



6 TYPES OF JAPANESE WARRIORS

By Tasha Lim



When we hear 'warriors of Japan', we immediately think of 'samurais' and 'ninjas'. But, did you know that there were other warriors that **resided** in early Japan as well? Here are 6 other types of warriors that existed then:



Tsukai-Ban

They have an important job that many do not know of. In any army, communication is very important. Different groups far away must be able to send messages to each other easily. This group of warriors were the messengers of the battlefield.

For work, they had to wear a special type of uniform. A tsukai-ban could be identified by his uniform known as 'horo', usually made with beautiful colours. If not, he had to wear a uniform called a 'sashimono' which had small flags.

These messengers were very good horsemen. They would carry a message and give it to the correct person in a short time. They sometimes had to fight robbers or ninjas sent to steal the messages.



A warrior wearing the horo (red), a garment used as a defense against arrows.



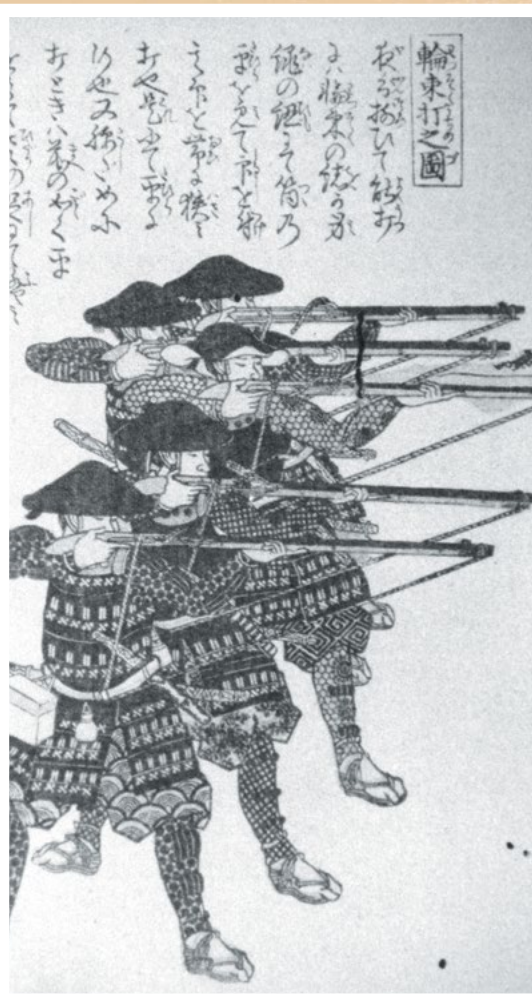
Sashimono poles were attached to the backs of the chest armor.



ASHIGARU

They may not be famous for their fighting skills but the ashigaru was strong when many were needed. These were your usual foot soldiers that would make up most of the army. They were usually normal people who worked as soldiers for war.

Usually, the Ashigaru fought with spears, swords and bows. Later in the 16th century, gunpowder guns became a part of their weapons. The warlord Nobunaga won a great war in 1575 by giving 3,000 of his ashigaru **arquebuses**.



A Japanese Edo period wood block print showing a gunner firing arquebus.



