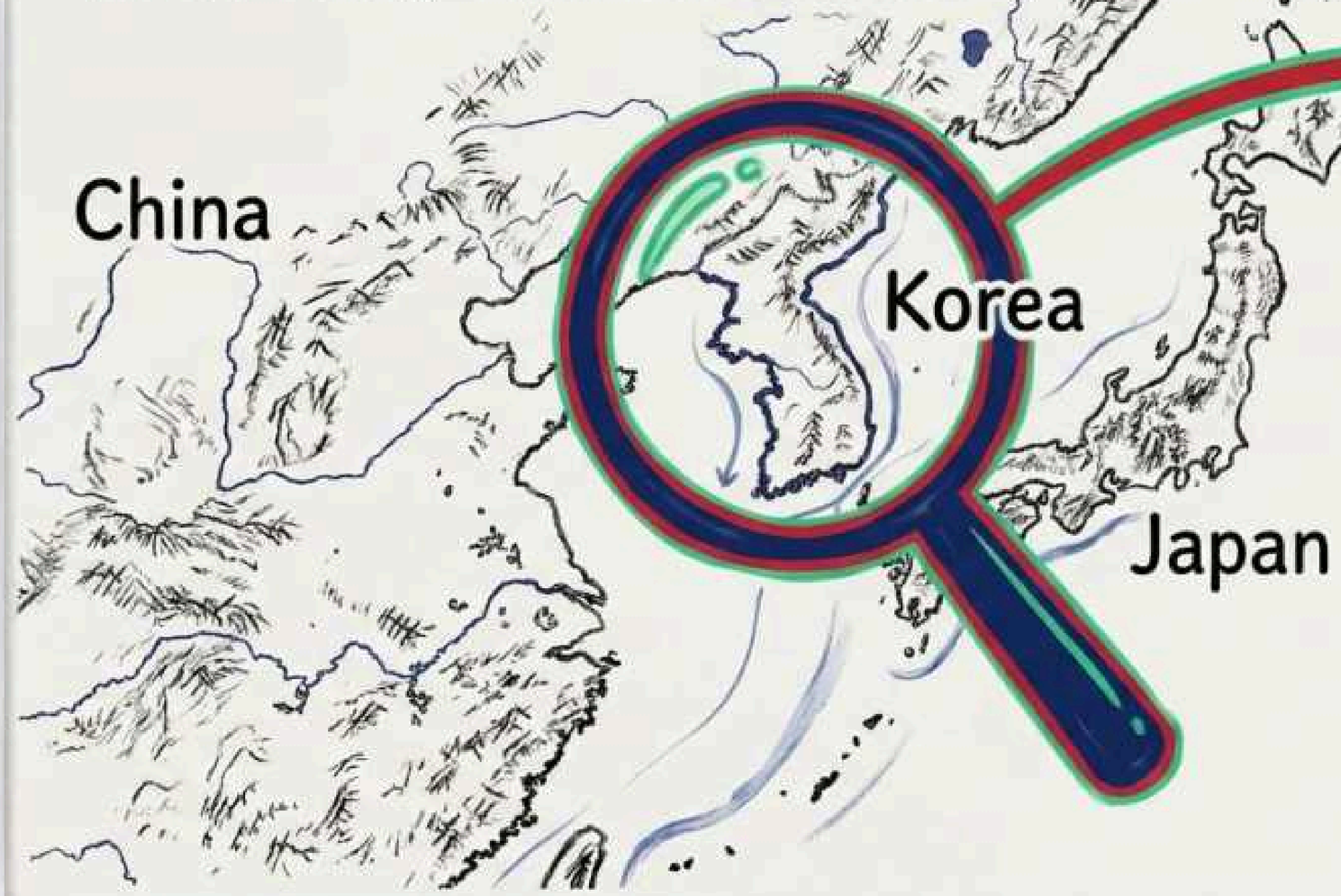
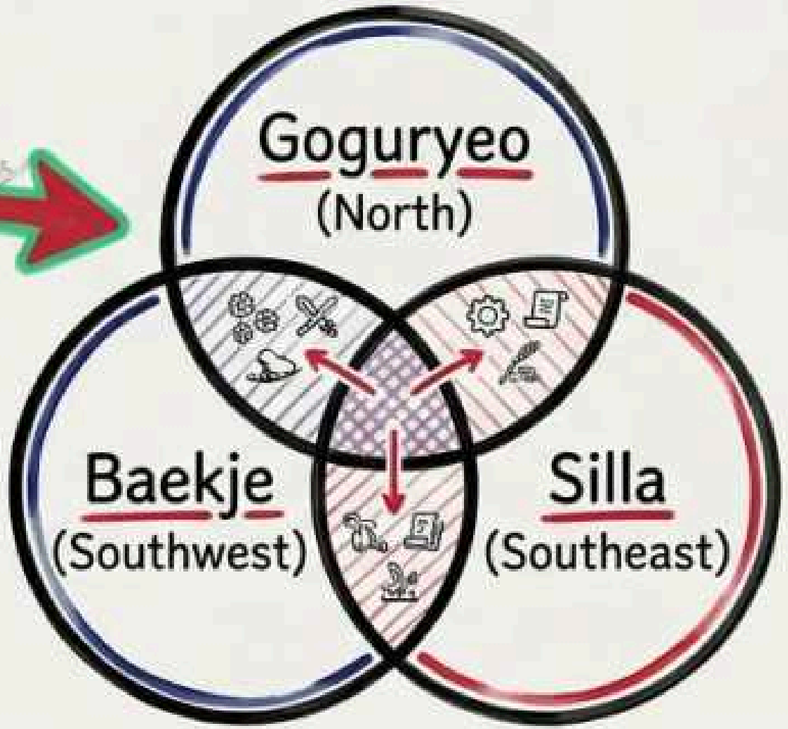
¶ 3.1

