



Meiji Restoration and Its Strong Ideological Impact in Asia

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Abstract: In the global context, the Meiji Restoration in Japan, initiated in 1868, was a nationalist and bourgeois revolution that brought significant changes to many aspects of society. The focus of many Meiji reforms was the creation of a new national identity. Political reforms established a constitutional monarchy and a modern administrative apparatus, shaping the governance structure. Social changes included the abolition of the feudal class system and the incorporation of the samurai class into administrative roles. Economically, industrialization and infrastructure development have driven Japan's growth. Education plays a crucial role, emphasizing accessible education, practical knowledge, and literacy. The Meiji Restoration demonstrates a close connection between these reforms and provides deep insights into social transformation. The Meiji Restoration also needs to be considered in the context of imperialism. The Meiji leaders had to confront a bifurcated international order between an elite class of colonial nations and a dependent class of subdued colonies. That context made imperialism a reasonable component of the Meiji state-building project. The Japanese were determined to act to reshape the global order, and their modern history has significantly unsettled the world. This strong dynamism has sparked many debates and conflicts, both domestically and with people and nations outside Japan's borders. Simply put, Japan has condensed a great deal of history into less than two centuries.

Keywords: Meiji Restoration, tradition, modernity, development.

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INTRODUCTION

Eastern thinking emerged on the foundation of Eastern society with an economic structure of conservative rural communes and an ideology Confucianism emphasizes rituals and propriety, downplays the law, and values emotions over reason... occupied a dominant position in that throughout the feudal period and created a tradition of governance by virtue with a utilitarian ideology. Western philosophy leans toward rational thinking and analytical dissection, while Eastern philosophy leans toward intuition. Eastern consciousness is more imbued with poetry than Western consciousness, except in the case of Greece. Ancient Eastern civilization was a village civilization; they did not aim to conquer nature but relied on it, embedding their emotions in nature to survive and establishing heartfelt customs to interact with others. Western civilization, characterized by early urban development, has had a consciousness of competing with nature and the supernatural, conquering nature and the world to assert the power of rational humanity. While the West, with its prominent cultural tradition, has always valued individualism and the conception of personal rights alongside the concept of citizenship; Eastern culture, in general, always considers individuals within the totality of social relationships, placing importance on family and clan roles. The Eastern notion of respecting origins in the motherland of nature (India) and bloodline origins (China) has led to an almost absolute sense of submission to the established hierarchy in politics and religion. In

Eastern mythology, divine powers wield absolute authority, and the hierarchical order is strictly adhered to. Eastern Buddhism is fundamentally consistent and coherent, with almost no "rebels"; however, in the West, Christianity is constantly revised, reformed, and even schismatic. Westerners, whose religions, political systems, and economies are all permeated by individualism, naturally do not favor moral doctrines that have satisfied the philosophical spirit of the East throughout history. Emphasizing the power of nature and the supernatural, Easterners believe that humans are dependent on nature and the supernatural world. Is it possible that the somewhat mystical emotional relationship between humans and nature, as well as with the supernatural world, is the main reason for this way of thinking?

Studying the history of Eastern thought, we see that the most prominent and dominant aspect is Chinese thought. Therefore, studying the history of that of this country reveals typical elements and, thru that, can clarify the common characteristics of Eastern political thought. For the Far East region, China has a traditional role similar to that of the Roman Empire in Europe - that is, a constant source of inspiration for issues related to politics, culture, religion, philosophy, and science. This is also a culture that, during a certain period, had an impact on many aspects of the East and human history, such as production techniques, the influence of social organization, moral philosophy, ...

The political life of China and some East Asian countries is greatly influenced by major political ideologies: Confucianism, Legalism, and Daoism. Especially, "the East leans toward Confucianism while the West leans toward civilization" [3, p.344]. Confucius's doctrine of virtue governance dominated the feudal societies of the East for thousands of years, profoundly influencing the cultural structure, psychological characteristics, and ethics of the Chinese people, while also creating a significant tradition of regional culture. As a doctrine that values lineage, emphasizes roots, remembers origins, upholds loyalty and filial piety, and respects hierarchy and order; Confucianism helps these societies achieve a high level of organization, maintain social order, and preserve social moral standards at a relatively high level, resulting in a civilized and long-term stable society. Confucianism accomplished all of this not through force but through a comprehensive education policy from the emperor and officials to the common people, so that each person would consciously fulfill their role according to their position [1, p.1042]; the emperor as the emperor, the minister as the minister, the father as the father, the son as the son [1, p.290]. This is also why Confucianist countries place great importance on education.

As the orthodox ideology and predominant position in Chinese history, Confucianism has contributed to the formation of a distinctive type of ideological and cognitive configuration in the East. Since the Han Dynasty, the doctrine of Confucianism's monopoly has distorted original Confucianism to an extreme to serve the demands of a dictatorial and autocratic political system: the ruler punishes the minister for treason, the minister who does not die for the ruler is disloyal; the father punishes the son for disobedience, the son who does not die for the father is unfilial. The nature of political dictatorship, supremacy, standing above and dominating all other forms of social consciousness (including law) is a hallmark of the East. The mystical aura of royal power, the absolute loyalty ideology of Confucianism, and the brutal punishments of the law firmly ensure the throne and royal authority, embodying the cultural-legal identity of the East. The strictness of feudal law as well as the customs of traditional villages (deeply influenced by Confucian thought, especially Song Confucianism) rendered the position and role of women in society very insignificant, treating them unequally compared to men. The concepts of valuing men over women, the Three Obediences and Four Virtues, the idea that a woman should not leave her home, the belief that a woman should be small in stature, and the notion that a woman's chastity is paramount have unjustly bound women to harsh and invisible rules, causing them much suffering. Especially, since the establishment of the centralized feudal regime, Confucianism became dominant and increasingly reverted to a conservative, backward, and unrealistic trend. Under the Eastern absolute monarchy, the elements of democracy and liberalism that were hardly

expressed. The intellectual revolution of the Japanese, exemplified by the Meiji Restoration, had a significant impact on the feudal states of that era and serves as a valuable lesson for countries in all times before the process of renewal and modernization of the nation.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

