THE MONGOL INVASIONS

JAPAN DEFENDS HAKATA BAY • 1274 & 1281



Defenders watch the Yuan fleet from the stone wall at Hakata Bay.

KUBLAI KHAN'S DEMANDS

Beginning in 1268, envoys from Kublai Khan's Mongol-led Yuan empire called on Japan to submit. The Kamakura shogunate rejected the demands and prepared the western coast for attack.

THE FIRST INVASION • 1274

Yuan forces sailed from Korea, attacked Tsushima and Iki, and landed near Hakata Bay. Japanese defenders fought them on shore. The invasion force withdrew, and severe weather may have increased its losses.

A WALL ACROSS HAKATA

Before a second attack, the shogunate ordered a long stone barrier built along vulnerable sections of Hakata Bay. The wall restricted landings and gave defenders a stronger position.

THE SECOND INVASION • 1281

Two large fleets approached Kyushu. Japanese warriors resisted for weeks from the coast and in small-boat raids. A powerful typhoon later struck the fleet, destroying many vessels and ending the invasion.

THE 'DIVINE WIND'

Later memory celebrated the storms as *kamikaze*, or 'divine winds.' Weather mattered greatly, but Japanese defenses, Yuan delays, ship losses, disease, and supply problems also shaped the outcome.

COST OF VICTORY

Because no new land was conquered, the shogunate struggled to reward warriors who had defended Japan. The expense and disputes weakened Kamakura rule over time.

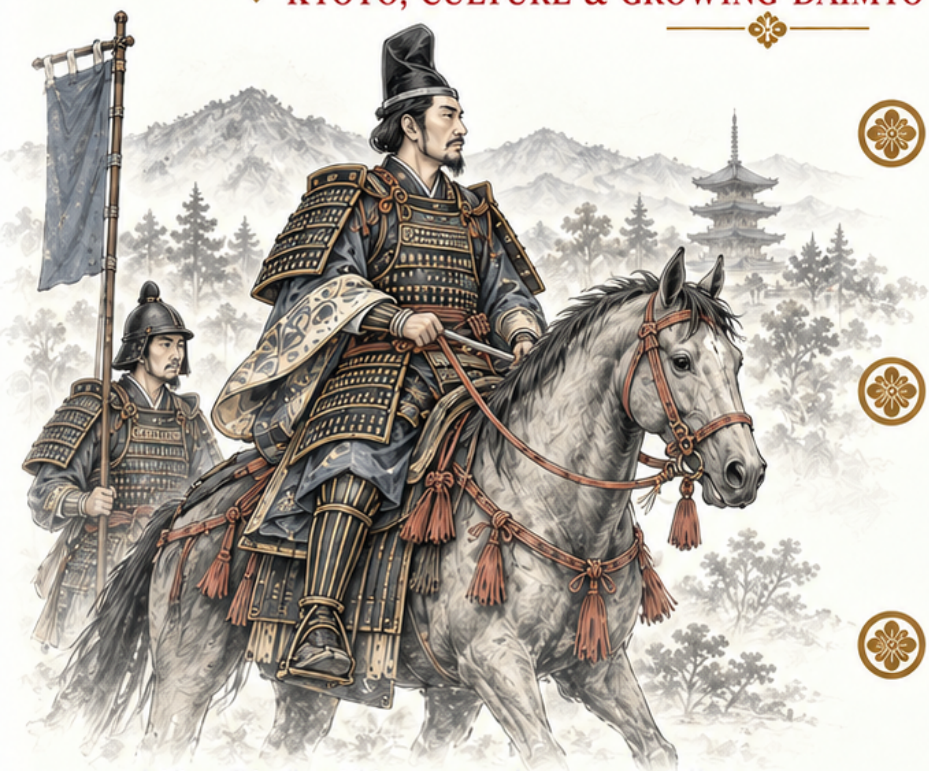
TIMELINE

1268	1274	1276–1277	1281
Yuan envoys arrive	First invasion	Hakata wall built	Second invasion

THE HISTORY OF THE SAMURAI

THE ASHIKAGA SHOGUNATE

KYOTO, CULTURE & GROWING DAIMYO POWER • 1336–1573



Ashikaga Takauji establishes a new warrior government in Kyoto.

FROM KAMAKURA TO KYOTO

After the Kamakura shogunate fell in 1333, a brief imperial restoration under Emperor Go-Daigo failed. Ashikaga Takauji established a new warrior government in Kyoto in 1336 and became shogun in 1338.

