US Forces Pacific Culture Guide

JAPAN

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and successfully achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information it contains will help you understand the decisive cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for achieving mission success (Photo: US Forces member discusses an explosive device with Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force Petty Officer).

The guide consists of 2 parts:

Part 1 is the "Culture General" section, which provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on East Asia.

Part 2 is the "Culture Specific" section, which describes unique cultural features of Japanese society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is meant to complement other pre-deployment training. (Photo: Sushi restaurant in historic city of Kamakura, Japan).

For more information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ or contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing—an image, word, object, idea, or story—represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value—freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories—what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains"—in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains—which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems, and others (see chart on next page)—as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social

identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

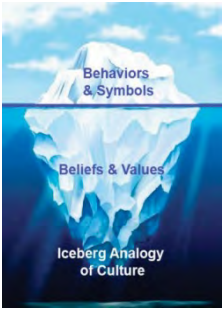
One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview—how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions, and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

Cultural Belief System

An important component of any worldview is a belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true—regardless of whether there is evidence to support those ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have help shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.



Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend

judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout East Asia, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.

East Asia includes the present-day countries of China, Japan, Mongolia, North Korea, and South Korea. By the 700s AD, ancient East Asian tribes and peoples had consolidated into unified Chinese, Japanese, and Korean states; Mongolia formed a state in the 13th century.

China has played a central role in East Asian history, influencing the region's culture, philosophy, and politics. Between the 8th and 11th centuries, the people of Japan and Korea adopted several aspects of Chinese culture, including clothing and architecture (Photo: The Great Wall of China).

Despite its predominance, China remained vulnerable to nomadic Mongol tribes living along its northern border. In the

12th and 13th centuries, Mongol forces under the command of Genghis Khan swept through Asia and parts of Europe, conquering China and Korea. Though vast and diverse, the Mongol Empire was ultimately short-lived.

Over the next 500 years, East Asian societies advanced along differing paths. Japan developed largely in isolation, while Korea – a Chinese tributary state – had some limited outside connections. After the Mongol Empire's demise in the 14th century, Mongolia came under Chinese control, which lasted until Mongolia aligned with the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1924. China established overland trade routes with Europe in the 200s BC, and by the 1500s AD, Europeans expanded their control in East Asia.

As Japan industrialized in the mid-19th century, it proceeded to colonize Korea, northeastern China, Taiwan, the southern half of Sakhalin Island and Micronesia. This colonial activity led to conflicts with other powers in the region, angering Japanese colonial subjects (Pictured: 1898 political cartoon depicting European and Japanese rulers dividing China over the protests of a Chinese official).

During World War II (WWII), Japan launched a coordinated attack on the US and other powers in the Asia-Pacific region in 1941. This war caused millions of casualties and lasting bitterness across the region. In 1945, Japan surrendered to the Allied Powers.

Following WWII Cold War politics shaped East Asia's destiny. In China, USSR-backed communists seized control of mainland China, forcing US-backed nationalists to retreat to the island of Taiwan off the Chinese coast. Korea was divided into the US-controlled South and USSR-controlled North as part of a postwar transition. In 1950 North Korea invaded South Korea, sparking the Korean War and permanent separation.

During the second half of the 20th century, Japan and South Korea became wealthy, democratic societies with developed

economies. China liberalized its economy but did not reform politically. Mongolia followed communist economic policies until the 1990s, when it liberalized both politically and economically. North Korea remains communist and isolated.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. Despite the longevity of its societies, East Asia has experienced substantial political change since the mid-1900s.

As a consequence of the Allied occupation of Japan from 1945-1952, Japan aligned with the US, demilitarized, democratized, and retained its emperor as a symbol of national unity. Japan also was able to rebuild its economy after the war. While the same party has ruled for the most part since 1955, Japan today enjoys economic prosperity and political freedom.

Once the USSR helped China establish a communist stronghold, China asserted sovereignty at the expense of several million casualties from political purges and avoidable famines. In 1978 China's government introduced market reforms that lifted millions out of poverty. Nevertheless, the Chinese Communist Party have maintained a tight rein on power, denying the Chinese people their autonomy.

Arriving in 1949, Taiwan's Chinese nationalists established an authoritarian rule that has promoted rapid economic growth. Today Taiwan has a thriving economy and a vibrant, multiparty democracy. Although China claims sovereignty over Taiwan, the island functions as an independent country.

The two Koreas have followed vastly different paths since their division (Photo: South Koreans protest for North Korean freedom near the border between the Koreas). During the 1960s and 1970s, South Korea was ruled by authoritarians who favored economic

growth over political freedom, prompting the country to industrialize rapidly. Having democratized in the late 1980s, South Korea now has an open, democratic political system and one of the world's most developed economies. North Korea, by contrast, remains militaristic, repressive, and economically weak.

Long a communist state, Mongolia transitioned to democracy after a peaceful revolution in 1990. Although the communist Mongolian People's Party continued to win elections in the early 1990s, several new parties have won majorities in the Mongolian Parliament in subsequent elections.

Regional security threats and mutual distrust motivate military posturing in East Asia. Having the largest military in the region, China lays claim to several disputed territories and defends a wide range of commercial interests. A well-equipped force, China's military has advanced technologically in recent years. The Japanese, South Korean, and Taiwanese militaries are substantially smaller than China's but are professional and well-resourced. Technically still at war with South Korea, North Korea has a massive but poorly trained and equipped military of more than a million troops. Mongolia has no international disputes and only a small military. While nationalism and historical animosity threaten East Asian security, most countries in the region trade or engage diplomatically. All East Asian countries apart from North Korea have US embassies.

Japan and the Koreas are societies made up of an overwhelming ethnic majority. Similarly, 94% of Mongolians are ethnic Mongols, while Turkic people constitute the rest of the population. Although 91% of China's population belongs to the Han ethnic group, the Chinese government also recognizes 55 other ethnic groups. No countries in East Asia have substantial foreign-born or immigrant populations.

Many differences exist among social groups within East Asian countries. Wealth, age, educational attainment, employment,

family background, and marital status factor into a person's social status. In most East Asian countries, city dwellers tend to regard their rural counterparts as backward, less cultured, and less educated. While some generational differences exist, most East Asians consider social and familial harmony paramount. Thus, young people tend to respect elders' wishes.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

Early East Asians were animists, believing that gods or ancestral spirits inhabited various natural objects and expressed their will in daily life. Today East Asians of many different faiths still follow certain ancient religious practices such as making offerings to ancestral spirits. Japan's indigenous animist religion, Shintoism, stresses the spiritual connection between Japan's land and its people (Photo: Famous Itsukushima Torii gate on Miyajima Island). Similarly, beliefs about shamans and their connection to a spiritual realm persist among some Chinese, Mongolians, and Koreans.

Multiple belief systems historically have coexisted peacefully in East Asia, many of which originated in China and are not linked to specific gods. East Asians typically observe practices from several belief systems simultaneously. In the 6th and 5th centuries BC, Chinese philosophers Confucius and Laozi developed Confucianism and Daoism, respectively. As these philosophies spread, they shaped regional ideas about social harmony. Whereas Confucianism describes how various types of social relationships should function ideally, Daoism emphasizes balance, simplicity, compliance with the natural order, and reverence for ancestors and Laozi.

Around 150 AD, Buddhism spread from the Indian subcontinent into China, eventually reaching other parts of Asia. East Asian

Buddhism has many variations because its adherents have adapted the faith to their cultures, philosophies, and traditions. Many East Asians practice some form of Buddhism today.

While Islam and Christianity have been present in East Asia for centuries, their influence has been limited to certain places. Arriving in China in the 7th century AD, Islam has a long history in western China and Mongolia and has undergone a modest expansion in recent years. Christianity also was introduced to East Asia in the 7th century AD and eventually gained converts among some Mongol tribes. Beginning in the 1500s, European missionaries expanded Christianity's reach. Today most East Asian Christians live in South Korea, where roughly 30% of the population is Christian.

During the 20th century, communist East Asian governments often curtailed religious practice in favor of atheism. China is still officially atheist, and the Communist Party of China forbids party members from following any religion. The North Korean government takes a different approach by promoting ***Juche***, a state-sponsored faith that combines aspects of Eastern and Western belief systems with reverence for Kim Il-sung, the first North Korean President, and his family. Despite these recent examples of religious suppression, East Asians have tended to resume open religious practice as the government permits. For example, Buddhism has thrived in Mongolia since the country abandoned communism in 1990.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin").

Most East Asians highly value family relationships. Individuals are expected to subordinate their desires to those of their families as a means of promoting harmony and the best interests of the family as a whole (Photo: A Japanese family in 1928). Children are taught

to respect and obey their elders from a young age. In return, parents devote themselves to their children and make many sacrifices for their wellbeing. These sacrifices enable children's success, preserve the family legacy, and ensure that parents will have a caretaker in old age.

Traditionally, East Asian families have been large, close-knit, multi-generational kin groups whose members support each other. Members of the same extended family traditionally have lived in close proximity, an arrangement that provided many benefits in the rural, agricultural villages that once were widespread in East Asia. Although family life still revolves around farming or herding in some rural areas, family life has changed as East Asia has industrialized and urbanized. While caring for elderly relatives is still common, some modern East Asian households, especially in urban areas, consist of nuclear families (2 parents and their offspring) that live far from their ancestral homes.

East Asian dwellings vary widely. In large urban areas like Beijing, Seoul, Tokyo, Ulaanbaatar, and Shanghai, people typically live in either older homes or modern, high-rise apartment buildings. By contrast, rural East Asians typically live with their extended families in freestanding houses. China and Mongolia have especially extensive rural hinterlands. A number of Mongolians continue to live seasonally as nomadic herders in collapsible huts (pictured).

Marriage is a key milestone for East Asians, who typically date and select their own spouses with the advice and approval of elders. Since many young East Asians today delay marriage to pursue educational or career opportunities, the average marriage age has increased. Nevertheless, the traditional expectation that young East Asians will marry, bear children, and care for their elderly parents remains deep-seated.

East Asians commemorate major life stages through a range of ceremonies and celebrations. The birth of a healthy child, for example, is a joyous occasion that prompts parties, gift-giving,

and welcoming and naming ceremonies. Conversely, funerals and other death customs are more somber and demonstrate respect for the deceased.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological and reproductive differences between males and females. Gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

While most East Asian countries provide for legal gender equality, women are subordinate to men in practice. Moreover, cultural norms tend to entrench traditional roles, whereby women remain underrepresented in both business and government. Many of East Asia's predominant philosophies and religions, such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, establish men as family providers and direct women to behave subserviently. Nevertheless, East Asian women still make important contributions to society, having enjoyed expanding rights over the past 50 years.

In states under communist influence, women have been allowed to work outside the home, although also expected to continue performing domestic duties. By contrast, women in Japan and South Korea gained social rights more gradually. Today, most East Asian women, particularly in urban areas, have access to training and education equal to that of their male peers.

While women typically receive less pay than men and rarely reach senior levels of leadership, East Asians generally accept women in the workplace. Many women balance career and family responsibilities, although they are more likely than men to leave the workforce to care for children or elderly relatives.

Due to family planning policies and increased use of contraceptives, among other factors, East Asian countries have low birthrates. Of note, China's birthrates have declined more than 40% since the government introduced a One-Child Policy in 1979. Due to an enduring cultural preference for sons, the

policy has driven many Chinese couples to abort female fetuses or give up their daughters for adoption in hopes that their lone child will be a son. These practices have skewed China's gender ratio.

East Asians historically have not regarded homosexuality as an acceptable practice. Consequently, homosexuals in the region typically have assumed heterosexual family roles. Nevertheless, gay rights are beginning to gain traction mostly in China, South Korea, and Japan, although same-sex marriages remain taboo.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication refers to the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally. In East Asian countries, most inhabitants speak the official language or a similar dialect. For example, more than 99% of people in Japan and the Koreas speak the official state languages, while more than 90% of Mongolians speak Khalkha Mongolian, the official language.

China is East Asia's most linguistically diverse country having 292 spoken languages. A majority of China's population speaks the official Mandarin (Sino-Tibetan) language, although a number of groups continue to speak ethnic languages as a means of preserving their unique identities (Pictured: A Chinese dictionary).

Speakers of Mandarin, Cantonese, and other Chinese languages use an ancient, character-based writing system to record sound and meaning. Developed around 1200 BC, the Chinese writing system has tens of thousands unique characters. Historically, Mongolians, Japanese, and Koreans also transcribed their languages using Chinese characters. While the Japanese and Koreans eventually devised their own writing systems, their languages still use some words and characters borrowed from Chinese. Mongolians have used many scripts to write their language, although they, like Russians, now use Cyrillic.

East Asians typically avoid confrontation, seek consensus, and refrain from displaying emotions in public. In order to maintain social harmony, East Asians often try to “save face”—avoid embarrassment to themselves or others. They tend to begin conversations by discussing neutral topics, such as health, family, and hobbies. While specific greeting customs—such as bows, handshakes, and forms of address—vary by country, all East Asians tend to use both verbal and non-verbal cues to convey respect and reinforce social hierarchy.

East Asians typically are reserved when meeting new people for the first time, particularly foreign nationals. Eventually, they become more comfortable and candid as they get to know a new acquaintance. Being introduced through a well-respected mutual contact alleviates these reservations to some extent.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) or culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems like schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Most East Asian cultures value education. Historically reserved for young male elites, formal education was an essential qualification for prestigious civil service jobs in ancient China, Japan, and Korea, where students often took personal lessons from famous scholars. Scholars and teachers historically have been and continue to be highly respected in East Asia, typically receiving high salaries and esteem.

Today East Asian children across social and economic ranks have access to basic education. Primary education is compulsory throughout East Asia, where literacy rates reach 96%. Although East Asian students tend to be among the world’s top performers on international achievement tests,

some observers criticize East Asian schools for their emphasis on memorization over critical thinking and creativity.

Urban schools tend to be better resourced and staffed than those in rural areas, particularly in China and Mongolia. Unlike their wealthier urban peers, many rural students cannot afford additional tutoring and tend to lag behind on national examinations.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most Western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to building lasting relationships. Most East Asian cultures consider personal relationships and efficient time management equally essential and not mutually exclusive in professional and social settings.

East Asians typically adhere to deadlines and schedules and may multitask to maximize efficiency. While they typically refrain from taking time to build relationships during meetings, they often use after-work social events to build and maintain personal relationships with coworkers. Accordingly, socializing over meals or drinks helps foster relationships.

East Asians occupy public and private space in ways that may be unfamiliar to Americans. For example, since East Asian cities tend to be crowded, personal space is at a premium. Similarly, people tend to stand in close proximity in social contexts. East Asians keep inside spaces clean, removing shoes and wearing slippers after they enter a home, school, or temple (pictured).

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill, and style. A country's clothing, games, music, theater, literature, and artwork reflect a variety of historic, cultural, and religious influences as well as its geographic features, climate, and global interconnectedness.

East Asia is known for its rich artistic traditions that emphasize principles such as balance, precision, and harmony, although these traditions vary by culture and time period. While the region has a long tradition of classical dance and music using a range of musical instruments, more recently, some musicians have adopted modern Western styles, particularly pop music.

East Asia also has a long, rich, and well-preserved tradition of literature and folklore. East Asian classics, such as Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, are well-known even in the US. Historically, East Asia's religions and philosophies, particularly Buddhism, Daoism, and folk beliefs, have influenced its arts, crafts, and architecture. Today modern secular influences tend to inspire East Asian artists. By contrast, North Korean art, music, and cinema are limited to themes that honor its leaders.

East Asians enjoy soccer and table tennis. Baseball is popular in Japan and South Korea, while basketball is common in China. Mongolians excel at archery, wrestling, and horseback riding. Martial arts, such as Japan's ***judo*** and ***karate*** or Korea's ***taekwondo***, are popular throughout the region. Many East Asian athletes have excelled in worldwide sports competitions. Notably, China, South Korea, and Japan have hosted the Olympics, collectively earning hundreds of medals.

