

Prince Shotoku depicted on a wall hanging and on a 1000 yen note

WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

The Importance of Harmony

Prince Shotoku of Japan's ruling Yamato clan wanted to create an orderly society. In 604, he outlined ideals of behavior for both the royal court and ordinary people. "Harmony should be valued," he wrote, "and quarrels avoided." Shotoku's words reflected a strong Confucian influence about social order. As he stated:

"Everyone has his biases, and few men are far-sighted. Therefore some disobey their lords and fathers and keep up feuds with their neighbors. But when the superiors are in harmony with each other and inferiors are friendly, then affairs are discussed quietly and the right view of matters prevails."

Focus Question What internal and external factors shaped Japan's civilization, and what characterized Japan's feudal age?

The Emergence of Japan and the Feudal Age

Objectives

- Explain how geography set Japan apart.
- Understand how China influenced Japan, and describe the Heian period.
- Summarize the Japanese feudal system.
- Explain how the Tokugawas united Japan.
- Identify how Zen Buddhism shaped culture in Japan.

Terms, People, and Places

archipelago	kana
tsunami	samurai
Shinto	bushido
selective borrowing	Zen

Note Taking

Reading Skill: Categorize Fill in a table like the one shown below with examples of internal and external factors that shaped Japan's civilization.

Influences on Japan	
Internal Factors	External Factors
• geography	•
	•

Like Korea, Japan felt the powerful influence of Chinese civilization early in its history. At the same time, the Japanese continued to maintain their own distinct culture.

Geography Sets Japan Apart

Japan is located on an **archipelago** (ahr kuh PEL uh goh), or chain of islands, about 100 miles off the Asian mainland and east of the Korean peninsula. Its four main islands are Hokkaido, Honshu, Kyushu, and Shikoku.

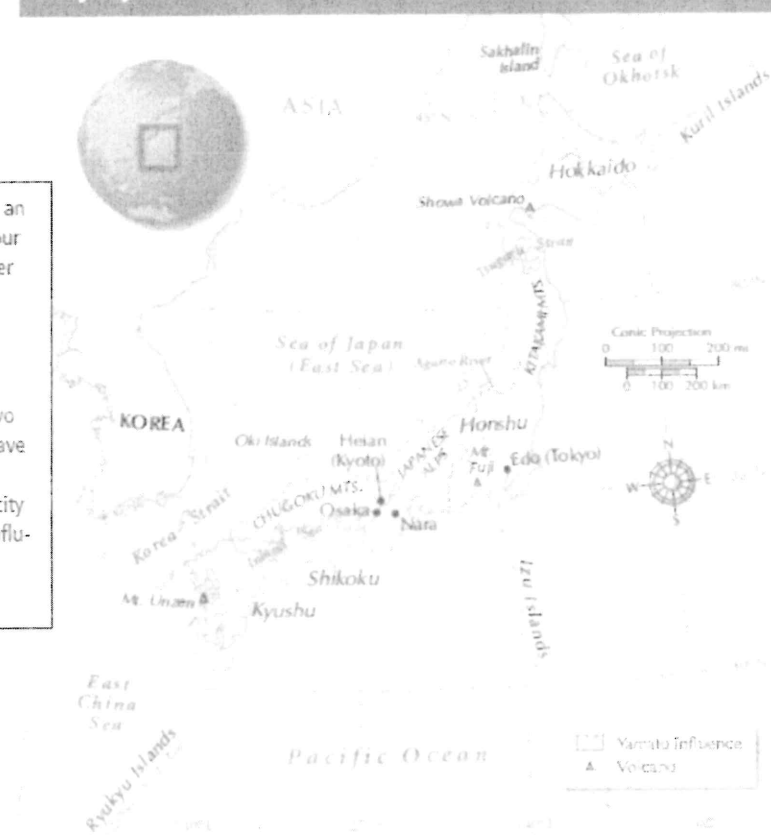
Seas Protect Japan Japan is about the size of Montana, but four-fifths of its land are too mountainous to farm. As a result, most people settled in narrow river valleys and along the coastal plains. A mild climate and sufficient rainfall, however, helped Japanese farmers make the most of the limited arable land.

