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**Group 1: History of Japanese Trade and the Role of Swords**

**Part A: Reading and Discussion**

**Source:** “Trade in pre-modern Japan,” Andrea Horbinski (UC Berkeley: 2017).

**Context:** We’ve seen in our studies that Japan acquired many important products and ideas from China and Korea. These products and ideas came to Japan primarily through trade. The following reading gives a general description of how that trade developed.

**Directions:** In your small group, read and annotate the provided source. Then discuss the prompt below.

**Trade in Pre-modern Japan: An Overview**

    After it reorganized itself on the Chinese model, the Japanese state took part in tributary exchanges with China from the seventh to the ninth centuries CE: the tributary system and the exchange of embassies between states on the Korean peninsula were ways for the Japanese state to acquire luxury goods, for which they traded small handmade goods or small quantities of metal. The Chinese court saw the tribute system as an acknowledgement of China’s cultural superiority.  The goods that foreign governments gave to the imperial court were expressions of submission to the Chinese emperor.  The Japanese state, however, engaged in the tribute system because it was the easiest way to conduct trade and to acquire goods to which they would not otherwise have had access, not because they saw themselves as inferior or subordinate to China.

    Not coincidentally, once merchants from the continent and the peninsula began making regular trips to Japan, the embassies to the Chinese court stopped, and while the Japanese state claimed the right to regulate and to conduct trade with foreign, principally Chinese merchants, powerful aristocrats increasingly began conducting foreign trade without court approval.

In this period, Japan imported raw materials for perfumes and medicines, as well as rare textiles and Chinese ceramics, particularly celadons and porcelain, both directly from China and via the Korean peninsula. Japan also imported Chinese books, which were essential to Japanese culture, along with small amounts of furs, bamboo, and exotic animals. For exports, Japan--which was a notable metal producer before the 18th century--sent out gold, metals, sulfur, and pearls, as well as paper, construction wood, mother-of-pearl items such as high-quality lacquerware, and fans and swords.

After this came an era of free trade in the 12th to 14th centuries, when the imperial court lost what control it had over trade and when Japanese people went out to begin trading in their own right in large numbers for the first time. Some of them became the first Japanese pirates, who seem to have preyed particularly on the coasts of the Korean peninsula. In this era, Japan also began importing large quantities of Chinese metal currency as a commodity rather than as a medium of exchange; although people did sometimes use Chinese money to settle payments, rice and cloth remained the primary forms of currency. After the 13th century, tea also became an increasingly common import, and by the mid-13th century, Japanese agents had entirely taken over the China trade, even as the Kamakura *bakufu* (Japanese military government) was unable to exert control over trade throughout the archipelago. The late 14th to 16th centuries saw the growth of the economy and trade within Japan, as well as the emergence of what was in fact a free market in the forms of merchant cooperatives, periodic markets, and wholesalers.

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| **Discussion:** In your small group, decide on the three most important developments in Japanese trade during this period. Be prepared to share these notes with your classmates later.  1.  2.  3. |

Go on to Part B.

**Group 1, Part B: DATA ANALYSIS ACTIVITY**

**Exports from Japan to China in 1453**

**Source: “**Exports from Japan to China in 1453,” adapted from Charlotte von Verschuer, *Across the Perilous Sea* (2006).

**Context:** Information organized into charts and tables provides easy access to evidence. This chart helps us understand the value of selected Japanese trade goods (including swords) to the Chinese mainland.

**Directions:** Determine the value of the listed trade goods (you may use a calculator).

**Exports from Japan to China in 1453**

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| **Products** | **Quantity** | **Value per Unit in China,  calculated in coins\*** | **Total Value** |
| Sapanwood (lbs.) | 106,000 | 70 |  |
| Sulfur  (lbs.) | 364,400 | 50 |  |
| Copper Ore (lbs.) | 152,000 | 60 |  |
| Long Swords | 417 | 6,000 |  |
| Short Swords | 9,483 | 6,000 |  |
| Fans | 250 | figure unknown |  |
| Gilt Bronze Pitchers | figure unknown | 4,000 |  |
| Gold Lacquerware | 643 | 600 |  |

\*While the value of trade goods are given in “coins,” actual trade between Japan and the mainland was usually in the form of goods exchanged for other goods and not cash transactions.

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| **Discussion:** What does this table reveal about the value of Japanese swords at this time? |

