Chapter 18

The Spread of Chinese Civilization: Japan, Korea, and Vietnam

OUTLINE

I. Introduction

Because of the remarkable durability of Chinese civilization as well as its marvelous technological and economic innovations, other cultures began to imitate China. Japan, Korea, and Vietnam were all drawn into China’s cultural and political orbit in the postclassical period. Each of the three areas interacted with China differently, developing different cultural patterns adapted to local conditions. In all of the areas, Buddhism played a significant role in cultural transformation. Indian culture was filtered through China and passed on to these other regions. Buddhism also provided links between Korea and Japan.

II. Japan: The Imperial Age

A. Introduction

Chinese cultural influence in Japan peaked during the seventh and eighth centuries C.E. In 646 the Japanese emperor introduced administrative reforms, the Taika reforms, intended to realign the Japanese government along Chinese models. Chinese patterns of court etiquette, diplomacy, historical writing, and Confucian philosophy became mandatory aspects of the Japanese court. Buddhism swept into Japan. The effort to merge Chinese and indigenous elements was often uneasy. The peasantry reworked Buddhism, merging it with worship of traditional Japanese nature sprits, the kami.

B. Crisis at Nara and the Shift to Heian (Kyoto)

The Taika reforms were intended to create an emperor with absolute powers assisted by a Chinese-style bureaucracy and supported by an army of conscripted peasants. Opposition to the reforms came from aristocratic families and from Buddhist monks. Buddhist monks had become so powerful in Japan that one of their number actually conspired to take over the throne in the 760s C.E. With the imperial government under constant threat of Buddhist disruption, the emperor moved the capital from Nara to Heian (Kyoto). The Buddhists who were forbidden to build monasteries within the new capital settled for constructing monasteries on the hills that surrounded the city. To counterbalance the growing influence of the Buddhists, emperors restored the powers of the aristocratic families, reinforced their traditional control of the imperial government, and permitted them to build up their control of rural estates. Attempts to create a conscripted army were abandoned and military organization was left to members of the rural aristocracy.
C. Ultracivilized: Court Life in the Heian Era

Although attempts to expand imperial centralization were abandoned at Heian, the imperial court produced a refined culture that set standards for aristocratic life. The court established strict rules of social conduct and a hierarchy of status that defined social relationships. The elite in Heian lived in a complex of palaces and gardens. Poetry was the favorite literary expression at Heian. Women participated in the production of poetry and other forms of literature.

D. The Decline of Imperial Power

By the middle of the ninth century C.E., the imperial court was dominated by the Fujiwara family. Aristocratic families competed with Buddhist monasteries for control of land around the capital. Both groups sought to frustrate imperial reforms and limit the power of the emperors. Gradually the secular elite within the imperial court at Heian and the Buddhist monasteries began to cooperate. Both groups came into conflict with the growing regional influence of local lords outside the region of Heian.

E. The Rise of the Provincial Warrior Elite

In the countryside, elite families also sought to monopolize land and labor. These families were able to carve out private precincts ruled by house governments. In each local precinct, the elite family in control constructed small fortresses to house the local lord and his military retainers. The warrior leaders, or bushi, exercised private jurisdiction within their lands and enforced their rule through private armies of mounted troops, or samurai. As the imperial government became increasingly weak, it began to hire local lords and their armed troops to provide for law and order, even in the regions near the capital. Supported by peasants, who supplied the bushi and samurai with food, local warriors began to emerge as a separate and powerful class. Warfare between groups of samurai was often based on heroic combat between champions. The samurai developed a distinctive code of conduct based on honor in war and requiring ritual suicide for disgrace. The rise of the samurai frustrated any attempts for the emergence of a free peasantry in Japan. Treated as the property of the warrior class, peasants turned to salvationist strains of Buddhism, notably the Pure Lands sect. Artisans were concentrated in the fortress towns.

III. The Era of Warrior Dominance

A. Introduction

As the power of the bushi grew, even the court aristocracy depended on alliances with powerful samurai to remain in power. By the 12th century, the regional bushi were able to contest for imperial power. The first conflict was between the Taira and the Minamoto families. During the 1180s, the Minamoto and their allies defeated the Taira, who continued to rely on alliances within the imperial court, while the Minamoto built ties with rural notables.
B. The Declining Influence of China

Chinese influence in Japan waned as the decline of power in the imperial court made maintenance of Chinese models useless. The emergence of a Japanese scholar-gentry was opposed by the attempts of the aristocracy to cling to power. When the Tang empire in China collapsed, Chinese models seemed even less appropriate. While monks and traders still made the journey, official missions to the Chinese court halted in 838 C.E. As a result of the Gempei Wars, the Minamoto family was able to establish the bakufu, a separate military government at Kamakura. Although the emperor and his court were retained, real power resided in the bakufu with the Minamoto and their allies.

