

The US Occupation of Japan (In what way did it influence Japan?)

Kris Koch

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Introduction

The US Occupation of Japan from 1945 to 1952 significantly altered the Japan of Yesteryear into the present powerful nation that is known today. Many factors went into the metamorphosis of this country such as guidance and control from the United States. With this control, evolved a new and powerful constitution, which would help to reconstruct this nation into a new superpower. The many policies contained in this constitution have affected the growth of this nation.

Background Information

The US Occupation of Japan began with the ending of World War II. On August 6, 1945 an atomic bomb with the power of 12.5 kilotons of TNT was dropped over Hiroshima by an American B-29 warplane. This colossal explosion which caused approximately 100,000 Japanese to perish, devastated Hiroshima, Japan's 7th largest city. Additionally many more people died of the aftershocks of the atomic explosion. This was not the only reason that Japan succumbed to the Allied Forces. A couple of days later, the Soviet Union waged war upon the imperial forces located in Manchuria and Korea. Additionally, on August 9, 1945 yet another atomic bomb was released above a Japanese City. This great explosion, consisting of the explosive force of 22 kilotons of TNT, desolated the city of Nagasaki killing between 60,000 and 70,000 people.

With all the devastation that Japan had encountered, it was up to its Supreme Council for the Direction of the War to decide the fate of Japan by choosing whether the battle should continue with the Allied Powers. This supreme council, formed a year prior, consisted of a six member body of senior war officials controlled by Emperor Hirohito. Traditionally, Japan has been a country reluctant to surrender easily, but these major attacks weakened this once powerful country. Finn states in his book:

It was a nation with a long and proud history of military valor. This samurai tradition, sometimes called the “spirit of Yamato,” had not disappeared during a century of modernization. The conflict in the Pacific had been tough and brutal, aptly described as a “war without mercy,” but the imperial forces had fought without surrender in a series of bloody battles in the western Pacific. Japanese leaders had had a great difficulty in deciding how to react to the Potsdam Declaration issued in Germany by the major Allied powers on July 26, 1945, calling on Japan to proclaim the unconditional surrender of its armed forces or face “prompt and utter destruction.”¹

Japan was fighting a losing battle at this point of the war. Bombing had destroyed 50 percent of urban Japan. Likewise, food and raw materials were becoming sparse due to the sinking of merchant ships by the Allied forces. Many of the Japanese troops had died or committed suicide and by August almost two million Japanese citizens had been killed.

The war was coming to an end and the Emperor finally realized this.² Then on August 9, 1945 Emperor Hirohito decided to accept the provisions of the surrender and by August 15, 1945 the war was over. Emperor Hirohito made a public announcement about the surrender. Hirohito stated to his Council for the Direction of the War, “I cannot bear to see my innocent people suffer any longer.”³ This was the end of the war and the start of the US Occupation of Japan.

The Allied Powers

The war was over. What was to happen to Japan? The Potsdam treaty stated that the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces would be in charge of Japan. This commander was known as the SCAP. It was time to appoint this leader in order to rebuild this war-torn country. Howard B. Schonberger states:

Soon after the devastating explosion of the atomic bomb over Hiroshima, President Harry Truman, after much hesitation, Decided to appoint General Douglas MacArthur, then head of American forces in the Pacific, as the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in Japan. With the approval of the heads of state of Great Britain, China, and Russia, the president sent MacArthur his first directive as SCAP on 15 August 1945. The general was to require the emperor, through his representation, to sign an instrument of surrender of Japanese armed forces, “the authority of the Emperor and the Japanese Government to rule the state will be subject to you... You will exercise supreme command over all land, sea and air forces which may be allocated for enforcement in Japan of the surrender terms by the Allied Powers concerned.”⁴

MacArthur accepted the job as the SCAP and flew to Japan in his C-54 named Bataan. On September 2, 1945 the official surrender ceremony took place aboard the battle ship Missouri. The nickname for this battle ship was Big Mo, named for President Harry S. Truman’s home state of Missouri. This was a risky maneuver for the new temporary leader of this nation. At this time the Japanese troops greatly outnumbered the Allied troops surrounding the ceremony. “MacArthur drove into Yokohama and his headquarters at the New Grand Hotel. His staff was mystified why the 30,000 Japanese soldiers lining the route turned their backs. It was a sign of respect, they were told, usually reserved only for Japan’s god-king, Emperor Hirohito.”⁵

There were only 4200 U.S. troops present at this occasion yet no trouble with Japanese forces ensued.

