

Seventh and Eighth Centuries

Robust trade linked the archipelago and the continent even before the introduction of continental culture to Japan in the sixth and seventh centuries. By the end of the sixth century, arts and technologies from the Korean peninsula and China were becoming increasingly commonplace in Japanese life. Buddhism and Chinese writing were quickly adopted by the ruling class, drastically changing the cultural landscape of Japan.

Buddhism's influence spread throughout Japan, promoted by powerful leaders such as Prince Shōtoku Taishi (574–622), a nephew of Empress Suiko (554–628). Prince Shōtoku established Shitennōji Temple in Osaka in 593, the first state-sponsored Buddhist temple in Japan. A scale model of the original temple is on display in the museum, along with a life-sized reconstruction of Prince Shōtoku's sarcophagus and burial chamber, located at Eifukuji Temple, a temple about 2 kilometers north of the museum.

By the eighth century, Chinese writing was widely used in Japan to disseminate Buddhist texts, official decrees, and other important documents. Paper was brought to Japan around the same time, but few examples of text on paper have survived from the sixth and seventh centuries. Paper was fragile and very expensive. Most of the examples of Chinese writing from this time that survive are written on wooden tablets called *mokkan*. Because *mokkan* were much cheaper than paper, most are records of trade and debt. The surviving *mokkan* provide a window on the daily life of officials in western Japan during the seventh and eighth centuries.