

Educational Reform Strategies of the Meiji Restoration and the Westernization Movement: A Comparison of Motivation and Effect

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Abstract: This paper discusses and compares the strategies for educational reform in Japan's Meiji Restoration and the Westernization Movement in China during the mid-19th century from three aspects: motivation, measure, and consequence. The two countries initiated reforms to meet the stimulus of the West with the goal to modernize and reinforce national capability. Japan's Meiji Restoration applied all-round change: an establishment of the modern education system based on popularizing primary education, studying abroad, and founding universities. It had thus promoted Japan's transition to a strong industrial power. In comparison, China's Westernization Movement adopted a conservative attitude toward Western culture, placing stress on technological progress while failing to eliminate the feudal restrictions of the system. The failure of the movement in modernization was due to the ideological rigidity and insufficiency of structural reform in establishing new schools and sending students abroad. It indicates that political and social conditions play an important role in the success or failure of educational reform and presents an enlightening message about the transforming function of education in nation modernization.

Keywords: Meiji Restoration, Westernization Movement, Educational reform, Modernization

1. Introduction

When talking about "Western learning", people often associate it with events such as the Hundred Days' Reform and the Self-Strengthening Movement to explain how China transitioned from a feudal society to a modern society. The Meiji Restoration and the Westernization Movement were two reform movements that took place in Japan and China in the mid-19th century, respectively, aimed at responding to the impact of Western powers and promoting national modernization. The Meiji Restoration was a comprehensive political, economic, social and cultural reform carried out by Japan in the second half of the 19th century. In 1868, Japan overthrew the shogunate (the rule of the Tokugawa family), restored the power of the emperor, and began the process of modernization and Westernization with Emperor Meiji as the center. The main goal of the reform was to build a strong, independent and modern country by absorbing Western advanced science and technology, military system, legal system and economic model. This reform enabled Japan to quickly transform from a closed agricultural country to a modern industrial country, and eventually become a powerful country in Asia. The Westernization Movement was a reform movement initiated by the Qing government of

China in order to respond to the pressure of Western powers and learn advanced Western military technology and production methods. The core slogan of the Westernization Movement was "Chinese Learning as Substance, Western Learning for Application", which means introducing Western military, industrial and technological knowledge while maintaining Chinese traditional culture and system. However, the reforms of the Westernization Movement were relatively conservative, mainly focusing on the military and industrial fields, lacking in-depth reforms of the political system and social structure. Due to corruption within the system and the one-sided introduction of Western technology, the Westernization Movement ultimately failed to achieve the expected results, and failed to enable China to effectively resist foreign aggression and achieve modernization transformation. At the same time, the two similar reforms experienced by China and Japan are often used as a comparison. Some people believe that these two reforms are both references to Western systems. The educational reforms of the two countries played an important role in the Westernization Movement and the Meiji Restoration respectively - promoting national modernization and industrialization.

Many domestic scholars have conducted certain research on the educational reforms of the Westernization Movement and the Meiji Restoration. Chen Qingyue's "Comparison of Educational Reforms during the Westernization Movement and the Meiji Restoration" and Shan Yumei's "Comparative Study of Educational Reforms during the Westernization Movement and the Meiji Restoration" both explained their specific educational reforms and explained the reasons for the two completely different results of educational reforms; Cui Bo's "Research on Japanese Educational Rule of Law during the Meiji Restoration (1868-1889)" linked Japan's Meiji Restoration educational reforms with the political background at the time, allowing readers to better understand the fundamental reasons why Japan made these educational reform measures at the time, while Fan Yuan's "On Educational Reforms during the Westernization Movement" conducted a deeper analysis of China's Westernization Movement and discussed in detail the feudal background of the Westernization Movement at the time. Previous studies mainly focused on the ideological enlightenment and military reforms of the Westernization Movement and the Meiji Restoration. Against this background, the author of this article is based on the relevant research on educational reforms in China and Japan, and draws on previous studies to try to conduct an in-depth study and comparison of the educational reforms of the Westernization Movement and the Meiji Restoration from the perspective of reform motivation and influence, so as to enrich the research on the Meiji Restoration and the Westernization Movement.

