

DBQ Meiji Restoration

Historical Context:

The Meiji Restoration took place in Japan following the arrival of American naval Officer Matthew Perry in 1853. Realizing how far behind the rest of the world Japan was, the Japanese government began a program of westernization, modernization and industrialization.

Task:

Evaluate the extent to which the Meiji Restoration impacted Japan.

Document 1

The Charter Oath (of the Meiji Restoration), 1868

By this oath we set up as our aim the establishment of the national weal on a broad basis and the framing of a constitution and laws.

1. Deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by public discussion.
2. All classes, high and low, shall unite in vigorously carrying out the administration of affairs of state.
3. The common people, no less than the civil and military officials, shall each be allowed to pursue his own calling so that there may be no discontent.
4. Evil customs of the past shall be broken off and everything based upon the just laws of Nature.
5. Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule.

Document 2

Encyclopedia entry on the impact of the new Japanese constitution

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

The government also introduced a national educational system and a constitution, creating an elected parliament called the Diet. They did this to provide a good environment for national growth, win the respect of the Westerners, and build

support for the modern state. In the Tokugawa period, popular education had spread rapidly, and in 1872 the government established a national system to educate the entire population. By the end of the Meiji period, almost everyone attended the free public schools for at least six years. The government closely controlled the schools, making sure that in addition to skills like mathematics and reading, all students studied "moral training," which stressed the importance of their duty to the emperor, the country and their families.

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

Document 3

An excerpt from Barbara Tuchman's book on The American General and China expert Joe Stillwell, Stillwell and the American Experience in China

"Japan's startling success in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 gave impetus to the 'self-strengtheners.' The Japanese example appeared as something to emulate. (Chinese) Students seeking a higher education in tune with modern times went to Tokyo."

Stillwell and the American Experience in China, 1911-1945 pg. 49-50 Barbara Tuchman

Document 4

An excerpt from Phillip Short's Mao: A Life

"Japan had become the inspiration for all those who made up what the newspapers called 'Young China,' the reformers and intellectuals who saw the country's salvation in a modernization movement on the lines of Japan's espousal (support) of foreign ideas after the Meiji Restoration. By Japan's defeat of China in 1895, Japan had forced China to face the reality of China's weakness. By its defeat of Russia ten years later, Japan had shown that an Asian army could defeat a European one. For China, Japan's victory would prove a mixed blessing, since Japan replaced Russia as the dominant power in Manchuria. But to the young generation, what mattered was that the yellow race had proved it could defeat the white."

Mao: A Life by Philip Short pgs. 37-38

Document 5

By comparing the Japan of fifty years ago with the Japan of today, it will be seen that she has gained considerably in the extent of her territory, as well as in her population, which now numbers nearly fifty million. Her government has become constitutional not only in name, but in fact, and her national education has attained to a high degree of excellence. In commerce and industry, the emblems of peace, she has also made rapid strides, until her import and export trades together amounted in 1907 to the enormous sum of 926,000,000 yen. Her general progress, during the short space of half a century, has been so sudden and swift that it presents a rare spectacle in the history of the world. This leap forward is the result of the stimulus which the country received on coming into contact with the civilization of Europe and America, and may well, in its broad sense, be regarded as a boon conferred by foreign intercourse. Foreign intercourse it was that animated the national consciousness of our people, who under the feudal system lived localized and disunited, and foreign intercourse it is that has enabled Japan to stand up as a world power. We possess today a powerful army and navy, but it was after Western models that we laid their foundations by establishing a system of conscription in pursuance of the principle "all our sons are soldiers," by promoting military education, and by encouraging the manufacture of arms and the art of shipbuilding. We have reorganized the systems of central and local administration, and effected reforms in the educational system of the empire. All this is nothing but the result of adopting the superior features of Western institutions. That Japan has been enabled to do so is a boon conferred on her by foreign intercourse, and it may be said that the nation has succeeded in this grand metamorphosis through the promptings and the influence of foreign civilization.

From: Okuma, Fifty Years of New Japan (Kaikoku Gojunen Shi), 2d Ed., (London: Smith, Elder, 1910), passim

Document 7 – An actual picture of American Commodore Matthew Perry and a Japanese cartoon of Perry.