East Asia's Middle Ground

Korea and Japan absorbed much from China while creating distinct civilisations.





Korea's history has been intimaately shaped by its geographical position wedged between its two massive neighbors.

The Silla Unification (660s CE)

¶ 3.2



← Influence

[Silla + Tang China Alliance] → **Unification of the Peninsula**

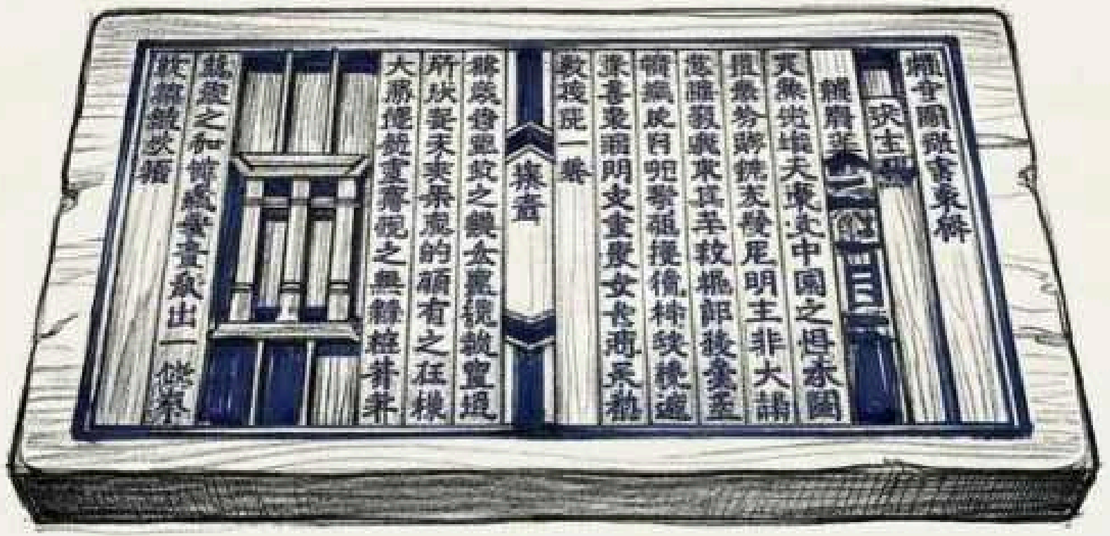
⇒ Cultural Peak

- [ ] Capital: Gyeongju (filled with Buddhist temples).
- [ ] Artistic Masterpiece: The Seokguram grotto Buddha, a pinnacle of East Asian art.
- [ ] Governance: Unified Silla adopted Chinese styles of government but actively maintained a rigid aristocratic system strictly based on birth.

Goryeo Dynasty (918–1392)

