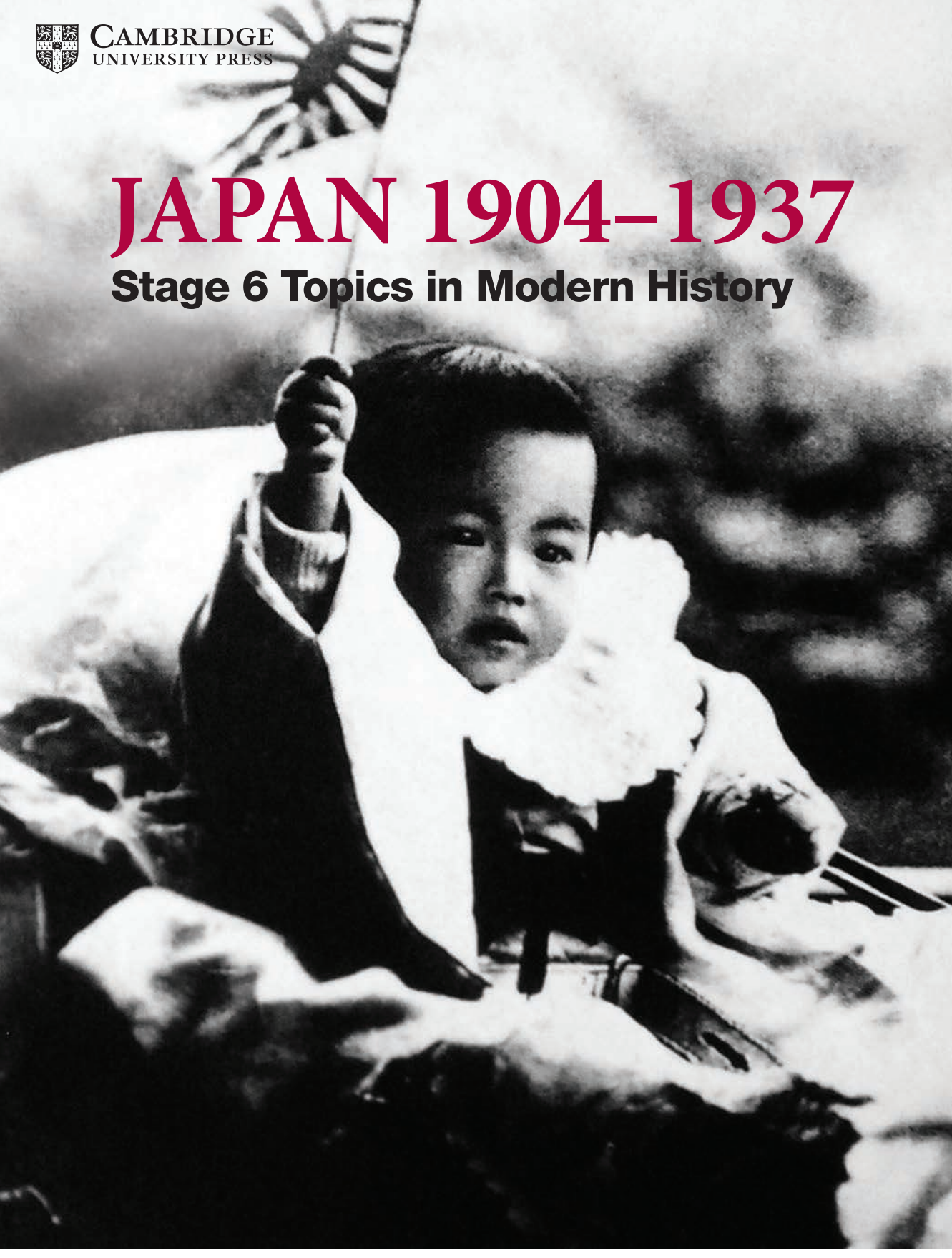
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JAPAN 1904–1937

Stage 6 Topics in Modern History



TOM DUNWOODIE

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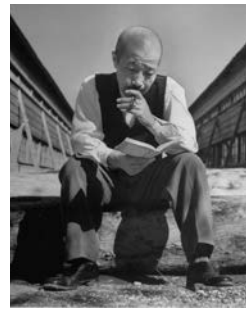
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Japanese names in this book are written family name first in keeping with Japanese convention. Please note that some Western sources may refer to these individuals with the name order reversed.

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About the author



Tom Dunwoodie

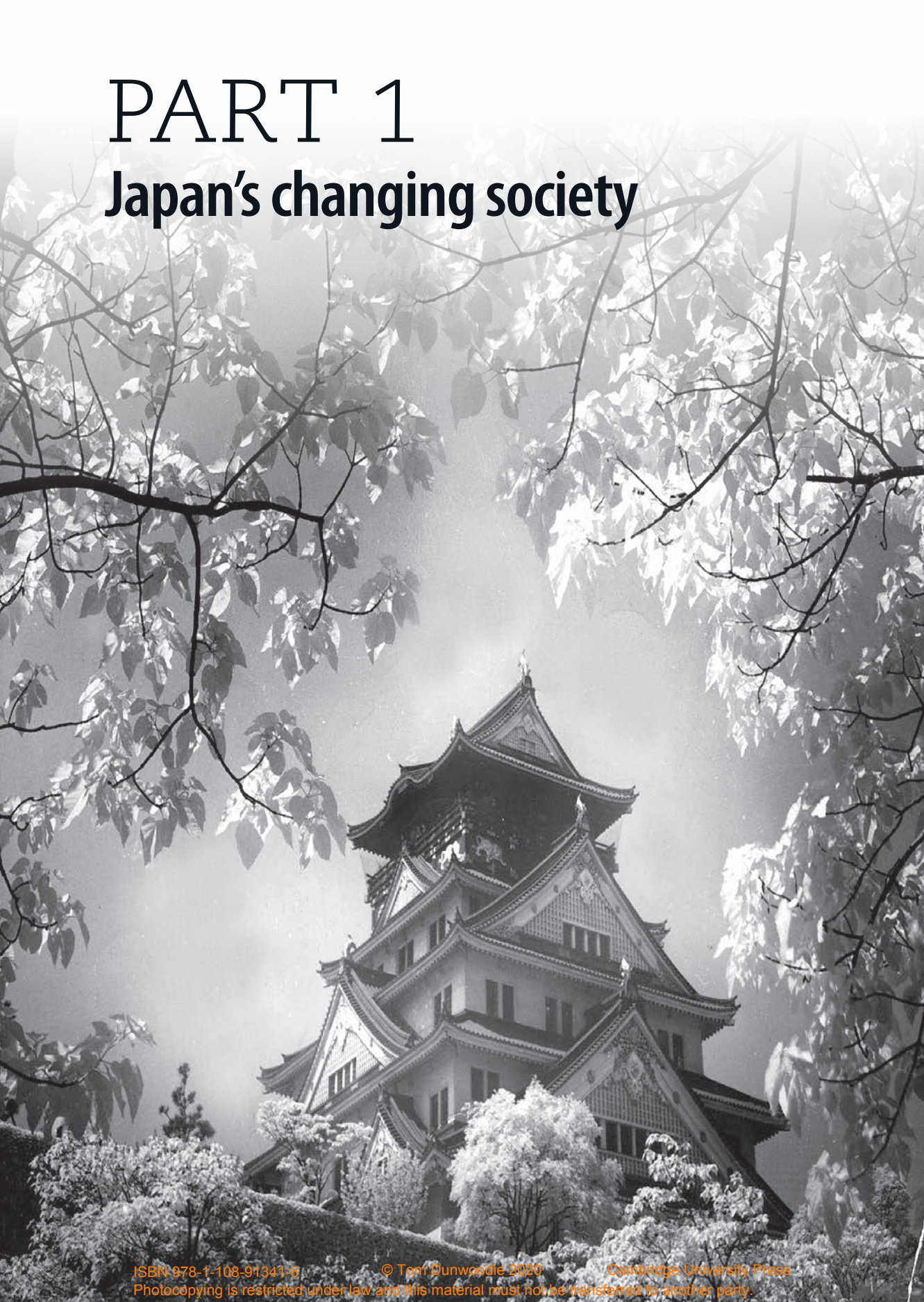
Tom Dunwoodie is currently the teacher/librarian at Trinity Catholic College in Goulburn. He has previously served as Head of History for the multi-campus M.E.T. Schools in New South Wales. As Campus Coordinator in Goulburn, Tom was lead teacher on introducing Harvard's Visible Thinking Routines, and developing a program fostering self-directed learning. He has attended several universities, most recently obtaining a Masters of Humanities in research from the University of New England, Armidale. Tom is also a co-author of Cambridge's new title *Modern History Transformed: Stage 5* and author of *Conflict in Europe 1935–1945*.

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PART 1
Japan's changing society



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1 Survey: Japan in the 1900s

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The significance of the Russo-Japanese War and the annexation of Korea
- Japan's growing status as a rising power
- Japan's participation in World War I and foreign policy with China
- The Treaty of Versailles and Washington Naval Conference
- The political, social and economic issues in Japan by 1921

CHRONOLOGY

1896	
3 June	Russia and China sign the Li–Lobanov Treaty against Japan
1902	
30 January	Anglo-Japanese Treaty signed with Great Britain
1904	
8 February	Admiral Tōgō begins a blockade of Port Arthur
1905	
January–March	Port Arthur surrenders, and Japan defeats Russian forces at Mukden
1905	
27–28 May	The naval Battle of Tsushima is fought, with the Japanese fleet victorious against the Russian fleet
1910	
22 August	Japan takes control of Korea
1914	
23 August	Japan enters World War I and captures German territories in the Pacific
1915	
18 January	Japan delivers Twenty-One Demands to China
1921–1922	
12 November–6 February	Washington Naval Conference results in Japan signing international treaties regarding war, China and limitations on shipping

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1.1 War between Russia and Japan

In the early 1900s, Russia and Japan engaged in a small war which had large consequences for the fate of both countries. **Tsar Nicholas II** looked to strengthen support for his rule through military conquest, and pursued an aggressive policy in his quest to obtain a warm-water port at Port Arthur. Russian ports froze during winter, so a large port on the edge of Asia would provide access to trade routes, and form both a defensive and offensive base for any future conflicts.

Video 1.1
Russo-Japanese War
(00:44 silent)

Japan feared this development, worried that Russia would seek territory to the south and impede Japan's own ambitions. Both countries engaged in brief negotiations, but these swiftly broke down. Japan declared war on 8 February 1904, and followed this with a surprise attack on Russian forces at Port Arthur, placing it under siege and fighting a sequence of engagements with no clear winner. Russia was not willing to leave its port, while the Japanese were not able to isolate and sink Russian ships. While the siege took place, the Japanese army landed and occupied Korea before marching towards Manchuria on its northern border.

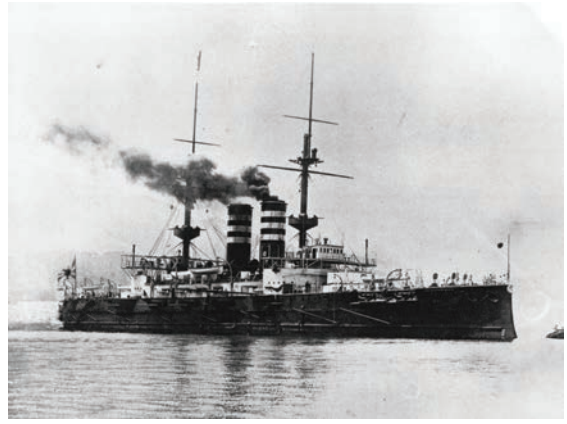


Figure 1.1 Admiral Tōgō's flagship, the battleship *Mikasa*, in 1905

On 15 October 1904, Nicholas II looked to turn the war in the east by sending the Russian Baltic fleet around the world to attack the Japanese. Half the fleet sailed through the Suez Canal, while the other half sailed 33 000 km around the Horn of Africa. As they sailed, the war continued



Figure 1.2 Russian and Japanese warships clash in the Straits of Tsushima during the Russo-Japanese War, 27 to 28 May 1905.

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on land with an indecisive battle at Sandepu, before a more decisive victory for the Japanese at Mukden. About 90 00 Russian soldiers were killed in the engagement, with the remaining retreating into Manchuria. Heavy Japanese casualties prevented their pursuit, but the army had done enough to ensure Japanese victory on land – now it was down to the navy to secure a final victory at sea.

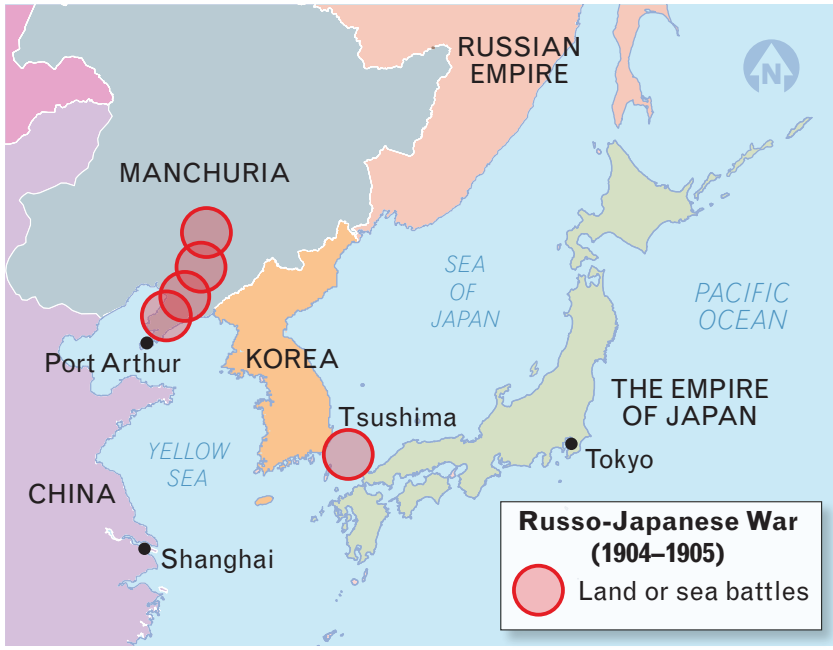


Figure 1.3 Location of naval and land battles at Port Arthur and Tsushima, during the Russo-Japanese War

Figure questions

1 What does Figure 1.2 suggest about fighting during the Battle of Tsushima?
2 Describe the locations of the key battles at Port Arthur and Tsushima.
3 Explain the conclusions which can be drawn about Japanese expansion during the early 1900s, from Figures 1.2 and 1.3.

The Battle of Tsushima commenced on 27 May 1905. It was devastating for the Russians, with the bulk of their fleet annihilated at the hands of Admiral **Tōgō Heihachirō's** forces. A total of 4380 Russian sailors died, and 5917 were captured. Nicholas II had no choice but to seek peace with Japan, marking the first time an Asian country had successfully resisted a 'western' incursion.

For Japan, Tsushima was a nation-defining event, instilling a sense of nationalism, patriotism and military superiority across the country. If Japan could defeat a western power, didn't it now deserve the respect western powers had?

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1.2 Korea

Official engagements between Japan and Korea can be traced to 1876, when Japan threatened to use its technically superior navy on Korea unless it opened its borders to trade. After Japan's defeat of China in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894), Korea was left exposed with no protection – this was now ruthlessly exploited by the Japanese.

After Tsushima, Korea had foreign soldiers and navies surrounding it, with no hope of resistance. The war was followed by the Japan–Korea Treaty of 1905, which forced Korea to the negotiating table where it became a **protectorate** in 1905, before a 1910 treaty saw Japan formally take over Korea. These treaties were forced on the Korean people, using the Korean Emperor's seal but not his signature. Some resistance to Japanese rule did occur, as military records reveal approximately 2800 instances of civil conflict between 1907 and 1910, with 17 700 Koreans killed as a result. Despite the attempts of the newly appointed governor, **Terauchi Masatake**, to act honourably in Korea, occupation led to continual civil unrest after 1910.



Figure 1.4 The Japanese Prime Minister with Crown Prince Uimin of Korea

An important impact of the annexation of Korea was the confiscation of land by the Japanese government. Many Koreans had no documentation of their land claims – so the Japanese government assumed control and created 'tenant farmers', people who produced their crops on behalf of the government. This allowed for the legal confiscation of part of their crops, which were shipped to the Japanese mainland. For many Japanese people, the takeover of Korea was worthwhile due to increased wealth and resources, and the prestige of having an empire. As the Great Depression unfolded from 1929, these same people would look to further territorial expansion, like what had occurred in Korea, as a way of securing the resources, trade and food they needed.

The Battle of Tsushima and Korea's annexation led many Japanese people to feel that Japan was finally taking its rightful place in the world. They viewed their home country as a superpower able to defend and conquer other countries, and believed they had a right to expand their empire. Ideas of **nationalism** – influenced by many Japanese who regarded themselves as descendants of the sun goddess Amaterasu – began to take hold in society. A social divide occurred, and many Japanese people were wary of how this appeared to countries like the United States, France, Germany and the British Commonwealth, which stopped any immediate pushes to gain further territory. But the seeds were sown among Japanese militarists – great gains could be made in Asia, without a great deal of resistance.

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For Japan, China was a giant country where it could potentially fulfil its territorial ambitions, but to do so brought Japan into direct conflict with the western powers. In 1895, France, Germany and Russia had sought to limit Japan's growth on the Liaodong Peninsula in China, but Great Britain was not involved. This led Japan to become closer to the British, formalised by the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of 1902. Japan received assurances that Britain would not become involved in any conflict surrounding Korea, while Britain prevented Russian expansion by agreeing to enter a war to support Japan if it were attacked by two or more countries.

The Anglo-Japanese Treaty meant that in 1914, Japan entered World War I on the side of the Allies. Japan occupied Germany's colonies in the Pacific, removing the threat of the German navy from the Asia–Pacific region. Limited resistance was provided as Japan took Tsingtao in China as well as the Mariana, Caroline and Marshall Islands. After these conquests, Japan made a mistake in its foreign policy relations with the Twenty-One Demands to China, and it would not be until 1917 that Japan made another military contribution to the war by providing escorts for British shipping in the Mediterranean. By 1918, Japan's role had evolved from supplying direct military support to filling industrial orders for the Allies, particularly the United States.

Source 1.1 **From Minichiello, S. *Japan's Competing Modernities: Issues in Culture and Democracy, 1900–1930* (1998), University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, Hawaii, United States, p. 230**

> [T]he Great War that sent Europe to its knees brought Japan to its feet. World War I was as much a watershed event for Japan as it was for Europe … Japan found itself dazed and confused in 1914. But not for long. Poignantly confronting its own technology dependency, Japan was swept (and swept itself) into the world of mass production perfected by the United States. It enjoined American expertise, entering business partnerships and forging a new trail of technological and organisational innovation. In the process, Japan grew into an industrial dynamo.

Source questions

1. How does Source 1.1 contribute to your understanding of industrialisation and modernisation in Japan?
2. What changes did Japan make after World War I?
3. Explain what you believe an 'industrial dynamo' is.

Twenty-One Demands

On 18 January 1915, the Japanese government sent a letter of **Twenty-One Demands** to China. Japan hoped it could take advantage of the distraction fighting the war in Europe had on the western powers to force China into

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significant concessions. The Twenty-One Demands were categorised into five different groups:

- Group One stated that Japan would gain control of all railways, ports and key cities in the Shandong Province of China.
- Group Two gave **Manchuria** to Japan for 99 years, as well as access to Mongolia for raw materials.
- Group Three allowed Japan to take control of mining in central China.
- Group Four prevented China from giving away any coastal areas to other foreign powers.
- Group Five was the most aggressive. It ensured that China gave control of its finance and policing systems to Japan in some areas, and allowed the Japanese to construct three railways, temples and schools. Japan also gained territorial concessions such as Fujian, which was a coastal area opposite Taiwan.

Naturally, China resisted Japan's Twenty-One Demands and sought help from western powers. Britain and the United States were openly critical of Japan's aggression, fearing the threat to their interests if Japan broke up the '**Open Door Policy**' in China. However, Japan only dropped Group Five from its demands before delivering an ultimatum to China – accept or be attacked. China could not rely on foreign intervention and agreed to the revised Twenty-One Demands, which were now only 13 demands. The final treaty was signed on 25 May 1915.

The biggest issue arising from Japan's Twenty-One Demands was its impact on international relations with foreign powers. The United States was now concerned with Japanese aggression in the region and viewed Japan as a rival, while the British became much warier of a country it had sought to become Allies with. In the context of World War I and Japan's contribution, Britain received mixed signals. On one hand, Japan made valuable contributions to the war effort, while on the other it also sought to upset the 'status quo' which existed in the region. Both Britain and the United States were worried about where future Japanese aggression would lead Asia.

1.4 The Treaty of Versailles from the Japanese perspective

Japan made significant contributions to the Allied war effort from 1914 to 1918. When the Japanese arrived in France to negotiate the end of the war at Versailles, they expected recognition of Japan's contribution. In their eyes, this would ideally occur by allowing Japan to maintain control over conquered island territories, and Chinese mainland territories which had belonged to Germany. Further to this, Japan regarded the Treaty of Versailles as a chance to bring together nations of the world through a **racial equality clause**. However, these thoughts were rapidly scuttled.

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Initially, Japan was part of a supreme council of 10 countries seeking to negotiate the Treaty of Versailles – but it was quickly excluded. In the resulting treaty, the Japanese were granted some territories north of the equator, and the territory of Tsingtao which they had taken in the first months of the war. But other islands were given to Australia, New Zealand and Nauru. Japan regarded this as white western countries looking after each other, and not a recognition of the world power it had now become. It believed the bigger nations, particularly France, Britain, the United States and Italy, had used their influence to limit Japan's growing empire.

Many Japanese viewed the Treaty of Versailles as continued western oppression of other countries, particularly in Asia. Their desired 'racial equality clause' was popularly supported, but ultimately denied by Australia and the United States. Media coverage of the racial equality clause was continual in Japan, and the public's dissatisfaction with the United States' position was strong. It furthered the belief in Japan that cooperating with the United States (and by extension the British) was not in Japan's best interests. Public opinion shifted towards Japan pursuing its own path in Asia, based on its strength, traditions and dignity.

Claim, support, question

- Make a **claim** (or thesis) about the treatment of Japan during the Treaty of Versailles, or Japan's response to it.
- Identify **support** for your claim – things you have researched, or know to support your claim.
- Ask a **question** related to your claim that you would need to research further.

1.5 The Washington Naval Conference

By 1921, tensions were growing in the Asia–Pacific region due to conflicting interests and the growing naval strength of Japan. With World War I a clear reminder of failed international relations, the recently established League of Nations sought to unite countries through treaties designed to encourage disarmament and peaceful relations. Three key treaties emerged from the Washington Naval Conference of 1921–22.

The Five Power Treaty

This treaty was directly targeted at the concept of disarmament. France, Japan, Italy, the United States and the United Kingdom all agreed to maintain a ratio of warship tonnage – known as the 5:5:3 ratio. Under this ratio, America and Great Britain could have 500 000 tonnes of shipping to Japan's 300 000. All fortifications and planned expansions were to be paused.

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The Four Power Treaty

The basis of this treaty was that the United States, France, Great Britain and Japan agreed to consult each other prior to engaging in any action, whether offensive or defensive, in the Pacific. It was hoped that this treaty would allow for foreign policy to become based on communication, rather than war.

The Nine Power Treaty

This treaty predominantly targeted China. The initial agreement was that the 'Open Door Policy' would remain, allowing the United States, Great Britain, Japan, France, Italy, Belgium, Holland and Portugal to continue their activities in China (the other signatory was China). The key target of this treaty was to protect the trade opportunities each country had developed, which in theory allowed all countries to trade and access the wealth of China without the threat of war. Violations of the treaty were to be dealt with through diplomatic relations, not conflict.

Problems with the conference

With hindsight, it is easy to identify the problems for Japan that arose from the conference. Why did Japan agree to a 5:5:3 ratio if it was going to be dissatisfied with this? Why return territory to China only to attempt to conquer it within two decades? Many Japanese civilians, politicians and military figures openly questioned the wisdom of signing treaties limiting

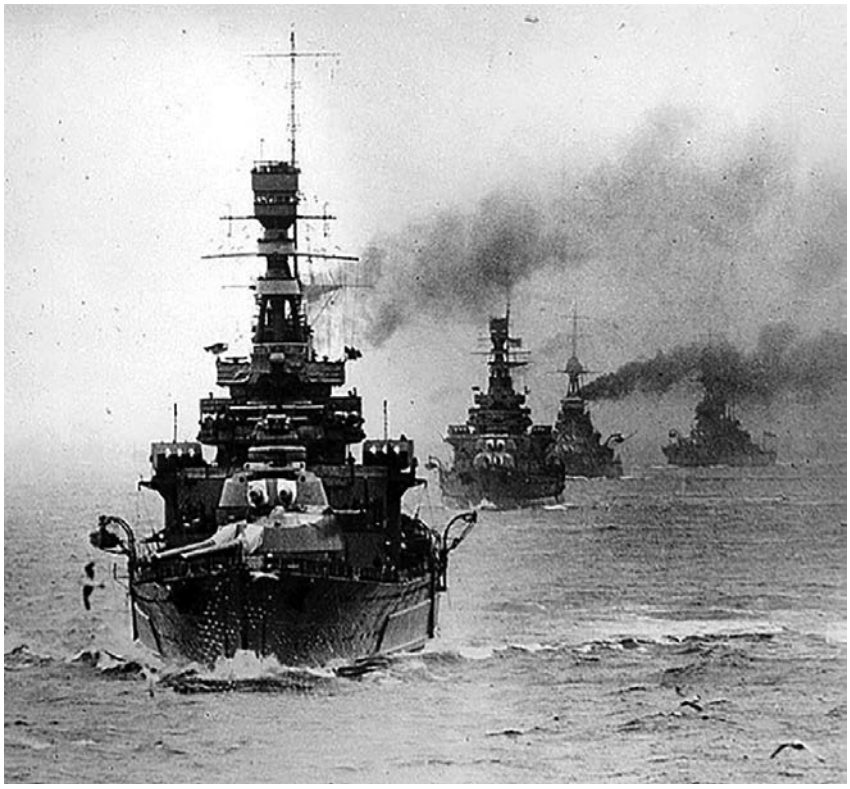


Figure 1.5 The British warship HMS *Repulse* – it was sunk by the Japanese off the coast of Singapore, 1941.

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Japan's ambitions in Asia. After all, the Japanese navy was now a modern, superior force, capable of defeating fellow superpowers. Some people saw this as another example of Japanese meekness in the face of controlling westerners. The naval conference contributed to the belief that an anti-western, pro-military government should be in control of Japan, and not a weak democracy. For now, this view was rather limited to only a few people in society, but it would only continue to grow, especially with renegotiations of the treaties in 1930.

Summary

- Japan was a nation experiencing widespread social and cultural changes at the end of the nineteenth century.
- Japan set out to gain an empire in Asia, which brought it into conflict with Russia. This led to land battles around Mukden and Port Arthur, followed by the naval Battle of Tsushima off the coast of Japan.
- Despite only recently industrialising, Japan successfully defeated Russia and brought Korea under its control.
- Japan played a role in World War I due to its alliance with the British, which saw it gain control of German territories across the Pacific and in Asia.
- After the war, the Treaty of Versailles gave some of these territories to other countries. This fact, and the refusal of several countries to support a racial equality clause in the treaty, caused anger among the Japanese.
- In 1915, Japan issued the Twenty-One Demands to China, which required China to give Japan trading opportunities and territory on the Chinese mainland. China initially refused, but did agree to lesser conditions.
- Japan had proven itself to be a growing power, and signed international treaties with other countries throughout Asia and the western world. One of these (the Five Power Treaty) limited Japan's navy to a 5:5:3 ratio.
- Many Japanese politicians, military figures and civilians were unhappy the government of Japan had negotiated away its right to gaining territory in Asia.