Research on the Japanese intellectual revolution and Eastern thought is exemplified through the Meiji Restoration, which took place from 1868 to 1912, a process of comprehensive reform and modernization of all aspects of Japanese society. The authors have researched, analyzed, evaluated, and discussed important documents, first and foremost the Great Japan Constitution of March 12, 1889, also known as the Meiji Constitution—Asia's first constitution, which is a typical example of the Western-style modern state-building perspective while still maintaining traditional elements, with the Emperor's status being upheld. Next are important documents from erudite researchers in various countries studying Confucianism, philosophy, history, economics, culture, society, education, and people during the periods before, during, and after the Meiji Restoration in Japan. The documents used for the research are in-depth studies, monographs, articles published in reputable journals, etc., which have high reference value and good quality. The authors used qualitative research methods, combining in-depth analysis and evaluation of the studied issues to highlight the traditional thoughts of Japan in general and to clearly illustrate the ideas and values of Emperor Meiji.

Analysis And Discussion

Japan: A Brief Overview of Traditional Thought

Japan is an island nation located in the northeastern part of the Asian continent, close to China, and has been significantly influenced by Chinese culture. With the pre-industrial level of technology, the distance between the East China Sea and the Korea Strait was wide and dangerous enough to limit large-scale activities from the mainland Asia to Japan. Therefore, compared to countries like Korea and Vietnam, Japan is actually in a position almost isolated from China, which was considered the center of the East Asian international order in the pre-modern period. The Industrial Revolution elevated Western countries to a position of global dominance, further distancing the "center" of the world from Japan. Compared to China, Japan is a country that is very alien in terms of ethnicity and culture to the West. Therefore, although Japan has gradually become more integrated with the international community alongside the process of modernizing the country, its relatively isolated status from the main currents of global interaction, at least with the leading powers, has continued until recently.

That relative state of isolation has created conditions for Japan to maintain its security. In history, Japan was not invaded by any country (except for the two failed invasions by the Mongol Empire). In the mid-19th

century, when Western countries arrived and disrupted the East Asian order, most Asian countries from China to smaller nations became colonies or semi-colonies of imperialism. Only Japan was not colonized due to its remote geographical location and cultural differences.

Since ancient times, Japan has strived to import and emulate Chinese culture. Chinese characters, Confucian thought, and Mahayana Buddhism show that Japan is within the sphere of influence of Chinese culture. However, Japan has never become a vassal of the Chinese empire like some neighboring countries. In history, Japan once implemented a policy of isolation (Sakoku) lasting more than two centuries from 1639 to 1859, completely closing itself off from the outside world, allowing only a small trading port for the Chinese and Dutch in the south, until the Tokugawa shogunate was forced to open three ports to the merchant ships of Russia, Britain, France, the Netherlands, and the United States. That prolonged isolationist policy helped Japan establish and maintain cultural uniformity, such as language standardization, acceptance of common methods in thinking and action, social rules, and customs... This policy also reinforced and consolidated the isolationist and closed nature, which were prominent features in Japan's attitude and foreign policy throughout the modern era.

Being an isolated archipelago, small like a parenthesis at the eastern edge of the vast Eurasian interaction zone, relatively isolated from other Asian countries for many centuries until the opening period (1868), Japan has distinct characteristics in customs, traditions, politics, economy, and culture. The transition from a slave system to a feudal system, along with the changes in class relations, also took a long period and depended on gradual progress. Ancient Japanese law is essentially a combination of Shamanism - a primitive religion. From the 6th to the 8th century, on the homeland of Mount Fuji, Cherry Blossoms, Shinto, and Sumo, a centralized state was established and its capital was located in Asuka (near present-day Nara), with the country's name changing from Great Harmony to Japan. "In 646, during the Taika Reforms, Japan still had remnants of clan society, was more backward than China, and the Japanese learned from China". It was during this period that Japan affirmed its feudal era, establishing a centralized autocratic state" [2, p.92]; the emperor was called the Tenno, wielding great authority. In the process of establishing the feudal state, foreign factors played a quite important role, and the influence of Chinese legal systems and political doctrines on Japan was very profound. At the same time, from its homeland in India, Buddhism was transmitted to Japan (via China) with a hierarchical and centralized organization, serving as a model for the Japanese feudal state to emulate. It was "a great and wondrous bird, flying across the ocean on powerful wings, bringing to Japan all the elements of a new life - a new morality, knowledge in all fields: literature, art, professions, and subtle metaphysical

thoughts that had never appeared in the indigenous tradition" [4, p.75]. Under the influence of the Tang dynasty's governance model, Japan attempted to establish a centralized government based on a comprehensive legal system headed by the Emperor. By the Nara period (710 - 794), culture reached a high point thanks to the combination of Chinese and Japanese elements. To establish the autocratic power of the Emperor, a legal system was developed based on the laws of the Jin Dynasty (266-420) and the Tang Dynasty (618-907) in China. Feudal criminal codes The legal decree issued in the early 8th century "is a complete copy of the Tang Dynasty Criminal Code." The Criminal Code of 1870 also drew from the legal codes of the Ming and Qing dynasties, while institutionalizing the Yedo law of the Shogunate. Overall, Japan did not develop an independent legal system but was significantly influenced by the feudal laws of China (mainly Confucian and Legalist ideologies from ancient times, extending thru the medieval and modern periods). "In Japan, it is clear that there was a significant influence from the borrowed legal codes of China. These codes, having decayed and transformed over centuries of use in Japan, still left a legacy that was respected in written documents and relied upon by experts" [4, p.23]. Like the feudal laws of China and other countries in the region, Japanese law during this period openly displayed severe class discrimination. The law also did not clearly distinguish between criminal offenses, civil matters, and the failure to fulfill ordinary obligations. The enactment of laws aimed to protect and consolidate the privileges of the feudal class. However, due to the lack of a solid foundation of a highly centralized political system and not being an entirely agrarian society, although Confucianism was honored by the Edo government, when it penetrated Japanese society, many values of Confucian ideology were transformed to adapt to the new political environment. The Japanese adopted Confucianism in their own way, and as a result, Confucianism could not become the dominant ideology on a national level and hold a monopolistic role in Japan. Therefore, although they tried to centralize power in the central government and consolidate a dictatorial regime, the Japanese state could not prevent the tendency toward feudal fragmentation. Instead, the form of military dictatorship is seen as a characteristic feature in the development of the feudal state of Japan.