¶ 3.3





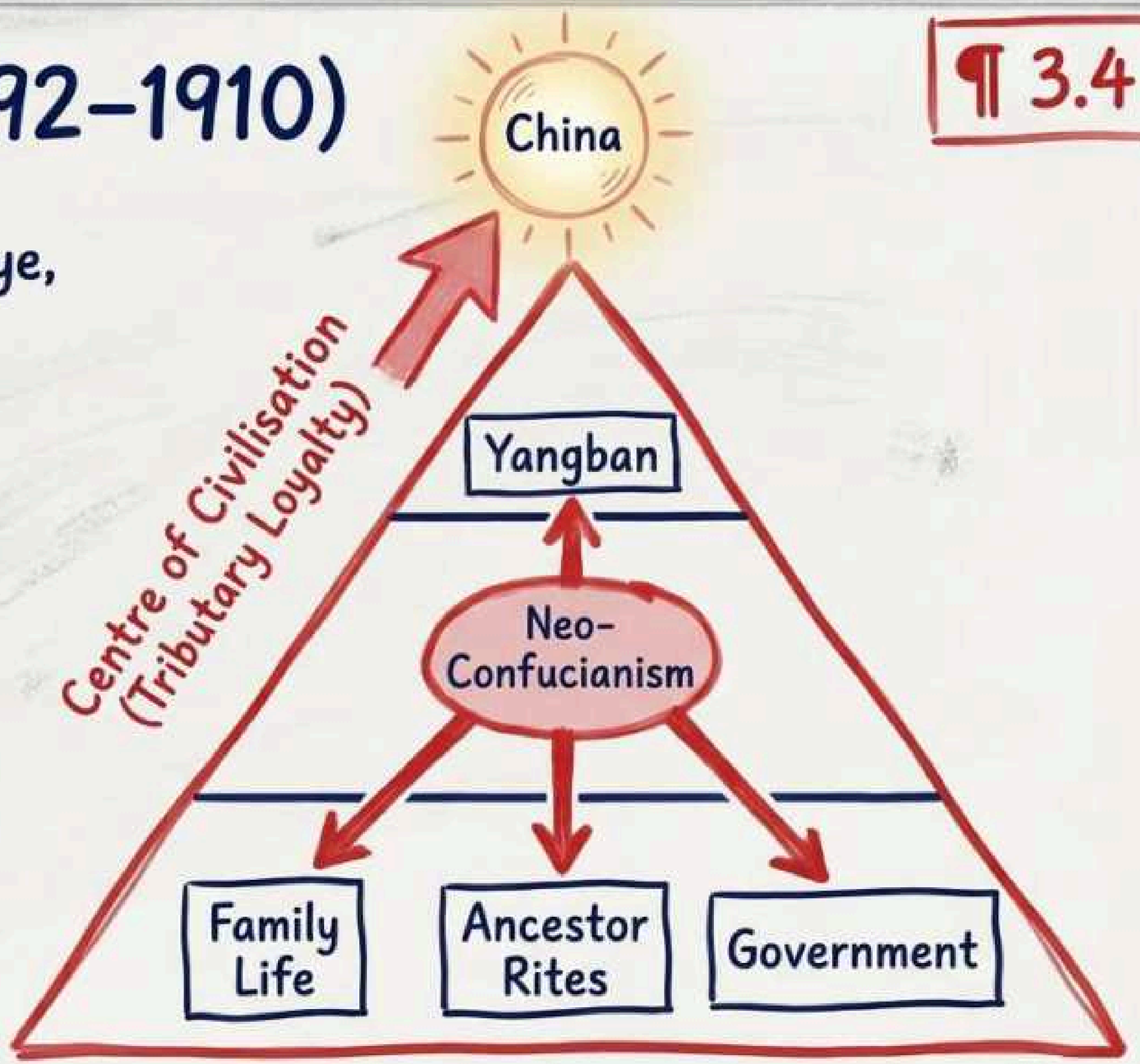
Jikji Printed with Metal Type (1377) » Gutenberg Bible (1450s)

[] The dynasty that gave Korea its modern Western name.
[] Artistry: Master craftsmen produced celadon pottery renowned for its famous jade-green glaze.
[] Print Technology: Produced the Tripitaka Koreana (Buddhist scriptures on over 80,000 wooden blocks) and the Jikji, the world's oldest surviving book printed with movable metal type.

Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910)

