

## The Early History of Japanese Militarism (1867 – 1940)

### 日本軍国主義初期歴史

The Japanese people, *Nihonjin*<sup>1</sup>, with their remarkable history and civilization made Nippon a unique and distinctive model in human history in the phases of its development. This distinction had its role on the political stage reflecting the Land of the rising Sun solo pattern in local independent governance. The main fact is that The Japanese Imperial Family ruled the country from 660 BC till today<sup>2</sup>.

This majestic ruler family<sup>3</sup> is the only strain that has not been affected by fluctuations over the centuries. They remained on the head of the authority despite all fateful strategic changes through centuries. At some stages, that royalty had absolute power, whereas at other stages they were just a symbol of the Japanese's majestic divinity and didn't have any effect on crucial decisions.

Japan does not only belong to the Asian continent geographically, but it is also unique in its religious, historical, social, and economic facets. However, in modern history, its political experience in modernization is differentiated from the rest of the Asian experiences because it was able to build its first revival retrofit in the nineteenth century without falling under Western colonialism. The Empire of Japan later controlled the resources of the defeated countries basing it on sparkling slogans, in a way that the “modernization” turned into subordination that serves the colonizer.

Nippon was a feudal country<sup>4</sup> threatened by Western colonialism, supported by its superior military arsenal. The Western brutal expansion defeated most of the peoples

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<sup>1</sup> Nanta, Arnaud (2008). "Physical Anthropology and the Reconstruction of Japanese Identity in Postcolonial Japan". *Social Science Japan Journal*. 11 (1): 29–47. doi:10.1093/ssjj/jyn019

<sup>2</sup> Asakawa., Kan'ichi (1903). *The early institutional life of Japan: a study in the reform of 645 A.D.* Cambridge: Harvard University.

[https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_K1MuAAAAYAAJ/page/n36/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_K1MuAAAAYAAJ/page/n36/mode/2up)

<sup>3</sup> *The Japanese monarchy is the world's oldest. Learn about its history—and its future.* (2019, April 29). National Geographic. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/topics/reference/japanese-monarchy/>

<sup>4</sup> Beasley, W. (2019, August 26). *Feudalism in medieval Japan.* World History Encyclopedia. <https://www.ancient.eu/article/1438/feudalism-in-medieval-japan/>

and nations of the world, then assigned Europe as the commandment of the third world countries and their fortunes.

Facing this Western crucial threat, most of the leaders in the Japanese Clans adopted the idea of Rationalism, where the goal was to convert their tribes into a Nation, defended by a strong modernized army, based on an industrialized economy.

## 1. Meiji Restoration

Within this situation, the enlightened Emperor Meiji<sup>5</sup> came to power in the year 1868<sup>6</sup>. The modern renaissance of Japan initiated due to *Meiji Ishin*<sup>7</sup>, thus became the first non-Western nation that stood equal to the colonial powers, while in turn embracing the imperialist policy toward neighboring countries.

Japan benefited from the presence of this loving leader of his people, who also gained a loyal group of councilors who formed an integrated team aiming at serving the Japanese nation following the principle of *Kokutai*<sup>8</sup> religious roots<sup>9</sup>, where the emperor was the head of state - family *Kokka Shugi*<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> **Meiji Tennō**, personal name Mutsuhito, (1852 - 1912), emperor of Japan from 1867 to 1912, during whose reign Japan was dramatically transformed from a feudal country into one of the great powers of the modern world.

Keene, Donald (2002), *Emperor of Japan: Meiji and His World, 1852–1912*, Columbia University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Karube, Tadashi (2019). *Toward the Meiji Revolution: The Search for "Civilization" in Nineteenth-Century Japan*. Tokyo: Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture.

<sup>7</sup> Marius B Jansen (1994). *Sakamoto Ryōma and the Meiji Restoration*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) pp. 312 – 346.

<sup>8</sup> Antoni, Klaus (2016). *Political Shintō from Early-Modern to Contemporary Japan*. Eberhard Karls University Tuebingen, Tobias-lib.

<sup>9</sup> Brownlee John S. (2000). *Four stages of the Japanese Kokutai*. Paper for the University of British Columbia: JSAC Conference, October. URL: <http://www.adilegian.com/PDF/brownlee.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Taniguchi, Masaharu (1938), *Yo no kokka shugi, Tōkyō: Kōmyō Shisō Fukyūkai*.

Online edition:

*Yo no kokka shugi*. (n.d.). The Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/98840854/>

The *Genrō*<sup>11</sup> around the emperor were descendants from the old Samurai class<sup>12</sup>, who had given up their previous privileges to engage in nation-building quest. Eventually, they had a leading role in the military, education, and the creation of a new culture.

Emperor Meiji's assistants met a series of goals endeavored to realize them. Among these goals were:

- 1/ Unification of power under one banner of the Empire.
- 2/ Developing society.
- 3/ Modernization of industry, and the creation of heavy industry.
- 4/ Establishing a strong army according to Western modern standards.
- 5/ Abolition of unfair agreements with the colonial powers.

