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“Three Great Reforms” of the Edo Period as Foundation for Understanding Japanese Behaviour

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Abstract

The proposed review deals with the problem of the Three Great Reforms in the second half of the Edo period in Japan. All Three Reforms were named after the era, when each began (Kyoho, Kansei, and Tempo). The general slogan of the reforms was “back to the golden age”, which meant the time of the founder of the Tokugawa dynasty. The real reason for the reforms was the need to reconcile some bourgeois changes in society with the formal feudal structure of the State organization. The content of each reform, its results, initiators and the socio-political situation are presented here in full, comprehensive form with basic details. The list of references is absent for the reason that the review itself is based on the materials of a doctoral dissertation, written by the author of the article previously, in Russian. The complete list of several hundred publications on the topic can be obtained by referring to the full text of the dissertation (Philippov A. V. “Three Great Reforms” and evolution process of the Japanese society, in the second half of the Edo period. Dissertation of Doctor in History. St. Petersburg, 2003. 503 p. URL: <https://www.dissercat.com/content/tri-bolshie-reformy-i-protsessy-evolyutsii-yaponskogo-obshchestva-vtoroi-pолоviny-epokhi-edo>). The author suggests that the experience of reforms in Tokugawa Japan was very useful for the formation of national character, ethnic stereotypes of behaviour, psychology and way of thinking of the Japanese. The content of all Three Great Reforms combined has never been presented in English or Japanese before.

Keywords

Kyoho reforms, Kansei reforms, Tempo reforms, Tokugawa Yoshimune, Matsudaira Sadanobu, Mizuno Tadakuni, Bakufu, Bakuhan

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«Три большие реформы» эпохи Эдо как ключ к пониманию национального характера японцев

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Аннотация

Предлагаемый обзор содержания «Трёх больших реформ» в японской истории периода Эдо (1603–1867) впервые предлагается вниманию англоязычного читателя (комплексные публикации на японском языке также не

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издавались). Каждая из трех реформ получила свое название в соответствии с девизом годов правления, в которые было начато ее проведение (Кёхо, Кансэй и Тэмпо). Общей мотивацией для всех реформ явился призыв возврата к «золотому веку», временам основателя династии Токугава Иэясу. Реальными причинами для проведения преобразований явилась потребность ликвидировать диссонанс накопившихся в социально-экономической жизни изменений с существующей феодальной системой, легализовав в рамках системы тенденции, связанные с периодом первоначального накопления капитала, первых ростков капитализма, проявлением черт раннебуржуазного характера. Исчерпывающий список литературы по теме читатель может получить, обратившись к полному тексту докторской диссертации автора на русском языке (Филиппов А. В. «Три большие реформы» и процессы эволюции японского общества второй половины эпохи Эдо: Дис. ... д-ра ист. наук. СПб., 2003. 503 с. URL: <https://www.dissercat.com/content/tri-bolshie-reformy-i-protsessy-evolyutsii-yaponskogo-obshchestva-vtoroi-pолоviny-epokhi-edo>). Проведение реформ в условиях феодального режима Японии при сёгунах Токугава оказало существенное влияние на формирование национального характера, этнических стереотипов поведения, психологии и менталитета современных японцев. В статье подробно представлено содержание трех реформ, значение личностей их инициаторов и проводников, социально-политическая ситуация, вызвавшая необходимость их проведения. Введение в широкий научный оборот на английском языке материалов и анализа содержания трех больших реформ способствует преодолению ряда неверных представлений об эпохе сёгунов Токугава как о времени застоя. Три больших реформы свидетельствуют о постоянной эволюции японского общества в этот период. Название «три реформы» может быть воспринимается с долей условности, поскольку в действительности череда реформ во второй половине эпохи Эдо, начиная с Гэнроку (1688–1704), была практически непрерывной и включала ряд иных девизов годов правления.

