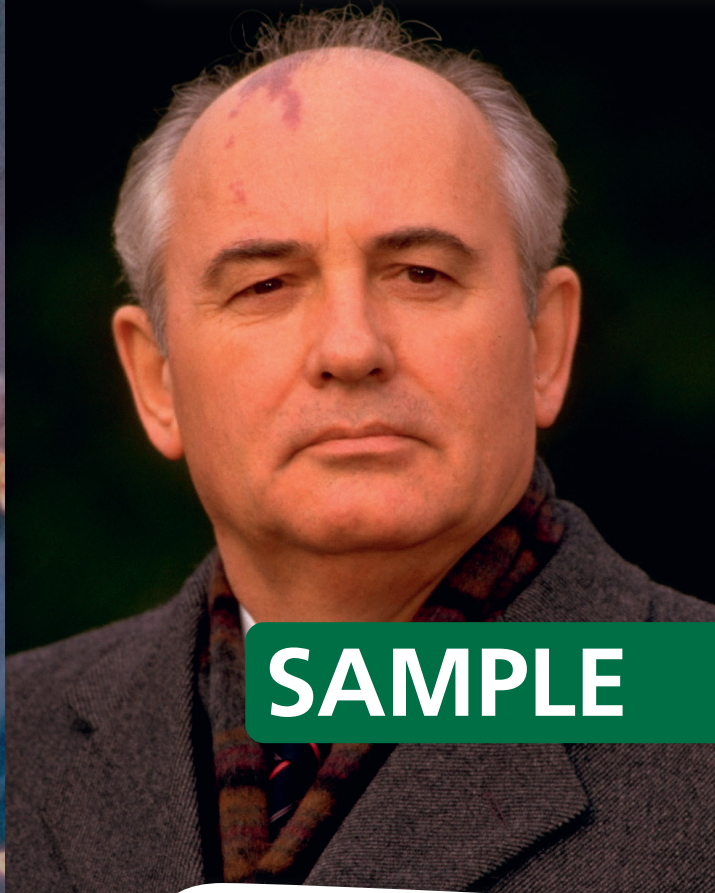


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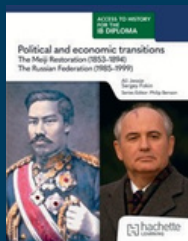
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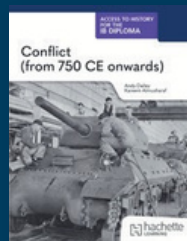
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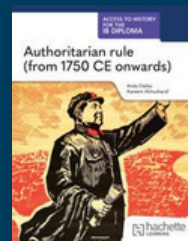
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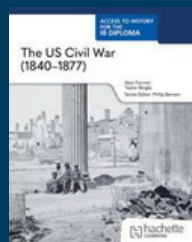
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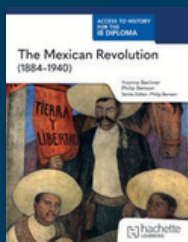
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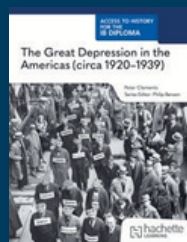
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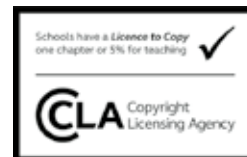
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How was the transition achieved?

The samurai who seized control did not have a coherent plan for leadership at first. Wanting to end the unequal treaties, they knew they needed to make sweeping changes to the Japanese government, economy, society and culture. The reforms they made modernized Japan and brought it into the global economy and power structure. In this chapter, you will need to consider the following questions:

- ★ How did the new government consolidate power?
- ★ How did the government transform Japan's economy?
- ★ What led to the creation of a new constitution and what kind of government did it create?

KEY DATES

1868	Meiji Restoration; establishment of provisional government; Charter Oath	1874	Beginning of popular rights movement
1869	Daimyō return land to the emperor; became governors; emperor moves to Edo (Tokyo)	1876	Samurai status eliminated
1871	Domains replaced with prefectures; currency reform; Iwakura Mission leaves	1877	Tokyo University established
1872	Compulsory education; first railway in Japan opens	1881	Emperor's announcement for constitution by the end of the decade
1873	Conscript army; land tax; national bank established	1884	Peerage Act
		1885	Itō Hirobumi named prime minister
		1889	Meiji Constitution promulgated
		1890	First election; Diet opens

1 The role of the Meiji oligarchy and the emperor

► **Key question:** *How did the new government consolidate power?*

The official name for the transition from the Tokugawa shogunate is the Meiji Restoration, but this term doesn't really explain what happened. The 15-year-old Meiji emperor declared a 'restoration' of imperial rule, but the system that was created after 1868 was like nothing Japan had had before. From the beginning, the men who had led the coup against the shogunate, the Sat-Cho rebels and some members of the imperial court, were in charge. They created an **oligarchy** and used the symbol of the emperor to consolidate their power and foster nationalism among the Japanese people.

