

# Unit 12c: Japan

## Objectives

At the end of this section, you will

## Be aware of the following

- Variety of religious influences on current Japanese religious practice
- Gestures and manners practiced by many Japanese
- Government registration of Japanese religious groups
- Code of conduct (Bushido) of traditional Japanese warriors
- World and life perspectives common to Japanese belief
- Local nature of Japanese religious expression
- Sacred, historical Japanese texts
- Tendai and Shingon schools of Japanese Buddhist practice
- Rites enabling adherents to reach enlightenment
  - Various new religions in Japan

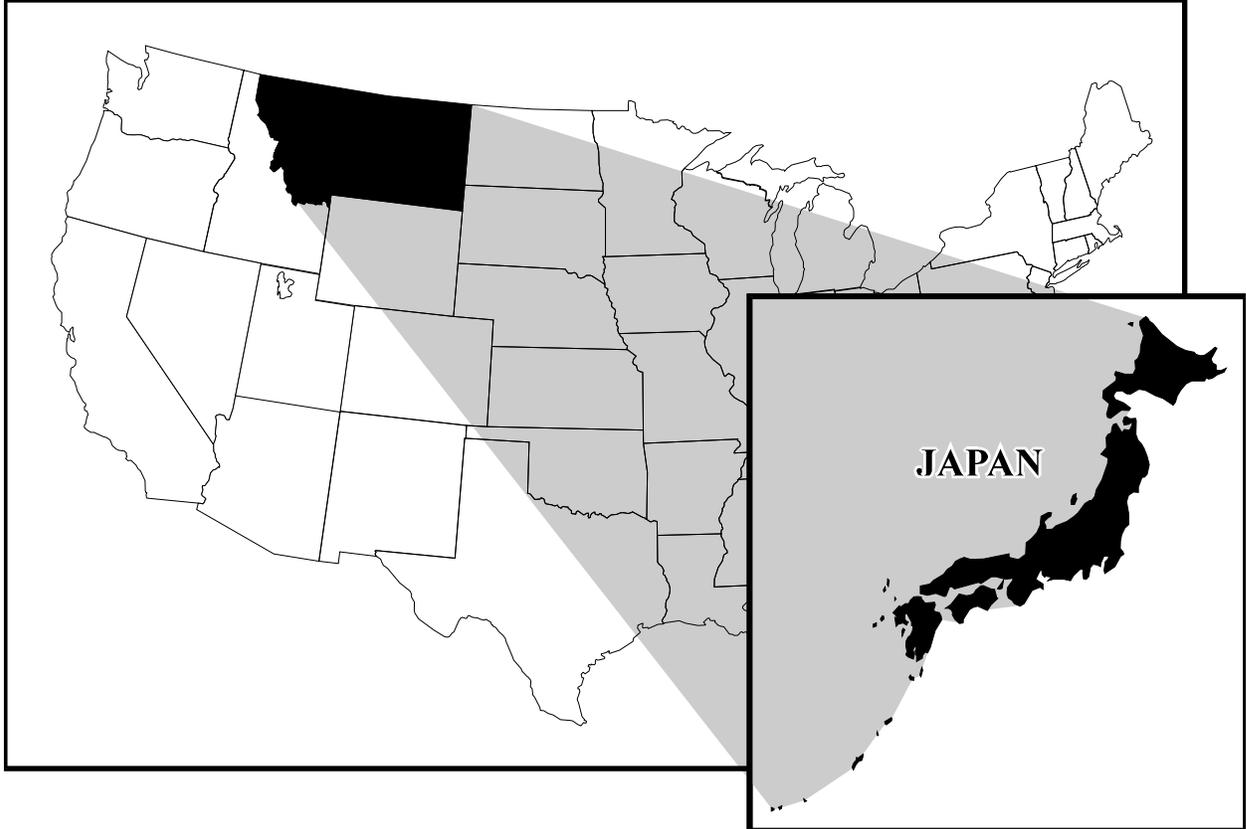
## Identify

- Comfort women, Asian women's fund
- Keiro-no-ki, Obon Festival
- Matsuri, Amaterasu Omikami
- Ujigami, Burakumin, Bushido
- Aum Shinrikyo
- Kimono, Hiroshima, Meiji, Sumo wrestling
- Sakyamuni, esoteric, Kami, Mandala
- Mappo, Bodhisattvas, Shintoism, Tama, Kotoage
- Kotodama, Shogun, Sammitsu
- Goma, Mudra, yoga, mantra, goryo
- Nembutsu, nembutsu odori, ofuda
- Amulets, Koans, Soka Gakkai
  - Gohonzon

