

# Early modern Japan

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# Central point of discussion

- The edo/ early modern/ togukawa period of japan provided the economical and social basis for Japan's rapid modernisation in the Meiji restoration

Q: What is the Meiji restoration?

A: In short, a centralization of power brought forth by a quick civil war and revolution and rapid modernisation in Japan in the 1860s which led to its rise as a world superpower

We will cover this in greater depth in another time

# This presentation is rated G

- We will focus instead on the big ideas
  - social structure
  - the economy
  - belief systems
  - things that lets say are “stereotypically Japanese”are only briefly touched on



# Why should you care?

- ~~Anime and the **AMTCODEOFCONDUCTHASREDACTEDTHIS**~~
- Japan's rapid modernisation in the Meiji restoration is responsible for its tumultuous rise in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a world superpower, then as a economical giant
- The Meiji restoration was made possible by the events of this period
- This period shows similarities to many other periods of history around the world

# The meiji restoration contributed directly to ...

- The October Revolution
- Japan imperialism in east Asia
- WWII

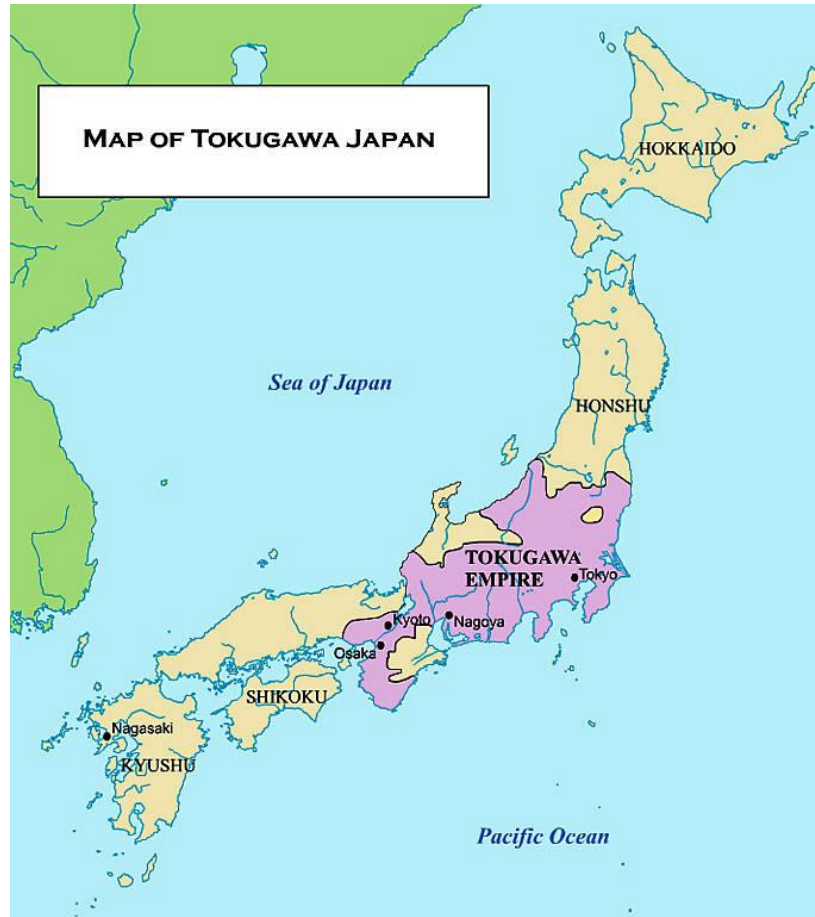


# Setting the scene: Japan's geography

- Island on the edge of East Asia
- Earthquakes, Volcanos, ~~anime~~, limited farmland
- China's influence:
  - only the good stuff: Confucianism (we'll get to this), literature, foods, cultural influences etc
  - no invasions!! There's a sea