KEY TERM

Oligarchy Government by a small elite group, known as oligarchs.

How representative was the new government?

Who were the Meiji oligarchs?

The new government did not have a clear structure at first. Most of the leaders who shared power in the government were samurai from Chōshū and Satsuma, while some others came from south-western domains like Tosa and Hizen, or were the samurai's allies in the imperial court from Kyoto (see table below). All of these men supported the sonnō jōi movement in the bakumatsu period and participated in the overthrow of the shogunate. Many also had Western experience either from travelling overseas or studying with Western teachers. Several were quite young, in their twenties or early thirties and went on to lead the Japanese government into the 20th century. Historians refer to them as the Meiji leaders or Meiji oligarchy, because they led Japan during the **Meiji period**.

Key figures in the Meiji government

From Satsuma	From Chōshū
Saigo Takamori	Ōmura Masujirō
Ōkubo Toshimichi	Kido Takayoshi
Mori Arinori	Itō Hirobumi
Kuroda Kiyotaka	Yamagata Aritomo
Ōyama Iwao	Inoue Kaoru
From south-western domains	Members of the Imperial Court
Okuma Shigenobu	Sanjō Sanetomi
Etō Shinpei	Iwakura Tomomi
Itagaki Taisuke	

KEY TERM

Meiji period Named for the reign of the Emperor Mutsuhito and meaning 'enlightened rule', the Meiji period lasted from 1868 to 1912. Most of the biggest changes of the Meiji Restoration were implemented in the first half of the period. Era names in Japan are used in the Japanese calendar, which is still used alongside the Western calendar today. The year 1868 was Meiji 1 and the emperor died in Meiji 45.

KEY FIGURE

Saigo Takamori Saigo was born a samurai in 1828 in Kagoshima, Satsuma domain. He later served his daimyō in Edo and became connected with Mitogaku scholars. In 1864, he led the Satsuma army to put down the Chōshū rebels who had marched on Kyoto, but in 1866 he agreed to a secret alliance with Chōshū to defy the shogunate. He was one of the key leaders of the Meiji Restoration and became a top leader in the new government. When several of the Meiji government members went on a two-year voyage to the USA and Europe in 1871 (see page xx), Saigo was left in charge of the caretaker government in Tokyo (formerly Edo). Saigo was responsible for implementing many of the early changes enacted by the Meiji government but crossed some of the other leaders when he started planning an invasion of Korea. This led to his ousting from the government and retreat to Satsuma, where he was seen as a hero to many. When an army of Satsuma samurai rebelled against the dissolution of the samurai class in 1877, Saigo stepped up to lead their fight (see page xx). The Satsuma Rebellion was put down by the new Meiji army, leading to the death of Saigo. Despite this, he is often memorialized as a classic samurai warrior.



KEY FIGURE

Ōkubo Toshimichi Like his friend Saigo Takamori, Ōkubo was born in Kagoshima, Satsuma domain, in 1830. He was well educated and became connected with a progressive daimyō of Satsuma. During the bakumatsu period, his views about the bakufu, the emperor and the West evolved, but by 1866 he was convinced that the shogunate should end and so he participated in the negotiations that led to an alliance between Satsuma and Chōshū. Like Saigo, he was a leading figure in the new Meiji government, championing many of the initial reforms. Unlike Saigo, he went on the Iwakura Mission to the USA and Europe, where he developed a more pragmatic plan for Japan's modernization. Disagreeing with Saigo's plan to invade Korea, Ōkubo led the charge to expel Saigo from the government. Ōkubo was the dominant figure in the Meiji government for the next few years, but his role in eliminating the samurai class and subduing the Satsuma Rebellion led to his assassination in 1878 (see page xx).



