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THE IMPACT OF THE GENRO COUNCIL OF ELDERS ON SHAPING MODERN JAPAN (1889-1912)

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Annotation. *Introduction.* The “Genro” 「元老」 is a group of elder statesmen who wielded significant influence in shaping Japan's political landscape during the Meiji period (1868-1912). Often referred to as the Meiji oligarchs or Meiji leaders, these influential figures constituted a formidable group of seasoned politicians who offered Emperor Meiji guidance and support as he spearheaded Japan's modernization and its evolution into a modern nation-state. *The objectives of the study* are to examine the impact of Genro members on key governmental institutions in post-Tokugawa Shogunate Japan. Our study will delve into several critical factors that underpin Japan's transformation, including foreign policy, financial policies, economic developments, military reforms, international trade, property rights and legal framework, naval affairs. This research seeks to shed light on the role of Genro members in shaping Japan's development across these key areas. *Materials and methods.* The article is based on general scientific analysis, induction, synthesis, deduction, statistical methods. Each historical theoretical result is presented with a certain accuracy of historical events. *Results.* The Genro played a pivotal role in the overthrow of the Tokugawa shogunate and the restoration of imperial rule under Emperor Meiji. They helped in facilitating the peaceful transition of power, supporting the emperor's authority and rallying various factions behind the cause. Also the Genro contributed to the establishment of a modern political system in Japan. They drafted and promulgated the Meiji Constitution in 1889, which introduced a constitutional monarchy and established a bicameral legislature known as the Imperial Diet. *Conclusion.* The Genro recognized the need for modernization and sought to transform Japan into a strong and prosperous nation. They advocated for the adoption of Western technology, education, legal systems, and military organization. They faced opposition from different factions within Japan, and their approach to modernization and centralization was not universally supported. Nevertheless, their leadership and guidance provided stability during a period of rapid change and helped lay the foundation for Japan's emergence as a major global power in the XXth century.

Keywords: Modernization, westernization, Meiji Ishin, Genro, Fukoku Kyōhei, Zaibatsu, Satchōdohi, Bushi, Shinoukoushou, IwakuraShisetsudan

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ҚАЗІРГІ ЖАПОНИЯНЫҢ ҚАЛЫПТАСУЫНА ГЕНРО АҚСАҚАЛДАР АЛҚАСЫНЫҢ ӘСЕРІ (1889-1912)

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Андатпа. *Кіріспе.* Генро ақсақалдар алқасы «元老» Мейдзи дәуірінде (1868-1912) Жапонияның саяси ландшафтының қалыптасуына елеулі ықпал етті. Мейдзи олигархтары немесе Мейдзи көшбасшылары деп аталған ықпалды қайраткерлер Жапонияның модернизациялануы мен заманауи ұлттық мемлекетке айналуында император Мейдзиге айтарлықтай жетекшілік етті. *Зерттеудің мақсаты мен міндеттері.* Генро мүшелерінің Токугава Сёгунаты құлауынан кейінгі Жапонияның негізгі мемлекеттік құрылымдарының қалыптасуына әсерін зерттеу. Нақтырақ айтқанда, сыртқы саясат, экономика, әскери реформалар, халықаралық сауда, меншік құқығы және құқықтық база, әскери-теңіз істері. Бұл зерттеу осы бағыттар бойынша Жапонияның дамуын қалыптастырудағы Генро мүшелерінің рөлін анықтайды. *Материалдар мен тәсілдер.* Мақала жалпы ғылыми талдау, индукция, синтез, дедукция, статистикалық әдістерге негізделген. Әрбір тарихи-теориялық нәтиже тарихи оқиғалардың белгілі бір дәлдігімен беріледі. Бұл мақаланың зерттеу материалы «Жапонияның Ұлттық парламенттік кітапханасы» *Кокурицу Коккайтотошокан* «国立国会図書館» архив деректеріне, сондай-ақ XIX ғ. Мейдзи кезеңінде Жапонияда болған Британия және Ресей империялары ғалым саяхатшыларының: «Жапон қарулы күштерінің капитаны Буген. Бөлім II.1885», «1885 жылғы Жапонияның британдық дипломатиялық және консулдық агенттерінің есептерінен үзінді. Жапон темір жолдары», «Соңғы екі қаржы жылындағы жапон бюджеті туралы траншеяның есебі: 1883-1884 және 1884-1885», «Жапонияның 1883 жылғы саудасы туралы есеп» секілді т.б. тарихи қолжазбаларға негізделген. Бұл тарихи қолжазбалар сол дәуірден тікелей ақпарат беретідіктен аса құнды болып табылады. *Нәтижелер.* Генро кеңесі Токугава сегунатының құлауында және императорлық билікті қалпына келтіруде шешуші рөл атқарды. Император билігін қолдады. Сондай-ақ, Генро Жапонияда заманауи саяси жүйенің қалыптасуына әсер етті. 1889 ж. Конституциялық монархияны енгізіп, императорлық парламент деп аталатын екі палаталы заң шығарушы органын құрды, Мейдзи Конституциясын жариялады. *Қорытынды.* Генро батыстық модернизация негізінде Жапонияны қуатты гүлденген мемлекетке айналдыруға тырысты. Өртүрлі фракциялардың қарсылығына тап болуына қарамастан, білім беру, құқықтық жүйе, әскери ұйымдардың жаңалануын қалады. Қарқынды өзгерістер кезеңінде тұрақтылықты қамтамасыз етіп, Жапонияның XX ғ. ірі жаһандық держава ретінде негізі қалануына үлкен ықпал етті.