## 2. The Birth of Japanese Militarism

The first goal was achieved with the beginning of the imperial era where Japan was united under a single state, whose capital was Tokyo<sup>13</sup>. Japan began its avid assimilation of Western civilization. Buildings made of stone and bricks were built on the sites of the mansions of feudal lords, and the major roads were paved with round stones. In 1869 Japan's first telecommunications line was opened between Tokyo and Yokohama, and the first steam locomotive started running in 1872 from Shimbashi to Yokohama. Western hairstyles replaced the traditional topknot<sup>14</sup> worn by men, and bowler hats, high collars, and bustled skirts were the height of fashion.

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<sup>11</sup> **Genrō** was an unofficial designation given to certain retired elder Japanese statesmen, considered the "founding fathers" of modern Japan, who served as informal extraconstitutional advisors to the emperor, during the Meiji, Taishō, and Shōwa periods in Japanese history.

Gordon, Andrew (2003). *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>12</sup> **Samurai**, a member of the Japanese warrior caste. The term samurai was originally used to denote the aristocratic warriors (*bushi*), but it came to apply to all the members of the warrior class that rose to power in the 12th century and dominated the Japanese government until the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

Hubbard, Ben (2015). *The Samurai Warrior: The Golden Age of Japan's Elite Warriors 1560–1615*. London: Amber Books.

<sup>13</sup> Akio Kamiko, *Implementation of the City Law and the Town and Village Law (1881–1908)*. Historical Development of Japanese Local Governance Vol. 2.

[www.grips.ac.jp/~coslog/activity/01/05/file/Seiritsu-2\\_en.pdf](http://www.grips.ac.jp/~coslog/activity/01/05/file/Seiritsu-2_en.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Mageo, Jeannette (1999). *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures: Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures*. *American Anthropologist*. 101 (3): 676–677. doi:10.1525/aa.1999.101.3.676.

In 1882 Japan's first zoological gardens were opened in Ueno. In 1885 the cabinet system of government was adopted. With the promulgation of the Constitution of the Empire of Japan in 1889, Japan established the political system of a modern state.

The Meiji reform commenced through a series of Imperial laws that targeted the second goal, which was the Japanese society revival. The community culture was reflected in the level of education among children. The second target abolition of class distinctions, in addition to parliamentary life under a modern constitution that guaranteed the right of political practice for the citizens<sup>15</sup>.

On the educational front<sup>16</sup>, the results were spectacular. It is noticed the lack of literacy among the younger age groups by the year 1910 because of the great reform through the improved educational system, which was based on the establishment of schools and universities. The Meiji government's decision to create a centralized school system can be seen in the context of two broad transformations in the concept and practice of education that have occurred worldwide in the last 400 years. The first is the widespread proliferation of educational institutions for commoners. This transformation occurred first in Western Europe and North America during the 17th and 18th centuries, when clergy and local elites, convinced that a limited education for local masses would have a positive effect upon the moral climate and the level of religious devotion in their communities, established schools for local children. Meanwhile, the expansion of the written word into the social and economic lives of ordinary people enabled them to conceive of the potential value of such schools<sup>17</sup>. The breakthrough was sending missions to the West to learn the modern scientific methods, in addition to bringing foreign expertise *O-yatoi Gaikokujin*<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Beasley, William G. (1995). *The Rise of Modern Japan: Political, Economic and Social Change since 1850*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

<sup>16</sup> Yamasaki, Yoko. "The impact of Western progressive educational ideas in Japan: 1868–1940", *History of Education*, September 2010, Vol. 39 Issue 5, pp 575–588.

<sup>17</sup> Brian Platt, "Educational Reform in Japan (19th c.)," in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #125, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/cyh/items/show/125> (accessed March 26, 2020).

<sup>18</sup> Hazel J. Jones (1980). *Live Machines: Hired Foreigners and Meiji Japan*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

As for equality in local society, the old class system was abolished, that strict system characterized the Japanese people as<sup>19</sup>:

- 1- *Ryōmin* (lit: good citizens): were the upper-class, divided into the four following subcastes:
  - a- *Kanjin*: government officials.
  - b- *Kōmin*: citizens.
  - c- *Shinabe*: professionals and tradesmen relevant to court functions.
  - d- *Zakko*: tradesmen, especially those relevant to the military, are considered of a lower class than the previous three.
  
- 2- The *Senmin* (lit: low citizens) were the lower-class, divided into the five following subcastes:
  - a- *Ryōko*: dedicated to the imperial family or guards of imperial tombs.
  - b- *Kanko*: dedicated to public ministries.
  - c- *Kenin*: servants of high-ranking families.
  - d- *Kunuhi*: slaves of the court.
  - e- *Shinobi*: slaves of families.

That radical change allowed all individuals to elevate on the social scale. The individual initiative was strengthened and served the community where all the Japanese citizens *Nihonjin*<sup>20</sup> were able to gain higher posts in serving the Japanese state *Kokka*.

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<sup>19</sup> Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko (1993). *Rice as Self: Japanese Identities through Time*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,

<sup>20</sup> Minahan, James B. (2014). *Ethnic Groups of North, East, and Central Asia: An Encyclopedia*. ABC-CLIO, pp. 231–233.

