Meiji Modernization (1868-1912)

Background to Meiji Modernization

A. Factors facilitating the decision to modernize

i. Strong solidarity and clear goal among the new leaders -

The Meiji leaders came mainly from the lower-middle rank of the samurai class. They had experienced both the corrupt Tokugawa feudal rule and the pressure of Western imperialism. As a group, they shared a common social background and political experience - they agreed that modernization was the only way to save the country.

Some Names
Kido Koin
Okubo Toshimichi
Okuma Shigenobu
Saigo Takamori
Yamagata Aritomo
Ito Hirobumi
Itagaki Taisuke

ii. Urgency of modernization to avoid national humiliation -

The Meiji leaders were well aware of the fate of Japan's immediate neighbour, China, where resistance to change only brought humiliation and defeat. They believed Japan was in danger of foreign attack. They recognized that the need for modernization was urgent.

B. Modernization to counter imperialism

Once in power, the Meiji leaders decided to turn away from tradition and modernize Japan to defend against Western imperialism. Western imperialism took two forms:

i. Politically, by means of unequal treaties, the foreign powers obtained many privileges from Japan. An example of such privileges was extra-territoriality (i.e. the foreign powers had the right to apply their own law to their nationals staying in Japan). All these gains were backed up by Western military superiority. Japan's national right was violated.

ii. Economically, foreign imports into Japan increased greatly because of the low tariff fixed by the unequal treaties. By 1870, foreign imports reached 70% of all Japanese trade.

Cheap foreign goods, like English textiles, poured into Japan and ruined native Japanese handicraft industries. Japan suffered from an unfavourable balance of payments (i.e. imports far exceeding exports). Loans were extended to Japan by Westerners; in return, Westerners received more privileges.

Moreover, since gold was cheaper in Japan than in other places of the world (less than half the world price), foreigners bought from Japan vast quantities of gold. This outflow of gold, together with the economic imperialism of foreign imports, caused social miseries in the country. To counter the economic threats of imperialism, Japan had to be economically powerful.

To counter the political threats of imperialism, Japan had to be militarily strengthened. Thus "rich country and strong army" (fokoku kyohei) was the slogan of Meiji modernization. The final objective was to establish strong political rule in Japan, so that she would at last be able to get rid of the unequal treaties imposed by the Western powers.

C. All-round and total modernization

Once the Meiji leaders began modernizing certain aspects of Japan, they found it necessary to modernize other aspects as well. For example, military reform called for the production of weapons, which only economic reform could successfully supply. On the other hand, to function efficiently, the military establishment needed modern communications. Thus more railways, roads and ships must be built.

Armament and transport themselves required the efficient administration and co-ordination of a modern government. Thus political reform had to be carried out. To make sure that these political, economic and military reforms would
be accepted by the people, and to train the people to carry out these reforms, long-term educational modernization must be developed at the same time. The different aspects of change were dependent on one another.

In short, modernization was an all-or-none matter. Either every aspect of the country had to be modernized to some extent, or no single aspect could be modernized successfully.

D. The characteristics of modernization

The term "modernization" refers to the transformation of a traditional, feudal society into a progressive, modern one. It has the following characteristics:

- Industrialization of the traditional economy.
- Increased agricultural commercialization and specialization.
- Importance of industry and trade over agriculture.
- More machines used for production.
- Possession of a nationally conscripted military force.
- Increased geographic mobility (people going from one place to another) and social mobility (people moving from one social position to another)
- Spread of popular, scientific and technical education.
- Increase in material standards of living.
- Politically conscious citizens.
- Increased urbanization (more cities) and well-developed, nationwide communications.
- Centralized and specialized administration by the government. Rule of law, not of man.

A Preliminary Step to Modernization - Strengthening of the Meiji State

A. Weaknesses of the Meiji state

- Although the Tokugawa shogunate was overthrown in 1868, the Meiji government that replaced it was not a strong one by 1870:
  
  Political: Indirect and incomplete political control over the country at large - This was because the daimyo with their samurai, still ruled the clans.

  Economic: Insufficient state revenue for full-scale modernization - The Meiji government got most of its tax income from former Tokugawa lands only.

  Military: Absence of any national army - The new government depended on only a few western clans (mainly Choshu and Satsuma) for its military force.

B. Measures to strengthen the Meiji state

The Meiji government took measures, both negative and positive, to strengthen itself.

The negative measure was the abolition of feudalism.

The positive measure was the introduction of modern land taxation and military conscription.

i. Abolition of feudalism

a. Political - In 1871, the Meiji government announced the abolition of feudalism as a form of government.

Clan governments and clan armies were ordered to dismiss. Whereas these clans had been politically autonomous, the Central Government now divided Japan into 75 prefectures governed by centrally appointed officials.

b. Social - With the breakup of feudal gov'ts, the old ruling class - the daimyo and samurai - no longer ruled the land. By way of compensation, the daimyo were given one-tenth of their clans’ original income, while the samurai were promised that their stipends (salary), though somewhat reduced, would continue.

Also, efforts were made to help the samurai become useful modern citizens, so that they would not cause trouble. They were given permission to enter other occupations like farming and commerce.

The government created employment for them and lent them money to go into business. The Meiji police force, for example, consisted almost entirely of samurai members.
In 1876, the government changed the yearly allowance for daimyo and samurai into a lump sum paid once and for all.

Meanwhile, other social feudal systems were also abolished, e.g. class distinctions were removed. The samurai lost their special legal privilege and their right of wearing swords. The commoners were given family names.

c. Effects -
Freed from the financial burden of supporting the old ruling class, the Meiji government was financially better able to carry out modernization.

National unity was strengthened when feudal clans were abolished. The samurai who had been loyal only to their lords, began extending their loyalty to the nation. The Meiji gov’t could therefore effectively rule over the whole country and was in a better position to modernize Japan.

The liberation of the people from feudal restrictions and the abolition of the samurai class created a large, mobile labour force for industrialization.

The removal of clans facilitated internal trade and led to the emergence of a national market for industrial and commercial expansion.

The lump sum payments to the daimyo and samurai formed a source of capital for investments in new industries. In particular, the former daimyo became big financiers, investing their wealth in banks, stocks and industries. A modern wealthy middle-class began to emerge.