Түйін сөздер: Модернизация, вестернизация, Мейдзи Исин, Генро, Фукокукёхей, Дзайбацу, Сатходохи, Буши, Щинокошоу, Ивакурашисетсудан

Дәйексөз үшін: Қуанбай О.Б. Қазіргі Жапонияның қалыптасуына Генро ақсақалдар алқасының әсері (1889-1912 жж.) // Отан тарихы. 2023. Т. 26. №4. С. 83-845 (Ағылш.). DOI: 10.51943/2788-9718_2023_26_4_832-845

ВЛИЯНИЕ СОВЕТА СТАРЕЙШИХ ГЕНРО НА ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ СОВРЕМЕННОЙ ЯПОНИИ (1889-1912 ГГ.)

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Аннотация. *Введение.* Совет старейшин «Гэнро» 「元老」 группа государственных деятелей, которые имели значительное влияние на формирование политического ландшафта Японии в период Мэйдзи (1868-1912). Эти влиятельные фигуры, которых часто называли «олигархами Мэйдзи» или «лидерами Мэйдзи», представляли собой внушительную группу опытных политиков, которые предлагали императору Мэйдзи руководство и поддержку, когда он возглавлял модернизацию Японии и ее эволюцию в современное национальное государство. *Цель и задачи.* Целью исследования является изучение влияния членов Генро на ключевые правительственные институты в Японии после краха сёгуната Токугава. Наше исследование углубится в несколько важнейших факторов, которые лежат в основе трансформации Японии: внешняя политика, финансовая политика, экономическое развитие, военные реформы, международная торговля, права собственности и правовая база, военно-морские дела. Целью данного исследования является пролить свет на роль членов Генро в формировании развития Японии в этих ключевых областях. *Материалы и методы.* В статье использованы методы общенаучного анализа, индукции, синтезе, дедукции, статистического анализа. Каждый историко-теоретический результат изложен с определенной достоверностью исторической событий. Материалами исследования для данной статьи послужили архивные данные «Национальной парламентской библиотеки Японии» Кокурицу Коккайтошюкан 「国立国会図書館」, а также исторические рукописи: «Капитан японских вооруженных сил Буген. Часть II.1885», «Выписка из отчетов английских дипломатических и консульских агентов из Японии за 1885 год. Японские железные дороги», «Отчет Тренча о японском бюджете за два последних финансовых года: 1883-1884 и 1884-1885», «Отчет об оборотах торговли Японии в 1883 году», написанный путешественниками, исследовавшими Британскую и Российскую империи в XIX веке и посетившими Японию в период Мэйдзи. Эти исторические рукописи неоценимы, поскольку они предоставляют сведения из первых рук об эпохе, документируя то, что исследователи наблюдали во время своих визитов. *Результаты.* Генро сыграли ключевую роль в свержении сёгуната Токугава и восстановлении имперского правления при императоре Мэйдзи. Генро способствовали созданию современной политической системы в Японии. Они разработали и обнародовали Конституцию Мэйдзи в 1889 году, которая ввела конституционную монархию и учредила двухпалатный законодательный орган, известный как Императорский парламент. *Заключение.* Совет Генро осознавали необходимость модернизации и стремились превратить Японию в сильную и процветающую страну. Они выступали за внедрение западных технологий, образования, правовой системы и военной организации. Они столкнулись с оппозицией со стороны различных фракций внутри Японии, и их подход к модернизации и централизации не получил всеобщей поддержки. Тем не менее, их лидерство и руководство обеспечили стабильность в период быстрых перемен и помогли заложить основу для становления Японии как крупной мировой державы в XX веке.

Ключевые слова: Модернизация, вестернизация, Мэйдзи Исин, Генро, Фукокукёхей, Дзайбацу, Сатходохи, Буси, Синокошоу, Нихонсихонсюги

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Introduction. The influence of the Genro in the development of the Meiji period 「明治時代」 was profound and far-reaching. Here are some key aspects of their influence:

Restoration of Imperial Rule: The Genro played a pivotal role in the overthrow of the Tokugawa shogunate and the restoration of imperial rule under Emperor Meiji. They helped facilitate the peaceful transition of power, supporting the emperor's authority and rallying various factions behind the cause.

Creation of a Modern Government: The Genro contributed to the establishment of a modern political system in Japan. They drafted and promulgated the Meiji Constitution in 1889, which introduced a constitutional monarchy and established a bicameral legislature known as the Imperial Diet.

Implementation of Western-style Reforms: The Genro recognized the need for modernization and sought to transform Japan into a strong and prosperous nation. They advocated for the adoption of



Western technology, education, legal systems, and military organization. They established institutions such as the Ministry of Education, which played a crucial role in modernizing the education system.

Industrialization and Economic Growth: The Genro members were instrumental in promoting industrialization and economic development in Japan. They implemented policies to encourage foreign investment, established modern infrastructure, initiated land reforms, and supported the growth of industries such as textiles, mining, and shipbuilding.

Strengthening the Military: Understanding the significance of a strong military in securing Japan's interests, the Genro focused on modernizing the armed forces. They expanded and reorganized the military, adopting Western military doctrines, technology, and training methods. This laid the foundation for Japan's later military successes.

Expansion of Imperialism: The Genro also supported Japan's imperialistic ambitions. They pursued territorial expansion, annexing territories such as Hokkaido, Okinawa, Taiwan, and Korea. This expansionist policy set the stage for Japan's involvement in regional conflicts and its eventual role in World War II.