# Map



It is about 200 km from Korea to Japan, going via the Tsushima strait

# Perks of a island nation – The divine wind





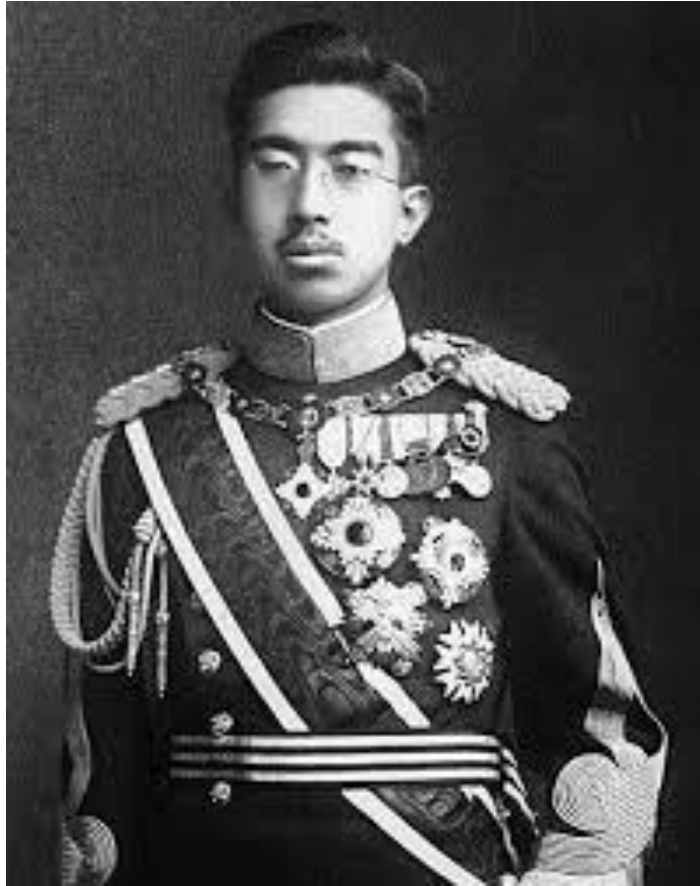
# Setting the scene: Invariant of Japanese history

The emperor:

- Japan has the world's longest unbroken royal line starting from the apocryphal emperor Jimmu in 600 BC to Naruhito today
- believed to have descended from the Sun God, divine status
- for most of history including the Edo period, the Japanese emperor had no actual power, serving only to legitimise the rule of the day's true ruler

幕府 = government behind the emperor's façade

# Famous emperors



The emperor is revered to this day



# Lets set the scene

- The period of early modern japan ranges from 1603 to 1868 but also has other names
- But wait ...
  - Why is the era called Edo period
  - Why is it also called Togukawa period
  - MOST importantly, why is it called the early modern period?
    - it will take us most of the talk to address this

# Why togukawa?

- Named after the founder of the ruling dynasty and the family name of the ruling clan of the day
- tokugawa ieyasu:



# Why Edo period?

- Why the emperor is based in Kyoto, the economic capital and togukawa's residence is based in Edo (now Tokyo)
- Edo is favoured for its strategic location



# The start of the Edo period – The great unification

The year is 1603, and Japan for the last two centuries has been a fragmented nation at war with each other. (The Sengoku period)

For the last 700 years, Japan has been ruled by various military dictators named **shoguns** (military dictator) ruling “in the name of the emperor”

Togukawa, following the footsteps of his predecessor [Oda Nobunaga](#) , unifies Japan, establishes a **bakufu** (military government) and proclaims a shogunate

# The decisive battle that made the shogunate



The battle of Sekigahara



# Oda Nobunaga

- I know little about him, but he is a significant person who forged the Edo era (but did not live to see it)
- Perhaps best not to trace history that far if we ever hope to get to WWII



# Table of contents

- **Overview: the big ideas**

- stability above all: economical progress at the cost of technological stagnation

- an odd mix: why Edo Japan has both modern and feudal elements

- well established land and water trade routes

- high urbanisation and social organisation BUT a feudality

- Beliefs of the Edo period

- Social structure of the Edo period

- Economy of the Edo period

# Look Mom – No wars!!

- The Edo period was a rare two and a half century period of peace in Japanese history
  - sure, there were protests and some riots, but nothing major
- Peace = stability
  - When there is stability, the economy prospers
    - flourishing trade and trade routes
    - increased agricultural production
  - development of the arts and entertainment
  - population growth = more consumers

# The Arts – made possible by \$\$\$



# The Stats

Metric	1600	1850
Population	15,000,000 (varies by estimate)	30,746,400 (varies)
Rice output (kg)	? But O(small)	3,600,000 tons/year (late 1700s)
Land under cultivation (1000 hectare)	1,635	3,050

# Chonin (cityperson) culture



# Edo Japan was a highly organised society

- High urbanisation (10% of people lived in cities)
  - Wait ... isn't that Tiny compared to say Australia? (66% live in the capital cities)
  - Bear in mind, it's the 1600s. Agriculture wasn't well developed back in the day
  - These 10% must be supported by farmers, which is 4 in 5 people
- High social organisation (more on this later)
  - Even the Hinin, which included beggars, had their own guilds and begging schedules!