While traditional clothing varies among and within East Asian countries, it is typically colorful and elaborately decorated. Most East Asians reserve traditional clothing for special occasions. For instance, Koreans wear ***hanbok*** or ***choson-ot***, a 2-piece garment with a short jacket for weddings or funerals. Japanese people often wear the ***kimono***, an ankle-length, long-sleeve robe, for special occasions. Across East Asia, Western-style clothing is the most common style for daily wear.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures, and economics. Theories of

disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

East Asian cuisine varies widely even within single countries. Rice is East Asia's main staple grain featured at most meals as a complement to meat, seafood, or vegetables. Rice is also an ingredient in many desserts. Many East Asian cuisines also include noodles, dumplings, and soups. Although the Koreas share a culinary heritage, North Koreans' diet has less variety and more corn since it is cheaper than rice. Mongolia's cuisine consists largely of meat and dairy from sheep, cows, camels, yaks (indigenous Asian long-haired ox), and goats, with few vegetables or spices due to a lack of arable land.

East Asians regularly drink teas and also enjoy a number of indigenous alcoholic beverages, including Japanese ***saké***, made by fermenting rice, and Mongolian ***airag***, which comes from fermented horse milk.

Although most East Asian countries have experienced gradual increases in life expectancy as they have industrialized, accessibility and affordability of modern medical care vary widely. Preventative care is considered important to maintain health. Many East Asians rely on traditional medicines such as acupuncture and herbal medicines to cure their ailments. Some mainstream medical practitioners have incorporated traditional practices into their clinical healthcare. Of concern is the use of toxic herbal treatments that can harm patients, rare animal species like rhinos and tigers, and the environment.

While most communicable diseases have been eradicated or controlled in East Asia, less healthy lifestyles have contributed to an increase in non-communicable illnesses, such as cancer and cardiovascular diseases. Emerging infectious diseases, such as "bird flu" (avian influenza), can threaten public health and spread rapidly in densely populated cities. In addition to purely medical concerns, China, Japan, and South Korea also face the common problem of financing healthcare for their growing elderly populations. Meanwhile, Mongolia and North Korea still grapple with malnutrition.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. It details how countries allocate their resources by sector, trade with other countries, give or receive aid, and pay for goods and services within their borders.

East Asian economic systems range from communism to free market capitalism. With the exception of North Korea, East Asian countries have benefited from industrialization and global trade and investments. China, Japan, and South Korea, in particular, have some of the world's largest economies, ranking 2nd, 3rd, and 12th in the world by nominal gross domestic product (GDP), respectively.

China's shift from planned to free market economics enabled it to realize dramatic economic gains. Since liberalizing its economy, China has experienced economic growth averaging 7% annually, largely due to its exports. This expansion so far has freed 500 million people from poverty, although wealth remains primarily in the hands of China's elites. While China continues to grow, the pace has slowed (Photo: Shanghai skyline).

Japan and South Korea have industrialized, highly developed economies. Since World War II, both countries have achieved large economic gains. In the 1990s, Mongolia abandoned its planned economy and privatized many industries, leading to substantial economic growth and social change. By contrast, North Korea's economy struggles under international sanctions and relies heavily on China to boost its failing economy.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. While technological development is often seen as purely positive, governments can also harness technology to monitor their citizens and crackdown on dissent.

Technology has enabled development throughout East Asia, although it has occurred at different rates. For example, while Japan and South Korea have adopted a range of industrial and Internet-enabled technologies, North Korea purposely shuns many of those technologies in order to remain isolated. China, Japan, and South Korea have well-developed physical and telecommunications infrastructures that enable transportation, trade, and connectivity with the entire world.

Transport infrastructure varies widely throughout East Asia. For example, high-speed trains crisscross much of Japan (pictured), while only about 20% of Mongolia's roads are paved. Consequently, most Mongolians travel by foot, on animals, or on motorcycles.

While Japan and South Korea have relatively few mineral resources, Mongolia, China, and North Korea have large mineral deposits. Most East Asian countries use diverse energy sources such as coal and oil, importing substantial quantities of oil and natural gas from other regions. China is the world's 2nd largest oil importer and largest producer and consumer of coal. Apart from North Korea, East Asian countries have sought to develop nuclear power and hydropower as alternative energy sources.

Freedom of the press and Internet vary substantially in East Asia. China and North Korea lack these freedoms, sponsoring state-controlled media outlets. Japan, Mongolia, and South Korea, by contrast, have relatively few restrictions on the press and Internet. While the number of Internet users in China alone exceeds the entire US population, China's government heavily censors online content and monitors its citizens' Internet use. Japanese and South Korean residents are avid Internet users, enjoying some of the world's fastest Internet connections.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize East Asian society at large, we will focus on specific features of Japanese society.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

Japan traditionally traces its mythical beginnings to the coronation of its first emperor in 660 BC. After a long period of Chinese cultural influence, ***shōgun*** (military leaders) supported by ***samurai*** warriors ruled for hundreds of years as Japan tried to isolate itself from most foreign contact. For the first half of the 20th century, Japan pursued a course of imperial aggression that brought it into violent conflict with both its neighbors and the US. Since the US occupation following Japan's defeat in World War II, Japanese society has been marked by its pacifism and pursuit of stability and economic development.

Early Japan

Scientists believe that immigrants from mainland Asia and Polynesia populated the Japanese islands as early as 35,000 BC. During the Jōmon period (ca. 10,000 BC–300 BC), communities of hunters and gatherers produced distinctive pottery. Some scholars believe that the Ainu people, who live mainly on Hokkaidō today, are descendants of these early inhabitants (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*) (Photo: Late Jōmon period Dogū figurine).

Chinese Influence

A long period of Chinese cultural influence began during the Yayoi period (ca. 300 BC–300 AD). During the Kofun period (ca. 300-500), militaristic rulers led a rudimentary state-level society, and Japan's indigenous religion, ***Shintō***, emerged (see p. 2-3 of *Religion and Spirituality*). In about 405, the Japanese officially adopted the Chinese writing system. Later in this period, Chinese and Korean emissaries introduced Buddhism to Japan (see p. 2-3 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

The Yamato Period: Contact with Chinese technology and ideas reached its height during the Yamato period (ca. 300-710) and resulted in the transformation of Japan's agricultural systems, calendar, philosophy, architecture, poetry, medicine, and law. In addition, the Japanese court, now led by an emperor, adopted the ways of the Chinese imperial court. Japan's oldest written historical records date to this period (Photo: 5th century iron armor).

The Heian Period: Japanese rulers moved the capital from Nara to Kyōto in 794. From Kyōto, the emperor named a member of the Fujiwara family to rule on his behalf, an arrangement that would hold for the next 300 years. Although contact with China continued to influence Japanese culture during the Heian period (794-1185), Japan also developed its own aesthetic, literary, and artistic styles.

The Rise of the Shōgun

Beginning in the Kamakura period (1185-1333), the state named a ***shōgun***, a supreme military commander, to act for the imperial court. Although the emperor continued to be head of the state, the shōgun actually held supreme political authority. Regional warlords supported the shōgun, while samurai warriors swore allegiance to the warlords.

Mongol Invasions: As part of a massive imperial expansion that stretched from the Pacific Ocean to Eastern Europe, Mongols from Central Asia attempted to invade Japan twice in the 13th century. Both times the invasion forces withdrew after typhoons scattered their fleets. The Japanese referred to these storms as ***kamikaze***, or a "divine wind" protecting the country.

Contact with the West

First contact with the West occurred in 1549 with the arrival of Portuguese Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier, whose ship was blown off-course on its way to China. Soon, traders from several European countries arrived along with other Catholic missionaries (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Japan's warlords adopted the new European weapons as their struggles for dominance escalated to civil war.

The Tokugawa Shogunate

In 1603, a group of warlords led by Tokugawa Ieyasu (pictured) consolidated power and proceeded to defeat and unify the various factions through civil war. It ended in the creation of a shogunate or military government that would last until 1868.

The shogunate moved the capital from Kyōto to Edo (renamed Tokyo in 1868) from which the regime ruled through a network of alliances with over 200 ***daimyo*** (regional lords). For more than 250 years, Japan experienced relative stability and prosperity.

Period of Isolationism: Believing that European traders and missionaries were preparing for a European military conquest of Japan, the shogunate began to curtail diplomatic ties. Westerners were allowed access only to special zones called "treaty ports." By 1639 the shogunate expelled almost all foreigners, allowing just a few Dutch and Chinese traders to operate from Nagasaki.

During this time, the regime brutally suppressed Japanese Christians (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*), while installing an array of mechanisms to control its citizenry. Notable measures included banning armaments and establishing strict household registration requirements and roadside checkpoints. These and other policies reflected Confucian ideals of social stability, specific paths to authority, and collective responsibility (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Membership in strict hereditary social classes dictated all aspects of social life. In addition to the nobility and a small group of outcasts, these classes included the samurai warriors, farmers, artisans, and merchants. Membership conveyed certain privileges. The samurai, for example, enjoyed the right to carry swords, use a family name, and wear silk garments.

Due to these policies and mechanisms, Japanese culture and society became somewhat unified across the country. Urban areas enjoyed a flowering of arts, literature, and sports forms

still popular today. These include ***kabuki*** drama, ***bunraku*** puppet theater, ***sumo*** wrestling, ***ukiyo-e*** woodblock prints, and ***geisha*** entertainers (see p. 3-5 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). By the late 18th century, Edo (Tokyo) was the world's largest city, with a population of about 1 million.

Bushidō: the Way of the Warrior

An unwritten code of behavior characterized the proper role of the samurai class and came to be known in the Tokugawa period as ***bushidō***, the way of the warrior. Based in the values of Shintō, Buddhism, and Confucianism (see p. 2-3 of *Religion and Spirituality*), the code stressed honor, courage, politeness, and reserve.

According to ***bushido***, a samurai and his family must be willing to sacrifice themselves to protect the life and honor of their lord. If they failed to do so, their suicide by sword was the only appropriate response. Some lords lost their holdings and their ability to retain samurai in the late Tokugawa period. Consequently, many samurai became ***rōnin***, or masterless samurai, whose lives have been romanticized in countless books and movies.

The End of Isolation: The 1853 appearance of US Navy Commodore Matthew Perry and a squadron of warships (known to the Japanese as Black Ships) effectively ended Japan's 200 years of isolation and initiated a serious political crisis. While factions debated how to respond to the Western presence, the Tokugawa shōgun entered into treaties and agreements that opened Japanese ports to foreign trade and allowed foreigners the right of residence. These acts spurred an anti-Tokugawa movement.

In 1863, the emperor ordered the shōgun to report to him at the imperial palace and explain his actions – the first time a shōgun had visited an emperor since 1634. Recognizing his lack of support, the shōgun submitted his resignation when a group of

allied samurai seized control of the court and announced the restoration of direct rule under Emperor Meiji in 1868.

The Reforms of the Meiji Restoration

Although Emperor Meiji (illustrated) ostensibly headed the new government, the group of samurai who had led the Meiji Restoration actually ruled. Looking to the European nations as models, these leaders implemented reform and modernization policies that radically transformed society. These policies included reform of the landholding system, elimination of the samurai ranks, and creation of a centralized state with a parliamentary system based on a Western-style constitution. Other changes included the creation of a single national dialect (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*) and the formation of a modern military based on compulsory military service (military service was formerly a privilege of the samurai only).

An important part of the Meiji leaders' efforts to form a stable state involved emphasizing the imperial family as the sacred and divine foundation of the country. These efforts included the teaching of Japan's mythological origin (see "Myth" below) as historical fact and the declaration of Japan's indigenous religion, ***Shintō***, with its focus on emperor-worship, as the official state religion (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

The Emergence of Japan as a Regional Power

In the midst of these reforms, Meiji leaders began to consider imperialist expansion. Because it regarded China's influence in the Korean peninsula as a potential threat, in 1876 Japan used the threat of force to compel the Korean government to accept an uneven treaty. Among other terms favorable to Japan, the treaty declared Korea a sovereign, independent state equal in status to Japan – a strategy that ultimately ended Korea's historic subordination to China.

The Sino-Japanese War: These and other territorial spats developed into a war between China and Japan (the Sino-

Japanese War) which Japan won in a decisive victory in 1895. The subsequent treaty granted Japan the Ryukyu Islands (present-day Japan's southernmost islands) and Taiwan, and forced China to renounce its claims in Korea. In addition, Japan took control of Port Arthur, a Chinese-controlled port on the Yellow Sea in Korea (Pictured: Chinese generals surrender in 1894).

Meanwhile, Russia grew concerned about Japan's expansion in the region. Just days after Japan took control of Port Arthur, Russia, along with France and Germany, pressured Japan into returning the port to China. In 1898, however, Russia itself took control of Port Arthur amid other expansionist efforts.

The Russo-Japanese War: Russian and Japanese expansionism eventually led to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, which was fought in Korea and adjacent regions in northeastern China. Japan took control of Korea during the war and eventually prevailed over Russia. In addition, Japan took possession of the Kuril Islands north of the Japanese island of Hokkaidō as well as Russia's interests in Manchuria (China) (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*). Japan made Korea a protectorate (a state protected and partly controlled by another state) in 1905 and a full colony in 1910.

Japanese Nation-Building

Through the 1920s, Japan progressed slowly toward a more democratic form of government. However, when Emperor Hirohito (the father of current Emperor Akihito) took the throne in 1926, a reemphasis on the sanctity of imperial institutions emerged, with military leaders gaining greater influential.

Increased Imperial Aggression: In the 1930s, Japan pursued expansionist goals. First, it invaded and occupied Manchuria in northern China in 1931. In 1937, Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China during which Japanese soldiers committed atrocities and massacres against Chinese soldiers and civilians. This invasion eventually became part of the greater World War II conflict which began in Europe in 1939.

Strongly opposed to Japan's expansionist activities in Asia, the US tightened existing economic sanctions against Japan, including banning shipments of oil. Requiring new sources to fuel its expansion, Japan made plans to secure Southeast Asia's oil reserves. Believing that Germany's swift successes in the European theater would divert the Allies' attention from its activities in Asia, Japan began moving troops into northern Vietnam in 1940. However, to fully accomplish its plans, Japan realized it would have to neutralize the US Navy.

The Pacific War

On December 7, 1941 Japan launched a surprise air attack on US naval forces at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. This event triggered the Pacific War, a term that refers to World War II events in the Pacific and East Asia. Although the US had expected an attack in the Philippines, it had not anticipated an assault on Hawaii. Consequently, the attack caught US forces off guard. Although devastating (the Japanese sunk 4 battleships, destroyed many aircraft, and killed over 2,000 people), the attack caused little significant long-term damage to US capabilities.

Mobilizing all its assets, Japan was initially successful, capturing the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaya, and Burma. Japan tried to gain support for its aggressions by declaring that its victory would benefit all Asian nations. Instead, Japan's brutal and exploitative treatment of the residents of its occupied territories prevented it from making any regional allies.

The tide began to turn in June 1942 when US forces sank 4 Japanese aircraft carriers and won the Battle of Midway. By 1944, Allied ground forces had recaptured areas in the Western Pacific. Similarly, Allied naval forces were destroying the Japanese fleet, while Allied bombing raids were razing Japanese cities. Meanwhile, the Japanese leadership grew desperate, sending *kamikaze* pilots to fly suicide missions into enemy ships and airplanes (Photo: US soldiers approach a Japanese dugout in 1943).

Germany surrendered to the Allies in May 1945, ending the war in Europe. Yet Japan failed to respond to the Allies' July 1945 call for its unconditional surrender. Consequently, the US dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, 1945. Both cities were destroyed and about 340,000 Japanese died during the bombings and in their aftermath.