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Key personalities and terms

Personalities

Tsar Nicholas II (1868–1918) was the last Emperor of Russia and ruler of the Romanov dynasty. Throughout his reign (1894–1917), Nicholas struggled to deal with widespread problems in Russia, including famine, economic hardship and political violence. During World War I, a revolution caused Nicholas to abdicate his throne for a 'Provisional Government', which was then overthrown by a Communist government. Nicholas and his family were shot by Communists at Yekaterinburg in July 1918.



Figure 1.6 Tsar Nicholas II



Figure 1.7 Tōgō Heihachirō

Admiral **Tōgō Heihachirō** (1848–1934) was the commander of the Japanese Navy who successfully defeated the Russians at Tsushima. Tōgō was awarded numerous commendations and titles for his achievements, and became the adviser and educator of Emperor Taishō. He died of cancer in 1934 and was awarded a state funeral.

Terauchi Masatake (1852–1919) was a *Gensui* (Marshal) in the Japanese Imperial Army and, unsurprisingly, pursued an aggressive foreign policy throughout China. Under his prime-ministership, Japan fulfilled its obligations to Great Britain during World War I and followed this with a commitment to support the 'Whites' in the Russian Civil War against the **Bolshevik** 'Red' threat. Terauchi resigned from office in September 1918, as rice riots ran out of control in Tōkyō.



Figure 1.8 Terauchi Masatake

Terms

Bolshevik: the early name of the Communist Party of Russia, which overthrew the semi-democratic government that took power after Nicholas II's abdication.

Manchuria: a region of north-east China, which was fought over by Russia and Japan before Japan extended control into this region in 1931.

Nationalism: the promotion of the interests of one's own nation above all others.

Open Door Policy: a United States policy which called for all countries to be given equal access to trade in China.

Protectorate: a country controlled and protected by another.

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Racial equality clause: a proposal recognising that all races were equal, submitted by Japan during the negotiations for the Treaty of Versailles.

Twenty-One Demands: a list of demands Japan sent to China during World War I, which threatened war if China did not agree to give Japan territory and restrict other foreign influences.

Activities

Thinking historically

1. Create a timeline of the key events during the Russo-Japanese War.
2. Describe how victory over Russia made the Japanese people feel.
3. Explain why the failure to include a racial equality clause would have upset the Japanese.
4. Briefly outline the impact of the Five, Four and Nine Power Treaties.
5. To what extent is nationalism present in Japanese society during the early 1900s? Justify your response with reference to specific events.

Headlines

If you were to write a headline for this topic or issue right now that captured the most important aspect that should be remembered, what would that headline be?

- Compose four headlines which summarise a key component of this chapter.
- Reflect on how your headlines demonstrate the changing nature of Japan in the period from 1904 to 1921.

Writing historically

1. In two paragraphs, describe what you believe Japan's greatest success was during the early 1900s, as well as its greatest failure.
2. Imagine you are a Japanese diplomat during this timeframe. Compose a letter to a friend describing your goals in negotiating and the reason you agreed to international treaties.

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2 Democracy in Japan

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The nature and role of nationalism and **militarism** in Japanese society
- The traditional power structure of Japan and how it changed
- Japan's introduction of a limited liberal democracy
- Early successes and failures of liberal democracy

CHRONOLOGY

1868	Emperor Meiji restored to power
1872	National army created, with three years' conscription for all men
1877	Satsuma Rebellion by samurai seeks to overthrow the Meiji government, but is suppressed by the new government's army
1881–1882	Formation of Japan's first two political parties
1890	Meiji Constitution comes into effect
1905	
5–7 September	Mass riots break out in Tōkyō
1912	
30 July	Death of Emperor Meiji and the beginning of the Taishō era
1912	Taishō crisis occurs when the army refuses to appoint a minister
1918	
23 July –16 August	Rice riots sweep the country after starting in Tōkyō
1921	
4 November	Prime Minister Takashi Hara assassinated

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Figure 2.1 Emperor Meiji (Mutsuhito) of Japan, 1852–1912

One of the interesting questions that historians debate regarding Japan from 1904 to 1937 is the type of government which existed. The **Meiji Restoration** period saw the end of the rule of **Shoguns** and established the Emperor as the leader of Japan. But was this purely a spiritual and ceremonial position, or did the Emperor have genuine authority?

The Japanese government was known as a **limited liberal democracy**. This meant that in many ways it functioned as a typical democracy by electing its representatives, but it also meant that, in some ways, this democracy was legally limited. In other words, this type of democracy allowed for the Emperor, ***genro*** and imperial family to play some role in government. After the Meiji Restoration, the Emperor was the leading figure in Japanese society, but his power was somewhat limited to an advisory capacity – ministers *were* meant to listen if he wanted something to be done but, technically, this could be ignored. The Emperor was advised by the *genro*, who also had the responsibility of selecting a prime minister to be appointed by the Emperor, who then led the **Imperial Diet**. Often, this person came from one of the two major parties, the **Seiyūkai**, or the **Kenseikai**.



Figure 2.2 Emperor Taishō (Yoshihito) of Japan, 1879–1926



Figure 2.3 Emperor Shōwa (Hirohito) of Japan, 1901–1989

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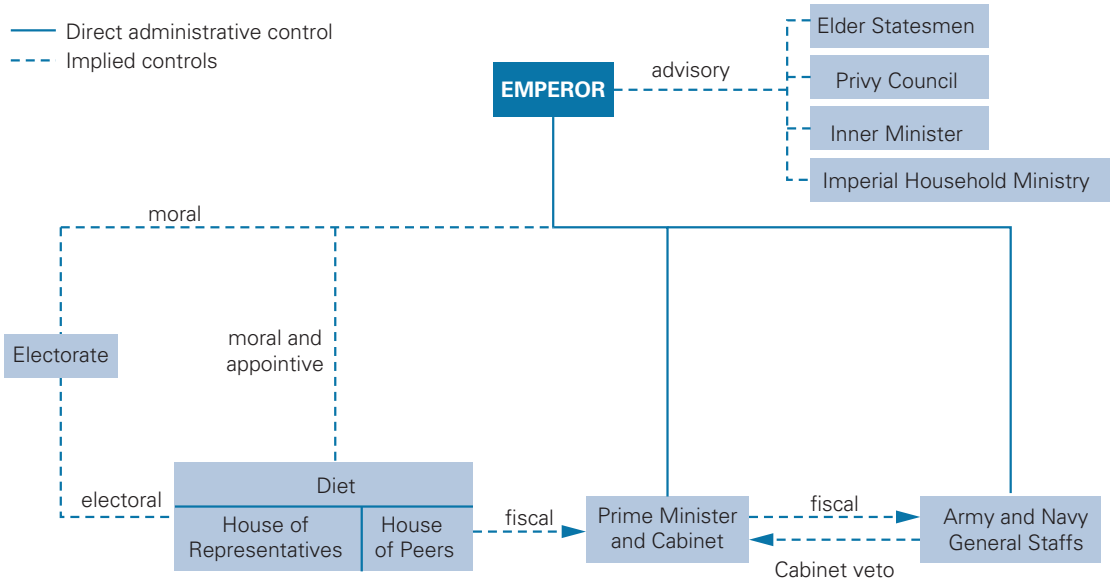


Figure 2.4 The hierarchy of the Japanese government

Figure questions

1. Using Figure 2.4, assess the power of the Emperor in Japan.
2. Which figures could influence the Emperor in his decision-making?
3. Figure 2.4 demonstrates that the army did not answer directly to parliament. Suggest reasons why this may have been a problem in Japan.

The challenge for the liberal democracy in Japan was the simple fact that the system constructed during the Meiji era contained other groups or interested parties. They did not have direct political power, but could wield their influence to obtain what they wanted.

From Paine, S.C.M. *The Japanese Empire: Grand Strategy from the Meiji Restoration to the Pacific War* (2017), Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, pp. 89–90 Source 2.1

Key institutions not subject to public control included the upper house of the legislature, the House of Peers, composed of hereditary members and imperial appointees, with infusions of officers appointed after each war; the Privy Council, appointed by the emperor to advise him on constitution and legal matters, including treaties; and most significantly, the military, the oligarchs and the emperor.

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2.1 Challenges for democracy, 1900–20

The Taishō crisis

The Taishō crisis was a short but significant event in Japanese politics, as it marked the developing strength of the army's position in the wider political landscape. The final years of Emperor Meiji's reign saw increased spending in Japan, particularly in the realm of defence. After the Emperor's death on 30 July 1912, the Prime Minister decided to limit defence spending – but was countered by the resignation of the Army Minister, and the refusal of any generals to serve in that position as a result of his resignation. The Meiji Constitution required a general to serve as Army Minister, but one could not be 'found'. The government could not form until a minister was appointed, meaning the army had found a way to force its opinions on the government.

This was attempted against the next Prime Minister, Katsura Tarō. He sought the Emperor's aid – who issued an edict that the navy must provide a minister. While this may have solved the issue, it was also regarded as undemocratic. Protests broke out across Tōkyō; the Diet was suspended, and support for Katsura plummeted. He lost a vote of no-confidence in his government and resigned, whereupon he was replaced by a former navy admiral. The Taishō crisis is significant because of the way the army and navy exploited their positions to achieve their aims of increased military spending and stronger political power. These arose again as key issues in the 1930s, but the beginnings of this process can be traced back to 1912.

Table 2.1 Riots in Japan, early twentieth century

Date	Reason	Location	Result
5–7 Sep 1905	Nationalist movements protesting the 'weak' peace treaty to end the Russo-Japanese War.	Originated in Tōkyō (Hibiya Park) before spreading to other cities across Japan.	Over 30 000 people rioted, committing widespread damage to buildings and trams. 17 people killed, 311 arrested. 450 policemen and 50 firemen injured.
15–18 Mar 1906	Increase in the cost of a tram fare, and government corruption.	Tōkyō	Destruction to streets and trams. Over 100 people arrested.
5–8 Sep 1906	Increase in the cost of a tram fare, and government corruption.	Tōkyō	113 arrested, multiple people injured, including police. Destruction to streets. The government bought the tram companies in 1911.
11 Feb 1908	Protesting tax increases.	Tōkyō	21 arrested

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Date	Reason	Location	Result
10 Feb 1913	Wanting constitutional government – contributed to the Taishō political crisis.	Outside the Diet in Tōkyō, before spreading to Kobe, Ōsaka, Hiroshima and Kyōto.	Attacks on streets, police and newspapers. A small number of people were killed, 168 injured, 253 arrested. Prime Minister Katsura Tarō resigned.
7 Sep 1913	Nationalist desire for aggressive policy against China.	Tōkyō	Storming of the Foreign Ministry for 'negotiations'.
10–12 Feb 1914	Stronger China foreign policy, naval corruption, and a desire for constitutional government.	Outside the Diet in Tōkyō and Ōsaka.	Members of the Diet attacked, street fighting, violence and damage. 435 people arrested.
11 Feb 1918	In support of universal suffrage.	Tōkyō	Clashes between police and demonstrators. 19 arrested.
23 July – 16 Aug 1918	Petition to the government over price rise of rice.	A small town (Uozu) in Japan, before spreading across the nation.	Across the extended period of time, 66 000 people joined the riots, and 25 000 were arrested. Damage occurred to buildings, trams, police stations, shops, and government buildings.

Source: Adapted from Gordon, A. *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan* (1992), University of California, United States, pp. 28–9

Table questions

1 Which riot had the largest number/amount of the following:
- protesters
- deaths of rioters
- cities involved
- destruction to property?

2 From Table 2.1, what were the main causes of protest?

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Figure 2.5 Hibiya Park in Tōkyō was the organisation point for many protests.

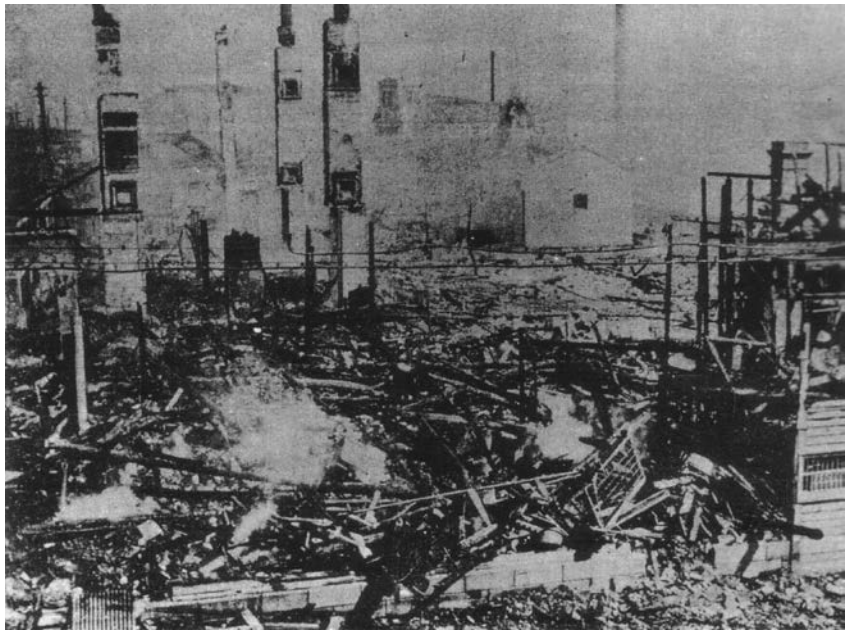


Figure 2.6 A Suzuki store is burnt to the ground during the 1918 rice riots in Kobe.

Violence and assassinations

Violence was a part of Japanese traditions, with figures such as samurai a revered component of society. It is generally assumed that democratic societies transition away from violence to open communication and debate; however, this was not the case in Japan. The creation of the Meiji Constitution and the institution of the Diet as the governing body did not see much decrease in violence in governance.

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From Yukio, O. *The Autobiography of Ozaki Yukio: The Struggle for Constitutional Government in Japan* (2001), Princeton University Press, United States, p. 130 Source 2.2

It was not unusual to see members arriving at the Diet all bandaged up. Inukai [Tsuyoshi] was wounded in the head. Shimada Saburō was attacked a couple of times and badly hurt. Takada Sanae was cut down with a sword from behind and the blade almost reached his lungs; he would have died on the spot had he not been obese. Kawashima Atsushi, Ueki Emori, and Inoue Kakugorō were all attacked at different times and came wearing bandages. Suematsu Kenchō was hit by horse manure thrown from the gallery. Members often even got into fistfights on the floor of the House, which became a rather rough place to be.

Continual political attacks during the Meiji period and early Taishō era had the unfortunate effect of normalising violence in politics, in the same way that violence became part of Germany's politics in the post-war period.



Figure 2.7 An annotated crime scene photo demonstrating Prime Minister Takashi Hara's waiting location, stabbing position and where he fell

This violence bound individuals together, who often had shared nationalist or **imperialist** values, whether they came from politics, a branch of the military, or business. Their beliefs could often be summarised by three ideas: restoring Japanese traditions, respect for the Emperor and removal of foreign influences or threats like **Communism**.

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The use of violence in politics became front-page news with the assassination of Prime Minister **Hara Takashi** on 4 November 1921. Hara was waiting at Tōkyō station for an overnight train to Kyōto when he was stabbed by a railway switchman. The switchman, Kon'ichi Nakaoka, was extremely dissatisfied with the path Hara's political party had taken and decided to act. While Hara's assassination was not directly connected to violence between political parties, it does show the extent to which elected officials could be targeted by the broader society – and it was a process which grew worse as grievances arose in different areas of Japan's society.



Figure 2.8 The trial of Kon'ichi Nakaoka (*right*), the young man who assassinated Prime Minister Hara. Seated beside him is an accomplice, Y. Hashimoto, charged with instigating the crime.

See, think, wonder

Create a three-columned table with the titles See, Think and Wonder.

1. List what you can **see** in Figure 2.8 in the first column. (I can see …)
2. Using this list, write down what these words make you **think** about. (I think …)
3. In the final column, create a list of ideas which may not directly be in the image, but you now **wonder** about. (I wonder …)

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Summary

- Between 1900 and 1920, democracy was in an experimental phase in Japan due to the numerous powerful political, traditional and military figures who exerted their influence on government.
- The Taishō crisis of 1912 was an example of the military seeking to gain control in politics by refusing to appoint a minister. As a result, Prime Minister Katō resigned, and the military secured their budget.
- Between 1905 and 1918, riots occurred regularly across Tōkyō and other major cities. Riots broke out to protest the end of the Russo-Japanese War, corruption, taxes, or rising costs such as rice prices.
- As a result of dissatisfaction in society, violence and assassination attempts were relatively common, whether against political figures or business owners. In 1921, Prime Minister Hara was stabbed by a railway worker at a train station.

Key personalities and terms

Personalities

The reign of **Emperor Meiji** (1852–1912) occurred at the same time as the end of the Shogun's rule in Japan. During his rule, Japan was open to western culture and traditions, such as democracy, and established the Meiji Constitution. But while Japan underwent a rapid period of change, Emperor Meiji also ensured Japanese traditions and values were protected.



Figure 2.9 Emperor Meiji



Figure 2.10 Emperor Taishō

Emperor Taishō (1879–1926) was the 123rd Emperor of Japan, technically ruling from 1912 until his death. Taishō's health was complicated by meningitis at a young age, which made walking and talking difficult. He played no real role in the affairs of government as his son Hirohito became regent in 1921.

Emperor Shōwa (Hirohito) (1901–1989) assumed responsibility for the affairs of Japan due to the illness of his father. Hirohito was well educated in religious and military tradition, and had spent six months travelling in western Europe. He wed Princess Nagako on 26 January 1924, and assumed the mantle of Emperor in 1926.



Figure 2.11 Emperor Shōwa

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Hara Takashi (1856–1921) was the first commoner to head a cabinet in Japan, as well as the first Christian Prime Minister. He was very cautious in his political manoeuvrings, which upset large swathes of Japanese society who wanted change. Prime Minister Hara was responsible for agreeing to the conditions of Versailles and joining the League of Nations. He was assassinated in 1921 by a railway worker.



Figure 2.12 Hara Takashi

Terms

Communism: a type of government with no class structure where the 'state' owns everything and redistributes it to the people.

Genro: a powerful council of elder statesmen, who had played a leading role in the 1868 Meiji Restoration and in the organisation of the new government that followed.

Imperial Diet: the name of the Japanese parliament, which featured a House of Representatives and a House of Peers.

Imperialism: a policy of gaining territory, and empire, possibly through conquest.

Kenseikai: translates as Constitutional Politics Association, was a Japanese political party that was generally in opposition to the Seiyūkai, and supported labour and voting law changes.

Limited liberal democracy: a form of government which recognises the rights and freedoms of its citizens and elects representatives by vote, but has deliberately restricted or limited some of these rights and freedoms by law.

Meiji Restoration: the political revolution which restored the power of the Emperor (Emperor Meiji) and brought an end to the reign of Shoguns in Japan.

Militarism: a belief that a country should grow its military forces to achieve its foreign policies or national interests.

Seiyūkai (Rikken Seiyūkai): translates as Friends of Constitutional Government, was one of the main political parties in Japan and was generally regarded as conservative.

Shogun: the chief military commander in Japan from 1603 to 1868.

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Activities

Thinking historically

1. Discuss the events which triggered riots across Japan in the 1900s, and how they reflected growing anger or unhappiness in Japanese society.
2. Summarise the key events of the Taishō crisis in 1912.
3. The government shielded Emperor Taishō from the public. Why?
4. Describe the challenges for the Japanese government in the period 1900 to 1921.
5. What does the idea of violence becoming 'normal' mean?

Step inside

In your workbook, respond to the three following questions:

- What would an average man or woman be able to perceive (see) about the government of Japan and its policies?
- What might these people believe they could do to change or impact this?
- What might they care about which would prompt them to take such action?

Writing historically

1. Write a newspaper report detailing the attack on Prime Minister Hara and its impact on Japanese society.
2. Justify the army's stance in 1912. What was it hoping to achieve from its actions, and what did it fear to lose?

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3 Social and economic challenges

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- Political, social and economic issues in Japan by 1921
- Changes to Japanese society in the 1920s
- The growing tensions between tradition and modernisation

3 – 2 – 1 bridge

This sequence is completed twice, once at the start of the chapter, and once at the end. Compose your response to the following:

- Three initial thoughts or ideas on the topic of Japan's society and economy.
- Two questions you immediately have, which you want to be answered.
- One analogy (for example: I think Japan was like …)

One of the key elements to remember about the Japanese social, economic and political spheres is how much they had changed before the 1920s. In 1912, it had only been 58 years since Commodore **Matthew Perry** had forced Japan open to the outside world. This fact should be carefully considered when studying **modernisation** and **westernisation** in Japan. Prior to this, Japan was extremely traditional and insular – which can be seen through the respected role of the **samurai**. Modernisation was slow, and **industrialisation** unheard of. This time (known as the Edo period) was remembered by grandparents who lived it as young children. To progress from traditional life to industrialisation, women's rights and role changes, **urbanisation**, trade and westernisation, not to mention an entirely different style of governance – this would have required a great level of adaptability and new thinking by this older generation. Japan was in a grand position if it could manage to steer through the challenges of a modernising, industrialising and westernising society, particularly if it could bring its people to understand why these changes were important, and the benefits they brought.

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3.1 Westernisation and modernisation

When Emperor Taishō assumed the throne, Japan was already undergoing mass changes. In his capacity as spiritual leader, Taishō needed to guide the country on its new path. But as a child, the Emperor had suffered from meningitis, which left him with some debilitating conditions including an inability to speak clearly or walk easily. The Emperor needed to be a spiritual guide for Japan in a time of rapid change, but he was barely heard from as his ministers and family members shielded him from the public view. While the Emperor was quiet, Japan evolved around him.

Video 3.1
Baseball (00:44 silent)

From Hoffman, M. 'The Taisho Era: When modernity ruled Japan's masses', 29 July 2012, *The Japan Times*

Source 3.1

The Taisho Era transfigured the Japanese character. New types abounded. Meet *mobo* and his sister (or lover) *moga* – modern boy and modern girl respectively – *mobo* in bell-bottom trousers, floppy tie, coloured shirt and round-rimmed *roido* spectacles (named for American silent film star Harold Lloyd), *moga* having shed her 'shapeless, unbecoming kimono' in favour of 'Western clothes' that 'accentuate every curve and hollow, give her body a brilliant surface and lively flowing lines'. *Mobo*'s hair was long, *moga*'s short, sometimes boyishly short; sexuality was out in the open now and not to be hemmed in by simplistic old categories like 'male' and 'female'.

Where did *mobo* and *moga* hang out? Most typically, in the new European-style cafes springing up here, there and just about everywhere, especially in the Ginza, Tokyo's little Europe. The first one opened in 1911 (coffeehouses, quite different, had been around for a generation); by 1939, nationwide, they numbered 37,000. To the cafes streamed *mobo* and *moga* and all their various subspecies.



Figure 3.1 Two members of the 1921 Waseda University baseball team

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Source 3.2 **From Beasley, W.G. *The Japanese Experience: A Short History of Japan* (2000), Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, England, p. 241**

> Outside politics there was a relaxation of social discipline, especially among the young, typified by the popularity of dance halls and a taste for popular entertainment of the western kind … In Japan they were imported fashion, widely criticised as such by traditionalists. They branded the habits of the age – including most of the parliamentary ones – as a betrayal of the past, a descent to what Confucian moralists had always described as 'luxury'. Such moral condemnation carried over into reactionary politics, reinforced by a fear of socialism, as the post-war slump brought distress to the workers, provoking strikes and 'dangerous thoughts'. To many Japanese in the 1920s, something seemed seriously wrong with the body politic. An increasing number joined 'patriotic societies', in which disgruntled officers from the nation's forces joined hands with civilian visionaries and radicals. In this were the roots of what came to be known as 'ultranationalism'.

Source questions

1. What view did the 'traditionalists' hold, according to Source 3.2?
2. Using this source, explain how modernisation led to a rise in ultranationalism.



Figure 3.2 A street of motion picture theatres in Asakusa Park, Tōkyō, c. 1930

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Elderly Japanese, who tended to be more traditional, developed a dislike for the *ero*, *guro* and *nansensu* – the erotic, the grotesque and the nonsensical. Much like liberal democracy had allowed for the flourishing of art, music, literature, women's rights and social expectations in Germany, Japan experienced a rapid shift to progressive lifestyles. This often created a gulf between those who were steeped in Japanese tradition, and those who embraced new western influences. Japan's quest for modernisation and urbanisation had started to sow the seeds of division between different generations.



Figure 3.3 Photograph of the Meguro Racecourse in Tōkyō, c. 1932

Women

Large-scale changes to the status of women in Japanese society were not common, even in terms of their clothing and sexuality. Women still worked themselves to death in agriculture, upheld traditional views on family, and had no realistic equality with men, particularly in politics. But changes during the Meiji period had some flow-on effects to the Taishō era. The biggest of these related to education, where the lives of women improved significantly as a result of equal access to schooling, or in industrial relations, where a growing number of women were employed.



Figure 3.4 Women working on cocoons in a silk plant, 1927

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While the conditions these women completed their work duties under were not particularly good, it was a step forward for women's rights movements. Women were often underpaid in their jobs, worked long hours, and were still required to do all the maintenance of the household by their husbands or fathers. Occupations available for young women and girls included textile and factory work, domestic service, peddling, day labouring and tea picking. For those who were poor and struggling to survive, coal mining was an option, although it was one of the harshest and most demanding jobs available to women, with high incidents of injury or death.

Despite the restricted access to political organisations for women, Japan had an active women's movement from the 1920s. A ban on women attending political meetings was lifted in 1922, although women were still prevented from joining a political party and were unable to vote until 1945. Women's associations in this period that protested for equality included the Shin Fujin Kyokai (New Women's Association), which sought voting and political rights, and the Socialist Sekirankai (Red Wave Society).

Education

One of the key changes to flow from the Meiji era reforms, and one with the largest impact, was the exposure of the Japanese people to foreign influences through education. Westernisation brought new understandings of democracy and philosophy, stories, radio (and film in the 1920s), and some of these ideas were taught in Japanese schools. But with these foreign influences came other ideas that were often regarded as subversive or corrupting. The first of these was **Marxism** and the various offshoots of Socialism, Bolshevism and Communism. These ideas were embraced by large numbers of the population, instilling the government with a sense of fear (and eventual action in 1925). Those who embraced Communist beliefs were ready to take political action – to throw off the remnants of ***hanbatsu*** (the clan-based ruling system which arose during the early 1900s), and remove the rich **oligarchs** and the influence of the *genro*. Japanese Socialists wanted better labour laws, and support for the hardships they endured in agricultural or industrial work.

Multiple views existed regarding how Japanese society and government should function. Historically, as civilisations became educated, their people were more inclined to speak out or even protest the society which was being built. To counter this, some Japanese saw a need for a strong military and nationalism to defend against this growing threat of Socialism and Communism in Japan and abroad.

Circle of viewpoints

- Students divide into groups of four.
- Each student is assigned a 'viewpoint' – a young person, an elderly person, a government figure, an ultranationalist.

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- Each student should consider the westernisation and modernisation of Japan from their different point of view, before responding to the following prompts:
  - I am thinking of … from the point of view of …
  - I think this person would hold these opinions of modernisation …
  - One question I have about this point of view is …
- Students share their different points of view in the group of four.



Figure 3.5 Schoolboys marching in ranks, 1919



Figure 3.6 Students practising their typing on American typewriters, 1920s

Figure questions

1. What evidence do Figures 3.5 and 3.6 provide about the lifestyles of Japanese women and children?
2. Explain the objectives of the government in having schoolboys practise marching with the national flag of Japan.

