

A Brief Survey of Meiji Slogan (Fukoku Kyohei) and Its Influence on the Modernization of Japan in the 19th Century

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Abstract: *This article analyses the acceptance of Fukoku Kyohei slogan (which means a strong and prosperous nation) amongst the Japanese statesmen in the early and late Meiji periods. This ideology connotes a sort of agenda in transforming the Japanese state into a prosperous nation, strong army. This was evidently felt at least during the last years of Shogunate administration as well in the early foundation of Meiji government since 1868 onwards. Retrospectively, the Japanese leaders found this ideology timely as they were aware of increasing Western presence in the East Asian region. The study demonstrates that some of Japanese leaders (Ito Hirobumi, Saigo Takamori and Kido Takayoshi to name a few) whom later had paved the way for Meiji Restoration in 1868, realized the necessity for Japan to transform itself into a modernized nation in order to contain the ever increasing Western encroachment into their country that would safeguard the sovereignty of Japan. This was realized undeniably by putting an end to the Bakufu administration in the hands of Meiji reform-minded leadership key which paved the way for the creation of modern administrative, political and economic changes in Japan as early as 1870s. Finally, it also analyses the attitude of the some Meiji key figures towards the issue of modernization in Japan who were found to be divided in their views and approaches towards achieving and realizing this modernization agenda in Japan. In doing so, this study adopts the method of content analysis by scrutinizing the scholarly works written by the Japanese scholars and Western writers alike on the topic under study.*

Keywords: Fukoku Kyohei, Meiji Restoration, Meiji figures

1. Introduction

The late 19th century witnessed steady Western presence in the East Asian region which alarmed the Japanese leaders that the position of Japan as an independent and sovereign state would be soon exposed to the Western expansionism in the region. It is safe to note that, in context of this worrying situation, some far-sighted Japanese leaders had engineered the Meiji Restoration in 1868 that replaced then the obsolete Bakufu administration with reform-minded leadership under the tutelage of Meiji Emperor. For many, the Meiji Restoration has been considered as a turning point in the Japanese history that provided a springboard for much awaiting reforms in Japan. It seemed to the Japanese leaders that they should emulate the West in whichever way possible while the other notable Japanese leaders who were essentially pro-Bakufu faction looked this with scepticism. Nonetheless, the plan for modernization in Japan was underway with the creation of a new leadership in Japan in the hands of prominent Japanese figures like Ito Hirobumi, Saigo Takamori and Kido Takayoshi and few other able Japanese leaders. In this regard, arguably, the drive towards modernization

found its impetus in a widely circulated ideology, known as *Fukoku Kyohei*. This ideology found its adherents amongst the key leaders of the Meiji leadership as mentioned above.

This ideology, arguably, becomes a rallying point for the Japanese leaders to implement a number of substantial reforms in the Japanese society, which if one were to look this closely, find that this Restoration was largely a natural response towards the rapid Western imperialist activities in the East Asian region. In simple words, it seems there is no other viable remedy left before the Japanese leaders except to modernize and strengthen their country economically and militarily. This is precisely rooted, according to the researcher, in the very essence of *Fukoku Kyohei*. Therefore, it is safe to argue here that this ideology was publicised in order to create right ‘moods’ and ‘circumstances’ for the Japanese society so that any modernization agenda put forward by the Meiji government could be realized and actualized despite a series of considerable protests and uprisings in the country. This on-going discussion on the *Fukoku Kyohei* shall be discussed in a great length in the subsequent attempts.

2. Method

This article is an on-going discussion on the underlying reason that spurred the Japanese leaders to launch a series of modernization plans in Japan. Sources for this analysis will be taken from studies on a wide range of scholarly works which are written by the Western and Japanese scholars. This article uses method of content analysis which can be defined as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use”. That said, the researcher uses analytical constructs or inferences, making sense of texts found into contexts where the current study is conducted. In this respect, two domains, the texts and the contexts, are logically independent, and the researcher makes conclusions by looking at these two domains (White & Marsh, 2006). Moreover, this content analysis uses one particular technique which is coding system which simply means labelling. According to Boeje (2010), as what normally used in the grounded research approach, coding is normally performed at three levels: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. For the first level (open coding) it is done by taking out texts and rearranging them into its own different themes and concepts found in the data. Afterwards, this set of different information is then reorganized based on their content into a number of categories which is termed as axial coding. Moreover, the third level, known as selective coding was carried out by making rational links between the core categories so as to make sense of understanding what has been really happening in the observed practices and or events (Dina Wahyuni, 2012). This research method allows the researcher “to understand social reality in a subjective yet in scientific manner; explore the meanings underlying physical messages; and is inductive, grounding the examination of topics and themes, as well as inferences drawn from them, in data” (Kaid, 1989; Patton, 2002; Zhang & Wildenmuth, 2009)