Surrender: The Japanese heard their emperor's voice for the first time on August 15, 1945, as he announced Japan's surrender in a radio broadcast. Japan's aggressions in World War II resulted in the loss of over 3 million Japanese lives and the destruction of its cities, towns, and infrastructure. Japan also lost all of its overseas possessions. Manchuria reverted to China, while Japan renounced its claims to Taiwan and Korea. The Soviet Union (USSR, later Russia) occupied the islands north of Hokkaidō, while the US became sole administering authority on the Ryukyu Islands, returning them in 1972.

Occupation

From 1945-1952, Allied troops led by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in Japan, US Army General Douglas MacArthur, occupied Japan. The Occupation government initiated major reforms, including demilitarization, a revision of the constitution and political system, the separation of state and religion, and land and education reform.

Although the Occupation government punished or executed other leaders, it allowed the emperor to remain on the throne, requiring only that he renounce his divinity (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*) (Pictured: 1947 illustration of US military checkpoint in Japan).

A New Constitution: In 1947, Japan adopted a new constitution that renounced war, proclaimed respect for basic human rights, and declared Japan a democracy. Significantly, Article 9 of the constitution forbade the maintenance of any military war potential and allowed only self-defense forces (see p. 5-6 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Consequently, Japan signed a 1960 treaty with the US stating that the US must come to Japan's aid in the event of invasion. In addition, it guaranteed the US the right to maintain military bases on Japanese soil.

By the time Japan regained its sovereignty in 1952, initial reconstruction was complete. The conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) emerged as the dominant political party, prioritizing economic growth and social stability.

Modern Japan

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Japan experienced rapid industrialization and swift economic recovery due largely to a stable political situation and close cooperation between business and government (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*). By the 1970s, Japan's products began to dominate overseas markets, and its citizens enjoyed unprecedented prosperity as a large, urban middle class developed. (Photo: A high-speed train passes Mount Fuji).

In 1989, Emperor Hirohito died and his son, Akihito, ascended the throne, assuming the title Emperor Heisei ("achievement of universal peace"). Despite some criticisms that the elaborate Shintō rites at his coronation represented prewar imperialism and nationalism, the emperor remains a revered symbol of the nation (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Political stability was threatened in the 1980s and 1990s, first when corruption scandals resulted in high-level resignations and the founding of several splinter parties. To remain in power, the ruling LDP joined a coalition with other parties, while the new center-left Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), emerged.

The government responded poorly to a 1995 earthquake that devastated the city of Kobē. Same year, a nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway by a religious cult group further distressed the populace. Finally, a precarious economic situation starting in the 1980s worsened in 1998 when Japan slid into a severe recession related to a wider Asian economic crisis.

Political Upheaval

Junichiro Koizumi of the LDP became Prime Minister (PM) in 2001, instituting badly-needed economic reforms that helped to restore citizens' confidence in the political system and enable a partial economic recovery. While in 2006 the LDP chose Shinzō Abe to supersede Koizumi, various scandals plus the LDP's loss in parliamentary elections forced Abe to resign just a year later. Two other LDP politicians held the PM office over the next 2 years.

In September 2009, voters expressed their frustration with the LDP by electing a DPJ majority in Parliament, resulting in Japan's first non-LDP PM. Nevertheless, political stability was as elusive for the DPJ as it had been for the LDP: in the 3 years that the DPJ held the majority, 3 different PMs held office. Voters returned the LDP to power in 2012.

As leader of the LDP, Shinzō Abe (pictured) became PM for the second time in December 2012 and immediately began to pursue "Abenomics," a set of policies intended to revitalize the economy. In 2013, voters expressed their broad approval for these reforms, awarding the LDP additional parliamentary seats. Poor economic performance prompted Abe to schedule new elections for December 2014, which the LDP won handily, maintaining LDP's hold on parliament and keeping Abe in power until his 2020 resignation.

Focus on Peace

National self-identity since the war has focused on peace. Due to the country's tragic experience with a military-controlled government during World War II followed by a half century of strong pacifism, many Japanese oppose the military. Consequently, Abe's vocal support for a more robust military sparked major debate in Japan. Despite the controversy, Abe continued to press for Japan's participation in collective self-defense activities including combat cooperation in the defense of another country. These actions currently are interpreted as illegal under Japan's constitution (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Myth

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity.

Japan's earliest myths were passed down both orally over the generations and also recorded in writing. Chronicles from the early 8th century include stories about mythological beginnings of the universe and the adventures of the gods. Japan's most significant myth describes the creation of the Japanese islands and the source of the Japanese emperor's divinity. These stories became a foundational part of State Shintō, Japan's official religion in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Izanagi and Izanami Create the Universe

In the beginning the world was formless. Then, a reed grew and 8 generations of gods were born from it. Two of the gods – the male Izanagi and the female Izanami – stood on a floating bridge between heaven and earth and stirred the ocean with a jeweled spear. When they raised the spear, droplets of water fell and formed the islands of Japan (Pictured: A 19th century depiction of this myth).

The couple then built a home on an island and had several children, including the gods of the wind, mountains, rivers, seas, and trees. Although Izanami died while giving birth to the god of fire, Izanagi produced Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess and ruler of the universe. Amaterasu then sent her grandson, Ninigi, to rule Japan, presenting him with 3 treasures: a bronze mirror (signifying purity), a sword (courage), and a curved jade necklace (generosity and kindness). Ninigi's grandson Jimmu ("Divine Warrior") became the first human emperor of Japan. All subsequent emperors are descended from Jimmu, and the mirror, sword, and necklace remain the imperial symbols of Japan today.

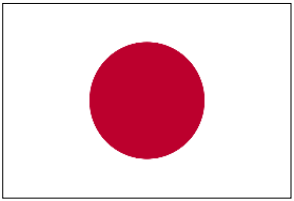
2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name
Japan
Nippon/ Nihon
日本 (Japanese)

Political Borders
Coastline: 18, 486 mi

Capital
Tokyo

Demographics
Japan has a population of about 125.5 million, making it the world's 11th most populous country. Significantly, Japan's population is declining at a rate of -0.27% annually. This lack of population growth, coupled with Japan's high life expectancy (see p. 4 of *Sustenance and Health*), result in a swiftly aging population. Currently, 29% of the population is over the age of 65, compared to 17% in the US, a situation that results in significant healthcare and economic challenges (see p. 4-5 of *Sustenance and Health* and p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*). Nearly 92% of the population lives in urban areas, and almost half are concentrated in the major metropolitan areas of Tokyo, Osaka-Kobē, and Nagoya.



Flag
Known as ***Nisshōki***, the Japanese flag consists of a large red disk representing the sun set against a pure white backdrop. The red disk, known as ***Hinomaru***, is an ancient sun motif that *samurai* and *daimyo* (see p. 1 and 3 of *History and Myth)* historically used on their flags. The white background represents honesty and purity.

Geography

Japan is an island nation located to the east of the Korean peninsula. Comprising over 4000 islands, the country is surrounded by the Pacific Ocean to the East and South, the East China Sea to the Southwest, the Sea of Japan to the West, and the Sea of Okhotsk to the North. Japan's total land area is about 146,000 sq mi, which is slightly smaller than Montana (Photo: Mount Yari on the island of Honshū).

Sometimes called the "Home Islands," Japan's 4 main islands are Hokkaidō, Honshū, Shikoku, and Kyūshū. Together, these islands form almost all of Japan's land area. The largest, Honshū, is home to about 80% of Japan's population as well as the cities of Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya, Osaka, and Hiroshima. South of Kyūshū is a chain of volcanic islands called the Ryukyu Islands (known in Japanese as the Nansei Islands), which includes Okinawa.

Much of the country is forest-covered and mountainous, with the highest peaks located on Hokkaidō and Honshū. Japan's highest point is Mount Fuji, which rises 12,388 ft on Honshū's southeastern shore.

Climate

Japan experiences all 4 seasons, although the North is significantly cooler than the milder South. The northern island of Hokkaidō, for example, experiences freezing temperatures and heavy snowfall in winter. By contrast, the southern islands of Shikoku and Kyūshū have warmer average winter temperatures of 46°F. Summers tend to be warm and humid across the country, with average August temperatures of 70°F on Hokkaidō and 82°F on Kyūshū.

Japan has a monsoonal climate characterized by distinct wet and dry seasons. Known as the ***baiu*** or ***tsusy*** ("plum rain"), Japan's rainy season occurs in the early summer months of June and July. Winter is typically Japan's driest season, with the exception of the coastline along the Sea of Japan which experiences heavy snowfall from November through April.

Natural Hazards

Japan is vulnerable to several types of natural hazards, including typhoons, volcanic activity, and earthquakes. Typically occurring in August and September, typhoons can cause flash floods and landslides. Japan has 108 active volcanoes, some of which erupt frequently, endangering nearby infrastructure and populations. Japan's location at the intersection of several major tectonic plates means that it is especially vulnerable to earthquakes, averaging 1,500 seismic activities per year. Tsunamis (large ocean waves caused by earthquakes), volcanic eruptions, and other geologic disturbances threaten Japan's densely populated coasts. In March 2011, a massive earthquake and subsequent tsunami struck Honshū's northeastern shore, killing 20,000 people and displacing another 500,000. The quake also damaged several nuclear reactors at power plants, resulting in radiation leaks (see p. 2 of *Technology and Material*).

Environmental Issues

Rapid industrialization following World War II resulted in widespread pollution in the 1950s. Despite implementing strict environmental regulations in subsequent decades, Japan still experiences severe air pollution. Acid rain is especially pervasive, degrading natural water supplies, negatively affecting biodiversity, and damaging infrastructure. Recently, the depletion of marine resources through overfishing has become a concern as Japan's population relies heavily on its coastal waters for food (see p. 2 of *Sustenance and Health* & p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*).

Government

Japan is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary government. The country divides into 47 prefectures or districts of varying sizes administered by local governors and assemblies. Adopted in 1947, the constitution designates the Emperor as the official head-of-state yet denies him any real power (see p. 8-10 of *History and Myth*) (Photo: Emperor Naruhito).

Executive Branch

Executive power is vested in the Prime Minister, who forms and leads the Cabinet (***naikaku***), is head-of-government, and acts as commander-in-chief of Japan's Self-Defense Forces (see "Defense" below). Elected by the national legislative body and formally appointed by the Emperor, the Prime Minister is typically the leader of the majority political party at the time of the election. As President of the popular Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), current Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga took office in September 2020, becoming Japan's 58th Prime Minister (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*).

Legislative Branch

Japan's legislature is a 2-chamber Parliament, the National Diet (***Kokkai***, pictured), consisting of a 465-seat House of Representatives (lower house) and 245-seat House of Councillors (upper house). Both houses are filled through a combination of majoritarian and proportional representation. Because voter loyalty often rests with local political families, more than 100 seats in the Diet are held by 2nd and 3rd generation members. Representatives serve 4-year terms, while Councilors serve 6-year terms. Both houses together are responsible for making laws, approving the annual national budget, initiating amendments to the Constitution, conducting investigations on the government, and formally selecting the Prime Minister. Because it holds certain additional powers and authorities, the lower house is the more powerful. The Prime Minister has the authority to dissolve the Diet with the Cabinet's agreement and call for new elections.

Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes a Supreme Court, appellate courts, district and family courts, and informal (summary) courts that oversee minor civil cases. As the highest court, the 15-member Supreme Court has the power to constitutionally review all laws, orders, and official acts of the government. Although the Cabinet appoints all justices, the Emperor must approve the nomination for Chief Justice.

Political Climate

Although Japan has many active political groups, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) have historically competed for power (see p. 9-10 of *History and Myth*). The dominant force in politics since the end of World War II, the conservative LDP's platform includes support for business, export-based economic growth, and administrative reform. The latter includes simplification of government bureaucracy, privatization of state-owned corporations, and tax reform.

As the LDP's more liberal opponent, the DPJ supports government's decentralization, reduced economic regulations, and increased government transparency. Although politicians generally identify with their party's platform, they frequently express diverging opinions on important issues such as Japan's nuclear energy program (see p. 2 of *Technology and Material*), population-related challenges (see p. 4-5 of *Health and Sustenance)*, and the constitution's Article 9, which limits Japan's military activities (see "Defense" below).

Defense

Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF) are a unified military force consisting of ground, maritime, and air branches. Japan's constitution, ratified during the US Occupation following World War II (see p. 8-9 of *History and Myth*), required a massive reduction to Japan's once powerful military as well as a fundamental shift from its aggressive wartime stance to a defensive posture.

Japan's national defense since World War II has also been upheld through arrangements that permit the US to operate military bases in Japan (see p. 8-9 of *History and Myth*) (Photo: SDF members drive armored personnel carriers during bilateral training exercises with the US military). In spring 2015, the US and Japan began negotiating a new agreement that would broaden Japan's ability to defend the US if attacked by a 3rd party.

The Japanese government historically interpreted Article 9 of the constitution to mean that military force may be used solely for self-defense purposes. In 2014, Prime Minister Abe suggested a new interpretation of Article 9 that would allow for an expansion of the SDF's historic mandate. This proposal would permit the SDF's participation in an array of collective self-defense activities, including combat operations in defense of another country. This new interpretation reflects a desire among some factions to make the SDF a more robust military force, a controversial stance in a country that has focused on peace since World War II (see p. 8-9 of *History and Myth*). Consequently, Prime Minister Abe's proposal has sparked major public debate.

Although the SDF is among the smaller regional militaries with just 247,150 active duty troops and 56,000 reserves, it has access to cutting-edge technology in both equipment and infrastructure. Its small size is based on a comparison to China, North and South Korean, Russia and the US. In actuality, the SDF is a top 10 military globally (twice as big as Australia).

Ground Self-Defense Force: Japan's Ground SDF is a well-equipped, well-trained force of 150,850 active-duty troops. The Ground SDF has 5 regional commands, 1 special forces unit, 14 maneuver divisions and brigades (including armored, mechanized, light, air maneuver, and aviation), and numerous combat support brigades.

Maritime Self-Defense Force: Consisting of 45,350 active-duty personnel, Japan's Maritime SDF is also a capable force organized into 4 escort flotillas, each having 7 to 8 assigned warships. Marine bases are located on Yokosuka, Kure, Sasebo, Maizuru, and Ominato.

Air Self-Defense Force: Japan's Air SDF consists of 46,950 active-duty personnel and has 556 combat capable aircraft and 30 squadrons (Photo: Air Force Chief of Staff is welcomed by Japan Air Self Defense Force Chief of Staff in 2013).

Japanese Air Self-Defense Force Rank Insignia

AMN 3rd Class

AMN 2nd CLASS

AMN 1st Class

SSGT

TSGT

MSGT

SMSGT

WARRANT OFFICER

2LT

1LT

CAPT

MAJ

LT COL

COL

MAJ GEN

LT GEN

GEN

Security Issues

Japan's security concerns focus on 2 main issues: a rising and occasionally aggressive China and the nuclearization of North Korea, both of which have prompted Japan to adjust its defense posture. Although ongoing territorial disputes with South Korea, Taiwan, and Russia provide some tensions, they rarely escalate. Similarly, Japan suffered acts of domestic terrorism in past decades but none recently. After the last incident, a 1995 poison gas attack in the Tokyo subway (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*), the government instigated new emergency response training programs, designated disaster centers, and established a national anti-terrorism office.

Foreign Relations

Despite some regional tensions, Japan enjoys cooperative trade relations with South Korea, China, Taiwan, and Russia (see p. 4 of *Economics and Resources*).

Relations with South Korea: Japan has a strong but uneasy relationship with South Korea. Despite shared security interests and good trade relations, anti-Japanese sentiment persists in South Korea due to the countries' difficult history (see p. 5-8 of *History and Myth*). Similarly, some animosity towards Koreans exists in Japan (see "Ethnic Groups" below). The relationship is further strained by an ongoing territorial dispute over the Liancourt Rocks (called the Takeshima Islands in Japan and Dokdo in Korea) and occasional nationalist demonstrations in South Korea (Photo: A watchtower on the Liancourt Rocks).

