
UNIT 1 THE ROOTS OF MODERN JAPAN

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, you will learn about the following:

- A broad survey of Japanese history, upto the 16th century and the key political institutions that have shaped the country,
- The economic development and the transformation of daily life, and
- the major religious systems and intellectual trends that form the bedrock of Japanese thinking.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit provides a background essential to understanding the history of modern Japan. The Unit will locate Japan within the East Asian region, introduce you to some characteristics of the geographical environment, and give a broad outline of historical development till the 18th century.

1.2 EAST ASIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD

The key features important to keep in mind are that Japan, composed of four main islands, and other smaller ones, was physically separated from the continental mainland but not isolated from its influences. The Japanese were bound to the mainland through maritime connections. The Straits of Tsushima that lie between Japan and the Korean peninsula are only 120 miles wide so Korean connections were an important route for the entry of people, ideas, and trade to the Japanese islands. In this period, crossing the East China Sea was

dangerous so Japan was insulated from direct contact, and the possibilities of invasion by China, which was the dominant political and cultural power in the region. Japan was connected to the continent but protected from political interference.

The maritime routes also linked the Japanese islands to Southeast Asia. In modern times, nationalists who wanted to assert the superiority of Japan and its role as leader of Asia argued that Japanese civilisation was shaped by Asian civilisations, but since it was never colonized it best preserved these elements.

Most importantly China, as the most developed civilisation in the region, exerted a powerful influence in East and Southeast Asia. The Chinese language became the language of the elites and Chinese religious and philosophical ideas were adopted, and adapted, in Japan, Korea and Vietnam. These bonds created a common language and a shared sense of values but also tensions and conflicts as each struggled to maintain its autonomy from Chinese political control and the dominance of its ideas.

1.3 JAPAN: THE GEOGRAPHICAL ENVIRONMENT

It is important to understand geography when studying history as it defines what is possible for the inhabitants. The Japanese archipelago is a relatively recent creation. The process started only some fifteen million years ago but it has mostly been during 2-5 million years that the islands, as we know them, have been created. These islands were brought about by the collision of four tectonic plates. These collisions continue to produce earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. This unstable condition has resulted in periodic disasters forcing the inhabitants to learn to anticipate and cope with these recurring disasters.

The East and southeast Asian region were not affected by ice-age glaciers and because the Japanese archipelago was connected at various periods to the continental mainland it has benefitted from the biological riches of the region. For instance, North America has some 250 varieties of commercially useful indigenous trees while Japan has around 500 such varieties. This has been a rich resource for development but also allowed nature to respond in a variety of ways as Japan developed.

Japan's terrain is 80 % mountainous, and these mountains are on an average 2-3,000 metres in height and very steep. The mountainous terrain of narrow valleys has streams that can turn into raging torrents. This has made water management very important and led to the development of sophisticated water management techniques. Agricultural development was largely confined to the plains but swidden, or slash and burn agriculture, was practiced. The cultivation of the steep hillsides for fuel, fodder, and mulch lead to erosion and flooding as hillsides were denuded of their forest cover. It also led to efforts to maintain forested areas. Today 70% of Japan still remains wooded.

The climate is largely of mild winters and hot summers which allows irrigated rice-culture in the alluvial plains along the coast. Rice culture has been dominant

because it yields a high caloric count per hectare and, despite only 20 % cultivable land, Japan has historically been able to support higher populations. The volcanic soil was largely acidic but was improved by extensive use of fertilisers. This need lies behind the fact that in modern times Japan became the largest user of chemical fertilisers in the world. Maritime resources have always been an important source of food as well.

