

Japan's Meiji Revolution in Comparative Perspective

How can we limit the sacrifice in revolutions?

For the 80th anniversary of Japan-Iraqi relations

Hiroshi Mitani

I. What Was the Meiji Revolution?

One of the largest revolutions in the 19th century, but one almost invisible today.

Changes

1. Imperial restoration
2. Abolishment of Daimyo states
3. Abolishment of Hereditary status system

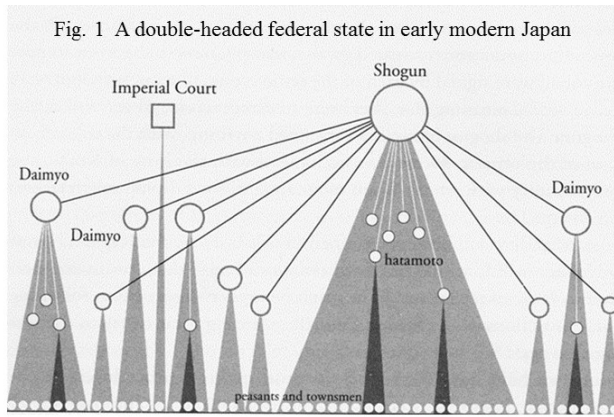
Differences from the model of revolution in the 20th century

1. Pivotal role of a monarch
2. Small sacrifice: about 30,000

Occurred in a country with sixth population in the world

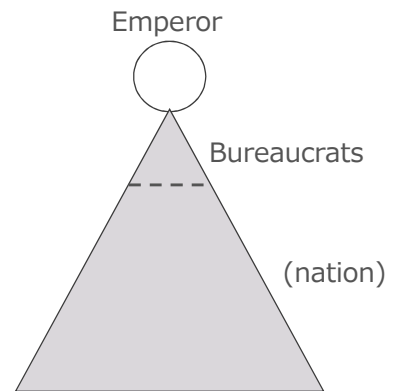
I. Structural changes during the Meiji Revolution

(1) Polity 1858



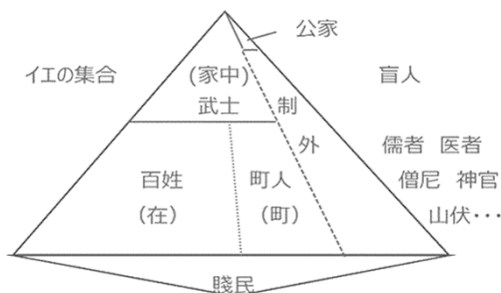
The lines represent feudal ties between masters and vassals. Shaded triangles represent domains and bureaucracies administering them.

1877

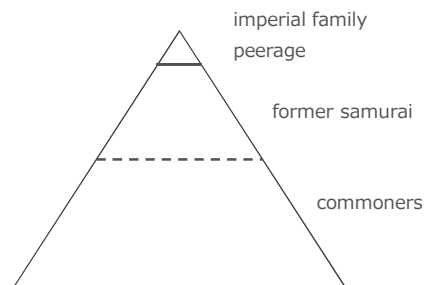


(2) Structural changes in society

Hereditary status system in 1858



Society in 1877



(3) Sequential pattern of the transformation

Duration and sequential pattern of revolutions

French Revolution: over 80 years

1789 1792 1804 1814 1848 1852 1870

Meiji Revolution: 20 years or 40 years with no backlash

1853 US envoy demanded Japan open

1858 Beginning of governmental collapse

1868 New government; until 1868 slow → consensus

1871 abolishment of daimyo states very rapid

1877 Satsuma Rebellion

Scarcity of ideological conflict

II. Raising general questions from the Meiji Revolution

A. Basic facts: death tolls during the revolution

Meiji Revolution: 30,000

French Revolution: 1,550,000

domestic conflicts 400,000 + foreign wars 1.150.000

China, Russia: 10,000,000 or more

B. Causes of the difference

(1) presence or absence of large-scale foreign wars

(2) the timing of drastic redistribution of social rights and properties

French Revolution: in the first year

deprivation of property of the Catholic Church

Meiji Revolution: on the last stage after 10 years of negotiation

abolition of daimyo states and hereditary samurai stipends

(3) the lack of popular involvement in political arena

(4) the scarcity of ideological confrontations

(5) a unique condition

China and Korea: consistent regimes

highly centralized, examination system, Confucianism

Japan: dispersed power structure

two heads with 260 daimyo states

+ strong pressure from outside

→ transfer of daimyo's support toward Kyoto emperor

made Japan easy to be dissolved and to be reintegrated.

C. Public sphere and violence

The Pen and the Sward appear simultaneously.

For success, revolution should break with violence.

In the Meiji Revolution

Assassinations sometimes changed the political climate.

A major stream: 'Politics based on Public Opinion'

Just after the establishment of the Meiji government:

Civil war was limited to Northeast Japan.

← assentient mentality + nationalism against the West

Opposition from the winner's side: Choshu, Satsuma, Tosa

Satsuma rebellion: repressed by governmental army

Tosa changed its tactics: utilizing speech only

The less violence, the more liberalism in the new regime.

Final remarks

There are many difference in the initial conditions of reforms
between Iraq and Japan.

Yet, it may benefit both of us to try comparative studies
to find the conditions for reforms and stability.

Thank you!