CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter emphasizes the importance of the T’ang dynasty of China in spreading civilization to Japan, Vietnam and Korea. Japanese historic development began with the Jomon culture and was replaced about 300 B.C.E. by immigrants from the Korean peninsula who established the Yayoi culture. They contributed their expertise in using bronze and iron. According to Chinese historians, a queen named Pimiko achieved a temporary hegemony over some regional states in the third century C.E. Emerging directly from the Yayoi culture was a period from 300-600 C.E. characterized by tomb mounds. The Yamato period is known to us through Chinese records and the earliest Japanese accounts of its own history: Records of Ancient Matters and Records of Japan. They recall political power struggles at court between aristocratic families and constant wars in outlying regions. The Yamato period continued to be influenced by Koreans who introduced Buddhism to Japan in 532. The indigenous religion of Japan, however, was an animistic worship of the forces of nature called Shinto or "the way of the gods."
A major turning point in Japanese history was its adoption of the higher civilization of China beginning in the early seventh century. Official embassies began to China in 607 C.E. that included traders, students and Buddhist monks, as well as representatives of the great Yamato kings. The emperor Temmu (673-686) established a kingship along Chinese lines, styling himself as the "heavenly emperor." The emperors at the Nara (710-794) and Heian (794-1156) courts in Japan were both Confucian rulers with the majesty accorded by Chinese law, and Shinto rulers descended from the Sun Goddess. Protected by an aura of the sacred, their lineage was never usurped; all Japanese history constitutes a single dynasty. The chapter then details the Japanese governmental structure, noting the similarities and differences with that of China.

The land system of Nara and Heian Japan was the "equal field system" of the early T'ang. However, this gave way to the "quota and estate" system that contributed to the rise of Samurai society. The court gave each governor a tax quota and he in turn gave one to each district magistrate; any amount collected over the quota, they kept. In this way, a new local ruling class was created. The nobility became exempt from taxation on their estates.

The conscript armies of the Nara had proved ineffective so the courts abolished conscription and began a new system based on local mounted warriors called samurai ("those who serve"). Their primary weapon was the bow and arrow, used from the saddle. The samurai generally came from well-to-do local families who could afford to supply the costly weapons. Their initial function was to preserve local order and help with tax collection. But they also contributed to disorder as regional military coalitions formed from the tenth century. The chapter goes on to detail governmental institutions and administrative relationships during the late-Heian period. Power was often shared between emperors and noble clans such as the Fujiwara. In 1156, the House of Taira assumed control of Japan through support of a military coalition.

The culture in Heian Japan was quickly assimilated from the T'ang culture of China and was the exclusive preserve of the aristocracy. This explains why aristocrats found commoners to be odd and hardly human. The Chinese tradition remained strong and most writing of the period, including legal codes, was done in Chinese. The Japanese often evaluated their actions in the mirror of Chinese history. Japanese writing developed in the ninth century with the introduction of the Kana, a syllabic script or alphabet. The greatest works of the period were the Pillow Book and the first novel, Tales of Genji, both written by women around 1010. These literary tracts reflect wit, sensitivity and psychological delineation of character.

In Japan, Buddhism grew gradually during the seventh and eighth centuries. The Japanese came to Buddhism not from the philosophical perspectives of Confucianism or Taoism, but from the magic and mystery of Shinto. The appeal of Buddhism to the early Japanese was in its colorful and elaborate rituals.
Two new Buddhist sects, the Tendai and Shingon, were established respectively by Saicho and Kukai in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. Shinto religion was generally absorbed into the faith and only disentangled from Buddhism in the mid-nineteenth century.

