

# Meiji Era – Change or Continuity?

By Catherine Mein with Kit Wainer

## Introduction:

From the multitude of political, economic, social, intellectual, technological, institutional, and cultural changes of Meiji Japan's encounter with modernity, this lesson focuses on material culture. The lesson asks students to analyze visual primary and written secondary sources as a means of looking at the everyday life of Japanese in terms of (1) continuity and change and (2) the impact and limits of modernization.

This lesson is designed for use in a high school world history course, but middle school teachers can modify the reading and assessments to make the lesson workable with their students. It assumes prior study of the transition from the Tokugawa (Edo) era to the Meiji era, including:

- Commodore Perry's arrival and resulting treaty, 1853-1854.
- Unequal treaties of 1858 with the United States, Britain, France, Russia, and the Netherlands.
- The process of modernization and how a country becomes a modern nation.
- Continuities in this transition such as:
  - Proto-industrialization in the Tokugawa era sets the stage for Meiji industrial development.
  - The elite samurai remain in leadership, wielding power behind the "restored" emperor despite a revolution against the shogun.

**Objectives:** After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Recognize change and continuity in the Meiji era.
- Evaluate the effects of modernization efforts on daily Japanese life.
- Use a variety of sources to assess a historical argument.
- Analyze historical artifacts.

## Guiding Question:

- Was modernization the dominant feature of daily life in Meiji Japan?

## Standards and Guidelines:

### [World History Content Standards](#)

*Era 7 (1750-1914), Standard 3: The transformation of Eurasian societies in an era of global trade and rising European power, 1750-1870.*

Standard 3E: The student understands how Japan was transformed from feudal shogunate to modern nation-state in the 19th century.

*Standard 5: Patterns of global change in the era of Western military and economic domination, 1830-1914.*

Standard 5D: The student understands transformations in South, Southeast, and East Asia in the era of the "new imperialism."

5-12 - Analyze Japan's rapid industrialization, technological advancement, and national integration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

### **AP® World History Curriculum Framework**

*Period 5: Industrialization and Global Interaction, c. 1750 to c. 1900*

Key Concept 5.1. Industrialization and Global Capitalism

- I. Industrialization fundamentally changed how goods were produced.
  - D. As the new methods of industrial production became more common in parts of northwestern Europe, they spread to other parts of Europe and the United States, Russia, and Japan.
- V. The development and spread of global capitalism led to a variety of responses.
  - C. In a small number of states, governments promoted their own *state-sponsored visions of industrialization*.

### **Common Core State Standards Grade: 6-12 Literacy in History/Social Studies**

*Key Ideas and Details, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.*

*Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.9: Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.*

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.*

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.*

### **Plan for Assessment:**

Several options for formative assessment are described below. As a summative assessment, students answer the central question of the unit, drawing on the sources provided for evidence to support their answers.

### **Formative Assessments:**

- Visual Answer: Teacher identifies one side of the room as “Yes, modernization was the dominant feature of daily life in the Meiji period” and the other side as “No, modernization was not the dominant feature of daily life in the Meiji period.” Each student then physically moves to a location that best represents his/her answer to the guiding question. Each student briefly explains his/her position. Students should refer to evidence from the sources to justify their position. Variation: Teacher draws a spectrum on the board from “Yes” to “No,” and students use sticky notes to show their answers. Students should write their reasoning on the sticky notes.
- Ticket Out: Students write a paragraph or brief outline to answer the guiding question. Answers should include some indication of the sources and evidence that support that position.

**Criteria for Evaluating the Formative Assessments:**

- Students clearly answer the guiding question in their responses. The best answers will consider the complexity of the situation rather than simply answering yes or no.
- Students distinguish between public and private life in their answers.
- Students use specific evidence from multiple sources to support their position.
- Students demonstrate an understanding of the changes and continuities that occurred during the Meiji Era.
- The best answers identify the groups in Meiji society most and least affected by those changes.

**Summative Assessments:**

- Image Analysis: Students analyze one or two images (see the **Image Analysis Assessment**). Analysis should include a detailed description of the image with an explanation of how the image answers the central question. If two images are used, students should also compare and contrast the meanings taken from each image. (See **Assessment** section for rubric.)
- Essay/Speech: Students use the resources from the lesson to prepare an argumentative essay/speech that answers the guiding question. Students should provide specific evidence from the sources to support their answers. (See **Assessment** section for rubrics.)

