

LESSON 2

# The Reunification of Japan

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What factors help unify a kingdom or dynasty?
- How can external forces influence a kingdom or dynasty?

READING HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

- process
- community

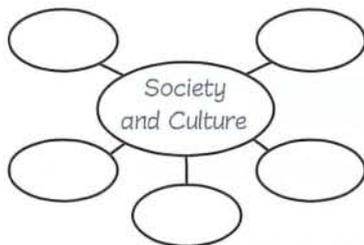
Content Vocabulary

- daimyo
- hans
- hostage system
- eta

TAKING NOTES

Key Ideas and Details

**Categorizing** Use a graphic organizer like this one to categorize key elements of Japanese society and culture during the Tokugawa era.



IT MATTERS BECAUSE

*From the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century, Japan was unified through efforts of powerful leaders. It imposed restrictive social systems and enforced cultural isolation, while trade and industry increased.*

Political Changes in Japan

**GUIDING QUESTION** *What changes took place in Japan after its political unification?*

At the end of the fifteenth century, Japan was in chaos. The centralized power of the shogunate had collapsed. **Daimyo**, heads of noble families, controlled their own lands and warred with their neighbors. Soon, however, a dramatic reversal would unify Japan.

The **process** of unification began in the late sixteenth century with three powerful political figures. The first was Oda Nobunaga (oh • dah noh • boo • nah • gah). Nobunaga seized the imperial capital of Kyōto and placed the reigning shogun under his control. By 1582 he had unified the central part of present-day Japan.

Nobunaga was succeeded by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (toh • yoh • toh • mee hee • day • yoh • shee), a farmer's son who had become a military commander. Hideyoshi located his capital at Ōsaka. By 1590 he had persuaded most of the daimyo on the Japanese islands to accept his authority.

After Hideyoshi's death in 1598, Tokugawa Ieyasu (toh • kuh • gah • wah ee • yah • soo), the powerful daimyo of Edo (modern-day Tokyo), took control of Japan. Ieyasu took the title of shogun in 1603 and technically ruled on behalf of the Emperor, who remained at the court in Kyoto. The Tokugawa rulers completed the restoration of central authority that had begun with Nobunaga and Hideyoshi. The Tokugawa shoguns remained in power at their capital of Edo until 1868. Tokugawa rule brought a period of peace known as the "Great Peace."

As the three great commanders were unifying Japan, the first Europeans began to arrive. Portuguese traders landed on the islands in 1543. In a few years, Portuguese ships began stopping regularly at Japanese ports to take part in the regional trade between Japan, China, and Southeast Asia.

At first, the visitors were welcomed. The Japanese were fascinated by tobacco, clocks, eyeglasses, and other European goods. Nobunaga and Hideyoshi found the new firearms helpful in defeating their enemies and unifying the islands.

The first Jesuit missionary, Francis Xavier, arrived in 1549. The Jesuits converted a number of local daimyo. By the end of the sixteenth century, thousands of Japanese had become Christians. However, after the Jesuits destroyed local shrines, Hideyoshi issued an edict in 1587 prohibiting Christian activities within his lands.

European merchants were the next to go. Only a small Dutch **community** was allowed to remain in Japan. Dutch ships were permitted to dock at Nagasaki harbor only once each year and could remain for only two to three months.

### ✓ READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Interpreting** How did the rule of Japan shift from the rule of the daimyo to the rule of the three great commanders?

## The Tokugawa Era

**GUIDING QUESTION** *What forms of art flourished under Tokugawa rule?*

Major political and economic change took place under the Tokugawa. Since the fourteenth century, many upper-class Japanese, influenced by Confucianism, had considered trade and industry beneath them. Under the Tokugawa rulers, however, trade and industry began to flourish.

### Tokugawa Rule

The Tokugawa rulers established control of the feudal system that had governed Japan for more than 300 years. As before, the state was divided into about 250 separate territories called **hans**, or domains. Each was ruled by a daimyo. In theory, the daimyo were independent because they were able to support themselves from taxes on their lands. In actuality, the shogunate controlled the daimyo by a **hostage system**.

In this system, the daimyo were required to maintain two residences—one in their own lands and one in Edo, where the shogun's court was located. When the daimyo was absent from his residence in Edo, his family was forced to stay home there as a kind of insurance for the daimyo's loyalty to the shogun.

During this long period of peace—known as the “Great Peace”—brought by Tokugawa rule, the samurai who had served the daimyo gradually ceased to be a warrior class. Many became managers on the daimyo's lands.

### Economy and Society

By 1750, Edo had a population of more than one million and was one of the largest cities in the world. Banking flourished, and paper money became the normal medium of exchange in business transactions. A Japanese merchant class emerged and began to play a significant role in Japan. What effect did these economic changes have on Japanese peasants who made up most of the population?

