuji. Though these groups were only formally recognized as separate from the government in the 1890s through a legal distinction,

JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY

there were sects that predated this. The primary difference is that sects tend to have an individual founder who tried to shape the practice in a specific way, instead of slowly arising through practice.

Folk Shinto represents the various practices undertaken. Everything from folklore regarding ghosts to paying homage to something like the local river spirit falls under this branch of Shintoism. Many practices stretch back prior to the introduction of Buddhism into Japan when they were a form of animism.

Regardless of how it is practiced, Shintoism is well known for being highly based on traditions and repetitions.

THE AFTERLIFE

Important to the practice of Shinto is the existence of the afterlife; kami is at once both the individual spirits and the general essence of the world. In old Japanese legends, those that were pre-Buddhist, the dead would go to a place called yomi. It closely resembled the Greek Hades, a gloomy underground realm with a river.

Shintoism tends to hold beliefs of dead bodies being impure or a source of pollution, a belief that likely helped to limit the spread of various diseases. Despite the otherwise negative view of death within Shinto, it was also understood that death could be used to reach apotheosis with various legendary individuals being enshrined after death. Emperors and heroes would become great and powerful kami after death.

GODS AND GOD-LIKE FIGURES

AMATERASU

The goddess of the sun and universe, she served a major role within Shinto belief systems. It is believed by some that she is the Japanese expression of a pan-Asiatic solar goddess. There are several similarities between her and other goddesses from neighboring nations. Within Japanese iterations of Buddhism especially, her worship has continued.

Amaterasu was the sister to two of the other main gods of Japanese cosmography, and her worship still continues in some fashion to this day. Her aspect of the rising sun speaks of renewal and rebirth, and has led to a practice in Honshu of destroying and rebuilding on of her shrines every twenty years to honor her, a practice that has continued since 690.

According to legend, it is from Amaterasu that the imperial regalia were bequeathed to humanity in the form of her mirror, her jewel, and her sword.

FEUDAL JAPAN

SUSANOO

Another of the gods of Shintoism and the sibling to Amaterasu, Susanoo is the god of the sea and storms. Many of the myths surrounding him speak of the rivalry between him and his sister, Amaterasu. When he was to leave Heaven, for example, he went to Amaterasu. There was a lack of trust between them, but they agreed to pass gifts to each other. From these gifts sprang a number of other, lesser gods. They compared those that were spawned, and Susanoo declared himself the victor because women sprang from hers, with some tellings implying that he would declare himself the winner regardless. Later, when he again became restless, he fell into a fit of rage that resulted in destroying his sister's rice fields, hurling a flayed pony at her loom, and killing one of her attendants.

According to legend, the sword that Amaterasu bequeathed to the first emperor was from Susanoo, itself given to her as a gift in an effort to reconcile with his sibling.

TSUKIYOMI

The third of the god siblings, and sibling to Amaterasu and Susanoo, Tsukiyomi is the moon god of Japanese Shintoism. He climbed a mystical ladder to live among the heavens with Amaterasu, who eventually became his wife.

Their marriage would not last however, as Tsukiyomi killed the goddess of food, angering Amaterasu. The story goes that this was because of the repugnant way the goddess created the first food, literally vomiting it into existence. This angered her such that she refused to be near him ever again, creating night and day.

WATATSUMI

A legendary kami, this water dragon spirit could be either underneath a kami or a god-like figure. In stories, he often serves as a tutelary figure, extolling wisdom or direction.

In several of the stories related to them, he is related to the primary gods of the Japanese pantheon, such as it is. He is imagined as either a gargantuan water snake or as a watery dragon.

KAMI

The spirits of Japanese folklore, kami do not easily map to other belief systems. They include what would, in other belief systems, be everything from small level spirits to gods and goddesses. Included within the kami are ancestors adapted and adopted into the spiritual belief system the Japanese had around the rest of these spirits. Like many other belief systems, the stories they have within their society become a part of the underlying folklore and superstitions, and shape them.

JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY

BAKU

Another of the pieces of Japanese folklore that originates from China, the baku is an eater of dreams. They are portrayed in different ways, often as bizarre amalgamations of different animals. Throughout their history, however, they have always been portrayed as shy. The creature has evolved over time to become a more charming creature, capable of eating nightmares. This has led to small traditions including children asking baku to come eat their bad dreams before they go to sleep at night.

DRAGONS

Based on amalgamations of the stories from China, Korea, and other neighboring states, the Japanese dragon is a water spirit, often associated with rainfall or large bodies of water. They are often portrayed as long, wingless, serpent like creatures with four legs. There are several words within Japanese to refer to dragons, with an adapted version of “dragon” serving only to refer to those creatures of European mythological pedigrees.

Dragons range in different stories from godlike figures, such as Watatsumi from earlier, to more earthly-based creatures. Some dragons are said to be the ancestors of the first Emperors of Japan. Later iterations of the dragon myths draw on inspiration from Chinese and Indian sources. In one such example, a spurned teahouse waitress researched magic and eventually transformed into a dragon to seek her revenge.

To this day, there are still shrines dedicated to dragons around Japan, and there is an annual Golden Dragon Dance at a Buddhist temple in Asakusa.

GASHADOKURO

Gigantic skeletons, fifteen times larger than an average person, these spirits are a terrifying example of Japanese mythology. Said to be formed from the bones of those who have died of starvation, they are portrayed as being vaguely inhuman in ways aside from just their size. They are said to be both invisible and indestructible, though they can be warded off by certain charms. They are said to wander after midnight, often in remote areas, searching for lone travelers. There is a loud ringing in their soon-to-be-prey’s ear, shortly before being grabbed and lifted up into the air. The spirit would then bite off the traveler’s head, drinking the blood that sprays out.

KAPPA

Appearing to be almost like hairy humanoid frogs, the kappa is one of the oddities of Japanese folklore. Living in rivers, streams, and lakes, they traditionally served as a warning to prevent children from playing in water that was too dangerous for them.

FEUDAL JAPAN

The specifics of a kappa's appearance vary from region to region, but the broad strokes are often the same. They tend to have beaks, green or yellow scales, a shell, and a flat, hairless region on their head that is always wet. In some variations, this isn't a flat portion, but is instead a bowl that is part of the creature's head. Similarly, some of the versions of this creature can be killed or defeated by tipping the water out of his head.

Like many spirits within Japanese folklore, kappa are realized as everything from the mischievous to the drastically violent and malicious. In some stories, they drag children below the water and drown them while in others they just grab at ankles and give people a fright.

KITSUNE

Fox spirits, the kitsune is renowned for its ability to transform between different forms. They often serve as messengers in Japanese mythology, and their portrayal with multiple tails, up to a maximum of nine, conveys the older, wiser, and more powerful the spirit is. Their transformation takes different forms in different stories. More modern retellings often have them able to shapeshift nearly at will, but ancient stories suggested they must place reeds, a broad leaf, or a skull over their head while hiding in a secluded place. They would, most often, take the form of beautiful women, though they would often retain some foxlike traits.

Though throughout much of Japanese history kitsunes were lauded as beatific creatures, they were viewed as witches during the Edo period. It was during this period that there were attempts to codify what the abilities of the kitsune were. They have been attributed with the ability to create fire or lightning from their mouths or tails, possess humans, willful manifestation in the dreams of others, flight, invisibility, and the capacity to create dreams. Though they are not always malicious, some myths tell of them feeding on the life or spirit of human beings, most often through sexual contact.

