

2015

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Recommended Citation

Woodside, Adam M., "The Occupation of Japan: An Analysis of Three Phases of Development" (2015). *A with Honors Projects*. 151.
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Research Project

HIS – 105

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The Occupation of Japan: An Analysis of Three Phases of Development

Introduction

After World War II, Europe was war-ravaged and the Pacific islands were devastated. The impact was compounded by Japan's previous invasions of China, Korea, the East Indies and more. Additionally, the numerous Allied non-atomic and two atomic bombings in Japan caused a need for physical reconstruction. The result of these factors necessitated massive efforts to return the Pacific to a state of normalcy. Another resulting problem that was facing Japan was the need for economic reconstruction of their country.

One of the main efforts that was needed was to return people back to their home country. This is called repatriation. This was especially important for Japan as they had to bring their people home from the many countries that they had previously invaded. The Allied Powers also enacted reforms and reconstruction through a military government that was put in place in Japan. This helped build Japan back up economically and included several ratified treaties. This period of reconstruction can be broken down into three separate phases.

The first phase of the Japanese reconstruction period was repatriation. This period was marked by returning citizens to Japan and the instillation of a military government. The second phase was the economic and political reconstruction. To rebuild economically, Japan had to rebuild their many destroyed cities and get people back to work. In order to restructure politically they would need to ratify a constitution and hold national elections for new leaders in their government. The third phase was to ratify treaties with the Allied Powers and for Japan to

resume its normal governance of its own country. The Pacific reconstruction period after World War II, specifically how it fits within the previously mentioned three phases, was one of the greatest achievements for the United States and the Allied Powers following the war.

Phase One: Redrawing Borders and Repatriation

The first stage of the United States' plan to help rebuild Japan after World War II was to redraw borders for the countries in the Pacific. The redrawing of borders was an immense project that involved many conflicting interests. This redefinition of borders was necessary because Japan had invaded surrounding areas during the two decades preceding World War II. Japan is an island nation with a large population and a "mostly rugged and mountainous" landscape. (Japan) The rough terrain meant that the majority of the population needed to live in cities. There was a lack of fertile land for farming. Also due to the terrain, the Japanese lacked sufficient natural resources. These facts led to a rapid expansion of Japanese Empire before and during World War II to keep up with the demands of waging war. Japan invaded China and Manchuria in 1937 and then continued its advance so that "in December 1941, Guam and Wake Island fell to the Japanese, followed in the first half of 1942 by the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies, Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore, and Burma." (World) After the war, these territories, along with Korea which Japan had previously invaded, (Korea) had to be returned to normalcy. The previous governments needed to be reinstated and much of those countries needed to be rebuilt as well. In the cases of European colonial holdings and Manchuria and Korea, this was an enormous task. Manchuria became a region of China, Korea was finally returned to the people of Korea after thirty five years of servitude (Korea), and the former European Colonies had to develop their own systems of governance, each unique to their culture. The United States

also wanted to prevent the spread of communism in these nations as well by assisting in the rebuilding process.

The rebuilding process in Japan had begun when the second stage in the United States' plan for the East Asian nations was initiated. This portion of the plan had to do with repatriating individuals who were displaced by the war. Throughout Japan's domination of Asia, they had uprooted much of the population and moved them into forced labor camps. Other cities and towns had been completely destroyed. (Gruhl 8) The scope and breadth of impacted people who were displaced by the war and needed to be returned was difficult to grasp. Approximately 6.1 million Japanese and 1.3 million Koreans were repatriated within the first two years following the war's end in 1945. (Dowers 54) These numbers are astronomical and this does not even factor in many of the other Asian nations that were impacted by the Japanese expansion. This meant that "from a logistical standpoint, the repatriation process was an impressive accomplishment." (54)

Initially the US led repatriation program allowed priority evacuations from United States controlled areas in the Western Pacific. Later, United States owned ships were made available to the Japanese to supplement their shipping resources. (Dowers 54) One of the program's greatest challenges was that all repatriation had to be conducted over ocean areas, often over very great distances. This challenge was compounded by the amount of coordination and logistics support that was necessary to move over seven and a half million people to new locations.