3. Discussion

As discussed previously, the researcher of the view that this *Fukoku Kyohei* provides a much needed stimulus for the reform-minded Japanese leaders to prepare the minds and hearts of the Japanese community at large on the necessity to modernize their country in every realms possible though they had to deal with a number of disapprovals in their pursuit of modernization. While others approved of what Meiji leaders were planning, some found this with pessimistic and hostile views. This was true for pro-Bakufu leaders who were still trying

to hinder any drastic changes (either through direct oppositions or even uprisings directed towards the central leadership or by refusing to accept any positions in the government) within the Japanese state and society at large. As time passed, their voice was ‘subdued’ with the overwhelming support given by the Meiji emperor towards the modernization plans which was essentially masterminded by several number of prominent Meiji key leaders.

Moreover, there seems also a need to briefly discuss the Meiji Restoration that attracts much attention from the Japanese and Western scholars alike. To begin with, it was commonly known as *Meiji Ishin* in the Japanese official history. It was carried out mainly, according to scholars, by lower ranking samurai from the four powerful hans (domains), namely Satsuma, Choshu, Tosa and Saga besides few other more interested parties against the Bakufu administration. This came about due to many reasons such the signing of unequal treaties with the Western Powers (i.e. United States and Britain to name a few) which led to opening of Japanese ports to foreign ships for supplies and maintenances. The opening of Japanese ports in 1859 to the foreign powers, had given a birth to a steady wave of anti-foreign sentiments across the nation. This feeling was manifested in one certain slogan called *Sonno-Joi* (Revered the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians). In addition, there were also clashes took place between the feudal lords and Westerners and in some occasions some of the Westerners were killed by some dissatisfied samurai. In reaction to this, as expected, the Western powers demanded that the Shogun to punish any rebellious feudal lords (daimyos) who were involved in this conflicts (Jean-Pierre Lehmann, 1982). On the other hand, some far-sighted Japanese individuals realized that, especially in the 1860s, to confront the Western powers face to face was almost impossible. In this regard, this assumption proved to be true following the bombardment of Kagoshima in 1863 and Shimonoseki in 1864 respectively. The samurai of these two areas, without doubt, could only watch these military demonstrations with hard feelings.

To make things worse, the Bakufu administration found to have its hands tied in the middle; at one side, the shogun needed to cool down this anti-foreign sentiment while on the other side, he needed to assure the Western powers that the order and security in the state under control while the Japanese administration remained committed to the treaties signed previously (Kitajima Masamoto & G. Cameron Hurst, 2020). Moreover, there was also a tendency among the Western powers, for instance in the case of British Minister, named Sir Harry Parkes who decided to deal directly with the Emperor in Kyoto rather than to stick to a traditional way of consulting the Shogun. Samurai in several other domains also revealed their dissatisfaction with the *bakufu*’s management of national affairs. The classic example would be Choshu domain which had demanded a serious commitment from the Shogun to deal with this sort of national affairs. As mentioned previously, this had triggered angers both from the Western powers and the Shogun.

Choshu domain in particular was hostile towards the Bakufu administration and the former’s samurai believed not to put their trusts anymore in the Shogun. They wanted to restore the government’s power and authority in the hands of Emperor. Sooner Choshu became the centre for disgruntled samurai from other domains who were found to be impatient with their leaders’ caution (Kitajima Masamoto & G. Cameron Hurst, 2020). In 1866 Choshu allied itself with its neighbouring domain, [Satsuma](#), as an attempt to resist any Shogun-led military expeditions (which really took place in 1866) against them with the help of Frenchmen. However, Choshu forces had able to defeat the shogun’s forces which further embarrassed the latter. Moreover, in 1866, also saw the death of the shogun Iemochi which then paved the way for the succession of the last shogun, [Yoshinobu](#). The newly appointed Shogun had

realized the irresistible need for national unity. In 1867 he decided to tender his resignation with the belief that he could avoid a full-scale military confrontation from the two powerful domains, namely Satsuma and Choshu. He had also believed that while anticipating there is a change of national administration in near future, he would be able to retain any significant role in that administration. Yet he proved to have wrongly judged this critical situation in the country. Yoshinobu decided to march forward his forces against forces which to be known as Restoration movement, but to no avail.

