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EXPLAINING MEIJI JAPAN'S TOP-DOWN REVOLUTION

by

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Meiji Japanese leaders consisted of an oligarchy that strived to overcome Western imperialist pressures in Asia. They did so by overturning some deeply rooted Tokugawa-Era traditions in Japanese society and replaced them with Western ones. They understood that Western norms dictated world affairs, so they sought to make Japan strong along Western norms. Modeling the West provided enough traction for Japan to meet Western threats and maintain its sovereignty. Meiji leaders reshaped Japan's foreign policies by emphasizing foreign affairs, emulating Western boundary-making, revising the unequal trade treaties, and asserting themselves regionally with Korea. They simultaneously created a centralized military to support new foreign policies by conscripting soldiers from across the country; equipping, training, organizing them in a Western fashion; instilling self-discipline; and creating a symbiotic relationship between domestic industries and the military. Meiji Japan's foreign policy evolution and military reforms enabled Japan to not only maintain its sovereignty, but also challenge the regional hierarchy. This paper thus focuses on Meiji Japan's foreign policy and military.

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EXPLAINING MEIJI JAPAN'S TOP-DOWN REVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

Meiji Japanese leaders consisted of an oligarchy that strived to overcome Western imperialist pressures in Asia. They did so by overturning some deeply rooted Tokugawa-Era traditions in Japanese society and replaced them with Western ones. They understood that Western norms dictated world affairs, so they sought to make Japan strong along Western norms. Modeling the West provided enough traction for Japan to meet Western threats and maintain its sovereignty. Meiji leaders reshaped Japan's foreign policies by emphasizing foreign affairs, emulating Western boundary-making, revising the unequal trade treaties, and asserting themselves regionally with Korea. They simultaneously created a centralized military to support new foreign policies by conscripting soldiers from across the country; equipping, training, organizing them in a Western fashion; instilling self-discipline; and creating a symbiotic relationship between domestic industries and the military. Meiji Japan's foreign policy evolution and military reforms enabled Japan to not only maintain its sovereignty, but also challenge the regional hierarchy. This paper thus focuses on Meiji Japan's foreign policy and military.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

The rise of Meiji Japan occurred over a period of several decades. It began as a reaction to Western military threats, yet Japan transformed into a great power in a relatively short period of time. European and American countries took centuries to consolidate domestic power before having significant international influence. Japan turned into a great power and overturned Western unequal treaties that had been imposed less than half a century before.

The Meiji leadership found ways to quickly develop state power.[1] On the domestic front, they sought to centralize power, refocus the economy toward industry, reform the social structure to feed industrial output, reshape society to strengthen the nation against external threats, and boost military power. Their unique methods in achieving these ends rapidly built a stronger state. In doing so, the new leadership also strengthened Japan's international position. Despite the Meiji leadership's initial lack of an overarching plan, they found ways to carry out a top-down revolution that transformed Japan into a competitive world power. This raises the question of how the Meiji regime's top down revolution enabled Japan to turn into a great power in such a short period of time.

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Japan's approach to change during the Meiji Era was key to major changes in Asia for more than a century. The rise of Meiji Japan affected East Asia by bringing Japan from isolation into regional relations as one of the only two Asian countries that retained sovereignty.[2] Japanese leadership's determination to become a strong country brought increased colonization to East Asia that intensified during WWII and eventually

[1] Thomas C. Smith, "Japan's Aristocratic Revolution," *The Yale Review* (1960–1961): 371.

[2] The other country is Thailand.

led to European countries losing colonies in the region. These events shaped nationalism throughout East Asia, and China and Korean nationalism still have a significant dose of anti-Japanese sentiment to this day. Meiji Japan also supplied a template for East Asian governments to develop their economies in a top-down fashion during the Cold War. Understanding how Meiji leadership enabled Japan to become a great power also provides insights into how Japan became what it is today—an economically strong but militarily weak country.

The Meiji Restoration began as an effort to better handle foreign interactions such as trade and military threats. However, there was no coherent plan for defining success or how to achieve it. Through trial and error, the Meiji leadership changed Japan's internal workings to create a new national system and more robust state that gave Japan more weight in international affairs. On the other hand, opening to the West created some chaos within the country. The manner in which Meiji leadership responded to this domestic chaos—and in some ways created more—defined and brought success. The top-down nature of the Japanese revolution allowed for effective decision-making that centralized domestic politics and boosted economic developments.

Studying the Japanese case provides insight into effective state building methods. Meiji Japanese leadership achieved similar strength to Western powers by copying some Western features and remaking them to fit Japanese conditions. The Meiji state drove industrial development instead of waiting for private entrepreneurs to become interested, and the Meiji leadership introduced a representative political entity without authority to sway state politics. In doing so, the Meiji state bypassed some turmoil through which Western features developed. For example, Meiji Japan acquiesced to a representative government body without enduring an equivalent to England's Oliver Cromwell. Japan's experience provides an example for how to control a dissenting population while melding foreign achievements with one's own country.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars approach the rise of Meiji Japan from a number of different perspectives. There are four main approaches. Some literature analyzes the era's changes with respect

to the West, partly because Meiji leaders attempted to reform Japan's institutions so that the state could compete with Western imperial powers. These Western-centric frameworks tend to find Meiji changes in these areas lagging behind Western counterparts. Another analytic approach takes a Japanese-centric stance in an effort to see beyond Western influences and look at how Japan's modern history grew out of Japanese values and institutions that existed prior to the arrival of the West. A third approach centers on how Japanese elites sought to develop national strength because of the international environment's competitive nature. A fourth approach centers on a disgruntled upper class who initiated top-down reforms that resulted in quick changes to social structure, the political process, and the economy. The following sections summarize these four approaches

1. Western-Centered History

The main purpose of the Meiji Restoration was to make Japan strong and modern, which most historians interpret by analyzing Japan against Western standards. There is typically an assumption that "modernization" equates to and can only be achieved by "Westernization." This was the main approach of historians up through 1960. Both Western and Japanese analysts compared Japan with Western Europe and America, because they tended to think that the "major elements of modernization were first introduced from the outside," namely the West.[3] This type of analysis tends to point out Meiji success or shortcomings in achieving Western changes. Authors in this school of thought therefore highlight how Meiji Japan was extraordinary in its fulfillment of Western ideals or stress how Meiji Japan fell short of realizing Western goals.

Academic comparisons with the West tend to follow two roads. One road focuses on changes to social structure and government institutions.[4] Since some of the resultant policies were adopted from Western institutions and some Meiji leaders wanted to

[3] John Whitney Hall, "Changing Conceptions of the Modernization of Japan" in *Changing Japanese Attitudes Toward Modernization*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 11, 45.

[4] Andrew Gordon, *A History of Modern Japan from Tokugawa Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 78–90.

implement more intensively Western institutions and values, it made sense to many scholars to compare Meiji government experiments with Western counterparts. The other road focuses on changes made to compete with the West in the economic and military realm. Since Meiji Japan began in reaction to hostile Western threats, the Meiji leadership set goals to meet these challenges. This sort of analysis also seemed appropriate to scholars, because different Meiji leaders compared their own country to the West.

Many authors in the Western-centric school "explain modern Japanese history in terms of the conceptions of distortion and lag."[5] For instance, historians before the 1960s tended to villainize the "samurai, the zaibatsu, the Meiji constitution, [and] Confucianism."[6] These critiques often argued that the Meiji elite failed to implement Western-enough changes to achieve more Western-like success, because they adhered too closely to old Japanese values and institutions. By the 1960s, historians began to instead villainize the "lower class samurai, the parasitic landlord, [and] the warmongering general."[7] These critiques took aim at different issues, but they also highlighted how some Meiji personnel battled to preserve the Tokugawa way of life and thus hampered potential Meiji success in comparison to the West.

Japanese Marxists also take the Western path of historical development as a standard by which to judge Japanese development. Marxism predicts that capitalism will lead to a working class revolution. Japanese Marxists argue that the Meiji elite avoided this by implementing partial reforms to steer society away from industrial failure. In effect, they hampered Japan from achieving its Marxist destiny.

American Marxist E. H. Norman also tracked how the Meiji government led Japan down a path that differed from what Marxism predicted. Specifically, he focused on how the Liberal Party evolved from political societies and parties, and how the government responded to these organizations. He shows that the government responded

[5] Hall, "Modernization of Japan," 37.

[6] Ibid., 40.

[7] Ibid..

by acquiescing to some political participation while stifling the development of more representative government institutions.[8] This effectively kept the Liberal Party divorced form the working class and hampered working class motives from becoming part of the Liberal Party's platform.

Another analytic approach focuses on the spread of Western ideas and institutions to Meiji Japan. Scholars of this ilk track how Japanese who traveled to Europe and America were exposed to Western concepts of government and society.[9] These concepts spread in Japan and eventually Japan established a representative government body that resembled Western ones.[10] However, Japan's government differed from constitutional monarchies of the time period, such as Great Britain. Some authors find this important because while the government was introducing measures to expose Japan to Western ideas for militarism and wealth, Western ideas such as a parliament and liberal rights also came in and became distorted.[11]

For instance, it took the government and populace time to develop relatively stable ideas of individual rights and government responsibilities toward citizens. For example, Norman explores how the agrarian sector sought to embody the Western ideals of individual liberties and government responsibilities to citizens. He explains how at first, "discontented samurai"[12] led agrarian revolts, and at times, these revolts "expressed a vague aspiration toward a fuller democracy."[13] After the Meiji government crushed the samurai component, the movement split. One splinter was "the movement of landowners … against the government policy of favoring the great mercantile and financial houses at the expense of the rural community."[14] Norman holds that this helped spur the People's

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[8] E. Herbert Norman, *Japan's Emergence as a Modern State* (New York: International Secretariat Institute of Pacific Relations, 1940), 167–177.

[9] Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: A History of U.S.——Japan Relations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997), 36–38.

[10] Gordon, *History of Modern Japan*, 64.

[11] Ibid., 78.

[12] Norman, *Japan's Emergence as a Modern State*, 168.

[13] Ibid., 168.

[14] Ibid., 168.

Rights movement,[15] which led the push for constitutional government and "formed the background of the Liberal Party Jiyuto."[16] Their calls for a representative assembly capitalized on tax complaints.[17] Another way that proponents of the Popular Rights Movement framed their new predicament was that "national wealth and military power might be incongruous."[18] More liberal Japanese—including the liberal press—supported this idea.[19] They believed that the end goal was civilizational parity with the West. To an extent, the government believed that Japanese civilization lagged behind; it sent Jiyuto leaders abroad to learn about Western "political institutions."[20] However, the government also used repressive measures to maintain centralized power.[21] Scholars thus concluded from the government's action that it did not place as much emphasis on individual rights as Western powers, and that the government was not liberal enough to be modern.

Japanese liberals also took the West as a model to judge Japanese development. Fukuzawa Yukichi's work was a prime example. He "argued that… Wisdom…could be learned from abroad but was best nurtured at home."[22] Fukuzawa and his contemporaries saw Japan in need of catching up to the West. With a backdrop of opulent Western-style parties and calls to revise the Japanese spoken and written language to be more like European languages, defining "Japaneseness" and promoting it became a concern.[23] Fukuzawa supported liberal values, yet placed the state's rights above individual rights, and he "taught the dignity of the individual"[24] within the context of strengthening the

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[15] Norman, *Japan's Emergence as a Modern State*, 169.

[16] Ibid., 169.

[17] Ibid., 171.

[18] Richard J. Samuels, *"Rich Nation, Strong Army" National Security and the Technological Transformation of Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 36.

[19] Ibid., 33.

[20] Norman, *Japan's Emergence as a Modern State*, 179.

[21] Ibid., 180.

[22] Samuels, "*Rich Nation, Strong Army,"* 43.

[23] Donald H. Shively, "The Japanization of the Middle Meiji," in *Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture*, ed. Donald H. Shively (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 93–97.

[24] David J. Lu, *Japan: A Documentary History* (Armonk, NY: An East Gate Book, 1997), 346–350.

nation. This differed from Western liberal thinkers and movements that expressed individual rights as higher priorities than increasing state power.

2. Japan-Centered History

Another group of historians analyze the Meiji Era with respect to its Japanese past instead of its Western contemporaries. This approach began in the 1970s, and Sheldon Garon calls it the "non-modernizationist" approach. Their framework rejects comparing Japanese and Western modernization because the hallmarks of Japanese modernization went beyond ideas for "greater democracy and social justice" and included other vital and unique aspects.[25] John Whitney Hall has critiqued the Western-centric school for making no effective effort to expand the standard of modern beyond "Westernization, democratization, or industrialization."[26] Japan-centric advocates thus claim to understand the Meiji transformations more fully by analyzing Japan's changes without comparing them to Western contemporaries, thus avoiding judgement that Japan lagged behind Western changes.[27] In doing so, they are able to explore the Meiji Era's top-down changes with respect to their origins in Japanese values and institutions.[28]

A specific school within the non-modernizationist camp arose in the 1970s called "Minshushi."[29] These scholars approach Japanese history by focusing on "the relation between social structure and values," "ideas," and "attitudes."[30] They reject the non-emotional Marxist approach, and are sometimes vulnerable to the critique that they romanticize Japanese culture as without fault and view it as timeless and unchanging. For example, some historians explain some Meiji political attitudes in terms of the "purity" of

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[25] Sheldon Garon "Rethinking Modernization and Modernity in Japanese History: A Focus on State-Society Relations," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no.2 (May 1994), http://www.jstor.org/stable/2059838, 348.

