

CHAPTER 3:

RISE OF MILITARISM IN JAPAN

Reasons for the Rise of Militarism in Japan How did this lead to militarism by 1932?

> UNDERLYING / LONG-TERM

- Flaws in Japanese democracy
- Resentment of the West
- Imperialism to solve economic problems

— HOW:

- Ensured that the military presence remained in the government.
- The Japanese wanted to stand up to the Western Powers, and they were more likely to use military means to prove they were equals.

> SHORT-TERM

- Weak imperial leadership
- Economic crises (Banking Crisis and Great Depression)
- Resentment with politicians
- Powerful monopolies in the zaibatsu
- Worsening income inequality

— HOW:

- Emperor was unable to check the influence of the military
- Economic crisis damaged the credibility of the civilian politicians
- The Japanese began to support the militarists who proposed annexation of foreign lands to solve Japan's economic problems.

> TRIGGER

- Emboldened military (Zhang Zuolin, Mukden, League of Blood)
- Rise of ultranationalism

— HOW:

- The militarists were emboldened to resort to violent methods because they were gaining a lot of support from the Japanese people.
- They got rid of the democratic politicians who stood in their way, allowing them to finally come to power by 1932.

LORE

JAPAN FROM 1600S

- The islands that constitute modern Japan are ruled by the shogunate (1185 to 1868).
- The shogun is a military leader, who borrows the legitimacy (the right) of the emperor to rule.
- There is no national identity of Japan at this stage (no concept of Japan as a nation). Political identity surrounds the feudal lord.
- Japanese society is a rigid social hierarchy determined at birth.
- Compared to previous shogun rule, the Tokugawa period is relatively peaceful.
- One way it accomplishes this is by a policy of isolationism = no interaction with foreign countries.
- However, this peace comes at a price as the peasants suffer due to limited land, resources and trade opportunities.
- Despite their high standing in society, samurai are also restless as, they are not able to contribute.

AMERICAN ARRIVAL (1854)

- American Commodore Matthew Perry arrives in Tokyo Bay to demand Japan trades with the West.
- The shogunate leaders agree. Why did they do so?

UNEQUAL TREATIES (1858)

- The result is known as the Unequal Treaties Regime in place from 1858.
- The shogunate cannot set its own trade tariffs (tax on traded goods), foreigners do not have to obey local law (a concept called extraterritoriality).
- The country is not seen as an equal member of international society.

MEIJI RESTORATION (1868)

- A coup (sudden, violent and unlawful seizure of power) by middle-ranking samurai removes the shogun and restores the Emperor to power.
 - Emperor establishes the Charter Oath in April which:
 - Establishes parliament;
 - Involves all classes in the government;
 - Promotes social mobility;
 - Embraces laws rather than superstitious practices;
 - Seeks knowledge from around the world for Japan
 - It adopts the motto, Fukoku Kyohei (rich country, strong army).
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MODERNISING MEIJI JAPAN

SOME CHANGES TO SOCIETY

1. Rapid wealth growth in cities like Edo
2. Daimyo surrendered lands to state
3. Building modern infrastructure
4. Trade with western economies
5. Taxation by central government
6. Social mobility – merit rather than birth Changes only benefited a limited group such as some samurai who could transition to the bureaucracy. Does not benefit the lower classes.

IMPACT ON SOCIETY

- Pts 1 to 5: Japan grew rich and prosperous very quickly. It could generate new wealth through trade and taxation. Its cities had the modern infrastructure to encourage further investment. // However, this wealth was concentrated in the cities and did not pass on to the peasantry.
- Created a new imagination of a unified Japan, desire to see Japan prosper and compete with western powers as an imperial power.

THE MEIJI RESTORATION

- In Feb 1889, Japan becomes a constitutional monarchy. Emperor remains head of state but governs by the laws/powers of the constitution.
- But, this government had two power centres – the civilians and military.
- The civilian cabinet led by the Prime Minister controlled functions of government such as foreign policy and education.
- The cabinet also consisted Ministers for the Army and Navy.
- But, the Ministers for Army and Navy reported directly to the Emperor.
- Furthermore, the military could veto any cabinet decisions.
- This was designed to accommodate the transition from military to civilian rule.
- At this early stage of Japan's democracy, only land-owning men aged above 25 are allowed to vote. Later in 1925, this is expanded to all men aged above 25.
- Women are not allowed to vote till after WWII.

FIRST SINO-JAPAN WAR, 1894

- China and Japan fought a war for 8 months over the influence of Korea.
- With its modern army and navy, Japan wins almost every battle. Qing China is completely embarrassed.
- The Treaty of Shimonoseki (Apr 1895) results in:
 - Korea moving to the Japanese sphere of influence;
 - Taiwan and Liaodong Peninsular ceded to Japan;

- China required to pay 7.5M kilograms of silver to Japan.
- The war is very popular with the Japanese people who want to see Japan as a great imperial power.