In January 1868 a substantial number of daimyo were summoned to Kyoto to be informed of the establishment of an Emperor-led government. The Emperor later moved to Edo and renamed the city as Tokyo. As the new Japanese government in place, the effort towards modernization of Japan was began (Kitajima Masamoto & G. Cameron Hurst, 2020). In this respect, as what embedded in the *Fukoku Kyohei*, it informs the Japanese of the need to transform Japan into a strong nation, militarily and economically. In doing so, some far-sighted Japanese leaders decided to implement a number of reform initiatives (such as administrative and political reforms as well as economic reform programmes) which eventually prepared Japan in embracing itself with ever-changing world politics. This is, arguably, would safeguard the sovereignty of a tiny nation like Japan. That said, it is imperative at this juncture to examine the origins and development of this ideology as to familiarize ourselves with its essence and its position within the minds of the Japanese leaders. Historically speaking, it first appeared in the writings of Shang Yan, a political leader and philosopher of the Qin Dynasty (338 BCE). The phrase comes from four Chinese characters: rich (fu) nation (koku) strong (kyo) and army (hei). This was considered by many as Japan's national slogan during the Meiji Era which directed the course of the nation for decades to come. It is also related to two other national ideas that emerged after the opening of Japan, namely *Sonno Joi*, which means "Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarian", and the idea of *Bunmei Kaika* or "Civilization and Enlightenment" (Joanna Luisa Osbipo, 2017).

Let us briefly discuss these two related slogans as mentioned above; for *Bunmei Kaika*, the leading advocate was Yoshida Shoin who wanted to revive Japanese history and keep their traditional values alive within the State. He recognized the very fact that Japan could not become a strong and powerful state like the Western powers or even imagining to defeat the West without becoming like them, which means to adopt their Western technology. Japanese leaders who were attracted to this *Bunmei Kaika*, like Yamagata Aritomo, the founding father of the Japanese army, held the same belief that while keeping their traditional values remained intact, change was deemed very necessary for Japan so that it could turn Japan into a strong and modernized country through the acquisition of Western knowledge and technology. This inclination, arguably, embedded into what *Fukoku Kyohei* has been aspired for all this while (Murthy, 1973; Beasley, 1995; McClain, 2002). It seemed little doubt that the Iwakura Mission to Europe and West portrayed such an inspiration to turn Japan into a strong and powerful state economically and militarily. Other prominent Japanese figures such as Okubo Toshimichi and Ito Hirobumi convinced their fellow Meiji leaders of the need for a strong and modern Japan in order to preserve its independence and on top of that to remain relevant at the international politics. These efforts towards modernization of Japanese State signified a total breakaway from the old policy of seclusion that undermined the capability of Japan as a new rising Asian power.

With the restoration of power and authority in the hands of Emperor in the year 1868, Japan at that point of time was still economically and militarily weak, while at the same time faced ever-increasing pressures from the Western powers through the signing of unequal treaties

since 1860s. It is safe to note that the only possible option left for the new Japanese government was to transform Japan into a modernized state so that she could stand on par with other Western powers and eventually Japan could even negotiate and demand more equitable treaties with their Western counterparts. The efforts towards modernization of Japan therefore began with introduction of Western concepts and ideas in the fields of administration, socio-economic set-up, and military changes. Such transformations include creation of Japanese Constitution based on Prussian/German model; reorganization of Japanese navy and army based on British and German models respectively; adoption of enterprise capitalism in Japanese firms; and last but not least the borrowing of foreign experts into Japan's important sectors. In addition, Japanese students were also sent abroad to learn the arts and tools of Western civilization so that they could bring them into Japan upon their completion of studies later.