[26] Hall, "Modernization of Japan," 11.

[27] Ibid., 10.

[28] Garon, "Modernity in Japanese History," 362.

[29] Carol Gluck, "The People in History: Recent Trends in Japanese Historiography," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 38, no.1 (Nov 1978), https://www.jstor.org/stable/2054236, 38.

[30] Ibid., 38.

the "common man," specifically focusing on village life.[31] Yet, Japan-centered historians claim that by leaving Western ideologies aside and focusing on processes internal to Japan before and after the arrival of the West, they are better able to understand how the Meiji reforms emerged from Japanese values and institutions.[32]

3. International Competition and National Self Strengthening

Other historians focus on the Meiji leadership's desperation to strengthen the state, its military, and "achieve economic autonomy in the face of hostile powers."[33] Overturning the unequal trade treaties and developing a formidable military would signal Japan's success in these matters.[34] To accomplish this, Japan had to make itself defensible by centralizing power, producing exports, and creating a strong military.[35] To produce industrial output for the economy and military, Japan had to improve its technological capabilities.[36] Japanese leadership accomplished these goals because they saw Japan in constant competition with Western powers and thus used lessons from Western countries to improve their competitive edge.[37]

For instance, W. G. Beasley highlights how Meiji reforms were part of international competition between Japan and Western states.[38] He explores how factors like land reform, aristocratic evolution, government institutional evolution, Western relations, and legal reform detracted from and improved Japan's strength. Although he also examines how some Meiji leaders saw their role as making Japan modern in a social sense, Beasley concludes that their end goal was to make Japan defensible. Most of his explanatory factors focused on the ways that the Meiji regime created a stable,

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[31] Gluck, "Trends in Japanese Historiography," 32–33.

[32] Ibid., 38, 47.

[33] Samuels, "*Rich Nation, Strong Army,*" 37.

[34] Ibid., 3.

[35] Ibid., 44.

[36] Ibid., 45, 83.

[37] LaFeber, *The Clash: A History of U.S.——Japan Relations,* 13–64.

[38] W. G. Beasley, "Meiji Political Institutions," in vol. 5 of *The Cambridge History of Japan,* ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge, NJ: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 646.

centralized power, which could militarily project in order to best defend itself through offensive deterrence.[39]

Other scholars, most notably Richard Samuels, apply the idea of "technonationalism" to the Meiji era.[40] Samuels argues that technonationalism resulted from the Meiji drive to improve Japan's technological competitiveness. This focus on the military aspect of fitting into the "modern world" indirectly but drastically affected the civilian sector of Japan.[41] The driving force of change in Japanese society was therefore largely centered on achieving military advancement with respect to the West. According to Samuels, "Japan's national technology policy comprised three elements: (1) import-substituting indigenization… to stimulate local development; (2) … the distribution of this know-how throughout the economy; and (3) the nurturance of a capacity to innovate and manufacture."[42] He then shows that "Technology … was a matter of national security, and the bundle of beliefs and practices that constitute this view can be called "technonationalism.'"[43]

Another approach, advocated by Walter Lafeber, emphasizes how the clash between the U.S. and Japan fueled the development of a strong economy and military in Meiji Japan. The U.S. "opened" Japan, initiating a chain reaction in which the Japanese elite sought to mimic the US's economic and military power. Lafeber frames his analysis between Perry's arrival and imperial competition of the 1900s in this light.[44] In doing so, he highlights how the fertile environment for clashes developed alongside fear in each country's leadership. He emphasizes the role that Western ambassadors played and the reaction they created in Japan.[45] He also explains how trips abroad affected different influential Meiji leaders. They returned with a broad range of Western ideas to make

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[39] Beasley, "Meiji Political Institutions," 672–673.

[40] Samuels, "*Rich Nation, Strong Army,*" 33.

[41] Ibid., 33.

[42] Ibid., 33.

[43] Ibid., 33.

[44] LaFeber, *The Clash: A History of U.S——Japan Relations,* 13–64.

[45] Ibid., 16–22, 25.

Japan more competitive and "modern." These missions had three purposes: learn Western ideas, improve relations with the West, and negotiate better trade treaties. Japan's leadership wanted to use knowledge from these missions to achieve "economic and military security"[46] with respect to the West.[47]

4. Meiji Japan as a Restoration or Revolution

There is some debate about whether the Meiji Restoration should be called a revolution or a restoration. Characterizing Meiji Japan as a result of a restoration implies that an older institution or system was strengthened. Since Meiji Japan succeeded the Tokugawa Era, a restoration would have to draw from an institution or system that preceded the Tokugawa Shogunate. On the other hand, characterizing the Meiji Era as a revolution implies that it shattered the previous system and implemented something entirely new.

The Meiji leadership claimed that the term "restoration" was most appropriate because they strengthened the existing imperial institution and adapted it to modern demands. It can be said that the Meiji leaders did in fact do this, as they placed the Meiji Emperor back at the pinnacle of Japanese political power, and they were thus not revolutionary, because they did not overthrow Japanese institutions and values to the same extent as the French or Russian Revolutions. They restored a former system. Meiji changes retained an ancient institution and strengthened it by redefining how it served Japan's new needs.[48]

Thomas C. Smith, on the other hand, argues that the Meiji Restoration was not a restoration that revived old values and institutions, but rather a top-down revolution. Members of the upper class revolutionized life for both upper and lower classes of society. They used the Meiji Emperor's restoration as a spark to ignite radical changes in society, politics, and the economy throughout the country.

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[46] Samuels, *"Rich Nation, Strong Army,"* 33.

[47] LaFeber, *The Clash: A History of U.S——Japan Relations,* 37–39.

[48] Gordon, *History of Modern Japan,* 61–21.

Thomas C. Smith argued that the Japanese aristocracy differed from Western aristocracies enough to instigate the Meiji Restoration. Unlike Western ruling classes, Japanese elites had more to gain from changing the domestic order than fighting to retain it.[49] The changing international circumstances that led to Perry's ultimatum provided an opportunity for the Japanese aristocracy to gain prestige and influence. Thus, some members of this class centralized power, transformed the social structure and opened up new social opportunities.[50] This leads to the conclusion that Meiji Japan's prosperity was unique because of Japan's unique top-down revolution. If the upper class had not been disgruntled at the same time as an opportunity for change appeared, they would not have risked a drastic revolution.[51] Their support was vital to the success of Meiji reform, as their position in the upper class meant that they both saw the outside threat more clearly and had a better position from which to bring about change. A lower class revolution would likely not have achieved similar results.

In a similar vein, historians such as John Whitney Hall, Richard Samuels, and Walter LaFeber, argue that the Meiji Era did not constitute "a bourgeois revolution," but rather an oligarchy that "imposed… absolutism."[52] This oligarchy gravitated toward two ideas: *fukoku kyohei* and *shokusan kogyo. Fukoku kyohei* marries the ideas of national wealth and strength.[53] *Sokusan kogyo* is translatable as "the nurturance and protection of domestic industry"[54] Meiji leaders tried to realize these ideas.[55] Examples include how Okubo Toshimichi "established the Ministry of Home Affairs" after he witnessed similarly important institutions in Europe.[56] Okuma Shigenobu also founded the Ministry of Engineering and "stipulated that the purpose of the new ministry was to achieve

[49] Smith, "Japan's Aristocratic Revolution," 370, 373–377.

[50] Ibid., 377–379.

[51] Ibid., 370–371.

[52] Hall, "Modernization of Japan," 13.

[53] Samuels, "*Rich Nation, Strong Army,"* 36.

[54] Ibid., 37.

[55] Ibid., 40.

[56] Ibid., 38.

…richness of the country…and the need for military buildup."[57] Likewise, Yamagato Aritomo focused on making Japan strong through military expansion.[58]

D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Historians typically address the Meiji Restoration through major factors that changed in Japan. These factors included Western influence, political power, economic development, and social changes. These provide the main explanations for how an oligarchy morphed Japan into an international success. Japan began interacting with the West in a similar fashion to other East and Southeast Asian countries: a superior military forced it into unequal treaties. Yet Japan was able to change course once interaction began. The top-down restoration facilitated this swift change of course. Competent Meiji leadership from the upper classes saw a necessity to change and opportunities to change for the better. They incrementally changed interactions with the West, centralized power, revamped the social structure, and built a competitive economy.

1. Western Influences Facilitated a Top-Down Restoration

The Meiji leadership implemented Western ideas to overcome Western dominance. Most authors open their discussion of the Meiji Restoration with the catalyst: Commodore Matthew Perry's arrival to "open" Japan in 1853.[59] The Japanese leadership was aware of the Western powers' activities in Qing China, and thus knew that resistance was futile.[60] In an attempt to realize a destiny different from a Japanese version of the Opium Wars, the Tokugawa leadership agreed to unequal trade treaties. This created a fissure within elite society that brought the Tokugawa's downfall and a new oligarchy's rise behind the Emperor. The new oligarchy devoted much of their activities to neutralize these unequal trade treaties.[61] They explored and often transplanted a large spectrum of

[57] Samuels, "*Rich Nation, Strong Army,"* 37.

[58] LaFeber, *The Clash: A History of U.S——Japan Relations,* 47–48.

[59] Gordon, *History of Modern Japan,* 49.

[60] Ibid., 48.

[61] Ibid., 62, 73–86.

Western ideas into Japan to achieve this end.[62] Part of their means and their overarching end goal meant a closer and often friendlier relationship with Western powers.

2. Centralizing Power Was Key to the Meiji Regime's Top-Down Revolution

Meiji leadership overcame domestic obstacles in a timely manner. The new oligarchy did so by centralizing power. This contributed to the Meiji regime's top-down revolution because it allowed the newly-powerful central government to mobilize the populace in ways that benefited the state. This meant disintegrating the feudal power structure that had stabilized Japan for over two centuries during the Tokugawa period. The Tokugawa Shogun leaned on the feudal entities that naturally developed as a bulwark against internal chaos, since they were strong entities. The Shogun used their strength to his benefit by allowing feudal lords to retain their hard-won regional power in exchange for submission. This power structure permeated economic, social, and government aspects of Japan at every level.[63]

The new oligarchs took a trial-and-error approach to reforming the feudal structures of Tokugawa Japan that required time and caused friction.[64] If they had moved more quickly and drastically, they would have likely faced overwhelming friction and failed. If they had moved more gradually and less thoroughly, they would have likely faced the same unending-obstacles of Qing China's failed self-strengthening movements.[65] Before the Meiji Restoration, the government consisted of feudal entities loyal to the Shogunate in an internationally isolated Japan.[66] This was congruent with neither Japan's new need to interact with the West, nor with the new oligarchy's goal to do so on an equal level. Tactfully, centralizing power away from regional interests

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[62] Shively, "Japanization of the Middle Meiji," 77–80.

[63] Smith, "Japan's Aristocratic Revolution," 374–377.

[64] Gordon, *History of Modern Japan*, 62–67, 78–88, 94–111.

[65] Benjamin A. Elman, "Naval Warfare and the Refraction of China's Self-Strengthening Reforms into Scientific and Technological Failure, 1865–1895," *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no.2 (May 2004), http://www.jstor.org/stable/3876516, 283–284.

[66] Gordon, *History of Modern Japan*, 9–14.

eventually allowed the government to build up the country's industrial capacity. The oligarchy also changed the institutional bodies that made up the government in order to meet new external responsibilities. These bodies morphed over time to meet new issues that arose as Japan's society responded to the new government requirements.[67]

These changes would not have occurred without a willing oligarchy. Neither the Emperor nor the poorest in society instigated the Meiji Restoration. As Thomas C. Smith points out, the aristocracy instigated and successfully led "sweeping" change in Japan.[68] The samurai class took control of the country's two leading individuals, and cities then formed a ring of support under one of them. A few members of the former aristocracy formed this ultimately stable support ring. Some pulled the country toward militarism while others focused energy on domestic matters.[69] The oligarchy navigated this minefield of malcontent and differences and steered Japan away from the fate of nearly every other Asian country while laying groundwork for Japan's imperialist rise and fall.

