

Lesson 11

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

What was Japanese feudal system like before modernisation like?

What were the reasons for the Meiji restoration?

What was Japanese modernisation process like?

How was Meiji restoration (Japan's modernization) different or similar to that of China?

What were the impact of Meiji restoration?

IB Questions

Reasons for and Impact of Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895)

1. Examine the causes, and the consequences for Korea and the region, of the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895).

Reasons for Japan's annexation of Korea

2. Why did Japan annex Korea in 1910? (M10 Q7)

Reasons for and Impact of Japan's annexation of Korea

3. Examine the reasons for, and results of, Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910. (M15)

A. Background Information

During the 1870s the Japanese government maneuvered forcefully to promote the country's diplomatic interests. The oligarchs' actions, however, did not add up to a pre-mediated plan for continental expansion. Rather in the first decade of its existence the new Meiji government had the more limited objectives of clarifying the nation's borders and reorganizing its relationship with its closest neighbours to correspond with western practices. By the end of the decade the oligarchs had achieved those goals.

For instance, the Meiji government wanted to establish a clear boundary somewhere to the north of Hokkaido as they felt that Japan needed that major island for both economic and strategic reasons. They wanted their soldiers and traders as far from the heart of Japan as possible as they also thought of the possible threat of Russian advance in the north.

Japanese attitudes towards their neighbours changed dramatically in the 1880s as a new and more virulent strain of Western imperialism threatened to overwhelm East Asia. During the late 19th century, the powerful nations of the West believed in having an empire to be a successful modern power and this touched off a fierce

rivalry for overseas possessions among the western powers. The aggressive Western penetration of Asia persuaded many Japanese that their nation had to rethink its relationship with its neighbours in Asia and the belligerent powers of the West. The person most responsible formulating Japanese foreign policy was Yamagata Aritomo, the veteran oligarch who had overseen the creation of the Japanese conscript army, was Home Minister in the 1880s and accepted the position of prime minister in 1889.

In his perception, Japan's neighbour was weak and backward nation, possible future prey for the predatory British or the ambitious Russians, who were about to build the Trans-Siberian Railway across northern Asia to Vladivostok. The completion of this transportation link, Yamagata concluded, posed a long-term threat to Japan's vital interests since it would position Czar's armies to move on to Manchuria or even Beijing. Japan believed that Russia hungered to have a year-round port as the terminus for its new railroad, and since Vladivostok iced over during the winter, Russia would also have possible interest in securing access to Korea for more temperate harbours. If either Britain or Russia secured even a toehold on the Korean peninsula, Yamagata feared Japan's independence would be ultimately jeopardized.

In order to defend its sovereignty, the foreign policy objective was for Japan to defend a line of sovereignty, which is the newly settled national borders, as well as line of advantage which is a buffer zone whose neutrality was essential to Japan's security needs and this line of advantage ran through Korea.

By the early 1890s many in Japan felt that Western imperialism and racist attitudes posed grave threats to Japanese independence and that Japan was justified in contemplating action outside its national borders to preserve its national integrity. Seizing upon the rhetoric of expansionism that filled the air, Japan felt that it has to be assertive, even victimize others, if it wish to be victimized itself.

B. Reasons for the outbreak of Sino-Japanese War 1894-1895

Importance of Korea to Japan

Korea was seen as vital not only for Japan's national integrity but also for economic concerns. Between 1877 and 1893 the value of Japanese commodities shipped to the peninsula increased fourfold and in return Japanese traders purchased about 90% of all Koreans exports of rice and soyabeans.

The Tianjin Convention, 1885

In Korea, by the early 1880s the court was dominated by a conservative faction determined to preserve a Confucian-based society, enforce an exclusionist foreign policy and continue Korea's reliance on China for advice. However, rising in opposition was a group of self-styled progressives, led by Kim Ok-kyun., who

admired Japan's response to the West and believed that Korea should undertake reforms. Some pro-westerners in Tokyo befriended Kim and encouraged by such support Kim organized a coup attempt against the Korean monarchy. Using weapons smuggled to him from Japan and openly assisted by guard unit posted to Japan's legation in Seoul, Kim and his followers stormed the royal palace in 1884. Korean conservatives immediately appealed to Chinese garrison force for help and after 3 days of fighting they restored order to the capital. Angry Koreans took their revenge by killing forty Japanese and burning the legation to the ground.

China and Japan concluded the Tianjin Convention in 1885 and it was stipulated that neither Japan nor China will place troops in Korea or move forces into the Peninsula without giving prior notification. However, Japan's economic and strategic interest in Korea meant that it would remain sensitive to conditions on the Korean Peninsula.

