



Families of Japan

Teacher's Guide

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Families of Japan----Seichi 9 Years Old

The leaves still show signs of last night's rain, as the sun rises on our farm near Furukawa, Japan.

It's about 7 o'clock when mother wakes us for school.

My name is Seichi and I live with my parents, my two sisters and our grandparents.

After breakfast we all have chores to do before we leave for school. Haruna feeds our pet rabbit. Grandfather sweeps the yard. I feed the chickens and bring in the eggs. Grandmother and mother open the green houses, so the air inside doesn't get too hot during the day. I'm watering squash seeds we planted a few days ago. At night we close the greenhouses to keep in the warm air. That way we can grow vegetables like this all winter, so we can sell them at the market in Furukawa.

Mother is in charge of growing and selling our vegetables.

Grandmother is in charge of growing and selling flowers and bonsai. Bonsai are trees that are kept small, but are cut and shaped to look like big trees.

We have lots of old trees and plants on our farm, because our family has lived on this land for 14 generations.

We sell bamboo shoots from our grove. We cut the shoots when they're young and tender. People usually cook bamboo with other vegetables, and sometimes with meat or fish.

Our area is famous for the kind of rice we grow. It gets moist and sticky when it's cooked. We plant rice in fields that are flooded with water. Usually we use rice planters like this.

The young plants are grown, so that the machine can plant one at a time. Rice planters are very expensive and most farms are small, so farmers often pay someone else to plant their fields by machine. All rice used to be planted by hand, but now most farmers just add plants in places the machine missed.

When the plants grow larger, we drain the water from the fields. Then, in the late summer, when the kernels look like this, the rice is ready to harvest. The kernels have an outer layer, or husk, that's removed before the rice is sold.

After we finish our chores and change into our school clothes, Haruna and I walk to school with our friends from nearby farms. Our older sister, Chinatsu, went earlier because she's a crossing guard.

I'm in 4th grade. Our teacher is taking role to see who is absent today. This morning we're studying Japanese. One kind of written Japanese is based on Chinese characters. Each character stands for a whole idea or thing, such as "house" or "water". We have to memorize about 1800 characters in order to graduate from high school.

We also use another kind of character or letter to write Japanese. 50 characters are combined in different ways to make words that can be sounded out.

When it's break time, we end the class with a bow to our teacher.

Students take turns serving lunch in our classroom. Before we start, we say we're grateful for the meal we're about to eat. We keep toothbrushes at school so we can brush after lunch.

After school, Haruna has a snack while Mother starts rice for dinner tonight. Scrubbing the rice for a long time improves the taste. We have rice at most meals and usually have several other dishes to eat with it, especially in the evening. Most people use a rice steamer. Mother says we're lucky to have our own vegetables, chicken and eggs, so we know they're always fresh.

Grandmother loves to watch Sumo wrestling. Every other month there are Sumo tournaments on TV. Whoever pushes the other wrestler to the floor or out of the ring wins, so being heavy can be an advantage. The wrestlers eat a special diet to help them gain weight. They live with their teachers in their training school from the time they're young until they retire.

I'm doing my homework. Kids our age usually have 30 minutes to an hour of homework each day.

Then Haruna and I help get dinner ready. After that, we have some time to play before we eat. My sister, Chinatsu, finishes setting the table.

People in Japan think it's important for food to look as good as it tastes. And Grandmother helps with the cooking.

Everyone usually eats together in the evening, except father, who doesn't get home from work until 8 or 9 at night.

We're rolling rice in thin sheets of nori, which is a sea plant. It's easy because the rice sticks together. For a special occasion, mother sometimes makes sushi, where she rolls vegetables or fish in with the rice.

Before we go to bed, my job is to make sure the tub is clean. We have a special routine at night. First, in order to get clean, we take a shower. Then, in order to relax, we have a nice long soak.

When we're ready for bed, Mother helps us roll out our mattress, or futon. During the day they're kept in the closet, so we can use our room to play or study. Our farm house is bigger than most city homes in Japan.

It's Saturday morning, so we only have a half day of school and Father will come home from work at noon. Father works at the agricultural cooperative in Furukawa, studying how to grow crops better. Here he's measuring rice plants grown in different ways to discover how to improve the quality.

Mother washes clothes in the washing machine. But when it's not raining, instead of using the clothes drier, she likes to hang them in the courtyard to dry.

Mother often makes noodles at noon, because they're fast and we love them. When we eat food in bowls, like soup or noodles, we bring the bowl up to our mouth and scoop the food in with chopsticks. It's OK to be noisy.