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3.2 Economic changes

Taking over Korea and fighting in World War I were defining events for the Japanese economy. Both led to a sudden upsurge in production as a result of new resources and markets for trade, particularly with the Allied countries, which gave an injection to the growing Japanese industrial sector. But the end of the war posed clear economic challenges, as the boom period faded and demand for Japanese products declined. Japan's economy had always been dependent on agriculture, but the war shifted this to industry. Metal and machinery production quadrupled between 1895 and 1914, while trade opportunities in other industrial areas grew at a similar rate.

Source 3.3 **From Cullen, L.M. *A History of Japan, 1582–1941: Internal and External Worlds* (2003), Cambridge University Press, United States, p. 252**

> The relative importance of agriculture declined in the war and inter-war years. As a counterpart to this change, urban population grew: from 16.2 per cent in 1903 to 19.4 in 1913, and still more rapidly to 25.2 per cent in 1920.

The industrialisation Japan experienced was similar to that endured by Britain and the United States, although it occurred in a much shorter timeframe. As in western countries, industrialisation created widening gaps between areas of society, whether this was city and country, or the rich and the poor. The **zaibatsu**, giant family-owned companies with control of a variety of businesses, were able to build their wealth in a short period of time. But for those people working in the traditional or agricultural sectors, their earnings were stagnant, if they did not shrink.

Source 3.4 **From Harootunian, H. *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (2002), Princeton University Press, United States, p. 4**

> After the early Meiji period, governments employed all powers at their disposal to promote growth in modern capital industries as a national necessity. Yet the program required sacrificing traditional areas of economic activity. By favouring armaments, investment goods, and exports over consumption goods, state policy kept the standard of living lower than they might have been. Between 1885 and 1920, the rise in personal consumption per capita, a rough measure to be sure, was only 67 percent. This very slow increase in the standard of living resulted in political and social strains in the early 1920s and the explosive conflict among expectation, desire, and capability.

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While rapid industrialisation and growth in foreign trade brought benefits to Japan, the shock of the post-war downturn was felt by all. Dissatisfaction with the government remained relatively low while Japan's economy was performing well, but as hardship increased, so did anger, protest and violence. The biggest of these challenges was the rice riots from July to September of 1918. The government sent 100 000 soldiers to resist the riots, but this only escalated the problem as thousands were arrested and 30 people died. Some Japanese felt they worked extremely hard and could not afford basic food, while big business such as the *zaibatsu* continued to grow their profit margins. They believed demonstrations, and even riots, would cause the government to stop and listen to their concerns – it did not, however, as the government suppressed and jailed those responsible.

Workers

Conditions for Japanese workers were dependent upon the industry or job in which they were employed. While Meiji Japan had invested heavily in industrialisation programs and provided tax breaks, the majority of Japan's workforce remained employed in physically challenging agricultural work. These workers did not own the land upon which they toiled but instead paid rent to a landowner. Obviously, this created a scenario where landowners could acquire large profits for minimal effort, and it remained in their interest to ensure the inequality of their position, compared to the worker, was protected. While industrialisation brought a need for increased worker employment in factory jobs, it still required these peasant farmers to work the land – especially as huge markets for cotton, silk and woven cloth opened. Labour in the agricultural sphere was mostly performed manually, with no mass development in technology to assist production until the middle of the 1930s.



Figure 3.7 A peasant works a machine designed to irrigate the fields, 1922.

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Figure 3.8 Traditional Japanese farming practices were still in use in the 1920s.

In factories, conditions could be extremely harsh, similar to the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain, where workers suffered through long hours working with dangerous machinery. Workers' physical or mental safety was largely ignored, and losses were considered 'acceptable' if the production rate was maintained. Historians estimate that 25% of children aged 12 to 15 who worked in a wool mill died in the workplace. Some of these deaths were from disease, which spread through the hastily assembled worker dormitories located near the factories. Similar conditions existed in mining, with long working days and over-employment of children, not to mention the dangers of collapsing mines and poisonous gases.

In a move to suppress any political uprising, the Public Order and Police Law of 1900 was implemented. This was designed to stop organised labour movements from forming, but also restricted freedom of speech and prohibited workers from going on strike. Despite being banned several times, **labour unions** sought to improve the conditions and welfare of workers, such as the Yuaikai (Friendly Society) and the pro-Communist Nihon Rodo Kumiai Hyogikai (Japan Labour Unions Council). These unions were a place for workers to channel anger at their working conditions, wages or lack of political voice, in the hope that unified action would bring change.



Figure 3.9 Pedlars selling baskets in Japan

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Figure 3.10 A farmer transporting his ducks to market



Figure 3.11 Workers winding induction regulator coils in a Shibaura Engineering Works plant, 1927

Figure questions

1. Outline the information provided in the photographic sources.
2. What evidence is present in Figure 3.11 of changes to Japanese society?
3. In your opinion, how would the farmer in Figure 3.10 have felt about the industrialisation shown in Figure 3.11?

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Summary

- The Meiji Restoration was a time of immense social and cultural change in Japan, which continued into the Taishō era from 1912 to 1926.
- Changes from modernisation led to new clothing styles, haircuts, and gender expectations, which challenged the traditional view of how a man or woman should act and dress. Ideas from western cultures were transported to Japan, such as cafes, baseball and dancing.
- These rapid changes created a clash between modernisation – particularly among the young – and the traditional values of Japanese culture.
- Women's role in society gradually changed during the Taishō period, as they gained employment and could join political movements.
- Education now included foreign ideas like democracy and philosophy, but also ideas regarded as subversive or corrupting, such as Communism and feminism.
- As a result of industrialisation and urbanisation, cities grew at a rapid rate, while huge family businesses called *zaibatsu* gained considerable wealth and influence.
- Workers still struggled to make a living doing physical tasks, such as farming, coal mining, or working in factories. The wealth from these jobs became concentrated in the landowners' hands or the *zaibatsu*.



Figure 3.12 Matthew Perry

Key personalities and terms

Personalities

Matthew Perry (1794–1858) was a US Commodore who sailed to Japan in 1853 to threaten the Japanese government into receiving a letter from the President. He returned to Tōkyō Harbour in 1854 with more gunboats, and forced the signing of the Treaty of Kanagawa, which made Japan give up its isolationist ways, and 'favour' the United States.

Terms

Hanbatsu: A political system based upon the power and influence of the clans.

Industrialisation: the process of a society converting to a socio-economic system which is dominated by machines.

Labour unions: organisations of united members seeking to protect their rights, and negotiate better working conditions or wages.

Marxism: a social, political and economic theory based on the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

Modernisation: the process of changing and adapting society from something older and traditional to something new.

Oligarchy: a small group of wealthy and powerful people who rule a country.

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Samurai: a member of a military class of high social rank in Japan from the eleventh to the nineteenth centuries.

Urbanisation: the transfer of the population from the country to cities.

Westernisation: the process whereby western cultures (European or North American) influence the ideas, customs or practices of another culture.

Zaibatsu: a group of industrial and financial companies that controlled a large part of the economy of Japan until World War II.

Activities

Thinking historically

1. Describe 10 changes in Japan as a result of modernisation and/or urbanisation.
2. What were a *mobo* and a *moga*?
3. Imagine you could interview a teenager from this time. Compose a list of five questions you would ask them.
   - Switch your questions with a peer, and respond to their questions as a teenager in Japan during this time.
4. How would a descendant of the samurai view the changes occurring in Japan?
5. Why did dissatisfaction arise over working conditions or employers?
6. Discuss why Marxism or Communism were appealing propositions for many farmers or industrial workers.

3 – 2 – 1 bridge

This sequence is completed twice, once at the start of the chapter, and once at the end. At the start of the chapter, you recorded your three initial thoughts on what Japan was like, two questions you wanted answered, and one analogy. Compose your response to the following:

- Three concluding thoughts or ideas on Japan's society and economy now that you have read about it.
- Two questions you still have, which you want to be answered.
- One analogy (for example: After researching this topic, I think Japan is like …).

Pair with another student:

- Explain how your understanding has changed, from your first thoughts on the topic to your deeper knowledge at the end (this is the bridge of your knowledge).

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Writing historically

1 Essay question: To what extent did tensions between tradition and modernisation result in changes in Japan from 1904 to 1937?
   - Create a clear thesis statement which addresses the question.
   - In the left-hand side of a table, detail five changes which occurred from modernisation.
   - In the right-hand side of the table, describe how each change led to rising tension between modernisation and tradition.

2 Write a reflection on the key ideas you have learnt regarding changes to Japan through modernisation, urbanisation and industrialisation. In your answer, explore whether these matched your previous assumptions of what Japan was like prior to undertaking this topic.

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PART 2
The successes and failures of Japan's democracy



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4 Japanese politics

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The introduction of limited liberal democracy
- The main political parties of Japan (Seiyūkai and Kenseikai)
- The impact of the parties on the Japanese political systems and government



Figure 4.1 This drawing was the winning artwork submitted into a competition to design the Japanese Imperial Diet Building in Tōkyō.

4.1 Seiyūkai

The Seiyūkai (Constitutional Association of Political Friendship), also known as the Rikken Seiyūkai, was one of two key political parties prominent in Japan following World War I. It was founded by **Itō Hirobumi** and became the most powerful political party from 1900 to 1921, with policies focused on government control and grand public spending. The Seiyūkai had close ties with the **Mitsui *zaibatsu***, which created the impression it was connected, if not directly controlled, by the 'elites' of Japan's business world. Members of the party were generally **liberal**, supporting democratic processes

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and advocating for **universal suffrage**, but the Seiyūkai was also a political party and justified its stances on what was popular and would, therefore, secure votes.

The party was regularly in opposition to the Kenseikai, and politically attacked various policies and prime ministers through the 1920s. Seiyūkai leaders could be controversial and divisive figures, as was evident by the assassinations of Prime Ministers Hara Takashi and Inukai Tsuyoshi. Some of these figures also bear responsibility for poor decisions which contributed to rising dissatisfaction and militarism felt throughout Japan.



Figure 4.2 Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi

From Dickinson, F.R. *World War I and the Triumph of a New Japan, 1919–1930* (2015), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, p. 101 Source 4.1

> Those who highlight the failure of party politics in interwar Japan are invariably soured by the increasingly compromising behaviour of one political party in particular … the Seiyukai under Tanaka Giichi (April 1925) followed a very different trajectory than the dramatically reformist agenda pursued by Hara Takashi. Indeed, the Tanaka cabinet is associated with domestic and foreign policies – communist purges and troop dispatches to China – more fitting with the conflict-ridden 1930s than of the New Japan.

Source questions

1 What information does this source provide about Prime Minister Hara?
2 Source 4.1 suggests that the Seiyūkai changed throughout the 1920s. What evidence is provided to support this belief?

The Seiyūkai dissolved in 1940 to create a one-party state similar to the Nazi Party in Germany, called the **Imperial Rule Assistance Association (IRAA)** (also known as the Imperial Aid Association). The IRAA was responsible for pursuing an aggressive war in Asia, and bore overall responsibility for the many war crimes committed by Japanese forces.

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4.2 Kenseikai/Minseito

The Kenseikai (Constitutional Politics Association) was the second of the two dominant political parties in 1920s Japan. It was founded on 10 October 1916, in direct opposition to the Seiyūkai by the merger of Rikken Dōshikai, Chūseikai and some members of the Kōyū Club. While the Seiyūkai were supported by the Mitsui *zaibatsu*, the Kenseikai were supported by the **Mitsubishi *zaibatsu***.

Some historians have criticised the two political parties of Japan as being too similar in their approach to policies and laws, and concluded that they did not offer alternatives to the Japanese people. The Kenseikai did tend to promote laws regarding labour rights, while the Seiyūkai focused on restricting the number of union protests, strikes, or riots. When working together, both parties were able to make changes for Japan, such as in 1924, when the Kenseikai formed a majority government with the Seiyūkai – the first of its kind in Japanese history – and passed policies recognising suffrage to all males aged 25 and over under the **General Election Law**. However, the coalition followed this with the last of the restrictive **Peace Preservation Laws**, which allowed for the arrest of Japanese citizens for protesting. The **Shōwa Financial Crisis** brought down this coalition and led to the rebadging of the Kenseikai as the **Minseito**. As the Minseito, the party adopted plans to legalise workers' strikes, promote responsible economics, balance budgets and respond to the demands of the Great Depression. The Minseito focused on developing stronger international relations with both China and the west, which angered many militarists and nationalists.

Source 4.2 **From Meyer, M.W. *Japan: A Concise History* (2009), Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland, United States, p. 184**

> Both parties represented identical interests, consisting of a fusion of landlords, agrarian capitalists, big business, and the rising middle class. The landlord class was probably somewhat stronger in the Kenseikai/Minseito, but fundamentally both parties were the same in ideology and platform. The difference lay in that each was composed of different factions within the same classes. The Mitsui group was more pronounced in the Seiyukai, and the Mitsubishi dominated the other. This period was the most democratic of Japanese political history to that time, but the degree of democracy should not be overrated.

Source questions

1. Discuss the similarities and differences of the Kenseikai and Seiyūkai, as provided in Source 4.2.
2. Explain the conclusions that Meyer draws in this source.

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4.3 Was Japan a liberal democracy in the 1920s?

The question of the 'type' of government Japan became in the 1920s is still debated by historians to this day. Most reach the conclusion that Japan must be considered a limited liberal democracy *at best*, as it did not display the features associated with a true democracy. In the early 1900s, the role of the clan leaders who sought to gain political power (*hanbatsu*) meant democratic processes struggled to gain momentum until the 1920s. By the 1920s, a two-party system featuring the Kenseikai and Seiyūkai had emerged, with voting to elect ministers or pass legislation through parliament – but this system still maintained features from earlier periods of Japanese history.



Video 4.1
Japan opens new home for Parliament (01:39 silent)

From Garon, S. *The State and Labor in Modern Japan* (1992), University of California Press, Berkeley, United States, p. 3

Source 4.3

> Why did a broad-based movement for the democratization of Japan's political and social institutions develop after World War I? Moreover, why did it so totally collapse after 1931, and how should one describe the repressive system that replaced it? Some historians have addressed these questions by examining the brief ascendancy of the political parties and party cabinets during the 1920s. They have generally concluded that politicians were unable or unwilling to build a mass following and a firm constitutional base against military and bureaucratic rivals. [Other historians] reveal a disturbingly elitist and idealistic understanding of democracy, which prevented even the champions of Taisho democracy from fully supporting the formation of mass organizations and the rough-and-tumble world of parliamentary politics.

Within the democratic government existed the peculiar roles (for a democracy) of the *genro*, the Emperor, and the imperial family or imperial advisers. This meant the Imperial Diet's decisions were often made in consideration of what the *genro* or Emperor desired. Tradition held that the Emperor would never intervene in government as he was a figurehead and spiritual leader rather than a direct leader – yet, it was possible for him to do so. At times, Hirohito did directly intervene, such as demanding his military leaders suppress a coup in 1936, or intervening to end World War II. Another significant 'figure' in Japanese society was the military. With their successes in Korea and against Russia in the early 1900s, they were eager to maintain their relevance in a democratic society. The Taishō crisis of 1912 demonstrated the extent of actions the army was willing to take to maintain its respect, authority and power.

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Apart from external influences, the Meiji Constitution created several restrictions on the democratic process. The most obvious of these was the inability of women to participate, although this was not uncommon for the time period. However, Japan's democracy also limited the voting rights of men until 1925, and even when the right to vote expanded, only 19.1% of the male population could vote. How could a government which did not have the participation of its citizens in the voting process be classified as democratic? This is why Japan is often referred to by the term 'limited liberal democracy' – it had some of the features you would expect to see in a democracy, while also including severe restrictions.

When looking at these significant influences on the processes of government, it can only be concluded that Japan was *some* form of democracy, but it also had *some* features of an **authoritarian** government, and in the later years, *some* features of a **Fascist** government. The only certainty which can be given when trying to describe the Japanese government is the simple fact that it does not fit neatly into any defined type of government from the time.

Table 4.1 Japanese prime ministers, 1918–44

Name	Date start	Date end	Affiliation	Cause of death
Takashi **Hara**	29.9.1918	4.11.1921	Seiyūkai	Assassinated
Takahashi Korekiyo	13.11.1921	12.6.1922	Seiyūkai	Assassinated
Katō Tomosaburo	12.6.1922	24.8.1923	Military (Navy)	Died in office (natural causes)
Yamamoto Gonnohyoe	2.9.1923	7.1.1924	Military (Navy)	Died after retiring from political life (natural causes)
Kiyoura **Keigo**	7.1.1924	11.6.1924	None	
Kato **Takaaki**	11.6.1924	28.1.1926	Kenseikai	Died in office (natural causes)
Wakatsuki **Reijiro**	30.1.1926 14.4.1931	20.4.1927 13.12.1931	Rikken Minseitō	Died after retiring from political life (natural causes)
Tanaka **Giichi**	20.4.1927	2.7.1929	Seiyūkai	Died after retiring from political life (natural causes)
Hamaguchi Osachi	2.7.1929 10.3.1931	14.11.1930 14.4.1931	Minseito (Kenseikai)	Injured from an assassination attempt – died 8 months later
Inukai Tsuyoshi	13.12.1931	15.5.1932	Seiyūkai	Assassinated
Saito Makoto	26.5.1932	8.7.1934	Military (Navy)	Assassinated
Okada Keisuke	8.7.1934	9.3.1936	Military (Navy)	Nearly killed in revolution attempt (died shortly after)
Hirota Koki	9.3.1936	2.2.1937	None	Later executed – war crimes

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Name	Date start	Date end	Affiliation	Cause of death
Hayashi Senjuro	2.2.1937	4.6.1937	Military (Army)	Died after retiring from political life (natural causes)
Konoe Fumimaro	4.6.1937 22.7.1940	5.1.1939 18.10.1941	Joined Imperial Rule Assistance Association	Later suicided – potential war crimes
Hiranuma Kiichiro	5.1.1939	30.8.1939	None	Sentenced to life imprisonment for war crimes, paroled 1952, and died (natural causes)
Abe Nobuyuki	30.8.1939	16.1.1940	Military (Army) Joined Imperial Rule Assistance Association in 1940	Died after retiring from political life (natural causes)
Yonai Mitsumasa	16.1.1940	22.7.1940	Military (Navy)	Died after retiring from political life (natural causes)
Tojo Hideki	18.10.1941	22.7.1944	Imperial Rule Assistance Association	Sentenced to hang for war crimes

Summary

- The Seiyūkai (Constitutional Association of Political Friendship) was founded in 1900, and became the largest political party in Japan by 1922.
- The Seiyūkai had close ties to the Mitsui *zaibatsu*.
- As part of a two-party system, the Seiyūkai was generally opposed to the Kenseikai Party (Constitutional Politics Association), which formed in 1916 but merged with two other parties to form the Minseito on 1 June 1927.
- The Kenseikai had close ties to the Mitsubishi *zaibatsu*.
- Both parties had members elected to the Imperial Diet (the parliament) by general elections across Japan, although only around 19.1% of men were allowed to vote (suffrage) and women were not allowed to vote.
- In the 1920s, Japan's government is historically regarded as a limited liberal democracy. It was a democracy, because it had general elections where members were voted into parliament. It was liberal, because it sought to protect the rights of its peoples. However, it was also limited, because only some people could vote, depending on wealth and gender, and there were other non-elected figures in the political process, such as the Emperor.

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Key personalities and terms



Figure 4.3 Itō Hirobumi

Personalities

Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909) was a statesman who became Japan's first Prime Minister in 1885. He drafted the Japanese constitution and worked to create legislation for the Imperial Diet. Hirobumi favoured positive international relations, and worked to strengthen Japan's connections to Germany, the United States and Great Britain. In 1909, Hirobumi was assassinated by a Korean independence nationalist after agreeing to the army's takeover.

Terms

Authoritarian: demanding that people obey completely and refusing to allow them the freedom to act as they wish.

Fascist: a political system based on a powerful leader, state control, and being extremely proud of country and race.

General Election Law: the law passed by the Diet which established 'universal' suffrage in Japan (although this was limited to men, within a certain age, and with a certain amount of money).

Imperial Rule Assistance Association (IRAA): was founded to unify the two-party system of democracy in Japan into a more authoritarian form of government.

Liberalism: a political ideology that promotes equality, liberty, protection from injustice and economic opportunity for all people.

Minseito: the renamed Kenseikai Party from 1927 onwards.

Mitsubishi *zaibatsu*: one of the four major conglomerates which dominated Japanese industry and the economy, with a close connection to the Kenseikai.

Mitsui *zaibatsu*: one of the four major family conglomerates which dominated Japanese industry and the economy, with a close connection to the Seiyūkai.

Peace Preservation Laws: a sequence of laws which led to the arrest of anyone who protested against the government, or did not display Japanese cultural traits and traditions.

Shōwa Financial Crisis: a time of financial panic in 1927 Japan, which led to the closure of 37 banks.

Universal suffrage: the right of all adult citizens to vote in an election, especially for representatives in a government.

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Activities

Thinking historically

1. What were the two main political parties?
2. Which *zaibatsu* was each party connected to?
3. Describe the problems these connections between business and politics created.
4. What is the difference between a Fascist government and an authoritarian one?
5. Who were the prime ministers who took Japan through the following events?
   - **a** the extension of voting rights for men in 1925
   - **b** the Great Depression from 1929 to 1933
   - **c** the invasion of Manchuria in September 1931
   - **d** the war with China in 1937.
6. Considering the dates of each prime minister's appointment, what conclusions can be drawn about prime ministers in Japan. Justify these conclusions.
7. Broadly, what years featured prime ministers with a military background?
8. What does the rise of militarist prime ministers suggest about Japan's democracy?

Tug of war

- Consider whether Japan was a democracy during the 1920s.
- Create a table of evidence for and against this argument – these are the 'tugs'.
- Using the 'tugs', conclude whether Japan was or was not a democracy during the 1920s.

Writing historically

- Using information from the tug of war exercise, compose a response to the following question: How secure was democracy in Japan during the 1920s?

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5 Influences on the developing democracy

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The introduction of limited liberal democracy and the challenges faced
- Political influence of the *zaibatsu*
- The role of the *genro* and bureaucracy in Japanese democracy

5.1 *Zaibatsu*

The term *zaibatsu* means literally 'money-cliques' and describes Japanese business houses with broad interests. The four major *zaibatsu* were the Mitsui, Mitsubishi, Sumitomo and Yasuda, although there were other 'second-tier' *zaibatsu*. These business groups in Japan had become **monopolies** with huge economic power and, therefore, political influence. They were largely run through dynastic families, had controlled and established links with other firms, and used their own banks to finance their operations.

During the 1800s, as Japan sought to modernise, the Meiji government had provided financial support to companies that contributed to the development of Japan's economy. This allowed for the growth of key businesses that purchased industries from the state. As a result, all real competition was prevented – and as the industries the government sold were usually productive and important, the influence of the *zaibatsu* developed quickly.

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Table 5.1 Areas of business for the two largest *zaibatsu*

Core subsidiaries in the Mitsui and Mitsubishi combine at the end of World War I	
Mitsui	**Mitsubishi**
First-line subsidiaries:	**First-line subsidiaries:**
Trading	Trading and Banking
Mining	Mining
Trust	Trust
Real Estate	Real Estate
Chemicals	Chemical Processing
Shipbuilding	Oil
Precision Machinery	Steel Fabricating
Life Insurance	Electric
Agriculture and Forestry	Warehouse
Steamships	Heavy Industries
Second-line subsidiaries:	**Second-line subsidiaries:**
Taishō Marine Fire Insurance	Tōkyō Marine Fire Insurance
Mitsui Warehouse	Japan Optical
Mitsui Light Metal	Japan Steel Construction
Tropical Produce	Japan Grain Products
Mitsui Petrochemical	Mitsubishi Chemical
Sanki Engineering	Machinery
Toyo Cotton	Mitsubishi Steamship
Japan Flour Milling	Japan Aluminium
Toyo Rayon	Meiji Life Insurance

Source: Yamazaki, H. 'The Development of Large Enterprises in Japan: An Analysis of the Top 50 Enterprises in the Profit Ranking Table (1929–1984)', in S. Yasuoka and H. Morikawa (eds), *Japanese Yearbook on Business History*, 5, Tokyo, 1988, pp. 12–55

Table 5.2 Annual income for the *zaibatsu* families, in yen

Family	Annual income in 1895, ¥
Iwasaki (Mitsubishi)	1 084 000
Mitsui	529 000
Sumitomo	156 000
Yasuda	94 000
Okura	65 000
Furukawa	62 000

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See, think, wonder

Create a three-column table with the titles See, Think and Wonder.

- List what you can **see** in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 in the first column. (I can see …)
- Using this list, write down what these words make you **think** about. (I think …)
- In the final column, create a list of ideas which may not directly be in the information in the tables, but you now **wonder** about. (I wonder …)

Source 5.1 **From Allen, G.C. *A Short Economic History of Modern Japan* (1981), Palgrave Macmillan, United Kingdom, p. 138**

> But the zaibatsu by 1929 occupied a special position, not merely because of the magnitude of their interests and their close and peculiar relations with the Government but also because of the very wide range of their interests. These comprised mining, metals, mechanical engineering, electrical apparatus and machinery, textiles, paper, cement, glass, chemicals, shipbuilding, shipping, foreign and domestic trade, banking and insurance. It was difficult, indeed, to find any form of large-scale economic activity in which the zaibatsu had not an important share …

Source questions

1. From Source 5.1, in what areas of society did the *zaibatsu* have control?
2. Suggest potential consequences arising from the *zaibatsu* having control over so many areas of business.

Subsidised by the government, the wealth and power of the *zaibatsu* continued to grow. Their influence began to extend into politics, through funding campaigns or having personnel join the parties, even potentially bribing voters to influence elections. Japanese citizens, therefore, had a valid complaint saying that governments in the 1920s were made up of these elites, or only made policies that benefited the elites. While ministers formed connections with the *zaibatsu* when in parliament, it was very likely they already had these connections before they were elected, especially if their path to politics came through business or economics.

By the late 1920s, the Mitsui was associated with the Seiyūkai Party, while the Mitsubishi was associated with the Kenseikai Party. Fears of corruption resulting from the influence of the rich persisted in Japanese society, particularly with the challenging circumstances Japan endured through the 1920s. Events such as Japan returning to the gold standard, which saw huge profits for the *zaibatsu* in the midst of the Great Depression, did not help this perception at all.

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From Gordon, A. *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (2003), Oxford University Press, New York, United States, p. 183 Source 5.2

Japan's zaibatsu banks behaved in a way that was economically smart but politically damaging. Bankers quickly realized that the government would have no choice but to abandon this move to the gold standard and devalue the yen. They sold massive amounts of yen for dollars. When Japan indeed left the gold standard in 1931, the value of the yen quickly fell by half against the dollar. The banks happily doubled their money by repurchasing the cheaper Japanese currency with their dollars. This behaviour reinforced the widespread belief that capitalists and their allies in the political parties were greedy and selfish: They were profiting handsomely by selling out the country during a depression that was impoverishing everyone else.



Figure 5.1 Postcard picture of a Japanese business district, Nihonbashi, Tōkyō, Japan, 1922

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Source 5.3 **From Fukio, H. *Party in Power: Japanese Liberal-democrats and Policy Making* (1970), University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, United States, p. 31**

> Relationships between one or the other of the major conservative parties and a zaibatsu concern were well known from the earliest days of Japanese party politics. They assumed increasing importance after the Russo-Japanese War and reached a peak following World War I during the 'Taisho Democracy'. This state of affairs lasted until the early 1930s, when the Mitsui and then Mitsubishi underwent a 'change of policy' and put an end to their active intervention in party politics.

