

Geography and History Activity

networks

Civilizations of East Asia

The Impact of Geography on Japan's Development

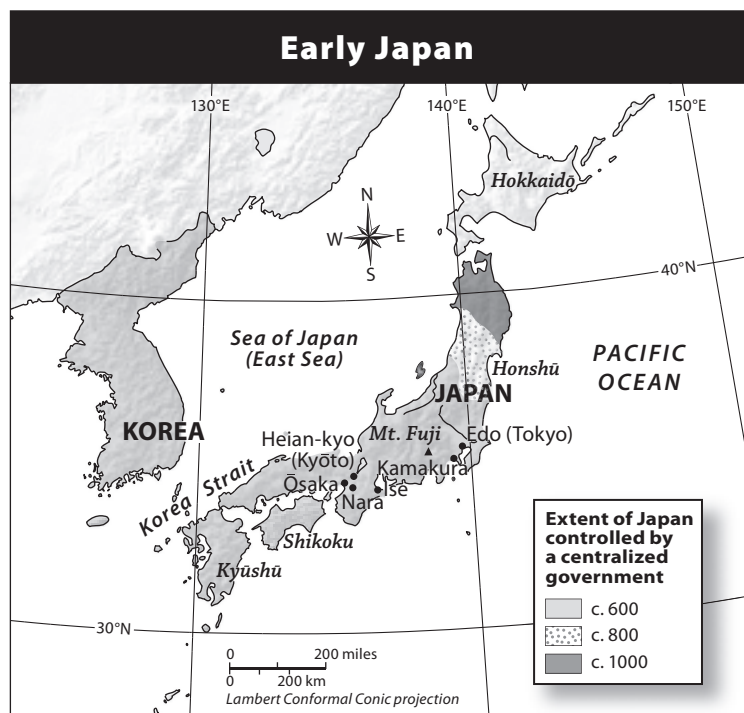
Japan's geographic features are unique in several ways. Not only is Japan an **island country**, but it also is situated along the Ring of Fire, a zone of frequent earthquakes and volcanic eruptions bordering the Pacific Ocean.

Mountainous terrain covers about 80 percent of Japan's land area, leaving only about a small percentage of **arable land**, or land suitable for farming. This **physiography**, or physical geography, has had a large effect on Japan's economy and culture.

Site as a geographic term refers to the physical features of a place that have historically been important to the development of that place. Japan's site—its physical characteristics—might have at first seemed inhospitable, but the volcanic eruptions created fertile soils, so farming in arable areas was always productive. Furthermore, abundant amounts of rainfall and generally mild temperatures added to agricultural success. The cultivation of rice has always been important in Japan, and the **human-environment interaction** needed to grow rice is considerable. Establishing and maintaining paddy fields, including irrigation channels complete with dams and drainage systems, involved great investments in time and labor.

Situation as a geographic term refers to the geographic position of a place relative to its physical and cultural attributes and other places. These attributes are significant to the economic and social development of an area. Japan's situation, separated as it is from the mainland, would have afforded a certain amount of safety from invaders. Still, Japan is close enough to Asia's mainland to allow for cultural influences from Korea and China, such as the introduction of the Chinese writing system, Buddhism, and many artistic forms.

In early Japan, cities tended to be along the coastal areas on the Pacific Ocean rather than on the Sea of Japan. To this day, the Japanese population is heavily concentrated in these low-lying areas on the island of Honshū. The development of the cities of Heian-kyo (present-day Kyōto), Ōsaka, and Edo (present-day Tokyo) was possible in large part because of the site and situation advantages of being on a large flat plain, protected by a peninsula, and located on a bay.



Caption: By 1000, most of Japan was unified as a single country.

Geography and History Activity *Cont.*



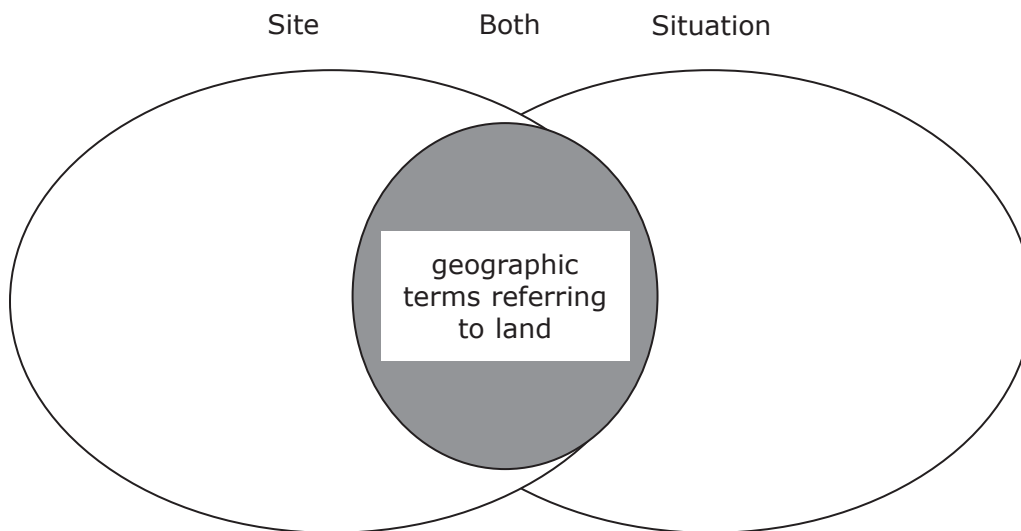
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Directions: Answer the questions below in the space provided.

Understanding Concepts

- 1. Explaining** What is unique about the physical geography of Japan?

- 2. Comparing and Contrasting** Complete the following Venn diagram to show the difference in meaning between the geographic terms *site* and *situation*. The center section has been completed for you.



Applying the Concept

- 3. Location** Explain why the population in Japan tends to be concentrated along the coast rather than inland. Use the terms *site*, *situation*, and *human-environment interaction* in your answer.

Geography and History Activity *Cont.*



Civilizations of East Asia

4. **Making Connections** Japan is one of the few island countries in the world. Name another island country and explain what is unique about its site, situation, and culture.

5. **Regions** What geographic features contributed to the importance of Keian-kyo (Kyōto), Ōsaka, and Edo (Tokyo)?
