

Japan: Land of the Rising Sun

Japan is a necklace of islands that run from north to south and lie to the east of the coasts of Siberia, China, and Korea. West of Japan is the Sea of Japan, which separates the Japanese islands from the Asian mainland. East of Japan is the vast Pacific Ocean.

Our name, “Japan,” comes from the Chinese name for the country. The people of Japan, however, call their country *Nippon*, a word that means “Land of the Rising Sun.” When they spelled *Nippon*, the Japanese used the Chinese characters for “sun” and “source.” In Chinese, those characters would be pronounced as JIH-PEN. Europeans, learning the name from Chinese speakers, called it Ja-pan.

Only a very small part of Japan is easily **habitable** by human beings. Today, Japan’s over 100 million people inhabit the 15 percent of the country that is flat and fertile. The other 85 percent of Japan is mountainous, forested, and scenic. The mountains were formed from

volcanoes, some of which are still active. The most famous is Mount Fuji, a beautiful, impressive volcanic mountain near Tokyo.

habitable: fit to live in
staple: most important
typhoon: a violent storm;
hurricane

The soil from the volcanoes of Japan is rich, and the Japanese have learned how to get the most food they can from it. The largest crops are rice (a **staple** food of the Japanese diet), tea, soybeans, and fruit. The Japanese harvest fish from the abundant waters around

the islands both for their own needs and to sell to other nations.

Japan is made up of four islands. The northernmost island is called Hokkaido. Sapporo is its capital. The island is known for its beauty. It has active volcanoes, hot mineral springs, and unspoiled lakes and forests. Its weather is cold and snowy in the winter and cool in the summer.

To the south of Hokkaido lies the Island of Honshu. Honshu is by far the largest of Japan’s islands and is home to the nation’s capital, Tokyo. Honshu is heavily populated and currently produces much of Japan’s industrial goods (cars, boats, industrial machinery, etc.) and high-tech products (such as electronics).

The inhabitants of Honshu benefit from an unusual feature called the Inland Sea --- a waterway between the southeastern part of Honshu and the northern part of Shikoku, the next island in the chain. The Inland Sea, with its numerous small coves, gives Japan a waterway that is screened from the Pacific Ocean.

Shikoku is the smallest of the four major islands. It is a beautiful land, covered with lush vegetation, though its mountains and valleys make farming very difficult. In summer, torrential rains and storms pound the Pacific side of the island. Snows cover the island during the winter, and rain falls often in torrents during the spring and especially the summer. These harsh rains sometimes grow into destructive **typhoons** in the Pacific Ocean.

The southernmost of the four main islands in the chain, Kyushu, is the third largest. It has a mountainous central region with coastal plains around it. Kyushu’s climate is

subtropical, with heavy rain. The northern part of the island houses industry, while the southern part produces abundant rice, potatoes, citrus, livestock, and fish.

Because its islands are volcanic, Japan experiences many earthquakes. Some release just a small amount of energy and cause inconvenience, while others are terribly destructive. Because their homes have been repeatedly destroyed by storms and earthquakes, the Japanese have learned to work together as an inventive and courageous team, ready to rebuild their homes as often as necessary.

Early History of Japan

The earliest inhabitants of Japan came to the islands in three waves of settlement. First came Stone Age **Caucasians** from Siberia; the next to arrive were Asian farmers. The third group of settlers was also Asian. They migrated into the south and began the process of nation building that produced Japan.

Around the 3rd century A.D., a tribe living in the Yamato Plain in central Honshu made itself the chief power over most of Japan. This tribe founded a dynasty of emperors that has continued without a break into our own time. This dynasty is called Sun, because the Yamato family claimed that they were descended from the sun goddess, Amaterasu, who gave them three items that later became symbols of the emperor's power --- a bronze mirror, a bronze sword, and a jeweled necklace.

