

Japanese history - the meiji restoration

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The Meiji Restoration The Meiji Restoration, in the history of Japan, is a period that can be well defined as a political revolution that saw the downfall of Tokugawa shogunate, therefore restoring the steering of the country to its former imperial rule, led by Emperor Meiji. This period brought about an era of major social, political and economic changes in Japan marking the period famously known as the Meiji period (1868-1912).

The leaders that spearheaded the restoration were mostly young Samurai who rose from the feudal domains, known to have resisted the Tokugawa authority from time past. These Samurai were motivated by the current state of the country including threat of encroachment from foreigners and emergent domestic problems. They adopted the fukoku-kyohei slogan (“Wealthy country and strong arms”) and pursued after creating a nation-state that could stand equal among the Western powers. The new government, as deduced from the 1868 Charter Oath, sought to dismantle the aged feudal regime (Devine, 51).

In mid-1870s, restoration leaders, acting under the Emperor’s name, faced such steep opposition in carrying out the restoration changes. Saigō Takamori led the famous disgruntled samurai in rebelling against the government which were later, with great difficulty, repressed by the formed army and in 1880’s, peasants who had grown distrustful of the newly formed regime, joined in the revolts bringing it to its peak. This turmoil was halfway dissolved by a call from a Rights movement that was gaining popularity although it was mainly influenced by liberal western ideas. They advocated the formation of a constitutionally-based government with deliberative assemblies (Devine, 54). In 1881, the government responded by issuing a statement that promised a constitution by year 1890 and in 1886, <https://assignbuster.com/japanese-history-the-meiji-restoration/>

constitution formation started after the formation of a cabinet system in 1885. By year 1889, a constitution was promulgated to the people as a gift from Meiji

Social and economic changes were concurrent with the political changes that were already taking place during this era. Agriculture was the primary drive for the economy of Japan (Schirokauer, Lurie, and Gay). However, the Meiji government was working towards industrialization and hence directed developments in communications, transportation and strategic industries.

Railroads were built, telegraphs linking all the main cities and private sectors received government support thru funds and European-like banking system.

They relied on and heavily promoted western technology and science immensely but in 1880, the wholesale westernization was checked with a bid to preserve the traditional Japanese values. This followed, even in the education system, a way of applying the western methodologies, but embracing and promoting the Japanese culture (Bharucha, 188).

The goals of Meiji Restoration by early twentieth century had been accomplished largely, and Japan had already taken a halfway journey to becoming an industrial nation. In 1894, unequal treaties that were to the advantage of the foreigners were revised and led to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance later in 1902. In 1895 and 1902, Japan was victorious against China and Russia respectively demanding respect from the Western world and for the first time, Japan emerged as a major superpower. The end of this era was marked by the death of Emperor Meiji.

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