ONI

Translated as ogres, demons, devils, or trolls, the oni are gigantic, wild creatures who pose a threat to many a hero from a Japanese tale. They are primarily humanoid, excepting their large size and horns growing from their head. In addition, some have an odd number of eyes or fingers and have red or blue skin. Traditionally armed with a large iron club, they have been reinterpreted in modern times to wield large swords, making them serve as stand-ins for evil samurai at times.

Many samurai masks draw their inspiration from the oni, perhaps adding to the myths that surround these creatures. Often living in remote, mountainous places, they were believed to threaten villages, particularly those that were rural or remote. Many communities would have an annual tradition to ward off the oni from raiding their village.

JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY

TENGU

One of the most famous mythological creatures from Japanese folklore is that of the tengu. Translating to “heavenly dog”, they are demons that take on both avian and humanoid characteristics, predominantly those of crows or hawks. Originally, Buddhist beliefs held they were dangerous and were harbingers of war, but over time that view softened until they were reimagined as protectors of the mountains and forests, a position that still made them dangerous to humans.

In some mythologies, primarily those that are more modern, the tengu taught the ninja their secrets. These accounts draw on the tendency for tengu to act as a sort of vigilante or karmic justice in some legends, especially punishing Buddhist monks engaged in less than appropriate activities. In other myths, they teach lost young men their secret arts of wielding a sword, in one legend teaching the mythical Minamoto no Yoshitsune to enable him to turn against the Taira clan and exact his revenge.

YŌKAI

Serving as a class of supernatural beings within Japanese folklore, yōkai are a form of spirit or demon. Their name comes from an amalgamation of a few kanji meaning “bewitching; attractive; calamity” and “spectre; apparition; mystery; suspicious”. They range from the malicious to the mischievous, but can be a boon to those who encounter them. Often, they are amalgamations of humans and some sort of animal, in the manner of many Japanese supernatural creatures.

The name yōkai is used alternatively with mononoke to explain the unexplainable. They could be, in effect, an effort to explain that which western societies have ascribed to a number of different specific spirits (poltergeists, knockers, and so on). These terms serve as a sort of catch-all for supernatural spirits that shape the world.

YŪREI

These spirits are another catch-all for a number of different phenomena. Underneath Japanese beliefs, each person has a spirit or soul. When an individual dies, their soul enters a sort of purgatory until the proper funerary rites have been completed. If someone has a particularly violent or sudden manner, then the funerary rites may not be enough. In those instances, a spirit can transform into one of these spirits, and bridge their way back into the physical world.

Many yūrei are not malicious, but are either protectors or seekers of justice. They may seek the proper punishment of their killer, or ensure the next generation of their family is safe.

FEUDAL JAPANESE CHARACTERS

The Feudal Eras of Japan have captured the imaginations of generations. There is the sentiment of it being a golden era within Japan, one that can be easily undermined. The romanticism of this nation has continued, however, and there are re-imaginings and adaptations continuing to this day.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS

Daimyo: The feudal lords of Japan, each was responsible not only for the lands they had a claim to, but also the samurai under their command. They were often trained as adept fighters and as leaders of their many followers. Politicking was as much of an important skill as strength of arms. **Suggested Skills:** Fighting, Intimidation, Knowledge (Battle), Persuasion, Riding

Monk: There have been a variety of religious sects and bodies that have operated throughout Japanese history. Many of them were able to use their positions to travel throughout the country. There are legends of some of them serving as observers of the condition of Japan, or of involving themselves with their lives. **Suggested Skills:** Fighting, Healing, Knowledge (Chosen Religion), Persuasion, Survival

Ninja: The ninja were mythologized groups that operated across Japan. Serving as saboteurs, assassins, and intelligence operators, there are many legends about their exploits and capabilities. None may ever know the truth of what happened; they lived much of their lives in the shadows. **Suggested Skills:** Climbing, Fighting, Lockpicking, Notice, Stealth

Priest: The Shinto priests were often less nomadic than their monkish counterparts, tending to a particular shrine or location. This is not to say they didn't travel; like many others they would travel to spread the gospel of their religion or serve their particular cause. **Suggested Skills:** Intimidation, Knowledge (History), Knowledge (Shintoism), Notice, Persuasion

Ronin: Once you had a daimyo you swore fealty to, but no more. Perhaps you struck out on your own voluntarily or you lost your Daimyo to the shifting politics of the era, you are now on your own. Many ronin were forced to travel across Japan, selling their sword and services wherever they could. **Suggested Skills:** Fighting, Gambling, Healing, Riding, Tracking

FEUDAL JAPANESE CHARACTERS



Samurai: Samurai are in service to a daimyo, serving them as an extension of their sword arm and their will. Trained as both an officer and as a fighter, they serve the daimyo and, by extension, the emperor. Samurai have their own armor and weapons, a rarity in Japanese society. When they weren't soldiers for their daimyo, they could at time be tasked with any number of things.

Suggested Skills: Fighting, Healing, Knowledge (Battle), Riding, Tracking

HINDRANCES

The following are some uses of existing Hindrances along with new Hindrances for Feudal Japanese characters to choose from.

FEUDAL JAPAN

EXISTING HINDRANCES

CODE OF HONOR

Bushido was a way of life for many samurai, and even those in other positions within Japanese society had strict codes of honor that bound them.

HEROIC

By a similar token, many samurai or members of the nobility would view themselves as heroes within their own story. Stories tell of the foolhardy undertakings that were the result of a culture of heroism.

LOYAL

The individual was subservient to clan and those above them in the hierarchy of the world. It was not uncommon for loyalty to become an all-encompassing aspect of their lives.

OUTSIDER

Whether speaking about foreigners or members of the castes that stand aside from the rest of the hierarchy of Japanese society, due to the close-knit nature of Japanese villages and society throughout the feudal era, it was relatively easy to spot the outsider.

NEW HINDRANCES

BUSHIDO (MAJOR)

A strict code of honor, bushido goes above and beyond the normal codes of honor that existed elsewhere. For those who lived under the bushido code, it was the entirety of their being. Though there have been modern attempts to write the code down, this has all been after the fact. In actuality, the code was largely unwritten and was

instead a series of norms about what was viewed as proper behavior. Going against these norms would be anathema to their very existence.

FATALISM (MINOR)

There is a strange, to outsiders, form of productive fatalism that occurs throughout Japanese history. It was especially among the samurai and other warriors that this would occur. Viewing themselves as already dead, they fear almost nothing, especially not their own death.

The character gains a +2 bonus to all Fear (or Guts) tests, but cannot look beyond his current life to plan for the future or envision a life different than what he has.

HOUSE AND CLAN (MINOR)

Most samurai and peasants were tied to their specific family and clan. Loyalty was owed to them, and there was little room for the ability to do anything outside of what was expected of you. Further, it is from higher up the societal pyramid that orders were passed down; orders that could not be easily ignored.

RONIN (MINOR)

Freedom, in the sense that Westerners recognized it, was a rarity within Japanese history. Everyone was held firmly within a limited set of options by expectations and social norms. It was only those outside of society, like the ronin, who had true freedom. Freedom, however, came with the lack of support, ties, or allies. Many either sought to return themselves to society proper, or became criminals to support themselves.

FEUDAL JAPANESE CHARACTERS

EDGES

The following are some uses of existing Edges along with new Edges for feudal Japanese character to choose from.

