
UNIT 3 THE MEIJI RESTORATION AND THE CREATION OF MODERN JAPAN

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to learn about:

- The problem posed by the European intervention to the old regime in Japan,
- The Meiji Restoration of 1868, and
- The role of Meiji Restoration in creation of modern Japan.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we will look at the how the Western powers, starting with Russia, Great Britain, and the United States tried to establish diplomatic relations with Tokugawa Japan. These attempts were initially resisted but soon the Tokugawa regime relented and negotiated trade and diplomatic relations with the United States, Great Britain and other European powers. Imperialist intrusion led to debates about alternative models of government, and finally to an alliance led by the Satsuma and Choshu to overthrow the Tokugawa bakufu and bring about the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Scholarly opinion may be divided on how it looks at this period and it's analysis of the Meiji 'restoration' but there is agreement that it marked the beginning of modern Japan.

3.2 THE COMING OF THE 'BLACK SHIPS'

Tokugawa society was, in spite of its dynamism, largely isolated from developments in Europe. When foreign ships began appearing and demanding access to Japanese ports it was faced with a serious problem. During the seventeenth century Japanese military capabilities were not very different from the Portuguese or English but by the nineteenth century the European nations had developed in ways unimaginable in Japan. In the Tokugawa period Europe largely meant Holland and Portugal. It is only towards the end of the period that they began to learn about Great Britain and its empire, the colonization of India, and about the United States. The encounter with the West in the nineteenth century posed new problems for the Tokugawa and it was not equipped to deal with these problems. In ways similar to other countries in the region the period from the late seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century Japan faced the problems of dealing with Western imperial threats and restricting society and government to meet the challenges of the modern world.

In 1853 Commodore Matthew Perry appeared with a flotilla. His ships were called black ships because coal tar was used to seal the cracks between the planks of the ship. The following year a treaty of Amity and Friendship was signed. This marked the culmination of a process which had begun much earlier. The Russians and British had been pressing on the coast of Japan since the seventeenth century. The Russians had established themselves on the Sea of Okhotsk and from there they made exploratory trips. In 1738 Martin Spangberg, a Russian explorer had discovered a route to Japan. Subsequently serious efforts were made to open Japan and establish relations. In 1792 Lieutenant Adam Laxman (1766-1806) arrived in Ezo (modern Hokkaido) but was denied entry and failed to win any concessions to open trade. The next Russian envoy went to Nagasaki, which was the only port where foreigners were allowed, but the Japanese were not interested in foreign trade. In 1806 and 1807 the Russians raided Japanese posts in Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands and this led to tensions and confrontations between the two countries.

The British had been attempting to explore this area as early as the seventeenth century. Captain Cook was planning to go to Japan when he died in 1793. The embassy led by Earl George Macartney (1737-1806) to China in 1793 also failed to go to Japan though Macartney carried letters to the emperor of Japan. He was later Governor of Madras and opposed the East India's trade in opium. In 1797 an English ship went to Hokkaido and in 1808 the frigate Phaeton entered Nagasaki.

3.3 WHALING AND THE OPENING OF JAPAN

In the nineteenth century whaling was the fifth largest industry in the U.S. and whaling ships sailing across the Pacific needed safe ports for refueling and supplies. This, as well as the attraction of the China market, led the U.S to play an increasingly important role in opening Japanese ports to foreign trade. The writer Herman Melville depicts this world of the whalers in the novel *Moby Dick* (1851) and writes, if Japan the 'double bolted' land is ever opened it will be because of the whale ships. The westward expansion of United States in the

1840's, fuelled by ideas of 'manifest destiny', that it was the destiny of white Americans to rule the native populations, also encouraged U.S businessmen to try and gain access to China but this proved futile and the government began to be more interested in Japan. From 1835 attempts were made to conclude diplomatic arrangements. In 1846 Commodore Biddle came to Edo Bay but he was refused entry. Commander Glynn subsequently went to Nagasaki in 1849 but did not make any arrangements to carry on trade.

