

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

### Section 1: Geography and Early Japan

#### GEOGRAPHY SHAPES LIFE IN JAPAN

The islands of Japan are the tops of undersea mountains and volcanoes. Because it is difficult to live and farm on mountain slopes, most Japanese people have always lived in the few flat areas along the coastal plains.

The nearness of the sea means that seafood has been a key part of the Japanese diet for thousands of years. Isolation has contributed to a distinctive Japanese culture, although the Japanese have been influenced by nearby Korea and China.

#### EARLY JAPANESE SOCIETY

Early Japan was home to two different cultures, neither of which had much-if any-contact with the rest of Asia. The Ainu (EYE-noo), with a look and language distinct from the rest of Asia, were driven by conflict to the northern island of Hokkaido. Over time, the Ainu culture almost disappeared.

The people living to the south of the Ainu eventually became the Japanese. They lived mostly in small farm villages. **Clans**, or extended families, ruled these villages. They practiced religious rituals that became **Shinto**, the traditional religion of Japan. According to this tradition, everything in nature has a spirit, or *kami* (KAH-mee).

Some clans became so powerful that they took over much of Japan. The Yamato rulers were the first clan to call themselves emperors of Japan.

#### JAPAN LEARNS FROM CHINA AND KOREA

By the mid-500s, Japanese rulers yearned to learn new things. They sent emissaries to Korea and China to learn about those cultures. Chinese culture was very influential in Japan. With no written language of their own, the Japanese used Chinese characters to spell out Japanese sounds and words. Chinese was actually Japan's official language from about 500 to about 1100.

**Prince Shotoku** (shoh-toh-koo), who served as **regent** for his aunt the empress, was a major proponent of Chinese culture. Shotoku had advisors introduce the Chinese philosophy of Confucianism to Japan. He also encouraged the spread of Buddhism. Shotoku's attempt to bring a more absolute, Chinese-style of rule to Japan did not fare as well. Clan leaders opposed it. They were afraid to give up their power. Prince Shotoku died without achieving his goals. Later rulers put many of his ideas in practice, though.

### Section 2: Art and Culture in Heian

#### JAPANESE NOBLES CREATE GREAT ART

In 794 the emperor and empress of Japan moved to Heian (HAY-ahn), a city now called Kyoto. The nobles who followed created an imperial **court**. These nobles had little to do with the common people of Heian. They lived apart from poorer citizens and seldom left the city. They loved beauty and made the court at Heian the center of a golden age of art and learning between 794 and 1185.

These nobles dressed in beautiful silk robes and carried decorative fans. They were also lovers of the written and spoken word, and spent many hours writing in journals. Several women of the Heian court wrote in the Japanese language, although Chinese was the official language. As a result, women wrote most of the major works of early Japanese literature.

Probably the greatest of these early writers was **Lady Murasaki Shikibu** (moohr-ah-sahk-ee sheekeeboo). Around 1000, she wrote *The Tale of Genji*, often considered the world's first full-length novel. It is the story of a prince named Genji and his quest for love. During his search he meets women from many different social classes.

Visual arts were also popular, particularly painting, calligraphy, and architecture. The paintings were made in bright, bold colors. Most Heian architecture was based on that of the Chinese capital. Other architectural styles were simple and airy. Wood houses with tiled roofs featured large open spaces surrounded by elegant gardens. Performing arts also flourished at the Heian court, particularly a form of drama called Noh, which combined music, dance and speaking parts. Noh plays often presented the feats of great Japanese heroes.

### **BUDDHISM CHANGES**

Common Japanese people had no time for the long, elaborate rituals practiced by the court. Both groups were deeply religious, however. The Japanese introduced important changes to the Buddhism, which had been brought from China. Some new forms of Buddhism blended elements of Shinto. Other forms were unique to Japan. One very popular form, called Pure Land Buddhism, did not require any special rituals. Instead, Pure Land Buddhists chanted the Buddha's name over and over again.

In the 1100s a new form of Buddhism called **Zen** developed. Zen Buddhists believed that neither faith nor good behavior led to wisdom. Instead, people should practice self-discipline and meditation, or quiet thinking. These ideas appealed to many Japanese, especially warriors. As these warriors gained more influence in Japan, so did Zen Buddhism.

## **Section 3: Growth of a Military Society**

### **SAMURAI AND SHOGUNS TAKE OVER JAPAN**

While the Heian court flourished, order was breaking down in Japanese society. By the late 1100s, powerful nobles were openly at war. Rebels fought against imperial officials. Japan's rulers did not notice the problems growing in their country.

Japan's large landowners, or **daimyo** (DY-mee-oh), decided they could not rely on the emperor to protect them. They hired **samurai** (SA-muh-ry), trained professional warriors, to defend their property. Several noble clans decided to seize power themselves.

Two of these clans fought each other fiercely for 30 years. Finally, the head of the Minamoto clan declared himself Japan's new ruler. The Minamoto leader kept the emperor on as a **figurehead**. The Minamoto leader took the title **shogun**. He ruled in the emperor's name. When he died, he passed his title and power on to one of his children. For about the next 700 years, Japan was ruled by shoguns.

### **SAMURAI LIVE HONORABLY**

The samurai enjoyed many privileges, but also had to follow a strict code of rules called **Bushido** (booh-shi-doh). Loyalty and honor were central to this code. Both men and women of samurai families learned to fight.

### **ORDER BREAKS DOWN**

The shoguns, with the help of the samurai, kept order in Japan for nearly a century. Slowly that order broke down. Two foreign invasions by the Mongols were stopped, but the authority of the shoguns weakened. Increasingly, nobles began to resent the shoguns' power over them. The daimyo and the emperor worked together to limit the power of the shogun.

**STRONG LEADERS TAKE OVER**

Eventually, new leaders rose to power. Each fought to unify all of Japan under his control. The first to restore the power of the shogun was Oda Nobunaga (ohd-ah noh-booh-nah-gah), who ruled half of Japan by 1582. Other shoguns who followed stabilized Japanese rule. The shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu (toh-koohg-ah-wuh ee-e-yahs-oooh) sent emissaries out to the world. Others, however, feared the intrusion of foreigners. In 1630, the reigning shogun closed off Japan completely. This extended the samurai period until the 1800s.