It seems appropriate to divide the Meiji Era into five periods: “1. Restoration (1868 – 1878); 2. Internal Development (1879 – 1889); 3. Constitutionalism (1889 – 1899); 4. Cosmopolitanism (1899 – 1910); 5. Continentalism (1910 –). However, it's essential to acknowledge that these divisions are relative rather than absolute” (Clement, 1915: 110). Nonetheless, by considering these sub-periods, we can trace the overall evolution that significantly influenced the Meiji Era. We conduct a thorough scientific examination of all these Meiji Restoration periods, taking into account Genro's substantial political influence that extended across this entire historical timeframe.

Materials and research methods. The research material for this article consists of archival data from the “National Diet Library of Japan” *Kokuritsu Kokkai Toshokan* 「国立国会図書館, along with historical manuscripts: “Japanese Armed Forces Captain Bouguen. Part II.1885”, “Extract from reports of English diplomatic and consular agents from Japan in 1885. Japanese Railways”, “Trench's Report on the Japanese Budget for the Last Two Fiscal Years: 1883-1884, and 1884-1885”, “Otchet ob oborotakh trgovli Yaponiy v 1883 godu” authored by travelers who explored the British and Russian empires during the XIXth century and visited Japan during the Meiji period. These historical manuscripts are invaluable because they provide firsthand accounts of the era, documenting what these researchers observed during their visits.

The article is based on general scientific analysis, induction, synthesis, deduction, statistical methods. Each historical theoretical result in the article is presented with a certain accuracy of archival documentation. Genro (Council of Elders) played a pivotal role during the Meiji period of Japan's history, and investigating this influential council requires a comprehensive approach. As researchers, we can use a variety of research methods in historical scholarship to gain a deeper understanding of the Genro Council. The research method and their potential applications are: *Historiographical Analysis:* Delving into the works and insights of historians and scholars who have examined the Genro over time. This allows us to explore how historical events and the role of the Genro have been interpreted and reinterpreted in Japanese historical scholarship. *Biographical Research:* Investigating the life stories and memoirs of Genro members to gain profound insights into their personal lives, political careers, and decision-making processes. Biographical studies offer a deeper understanding of their contributions to Japan's political evolution. *Comparative Analysis:* Evaluating the actions and influence of the Genro in the context of political advisory systems or councils in other countries. This comparative approach provides valuable context for comprehending the unique role of the Genro in Japanese history. *Visual Research:* Scrutinizing photographs, portraits, and visual records of Genro members and their activities, along with artifacts or memorabilia from the Genro era. *Quantitative Analysis:* Employing statistical methods to analyze demographic and socio-economic data from the Meiji period, facilitating an assessment of the broader impact of Genro's policies on Japan's development.

Discussion. To explore this scientific topic, the article drew from five archival sources, including: *Meiji Kenpō to nihonkokukenpō ni kansuru kiso-teki shiryō* (Meiji kenpō no seitei katei ni suite) saikō hōki to shite no kenpō no arikata ni kansuru chōsa ko iinkai Heisei 15-nen 5 gatsu Shūgiin Kenpō Chōsa-kai Jimukyoku.



明治憲法と日本国憲法に関する基礎的資料（明治憲法の制定過程について）最高法規としての憲法のあり方に関する調査小委員会（平成15年5月8日の参考資料）平成15年5月衆議院憲法調査会事務局 [Basic materials on the Meiji Constitution and the Constitution of Japan. May 2003. S. 12] ; *Itō shushō no shisei hōshin danwa yōshi/ 2 - 17 Seitō to seifu no sekkin* 「国立国会図書館」 「伊藤首相ノ施政方針談話要旨/2-17 政党と政府の接近 [Summary of Prime Minister Ito's policy statement /2-17 Closeness between political parties and the government] 憲法取調出張中の伊藤博文 ベルリンにて 明治15年 『伊藤博文秘録』 *Kenpō torishirabe debarinaka no itōhirofumi Berurin nite Meiji 15-nen "Itō Hirobumi hiroku"* [Hirobumi Ito, on a business trip to research the constitution, in Berlin 1882, "Secret Record of Hirobumi Ito]; *Rikkenseitai chōsa ni tsuki tokuha riji Ō shū haken no chokusho* [立憲政体調査につき特派理事歐洲派遣の勅書] [Imperial Decree Sending a Special Adviser to Europe for the Inquiry into Constitutional Government. 3 March 1882.]; *Itō Hirobumi kankei bunsho shorui no bu 209, Meiji 15-nen 3 tsuki 3-nichi, kokuritsu Kokkaitoshokan.* 伊藤博文関係文書書類の部209, 明治15年3月3日, 国立国会図書館 [Hirobumi Ito, Chapter 209, March 3, documents on Meiji 15, National Diet Library. 1-2 pp.].

Also in the research, archival manuscripts of scientists and travelers of the XIXth century of the Russian and British empires were introduced into scientific circulation: *Morskoy Sbornik, 1870 - Morskoy Sbornik izdavayemyy pod nablyudeniem uchenago otdeleniya morskago tekhnicheskago komiteta.* «Yaponskoye admiralteystvo v Íokosuke, 1 Noyabr' 1869 g.» Redaktor, kapitan II-go ranga N. Zelenoy. Tom CVÍ №1. Yanvar'. Tipografiya Morskago Ministerstva/Glavnom Admiralteystva. Sankt-Peterburg": 1870 g.; *Zhurnal narodnago prosveshcheniya, 1859 - Zhurnal narodnago prosveshcheniya.* Oktyabr', Chast' SÍV. 1) «Monetnaya sistema v Yaponiy. Otd. VII – Novosti» Tipografiya imperatorskoy Akademiy Nauk. Sankt-Peterburg": 1859 g.; *Gornyy zhurnal, 1863 - Gornyy zhurnal izdavayemyy uchenym komitetom korpusa gornykh inzhenerov.* №7. «Yaponskiy svintsovyy rudnik i zavodov na ostrove Íesso bliz gorode Khakodade» Tipografiya Íosafata Ogrizko. Sankt-Peterburg: 1863 g.; *Gornyy zhurnal, 1879 - Gornyy zhurnal izdavayemyy gornym uchenym komitetom.* Tom III. Íyul' – Avgust – Sentyabr'. «Kratkiy ocherk" geologicheskago stroyeniya Yaponii i vstrechayushchiesya v ney poleznyya iskopayemyya. Sostavitel' Gotfrey i Moroye. 1879 g.» Tipografiya i khromolitografiya A. Transhelya. Sankt-Peterburg: 1879.; *Sbornik po geograficheskikh, topograficheskikh i statisticheskikh materialov po Azii, 1885 - Sbornik po geograficheskikh, topograficheskikh i statisticheskikh materialov po Azii.* Vypusk XVIII spekretno. «Otchet ob oborotakh trgovli Yaponiy v 1883 godu» Izdanie voyenno-uchenago komiteta glavnago shtaba. Voyennaya tipografiya S.-Peterburg": 1885 g.