Relations with China: Although China and Japan are closely linked through strong economic ties (see p. 4 of *Economics and Resources*), China's growing military and increased regional dominance concern Japan. In addition, an ongoing territorial dispute heightens tensions.

There exists a territorial dispute among Japan, China, and Taiwan concerning a group of uninhabited islands in the East China Sea known in Japan as the Senkaku Islands and in China the Diaoyu Islands. Currently controlled by Japan, the islands lay close to important shipping lanes within rich fishing grounds and near significant oil and gas reserves. The dispute escalated in 2012 when the Japanese state bought 3 of the islands from a private Japanese owner, triggering public and diplomatic protests in China. Further, in 2013, China announced the creation of an air-defense zone over the islands within which aircraft must adhere to Chinese laws. Since then, occasional and potentially hostile interactions between Chinese and Japanese military aircraft have occurred.

Relations with Taiwan: As with South Korea and China, Japan maintains good trade but strained political relations with Taiwan. In a strategic effort to build a relationship with the People's Republic of China in 1972, Japan announced it would cut all diplomatic ties with Taiwan. Thereafter, Japan maintained only private and informal relations with Taiwan. Although the dispute over the Senkaku Islands further strained relations, in 2014, Japan and Taiwan reached a cooperative fishing agreement for adjoining waters, somewhat decreasing the tensions between the 2 nations.

Relations with Russia: A territorial dispute over the Kuril Islands (pictured – known as the Northern Territories in Japan) poses a key issue in Russian-Japanese relations. While the Russians originally settled the islands beginning in the 17th century, Japan took control of them in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*). Although Russia regained sovereignty following World War II, Japan claims the 4 southernmost islands just north of Japan's Hokkaido Island. Consequently, Japan and Russia still have not signed a peace treaty formally ending World War II. Despite this dispute, Russia and Japan maintain an important trade relationship (see p. 4 of *Economics and Resources*).

Relations with North Korea: Japan views North Korea's development of nuclear weapons and recent investment into missile capabilities as threats to Japan and potentially destabilizing to the entire East Asian region. Although 6-party negotiations between Japan, North Korea, South Korea, China, Russia, and the US began in 2003, the talks failed to attain their goal of ending North Korea's nuclear program. In 2014, Japan began to upgrade its defense preparedness in response to the possible implications of North Korean missile launches toward Japan. Further straining the relationship is Japan's attempt to resolve the status of several Japanese citizens that North Korea kidnapped from Japan in the 1970s and 1980s. While North Korea allowed 5 of the victims to return to Japan in 2002, the others have remained in North Korea. In a July 2014 attempt to resolve the matter, Japan eased several sanctions against North Korea. In return, North Korea agreed to reopen investigations into the abductions.

Relations with the US: The US-Japan alliance is strong and stable. A 1960 treaty grants the US the right to maintain a military presence on Japanese soil in exchange for aid in the event of Japan's invasion (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). Japan participated in its first overseas military operation in 2001, supporting US forces in the Gulf war. In 2003, Japanese forces supported postwar reconstruction efforts in Iraq. Following the 2011 earthquake/tsunami that devastated Honshū, SDF and US forces conducted the largest bilateral rescue mission in alliance history (Photo: Then-President Obama and then-Prime Minister Abe).

As of 2019, the US had more than 50,000 active duty service members stationed in Japan, including personnel from the Army (2,000), Navy (13,000), Air Force (15,000), and Marine Corps (18,000). Major US installations include naval bases in Tokyo Bay and near Nagasaki and the Yokota Air Base near Tokyo and Misawa Air Base on northern Honshū.

The US military's largest presence is on Okinawa, consisting of 37 facilities that occupy 19% of the island's surface area. The US military's presence there has historically been a source of tension since some Okinawans resent the burden of hosting US forces. In an attempt to relieve this pressure, the US began negotiations in 1996 to relocate the Futenma Air Station, currently situated in a heavily urbanized area, to a more remote location. The site selection process has been contentious and is still unresolved.

Ethnic Groups

Japan's population is ethnically homogeneous – over 98% of the population is ethnic Japanese. Koreans and Chinese make up about 0.5% and 0.4% of the population, respectively. Before World War II, Japanese tended to distinguish Okinawans from other Japanese due to cultural and physical differences. Today, because perceptions of Okinawan heritage have shifted, the Japanese generally accept Okinawans as part of the larger Japanese culture.

Ainu: Thought to be descendants of migrants from northern Asia (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*), the Ainu are an indigenous culture whose members formerly occupied Japan's Hokkaidō Island and Russia's Sakhalin and the Kuril islands. Today, about 25,000 Ainu live on Hokkaidō. Despite a language revitalization program initiated in the 1980s, very few people still speak the Ainu language today.

Resident Aliens: During World War II, the Japanese forcibly relocated many Koreans to Japan to work as laborers. Following the war, many Koreans remained and today constitute the largest foreign community in Japan. Although born and raised in Japan, these second and third generation Korean-Japanese are denied citizenship, instead classified as permanent residents. While discrimination against them remains a problem, there are also other issues such as tensions between Koreans who pledged support to either South Korea or North Korea during the Korean War.

Social Relations

Traditionally, Japanese social relations reflected Shintō's (Japan's indigenous religion–see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*) focus on harmonious relations. Likewise, Japanese society was ordered hierarchically in accordance with the teachings of Confucius (pictured), a 6th-5th century BC Chinese philosopher. According to Confucian ideals, social relations should promote social harmony rather than individual happiness and support social stability, specific paths of authority, and collective responsibility.

During the 17th-19th century Tokugawa period (see p. 3-4 of *History and Myth*), the bulk of the population was divided by heredity within a hierarchy of 4 classes. At the top were Samurai warriors followed by farmers, artisans, and merchants. Ideal samurai behavior was characterized by the concept of ***bushidō*** (see p. 4 of *History and Myth)*, an unwritten code that emphasized honor, courage, politeness, and reserve as well as unswerving loyalty and a willingness to sacrifice. Below the merchants was a small class of so-called "outcasts" (***burakumin***), people who worked as butchers or with leather.

Today, hereditary social classes no longer exist, and the once rigid social rules have relaxed. Nevertheless, Japanese remain mindful of their own and others' positions within social, family, and work hierarchies. Children use certain terms to differentiate older schoolmates from younger ones. Similarly, employees typically act respectfully and deferentially toward elder colleagues and remain loyal to their career-long employers.

The Japanese continue to show respect for each other based on group identity: they may be least courteous to strangers, members of different social circles, or those labeled ***gaijin*** (foreigner). Minority group members, including Ainu, Okinawans, and Korean-Japanese are sometimes the victim of outright discrimination in housing and employment. Although the government forbids discrimination against *burakumin* descendants, some Japanese hire investigators to determine if a potential marriage partner's family tree includes *burakumin*.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

Religion in Japan is characterized primarily by syncretism, meaning worshipers typically identify with 2 or more religions that are blended rather than practiced alternately. Shinto and Buddhism are Japan's most commonly synced religions. Total adherents exceed 100% since Japanese commonly identify with both religions. In 2015, Shinto made up 70% of worshipers and Buddhism 70%. Additionally, 2% adhered to Christianity and 7% identified as other.

It is noteworthy that over 60% of people in Japan claim to be atheists. In fact, exclusive religious affiliation is traditionally uncommon in Japan. In their daily lives, Japanese typically rely on different religious rituals to mark important life events, such as engaging in Shintō rituals to mark births and marriages and Buddhist ones to respond to illness and death (see *Family and Kinship*). This flexibility is reflected in the common Japanese saying "Born Shintō, die Buddhist."

Accordingly, many Japanese who observe Shintō or Buddhist practices and rituals do not consider themselves to be "religious." This outlook stems from the fact that people do not "join" a Shintō or Buddhist community by a profession of faith like they might join a Christian congregation. Instead, they are automatically considered a member of the nearest Shintō shrine and/or Buddhist temple that houses their family's burial vault. In this way, Japanese are born into Shintō and Buddhist communities and grow up attending a variety of rituals, ceremonies, and festivals, identifying with them in the same way they identify with their hometown and country (Photo: A Shintō priest reads a prayer during a US Navy groundbreaking ceremony).

Shintō

Shintō, or the "Way of the Gods," is Japan's indigenous religion. Its focus is the cultivation of a harmonious relationship with nature through the veneration of spiritual beings. According to Shintō, all things in nature, both living and non-living, embody ***kami***, a spiritual energy or force. Because every natural phenomenon may embody *kami*, Shintō followers traditionally have great respect for the natural environment.

Unlike many other religions, Shintō has no set of written scriptures or ethical directives, no central figure of worship, and no founder. Instead, it consists of invocations, ceremonies, rituals, stories, and myths that have been handed down for centuries. Despite its lack of dogma, Shintō does provide a code of values and way of thinking that pervades Japanese society even today. For example, Japanese living spaces and hygienic practices reflect Shintō's emphasis on cleanliness and purification (see p. 1-2 of *Family and Kinship*). In addition, Japanese social relations and etiquette norms reflect Shintō's focus on respect for elders and leaders (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Buddhism

First brought to Japan from China via Korea in the mid-6th century, Buddhism traces its beginning to around 500 BC when Siddhartha Gautama, a South Asian prince, attained spiritual insight through meditation. Buddhists believe that humans are fated to suffer because of the human inclination towards greed or desire. They also believe that suffering can be stopped by following a spiritual path that includes unselfish living and meditation. Buddhists' ultimate goal is to achieve nirvana, a state of peace and unity with the universe.

Unlike Shintō, Buddhism is based on a set of scriptures and ethical/moral instruction which offer an explanation of life after death. Followers recognize figures of worship called buddhas and bodhisattvas – compassionate enlightened beings – that provide them help and support in their lives (Pictured: 17th century depiction of Buddhist monks).

Religion and Spirituality in Historical Perspective

The Emergence of Shintō

Between the 5th-8th centuries, Japan's exposure to China's philosophical and religious traditions (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism) collectively influenced the development of Shintō (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*). This belief system emerged early in Japanese history as people began to perform rituals to commemorate birth, death, the agricultural cycle, and the rhythms of the natural world. First recorded in the 8th century, ancient prayers formed the foundation of Shintō ceremonies, while ancient stories related the mythological beginnings of the Japanese islands and its imperial family (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*) (Photo: Tsurugaoka Hachiman-gū shrine in Kamakura).

Confucianism: Based on the teachings of Confucius, a 6th-5th century BC Chinese philosopher, Confucianism teaches that social relations should promote social harmony rather than individual happiness. Confucianism is not a religious belief system, but rather a system of ethics having specific rules of conduct and courtesy for every relationship. Confucianism had profound effects on Japanese society (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*). Recognizing similarities between Confucianism and Shintō, such as the importance of fairness, harmony, and ancestor worship, the Japanese incorporated many Confucian principles in their practice of Shintō.

Taoism: Like Shintō, Taoism emphasized harmony with nature and recognized a variety of nature gods. But unlike Shintō, Taoism acknowledged a singular great force behind all things in the universe, the ***tao***. Although Taoism's influence on the practice of Shintō was much more subtle than that of Confucianism, its effects were felt in a variety of ways. These include the Japanese adoption of a Chinese calendar of "good" and "bad" days, certain rituals for telling the future, and a process for choosing the appropriate placement of buildings.

The Spread of Buddhism

Buddhism flourished in Japan for several reasons. Japanese appreciated the similarity of Buddhism's deities to Shintō's *kami*, Buddhism's elaborate rituals and colorful pageantry, and its tolerance of other beliefs. Unlike Shintō, Buddhism provided an explanation of life after death that involved passage to a better place, an idea many Japanese embraced. Finally, the perceived value of Buddhist practices in curing illness and protecting against evil spirits appealed to many Japanese.

In 604, Japan's court adopted a constitution based in Buddhist and Confucian concepts. Although officially still Shintō, the court also embraced Buddhism. As authorities built temples with great statues of Buddhist divinities, many people continued to worship at Shintō shrines (Photo: The Great Buddha at Kōtoku-in Temple in Kamakura).

As it evolved, Japanese Buddhism split into sects. While some sects emphasized that followers could achieve salvation through faith by reciting certain phrases, Zen Buddhism taught that enlightenment comes intuitively through meditation. Zen Buddhism also emphasized simplicity and discipline, appealing to the ***samurai*** (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*) and greatly influencing Japan's traditional arts (see p. 4 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Eventually, Buddhist and Shintō priests, temples, shrines, rituals, and ceremonies intermixed, a state that persisted through the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1868 – see p. 3 of *History and Myth*).

Shintō and Japanese Nationalism

Japan's native Shintō religion enjoyed renewed support as part of the larger Japanese reaction to a 19th-century wave of foreign influences (see p. 4-6 of *History and Myth*). Following Emperor Meiji's 1869 restoration to power, the government sought to bolster the court's authority and promote a sense of national pride and unity. Consequently, the government named "State Shintō" the national religion and effectively ended the centuries-long intermingling of Shintō and Buddhism.

State Shintō: State Shintō emphasized the emperor's divine right to rule and the superiority of the *kami* over other religions' deities. In addition to requiring his veneration as a living *kami*, the emperor demanded the separation of Shintō and Buddhist places of worship. Although the government later declared State Shintō to be nonreligious, it required its observance as a patriotic duty, required schools to teach a blend of Shintō and Confucianism, and founded new shrines dedicated to the *kami* of the imperial family.

State Shintō facilitated the rise of Japanese militarism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (see p. 5-6 of *History and Myth*). Specifically, Japanese leaders used the teachings of Shintō to rationalize Japan's expansionist plans and justify its right to rule over other peoples. From birth, the Japanese were taught that their emperor was descended from the gods and that their death in his service would result in their becoming *kami*. Due to these and other teachings, Japanese soldiers were especially tenacious during World War II, even willingly sacrificing themselves as ***kamikaze*** (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*). The worship of the emperor as a living *kami* ended only when Emperor Hirohito was forced to renounce his divinity following Japan's defeat in World War II. Japan's 1947 constitution stipulated the separation of religion and state.

Shintō Today

Stressing gratitude, sincerity, cooperation, and harmony, Shintō is an important part of Japanese culture. While Japan's 81,000 Shinto shrines come in all shapes and sizes, they all feature ***torii***, a symbolic gateway consisting of 2 slanting upright supports connected by 2 cross pieces (pictured). Many shrines are also recognizable by the small wooden tablets tied to nearby trees on which the faithful inscribe their prayers and wishes. Open to worshippers of all religious traditions, Shintō shrines do not hold regular services. Instead, followers visit shrines to worship individually, to take part in life-event commemorations, such as weddings, or to attend annual shrine festivities.

Many Japanese homes and businesses have their own small, personal Shintō shrine or ***kamidana***. Usually an altar or high shelf, it may contain talismans (objects believed to have magical powers) or other symbols of worship. Businesses may dedicate their shrine to the worship of the Inari, a *kami* traditionally associated with the rice harvest but now seen as the god of good fortune for business (Photo: A Japanese family's personal Shintō shrine).

To perform individual worship, followers first ritually wash their hands and rinse out their mouths. They then stand before the shrine, bow twice, ring a bell, and then clap twice to summon the *kami*. Worshippers then bow again and pray, either thanking the *kami* for their goodness or requesting their blessing. It is customary to leave a small offering, such as a few coins or a bit of wrapped food for the *kami*.

Shinto priests dressed in elaborate robes modeled on ancient Japanese styles conduct ceremonies at shrines. Intended to facilitate worshippers' communication with the *kami*, these ceremonies usually include offerings, prayer, communion or feast, and some purification actions (such as when a priest waves his wand over the heads of a bridal couple to keep away misfortune and bad spirits).