A DIVIDED COURT

Takauji supported a Northern Court in Kyoto, while Go-Daigo formed a Southern Court at Yoshino. The two courts divided loyalties until they were reunited in 1392.

THE MUROMACHI NAME

The era took its name from Kyoto's Muromachi district, where the Ashikaga shoguns established their headquarters.

POWERFUL PROVINCIAL LORDS

The Ashikaga shoguns relied on military governors called shugo. Over time, leading warrior families built regional armies and estates, becoming increasingly independent daimyo.

THE ŌNIN WAR • 1467–1477

Succession disputes and rival warrior coalitions devastated much of Kyoto. Ashikaga authority weakened sharply, helping open the long Sengoku, or Warring States, era.

ART IN A WARRIOR AGE

Shogunal and Zen patrons encouraged ink painting, garden design, Noh theater, and tea culture. Yoshimitsu's Golden Pavilion became a symbol of courtly elegance joined to warrior power.

WHY IT MATTERS

The Ashikaga shogunate placed warrior rule in Japan's old capital and helped create a brilliant culture. Yet its reliance on powerful regional lords allowed the daimyo to become the leading force in Japanese politics.

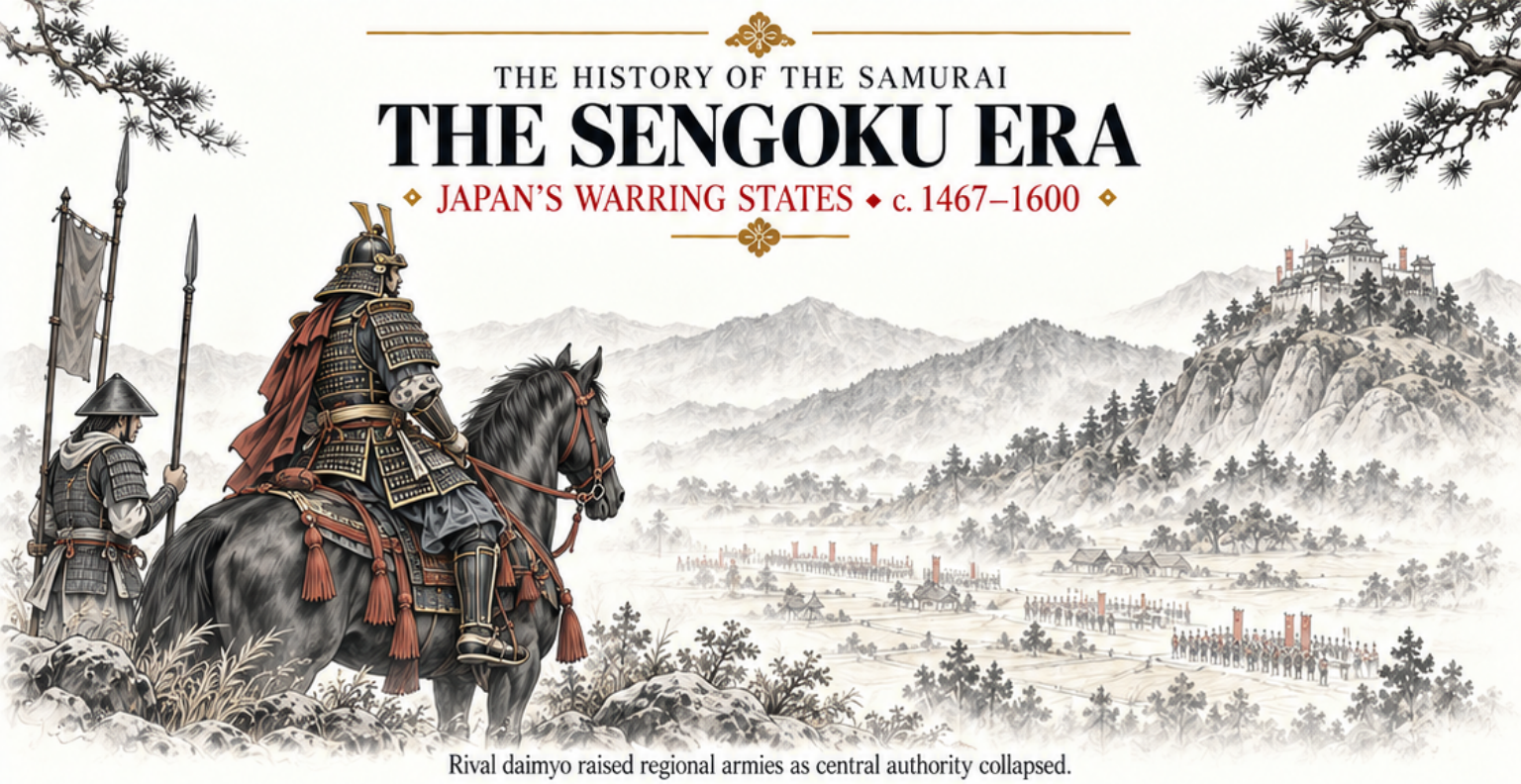
TIMELINE

1333	1336	1392	1467–1477	1573
Kamakura falls	Ashikaga government	Courts reunited	Ōnin War	Shogunate ends

THE HISTORY OF THE SAMURAI

THE SENGOKU ERA

JAPAN'S WARRING STATES ◆ c. 1467–1600



Rival daimyo raised regional armies as central authority collapsed.

