

# The Rise of Japan as an Industrial Power

Japan's destiny was about to change! Western intervention opened Japan, an island that had been isolated for 200 years, to trade (just as the West had in Mexico and China!). The interaction between Japan and Western nations gave birth to a modern industrial society.

**Step One:** Watch a clip from “Japan: The Secret Empire, Episode III”. Answer the following questions.

1. How did the Japanese view “the West”?
2. What goods or resources were Americans interested in obtaining from Japan?
3. How had the Japanese Shogunate (military leader) prepared for the arrival of the West?
4. What were the Japanese thinking when they saw the American naval ships arriving on their coast?
5. Commodore Matthew Perry (US Navy) ignored requests to leave. What did he demand from the Japanese?
6. Why do you think the Japanese people were so angry or fascinated by Matthew Perry?
7. What were the arguments for and against the opening of trade in Japan?
8. What was the US/Japanese compromise?
9. What happened to the samurai class?
10. Do you think the Japanese made the right choice in opening up for trade when they did? Explain.



**Step Two:** Read the following article about the period of industrialization or “Enlightened” Meiji (“pronounced “may-jee”) period in Japan. Also use your book from pages 698-701 to gain additional information on the subject.

## Meiji Period (1868 - 1912)

In 1867/68, the Tokugawa era found an end in the Meiji Restoration. The emperor Meiji was moved from Kyoto to Tokyo which became the new capital; his imperial power was restored. The actual political power was transferred from the Tokugawa Shogunate into the hands of a small group of nobles and former samurai.

Like other subjugated Asian nations, the Japanese were forced to sign unequal treaties with Western powers. These treaties granted the

Westerners one-sided economical and legal advantages in Japan. In order to regain independence from the Europeans and Americans and establish herself as a respected nation in the world, Meiji Japan was determined to close the gap to the Western powers economically and militarily. Drastic reforms were carried out in practically all areas.

The new government aimed to make Japan a democratic state with equality among all its people. The boundaries between the social classes of Tokugawa Japan were gradually broken down. Consequently, the samurai were the big losers of those social reforms since they lost all their privileges. The reforms also included the establishment of human rights such as religious freedom in 1873.

In order to stabilize the new government, the former feudal lords (daimyo) had to return all their lands to the emperor. This was achieved already in 1870 and followed by the restructuring of the country in prefectures.

The education system was reformed after the French and later after the German system. Among those reforms was the introduction of compulsory (required) education.

After about one to two decades of intensive westernization, a revival of conservative and nationalistic feelings took place: principles of Confucianism and Shinto including the worship of the emperor were increasingly emphasized and taught at educational institutions.

Catching up on the military sector was, of course, a high priority for Japan in an era of European and American imperialism. Universal conscription (like the American draft system) was introduced, and a new army modeled after the Prussian force, and a navy after the British one were established.

In order to transform the agrarian economy of Tokugawa Japan into a developed industrial one, many Japanese scholars were sent abroad to study Western science and languages, while foreign experts taught in Japan. The transportation and communication networks were improved by means of large governmental investments. The government also directly supported the prospering of businesses and industries, especially the large and powerful family businesses called zaibatsu.

The large expenditures led to a financial crisis in the middle of the 1880's which was followed by a reform of the currency system and the establishment of the Bank of Japan. The textile industry grew fastest and remained the largest Japanese industry until World War II. Work conditions in the early factories were very bad, but developing socialist and liberal movements were soon suppressed by the ruling class.




On the political sector, Japan received its first European style constitution in 1889. A parliament, the Diet was established while the emperor kept sovereignty (sole power): he stood at the top of the army, navy, executive and legislative power. The ruling clique, however, kept on holding the actual power, and the able and intelligent emperor Meiji agreed with most of their actions. Political parties did not yet gain real power due to the lack of unity among their members.

Conflicts of interests in Korea between China and Japan led to the Sino-Japanese War in 1894-95. Japan defeated China, received Taiwan, but was forced by Russia, France and Germany to return other territories. The so called Triple Intervention caused the Japanese army and navy to intensify their rearmament.

