



The Cultures of East Asia

TERMS & NAMES

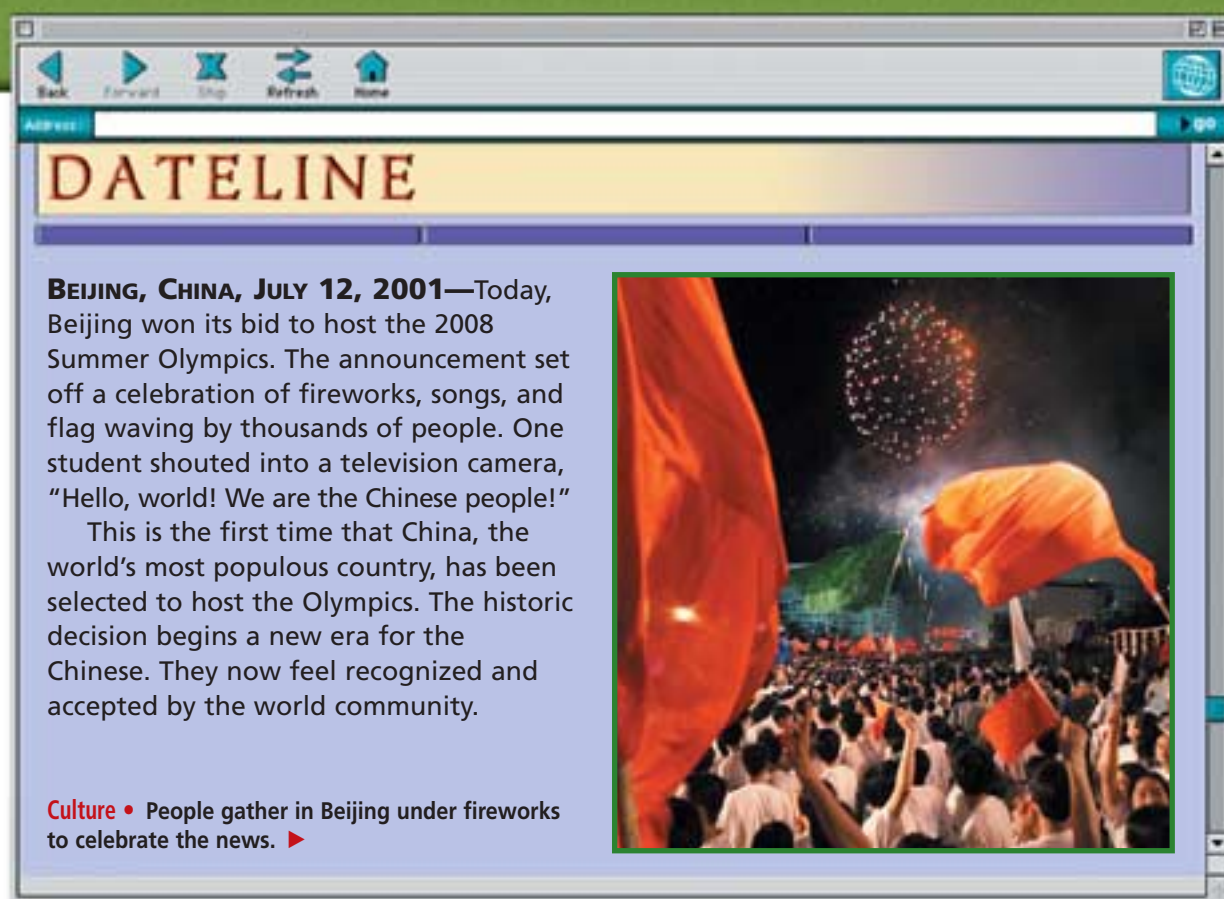
zither
haiku
Han

MAIN IDEA

The cultures of the nations of East Asia share much in common because of years of cultural exchange.

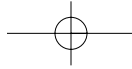
WHY IT MATTERS NOW

As East Asians are introduced to Western culture, they are careful not to forget their own cultural heritage.



Cultural Exchange

Cultural exchange has occurred for centuries among the countries of East Asia. In recent decades, these countries have been influenced by Western culture as well. At the same time, aspects of East Asian cultures have spread outside the region. International events like the Olympics are sure to generate more awareness of the region around the world.



Exchange Within East Asia

East Asian cultures have much in common because of cultural exchange. Many of the shared aspects of culture originated in China, whose civilization has already existed for 4,000 years. For example, the Japanese and Koreans adapted the Chinese writing system to their own languages. The Japanese also adopted Chinese ideas about centralized government, urban planning, and painting techniques. Similarly, the Koreans picked up Chinese printing techniques and methods of government administration.