Douglas MacArthur, the new SCAP, was born in Little Rock, Arkansas in early 1880. His background is an important feature in the understanding of his new position. MacArthur's father Arthur was a colonel in the 24th Wisconsin Volunteers during the Civil War, a captain on the Indian frontier, and a military governor in the Philippines who helped to halt the upheaval against American rule. Due to many reasons, including family tradition, Douglas MacArthur enrolled at West Point Military Academy in 1899. Following his extremely successful stay at the Academy, MacArthur acquired assignments in the Philippines and the Far East where he joined his father in Japan as a lieutenant. He believed that this experience was vital for his success. MacArthur stated, "It was crystal clear to me that the future and indeed, the very existence of America, was irrevocably entwined with Asia and its outpost islands." ⁶ MacArthur was also fascinated by the bravery and boldness of the Japanese soldiers.

Years later, MacArthur would once again return to this area. This time he would be on tour as a military aide to President Theodore Roosevelt during the American occupation of Vera Cruz. This was valuable training for his future position as the SCAP in Japan. For his outstanding duty, he was marked as one of the most ambitious and promising officers in the services. In 1925 MacArthur was promoted to the rank of major general.

In 1935, MacArthur was sent to the Philippines as a military advisor of a newly formed Commonwealth in order to prepare the area for independence. It was MacArthur's job to defend this infant commonwealth from the Japanese war machine.

This was considered an impossible task considering the lack of support he received from the United States Government. Soon after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Japanese attacked the Philippines. The Philippine's defenses could not hold back the incredibly skilled and daring enemy. MacArthur was forced to organize a retreat of American and Filipino troops to the Bataan peninsula. At this peninsula, they awaited support from Washington but they soon realized it wasn't coming. MacArthur escaped from Bataan to Australia and promised his troops that he would return with reinforcements. His bravery in action proved his importance to the military, and he was regarded as a hero.

MacArthur was the selected to be the commander of the Japanese island invasion. Although he did not get to lead this attack, he became the SCAP thus leading a peace invasion of the island. His background undoubtedly displays his credentials for the rebuilding of Japan.

The Occupation of Japan required troops in order to help rebuild this war devastated nation. The Eighth Army under Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger stationed in Yokohama and the Sixth Army under General Walter Krueger standing in Kyoto were the two armies present at this time. These armies totaled about 460,000 troops and were controlled directly by MacArthur. In order to control such a large amount of people, including the Japanese, MacArthur arranged the control structure into two headquarters. The first headquarters was called the (GHQ SCAP) which was in control of Japan and the other was called the (GHQ FEC) which controlled the US forces in the Far East. MacArthur believed that if an organization "is right at the top, it will be right at the bottom."⁷

Additionally, the (GHQ SCAP) which was located in the Dai Ichi Building, Tokyo, Japan, was divided into fifteen staff sections. The Government section dealt with political topics and the Diet. Some of the other divisions included the Economic and Science Section (EES); The Civil Information and Education Section (CIE) and G-2 which was in charge of intelligence and censorship.

What was the Japanese reaction to this influx of American troops? As stated earlier, the Japanese tradition made it difficult to agree to the surrender. Many expected violence to occur during the occupation but more of the Japanese civilians and soldiers realized that they had been beat. In 1948, troops went home because the occupation was being accomplished peacefully. This is not to say that no problems or conflicts occurred, but the number was fewer than expected. Many Japanese feared the future, when the US Occupation of Japan began. One incident involved high officials ignoring the surrender and continuing to shoot American planes out of the sky. Twenty Allied planes had been destroyed before it came to a halt. The Associated Press explains, “The overwhelming majority of Japanese, however, came to grips with defeat quickly, and worked hard to get their country back on its feet.”⁸ Perhaps, one of the reasons that the beginning of the occupation went so well, had to do with the manner in which the United States forces entered Japan. The Detroit News describes, “Rear Adm. Yoshio Kodama had expected unbearable dark events. Instead, the Americans were handing out candy and chewing gum to Japanese children. Some Americans descended on a brothel and told the personnel to put their kimonos in a pile. Then, they left with them as souvenirs, also leaving the girls unpatronized.”⁹

The US Occupation had many goals to accomplish in order to revive Japan as a country. A large debate ensued on the role of the Emperor and the Imperial line. The State Department argued that the Emperor could be utilized as a figurehead in order to promote occupation objectives in Japan. The Japanese society would accept commands more willingly if its own Emperor informed them. Roger Buckley states:

The imperial rescripts provided valuable ammunition for those who maintained that the Emperor (and his government) should be employed as agents of the Allies to promote the objectives specified on the Potsdam Declaration. Yet this was no automatic decision. It took considerable courage for the administration to suggest that the Emperor could assist the United States when many Allied governments ,such as the Soviet Union and Australia, expected him to be arraigned and Japan strictly controlled as punishment for its recent past. For an American president to order policies that appeared relaxed toward one of those held responsible for the day of infamy was no easy matter...¹⁰

The highly debated role of the Emperor was later defined in the 1947 Japanese Constitution. This Constitution is discussed later in the paper.