Another issue that needed to be addressed during repatriation was what to do with people who had nothing to return to. Much of the Asian islands had been battlegrounds for United States and Japanese troops, and there was nothing left for the displaced residents to return to. Close to 9 million people were homeless. Sixty-six major cities, including Hiroshima and

Nagasaki, had been heavily bombed, destroying 40% of these urban areas overall and rendering about 30% of their populations homeless. In Tokyo, the largest metropolis, 65% of all residences were destroyed. In Osaka and Nagoya, the country's second and third largest cities, the figures were 57 and 89%. Five millions of Tokyo's seven million population had left the ruined city. (Baran) This was often dealt with by moving people to new and unfamiliar towns and cities. This created additional drag on many large cities' already struggling infrastructure. Another consequence of the war was that 4.5 million servicemen who were decommissioned in 1945 were wounded or ill. (Baran) This also created a huge drain on available resources and available manpower to rebuild the country. Other critical issues facing post-war Japan included food shortages, and increases in corruption, communicable diseases, alcoholism, drug addiction, and violent as well as non-violent crime. (Baran)

Because of how complex these first two stages of the redrawing borders and repatriation were, the United States recognized that they needed an authority structure to take command of the operation. The obvious choice was the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers in the Pacific, General Douglas MacArthur. (Smitha) Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the Republic of China each had an advisory role as part of an "Allied Council," but General MacArthur had the final authority to make all decisions. (Hsu) General MacArthur ended up being a fantastic choice. Because of how effective of a leader he was, and much of the work he would do to modernize Japan, many "Japanese at all levels of society embraced the new supreme commander with an ador[e] hitherto reserved for the emperor." (Dowers 227) The work that made him a beloved figure in Japan started with his effective management of the crisis regarding the movement of people and country borders. This strong start helped him his plans developed to further change Japan economically and politically.

Phase Two: Economic and Political Reconstruction

The repatriation process happening across Asia and borders being redrawn were enormous operations, but they pale in comparison to the challenges General MacArthur faced in trying to rebuild and restructure Japan. After the war, Japan's "formidable prewar industrial base was gone; even in remote areas, nearly every factory was destroyed." (Reid 43) Japan's railroads were also ravaged by the war, both from United States bombings and from Japan repurposing the metal for military needs. (43) To begin the rebuilding process the United States established key areas they wanted to progress in Japan's economy. The main goals that General MacArthur was supposed to meet were "to extend the franchise to women, promote labor unionization, open schools to more liberal education, democratize the economy by revising 'monopolistic industrial controls,' and in general eliminate all despotic vestiges in society." (Dowers 81) The first of these objectives sought to bring Japan to a more modern way of thinking and allow for a more balanced society. By giving Japanese women the right to vote, the United States was putting women on equal playing field as men which would help the Japanese society move on from a patriarchal society and hopefully help avoid war in the future. This was highly effective and in the first election women were allowed to vote in, women were elected to thirty nine seats in public office. The second element in economic reform was to foster a society where unionization was encouraged. By enforcing this idea in Japan, the United States could ensure a check on the higher tiers of society which tended to be nationalistic and were often seen as responsible for the strong culture of war by the United States government. Prior to the war, Japan was dominated by the Emperor's ideals and unionization would help mechanism to control that power. Both of these initiatives served an additional common purpose. Both would allow citizens to feel that they had a voice and empower them after the war. Because they had just

sustained a glaring defeat and were a proud people, the Japanese needed something to keep them moving forward. Giving women the right to vote would help them advance society as a whole and allowing citizens to unionize would help them feel impactful and increase their productivity. Thirdly, the United States wanted to institute a more forward thinking education system. Education is the easiest way to influence a society and build culture in the future. By changing the educational curriculum in Japan the United States was able to instill, what the thought were better, values in the Japanese youth. This shift in values from the bottom up paved the way for making the changes instituted by the United States a more long lasting impact. The fourth goal of removing “monopolistic industrial control” (81) allowed for a more capitalistic society to take hold. This was good for the United States because it signaled lower likelihood of a highly militaristic economy and allowed for everyday citizens to rise up in the world regardless of their birth. Finally, the last goal in General MacArthur’s action plan was to remove the traces of the former tyrannical society. The majority of this was done through political reform, however the directive he received the United States gave General MacArthur some leeway to make any changes he deemed necessary for the success of the restructuring of Japan.

From the moment he was installed as supreme commander, General MacArthur was driven to modernize Japanese society. To do this he instituted many economic reforms. These would have been altogether unsuccessful if it had not been for the political reforms that he also installed. At first, the only plan from the United States was to absolve the Emperor of his position and power. Luckily, for the success of the political reforms ended up hinging on it, “General MacArthur ... successfully argued for maintain Hirohito as the symbol of the Japanese nation around which society could be reconstructed.” (Heinz 295-296) Although the title of the Emperor remained and the family line was not abolished, the power of the Emperor was stripped.

(Dowers 360) This made the Japanese Emperor much like the monarchy in England. This then allowed General MacArthur to build a constitution for the Japanese people. This was done without direct authority, but within the ambiguity of his final directive under his economic reform, as he instituted the constitution “after months of scrupulously refraining from placing pressure on the government.” (361) The dramatic change in policy was due to a lack of progress after months of work by Japanese officials on satisfactorily changing their old constitution.

