

Early Korea, Japan, and Vietnam
AP World History
Kienast

Early Korea

The Korean peninsula is located at the eastern end of Asia, between China, Siberia (now part of the Russian Federation), and the islands of Japan. Because of the complex, shifting, and historic relations between these areas, as well as relations with other places such as the United States in more recent times, the history of Korea has been told in many ways and is still the subject of hot debate both inside and outside the Koreas. Over the last 2,000 years the Korean peninsula has been wracked by eight major invasions and countless smaller wars and incursions. Strategically situated on a partial land bridge in the Yellow Sea interaction sphere, the peninsula has been a natural access route for invasions to and from the Asian mainland.

By 400 BC Chinese records tell of formidable cultures on the peninsula. Among these early peoples were the Yemak and Puyo. By 108 BCE, the Han Empire had set up several posts on the peninsula after battles with the Wiman Chosun kingdom. Over the next four hundred years many aspects of Chinese culture were assimilated into the various peninsula cultures. With the decline and fall of the Han dynasty in China, the Chinese command posts were gradually abandoned and three major kingdoms emerged on the peninsula. These three rival kingdoms were Koguryo (37 BCE-668 CE), Paekche (18 BCE- 660 CE), and Shilla (Silla) (57 BCE-935 CE). Although Koguryo was the earliest, largest, and most powerful of the Three Kingdoms, by the seventh century it was suffering from a decline in leadership and was weakened by wars with Sui dynasty China. For sixteen years, a tremendous amount of resources had been used in constructing a long wall between Koguryo and China. Shilla, on the other hand, was modernizing its government and eventually strengthened its relations with the newly established Tang dynasty. Eventually, Shilla was able to defeat both Paekche and Koguryo in a series of wars and take control of much of the peninsula

As the Tang dynasty declined in China, leadership in Unified Shilla was also weakening. In the course of uprisings and fighting the Unified Shilla state fell into pieces. Eventually a rebel leader named Wang Kon became strong enough to challenge Shilla. In the end, he and the last Shilla king ended it amicably by each marrying one of the other's daughters, with Wong taking control and allotting the former king a large holding of land. The new state would be known as the Koryo dynasty.

The Koryo dynasty, founded by Wong Kon, extended the borders of the defeated Unified Shilla northwards into parts of old Koguryo – Koryo is a shortened form of that name. The name “Korea” is derived from Koryo. During the Koryo period Buddhism flourished and was closely linked to the ruling caste. By 1231, the Mongols had begun serious incursions into Koryo that lasted thirty years with devastating effect. An independent dynasty, the Choson, or Yi, dynasty lasted from 1392 until 1910. In the course of the dynasty, relations were established with Ming China. The peninsula was invaded by the Japanese in the late 16th century; their neighbors, the mighty Manchus, invaded a few decades later; Western powers threatened Korea by the mid-19th century, while Japan positioned to take control of Korea by the end of that century.

Early Japan

Although Japan's culture developed late in Asian terms and was much influenced by China and later the West, its history, like its art and literature, is special among world civilizations. As some scholars have argued, these outside influences may have "corrupted" Japanese traditions, yet once absorbed they also enriched and strengthened the nation, forming part of a vibrant and unique culture. Trade with China and Korea was heavy during Japan's early years, leading to the spread of cultural traditions such as Buddhism.

Early in Japan's history, society was controlled by a ruling elite of powerful clans. The most powerful emerged as a kingly line and later as the imperial family in Yamato (modern Nara Prefecture or possibly in northern Kyushu) in the third century CE., claiming descent from the gods who created Japan. An imperial court and government, shaped by Chinese political and social institutions, was established. Numerous official missions of envoys, priests, and students were sent to China in the seventh century. These visits eventually led to the Taika Reforms.

Although it did not constitute a legal code, the Taika Reforms (Taika means great change) mandated a series of reforms that established the *ritsuryo* system of social, fiscal, and administrative mechanisms of the seventh to tenth centuries. *Ritsu* was a code of penal laws, while *ry* was an administrative code. Combined, the two terms came to describe a system of patrimonial rule based on an elaborate legal code that emerged from the Taika Reforms.