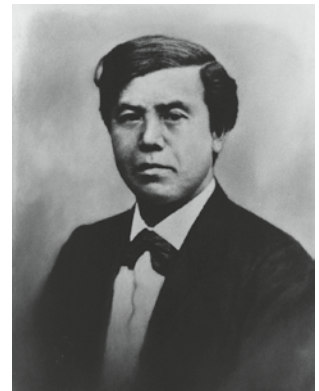
KEY FIGURE

Ōmura Masujirō Ōmura was born in 1824 in Chōshū domain. He became interested in rangaku, first as a student of Western medicine and then Western military. Ōmura helped lead the Chōshū expedition on Kyoto in 1864 and led forces in the coup in 1868. He was the main proponent of starting a national army of non-samurai conscripts, but for this he was assassinated in 1869.



KEY FIGURE

Kido Takayoshi Kido was born in 1833 in Hagi, Chōshū domain. As a teenager, he studied under the nationalist thinker Yoshida Shōin (see page xx, Chapter 1). During the bakumatsu period, he worked for the Chōshū daimyō in Edo, where he established connections with other samurai in the sonnō jōi movement. In the 1860s he spent more time in Kyoto, plotting the overthrow of the shogunate with other shishi activists. He was the main Chōshū leader who negotiated the secret Satsuma–Chōshū alliance in 1866. Kido was a key leader in the new Meiji government who drafted the Charter Oath in 1868 and helped consolidate the Meiji government's authority. He joined the 1871–3 Iwakura Mission to the USA and Europe and returned to block Saigo Takamori's caretaker government from invading Korea. He then clashed with Ōkubo over the 1874 Taiwan Expedition. He briefly left but then rejoined the government; however he died of cancer in 1877. (Note: Kido changed his name several times in his life.)



A T L Thinking skills/Self management

Read the profiles of the Meiji leaders. As you read, make notes to help you answer the following questions about each leader:

What changes did they leaders support?

What did they do to support and strengthen the new government?

With a partner, discuss what the leaders have in common and how they differ. Write a paragraph to compare and contrast their roles in the new government.

Thinking skills

Think about the problems faced by the shogunate during the bakumatsu period. How did the Charter Oath address these issues? How did the Charter Oath support the consolidation of power by the Meiji leaders?

ATL



- 1 What does the Charter Oath suggest the Meiji leaders intended to do?
- 2 What do each of the points in the Charter Oath mean? How clear are they?
- 3 Why do you think that the points in the Charter Oath were written in this vague way?



- 1 What does the author of Source B suggest about common people's expectations for the new Meiji government?
- 2 How does the character's affiliation with the kokugaku school influence his understanding of the changes?
- 3 How useful is this source to a historian trying to understand the Meiji Restoration?

How can fictional sources add to our understanding of the past? Is an artist obligated to be factual? To what extent can fictional representations be considered a form of historical knowledge?
History, Art)

TOK

Charter Oath

One of the first actions of the new government was to issue a statement of purpose, known as the Charter Oath. This vague set of goals aimed to convince the public that they were going to make bold changes to improve and better Japan. It was not clear at first how they intended to actually implement these promised changes. The Meiji leaders formed a provisional Council of State to start consolidating their power and reforming Japan.

SOURCE A

Extract from the Charter Oath, 6 April 1868

- 1 Deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by public discussion.
- 2 All classes, high and low, shall unite in vigorously carrying out the administration of affairs of state.
- 3 The common people, no less than the civil and military officials, shall each be allowed to pursue his own calling so that there may be no discontent.
- 4 Evil customs of the past shall be broken off and everything based upon the just laws of Nature.
- 5 Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule.

SOURCE B

Excerpt from *Before the Dawn*, a historical novel published in serial form between 1929 and 1935 by Tōson Shimazaki, several decades after the events depicted in the story. Tōson was born in 1872 and based this novel on his father's experiences of the bakumatsu period. The character of Hanzo, based on Tōson's father, was a village headman who ran the honjin, an inn for government officials passing to or from Edo on the post road. Hanzo was a follower of *kokugaku* studies, especially the scholars Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843) and Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801). The character of Hanzo represents a *kokugaku*-influenced village elite rather than the wider population. This excerpt describes Hanzo's feelings just as the Meiji Restoration has occurred

... Hanzo reflected on how naturally the dreams of the thousands of Hirata disciples throughout the country matched the new government's desire to repudiate all vestiges of the middle ages in order to realize a better society and he envisioned the return to the straightforwardness and wholesomeness evident in the national character of the Japanese of antiquity.

... What kind of new antiquity would [tomorrow] bring to the waiting people of this nation? Ultimately, it was beyond the powers of the imagination to tell. Hanzo himself, as a Hirata disciple dedicated to learning, wanted to learn still more, but the time had not yet arrived when he could have the comfort of counting even the ten thousandth part of his desires as having been realized. It was his fervent wish to be able to rely on people in a spirit of complete faith and to join hands with his fellow disciples in firmly establishing the new government. In this manner they would follow in the footsteps of the great masters such as Motoori Norinaga who had opened the way for those who came after.