1.4 APPROACHES FOR STUDYING JAPANESE HISTORY

Our understanding of modern Japanese historical development has been shaped by a variety of historical sources: Western missionary accounts, Japanese writings and that of Western, notably U.S scholars. The ‘area study’ approach that was developed in the U.S in the post WW-II period, was based on the idea that countries in Asia were different and they needed ‘interpreters’ to understand their societies. This approach looked at these countries in isolation and defined them through their religion and philosophical traditions emphasising the exceptionalism of Japan. It sought to understand Japan which, unlike other Asian countries, ‘modernised’. It looked for answers in the intellectual traditions and ignored such factors as the role of colonialism in preventing development.

In Japan conservative thinkers have based their ideas on the mythic tales of the Chronicles of Japan or Nihon shoki (720) and Record of Ancient Matters or Kojiki (712). In these texts it is written that the islands were created by the gods and the Sun Goddess sent her grandson to rule the country. To this was added the myth that there has been a direct and unbroken line of emperors down to the present emperor, so the emperor was considered a living god. This myth was used in the modern period to mark Japan as different and superior to China, and other countries. It was a powerful idea that underpinned political institutions and shaped common understanding.

Academic writing in the post-World War- II period has largely represented Japan as the only Asian country to modernise. The modernisation approach glossed over conflicts, peasant rebellions and the experience of Japan as a colonizer to underline its difference from China and other Asian countries. These arguments were questioned, particularly after the Vietnam war in the 1960’s and 1970’s and Japanese developments were located within a regional context to show links and similarities, Japan’s colonisation of Korea, Taiwan and parts of China was shown to have shaped Japanese history in decisive ways. Further postmodernist writings deconstructed ideas about Japan, by examining institutions and ideas that seemed to have a long history, and showed how they were constructed as Japan modernized. Other scholars began to see Japanese developments within a global perspective and how these affected Japan. For instance, global silver flows in the premodern period led to a shortage of silver and Japanese rulers began to carry out measures to produce silk that was being imported and reduce the outflow of silver. In the subsequent units we will see how these views have shaped our understanding of modern Japanese history.

The early dominance of Chinese culture in the East Asian region has meant that Chinese influences shaped the area and the Chinese language became the carrier

of civilization and the lingua franca of the elites. Japan adopted Chinese by the 8th century as the language of administration and culture. The Japanese language is a polysyllabic and conjugated language and very different from Chinese. Japanese used Chinese ideographs (kanji) but also created two alphabets, which they used along with the Chinese ideographs to write Japanese as it was spoken. Knowledge of Chinese gave the elites access to Chinese civilization but the knowledge they gained was diffused to a wider popular level because texts written in the local alphabet could be read by those who were not educated in the high culture. For instance, Buddhist religious teachings were written using the phonetic alphabet in a simple style and illustrated to spread their teachings. Even the way peasant petitions were written shows the influence of elite styles. Ideas of high culture spread beyond the elites.

1.5 PERIODISATION IN JAPANESE HISTORY

The dominant political categorisation of Japanese history by ruling dynasties has been questioned in many ways. The standard political divisions are the classical period with the Heian (794-1180) marking the peak of Japanese civilization with its distinctive characteristics. In the Heian period the imperial government was the dominant power. This was followed by the warrior governments or bakufu of the Kamakura (1185-1333), then the short Kemmu restoration when imperial power was restored (1333-1336), and then again power passed to a warrior house, the Ashikaga or Muromachi bakufu (1336-1573). The period from 1573 to 1603 saw the emergence of daimyo houses that began to control large parts of Japan. The first to emerge from among the daimyo's of the military conflicts of the time was Oda Nobunaga. He was followed by Toyotomi Hideyoshi and then Tokugawa Ieyasu who established Tokugawa rule which lasted from 1603 to 1868. The modern period dates from 1868 when a revolution made Japan into a modern-nation state. This broad classification has been refined in many ways but is still the prevailing periodisation.

