

Japanese culture from ancient to modern times

[Science](#), [Social Science](#)



Japanese culture from ancient to modern times Over the past 2000 years, China and Japan have constantly engaged in exchange and contact across several mediums including technology, architecture, religion, law and writing system (Brinkley, 2007). The influence of western powers during the 1800s resulted in the Meiji Reformation which accelerated economic growth in Japan towards modernization. On the other hand, China was unable to defend itself against the invasions of western powers and had to undergo a prolonged period of occupation until the early part 20th century (Chaurasia, 2003). Two of the most important areas that shaped the relations between China and Japan are ' Technology' and ' War & Conflict'.

Pre-Modern Era

The first military conflict between China and Japan, known as the battle of Baekgang, took place in the year 663 AD and was fought between the Chinese and the Japanese Yamato. Dower (1995) says that the conflict proved to be a bitter defeat for the latter as over 350 of the Japanese vessels were destroyed by the Silla-Tang alliance. In fact, Japanese technology in marine warfare was rather obsolete in comparison to the Chinese, who achieved this feat using lesser number of advanced vessels. This defeat forced Japan to accede to several terms set forth by the Chinese including direct trade and subsidies to Chinese imports (Howe, 2006). Between the periods 700 -1500 AD, the Japanese undertook a steady campaign to modernize their war inventory with the help of expertise from overseas and improve their prospects in battle (Howe, 2006).

Early Modern Era

Between 1600-1568, Japan was ruled by a feudal regime known as the

Tokugawa Shogunate. During this period, China was ruled by the Qing dynasty, who favored absolute authority and political stability (Spielvogel, 2009). This led them to shun any technological innovation as they feared that this could lead to civil unrest and conflict. As a result, the Chinese went behind in technological innovation in comparison to their European counterparts who were experiencing the benefits of the renaissance and the industrial revolution (Twitchett, 2004). The Tokugawa Shogunate had established similar restriction on Japanese citizens, which not only declined technological improvement, but also contributed to a false sense of pride in Japanese might and superiority across all parameters (Brinkley, 2007). These deficiencies eventually led to the occupation of China by Western forces and the forced opening of trade activities between China and Japan.

Modern Era

Japan underwent a major political change in 1868 due to the abolition of the Shogunate as a result of the Meiji reformation. The nation under Emperor Meiji recognized the need for a strong army and a rich country and strived to achieve these aims by seeking inspiration and knowledge from the industrialized and developed countries of Europe (Chaurasia, 2003). This policy allowed Japan to gather expertise in all major areas of science & technology, while the Chinese were still underdeveloped owing to the restrictions in place under the Qing dynasty. In fact, by the late 1800s, Japan had emerged to become a prominent industrial power and an economic powerhouse (Dower, 1995). The best example for this is the conflict between Japan and China over the Ryukyu Islands when the former defeated the latter without much effort (Sino Japanese conflict of 1894-1895) leading eventually

to the annexation of Taiwan by the Japanese (Howe, 2006).

Analysis

The above aspects highlight many interesting trends between the two nations. It appears that Japan was under conservative rule during the pre-modern era. While the Chinese were better equipped and trained at warfare during this period, it is evident that the Japanese forbade any contact with the outside world. This not only stalled their technological advancement, but curtailed the flow of knowledge and innovation into Japan (Spielvogel, 2009).

However, the pre-modern era was characterized by autocratic and prohibitive rule in both countries. In contrast, nations in Europe were experience revolution one after another and people there were benefiting from the freedom of free and open thought. In the case of China and Japan, such expressions were curtailed by the use of religious, cultural and social pressures (Twitchett, 2004). The social atmosphere within both countries also appears to have instilled a false sense of pride among the countrymen over their technical and military prowess.

In fact, it is also evident that the Japanese realized their mistakes only at the end of the nineteenth century when the real elements for economic and political growth were recognized. Under Emperor Meiji's rule, the Japanese seem to have engaged in a national reconstruction that was intended to place Japan on par with other world powers (Dower, 1995). The achievements of Japan over the past century and their role in world affairs are a clear indication to suggest this upheaval.

Conclusion

The above sections state some examples of the relations and exchange between China and Japan over the past centuries. China and Japan thus share a vast history across multiple disciplines including warfare and technological development. While each country had its share of ups and downs, it appears that the Japanese have marched ahead of the Chinese in the recent past. Part of the reason for this trend is the realization among Japanese rulers that development and growth is only possible through the free flow of knowledge and cultural exchange. The Chinese, on the other hand, have been further dissociated from the global mainstream owing to communist rule since the 20th century. It is only since the 1980s that the China has opened up to the outside world. However, much needs to be achieved before China can stake its claim on par with the Japanese.

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