

= Charter Oath =

The Charter Oath (五箇条の御誓文 , Gokajō no Goseimon , more literally , the Oath in Five Articles) was promulgated at the enthronement of Emperor Meiji of Japan on 7 April 1868 . The Oath outlined the main aims and the course of action to be followed during Emperor Meiji 's reign , setting the legal stage for Japan 's modernization . This also set up a process of urbanization as people of all classes were free to move jobs so people went to the city for better work . It remained influential , if less for governing than inspiring , throughout the Meiji era and into the twentieth century , and can be considered the first constitution of modern Japan .

= = Text = =

As the name implies , the text of the Oath consists of five clauses :

By this oath , we set up as our aim the establishment of the national weal on a broad basis and the framing of a constitution and laws .

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

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

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

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

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

= = Origin and subsequent influence = =

The first draft of the Oath was written by junior councilor Yuri Kimimasa in January 1868 , containing progressive language that spoke to the frustrations that the radical but modestly born Meiji leaders had experienced in " service to hereditary incompetents . " Yuri 's language was moderated by his colleague Fukuoka Takachika in February to be " less alarming , " and Kido Takayoshi prepared the final form of the Oath , employing " language broad enough to embrace both readings . " The Oath was read aloud by Sanjō Sanetomi in the main ceremonial hall of the Kyoto Imperial Palace in the presence of the Emperor and more than 400 officials . After the reading , the nobles and daimyo present signed their names to a document praising the Oath , and swearing to do their utmost to uphold and implement it . Those not able to attend the formal reading afterwards visited the palace to sign their names , bringing the total number of signatures to 767 .

The purpose of the oath was both to issue a statement of policy to be followed by the post @-@ Tokugawa shogunate government in the Meiji period , and to offer hope of inclusion in the next regime to pro @-@ Tokugawa domains . This second motivation was especially important in the early stages of the Restoration as a means to keep domains from joining the Tokugawa remnant in the Boshin War . Later , military victory " made it safe to begin to push court nobles and daimyo figureheads out of the way . "

The promise of reform in the document initially went unfulfilled : in particular , a parliament with real power was not established until 1890 , and the Meiji oligarchy from Satsuma , Chōshū , Tosa and Hizen retained political and military control well into the 20th century . In general , the Oath was purposely phrased in broad terms to minimize resistance from the daimyo and to provide " a promise of gradualism and equity : "

" Deliberative councils " and " public discourse " were , after all , terms that had been applied to cooperation between lords of great domains . That " all classes " were to unite indicated that there would continue to be classes . Even " commoners " were to be treated decently by " civil and military " officers , the privileged ranks of the recent past . No one was likely to be in favor of the retention of " evil customs " ; a rather Confucian " Nature " would indicate the path to be chosen . Only in the promise to " seek knowledge throughout the world " was there a specific indication of change ; but

here , too , late Tokugawa activists had deplored the irrationality of Japan 's two @-@ headed government as the only one in the world . Moreover the search would be selective and purposeful , designed to " strengthen the foundations of imperial rule .

The Oath was reiterated as the first article of the constitution promulgated in June 1868 , and the subsequent articles of that constitution expand the policies outlined in the Oath . Almost eighty years later , in the wake of the Second World War , Emperor Hirohito paid homage to the Oath and reaffirmed it as the basis of " national polity " in his Humanity Declaration . The ostensible purpose of the rescript was to appease the American occupiers with a renunciation of imperial divinity , but the emperor himself saw it as a statement of the existence of democracy in Meiji era .