Source 5.4 **From Goto-Jones, C. *Modern Japan: A Very Short Introduction* (2009), Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, United States, p. 76**

> By the end of the Taisho period, Japan was in depression, the zaibatsu conglomerates (such as Mitsubishi, Mitsui, and Sumitomo) were beginning to take over the economy as private banks failed, and they were cultivating ever-closer connections with the political parties and the military. This meant that wealth was being concentrated into fewer hands, and more of the urban population was struggling to maintain their way of life.

Politically, it seemed that the *zaibatsu* tended to support military action, as it could be extremely profitable – but this is not a clear conclusion. There were times when the *zaibatsu* turned away from militarism and imperialist policy, or were actively turned away by the army. While World War I created great wealth for the *zaibatsu* in the defence sector, this does not lead to the conclusion that all the *zaibatsu* were pro-war. Through the 1930s, many militarists openly criticised the *zaibatsu*, while seeking to take advantage of their production power necessary for a modern military force.

True, for who?

Consider the claim: the corruption of the *zaibatsu* led to the rise of militarism in Japan.

1. **Discuss**. Who would be likely to make this claim, and under what circumstances? What interests would they have in making this claim public?
2. **Brainstorm**. Make a list of different points of view you could look at this claim from.

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3 **Dramatise**. Choose a viewpoint to embody and imagine the stance a person from this viewpoint would be likely to take (for example – a Japanese civilian, politician, militarist, or a family member of one of the *zaibatsu*). Would he or she think the claim is true, false or uncertain? Why? Go around in a circle and dramatically speak from the viewpoint. Say:
   - My viewpoint is …
   - I think this claim is true/false/uncertain because …
   - What would convince me to change my mind is …
4 **Stand back**. Step outside of the circle of viewpoints and take everything into account: What is your conclusion about this claim? What new ideas or questions do you have?

5.2 Role of the *genro*

The word *genro* is often used to describe the role or position of a group of people that performed a specific function, but it can also be used as a title for an individual *genro*. The two relevant to Japan in the 1920s were **Yamagata Aritomo**, who was *genro* until his death in 1922, whereupon Prince **Saionji Kinmochi** became the last surviving *genro*.

The Meiji state had been largely shaped by the policies pursued by the *genro*, but the bulk of their power was weakened in 1905. From this point onwards, the legacy of the *genro* position was that of a close adviser to the Emperor, with the ability to select the prime minister for appointment. But while the *genro* did not have direct power in many areas of government, they did have the ability to place a great deal of pressure on any issue due to the prestige and respect accorded to them – this is evident when the *genro* forced the resignation of Prime Minister Katō after he acted without their consultation and presented his Twenty-One Demands to China. Katō's removal demonstrates the authority the *genro* could bring to bear by isolating figures – even prime ministers – in parliament. At other times, they forced negotiations to policies so that the desires of the people (through the democracy) were filtered through the desires of those in positions of power.

In the 1910s, prime ministers looked to persuade the *genro* to give greater power to the political parties of Japan. The *genro* were, after all, a dying breed of statesmen, who were unlikely to be replaced. Both sides of politics, the Seiyūkai and the Kenseikai, worked to limit the influence of the *genro* while simultaneously expanding the influence of their party.

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Source 5.5 **From Duus, P. *Party Rivalry and Political Change in Taisho Japan* (1968), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States, p. 83**

> [Various Prime Ministers] shared a common set of problems as party leaders – how to reduce the influence of the genro in politics … Such problems did not admit of an easy solution, for the aging survivors of the oligarchy were loath to relinquish their hold over the state, which they had so painstakingly created … The genro, on the whole, were still disinclined to entrust the reins of government to the leaders of political parties. Instead, their ideal remained that of '**transcendental government**' rule by men who stood apart from party connections and could carry out policies that served the interests of the nation as a whole and not just one part of it. They wanted to perpetuate the benevolent bureaucratic authoritarianism they had practiced during the early years of modernization.

Source 5.6 **From Sakusuke, S. *Taketomi Tokitoshi: Postwar trends and how to deal with them* (1934), cited in Duus, P. *Party Rivalry and Political Change in Taisho Japan* (1968), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States, p. 39**

> The genro until recently seem to have held the centre of political power, but they are growing old and falling into a decline … The time for the establishment of party cabinets is approaching, and when it comes, it will be impossible to face the political situation to come without a party at one's command.



Figure 5.2 Photographic portrait of Count Yamagata Aritomo, a much-respected *genro* of Japan

Despite the fact that the *genro* Yamagata Aritomo was an ageing figure in Japanese politics and had semi-retired, he still maintained great authority in the decision-making process of Japan. The appointment of Prime Minister Hara in 1918 had weakened the influence of the *genro* and shifted power towards political parties. However, Yamagata still favoured 'transcendental government' methods, as they allowed him to control and manipulate the selection of prime ministers to achieve his own objectives by placing those who supported an oligarchic method of power into positions of authority.

When Yamagata died in 1922, Saionji was the sole remaining *genro*, with all the authority of the traditional position. It was an authority that suited Yamagata but fell less comfortably on Saionji. As *genro*, Saionji sought political unity in Japan by attempting to keep himself beyond small politics and focused on the broader picture of what was best for Japan. But he was also required to nominate the prime minister, which meant

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he selected one side of politics or the other, or indeed, selected no side of politics and went for a military figure. He held mixed views of liberal democracy – in his eyes, he had a duty to place Japan on the best path possible, whether this was democratic, or not.

Saionji struggled with the appointment of prime ministers throughout his time as *genro*. Prime Minister Katō, who had resigned his office after losing the respect of the *genro* over the Twenty-One Demands incident, was the clear choice for prime minister after Hara's assassination in 1921. Saionji had nominated **Takahashi Korekiyo**, who failed in the role, and had the opportunity to replace him with **Katō Tomosaburo** – but his failure to do so destabilised the government through the early 1920s. This is evidence of the power the *genro* maintained, as Saionji's actions could either bring stability to government in Japan or lead to turmoil.

From Duus, P. *Party Rivalry and Political Change in Taisho Japan* (1968), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States, p. 166 Source 5.7

> Saionji was guided by purely pragmatic considerations. He recommended men in whom he felt personal confidence and who seemed capable of controlling the Diet and the other high organs of government. Relying on the best information he could obtain, usually gleaned from the press or from reports of informants such as Matsumoto and Harada Kumao, his choice was guided by considerations of a man's personal character, his reputation, and his bases of power. He took the role of an objective bystander, who, after gathering a vague and unsystematic consensus, picks the candidate who seems most appropriate at the moment. Before 1924, this meant men who were 'above party'; between 1924 and 1932 it meant men in the parties; and after 1932, when his role diminished conspicuously, it meant men who were best equipped to prevent military terrorism and to control army insubordination.

Source questions

1 Outline the assessment Source 5.7 has made of the last *genro*, Prince Saionji.
2 Do you believe this source presents Saionji positively or negatively? Justify your response with specific reference to Source 5.7.

In 1932, Saionji made a decision that sealed the fate of parliamentary democracy. Faced with the choice of whom to appoint as prime minister in the wake of the assassination of Prime Minister Inukai in an attempted coup, Saionji chose to place a military figure in power. It was the same principle the *genro* had followed in the wake of the 1912 political crisis, and while Saionji did find someone who was 'not close to Fascist' as the

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Emperor demanded, Inukai was also not a party politician. From this point, the political parties of Japan would decline, partly because of Saionji's decision.

Seeking to bring stability as he aged, an 84-year-old Saionji tried to establish a body known as *jushin*, or senior retainers, who took over the role of selecting the prime minister. This body comprised parliamentary members of authority and ex-prime ministers, who focused on electing a prime minister with enough support to promote national unity. One of Saionji's final political acts was to oversee the appointment of **Konoe Fumimaro** as prime minster, but this appointment did not last long. Konoe's resignation triggered a new debate in Japan, similar to the debate in Germany before Adolf Hitler came to power. How could the **right-wing nationalists** be brought into the political sphere without also bringing in the **radical right wing**? This led to the appointment of more militaristic figures to positions of governance and to the Privy Council (advisers to the Emperor) – all with the agreement of Saionji.

When considering the role and influence of the *genro* in Japanese politics, it is difficult to assess their overall impact on democracy, and ultimately, the rise of nationalism. The fact that the *genro* featured in Japanese politics meant that it was less democratic than other systems of government, and it must be acknowledged that other democracies around the world had similar systems for appointing their leaders. Further complicating the process of government was the ability of the *genro* to influence political figures and sway the Emperor to their point of view. While the Emperor would not directly intervene, it was extremely unusual for the Japanese government to act in a way that went against his wishes. Yamagata Aritomo was less democratically inclined than Saionji, but Saionji oversaw the transition to a more militaristic form of government despite his apparent preference for a democratic form. Perhaps this was because he was too soft on policies, whereas Yamagata had the weight of authority behind him – or it could also be that his desire to thwart an *outright* coup ultimately led to concessions placing militarists in positions of authority. Either way, the *genro*'s influence in politics ushered in a more militaristic and nationalist form of government by the early 1930s.

Summary

- *Zaibatsu* directly translates as 'money-cliques' – large family businesses that controlled extensive areas of Japan's economy, such as industry, manufacturing and finance.
- Through the 1920s, the *zaibatsu* became involved in politics through their associations with the Kenseikai and Seiyūkai parties. This left many people unhappy, as they feared the political parties no longer represented their interests, but gave in to the desires of the rich so they could ensure future donations.

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- Corruption was a constant allegation aimed at the *zaibatsu* and politicians with connections to them. It was not helped when the *zaibatsu* used events like abandoning the gold standard during the Great Depression to make monstrous profits. While the poor suffered through the economic downturn, the *zaibatsu* grew their wealth.
- The *zaibatsu* supported some military action if it was profitable, and played a key role in arming Japan for war with modernised technology.
- Another powerful group in Japan were the *genro*, who were respected for their prestige and status as the 'elder statesmen' of Japan. In the Taishō era, they were literally dying out due to old age, and would not be replaced.
- The *genro* advised the Emperor on whom to appoint as prime minister – the Emperor made the actual appointment after receiving this advice.
- Prince Saionji was the last *genro* of Japan from 1922. He struggled to prevent rising militarism and nationalism in Japan, and appointed military figures to the position of prime minister.

Key personalities and terms

Personalities

Yamagata Aritomo (1838–1922), also known as Yamagata Kyosuke, was a Marshal in the Imperial Japanese Army and also Prime Minister of Japan on two occasions. He was a strong supporter of the military in Japan, although he took some steps to establishing democracy as one of Japan's final *genro*.



Figure 5.3 Yamagata Aritomo



Figure 5.4 Saionji Kinmochi

Prince **Saionji Kinmochi** (1849–1940) was a Japanese politician, statesman and twice Prime Minister of Japan. His title does not mean he was the son of the Emperor, but indicates the highest rank of Japanese hereditary nobility as he was elevated from Marquis to Prince in 1920. As the last surviving *genro*, he was Japan's most honoured statesman during the 1920s and 1930s.

Takahashi Korekiyo (1854–1936) was a member of the Seiyūkai and the second Christian Japanese Prime Minister, a fact leading to his removal from power due to being regarded as an outsider. He was more effective as the Finance Minister, where his policies to devalue the yen and increase Japanese exports brought economic stability to Japan. Takahashi was among those murdered by rebelling military officers in the February 26 Incident of 1936.



Figure 5.5 Takahashi Korekiyo

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Figure 5.6 Katō Tomosaburo

Katō Tomosaburo (1861–1923) was a career officer in the Imperial Japanese Navy and became the 21st Prime Minister of Japan in 1922. Katō served as Chief of Staff to Admiral Tōgō during the Russo-Japanese War, and was responsible for implementing the provisions of the Washington Naval Conference. Katō preferred diplomatic policies to aggression, withdrawing Japanese forces from Shantung in China, and from Russia. He died of natural causes just before the Great Kanto Earthquake.



Figure 5.7 Konoe Fumimaro

Konoe Fumimaro (1891–1945) was a Japanese politician who served as the 34th, 38th and 39th Prime Minister of Japan, and in 1940 founded the Imperial Rule Assistance Association, which aimed to eventually create a totalitarian one-party state to support the war effort against China. Shortly into his second appointment as Prime Minister, the army instigated the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in China to start a war. Konoe initially warned the army not to escalate the situation, but they ignored his request. Konoe decided to take Japan to war rather than confront the army. He committed suicide after the war ended in 1945.

Terms

Monopoly: exclusive control of a service, trade or industry.

Radical right wing: these people had similar views to right-wing nationalists, but wanted to use violence, intimidation, threats and assassinations to achieve their aims.

Right-wing nationalists: people who tended to support more authoritarian governments, backed by the military, and based upon nationalist principles.

Transcendental government: a type of government led by men who were supposedly above petty political fights, instead making decisions in the best interest of Japan.

Activities

Thinking historically

1. Describe the role of the *zaibatsu* in Japanese society.
2. List five areas the Mitsui and Mitsubishi *zaibatsu* were involved in.
3. In your opinion, what impact did such widespread, dominant companies have on Japanese society?

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4 Discuss the potential problems with a 'transcendental government'. To what extent was it democratic?
5 What was the role of the *genro*?
6 How powerful were the *genro* in Japanese society? Include specific examples to demonstrate their power.
7 Define the difference between a nationalist and a right-wing nationalist.

G-S-C-E concept map

- **Generate** a list of ideas and initial thoughts that come to mind when you think about the challenges to democracy in Japan.
- **Sort** your ideas according to how important they are, placing key ideas in the centre of your page.
- **Connect** your ideas by drawing lines between ideas that have something in common. In a short sentence between, explain how the ideas are connected.
- **Elaborate** on any of the ideas/thoughts you have written so far by adding new ideas that expand, extend or add to your initial ideas.

Continue generating, connecting and elaborating new ideas until you feel you have an effective visual representation of your understanding.

Writing historically

1 As the last *genro*, Prince Saionji was an influential figure during the interwar period in Japan. Create a biography of his life and defining events.
2 Evaluate Prince Saionji's contribution to the failure of democracy in Japan – this can be added to as you work through the unit.
3 Essay question: Assess the political impact of the *zaibatsu* on Japanese society.
   - Create a clear thesis statement which addresses the question.
   - Compose three topic points on the *zaibatsu*'s political contribution to Japan in the 1920s.

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6 Defining events of the 1920s

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- Changes in society during the 1920s
- The successes and failures of democracy
- The political and economic impact of the Great Depression
- Growing tensions between tradition and modernisation
- The growth of nationalism and militarism as a result of hardship

CHRONOLOGY

1923	
1 September	Great Kanto Earthquake strikes Japan
1925	
5 May	The passing of the General Election Law increases the number of men able to vote in the 1928 elections
1925	
12 May	Public Security Preservation Laws pass through parliament
1927	
March	Shōwa Financial Crisis begins
1928	
15 March	Mass arrest of over 16 000 Communists

The events of this chapter occurred during the turbulent times of the 1920s. It is important to know these events, but for your course you are particularly focusing on the political response to these events. As each of the following had a broad impact on Japanese society or the economy, the government naturally took some form of action to address these challenges. You will need to understand the government's response, its effectiveness and overall impact – not simply what happened.

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6.1 The Great Kanto Earthquake

At 11:58 a.m. on 1 September 1923, the Great Kanto Earthquake struck the cities of Tōkyō, Yokohama and their surrounds. With a magnitude of 7.9 on the Richter Scale, the earthquake devastated both cities, as did each of the subsequent aftershocks. Japan was known for its seismic activity, as a country along the so-called 'Ring of Fire' around the Pacific, but the annihilation of Tōkyō and Yokohama was still a great shock. Estimates placed the death toll around 142 000 people as a result of the quake or the subsequent firestorms which were triggered across the predominantly wooden cities. A typhoon situated off Japan brought strong winds, driving a wave of inescapable heat through buildings and homes. In the surrounding areas, landslides and tsunamis claimed further lives. Approximately 60% of Tōkyō's population became homeless after the earthquake.

Video 6.1
1923 earthquake (00:28)



Figure 6.1 The charred remnants of Tōkyō after the earthquake and fires



Figure 6.2 People taking refuge in sewers near Yokohama after the Great Kanto Earthquake

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See, think, wonder

Create a three-columned table with the titles See, Think and Wonder.

1. List what you can **see** in Figure 6.2 in the first column. (I can see …)
2. Using this list, write down what these words make you **think** about. (I think …)
3. In the final column, create a list of ideas which may not directly be in the image, but you now **wonder** about. (I wonder …)

Source 6.1 **From the diary of Charles Blauvert, an American visiting Japan; in http://www.transpect.com/japan_diary/**

> At the Imperial Hotel Tokyo. [I] was talking in my room #310 on the third floor … when we felt a terrible Earthquake. The whole building rocked and trembled, chairs and the beds slid about the room and we were all scared. As soon as the first quake passed we ran for the street … The streets filled fast with frightened people and buildings were down all about us or badly cracked … Fires had started in six or eight places where we passed and burned with terrible fury … [seeming] to cover the whole city. The fires burned all day and all night. Refugees passed … by in the hundred thousands. Most women carrying babies, the men and children carrying great loads of bedding or clothing or pushing a rikisha or some contrivance loaded with house-hold effects. Probably their entire belongings.

While the Great Kanto Earthquake had a devastating impact on the people living in Tōkyō and its surrounds, it also had a lasting impact on many Japanese citizens. Japan was a country steeped in traditions arising from the **Shinto** religion. This religion focused on the ancestors and the spiritual world – it was easy for followers of Shintoism, or those who were resistant to western influence, to claim the earthquake was punishment from the ancestors for the 'unhealthy' and 'corrupted' state of Japan. They urged the Japanese people to purge western or foreign influences and reclaim their traditions.

In the aftermath of the Kanto earthquake, racism took hold in Japan, particularly directed at Koreans. As a minority, they provided an easy outlet for the anger, rage and helplessness many people felt. On the afternoon of 1 September, rumours were spread that the Koreans had started the fires, looted houses, and even the extreme idea that they had attempted a coup to overthrow the government. How this would legitimately occur is unknown, but many people were not thinking clearly in the wake of their losses, and the horrors they endured. But these horrors only continued as 6000 Koreans and 700 Chinese were hacked to death in revenge attacks.

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Industry in Tōkyō ground to a halt, causing a sharp downturn in Japan's economic fortunes. However, this was countered by the restoration of Tōkyō across the next few years, with city-wide reconstruction projects bringing employment and redevelopment opportunities. This economic growth was largely stimulated by the government, which made loans to encourage development; but these loans would play a key role in the Shōwa Financial Crisis of 1927.

From Gordon, A. *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (2003), Oxford University Press, New York, United States, p. 140 Source 6.2

A 'reconstruction boom' in the aftermath of the earthquake temporarily stimulated jobs and businesses in the Tokyo area. The government encouraged liberal bank lending as further stimulus – against the orthodox logic of retrenchment. Industrial production did increase steadily in key industries such as machine building and shipbuilding. But the basic problem of high international prices remained, and many producers stood on shaky grounds. Domestic textile mills, for example, were losing ground to lower-cost competitors in China, including Japanese producers with overseas investments.

From Hunter, J. & Ogasawara, K. 'Price Shocks in Disaster: The Great Kanto Earthquake in Japan 1923' (2016), London School of Economics and Political Science, *Working Papers*, No. 253, November 2016, pp. 4–5 Source 6.3

Research on the economic impact of the disaster … has remained limited, perhaps because most economists and economic historians have taken the view that its influence on Japan's longer-term growth and development was fairly minimal. Certainly, it is acknowledged that the disaster was a key factor in the stop-go financial and monetary policy of Japan in the 1920s, that it also led to financial dislocation, and that it contributed to the occurrence of a major financial crisis in 1927.

From Meyer, M.W. *Japan: A Concise History* (2009), Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland, United States, p. 183 Source 6.4

The [Great Kanto] holocaust exacted 100,000 lives, obliterating half of the city and most of neighbouring Yokohama. It helped to eradicate the old urban areas, and at the same time, it laid the groundwork for a new megalopolis. The rebuilt central Tokyo area was transformed into a city of broad boulevards flanked by massive steel and reinforced concrete buildings. Other cities followed Tokyo's lead in a countrywide outburst

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of urban construction. Despite modernization, however, in Japanese society, particularly in rural areas, some old characteristics survived, such as the importance of family ties, the exercise of paternal authority, and the dominance of the male. Yet in increasing numbers, the younger generation in the cities challenged these traditional social customs. Youth contracted [their] own marriages rather than accept those arranged by families, and women joined the ranks of career workers. The *moga* (modern girl) and *mobo* (modern boy) enjoyed Hollywood movies, jazz, and Western-style dancing. Western sports became the rage. Tennis, track and field sports, swimming, and baseball, the great national sport, became common in Japan.

Source questions

1 Outline the information provided in Sources 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4.
2 Using your own knowledge and the sources provided, create a table of the long-term and short-term impacts which resulted from the Great Kanto Earthquake.

The impacts of the 1923 earthquake were diverse, but it can safely be concluded that the Kanto Earthquake heralded the beginning of large changes in Japanese society. Apart from social change, the fact that **Yamamoto Gonnohyoe** was restored as Prime Minister, despite having been removed for a corruption scandal in 1914, allowed for public cries of corruption to be levelled at the government once again. Redevelopment of Japan led to increased western influences like cinemas or cafes, furthering racist and anti-foreigner sentiment. The belief that Japan needed to secure its cultural identity, and future, played directly into the hands of rising nationalists and militarists. While these issues were present in Japan prior to 1923, they gained greater relevancy by 1924 in the shadow of the earthquake.



Figure 6.3 Reconstruction of the Azuma Bridge in Tōkyō, which was damaged from fires after the Kanto Earthquake

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6.2 The Shōwa Financial Crisis

In 1927, financial panic during the newly appointed Emperor Hirohito's reign led to the Shōwa Financial Crisis. Japan was an industrialising country, providing many opportunities for businesses to invest. During World War I, production had accelerated as demand for weapons and munitions gave a short-lived boost to Japan's economy. After the war, the boost faded, leaving Japan with a slowing economy that had just endured political and economic hardship as a result of the Great Kanto Earthquake. By the end of 1923, business slowed further, and numerous small banks began to experience financial pressures. While this had become relatively common, the **Bank of Japan** (BoJ) was forced to intercede and provide 'special loans' to failing banks. The government, fearing the impact this would have on the BoJ, sought to protect it, with 100 million yen available should the BoJ incur any losses. The government also sought and legislated for banking reform to adjust banking practices.

For four years following the earthquake, it appeared as if the government's actions were successful. But in January 1927, Prime Minister **Wakatsuki Reijiro** and his cabinet sought to use bonds to finalise the BoJ's debts from the Great Kanto Earthquake. The debate in the Diet was furious – and Minister Naoharu Kataoka falsely declared that the Tōkyō Watanabe Bank had become bankrupt, triggering panic among the population as they sought to withdraw their money from banks before they collapsed. The Kenseikai leader, Wakatsuki, was forced to resign the prime-ministership as financial panic spread across Japan.

Tanaka Giichi of the Seiyūkai Party took over the prime-ministership, and within two days sought to act on the banking crisis. By early May, his party had steadied the banking institutions in Taiwan and Japan, and gone some way to restoring the population's faith in the banking sector. But the damage had already been done – one government had fallen, and 37 smaller banks were consumed by the *zaibatsu* conglomerates. They strengthened their control of the financial sector, and as a result, strengthened their influence on the politics of Japan.

6.3 Universal suffrage

Prior to 1925, only men who paid at least 15 yen each year in property taxes could vote in an election. By any simple definition of democracy, this does not make Japan very democratic. A **plutocracy** is a form of government based on wealth, and with under 2% of the Japanese population voting, their style of government shared some similarities. However, after much pressure from social groups and political parties, the government of Prime Minister **Katō Takaaki** enacted the 1925 General Election Law, which gave more men over the age of 25 the right to vote. While this is described as

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'universal suffrage', in reality, it applied to only one-fifth of the population (around 12 million people).

The new law laid out some restrictions on who could vote, apart from women and males below 25. This included anyone judged 'incompetent' in a loosely defined category, those who were bankrupt or receiving money from the government, as well as those who had no address or had served more than one year in prison. Furthermore, despite being passed in 1925, the General Election Law did not come into effect until the 1928 elections. This allowed the government to create a second piece of legislation in 1925, which oppressed many of the parties or movements these new voters could vote for.

Table 6.1 Percentage of Japan's population eligible to vote

Year	% (approximate)
1889	2.0
1900	3.9
1917	4.8
1920	10.2
1925	19.1

Source: Figures extracted from S.C.M. Paine, *The Japanese Empire: Grand Strategy from the Meiji Restoration to the Pacific War* (2017), Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, p. 89

6.4 The Public Security Preservation Laws

Following the General Election Law of 1925, the Japanese government was quick to introduce the **Public Security Preservation Laws** (also referred to as the Peace Preservation Laws). Historians have argued that these laws were introduced due to the growing fear of Communism, as they gave the government the capacity to prevent the spread and potential revolt of Communists. They also had the added effect of giving the government more power, to control people they regarded as not displaying Japanese traits.

Source 6.5 **From Huffman J.L. *Modern Japan – A History in Documents* (2004), Oxford University Press, New York, United States, pp. 126–7**

The laws stated:

1. Anyone who forms, or knowingly participates in, groups whose goal is to deny the system of private property or to change our national essence (***kokutai***) shall be sentenced to prison or penal servitude of up to ten years. Anyone who attempts to commit this crime also will be punished.
2. Anyone who engages in discussions intended to carry out the aims of Article One, Clause One shall be sentenced to prison or penal servitude of up to seven years.

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3 Anyone who instigates actions by others intended to carry out the aims of Article One, Clause One, shall be sentenced to prison or penal servitude of up to seven years.
4 Anyone intending to carry out the aims of Article One, Clause One who instigates crimes resulting in riots or violence that cause damage to property, bodily injury, or destruction of life, shall be sentenced to prison or penal servitude of up to ten years.
5 Anyone who, intending to carry out the aims of Article One, Clause One or of the crimes described in the three previous clauses, gives money, goods, or other financial benefits to others, or makes promises of such for that same purpose, shall be sentenced to prison or penal servitude of up to five years. Anyone who knowingly demands or receives such remuneration, or makes a commitment for such remuneration, shall be given the same punishment.
6 Anyone guilty of the offences in the five preceding articles who surrenders voluntarily to the police shall receive a lighter sentence or be exonerated.
7 This law shall apply to anyone who commits these crimes, even if that person lives outside the regions where the law has jurisdiction.

Source questions

1 Outline the key ideas contained in the Public Security Preservation Laws.
2 What were the punishments for those seeking to change Japan's *kokutai*?
3 Discuss whether you believe it is appropriate for a law to apply to a person who lives 'outside the regions where the law has jurisdiction'.

Circle of viewpoints

- Students divide into groups of three.
- Each student is assigned a 'viewpoint' – a Communist, a member of the Seiyūkai, a military officer from the army or navy.
- Each student should consider the Peace Preservation Laws from their point of view, using the following prompts:
  - I am thinking of … from the point of view of …
  - I think this person would hold these opinions of the Peace Preservation Laws …
  - One question I have about this point of view is …
- Students share their different points of view in the group of three.

These laws vaguely defined the offences which a Japanese citizen could be charged with. They were vague due to the notion of *kokutai*, or 'national essence'. What qualified as *kokutai*, and what did not, was poorly explained by the law, but it essentially meant displaying a sense of Japanese character.

