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## **Pre-modern East Asia**

Wu Zao, Hojo Masako, and Queen Sondok are the prominent and strong women of China, Japan, and Korea respectively, they have exerted great influence on the country and it is also because of their efforts that the country is making progress up till now. These three women have played a significant role in the beginning of the Kamakura period. They have played an important role in the Premodern East Asian History. In this essay, the role of these women in historical context, the rise and fall of their power, their influence, and existence of similarities among them are discussed.

### **Wu Zao**

Empress Wu or Wu Zao is the famous Chinese women of the Tang dynasty. She became emperor's mistress in 649. However, she longed the authority and power to an extent that she accused the crime empress. The emperor, however, deposed his wife and chosen Wu Zao as a new emperor of the state. After the death of emperor Wu Zao got supreme authority and power. She was known for her cruelty and ruthlessness but at the same time she was a great leader with various remarkable leading skills. her leadership can be analyzed from the fact that hse was the first ruler that had suggested and gave higher government position to the graduates of the civil service examination. She also formed good relations and alliance with Korea in order to lower the taxes. It is because of her efforts that women become familiar and got their new rights as well as privileges during the tang dynasty. The women were given freedom to join the sports such as polo, and also allowed for dancing and singing. However, at that time most of the marriages were

arranged, and women was allowed to get married just once in her entire life. Because of her extraordinary military and political leadership, the Chinese empire expanded beyond the previous limits of the territory. China became able to gain as well as sustain its supreme power. Her leadership has also positively influenced the social class in China, and great emphasis was paid to the education, Taoism, literature, and Buddhism. Furthermore, in addition to her remarkable political career, she was also very active in her family life, and managed all the family matters effectively. Though sometimes she had to face problematic situations in the relationships, yet she managed them very well. She was, however, the mother of three sons, who served as emperors in stints. Further, one of her grandson, however, became renowned emperor of the Tang dynasty, who ruled during the Golden Age.

## **Hojo Masako**

Masako is a formidable figure in the politics of Japan; she has taken a place on the period of the warrior government of Japan. She was the daughter of Hojo Tokimasa, and Minamoto Yoritomo was her husband (Lebra-Chapman, Paulson, and Powers). In 1192, she, however, became first Minamoto Shogun after the death of her husband. In 1199, she took up the habit of a nun, but she didn't left the politic, she worker hard with her father in order to secure power of Hojo in the kamakura. However, her first and most important action was the creation of a council of the elders known as shukuro, for moderating the power of her son named Shogun Yoriie., who was exasperated on the measure, and bowed for supporting among the major political obstacle at that time named Hiki clan. Tehn Masako heard that Yorrie was making plan with the Hiki in order to kill Hojo, so Masako told all this matter to her father.

In 1203, Hojo Tokimasa, eliminated the leadership of Hiki (Perez). However, Yorrie was compelled into the exile in province Izu and then he was murdered later on. In 1205, Masaka with Yoshitoki-her brother, expelled Tokimasa for plotting the death of Sanetoma who was eleven years old, and installed in Tokimasa's place. Considering this situation, Tokimasa resigned. Masako, however proved supportive and beneficial for her brother, in the same way, as she proved useful for her father. Further, in 1218, Masako was sent to Kyoto in order to suggest that the sons of a retired emperor be adopted as the legal heirs of Sanetomo who did not have any child. However, Sanetomo was assassinated at that time, and Go-Toba rejected to give a successor, and in 1221, he tried to return to the imperial authority but failed.

In 1224, Yoshitoki died, and his death inspired the conspiracy by Iga family. The Iga family, however, expected to use influential Miura Yoshimura in order to overthrow the Hojo, for replacing them in Kamakura. Furthermore, Masako learned personality and threat, and rushed in order to see Yoshimura, taking out the promise that he would support the Hojo effectually, devastating the conspiracy prior to its beginning. Masako's brother Yasutoki, however taken the regency, and the next year Masako died at the age of about 69.

Mosako has consolidates the rules of warrior and created an advisory council. Further, she has eliminated the conspiracies particularly those that were committed by her father, improved the relationships with the aristocratic and imperial families, decided the rewards of post-war, and dispensed humane decisions and judgments, and demanded strict

punishment for the criminals and for the deserving ones. Furthermore, she was a continuous source of power for the Hojo me, she was a symbolic mean of courage for them, and enabled them to rule Kamakura Shogunate government till 1333, after which Kamakura Shogunate government was shattered (Perkins). The life and the work of Masako is the representation of the age that held the authority of female to be legal. Masako was an extraordinary figure, and because of her remarkable political ability as well as influence in the Kamakura she was known as ama-shogun and nun-shogun.

