

Slide 1

Who was Who in Japan

Who was WHO in Japan?



The Role of Emperor in Japanese Society



The First Emperor

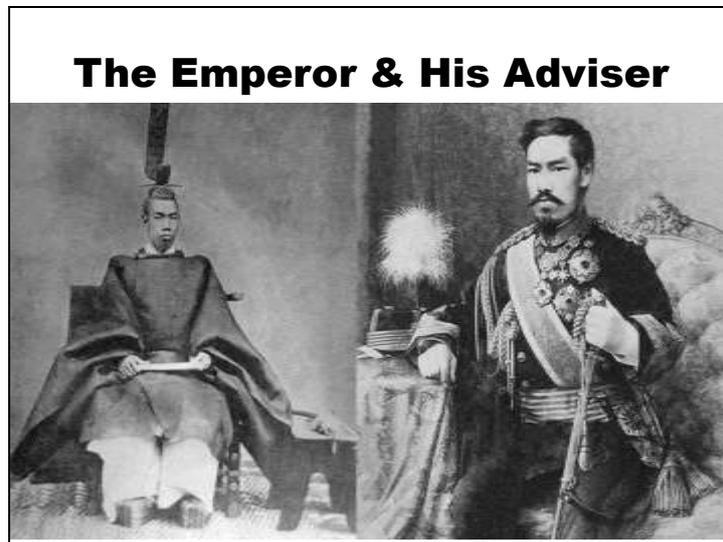
^ Every emperor of Japan, from Jimmu's time to present day, have been directly related to Jimmu and therefore, a descendant of the gods.

The slide features a central illustration of the First Emperor, Jimmu, depicted as a warrior in traditional armor, holding a bow and arrow. To the right of the illustration is a vertical strip showing a map of Japan and a blue wave graphic. The text is presented in a mix of bold black font and blue italicized font.

Notes

Japan enjoys a unique historical fact in being the only country in the world today whose national leader (the Emperor) can boast a continuous and unbroken bloodline right back over two and a half thousand years to 600BC, to the country's first Emperor Jimmu. Over that extensive period of time, for all but the last 75 years, the Japanese people fervently believed that their Emperor possessed magical powers and had the crucially important ability to be able to converse with their country's numerous spirit gods / kamis.

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Notes

Because Japan's Emperors were believed to possess unique magical powers and had the ability to converse with their Shinto spirits and gods, it was therefore considered beneath him to become involved in the day-to-day affairs of governing and running of the country.

As a consequence the mundane matters of 'governing' were left to the Emperors' advisors.

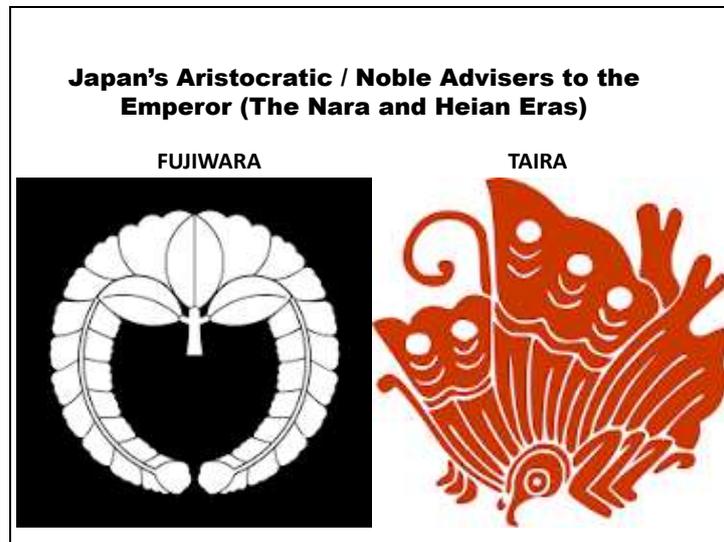
It must be emphasized that the position of key adviser to the Emperor was a most powerful one, as it allowed that adviser to promulgate laws in the name of the Emperor that were to the advantage of his own family or clan.

For example, in matters of taxation, trade and foreign policy, which applied to the whole Japanese nation, an adviser to the Emperor could make laws that gave his family special rights – and they did take advantage!

Because the position of chief adviser (Regent) to the Emperor was so advantageous, it was the one that was most sought after.

In fact, in a nutshell, it is basically that struggle for the position to be the adviser to the Emperor that most of Japan's modern history has been all about!