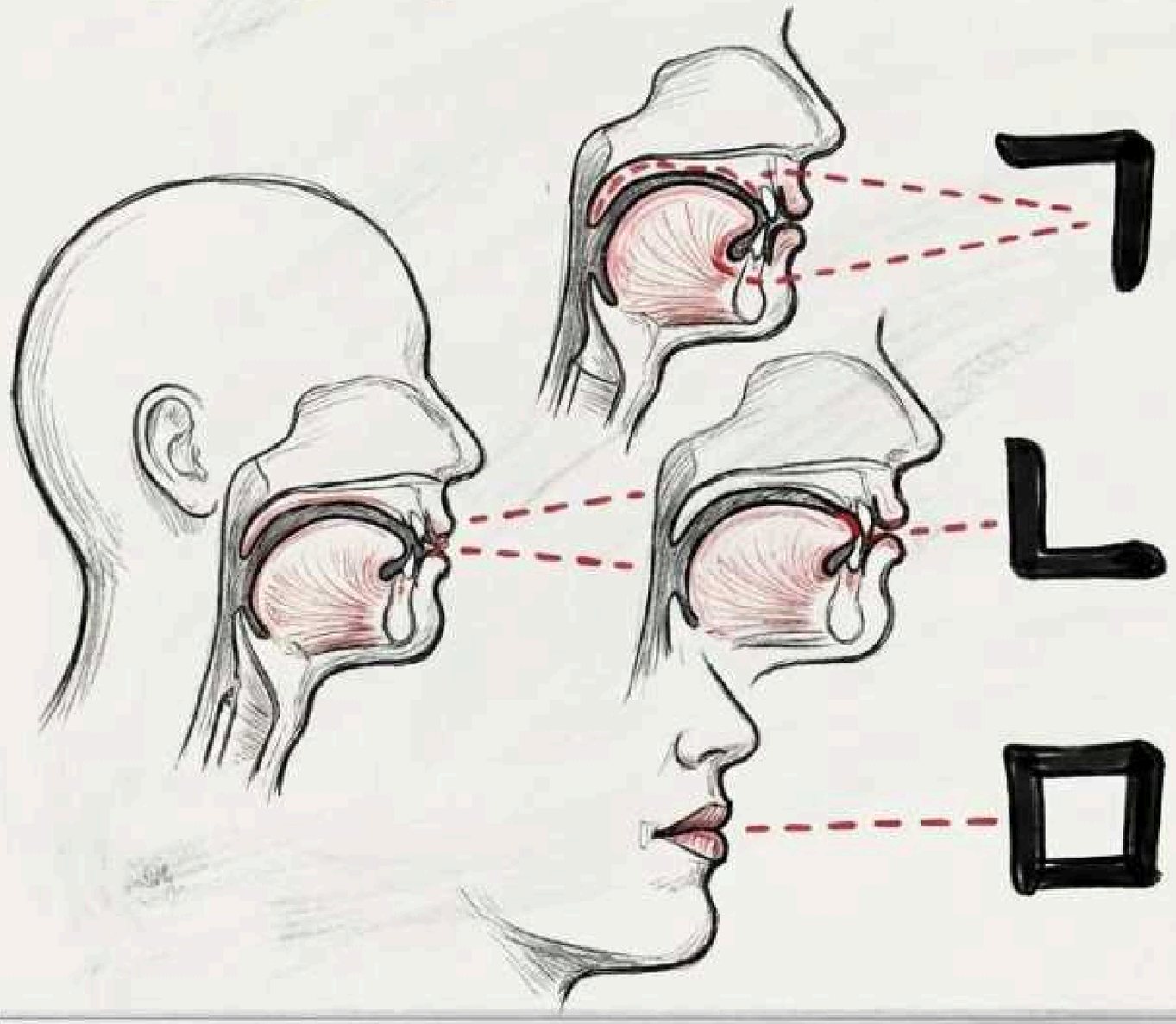
¶ 3.4

- Founded by General Yi Seong-gye, enduring for more than five centuries.
- Embraced Neo-Confucianism more thoroughly than China itself.
- Dominated by the yangban—a hereditary elite who controlled office-holding through rigorous examinations.



King Sejong & The Creation of Hangul (1443)

¶ 3.5



- King Sejong the Great reigned from 1418 to 1450.
- The Problem: Chinese characters take years of intense study to master.
- The Solution: Hangul's letters physically reflect the shape of the mouth in making sounds; it can be learned in days.
- The Legacy: Though elites long preferred Chinese, Hangul stands today as the absolute pride of Korean culture.

Invasions & The Hermit Kingdom

¶ 3.6



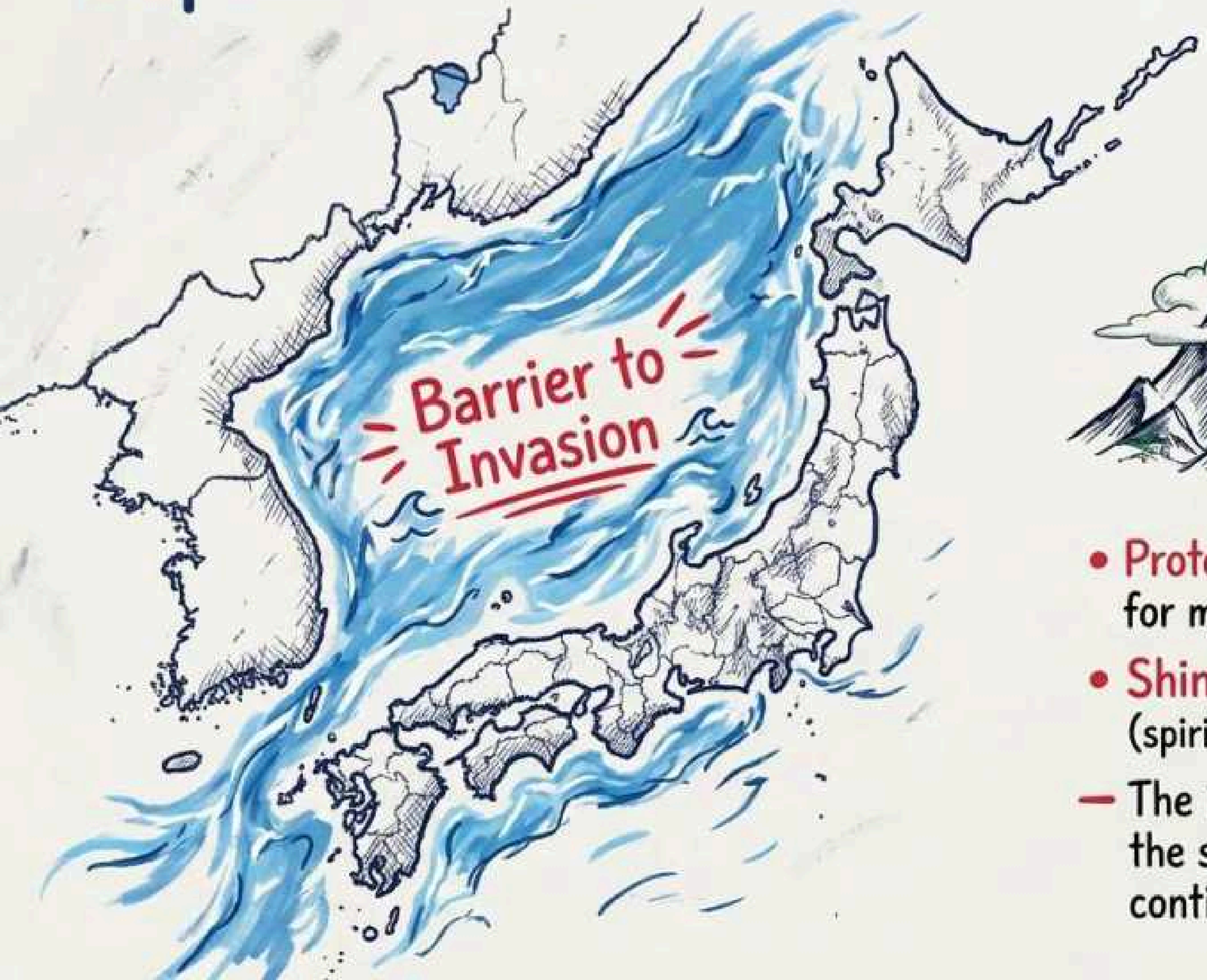
Japanese Invasion (Toyotomi Hideyoshi, 1592–1598)	⇨ Defeated via Turtle Ships + Ming Aid
Manchu Invasion (1630s)	⇨ Devastation of the peninsula