Ecology that is looking at the dominant relation between man and his environment rather than using political events to demarcate periods provide another way of looking at the broad sweep of Japanese history. The historian Conrad Totman divides Japan's history into three stages: forager, agricultural and industrial. The forager period was when people lived off what the land produced naturally. This would be roughly up to 400 BCE and encompass the early Jomon (1400-300BCE) and Yayoi (350BCE-250) cultures. The second period, marked by the use of agriculture goes through many sub-phases. Agriculture begins to develop from the Tomb Culture (Kofun 250-538) period to the classical period of the Heian dynasty but it becomes more intensive by the 12th century when power shifts to the warrior class during the Kamakura and Tokugawa periods. The third stage is from around 1890, as industrial society develops on what Totman calls 'the exploiters of the dead', in other words society is now living off not just what nature produces but is using what was produced in the earlier periods. In other words Totman argues, it is depleting the natural resources that have been stored, such as fossil fuels and using up stored resources.

- 1) Briefly discuss the role of geographical environment in shaping Japan?

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- 2) What are different approaches for studying Japanese History?

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- 3) Critically evaluate different approaches for periodising Japanese History?

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1.6 THE MAKING OF CLASSICAL JAPAN

In 794 the Yamato state built its capital at Heian. This marks the beginning of the what has come to be seen as the classical age of Japan when the main characteristics that are at the core of Japanese civilization were formed. The Heian period spans the years from 794 when the capital was built at Heian-kyo to 1185 when power shifted to the warrior governments. This long period of 400 years is the longest of the standard divisions of Japanese history.

It was the period when Chinese influence, through Buddhism, was absorbed, adapted and used to create an imperial state, where the emperor exercised direct political power. Buddhism became the state religion. The Chinese language was adopted by the elites and through it Chinese philosophies and literature were introduced and came to play an important part in intellectual life. Thus was also the period when women writers produced literature written in the Japanese language, and not Chinese. The *Tale of the Genji*, a novel by Murakami Shikibu, written in Japanese kana and not Chinese characters, paints a picture of Heian aristocratic life and she has come to be seen as the greatest Japanese writer, somewhat like Kalidas in Sanskrit, or Shakespeare in English.

The Heian period, named after the capital, which in turn was modeled on the Chinese capital of Chang'an brought together earlier clan (uji) based groups into an imperial state modeled on the Tang dynasty state (618-907) in China but adapted to Japanese ideas. The emperor was the sole ruler but, unlike in China, was considered divine. In China the bureaucracy was well developed and strong but while the Japanese had bureaucratic organisations, posts were manned by hereditary nobles. Rules and regulations were developed to create a military organisation and a system of tax collection collectively known as the ritsuryo (penal codes and civil codes) system. The country was divided into provinces, each to be ruled by a governor. However unlike China, a council of religious practices was placed above all other offices.

The area ruled in this period was mostly in the Kyoto region and the southern island of Kyushu but emperor Shomu began to send expeditions to Tohoku, the northern region of the main island Honshu and by 725 had 'pacified' the area upto modern day Sendai.

There is a theory, not accepted by everyone, that the 'emishi' were people from the Jomon culture who had been driven north as the Yayoi people took over the main islands of Japan. These northern expeditions marked the advance of settled agriculture to this region. The 'emishi' were foragers. The 'emishi' are later known as Ainu, the original inhabitants of Japan. The Ainu were animists and their language, as well as cultural practices, was very different from the Japanese, or wajin as they were known then.

In effect the trappings or structure of an imperial state was created but its power on the ground was limited. One of the major characteristics of the period is that even though the trappings of imperial power were based on a bureaucratic model and land belonged to the emperor, 'familial authority' was widespread and this appeared in different forms. One was the spread of 'shoen' private estates only nominally under imperial control. Two periods when 'retired emperors' (insei) had control. Emperors would retire and a child would be put on the throne. Rule was exercised by guardians. For instance the Fujiwara family, or 'retired' emperors. Thirdly, power was held by exercised by samurai bands or governors.