C. The Breakdown of Bakufu Dominance and the Age of the Warlords

The first shogun of the bakufu was Yoritomo Minamoto. He severely weakened the military government by eliminating any potential threats to his rule, even from among his own family. At Yoritomo’s death, there was no able heir to succeed him. The Hojo family rose to dominate the bakufu, although members of the Minamoto family continued to hold the title of shogun. In the early 14th century, Ashikaga Takuaji, a member of a collateral branch of the Minamoto family, led a rebellion of bushi who overthrew the Kamakura shogunate and established the Ashikaga shogunate in its place. When the emperor refused to recognize the Ashikaga military government, the Ashikaga shoguns chased him from Kyoto and placed new puppet emperors on the throne. Continued civil strife destroyed whatever power the emperors had been able to retain. Powers of the bushi grew at the expense of central government, whether imperial or bakufu. With the full-scale civil war that was fought from 1467 to 1477, rival heirs of the Ashikaga family sought to create alliances with bushi leaders. The shogunate lost authority to regional lords. Warlord rulers divided Japan into nearly 300 private states under the jurisdiction of daimyos.

D. Toward Barbarism? Military Division and Social Change

Under the daimyos, warfare changed from heroic combat to more modern conflict. Daimyos relied on large peasant armies. As the constant state of war destroyed the Japanese economy, some peasants engaged in futile rebellions against their military overlords. Despite constant conflict, some daimyos attempted to build up their estates and establish rural stability. Local rulers invested in irrigation systems, attempted to recruit new supplies of labor, fostered commercial production, and introduced merchants into local communities. Women in merchant and artisan families may have benefited from daimyo attempts to improve economic conditions. Most women, however, lost status during the daimyo period.

E. Artistic Solace for a Troubled Age

Cultural development continued during the warring-houses era. Particularly important in cultural development was Zen Buddhist monasteries. On the cultural level, Zen monasteries provided for renewed contact with China. Painting, architecture, and garden design, in particular, were important in daimyo society.

IV. Korea: Between China and Japan

A. Introduction

Chinese culture influenced Korea more heavily than any other region, even though indigenous
dynasties continued to rule the peninsula for much of the postclassic period. The people who inhabited the Korean peninsula were different ethnically than those who came to consider themselves Chinese. In 109 B.C.E., a Han dynasty emperor conquered the Korean kingdom of Choson and settled Chinese colonies in Korea. These Chinese colonies provided the conduit through which Chinese culture was transmitted. As Chinese control of Korea weakened, the indigenous Koguryo established an independent kingdom in the northern part of the peninsula. Koguryo contested control of the peninsula with two smaller kingdoms, Silla and Paekche. In all three kingdoms, Buddhism supplied the key links to Chinese culture. In Koguryo, rulers attempted to institute the Chinese examination system, Chinese writing, and a bureaucracy. Opposition to Sinification by the Korean aristocracy led to the failure of the plan.

B. Tang Alliances and the Conquest of Korea

The Tang emperors conquered Korea for China for the second time. In the process of conquest, the Tang allied themselves with Silla in order to defeat the other two dynasties. When Silla proved resistant to external control, the Tang emperors agreed to recognize the Silla monarch as a vassal in return for the payment of tribute. The Chinese withdrew their armies from Korea in 668 C.E., leaving the kings of Silla as independent rulers.

C. Sinification: The Tributary Link

Under the kings of Silla and the succeeding Koryo dynasty (918 C.E. to 1392 C.E.), Sinification was thorough. The Silla rulers intentionally modeled their government after the Tang dynasty. The tribute system was critical to the process of cultural exchange. Tribute missions offered access to Chinese learning, art, and manufactured goods. Scholars from Korea were able to study at Chinese schools and Buddhist monasteries.

D. The Sinification of Korean Elite Culture

The aristocracy of the Korean kingdom of Silla clustered about the capital city of Kumsong. There they became immersed in Chinese culture, including Confucianism. Despite the interest in imitating all things Chinese, the Korean elite preferred Buddhism to Confucianism. The Koreans learned the initial secrets of pottery from the Chinese, but Korean artisans produced masterworks that often rivaled the efforts of their teachers.

E. Civilization for the Few

Sinification was largely limited in Korea to the elite, who monopolized most political offices and dominated social life. Much of Korea’s trade involved supplying luxuries for the elite. To support the importation of luxuries, Korea exported raw materials. Artisans remained in the lower ranks of Korean society. Korea failed to develop a distinctive merchant class. The lower ranks of Korean society existed to serve the elite. Salvationist Buddhism promised an afterlife as a release from the drudgery of service to the Korean aristocracy.