# Hinin





# Highly organised merchant systems

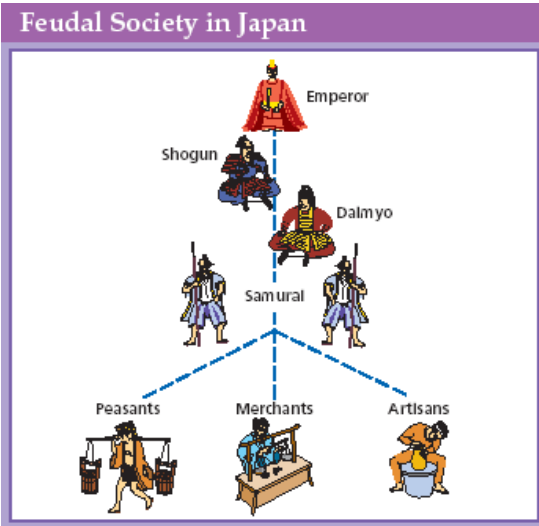
- Rice markets in Osaka and Kyoto connected by hubs (more on this later)



# But ... A feudality

- A feudal system is one where a head of state (in our case shogun) gives local control of various lands to regional leaders (warlords / allies / family etc) in exchange for taxation and/or military service
- Its funny how feudalism developed in many different parts of the world in different forms
  - medieval Europe: knights, lords and king
  - Han China (especially the first half)
  - AND japan (more on this later)
- Feudalism is considered an older form of governance. So despite many modern elements, Edo Japan is **still not exactly modern**

# Different feudal system



# Table of contents

- Overview: the big ideas
- **Beliefs of the Edo period**
  - Confucianism: producers above traders
  - Confucianism as a means of stability: defend against Christian influences
  - effects of Confucianism and note on Buddhism and shinto
- Social structure of the Edo period
- Economy of the Edo period

# Confucius quotes

- *never do to others what you would not like them to do to you.*
- *He who knows all the answers has not been asked all the questions*
- *Computational Geometry is a pain in the ass*



# Confucianism philosophy

- Made in China, the most prominent ideology in Edo Japan
- Key beliefs
  - values moral goodness, integrity
  - contribution to society (Work hard)
  - filial duty (family is a important unit)
  - the governor is given the heaven's mandate to govern**

“The controlling philosophy of Edo Japan”



# Consequences of this ideology

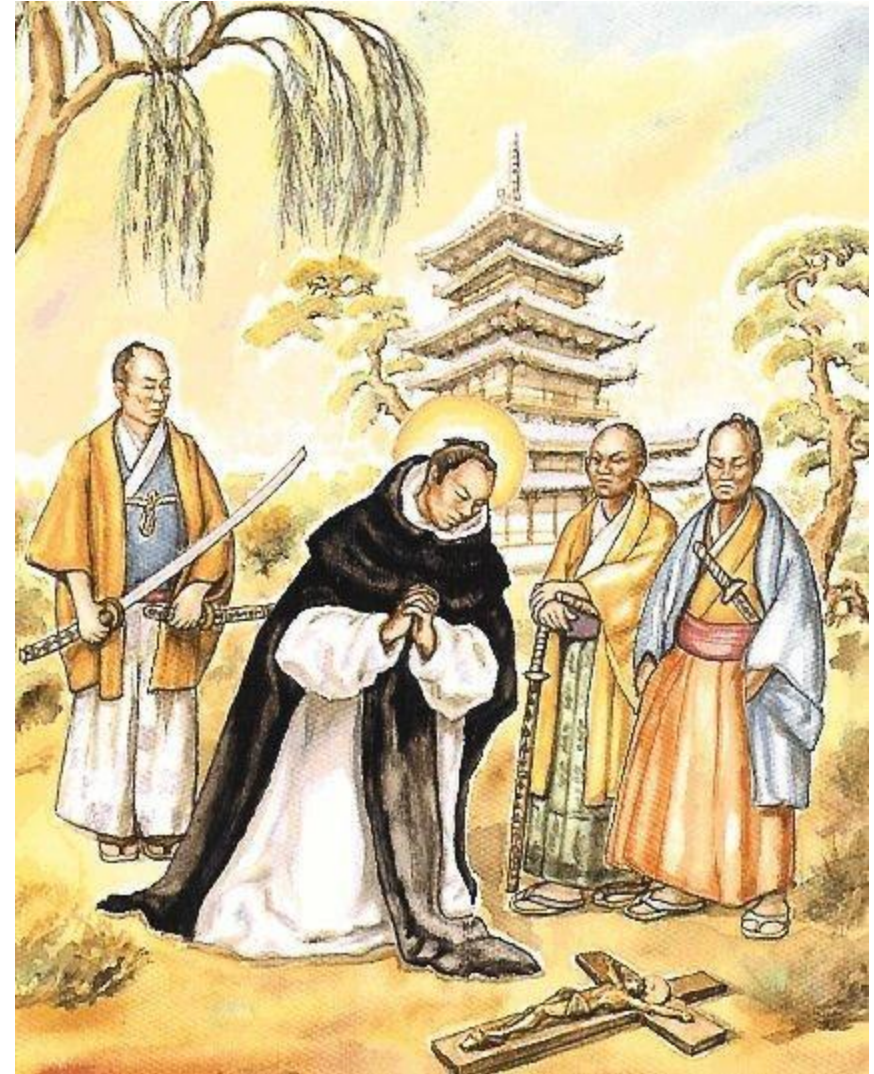
- Influence on class system
  - high value on peasants which contributes food
  - low value on merchants
- Stable rule: By justifying the Shogun's rule
- Influence on social structure:
  - family as a social unit, run business or farm
  - weird customs like adoption to continue line

