



The Meiji Restoration

*The Charter Oath & the Meiji
Constitution
1868-1912*

Charter vs Constitution

CHARTER

A charter is often used for defining corporations or associations.

In politics, a charter is a written grant from the sovereign power (in this case Emperor Meiji, with influence from former daimyo) of a country giving certain rights and privileges on a person, a corporation, or the people. In Japan's case, it explained how a new government would be organized.

CONSTITUTION

A legally recognized document that:

- states the rights and freedoms of the individual in a country
- important rules in the organization of the government
- All laws proposed are checked against the constitution

How Would You Solve These Problems?

If you were a Meiji leader following the Tokugawa period, what would have to change?

Internal Problems (in Japan)

- Commoners are unhappy with poverty
- People are unhappy with no social mobility
- The Shogun made decisions based on his ideas and perhaps his advisers
- Japan was woefully lacking technology

External Problems (outside of Japan)

- Treaties were forced upon Japan by other nations
- Other nations were pressuring Japan to trade

The Charter Oath 五箇条の御誓文

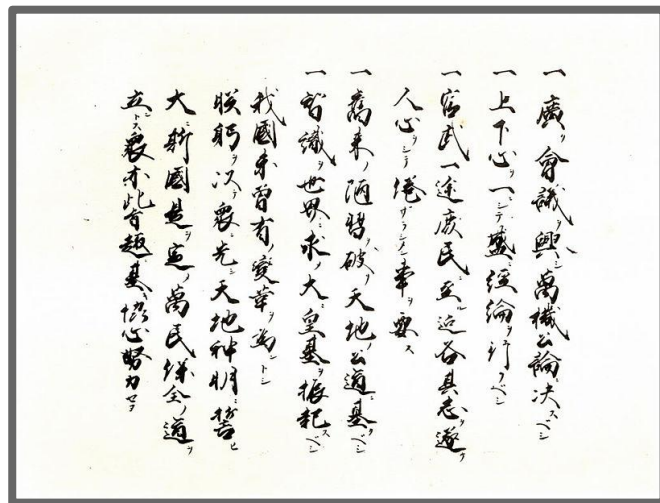
1. Deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by public discussion.

2. All classes, high and low, shall unite in vigorously carrying out the administration of affairs of state.

3. The common people, no less than the civil and military officials, shall each be allowed to pursue his own calling so that there may be no discontent.

4. Evil customs of the past shall be broken off and everything based upon the just laws of Nature.

5. Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule.



Assessing the Charter Oath

1. Why did the leaders of the Meiji Restoration feel it was necessary to issue the Charter Oath?
2. What do you think the authors of this document meant by “deliberative assemblies” and “public discussion”? Does this suggest a commitment to democratic rule?
3. What did the authors of the Charter Oath believe to be the “evil customs of the past”?
4. Which do you think is the most important of the five articles? Explain why.

The Charter Oath

The **Charter Oath** (Gokajyo no Goseimon) was a short but very important public document issued in April 1868, just months after the Meiji Restoration brought an end to the Tokugawa shogunate and installed a new Japanese government. Issued in the name of the Emperor Meiji (Mutsuhito, who was only 15 years old at the time), the text was written by a group of the young samurai, mainly from domains in southwestern Japan, who had led the overthrow of the Tokugawa government and the “restoration” of imperial rule.

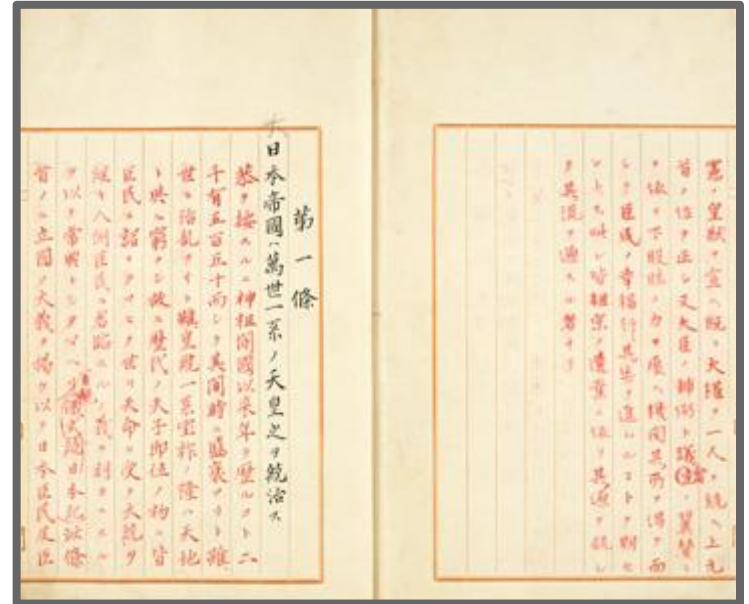
Three Japanese statesmen drafted the charter, Yuri Kimimasa, Fukuoka Takachika and Kido Takayoshi. The Charter Oath became law in Japan on April 7, 1868. It was then read aloud by Emperor Meiji. The Charter was intended to set the pace and tone for reform, the constitutional and legal reinvention of Japanese society and government.

The **Charter Oath** appeared at a time of considerable uncertainty in Japanese society, as people throughout the country were unsure of the intentions and priorities of the new regime governing Japan.

The Constitution of 1868

The first Meiji constitution was drafted, rather quickly, to bring the ideas from Charter Oath into existence.

The aim was to define the powers of the government and clearly define the rights of the Japanese citizens.



Pages from the Meiji Constitution

Assessing the Constitution of 1868

Three key ideas were:

- The Grand Council of State (the Daijo-kan / 太政官) had all authority. It was made up of nobles, and was not elected.
- The Lower House (the Gisei-kan / 議政官) could debate issues and suggest laws, but had no power to make decisions.
- The Lower House members were elected from each city, each clan, and each prefecture. (Satsuma, Choshu, Tosa and Hizen clans tended to dominate)

Look at the [key features of the Meiji Constitution](#). What are some of the potential problems it could create?

1868 Constitution: Change and Continuity

ARTICLE XX. - Continuity

ARTICLE XXIX. - Changed somewhat

ARTICLE XXX. - Change

ARTICLEXXXIII. - Change

ARTICLEXXXIV. - Changed somewhat

ARTICLEXXXV. - Change

*Read
chapter 9,
pp. 24 to
25*