Japanese literature on the subject was also employed in the research. These books shed light on the significance of Genro's leadership during the Meiji era: *Kitaoka, 1993 - Shinichi Kitaoka, The Army as a Bureaucracy: Japanese Militarism Revisited.* USA, Lexington, Virginia: The Journal of Military History, 1993.; *Kiyoshi, 1955 - Kiyoshi I, Shinzaburo O, Shiyoshi S,* 「現代日本の歴史」 “Gendai Nihon no rekishi”, V. Grivnina, A. Nemzera i B. Braskina. Izdatel'stvo inostrannoy literatury, Moskva. 1955.; Ichikawa, 1907 - Ichikawa Dai, «Etika yaponsev» perevod s nemetskogo I. Klyachko, SP.; Shinkichi, 2005 - Shinkichi Eto «Selected Works on Modern Japan-China Relations», Toyo Bunko Research Library 5, Toyo Bunko Yaymevi, Tokyo.

This subject was investigated with the assistance of English-speaking authors: *Kenneth, 1936 - Colegrove Kenneth.* The Japanese Cabinet. USA, Washington, DC: American Political Science Association, 1936.; *Nish, 2013 - Nish Ian Hill,* The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The Diplomacy of Two Island Empires 1884-1907. London; *Jansen, 2000a - Jansen Marius Berthus,* The Making of Modern Japan. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.; *Jansen, 2002b - Jansen Marius Berthus,* The Making of Modern Japan. Cambridge, Third printing, Printed in the USA, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 2002.; *Quigley, 2014 - Quigley, Carroll,* Tragedy and Hope: A History of the World in Our Time, San Diego, CA, Dauphin Publications, 2014.; *Bessho, 2013 - Bessho Koro.* Identities and Security in East Asia. GB, London.; *Clyde, 1953 - Clyde, Paul Hibbert,* The far East, A History of the Impact of the West, Second Edition, Prentice-Hall., Inc, USA,



New-York, 1953. *Clement, 1915* - Clement W. Ernest. A Short History of Japan, Chicago. University of Chicago Press. 1915.

A significant amount of scientific information is available in Russian. The author made every effort to utilize books that discuss Genro: *Yezhegodnik Yaponiya, 2019* - Sarkisov Konstantin Oganovich, “Yaponskiy opyt transformatsii: ot “monarkhicheskogo konstitutsionalizma” k totalitarnoy sisteme”, *Yezhegodnik Yaponiya, 2019.*; *Kutakov, 1988* - Kutakov Leonid Nikolayevich, *Rossiya i Yaponiya, Moskva, Akademiya Nauk SSSR, Institut Vostokovedeniya, Nauka, 1988.*; *Streltsov, 2013* - Streltsov Dmitriy Viktorovich, *Politicheskaya sistema sovremennoy Yaponii: Institut Vostokovedeniya Rossiskoy Akademiy Nauk. M.: Aspekt Press, 2013.*

Results. The 1868 “Meiji Ishin” 明治維新 revolution, a pivotal moment in Japan's history. The “Meiji Ishin” (1867-1868), while sharing similarities with major revolutions in other countries, had some significant distinctions: “In this revolution, the Japanese monarchy was later molded into a “progressive” constitutional monarchy, following the Prussian model, which was perceived as the most progressive and dynamic at the time. Among the two forms of constitutional monarchies, one where “the monarch reigns but does not rule” and the other where “the monarch reigns and governs according to the constitution” Japan opted for the latter. This choice hinged on the condition that the Japanese emperor would abstain from governing the country, and the actual power would be transferred to those who led the revolution and established a new monarchy. This was the original vision of the nation's founding leaders Genro” (*Yezhegodnik Yaponiya, 2019: 252-253*)

The Genro 「元老」 Council of Elders was officially established in 1889. By decree of the emperor, Genro status was conferred upon 7 (later expanded to 9) representatives from the highest echelons of the state. These esteemed figures included: Prince Ito Hirobumi 伊藤博文 (1841-1909); Count Kuroda Kiyotaka 黒田清隆 (1840-1900); Prince Yamagata Aritomo 山縣有朋 (1838-1922); Prince Matsukata Masayoshi 松方正義 (1835- 1924); Count Inoue Kaoru 井上馨 (1836-1915); Marquise Saigo Tsugumichi 西郷従道 (1843-1902); Prince Oyama Iwao 大山巖 (1842-1916). Subsequently, other notable individuals such as Katsura Taro 桂太郎 and Saionji Kinmochi 西園寺公望 also gained recognition as Genro members. The Genro are often regarded as the “architects” of modern Japan. These nine Japanese statesmen served as informal advisers to the emperor throughout the Meiji, Taisho, and Showa eras (Kitaoka, 1993: 64).