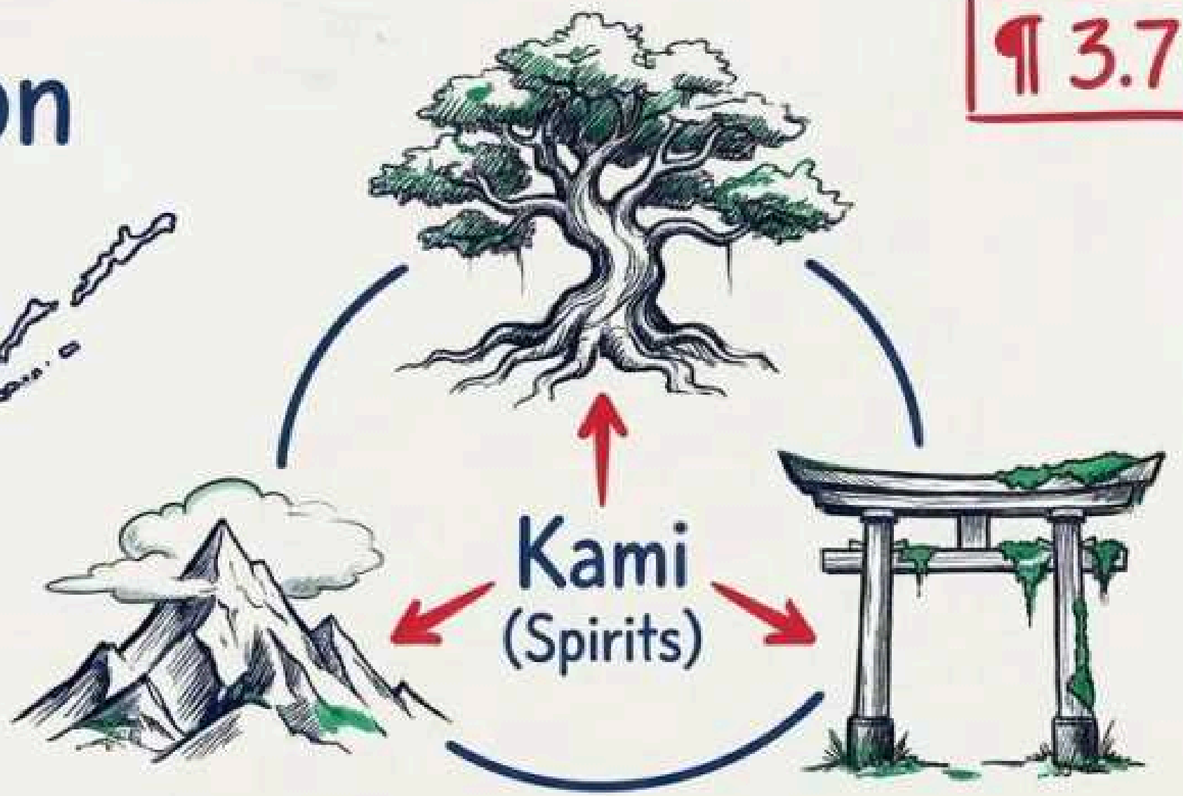
Hideyoshi invaded Korea with the ultimate goal of conquering China. Following back-to-back devastating wars, Joseon systematically locked its doors to the outside world.

