

International State-Building in Post-WWII Japan

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Introduction

- International attempts to conduct state-building efforts by foreign actors to build up institutions in a given nation, have largely failed, with few notable exceptions.
- Often, international actors pressure domestic elites to adopt reforms while domestic elites subvert that pressure and capture external resources for personal or political gain.
- Japan, a rare case of successful international state-building, had its institutions revitalized by the American Occupation following the end of WWII in 1945.
- This project aims to examine the relationship between international state-building and domestic political order, studying what factors, both foreign and domestic, contributed to Japan's success story.

Methods

- Analyzed documents, books, reports, and more, developing a timeline and analysis of factors in Japan's postwar state-building.
- Tracked trends in economics, social issues, policy, and international relations over time.
- Examined various actors, including the U.S., liberal and conservative factions, and former military leaders.



General MacArthur and Emperor Hirohito

Notable Historical Events

- 1945 (Jul. 6): Potsdam Declaration emphasizes U.S. goals of democratization and demilitarization
- 1945 (Aug. 14): Japan's defeat in WWII
- 1945: SCAP abolishes government propagation of Shinto and suspends nationalist education
- 1946 (Jan. 1): Emperor Hirohito renounces divinity
- 1947: Diet adopts constitution based on SCAP draft
- 1947: As the Cold War begins, the Occupation goals shift towards economic and anti-communist ends
- 1948: Conservatives de-purged due to U.S. alignment
- 1949 - 1950: Purging of alleged Communists from public and private sectors
- 1950 - 1953: Korean War boosts Japanese economy
- 1959 - 1960: Anpo Protests against ratifying the revised US-Japan Security Treaty
- Mid-1960s: Unified middle-class consciousness forms

Conclusions

- Foreign actors, specifically the U.S., did not instill democracy so much as they catalyzed and guided its creation.
- Unique domestic factors, most notably the Japanese public's already gradually increasing desire towards self-government pre-war, were vital for successful state-building.
- The government had much economic legitimacy for most of the post-war period, relying on a strategy of rapid GNP growth.
- The U.S. sought to have democracy grow from the Japanese people rather than being forced on the nation, encouraging reforms rather than demanding compliance when possible.
- The ultimate reforms were not as radical as America's original proposals due to the "reverse course" that occurred in light of the Cold War
- There were significant arguments in Japan over to what extent tradition from the prewar era should be preserved.

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