But because the samurai’s social position was abolished, discontent among the samurai class grew leading to -> Satsuma Rebellion 1877.

ii. Establishment of a modern system of land taxation

a. Motive - The purpose was to ensure a continuous and large income to finance different modernization programs.

b. Contents - As the Japanese economy was still agricultural by 1870, the Meiji government depended on agriculture for a reliable revenue. In 1873, it was announced that all landowners had to pay a yearly tax of 3% of the land value. Certificates of landownership were given to the farmers.

c. Effects -
This land-tax system enabled the Central Government to predict its income, since the tax (fixed in amount) no longer varied with the harvests and since the tax had to be paid in cash.

Until 1888, land tax alone accounted for over half of the whole government’s income. The costs of industrialization could be paid.

Yet many peasants suffered greatly from the new land tax system. Rural discontent grew quickly.

As many small peasants were unable to pay the required land tax, they sold their land to richer landlords and became tenants (landless agricultural labourers).

iii. Creation of a modern conscripted army
See military reform later

C. Problems in the strengthening of the Meiji state

i. Discontent among the poor samurai and hard-pressed peasants led to the outbreak of many local rebellions. There were nearly 200 uprisings from 1868 to 1878.

ii. Partly because of the payments to the daimyo and samurai, and partly because of the new land taxation, inflation was very serious from 1868 to the early 1880s. The income of both the samurai and the government was badly affected.

Economic Modernization

Background

A. Late Tokugawa economic conditions

i. First, the late Tokugawa commercial economy was prosperous. Many rich merchants had saved large amounts of capital, which, if invested in modern industries, would greatly stimulate industrialization. They served to pave the way for industrial progress in the Meiji period.

ii. Secondly, from 1854 (when Japan was opened by the West) to 1868, the Tokugawa shogunate
and some other clans had already developed considerable ship-building and arms-manufacturing industries. There were already some Japanese engineers and technicians who knew Western technology.

By taking over and centralizing the control of these pre-1868 industrial undertakings, the Meiji government had a good foundation to start with.

B. Motives of economic modernization
i. Development of military-strategic industries such as production of ammunition and construction of war-ships, for national defence against possible foreign attacks.

ii. Economically independent from Western economic imperialist control.

iii. Manufacturing of consumer-goods by Japan herself so as to cut down foreign imports.

iv. Balance of exports and imports so as to solve the problem of unfavourable balance of payments.

v. Creation of employment opportunities for the people, especially for the discontented and jobless former samurai.

vi. Improvement of the economic conditions of the peasants.

vii. Strengthening of the material foundation of the Meiji state so that the government could collect more tax and be more wealthy.

AGRICULTURAL REFORMS

A. Reasons for development

Japan was still largely an agricultural country by 1870.

A modernized agriculture is the foundation of and pre-condition for successful industrialization.

B. Contents

Agricultural students were sent abroad to learn more advanced agricultural techniques.

Foreign experts were employed to give advice on agricultural development.

New kinds of plants and seeds were imported. Experimental agricultural stations and agricultural colleges were founded throughout the country to test new methods of planting and advise farmers on new agricultural techniques.

C. Results

With state encouragement as such, agricultural production steadily expanded. Total rice production, for example, grew over 30% between 1880 and 1894, partly because new land was opened for cultivation, but mostly because new farming methods increased productivity.

On the other hand, great progress was made in silk production and export. By the 1890s, silk alone already accounted for 1/3 of all Japan’s export trade by value. Three reasons explained this:

a. There was a favourable market in Europe.

b. The high quality of Japanese silk attracted many buyers.

c. Silk manufacture was technically improved.

D. Effects

i. Since the Meiji government’s revenue depended largely on agricultural taxation, expansion in agricultural production indirectly increased the government’s income that could be invested in other modernization programs.

ii. The great expansion in silk exports helped to balance foreign imports, thus partly making up for the unfavourable balance of payments that Japan had been suffering.

iii. In general, agricultural exports earned much money to pay for the industrial machinery and raw materials that had to be imported.

iv. The increase in the income of the farmers created a home market for locally-made consumer goods.

v. Rural discontent was to a certain extent pacified when the incomes of many farmers were raised.

vi. Agriculture became increasingly specialized and commercialized, which increased tenancy as
well as large-scale concentration of land in the landlords.

Many poor tenant-farmers went from the villages to the towns, thereby providing cheap labour for urban industrialization. When more and more farmers became tenants, the countryside was increasingly under the control of conservative landlord-merchants. Thus, Western democratic movements failed to take root in rural Japan.

INDUSTRIALIZATION
A. Requirements of successful industrialization

As already discussed, late Tokugawa economic conditions were in effect a basis for subsequent industrial growth. Yet, for successful industrialization, two requirements were essential:

a great body of skilled labour and advanced technology;

a large store of capital.

i. Technical skills could be obtained in two ways:

Immediately, they could be borrowed from abroad. Thus, foreign advisers and engineers were employed to run new industrial undertakings and train native Japanese technicians.

In the long run, they could be obtained through modern education. Thus technical schools were set up. Compulsory education was introduced.

Once Japanese had been successfully trained to become skilled workers and technicians, they could replace foreign advisers.

Yet, capital was a problem. The few wealthy merchant families of late Tokugawa times were unwilling to invest in modern enterprises. They preferred to remain in traditional economic activities like banking, usury (high-interest money lending) or land buying.

There were three reasons for this:

These merchant families had conservative "house laws" that warned against investment in new business.

In the early 1870s, modern enterprises were new, and therefore risky, in Japan. Also, they involved slow returns; they would bring profits only after a long period of investment.

The old merchants lacked the techniques and knowledge that were required for running a modern business.

B. Government initiative in industrialization, 1870 - 1880

Having unsuccessfully tried to stimulate private investment in the early 1870s, the Meiji government adopted a policy that was to prove successful - she developed industries herself.

The necessary capital came from (a) government revenue from land tax; and (b) loans contracted by the government from some old merchant families (not from the Western powers, for fear of being under their economic control).

i. Emphasis on military-strategic Industries :- The reasons were as follows:

The industries developed in late Tokugawa times and taken over by the Meiji government were mostly military-strategic in nature.

It was necessary to defend the country against any foreign military threat. Thus, shipbuilding yards, gun-powder and munition factories, and artillery works were established.

ii. Development in consumer-goods industries - Meanwhile, consumer-goods industries were also developed, though emphasis put on them was not as strong as that on heavy industries.