The Taika Reforms, influenced by Chinese practices, started with land redistribution, aimed at ending the existing landholding system of the great clans and their control over domains and occupational groups. The country was divided into provinces headed by governors appointed by the court, and the provinces were further divided into districts and villages. Reforms and bureaucratization of government led to the establishment of a permanent imperial capital at Heijokyo, or Nara, in 710 CE. The capital at Nara, which gave its name to the new period (710-94), was styled after the grand Chinese Tang Dynasty (618-907) capital at Chang'an and was the first truly urban center in Japan. It soon had a population of 200,000, representing nearly 4 percent of the country's population, and some 10,000 people worked in government jobs. The ultimate impact of the Taika Reforms was to bring an element of Chinese culture to Japan, including Chinese architectural styles, Confucianism, and a merit-based bureaucracy.

Factional fighting at the imperial court continued throughout the Nara period. Imperial family members, leading court families, such as the Fujiwara, and Buddhist priests all contended for influence. In the late Nara period, financial burdens on the state increased, and the court began dismissing nonessential officials. In 792 universal conscription was abandoned, and district heads were allowed to establish private militia forces for local police work. Decentralization of authority became the rule despite the reforms of the Nara period. Eventually, to return control to imperial hands, the capital was moved in 784 to Nagaoka and in 794 to Heiankyo (Capital of Peace and Tranquillity), or Heian, about twenty-six kilometers north of Nara. By the late eleventh century, the city was popularly called Kyoto (Capital City), the name it has had ever since.

The samurai trace their origins to the Heian Period during which they rose out of the continuing battles for land among the family clans. The samurai (or bushi) were the warriors of pre-modern Japan. They later made up the ruling military class that eventually became the highest ranking

social caste of the Edo Period (1603-1867). They gave complete loyalty to their Daimyo (feudal landowners) and received land and position in return. Each Daimyo used his Samurai to protect his land and to expand his power and rights to more land. Samurai were supposed to lead their lives according to the ethic code of bushido ("the way of the warrior"). Strongly Confucian in nature, bushido stressed concepts such as loyalty to one's master, self discipline and respectful, ethical behavior. Samurai gained enormous power in 1185 CE with the rise of the Kamakura Shogunate. The Kamakura shogunate was a military dictatorship in Japan headed by the shoguns from 1185 to 1333. It was based in Kamakura. Shoguns were military dictators who ruled Japan in place of the emperor. Shoguns successfully united the warring clans of Japan in the 1500's under the rule of Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Later, a shogun named Tokugawa Ieyasu would usher in a time of peace and trade that is considered one of Japan's golden ages, the Edo Period. This Edo period saw the rise of a much more centralized government through consolidation of power in a new capital and a decreased role for the regional warlords, the daimyo.

The Edo Period (1603-1867) is named for the new capital city of Edo (modern Tokyo) that was established in the late 1500's. During this time, the samurai were forced to live in castle towns, were the only ones allowed to own and carry swords and were paid in rice by their daimyo or feudal lords. Masterless samurai were called *ronin* and caused minor troubles during the 1600s.

Relative peace prevailed during the roughly 250 years of the Edo Period. As a result, the importance of martial skills declined, and many samurai became bureaucrats, teachers or artists. The Edo Period was known for increasingly centralized government. Trade with China increased and centralized government was needed to promote trade. Art especially boomed during this period. Wealthy merchants financed arts such as woodblock printing and kabuki theater. Kabuki is the traditional style of play used in Japan and originated during the Edo period. Trade was the reason for these changes. Increased trade led to greater prosperity and a decline in fighting. The power of merchants began to grow as Japan became prosperous through trade and the daimyo lost power because their power was based on protection that was no longer necessary. Japan's feudal era eventually came to an end in 1868, and the samurai class was abolished a few years afterwards.

Early Vietnam

Originally Vietnam was divided into Annam, Dai Viet, and Champa. Much of its early history is marked by trade and conflict with China. Early Vietnam is famous for trading Champa rice with China, a type of rice that is drought-resistant and one which matures faster.