Consolidation of power

How did the Meiji leaders centralize power in the state?

Motivating the Meiji leaders was the desire to strengthen Japan on the world stage. The decentralized bakuhan system of the Tokugawa era was viewed as a weakness that had led to Japan's humiliating subordination by Western powers in the unequal treaties. Even while they were still fighting the last northern battles of the Boshin War, the Meiji government was making changes to solidify their own power and unify Japan.

Tokyo

Throughout the Tokugawa period, the shogun ruled from the city of Edo while the emperor resided in Kyoto. By 1869, the Meiji leaders had moved the young emperor to Edo and renamed the city Tokyo. The imperial family lived in the former shogun's castle and the Meiji leaders took residence in Tokyo and constructed new government buildings. Many of the daimyō and samurai who lived in Edo stayed on as residents in Tokyo.

Structural changes

The bakuhan system had allowed for great autonomy in each of the daimyō's domains. The Meiji leaders, coming primarily from outer western domains, worried that their authority might be challenged if they allowed this autonomy to continue. Furthermore, they needed the power to implement their reforms throughout Japan and they needed to create a modern nation-state in order to stand up to Western powers.

Daimyō and domains

Starting with their own daimyō from Chōshū, Satsuma, Tosa and Hizen, the Meiji leaders persuaded all the daimyō in Japan to give up their lands by 1870. Many of the castles were dismantled, the land was formally 'returned' to the emperor and the daimyō were made to be governors of the regions instead. However, in keeping with their goal to staff the government with 'men of talent', rather than hereditary leaders, many of the daimyō were gradually eased into retirement (subsidized by the new government) and replaced with new administrators chosen by the Meiji leaders. Later, in 1887, the government created an official merit-based civil service exam. However, top national posts were held by the Meiji leaders themselves.

Another key reform was to reduce the number of administrative regions so that they could be more easily kept under central control. At the end of the Edo period, there were 280 domains in Japan. In 1871 the Meiji leaders abolished the domains and replaced them with 72 prefectures. Over the next few decades, the prefectures were further consolidated, making it even easier to implement national policies. The greatest benefit of these consolidation reforms to the central government was the new power to levy taxes on the people of Japan, who no longer paid such taxes to their daimyō.



What does Kido's diary entry reveal about the reason why the domains were abolished?

SOURCE C

Extract from Kido Takayoshi's diary entry regarding the abolition of the domains on 29 August 1871. Kido was a key player in the Sat-Cho coup and central figure in the new Meiji government

... [T]he emperor appeared in the Grand Hall and the governors of fifty-six domains were summoned before him. There the Imperial edict on the abolition of the domains was read to them ... With this, the seven-hundred-year-old political structure, with all of its undesirable features, has been reformed; and we may say that the foundation for a structure which will enable us to face the nations of the world on a basis of equality for the first time has been established.

Samurai

Although the Meiji leaders were samurai themselves, many of them viewed the samurai class as an obstacle to Japan's success. The main reason for this was that the burden of paying the stipends to the samurai would drain the resources of the government. The incongruity of the prescribed social hierarchy and the economic realities of Japan provided further impetus for change. Many, especially lower-level samurai, felt discontent with the restrictions placed on them from participating in commerce, which severely limited their ability to become wealthy. By removing the hierarchy rules and eliminating the samurai status, the government would have money to invest in other reforms and some samurai would benefit by finding new careers as merchants or government officials.

Eliminating the samurai status would probably be met with some pushback, so in order to achieve this reform, the Meiji leaders moved gradually. First, in 1873 they eliminated the ranks that distinguished different levels of samurai. Then, they began taxing the stipends and offering the choice of bonds (government IOUs) instead. In 1876, the government took away the samurai privilege of wearing swords in public and then moved to eliminate stipends altogether. This effectively ended the samurai class distinction, making all Japanese people commoners.

SOURCE D

Photo taken in 1867 or 1868 of the Dutch missionary and teacher Guido Verbeck with his young son (one assumes) and a group of samurai students. Verbeck lived in Japan from 1859 until his death in 1898 and taught English, Dutch, German, French and Russian, as well as science and politics. Meiji leaders, including Okubo, Ito and Okuma, all studied with Verbeck during the bakumatsu period. None of the samurai can be properly identified, but most would probably have been impacted by the changes imposed by the government in the 1870s

- 1 Why might these samurai have sought their education with a Dutch teacher?
- 2 How might their lives have changed after 1876 when the samurai class was abolished?