Silk-reeling plants, glass and chemical manufacturing plants, a cement works, a cotton-spinning factory and a sugar factory were established. The cotton spinning mill encouraged rural Japanese spinners to use machines in spinning raw silk. The sugar refinery bought sugar products from local Japanese farmers. In these ways, industrialization benefited agriculture in return.
iii. Encouragement of private investments -
At the same time, attempts were made by the government to divert private capital into these newly developed government industries. The results were encouraging.

a. The former daimyo and the old merchants began investing their wealth in the new enterprises.
b. The landowners, who were enriched by the commercialization of agriculture that partly resulted from the Meiji land tax reform, began transferring most of their new savings out of agriculture into new industries.

C. Government sale of industries to private ownership from 1880 onwards

i. Reasons -
After 1880, while still retaining control and ownership of military-strategic industries (like railways, telegraphs, shipbuilding, arms-manufacturing, and arsenals), the Meiji government began selling off other industries to a few trusted private companies at very low prices. This change of industrial policy could be explained by a number of reasons:

First, government initiative in industrial development at best only laid the basis for industrial growth, while long-term industrial expansion must rely on private companies.

Secondly, the government was at the moment having financial problems.

The payments of samurai stipends in 1876, the cost of suppressing the 1877 Satsuma Rebellion, and the general expenditure of modernization programs, all brought about financial difficulties for the Meiji government.

Many industrial projects under state operation were not profitable, owing to their being still at the infancy stage.

The Meiji government was at the moment in need of funds for naval expansion.

ii. Sale of industries -
A few private companies bought many government-owned industries.

For example, the Mitsubishi got a shipyard and many ships from the government. The Mitsui purchased a silk-reeling mill and a spinning mill.

iii. Government supervision -
Thereafter, the Meiji government, instead of actively and directly founding, managing and controlling industries herself, took on the role of indirect protector and supervisor of industrialization.

The government established a Department of Agriculture and Commerce in 1881.

In 1882, the first Japanese central bank (state bank) was set up, through which the government could regulate industrial growth. Through tariffs, tax policy and big quasi-public banks, the government established indirect control over the economy. Subsidies and technological advice were given to the private companies.

iv. Effects -
a. Having sold non-military industries to private ownership, the government was in a better financial position to overcome economic difficulties like inflation.

A policy of retrenchment (cutting unnecessary state expenditure) was adopted in the early 1880s. In the end, 1/4 of government revenue was saved, and inflation stopped. The basis for orderly and stable growth had been laid.

b. Concentration on military industries - Having disposed of non-military industries, the Meiji government could now concentrate on purely military ones.

Thus, despite the general decrease in other state expenditures in the 1880s, there was a sharp rise in military spending (over 60%).

c. Rise of the zaibatsu -
The few private companies that succeeded in buying government industries became monopolistic economic giants known as the zaibatsu (financial combines).

Famous zaibatsu included the Mitsui, the Mitsubishi, the Sumitomo and the Yasuda.
They ran a wide range of economic activities, from banking and manufacturing to insurance. Free economic competition, which was a condition for successful democracy, was suppressed.

d. Close relationship between government and business -

The sale of government industries marked the alliance between government and business, or rather, the subordination of business to government interests. As the zaibatsu were brought up by an undemocratic government, they were used to doing business under an undemocratic government, even under a militarist dictatorship in the 1930s later.

e. Firmer support for the Meiji government -

Some industries were sold to a few former officials of the Meiji government like Goto. This had the effect of strengthening the support for the Meiji state.

D. Measures taken by the Meiji government to protect its young industries against Western economic imperialism

These measures were what a Meiji leader learnt from Bismarck in a Japanese mission to Germany in 1873.

The Meiji government tried to discourage foreign investments in Japan by buying back foreign-owned industrial undertakings.

Trade rules were enacted to the disadvantage of foreign businessmen.

Foreign loans were repaid. No further loans from foreigners were contracted.

Successful industrialization: --

After the 1880s, both light and heavy industries continued to grow. From 1880 to 1913, industrial output increased five fold, while national income doubled.

Heavy industries - By the early 1890s, Japan was able to produce machinery and electrical equipment herself. The first Japanese locomotive was manufactured. Both coal and copper were exported.

Light industries - Textile industries were particularly important. The reasons were many:

First, they required less capital and less technical knowledge to run than heavy industries.

Secondly, they could be developed in small workshops rather than large and expensive factories. Thirdly, they made use of the rural labour that Japan's farm households could easily provide.

Consequently, private investments in textile industries were great and progress made was fast. During the 1880s, most textile products were absorbed by the domestic market. From the 1890s on, textile goods were exported.

DEVELOPMENTS OF THE MEIJI INDUSTRIALIZATION

EFFECTS OF INDUSTRIALIZATION

A. Political effects

Industrialization laid the necessary foundation of a modern state. As the Meiji government had a strong and modern economy to rely on, the scope of government power was enlarged, its efficiency increased.

Rapid industrialization strengthened the Meiji state's undemocratic rule, as it provided new instruments for power concentration. The government could therefore effectively put down internal oppositions and carry out a stronger foreign policy.

B. Foreign effects

As both domestic and foreign trade increased under industrialization, foreign economic exploitation could be shaken off.

i. Large volumes of textile and silk exports helped to balance foreign imports. Since the government controlled all foreign trade, it concentrated on importing what it needed: raw materials and industrial machinery for industrialization, rather than foreign luxuries. In the end, foreign imports into Japan were gradually cut down.
ii. The control of coastal shipping gradually fell back into Japanese hands from foreigners, as the Mitsubishi succeeded in building up a strong trade fleet.

C. Economic effects
In the long run, industrialization destroyed Japan's traditional agricultural economy. First, the local economically self-sufficient village society was replaced by increased agricultural commercialization and specialization. Secondly, with greater circulation of goods, capital and even labour, localism of village society broke down; the village people felt that they belonged not only to the village but to the nation as a whole. Thirdly, industry replaced agriculture as the nation's most important economic activity. Also, industrialization reduced economic inequalities of the old Tokugawa society. Gradually, however, new concentrations of wealth and power were built up by the zaibatsu, which controlled much of the entire country's economy.