The first emperor of the Sun Dynasty to rule Japan was Jimmu Tenno ("Divine Warrior"), who was called the **mikado** ("Honorable Gate") of Japan. Since Jimmu Tenno said he came from Amaterasu, all of the emperors of Japan have been considered descendants of the gods. The *mikado's* cousins became chieftains of the clans, which in Japan were groups of families. Later, Japanese clans formed industrial companies, such as Toyota, Mikasa, and Mitsubishi.

The oldest religion in Japan is Shinto, the worship of nature gods and ancestors. Shinto teaches that the gods founded Japan and will remain with the Japanese people as long as they are ruled by a *mikado* from the Sun Dynasty of Jimmu Tenno. Shinto continues the ancient practice of worshiping gods and spirits that are believed to inhabit such things as rivers and mountains. Shinto honors ancestors and encourages people to pray to them for aid. Even today, Shinto remains an important part of Japanese life in fostering **piety** and reverence for ancestors.

subtropical: a region near the tropics, having hot summers and warm winters, with nearly no frost or snow; *semitropical*

Caucasian: of or relating to the white race

mikado: emperor of Japan

piety: being pious --- that is, being reverent and respectful toward God, one's parents, other elders, and those in authority

China's Influence on Japanese Culture

Japan's nearest neighbors on the mainland of Asia were China and the little kingdoms of Korea. Korea had been civilized by the Chinese and was a very wealthy land in the eyes of the poor Japanese. Japanese clans began to raid Korea and try to conquer it. When they saw Chinese culture in Korea, the Japanese raiders thought it was superior to their own culture, and they began to imitate it. In that way, Chinese civilization first began to come into Japan.

One Korean king sent a number of gifts to the *mikado*. Among these gifts was an invaluable book, the *Thousand Character Classic*. Written in Chinese script, the book was a guide to learning and reading Chinese characters. Because only a few men in Japan were able to read, the *mikado* saw that the book would be very valuable to him. He sent to Korea for a scholar who might be able to teach the Japanese to read and write. The arrival of the Korean scribe Wa-ni in A.D. 405 was a new dawn for Japan. Chinese script became the first official written language of Japan.

Writing Japanese in Chinese characters (called ideograms) is very difficult. Unlike Chinese, Japanese is an inflected language; that is, it adds syllables to words to show they are plural or to indicate what tense they are. (For instance, in English, we add -s or -es to nouns to show they are plural and -ed to verbs to show past tense.) Chinese does not do this; its words do not change form at all, and so it is easy to use ideograms with it. Japanese words, on the other hand, change form, and so ideograms do not work as well with Japanese.

syllabary: a set of written characters, each one representing a syllable

In the 9th century, a Japanese monk named Kobo Daishi found a solution to how to use Chinese symbols for Japanese. Using the Indian language, Sanskrit, which has an alphabet, he came up with a **syllabary** for Japanese. Unlike a language, like our own English, which uses symbols (letters) for each sound, a syllabary uses symbols that represent syllables. English, for instance, uses *a* for the "aye" sound, *b* for the "bee" sound, *t* for the "tee" sound, etc. A language like Japanese uses one symbol for each syllable. A word such as *alphabet*, which has three syllables, would have three symbols, indicating each of the syllables *al*, *pha*, and *bet*.

Another import from Korea was Buddhism. Around 500, a Korean king sent an image of Buddha and sacred Buddhist books to the emperor of Japan. The emperor's family decided to adopt Buddhism, partly because it was considered to be the religion of the civilized world. The Japanese ruling clans, however, feared that Buddhism might offend their native gods, spirits, and divine ancestors. This conflict between Buddhism and Shinto was a violent one.