Nowadays, most scholars believe that Confucianism began to spread to Japan thru Korea around the 5th century via trade routes and thru Korean immigrants to Japan. But it was not until the first half of the 6th century that the Japanese aristocracy officially came under the influence of Confucian thought. Initially, due to the method of learning based on personal transmission, education was only popular among the royal family and a few people in the court. On the other hand, due to the emphasis on studying ancient characters and interpreting classical meanings, Confucianism at this time was only suitable for highly educated individuals

and did not spread quickly like Buddhism, being limited to a certain segment of the upper class. Prince Shotoku (574 - 622) used Confucian ideals to establish laws, and Confucianism that was first expressed. In the context of Japanese society and its isolation, Chinese Confucianism could not spread without being transformed. "From the very beginning, the Japanese, to some extent, understood the theories in their own way and applied different interpretations to them." The religious revolution occurred rapidly, and perhaps unconsciously, right on the decks of ships from China and Korea or on the beaches along the shores of Japan" [5]. Not only did they adopt Confucianism from Korea, but the Japanese court also sent delegations to China to interact, study, and assimilate Confucianism through their worldview to disseminate it back to the people. After the Taika Reforms, Japan modeled its legal system after the Sui and Tang dynasties, making Confucianism important while still maintaining harmony with Buddhism (during the era of Prince Shotoku). From the Taika Reforms to the early 8th century, the Japanese political system bore a purely Confucian character, almost a replica of the Tang dynasty's governance system, albeit with some adjustments to suit Japan's actual conditions and circumstances [6]. From then on, Confucianism became the foundation for national political thought and a mandatory knowledge for those involved in governance.

However, during the typical development phase of the feudal system in Japan, Confucianism somewhat receded, yielding the highest position to Zen Buddhism. By the Nara period and the early Heian period (794 - 1185), Confucianism developed strongly among the aristocracy and monks, but Confucianism still remained within the structure of the Three Teachings with Buddhism being predominant. The popularity of Confucianism at this time was almost entirely confined to the highest educational institution, the Daigaku-ryo, and a few private schools. By the late medieval period, during the decline of the feudal system (the Edo period, 17th century - 1868) and the emergence of early capitalism along with the rise of the urban merchant class, Confucianism replaced Buddhism in daily life and relegated Buddhism to a more modest position. The Zhu Xi school (1130-1200) was encouraged by the Shogunate and became the state orthodoxy of Confucianism. "From 1790, Zhu Xi's theory, representing Confucianism, was regarded as the orthodox philosophy in Japanese feudal society." To effectively maintain the feudal society in terms of morality, the feudal Tokugawa shogunate prohibited doctrines other than Zhu Xi's theory [15, p.127]. Confucianism became increasingly strict to counter foreign teachings – the religious movement brought by the West. Transitioning to the modern era (1868-1945), Emperor Meiji ascended the throne and declared the beginning of the modernization campaign to catch up with Western countries. At this time, the liberal reformers recognized the limitations of Confucianism (especially Song Confucianism) on the reform efforts, which had encouraged practical learning and the spirit of

self-reliance. Meanwhile, the imperial court and the noble intellectuals, although recognizing the shortcomings of Confucianism, still wanted to use it as a tool for educating morality, loyalty to the Emperor, and building Japan according to the policy of a rich and powerful nation. It can be seen that due to the geographical peculiarity (relative isolation), the cultural homogeneity of Japan, and the fact that it was not colonized by foreign powers (China), unlike many other East Asian countries in the region, the cultural influences from China were transmitted to Japan not through coercion but through a voluntary and proactive choice to adopt them. Those conditions have helped Japan maintain stability, social sustainability, and proactively absorb external ideologies.

Meiji Reforms

The choice of the Japanese when standing between the two influences of China and the West

In history, China was once regarded as the intellectual cradle of Japan: Kyoto (established in the 8th century) - the political capital of Japan for a thousand years, was a perfect replica of the Tang Dynasty capital, Chang'an. Many great works of Japanese poetry were written in China. For men, learning is synonymous with studying in China. Almost all of the cultural values of the Japanese originate from China, from the tradition of wet rice cultivation, writing, Confucian views on the order of ruler and subject and family, to the techniques of using bronze and iron. The influence of Confucianism is also clearly reflected in the social order of Japan: Japanese history has affirmed the divine right of the Emperor as the "Mandate of Heaven" bestowed by the heavens, unchanging from ancient times to the present, and as an absolute power. As the holder of supreme power and the one who decides all matters of the country, the Emperor is always revered and regarded as a descendant of the gods, worshiped everywhere; the collective will of the people is directed toward serving the Emperor. With his position, the Emperor holds the power of legislation, administration, and judiciary. The influence of Confucianism on the order and social relations in Japan is also manifested in the clear division of social classes. Japan is also considered a country that highly values people and ethics, with a high level of discipline and a tightly-knit community, possessing a rather complex system of honorifics and humble language. The ideas of self-cultivation, proper naming, the Three Bonds and Five Relationships are often the foundations for establishing social order, maintaining interpersonal relationships; they play an important role in sustaining a prosperous, stable, and developed society. Through education, the government aims to affirm the status of each class and individual within the social order. In Japan, Confucianism has a positive significance, making people aware of their responsibilities and obligations in social relationships; it is an important factor in stabilizing social order, establishing a hierarchy, and thereby cultivating oneself to become better over time. In addition to its distinctive cultural traits, the education