EXISTING EDGES

COUNTERATTACK

Fighting in solo combat would often require extensive training, and knowing how and when to counterattack was key.

FLORENTINE

One of the samurai's trademark fighting styles (either historically or mythically) was the two-weapon attack using a katana and a wakizashi.

KILLER INSTINCT

The life of many within feudal Japan was oriented around combat. The capability to kill when your life was on the line was integral to ensure survival.

MARKSMAN

Many samurai specialized with bows, making them devastating on the battlefield.

MARTIAL ARTIST

Throughout the myths of Japan, both told by those within and without, those being capable of extensive martial skills were common. Many traditions of martial arts were developed in Japan.

TRADEMARK WEAPON

The myths about various figures similarly tend to give each a trademark weapon. Whether true or false, the stories tell of at times supernatural skill when wielding the trademark weapon of a specific individual.

NEW EDGES

KAMI TOUCHED

Type: Background

Requirements: Novice, any skill above d10+

Whether it is true or simply a curated story, with Kami Touched people believe the character has been touched, or otherwise blessed, by some spirit. It could be the belief she was trained by the tengu, her mother was a kitsune, or something else entirely.

She gains the Luck Edge and is well known regardless of where she travels within Japan (gaining a +2 bonus to Streetwise and Persuasion). The result of living a larger than life story, however, is that without maintenance, the story can turn against her. If the character continues to not live up to the story being told about her, this can quickly become a hindrance with people constantly attacking her to kill the "demon" she has become or challenging her to duels to prove her mettle.

KNOW YOUR PLACE

Type: Background

Requirements: Novice, Charisma 0+

Within such a stratified society, "knowing your place" was an important thing to understand. Being able to appropriately greet other members of society is vital. Whether speaking to betters or lessers, following the proper decorum is always necessary. With the Know Your Place Edge, the character gains a +d6 bonus to all social and Knowledge rolls that require him to know his place (e.g. when speaking with a superior).

FEUDAL JAPAN

MARTIAL PROWESS

Type: Combat

Requirements: Novice,
Fighting d8+

Throughout much of the history, those who dedicated themselves to martial endeavors in Japan sought to make an art form out of it. Individuals would dedicate themselves to a weapon or a style of fighting, or merely the art of fighting itself. They viewed it as more than just a profession, but as a spiritual thing as well.

Pick a specific melee weapon the character has trained with. Successful

attacks gain a +d4 bonus to the damage roll. Martial Prowess can be taken multiple times with a different weapon chosen each time.

WAY OF THE NINJA

Type: Professional

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility d8+, Climbing d6+, Fighting d8+, Stealth d8+

Subject to untold legends and myths, the ninja are masters of night and shadows. They can use a Benny to re-roll attacks if their target is surprised or unaware and gain a +d6 bonus to their damage roll.

WAY OF FIVE RINGS

Written by Miyamoto Musashi circa 1645, *The Book of Five Rings* developed a way of thought oriented around prowess in battle and philosophy of conflict. There is a no-nonsense tone established throughout the text, pointing out that all that matters in conflict is defeating your opponent, often by cutting them down.

ARCANE BACKGROUND (FIVE RINGS)

Arcane Skill: Sword Focus (Spirit)

Starting Power Points: 10

Starting Powers: 2

Learning to follow the Way of Five Rings is as much a way of life as a series of skills. There is not a clear demarcation between the philosophy, way of life, or skills developed through following it. Every follower should find their abilities tied to following this ethos.

The Book of Five Rings discusses martial arts, particularly with the use of weapons (as opposed to unarmed martial arts). Trappings for Arcane Background (Five Rings) should include some type of weapon movement, requiring the character to wield a traditional samurai weapon (such as the katana).

Ethos of the Blade: The following of the Way of Five Rings is predicated upon all the different aspects feeding into each other. Failing to follow the underlying philosophy results in losing the ability to utilize these Powers. The player and Game Master should work together to determine the interpretation and version of the Way the character must follow; violation of that interpretation results in the character losing all his Power Points until repenting for violating this philosophy.

FEUDAL JAPANESE CHARACTERS

ROLE-PLAYING OPPORTUNITIES

JAPANESE LEGENDS AND MYTHS

Some of the greatest attractions of the isles of Japan are the mythical legends that fill it. Characters could easily be warrior-poets and mystical monks that speak to kami, righting wrongs across the lands. In this kind of game, the road blocks and laws that are widespread across Japan in most of the feudal period are for other people, not for heroes like the player characters. The only time such banal threats come into play is if there are corrupt guards or an angry daimyo.

Between the kami that legends speak of are the great body of artistic creations that have followed in this tradition. Even if the politicking realities of the daimyo, shogun, and emperor are brought up, they should be the sort of individual who stands against the PCs, likely to be overcome.

Stories like the *47 Ronin* and other revenge stories can fit into this type of narrative, especially if there is supernatural assistance and the players are seeking to ensure balance is returned to Japan, or at least their small corner of it. One thing to remember about other Japanese stories is the importance of this balance and order as major themes. Often in these stories there is a personal level of revenge or love-seeking that mirrors the tensions of order and disorder at a higher level.

REAL POLITICKING

In the alternative, the characters can be immersed in a much more realistic version of Japan. Serious narratives that grapple with religion, class, and other difficult realities can be accomplished here. In the alternative, it can be approached from a more limited point of view, dealing with fewer of these concerns. It can be merely dealing with the realities of a corrupt daimyo or a very personal and grounded story of revenge.

This interpretation doesn't mean there will be no spirits or other fantastical creatures or features involved. Instead, they will be a lot less prevalent and the PCs are likely to be limited in how much they can utilize them to change the world around.

One such role-playing opportunity would be to set up the PCs as a daimyo and the close members of the court that advised and worked with him. This includes high-ranking samurai, counselors, and the like. They can be a part of one of the many civil wars that wracked Japan over the course of the feudal era or they could be under pressure from a larger clan, forced to pick their allies carefully to ensure their enemies don't defeat their clan.

Whatever their challenge, the realities of this era should continue to dawn on them. Life was brutal and the strange or bizarre were ostracized and punished. The movie *Silence*, about Jesuit Missionaries in a Japan hostile to Christianity, reflects one such interpretation of what this world could look like.

FEUDAL JAPAN

LAND OUTSIDE OF TIME

The isles of Japan were long defended from the outside world. Whether by the combination of weather and military efforts or just the ongoing security of the land, they remained isolated from the rest of the world. Regardless, during the feudal era when the Japanese first made contact with Europeans, it was viewed as an unknown world. Even the most immediate neighbors to Japan knew relatively little about what happened on the islands. This ignorance went two ways, using Hideyoshi as an example for the hubris of the Japanese shogun and emperors who misjudged the military might of outsiders. Had it not been for the dangerous waters surrounding Japan and the threats from other directions, the nation may not have survived for so long as an independent force.

In light of this, it could be possible to approach the roleplaying opportunities from different angles. Japanese culture and society could be remixed, with the player characters serving as outsiders attempting to make trade with and understand a different culture. In the alternative, the PCs could be citizens of some hitherto unknown island of Japan that has made contact with the rest of the nation, only to find the shogun or emperor eyeing up their particular stretch of land. They are forced to quickly get up to speed with the rest of the nation, trying to establish their own daimyo and feudal society and hold off the inevitable invasion.