The surrounding seas have both protected and isolated Japan. The country was close enough to the mainland to learn from Korea and China, but too far away for the Chinese to conquer. Japan thus had greater freedom to accept or reject Chinese influences than did other East Asian lands. At times, the Japanese sealed themselves off from foreign influences, choosing to go their own way. The seas that helped Japan preserve its identity also served as

Early Japan

Map Skills Japan is located on an archipelago. In addition to its four main islands, Japan includes over 3,000 smaller ones.

- 1. Locate** (a) Edo (b) Mt. Fuji (c) Honshu (d) Kyushu
- 2. Human-Environment Interaction** Explain how two geographic features might have influenced Japanese life.
- 3. Draw Conclusions** Which city was more likely to feel the influence of the Yamato clan—Osaka or Edo? Why?



trade routes. The Inland Sea was an especially important link among various Japanese islands. The seas also offered plentiful food resources and the Japanese developed a thriving fishing industry.

Forces of Nature The Japanese came to fear and respect the dramatic forces of nature. Japan lies in a region known as the Ring of Fire, which is made up of a chain of volcanoes that encircle the Pacific Ocean. This region is therefore subject to frequent volcanic activity and earthquakes. Underwater earthquakes can launch killer tidal waves, called *tsunamis*, which sweep over the land without warning, wiping out everything in their path.

✓ **Checkpoint** How did the sea help Japan preserve its identity?

Early Traditions

The people we know today as the Japanese probably migrated from the Asian mainland more than 2,000 years ago. They slowly pushed the earlier inhabitants, the Ainu, onto the northernmost island of Hokkaido.

The Yamato Clan Claims Power Early Japanese society was divided into *uji*, or clans. Each *uji* had its own chief and a special god or goddess who was seen as the clan's original ancestor. Some clan leaders were women, suggesting that women enjoyed a respected position in society.

By about A.D. 500, the Yamato clan came to dominate a corner of Honshu, the largest Japanese island. For the next 1,000 years, the Yamato Plain was the heartland of Japanese government. The Yamato set up Japan's first and only dynasty. They claimed direct descent from the sun goddess, Amaterasu, and chose the rising sun as their symbol. Later Japanese emperors were revered as living gods. While this is no longer the case, the current Japanese emperor still traces his roots to the Yamato clan.

A Religion of Nature Early Japanese clans honored kami, or superior powers that were natural or divine. The worship of the forces of nature became known as *Shinto*, meaning "the way of kami." Although Shinto has not evolved into an international religion like Christianity, Buddhism, or Islam, its traditions survive to the present day in Japan. Hundreds of Shinto shrines dot the Japanese countryside. Though simple in design, they are generally located in beautiful, natural surroundings. Shinto shrines are dedicated to special sites or objects such as mountains or waterfalls, ancient gnarled trees, or even oddly shaped rocks.

The Korean Connection The Japanese language is distantly related to Korean but completely different from Chinese. From early on, Japan and Korea were in continuous contact with each other. Korean artisans and metalworkers settled in Japan, bringing sophisticated skills and technology. Japanese and Korean warriors crossed the sea in both directions to attack each other's strongholds. Some of the leading families at the Yamato court claimed Korean ancestors.

Missionaries from Korea had introduced Buddhism to Japan in the 500s. With it came knowledge of Chinese writing and culture that sparked a sustained period of Japanese interest in Chinese civilization.

✓ **Checkpoint** How did the Yamato clan influence future Japanese government?

Japan Looks to China

In the early 600s, Prince Shotoku of the Yamato clan decided to learn about China directly instead of through Korean sources. He sent young nobles to study in China. Over the next 200 years, many Japanese students, monks, traders, and officials visited the Tang court.

The Japanese Visit China Each visitor to China spent a year or more there—negotiating, trading, but above all studying. The visitors returned to Japan eager to spread Chinese thought, technology, and arts. They also imported Chinese ideas about government. Japanese rulers adopted the title "Heavenly Emperor" and claimed absolute power. They strengthened the central government, set up a bureaucracy, and adopted a law code similar to that of China. Still, the new bureaucracy had little real authority beyond the royal court. Out in the countryside, the old clans remained strong.