Grandfather is going to his Tango class. The Tango is a dance from South America. First the class learns the steps without music. Then they practice with a partner. Finally when they know the steps, they try it with music.

After lunch we all go shopping for Sports Day, which is tomorrow. The whole family spends the day at school. We'll take a picnic lunch, so today

we get to pick our favorite foods to bring. Food is expensive, so we shop carefully. As a special treat we get to go to the candy store. It's hard to decide what to get with so much to choose from. Shopping is taking too long for Haruna. She's run out of energy.

Later in the afternoon we're invited to our cousin's engagement ceremony. Young people often use matchmakers or go-betweens to help them meet someone they might like to marry. If the couple likes each other, they date for a while to get to know each other better. If they decide to get married, some couples have a traditional engagement ceremony like this. The couple and their families drink rice wine, called sake, to symbolize the new ties between the families. Then everyone has a wonderful meal to celebrate.

Today is the big day we've been waiting for...Sports Day! Our teachers have set up tents around the playing fields for our families to sit during the day. The ceremonies start off with firecrackers. The classes are divided into four teams with students from every class. The teams compete against each other to see which team can win the most points during the day. My team is yellow.

Everyone does warm up exercises before we start the games. We have all kinds of contests and races. That's Chinatsu out in front. Students are putting up the finish line. Other students quickly take the winners to receive their awards before the next race starts.

The 6th graders plan Sports Day with help from the teachers. They try to have something happening all the time. Even the youngest kids participate. We jump rope in exercise class, so we learned a special routine for today. The little kids learned a routine too.

We all like this contest. Whichever team gets the most balls in the basket, wins. To see who wins, each team throws a ball in the air as the announcer counts. The other teams have run out of balls and my team is still throwing balls in the air! That means we won!!

At the end of the day our team has the most points. We're tired and happy as we leave the field to go home. We don't even want to watch TV tonight!

Goodnight!

Families of Japan----Ayako 9 years old

It's about 6 o'clock when my parents get up to get ready for work.

Father always reads the paper after breakfast. Japanese newspapers and books are printed so that we turn pages from left to right, and read from right to left, just the opposite of English.

Father leaves for work at about 7:00 o'clock.

I get to sleep until 7:30. My name is Ayako Yano and I'm 9 years old. I live with my parents and grandmother in Sendai, Japan.

Mother, Grandmother and I usually have breakfast together. Today we're having eggs, bread, grapefruit and coffee for breakfast. By the time we clean up, I'm more awake. I have a few minutes to watch TV before I have to leave for school.

Mother and Father work together at their office downtown, but before she leaves for work, Mother does some laundry and reads the paper.

My grandparents built this house about 30 years ago, and we added on to it three years ago. Our family is unusual because we live in my mother's home. It's more common that families live with the husband's mother and father, especially in the past. But as cities have become more crowded and houses and apartments more and more expensive, houses and apartments are often too small for everyone to live together.

Mother drives her car to work at about 8:30. In Japan we drive on the left side of the road. Most people take a bus or train to work, but mother needs to use her car during the day. Mother uses a parking garage near her office. She leaves her car in a garage with a big revolving lift.

She and Father run a company that helps people get official papers they need to buy or sell property.

Mother can often walk to the places she goes to pick up and deliver papers. Today she's going to the government building where official documents are kept. But she often has to drive to a business or bank. Then she gets her car out of the garage.

Mother and Father's business is in downtown Sendai, and Mother likes to walk around the city at lunchtime. A shop near their office makes official seals. Each family has a seal, or sign, carved just for them. They dip the seal in ink and stamp the family sign on letters and documents instead of writing their name.

While Mother and Father are at work, I'm at school. We each have a locker where we keep our indoor shoes. This morning we're practicing our cheering for Sports Day, which is next week. We'll also perform this traditional dance from Okinawa. Okinawa is one of Japan's outer islands. It's also a prefecture, which is like a state.

While we practice, cooks are making lunch in the school kitchen. When we come back to our classrooms, lunch is delivered there, and students take turns serving and cleaning up. Today we're having squash soup, rice, and pork slices.

In the afternoon we take a math test. Then each of us works on an electric car we're putting together from kits for science class.

After school, we take turns cleaning the school. Then most students take part in some kind of club after school. There are a lot to choose from: This club is learning to communicate with deaf people using sign language.

The cooking club is voting on what to make next week. They're tied between pan cakes and french fries. So the group decides to make pan cakes one week and french fries the next.