## Realize

- Reasons domestic violence may go unreported
- Significance of New Year's Day and Obon Festivals
- Status of disabled people in Japan
- Korean minority status in Japan
- Importance of community
- Eclectic nature of Japanese religion
  - China's influence on Japanese religion

## Japan



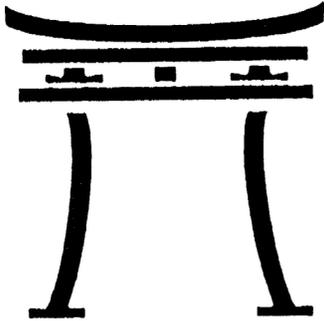
<u>Population</u>	125,506,000
% under 15 years	16%
<u>Commo</u>	
TV	1:1
Radio	1:1
Phone	1:2
Newspaper	579:1,000
<u>Health</u>	
Life Expectancy	Male 77/Female 82
Hospitals	1:74
Doctors	1:570
IMR	4:1,000
<u>Income</u>	\$20,200.00 per cap
<u>Literacy Rate</u>	99%

## 1. Religious Groups (See Appendix--Japanese Religions)

a. Shinto/Buddhist 84%

**b. Other 16% (0.7% Christian)**

**c. Religious Practice** *"Most Japanese participate in rituals and customs derived from several religious traditions.*



*Life cycle events are often marked by visits to a Shinto shrine.*

*The birth of a new baby is celebrated with a formal shrine visit at the age of about one month, as are the third, fifth, and seventh birthdays and the official beginning of adulthood at age twenty. Wedding ceremonies are often performed by Shinto priests, but Christian weddings are also popular. In the early 1980s, more than 8 percent of weddings were held in a shrine or temple, and nearly 4 percent were held in a church. The most popular place for a wedding ceremony--chosen by 41 percent--was a wedding hall.*

*Funerals are most often performed by Buddhist priests, and Buddhist rites are also common on death day anniversaries of deceased family members.*



*Some Japanese do not perform ancestral ceremonies at all, and some do so rather mechanically and awkwardly. But there have also been changes in these practices, such as more personal and private ceremonies and women honoring*

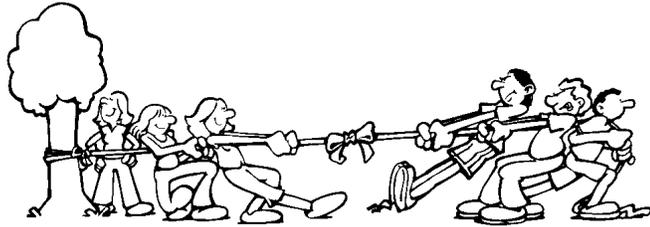
*their own as well as their husband's ancestors, that make them more meaningful to contemporary participants."* (Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from the Library of Congress Country Studies/Area Handbooks--Japan.)

## 2. Ethnic/Racial Groups

a. Japanese 99.4%

b. Other 0.6%

## 3. Gender Issues



### a. Domestic violence

*"Violence against women, particularly domestic violence, often may go unreported due to social and cultural concerns about shaming one's family or endangering the reputation of one's spouse or offspring."*

*Typically, victimized women often return to the home of their parents rather than file reports with authorities."* (US Department of State, Japan Report on Human Rights Practices for 1996.)

**b. Harassment** *"There is no specific law on sexual harassment. Sexual harassment in the workplace is widespread, as evidenced by a May survey by the Japanese Trade Union Confederation, RENGO, which revealed that over 40 percent of working women have experienced sexual harassment."* (Human Rights Practices...)

**c. Equal opportunity** "The position of women in society, although significantly improved during the last few decades, continues to reflect deep-seated traditional values that assign women a subordinate role in the workplace. Although discrimination by private employers against women is prohibited by the Constitution, it persists.



Although the Equal Employment Opportunity Law prohibits discrimination against women in wages, female workers on average earned only 62 percent of average male earnings. Much of this disparity results from the "two-track" personnel administration system found in most larger companies. Under this system, newly hired employees are put into one of two categories: managerial track or clerical track." (Human Rights Practices...)

