

Japanese history, language and animation

For this presentation we had to choose a familiar topic so I chose the subject that has been intriguing me for the last 7 years-Japan and its characteristics. First of all we have to understand why Japan is different in so many ways from our civilisations. The Japanese ancestors established their first settlements in the area in 12,000 BC. The golden age of the ancient Japan as a civilization started in the first millennium BC and it lasted for 2.000 years. This era was greatly influenced by China, which helps us understand why the Japanese use Kanji as their writing, which is originally Chinese.

The era of Feudal Japan followed-it lasted from the 12th till the 19th century. In this period the shogun (warlords) and the daimyo (powerful families) ruled Japan, leading the politics of isolationism, especially in the last 2 centuries. The Samurais, Geishas, Kimonos and other Ceremonies originated in the 7 centuries. In 1853 the Japanese opened to the world and became a strong political force, which took part in both of the World Wars. After the occupation from the 2nd World War Japan developed incredibly quickly and is now known as one of the leading forces in the world economy.

Having studied carefully or vaguely the history of Japan one can easily see, why the Japanese use different writing and language than we do. Their words consist of small units, syllables and that's why they have so many different writings and characters.

The easiest one to learn is the Rōmaji (ローマ字), which uses only one letter per sign and is actually written pronunciation, made in 17th century, because the other writings are complicated and this was why it was hard for the merchants from for ex.: Portugal and Japan to understand each other.

The writing called katakana (片仮名) is taught in the first 4 years of the elementary school and is normally used to write foreign words and names, emphasized words and scientific terms. Hiragana (平仮名) is used for auxiliary verbs, grammatical particles and for words that have no kanji.

The one that is the most complicated and adopted from the Chinese is kanji (漢字), which is used to write nouns, adjectives, verbs and Japanese names. The Dainkawa Jiten, the largest dictionary of kanji ever compiled has about 50.000 entries. An interesting thing to mention is that those, who work as a secretary, have to know at least about 2.000 of them, a boss of a smaller factory about 5.000 and the manager of a concern about 10.000. Easy, isn't it?

Below is a comparison of the different writings, taken from Wikipedia:

	Kanji	Hiragana	Katakana	Rōmaji	English
私	わたし	ワタシ		<i>watashi</i>	I
金魚	きんぎょ	キンギョ		<i>kingyo</i>	goldfish
煙草	たばこ	タバコ		<i>tabako</i>	tobacco, cigarette

The topic I would also like to introduce you to today is also Japanese animation, which actually is the reason I got immersed into this amazing world of Japanese. The world anime, which means Japanese cartoon, derives from *animēshon*, a transliteration from the English word for animation and it started developing in the beginning of the 20th century as experimenting. It got really successful in 1970s and in 1980s and now in the beginning of the new millennia it got popular again. It is strongly connected with mangas, Japanese comics, read from right to left, which usually provide the story for the anime.

There are many different genres of anime, like Bishōjo and Bishōnen (meaning animes with beautiful girls or boys), Ecchi (mild sexual humor), Kodomo (anime for children), Mecha (with robots), Sentai (with superheroes), Shōnen-ai (animes with romance between male characters, Shōjo-ai (romance between girls) and many others.

The music plays an important role in animes and so does the animation style, which can include everything from normal style, to chibi (meaning deformed, exaggerated), from which the most known are the nosebleed and the sweat-drop.

One of the most known production houses is Toei Animation, which launched one of the most known animes, Dragon Ball, in 1986, made by Akira Toriyama. They also launched many OAV's, Original Animated Video, like Castle in the Sky by Hayao Miyazaki, one of the most remarkable authors in the last years.

What I told you was just a short description of the immense world of Japan, its history, language and animation. If you are interested in studying the language, you can do it at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana or you can take a short course of Japanese by yourself. With Japan becoming a strong economical and political force I think that studying it could be a really good idea.

Sources I used to make this presentation:

-<http://www.japaneselifestyle.com.au/culture/culture.html>

-http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_animation

-http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_anime

-http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_writing

-<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanji>

-http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_history#Ancient_and_Classical_Japan