In 710, the Japanese emperor built a new capital at Nara, modeled on the Tang capital at Chang'an. There, Japanese nobles spoke Chinese and dressed in Chinese fashion. Their cooks prepared Chinese dishes and served food on Chinese-style pottery. Tea drinking, along with an elaborate tea ceremony, was imported from China. Japanese officials and scholars used Chinese characters to write official histories. Tang music and dances became very popular, as did gardens designed using Chinese influences.



Early Japanese sword and sword guards, both considered to be works of art.



As Buddhism spread, the Japanese adopted pagoda architecture. Buddhist monasteries grew rich and powerful. Confucian ideas and ethics also took root. They included an emphasis on filial piety, the careful management of relationships between superior and inferior, and respect for learning.

Selective Borrowing Preserves Culture In time, the initial enthusiasm for everything Chinese died down. The Japanese kept some Chinese ways but discarded or modified others. This process is known as *selective borrowing*. Japan, for example, never accepted the Chinese civil service examination to choose officials based on merit. Instead, they maintained their tradition of inherited status through family position. Officials were the educated sons of nobles.

By the 800s, as Tang China began to decline, the Japanese court turned away from its model. After absorbing all they could from China, the Japanese spent the next 400 years digesting and modifying these cultural borrowings to produce their own unique civilization. The Japanese asserted their identity by revising the Chinese system of writing and adding *kana*, or phonetic symbols representing syllables. Japanese artists developed their own styles.

✓ **Checkpoint** How did Japan seek out Chinese influences?

The Heian Period

This blending of cultures took place from 794 to 1185. During this time, the imperial capital was in Heian (hay ahn), present-day Kyoto. There, emperors performed traditional religious ceremonies, while wealthy court families like the Fujiwara wielded real power. The Fujiwara married their daughters to the heirs to the throne, thus ensuring their authority.

Women Shape the Court At the Heian court, an elegant and sophisticated culture blossomed. Noblewomen and noblemen lived in a fairy-tale atmosphere of beautiful pavilions, gardens, and lotus pools. Elaborate rules of etiquette governed court ceremony. Courtiers dressed with extraordinary care in delicate, multicolored silk. Draping one's sleeve out a carriage window was a fine art.

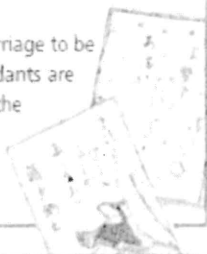
Although men at court still studied Chinese, women were forbidden to learn the language. Despite these restrictions, it was Heian women who produced the most important works of Japanese literature of the period.

In the 900s, Sei Shonagon, a lady-in-waiting to the empress during the Heian period, wrote *The Pillow Book*. In a witty series of anecdotes and personal observations, she provides vivid details of court manners, amusements, decor, and dress. In one section, Shonagon discusses the importance of keeping up a good appearance at court:

Primary Source

“Nothing can be worse than allowing the driver of one's ox-carriage to be poorly dressed. It does not matter too much if the other attendants are shabby, since they can remain at the rear of the carriage; but the drivers are bound to be noticed and, if they are badly turned out, it makes a painful impression.”

—Sei Shonagon, *The Pillow Book*



Lady Murasaki Writes the World's First Novel The best-known Heian writer was Murasaki Shikibu. Her monumental work, *The Tale of Genji*, was the world's first full-length novel.

The Tale of Genji recounts the adventures and loves of the fictional Prince Genji and his son. In one scene, Genji moves with ease through the festivities at an elaborate "Chinese banquet." After dinner, "under the great cherry tree of the Southern court," the entertainment begins. The main event of the evening is a Chinese poetry contest. Genji and other guests are given a "rhyme word," which they must use to compose a poem in Chinese. Genji's poem is the hit of the banquet.

Elegant though they are, the Heian poems and romances are haunted by a sense of sadness. The writers lament that love does not last and the beauty of the world is soon gone. Perhaps this feeling of melancholy was prophetic. While noble men and women strolled through manicured gardens, clouds of rebellion and civil war were gathering.

✓ **Checkpoint** How did women influence culture at the Heian court?

Warriors Establish Feudalism

Feudal warfare swept Japan in the 1400s. Disorder continued through the following century. Yet, despite the turmoil, a new Japanese culture arose. While the emperor presided over the splendid court at Heian, rival clans battled for control of the countryside. Local warlords and even some Buddhist temples formed armed bands loyal to them rather than to the central government. As these armies struggled for power, Japan evolved a feudal system. As in the feudal world of medieval Europe, a warrior aristocracy dominated Japanese society.