3.4 THE BAKUFU AND DAIMYO REACTIONS TO WESTERN DEMANDS

The pressure on Japan to conclude diplomatic and commercial relations, with the Western powers placed the Bakufu in a difficult situation. The initial reaction since the Russian ships appeared was to firmly reject trade and the opening of ports. In 1806 a decree ordered local officials to keep foreigners out and in 1825 the officials were told to destroy any ships which came near the coast. This was not just based on a xenophobic anti-foreignism. It was a reaction to a complex problem. On the one hand the Japanese clearly lacked the military capability to keep the Western nations out but on the other hand most groups were adamant that there should be no concessions to these demands.

However, in 1842, when the Japanese learned from the Dutch of the Qing defeat in the opium war, they softened their policy and allowed the entry of foreign ships in need of aid. Subsequently British and French ships visited ports to negotiate trade deals but failed. They were, however, not fired upon reflecting a softening stand. The Bakufu now began to work on building coastal defence and adopted a conciliatory policy of dealing with foreign powers.

3.5 THE COMING OF PERRY

In 1853 Commodore Matthew Perry came to Japan via China and Okinawa in a squadron of two steam frigates and two sloops, entered Edo Bay in July 1853 to demand the opening of ports and ensure a supply of coal. Perry presented a letter from the President of the USA. Perry's imperious behavior, backed by superior military power, underlined the inability of the Tokugawa Bakufu to deal effectively with the power of the Western nations. In the spring of 1854 the Bakufu signed a Treaty of Amity and Commerce and opened two ports, Shimoda and Hakodate. where U.S. ships could refuel and provision their ships. There was a most favoured nation clause which would automatically extend any benefits granted to any other country. The United States was also allowed to post a counsellor agent at Shimoda. The treaty was a beginning as the ports opened were small and remote but it was a major departure from the Bakufu's earlier policy of isolation.

Just as Perry had concluded his treaty the Russians had also been active. Yevfimiy Putyatin (1803-1883) had been trying to extract a treaty and settle the boundary to the north of Hokkaido but had failed. In October the Bakufu concluded a similar treaty with the British and then with Russia in which Nagasaki was also opened. In 1855 the Dutch too signed a treaty with the Japanese.

The United States sent Townsend Harris as its counsel to reside in Shimoda in 1856. Here, he faced considerable difficulties, but through patience and tact

managed to convince the Bakufu that they would be better served by signing a treaty with the United States otherwise they might have to sign more onerous treaties with the other Western powers. The Hanks Treaty signed on July 29, 1858, opened the ports of Kanagawa and Nagasaki and by stages Niigata and Hyogo. Foreigners were to be allowed to reside at Osaka and Edo and they were to have extra-territorial privileges. Finally, the two countries would exchange representatives. Similar treaties were concluded with the other nations. Aside from opening ports, the major concession the Japanese made was to fix import and custom duties at low rates.

3.6 STEPS TO THE MEIJI RESTORATION

The period from 1853 onwards, when Commodore Perry landed in Japan can be divided into three sub-periods:

- 1) **1853-1858:** During this period the Bakufu tried to minimize foreign demands to open ports. Abe Masahiro (1819-1857), the bakufu official, argued that rejecting Perry's demands for a treaty would invite the danger of war while acceptance would give them a breathing space during which they could strengthen themselves. The real danger, as perceived by the bakufu was not so much to do with trade as the fear of social disorder. Foreign penetration threatened the capital Edo and even more importantly the Imperial capital of Kyoto. As a bakufu official wrote, arguing that Yokohama should be opened to keep foreigners away from "the Imperial Palace, the shrine territories and the private fiefs" so that it could preserve the natural order by making only the minimum concessions.

The chief bakufu official Hotta Masayoshi (1810-1864) advanced the idea of *kaikoku* or open country. He argued that in the new conditions trade and alliances with other countries were vital and necessary. Japan had to reconsider her policy of isolation because "military power always springs from national wealth and the means of enriching the country are principally to be found in trade and commerce." This was a new argument for the ruling establishment as up to now traditional wisdom had seen only agriculture as the basis of wealth and commerce and merchants were frowned upon.

Hotta was advancing a new proposition but he was still bound in the old dream of keeping the foreigners at bay. He was proposing that Japanese go out to acquire this wealth but such arguments still did not concede the right of residence in Japan to foreigners.

The Bakufu signed the treaties in 1858 which allowed trade at Yokohama and permitted foreign residence in Edo from the following year in 1859. These moves gave an impetus to opposition movements and the "revere the Emperor expel the barbarian" (*sonno joi*) movement gathered momentum particularly when one of the loyalists assassinated Ii Naosuke (1815-1860), a Bakufu official.

