

The Structure of Feudal Japan

Social Class	Social, Political and Economic Context
<p>Emperor The chief of several clans or family groups called <i>ubi</i> became the Emperor when one of his class took political power.</p>	<p>The <i>Emperor</i> and the imperial family had the highest social status. He was a figurehead, a leader in name only. He was the religious leader, but had little political power, and in reality was under control of the shogun's clan. Economically, the people of all other classes of society provided for the Emperor and his court.</p>
<p>Shogun The shogun was part of the warrior class, and considered to be a noble.</p>	<p>The <i>shogun</i> was the military leader of the most powerful of the Emperor's clans. The clans often fought to acquire this high social status. The shogun was the actual political ruler. He had a high social status and those of the other classes provided for his economic needs in return for protection and privileges (e.g., a small portion of land, some of the produce of the land).</p>
<p>Daimyos The daimyos were part of the warrior class. They were nobles at the top of the samurai class. Daimyo translates to mean "great names."</p>	<p>The <i>daimyos</i> were the shogun's representatives. They ran the estates according to the shogun's rules. Their swords were their most valuable possessions because they were required to use them often to demonstrate their loyalty to the shogun. They had high social status as members of the warrior class. They lived in huge castles surrounded by moats.</p>
<p>Samurai The samurai were members of the warrior class.</p>	<p>The <i>samurai</i> were professional warriors of the military aristocracy. They were loyal to the shogun and daimyos, in whose castles they resided. Their position gave them fairly high social status, but little political power. Their economic needs were met by lower classes similar to the arrangement with the daimyos and the shogun.</p>
<p>Ronin The ronin were paid soldiers whose loyalty was with the leader they defended at the time.</p>	<p>The <i>ronin</i> were wandering samurai who had no daimyos. They worked as body guards for rich merchants or as paid soldiers during civil war. They had low social status, no political power and depended on others for their economic well-being.</p>
<p>Peasants The peasants were the largest class, constituting 90% of the population.</p>	<p>The peasants included farmers and fishermen. They had very low social status, no political power and were very poor. They were valued because they produced the food for all other classes, and often made the material for clothing. The peasants paid taxes to the daimyos and shogun in the form of rice and work. Often peasants starved when they had to give up more than two-thirds of the year's crops to the upper classes in return for being able to remain on the land.</p>

<p>Artisans The artisans were the craftspeople who made a variety of wood and metal products to meet the needs and wants of the other classes.</p>	<p>The artisan crafted a variety of products including art, cooking pots, fish hooks, farm tools, utensils, ship anchors and swords. The artisans, who were well-known for their exceptional swords, were highly respected. However, on the whole, this class was not as respected as peasants because they did not produce food.</p>
<p>Merchants The merchants sold goods and produce made by others.</p>	<p>The merchants were of very low social status and seen as unimportant because they produced nothing of value and lived off the efforts of others' work. So low was the respect for these sellers that, often, they were made to live in separate locations and not allowed to mix with other classes except to do business.</p>