

# Summary: The Cultures of East Asia

## Cultural Exchange

For thousands of years there has been a cultural exchange among Asians. For example, Japan and Korea use a system of writing taken from China. Japan borrowed ideas from China about central government, city planning, and painting. Korea uses printing techniques and methods of running government that were adopted from China.

Religion is another area of cultural exchange. Buddhism began in India. It spread first to China and then to Korea and Japan. The Japanese included elements of Buddhism in their Shinto practices. Confucianism also spread from China to Korea and Japan.

## Arts Past and Present

Arts such as painting and pottery techniques have been shared throughout East Asia. Still, each culture has unique art forms. Many forms of Chinese art are thousands of years old. Ancient instruments, such as the bell, flute, drum, and zither, are still played today.

Buddhist ideas have influenced Japanese art. Artists consider simplicity, delicacy, and tradition to be important. These ideas are all present in Japanese painting, dance, printing, music, writing, and theater. Haiku is a traditional form of Japanese poetry. Haiku uses exactly 17 syllables and few words to state broad ideas. Today, the Japanese government pays potters and weavers to keep their arts alive.

## Culture and Communism

Artists in Communist countries are not free to express their ideas. During the Cultural Revolution, writers and painters could only create works that supported Communist ideals. Artists who criticized the government through their art were punished. In North Korea, the government still limits the work of artists. In China, artists have a little more freedom.

About one-fifth of the world's population lives in China. Most belong to an ethnic group called the Han. China has about 55 minority groups. Each has its own language. Mandarin Chinese is the official language. Because there are so many people, the government said that families living in cities could have only one child.

### Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

**zither** *noun*, a stringed instrument played in China

**haiku** *noun*, a form of Japanese poetry

### After You Read

**REVIEW** How did the countries of East Asia pass their cultures to each other? Underline main ideas and details that tell about shared culture.

**REVIEW** What importance does the Japanese government give to traditional arts? Circle details that explain how the Japanese government supports traditional arts.

**REVIEW** Why do you think the Communists worried about allowing artistic freedom? Draw a box around details that explain how these artists are limited.