



ST JOSEPH'S INSTITUTION INTERNATIONAL ^{Time?}

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Subject _____ Date 25/8

"The impact of social and cultural change in Meiji Japan was extensive." Discuss.

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Japan underwent the Meiji Restoration from 1868 to 1912 that transitioned Japan from the Tokugawa shogunate to ~~the~~ imperial rule under the Meiji Emperor. Meiji reforms used Western institutions as a basis of comparison and emulation, enacting social change and cultural revolution alongside other political, economic and military reforms centred around the slogan 'fukoku-kyohei'. Though Japanese society experienced cultural Westernisation and socio-economic transformation, the following essay will discuss its inability to deeply penetrate the traditional ^{cultural} ~~work~~ of society ~~is~~, instead preserving the trappings of a Shinto society.

good

The influx of Western cultural norms during the Meiji period transformed the Japanese way of life, though the cultural changes were concentrated within the urban demographic and failed to revolutionise traditional values. There was widespread adoption of Western ^{social} habits in urban Japan following the 1871-73 Iwakura Mission. Japanese began eating beef, the traditional chonmage hairstyle was abandoned for Western styles, and kimonos and obis were paired with Western shoes, suits and spectacles. ~~the~~ Western culture burgeoned from major foreign ports established in coastal cities like Yokohama and Kobe which pioneered the culture shock. This was reinforced by the rapid industrialisation that connected ~~at~~ major cities like Yokohama and Tokyo by telegraph (1869), accelerating the spread of cultural ^{isolationist foreign} change. In analysing, the Meiji government's abandonment of the Tokugawa sakoku policy structurally revolutionised Japan's engagement with Western culture, allowing for Westernisation to rapidly take root in urban Japanese culture, specifically in new professions like policemen, teachers and Meiji officials. The magnitude of cultural change was reinforced by 11,000 students being sent overseas, returning to Japan carrying Western ideals, suggesting cultural change being ingrained in the younger generation. However, upon critical analysis, the range of cultural change did not penetrate rural Japan where traditional farming and fishing professions experienced little change. Instead, cultural innovation was constrained among educated elite, limiting the scope geographically. Moreover, Westernisation incited rising cultural nationalism as backlash towards the perceived dilution of Japanese culture, manifesting in riots in Hiroshima (1871) and protests against the Meiji government's departure from the chonmage. Ultimately, while Meiji Japan experienced unprecedented openness towards Western culture, ^{change} ~~it~~ did not occur on a scale significant enough to uproot traditional values.

class system?

→ more evi. needed to show culture changes
consumption law → shift in class structure

Socio-economic reforms

~~Social~~ change in Meiji Japan facilitated the increased social mobility and equity within society, attempting to dismantle the feudal system and transition towards a merit-based society. The 1868 Charter Oath pledged meritocracy for all classes, ~~the~~ realised through the 1873 land tax that replaced its feudal ^{tokugawa} predecessor. Instead of taxing 40% of crop yield, land tax was restructured to assess the cash value of the land ^{rather than} instead of a fixed percentage. This equitable system was complemented by granting the right to private land ownership, issuing 10.9 million land certificates. Historian Pyle forwards the perspective of land tax being the most significant social change of the Meiji period. This is convincing as the land tax directly impacted a wide scale of 80% of the Japanese population who were peasant farmers. Restructuring the tax addressed structural inequality embedded within Japan's social order, shifting away from the feudal system that ^{previously} allowed domains like Choshu and Satsuma to prosper at expense of peasant welfare, towards a more equitable prefecture system. The land tax further formed the financial backbone of the Meiji government, funding the extensive railway building of 5000 miles (1906) ~~and~~ that encouraged urban migration. ~~The~~ Social class were further shifted through the establishment of a voting system in 1889, resulting in Japan holding her first General Election in 1890. This was complemented by the ranking of Samurai status, replacing the Samurai with a Western-based military in 1873 and removing the right to carry swords and receive government stipends in 1876. However upon critical analysis, the success of Japan's attempts ^{at} meritocratic and democratic reform were less ~~extensive~~ ^{extensive} than the land tax. Despite Japan appearing to spearhead democratic representation, the voting electorate was constrained to 1.13% of the population who ^{had to meet} ~~met~~ specific tax requirements, revealing ~~the~~ ^{the} superficiality of democracy. ~~As~~ Evidenced by the 1877 Satsuma Rebellion, there was an undercurrent of strong support within social elites to guard power, resulting in social change being unable to flourish on an unhindered scale.

