

Study on the westernisation of asia



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Asia is under siege and the invasion is coming from the West, which gave the world things such as the Beatles, Baywatch and many styles of fashion.

Asian society is not sure what, if anything, they should do about this ambush. For many, especially the young, 'West is best', its faith of individualism and liberal democracy are seen as superior to typical Asian values. The new middle class is soaking up Western lifestyle and culture, tossing aside traditional thoughts of fate and family.

But is westernisation Asia's proposal for the next decade? That depends on the definition. The Western value system is typically identified with personal freedom and rationalism, (Somers and Cain 2004, p. 167). It has also been equated with modernisation. But as Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore clearly show, modernisation hardly means total Westernisation.

Westernisation is a process whereby traditional, long established societies come under the influence of Western culture in such matters as industry and technology, law, politics, economics, lifestyle and diet, language and the alphabet, religion and values. Westernisation has been a pervasive and accelerating influence across the world in the last few centuries (Wikipedia, 2005).

Westernisation can also be related to the process of acculturation (Wikipedia, 2005) referring to the changes that occur within a society or culture when two different groups come into direct continuous contact. After the contact, changes in cultural patterns within either or both cultures are evident. More specifically, Westernisation refers to the effects of Western

expansion and colonialism on native societies and may be forced or voluntary depending on the situation of the contact.

In many instances modern East Asian societies have reacted against Western behavioural norms and values. People have decried the fact that continuing exposure to stimulus material from the West, with its technological superiority and its wealth, has eroded traditional ways of life and traditional virtues, such as respect for authority, a sense of family duty, and individual sacrifice for the larger common good, whether that be the good of the family or even the nation. Nevertheless, the lures of wealth and technological advancement have continued to entice the East Asian population, assuring the continued health of Westernisation.

Educational systems were often vehicles of Westernisation. Following the arrival of the West, the Nationalist regime established universities in China in the late 1920s which many Chinese youth attended or pursued education in Europe or the United States. After having mastered a Western language and having internalised Western values, many of these overseas trained elite led the nationalist movements in East Asia to modernise their respective countries. Education in the West has continued to bring Western influences into East Asia. There are people who resent the Western influences in the country but Fukuzawa Yukichi founder of Keio University stated, “ As Japan becomes more like the West, it gains power, which is what we will need to keep our country alive. We may lose some of our traditional values and practices, but we will gain equality with the other powers of the world and freedom from the threat of colonisation.”

Japan is sometimes considered Western, as they supported the West during the Cold War, have a similar economic system and welfare, a stable democracy, protects human rights and is a member of typical Western organisations, (Burr 2001, p. 15). In this definition however, the cultural aspect must be neglected as Japan has a unique culture with distinct non-Western traits. Furthermore South Korea, the Republic of China (Taiwan), Hong Kong, Macau and Singapore can be regarded as Western for the same reasons.

Influenced by others, Japan is like many other nations in the world. While many were opposed to anything that was foreign, the country was eventually westernised. Even though the constitution had been viewed as a fully Japanese document, it was influenced by the west. Westernisation was consciously acquired in the last half of the nineteenth century and included industrialisation to make Japan as powerful as any of the Western powers. In the late 1800's, Japan's upper class wanted to join the community of powerful nations, so they modified their culture and created a constitutional government, western legal and political institutions, segregated men and woman in public bath houses and tried to imitate western social customs. The changes went as far as to people of higher class holding dances with western diplomats and their families every Sunday evening and some people even tried to marry with western people to improve the Japanese biologically.

Not everybody agreed with the new government. People who opposed the westernisation of Japan, stated that it causes a decrease in Japanese culture and that they were sacrificing the culture to gain temporary power. The

angriest of all were the Samurai. The ending of the feudal system stripped them of their land and power. They were paid for the land with government bonds, but it was small repayment for the power they once had. They were set on an equal footing with the people they had once ruled over. The Samurai were forbidden to wear their swords, a traditional symbol of their class and power. This made them incredibly angry, and so they rebelled against the Meiji government, believing they could win.

The new Japanese army was based on European armies; they fought with Western weapons, and in a Western style. They were pitted against Samurai armies, who were powerful but using techniques of the past. The Japanese army was able to put down the numerous rebellions, but at a cost. The expenses of fighting the Samurai were heavy, leading to financial problems. These financial issues lead to the appointment of Masayoshi as Minister of Finance. The government, and Japan, hoped that new financial reforms being introduced would bring the country out of debt and into the glory of the New Japan.

Westernisation has impacted many societies throughout the world and will continue to do so throughout the near future. Outcomes will be determined through whether or not the process is welcomed by society and must ensure an even balance of culture and traditional values which should not be forgotten as well as its origin.