Lest you think that some of these are especially farfetched, it was not too long ago that Japanese soldiers from World War II were found on some islands, unaware the war had ended.

MILITARY ROLE

As a result of the realities of the samurai, they formed the bulk of the Japanese military throughout much of feudal history. The rise of the ashigaru was a temporary affair, and it entirely reworked how militaries functioned for that brief period. During this smaller era, the ashigaru served as the backbone of the army. Compared to them, the samurai were the elite shock troops.

The roles within a battle were based largely around the weapons the samurai wielded. In romanticized portrayals of this era, they would quickly pair off for single combat against the opposing side. Though this did happen in reality, it was incredibly rare. In practice, the samurai fought in formations, just like every other military.

FEUDAL JAPAN GEAR

Within the Feudal era, it was often only the samurai who could bare and maintain weapons and armor. Only during relatively brief periods was the rest of society allowed to have weapons, such as during the rise of the ashigaru. Due to the legality of weapons and armor coming primarily from their nobility, samurai were required to purchase and maintain their arms and armor individually. The masses of samurai that operated in combat would often be equipped similarly, but not identically.

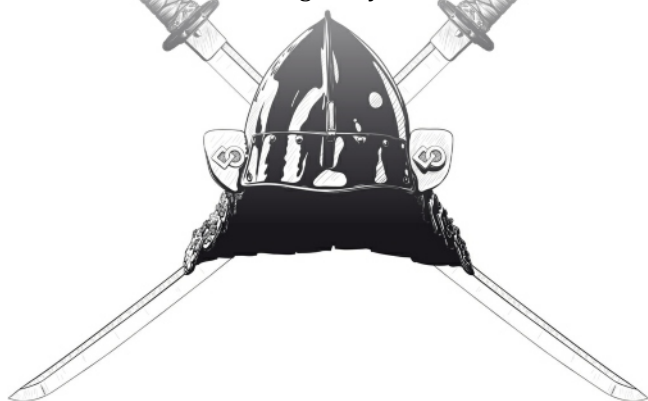
The rest of society was limited in what they could own and maintain. Weapons were, as a result, either easily hidden or repurposed farming implements. Both in myth and in reality, the weapons of the ninja were based around this sentiment.

FAMILY HEIRLOOMS

The weapons of the Japanese regularly became familial heirlooms, whether it was a katana passed down from father to son, or the yumi (longbow), or whatever else the family used in a not-too-distant battle. Despite the romantic considerations of this, there was regularly work for people to make new weapons. Whether it was because katana were broken or a younger sibling needed a weapon, there were always craftsmen on hand to create new and more weapons.

Though there were weapons that existed in the broad strokes elsewhere, many of them have specific differences unique to them. Whether it is the curved swords that are the katana, or the variations between the naginata and Western spears.

Samurai tended to focus on a specific weapon, seeking to master it as an art form. They would focus on doing everything they could to be absolute masters with their chosen weapon. This was often the katana; it was from this use as a staple weapon that it became the thing of myth.



MELEE WEAPONS

Bokken: Built in the same shape as the katana and other weapons within Japan, the bokken is a wooden approximation used for training. They are typically modeled after the katana, but other varieties exist. Despite lacking the lethality of a proper katana, few would want to be struck with one of these.

Chigiriki: This is a Japanese flail weapon consisting of a wooden handle or iron staff with an iron weight on the end of a chain.

Dai-Katana: The dai-katana is, in many ways, the Japanese version of the claymore. It is a gargantuan katana that needs to be wielded with two hands.

Kanabo: A large spiked or studded two-handed war club that was used by the samurai. Also wielded in myth by the oni, they were either made of wood with iron studs or spikes, or it was made from solid iron. They were often used to break the legs of horses and enemies.

Katana: Known by the less educated as the samurai sword, this is a slightly curved blade that has only one edge. They have a circular or squared grip that is long enough to accommodate two hands. Their production has been widely mythologized, and possession was

Kusarigama: A uniquely Japanese weapon, this consists of what is essentially a sickle connected by a

length of chain to a heavy weight. It was used by spinning it around then whipping it forward to entangle the enemy, and then they can finish them off with the sickle.

Naginata: A spear with a long katana-like blade. It was often used by warrior monks, resulting in a unique style of fighting.

Tanto: The tanto is a short knife that could be wielded by anyone within Japanese society. Women, in particular, were often allowed to wield these weapons in self-defense, even in eras when weapons were controlled.

Tessen: The Japanese war fan, the tessen are infamous in both Japanese folklore and in pop culture. They were used to signal and give orders on the battlefield, but could also be used in combat.

Wakizashi: A shorter and smaller knife, it's often (though not always) shaped like a miniature katana. Some were able to wield it in their offhand with a katana, while others kept them to use for seppuku. Like the tanto, they could be wielded by other members of society aside from the samurai, with many in the merchant class being allowed to own them.

Yari: The yari is a traditional Japanese spear with a long straight blade. They were wielded by either specialized samurai or foot troops.

FEUDAL JAPAN GEAR

MELEE WEAPONS TABLE

Type	Damage	Weight	Cost	Notes
Daitō Bokken	Str+d6	6	25	Nonlethal
Shoto Bokken	Str+d4	1	10	Nonlethal
Chigiriki	Str+d8	8	400	AP 1, Parry -1, Ignores shields
Dai-Katana	Str+d8+1	20	600	AP 1, Reach 1, 2 hands, Parry -1
Kanabo	Str+d10	25	500	2 hands, Parry -1, AP 2 vs rigid armor.
Katana	Str+d6+2	6	1000	AP 2
Kusarigama	Str+d8	5	300	Reach 2, 2 hands, Parry -2, Disarm +1
Naginata	Str+d6	25	600	AP 2, Reach 2, 2 hands
Tanto	Str+d4+1	3	150	AP 1, Can be thrown (use throwing knife rules)
Tessen	Str+d6	1	300	Parry +1
Wakizashi	Str+d4+1	4	300	AP 2
Yari	Str+d8	12	500	AP 1, Reach 2, 2 hands

RANGED WEAPONS

Arquebus: An early muzzle loaded firearm that was imported from Europe. They utilized a matchlock mechanism and were widely used by both Europeans and the Japanese in warfare until the middle of the 17th century. They were difficult to use; in warfare, users would stand in a line to account for the difficulty of hitting a target. **Note:** Two rounds to reload.

Yumi: The yumi is a specialized Japanese longbow. It is exceptionally tall, often standing more than two meters tall. It is also asymmetric, with one arm being significantly shorter than the other. Originally, it was developed for use while on horseback, with the lower arm being on the lower side to ensure the user could move it from side to side on the horse. **Note:** Can be used on horseback without any penalties, assuming the user can ride.

RANGED WEAPONS TABLE

Type	Range	Damage	RoF	Shots	Wt.	Min Str	Cost
Arquebus	15/30/60	2d6-1	1	1	15	d6	150
Yumi	15/30/60	2d6	1	1	5	d8	200

ARMOR

Beginning with lamellar armor and evolving over the years, the armor of the samurai was a unique and specific affair. Each individual would have their own custom armor, tailored and created for their own body. Each of them would include a customized helm specific for the samurai. Everyone from the specific designs to the colors to the decorations would be customized for that samurai.

As a result, the samurai were similar to the Western knights in that they were forces to be reckoned with on the battlefield. As they were the only individuals who could afford to risk horses in war, they were similarly more mobile.

