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MILITARY EFFECTS OF THE MEIJI RESTORATION

As Japan absorbed Western political and economic influences during the Meiji period, its leaders also began to imitate the West's imperial ambitions. As part of its modernization campaign, the government dismantled the old feudal military system and replaced it with a national army. Catching up on the military sector was, of course, a high priority for Japan in an era of European and American imperialism. Universal conscription was introduced, and a new army modeled after the Prussian force, and a navy after the British one was established.

The government also instituted nation-wide conscription in 1873, mandating that every male serve in the armed forces for 3 years upon turning twenty-one. One of the primary differences between the samurai and peasant class had been the right to bear arms; this ancient privilege was suddenly extended to every male in the nation. Not surprisingly, this led to a series of riots from disgruntled samurai. One of the major riots was the one led by Saigo Takamori, the Satsuma rebellion, which eventually turned into a civil war. This rebellion was however put down swiftly by the newly formed imperial army, trained in Western tactics and weapons, even though the core of the new army was the Tokyo Police force, which was formed in great parts of former samurai. This sent a strong message to the dissenting samurai that their time was indeed up. Subsequent to this, there were fewer samurai uprisings, although the samurai spirit lived on, and this was to have an important effect during the wars Japan participated in at the turn of the 20th century.

Great power status rested on access to colonies which provided raw materials, and these, in turn, rested on naval power, which required bases for the increasingly large battleships of the era, and a chain of coal stations for warships to restock the fuel for their boilers.

Japan's location encouraged it to focus on the Choson Dynasty in Korea and the Qing Dynasty in northern China, putting it in competition with its neighbor, Russia. The Japanese effort to occupy Korea led to the Sino-Japanese War. Japan's subsequent defeat of China led to the Treaty of Shimonoseki (April 17, 1895) by which China abandoned its own claims to Korea, as well as ceding Taiwan and Lüshunkou (often called Port Arthur).

The occasion for the **Russo-Japanese War** of 1904 was Russia's refusal to withdraw its troops from Manchuria following the suppression of the 1900 Boxer Rebellion in China. Negotiations brought no Russian back-down, and on February 9, 1904 Japan launched an attack, and mauled the Russian Far Eastern Fleet anchored at Port Arthur. Japan, in this fight, possessed the advantage of a modernized and German trained army of 300,000 field troops, with a reserve of 400,000 trained reservists. Czarist Russia's conscript army in the Far East, ill trained and low in morale, was 80,000 at the beginning of 1904, and was reinforced slowly, to a low maximum of 250,000 in December 1904. The Japanese fleet was superior both in size and in quality. In short, a surprise naval attack, the blockade and siege of Port Arthur, a land victory at Mukden, and the destruction of Russia's Baltic fleet, brought success to Japan and the acquisition of Port Arthur, renamed Vladivostok.



All of Asia was watching. After centuries of dominance in Asia by Western powers, an Asian nation had resoundingly defeated one of those powers. Following the Russo-Japanese War, Japan annexed Korea, further establishing its influence in Asia and putting itself in a position to eventually challenge the Western national powers' Asian ambitions.