

Japan

Japan is a nation made of a chain of islands in eastern Asia in the North Pacific Ocean. The nation is divided into 47 prefectures, or governmental jurisdictions. These prefectures can be divided into nine basic regions: Hokkaido, Tohoku, Kanto, Chubu, Kinki, Chugoku, Shikoku, Kyushu, and Okinawa. Japan is a constitutional monarchy, but the monarch (emperor) has limited powers. The monarch appoints a Prime Minister, who is the head of the executive power of the government. The legislative duties are performed by the National Diet, which is a parliament. The current Emperor of Japan is Akihito. He assumed the throne in 1989 and is the 125th emperor of Japan. Although his duties are largely ceremonial, he travels to many foreign countries and is an honored diplomat.

Japan is a country with a very long history. The history of Japan is usually divided into eras of relative stability. Scientists have found data about the area being peopled as early as 4,000 B.C.E. These early people were largely hunters. Eventually, they turned to farming, and rice cultivation became a staple of their existence. Traditionally, Japan is believed to be founded by Emperor Jimmu, although historians believe he is merely legendary because they have no solid evidence of him. The era after that of Emperor Jimmu is known as the Yayoi period, which existed from 500 B.C.E. - 300 C.E. Information about this period is known from Chinese sources. These Chinese writings mention people who ate raw fish, rice, and vegetables. These people lived in diverse tribal groups with vassal-master relationships.

During the Asuka period (538 – 710), art and architecture flourished. Buddhism was introduced to Japan during this time period, and it influenced all aspects of life. In 607, the famous Horyuji temple was completed, which contains the oldest wooden structure in the world. Powerful clans came to power during this time, and the head of the clans were patriarchs over the extended members of the clan. The emperor of Japan began to rule uncontested. The most important clan of this time was the Soga clan. The Soga clan was responsible for spreading Buddhist principles throughout the country. The Prince Regent, Shotoku Taishi, was well-read and made many lasting changes to the government. He is credited for setting the example that Japan would follow with regard to their policies toward foreign countries like China.

After Shotoku died, Emperor Kotoku brought about the Taika Reform Edicts in 645. The Soga clan lost power and edicts were passed to reorganize the government. The purpose of these reforms was to centralize the power of the government around the emperor and to increase the power of the emperor. Emperor Kotoku attempted to assimilate Chinese culture into Japan as much as possible by adopting Chinese writing, diets, religion, and government.

Name _____

Date _____

Japan (Cont'd)

The feudal period in Japan took place between the 12th and 19th centuries. It was characterized by warlords called shogun and powerful families called daimyo. During this period, the power of the Imperial Court was lessened. The real political and military power came from the shogun and daimyo, who gained power through their vast land holdings. In 1397, the famous Temple of the Golden Pavilion was built in Kyoto. It was originally built as a retirement estate for a Shogun named Ashikaga Yoshimitsu. The temple was burned to the ground three times, and its legends are well-known in Japanese culture. The first shogun, Minamoto No Yoritomo took much power away from the Imperial Court. For all intents, he became the primary ruler of Japan. He was supported by the samurai class of warriors. The samurai caste was a class of warriors who followed the code of Bushido, which meant they were honor-bound to serve their masters. Later on, the samurai would become administrators and courtiers.

During the Edo period (1603 – 1868), Japan underwent many changes, including industrialization. The Tokogawa Shogunate ruled from the city of Edo, now known as Tokyo, during this period. In 1639, Japan began a period of seclusion, which prohibited foreigners (except the Dutch) from entering Japan. This caused more attention to be paid to internal concerns and helped Japan modernize effectively. Japan began to modernize and developed many foreign relations with other nations, and their commerce increased. Agriculture, infrastructure, and a class-system became highly organized during this period. Cities like Kyoto and Osaka flourished, and roads were created that networked all of the cities together.

Presently, Japan is the second largest economy in the world. Japan is also a leader in scientific research, including space agencies and biomedical research. The country has 173 airports and the Haneda Airport is Asia's busiest airport. Japan is also a member of the United Nations and the G8.

Name _____

Date _____

Japan Questions

Multiple Choice:

1. Japan is a chain of islands located in the:
 - a. Northern Pacific Ocean
 - b. Southern Indian Ocean
 - c. Northern Atlantic Ocean
 - d. Southern Arctic Ocean

2. Traditionally, Japan is said to be founded by:
 - a. Mao Tsedung
 - b. Jimmu
 - c. Tokyo Edo
 - d. Haneda

3. The current emperor of Japan is:
 - a. Edo
 - b. Akihito
 - c. Minamoto
 - d. Mao

Fill In:

4. This temple was originally built in Kyoto for a shogun: _____. It burned to the ground three times.

5. During the _____ period (1603 – 1868), Japan underwent many changes, including industrialization.

6. During the _____ period (538 – 710), art and architecture flourished.

7. The _____ clan was responsible for spreading Buddhist principles throughout the country.

True or False:

- ____ 8. Japan is a democracy.

- ____ 9. In 1639, Japan began a period of seclusion, which prohibited foreigners (except the Dutch) from entering Japan.

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Japan Answers

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