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Perhaps this was done deliberately, as it gave the government the ability to control anyone it did not regard as displaying Japanese values or traditions. Either way, it became an avenue of exploitation as the government shifted towards authoritarian rule in the 1930s. The introduction of universal suffrage gave rise to fears that the 'common' man, or the worker, would vote for the Communist and Socialist parties in the next elections. A simple way to address this was to outlaw those foreign and subversive ideas, and arrest anyone who encouraged them.

Source 6.6 **From Hane, M. & Perez, L.G. *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey* (2012), Westview Press Inc., Boulder, United States, p. 489**

Ten days before the bill for universal manhood suffrage passed the Diet, the Peace Preservation Law was enacted. The purpose of this law … was to curb 'dangerous thought' that was being spread, it was argued, by **anarchists** and Communists. The law was designed to punish those who either advocated revolutionary changes in the national polity or rejected the system of private property. The law was prepared separately from the bill on universal suffrage, but its passage was clearly intended to mollify the conservatives, particularly those in the House of Peers. These men had insisted that safeguards be established to combat the spread of dangerous ideas that they were certain would follow in the wake of universal suffrage. The law was also intended to guard against the further diffusion of communistic ideas ...

Source 6.7 **From Ward, M.M. *Thought Crime* (2019), Duke University Press, London, England, p. 22**

[B]ureaucrats and legislators struggled to legally define *kokutai* in the initial deliberations over the Peace Preservation Bill in 1925 … *Kokutai*'s categorical ambiguity did not hinder the application of the law but became the condition for its expansion into various domains of everyday life in imperial Japan.

Source 6.8 **From Garon, S. *The State and Labor in Modern Japan* (1992), University of California Press, Berkeley, United States, pp. 130–1**

[F]rom 1926 to 1945, the authorities invoked the Peace Preservation Law to arrest tens of thousands, ranging from Communist Party members to liberal intellectuals and followers of religious groups. Ironically, Kato's coalition sponsored the Peace Preservation Law at the same time as universal manhood suffrage. To most Japanese scholars, the simultaneous passage of repressive and reform legislation was no coincidence. In their

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view, the established parties and the bureaucracy extended the vote while arming the state with new powers to check any truly democratic challenge that might result.

Beginning repression: 'Thought Police' and the end of Communism

The use of the term *kokutai* was an attempt to restore some sense of what constituted 'being Japanese' into both politics and wider society. It is not an easily defined term, but that was the entire purpose of it. From this point, it was easy to arrest and imprison any person who was 'altering the *kokutai*' of Japan – in simple terms, the government could arrest anyone with a different point of view. In 1928, this law would be exploited with the arrests of 1600 Communists, including those only *suspected* of being Communist. Prime Minister Giichi also pushed new legislation through the Imperial Diet amending the maximum penalty from 10 years' imprisonment to a death sentence.

The 'Thought Police', or **Tokko**, was expanded as part of the Home Ministry – it was initially created in 1911 after an assassination attempt on Emperor Meiji to police anti-Japanese behaviour. The Tokko had branches across Japan, such as in Tōkyō and Ōsaka, and was even integrated into overseas territories. This gave the government the ability to find, counter and suppress movements in Japan that did not contribute towards its vision – easily arresting and imprisoning people due to the loose definition of *kokutai*. '**Thought Prosecutors**', or *shiso kenjii*, investigated those who breached the Peace Preservation Laws, recommending punishment through conversion ('re-education'), imprisonment, or the death penalty.

From Huffman, J.L. *Japan in World History* (2010), Oxford University Press, New York, United States, p. 96

Source 6.9

Officials also used more repressive means to assure conformity. Censorship of 'dangerous' speeches and publications became pervasive in the 1920s, and efforts to suppress socialism increased, especially after mid-decade. From 1918 to 1930, some 350 newspapers a year were banned for articles that threatened public order, and following the 1923 earthquake, police arrested socialists and spread xenophobic rumours that led to the massacre of several thousand Korean residents by vigilantes. Military police also murdered several jailed socialists in the earthquake's aftermath. This bare-knuckled approach intensified after the passage in April 1925 of a 'peace preservation law' that provided for up to ten years' imprisonment for persons who sought to abolish the private property system or change Japan's kokutai (national polity). A special law enforcement division, the Special Higher Police, known popularly as the 'thought police,' was charged with administering the law, and while enforcement was uneven in the 1920s, radical thought became increasingly unacceptable. On the night of March 15, 1928, police raided more than a hundred locations and took 1,600 suspected communists into custody.

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Source 6.10 **From Meyer, M.W. *Japan: A Concise History* (2009), Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland, United States, p. 186**

> Because the revitalized party was illegal, the Communists worked through the Farmers and Workers party in the general election of 1928, the first one to be called after the new electoral laws of 1925. Great progress was made, and the front party won a quarter of a million votes. In that same election year, however, the police embarked on another wave of arrests and drove party members into hiding. Police vigilance carried over into the depression years, and, by the early 1930s, it was impossible for party members to operate politically.

Source questions

1. Explain who the main targets of the Peace Preservation Laws were, and why these people or groups had become the target of these laws.
2. Outline the crimes people could be arrested for in Japan from 1925 onwards.

Summary

- The 1920s saw a series of internal challenges for the Japanese government. Effective political responses, through policies or laws, were vital to the stability of democracy in Japan.
- The Great Kanto Earthquake of 1 September 1923 led to the death of approximately 142 000 people, while many more were made homeless after the destruction.
- The earthquake led to the killings of Koreans, mass rebuilding across Tōkyō, and a developing sense among parts of the population that Japan was being punished for allowing corrupt ways to take over its traditional culture.
- In 1927, the Shōwa Financial Crisis was triggered by careless comments from politicians, who declared that a bank had collapsed. This led to widespread panic among the population, who rushed to withdraw money from banks. By the end of the crisis, 37 banks were taken over by the *zaibatsu*, who strengthened their hold on the financial sector of Japan.
- The General Election Law of 1925 expanded the number of men who could vote by removing an earning requirement (based on taxation).
- Immediately following the General Election Law was the passing of the Public Security Preservation Laws – sometimes referred to as the Peace Preservation Laws. These laws allowed for the arrest of anyone not displaying *kokutai* – which particularly targeted Communists.
- In 1928, 1600 Communists were arrested under the Peace Preservation Laws.
- The Tokko was the police force expanded under these laws, with 'thought prosecutors' in charge of investigation and arrest. Being found guilty could potentially lead to death.

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Key personalities and terms

Personalities



Figure 6.4 Katō Takaaki

Katō Takaaki (1859–1926) was a liberal politician of the Kenseikai, who opposed the *genro* in Japanese politics, and wanted to see universal suffrage and a stronger constitution. His coalition government was successful at negotiating legislation through the Imperial Diet. In 1925, male suffrage was enacted through the General Election Law, as well as the Peace Preservation Laws used to arrest those not displaying Japanese *kokutai*. Katō was Prime Minister for two years before he died of pneumonia.



Figure 6.5 Yamamoto Gonnohyoe

Yamamoto Gonnohyoe (1852–1933) was an Admiral in the Imperial Japanese Navy. He was regarded as a liberal politician, who supported universal male suffrage. His first administration in charge ended after charges of corruption in his cabinet forced him to take responsibility and resign, but he was recalled to government as Prime Minister in the 'emergency cabinet' after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923.

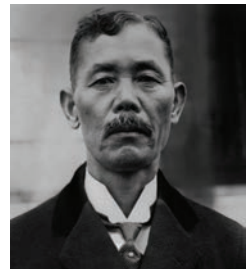


Figure 6.6 Wakatsuki Reijiro

Wakatsuki Reijiro (1866–1949) was a member of the Kenseikai, and responsible for the political policies of the Shōwa Financial Crisis. During his first time as Prime Minister, he wanted to make changes through the Bank of Japan but was refused by parliament and forced to resign. When he resumed the role in 1931, he pushed for disarmament in Japan and supported International Treaties. However, his second reign as Prime Minister saw the rise of militarism and he was unable to halt the army's growing aggression in Manchuria. His inability to resolve the crisis led to his resignation.



Figure 6.7 Tanaka Giichi

Tanaka Giichi (1864–1929) was a general in the Imperial Japanese Army, a politician of the Seiyūkai, and the 26th Prime Minister of Japan in 1927. Giichi was more aggressive than his predecessors, seeking to use the military to bring stability to Japan. He targeted Manchuria with policies to strengthen the local population's understanding that they were 'Japanese', and deployed 4000 troops into Shandong. Despite his more militaristic attitude, when he attempted to punish army officers involved in the assassination of Manchurian leader Zhang Zuolin, the army refused to back Giichi, and his cabinet fell. Giichi was also the Prime Minister who oversaw the arrests and suppression of Communists (as well as suspected Communists) in 1928.

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Terms

Anarchists: people who desire a society where there is no hierarchy, government or control, instead of a self-governed and self-managed society.

Bank of Japan: the large Japanese bank, founded 10 October 1882, and responsible for issuing money across Japan.

Kokutai: sometimes translated as 'national essence', *kokutai* meant displaying Japanese traits or characteristics; it is perhaps best defined by saying that it meant not protesting, not being Communist, and not resisting the Japanese government.

Plutocracy: a government based upon those with wealth.

Public Security Preservation Laws: a sequence of laws which led to the arrest of anyone who protested against the government, or did not display Japanese cultural traits and traditions.

Shintoism: a Japanese religion according to which people worship past members of their families and various gods who represent natural forces.

Thought Prosecutors: otherwise known as *shiso kenjii*, thought prosecutors investigated, arrested and 're-educated' those arrested under the Peace Preservation Laws.

Tokko: the policing organisation that arrested Japanese citizens under the Peace Preservation Laws.

Activities

Thinking historically

1. Evaluate the key changes which resulted from the Great Kanto Earthquake.
2. Was universal suffrage a positive or negative influence on Japanese society? Justify your response.
3. The Public Security Preservation Laws immediately followed universal suffrage. Explain why this occurred.
4. Compose three questions you would ask a Japanese politician from the 1920s about the General Election Law, the Public Security Preservation Laws, and the creation of Thought Prosecutors.
5. Research the term *kokutai*. Create a list of actions which would not be considered to display *kokutai* in Japan.
6. Why do you believe that *kokutai* was left as such a vague term in Japanese law?
7. Outline the key political events of 1928. Explain why these events show the deterioration of democracy in Japan.

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Connect – extend – challenge

- **Connect:** How are the ideas and information presented in this chapter connected to what you already knew of Japan's democracy?
- **Extend:** What new ideas did you get that extended or pushed your thinking in new directions?
- **Challenge:** What is still challenging or confusing for you to get your mind around? What questions, wonderings or puzzles do you now have?

Writing historically

1 Assess what type of government Japan was by the start of 1929. Justify your answer by referring to the General Election Law, the Public Security Preservation Laws, the creation of the Tokko, and Thought Prosecutors.

2 Sequence the important events of 1920s Japan in order of importance to the struggles of democracy (1 – most important, 6 – least important). Explain why you sequenced the events in this order in a paragraph.

3 Essay question: How effectively did Japan respond to its internal political challenges in the 1920s?
   - Create a two-columned table.
   - In one column, add the key political challenges faced by Japan in the 1920s (note, the Great Kanto Earthquake is an example of a political challenge when you consider how the government responded to the earthquake and its impact on society).
   - In the second column, assess how effectively Japan responded to each of these political challenges.
   - Compose an essay response to this question using the following guide:

STEAL paragraph style

Statement: Answer the question with a thesis statement which uses the words of the question.

Topic elaboration: Expand and build your argument.

Evidence: Refer to historical evidence, including historians if appropriate.

Analysis: Explain how your evidence helps you answer the question.

Linking sentence: Link your paragraph back to the question using the words of the question.

- It is important to know that there are different styles of writing a paragraph which your school, or teacher, may use. Although the name of each structural element may change, they all follow the same rough guide.

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7 Historians' views on changes to the traditional power structures of Japan through the 1920s

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The introduction of limited liberal democracy
- The impact of the Seiyūkai and other political parties on the Japanese political system and governments
- The challenges of the *genro*, bureaucracy and army to party politics

Source 7.1 **From Gordon, A. *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan* (1992), University of California, United States, p. 5**

> Many historians, in Japan some time ago and in the West more recently, have dealt [regarded] the era of party rule as a superficial flirtation with democracy. Troubled by evidence of nationalism and support for imperialist expansion voiced in the early days by many Taisho democrats … Some historians have sceptically dismissed 'Taisho democracy' as a shallow phenomenon …

Source 7.2 **From Goto-Jones, C. *Modern Japan: A Very Short Introduction* (2009), Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, United States, p. 76**

> [E]conomic collapse in Japan … followed the wartime bubble, and natural catastrophe in the form of the great Kanto earthquake of 1923, which left 150,000 people dead or missing and about half a million residences in Tokyo levelled. By the end of the Taisho period, Japan was in depression, the zaibatsu conglomerates (such as Mitsubishi, Mitsui, and Sumitomo) were beginning to take over the economy as private banks failed, and they were cultivating ever-closer connections with the political parties and the military. This meant that wealth was being concentrated into fewer hands, and more of the urban population was struggling to maintain their way of life. Hence, by the start of the increasingly militaristic Showa period, Japan was ripe for change once again: the democratic window appeared to be closing.

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From Harukata Takenaka, *Failed Democratization in Prewar Japan: Breakdown of a Hybrid Regime* (2014), Stanford University Press, United States, p. 87 Source 7.3

Despite the military's institution prerogatives [issues which were built into the Meiji Constitution], the party government succeeded in constraining it from 1918 to 1926. This was because the semi-democratic regime enjoyed a high and sustained level of legitimacy among a broad swath of the population.

From Wray, H. & Conroy, H. *Japan Examined: Perspectives on Modern Japanese History* (1983), University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, Hawaii, United States, p. 179 Source 7.4

[T]he eclipse of Taisho democracy occurred not in 1940 but much earlier – sometime in the late 1920s not very long after the dawn of Taisho democracy. Certainly, external factors pressing in heavily upon Taisho democracy were an important cause: the constraints posed by the Meiji constitutional framework, opposition from anti-democratic elites, the corrosive impact of uneven economic growth, crises in Japan's international relations, and others. But the inner history of Taisho democracy, with its persistent civil wars … also explains why the potentials of Taisho democracy were so short-lived.

From Large, S.S. *Emperor Hirohito and Showa Japan: A Political Biography* (1998), Routledge, London, England, p. 43 Source 7.5

Failure to bring about fundamental changes in the relationship of the political parties to the civil and military bureaucracies allowed the liberalism of Taisho democracy to disappear when it failed to provide solutions to Japan's critical problems.

From Sims, R. *Japanese Political History Since the Meiji Restoration* (2001), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, United States, p. 162 Source 7.6

To attribute the major setback experienced by Japanese political parties solely to international factors would be far too simple … As contemporary critics were quick to point out, the parties were open to attack on many counts. Bribery and corruption scandals had become more numerous as politicians acquired more power and influence, and although little was known for certain about the parties' relationships with business interests, it was widely believed that the Seiyukai was dependent on Mitsui and the Minseito on Mitsubishi. [S]ince the largest providers of money [for campaign finances] were assumed to be the zaibatsu, the parties could easily be accused of pandering to the interests of their paymasters.

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Figure 7.1 Members of the Kenseikai celebrate following a political victory.

Activities

Thinking historically

1. From your own knowledge and research, describe the features of Japan's traditional political structure.
2. Using the sources provided, identify the key changes that occurred to Japanese politics or society throughout this time period.
3. Which people, groups or events provided the greatest threat to the new democracy?

I used to think … now I think …

- Before reading this topic, what did you think the interwar Japanese government was like? Start your sentence with: I used to think …
- Describe how this view has changed. Start your sentence with: Now I think …

Writing historically

- After reading the sources, compose a paragraph explaining which historian's view you support and why. Likewise, write a paragraph explaining which historian's view you do not agree with, and why.

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8 The Great Depression

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The political and economic impact of the Great Depression
- The impact of modernisation and urbanisation on Japan and the development of social tensions
- Success and failures of democratic parties during the 1920s and 1930s

3 – 2 – 1 bridge

This sequence is completed twice, once at the start of the chapter, and once at the end. Compose your response to the following:

- Three initial thoughts or ideas on the Great Depression in Japan.
- Two questions you immediately have, which you want to be answered.
- One analogy (for example – I think the Great Depression in Japan was like …)

8.1 Economic impact

As in many countries across the world, the Great Depression had a severe impact on Japanese society. When the Depression struck in 1929, Japanese imports and exports both declined sharply. This was in part due to less demand from other countries, but also from shrinking demand for imported products within Japan. As in other countries, this put stress on employment and wages and triggered a downturn in key areas across the economy. Some areas were able to withstand the Great Depression, while other areas, like farming, were devastated.

There are two clear phases to Japan's response to the Great Depression. Initial responses through 1929 and into 1930 were largely ineffectual. The Minseito – the former Kenseikai Party – were not able to shape effective policies to deal with the challenges faced by Japan, and did not push hard enough to detach the yen from the gold standard (which would

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later be done, and prove beneficial). When the Seiyūkai came to power in response to the Minseito's ineffective governance, Finance Minister Takahashi Korekiyo detached the yen from the gold standard and increased government spending, which was mostly accounted for through the issuing of government bonds. By 1933, these policies had achieved a large amount of success, with Japan returning to its pre-Depression levels of output, and surpassing its prior levels of total exported goods. It appeared Japan had largely survived the Great Depression intact, in comparison to other countries like Germany or the United States.

Source 8.1 **From Fletcher, W.M. *The Impact of the Great Depression* (2005), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, United States, p. 208**

> In the domestic context, the downturn in some ways proved less severe than that experienced in the recession that followed World War I. One of the foremost scholars of the depression era notes that the 36 percent slide in wholesale prices in Japan from 1929 to 1931 did not match the precipitous drop of 41 percent from March 1920 to April 1921. Moreover, as Hara Akira observes, the 'bottom of the period of the Great Depression came earliest in Japan, in 1930. In these ways, the effects of the Great Depression in Japan differed significantly from the experience of the United States and European nations. The variety of terms that scholars use to refer to the period from 1929 to 1932 in Japan – the Showa slump, the Showa crisis, recession, and depression – reflect an uncertainty about the exact nature of what happened.

The view that Japan did not suffer to the same extent as some western powers is a very narrow interpretation of the evidence, and one that does not tell the whole story of the Japanese experience. Different areas of Japan, different industries, different communities – these all endured the impact of the Great Depression to varying degrees, ranging from severe or potentially life-threatening, to light. The following sources detail some areas of society that suffered through the Great Depression.

Source 8.2 **From Huffman, J.L. *Japan in World History* (2010), Oxford University Press, New York, United States, p. 99**

> First came the Great Depression. Japan's economy, which had stagnated in the late 1920s, plummeted after the New York stock market crash in October 1929. Over the next several years, foreign firms cut back on their purchases of Japanese goods, and by 1931 the country's exports to the United States had dropped 40 percent, those to China 50 percent, and its GNP had fallen 18 percent. The personal costs were horrendous: more than a million unemployed workers, labour violence, soaring bankruptcies.

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Things were especially bad in rural regions where declining markets, along with crop failures in 1931 and 1934, took food from the table and made it impossible to pay rents.

From Dore, R. (editor) *Japan and World Depression: Then and Now* (2014), Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, United Kingdom, p. 61 Source 8.3

The depression was especially severe in rural areas, where prices of rice and other agricultural crops fell 30–40 percent … These were wretched times in the urban areas as well, as labourers were laid off and merchants went bankrupt. Industries were being ravaged by the recession across the board. No accurate figures on unemployment exist, and there were relatively few people without any work whatsoever. [T]his recession was characterized not by a decline in production but rather by major price collapses and deficit-running operations in virtually all industries.

From Allen, G.C. *A Short Economic History of Modern Japan* (1981), Palgrave Macmillan, United Kingdom, p. 144 Source 8.4

[T]he real wages of men in the light industries and of women, especially those engaged in textiles, deteriorated. In cotton spinning and silk reeling, for instance, real wages in 1936 were scarcely 70 percent of those of 1929. Professor Uyeda, in commenting on the trend disclosed by statistics of real wages, reached the conclusion that observations of actual facts bore out the truth of the statistical evidence and that after 1931 'earnings did not increase sufficiently to compensate for the rising cost of living, and real wages were, therefore, on the average definitely falling'.

Source questions

1. Describe how the Depression was experienced differently across Japan.
2. What happened to wages in comparison to the cost of living in Source 8.4?
3. How would those impacted in Sources 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4 respond to their changing circumstances or lifestyle as a result of the Great Depression?

8.2 The political impact: To blame the government, foreigners, the Emperor, or the *zaibatsu*?

A judgement that Japan did not suffer compared to European countries like Germany is misguided. Yes, Japan did rapidly restore its economic fortunes following the Wall Street collapse, experiencing the worst of conditions in 1930. However, this does not change the fact that Japan suffered a short and severe downturn in its fortunes, which had harsh impacts on the

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population. One of the clear reasons for Japan's shift to a more authoritarian form of government was the anger, frustration and dissatisfaction that swelled across the country and certain elements of society as a result of the conditions they endured from 1929, if not before. The economic hardship had clear repercussions for Japan's political system and, as in many countries across Europe, this economic hardship led to increased nationalism and, ultimately, militarism.

Economic control shifted from open markets to state-controlled. The government assisted in the formation of cartels (groups which regulated the supply of a product or resource), which limited the prospects of many. Both workers and farmers were active in their protests, regarding the government's response as passive, despite its relative success in stabilising the country. As protesters now had access to radio or newspapers – which had not been accessible in the 1800s – they convinced people to join union movements, vote for fringe parties, or publicly voice their discontent. Some protests again turned to violence.



Figure 8.1 Japanese women holding a demonstration to protest low wages paid to female factory workers

Historical evidence suggests that the economic hardship endured during the Great Depression directly relates to increased violence and anger directed at the government and, to some extent, the *zaibatsu* who appeared to exploit the suffering of others. This was particularly relevant to their actions surrounding the leaving of the gold standard, where the *zaibatsu* made significant profits while others suffered. Attacks on figures in industry increased, as did the publication of aggressive posters and letters calling out those regarded as responsible.

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Hane, M. & Perez, L.G. *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey* (2012), Westview Press Inc., Boulder, United States, p. 500 Source 8.5

It was assumed that the government would be forced to go off the gold standard again. This, of course, would cause the value of the yen to drop. In anticipation of this, the rich, led by the Mitsui interests, began frantically to buy up American dollars, thus accelerating the outflow of gold. This kind of selfish indifference to the public good coupled with the many instances of graft and corruption involving high government officials and businessmen gave credence, in the minds of the people, to the charges being directed against big business and party politicians. The right-wing critics accused them of being selfish, unpatriotic traitors who had 'sabotaged the nation to enrich themselves'.

Farmers were extremely dissatisfied with government policies to address their struggles. The hardship in rural communities led to starvation, poverty and mass suicide. This anger was felt within the capital as the militarists, who often recruited from rural areas, complained about the plight of the country. The military regarded aggressive foreign policy, particularly in China, as a key to fixing many of the issues felt in the countryside. Further territorial expansion would open new markets for trade, bring greater resources (including food) and wealth, and allow for an increase in the standard of living. Of course, this came at the expense of other cultures, but they reasoned that this was no different from what European powers had done. Finally, stronger military action would place greater power in the hands of the military, and not the political figures who were regarded as too western, and corrupt.

Stop, look, listen

Select one of the sources in this or the previous section, and complete the following:

- Identify a claim in the source about the impact of the Great Depression on Japan.
- **Stop:** Define the key idea of this claim, and consider whether you find it to be accurate or inaccurate.
- **Look:** Find more sources (from the sources provided above, or your own research) which support or counter this claim.
- **Listen:** Hear what the sources tell you with an open mind. Is it possible for your source to be biased, and how does it affect your information?

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8.3 Contribution to the fall of the democratic parties

Both parties made changes impacting Japan while in power during the Great Depression, but they struggled to meet the myriad demands from different aspects of society. During the Depression, the government was not able to deal with the agricultural challenges associated with falling prices, which led to anger in the agrarian sector, particularly among the poor. It also led to greater nationalism as those in the military, many of whom came from poor areas, sought power to influence policy and bring relief. This dissatisfaction was exacerbated by a sense that both political parties acted only in their own interests, or for the *zaibatsu* – it was also exacerbated by the levels of corruption and scandal in the governments through the 1920s.

Both parties failed to address societal pressures which were developing in the wake of the Great Kanto Earthquake. There was a sense that this 'divine act' was a judgement on Japan for abandoning its traditional values, culture and ancestors, in favour of westernisation and materialism. Foreigners became targets for attacks, like the Koreans in the wake of the earthquake, and patriotic societies developed which aimed to attack the democratic government in order to return to traditional ways.

Source 8.6 **Sims, R. *Japanese Political History Since the Meiji Restoration* (2001), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, United States, p. 179**

> The various ideological and social evils of present-day Japan are the result of ignoring the fundamental and running after the trivial, of lack of judgement, and a failure to digest things thoroughly; and this is due to the fact that since the days of Meiji so many aspects of European and American culture, systems and learning have been imported, and that, too rapidly.

Source 8.7 **Christian pacifist Fujii Takeshi wrote the poem 'Go to Ruin!', published in July 1930; cited in Huffman, J.L. *Modern Japan – A History in Documents* (2004), Oxford University Press, New York, United States, p.135**

> I know not whether Japan is growing or declining,
> Whether my beloved country is blessed or cursed.
> I believed she was growing; I saw her as blessed.
> But I cannot find a single statesman in this country
> Who loves righteousness and acts justly.
> I leave no stone unturned, but still I find not one soul
> Who seeks after truth for its own sake.
> Young men stick close to the ground, like chickens, forgetting eternity;
> Young women pursue the foolish and the shameful, trampling on pearls – like swine …

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Surely, Japan is falling, like flesh peeling from lepers.

The name of Japan, my beloved fatherland, soon will be removed from the earth;

The Great Crocodile will devour her.

Be ruined, you country of disgraceful young women, you country of spineless young men!

Summary

- As in many countries across the world, the Great Depression had a large impact on Japanese society when it struck in late 1929.
- Comparably, the economic downturn in Japan was not as severe as in other countries, partly due to the fact that the Shōwa Financial Crisis had already caused a downturn in 1927, from which Japan had not yet recovered. Japan's worst conditions were in 1930 before progress at stabilisation was made.
- Prices decreased during the Great Depression as exports declined. Unemployment rose, leading to poverty and hardship. The rural areas struggled immensely, with many farmers committing suicide as a result of conditions.
- Across society, widespread anger transferred into violence. Anger was directed at the government for failing to respond to the needs of its people, or directed at the *zaibatsu*, who were wealthy and further profited while others suffered.
- Nationalist, ultranationalist and militarist movements grew, all with different purposes. Some wanted the Emperor restored to his position as the leader of Japan, while others wanted the government removed. Military figures called for expansion in Asia to bring territory and resources to Japan, and provide for the people.
- In Japan, like the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany, the hardship suffered by society during the Great Depression opened the door to a more authoritarian form of government to gain power.

Activities

Thinking historically

1. Outline the specific impacts of the Great Depression on Japanese society.
2. Which areas of Japanese society faced the greatest challenges from the Great Depression?
3. From your studies in modern history and your own research, compare the severity of the Great Depression in the United States, Germany and Japan.
4. Why would the actions of the *zaibatsu* during the Great Depression have drawn the ire, or anger, of the Japanese population?
5. Do you believe the government's responses to the Great Depression were effective or ineffective? Explain why.
6. How did the Great Depression contribute to the growing tension between modernisation and tradition in Japan?