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Notes

Although the Japanese Emperor appeared to have sovereign 'power', in reality for nearly 300 years the real decision making power was in the hands of the heads of the Fujiwara clan, a powerful and wealthy aristocratic family who had intermarried with the imperial family.

During that period the Fujiwara clan adopted a policy of maintaining attachment to the imperial family through the marriage of Fujiwara daughters to emperors.

This meant that the Fujiwara daughters were empresses, that their grandsons and nephews were emperors, and that members of their family, including its lesser branches, received royal patronage. Thus, the Fujiwara clan chieftain, whether he held office or not, could effectively manipulate the reins of government, and ensure his clansmen increased their economic interests.



Notes

However, it was this largesse that eventually led to the downfall of the Japan's aristocratic families and the loss of their role of as regent advisers to the Emperors.

The aristocratic / noble families had done so well in terms of increasing their ownership of villages and rice paddies, that by about 700 AD they had an increasing need to protect their widespread economic assets from marauding thieves and rebellious tenant farmers.

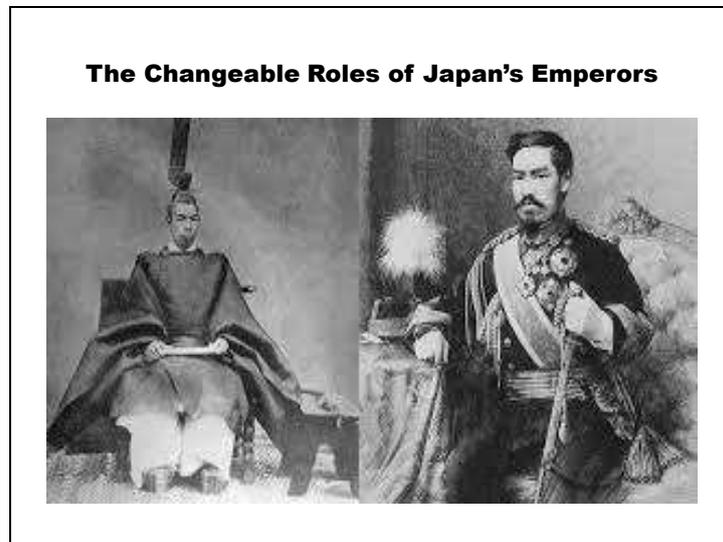
The Fujiwara gained the military protection they sought by creating a new class of warriors / soldiers recruited from other less fortunate aristocratic families, which saw the beginnings of the creation of the Samurai class, who carried out those necessary warrior type functions for the elite noble family.

However over the course of the next 400 years of the Heian (peace) period, this emerging samurai warrior class gradually increased its influence to the point where by in 1185 AD more than 350 militarily strong Daimyos (Samurai Land Lords) came to own and control the bulk of Japan's arable land.

The strongest of these Daimyo, Minamoto, defeated the nobles in battle and established the first Shogunate and government at Kamakura. In so doing he also took over the key role of ensuring his clan provided the Emperor with his future advisers.

For the next nearly 700 years until 1868, three Shogunate families would carry out that key role of adviser to the Emperor of Japan, while the Emperor himself would remain a mere figurehead and puppet.

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Notes

The role of the Emperor of Japan has historically alternated between a mostly ceremonial symbolic role, interspersed with short periods where they acted as actual imperial rulers.

After the establishment of the first shogunate in 1192, the Emperors of Japan have rarely taken on a role as supreme battlefield commander, unlike many European monarchs.

Japanese Emperors have nearly always been controlled by external political players, to varying degrees. In fact, between 1195 and 1867, although they were nominally appointed by the Emperor, the shōguns were the *de facto* rulers of Japan.

After the Meiji Restoration in 1867, however, the Meiji Constitution of 1889 ordained that the Emperor was the embodiment of all sovereign power in the Japanese nation.

The emperor was 'sacred and inviolable' and sovereignty rested with him as the Head of the Empire. He commanded the armed forces, declared war and concluded treaties. All laws required his sanction and enforcement. And yet he still had no real political power; his main role was to ratify and give the imperial stamp of approval to decisions made by his ministers.

However, with the enactment of the 1947 post war Japanese Constitution, the role of Emperor again limited as it was returned to that of a ceremonial head of state without even nominal political powers, which remains the case today.

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Notes

Right up until 1945 the Japanese people believed their Emperors possessed unique magical powers and had the ability to converse with their Shinto spirits and gods.