- 2) **1860-1864:** During 1860 and in 1863 there was an unsuccessful attempt to restore the Emperor. In this fast paced political scenario there were

other attempts to broaden the base of political participation. The great Daimyo who had been excluded from power and kept out of the decision-making councils sought to use the beleaguered Bakufu's weakness to increase their role and strength. One such move was an alliance of Court and Shogun (kobugattai). This move wanted to bring together a coalition of high ranking members of the nobility and the samurai to work in unison for national unity. This move too was unsuccessful but the danger of civil war was averted for the time being. The overriding fear that foreigners would make use of internal disunity was ever present in the minds of the leading political actors. The 1860's saw the foreigners still excluded from the area around the Imperial capital of Kyoto called the Kinai and steps were taken to ensure its defence and protection.

In 1864 the bakufu agreed to give indemnities for foreigners but did not allow them to reside in the Kyoto area. In 1865 the Court approved the treaties but refused to allow foreigners in Hyogo, even though this was agreed to in the treaty. The bakufu had to accept a ruinous rate of tariffs in lieu of this provision.

The bombardment of the han of Satsuma and Choshu marked a clear lesson, which showed the futility of both the policies of the forceful expulsion of foreigners and of giving limited concessions. By 1865 it was clear that sakoku or closed country could not succeed. It should be pointed out that the word 'sakoku' or closed country was only used in 1801 in the translation of a 17th century German book on Japan.

- 3) **1865-1868:** This period marks the triumph of an open country policy and an acceptance of the new order. The Bakufu sent official embassies to London and Paris in 1867 and even before that an official, Ikeda Nagasaki wrote, after a tour of Europe, that "to Lay the foundations of national independence it is fundamental that national unity be attained within Japan." He advised that it was imperative that the Japanese sign treaties and travel, gather information and study Western countries. In this changed situation the Shogun Yoshinobu could write, "if we alone, at such a time, cling to outworn custom and refrain from international relations of a kind common to all countries, our actions will be in conflict with the natural order of things." These statements could not have been made earlier and clearly indicate an intellectual transformation. No doubt their ideas had been transformed under the pressure of circumstances but the choices they made were a creative response to a new situation.

3.7 BRITISH AND FRENCH RIVALRY IN JAPAN

Up to now it had been a question of Japan and the foreigners but soon Anglo-French rivalry began to intervene in Japanese affairs with the French gravitating towards the Bakufu and the British supporting Satsuma and Choshu. The French connection began in 1864 when a Bakufu official was sent to Paris and Leon Roches (1809-1901) came to Japan. Roches gradually began to pursue an independent French policy rather than work in concert with the other Western powers. He favoured a strict response to Japanese attacks on foreigners, advanced

loans to the Bakufu to build the Yokosuka arsenal and the idea of a joint Franco-Bakufu trading company was also floated.

The British, too, were gradually shifting towards supporting the han. In 1866 Ernest Satow, an official of the British Legation had translated into Japanese a series of articles that he wrote urging foreigners not to treat Japan as one single entity but rather as a collection of Daimyo ruled han. Japan was gradually intertwined in Anglo-French rivalry and the danger of imperialist incursion was rapidly assuming dangerous proportions. The linking of Bakufu with France and Britain with Satsuma-Choshu had serious internal repercussions. The daimyo on the one hand were strengthened against the Bakufu but mutual suspicion also increased and conciliatory overtures were made difficult. Finally, the dependence of both daimyo and the Bakufu on Western military technology and training increased.

The war against Choshu enabled the foreign powers to further increase their levels of involvement particularly in the matter of supplying guns to the various groups. Sometimes the fears were incorrect but there were many rumours that the daimyo were receiving financial aid and military help. Katsu Kaishu, a bakufu official described England as a “famished tiger” and he went on to warn that the bakufu too should not borrow money from France as that was a “hungry wolf”.

Inland travel by foreigners and missionary activity were two areas which were also creating problems. By 1867 not only diplomats but technicians and missionaries were moving about in areas of Japan. Once Hyogo and Osaka were opened this travel increased and the bakufu issued instructions to allow foreigners to travel, to visit Nara and to enter the “theatre and restaurants in Edo and Osaka”. This led to incidents of violence as the public had still to accept the idea of foreigners entering Japan. Attacks on foreigners increased and this further increased demands for indemnities.

