

Give a topic

History



China and Japan from the 17th to 20th Century China and Japan are countries in the Asian continent, separated geographically by a narrow expanse of ocean (Mosk 9). These two countries have both similarities and differences in their historical developments, through the industrialization era, up to the present. This paper will outline the differences and similarities between the two countries from the 1600s to the 1900s with a focus on the political and socio-economic factors. It will also point out the challenges the two countries faced in the early century and how they overcame them.

Between 1600 and 1800, the Chinese economy significantly expanded. This was mainly driven by the steadily growing population which gave rise to a growth in agriculture, trade and industry (Fairbank & Merle 89). China's economy in this period was based on agriculture and all other sectors were either drawing from it or servicing it. In the era of the Song dynasty, China's agricultural system was the most productive worldwide. However, China's fast raising population quickly led to a decline in labor costs towards the 19th century (Fairbank & Merle 93). To overcome the situation, industrial producers started substituting labor for capital goods whenever the chance presented itself. Similarly, Japan's population grew in the same period. A national unifier named Tokugawa Ieyasu established a dynasty after victory in battle. This gave way to changes including bringing in new crops from the West and Chinese technology in civil works. More land was put under irrigation. The government, under Tokugawa, opened up trade with the Western world and encouraged its people to take part in economic activities. It promoted industrialization by helping private businesses in allocation of resources and planning, while the private sector stimulated economic growth (Mosk 41). But unlike China, Japan's growing population did not bring about a

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decline in labor costs.

In the 19th century, China and Japan were faced with similar situations of advancing industrialization with moderately low productivity levels in agriculture. Low agricultural productivity translated into low wages, and this factor presented both a challenge and an advantage (Fairbank & Merle 104). It meant that the labor supply in agriculture was elastic enough to move to manufacturing, which was an advantage. However, the challenge was how the farm labor could be freed up for employment in the factories by raising productivity of labor in farming. The different decisions made by the two countries to raise productivity of agricultural labor played critical roles in shaping the character of their economic development in the 1900s (Mosk 71). The elites in Japan provided incentives to increase efforts of farm labor, including working hours, through incentives like improving infrastructure. They improved roads, railroads, hydroelectric systems and health and education systems. Those in China, on their part, largely resisted such changes. By the end of the 1900s, Japan was a multi party, higher income per capita country (Mosk 56). On the contrary, China became a single party, lower income per capita country. Its market forces are controlled by an inheritance of command and centralized planning embedded in enterprises owned by the state. Enterprises owned collectively by villages also play a role in controlling the Chinese economy (Fairbank & Merle 116).

Works Cited

Fairbank, John & Merle, Goldman. *China: A New History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. Print.

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