Japan Makes It Own

Trace how borrowed ideas became local traditions.

7.H.9 "Identify the cause and effect relationship leading to Japan becoming independent from earlier Chinese influences to develop their own political, religious, social, and artistic traditions."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline causes of change in Japan, then circle one resulting change in government, religion, court society, and art. Draw an arrow from each circled change to a cause you underlined.

A Court Finds Its Own Way

1. Imagine a messenger arriving at Japan's Heian court with news from China. For centuries, Japanese leaders had borrowed Chinese writing, laws, and ideas about government. By the late 800s, however, Japan's court had grown confident in its own ways. In 894, the court ended official missions to China, partly because travel was dangerous and China's Tang dynasty was weakening. With fewer official trips, leaders relied more on local choices. They kept an emperor, but powerful families, especially the Fujiwara, controlled many court decisions through marriage ties.

2. Chinese Buddhism had reached Japan earlier, but it did not replace local beliefs about kami, the spirits honored at shrines. Instead, many people practiced both, and Japanese Buddhist groups developed ways of worship suited to life in Japan. Court society also took a different path from China's. In China, examinations could help educated men enter government. In Heian Japan, birth and family ties usually mattered more for high court positions. These choices reflected the power of Japanese families and the continued importance of local religious traditions.

3. Japanese artists and writers also reshaped what they had learned from China. Chinese characters remained in use, but Japanese writers developed kana, a script that could record Japanese words more easily. Court women used kana to write works such as The Tale of Genji. Painters created yamato-e, pictures that often showed Japanese scenery and court life rather than Chinese subjects. As travel and official exchange with China declined, local language and court interests gained more room to shape art. Independence did not mean erasing Chinese influence; it meant building new traditions from it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did the court end official missions to China in 894, and what political shift followed as leaders made more local choices?

2. How did local beliefs affect what happened to Buddhism after it reached Japan?

3. How did the power of Japanese families make Heian court society different from China's?

4. How did Japanese language and court interests shape two artistic traditions described in the passage?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine official missions to China had continued regularly after 894. In four or five sentences, predict how traditions in two different areas of Japanese life might have developed differently. Support each prediction with a passage detail, and make clear that your ideas are possibilities, not facts.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 7 · 7.H.9

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline causes of change in Japan, then circle one resulting change in government, religion, court society, and art. Draw an arrow from each circled change to a cause you underlined. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did the court end official missions to China in 894, and what political shift followed as leaders made more local choices?	**Dangerous travel and the weakening Tang dynasty helped bring the missions to an end. The emperor remained, but powerful families, especially the Fujiwara, controlled many court decisions.**
2	How did local beliefs affect what happened to Buddhism after it reached Japan?	**Buddhism did not replace beliefs about kami. Many people practiced both, and Japanese Buddhist groups developed their own ways of worship.**
3	How did the power of Japanese families make Heian court society different from China's?	**Birth and family ties usually mattered more for high court positions in Heian Japan, while examinations could help educated men enter government in China.**
4	How did Japanese language and court interests shape two artistic traditions described in the passage?	**Writers developed kana to record Japanese words and used it in works such as The Tale of Genji. Yamato-e painters often chose Japanese scenery and court life as subjects.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

If official missions had continued, Japanese leaders might have followed more new ideas about government from China instead of relying so much on local choices. Powerful families such as the Fujiwara might still have held influence, but court decisions could have followed more Chinese models. Writers might have used Chinese characters more often alongside kana if they had encountered writing from China more regularly. These changes are only possibilities because Japan was already adapting borrowed ideas to fit its own needs.

Accept other passage-supported cause-and-effect explanations. For Part 3, look for two plausible predictions in different areas, each linked to a passage detail and stated as uncertain.