As for the parliamentary democratic activation, beginning from the first quarter of 1868, Emperor Meiji issued the Five Principles of Reform<sup>21</sup> OATH<sup>22</sup>, which were a significant leap in the Japanese political life<sup>23</sup>, in which it thrived especially in the preparation to declare the Japanese Constitution *Dai-Nippon Teikoku Kenpō*<sup>24</sup> that was presented by Emperor Meiji himself on February 11, 1889<sup>25</sup>.

The Constitution was a double-edged sword for Japanese political elites. Although it was inspired by the Western constitutions, it stressed the sanctity of the emperor with the lack of accountability, in addition to giving the priority to the benefit of the Japanese nation. This nationalism transformed Japan from a Western model of democracy to a democratic state that served the supreme interest of Imperial ambition.

The third goal was the industrial modernization<sup>26</sup>. The initial development began by supporting the traditional industries, especially the textile industry with both types of cotton and silk by importing high-tech machines from Europe to improve the quality of the local production under the direct supervision of European engineers. That was the beginning of the government's support for the private sector.

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<sup>21</sup> McLaren, W. W. (1979). *Japanese Government Documents*. Bethesda, Md.: University Publications of America.

<sup>22</sup> 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 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 open discussion.*
2. *All classes, high and low, shall be united in vigorously carrying out the administration of affairs of state.*
3. *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.*
4. *Evil customs of the past shall be broken off and everything is based upon the just laws of Nature.*
5. *Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundation of imperial rule.”*

<sup>23</sup> Beasley, William G. (1972). *The Meiji Restoration*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

<sup>24</sup> Matsui, Shigenori (2011). *The Constitution of Japan: A Contextual Analysis*. Oxford: Hart Publishing.

<sup>25</sup> Kokaze, Hidemasa (2011). “*The Political Space of Meiji 22 (1889): The Promulgation of the Constitution and the Birth of the Nation*”. *Japan Review*. 3: 119.

<sup>26</sup> Sugihara, Shiro and Tanaka, Toshihiro eds. (1998). *Economic Thought and Modernization in Japan*. Cheltenham UK: Edward Elgar.

Economic reforms included a unified modern currency based on the yen, banking, commercial and tax laws, stock exchanges, and a communications network. The establishment of a modern institutional framework conducive to an advanced capitalist economy took time but was completed by the 1890s. By this time, the government had largely relinquished direct control of the modernization process, primarily for budgetary reasons. Many of the former *daimyo*, whose pensions had been paid in a lump sum, benefited greatly through investments they made in emerging industries. Those who had been informally involved in foreign trade before the Meiji Restoration also flourished. Old *bakufu*-serving firms that clung to their traditional ways failed in the new business environment.

This approach initiated the interest in the Heavy Industry and begin a new phase of manufacturing in military service, where most of the new industries were in collaboration with the army headquarters. The factories of gunpowder, iron and shipbuilding and Petrochemical industries were set up, followed in a later stage by the establishment of cannon factories, in addition to its accessories and special munitions factories, its final purpose was promoting the Japanese combat capabilities. All that was under the slogan of “rich country strong army” *Fukoku kyōhei*<sup>27</sup> that fiscal *Zaibatsu* monopolies adopted<sup>28</sup>.

*Zaibatsu* was an integration of a range of institutions in a single company. According to the Holding system (stock), it has consisted of the alliance between Emperor and his entourage on one side, and the Japanese businessmen on the other side<sup>29</sup>. The national goal was to steer the Japanese economy in line with the national revival and modernization of the army.

The fourth objective was to build a modern army capable of defending the Japanese territories and to confront the West colonial threats. Japan, meanwhile, was a primitive state on the military scale. The Opium War<sup>30</sup> between Britain and China

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<sup>27</sup> Obispo, Joanna Luisa. (2017). Japan's Fukoku Kyohei: A Continuous Pursuit of Economic and Military Powers. 9, 56-80.

<sup>28</sup> Schenkein, Joshua (2014). *Japan, the Great Power: Industrialization through the Lens of Zaibatsu Firm Characteristics*. Amazon; 1 edition (September 20, 2014).

<sup>29</sup> Morck, Randall & Nakamura, Masao. (2007). *Business Groups and the Big Push: Meiji Japan's Mass Privatization and Subsequent Growth*. National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc, NBER Working Papers.

<sup>30</sup> Melancon, Glenn. "Honour in Opium? The British Declaration of War on China, 1839–1840." *International History Review* 21.4 (1999): 855–874.

the closest example to the Japanese people, where the superiority of Western firearms appeared imposing the opium trade on defeated China, which fought with primitive weapons, mostly white arms.

Under the Meiji government, the reform leaders brought French missions for founders the Japanese Imperial Army *Dai-Nippon Teikoku Rikugun*<sup>31</sup>. The Japanese armed forces were commanded by the samurai, while all the Japanese citizens were allowed to join it and then upgrade within the military ranks. After the French initial foundation, the Imperial army adopted the German thought of direct combat tactics, to become a regional power that every state feared.

Japanese leaders reckoned with a self-term policy to get rid of the unfair agreements that were imposed on Nippon starting from 1854. The Japanese military modernization had a big role in amending those agreements.