# Christinanity

- Well, why did the Romans crucify Jesus?
  - destabilising force: if someone starts claiming that they're the son of god and that the government is illegitimate, of course your going to kill them off

To avoid Christian influence what did Japan do?

- kill people: any Christian / foreigner in japan will suffer execution-nitis
- block of trade: stop Christian text coming in





# AND THIS IS CRITICAL TO THE MEIJI RESTORATION

- Very little foreign trade (only with Dutch really)
- So No import of new technology or sciences
  - no steam / medicine / maths / military tech
  - SO NO INDUSTRY
- By 1860s, Japan is severely outdated
  - kinda sucks being 250 years behind ur time (imagine fighting the US carrier group with sailboats!!)

Key motivation of the Meiji restoration: to modernise and to regain national pride

# USA op pls nerf



# A side note: Buddhism and Shinto



- Shinto belief:
    - bunch of weird stuff that helped create pokemon (idk everything is magic or something similar)
    - the emperor is divine (later led to Japanese nationalism etc)**
  - Buddhism:
    - some stuff that is really popular with Japanese people
    - lots of monasteries and monks **WHO CAN HAVE CHILDREN**
    - the allure of religion and the incentive of a powerful family line made monks a powerful force
- It seemed that the beliefs didn't get on too well with each other but idk

# The ruins of a Shinto shrine, Nagasaki, 1945



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- Overview: the big ideas
- Beliefs of the Edo period
- **Social structure of the Edo period**
  - the feudal system: daimyo, samurai, peasants, artisans, merchants
  - decline of the samurai into bureaucracy and consequences on economy
  - how the daimyo were controlled: a balance of power
- Economy of the Edo period

# The hierarchy: class is inherited

- Shogun and Emperor
- Daimyo (Samurai lords)
- **Samurai**
- **Commoners**
  - peasants
  - artisans
  - merchants <pic of hierarchy>
- Untouchables (those with weird lines of work)

# Examining the hierarchy – Those within the 4 tier system (the bolded classes)

- Peasants – productive members valued by Confucianism
  - BUT -high taxes (50% of production)
  - hard, short lives
- Artisans – also valued by Confucianism as productive also
  - many became successful within the rising economy
- Merchants – NOT valued by ideology because not seen as productive
  - BUT – became very successful, especially in big markets like Edo and Osaka, had lots of money to splash on Geishas
  - only class that understood economics

