

# Japan

## How Did Japan's Geography Impact Its Development?

### Geography of Japan

Japan is located on a chain of islands called an **archipelago**. It is made up of four main islands and thousands of smaller ones. The terrain is mountainous, which means there is not a lot of good land for farming. Because of the geography, the Japanese relied on the sea for many aspects of daily life. Trade with China and Korea became important to get the resources they needed.

### China's influence

Through trade and **migration, cultural diffusion** occurred between Japan and China as early as 100 B.C.E. Japan adopted the Chinese system of writing and a similar style of architecture. One of the major ideas that influenced Japan was Buddhism. While Shintoism was the main religion many Buddhist beliefs and rituals were accepted by the Japanese people. Both religions are still followed in Japan today.



Map of Japan

Source: <http://www.worldbookonline.com/advanced/extmedia?id=ar285600&st=japan&em=mp000108>

### Shintoism

Shintoism is an ethnic religion that is found only in Japan. Shinto was based on respect for the forces of nature and on the worship of ancestors and the emperor. Worshipers believe in **kami**, which are spirits found in nature. All parts of nature such as trees, rocks, waterfalls, and mountains, could be the home of a kami. Many shrines are built near a natural feature or the location of a historical event. Most of these shrines have a torii, or Japanese gate, at the entrance to separate the everyday world and the **sacred** world.



Torii at a Shinto shrine

Source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Titibuiamamiya-torii.jpg>

warlords for protection. This began a system of **feudalism** which had similar **structures** like in Europe. Because there were many wars between the warlords, they wanted to be surrounded by bodyguards. These loyal warriors became known as samurai. They followed a code of behavior called Bushido which taught them to be brave, fair, generous, and honorable. Eventually one warlord became powerful enough to be given the title of Shogun, or supreme general. While the Emperor still kept his position, the Shogun actually **governed** Japan. The last **Shogun** dynasty ruled from 1603-1868.

### Samurai

Over time the power of the emperors weakened and they lost control. In the countryside laws were not followed and it became dangerous. Large landowners began to create their own private armies to protect their farms. To be safe, smaller farmers would give their land to the



Samurai Armor, circa 1500 C.E.

Source: [http://www.masslive.com/entertainment/index.ssf/2011/01/top\\_5\\_items\\_from\\_the\\_spring-fie.html](http://www.masslive.com/entertainment/index.ssf/2011/01/top_5_items_from_the_spring-fie.html)

### Key Vocabulary

**Archipelago:** a large group or chain of islands

**Migration:** the movement of people

**Cultural Diffusion:** the flow of ideas, beliefs, and practices among different regions

**Feudalism:** the system of exchanging of land for loyalty and protection during the Middle Ages in Europe and Japan

**Sacred:** holy

**Structures:** a system or organization made up of interrelated parts functioning as a whole

**Samurai:** aristocratic Japanese warrior practicing Bushido

**Shogun:** military rulers in Japan

**Governed:** having political authority including the power to make laws

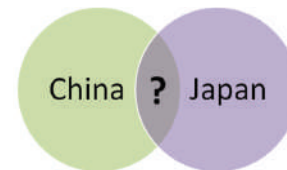
### Quick Review

1. Which geographical term best describes Japan?

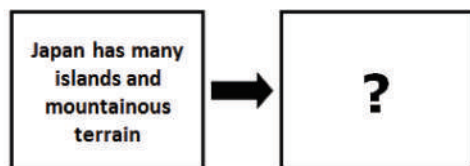
- A. estuary
- B. peninsula
- C. archipelago
- D. continent

2. Which items should replace the question mark?

- A. Samurai and Shogun
- B. Shintoism and Buddhism
- C. Writing and Architecture
- D. Sacred and Profane



3. Which assumption can be made from this statement?



- A. There was a lack of fertile farmland
- B. It was easy for the shogun to control Japan
- C. No contact was made with other cultures
- D. Religion didn't develop in Japan

4. Identify and explain 2-3 beliefs or facts about Shintoism.

### Connection to Today

Currently, Japan is the world's third largest economy. What two nations are ranked higher? What are the main types of economic activity Japan engages in?

### Resources

Learn 360

- Japanese History from the First Emperor of Heaven to the Shoguns (<http://goo.gl/yRVGq>)
- East Asian Religions and Cultural Traditions: (<http://goo.gl/qyEiS>)