Ключевые слова

реформы годов Кёхо, реформы годов Кансэй, реформы годов Тэмпо, Токугава Ёсимунэ, Мацудайра Саданобу, Мидзуно Тадакунэ, бакуфу, бакухан

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Introduction

The significance of the Edo period in the history of Japan is commonly renowned. The latter part of the period begins from the great splash of a townsmen culture of the *Genroku* era (1688–1703), thus indicating the initiation of the inner metamorphosis of the whole society. The very start of upcoming bourgeois society found its footing in the Genroku era, and it would take a rather long time to complete the whole period of initial capital accumulation (ending only with the coming of the Meiji era and formation of the “modern” Japanese State). The period left a lot of marks in history by great cultural events, including verses, prose, fine arts, education achievements and so on.

The contents of “The Three Reforms”

Reforms have been carried out almost continuously since the Genroku era. The “Three Great Reforms” in the latter part of the Edo period include the reforms of the Kyoho (享保), Kansei (寛政) and Tempo (天保) years. The original idea in each of the reforms was the intention to “return to the path of Ieyasu (the founder of the last shogun dynasty)”, a kind of “Dream of a Golden Age” in a declining society. In general, the “three reforms” were a reflection of deeply conservative trends in *Bakufu* 幕府 politics. In fact, it was necessary to adapt the official structures of society to the changes that had taken place. For the survival of the feudal system, every effort was made to convince ordinary people that the system was still stable.

Leaders of the Three Reforms, with the exception of the first reforms of Kyoho (when *shogun* Yoshimune himself was a talented leader), were favourites or temporary appointees who gained their power due to the political situation. On the eve of the Kyoho reforms, the “prelude to the Kyoho reforms” reforms were also undertaken; the initiator was Arai Hakuseki (新井白石), thus another name was also fixed – “Arai Hakuseki reforms”. The Kansei reforms were led by Matsudaira Sadanobu (松平定信). The leader of the Tempo reforms was Mizuno Tadakuni (水野忠邦).

Given that reform leaders were usually temporary appointees, the answer to the question "Who is to blame for the failure?" – becomes simple. It is not the *shogun* in power who is guilty (who rules the Celestial Empire 天下 *Tenka*), but his bad assistant. So even in critical circumstances, the owner of the Heavenly Mandate (天命 *Temmei*), without damage to the image of the Perfect Sage (聖人 *seijin*), did not lose the "virtue of the ruler". It was probably the same with the position of the Japanese emperor (from the time of Fujiwara to the end of Tokugawa rule, 9th – 19th centuries), as well as with the absolutely formal position of the *shogun* (during the time of the Hojo regents, 13th – early 14th centuries). The perfections and virtues of the person holding the highest office in Japan were indisputable by default (even if they did not have any real power in politics).

As for the real issue of the need and goals of reforms, they were: strengthening the system foundation and a desperate attempt to support the existing society, willingness to do anything to preserve the rules of the past. But in fact, even the turn to reform turned out to be the recognition and acceptance (albeit forced) of significant changes in society, and not just the development of the sphere of circulation. Further development and adjusting the relations between the Tokugawa feudal administration and the new world of merchants and townspeople, became a new social stratum (rapidly growing and steadily getting its way to obtaining real power).

Reforms of the Kyoho era

The Kyoho reforms were political reforms, undertaken from 1716 by the 8th *shogun* Yoshimune (吉宗, ruled 1716–1745). Divided into two stages: The Kyoho Prelude, also known as the reign of Arai Hakuseki, spanned a period of about 7 years (the time of the 6th and 7th shoguns). The time of the 8th *shogun* Yoshimune rule was approximately 30 years.

The so-called Hakuseki rule can be defined (by the views of historian Kurita Mototsugu) as civil (文治主義 *bunji-shugi*) and Yoshimune time as military (武断主義 *budan-shugi*). This is only a variant of the definition, a possible interpretation, where the difference between the "civil" (Hakuseki) and the "military" (Yoshimune) approach to management and administration is revealed; with an emphasis on the fact that Yoshimune's desire to "return to the past" turned into an obstacle to progress, slowed down the evolution of *Bakufu*, and later led to the collapse of feudalism in Japan. As for modern historians, it is considered that the Yoshimune times had the same tendencies as the previous stage (which began directly with the Genroku era, including the Hakuseki period too); there were only subtle differences that depended on the era. In any case, both Hakuseki and Yoshimune were rather near in their aspirations for stagnation, though Hakuseki was more conservative, whereas Yoshimune – more practical and educated.

