Lesson 4

Student Handout 4.1—New Identity in Japan: Resistance and Change

During the first half of the nineteenth century, Japan was ruled by the Tokugawa shogunate (1600-1868). This period is called the Edo period because the Tokugawa capital was in Edo (modern Tokyo). The Tokugawa shogun was a dictator who ran a central bureaucracy with alliances to regional daimyo, or great estate owners, and to the samurai, a class of professional knights in service to both daimyo and the shogunate. Japan continued to have an emperor but only with ceremonial functions. To preserve stability, society was formally divided into samurai, farmers, artisans, and merchants, and contact with the world beyond Japan was severely restricted. The Tokugawa shogunate initiated a number of changes, including the standardization of coins, a system of weights and measures, improvement of roads and canals, and implementation of detailed law codes. In part because of these policies, Japan’s internal economy grew impressively during much of the Tokugawa period.

Japanese cultural and intellectual life also flourished into the beginning of the nineteenth century. For example, the number of educational institutions increased, resulting in the highest rate of literacy outside of Europe by the middle of the century. Intellectual life in Japan also produced a number of debates between traditionalists and reformists, the former praising Japanese government and Shinto religion and the latter admiring Western science and literature.

Commerce and manufacturing expanded, developments that may have planted some early seeds of industrialization. Despite this expansion, however, the Tokugawa regime faced a number of financial problems. For one thing, it continued to rely on taxes on agriculture despite the fact that Japan’s commercial economy was producing more and more potentially-taxable revenue. In addition, the delicate political balance it tried to maintain with the daimyo and samurai required payment of large stipends in exchange for their loyalty. By the 1850s, economic growth had slowed and rural protests erupted among peasants, who were unhappy with financial conditions and landlord controls.

Despite these problems, Japan experienced an unprecedented period of peace and relative stability under the strict isolationist policy of the Tokugawa shogunate. Faced with the reality of European expansion, however, some Japanese became increasingly worried about the threat of outside forces. Then, in 1853, U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry sailed into Edo Bay with a small armed fleet, and he insisted that Japan open its ports to American trade. Nearly powerless against this show of naval superiority, Japan signed a formal treaty with the U.S. to open two commercial ports. Soon thereafter, the major European powers won similar rights.

Now faced with the collapse of its strict isolationist policy and humiliated by Perry’s forces, Japan entered into more than a decade of political turmoil. Some Japanese, like those intellectuals who had already become fascinated with Western culture, were completely ready to open their doors to European and American influence. Others, like
the daimyos, wanted to conserve Japanese traditions and their way of life. The samurai were divided, with some seeing the opportunity for more political power if the shogunate ended. In 1867, using American Civil War surplus weapons, a group of samurai defeated shogunate forces, convincing many of the military superiority of Europe’s modern weaponry.

In 1868, radicals seized the imperial palace and claimed “restoration” under the young emperor whose formal reign name was Meiji. A brief civil war followed, ending with the victory of Meiji forces. Hence began a period of Meiji rule, in which the government was centralized and power distributed among appointed district administrators. The Meiji government sent officials abroad to study Western economic and political institutions and technology and, impressed with what they found, instituted a number of reforms. The tax on agriculture was broadened and samurai stipends were decreased. Former samurai organized political parties; government bureaucracy was expanded and a constitution was issued.

The new Meiji army also modeled itself after Western standards, instituting full military conscription and officer training, and upgrading weapons. The government also set its sights on full industrialization, expanding railroads and promoting increased agriculture to support it. The government expanded technical training, education, and banking systems to make way for industrialization as well. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Japan had entered a complete and well-organized industrial revolution.

The Meiji government also provided a universal primary education, which stressed science and technology to further support increased industrialization. Education, however, brought exposure to values different from traditional Japanese values. By 1880, the emperor decided that changes had gone too far. Therefore, the government set out on a mission to provide an education replete with traditional Japanese morals and loyalty to the government and nation. Many Japanese were particularly eager, for example, to maintain the traditional inferiority of women. Also, the Meiji emperor and his conservative advisers placed government restrictions on Buddhism, giving new primacy to the native Japanese religion of Shintoism, which promoted strict order and national allegiance.

Still, Japanese culture and life became imbued with borrowings from the West, including fashion, hairstyles, and hygiene. Japan adopted the Western calendar and metric system. Although Japan retained many traditional values and institutions after contact with the West, at the beginning of the twentieth century it surely was different from early nineteenth-century Japan.

Lesson 4: Struggles to Retain Old Identities
1850-1914 CE
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Student Handout 4.2—New Identities in Egypt: British Imperialism and the Crisis in Islam

On July 1, 1798, Napoleon’s French forces landed in Alexandria, Egypt, bent on gaining control of Egypt with an eye toward ending British power in India. The Mamluk rulers of Egypt initially dismissed the capability of Napoleon and his forces, which probably contributed to a crushing Egyptian defeat in a series of lopsided battles. Shortly thereafter, in 1801, a joint Ottoman-British force caused Napoleon’s forces to retreat.

Chaos ensued in Egypt, allowing Muhammad Ali, an officer of Albanian origin, to take control of Egypt in 1805. After the humiliating defeat at the hands of the French, Muhammad Ali devoted his energies to updating the Egyptian military under a Western model. He built a European-style military, introduced conscription among the peasantry, hired French officers to train his troops, imported Western arms, and adopted Western military tactics. Despite resistance from the peasants with whom he populated his forces, he built the most effective military force in the region. This allowed him to defeat Ottoman forces in Syria in 1831, creating for himself a small, albeit short-lived, Egyptian empire. In 1840, British forces intervened to restore Ottoman power, but Muhammad Ali became viceroy of Egypt, leaving the Ottoman empire in control in name only.

