



Recognized and admired throughout the world, Japanese design is both groundbreaking and rooted in history.

From fashion to robots, today's cutting-edge achievements are mirrored in an earlier time. Creativity and innovation flourished in both the Edo period (1603–1867) and contemporary Japan (1945–2011). These times are similar in Japan because of their lack of armed conflict, greater political autonomy, shifting social hierarchies, and increasing wealth and leisure time.

By exploring five key areas — travel, robotics, social status, consumer culture and entertainment — Japan: Tradition. Innovation. demonstrates the parallels between these two important periods.

EDO JAPAN:

Much of what we consider traditional Japanese craft and design was developed and refined during the Edo period (1603–1867). This period was distinctive for a number of reasons:

For the first time, almost all of Japan was unified politically and geographically.

Commanders-in chief, known as shoguns, took power, leaving the emperor with only a ceremonial role. For generations, the shoguns were members of the Tokugawa family.

Under the shoguns were daimyo (lords) and samurai warriors.

Laws were introduced to limit contact with the outside world.

Japan became an increasingly urban society. Edo (today's Tokyo) was one of the largest cities in the world and the centre of the political power. Kyoto was a city of crafts and artisans, and Osaka was a trading centre.

JAPAN TODAY:

While contemporary Japan is known for its innovation, it is also inspired by models and ideas from its past. Contemporary Japan is distinctive in many ways:

Following the Second World War, Japan was relatively secluded from the rest of the world, focusing its energy on developing and producing goods within its own country.

Within decades, Japan gained significant economic power in world markets. Japan's power and stability were eroded with the bursting of the economic bubble in the early 1990s. While Japan continues to adjust its industrial structure, its economy is now the third largest in the world.

Japan's population is aging: birthrates are declining and immigration is limited. In response to these challenges, technology is playing a greater role in daily life.

Japan's population lives mainly in big, fast-paced cities. Tokyo is the most densely inhabited city in the world — with a population nearly twice that of New York City — and is known for setting cutting-edge trends.

Japan is a design powerhouse, and has become increasingly global in its influence.