

Lesson 5

Question for the Lesson/What you need to know in this lesson:

What was Japanese feudal system before modernisation like?

What were the reasons for the Meiji restoration?

What was Japanese modernisation process like?

What were the impact of Meiji restoration?

IB Questions

Traditional Japan

Japanese Feudal System

In 1603 the Emperor of Japan conferred upon Togugawa Iyeyasu the title of Shogun (hereditary commander-in-chief) or Barbarian subduing Great General

The Togugawa Shogunate will rule Japan for another two and a half-centuries till 1858

Political Organisation

At the **top of the political organization of Japan under the Tokugawa stood the emperor at Kyoto**

But the emperor did not rule. This absence of imperial authority dated from 12th century when the emperor of the day transferred his political functions to Minamoto Yoritomo, the head of the powerful Minamoto clan. Yoritomo set up the first shogunal government in the country. The imperial family provided a symbol of ideological unity for the feudal order

From that time onwards the emperor's functions became purely ceremonial, while the **actual ruler was the shogun** – the emperor was theoretically supreme and to whom divine power was ascribed and the shogun who actually governed with the help of his advisers

The **Shogunal system of government was called the Bakufu or Military Camp government** and continued in existence till 1867.

The Tokugawa shoguns ruled with the help of the feudal lords (the daimyo)

The Daimyo was divided into 3 groups – the Fudai Daimyo, Tozama Daimyo and members of the Tokugawa clan. While the Fudai Daimyo were those who had supported the Tokugawa in consolidating their power, the Tozama Daimyo were those who fought against the Tokugawa.

Next came the Samurai, the hereditary warriors of each clan –they were privileged group and were permitted to carry two swords which were the mark of their military character. Their loyalty to their daimyo was unquestioned and the daimyo supported them in return for their services. When not engaged in their

military duties, most of whom were men of culture and education, administered the other affairs of the clan

Below the samurai were the commoners, made up of the peasants, artisans and merchants of the clan. Of these three groups the peasants were considered the most important while the merchants stood at the bottom of the feudal ladder.

However, the Tokugawa period witnessed a great development of town life. The towns were usually located around the castles of the daimyo where the samurai and other retainers lived. **Instead of the peasants it was the merchants who now began to supply the economic needs of an urban society and as a result many of them became extremely rich** – the merchants now experienced a great change in their position. The artisans experienced a similar change as their services as craftsmen came into increasing demand

Tokugawa Administration

The system of feudal administration was built upon on a system of local feudal loyalties which the Tokugawa exploited to the extreme

It began with the emperor and worked all the way down through the Daimyo and samurai to the commoners. It was for this reason that while the Shogun ruled, he did so in the name of the emperor and acted on his behalf - **in this way his authority was seen to be derived from the Emperor and any act of disloyalty to the shogunate would be an act of disloyalty to the emperor.**

The daimyo of Japan were obliged to sign the written oaths of loyalty to the Shogun and swore to obey him and help him against his enemies.

On his part the Shogun granted a free hand to the daimyo in the running of their fiefs as long as they honoured their oaths of loyalty.

The loyalty of the samurai was maintained by propagating a harsh and ascetic code of ethics. **Much stress was laid on the divine of the Imperial family as this provided the ideological unity for Japanese feudalism.**

Shintoism, which means the 'Way of Gods' was stressed by the Tokugawa, and it kept and maintained the Emperor as a semi-divine figurehead.

The coming of Westerners and Christianity to Japan

The first Europeans to reach Japan were the Portuguese in 1542. This initial contact brought about by 3 Portuguese resulted in the opening of regular trade between Malacca and the Japanese port of Kagoshima.

Trade increased manifold when the Portuguese established themselves at Macao in 1557 but the Portuguese insisted that they would only trade with Kagoshima if the local daimyo would grant their missionaries freedom to preach their religion and 7 years later, St. Francis Xavier reached Kagoshima. The Portuguese thus brought Christianity to Japan.

The Portuguese brought with them muskets and apart from being impressed by the many aspects of European civilization which the Portuguese introduced, the Japanese were quick to recognize the advantages of the use of European guns.

However, in late 16th century all missionaries were asked to return to their countries and an anti-Christian movement took place. One of the reasons for this decision was the Christian priests began to destroy Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. Another reason was the Christian teaching on the Unity of God and the position of the Pope vis-à-vis that of the Emperor. Such doctrines not only undermined the Japanese belief in their deities, but also challenged the ideological basis of the state, which rested upon the divinity of the Emperor.