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F. Koryo Collapse, Dynastic Renewal

Periodic rebellions against the Korean government and aristocrats eventually weakened both the Silla and Koryo regimes. Following the Mongol invasion of Korea in 1231, the Yi dynasty was founded in 1392. It survived in much the same format as its predecessors until 1910.

V. Between China and Southeast Asia: The Making of Vietnam

A. Introduction

The Chinese were interested in the annexation of Vietnam in order to control the rice production of the Red River valley. The Vietnamese were less conciliatory toward the adoption of Chinese culture than other peoples. The first attempts at conquest during the Qin dynasty resulted in the establishment of trade between China and Vietnam but no political unification. Aspects of Vietnamese culture, such as language, household formation, local autonomy, dress, and the higher status of women, differed significantly from Chinese patterns.

B. Conquest and Sinification

The Han dynasty emperors were responsible for the conquest of the Red River valley. By 111 B.C.E., Chinese troops and administrators were present in Vietnam. Initially the Viet elite cooperated with its conquerors and entered the bureaucratic administration of local government. The Viet elite undertook Confucian education and underwent the Chinese examination system as a means of qualifying for official posts in the government. With the introduction of Chinese agricultural techniques, Vietnamese agriculture became highly productive. Adoption of Chinese military techniques gave the Vietnamese advantages over the neighboring cultures of Southeast Asia.

C. Roots of Resistance

Chinese cultural importations failed to make an impression on the Vietnamese peasantry. Vietnamese resistance to political inclusion within the Chinese empire led to rebellions. The most famous of the rebellions occurred in 39 C.E. under the Trung sisters.

D. Winning Independence and Continuing Chinese Influences

Separated from China by substantial distance and geographical barriers, Vietnam was difficult for the Chinese to govern. Whenever political chaos existed in China between dynasties, the Vietnamese were quick to reestablish their independence. Following the fall of the Tang, the Vietnamese achieved separation from China in 939 C.E. Until their conquest by the French in the 19th century, the Vietnamese were able to stave off foreign invasion. Chinese cultural influences did not end with the restoration of Vietnamese political independence. Vietnamese dynasties after 980 C.E. continued to imitate the Chinese bureaucracy, examination system, and the scholar-gentry. The Vietnamese administrators were never as powerful as their Chinese counterparts because their power did not extend effectively to the village level. The competition with Buddhist monks also limited the power of the nascent Vietnamese scholar-gentry. Failure to establish a strong, centralized administrative network weakened many Vietnamese dynasties.
E. The Vietnamese Drive to the South

Vietnam continued to enjoy advantages over other rivals in Indochina. Their main adversaries were the Chams and Khmers, who resided in the southern portions of the region. The Vietnamese remained less interested in the hill peoples, whom they regarded as savages. Between the 11th and 18th centuries, the Vietnamese drove the Chams from their lands in the south. Following the defeat of the Chams, the Vietnamese expanded their territories at the expense of the Khmers. By the eighteenth century, the Vietnamese had successfully taken much of the land surrounding the Mekong River delta.

F. Expansion and Division

As southern expansion continued, the central government in Hanoi had increasing difficulties establishing their authority in the south. By the 16th century, a rival dynasty (the Nguyen) emerged to challenge the northern Trinh dynasty. For two centuries, the war between the Trinh and Nguyen continued. Internal war weakened the Vietnamese when it became necessary to face an external threat from European imperialism.

VI. Global Connections: In the Orbit of China: The East Asian Corner and the Global System

Chinese culture spread to the sedentary agricultural populations of Korea, Japan, and Vietnam in the first millennium C.E. Chinese writing, bureaucratic organization, religion, and art all made impressions on the indigenous cultures. In general, the local elites of the three regions actively sought to emulate Chinese models. Differences within the three areas resulted in divergent outcomes and alternative mixes of the indigenous and the imported. China was able to establish direct control over Korea. In Vietnam, Chinese influences mingled with Indian cultural contributions. Only Japan remained permanently independent of China and, thus, was able to selectively adapt Chinese models to Japanese needs. In East Asia, as a whole, cultural exchanges took place in isolation from the rest of the civilized world.
TIMELINE

Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.

last Japanese embassy to China
Vietnam wins independence from China
independent Silla kingdom established
Ashikaga Shogunate begins in Japan
start of Gempei Wars in Japan
Yi dynasty established in Korea

TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one.

Taika reforms
Tale of Genji
samurai
bakufu
Hojo
Onin War
Koguryo
Paekche
Khmers
Le
Heian
Fujiwara
seppuku
shoguns
Ashikaga Shogunate
daïmyo
Sinification
Yi
Chams
Trinh
Nara
bushi
Gempei Wars
Minamoto
Kamakura Shogunate
Choson
Silla
Trung sisters
Nguyen
Hue
MAP EXERCISE

The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in the chapter. Locate the following places on the map.