This is the Cartoon club. Comic books, animation and cartoons are very popular in Japan. Even adults like them. There's a science club, a sewing club, and all kinds of sports.

When I get home at about 3, I usually have about a half-hour of homework to do. Today, we're supposed to look at our family's water bill to figure out how much water we used and how much it cost.

When I finish my homework, I practice the piano. I can turn on a button that silences the piano so that only I can hear it in my earphones. That way it won't bother the neighbors.

Today I have a calligraphy lesson in our neighbor's home. Calligraphy is making beautiful Japanese characters with a brush and ink. We each fill 15 sheets of paper. When we finish, our teacher makes a spiral if they're right. If they're not, she shows us how to improve them.

When Mother gets home from work, we go shopping. In order to save space, tall buildings often have many different stores, with parking on the roof. Our grocery store is on the 6th floor. We're buying vegetables for dinner. This is daikon, a kind of Japanese radish.

When we get back, mother and Grandmother put the heater under the table, covered by a warm quilt. When we sit at the table, we stay toasty warm.

While Grandmother watches Sumo wrestling, I play in the garden. Grandfather started this garden when the house was built. Now that he has died, Mother takes care of it.

Mother is making dinner. She's cutting up mushrooms and fried tofu to put into miso soup. Then she adds the daikon we bought at the store.

Tonight we're having bamboo shoots, yams and mushrooms cooked in soy sauce, rice, tofu, cooked greens, and miso soup. Grandmother, Mother and I usually eat at about 6 o'clock, but Father doesn't get home from work until 8 or 9 at night.

When he comes home, we all greet him at the door. After he changes clothes and eats, he likes to watch TV in his study.

When it's time for bed, Mom helps me wash and dry my hair.

Goodnight!

Glossary

bonsai: Trees or shrubs that are grown in pots. They are kept small, but are cut and shaped to look like full-grown trees.

calligraphy: The art of making beautiful characters with a brush and ink.

character: A symbol or mark used in a writing system.

chopsticks: A pair of slender wooden, ivory, or plastic sticks used as eating utensils in Asian countries and restaurants.

bambo: A tropical plant having hard-walled stems with ringed joints.

daikon: A Japanese radish.

futon: A flexible mattress that can be rolled up and stored during the day.

miso: A paste made from soy beans.

nori: A nourishing plant harvested from the sea and often used in Japanese cooking, especially in sushi.

sake (or saki): Rice wine.

seal: A family sign or signature usually carved out of wood or stone. The seal is dipped in ink and stamped on letters and documents instead of writing the family name.

sumo: A Japanese sport where the wrestler that pushes his opponent to the floor or out of the ring wins.

sushi: A Japanese dish consisting of thin layers of fresh raw fish or vegetables wrapped around a cake of cooked rice.

Tofu: A custard-like, protein-rich food made from soybeans.

yen: The basic Japanese currency.

Discussion and Activities After Viewing

Discuss how your children's lives and schools are different from Japanese children's. How are they similar?

Ask the class to describe the roles of the men and women in the video.

Have the class point out activities; items or ways of doing things that are only found in Japan.

What differences did the class see between the Japanese city and farm families?

More than four-fifths of Japan is mountainous. Most people live in densely populated areas along the coasts. What are some of the ways Japanese people have adapted to living in small spaces?

If children have friends or relatives from Japan, ask the children to interview them and bring in items, photos, and stories about them.

Invite someone from Japan to talk with the class about growing up in Japan, play a traditional instrument, or tell a Japanese story.

Questions

1. Why is food expensive in Japan?
2. How do the Japanese people and Chinese people differ?
3. Why do Japanese use Chinese characters to write?
4. How do the Japanese save space in their home?
5. How do they save space in Japan?

Questions and Answers

1. Why is food expensive in Japan?

The government wants to be sure that the farms are not abandoned and the country become completely dependent on imports. Prices are high so farmers will keep farming

2. How do the Japanese people and Chinese people differ?

Their languages are very different. Chinese language use tones while the Japanese do not. Japanese people are a mixture of Polynesian, North Asian and perhaps Southeast Asian peoples.

3. Why do Japanese use Chinese characters to write?

The Japanese use Chinese characters because when they first made contact with the Chinese, about one thousand five hundred years ago, the Chinese had already developed an advanced civilization with a written language. Since the Japanese were less developed and had no written language, they borrowed the language from the Chinese. Only later did they develop their own written language, which is like an alphabet. But by then use of Chinese characters had become so ingrained that they did not abandon it.