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3 – 2 – 1 bridge

This sequence is completed twice, once at the start of the chapter, and once at the end. At the start of the chapter, you recorded your three initial thoughts on the Great Depression in Japan, two questions you wanted answered, and one analogy. Compose your response to the following:

- Three concluding thoughts or ideas on the topic now that you have completed it.
- Two questions you still have, which you want to be answered.
- One analogy (for example – I now believe the Great Depression in Japan was like …)

Pair with another student:

- Explain how your understanding has changed from your first thoughts on the topic, to your deeper knowledge at the end (this is the bridge of your knowledge).

Writing historically

1 Create a for and against table:
   - In the first column, place the reasons why the Great Depression may have contributed to rising nationalism in Japan.
   - In the second column, place the reasons the Great Depression would not have impacted the rise of nationalism in Japan.
   - Reflect on which column has more supporting evidence, and write a clear statement about the impact of the Great Depression on nationalism in Japan.

2 Essay question: Assess the political and economic impacts of the Great Depression on Japan.
   - Create an essay scaffold for this question using the following table:

Overall thesis statement:				
	Paragraph idea	**Topic sentence**	**Key facts**	**Historians' views**
Paragraph I				
Paragraph II				
Paragraph III				
Paragraph IV				
Paragraph V				

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PART 3
The rise of militarism in Japan



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9 The impact of militarism

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The nature, growth and impact of militarism, nationalism and imperialism
- The role and significance of the army and the factional divisions within it
- Developing hostility towards the *zaibatsu*
- The collapse of party politics in Japan

CHRONOLOGY

1928	
4 June	Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin assassinated by the Kwantung Army
1929	
24 October	'Black Thursday' in the United States triggers the Great Depression
1930	
21 January	The London Naval Conference commences
1931	
18 September	The Mukden Incident is used by the Kwantung Army to trigger an invasion of Manchuria
1932	
1 March	Puppet state of Manchukuo created in Manchuria
1932	
15 May	Prime Minister Inukai assassinated by young naval officers
1933	
25 February	Japan withdraws from the League of Nations
1936	
26 February	An attempted coup in Tōkyō by members of the military

9.1 The London Naval Conference

Japan was invited to attend the London Naval Conference of 1930 as a follow-on to the Washington Naval Conference of 1921–22. Japan had signed the Five Power Treaty at the Washington conference, agreeing to a 5:5:3 ratio for the comparative tonnage of warships against the United

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Figure 9.1 Japan's delegates attend the naval disarmament conference in London, headed by former Prime Minster Wakatsuki (*4th from left*), with United States Secretary of State **Henry L. Stimson** (*centre*).

States and Britain. The 1930 conference was designed to extend the initial treaty and look at further methods of promoting disarmament.

By 1930, the situation had significantly changed from 1921. Tension had developed in the relationship between the United States and Japan, with both recognising that their interests in the Pacific could be curtailed by the other, and Japan still bitter over the 1924 American *Immigration Act*, which essentially banned Japanese migration. The United States wished to maintain the advantage of the 5:5:3 ratio, while Japan wanted to see its tonnage increased to match its superiority throughout the Asia–Pacific region. At the conference, a deadlock was reached before an agreement was brokered which effectively allowed Japan to build at a 10:10:7 ratio, even if the agreement still used the wording of the 5:5:3 (or 10:10:6) ratio.

For some elements of the navy, this was not good enough, and they swiftly seized on the ratio as a reason to voice their discontent. They viewed the government as again bowing to international pressure, which limited Japan's growth and eminence in the Asia–Pacific region.

The Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral **Katō Kanji**, sought to take his grievances straight to the Emperor in order to request that Hirohito become involved in the negotiation process, but he was blocked from speaking to him by the Grand Chamberlain. After the spread of the new treaty's terms across Japan's news cycle, Katō Kanji reported that the army would 'make do' with the provisions of the London Naval Conference. These were not the words of a man who supported the treaty. Despite this, Prime Minister **Hamaguchi Osachi** met with the Emperor and gained his approval for the treaty to be signed.

The navy was far from satisfied with the negotiation process, or the treaty itself. Many viewed the Grand Chamberlain as corrupt, after he

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Figure 9.2 Photograph shows Prime Minister Hamaguchi supported by colleagues just after a would-be assassin's bullets pierced his stomach and left him seriously injured. The assailant was an unidentified man of approximately 28 years of age.

prevented the Chief of the Navy from speaking to the Emperor the day prior. They thought the Chamberlain's actions had been deliberately designed to serve the interests of the democratic government. In their eyes, the Emperor had been led astray by politicians and bureaucratic figures, and would no doubt support their cause if only they could be heard. This anger was only increased when Hamaguchi was able to navigate the treaty through the Imperial Diet. To militarists it appeared as if the government ultimately decided the importance of the military, dictated its size, and could curtail the amount of money invested (around 210 million yen). Both naval ministers from the negotiations resigned, and further members of the navy who supported the treaty were purged from positions of leadership.

The biggest consequence of the London Naval Conference was the assassination attempt, and eventual death, of Prime Minister Hamaguchi by ultranationalist forces in 1931. Once again, nationalistic militarism was attacking liberal democracy.

9.2 Increasing aggression in China

The Emperor's title of Shōwa (Bright Peace) was meant to be a sign of the newfound stability spreading across Japan when Hirohito came to power. Commitments had been made to international treaties, peaceful negotiations and to limiting the military. In the early 1920s, the military was relatively constrained due to societal pressure. After Japan's economic struggles following World War I, a consensus developed that Japan should avoid war with larger countries. This would not stop it from acting in Asia, such as sending troops into Siberia with the withdrawal of the United

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States' influence. On the whole, the government's policies throughout the 1920s were restrained and focused on international engagement.

From Gordon, A. *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (2003), Oxford University Press, New York, United States, p. 175 Source 9.1

> Throughout the 1920s, the Japanese government streamlined its military forces for strategic as well as economic reasons. Most military leaders supported these efforts. The government cut manpower and weapons. Military costs fell from a peak of 55 percent of the national budget in 1918 to just 29 percent by 1924. Troop reductions continued over the next several years. In 1925 Ugaki Kazushige, the minister of the army (who served in Kenseikai/Minseito cabinets from 1924 to 1927 and again from 1930 to 1931), cut four divisions or thirty-four thousand troops. But much of the money saved was redirected to new commitments to buy modern weapons. Ugaki also implemented policies to build popular support for the military, such as required military education in middle and higher schools. This approach reflected the lesson learned by the Japanese high command from World War I: Any future war would require the total mobilization of the civilian population. Parallel to these policies to limit and modernize the Japanese military, the government for much of the 1920s pursued a more cautious policy toward China than it had during World War I.

In 1926, Prime Minister Katō's focus on peaceful cooperation with China had raised eyebrows in the military. They wanted an aggressive foreign policy strengthening Japanese influence throughout the area. He was shortly forced from government and replaced by Prime Minister Giichi, who had a clear sympathy towards rising militarism, and immediately strengthened troop deployments in China. This was desired by broad areas of Japanese society, not just within the military. Japan continually curtailed its left-wing influences, restricting the Communist Party, establishing the Peace Preservation Laws leading to the arrest of any person not reflecting *kokutai*, and finally mass-arresting civilians in 1928. However, while the left wing was curtailed, the right-wing nationalists were not given the same treatment. For some elements of Japanese society, Japanese victories in the early 1900s saw ultranationalist groups and writers, such as the **Black Dragon Society** and **Kita Ikki**, gain increasing popularity with their views that Japan should take leadership in Asia to expel foreign powers by means of a righteous war. Many of these ultranationalist groups believed that the moral purity of Japan's unique ancestry as descendants of the sun goddess Amaterasu entitled them to a leadership role in Asia. If the Japanese government was not willing to return Japan to its place of status in Asia, in the ultranationalists' eyes it was not fit to rule and should be removed – violently, if necessary.

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The Kwantung Army

The **Kwantung Army** (sometimes referred to as the Kanto Army) was a military force created in 1919 from the Kwantung Garrison, which was based in the city of Port Arthur (now Lüshun Port). The army had around 100 000 men, although this fluctuated depending on the prime minister in power, or the policies of the government at the time. Among the soldiers and their officers were men who did not respect the democratic government, and were willing to take independent actions to secure what they believed were gains for Japan.

Source 9.2

From Henshall, K. *A History of Japan: From Stone Age to Superpower* (2012), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, United States, p. 114

> As discontent and intolerance towards democracy mounted, there were increased calls from the military for a policy of territorial expansion as a solution to Japan's woes. Eyes turned to China. As the politicians dithered, the military took matters into their own hands. In June 1928 extreme elements in Japan's Kwantung Army deliberately blew up a train near Mukden, killing the warlord [Zhang Zuolin]. The plotters blamed Chinese bandits, hoping to use this as justification for initiating Japanese military action in the area. Moderates in the army stopped the situation from escalating, but the plotters received only token punishment. Hirohito rebuked Prime Minister Tanaka Giichi (1864–1929) for failing to take firm action, causing him to resign, but he himself took no action against the plotters either.

Source questions

1. How is Source 9.2 evidence of the deterioration of democracy in Japan or its territories?
2. Explain why the plotters only receiving a light punishment could become a problem.
3. Discuss the evidence in Source 9.2 regarding how Emperor Hirohito viewed the actions of the Kwantung Army in Manchuria.

Anti-foreigner sentiment was stoked by the militarists, especially the ultranationalists, and their next targets were in Asia. By 1928, China was becoming unified by nationalist leader **Chiang Kai-Shek**, causing ripples of fear to be felt in Tōkyō. The military was worried about China expanding its influence into Manchuria and acting against Japanese interests. From the perspective of the militarists, taking no action to counter this threat would allow the spread of Chinese power, directly countering Japan's sphere of influence. Elements of Japan's military, in the form of the Kwantung Army, were willing to act without the support of the government in Tōkyō, and they assassinated **Zhang Zuolin**, the warlord of Manchuria, in a bomb blast on his train carriage.

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Figure 9.3 The wreck of Zhang Zuolin's train carriage after his assassination

Initially backed by the Japanese, the warlord had sought skirmishes around Beijing and along the Manchuria border. But after being defeated by the Chinese Nationalist forces of Chiang Kai-Shek, he returned to Manchuria, only to be killed. This is further evidence of the developing tension in the region. Fear of Chinese nationalism and potential Soviet influence – as they supported forces opposing Chiang Kai-Shek – led the Kwantung Army's dissatisfaction with its government, which was still unwilling to act.

From Beasley, W.G. *The Japanese Experience: A Short History of Japan* (2000), Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, England, p. 240 Source 9.3

> The result was an attempt in 1928 to force the cabinet's hand. The local warlord in Manchuria, [Zhang Zuolin] whose rise was due in part to the patronage of the Kwantung Army, was proving difficult to control. In particular, he began to set himself up in the region around Peking as a rival to Chiang Kai-shek. This was unwelcome to his Japanese army sponsors, who had no wish to see Manchuria dragged into the mire of China's national politics. A plan was therefore made to remove him and find a more amenable ally. In June 1928 a bomb was detonated under the warlord's train as it was approaching Mukden. Chang died within a few hours; but before any further steps could be taken, Tokyo disavowed the plot and took steps to punish the conspirators. Shidehara – out of office at the time of the incident – was brought back to the Foreign Ministry; and the Kwantung Army was left to nurse its wounds, aware that any further action of the kind would need to be better organised.

The London Naval Treaty of 1930 fostered further hostility towards the democratic government in the Kwantung Army, particularly the further limitation of the military. Many soldiers or officers were from country or

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peasant families, and the Great Depression focused their attention on the failures of democracy as well as the need for territorial expansion to bring greater wealth to Japan. For the Kwantung Army, these events justified its actions in Asia, with some openly supporting ultranationalist groups calling for a '**Shōwa Renovation**' (sometimes also referred to as the Showa Restoration), subverting the idea of the Meiji Restoration, which had brought widespread change to Japan.

Source 9.4 **From Sims, R. *Japanese Political History Since the Meiji Restoration* (2001), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, United States, p. 180**

The upsurge of anti-Westernism and anti-modernism goes a long way towards explaining why eighty-seven nationalist societies were formed in 1931 and 196 in 1932 (compared with one in 1920, sixteen in 1925, and forty in 1930), and why the number in existence rose from 330 in 1932 to 988 in 1940, with membership increasing from 306,857 to 587,128 during the same period … The growth of mass culture helped to raise political consciousness and encourage the feeling that not just elites but the *kokumin* (the people at large) had the right to share in political decision making … [W]hen internationalism and constitutional government seemed to have failed Japan in the early 1930s, the tendency to seek refuge in simple alternatives without perceiving their dangers became evident. In particular, the naïve belief that all would be well if there was total national unity gained almost complete sway.

Source 9.5 **From Meyer, M.W. *Japan: A Concise History* (2009), Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland, United States, p. 193**

Held in the background during the more liberal atmosphere of the 1920s, in the course of the following decade the right-wing civilian movement joined forces with segments of the military, particularly those of junior rank, who became the motivating centre for action. Agreeing with the civilian rightists, these younger officers proclaimed the so-called Showa Restoration (or Second Restoration, the first being the 1868 Meiji Restoration), aimed at enhancing imperial rule and prestige. Propagating a violent brand of fascism, they performed terroristic acts and carried to an extreme a policy of radicalism, as they had in 1932. Anticapitalistic as well as anti-Communist, they demanded the abolition of both capitalistic societies and left-wing movements.

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From Smethurst, R.J. 'Japan, the United States and the Road to War' (2012), *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Volume 10, Issue 37, No. 4 Source 9.6

Students of Japan have commented on how few voices spoke out against the rise of militarism, fascism in Japan in the 1930s. Many of Japan's leaders shared their right-wing countrymen's resentments toward the US and the UK and segued from the cooperation to the autonomy camp. Even the socialists in the Diet came to support Japan's road to war and war preparation. Many who did not move to autonomy/autarky were murdered: Prime Minister Hamaguchi in 1930, his Finance Minister, Inoue Junnosuke, Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi, and the head of the Mitsui Corporation, Baron Dan, in 1932; former Prime Minister Saito Makoto and Finance Minister Takahashi in 1936.

Source questions

1 Analyse the reasons Source 9.6 provides for rising militarism in Japan. Discuss whether this is reflective of what you have already learnt about the conditions which gave rise to militarism.
2 What do these sources reveal about the connection between the military and ultranationalist groups in Japan?

9.3 The Mukden/Manchurian Incident

By 18 September 1931, members of the Kwantung Army situated in the south of Manchuria decided they had reached their limit with political solutions and took action. It was a turning point in Japanese history as it led to a more authoritarian control by the army and the failure of a two-party liberal democracy.



Video 9.1
Speech in defence of Japan's actions in Manchuria (02:40)

Colonel Itagaki, Lieutenant-Colonel Ishihara and Major Hanaya of the Kwantung Army in Manchuria decided to enact what is today called a **false flag attack**. They declared that a railway had been bombed and Japanese forces fired upon by the Chinese at Mukden – the event came to be referred to as the **Mukden Incident**. In response, two Japanese artillery fired upon fixed Chinese positions nearby, while ground troops attacked the garrison. The experienced Japanese forces easily defeated the Chinese, although the Chinese were ordered to offer minimal resistance and store their weapons. Even when orders finally came to resist the Kwantung Army, the Japanese had already conquered several cities across Manchuria. From here the army established a puppet government in their new territory of **Manchukuo**. The Chinese had no serious hope for victory and instead turned to the international community for assistance.

The government had not ordered the attack at Mukden. When it did issue orders – for the Kwantung Army to stand down – they were ignored.

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Figure 9.4 Japanese troops entering Manchuria in the wake of the Mukden Incident

Prime Minister Wakatsuki refused to declare war and only publicly referred to the conflict as 'the incident'. He sought a de-escalation of tension in the area, but the military commander in Korea sent more troops in support, and the army again refused to listen to the government and de-escalate the situation. The army declared it was not a political matter, but a military one. Wakatsuki resigned in protest of the army's refusal to comply, and the unwillingness of military figures located in Japan to condemn the war. Prime Minister **Inukai Tsuyoshi** inherited the problem, again requesting the army withdraw – only to be again ignored as the Kwantung Army pushed further into Manchuria. In January 1932, Japanese and Chinese forces fought over Shanghai, with the brutal bombing campaign conducted by Japan making international news. The League of Nations intervened to negotiate a ceasefire, whereby Shanghai was turned into a **demilitarised zone**, only occupied by Chinese police forces.

Inukai's political opposition to the army and attempts to restrain the military ultimately led to his assassination and an attempted coup on 15 May 1932. Young nationalist officers of the Imperial Japanese Navy shot Inukai in the Prime Minister's residence. Also present in the Prime Minister's house was the film star Charlie Chaplin, who was touring Japan to promote his latest movies. He was a target for the naval officers, who believed killing Chaplin would force Japan into a war with the United

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States or Britain. They hoped that by causing chaos across Japan, and internationally, martial law would be declared, whereby the government would surrender control to the military.

From Huffman, J.L. *Japan in World History* (2010), Oxford University Press, New York, United States, p. 102 Source 9.7

On May 15, 1932, young naval officers, cooperating with the nationalist society League of Blood, assassinated prime minister Inukai Tsuyoshi, hoping to force the military to declare martial law and take over the government. They failed in that aim, but the assassination ended political party government, and the perpetrators' passionate courtroom defences, given free rein by judges, inspired wide public sympathy. Similar acts followed in the mid-1930s.

From Toland, J. *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1936–1945* (2001), Penguin, London, United Kingdom Source 9.8

The coup itself – named the 5/15 (May 15) Incident – had fizzled out, but it brought forth even more sensational trials. There were three in all – one for civilians, one each for Army and Navy personnel. As usual a large segment of the public sympathized with the assassins, and there was general applause when one defendant declared that he and his comrades only wanted to sound an alarm to awaken the nation. The people had heard so much about 'corruption' that little sympathy was shown the memory of gallant little Inukai. His death was a warning to politicians. Feeling ran so high that 110,000 petitions for clemency, signed or written entirely in blood, inundated officials of the trial. Nine young men from Niigata asked to take the place of those on trial, and to show their good faith enclosed their own nine little fingers pickled in a jar of alcohol. One of Inukai's assassins did express regret but said that the Prime Minister had to be 'sacrificed on the altar of national reformation'. Another declared, 'Life or death does not count with me. I say to those who be-moan my death, "Do not shed tears for me but sacrifice yourselves on the altars of reform".' The results of the trials could have been predicted. No one was sentenced to death, and of the forty to receive sentences almost all were free in a few years.

As a result of the Mukden Incident, Japanese society and government were irrevocably changed. Gone were the days of the two-party democracy, and welcome were the days where the army directed the government. But the people were not unhappy with these changes; after all, the army *had* been successful in its conflict and *had* secured

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Figure 9.5 A cartoon depicting Japan stabbing the 'Kellogg Briand Pact' on its way through the doorway of Manchuria. The pact was designed to ensure that borders between countries were respected, and disputes negotiated.

large resources of coal, iron and agricultural land in Manchuria. Many Japanese who struggled through the Great Depression saw the potential for increased wealth, trade, exports and construction. Nationalism and imperialism, ideas which had been developing for some time, suddenly mutated into key concepts of Japanese culture.

Following the assassination of Prime Minister Inukai, party-led government deteriorated to the point where a moderate Prime Minister, Admiral **Saito Makoto**, established a cabinet of 'national unity' in 1934 which was designed to appeal to the military. It consisted of former bureaucrats and politicians from both main parties. Saito was succeeded as Prime Minister in 1934 by another moderate, Admiral **Okada Keisuke**. These appointments were aimed at placing military figures into power who might be able to unify Japan and prevent further fragmentation of viewpoints among its people. But they ultimately failed due to the short length of their appointment, and the growing voices of people calling for aggressive militarism.

G-S-C-E concept map

- **Generate** a list of ideas and initial thoughts that come to mind when you think about the outbreak of war in China in 1937.
- **Sort** your ideas according to how important they are, placing key ideas in the centre of your page.
- **Connect** your ideas by drawing lines between ideas that have something in common. In a short sentence between, explain how the ideas are connected.
- **Elaborate** on any of the ideas/thoughts you have written so far by adding new ideas that expand, extend or add to your initial ideas.

Continue generating, connecting and elaborating new ideas until you feel you have an effective visual representation of your understanding.

9.4 Leaving the League

When the League of Nations formed as part of the Treaty of Versailles, some Japanese, like Prince Saionji, saw it as a great opportunity for Japan to become part of the international community. Others viewed the formation of the League of Nations as a way for western countries to protect their

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Figure 9.6 Japanese territorial expansion to 1937

territories and sphere of influence. It is worth noting that these views were widely circulated in Japanese newspapers, regardless of whether they were accurate or not.

In 1933, the League of Nations investigated and condemned Japan's actions in China. This was an extremely challenging moment for Japanese politicians. They were faced with conflicting goals – wanting to participate in the League and protect their foreign policy path of internationalism, but also trying to maintain their extremely weak grasp over the army by appeasing some of its wishes. The army had already proven it would act independently, and this left the government with few policy choices but to defend the army and its actions in China, even if it led to Japan leaving the League of Nations.

As a result of international pressure over the fate of Manchuria, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations. International diplomats who had gathered in Geneva were stunned by the decision and sat in



Figure 9.7 A satirical cartoon depicting the findings of the Lytton Report at the League of Nations. The Lytton Report condemned Japanese aggression and triggered Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations.

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Figure 9.8 Protesters in New York wave banners charging Japan of crimes in China and Manchuria.

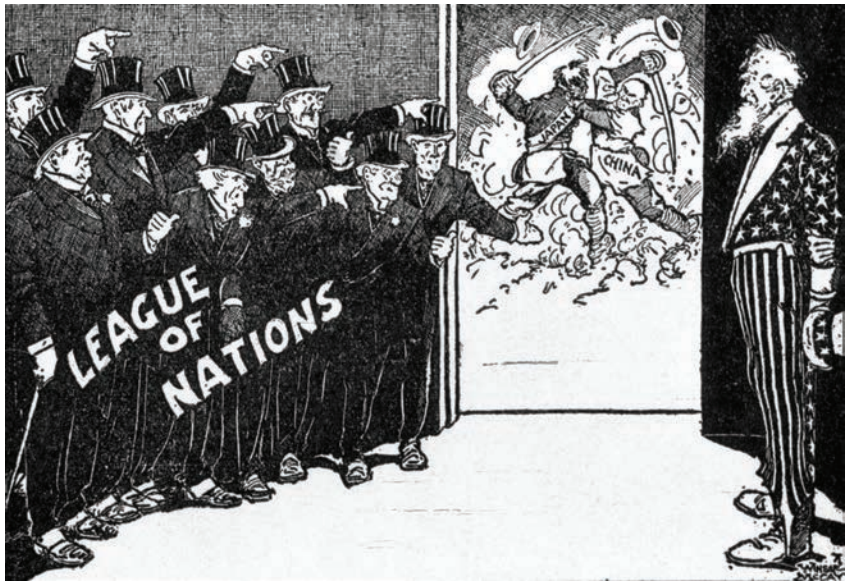


Figure 9.9 A 1931 political cartoon satirising the League of Nations response to the conflict between Japan and China. All countries looked to the United States to take action.

silence as the Japanese delegation walked from the hall. Japan's decision was made in response to the **Lytton Report** conducted by the League of Nation's assembly recommending Japan withdraw its forces from Manchuria and restore occupied territory to Chinese control.

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Speech by Matsuoka Yosuke, the Japanese representative at the League of Nations Assembly – Records of the Special Session Source 9.9

It is a source of profound regret and disappointment to the Japanese Delegation and to the Japanese Government that the Draft Report has now been adopted by this Assembly. Japan has been a member of the League of Nations since its inception … I deeply deplore the situation we are now confronting, for I do not doubt that the same aim, the desire to see a lasting peace established, is animating all of us in our deliberations and our actions.

It is a matter of common knowledge that Japan's policy is fundamentally inspired by a genuine desire to guarantee peace in the Far East and to contribute to the maintenance of peace throughout the world. Japan, however, finds it impossible to accept the Report adopted by the Assembly … The Japanese Government now finds themselves compelled to conclude that Japan and the other Members of the League entertain different views on the manner to achieve peace in the Far East and the Japanese Government are obliged to feel that they have now reached the limit of their endeavours to co-operate with the League of Nations in regard to the Sino-Japanese differences.

The Japanese Government will, however, make their utmost efforts for the establishment of peace in the Far East and for the maintenance and strengthening of good and cordial relations with other Powers … [Following this address the Japanese Delegation withdrew as Matsuoka made the final statement] *We are not coming back*.

True, for who?

1. **Discuss**. What kind of situation were Matsuoka's claims made in? (What were his interests and goals? What was at stake?)
2. **Brainstorm**. Make a list of different points of view you could look at these claims from.
3. **Dramatise**. Choose a viewpoint to embody and imagine the stance a person from this viewpoint would be likely to take (Chinese official, Japanese civilian, American diplomat). Would he or she think Matsuoka's claims are true, false or uncertain? Why? Go around in a circle and dramatically speak from the viewpoint. Say:
   - My viewpoint is …
   - I think the claim is true/false/uncertain because …
   - What would convince me to change my mind is …
4. **Stand back**. Step outside of the circle of viewpoints and take everything into account: What is your conclusion on Japan's speech at the League of Nations? What new ideas or questions do you have?

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9.5 The February 26th Incident of 1936

Like Germany, political violence had become a hallmark of 1920s and 1930s Japan. This violence culminated in attacks on various politicians and businessmen for their perceived corruption or impure actions. But while it may be tempting to classify this violence as instigated by either the ultra-right or the army, the reality is that these actions were conducted by a variety of people for a variety of reasons. The army itself was divided between two factions, and the right wing was divided between various nationalist groups, and various ultranationalist groups, all with different aims. There was no real unity among these groups, unlike Hitler's unification of the Nazi Party. When the February 26th Incident occurred, it was conducted by one small element of the army, although they did have some support from authority figures within – most importantly, however, despite being dedicated to the Emperor, they did not have the direct support of the Emperor.



Figure 9.10 This photograph shows the military coup attempt on 26 February, as rebels move into position hours before the revolt.

Source 9.10 **From Henshall, K. *A History of Japan: From Stone Age to Superpower* (2012), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, United States, p. 112**

The best-known attempted coup, the 'February 26th Incident' or '26-2-36 Incident', took place in the early hours of 26 February 1936. Some 1,400 troops led by junior officers stormed several government buildings, killing

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and wounding a number of leading political figures and imperial advisers. Their aim was to install a military government more sympathetic to their ultranationalist ideas. However, there was by no means full support for them, and the top levels of the military were divided over their action. A decisive factor in the eventual outcome was, to the surprise of many, Hirohito. The rebels had declared themselves absolutely loyal to the emperor and had their cause severely weakened when Hirohito, outraged at the attacks on his advisers, refused to have anything to do with them and insisted they be brought to trial as traitors. He also denied them the right to commit ritual suicide. The rebel leaders hoped the trial might provide a forum for their views, but even this was denied them, for it was conducted in secret. Nineteen were eventually executed and 70 others imprisoned. However, none of the senior officers who had openly shown sympathy were convicted.

The February 26th Incident was a rare case of firm intervention by Hirohito, and of the military being curbed. In general, the first 10 years of Hirohito's Showa had seen the military gain control of the nation at the expense of parliamentary government. Their aggressive anti-western, anti-liberal mood, shared by many members of the public, did not make an auspicious start to the era of Illustrious Peace.

Source questions

1 What were the aims of the rebels, as shown in Source 9.10?
2 Assess the challenges faced by the rebels in achieving these aims.
3 How does Source 9.10 portray Emperor Hirohito?

While Hirohito's actions had restricted the immediate overthrow of the 'democratic' government, it had not put an end to the drive of the army to assume greater control in Japan. This culminated in 1937 with the invasion of China, and Prime Minister Konoe's decision to support the Kwantung Army's actions rather than risk confrontation with the militarists. The risk to any politician or businessman opposing the will of the military in 1937 was significant – without anyone willing to speak for democracy, it was finally, and completely, dead in Japan.