Although their Shintō meaning may be obscured today, many of Japan's most famous festivals are of Shintō origin. Of note, ***sumo*** wrestlers (see p. 3 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*) traditionally performed as entertainment for the *kami*. Today, *sumo* wrestling still includes purification by washing and the sprinkling of salt, hand clapping to attract *kami*, and feet stamping to drive bad spirits away.

Buddhism Today

Although Buddhist temples exhibit different architectural styles, they all feature a main hall containing an image of Buddha and a table for offerings. While many temples have imposing entry gates, Buddhist temples often contain elaborately landscaped rock gardens intended to aid meditation.

Although many Japanese participate in Buddhist services only when they attend funerals (see p. 5 of *Family and Kinship*), some Japanese have a Buddhist altar (***butsudan***) in their homes that contains Buddha's image and tablets commemorating deceased family members. The most significant Buddhist celebrations honor ancestral spirits. During ***Obon***, Buddhist families gather to celebrate ancestral spirits' return to earth (see p. 5 of *Family and Kinship*) (Photo: Nanzen-ji Zen Buddhist temple).

Christianity

Christianity first arrived during a period of political upheaval in 1549 (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier and the missionaries who followed him faced challenges in their quest for converts. First, Christianity was very different from Shintō and Buddhism. Second, because the Japanese were used to practicing more than one religion simultaneously, the Christian requirement that they abandon all other religious beliefs and practices baffled most potential converts. Despite these challenges, by the early 1600s, about 300,000 Japanese had converted as Nagasaki became Japan's Catholic center.

Although initially welcoming, the government eventually came to view the Europeans' presence as a threat. Persecution began in 1587, reaching its peak in 1637-1638 when authorities killed some 37,000 Christians near Nagasaki. Shortly thereafter the government banned Christianity and expelled all foreigners, ushering in a long period of isolation (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*).

When Christian missionaries arrived again in the late 1850s following Japan's re-opening to the West, they found that their religion had stayed alive with about 20,000 so-called "hidden Christians." Japan's first Protestant church was established in 1872. Following Emperor Meiji's removal of the ban on Christianity in 1873, missionaries from several countries and traditions, including Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and various Protestant congregations, began to arrive.

Although there were about 960 Protestant missionaries in Japan by 1908, Christian church growth slowed in the early 20th century as State Shintō received official support. Under government pressure, 30 Protestant churches banded together in 1941 to form the United Church of Christ in Japan. Following World War II, Christian churches experienced some growth with another influx of foreign missionaries into Japan.

Although Christians make up only 1-2% of the population today, almost all Christian denominations have a presence in the country. While they may not be members of Christian churches, many young Japanese have adopted certain Christian customs, such as celebrating Christmas and marriage in a Christian church (see p. 4 of *Family and Kinship*).

New Religions

Japan's government recognizes several hundred so-called "new religions." One example with distinctly Shintō roots is Tenrikyo ("Religion of the Heavenly Truth"), founded in 1838 by a woman who claimed she had been visited by the creator deity. Other "new religions" arose later, reviving ancient folk traditions (see text box below) or incorporating aspects of Buddhism or Confucianism. For example, Sōka Gakkai ("Value Creation Society"), which is based on a form of Buddhism, was founded in 1930 and later suppressed during World War II for its opposition to State Shintō.

Japan's Folk Gods

In addition to its organized religious traditions, Japan is also home to localized, ancient belief systems that tell of guardian and demon spirits. Although few Japanese express belief in their powers, these gods are well-known and popular. For example, New Year's greeting cards often depict the Seven Lucky Gods. These include, among others, the gods of longevity, prosperity, and happiness, the last identifiable through his fat belly and wide smile. The ***oni*** or demons, such as the red-faced mountain goblins and trolls who dwell under bridges, are considered unlucky.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

Although traditional values like harmony, honor, and duty still infuse Japanese family life, profound societal changes since World War II have altered the family's structure and function. Rapid urbanization, the diminished extended family structure, and a decreased marriage rate changed traditional housing patterns. Likewise, an increase in life expectancy combined with a decreased birth rate resulted in more elderly and fewer children. Meanwhile, post-World War II society's emphasis on work and career has imposed stress on many families.

Residence

Nearly 92% of Japanese live in urban areas where housing shortages are common. While most urban-dwellers live in ***danchi*** (rented, block-style apartments) or ***manshon*** (condominiums), others occupy detached homes in suburban neighborhoods.

Traditional: Traditional Japanese homes feature white plaster walls with wood paneling, topped by a steep pitched roof made from thatch (pictured) or tiles. Slightly elevated and surrounded by walls and fences, a traditional home is distinctly separate from community life outside. The ***genkan***, or entryway, typically sits on a lower plane than the rest of the house. At the *genkan*, visitors announce their arrival and residents and visitors alike change from street to house shoes. To facilitate the use of space, interior rooms are multipurpose and divided by sliding doors and ***fusuma*** (movable folding screens). Consequently, privacy among family members in traditional homes is usually limited.

For meals and socializing, family members traditionally sit on ***zabuton*** (floor cushions) laid over ***tatami*** (thick straw mats) before a ***kotatsu***, a low table covered in a quilt. Family members may sleep on ***futons*** (folding mattresses) which are kept in cupboards during the day.

Japanese Bathrooms

In most Japanese homes, residents use separate slippers to visit the toilet and bathing room, typically located in separate rooms. When bathing, Japanese first scrub clean in a shower and then soak in steaming water in the ***ofuro,*** a deep bathtub located next to the shower. Since the same bathwater may be used by the entire household each day, members must be fully clean before entering the *ofuro*. Many Japanese bathrooms feature high-tech components such as toilets with automated bidets and heated seats.

Modern: While city living conditions are usually cramped, homes today are made from a variety of modern materials. Apartments typically have Western-style beds and tables, plus a more traditional room with *tatami*, ***tokonoma*** (an alcove with paintings, flowers, and other décor), or other time-honored elements. Every apartment or house has some type of *genkan* where residents and visitors change to house shoes.

Gardens: Japan is well-known for its tranquil and manicured gardens that often include elaborate water and rock features. Carefully-tended gardens are often an important part of Zen Buddhist temples (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Family Structure

Japanese traditionally view the family as a single unit rather than a group of individuals. Family members value the good of the family unit over their own needs and are expected to assist each other. Traditionally, extended families consisting of parents, children, grandparents, and even great-grandparents lived together in a single residence. Today, most households consist of small nuclear families (parents plus offspring). While many women work outside the home, Japanese typically regard men as the primary breadwinners and household heads. They expect women to manage the household affairs and take responsibility for childrearing (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*).

Children

Japanese treasure their children as the perpetuators of family heritage. Japanese believe that a child's upbringing and education, not just his individual personality, significantly shapes his character and intelligence. From a young age, children learn by example and through group work how to be cooperative and work harmoniously with others. Harsh discipline or punishment for disobedience is uncommon. Mothers are typically highly involved in their children's lives while fathers are often absent due to lengthy work hours and commutes (see p. 1 of *Time and Space*).

Names: When naming their children, Japanese carefully consider all aspects of a name, such as the characters used to write it, its pronunciation, and its harmony with the surname. While many girls' names find inspiration in nature, such as ***Yukiko*** ("child of snow"), boys often receive names based on abstract concepts, such as ***Noboru*** ("abundance"). Traditionally, parents give their children a name 7 days after birth in the ***Oshichiya*** (baby naming) celebration, then present them at a Shintō shrine (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*) for a blessing after 100 days.

Youth Milestones: Many Japanese celebrate particular age milestones for their children such as ***Shichigosan*** for children age 3 and 7 (girls) and 5 (boys). These children are dressed in traditional clothing and taken to the local Shintō shrine for prayers. They also receive candy bags decorated with turtledoves or cranes which symbolize a long life.

Coming of Age Day: This ceremony is held the second Monday in January to honor all Japanese youth who turn 20 that year. This age marks adulthood in Japan when young people attain the legal right to vote, drink alcohol, and smoke tobacco. On this festive day, Japanese 20-year-olds wear formal attire, listen to speeches by government officials, and attend parties in their honor.

Marriage

Traditionally, Japanese marriages were ***omiai*** (arranged) as a union of 2 families. A ***nakodo*** (go-between) assisted families in finding suitable spouses for their children based on education, social status, and wealth. Today, Japanese more commonly choose their own spouses, meeting prospective partners through family, friends, or coworkers, or even the use of a *nakodo*. Singles also meet through ***gokon*** (small group blind dates) or in matchmaking parties organized by local governments. Recently, dating apps have grown in popularity.

Weddings: Japanese weddings may blend Shintō, Buddhist, and Christian elements, depending on the preference of the couple. In a traditional Shintō ceremony (pictured), both the bride and groom wear traditional clothing – the bride a white ***kimono*** (see p. 1 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*) and the groom a black one. Beside the shrine attendants, only the couples' parents and the *nakodo* (or, often today, someone akin to a best man) traditionally attend the ceremony, which includes prayers, the burning of incense, and sips of ***sake*** (rice wine – see p. 4 of *Sustenance and Health*).

Other couples choose to marry in a more elaborate Western style. The groom may wear a black suit with a white shirt and tie and the bride a white gown. Couples may exchange vows in professional wedding halls or hotel banquet rooms. Festivities often include large receptions during which family, friends, and the couple's employers give speeches. Both families typically split the wedding costs, although guests often contribute cash gifts to offset the families' expenditures.

Divorce: With a rate of just 1.8 divorces per 1,000 people in 2016, Japan has one of the industrialized world's lowest divorce rates. This fact is often attributed to women's economic dependence, social stigma, and ideals of cooperation and harmony, among others. After increasing annually since the late 1960s and hitting a peak in 2002, divorces have declined slightly every year since 2003.

Death

Japanese usually memorialize the death of a loved one with the burial of cremated remains in a cemetery following a wake and funeral service. Although usually based in Buddhist traditions, ceremonies may contain some Shintō elements (see p. 3-4 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

According to Buddhist tradition, upon death the deceased is dressed in a white *kimono,* placed in a casket, and returned home. There, the casket may remain for overnight while a Buddhist priest prays and burns incense. Certain ritual elements are believed to facilitate the deceased's way into the afterlife, such as the ceremonial items placed in the casket and the posthumous name the priest gives the deceased. Other elements emphasize the deceased's departure from the land of the living, such as the reverse folding of his *kimono*.

Family members, friends, and colleagues gather for the funeral service, during which the priest again prays, burns incense, and lights candles. Other attendees may read a eulogy or messages of sympathy. Funerals are usually very expensive. Guests typically present ***koden*** (a cash gift in a special black and white envelope) and receive in return ***koden gaeshi***, a small gift, such as a dish or other small memento from the deceased's possessions.

Following the funeral, the casket is transported to the cremation facility. Following cremation, family members use special chopsticks to gather the bones, placing them in a box and the ashes in an urn. Families may keep the remains at home for up to 49 days, during which time a Buddhist priest comes by at regular intervals to perform certain rituals. After this period, the family may inter the remains in a family vault at a cemetery or scatter them at a meaningful location. On the anniversary of the death and during the ***Obon*** Festival (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*), family members typically visit and clean the graves (Photo: Film director Kurosawa Akira's grave in Kamakura).

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Traditional gender roles in Japan have been shaped by Confucian values (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*) which grant men higher status than women. Effort, dedication, and perseverance, especially in work and career, generally are seen as important qualities for men. Social norms of marriage, childbirth, and child-raising continue to shape modern expectations of women. They should be dedicated to their families, reserved in public, and respectful toward men. While the government and some businesses promote equality measures, gender disparities are common (Photo: Girls in traditional dress).

Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Labor: Women in Japan today continue to hold primary responsibility for their children's care and education, the housework, and the care of elderly parents. In fact, the average time per day that Japanese men devote to household chores is one of the lowest among industrialized nations.

Workforce: About 51% of Japanese women work outside the home, compared to 56% in the US. While about 60% of US women return to work after childbirth, the same percentage of Japanese women workers leave the labor force at that time. This departure is due mainly to Japan's long working hours (see p. 1 of *Time and Space*), unavailability of part-time or flexible schedules, and a shortage of childcare. Even after their children are grown, many women are reluctant to return to the workforce. Unlike the US, Japan supports maternal and paternal leave, yet few take advantage of these benefits. Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's so-called "womenomics" goals of his "Abenomics" policies (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*) include an increase of women in business leadership positions to 30% by 2020, the provision of more childcare opportunities, and the adoption of merit-based promotion policies.

Gender and the Law

Women received voting, equal inheritance, and equal education rights in the 1947 constitution (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*). While gender discrimination is illegal, yet some laws create gender disparities. For example, a law designed to clarify paternity in post-divorce pregnancies requires women, and not men, to wait 6 months to remarry after divorce. Other laws discriminate against men, such as in child custody cases. For example, divorced couples may not hold joint physical custody of their children. Most often, courts grant custody to women because judges view them as the “natural” caregivers.

Gender and Politics

Despite government measures to increase women’s participation in political life, their involvement remains relatively low. In 2019, just 23% of Japan's lower parliament members were women, compared with 24% in the US House of Representatives. Participation was higher in the upper house, where about 21% were women, compared with 26% in the US Senate. Although the 2019 cabinet included 2 women, many Japanese women complained about a lack of political advocacy for women's issues. Female office-holders often experience sexual harassment and even public sexist taunts from their male colleagues at all levels of governance, from local assemblies to the national parliament (Photo: Japan’s First Lady Akie Abe).

Domestic Violence and Sexual Harassment

Japan passed its first domestic violence law in 2002 and in 2011 improved its system for reporting and investigating domestic violence. Consequently, the number of reported cases increased dramatically, with authorities recording 46% more cases of domestic violence over the first 6 months of 2012 than the entire previous year.

Not prohibited by law, sexual harassment is widespread in the workplace and common in public places. Over time, the Japanese term for sexual harassment (***seku hara***) increasingly has become recognized, and most workplaces have rules

regarding appropriate and inappropriate behaviors between male and female coworkers. Nevertheless, sexual harassment continues to occur (Photo: Women-only train car designed to protect women from sexual harassment). ***Manga*** (comics – see p. 5 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*) and video games often depict women in sexually demeaning or violent situations, while sexual innuendo is common in the media.

Sex and Procreation

Although Japanese consider sex and intimacy a private matter, they regard nudity as natural and appropriate in certain contexts, such as public bathhouses.

At 1.4 births per woman, Japan's birthrate is one of the world's lowest and well below the ratio required to maintain the population. Alarmed by this low rate, the government created a cabinet post to raise fertility.

HIV/AIDS: Japan has a relatively low HIV/AIDS prevalence rate of less than 0.1%, one of lowest prevalence rates in the world. However, the total number of new HIV carriers in 2018 was 1,200. Due to entrenched habits and lack of effective education, some high-risk Japanese fail to take measures to stop the virus' spread. For fear of social exclusion or loss of their jobs, many afflicted members avoid testing for the virus. As a result, over 30% of new diagnoses occur when the patient is in the advanced stages of AIDS, making treatment difficult.

Homosexuality

Although legalized in 1880, homosexual activity remains a controversial subject in Japan. Its traditional emphasis on the perpetuation of the family influences some Japanese to view homosexuality as inappropriate even though the primary religions do not prohibit it. Same-sex couples cannot legally marry nor receive the same legal protections as heterosexual couples. Although discrimination based on sexual orientation is banned in several cities, it is not prohibited by national civil rights laws. Some homosexuals experience discrimination while others suffer bullying and violence.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

Japanese is the first language of most Japanese people. Although Japanese bears similarities to several Asian languages of the Altaic language family, including Korean and Mongolian, linguists dispute its origin and relation to other language groups. Unlike Chinese, Japanese is not a tonal language – it does not use tone or pitch to convey meaning. Of note, Japanese pronounce all syllables fully and evenly: the city "Nagano" is Na-ga-no, not Na-GA-no.