Iyeyasu was aware of the rapid spread of Christianity as well as of the military strength of the Westerners. There was evidence of Christian involvement in the anti-Tokugawa uprising by the daimyo. New anti-Christian campaign begin in 1615. The anti-Christian measures of the Tokugawa Shogunate reached their peak during the rule of Shogun Iyemitsu when he banned Christianity altogether. Trade with Chinese, Koreans and the Dutch was limited.

Precautions were also taken to isolate the Japanese from the Dutch and the outside world. In 1641, the Dutch were ordered to move their headquarters from the mainland to Deshima, an island at the entrance to Nagasaki harbour. No foreign books were permitted into the country and no Japanese was allowed to learn Dutch.

The Tokugawa Shogunate thus embarked on the policy of seclusion, which officially remained in force till the arrival of Commodore Perry in 1853.

Conditions on the eve of Perry's arrival in Tokyo Bay

The situation as it existed in Tokugawa Japan during the early part of the 19th century was a situation of dissatisfaction. The Shogun's government tried to correct matters but it failed in its attempts to prevent change. Troubles from within seemed to be sprouting up everywhere during the first half of the 19th century. Troubles from without arrived full force in 1853, when Commodore Perry sailed into Edo Bay and demanded that Japan opened up itself.

(i) Economic Woes, Social Dissidence

In the early 19th century many samurai families had to supplement their incomes by planting apples, plums and apricots for sale in the market and by setting up home workshops and producing items such as straw sandals and umbrellas. Samurai families in Japan turned to those commercial pursuits because they believed their standard of living was declining. Also the daimyo and Shogun fixed the stipends paid to their retainers in the early 17th century and rarely increased them thereafter. The real incomes of warrior families actually shrank at times in the 19th century. Many Samurai did not take kindly to such a situation. Many thus did not behave appropriately and refused to obey domain laws.

Many rural and urban commoners also became less deferential to authority in the early 19th century, especially after a series of substandard harvests caused the devastating Tenpo Famine, which lasted from 1833 to 1838. Officials in northern

Japan reported 100000 dead in 1836 alone. Robbery, burglary and stealing were the order of the day. There was also protests of the people against the government authorities demanding for policies that would alleviate suffering. In urban centres, starving people harangued the shogunate or local daimyo to provide relief supplies from government warehouses, to halt price gouging and to defer temporarily the collection of rice taxes. Such defiance and organized collective action forced the government to implement relief measures during the earlier subsistence crises, and the approximately 400 hundred peasant uprisings and urban riots recorded in the 1830s totalled more than had occurred during the entire 17th century.

Other contentious events, many related to protoindustrialization, scarred the early decades of the 19th century. In many regions farm families that had grown prosperous from their commercial endeavours organized protests against the incumbent village leaders whose families had held local office for generations by virtue of inheritance. In the 1830s, such as in the Choshu domain, there were even demonstrations to urge governing authorities to abolish inherited office-holding in favour of new procedures that would empower the upwardly mobile.

Overall: It was not possible for the Shogun to stop the rise of cities and merchant banks or force the peasants back on the lands which they had left because of heavy taxation and famine. The merchants who were now rich were dissatisfied as they wanted more opportunities and a better social status. The peasants, who were the victims of the stresses and strains brought about by the rise of a money economy, expressed their earlier frustrations in the uprisings which periodically took place in various parts of the country, especially in the early part of the 19th century. Dissatisfaction also spread amongst the Samurai who were likewise affected by economic change and were also influenced by the revival of traditional Japanese values and traditions especially concerning the role of the Emperor.

(ii) New Intellectual Discourses

New intellectual discourses and religious expression filled the air in the early 19th century. For some time the scholars associated with Kokugaku or the school of National Learning had been returning to rediscover the distinctive characteristics of Japanese culture. Major figures in the national learning movement, such as Kamo no Mabuchi, came to believe that antiquity represented a golden past, a repository of values and moral lessons that could serve the needs of contemporary society. . In 1716 he repealed the restrictions on the import of foreign books, except those on Christianity. Orders were also given for the compilation of a Dutch-Japanese dictionary. The Japanese were very much impressed by the advance that the West had made in anatomy and medicine and students showed great interest in both these subjects. Other science subjects like astronomy, geography and botany were also studied with keen interest and many translations made into Japanese. When Commodore Perry visited Japan in 1853 he was surprised at the geographical and scientific knowledge of the Japanese, inspite of its isolation.

