

Asian Odyssey

A National K-12 Interdisciplinary Curriculum Model

The
Cleveland
Museum
of Art

A world of great
art for everyone

MILITARY HISTORY OF CHINA AND JAPAN

Grade Level

This lesson was developed for a High School English class, grades 10-12. It is designed so that students have a two-week period to do research and prepare a presentation.

Purpose

To examine how the Chinese and Japanese used art and literature to bolster the legitimacy of military regimes.

Concepts

- Zhou dynasty (BCE 1100-256): The longest dynasty in Chinese history, it established distinctive political and cultural characteristics that predominated in China for the next two millennia. The name of King Wen, the first Zhou ruler, became synonymous in the Chinese mind with "culture" and "civilization."
- Hou Ji (in Chinese mythology, Lord of Millet Grains): the mythical male ancestor of the Zhou, who was worshiped as early as the 22nd century BCE. He was thought to be the provider of abundant harvests and was honored in elaborate rituals in the hope of continued prosperity. According to legend, Hou Ji was conceived when his childless mother stepped in the toe print of a god; as a child he was said to have been brought up in the forest by the birds and animals.
- Zhou: located in the Wei River Valley, a dependent state of the Shang dynasty (BCE 1750-1040); with who it was alternately on friendly terms or at war. King Wen (d. BCE 1129) and his son, King Wu (d. BCE 1115) built up the Zhou military until it was strong enough to successfully rebel against the Shang in the mid-11th century. The Zhou established a new state with its capital at Hao (later known as Chang'an, the modern Xi'an).
- Kings Wen and Wu justified the establishment of the Zhou state and the overthrow of their Shang overlords by invoking the newly formulated concept of the Mandate of Heaven.
- Mandate of Heaven: a fundamental Chinese political principle, used to justify changes in political dynasties: the ruling dynasty had become immoral, broken Heaven's laws, and deserved to be punished (overthrown) and replaced by a virtuous ruler; used by each successive dynasty in Chinese history to legitimize its overthrow of the previous dynasty.

- Duke of Zhou, the younger brother of King Wu, and regent for the third Zhou ruler, consolidated the Zhou state, creating a feudal system under which all of the land belonged to the king and all the people are his subjects.
- Confucius (BCE 551-479), the most important thinker in Chinese history, whose philosophy became the basis for the Chinese government until the 20th century, regarded the early centuries of Zhou dynasty history as an idea period of government. The political realities of the Zhou state were the basis for Confucius's model of the Chinese political state, where the king acts as father to all his subjects, who in turn owe him unquestioning obedience and loyalty (the concept of filial piety, where children behave toward their parents with loyalty and obedience).

Key Ideas

- The Zhou had established a feudal system under which local rulers (often members of the imperial family) administered their states but pledged loyalty and military assistance to the Zhou rulers. The emperor also maintained under his direct control a number of standing armies stationed at various points around the empire to fight the barbarians. The bronze halberd was the main weapon. After several centuries the political and military authority of the Zhou rulers declined as local rulers began to assert their power and fight among each other.
- The Zhou military was advanced, continuing the Shang tradition of using horse-drawn chariots in battle. The bronze halberd was the main weapon of the foot soldier, and archaeologists have found the remains of these weapons. As the technologies of bronze casting became more sophisticated, and with the introduction of iron tools and weapons, the Chinese developed far more effective methods of warfare. Mounted warriors made increasing use of the crossbow, and by the Tang period, catapults were also common weapons of war.
- The first emperor of the Qin dynasty (BCE 221-210) is credited with the construction of China's Great Wall, designed to keep out the northern barbarian tribes. In actuality he linked together and extended many of the existing fortifications from previous dynasties, interconnecting them to form a solid construction about 1,650 miles long.
- During the Han dynasty, Wudi, known as the Martial Emperor, greatly expanded China by incorporating territories on its borders. The emperor sent trading caravans to the nomadic tribes of Central Asia, trading silk for various goods, particularly horses from Ferghana (modern Uzbekistan) that were far superior to Chinese horses for military purposes.
- Under the short-lived Sui dynasty (581-618) the army was turned into a system of militias that were self-supporting when the country was not at war, a system that was adopted by the Tang. Military service was rotated between defense of the national frontiers and duty in the capital. Using this army together with auxiliaries recruited from ethnic groups the Tang rulers pushed back would be invaders and so extended their territorial control beyond China proper. At its peak of power, the Tang controlled large parts of central Asia all the way into Iran as well as Manchuria, most of the Korean peninsula.
- The Yuan dynasty illustrates the military prowess of the Mongols, a non-Chinese nomadic tribe. In the 12th century, Genghis Khan (1162-1227) unified the disparate Mongol tribes to form a cohesive fighting force. By 1206, he had 95 military units

under his control. Each unit consisted of 1,000 men and their supporting families who lived off pastureland that was assigned to them. At the head of the army was an honor guard of 10,000 of his best soldiers.