The origin of the Genro Council has been a subject of debate. Various scholars, considering the unofficial nature of their political role, cite differing dates for its formation. As the Genro's role wasn't officially stipulated by the constitution and lacked formal documentation, their significance in shaping the new Japanese state was immense. This was evident in the fact that the emperor refrained from making any decisions without the input of the Genro: “In 1892, following Matsukata Masayoshi's resignation as prime minister, the term “Genro” was first brought up in a local newspaper” (Kenneth, 1936: 56). In theory, the chronological sequence makes sense as the Genro was established in 1889, and it wasn't until 1892 that discussions about the Genro Council began. In Japanese society, the Genro weren't openly discussed, and they preferred to keep a low profile. However, behind the scenes, they were instrumental in forging a powerful new country.

At the outset of the Meiji Restoration, none of its leaders had attained dominance in any particular field. Specialized bureaucracies only began to take shape with the ascent of Genro's 「元老」 representatives to power. The Meiji leaders viewed themselves as versatile authorities, with Genro members expected to engage in both national and local institutions influencing foreign and domestic decisions. The Genro Council of Elders eventually emerged, wielding substantial influence over all state decisions based on shared foundations: “Ito Hirobumi and Inoue Kaoru were part of the original *Sangi* 「参議院」 (Councillors) within the initial Meiji government” as noted by Jansen in his account of the Genro Council's formation. They were soon joined by others. Although their numbers decreased from 106 to 26, ultimately settling at 7 as the modern cabinet system replaced these appointments in 1885, they retained their positions. Key figures within this group included individuals who had ventured abroad; Ito Hirobumi and Inoue Kaoru were part of the small Choshu delegation sent to England in the 1860s. Likewise, figures like Yamagata Aritomo (Choshu) and Matsukata Masayoshi (Satsuma) pursued overseas research in military and financial systems. “Initially, they were given lower bureaucratic positions, but it appears that they rose swiftly in the



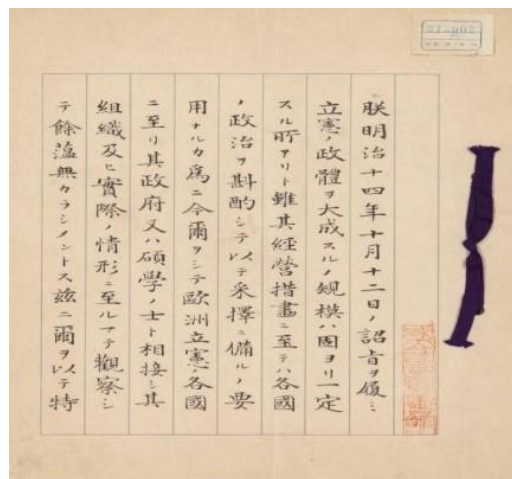
1870s as the influence of *Satsuma* 「薩摩藩」 and *Choshu* 「長州藩」 became more pronounced” (Jansen, 2002: 371) as explained by Jansen.

The Genro's primary mission was to rapidly elevate the country across all aspects of the state structure, and they effectively achieved this goal: “Genro embraced the guiding principle of “Rich Country, Strong Army” *Fukoku Kyōhei* 「富国強兵」 in their leadership. This concept of national enlightenment can be traced back to the teachings of the *Mito school* 「水戸学. The political doctrine encompassed four main aspects: reforming domestic policies, enhancing the efficiency of the military, improving the nation's prosperity, and prioritizing national security essentially, building a wealthy and powerful state. As Meiji Japan broadened its understanding of international affairs, the rallying cry that fueled the Meiji Restoration is *Sonnō Jōi* 「尊王攘夷」 “Respect the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians” was replaced by *Fukoku Kyōhei*. This slogan was embraced to underscore the pursuit of a rich and militarily strong state” (Bessho, 2013: 1).

Genro members Ito Hirobumi 「伊藤博文」, Yamagata Aritomo 「山縣有朋」, and Inoue Kaoru 「井上馨」 primarily focused on addressing foreign policy matters, while Matsukata Masayoshi 「松方正義」 was dedicated to spearheading financial and economic reforms: “The renowned Iwakura Mission *Iwakura Shisetsudan* 「岩倉使節団」 comprised of prominent Meiji leaders, gleaned invaluable insights from their extensive two-year global journey (1871–1873), which included visits to North America and Europe” (Streltsov, 2013: 37-38). Attached below is an archival photo and Emperor Mutsuhito's decree on the Iwakura missions.

2 - 5 Itō Hirobumi no Yōroppa Kenpō Chōsa
伊藤博文のヨーロッパ憲法調査





憲法取調出張中の伊藤博文 ベルリンにて 明治15年『伊藤博文秘録』
Kenpō torishirabe debarinaka no itōhirofumi Berurin nite Meiji 15-nen "Itō Hirobumi hiroku"
 [Hirobumi Ito, on a business trip to research the constitution, in Berlin 1882, "Secret Record of Hirobumi Ito]

Rikkenseitai chōsa ni tsuki tokuha riji Ō shū haken no chokusho [立憲政体調査につき特派理事歐洲派遣の勅書]

[Imperial Decree Sending a Special Adviser to Europe for the Inquiry into Constitutional Government. 3 March 1882.]

Itō Hirobumi kankei bunsho shorui no bu 209, Meiji 15-nen 3 tsuki 3-nichi, kokuritsu Kokkaitoshokan. 伊藤博文関係文書書類の部209, 明治15年3月3日, 国立国会図書館 [Hirobumi Ito, Chapter 209, March 3, documents on Meiji 15, National Diet Library. 1-2 pp.]