Result: Severe limitation of outside contact, earning Korea the title "The Hermit Kingdom".

Japan: The Island Nation

¶ 3.7





- Protected by water, remaining free from invasion for most of its history.
- Shinto: The native religion venerating kami (spirits found in nature, ancestors, and specific places).
  - The imperial family claims direct descent from the sun goddess Amaterasu, making it the oldest continuous hereditary monarchy in the world.

The Era of Borrowing (6th Century+)

¶ 3.8



Buddhism (arrived 500s) → Integrated heavily by Prince Shotoku.

Confucian Ideals → Tang-style Government (Taika Reforms).

Chinese Characters → Kana (Syllable scripts for Japanese sounds).

Chang'an Architecture → Capital cities Nara & Kyoto.

Japan eagerly, yet selectively, borrowed systems of religion, governance, writing, and urban planning from the mainland.

The Heian Court (794–1185)

¶ 3.9

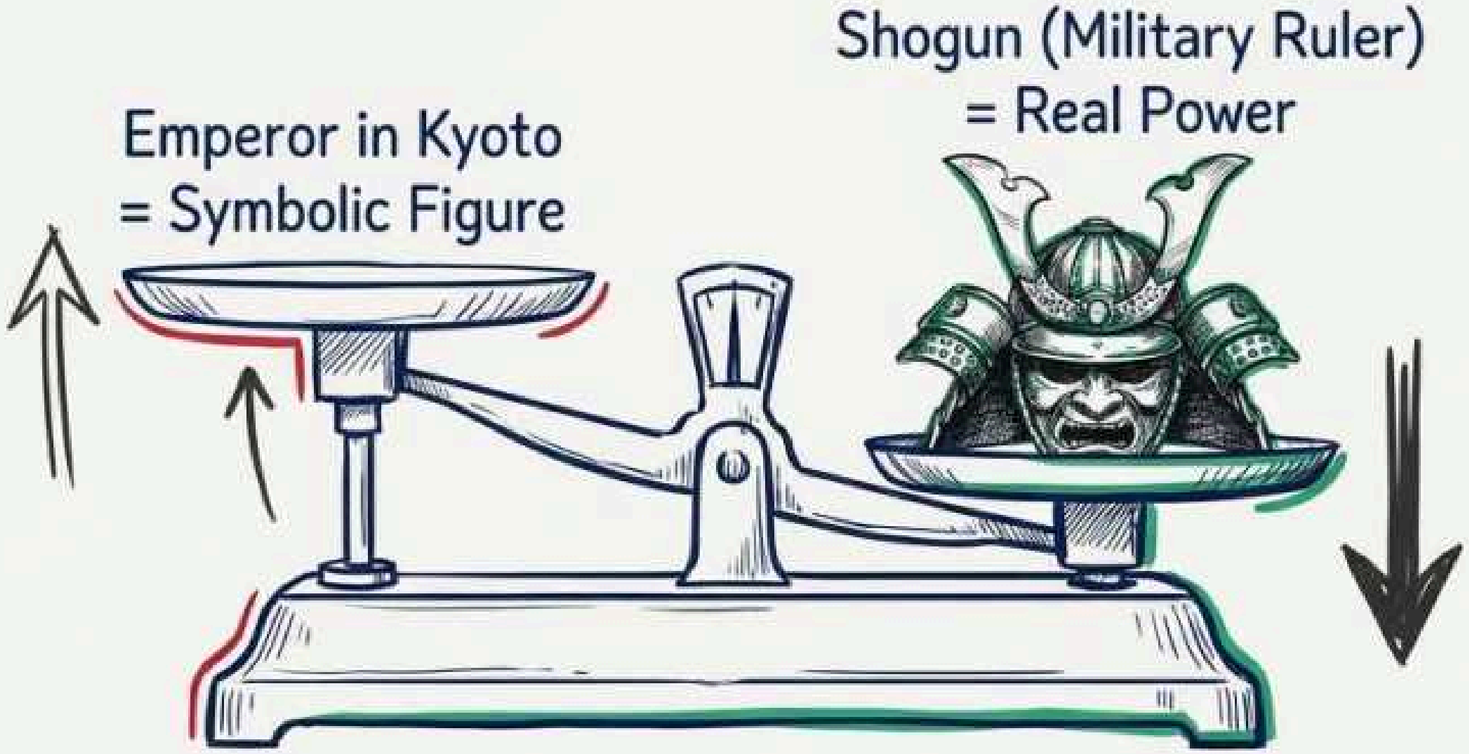


Beauty	Poetry
Refined Manners	Prose

- Centered in Kyoto (then called Heian-kyo). Court aristocrats prized aesthetics and refined manners above all.
- Court women, writing in kana, produced some of the world's first great prose:
  - *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu (~1000 CE, widely considered the first novel).
  - *The Pillow Book* of Sei Shonagon.