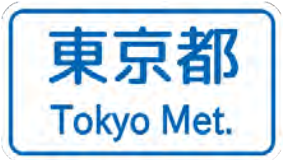
Japanese was standardized in the late 19th century as part of the Meiji Restoration reforms (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*). Seeking to create a centralized state like the European nations, government leaders designated Tokyo the new capital and its dialect as the Japanese language standard. Although standard Japanese dominates the media and education system, many regions still maintain their own dialects. Similarly, special groups and classes of people such as the Yakuza (Japan's organized crime syndicate) have their own jargon. These dialects and jargons are often so different from the standard that an outsider has difficulty understanding them.

Japanese Writing Systems

Japanese combine 3 systems to write their language (***kanji***, ***hiragana***, and ***katakana***). Although spoken Japanese is not related to Chinese, Japan's oldest writing system, ***kanji***, consists of Chinese characters or ideograms first adopted by the Japanese beginning in the 5th century (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*). Over time, the Japanese expanded the use of *kanji* characters to represent Japanese words. Later, the Japanese began to use *kanji* characters to signify something other than their literal meanings, such as sounds or grammatical elements. In this way, they developed 2 distinctly Japanese writing systems, ***hiragana*** and ***katakana*** (Pictured: "*Nihongo*" or "Japanese" written in *kanji*).

Each of these systems consists of 46 symbols that depict either a vowel sound or a vowel/consonant combination, such as the sound “na.” Japanese use *hiragana* to write Japanese words in combination with or as substitutes for *kanji* characters. By contrast, Japanese use *katakana* mainly to write words borrowed from other languages, including foreigners’ names.

Modern written Japanese typically incorporates elements from all 3 systems. Each *kanji* character often has 2 pronunciations–one is close to the original Chinese and the other is a Japanese pronunciation. While Japanese usually use *kanji* for nouns, verb stems, adjectives, and adverbs, they use *hiragana* to indicate inflectional endings, suffixes, function words, and grammatical particles. About 3,000 *kanji* are in common use today. Although Japanese traditionally write in vertical columns and read from right to left, the Western method of writing horizontally from left to right is increasingly common (Pictured: Japanese road sign in *kanji* and English).



Japanese use a script called ***rōmaji*** to write Japanese words using the Latin alphabet. To aid pronunciation, this system places small bars over vowels to signal the speaker when the vowel sound is long, such as in the word *shōgun.*

English

English is popular in Japan due to its widespread use in international business. Despite this popularity, Japan’s English-language programs are not as effective as those of its neighbors, particularly South Korea and China. Amid fears that Japan will lose its competitive edge unless it addresses the “English deficit,” Japan is striving to improve its English-language programs. After the Japanese business community lobbied for a new curriculum in 2011, English became a compulsory subject at Japanese primary schools (see p. 3 of *Learning and Knowledge*). This new program augments 6 years of foreign language instruction given to students in secondary school, with the goal of improving Japan’s low ratings in international English proficiency standings.

Communication Overview

Communicating competently in Japan requires not only knowledge of the Japanese language, but also the ability to use it to interact effectively. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Confucian ideals (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*) still influence Japanese communication styles. In particular, Japanese typically treat people of different ages, genders, and backgrounds with varying levels of respect. They tend to be deferential toward people of high status and usually make decisions (both in business and in daily life) through group consensus rather than relying on individual judgment (Photo: US military and Japan SDF planners meet).

Japanese use specific forms of speech to express varying levels of politeness required by differences in social status and context. These forms include so-called “honorific” and “humble” speech. Traditionally, women speak more politely and with a softer tone than men. Although Japanese do not expect non-Japanese speakers to understand the intricacies of these forms of speech, foreign nationals should understand that these habits may influence the way Japanese speak English.

Due to their emphasis on courtesy and a desire to “save face” (avoid embarrassment to themselves or others), Japanese prefer indirect communication, especially in public contexts. They often talk around contentious issues or avoid them entirely. Similarly, they may avoid conveying bad news or keep negative opinions to themselves. Japanese may hesitate to offer frank opinions, providing more sincere replies to open-ended questions (not requiring a definitive answer) or asked within the context of a trust-based relationship. Typically, they

refrain from using specific responses such as “yes” and “no,” preferring more ambiguous language, such as “maybe.”

The Japanese tend to avoid prolonged direct eye contact, especially in conversations with an elder or superior. They also may use silences and pauses as communication tools to signify either reflection or the desire to move on to a new topic.

Greetings

Bowing is Japan’s most common greeting. The Japanese bow, ranging from a slight inclination to a deep bend, can communicate a range of messages, from greetings and farewells to apology, gratitude, affection, and acknowledgement of social status. People with similar social status bow slightly for about a second. To express deep feelings of humility, apology, or sorrow, or to express respect to a person of greater social status, a Japanese bows more deeply, holding the position longer. The person of lower social status usually initiates the bows (Photo: US and Japanese sailors bow after a softball game).

When Japanese meet in professional contexts, they typically exchange business cards or ***meishi***. Foreign nationals should exchange *meishi* the Japanese way by using both hands, bowing slightly, and looking at the received card briefly to demonstrate interest and respect. Some Japanese have adopted the handshake with friends or foreign nationals.

Names

Japanese family names (last names/surnames) and given names (first names) usually contain 2 or more syllables. As in China and Korea, family names precede given names. Although widely referred to as Shinzō Abe in the Western world, the Prime Minister is Abe Shinzō in Japan. Unrelated adults typically address each other using family names, even in casual and intimate situations. By contrast, parents address their children using given names, as do teenagers who are close friends. Even if they referred to each other by given names as children, friends often switch to family names as they get older.

Forms of Address

Japanese use specific forms of address to indicate respect and solidarity. As noted earlier, Japanese are always aware of their own and others' positions within social, family, and work hierarchies (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*). Japanese strive to ensure that they address others appropriately and formulate their messages with suitable formal/informal, polite/plain, and masculine/ feminine terms.

In business contexts, Japanese tend to address both peers and superiors by family (last) name. Alternatively, they may use titles as forms of address at work. They also often add the gender-neutral suffix -***san*** to both names and titles to show respect. Even workplace peers may use polite titles with each other, such as ***sensei*** ("teacher") with the last name.

Conversational Topics

Japanese typically begin conversations with general questions about family, hobbies, marital status, occupation, and education before moving on to the main subject. These initial queries help to establish common ground among speakers. They also help speakers to determine each other's social status and, if the conversation occurs in Japanese, appropriate pronouns, titles, and other honorifics. Foreign nationals should feel free to discuss these and similar topics, such as health, food, and positive observations about Japan, but avoid local politics, North Korea, World War II, and personal topics.

Gestures

The Japanese gesture for "come here" involves waving fingers with the palm down. The gesture for "money" resembles the American "OK" sign. Japanese consider pointing with the index finger rude and instead "point" by extending an arm with the palm up (Photo: Japanese Lt Gen Yamamoto greets US Army Col Rallis).

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Romanized Japanese	*Kanji/Hiragana*
Hello	konnichiwa	今日は
How are you?	o genki desu ka?	お元**気**ですか?
I am fine, thank you. And you?	o kagesama de genki desu	お蔭**様**で元**気**です
What is your name?	o-namae wa nan desu ka?	お名前はなんですか?
My name is ___	... desu	…です
Pleased to meet you	hajimemashite	初めまして
Yes	hai	はい
No	iie	いいえ
Thank you	arigatō gozaimasu	ありがとうございます
How do you say… in Japanese	... wa nihongo de nanto īmasu ka?	… は日本語でなんと言いますか。
Excuse me	sumimasen	すみません
Do you speak English?	Eigo wa dekimasu ka?	英語はできますか?
Goodbye/ See you later	jā mata ne	じゃあまたね
Please speak more slowly	yukkuri hanashite kudasai	ゆっくり話してください
What does this mean?	kore wa dōiu imi desu ka?	これはどういう意味ですか?
I don't understand	wakarimasen	わかりません.
Write it down, please	Kaite kudasai	書いてください
How much is this?	Kore wa ikura desuka?	これはいくらですか？
Can you help me?	Tetsudatte kuremasuka?	**伝**ってくれますか？

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 99%
- Male: 99%
- Female: 99% (2014 estimate)

Early History of Education

Japan has a long history of formal education dating to the 6th century, around the time Japan adopted the Chinese writing system (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*). Open only to the aristocracy, early schools primarily taught Confucianism and Buddhist thought (see p. 2-4 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Granted an official charter in 701 and based on the Chinese educational model, Japan's first university taught Chinese history and Confucian ideals to young elites to prepare them for government service. During this period, the government also founded local colleges to teach medicine, Confucianism, and Chinese to aristocrats living beyond the capital. Meanwhile, the non-elite received religious education focused on personal, moral, and spiritual development at Buddhist temples.

A 12th century shift in state leadership to a ***shōgun***, a supreme military commander, along with the rise of the ***samurai*** warrior class (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*) resulted in curriculum expansion. Schools began to prepare young men's minds and bodies for national defense, including training in weaponry and horseback riding.

By the 17th century the education system had grown to include several different types of schools. While previously only male elites received an education, these new schools were open to members from a range of social classes and offered a variety of subjects including arithmetic, reading, medicine, and penmanship. For example, the ***terakoya*** were provincial schools for non-elite girls and boys housed in Buddhist temples (Pictured: A 19th-century ***terakoya*** school for girls).

Education in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

The Japanese education system grew rapidly following the late 19th-century Meiji Restoration (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*). As Japan reopened to foreign influence after 200 years of cultural isolation, the government implemented Western-style reform and modernization processes intended to position Japan alongside other major global powers.

Consequently, the government integrated the different school types into a new public education system that granted equal scholastic opportunities to both genders and reduced the traditional emphasis on Confucianism. The ***terakoya***, for example, were transformed into primary schools which formed the core of the new system. By the end of 19th century, primary school was compulsory, and about 500 secondary schools and a network of universities had been established.

Education before and during World War II: In the decades prior to and during World War II, Japan's curricula and teaching methods were intended to support Japan's imperial expansionist goals. Schools provided instruction in military service-related vocational skills and promoted nationalist state goals. Students were taught the mythological origins of Japan as fact (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*) with emphasis on the Emperor's divine right to rule as specified by State Shintō (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Education after World War II: Following Japan's defeat in World War II, the US-led Occupation government sought to demilitarize the country in part by reforming its education system to emphasize academic freedom for faculty and equal opportunity for all students (Photo: A Tokyo high school in 1945). These reforms also created the current academic structure of 6 years of compulsory primary school, followed by 3 years of compulsory lower secondary school, 3 years of optional upper secondary school, and 4 years of university. Japan today has one of the world's best-educated workforces, with near-perfect (almost 100%) literacy.

Modern Education System

The Japanese education system's reputation as one of the world's finest is based on graduation rates, post-secondary enrollment rates, and national literacy scores, among other factors. Some observers attribute the system's success to the population's historical respect for education (see p. 3 of *Family and Kinship*) and its strong support for teachers, who are typically well-paid and highly respected. Others ascribe students' success to the importance of school-based peer and alumni networks in finding employment for graduates.

Despite its reputation for success, some experts criticize Japan's education system for its emphasis on memorization rather than the cultivation of analytical and creative skills. Still other critics suggest that the system is inefficient, claiming that public schools fail to prepare students adequately for rigorous entrance examinations (see "Examination Hell" below).

Primary: Consisting of 6 grades and starting at age 6, primary school is both compulsory and free. Consequently, almost all children of the appropriate age enroll. Subjects include math, science, Japanese, social studies, ethics, music, art, and physical education. Students also begin learning English in 3rd grade (see p. 2 of *Language and Communication*).

Secondary: Lower secondary or middle school (grades 7-9) is compulsory and free. Required courses include math, science, social studies, Japanese, art, music, ethics, and physical education. Students not planning to attend upper secondary school and college may also take vocational and technical classes. Elective courses include several foreign languages, although most students elect English (Photo: A Japanese secondary school classroom).

Not compulsory, upper secondary or high school (grades 10-12) provides either general or specialized education. While over 97% of middle school graduates enroll in high school, competition for the best schools is extremely rigorous.

Japan has 3 types of high schools: general academic, special purpose, and vocational. Most high school students attend general academic schools which prepare them for university entrance exams. Students who enroll in special purpose or vocational schools complete a specialized curriculum, often taking on part-time employment while in school.

Post-Secondary: Around 56% of Japanese high school graduates eventually pursue higher education at technical colleges, junior colleges, or universities. Technical colleges enroll students directly from middle school and offer 5 year vocational programs in subjects such as industrial chemistry, mechanical engineering, and metalwork. Traditionally enrolling primarily women, junior colleges offer 2-3 year degrees in home economics, humanities, education, and social sciences.

Most universities offer 4-year undergraduate degrees to high school graduates, while some also offer medical, dental, veterinary, or other graduate degrees. After rigorous middle and high school years, many Japanese consider university as a "leisure land" where they can focus on extracurricular activities instead of academics. During their final years at university, students shift their focus to ***shuushoku katsudou*** or job hunting, attending recruitment events and job fairs (Photo: Japan's Doshisha University).

"Examination Hell": All levels of schools, from primary to university, require entrance exams. Because admission is highly competitive, many students suffer stress and anxiety as they struggle to balance rigorous academic schedules with their personal lives.

***Juku*:** These are private facilities that offer after-school classes designed to prepare middle and high school students for entrance exams. Although most parents and students consider *juku* attendance essential, critics argue that these "cram" schools put too much pressure on students. Some also claim that this type of excessive studying is inefficient, since exhausted students study poorly.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Most Japanese value punctuality and efficient time management and are known to devote long hours to work and school. Although Japanese traditionally avoid physical contact in public, this preference is difficult to uphold in the bustle of Japan's congested cities.

Time and Work

Japan's work week runs from Monday-Friday, with hours varying by establishment type. Most banks are open from 9:00am-3:00pm, while private businesses and post offices are accessible from 9:00am-5:00pm. A number of stores are open from 10:00am-8:00pm 7 days a week, although department stores may close 2-3 weekdays a month. Convenience stores are open 24 hours, 365 days a year. Most museums are closed on Mondays (Photo: An indoor shopping center).

Working Hours: Since the rapid growth of Japan's economy beginning in the late 1950s, the Japanese ***salaryman*** or male salaried employee typically work long days with little or no overtime pay. Although conditions have improved in recent years, men still work on average 44 hours-per-week, compared with 40.5 in the US. Almost 9% of workers average 60 or more hours-per-week while overwork-induced deaths and suicides remain a serious issue. Of note, the average worker has devoted himself to one employer for his entire career.

A number of Japanese women work outside the home, along with caring for children and housework (see p. 1 of *Sex and* Gender). Women commonly hold "part-time" jobs that in fact exceed 40 hours per week and offer little or no employment benefits.

Time Zone: Japanese Standard Time is 9 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 14 hours ahead of Eastern

Standard Time (EST). Japan does not observe daylight savings time.

Date Notation: When writing dates, Japanese record the year first, with the appropriate Japanese characters for "year," "month," and "day" inserted after the numerals. For example, they would record the last day of 2014 as 2014年12月31日. When Emperor Akihito took the throne in 1989, the Japanese adopted the imperial calendar, currently called ***Heisei*** (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). This parallel system is based on the number of years the emperors have reigned. In this system, 2014 corresponds with Heisei-26. Accordingly, the last day of that year is annotated as 平成26年12月31日.

Time and Business

Japanese value punctuality and typically respect deadlines. It is therefore appropriate for foreign nationals to arrive at meetings and finish work on time. Generally, business tends to move more slowly in Japan than in the US, primarily because Japanese prefer to establish personal relationships before doing business. It may take several meetings for Japanese to become comfortable with new acquaintances.

