

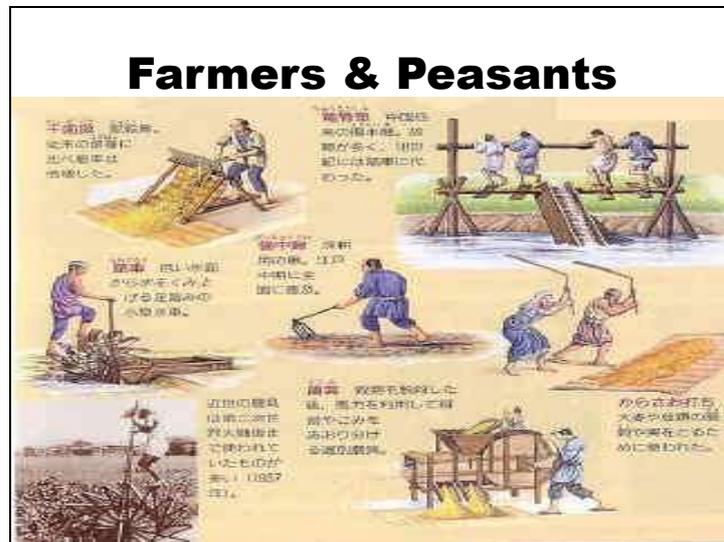
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Who was Who in Japan

Who was WHO in Japan?



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Notes

Since only 15% of Japan was arable, fertile land available for farming in Japan was relatively scarce, and therefore food production (primarily rice) by farmers was considered to be a vital occupation.

Because peasants in feudal Japan produced the food that people in all the other social classes required, they were considered to be much more productive and socially superior to artisans and merchants.

Within Japan's social hierarchy, farmers who owned their land were considered to be more esteemed than 'tenant' farmers who rented land.

Despite the fact that farmers played a vital role in feudal Japanese society, they were nevertheless burdened with a number of obligations.

Being the only really productive layer within the Japanese social structure, Japanese farmers were obliged to pay high rates of taxation to the daimyo and bakufu, largely in the form of the rice they produced.

Up until 1588 AD (during Japan's 'Warring States Period') farmers possessed weapons (mainly swords and pikes) and in the event their local daimyo went to war, the farmers in his domain / han were co-opted into military service as soldiers, which obviously disrupted their productive farming activities.

In a rigid Japanese social structure in which 'respect' for one's superiors was considered a most crucial obligation, farmers were obliged to bow or kneel to any passing samurai or noble. Failure to show sufficient 'respect' would be met by the farmer being summarily decapitated by an aggrieved samurai.

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Who was WHO in Japan?



Japan's Artisan Class



Notes

Artisans were more highly regarded than the merchants, because they made objects useful to society, but less so than farmers. Artisans were individuals who specialized in a certain art or skill, also called craftsmen.

Some of the goods the artisans made included cloth weaving from silk, tailoring clothes, pottery & cooking utensils and sword makers.

Although they did not produce food, as the farmers did, the artisans' works were well-respected and considered useful, and were therefore higher on the pyramid than merchants. Artisans also lived in designated craft areas of Japanese cities, in less marginalised sections than the merchants did.

Who was WHO in Japan?





Notes

According to Confucianism, the more an individual contributed to society, the more highly they were regarded on the social pyramid.

The bottom rung of feudal Japanese society was occupied by merchants, that included traveling traders, shop-keepers and money lenders.

Because **merchants** acted as 'middle men' between farmers /artisans and consumers, and did not actually add to the volume of goods produced in the Japanese economy, their efforts and activities were considered to be unproductive.

Moreover, because many merchants had necessarily to be astute in their business transactions, and were therefore often financially successful, it was widely assumed that they took unfair advantage of their product suppliers.

In the era of feudal Japan for the reasons cited above, merchants were ostracised and placed at the bottom of the social pyramid, which in turn required them to live in designated lower-class suburbs on the edges of Japanese towns and villages.

