



Japanese soldiers occupying a Chinese city in 1938

## WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

### Japan in the Midst of Change

Groups with conflicting ideologies fought for control of Japan in the 1930s.

“Look straight at the present state of your fatherland, Japan! Where, we dare ask, can you find the genuine manifestation of the godliness of the Imperial Country of Japan? Political parties are blind in their pursuit of power and egoistic gains. Large enterprises are firmly in collusion with politicians as they suck the sweat and blood of the common people . . . Diplomacy is weak-kneed. Education is rotten to the core. Now is the time to carry out drastic, revolutionary change. Rise, and take action now!”  
—A Japanese ultranationalist criticizing the government, 1932

**Focus Question** How did Japan change in the 1920s and 1930s?

# Conflicting Forces in Japan

## Objectives

- Explain the effects of liberal changes in Japan during the 1920s.
- Analyze how nationalists reacted to Japan’s problems during the Great Depression.
- Describe how the militarists used their power in the 1930s.

## Terms, People, and Places

Hirohito  
ultranationalist  
Manchuria

## Note Taking

**Reading Skill: Understand Effects** As you read this section, fill in the effects of two opposing outlooks in Japan in the 1920s and 1930s in a table like the one below.

Conflicting Forces in Japan	
Liberalism in the 1920s	Militarism in the 1930s
• • •	• • •

Solemn ceremonies marked the start of Emperor Hirohito’s reign. In the Secret Purple Hall, the new emperor sat on the ancient throne of Japan. Beside him was his wife, the empress Nagako. Calling on the spirits of his ancestors, he pledged “to preserve world peace and benefit the welfare of the human race.”

In fact, **Hirohito** reigned from 1926 to 1989—an astonishing 63 years. During those decades, Japan experienced remarkable successes and appalling tragedies. In this section, we will focus on the 1920s and 1930s, when the pressures of extreme nationalism and economic upheaval set Japan on a militaristic and expansionist path that would engulf all of Asia.

## Japan on the Rise in the 1920s

In the 1920s, Japan moved toward greater prosperity and democracy. To strengthen its relationship with other countries, Japan drew back from some of its imperial goals in the 1920s. The country grew in international prestige. However, conflicts lurked beneath the surface. The economic crisis of the Great Depression in the 1930s would bring them to light.

**Growth and Expansion After World War I** During World War I, the Japanese economy enjoyed remarkable growth. Its exports to Allied nations soared. Heavy industrial production grew, making Japan a true industrial power.



While Western powers battled in Europe, Japan expanded its influence throughout East Asia. Japan had already annexed Korea as a colony in 1910. During the war, Japan also sought further rights in China with the Twenty-One Demands. After the war, Japan took over former German possessions in East Asia, including the Shandong province in China.

**Liberal Changes in the 1920s** During the 1920s, Japan moved toward more widespread democracy. Political parties grew stronger. Elected members of the Diet—the Japanese parliament—exercised their power. In 1925, all adult men, regardless of class, won the right to vote. In addition, Western ideas about women's rights brought some changes. Overall, however, the status of Japanese women remained below that of men. They would not win suffrage, or the right to vote, until 1945.

Despite leaning toward greater democracy, political parties were manipulated by the zaibatsu (zy baht soo), Japan's powerful business leaders. The zaibatsu influenced the government through donations to political parties. They pushed for policies that favored international trade and their own interests.

Japan's aggressive expansion began to affect its economic relationship with the Western powers. To protect relations, moderate Japanese politicians decided to slow down foreign expansion. In 1922, Japan signed an agreement to limit the size of its navy with the United States, Britain, and France. It also agreed to leave Shandong. The government reduced military spending.

**Problems Below the Surface** Behind this well-being, Japan faced some grave problems. Rural peasants did not share in the nation's prosperity. They were still very poor. In the cities, factory workers earned low wages. Their poverty drew them to the socialist ideas of Marx and Lenin.