## **Queen Sondok**

Queen Sondok is a strong and renowned queen of the Silla era, who was a born Princess Doekman. With the death of King Jinpyeong in 632 AD, Princess Doekman, who was 26 years old became the first woman monarch, named Queen Sondok. She had continued the conflict of Silla with Paekche and Koguryo, which are also Korean Kingdoms. For the protection of Silla she built relations with China, and chose a capable general named Kim Yusin in order to direct military. In continuation with her relationship with China, she has encouraged the student to visit China and get higher education from there. She is also best known for exerting cultural impact on the country. She has encouraged Buddhism, and revitalized it by building temples at Yongmyo-sa and Punhwang. Further, she also encouraged building of several monuments. Moreover, she is also known for sponsoring the education and arts, but only a few details of her patronage are present (Seth). However, some of the constructed buildings that she had ordered are still present today. The most enduring and famous monument of Queen Sondok is the

oldest surviving astronomical observatory of the world, known as the Star gazing Tower of Cheomseongdae, its structure is bottle shaped and is formed of the blocks of granite (Yi, and Chan). In addition to dealing with the external affairs, she was also active socially though she was never married and has no children.

She has encouraged the relations among the major families residing in Silla. She has also played an important role in arranging the marriages between the families of General Kim Yu-sin, and Taejong the Great. However, powerful coalition has paved the way to the unification of the Korean Peninsula, and concluded the Three Kingdoms era.

She, however, died in 647 AD, and was buried in a Tomb on Nangsan. She, did not suffer from any disease, and she has announced before that she would die on 17th of January of 647, and died on the same day.

## **Nakano Takeko**

There are many similarities found among Tomoe Gozen, Hojo Masako, and Nakano Takeko in a way that they are not they have changed the concept of Japanese women. Japanese women are not associated with the sports traditionally, though Japan is regarded as the developed country yet the image of Japanese women in west is slight diffident and shy figure, dressed, in a way that restrict their movement. This perception is, however, impacted by the American classical movies e. g., sayonara. For about 600 years the society of Japan was assisted by the Confucianism principles, Samurai code of conduct, and Buddhism that were highly discriminating for women, but these warrior women have changed this concept of discrimination as they were quite discouraging for females.

For example according to the Confucianism the females should obey the male members of the family, similarly the views of bushido were that a female should look upon male i. e., her husband by considering that her husband is heaven itself. These women have performed in such a courageous manner that they set examples for other women and liberated them from their inferior status. All the three women i. e., Empress Wu, Hojo Masako, and Nakano Takeko, were brave, it was due to their efforts that women were trained in several martial arts in order to defend their villages as well as homes, and for actively participating in the war. The consequence was that, a strong, agile and flexible woman warrior was capable of holding off many male warriors at that time.

All the three women have set examples by surrendering their selves for home, husband, and family. They have shown loyalty towards their husbands, as well as the domesticity by actively participating in the issues related to the family. All of them have, however, displayed discipline, courage, and loyalty that is expected from the warrior class. They lived hard times, and fought battles, and set examples of strong character, determination, defense of the beloved ones, and physical strength and bravery. Furthermore, they displayed good character as well as ethical conduct.

Such ideal women of China, Korea and Japan may, however, exist in the individuals but as a matter of fact this is not a typical woman of Japan, Korea, and China. Even they are not the depiction of the ideal woman of these countries, but because of these warrior women most of the Japanese, Korean, and Chinese women are fighting against the gender discrimination

that was particularly held for them. The warrior women have given the typical woman a sense that they should recognize their role in the society, in politics, and in the household that is transferred to them due to their gender. As a result of this the women stood up for themselves, and are still taking actions in order to sustain their identity.

In a nutshell, these strong Asian women were brave, passionate, and realistic, but grounded. They were amazing females of the fascinating period in the history of Japan, China, and Korea that was the period of might is right. The beginning of the Kamakura period, Tang, and Silla has saw significant decline in the influence and power of the religious institutions and the imperial courts, but these women have fought in such a way that they help in sustaining the power as well as religious traditions of the country (Shirane). As a result of their efforts, the country became strong culturally that can be seen from the emergence of the warriors, blend of the marital as well as court styles, development in the literature, art, and thought, ethnic values, a strong blend surge of the Buddhism reforms, and value of women that has exerted strong influence on the Japanese, Chinese, and Korean society. The Kamakura era, Tang era, and Silla era is also held responsible for helping the emergence of the present day Japan, China, and Korea, where women is enjoying their political, social, and cultural rights, and are enjoying the freedom to live as an independent human being in a society without any undue pressure of their husbands, society, and other individuals. So, these women have set an example for all the times to come through their efforts, courage, determination, and bravery.

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