Postclassical Japan

The Samurai Suenaga facing Mongols, during the Mongol invasions of Japan. Moko Shurai Ekotoba circa 1293.
Yamato Period: 250-710

• by 6th century, clans from the Yamato plain had established lineage as the imperial family of Japan
• current emperor is direct descendent of these early rulers making this the longest ruling family in history

His Imperial Majesty Emperor Akihito

That’s some continuity
Borrowing from China during the Yamato Period

• The Japanese borrowed and adapted four important elements of Chinese civilization at this time: **Buddhism**; a **centralized, imperial state**; Confucian ethical and political thought; and the **Chinese writing system**.

• *But . . . It is crucially important to understand that what the Japanese borrowed, they also adapted and made Japanese.*  
  Haruo Shirane, Professor of Japanese Literature and Culture, Columbia University
“At this time, Chinese language was to East Asian civilization what Latin was to early Europe. It was written and read by educated elites in China, Japan, Korea, and what is Vietnam today.”
Robert Oxnam
President Emeritus, Asia Society
Prior to this time, Japanese was only a spoken language.

Then the Japanese began using Chinese characters to transliterate their own spoken tongue. Eventually they adapted Chinese written characters to create a set of syllables, called *kana*, that would fit the Japanese language.

*And so, once again, a fundamental aspect of Japanese culture has foreign roots but a uniquely Japanese expression.*

Haruo Shirane
In the year 552, The Emperor Justinian was on the Byzantine throne and the great dome of Hagia Sophia was under construction in Constantinople. This is when Buddhism, the dominant religion in China at the time, reached the Japanese islands from Korea.
Chinese Cultural Influences: art and Architecture (and Buddhism)

Hōryū-ji is a Buddhist temple in Ikaruga, Nara Prefecture, built in the 7th century.
Shintô: can you say . . . Continuity?

- When Buddhism was introduced to Japan during this period of cultural borrowing from the late sixth century, the amalgam of native religious beliefs was labeled, or called, Shintô.

- It's a Chinese type of word, it's written with two characters that mean, "the way of the kami" - kami being the Japanese word for deities or spirits.

- In Shintô, the Japanese look at nature, in particular the natural beauties of the Japanese islands and they have a great love for this. And their art and their aesthetics, to a large extent, centers on this love of nature. And nature is inherently good because the kami--the deities--live in nature. Shintô has largely been concerned with life and the life processes and passages.
Chinese Influence: Political

a centralized, bureaucratic state headed by an emperor;

Confucian ethical and political thought

But not . . . the Chinese notion that the Emperor rules by virtue of a "Mandate of Heaven" that can be withdrawn. Instead, Japanese drew on their own mythological traditions which supported the eternal rule of one imperial family.

And not civil service exams, which would imply meritocracy
Prince Shotoku: 573-621

- Adopted Chinese culture and Confucianism.
- Buddhist sects allowed to develop.
- Created a new government structure:
  - 17 Article Constitution in 604.
Prince Shotuku’s Constitution

Excerpt, Constitution of Prince Shôtoku

The Prince Imperial Shôtoku in person prepared laws for the first time. There are seventeen clauses as follows.

One. Harmony should be valued...

Article IV, Constitution of Prince Shôtoku

The ministers and officials of state should make proper behavior their first principle, for if the superiors do not behave properly, the inferiors are disorderly; if inferiors behave improperly, offenses will naturally result. Therefore, when lord and vassal behave with propriety, the distinctions of rank are not confused. When people behave properly the Government will be in good order.

**Taika Reform Edicts** written and sponsored by Confucian scholars in the Yamato court 645 CE: Use this document to analyze the extent of Chinese influence on Japan:

*Emperor Kotoku’s vow*: The Emperor, the Empress Dowager, and the Prince Imperial summoned together the Ministers under the great tsuki tree, and made an oath appealing to the Gods of Heaven and Earth, and said,

In Heaven there are not two suns: in a country there are not two rulers. It is therefore the Emperor alone who is supreme over all the Empire, and who has a right to the services of the myriad people. . .

Let the people established by the ancient Emperors, etc., as representatives of children be abolished, also the Miyake of various places and the people owned as serfs by the Wake, the Omi, the Muraji, the Tomo no Miyakko, the Kuni no Miyakko and the Mura no Obito. Let the farmsteads in various places be abolished."

Fiefs will be granted for their sustenance to those of the rank of Daibu and upwards on a descending scale. Presents of cloth and silk stuffs were given to the officials and people, varying in value. It is the business of the Daibu to govern the people. If they discharge this duty thoroughly, the people have trust in them, and an increase of their revenue is therefore for the good of the people.
Nara Period, 710-784

• Creation of a new capital, court and bureaucracy in the city of Nara
• Capital and court system imitates tang Chinese capital and court at Changan
• But retained importance of heredity aristocracy (instead of Chinese style Confucius meritocracy) and position of emperor as descendant of sun goddess (and so no Mandate of Heaven) cont.
• Buddhism and Shinto continue to coexist
Imperial edict decreeing the transfer of the capital to Nara, issued by the Japanese government on the 15th day, 2nd month, 1st year of the Wadô Era (March 11, 708 CE) Use this document to analyze the extent of Chinese influence on Japan:

In ancient times, the kings of the Shang Dynasty brought prosperity to their country after transferring the capital five times. The kings of the Zhou dynasty ensured peace in their country after establishing the capital three times. They moved their residences on secure bases. Today, as for the site of Nara, the layout of the four animals is in accord with the model, mountains guard the site in three directions, and the divination suggests good fortune. It is reasonable for us to build a new capital at this site. Materials for construction, as the need arises, should be listed and reported. Construction of streets and bridges should be started after the autumn harvest...

recorded in Shoku-Nihongi, the second official history of Japan after Nihon-shoki, which was compiled in the last decade of the 8th century.
Art and Architecture in Nara

Toudai-ji Buddhist Temple, Nara Japan, built in Nara era

The bronze Daibutsu of Todai temple in Nara is 16 meters high and weighs 500 tons. It was originally cast in 759 AD and was commissioned by Emperor Shomu to appease the gods after a devastating epidemic in 737 AD.