Also a time-consuming process is the Japanese preference for group decision-making, usually involving a blend of seniority preferences and group consensus. To build and maintain business relationships, Japanese often engage in after-work socializing at bars and restaurants and exchange seasonal greeting cards. Of note, Japanese employees are typically evaluated by the effort and dedication they exhibit in their work. Consequently, there is less casual socializing among employees during the workday as compared to the US, especially in the presence of customers or clients (Photo: Japanese chefs instruct US sailors).

Personal Space

In social settings, Japanese usually stand about an arm's length or more apart while conversing, which is typically greater than Americans are used

to. While strangers may stand slightly farther apart, friends typically stand closer.

Japanese typically form orderly lines to board public transportation except for rush hour, when attendants tend to push patrons into overcrowded subway cars. Similarly, pedestrians navigating congested city sidewalks often push and elbow. This behavior is socially acceptable and does not require an apology (Photo: Crowded Tokyo).

Touch

Traditionally, Japanese prefer to avoid physical contact while in public with the exception of small children and in the case of general tolerance of sexual harassment (see p. 2-3 of *Sex and Gender*). This contact avoidance is changing somewhat among young people, who may hold hands in public places or walk with intertwined arms. Close physical contact also may occur among same-sex classmates at school.

Although conversational touching between family and friends is common, foreign nationals should wait for Japanese to initiate contact during greetings and conversations. Japanese generally consider back-slapping or holding another's arm while conversing inappropriate behavior with the exception of some all-male social events.

Eye Contact

As a sign of respect, Japanese traditionally made little eye contact during conversations, particularly with older people or those of higher social status. This tradition has relaxed somewhat, although eye contact remains impolite for some.

Photographs

Foreign nationals are advised to request permission before photographing Japanese. Although photography is usually permitted on the grounds of Buddhist temples and Shintō shrines, it may be prohibited inside. Some banks, stores, and government offices may display signs prohibiting photography.

Driving

Despite the density and congestion of Japan's metropolitan areas, the public transportation systems are highly efficient (see p. 1 of *Technology and Material*). Since residents must have proof of an appropriate parking space before purchasing a vehicle, a number of urban dwellers do not own cars.

Driving in Japan is challenging for some foreign nationals due to the congestion, aggressiveness of taxi drivers, and custom of operating vehicles on the left side of the road. As is common in the US, the police rigorously enforce drunk-driving laws and are known to make frequent traffic checks. Tolls based on the distance traveled are enforced on a number of highways.

Holidays

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- 2nd Monday in January: Coming-of-Age Day
- February 11: National Foundation Day
- March 20: Vernal Equinox Day
- April 29: Showa Day (honors Emperor Hirohito, see p. 6 & 9 of *History and Myth*)
- May 3: Constitutional Memorial Day
- May 4: Greenery Day
- May 5: Children's Day
- 3rd Monday in July: Maritime Day
- 3rd Monday in September: Respect for the Aged Day
- September 23: Autumnal Equinox Day
- 2nd Monday in October: Health and Sports Day
- November 3: Culture Day
- November 23: Labor Thanksgiving Day
- December 23: Emperor Akihito's Birthday

Note: The period of holidays between April 29 and May 5 is known as the "Golden Week."

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

The Japanese enjoy diverse artistic and recreational traditions ranging from engaging martial arts to the serene tea ceremony. Over the centuries, the Japanese adapted cultural elements from Korea, China, and the West to form a uniquely Japanese sense of refinement, subtle beauty, power, strength, and discipline.

Dress and Appearance

Traditional: The traditional Japanese attire is the ***kimono,*** a long V-neck robe worn by both men and women. Although originally a Chinese fashion, *kimono* evolved over the years to have a distinctive Japanese style. All *kimono* have similar tailoring yet vary in fabric, color, and pattern depending on the season, occasion, or wearer's age (Photo: Women in *kimono*).

Beneath the *kimono* Japanese wear special undergarments and use an ***obi*** (sash) of varying width, color, and design to hold it in place. On their feet, Japanese traditionally pair ***tabi*** (white socks slit at the big toe) with thonged sandals, such as ***zōri*** (flat sandals made of plant fibers or wood) or ***geta*** (raised wooden sandals). Today, Japanese wear *kimono* mostly on special occasions such as weddings, festivals, or funerals (see p. 3-5 of *Family and Kinship*). It is stylish for some women to wear *kimono* as an outer garment for Western-style clothing.

Modern: Japanese commonly wear Western-style clothing. Youth in particular are fond of the latest fashions from Europe and the US, as well as Japan. At home, older Japanese may wear the ***yukata***, a simple cotton kimono. Hotels often offer this garment to their guests as leisure attire. At work, men usually wear dark suits, dress shirts, and ties in conservative colors. Women wear dresses or pant suits in the workplace but generally avoid low-cut or sleeveless blouses and bare legs. Government workers and school children typically wear uniforms.

Recreation and Leisure

Although long working hours leave some Japanese little time for leisure (see p. 1 of *Time and Space*), many Japanese enjoy a variety of recreational activities. Hiking and mountain climbing in one of Japan's national parks is popular, as is vacationing abroad to other parts of Asia, Europe, or the US.

Festivals: Japanese celebrate a variety of national holidays as well as regional and national festivals. Widely-celebrated festivals mark the change of seasons, honor deceased ancestors, or observe youth's coming-of-age (see p. 3 of *Family and Kinship*). Known as the "Golden Week," the days between April 29 and May 5 includes 4 major holidays (see p. 4 of *Time and Space*).

Tea ceremony: The Japanese tea ceremony, ***sadō orchado*** (or ***chadou***), is an intricate and serene ritual. Originally a time for solitary reflection for Zen Buddhists (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*), the tea ceremony remains popular for those Japanese desiring to delay their worldly pursuits and focus on simple, aesthetic details. The popularity of the tea ceremony has encouraged the reinvigoration of other traditional arts associated with the ceremony, including ***ikebana***, an ancient tradition of floral arrangement and design.

Geisha

The term ***geisha*** emerged in the late 18th century to refer to female singers, dancers, and actors who catered to the *samurai* and other elite clientele. Although some *geisha* were prostitutes, many were simply highly-trained entertainers.

Geisha today also perform traditional music and dance, lead games, or demonstrate calligraphy during tea ceremonies, parties, banquets, or business meetings. They are forbidden from engaging in prostitution. Young *geisha* wear heavy white make-up, bright red lipstick, and elaborate hairstyles. Older *geisha* display a more subdued appearance.

Sports and Games

Baseball: Widely popular in Japan, baseball, known as ***yakyu***, was introduced in the late 19th century and varies slightly from the American version in its use of smaller balls and a wider strike zone. While the Central and Pacific national leagues have millions of fans, Japan's high school league is equally popular, especially its annual national tournament.

Sumo*: *Sumo (wrestling) is Japan's most popular traditional sport, originating in the Shintō traditions of the 8th century (see p. 2-3 of *Religion and Spirituality*). It is a match of wits in which massive athletes (each averaging 300 lbs) clad only in loin cloths attempt to force their opponent to step outside the ring or touch any body part other than the feet to the ground. Matches are typically brief yet involve a high degree of preparation. Wrestlers follow a strict diet and particular lifestyle within communal training facilities called ***heya*** (stables). The ***yokozuna*** (grand champions) of the 6 annual championships are major celebrities in Japan.

Martial arts: Popular self-defense sports include ***judo*** (pictured) and ***karate***, as well as ***kendo*** (Japanese-style fencing), and ***aikido***, a non-combative martial art in which fighters attempt to use their opponent's strength against them.

Other sports: ***Sakkā*** or ***futtobōru*** (soccer) has increased in popularity since professional leagues were created in 1993 and Japan co-hosted the 2002 FIFA World Cup with South Korea. Japan also favors volleyball, basketball, golf, and tennis.

Olympics: Japan has hosted the Winter Olympics twice, in 1972 in Sapporo and in 1998 in Nagano. After hosting the Summer Games in 1964, Tokyo will again act as host in 2020.

Games: As the birthplace of the popular Nintendo, PlayStation, and the Wii gaming systems, Japan is an important center of the video-gaming world. Popular board games include ***shogi*** (a Japanese chess game), ***go***, and ***mahjong***.

Performance Arts

Music: Musicians at Japan's imperial court (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*) traditionally performed ***gagaku*** (orchestral music) with a variety of instruments, including ***shamisen*** (a 3-stringed guitar), ***shakuhachi*** (a bamboo flute), and ***koto*** (a large 13-stringed wooden instrument). Today, religious rituals, weddings, and festivals often incorporate traditional music. Some modern ensembles, such as the Oki Dub Ainu Band, blend traditional and rock music. Singing ***enka***, emotionally charged ballads, in ***karaoke*** clubs is also popular.

Modern Japanese music comprises a variety of genres. ***Jpop*** or Japanese pop music stars include Hamasaki Ayumi and the all-male band *SMAP*. International styles such as reggae, rap, and hip-hop are also popular.

Theater and Dance: ***Nō*** (pictured) is a form of classical musical drama in which actors in elaborate costumes sing and dance ***mai***, a combination of slow shuffles and quick circles. Although ***kyogen***, or comedic theater, originally developed as an interlude during *nō* performances, troupes today often perform it alone. ***Kabuki*** theater involves all-male troupes in elaborate costumes who perform rhythmical dancing called ***odori***. ***Bunraku*** or traditional puppet theater performances include chanting accompanied by a ***biwa*** (lute) and *shamisen*.

Cinema: Since cinema's arrival in 1896, Japan has produced many internationally-recognized films and filmmakers. While the monster *Godzilla* terrorized Tokyo in the 1950s, the decade also produced award-winning films by director Kurosawa Akira, including *Rashōmon* and *The Seven Samurai.* In 2009 Yōjirō Takita's film *Departures* won an Academy Award.

Since its 1958 debut, ***anime*** has become one of the most sophisticated and recognized forms of animation in the world. Genres range from children's television cartoons such as *Pokémon* to full-length dramas such as *Battleship Yamato.*

Literature

Poetry is Japan's oldest form of literature. In the 6th century, the Japanese composed poems in Chinese called ***kanshi***. Later they developed Japanese forms, ***waka***. Over the centuries, Japanese developed particular styles, including ***renga***, a collaborative verse form, and ***haiku***, a non-rhyming poem with 3-line, 5-7-5 syllable pattern.

The Golden Age of Japanese prose literature occurred during the Heian Period (794-1185, see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). Written by female author Murasaki Shikibu in the early 11th century, ***Genji monotagari***, (*The Tale of Genji*) is one of the world's earliest novels and a Japanese literary masterpiece.

Japanese are avid readers, featuring one of the world's highest book and periodical consumption rates. Adults and children alike purchase hundreds of millions of ***manga*** (Japanese comics) each year. Available in all subjects and topics, from science fiction and romance to history and instructional manuals, *manga* may have violent or sexually explicit content.

Visual Arts and Crafts

According to Shintō, Japan's indigenous religion, all things in nature embody a spiritual energy or force (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Many Japanese artists traditionally strived to depict spirituality in their work, while others were heavily influenced by Buddhist philosophy and traditions. Some of Japan's most widely-recognized paintings are ***ukiyo-e*** or "pictures of the floating world." In these paintings, artists depicted mountains, forests, or *kabuki* performers with minimal brush strokes (Pictured: A 19th century *ukiyo-e* depiction).

Craftwork varies by region, including colorful ***imari*** porcelain from Kyūshū and weaving techniques in Okinawa. Japan is famous for its variety of dolls including ***hakata-ningyo*** (clay dolls) from northern Kyūshū and papier-mâché dolls from Darum. Other crafts include ***washi*** (traditional paper), bambooware, toys, masks, calligraphy, and lacquerware.

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Japan's traditional diet centers on rice and fish. Japanese value cooking methods that showcase a food's freshness as well as its innate flavor and texture (Photo: An assortment of sushi).

Dining Customs

Japanese traditionally ate their meals while seated on the floor at low tables (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*). Today, they often sit in chairs at Western-style tables. Before the meal, hosts or restaurant staff may provide guests a small, hot towel (***o-shibori***) to cleanse their faces and hands. Japanese meals do not consist of a succession of courses. Instead, all dishes are served at once. Patrons may express their gratitude for the food by bowing slightly and uttering ***itadakimasu*** ("I humbly receive") and following a meal with ***gochisō-sama deshita*** or "thank you for this feast."

Japanese eat 3 meals daily, with the main meal in the evening. As a staple, rice is traditionally a part of almost every meal. The importance of rice is evident in the Japanese language: the Japanese word for "rice," ***gohan*** or ***meshi***, also means "meal." Unlike Americans, Japanese rarely mix rice with other food. Instead, they alternate bites of rice with bites of other foods, usually holding the rice bowls near their mouths.

The Japanese consider it polite for a person to finish all his food, which serves as an indicator that he is full. Leaving food in one's bowl suggests the person would like more. Of note, slurping noodles and drinking soup directly from the bowl are acceptable practices.

In Japan a person does not customarily pour or refill his own drink. Typically, a dining companion or host would do the honors. Before the first sip of a drink in social contexts, members customarily enjoy a toast (***kanpai***). By finishing his beverage, an individual signals he would like a refill.

Diet

Like rice, fish traditionally is eaten at almost every meal, providing up to 50% of Japanese protein intake. Local catches include squid, shrimp, king crab, and a variety of fish and deep sea varieties such as tuna. While Japanese consume more red meat and dairy that before, many of them still eat at least one meal centered on rice and fish each day.

Breakfast traditionally includes a variety of savory foods, such as ***miso*** (fermented soybean paste) soup, dried fish, pickled vegetables, noodles, or a bowl of rice topped with a raw egg and soy sauce. Some Japanese prefer a Western-style breakfast of cereal, fruit, bacon, eggs, or toast. Many Japanese eat their mid-day meal from a ***bentō*** or boxed lunch. Prepared at home or purchased ready-made, an elaborate box may have individual compartments for fish, meat, vegetables, rice, noodles, and cake. A simpler *bentō* may consist of a single dish, such as pickled plum with rice.

The large evening meal traditionally consists of soup, rice, and accompanying dishes such as seafood, beef, pork, chicken, eggs, soybean products, and vegetables. Japanese did not traditionally eat dessert after a meal. Instead, sweets made of beans, sea plants, and rice powder were part of the main meal.

Chopsticks Etiquette

Japanese never use their chopsticks (***hashi***) to pass food or to serve themselves from a communal bowl. If other utensils for the communal bowl are unavailable, the member reverses his chopsticks and transfers the food with the clean ends. During pauses to speak or drink, Japanese place their chopsticks on a small chopstick rest, never crossing the chopsticks on the rest or placing them on a bowl or plate. Nor do they pierce their food with chopsticks, use them to point, or leave them lodged vertically in rice – a custom reserved exclusively for offerings to ancestors (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Japanese oftentimes pick up sushi with their fingers, not chopsticks.

Popular Traditional Dishes

Traditional Japanese cuisine does not include the array of spices prevalent in some other Asian traditions. Instead, Japanese chefs customarily rely on just a few flavor enhancers, such as sesame oil and dried seaweed and fish, or sauces and relishes made from soybean or the Japanese radish. Japanese cuisine also emphasizes ***umami***, a taste distinct from sweet, salty, sour, and bitter tastes and relatively unknown in Western foods. Japanese chefs tend to consider a food's consistency and presentation to be as important as its taste. As a result, chefs may serve certain dishes simply for their visual appeal.

Sushi, Japan's most famous culinary export, consists of bite-sized portions of rice seasoned with vinegar and served with vegetables, ***tōfu*** (bean curd), or raw or cooked seafood. ***Sashimi*** consists of small pieces of thinly-sliced raw seafood, such as tuna, squid, mackerel, and octopus, served without rice. ***Tempura*** is made by deep-frying pieces of battered vegetables, seafood, or meat. At some restaurants, patrons use hotplates at their tables to prepare ***teppanyaki***, a dish of cubed steak, or ***okonomiyaki***, beef, pork, prawns, or vegetables prepared like an omelet or pancake.