The opening of Japan had not meant that Christianity would be allowed and the ban on the religion continued. However, with the growing presence of foreign residents Christianity was allowed to be practiced in the treaty ports. Missionaries began to arrive and, in spite of the ban, took steps to spread their religion. French missionaries had opened a church in Nagasaki in 1865 and they allowed in those Japanese who began to practice the religion openly. A Japanese official wrote in complaint to the French representative Leon Roches (1809-1901) that missionaries were preaching in villages, staying in peoples homes, collecting gold and silver and that their activities were disruptive and must be stopped. These problems created tensions not just between the bakufu and the foreigners but between the local people and the foreigners and the bakufu, aggravating an already complex problem.

3.8 ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND ANTI-FOREIGN SENTIMENTS

By 1867 the foreign powers had become deeply involved in the internal rivalries and this involvement created a dangerous situation for Japan in which it could easily have been colonised. The economic effect of the treaties and the entry of

foreign trade had been disruptive. Cheap manufactured goods like cotton fabric were ruining traditional domestic industry. In particular the favourable gold and silver exchange in Japan was used by foreign traders to devastating effect. In Japan the gold and silver exchange was 6: 1, whereas in the rest of the world it was 15: 1. Traders brought in silver and bought the cheaper gold and then exported this gold to make a handsome profit. The massive export of species and influx of silver disrupted the Japanese economy and caused undue hardship to the people. The large number of peasant uprisings and urban disturbances is ample reflection of the strains the economy and society were undergoing.

Instead of considering the history of the closing years of the Bakufu as a period when two static positions confronted each other it is more productive to consider these as instrumental devices by which ideologues, and policy makers sought to realize certain social ideals. As we have seen Tokugawa Japan was not really 'closed', trade and diplomatic relations were an important aspect of government policies. In the nineteenth century as imperialist powers pressed on the rulers to open trade how to deal with this threat became the major concern.

In this context anti-foreignism became an important aspect. The debate now centred around the question of how to meet the foreign threat. The debate on how to deal with foreigners was within the context of how to strengthen the state and its abilities to meet this challenge. The initial measures included better coastal defence, better arms and modern training for soldiers, and producing arms locally. It did not stop there. The need for a different kind of political organization, the need to encourage industry and science and reform religious systems was keenly felt and debated.

These ideas coalesced around the effort to build the new state with the imperial house at the centre. The emperor came to represent the symbol of a common cultural and ethical values. This shift was supported by intellectual and economic changes which increased the level of public participation in making policy decisions in foreign relations.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What was the initial reaction of Bakufu towards imperialist interference?
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- 2) Briefly discuss the Anglo-French rivalry in Japan in the nineteenth century.
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3.9 THE MEIJI RESTORATION

The return of power from the bakufu to the Emperor in 1868 marks the Meiji Restoration. This was brought about by a coalition of daimyo's led by Satsuma and Choshu, two of the major 'outside lords'. The abdication of Tokugawa Yoshinobu (original name Keiki, ruled from 1866-67) was announced by an Imperial Edict on January 1868. This marked the formal end of the long rule of the Tokugawa. In April the Court announced the Charter Oath which laid down the policies the new government would follow and in October, 1868 the Emperor selected the Chinese characters meaning "enlightened rule" or Meiji by which his reign, 1868-1912, would be known.

The restoration or ishin (the word means renewal) as the event is known was carried out by some sections of the nobility and particularly the hans of Satsuma, Choshu, Hizen and Tosa. It was supported by sections of the samurai and rural rich who found the constraints of the Tokugawa system increasingly restrictive. These groups wished to share power with the Bakufu and when foreign pressure made it difficult for the Bakufu to maintain its position these groups asserted themselves.

Foreign demand to open the treaty ports and the Bakufu's vacillation allowed these groups to rally around the Imperial Court and demand that the Tokugawa hand back power to the Emperor. In this demand they were supported by the loyalists who genuinely wished to have an active Imperial Court. The han, particularly Satsuma and Choshu had initially been at loggerheads, each leading their groups but they came together and used the court to topple the Tokugawa Bakufu.