system in Japan during the Tokugawa period was also significantly influenced by Chinese civilization, with a notable characteristic being the clear distinction of social classes. However, the influence of Confucianism that also had its limitations and negative aspects, such as the absolutization of the roles of kings, emperors, and sovereigns, which in turn fostered a conservative, monopolistic, and dogmatic mindset among the Japanese. The strict ideas about propriety, righteousness, loyalty, and filial piety can sometimes be a binding rope, stifling human development. In addition, one of the social issues that Japan is quite deeply influenced by Confucianism is the role and position of women: Although they do not endure the harsh constraints of Confucian feudalism as much as Chinese women (the homeland of Confucianism), Japanese women still face many disadvantages and certain forms of discrimination compared to men. Beside the influences of other traditional customs regarding beliefs and religions, the discriminatory thoughts within the hierarchical feudal class system, gender, and the Confucian preference for males over females have created a deep divide, hindering social development.

From the early 10th century to the 19th century, the feudal system in China transitioned from a period of revival to a period of decline. Also during this period, the grandeur of Chinese civilization gradually weakened. Especially in the 19th century, the internal situation in China became distinctly rotten: the emperors were only concerned with indulgence, the officials were corrupt and incompetent, and the military was merely bureaucratic with swords. The economic decline and internal conflicts were good opportunities for capitalist countries to carve up China. As a country that once stood at the pinnacle of ancient civilization, stagnated during the medieval period, and fell into the abyss of decline in modern times, China became the "Sleeping Giant of the East," the "Eastern Slumbering Tiger," the "Eastern Sleeping Lion," the "Old Tiger," etc., despised by Western countries, which called it the "Sleeping Tiger" and the "Paper Tiger." Not only was China excluded from the "dance of the world" (C. Marx), but it also faced the risk of being "smashed like a watermelon" when just a small number of British warships were enough to "humiliate" the great civilization of the "Central Kingdom under heaven" during the Opium War (1839-1842). Along with the backwardness of the mode of production, Confucian ideology also fell into stagnation, became outdated, and Confucianism turned into the "Conservative Old Man of the East." After more than 20 centuries of formation and development, Confucianism in China has experienced periods of prosperity and decline, sometimes reigning at the pinnacle of the dominant ideology, but at other times being mercilessly criticized and regarded as "filth" that needed to be discarded. To survive, Confucianism has also had to endure many historical upheavals in its own homeland. Discussing the feudal rites, Fukuzawa Yukichi stated: "In the old scholarship of China, nothing compares to the

rites and music". Rituals are meant to make people bow their heads in submission. Music is to lull the people's grievances and frustrations so that they continue to submissively endure the oppressors" [8, p.123]. Japan and many Eastern countries have realized that "Confucianism is exhausted, it is no longer of any use." Like a crumpled piece of foil, it can no longer be smoothed out once it has been wrinkled [9, p.7].

Meanwhile, "From the 16th century, Western thought and scholarship reached Japan, opening up new perspectives for the Japanese on the world, on nature, and creating a new technological foundation in the country." During the Tokugawa shogunate, scholars in the national education system made efforts to revive national spirit and gradually loosen the influence of China. When the education system was relatively developed, Japanese studies not only focused on Confucianism but also showed interest in Western knowledge through other subjects. From the late 18th century, Japan saw the emergence of the "Dutch Learning" movement with the aim of studying and adopting Western science and technology through the Dutch language. Through the Dutch language, they translated books on medicine, literature, and technology, and these translated materials played an important role in helping Japan, despite being a closed country, not fall too far behind the contemporary developed Western countries. Along with the increasingly growing movement to learn Western knowledge, public opinion increasingly criticized the policies and class systems that had stifled the development of individuals and society" [10]. Thanks to studying Western knowledge and later Western studies, with a spirit of openness, the Japanese realized that they had to change their anti-Western policy to a proactive, flexible policy of actively embracing Western scientific and technological achievements. Over time, the dissemination of Western culture and technology expanded into a semi-public form. At the same time, "as Japanese knowledge developed, they began to realize that China was not the center of the world, and they gradually recognized China's weaknesses." Therefore, they thought, "we should start defining our own position" (Ian Buruma).

According to David Pilling, the isolation from China to shape Japanese values was a "painful" decision, as almost all of their cultural values originated from China. However, the above trend was also influenced by the political context of Japan during the modern period. After 250 years of rule, by the mid-19th century, the Tokugawa shogunate was in a severe crisis on all fronts. Economically, Japan remained an agricultural country that maintained a backward production method based on a feudal foundation. Japanese farmers had to endure heavy taxes combined with crop failures, leading them to a state of poverty and destitution. While agriculture faced many difficulties, thanks to the advantage of large seaports, commerce in Japan flourished, and merchants quickly became wealthy, laying the foundation for the