As mentioned previously, because an Emperor had god these like powers it was considered beneath him to become involved in the day-to-day running of the country, and such mundane matters were left to the Emperors' ministers and advisors.

However there were some exceptions in Japanese history. In the period between the 7th and 8th centuries several emperors (Tenji, Shotoku and Kammu) each tried (but failed) to bring the Japan's regional clans under central Imperial control.

However the question can be asked as to whether or not one of Japan's most recent Emperors also sought to have a direct involvement in the temporal affairs of government.

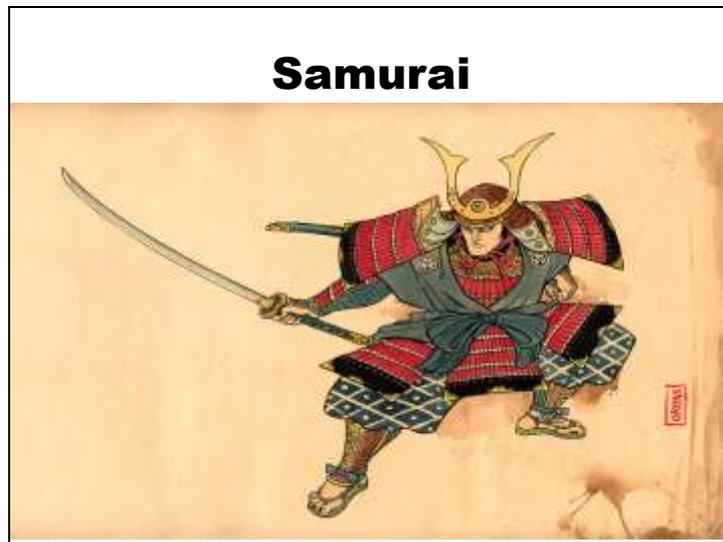
Following Japan's aggression in World War II, some historians assert that in the lead up and during that conflict, Japan's **Emperor Hirohito** may have played a direct and hands on role in determining aspects of Japanese foreign and military policy.

Indeed that belief was so strong in some quarters that at the conclusion to the War, the Commonwealth Government of Australia sought to have Hirohito prosecuted for war crimes.

The question whether Emperor Hirohito had a hands-on role in Japanese military affairs during the War is one that you may wish to consider and draw your own conclusions.

Who was WHO in Japan?





Origins of the Samurai

The word “samurai” roughly translates to “those who serve.”

As mentioned previously, during the Heian Period (794-1185) a number of **aristocratic families** such as the Fujiwara clan began the practice of retaining warriors to protect their widespread property interests from bandits and rebellious farmers throughout Japan’s rice growing provinces.

Many of these early samurai were men who left the imperial court to seek their own fortunes because their families were effectively shut out of power by the dominance of the aristocratic Fujiwara & Taira clans.

An unintended consequence of this practice however was that the numbers and power of the samurai class gradually grew to the point where, by the end of the era, more than 350 militarily strong Samurai had evolved to become Daimyos (War Lords & large land owners) who controlled the bulk of Japan’s arable land.

Many of the stronger Daimyo came to covet the idea that they would like to have the role of key adviser to the Emperor, along with the power that position entailed.

We will learn more about the Daimyo shortly.

**The War Between the
Aristocrats and the Warriors
for the Position of Adviser to
the Throne**

The Gempei War (1180-1185)

The Taira Clan

V

The Minamoto Clan

The Gempei War (1180 > 1185)



Notes

The **Gempei War** (1180-1185) pitted two of Japan's great family clans – the then dominant aristocratic **Taira family** and the militaristic **Daimyo Minamoto clan** against each other in a struggle for control of the Japanese state.

The war ended when one of the most famous samurai heroes in Japanese history, **Minamoto no Yoshitsune**, led his clan to victory against the Taira clan.

As Japan's most powerful Daimyo (war lord) Yoshitsune took the title Shogun (Supreme War Lord) as well as the role of key adviser to the Emperor, thereby replacing the aristocratic Taira family.

Thus at the beginning of the 12th century, real political power in Japan shifted away from the emperor and his nobles in Kyoto to the country's most powerful Daimyo / war lord.

This resulted in the formation of the first Shogunate (Minamoto) in 1192 AD and the beginning of Japan's 700 hundred years feudal period, in which three successive Shogunates would rule up until the beginning of Japan's modern era in 1868.