# Edo Japan commoners





Nope maybe this



# Samurai

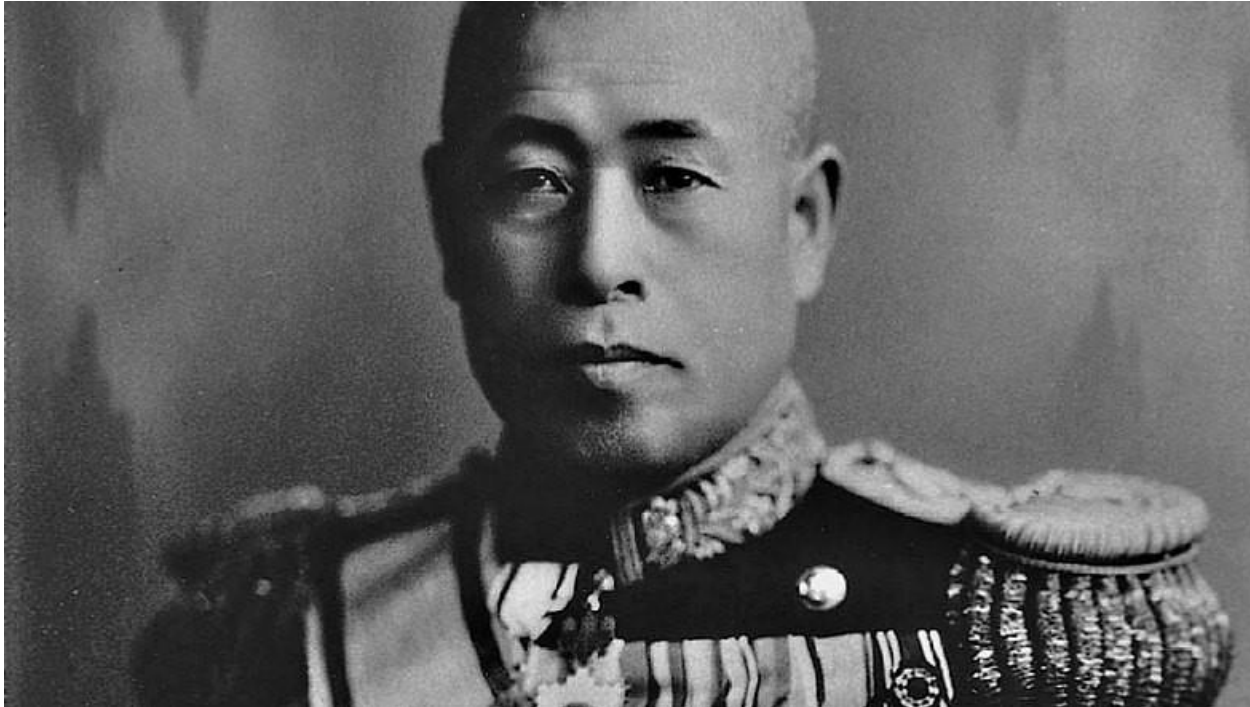


# Samurai class – the highest of the 4 class system

- Stipend paid in rice from higher up
- Soldiers turned bureaucrats in peace time
- Bushido code and well educated
- Societally prestigious: if a man did not bow to a samurai as he passed, it was legal that the samurai could decapitate him
  - status decreased as peace went on, greater social mixing in peacetime (e.g in entertainment districts)

Fun fact: -many future leaders of the Japanese government and military forces were descendants of samurai

- Togo Heihachiro: One of Japan's greatest naval heroes
- Isoroku Yamamoto: The commander of Japan's naval forces in WWII