***By the middle of the 19th century the intellectual ferment generated by the original advocates of Dutch studies and National Learning would encourage a new generation of Japanese to debate the utility of a Confucian based social hierarchy, pose tough questions about the role of the shogunate in a country where they are so many troubles and where the rosy memory of direct rule by the Heavenly sovereign offered the vision of an alternative political arrangement.**

(iii) Failed Reform and Failed Expectations

Authorities were not oblivious of the social and economic turmoil of the early 19th century and the shogunate and several daimyo responded by initiating reform programs in the 1830s and 1840s.

Mizuno Tadakuni who by 1841 had emerged as the shogun's chief policy maker, crafted an elaborate set of proposals that relied on traditional recipes of moral rearmament, frugality and agrarian fundamentalism. He punished allegedly corrupt officials, trimmed government expenditures, instructed samurai to practice austerity and self-discipline, directed merchants to reduce process, in rural areas he issued bans against commercial agriculture and cottage industries so that farmers can concentrate solely on growing crops, extracted monetary contributions from merchants and etc.. Numerous domains also undertook reform programs in the Tenpo period, the years from 1830 to 1844.

The attempts and results were mixed and diverse. A few domains enjoyed modest success. In Choshu, which kicked off a reform program in 1838, authorities balanced the domain's budgets for several years by reducing official expenditures, repudiating the daimyo's debts to merchants and etc. Satsuma domain resolved the domain's debt crisis in a single stroke by unilaterally declaring that all outstanding loan repayments to merchants would be stretched over a 250 year period with interest reduced. Officials also encouraged expanded production of cane sugar and introduced new commercial crops that farmers sold to the domain for subsequent marketing in Japan's urban centres.

In contrast with Choshu and Satsuma, most daimyo reform programs ended inconclusively as they tended to treat symptoms and not causes, relied on traditional prescriptions which provided only temporary solutions, lacked experience and expertise when they intervened in political economy to create new domain monopolies and their innovative experiments more often than not simply ended up promoting chaos, shortages and higher prices and expertise. On the national level, Mizuno was no more successful. His policies did not halt inflation, permanently reduce deficits, or create economic prosperity and his plan to confiscate land around Edo and Osaka caused an uproar that ended with his dismissal from office in the autumn of 1843.

The Tenpo reform era left two enduring legacies.

Among the daimyo many lords began to distrust a shogunate that seemed inept yet stubbornly determined to impose its authority over the lords by threatening to confiscate their holdings.

In the popular mind, a pervasive sense of failed expectations indicated an incipient loss of confidence in government among the commoners, a nascent disbelief that the autonomous or the daimyo could ever formulate solutions to the social and economic malaise that was settling over the country.

By 1850, Tokugawa Japan was not the same tightly controlled feudal state it had been during the 17th century. Almost every class in Japanese society – the rich merchants, restless samurai scholars, and the discontented peasantry – wanted a change.

While the Tokugawa lifted the ban on foreign learning this was not the case of foreign trade. The reason for this was the fear that foreign trade would lead to the importation of Western firearms into the country and so enable the Outer Daimyo to build their strength.

But by the 19th century when there came increasing evidence of Western interest in the country, many elements in Tokugawa Japan was ready for change. The coming of Commodore Perry helped to release the forces which would have probably soon exploded in any case.

(iv) Early attempts at opening up Japan – Troubles from without

After the Opium War and the signing of Treaty of Nanking between China and the Western powers, these powers once again came knocking at the closed doors of Japan.

In the meantime several attempts had been made by western countries to open trade relations with Japan. In spite of mounting problems the Tokugawa authorities refused to negotiate or alter their policy of isolation.

The Restoration Movement (1860-1868) - The opening of the doors

Changes in America

The inclusion of the Oregon (1846) and California (1848) as part of the United States of America led to acquisition of a Pacific frontier and the shortest trans-Pacific route to Asia. The sailing routes via the Atlantic and Indian Oceans now lost the importance and the Pacific Ocean came now to be looked upon as the direct highway to the Far East. The Americans began to take a keener interest in Japan than they had ever done before because its location on this shortest route was bound to make it an important station enroute.