- Genghis Khan claimed that he had a divine mission from heaven to rule the whole world. To this end, he led military campaigns west into Central Asia and Russia and east to Manchuria and Korea. All Mongol boys learned to ride and shoot weapons at an early age so they were easily mobilized into a well-trained cavalry. They were skilled horsemen who could attack by crossbow at long range. While his army was often outnumbered, Genghis Khan managed to defeat many larger armies.
- Under the Ming, a new hereditary cast of soldiers was created. Additionally, commanders were made into military nobility. Strategic garrisons were established to prevent any resurgence of Mongol power.
- For centuries, the government of Japan was dominated by a succession of powerful families whose leaders were emperors in all but name. From 858 onward, the Fujiwara clan controlled the government. At the time Japan was made up of small rival states controlled by military clans who were constantly at war with each other.
- In 1192, the military chief of the Minamoto clan, Yoritomo, received the title of Shogun, formally Seii-Tai-Shogun (Barbarian-Subduing Generalissimo), conferred by emperor on the head of the country's strongest military clan. From then until the beginning of the Tokugawa Shogunate in the 1600s, when the title became hereditary, the chief function of the emperor was to formally confer the title of shogun on the de facto ruler of the country.
- While the emperor remained the head of government, he became increasing a figurehead with real power held by the head of the strongest clans. Rich, powerful provincial landowners, daimyo, set up and maintained their own private armies, organizing groups of warrior to defend their estates. The prerequisite of being a daimyo was not only military prowess but also the possession of estates large enough to provide sufficient rice to pay his private army.
- Known as samurai, the soldiers recruited by these daimyo owed their overlords absolute allegiance and unquestioning obedience. Their behavior was governed by a special code of honor, known as *Bushido*, which laid down rules for conduct on and off the battlefield based on inner discipline. *Bushido* also governed the relationships between samurai as well as defining their spiritual life. If they broke the code, they were required to perform ceremonial seppuku, or suicide. *Bushido* contains elements of Confucianism, Zen Buddhism, and Shinto.
- From the 12th century onward, the warriors (samurai) were the highest of Japan's four castes, followed by the peasants, artisans, and merchants. They were awarded this position because they defended the country from attack and enforced its sanctions.
- Samurai was a hereditary position. These samurai were graded in military ranks, the higher the rank the more you were paid—though all salaries were paid in rice.
- The military armor worn by daimyo and samurai was designed for fighting on horseback. It was much lighter and allowed for a much greater range of movement than the chain-mail armor worn by European knights at the same period. The elaborate helmets and headgear were designed to instill terror in an enemy.

Materials

China

Album of Daoist and Buddhist Themes: Search the Mountain: Leaf 41, 1200s, CMA 2004.1.41

Chariot Handle Bar Cap, BCE 475-221, CMA 1985.128

Receiving Surrender from the Eli: from Battle Scenes of the Quelling of Rebellions in the Western Regions, with Imperial Poems, c.1765-1774; poem dated 1755, CMA 1998.103.1-16

Japan

A Heavenly General (One of the Junishinsho), 13th century. CMA 1988.53

Guardian Figure, 1000s, CMA 1969.126

Sword Guard, Japan early 19th century, CMA 1919.369

Sword Guard, Japan, early 19th century, CMA 1919.421

Handout

Procedure

1. To introduce the lesson, show students side-by-side images of *Leaf 41* from the *Album of Buddhist and Daoist Themes* and *A Heavenly General (One of the Junishinsho)*. Both of these depict celestial beings but both show their subjects in full battle armor. Ask students if they can tell which is Chinese and which is Japanese? Tell them to keep these figures in mind as they proceed with the lesson.
2. Review brief history of the Chinese and Japanese warrior.
3. Assign a student to read aloud “When a Son is Born,” from *Book of Songs* (see Handout).
4. Then read “The Code of *Bushido*” (see Handout). Ask the students to draw similarities and difference between the two documents.
5. Divide the class in half and tell one group they are to be Chinese scholars, the other group Japanese scholars. Each group will research warfare in its assigned culture (see Bibliography).
6. After two weeks, the students should give a PowerPoint presentation about their assigned culture (ask for a volunteer spokesman from each group). Students are to use the CMA images in their PowerPoint presentations as evidence of their research.
7. After the presentations, ask students to reexamine the poem, “When a Son is Born,” and “The Code of *Bushido*.” Have representatives from each group of scholars cite examples from history that ties into the culture's respective codes.
8. As a class, ask students what can we learn from this comparison about the expectations of heroes, and what constitutes heroic actions?