Impact felt decades later? zaibatsu system?

Westernisation of education in the Meiji era succeeded in transforming the avenues for social mobility in Japan, but only superficially revolutionised the cultural outlook. Education system was reformed based on French and American models under advisor David Murray and by 1872 a mandatory national education of 4 years had been established. This was crucial in broadening access to education on a large scale, doubling enrollment ~~and~~ through 25,000 schools by 1875, with 96% of children receiving primary education by 1910. Changes to education heralded a pivotal shift in the social structure of Japan by reversing class restrictions, instead equalising access to opportunities for ^{social} empowerment previously restricted to the ^{scholar} Yangban class. This was pivotal as traditionally only wealthy scholar class could receive education required for political power, ~~so~~ hence ~~the~~ Meiji Japan sowed the seeds for long-term political representation of lower social classes such as how Hara Kei, a commoner,



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definitions?

91% primary educated.

became Prime Minister in 1918. The extensive social change can be substantiated by Japan's 100% literacy rate that surpassed the West, indicating at the rapidity and breadth with which they equalled education opportunities. However, upon critical analysis, the core of Japanese Shinto-based education failed to undergo significant cultural change. The learning of Western science and technology was prioritised in the nationwide drive towards industrialisation and military strength, embodied by nationalistic 'oitsuke oikose' and 'fukoku-kyohei' ^{slogans}. However, Western social ideals of liberalism and democracy failed to take root; instead, the 1890 Imperial Rescript urged loyalty to Shinto Confucianism, the state and the Emperor. Critically analysing, Meiji education intended to ingrain the Kobutei mindset of servitude to the state within the youth, concretising the Shinto cultural core. By ~~centring~~ making 'Wakoku Yosai' the focal point of reforms, Meiji Japan only superficially ~~de~~ ~~abandons~~ revolutionised their education institutions without changing their cultural nationalism.

Reforms to political governance ^{advanced} in ~~reflected~~ the rising social trend of democratic ideals, however public pressure was not strong enough to revert the militarist culture in Japanese politics and society. The 1870s Minken Movement in Japan saw surging support for democratic representation propelling to formation Itagaki's 1873 Public Party of Patriots and Okuma's People's Rights Movement (1875). Japan's social Westernisation fuelled the political trend towards representative governance, structurally transforming Japan's ^{governance} ~~pol~~ through the establishment of a cabinet in 1885 and Hirobumi as Prime Minister. The 1889 Constitution embodied the unprecedented recognition of civil rights and ^{on} departure from feudalism towards constitutional democracy. Upon analysing, while there was burgeoning support for liberal social freedom through democracy, the anchoring of political institutions in Shinto culture resulted in democratic change only occurring on the surface-level. Historians Henshall and Jansen critique the establishment of democratic institutions as superficial to placate opposition - this is convincing as political hardpower remained with the Meiji oligarchy that functioned as the highest advisory body to the Emperor as the Privy Council (1888). Entrenched political power in elite hampered the flourishing of democratic culture by implementing the 1887 Peace Preservation Law that nipped potential opposition in the bud, and the few opposing political parties were still led by oligarchs like Okuma and Itagaki whose resistance ~~were~~ were short-lived. Thus upon closer scrutiny, the curtailing of freedom of expression remained prevalent in Japan as the oligarchy engineered the nation towards national polity, stymieing the progress of social liberalism and preserving the trappings of feudal ^{Japan} ~~democracy~~.

food

Meiji Japan further failed to cast off the influence of Tokugawa bakufu, instead enshrining it within the constitution. Through enshrining the Emperor's deified status in the Meiji Constitution,

↳ social/cultural?

militarism leftover from the