The Rise of the Samurai (1185 onward)

¶ 3.10



- In 1185, the Minamoto clan defeated the Taira in the Genpei War.
- Minamoto no Yoritomo became shogun in 1192, beginning nearly seven centuries of military rule.
- The Samurai ideal stressed Loyalty, Discipline, and Courage over aristocratic beauty.

Kamikaze & The Warring States

¶ 3.11



Kublai Khan's massive invasion fleets (1274 & 1281) were destroyed by typhoons.



Central authority collapses into the Warring States period, ruled by competing regional lords (Daimyo).

The Cultural Paradox:

Amidst total political turmoil and warfare, quiet cultural institutions flourished: Zen Buddhism, the Tea Ceremony, and Noh Theatre.

The Three Great Unifiers

¶ 3.12



1. Oda Nobunaga

Mixed the rice cake.

2. Toyotomi Hideyoshi
(Unification completed 1590)

Baked it.

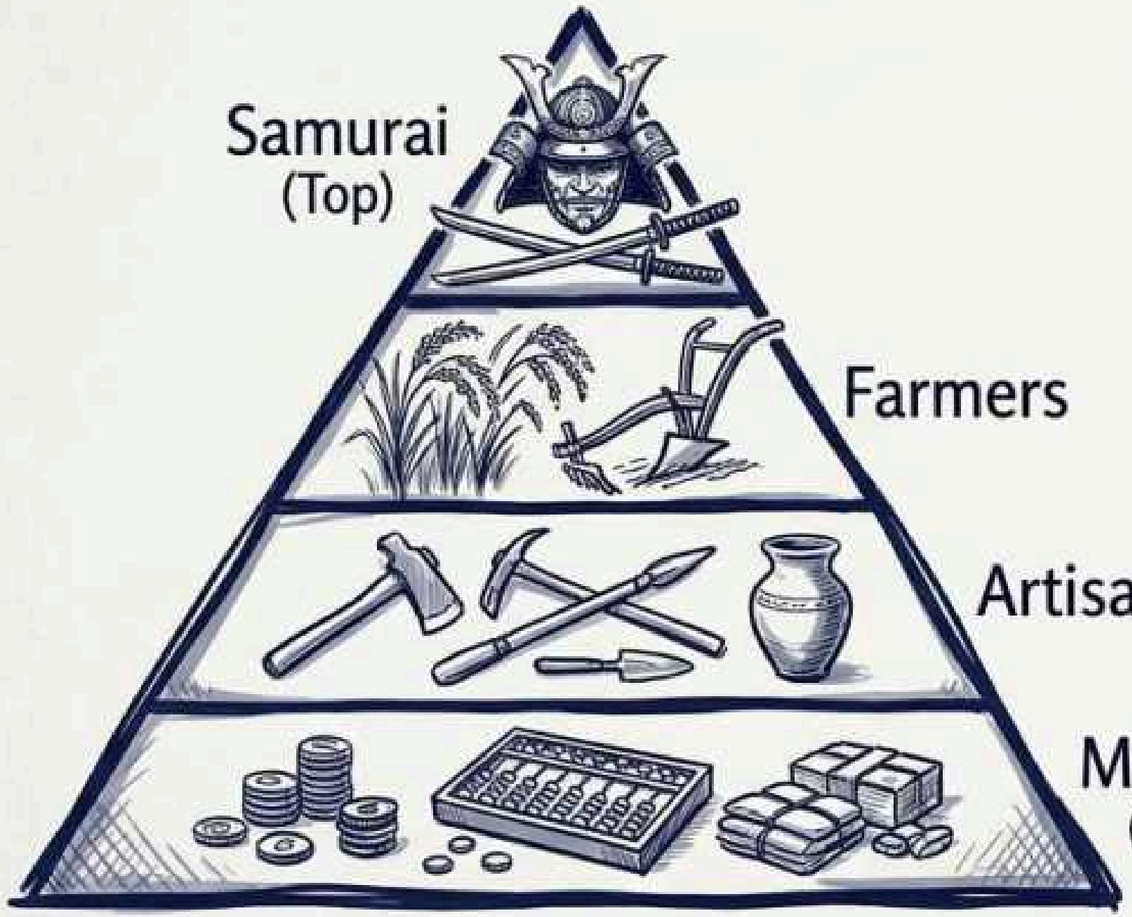
3. Tokugawa Ieyasu
(Won Battle of Sekigahara 1600 / Shogun 1603)

Ate it.

Successive warlords utilized distinct strategies (from Western firearms to strategic consolidation) to finally end the relentless civil wars.

