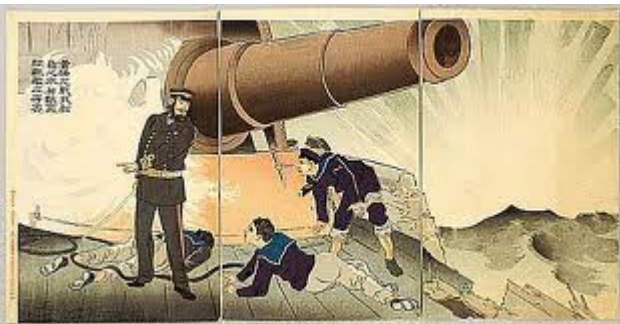


Colonialism and Expansion:

In 1894 Japan fought a war against China over its interest in Korea, which China claimed as a vassal state. The Korean peninsula is the closest part of Asia to Japan, less than 100 miles by sea, and the Japanese were worried that the Russians might gain control of that weak nation. Japan won the war and gained control over Korea and gained Taiwan as a colony. Japan's sudden, decisive victory over China surprised the world and worried some European powers.



Japanese Army defeating Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905



Japanese Army adopts weapons & tactics from Western Countries

At this time the European nations were beginning to claim special rights in China - the French, with their colony in Indochina (today's Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia), were involved in South China; the British also claimed special rights in South

Nationalism →

Militarism →

Modernization →

Industrialization →

The Meiji Restoration

For two centuries Japan had been locked away from the outside world. By 1615, after a century of civil war, the powerful Lord Tokugawa had defeated his enemies and declared himself Shogun, ruler of all Japan. Tokugawa divided society into four ranks: at the bottom were the merchants; then came the artisans; just above them were the farmers, who gave up half their rice harvest to those at the top, the *Samurai*. It was the most orderly place imaginable. It was a completely organized society where everybody knew who he was and what he had to do. No outsiders were allowed into Japan and few Japanese were allowed out for over 200 years.

In 1853, four American war ships steamed up the bay near Yedo. Commanded by Commodore Perry, the Americans had come to open up Japan. America wanted water and coal for their whaling ships and China trade.

The Japanese were astounded at the power of Perry's vessels. The Japanese called them black ships for the ominous smoke that billowed from their coal engines. The ships sent a clear message. If the Japanese didn't open up their country, Perry would open it by force. Most Japanese had never seen a westerner. In the first portraits of Perry and his men, they marveled at the strange-looking barbarians from across the sea.

Japan Answers the Challenge of the Western World

In 1868 the Tokugawa shōgun ("great general"), who ruled Japan in the feudal period, lost his power and the emperor was restored to the supreme position. The emperor took the name Meiji ("enlightened rule") as his reign name; this event was known as the Meiji Restoration.



A Japanese artist vision of Perry's Vessels

The Reign of the Meiji Emperor: When the Meiji emperor was restored as head of Japan in 1868, the nation was a militarily weak country, was primarily agricultural, and had little technological development. It was controlled by hundreds of semi-independent feudal lords. The Western powers - Europe and the United States - had forced Japan to sign treaties that limited its control over its own foreign trade and required that crimes concerning foreigners in Japan be tried not in Japanese but in Western courts. When the Meiji period ended, with the death of the emperor in 1912, Japan had

- a highly centralized, bureaucratic government
- a constitution establishing an elected parliament
- a well-developed transport and communication system
- a highly educated population free of feudal class restrictions
- an established and rapidly growing industrial sector based on the latest technology
- a powerful army and navy

It had regained complete control of its foreign trade and legal system, and, by fighting and winning two wars (one of them against a major European power, Russia), it had established full independence and equality in international affairs. In a little more than a generation, Japan had exceeded its goals, and in the process had changed its whole society. Japan's success in modernization has created great interest in why and how it was able to adopt Western political, social, and economic institutions in so short a time.

One answer is found in the Meiji Restoration itself. This political revolution "restored" the emperor to power, but he did not rule directly. He was expected to accept the advice of the group that had overthrown the shōgun, and it was from this group that a small number of ambitious, able, and patriotic young men from the lower ranks of the samurai emerged to take control and establish the new political system. At first, their only strength was that the emperor accepted their advice and several powerful feudal domains provided military support. They moved quickly, however, to build their own military and economic control. By July 1869 the feudal lords had been requested to give up their domains, and in 1871 these domains were abolished and transformed into prefectures of a unified central state.