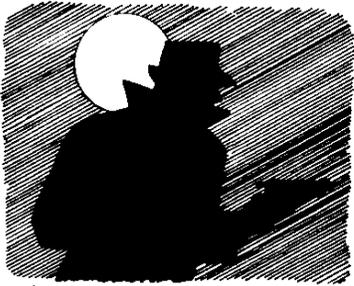


**d. Comfort women** "In 1993 the Prime Minister publicly acknowledged and apologized for the former Imperial Government's involvement in the army's practice of forcing an estimated 200,000 women (including Koreans, Filipinas, Chinese, Indonesians, Burmese, Dutch, and Japanese) to provide sex to soldiers between 1932 and 1945.

The Asian Women's Fund was established in July 1995 as a private, government-sponsored fund to compensate former comfort women. The fund will support three projects. The first will provide direct compensation payments to individual victims and will be financed entirely through private donations. A second project will provide medical and welfare assistance to individual comfort women. A third will fund projects to improve the general status of women and girls in Asia." (Human Rights Practices...)

## 4. Conflicts

**a. International disputes** *"Islands of Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan, and the Habomai group occupied by the Soviet Union in 1945, now administered by Russia, are claimed by Japan; Liancourt Rocks are disputed with South Korea; Senkaku Islands are claimed by China and Taiwan."*  
(1996 CIA Factsheet.)



### b. Terrorist groups

**(1) Aum Supreme Truth** *"On 20 March 1995 Aum members carried six packages onto Tokyo subway trains and punctured the packages with umbrella tips, releasing deadly sarin gas that killed 12 persons and injured more than 5,000. Japanese police arrested Asahara in May 1995 and he was on trial when 1996 ended. Several key Aum figures remain at large. The group may have perpetrated other crimes before the March 1995 attack and apparently planned future attacks...group claimed 9,000 members in Japan and 40,000 worldwide."*

**(2) Chukaku-Ha** *"An ultraleftist/radical group with origins in the fragmentation of the Japanese Communist Party in 1957...Participates in street demonstrations and commits sporadic attacks using crude rockets and incendiary devices...Has launched rockets at a U.S. military facility."*  
(1996 Global Terrorism Report, U.S. Department of State)

**5. Holidays/Observances** (The following material, adapted from Holidays, Festivals and Celebrations of the World Dictionary, compiled by Sue Thompson and Barbara Carlson, [Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1994], is instructive).

**a. Autumnal Equinox** (EE-kwah-noks, 22/23 Sep)

- Celebrates arrival of autumn
- Honors family ancestors

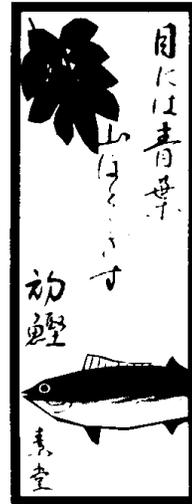
**b. Bear Festival** (early Dec with Ainu of northernmost Japan)



- Ceremonial killing of a young bear to appease the spirit world

**c. Bunka-no-hi** (BOON-kah-noh-HEE, Culture Day, 3 Nov)

- Day to honor contributions to the arts and sciences
- Originally celebrated as birthday of Emperor Meiji, who ruled from 1868-1912
- Meiji age was one of civilization and enlightenment, a turning away from feudalism
- Emperor Meiji is the great-grandfather of the present Emperor Akihito



**d. Freeing of Insects** (late Aug to early Sep)

- Traditional rural festival
- Insects purchased on 28 May, kept in cages, and make songs during the summer months, are freed
- Occurs in public parks, temples or shrines

**e. Hanami** (Hah-nah-MEE, March and April)

- Appreciation of cherry blossoms
  - People go to parks for picnics, games, stories and dance

**f. Higan** (HEE-gahn, 20/21 March and 23/24 Sep)

- Buddhist observance looking to "the other shore" (higan)
- Celebrates move from world of suffering to world of enlightenment
- Adherents remember dead, visit and clean graves, recite texts and prayers
  - O-hagi (rice balls and sweet bean paste) and sushi are offerings



