

The *Kentōshi*: Japanese Interactions with East Asia, 538-794 CE

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Introduction:

This lesson explores the concepts of cultural borrowing and adaptation, focusing on the influence of Chinese political, social, and economic traditions on the Yamato state in Japan. Students use both primary and secondary sources as they investigate the lesson's guiding questions.

This lesson is appropriate for high school World History and AP World History courses. It assumes students' prior study of Tang China, particularly its government institutions, flourishing trade, and cultural achievements. It also assumes understanding of the basic ideas of Confucianism and Buddhism.

The lesson could be used in a "flipped classroom" if students are assigned to view the video clip and read the Fuqua article as homework prior to attending class.

Objectives: After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Define the concepts of *cultural borrowing* and *adaptation*.
- Evaluate the influence of Chinese political, social, and economic traditions on the Yamato state in Japan.
- Read and answer questions on key primary source documents.

Guiding Questions:

- What political, economic, social and cultural institutions did the Yamato state borrow from Asia through encounters with Chinese and Koreans? How and why were these institutions borrowed?
- How did continental institutions become integrated with indigenous Japanese institutions and beliefs?

Standards and Guidelines:

World History Content Standards

Era 4 (300-1000 CE), Standard 3: Major developments in East Asia and Southeast Asia in the era of the Tang dynasty, 600-900 CE.

Standard 3A: The student understands China's sustained political and cultural expansion in the Tang period.

7-12: Assess explanations for the spread and power of Buddhism in Tang China, Korea, and Japan.

Standard 3B: The student understands developments in Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia in an era of Chinese ascendancy.

7-12: Assess the patterns of borrowing and adaptation of Chinese culture in Japanese society from the 7th to the 11th century.

5-12: Describe the establishment of the imperial state in Japan and assess the role of the emperor in government.

AP World History Curriculum Framework

Period 3: Regional and Transregional Interactions, c. 600 C.E. to c. 1450

Key Concept 3.2. Continuity and Innovation of State Forms and Their Interactions

I. Empires collapsed and were reconstituted; in some regions new state forms emerged.

C. Some states synthesized local and borrowed traditions. Teach one illustrative example of such *synthesis by states* using the example of Chinese traditions that influenced states in Japan.

Common Core State Standards: Grades 6-12 Literacy in History/Social Studies

Key Ideas and Details, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Plan for Assessment:

Formative assessment can be conducted through observations of interaction and work conducted in groups. Students' notes can also be collected for additional evaluation. The concluding writing activity is designed to serve as the summative evaluation for the lesson. A rubric is available for teacher use or peer review.

Time Required: Two to three 50-minute class periods or one to one-and-a-half blocks.

Materials:

Materials Provided	Online Resources	Other Materials
Handouts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note-taking Worksheet • <i>Kentōshi</i> Ship Display (reading level: 11.1) • Visual Primary Sources Assessment Tools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubric for The <i>Kentōshi</i> Essay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Classical Japan: Four Elements Borrowed from China</i>, Asia for Educators video clip, 38 sec. Full transcript available on the same webpage. • <i>The Japanese Missions to Tang China</i>, The Japan Society (reading level: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer, projector, and Internet connection (multiple computers will be needed if students are to do the research on Day 2 in class)

	12.3) • Excerpts from <i>The Reform Edict of Taika</i> , Asia for Educators, Columbia University (reading level 8.3) • The Constitution of Prince Shōtoku , Asia for Educators, Columbia University (reading level: 5.3)	
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Implementation:

Day 1

1. To introduce the lesson, share the following information with students:

In certain periods, Japan's government aggressively reformed and borrowed culture from other nations, subsequently adapting and transforming what was borrowed according to local priorities. This was true in the Asuka (538-710) and Nara periods (710-794), as Japanese peoples looked to the developed and centralized empires of the Sui and Tang dynasties and Korean peninsula kingdoms, which possessed a sophisticated political and governance system, new religious and philosophical ideas, as well as highly developed cultural practices, including art, architecture, city planning, ceramics, and literature. Japanese states borrowed many political, social, economic, and cultural institutions from Sui and Tang China, sometimes via the Korean peninsula. In this lesson, you will be looking at primary and secondary sources to learn more about cultural borrowing and adaptation in these periods.

