

education, possession of government offices, stipends, sword bearing, and surnames.

The Meiji Constitution

- Promulgated on February 11 1889. Constitution a 'gift' from the Emperor who was referred to as 'sacred and inviolable'
- Emperor exercised executive authority – all ministers responsible to Emperor plus supreme command of the army and navy
- Had the authority to suspend the Diet and dismiss the Lower House and issue laws when the Diet was not in session
- The Lower House was to be elected by males paying 15 yen or above in taxes – approximately 5% of male population – the Lower House had control of the purse strings – however, if the budget was not approved for a particular year they could use the budget from the previous year
- Upper House which contained peers was to act as a check on the lower House
- The aims of the Meiji leaders was not to create a democracy, but to a national assembly was created as a means of achieving national unity – no democracy as ministers of state were appointed by the Emperor and were responsible to him rather than to the Diet
- The Meiji leaders talked of the cabinet – i.e. the body containing all the Ministers of State (not mentioned in the constitution) as being transcendental i.e. above all selfish political concerns of all groups in the state.

The constitution's statement that the emperor ruled and was advised, meant that just as under the shoguns, the emperor was a figurehead and rule was in the hands of other people.

The influence of the *genro* was nearly always paramount whether within the cabinet or unofficially. The last of the *genro*, a Fujiwara, Prince Saionji, did not die until 1940.

The key problem with the working of the constitution was the imperfect control that the House of Representatives had over the budget.

- When the house would not approve the prime minister's budget, it was apparent that he could not carry through reforms, so he dissolved the Diet.
- In the end, what happened in regard to this ridiculous situation was that prime ministers were forced to ally themselves closely with political parties in order to win the support they needed in the lower house.
- The original constitutional aim of allowing the cabinet complete freedom from the veto of the Diet was thus defeated, and in Ito Hirobumi's fourth term as prime minister, he appointed party members to the cabinet.
- Not, of course, in sufficient numbers to have control of the cabinet.
- The militarist faction, led by the *genro* Yamagata, who was the most important figure in the formation of a national army, often succeeded in pushing through its policies against the parties' opposition.

The assurance of direct access to the emperor for the military commanders meant that their policies had a disproportionately strong effect from time to time.

Social, Economic, and Cultural Transformations

In just three decades, from the 1860s to the 1890s, the Japanese economy emerged as an Asian powerhouse. It came to be called "the Workshop of Asia," a cliché that persisted far into the twentieth Century.

By the 1890s, textile manufacturers dominated home markets. They began competing successfully with British firms in China and India, as well. Japanese shippers were competing with European traders to carry these goods even to Europe.

The immediate impact of the industrial revolution was disastrous for many people in Japan. Especially hard hit were members of two large, overlapping groups: small-scale family farmers and young women workers.