WHEN CENTRAL RULE COLLAPSED

The Ōnin War of 1467–1477 devastated Kyoto and weakened Ashikaga rule. Across Japan, ambitious local lords and warrior families fought for land, alliances, and survival.

CASTLES & CASTLE TOWNS

Daimyo strengthened mountain forts and later built larger stone-based castles. Markets, artisans, soldiers, and administrators gathered nearby, creating castle towns that reshaped political life.

THE SENGOKU DAIMYO

Successful daimyo built independent regional governments. They surveyed land, issued laws, collected taxes, constructed fortresses, and demanded direct loyalty from warriors.

GEKOKUJŌ — THE LOW OVERTHROW THE HIGH

War opened paths for talented retainers and lesser lords to rise. Loyalty shifted as families rebelled, formed new alliances, and replaced older elites. Most common people still faced heavy burdens.

ARMIES GROW LARGER

Mounted samurai remained important, but foot soldiers called ashigaru became the backbone of many armies. They fought with long spears, bows, and—after 1543—matchlock guns.

TOWARD REUNIFICATION

By the late 1500s, a few leaders began to overcome the divided realm. Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu would transform war into national unification.

WHY IT MATTERS

The Sengoku era changed warfare, government, castle building, and social order. It produced the organized armies and powerful leaders who eventually reunited Japan.

