JAPAN: SHAPING A UNIQUE WORLDVIEW

- The land of the rising sun
- Nature’s role in Japan
- A self-sufficient country
- The Ainu: a case study
THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN

- For centuries, the Japanese described their country as the land of the rising sun.

- According to legend, Izangi, had a daughter named Amaterasu, known as the sun goddess.

- She secluded herself in a cave, while the world plunged into darkness.

- The other gods eventually tricked her into coming out, thus bringing back light and hope to the Japanese people.
THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN

• The rulers and emperors of Japan were considered the descendants of Amaterasu.
• The emperor was believed to be divine, he was the representative of the gods on earth.
• With a land area of 380,000 sq. km, Japan is about 60% the size of Alberta.
• By 1600 Japan’s population was 12 million, Alberta is less than 4 million today.
• [Link to video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ob7UHBI7Oc)
THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN

- Japan is an archipelago
- It consists of four main islands Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu as well as more than 300 smaller islands
- It stretches over 2500 km
THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN

• Forested mountains and steep valleys cover about 80% of the land
• 18% of the country is level enough to permit agriculture or settlement
• The largest flat area of Japan is less than 200 km across
• Japan’s population density is 337 people per sq. km, there are 35 nations with a higher population density

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9dFy6xBOBM&feature=related&
THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN

• The 185 km between Japan and Asia is very rough, travel is difficult
• The west coast of Japan has fewer bays and inlets, typical places for harbours, than the eastern side
• Prior to 1500, Europeans did not have the means to access Japan either from sailing across the Pacific or sailing around the southern tip of Africa and across the Indian Ocean
THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN

- There was some cultural exchange with China
- For example, the Japanese used the Chinese system of writing in characters, kanji
- Over time, the characters developed into a new system that combined kanji with Japanese characters called kana
- Modern Japanese uses three main scripts: Kanji, Hiragana, and Katakana
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWNHd_wtblM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWNHd_wtblM)
NATURES ROLE IN SHAPING JAPAN’S VIEW

• Most of Japan experiences distinct and predictable seasons, celebrations and rituals marks the change in seasons

• Cherry blossoms are most beloved flowers among the Japanese and the spring blooming of the cherry trees is a time of celebration

• Cherry blossoms represent many things to the Japanese
  – New beginnings
  – Beauty
  – The shortness of beauty and life
    – http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6YaMPXg1LU&
NATURES ROLE IN SHAPING JAPAN’S VIEW

• Nature has a dominant role in the culture of the Ainu, Japan's indigenous people.

• The Ainu regard things like fire, water, wind, thunder, animals and plants as gods called kamuy, who visit the earthly world.

• The brown bear is one of the most important kamuy and is the inspiration for an elaborate annual ceremony.

• [http://e360.yale.edu/feature/in_japans Managed Landscape a Struggle to Save the Bears/2204/](http://e360.yale.edu/feature/in_japans Managed Landscape a Struggle to Save the Bears/2204/)

• Our culture and language are inspired by nature, so is our art.

— Kayano Shigero, Member of the Diet
NATURE’S ROLE IN SHAPING JAPAN’S VIEW

• Shinto is the ancient religion of Japan
• The love of nature is the most important aspect of Shinto
• Many traditional Japanese arts, such as flower arranging and garden design are based on the Shinto idea of harmony with nature
• Shinto does not have a founder and there are no religious laws
• Buddhism and Confucianism were brought from China and adapted, to form a distinctly Japanese form of worship
NATURE’S ROLE IN SHAPING JAPAN’S VIEW

• Many Japanese households have a Buddhist altar called a butsdan, they also have a small shrine called a kamidana

• Water and rice are offered in both the butsudan and the kamidana

• [http://jpnreligions.weebly.com/household-rituals.html](http://jpnreligions.weebly.com/household-rituals.html)
NATURE’S ROLE IN SHAPING JAPAN’S VIEW

• Japan is located in an area where it is susceptible to multiple natural disasters
• Earthquakes, volcanoes, typhoons and tsunamis are among the extreme phenomena Japan deals with
• Typhoons are violent tropical storms like hurricanes, that develop over the Pacific Ocean

• http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSx_gisp24w&
• http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkHLQfe3dw4&
A SELF SUFFICIENT COUNTRY

• Prior to it reopening in 1853, Japan’s farmers and fishers provided sufficient food to feed the people

• Wood for building and fuel came from abundant forests

• Silkworms and cotton plants provided material for clothing

• Skilled artisans made use of available metals

• Although farm land in Japan is limited, it is very fertile
A SELF-SUFFICIENT COUNTRY

- A temperate climate and dependable rainfall provide a longer growing season than is available in Canada
- Japan’s climate includes a brief winter, so growing food to last through that season was a challenge
- The seas provides fish, one of the main sources of protein in Japan
- Another staple crop is seaweed, which is high in vitamins and mineral salts
- Soy is also an important part of the Japanese diet
A SELF SUFFICIENT COUNTRY

• Rice is the main food in Japan
• Rice requires the right amount of moisture, which is brought in by monsoon winds
• For centuries rice was the Japanese currency
• The value of land was determined by the estimated amount of rice it could produce
• A lord’s rank and wealth was related to the total rice production
  • [Link](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ws6MTMNNr3A&)
  • [Link](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ra_xSOcv8xQ&)


A HOMOGENEOUS SOCIETY

- A homogeneous society consists of people who see themselves as having a similar nature and character.
- The geographical factor that most assisted the development of a homogeneous society in Japan was the sea.
- Most of the society lived along the seas and this created a communication and trading corridor for them.
- Ideas, beliefs and values were exchanged.
AINU: A CASE STUDY

• The Ainu lived in the northern part of Japan for several thousand years in an area called Ezochi, land of the Ezo

• The word Ainu means human in the Ainu language

• They had their own separate society and territory, but eventually other Japanese began to take over their lands

• Eventually the Ainu territory officially became a part of Japan and the island where most of them lived was renamed Hokkaido

• [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=endv3PVpXFg&](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=endv3PVpXFg&)
AINU: A CASE STUDY

- The Japanese began a program of assimilation
- Assimilation means to make similar
- A dominant society that tries to get the minority to give up its language and customs is attempting assimilation
  - They were forbidden to speak their language
  - practice many of their customs,
  - were restricted into living in areas provided for them by the government
  - They were given land to farm, even though they were traditionally a hunting and fishing society
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcX37genDxM&](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcX37genDxM&)