development of capitalism in Japan. Socially, Japan still maintained a class system with power completely held by the daimyos and samurai warriors. The bourgeois commercial and industrial class is becoming increasingly wealthy but lacks political power and is heavily taxed, creating a growing conflict between the merchant class and the ruling class. Farmers were under pressure from both the aristocracy and the merchants. Politically, the Japanese feudal system was supposed to be decided by the Japanese emperor (Tenno), but in reality, the Tokugawa shogunate completely manipulated it. Therefore, the royalist faction was very dissatisfied and sparked a movement to overthrow the Shogunate, restoring power to the Imperial Court. In terms of foreign relations, Western capitalist countries took advantage of the chaotic situation in Japan to pressure it into opening up trade. The Tokugawa shogunate pursued a policy of "locking the country" or "locking the seas" to prevent Westerners from entering, absolutely forbidding them from stepping foot in Japan. In response to the Tokugawa shogunate's resolute stance, in 1853, the United States government sent four warships-Mississippi, Plymouth, Saratoga, and Susquehanna-into Tokyo Bay and issued an ultimatum threatening to open fire. Vice Admiral Matthew Calbraith Perry and the "Black Ships" ended the Tokugawa shogunate's policy of isolating trade with the West (the arrival of the West was seen as a challenge to Japanese traditional customs and values). After a series of unequal treaties with Western imperialist countries and in the face of national crises as well as intense internal and external conflicts, Japan faced two choices: First, to maintain the traditional feudal system and the shogunate's position but risk losing the country to foreign domination. The second option was to undertake a comprehensive reform to learn and absorb Western knowledge in order to transform into a powerful nation, standing shoulder to shoulder with Western powers. In the context of the 1860s, the movement against the Tokugawa Shogunate erupted everywhere under the leadership of prominent figures rising up against the Shogun. Finally, the shogunate was dissolved (12/1867) and under the slogan "Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians," some progressive samurai with reformist ideas, along with nobles at the court, seized the opportunity to take leadership of the country and implement reforms. On January 3, 1868, the new government appointed by Emperor Meiji was established. The bourgeois class had not yet participated in the government, but the new regime created conditions for the development of capitalism, so they supported the new government, and the Meiji period - the "enlightened rule" in Japan began.

The process and basic content of the Meiji Restoration

The Meiji Restoration was a series of reform and modernization events that led to significant changes in Japan's social and political structure. The Japanese emphasized the spirit of Japan, the essence of the West, encouraging all citizens to diligently learn from new civilizations. From a "closed" country burdened by many

outdated customs, the Japanese people, faced with the threat of Western aggression, rose up to reform based on a new mindset, as demonstrated by the 5 oaths of Emperor Meiji upon ascending the throne. Then they swore to do so, these 5 oaths were the aspirations, scale, and policies of Emperor Meiji to reform and transform Japan. In about 30 years, Japan became a civilized nation, a powerful people, standing on par with the Western countries [11, p.70].

The reform led to a strong development of Japan's economy in the last 30 years of the 19th century, and Japan became a military power by 1905. Thanks to this, Japan developed the country along the path of modernization and avoided the invasion of Western countries during the modern era. The Meiji Restoration was a pivotal event in Japanese history that marked the beginning of the modernization and industrialization process, which lasted from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, gradually transforming feudal Japan into a modern, wealthy, and powerful capitalist nation in the region.

Emperor Meiji (November 3, 1852 - July 30, 1912) after a tumultuous process of ascending the throne and overthrowing the shogunate, moved the capital from Kyoto to Edo and established a new era name. "Prince Mutsuhito soon recognized the dire and tragic state of the country, as well as the increasingly evident threat of Western colonialism, which endangered national independence". In light of that situation, he, along with those who followed radical nationalism, was determined to make Japan strong. The first manifestation of this determination was immediately after ascending the throne, Mutsuhito adopted the reign title Meiji, meaning "Enlightened Rule" [12]. The Emperor - the leader of the reform, who laid the foundation for the "Japanese Miracle," conducted synchronized and comprehensive reforms across all areas of social life:

The Method of Education: Another positive social development that took place during the Meiji Restoration was educational reforms. Since Japan had high literacy rates and in setting up new schools, the government did not have to deal with the entrenched relationship between education and religion and could therefore put into practice a modern, universal system. They made education compulsory for four years in 1872, and they built primary and secondary schools. Western knowledge was taught as well as traditional Japanese beliefs and skills, while children were brought up with a strong sense of patriotism and reverence for the Emperor. In 1890 the Imperial Rescript on Education was issued to schools which set down the aims for education. Children were required to memorise the edict, obey their parents and to "guard and maintain the prosperity of our Imperial Throne". Moreover, while thousands of Japanese students were initially sent to foreign universities, this declined as Japan developed its own colleges, including Tokyo University in 1877 and Kyoto in 1897. Education

played a key role in instilling loyalty to the emperor and creating a new nationalism that could allow the genro to re-establish unity and stability in political life, while simultaneously supporting Japan's long-term economic and industrial growth which allowed it to achieve its imperialist ambitions.

Social & Political Changes: The leaders of the Meiji Restoration took the first major step in demolishing a 260-year-old political order by abolishing all daimyo territories. In March 1869, the first steps toward a unified national polity were taken. Key daimyo of prestige and authority, particularly those of Satsuma, Choshu, Tosa, and Hizen, were persuaded by the new administration to return their holdings to the emperor freely. All domains were abolished in August 1871, and "prefectures" were established, with governors appointed from the center. The daimyo were told that they needed to relocate to Tokyo. Several castles were demolished. The number of governmental units was substantially reduced from 280 domains to 72 prefectures in just three months. This proclamation was accompanied by a sizable stipend for the daimyo. They were given annual wages that were equal to around 10% of their former domain's annual tax collection. In 1868, the Council of State was founded as the highest governmental authority, and Meiji leaders dominated its top positions. This council's structure was altered in 1869 and again in 1871. Later in 1871 it was replaced by a tripartite set of ministries of the Center, Left, and Right, further subdivided into various functional ministries (Finance, Foreign Affairs, Public Works, and Home Affairs). A system of civil service examinations was also introduced in 1887. One of the most portentous new departures of the revolutionary years of early Meiji was the decision to put the emperor at the very center of the political order. The emperor and empress were given increasing symbolic weight by the government. The emperor's legal and cultural authority were considerably enhanced by the constitution. The imperial institution became an all-too-powerful unifying factor from the 1880s through the 1930s.

The removal of the status system, the second big reform of early Meiji, was even more spectacular and came at a higher cost. The samurai's economic privileges were completely abolished by 1876, less than a decade after the restoration coup. The government limited the huge number of samurai levels to two in 1869: higher samurai (shizoku) and lower samurai (shizoku) (sotsu).