The ashigaru, during their brief existence, had simplified and uniform armor. Each of them wore the same armor as the man next to them, an atypical situation for the history of Japan.

Despite these intricacies, Japanese armor was functionally leather and chain with small steel plates as part of them. Unless they were utilizing mythical or some type of specialized armor, they are unlikely to utilize any rules different from what can be found in the core rulebook.

Dou: The dou is the chest piece worn by the samurai. It is either a single piece of metal or made of several layered plates of whatever material the armor is made from.

Haidate: The haidate is thigh armor created using small armor plates of leather or iron attached to a cloth backing. It covers the legs and can be worn while on a horse

Kabuto: The kabuto refers to the helmets worn by the samurai. They served both a symbolic and practical role for the owner.

Kote: Kote refers to the gloves worn by the samurai. They were not as defen-

sive as European gauntlets, extend all the way to the shoulder, and made from cloth or chain with iron plates

Kusazuri: The kusazuri was the chain mail coif that went underneath the kabuto when wearing full samurai armor.

Sode: The shoulder guards worn by samurai. They are made from either iron or leather, like the rest of samurai armor.

Suneate: The suneate were the pieces of armor used to defend the front of the samurai's shins and lower legs. They are made from cloth or chain with iron plates fastened to it

FEUDAL JAPAN GEAR

ARMOR TABLE

Type	Armor	Weight	Cost	Notes
Chain Kote	+2	6	100	Covers arms
Chain Suneate	+2	6	100	Covers legs
Cloth Kote	+1	2	25	Covers arms, only protects against weapons of Str+d4 or less
Cloth Suneate	+1	5	25	Covers legs, only protects against weapons of Str+d4 or less
Iron Dou	+3	20	400	Covers torso
Iron Haidate	+3	13	200	Covers thighs and waist
Iron Kabuto	+3	7	150	Covers head and face
Kusazuri	+1	5	200	Can be worn under Dou and Kabuto. Stacks.
Leather Dou	+1	15	50	Covers torso
Leather Haidate	+1	10	50	Covers thighs and waist
Leather Kabuto	+1	5	50	Covers head and face

MUNDANE EQUIPMENT

Much like many societies around the world, what the rich and the poor had were drastically different. Typically only the highest of nobles had their own personal horses for riding, and many were limited to ponies for moving things around.

The easily accessible equipment within Japan is, in broad strokes, similar to the rest of the world. There are swords, farming implements, knives, etc. Digging down, however, one finds the key aesthetic and functional differences that have captured imaginations for generations.

FARMING IMPLEMENTS

Kama: The kama is a small sickle used by Japanese farmers for reaping crops, but was also used as an improvised weapon.

Ono: The ono is a Japanese hand-axe, utilized in one hand. It was essential-

ly a hatchet with a convex cutting edge.

Tobiguchi: The tobiguchi is a large smoke pipe that doubled as an improvised weapon like a club.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

HATTORI "THE DEMON" HANZO

Having long since become the thing of legends, Hattori has been reimagined countless times. In reality, he was a loyal samurai and ninja under Tokugawa Ieyasu. Born to relatively minor parents, he fought in his first battle at the age of 16. A nighttime assault on a castle, his participation in the battle was noted. Within about four years, he assisted with the daring rescue of some of Ieyasu's daughters in 1562. Seven years later, he led the successful siege against yet another enemy castle.

Having already demonstrated himself as an astute tactical mind, he was given a command of 150 men shortly before Oda Nobunaga's death. He protected his homeland of Iga, known as the homeland of the secretive ninja. Eventually, his defense would fail, but not before forcing Oda Nobunaga himself to come to lead his troops.

His position in history was solidified with the death of Nobunaga. Tokugawa Ieyasu was on the run, and it was only with Hattori's assistance that he was able to navigate through Iga homelands with extensive assistance from the local ninja clans. He went on from this to continue to serve Ieyasu and the Tokugawa clan, helping to solidify the Tokugawa shogunate.



HATTORI HANZO

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d6

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 6 (1)

Skills: Fighting d10, Knowledge (Battle) d8, Knowledge (Military Tactics) d8, Knowledge (Shinto Buddhism) d8, Notice d8, Persuasion d8

Edges: Charismatic, Command, Connections (Tokugawa), Inspire, Martial Prowess (Spear)

Hindrances: Cautious, Loyal, Outsider (Ninja)

Armor: Leather (torso, arms, legs +1)

Weapons: Naginata (Str+d6+d4, AP 2, Reach 2, 2 hands)

NON PLAYER CHARACTERS

Mannerisms: Few of his mannerisms have survived the histories and myths written about him. One of his most notable features was his fearlessness in the face of any enemies. Despite this fearlessness, the histories do not note his arrogance, and instead portray him almost like an incredibly loyal and competent bureaucrat.

Distinguishing Features: Much of the artwork that survives of Hattori is highly stylized. He is portrayed as being bald with a long goatee that comes down from his chin, both of which are black, with hints of grey as he ages.

ODA NOBUNAGA

Along with Hideyoshi and Ieyasu, Nobunaga is viewed as one of the three unifiers of Japan. He represents an interesting character within Japanese history; one who both recognizes and is willing to raise up those around him, such as noticing the talents of his sandal bearer who would become Hideyoshi, or through allying with the man who would become Tokugawa Ieyasu despite generations of tension and conflict between their clans.

Nobunaga's goal to unify Japan was known from a relatively early time, though it was not an uncommon one. Many daimyo had dreamed of unifying Japan, but Nobunaga is recognized as the first instance in a great period of time of an individual being capable of doing so.

From his father's death, including a rageful outburst at the funeral, Nobunaga was not the favored choice to take over the family. His mentor and teacher, ashamed at what had happened, committed seppuku in despair. This raised the issue of succession for the Nobunaga clan.

Despite the forces arrayed against him, Nobunaga arranged for a series of alliances within his own clan and brutally destroyed those who stood against him. He also took advantage of this period to create alliances with his neighbors, limiting the threats while he brought his own house into order.

The final pieces of unification of the Owari province, his place of power, included Nobunaga faking an illness to get close to his brother who had previously rebelled, then been subsequently pardoned, and who had planned to rebel again. Under the guise of this illness, he was able to get close enough to his brother to assassinate him, solidifying his control over the province and his own clan.

It was not long after this that enemies began to move against Nobunaga. Imagawa Yoshimoto was able to arrange 40,000 troops to march towards Nobunaga, utilizing very flimsy pretexts as a cover. Advisors recommended that Nobunaga force them to besiege him, but he responded that "only a strong offensive policy could make up for the superior numbers of the enemy." He was able to force the opposing force into combat they were not prepared for in a narrow gorge that limited the advantage they gained from their superior numbers. The battle was, ultimately, a conclusive one that quickly demoralized the Imagawa clan, including causing other clans to break free of them.

FEUDAL JAPAN



ODA NOBUNAGA

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Charisma: +4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8 (1)

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d10, Knowledge (Battle) d10, Notice d8, Persuasion d10

Edges: Charismatic, Command, Natural Leader, Noble

Hindrances: Mean, Vengeful

Armor: Leather (torso, arms, legs +1)

Weapons: Katana (Str+d6+2, AP 2)

From these key successes he continued on military campaigns to gain more land and, ultimately, seek to unify all of Japan. He forced other daimyo to swear their vassalage to him, either through military might or through political trickery.

