

The Japanese Response to Imperialism

Issues on the table:

- responses to imperial challenge
- nationalism
- revolution from above
- late development
- costs of catching up

The Need for Reform: Tokugawa Japan; how was Japan threatened by imperialism?

1. From 1600 until 1868 Japan was governed by a centralized feudal state in which the central government, the Bakufu, headed by the Shogun, was moved to Edo (Tokyo)
2. Politically, the country was divided into han, or feudal divisions under the nominal control of daimyo, or feudal lords; in fact, they were effectively governed in most places by samurai, who were originally warriors, but who increasingly became administrators under the Tokugawa regime; to weaken the daimyo, the Shogun required them to spend alternative years at court in Edo and to leave their families as hostages there even when they returned to their han; moreover, while not taxed, they were required to pay for improvements to infrastructure, coastal defense, and castle construction, thus effectively limiting their ability to wage rebellion
3. the Emperor at this time, while formally the political leader, was really far in the background politically, although he did remain the religious leader of the Shinto religion and had divine status in Shinto
4. Furthermore, there was a rigid social hierarchy, with daimyo at the top, samurai below them, peasants further down, then artisans, and at the bottom, merchants
5. This system, which included a closing of Japan to the outside world, other than some officially sanctioned trade with Korea, with China through Okinawa, and with the west through a Dutch trading post at Nagasaki, produced a long period of peace and prosperity

6. the relatively high taxation of the peasantry and the relatively low taxation of the merchants produced, by the end of the Tokugawa regime, the anomaly that the merchants had become, despite their bottom-level social standing, very wealthy, and the samurai, relying on peasants for taxation, peasants who were increasingly squeezed, eventually became indebted to the merchants and somewhat dissatisfied by the situation

7. In 1853 Commodore Perry sailed to Japan and by using military threats forced the Japanese to open their ports to American ships; other European powers followed; the trade treaties were considered unequal and demeaning by the Japanese, but at the time the westerners had greater military power; provisions included that in the treaty ports where trade was conducted western navies protected their nationals, western nationals were extraterritorial trial by their own judges under their own laws, and limitations on Japanese tariffs opened the pre-industrial economy to western machine production

8. **In sum: what was the challenge faced by Japan? What stood in the way of its effective response?**
 1. **Late development as a challenge**

 2. **Social and political structure as a constraint**

 3. **Culture as a constraint, or a facilitator of change?**

The Meiji Restoration: a revolution from above; what was revolutionary?

1. The weakness of the Tokugawa government in the face of this foreign onslaught created great unrest among the daimyo and samurai, especially the daimyo from the western and southern han who in 1868 overthrew the Shogun and the Tokugawa regime

1. they were primarily motivated by **nationalism**; their slogan eventually became "strong nation and powerful army"

2. their entry to power, while called a restoration because they used the restoration of the emperor to "effective" power (actually, he simply approved their suggestions), was really a kind of revolution, but not a revolution from below, rather from above; this included a revolution in the geographical basis of state power to elites from the western and southern han

3. they were actually somewhat ambivalent about change
 1. they clearly saw the need for social, economic, and political change in order to meet the challenge of the West

 2. however, they hoped in so doing to maintain the spiritual essence of the Japanese people

2. The changes wrought

1. the new Meiji rulers became an oligarchy that ruled through the emperor who was no more than a rubber stamp for their "advice", and eventually their top leaders were known as the genro (elders)

2. they engaged in wholesale borrowing of western institutions and practices, sending representatives out to various parts of the world to observe western institutions in practice, and they hired foreign consultants to advise them on the best institutions to introduce for their setting

1. What does Fukuzawa say about this? Discuss that short reading

2. What does Soseki say about modernization?

2. socially, they abolished the han and thus undercut the daimyo's social power

3. they established universal conscription into the army, thus undercutting the samurai's monopoly on the right to bear arms, thus undercutting the samurai's independent basis of power

4. they established universal primary education and set up a number of universities

5. the government initiated a number of industrialization projects, later turning them over to private investors

6. extraterritoriality was removed

2. political reforms:

1. there was no new constitution written until 1889; other changes came first

2. when it came, the Meiji oligarchs showed that they were particularly attracted to the Prussian model: the emperor (meaning in practice his advisors should retain effective power, the popular assembly should have a consultative role, and the parties should be

an impotent opposition rather than potential alternative governments)

3. an Imperial Diet of a House of Peers (the daimyo had been turned into a nobility, and the new oligarchy and imperial family were included) and a House of Representatives initially elected by an extremely narrow, property-based electorate (later, suffrage was extended) was created, but remained limited by the superior status and powers of the emperor which were somewhat ambiguously stated; genro preferred it this way but they and their successors were eventually forced to step down to party politics because of the need to get the Diet to approve funding for the growing federal budget; yet, the formal basis of Diet power was somewhat ambiguous too, just as was the basis of imperial power