

Background Information

Charter Oath of 1868

The following declaration, often called the Charter Oath of 1868, is one of the first documents written by the new Meiji leaders and reveals much about the new society they hoped to create. The oath was written by the new leaders and given to the newly restored emperor to present to the people.

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

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.

"Charter Oath of 1868." *Sources of Japanese Tradition*. Comp. Ryusaka Tsunoda, William Theodore de Bary and Donald Keene. New York: Columbia UP, 1958. 137.