(Schonberger 57) Because the Japanese failed to make progress and “for MacArthur the most important step in the peaceful transformation from a feudal system to a capitalist democracy” (56) it was important that the new constitution have dramatic changes and changes that the people would accept. Japanese citizens were already experiencing the new found leniency in the economic sphere and “ordinary men and women were proving receptive to the sort of democracy the Americans were promoting.” (Dowers 355) With this new found freedom, a poll was established to get the public’s feeling on more political freedom and it was overwhelmingly supported. (361) To MacArthur, this meant that he had to institute this change in order to preserve his mission.

The changes that General MacArthur orchestrated in the political and economic sphere were wide reaching and highly effective. There are many critics however. Many say that he stripped too much of the Japanese culture and did not allow the Japanese to come up with a system that was good for them, but rather pressed upon them what he wanted for his own gain. (Burkman 190) For these reasons there are highly nationalistic fringe factions that want to repeal the many changes that he instituted. While there are fringe groups that do say this, there are many more that believe that the changes that MacArthur instituted were clearly of a high level. This fact is clearly on display in the attitudes of many Japanese people. The Japanese people feel

that “they have directly benefited from Occupation reforms.” (190) On top of this, they do not even want to attempt to revise the aforementioned reforms because they are afraid that they might lose the freedoms they value. (190)

Phase Three: Sustainability

Japan held its first elections and had a new prime minister by 1947. Even though this was very rapid change right after the war, there was still much to be done. The San Francisco Peace Treaty and the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty that fully took Japan out from under United States control were not signed for five more years, until 1952. (Reconstruction) At this point it was thought that there was enough stability for Japan to resume full governance of all within its borders. The newly ratified constitution still demanded pacifism, but other than that they had free rule. With this new found capability, the government faced a struggling economy and frustrated workforce that was filled with striking unions. Not to be discouraged, the government went to work and set about rekindling the drive and resiliency of the Japanese people. The government recognized that this was not something that would happen overnight, “but by 1975 the foundation for growth as firmly in place.” (Reid 44) From there, Japan has grown to be an economic powerhouse and a center for global technological innovation.

The period of time post-occupation was not only a time of domestic policy, Japan also began ratifying treaties to regain its place in the global economic sphere. One of the first that they ratified in 1952 was the Treaty of Taipei. The Treaty of Taipei was a peace treaty with China agreeing that the war between the neighboring nations ended on the date of ratification. (Treaty) Also in 1952, Japan ratified the Treaty of Peace Between Japan and India which restored relations between the two nations which India had ended because it felt that the United States was oppressing Japan. (Indian) These two treaties, along with the ideology of the

Japanese, suggests a shift in their foreign policy. Prior to World War II, Japan was often looked at as an aggressor, and after World War Two “nationalism in Japan has been deeply colored by pacifism...” (Weinstein 105)

This attitudinal change is a direct result of the United States Occupation of Japan. The Occupation made Japan realize that “national sovereignty and independence are not absolutes in a world of nuclear missiles and increasing economic interdependence.” (Weinstein 105) Even though these can be harsh realities, they are ones that sometimes need reminding. Even just after the war, many were thankful for the occupation even though it meant learning these hard lessons. The Japanese are a resilient people and they learned from this course of events and with the way their policy moves forward, the changes General MacArthur are clearly sustainable.

Conclusion

Japanese people have a belief that their land was created by a god and that their Emperor is a descendant of that god sent to lead his peoples. (Heinz 283) While this may seem outlandish to some, it was this belief that led to many of the atrocities Japan caused in World War II. The military felt that they had divine authority on their side and would do whatever was ordered of them. After the war, this is one thing that the United States wanted to see destroyed in order to prevent another ill-guided Japanese conquest and further loss of life.

Ironically, the Empirical structure is still intact even though the Occupation changed almost every other aspect of Japanese society. The first of these changes was that the United States returned all of the land that Japan had conquered prior and during World War Two. They also helped to repatriate the individuals who were displaced during the war. Both of these things were done while they instituted a military government in Japan that would be responsible for

implementing future changes within Japan. The next change they implemented affected every person in Japan. General MacArthur created a new constitution and implemented many economic reforms to revamp post war Japan. Finally, the Allied powers work to make sure that all of the work that General MacArthur implemented were not in vain by ratifying treaties and keeping watch on the domestic affairs within Japan. The dramatic changes to the people within Japanese borders, how they interacted with one another economically and politically, and how they interact with the rest of the world, all contributed to the elevation of Japan to its place in global society today. For this reason I think that after winning World War II, the success of the Occupation of Japan was the Allies' greatest victory.

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