

# Japan Docs Discussion

“Adept at Adaptation”

1. **Considering cultural borrowing and assimilation:** What evidence of cultural borrowing can you identify in these documents? To what extent did those borrowed elements come to be regarded as Japanese?

- **Chinese Influences:**

- Legalism-
- Confucianism-
- Buddhism-
- Political-

1. **Considering cultural borrowing and assimilation:** What evidence of cultural borrowing can you identify in these documents? To what extent did those borrowed elements come to be regarded as Japanese?

- **Topic Sentence:** Heavy borrowing from Chinese influences is evident in this selection of documents.
- **Topic Sentence:** While Chinese influence is clear, these ideas are presented as if a part of Japanese indigenous culture.

1. **Considering cultural borrowing and assimilation:** What evidence of cultural borrowing can you identify in these documents? To what extent did those borrowed elements come to be regarded as Japanese?

- **Topic Sentence:** Heavy borrowing from Chinese influences is evident in this selection of documents.
  - (Docs 9.1, 9.3, 9.4, 9.5)
- **Topic Sentence:** While Chinese influence is clear, these ideas are presented as if a part of Japanese indigenous culture.
  - (Docs 9.2, 9.3, 9.5)

**1. Considering cultural borrowing and assimilation:** What evidence of cultural borrowing can you identify in these documents? To what extent did those borrowed elements come to be regarded as Japanese?

- In these documents, one can find evidence of borrowing from the Chinese Legalist tradition, particularly in Document 9.1 where the two paddles concept is prominently displayed.
- Evidence of Confucian philosophy is found in Documents 9.1, 9.3, 9.5, where references to filial piety, the elite as role model, and selfless behavior are emphasized.
- All the documents refer to Buddhist influences. Document 9.2 is devoted to the distinctive features of the Zen tradition; Document 9.4 provides an account of a pilgrimage to a Buddhist temple; and the other documents all recount how Buddhist teachings impacted Japanese social and political thought.
- To some extent, all of the documents reveal that these borrowed elements came to be regarded as Japanese, as they do not refer to the Chinese origins and integrate them into Japanese social and political ideas.
- Document 9.3 explicitly explains how Buddhist and Confucian ideas were Japanese in conception.
- Document 9.5 refers to Confucian and Buddhist ideas in the context of an indigenous Japanese warrior tradition.

**2. Looking for continuities:** What older patterns of Japanese thought and practice persisted despite much cultural borrowing from China?

**2. Looking for continuities:** What older patterns of Japanese thought and practice persisted despite much cultural borrowing from China?

- Older patterns of Japanese thought and practice include the Shinto faith, ideas about the origins and legitimacy of the Japanese imperial family, and origins myths concerning Japan.
- While the courtly culture was not fully in place before the arrival of Chinese cultural borrowing, one could argue that the relative freedoms of courtly women in Japan, as recounted in Document 9.4, may draw on older Japanese traditions.
- One might also argue that the bushido code drew in part on Japanese traditions that predated Chinese cultural borrowings.

**3. Noticing inconsistencies and change:** No national culture develops as a single set of ideas and practices. What inconsistencies, tensions, or differences in emphasis can you identify in these documents? What changes over time can you identify in these selections?



**3. Noticing inconsistencies and change:** No national culture develops as a single set of ideas and practices. What inconsistencies, tensions, or differences in emphasis can you identify in these documents? What changes over time can you identify in these selections?

- The lack of Confucian values in Document 9.4 runs counter to Documents 9.1 and 9.5. Document 9.3 emphasizes, when describing the political tradition, distinctly Japanese traditions and seeks to place Chinese borrowing into a Japanese framework. Document 9.1, on the other hand, does not emphasize Japanese origins for the set of political principles it presents.
- There are some similarities but also important differences between the ideal government official as described in Document 9.1, which was produced in 604, and the code of bushido as presented in Document 9.5, which dates from the fifteenth century. Thus, these two documents reflect change over time in Japanese society. Document 9.1, The Seventeen Articles Constitution, emphasizes the importance of leaders being “harmonious” (#1) and leading by example (#4). It also states that decisions should be made in consultation with others (#17). While Document 9.5 also places importance on the moral character of the samurai, there is much more focus on Buddhism as a guiding force in life. This is illustrated in the stress that the two excerpts place on respecting elders and ancestors.
- The understanding of the Buddhist tradition in Japan differs from Document 9.2, produced in the thirteenth century, and Document 9.3, written in the fourteenth century.

**4. Considering Japanese Buddhism:** In what different ways did Buddhism play a role in Japan during the postclassical era? How did Buddhism change Japan, and how did Japan change Buddhism?

**4. Considering Japanese Buddhism:** In what different ways did Buddhism play a role in Japan during the postclassical era? How did Buddhism change Japan, and how did Japan change Buddhism?

- Reverence for the Buddha, his teachings, and Buddhist monks were explicitly required in The Seventeen Article Constitution of 604; Buddhist shrines became places of pilgrimage, as detailed in Document 9.4; and the Lotus School and Zen Buddhist traditions both secured large following in Japan.
- Japan adapted elements of Buddhism into its own traditions. As detailed in Document 9.3, Kitabatake Chikafusa sought to integrate Buddhist teachings into traditional Japanese ideas about imperial authority and the Shinto religion when he asserted that Buddhist teachings helped to disseminate “the bright seeds of the divine light” offered by the Sun Goddess and the deities of the Shinto faith (p. 412). Also, Buddhist ideas helped to shape and justify portions of the bushido code of the samurai.