HYPOCRISY OF THE WESTERN POWERS

- The Triple Intervention (Apr 1895) - Russia, with France and Germany, demands Japan withdraw from the Liaodong Peninsula. Britain and America are silent.
- Japan is unwilling to fight three European powers and agrees to withdraw.
- In 1898, Russia signs a 25-year treaty with China to lease Port Arthur in the Liaodong Peninsula.
- Japan is outraged at the West's hypocrisy.

RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR, 1904

- Imperial tensions between Japan and Russia continued after 1898.
- Japan was prepared to cede control of Manchuria if Russia recognised Japan's right to control Korea. Russia refused.
- Japan carried out a surprise attack on Port Arthur (Manchuria) in Feb 1904. It wins by Sep 1905.
- Russia is humiliated and returns the Liaodong Peninsula to Japan. The Kwantung Army is formed to defend the peninsula.
- Russia also recognises right to control Korea. Japan fully annexes Korea in 1910.

JAPAN ON THE WORLD STAGE

- The 1905 Russo-Japanese War was the first time an Asian country had defeated a European country.
- However, the Japanese public was unhappy with the negotiations as they felt it was too lenient on Russia.
- They were unhappy that the politicians had not been able to extract monetary rewards – like after the 1894 Sino-Japanese War.
- Protests resulted in the Hibiya Incendiary Incident (1905) which killed 17 people.

DEATH OF EMPEROR MEIJI

- On 30 Jul 1912, the Meiji Emperor dies of stomach cancer.
- His reign had brought about great changes in Japan.
- He is replaced by his son Yoshihito, later known as the Taisho Emperor.

Pitstop: “Checklist” of Japan’s priorities at the end of Meiji Reign

- ❖ Be recognised as an imperial power
- ✓ Modernise the military with western hardware and training
- ✓ Prove our military abilities: defeated China (1894) and Russia (1905)
- ✓ Unquestioned influence in Korea (1910)
- ❑ BUT: Are there other territories we can occupy to prove we are a great power?
- ❑ BUT: Why won’t the West treat us with respect?

- ❖ Build a politically-stable government
- ✓ Introduce a constitution and laws
- ✓ Introduce voting rights (well, only for rich men)
- ✓ Build a national identity via compulsory education that honours the military and emperor
- ✓ Remove rigid social hierarchies
- ❑ BUT: Unhappy military-class who have lost out because of reforms

- ❖ Build a strong and sustainable economy
- ✓ Establish trade and investment with foreign powers
- ❑ But: Rising income inequality threatens society’s stability

THE DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT (1912-1930)

Japan prospers in World War I...

- Japan, now led by Taisho Emperor, joins WWI at the request of its ally Great Britain in Aug 1914.
- It occupies German territories in Shandong and Tsingtao.
- Japan benefits economically from the war as its exports increase. There is a business boom during the war.

... but faces the same struggles...

- Widespread income inequality continues between the landowners and merchants vs. peasants.
- Merchants drove prices up, and government constrained supply to support the war effort.
- Peasants often could not afford to buy the rice they had grown.
- The 1918 Rice Riots (Jul to Sep) resulted in more than 25,000 arrests.

... and international humiliation...

- Japan proposed an amendment to the LoN in Feb 1919 to be seen as an equal country in the community of nations.
- A clear majority voted for the amendment.
- However, the British interpreted this as a threat to its race-based colonial empire and rejected it. The US, not wanting to anger the British, overturned the vote.
- Japan is again rejected in its attempts to be treated as an equal nation.

... continued.

- In Feb 1922, Japan participated in the Washington Naval Conference to reduce the size of militaries – as required by the League of Nations.
- It was forced to agree to a battleship tonnage ratio of 5:5:3.

THE GREAT KANTO EARTHQUAKE (1923)

- On 1 Sept 1923, an earthquake rocks Japan.
- More than 150,000 people are dead in what became known as the Great Kanto Earthquake.
- To support businesses that had collapsed as a result of the earthquake, the government issued “earthquake bonds”.
- Study the summary of how it worked.
 - #1 After the earthquake, both firms and banks did not have money. Banks did not have cash to loan out, firms had no collateral to guarantee their loans with.

- #2 Firms signed I-Owe-'U's (IOUs or bonds) with banks, promising to pay back once the crisis was over. No collateral required.
- #3 Banks went to the government to sell the IOUs – they exchanged the value of the IOU for cash. This way, banks could also have cash.

