

## Samurai Ranks and Residences around Kaga Castle

In this hub of the Kaga domain (feudal-era Ishikawa Prefecture, centered on Kanazawa), samurai retainers were allotted land for their residences appropriate to their stipend, which was determined according to rank. Residential areas around the castle were divided and redistributed several times in the early years of the Edo period (1603–1867), but after 1659 there were no further major changes. In principle, the higher a samurai's rank, the closer his residence was to the castle and the larger the residential site assigned to him. Lower-ranking samurai were placed further out and allocated less land. This was both a political and strategic arrangement that kept high-ranking samurai close and made attacking the town from outside more difficult.

In Kanazawa, the area inhabited by samurai made up nearly seventy percent of the town. This included the castle, domain facilities, samurai residences, and accommodation for *ashigaru* (foot soldiers). Samurai of middle rank (*heishi*) were especially numerous and occupied roughly 25 percent of this land. It is thought that a high proportion of *heishi* was one reason that Nagamachi, in which many *heishi* lived, never suffered serious fire damage. The land they occupied was roughly seven times the area allotted to common townsfolk, and these expansive grounds were connected by gardens interspersed with water channels. Thus, fire could not spread as quickly as in areas with the higher densities more typical of the Edo period.

*Ashigaru*, the lowest-ranking samurai class, lived in designated wards called *kumichi* in various parts of the city. Unlike those in other domains, Kaga's *ashigaru* were given detached residences, which—on top of plentiful business opportunities—is thought to have made the domain attractive to many *ashigaru*.