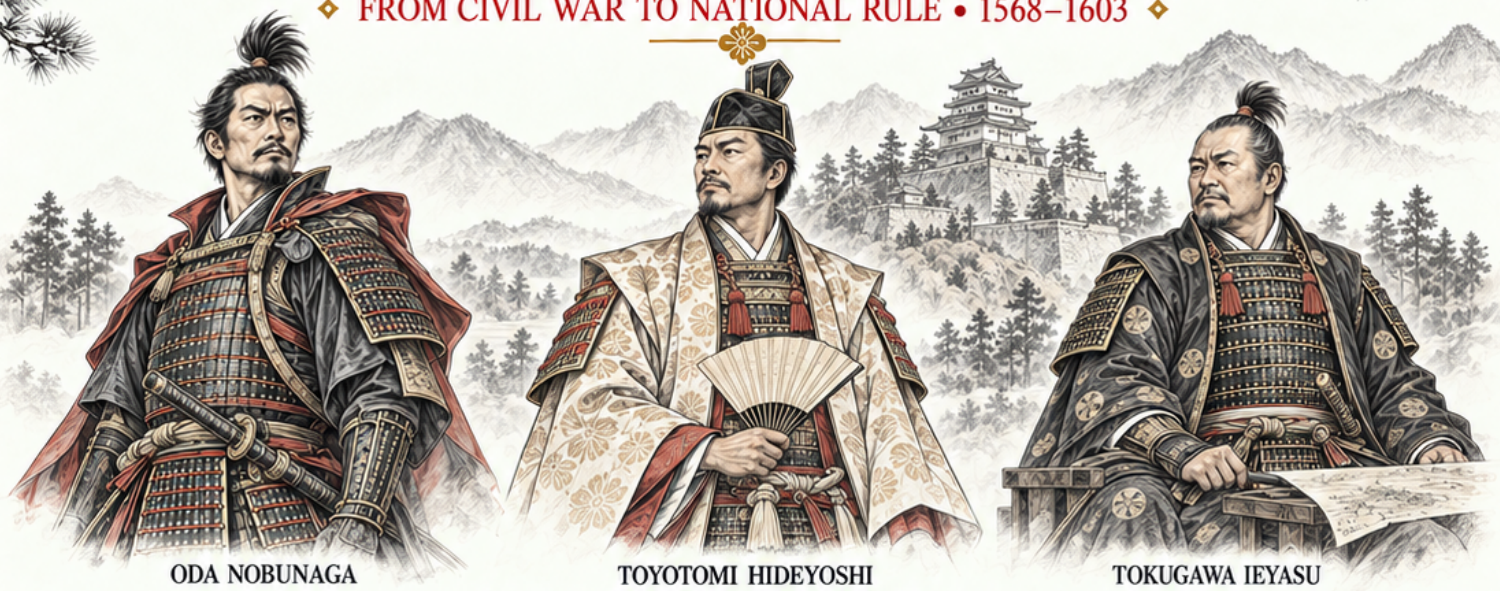
TIMELINE

1467	1543	1568	1590	1600
Ōnin War begins	Matchlocks arrive	Nobunaga enters Kyoto	Hideyoshi unifies Japan	Battle of Sekigahara

THE HISTORY OF THE SAMURAI

THE THREE GREAT UNIFIERS

FROM CIVIL WAR TO NATIONAL RULE • 1568–1603



ODA NOBUNAGA | TOYOTOMI HIDEYOSHI | TOKUGAWA IEYASU

Three successive warlords transformed a divided country.

ODA NOBUNAGA • 1534–1582

In 1568, Nobunaga entered Kyoto and installed Ashikaga Yoshiaki as shogun. He drove Yoshiaki out in 1573, ending Ashikaga rule. Through campaigns and alliances, Nobunaga brought much of central Japan under his control.

TOYOTOMI HIDEYOSHI • 1536–1598

After Nobunaga's death, Hideyoshi defeated rival leaders and secured the submission of remaining daimyo. By 1590, he had effectively unified Japan. Land surveys and the 1588 Sword Hunt strengthened his rule.

TOKUGAWA IEYASU • 1543–1616

After Hideyoshi died, rival coalitions struggled for power. Ieyasu won the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600 and became shogun in 1603, founding the Tokugawa government.

TOOLS OF UNIFICATION

Each leader combined warfare with negotiation, marriage alliances, land grants, castle building, and economic policies. Victory depended on administration as much as battle.

FIREARMS & FORTRESSES

Matchlock guns changed battlefield tactics, while large stone-based castles became military headquarters, political centers, and symbols of authority.

A VIOLENT PATH TO PEACE

Unification reduced warfare within Japan, but it involved sieges, coercion, and harsh punishment. Hideyoshi's invasions of Korea caused widespread death and destruction.

WHY IT MATTERS

Nobunaga began the process. Hideyoshi completed most of it. Ieyasu created the lasting shogunate that ruled Japan for more than 250 years.

