



chapter seven

The Continuing Process

A New Impetus



▲ *'The Princess of the Country of Porcelain' (1864) by James Whistler. The influence of Japanese art is strong in this picture. Most importantly, the girl's stance echoes a print by Utamora, one of the greatest of the Japanese print makers.*

► *Print by Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849). It shows figures gazing at Mount Fuji in the distance. This element of perspective was a western idea that was new to Japanese art. In turn, Hokusai's prints greatly influenced the works of the European Impressionists.*



Western ideas on economics, education, administration and politics had a dramatic impact on the ancient cultures of Asia. Britain's control of India, which had begun as a result of trade, led to the imposition of its systems of administration and education. However, resistance to this process also produced an increased awareness of Indian nationality and culture. The new social and political movements that emerged in India were based on western models but also incorporated large elements of their own traditions.

In China, new western ideas, combined with the pressure to compete commercially, undermined the ancient systems of administration and Empire. The ruling Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) resisted reform, leading to revolution in 1911. The Japanese, by contrast, once they had opened their doors fully to western trade, embraced many elements of western culture, too. Under the Meiji emperor (1867-1912), the old feudal system was abolished and administration was based around European models rather than the old Chinese ones that had been in operation since the Seventh Century CE. Adopting western technology and its capitalism, Japanese industry rapidly expanded and, by the end of the Nineteenth Century, its economy had long outstripped that of China.

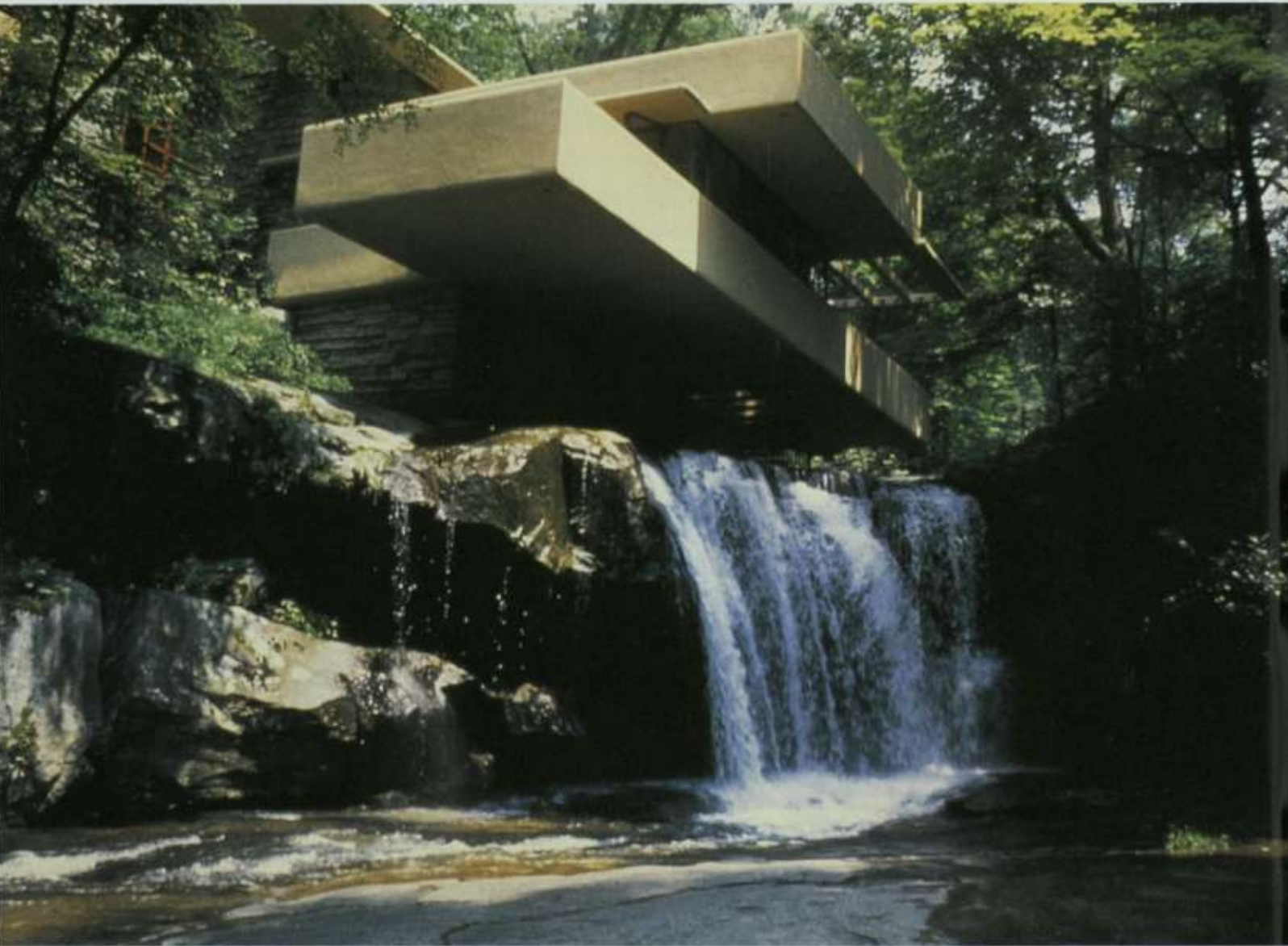
In both East and West, these changes were reflected in art styles and images. Japanese artists were eager to learn about western art and, at exhibitions held in Tokyo and Kyoto in the 1870s, any western-style pieces exhibited quickly sold. In the West, Japanese art, in particular the woodblock print, began to have a great effect. American artist James Whistler (1834-1903) borrowed ideas from the Japanese, and their use of light and colour influenced the work of the European Impressionists. In architecture, too, the excesses of chinoiserie and other such styles were replaced by elements closer to the reality of eastern style. The straight lines and uncluttered spaces of the interior designs and buildings of the Scottish architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928) echo the houses of Japan and Southeast Asia and reveal the assimilation of ideas that was taking place.