D. Social effects
The standard of living in society was raised. One way or another, industrialization improved the economic conditions of the people. In return, the people sup-ported the government. On the other hand, social mobility was facilitated (more people of low social positions could climb up to high positions, or vice versa). Successful industrialists or businessmen became Modern Japan's social leaders. Also, success in industrial growth greatly strengthened Japan's nationalist spirit and confidence. But because industrialization was at first started by the government and later placed under strict government supervision, an independent middle-class of merchants and industrialists who would support democratic movements failed to emerge. As a result, the forces of democracy were weak.

E. Military effects
The strong emphasis placed on military-strategic industries strengthened the power and position of the military establishment and indirectly led to the rise of militarism later.

Educational Modernization
A. Condition of education in late Tokugawa times
Two kinds of schools in Japan before 1868:
First, there were many thousands of small private schools for the commoners' children. Feudal clan governments seldom interfered in the operation of these schools. Children learnt to read and write, Moral qualities like submission to family & obedience to superiors were taught.

The second kind of school was for the samurai's children and was run by feudal governments. Confucian moral values were taught.

B. Factors facilitating educational modernization
Before 1870, many of the late Tokugawa schools already taught Western science and technology. Thus the people were better prepared to accept Western knowledge after 1870. A sound basis for acquiring more Western knowledge had been laid.

Tokugawa education was based on a Chinese rather than a Japanese tradition. This made it easier for the Japanese to abandon Chinese learning in favour of Western knowledge, since both of them were of foreign origin.

By 1870, nearly half of the male population was literate. In fact, a historian says that Japan in 1870 "enjoyed one of the highest literacy rates of any non-industrial society". The Meiji leaders were all educated in the Confucian schools in late Tokugawa times. They had a Confucian respect for learning. They were thus enthusiastic for educational modernization.

C. Motives of modernization
Technical skills and Western knowledge, which other programs of modernization needed, could
not be forever borrowed from the West through the employment of foreign advisers. Development of modern education in the long run enabled Japan to acquire such skills and knowledge herself. Modernization would be useless if there were just modern institutions without modern citizens. The development of education could bring about a modern, literate citizenry. Through education, the government could widen its popular support by the people.

On the other hand, the people, after having acquired some basic skills, could lead a better life. Education would raise the standard of living in society. From the 1880s on, however, education was used increasingly by the government to teach nationalistic ideas. Through a nationalist education, the Meiji government attempted to strengthen national and social unity, thereby safeguarding national safety in an age of foreign imperialism.

DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATIONAL MODERNIZATION

During the 1870s, the Meiji government adopted a policy that aimed at a Western, liberal and utilitarian (i.e. a method is used only if it brings direct material and practical benefits) education. Starting from the 1880s, however, education became more and more undemocratic in Japan. It was used increasingly for political objectives.

A. Fundamental Law on Education of 1872

Aims -

a. To establish national control over education.
b. To impose uniform educational standards in the country.
c. To introduce universal and compulsory education for the people.

Contents

a. Education for a period of 16 months was made compulsory for all children 6 years of age. Japan would be divided into 8 educational regions. Each of them would have one university and 32 secondary schools. In each secondary school district, there would be about 200 primary schools. Administration would be centralized.
b. In school, Confucian moral lessons of the past were replaced by progressive and modern curricula based on the French model. Western knowledge and science were taught.

Textbooks were updated. Translated materials from American or English texts were borrowed.

In many schools, European rather than Japanese history was taught.
c. The French and American principles of education were accepted: the purpose of education was the material and intellectual advancement of the individual.

Development-

Progress was rapid. In 1877, a new education ordinance, more liberal than that of 1872, was introduced. By 1880, there were nearly 30,000 primary schools.

Problems -

a. First, teachers were lacking. As a result, foreign teachers had to be employed for the time being, while Japanese teachers were being trained.
b. Secondly, the capital needed for such an ambitious compulsory-education project was large. The government therefore ruled that parents had to pay part of their children’s school fees. Consequently, many poor peasants were unwilling to send their children to school.
c. Thirdly, people feared that compulsory education would result in heavy taxation. At the same time, the local government which was eager to preserve local power, viewed the national government’s educational centralization with suspicion. Opposition to the new education system arose. Some elementary schools were burnt by ignorant villagers. Riots broke out.
d. Fourthly, the conservative peasants found it difficult to accept the Western idea of compulsory education.
e. Lastly, but most importantly, the Western and liberal approach to education aroused
dissatisfaction from those conservatives educated in the Confucian tradition of the past. Motoda Eifu, the Emperor’s Confucian teacher, was one such conservative. They wished to bring Confucianism back into school teachings, and they complained that Japan’s national spirit would be lost if education continued to be based on Western principles. The Emperor himself was alarmed at too Westernized an education.

- Once, when visiting a local school, he found out that some Japanese students speaking in English were unable to translate back into Japanese the English that they spoke. In 1879, he issued the Great Principles of Education and argued that the decline of Japanese culture was due to Western education.

- In the same year, Motoda published a book called Essentials of Learning for the Young to advocate a return to traditional education.

B. Education Act of 1879

Meanwhile, the Meiji government tried to get more popular support for the new education by changing from the French model of administrative centralization to the American model of educational decentralization.

In the Education Act of 1879, more power in educational matters was given to local authorities. The results were, however, unsatisfactory.

i. Without central guidance, the percentage of children attending schools declined instead.

ii. Local educational authorities began reintroducing traditional elements into school curricula.

C. Beginning of illiberal education

In the 1880s, the government started to make use of education as an instrument to teach loyalty to the Emperor, nationalist spirit, as well as respect for authority. Military training was introduced in school. Textbooks were checked by the government before they could be used.

Teachers were forbidden to attend any political meeting. In short, the liberal methods of the 1870s were abandoned. Education became a way of social control.

D. Education Act of 1886

In 1886, changes were again made to the educational system. Under the leadership of Mori Arinori, the Prussian model, not the American one, was used.

i. The administration of education was again centralized.

ii. The period of compulsory education was extended to 4 years. Schools were made more specialized.

iii. A Dual System was adopted. At the lower educational levels, a moral education based on Confucian ethics (i.e. Confucian rules of conduct) and an emperor-centred nationalism was added to the original Western practical training. At the upper levels, including the university, the greatest possible academic freedom was allowed.

iv. Supervision over the schools was tightened. Private schools were subject to official licence and inspection.

v. The supremacy of the state at every educational level, from primary school to university, was confirmed.