4. How do the Japanese save space in their home?

The beds or futons are rolled away during the day. The dinner table are often put away too. They shop daily so that the refrigerator does not take too much room. They make the manufacturers of products make everything small and light, such as TVs, radio, air-conditioners and such.

5. How do they save space in their cities?

They have excellent public transportation so there needs be less space for roads and parking spaces. They use high rise garages. They have high rise buildings with bowling alleys, restaurants, theaters, shopping centers and gyms.

Some Things We've Learned About Japan

(Circle the correct answer)

1. T F Teachers plan Sports Day activities.
2. T F Japan has a tropical climate with no cold weather.
3. T F Nori is a kind of bamboo.
4. T F A seal is often used instead of a signature to sign letters and legal documents in Japan.
5. T F Bonsai are large palm trees.
6. T F In Japan it's OK to make noise when you eat.
7. T F In Japan most married couples live with the wife's parents.
8. T F Calligraphy is a Japanese dance.
9. T F Bonsai is a style of wrestling.
10. T F A Japanese prefecture is like a state in the US.
11. T F It's bad manners to eat with your hands in Japan.
12. Name some things Seichi's family (the farm family) raises to sell.

13. What should you remember to do when you enter a Japanese home?

14. Why does the parking garage put cars on an elevator and turn table?

15. Draw a picture of the school club you would choose if you went to Ayako's school.

16. Draw pictures of the parts of Ayako or Seichi's life. Try to draw as many details as you can remember of each part.

Introduction

Japan is famous around the world for its well-made manufactures, for its sushi and for its animation products. It is the home of samurai castles, Zen gardens and Mount Fuji.

The Land

Japan is an island country about the size of Norway, California or Paraguay. It consists of 4 main islands and many smaller islands. Four-fifths mountains with many volcanoes, the land is also seismically active, with the last major earthquake occurring in the Osaka-Kobe region in 1985. The country gets around 1000 earthquakes a year, most of them too small to notice.

The Climate

The climate is temperate, with the warm waters of the Japan Current moderating the continental weather. Summer monsoons bring rain to the Pacific side of the islands, while winter monsoons bring rain to the Sea of Japan side of the islands. The northernmost island of Hokkaido has a mean January temperature of 16 degrees Fahrenheit (-9 Centigrade), while the southern island of Kyushu the mean January temperature is 45 degrees Fahrenheit (7 Centigrade).

Plant and Animal Life

As much as two thirds of Japan is covered with forests and woodlands, these range from semi-tropical rainforest in the Ryuku islands to coniferous forests in the north. Notable animals include the giant Japanese salamander, bear, deer and antelopes.

The People

The Japanese people are fairly homogeneous. The vast majority works in services and industry, with only 5% working in agriculture, fishing, and forestry. 95% of her students graduate from high school and the literacy rate is almost 100%. The country prides itself in having a very broad middle class and very low crime levels. The country is highly urbanized with the capital city of Tokyo having a population of over 20 million people.

The very traditional roles in child-rearing and housework responsibilities of women have discouraged child bearing. On average each woman only has 1.22 children in her lifetime. At the same time, the Japanese have one of the highest life expectancies in the world. On average women can expect to live to 82 and men 79. This means that Japan has one of the oldest populations of any country. Such low fertility and high life expectancy will mean continued slow growth in the future.

Religion

Shinto, the native religion of Japan; Buddhism, Confucianism, and even Christianity all play a role in contemporary Japanese social life, and are defining in some way of the Japanese worldview. Religions for the most part, are not exclusive of each other. Shinto grew out of a reverence for the manifestations of nature such as sun, water, rocks, trees and even sounds. All such natural features were felt to have their god and shrines were erected in particularly sacred spots. Many Shinto beliefs were incorporated into Japanese Buddhist practices after its introduction in the 6th century.

History

Humans have lived in Japan for tens of thousands of years. It is believed that these earliest settlers were fishers, hunters and food gatherers who came over the land bridges from Korea to the west and Siberia to the north. It's also thought that seafaring migrants from Polynesia were part of the ethnic blend. The earliest pottery in the world, from ten thousand years ago, are found in Japan. There is also evidence of early agriculture and large settlements. Around 250 BCE, a new culture characterized by the wet cultivation of rice, iron implements and mounted warriors appear in Japan. The burial goods suggest a Korean origin of the new culture as identical items are found in Korea at the same period. By 300 AD, the sun-worshipping Yamato kingdom had loosely unified the nation through conquest and alliance. Buddhism was introduced from China in the mid-6th century and soon became the state religion. Presenting Shinto deities as manifestations of Buddha diffused the conflict between Buddhism and Shinto, the traditional religion of Japan. Many students from Japan went to Tang dynasty China to study. A tremendous amount of cultural borrowing ensued.