**g. Keiro-no-hi** (KAY-ee-ROOOH-noh-HEE, Respect-for-the-Aged Day, 15 Sep)

- National holiday honoring the elderly

**h. Kodomo-no-Hi** (koh-doh-moh-NOH-hee, Children's Day, 5 May)

- National holiday for boys and girls
- Family picnics occur, households with boys fly streamers with carp fish
  - Carp represent strength, courage and determination as they swim upstream

**i. Obon Festival** (OOOH-bohn, 13-15 Jul or Aug)

- Also called festival of dead, Buddhist belief that dead revisited the earth
- On first evening, small bonfires welcome ancestors, along with meals
- Final day, farewell dumplings and more bonfires guide spirits back
  - Climax is Bon-Odori (Dance of Rejoicing), folk dances which comfort the souls of the dead by the light of paper lanterns

## j. Other festivals

### (1) Matsuri and Nenchu Gyo ji

(mat-soo-REE, nuhn-chew gyoo-JEE)

*"There are two categories of holidays in Japan: matsuri (festivals), which are largely of Shinto origin and relate to the cultivation of rice and the spiritual well-being of the community, and nenchu gyo ji (annual events), mainly of Chinese or Buddhist origin.*



*Very few matsuri or nenchu gyo ji are national holidays, but they are included in the national calendar of annual events.*

*Many Japanese also participate, at least as spectators, in one of the many local matsuri celebrated throughout the country. Matsuri may be sponsored by schools, towns, or other groups but are most often associated with Shinto shrines. As religious festivals, these strike a Western observer as quite commercialized and secular, but the many who plan the events, cook special foods, or carry the floats on their shoulders find renewal of self and of community through participation."*

### (2) New Years and Obon

*"Most holidays are secular in nature, but the two most significant for the majority of Japanese--New Year's Day for Shinto believers and Obon (also call Bon Festival) for Buddhists, which marks the end of the ancestors' annual visit to their earthly home--involve visits to Shinto shrines or Buddhist temples.*



*The New Year's holiday (January 1-3) is marked by the practice of numerous customs and the consumption of special foods. These customs include time for getting together with family and friends, for special television programming, and for visiting Shinto shrines to pray for family blessings in the coming year.*

*Dressing in a kimono, hanging out special decorations, eating noodles on New Year's Eve to show continuity into the new year, and playing a poetry card game are among the more "traditional" practices.*

*During Obon season, in mid-August (or mid-July depending on the locale), bon (spirit altars) are set up in front of Buddhist family altars, which, along with ancestral graves, are cleaned in anticipation of the return of the spirits. As with the New Year's holiday, people living away from their family homes return for visits with relatives. Celebrations include folk dancing and prayers at the Buddhist temple as well as family rituals in the home."*

## 6. Customs

**a. Gestures** The following cautions, adapted from Gestures, the Dos and Taboos Around the World by Roger Axtell (NY: Wiley and Sons 1991), pp. 180-184, are instructive.

- **Handshakes** May be with light grip, eyes averted
- **Business Cards** A complex ritual...use both hands to grasp and receive cards. Refrain from scribbled notes on the back of cards.



- **Smiles** Cover many feelings-- happiness, anger, confusion, apologies, sadness.
- **Posture** Maintain good posture during social occasions.
- **Masks** White gauze masks are not so much a fear of air pollution as a precaution to not pass cold germs
- **Demonstrative behavior** Avoid long physical contact, public displays of affection and clapping another person on the back
- **Silence** Expect long periods of silence during meetings or conversations. Practice good listening skills.

- **Style** Use both hands to receive a gift, thus expressing humility. Style means much
- **Hands** Avoid hands in pockets.

## b. People with disabilities



*"Japan has no national law protecting the rights of the disabled, including access and employment, but some prefectures and cities have enacted their own legislation addressing the issue. Despite the disabled's lack of legal protection, there is growing societal awareness of the issue." (Human Rights Practices...)*

## c. National/racial/ethnic minorities

*"The Burakumin (buh-rah-kuh-mihn, descendants of feudal era 'outcasts' who practiced 'unclean' professions such as butchering and undertaking), although not subject to governmental discrimination, are frequently victims of entrenched societal discrimination including restricted access to housing and employment opportunities. They are estimated to number approximately 3 million, but most prefer to hide their identity.*

