

Heishi (Middle-Ranking Samurai)

Middle-ranking samurai were referred to as *heishi*. In the Kaga domain (feudal-era Ishikawa, centered on Kanazawa), *heishi* made up the bulk of the samurai in the service of the domain and the core of its administrative body. Historical documents indicate the existence of as many as 1,400 *heishi* residences by the end of the feudal period in 1868.

Work

The samurai class in Kaga domain was separated into two major groups: those whose role was essentially military and those who were primarily administrators.

The military group was split into six subgroups. Two of these subgroups were the *omawari-gumi*, who served as cavalry, and the soldiers who formed the bodyguard (*shinban-gumi*) of the domain lord (daimyo). The role of *heishi* within these subgroups could change, depending on their wealth.

In addition to the six military subgroups, *heishi* also constituted officials for ten administrative organizations. These included the horse officials who cared for the daimyo's mounts, officials who oversaw the repair and maintenance of the castle, officials who served as magistrates of public affairs and sat in the high courts, and police, responsible for local law enforcement.

Stipend

Although *heishi* held a middle rank among samurai, their lives were not necessarily easy—and the lower their stipend, the more difficult their lives became.

Samurai stipends were measured in units of rice called *koku*. One *koku* was about 180 liters, or roughly the amount of rice an adult person consumes in a year. On paper, a samurai of the *heishi* rank might receive a stipend of anywhere from 80 to 2,400 *koku*. However, in reality, many families had immediate access only to about 40 percent of that amount. In the Takada family's case, that meant that while they were a 550-*koku* family, they probably only received around 220 *koku* each year.

According to documentation from 1825, a *heishi* estate receiving 500 *roku* spent over 70 percent of that income on necessities such as food and clothing, and 11 percent on servants (*chugen*). Consequently, less than 20 percent of a samurai's salary was actually available for ready use. Compared to a household of lesser means, this was still a considerable sum. A *heishi* estate of 100 *roku* saw 83 percent of its stipend go to basic necessities and 13 percent to *chugen*, meaning that they retained barely anything for other needs. There was a saying at this time that "in a 100-*roku* family of six, eight suffer," meaning that a *heishi* family with six members could barely afford their living expenses, and the two or more *chugen* that attended them would invariably lead harsh lives.

In the early days of the Edo period (1603–1867), *heishi* were given their land by the daimyo. They collected rice as a form of tax from the farmers on those lands, which meant that their real stipend was greatly dependent on the harvest each year. In 1656, reforms instituted by the daimyo Maeda Toshitsune (1593–1658) provided some stability for *heishi* families by switching the Kaga domain to a twice yearly (spring and winter) payment system. This ensured that *heishi* were paid regardless of fluctuations in annual yields.