Japan  Korea  Vietnam

Which of the satellite regions could be described as peninsular? Which regions could be described as insular? How does this help to explain the variations in dissemination of Chinese culture among the regions? How does this help to explain the late appearance of Chinese culture in these regions?
MAKING CONNECTIONS

The following questions are intended to emphasize important ideas within the chapter.

1. What led to the failure of the Taika reforms? What was the political result?
2. Describe the nature of Japanese government between the Gempei Wars and the Onin War.
3. What was the nature of Japanese society and economy during the period of the daimyos?
4. How was the Sinification of Korea accomplished? How did it affect the social development of Korea?
5. What accounts for the cultural differences between the Vietnamese and Chinese?
6. What was the nature of the Vietnamese government following the reestablishment of independence?
7. What were the common elements of Chinese culture passed to all three of the satellite civilizations?
8. How was East Asian civilization different from other postclassical civilizations in terms of cultural diffusion?

PUTTING LARGER CONCEPTS TOGETHER

The following questions test your ability to summarize the major conclusions of the chapter.

1. How do the relationships between China and the three satellite civilizations (Japan, Korea, and Vietnam) relate to the shifting dynastic fortunes in China? Which of the three culturally influenced areas seems least affected by internal Chinese political developments? Why?
2. Compare and contrast the degree of Sinification in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.
SELF-TEST OF FACTUAL INFORMATION

1. What was the primary difference between the Chinese relationship with Japan and Chinese impact on the other satellite regions?
   a. Japan never received Confucianism from China.
   b. Unlike the other regions, Japan retained the Confucian bureaucracy throughout the postclassical period.
   c. Japan rejected Buddhism in favor of strictly Japanese animism.
   d. Unlike the other regions, China never directly ruled Japan.

2. Because the three satellite civilizations received Buddhism through Chinese filters rather than directly from South Asia,
   a. they received the Mahayana branch of Buddhism likely to appeal to peasants.
   b. Buddhism was strongly affected by the Legalist school of Confucianism.
   c. monasteries failed to develop in satellite civilizations.
   d. Buddhist schools were more likely to identify with the centralized government.

3. What was the central purpose of the Taika reforms?
   a. to remake the Japanese monarch into an absolutist Chinese-style emperor
   b. to destroy the Confucian scholar-gentry in favor of a military aristocracy
   c. to increase the power of the Buddhist monastic structure
   d. the destruction of the traditional peasant-conscript army

4. The *Tale of Genji* described
   a. the military organization of the bakufu in Kamakura.
   b. life at the imperial court at Heian.
   c. the structure of society under the Ashikaga Shogunate.
   d. the travels of an imperial emissary in China.

5. Which of the following statements concerning the provincial military elite in Japan is *NOT* correct?
   a. Provincial elite families often arose from local landowners and estate managers.
   b. The provincial elite came to control land and labor and to deny these resources to the imperial government.
   c. The rise of the provincial elite corresponded to the recovery of the imperial government and its overthrow of the aristocracy of the court.
   d. Within their little kingdoms, warrior leaders administered law and collected revenue.

6. Which of the following statements concerning the nature of warfare among the bushi is most accurate?
   a. The bushi depended on infantry tactics, equipping the samurai with long spears.
   b. The introduction of gunpowder allowed the bushi to rely on artillery.
   c. Battles hinged on massed assaults predicated on the willingness of retainers to sacrifice themselves.
   d. Battles hinged on man-to-man duels of great champions typical of the heroic stage of combat.
7. The rise of the samurai in provincial Japanese society
   a. reduced peasants to the status of serfs bound to the land they worked.
   b. produced greater social mobility among the higher ranks of the peasantry.
   c. frustrated the development of artisan and merchant classes.
   d. created a class of free farmers with private land holdings throughout Japan.

8. The end of the Gempei Wars signaled the beginning of
   a. the centralized Confucian bureaucracy.
   b. the Japanese feudal age.
   c. the Tokugawa Shogunate.
   d. the Ashikaga Shogunate.

9. Which of the following was NOT a result of the growth of power of the provincial warrior elite in Japan?
   a. The relevance of Chinese precedents and institutions to the Japanese diminished.
   b. The Confucian precept that warriors should dominate the social and political world was strengthened.
   c. Pretensions to a heavenly mandate and centralized power became ludicrous.
   d. The emergence of a scholar-gentry was stifled by the reassertion of aristocratic power and prerogatives.

10. One of the major reasons for the Chinese failure to assimilate the Vietnamese was
    a. the unwillingness of the Vietnamese elite to accept Chinese military organization.
    b. the lack of impact of Chinese cultural imports in the Vietnamese peasantry.
    c. the absence of Buddhism in Vietnam.
    d. the widespread cultural impact of European culture in Indochina by the 13th century.