In theory, the emperor stood at the head of Japanese feudal society. In fact, he was a powerless, though revered, figurehead. Real power lay in the hands of the shogun, or supreme military commander. Minamoto Yoritomo was appointed shogun in 1192. He set up the Kamakura shogunate, the first of three military dynasties that would rule Japan for almost 700 years.

The Ways of the Warriors Often the shogun controlled only a small part of Japan. He distributed lands to vassal lords who agreed to support him with their armies in time of need. These great warrior lords were later called daimyo (DY myoh). They, in turn, granted land to lesser warriors called samurai, meaning "those who serve." Samurai were the fighting aristocracy of a war-torn land.

Like medieval Christian knights in Europe, samurai were heavily armed and trained in the skills of fighting. They also developed their own code of values. Known as bushido, or the "way of the warrior," the code emphasized honor, bravery, and absolute loyalty to one's lord.

Noblewomen Lose Ground At first, some noblewomen in Japanese feudal society trained in the military arts. A few even became legendary warriors. At times, some noblewomen supervised their family's estates.

As the age of the samurai progressed, however, the position of women declined steadily. When feudal warfare increased, inheritance was limited to sons. Unlike the European ideal of chivalry, the samurai code did not set women on a pedestal. The wife of a warrior had to accept the same hardships as her husband and owed the same loyalty to his overlord.

● BIOGRAPHY



Murasaki Shikibu

"If only you were a boy, how happy I would be!" said Murasaki Shikibu's father. Although he was praising her intelligence, he was also revealing how Japan valued men over women. Growing up, Murasaki Shikibu (978[?]-1014[?]) studied with her brother. This fact was probably kept secret, because learning by girls was considered improper.

After the death of her husband, she went to the imperial court as a lady-in-waiting. There, as Lady Murasaki, she penned the world's first full-length novel, *The Tale of Genji*, a story of the Heian age that has been celebrated for more than a thousand years. What personal qualities can you infer that Lady Murasaki possessed?

WITNESS HISTORY VIDEO

Watch *The Samurai of Japan* on the Witness History Discovery School™ video program to learn about the samurai.

Discovery
SCHOOL

Peasants, Artisans, and Merchants Far below the samurai in the social hierarchy were the peasants, artisans, and merchants. Peasants, who made up 75 percent of the population, formed the backbone of feudal society in Japan. Peasant families cultivated rice and other crops on the estates of samurai. Some peasants also served as foot soldiers in feudal wars. On rare occasions, an able peasant soldier might rise through the ranks to become a samurai himself.

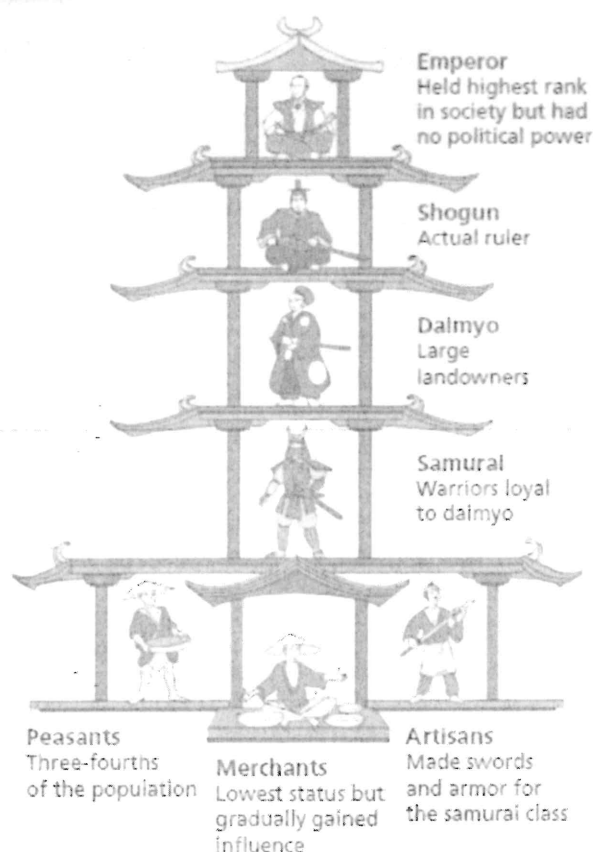
Artisans, such as armorers and swordmakers, provided necessary goods for the samurai class. Merchants had the lowest rank in Japanese feudal society. However, as you will see, their status gradually improved.