# Daimyo



## Who are Daimyo?

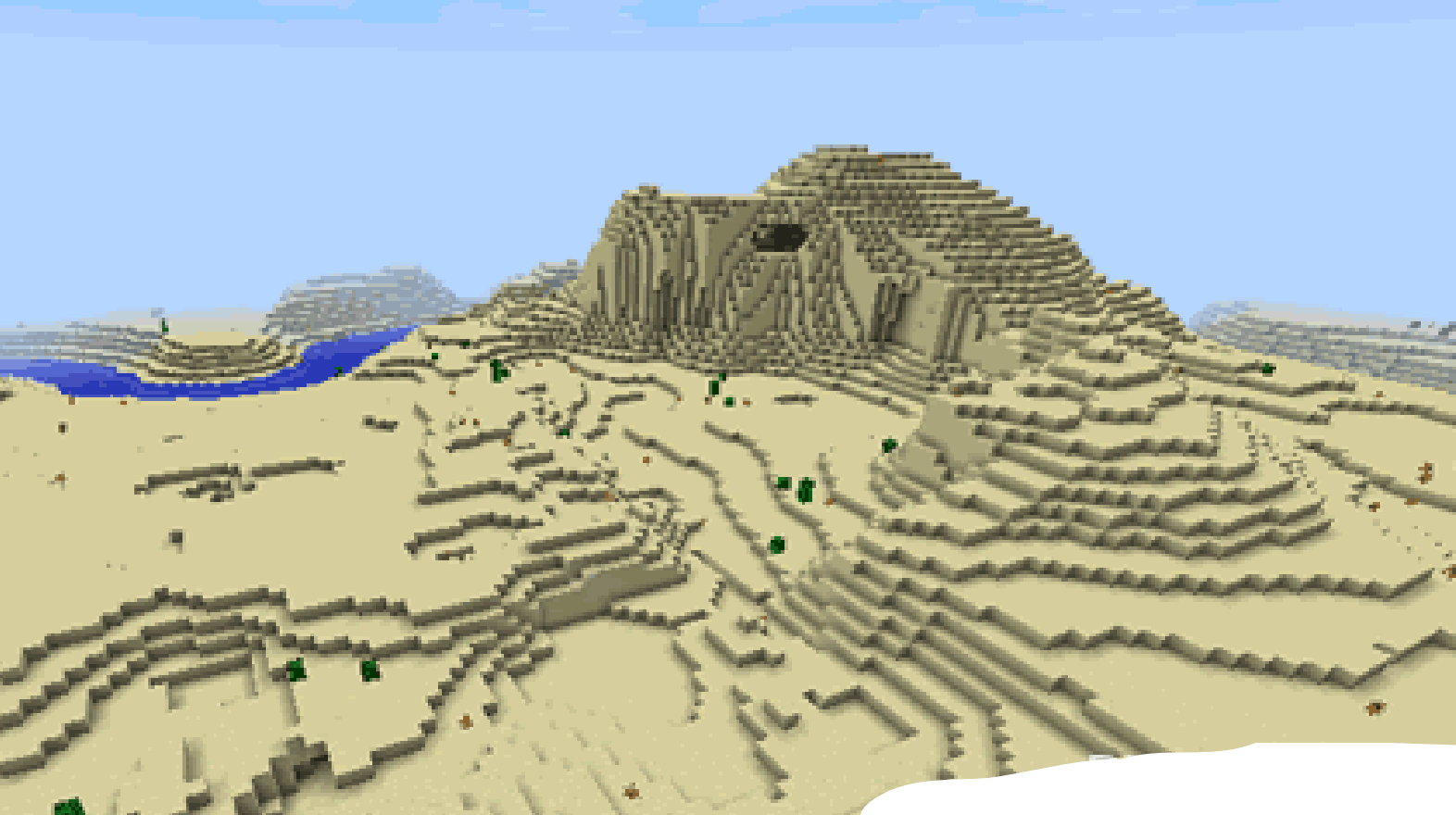
- feudal lords with samurai background
- powers: control taxation in their areas of governance (han), holds army of samurai
- duties: submit rice tax to central authority, provide military assistance to shogun

# Tiers of Daimyo

- Based on trust
- More trusted Daimyo control more fertile, secure, strategically important regions
- (Theory inbound)

# The tiers

- ***Shinpan***: direct relatives of Togukawa
  - held the most fertile **han** (in terms of rice production)
- ***Fudai***: allies of Togukawa prior to establishment of regime
  - controlled strategic outposts
- ***Tozama***: enemies of Togukawa or local powers under a negotiated peace with Togukawa after regime establishment
  - held the largest but most remote han
  - were not involved in government positions
  - ultimately caused the downfall of the regime



# Analogy (Australia)

Shinpan, Fudai, Tozama



# Why feudal system?

- Debated, but one point of view is that it is out of necessity
- Why not create a centralised system (like a constitutional monarchy) such as England today?
  - the shogun regime was built often on compromise between previously opposing warlords
  - it would be mutually detrimental to wage war to eliminate rather than compromise:
    - Daimyo gets wiped out by superior shogun forces BUT
    - shogun's forces are depleted, weakening regime

# Critical questions to ask

- Why was the social structure so stable and well enforced?

A: in short, Confucianism

- What were long term problems with the social structure?