Buddhism was finally allowed into the country when the crown prince, Shotoku, decided to make China's great civilization the model for remaking Japanese society. His father, the *mikado*, had only a short a reign and was succeeded by Shotoku's aunt, who in 593 allowed him to rule the kingdom as regent. To change his country, Shotoku insisted that his nobles learn and observe the moral laws of Confucianism. He wrote up laws for

Japan, based on Confucius' teachings. He declared Buddhism to be the religion everyone should admire, though he did not forbid people to practice Shintoism. Eventually, Buddhism became the chief religious philosophy of Japan, while Confucianism guided the laws, and Shinto directed the rituals of the court and was the religion of the people.

Under Shotoku's direction, Japanese who were skilled in the arts or Buddhist learning were sent to China to complete their studies. When they returned after 10 or 20 years of training at the Chinese court, they received important government posts in Japan. In this way, Shotoku introduced the Chinese civil service system into Japan. The crown prince also sponsored irrigation projects for farming and instituted government-supported measures to help the poor. Shotoku, who changed the life and culture of Japan and gave the imperial court its ceremony and philosophy, died at the age of 48. He had been the most powerful man in the realm, though he never himself became emperor. He was always just the crown prince.

Japan in the Middle Ages

The full flowering of Chinese culture in Japan occurred during what is called the Heian period, which lasted from 794 to 1185. The *mikado's* court imitated the Chinese emperor's court and created poetry and music, artwork, and elegant calligraphy. In 793, a new capital city was built in the center of the Yamato plain. It was named Heian-kyo, or "Capital of Peace." Heian-kyo was the first true city in Japan. Its layout copied the Chinese capital city of Changan. It was rectangular, three miles long, and two and two-thirds miles wide. At the center of Heian-kyo sat the imperial palace. Parks and broad avenues, set at right angles, made it a lovely city. In time it came to be called simply, Kyoto, "the capital."

Though they imitated Chinese art styles, Japanese artists painted portraits that were more realistic and showed the individual character of people better than Chinese portraits did. Japan's oldest surviving portrait of an individual is the sculpture of the great Chinese Buddhist monk-missionary, Ganjin. It shows him as a **wizened** old man, wrinkled and worn, but meditating and tranquil of mind.

One of the great works of Japanese classical literature appeared only in 760, a short time before the Heian period. It was a collection of 4,500 poems called *Man'yoshu*, "Ten Thousand Leaves." Most of the poems in the collection are short, five-line poems called *waka*. A few are long poems, or *choka* --- though long poems do not work well in the Japanese language and Japanese poets did not favor them. Poetry became very important during the Heian period. A **courtier**, for instance, was expected to be able to compose and recite a

wizened: dry, shrunken, or wrinkled, usually on account of old age

courtier: a person present in the court of a king, emperor, etc.; a court attendant

prose: writing in the ordinary form of speech; not poetry

waka on command for any occasion, and to compose long poems for formal recitation when needed.

In the 900s, **prose** romances became fashionable reading, and women writers made names for themselves by writing these works. Around 1002, one woman writer, Sei Shonagon, wrote the romance, *Pillow Book*, which is now recognized as a masterpiece. The greatest prose work of the period was by another court lady, Murasaki Shikibu. This work, called *The Tale of Genji* (written around 1015), is thought to be the world's first novel. Like many works written under the influence of Buddhism, *The Tale of Genji* gives one a sense of the impermanence of the world, though it contains skillful descriptions of human emotion and expresses the beauty of nature.

The Heian period enjoyed a kind of formal Buddhist dance that featured characters and told a story. It is said that a Korean named Mimashi had brought this dance, called *gigaku*, to the Japanese court in 612. *Gigaku* dancers wore masks to identify themselves as various characters. During 7th century, another dance, called *bugaku*, earned the favor of the court. *Bugaku* was and is a very formal dance performed by groups of four to eight male dancers to the accompaniment of bells, flute, lute, drums, and panpipe. During the Heian period, performers attached to temples and shrines began performing plays that included dancing, singing, and dialogue. Much later, in the 14th century, this joining together of dance, song, and drama became more highly developed in a form called *Noh*. Borrowing from the musical forms of both *bugaku* and *gigaku*, *Noh* also utilized Buddhist chanting. *Noh* plays have been continuously performed to our own time.