?



Symbolic emperor

Meiji leaders claimed to have 'restored' the emperor to his rightful and historic role as sovereign leader of Japan, but in fact they created a whole new role for him. The teenage Mutsuhito was not responsible for the overthrow of the shogunate or the vast changes that came in the decades to follow. Instead, the Meiji leaders used him to legitimize their rule and build unity among the populace. The emperor issued formal announcements (called rescripts) of government policies. He also travelled all over Japan, making many public appearances to promote government-favoured cultural changes. Mutsuhito, the Meiji emperor, reigned for four decades, overseeing a dramatic transformation. Foreign leaders sometimes mistook him for the actual leader of Japan, not understanding the role of the oligarchy.



What do these photos reveal about how the Meiji leaders wanted to portray the emperor?

SOURCE E

Two contrasting photos of Mutsuhito, the Meiji emperor, taken by the photographer Uchida Kuichi. Uchida was the only photographer allowed to photograph the emperor and he did so twice, in 1872 (left), with Mutsuhito in traditional Shinto dress and again in 1873 (right), in Western military dress



Thinking skills

How did the changes implemented in the first few years after the Meiji Restoration correspond to the promises of the Charter Oath?

ATL

Nationalism

As explained in Chapter 1, Japanese identity in the Tokugawa era was more tied to domain than to a sense of national consciousness. Scholars in the kogaku (ancient learning), kokugaku (national learning) and Mitogaku (learning from Mito domain) schools suggested early forms of nationalism, but many historians argue that the unequal treaties of the 1850s are what truly gave rise to Japanese nationalism. However, this sense of identity was not necessarily widespread beyond the *sonnō jōi* movement. Once in power, the Meiji leaders sought to build nationalism in the common people. They consciously did this through the symbolic emperor as well as new institutions developed in the 1870s.

SOURCE F

Extract from 'Progress in Japan', *The New York Times* editorial, 31 July 1869. Rear Admiral Stephen C Rowan was the commander of the US Asiatic Squadron who visited Japan in 1869, just after the Meiji Restoration (Note: Westerners referred to the daimyō as 'princes').

The dispatch of Rear-Admiral Rowan from Yokohama ... gives a striking picture of the marvelous effects which have already been produced in Japan by the contact of the irresistible Western civilization with the hitherto immutable [unchangeable] institutions and rigorously obeyed traditions of the Japanese ... The feudal system, so long the chief obstacle both to material progress and the establishment of friendly relations with foreign nations, is at the point of collapse and ... many of the semi-independent Princes have voluntarily relinquished their power and privileges "for the general good."

The most remarkable feature in the Admiral's dispatch, however, is the account which he gives of the numerous instances in which the Japanese, as he phrases it, have already outstripped the Chinese in their progress toward Western civilization ... [W]ho can place limits to the future development and prosperity of a nation of 35,000,000 of brave, highly intelligent and inventive people and possessed of boundless resources, which, after centuries upon centuries of absolute isolation, remodels its cherished institutions and adopts so readily the appliances of a higher civilization?

- 1 What changes enacted by the new Meiji government were regarded as most impressive by the author of Source F?
- 2 How does the context of the source influence how it can be used to understand the impact of the Meiji Restoration?

?

Ideas for change: the Iwakura Mission

The Meiji government inherited the unequal treaties signed by the Tokugawa government and almost immediately took action to try to have them revised. In order to do this, the oligarchs sent an embassy to visit the USA and European countries. Following the official Tokugawa embassy to the USA in 1860, many of the Meiji leaders travelled abroad and so began to see value in studying foreign policies and institutions. In 1871 they decided to send half of the government itself to try to negotiate the treaties and learn from the West. For most of the next two years, the Meiji government was split in two, with one group on the mission and the other group left to govern Japan from Tokyo. This caretaker government included Sanjō Sanetomi, Saigō Takamori (see profile on page xx), Etō Shinpei, Itagaki Taisuke, Ōkuma Shigenobu and Inoue Kaoru. Meiji leaders who went on the mission were Okubo Toshimichi and Kido Takayoshi (see profiles on page xx), Itō Hirobumi and the senior leader and namesake of the mission, Iwakura Tomomi. Mori Arinori also went on the first part of the journey but stayed in Washington DC to serve as Japan's first ambassador to the USA.

