



Ancient Japan

TERMS & NAMES

Shinto

clan

Heian Age

The Tale of Genji

Zen

samurai

shogun

MAIN IDEA

For hundreds of years, Japan developed its unique culture with influence from only its closest neighbors, China and Korea.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Japan continues to follow an independent path in world affairs.

DATELINE

EXTRA

THE COAST OF JAPAN, A.D. 1281

Fifty-three days ago, our people were horrified to see a fleet of ships carrying 140,000 Mongol invaders approaching our shores. The Mongol emperor of China, Kublai Khan, sent the ships to conquer our country. Our brave samurai fought valiantly, but the Mongols had powerful crossbows

and catapults that hurled terrifying missiles. Our warriors were near defeat.

Then, out of nowhere, a typhoon arose on the water. Mongol ships were smashed and sunk by the furious storm. Our people will always remember this *kamikaze*—the “divine wind”—that saved our country.



Culture • Japanese samurai prepare to battle the Mongols. ▲

Early Japan

Long before the *kamikaze* (KAH•mih•KAH•zee) saved Japan from Mongol defeat, people inhabited its islands. From 10,000 to 300 B.C., hunters, gatherers, and skilled fishermen lived along Japan’s eastern coast. Toward the end of this period, the Japanese began practicing a religion called **Shinto**, which means “the way of the gods.” Shinto teaches that supernatural beings, called *kami* (KAH•mih), live in all objects and forces of nature.



The early Japanese lived in kingdoms organized around clans. A **clan** is a group of families who trace their descent from a common ancestor. Clans in Japan were each led by a chief who inherited the position. Around A.D. 250, the Yamato clan emerged as the most powerful, and it established a government that ruled Japan for hundreds of years.



Place • This gateway standing in the sea is the entrance to the Itsukushima Shrine, one of Japan's most famous places of Shinto worship. ▲

Outside Influences

Around the time that the Yamato clan took power, Japan began using new ideas and practices from its neighbors, Korea and China. From Korea, the Japanese gained knowledge of how to use bronze and iron technology to make tools and weapons, as well as how to grow an important crop—rice. Japanese religious life also changed significantly when the Koreans introduced Buddhism into Japan. This religion was one of many ideas and customs that originated in China and were brought to Japan by Koreans. In the A.D. 500s, China began to influence Japan's culture directly, as well.

Prince Shotoku At that time, Japanese rulers believed an understanding of Chinese civilization would help them gain political power in East Asia. Japan's Prince Shotoku Taishi (shoh•TOH•koo tay•EE•shee) became a Buddhist and a student of Chinese literature and culture. He established diplomatic relations with China and sent priests and students there to study its culture. Through this exchange, the Japanese adopted China's writing system, calendar, and system of centralized government.

Reading Social Studies

A. Recognizing Effects What does Japan's experience with learning from its neighbors tell you about the importance of cultural exchange?

Vocabulary

artisan:
craftsperson

The Heian Age In A.D. 794, the emperor Kammu built a new capital called Heian-kyo (HEY•ahn-KYOH). The period from that year to 1185 is called the **Heian Age** and is considered Japan's golden age. During this period, Japanese culture flourished. A bustling population of 100,000 made up of aristocrats, servants, and artisans lived in Heian-kyo.

Citizenship IN ACTION

Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties

Keeping the rich cultural heritage of Japan alive is the mission of the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties. The Institute's scientists, researchers, art historians, and other experts are dedicated to preserving Japan's art, artifacts, ancient monuments, and historic sites, such as Buddhist temples (see below).

In 1995, the Institute opened the Japan Center for International Cooperation in Conservation. The Japan Center works across national borders to help preserve ancient sites throughout the world.





Culture • In this illustration, Lady Murasaki sits under the moon, planning *The Tale of Genji*. ▲

Members of the royal court lived in luxury and high style. Many aristocratic women wrote diaries, letters, and novels about life in the imperial court. Lady Murasaki Shikibu (MOO•rah•SAH•kee SHEE•kee•boo) wrote the world's first novel, called *The Tale of Genji*. In the novel, Lady Murasaki described life at Heian-kyo's imperial court.

Zen Buddhism After first being established at the Heian-kyo court, Buddhism became a national religion. One branch of Buddhism, called **Zen**, was the most influential in Japan. Zen emphasizes that people can achieve enlightenment suddenly, rather than through many years of painful study.

Zen teaches that to reach enlightenment, a person must focus intensely to understand certain concepts, called koans (KOH•ahnz). Koans are statements or questions that seem to make little sense. However, if someone concentrates very hard to understand one of them, then he or she might reach enlightenment.