With its fine harbour, San Francisco soon became the centre of a flourishing trans-Pacific trade with China. American sailing ships could now enter the Pacific and

needed a port where they could recuperate and also replenish their supplies in times of need. Significantly, the increase of American interest in the Pacific Ocean coincided with the rise of the steamship. Since Japan was believed to have vast deposits of coal, the Americans regarded it as the logical supply station for a trans-Pacific route to China. For these reasons, the Americans initiated the opening of Japan.

American naval policy as this period was focused on securing naval bases in the Pacific and charting the numerous island-groups and coastlines of the Pacific. The leading advocate of this policy was Commodore Perry.

Commodore Perry was instructed to secure from the Japanese government:

- a) the opening of one or two ports for trade
- b) the rights to purchase coal at certain ports
- c) a guarantee that shipwrecked Americans sailors would be given protection and proper treatment

In July 1853, the letter with the demands from the American President was to the Emperor of Japan at Edo. His black ships then left for China giving the Emperor enough time to get a reply ready.

While the majority of the Daimyo were in favour of the adhering to the policy of isolation, the Tokugawa went against their own declared policy and procured the approval of Emperor Komei to accept the requests of Commodore Perry. Why?

Perry returned to Japan on Feb 1854 with a squadron which now included seven instead of his original 4 black ships. In the agreement that was reached, the Japanese agreed to open two new ports, Shimoda and Hakodate, in addition to Nagasaki, where American ships could be refitted and obtain supplies of coal and other provisions, treat kindly and convey to one of the ports mentioned above, any American sailors found shipwrecked on their shores, permit an American Consulate or Agent to reside at Shimoda, 18 months after the signing of the Treaty.

The Dutch who had been subjected to many humiliating restrictions at Deshima for over 2 centuries, got these removed and were permitted to trade freely at any ports mentioned above.

All the treaties that were signed included the 'most-favored nation' clause. This meant that any concessions henceforth granted by Japan to any one of the powers which had signed the above treaties, would be automatically extended as a right to the others too

With the signing of these treaties, the seclusion of Japan finally came to an end.

The aftermath of Perry's visit

The anti-Tokugawa leaders were not slow in grabbing the opportunity that the new situation presented to them and began to accuse the Tokugawa of abandoning a policy which the country had followed for so long. Even the court nobles joined the

anti-Tokugawa daimyo and together they were able to rally the support of the emperor to their side. The Emperor having given his approval to the treaties, ordered the Shogun not to make any future commitments of any nature. On the other hand, the Shogun was ordered to keep commercial contacts with the outside world to the barest minimum.

The Shogun was in a state of dilemma. On the one hand, he was being bitterly opposed by all the anti-Tokugawa forces in the country, including the Emperor and some members of the Tokugawa clan itself. On the other hand, foreign demands were also being made on him to fulfil the treaty obligations. And he knew that any attempt on his part to implement the clauses of the treaties would certainly result in open clashes in the country.

The Treaty of Edo

Townsend Harris arrived in August 1856 to take up his post as American Consul at Shimoda. A commercial treaty was signed with Japan in July 1858.

The clauses in the Edo Treaty:

- a) Edo and four new treaty ports (Kanagawa, Osaka, Kobe and Niigata) were to be opened for trade and residence for foreign merchants
- b) Full extra-territorial rights both for civil and criminal cases and religious freedom were to be extended to all Americans
- c) The US was also to enjoy the most favoured nation clause
- d) Custom duties were to be fixed by mutual agreement (this placed Japanese tariffs under international control and pegged import duties at levels that benefitted foreign traders)
- e) Opium was to be excluded from the list of imports into Japan

In the following weeks, Ii Naosuke, the shogunate's chief policymaker, signed commercial treaties with the Netherlands, Great Britain, France and Russia, acceding in each case to the inclusion of the most-favoured-nation clause.

Reaction to the Treaty

The Treaty of Edo was signed by the Shogun. By doing this, the Shogun defied the authority of the Emperor who had ordered him not to sign any more commercial treaties and keep the foreigners out of the country.

By signing the Treaty of Edo, the Shogun had done just the opposite and misunderstanding grew between the Shogun and the Emperor who was soon supported by the anti-Tokugawa forces in the country.

