

# TOKUGAWA ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

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The Tokugawa Period or the Edo Period is from 1603-1868. It is designated as the period with strict social order, economic growth and stable population. The Shogunate was established by Tokugawa Ieyasu. After defeating Mitsunari's faction in the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600 and eliminating the Toyotomi family, Ieyasu was successfully named the Shogun in 1603.

He exercised control over the Daimyos. He transferred many Daimyos who stood as an opposition. The Daimyo's confiscated lands were distributed among the Tokugawa relatives. Even Hideyori (Hideyoshi's son) was given the position of Daimyo of Kinki District. Daimyos were assigned territories and positions based on whether they supported the Tokugawa family at the battle of Sekigahara or they submitted to them after the war. There were 3 categories of Daimyos: *Shimpan*, which were the relatives of Tokugawa family, *Fudai* - the hereditary Daimyo and *Tozama* which were the outside lords. The *Tozama* lords were not fully trusted by the Bakufu and were located in the areas between the trusted *Shimpan* and *Fudai Daimyo*. The Bakufu kept extra vigilance on the *Tozama* lords by keeping spies who kept an eye on any conspiracies. In general, The Daimyo families were prohibited from any marital ties without the approval of Bakufu. Anything that might be endangering the Supremacy of Bakufu was taken care of beforehand. Bakufu instituted the Sankinkotai system (alternate attendance) which required the Daimyos to visited Edo every other year. This was done so to drain their resources and to prevent them from accumulating resources for disobeying or using it against the Bakufu. The Daimyos wives and children were held hostages in Edo which made the Daimyos obey Bakufu. The Daimyo families were prohibited from any marital ties without Bakufu's approval. In addition to this, the daimyo were forced to assist in public works such as the construction of castles in the

bakufu domains, which kept them busy and in financial difficulties. Immediately after destroying the Toyotomi family in 1615 by killing Hideyori in Osaka, the Laws for the Military Houses (Buke Shohatto) and the Laws for the Imperial and Court Officials (Kinchū Narabi ni Kuge Shohatto) were promulgated. It was used by the Bakufu to control the Daimyo and imperial court. The *Bukke Shohatto* authorized the mode of conduct for the samurai and Daimyo. The **Bakuhan**, the bakufu control policy advanced further. Daimyos retained their power in their domains (Han), thus, the Tokugawa system is referred to as baku-han system. The ideas of Neo-Confucianism, especially of the Sung dynasty Chu Hsi School (Shushigaku) helped in aligning the Bakuhan system. The central moral ideas of Confucianism was *chū* (loyalty,) and *kō* (filial piety). The ideal of filial piety replaced all considerations except for loyalty to the lord.

At this time, the Tokugawa Bakufu domains amounted to more than seven million koku (about one fourth of the whole country). The daimyos were allowed free hand in the administration of their Hans. The Bakufu held back the right to manage the foreign relations of the country, hence declaring monopoly over it. It controlled the coinage, inter-han transportation, etc. Bakufu had greater financial resources than Daimyos.

## STRUCTURE OF THE ADMINISTRATION

The formation of administration took its final form under the reign of Tokugawa Iemitsu. The Shogun was assisted by several councilors. The highest rank was of *Tairō* (great councilor). During the early years, Tokugawa Bakufu had 3 *Tairō*, which was later reduced to one. The other conciliar position was of *Rōjū* (senior councilor) they were chosen from the *Fudai Daimyo* with land holdings above 25,000 koku. Under their supervision was *ō-metsuke* (inspector general) whose function was to supervise the

relationship of Shogun with the Daimyo. *Bugyō* or the Commissioners were in charge of major cities, financial affairs, monasteries and shrines. There were city commissioners who managed administrative and judicial affairs in Edo. *Wakadoshiyori*, The Junior councilors were the three to five junior officials who were chosen from among the *Fudai Daimyo*. Their task was to supervise the housemen and the affairs within Edo Castle. Under them were the *Metsuke* (inspectors) who also supervised housemen and bannermen. There were four intendants known as *Gunkai* and around forty to fifty *Daikan* who were appointed to manage the land of the Bakufu. For a close check on the imperial court, the Bakufu assigned a deputy in Kyoto. The whole system was established in such a way that Bakufu's position will not be threatened in any manner.