Britain was ahead of countries that have concluded agreements with the new Japanese Empire in 1894<sup>32</sup>, then followed by 14 other nations. Britain was not only content with trade treaties, but rather signed a strategic alliance treaty with Japan in 1902, the Japanese ambitions started to play a role in the regional and international arenas.

The Korean protectorate<sup>33</sup> was the epicenter of explosives in East Asia<sup>34</sup>. Proceeding confrontation with China occurred<sup>35</sup>, and the defense of the Japanese expansion led to the clash with Tsarist Russia, where the Russo-Japanese War<sup>36</sup> waged between the most modern in Asia, versus the least developed nation in Europe.

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<sup>31</sup> Drea, Edward J. (1998). *In the Service of the Emperor: Essays on the Imperial Japanese Army*. University of Nebraska Press.

<sup>32</sup> Daniels, Gordon, Janet Hunter, Ian Nish, and David Steeds. (2003). *Studies in the Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902-1923)*. London School of Economics (LSE), Suntory and Toyota International Centres for Economics and Related Disciplines (STICERD) Paper No. IS/2003/443.

<sup>33</sup> Tamaki, Taku (2010). *Deconstructing Japan's Image of South Korea: Identity in Foreign Policy*. Berlin: Springer.

<sup>34</sup> Hilary Conroy, *The Japanese Seizure of Korea, 1868-1910: A Study of Realism and Idealism in International Relations* (1960). pp 494-96.

<sup>35</sup> Paine, S.C.M (2003). *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>36</sup> Connaughton, R. M. (1988). *The War of the Rising Sun and the Tumbling Bear—A Military History of the Russo-Japanese War 1904–5*. London: Hachette UK.



For the first time, an Eastern state has been able to defeat the Western force, triggering a wave of joy within each people submitted under Western colonization.

Britain, despite its declaration of neutrality in that war, provided support to its ally Japan, which contributed to the Asian victory. The British intelligence informed the Japanese navy of the movement of Russian warships “in case of vision”<sup>37</sup>. The Royal Navy (RN) had a role in the prevention of the Russian Black Sea Fleet from crossing the Dardanelles in collaboration with the Ottoman Empire. That had an impact on the balance of military forces and accelerated the Russian response to accept the initiative of US President Roosevelt<sup>38</sup>, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in honor of his role in resolving that conflict<sup>39</sup>.

Emperor Meiji died in 1912 after he converted his country from a feudal state with primitive agriculture to a sophisticated imperialist empire that contained all the elements of a state *Kokka*.

By the end of the Meiji era, Nippon had all the elements of regional and international power. Internally, it lived a civilization and enlightenment era *Bunmei Kaika*<sup>40</sup> through a cultural renaissance accompanied by modern heavy industries that created a strong army able to protect the country.

### 3. The Rise of Military Political Influence

When the Meiji period ended in 1912, his son Emperor Taisho<sup>41</sup> succeeded him. Then, the Japanese nation achieved its primary objectives, adding the ambition to play a strategic role in the international scene.

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<sup>37</sup> Credland, Arthur (2004). *North Sea Incident*. Hull: Hull Museums and Galleries.

<sup>38</sup> Tilchin, William, “*The Rising Star of Theodore Roosevelt's Diplomacy: Major Studies from Beale to the Present.*” *Theodore Roosevelt Association Journal* 15#3 (Summer 1989):2–24.

<sup>39</sup> The Nobel Peace Prize 1906. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB 2020. Sat. 21 Mar 2020. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1906/summary/>

<sup>40</sup> *The neutral reflection of westernization: Women in the Rokumeikan · Bunmei Kaika: Japan's balance between westernization and traditional values · Japan's samurai revolution.* (n.d.). Site Information · Japan's Samurai Revolution. <https://samurairevolution.omeka.net/exhibits/show/olc/olc>

<sup>41</sup> **Taishō Emperor, Yoshihito** (1879–1926). It followed the Meiji period and represented a continuation of Japan's rise on the international scene and liberalism at home. Politically, the country moved toward a broader representational government.

Externally, this force created a nationalist chauvinist ideology with the ambition to play an imperial role on the East Asia stage and enabled Nippon to participate in the First World War expanding its regional influence.

The reign of Emperor Meiji ended at a time when Japan turned into a major regional power aspired to play an important role at the international theater. From this ambition, Japan participated in the First World War. In August 1914 at the outbreak of World War I, Japan, deciding to honor the terms of its 1902 alliance with Great Britain, declared war on Germany despite deep misgivings among many in the government and army, who felt Germany would prevail. The war in Europe quickly became a stalemate along the Western Front, with both sides dug into trenches, unable to achieve a decisive victory<sup>42</sup>.

Despite this military action, Japan lived a period of liberalism in the reign of Emperor Taisho in what was called: **Taisho Democracy**.

By the ruling of Emperor Yoshihito to succeed his father, the central authority, represented in the person of the emperor, was relieved. The citizens began to advocate a Japanese model of democracy called: *Minpon-shugi* (The Democratic Application of Sovereignty)<sup>43</sup> which was different from the Western model representing the absolute democracy, where the rule belongs to the voters *Minshu-shugi* (The Sovereignty of the People)<sup>44</sup>.