Japan Holds Off Mongols During the feudal age, most fighting took place between rival warlords, but the Mongol conquest of China and Korea also threatened Japan. When the Japanese refused to accept Mongol rule, Kublai Khan launched an invasion from Korea in 1274. A fleet carrying 30,000 troops arrived, but shortly afterwards a typhoon wrecked many Mongol ships and drove the invaders back to the mainland.

In 1281, the Mongols landed an even larger invasion force, but again a typhoon destroyed much of the Mongol fleet. The Japanese credited their miraculous delivery to the kamikaze (kah muh KAH zee), or divine winds. The Mongol failure reinforced the Japanese sense that they were a people set apart who enjoyed the special protection of the gods.

✓ **Checkpoint** What was bushido and why was it important?

Feudal Society in Japan



The Tokugawas Unite Japan

The Kamakura shogunate crumbled in the aftermath of the Mongol invasions. A new dynasty took power in 1338, but the level of warfare increased after 1450. To defend their castles, daimyo gave arms to peasants as well as to samurai, which led to even more ruthless fighting. A popular saying of the time declared, "The warrior does not care if he's called a dog or beast. The main thing is winning."

Gradually, several powerful warriors united large parts of Japan. By 1590, the brilliant general Toyotomi Hideyoshi (hee day YOH shee), a commoner by birth, had brought most of Japan under his control. He then tried, but failed, to conquer Korea and China. In 1600, the daimyo Tokugawa Ieyasu (toh koo gah wah ee AY ah soo) defeated his rivals to become master of Japan. Three years later, he was named shogun. The Tokugawa shogunate would go on to rule Japan until 1868.

Central Government Imposed The Tokugawa shoguns were determined to end feudal warfare. They maintained the outward forms of feudal

Chart Skills The organizational chart above illustrates the social levels of feudal society in Japan. According to the chart, who occupied the lowest position? How does the chart show this?