But while the arts at the court flourished, the imperial government was weakening. The imperial family came to rely on the Fujiwara family to help them govern, and the Fujiwara gradually replaced the emperors as the real rulers of Japan. They did not remove the emperors but forced them to stay in their palace in Kyoto while the Fujiwara took care of the government of Japan. But the Fujiwara could not stand up to the growing power of the warrior clans from the provinces, who gradually began to make themselves the masters of Japan.

Two warrior clans came to vie with each other for the control of the imperial family through marriages and military force. They were the Taira and Minamoto clans. The story of their long feud and struggle for control of the emperor is the subject a long story, called the *Heike Monogatari* (written about 1250). Stories from that conflict became subjects of Japanese drama.

The Revenge of the First Shogun

The Minamoto family found favor at court and were given honors and wealth by the *mikado*. But, one night, their enemy, the Taira family, surprised them and slaughtered all the family except one small boy, Minamoto Yoritomo. He was the last of the Minamoto line, and when the guards were about to kill him, he spoke up and said, "My mother and father are dead, and who but I can pray for their happiness in the next world?" The

young boy reminded the Taira grandmother of her own son who had died as a boy. Moved by the boy's **filial piety**, and remembering her own son who had died as a boy, the Taira grandmother begged for Yoritomo's life. The Taira spared him, but they banished him to an island in the faraway Izu province.

In his place of exile, Yoritomo was kept under close guard. Moreover, his guards had been given orders to kill him when he reached thirteen years. But a faithful servant raised Yoritomo and taught him **martial arts** in secret. When Yoritomo was thirteen, he was so **submissive** and seemingly helpless that the lord of the Taira allowed him to live. Yoritomo bided his time, waiting for the time he could take his revenge on his enemies, the Taira.

In order to get soldiers to help him carry out his revenge, Yoritomo decided to arrange a marriage with a powerful clan --- which would make the clan his ally. There was one such clan, with two sisters, one ugly, the other, beautiful.

To avoid notice and to gain the favor of the mother, Yoritomo decided he would ask to marry the ugly daughter. He thus wrote her a letter proposing marriage and sent it by his servant. But, as events turned out, the servant had other plans than his master.

One night, the ugly sister had a dream of a pigeon flying to her with a box of gold. When she awoke, she told her dream to the beautiful sister, Masago, who said, "Let me buy your dream, little sister, and I will give you my golden mirror in exchange." The homely sister agreed, but she had barely time to say "yes," before Yoritomo's servant appeared and handed his master's letter, not to the ugly sister, as he had been told to do, but to the beautiful one.

Masago eventually eloped with Yoritomo and began aiding him in his quest for revenge and the restoration of his house. The two of them set about collecting an army of followers and friendly lords, who were worried about the growing power of the Taira. The head of the Taira clan heard of Yoritomo's army and laughed. "For an exile to plot against the Taira is like a mouse going against a cat," he said.

But the laugh was soon Yoritomo's. Both sides gathered for battle on opposite sides of the Fuji River. On the night before the battle, two of the Taira warriors thought they would slip into Yoritomo's camp and assassinate him. They tried to cross the river through the wide shallows on their side, but their splashing stirred up the great flocks of ducks that were resting there. The sound of the birds flapping and quacking woke the Taira troops, who suspected a surprise attack by their enemy. In the confusion, many ran for safety and some fought their own men in the dark. In the morning, the Taira force was dead or fled from the field. Yoritomo had won a victory without striking a blow.

In time, Yoritomo and his beautiful wife Masago built a city for themselves and their followers at Kamakura, in a valley facing the open sea. There, Yoritomo and Masago made their own court more beautiful and attractive than the emperor's court in Kyoto. Indeed, Yoritomo became more powerful than the emperor. When Yoritomo died

filial piety: the piety shown by a son or daughter to his or her parents
martial arts: the art or skill of fighting; the arts suitable to a warrior
submissive: obedient, humble

in his bed in 1199, his Minamoto family held control not only of the capital, Kyoto, but of the entire country.