The year 1185 was a major turning point in Japanese history. It began a shift from centuries of rule by a civil aristocracy to centuries of military control. It saw the formation of the bakufu (tent government), a completely non-Chinese type of government under the initial leadership of Minamoto Yoritomo. Centering his rule in Kamakura, this bakufu lasted from 1185-1333. This period also saw the emergence of the shogun as the de facto ruler of Japan, though in theory he was but a military official of the emperor. It marked the beginning of new cultural forms and changes in family and social organization. The chapter details the rule of Yoritomo, Kamakura feudalism and the role of women in a warrior society.

Between 1331 and 1336, Japan entered upon a period of turmoil from which emerged a regional multistate system centering on Kyoto, called the Ashikaga Bakufu (1336-1467). Each region was based on a warrior band, and civil and military posts were fused, which provided a greater degree of control over the population.

The chapter concludes with an assessment of Buddhism and medieval culture. Zen, in particular, influenced the arts of medieval Japan. Aristocratic creativity was often seen as grounded in the experience of meditation. There were new art forms as well such as No Play, a kind of mystery drama with no parallels in East Asia.

**KEY POINTS AND VITAL CONCEPTS**

1. **Chinese Influence on Japan**: Chinese civilization was a key element in influencing the culture and government of Japan. Official embassies to China began in 607 C.E. and the Japanese who studied there played key roles in their government when they returned. Chinese writings were used in official documents, histories and legal codes. Japanese writing only developed with the Kana in the ninth century. The No Play of the Ashikaga period was a unique move away from Chinese influence.

2. **Shogun and Samurai**: By 1200, Japanese military forces had emerged as an organized and potent force for change or stability. The samurai warriors hailed primarily from local aristocracy and gave relative influence to provincial strongmen as a feudal society similar to the European experience developed. The Mongol invasions of 1274 and 1281 brought more power to the hands of the military as the country required protection. Peasants were reduced to serf status and the society was regulated. There is some dispute as to whether Japanese feudalism actually involved
iefs in exchange for military service, but there is no ambiguity as to the vassal relationship and the warrior ethic. At first the shogun served as the primary military commander for the emperor, but by 1200, emperors generally remained in a figurehead position.

3. **Japanese Chronology**: Japanese history has three main turning points, each marked by a major influx of outside culture and each followed by a massive restructuring of Japanese institutions:
   A) **Third century B.C.E. - 600 C.E.**: Old Stone Age Japan became an agricultural metal-working society.
   B) **600 - ca. 1850**: Japan is influenced by Chinese culture and leaps to a higher civilization with the development of a writing system, new technologies and philosophies.
   C) **Ca. 1850 - Present**: Japan encounters western civilizations. The second period can be further subdivided as follows:

   - 710 - 794: Nara Japan
   - 794 - 1156: Heian Japan
   - **Rule by Military Houses**
     - 1156 - 1180: Taira rule
     - 1185 - 1333: The Kamakura Bakufu (Yoritomo, Hojo, etc.)
     - 1333 - 1336: Disputed control
     - 1336 - 1467: The Ashikaga Bakufu

4. **Early Japanese History in World Perspective**: The spread of civilization in East Asia from its heartland in China was more rapid than in the West because the T'ang empire of China had been reestablished on a more vital plane. Vietnam, Korea and Japan all took advantage of the Chinese model. Yet, because of Japan's large population and distance from China, it proved eventually to be a strong variant to the Chinese pattern in East Asian civilization. Both Japan and western Europe had centuries of feudalism and both areas began as backward societies onto which "heartland cultures" were grafted during the first millennium C.E.
**SUGGESTED FILMS**

*Japan.* Bryan Julien. 27 min.

*Japan: An Historical Overview.* Cornet, Div. of Equire. 14 min.


*Japan: Harvesting the Land and Sea.* Encyclopaedia Britannica Ed. 26 min.

*Japan: Land of the Kami.* Film Library Holder. 26 min.

*Japanese Armor.* Japanese Broadcasting Company. 30 min.

*Japanese Calligraphy.* Film Library Holder. 17 min.

*The Japanese Sword as the Soul of Samurai.* Kensharo Production. 24 min.
