

The Modernization of Japan

In 1636, Japan had cut off all contact with the outside world. Over 200 years later, in 1853, **Commodore Matthew Perry** and his warships reached Tokyo. He demanded that Japan trade with the United States. The next year the shogun who ruled Japan reluctantly signed the Treaty of Kanagawa opening Japan's ports to foreign trade. Trade treaties were also signed with European nations.

If we try to drive them away, they will immediately begin hostilities, and then we shall have to fight. In time, the nation will incur vast expense, and the people [will be] plunged into misery. Rather than allow this, as we are not the equals of foreigners in the mechanical arts, let us have relations with foreign countries, learn their drills and tactics, and it will be not too late then to declare war.

View expressed by those Japanese leaders who favored the Treaty of Kanagawa

The shogun was overthrown by a group of senior samurai in 1868. The young emperor in whose name they seized power was called the Meiji (enlightened one). The samurai who were the real rulers of Japan were also known as Meiji. They enacted a series of reforms that turned Japan from a feudal aristocracy into a modern state. They persuaded great landowners to exchange their lands for high government office. By imposing universal military service, they reduced class differences and encouraged nationalism. Under the influence of Western culture, the Meiji adopted a constitution that empowered the emperor to appoint a prime minister and to disband Parliament. They also created a civil service based on talent.

To make Japan economically competitive with the West, the Meiji visited European factories and hired Westerners to teach industrial skills to the Japanese. They created a huge demand for industrial goods by building up the military, investing in heavy

industry and mining, and modernizing communications. Modernization was financed by the government, not by foreign capital. Japan did not want to become indebted to the West. A universal system of education and a high birth rate provided industry with a plentiful, cheap, and skilled labor force.

By 1890, Japan had become a world industrial power. Since its own natural resources were meager, it looked for overseas

sources of minerals and metals. Japan won control over Taiwan and Korea following a war with China. In 1902, it signed a naval alliance with Britain. In the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 it won Port Arthur and southern Manchuria from its humiliated opponent. In World War I, Japan fought on the allied side and was rewarded with some of Germany's Pacific colonies.



Why might those Japanese who favored the Treaty of Kanagawa support industrialization?