Scholars have tended to see Heian Japan as 'ancient' as opposed to the medieval Kamakura period but this classification follows a Western model of history. Today scholars, such as C. Cameron Hurst argue that the Heian period should be divided into two periods, the early period up to the tenth century when elements of the Tang model were dominant but 'feudal' tendencies were beginning to develop. The latter part saw these feudal characteristics strengthening as the central power eroded and passed first to the Fujiwara family, and then to the retired sovereigns.

Scholars have argued that the emperor and nobility did not simply surrender their power to outside interests but rather the nobility created a 'royal court state' (ocho koka) whereby they contracted certain political duties to concentrate on rituals, which were in those times an equally important part of 'politics'. They did not surrender or lose sight of how this power was exercised but were involved in different ways. For instance, scholars have pointed out that documents show that the appointment of governors was carefully done so that there would be no impediment to the income of the state.

Imperial power was established but direct imperial rule did not last long. The Fujiwara family became the major power from 794. They exercised this power as regents and by marrying their daughters to the Japanese emperors. The striking and recurrent feature of Japanese history is the division between legitimacy and power. The Emperor continued to remain the legitimate ruler, the source of power but actual power was exercised by the Fujiwara family, the most powerful of whom was Fujiwara-no-Michinaga (966-1028 AD).

The Culture of the Heian Period

Heian civilization was an aristocratic culture which was created and carried on by a few thousand courtiers. During the tenth and eleventh centuries this culture produced a highly sophisticated and refined aesthetic philosophy. Material life was, however, extremely simple and austere. The diet was rice, vegetables and very little meat or fish was eaten. Tea was introduced from China only in the ninth century but was used only as a medicine. The ox-cart was the major form of transport. Ships were simple and could not safely make voyages across the seas but had to hug the coast.

Buddhism became the religion of the state. Shinto, the whole set of earlier popular religious practices, became a part of Buddhism. The relationship between the two is complex. The word Shinto was rarely used in classical Japan, but when it was it meant only 'popular religious practice'. The word came to take the meaning the 'way of the gods', under Buddhist influence as Buddhism is 'the way of the Buddha'. Shinto evolved as it became inter-linked with Buddhism and soon Shinto gods or kami were identified with the Buddha.

Buddhism came to Japan from China through Korea. Buddhism provided the religious foundations for the new imperial state. In the 740s emperor Shomu (724-749) built the Todaiji, a Buddhist temple reputed to be the largest wooden structure of its time. Initially supported by the state Buddhist sects such as Tendai founded by Kukai (774-835) and Shingon (True Word) by the monk Saicho (767-822) developed. Saicho based his teachings on the Lotus Sutra, formulated a religious system which held that work, meditation and faith led to enlightenment. Both these sects flourished through the ninth and tenth centuries and found favour among the Heian aristocracy.

New movements such as Zen, Jodo and Nichiren developed in Buddhism as it spread from the elites to the people. By the 13th century Buddhism was no longer confined to the elites but a part of the political and religious life of the people. Monasteries were powerful centres bringing together monks and lay followers, sometimes in conflict with the ruling powers.

Buddhism had from its introduction into Japan moved from an esoteric and aristocratic religion spread out to become a religion of the people. Japanese tribute and trade contacts with China stopped after 800 and in 1274 and 1281 the expanding Mongol empire of Qiblai Khan of China launched two invasions. The first Mongol invasion was to test the ground and the second, said to be the largest sea expedition till the twentieth century, was defeated partly because of Japanese preparations but also because a typhoon caused extensive damage to the ships. It seems that the Japanese would have won in any case but the 'divine wind' (kamikaze) that destroyed the Mongol ships became a major mythic event that was used by some to underline how Japan has been protected by the gods. In the

last days of WW-II as Japan was running out of resources it took desperate measures, such as raising a squadron of 'suicide bombers', named kamikaze pilots. These young men were brainwashed to crash their planes into their targets. They functioned like human bombs.