In 1854 the Treaty of Kanagawa was signed and by 1859 Japan's foreign relations were established on the basis of the unequal treaties as in China. The pressure to open treaty ports, (Kanagawa, Nagasaki, Hyogo, Niigata) created a sense of crisis in which various critics of the Tokugawa came together. For instance, even conservatives within the Tokugawa camp who disapproved of the treaties allied with the Kyoto nobility and they tried to reform the Bakufu.

Satsuma and Choshu played a dominant role because they were "outside lords" who had considerable land and revenue's. even though they were excluded from decision making. Their domains were far from the Tokugawa areas and their territories integrated. Many of the daimyo had begun to reform their domains to meet the new challenges they faced.

3.10 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF 1868

The political change of 1868 was one step, albeit a major step, in a process. The new government did not start with a clear agenda but through debates and experiments they created a modern constitutional monarchy by 1890. There were various movements that reflected a search for an alternative form of government. One major model available was to build the daimyo ruled han. Many han had begun reforms to strengthen their finances, restructure their administration and even build an army trained in modern methods. In the han of Choshu and Kii, for

instance, they hired foreigners to train their soldiers. In Kii a militia that was composed of peasants and monks was raised thus breaking the monopoly of the samurai on the right to bear arms.

The second model was to look back at the 'ritsuryo' system of imperial rule in the Heian period. This was supported by the growing strength intellectual movements placing the emperor at the centre of Japanese culture. The third was the models provided by Western countries. Japanese had been studying these countries, and the bakufu had begun to send embassies to study the West. These embassies came back with ideas that were used to design new policies. Scholars have come to see that many of what were considered traditional institutions were actually created during this period. The imperial house, no doubt an old institution was re-shaped along Western lines. Even the way the emperor dressed came to resemble the uniform of a European monarch.

3.11 SCHOLARLY APPROACHES TO THE MEIJI RESTORATION

Whether the events of 1868 mark a restoration or a revolution are questions which scholars are still debating. Tetsuo Najita, for instance writes that, "The Japanese Emperor did not have a specific structure of power to restore, and whatever grandiose images came to be associated with him after the 'restoration' (ishin) were the result of the ideological construction of the modern state and not the legacy of recent history." The events of 1867 and 1868 were not of a cataclysmic nature and if only this period is considered, then the transition from Tokugawa to Meiji seems easy and with little conflict. However, when viewed from the beginning of the nineteenth century then it can be seen that the changes which were brought about profoundly altered Japan and created a modern nation state. The view of the nature of this transition has been influenced by the concerns of the writers and their times.

3.12 SOME JAPANESE VIEWS

A well-known Meiji intellectual Tokutomi Soho (1863-1957) argued that it was not Meiji leaders but the circumstances which helped to create a modern Japan. He saw feudal Japan as already weakening with the emergence of rural leaders whose strength was based on a productive and rich economy but who were denied political power. The 15th and last Tokugawa shogun Yoshinobu, after retiring led a quiet life. He argued in his memoirs, written in 1915, that the forces of Imperial loyalty were responsible for bringing about the restoration.

A very influential analysis of the Meiji Restoration was made by the Marxists in the 1920s. when internal repression and an aggressive foreign policy led them to re-examine the nature of the modern Japanese state. A vast range of detailed and scholarly works were produced and the views were divided into two broad groups:

- The Labour-Farmer group (rono-ha) saw the restoration as fundamentally a bourgeois revolution which ended feudalism and laid the basis for capitalist development.

- The other group, which took its name from the series of lectures (koza) they produced. The 'koza' group, argued that the Meiji Restoration was not a successful capitalist revolution but one which ushered in an absolutist rule. This was based on the "Emperor System" and the power of this system rested on feudal relations which had continued in the countryside.

The Marxist arguments were closely tied to their political programmes. If feudalism had ended then it was not necessary to fight the Emperor which would bring about the proscription of the party but if feudalism was still important then the Emperor system had to be countered and this meant the party would be banned.

An influential Japanese ideologue Kita Ikki (1883-1937) saw the restoration as a restoration-revolution recognizing both the forward looking elements as well as the constraints of the past which continued. In a work which was banned almost immediately after it was published he forcefully put forward this view. He identified the new thinking and the elements that led from the political changes to the declaration of a modern constitution.