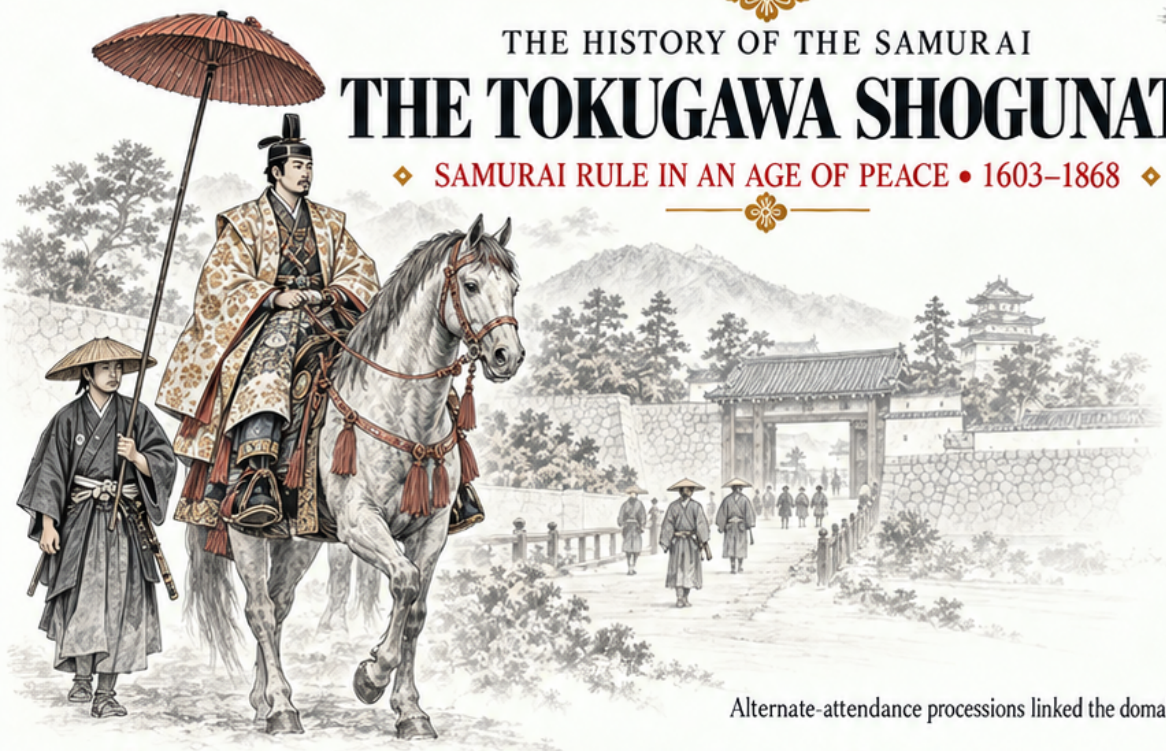
TIMELINE

1568	1573	1582	1590	1600	1603
Nobunaga enters Kyoto	Ashikaga rule ends	Nobunaga dies	Hideyoshi unifies Japan	Battle of Sekigahara	Ieyasu becomes shogun

THE HISTORY OF THE SAMURAI

THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE

SAMURAI RULE IN AN AGE OF PEACE • 1603–1868



Alternate-attendance processions linked the domains to the shogun's capital at Edo.

A NEW SHOGUNATE

In 1603, Emperor Go-Yōzei appointed Tokugawa Ieyasu shogun. The new military government ruled from Edo, while the emperor and imperial court remained in Kyoto.

THE BAKUHAN SYSTEM

Authority was divided between the Tokugawa shogunate and more than 250 domains governed by daimyo. Lords managed local affairs but remained subject to shogunal laws and supervision.

CONTROLLING THE DAIMYO

Under sankin-kōtai, daimyo spent alternating periods in Edo and their domains. Their families usually remained in Edo. Travel and maintaining two residences also consumed resources that might have supported rebellion.

SAMURAI AS ADMINISTRATORS

With fewer wars, many samurai became officials, magistrates, accountants, teachers, and scholars. They retained warrior status, wore two swords, and usually received stipends from their lords.

CASTLE TOWNS & ROADS

Peace encouraged the growth of castle towns, highways, markets, and regional trade. Edo became one of the world's largest cities, while Osaka and Kyoto remained major economic and cultural centers.

ORDER AND LIMITS

Tokugawa rule brought long stability, but society remained hierarchical. Farmers carried heavy tax burdens, merchants gained wealth despite low official status, and movement and weapons were regulated.

WHY IT MATTERS

Tokugawa rule transformed the samurai from battlefield warriors into a governing elite and shaped Japanese institutions for more than 250 years.