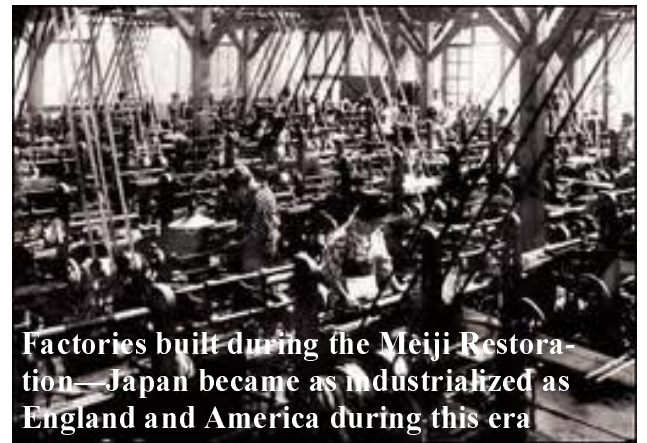
The feudal lords and the samurai class were offered a yearly stipend, which was later changed to a one-time payment in government bonds. The samurai lost their class privileges, when the government declared all classes to be equal. A national army based on universal conscription was created in 1872, requiring three years' military service from all men, samurai and commoner alike. A national land tax system was established that required payment in money instead of rice, which allowed the government to stabilize the national budget. This gave the government money to spend to build up the strength of the nation.

Social and Economic Changes: The abolition of feudalism made possible tremendous social and political changes. Millions of people were suddenly free to choose their occupation and move about without restrictions. By providing a new environment of political and financial security, the government made possible investment in new industries and technologies.

The government led the way in this, building railway and shipping lines, telegraph and telephone systems, three shipyards, ten mines, five munitions works, and fifty-three consumer industries (making sugar, glass, textiles, cement, chemicals, and other important products). This was very expensive, however, and strained government finances, so in 1880 the government decided to sell most of these industries to private investors, thereafter encouraging such activity through subsidies and other incentives. Some of the samurai and merchants who built these industries established major corporate conglomerates called *zaibatsu*, which controlled much of Japan's modern industrial sector.



The government also introduced a national *educational* system and a *constitution*, creating an *elected parliament* called the Diet. They did this to provide a good environment for national growth, win the respect of the Westerners, and build support for the modern state. In the Tokugawa period, popular education had spread rapidly, and in 1872 the government established a national system to educate the entire population. By the end of the Meiji period, almost everyone attended the free public schools for at least six years. The govern-



Factories built during the Meiji Restoration—Japan became as industrialized as England and America during this era

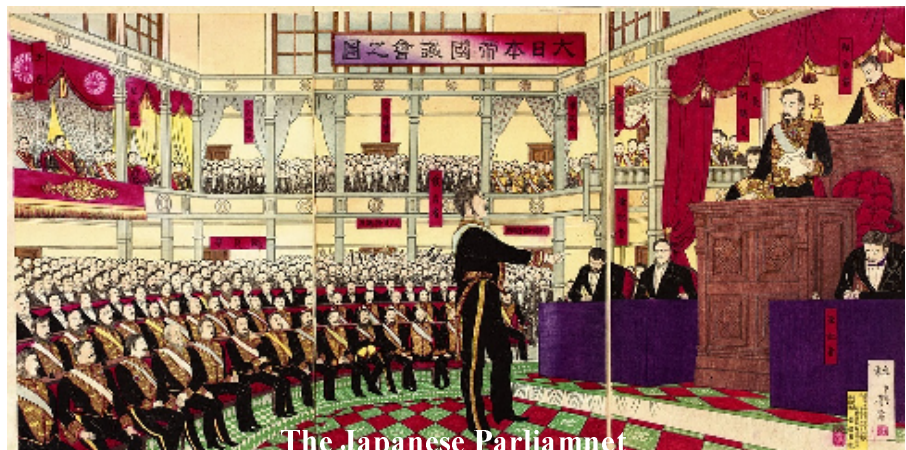


Japanese wearing clothing from the Western World

ment closely controlled the schools, making sure that in addition to skills like mathematics and reading, all students studied "moral training," which stressed the importance of their duty to the emperor, the country and their families.

The 1889 constitution was "given" to the people by the emperor, and only he (or his advisers) could change it. A parliament was elected beginning in 1890, but only the wealthiest 1 percent of the population could vote in elections. In 1925 this was changed to allow all men (but not yet women) to vote.

To win the recognition of the Western powers and convince them to change the unequal treaties the Japanese had been forced to sign in the 1850s, Japan changed its entire legal system, adopting a new criminal and civil code modeled after those of France and Germany. The Western nations finally agreed to revise the treaties in 1894, acknowledging Japan as an equal in principle, although not in international power.



The Japanese Parliament