

The Meiji Restoration

Since the 8th century, the political and executive power of the Japanese Imperial Court had been thrice transferred to the Bakufu (*military government*), under the leadership of the Shogun (*Barbarian-Quelling Generalissimo*), in the years 1192 (Kamakura Bakufu), 1336 (Muromachi Bakufu) and 1603 (Edo Bakufu), while the Emperor remained a ceremonial figure in the Imperial Court in Kyoto.

The Meiji Restoration (in 1868) was a political and social revolution that ended the rule of the Edo Bakufu, and saw political and executive power being restored to the Emperor of Japan. It was a watershed event, ushering in political, economic, social, and many other changes in the country.

While the 200 over years of peace and prosperity during the Edo period laid strong foundations, the Meiji Restoration marked the dawn of modern Japan, paving the way for the development of the first modern industrial nation in East Asia.

Kagoshima, birthplace of many key figures who contributed greatly to the Meiji Restoration, such as Saigo Takamori and Okubo Toshimichi, played a major role as one of the main driving forces of the Restoration. It is also home to Shuseikan, the first Western industrial factory complex in Japan. The Shuseikan project was initiated by Shimadzu Nariakira, 28th patriarch of the Shimadzu family, which ruled over the domain of Satsuma (present day Kagoshima). He ordered the construction of a modern Western factory to spin cotton, cast iron cannons, manufacture the Satsuma Kiriko cut glass, and engage in other industrial activities, so as to help boost the income of the domain through export and sales. The old Shuseikan factory, located next to Sengan-en Garden in Kagoshima city, was inscribed as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage in July 2015 as one of the component of the “Sites of Japan’s Meiji Industrial Revolution: Iron and Steel, Shipbuilding and Coal Mining” .

