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 and People

- **archipelago** – a chain of islands
- **tsunami** – a very large, damaging tidal wave launched by an undersea earthquake
- **Shinto** – the worship of the forces of nature in Japan
- **selective borrowing** – the process of choosing to accept some aspects of another culture, while discarding or modifying others
Terms and People (continued)

- **kana** – phonetic symbols representing syllables in the Japanese system of writing
- **samurai** – member of the warrior class in Japanese feudal society
- **bushido** – a code of values, or the “way of the warrior” shared by samurai, which emphasized honor, bravery, and loyalty to one’s lord
- **Zen** – a Buddhist sect widely accepted by samurai; emphasizes self-reliance, meditation, and devotion to duty
What internal and external factors shaped Japan’s civilization, and what characterized Japan’s feudal age?

The Japanese people were influenced by China in much the same way that Koreans were.

However, like Korea, Japan maintained its own distinct identity and culture throughout its long history and feudal age.
Japan’s unique geography set it apart from the Asian mainland.

- The country is located on an archipelago and consists of four main islands. Most people live in valleys or on the coasts.

- Japan’s island location has protected it from being conquered by China.
The Japanese people had great respect for nature—its resources as well as its power.

• The Inland Sea was a link between the nation’s islands.

• The ocean provided food as well as trade routes.

• However, Japan lies in the Ring of Fire, a chain of volcanoes, and has been subject to terrible tsunamis.
The earliest Japanese people migrated from the Asian mainland over 2,000 years ago. They lived in a society divided into *uji*, clans.

- Some clan leaders were women.
- The Yamato clan formed Japan’s first and only dynasty by A.D. 500. They claimed descent from the sun goddess.
- The current emperor traces his roots to the Yamato clan.
The traditional Japanese religion was **Shinto**, worship of the forces of nature.

- There are hundreds of Shinto shrines in Japan.

  - **Dedicated to special sites such as mountains or ancient trees**, they are usually located in places of natural beauty.
Japan and Korea were in constant contact with each other for centuries.

- A consequence is that the Japanese language is related to Korean.
- Korean missionaries introduced Buddhism to Japan in the 500s.
- This sparked Japanese interest in China.
Between the early 600s and early 800s, many Japanese nobles, students, and traders visited the Tang court in China.

- When the visitors returned, they spread Chinese technology, arts, and ideas about government.
- Many Chinese customs, such as the tea ceremony, became popular and influential in Japan.
Eventually, the thirst for everything Chinese slowed.

• The Japanese used **selective borrowing**, choosing which Chinese ways they wanted to keep.

• In this way, Japan preserved its own culture.

• The Japanese revised the Chinese system of writing, adding **kana**. They also developed their own artistic styles.
During the Heian period, women shaped the court, and an elegant culture emerged.

- Nobles lived in a fairy-tale setting and dressed in silk.
- **Women produced important works** of Japanese literature during this period.
The world’s first full-length novel, *The Tale of Genji*, was written during the Heian period by Lady Murasaki.

- The novel tells about the life of a fictional prince and his son.
- The main event is a Chinese poetry contest, which Prince Genji wins.
- The tone of Heian writing is melancholy, lamenting the passage of all things.
During the 1400s, rival clans battled for control of the Japanese countryside. A new culture arose—the feudal system.

- The emperor became powerless as the shogun, or military commander, took over, setting up a military dynasty.

- The shogun gave land to the daimyo, who granted it to lesser warriors called samurai. These fighting aristocrats developed a code of values called bushido, the “way of the warrior.”
Feudal society in Japan was very hierarchical during this age.

- **Noblewomen** lost status and inheritance was limited to sons in this period.

- **Peasants, artisans, and merchants** were at the bottom of the ladder, under the samurai.
During this period, Japan held off Mongol invaders—twice.

• Both times the Japanese were aided by typhoons, which destroyed Mongol fleets.

• The fact that the Mongols failed made the Japanese feel they enjoyed special protection from the gods.
Finally the general Toyotomi Hideyoshi united most of Japan by 1590.

Next, Tokugawa Ieyasu defeated rivals and established rule that would last until 1868.

The level of warfare increased in Japan after 1450, and daimyo gave arms to peasants.
The Tokugawa rulers created an orderly society. They were determined to end feudal war.

- They created a strong central government.
- They required that the daimyo live in the capital at Edo every other year.
- They reinforced the social hierarchy.

Once peace was restored, the Japanese economy boomed.
A Buddhist sect called **Zen** became popular among the samurai during the feudal age.

- Zen Buddhists believed that people could seek enlightenment through meditation and through the precise performance of everyday tasks.
- Zen **influenced Japanese culture**. Landscape paintings express its reverence for nature, and the tea ceremony reflects the Zen value of peace.
The arts changed as Japan began to embrace an urban culture.

- **Noh plays gave way to Kabuki theater.** Puppet plays called *bunraku* became popular.

- **Colorful woodblock prints were created in the 1600s** and depicted the joys of town life.