*Despite improvements in Japan's legal safeguards against discrimination, Korean permanent residents (most of whom were born, raised, and educated in Japan and who are estimated to number approximately 700,000) are still subject to various forms of deeply entrenched societal discrimination.*

*By law, aliens with 5 years of continuous residence are eligible for naturalization and the simultaneous acquisition of citizenship rights, including the right to vote. In fact, however, most eligible aliens choose not to apply for citizenship, in part due to fears that their cultural identity would thereby be lost. De facto obstacles to naturalization include broad discretion available to adjudicating officers and great emphasis on Japanese language ability." (Human Rights Practices...)*

**d. Religious groups** *"The Government does not require that religious groups be licensed. However, to receive official recognition as a religious organization, which brings tax benefits and other advantages, a group must register with local or national authorities as a 'religious corporation.'*



*In practice, almost all religious groups register, and until this year the procedure was little more than a formality. In response to a series of crimes committed by the Aum Shinrikyo religious sect, the Diet amended the Religious Corporation Law to give governmental authorities increased oversight of religious groups and to require greater disclosure of financial assets by religious corporations." (Human Rights Practices...)*

**e. Bushido** (buh-SHEE-doh) *"The way of the warrior (samurai), a term applied to the principles of loyalty and honor; a code of stoic endurance, scorn of danger and death, religious worship of country and sovereign, and proper social relationships; an aesthetic life-style."*

**7. Cultural Literacy Concepts/Terms** The following terms, adapted from The Dictionary of Global Culture, (edited by Kwame Appiah and Henry Gates, Jr., NY: Alfred Knopf, 1997), apply to Japan. For more detailed information, consult The Dictionary of Global Culture.

**a. Amaterasu Omikami** (ah-mah-tehr-ah-soo OOH-mee-khah-mee)

- Goddess of the sun in Shinto mythology
  - Ruling emperors of Japan trace their ancestry back to this deity



### b. Bunraku (buhn-rah-koo)

- Traditional Japanese puppet theater founded by Uemura Bunrakuken
- Nearly life-sized stringed puppets
  - Narration is chanted and accompanied by a three-stringed instrument, the samisen

### c. Byodoin (bee-YOOOH DOOOH-eehn)

- Buddhist temple dedicated in 1053 for Amitabha Buddha
  - Temple has many architectural achievements, including the Hoodo or Phoenix Hall, whose layout resembles a giant bird

### d. Chikamatsu Monzaemon (chee-kah-MAHT-soo mohn-zah-EH-mohn, 1653-1724)

- Famous Bunraku playwright
- Combined traditional mythical Bunraku with a more real setting
  - Wrote Bunraku as historical romances, tragic love stories, and ancient battle dramas

### e. Choka (choo-KAH)

- Form of long Japanese poem popular in the late seventh and early eighth centuries
  - Development of more condensed haiku displaced choka by the ninth century.

御  
年  
賀

### f. Chushingura (choo-sheen-goo-RAH)

- Play originally written by Takedo Izumo in 1748 for the Bunraku puppet theater
- Was adapted to kabuki
  - Chushingura dramatizes (for ten hours) events surrounding forty-seven masterless samurai who avenge the death of their lord

### g. Edo (eh-DOH)

- Original name for Tokyo (from 1180-1868) which means "river gate"
- Edo became Japan's official capital around 1600 when the Tokugawa Shogunate located there
  - In 1868, the end of the Meiji Restoration brought the Imperial Palace to the site of Edo Castle, and renamed the city Tokyo

### h. Genji Monogatari (gehn-jee moh-noh-ghah-tah-REE)

- Written in the eleventh century by Murasaki Shikibu (c.980-1015)
- Depicts the life of Genji, a tragic prince, and his descendants
  - Genji precedes the Western novel by 500 years

### i. Genroku era (gehn-roo-koo)



- Term referring to the period of 1688-1704
- Peace brought by the shogun's power stimulated cultural awareness and enlightenment in the arts, sciences, and philosophies
- Samurai were able to concentrate on these studies during peacetime

### j. Gunki monogatari (guh-n-KEE moh-noh-ghah-tah-REE)

- "Medieval war tales"
- Depicted the civil wars plaguing imperial rule from 1156-1221
- Narratives provided plots for much of Japanese theater