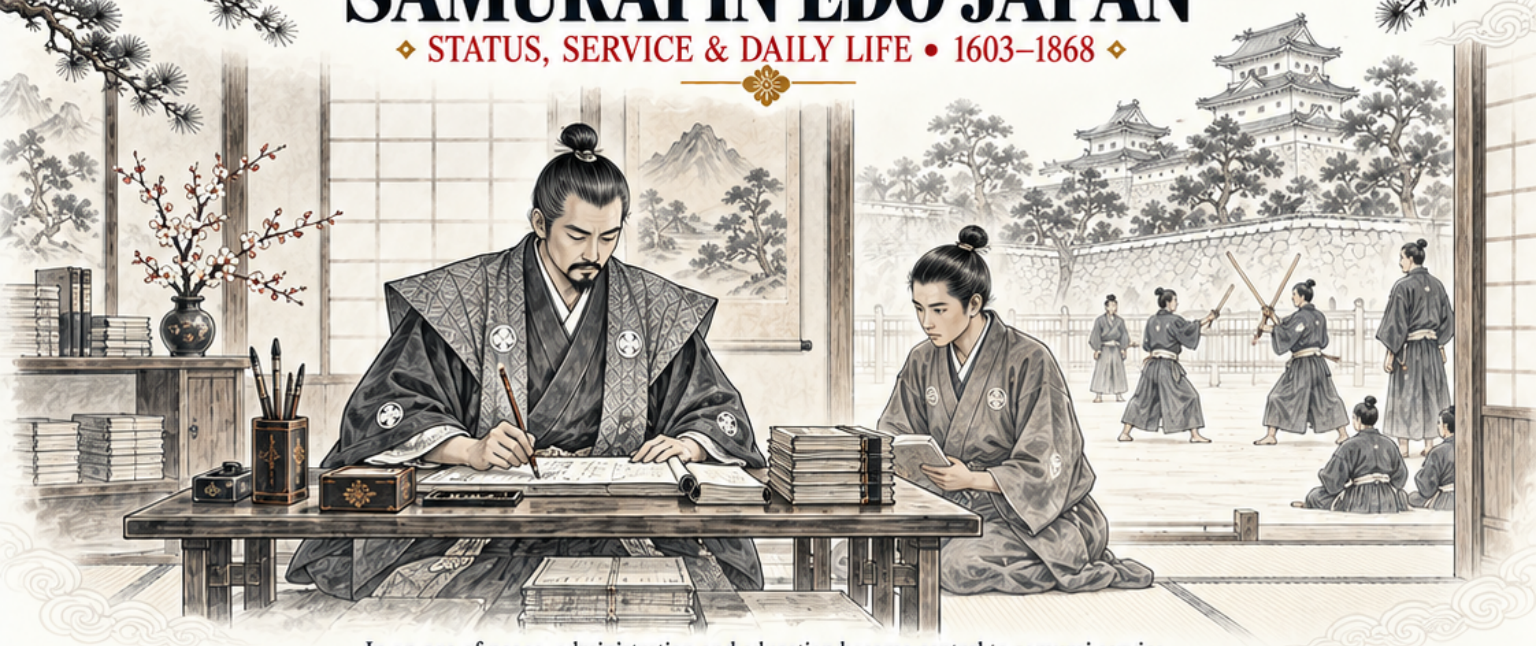
TIMELINE

1600	1603	1615	1635	1868
Battle of Sekigahara	Shogunate begins	Osaka Castle falls	Alternate attendance formalized	Shogunate ends

THE HISTORY OF THE SAMURAI

SAMURAI IN EDO JAPAN

STATUS, SERVICE & DAILY LIFE • 1603–1868



In an age of peace, administration and education became central to samurai service.

A WARRIOR WITHOUT WAR

By the eighteenth century, most samurai had never experienced battle. Military training continued, but daily service often meant guarding gates, keeping records, hearing disputes, or managing a domain.

STIPENDS AND DEBT

Many samurai were paid hereditary stipends assessed in rice. Because expenses were increasingly paid in money, changes in rice prices and the cost of urban life left many families in debt.

DAISHŌ: THE TWO SWORDS

The paired long and short swords, called *daishō*, became a visible mark of samurai status. Wearing them signaled legal privilege, family rank, and responsibility to a lord.

EDUCATION AND SCHOLARSHIP

Domain schools taught Confucian ethics, history, calligraphy, mathematics, and military skills. Samurai also studied medicine, astronomy, agriculture, and Western learning.

HOUSEHOLD AND DUTY

Samurai status belonged to households, not only individual fighters. Marriage, inheritance, adoption, service, and family reputation shaped a retainer's future. Women helped manage property, education, and household survival.

RŌNIN: WITHOUT A LORD

Samurai who lost their masters became *rōnin*. Some found new posts, opened schools, became scholars, or worked as guards. Others struggled without a stipend or secure place in the social order.

REMEMBER

The Edo samurai was both warrior and civil servant. Ink brushes, account books, and official seals could matter as much as swords.