3. The Meiji Oligarchy Reshaped Japan's Economy to Make Japan Stronger

The oligarchy that emerged during the Meiji Restoration changed the social fabric of Japan at all levels in response to the new international situation. The ruling oligarchy brought in new Western influences and new economic and military requirements. The ruling oligarchy also tried to make the Japanese economy strong. They wanted to make Japan a great power to avoid becoming a victim of great powers.[70] Their efforts included dissolving feudal lords' tax bases, improving farming methods, supporting textile and mining industries to boost military development, and integrating women into the workforce. These changes increased central government revenue, industrial output, and agricultural yield.[71] By carrying out these reforms, Japan eventually was able to

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[67] Gordon, *History of Modern Japan*, 83, 91–93, 111–114, 120, 125.

[68] Smith, "Japan's Aristocratic Revolution," 370–371.

[69] LaFeber, *The Clash: A History of U.S.—Japan Relations*, 46–49

[70] Samuels, "*Rich Nation, Strong Army,*" 33–34.

[71] Gordon, *History of Modern Japan*, 94–101.

overcome the unequal treaties that began with Perry's arrival and become a great power.[72]

4. Japanese Society's Reactions to Meiji Reforms Shaped Japan's Rise

The Meiji reforms required much more public involvement in government affairs than in the preceding centuries. They provided platforms for people to voice different ideas about how best to run the country.[73] This caused a wave of rebellion and ongoing changes.[74] Popular responses to toward government activities were important. They shaped the effectiveness of the state's push for heavy industry, increased military participation and dissolution of the elite.[75] In the end, Japan's new oligarchy successfully spurred a new social structure that melded East and West without following a model.

E. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study argues that the Meiji Restoration was a top-down revolution led by an oligarchic leadership, whose end goal was to maintain sovereignty for Japan with as much dignity as possible. Their goal intrinsically focused on how external entities saw Japan because that determined how they interacted with Japan. Therefore, Japan's changed approach to foreign affairs was arguably the most successful aspect of the Meiji Era. The leaders deftly wove military strengthening into its foreign policy evolution. They understood that Western countries were the most powerful in the world as such their ideas about how countries interacted constituted the "rulebook" for international relations. Since the West valued intricate diplomacy and trade along with a centralized military capable of supporting assertive foreign policies, Meiji leaders pursued these ends. They molded domestic governance and society to help meet these ends, but ultimately reshaping and controlling internal issues supported the more important external goal. Thus, this thesis aims to understand Meiji Japan's path toward meeting this external goal

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[72] LaFeber, *The Clash: A History of U.S.——Japan Relations,* 48.

[73] Ibid., 46–49.

[74] Gordon, *History of Modern Japan,* 85–87, 94–111.

[75] Ibid., 88–90, 96–104.

through diplomatic and military changes. This thesis further narrows the window of analysis to early and middle Meiji Japan because they were the most critical periods. Meiji leaders faced a race against time to prove their respectability to the Western powers that had just defeated the regional hegemon. Meiji leaders demonstrated remarkable ability to jumpstart changes in Japan so quickly after the Restoration that they set the country on track to continuous growth and stability.

This study is not a political science analysis; it will not confirm or refute existing theories. Instead, this study will provide a narrative history of how the Meiji oligarchy strengthened Japan in terms of Western interactions and military reforms. To accomplish this, it will address Western treaties and visits, increasingly assertive foreign policies, creation of a military, industrial growth, and popular reactions to new government decisions.

Sources include chronological histories and political analysis from different time periods because they present Meiji leadership's goals and methods in different lights. Vital scholars for analytic material include Akira Irye, Ian Nish, Meirion and Susie Harries, Marius B. Jansen, and Richard Samuels. Irye explores how Meiji leadership altered Japan's foreign policy to align with contemporary Western standards.[76] Nish chronically examines how foreign ministers gradually reshaped Japan's approach to foreign affairs, particularly regarding the unequal treaties.[77] Harries and Harries analyze how state-level military reforms developed throughout the Meiji period and created a strong, loyal, and centralized army.[78] Jansen provides insight into the single most important individual driving military reform: Yamagata Aritomo.[79] Richard Samuels examines how the Japanese military developed from a small relatively weak entity to a

[76] Akira Irye, "Japan's Drive to Great Power Status," in *The Cambridge History of Japan: Volume 5 The Nineteenth Century,* ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1989), 721–765.

[77] Ian Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy 1869–1942* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1977), 1–68.

[78] Meirion Harries and Susie Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun* (New York: Random House, 1991), 1–50.

[79] Marius B. Jansen, "Japan in the Early Nineteenth Century," in *The Cambridge History of Japan: Volume 5 The Nineteenth Century,* ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1989), 50–111.

large powerful force in concert with economic growth.[80] Taken together, these and other historians of Japan greatly assist in understanding how the Meiji oligarchy successfully launched a top-down revolution that remade Japan's foreign policy, economic, and military structures to transformed Japan into a great power.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

The thesis is organized in three more chapters. The second chapter focuses on how the government improved foreign relations. Specifically, it analyzes how it built a new ministry, learned about the West, clarified its borders, successfully brought to an end the unequal treaties that foreign powers imposed on Japan, and developed assertive foreign policies.

The third chapter explores how the oligarchy developed a strong economy and military. In building a centralized conscript army, the Meiji leadership defied Japanese tradition and bound even low-ranking soldiers to directly serve the state. In investing in industries that support military needs, they created a symbiotic cycle of profitable businesses that could domestically provide valuable military resources.[81]

The fourth chapter is the conclusion and summarizes this study's findings on the Meiji oligarchy's top-down revolution. It highlights what has been learned about the factors behind their successful foreign policy evolution and military reforms.

[80] Samuels, *Rich Nation Strong Army,* 33–36.

[81] Gordon, *History of Modern Japan*, 66–67, 85–90, 96–104.

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II. MEIJI JAPAN'S FOREIGN POLICY EXPANSION

A. INTRODUCTION

Despite Japan's weak position when America's Commodore Perry arrived in 1853, the incident spurred Japan to alter its approach to foreign affairs.[82] Meiji Japan began to sanction foreign interactions and crafted a foreign policy that resembled Western ones. This put Japan in a drastically different situation than it found itself in 1853, eventually rising as one of the world's powers. Meiji oligarchs working in the Emperor's name sought and developed new relationships between Japan and other countries in a changed world.

This chapter argues that the West's movement into East Asia pressured Meiji leaders to evolve Japan's foreign policies. Their principal changes included placing a new emphasis on learning about and replicating Western-style foreign affairs. They shaped foreign policy to align with Western norms by aggressively claiming and clearly defining boundaries while undoing the unequal trade treaties that had caused Japan's initial predicament. These foreign policy reforms encountered both domestic and international problems. As Western ideas about engaging the populace in politics swept into the country, nationalism encouraged people to support aggressive policies. Competing factions among Western powers also became a roadblock to Japan's ability to assert itself among its neighbors. However, the Meiji oligarchs' earnest efforts to behave like the most powerful countries of their era succeeded in earning respect for Japan.

[82] James L. McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 137.

B. CONTEXT

1. Tokugawa Foreign Policy

The Tokugawa dynasty had mostly "insulated" the country from "the dangers of European connection" for over 200 years before the undercurrents of the Meiji Restoration began.[83] Christianity posed potential problems for the early Shoguns and their immediate predecessor Toyotomi Hideyoshi in maintaining control of a unified Japan. Catholic European leaders in Japan exercised strong control over large groups of Japanese Christians, and in the port city of Nagasaki developed military capabilities and secular authority. Some Christian Japanese lords had forced their subordinates to convert, and had the potential to form a military "holy league" against the national seat of power.[84] To protect against potential threats, national leaders created strict anti-Western policies.

The main structures of Tokugawa foreign policy came to prohibit most engagements with the West. Japanese were not allowed to be Christian, Japanese who tried to venture abroad faced a death sentence, and Japanese who did venture abroad were forbidden from returning.[85] It was also illegal to build "ships capable of sailing to foreign countries" or "expor[t] weapons."[86] Foreign interaction on Japanese soil was also limited. Dutch traders were the only Christians permitted into Japan because, as Protestants, they "were enemies"[87] of the Catholic faith that had previously built a contagious power base loyal to a foreign pontiff. However, even the Dutch were restricted to one trading station

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[83] Beasely, *Japan Encounters the Barbarian: Japanese Travellers in America and Europe*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995, 17.

[84] Jurgis Elisonas "Christianity and the Daimyo," in *The Cambridge History of Japan, vol. 4, Early Modern Japan*, ed. John Whitney Hall and James L. McClain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 359–363.

[85] Ibid., 368–370.

[86] Ibid., xix.

[87] Ibid., "Christianity and the Daimyo," 371.

in the only port authorized to participate in Western trade: Deshima[88] in Nagasaki.[89] Foreign traders from Northeast Asia—particularly the Chinese and Koreans- enjoyed more access to Japanese ports in other parts of the country.[90] Interestingly, Tokugawa Shoguns required the Dutch to make tribute missions to the capital city that included reports about Western events. These trips provided the Dutch opportunities to interact with "representatives of each daimyo through whose land they moved" as well as court officials.[91] While this exposed some of Japan's ruling class to the West, the masses had little chance of similar exposure. The Shogunate allowed some Dutch books to circulate in educated circles, but heavily censored publications dealing with Western religious ideas.[92]

The isolationist system changed slightly over the course of the Tokugawa dynasty, but mostly remained in place. As more sailors came to Japanese shores in the early 1800s, the Shogun's cabinet enacted "measures to increase the study of European languages" but did not try to change the stigma that official anti-Western laws had created.[93] Instead, the Shoguns gradually reduced the number of ships that the Dutch could bring until the limit was one per year.[94] The frequency of Dutch trips to the capitol city also fell from one per year to one every four years.[95] Throughout this period of isolation, the Tokugawa Shoguns made no definitive moves to solidify Japan's grasp beyond the three main islands Kyushu, Shikoku, and Honshu. When one lord from northern Honshu asked to establish dominance over Hokkaido in an effort to counter

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[88] Marius B. Jansen, "Japan in the Early Nineteenth Century," in *The Cambridge History of Japan: Volume 5 The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1989), 87.

[89] Elisonas "Christianity and the Daimyo," 369–372.

[90] Jansen, "Japan in the Early Nineteenth Century," 88.

[91] Jansen, "Japan in the Early Nineteenth Century," 89.

[92] Ibid., 58, 90–91.

[93] Marius B. Jansen, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge History of Japan, vol. 5, The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 12.

[94] Jansen, "Japan in the Early Nineteenth Century," 88–89.

[95] Ibid., 89

Russian expansion, the Shogun refused.[96] Japan's official lack of concern or urge to interact with the world around it did not cause problems for generations. While this system helped the Shogunate maintain order domestically, it eventually made Japan vulnerable to external developments two centuries later.

2. Collapse of Tokugawa Foreign Policy under Foreign Pressures

Fear of the Western powers that had displaced China as the Asian hegemon pressured Japan into changing. The Opium Wars demonstrated Western aggression and caused fear in Japan because it was clear that the West might seek to forcefully engage with Japan next.[97] Within less than a decade after Commodore Perry's arrival, the Japanese leadership felt threatened enough by Western powers to sign unequal treaties with five countries it had shunned for centuries. Perry's arrival in 1853 from the United States prompted an unequal treaty with America in 1858.[98] The treaty to which the Tokugawa Shogun had agreed was modeled after one that China had recently signed with the British and French. It essentially made Japan "subordinate to foreign governments" both "politically and economically."[99] The treaty included aspects like forcing eight ports to engage in foreign trade, "surrender[ing] tariff autonomy, and legal jurisdiction over the treaty ports."[100] Foreign settlements within Japan were formally established, primarily in Yokohama, Kobe, and Osaka just before and during the Meiji leaders taking power.[101] During the first 25 years of the unequal treaties, foreigners enjoyed extraterritoriality with consular courts and export trade grew so steeply through the 1870s that Japan was essentially a "client state" of the West. Japan acquiesced to foreign demands and

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[96] Jansen, "Introduction," 12–13.

[97] Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 48–29.

[98] Ibid., 49–56.

[99] Ibid., 50.

[100] Ibid., 50.

[101] W. G. Beasely, "The Foreign Threat and the Opening of the Ports," in *The Cambridge History of Japan, vol. 5, The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 304–307.

essentially replicated this treaty with Britain, France, Holland, and Russia.[102] These events enflamed an internal debate among the Japanese elite about how to interact with the world.[103]

Domestic turmoil worsened as some felt that Japan should command respect by acting with strength, while others felt a sense of urgency to strictly conform to standards set by more powerful countries. The former held tightly to traditional ideas that Japan should shun outsiders. The latter knew that Western outsiders were now capable of conquering Japan and that aloof behavior would not induce the West to leave Japan alone. Together these factions overthrew the Tokugawa Shogun for their own reasons. The Shogunate was doomed because domestic critics condemned the Shogun for acquiescing to Western demands that Japan was too weak to refuse.