In Japan, Arai Hakuseki (1657–1725) was the first to put into practice the theory of public administration (經世論 *keisei-ron*), which arose under the 4th shogun Ietsuna on the basis of the theory of politics and morality (政治論・道德論 *seiji-ron, dotoku-ron*) of Zhu Xi (朱熹, *Jap. Shushi* 朱子) with the inclusion of economic theory (經濟論 *keizai-ron*) as well. Surprisingly, even before entering politics, he was already known for his "extensive experience in making profits and intrigues".

His reforms had included the recovering of the financier (勘定吟味役 *kanjo-gimmi yaku*) to improve the management of peasantry (農政 *nosei*) and increase the amount of the annual rice tax (年貢 *nengu*), the re-minted coins in the *Shotoku* era, and so on, all while constantly bearing in mind the need to support merchants from Kamigata in Kyoto. His cherished goal was to restore the standards of monetary circulation (品位 *hin-i*), the percentage of gold and silver in coins, as in the Golden Age, when the dynasty had appeared. Later attempts at re-minting (before Meiji) represented a continuous "coinage debasement" with a gradual decrease in the purity of gold and silver in coins, which caused damage to the entire monetary circulation system. Arai Hakuseki's intentions were good, but he resigned, unable to find a way out of economic stagnation and depression.

The reforms of Arai Hakuseki also imposed new restrictions on foreign trade through Nagasaki to limit the number of Dutch and Chinese ships (1685, 定高仕法 Jodaka Shiho, or Sadamedaka Shiho = Law on allowed amount of annual trade; 1715, 長崎新令 *Nagasaki shinrei*, or 海舶互市新例 *Kaihaku goshi shinrei* = New law on Maritime trade).

The reforms of Kyoho are related to 1716–1736 (from Kyoho to the Gembun era), although in fact they covered the entire reign of the 8th Shogun Yoshimune (1716–1745). The need for reforms was caused by the rapid progress of the monetary economy after Genroku, which led to numerous problems for the government, such as: acute financial deficit in the treasury, mismatch of well-being in the military class (*samurai* luxury and poverty), significant growth of the merchant class, impoverishment in rural communities, growth of peasant unrest and riots. The aim of the reforms was to restore the political and economic influence of the Bakufu. The primary and urgent task was to replenish the treasury, which had become impoverished after Genroku. The reform methods rejected the ideas of Arai Hakuseki about a “civil government”. The main focus of Kyoho’s reforms was the restoration of a management style similar to the “Golden Age of Ieyasu”.

Basically, the key ideas of the Kyoho reforms were: encouraging all kinds of economy and frugality, striving to improve the situation in agriculture and increase productivity, regulation of the taxation system, regulation of the market, commodity circulation and consumption, improving the legal and judicial system, social development. Encouraging all kinds of economy and frugality meant reducing consumption, banning luxury, simplifying lavish ceremonies, and so on. The intention to better agriculture moved to look for ways to increase productivity. Persistent attempts of harvest increase were supposed to give an increase in tax revenue. The government encouraged utilizing untouched fields, the production of industrial crops for sale, counting on an overall increase in productivity.