DOMAIN OFFICE



CASTLE GUARD



SCHOOL

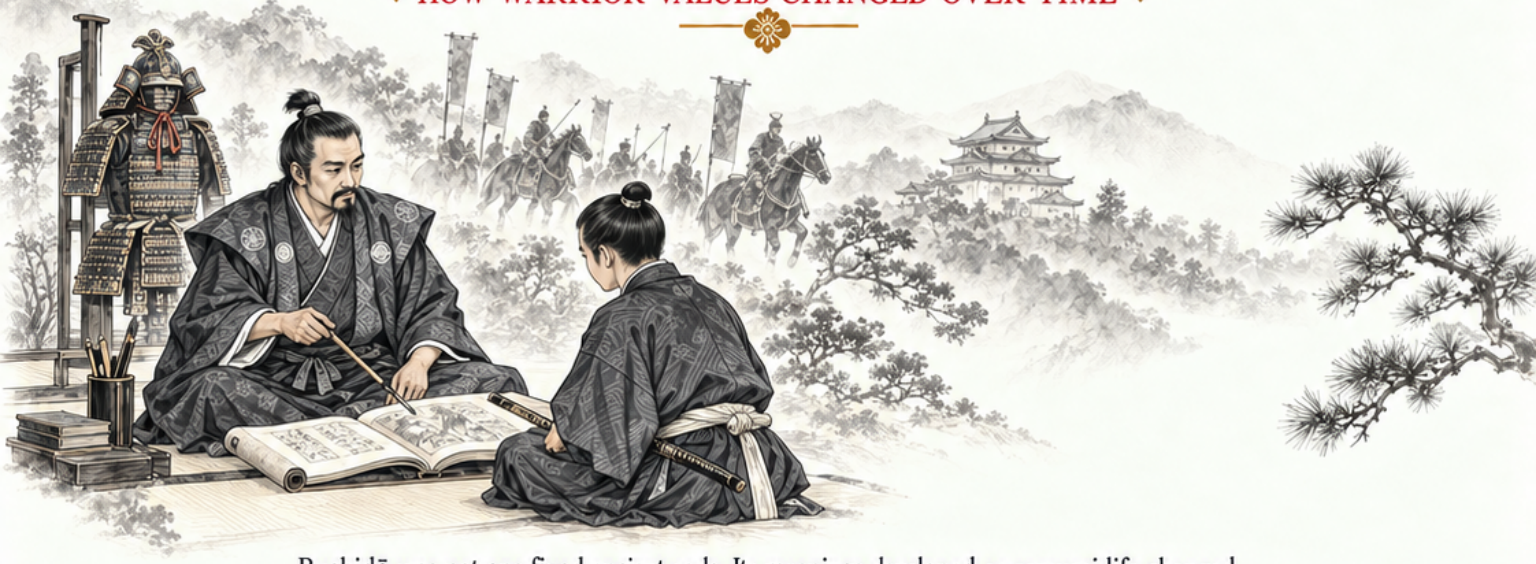


TRAINING HALL

THE HISTORY OF THE SAMURAI

BUSHIDŌ: IDEAL & REALITY

HOW WARRIOR VALUES CHANGED OVER TIME



Bushidō was not one fixed ancient code. Its meanings developed as samurai life changed.

NO SINGLE RULEBOOK

Warrior conduct differed by century, clan, domain, and circumstance. House laws and military tales praised proper service, but samurai never followed one universal list of rules.

VALUES OF THE WARRIOR

Loyalty, courage, self-control, reputation, martial skill, and duty were widely admired. In practice, alliances shifted and survival, family interest, and political judgment also shaped decisions.

PEACE RESHAPES DUTY

During the Edo period, many samurai became officials and scholars. Confucian ideas encouraged them to justify their privileged status through education, discipline, and service to society.

YAMAGA SOKŌ

The thinker Yamaga Sokō (1622–1685) argued that warriors should become moral examples in an age of peace. Study and public responsibility joined martial readiness as samurai ideals.

HAGAKURE IN CONTEXT

Yamamoto Tsunetomo's *Hagakure* was recorded in the early 1700s. It reflected the concerns of one former retainer in the Saga domain—not a rulebook obeyed by every samurai.

A MODERN IMAGE

Inazō Nitobe published *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* in English in 1899, after the samurai class had ended. His influential book helped shape the modern world's romantic image of bushidō.

REMEMBER

Bushidō is best understood as an evolving tradition of warrior ideals—not a single timeless code.



1100s–1500s
HOUSE CODES



1600s
EDO THINKERS



EARLY 1700s
HAGAKURE



1899
NITOBE'S BUSHIDO

THE HISTORY OF THE SAMURAI

THE FALL OF THE SAMURAI

THE MEIJI RESTORATION • 1853–1877



In a single generation, Japan replaced hereditary warrior rule with a modern centralized state.

THE BLACK SHIPS

Commodore Matthew Perry entered Edo Bay in 1853. Under pressure from foreign powers, the shogunate opened ports through new treaties, deepening arguments over Japan's leadership and security.

THE SHOGUNATE FALLS

Powerful domains opposed Tokugawa rule. After political crisis and civil war, the last shogun surrendered authority, and imperial government was restored under Emperor Meiji in 1868.