Yet to many die-hard conservatives like Motoda, Mori’s policy was still too Western and liberal. These traditionalists wished to establish an educational system that preserved more of Japan’s national traditions. The opportunity came in 1889, when Mori was assassinated by an ultra-nationalist.

E. Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890

This was issued by the Emperor under the influence of conservatives like Motoda. As one of them later admitted, the Rescript was intended to counter the growing influence of Western thought.

i. A rigid code of behaviour and belief was laid down for the people. The people were told not to
give up national virtues like ancestor worship and filial piety.

ii. The educational ideal, according to the Rescript, was not the individual’s self-betterment; instead, it was the individual’s service to the state. School children were taught total and unquestioned loyalty to the Emperor.

Until 1945, the Rescript was memorized by all school children. It was the bible of patriotism in Japan.

F. Authoritarian education after the 1890s

After the 1890s, education was put under stricter government control. Textbooks were all written and published by the state. In these textbooks, the students were ordered to be absolutely obedient. Religious stories of Shintoism (Japan’s traditional religion) were presented as believable historical facts.

G. Higher education

The government established most of the universities. Private ones were founded only rarely. The graduates would be employed by the state in the various government departments. University education was a training ground for government officials.

EFFECTS OF EDUCATIONAL MODERNIZATION

A. An instrument of ultra-nationalism and authoritarianism

By 1900, it was clear that education in Japan was far from liberal. Just as all teachers were civil servants under state control, university professors had to take oaths of loyalty to the government. In the long run, free thinking and a questioning mind, both of which were conditions for a successful democracy, were suppressed. Ultra-nationalism grew under such an authoritarian educational system, leading finally to the rise of militarism and expansionist aggression in Asia.

B. Greater social and national unity

But owing to modernized education, Meiji Japan had achieved to high degree of homogeneity (uniformity) of thought. Conflicts between social classes were therefore minimized.

Brought up by the same kind of education, both government officials and citizens shared common ideas and were equally nationalistic. Communications between the government and the people were made easier. Government administration was more efficient.

C. Increased social literacy

At the same time, because of the national system of education, the rate of social literacy was raised. More people knew how to read and write. In 1912, the Japanese government claimed that 95% of its population was attending school. However, literacy was in fact by no means nationwide: a survey of 22 factories in 1892 showed that about 1/3 of the workers had received no education at all. Yet there can be little doubt that there were more literate citizens.

D. Contribution to successful modernization

There were more technicians and skilled workers to carry out industrialization. Also, many of Modern Japan’s political leaders had studied in the Tokyo Imperial University.

E. Greater political consciousness among the people and greater social mobility in society

Socially, national education increased the political consciousness of the people. The people began to demand more political rights. Social movements such as trade-union movements and student movements began to grow. On the other hand, greater social mobility was achieved. More people could move from low social positions to high social positions, or vice versa.

Military Modernization

A. Factors facilitating military modernization

Japan’s long militarist tradition made it easier for the people to accept military reforms and for the government to carry them out. Many government leaders had been commanders of the clan forces before 1868. They had
experienced military encounters with the West, and they had fought the civil war that led to the 1868 Restoration. Besides, it was their military forces that gave the new government its main military support. Logically, therefore, they favoured military reforms. Effective political centralization should be backed up by the creation of national armies. So military reform was necessary.

Late Tokugawa military undertakings had already laid the foundation for further subsequent military build-up during the Meiji period:

a. The Tokugawa shogunate left behind a number of gunneries, some naval specialists and a varied knowledge of Western military techniques.

b. Clans like Satsuma and Choshu had experimented with modern military forces: Satsuma had created a naval squadron, and Choshu a land force, all on European models.

B. Aims

In the early 1870s, military modernization was carried out for the sake of defending Japan both against any possible foreign military threats and against any domestic rebellions or disorder. After the 1890s, however, attention was more and more concentrated on Japan’s ability to fight and win a foreign offensive war and to acquire imperialist interests overseas.

C. Development of the army

Lack of a national army in the early 1870s - Strictly speaking, there was no national army under the Meiji government’s control in 1870, as former clan armies were still not unified.

- In 1871, however, the situation changed for the better; an Imperial Guard was formed, when a few western clans put their troops under the direct command of the Emperor. With such a military backing, the Meiji government succeeded in effecting political changes like the abolition of feudalism and crushed internal opposition.

Conscription Law of 1873

- It was only after the introduction of the Conscription Law in 1873 that a truly national army began to take shape. According to the law, all Japanese males over 23 years old were required to serve a 7-year military service in the regular army, with 4 more years in the reserve.

Opposition to conscription

- The peasants were very dissatisfied with this sudden imposition of what seemed to them a strange and troublesome obligation. Consequently, riots broke out in the countryside. On the other hand, the samurai were also dissatisfied with the loss of their military status to the peasants. Many discontented samurai caused trouble. In 1878, even the Imperial Guard mutinied.

Efforts at reorganization after 1878 and their effects

- Although the revolt was quickly put down, Yamagata Aritomo, the Meiji leader responsible for military modernization, was fearful that the new national army was disloyal. He thus made efforts to reorganize the army:

  a. First, whereas the new army had been based on the French model, army organization was now on German lines. Stricter discipline and tighter administrative control were introduced. A General Staff was created to advise the Emperor on military matters - a job that formerly belonged to the civil officials (non-military officials). As the General Staff could directly approach the Emperor, civil control of the military was lost.

  b. Secondly, to cut the army off from being influenced by any democratic movement, Yamagata reintroduced the spirit of bushido for the troops.

  In 1878, he issued the Admonition to Soldiers, emphasizing unquestioned obedience to the emperor.

  In 1882, the Emperor himself issued the Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors, telling the soldiers to be loyal and to cultivate traditional militarist spirit. In this way, the authoritarian and militarist ideas of the feudal past were preserved in the army.

  c. Thirdly, the 1873 Conscription Law was revised so that the periods of military service were extended.
By 1894, Japan would have 200,000 soldiers in case there should be war. Meanwhile, military colleges were founded, and a Staff College was set up for greater specialization of military functions. Expenditure on the army rose sharply.

D. Development of the navy
The organization of the navy was based on the British system. In 1872, a Navy Ministry was formed. Both Japanese-built and foreign-bought ships were added to the Japanese fleet.