Regulating the tax system was also an urgent task for the *Bakufu*. In addition to the new taxes and taxation principles, the collection of all taxes had become really tough. The main innovations were the following: 1) The *Bakufu* introduced a new tax for local *daimyo*-landowners (上米 *Agemai*) lords. From then on, the *daimyo* 大名 gave 100 *koku*¹ of rice for every 10,000 *koku* of their income to the *shogun*. 2) The annual tax in rice (年貢 *nengu*) increased. At the end of the Yoshimune reign, in 1744, the total crop amount² in Japan and the annual *nengu* tax collected reached the maximum for the entire Edo era. 3) There were two ways to calculate the estimated annual harvest and the levied rice tax. The first was “inspection of sprouts” (有毛検見 *arige-kemi*), in accordance with the trial harvest. The second one was “fixed tax” (定免 *jomen*), judging as average annual results.

The reforms have thoroughly touched upon the issues of the market and commodity circulation, as follows: 1) The liberalization of rice prices (米価安 *beika-yasu*) was aimed at restructuring the entire financial system. This led to the control of rice prices (米価調節 *beika-chosetsu*), wholesale purchases of rice, and so on. 2) In order to establish control over trade and consumer prices, the reforms promoted the creation of guilds for merchants and artisans (仲間・組合 *nakama, kumiai*). 3) During the reforms, the policy of “hard currency” (良貨 *ryoka*) was adopted. This put an end to the depreciation of coins, as it was before (the drop in gold and silver samples). By 1736, success had been achieved in the minting of gold and silver coins of “true value”. Thus, it was supposed to overcome the depression in the economy.

Regulation of the legal system became an important aspect in the reforms of Yoshimune. Its scale is comparable only to the times of Tokugawa Ieyasu. Particularly significant for Yoshimune are: the reorganization of the management system and the codification of the legal system. In the reorganization of the management system, the main innovations were as follows: 1) For officials, the possibility of growth in position and salary for low-ranking vassals (足高 *tashidaka*) was introduced. This meant the promotion of the talented and dismissal of the unworthy. In order to get in-

¹ 1 *koku* 石 is a measure of rice sufficient to feed one person per year, approx. 150 kg or 180 litres

² The total amount of the crop, (石高 *kokudaka*) – income expressed in the equivalent of rice.

formation from people, involve them in politics, and control local authorities, "complaint boxes" (目安箱 *meyasu-bako*) were installed throughout the country. 2) The functions of some positions in the central office were clarified (e.g., Elder for Finance 勝手掛老中 *Katte-gakari roju*). The duties of the Elder for Maintaining Order (勝手方 *Katte-kata*) and the Elder for State Affairs (公事方 *Kuji-kata*) were divided. 3) As for the modification of the legal system, new law codes appeared: 1742, the Code of state affairs (公事方御定書 *Kujikata o-sadamegaki*) in two volumes. In the first volume there were 81 paragraphs, in the second known as (御定書百箇条 *O-sadamegaki hyakkajo*) there were 103 paragraphs on procedural, criminal and civil law. Collections of laws and regulations published earlier (御触書 *o-furegaki*) were compiled. These are collections before the era of Kampo 1741–1744 (御触書寛保集成 *O-furegaki Kampo shusei*); later, collections for the era of Horeki 1751–1764, Temmei 1781–1789 and Tempo 1830–1844 appeared.

The further development of the social sphere was often based on complaints from the aforementioned *meyasu-bako*: 1) A charitable hospital (小石川養生所 *Koishikawa-yojosho*) was established. 2) A well-ordered city firemen system (町火消 *machi-bikeshi*) was created. 3) The sphere of science and education was developing. The network of temple schools (寺子屋 *Terakoya*) was expanding. Restrictions on knowledge about Europe and "Dutch science" of 蘭学 *Rangaku* were reduced. Since 1720, the import of Chinese books translated from European languages (not related to Christianity) had been simplified, and applied sciences based on the same European science (astronomy, medicine, medicinal plants, geography, etc.) were being promoted.

As a result of the Kyoho reforms, already in the first years of Kyoho era (by 1721), the former abuses of bureaucracy were destroyed, and Yoshimune's authority grew enormously.