1.7 COMPETING POWERS: EMPEROR, RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND WARRIORS

The imperial state's power did not last long as it gradually conceded land and the right to collect revenue to noble families and Buddhist monasteries. The nobility and the Buddhist monasteries acquired control over land estates or *shoen* and collected the taxes and raised their own armies. They became politically powerful. By 1200 over half of all imperial tax lands had become 'shoen', that is privately held land outside the state's control.

The imperial state also lost control over its armed retainers and by 1150 samurai or warriors bands owing loyalty to their leaders had emerged. These groups were hierarchically organized and bound by kinship and loyalty to their leaders. Minamoto Yoritomo (1147-1199), the leader of the Taira, one of the major families that was contending for power emerged as the most powerful leader.

The revenues extracted from the Osaka-Kyoto (Kinai) were restricted and supported a very small elite. By the 11th century the Kinai region had been stripped of extractable resources. It was against this background that by 1190 real power had shifted from the Imperial Capital Kyoto to Kamakura. The Kamakura bakufu (the word literally means "tent government" and originally referred to the headquarters of the army in the field) had a wider revenue base. The samurai or warrior groups now emerged as a major group competing for power.

The Japanese scholar Kuroda Toshio argues that between the eleventh and fifteenth century state authority was divided between three powers working together. He uses a word used for family in this period – *kennmon* or powerful families. Kuroda identifies three groups of families- the courtiers (*kuge*), warriors (*buke* or samurai) and religious institutions (*jisha*). Kuroda looked at these three groups the courtiers, the warriors and religious institutions as part of one political system, organized similarly and interdependent. Each needed the other. So the transition was not just that imperial power was replaced by warrior governments but the transition was marked by a period when these three groups competed for power.

Yoritomo established his warrior government or bakufu at Kamakura, in the Kanto region working out a power sharing arrangement with the emperor. Yoritomo received many titles from the emperor as a mark of his power and authority. One of these titles, 'barbarian subduing generalissimo' (*sei tai shogun*), has become the best known in English.

The next bakufu, the Ashikaga or ((1333-1573, also called by the name of their capital Muromachi), nominally acknowledged the authority of the emperor. Traditionally 'medieval' Japan was said to begin with the Kamakura bakufu in 1180 but today scholars see the Kamakura period as a transition from the Heian period and see the 1330's as a turning point when the Kenmu rule and the Ashikaga brought about a new type of rule. This was a shift where military power became

the basis for rule. Earlier authority was based on legitimacy given by status or position now superior force was enough.

The Kamakura bakufu was defeated and followed by the rule of Emperor Go-Daigo, and then the Ashikaga warrior government. This period of rapid change was marked by new ways to establish political control. Political power was based on the daimyo or regional lords who exercised a high degree of autonomy in their domains. Each daimyo attempted to increase his power by encroaching on imperial lands, or that of other lords, leading to a period of instability, termed 'gekokujo' or 'those below toppling those above'.

This politically volatile atmosphere meant that only those daimyo were successful who had a reliable vassal base, were successful in organizing economically well run domains, and created efficient military forces to protect their territories. These daimyo concentrated on consolidating their domains rather than expanding their control. They were called 'warring states lords' (sengoku daimyo) From this process of local consolidation emerged the leaders who would unify Japan.

Religious institutions were an integral part of the political system and politics were not separate elements as in the modern period. The major religious centres was in Mt Hiei, near Kyoto which belonged to the Tendai sect, Nara where the major temples of Kofukuji and Todaiji were located was dominated by sects that were more philosophical and appealed to the aristocracy, and Mt. Koya, the headquarters of the Shingon sect of Buddhism. Tendai and Shingon were the major Buddhist sects with followers across the country, patronized by the state and leading families, and they produced influential writings that shaped the religious and intellectual life of the people.