By 1894, the fleet already had 28 modern ships, together with many torpedo boats. Dockyard facilities were also modernized.

EFFECTS OF MILITARY MODERNIZATION
A. Political effects
Strengthening of the Meiji state
- In building up a strong army and teaching soldiers the values of obedience and discipline, the Meiji government was greatly strengthened.
- It had gained more support, and was in a better position to defend Japan against the Western powers and to re-negotiate unequal treaties with them.
- Moreover, she was able to fight successful wars: in 1894-5, she defeated China; in 19045, she defeated Russia.

Beginning of demand for more political rights in society
- The introduction of conscription, however, meant that the government expected the people to contribute military service to the state.
- In return, therefore, the people expected that the government should repay them by giving them more political rights. Popular political movements arose.
- Conscription gave these movements an excuse to demand constitutional rule.

The authoritarian military independent of civil control
- Most importantly, after the reorganization by Yamagata since 1878, the army became a strong-hold of authoritarian and militarist traditions. No democratic forces could break this stronghold. The military became a link with Japan's reactionary feudal past.
- Furthermore, mil. officers constantly interfered in politics and the civil affairs of the country. In a truly democratic country, the military forces are put under the control of the civil government that represents the people. In Japan, however, the mil. enjoyed independence from the civil government.

B. Economic effects
Demand for military-related industries
- Military modernization needed arms. Armament industries were developed, which benefited industrialization. For example, arms manufacturing led to the rise of metallurgical and engineering industries.

Introduction of Western knowledge
- Military modernization introduced Western technology and systems of organization into Japan, thereby bringing indirect gains to industries and other business undertakings.

C. Social effects
Destruction of localism
- Conscription enabled more Japanese to acquire technical skills. Because of conscription, more Japanese were drawn out of their village society to come into contact with urban livelihood.
- Ignorant peasant boys were given their first encounter with the modern world and its activities. All this helped the peasants to live a more modern life, and made it easier for them to accept modern things.

Increased political consciousness of the people
- Conscription increased the political consciousness of the Japanese. Local feelings were overcome as peasants underwent national military training.

Expansion in education
- As soldiers must be able to read simple orders or to know the names of weapons, national education was developed. Conscription contributed to stronger emphasis on the development of popular education. More
specialized technical schools were founded to teach military science.

**Promotion of militant Japanese nationalism**
- Conscription helped teach qualities like obedience, spirits of courage and sacrifice, and loyalty to the Emperor among the people. A "Japanese spirit", which was a compound of traditional samurai spirit and imperial nationalism, began to take shape. In short, military modernization partly gave rise to the modern but militant Japanese nationalism.

**In Search of a National Ideology**

**A. The meaning and function of ideology**
A national ideology is a body of thoughts, beliefs and ideas that all citizens of a nation share. Generally speaking, if a country has a national ideology, conflicts of opinion among the people will be minimized. Its function is to give greater unity to a nation.

**B. Shintoism at the expense of Buddhism and Confucianism**
Shintoism, which was a native Japanese religion that regarded the Emperor as Japan's God, was adopted by the Meiji government as a national ideology. In 1871, a Ministry of Shinto Affairs was established. It enjoyed independence from other government departments and was responsible for educating the Japanese to become loyal to the Emperor. To make Shintoism the only religion in Japan, both Buddhism and Confucianism were discarded. Buddhist temple lands were confiscated by the government, and Buddhist ceremonies were abandoned at the imperial court. On the other hand, Confucian teachings were given up in the new schools.

**C. Persistence of Buddhism and Confucianism**
However, because both Buddhism and Confucianism had deep roots in Japanese society, the attempt to isolate them from Shintoism failed. Many Japanese still believed in Buddhism, and Confucian virtues like filial piety formed an inseparable part of the Japanese family system.

**D. Combination of Shintoism and Confucianism: the "family-state" ideology**
Consequently, in the 1880s, the government had to follow a different policy: Buddhism as a religion was tolerated, while Confucianism was combined with Shintoism.

The result was the formation of the "family-state" ideology in late Meiji times:

i. *Within individual families, Confucian virtues such as filial piety and obedience to superiors were emphasized. Sons and daughters had to be loyal to the father.*

ii. *In the country at large, the Emperor was regarded as the "father" of all these individual families, for according to Shintoism, the imperial family was the national head family. In effect, therefore, the whole country became a big "family".*

iii. *Individual families would then extend their family loyalties upward to form a larger national loyalty to the emperor.*

iv. *In school, moral lessons taught virtues like filial piety, loyalty and obedience. With this "family-state" ideology, Japan achieved stronger social unity. Nationalism was also strengthened.*

**Political Modernization**

**A. Circumstances leading to the adoption of a constitution in 1889: the first phase, 1870-1881**

i. *Split of the Meiji leadership in 1873*

- It was the unity among different samurai leaders from a few feudal clans in late Tokugawa times that succeeded in bringing about the Restoration in 1868. This leadership unity was, however, broken in 1873.

- Two national issues divided the Meiji leaders:

  a. *The question of the composition of the new modern army to be created*

- Some conservative and traditionalist leaders, led by Saigo Takamori (from the former Satsuma clan), argued that the samurai should form the core of the new army, while other more progressive leaders favoured an army composed of the conscripted peasants in which the samurai would only be a minority.
b. The problem of national defence against Western imperialism

- Again, it was Saigo, supported by Itagaki Taisuke (from the former Tosa clan), who urged a military expedition against Korea. They argued that an external war would bring internal unity for the country, raise the morale of the samurai, and forestall any Western imperialists from occupying Korea.

- The majority of other Meiji leaders, who were more cautious, wished to delay the proposed expedition till Japan was economically and militarily strong enough. They argued that if Japan really practiced an adventurous foreign policy, the Western imperialist powers would use the opportunity to attack Japan.

In the end, Saigo, Itagaki and their followers gave way to the other Meiji leaders. Peasant conscription, not a samurai-dominated system, was created. No military expedition was sent to Korea. In protest, both resigned from the government. Out of the disagreement over national policy, there emerged three groups of leaders:

a. The most powerful was the one in control of the government. It consisted of men like Ito Hirobumi (from the former Choshu clan).