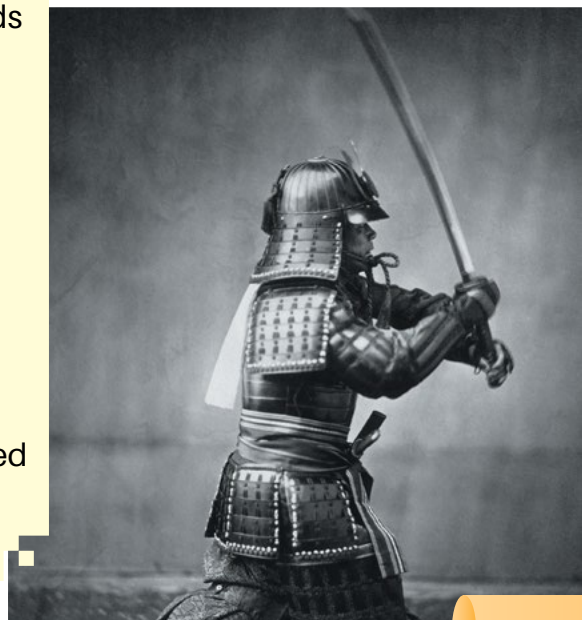


Samurai

Probably the most famous of the lot, samurais were the most **prominent** of Japan's feudal years. During the feudal years, many lords fought with each other to take over their lands. This was for two reasons: their work as warriors and their sword skills.

The samurais began as horse archers and became swordsmen later on. Their skills were well respected and they later became leaders of the army. They carried a long and short katana (Japanese sword) at all times. The swords were a sign of their power.

Samurais became especially important during the Shogunate period as the Minamoto and Taira families fought for power. In the end, the samurais changed again to become administrators (people who help to run a country) when Japan changed the way they ruled.



Sohei

These were a group of powerful Buddhist monk warriors who fought for the people to help them. Several monasteries actually had armies of such monks.

Their loyalty, not like the samurai, were with the monasteries they were part of. They were almost the same as samurais in some ways but their work was not the same.

The most famous and feared **contingent** was at Enryaku-Ji, the big temple on Mount Hiei.



Ronin

A samurai has a clear place in Japan. He works for a lord and serves his master. However, when he loses his place, he becomes a 'ronin'.

A ronin doesn't only lose his former position but he also loses his land, power and monthly pay.

In order to fill their stomachs, ronins had to put their fighting skills to use by becoming killers who worked for anyone who would pay them. This was especially so during the 15th and 16th centuries when Japan was going through a time of change. However, when peace finally came, the work of the ronin died out.

Ninja

They are the secret killers that everyone loves in Japanese movies. Similar to what is seen in the movies, ninjas do not fight on the battlefields but from the shadows.

Their special skill was sneaking into the enemy's castle without being found out, damage weapons or food stores, and killed the lord of the castle. In Japan, they are also called "shinobi" which means "those who work with **stealth**". They used lying and bluffing to surprise their enemies.

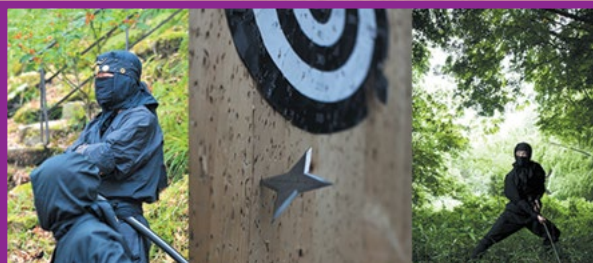
Their way of fighting were both their strong points and failing points too. To many, the ways of a ninja were bad as it was against the "way of the warrior" and so, ninjas were not given the same position as samurais. Many lords would not pay ninjas to work for them.



The image of the ninja entered popular culture in the Edo period, when folktales and plays about ninja were conceived.

Each type of Japanese warrior had to work hard for their lords. Each warrior had an important role to play.

Iga Ninja Camp



LEVEL: A2

GLOSSARY:

arquebus (noun) – a portable but heavy gun invented in the 15th century

contingent (noun) – a group of people

prominent (adjective) – widely and popularly known

reside (verb) – to stay in, dwell permanently or continuously; to live in

stealth (noun) – the act of moving in a quiet or secretive way

DID YOU KNOW?

The small Japanese city of Iga, the birthplace of the ninja, is currently suffering from a shortage of ninjas!

The city has a population of 100,000 but younger Japanese people are moving to larger cities and turning their backs on the ninja life.

Now the city of Iga is offering up to \$85,000 to people who want to come and train as a ninja! If you want to find out more, scan the QR code below to listen to an informative podcast!

