

Tokugawa Period Travel

At the end of a long period of civil war, the Tokugawa clan rose in 1603 as the strongest political family in Japan. The Tokugawa ruled Japan from 1603 to 1868, a period known as the Great Peace. The first Tokugawa ruler, or shogun, created a new capital in Edo (today's Tokyo). To centralize power and show authority over daimyo, the Tokugawa shogunate created and enforced social laws. These laws were based in part on Confucian ideals of the well-ordered society, in part on wise political strategy.

The Tokugawa government required daimyo to travel from their domains to Edo every other year to pay tribute to the shogun. The daimyo thus lived in their domains one year, and in Edo the next. Their wives and children were required to stay in Edo. This tactic, known as "alternate attendance," helped keep the peace and control the daimyo's wealth and power. Because the daimyo never stayed for more than one year in their domains, they were unlikely to unite with neighboring daimyo against the Tokugawa government. The daimyo's attendants, samurai who traveled with him, were required to leave their families in the domain. The costs of maintaining two elaborate homes, one in the country and the other in Edo, and of traveling back and forth to Edo, with a large group of samurai attendants, reduced the daimyo's wealth.

The continual movement of daimyo and their attendants from the countryside to Edo required a network of highways and waterways linking the main cities of Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka, as well as smaller cities and towns along the way. The Tokugawa government maintained five major highways. The Tokaido Road, which linked the ancient capital, Kyoto, with the new capital, Edo, was one such highway. As they traveled the highways, the daimyo processions, often numbering in the hundreds of people, stopped to eat and rest at teahouses, restaurants, and inns that catered to the travelers. Thus, the daimyo processions helped to grow local markets and regional specialties of food, drinks, arts, and crafts. Travelers from the domains brought information, souvenirs, and regional artwork to Edo. They also spread information, art, and souvenirs of Edo on their return journey to the provinces.

By the middle and late Tokugawa period, common people also traveled the network of roads linking the cities and countryside. Because of the demand for skilled builders and craftspeople to provide services to the daimyo and their attendants in Edo, people moved along the system of roads from the countryside into the capital. Agricultural and other goods produced for sale in the countryside moved along roads and waterways into Edo and other cities. In addition, common people traveled along the major roads to visit shrines and places of religious importance all over Japan.

One result of the increasing travel throughout the Edo period was that people more connected. People who had formerly been isolated in villages and small towns had chances to travel and to interact with travelers. Changes taking place in cities were taken to other areas by travelers. In turn, people across Japan began to feel more connected and recognize that they shared a common culture.

Publishing and the Arts in the Tokugawa Period

As peace and stability rose during the Tokugawa period, a publishing industry grew in Edo and other major cities. Since more people could read and write, the demand for literature—novels, poetry, maps, guide books, and woodblock prints—was high. The famous poet Matsuo Bash published poems and prose about his travels around Japan. Jippensha Ikku's novel *A Shank's Mare Tour of the Tokaido*, a comic story about two traveling samurai, was a best-seller in 1802. The popularity of Bash and Ikku's works caused painters and print artists to illustrate the places made famous by their writings. One example is Hiroshige's print series of the 1830s, *The Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido Road*. Another famous print series of the time, Hokusai's *Thirty-six View of Mt. Fuji*, depicted Japan's sacred mountain from many viewpoints and in a variety of weather and light conditions.

Woodblock prints showing the urban culture of the period, as well as the landscape of the countryside and the open road, relied on an advanced publishing industry for their production and distribution. Woodblock prints were mass produced. Production involved four people: the artist, who drew the design on paper; the carver, who carved the design onto cherry wood blocks, one for each color of ink; the printer, who applied color to each block and transferred the print to paper; and the publisher, who gave money for the production of the prints and advertised and sold them to the public. Color woodblock printing as developed in this period was a major technological innovation, producing prints that were more advanced than anything available in Europe at the time.

People from all social classes bought and collected woodblock prints, which were inexpensive. A wood-block print cost about as much as a bowl of noodles. Travelers to Edo bought prints as souvenirs of the city, returning with them to the countryside and other parts of Japan. These prints helped to advertise what was popular in Edo: famous actors, department stores, women's makeup, courtesans, restaurants and teahouses, boating & viewing fireworks along Edo's main waterways, and other aspects of the "floating world," the shifting urban scene. Woodblock prints of this world were known as *ukiyo-e*, or "art of the floating world."