Based on these general principles the democratized partisan governments were rolled, and Japan lived a period of economic prosperity, taking advantage of its regional expansion, which earned it new territory. Including the primary ores, as well as new markets for Japanese goods.

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Young A Morgan (2010). *Japan Under Taisho Tenno: 1912-1926*, London: Routledge.

<sup>42</sup> Ian H. Nish, "Japan's policies toward Britain," in James William Morley, ed., *Japan's Foreign Policy: 1868-1941* (1974) pp 184-235.

<sup>43</sup>Yoshino Sakuzō. "On the Meaning of Constitutional Government and the Methods by Which It Can Be Perfected." (Kensei No Hongi O Toite Sono Yūshū No Bi O Seisu No To O Ronzu). 1916. In *Sources of Japanese Tradition, Abridged: Part 2: 1868 to 2000*. Compiled by Wm. Theodore DeBary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur E. Tiedemann. 2nd edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. 168-9.

<sup>44</sup> De Bary Theodore (2006). *Sources of Japanese Tradition, Abridged: 1600 to 2000*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 167

The constitutional concept prevailed at home and imperialism towards the neighboring territories. “Constitutionalism at home, Imperialism abroad”<sup>45</sup> meant that all the state institutions, such as the militaristic, political, economic, and educational systems were harnessed for the construction of an expansive state supported by a modern army.

Meanwhile, Japanese diplomacy had been active to promote imperial prestige on the global stage. Japan was one of the main victorious countries where it was involved in the Versailles conference<sup>46</sup>, where it contributed actively to the creation of the League of Nations (LN)<sup>47</sup> which established the global system in that historic era.

Japan also participated at the Washington Conference<sup>48</sup>, signed the treaties emanating therefrom and achieved as much as possible of the gains, to become a dominant force in East Asia and the Pacific.

At homeland, Emperor Taisho has predisposed a peaceful trend in the management of state affairs. In his reign, the principle of the supreme monarch aimed to harmonize the presumed authority of the emperor, because the parliamentary system became widespread. This quiet approach was that of his opponents within the military and financial conglomerates monopolistic. Meanwhile the economic and financial recovery in the first phase of the post-World War I kept the criticism limited<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Tsuzuki Chushichi (2000). *The Pursuit of Power in Modern Japan 1825-1995*. London: Oxford University Press. P. 185

<sup>46</sup> Paris Peace Conference, (1919–20), the meeting that inaugurated the international settlement after World War I. Duff, John B. (1968), "The Versailles Treaty and the Irish-Americans", *The Journal of American History, Organization of American Historians*, 55 (3): 582–598, [doi:10.2307/1891015](https://doi.org/10.2307/1891015).

<sup>47</sup> **League of Nations**, an organization for international cooperation established on January 10, 1920, at the initiative of the victorious Allied powers at the end of World War I.

Northedge, F.S (1986). *The League of Nations: Its Life and Times, 1920–1946*. Teaneck: Holmes & Meier.

<sup>48</sup> **Washington Naval Conference** (1921–22), an international conference called by the United States to limit the naval arms race and to work out security agreements in the Pacific area. Held in Washington, D.C., the conference resulted in the drafting and signing of several major and minor treaty agreements.

*Milestones: 1921–1936*. (n.d.). Office of the Historian. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/naval-conference>

<sup>49</sup> Smitka, Michael (1998). *Japanese Prewar Growth (Japanese Economic History 1600–1960)*. London: Routledge. p. 192.

The economic boom was soon exposed to social spasms and natural disasters that precipitated towards the end of the Taisho democracy. The first signs of inflation were the rising of the main commodity prices, especially rice, which is the main meal of the Japanese people. That triggered the Rice Riots *kome sōdōin* 1918<sup>50</sup>.

However, the harsh blow came from the Tokyo earthquake, the Great Kanto Earthquake *Kantō dai-jishin*, where 105,000 died<sup>51</sup>. Moreover, the issue of the treasury liquidation aiming to address the effects of the “Earthquake Bonds”, followed by mismanagement was the cause of the internal Financial Crisis that proceeded with the great global recession in 1929<sup>52</sup>.

**From here the most important hypothesis was highlighted, would the state strategy be affected by the variation in power?**

Health problems escalated with Emperor Taisho, and his son Hirohito was the Crown Prince, so he exercised a lot of his father's duties throughout the years 1921-1926 until he officially took over the government.

Taisho democracy<sup>53</sup> ended during the reign of its emperor; Peace Preservation Law *Chian Keisatsu Hō* was issued in 1925<sup>54</sup> to counter the leftist tide in Japanese society.

