

# UNIT 4 BIOGRAPHY PRINCE SHOTOKU

*Prince Shotoku served as the regent of Japan from 593 until his death in 622. He reshaped the Japanese government and brought Confucian ideas and Buddhism to Japan.*

- **Job:** Crown Prince and Regent
- **Goal:** Improving Relations with China
- **Influences:** Confucianism and Buddhism

Born in Yamato, Japan, in 574, Prince Shotoku was a member of the powerful Soga family. After the death of his father, Shotoku's aunt became empress. Shotoku was named crown prince and regent, making him the effective ruler of the country.

As regent, Shotoku was able to re-open cultural and political channels with China. Chinese culture greatly impressed Shotoku—so much so that he introduced many Chinese ideas to Japan. He sent representatives to China and brought back hundreds of scholars, artists, and craftsmen.

Shotoku reshaped the Japanese government by incorporating many Chinese influences, which included setting up a centralized government and bureaucracy. In 604, Shotoku introduced the Seventeen Article Constitution. This code of laws for the ruling class stressed obedience to the emperor and the duty of the emperor to take care of his subjects. Shotoku stressed the Confucian idea of establishing a united country ruled by one person. He divided government positions into ranks that were recognizable by the color of the



Japan: Prince Shotoku (Shotoku Taishi, 574-622). / Pictures From History / Bridgeman Images

Statue of Prince Shotoku (574–622)

headgear that people wore. Doing so allowed positions to be awarded based on merit rather than on heredity.

Prince Shotoku was also influenced by Chinese religious practices and during his reign he introduced Buddhism to Japan. He promoted Buddhism by building temples throughout the country. In time, Buddhism became integrated with Japanese Shinto traditions. Shotoku died in Yamato, Japan, in 622. After he died, he was considered a Buddhist saint.

## REVIEW & ASSESS

**1. Summarize** In what ways did Chinese culture influence Prince Shotoku?

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**2. Make Inferences** How do you think bringing Chinese scholars, artists, and craftsmen into Japan affected Japanese culture?

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