The Tokugawa Era and its foreign policy crumbled at a time when modern states around the world were supposed to define and expand their boundaries and have a military prepared to defend people within. Each modern state's military was therefore a direct threat to others yet no one necessarily wanted to engage them. This meant that countries could use any avenue of engagement on a continuum ranging from inaction to war in order to compete. These included political influence, economic influence, and general prestige. Japan had to emulate the behavior of Western powers if it was going to survive as a sovereign state, yet the Tokugawa dynasty lacked both the military strength and domestic support to implement any options on the Western foreign policy continuum. The faction within Tokugawa Japan who understood the threat of the West consolidated their power as the new Meiji oligarchy. They made the changes that the Tokugawa government could not.

C. FINDING NEW MODELS OF FOREIGN POLICY FROM ABROAD

Meiji leaders made two major shifts in Japanese foreign policy shortly after coming to power. First, they appointed people to learn about and engage with the West.

[102] Beasely, *Japan Encounters the Barbarian*, 37–38.

[103] Gordon, *History of Japan*, 49–56.

The new Meiji leaders established a Foreign Ministry with multiple locations and fostered its accruement of foreign knowledge. Second, the Meiji government sponsored overseas missions to gain an in-depth understanding of how to shape Japan's foreign policies. The combination of these initial foreign policy shifts taught Meiji oligarchs precisely where Japan stood in the world's power structure. They eventually recognized that what Japan experienced in the 1850s was part of a larger international relations "playbook" that Western powers had devised, and began to "play" by those rules. Because the Tokugawa Era did not bequeath a strong military to the Meiji Era, Meiji leaders learned to avoid ambitious policies that Western powers would not tolerate until Japan had gained respect and credible military strength.

1. Establishing the Foreign Ministry

By July 1869, the new Imperial government had established six initial ministries including the Foreign Ministry. Iwakura Tomomi directed this Foreign Ministry from 1871 until he died in 1883.[104] As a Prince and a member of the Imperial Council, "the fact that he was prepared to accept the office of foreign minister…suggests that it was the intention of the new leaders that the Foreign Ministry should be one of the key instruments of the new government."[105] It had offices in both Tokyo and Yokohama so that both the port, which handled the majority of foreign interactions, and the capitol could devote appropriate levels of attention to foreign interactions and do so in lock-step.[106] Previously, the Japanese government had most of its dealings with foreign governments only in port cities.[107] Japan also brought foreign advisors into the Foreign Ministry. They predominantly consisted of American citizens, though they also employed British, German, and French advisors.[108]

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[104] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy*, 9.

[105] Ibid., 11.

[106] Ibid., 14.

[107] Ibid., 12.

[108] Ibid., 17.

The Ministry soon created an entire department to function as a foreign language school.[109] By the end of the 1860s—within two years of the Restoration—multiple translations of studies on international law widely circulated in the country. These included "Elements of International Law" and "Commentaries on International Law."[110] The Ministry also translated "Britain's most recent treaties in order to achieve some standard of comparison for those" recently imposed on Japan.[111] This shows how commonplace it had become to learn about Western concepts of foreign affairs in less than two decades after Commodore Perry shattered Japan's isolation.

2. Overseas Trips

Meiji Japan initially learned about the Western criteria for "modern states"by officially sponsoring trips abroad. These trips helped them to do so and included the high-profile Iwakura Embassy from 1871–1873 but mostly comprised of students, bureaucrats, and some military commanders making smaller trips. Some of the most powerful men in the country participated in the Iwakura Embassy and essentially surveyed several European and American cities before returning.[112] Some of the smaller missions included a former military commander "recruit[ing] foreign experts to assist in the development of Hokkaido," and a bureaucrat who worked with the London postal service and eventually helped develop logistical aspects of running a capital city like Tokyo.[113]

The government appointed Iwakura to lead several dozen senior statesmen overseas for a year and a half to learn about the West.[114] This became known as the "Iwakura Embassy."[115] During this trip, Japan's new key leaders learned how to affect

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[109] Ibid., 14.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Ibid., 14–15.

[112] Beasely, *Japan Encounters the Barbarian*, 194–195.

[113] Ibid., 194.

[114] Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan,* 73.

[115] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy,* 13, 18.

change in Japan's international status. One of the first suggestions Iwakura made was to send imperial envoys to powerful Western countries. Another was to reshape Japan's domestic institutions so that world powers would be more comfortable adjusting the judicial aspects of the unequal treaties.[116] Evidence of this decision lies in how Iwakura rescinded the instruction to renegotiate the treaties and instead instructed those accompanying him to "seek knowledge from all over the world, restore Japan's rights and reform faults in her institutions."[117]

The Embassy succeeded beyond bestowing knowledge on the Japanese. It also succeeded in "convey[ing] a spirit of interest in Westernization, of friendship and of earnestness."[118] The mission went through the United States, Britain, France, Germany, and Russia, changing the perception that Japan was thoroughly xenophobic.[119] Japanese diplomats" style of dress also indicates an awareness of how to adapt in ways that induced Western countries' approval. Unlike the Chinese, Japanese on government-sponsored trips mostly dressed in Western styles while abroad.[120] Behavior like this showed the West that the new Meiji Japan was committed to building good relationships instead of reviving isolationist policies.

3. What Meiji Oligarchs Initially Learned

Those who participated in the Iwakura Embassy were some of the highest-ranking men in the oligarchy. The most vital thing that they learned on the trip was the necessity to reform Japan and its foreign relations carefully so that Western powers would accept its presence as a responsible country. This meant behaving with caution until Japan had enough strength to behave like an imperialist power. The division in foreign policy views between those who remained in Japan and those who embarked on the trip underscored

[116] Ibid., 18.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid., 20.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy*, 15.

the changes taking place. Meiji oligarchs had learned how much they needed to pull Japan away from its past foreign policies.

The clearest example of this division of views on foreign affairs was when Iwakura and those who accompanied him to Western cities squashed plans to invade Korea with former Samurai.[121] The plan was not without reason. After Japan unified under the Shogun hundreds of years previously, former Samurai who used to work for defeated lords became roving criminals and caused security problems for the pacified population.[122] However, Iwakura and the other travelers learned that the power holders of the international community would see Japan as a land of barbarians if it attacked Korea.[123] Iwakura even dismissed the man acting as Foreign Minister in his place for not grasping how fragile Japan's reputation was.[124] The decision to refrain from the Korean invasion meant that Japan could maintain amiable dealings with Western powers and China for the time being. Although Japan did impose the Kanghwa Treaty for free trade on Korea in 1876, Japan did not enforce it for nearly a decade in order to stave off international backlash.[125] Meiji leaders', quest to reform Japan's foreign policy continued as they delicately tried to renegotiate the unequal trade treaties. -

D. ALTERING JAPAN'S FOREIGN POLICIES

Meiji oligarchs deliberately changed Japan's foreign affairs in two fields to make Japan into a respectable and modern country. The first was renegotiating the unequal treaties that had begun Japan's tumultuous entry into world events. Secondly—and simultaneously—they attempted to model Japan's claiming and defending of its territory after that of Western empires.

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[121] Ibid., 22.

[122] Gregory Irvine, Nicola Liscutin, Angus Lockyer, "The Samurai," In Our Time, BBC Radio 4, podcast audio, December 24, 2009, http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00pcm9f.

[123] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy*, 22.

[124] Ibid., 19.

[125] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy*, 24.

1. Renegotiating Unequal Trade Treaties

When Meiji Japan emerged, amending Japan's humiliating unequal treaties was both a litmus test of strength and a goal in itself. It seems that Japan's leaders first tried to rectify the situation by making a treaty with Korea in 1876. This Kanghwa treaty *was* an unequal treaty, but one in which Japan benefited. Japan used "threats and provocation" to pressure Korea into signing it. On its own, this treaty demonstrates Meiji leaders' determination to be imperialistic instead of imperialized. Understanding China's role in the situation underscores this determination. The Chinese Emperor had traditional sovereignty over the Korean Kingdom.[126] Even though Korea was autonomous within that suzerainty, the Kangwha treaty contradicted the relationship between Korea and China. In doing so, the treaty challenged Japan's relative position to China and foreshadowed the Sino-Japanese War to come. Despite Japan's decision not to enforce this treaty for nearly a decade to avoid tension with the Russian Empire,[127] the Kangwha treaty began Japan's journey to commanding respect in treaty negotiations.

Japan's next steps in treaty revision consisted of failed negotiations with great powers from which the Foreign Ministry learned a great deal. Throughout 1886, Minister Inoue Kaoru "made considerable progress" at 36 meetings with foreign diplomats.[128] Renegotiating the treaties had a negative domestic impact, too. Though the process did not initiate a coup like the Meiji Restoration, it did dredge up old debates about the specifics of how Japan should interact with the rest of the world. The public and several ministers became outraged when they learned that his negotiations included plans to "allow Western judges to try cases involving foreigners," continue setting import tariffs by treaty, and open "the whole of Japan…for foreign travel."[129] The Imperial government dissolved the Diet twice because there was so much public turmoil. In some cases, the emperor directed the Foreign Minister to conduct negotiations in secret, from both the

[126] Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan,* 116.

[127] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy,* 23–24.

[128] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy,* 31.

[129] Ibid.

public and other ministers. However, some ministers resigned, including the Minister of Agriculture, Inoue resigned as well. Despite this, Inoue's basic ideas for treaty revision did not die. They centered on making Japan seem more amenable toward the West.[130] Inoue had engaged the Ministry's foreign advisors to make Japan's law codes more similar to Western ones "in respect of laws, prisons, and punishments."[131] Japan's Western-style constitution also seems to have been important in maneuvering Japan into a better bargaining position.

Mutsu Munemitsu was the next Foreign Minister with great impact.[132] He oversaw Japan's first successful unequal treaty revision. He followed of Minister Inoue's ideas to achieve this end, but also took advantage of international developments. Japan managed to alter the unequal treaties with his oversight. The Japanese began to study an earlier 1883 treaty between the British and Italians that focused on commerce and navigation because it treated both Britain and Italy as equal peers. Then the Japanese successfully negotiated a treaty with Mexico in 1888 based on the Anglo-Italian model. With both a successful template and negotiation experience, Japan had built itself the stepping stones to renegotiate its original unequal trade treaties with the world's most prominent Western powers.[133]

Minister Mutsu then used Japan's domestic developments in concert with what he had observed about world power politics. He showcased Japan's new 1889 constitution and law codes and leveraged his knowledge about domestic popular opinion. He knew that "the Japanese people would never be satisfied…by a compromise" and that treaty revision would have to "confer equal rights and obligations on both sides."[134] While negotiating the treaty with Mexico, Mutsu learned how to conceal possibly unpopular treaty discussion from the Japanese public while taking advantage of the competition and

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130 Ibid.

131 Ibid., 30–31.

132 Ibid., 26.

133 Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy,* 32.

134 Ibid.

jealousy between Western powers. He pursued these goals simultaneously by negotiating with countries individually and in their capital cities.[135] By not having negotiations in Japan, he lessened the opportunities for the Japanese public to learn about negotiation details to which they might vehemently object.

All of this meant that by the 1890s, Mutsu had advantages for revising the unequal treaties that his predecessors did not. Japan had (1) a constitution that made it appear familiar instead of alien to Western societies, (2) a plan to keep the Japanese populace from disturbing the renegotiation process, (3) a foreign minister with experience in negotiating an equal treaty, and (4) a foreign minister who understood how to exploit Western powers' competition with each other. For the first time, Japan had the chance to play on a level field with Western counties in terms of treaties. The Japanese Imperial Cabinet approved Mutsu's treaty revision plans in July 1893.[136] He sent a diplomat to renegotiate the unequal treaties with both Germany and Britain.[137] Germany proved unresponsive, but Britain was open to discussions.[138] By September 1893, the diplomat Aoki Shuzo and the British Minister to Japan embarked on initial negotiations in London that lasted until December when they produced an amended draft.[139]

Mutsu's plans partly backfired at that point because the Japanese Diet and public learned about a draft allowing foreigners into Japan's interior. Xenophobia drove popular unrest. Interestingly, the domestic Japanese turmoil hastened the British decision to acquiesce because they understood that much of Japan held foreigners and the unequal treaties with distain.[140] Extraterritoriality had brought significantly increased contact between Japanese and Westerners. Western powers began to fear that continued extra-territoriality might stir so much anti-Western sentiment that they would ultimately lose

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid., 30–35.

[137] Ibid., 30–35.

[138] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy*, 30–35.

[139] Ibid., 32–33.

[140] Ibid., 30–31, 33–35.

