

FEUDALISM AND A MILITARY SOCIETY



Beginning in the 1100s in Japan, the government was starting to lose power to the daimyo, powerful landowners. The daimyo families divided the land and made the peasants farm the land. The military leaders were “war lords,” with the most powerful one in the empire being called the “shogun.” Samurai fighters were soldiers that protected the land and the people.

Although the Emperor was still the highest position in Japan, he was actually little more than a figure head, as the shogun actually ruled the nation. After the shogun and the daimyo came the samurai, followed in rank by peasants and artisans. The lowest class of people was the merchants, because they did not produce goods for society. The largest group of people were the peasant farmers who were vassals to the daimyo. Vassals are holders of land in exchange for an agreement with a lord or monarch. In exchange for working the land, the farmers were given protection and were allowed to hold land and farm it.

The first shogun was Minamoto Yoritomo, who was the military leader when civil war broke out in 1336. The emperor sent armies of samurai to fight on his behalf. When they returned from war, he bestowed the title of Shogun to Minamoto Yoritomo in an effort to keep the warriors from taking over as emperor.

Feudalism reigned in Japan until a Japanese warrior and government official named Oda Nobunaga overthrew the shogun in 1573. Half of the provinces in Japan were unified under his rule. He established conditions that led to the whole country becoming unified after he died. He was the son of a minor daimyo.

The next major military leader was Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the son of a peasant who gained respect for his brilliant talents in military strategy. He rose to become one of Nobunaga's most powerful commanders and after the death of Nobunaga, he fought to secure the position as successor to Nobunaga. He continued the work already begun to unify the country, and by 1590, all of Japan had come under his control.

Tokugawa Ieyasu was the son of a local warrior, who like many other such families, struggled to survive. Ieyasu's was brilliant at military and administrative strategy and became shogun under the powerless imperial court. He retired just two years after becoming shogun, but passed the title on to his son, establishing a shogunate that lasted 200 years.

WHILE YOU'RE READING...

MARK WITH SYMBOLS

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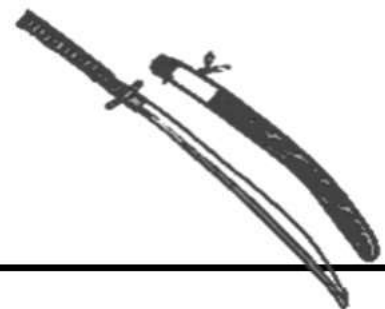
? when you are unsure or confused by something.

* when you find something important.

HIGHLIGHT WITH COLORS

yellow power words or key terms

green key phrases and definitions



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Question 1: How did Minamoto Yoritomo keep warriors from taking the title as emperor?

Question 2: Why were merchants considered the lowest class in the Medieval Japanese hierarchy?

Question 3: What does it mean to be a "vassal"? Who were the vassals in Feudal Japan?



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Questions I have while reading:

Summary of what I have read:

