

35 Minutes.

Study Sources A and B.

SOURCE A

The following is a review of the Meiji Constitution.

The highlights of the Meiji Constitution included establishing the Emperor system and the principle of imperial sovereignty, placing the Emperor at the heart of the ruling body and ensuring exclusive supreme command over the army for him. In addition, it stated some freedom and rights enjoyed by the people.

The Meiji Constitution is not only the first constitution in the history of Japan but also the outcome of the Meiji Restoration and learning from Western law systems. It played an influential role in further dismantling the feudal system and promoting political modernization. However, the Emperor enjoyed absolute power under the Constitution while limited democracy and freedom were established. This constitution also provided a breeding ground for Japanese militarism and its aggression.

SOURCE B

The following passage discusses the political aspect of Japan during the Taisho period.

Given that most of the people longed for the General Election Law, the long-awaited law was enacted in the spring of 1925 with the intention of holding the radicals in check by giving suffrage to large number of people. From then on, all men aged 25 or above enjoyed the right to vote, and those aged 30 or above had candidate eligibility. The number of electorate jumped from 3 million to 12 million, which accounted for more than 20% of the country's population. Despite the fact that women had no suffrage, the pass of the General Election law pushed Japan a great step forward in its way to democracy. However, the wave of social movements was gaining momentum at that time. In order to prevent workers and peasants from starting extreme political movements, the Public Security Preservation Law was enacted in May of the same year to punish any association or activity that aims at 'altering the kokutai*' or system of private property. Nevertheless, this law was later used to stifle even peaceful acts, including speech about liberalism. In fact, it inherited the essence of the Public Assembly Law, the Law on Political Association and Assembly, and the Public Order and Police Law. It was also unexpectedly used by the militarists afterwards as a tool for persecuting democrats.

* kokutai: literally 'system of government'

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- (a) With reference to Source A, identify *two* characteristics of the Meiji Constitution.
(4 marks)
- (b) Identify the political change in Japan during the Taisho period, as reflected in Source B.
(3 marks)
- (c) To what extent did Japan achieve political modernization during the Taisho period (1912-26)? Explain your answer with reference to Sources A and B, and using your own knowledge.
(8 marks)