

Effects of the meiji restoration

Politics



Japan's goal of achieving *fukoku kyohei*, "rich country; strong military", fuelled major political, economic and social changes during the Meiji Restoration. By the 20th century, Japan had a modern constitution and national parliament, though it was not truly democratic. The modernization of the nation also made Japan richer and more economically stable, with a structured education system. Japan, an impotent, closed feudal state, was transformed into a formidable nation focused on nationalism.

In attempt to acquire strength and unity in the government, political changes focused on creating a centralized government and a western constitution. In consequence, the Japanese government became more united and organized. As the western nations were the most influential countries at the time, Japan believed that following a western example would prove most effective. In order to create a fully centralized government, feudalism was ended. The government was then able to establish power over all of the 260 feudal domains. The court nobles and the feudal lords were given the same rank... compelled to hand back (land). " (Miocevich, 25) The use of the word 'compelled' suggests that there was some dissension within the government. There was also argument over public voice and the style of the constitution. As a result, the first constitution was abandoned, leading to the creation of a second Meiji Constitution in 1889. Although the government was still under imperial rule, it was slowly moving towards democracy, as a Prussian parliamentary system was adopted.

Regardless, various parties were still excluded from political influence, as the oligarchy, ruling in the emperor's name, continued to hold significant authority. The constitution did however foster a more organized and united

government in Japan. During 1883, the Progressive Party founded by Okuma, which opposed the constitutional model, fell apart. All political parties eventually unified under one government. These changes provided Japan with the unity and strength it needed to transform itself, a victim, into one of the powerful aggressors.

The economic changes that occurred in Japan focused on increasing revenue and in turn, helped Japan achieve its goal in becoming a richer nation with stronger defenses. With industrialization as a key aim in Japan's economy, the *shokusan koygo*, a government policy that encouraged economic freedom, was developed. Infrastructure was also tightened, as a new banking system was developed, modern communications were constructed, and an official currency was adopted and issued.

Lastly, in order to acquire more revenue, a new land tax was introduced, while the government also began allowing and promoting the purchase of certain industries from private companies in the *Zaibatsu*. By the end of the Meiji Restoration, Japan, as "one of the world's largest producers of coal and exporters of copper" (Miocevich, 26), definitely possessed a progressive and prosperous economy. The land tax, which contributed to 78% of the nation's income in 1868, had decreased to 30% by 1897. (Miocevich, 27) This indicates that Japan was now receiving a constant flow of revenue by other means, such as the *Zaibatsu*. The nation was now economically stable, and had transitioned into an aggressive and successful nation.

Japan's triumph in both the Sino-Japanese War in 1894 and Russo-Japanese War in 1904 further confirmed Japan's new and seemingly indestructible

defenses. The Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895) gave Japan “most-favored nation rights in China, a privilege long desired.” (Miocevich, 34) The Treaty of the Portsmouth (1905) gave Japan “the lease of the Liaotung Peninsula”. (Miocevich, 37) Japan would have never been able to demand these advantages if it had not conquered China and Russia. By the end of the Meiji Restoration, Japan had taken its inevitable part in the international scene. As the government and economy adjusted, the society took on many changes as well, such as the adoption of the Western culture, a reform in the education system, and the instillation of nationalism in Japan. The desire to be perceived as an equal by Westerners resulted in the adoption of the Western culture in the Japanese society.

There were changes in the fashion as well as food and cuisine. Western-style haircuts were ubiquitous in the Japanese streets during 1870, while the introduction to bread, beef and dairy products made their way to the community subsequently. With the aim of a modernized society, the Meiji government also found an organized education system a vital aspect, thus instituting the Terakoya system. This change in education also launched the establishment of the Ministry of Education, which had an aim of providing education for all people.

In 1868, almost 13,000 terakoyas were constructed with 837,000 students. (Miocevich, 30) By 1910, an immense advancement was made, as 98% of Japanese students were given compulsory education. (Miocevich, 30) Clearly, the Japanese had made education a priority. Finally, nationalism was probably the most prominent change in the Japanese society during the Meiji Restoration. As Japan grew stronger as a nation, their citizens grew

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increasingly patriotic. This newfound patriotism was displayed in the actions of the soldiers, determined to risk their lives for the benefit of Japan.

An excerpt by a Japanese official further reiterates this growing sense of nation pride. "To strengthen Japan by war is to show loyalty to our country... our guiding principle." (Miocevich, 30). Japan's modernization within the society had resulted in the adoption of western cultures, an increased literacy rate, and patriotism in the nation. The Meiji Restoration had made the dream of accomplishing *fukoku kyohei* a reality for Japan. The adoption of a western parliamentary model aided Japan in its development towards a stable rule, which in turn, created unity within the nation.

With the focus of modernization, necessary changes were also made in Japan's industry and society, such as the adoption of a new banking and education system. Moreover, Japan's new stable economy allowed it to thrive financially and build stronger defenses. Accompanied by the growing nationalism within the Japanese, the soldiers of the military grew more tenacious, as proven by Japan's growing victories in wars. By the end of the Meiji Restoration, Japan had proved to the other formidable nations that it had found its rightful position with the aggressors.