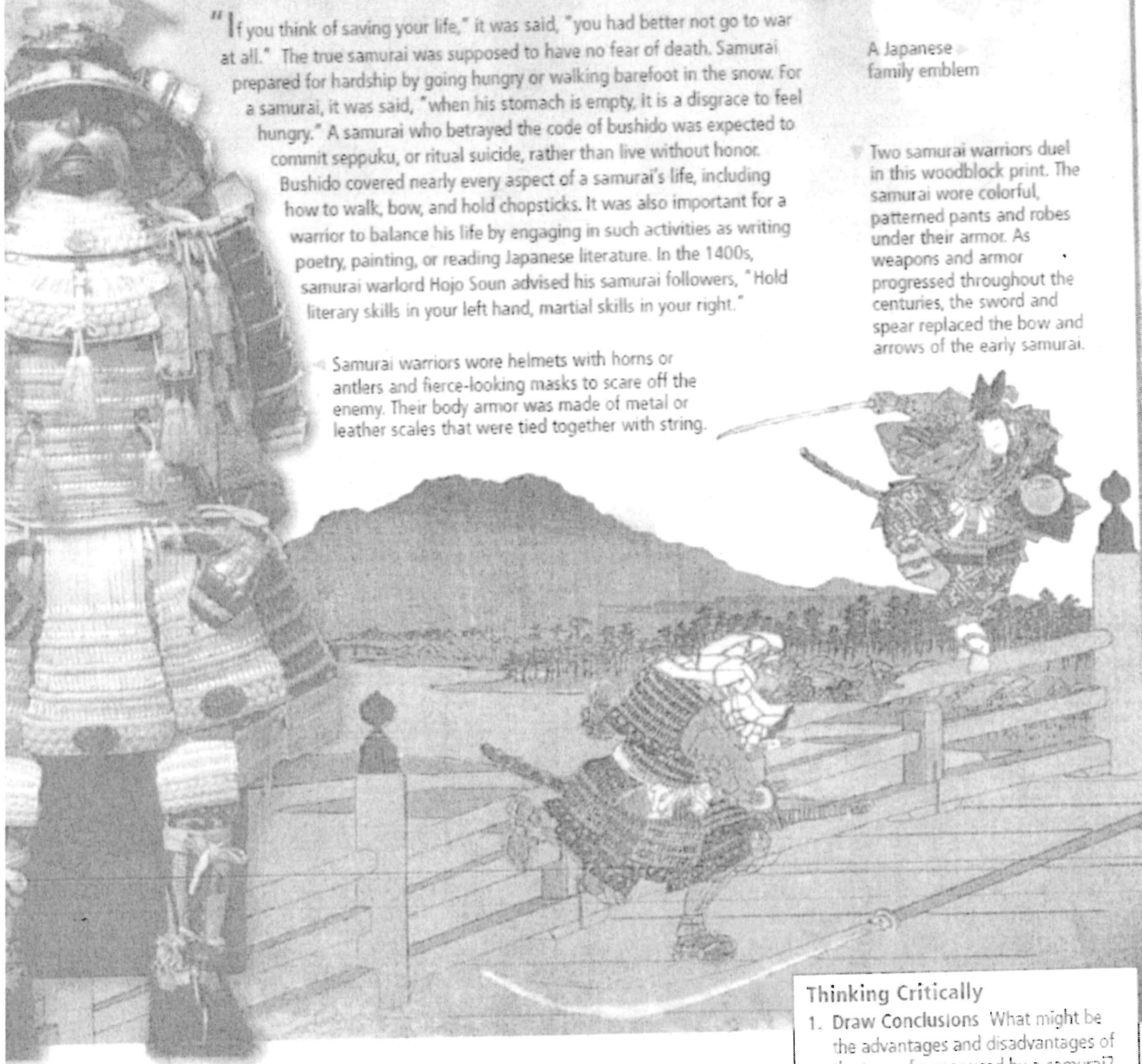
CODE OF THE SAMURAI

"If you think of saving your life," it was said, "you had better not go to war at all." The true samurai was supposed to have no fear of death. Samurai prepared for hardship by going hungry or walking barefoot in the snow. For a samurai, it was said, "when his stomach is empty, it is a disgrace to feel hungry." A samurai who betrayed the code of bushido was expected to commit seppuku, or ritual suicide, rather than live without honor. Bushido covered nearly every aspect of a samurai's life, including how to walk, bow, and hold chopsticks. It was also important for a warrior to balance his life by engaging in such activities as writing poetry, painting, or reading Japanese literature. In the 1400s, samurai warlord Hojo Soun advised his samurai followers, "Hold literary skills in your left hand, martial skills in your right."

Samurai warriors wore helmets with horns or antlers and fierce-looking masks to scare off the enemy. Their body armor was made of metal or leather scales that were tied together with string.

A Japanese family emblem

Two samurai warriors duel in this woodblock print. The samurai wore colorful, patterned pants and robes under their armor. As weapons and armor progressed throughout the centuries, the sword and spear replaced the bow and arrows of the early samurai.



society but imposed central government control on all Japan. For this reason, their system of government is called centralized feudalism.

The Tokugawas created a unified, orderly society. To control the daimyo, they required these great lords to live in the shogun's capital at Edo (present-day Tokyo) every other year. A daimyo's wife and children had to remain in Edo full time, giving the shogun a powerful check on the entire family. The shogun also forbade daimyo to repair their castles or marry without permission.

Thinking Critically

1. **Draw Conclusions** What might be the advantages and disadvantages of the type of armor used by a samurai?
2. **Synthesize Information** How did the rules that governed the samurai affect their way of life?



Zen Gardening

Zen beliefs shaped Japanese culture in many ways. At Zen monasteries, upper-class men learned to express devotion to nature in such activities as landscape gardening. How did Zen gardening reflect Zen values?

New laws fixed the old social order rigidly in place and upheld a strict moral code. Only samurai were allowed to serve in the military or hold government jobs. They were expected to follow the traditions of bushido. Peasants had to remain on the land. People in lower classes were forbidden to wear luxuries such as silk clothing.