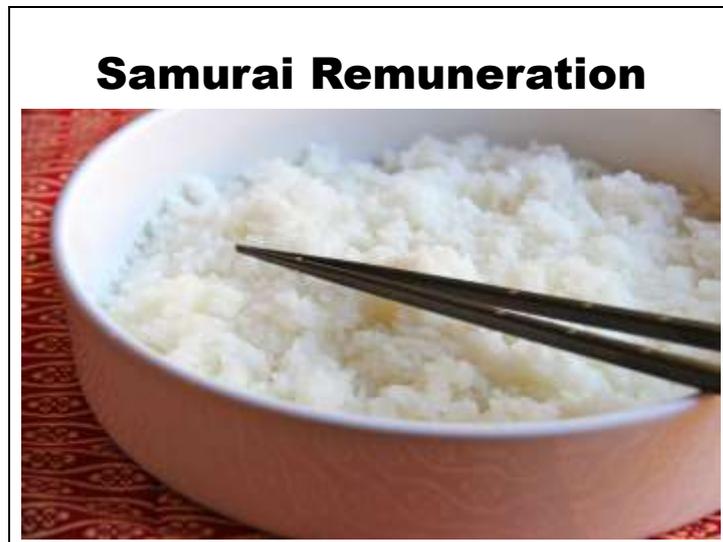
More importantly, the traditional samurai code of honour, discipline and morality known as **bushido**—or “the way of the warrior”— became the basic code of conduct for much of Japanese society.

A Samurai Katana Sword



Notes

During the first Shogunate the sword came to have a great significance in samurai culture. A man's honour was said to reside in his sword, and the craftsmanship of swords—including carefully hammered blades, gold and silver inlays and sharkskin handgrips—became an art in itself.



Notes

In a strongly hierarchical society it should not surprise to find that in the strict Japanese feudal system there were different levels of samurai.

During the first two Shogunates, samurai were designated as **Gokenin samurai** (full time warriors) or **Jizamurai samurai** (part time warriors).

Gokenin were retained by their Daimyo as full time warriors in his castles, while Jizamurai lived in the Daimyo's villages where they farmed (planted / harvested) for part of the year, and were available to fight for their Daimyo / Lords at other times.

Samurai received their remuneration in the form of a wage, paid 3-4 times a year in *koku*, and the amount of the stipend determined their status.

The income of a samurai in *koku* also directly influenced what a samurai could be expected to provide for themselves or others.

A 50-*koku* Jizamurai (part time) samurai was expected to support his family and provide his own arms and equipment when called to serve his lord / daimyo.

a 300-*koku go-kenin* (full time) samurai would also be required to provide one spearman, one armour-bearer, one groom, one sandal-bearer, one *hasamibako*-bearer, and one baggage carrier to serve his lord / daimyo.

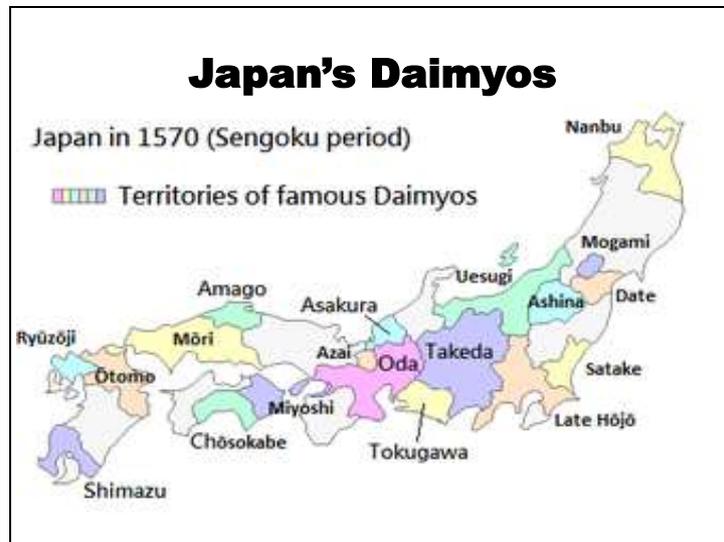
In a society where rice was the key medium for remunerating samurai, a daimyo with extensive fertile rice producing land holdings was clearly potentially much stronger from

both a financial and a military perspective than other daimyo with smaller and less productive holdings.

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Notes

Initially the Daimyo were the ex-aristocratic class military lords who began taking control and legal jurisdiction of the province sized land estates into which Japan had become divided from the 8th century on.

