

DIPs. Monday 6th November 2017:

Japan

“One nation, one civilisation, one language, one culture and one race” Taro
Also, former Japanese Prime Minister

*What Japanese words do we know? Why have these particular words entered into our common culture? Do they provide insight into our relationship with Japan?
What is the national stereotype of Japan? What is the basis for this? Does it differ from other national stereotypes and how/why?*

A BRIEF HISTORY OF JAPAN

Japan's culture has been moulded by strong influences from the outside world followed by long periods of isolation.

Samurai/Shogun

In the feudal era {12-19 centuries} a new ruling class of warriors emerged - the Samurai. One of the most successful of these Samurai, Oda Nobunaga, conquered numerous other warlords and almost unified Japan but was assassinated in 1582.

In 1600, Tokugawa Iyeyasu defeated all rival clans and was appointed shogun [ruler of Japan]. The Tokugawa shogunate began the isolationist policy called sakoku, [locked country], which spanned the next 250 years of political unity known as the Edo period. Relations and trade with other countries were severely limited, nearly all foreigners were barred from entering Japan and the ordinary Japanese people prohibited from leaving.

*Does this one aspect provide any insight into the Japanese national development?
Are there parallels with other countries?*

In 1854 the US navy forced the opening of Japan to the outside world, attacking with the so-called “black ships”. The Japanese realised that they were far behind the European world when the American Commodore Matthew C Perry came to Japan in large warships with armament and technology which far outclassed those of Japan. National politicians concluded, “If we take the initiative, we can dominate; if we do not, we will be dominated”, leading Japan to throw open its doors to foreign technology.

Did our country [or any other] have similar insights/conclusions?

The political and economic crises which ensued led to the Boshin war. This is sometimes known as The Japanese Revolution, a civil war fought in 1868 between forces of the ruling Tokugawa shogunate and those wishing to return to the power of the Imperial court. This led to the establishment of a centralised state under the name of the Emperor - Meiji

The Meiji Restoration

In the Meiji restoration beginning 1868, the national identity of Japan was further developed as a result of government policies to develop a strong centralised state. A national education system, the introduction of National Service and a national military resulted in a dominant national dialect replacing local and regional dialects. This was based on the linguistic patterns of Tokyo's ruling classes, the Samurai [warriors]. The death penalty was introduced for foreigners entering or Japanese nationals leaving the country.

During this period, Japan was transformed into an industrialised world power which embarked on a series of military conflicts to expand the nation's sphere of influence. These were the two Sino-Japanese wars or 1894/1895 and 1937-1945 and the Russo-Japanese war of 1904/05.

Was the Japanese policy of expansionism any different from that of the British Empire or The Third Reich?

The empire of Japan aimed to dominate Asia and The Pacific and was already at war with China from 1937. Germany subsequently formed the Axis alliance with Italy and Japan. Japan's war with China escalated with the attack on Pearl Harbour on 7th December 1941; the next day, the USA, UK and Netherlands declared war on Japan. When Japan refused to surrender under the terms of the Potsdam Declaration of 1945, the USA instigated the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, resulting in surrender. Millions of Japanese had been killed and the country's infrastructure and industry wiped out.

What is your position on the American atomic bombing of Japan?

Kamikase pilots of WW2

Kamikase means divine wind in English. It is believed that 3,000-4,000 Japanese pilots crashed their planes into an enemy target on purpose. Only 10% of missions were successful but they sank some 50 Allied vessels. Japanese opinion on Kamikase pilots has been divided because their legacy has been used as a political tool. During the 7 years of the Allied occupation, the suicidal tactic was portrayed as insanity. In the 1970's and 80's, the vast majority of Japanese thought of the Kamikaze as something shameful, a crime committed by the state against their family members. But in the 1990's, the nationalists started testing the water, seeing if they could get away with calling the pilots heroes. When there was little comment, they became bolder.

However, in a survey of 2015, only 11% of Japanese people would fight for their country. That was the lowest of all countries polled. { Pakistan:89%, India:75%, Turkey:73%, China:71%, Russia:59%, US:44%, UK:27%, Japan:11% }

Young people interviewed in Tokyo used the words "Irrational, heroic and stupid" to describe kamikaze actions, although use of the word heroic was questioned.

Is Kamikase the equivalent to modern day terrorists who carry out suicide missions?

Post-war Japan

In the 1970's and 1980's, there was exceptional economic growth, with Japan already having become the world's second largest economy in the 1960's. This economic miracle was promoted through government stimulating private growth, firstly through regulations and protectionism and later through trade expansion. There was also considerable American aid. In 1991 the economic bubble burst, caused by speculation and unsustainable soaring property prices. The Finance ministry raised interest rates in an attempt to halt speculation but this quickly led to a stock market cash and debt crisis, as borrowers failed to make payments on many debts backed by speculative assets. The subsequent banking crisis led to government bailouts of the banks. For the next decade, Japan experienced low growth and deflation, while its stock market hovered at near record lows and its property market never fully returned to the boom levels.

How did Japan and Germany achieve such rapid post-war economic growth, whereas the British economy appeared to stagnate?

Was the American/British crash of 2007 the same as that in Japan? Could/should lessons have been learned?

Natural disasters

The archipelago lies on several major fault lines. There are 1500 volcanoes and earthquakes are common. In 2011, the earthquake and tsunami killed 19,000 people and triggered equipment failures at the Fukushima nuclear power plant

Population

The population is currently 127,000,000 but is in decline. It is the 10th largest country in the world. There are 6800 islands, although the biggest 4 - Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu and Shikoku - have 97% of the population. 81,000,000 [65%] live in urban areas, which are only 3% of the landmass. Only 15% of the landscape is level enough for agriculture leading to high population densities in the coastal regions i.e. 35,000,000 in the Tokyo Bay Area.

Unlike many other countries, Japan's population appears largely homogenous with 98.5% being ethnic Japanese. Japan has an ageing population and is currently the world's oldest country. By 2050, 40% of the people will be over 65. While 5 decades ago there were 12 workers for every retiree. If this trend continues, by 2050 the ratio will be 1:1. Also the population might well fall by 30% to 87,000,000 due to the declining birth rate. Japan has one of the world's highest suicide rates, although this has declined in the last 3 consecutive years. Japan also has the world's highest life expectancy.

What could Japan do about this situation? Is it sustainable?

Political Life

Japan has been a constitutional monarchy since the Meiji constitution of 1890. In 1947, a new constitution was drafted by advisers to the Allied occupational force and

adopted by parliament. This constitution guarantees the equality of the sexes, extends suffrage to all adult citizens, emphasises the Emperor's renunciation of claims to divine status and assigns him a symbolic role as Head of State.

The constitution renounced the use of military force and forbids the state from maintaining Armed Forces [Article 9]. However, Japan maintained a self-defence force. In 2015 legislation was passed to allow the country's military to participate in foreign conflicts. The new legislation interpreted self-defence as allowing the military to operate overseas for "collective self-defence" in support of Allies.

There was opposition to this - both in Parliament and by the public with a ratio of 2:1 against. 90% of people surveyed regarded the act as unconstitutional, as the Prime minister had circumvented the constitutional amendment procedure without Diet {Parliament} debate, vote or public approval/referendum.

Why has the government changed the constitution? Was it justified in this act? Despite legislation, does Japan remain a largely sexist nation? How does this compare with our society - politically, socially, spiritually?