Retrospectively, in this respect, the new Japanese leadership under Emperor Meiji had responded to the Western pressures by embarking on the efforts of modernization through the support of the Imperial Institution which thus determined towards realization of *Fukoku Kyohei*. This modernization agenda was extremely important for the survivability of a small state like Japan so that the Western powers would be impressed with the former's capability to modernize itself and thus paved the way for equal treatment and respect between the parties in all aspects concerned. Nevertheless, it is equal important to note here that though Japanese leaders found their models in the West, it does mean that the former carried out imitation process entirely based on the Western models rather it involved process of selection, filtration, refinement and implementation. For example, Michio Nagai termed this emulation of Western models (for instance in the case of education sector) based on Japanese values and worldviews as Japanization. To elaborate, there had been a number of changes carried out by the Japanese leaders in various fields of public life which targeted at Japanese's socio-economic changes as well as to reorganize Japanese navy and army as briefly mentioned above. These changes include development of Japanese military-strategic industry (ship-building, munition factories) which also led towards development of small scale industries like textile and manufacturing domestic products. This economic strategy led to birth of Japanese big conglomerates known as *Zaibatsu* which controlled much of Japan's modern industrial sector such as Mitsui, the Mitsubishi and the Sumitomo.

From that point onwards, the later Meiji period witnessed a steady development of Meiji economies which went hand in hand with the continuous borrowing of the Western technology and expertise into the State. This modernization plan had successfully transformed Japan into one of major industrialized nations after the First World War, partly contributed by war requirements and economic strategies of the Japanese government. Moreover, in Japan's efforts to modernize and restructure its military as to meet the modern requirements and circumstances, a new national law on military conscription was passed in the early 1870s, where mostly recruited from peasants. According to this law, "Japanese males over 27 years were required to serve a 7-year service in the regular army, with four more years in the reserve". The western models were introduced into the military which for example witnessed the prevalent of Prussian military style in the Japanese modern army. The army later became the defender of militarist ideology within the State's structure. Along with the army's reorganization, Japanese navy also underwent changes as well. In 1872, a special ministry for navy was created, better known as Navy Ministry. In respect to restructuring of Japanese navy, the Japanese leadership found their model in the British Navy where a substantial number of the latter's technology, style and command structure found their ways in the Japanese navy.

By the late 19th century, Japan had already modernized its navy where at her disposal, the navy had a number of modern warships and sophisticated weaponries of the time. (Levin, Moline, & Redhead, 2007). This acquisition had further strengthened the Japanese state where the militarism had steadily gained its foothold in the state. A substantial number of Japanese leadership who were heavily under the impression of militarist influence, sought to prove to the rest of the world of her ability to acquire any territories by her own and thus create his own sphere of influence to any of her intended colonies. Retrospectively, this signalled that Japan could stand on par with other western colonial powers. In that direction, Japan had engaged with a series of war with China whereby Japan had defeated China in 1895 and Russia in 1905 respectively. In addition, Korea had become a Japanese protectorate in early 1900s. Moreover, during the First World War (Japan had sided with the Allied Powers against Germany), Japan had acquired a number of territories in the Chinese mainland through the Versailles and Washington Disarmament Treaties. This indeed indicates efforts towards realization of *Fukoku Kyohei*.

Japan had further pursued her aggressive military campaign throughout Asia, and in 1941, Japanese military central command decided to bomb Pearl Harbor which culminated into the Pacific War between Japan and United States and its allies. Indeed, the results of Japan's rapid modernization had paved the way for Japan to become a world economic and military power (Obispo, Joanna Luisa. (2017). All these efforts featured the means through which the very essence of *Fukoku Kyohei* could be realized and actualized. It had successfully attracted a considerable number of notable Japanese leaders who later used this platform to, first, overthrow their pro-Bakufu leadership and secondly to replace the so-called the obsolete system and its apparatus within the Japanese state to more modern and sophisticated administrative structure as previously discussed above. It is interesting to note that although the plans for modernization were consistently tried, improvised and implemented since the Meiji Restoration took place, there had been a number of occasions where even some of the early proponents of Meiji Restoration disagreed with the these plans, resulted in a series of uprisings or rebellions against the Meiji government (the classic case would be Saigo Takamori). Furthermore, it is also deems necessary at this juncture to briefly discuss several number of reform-minded Japanese leaders who upheld this ideology to actualize the birth of a strong and modern Japan in all aspects concerned.