Because woodblock prints were purchased and distributed widely throughout Japan, they served an important role in bringing the Japanese people together. Woodblock prints spread information about the country of Japan among Japanese people, wherever they lived. People in small villages could learn about life in the larger cities through the detailed prints. Since prints often included place names, names of publishers and artists, as well as other written tidbits about life, the increasingly literate commoner population, both urban and rural, could read prints for clues about their changing society. The woodblock prints also contributed to the viewers' knowledge of Japan's geography. Geographic landmarks—the most obvious being Mt. Fuji—were repeated in woodblock prints so often that they became clearly recognizable symbols of their country. In these ways, woodblock prints helped to create a sense of a shared culture and country called Japan.

Tokugawa Period Economy and Society

In order to increase the power of the shogun and decrease the power of the daimyo, the Tokugawa shogunate created and enforced social laws. These laws were based in part on Confucian ideals of the well-ordered society, in part on wise political strategy. Some of the Tokugawa government's rules were about the four social classes—the samurai, farmers, artisans, and merchants.

The samurai class was officially the highest social rank in the Tokugawa class system (other than shogun, daimyo and emperor.) During the preceding era of civil wars, the samurai had served their regional lords, or daimyo, as warriors. Now in the “Great Peace” of the Tokugawa period, the government required samurai to move off of the land and into castle towns. There, they served their daimyo as bureaucrats and attendants. To show their elite position, the samurai were permitted to carry swords and wear luxurious fabrics, such as silk. By law, however, they could not participate in trade or farming. Thus samurai found it difficult to profit from peacetime pursuits. As a result, many samurai, though high in status, grew poor during the period.

With the movement of daimyo and samurai into regional castle towns, Japan underwent a period of rapid urbanization (city growth.) Building roads, houses, and government structures required skilled labor; workers required housing, food, and other services. Businesses sprang up to supply the needed materials and goods. Castle towns grew greatly during the period, as they became regional centers of trade and government administration. To improve economic growth, the Tokugawa government established a monetary system, with standardized coins. This system greatly simplified trade among regions of the country.

Meanwhile, the three lower classes profited from a growing population and growing urban centers. Farmers, who made up 90 percent of the population, became increasingly well-off during the period, as more land was made available for agriculture, farming techniques improved, and food production grew. As cities developed and expanded, the urban demand for goods other than food allowed farmers to produce silk and other products in small-scale rural factories. Artisans supplied the skilled labor to build the great castle towns and to maintain and build the roads, bridges, buildings, and infrastructure of an urbanizing society.

The merchant class, officially at the bottom of the Tokugawa social pyramid, benefited greatly from the period's economic growth and rapid urbanization, growing prosperous and powerful during the period. The samurai, whose incomes were still paid in fixed amounts of rice, had to trade their rice for cash with the merchants, who controlled this exchange. Samurai owed more and more money to merchants. They borrowed from merchants to have a lifestyle they really couldn't afford. During the Tokugawa period, merchants grew wealthy selling the products and services desired by commoners and samurai alike. The merchant class created a new style of life and art, showing off their wealth and power, enjoying the theater, hosting boating parties on city waterways, and frequenting restaurants and teahouses. Their lavish (very wealthy) lifestyle was celebrated and recorded in woodblock prints of the period.

Purpose: To understand changes in the social, political, and economic life during Tokugawa Period Japan.

Use complete sentences & your own words. For questions where you have a choice, circle choice, complete sentence, add additional sentences with evidence to support your answer.

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1. Daimyo liked / did not like the system of alternate attendance because _____

2. Why were common people also traveling more during this period?

3. Increased travel was / was not beneficial to Japan because _____

Publishing and Arts in the Tokugawa Period

4. It would / would not have been possible for a commoner to own a woodblock print because _____

5. Woodblock prints are / are not a good source of information of life during Tokugawa Japan because

6. How did woodblock prints help link the city and the countryside during the Tokugawa period?

Tokugawa Period Economy and Society

7. Samurai during Tokugawa Japan were / were not wealthy because

8. Why did cities grow during Tokugawa Japan?

9. To which social class in Tokugawa society (described in this section) would you prefer to belong?

Explain your choice.