**Time Required:** Three 50-minute class periods or two 90-minute block periods, plus homework; middle school teachers will likely want to shorten the lesson by omitting some of the sources to be analyzed by students.

**Materials:**

<b>Materials Provided</b>	<b>Online Resources</b>	<b>Other Materials</b>
Handouts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Japan's Response to Imperialism</li> <li>• Meiji Era Woodblock Prints: Images of Modernization</li> <li>• Meiji Era PowerPoint Notes Format (or, for a note-taking handout showing the visuals, print the <b>Meiji Era: Change or Continuity? PowerPoint</b>, choosing "Print All Slides" and "Handouts: 3 Slides" under Print Settings)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">MIT Visualizing Cultures "Throwing Off Asia I"</a> (reading level: 14.3)</li> <li>• <a href="#">MIT Visualizing Cultures Meiji Era Woodblock Prints</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Old Photos of Japan: A photo blog of Japan in the Meiji, Taisho and Showa periods</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Word document, chart paper, or other way to record and retrieve class prediction list</li> <li>• Copies of your course textbook's coverage of the Meiji Era</li> <li>• Computer and projector, plus multiple computers with Internet access</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Stability in Transition*</b> (reading level: 8.8)</li> </ul> <p>Power Point</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>“Meiji Era: Change or Continuity?” PowerPoint</b></li> </ul> <p>Assessment Tools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Meiji Era—Image Analysis Assessment</b></li> <li>• <b>Meiji Era—Change or Continuity Image Analysis Rubric</b></li> <li>• <b>Meiji Era—Change or Continuity Essay Rubric</b></li> <li>• <b>Meiji Era—Change or Continuity Speech Rubric</b></li> </ul>		
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\*For a challenging reading for upper-level students, teachers can also access Chapter Seven in Susan B. Hanley’s *Everyday Things in Premodern Japan: The Hidden Legacy of Material Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) and prepare copies of the excerpts on “Housing” (pages 156-159) and “Clothing” (pages 166-168). In this case, a visual glossary of the terms used in the excerpts is suggested as well.

## Implementation:

### **Pre-Lesson Activities (Optional)**

1. Introduce the Meiji era using the **Japan’s Response to Imperialism** handout, which asks students to read a challenging essay ([MIT Visualizing Cultures “Throwing Off Asia I”](#)) and create a PowerPoint presentation illustrating their response to the question: *Did Japan respond to the West as a threat or an opportunity?*
2. Have students complete Part 1 of the **Japan’s Response to Imperialism** worksheet as homework. If students do not have Internet access at home, you may need to print a few copies of the Dower essay from the MIT site.
3. Organize students into groups of two or three and have them complete Part 2 in class. Students will need computers with Internet access to complete the assignment. Collect students’ worksheets and PowerPoints.

### **Day 1**

1. For homework, have students read a textbook account of the Meiji era and Japan’s encounter with modernity. As students are reading, have them make note of changes that are described and whether these changes would have applied to all Japanese (A) or some Japanese (S).
2. In class, review the Meiji era as Japan’s encounter with modernity. Based on students’ understanding of the process of modernization—how a country becomes a modern nation—and the case of Japan, have students predict the impact of changes on the everyday lives of Japanese people. Introduce the lesson’s central question: *Was modernization the dominant*

*feature of daily life in Meiji Japan?* Record students' predictions and save for the end of the lesson.

3. Have students share their notes from the textbook reading assigned for homework. When they identify a change only affecting some, ask them to try to identify which groups (rural, urban, samurai, farmers, artisans, merchants, outcasts, commoners, elite, women, wealthy, poor) would be affected. Review the central question and how they would answer the question based on this source.
4. Pass out the **Meiji Era Woodblock Prints: Images of Modernization** handout for students to take notes. With the whole class, access the first image online and model analysis of: (1) changes and continuities of the Meiji era portrayed in the image and (2) what groups each change or continuity would have affected. Draw students' attention to clothing, architecture, utilities, transportation, and other details. Discuss when and why each image was created. (Make sure students understand that Meiji woodblock prints featuring Western structures and new technology were used unofficially to promote the Meiji government's national project of modernization.) Have the students complete analysis of the remaining three images for homework or in class.
5. Have students compare their findings from the images with their notes from the textbook. Do these sources agree or disagree?

