

# The Samurai Revolution

# Uniqueness of an elite-led revolution

- Samurai were not securely landed elite, but essentially salaried employees of their lords.
- Samurai status was hereditary, but less rooted in property than a European-style feudal estate.
- Samurai had developed a commitment to build a realm that went beyond the narrow confines of a single domain.

# Political Unification

- Two Threats
  - Foreign Encroachment
  - Domestic opponents armed with Western weapons.
- The politically fragmented system of domains must be overhauled.
- The four prestigious daimyo voluntarily surrendered their lands back to the emperor in 1869.

# Prefectures Replaced Domains

- In 1871 the government announced that all the domains were immediately abolished.
- 280 domains were replaced by 72 prefectures.
- The new governors were not former daimyo, but samurai in middle ranks.
- Daimyo were ordered to move to Tokyo.

# Political System Reforms

- 1885: A cabinet system, modeled explicitly along European lines.
- 1887: civil service examinations to recruit bureaucrats.
- 1889: The Meiji constitution codified the new political institutions.

# Eliminating the Status System

- The revolution leaders expropriated the entire social class by 1876.
- Even after the domains were abolished, samurai still lived on stipends, which were a huge burden on state revenues.
- In 1876, former samurai were forced to trade the right to receive a stipend for an interest-bearing bond which was to be matured in 14 years at maximum.
- Most samurai suffered a huge loss in finance as well as in pride and prestige.

# Discrimination Remained

- Samurai in upper class were newly ranked in *shizoku*.
- Samurai in lower class and other non-samurai commoners were classified in *heimin*.
- Discrimination against the hereditary outcast group (*eta* and *hinin*) were legally abolished, but they were labeled *burakumin* (village people) and continued to face prejudice and discrimination.

# The Conscript Army

- The former-Choshu leaders had an idea to create a conscript army drawn from the entire population.
- But the first imperial army was created from Satsuma, Choshu, Tosa, and Hizen samurai.
- In 1873 the government decreed a system of universal conscription.
- The draft was unpopular. It allowed people to buy their way out for a huge fee of 270 yen.
- The angry crowds attacked registration centers in 16 riots in 1873-74.



# Compulsory Education

- Observation of Western societies convinced leaders that mass schooling, like mass conscription, was a fundamental source of the economic and military power of the West.
- They had different expectations for girls and boys.
- Girls were expected to learn skills useful for domestic roles.
- Boys were expected to learn knowledge useful for building the strong nation.

# Reactions to the compulsory education

- Angry taxpayers destroyed national schools because they recognize the schooling as draft.
- Simply not going to school was widespread.
- However, people gradually accepted schooling as an obligation of the emperor's subjects.
- By 1905, the elementary school attendance rate reached higher than 90%.

# The Monarch at the Political Center

- The Meiji revolution was motivated by the idea to put the emperor at the very center of the political order.
- But this idea had not been confirmed until 1889 when the constitution was settled.
- The development of the emperor's portraits was a good illustration of the striking metamorphosis toward the symbol of a modern monarchy.

1872:  
The young  
emperor  
appears rather  
ill at ease.





1873:  
The young emperor is not yet fully at home in his new role as a Westernized ruler.

1888:

In the famous painting by Chiossone, an Italian artist, the emperor shows an imposing and matured image, authorized by the government. This painting was later photographed and enshrined in schools throughout the nation.



# “Rich Country, Strong Army”

- Under the strong influence of the West, the leaders took numerous steps to industrialize the nation.
- In 1873, a new tax system was introduced: The government collected taxes on land.
- In Tokugawa period, taxes were collected in rice based on assessed yield.
- Now land is assumed to be valued at market, and taxed on its market value at rate of 3%.
- The new system stabilized revenue, but had brought inevitable burden on landlords.

# Industrialization

- The tax revenue was used for public works to strengthen industrial infrastructure.
  - Postal system
  - Uniform national currency (yen)
  - Railroad network
- The government financed establishment of industrial enterprises, being afraid of foreign investment as the steps of colonization.



# Hired Foreigners

- The government hired many technological experts as consultants and managers.
- It did not expect from the foreigners any more than detailed technical expertise.
- They were paid salaries at the top level officials of the government.
- The government-managed businesses failed in gaining profits, but trained a first generations of managers and engineers.

# Learning from the West

- Travel abroad was the most important educational experience for the young rulers of the Meiji state.
- The most important venture abroad was the *Iwakura Mission* of 1871-73.
- Iwakura and most most powerful figures (*Okubo, Kido, Ito*) spent 18 months through the US and Europe.
- The initial purpose of the mission was to revise the unequal treaties.
- But they were told that they had to raise their legal and political system up to European standards.

# The Iwakura Mission



# Trial to extend hegemony over Asia

- In 1873 Saigo Takamori tried to invade Korea while the Iwakura mission was abroad.
- In 1874 Okubo Toshimichi sent military expedition to Taiwan to claim control of the Ryukyu Islands (Okinawa now), and extracted a modest reparation payment from China.
- In 1879 Japan forced the Ryukyu King to incorporate their lands as the part of Okinawa prefecture.
- Okinawa was formerly subject to Satusma domain during Edo period.