Chair Bios

Head Chair: Evan Alexis

Evan is a Gunn alumni and has currently deferred admission at Washington University in St. Louis. This is his fifth year in MUN and second year chairing GMUNC. He is also an avid policy debater, enjoys biking, and plays bridge (the card game for 70-year-olds). He hopes you enjoy this unique committee and that if you have any feedback or questions you let him know by emailing the committee email!

Crisis Head: Jordan Cheng
Jordan Cheng is a rising senior at Gunn and is excited to run crisis for this chaotic committee. This is his fourth year participating in MUN and third year running crisis for GMUNC. Outside of the activity, he enjoys running, staying up really late at night, and playing video games. He’s excited to present the twists and turns present in this tumultuous time period!

**Co-Chair: Aditya Mittal**

Adi is a rising junior at Gunn and is thrilled to dive into the Edo period and learn about the Tokugawa shogunate! This is his second year practicing MUN, and first year co-chairing GMUNC at its seventh iteration. Outside of MUN, he appreciates math, making music, philosophizing unnecessarily, as well as athletics, being an avid runner and martial artist of taekwondo. If anything in this committee, don’t be afraid to play devil’s advocate or cause controversy! Debate isn’t so with only one argument, and without it, will turn the simulation into a scripted play. Relax, and have fun!

**Co-Chair: Arjun Raja**

Arjun Raja is a rising junior this year at Gunn High School. This is his 7th year doing Model UN. he was born in Boston, Massachusetts, and moved to Palo Alto in 5th grade. His cousin introduced him to Model UN, and he started to learn about the world from a different perspective. World topics have always interested him, but he is excited to learn about something outside his niche! Learning about the Tokugawa Shogunate has been a truly unique and amazing experience, and he hopes you have an amazing experience in this committee.

**Co-Chair: Ethan Zhang**
Ethan is a rising junior at Gunn and is excited to learn about the Edo period of feudal Japan and debate about the Tokugawa Shogunate. This is Ethan’s third year participating in MUN and second year co-chairing. Ethan enjoys drawing, swimming, playing basketball, playing volleyball, and other assorted sports. Anything to do with friends, he enjoys doing! He hopes everyone has a good time during committee and is open to answer any questions you may have. He hopes you really delve into your character to have more fun in committee. At the end of the day, MUN is for fun!
Introduction/Letter From the Chair

My esteemed daimyos,

I am glad that you can join me as we navigate the future of our great nation together. As a body, you comprise my panel of advisors and as such I will implement your policy. Experience is no matter—unlike the elitist meetings of the former Imperial Court, these proceedings are open to all.

We must build a better Japan, one that is more equal and prepared for the future. The people deserve better, and if we don’t grant them the privilege of individual freedom then we are no better than the tyrant we overthrew. Collaboration is key—what is a government without unity?

I hope your guidance and counsel is true in these trying times; never Japan had so much to lose. If there are any questions left unanswered in this notice, send an inquiry to meijirestoration.gmunc@gmail.com. Remember, we need concrete actions that help people and not foolish whims or inklings.

Sincerely,

Emperor Mutsuhito Meiji
**Background**

In 1603, Tokugawa Ieyasu declared himself supreme military leader (or Shogun) of a newly unified Japan. For 264 years, his family maintained a tight hold on the Samurai warlords (known as the daimyos) who kept control of Japan’s provinces and successfully suppressed the powers of the Imperial family. By 1866, a combination of foreign influence and daimyo resentment fostered a successful rebellion which toppled the government. After a failed attempt to enforce a parliamentary system, the insurgents turned to a far more traditional ruler: fourteen-year-old Emperor Meiji, hitherto a sheltered studier of Classical arts, seized back control of his family’s birthright and brought Japan formally into Imperial rule. Little did the young Emperor know, his country now teetered on the cusp of a new era that would set Japan on an unalterable march towards a seemingly bright future.