Tonghak Insurrection, 1894

Kim was murdered by agents of the Korean government and the Chinese authorities returned the corpse to Seoul. That same spring the Japanese government looked on with growing alarms as leaders of Tonghak, a new religion, that rallied people and threatened to overthrow the regime unless it undertook reforms to improve the lot of Korea's poor. The Korean government asked China for military assistance to quell the domestic unrest and as some 3000 Chinese troops were disembarking near Seoul in June, Japan's policy makers convened to decide on a response. In the view of the Japanese leaders China had violated the Tianjin convention by dispatching troops without informing Japan and the prospect of a weak Korea once again allied closely with disintegrating China resurrected the spectre of Russian or British intervention. Japan's leaders decided to dispatch an expeditionary force to Korea in the late spring of 1894 and following skirmishes with Chinese forces, war was officially declared on August 1894.

The Treaty of Shimonoseki, 1895

Recognized Korean independence; Japan eventually annexed Korea in 1910

Cession of Taiwan, Pescadores and Liaotung Peninsula

Opening up of more Chinese ports

Japanese could open factories and this was quickly copied by the other powers

C. Reasons for China Defeat and Japan's Victory

Japan had become a modern state in which a nationalistic consciousness bonded the government and people into a unified body. But in China, the state and the

people formed separate entities. The war hardly affected the Chinese people; The Japanese army was fought by Li Hung-chang's Peiyang and Huai army.

The Japanese mobilized 21 ships, 9 of which were constructed after 1889, capable of 23 knots. The Peiyang fleet possessed 25 ships in 1888; 2 of them were large ironclads of 7000 tons as compared with the largest 4000 ton Japanese ships. However, the speed of the Chinese ships were only 15 or 16 knots. In sum, the Chinese fleet was large, old and slow while that of the Japanese was small, new and fast. Corruption at the Qing court and in the Peiyang command doomed the Chinese effort from the start.

The misuse of naval funds for Dowager's Summer Palace led to abandonment of plans to purchase two fast ships and instead these ships were purchased by Japan and one of these ships, the Yoshino, established a splendid record in the naval battle. Within the Peiyang command itself, corruption and irregularities were rampant. Li's subordinates embezzled funds. The big ten -inch guns on the two iron-clads were allocated only 3 shells each and the many smaller guns were assigned wrong size shot and the funds for the ammunition lined the pocket of the officer in charge of supplies.

D. Significance of this victory for Japan

Japan replaced China as the leading state in East Asia. With Taiwan in the south and Korea in the north, Japan had secured a solid base for future advance into Southeast Asia and a convenient springboard to Manchuria. The war paved the way for its challenge to Russia in 1904, its rise to the great-power status, its future aggression in China and its domination of Southeast Asia during World War II.

In addition, in the spring of 1894 Great Britain, which had been particularly stubborn in refusing to yield to treaty rights, decided to cultivate Japanese goodwill as a way to inhibit Russian ambitions in northern Asia. The Anglo-Japanese Commercial Treaty was signed in 1894, which abolished the segregated, enclave like British settlements within Japanese cities and provided for the abolition of extraterritoriality in 5 years. By 1897 the other treaty powers, impressed with Japan's new military powers, had entered into similar agreements that also recognized Japan's tariff autonomy and provide for the complete equalization of all relations by 1911. The country thus achieved its long-sought goal of treaty revision with the western powers.

E. Reasons for Russo-Japanese War

The agony of the Triple Intervention soon deprived the Japanese of their thrill of victory against China. At the end of the 19th century the powerful nations of Europe were preparing to carve the Chinese 'melon' into spheres of imperialistic influence and the Russian Czar was resolved to reserve a generous slice in the north of China.

Just days after signing the Treaty of Shimonoseki, St Petersburg advised Tokyo to return the Liaodong Peninsula to China. Without the support of America and British to resist Russia and France and Germany agreeing with the Czar, Japan restored Liaodong to Chinese control.

Russia began to muddle in Korea's domestic affairs. Russian advisers ingratiated themselves with Queen Min, who had emerged as a rallying point for anti-Japanese sentiment. The leading Japanese official in Seoul made the situation worse in Oct 1895, when he became involved in the murder of Queen Min and installation of pro-Japanese reformers at court. King Kojong, fearing for his life, invited Russian to station protection in the Russian legation and granted Russia mining and timber rights in the northern part of the Peninsula. By 1898 Russia had also gained 25 year leasehold on the Liaodong Peninsula and also had demanded rights to build Chinese Eastern Railway westward across Manchuria.

More than ever Tokyo was determined to win full recognition for its special interests in Korea and to preserve the peninsula's independence from the western powers. As negotiations between Japan and Russia failed to hammer out a modus vivendi for northern Asia, Japan's claims to special position in Korea, war fever built up in Japan.

In Jan 1904 Japan decided to go to war with Russia. On Sept 5, 1905, the Treaty of Portsmouth was signed, an agreement that seemed to signify victory for Japanese. The second clause of the treaty stipulated that Russia must recognize Japan's preponderant interest in Korea and not oppose any measures that Japan might undertake there.

Additional provisions granted Japan the Russian leasehold over the Liaodong Peninsula (Kwangtung Territory), the Czar's railroad and mining rights in southern Manchuria, and sovereignty over southern half of Sakhalin.