With the empire more or less stable, particularly after the conquest of the indigenous Ainu in the 9th century, Japan's emperors began to devote more time to leisure and scholarly pursuits and less time to government. The noble but corrupt Fujiwara family dominated important court posts. Out in the provinces, younger members of the Imperial family and lower ranking aristocrats established their own power base of armed men. These feudal lords supported by a class of *samurai* warriors ended the old monarchical system of court and aristocracy. In 1185 after assuming the rank of *shogun* (military leader), Yoritomo Minamoto set up his headquarters in Kamakura, while the emperor remained the nominal ruler in Kyoto. This was the beginning of a long period of feudal rule by successive samurai families, which lingered until imperial power was restored in 1868.

The Kamakura Period (1185-1333) saw two invasions by Kublai Khan's Mongol armies. Japan managed to stave off the Mongols with the help of typhoons, but the financial strain of the effort led to dissension among the warrior class. Regional lords gradually grew to great powers and the country was often in strife. The various factions were pacified and unified during the 1550s by Oda Nobunaga and his successor Toyotomi Hideyoshi. The quick spread of Christianity during this period was tolerated at first, and then ferociously quashed as the interloping religion came to be seen as a threat. During the Tokugawa Period (1600-1867), Tokugawa Ieyasu defeated Hideyoshi's young heir and set up his headquarters at Edo (now Tokyo). By the turn of the 19th century, the Tokugawa government was stagnant and corrupt. Foreign ships started to probe Japan's isolation with increasing insistence and famine and poverty weakened support for the government. In 1853 Admiral Matthew Perry led a squadron of US naval vessels into Tokyo Bay and forced open Japan to western trade.

In 1867 the ruling shogun resigned and Emperor Meiji resumed control of state affairs, seeing Japan through a crash course in westernization and industrialization. In 1889, Japan created a western-style constitution, together with an emphasis on traditional values. Japan's growing confidence was demonstrated by the ease with which it defeated China in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-5) and its victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5). Japan sided with the Allies in WWI but did not become heavily involved in conflict. Japan took the opportunity, through shipping and trade, to expand its economy at top speed. Emperor Hirohito ascended to the throne in 1926. A rising tide of nationalism was quickened by the world economic depression that began in 1930. Popular unrest led to a strong increase in the

power of the militarists: Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 and, in 1937, entered into full-scale hostilities against China.

Japan entered into WWII with a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. At first Japan scored rapid successes, pushing its battlefronts across to India, down to the fringes of Australia and out into the mid-Pacific. The Battle of Midway opened the US counterattack, destroying Japanese naval superiority and turning the tide of war against Japan. On August 1945, faced with a declaration of war by the Soviet Union and the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan surrendered unconditionally. Japan was occupied until 1952 by American forces that aimed to create a democracy and demilitarize the country. The emperor was made into a figurehead leader. A recovery program, American assistance, and hard work enabled the economy to expand rapidly and Japan became the world's most successful export economy, generating massive trade surpluses and dominating such fields as electronics, shipbuilding and car production. In the 1990s, Japan entered a decade of minimal growth due to earlier over-investment and the weakness that had caused to its banking system. Growth increased to around 2% from 2002-2007 as China's economic expansion increased demand for Japanese capital goods. The economy slowed again in 2008 and 2009 as oil price increases and slowing economies in the US and Europe and world financial crisis impacted exports.

Japan Fact Book



- Introduction
- Geography
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- Transportation
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Japan

Introduction

Background: While retaining its time-honored culture, Japan rapidly absorbed Western technology during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. After its devastating defeat in World War II, Japan recovered to become the second most powerful economy in the world and a staunch ally of the US. While the emperor retains his throne as a symbol of national unity, actual power rests in networks of powerful politicians, bureaucrats, and business executives.

