

Japan civilization

[History](#)



The Tokugawa period of Japanese history is unique due to the fact that it proved to be a fundamental and pronounced shift away from many of the prior realities and cultures that had helped to create the Japanese identity. Ironically, the framers of the Tokugawa period, the shoguns, saw this paradigm shift as something that could potentially and ultimately benefit the culture of Japan and provide for a uniquely nationalist and isolationist interpretation of culture and the means by which it should be furthered and defined. Within such a nativist interpretation of culture and history, the Tokugawa period was unique with regards to the way in which Edo-art, theater developed, and government sponsored and supported arts flourished during this time.

Firstly, with regards to art during this particular period, it is something of a deviation from traditional Japanese art; yet, at the same time, it was a movement that sought to re-integrate an understanding and appreciation for the most traditional aspects of Japanese culture. Whereas the arts were not officially supported by the government prior to this period, the Tokugawa period saw a time in Japanese history in which landholders were the ones that were ultimately the pinnacle of society. Within such an interpretation, these landholders had to shoulder the majority of the tax burden. As such, once these taxes were received by the government, artists were supported, at least in small part by the proceeds of these taxes. In such a way, it comes as little surprise that the portraits and etchings that they engaged invariably were concentric upon the subject matter of harvesting, planting, and the manual labor that is oftentimes evidenced in fields or on farms.

As a result of the growth of wealth derived from a thriving merchant culture, a desire for amusement was born within Tokugawa society. One of the most

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prominent outgrowths of this desire for amusement is with regards to the theater that came to such a level of prominence during this period of Japanese history known as the Kabuki (Nenzy 12). Within this theater, lavish displays of passion, costumes, and intrigue were represented directly to a new class of people who had grown as a direct result of the policies and constraints that the shogun had encouraged by the development and evolution of this “ new” society.

Many have argued that no other aspect of culture represents the Tokugawa era better than the Edo woodblock images that were churned out in such volume during these times. These images would, if they were created within our own current culture, be considered as pop art and/or even political cartoons. In such a way, these woodblock carvings served as a cheap and ubiquitous way to engage the public with a litany of different images and understandings that they would otherwise not have ready access to.

Although Tokugawa culture exhibited many different norms and societal patterns that were approved by the framers of this particular cultural interpretation of Japanese life, the culture itself, as is so oftentimes the case with culture, took a life of its own and developed wholly independent from the mores and norms that it was typically associated and determined to espouse.

Work Cited

Nenzi, Laura. " Caught In The Spotlight: Late Tokugawa Japan." Japan Forum 23. 1 (2011): 1-23. Academic Search Complete. Web. 11 June 2013.