The Genro, as an institution, possessed a distinct set of characteristics that set it apart from other political bodies in Meiji Japan. Streltsov encapsulates these features as follows: “Moreover, there existed several advisory bodies under the emperor, not provided for by the constitution, yet exercising a crucial role in the nation's political life. Among these, the Genro stood out, composed of senior members of the imperial house, former prime ministers, and elder statesmen from noble feudal clans, serving for life. No significant decision was made by the emperor and his council of ministers without seeking the counsel of the Genro. Their input was especially critical in appointing the head of government” (Streltsov, 2013: 43).

The leaders of the Genro Council of Elders, such as Ito Hirobumi and Inoue Kaoru, also held the reins of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So, until 1898, Genro members effectively governed the country. This was because the position of prime minister couldn't be determined without their approval. In the words of Quigley: “These power-brokers behind the scenes held the true authority in the nation. Seeking the Genro's opinion on all pivotal matters and, more crucially, heeding their counsel became the norm. No one could ascend to the role of prime minister without the Genro's recommendation. Until 1922, not a single bill or significant international agreement received the emperor's consent without bearing the Genro's signature. During those times, these individuals were the genuine rulers of Japan” (Quigley, 2014: 200).

However, it's important to emphasize that: “The Genro members were never formally acknowledged in the constitution, but their decisions held sway over both the government and the entire Japanese bureaucracy. As an informal organization, the status of the Genro was not officially established by the Constitution or any law” (Nish, 2013:4). These assertions are also supported by another prominent twentieth-century researcher: “Until 1931, shortly after the adoption of the Constitution, the most influential force in Japanese government and politics was the Genro, even though this group operated outside the constitutional framework. Comprising seasoned and trusted statesmen who spearheaded the development of the new Japan from around 1880 to 1900, they were the ones effectively making decisions” (Clyde, 1953: 203).

Japan's limited industrial raw material base early on made its economy reliant on foreign markets for raw materials. Furthermore, the persistent feudal remnants deeply rooted in rural areas and the low living standards of the majority of the population, who endured harsh exploitation, constrained



the potential of the domestic market: “As a result, Japanese capitalism began pursuing foreign markets to address these internal contradictions. This drive for foreign markets was further fueled by the colonial conquests of military-feudal imperialism, propelled by the adventurous militarist factions within the government. These conquests also aligned with the industrial sector's need to access foreign markets, thereby securing substantial profits while retaining feudal remnants domestically” (Kiyoshi, 1955: 105).

The military class of the former Tokugawa regime maintained strong connections with the farming community. Many influential figures of the future would rise from the ranks of these lower-ranking samurai: “The military, largely composed of the traditional samurai class, maintained close ties with the landowning elite. Over time, it evolved into a critical instrument for executing the predatory policies of the dominant alliance of landowners and capitalists. This development increased the monarchy's influence over the entire state apparatus, rendering it nearly autonomous and highly influential in the nation's political landscape” (Kutakov, 1988: 195).

The Japanese archive explains how the Genrō 「元老」 Council of Elders, which forms the basis of the Meiji Constitution and the Constitution of Japan, and the Genroin 「元老院」, which is somewhat similar in pronunciation but has a completely different structure, came into being as follows:

「當時の民選議會設立論は同時に成文憲法制定論でもあつた」『憲法略説』先に触れたように、明治5年（1872）には民選議院設置論が太政官左院の取り上げるところとなり、明治7年（1874）5月には、政府から「國憲編纂」の作業を命じられ、その作業が進められていた。明治8年（1875）4月に「立憲政體樹立の詔」が出され、左院が廃止されたことで、左院の「國憲編纂」事業は終了するが、明治9年（1876）、左院に代わって新たに設置された元老院にこの事業は引き継がれることになった」 Above is the original text, followed by the translation from the Japanese archive: “At that time, the theory of establishing a popularly elected assembly was also the theory of establishing a written constitution. As mentioned earlier, in 1872, the idea of establishing a popularly elected Assembly attracted the attention of *Dajokan Sain* 「太政官左院」, and in May 1874, the government ordered the work of compiling a national constitution, and the work continued. In April 1875 (Meiji 8), the “Edict for the Establishment of Constitutional Government” *Rikkenseitai Juritsu no Mikotonori* 「立憲政體樹立の詔」 was issued and the institution of *Sain* 「左院」 was abolished” (Archive Meiji Kenpō to Nihonkoku Kenpō ni Kansuru Kiso-teki Shiryō, 2003: 12).

To provide a comprehensive overview, detailed tabular data on Japanese trade during the initial seven years of the Meiji era is meticulously presented: “In 1883, Japan's foreign trade reached a total turnover of \$63,558,058, with \$27,848,992 accounting for imports and \$35,709,066 for exports. These figures highlight the significant growth in foreign trade under the guidance of Genro” (Sbornik po geograficheskikh, topograficheskikh i statisticheskikh materialov po Azii, 1885:182)

Ito Hirobumi, a prominent member of the Genro Council of Elders, expressed the need for import tariffs to ensure Japan's public welfare and facilitate rapid economic growth. He argued, “If we do not implement protective tariffs, like how England has achieved its current prosperity and dominance in global manufacturing, countries like ours that are still in the process of development risk falling behind in progress and delaying our own civilization” (Jansen, 2000: 375).