Japan as a trade market.[141] This worked to Japan's advantage because the British grasped that "if it did not renegotiate the treaties, the Japanese government might be forced to denounce them unilaterally under the force of public opinion."[142] Britain would then be stuck with the extra-territoriality clauses of the original treaty and find itself in a predicament to inevitably lose all trade with Japan. Renegotiations resumed in April 1894 and overlapped in June with Japan sending troops to Korea to challenge China's historical preeminence on the peninsula.[143] Once again, this development worked to Japan's advantage because it increased both Japan's and Britain's urgency to conclude negotiations. They signed a new, equal treaty on 16 July 1894. The treaty had three main parts: "ending…extraterritoriality not earlier than five years after its signature, an agreed "ad valorem" import tariff, and a protocol introducing the new tariff one month after the exchange of ratifications."[144]

2. Remaking National and Regional Boundaries

Learning about the international environment deeply affected how Meiji leaders approached foreign policy. At the time, the great powers were all imperialist and viewed uniform governance within clearly defined borders[145] to be a key aspect of respectable, modern states. Japan's leaders set out to emulate great power foreign policy by clearly defining its boundaries This brought Sakhalin, the Kuril, and the Ryukyu islands into the political spotlight. Japan did not have a capable enough military in the early Meiji period to defend Japanese living in all of those places. Despite this, Japan had to contend with domestic and international pressure to assert prestige by boldly claiming and defending

[141] Ibid., 30.

[142] Ibid., 33.

[143] Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan,* 116–118.

[144] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy,* 33.

[145] Akira Irye, "Japan's Drive to Great Power Status," in *The Cambridge History of Japan: Volume 5 The Nineteenth Century,* ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge, NJ: Cambridge University Press: 1989), 721–735.

territory. The domestic concerns were the most pressing because Meiji rule was young and thus still had a fragile hold on power.[146]

Drawing clear boundaries removed ambiguities and buffer areas between its land and that of other countries. For Japan, this meant defining its borders along Russian territory in the North and Chinese territory in the South. Japan was inferior to Russia in both wealth and strength at the time. Somewhat ingeniously, Japan proposed and received a compromise in the North by removing all claims to Sakhalin while fully claiming the Kurils. They signed the agreement in St. Petersburg in May 1875.[147] Domestic and international affairs opposed each other. To the Japanese public, this was a weak and unpopular move. Nationalism was taking hold like it had in the powerful empires that Japan began to emulate.[148] However, Japan would almost certainly be defeated in the international arena, and lose chances of building future prestige, if it tried to be more assertive toward Russia at that moment in time.[149]

The Ryukyus were more complicated because Japanese citizens did not live there. Instead, a southern Japanese clan was historically responsible for interacting with the small island kingdom that sent tribute to multiple countries, including Japan.[150] The Japanese used military force to establish its boundaries around the Ryukyu kingdom between 1872–1881.[151] During this period, a ship carrying men from the Ryukyus shipwrecked on Taiwan, at which point the local Taiwanese slaughtered them.[152] The powerful Satsuma clan in southern Japan claimed that the Ryukyuans were their kinsmen and demanded revenge. The Meiji government reluctantly sanctioned an "expedition to Formosa in 1874 … to chastise the …barbarians for attacking Japanese subjects in the

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[146] Ibid., 729–735.

[147] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy,* 23.

[148] Irye, "Japan's Drive to Great Power Status," 721–731.

[149] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy,* 23.

[150] Irye, "Japan's Drive to Great Power Status," 724–726, 739–744.

[151] Eto Shinkichi, "Japan's Policies Toward China," in *Japan's Foreign Policy 1869–1941: a Research Guide*, ed. James William Morley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 237.

[152] Irye, "Japan's Drive to Great Power Status," 729–735.

Ryukyu (Loochoo) islands." [153] This demonstrated how differently Japan saw international norms than before: Japan used forceful retaliation in the same manner that Western countries of the period did to protect its citizens abroad.[154] During the preceding Tokugawa Era, Japan had disregarded international norms almost entirely. [155] With British help, the Meiji government negotiated with China to end the retribution Embassy in exchange for "a sum to defray [Japan's] expenses and a promise" that China would "accept the Ryukyuans as Japanese subjects." [156] Having clarified some initial boundaries, Meiji oligarchs saw that they had gained a measure of respect because the outside world accepted the manner in which Japan "defended" its territory. Japan's next foray into claiming and protecting its borders occurred with the Korean Peninsula in the 1890s and demonstrated considerably increased boldness.

Korea serves as a platform to see how much Meiji Japan conformed to international relations standards and how aggressive its leadership became. Japan's actions regarding the Korean Kingdom shortly after the Meiji Restoration provides a baseline to grasp how much Meiji oligarch's changed Japan by 1894. Newly-emplaced Meiji leaders grew offended that "Korea… reject[ed] out of hand her overtures for recognition" [157] shortly after the Restoration. Japan's new leaders wanted to change Korea's behavior. To so do, they had to interact with China because of China's traditional suzerainty over Korea's foreign policy.[158] In March 1873, China gave Japan's foreign minister a formal Imperial audience in Peking "to discuss" Korea's attitude. [159] By dealing with China instead of Korea, Japan acknowledged China's hold over Korea. This meant that Japan's leaders saw China as more powerful than Japan. That Japan stopped

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[153] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy*, 23.

[154] Irye, "Japan's Drive to Great Power Status," 739–744.

[155] Ibid., 729–735.

[156] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy*, 23.

[157] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy*, 21.

[158] Ibid., 22.

[159] Ibid.

short of engaging in battle with Korea in this incident also signals that Japan did not feel powerful enough.

By 1894, Japan's position relative to China had changed. The Japan-Korea trade relationship grew during the 1870s and 1880s to the point where some Japanese advised Koreans in political and military affairs in an official capacity. Because the Meiji government had already steered Japanese society toward patriotism, Korean infighting that resulted in Japanese officers and civilians dying in Seoul provoked aggressive rhetoric amongst the Japanese populace.[160] Although Meiji Japan was building up its military in accordance with modern state trends around the globe, it was not ready for a military engagement in the 1880s. Thus, domestic frustration with government inaction mounted while the population grew fixated with events in Korea and China. This eventually helped propel Meiji Japan toward the Sino-Japanese War of 1895.[161]

The Korean Peninsula concurrently attracted attention from other powerful countries. Russia and China also tried to gain influence in the Korean Kingdom through advisors because they were also "modern" and "modernizing" states vying for power.[162] For the Meiji government, this resulted in domestic voices calling for patriotic aggression while expansionist criteria dictated that Japan compete against Russia and China to win the most influence in Korea. In 1885, China and Japan clearly emerged as the two main competitors in Korea. One of the most powerful Meiji oligarchs—Ito Hirobumi—and China's chief politician regarding Korea—Li Hongzhang—negotiated an understanding. This Li-Ito pact dictated that each country would refrain from having a military presence in Korea without first notifying the other.[163] A domestic Korean rebellion in 1894 caused the Korean King to invite Chinese troops. This in turn tripped clauses in the Li-Ito pact

[160] Irye, "Japan's Drive to Great Power Status," 751–761.

[161] Ibid., 751–761.

[162] Cummings, Bruce, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), 121–127.

[163] Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan,* 117.

and Japan then sent troops as well. The stage was then set for the Chinese-Japanese competition to devolve into a military engagement.[164]

Japan's decision to take Korea by warring with China seems to be the making of its own leaders. Japan's success, however, seems to have been partly due to the international relations environment. Given the Imperial Japanese government's dedication to learning as much as possible about the West, it is likely that its leaders predicted that Western powers would not intervene. The British seriously considered "a warlike demonstration in the seas around Japan" as a deterrent.[165] However, Britain, along with other powers, did not want to hinder the only buffer between their influence in Asia and Russian expansion southward.[166] The Japanese Foreign Minister even went so far as to provide a safety net in the event that Japan's leaders misunderstood the power dynamics between Western countries. Mutsu assured foreign powers that Japan would not impede their trade in Shanghai.[167]

Meiji Japan eventually used military force against Korea and annexed the Kingdom as a colony, demonstrating Japanese adherence to modern state principles of the day.[168] Meiji Japan was willing to behave aggressively toward the historical regional leader—China, demonstrating how closely the country's leaders ascribed to Western influence after only a few decades. Domestic dynamics within Japan also demonstrate how well-informed Japan's oligarchy had become in international relations. By the end of the Korea campaign in 1895, the Japanese Premier, Foreign Minister, and War Minister recognized that Japan had become "unpopular" and were "anxious to respect foreign rights and to conclude peace as soon as possible."[169] In contrast, the Japanese public wanted the war to continue until "the Japanese flag was planted in Peking."[170] The

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[164] Ibid., *117–118.*

[165] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy,* 37.

[166] Ibid., 37.

[167] Ibid., 38.

[168] Irye, "Japan's Drive to Great Power Status," 761–772.

[169] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy,* 39.

[170] Ibid., 39.

oligarchy demonstrated a measure of restraint in squashing the original plan to invade Korea and in how they ended the Sino-Japanese War. This shows that not only did the oligarchy seek and retain a fairly accurate understanding of the rules by which world powers played, but they could also enforce decisions independently of popular opinion.

E. TRIPLE INTERVENTION AND REGIONAL-CENTRIC THINKING

Japan's aggressive foreign policy toward Korea and China is inextricably linked to new understandings of Asia in Meiji Japan. Western countries remained the most powerful in Asia and reprimanded Meiji leaders for their decisions. This Triple Intervention showed that although Japan gained more respect with the ending of the unequal treaties, it was not as much as Japan wanted. Pre-existing political opinions in Japan primed the populace to grow angry about the results of the Sino-Japanese War.

The Japanese oligarchy failed to fully understand the rules by which Western powers interacted. To Japan's surprise and dismay, three of the great powers intervened at the end the Sino-Japanese War. Germany, Russia, and France pressured Japan to return the Liaodong peninsula to China by convincing the leaders that "trouble" would inevitably arise from Japan holding onto that land. Japan's leaders acquiesced despite knowing the unrest it would stir at home. Premier Ito Hirabumi "arranged for the emperor to announce the retrocession of Liaodong" to the Japanese people because his "rulings were beyond criticism."[171] Japan then used the large indemnities it gained to further develop its military capabilities.[172]

As with Britain's decision not to intervene initially, Germany, Russia, and France's decision to intervene after the war was to protect their individual interests. This demonstrates not only that Japan inaccurately predicted Western powers' decisions, but also that Japan's leaders had to give way to foreign relations beyond their control. One must conclude that Japan's oligarchy therefore proactively shaped as much of Japan's foreign affairs as possible yet begrudgingly acquiesced to Western demands when their

[171] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy,* 41.

[172] Ibid., 41.

predictions failed. While this acquiescence is reminiscent of the Shogun giving in to unequal trade treaties, the Meiji government's openness toward Western ideas had already unwittingly prepared the Japanese population to react differently.

The Triple Intervention ignited imperialistic Asian-centric thinking among the Japanese population. Before the Sino-Japanese War, undercurrents of "Asianism" had developed alongside nationalism in the "newly-politicized society."[173] Before the War, Asianism encompassed frustration with the government for devoutly embracing nad focusing on the West.[174] The ideology had gained enough traction that the government used Asianism as part of the official rhetoric justifying Japan beginning the Sino-Japanese War—Meiji leaders could now say they were focusing on Asia.[175] While advancing into other countries seemed like a natural development to the Japanese who intentionally mimicked the West to avoid being conquered, some Western powers were surprised. The three great intervening empires were "alarm[ed] at the quick tempo of Japanese expansionism" and sought to "preserve as much of China as possible for their own exploitation."[176] This evidence of Western surprise—The Triple Intervention—was itself a surprise to the Japanese. The fact that it was combined with self-serving goals must have seemed to the Japanese like Westerners were unwilling to respect others, no matter how "modern" the state. The Japanese interpreted this to mean that regardless of how much Japan self-strengthened and transformed, the Western powers continued to play a zero-sum power game.[177] As a result, the Triple Intervention changed the Asianism and nationalism that already existed. Some Japanese began advocating "Pan-Asianinsm" in which Japan had both the means and responsibility to guide Asians into the future while protecting them from the West.[178]

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[173] Irye, "Japan's Drive to Great Power Status," 772.

[174] Ibid., 753–757.

[175] Ibid., 765–769.

[176] Ibid., 768.

[177] Irye, "Japan's Drive to Great Power Status," 769.

[178] Ibid., 773.

F. CONCLUSION

Meiji Japan emerged in an age when there were two strategic options: either be an imperialist or be colonized. Meiji leaders chose to model Japan's foreign policy after imperialist Western behaviors and successfully implemented a top-down revolution. Because of their leadership, Japan responded to the Western threat by emphasizing the importance of foreign affairs, mimicking Western ideas of boundary-making, and negotiating treaties with dignity. These reforms put Meiji Japan in a position to behave imperialistically, annexing non-Japanese people in the Ryukyus, Taiwan, and Korea. This produced mixed reactions from Western powers.

The 1902 Anglo-Japanese Alliance shows British recognition of Japan as the major regional player.[179] Japanese efforts to understand and behave like Western powers mostly succeeded—Japan remained independent and became more powerful than its neighbors. The Alliance shows how far Japan had come because it specifically demonstrates that Japan had earned a measure of respect beyond trade. In a sense, Meiji Japan's leaders surpassed their goal for overturning the treaties that had brought shame, a coup, and civil war.