In the cities, members of the younger generation were also in revolt against tradition. They adopted Western fads and fashions. Also, they rejected family authority for the Western ideal of individual freedom, shocking their elders.

During the 1920s, tensions between the government and the military simmered not far below the surface. Conservatives, especially military officers, blasted government corruption, including payoffs by powerful zaibatsu. They also condemned Western influences for undermining basic Japanese values of obedience and respect for authority.

Although the economy grew throughout the 1920s, it experienced many highs and lows. One low point occurred when a devastating earthquake, one of the most destructive quakes in history, struck the Tokyo area in 1923. The earthquake and the widespread fires it caused resulted in the deaths of over 100,000 people and damaged more than 650,000 buildings. As many as 45 percent of surviving workers lost their jobs because so many businesses were destroyed. With help from the government, the Tokyo area gradually recovered—just as Japan faced a worldwide economic crisis.

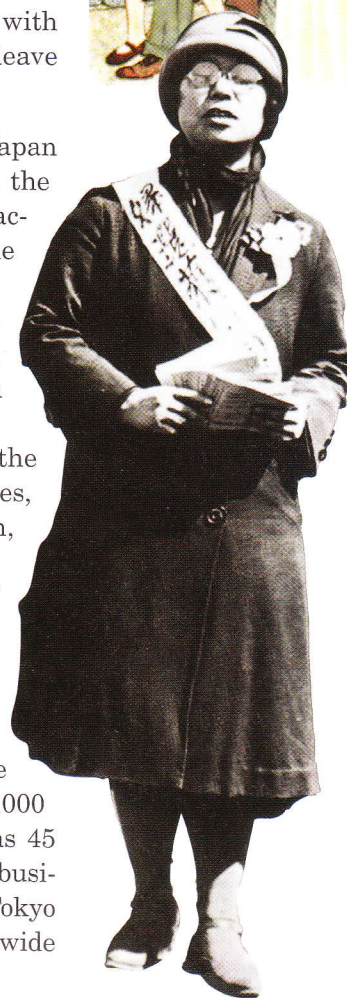
### Vocabulary Builder

manipulated—(muh NIP yoo layt id) *vt.*  
influenced skillfully, often unfairly



### A Combination of the Old and the New

In this lithograph (above), Japanese people in traditional clothing walk with others in Western clothing in one of Tokyo's parks. A woman protests low wages at a Japanese factory in 1920 (left).



✓ **Checkpoint** How did democratic participation in Japan both grow and stagnate in the 1920s?



## Japan's Expanding Empire to 1934

Geography Interactive

For: Audio guided tour

Web Code: nap-2751



**Map Skills** Japan expanded its territory in Asia between 1918 and 1934. From their conquered lands, the Japanese acquired natural resources to fuel their industries.

- 1. Locate:** (a) Japan (b) Korea (c) Manchuria (d) Taiwan
- 2. Region** Where were Japan's main manufacturing areas located?
- 3. Draw Conclusions** What natural resource does Korea lack but Manchuria have?

## The Nationalist Reaction

In 1929, the Great Depression rippled across the Pacific, striking Japan with devastating force. Trade suffered as foreign buyers could no longer afford to purchase Japanese silks and other exports. Unemployment in the cities soared, while rural peasants were only a mouthful from starvation.

**Unrest Grows** Economic disaster fed the discontent of the leading military officials and extreme nationalists, or **ultranationalists**. They condemned politicians for agreeing to Western demands to stop overseas expansion. Western industrial powers, they pointed out, had long ago grabbed huge empires. By comparison, Japan's empire was tiny.

Japanese nationalists were further outraged by racial policies in the United States, Canada, and Australia that shut out Japanese immigrants. The Japanese took great pride in their industrial achievements. They bitterly resented being treated as second-class citizens in other parts of the world.

As the economic crisis worsened, nationalists demanded renewed expansion. An empire in Asia, they argued, would provide much-needed raw materials as well as an outlet for Japan's rapidly growing population. They set their sights on the northern Chinese province of **Manchuria**. This region was rich in natural resources, and Japanese businesses had already invested heavily there.