4. Meiji key figures

Kido Takayoshi

Kido Takayoshi, also called Kido Kōin, whose original name known as Katsura Kogoro. He was born in August 11, 1833, Choshu, Nagato province. He died May 26, 1877 in Tokyo. He was considered as one of the heroes of the [Meiji Restoration](#) who responsible for the change of the 264-year rule of the Japanese government by the Tokugawa family and thus brought the return of central leadership in the hands of the Japanese emperor. Following the change of government in 1868, Kido became one of the important key figures in the efforts of a new Japanese leadership to remedy the existing situations befell into the Japanese State. He had called for a number of necessary modifications into the state as well as public affairs.

To start with, Kido was born into an influential warrior family where he later chose to actively engage in the politics of his *han* (Choshu). Later, he had a chance to study under Yoshida Soin, thus this connection brought him into close contact with a group of Choshu young leaders who later took up a mission of overthrowing the Tokugawa rule in 1868. He later rose up to prominence within his own han (domain) in 1862. Tokugawa rule which

based in Kyoto worried of radical developments within Choshu decided to send a military expedition to Choshu in order to curb that radicalism from spreading over to other hans. As a result, Kido was removed from his position, instead the Tokugawa had created a conservative government in Choshu. Nevertheless, Kido and his inner circles did not give up their ways; they had already created their small scale military forces in order to resist the Tokugawa's incoming expeditions which they successfully did so in the second military expedition launched by Tokugawa authority. From this time onwards, Kido, as the head of Choshu han, had already started to negotiate with radical samurai from his neighbouring han, Satsuma. Kido, as he shared similar ideals and objectives with the other two important leaders from Satsuma, namely Okubo [Toshimichi](#) and [Saigo Takamori](#), [this had brought them together to launch one decisive coup d'état](#) that eventually toppled the [shogun](#) and restored the emperor to power.

With a new reform-minded government in place, Kido was soon to become one of the most influential Japanese figures who provided the reform agenda to be adopted by the newly founded Meiji government. He was said to have played a greater role in persuading the masters of the large domains to renounce possession of their domains and thus returned them to the Emperor. Kido had helped to prepare a plan for converting the domains into a number of prefectures within the country. He had joined a mission to Europe and West along with his countrymen to learn from the West so that changes could be actualized in the country thus opened the way for the modernization of Japanese State since 1870s onwards. Focused much on internal transformation of Japanese state, he had opposed two proposals of disciplining Korea and Taiwan respectively. He seemed to be very critical of providing Japanese State with a National Constitution which modelled from the West. Nevertheless, due to his poor health condition, this had forced him to assume a minor role in the government.

A prominent Japanese scholar of the Meiji Era, Takii Kazuhiro, observed that, by looking at Kido's diary revealed his utmost dedication towards providing Japan a working national Constitution that would safeguard and protect both nation and its people. The professor further said, in his January 2, 1873 entry Kido wrote:

At the busiest time among the events of the Restoration [1868], following my proposal, daimyo, nobility, and government officials swore the Oath of Five Articles, thereby final setting the direction of the nation. Today, it is incumbent on us to firmly establish a fundamental legal code. In hopes of deliberating the laws, government systems, and so forth that form the foundations of the countries we are visiting, I have notified Ga of what we should do (Takii Kazuhiro, 2014).

Ito Hirobumi

He was born on October 16, 1841 in the village of Tsukari (Suo Province). His father's name was Hayashi Jozo and his mother's name was Kotoko. They were a farming family and in order to support the family, his father worked for a man named Ito who lived Hagi. Risuke was a named Hirobumi used to be called Risuke during his childhood days. His family was later adopted into Ito family, thus, the name was changed to Ito Hirobumi. This adoption brought Hirobumi's family into the samurai class though of a lower rank. Naemon, as the head of the adoptive Ito's family, was also a low ranking retainer of the Choshu domain (Takii Kazuhiro, 2014).

His fortune seemed to start first when in 1856 this young Ito Hirobumi was dispatched by his Choshu domain to Sagami province on guard duty at Edo Bay. Coincidentally, in the second

month of 1857, Kuruhara Ryoza (1829-62) was to head the guard at Sagami where Ito Hirobumi was stationed. This Kuruhara Ryoza later developed a special interest on Ito Hirobumi. As a matter of fact, Kuruhara Ryoza was a younger brother-in-law of Kido Takayoshi whom later emerged as one of the leading figures in the *Meiji Ishin*. After nine months of duty, Ito Hirobumi was released from his official duty and therefore he returned to Hagi (Choshu domain) which he carried with him a letter which was written by Kuruhara to be given to Yoshida Torajiro, also known as Yoshida Shoin (1830-59). This man, Yoshida Torajiro was a famous scholar, political-reformer of the time. Ito Hirobumi later visited Yoshida Shoin with a request so that he could be accepted into Yoshida's private school which famously known as *Shoka Sonjoku*. Yoshida, without much hesitation, accepted Ito Hirobumi into his private school.