Making the slogan, Son-O-Jo-I (Revere the Sovereign and Expel the Barbarian) their war-cry, the anti-Tokugawa forces rallied overwhelming support amongst the people. The Samurai declared that if the Bakufu did not perform its duty in a proper manner they would take matters into their own hands and drive the foreigner from the country.

The anti-Tokugawa forces opened an anti-foreign campaign of their own, of insults, threats and violence. During the years of this campaign a number of westerners were killed.

These attacks were also against the hierarchy of the Tokugawa Shogunate because the masses felt that the latter was primarily responsible for the state of affairs that existed in the country. Taira no Naosuke, one of the most outstanding Bakufu at that time, was the first to be slain by samurai swords. He was assassinated in 1860 by young assassins from Mito and Satsuma domains. In the two years between 1862 and 1864, many from Choshu, Satsuma, Tosa and Hizen, carried out more than seventy assassinations

The western clans (the outsiders) now formed a formidable alliance with the anti-Tokugawa party in Kyoto. The party got added support from Satsuma and Choshu daimyo. In 1866, discarding their individual differences, both the powerful daimyo threw their support behind the anti-Tokugawa group in the Kyoto court and against the Bakufu at Edo. As a result of this, the Choshu-Satsuma group (Satsuma, Choshu, Tosa and Hizen) not only took over the leadership of the anti-Tokugawa group but also came to the fore-front in challenging the might of the foreign powers.

In 1863 sonno joi (Revere the Heavenly polity, Expel the Barbarians) activists plotted a daring coup d'etat, an assault on the royal palace intended to free the Heavenly Sovereign from Shogunal forces occupying Kyoto and place him at the head of a loyalist army that would strike against foreigners and confiscate all Tokugawa landholdings in western Japan. But the coup did not materialize. However, the young radicals, their violence, assassinations, attacks on foreign ships and attempted coups set shogun against daimyo and pitted the court against the camp.

From 1862, the leading officials within the Shogunate begin to push for reforms that would strengthen the Shogunate military, revitalize its authority over Kyoto and open the possibility of abolishing daimyo domains unfriendly to the government in Edo. By 1865 the Shogunate had imported more than ten thousand rifles through Yokohama and was beginning to reorganize its samurai legions into cavalry, artillery, and infantry units, with the aim of developing a professional standing army equipped with modern weapons.

Edo's military buildup did not sit well with those new leaders in Choshu or with their compatriots in Satsuma. In the former, Ito Hirobumi, Yamagata Aritomo and other former radicals who assumed key positions following the domains civil war had long since dismissed the Shogunate as inept. Ito and several colleagues had returned from a trip to England in 1863 and were impressed with the West's wealth and power. Dismayed by the Shogunate's aggressive disposition and sensing a showdown, Satsuma and Choshu raced to increase their own wealth and power.

Even as the Shogunate and the domains of the southwest edged toward confrontation, economic problems associated with the inauguration of foreign trade racked the country, intensifying the distrust that many ordinary people felt towards the Edo policies and ultimately raising questions in the popular mind about shogunal legitimacy. Burgeoning foreign demand brought prosperity to families that grew tea

and raised silkworm, as there were increasing demand for tea and silk thread. But it held negative consequences for many other sectors of the society. As the cost of raw silk thread soared, weavers in Kyoto and Kiryu faced unemployment when they had to boost prices of the finished cloth they sold to domestic customers. In some parts of the country, urban dwellers found themselves paying more food as farmers converted paddy to the production of tea and mulberry trees, thus shoving up the price of rice between 1863 and 1867. A catastrophic earthquake shook Edo in 1854, leading about 100 000 dead, Westerners brought a cholera epidemic into Japan's ports in 1861, and 1866 saw severe crop failures.

As the economic stresses associated with the arrival of the West became more apparent in the 1860s, Japan's commoners began to redirect their criticisms towards the Shogunate. Increasingly, there were complaints about the difficulty of eking out a living when inflation and unemployment were so epidemic and foreign trade was condemned for the suffering it caused and urged the removal of the barbarian-subduing shogun who had failed to carry out his duties. When poor harvests led to food shortages in 1866, commoners in Edo rioted for just the third time in that city's history, castigating authorities for failing to undertake relief measures and for permitting rice dealers to hoard again. Mass uprisings in the countryside in 1866, a larger number than during any other single year in the entire history of the Tokugawa shogunate added to the social chaos. Driven to violence by the hardships of the present, many demonstrators in the mid-1860s conceived of their actions as a step toward a better tomorrow. For most peasants, the term *yonaoshi* (world renewal) signified discontent with the ruling elites.