Place • This Buddhist temple in China stretches across a peaceful pond. ◀

Reading Social Studies

A. Making Inferences By what means do you think the countries of East Asia passed their culture on to one another?

Religion The religions of East Asia are strong indicators of cultural exchange within the region. Buddhism, for example, originated in India. The Chinese learned about the religion around 1,700 years ago. They then passed on their understanding of it to the Koreans, who later transmitted their knowledge to the Japanese. Some of the elements of Buddhism that the Japanese adopted were incorporated into their native Shinto religion. The Koreans and Japanese also developed interest in Confucianism. It, too, spread from China to their countries.

Culture • Many Taoists practice tai chi, a form of exercise meant to relieve the body of stress and worry. ▼

Practices Today Throughout East Asia, many people still practice Buddhism and Confucianism. They also practice other religions, such as Christianity and Taoism. The Communist government of North Korea discourages religious freedom. South Koreans, however, practice Buddhism and Christianity. Mongolians practice Tibetan Buddhism. Taiwan's dominant religion is based on Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Japan's two major religions are Zen Buddhism and Shinto.





Cultural Exchange with East Asia Throughout History



Arts Past and Present

Like the religions, the art forms of East Asia's countries reflect cultural exchange. For example, similar methods of painting and making pottery are used throughout the region. However, each country also boasts unique artistic traditions.



Art in China Chinese art forms date back thousands of years. The art of bronze casting was developed around 1100 B.C. Music and dance are also ancient art forms in China. Many different kinds of instruments have been found in ancient tombs. Bells, flutes, drums, and a stringed instrument called a **zither** are all still played in China.

Fine porcelain dishes and vases are among China's greatest art treasures. The scenes, designs, and words that decorate them have also helped historians understand the cultural life of ancient China.

Today, theater is a popular art form in China. There are at least 300 forms of traditional opera in China. At the Beijing Opera, actors wear elaborate costumes to perform dramas based on Chinese stories, folklore, and history.

Art in Japan Buddhist ideas have influenced the arts in Japan. Artists consider simplicity, delicacy, and tradition to be important in their artwork. Painting, printing, dance, music, and theater all reflect these ideals. In literature, the **haiku** (HY•koo) is a world-famous form of Japanese poetry. Each haiku uses only 17 syllables. The goal of the form is to suggest, in a short description, much more than is stated. Many Japanese poets, such as Basho (1644–1694), have written haiku since the form was developed hundreds of years ago.

Some artists in Japan are working to preserve traditional crafts. Potters and weavers, in particular, receive money from the Japanese government so that they can continue their work and teach others. These artists are considered living treasures.

Culture • Bunraku puppetry is a famous Japanese art form. The puppets are nearly life-size. Each one is manipulated by three puppeteers, who control different parts of it. ▼