2. Distribute the **Note-taking Worksheet** and tell students that they are going to be watching a short video clip that will be their first source for answering the questions on the worksheet. You may need to clarify that “continental institutions” refers to practices or systems borrowed from the Asian continent.
3. Show the short video clip, **Classical Japan: Four Elements Borrowed from China**, available at http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/at/cl_japan/cj03.html. Debrief the film clip, by asking the following questions: *What political, economic, social or cultural institutions did the Yamato state borrow from the Chinese and Koreans?* (Buddhism; a centralized imperial state; Confucian ethical and political thought; and the Chinese writing system) *How were borrowed institutions adapted and transformed?* (The Japanese did not adopt the idea of a Mandate of Heaven as the source of imperial power, but instead drew on Japanese mythology that supported the rule of an imperial family.) Encourage students to add notes to their worksheets as the questions are discussed.
4. Explain that in the next steps of the lesson, students will read secondary and primary source documents to uncover other elements borrowed, indigenous institutions maintained, how the institutions were integrated, and how the knowledge was transferred. Tell students that one way in which knowledge was transferred was through diplomatic study and trade missions from the Yamato court to Sui and Tang China and Korean kingdoms. The

diplomatic missions to Tang China were known as *kentōshi*. Students will look at the impact of the *kentōshi* through a secondary source.

5. Have students read and annotate the article, **The Japanese Missions to Tang China**, written by Doug Fuqua and appearing on the website, *About Japan: A Teacher's Resource* (http://aboutjapan.japansociety.org/content.cfm/the_japanese_missions_to_tang_china_7th-9th_centuries). For a flipped classroom, this should be done individually as homework prior to the lesson. If read in class, have students read in groups of two or three. If appropriate teachers can differentiate for lower-level readers by having small groups read only one section and then share summaries with other groups or by shortening the reading to end before the first-person account of the mission. Students should add notes to their worksheets as they read.
6. Then discuss the following questions, asking students to support their answers with evidence from the text:
 - *What political, economic, social, or philosophical/intellectual benefits did the Japanese gain as a result of diplomatic missions undertaken in the Sui and Tang eras?* (They were able to tap into a great deal of Chinese knowledge and scholarship. They learned how to structure a bureaucracy to run the centralized government using a variety of Chinese customs and practices. They adopted the Chinese calendar, and two religious scholars who participated in missions started new Buddhist sects in Japan.)
 - *Evaluate the impacts of these benefits on Japan.* (While it is difficult to evaluate the impact based on the information students have gathered, students should understand that Tendai and Shingon Buddhism were influential in Japan and that adoption and adaptation of Chinese practices allowed the Japanese government to consolidate power.)
 - *Were the *kentōshi* a good use of the Yamato court's resources?* (Most students will likely say "yes" based on the knowledge gained through these diplomatic missions.)
7. In groups of two to four, students will read one of two primary sources which are examples of the impact of Japanese interactions with the Tang dynasty: **Excerpts from *The Reform Edict of Taika*** (<http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/japan/taika.pdf>) or **The Constitution of Prince Shōtoku** (<http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/japan/shotoku.pdf>). Students should read the shorter version of their assigned document (presented first at each link) and discuss the accompanying prompts in their groups. After each group has had sufficient time to read and prepare, pair groups that have read different documents and ask them to teach each other about their findings, adding new information to their **Note-taking Worksheet**.
8. Share the following information with students:

Cultural borrowing includes the processes of adoption, rejection, and adaptation. From the primary sources, wholesale borrowing of Chinese institutions and beliefs seems apparent. What the primary sources do not tell us is that there were debates between familial clans in regard to cultural borrowing from the continent. For example, according to Confucian ideas, males should rule. In Japan, however, female ruling empresses continued to rule through the Nara period. Another controversy related to the merit-based exam system, which members of the Nara court with Korean ancestry lobbied unsuccessfully for. In Nara Japan, bureaucrats were selected by patrimonialism. The belief in kami (Shintō dieties) was maintained despite increasing emphasis on Buddhism. In the 500s, members of clans who supervised religious ceremonies of the court opposed Buddhism. A century later, in addition to the eight ministries that made up the Tang-

style Council of State, the Yamato court established a Council of Shrine Affairs (Jinji-kan) to complement the Ministry of Rites under the Council of State. In the late Nara period, Shintō shrines were organized in similar fashion to the system of provincial Buddhist temples.