Reforms of the Kansei era

The Kansei reforms mainly took place in 1787–1793 at the initiative of Elder Matsudaira Sadanobu (1758–1829). In reality, the reforms lasted much longer. Since 1793, when Matsudaira Sadanobu retired, the reforms continued up until the end of the Bunka era (1804–1818) due to the other "elders of the Kansei era" (Matsudaira Nobuakira, Honda Tadakazu, Toda Ujinori, etc.).

The main reason for the reforms was the urgent need to overcome contradictions in the economy that arose as a result of the rapid development of the trade sphere. Social problems affected both urban and rural residents. In rural areas, the outflow of peasantry from the countryside gained strength. "Seasonal work" became the main source of income as the peasantry looked for earnings in the cities. The desolation of villages, inability to feed the family, impoverishment of villages led to peasant uprisings (百姓一揆 *hyakusho-ikki*). Both taxes of local authorities and the government were a heavy burden for the peasantry (e.g., an increase in the annual rice tax, a system of monopolies, and so on.). The situation in the cities was also difficult, but in other ways. The complexity of urban life was compounded by the rapid rise in consumer prices. And moving of the impoverished peasantry to the cities made the situation even worse, leading to urban riots (打ち壊し *uchikowashi*).

The goals of the Kansei reforms were to restore the influence of the government and correct the abuses of the former elder Tanuma Okitsugu. The country was also devastated by natural disasters and famine that had occurred shortly before. The methods of these reforms were mainly petty regulations, prohibitive decrees, often dealing with worthless issues. The content of the reforms as a whole suggested several directions: 1) efforts to solve problems in agriculture, 2) innovations in money circulation and trade, 3) innovations in the social sphere, 4) control over ideology and related fields (philosophy, information, education, etc.).

Attempts to solve problems in agriculture consisted of the following: 1) 1790, Decree on the return of peasants to their native village, or Decree on the return of people (旧里帰農令・人返し令 *Kyuri-kino-rei, Hitogaeshi-rei*). This was an attempt to restore agriculture and the village communi-

ty, its stability and management system in rural society (本百姓経営 *hombyakusho-keiei*). 2) *Bakufu* provided special “loans for the restoration of wastelands and the upbringing of children”. 3) As a reserve in case of famine, it was prescribed to create warehouses of raw rice (籾倉 *momikura*) in the villages. Innovations in money circulation and trade revealed the *Bakufu*’s interest in influential merchants. Ten wealthy merchant houses (豪商 *gosho*) from Edo were required to become official suppliers of the Treasury (御用達 *goyo-tashi*) in order to control the prices of rice, for example.

Innovations in the social sphere, with all their diversity, often had a very negative impact on the lower strata of society: 1) A correctional prison (house of corrections) was established (石川島人足寄場 *Ishikawajima ninsoku yoseba*). 2) 1791, Decree on the “seven tenths” (七分積金令 *Shichibu-tsumikin-rei*), well known as 七分積金立 *Shichibukin-tsumitate*, or 七分積金之法 *Shichibu-tsumikin-no ho* – caused a negative attitude towards *Bakufu* among all merchants of Edo. About 70 % of money accumulated over the year was subject to transfer to the magistrate (a certain financial reserve of the magistrate). 3) 1789, the Law on Donations from Rice Merchants-wholesalers (札差棄捐令 *Fudasashi-kien rei*) – also caused a negative outcry. These donations were required for the needs of the impoverished direct vassals of the *shogun* (旗本 *hatamoto*).

Control over ideology and related fields (philosophy, information, education, etc.): 1) 1790, Decree on the “prohibition of other ideologies” (異學之禁 *Igaku-no kin*), aimed to support the official ideology – the doctrine of Zhu Xi. 2) 1790, Decree on the control of printed materials. It was forbidden to publish books about carnal pleasures or books with political criticism. 3) The arrival of Adam Laxman’s Russian trade mission in 1792, negative rumours about Russia after the appearance of Hayashi Shihei’s essay “Military words about the Maritime State” finally led to the concept of the urgency of maritime defense for Japan.