The academic manuscript titled “The Japanese Coin System. Department VII – Updates 1859” provides a comprehensive account of Japan's financial challenges during the Meiji era. It delves into matters like ameliorating the economic conditions of the populace, enhancing the currency's value, and engaging in trade with neighboring nations. Russian Empire's research voyagers offer firsthand observations of their experiences. Furthermore, the manuscript highlights that “Japan's monetary system did not conform to global standards during the Meiji period, featuring three currency types: 2 silver and 3 copper” (*Zhurnal narodnago prosveshcheniya*, 1859: 172). The weight of this coin is 0.372 ounce (i.e. 31.1034768 grams) or approximately 174 gran (i.e. 11.275 grams). If we compare prices around 1897 (Meiji 30) with today's prices, current prices are thought to be 3,800 times the



prices at that time. In other words, 1 yen during the Meiji period was equivalent to about 3,800 yen today. Original text is:

「1897年（明治30年）頃のもの価と現代のもの価を比較した場合、現在のもの価は当時の3,800倍に相当すると考えられています。つまり明治時代の1円は、今の約3,800円に相当するということです (<https://www.uriel-cuore.co.jp>)

When I compared and analyzed all Russian data with Japanese sources, I found that all historical information overlapped. For example, the most important gold coin of that period was *Kouban* 「小判」. So, Koban is the gold coin that came into circulation during the Edo period. Together with the *Ichibukin* 「一分金」, it formed the standard currency of the Shogunate monetary system. From 1600 it was printed only in Ginza. From *Keicho Koban* to 「慶長小判」 *Mannobu Koban* 「万延小判」 each had a value of 1 ryo. Keicho Koban weighed 4.76 momme (about 18 g), slightly heavier than the weight unit of 1 ryo, but after *Hoei Koban* 「宝永小判」 and *Genbun Koban* 「元文小判」 it became lighter and ryo was completely gold became the currency. Before the *Keicho koban*, there was the Musashi sumi calligraphy koban of the Tokugawa clan, and during the Keicho period, there were regional coins such as the *Matsuki koban* of the Kai and the *Umebachi koban* of the *Kaga* 「梅鉢小判」 (<https://www.historist.jp>)

From this historical document, several significant observations emerge: “The Japanese exhibit remarkable talent, on par with American and Asian jewelers. They spare no effort, not even adding a trace of copper to enhance the disguise. The so-called gold coins are actually crafted from various amalgams of gold and silver. Japanese law sternly forbids the export of these coins, accompanied by severe penalties. These legal restrictions render the acquisition of Japanese currency a challenging endeavor” (*Zhurnal narodnago prosveshcheniya*, 1859: 172-173). The Genro Council of Elders took decisive action by prohibiting the export of Japanese currency from the country, effectively bolstering the battle for gold coins. Genro's Council of Elders maintained stringent control over monetary policies. The information above attests to the wisdom of Genro's policies concerning the monetary system.

The author of the article “Japanese Navy in Yokosuka. 1869” describes the state of the sea during the Meiji restoration on 1 November 1869. According to these data, just a year later the Admiralty was built and the establishment of navigation began, which had a very positive impact on Japan's world domination in the Pacific Ocean in subsequent years. What Genro leaders wrote about Yokosuka in their memoirs. “Japan's conquest of the southeastern countries was carried out through this port. Foreign experts, known in Japan as *Oyatoi Gaikokujin* 「御雇い外国人」 or 「御雇い外国人」 (hired foreigner) were hired by Genro to help modernize the country. For example, an engineer Richard Henry Brunton from Scotland worked in this port” (*Morskoy Sbornik*, 1870: 78)

Lead ores are highly valuable minerals that play a crucial role in supporting the economy, shipbuilding, and weaponry. In an article titled “Japanese Lead Mines and Factories on Iesso Island near the city of Hakodate” Russian scientists emphasize the significant importance of lead for Japanese soldiers. The Russian scientist-traveler I. Lopatin, in his account dating back to June 1862, describes the area as exceptionally clean with broad streets. He provides insights into the conditions of Hakodate village and the street battles that unfolded on the eve of the Meiji Restoration: “The Genro Council consults with Emperor Mutsuhito regarding the strategic utilization of lead for military purposes. Genro also reaches out to foreign geoscientists to survey Japan's subsoil for future development prospects. Hakodate stands as a place of great historical significance, having witnessed numerous pivotal events in history” (*Gornyi zhurnal*, 1863:167).

Studying the natural resources beneath Japanese soil was of particular significance for the military industry. In pursuit of this objective, the Japanese government, under the leadership of the Genro, extended invitations to geologists, engineers, and mathematicians from various nations: “In the early Meiji period, Japan grappled with a severe shortage of mineral resources. To address this issue,



the Genro Council invited foreign geological research teams and scientists to explore Japan's subsoil. Japan encountered a multitude of challenges during this time, anticipating rapid development in the years to come” (Gornyy zhurnal, 1879:71).

As mentioned earlier, the Genro held undisputed authority over all aspects of Japan's governance during the Meiji era. To some extent, the parliament sought to curb the Genro council's monopoly on power. Japanese archival materials pertaining to this matter are presented below. On November 22, 1895, just before the 9th Diet session, the Liberal Party, in pursuit of collaboration with the Government, issued a 'declaration' emphasizing its intent for a mutually beneficial partnership. The declaration underlined its commitment to constitutional governance, aligning its policies with those of the ruling Cabinet. Notably, it hinted at the possibility of forming a bond with the Satsuma Choshu group, particularly Prime Minister Ito Hirobumi. In response, the Imperial Constitutional Party (ICOC) gathered Cabinet members and released a statement. The document titled “Prime Minister Ito's Policy” archived under the name *Itō shushō no shisei hōshin danwa yōshi itō miyoji kankei bunsho 34 35 - 005* 「伊藤首相ノ施政方針談話要旨・伊東巳代治関係文書 34・35 - 005」 contains a summary of the declaration. The document notes: “Last evening, Prime Minister Ito invited each minister to his residence and delivered a brief statement regarding the future direction of the Cabinet's management. When we consider the essence of this statement, it raises questions about whether it is feasible to secure the Diet's majority approval for implementing Cabinet policies within a constitutional government framework, particularly in Japan. Given these circumstances, there's a pressing need for projects like enhancing armaments, expanding maritime routes, advancing trade development, and establishing domestic and overseas facilities. Receiving parliamentary approval for such initiatives implies not only securing unanimous support within the parliament but also swiftly gaining the support of a substantial portion of the population. Looking at the past statements and actions of various political parties, most have historically made emotional arguments and tended to collectively oppose the government. Even today, I am relieved to be free from such challenges” (Archive *Itō shushō no shisei hōshin danwa yōshi*, 1895, 2 – 17. 344).