A considerable number of inferior samurai were reclassified as commoners (heimin) in 1872, though they kept their stipends for the time being. The government declared that stipends will be taxed in 1873. The next year, it introduced a programme to convert stipends to bonds on a voluntary basis. Only a few samurai agreed to participate in this programme. In 1876, the government made this programme mandatory. The elimination of statutory constraints on the rest of the populace was the other side of the abolition of samurai

privilege. This, at least in theory, amounted to social liberty. In 1870, all non-samurai were legally classified as commoners (heimin). The Tokugawa era's prohibitions on modes of transportation, attire, and hairdo were lifted, with a few notable exceptions depending on gender. Occupation restrictions were removed. The government abolished legal discrimination against Tokugawa's hereditary outcastes, such as the eta and hinin. Even before the samurai were completely dispossessed, Meiji officials concluded that the military needed to be rebuilt from the ground up.

Religion: Another positive cultural development during the Meiji Restoration was the emergence of new religious value systems. While the period of the Shogunate had seen extreme Japanese hostility towards Christianity, the ban on Christianity was lifted when the leaders of the Iwakura mission sent to the US and Europe saw its importance to Westerners. From 1873 onwards, it became legal for missionaries to preach Christianity and there was a significant missionary effort in Japan, although there were relatively few converts. By 1889 Japanese Christians constituted less than 0.25% of the population. More importantly, historian Kenneth Pyle argued that the Meiji leaders created 'a new national ideology' in the form of family state ideology, State Shinto, referring to the philosophy of industrial harmony, and the ideal image of Japanese womanhood. The Imperial Rescript on Education was distributed to every school in the Japanese empire, along with a portrait of the Emperor. It established the concept of the 'family state'; the Emperor was the father of the nation and the subjects of his children. Government-controlled textbooks similarly promoted the idea and importance of reverence to the throne, while army conscripts had such values indoctrinated into them. Moreover, in 1906 the government merged all Shinto shrines and replaced them with one central shrine in each administrative village. While many of the Shinto shrines throughout Japan were previously devoted to local and personal interests such as a good harvest, now ceremonies at the shrines emphasised reverence for the Emperor. Thus the value system that emerged as predominant out of Meiji Modernisation was an Emperor-centred nationalism, directed towards working for the country. This also promoted a widespread desire for Japan to be a predominant power in the world.

Army: The government formed an imperial army of little about 10,000 samurai from the restoration forces in April 1871. In 1873, the government established a universal conscription system. All males were required to serve three years on active duty and four years on reserve status beginning at the age of twenty. The clan-coalition army that destroyed the Shogunate were enlarged and reformed on the French model, while the Satsuma-influenced navy embraced the English system from the start.

There were three phases in the transition to a modern military organization. First phase (1853 to 1870)- A lengthy period of experimentation with new forms and involved wide variation among a large number of organization. Second phase (1870-1878)- The central government established a single, centralized organizational model for the army and the navy. Third phase (1878-1890) - Attention was shifted to the ways in which the military interacted with the political and social environment, with respect to ensuring the supply of needed resources and increasing the military's autonomy and effectiveness.

In 1882, an imperial re-script addressed to soldiers and sailors urged young people to serve the emperor with honour and dedication. In the 1880s and 1890s, the fleet was built substantially. By the mid-1890s, Japan's military had grown strong enough to shift its focus from maintaining order at home to enforcing its will abroad. Most recruits and their families came to see military duty as a patriotic obligation for Japanese males.

Economic Changes & Industrialisation: The government spent the first fifteen years of the Meiji period establishing both social and industrial infrastructure. Railways, transportation, communication, ports, lighthouses, and other public works projects were significantly funded by the government. The Meiji rulers also spent a large portion of the country's money on acquiring Western technology and experience in order to establish up sophisticated enterprises. Japan developed in a way that incorporated dual-economy characteristics, with contrasts between traditional and modern industries. Agriculture was the dominant sector for the first two decades of the Meiji period, and it dominated the economy. It not only employed the greatest number of people, but it also generated the most revenue for the government in the form of land taxes.

The economy grew at an exceptional rate thanks to the adoption of the Land Reform Act of 1873, the introduction of new rice strains, and the establishment of agricultural educational centres. Peasants were given ownership of the land they had cultivated for feudal lords under the previous government after the Meiji Restoration. Land tax payments in money were exchanged for forced labour and payments in land products. Japan's economic transformation in the Meiji was initially achieved through the subsidizing of the agriculture industry, and exploiting the peasant population. Taxing heavy industries and zaibatsu at this early period of development would have been counter-productive for the entire economy, therefore this was the only sustainable source of government revenue. Economically, the government's support of family owned large businesses, called zaibatsu led to the development Japanese industry and economy. Although these zaibatsu conglomerates was abolished after World War II.

While the country was poor in natural resources, Japan was able to take advantage of the high demand for silk in Europe. Tea was another commodity that Japan exported heavily. The foreign demand for silk and tea, therefore, stimulated agricultural diversification and growth, which in turn led to higher revenues for which the government used to invest in industrial development. The revenues from exports in Japan was used for the purchase of foreign machinery. By the end of the Meiji Period, Japan was the leader among all manufactured silk exporting countries.

The Meiji Restoration (breaking the old and establishing the new) over 30 years was both swift and bold, as Emperor Meiji swore to the heavens and gods and earnestly carried it out. From politics, culture, education, military, commerce, finance, mechanics, and art, to even mundane matters of clothing and trivial customs, no issue or aspect was left untouched, transforming the old into the new. From a backward feudal nation, internally divided and externally oppressed and humiliated by other countries, within just three decades, all the old customs and traditions of Japan were erased, making way for Western civilization. "The rapid transformation of Japan from old to new was so astonishing that everyone was shocked and amazed". Every small and big thing must be newly established, there is no useful institution or system from the West that Japan does not adopt. Trains, ships, banks, factories, as well as all matters of education, technology, and science... Japan organized everything all at once. [11, p.72]. The major reforms implemented by the Imperial court led to significant changes that liberated Japan from feudalism and dependence on Western countries, advancing toward capitalism and becoming the only Eastern empire capable of competing with Russia, Britain, the United States, and Germany—leading world powers. The comprehensive and fundamental reform initiated and led by the Meiji government paved the way for transforming feudal Japan into a capitalist nation, successively defeating China and Russia in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and defeating the Russian Imperial Navy in 1905, becoming a military power. The Meiji Restoration is considered a transitional period from feudalism to capitalism, leading Japan to develop according to the model of capitalist countries, escaping the fate of being a colonial or semi-colonial nation. However, the Meiji Restoration is also considered a bourgeois revolution that was not thorough because it was not led by the bourgeois class and did not completely abolish the domination of the feudal landlord class.