Tokugawa Shogunate (1603–1868)

¶ 3.13

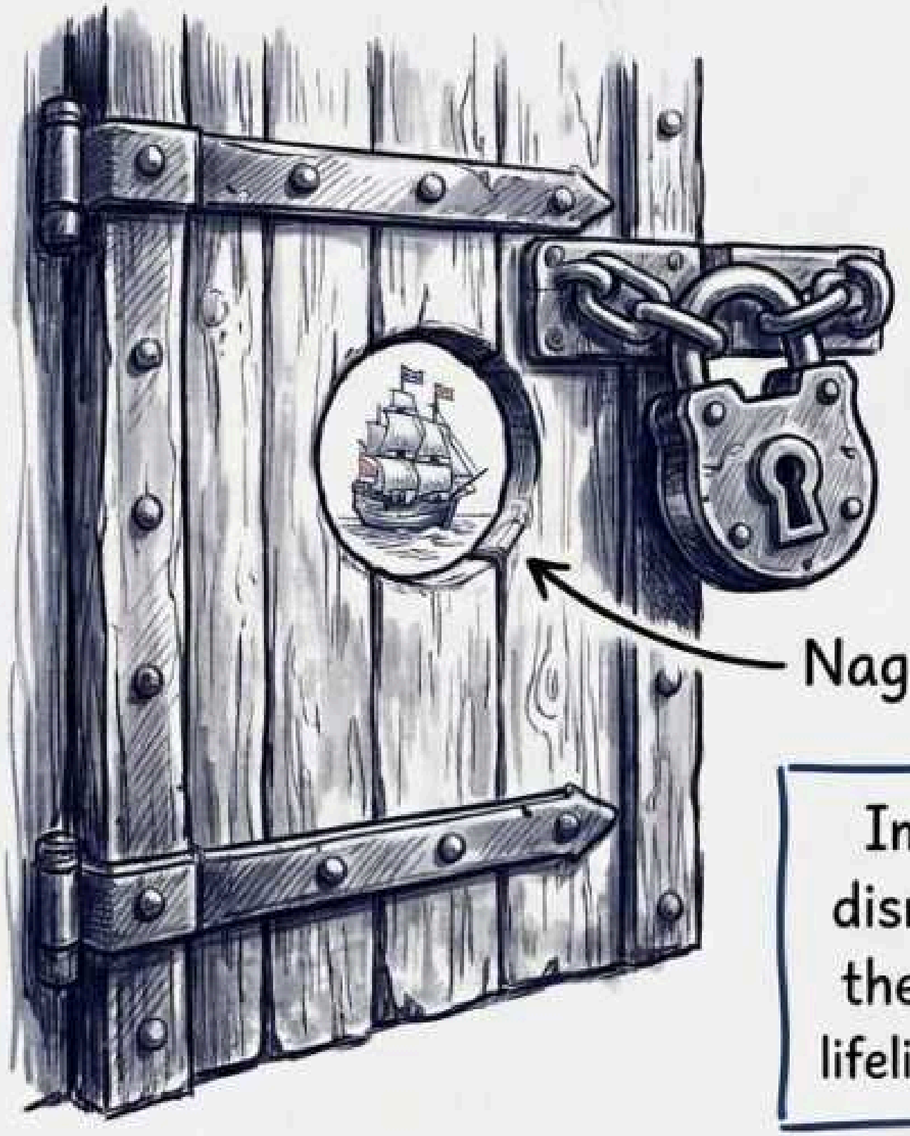




- The ultimate mechanism of peace: keeping regional lords continually under watch and constantly draining their wealth through forced travel.
- The result: An unusual achievement of two and a half centuries of absolute peace.

Sakoku: The Closed Country

¶ 3.14



State Policy (Boolean Logic Formula):

Foreign Contact = FALSE

(Driven by violent suppression of post-1549 Jesuit Christianity)

Exceptions = {Dutch, Chinese}

(Confined solely to Nagasaki)

Implemented in the 1630s to protect the Shogunate from disruptive Western religious and political influence. Through the Dutch merchants, Japanese scholars maintained a tiny lifeline to Western science, a tradition known as "Dutch learning."

Urban Prosperity in Edo

¶ 3.15



- Peace breeds immense prosperity. Merchants—despite ranking lowest officially—grew incredibly rich.
- Literacy rates soared by global standards.
- A vibrant, hedonistic urban culture emerged: Kabuki theatre, puppet plays, woodblock prints by artists like Hokusai, and the haiku poetry of Matsuo Basho.

Summary: Parallel Paths by 1850

¶ 3.16

	Korea	Japan
Governance	Unified under Silla/Joseon Confucian State	Emperors supplanted by Shoguns
Cultural Golden Age	Goryeo Celadon, Metal Type, Hangul	Refined Heian Court / Tale of Genji
Warrior Disruption	Devastating Invasions (Hideyoshi/Manchus)	Warring States & Samurai Rule
Final Stance (1850)	Restricted Contact (Hermit Kingdom)	Sakoku (Tokugawa Peace)

- Both nations created brilliant, distinct civilizations from Chinese roots.
- Both endured extreme internal or external violence.
- Both chose to strictly lock their doors.
- Next Phase: How the West broke in.