Cultural and labor milieus in Japan conveyed the triumph of the Bolshevik revolution<sup>55</sup> against the House of Romanov<sup>56</sup>, then the establishment of

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<sup>50</sup> MacPherson, WJ (1995). *The Economic Development of Japan 1868–1941*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>51</sup> Borland, Janet (May 2005). "Stories of ideal Japanese subjects from the great Kantō earthquake of 1923". *Japanese Studies*. 25 (1): 21–34. doi:10.1080/10371390500067645

<sup>52</sup> Yamamura, Kozo (1998). *The Economic Emergence of Modern Japan*. London: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>53</sup> Bernstein, Gail Lee (2008) *Japan in Crisis: Essays on Taishō Democracy*. [Issue 20 of Michigan classics in Japanese studies](#), Center for Japanese Studies, the University of Michigan.

<sup>54</sup> Minichiello, Sharon. (1984) *Retreat from Reform: Patterns of Political Behavior in Interwar Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

<sup>55</sup> Daly, Jonathan, and Leonid Trofimov, eds (2009). *Russia in War and Revolution, 1914-1922: A Documentary History*. MA: Hackett Publishing Company.

<sup>56</sup> Massie, Robert K. (2012). *The Romanovs: The Final Chapter*. New York: Random House.

the Soviet Union. The USSR created the International Communist Organization *Comintern*<sup>57</sup> to publish socialist ideas around the world.

As a result of external activation and Interior reactivity, the Japanese Communist Party *Nihon Kyosantō*<sup>58</sup> was established, which then attracted many syndicates and student groups<sup>59</sup>.

#### 4. Japanese Militarism Era, *Nihon gunkoku shugi*

When Emperor Hirohito<sup>60</sup> officially took over the throne, imperialism was in theoretical power again. The ritual of his appointment on the throne presented him as Living Deity *Arahitogami*<sup>61</sup>, in addition to being the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces *Dai-gensui*<sup>62</sup>. By that, the emperor restored the full absolute power, supported by financial monopolies *Zaibatsu*<sup>63</sup>. The serious work began for the militarization of the Japanese society *Nihon gunkoku shugi*<sup>64</sup>.

At the beginning of the Showa Period *Shōwa jidai*<sup>65</sup>, Japan was suffering from a severe economic crisis, which affected the internal balance with the emergence of a military tendency calling for external expansion, which was long suppressed by the democracy partisan governments. The Japanese foreign policy began gradually to transform from a positive neutrality policy to direct intervention in the affairs of neighboring countries.

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<sup>57</sup> Lazitch, Branko; Milorad M. Drachkovitch (1986). *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*. New York: Hoover Press.

<sup>58</sup> *A profile of the Japanese Communist Party/2011*. (n.d.). 日本共産党.

[https://www.jcp.or.jp/english/what\\_jcp.html](https://www.jcp.or.jp/english/what_jcp.html)

<sup>59</sup> R. Swearingen and P. Langer (1952) *Red Flag in Japan: International Communism in Action, 1919–1951*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>60</sup> **Hirohito**, original name Michinomiya Hirohito, posthumous name Shōwa, (born April 29, 1901, Tokyo, Japan—died January 7, 1989, Tokyo), emperor of Japan from 1926 until his death in 1989. He was the longest-reigning monarch in Japan's history.

Bix, Herbert P. (2000). *Hirohito And the Making Of Modern Japan*. New York: Harper.

<sup>61</sup> *Aston, William George* (1896). *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697. I*. London: *Japan Society of London.*, English translation, *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697*. 2 vols. Kegan Paul.

<sup>62</sup> Drea, Edward J. (1998). *In the Service of the Emperor: Essays on the Imperial Japanese Army*, California: University of Nebraska Press, p. 277.

<sup>63</sup> Schenkein, Joshua (2014). *Japan, the Great Power: Industrialization Through the Lens of Zaibatsu Firm Characteristics*. Amazon; 1 edition (September 20, 2014).

<sup>64</sup> Dower, John W. (1995). *Japan in War & Peace*. New York: The New Press.

<sup>65</sup> Nakamura, Takafusa (1998). *A History of Shōwa Japan, 1926-1989*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.

With the investiture of Emperor Hirohito, the militarism of the Japanese state reached its full extent where the Great Empire of Japan *Dai Nippon Teikoku*<sup>66</sup> which was the first Non-Western imperialist country that had a powerful economy and advanced army<sup>67</sup>.

The imperial Japanese war phase was characterized by severe interference in the political, economic, and military factors, accompanied by the internal political difference on overseas expansion strategy.

Japanese power of different political orientations endeavored to serve the emperor and then the Japanese nation. Among that overlap the ideological conflict at the political level was overwhelming, and both litigants strove to the emperor's satisfaction.

The supporters of the supreme monarch theory *Tenno Kikanseru*<sup>68</sup> looked at the emperor as the ultimate symbol of the state. The consideration of the new leaders *Jushin*<sup>69</sup> heirs of *Genro*, was that he was the deity god. Thus, similar liberal ideas and it is contradictory militant ideas meet on the importance of the emperor as the head of state. When the ideological conflict switched from the political arena to the military institution, the two parties collided on issues of expanding, rather than increment or cessation.

