

# History and Culture

## SECTION

## 2

### If YOU lived there...

You live in Kyoto, one of the most beautiful cities in Japan. Your class is visiting a museum to see an amazing demonstration by a sword maker. You all stare in amazement as he hammers red-hot metal into a curved sword, then plunges it into cold water. He tells you that his family has been making swords for 300 years.

**What kind of craft would you like to know?**

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** Even though Japan is an industrial nation, the Japanese still respect and admire traditional arts and crafts and the people who make them, such as this sword maker. In fact, traditions continue to shape life in Japan and the Koreas today.

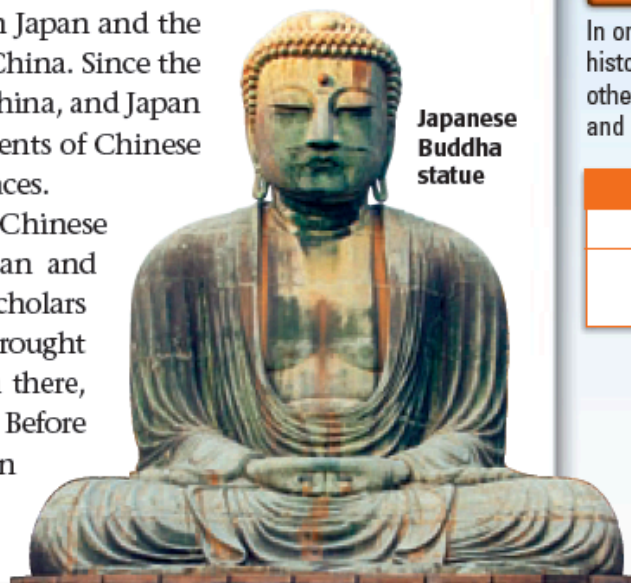
## History

Both Japan and the Koreas have very long histories. Early in these histories, their cultures were intertwined. As time passed, though, Japan and the Koreas developed very differently.

### Early History

Early in their histories, both Japan and the Koreas were influenced by China. Since the Korean Peninsula borders China, and Japan lies just across the sea, elements of Chinese culture seeped into both places.

Among the elements of Chinese culture that influenced Japan and Korea was Buddhism. Scholars and missionaries first brought Buddhism into Korea. From there, visitors carried it to Japan. Before long, Buddhism was the main religion in both countries.



Japanese  
Buddha  
statue

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. The early history of Japan and Korea were closely linked, but the countries developed very differently.
2. Japanese culture blends traditional customs with modern innovations.
3. Though they share a common culture, life is very different in North and South Korea.

### The Big Idea

History and tradition are very important to the people of Japan and the Koreas.

## Key Terms and Places

Kyoto, p. 598  
shoguns, p. 598  
samurai, p. 598  
kimonos, p. 600  
kimchi, p. 601

### TAKING NOTES

Draw two boxes like the ones shown here.

In one box, take notes about the history and culture of Japan. In the other, take notes about the history and culture of the Koreas.

### History and Culture

Japan	The Koreas

## FOCUS ON READING

Where could you look to find out whether these facts are true?

## Emperors, Shoguns, and Samurai

The first central government in Japan was based on China's government. For many centuries, emperors ruled in Japan just as they did in China. The imperial capital at Heian, now called **Kyoto**, was a center of art, literature, and learning. At times, some of Japan's emperors were more concerned with art than with running the country. Eventually, their power slipped away.

As the emperors' power faded, Japan fell under the control of **military leaders called shoguns**. Powerful generals, the shoguns ruled Japan in the emperor's name. Only one shogun could hold power at a time.

Serving under the shogun were armies of **samurai, or highly trained warriors**. They were fierce in battle and devoted to their leaders. As a result, the samurai were very respected in Japanese society. With their support, the shoguns continued to rule Japan well into the 1800s.

## Later Japan

Not everyone was happy with the rule of the shoguns. In 1868 a group of samurai overthrew the shogun and gave power back to the emperor.

When World War II began, Japan allied itself with Germany and Italy. It wanted to build an empire in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. The Japanese drew the United States into the war in 1941 when they bombed the naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. After many years of fighting, the Americans took drastic measures to end the war. They dropped devastating atomic bombs on two Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Shocked by these terrible weapons, the Japanese surrendered.

## Korea

Although Japan was influenced by China, it remained independent. The Koreans, on the other hand, did not. For centuries, the Koreans were ruled by China. Later, the Japanese invaded the Korean Peninsula. They were harsh rulers, and the Korean people grew to resent the Japanese.

After World War II, Korea was taken away from Japan and once again made independent. Rather than forming one country, though, the Koreans formed two. Aided by the Soviet Union, North Korea created a Communist government. In South Korea, the United States helped build a democratic government.

In 1950 North Korea invaded South Korea, starting the Korean War. The North Koreans wanted to unify all of Korea under a Communist government. With the aid of many other countries, including the United States, the South Koreans drove the invaders back. The Korean War was costly, and its effects linger in the Koreas today.

## BIOGRAPHY

### Hirohito

(1901–1989)

Hirohito was Japan's emperor for most of the 1900s. As such, he led the country through periods of great crisis and change. He was emperor when Japan launched wars against China and Russia in the 1930s. He was also in power in 1945 when the United States bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After World War II ended, Hirohito led Japan through changes in its government and economy. Many of these changes affected Hirohito personally. For example, he gave up much of the power he had once held as emperor in favor of a democratic government.

