

## Document 5

### THE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF THE MEIJI RESTORATION

In Japan in 1853, only 3% of the population was receiving a formal education. The farmers, tradesmen, and soldiers received their own specific training, but no formal education. By 1878, however, 25% were; by 1885, 42%; and by 1897, 95% were receiving some formal education, at least at the primary level, which would be equal to our elementary schools. This had a great effect on Japan because, with these educated people, it was then possible for Japan to rapidly man factories for steel, iron, and rubber production, and train people to grow more food with the aid of new farm tractors. Because of this last innovation, the Japanese people at better and became healthier. Eventually, their population skyrocketed and Japan became a very crowded chain of islands. To reduce this crowding, and to search for supplies of raw materials, Japan began to look for new lands to expand into; with their new modern weapons and methods, they began to build an empire in Asia.

The Emperor Meiji knew that for Japan to be successful in her modernization effort she would have to copy many western ways. Here are some examples.

-The government also built model factories in the steel, cement, plate glass, fire brick, woolen textiles, and spinning industries. They were set up on a profit-making basis but with the primary aim of introducing European production methods and techniques into Japan.

-Reforms in other fields were far reaching: education was made compulsory, all restrictions were lifted on Japanese going abroad, Christianity was permitted, vaccinations, postal service, telegraphs, and steamships were introduced, torture was abolished, European dress was prescribed for officials (with the Emperor showing the way by adopting Western military dress), and European and American advisers were freely employed.

The Meiji reforms brought great changes both within Japan and in Japan's place in world affairs. Japan strengthened itself enough to remain a sovereign nation in the face of Western colonizing powers and indeed became a colonizing power itself. During the Taishô period (1912-1945), Japanese citizens began to ask for more voice in the government and for more social freedoms. During this time, Japanese society and the Japanese political system were significantly more open than they were either before or after. The period has often been called the period of "Taishô democracy." One explanation is that, until World War I, Japan enjoyed record-breaking economic prosperity. The Japanese people had more money to spend, more leisure, and better education, supplemented by the development of mass media. Increasingly they lived in cities where they came into contact with influences from abroad and where the traditional authority of the extended family was less influential. Industrialization in itself undermined traditional values, emphasizing instead efficiency, independence, materialism, and individualism. During these years Japan saw the emergence of a "mass society"<sup>2</sup> very similar to the "Roaring 20s"<sup>1</sup> in the United States. During these years also, the Japanese people began to demand universal manhood suffrage, which they won in 1925. Political parties increased their influence, becoming powerful enough to appoint their own prime ministers between 1918 and 1931.

In forty-five short years, less than the span on one man's life, Japan had been changed drastically. Although Japan had changed, every change had a Japanese flavor to it, and large elements of traditional Japan still remained, as we will see in the future.

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<sup>2</sup> Mass society is a society in which the concerns of the majority - the lower social classes - play a prominent role, characterized by extension of voting rights, an improved standard of living for the lower classes and mass education

<sup>1</sup> Roaring 20's-refers to the North American historical period of the 1920s, which has been described as "one of the most colorful decades in American history." The decade encapsulates a fascinating story, beginning with the return of young soldiers from the fronts of the Great War and emergence of a new and confident face of the modern womanhood.