By the time of his death, he had unified much of Honshu under his rule, putting him in a position where many expected him to finally unify Japan. Even though he was never able to bring his goals to final fruition, it did establish the foundation that his successors were able to finally unify Japan.

Mannerisms: Renowned for his bitter wrath, it was not uncommon for Nobunaga to extract severe vengeance against those who had wrong him in the past. A brutal man, he still inspired great loyalty in his followers

Distinguishing Features: Existing paintings depict Nobunaga with a very slight, dark moustache and his black hair in the style of the traditional samurai topknot.

TOKUGAWA IEYASU

The founder and first shogun of what would be the last shogunate to rule over Japan, Ieyasu has been subject to the intense level of mythologizing that nearly every major figure in feudal Japanese history incurs. Due to the assistance that he received from the ninja clans of Iga, some have suggested he was a ninja, while others portrayed him as a tactical savant.

The name he took in 1567, and the one he is arguably most famous for (Tokugawa Ieyasu) is a claim of direct descent from the Minamoto clan of Japanese history, though there has been no proof of this claim. During his early life and rule, he adeptly managed alliances and deals to ensure his clan could grow in strength.

Throughout Ieyasu's military career, he was benefitted by the deaths of various military leaders that stood against him. In some tellings of his history, particular-



NON PLAYER CHARACTERS

ly those that are stylized or romanticized, these are further evidence of the involvement of ninja or other forces to assist in his rise to power.

It was in late 1582 that Ieyasu learned of the death of Oda Nobunaga, a period when he was far from his own territory. He managed the dangerous journey back to his own lands, avoiding military forces that were hunting him. Both he and Hideyoshi were attempting to take revenge on Nobunaga's killer, essentially hoping to further legitimize himself in order to take power. By the end of the year, Hideyoshi was already cementing his power and position. Ieyasu took advantage of this opportunity to conquer some of Nobunaga's former vassals, further strengthening his position.

Throughout the period of Hideyoshi's rule, Ieyasu served as an ostensibly loyal vassal to the new shogun, despite backing a different heir than Hideyoshi was. They eventually came to peace, though it was five years before the new shogun was willing to accept him as an ally in battle.

Mannerisms: Serving as a sort of ideal ruler by some accounts, Ieyasu certainly possessed a number of qualities that enabled and ensured his rise to power. He was capable of both being incredibly careful and bold, both when the proper time called for it. Within a single war, he would shift alliances based on the changing situation. Despite this, he was also renowned for his loyalty, never turning against Oda Nobunaga once he had pledged loyalty to the man. He also protected many former Takeda retainers, knowing they were only following orders and the dictates of their code of conduct. He was also capable of turning former enemies into loyal followers, taking many of the retainers of defeated enemies into his inner circle.

His favorite pastime was falconry, also adopting a great number of scholarly pursuits late in life.

Distinguishing Features: Ieyasu was often portrayed in artwork as having a long ponytail of dark hair, and a slight moustache and beard.



TOKUGAWA IEYASU

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d12, Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d6

Charisma: +4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (2)

Skills: Fighting d8, Knowledge (Battle) d8, Notice d8, Persuasion d10

Edges: Charismatic, Command, Followers, Level Headed, Luck, Natural Leader, Noble, Tactician

Hindrances: Code of Honor, Loyal

Armor: Chainmail (torso, arms, legs 2), helm (head 3, 50% vs. called head shot)

Weapons: Katana (Str+d6+2, AP 2)

SNOWED IN

BACKSTORY

Travelling was a rarity during Edo era Japan, but it did happen from time to time. There were various inns and other establishments set up along the way to assist weary travelers during their journey. In this particular adventure, each of the player characters has some reason to be at this particular inn, nestled within a mountain pass. Perhaps they are travelling monks, spreading the good word of their religion (covertly or overtly); perhaps they are ronin looking for their next job; perhaps they are messengers who have been snowed in.

Whatever the reason, they reach the inn as snow begins pelting down on them. A blizzard is undeniably blowing in, and they must stay at the inn or risk dying. Between the nature of mountain passes and the vicious nature of this storm, who knows how long they will be trapped at the inn.

The difficulty arises, however, when people start to die. With no way to escape, and the bodies mounting, they need to get to the bottom of the killings before it is too late.

INVESTIGATING

There are multiple ways the heroes could arrive at the inn. It could be an opportunity for the party to have their first meetings or it could serve as an interlude during their adventures. Whatever the situation, this is a standalone adventure that keeps the party severely limited in their choice of actions.

The world of Japanese culture throughout the Edo period pays strict attention to societal class and a group should make a determination in advance of whether or not they will engage with this. It can be a fun and enlightening experience to explore issues of class, culture, and gender, but that isn't necessarily fun for everyone. As a result, expectations should be managed in advance about whether these issues are going to be hand-waved away or whether they will be an important part of the mission.

THE INN

Though the players are stranded at the inn, it is not a single building they are limited to. There are eight separate buildings to contend with; the main building (home to the entrance hall, kitchen, and eating area); the stables (a small affair that can only deal with a small number of horses); the ofuru (two bathhouses, segregated by gender, that lead to small hot springs); and four buildings with sleeping rooms.

The buildings are all oriented around a central area. During the spring through the autumn, it is a small garden for aesthetic purposes. The area surrounding the collection of inn buildings has some vegetable gardens and some support for chickens to help supplement the food the innkeepers purchase.

Day to day operations of the inn are a fairly subdued affair. A husband and wife, along with their two daughters (an eighteen- and a fifteen-year old) own and run the inn. They each take part in the various duties involved with maintaining the inn; everything from basic cleaning and maintenance to cooking the shared meals and preparing tea and sake.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

As with any good murder mystery, there is a cast of people stranded at the inn along with the main characters. After this section are the details about the order of which people will die, and revelations about who is behind the murder. GMs should be certain the players do not read beyond this section.

INNKEEPER'S FAMILY



FUJIMA

The father of the family, Fujima cares incredibly deeply for his inn and family. It has remained in the family for generations and his greatest concern is the lack of children, especially sons, to take over. The family has shrunk too much, and they are in danger. As a result, he will do anything to protect the inn, including trying to downplay the murders.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8,

Spirit d4, Strength d4, Vigor d4

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4;

Toughness: 4

Skills: Fighting d4, Notice d6

Edges: Charismatic

Hindrances: Cautious, Loyal

Armor: None

Weapons: None



OKUDA

Fujima's wife, she is similarly devoted to the inn and her children. Her view of the world is one that is fairly bleak and she feels it is becoming an inevitability that the inn collapses due to their lack of family. She's skeptical of outsiders who come in, worried they are distant relations circling like vultures.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d10,

Spirit d4, Strength d4, Vigor d4

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 2;

Toughness: 4

Skills: Notice d8

Edges: Charismatic

Hindrances: Cautious, Loyal

Armor: None

Weapons: None

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HANO

The youngest of the two daughters who work at the inn, she is a mere thirteen years old. For a young woman of the age and class, she is well-educated, though this means little more than being adept at arithmetic, Buddhist teachings, and knowledge about the area. She is incredibly shy and, unfortunately, the first to die.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6,

Spirit d4, Strength d4, Vigor d4

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 2;

Toughness: 4

Skills: Notice d4

Edges: Attractive

Hindrances: Cautious

Armor: None

Weapons: None



ORIO

The eldest of the two daughters, she entertains dreams of marrying up in society. Though she's relatively realistic about the world, she's still hoping to socially climb. If there is a member of the party she, as a nineteen year old, would be interested in and is of a slightly higher social status than her, she will attempt a courtship, which the PC can choose to engage in or not.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d8,