3.13 SCHOLARSHIP AFTER WORLD WAR-II

In post-WWII period in Japan the debate has continued. E.H. Norman in his path breaking work put forward an interpretation which has influenced many scholars. Norman saw the restoration as the work of a coalition of "lower samurai" and "merchants". This coalition was crucial to creating the Meiji state and it was responsible for the features which were developed, namely foreign expansion and internal centralization. However, other scholars have found this framework difficult to substantiate by detailed studies.

Albert Craig has argued that "lower samurai" is analytically meaningless as "upper samurai" were a very small percentage and any movement would include a large number of lower samurai. Thomas Huber who, like Albert Craig studied the han of Choshu, has defined the lower samurai by their income and concluded that they included commoner village administrators. Shibahara Takauji has seen the popular anti-feudal sentiments as the driving force behind the restoration movement. Conrad Totman, however, argues that commoners took part on all sides and it is not possible to equate anti-feudal with anti-Bakufu.

The role of popular discontent is difficult to analyse. Certainly there were popular movements but, as one study points out, many of them took place in the Tokugawa areas which were relatively more prosperous than the anti-Bakufu domains. The role of merchants also needs to be carefully studied before it can be conclusively argued that they were supporters of the loyalist movement.

Marius Jansen has questioned the actual danger posed by foreign intervention arguing that the governments were not either really interested or in a position to increase their influence. However, he does concede that the Japanese perceptions of foreign threat were an important force in making the people take action. In particular the fear of foreign loans played a crucial part in this period as well as in the Meiji era.

The debates will continue and we need to further refine our understanding of the actual processes by careful and detailed study. However, it can be said that there are three major areas around which the debates centre:

- i) The first is that the Meiji ishin arose as a protective reaction against Western imperialist threat.
- ii) Secondly, the real conflict lay between the forces of feudalism and the emerging capitalist forces and the Meiji state which emerged was a mix of these two elements.
- iii) Thirdly, the nature and role of the lower samurai is debated. Conrad Totman has argued that the prime cause of the Meiji Restoration was the internal collapse of the Tokugawa Bakufu and this was brought about by a long-term decline caused by an inability to respond to the new forces generated by the continuous peace and economic development. He sees the movements of the early 1860's such as the 'sonno-joi' (revere the emperor, expel the barbarians) and the move to unite the court and the bakufu (kobugattai) as voluntaristic but, he argues that they failed to unify the country. His analysis stresses the importance of national political considerations and consequently he does not place a crucial significance on domainal affairs and problems. The problem of the domains was important but not the crucial determining factor in the type of change that was brought about.

Harold Bolitho who has studied the fudai daimyo of Tokugawa Japan takes an opposite view. He argues that central authority had not developed but rather the weak shoguns had increased the strength 'and power of the han. The domainal interests then became the crucial force in the last years of the Bakufu. These han interests found symbolic leadership under the Emperor. This coalition of hans under the Emperor could challenge the Bakufu and press its demand for political change. The kobugattai movement was the main attempt to replace the Bakufu by this coalition. The sonno-joi movement was national in scope and brought lower and middle ranking samurai together against the Bakufu.

Thomas Huber, as mentioned earlier, in his study of Choshu focuses on the class nature of the movement which helped to bring about the Meiji Restoration. Huber agrees with Bolitho in placing importance on imperialist pressure but he disagrees with both Bolitho and Totman and argues that both domainal consciousness and national consciousness were not crucial in the anti-Bakufu movements. Huber's study of the movement called Heaven's Revenge in Choshu shows that it was a consciousness of class and a desire for social justice which was the prime driving force. Huber's examination of the Bakufu's attempts to reform the structure from within is less hopeful. He sees the Bakufu as essentially conservative and incapable of change and the reformers were at best marginal within this structure.

3.14 THE MEIJI RESTORATION IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

The events of the Meiji Restoration have been examined by scholars working on Japan but few specialists from other areas have tried to look at this event within

the larger framework of how societies have made the transition to a modern state. The process is difficult and has not always been successful. Mexico experienced a peasant revolution in 1910 which was put down but after decades of capitalist development it still remains an underdeveloped country. Turkey, on the other hand carried out, under Kamal Atatürk in 1919, a national transformation but it too failed to develop. In Asia, China carried out a republican revolution in 1911 and in 1949 the Chinese Communist Party came to power but it was able to successfully industrialize only after 1970s. Japan's Meiji Restoration thus is important as marking the successful transformation of a non-industrialized society into a modern nation state. This event needs to be considered as part of a larger historical process.

