

The Sino-Japanese Peace Memorial House

This museum commemorates the Treaty of Shimonoseki, which ended the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). The treaty was the result of a month-long negotiation between leaders from both nations. It was a landmark event in Japan's efforts to expand its territory and redefine its position on the global stage.

The museum displays documents and materials related to the war and the negotiations that ended it, as well as a recreation of the conference room where the treaty was negotiated and signed.

The First Sino-Japanese War

Japan began modernizing in the Meiji era (1868–1912), and this cultural shift was accompanied by a shift in national identity. Having already been forced to accept unfavorable treaties with Western nations, Japan's leaders began seeking ways to strengthen the country's standing overseas. The Korean Peninsula was a focus of those efforts.

In the final decades of the Joseon kingdom (1392–1897), Korea was economically and militarily vulnerable, and pro-imperialist factions in Japan looked toward Korea as a prime target; it lay just across the Sea of Japan, and establishing an outpost there would support future expansion into China.

For centuries, Korea had been a tributary state of China, which was also pursuing modernization under the Qīng dynasty (1644–1911). The Joseon government maintained strong ties with Qīng China, but, beginning in the 1880s, some rebellious Korean factions began to cooperate with Japan. This conflict came to a head in 1894, when the Donghak Peasant Revolution broke out in Korea. China sent troops to support the government, and the rebellion was quickly suppressed. However, Japan sent its own troops to Korea to challenge China's control, and this led to the outbreak of a war between Japan and China on August 1, 1894.

The First Sino-Japanese War was fought largely on the Korean Peninsula, but the battles extended to the Chinese mainland. Japan won decisively, both on land and at sea, and even seized the crucial port of Dalian, in Northeast China. Soon after the destruction of

the Chinese fleet at Weihaiwei in February 1895, the two parties agreed to commence peace talks, which were held in Shimonoseki.

The Treaty

The Sino-Japanese Peace Conference began on March 20, 1895, at a luxurious inn called Shunpanrō. The Chinese delegation included statesperson Lǐ Hóngzhāng (1823–1901) and his adopted son Lǐ Jīngfāng (1854–1934), who were advised by former US secretary of state John W. Foster (1836–1917). The Japanese representatives were led by Prime Minister Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909) and Foreign Minister Mutsu Munemitsu (1844–1897).

Japan began from a very strong position, having thoroughly defeated China's military. However, just a few days into the negotiations, Lǐ Hóngzhāng was attacked by a Japanese radical as he made his way back to his lodgings at Injōji Temple. Fearing for his safety, Lǐ began taking a less public route to the meetings, and Japan suffered the embarrassment of failing to protect an important foreign guest.

The two nations agreed to a ceasefire and signed the treaty on April 17, 1895. Japan secured many concessions from China, which was made to recognize the full independence and autonomy of Korea, thus ending a centuries-long tributary relationship. China also ceded control of the Penghu Islands, Taiwan, and the Liaodong Peninsula. Moreover, China was obliged to pay Japan war indemnities of approximately 7.5 million kilograms of silver, to open the ports of Shāshi, Chóngqīng, Sūzhōu, and Hángzhōu to Japanese trade, and to grant Japan the same favored status it had given to Western nations.

The Shimonoseki Treaty established Japan as the clear victor. China had been the dominant military and cultural force in Asia for centuries, and this victory gave Japan the confidence and economic resources to expand its territory still farther. At the time, aggressive imperialism was seen as the natural behavior of a modern global power.

The Building

This museum was built in 1937 on the grounds of the original Shunpanrō building to house items used during the negotiations. It is a reinforced concrete structure with specially designed roof tiles stamped with the house's name. The conference room has been recreated inside, and the surrounding corridor is lined with documents,

photographs, and other materials relating to the Sino-Japanese War and the peace talks that ended it.

The European-style chairs upholstered with Japanese motifs of phoenixes were custom-made in Britain for the Japanese government. They are arranged in the actual seating order of the delegations, as seen in the photos along the corridor wall. The writing utensils on the central table and the French heating stove nearby are also original items used at the conference.

This building was not damaged in the firebombing of Shimonoseki during World War II, but Akama Jingū Shrine next door was nearly leveled. One local story attributes this to divine intervention, as the hall was safeguarding the shrine's central object of worship in its underground concrete bunker during the air raid.