2. Background explanation

In 1861, after the setbacks of the two Opium Wars, the Qing government was determined to revitalize science and technology and industry, but found that the national education system was seriously lagging behind. At this stage, the Qing government deeply realized the urgency and importance of the shortage of domestic talents, so it decided to vigorously cultivate new talents for Westernization, learn from Western experience, and enhance national strength. The concept of "learning from the barbarians to control the barbarians" proposed by Wei Yuan is the concentrated embodiment of this strategic thought: advocating the introduction of a large number of advanced Western technologies and the construction of modern military industries and private enterprises. In the same period, with the support of patriotic patriots, the Meiji Emperor seized the Japanese regime by force in 1868 and established a new ruling system. The Meiji government abolished the old system and actively absorbed foreign culture, achieving remarkable achievements. A large number of foreign-funded equipment were introduced, many modern enterprises were established, and efforts were made to improve education and national cultural quality, achieving the goal of compulsory education. The "Meiji Restoration" in modern Japanese history thus kicked off. This was a bourgeois reform that

promoted the development of Japan and made it gradually rise from a poor small country to a world power. Japan's modernization process began with the Meiji Restoration.

3. Specific reform measures of the Westernization Party on education

3.1. Establishment of new-style schools

During the Westernization Movement, the Westernization Party implemented a series of reforms by establishing new schools and sending students abroad. These new-style schools are mainly divided into three categories: foreign languages, military and science and technology. Since the Opium War, cultural exchanges between China and Japan have become increasingly close. However, due to the difficulty of English-Chinese translation and the lack of professional translation talents, the Qing government has repeatedly suffered setbacks in its exchanges with foreign countries. To this end, the Qing government actively introduced outstanding foreign talents. In 1862, China's first foreign school, the Beijing Tongwen Hall, was established, offering English, French and German courses, and cultivating a large number of outstanding diplomats and translation talents. At the same time, a foreign language school was established in Shanghai, and branches were also established in Guangdong and Hubei.

3.2. Sending students to study abroad

In 1871, the Qing court promulgated a policy stipulating that 30 students would be sent to the United States each year from 1872 to 1875, for a total of 15 years. During their stay in the United States, these students received education in military, navigation, mathematics, manufacturing and other fields. [1] This move was intended to learn from the advanced military and civilian technologies of the West and make up for the shortcomings of modern China in the fields of science and technology and military. The students mainly studied professional knowledge such as shipbuilding, navigation theory, geometry, logistics, etc., and also studied middle school courses, elementary education, the Five Classics and the laws of the Qing Dynasty, and actively spread the "Sacred Edicts and Instructions". These plans reflected the educational concept of "Chinese learning as the body and Western learning as the use", which not only inherited the culture of the country, but also absorbed Western technology. However, due to the great differences between Western culture and the educational model under the feudal system of the Qing Dynasty, these students cut off their braids after receiving Western education, which made the Qing court deeply uneasy. The Qing government was worried that these students would be influenced by Western ideology, and even if they returned to China, it would be difficult for them to serve the Qing Dynasty loyally. Therefore, the court ordered all students studying in the United States to return home immediately. During this period, the Qing government sent a total of 120 students, but only 94 of them returned in the end, and the remaining 26 were unable to return home due to illness or leave. Surprisingly, only two of them completed their university studies, one of whom was Zhan Tianyou, known as the "Father of Chinese Railways". During the Westernization Movement, in addition to sending students to the United States, the Qing government also sent a large number of students to Europe. In 1877, the first batch of regular naval students in my country set off on a journey to learn from the West and mastered skills such as shipbuilding and navigation. After returning to China, the overseas students became the backbone of my country's shipbuilding industry and naval armed industry, and strongly promoted the modernization of China's modern industry and army.

In summary, the Westernization Movement was not only an active exploration of social change, but also a subversive innovation of the traditional system, and it promoted the spread of Western culture; at the same time, a group of experts who were proficient in foreign languages, diplomacy, military and technology emerged in the same period. Tongwentang has provided the country with

many foreign experts and teachers. Although the first batch of students who went to the United States did not complete their studies, they stayed in the United States for several years and had a deep understanding of the field of science; their return had a profound impact on national construction. In addition to Zhan Tianyou, who has been mentioned, there are also bourgeois enlightenment thinkers such as Yan Fu who studied in Britain and France. In general, early overseas students made outstanding contributions to shipbuilding, railways, mining, telegraph, coastal defense and other fields. However, because the reform measures failed to break through the shackles of the feudal system and were restricted by reactionism, the depth and breadth of the reforms were very limited; therefore, it was difficult for the Westernization School to achieve the goal of modern education.