Vocabulary

imperial:
relating to an
empire or emperor

BACKGROUND

This is one of the most famous koans: "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

Feudal Japan

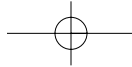
By the 1100s, the Heian-kyo aristocracy lost control of the country to powerful lords. The strongest lords enlisted warriors to fight rival lords. Japan began to develop a feudal system similar to that of medieval Europe, with the country divided into huge estates.

The Samurai While the aristocracy at the Heian-kyo court lived lavishly, disorder and violence spread throughout the rest of the country. Lords needed protection against outlaws and bandits. They relied on warriors called **samurai** (SAM•uh•RY) to protect their estates.

Human-Environment Interaction

• Zen Buddhists take pride in creating peaceful gardens as settings for meditation. ▼





Reading Social Studies

B. Recognizing Important

Details How did the use of samurai differ from the use of an army?

BACKGROUND

In a shogunate, the emperor and his court carried out merely ceremonial roles.

As with European knights, the samurai each pledged to serve a particular lord. They provided him with military and bureaucratic services. By law and privilege, samurai and their families became a distinct social class.

The Kamakura Shogunate During the 1100s, Japan was torn by a murderous war between two clans battling for power. After 30 years of fighting, the Minamoto clan claimed victory. In 1192 in Kamakura, the clan's leader, Yoritomo, established a new kind of warrior government called a shogunate (SHOH•guh•niht). He took on the role of **shogun**—or the emperor's chief general—and held most of the country's power.

In 1274 and again in 1281, the shoguns faced their greatest challenge—Kublai Khan attempted to invade and conquer Japan. On page 484, you read about the events of the second battle. The Kamakura shogunate defeated the Mongols, but at a great cost. The war drained the treasury, and the shogun was unable to pay the samurai. They turned back to individual lords for support, and many years of fighting among lords followed.

Tokugawa Shogunate

Finally, in the 1560s, the fighting began to settle down. The lord Tokugawa Ieyasu (toh•koo•GAH•wah ee•YAH•soo) defeated his rivals and became shogun in 1603. In that year, he moved the capital to Edo.



Fine Protection Samurai, who fought hand to hand against their enemies, wore finely made suits of armor and helmets for protection. Low-ranking samurai wore lightweight armor made of small metal panels. The highest-ranking samurai sported much fancier armor, such as the suit shown here. Made of iron panels that were laced or pinned together, it could also include panels of thick leather or linked pieces of metal called chain mail.

The armor was often intricately decorated. The entire suit could weigh as much as 40 pounds. At celebrations, to add to the finery, a samurai wore over his armor a long, loose tunic made of brightly dyed silk and embroidered with his family symbol.

THINKING CRITICALLY



- Drawing Conclusions** What does this suit of armor tell you about the rank of the warrior who wore it?
- Clarifying** For what purpose did samurai wear beautiful tunics over their armor?





Place • Today, Edo is called Tokyo and is still Japan's capital. ▲

The First Europeans in Japan In 1543, just before the Tokugawa Shogunate began, the first Europeans arrived in Japan. They brought firearms and other goods to trade for gold and silver. In 1549, Catholic missionaries arrived in Japan and began converting many Japanese. By 1614, 300,000 Japanese had become Catholics, including many peasants.

The Closing Door By the 1630s, Tokugawa Ieyasu was worried about foreigners in Japan. He got word that the Spanish had established a settlement in the Philippines. To avoid such a situation in Japan, he ordered all Christians to leave the country. He also declared that any Japanese who left the country would be put to death upon their return. He banned most European trade, finalizing his decision to free Japan of European influences. This situation continued for 200 years, during which Japan isolated itself from most outside contact.

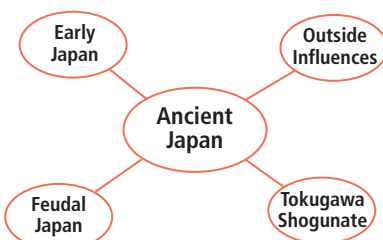
SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT

Terms & Names

1. Identify: (a) Shinto (b) clan (c) Heian Age (d) *The Tale of Genji*
(e) Zen (f) samurai (g) shogun

Taking Notes

2. Use a spider map like this one to list important facts about the development of Japan's culture.



Main Ideas

3. (a) How did the Chinese and the Koreans influence Japan's culture?
(b) What services did samurai provide, and to whom?
(c) Under the shogunates, who held more power—the emperor or the shogun?

Critical Thinking

4. Evaluating Decisions

Do you think Tokugawa Ieyasu was right to isolate Japan from European influence? Explain.

Think About

- ♦ the period before Tokugawa Ieyasu gained control of Japan
- ♦ European influence elsewhere
- ♦ effects of Japan's isolation

ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Write a **short story** from the perspective of a samurai, a shogun, or a lord about life in feudal Japan.