Geography

Location: Eastern Asia, island chain between the North Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Japan, east of the Korean Peninsula

Geographic coordinates: 36 00 N, 138 00 E

Map references: Asia

Area:

total: 377,835 sq km

land: 374,744 sq km

water: 3,091 sq km

note: includes Bonin Islands (Ogasawara-gunto), Daito-shoto, Minami-jima, Okino-tori-shima, Ryukyu Islands (Nansei-shoto), and Volcano Islands (Kazan-retto)

Area - comparative: slightly smaller than California

Land boundaries: 0 km

Coastline: 29,751 km

Maritime claims:

exclusive economic zone: 200 nm

territorial sea: 12 nm; between 3 nm and 12 nm in the international straits - La Perouse or Soya, Tsugaru, Osumi, and Eastern and Western Channels of the Korea or Tsushima Strait

Climate: varies from tropical in south to cool temperate in north

Terrain: mostly rugged and mountainous

Elevation extremes:

lowest point: Hachiro-gata -4 m

highest point: Fujiyama 3,776 m

Natural resources: negligible mineral resources, fish

Land use:

arable land: 11%

permanent crops: 1%

permanent pastures: 2%

forests and woodland: 67%

other: 19% (1993 est.)

Irrigated land: 25,920 sq km (2003 est.)

Natural hazards: many dormant and some active volcanoes; about 1,500 seismic occurrences (mostly tremors) every year; tsunamis

Environment - current issues: air pollution from power plant emissions results in acid rain; acidification of lakes and reservoirs degrading water quality and threatening aquatic life; Japan is one of the largest consumers of fish and tropical timber, contributing to the depletion of these resources in Asia and elsewhere

Environment - international agreements:

party to: Antarctic-Environmental Protocol, Antarctic Treaty, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Desertification, Endangered Species, Environmental Modification, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Nuclear

Test Ban, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Tropical Timber 83,
Tropical Timber 94, Wetlands, Whaling
signed, but not ratified: Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol
Geography - note: strategic location in northeast Asia

People

Population: 127,088,000 (July 2009 est.)

Age structure:

0-14 years: 13.7%

15-64 years: 64.7%

65 years and over: 21.6% (2008 est.)

Population growth rate: -0.191% (2009 est.)

Birth rate: 7.64 births/1,000 population (2009 est.)

Death rate: 9.54 deaths/1,000 population (2009 est.)

Infant mortality rate: 2.79 deaths/1,000 live births (2009 est.)

Life expectancy at birth:

total population: 80.7 years

male: 77.51 years

female: 84.05 years (2000 est.)

Total fertility rate: 1.22 children born/woman (2008 est.)

Nationality:

noun: Japanese (singular and plural)

adjective: Japanese

Ethnic groups: Japanese 99.4%, other 0.6% (mostly Korean)

Religions: observe both Shinto and Buddhist 84%, other 16% (including Christian 0.7%)

Languages: Japanese

Literacy:

definition: age 15 and over can read and write

total population: 99% (2009 est.)

Government

Country name: Japan

Data code: JA

Government type: constitutional monarchy

Capital: Tokyo

Administrative divisions: 47 prefectures; Aichi, Akita, Aomori, Chiba, Ehime, Fukui, Fukuoka, Fukushima, Gifu, Gumma, Hiroshima, Hokkaido, Hyogo, Ibaraki, Ishikawa, Iwate, Kagawa, Kagoshima, Kanagawa, Kochi, Kumamoto, Kyoto, Mie, Miyagi, Miyazaki, Nagano, Nagasaki, Nara, Niigata, Oita, Okayama, Okinawa, Osaka, Saga, Saitama, Shiga, Shimane, Shizuoka, Tochigi, Tokushima, Tokyo, Tottori, Toyama, Wakayama, Yamagata, Yamaguchi, Yamanashi

Independence: 660 BC (traditional founding by Emperor Jimmu)

National holiday: Birthday of the Emperor, 23 December (1933)

Constitution: 3 May 1947

Legal system: modeled after European civil law system with English-American influence; judicial review of legislative acts in the Supreme Court; accepts compulsory ICJ jurisdiction, with reservations

Suffrage: 20 years of age; universal

Executive branch:

chief of state: Emperor AKIHITO (since 7 January 1989)

head of government: Prime Minister Yukio HATOYAMA (since 16 September 2009) *cabinet:* Cabinet appointed by the prime minister

elections: none; the monarch is hereditary; the Diet designates the prime minister; the constitution requires that the prime minister must command a parliamentary majority, therefore, following legislative elections, the leader of the majority party or leader of a majority coalition in the House of Representatives usually becomes prime minister

Legislative branch: bicameral Diet or Kokkai consists of the House of Councillors or Sangi-in (252 seats; one-half of the members elected every three years - 76 seats of which are elected from the 47 multi-seat prefectural districts and 50 of which are elected from a single nationwide list with voters casting ballots by party; members elected by popular vote to serve six-year terms) and the House of Representatives or Shugi-in (500 seats - 200 of which are elected from 11 regional blocks on a proportional representation basis and 300 of which are elected from 300 single-seat districts; members elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms)