▼ *Façade of the Glasgow School of Art designed 1907-9 by Charles Rennie Mackintosh. He was inspired partly by the architecture of Japan and Southeast Asia. The design contrasts spectacularly with the fanciful shapes of the Brighton Pavilion (see page 39).*





All Channels Open



▲ *'Fallingwater', a house designed by American architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959). He continued to develop ideas inspired by the architecture of Japan and Southeast Asia, closely relating buildings to their surroundings.*

The process of cultural exchange and assimilation by the peoples of the world continues, of course, to the present day. But the picture has become ever more complicated with the dramatic improvement in communications that has taken place. Aeroplanes and cars, telephones and televisions have made our world very different from that of a hundred years ago. Today, people have access to so many different cultures through so many different mediums that, at times, it is almost impossible to separate the various influences at work. Both East and West can share in the rich heritage and continuing innovations of their many different cultures.

Many westerners live in open-plan apartments and work in open-plan offices, a concept that has developed partly from eastern ideas of architecture and interior design. They may decorate these spaces with Turkish, Persian, Indian and Chinese rugs or with ceramics by artists such as Bernard Leach and Lucie Rie, whose works have been inspired by the body shapes and colours of antique Chinese and Korean pottery. A meal out might be at an Indian, Chinese or Japanese restaurant or, by buying a book or watching a television programme, many learn how to cook these various cuisines for themselves. A trip to the ballet might involve watching work inspired by the Kabuki dances of Japan or *nritta* dances of India – or it could be to see one of the many eastern dance companies on tour. Even the more modern trappings of a westerner's life, for example, the personal stereo or the computer, may well have been designed in Japan and manufactured in one of the many Japanese-owned factories around the world.

On the other hand, western influences in the East, particularly in Japan, are everywhere to be seen. Giant companies pay fortunes for European paintings, and people everywhere wear western clothes, jewellery and hairstyles and listen to western music. Western dances and films are extremely popular, and western literature, from the tragedies of Shakespeare to the comic strip, influence contemporary writers, playwrights and film makers in Japan and other countries.



▲ Vase made by English potter Bernard Leach (1887-1979). Its design derives from older eastern ceramics.



The role of trade and commerce in this process is as important as ever, if not more so. The global scale on which it is now practised has been partly responsible for the development of an 'international' sense of culture. It has also led to spectacular advances in industry and technology in many Asian countries. Japan is the most notable of these, whilst oil has given great wealth to many of the countries of the Middle East. Much of the world's wealth may still be concentrated in Europe and the United States, but Asia is increasingly able to finance itself.

◀ There are many oriental restaurants in the West today. Even more authentically, these people are eating in China.



▲ Scene from the film *Ran* by the Japanese film director Akira Kurosawa (1910-). The film was inspired by King Lear, one of William Shakespeare's (1564-1616) tragedies.



Connecting Past with Present

At the end of the Twentieth Century, a nation's or people's culture is open to so many different influences that, in some cases, it seems a saturation point has been reached. Modern arts, crafts and design have absorbed, adapted and blended ideas from all over the world to the extent that it is perhaps difficult to speak of any 'national' style. But many artists and craftsmen have consciously set out to maintain a sense of national or cultural identity in their work. They have been able to do this by looking to the traditions of the past for inspiration.

This process of linking past and present is not only apparent in the world of the creative arts. As ever, these are a reflection of influences at work in society as a whole. In a world of great change and uncertainty, people look to the past as a means of understanding the present and to give them a sense of continuity as well as identity. In Mongolia, newly emerged from the powerful influence of the Soviet Union, people have turned again to Buddhism, whilst Ghengis Khan, the builder of their massive empire in the Thirteenth Century, is widely celebrated. The national cultures of former old Soviet Central Asian states, such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, are also emerging with renewed vigour – as well as old cultural and ethnic rivalries.

To understand the history of a single civilization or people, it is necessary to see the many different influences that have contributed to it. As the connections formed by the Silk and Spice Routes reveal, cultures and civilizations have not developed in isolation over the centuries, and it is partly because of this that there has been a renewed interest in the trade routes' history. One product of this interest is the UNESCO project entitled 'Integral Study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue', of which this series of books is a part.

So far, this project has arranged four international expeditions. Teams of scholars have travelled different sections of the Silk Route in China, Central Asia and Mongolia and along the Spice Routes from Italy to Japan. They visited many historic sites and museums, working alongside academics from the local area. These expeditions have resulted in the setting up of international research programmes, seminars, exhibitions, publications and films. This project was launched not only to encourage a greater awareness of individual nations' pasts but also in the hope that, by revealing the heritage they share with others, it will be easier to maintain good international relations in the future.

◀ A camel caravan carrying tourists in the Gansu region of China. It was through this province of northwest China that the Silk Route passed. Today, tourists travel there to experience first hand the path that was responsible for the development of so much of our common cultural heritage.



▲ A group of Mongol youths who have abandoned their horses, so much a part of their culture, for the attractions of a more modern form of transport – the motorbike.