Spirit d4, Strength d4, Vigor d4

Charisma: +4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 2;

Toughness: 4

Skills: Notice d6

Edges: Attractive, Charismatic

Hindrances: Cautious, Loyal

Armor: None

Weapons: None

COURTESAN AND HER GUARDS



MAWATARI AYAKA

A member of the inner court of a daimyo, she is on her way back to Satsuma from Kyoto. Her relocation is part of political infighting and shifts, and she is, in part, being demoted. She will do everything she can to avoid talking about it and keep her distance from everyone else. It is unlikely any of the characters are at the same social status as she is, and she will want to maintain that difference. If they are a member of the nobility, or a higher ranked samurai, she attempts to enforce class lines and seek their approval. Ultimately, she's a vain, preening creature and is feeling threatened by her changing social status.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6,

Spirit d8, Strength d4, Vigor d4

Charisma: +6; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 2;

Toughness: 4

Skills: Notice d4

Edges: Charismatic, Very Attractive

Hindrances: Doubting Thomas,

Greedy

Armor: None

Weapons: None



KUBA

Kuba is one of the two bodyguards assigned to ensure Ayaka is safe during her travel back to the castle in Hokkaido. He is a relatively low ranking samurai and is comfortable with his place in the world. By and large, he is taciturn and unconcerned with the world around him other than his place in it. Any attempts at politicking are be ignored.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4,
Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d4
Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6;
Toughness: 4
Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6
Edges: Martial Prowess (Katana)
Hindrances: Bushido, Fatalism
Armor: None
Weapons: Katana (Str+d6+2+d4,
AP 2)



RYOMA

The other of the samurai that serves as a bodyguard to Ayaka, Ryoma is brash and outspoken where Kuba is soft-spoken. Though he is, similarly, ranked low within the samurai class, he believes he is destined for greater things. Whether through merit, clever politicking, or some other avenue, he believes he will be able to rise above.

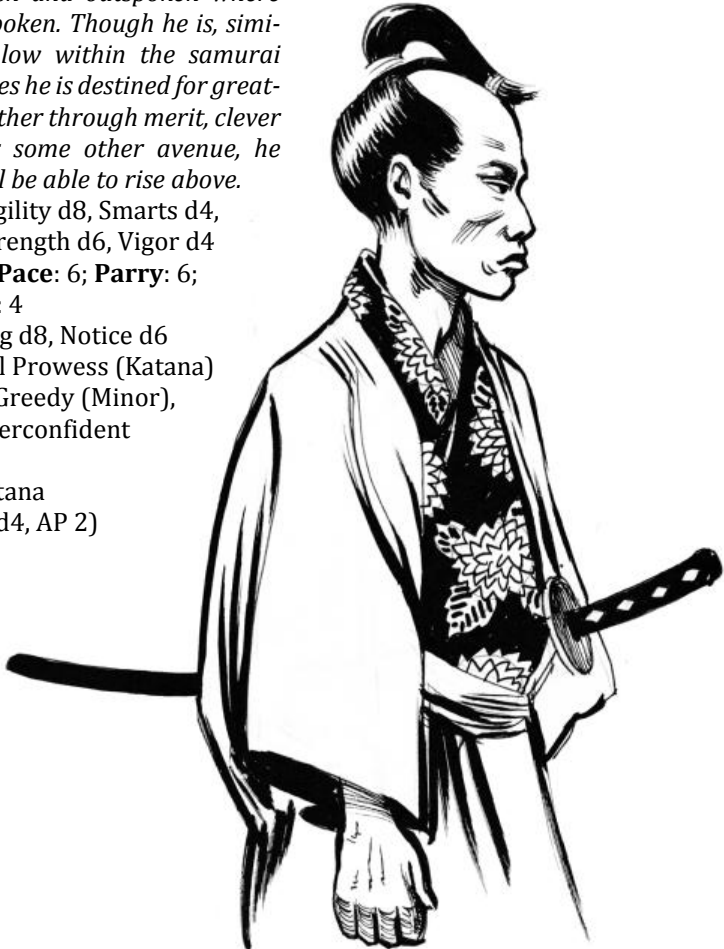
Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4,
Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d4
Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6;
Toughness: 4
Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6
Edges: Martial Prowess (Katana)
Hindrances: Greedy (Minor),
One Eye, Overconfident
Armor: None
Weapons: Katana
(Str+d6+2+d4, AP 2)

MERCHANT



MUNEYAKI

One of the few travelling merchants of Japan, MuneYaki is traveling to pedal his wares. He has three donkeys in the stable that are, when traveling, laden down with things for him to sell. Since he is so low in society, but makes relatively good money, he is almost too nice. Skeptical people may suspect he is hiding something, but in reality it is little more than the occasional frustration with a customer he is hiding.



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Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d8,
Spirit d4, Strength d4, Vigor d4
Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4;
Toughness: 4
Skills: Fighting d4, Notice d8,
Persuasion d10, Streetwise d10
Edges: Charismatic
Hindrances: Loyal
Armor: None
Weapons: Club (Str+d4)



IKKU

Muneyaki's son, Ikku is as prickly and easily outspoken as his father is easygoing and friendly. Taken out to assist with his father's business, he is a closeted Christian. From learning, in secret, about how European societies function, he is incredibly disillusioned with Japan and has not yet grown wise enough to hide his feelings, though he is quite adept at hiding his underlying beliefs.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d10,
Spirit d6, Strength d4, Vigor d4
Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4;
Toughness: 4
Skills: Fighting d4, Notice d4
Edges: Luck
Hindrances: Curious, Yellow
Armor: None
Weapons: Club (Str+d4)



HOKICHI

A ronin, Hokichi has been hired to help guard Muneyaki and Ikku during their travels. He has worked for Muneyaki before on numerous occasions and enjoys him as an employer. The tensions between him and Ikku, however, have neared breaking point even before the blizzard blew in. Confined to the close environs, it won't be long until a fight between the two of them breaks out.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4,
Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6;
Toughness: 5
Skills: Fighting d8, Healing d6, Notice
d6, Streetwise d6, Survival d6
Edges: Martial Prowess (Katana)
Hindrances: Bushido, Fatalism, Ronin
Armor: None
Weapons: Katana (Str+d6+2+d4,
AP 2)



NAKAZO

Unlike Hokichi, Nakazo has not done this work before. Until recently, he had served a distant daimyo. Recent conflicts have resulted in the daimyo being slain and his son, a young child, taking over in his place. Several samurai were dismissed from service in disgrace, and Nakazo was one such individual. He bristles under his new position in life and is likely to take his frustration out on others.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4,
Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d6
Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6;
Toughness: 5
Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6
Edges: Martial Prowess (Katana)
Hindrances: Mean, Outsider, Ronin
Armor: None
Weapons: Katana (Str+d6+2+d4,
AP 2)

THE REST



IKEDA

A traveling ronin, Ikeda is little more than a traveling drunkard with a sword. Prone to bitter comments and cutting insights towards others, he is not a pleasant individual to be around. Despite this unpleasant nature, he is merciful. For the right price, which he is

happy to negotiate, he will either help out with combat or be willing to take on another role entirely. Ultimately, his guiding light is the bottom line or, failing that, alcohol.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d4
Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6;
Toughness: 4
Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6, Survival d6
Edges: Martial Prowess (Katana)
Hindrances: Fatalism, Habit (Alcohol) (Minor), Outsider, Ronin
Armor: None
Weapons: Katana (Str+d6+2+d4, AP 2)



SHUSUI

The murderer himself, this monk is actually a supernatural entity devouring the young to ensure he can continue living. So long as he is able to continue killing and consuming the life of the young, he can continue his life.