Unfortunately, if one could say so, Yoshida Shoin was later punished to death due to one certain accusation of promoting Sonno Joi ideology, which thus indirectly called for the resignation of Tokugawa rule in favour of Emperor rule. In 1860s, Choshu domain's leadership realized the usefulness of Western civilization and its tool in Japan, thus, Ito Hirobumi along with his four friends were sent by Choshu to Britain to study Western naval science. After four months of travel, Ito and his friend, Inoue Kaoru reached London on November 4, 1863. He was supposed to spend his study sojourn in London for about three years, yet, due to unstable conditions in Choshu domain, had compelled Ito Hirobumi and Inoue Kaoru to return home. This decision was made in order to persuade the Choshu leaders not to proceed with their plans of expelling the foreigners from Japan (Takii Kazuhiro, 2014).

As situations went against the Tokugawa rule, the forces which favoured a radical change of government leadership had come into a consensus which they then decided to topple the existing Tokugawa rule with that of Emperor Rule. This had birthed to a reform-minded Meiji government which Ito Hirobumi found his shining careers since late 1860s. Soon after this Meiji Restoration in 1868, Ito Hirobumi was to assume a number of important positions within the Meiji government. For example, in February 1868 he was to be in charge of Japan's foreign affairs while concurrently the Governor of Hyogo Prefecture. He was later to dominate the efforts towards institutional changes within Japanese state. Among such changes included He helped draft the [Meiji](#) constitution (1889) and brought about the establishment of a bicameral national [Diet](#) (1890). Commenting on the need for Japanese state to adopt western models in the former's effort to stand on equal footing like the Western countries, Ito Hirobumi remarked that:

If Japan hopes to have a civilized government like those of the Western countries and wishes all its people to receive the blessings of the emperor, then there is no other way than to integrate all the governing entities throughout the country into one' (Takii Kazuhiro, 2014).

To elaborate, his rose to prominence in the Japanese politics took place specifically when Okubo, one of trio who engineered the Meiji Restoration, was assassinated in 1878, thus Ito was entrusted the Ministry of Home Affairs into his hands. At the same, he had come into conflict with another powerful Japanese statesman, Okuma Shigenobu especially on the nature of right constitution which Japan should have and adopt. In years to come, he had managed to side-line Okuma and his supporters from the inner circle of government. By 1889, the Japanese emperor had officially proclaimed a national Constitution for Japan and in 1890 the National Diet come into existence. Ito Hirobumi, in his efforts of creating a constitution government of Japan, had spent one year and a half in Germany to study the arts

of constitutional government as practiced in Europe. This later gave birth to the Japanese Constitution, which according to Takii, marked Ito's utmost contribution to a modern Japan. Yet, there had been a series of criticisms had been harboured towards Ito for approving such Constitution for Japan. One aspect of these criticisms were directed towards curtailment of civil rights and Diet's powers.

Ito had risen to a top helm of government leadership when he was appointed as the first Japanese Prime Minister in 1885-1888 (he held the position for three times). In his tenure as prime minister, as mentioned in the previous discussion, he had created a cabinet system replaced the old system of *Daijokan* (Council of State). In the year 1888, he resigned his post as prime minister, yet he took a helm of another important post, which was the President of Privy Council. In February 1889, he had masterminded the promulgation of Meiji Constitution as he envisioned the close-knit relations between Japanese emperor and his Japanese subjects. He later come back to his former position for the second term from August 8, 1892 until August 31, 1896. During his second tenure, he had supported the First Sino Japanese War which eventually witnessed the supremacy of Japanese forces in this war against Chinese forces. In 1894, he had able to put side some of unequal clauses between Japan and Britain through the signing of Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation (Beasley,)

Moreover, during his third term as prime minister (January-June 1898), Ito Hirobumi now faced a new problem which was the idea of party politics. He faced adamant criticisms from *Jiyuto* (Liberal Party) and *Shimpoto* (Progressive Party) which resulted from Ito's calling for new land taxes. Due to this opposition, Ito then decided to dissolve the Diet and therefore paved a way for new national elections. Ito seemed miscalculated of the situation because the above two parties then merged into *Kenseito*. This new merger won a majority of seats in the Parliament (Diet) which as a consequence, compelled Ito to resign from his post. This situation prompted Ito to organize a political party which friendly to the government and this gave birthed to the *Rikken Seiyukai* (Constitutional Association of Political Friendship) in 1900 (Takii Kazuhiro, 2014).