What were the key learnings of the Iwakura Mission?

Research skills

What was happening in the countries visited by the Iwakura Mission in the early 1870s? What do you know about the USA and Europe at this time? Conduct some brief research to help you answer the question.

ATL

Thinking skills

What does the choice of destinations on the Iwakura Mission's route suggest about which powers the Meiji state saw as models or threats? How might sending leaders on such a long journey have strengthened the authority of the central government at home?

ATL

Hundreds of others joined as well, many of whom were students who stayed even longer in Western countries. Altogether, the mission toured the USA and 11 European countries and briefly stopped at ports in the Middle East and Asia, where their observations confirmed their goals to modernize and avoid colonial subjugation (and perhaps gave them ideas about becoming colonial powers themselves).



Map of the route taken by the Iwakura mission



The route taken by the Iwakura Mission in Europe

SOURCE G

Photo of Iwakura Mission leaders: (l-r) Kido Takayoshi, Yamaguchi Naoyoshi, Iwakura Tomomi, Itō Hirobumi and Ōkubo Toshimichi. Iwakura, seated in the middle, was a member of the imperial court and the leading ambassador on the mission

**SOURCE H**

Extract from an 1871 letter to US President Ulysses S Grant, signed by Emperor Mutsuhito and Prime Minister Sanjō Sanetomi, to be delivered by the envoys of the Iwakura Mission.

The period for revising the treaties now existing between ourselves and the United States is less than one year distant. We expect and intend to reform and improve the same so as to stand upon a similar footing with the most enlightened nations and to attain the full development of public rights and interest. The civilization and institutions of Japan are so different from those of other countries that we cannot expect to reach the declared end at once. It is our purpose to select from the various institutions prevailing among enlightened nations such as are best suited to our present conditions and adapt them in gradual reforms and improvements of our policy and customs so as to be upon an equality with them. With this object we desire to fully disclose to the United States Government the constitution of affairs in our Empire and to consult upon the means of giving greater efficiency to our institutions at present and in the future and as soon as the said Embassy returns home we will consider the revision of the treaties and accomplish what we have expected and intended ...

- 1 What do you notice about the clothes that the leaders of the Iwakura Mission are wearing in Source G? Why might they have chosen to dress this way?
- 2 How does the content of the source reflect the changes taking place in Japan?

?

- 1 According to the source, what were the key aims of the mission to the United States?
- 2 Why was this source written? How does the audience and purpose of the source affect the content of the source and the way it has been written?

?

EXTENSION

Japanese students and the Iwakura Mission

The Iwakura Mission was made up of top Meiji leaders, as well as a number of young Japanese men who intended to stay in the United States or Europe to study. Additionally, five young Japanese girls accompanied the Mission, recruited by Kuroda Kiyotaka, a Satsuma samurai who had participated in the coup, studied abroad and advocated changing women's roles in Japan. When the Meiji government requested families to send their daughters to study in the United States, only five volunteered. They were all daughters of former samurai who had fought against the Meiji leaders in the short Boshin War and their families accepted the call partly because they sought redemption with the new government and partly because they could not afford to feed another daughter. The oldest girls were 14 years old and the youngest was six. They sailed to America with the Iwakura Mission, meeting the Meiji leaders Okubo, Ito, Mori and others. The two oldest girls were too miserable and opted to return to Japan, but the younger three continued in their commitment to stay for ten years. They travelled with the Iwakura Mission from San Francisco to the east coast and then settled in with host families.

Eleven-year-old Yamakawa Suteomatsu and ten-year-old Nagai Shigeko both lived in New Haven, Connecticut, where they learned English, attended high school and went on to study at Vassar College in New York. Six-year-old Tsuda Umeko lived in Washington, DC. All three returned to Japan in the early 1880s but found Japan very different from when they had left. They, too, were transformed by their time in the United States. Tsuda especially struggled to adjust to life in Japan, as she spoke better English than Japanese. Tsuda returned to the US from 1889 to 1892 to study at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania.

For the rest of their lives, the three women remained connected to each other and to the Meiji government. They worked to promote girls' education in Japan, teaching English, music and other subjects. Yamakawa Suteomatsu invited her former American host sister, Alice Mabel Bacon, to visit Japan and help train teachers. Bacon returned a second time in 1900 and worked with Tsuda Umeko to found a new girls' school, which eventually became Tsuda University.

The story of three girls is documented in the book *Daughters of the Samurai: A Journey from East to West and Back*, by Janice P Nimura (2015).

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