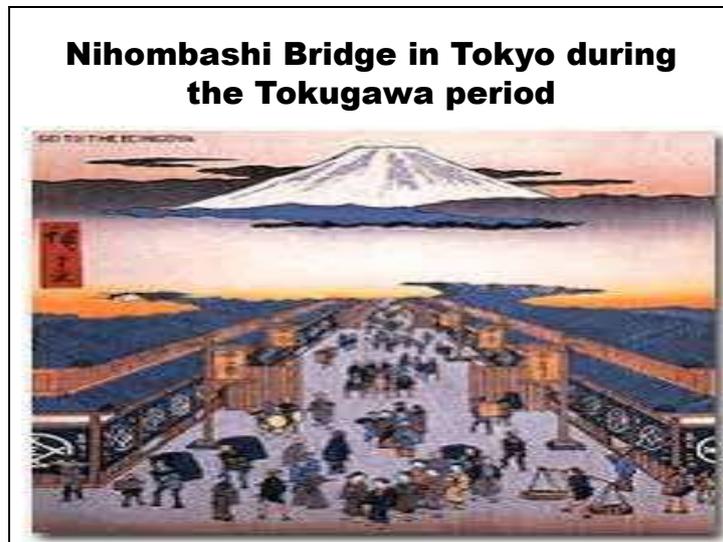
More over the merchant class was forbidden to converse with higher class individuals except on those occasions when they were in the process of selling their goods.

Despite their low rank in society, merchants performed an essential function in the Japanese feudal economy and over the generations many merchant families were able to amass large

considerable wealth. As their economic power grew over time, so did their political influence, and the restrictions against them weakened.

Consider however a scenario of what might happen to this outcast class if Japan was to move quickly from a subsistence feudal system to a modern industrial economy? This would happen in the Meiji era after 1868.

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Notes

This print depicts the bustling commercial district around the Nihombashi Bridge in Tokyo during the Tokugawa period, which became home to the Echigoya merchant house, run by the wealthy Mitsui family.

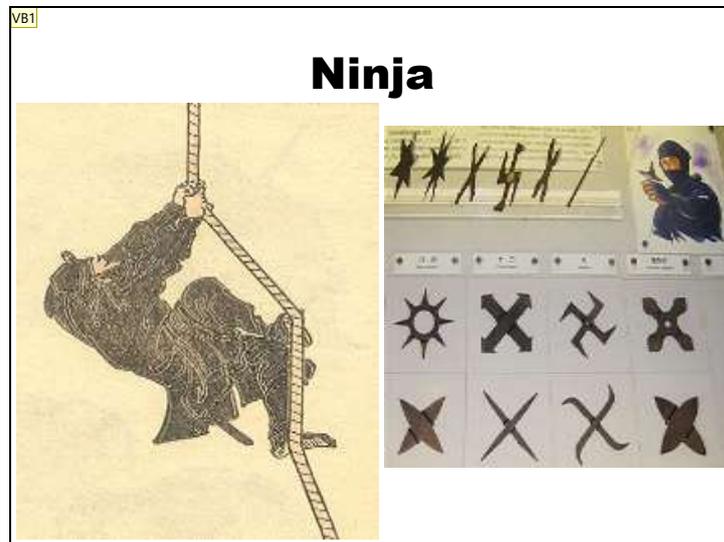
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Notes

Today, the Nihombashi area still feels the influence of the Mitsui — the head office of the Mitsui Bank and the Mitsukoshi Department Store occupy the original site of the Echigoya.

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Notes

Ninja figure prominently in Japanese legend and folklore, where they are often presented as possessing superhuman abilities such as invisibility, as having control over the natural elements, with the ability to walk on water.

Many films and novels dealing with Japan's feudal era tend to incorporate scenes involving attacks by shadowy Ninja warriors. As a result, the ninja have become much romanticized in popular culture, and their powers have often been greatly exaggerated.

During Japan's Warring States Period (1467 AD > Circa 1600) Ninja families living in difficult mountainous terrain, were lower class mercenary warriors available for hire. They specialized in unconventional warfare, often employing 'stealth' when conducting activities such as infiltration, spying, sabotage and assassination.

Within Japan's feudal social structure at that time ninja were mostly recruited from the lower classes, and operated as clandestine mercenaries for hire. However their covert methods were considered dishonourable compared to the Samurai warrior class, who conducted their engagements openly and under the strict rules of Bushido.

With the arrival of more peaceful and stable times during the Tokugawa Shogunate period in the 17th and 18th the centuries the roles and activities of the Ninja clans quickly declined. However a few Ninja were periodically employed by various Shoguns to spy on the activities of some of the country's more distant and less reliable Daimyos, with secret reports of their doings being sent back to the government at Edo (Tokyo).