Against the backdrop of mounting popular discontent, tensions between the Edo government and the powerful domains of the Western Japan came to a head in the summer of 1866, when Iemochi ordered several daimyo to supply him with troops for the proposed second expedition against Choshu. In the eyes of its critics, the Shogunate's attempt to punish such a respected domain as Choshu was a reckless undertaking. For more than a decade, they charged, the government in Edo had failed to address adequately "troubles from within and without." It had bungled foreign policy, its domestic policies lacked credibility and now it seemed preoccupied more with furthering its own self-fish interests than with tending to important national concerns.

Satsuma refused to contribute troops to the shogun and instead there was a secret agreement negotiated with Choshu in the First month of 1866 pledging mutual support should the shogunate attack either domain. Determined to defend their home soil, Choshu armies easily turned aside the shogunate's undermanned and poorly commanded battalions, which retreated to Edo after Iemochi died unexpectedly in the Seventh Month of 1866.

To the horror of the dissident domains, in the autumn of 1867 the new shogun announced yet another self-strengthening program that would revamp administrative practices, raise taxes and use French loans and military advisers, to restore Tokugawa military. In the southwest, men began to formulate plans to overthrow a regime that seemed to be dangerously out of control and intent on wiping out

dissenting daimyo. In Kyoto, anti-shogunal courtiers, such as the influential Iwakura Tomoni, openly encouraged rebellion. Many ordinary people shared whose sentiments.

As 1867 drew to an end, contingents of armed rebels from Satsuma and Choshu moved towards Kyoto. On the morning of Jan 3, 1868, warriors from Satsuma stormed into the royal compound, where they were welcomed by the anti-Shogunal courtiers. A fifteen year old son, who had ascended the throne upon his father's death the previous year, and who would soon become known to the world as Emperor, issued a proclamation that abolished the office of shogun, restored power to the Heavenly sovereign, created new government offices to be staffed by court nobles, daimyo and other men of talent and promised a renewal of all things in order to end the distress of the people.

There were some opposition but volunteers from Satsuma, Choshu, Tosa, Hizen, Echizen and several other domains created an effective royal army and drove the shogun's battalions back towards Edo, which fell in the Fourth month of 1868.

The men who attacked the shogunate cloaked their actions in tradition by calling for a restoration of rule by the Heavenly Sovereign and their victory came relatively quickly, with considerably little sustained violence.

But the young men of 1868 intended to do far more than stage a coup d'etat that would resurrect the inherited values of the past and save their domains from extinction. In the early decades of the century Japan's troubles from within had raised serious questions about the ability of the traditional polity to respond to problems of samurai impoverishment and morale, adapt to the economic transformations set in motion by protoindustrialization and the commercialization of agriculture, cope with social chaos, answer criticism from intellectuals and make room for the new political consciousness evident in acts of collective dissidence. The troubles from without which began with the arrival of Perry revealed the structural weakness and ideological bankruptcy of the shogunate and the regime's capitulation to foreign demands earned it the animosity of the young radicals and the loathing of the peasants and urban dwellers who suffered the consequences of opening the country to trade. The men who seized power in 1868, were nationalists who railed against Japan's semi-colonial status, were Japanese who were sympathetic to the problems confronting their countrymen. Radicalized by the events of the 1850s and 1860s, filled with rage and resentment, they were profoundly dissatisfied with their world and wanted to change.

The need to create more flexible governing institutions that would enlist the abilities of men of talent, promote national unity.

Motives behind the modernizing movement

The motives behind Japanese modernizing movement were related to the world-wide expansion of the Western nations. The person who set these forces in motion as far as Japan was concerned was Perry, who made it clear that Japan could no longer live in isolation. This was accepted by those Japanese leaders who were aware of the technological and scientific advances of the West and of their own

inferiority in this respect, even before the arrival of Perry. The general motives for modernization had their roots in the shock that the Japanese experienced as a result of the opening of the country to the West. **The primary goal of the Japanese therefore was to preserve their national independence and at the same time build up enough power to prevent external encroachments.** Their aim was to **raise the status of their own country to the same level as that enjoyed by countries like the United States, Great Britain, Russia, Holland and France.** To do this they would have to **abolish the humiliating unequal treaties that they had been forced to accept.**