9.6 Turning against the *zaibatsu*

Hostility towards the *zaibatsu* coincided with the rise of militarism and shift away from democratic government. A series of events in the 1920s and 1930s had led to questions about the role of the *zaibatsu* in Japanese society, and had led many to conclude they were responsible for Japan's current course. When the *zaibatsu* gained influence in politics through the Mitsui and Mitsubishi conglomerates, questions were asked about whether

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they represented the interests of the people or only their families' interests and their profit margins. Increased levels of corruption in government strengthened this viewpoint and contributed towards growing anger in the form of protest and eventual assassinations. The Great Kanto Earthquake had led many Japanese to question whether they were on the 'right path'. Interpreting the earthquake as a religious sign, a sign that the spirits of the ancestors were unhappy, many Japanese wanted a purge of western influence in society – one of these targets was the *zaibatsu*.

Anger directed towards the *zaibatsu* related to their ability to profit from hardships endured by others, particularly those from the poorer classes. The Shōwa Financial Crisis led to the reduction of small banks and the consolidation of the *zaibatsu* in the financial and banking sector. To those whose savings were at risk, this appeared as if the *zaibatsu* had profited. While the crisis resolved, the Great Depression again led to the impression the *zaibatsu* had profiteered at the expense of others. One of the big political decisions was to float the yen, detaching it from the gold standard. This brought the *zaibatsu* great profit, but this success had come at a time when others endured extreme hardship.

The rise of militarism led to increased pressure on the *zaibatsu*. Now viewed as potentially corrupt, not upholding Japanese values and demonstrative of all the excesses of western culture, the *zaibatsu* were targeted for violence by ultranationalist groups. The army was more circumspect, but when the Mukden Incident led to the establishment of

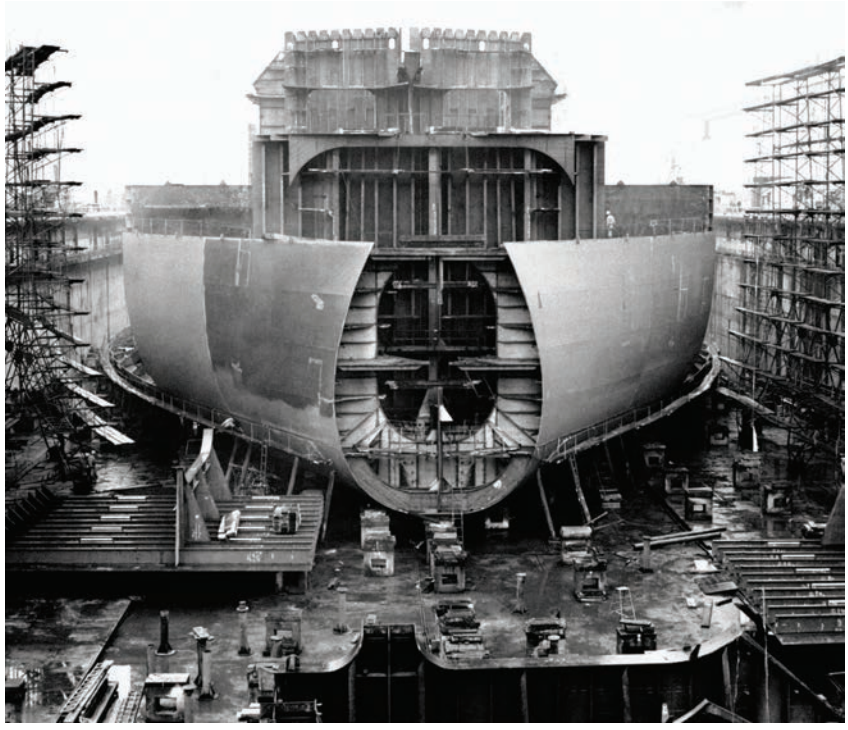


Figure 9.11 Construction of a tanker in the Mitsubishi shipyard, Nagasaki, Japan

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Manchukuo, the army intentionally kept the *zaibatsu* from trading in the region, hoping to limit their influence. As time passed, the military realised that despite their opposition to the *zaibatsu*, they were needed to build a technologically advanced fighting force. The *zaibatsu* had the capability to build industry to produce technology and weaponry, which could support a future war effort.

But while the military might have slowly come to recognise the need for the *zaibatsu* in the middle of the 1930s, the ultranationalists maintained their animosity. Nationalist groups disliked the economic effects of capitalism and its increasingly strong links with, and influence from, the west. This criticism was especially widespread during the years of the Great Depression. Members of the **Ketsumeidan** ('Blood Brotherhood' or 'League of Blood') murdered former Finance Minister Junnokouke Inoue in February 1932, and the following month they killed Baron Takuma Dan, head of the Mitsui group. The assassinations were largely motivated by resentment against economic hardship, especially in rural areas.

Summary

- Rising militarism played a key role in shaping Japanese politics and international relations through the 1930s.
- The revision of the naval treaties in London saw militarists in the government demand that Japan push for equality with the United States and Britain (overturning the 5:5:3 ratio of warship tonnage). When this was ignored, it triggered a public outcry, culminating in the assassination attempt on Prime Minister Hamaguchi.
- In 1928, the Kwantung Army assassinated the Manchuria warlord, Zhang Zuolin. The army wanted to replace him with someone more pliable, in order to trigger a war with China. The plan failed, as did the Kwantung Army's first attempt at war.
- In September 1931, the Kwantung Army invaded Manchuria after a claimed bombing attempt on a railway at Mukden. The army established the puppet state of Manchukuo, rejecting all efforts by the government to stop it. The invasion led to the resignation of Prime Minister Wakatsuki, and the assassination of his successor, Prime Minister Inukai, in 1932.
- The Mukden Incident resulted in the end of two-party democracy, and increasing direction of the government by the army, with the acquiescence of the people.
- International protest by China and the United States was recognised by the League of Nations condemning Japan's actions. Japan opted to leave the League of Nations.
- An attempted coup occurred on 26 February 1936. A small section of the military sought to restore Emperor Hirohito to power – he rejected the coup and threatened to lead his own personal guard to put the coup down if the military did not stop it. They did.
- Many Japanese were anti-capitalist, resenting the *zaibatsu* for profiteering while they suffered economic hardship. The military realised they needed the *zaibatsu* for armament production, but ultranationalists were violent towards them.

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Key personalities and terms

Personalities



Figure 9.12 Katō Kanji

Katō Kanji (1870–1939) was a naval officer during World War I, who rose to the position of Chief of the Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff in 1929. Katō did not support the position of the government during the London Naval Conference, especially the conditions which sought to limit Japan's naval production. After the treaty was signed, Katō resigned in protest, to much anger throughout the Imperial Navy and general population. He died in 1939 of a haemorrhage.



Figure 9.13 Hamaguchi Osachi

Hamaguchi Osachi (1870–1931) was Prime Minister of Japan twice, in July 1929 and March 1931. As Prime Minister, he was largely responsible for the initial reaction to the Great Depression, although these policies were unsuccessful as he focused on limiting spending, rather than increasing it. Hamaguchi also stuck to the gold standard, whereas it was successfully abandoned later. After an assassination attempt wounded him, Hamaguchi resigned, but he was recalled to the prime-ministership in 1931. His poor health prevented him from staying in the position for much longer than a month, and he died shortly after.



Figure 9.14 Henry L. Stimson

Henry L. Stimson (1867–1950) was appointed US Secretary of State in 1929, and from this position was heavily involved in the London Naval Treaties, and negotiations with Japan after the invasion of Manchuria and the withdrawal from the League of Nations. Stimson strongly opposed Japanese aggression in Asia, seeking to protect the interests of the United States throughout the region.



Figure 9.15 Zhang Zuolin

Zhang Zuolin (1875–1928) was a Chinese warlord and ruler of Manchuria who fought against Chinese nationalist forces under the leadership of Chiang Kai-Shek. Initially, the Kwantung Army supported Zhang Zuolin, but as his failures in China became more common, they took action. A military officer placed a bomb under the railway line, which exploded and mortally wounded the warlord.

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Chiang Kai-Shek (1887–1975) was a politician and military commander who sought to create a nationalist government in China. Kai-Shek attempted to walk the difficult line of resisting Japanese aggression, without antagonising the Kwantung Army. After war broke out in 1937, Kai-Shek fought against Japan for eight years, and then the Communists within his own country for the next three. He retreated to Taiwan, where he ruled until his death in 1975.



Figure 9.16 Chiang Kai-Shek



Figure 9.17 Inukai Tsuyoshi

Inukai Tsuyoshi (1855–1932) was a Japanese journalist and politician who was appointed in the wake of the Mukden Incident in Manchuria. Inukai was in a difficult position, as he tried to maintain the Emperor's wishes and follow Japan's international treaties – but he also realised he had limited control of the Kwantung Army in Asia. Under Inukai, Manchukuo was established (but not formally recognised), but he also worked to limit further hostilities with China. This led to the anger of the military, as well as those who wanted a complete withdrawal of Japanese forces. This dissatisfaction led to his assassination by young naval officers in the 15 May Incident of 1932.

Saito Makoto (1858–1936) became Prime Minister after the assassination of Inukai in 1932. His appointment to the position was a compromise with the Imperial Navy – an act many saw as giving in to terrorism. He immediately pursued an aggressive foreign policy, recognising Manchuria as a puppet state and withdrawing from the League of Nations. Saito resigned over a corruption scandal that erupted in 1934 and was assassinated in 1936.



Figure 9.18 Saito Makoto



Figure 9.19 Okada Keisuke

In the turbulent period of the 1930s, **Okada Keisuke** (1868–1952) was a voice who spoke out against the rise of militarism in Japanese society, despite coming from a military background. During his time as Prime Minister, he became embroiled in a political discussion regarding the divinity of the Emperor and became a focal point for right-wing groups. He barely avoided assassination by ultranationalist forces in February 1936 after his brother-in-law was mistakenly killed by the assassins.



Figure 9.20 Kita Ikki

Kita Ikki (1883–1937) was a philosopher and writer in Japan, who wrote complex racist, national socialist and religious arguments calling for restrictions of society and government.

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Terms

Black Dragon Society: an ultranationalist society in Japan that publicly attacked both Communist and democratic practices.

Demilitarised zone: an area which cannot have military forces within it.

False flag attack: the faking or staging of an attack, often to cast the blame for the attack on another person, group or country.

Ketsumeidan: the 'League of Blood' society, an ultranationalist group that targeted politicians and businessmen for assassination.

Kwantung Army: a prestigious Japanese army situated on mainland Asia, responsible for aggressive foreign policy in the region from the late 1920s.

Lytton Report: a report conducted by the Lytton Commission, which concluded Japan had been the aggressor in Manchuria, and had wrongfully invaded the country.

Manchukuo: the puppet state created in Manchuria, under the puppet Emperor Pu Yi.

Mukden Incident: a staged attack by the Kwantung Army which provided the justification for its invasion of Manchuria.

Shōwa Renovation: a plan among nationalist supporters to 'renovate' Japan in the same way the Meiji Restoration had occurred, but this time focusing on the removal of foreign influences, and a return to traditional Japanese values.

Activities

Thinking historically

1. Explain why the London Naval Conference was an important event in the rise of militarism in Japan.
2. Who instigated the Mukden Incident? Why?
3. Analyse the consequences of the Mukden Incident for Japan, both domestically and externally.
4. Why would Japan want to gain and maintain territory in Asia? What benefits did it bring for Japanese society?
5. Assess the reasons Japan left the League of Nations.
6. Evaluate why the 26 January Incident was a success or failure.

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Headlines

If you were to write a sequence of headlines for the rise of militarism in Japan, which captured the most important aspect to remember, what would these headlines be?

- Sum up the rise of militarism in Japan with a series of headlines for a newspaper.
- They should date from: before the 1930s, after the Mukden Incident, after leaving the League of Nations, and on 26 February 1936.
- Reflect on how your headlines demonstrate the extent of militarism's growth during the 1930s.

Writing historically

1 How significant was militarism in shaping Japanese politics and society in the period to 1937?

- Create a two-columned table.
- In one column, add the key events where militarism is evident.
- In the second column, add the significance of the army's involvement in this period to shaping politics and society.
- Compose an essay response to this question using the following guide:

STEAL paragraph style

Statement: Answer the question with a thesis statement which uses the words of the question.

Topic elaboration: Expand and build your argument.

Evidence: Refer to historical evidence, including historians if appropriate.

Analysis: Explain how your evidence helps you answer the question.

Linking sentence: Link your paragraph back to the question using the words of the question.

- It is important to know that there are different styles of writing a paragraph which your school, or teacher, may use. Although the name of each structural element may change, they all follow the same rough guide.

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10 Japanese aggression

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The role and significance of the army and political divisions within it
- The outbreak of war in China
- Differing domestic responses to militarism

CHRONOLOGY

1931	
18 September	The Mukden Incident leads Japan to occupy Manchuria in an act not sanctioned by the Japanese government
1932	
28 January – 3 March	The Japanese army commences an aerial bombardment and occupation of Shanghai before a ceasefire is negotiated by the League of Nations
1932	
1 March	Puppet state of Manchukuo created in Manchuria
1933	
25 February	Japan withdraws from the League of Nations due to a vote condemning its creation of Manchukuo and a recommendation Manchuria return to China's control
1934	
1 March	Japan formalises its puppet state of Manchukuo by establishing **Pu Yi** (the last Emperor of China) as Emperor of Manchukuo
1937	
7 July	The Marco Polo Bridge incident leads to a full-scale invasion of China by the Japanese
1937	
August	Japanese bombers attack numerous Chinese cities, including Nanking and Shanghai
1937	
November	Imperial General Headquarters established in Tōkyō to direct the war effort in Asia
1937	
12 December	The USS *Panay* is bombed and sunk, sparking further international pressure from the United States
1937	
13 December	Assault and capture of Nanking leads to a massacre, with numerous war crimes committed by the Japanese

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In the middle of the 1930s, aggression directed at China by Japan slowed in the wake of Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations. While those within the army still sought to bring greater emphasis to military expansion in the region, and the army sought out conflicts it could use to motivate a wider struggle, both sides were relatively controlled until 1937. In part, this was due to the Foreign Ministry of Japan and the army focusing on different objectives. For the army, the occupation of Chinese territory was a priority, but it could not fight a full-scale war without the support of the government. The government was, for the moment, focused on the growing influence of Communism in China and how this could potentially threaten Japanese interests. It hoped to win over nationalist leader Chiang Kai-Shek in order to resist the spread of Communism. Kai-Shek was generally agreeable, but in order to maintain the peace was forced to ignore the deliberate provocations of the Kwantung Army.

10.1 Divisions in the army

One important issue which needs to be understood is the concept of the 'military' or 'army' in Japanese society. These terms are generally used to convey the idea that the government was seeking to act in one way, and as a whole, the army was seeking to influence politics and promote its militaristic agenda. The problem with this simplification is that it leads to the conclusion that the aims, objectives and steps taken by the army were unified. In reality, this was far from the truth. Major divisions existed within the armed forces of Japan, and not just between army, navy and air force. Instead, the military had two main factions (groups) with different aims and methods of achieving those goals.

Kodoha – the Imperial Way Faction

Led by **Araki Sadao**, the Imperial Way Faction focused on the ideology of **pan-Asianism**, and wanted the political system to be violently overthrown (apart from the Emperor). The Kodoha followed the ideology of ***bushido*** – the code of honour used by the samurai – and wanted to restore the traditional connection between the Emperor, the people and the ancestors. They believed Japan needed to be purged of westernisation and corrupting influences, and specifically focused on targeting bureaucrats, politicians and the *zaibatsu*.

The Imperial Way Faction believed in the supreme **Yamato spirit** of the Japanese soldiers – a concept similar to the French who believed in *élan*. This fighting spirit could be taught to the Japanese soldiers, providing them with a distinct advantage in combat. Yamato spirit led to the development of the 'heart and mind' of the Japanese soldier, focusing on traditional values, culture and traits of the Japanese, which would ultimately develop into a willingness to die for country and Emperor.

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Toseiha – Control Faction

The Toseiha were led by Tetsuzan Nagata and **Tojo Hideki** (who later became Prime Minister and was tried for war crimes post-war). The Toseiha formed in direct response to the creation of the Imperial Way Faction within the army, but in contrast to the Kodoha, they did not believe that violent attacks/assassinations or bombing were necessary to achieve their goals. The Toseiha were heavily sceptical of liberal democracy and sought reforms leading to increased control by figures in the military.

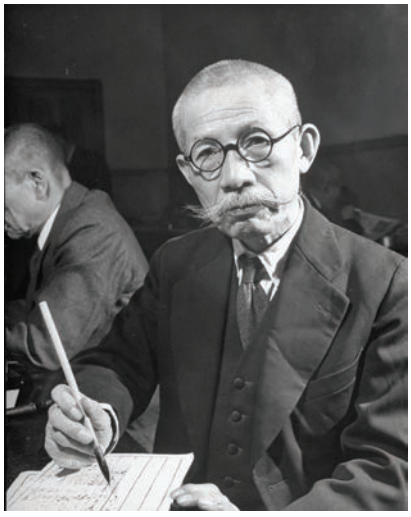


Figure 10.1 A post-war photo of Araki Sadao during his trial for war crimes

The Toseiha believed that modern military technology, combined with the innate spiritual qualities of the Japanese soldier, would see them rise to take their position of eminence in the world. Further to this, the Toseiha advocated a policy of national mobilisation – where each Japanese civilian contributed to the united effort – and military control of investment and labour. This would allow Japan to be able to fight a '**total war**', which clearly suggests they were planning future expansion into Asia at the least.

Struggle for dominance

After the Mukden Incident of 1931, both the Toseiha and the Kodoha struggled to gain superiority within the military. The Kodoha enjoyed some success in recruiting members of the army and navy into their faction during the early 1930s, helping to shape policies with Araki Sadao, the Minister for War, in the 1931 Inukai prime-ministership. During this time, Araki was able to suppress the influence of the Toseiha, at least until his poor health weakened the Imperial Way Faction.



Figure 10.2 Tojo Hideki in military uniform

The conflict between the two factions came to a head in 1934, when a plot by Kodoha officers to murder politicians was discovered. The Toseiha led a purge of officers, with mass demotions of their followers. But those demoted officers did not take the news well, resulting in the retaliatory murder of Tetsuzan Nagata, one of the founding figures of the Toseiha. The trial of the killers was completed in two years, but anger over the outcome directly contributed to a coup attempt on 26 February 1936. When the coup failed, Araki resigned, and the Kodoha faction faded into obscurity. However, that did not stop the existence of their ideas, particularly those relating to the idea of Yamato spirit, *bushido* and the importance of the Emperor. These ideas were integral to the Japanese army in the 1937 Sino-Japanese War, and the eventual war fought across the Pacific region.

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Claim, support, question

- Make a **claim** (or thesis) about the factional fighting or political views of the army.
- Identify **support** for your claim – things you have researched, or know to support your claim.
- Ask a **question** related to your claim that you would need to research further.

10.2 The Second Sino-Japanese War

In 1937, the army again decided to escalate the simmering conflict in China. On 7 July, gunfire was exchanged across the Marco Polo Bridge in Wanping (near Beijing) after a single Japanese soldier went missing. A ceasefire was negotiated; however, the army was not satisfied with this outcome, nor with continued skirmishes against Communist forces across the border. Instead, it decided to launch a full-scale invasion of China. There is no evidence to suggest the government in Japan had knowledge

Video 10.1
Japan–China war
(02:28 silent)



Figure 10.3 Japanese conquest of Chinese territory in 1937

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of the attack by the army, as there was no communication to the newly appointed Prime Minister, Prince Konoe Fumimaro.

Source 10.1 **From Beasley, W.G. *The Japanese Experience: A Short History of Japan* (2000), Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, England, p. 243**

A clash with Chinese troops on the outskirts of Peking, not unlike others that preceded it, was this time allowed to escalate, reflecting a confidence within the high command that total victory would be possible. Large reserves were committed; operations were begun against Shanghai and up the Yangtse to Nanking; a naval blockade was declared for the whole of the Chinese coast. Chinese forces suffered a series of defeats, accompanied by heavy bombing of mainland cities and a number of atrocities against the civilian population, most notoriously in Nanking.



Figure 10.4 The Second Sino-Japanese War – the invasion and occupation of Nanking, 1937

Source 10.2 **From Goto-Jones, C. *Modern Japan: A Very Short Introduction* (2009), Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, United States, p. 80**

Rather than trying to restrain the army in China, [Konoe] authorized the escalation of the conflict, and the army immediately launched a massive offensive. By mid-December, Japanese forces had pushed south from Beijing as far as Shanghai and Nanjing. The conduct of the Imperial Army in Nanjing was horrifying and mystifying. Japanese troops herded together tens of thousands of civilians and surrendered soldiers and murdered them; they raped and killed perhaps 20,000 women of all ages. The total number of casualties is still contested to this day, with numbers ranging from tens

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of thousands to 300,000 deaths. The terrible violence continued for nearly two months. The question of why the Imperial Army behaved in this appalling way, and why the High Command permitted the atrocities to continue for nearly two months has still not received a satisfactory answer.



Figure 10.5 A bloodied and crying child, outside the South Railway Station in Shanghai after a Japanese bombing raid, 28 August 1937



Figure 10.6 A panorama of the Zabei district of Shanghai after bombing by Japanese planes in 1937



Figure 10.7 In front of the Imperial Palace, Japanese schoolgirls wave flags in celebration of the military victory, Tōkyō, 15 December 1937.

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Source questions

1 What do these figures and sources suggest about the nature of war in China?
2 In Figure 10.7, civilians celebrate Japan's victories. Do you believe these people would have been aware of the atrocities in China? Justify your response.

The outbreak of the war in 1937 signifies one of the final actions covered in this unit. In order to understand why it is important, it must be understood that this event was the culmination of the aims and strategies of the army from the early 1920s. The Second Sino-Japanese War was not the first time the army had attempted to take Japan on a path to war not sanctioned by the government. Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, the army had sought to extend its grip on power at the expense of the liberal democracy. This initially revolved around growing its support by channelling anger at events like the Shōwa Financial Crisis, the Great Depression and the London Naval Conference. By 1931, the Kwantung Army felt itself to be in a position to act free of the government, despite the direct attempt of various prime ministers to prevent its aggression. From 1931, government appointments through the 1930s again saw the strengthening of the army, despite Prince Saionji (the last *genro*) seeking to limit its influence. In 1937, the army took the final steps in destroying the liberal democracy, which had largely been achieved by 1933 – but now the country was on a path to war, and at the end of that road, devastating defeat.

Despite Japan fostering the idea of a united Asia free of western influence, its real goal was cultural dominance leading to increased land,



Figure 10.8 Japanese army officers and men cheering at Nankou, Beijing, China, during the invasion of 1937

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resources and trade opportunities. In order for this to occur, other countries had to be conquered, controlled and exploited, even if this was achieved through war crimes. The challenge for any historian is understanding why Japan pursued such savage and barbaric actions; but, to this day, this is still a difficult question to answer. A belief in racial superiority does not by itself explain the extent of the horrendous crimes – rape, torture, desecration of corpses, biological and chemical experimentation, and, of course, murder through gruesome methods – committed by the Japanese in China.

10.3 How did society respond to militarism?

It is always dangerous to generalise a response as to which elements of society responded positively to militarism, and which did not. It also imposes the idea that individuals or groups could support militarism at times, and hold another view at different times. This is specifically relevant when you consider that there were different types of militarism which the population could support. They ranged from supporting growth in the army and navy, supporting a war in Asia, supporting stronger authoritative government directed by the Emperor, or desiring some other form of authoritarianism. There were also varying ultranationalist groups, all with different aims but a general consensus that rising militarism was a good thing for Japan.

From Hane, M. & Perez, L.G. *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey* (2012), Westview Press Inc., Boulder, United States, p. 457 Source 10.3

> Radical nationalist thinkers – civilian and military – may have disagreed about the best means to bring about the new order and about some minor details in analyzing the ills of Japan, but, by and large, they all shared mystical notions about the superiority of the Japanese national character, the national polity (*kokutai*), and the sacredness of the imperial institution, which was the source of all values … The ultranationalists generally favored expansion into the Asian continent, development of a powerful military force, and the creation of a totalitarian state that inclined toward national socialism. Consequently, they opposed liberal, individualistic values as well as the democratic parliamentary concepts that had entered the country in the mid-nineteenth century. In concert with these attitudes, they rejected the basically Western, urban culture in favor of the traditional, agrarian way of life and values.

How broader society responded to rising militarism is remarkably varied. In a general sense, however, some specific areas of society were satisfied with the shift to a more militaristic form of government, while others abhorred the change.

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Figure 10.9 A military parade to celebrate Armed Forces Day on the Ginza in Tōkyō, Japan, 10 March 1934. The march commemorates the Japanese victory in the Battle of Mukden, during the Russo-Japanese War.

Japan's brief shift to democracy peaked in the middle of the 1920s due to the general popularity of the democratic governments. In this time, the influence of the military was at its lowest point, aggression in China was limited – although the number of soldiers did steadily increase – and politicians pursued a foreign policy of disarmament, treaties and international engagement (internationalism). Six groups provided the general support for this: the *zaibatsu*, journalists, academics, diplomats, some politicians, and some but not all labour and trade unions. Many of the latter were influenced by the developing Communist/Socialist movements of the 1920s, which stood in opposition to authoritarianism and militarism.

Those areas of society that gained benefits from liberal democracy were disappointed and wary at the rise of militarism, especially in the 1930s. The *zaibatsu* were worried by the check to their growth, and potential hostile policy choices like the initial decision to restrict their involvement in the development of Manchuria. An end to friendly relationships with other countries would also impact Japan's ability to trade, especially if the United States and Great Britain developed hostile policies in return, or imposed sanctions, as they did in the late 1930s. Many politicians and members of the *zaibatsu* families felt threatened by militarism, rightly fearing for their personal safety.

Politicians and their supporters, who had committed to the development of democracy, were angered by the drift towards militarism. Some educated civilians feared that the growth of militarism would

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lead to restrictions on free speech or the right to assemble – which it did in 1925 and 1928 with the Peace Preservation Laws. There were also genuine concerns as authoritarian and militaristic governments suppressed journalists, and censored their publications. Those liberal politicians who pursued positive internationalist policies worried about the future direction of Japan if it became hostile in China, and the impact on Japan's economy and trade as a result. They were no doubt worried about the rise of militarism, but many chose not to speak out for fear of harm to themselves, or their families.

From Storry, R. *A History of Modern Japan* (1991), Penguin, London, England, p. 182 Source 10.4

The Japanese often give the name, *kurai tanima* – 'dark valley' – to the period between 1931 and 1941, the decade immediately preceding the outbreak of the Pacific War. For during those years the still delicate plant of liberalism and personal freedom that had sprouted during the twenties was effectively killed … liberal-minded men in politics, the [armed] services, education, literature, and art found themselves, after 1931, treading a path increasingly beset with dangers from the twin forces of reaction and revolution … its violence had two aspects – unchecked aggression abroad and murderous conspiracy at home.



Figure 10.10 Japanese children in Admiral uniforms on a street in Tōkyō, December 1937

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Figure 10.11 A Japanese officer conducts shooting practice with girls at a school, 1933.



Figure 10.12 School girls support the war effort in China by creating comfort bags for soldiers.

One group of society happy with newfound militarism were the ultranationalist societies. In general, these societies focused on turning the liberal government into one that was more authoritarian (though they recognised the Emperor's divine status) and extending Japan's sphere of influence across Asia. The army held similar goals – although it was not always prepared to go to the same extent to achieve them by using terror and violence. The all but official ending of democracy, the rise of traditional Japanese values and direct opposition to westernisation were openly supported by ultranationalists.