**Drawing Conclusions** Why might a ruler give up much of his power?



**READING CHECK Analyzing** How did the Koreas change after the Korean War?





## A Buddhist Temple

Buddhism has been a major religion in Japan for centuries. This temple in Nara was built around the year 600.

## Japanese Culture

Japan's culture reflects the country's long and varied history. For example, some elements of the culture reflect the influence of the Chinese, while others are native to Japan. Since World War II, Western ideas and innovations have also helped shape Japanese life.

### Language

Nearly everyone in Japan speaks Japanese. The Japanese language is complicated and can be difficult for other people to learn. This difficulty stems in large part from the Japanese writing system. Japanese writing uses two different types of characters. Some characters, called *kanji*, represent whole words. There are about 2,000 *kanji* characters in common use today. Other characters, called *kana*, stand for parts of words. Most texts written in Japanese use both *kanji* and *kana* characters.

### Religion

Religion can also be complicated in Japan. Most people who live there blend elements of two religions—Shinto and Buddhism.

Unlike Buddhism, which was brought to Japan from Korea, Shinto is native to the islands. According to Shinto teachings, nature spirits called *kami* (KAH-mee) live in the world. Shintoists believe everything in nature—the sun, the moon, trees, rocks, waterfalls, and animals—has *kami*. They also believe that some *kami* help people live and keep them from harm. As a result, they build shrines to the *kami* and perform ceremonies to ask for their blessings.

Buddhists have also built shrines and temples all over Japan. Some temples, like the one pictured above, are very old. They date back to the earliest days of Buddhism in Japan. People visit these temples to seek peace and enlightenment. The search for enlightenment is Buddhists' main goal.



## Traditional Dress

These Korean dancers are wearing traditional costumes to perform a fan dance. Most of the time, people in both South Korea and North Korea wear Western-style clothes.

### Customs and Traditions

Japan's history lives on in its customs and traditions. For example, many Japanese wear **traditional robes called kimonos** on special occasions, just as samurai did long ago. Most of the time, though, people in Japan wear Western-style clothing.

Traditional forms of art are also still popular in Japan. Among these art forms are two types of drama, Noh and Kabuki. Noh plays use music and dance to tell a story. Actors do not move much and wear masks, using their gestures to convey their tale. Kabuki actors, on the other hand, are much more active. Kabuki plays tell stories, but they often teach lessons about duty and other **abstract** ideas as well.

**READING CHECK** Summarizing How did Japan's history affect its culture today?

### Korean Culture

Like Japan's, Korea's culture reflects the peninsula's long history. Traditional ways of life influence how people act and think.

### Language and Religion

People in both North Korea and South Korea speak Korean. Unlike Japanese, Korean is written with an alphabet. People combine letters to form words, rather than using symbols to represent entire words or syllables as in Japanese.

In the past, most people in Korea were Buddhists and Confucianists. Recently, though, Christianity has also become widespread. About one-fourth of South Korea's people are Christian. North Korea, like many Communist countries, discourages people from practicing any religion.

#### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**abstract**  
expressing a quality or idea without reference to an actual thing



Kimonos are the traditional clothing style in Japan. Both men and women wear kimonos for special occasions, such as weddings.

## Customs and Traditions

Like the Japanese, the people of Korea have kept many ancient traditions alive. Many Korean foods, for example, have been part of the Korean diet for centuries.

One example of a long-lasting Korean food is **kimchi**, a dish made from pickled cabbage and various spices. First created in the 1100s, kimchi is still served at many Korean meals. In fact, many people think of it as Korea's national dish.

Traditional art forms have also remained popular in parts of the Koreas. This is true especially in North Korea. Since World War II, the Communist government of North Korea has encouraged people to retain many of their old customs and traditions. The Communists think that Korean culture is the best in the world and do everything they can to preserve it.

In South Korea, though, some customs have been lost. Many people there have moved into cities and come into contact with people from other countries. As a result, people have adopted new ways of life. Many of these ways are combinations of old and new ideas. For example, Korean art today combines traditional themes such as nature with modern forms, like film.

**READING CHECK** **Contrasting** How are North and South Korea's cultures different?

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** In this section, you learned that the cultures of Japan and the Koreas have been shaped by the countries' histories. In the next section you will see how traditional cultures continue to influence life in Japan today.

## Section 2 Assessment

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Online Quiz

KEYWORD: SK7 HP23

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and Places

- a. **Define** Who were shoguns?

b. **Elaborate** How did World War II affect life in Japan?
- a. **Identify** What is one traditional style of clothing in Japan? What do people wear most of the time?

b. **Elaborate** How does Japan's religion reflect its history?
- a. **Recall** What is kimchi? Why is it important in Korea?

b. **Explain** What has led to many of the differences between modern culture in North and South Korea?

### Critical Thinking

- Analyzing** Draw a diagram like this one. Using your notes, list two features of Japanese culture in the left box and of Korean culture in the right box. Below each box, write a sentence about how each country's culture reflects its history.

Japanese Culture	Korean Culture

### FOCUS ON WRITING

- Analyzing Cultures** Traditions and customs are central to life in Japan and the Koreas. How can you reflect this importance in your poem?