

Participation and Protest

Commoners in the Realm

- In Tokugawa era, commoners were to be the object of political action, not actors in their own right.
- Tokugawa Ieyasu said “Peasants should be neither dead nor alive.”
- He also said, “Peasants are like oil-producing sesame seeds. The harder you squeeze them, the more you extract.”
- Participation of commoners had not been imagined until Sakamoto Ryoma’s plan (1867)

五箇条の御誓文

- 一 広ク会議ヲ興シ万機公論ニ決スヘシ
- 一 上下心ヲ一ニシテ盛ニ経綸ヲ行フヘシ
- 一 官武一途庶民ニ至ル迄各其志ヲ遂ケ人心ヲシテ倦マサラシメン事ヲ要ス
- 一 旧来ノ陋習ヲ破リ天地ノ公道ニ基クヘシ
- 一 智識ヲ世界ニ求メ大ニ皇基ヲ振起スヘシ

The Five-Article Oath (1868)

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 their own calling so that there may be no discontent.

The Five-Article Oath (1868)

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.

Debate on constitution and assemblies

- Public press (journals and newspapers) emerged in 1870s.
- Some western books were translated and enthusiastically welcomed by intellectuals.
 - John Stuart Mill
 - Jean-Jacques Rousseau
- Meiroku Zasshi journal was the most influential in public debate.

Fukuzawa Yukichi

- The most influential author in the Meiji era, and the founder of Keio University.
 - *Conditions in the West*, an introduction to Western civilization.
 - *Encouragement of Learning and Outline of Civilization*, promoting practical learning, free and skeptical inquiry, a spirit of independence, equality of opportunity.



Movement for Freedom and People's Rights

- Two fundamental questions:
 - What sort of new political structure should be adopted?
 - Who would participate?
- By early 1870s, a simple logic framed all political discourse: Japan must have a constitution in order to form a strong state.
- Political leaders neglected the importance of individual freedom, happiness and welfare.

Movement for Freedom and Popular Rights (自由民権運動)

- The Meiji leaders gradually concentrated political power in the hands of a narrow group of former samurai from Satsuma and Choshu,
- The popular rights activists, many of which are losers in the Meiji government, claimed that a new “Sat-Cho” dictatorship had replaced the old Tokugawa Tyranny.

Itagaki Taisuke

- He was a former high official of the Meiji government, and founded *Patriotic Public Party* in the former Tosa domain.
- He submitted “Memorial on the Establishment of a Representative Assembly” to the government.
- His initial organization soon collapsed, but was followed by new movements for popular political participation at the grass roots of society.



Main Issues

- Many “draft constitutions” have been discovered until now.
- The place of the emperor in constitution was widely discussed with few taboos.
- The extent of people’s rights and the power of representative assembly over the state decisions on domestic and diplomatic affairs were also fully discussed.

Reaction by the government

- The leaders, like Yamagata and Ito, realizing the danger of popular rights movements to the state, decided to make a conservative, state-centered constitution.
- The unprecedented popular rights campaigns of petitions motivated the government in two ironic ways.
 - It adopted repressive censorship laws.
 - It decided to make a constitution modeled along the Prussian conservative constitution of 1854, which gave the king and his ministers much power and limited people's rights.

Samurai Rebellions

- Samurai shared anger at being left out of the government decision making.
- Some of them became popular rights activists, like Itagaki.
- Others decided to influence the government with swords and guns, like Saigo.



Saigo Takamori

- He was the leader of Satsuma samurai, and the military commander of the Meiji government army.
- In 1873, he resigned from the government when his proposal to invade Korea was rejected by the majority of the political leaders.
- He returned to his home of Kagoshima, founded his own military force, and finally set off with a march headed for Tokyo, to overthrow the government and restore samurai privilege.
- In 1877, Saigo lost the battle near the Kumamoto Castle and killed himself.

Gender roles in the revolution

- Horror at the anarchic mixing of men and women in the West had been apparent in the writings of some of the earliest Japanese official travelers.
- A bakufu official, Muragaki Norimasa, watching men and women together at a ball room of the US state department, was amazed at the inappropriateness that “the Prime Minister should invite ambassadors of other countries to an event of this sort.”

Roles of Women in Debate

- The leading intellectuals like Fukuzawa wrote on
 - the meaning of equality between men and women,
 - the value of education for women, and
 - the demerits of legally recognizing concubines and giving their children rights of inheritance.
- Contributors to the leading journals carefully stress on the separation of equal respect for men and women, from equality of political or legal rights in society.

The *Rokumeikan*

- The government finally concluded that wives of rulers might play semipublic roles as in the Western nations.
- Elite women and men took up ballroom dancing and entertained foreigners at grand parties held at *Rokumeikan* in the hear of Tokyo.



Treaty Revision

- In 1873, the Iwakura mission failed to open negotiations to revise the unequal treaties.
- In 1886, Inoue Kaoru, a foreign minister, almost reached an agreement with all the treaty powers under some strict conditions on Japan's autonomy.
- This effort failed, facing flooded petitions against the revision with still unequal conditions.
- The next foreign minister, Ohkuma Shigenobu, received a bomb attack from a right-wing nationalist, and lost a leg.

The Meiji Constitution

- The constitution was drafted secretly in 1886 and 1887 by a talented group under the direction of *Ito Hirobumi*.
- The task was intensively advised by foreign legal advisers, mainly from Germany.
- The draft was discussed in a newly created committee, the *Privy Council* in 1888.
- The constitution was “handed down” as a gift from the emperor to the people in 1889.



The Emperor gave the Constitution to Prime Minister Kuroda



Constitution as a Gift from the Emperor

- Cabinet Ministers were to be responsible to the emperor and not to the Diet.
- The constitution gave a special independence to the military general staff, via the “right to supreme command.”
- Civil rights were limited by law.
- The Diet was composed of an elected House of Representatives and a non-elected House of Peers.