

- 2) From the end of the Heian Period to the beginning of Meiji, Japan was ruled by a warrior class that included the Samurai. How did they control and influence the population of Japan, and how do you think the Samurai legacy shaped Japanese culture into the 20th century?

The end of the Heian Period saw the beginning of the Tokugawa bakufu, which essentially ruled Japan for about 260 years, until the beginning of the Meiji era in the late 1800's. The Tokugawa era was a time of peace for Japan, without any warfare. Without warfare, there was less need of a warrior class, the most notable of which were the samurai. During the Heian Period, when daimyo were at constant war with each other, these samurai often held lands of their own and swore allegiance to the local daimyo to receive their protection. With the introduction of the Tokugawa era, however, most of these samurai left their home villages or fiefdoms for city-life, where their place in Japanese culture would change forever.

After Japan became unified under Tokugawa rule, many samurai took up residence in towns and cities. Although they were still considered to be connected to their home village or fiefdom, such as how they received stipends based on the size and rice output of their home village, this connection became very weak and abstract as time went on. As city-dwellers, some samurai became law-enforcers, but most samurai were either assigned to their daimyo's capitol residence near the shogun's own castle, or they became officers in rural towns where they helped keep order and collect taxes for their daimyo and the shogun. With this change in lifestyle for the samurai, they changed from a warrior class to a more peaceful way of life as a kind of bureaucrat.

This change during the Tokugawa era resulted in today's image of the samurai as being warrior poets. Although with the beginning of the Tokugawa era many of the samurai were still a very violent class, resulting in what Gordon refers to as a kind of "*West Side Story* in the shadows of Edo castle (Text p. 15)," this changed as time went on and the samurai began readjusting to city life without warfare. As

Professor Painter often points out, the clichéd saying goes “They put down their swords for calligraphy brushes.” Many of these city-dwelling samurai passed their new-found free time by taking up the liberal arts, such as writing and painting. Although samurai still retained the right to openly wear their swords, and some served as law-enforcers, this change was not so smooth for some samurai. Some samurai did not know any other way of life, and acts of honor-bound vendettas were harshly punished by the bakufu. A good example of this is the samurai in the movie *Eijanaika*, who cannot comfortably live a normal, peaceful life, and eventually assassinates a government official and committing seppuku, or ritualistic suicide, along with his unofficial mistress.

Although this warrior class had become either socially displaced or entered a peaceful, bureaucratic way of life, the “samurai spirit” was resurrected during the 20th century. During a time of great change and modernization, the Meiji government wanted to unify and rally the people with an image of being descended from this mighty group of warriors who were fiercely loyal to their rulers. This also resulted in many people, both Japanese and foreigners, relating the image of samurai with Japanese culture. This is visible in many forms of media even today, in manga, anime, and movies, where the hero is often either a samurai or lives life with a “samurai spirit.” Even almost three centuries after the samurai essentially laid down their swords, they still persist into modern times, giving the Japanese people and culture a sense of fierce warriors who are completely loyal to those in charge, whether that be their parents, their boss, or the Emperor.

3) The “Modern Girl” is one of the most powerful symbols to emerge from the late Meiji Period.

Discuss both the images and realities of “Modern Girls,” and what these can tell us about social and cultural changes in rapidly modernizing Meiji Japan. Be sure to include in your answer some information about the place of women in Meiji industrialization.

As Japan opened its doors with the introduction of the Meiji era, they were hard pressed to modernize their country and catch up with the Western nations. This pertained not just to their technology and government, but to their culture and way of life as well. One of the biggest icons during this time of modernization was the “Modern Girl.”

This concept of the “Modern Girl” resulted, at least in part, from women’s’ new place in Japanese society. During the Tokugawa era, women held little to no sway in Japanese society. All matters of importance, from leading a farm to leading the nation, were run by men. Women were left to either raising children, helping out around the farm, or entering the pleasure business as showgirls or prostitutes. As Japan began to modernize, however, women began to enter the workforce, entering industry warehouses, such as the textile industry. As Harootunian points out, “Between 1920 and 1930 more than half of all factory workers were women (p. 12).” With this introduction of women into the workforce, making them somewhat more independent, and along with the introduction of how women appear in the West, this image of the “Modern Girl” began to appear.

This image of the “Modern Girl” portrayed modern women as being sexually alluring, fiercely independent, and free of social constraints. Although this was the image guiding women during the early Meiji times, the reality was quite different. Although the women who moved to the city had escaped a horrid life of farm work, which was experiencing hardships of its own in the early Meiji years of modernization, their quality of life in industries was not much improved. The warehouses in which they worked were cramped and tightly enclosed, resulting in the spreading of disease and poor health.

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JAPN 305

When the women were not working their 12-14 hour shifts, they slept in dorms which were locked up at night. Although many women felt mistreated and wished to improve the working conditions, many felt they had improved their life by escaping the farms or brothels.

Even this slightly exalted lifestyle was taken away, however, as industry work was being taken over by men in the 1930's. This image of the "Modern Girl" was also beginning to be seen as a threat to the public order of Japanese society. It was illuminating the stark differences in gender roles in Japanese society, and some feared a resulting gender war. In response to this, the image of proper a Japanese woman being "good wives and wise mothers" began to be spread by the media and the Japanese government. Due to the successful take-over of industrial by men, and the spread of this idea of women being "good wives and wise mothers" resulted in women returning to their role as house caretakers and playing the role of stay-at-home mothers. Despite their major role in the early industries of Meiji Japan, constituting the majority of the industrial workforce, women are only now just beginning to enter the work sphere with force, taking a more equal place in Japanese society alongside men.