Reforms of the Tempo era

The Tempo reforms of 1841–1843 were carried out by Elder Mizuno Tadakuni. Being undertaken as a last attempt to revive the *Bakuhan* 幕藩 system (the relationship between *Bakufu* and *daimyo*-landowners), they became the initial moment for the collapse of *Bakufu* and feudalism in general. The reasons for the reforms were related to the general crisis, which was perceived as “internal unrest and external complications” (内憂外患 *naiyu-gaikan*). There was not a single sphere of life that was not affected by this crisis. The goals of the Tempo reforms were to restore the politics of Kyoho and Kansei, as well as to try to rebuild the *Bakuhan* system (in the hope of preventing its complete collapse).

There are significant differences in the methods of reforms, which differ from the times of Kyoho and Kansei: 1) According to the decrees for *daimyo*, *hatamoto*, peasantry, and others, it was important to strengthen discipline (綱紀肅正 *koki-shukusei*), to encourage extreme frugality (儉約の励行 = 儉約の徹底 *ken-yaku-no reiko, ken-yaku-no tettei*), to correct the “manners and customs” (風俗是正 *fuzoku-zesei*, i.e. prohibition of luxury and extravagance). 2) For the peasantry, any activity not related to agriculture and even seasonal temporary work was strictly prohibited. 3) The *Bakufu* proclaimed the slogans of “dispersion of merchants” (商人離散 *shonin-risan*), outlawing the activities of guilds of both artisans and merchants. 4) The system of “alternate attendance” at the shogun’s court for *daimyo* (参勤交代、参勤交替 *sankin-kotai*), often called the “hostages” institute, was strictly maintained.

The general content of the Tempo reforms was as follows: 1) Excessively rigid implementation of reforms. 2) Strengthening of the *Bakuhan* system (*Bakufu* and *daimyo* feudal lords’ relations). 3) Efforts to restore the rural community and its way of life (本百姓体制 *hombyakusho-taisei*). 4) Regulation of the monetary system and the sphere of commodity production. The rigid control of

authorities was aimed at forcing all kinds of economy and frugality (for any social strata without exception).

Bakufu tried to revive the weakening *Bakuhan* system and debug relations with *daimyo* in order to restore a strong centralized state. The Decree of 1843, issued to change the landowners near Osaka and Edo (上智令 *Agechi-rei*) was supposed to forcibly take off the feudal lords' lands for *Bakufu* property, giving in return scattered plots in other regions. *Bakufu* intended to achieve the following goals: 1) The *Bakufu* aimed to replenish the treasury by replacing the low-income *Bakufu* lands (low yields meant low annual tax income) with highly profitable *daimyo* lands. 2) The other goal was to concentrate the *Bakufu* lands in the prestigious region (Edo and Osaka). Unfortunately, these lands had belonged to the powerful local feudal lords from old times. Therefore, the redistribution of lands in the centre of the country in favour of the *Bakufu* proved to be rather difficult. 3) *Bakufu* tried to strengthen control in its own possessions too. It was similar to the redistribution of *daimyo* lands by *Agechi-rei*. 4) In general, this meant the *Bakufu*'s desire to strengthen control both on their own lands and on the lands of other feudal lords.

True zeal was shown for the restoration of the rural community. This was the cornerstone of the entire *Bakuhan* system. Thus, solving the problems of agriculture was the most important part of the reforms. Decrees were issued for the return of peasants to the village (wanderers, seasonal workers, etc.). Two of them are particularly important. 1842, Decree on the return of pariahs to their places of residence (無宿野非人旧里帰郷令 *Mushukuno hinin kyuri kigo rei*). 1843, Amendments to the provincial census (諸国人別改改正 *Shokoku nimbetsu aratame kaisei*); also known as the Decree on the Return of People to their former village (人返し令 *Hitogaeshi-rei*), reminiscent of the 1790 Decree of Kansei times.