Enlightenment Thought - The Guiding Lighthouse of The Revolution

The world is guided by ideas, and revolutions in that are always the prelude to changes in practice. To avoid facing a fate similar to that of China and other contemporary Asian countries, Japan embraced Western civilization and severed its ties with its Asian origins. The great achievements of the Meiji Restoration were

influenced by many factors, among which the role of Fukuzawa Yukichi, one of the great thinkers - the "political physician" - who led the reform and illuminated the modernization movement to form modern Japan, cannot be overlooked. From his rich personal experiences in the context of a tumultuous era, having early recognized the values and strengths of Western civilization along with the acute awareness of the times and a profound sense of responsibility of a true citizen and intellectual toward the country, Fukuzawa dedicated his entire life to seeking reformist ideas for the nation. He focused his thoughts, reasoning, and explorations to develop the famous theory of "Datsu-A Ron" (the principle of escaping from Asia), which became the foundation of the Meiji Restoration, helping Japan escape the threat of dependency and develop alongside Western powers, becoming the pinnacle of the reform movement and the harbinger of spring for the land of cherry blossoms.

The main content of this famous essay "Escape from Asia" is summarized in two words "Escape from Asia" - meaning to break free from the constraints of the petty, outdated, and superficial culture of Asian countries (exemplified by China) in order to learn from Western civilization and integrate with the outside world. Accordingly, Japan abandoned the obstacles rooted in Asian traditions on its path to the future. According to Fukuzawa, Japan cannot be held back by the feudal systems of China and Korea, and should "break free from the ideological circle of Asian countries and join the civilized Western nations (escape Asia, join Europe)". This famous essay sparked the Enlightenment movement in Japan and became the spiritual foundation of the Meiji Restoration. Thanks to this policy, along with the successful implementation of the Meiji Restoration movement, Japan formed a new system of values and integrated with the outside world, helping the country not only maintain its independence but also become a powerhouse in economics, culture, and science and technology later on.

Having been exposed to Western civilization thru books and visits to the United States and Europe in the late 19th century, Fukuzawa recognized the advancements of Western civilization (which were more developed than Asia in many aspects) and that Asian countries would find it difficult to maintain their independence if they remained closed off to Western civilization. According to him, gaining autonomy is not yet independence, but true independence can only be realized by becoming an advanced and civilized nation. And without enlightenment and civilization, the independence gained would quickly be lost and fall back under the dependence of more advanced nations. Recognizing that the countries in the Asian region were only at the level of "semi-civilization" and could not serve as a model for Japan to learn from, Fukuzawa called on Japan to "separate from the ranks of Asian countries, catch up with, and join the ranks of Western

civilized nations" [13]. He advocated for opening trade with the West, learning knowledge and social management experience from the West to develop Japan. Fukuzawa believed that education was the only way to achieve civilization, as the essence of civilization is the development of knowledge and the internal morality of the nation: "one must be fully equipped in both material and spiritual aspects to be called civilized". However, the convenience of material aspects as well as the nobility of the human spirit have no limits. Therefore, when we refer to "comfort" or "nobility", we must think of it as a state of progress toward a higher level. And because knowledge and ethics are the driving forces of this progress, it can ultimately be said that civilization is the advancement of human knowledge and ethics" [14, p.95-96].

According to Fukuzawa, the traditional Confucian education (Kangaku) in Japan is the greatest hindrance to civilization: it is both outdated and underdeveloped, unchanged for thousands of years, valuing superficial appearances while disregarding truth and principles. The number of people attending school was small, and they were only taught reading and writing without being encouraged to develop creative and independent thinking (harshly criticizing the rote learning method, quoting previous works). Fukuzawa believed that education is the key to civilization, the core of education is practical learning, and the effectiveness of the education system must meet the needs of different social classes. An important goal of education is to cultivate independent character, because "the civilization of a nation cannot rely on the power of the government but must focus on each individual citizen". Each citizen must take responsibility for protecting and preserving the country's independence [15, p.13]. He also proposed the famous principle "National independence thru personal independence", meaning that a society wanting to develop must rely on individuals capable of independent and creative thinking (individual strength - confidence in personal strength), rather than on the government. The fundamental principle of education is to combine Western science with Eastern ethics. He called on Japanese scholars and officials to work under the motto "Value the nation and downplay the government", confident in their personal strength without relying on the strength of others. Each person in society, from learned scholars and high-ranking state officials to poor farmers and small traders, can pursue education to better fulfill their own roles, thereby contributing to societal development, without necessarily having to study to become officials in the traditional, outdated Confucian way (the Enlightenment thought of Immanuel Kant). People should pursue the practical education of the West, based on the foundation of science and technology.

Criticizing the Confucian education system that emphasizes classical texts but disregards practical knowledge in China and Korea, Fukuzawa Yukichi argued that these two countries "Have not changed for

thousands of years and remain attached to outdated customs. When discussing education, they only speak of preserving Confucian education, quoting teachings like 'Ren, Yi, Li, Zhi,' focusing on superficial forms while neglecting truth and principles, being superstitious and ignorant of science, yet still being arrogant and self-satisfied" [13]. With the eyes of an eagle, Fukuzawa Yukichi observed: "The roads of the world are the means for the winds of Western civilization to blow into the East". Everyplace, no grass or tree can stop this wind of civilization" [13]. He recognized the suffocating, "ancient and shameful" state of Asia and encouraged the Japanese to adopt the idea of "escaping Asia".