A: There were many

- bureaucrats were samurai who did not understand economics
- thus bad fiscal policy, leading to inflation which weakened the governance of the samurai, while making merchants powerful
- high taxation on peasants
- crucially, the tension between samurai and merchant classes

# The tension

- Despite the strict class system, enforced by:
  - strict control over merchants
  - social prestige
- Problem: as time went on, social class blurred
  - samurai worked for merchants
  - merchants prospered and became powerful
- Key evidence: Entertainment



# Entertainment in Edo Japan



- Based in the “red light district” (bit of misnomer) on outskirts of Tokyo <insert map>
- This should be a larger topic but screw having fun right
- Forms of entertainment: Kabuki theatre, Sumo wrestling, Teahouses, Geishas (female entertainers) and other more red light stuff



# Samurai in entertainment

- While seen as inappropriate for samurai to engage in this entertainment, the district was attended by them all the same (in disguise ofc)
- A sign of blurred class boundaries that increasingly underlined the Edo social structure



# How did this bring forth the Meiji restoration

- Many reasons, not all of which I have researched
- revolution happens often when there are unhappy citizens
- Oppressed peasantry
- Dissatisfied and economically inferior samurai
- Merchants who are wealthy but dislike their own lack of status
- The realisation of backwardness associated with trade restrictions

# The concept of family

- The social structure of Edo Japan was centred around the unit of family.
- We try to make arguments for why this is so



# Titles and Peerage

- Whether you're a samurai, peasant or merchant, your occupation is hereditary\* (with exception we will discuss later)
  - Thus the skills you need for occupation is taught is hereditary, you learn them from your parents
  - Hence you must adhere to filial structure to succeed in the world
- The patriarch of the family runs the family job
- <peasant example learn to grow rice>



# A interesting result of this filial structure: adoption

- Adoption was common in feudal Japan as a means of
  - (1) Continuing the family line: a man marrying **into** family
  - (2) HR: Recruiting talent into the family

Modern(ish) examples:

Nobusuke Kishi – Prime Minister of Japan (and war criminal)

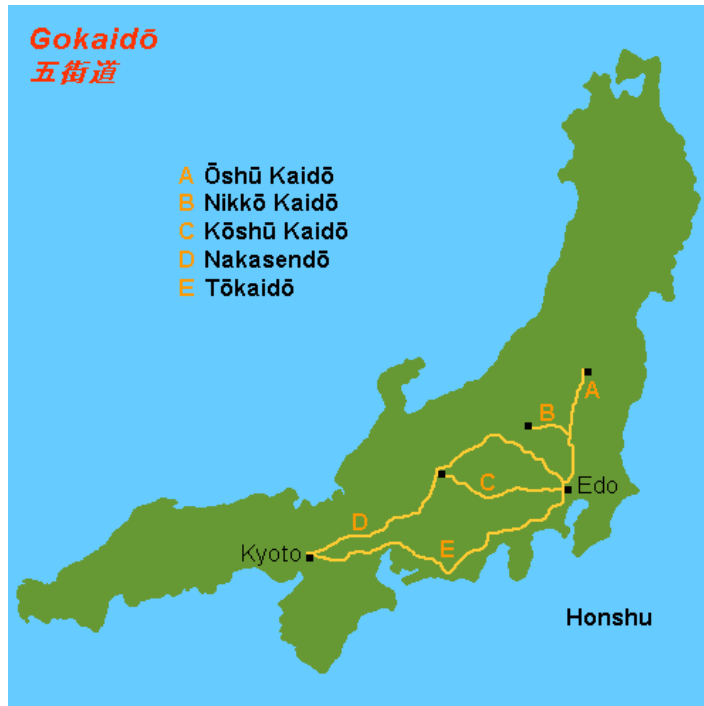
Isoroku Yamamoto – Fleet Admiral of the Japanese Navy in WWII

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- Social structure of the Edo period
- **Economy of the Edo period**
  - stability brings prosperity
  - rice as the universal currency
  - the rise of the merchants and tensions in the class system

# Peace = Money

- Trade routes develop
- Markets expand in cities like Osaka, Tokyo, Kyoto



## *sankin-kōtai*: *pilgrimage system*

- Daimyo must stay in Edo every second year
- Their wives and children stay in Edo all year around
- Effectively Hostages, dissuade rebellion
- The commute from territories to Edo increased trade between Edo and territories, establishing Edo further as a economic hub



Seems brutal but not  
uniquely Japanese

# Currency in Edo Japan

- Gold – Ryo (a coin)
- Silver – kan (a coin)
- Rice (koku) (roughly 80kg of stuff)
- Others: silk, copper



- Key observation: Gold and silver have permanence, but rice isn't
- Key observation 2: Samurai were paid in rice (4-6 koku a year for a footsoldier to say 400 for a imperial guard)