The Triple Intervention exemplifies negative Western reactions to Japan's foreign policy reforms. It intensified anti-Western and imperialist sentiments among the Japanese. This culminated in the Japanese population and leadership uniting behind the idea of Japan asserting itself regionally. The military reforms of early and middle Meiji Japan ultimately facilitated Japan's new take on foreign affairs.

[179] Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy*, 64–68.

III. MEIJI JAPAN'S MILITARY REFORMS

A. INTRODUCTION

Important changes in Meiji Japan extended beyond nurturing a different understanding of foreign affairs. One of the most impactful categories of Meiji reforms were reforms related to the military. Meiji Japan existed because Japanese elites feared that a weak Japan increased the likelihood of the country's demise. Meiji leaders thus primarily concerned themselves with "capacity to preserve the nation's independence."[180] The Tokugawa Era had famous military elements, yet those elements could not compete with the late 1800s Western militaries. Meiji leaders therefore kept military strength as "the bedrock of power…. albeit in a new guise."[181] They achieved this new guise by changing military fundamentals in personnel and equipment to thoroughly align with Western examples before engaging in conflicts. They also slowly altered Japanese attitudes toward the West. They found these changes sometimes difficult to implement and learned considerable lessons from the Satsuma Rebellion and the need for domestic control. However, these changes were nonetheless worthwhile as they helped Meiji leaders steadily achieve a top-down revolution.

B. BACKGROUND

Meiji reforms affected the foundation of Tokugawa power: the military. Tokugawa military traditions had feudal personnel structures, less advanced military equipment, and a defensive attitude toward the world. The Tokugawa Shogunates continued their predecessors' military habit of reserving military membership for a warrior class, specifically excluding most of the population. Such policies likely arose in reaction to powerful peasant revolts in the 1400s. Peasants in the prefeudal and early

[180] Roger F. Hacket, "The Meiji Leaders and Modernization: The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," in *Changing Japanese Attitudes Towards Modernization*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 244.

[181] Meirion and Susie Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun* (New York: Random House, 1991), 20.

feudal times had arms to defend their land. When feudalism took root, the lords and higher leadership realized they could only sustain their positions if they disarmed the peasants. Toyotomi Hideyoshi—the predecessor to Japan's first Shogun—actually instigated a "Great Sword Hunt" in 1587 that removed peasants from militaristic activities.[182]

Foreign ideas and interactions had little influence in Japan before Perry's arrival. The Tokugawa attitude toward the rest of the world fits into one phrase: "closed country."[183] Not only was Tokugawa Japan's knowledge of the West mainly limited to annual Dutch reports to the government about world events, the country's regional foreign relations did not extend far beyond trade.[184] Domestic feudal military units thus did not interact in concert, on a large scale, or with foreign state actors. Though military equipment included firearms, the domestic focus eliminated any need for equipment like large naval vessels to transport military units off the islands.[185]

Japanese military changes took root in the years leading up to and during the Restoration itself. In the Tokugawa Era, the Japanese learned from the lessons of China's Opium Wars through both Dutch and Chinese contacts. There is literary evidence of this as early as 1843.[186] By the time a Western military took an interest in Japan, the local elite had learned from the tales of Western military interactions with China. A decade later, Commodore Matthew Perry arrived with the United States' Navy.[187] Even if Perry had not sparked a civil disagreement in Japan, external influences and an internal chain of events had already begun that would inevitably change the country. Just one year after

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[182] E. Herbert Norman, "Soldier and Peasant in Japan: The Origins of Conscription," *Pacific Affairs* 16, no.1 (March1943): 49.

[183] Marius B. Jansen, "Japan in the Early Nineteenth Century," in *The Cambridge History of Japan: Volume 5 The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge, NJ: Cambridge University Press: 1989), 88.

[184] Ibid., 87–89.

[185]David C. Evans and Mark Peattie, *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics, and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1887–1941* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press), Kindle Edition, locations 411–434.

[186] Norman, "Soldier and Peasant in Japan," 48.

[187] Ibid., 48.

Perry arrived, a Russian mission arrived with a similar purpose to Perry's.[188] The Japanese did not make the Chinese mistake of trying to repel Western militaries by force. Instead, the Japanese elite—both Shogunate forces and insubordinate lords—began a snowball process of learning quickly from every interaction. Many elites within Japan recognized that Western militaries played key roles in the Asian power balance. Changing Japan's military was a natural reaction to survive the striking and new power balance.

Before facing mutiny, the Shogun engaged in a scheme to adapt in the face of Western militaries. The Shogunate began to increase knowledge and possession of Western military technology from the Dutch after the first Opium War.[189] Then, the Shogun hired a French military mission within a few years of acquiescing to Perry's demands. French Captain Jules Brunet arrived in 1865 and began to advise military reforms.[190][191]

The mutineers who eventually overthrew the Shogun came from the Choshu and Satsuma regions, and evidence of their military reforms extends back to Perry's arrival. The Satsuma leader had personnel study a rifle that Americans showed to the Shogun.[192] The Satsuma clan was one of the most powerful in the country and Japanese smiths had competently produced firearms for centuries.[193] The most powerful clan did not *need* to study another variation of a weapon that was only a moderately effective compared to other military technology at the time. The Satsuma leader taking an opportunity to study a new rifle design demonstrates how committed Japanese leaders were to having military strength. Western technology inclusion into the Tokugawa military was pivotal in that it allowed relatively untrained individuals to be as effective militarily as well-trained

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[188] Norman, "Soldier and Peasant in Japan," 48.

[189] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun,* 8.

[190] Ibid., 15.

[191] Ibid., 16.

[192] Ibid., 11.

[193] Samuel Hawley, *The Imjin War: Japan's Sixteenth-Century Invasion of Korea and Attempt to Conquer China* (n.p. Conquistador Press, 2014), 4–6.

samurai. This Tokugawa military reform became fundamental in the struggle that began the Meiji Era.[194] The Choshu and Satsuma clans trained with Western arms after Perry's visits and used them to help defeat the Shogunate forces.

Aside from weaponry, the opposition forces also organized their fighting forces differently. The Kiheitai was a fighting unit in Choshu comprised of both Samurai and peasants from multiple classes. Choshu leadership established this unit in 1863, and this group was one of the main fighting groups in the Meiji Restoration. They demonstrated that rebellious clans accomplished the first meaningful military reform before the Shogun. The men involved would become the most influential with later Meiji military reforms, particularly Omura Masujiro and Yamagata Aritomo. This is significant because by incorporating more than the Samurai, they "cut to the very root of feudalism…thus…called for a new social organization. Kiheitai represented a kind of peasant revolt controlled from above."[195] Yamagata Aritomo himself participated in the Kiheitai.[196] In these foundational years of the Meiji Era, an eccentric thinker named Shoin Yoshida emerged with a vision of a powerful imperial army based on "Yamato Damashii," or the national spirit of Japan.[197] Yamagata later made this vision a reality as he maintained prominence in the Meiji Era that followed.

C. PERSONNEL

Like many reforms constituted Meiji Japan's top-down revolution, military changes began with its people. The Meiji oligarchy made reforms regarding military personnel because feudal militaries were inferior to their contemporary Western militaries in numbers, tactics, and overall effectiveness. Without large numbers of people who are well-trained in modern tactics, funding and equipment are useless. Teaching and controlling personnel on a vast scale required implementing training programs, new command and control structures, and reshaping social aspects of the military. Two

[194] Hacket, "The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," 251.

[195] Norman, "Soldier and Peasant in Japan," 60–61.

[196] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun,* 12–13.

[197] Ibid., 9.

members of the Meiji oligarchy—Omura Masujiro and Yamagata Aritomo—were particularly influential in implementing and continuing military personnel reforms. Their changes ultimately shaped not only military personnel, but also much of the populace.

1. Leaders

Omura Masujiro was one of the forbearers of the Restoration. Yamagata Aritomo was a general participant and follower. Then in 1869, Omura Masujiro was assassinated.[198] Omura was Vice Minister of War by that time and had taken a controversial stance on army personnel issues.[199] He was assassinated because he began the process of general conscription.[200] Yamagata replaced Omura as Vice Minister of War the next year upon return from an overseas tour.[201] Yamagata's time as part of Choshu's revolt efforts shaped his views to resemble Omura's in many ways. However, he was more successful than his predecessor. Between 1868 and 1890, "Yamagata and the other Meiji leaders had splintered a tradition of military-civil relations spanning two millennia."[202] Their changes centralized the military and society under a Western-style constitution while implementing increasingly strict control of the military.

Yamagata formed initial military-esque entities that foreshadowed the conscription-based system to come. In March 1868, Satsuma troops and some others became a guard unit for the early form of central government called the "Court Bureau." Though this did not last, the approximately 400 men were the first armed men to work for the new national-level government.[203] The new government later created the Imperial Guard in 1871. Three of the most powerful daimyos supplied approximately 10,000 men in total.[204] This second group of armed men provided the preliminary basis for both the

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198 Norman, "Soldier and Peasant in Japan," 47.

199 Ibid., 47.

200 Ibid., 63.

201 Hacket, "The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," 251.

202 Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun,* 41.

203 Hacket, "The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," 252.

204 Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun,* 21.

future army and police forces.[205] Yamagata eventually steered national politics to create an Army Service Corps in 1888.[206]

2. Conscription

The new Meiji leaders supported reforms that broke with Tokugawa-era traditions. Many leaders supported universal conscription. Among these supporters in the Meiji leadership was Saigo Takamore—an important figure in a later revolt against change. That not only the young Meiji leaders but also a tradition-oriented person like Saigo liked the idea of melding the worlds of military and populace demonstrates its appeal. Ideas supporting conscription emerged late in the Tokugawa Era. Pro-conscription writers in that time seemed to think that the feudal lords could groom peasants to have a loyal enough mentality not to revolt. They stressed that the concept was rooted in "Japanese historical tradition."[207] They referred to this idea as the "nohei system" and advocated that the Shogun's contemporary system was a hindrance.[208] Meiji leaders supported the initial Restoration to achieve a country that could withstand the West. They knew that drastic change was a necessary element to strength and success. Increasing the military's strength by increasing the manpower seemed like it was worth the risk that it may damage other aspects of the Japanese way of life.

While Omura Masujiro did not conceive the idea of a conscription army for Japan, he did propel the idea forward. Before the Tokugawa Era, peasants were involved in armed violence. Some people during the Tokugawa Era formed a mixed consensus about whether this was a good idea. They referred to these peasant-soldiers as "nohei'.[209] Those writers who favored the old idea created a nostalgic movement by the end of the Tokugawa Era.[210] Those in favor of the conscription specifically pointed to the peasant-

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[205] Hacket, "The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," 252–253.

[206] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 50.

[207] Ibid., 23.

[208] Norman, "Soldier and Peasant in Japan," 51–57.

[209] Ibid., 48.

[210] Ibid., 50.

soldiers who predated the Tokugawa Era. The idea gained so much momentum that the Tokugawa government toyed with the idea of reforming the military to include peasants, but eventually rejected it.[211] Their influence culminated with Meiji leaders who implemented the Conscription Act of November 28, 1872.[212]

When the Meiji leadership finally introduced new concepts to military service in 1872, they met resistance. Not only was including peasants an unusual move, they had been gradually emphasizing fighting men's loyalty to the national level instead of the clan level. Initially, the examiners who implemented the first Conscription Act exercised some of their own judgement instead of strictly following policy. Thus, in practice they often exempted "upper-class youths."[213] The Act was understandably unpopular because there was no inherent reason to think that being forced to serve outside of their traditional roles as an honor. Instead, they saw it as a "burden that took the fittest young men from the land and threatened them with unknown rigors."[214] Then in 1876, Meiji leadership made their experimental Army more legitimate by removing the samurai's right to bear swords. In addition, the government ended traditional samurai stipends. Though these moves might have made the Army more prestigious, it initially caused problems by negatively impacting the social order. This new rule made many samurai outside of the new military feel that the government took their "remaining shreds of both status and security."[215]

Disgruntled samurai loyal to their clans led the Satsuma Rebellion in 1877.[216] The Imperial army, with its new conscript system, beat the samurai fighting this rebellion. Yamagata called for an advance of funds during the conflict so that the national army could prevail, but the government did not have the money. Despite lack of funds, the army that employed peasant conscripts and Western methods won. As a result, the Meiji

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[211] Norman, "Soldier and Peasant in Japan," 58–61.

[212] Ibid., 47.

[213] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 22–23.

[214] Ibid., 23.

[215] Ibid., 28.

[216] Ibid., 30–32.

leadership could clearly see that they had to embrace Western methods above traditional Japanese military methods.

