SECTION 4

# Feudal Societies

## What You Will Learn...

**Main Ideas**

1. Feudal societies shared common elements in Europe and Japan.
2. Europe and Japan differed in their cultural elements such as religion and art.

**The Big Idea**

Although the feudal systems of Europe and Japan were similar, their cultures were very different.

**Key Terms**

chivalry, *p. 513*
haiku, *p. 514*

**TAKING NOTES** As you read, take notes on the feudal systems and cultures of Europe and Japan in the Middle Ages.

| | Europe | Japan |
|---|---|---|
| Fuedal system | | |
| Warriors | | |
| Religion | | |
| Arts | | |

## If YOU were there...

You want to be a squire, a young person who trains to be a knight. Your best friend thinks you are foolish. He says that you'll have to swear a vow of loyalty to your lord, and you'll have to fight in battles for him. Your sister told you that you will have to follow a strict code of honor. But you still want to be a knight.

**Why do you want to be a knight?**

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** Knights were an important part of feudal society. People who wanted to be knights did have to swear vows of loyalty, fight in battles, and follow a code of honor. But European knights were not the only people who had to live by these rules. Half a world away, Japanese samurai lived under similar obligations. In fact, if you look at these two societies, you will see that many striking similarities existed between them.

## Feudal Societies Share Common Elements

Feudalism was not unique to Europe. As you have already read, the Japanese developed a very similar system halfway around the world from Europe at about the same time. But how similar were the two societies?

### Lords and Vassals

In Europe, the basis for the feudal system was land. Kings and lords gave land to knights. In return, the knights promised to serve their lords and fight for them when necessary. Many knights owned large manors. Peasants and serfs worked on the manors and paid the lords in food.

A very similar system existed in Japan. There, the emperor gave land to great lords who were later called daimyo. In turn, these lords employed warriors called samurai. Like European knights, the samurai promised to serve and fight for their lords. In exchange, the samurai received rice and grain. Lords got the grain from peasants who farmed their land. Peasants had to pay their lords in grain.

## Samurai and Knights

**Although Japanese samurai and European knights never actually met, they had much in common. Both were the elite warriors of their time and place.**

**ANALYSIS SKILL** **ANALYZING VISUALS**

**How are the samurai and knight similar? How are they different?**

### Knights and Samurai

The lives of knights and samurai were, in many ways, very similar. Both had to swear vows of loyalty to their lords. These lords expected them to fight well and to be fearless in battle. The lords also expected their knights or samurai to live disciplined and honorable lives.

Both European knights and Japanese samurai had to follow strict codes of honor that governed how they behaved. You have already learned about Bushido, the Japanese code of the samurai. Europeans called their code of honorable behavior for knights **chivalry** (SHIV-uhl-ree). Like Bushido, chivalry required knights to be brave and loyal but humble and modest at the same time. It also required them to be kind and generous when dealing with people, especially women.

Because of their loyalty and dedication, both knights and samurai were greatly admired by other members of their societies. This admiration can often be seen in literary descriptions of the men, such as this description of the French knight Roland and his comrades who are greatly outnumbered by their enemies:

> "The battle is fearful and full of grief.
> Oliver and Roland strike like good men,
> the Archbishop, more than a thousand blows,
> and the Twelve Peers do not hang back, they strike!
> the French fight side by side, all as one man.
> The pagans die by hundreds, by thousands:
> whoever does not flee finds no refuge from death,
> like it or not, there he ends his days."
>
> –from *The Song of Roland*, translated by Frederick Goldin

**FOCUS ON READING**

Why do you think a primary source is included here?

Even though Roland and the others were almost certain that they would die, they continued to fight. They became heroes, admired for their courage and bravery.

**ACADEMIC VOCABULARY**
elements parts

The Japanese also admired their warriors for their courage. A passage from a Japanese text shows a similar admiration for warriors fighting impossible odds:

> "Where Naozane galloped, Sueshige followed; where Sueshige galloped, Naozane followed. Neither willing to be outdone, they dashed in by turns, whipping their horses and attacking until the sparks flew… Naozane pulled out the arrows that were lodged in his own armor, tossed them aside, faced the stronghold with a scowl, and shouted in a mighty voice, 'I am Naozane, the man who left Kamakura last winter determined to give his life for Lord Yoritomo… Confront me! Confront me!'"
>
> –from *The Tale of the Heike*, translated by Helen Craig McCullough

**READING CHECK** **Comparing** How were European knights and Japanese samurai similar?

## Europe and Japan Differ

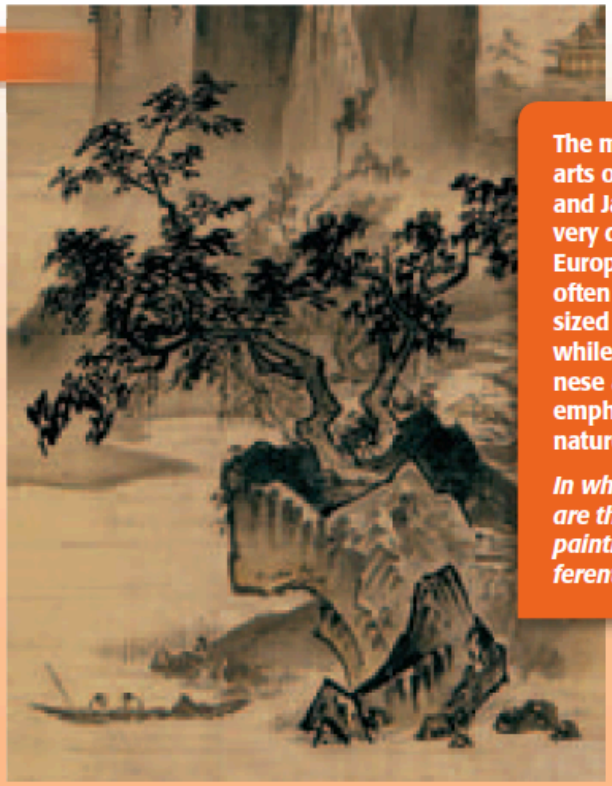
Although European and Japanese societies were the same in some ways, in most ways they were not. Their two cultures were also very different.

