

History
UNFOLDING

CHINA AND JAPAN IN THE MODERN AGE



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Introduction

Two Nations, Two Paths

The story of China and Japan since the mid-1800s is the story of two parallel responses to the West and to the forces of modernization. Both nations were forced to react to the aggressive actions of Westerners seeking to open them up to trade. Both regarded the West as a mortal threat and took steps to protect themselves accordingly.

But their responses were vastly different.

Japan acted with amazing unity to absorb as much of the West's ways as it needed to industrialize, centralize, and create a fully modern state in an amazingly short space of time. China, on the other hand, took a long and tortuous path to modernity, a path along which it is still struggling today.

Together, the stories of these two great nations illustrate an important point. However much the West may have dominated other regions, those other regions were always active participants in their histories, not the mere passive pawns of others.

This set uses 12 visual displays to focus on several key themes in these stories, comparing and contrasting them at key points along the way. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

Japan: The Meiji Revolution

The focus here is on the spirit of reform and the nature of the changes that transformed Japan into a powerful industrial nation in less than half a century. Several Japanese works of art are used to illustrate the spirit of the times for Japanese living through this transformation.

China: The Old Order Passes

The illustrations focus on China's clash with the West and the divided way its leaders responded to the challenge. As a result, warlordism, civil war, and invasion plagued China throughout the first half of the 20th century.

Japan: Ashes to Asian Superpower

Japan's rise to industrial power was flawed. Its weak form of democracy gave way to militarism, dictatorship, war, and disaster. But in a new Meiji-like era after the war, it again drew strength from the West and recreated itself into a thriving and democratic industrial superpower.

China: Mao and the Future of a Revolution

Mao Zedong's totalitarian communist state finally established China as a fully independent state, but at an enormous cost. After the disasters of Mao's rule, China has moved slowly to reform and to abandon the worst excesses of communism, at least with respect to its economy. In many ways, it is even still struggling to find its own route to modernity.

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

DIGITAL IMAGES The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

*China and Japan in the Modern Age***OBJECTIVE**

1. Students will better understand how rapid and sweeping Japan's response to Western pressures was after Commodore Perry forced it to open its ports to trade with the West.

Japan: The Meiji Revolution

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustrations 1A, 1B & 1C**

In 1853, U.S. Commodore Matthew C. Perry's squadron opened Japan to trade (Illustration 1A), ending Japan's isolation from the West. He also sparked an upheaval that in 40 years turned Japan into Asia's first fully industrialized nation. Japan's old order might have changed anyway. Its military leader, the shogun, faced growing criticism. Two centuries of isolation and peace had produced strains—a growing population, angry peasants, restless merchants, and discontent among the powerful ruling families known as daimyo. In the 1860s, they ended the shogunate and restored the emperor as the symbol of a united nation. The young emperor, Prince Mutsuhito, took the name Meiji (“enlightened rule”) and backed reformers who sought to modernize Japan. He and his wife, Empress Shoken, appear here in Illustrations 1C and 1B.

Illustrations 2A & 2B

To cope with the West, Japan first set about learning from it. Experts were sent to Europe and the U.S. to bring back the best ideas in science, education, technology, and government. With amazing speed, Japan adopted what it needed to modernize, as these paintings suggest. Illustration 2A is a Japanese print from 1870 showing various forms of traditional and modern transportation in Japan. Illustration 2B is one panel of an 1871 triptych print showing foreign and Japanese people on a street, some wearing traditional clothing, others more modern forms of dress. The triptych is by well-known Japanese artist Hiroshige III.

Illustrations 3A & 3B

As Japan modernized, feelings of national pride soared even as Japan hurried to copy many ideas and institutions from the Western nations. In doing this, Japan opened itself up to the West at a time of rapid industrial growth and during the rise of huge corporations reaching worldwide markets. This is suggested by Illustration 3A, an 1892 ad for Singer sewing machines. It shows many small scenes of people all over the world using these machines. Modernization was so rapid, it must often have left the Japanese feeling bewildered. Illustration 3B is another Hiroshige III panel of what was supposedly an American town square. It is actually based on an illustration of the Fredericksburg Castle near Copenhagen, Denmark.

Lesson 1—Japan: The Meiji Revolution

Illustrations 1A, 1B & 1C

1B

1C

1A



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Discussing the Illustrations

1. In 1853, a special visit sparked one of the biggest turning points in Japan's history. Using Illustration 1A, explain briefly what this visit was. Why do you think it was an important turning point? What point of view about this visit does the painting express?
2. For two centuries before Perry's visit, Japan was ruled by the shogun—though there also was an emperor. What do you know about the shogun and the emperor in Japan?
3. The shogun shared control with powerful landowners called *daimyo*. After 1853, some *daimyo* overthrew the shogun and began the Meiji Restoration. What was this, and why is it called a "restoration"?
4. Illustrations 1B and 1C are of Empress Shoken and her husband Prince Mutsuhito, who became Japan's new Meiji emperor in 1868. "Meiji" means "enlightened rule." The Meiji era was more a revolution than a restoration. Can you explain why? What can you tell about Japan's emperor from these two photos?

Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** The Meiji Restoration put an end to the long reign of the Tokugawa Shogunate, which had come to power in Japan in the 1600s. Learn more about the Tokugawa Shogunate, its rise to power, and the nature of the political system in Japan during its rule. In particular, assign one or two group members to learn more about each of the following four figures or groups from the Tokugawa era:

The Emperor
The Tokugawa Shoguns
The Daimyo
The Samurai

Create a timeline of key events in the history of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Use the timeline and what you have learned in a brief talk summarizing its history and the nature of its political system. Open the talk to discussion centered on this question: "Why was the Tokugawa Shogunate a time when Japan tried so hard to isolate itself from the West?"