2-17 政党と政府の接近 /伊藤首相ノ施政方針談話要旨 / [明治28年] 伊東巳代治関係文書 344. 国立国会図書館. 2 - 17 Seitō to seifu no sekkin/ Itō shushō no shisei hōshin danwa yōshi/ [Meiji 28-nen] itō miyoji kankei bunsho 344. Kokuritsu Kokkai Toshokan. 2-17. [*Closeness between political parties and the government/Summary of Prime Minister Ito's policy statement/Documents related to [1895] Miyoji Ito 344. National Diet Library*]

The Genro not only established and advanced the military-industrial sector but also successfully cultivated a spirit of samurai warfare among citizens of all ages, a mindset that played a crucial role in the victories achieved in the subsequent years. Following the restoration of the emperor's political authority, it was expected that all members of the military class would unconditionally uphold the honor and dignity of the Japanese emperor, irrespective of their personal desires. This sense of duty was instilled in parents and every soldier, a principle vividly illustrated during the *Nisshinsensō* 「日清戦争」 First Sino-Japanese War. For instance, in Dai Ichikawa's work titled “Ethics of the Japanese” published in Petersburg in 1907, the following passages can be found: “When a young Japanese embarks on military service or goes to war, his family members, including parents, wives, and daughters, refrain from shedding tears or exhibiting weakness in front of one another. Instead, they charge him with a solemn duty to return with honor or sacrifice his life for the sake of the Emperor. Fear of death is met with ridicule from family and society, leaving the young man no choice but to display courage” (Ichikawa, 1907: 2717-2718). “Most of the Army's top military strategists agreed that any war with China should be avoided, but for the vast majority of officers the priority was to protect the *Gunnoishin* 「軍の威信」 prestige of the Imperial Army” (Shinkichi, 2005:9).

Overall, the Genro's influence in these areas was aimed at modernizing Japan, consolidating power, and positioning the country as a major global player. Their policies and reforms laid the foundation for Japan's transformation into a modern nation-state and its emergence as a significant power in the early XXth century. In summary, researching the Genro is essential for understanding the historical, political, and socio-economic contexts of the Meiji period and its impact on Japan and the world. It provides valuable insights into nation-building, leadership, foreign relations, and the dynamics of modernization, making it relevant for historians, political scientists, sociologists, and anyone interested in Japan's history and its place in the global context.

Conclusion. The influence and significance of the Genro during the Meiji period (1889-1912) left an indelible mark on Japan's modernization, with far-reaching consequences. Comprising seasoned leaders who played integral roles in the Meiji Restoration, this council of elder statesmen played a pivotal part in shaping Japan's destiny during an era of unprecedented transformation. The importance of the Genro Council can be distilled into several key points:

Guidance and Leadership: The Genro provided invaluable guidance and leadership during a time of rapid change. Their collective wisdom and experience proved instrumental in navigating Japan through the complex process of modernization, helping to avert potential pitfalls and disruptions that other nations encountered during similar transitions.

Political Stability: The establishment of the Genro institution contributed significantly to political stability. By institutionalizing leadership and ensuring continuity in governance, the Genro played a vital role in maintaining order amid substantial social and political upheaval. Their contribution was instrumental in centralizing political authority under the emperor's constitutional monarchy, fostering national unity and coherence.

Modernization of Key Sectors: The Genro's influence extended across various facets of Japanese society, including the military, government, economy, and education. Their policies and decisions facilitated the modernization of these critical sectors, laying the groundwork for Japan's subsequent global success.

Enduring Legacy: The Genro's legacy transcended the Meiji period, continuing to influence subsequent generations of leaders and contributing to Japan's ongoing development as a prominent global player.



Transformation of Feudal Japan: The Genro played a pivotal role in guiding Japan's transition from a feudal society to a modern, industrialized nation. Leveraging their collective knowledge and leadership, Japan adeptly embraced Western practices, institutions, and technologies while preserving vital aspects of its cultural heritage. Their efforts dismantled the old feudal order and consolidated political power under the emperor's constitutional monarchy, a transformation essential to Japan's unification as a modern nation-state.

In essence, the Genro during the Meiji period bridged Japan's traditional past and its modern future. Their contributions and leadership were instrumental in Japan's successful modernization and industrialization, propelling the nation onto the global stage as a formidable power. As visionary statesmen and architects of Japan's modernization, their legacy stands as a testament to the transformative potential of strong, visionary leadership in shaping a nation's destiny. The formation of the Genro, or Council of Elders, was a pivotal moment in Japanese history, serving as a conduit for the knowledge and experience of senior statesmen, guiding the nation through a period of profound transformation. This scholarly analysis offers insights into the historical, sociopolitical, and institutional dimensions of this critical development in Japan's modernization journey.

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