3. Training

The Meiji leaders also gradually reformed the training and planning systems based on Western examples and advice. Omura began this series of events as Vice Minister of War. The former Shogun arranged for French advisors to train some of his troops. Omura took advantage of this and went a step further by having some of those officers establish "a military school in Kyoto."[217] Western societies have long histories of military academies, and so this step allowed the Meiji military to align more quickly with Western military competence. Thus, Omura allowed not only Western lessons and personnel to bleed into the Japanese military, but also an institution type. Part of this initial training scheme included the idea that officer corps consisting of Western-trained samurai and an enlisted corps consisting of "the population at large."[218] While a similar concept existed in some Western militaries, Omura likely favored it because it provided some measure of consistency in Japanese societal relations. As the new Meiji military continued to develop, social relations within the military added the "glue." Army units "reinforced the family idea in its dealings with new recruits" because unit commanders corresponded with recruits' families before they became part of a unit.[219] This tight familial and communal relationship added requisite continuity since the Samurai ceased to be a specially-privileged class. In such a regionalized country, communal loyalty was a pre-existing aspect of life, and so….

Meiji leaders exposed the officer corps even more to Western ideas, and in 1872, they invited a second French mission group. This one, possibly like the group that the Shogun invited, focused on small-unit training and fighting spirit.[220] This mission trained officers and established a system of military schools in Japan. In 1873, the French helped

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[217] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 20.

[218] Ibid., 20.

[219] Ibid., 41.

[220] Ibid., 24.

establish the Toyoma school to produce non-commissioned officers (NCO's) to train the "rank and file."[221] These types of officers usually specialized in a specific military capability, thus compartmentalizing the army. By adding specialized skills to the new national military, Meiji leadership allowed NCOs and their subordinate trainees to develop greater pride in their service. By 1875, the French advisors helped found a Japanese military academy. This school provided a "science-based education virtually unattainable elsewhere" in Japan and produced a "unitary" officer corps.[222] Like the NCO's, academy graduate likely felt pride in being among the first to use a science-based education in service of the emperor. One of the final steps that Meiji leaders took to professionalize the military occurred in 1883. They established a staff college with foreign instructors, including Prussian Major Jacob Meckel who arrived by 1885. By developing a staff college and employing foreigners from countries with wartime experience, Meiji leaders arranged training from which their military could learn lessons from foreign wars without enduring them. By diversifying advisors beyond French nationals, the new Meiji military learned concepts that apply beyond the unit-level. For example, Major Meckel taught large scale operational planning. One of Meiji Japan's key military improvements whose legacy still exists is the extensive railway network—Meckel emphasized improved transportation as a necessity for large operations. Japan's continued invitations to foreign advisors also meant that Meiji leaders exposed themselves to foreign mindsets about strategic threats. An example being that Major Jacob Meckel proposed that Korea was a "dagger"-like threat to Japan, encouraging top military personnel attending the staff college to think aggressively.[223]

4. Command & Control within the Battlespace

Aside from intentionally infusing foreign lessons, Meiji military leaders also learned lessons from the domestic arena. The Satsuma Rebellion taught Meiji leadership to separate the command and control functions from administrative functions. Generals

[221] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 24.

[222] Ibid.

[223] Ibid., 48–49.

should execute command and control better than an enemy to succeed in a conflict. The new conscript system required a new control system. The old control system was inherent in the feudal military structure—the shogun controlled lords who in turn controlled samurai. A conscript system under central government direction lacked mobile or focused command and control. Japan had not faced a foreign enemy in a full-scale war, so leaders applied a lesson from the recent Prussian victory over France. Meiji leadership replicated the Prussian idea of a separate "staff bureau" to control an active battlespace, so that the Ministry could continue its focus on administrative duties.[224]

5. Discipline Outside of the Battlespace

Controlling troops outside of a battlespace also became important. The government accomplished this by linking the nation, military, and imperial institution more closely. Yamagata intentionally molded a specific spirit into the military-Bushido—to help in this respect.[225] First, in 1872, he introduced "Tokuho" or the Soldier's Code., then the Admonition to Soldiers in 1878.[226] In 1882, the Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors demanded "absolute loyalty to Emperor" and "sacred obligations."[227] New recruits liked this.[228] The Emperor also contributed to this development by promising to "worship at Yasukuni the "nation-protecting" Kami [spirit] of soldiers who died in his service."[229] It was no longer the government trying to make the military loyal to the Emperor. The Emperor was now also loyal to the military. Later that year, the military police were established. Yamagata and the Emperor provided definition and infused pride in a military that did not exist a generation earlier. Yamagata partly did this in an effort to keep the popular rights movement from tainting military personnel. This was a vast political movement in which people throughout society felt

[224] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 29–33.

[225] Ibid., 24.

[226] Ibid.

[227] Ibid., 25.

[228] Ibid.

[229] Ibid.

empowered to explore political ideas from around the globe, form large groups to discuss their thoughts, and demand various changes from the government. From the government's perspective, the movement was a disruptive consequence of aligning Japan with Western influences.[230] As a result of instilling an ethos in the military that ran counter to the popular rights movement, Yamagata inserted a self-controlling mechanism into the military.[231]

6. Social Impacts

Unifying troops had the additional effect of unifying the populace. One positive—and possibly unintended—consequence of a conscription-based military was that it affected the social fabric by introducing the young men to an "urban environment with Western tools and routines" as well as "reading, writing, and technical skills."[232] In exposing military men to Western things, a good portion of the population came to see the West as less barbaric than previous generations. Because these men from across Japan, their shared "unique and universal experience" linked not only them, but also their communities to the national level.[233] As these men returned to their families after military service, the concept of supreme loyalty to the emperor above a daimyo must have seemed less and less strange as time went on.

Imperial Rescript also abolished the han (Tokugawa—Era domains) in 1871, further building the nation toward unity.[234] Prefectures with newly-drawn borders replaced them.[235] The Meiji government did this to supplant feudal militaries with a single national military. This same action also officially ended the feudal social order.[236] The Meiji government successfully used the new military to crush the revolts that ensued

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[230] Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan,* 80–85.

[231] Hacket, "The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," 259–260.

[232] Ibid., 257.

[233] Ibid., 255–257.

[234] Ibid., 245.

[235] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun,* 22.

[236] Hacket, "The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," 253.

in the 1880s. Ending these revolts boosted the central government's and the new prefectures' legitimacy.[237]

Yamagata sought to further cement the new social order and curtail the popular rights movement itself by implementing controls on civilian life.[238] He made local government "a form of national service" more than "a vehicle for political expression."[239] He restructured the police to "to give central government tighter control." The police also received a training school based on the German model.[240] Yamagata essentially created a whole "local government system" based on the German system to provide political and military stability throughout the country.[241]

D. FUNDING AND EQUIPMENT

The Meiji oligarchy understood the connection between reliable, advanced military equipment and its manufacturers By investing in domestic and technologically advanced military hardware fabrication, they developed industries that could supply military resources and a military that perpetually supported the associated industries. Government investment in arsenals, shipyards, factories, and metalworking created a system that provided for an ever-increasing military-industrial apparatus.

1. Ideas

The Satsuma Rebellion reinforced an old idea: government funding is important for military success. Although the Imperial Army triumphed, Yamagata initially called for an advance of funds. The government lacked money and thus so did the military. This could have influenced a terrible outcome if the Imperial Army faced a more formidable foe.[242] From the start of the Meiji Restoration, the new leadership "was sensitive to the

[237] Hacket, "The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," 247.

[238] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun,* 36.

[239] Ibid., 38.

[240] Ibid.

[241] Hacket, "The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," 246.

[242] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun,* 29–33.

interrelatedness of military requirements, political reforms, economic development, and other aspects of modernization."[243] Meiji leadership came to lean on the idea of Fukoku Kyohei, which means "rich nation, strong army," and later became a central idea of Meiji Era industrialization.[244] The original idea had deep roots: it began in China and existed as far back as 338 BC. Fukuzawa Yukichi, a particularly influential late Tokugawa scholar, along with early Meiji scholars, embraced this idea.[245]

Meiji Japan also emerged at a time when industrialization and free market principles ruled Western interactions. Since Meiji leaders looked to Western concepts for ways to improve Japan, they likely faced the idea that "Japan, with its cheap and abundant labor, would specialize in the low-tech, labor-intensive industries such as textiles."[246] Meiji leaders did not hold fast to such industries for inherent comparative advantage. Instead, they created it by "promot[ing] industries on which to build a great industrial and technological power."[247] Creating comparative advantage in this fashion may have been an unintended consequence of pursuing military strength headlong. Nonetheless, they realized Freidrich List's ideas of creating comparative advantage and that "the constant danger of war requires each nation to maintain its productive capacity."[248] Meiji leaders innovated the military enough to jump-start the Japanese economy, aligning with economic theories that suggested innovation could also "drive" a capitalist economy.[249]

This new economic landscape had a symbiotic relationship with the military investments which started it. Military build-up helped spawn military-related industries. The industries became robust enough to help provide supplies and tax revenue for

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[243] Hacket, "The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," 250.

[244] Richard J. Samuels, *Rich Nation, Strong Army* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 35.

[245] Ibid., 34–36.

[246] Ibid., 14.

[247] Ibid.

[248] Ibid., 6.

[249] Ibid., 13–14.

continued investment, especially for repairs after conflicts and capital-intensive naval endeavors.

2. How The Symbiotic Relationship Worked

Meiji military leaders nurtured a symbiotic relationship between the military and industrial development that worked well. Determination to build the military helped the economy because it "provided demand necessary for … the growth of … struggling private firms in the shipbuilding, machinery and machine-tool industries."[250] Though Yamagata initially focused the military on domestic matters, he later decided to use the military in external warfare. Preparing for this change helped develop the economy, which in turn strengthened the military to be more formidable. Strengthening the military and using it to ward off foreign threats meant that it required more and improved continued resources. The central government could not provide the Imperial Army with additional funding, though it helped to create an economy that could. The government invested in industries that supported the military, and these industries developed to the point where they could support the government with money and the military with additional supplies. Some industries were able to support both the government and military in later years precisely because the military leadership—as part of the government—kept requesting resources.

Much initial government investment in military-related industries focused on hardware. Providing the military with technologically advanced equipment "was the principal motivation behind creating and expanding arsenals to the publicly-financed shipyards and modern factories which acted as highly effective centers for the absorption and dissemination of Western technologies and skills."[251] The government urged "indigenization" of advanced foreign technologies with military applications.[252] The government began work on Western-style arsenals and shipyards in 1871. Indigenization

[250] Kozo Yamamura, "Success Illgotten? The Role of Meiji Militarism in Japan's Technological Progress," *The Journal of Economic History* 37, no.1 (March 1977): 116–118.

[251] Yamamura, "Japan's Technological Progress," 113.

[252] Samuels, *Rich Nation, Strong Army*, 42–44.

was also evident in the areas of machinery and iron and steel creation.[253] This trend spurred civilian factory development before and during the coming wars.[254] The government's massive military expenditures had the added benefit of facilitating the development of close relations between military technological endeavors and civilian businesses.

Meiji Japan reaped the benefits of these investments and close relationships in the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars. If Japan had not invested in shipyards for naval vessels and arsenals for weapons early, the Japanese Navy would not have been able to execute their superior tactics, command, and control over the Chinese in Sino-Japanese War.[255] By spurring civilian factory development before the Russo-Japanese War, private business saved the Japanese military. As this second war faded into winter, the Japanese army had a "critical shortages of shells."[256] Businesses that produced shells quickly responded with additional weapons to abate the "crisis."[257] Stronger civilian businesses were also able to produce greater tax revenue for the central government as they grew.

The government also invested in the equally important raw materials with which to make technologically advanced military hardware. Iron and steel were as critical for military equipment in the late 1800s as today. Meiji leaders continued the pursuit for basic military materials that began in the late Tokugawa Era. The Saga lord initiated steel production in 1850 by "buil[ding] the first reverberating furnace … to forge cannon."[258] Then in 1854, one year after Perry's arrival and the Western threat became clear, "the Satsuma daimyo ordered construction of Japan's first modern blast furnace…based on Dutch design."[259] Twenty years later, the Meiji government established an Ironworks in Iwate Prefecture. Eventually, iron from this facility "was equal to the world's best…and

[253] Samuels, *Rich Nation, Strong Army*, 72.

[254] Yamamura, "Japan's Technological Progress," 114–117.

[255] Ibid., 117–120.

[256] Ibid., 121.

[257] Ibid.

[258] Samuels, *Rich Nation, Strong Army*, 72.

[259] Ibid., 72.

usable for military purposes."[260] Despite such progress, the government pushed the industry more because its leaders were concerned that high import volumes of these critical military materials put Japan at a disadvantage by overreliance on foreign countries. Even with sites like the Iwate Ironworks, "imported iron and steel still accounted for four-fifths of consumption"[261] into the late 1880s. The government continued to steer the metalwork industry to mitigate the problem. For example, in 1890, the Navy placed "a five-ton open hearth furnace at the Yokosuka arsenal."[262] By the time the Japanese won the Sino-Japanese War a few years later and proved itself a possible future threat, Western powers ceased to give Japan weapons. This denial hastened the Meiji government's pursuit of "self-sufficiency." Japan could then rely on domestic production because its leaders had developed the industries associated with military hardware over several decades.