The Era of the Shoguns

Because Yoritomo had become the most powerful man in Japan, the emperor in Kyoto was forced to turn to him to subdue the other warrior-chiefs and bring peace to the country. In 1192, the emperor gave Yoritomo a special title, **shogun**, or “supreme general,” and with it the right to rule Japan for the emperor. The office of *shogun* became the chief power in the land. Under the *shogun*, warrior lords, called **daimyo**, came to

shogun: supreme general; a military ruler of Japan

samurai: the art or skill of fighting; the arts suitable to a warrior

daimyo: military lords of ancient Japan who controlled a number of private estates

control various private estates into which Japan had been divided. The emperors, though born of the ancient Sun Line, were mere figureheads without power or even enough wealth to keep up their palaces.

Yoritomo set up a system of government that was similar to feudalism in Europe. *Daimyo* and other nobles were to be loyal to their ruler, and the ruler to his nobles. Part of this system of loyalty was the warrior, called a **samurai**. The samurai followed the “code of the warrior,” by

which he was totally dutiful to his lord or master. A samurai’s loyalty was absolute; he would unflinchingly die rather than face dishonor. The courage of the samurai may be compared to that of the Spartans. Yet, although the military skill of the samurai was legendary, they were much more than just warriors only. They were trained in writing and in politics as well.

The samurai were drawn to a sect of the Buddhist religion known as Zen. Zen Buddhism teaches that one can become enlightened through meditation and physical and mental discipline. Zen was blended with elements of the traditional Shinto religion to provide moral and artistic guidelines for the tough, yet loyal and artistic warriors --- the samurai --- of Japan. Other schools of Buddhism in Japan also flourished during the 12th and 13th centuries. With Zen they began to take on distinctively Japanese characteristics and traditions. Until the 12th century, Buddhism in Japan had been basically a Chinese religious philosophy transplanted in Japanese soil. After the 12th century, it took on the colors of Japanese culture.

The period of the *shoguns* brought some peace and prosperity to Japan. However, noble families constantly struggled for control of the country. Each powerful clan wanted to rule Japan in the name of the emperor. In the warfare, many lords died. Their orphaned samurai became *ronin*, or lordless samurai. They hired themselves out as warriors or wandered the country, taking whatever they needed by force.

Traditional Japanese Arts

Influenced by the natural beauty of Japan, the Shinto religion's appreciation of nature, and Buddhist contemplation, the Japanese developed very striking and unique arts: flower arranging (*ikebana*), the growing and pruning of miniature trees (*bonsai*), poetry, and the traditional tea ceremony.

Traditional Japanese flower arranging (*ikebana*) developed from the practice of offering flowers in Buddhist temples. These flower arrangements using natural flowers and other plant materials were afterwards found in the homes of the upper classes and came to be recognized as an art form. The arrangements expressed the traditional Japanese idea of the balance of heaven and earth.

Traditional Japanese poetry expresses a strong, clear thought or emotion in verse that follows strict rules. Poetic ideas are inspired by natural objects, such as mountains, grass, or rain. The poet must express his thought in a very few words. The Japanese poetic form best known in the West today is *haiku*. A haiku poem has three unrhymed lines. The first line has five syllables; the second line, seven syllables; and the third line, five syllables again. In haiku the poet compares and contrasts what he sees here and now with the enduring patterns of nature. The reader is challenged to find the meaning of the poem by comparing permanent things with those that pass quickly away.

The Zen monk, Basho, wrote one famous example of haiku:

This ancient pond here:
A frog suddenly plunges:
Plop of the water.