The Economy Booms While the shoguns tried to hold back social change, the Japanese economy grew by leaps and bounds. With peace restored to the countryside, agriculture improved and expanded. New seeds, tools, and the use of fertilizer led to a greater output of crops.

Food surpluses supported rapid population growth. Towns sprang up on the lands around the castles of daimyo. Edo grew into a booming city, where artisans and merchants flocked to supply the needs of the daimyo and their families.

Trade flourished within Japan. New roads linked castle towns and Edo. Each year, daimyo and their servants traveled to and from the capital, creating a demand for food and services along the route. In the cities, a wealthy merchant class emerged. In accordance with Confucian tradition, merchants had low social status. Japanese merchants, however, were able to gain influence by lending money to daimyo and samurai. Sometimes, merchants further improved their social position by arranging to marry their daughters into the samurai class.

✓ **Checkpoint** How did the Tokugawas set up centralized feudalism?

Zen Buddhism Shapes Culture

During Japan's feudal age, a Buddhist sect from China won widespread acceptance among samurai. Known in Japan as Zen, it emphasized self-reliance, meditation, and devotion to duty.

Zen had seemingly contradictory traditions. Zen monks were great scholars, yet they valued the uncluttered mind and stressed the importance of reaching a moment of "non-knowing." Zen stressed compassion for all, yet samurai fought to kill. In Zen monasteries, monks sought to experience absolute freedom, yet rigid rules were in place.

Vocabulary Builder

stressed—(stresd) *v.* emphasized

Zen Buddhists believed that people could seek enlightenment through meditation and through the precise performance of everyday tasks. For example, the elaborate rituals of the tea ceremony reflected Zen values of peace, simplicity, and love of beauty. Zen reverence for nature also influenced the development of fine landscape paintings.

✓ **Checkpoint** How was Zen Buddhism similar to bushido?

Artistic Traditions Change

Cities such as Edo and Osaka were home to an explosion in the arts and theater. At stylish entertainment quarters, sophisticated nobles mixed with the urban middle class. Urban culture emphasized luxuries and pleasures and differed greatly from the feudal culture that had dominated Japan for centuries.

New Drama Develops In the 1300s, feudal culture had produced Noh plays performed on a square, wooden stage without scenery. Men wore elegant carved masks while a chorus chanted important lines to musical accompaniment. The action was slow, and each movement had a special meaning. Many Noh plays presented Zen Buddhist themes, emphasizing the need to renounce selfish desires. Others recounted fairy tales or the struggles between powerful feudal lords.

In the 1600s, towns gave rise to a popular new form of drama called Kabuki. Kabuki was influenced by Noh plays, but it was less refined and included comedy or melodrama. Puppet plays, known as bunraku, were also enormously popular in towns. A narrator told a story while handlers silently manipulated near-life-sized puppets. Bunraku plays catered to popular middle-class tastes.

Painting and Printmaking Japanese paintings often reflected the influence of Chinese landscape paintings, yet Japanese artists developed their own styles. On magnificent scrolls, painters boldly recreated historical events, such as the Mongol invasions.

In the 1600s, the vigorous urban culture produced a flood of colorful woodblock prints to satisfy middle-class tastes. Some woodblock artists produced humorous prints. Their fresh colors and simple lines give us a strong sense of the pleasures of town life in Japan.

✓ **Checkpoint** What new art forms catered to the growing middle class?

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-quiz with vocabulary practice

Web Code: naa-1241

Terms, People, and Places

1. For each term, person, or place listed at the beginning of the section, write a sentence explaining its significance.

Note Taking

2. **Reading Skill: Categorize** Use your completed table to answer the Focus Question: What internal and external factors shaped Japan's civilization, and what characterized Japan's feudal age?

Comprehension and Critical Thinking

3. **Make Comparisons** How was the Japanese development of kana similar to the Korean development of hangul?
4. **Analyze Information** How did the Japanese preserve their own identity and culture?
5. **Recognize Causes and Effects** Describe three results of the centralized feudalism imposed by the Tokugawas.

Writing About History

Quick Write: Write a Thesis Statement and Introduction Review this section by thinking about cause and effect relationships in Japanese history. Write a thesis statement and introductory paragraph for an essay that discusses a cause and effect in ancient Japan. Remember that an introduction should map out what the essay will discuss.