Judicial branch: Supreme Court, chief justice is appointed by the monarch after designation by the cabinet, all other justices are appointed by the cabinet

Political parties and leaders: Democratic Party of Japan or DPJ; Japan Communist Party or JCP; Liberal Democratic Party or LDP; Reform Club; Social Democratic Party; Komeito

International organization participation: AfDB, APEC, AsDB, Australia Group, BIS, CCC, CE (observer), CERN (observer), CP, EBRD, ESCAP, FAO, G- 5, G- 7, G-10, IADB, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICC, ICFTU, ICRM, IDA, IEA, IFAD, IFC, IFRCs, IHO, ILO, IMF, IMO, Inmarsat, Intelsat, Interpol, IOC, IOM, ISO, ITU, NAM (guest), NEA, NSG, OAS (observer), OECD, OPCW, OSCE (partner), PCA, UN, UNCTAD, UNDOF, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNIDO, UNITAR, UNRWA, UNU, UPU, WFTU, WHO, WIPO, WMO, WToO, WTrO, ZC

Diplomatic representation in the US:

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consulate(s) general: Hagatna (Guam), Anchorage, Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Honolulu, Houston, Kansas City (Missouri), Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York, Portland (Oregon), San Francisco, and Seattle

consulate(s): Saipan (Northern Mariana Islands)

Diplomatic representation from the US:

embassy: 10-5, Akasaka 1-chome, Minato-ku, Tokyo 107-8420

mailing address: Unit 45004, Box 205, APO AP 96337-5004

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FAX: [81] (3) 3224-5856

consulate(s) general: Naha (Okinawa), Osaka-Kobe, Sapporo

consulate(s): Fukuoka, Nagoya

Flag description: white with a large red disk (representing the sun without rays) in the center

Economy

Economy - overview: Government-industry cooperation, a strong work ethic, mastery of high technology, and a comparatively small defense allocation (1% of GDP) have helped Japan advance with extraordinary rapidity to the rank of second most technologically powerful economy in the world after the US and third largest economy in the world after the US and China. One notable characteristic of the economy is the working together of manufacturers, suppliers, and distributors in closely knit groups called keiretsu. A second basic feature has been the guarantee of lifetime employment for a substantial portion of the urban labor force. Both features are now eroding. Industry, the most important sector of the economy, is heavily dependent on imported raw materials and fuels. The much smaller

agricultural sector is highly subsidized and protected, with crop yields among the highest in the world. Usually self-sufficient in rice, Japan must import about 50% of its requirements of other grain and fodder crops. Japan maintains one of the world's largest fishing fleets and accounts for nearly 15% of the global catch. For three decades overall real economic growth had been spectacular: a 10% average in the 1960s, a 5% average in the 1970s, and a 4% average in the 1980s. Growth slowed markedly in 1992-95 largely because of the aftereffects of overinvestment during the late 1980s and contractionary domestic policies intended to wring speculative excesses from the stock and real estate markets. Growth picked up to 3.9% in 1996, largely a reflection of stimulative fiscal and monetary policies as well as low rates of inflation. But in 1997-98 Japan experienced a wrenching recession, centered about financial difficulties in the banking system and real estate markets and exacerbated by rigidities in corporate structures and labor markets. From 2000 to 2001, government efforts to revive economic growth proved short lived and were hampered by the slowing of the US, European, and Asian economies. In 2002-07, growth improved and the lingering fears of deflation in prices and economic activity lessened, leading the central bank to raise interest rates to 0.25% in July 2006, up from the near 0% rate of the six years prior, and to 0.50% in February 2007. In addition, the 10-year privatization of Japan Post, which has functioned not only as the national postal delivery system but also, through its banking and insurance facilities as Japan's largest financial institution, was completed in October 2007, marking a major milestone in the process of structural reform. Nevertheless, Japan's huge government debt, which totals 192% of GDP, and the aging of the population are two major long-run problems. Some fear that a rise in taxes could endanger the current economic recovery. Debate also continues on the role of and effects of reform in restructuring the economy, particularly with respect to increasing income disparities.

GDP: purchasing power parity - \$4.14 trillion (2009 est.)

GDP - real growth rate: -5.7% (2009 est.)

GDP - per capita: purchasing power parity - \$32,600 (2009 est.)