DEATH OF TAISHO EMPEROR; REIGN OF SHOWA EMPEROR (Hirohito) (1926)

- Taisho Emperor was often unwell and did not appear in public after 1921 – only 9 years into his reign.
- Monarchy was weakened because of the lack of imperial presence.
- Showa Emperor takes over in 1926 but is about to be thrown into a tremendous economic crisis after the Kanto Earthquake.

SHOWA FINANCIAL CRISIS (1927)

- The financial crisis causes PM Reijiro to resign as his government is unable to solve the crisis.

> However, firms took advantage of the situation to turn their bad pre-earthquake debts into earthquake bonds.

- In 1927, govt asked banks to repay. The firms, and thus banks, could not. > 20 banks collapsed and bought over by big banks.
- This consolidated the banking system: from many medium-size banks to only five big zaibatsu banks which remained.

> The Big 4: Sumitomo, Mitsui, Yasuda, Mitsubishi

- The zaibatsu are now the most powerful corporations in Japan.
- By early 1929, most banks are profitable again. Until...

THE GREAT DEPRESSION (1929)

- The Great Depression wreaks havoc.
- The yen falls 50% against the dollar.
- Japan's exports are cheaper and thus businesses earn less per item sold.

This results in:

1. More than 20% additional unemployed.
2. No. of collapsed small businesses doubled.
3. Drop in farmer's income by an average of 43%.

However,

4. Zaibatsu encouraged by government to limit production. This was meant to stop falling prices of goods so factories could still profit.
5. However, this caused a rise in shortages. Workers could not afford the very goods they were producing!

Resulting in,

6. Accusations of civilian politicians' favouritism for the zaibatsu and not the people.

AN EMBOLDENED MILITARY (1930-1932)

ASSASSINATION OF ZHANG ZUOLIN (1928)

- In June 1928, the Kwantung Army assassinates the warlord Zhang Zuolin
- Zhang was a Japanese ally but had become increasingly ineffective. The Kwantung army thought they could blame the Chinese for his death.
- This would allow the Japanese a pretext for war to take over in Manchuria.
- Emperor discovers this plot and prevents war. However, neither he nor the Prime Minister can punish the plotters.

LONDON NAVAL CONFERENCE (1930)

- In April 1930, Japan negotiates a new naval disarmament treaty of 10:10:7.
- While an improvement from 1922, Japan resents the West's refusal to treat it equally.
- Japan's civilian government wanted to slash its military budget to focus on its economy and agrees.
- Prime Minister Osachi of the Minseito Party (Constitutional Democratic Party) is shot in Nov 1930. He dies in Apr 1931.
- The assassin is from the Aikokusha Secret Society. This is led by a politician from the Seiyukai party.
- He is assassinated for his "failure" at the London Naval Conference.
- This marks the start of a period of violence in Japanese politics.

THE MUKDEN INCIDENT (18 Sep 1931)

- Japanese military blows up the Mukden Railway on 18 Sep 1931.
- Just like it planned to do in 1928, it uses this as a pretext to invade Manchuria – military enacts its own foreign policy!
- Invasion of Manchuria is very popular with the public – the key to its economic woes and wounded national pride.
- In Feb 1932, the Japanese announce the puppet state of Manchukuo.
- They installed Emperor Puyi, as their puppet to do their bidding in Manchuria.
- Mar 1932 – the League of Nations condemns the invasion of Manchuria.
- Despite being a permanent member, Japan quits the League.

ASSASSINATIONS 1930-1932

- Ultrationalist groups, with the support of the militarist elements, engage in a series of political and commercial assassinations:
 - ✗ PM Hamaguchi Osachi – Nov 1930
 - ✗ Inoue (Finance Min.) – Feb 1932
 - ✗ Takuma Dan (Head of Mitsui Corp) – Mar 1932
 - ✗ PM Inukai Tsuyoshi - 15 May 1932. Perpetrators also attack the Mitsubishi Bank. This is known as the May 15 Incident.

- The judiciary received 11,000 petitions from the public to spare the 11 junior naval officers who were the perpetrators.

MAY 15 INCIDENT

- Inukai Tsuyoshi was from the Seiyukai Party.
- In the Feb 1932 general election – after the popular annexation of Manchuria – Seiyukai had won 58% of the vote.
- But Inukai was still unpopular with the ultranationalist militarist elements who did not have to report to him.
- Inukai had tried to limit military involvement in China and withheld formal recognition of Manchuria for fear of antagonizing the Americans.

26 MAY — MILITARY TAKEOVER

- Military elites prevented the Seiyukai Party from taking power though they had won the election.
 - They could do this because Cabinet could not be formed without a minister from the military.
 - The Emperor appointed Admiral Saito Makoto as PM – only 1/3 were elected officials. The remaining 2/3 were from the military.
 - Elections are temporarily suspended.
 - Japan is now under militarist rule.
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