The primary objective of the US changed as the occupation evolved in Japan. The beginning years, considered the radical stage, took place from 1945 to 1947. During this period, Japanese individuals were removed from government, business, and academia. Some of these individuals received jail terms and death sentences. Walter LaFeber's book describes, " Others believed the roundup destroyed both innocent lives and a bureaucracy needed to make the country function."¹¹ This "Purge" as it was called was reversed after a short time.

This period also brought about a great change for Japanese women. Before this period women had very few freedoms or rights. In fact, women were thought to be inferior to men. For instance, only women could be tried for adultery.

Yet another example of this inequality is displayed when the US troops arrived: “When the U.S. troops arrived in August 1945, Tokyo authorities sought to please the occupiers—and protect women of the upper classes—by setting up groups of “special prostitutes” from lower classes who personally pledged before the Imperial Palace to sacrifice themselves for kokutai.”¹² This was all going to change with the leadership of SCAP. Women suddenly earned the right to vote, own property, obtain a higher education, enter the government, and join the police department. American women suggested to the SCAP that the contract of marriages should be abolished. These women claimed that the contract of marriages enslaved the Japanese women to their husbands. This was soon added to list of demands by the SCAP.

The SCAP also planned for major educational reform. They tried to decentralize authority, while denationalizing and democratizing textbooks. This reform ran across many obstacles during its implementation.

One of the major reforms being considered was the new Japanese constitution. MacArthur’s goals were to form a democratic, open market in Japan similar to the market in the United States of America. The Japanese citizens would have individual rights that the government could not infringe upon. This includes freedom of speech, thought, and religion.

The decentralization of the political function and the antitrust sentiment was created in order to dismantle Japan’s *zaibatsus*. These *zaibatsus* or corporate ties did not follow the US model MacArthur attempted to follow. The Mitsui *zaibatsu* was the equivalent size of some of the largest companies in the US combined, such as U.S. Steel, General Motors, Standard Oil of New York, Alcoa, Douglas Aircraft, Dupont, Allis

Chalmers, Westinghouse, AT&T, RCA, IBM, Dole Pineapple, National City Bank, Woolworth Stores, and Statler Hotels. Gigantic *Zaibatsu* banks funded *Zaibatsus*, like the one above. In 1947 the SCAP ordered that all *Zaibatsus* be disbanded.

This breaking up of the *zaibatsu* was the primary reason that the radical or first stage of the US Occupation of Japan failed. Inflation increased to unbearable levels while food became scarce. In fact prices increased 12 times between 1946 to 1949.¹³ This high inflation almost completely suspended exports. Japan was Bankrupt.

The US Occupation had to evolve in order to save this failing nation. This change in ideology took place from 1947 to 1950 and is considered the conservative period of the occupation. They kick-started the economy by eliminating the anti-zaibatsu laws and by increasing the power and size of The Economic Stabilization Board (ESB). This board was formed in late 1946 to be the headquarters for economic planning. Kiyoko Ishikawa illustrates:

The ESB undertook the tasks of general economic coordination and development of a broad range of policies covering everything from economic planning, control, and prices to food, industry, and trade. Early on, the ESB consisted of five departments and some 300 staff members. But in May 1947, it was expanded to eleven divisions and a permanent staff of about 2,000 and was granted formidable powers of control over the economy.¹⁴

This new board emphasized the Dodge Line, which translates to a balanced budget system, a fixed exchange rate, a reduction in subsidies, and many other measures. This set Japan on the road to recovery. Eventually the ESB was reduced in size and renamed the Economic Planning Agency.

The New Constitution

The formation of the new Japanese Constitution was perhaps one of the most important goals of the US Occupation of Japan. This document is the guiding path of Japan's future. MacArthur's government section worked on creating this document following guidelines that would fulfill the SCAP's criteria.¹⁵ These guidelines included suffrage for women, the encouragement of labor unions, regulation of child labor, liberalization of education, elimination of government fear tactics and the promotion of a wide distribution of income as well as ownership. The Constitution of Japan was accepted and approved in October 1946 by the Japanese Diet. It went into effect on the May of 1947.