Some farm families benefited by exploiting the growing demand for cash crops (crops grown for sale). Most peasants, however, experienced declining profits and rising costs and taxes. Many were forced to become

**daimyo** “great names”; heads of noble families in Japan who controlled vast landed estates and relied on samurai for protection

**process** a series of actions or steps leading to an end

**community** a group of people with common interests and characteristics living together within a larger society



▲ Eighteenth-century Japanese samurai armor



▲ Detail from a scroll depicting an *Excellent View of Our Prosperous Age*, from the Edo period

#### ► CRITICAL THINKING

**Analyzing Information** How does this street scene in Edo depict Japanese prosperity?

**hans** approximately 250 domains into which Japan was divided under the Tokugawa

**hostage system** a system used by the shogunate to control the daimyo in Tokugawa Japan; the family of a daimyo lord was forced to stay at their residence in the capital whenever the lord was absent from it

**eta** Japan's outcast class, whose way of life was strictly regulated by the Tokugawa

tenants or to work as hired help. When rural conditions became desperate, some peasants revolted.

Social changes influenced by Confucian doctrines also marked the Tokugawa Era. During this era, Japan's class system became rigid. Rulers established strict legal distinctions among the four main classes: warriors, peasants, artisans, and merchants. Inter-marriage between any of these classes was forbidden.

The emperor and imperial court families were at the top of the political and social structure. Next came the warrior class—the shogun, daimyo, samurai, and *ronin*. The shogun was supreme ruler below the emperor and distributor of the national rice crop. The local daimyo received land and rice from the shogun in

exchange for military service. Samurai received rice from the daimyo in exchange for their services as advisers and government officials. Finally, the *ronin* were warriors who traveled the countryside seeking jobs.

Below the warriors were the farmers, artisans, and merchants. Farmers produced rice and held a privileged position in society but were often poor. The artisan class included craftspeople such as sword makers and carpenters. Merchants, who distributed basic goods, were at the bottom of the social hierarchy because they profited from others' labor.

Below these classes were Japan's outcasts, the **eta**. The Tokugawa enacted severe laws to regulate the places of residence, the dress, and even the hairstyles of the *eta*.

Especially in the samurai class where Confucian values were highly prized, the rights of females were restricted. Male heads of households had broad authority over property, marriage, and divorce.

Among the common people, women were also restricted. Parents arranged marriages, and a wife had to move in with her husband's family. A wife who did not meet the expectations of her husband or his family was likely to be divorced. Still, women were generally valued among the common people for their roles as child bearers and homemakers.

### Literature and Arts

In the Tokugawa Era, a new set of cultural values began to appear, especially in the cities. It included the rise of popular literature written by and for the people. The best example of the new urban fiction is from Ihara Saikaku, considered one of Japan's greatest writers. Saikaku's greatest novel, *Five Women Who Loved Love*, tells of a search for love by five women.

Much popular literature of the Tokugawa Era was lighthearted, but poetry remained a more serious form of literature. Matsuo Bashō, the greatest Japanese poet, wrote exquisite poetry about nature in the seventeenth century.

A new world of entertainment in the cities gave rise to Kabuki in the theater. Early Kabuki dramas dealt with the world of teahouses and dance halls in the cities. Government officials, fearing that these subjects onstage might corrupt people's moral standards, forbade women to appear on stage. Thus a new profession was created—male actors who portrayed female characters on stage.

Art also reflected the changes in Japanese culture under the Tokugawa Era. The shogun's order that all daimyo and their families have residences in Edo sparked an increase in building. Nobles competed to erect the most magnificent mansions with lavish and beautiful furnishings.

Japanese art was enriched by ideas from other cultures. The Japanese studied Western medicine, astronomy, languages, and painting styles. In turn, Europeans wanted Japanese ceramics, which were prized as highly as the ceramics of the Chinese.

**READING PROGRESS CHECK**

**Summarizing** Summarize the social structure that developed during the Tokugawa shogunate.

▼ Kabuki actors performing a play called *Soga Monogatari*

► **CRITICAL THINKING**

**Comparing and Contrasting**

How does Kabuki theater appear similar to or different from Western theater?



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**LESSON 2 REVIEW**

**Reviewing Vocabulary**

1. **Explaining** Write a paragraph explaining how the hostage system helped the shogunate control the daimyo.

**Using Your Notes**

2. **Describing** Use your notes to write a paragraph describing Japanese society and culture under the Tokugawa shogunate.

**Answering the Guiding Questions**

3. **Identifying** What changes took place in Japan under the Tokugawa shogunate?

4. **Identifying** What forms of art flourished under Tokugawa rule?

**Writing Activity**

5. **Narrative** Write a narrative paragraph presenting an imaginary episode during the introduction of European goods to Japan. Present vivid details of the event in clear chronological order.