Zen Buddhism, which stressed meditation as a way to attain salvation, was divided into two sects, Soto and Rinzai. Zen was imparted through rigorous training through such exercises as koan or riddles that forced the adherents to think about their assumptions. Zen exercised a powerful influence on the warriors and in the arts. Zen monks because of their connections with China played an important role in trade with China.

Trade with China was started after a long gap in the 1300's and from the 1400's Japan sent tribute missions to both gain recognition and for trade. The Zen monasteries, many of whose monks had trained in China, became important players in this trade.

1.8 THE RISE OF THE DAIMYO: ODA NOBUNAGA

From the end of the fifteenth century war became a constant feature. There were competing forms of government at this time. The imperial house was marginalized, and the major forces that competed for power and dominance were the samurai retainers bound by feudal ties to the daimyo, the monasteries which controlled lands and armies, and bands or ikko (solidarities) formed by farmers and cultivators.

The solidarities or Ikko groups were religious groups based on principles of equality and hierarchical like the samurai. Their battles between the 1560's and

1570's threatened the daimyo centred power of the samurai. Religious sects, like the Ikko sect of Amida Buddhism in Echizen and Kaga (modern Fukui and Ishikawa) and were behind the ikko-ikki or uprisings of these times.

In the political anarchy which prevailed up to the middle of the sixteenth century the economy grew and institutions developed a degree of sophistication. The feudal lords devoted much of their attention to consolidating their holdings and preventing antagonistic alliances. In this unstable situation three figures gradually brought the main islands under their control: Oda Nobunaga (1543-82), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-98) and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616). These three men of widely differing character followed each other and brought about not only the political unification of Japan but also its economic and social consolidation.

The decisive event that marked this change was in 1568 when Oda Nobunaga forced the emperor to recognise Ashikaga Yoshiaki (1537-1597), and then when the shogun proved disobedient drove him out. Nobunaga never took the title of shogun but through his military skill brought large areas under his control.

Nobunaga brought the daimyo under his control but he also demolished the power of monasteries and village based Ikko groups. In October, 1571 Nobunaga destroyed the Tendai Buddhist monastery of Hiezen. This monastery was a vast complex with large estates and its own warriors. Its destruction and the massacre of over three thousand monks effectively put an end to their bid for political authority.

Nobunaga fought the armed leagues of the Jodo Shinshu sect of Buddhism, the Ikko Ikki, as they were called, centred around the temple of Ishiyama Honganji in Osaka and crushed them. With his power squarely established, he then built the magnificent castle of Azuchi, reputed to be a magnificent structure, which no longer exists.

Nobunaga at the time of his death controlled over one-third of Japan and laid the basis for the emerging political structure. In 1571 he started a new system of land tax assessment and in 1576 he began to disarm the peasantry. Long years of continuous warfare had led to the emergence of an armed population. Nobunaga, to ensure peace, not only disarmed the peasantry so that they could return to their primary occupation of working on the land but also brought the warriors or samurai to the castle towns, which were to form the nucleus of the emerging cities. This step helped to reduce the independent power of the military landed aristocracy. Nobunaga also attempted to introduce uniformity in weights and measures.

1.9 HIDEYOSHI: A COMMONER WHO BECAME RULER OF JAPAN

Nobunaga was murdered in 1582 and in the following years Hideyoshi (1536-1598) emerged as the key figure uniting Japan. Hideyoshi came from an ordinary family but because of the unsettled times he could rise through his abilities to become a powerful ruler of the country. He managed to defeat other daimyo contenders such as Shibata Katsuie and in 1585 had himself appointed Kampaku (regent) by the Emperor. Many titles were taken as a way of gaining legitimacy

in the formal hierarchy. For the next few years he dealt with other rivals and by 1590 had defeated his major opponents.