GDP - composition by sector:

agriculture: 1.4%

industry: 26.5%

services: 72% (2007 est.)

Population below poverty line: NA%

Household income or consumption by percentage share:

lowest 10%: 4.8%

highest 10%: 21.7%

Inflation rate (consumer prices): -1.3% (2009 est.)

Labor force: 65.97 million (2009)

Labor force - by occupation: trade and services 67%, industry 28%, agriculture, forestry, and fishing 5%

Unemployment rate: 5.6% (2009 est.)

Industries: among world's largest and technologically advanced producers of motor vehicles, electronic equipment, machine tools, steel and nonferrous metals, ships, chemicals; textiles, processed foods

Industrial production growth rate: 1.3% (2007est.)

Electricity - production: 1058 billion kWh (2007)

Electricity - production by source:

fossil fuel: 56.68%

hydro: 8.99%

nuclear: 31.93%

other: 2.4% (2009)

Agriculture - products: rice, sugar beets, vegetables, fruit; pork, poultry, dairy products, eggs; fish

Exports: \$677 billion (f.o.b., 2007 est.)

Exports - commodities: motor vehicles, semiconductors, office machinery, chemicals

Exports - partners: US 17%, China 17% , South Korea 7 %, Taiwan 6 %, Hong Kong 5.6% (2009)

Imports: \$572 billion (c.i.f., 2007 est.)

Imports - commodities: fuels, foodstuffs, chemicals, textiles, office machinery

Imports - partners: China 20.%, US 12%, Saudi Arabia 6.4%, UAE 5.5%, South Korea 4.8%, Australia 4.8% (2009)

Currency: yen

Exchange rates: yen per US\$1 – 94.5 (2009), 107 (June 2008), 124 (June 2007), 110.22 (2005), 105.16 (January 2000), 113.91 (1999), 130.91 (1998), 120.99 (1997), 108.78 (1996), 94.06 (1995)

Fiscal year: 1 April - 31 March

Communications

Telephones - main lines in use: 47 million (2009)

Telephones - mobile cellular: 110 million (2009)

Transportation

Railways:

total: 23,670.7 km

Highways:

total: 1,197,207 km

paved: 949,003 km (including 6,114 km of expressways)

unpaved: 289,204 km (2009 est.)

Waterways: about 1,770 km; seagoing craft ply all coastal inland seas

Ports and harbors: Akita, Amagasaki, Chiba, Hachinohe, Hakodate, Higashi-Harima, Himeji, Hiroshima, Kawasaki, Kinuura, Kobe, Kushiro, Mizushima, Moji, Nagoya, Osaka, Sakai, Sakaide, Shimizu, Tokyo, Tomakomai

Airports: 176 (2009 est.)

Airports - with paved runways: 144

Websites

<http://www.into.go.jp>

<http://jin.jcic.or.jp/atlas/>

Recipes

Ramen Noodle Soup (approximately 20 half-cup servings)

5 packages ramen noodle soup
5 carrots, cut into very thin sticks or slices
3 scallions, chopped
5-8 mushrooms sliced
2 or 3 Chinese cabbage or iceberg lettuce leaves, shredded
(optional) 1 Daikon radish, cut into very thin 2" long sticks
(optional) 1/2 pound snow peas
(optional) chopsticks

Make the soup according to package directions. Set aside while you cut the vegetables. When the soup is cool enough to eat, pour into small individual soup bowls. Each child can add a few of the vegetables to his/her bowl. Eat the soup by holding the bowl up to your mouth and pushing the noodles into your mouth with chopsticks.

Activity

Make a Fish Kite

A kite in the form of a carp is flown outside the home to celebrate Children's Day in Japan.

What you need:

Tagboard strips 1" x 12" (2.5 x 30.5cm)

Butcher paper, or similar

Crayons or felt pen

Glue, safety scissors, hole punch, string

Stick – 1 per child (bamboo plant stakes, thin branches etc)

Instructions

1. Form a ring by stapling the tag strip
2. Decorate the a 12" x 12" paper material with eyes, gills and scales using crayons or pens.
3. Cut long strips 6" x 1" to form fin strips
4. Glue fish body together to form a tube using 12" x 12" paper.
5. Glue long fin strips to the end. Glue short fin pieces to the side. Glue the ring inside the front to keep it open.
6. Make three holes in the ring end with a hole punch. Tie 15" stick (38 cm) strings to each hole. Tie the other end of each string to your stick.

Take outside and run across the playground to make the fish move in the air.