Reading Social Studies

B. Clarifying
What importance does the Japanese government give to traditional arts?

Omodzukai

Chief Manipulator
• holds puppet
• moves puppet's head, body, and right hand

Ningyo

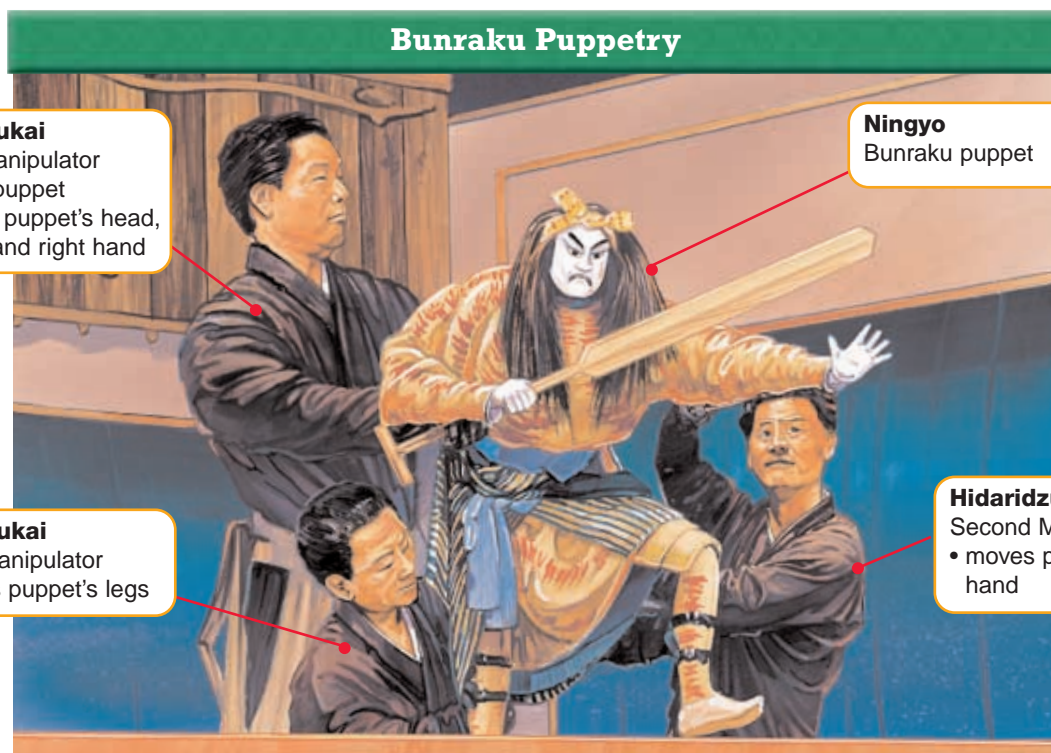
Bunraku puppet

Ashidzukai

Third Manipulator
• moves puppet's legs

Hidaridzukai

Second Manipulator
• moves puppet's left hand





Culture and Communism

Communism has significantly affected some of East Asia's cultures. In North Korea and China, the Communists repressed artistic freedom. During the Cultural Revolution in China, artwork was frequently damaged or destroyed. Writers were forced to create propaganda instead of expressing their own ideas. Even Mao wrote poetry, but his poems only concerned Communist ideals. Playwrights and painters who created work that reflected Communist ideals were allowed to continue their work. Artists who used their art to criticize the government were punished.

In North Korea today, the government still controls the work of artists. The Chinese government has shown greater willingness to allow artists to pursue their own ideas.

Reading Social Studies

C. Drawing Conclusions Why do you think the Communists worried about allowing artistic freedom?

The Chinese People

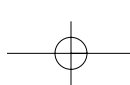
China contains about one-fifth of the world's population. Most people in China belong to an ethnic group called the **Han**. In addition, there are about 55 minority groups in China. Each has its own spoken language, and some also have their own written language. In school, students often speak their native language, and Mandarin Chinese is taught as the official language.



The Martial Arts The martial arts are a unique form of fighting. They originated in ancient East Asia but are now also practiced in other countries, such as the United States. Karate originated in Japan and involves striking and kicking with hands and feet. The Koreans practice a similar martial art called tae kwon do (ty kwahn doh). The Japanese also developed other forms, such as judo (JOO•doh) and aikido (EYE•kee•doh), that involve throwing or blocking an attack.

The Chinese call their fighting style kung fu, and for centuries, they shared it only with other Chinese. In the mid-1800s, however, Chinese laborers introduced their martial arts to the United States. In the 1960s, a young Chinese American, Bruce Lee (shown at right), began teaching kung fu's fantastic flying leaps and spin-kicks to Hollywood stars. He soon became an international action-movie star. Today, 4 million people in the United States take martial arts classes to exercise, learn self-defense, and enjoy the sport. As one of the most popular forms, tae kwon do became an official Olympic sport in 2000.





Changes to the Family The Chinese have traditionally lived in large, extended families. To slow down population growth, the Chinese government decreed in the 1980s that each married couple in a city may have only one child. Rural families may be allowed to have a second child, and families in ethnic minorities may have more than one child. Most Chinese households today are made up of small family units that may include the grandparents.

Family members in China depend on one another and follow traditional patterns. In a family, elders are greatly respected. Children, because there are so few, are given lots of attention. In the past, marriages were arranged by the parents, but that is no longer common. In present-day China, most parents work outside the home, so grandparents often care for the children.



Place • As is typical in China, this couple has only one child. ▲

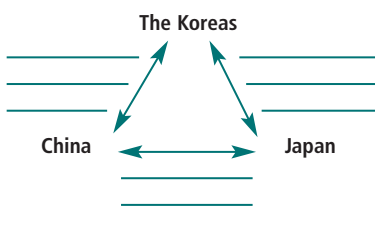
SECTION 4 ASSESSMENT

Terms & Names

1. Identify: (a) zither (b) haiku (c) Han

Taking Notes

2. Use a diagram like this one to list aspects of culture that East Asian countries have exchanged with each other.



Main Ideas

3. (a) What is the goal of Japan's living treasures?
 (b) How has the government affected religion and art in China and North Korea?
 (c) What led the Chinese government to place restrictions on family size?

Critical Thinking

4. Drawing Conclusions

What factors do you think encourage cultural exchange?

Think About

- ♦ migration patterns
- ♦ geographic features
- ♦ speaking related languages

ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Make a **list** of five questions that you would like to ask a Chinese teenager about his or her life.