Hideyoshi built on the work done by Nobunaga and put into place a system that would lay the basis for Tokugawa rule. In 1588 he began a ruthless sword hunt, the aim of which was to clearly demarcate the farmer from the soldier. The samurai were the only class allowed to carry swords. In 1590 a land survey recorded fields in the name of the free cultivator, this clearly identified the owner of the land and the person responsible for paying taxes. Assessment of taxes was to be based on productivity but was levied on the village as a unit. The record ensured that the government had the basis for knowing its expected revenues and planning its expenditure. All proprietary rights in land were with the daimyos or feudal lords.

Hideyoshi dreamt of world conquest. He launched an abortive invasion of Korea in 1592 but faced stiff resistance from the Korean and Chinese and he had to call off his invasion. The dream of invading China and later India ended in failure. Part of the failure was also due to his inability to recognize the importance of naval power. However, for Japan an important benefit of this failed invasion was the arrival of many Korean artisans, particularly potters who settled in areas of Kyushu, which became an important centre for ceramic production.

1.10 EMERGENCE OF TOKUGAWA'S POWER

When Hideyoshi died Tokugawa Ieyasu was the strongest daimyo with holdings twice as large as any other daimyo (2.3 million koku). Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616) had been powerful in eastern Japan since the time of Nobunaga and his relations with Hideyoshi had see-sawed but both realized that confrontation was not advisable. Ieyasu, after Hideyoshi's death, established his supremacy by forming an alliance with other daimyo's and they defeated their rivals on 20th October 1600 on the field of Sekigahara. On the strength of this alliance Tokugawa Ieyasu was appointed Shogun in 1603 and his authority as the leader was confirmed. Ieyasu has been glorified in later accounts so that the work of his successors has been largely overlooked but he did play a major role in laying the basis of Tokugawa rule.

1.11 CONTROLLING THE BARBARIANS OR EMISHI

Till the fifteenth century the Ainu were able to hold their territories but from the sixteenth century rulers in the Tohoku region established a foothold in what is called Hokkaido. These rulers acknowledged Ieyasu's rule and changed their name to Matsumae, which gave its name to their castle town in southern Hokkaido. The rest of the area, known as zo then was populated by Ainu. Clashes and disease led to a reduction of population and a major rebellion in 1669 by the Ainu was put down severely. Edo rule extended upto Matsumae and Matsumae managed relations with the Ainu. Trade was largely in timber and fish and fish meal used as fertilizer. This was the pattern of relationships between Edo and the outlying territories of the Ryukyu islands. Here the han of Satsuma handled trade and diplomatic relations. Similarly the han of Tsushima handled relations with Korea.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Describe the main features of Classical period in Japan.

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- 2) What were the main contributions of Hidoyeshi as a ruler?

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- 3) Briefly discuss the rise of Tokugawa.

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1.12 LET US SUM UP

This brief introduction to the history of Japan till the sixteenth century covers a very long period. This is to introduce some of the main developments that have shaped Japan. The Japanese islands lay on the fringes of the Asian continent, close to the China, the dominant power in the region. Rulers on the Japanese islands always had the example of China but hardly ever faced the prospect of direct rule. They borrowed heavily but adapted freely. The tension of having to assert their difference has been a major factor in Japanese history.

The Japanese islands were also part of an intricate maritime network that brought in people, goods and ideas. The influence from the Pacific islands, for instance, can be seen in the language and architecture of Japan. Korean influences also played a vital role as can be seen in the early art and ceramics. The Koreans brought in sophisticated techniques of production.

The political organization created during this period developed from simple clan based groups to a sophisticated imperial state. The imperial state soon became one element in the system where other types of rulers vied for power. By the sixteenth century the daimyo ruled han became the successful form of rule. Yet the daimyo continued to give allegiance to the emperor, who even while lacking

political power continued as the source of legitimacy. This inviolability of the imperial institution continued and was used in the modern period to build a modern-nation state.

1.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See section 1.3
- 2) See section 1.4
- 3) See section 1.5

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See section 1.6 for details
- 2) See section 1.9
- 3) See sections 1.10 and 1.11



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