To understand such a poem, you need to visualize the scene. Imagine yourself standing beside the oldest pond you can think of, seeing the lichen on the trees and rocks, and the color of the dark stones. Think of how long the pond has been there and of the men of prayer and thoughtfulness who have stood, like you, beside these waters. As you are drawn deeper and deeper into the contemplation of the deep water, a frog suddenly jumps in. You do not see him; he is too quick. But the sound of his hitting the water breaks your **reverie**, and in that moment the music of the rippling water reminds you that the ancient touches the now.

reverie: dreamy thoughts, dreamy thinking of pleasant things

Sometimes haiku can be used to express ideas of morality as well. Here is another poem by Basho:

When a thing is said,
The lips become very cold
Like the autumn wind.

“When a thing is said” --- this is not just anything that is said, but a cold thing, cold enough to chill the lips that spoke it. How often do we regret having said an unkind word almost as soon as we have said it? Here, Basho thinks of that moment of regret as a cold autumn wind, turning the lips, and the heart, cold with sadness, and perhaps a little fear.

The Japanese tea ceremony or *chanoyu* takes place in a small, out-of-the-way room set aside for tea. Honored guests arrive to take part in what is more than simply a social gathering --- it is a chance to purify the soul by appreciating nature. The ceremony is also an opportunity to appreciate the gardens surrounding the tearoom, the ceramic bowls used in the ceremony, and the decorative flowers. The tea ceremony, introduced from China, developed into its present form in the mid-1800s. It became an important form of social communication among the upper classes. The slow motions of the tea server, and the attention of the guests to every gesture, reflect the Japanese attitude to existence.

Europe Comes to Japan

Around the year 1540, a Portuguese ship, driven by a storm, landed on an island lying south of Kyushu. This was the first contact Europeans had ever had with “The Land of the Rising Sun.” Soon Portuguese merchants were trading with the Japanese.

In 1549, the Portuguese brought the Spanish Jesuit, St. Francis Xavier, to Japan. By his preaching and his holiness, as well as by many miracles, Francis Xavier won hundreds of Japanese to the Catholic Faith. He enthusiastically praised the spiritual understanding of the Japanese people and their openness to the Christian Faith. When Francis Xavier set out for China in 1551, other Jesuits came to Japan to carry on his missionary work. By 1587, there were about 200,000 Catholics in Japan.

By 1590, a Japanese feudal lord named Toyotomi Hideyoshi unified all of Japan under his power. Though at first Hideyoshi did not object to the Christians, he began to fear that Catholic priests were working to prepare Japan for conquest by Portugal or Spain. Hideyoshi feared, too, that his rivals, the samurai lords, would use the Christians against him. Hideyoshi thus began to persecute the Christians. He banished Christian missionaries from Japan and then made being a Christian a crime punishable by death.

Hideyoshi’s wrath broke out against 20 Japanese Christians along with six Franciscan missionaries, whom he arrested. Among these were the Japanese Jesuits Paul Miki, James Kisai, and John de Goto. All 26 were crucified on a hill near Nagasaki on February 6, 1597. As he hung from the cross, Paul Miki preached to the crowds, inviting them to love Christ. All 26 men are today saints of the Catholic Church, known as the “Japanese Martyrs.”

The desire of the Japanese government to keep Japan pure from outside influences led to further persecution of Christians from the 1600s until the middle of the 1800s. Thousands of Christians died rather than deny the Faith. Yet, despite all the persecution against Christians, the Church in Japan was not destroyed. When Catholic

missionaries entered Japan in 1865, they found about 20,000 Japanese Christians who still practiced the Faith in secret.

The Tokugawa Shogunate

Five years after Hideyoshi's death in 1598, Tokugawa Ieyasu (a descendant of Yoritomo) emerged as the *shogun* of all Japan. Ieyasu moved the capital to Edo, on the eastern shore of the island of Honshu --- the place where Tokyo stands today. The emperor's court remained at Kyoto, but the *mikado* was totally powerless. Japan kept the emperor only because the Shinto religion taught that he was sacred.