Colonizing Korea

Following the war with China and the humiliating Triple intervention many Japanese policymakers adopted the more extreme view that Japan itself must be strong enough to ensure that no other nation unduly influenced affairs on the Korean peninsula. After the hostilities with Russia, in May 1904, the Japanese cabinet decided that Japan must assume responsibility for Korea's internal stability and national security. In the fall of 1905, Ito Hirobumi travelled to Seoul as a special envoy to implement that policy.

Korean-Japanese Convention of 1905

A forced agreement that turned the peninsular country into a Japanese protectorate by providing for the establishment of the Office of the Resident General vested with the authority to dictate Korea's foreign relations and use Japanese troops to enforce domestic law and order. Ito himself became the Resident General. He engineered the abdication of Kojong (emperor) and disbanded the Korean Army in 1907 and endowed himself with considerable civil and military prerogatives and thus comprehensive control over domestic matters. Resident General Ito and his several

thousand Japanese advisers began to reform, Korea's currency and tax structure and modernize its telegraph, telephone, and postal services.

Japanese cabinet also considered the economic as well as the political and strategic advantages that would accrue from Japanese mastery over Korea. The Office of the Resident General extended Japanese fishing grounds into Korean coastal waters and negotiated timber concessions and mining rights that it could assign to men of capital. The Japanese government also provided generous construction subsidies and guaranteed bond issues to complete construction of a railroad linking Seoul with the Southern port of Pusan. The new line had military importance as it ran through the most populous sections of Korea, but it also opened up new markets and brought down the cost of transporting goods. There was steady expansion in the volume of goods exported to Korea after 1895.

Responding to such initiatives, more than 125,000 Japanese took up residence in Korea by 1908. Some set up small manufacturing enterprises, some worked as teachers, artisans or took up jobs as porters and coolies. Many migrants also opened restaurants and tearooms in Korean cities to cater to the expatriate community and the bureaucrats who served in the Office of the Resident General. Japanese farmers also migrated to Korea. Tokyo provided discounted train and boat fares and extended low-interest long-term loans to get the settlers started with their new lives. The intention was to provide new opportunities for people from the poorer regions of the Japanese countryside and to also boost agriculture production on the peninsula. Large quantities, according to the planners, of relatively cheap Korean rice, soybeans and other agricultural products would flow into the Japan's urban centres and increased income of the rural population in Korea would stimulate demand for Japanese manufactured goods. The Japanese farmers who had made their way to the Peninsula without official help were already owning 3% of Korea's arable land.

Final Annexation of Korea

As part of Korean opposition to Japanese illegitimate takeover of their country's economy and government, Ito was gunned down by a young Korean patriot. Tokyo realised that Korean officials and people have not yet been brought into a satisfactory relationship with Japan. Determined to seize Korea outright, the Japanese drew up a treaty of annexation. Signed on August 22, 1910, and enacted just seven days later the covenant renamed Korea Chosen, made it into a colony of Japan and placed total authority over civil and military matters in the Government-General of Korea.

F. Conclusion: Japanese Imperialism

Fear and apprehension of the West made fertile seedbed for the growth of Japanese imperialism. As Meiji leaders watched the West reduce their country to semi-colonial status and as they had to contend with new round of Western intrusion into Asia that threatened to overwhelm Japan, they feared that their modernizing efforts were being ruined. Japanese government reacted defensively and justified its acquisition of empire as a countermeasure designed to preserve its national independence in a

volatile and potentially lethal international environment. That desperate sense of vulnerability was the primary reason for Japanese policy-makers decision to seize Korea and keep Korea out of the hands of opportunistic Western powers. Similarly, the Treaty of Shimonoseki that China surrender Taiwan and the Liaodong Peninsula reflected the navy's wish to have a base to guard the southern approaches to Japan and the army's desire to expand the line of advantage to protect Korea's northern flank.

The economic reasons of Japanese expansionism in the 19th century were subordinate to geopolitical concerns. The government hoped to capture economic privileges and develop commercial interests, such as in Korea, in order to buttress (provide support to) Japan's political and strategic position. It was ultimately strategic anxieties that drove the leaders to wage war against China and Russia.

However, Japan's imperial expansionism was something more than a reflex-like response taken by a small nation to protect itself against an imminent threat to its existence by a larger predator. Rather, Japan's government deliberately, consciously and knowingly chose the course of imperialism and its expansion had an aggressive as well as defensive cast to it.

By the late 1880s, its leaders were fully aware of the multiple benefits – prestige, strategic advantages, material wealth – realized by nations that projected their power abroad and claimed markets and raw materials. Japan hungered to enter the circle of leading nations, and in the era when imperialism and international standing went hand-in-hand, the leaders did not fear to take the leap when the opportunities were presented themselves to emulate the actions of the Great Power. For Japan's government, the new century and the quest for modernity included unequivocal commitments to constitutional and parliamentary government, industrialization and capitalism, and a strong and imperialistic foreign policy.