The Control Faction *Tōseiha*<sup>70</sup> supported by bureaucrats and veterans had been seeking to build modern Japan, protected by an advanced army which would not only defend the motherland but also protect the colonies in Taiwan and Korea, also the multi-friendly nations in the land of the continent, especially *Manchukuo*<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Duus, Peter, Ramon H. Myers, Mark R. Peattie (2010). *The Japanese Wartime Empire, 1931-1945*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

<sup>67</sup> Keene, Donald (2002). *Emperor of Japan: Meiji and His World, 1852–1912*. New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>68</sup> Sansom, George Bailey (1978). *Japan: A Short Cultural History*. California: Stanford University Press.

<sup>69</sup> MacArthur Douglas (1966). *Reports of General MacArthur*. Washington: United States Department of the Army.

<sup>70</sup> Harries, Meirion (1994). *Soldiers of the Sun: The Rise and Fall of the Imperial Japanese Army*. New York: Random House.

<sup>71</sup> **Empire of Manchuria**, after 1934, was a puppet state of the Empire of Japan in Northeast China and Inner Mongolia from 1932 until 1945. It was founded in 1932 after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, and in 1934 it became a constitutional monarchy. Under the de facto control of Japan, it had limited international recognition.

Nanking- Republic of China, *Mengkukuo*<sup>72</sup> and other puppet nations which allied with Japan in Southeast Asia.

On the other hand, the Imperial Way Faction *Kōdōha*<sup>73</sup>, was endorsed by the junior officers and commanders. Those were the most extreme, aimed to increase military expansion towards the north where the Soviet Union, and south, towards the Western European colonies.

The two sides agreed to enhance the fighting capabilities of the Japanese army, but the difference was on how, where and when the next expansion will be. Although the assassinations and arrests exchanged between the two groups, the moment of truth was the intervention of Emperor Hirohito personally after February 26, 1936, *Ni-Ni Roku Jiken* incident<sup>74</sup> for the benefit of the veteran's wisdom of *Tōseiha*<sup>75</sup>.

The control of the right-wing currents on the intellectual and political arenas was clear because of the pressure that the leftist was faced, and the cruelty in dealing with its leaders and individuals.

The attention was oriented toward the populist mobilization of the masses in favor of internal militarization and foreign imperialism.

Journalism and arts, in general, played a prominent role in popular mobilization, then began work on the younger generations, and a booklet was issued highlighting the main principles of Japanese nationalism and uniqueness *Kokutai no Hongi*<sup>76</sup>. It printed millions of copies and was distributed to

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Jowett, Philip (2004). *Rays of the Rising Sun, Japan's Asian Allies 1931–45, China, and Manchukuo*. Warwick: Helion and Company Ltd.

<sup>72</sup>**Mongol United Autonomous Government** was an autonomous area in Inner Mongolia, formed in 1939 as a puppet state of the Empire of Japan, then from 1940 being under the nominal sovereignty of the Reorganized National Government of the Republic of China (which was itself a puppet state). It consisted of the previously Chinese provinces of Chahar and Suiyuan.

Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Sims, Richard (2001). *Japanese Political History since the Meiji Renovation 1868–2000*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>74</sup> Shillony, Ben-Ami (1973). *Revolt in Japan: The Young Officers and the February 26, 1936, Incident*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

<sup>75</sup> Meirion (1994) op. cit.

<sup>76</sup> Kitagawa, Joseph M. "The Japanese Kokutai (National Community) History and Myth", *History of Religions*, Vol. 13.3 (Feb. 1974), pp. 209–226.

schools in the homeland and the colonies to raise generations on the love of the emperor and the preference of the group over the individual<sup>77</sup>.

By the outbreak of war on the Chinese mainland, Japanese society directed towards full militarization, especially with the issuance of National Mobilization Law *Kokka Sōdōin Hō*<sup>78</sup> which enabled the army to control the manpower and natural resources, industrial production, and the flow of money. At the same time, the government passed a law imposing censorship on media and unwanted public meetings<sup>79</sup>.

Militarization had all the Japanese corners spread throughout Federations villages, neighborhood associations, and paramilitary organizations. Finally, militarization garlanded by a decree the abolition of political parties in Japan in July 1940 when Japan became a fully Totalitarian State<sup>80</sup>.

US provocative pressure by imposition the trade restrictions and the freezing of deposits reached a full oil embargo. The Japanese popular response aimed to enhance the attachment to its imperial policies, the national slogans permeated which most of the population responded in an extreme nationalist fervor. Among the most important of these logos was Wish Nothing until Victory, *Hakkō ichiu*<sup>81</sup>, and the famous Luxury is the enemy<sup>82</sup>.

The hypothesis of the militarization of the Japanese Empire was very clear in the interwar period and was the product of the national environment, as well as its global counterparts, where the nationalist thought to spread in different parts of the globe, especially in Europe.

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<sup>77</sup> Gauntlett, John Owen and Hall, Robert King (1949) *Kokutai no hongii: cardinal principles of the national entity of Japan*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

<sup>78</sup> Lucken, Michael (2017). *The Japanese and the War: Expectation, Perception, and the Shaping of Memory*. New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>79</sup> Uyehara Cecil H. (2009). *The Subversive Activities Prevention Law of Japan*. Amsterdam: BRILL.