- Most of these leaders came from Choshu and Satsuma. They intended to carry out modernization by first centralizing power in the government. They aimed at the creation of a strong state by binding the nation under the Emperor.

b. The second group, led by Saigo, consisted of conservative samurai who were dissatisfied with their loss of the samurai social position after the abolition of feudalism and the introduction of peasant conscription.

c. The third group, led by Itagaki, consisted of samurai leaders from other clans (except Choshu and Satsuma).

- These men supported the government in the abolition of feudalism but were dissatisfied with the monopoly of power by Choshu and Satsuma. They accused the Meiji government of being a “clan government” (Hambatsu)

ii. Opposition to the Meiji government in the 1870s

a. Peaceful opposition - In a struggle for power with the government, Itagaki adopted a peaceful policy.

- In 1875, he and his followers issued a statement to the government and called for the establishment of an elected political assembly. With a parliament, they argued, the government and the people would be united.

- Besides, since the Meiji government required the people to perform military service, the people had the right to demand political power from the state.

- From 1875 to 1881, Itagaki succeeded in making the movement for constitutional government a national issue. Peasants supported the movement because they believed a constitutional government would reduce taxation and withdraw conscription.

b. Armed opposition

- Meanwhile, Saigo and his followers were impatient with the method of peaceful opposition adopted by Itagaki. In 1877 Saigo revolted. This was the Satsuma Rebellion. Although it was quickly put down by the new peasant army of the government, it left behind two effects:

- First, its failure showed that the Meiji government was too powerful to be challenged by force. Thereafter, opposition to the Meiji government must follow Itagaki’s peaceful way.

- Secondly, the Meiji government, knowing the danger of ignoring and excluding other leaders from political participation, began to consider seriously the practice of constitutional government.

iii. Government in favour of constitutional rule -

The Meiji government became in favour of constitutional rule, for the following reasons:

a. Many strong European powers had constitutions. The Meiji leaders believed that a constitution was essential for a modern state.

b. On contact with the West, the Meiji leaders were convinced that a constitution would broaden the base of popular support for the government.
c. A constitution based on Western models would gain Western appreciation. Then, Japan could better argue for a revision of the unequal treaties.

d. It was the Meiji leaders’ dissatisfaction with the Tokugawa authoritarian rule that led them to overthrow it. Basically, therefore, they were opposed to authoritarian rule.

e. The Meiji leaders hoped that a constitution would raise the position of the Emperor and strengthen Japan’s national identity.

In the early 1870s, the government told individual officials to draft different constitutions for consideration. One of the officials, Okuma Shigenobu (from Saga clan) submitted directly to Emperor in 1880 his draft which proposed a basically British system of government by political parties and suggested the opening of an elected parliament in the following year.

Other Meiji leaders, who were mainly Choshu and Satsuma men, considered it too liberal, and thus forced Okuma to resign from the government.

iv. Different motives concerning the future constitution

a. To the Meiji government, a constitution could strengthen the state by uniting the people and the government.

b. To men like Itagaki and Okuma, a constitution would give them power and limit the rule of the Meiji government.

B. Circumstances leading to the adoption of a constitution in 1889: the second phase, 1881-1889

Government decision to adopt a constitution in 1881 -

- In 1881, government reputation was badly affected by a big scandal connected with some state officials. To regain the people’s confidence, the Meiji leaders knew that the promise of a constitution could not be delayed.

- Thereby, the Emperor announced that a constitution would be promulgated and a parliament would be opened by 1890.

Formation of political parties -

a. Reform Party (Kaishinto) - Okuma, now out of government, organized a Reform Party. It advocated the British type of constitutional government. It drew support from urban intellectuals, former government officials and businessmen.

b. Liberal Party (Jiyuto) - At the same time, Itagaki organized a Liberal Party. It advocated the French type of political organization. It drew support from rural peasants, landlords and the poor people in cities.

c. Constitutional Imperial Party (Rikken Teiseito) - In order to compete with the Liberal Party and the Reform Party, the Meiji government sponsored a party herself, known as the Constitutional Imperial Party. It was based on the Germany model.

Government suppression and party disbandment in the 1880s

- During the 1880s, the Meiji government began limiting party activities through restrictive press and association laws. Many small peasants and tenant-farmers of the Liberal Party protested against government suppression. Some of them even broke into open revolts.

- Yet the top party leaders (like Itagaki), who mostly consisted of former samurai leaders and landlord merchants, refused to support their junior party members, who mostly came from the lower social classes.

- Furthermore, to show that they had no responsibility for the rebellions and to avoid being accused of treason, the top party leaders disbanded their parties altogether.

- From the beginning, therefore, Japanese political parties failed to develop solid links with the people. They bowed easily to government suppression.

DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL MODERNIZATION

A. Preparatory steps taken by the government before the promulgation of a constitution in the 1880s

In promising, as early as 1881, to adopt a constitution by the year 1890, the Meiji leaders
had gained a long period of time during which they could
(a) take measures to strengthen the Emperor's rule before actual constitutional rule was practiced; and
(b) carefully work out a constitution that would safeguard rather than limit the government's power.

i. Measures to strengthen the Emperor's rule

It was decided that the Emperor should be supreme, above the constitution and uncontrolled by the future parliament.

Thus the Imperial Household Ministry (which was responsible for managing the Emperor's properties) was removed from the cabinet's control. The properties owned by the Emperor were increased, so that he could pay for the entire armed forces and the police from his yearly income, independent of the parliament's financial control.

The Meiji civil service was modernized and centralized, so that the future parliament could not control it. The whole civil service system was re-organized on the German model. Government officials were employed under strict state control. High officials were still selected by the top Meiji leaders. New civil service regulations were issued to make sure that civil servants would be loyal to the Emperor.

In 1884, the nobility, which had been abolished in the early 1870s, was re-established. It consisted of the former daimyo and court nobles. With the re-establishment of the nobility, the Emperor's position was strengthened.

In 1885, the first Japanese cabinet was formed. It was headed by Ito and was directly responsible to the Emperor.

ii. Drafting a constitution

In 1882, Ito was appointed as the head of a mission to study European constitutions. After arriving in Europe, Ito sent a junior official to France, while he himself went to Germany. The reason was that from the very beginning, the Meiji leaders had already decided to adopt an undemocratic Prussian-style constitution. In Germany, Ito attended the lectures of a well-known jurist, Gneist, and got much conservative advice. In 1883, the mission returned to Japan. In 1886, under the personal supervision of the Emperor, Ito began working out a constitution.

