

Meiji Modernization
Andrea Dumolt - East Asian Studies 3-9-2004

Purpose: This lesson is intended to provide students with the opportunity to analyze and interpret the significance of imperialism and the modification of Japan during the Meiji period.

1. Who were the Meiji leaders and what was their plan for Japan? Did they succeed?
2. Why did Japan want to counter imperialism?
3. What are the characteristics of modernization?

Target Grade level:

Students with special needs grade 9-10

Topic:

Modernization of Japan

Concepts:

Imperialism

Modernization

Materials:

* map of world/globe

* Handouts A/B and C/D modified from Meiji Modernization (1868-1912) adapted by TK Chung @ www.thecorner.org/hists/japan/meiji2.htm

Key Idea:

The Meiji leaders were fearful Japan would be defeated by westernization. They decided to modernize the country and turn away from traditional ways in order to defend Japan against imperialism of the western world.

Skills:

Application: Given the concept of Meiji Modernization students will research the roles of the Meiji leaders stating the significance of each.

Synthesis: Students will predict what may have happened to Japan had they not modernized.

Procedures:

1. List the following on the board; “Meiji Era- Fukoku Kyohei- rich country and a strong army”. Ask students what they think this means. Discuss how Japan is an island nation and was able to escape invasion from other countries (use world map/globe). However, Japan was in fear of imperialism during the Meiji period. Define imperialism. Ask students what they think the Meiji leaders planned to do to keep Japan from falling to western imperialism. List their ideas on the board.

2. Pass out handout A/B. Read together. Discuss; How did the leaders of Japan feel about western imperialism? (fearful, felt they needed to modernize Japan before it fell to imperialism). Why did the leaders rush to modernize? (to avoid national humiliation). Why would they feel humiliated? (student responses). Discuss. Students should be able to answer what they think the Meiji leaders planned to do to keep Japan from falling to western imperialism. (build a strong army, become strong politically and economically in order to stop the western powers from taking advantage of Japan: unequal treaties).

3. Ask students what steps they think Japan took in order to modernize. List on board. (student responses- industrialize, start factories to make own products, improve farming techniques, computers, education).

4. Pass out Handout C/D. Discuss what all-round and total modernization is and discuss the characteristics of modernization compare student list to handout.

5. Either in groups or individually research one Meiji leader (list of names is found on handout A/B) using the internet. Students share their findings with the class. List on the board.

Evaluation:

Have the students write a 1/2 page to 1 page response to the following question: How did Japan’s Meiji leaders accomplish Fukoky Kyohei? Encourage them to use the lists from the board and the handouts to come up with a response. Students must include their prediction of what may have happened had Japan not modernized.

Grade Adaptation:

Regular high school students could write a more lengthy in depth response to the evaluation question as well as research each reform ie: military, economic, political in depth.

Relationship to Social Studies Standards:

Grade 9, History Standard, Students use materials drawn from the diversity of human experience to analyze and interpret significant events, patterns and themes in the history of Ohio, the United States and the world.

Explain the global impact of imperialism including the modernization of Japan.

Handout A/B

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 neighbor, 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 unfavorable 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.

Handout C/D

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.