**History**

In 1156, Japan’s most elite family ruptured. Emperor Konoe, at a mere 16 years old, had just died. Previous Emperor Sutoku had presumed that the rule would now fall to his son. When Sutoku’s half-brother Go-Shirakawa took his place on the throne, a civil war erupted between Go-Shirakawa and Sutoku’s supporters. After the dust cleared from the duly named Hogen Rebellion, Go-Shirakawa claimed victory. Go-Shirakawa had little time to enjoy his success. His
allies, the Samurai clans Minamoto and Taira, fought their own battle for supremacy: the Heiji Rebellion. The Taira triumphed and banished their rivals. Young Yoritomo, Yoshitsune, and Noriyori, the sons of the Minamoto leader, grew up in exile. In 1185, the brothers exacted their revenge on their conquerors. After a five year civil war, they decisively defeated the Taira in the naval battle of Dan-no-ura. Emperor Go-Shirakawa, still in power, gave Minamoto Yoritomo the ability to collect taxes and appoint government administrators. In this shift of power, the Imperial family unknowingly spelled their own demise. Kyoto, the residence of the Imperial Palace, remained the cultural center of Japan. The real power, however, now lay in Minamoto’s city of Kamakura. Minamoto Yoritomo had become the first shogun.

His military regime, known as the bakufu or “tent government”, kept an iron grip over the daimyo (then powerful landowners) and created feudal Japan. Governors called shugo maintained his many provinces. After Yoritomo passed away, his wife’s clan, the Hojo, seized their opportunity. Though they styled themselves as mere regents, the Hojo moved the strings of their shogun puppets. They ruled relatively peacefully and created a Council of State, an advisory board which worked successfully. They also adopted the Goseibai Shikimoku, a military legal code which ensured fair trials and regulated land disputes for over half a century.

Meanwhile, the Imperial family did not go quietly. Resentful of their denigration, in 1221, Emperor Go-Toba attempted to restore glory to his birthright. In what became known as the Jokyu Rebellion, he weeded out his detractors, outlawed the Hojo regent, and rallied the people of Eastern Japan. His forces, however, failed miserably against a Hojo counter attack. The regent, Hojo Yoshitoki, banished the Emperor and consolidated the power of the shogunate.
Despite this devastating defeat, in 1333, Emperor Go-Daigo attempted his own revolution. Dubbed the Kenmu Restoration, the Emperor briefly defeated the shogunate. Though he ruled for three years, ultimately his dissatisfied Samurai subjects overthrew him. The conqueror of Kyoto, General Ashikaga Takauji, began a new dynasty: the Ashikaga Shogunate. While Emperor Go-Daigo ostensibly retained control of the North in the “Northern and Southern Courts Period”, in reality, the shogunate maintained influence over the entire country.

Peace (via tight Shogun control) ruled for another century until the Onin War of 1467. Daimyos, by now powerful warlords, fought in the “Warring States period” for dominance of Japan. Political rivals Yamana Sozen and Hosokawa Katsumo tore apart the country and devastated Kyoto. Years of pointless carnage continued for over a century. In this time, known as the Sengoku Period, Japan declared independence from China’s tributary states system. Europeans also arrived on the islands, bringing with them muskets and Christianity.

An influential daimo, Oda Nobunaga brought the conflict to an end. The “Great Unifier” invaded Kyoto and installed Ashikaga Yoshiaki as Shogunate. He also defeated the Ikko-ikki, a Buddhist rebel group and conquered the island of Honshu. He had almost unified Japan when one of his generals betrayed him. The besieged Oda committed seppuku (ritualized suicide).

His successor and former retainer, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, had no trouble carrying on his previous superior’s legacy. Hideyoshi accomplished Oda’s dream of conquering Japan. He notoriously confiscated swords from the peasantry to prevent rebellion. He also launched a failed invasion of Korea. In 1598 he died. The stewardship of Japan fell to an ambitious young general: Tokugawa Ieyasu.
From 1600, Tokugawa initiated both the Tokugawa Shogunate and the influential Edo period. His society strictly divided subjects into daimyo, samurai, and peasants. Nurtured by his largely peaceful reign, culture and the arts flourished. Tokugawa’s Sakoku Policy forced Japan to develop in isolation, although the shogunate sent an exploratory party to present day America. Tokugawa held the daimyos at bay with policies that mandated warlords travel to the capital of Edo every other year and restricted fortification building. His well-organized government generated staying power; his descendents would remain in power for over 200 years.