## **Day 2**

1. Have students review their answers to the central question based on the sources they have seen so far.
2. Pass out copies of the **Meiji Era PowerPoint Notes Format** (or the handout printed out from the PowerPoint file) and tell students to take notes on it as you show the PowerPoint, **Meiji Era: Change or Continuity?** Students should analyze the images for changes and continuities during the Meiji era, trying to identify what groups in Japanese society would have been affected by each change or continuity. Encourage students to speculate on how and why each image/artifact was created. Students should note the title of each image or slide.
3. Have students compare what they gained from these sources with what they learned from the textbook account and the woodblock prints. Do the sources agree? Do they agree on some points and not on others? Discussion should also go back to the central question.
4. Distribute the **Stability in Transition** handout, which summarizes findings from a chapter of the same name in historian Susan B. Hanley's book *Everyday Things in Premodern Japan*. Ask half the students to read the section on clothing and the other half the section on housing. For homework, students should read their assigned section, looking for how this source agrees or not with the other sources and how it affects their answer to the central question.

## **Day 3**

1. Have students share the information from their readings, either in pairs or as a whole group. Discuss how the students would refine their answers to the central question based on this new source.

2. As a whole class, review the images from the **Meiji Era Woodblock Prints: Images of Modernization** handout and the **Meiji Era: Change or Continuity?** PowerPoint. Have students re-examine the images and compare them to Hanley's excerpts. Students should add new ideas or thoughts about the images/artifacts to their notes. The concept of "public and private" is an important one when analyzing material culture and teaching what Meiji Japan adopted and rejected—in another words, its changes and continuities. At this point in the discussion, make sure students recognize that in most cases:
  - Western attire, if worn at all, was frequently worn in public and as job uniforms for the military and other professions.
  - The buildings that Japanese chose to build in Western architectural styles (cement, brick) were public institutions supporting the processes of modernization and nation-building, such as schools, banks, post offices, and public spaces for entertaining guests.
  - In their private lives, Japanese in the Meiji era still wore Japanese clothing and preferred Japanese-style living space.
3. Ask students to review their predictions from the first day as to how changes in the Meiji era affected the lives of everyday people. Discussion should include in what ways their predictions were correct and in what ways they weren't. Encourage students to frame questions they have now and identify additional information needed to better understand the effect of modernization on everyday life.
4. In class or for homework, use one of the assessment options (see **Plan for Assessment**) requiring students to answer the central question of the unit, drawing on the sources provided for evidence to support their answers.

### Extension:

Prior to the concluding assessment activity, have students read and analyze written primary sources regarding various Japanese groups in terms of continuity and change in the Meiji period and the impact (both negative and positive) of modernization on their lives. Suggested excerpts from Mikiso Hane's book *Peasants, Rebels, & Outcasts: The Underside of Modern Japan* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982) and E. Patricia Tsurumi's book *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990) include:

- Poem and testimony of a silk reeler (Tsurumi, p. 84)
- Law 270 (Tsurumi, p. 114)
- Breakdown of male and female cotton workers by age, Table 7.1 (Tsurumi, p. 130)
- Complaint of licensed prostitute to police in 1910 (Tsurumi, p. 185)
- Newspaper article on differences between city and country (Hane, p. 33)
- Hiroshima authorities dispelling rumor of equal land distribution (1871) (Hane, p. 16)
- Peasant statement against *burakumin* (Hane, p. 144-145)
- Government inquiry on conditions of girls in the filature (Hane, p. 186)
- Japanese industrialist defending child labor (Hane, p. 195)

A number of these sources are used in the lesson "Voices from the Past: The Human Cost of Japan's Modernization, 1880s-1930s," available on the TEA website (<http://www.colorado.edu/ptea-curriculum/becoming-modern-1>).

**Resources and References:**

- Dower, John W. "Throwing Off Asia 1: Woodblock Prints of Domestic 'Westernization' (1868-1912)." *MIT Visualizing Cultures*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2008. [http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/throwing\\_off\\_asia\\_01/index.html](http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/throwing_off_asia_01/index.html).
- Hane, Mikiso. *Peasants, Rebels, & Outcastes: The Underside of Modern Japan*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982.
- Hanley, Susan B. "Stability in Transition: From the Tokugawa Period to the Meiji Period." *Everyday Things in Premodern Japan: The Hidden Legacy of Material Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, 155-175.
- Kjeld Duit Collection. *Old Photos of Japan*. [MeijiShowa.com](http://www.meijishowa.com) and <http://www.oldphotosjapan.com/en/>
- The Museum Meiji-Mura. <http://www.meijimura.com/english/>
- Tsurumi, E. Patricia. *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.