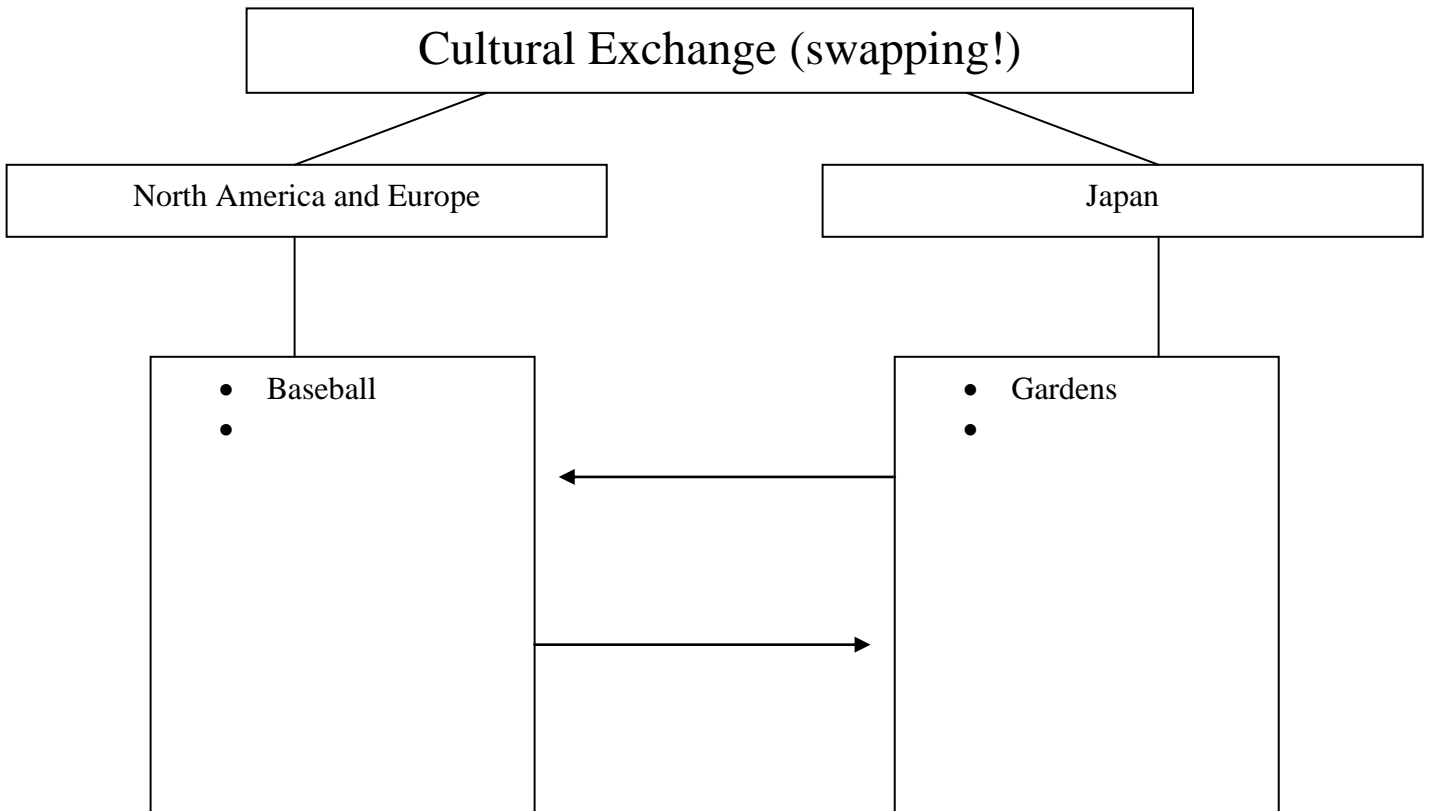
New conflicts of interests in Korea and Manchuria, this time between Russia and Japan, led to the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-05. The Japanese army also won this war gaining territory and finally some international respect. Japan further increased her influence on Korea and annexed her completely in 1910. In Japan, the war successes caused nationalism to increase even more, and other Asian nations also started to develop national self confidence.

In 1912 emperor Meiji died, and the era of the ruling clique of elder statesmen (genro) was about to end.

Now, based on what you read, fill in the following chart:

| Changes in Meiji Japan  |  |
|---|--|
| Politics<br>         |  |
| Economics<br>        |  |
| Social Structure<br> |  |

Step Three: Recognize Cultural Exchange. Japan began swapping ideas from the West, and the West liked their stuff too! Fill in the following chart (at least 5 for each box):



Step Four: Make a generalization. After the East (Japan) met the West (US/Europe), the world was never the same. List three pieces of evidence in favor of/against the modernization and industrialization of Japan.

| “It’s good that Japan became more modern!” | “It’s too bad that Japan became more modern!” |
|--|---|
|  |   |
|  |   |
|  |   |

Overall, do you believe that the Japanese people were better off for becoming modernized? Explain.