It was noted that Seiyukai became the leading party to have secured an absolute command in the House of Representatives during a Diet session. He thus felt satisfied with what had been set in order to ensure the smooth running of government agenda and plans. The House of Peers, however, were unhappy with what Ito's had established at this moment. In 1903, Ito decided to resign from his post as president of Rikken Seiyukai. This led to rise of one of powerful Japanese Prime Ministers, Yamagata Aritomo who later assumed leading voice among the powerful *genro* (*genro* means principal elder statesmen who used to advise the Emperor). He was known as the founder of Japanese modern army (Takii Kazuhiro, 2014).

Saigo Takamori

Another great Japanese leaders who led the Meiji Restoration was Saigo Takamori. His original name was Kichibe or Kichinosuke. He was born in January 23, 1828 in Kagoshima (Kyushu). He later died in September 24, 1877 in Kagoshima. He was very supportive of creation of a new leadership that would replace the Shogun-led government, meant a new government under the dictates of Japanese Emperor. This paved the way for the Meiji Restoration and the return of power to the Japanese Emperor. In later years, however, he decided to turn away from the Meiji government due to his dissatisfaction over several issues with the reigning government. In term of his physical stature, as reported, he seemed to appear frightening at first meeting, with his large, piercing eyes and bushy eyebrows,

nevertheless, he was said to have possess a friendly manner. Moreover, he was said to have a little patience over details, inclined to make decision quickly than to wait and last but not least he was man of actions, not words. He received training in Zen Buddhism and the Neo Confucianism (David Magarey Earl, 2020).

In his early age, he had become a commander of the Satsuma forces based in Kyoto. In addition, he was also one of the main committees of his domain when it comes to any decision making. In terms of his influence, he had able to attract a substantial number of imperial supporters throughout Japan which later made it easy for pro-Meiji restoration to overthrow Bakufu administration. He proved to be a man of caliber because he had been dealing with several important arrangements before Meiji Restoration could be actualized and executed. For example he was the one who had negotiated a secret alliance between Choshu and Satsuma in 1866 and he was also said to secretly plan among his circles to have shogun resigned from his post. In the critical hours before the proclamation of Meiji Restoration, a group of troops under the command of Saigo seized the control of palace gates before dawn on Jan. 3, 1868. There was a brief war took place between pro-Shogunate forces and Saigo's forces where the latter was in winning side. Edo capital was surrendered to Meiji forces. Now, the Japanese Emperor was in total command of the country through the help of his loyalist leaders. Surprisingly, at the early years of Meiji rule, Saigo decided not take active role in the new administration. Saigo, nevertheless, at last decided to join the newly founded Meiji government in 1871 where he was entrusted to head the newly created Imperial Guard, amounted roughly 10,000 troops. The new government then proceeded with the abolition of domains and to be replaced with prefectures since they were confident to do so given the fact that they had sufficient forces at hand to repel should there was any uprisings or resistance. To add more to his prestige, he was admitted into the Council of state (Dajokan) which responsible to push through reform programme along with Kido Takayoshi as briefly discussed above (David Magarey Earl, 2020).

He found himself in dilemma with regard to the introduction of universal army conscription though he had reluctantly approved the law, probably afraid of Japan might lose its samurai identity. In the year 1873, there was a heated debate regarding the problem of Korea. The Kingdom of Korea had refused to acknowledge the Meiji government and what made it worse was that the former refused to accept three successive missions from Japanese government. In this particular problem, Saigo felt that this treatment from Korean Government was utterly unacceptable. He was of the view that a military expedition against Korea would not only maintain the status of Japan as a rising Asian power but at the same time would be able to divert some of dissatisfaction among the Samurai against some of modernization plans which were currently in place such as conscription law. He offered himself as a Japan's special envoy to Korea in order to settle disputes with Korea. After many arguments, Emperor decided to approve his proposal. At the same time, Japanese Mission to Europe and West just about to come back to Japan. Upon its arrival in Japan, the leaders of this mission protested against Saigo's proposal on the basis that internal changes were of much important overseas expedition. Thus, Saigo's plan would have to be cancelled. Saigo was furious of this situation where he then resigned as a State Councilor as well as commander of the Imperial Guard. He returned to his domain (Kagoshima). Several of his close circles also handover their resignations as protest against this reversal of decision on the part of Meiji government.