### k. Hiroshima (HEE-roo-shee-mah)

- Japanese city located on the southwestern island of Honshu
  - Was a strategic military site until its near destruction by the first atomic bomb on August 6, 1945

### l. Horyuji (HOOOH-ree-yoo-jee)

- Buddhist Temple built in 607 by patron saint of Japanese Buddhism, Prince Shotoku
- Rebuilt in 708 after a fire
  - Presently holds the oldest wooden buildings in the world

### m. Ito Noe (ee-toooh noh-eh, 1895-1923)

- Leader in the Japanese feminist movement
- Last editor of the Seitoshu publication before its forced disbandment in 1916

### n. Japanese imperial family

- Emperor is often symbol
- Current emperor, Akihito (son of Hirohito), was enthroned in 1970; the 125th of his line
- Considered the chief priest of Shinto, retained by the Imperial Household Agency, with a staff of over a thousand



### o. Kabuki (kah-boo-kee)

- Common theater performance, sometimes questionable due to its dancing

- A 1629 law forbade women to perform, followed by a similar 1652 law forbidding young boys from the same
- Considered the most versatile of Japanese theater. Players have no directors, leaving full interpretation to the actors

**p. Kawabata, Yasunari** (kah-wah-baht-ah, yah-soon-ah-rhee, 1899-1972)

- Contemporary Japanese writer who received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1968
- Yasunari lost his entire family by the age of 16 to illness and old age, his works concentrated on aging and death

**q. Kimono** (kee-mohn-noh)

- Term meaning "clothing"
- Describes traditional Japanese robe garment with rectangular sleeves and a sash (obi) worn by both sexes



**r. Kinkakuji** (kihn-kah-koo-jee)

- Temple of the Golden Pavilion, rebuilt in 1955 after being burned first in 1565 and again in 1950
- Buddhist temple three-stories high, covered in gold leaf

**s. Kobayashi Takiji** (koh-bah-yah-shee tah-kee-jee, 1903-1933)

- Japanese author born in poverty who soon became a strong supporter of Communist movements
- Majority of his works, such as *Senkyuhyakunijuhachinen sangatsu jugonichi* (1928; The Fifteenth of March) and *Kani kosen* (1929; The

Factory Ship), were banned immediately after publication

- Died under torture in 1933

#### t. Kojiki (koh-jee-kee)



- "Record of Ancient Matters," the oldest historical record of Japan
- Covers the period from the age of gods (beginning of time) to the rule of Empress Suiko (593-628)
- First section is a holy book in Shinto. Includes myths of how the gods founded Japan
  - Second and third books relate empirical families and successions

#### u. Kokugaku (koh-koo-gah--koo)

- Originally philosophy, readers would cleanse their minds of contemporary thought to obtain a better understanding of classical literature
- Movement towards simplicity
- Nationalist movement utilized Kokugaku to encourage a removal of foreigners and the foreign influences from Japanese culture
  - Led to the imperialist state during World War II

#### v. Kukai (KOO-kah-ee, 774-835)

- "Father of Japanese culture", also known as Kobo Daishi
- Founded the Shingon or "True Word" school of Buddhism
  - Remembered as a traveler, poet, artist, and the compiler of the first Japanese dictionary

#### w. Kurosawa Akira (kuh-roh-sah-wah ah-kee-RAH, 1910-)

- One of Japan's greatest filmmakers
- Introduced Japanese cinema to the Western world and produced his own versions of Western themes in Japan (Shakespeare and Dostoevsky)

- Most famous films include *Shichinin no samurai* (1954; *The Seven Samurai*) which influenced the storyline and cinematography for *The Magnificent Seven* and *Kakushi toride no san-akunin* (1958; *Hidden Fortress*) which aided George Lucas in applications for the *Star Wars* trilogy

## x. Matsuo Basho (maht-soo-oh bah-shoooh, 1644-1694)



- Author specializing in travelogues and essays
- Perfected the haiku poetic form
- Originally a samurai, Matsuo chose a wandering life after his master died
  - A Zen Buddhist, Matsuo died on a nature journey

## y. Meiji Restoration (meh-ee-jee)

- Period of reform and unification in Japan begun by the signing of the Harris Treaty in 1858 by the Tokugawa Shogunate
- Treaty opened Japanese ports to foreigners
- A series of protests and political acts ensued which caused an end to the Shogunate and 800 years of militaristic rule