4. Specific educational reform measures of the Meiji Restoration

The Japanese government carried out a series of educational reforms during the Meiji era. While learning Western culture, they abandoned the original feudal system and created a brand-new capitalist system to achieve the goal of "enriching the country and strengthening the army".

4.1. Compulsory education for all people

In 1872, the Meiji government promulgated a groundbreaking educational law, the "School System Order", which pioneered modern educational legislation. The law covers school district division, school setting, teachers and students, examination system, management of international students, tuition fees and other aspects in detail, with a total of 109 articles. In March of the following year, it was further expanded to include three parts: overseas student rules, priest monk schools, and subject graduation certificates. In April, special education institutions and student loan policies were added, and the total number of chapters increased to 213. [2] The promulgation of the "Academic System" had a profound impact on Japanese society. It built a comprehensive education system from elementary school to university, laying the foundation for the stable development of modern education in Japan. According to this order, Japan established a basic education framework including ordinary elementary schools, high schools, middle schools and royal colleges. In addition, the academic system also promoted the modernization of Japanese education, optimized the allocation of educational resources, and significantly improved the national education penetration rate.

4.2. Sending a large number of students overseas

Similar to the same period China, Japan also sent many students overseas. Meanwhile, Japan did not order the students to return home like China did. Instead, it invested huge amounts of money to introduce many top science and technology experts and teachers from overseas to help it innovate its education system. Since 1863, Japan has continued to send students to study abroad. [3] In addition, many officials were sent abroad to study Western technology. After returning home, they replaced the foreign technicians who were originally hired with a lot of money, and then Japan's technical talents returned to the country.

4.3. Increase investment in colleges and universities

In 1877, Tokyo Metropolitan Kaisei School and Tokyo Medical College merged, and Tokyo Imperial University was born, which was an important milestone in the establishment of the higher education system in the Meiji era. The university was originally composed of four major fields: law, science, jurisprudence, and medicine. As Japan's first comprehensive university, Tokyo Imperial University is committed to improving the level of higher education. After the promulgation of the "School System Order", the government abolished the university entrance threshold, and children from

officials, farmers, and even children from poor families had the opportunity to enter the university. Later, the Meiji government also established a national academic institution-Tokyo Academy. [4] According to its own needs, the Japanese government established a series of institutions with independent intellectual property rights and cultivated many local scientific and technological elites.

It can be seen that the Meiji regime carried out profound reforms in Japan. Starting from the basic education stage, they gradually built a complete system for cultivating scientific and technological talents. More importantly, they led Japan from feudal society to the capitalist era, breaking the shackles of traditional educational elitism, allowing more people from humble backgrounds to receive higher education and even go abroad for further studies.

5. The focus of education reform in the two countries

China and Japan respectively carried out educational reforms through the Westernization Movement and the Meiji Restoration, but due to the different focuses of the two countries, there are huge differences in education between the two countries.

5.1. Japan achieved the primary transition to capitalism through the Meiji Restoration

Japan implemented the "open door to accept advice" policy in order to introduce foreign educational concepts and cultivate outstanding talents. In the third year of the Meiji era, Japan sent the first delegation composed of senior officials to 12 countries including Europe, the United States, Britain, France, and Russia to investigate the advanced capitalist systems of European and American countries and explore their characteristics in talent training and school-running models. They realized that in order to get out of Japan's backward state, they must introduce advanced technology from foreign countries, but they did not imitate the systems of Western countries in full, but focused on some aspects. For example, the Meiji government focused on modern production and basic natural sciences in sending students abroad and hiring foreign scientific and technological talents. Japan gradually replaced foreign technicians with local technicians to solve the problems caused by the oversupply of overseas technicians. For example, in the Department of Science at the University of Tokyo, the proportion of foreign teachers was as high as 80% in 1877, and by 1855, this proportion had dropped to 15%; in just over a decade, the University of Tokyo completely reversed the situation where foreign teachers had the upper hand. [5]

Japan's educational reform is from point to surface. They attach importance to both basic education and the establishment of a complete bourgeois education system. First of all, Japan's isolation from the outside world in modern times has led to a great gap between Japan's education and science and technology levels and those of European and American countries, so it was difficult to establish a complete capitalist education structure in a relatively backward country like Japan at that time. In order to improve the cultural and cultural level of the people, they started from elementary school, laying a solid foundation for future educational development. After Japan's basic education stabilized, it began to divert talented elites through high schools to universities. Universities bear the responsibility of managing and cultivating various professional talents, laying the foundation for the establishment and development of current scientific research.