Another factor which the administration concentrated upon was the finance. The primary source of income for the Daimyo was the taxes levied on the peasants of their han. The bakufu acquired their income from the mines and obtained loans from the merchants. Furthermore, it reserved the right to mint coins for the entire country. The Daimyos were also permitted to have their own currency and mint coins for their han but it had very little value in other domains. In place of the former Shoen system, *Kokudaka* i.e the actual product of the land, continued in this period. With this, the tax was levied on the village as a unit. The rights were held for the farming population, and the *Kokudaka* was applied to the landholdings of the Daimyos as well. Assessment of Koku was based on rice consumed by one person in a year. Peasants had rights for their land and were registered for their lands. The Taikō land survey gave rights to the peasants as cultivators and made them responsible for their own taxes. The *chigyō* system which was based on the *Kokudaka* system, mentioned that all the land belonged to the Shogun. The relationship of Bakufu and Daimyos, under the *chigyō* system, was that of the lords and vassals. Theoretically, under the system, the law belonged to the Shogun and was given as special favors to the Daimyos. In return, the Daimyos were obligated to provide military and other services to Shogun. With the structural organization of the Bakufu, the domain administration of the daimyo (*Hansei*) came together.

## LEGAL SYSTEM OF JAPAN

The legal system based on “**rule by status**” not “rule by law” which prevailed in the west. In the west, “Rule by law” held the supremacy of the law. Therefore, there was equality and no immunity was given for the ruling class. “**Rule by status**” gave the ruling class a multi-status in the society. The society was based on hierarchic relationship which made distinctions between the superior and inferior. The governing officials and the samurai class exercised power over the inferior classes. The law for the inferior classes was to submit themselves to the superior classes. The authority made it apparent that the basic principle with which the society ran was that people are unequal. This structure of hierarchical society gave the Samurais free hand for using the law against the common people and peasants. They would execute the inferior class if they felt that somebody did not behave properly or used unproper language.

There were various laws issued for the Bakufu's land, common people, Samurais and even monasteries and shrines. Under the Shogun Yoshimune, the rules were regularized and compiled in 1742 by making One Hundred Articles. There were 103 sections in the code. The punishment for the crimes was mostly death. Some crimes were punishable for not only the culprit but also their family members like fathers, brothers, wife, children, etc. With this custom of holding the family members equally responsible for the crime, a new custom came into existence by which the family members were legally disowned by the family. Modes of execution of people depended on the crime. Culprits were crucified, beheaded with a sword, burned at the stake, etc. There were other modes of punishments such as banishment, house arrest, imposition of fines, etc. In the Tokugawa period, the procedure for crimes was that nobody could be punished until they confessed. Therefore, torture was used against those who refused to confess for crimes like murder, robbery etc. They were flogged, weighed down with stones, etc.

In 1630s, an important event took place in Japan which limited the trade with the foreign countries. Japan enforced Nation Seclusion which was done because the Christian missionaries attempted to convert the Japanese making them Christians. In 1612-1614, decrees were made to prohibit the Christians. The

Dutch and the Chinese were allowed to continue the trade, although this was restricted and confined to only the island of Dejima at Nagasaki. Iemitsu also allowed some trade with Korea and the Ryukyu Islands. *Sakoku* was instrumental in facilitating the Tokugawa Bakufu to establish a prolonged peace of nearly 300 years; But on the other, it has been argued that this simply extended a rigid feudal system to an extent that is unknown elsewhere in the world.