Enrichment

- A. Using the poems as primary sources, describe as fully as possible the life of a warrior in eighth-century BCE China.
- B. Compare the concept of the Mandate of Heaven with the Divine Right of Kings, and other notions of the king's responsibilities toward his people.

- C. Research the evolution of armor in Japan and how it is constructed, then write an essay comparing it to the armor worn by the knights and their horses during the Crusades.

Ohio State Standards

English writing application standard

1. Write responses to literature that organize an insightful interpretation around several clear ideas, premises or images and support judgments with specific references to the original text, to other texts, authors and to prior knowledge.
2. Generate writing ideas through discussion

Bibliography

Duus, Peter. *Feudalism in Japan*. (Second Edition). NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976.

Jansen, Marius B., ed. *Warrior Rule in Japan*. NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995

Johnston, Alastair Iain, *Cultural Realism, Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1995..

Kierman, Frank A., Ed. *Chinese Ways in Warfare*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974.

Newman, John. *Bushido: The Way of the Warrior*. New York: Gallery Books, 1989.

“Military Technology” <http://depts.washington.edu/chinaciv/miltech/miltech.htm>

This lesson was developed by George Harley, Shaker Heights School District, Shaker Heights, Ohio

HANDOUT "WHEN A SON IS BORN"—Confucius "Song of Songs"

乃生男子	When a son is born,
載寢之床	He is cradled in the bed,
載衣之裳	He is clothed in robes,
載弄之璋	Given a jade sceptre as toy.
其泣嗶嗶	His lusty cries portend his vigor,
朱芾斯皇	He shall wear bright, red knee-caps,
室家君王	Shall be the lord of a hereditary house.

乃生女子	When a daughter is born,
載寢之地	She is cradled on the floor,
載衣之裼	She is clothed in swaddling-bands,
載弄之瓦	Given a loom-whorl as toy,
無非無儀	She shall wear no badges of honor,
唯酒食是議	Shall only take care of food and drink,
無父母詒罹	And not cause trouble to her parents.

"When a Son is Born," *Book of Songs* [Confucius], <http://www.chinapage.com/poem109.html>

Bushido

The Way of the Warrior

The code of Bushido is the ethical code of conduct developed during Japan's feudal period. This occurred at about the same time that the code of chivalry was developed in Europe. The development of both systems was directly related to the structure and purposes of feudalism, a social, governmental system wherein certain noble families controlled most of the land, and maintained private armies of professional soldiers. In Japan, these soldiers were called samurai. For almost five hundred years, various Japanese lords, called daimyo, warred with each other for land and for political and economic power. They employed thousands of the Samurai warriors, who swore loyalty to them alone. To hone their professional skills, outrageous license was granted to the samurai. A samurai could kill anyone who was not a samurai for any reason whatsoever or for no reason at all. It was reported that samurai would cut off the heads of passing peasants merely to test the cutting edge of their swords! Soon, these excesses led to the threat of anarchy. To forestall this, some form of noblesse oblige had to be imposed on the samurai. The code of bushido was the result.

The code demands adherence to seven basic virtues:

- **JUSTICE:** Justice is the principle of moral rightness, as applied to the administration of law. This requires more than just everyone receiving a fair deal.

It also requires a strict upholding of right for its own sake, no matter what the cost.

- **COURAGE:** Courage is the state of mind or spirit that enables one to face danger with self-possession, confidence, and resolution. Courage is required to support justice. Justice without force to support it is ineffective.
- **BENEVOLENCE:** Benevolence, or kindness, creates within a person a feeling of empathy for another's distress. The discomfort such empathy causes impels them to lessen the distress of the other person. Benevolence had to be required to prevent courage from becoming a rashness that would perpetrate the very ills the code was designed to lessen.
- **POLITENESS:** Politeness is the attitude marked consideration for others, correct manners, and tact. During the age of the samurai, failure in politeness could literally cause one to lose his head. Even today, the Japanese are marked by their strict attention to politeness.
- **VERACITY:** Veracity or truthfulness. This was so strict a requirement that once a samurai swore his blood oath of fealty to his daimyo, he never again signed another contract. The word of a samurai was considered to be as good a guarantee as one could get.
- **HONOR:** Honor is a keen sense of personal integrity which is maintained without legal or other obligation. It is knowing the difference between right and wrong and striving always to do what is right. Impugning the honor of a samurai was a blood challenge. For a samurai to lose his honor was so serious a matter that the only sufficient apology that he could make was seppuku, ritual suicide.
- **LOYALTY:** Loyalty is the act of being faithful and steadfast to one's homeland, government, or leader. Though the daimyo are no more, loyalty is still sought after by heads of state, employers and supervisors. The student of bushido should learn these virtues and apply them to the martial arts today, both on and off the field of battle.

“The Code of *Bushido*,” <http://www.unf.edu/~lrose/bushido.htm>