Commodore Matthew Perry burst Japan’s isolationist bubble by sailing his warships into Tokyo harbor, a show of force culminating in the 1854 Convention of Kanagawa, a treaty allowing the establishment of an American embassy as well as opening up Japan to trade. This policy reversal sent shock waves throughout the nation. Christianity grew in popularity as foreign missionaries streamed in and the army absorbed Western arms. Elite daimyos worried that with the shogun in charge, Japan could have become a colony of the West given the increasing foreign influence. In 1866, two fiefs (Satsuma and Choshu) created the Satcho Alliance. Though the lords did not trust each other, they had spent too long a time as vassals of a higher power. Under the leadership of Sakamoto Ryōma, a samurai external to the two clans, the partnership had one goal: to overthrow the emperor and restore Japan to its former glory.

In 1867, they put their plan into action. The clans marched on Kyoto and demanded the Imperial Court abolish the shogunate. Through bared teeth, the ruling daimyos agreed and the current ruler, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, stepped down. Emperor Komei was designated the official ruler of the nation, but soon died after taking his newly elevated position in January of 1867.
This meant that young Emperor Meiji, just fourteen years old at the time, was Japan’s new leader.

Some imperial forces, however, refused to accept this outcome and struck back against the Satsuma and Choshu forces in a conflict known as the Boshin War. The struggle was swift and decisive, and spelled the final demise of a 700-year-old form of government. Emperor Meiji finally restored his birthright, but the future was far from certain.

Current Situation

In the aftermath of the Boshin War, a new ruling class was formed: the Meiji oligarchy. A group of representatives from the clans that united to overthrow the previous government, these were the individuals responsible for informing the young emperor of the policies they wanted to see implemented. You are a member of this new elite, gathered in 1869 and tasked with the initial goal of reforming anything and everything to help this new organization survive amid massive civil unrest.

The first order of business should involve tying up loose ends: the Northern Alliance, a group composed of three provinces, is still refusing to assimilate into the new government. Worse, they have Enomoto Takeaki, an expert admiral who absconded with eight steam warships—a significant navy—to join the rebels. Crushing this rebellion shouldn’t be too difficult with the imperial army, but the real question is how to deal with what is left when the dust settles. Do traitors deserve forgiveness?
The most pressing longer-term priority is the **now-defunct feudal system**, with structures that served the shogun like daimiates and their accompanying samurai armies being left without a purpose. Uniting the people, be it the chonin (Smith), samurai (Crawcour 120), or daimyo–now relieved of their territories (119), needs to be a primary goal. That being said, the internal politics are intense and complicated: the main beneficiaries of redistributed territory could have an outsized impact on the future of Japan.

After the social issues are resolved, the next glaring issue is **the economy**. Under the shogunate, much of the economy was agrarian and very weak (Metzler). Archaic statues, such as restrictions on land-use and ownership, hinder both social and technological progress. Most of the government’s funding was provided by taxation of these daimiates, but that now seems unsustainable. Now that the pseudo-feudal system is obsolete, a new path must be taken to modernize. Potential areas of development include a national railroad system modeled off of the American success story, industrializing across the country, and investment in shipbuilding to bolster naval power and shipping potential (Morris-Suzuki and Nissan Institute Of Japanese Studies). Individuals can potentially expand their own endeavors in various areas to further accumulate wealth.

Though it may seem that your actions are constrained by the positioning of the new ruler as the apex of the political structure, in reality, he is widely considered “a complete figurehead” (Swale). The emperor is popular among the people and can be used as such to justify policy decisions.
Questions to Consider

What is the best way forward for Japan?

What is the best way forward for your Han?

How much foreign involvement in Japan is acceptable?

What should the social order of the nation look like?

What is the role of the people in government?
References