The Japanese word *daimyo* is derived from *dai* (“large”) and *myō* (“private land”).

Under the second Shogunate (Asikaga) the Daimyo were appointed as military governors of their regions (hans), where they collected taxes from the lands owned by aristocratic families and religious orders, while also benefitting from the produce of the land they themselves owned which was worked by tenant peasants.

The slide above illustrates the many land provinces that existed in Japan in 1570 AD, each with its own Daimyo (military lord).

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Notes

Late in the 15th century the government provided by the second Shogunate was found to be relatively weak (for reasons we will discuss later), which resulted in a period of Japanese history known as the **Warring States Period**.



Notes

For much of the 16th century the Japan's Daimyo constantly fought among themselves, endeavouring to defeat weaker neighbours, and consolidate their land and so bring more rice cultivation within their han and thereby increase their wealth and ability to fund even more samurai warriors for their armies.

As a consequence of the consolidation process associated with these 'every man for himself' conflicts, fewer and fewer Daimyo emerged, with each holding more and more territory, in what was a zero-sum game, where the Japanese nation as a whole had to lose out. Farmers found themselves constantly conscripted to fight in the armies of their Daimyo, rather than working the land and producing the nation's staple food crops.

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Japan's Three Unifiers



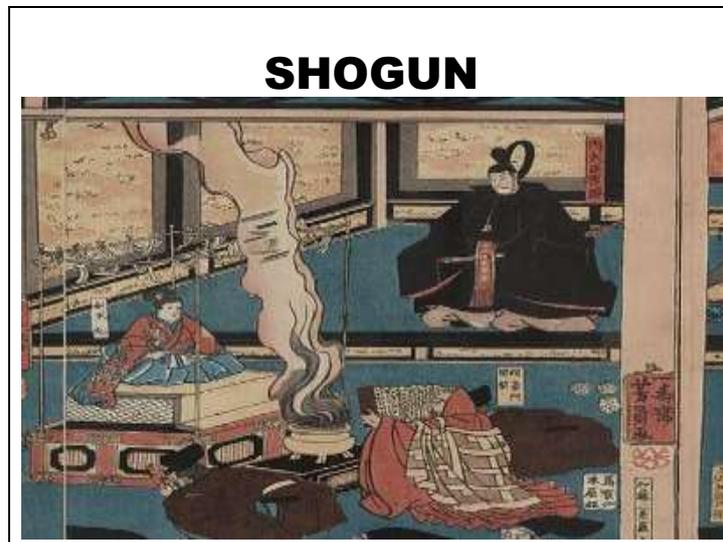
Notes

This madness of the Warring States Period was only ended when three remarkable men, each with very different attributes, were able to pacify the fighting daimyo and once again bring a long period of peace and order to the Japanese nation. This would become known as the Tokugawa era.

The stories of the three unifiers is fascinating, and is one we will consider in more depth.

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Notes

In Japan's long history, since about 530 AD there were just six families who advised / controlled Japan's Emperors.

The first three of these families derived from Japan's 'noble / aristocratic' class, who were closely related to the Emperor.

The era of 'noble' advisers to the Emperor ended with their defeat in the Genpei War (1190 > 1195) and was followed by a period when another three families – **this time the pre-eminent 'military' strongmen of Japan – the Shoguns** - ruled Japan on behalf of the Emperor for a further 550 years from 1195 AD through to 1868 AD.

The Shogun was the most powerful Daimyo in the land and its dominant military leader. *Shogun* literally means, "supreme commander of the army."

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Notes

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Each Shogun had to be officially recognized by his Emperor, who remained the source of sovereignty in Japan.

While the Emperor may seem to have power in Japan, in reality, he was a puppet – with his strings pulled by the Shogun.

The Shoguns then used that power to further their own interests and those of their clans first.

In the Warring States Period many Daimyo (war lords) envied this power, and fought amongst themselves to gain it.

In 1603 the Tokugawa family came to power, and this Shogunate continued for a further 15 generations until 1868.

The Tokugawa Shogunate was a notable era in Japan's early modern history and one we will consider in some depth later in the course.

Perhaps the most critical challenge each Shogunate family faced throughout Japanese history was the need to structure its government in such a way as to prevent other strong Daimyo and would be Shoguns from overthrowing their reign.

Later in the program we will consider some of the strategies employed by various Shoguns to achieve that objective.