3.15 FROM SAVING THE PEOPLE TO MOBILISING THEM TO SERVE THE STATE

The Meiji Ishin was a period when society was thrown into turmoil and ideas and relations had not yet jelled into the later "oligarchic state" and therefore to impose an order from later interests restricts the field of inquiry, as well as casts that inevitability so apparent on historical writing on Japan. Tetsuo Najita has looked at the transformation that took place in the way knowledge and the political economy were perceived. The Tokugawa concerns were with "ordering society and saving the people" (keisei saimin) but with the Meiji the prime interest has become "rich country, strong army" (fukoku kyohei). The change from "saving" to "mobilizing" the people occurred with the Meiji Ishin. This process occurred over a period of time and was preceded by debates and confrontation.

The transformation of Japan was not something which was carried out through consensus and harmony. When we consider these questions it becomes difficult to accept J.W. Hall's view that "Japan saw little of the social antagonisms or political ideologies which the French or Russian revolutions saw ... "The Meiji Restoration was neither bourgeois nor a peasant revolution, although both peasant and merchant were found among the individuals who led the attack on the Shogunate.

The Russian historian I.A. Latyshev notes that between 1868-1873 there were over 200 peasant uprisings and he argues that it would be better to see the restoration as an "unaccomplished revolution". It is also important to remember that while the Tokugawa house was not killed but continued, the battles which brought down the Bakufu at Toba and Fushimi involved 120,000 government troops and 3,556 were killed and 3,804 injured. Compare this with the 5,417 lost in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-5 and then only the magnitude of the struggle can be appreciated.

The upheaval of the Meiji Restoration has been examined from various perspectives. Irokawa Daikichi, an influential Japanese historian whose work on the democratic struggles of the people has established him as a major interpreter of Japanese history has stressed on the confrontation between "civilization" and "westernization". He argues that the hopes of the common people in the Great Renewal (goishin) as the Meiji Ishin was called were thwarted and with the arbitrary changes in customary practices their disillusionment increased and this

discontent fuelled the anti-establishment struggles, such as peasant rebellions. It was also evident in the increased popularity of popular religions, also known as new religions, such as Maruyama and Tenri. These were outside the established and officially recognized religious groups and were formed around charismatic leaders.

The tension between the demands for modernity and the destruction of the way of life of the common people was the driving force for the violent incidents during the restoration and immediately after.

In conclusion it needs to be emphasised that while the Meiji Restoration inaugurated a new era for Japan the reason for Japan's successful transformation lie not merely in the breathing space which it enjoyed. The Western imperialist powers were certainly more interested in the great China market and did not see any great potential in Japan. This gave Japan the chance to carry out a series of reforms but that she was able to conceive and execute these reforms, that she was able to use the chance that she had was more due to internal strengths and indigenous institutions.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What was the significance of events of 1968 for Japanese History?

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- 2) Evaluate the different interpretations of Meiji Restoration in brief.

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3.16 LET US SUM UP

The decline of the Tokugawa was caused by the generation of new social forces and the tensions these created. Samurai, merchants and peasants found increasing problems, some of them due to increasing productivity and prosperity. The Bakufu did respond and change but the long term changes in the economy, as well as the new intellectual trends but above all the hostile international environment undermined Tokugawa rule.

The middle of the nineteenth century was the high tide of Western imperialism and Russia, Britain, France were active in this region. Japan was saved the brunt of the onslaught because the powers were more interested in China. Yet it must

be emphasised that Japan's transformation was carried out under imperialist threat and this conditioned and directed her responses. The fear of being colonized as the example of India showed, the burden of unequal treaties which removed foreigners from Japanese jurisdiction and imposed heavy tariffs, fuelled the drive to transform Japan into a modern nation-state.

**The Meiji Restoration and the
Creation of Modern Japan**

3.17 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 3.4 and 3.5
- 2) See Section 3.7

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 3.10
- 2) See Section 3.11