Chapter one of the constitution pertains to the duties and powers of the Emperor. As stated earlier, there was great debate over this issue. Article six of this constitution provides the Emperor with the power to appoint the Prime Minister as approved by the Diet. Additionally, Article seven states that the Emperor may perform the following duties, such as the convocation of the Diet, the dissolution of the House of Representatives, the proclamation of general elections of members of the Diet, the Awarding of honors, the receiving of foreign ambassadors and ministers, the performance of ceremonial functions and etc.

Chapter Two of the constitution deals with the renunciation of war. This chapter includes the well-known and debated article nine.

The constitution states, “Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation... In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained.”¹⁶

Chapter three of the constitution refers to the rights and duties of the people. This section of the constitution is similar to the United States Bill of Rights. This section grants equality among all people and provides them with all the basic human rights. Before the war, Japan was noted for treating certain individuals as inferior. An example of this prejudice is against the people known as the Burakumin. Today, inequalities among people still exist but it is not as prevalent due to the constitution.

Chapters five through eight encompass information pertaining to the government and to governmental bodies. Article 41 states that the Diet is the law making division of the government. This Diet is divided into two houses, the House of Representatives and the House of Councilors. Furthermore, Chapter four continues to describe the law making procedure. This Diet existed during the occupation but was directed by the SCAP.

Chapter five discusses the Cabinet. This Cabinet consists of the Prime Minister and other Ministers of State. During the US Occupation the Prime Minister of Japan was Yoshida.

Consequences of US Occupation

The US Occupation has had a profound effect on numerous aspects of Japan. One such aspect is the effect on the population of Japan or the social effect. For instance, the status

of women has greatly improved due to reform during the occupation. This occupational reform was the starting point for the empowerment of women in this country. Figures from the Japanese Information Network show that women are active in Japan's modern economy: "According to the 1995 edition of the Ministry of Labor's *Hataraku josei no jitsujo* (The Labor Conditions of Women), 50.2% of women aged 15 or over had a paying job in 1994, 2.6 percentage points more than in 1980. Women comprised 40.5% of the total work force in 1994, up 1.8 points from 1980."¹⁷ Although women have come a long way since the prewar era, inequality still exists in Japan. Despite the 1947 Labor Standards Law, which stated that people should receive equal pay for equal work, many companies maintain separate policies for men and women. Men and women receive different treatment pertaining to promotions and salary. Without the efforts of the SCAP, the women's movement today may not have existed at all.

As stated earlier in this paper, the US Occupation also had a lasting effect on the modern education system of Japan. One of the reforms that were imposed by the occupation was the organization of school levels. To illustrate, the 6-3-3-4 system was introduced to Japan. This represents six years of elementary school, three years each for junior and senior high school, and four years for universities. It also established a board of education. The successfulness of this educational reform can be represented by the percent of students attending an education institution: "Almost 99% of students enrolled in public elementary schools."¹⁸

The US Occupation of Japan had an effect on the Art in Japan. This change in art is a direct reflection of the effect that the US involvement had on Japanese society.

This can be easily understood due to the profound participation in almost every aspect of Japanese life.

Moreover, many of the reforms imposed by the United States on Japan indirectly helped the economy grow. After the war the military disbanded, thus eliminating military expenditure. This elimination of the military helped the economy grow by alleviating the strain on Japan's economic resources. Military personnel joined the labor force after the disarmament and aided in the recovery of the economy. However, Japan has a rather strong military today. This may violate the Japanese constitution but this military force is not considered an army but rather a "self defense force".

Conclusion

In conclusion, Japan has evolved in many ways following the US Occupation of the country. This occupation has affected Japan socially, economically, and militarily. If it wasn't for the US Occupation, Japan may have developed differently following the war. Overall, the Japanese have benefited from the control of the SCAP. The US was a voice of organization during a time of chaos. Instead of punishing Japan for the war, the US aided Japan in its recovery thus creating a strong US partner. This Occupation proved beneficial to the many parties involved.

End Notes

1. Finn, P1
2. Schaller, P4
3. Finn, P5
4. Schonberger, P40
5. “Japan was beaten, but American GIs occupied with class”, P1
6. Schonberger, 42
7. Finn, P35
8. “Beginning of allied occupation marked start of Japan’s postwar recovery”, P2
9. “Japan was beaten, but American GIs occupied with class”,P2
10. Buckley, P14
11. LaFeber, P265
12. LaFeber, P265
13. LaFeber, P268
14. Kiyoko, P1
15. Schaller, P41
16. Lexus-Nexis, P2
17. “Social Life- Women”, P1
18. “Modern Education – Postwar”,P1

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