The Tokugawa *shoguns* continued to try to keep Japan pure of all foreign influence. They persecuted Christians and forbade contact with all foreigners. The only nation they traded with was the Dutch. Ships from all other nations were forbidden to enter Japanese ports.

Under the Tokugawa *shoguns*, Japanese society was divided into three classes: the nobles of the court, the samurai, and the common people. The nobles with the *shogun* controlled the government, while the samurai served the nobles. The commoners were divided into farmers, artisans, and merchants, of whom farmers received the most respect and merchants the least. There was also a class of "outcasts," whom everyone despised and who did the worst jobs. It was practically impossible for anyone in Japan to move from the lower classes into the higher ones.

Because Japan was closed to the outside world, the changes that occurred in Europe, the Americas, and other parts of Asia in the 17th and 18th centuries did not affect it. By the mid-19th century, Japan had none of the industry or technology that made the European countries world powers. Yet, by the end of the 19th century, Japan had adopted European-style industries and had built up a well-disciplined army and navy. Its samurai warrior tradition lived on into the 20th century and, armed with new weapons, challenged the great powers of the world.

CHAPTER REVIEW

Summary

- ♦ The people of Japan call their country *Nippon*, meaning "Land of the Rising Sun." Our name Japan comes from the Chinese pronunciation of the written name, *Nippon*, pronounced in Chinese as JIH-PEN.
- ♦ Japan has four major islands: Hokkaido in the north, known for its cool climate, beauty, and hot mineral springs; next Honshu, the largest and most populated island, home to the capital city, Tokyo; next Shikoku, the smallest island, which has a harsh climate and is separated from Honshu by the Inland Sea; finally, in the south, Kyushu, where mountains rise in the center and separate an industrialized northern part from a southern agricultural plain.

- ♦ Japan was settled by Stone Age Caucasians from Siberia and two groups of Oriental farmers. The tribe living in central Honshu established itself as the dominant power of the island in the 3rd century B.C. This tribe established the Sun dynasty.
- ♦ The Japanese emperor is called the *mikado*, which means “honorable gate.” He was thought to be a descendent of the sun goddess.
- ♦ The oldest religion in Japan is Shinto, the worship of nature gods and ancestors.
- ♦ Japanese learned Chinese civilization from Korea, which Japanese raiders invaded in A.D. 405.
- ♦ Japan developed its written language from Chinese script. A Buddhist monk, Kobo Daishi, invented a Japanese syllabary, or set of written characters each one representing a syllable.
- ♦ Buddhism was imported into Japan from Korea. After a violent conflict between Buddhism and Shinto, the crown prince Shotoku decided to remake Japanese society in the Chinese mode. Shotoku adopted Confucianism as the moral code, Buddhism as the philosophical or religious creed, and Shinto as the court and popular religion.
- ♦ During the Heian Period (A.D. 794–1185) Japanese culture experienced a golden age. It was a time of artistic development, poetry and literature.
- ♦ In 1192, Yoritomo became the first shogun, which means “supreme general.” The *shogun* was the most powerful man in the land, and the emperor became a figurehead. There was some peace and prosperity during the period called the Shogunate, but noble families were constantly fighting each other. The fighting men of a lord’s house were called samurai, and these warriors developed a strict code of loyalty, courage, and honor.
- ♦ In 1549, St. Francis Xavier brought the Christian faith to Japan when he arrived with Portuguese merchants. The Japanese people were very open to the Catholic Faith, and thousands converted.
- ♦ The *shogun* Hideyoshi opposed the foreign missionaries and regarded Christianity as a foreign threat and a power play by rival lords. Christians were banished, and persecutions began. St. Paul Miki and his companions were martyred near Nagasaki in 1597. The Church was oppressed until the Meiji Restoration in modern times.
- ♦ Beginning in the 17th century, the Tokugawa *shoguns* isolated their country from foreigners, so modern developments in the rest of the world passed them by in the 17th and 18th centuries.
- ♦ Traditional Japanese arts include: flower arranging or *ikebana*, pruning miniature trees or *bonsai*, haiku poetry, and the Japanese tea ceremony. The ideas of Buddhism influence these arts, which emphasize meditation, bringing peace to the soul, and the difference between the transient and eternal things.