In essence, he is an unusual kami of the winter and entropy. While sentient, he is utterly uncaring about the life of individual humans. He would care about widespread destruction, and has actually saved individual people in the past. His intelligence, however, is inhuman in how it operates. It is his nature to kill humans and he won't stop because of something like human morals.

The deaths are all along the same methodology. They appear to have been jumped from behind and knocked unconscious by blunt force to the back of the head. Their bodies appear to be suffering from severe frostbite around their mouths, regardless of where they have been found. This is because the magic he uses to pull the soul out of a person's

body requires them to be rendered unconscious. Sleep is not sufficient, as they can wake up during the process. The nature of the magic causes the frostbite.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d8
Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8;
Toughness: 6; **Power Points:** 20
Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d8, Spellcasting d8, Stealth d8, Survival d8
Edges: Martial Prowess (Katana), Martial Prowess (Staff)
Hindrances: Elderly (until he consumes someone; then this Hindrance goes away), Mean

Armor: None
Weapons: Staff (Str+d4+d4. Parry +1, Reach 2, 2 hands)
Powers: confusion, elemental manipulation (water and ice only), telekinesis

Special Abilities

- **Fearless:** Immune to fear and Intimidation.
- **Hardy:** Does not suffer a wound from being Shaken twice.
- **Immunity (Cold & Ice):** Is immune to the effects of cold and ice.
- **Regeneration:** [Slow] May make a natural healing roll once per day to recover wounds. [Fast] Becomes Fast Regeneration after consuming someone: may attempt a natural healing roll every round unless wounds were caused by fire or flame.
- **Wall Walker:** Can walk on vertical surfaces at its Pace.

FEUDAL JAPAN



EIEN

They are a common feature during this era, the messengers that travel across the islands of Japan to spread edicts, important messages, mail, contracts, and more. They form an uneasy bond amongst themselves, standing in such an odd position in society. They are able to see much of the islands, moving information about as they do. This particular messenger is young and impressionable, unsure about his duty.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d4, Vigor d6

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4;

Toughness: 5

Skills: Fighting d4, Notice d4, Stealth d6

Edges: None

Hindrances: Curious, Illiterate, Outsider

Armor: None

Weapons: None



YUIFUM

The second of the two messengers, Yuifum is the older one. The appearance of being a messenger is actually a lie, however, and he is secretly a Christian, attempting to spread the religion and secure it within Japan in this time that is hostile towards it. As a result, the messenger cover is not as deep as he would likely need it to be. Being trapped within the inn puts him at risk, and he is incredibly secretive as a result.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d4, Strength d4, Vigor d6

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7;

Toughness: 5

Skills: Fighting d8, Healing d6, Knowledge (Christianity) d4, Knowledge (European Studies) d6, Stealth d8, Survival d4

Edges: Martial Prowess (Staff)

Hindrances: Outsider, Vow (Christian Missionary), Wanted (For Christian Beliefs)

Armor: None

Weapons: Staff (Str+d4+d4. Parry +1, Reach 2, 2 hands)

TIMELINE

The entire adventure should play out like a murder mystery. Feel free to remix the order of events, especially if the heroes start making major changes. The events as follows are, in essence, what happens if the PCs are a passive audience. As you can see, many of the NPCs can easily be driven to violence or murder. Depending on what the characters do, the entire situation can quickly devolve into a Tarantino style bloodbath.

SNOWED IN

Day	Period	Event
1	Morning	Everyone has arrived at the inn by the morning, or over the previous night, and has awoken to the blizzard blowing in.
	Afternoon	Nothing major happens – the players can meet some of the NPCs, establish themselves, and so on.
	Evening	There is a dinner that everyone is invited to. It is a friendly enough affair, though a fight breaks out between Ikku and Hokichi.
	Night	The first murder takes place – Hano is killed when she goes out to relieve herself in the middle of the night.
2	Morning	The Christian does not appear at breakfast, and the younger messenger spreads gossip about him being odd, for a messenger. Hano is found murdered, tensions rise, and the parents inexplicably try to pass it off as “just a thing that happens” (trying not to scare guests)
	Afternoon	Ryoma and Koba get into an argument within the communal eating area while playing a game. The Courtesan watches, but does not become involved. The PCs can break it up, but it doesn’t come to blood otherwise.
	Evening	The Buddhist monk offers to lead a prayer that night,
	Night	The second murder takes place – Orio is killed in the bedroom that she and Hano shared.
3	Morning	The owners of the inn break down with both of their kids now dead. They continue to operate the inn, but are functionally in a state of automatism. If there is any hope of the murderer being caught, they offer what little they can in terms of a reward.
	Afternoon	Tensions are high and most people are trying to keep to themselves. The heroes can use this time to interrogate
	Evening	Everyone is forced to come together for the evening meal. The owners of the inn are in shock, so the meal is not particularly appetizing. Muneyaki and Fujima drink heavily and it is not long before they are very drunk.
	Night	Ikku is killed outside the bathhouse. At the time, the Courtesan was in the female hot springs, and Ikku was going to spy on her. One of her guards was nearby, keeping her safe, but he did not see the murder. Ayaka discovers the body on her way out of the bathhouse and screams, alerting everyone nearby. It is during this period the PCs might notice Yuifum and Shusui are both relatively unaffected by the cold.

FEUDAL JAPAN

Day	Period	Event
4	Morning	Tensions continue to rise, and the NPCs create alliances. Employment contracts might be strained and depending on the actions of the PCs, things could quickly start to fall apart. Though they still eat together, the lines quickly become quite clear.
	Afternoon	Everyone retreats to their own areas, ensuring they are prepared for any attacks. Trust has broken down and the innkeepers are mere shells of who they were.
	Evening	It is a time of sharpening weapons and stealing knives from the kitchen. Everyone attempts to arm themselves and ensure their alliances are secure. Panic is in the air; it is only a matter of time before things unravel.
	Night	Attempted murder takes place – the youngest PC is attacked at some point during the night while they are secluded, if possible. If there is no opportunity, the younger messenger is killed instead.
5	Morning	Almost no one comes to breakfast in the morning. The players can turn on Shusui or can try to turn others to their cause. Whether he is found out or not, Shusui tries to turn the other NPCs against the heroes, arguing they are outsiders and using anything he can against them.
	Afternoon	If violence has not already broken out, the afternoon has the feeling of the calm before a battle. The storm has stopped, but the weather is still cold. In the bright sunlight the snow is soft enough to make snowballs out of, not that it wouldn't be.
	Evening	No one comes to dinner instead fortifying themselves within rooms and other areas of the inn they feel they can keep safe. Small scuffles break out, but unless the PCs do something, none rise to the level of fights to the death.
	Night	If the younger messenger has not been killed, he are killed on this night. Otherwise no murder takes place.
6	Morning	Outsiders make their way to the inn, signaling the pass is now open. There is a lack of proper authority at the moment and all survivors are incredibly tense. They all go their separate ways and it doesn't take long until they have all gone.

The murderer, if not yet caught, escapes.



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