



The Meiji Restoration

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The Meiji Restoration of 1868 was a political revolution that ended the Tokugawa shogunate, ending along with it Japan's Edo period (1603 - 1867) and beginning the Meiji period (1868 - 1912) under the ostensible rule of Mutsuhito, who became Emperor Meiji. By restoring imperial rule after over two hundred years of control by the Tokugawa shoguns, the Meiji Restoration began a time of great political, economic, and social change, ultimately modernizing Japan into a world power by Emperor Meiji's death in 1912 (*Britannica*).

Before the Meiji Restoration, the Tokugawa shogunate had established military rule in Japan under a feudal regime. Although they managed to keep peace by shutting off contact with other nations, save one outpost at Nagasaki for Dutch traders, the shogun was forced to sign the Treaty of Kanagawa and open Japan after U.S. Commodore Matthew C. Perry arrived with a naval fleet and demanded that U.S. merchants be allowed to conduct business with Japan. The shogun had been informed by the Dutch about China's defeat by Britain and feared that Japan could also succumb to imperialist pressures; however, the Tokugawa regime's failure to keep out foreign invaders led to animosity from feudal domains opposing Tokugawa authority, especially the Chōshū, Satsuma, and Tosa. These domains supported imperial rule and favored modernizing Japan while supporters of the shogunate wanted to preserve the existing cultural and political traditions. The conflict between these two ideals culminated in the Boshin War (1868–1869),



which caused Tokugawa Yoshinobu, the last Tokugawa shogun, to step down several months after Emperor Meiji's ascension to power (*World History*).

Emperor Meiji's rule commenced the Meiji period, changing Japan into a more industrialized and Westernized nation through various reforms. Early actions taken by the new administration include moving the Japanese capital from Kyoto to Edo, renamed to Tokyo. The past feudal regime was abolished, with domains (previously controlled by daimyos) replaced by prefectures. The Meiji Constitution was also completed in 1889 and established a bicameral parliament, known as the Diet. Meiji leaders also created the Bank of Japan and the yen, the first national Japanese currency. Other reforms included the implementation of universal elementary education and the formation of a national army backed by conscription laws. Japan's growing military prowess was showcased by its victories in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). By the end of Meiji's rule, Japan had established itself as the dominant power in East Asia through its industrialization and modernization, with Western colonial powers acknowledging its international prominence.



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