**The Manchurian Incident** In 1931, a group of Japanese army officers provoked an incident that provided an excuse to seize Manchuria. They set explosives and blew up tracks on a Japanese-owned railroad line. Then, they claimed that the Chinese had committed the act. Claiming self-defense, the army attacked Chinese forces. Without consulting their own government, the Japanese military forces conquered all of Manchuria and set up a puppet state there that they called **Manzhouguo** (man choo KWOO). They brought in Puyi, the last Chinese emperor, to head the puppet state. When politicians in Tokyo objected to the army's highhanded actions, public opinion sided with the military.

When the League of Nations condemned Japanese aggression against China, Japan simply withdrew itself from the League. Soon, the Japanese government nullified the agreements limiting naval armament that it had signed with the Western democracies in the 1920s. The League's member states failed to take military action against Japanese aggression.

**✓ Checkpoint** How did the Great Depression lead to calls for renewed expansion?




## Militarists in Power

In the early 1930s, ultranationalists were winning support from the people for foreign conquests and a tough stand against the Western powers. Members of extreme nationalist societies assassinated a number of politicians and business leaders who opposed expansion. Military leaders plotted to overthrow the government and, in 1936, briefly occupied the center of Tokyo.

**Traditional Values Revived** Civilian government survived, but the unrest forced the government to accept military domination in 1937. To please the ultranationalists, the government cracked down on socialists and suppressed most democratic freedoms. It revived ancient warrior values and built a cult around Emperor Hirohito, whom many believed was descended from the sun goddess. To spread its nationalist message, the government used schools to teach students absolute obedience to the emperor and service to the state.

**More Expansion in China** During the 1930s, Japan took advantage of China's civil war to increase its influence there. Japan expected to complete its conquest of China within a few years. But in 1939, while the two nations were locked in deadly combat, World War II broke out in Europe. That conflict swiftly spread to Asia.

In 1936, Japan allied with two aggressive European powers, Germany and Italy. These three powers signed the Tripartite Pact in September 1940, cementing the alliance known as the Axis Powers. That alliance, combined with renewed Japanese conquests, would turn World War II into a brutal, wide-ranging conflict waged not only across the continent of Europe but across Asia and the islands of the Pacific as well.

 **Checkpoint** What changes did militarists make when they came to power?

## BIOGRAPHY

### Hirohito

Hirohito (1901–1989) became emperor of Japan in 1926. As emperor, according to Japanese tradition, he was the nation's supreme authority and a living god—no one could look at his face or even mention his name. In practice, however, he merely approved the policies that his ministers formulated.

Hirohito was a private man who preferred marine biology to power politics. As a result, his role in Japan's move toward aggression is unclear. Some historians believe that Hirohito did not encourage Japanese military leaders. Others assert that he was actively involved in expansionist policies. **Why was Hirohito given great respect?**



## SECTION 5 Assessment

### Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-quiz with vocabulary practice  
Web Code: naa-2751

#### Terms, People, and Places

1. For each term, person, or place listed at the beginning of the section, write a sentence explaining its significance.

#### Note Taking

##### 2. Reading Skill: Understand Effects

Use your completed chart to answer the Focus Question: How did Japan change in the 1920s and 1930s?

#### Comprehension and Critical Thinking

3. **Summarize** What changes occurred in Japan in the 1920s?
4. **Recognize Effects** How did nationalists respond to the Great Depression?
5. **Geography and History** What role did geography play in Japan's desire to expand its empire?
6. **Predict Consequences** Why might a nation turn to military leaders and extreme nationalists during a crisis?

#### Writing About History

**Quick Write: Decide on an Organizational Strategy** Most persuasive essays follow this organization:

- I. Introduction, including thesis statement
- II. Second-strongest argument
- III. Answer to opposing arguments
- IV. Strongest argument
- V. Conclusion

Write a thesis statement based on the content of this section, and write an outline showing how you would organize your arguments.