<sup>80</sup> Jansen, Marius B.; John Whitney Hall; Madoka Kanai; Denis Twitchett (1989). *The Cambridge History of Japan*. London: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>81</sup> Brownlee, John (1997). *Japanese Historians and the National Myths, 1600–1945: The Age of the Gods*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

<sup>82</sup> 戦前のスローガン「ぜいたくは敵だ！



Proceeding from the militarization hypothesis we can understand the convergence of foreign interests of Japan with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy to create the Axis powers *Sūjīkukoku*<sup>83</sup> against Communist expansion and compete with the Anglo-Saxon alliance.

## 5. Closure, Sealed Path towards WWII

**Here, the systematic question is the following: Did Imperial Japan present the absolute imperialism Asian?**

There is no doubt that the Japanese leaders had their expansion aspirations which took advantage of the existence of absolute power in the hand of the emperor and financial monopolies to strive and open new markets for their products where the new Zaibatsu appeared representatives by *Nissan Konzern* in Manchuria and *Nitchitsu Konzern* in Korea<sup>84</sup>.

There were several benefits from the bounties of these two countries and then a look forward towards a huge consumer market In China.

China was in a state of instability, especially with the outbreak of the conflict between the Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek<sup>85</sup> and the Communists led by Mao Tse-tung<sup>86</sup>, in addition to the presence of tens of warlords who controlled

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<sup>83</sup> *Tripartite pact and associated documents*. (n.d.). Avalon Project - Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject\\_menus/trimenu.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/trimenu.asp)

<sup>84</sup> Molony, Barbara (1990). *Technology and Investment: The Prewar Japanese Chemical Industry*. Harvard: Asia Center.

<sup>85</sup> **Chiang Chung-cheng**, (1887- 1975), soldier and statesman, head of the Nationalist government in China from 1928 to 1949 and subsequently head of the Chinese Nationalist government in exile in Taiwan. Taylor, Jay. (2009). *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China*. Massachusetts: Belknap Press.

<sup>86</sup> **Mao Tse-tung** (1893- 1976), principal Chinese Marxist theorist, soldier, and statesman who led his country's communist revolution. Mao was the leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from 1935 until his death, and he was chairman (chief of state) of the People's Republic of China from 1949 to 1959 and chairman of the party also until his death.

Chang, Jung; Halliday, Jon (2005). *Mao: The Unknown Story*. London: Jonathan Cape.

some areas in a way that their territories were larger than several European countries combined.

Although the Han race presented most of China's population, the Chinese community was made up of 56 ethnic groups that were all recognized by the state, except for some other small minorities. Most of the warlords were the leaders of these ethnic groups. A Civil war waged on the land of East Asia, where everyone was fighting, and sometimes some allied with their opponents and sometimes, raging battles took place among people of the same ethnic group.

No one can deny that the Japanese expansionist ambitions toward the Asian mainland, but the conflict between the Chinese Nationalists and Communists was fateful for both parties more than the Japanese invasion. Soviet leader Joseph Stalin played an essential role of intimidation for the unity of the Chinese formal grade to confront the Japanese intervention; its goal was to attrition the Japanese military capabilities, and thus pushed back the imperial threat from the Siberian border of the Soviet Union.

The Japanese built an alliance with the local Chinese powers, especially with the nearby ethnicities like Mancho and Mangol. They established a new relationship with the ethnics in south China in Southern Advance the stage where its advantages met with Igor and Pashtek and Tagicin middle Asia<sup>87</sup>.

As for the establishment of The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere *Dai Tōa Kyōeiken*<sup>88</sup> politically and the Yen Bloc<sup>89</sup> economically meant that the goal strategic was clear. It aimed to impose financial domination toward the colonist nations, but it was not a pure Japanese idea, it was born after the British foundation of the economic ABCD bloc *Ēbīshīdī rain*<sup>90</sup> to confront the policy to sink the

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<sup>87</sup> Beckwith, Christopher I. (2009). *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>88</sup> Matthiessen, Sven (2015). *Japanese Pan-Asianism and the Philippines from the Late Nineteenth Century to the End of World War II: Going to the Philippines Is Like Coming Home?* Amsterdam: BRILL.

<sup>89</sup> Schiltz Michael (2012). *The 'money doctors' from Japan: finance, imperialism, and the building of the Yen Bloc, 1894-1937*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center.

<sup>90</sup> **ABCD Encirclement** (1940), is an effort to discourage Japanese militarism, these nations and others stopped selling iron ore, steel, and oil to Japan, denying it the raw materials needed to continue its activities in China and French Indochina. In Japan, the government and nationalists viewed these embargoes as acts of aggression; imported

Japanese consumerism market in East Asia which was followed by the full oil embargo under the command of the United States to subject the Japanese economy.

Japan applied the Imperial policy in its foreign relations, where Imperialism was a part of the colonist struggle that included the entire world and Japan couldn't be a pigeon in the face of the imperialistic Eagles.

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oil made up about 80% of domestic consumption, without which Japan's economy, let alone its military, would grind to a halt.

Van Sant, John, Peter Mauch, Yoneyuki Sugita (2007). *Historical Dictionary of United States-Japan Relations*. Sydney: Scarecrow Press. P. 30.