

## Poss Handout

### **JAPAN and the West: The Meiji Restoration (1868-1912)** (from the Asia for Educators website)

- When the United States sends a naval delegation, led by Commodore Matthew Perry, to "open" Japanese ports in 1853, the Japanese are well aware of the "Unequal Treaties" that have been imposed upon China in the previous ten years (since the Opium War of 1839-42) as a result of the superior military power of the Western nations. The Japanese respond to the challenge of the West.
- Reform-minded samurai, reflecting the enormous changes that have taken place in the preceding Tokugawa period, effect political change. They launch the reform movement under the guise of restoring the emperor to power, thereby eliminating the power of the shogun, or military ruler, of the Tokugawa period. The emperor's reign name is Meiji; hence the title, "Meiji Restoration" of 1868.
- The Japanese carry out this modernization by very deliberate study, borrowing, and adaptation of Western political, military, technological, economic, and social forms — repeating a pattern of deliberate borrowing and adaptation seen previously in the classical period when Japan studied Chinese civilization (particularly in the 7th century to 8th century).
- Economic, political, and social changes that have taken place during the preceding 250 years of peace under the Tokugawa shogunate (1600-1868) lay the basis for the rapid transformation of Japan into a modern industrial power, with a constitution, a parliament, a national, compulsory education system, a modern army and navy, roads, trains, and telegraph — in less than 50 years.
- The emperor's effective power remains the same, but the reformers use the imperial symbol to rally public support and national sentiment for rapid modernization. In China, where a foreign power, the Manchus, holds imperial power from 1644-1911 (Qing dynasty), the similar use of imperial legitimacy — to mobilize popular support for social and political transformation to meet the challenge of the West — is not possible.
- Japan's successful transformation into a modern, military power is demonstrated first in 1894-95 and then in 1905-6. Japan defeats China, long the preeminent power in East Asia, in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5 over influence in the Korean peninsula. Japan defeats Russia, a major Western power, in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905-06 over rights in Manchuria and Korea. Chinese reformers and revolutionaries base themselves in Japan; Western nations take note of Japan's new power.
- Japan, which had isolated itself from international politics in the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), enters an international system of the late 1800s where imperialism dominates. Japan rapidly becomes a major participant in this international system and seeks particular imperialist privileges with its East Asian neighbors, China and Korea.
- By 1910, Japan annexes Korea as a colony and takes control over indigenous Korean modernization efforts. In 1931, Japan takes control of Manchuria and establishes the puppet state of "Manchukuo"; in 1937, Japan invades the rest of China.
- Japan's democratic political system continues to evolve under the Meiji constitution, but then is unable to meet the dual challenges of economic depression and the political power of the Japanese military leaders in the 1920s and 1930s.