This period saw enough economic prosperity that some company owners amassed enough wealth to form a distinct group within the merchant class: Zaibatsu.[263] Despite the initially fruitful relationship between the military and its supporting industries, a large shortfall emerged. Many in the government were not inclined to fund ever-increasing military needs and tried to freeze expenditures. The chief Meiji leader- the Emperor- intervened and ensured that the government provided full support to military funding. In 1892, the Emperor "offered 300,000 yen from the Imperial purse" for six years "toward the navy's expansion program; and he ordered all government officials to make a "donation" of 10% of their salaries."[264] This highly-visible government investment in the military continued the symbiotic cycle. The Japanese triumph over China in 1895 proved government investment to be the right course of action and shifted the overall Japanese "attitude toward the goal of nation's security."[265]

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[260] Samuels, *Rich Nation, Strong Army*, 72.

[261] Ibid.

[262] Ibid., 72.

[263] Ibid., 40.

[264] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 42.

[265] Hacket, "The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," 249.

E. ATTITUDE TOWARD THE WEST

A secondary effect which occurred as part of the other Meiji military reforms was Japan's changing attitude toward the West. Eventually, Meiji leaders like Yamagata learned to transform animosity toward the West that was prevalent in the Tokugawa Era. This animosity morphed into voluntary learning about multiple Western examples to catapult Japanese military into great strength. This changing attitude toward the Western world was a crucial step to allowing Meiji Japan to take advantage of Western knowledge.

1. Open-Mindedness

The Opium Wars and Perry's arrival impacted Tokugawa elites who became Meiji leaders beyond igniting a drive to Western-style military strength. Western interactions impressed upon Meiji leaders a secondary goal "to be accepted as a civilized nation."[266] This was a stark change from years of prideful isolation. Yamagata angrily described Westerners as inferior people in his youth.[267] By the time he returned from an overseas tour in 1870,[268] the expedition group was "infused with … progressive notions."[269] A willingness to engage with and learn about Western cultures launched multiple government-funded overseas missions, one of which included a trip to a place as obscure as a newly-founded capital city in the new outskirts of the United States—Sacramento.[270]

2. Technology

Meiji leaders quickly advanced Japanese military technology via their decision to import Western concepts. For example, they pursued domestic steel production with Dutch methods and new machinery for factories. These provided foundations for future

[266] Hacket, "The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," 245.

[267] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun,* 11–13.

[268] Hacket, "The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," 251.

[269] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun,* 21.

[270] Hacket, "The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," 245.

military equipment production.[271] Both Shogunate and future Meiji leadership fervently learned about Western weapons before the Restoration. The Shogunate began to increase knowledge and possession of such technology from the Dutch after the first Opium War[272] and the Satsuma clan lord studied a rifle that arrived with Perry.[273] Still before the Restoration, in 1863, Japan experienced how lethal a Western attack could be after Americans, French, and Dutch retaliated for an attack on their ships at Shimonoseki.[274] Not only did the Japanese learn not to attack the West outright while militarily inferior, the event cemented a respect for Western technology that blossomed during Meiji reforms.

3. Training

By fervently embracing Western training, Meiji leaders turned a potential disaster to their advantage. The Tokugawa Era did not provide Meiji leaders with a preliminary national army personnel system. Instead of trying to develop indigenous training models that taught introduced new personnel to effective but foreign military ideas, Meiji leaders borrowed from other countries. Personnel training is one of the most difficult and painful military aspects to adjust because it requires people to change the way they perceive their roles. By sidestepping the training development process, Meiji leaders ensured that military participants had to change their perceptions of their roles as little as necessary. In 1872, the Meiji leadership issued an imperial mandate that effectively directed the military to import and adopt as many aspects of Western training systems as possible.[275] That same year, the government invited another French military advisory mission to overlay French tactical training concepts onto small units.[276] This mission trained officers and established a system of military schools resembling those in France,

[271] Yamamura, "Japan's Technological Progress," 114–115.

[272] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun,* 8.

[273] Ibid., 11.

[274] Ibid., 21.

[275] Norman, "Soldier and Peasant in Japan," 47.

[276] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun,* 24.

including one that transplanted the concept of NCO's into the Japanese Army.[277] Another school essentially replicated the French Army Academy and instilled Western scientific ideas into future Japanese officers.[278]

By blindly and extensively using Western ideas to change the country, Meiji leaders unexpectedly invited the populace to voice a cornucopia of political views. The Freedom and Popular Rights movement peaked in the 1870s and appealed to the newly-created national military that did not yet have a solid identity. The Meiji oligarchy saw this as detrimental to national as well as military stability. The oligarchy's new negative attitudes toward this aspect of Western cultures led them to firmly guide the military in a different direction. Yamagata countered this problem by creating a military identity that steered recruits more toward the central government than the West and politics.[279] This identity became part of the training process that produced and governed military behavior and ethos.

4. Advisors

The Meiji oligarchy eventually learned that a mix of Western advisors provided the most knowledge about military engagements and therefore could propel the Imperial Military toward strength. Neither Dutch stories, French missions, nor later Prussian advisors alone provided the necessary kaleidoscope of knowledge. The combination of Dutch tales explaining how Western militaries triumphed over Asian ones, French emphasis on small unit cohesion, and Prussian strategic insight made the Meiji military competitive on an international scale. For example, Prussian insights taught staff college students how to plan large scale operations and the necessity of efficient transportation infrastructure, storage, and rationing.[280] Without these skills, the newly centralized Meiji military could not effectively employ the French-trained small units.

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[277] Ibid.

[278] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun,* 24.

[279] Hacket, "The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," 258.

[280] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun,* 48–50.

F. TURN TO EXTERNAL FOCUS

The most impactful Meiji military reform was turning the military focus to foreign affairs.[281] Yamagata allowed the military to develop enduring strengths by directing it to develop its foundation inside the country first, such as training and technology. This foundation meant little if the government would not use it to impact Japan's international affairs, since Meiji leaders' primary goal was security in the international area. For example, Japanese leaders were hesitant to install extensive railways for fear that invading countries might use them. Then, foreign advisors counseled Japanese leadership to think about railways as offensive tools rather than defensive weaknesses. The promising, newly created and well-trained military could not bring about Japan's international goals if it could not quickly leave the country.[282] This external focus thus provided additional advantages to the military and made Japan "more active" in international affairs.[283]

In 1873, leaders with exposure to the West squashed plans to invade Korea in favor of solidifying domestic issues.[284] At that time, however, China could no longer support Korea because of its loss in the Second Opium War. By the 1880s, Russian expansion toward an unsupported Korea aligned with Japanese military preparedness. Prussian advisor—Major Meckel—by this time voiced the potential threat that Korea posed to Japan. This Western military expert's opinion probably provided one of the last necessary pieces of motivation for Yamagata to employ the military outside Japan. When Yamagata gave his inaugural speech as Prime Minister in 1890 he publicly shifted the country's military vision to look externally. He did this by announcing Japan's lines of sovereignty and advantage that extended beyond Japanese shores (to where did they go?).[285] Later that year, Japan hosted an international ceremony and participated in mock

[281] Hacket, "The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," 247.

[282] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 48–50.

[283] Hacket, "The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," 248.

[284] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 27.

[285] Hacket, "The Case of Yamagata Aritomo," 248.

battles to explicitly show their military to the world.[286] Shifting the military to execute Japan's international goals demonstrated well-timed finesse that no other East Asian country achieved at the time. This shift began a cycle of positive effects that led Meiji Japan to win its first military engagement, which brought popular support and further fueled domestic military build-up.[287]

G. CONCLUSION

Japan's military reforms in the Meiji Era culminated in a surprising success. Tokugawa Japan's military consisted of personnel organizations and armaments that were pieces of compartmented social structures. The armament alone meant that Tokugawa Japan lacked naval power and land forces had poor equipment, training, and structure. The Tokugawa military would likely have suffered a worse defeat at the hands of Western powers than China had. Meiji leaders had the advantage of seeing from China's military troubles with the West that Japan needed to acquire military strength that was similar to Western countries. They set about studying and developing Japan's military to achieve this end by restructuring military personnel, revamping training pipelines and the chain of command, and invested in a symbiotic relationship between economic growth and military capabilities. When popular politic movements threatened ongoing military reforms, Yamagata geniously implemented self-imposed discipline among conscription soldiers by instilling them with a sense of national (?) pride. All of these reforms changed Japan's military into the opposite of what it had been under Tokugawa rule. The Meiji leaders accomplished these changes—some of which contradicted deeply rooted social constructs throughout the country—in less than three decades. This top-down revolution within the military gave Japan more options and credibility in its foreign policy agenda.

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[286] Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun,* 50.

[287] Yamamura, "Japan's Technological Progress," 126.

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IV. CONCLUSION

The Tokugawa dynasty's approach to foreign affairs failed to meet the threat posed by the West coming into the East. This placed pressure on Tokugawa leaders, which doubled under domestic discontent at Japan's response to the West. Meiji leaders were astonishingly successful at alleviating these pressures by making Japan's foreign affairs robust instead of non-existent like it had been in Tokugawa times. They changed how the population of an entire country behaved toward the outside world, which was necessary to implement the institutions that could withstand Western pressures.

During Meiji Japan, imperialism was one part of more general "expansionism" that captivated Western powers' foreign affairs strategies. Expansionism basically encompassed all means of gaining influence in foreign lands. Colonization and annexation were on one end of a spectrum that included trade and individual social relationships at the other end. The Japanese oligarchy employed many of these tools and ultimately gained a degree of respect the West. Meiji leaders learned to familiarize its population and Western audiences with each other, laying the groundwork for better state-state relations because the people enacting diplomatic ties did not seem so alien to one another.[288]

Meiji Japan's Foreign Ministers came to understand Western standards for respectable countries and followed suit in boundary-making, foreign trade, and then asserting itself regionally, namely in Korea. While this produced benefits like ending the humiliating unequal trade treaties, it also produced negative results like the Triple Intervention. Ultimately, however, the early and middle Meiji changes set Japan on course to sign its first alliance with a Western power within two years of the 20th century. That this first alliance was with Great Britain—a preeminent power in Europe—

[288] Akira Irye, "Japan's Drive to Great Power Status," in *The Cambridge History of Japan: Volume 5 The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge, NJ: Cambridge University Press: 1989), 758–759

underscored how powerful Japan had become. This clearly demonstrated that early and middle Meiji leadership had accomplished more milestones than it had setbacks.

Meiji military reforms managed to reshape feudal social structures to build political support while building a centralized military. These changes ultimately stabilized the Meiji government's hold on power while harnessing the populace's capacity to build one of the most instrumental tools in assertive foreign policy—a strong military. General conscription with centralized organization and training provided the baseline of military strength while nurtured industries provided the resources to arm it. Although the social changes instigated rebellions by confronting centuries of traditions, the untested Meiji state prevailed and in doing so inspired respect.

The Meiji oligarchs dissolved plans to invade Korea in the 1870s because they understood that the international relations environment would not support it. This demonstrated that Meiji leaders had made the first fundamental step in beneficial cooperation with the West. They were willing and successful in learning about the Western "rulebook" for international relations. Once they made the second fundamental step of emulating Western diplomatic and economic behavior, they correctly judged that world powers would tolerate a military assertive japan. Going into the 1890s, Japanese leaders included military options in foreign policy. Starting the Sino-Japanese War meant that Japan intended to challenge the power hierarchy in the region, positioning itself against Russia.[289] The speed with which the Japanese eventually invaded Korea "confirmed that advanced preparations had been made on a considerable scale."[290] That indicates that Japan's leaders not only knew that military conflict was coming, but had been building toward including such acts in its foreign affairs for some time. Each observation on Western foreign relations and changes to Japan's since 1868 maneuvered Japan into a position to challenge the new Asian hierarchy.

Meiji Japan's foreign policy cemented Japan as an imperialist power instead of a place for other empires to claim. Japan's foreign policy grew because the Meiji oligarchy

[289] Ian Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy 1869–1942* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1977), 37.

[290] Ibid.

intentionally learned about, attempted to change, and ultimately reversed how Japan interacted with sovereign and powerful Western countries. Part of Meiji leaders' genius was in simultaneously reforming the military. Once Japan had learned foreign policy skills that met the leadership's goals, Japan already had a military to support them. Japan succeeded so well at aligning foreign policies with international norms that it behaved imperialistically until it was forced to stop. Just like the Western powers from which it had learned, Japan ceased to be an imperialist country around the end of World War II. Studying how Meiji Japan successfully implemented a top-down revolution to survive international pressures lends gravity and context to international relations to this day.

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