Awakening early to the era-defining dangers, Japan quickly embraced Western culture with its superiority in industrial, scientific, and military fields; the Meiji Restoration, although 150 years ago, is still referred to by scholars both in and outside Japan as a milestone that transformed the nation into a power on par with the capitalist countries of Europe and America in the late 19th century. This comprehensive reform created favorable conditions for the liberation of the immense potential of the "Land of the Rising Sun". The essence of the 30 years of the Meiji Restoration is the process by which the Japanese nation looked to European civilization to enlighten its own spirit. From the awakening lesson of the "Escape from Asia" discourse, Japan successfully "escaped Asia" by harnessing the courageous spirit and self-sacrifice of the samurai, while preserving the pure Confucian moral values of "Ren, Yi, Li, Zhi, Xin" and eliminating the political aspects and institutions derived from them, especially the examination system that had weighed heavily on history. The reform was successful and resonated widely, creating a solid foundation that helped Japan develop into a civilized, modern nation with a leading global economy.

The revolution in thought is always the prelude to the revolution in practice. For Japan, isolating/cutting off the intellectual ties with China and focusing on the effort to modernize the country, integrating with the West, was a courageous and rational decision. The Japanese realized that the most important thing was to break free from Chinese culture, that is, the culture. That culture corrupts intellectuals, it does not recognize independent thinking and actions of individuals as a value. On the contrary, it considers the word "loyalty" to the ruling power as a fundamental value. On the foundation of logical thinking, the Japanese soon realized that, ultimately, development can only be achieved through innovation and creativity. And the most significant obstacles to innovation and creativity are the internal barriers, which lie within ourselves, in order to unleash the country's potential in all aspects for development, to confront and adapt to a world full of upheavals and constant changes. And more importantly: not falling into invisible traps, whether created by human negligence or intention, or by the randomness of history. With a

forward-thinking mindset, the Japanese also wisely recognized that "escaping Asia" or "escaping China" meant breaking free from the backward, limited, and rustic aspects of Asian countries while still retaining their Confucian cultural roots; adopting Western science and technology while preserving Japan's unique identity. The imperial court and intellectuals of Japan, on one hand, recognized the limitations of Confucian education in the new era, but on the other hand, they still saw the value of Confucianism in moral education, especially in teaching loyalty, and in building Japan according to the principle of "a rich and powerful nation". In the context of 19th century Japan, Fukuzawa Yukichi's reform ideas were profoundly insightful and practical, addressing the urgent needs of Japan's historical reality at the time and playing a crucial role in laying the ideological groundwork for the Meiji Restoration. Yukichi's "Datsu-Zoku Ron" became a work that changed Japan's history, transforming the mindset of an entire nation to build modern Japan and demonstrating the strength and greatness of a people who bravely refused to succumb to fate and dared to face the challenges of history to rise to the forefront of the world. Historical experience also shows that before each pivotal phase, history always presents each nation with strategic tasks and significant challenges; requiring the determination, willpower, and united effort (even sacrifices) of an entire nation to overcome and continue to advance. To successfully carry out the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese quickly realized the need to overcome outdated perceptions and embrace new, progressive, modern ideas and a development mindset to lift the country out of poverty and backwardness. Through progressive reform policies, they aimed to unleash the potential of all aspects of the nation. The issue of renewing the mindset on integration and development was identified by the Japanese as a breakthrough step, paving the way for significant social transformations during the Meiji period. At the same time, the ideology of reform and the absorption of human civilization, combined with the preservation and promotion of the nation's quintessence; the integration of internal and external excellence to build and develop Japan's country remains a lesson for nations on the path of modernization and national development today.

CONCLUSION

The Meiji Restoration, which took place in 1868, is of particular importance for many reasons, as it marked a turning point in Japanese history and had profound impacts on both Japan and the outside world by dismantling the centuries-old feudal system, abolishing the social hierarchy, and replacing it with a more egalitarian system. This was a groundbreaking change in the social structure. The Meiji Restoration marked the beginning of a rapid modernization and industrialization period, adopting Western industrial technologies and methods. This transformed Japan from a feudal society into a modern industrial nation in just a few decades. This regime established a centralized, bureaucratic government, replacing the dispersed power structure of

the shogunate and feudal lords. This new form of government played a crucial role in implementing nationwide reforms. This period witnessed significant reforms in education, with the establishment of a public education system and the promotion of Western knowledge and science, key elements in the country's modernization efforts. The Japanese military underwent comprehensive reforms, adopting Western military technology and organizational methods. This has transformed Japan into a formidable military power.

The success of the Meiji Restoration had a significant impact on Asian countries. Great reformers of China such as Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei advocated learning from Japan's path to carry out the Self-Strengthening Movement. The Meiji Restoration also had a profound impact on many other countries in the region, such as Thailand, the Philippines, Korea, India, and Vietnam. The reform movement in Thailand was influenced by the Meiji Restoration, which instilled additional confidence and strength in the Thai people in their struggle to maintain independence against the pressures of the British and French powers. The Meiji Restoration also played a significant role in encouraging the Philippine people's struggle against Spanish and American colonialism to gain independence.

As a British colony, before the success of the Meiji Restoration, many patriotic Indian intellectuals traveled to Japan to engage in activities and study. In the regional context, as a nation sharing a common culture, ethnicity, and ancestry, Phan Boi Chau – the initiator and leader of Vietnam's Dong Du movement – along with revolutionary patriots from China, India, the Philippines, and Korea, established the East Asian League and the Dien Viet Que League to create close ties and solidarity among Asian patriots. From this, Pan-Asianism was forged from the mid-19th century, passing on the spirit of enduring cooperation to patriots and subsequent generations of revolutionaries./.

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