Noodles in a variety of styles are very popular. Thin, brown ***soba*** (pictured) are made from buckwheat while thick, white ***udon*** are made from wheat. Japanese instant ***ramen*** noodle soup is popular worldwide. Other dishes have rice as the primary ingredient. Two examples include ***unagi domburi***, rice topped with broiled eel, and ***o-ya-ko domburi*** ("parent and child"), rice topped with chicken and egg.

Traditional Beverages

Served hot without milk or sugar, green tea has been a central part of Japanese culture for centuries. Although the preparation and drinking of tea can have profound meaning, such as during a formal Japanese tea ceremony (see p. 2 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*), tea-drinking is also a normal everyday pastime.

Served either warm or cold in small porcelain cups, ***sake*** is an alcoholic beverage made from fermented rice. Often enjoyed at meals, sake is also an important part of many celebrations, such as weddings (see p. 4 of *Family and Kinship*) or the opening of a new business.

Eating Out

Japanese cities feature restaurants serving both local and international cuisine in all price ranges. Many restaurants feature window displays of plastic replicas of their most popular dishes along with their prices, making ordering easy. Tipping is not customary in restaurants, although a service charge may be included in the bill.

Japanese traditionally considered eating and drinking while walking in public ill-mannered although less so today. Street food vendors (***yatai*** – pictured, courtesy of CultureGrams, ProQuest 2015) are popular, particularly during festivals (see p. 2 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*), as are fast food restaurants.

Health Overview

The Japanese population's overall health is one of the region's best. Maternal and child mortality rates are lower than regional averages, and at 86 years, Japan's life expectancy at birth is well above the regional average of 77 and the global average of 73. Japanese enjoy universal health insurance.

Despite this overall positive situation, the country faces several unique health challenges. Japanese suffer a variety of health-related problems associated with stress (see p. 1 of *Time and Space* and p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Due at least in part to Japan's history of "honorable" ritual suicide (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*) and society's tolerant attitude toward suicide today, some Japanese, especially men, react to stress by taking their own lives. Although Japan's suicide rate has declined slightly in recent years, it remains one of the highest in the world and is double that of the US. Preventive measures to reduce suicide rates are hampered by a cultural resistance to open discussion of mental health issues.

Japan also faces serious societal burdens in providing healthcare to its shrinking but aging population (see p. 1 of *Political and Social Relations*), a trend that is unlikely to reverse in the future. While 29% of Japan's population is aged 65 or older, scientists estimate that by 2060, the population will shrink from today's 125.5 million to about 87 million, with almost 40% of the population aged 65 or older.

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Japan's traditional medicine divides into 2 types: ***kampo***, the use of herbal formulas based on ancient Chinese remedies, and a variety of other "hands-on" treatment practices, such as acupuncture and massage.

Although *kampo* almost disappeared in the 19th century, it experienced resurgence after World War II and is practiced extensively today, usually in conjunction with conventional therapies. Of note, Japan has the world's only healthcare system that integrates both conventional and traditional practices. While licensed medical doctors may provide both therapy types, the national health insurance reimbursement list includes both conventional and *kampo* prescription medicines. About 84% of Japan's physicians use *kampo* in their daily practice. For example, surgeons often use *kampo* formulas to accelerate postoperative recovery while oncologists use them to counteract the negative side-effects of conventional cancer treatments.

"Hands-on" traditional treatment options include massage; acupuncture, a process of inserting very thin needles into various parts of a patient's skin; moxibustion, which involves burning or massaging herbs into acupuncture points; and judo therapy, the treatment and manipulation of bones, joints, and muscles (Pictured: Moxibustion treatment depicted in a medical book from 1853).

Modern Healthcare System

Legislation in the 1920s and 1930s established Japan's health insurance system which by the 1960s covered the entire population. Although there is some inequity between rural and urban areas regarding the quality of services, Japan's health insurance system strives to ensure equal access to medical treatment. It also attempts to minimize expenditures by offering the same medical services at the same prices to all citizens. Both private and public facilities offer "free access" medical services that ensure patients may choose their preferred provider and facility.

Although Japanese hospitals offer advanced diagnostic and treatment equipment with cutting-edge technology, they often suffer a lack of healthcare personnel to serve the burgeoning population of elderly. In 2016, Japan had about 2.4 physicians per 1,000 people, slightly lower than the US ratio of 2.6 (Photo: Red Cross Hospital in Mie Prefecture).

Health Challenges

As in most other developed countries, communicable diseases like malaria and tuberculosis are no longer the leading causes of death and illness in Japan. Instead, Japan's aging population suffers a variety of non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. These types of chronic and non-communicable disease now account for 82% of all deaths in Japan. In 2016, the top causes of death were cancer, heart disease, circulatory diseases, and pneumonia and bronchitis. Although rare, tuberculosis and infectious diseases like HIV and new types of influenza also threaten public health.

As a key strategy for keeping its aging citizens healthy, the government strives to establish an environment conducive to a healthier lifestyle. Current public health initiatives include the early detection and treatment of disease; improvement in dietary habits; the promotion of adequate physical activity, exercise, rest, and sleep; and the cessation of smoking.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

In the aftermath of World War II, Japan sought to rebuild its fractured economy primarily by expanding industrial production in support of aggressive export policies. To this end, the government encouraged manufacturers, suppliers, distributors, and bankers to form close-knit corporate groups known as ***keiretsu***.

The *keiretsu* system provided several advantages to Japanese industry, including allowing members to collaborate on long-term corporate strategies, providing a hedge against short-term market fluctuations. As a result, Japan experienced rapid economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s, eventually becoming one of the world's wealthiest and most industrialized countries (Photo: Tokyo cityscape).

Japan's rapid economic growth slowed considerably in the 1990s after highly inflated real estate and stock prices collapsed. In subsequent years, the economy remained stagnant while suffering recessions related to the 2007-2008 global financial crisis and the 2011 earthquake and tsunami (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*). This last event was uniquely harmful as it damaged much of Japan's manufacturing infrastructure and disrupted Japan's fishing industry.

Since Prime Minister Abe initiated an aggressive stimulus package commonly known as "Abenomics" in 2012 (see p. 10 of *History and Myth)*, Japan's economy has rebounded somewhat. Although unemployment has decreased and companies have seen record profits, household income is down as wages have lagged and prices have risen. Japan's main challenges remain its huge government debt in excess of 238% of GDP; continued reliance on exports to drive growth; and aging and shrinking population. Despite its fragile state, Japan remains the world's 3rd largest economy, after China and the US.

Services

Accounting for 69% of GDP and 72% of employment, the services sector is the largest and fastest-growing component of the Japan's economy. Important services industries include wholesale and retail sales, tourism, insurance, and financial services. While large department stores have opened in recent years, small shops still account for a large portion of retail sales. Since the 1990s, the Japanese government has worked to reform the financial services industry by facilitating mergers and introducing new regulations.

Tourism: Japan's natural beauty and unique historical and cultural sights drew over 32 million tourists in 2019. Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean people accounted for the majority of visitors, while Hong Kongese, Americans, Thai, and British accounted for much of the remainder.

Industry

Although Japan has few natural resources and must import most raw materials, the industrial sector is the 2nd largest component of Japan's economy. This sector accounts for 29% of GDP and 25% of employment.

Manufacturing: The driving force behind Japan's post-World War II economic growth, manufacturing is the most important component of Japan's industrial sector. Japanese companies make a variety of products in some of the world's largest and most advanced factories and plants. Sold both domestically and exported around the world, products include motor vehicles, electronics, iron and steel, ships, chemicals, textiles, and processed foods. Of note, Japan is currently the world's 3rd largest manufacturer of both motor vehicles and ships (Photo: A steel plant on Hokkaidō).

Construction: Construction currently accounts for about 11% each of GDP and employment. About 58% of construction projects represent private sector development. Public sector development accounts for the remainder and encompasses the construction of medical, healthcare, and welfare facilities.

Agriculture

The agricultural sector is Japan's smallest economic component, accounting for only 1% of GDP and about 3% of employment. Key agricultural activities include farming, livestock, fishing, and forestry and occur primarily on small rural farms (Photo: Scarecrows protect a rice paddy).

Farming: About 11% of Japan's territory is suitable for cultivation. Primary food crops include rice, sugar beets, vegetables, and fruit. Although Japan is completely self-sufficient in rice production, limited arable land requires it to import about half of other foods.

Fishing: Japan's fishing industry is well developed and accounts for nearly 23% of the global fish production. Despite recent decreases in national consumption patterns, Japan continues to be one of the world's largest seafood consumers. Experts criticize Japan's excessive demand as unsustainable and a cause of the depletion of global fish stocks such as Bluefin tuna. Recently, the Japanese government has moved to curb overfishing, tightening quotas and imposing stricter supervision over the industry.

Japan's 2000-year-old whaling tradition faces ongoing controversy. Although it signed a 1946 treaty that limited whale hunts to scientific research, Japan continued to kill up to 850 whales annually under the auspices of a research organization. After disputing the scientific significance of the organization, in 2014 the United Nation's International Court of Justice ordered an immediate halt to the organization's whaling activities. Despite the ban, Japan has announced plans to resume its whaling activities even though public demand for whale has reduced significantly in recent years.

Forestry: Although forests cover about 70% of Japan, there is little demand for domestic lumber. Consequently, Japan's timber industry is small and unprofitable, fulfilling only 35% of Japan's lumber needs. Instead, Japan depends heavily on imported lumber for woodchip, plywood, and pulp material.

Currency

Japan's currency is the Japanese yen (¥), issued in 4 banknote values (1,000, 2,000, 5,000, 10,000) and 6 coin values (1, 5, 10, 50, 100, 500). Although exchange rates vary, $1 has been worth an average of about ¥155 since 1972, between a high of ¥307 in 1975 and a low of ¥76 in 2011. The 2020 exchange rate was ¥106.4 per $1. Japanese typically use cash for everyday purchases. Although many businesses, such as taxis and large department stores, now accept credit cards, many other vendors, including small shops, flea markets, the metro system, and some restaurants do not.

Foreign Trade

In 2018, Japan's exports totaled $738.2 billion and imports totaled $6748.2 billion. Exports primarily included cars, semiconductors, iron and steel, auto parts, plastic materials, and heavy machinery. The largest buyers of Japanese goods included the China (20%), the US (19%), South Korea (7%), and Hong Kong (5%). Japan's top imports included petroleum, liquid natural gas, clothing, semiconductors, coal, and computer equipment. Japan purchases these goods from China (23%), the US (11%), and Australia (6%) (Photo: The Bank of Japan, Japan's central bank).

Trans-Pacific Partnership

In 2013, Japan joined the US, Canada, and 9 Asia-Pacific countries in negotiations surrounding the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The TPP is intended to create regional free trade and investment opportunities among partner countries. The US withdrew from the TPP in 2017.

Foreign Aid

In the wake of World War II, Japan received substantial US aid for relief and reconstruction (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). In the years since, Japan transformed into an aid provider, disbursing over $14.2 billion in Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2018 and becoming the world's 4th largest contributor behind the US, Germany, and the UK. Japan provides ODA to various countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Japan has one of the world's most advanced physical infrastructures, including efficient public transit systems and an extensive highway network. In addition, Japanese enjoy affordable and high-quality communications such as mobile phone service and some of the world's fastest Internet speeds.

Transportation

In addition to private modes of transit, such as walking, cycling, and driving, Japanese have access to modern, efficient public travel. In and around Tokyo, travelers use a rechargeable "PASMO" or "JR Suica" card to board subways, buses, and trains. Japan also has a comprehensive network of bus companies, some of which offer routes to rural areas served by few or no trains. Ferries are a common means of transit, linking all Japanese islands and providing transport to neighboring China, South Korea, and Russia. Finally, taxis are widely available. Of note, taxi drivers do not usually expect tips.

Roadways: Japan had about 757,309 mi of roadways in 2015, of which about 606,919 mi (81%) were paved. A network of national expressways (typically high-speed, multiple lane toll roads) serve Japan's 4 main islands and Okinawa. The signs on major routes normally include both ***rōmaji*** (Latin alphabet – see p. 2 of *Language and Communication*) and Japanese scripts (pictured). With 591 cars per 1,000 people in 2014, Japanese car ownership levels were below the US rate of 797 but well above China's rate of 205.

Railways: An important means of Japanese transport, railways comprise approximately 16,970 mi, extending across most of the country. Japan's leading rail company, the Japan Railways Group (JR Group), operates 6 regional commuter train systems on an extensive rail network.

The JR Group also runs the ***shinkansen***, high-speed bullet trains that provide rapid transportation between cities on 6 main lines. In addition, all major cities operate extensive subway systems (Photo: Tokyo's commuter-rail trains).

Ports and Waterways: Due to its long coastline and strategic location near China, North and South Korea, and Russia, Japan is a Northeast Asian shipping hub with the world's 16th largest fleet of commercial ships. Major ports include Kobē, Nagoya, Osaka, Tokyo, and Yokohama. Japan also has 1,100 mi of inland waterways navigable by small boats.

Airways: Japan has 175 airports and airstrips, of which 142 have paved runways. Japan's primary air transit hub is Narita Airport (Tokyo), followed by Kansai Airport (Osaka), Haneda Airport (Tokyo), and Central Japan Airport (Nagoya). Other major Japanese airports include Fukuoka Airport, linking Japan to its Asian neighbors, and Itami Airport in Osaka, which handles domestic traffic. Japan is home to 2 major airlines: Japan Airlines, the national carrier, and All Nippon Airways.

Energy

Prior to the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that destroyed the Fukushima nuclear reactor (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*), nuclear power accounted for 30% of Japan's energy needs. Following the disaster, as public hostility toward nuclear energy grew, the government began closing all of Japan's 48 nuclear reactors. Despite ongoing public anxiety, Prime Minister Abe revitalized a controversial energy policy that supported reopening 42 of the country's reactors under new safety standards by the end of 2017 with a goal of generating 20-22% of the country's energy by 2030.

Internationally, Japan is the 4th largest energy consumer. Since shutting down its nuclear plants, Japan is now the 3rd largest oil importer, generating most of its electricity (about 78%) from fossil fuels and the remainder from alternative (5%) and renewable sources (17%).

Media

Japan's constitution guarantees freedom of the press, although cooperative efforts among the media, government, and business at times prompt media self-censorship. Newspapers are popular among Japanese, who have access to more than 100 local and national newspapers in Japanese and other languages. With more than 10 million copies sold daily, the conservative ***Yomiuri Shimbun*** ("Japan Daily Press") newspaper has the world's largest circulation. Other popular national dailies include ***Asahi Shimbun*** ("Morning Sun Newspaper") and ***Mainichi Shimbun*** ("Daily News"). Popular English-language newspapers are *The Japan Times* and *Asia & Japan Watch* (Photo: The *Mainichi Shimbun* building in Nagano).

Radio and TV: The publicly-owned Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) is the largest Japanese broadcaster. Private broadcasters, such as Nippon Television and Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS), also have extensive reach. These and other large broadcasters typically offer both radio and TV programming. As of 2018, roughly 53% of households subscribed to cable or satellite TV, while Internet-based TV services also attract viewers. Popular radio programming is syndicated across the nation and rebroadcast by affiliates and local stations.

Telecommunications

Japan's telecommunications infrastructure is among the world's best, with universal mobile phone coverage and pervasive broadband Internet access. Of note, Japan has more mobile phone subscriptions (179.9 million) than people (125.5 million). Mobile carriers include NTT Docomo, AU (KDDI Corporation), SoftBank Mobile, and Y!Mobile (Yahoo Japan Corp).

Internet: More than 91% of Japanese are regular Internet users. Most (57%) access the Internet using computers at home, while 53% use mobile phones. As of 2018, Japan had the world's 3rd highest number of fixed (wired) broadband subscribers, roughly 41.5 million.

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