9. Have students add to their **Note-taking Worksheet** based on these debates that reflect the processes of rejection and adaptation.

Day 2

10. Remind students that encounters with Chinese and Koreans via diplomacy and trade impacted Japan in significant ways during the Nara period. The **Kentōshi Ship Display** handout lists tributary goods *kentōshi* transported to and from Tang China. *Kentōshi* ships were one way Silk Roads goods from Greece, Rome, Persia, and Tang China arrived in the Japanese islands.

11. Tell students they will be exploring visual primary sources (art and architecture) to learn why Japan is considered the “eastern terminus of the Silk Roads” and how practices and arts that traveled the Silk Roads became integrated with indigenous Japanese materials, institutions, and/or beliefs from 538-794 CE. Model the students’ task using the example of the planned capital city:

With the ascension of Emperor Kōtoku in 645, the Yamato court established its first planned capital city, based on Chinese ideas about urban planning which they were learning about from the continent and emissary visits to Chang’an in China. There would be five planned capital cities before the Heian capital (modern-day Kyoto). Cities were set up on a grid-system and following principles of feng shui. Unlike the Chinese model, Japanese did not fortify their planned cities with walls and moats. For images, see

*<http://www.asukanet.gr.jp/asukahome/ASUKA2/ASUKAMIYA/fuziwaragu.html>;
<http://www.hgeo.h.kyoto-u.ac.jp/soramitsu/hei-jokyo.html>; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heian-ky%C5%8D>)*

12. Distribute the **Visual Primary Sources** handout and go over the instructions with students. Students are to (a) choose a practice or artifact, (b) research its origins and how it was adapted/integrated with indigenous Japanese materials, institutions, and/or beliefs, and (c) prepare to share their findings with the class. In their presentations, they should include an image of the art or architecture examined. Students should begin their work in class and finish it as homework if necessary. As an option, students interested in the same topic could work together on this task.
13. Have students share their findings with the entire class or in small groups. Students should add information from their presentations to their **Note-taking Worksheet**.
14. For the concluding assessment, have students use their notes and evidence from the various sources they examined to write a brief essay (a minimum of six to eight complete sentences) addressing the lesson’s guiding questions:
 - What political, economic, social or cultural institutions did the Yamato state borrow from Asia through encounters with Chinese and Koreans? How and why were these institutions borrowed?
 - How did continental institutions become integrated with indigenous Japanese institutions and beliefs?

Use the **Rubric for The *Kentōshi* Essay** to establish expectations and for grading and/or peer review.

Resources and References:

- Asia for Educators. "Classical Japan: An Introduction." *Asian Topics: An Online Resource for Asian History and Culture*. New York: Columbia University, 2002-2014.
http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/at/cl_japan/cj01.html. Includes eight brief video clips pertaining to the development of Nara Japan and its cultural encounters with Sui and Tang China. Titles: [The Capital at Nara](#), [Influence of Chinese Culture](#), [Four Elements Borrowed from China](#), [Eternal Rule by One Imperial Family](#), [Confucianism and Prince Shōtoku's Constitution](#), [Buddhism Introduced](#), [Shintō](#), and [Japanese Use of Chinese Writing System](#).
- Asia for Educators. "The Constitution of Prince Shōtoku." *Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs)*. New York: Columbia University, 2009.
<http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/japan/shotoku.pdf>.
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http://aboutjapan.japansociety.org/content.cfm/the_japanese_missions_to_tang_china_7th-9th_centuries.
- Huffman, James L. *Japan in World History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Piggott, Joan R. *Tōdaiji and the Nara Imperium*. PhD dissertation. Stanford University. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1987. (Order No. 8723070)