### SOCIAL ORGANISING OF THE SOCIETY

There was a clear distinction made for the samurais in 1591, which prohibited the Samurai class to take up any farming activities. Thus, a clear division of labor was developed. After Hideyoshi confiscated the swords owned by anyone other than the warrior class, the society was divided on the basis of labor. There was a 4 class division of Samurai, Peasants, Artisans, and Merchants which is also known as the Shi-no-ko-sho system. It was the final completion of the society. There was a rigid distinction of the main classes. If a person born in a certain class, they remained in that same class and unlike the former periods, people could not climb up the social hierarchy. A samurai's son belonged to the samurai class. The hereditary class was based on their profession which was automatically taken up by their children. Their occupations were hereditary i.e A child born in the samurai faction cannot take up farming. Class status ruled all kinds of social relations. The lower classes were expected to be submissive and obedient to the superior classes. The objective of the Bakufu was to preserve the status and social order. Individualism was repressed and all new innovations were rejected. Inter-marriage between the classes was prohibited.

There was hierarchy in the **Samurai** class. There was a broad division of upper and lower class samurai. There were rigid social barriers in the classes as well. The lower class samurai could not rise into the upper class even if they performed their duties with excellence. Upper class samurais could ride horses, etc. but the lower class samurais were denied to do so. The foot soldiers were supposed to kneel on the ground when they see an upper class samurai. Inter-marriage was **not** allowed even amongst the upper and lower class samurais. The code of samurai was discussed in

the Tokugawa period by the Confucian scholars. The samurai was expected to be well-versed in Confucian classics as well as be a skilled swordsman. The samurais committed Hara-kiri after their masters died which was later prohibited in 1663.

**Peasantry** was about 80% of the population. Though ranked after the Samurais, their real status was below the townspeople. The peasants could not have a family name. There were two classes of peasantry, the ones who owned their lands (*hombyakusho*) and the ones who were tenants. They were not allowed to have swords. The Peasant's life was monitored by the ruling class. The peasant's crops were limited to just rice, wheat, beans, german millet and millet. They were told to make straw ropes in sandals in the evening in order to not waste their evening time. They were instructed to eat less food and to use cotton for clothing and bind their hair with straws instead of ribbons. The wives who had past times like tea drinking and flower viewing were divorced. The taxes were about 40-50% of the crop. The amount of rice each village had to pay was decided by the land surveys. In addition to the land tax, other taxes like taxes on doors, windows, female children, etc. was added. Some officials of Hans confiscated the peasant's possessions, wives etc if they failed to pay taxes. Peasants provided labor to maintain the roads and other public facilities. The village (*mura*) became the administrative unit after the shoen system collapsed. The shoguns and daimyo's agents supervised village affairs. Each village had autonomy in their managements to some degree.

**Artisans and Merchants** were placed lower than the peasantry because the samurai class respected the peasant class. Confucius stated that "the superior man thinks of virtue, and the inferior man thinks of possessions", it became the basis of social hierarchy for the Artisans and Merchants. Merchant's lot was much more than Peasants. Merchants collected more and more wealth and eventually gained financial power over the ruling class. Somewhere between 1600 and 1730 the area under cultivation increased considerably and it is estimated that the population grew from about 18 million to about 26 million by the early part of the 18th century, stimulating commercial activities. It helped in increasing the number of cities. About 130 cities flourished primarily as castle towns.

Edo grew into a major city overnight. Even amongst the townspeople there were 2 classes, those who owned their own houses and those who were tenants. Those who owned houses were registered in official registers and were treated as citizens. There was a distinction between wealthier merchants and the ordinary townspeople. Merchants and craft guilds were planned by the townspeople to limit the number of merchants or artisans in trade. Among the artisans and craftsmen, a master-follower relationship developed.

Other than the 4 main classes, a large section of the society was Outcastes. They were classified as *Ryomin*

(the good people) and *Semmin* (lowly people). Majority belonged to the good people category.

The Tokugawa Period which was named after Tokugawa Ieyasu modeled the current mode of thinking, values, behavior, etc. for two and a half centuries. The period succeeded in being social stability and peace in the society. The Tokugawa regime was prominent for its elaborate system of civil administration based on the Confucian philosophy. This system was also established in order to maintain peace and consolidate power throughout the country. At the end of Tokugawa rule the entire nation's agricultural yield was about 30 million koku.

#### REFERENCE

1. Hane, Mikiso. Japan: a Historical Survey. Scribner, 1972, pp 130-155

#### NOTES

1. Early Modern Japan (Tokugawa)