5.2. Westernization in Modern China and Its Dilemma

In the wave of educational reform in modern China, the concept of "integration of Chinese and Western cultures" advocated by the Westernization Movement also attracted much attention. They focused on teaching Western languages, but deliberately avoided learning about the capitalist system, and did not advocate Japan-style comprehensive Westernization. The goal of the Westernization Movement was not to promote the capitalist education system in China, but to solve problems such

as international trade, military equipment, and scientific and technological development through the Westernization Movement. These schools founded by the Westernization Movement educated students to uphold conservative and feudal values. Take the Tianjin Naval School as an example. Although its purpose is to cultivate shipbuilding technical talents, for students, the core of its education is "teaching the classics to understand the great principles, teaching literature to understand people, and improving their wisdom, that is, to cultivate their roots."

Since modern times, China has been full of contradictions in the process of learning from the West. They want to use Western knowledge to solve the problems encountered in their country; however, they often only taste the content they have learned and are unwilling to explore it in depth, fearing that it will violate the native culture. For example, the Westernization Movement feared that Western ideas would influence the students sent by China to the United States because of their young age, low education level, and long study time. The fear of "Westernization" created a contradiction between the training goals and the guiding ideology. It is impossible to completely solve the difficulties faced by China by just learning the superficial knowledge of the West without getting involved in the practice of its political system.

6. The fundamental reasons for the failure of the Westernization Movement and the success of the Meiji Restoration

6.1. There are theoretical differences between the two.

Japan is good at learning from the advantages of other countries and integrating them into its own development. As early as ancient times, Japan integrated the essence of Chinese culture with local culture. At the same time, it can see through its own shortcomings and actively seek improvements. For example, in 1843, the shogunate astronomical observatory translated the book "Navigation Cannon"; in 1856, the "Yi Shu Mediation Institute" was upgraded to the "Fan Shu Mediation Institute"; in 1863, it was renamed "Kaijie Institute" and opened a variety of subjects including multiple languages and chemistry. [5]

China has a tradition of absorbing foreign cultures since ancient times. In the Han Dynasty, Zhang Qian connected the East with Western civilization, and in the Ming Dynasty, Zheng He sailed to Asia and Africa. However, since the Qianlong and Jiaqing years, the Qing government implemented a "closed-door" policy, interrupting this exchange. Lin Zexu once convened experts to translate Western books into "Records of the Four Continents", and Wei Yuan created "Illustrated Records of the Maritime Countries" based on this, which had a profound impact on China. But the Qing government turned a blind eye to this and ignored Wei Yuan's works. [5]

It can be seen that there is a big gap between China and Japan in the basic ideas of education reform.

6.2. Class forces and goals that promote change

Japan's Meiji Restoration was carried out with the Meiji government as the core, and the middle class and lower-class warriors actively participated and truly grasped power. Although these samurai classes still have feudal colors, given that the feudal system has collapsed and the lower-class warriors live in poverty, they hate the feudal system. They are influenced by Western culture and retain the marks left by traditional education on them, especially a strong national consciousness. Under such circumstances, the Japanese government was able to vigorously reform the education system through a bottom-up approach, quickly get rid of feudal autocracy, and establish a capitalist system. It has cultivated a large number of government officials and scientific and technological talents needed for "enriching the country and strengthening the army" and "revitalizing the industry", promoting the rapid development of capitalism. [5] Since the Meiji Restoration, in order to build a modern education

system, lay the foundation for national governance, and shape modern national identity, education reform has been fully launched, and a modern education system has been established, which is closely linked to the fundamental interests of the people. The leadership and support of the Meiji government, as well as the participation of lower-middle-class fighters, provided a solid guarantee for Japan's modernization.