Operating from his own domain, Saigo decided to open his own private school. In this school, he paid special attention to military science and physical training. It was said the opening of

this school attracted a large number of dissatisfied former samurai, whom coming from different parts of Japan to study under him. It was estimated that there were about 20,000 students by 1877. For Saigo, this school meant to train the future bureaucrats of Japan which not shared by the central government. The latter felt that Kagoshima might become a center of insurrections against the government due to the fact that majority of higher ranking officials were students of Saigo who dissatisfied with the transformation plans of the central government. The central leadership believed they need to rectify the situation by using repressive measures imposed on Saigo and his disciples. This indeed had backfired the central government when on January 27, 1877, a group of Saigo's students attacked arsenal and navy yard in Kagoshima (David Magarey Earl, 2020).

Okubo Toshimichi

Other no less important figure who had contributed towards the creation of Meiji Government was Okubo Toshimichi. He was born in September 26, 1830 in Kagoshima. He died on May 14, 1878 in Tokyo. Before the Meiji Restoration, he was one of leading figures in the government of Satsuma. He was convinced that Japan needed to transform itself into a modern and progressive nation economically and militarily. Thus, the only possible way to that end was by replacing the Bakufu administration with that of reform-minded leadership of a new Japan. This was to be done with a strategic collaboration with another powerful domain, Choshu that give birth to the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Upon the creation of newly founded Meiji government, he was given important positions (Finance Minister in 1871 and Home Minister in 1877) in the new imperial government ([Adam Augustyn et. all, 2020](#)).

He went abroad and this further enhanced his conviction that in order for Japan to be at par with other Western countries, she had to adjust and modify itself with the needs and circumstances of the time, which was progress and modernization. Okubo viewed, of many of needed changes in the Japanese state, he favoured the creation of more technical schools, and a financial assistance should also need to be given to private enterprises as well as the foundation of government-linked enterprises in order to meet the national's needs and requirements. Moreover, with regard to Korean issue, he disapproved of Saigo's proposal and he in fact shared similar views with Kido that internal changes should be the main concerns of the government at that point of time. He had introduced land tax reform and the proclamation of Haitōrei Edict which banned the use of swords by all segments of Japanese society (except former daimyos) in 1876. Last but not least, his life was short as he was assassinated by discontented samurai on May 14, 1878 due to his direct involvement in suppressing the Satsuma Rebellion in 1877 led by his former friend, Saigo Takamori ([Adam Augustyn et. all, 2020](#)).

5. Conclusion

It is safe therefore to conclude that this Fukoku Kyohei served as a rallying point for the Meiji leaders to carry out reform programmes in Japan. These reforms programmes, according to Meiji leadership, were of vital importance for the sovereignty and viability of Japan at the expense of increasing Western encroachments in the East Asian region. That said, Meiji leaders introduced a series of reforms encompassing socio-economic and political-military transformation plans in Japan through their capacities as ministers in various portfolios. Though so, other Japanese saw these plans as breaking away from the traditional outlook of Japanese society, thus, resisted these plans through a series of uprisings and rebellions against the Meiji central government in Tokyo. Nonetheless, the reform-minded Meiji leadership had able to introduce and implement such intended changes within the

Japanese society albeit constant conflicts and clashes taken place since the creation of Meiji Government in 1868. Thus, it is not an exaggeration to note here that this *Fukoku Kyohei* was a timely indoctrination tool through which the modernization of Japan would take its spirit and shape within the Japanese society in the 19th and 20th centuries. For few years to come this modernization bore its fruit as the Japanese's economy and military capacities were accelerated steadily and thus the vision of Japanese statesmen of creating a modern and strong Japan would be realized very soon. This was true in the beginning of 20th century where Japan had able to acquire a few territories in the East Asian region thus Japan had formally joined the Imperialist Club as the Western Powers like Britain, United States and France to name a few. This marked the position of Japan as rising Colonial Power not only in the East Asian context but beyond that geographical confines.

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