Under Muhammad Ali, Egypt took initial steps toward modernization. He ordered the increase of agricultural goods that could be used for production in Europe and attempted to improve Egyptian harbors and extend irrigation works. At the same time, however, he declared all land state property and forcibly confiscated peasants’ produce to pay for his modernized military.

Muhammad Ali died in 1848 but produced a hereditary dynasty to follow him. However, his successors, called khedives, were ineffective rulers. This eventually caused the steady increase of European control and subsequent alarm within the Muslim world. For example, the khedives’ focus on cotton production at the expense of other crops led Egypt to rely on a single export, leaving their economy vulnerable to fluctuation in European demand. By 1914, cotton accounted for about half of Egypt’s agricultural produce and 90 percent of exports. In addition, while leading extravagant lives at the expense of the Egyptian peasantry, the khedives wasted revenue and became increasingly indebted to European financiers who wanted access to Egypt’s cotton.

Maintaining a steady supply of cheap cotton was one reason why, by the 1850s, Egypt had become of particular importance to European powers. A second reason was the Suez Canal, which was built between 1859 and 1869. The canal, connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea’s Gulf of Suez, provided a shortcut between European powers and their colonial empires. While the canal helped Egypt achieve greater modernization, such as the development of a railway system, it also encouraged more aggressive European maneuvering in Egypt. Not only did European powers set their sights on Egypt as a
crucial strategic area, but the economic opportunities afforded by cotton production and modernization attempts resulted in an influx of foreigners, from about 3,000 in 1850 to about 90,000 in 1882.

The ineptitude of the khedive rulers in Egypt, coupled with the increasing domination of European powers throughout the Ottoman empire, alarmed Muslim intellectuals and leaders. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, they had been faced with the increasing military, industrial, scientific, and intellectual domination of their Christian adversaries. The encroachment of the British into Egypt was particularly troubling, however, because Egypt had been largely independent, even within the Ottoman empire. In the mid-nineteenth century, Egypt became an important meeting place for Islamic leaders to come together and discuss tactics to deal with the encroaching European powers. Some moderate leaders took solace in the fact that much of the success of European powers was derived from Muslim influences. Others took a middle ground, arguing for some Western-inspired reforms within an Islamic framework.

Among these scholars was Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-1897), who encouraged Pan-Islamism, that is, the unifying of the Muslim community worldwide, and the reform of government to ensure autonomy in Muslim-dominated areas. On the one hand, al-Afghani argued for a return to pure Islamic traditions and political opposition to the West. On the other hand, he encouraged borrowing from Western scientific and intellectual innovations and democratization of Western states. Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), Al-Afghani’s disciple, emphasized the latter, eventually becoming a teacher and administrator at the University of Cairo. He introduced a modern curriculum to the university and emphasized the importance of reason in Islamic study and thought. Some Muslim leaders stressed more extreme approaches to deal with the increasing European hegemony. They called for jihad and a complete return to traditional Islamic traditions and religious observance.

In the end, Muslim leaders could not come to an agreement on how to deal with the challenges of the West, and Egypt continued steadily to fall into the hands of Europeans. By the mid-1870s, Egypt was financially bankrupt owing to poor management by a succession of khedives. In 1875, the khedive even sold his shares in the Suez Canal Company to the British. Criticism of khedive rule extended within the Egyptian military as well, and out of these ranks emerged a group of mutinous Egyptian officers who, under the leadership of Colonel Ahmad Urabi (1841-1911), gained control over the government in 1881, vowing to resist the Europeans. Urabi’s revolution was one of the first Egyptian nationalist movements and Urabi was considered a national hero, but the national fervor he inspired led to violent riots in Alexandria. Taking advantage of the political turmoil and concerned about the revolutionaries’ anti-European sentiments, the British intervened, landing troops in Egypt in September, 1882.

Although Egypt was never officially colonized, the British ruled through puppet khedives and British advisors well into the twentieth century. Between 1882 and 1914, a number of modest modern developments occurred in Egypt, including the building of new dams and
barrages, roads, and railways. However, there was little progress in modern industry and the trade and craft guilds were destroyed through increased government controls and an influx of European imports and businessmen. Agriculture, particularly cotton, remained the mainstay of the economy. Yet, as the population of Egypt doubled during this time, the country became a net importer of food by the early twentieth century.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Egypt was host to many changes, but few of them actually benefited Egyptians. In addition, European control was a severe blow to Islam as a whole. Events in Egypt and the rest of the Ottoman empire created a crisis of identity among Muslims, whose belief in theirs as the one true faith was brought into serious question by Western global domination.

Egypt
Lesson 4

Student Handout 4.3—Venn Diagram: Japan

Old Identities: Aspects of identity prior to significant contact with the West

Retained Identity: Aspects of identity intact after significant contact with the West

New Identities: Aspects of identity that were changed after significant contact with the West

New Identities: Nationalism and Religion

Lesson 4: Struggles to Retain Old Identities
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Student Handout 4.4—Venn Diagram: Egypt

Old Identities: Aspects of identity prior to significant contact with the West.

Retained Identity: Aspects of identity intact after significant contact with the West.

New Identities: Aspects of identity that were changed after significant contact with the West.