In the process of modernization, the Westernization Party became the main force of modern China's educational reform. However, the core members of the Westernization Party were mostly rulers of the landlord class. In order to safeguard their own class interests, they preferred to carry out economic and educational reforms under the existing system. Therefore, this reform was only a factional struggle within the ruling class, and there was no substantial change to the feudal autocratic system of the Qing Dynasty. They founded new-style schools not for the development of capitalism, but for foreign relations and economic needs. In other words, China, which was dominated by the Westernization Party at that time, was unable to carry out educational reforms and subvert feudal education, let alone realize educational modernization. [5]

7. Difficulties faced by the two countries in education reform

In the Meiji era, Japan's education reform was carried out smoothly and encountered almost no strong opposition. In the early days of the Meiji Restoration, Japan's legal system construction was still in the exploratory stage. Due to the vague positioning of the legal system by the Japanese government and the unclear path of legal system construction, the management rights and responsibilities of the education legal system construction were unclear, which affected the progress and efficiency of the education legal system construction. In the process of building the education legal system, the Japanese government continued to explore, revised, adjusted and re-formulated the education legal system according to actual development needs, and gradually formed a unique education legal system, laying a solid foundation for Japan's education legal system construction. In the process of Japan's education legal system development, although there were doubts from time to time, Japan's legal system construction mainly relied on government promotion, so the resistance encountered in the development process was relatively small.

Although the Westernization School took "Chinese learning as the body and Western learning as the use" as its main guiding ideology, it still regarded "Chinese learning" as the primary task, because China's feudal forces were strong and its grasp of Western science and technology was not comprehensive, making any change extremely difficult. The fourth supervisor, represented by Wu Zideng, was prejudiced against overseas students and believed that they behaved improperly. He regarded studying abroad as "heretical". [6] He once forced the activists among ten overseas students to be sent back to China, and hurried to Washington to suggest to the then US Ambassador Chen Lanbin to withdraw the overseas students. He believed that there were many drawbacks in foreign customs, and that overseas students lacked knowledge, were immature in character, and were easily infected with bad habits. Even if they tried to correct them, it would be difficult to work, and it would be best to give up completely. [7] Based on this view, the Qing government had to recall the overseas students, which hindered their study life in the United States.

In general, although Japan and modern China took a similar path of change in the Meiji era, their final fate was completely different. China did not completely change the feudal system, but used Western technology and civilization to maintain its own feudal regime, and eventually ended up with its own demise.

8. Conclusion

This article deeply analyzes the changes in the field of education caused by the Meiji Restoration and the spread of Western academic knowledge to the East, and discusses the motivations, strategies and results of the two in detail. At first, after the Opium War, the Qing Dynasty imitated the West and carried out large-scale reforms, the core of which was to absorb Western technology, establish new institutions of higher learning, and send students abroad. However, in essence, the innovation of Western academic knowledge did not completely break away from feudal constraints. Although the Qing Dynasty realized that there was a shortage of talents in the fields of diplomacy, military affairs, and industrial technology, it still adhered to the principle of "learning for practical use" in education. This shows that although Western technology can be learned, Confucianism still needs to be followed in ideology, which leads to the limitations of educational reform.

In contrast, Japan's Meiji Restoration carried out more thorough changes. The Meiji government abolished the old system, vigorously promoted educational reform, implemented compulsory education, and established a modern university system. While introducing Western educational concepts, popularizing primary education, and strengthening higher education, Japan has cultivated a large number of outstanding talents. In particular, Japan not only introduced rich production and management experience from abroad through overseas study and introduction of talents, but also gradually applied it domestically, reducing its dependence on foreign experts.

Although many students went abroad for further studies during the Westernization Movement, their educational concepts were too conservative under the social background at that time, posing a huge threat to the feudal regime; therefore, the study abroad program was soon cancelled and students were forced to return home. The Meiji Restoration adopted a completely different strategy. Japan gradually built a complete education system from elementary school to university by encouraging foreign students to study abroad and strengthening its own education standard. In addition, in the process of learning from the West, Japan not only respected its own traditional culture, but also did not limit itself to the superficial technical level like China.

Secondly, the fundamental reason for this difference lies in the different basis and driving force of the changes in the two countries. After the Meiji Restoration, the middle and lower samurai classes in Japan formed a strong national consciousness and regarded "enriching the country and strengthening the army" as their responsibility. Japan's education reform aims to completely change the old monarchical system and open up a new path for national modernization. In the late Qing Dynasty, the "Westernization School" emerged in China, who tried to solve domestic and foreign problems by introducing foreign technology without touching the feudal system. As a result, the process of Western modernization in China was not smooth.

Overall, Japan's educational reform has experienced a transition from learning from the West to absorbing Western learning, but its modernization process is more in-depth and extensive, which in turn promotes social modernization. Due to the rigidity of traditional concepts, China's Westernization failed to break out of the feudal framework and ultimately ended in the failure of its own reform. This study reveals the differences between China and Japan in educational reform from a new perspective.

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