Key Concepts

mikado: the name for the Japanese emperor, meaning “honorable gate”

Shinto: the oldest religion in Japan. Shinto worships nature spirits and ancestors and considers the *mikado* divine.

shogun: the supreme military ruler of Japan during the period called the Shogunate

daimyo: a warrior lord

Zen Buddhism: a form of Buddhism that teaches that one can become enlightened through meditation and physical and mental discipline

Dates to Remember

- 250 founding of the Sun dynasty as the dominant power of Japan
- 350
- 604 Prince Shotoku's reform of the imperial court and kingdom
- 1192 Minamoto Yoritomo establishes the Shogunate.
- 1543 The Portuguese arrive in Japan.
- 1549 St. Francis Xavier begins Jesuit missionary work in Japan.
- 1597 martyrdom of St. Paul Miki and companions
- 1603 Tokugawa Ieyasu seizes the Shogunate.
- 1637 Tokugawa *shoguns* close Japan to all foreigners except the Dutch.
- 1639

Central Characters

Jimmu Tenno (7th century B.C.): the first *mikado*

Shotoku (574-622): the grand prince who remade Japanese society on the Chinese model

Yoritomo (1147-1199): last of the Minamoto clan; became the first *shogun*

Basho (1644-1694): major poet of Japan; a master of haiku

St. Francis Xavier (1506-1552): Catholic missionary to Japan

Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598): the *shogun* who opposed Christian missionaries

St. Paul Miki: a Japanese Jesuit, martyred during Hideyoshi's persecution

Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616): the *shogun* who closed Japan to foreigners

Questions for Review

1. List the names of the islands that make up Japan
2. Describe Shinto. What does Shinto teach about the *mikado*?
3. What did Shotoku do to make Japanese culture more like Chinese culture?
4. List and describe three arts of Japan.
5. What role did the *shogun* have in medieval Japan? What were the *shogun's* warriors called?
6. What might have happened in Japan if Hideyoshi had not suppressed the Catholic Faith in the 16th century?
7. Ponder the bravery of the Japanese Christians in keeping the faith for 200 years. What does their endurance tell us about the character of the Japanese people?
8. Why do you think Japanese art is focused so much on the natural world?

Ideas in Action

1. As a class, read and discuss the two haiku included in the text and read other examples of haiku. Two links on the internet that may be helpful are: <http://www.big.or.jp/~loupe/links/ehisto/ehisinx.shtml> and <http://raysweb.net/haiku/pages/haikubythemasters.html>. Students should be encouraged to verbalize the links between the images in the haiku and then compose their own haiku from two juxtaposed images.
2. Teachers should find collections of Japanese painting and woodblock prints. Many collections can be found in libraries or bookstores. Students should be shown this artwork and instructed in the composition and color as representation of the Japanese spirit. Comparison should be made to Chinese painting and Byzantine icons and Western realistic and religious art.
3. View a film of performance of *bugaku* or *Noh* theatre. Discuss the differences between Japanese dramatic performances and those of our own culture.

Highways and Byways

Sesshu and the Mouse

Sesshu (1420–1506) was one of Japan's great artists. Originally, Sesshu studied to be a monk, but he was so busy drawing that he neglected his studies. As a punishment, his teacher tied him to a pillar at the temple. Sesshu's tears created a puddle at his own feet and, using only his toes, Sesshu drew a mouse in the mud. Legend has it that the mouse was so lifelike that his teacher, upon seeing it, gave Sesshu permission to study painting.