DOMAINS BECOME PREFECTURES

In 1871, the new government abolished the domains and replaced them with prefectures. Former daimyō lost their territories, while samurai ties to individual lords weakened.

A NATIONAL ARMY

The Conscription Ordinance of 1873 required military service beyond the samurai class. A national army gradually replaced the old system of hereditary warrior service.

STIPENDS AND SWORDS

Samurai stipends were converted into government bonds. In 1876, most former samurai were forbidden to wear swords in public, ending a visible privilege of their status.

THE SATSUMA REBELLION

In 1877, Saigō Takamori led dissatisfied former samurai in the Satsuma Rebellion. Their defeat by the imperial army showed that the old warrior order would not return.

REMEMBER

The samurai class disappeared, but former samurai became officers, officials, teachers, police, journalists, and business leaders in modern Japan.



1853
PERRY ARRIVES



1868
MEIJI RESTORATION



1873
NATIONAL CONSCRIPTION



1876–1877
SWORDS RESTRICTED • SATSUMA REBELLION

THE HISTORY OF THE SAMURAI

SAMURAI MEMORY & LEGACY

FROM HISTORICAL WARRIORS TO A GLOBAL ICON



Artifacts, traditions, and stories preserve the samurai—but they also reshape how the past is remembered.

OBJECTS AS EVIDENCE

Armor, swords, bows, documents, and castles reveal craftsmanship, rank, warfare, government, and daily life. Museums preserve these objects so historians can study samurai culture beyond legend.

MARTIAL TRADITIONS

Modern disciplines such as kendō and kyūdō carry forward techniques, etiquette, and ideals connected to earlier warrior training. They developed over time and are not unchanged copies of medieval combat.

STORIES REMEMBERED

War tales, chronicles, theater, prints, and family histories turned warriors into heroes, villains, and tragic figures. These stories preserved memories while adding drama and moral lessons.

THE GLOBAL SAMURAI

Novels, museums, film, television, and games introduced samurai imagery around the world. The armored warrior and lone swordsman became powerful symbols of courage, loyalty, and skill.

MYTH AND HISTORY

Samurai were more varied than the popular image suggests. They fought with bows, spears, swords, and firearms; served families and lords; governed domains; studied; and adapted to changing times.

WHY THEY ENDURE

The samurai story joins dramatic conflict with art, discipline, political power, and personal choice. Its appeal continues because it explores how people respond when duty and survival collide.

REMEMBER

The samurai legacy is most meaningful when objects, written evidence, and later stories are examined together.



1868
SAMURAI RULE ENDS



LATE 1800s
MEMORIES REFRAMED



1900s
FILM REACHES THE WORLD



TODAY
HERITAGE PRESERVED

THE HISTORY OF THE SAMURAI

SAMURAI: TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

A QUICK REFERENCE TO THE WARRIOR AGE



Nearly a thousand years of changing warfare, government, culture, and memory.

MASTER TIMELINE

c. 900s	Regional warrior families gain influence.
1185	Minamoto Yoritomo establishes warrior government at Kamakura.
1274 & 1281	Mongol invasions are repelled.
1336	The Ashikaga shogunate begins.
1467–1600	The Sengoku era divides Japan.
1600	Tokugawa Ieyasu wins at Sekigahara.
1603	The Tokugawa shogunate begins at Edo.
1853	Perry's ships enter Edo Bay.
1868	The Meiji Restoration ends Tokugawa rule.
1877	The Satsuma Rebellion is defeated.

ESSENTIAL TERMS

Samurai / bushi — Members of Japan's warrior class.

Shogun — Military ruler who governed in the emperor's name.

Daimyō — Powerful lord controlling a regional domain.

Bakufu — A warrior government led by a shogun.

Retainer — A warrior bound in service to a lord.

Rōnin — A samurai without a lord.

Daishō — The paired long and short swords.

Bushidō — Evolving ideals associated with warrior conduct.

Sankin-kōtai — Edo system requiring daimyō attendance at the shogun's capital.

FURTHER READING & RELIABLE SOURCES

The Metropolitan Museum of Art — Art of the Samurai: Japanese Arms and Armor, 1156–1868
metmuseum.org

Asian Art Museum — An Introduction to the Samurai; Edo Period Society; Samurai Warrior Codes
education.asianart.org

U.S. Office of the Historian — The United States and the Opening to Japan, 1853
history.state.gov

A FINAL THOUGHT

The samurai were never only swordsmen. They were warriors, landholders, officials, scholars, artists, family members, and historical people whose lives changed with Japan.