A Prussian adviser, Dr. Roessler, was employed. Since Roessler was opposed to popular rule, his advice no doubt fitted well with Ito's intention. The work was being carried out in strict secrecy. By 1888, drafts of the constitution were finished. Instead of presenting them to the people for ratification, Ito sent the drafts to the newly created Privy Council (headed by him and consisting entirely of conservative officials) for revision.

In 1889, the Meiji Constitution was promulgated. Only then did the people get to know its content and provisions.

B. The Meiji Constitution 1889

The Constitution was granted by the Emperor to the people. The Constitution was written in general terms. The Emperor could give orders outside the scope of the Constitution.

The Emperor was "sacred and inviolable" and above the Constitution.

Effective power lay with the Emperor:

He commanded the military forces and controlled foreign policy.

He appointed cabinet members, judges and Privy Council members.

He could dissolve Parliament (Imperial Diet) at will.

He could prevent any bill passed by Parliament from becoming law.

Parliament (Imperial Diet) was divided into two houses.

- The Upper House was the House of Peers; the Lower House was the House of Representatives.

The Upper House consisted of life members appointed by the Emperor. They were the nobles re-established by Ito in 1884. The Lower House had 300 members elected for 4 years service by 1% of the population.

The cabinet could in practice ignore Parliament in carrying out its policies.

The annual budget of the government was subject to Parliament's vote before it was
accepted. But in case Parliament refused to approve the budget, the previous year's would be used again.

The Meiji leaders were advisers to the Emperor from behind the scene. They were known as Genro (literally meaning "elders"). They were not bound by the Constitution.

The citizens were given freedom of religion, of speech and of association. Nevertheless, the government reserved the power to withdraw the citizen's rights if it felt necessary to do so.

A Contrast

Main features in Ideal Liberal Constitution

The Constitution is approved by the people and promulgated in the name of the people.

The Constitution is often written in specific details. Whatever the government does must be constitutional.

Even the Emperor must obey the Constitution.

Effective power lies with Parliament, especially the Lower House:

- Parliament commands the military forces and controls foreign policy through the cabinet.
- The Lower House elects the cabinet. Judges enjoy independence guaranteed by the Constitution.
- The Emperor has no right to dissolve Parliament.
- Any bill passed by Parliament will become law.
- Since the people elect Parliament, effective power is in the hands of the people.
- Both the Upper and Lower Houses are elected by the people. All adult people have the right to vote.
- The cabinet must have the approval of Parliament, or else Parliament will force the cabinet to resign.
- The annual budget must have the approval of Parliament, otherwise no budget can be used.
- Every political act and every statesman is bound by the Constitution.

The freedoms and rights given to the citizens are guaranteed and safeguarded by the constitution.

C. Reasons for the adoption of such an undemocratic constitution (reasons for the failure of the democratic movement)

Insincere attitude to democracy among party leaders

- The political parties of the 1880s had no real intention of giving more power and rights to the people.
- Party leaders like Itagaki were either former samurai or merchant-industrialists who were anxious to shape power with the Meiji gov’t leaders, not to transfer power to the people.
- Most of them had no real interests in democracy, and democracy had no roots in Japanese tradition.
- The parties, moreover, failed to develop any ideology (a body of beliefs) to compete with the sacred claims of the Emperor. When government suppression was carried out, the parties easily fell apart.
- Meanwhile, some top party leaders like Okuma made peace with the government and sided with it. They abandoned the democratic movement.

Strength of the Meiji government

- The Meiji government was determined to hold its political power. The Meiji leaders cleverly made use of the Emperor system. They stood out to represent the true personal rule of the Emperor.
- Any accusations against them would appear to be accusing the Emperor at the same time, which was treasonous.
- Having promised a constitution, the Meiji leaders had a long period of time to work out a constitution that permitted strong government rule.

The need for national unity

- Both the party leaders and the Meiji government leaders were agreed on the need for national unity to defend against Western imperialism.
- The force of nationalism gave the Meiji leaders an excuse to write an undemocratic constitution that strengthened the state.

**Lack of democratic tradition**
- Authoritarian tradition was strong in Japanese society. There was, for example, a traditional dislike of parties. They were viewed as groups that disturbed political harmony.
- The people were accustomed to obedience and discipline. As a result, social democracy failed to take root in Japanese society.

**D. Legal Reforms**
Japan knew that the Western powers would consider revising the unequal treaties only if the Japanese legal system was up to Western standards. Thus law reforms were carried out by the Meiji government, largely under foreign guidance.

In 1871, a Judicial Department was set up. Then a French lawyer was employed to draft three law codes for Japan: one criminal, one civil and one commercial.

When these codes were introduced, many people were dissatisfied, as the codes were felt to be too Western.

Consequently, revisions had to be made again and again. Under the new system, judges were trained. Judicial and administrative powers were separated. Torture was abolished. Rules of evidence and court procedure were laid down.

**EFFECTS OF POLITICAL MODERNIZATION**

**A. Contribution to Japan as a modern state**
Although the constitution was undemocratic, Japan had at least adopted a Western political structure. This helped her to become a modern state. The Meiji state was politically strengthened.

**B. Background to the rise of party rule in the 1920s**
To opposition leaders like Itagaki, there were at least opportunities for political activities.

Although the Meiji leaders still held effective power, they gradually found it necessary and convenient to cooperate with the parties which re-emerged after 1890.

Ito even organized a party himself. These developments paved the way for the rise of party rule and democratic experimentation in the 1920s.

**C. Political rights given to the people**
The political rights and freedom given to the people were great. These were necessary if the ignorant people were to be turned into modern citizens.

**D. Rise of new social movements**
Through public speeches and discussions, the political parties popularized Western thoughts and ideas that they imported into Japan.

After the 1900s, these new Western ideas began to attract some believers. New social movements began to appear.

**E. Underlying cause of the rise of militarism in the 1930s**
The gains of the constitution were not institutionized (not firmly rooted in law). The Emperor was above the constitution. Military leaders and the Genro could influence him outside the limits of the constitution.

The entire constitutional government could easily be turned into a militarist dictatorship. This was what really happened later in the 1930s.

**F. Misunderstanding of democracy**
Right from the start, democratic movements were confused with nationalist and patriotic movements in Japan. The real meaning of democracy was not understood.

*PYL Woo, adapted by TK Chung*