Perhaps the main difference between medieval Europeans and Japanese was religion. Nearly all Europeans were Christian, while the Japanese blended elements of Buddhism, Shinto, and Confucianism. European and Japanese religions taught very different ways of looking at the world. People in those places, therefore, did not act the same way.

The differences between Europe and Japan can also be seen in the artistic forms popular in each place. European art in the Middle Ages dealt mostly with religious themes. Paintings showed scenes from the Bible, and writers tried to inspire people with stories about great Christians.

In Japan, on the other hand, most art dealt with natural themes. Paintings of nature were common, and people built many gardens. Buildings blended with nature, rather than standing out. Japanese literature also celebrated nature. For example, Japanese poets in the 1600s created **haiku** (HY-koo), short, three-line poems of 17 syllables that describe nature scenes.

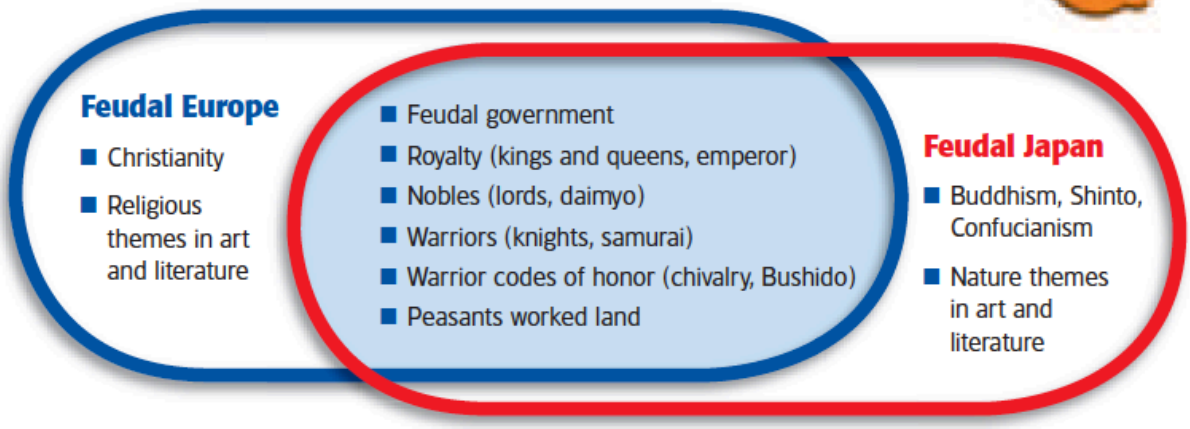
### Art in Europe and Japan



The medieval arts of Europe and Japan were very different. European art often emphasized religion, while Japanese art often emphasized nature.

*In what ways are these two paintings different?*

## Comparing and Contrasting Europe and Japan




Here is one example of haiku:

> Very soon they die—
> but of that there is no sign
> in the locust-cry.
>
> –Matsuo Basho, from *Anthology of Japanese Literature*, edited by Donald Keene

Although European and Japanese feudal systems seemed similar, the cultures that lay behind them were different. Still, it is remarkable to think that feudal systems so similar could exist so far apart.

**READING CHECK** **Contrasting** How were feudal European and Japanese cultures different?

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** In this section you learned how to compare feudalism in Europe and Japan. Although both Europe and Japan had feudal societies, there were many differences in the two societies. Feudalism lasted much longer in Japan than it did in Europe, not disappearing until the 1800s. In the next chapter you will learn about how European society changed after feudalism disappeared in the later Middle Ages. One major change was the growing importance of religion.

## Section 4 Assessment

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Online Quiz
KEYWORD: SN6 HP17

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

1. **a. Define** What was **chivalry**?
   **b. Compare** What were three characteristics knights and samurai shared?
   **c. Develop** Why do you think feudal systems developed in both Europe and Japan?
2. **a. Identify** What was the religion of most people in medieval Europe? What religions influenced most people in Japan?
   **b. Contrast** How were the subjects of **haiku** different from medieval European poems?
   **c. Evaluate** In your opinion, were European and Japanese societies more similar to or different from each other? Explain your answer.

### Critical Thinking

3. **Comparing and Contrasting** Draw a chart like the one below. Using your notes, list two similarities and one key difference between knights and samurai.

| Similarities | Difference |
|---|---|
| 1.<br>2. | 1. |

**FOCUS ON WRITING**

4. **Describing Chivalry** Think about what you've just learned about chivalry. What kinds of rules will you expect your knights to follow? How will you explain these rules to them?