# Buying power

- While silver and gold were used as official currencies in various parts of Japan (Osaka is silver, Tokyo is gold), they had fixed trade ratios (5:1 silver: gold), the price of rice (the primal form of GDP) fluctuated
- “One *ryō* was also considered equivalent to 1 [\*koku\*](#) of rice, or the amount of rice needed to feed one person for one year, although this was a less exact standard, which fluctuated depending on the abundance of the rice crop in any particular year.” – Wikipedia article on Ryo [Supply vs Demand]
- This had farreaching implications, such as instability in the samurai stipend. In times of prosperity and famine the rate is different

# Some coins and exchange rates

Name	Conversion (flunctuates)
1 koku of rice (80kg rice)	1 ryo of gold
100 momme of copper coins	1 momme silver
1 ryo	40 – 60 momme silver
1 mon copper	1/1000 koku rice
1 unit gold bullion	5 unit silver

As is standard for the time, coinage was valued in weight rather than denomination (e.g in today \$1 would be worth more than a \$2 coin)

Weight unit is momme (4g roughly)

Chinese influences are heavy (evidenced by fact that the kanji units resemble Chinese characters – look this up!)

# Semantics (if ur interested)

- gold *ryô* 両
- Rice unit (alternative to koku) 斗
- *mon* 文
  
- ... and other weird coinage name
- In next section we will look at standardised momme prices



# Buying power table (if ur interested)

Amount of Money	Can buy	Notes
8-16 mon copper (i.e 0.008 ryo)	A meal (soba, sushi)	
32 momme silver (0.5 – 0.75 ryo)	To see a play in 1820 (near end of Edo era)	Entertainment is very expensive
1 ryo	A formal outfit OR a scroll painting from a high standing artist	
3 -4 ryo	The annual salary of a maid or footsoldier	On average
40 ryo	A common annual income for samurai	
400 ryo	Income for an elite kabuki actor	
Idk I might have fucked something up cuz there are so many denominations. Last 4 entries are defs right		

# Events affecting exchange rates

- As mentioned, famine, good harvests for rice
- Silver production (when silver production dries up, the rarity of silver increases)
- Human economic policies

# Point: the togukawas were complete idiots at the economy

- It was samurai, warriors, rather than the merchants, who ran the country
- They made shortsighted decisions that decreased social stability
- We discuss this in a case study on Rice Traders in Osaka



## Case study: Rice dealers in Osaka

- The Dojima rice exchange in Osaka was a precursor to a modern banking system
- Supports:
  - Storing rice
  - Exchanging rice for currency (silver cuz osaka)
  - Paper tokens (cheques)
  - Converting taxed rice into money by selling it to wholesalers for a profit
  - Loans
  - Wall Street stuff (futures etc)

# Issue

- Samurai, seeking lavish lifestyles, often borrowed when their stipends decreased as result of market flunctuations
- This made many go into serious debt



# How did the shogunate fix the debt issue?

- Abolish all debt! (Kansei reforms)
- Sounds like a bad idea (seems unfair hmmm) and it was
- De-stabilised the economy
- Ripple effect to social stability
- To be fair the shogun did make a good call later by nationalising the exchange

# Other dumb things shoguns / Daimyo did

- Print money ... wcgw right
- Borrow money then not repay it ... wcgw



In summary ...



# Further reading

- Trading with the dutch
- More precise timelines

# The demise of the Bakufu

- Societal imbalance
- High taxes
  - 50% of rice is taxed
- Famine:
  - In the period from 1650 to 1850 there were 20 major famines

# Answering the big questions

- So why is it called early modern Japan?
- So how did the Edo period trigger and ensure the success of the Meiji restoration?
  - technological stagnation resulting in unequal treaties and national shame, resulting in the rise of nationalism
  - a desire to avenge social tension
  - high taxes on peasants and rapid inflation, decline in Samurai living standard

# Next time

- The bakumatsu, the final years of the Daimyo
  - America's intrusion
- The Boshin war
- The Meiji restoration
  
- We might also attempt to compare the fates of imperial China and Japan, why despite similar external pressures (The Opium War vs the treaty of Kanagawa) why Japan rose while China fell

# References

- Cambridge Eyclopedia of Japanese History (Vol 4)
- Wikipedia: Edo Japan
- Youtube videos on the subject
- Samurai wiki