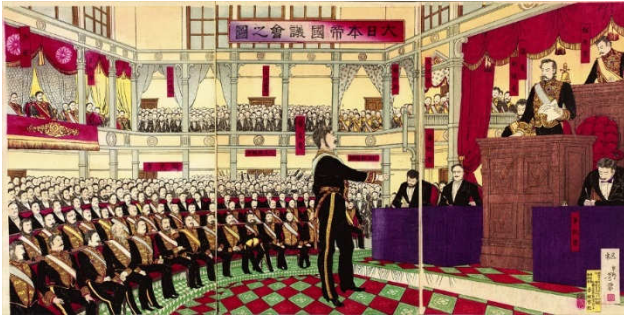
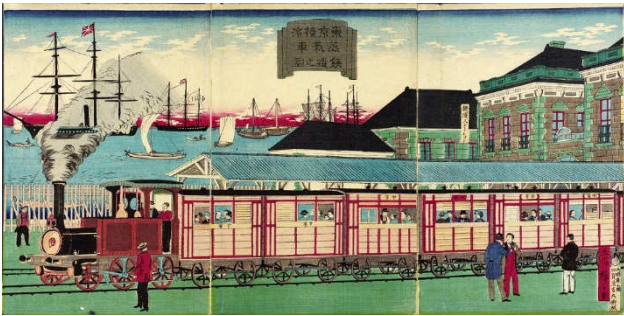


Meiji Restoration



For hundreds of years Japan was ruled by a **hereditary** military leader known as the Shogun, who kept the island nation closed to foreign visitors and foreign influences. In 1868, however, Japan experienced a revolution. The Shogun was overthrown, and the Meiji Emperor was installed as the country's political ruler. However, the emperor—who was only a teenager at the time—



was mainly a symbolic leader, while the real political power remained in the hands of a group of **oligarchs** who acted in the emperor's name. The new Japanese government recognized that it lagged behind the western powers (such as England, France, Germany, and the United States) in terms of economic and political strength. In order to solve this problem and make Japan into a world power,

hereditary: describes a title or possession passed down through inheritance.

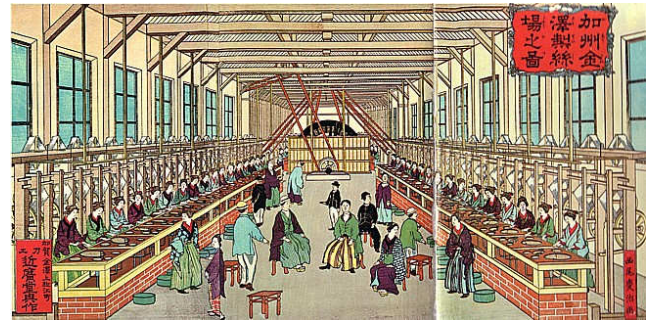
oligarchy: government by a small group, especially by a faction of people or a family.

industrialization: an economic transformation in which work is done more and more by machines and in factories, rather than by hand and at home.

export: to send a product abroad, usually for trade or sale.

the new government launched a program of massive **industrialization**. Scholars and scientists were brought in from Europe and the United States to help Japan's leaders transform the economy.

Borrowing technology from the West, such as steam power, the Japanese constructed steel works and began to build a national railroad system. Japan's political leaders asked people to work hard for the



glory of the emperor and their country. Silk production had already been an important part of the Japanese economy, but with industrialization, work moved from family farms to factories. Japanese silk was used to make shirts, dresses, scarves, handkerchiefs, and stockings. The new government demanded large amounts of silk from its people in order to **export** it abroad in exchange for foreign goods, including modern weapons.



STORIES FROM THE SILK WORKERS

Japanese silk factories had strict rules and regulations. When an employee broke one of these rules, money would be deducted from her wages. As a result, some silk workers didn't get to keep any of their salary! Here is a partial list of prohibited behaviors at one factory, taken from *Factory Girls* by Patricia Tsurumi:

1. Tardiness
2. Lying
3. Pretending to be ill and not coming to work
4. Reading while working a shift
5. Lack of attention to detail that sets a bad example for others
6. Damage or loss of attendance sheet

Some of the teenage silk workers left behind their stories in the form of songs and poems. Let's take a look! Japanese girls sang these songs as they walked together (sometimes over 100 miles) from their homes to the silk factories:

First Song:

We don't cross the Nomugi Pass for
nothing;
We do it for ourselves and for our
parents.
Boys to the army,
Girls to the factory.
Reeling thread is for the country, too.

1. According to these songs, why do the girls want to work for the factory?

2. Do you think these are good reasons to work hard? Why? Why not?

Second Song:

Put all your strength into your work.
It's for yourself,
It's for your family,
It's for the country of Japan.

3. Both songs mention working for the benefit of "the country." How do you think reeling (winding yarn or thread upon a reel) silk helped Japan?

The Prison Lament

Factory work is prison work,
All it lacks are iron chains.

More than a caged bird, more than a prison,
Dormitory life is hateful.

Like a horse or cow,
The reeler is fenced in.

Like the money in my employment contract,
I remain sealed away.

4. Why does the author feel like a "caged bird"?

5. Does she receive the wages for her work? Why/Why not?