Use these documents to analyze the extent of Chinese influence on Japan
Heian Period: 794-1156

**Characteristics:**
- Growth of large landed estates.
- Arts & literature of China flourished.
- Elaborate court life [highly refined]
  - ETIQUETTE
- Personal diaries
  - *The Pillow Book* by Sei Shonagon [10c]
- Great novel
  - *The Tale of Genji* by Lady Murasaki Shikibu [1000 pgs. +]
- Moving away from Chinese models in religion, the arts, and government.
Heian Court Dress

Era is characterized by extreme elegance and refinement in dress, speech, writing and art.
The Pillow Book
by Sei Shonagon (diary)

a book of observations and musings recorded by Sei Shōnagon during her time as court lady to Empress Sadako during the 990s and early 1000s in Heian Japan

Unlike other civilizations in this time, elite women are encouraged to be literate
Tale of Genji (first novel)

By . . . a woman . . . In the Heian era . . .
hmmm
Lady Murasaki Shikibu

She contributed much to the Japanese script known as *kana*, while men wrote with Chinese characters, *kanji*.
Increasing decentralization → eventual warlord era

• Imperial family increasingly lost real political control as emperors are reduced to puppets playing increasingly onerous ritual roles

• Control passes to Fujiwara regents and warlords

• Decline of emperor reflected in growth of an independent landed aristocracy

• As real control of land and wealth passes to provincial aristocracy, they gain an increasingly independent power base from which to develop their own bands of warriors (which will eventually threaten Fujiwara domination and plunge Japan into civil war)
Feudal Japan:

- 1192-1543

- dominated by powerful regional families (daimyo) and the military rule of warlords (shogun)

- The Emperor remained but was (mostly) a figurehead

- This time is usually divided into periods following the reigning family of the shogun.
Kamakura Era: 1192-1333

- **Military dominance**: though the emperor could not be killed or the imperial title transferred, the military really ruled.
- Military ideals and values would become fundamental to Japan from this period until after WWII.
- Creation of **Shogunate**: real power held by a shogun (supreme military commander) under nominal leadership of emperors.
- **Feudalism**: real power in the hands of aristocratic warriors with relative autonomy in the provinces (decentralized). Warlords are held together by oaths of loyalty, vassalage, marriage and economic and political interest.
- **Bushido**: the way of the bushi (warrior): bravery, pride, honor, absolute loyalty,” death before dishonor”
- **Martial arts**: skill in swordsmanship, archery and horsemanship
- **Strong social stratification**
- **Buddhism** continues to flourish, providing consolation in times of strife
  - Zen Buddhism adopted by aristocrats
- **Mongol invasions** legitimize militarization of society when second invasion was repelled (aided by kamikaze which destroyed fleets )
Minamoto Yoritomo

Founded the Kamakura Shogunate:
1185-1333

Founded the Kamakura Shogunate: 1185-1333
Early Mounted Samurai Warriors
Feudal Society

The emperor reigned, but did not always rule!
Feudalism

A political, economic, and social system based on loyalty, the holding of land, and military service.

**Japan:**

- **Shogun**
- **Daimyo**
- **Samurai**
- **Peasant**

- **Land - Shoen**
- **Protection**
- **Food**
- **Loyalty**
Code of *Bushido*

* Fidelity
* Politeness
* Virility
* Simplicity
* Honor
Seppuku: Ritual Suicide

It is honorable to die in this way.

*Kaishaku* – his "seconds"
Zen Buddhism

- A Japanese variation of the Mahayana form of Buddhism, which came from India through China (“Chan”).
- It reinforced the Bushido values of mental and self-discipline.
Full Samurai Attire
4,400 ships and 140,000 men, but kamikaze winds stopped them.
Muromachi (Ashikaga) Shogunate: 1333-1573

The Muromachi faction of the Ashikaga clan hold shogunate

International trade with China and Korea flourishes, leading to rise of merchant and manufacturing class. Merchants, bankers and pawnbrokers organize into guilds which are associated with important temples and military clans for protection.

Newly flourishing artistic tradition, influenced by Zen Buddhist culture as well as samurai and court society. Noh drama, ritual tea ceremony, flower arranging and ink painting reach their height. Zen influences gardening.
The Age of the Warring States: (1467 - 1568)

Ọ Each regional military clan under the leadership of a daimyo (lord) achieved basic independence; ties to central gov’t reduced even more

Ọ Each regional warlord built his own castle, mobilized an independent army of samurai and hired additional troops from roving bands of mercenaries (like medieval Europe)

Ọ Power shifts from above to below: a century of decentralization and military conflict
Compare to Feudalism in Europe

A political, economic, and social system based on loyalty, the holding of land, and military service.

**Europe:**

- **King**
  - Loyalty
  - Land - Fief
  - Protection
  - Peasant
- **Lord**
  - Loyalty
  - Land - Fief
  - Peasant
- **Knight**
  - Loyalty
  - Peasant
- **Peasant**
  - Food
Code of Chivalry

* Justice
* Loyalty
* Defense
* Courage
* Faith
* Humility
* Nobility
Medieval Warriors

European knight vs. Samurai Warrior
Medieval Warriors

Knight's Armor vs. Samurai Armor