Regulation of the monetary system and the sphere of commodity production. Their goal was to prevent and avoid both the corruption of the authorities and the desolation of villages: 1) 1841, one of the main decrees. The largest "Ten Groups of Wholesalers" (十組問屋 *tokumi-doiya*) from Edo was abolished; similar decrees applied to other (株仲間 *kabunakama*) guilds. This is another manifestation of the *Bakufu*'s desire for full control over the country. 2) Reduction of consumer prices, abolition of existing monopolies of feudal lords.

Despite the good goals of the Tempo reforms, they ended in complete failure: 1) An excessively wide range of reforms, its scale, and the severity of implementation led to a deep economic depression. 2) Aimed to consolidate on the principles of *Bakuhan*, the reforms turned into the starting point of the complete collapse for *Bakufu* and the feudal system itself. 3) The implementation of tough reforms provoked extreme resistance. Reform-minded elder Mizuno Tadakuni was removed from office. Though, reforms in the feudal domains were carried out independently of *Bakufu* and were successful in some regions, especially in the West of Japan (*Satsuma* and *Choshu*). The general trends of reforms in domains turned out to be rather similar (*Mito*, *Choshu*, *Tosa* and *Hizen*).

The similarities of the reforms separately conducted in the provinces were as follows: 1) Strengthening control and finding a way out of the crisis by raising taxes, austerity and thrift. All regions sought to restrain the development of the trade sphere. For example, in the domain of *Choshu* there was a "prohibition of the theory of profit" (興利之説は御制禁 *kori-no setsu wa goseikin*). Though, the policy of development and promotion of production (殖産興業政策 *shokusan kogyo seisaku*) was not approved by the local authorities. 2) Financial support of domain vassals. Thus, the authorities in *Tosa*, taking away fiefs of vassals, provided them with loans; as for the authorities in *Choshu*, long-term loans even assumed a repayment period in 37 years. 3) The focus on rebuilding the rural community was on the agenda everywhere. Thus, the authorities in *Mito* established a schedule to optimize the size of plots through the census and prohibited excessive concentration of fields; the authorities in *Hizen* adopted a system of equal fields with the refusal of landowners from their rights. 4) If local authorities were forced to rely on a policy of development and promotion of production, they had to count on complete self-sufficiency (自給自足 *jikyū-*

jisoku). Although the traditional predominance of agriculture over trade (抑商勸農 *yokusho kanno*) still prevailed.

Conclusion

In general, the *Bakufu* managed to achieve some success in each of the three reforms, although the proclaimed goal of “returning to the Golden Age” was never realized. The Edo period influenced the national character and stereotypes of behaviour among the Japanese. The cornerstone of the State system was the rigid fixation of features that are now considered traditional. Due to reforms and strict control, the Edo system survived for two and a half centuries. This contributed to the maturity of the national character. Consolidation continued even later, in the Meiji years. Even one step beyond was forbidden (though the system itself changed). The pressure, the absorption of personality by the system was preserved.

The reforms were a sign of change (to modernization). *Bakufu* was forced to seek transformations. Socio-economic changes in society had been integrated into the existing system. However, the very idea of transformation could also become dangerous for a society based on relationships established forever. Thanks to the *Bakufu* reforms, people are used to perceiving official changes as another norm. For the existing system, this was the impetus for the following changes. There were uprisings before and after the reforms (both in cities and in rural areas). The Edo system finally collapsed shortly after the third reform, although Japan entered the Meiji era, ready for the next transformation. Time will tell whether the conclusion is justified or not.

There is a certain contradiction in what has been said. On the one hand, reforms in the name of preserving traditions are accompanied by the perception of new phenomena. On the other hand, innovation threatens the foundations of the system. The third possible option is that historically, foreign ideas in Japan have changed significantly and almost beyond recognition. Borrowing promoted development, but often ended up not looking like the prototype.

It is worth noting that during the Edo period, traditions reached maturity of form, having been polished by centuries of stability. The “Three Reforms” were able to prepare Japan for modernization, when something new was adopted, but the old core of tradition remained unshakable. It was in the second half of the Edo period that the national character, ethnic stereotypes of behaviour, way of thinking and psychology of the Japanese crystallized.

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