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Circle of viewpoints

- Students divide into groups of four.
- Each student is assigned a 'viewpoint' – Japanese nationalist, leader of a *zaibatsu*, the Emperor of Japan and a democratic politician.
- Each student should consider the rise of Japanese militarism from their point of view, using the following prompts:
  - I am thinking of … from the point of view of …
  - I think this person would hold these opinions of rising militarism …
  - One question I have about this point of view is …
- Students share their different points of view in the group of four.

Summary

- Within the Japanese army, two factions developed. The Kodoha (Imperial Way Faction) supported the violent overthrow of the democratic government and the restoration of the Emperor, while the Toseiha (Control Faction) wanted changes to the style of government, but not through violence.
- The Toseiha faction gained control of the military after the discovery of an assassination plan, and the 1936 coup attempt. Kodoha leaders were purged from positions of authority, and the ideology of the Toseiha faction became dominant – such as dying for the Emperor or developing technology for warfare.
- In 1937, the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out after an exchange of gunfire at the Marco Polo Bridge. The Japanese army launched a massive offensive into China without consulting the government.
- During the war, Japanese troops committed numerous atrocities, particularly during the 'Rape of Nanking'.
- Prime Minister Konoe briefly tried to stop the war, before giving in to the will of the army and supporting it. He resigned as Prime Minister shortly after, expressing a desire to not be a puppet of the army.

Key personalities and terms

Personalities

Pu Yi (1906–1967) was the last Emperor of China and first of Manchukuo from 1934. This position was established by the Japanese to provide a sense of legitimacy to their invasion of Manchuria. After the war, he was imprisoned by the Soviet Union, and then China, before being released after converting to Communism.



Figure 10.13 Pu Yi

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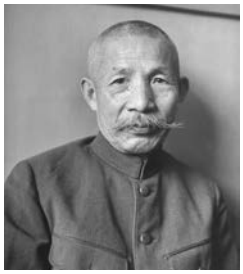


Figure 10.14 Sadao Araki

Araki Sadao (1877–1966) was a former Japanese army general sentenced to life imprisonment by the Allied Military Tribunal as a war criminal in 1948. He was a founding member of the Kodoha faction, and in the 1930s served as War Minister and Education Minister during the invasion of Manchuria.



Figure 10.15 Tojo Hideki

Tojo Hideki (1884–1948) was a general of the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) and the leader of the Imperial Rule Assistance Association. Tojo became Prime Minister in October 1941, with the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor occurring during his reign. While Prime Minister, Tojo tried to gather key positions in Japan's government for himself, such as Minister for the Army, which would have led to an authoritarian government. He was not successful and was forced from power in 1944. After Japan surrendered, Tojo was tried for war crimes and hung on 23 December 1948.

Terms

Bushido: translated as the 'way of the warrior', *bushido* was the ethical code followed by the samurai.

Pan-Asianism: an ideology promoting the cooperation and unity of Asian countries.

Total war: a society that has dedicated everything to support the war effort.

Yamato spirit: used to generally describe the traditional and cultural soul of Japan.

Activities

Thinking historically

1. Explain the differences between the Kodoha and Toseiha factions in the army.
2. Create a visual display of the ideologies the Kodoha and Toseiha each favoured, and those they shared.
3. Which faction gained control of the military, and why?
4. Research the circumstances leading to the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, creating a 10-point summary of the key events.
5. Describe the government's response to the outbreak of war with China.

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Connect – extend – challenge

- **Connect:** How are the ideas and information presented connected to what you already knew of the topic of the Japanese army, war in China, or the response of the people to militarism?
- **Extend:** What new ideas did you get that extended or pushed your thinking in new directions?
- **Challenge:** What is still challenging or confusing for you to get your mind around? What questions, wonderings or puzzles do you now have?

Writing historically

1. Write a detailed response assessing the following statement: The unwillingness of politicians to confront military figures or groups was the reason for rising militarism in Japan.
2. Research the figure of Tojo Hideki and compose a biography of his life and times.

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11 Japanese foreign policy and ideology

Key syllabus features

The key features are:

- The aims and strategy of Japanese foreign policy to 1937
- The impact of ideology on Japanese foreign policy to 1937
- Emperor Hirohito's role in the rise of nationalism and militarism in Japan

11.1 The aims of Japan

Without a doubt, Japanese foreign policy was directly impacted by ideology. However, this was dependent upon which party or military figures gained the position of prime minister. The political parties of the Seiyūkai and the Kenseikai/Minseito were largely restrained through the 1920s, with politicians actively seeking better relations in China and Korea, as well as the economic benefits of international diplomacy. Other prime ministers led their country on more aggressive courses of action, especially as social conditions deteriorated across Japan during the Shōwa Financial Crisis and the Great Depression. By the 1930s, key military figures and politicians had become sympathetic to ideological beliefs such as Emperor worship, nationalism, imperialism and cultural superiority (as the children of the sun goddess Amaterasu). While initially contained to the fringes, hardship experienced during these crises brought the ideologies into mainstream Japanese thought.

Source 11.1 **From Huffman, J.L. *Japan in World History* (2010), Oxford University Press, New York, United States, p. 96**

> Nothing illustrated the Taisho clash between progressive and conservative forces more vividly than Japan's actions in the arena of foreign affairs, where progressive internationalists largely held sway through the 1920s, agreeing with the diplomat Makino Nobuaki that Japan should 'honour pacifism and reject aggression', in keeping with 'trends of the world'.

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For its part, Japan willingly worked with the international community. A commitment to **internationalism** during the democratic phase of government resulted in diplomatic agreements, such as the Nine Power Treaty and **Kellogg Briand Pact**, as well as an openness to disarmament for the prevention of future hostilities. Where Japan struggled, especially with politicians who were forced to justify their commitment to internationalism, was the fact that it did not receive the same level of respect as western countries. The racial equality clause of the Treaty of Versailles was struck down, Japanese territorial gains following World War I were few, immigration was limited to the United States, and the naval conferences left Japan at a clear disadvantage. Some segments of the population asked why Japan should commit to a path of internationalism if they were never treated as equals? But even with this question at the forefront of Japanese thought, most Japanese governments through the 1920s supported the concept of internationalism.

Foreign policy had also been shaped by an attempt on the life of crown-prince Hirohito in 1923. This attempted assassination (known as the Toranomon Incident) was made by a Communist, and naturally heightened fears about the growing threat of Communism in Japan, as well as the Asia–Pacific. It made many Japanese openly hostile to Communist influence, or countries which were beginning to adopt Communism, such as areas of China. Dislike of Communism was based upon the belief that it had the potential to disrupt society, and potentially result in a coup, like the Russian Revolution of 1917. The upper echelons of the army questioned Japan's policy towards Communist countries, supporting a shift towards aggressive anti-Communist foreign policy.

From Nish, I. *Japanese Foreign Policy in the Inter-War Period* (2002), Praeger Publishing, United States, p. 51 Source 11.2

For the upper echelons of the army, politics during the 1920s and 1930s meant increasing involvement with foreign affairs. The army was naturally much concerned with Bolshevism coming to power in Russia and the prospect of a new Communist regime stretching from Moscow to Vladivostok. It braced itself to confront the traditional enemy Russia in its new Soviet manifestation. During the First World War, the army had become concerned with the instability of China in the hands of the warlords. But the 1920s campaign for a united China waged by the Kuomintang army under Bolshevik influence was even more disturbing for the army leaders whose long-term strategies seemed to have failed in both respects concerning China. The army saw the key to Japan's continental policy as Manchuria which had been won by Japan's great efforts in two horrendous wars. It believed that this resource-rich country, whose population had little sense of belonging to China proper, possessed vast economic potential in addition to strategic importance at the frontier between Japanese, Russian, and Chinese interests.

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Source questions

1 Summarise how the army feared Communism, as detailed in Source 11.2.
2 Does this source justify the army's growing aggression? Explain why, or why not.

Through 1924 into 1925, Japan struggled with the Communist question, particularly in light of Soviet propaganda and their growing influence in Asia. Passports were restricted at Vladivostok for the Japanese, and one consul-general was arrested by Russia for his suspected role in espionage. Tension eased due to the liberal democracies' commitment to internationalism, with both Soviet Russia and Japan making concessions. The question of China was still open-ended, but the government focused on achieving its objectives through international connections and peaceful negotiations. This was known as **Shidehara diplomacy**, after the Japanese Foreign Minister Baron **Kijuro Shidehara**.

Through the 1920s, Japan focused on developing positive foreign policies in Manchuria, which brought access, wealth and trade based on dialogue and negotiation. During this time there were numerous incidents of violent protest, which the Kwantung Army was required to suppress. In reality, Japan's foreign policy was extremely nuanced for the timeframe, as the government sought to develop positive Chinese relations while at the same time building its influence across Manchuria. The growing nationalist forces in China posed a threat to this process, as numerous incidents sparked a desire among the military to send the army to directly intervene. However, the government remained committed to achieving its objectives through peaceful means.

Despite these growing concerns about Japan's interests in China, Prime Minister Tanaka Giichi looked to secure stronger relations with Chiang Kai-Shek in the late 1920s, including welcoming him to Tōkyō. At the same time, Giichi coordinated two 'shows of force', where men were moved to the border of Japanese-controlled areas around Shantung. Giichi's 'positive policy' – or more aggressive policy in China – was latched onto by the army, which sought to continue this display of force and superiority throughout Manchuria and China. In reality, Giichi's policies, and the policies of Shidehara diplomacy, had limited overall impact on the region. There was a lack of cohesion to these policies, as they changed from prime minister to prime minister and foreign minister to foreign minister. But while politicians could not decide on effective international policies in Asia up to 1930, the military was quick to reach a policy decision of its own – war with China was coming, and if the government was not willing to coordinate it, the army would. It first tried in 1928, with the assassination of Zhang Zuolin, and would again in 1931 with the Mukden Incident.

The worst impacts of the Great Depression were seen in 1930, deepened by the response of the international community, which began placing tariffs

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(a form of import tax) on foreign goods. Tariffs were a type of **protectionism**, which existed when a country sought to protect its own industry from cheap imports. Growing protectionism across the world contributed to rising anger in Japan towards foreign powers, as well as towards the Japanese government for failing to address these foreign influences which were now impacting people's everyday lives. Growing anger as a result of the naval treaties from 1930 challenged internationalism as the leading foreign policy. Prime Minister Hamaguchi, who led negotiations at the conference, was wedged between being internationally responsible, and ruining the naval treaty by refusing to sign – he was also aware of how the growing nationalist and militarist movements in his country would respond if he did sign. Hamaguchi remained committed to internationalism, while for militarists, the time of western societies limiting Japan had passed. They now held a belief that Japan should take what it wanted, at the expense of weaker foreign countries.

The Mukden Incident of 1931 was the Kwantung Army's attempt to throw off internationalism. To some extent this was due to the increased tensions between China, Communism and nationalism, and the growing restlessness of the army. But it was also the belief that foreign policy had failed, in the eyes of the Kwantung Army at least, which led to the outbreak of war. The aims of the government and the army did not align at this point in history, as demonstrated by the assassination of Prime Minister Inukai in 1932, for opposing military expansion in China. This created two opposing objectives for Japan – the army, which wanted greater control and expansion, and the government, which wanted to constrain the growing influence of the army, while at the same time, maintaining its international commitments.

Internationalism was finally put to rest when Japan ignored a League of Nations resolution stating that Manchuria should be returned to China. Here, Japanese delegates took pains to state that Japan was committed to peace, while at the same time maintaining its right to territorial growth in the area. From this point, it can be retrospectively seen that a clear shift to nationalistic and imperialistic objectives had occurred. On the one hand, Japan spoke of peace, security for Asia and promoted the concept of '**Asia for Asians**', but this was sleight of hand to disguise its imperialism throughout the region.

Maligned by much of the international community, and feeling ill-treated in its pursuit of equality, Japan aligned itself with other nationalist countries through the **Anti-Comintern Pact** with Nazi Germany in 1936, which expanded to include Italy in November 1937. Japan had made its first commitments towards alliances with other non-democratic countries, negotiated not by diplomats or empowered members of parliament, but representatives from the army. Of course, the alliance with Germany, while targeting Communism in the Soviet Union, ultimately led to the deterioration of relations with the United States, Britain and France.

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Figure 11.1 German and Japanese flags displayed in celebration of the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact, Tōkyō, 21 December 1936



Figure 11.2 Ambassador Kintomo Mushakoji meets Adolf Hitler in 1937, to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the Anti-Comintern Pact.

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From Mason, R. *A History of Japan* (1997), Tuttle Publishing, Boston, United States, p. 337 Source 11.3

From the end of 1933, foreign policy was directed at securing Japan's dominant position in East Asia, unaided and unchecked by formal agreements with interested Western Powers. Japan's political and economic control of Manchuria became a key factor in a foreign policy which took more notice of strategic considerations as advanced by experts in the war ministry, than of advice offered by diplomats. This position not only disrupted relations with the West, but was highly disturbing to the Nationalist regime in China, despite Japan's projection of herself as a pan-Asian leader.

From Reischauer, E. *Japan: Tradition and Transformation* (1989), Houghton Mifflin, United States, p. 598 Source 11.4

Japan saw its position in China as based on national destiny, economic need, and history. Most Japanese felt their actions since 1931 were necessary to protect legitimate imperial interests. They judged events in terms of a status quo [existing situation] that was being disturbed by Chinese nationalism. China, on the other hand, saw its entire modern history as one of continuous aggression by foreign powers. Japan's encroachments were the most recent and outrageous. Rising Chinese nationalism could tolerate these no longer.

Step inside

In your workbook, respond to the three following questions:

- What would a military commander in Japan be able to perceive (see) about the potential for a war in China, and its benefits?
- What might these men believe they could do?
- What might they care about that would prompt them to take such action?

11.2 Pan-Asianism and the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere

During World War II, Japan used propaganda to build the idea of the **Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere** (sometimes referred to as the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere). This concept culminated in World War II as justification for the war, but was embedded from as early as the 1800s. At the end of the nineteenth century, many Japanese scholars saw Japan as having a 'mission in Asia', one which viewed Japanese nationalism and imperialism as a way to achieve its 'manifest destiny' as the leader of Asia.

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Figure 11.3 A Japanese propaganda poster displaying the harmony between Japan and Manchukuo

But at the end of the nineteenth century, these ideas were on the fringe of government and politics – only held by ultranationalists such as the Black Dragon Society and Kita Ikki. But the idea of Japan taking a leading role in Asia was heightened by the defeat of Russia at Tsushima. This brought an upsurge of pride that Japan had finally assumed its place as a world superpower.

With the economic hardship endured during the Great Depression, combined with the growing dissatisfaction with foreign countries, ideas about Japan's leading role in Asia gained traction in society. Ultranationalists now called for a war to expel external influences, while those struggling with the Depression saw a war in Asia as a means to bring riches to Japan. Many Japanese questioned why western powers had the right to colonise Asia as they wanted – most western countries had gained their empires through the exploitation of these colonies; surely a country with the prestige of Japan also had the right to such an empire? While the Co-Prosperity Sphere would not become formal until 1940, the ideology underpinning it shaped Japanese foreign policy in the lead-up to the war.

Figure questions

1 Explain why Figure 11.3 would be considered propaganda.
2 How might Figure 11.3 be useful to a historian *despite* the fact it is propaganda?

The Co-Prosperity Sphere was simply a front for Japanese ambitions – presenting the idea of a united Asia as a means to cover the darker truths. When war did break out in China, Japanese treatment of civilians in occupied areas was horrendous, completely putting away any ideas of racial unity or equality. The Co-Prosperity Sphere was just another form of imperialism, covered with propaganda to make it appear as if Japan had lofty aims for the unification and solidarity of Asian people across the region. All the army really wanted was to further the exploitation of China at its own hands, rather than those of westerners.

Source 11.5 **From Hotta, E. *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War* (2007), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, United States, p. 3**

Japan's intellectuals and political elites, as well as many of their Asian colleagues, had come to embrace the idea of Asian linkages for quite some time before 1931. Within this broad framework, many Japanese

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Pan-Asianists, aware of their country's unique position as almost the only Asian country that had escaped colonization, came to believe that Japan had a special mission to save weak Asia from Western domination.

11.3 Hirohito: Emperor worship

Traditionally, the Emperor held a special role in Japanese society, as the people believed themselves to be the descendants of the sun goddess Amaterasu. This established the position of the Emperor as a figure who existed between 'normal' people and the divine. When the power of the Emperor was restored under the Meiji Restoration, the new constitution described the Emperor as 'the head of the Empire, combining in Himself the rights of sovereignty' – note the use of the capitalised H. Further to this, Article III of the Meiji Constitution stated the Emperor was 'sacred and inviolable'.

Video 11.1
Birth of Hirohito's son (01:17)

A 1937 education resource known as '*Kokutai no hongi*'; cited in de Bary, T. *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (2006), Columbia University Press, New York, United States, p. 279

Source 11.6

Our country is established with the emperor, who is a descendant of Amaterasu, as its centre, as our ancestors as well as we ourselves constantly have beheld the emperor as the fountainhead of her life and activities. For this reason, to serve the emperor and to receive the emperor's great august will as our own is the rationale of making our historical 'life' …

Loyalty means to revere the emperor as our pivot, and to follow him implicitly. By implicit obedience, it means casting ourselves aside and serving the emperor intently … Hence, offering our lives for the sake of the emperor does not mean so-called self-sacrifice, but the casting aside of our little selves to live under his august grace, and the enhancing of the genuine life of the people of a state …



Figure 11.4 Hundreds of thousands of Japanese people line the streets to catch a glimpse of Emperor Hirohito following his enthronement.

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Emperor worship was an issue when the war in the Pacific broke out, with devoted soldiers of the Emperor upholding the *bushido* creed by fighting to the death and committing to suicide attacks rather than be captured. From 1926, Emperor worship gathered momentum as schools displayed carefully crafted photographs of **Emperor Hirohito**, and the *Imperial Rescript on Education* calling all students to be aware of their civil responsibility to 'advance public good and promote common interests; always respect the Constitution and observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the state; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne …'. For those involved in the armed forces, the mantra became about protecting Japan and its culture. It is not hard to see how the indoctrination children received in schools regarding the Emperor or Japanese culture transferred into the military.

To be fair to Hirohito, much of this was established prior to his ascension to the position of Emperor. It was coincidental that this indoctrination process brought through children with more nationalist views, who reached their 20s and 30s in the 1920s. In other words, they entered jobs, politics or military roles, and brought with them the influences of their youth. This was not Hirohito's fault – the real question is, what did Hirohito personally do to encourage Emperor worship, nationalism or even war across Japan?

Hirohito's rise to the position of Emperor brought with it the belief by many Japanese that Japan was entering a new age or time of prosperity. The infirm Emperor Taishō had struggled in his final years with illness, but from Hirohito's appointment as regent in 1921, Japan had an Emperor



Figure 11.5 On 9 May 1921, King George V of Great Britain leaves Victoria Station for Buckingham Palace with Crown Prince Hirohito of Japan.

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who could match the legacy of his grandfather, Emperor Meiji. The general population regarded Emperor Meiji lovingly, as he had increased the stature of Japan and brought a balance to progressive beliefs and tradition. This legacy greatly influenced Hirohito's choices.

Two different 'stories' exist for Hirohito's role in the war. On the one hand, Hirohito is regarded as a man who wanted to follow liberal democratic principles, but due to his advisers, and rising militarism, his country turned to imperialism. Despite being the Emperor, he did not have the *direct* authority to control the government, nor could he control the rising violence developing in Japanese society. The second approach to the figure of Hirohito is that he was a war criminal. Historians supporting this view regard Hirohito as an opportunist, one who deliberately sought to grow the power of Japan and, by extension, the position of Emperor. To these historians, Hirohito was a supporter of militarism, and any post-war recollections saying otherwise are propaganda designed to present Hirohito favourably.

From Kawamura, N. *Emperor Hirohito and the Pacific War* (2017), University of Washington Press, Seattle, United States, p. 70 Source 11.7

> Although the emperor was supposed to be inviolable and his decisions were supposed to be sacred, what Hirohito stated did not always carry weight. Moreover … the court advisers, with a view to protect the imperial throne from any ascribed responsibility and blame, advised the emperor to maintain personal neutrality … which often resulted in his inaction and passivity.

From Bix, H. 'War Responsibility and Historical Memory: Hirohito's Apparition' (2008), *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Volume 6, Issue 5 Source 11.8

> For Hirohito, like most Western heads of state, empire, national defence, and national greatness were primary. Given his strongly opportunistic nature, he would extend Japan's control over China when given the chance. In other words, as a traditional imperialist and nationalist, he was firmly committed to protecting Japan's established rights and interests abroad even in the face of the rising world tide of anti-colonial nationalism. But he was also highly sensitive to the internal balance of political forces and even more totally dedicated to preserving the monarchy.

Understanding two key issues can assist in the judgement of whether Hirohito supported militarism and allowed for the fall of the liberal democracy. The first of these was the growing aggression in China, and whether Hirohito would support or suppress this. Historians studying this issue have decisively concluded that Hirohito made no real effort to

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stop growing hostility in China; in fact, he appears to have supported it by failing to request the punishment of officers who authorised the attack in 1931. By not publicly declaring that the Kwantung Army was wrong in its actions, Hirohito appeared to agree to its continuation, regardless of whether he did, or did not. Only through firm action, statement, or punishment of those involved could Hirohito stamp his authority on the situation – but he did not do this. Evidence suggests Hirohito quietly complained to his advisers, while publicly appearing to allow the aggression to continue. Part of this may have been motivated by a desire to see his people benefit, as expansion into China would bring great benefit to a country struggling out of the Great Depression. Of course, this came at the expense of the Chinese people who were brutalised by Japanese troops. Again, Hirohito was silent on this, although he did express his remorse for these actions post-war.

The second issue relates to the democratic government in Japan, and whether Hirohito would allow it to be subverted, or taken over, by Japanese militarists. This is a more difficult question to answer, as it appears at times that Hirohito was receptive to greater control of the government after numerous weak political leaders, while at other times he appeared to support the liberal democracy. His consent to Japan withdrawing from the League of Nations gave power to the military, as did his support for the action in Manchuria. All of this reduced liberal democracy and its capacity to rule. At other times, the Emperor actively stated his dislike for Fascist governments and suppressed coups which arose. He was particularly firm during the 1936 coup – while his military commanders wavered on whether to offer their support, Hirohito threatened to take his personal guard to put down the coup if his commanders did not intervene. These contrasting approaches to the democratic process make it difficult to say for certain whether the Emperor was seeking to protect the democracy or let it die.

Source 11.9 **Hirohito, speaking to foreign journalists in Tokyo, 1971; cited in Hata, I. *Hirohito: The Showa Emperor in War and Peace* (2007), Global Oriental, Kent, United Kingdom, p. 3**

> I have always desired to serve as a constitutional monarch, and there have been only two occasions in which I took direct action, both of them extremely pressing crisis situations. One of them was the February 26 Incident, and the other was at the end of the war.

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Figure 11.6 Soldiers occupying Nagata-Cho and Akasaka area during the February 26 Incident in Tōkyō

From Large, S.S. *Emperor Hirohito and Showa Japan: A Political Biography* (1998), Routledge, London, England, p. 205 Source 11.10

> [T]his interpretation is untenable. It ignores, as this study has shown, that [Hirohito] personally opposed, and tried to use his influence privately at court to prevent, the acts of aggression that he ultimately sanctioned as representing the formal imperial will. He 'was absolutely consistent in using his personal influence to induce caution and to moderate, and even to obstruct, the accumulating, snowballing impetus towards war'.

Source questions

1. Source 11.10 contains bias. What evidence is there of this?
2. The source uses the word 'interpretation'. Explain how and why historians can reach different conclusions from the same information.

Much of the historical debate about Hirohito relates to his war guilt. Following the war in the Pacific, the **International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE)** was established to arrest alleged war criminals and place them on trial. The question was, would the Allied countries put Hirohito on trial? General **Douglas MacArthur**, who assumed a position of authority in Japan post-war, was adamant the Emperor would not appear before the IMTFE for political reasons. Hirohito could not be called to testify at trial, and documents relating to his role in the war were redacted (blacked out) or buried entirely. In short, the Emperor's role in the outbreak of war and the overseeing of numerous atrocities was hidden by the Allies and never legally tested. As a result of this, Hirohito's choices have been open to historical interpretation, and further muddied by Hirohito's statements of regret, or justifications in the post-war period.

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Source 11.11 **From Victoria, B.D. *Zen Terror in Prewar Japan: Portrait of an Assassin* (2019), Rowman & Littlefield, London, United Kingdom, p. 21**

In spring 1932, following the assassination of a prime minister [Inukai] by young naval officers, Hirohito and the Court Group abandoned their support for constitutional government conducted by party cabinets, thereby quickening the militaristic drift in Japanese politics … When in the fall of 1932 Japan formally recognized the puppet state of 'Manchukuo', it violated both treaties. Hirohito was pleased that his army had expanded the empire and partially redressed Japan's strategic weakness in natural resources such as coal and iron, but also agricultural land and its produce. So rather than abandon this huge territorial gain in the face of vehement US and Chinese criticism, he sanctioned Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations in March 1933 and issued an imperial rescript announcing the move. In late February 1936, a military insurrection in Tokyo took the life of Hirohito's closest political adviser and many others. Only after intervening forcefully to suppress the uprising and punish the rebel officers, did Hirohito sanction a large expansion of the military budget, a threefold increase in the size of the army's small garrison force in north China, and national policies that required Japan 'to become the stabilizing force in East Asia'. Thereafter the army and navy played the guiding role in shaping domestic policy; and Hirohito, who still imagined himself to be a traditional 'benevolent monarch', threw off his earlier indecisiveness and slowly began to assert 'direct' imperial rule in his capacity as uniformed commander-in-chief.

Source 11.12 **From Pike, F. *Hirohito's War: The Pacific War, 1941–1945* (2015), Bloomsbury Publishing, London, United Kingdom, p. 113**

Hirohito's defenders suggest that he was a shy, unworldly, peace-loving marine biologist, who had no interest in international politics. 'The official portrait … represented Hirohito as a cultured, secluded biologist who left the management of his realm to generals and admirals and devoted all his energy to puttering about with fungi and small wormlike marine organisms.' Hirohito claimed that the military constantly undermined his will and that they alone determined on the course of war. After the Mukden Incident, one of his courtiers relayed Hirohito's opinion: 'I believe that international justice and good faith are important and I am striving to preserve world peace, but the forces overseas do not heed my commands and are recklessly expanding the Incident. This causes me no end of anguish … When I think of all these problems, I cannot sleep at night.'

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True, for who?

1. **Discuss**. What claim is Pike making in Source 11.12?
2. **Brainstorm**. Make a list of different points of view from which you could look at this claim.
3. **Dramatise**. Choose a viewpoint to embody and imagine the stance a person from this viewpoint would be likely to take (for example – a defender of Hirohito). Would they think Pike's claim is true, false or uncertain? Why? Go around in a circle and dramatically speak from the viewpoint. Say:
   - My viewpoint is …
   - I think this claim is true/false/uncertain because …
   - What would convince me to change my mind is …
4. **Stand back**. Step outside of the circle of viewpoints and take everything into account: What is your conclusion or stance on Pike's claim? What new ideas or questions do you have?

From Wetzler, P.M. *Hirohito and War: Imperial Tradition and Military Decision Making in Prewar Japan* (1998), University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, Hawaii, United States, p. 6 Source 11.13

With respect to the emperor's role in military planning, documents available at the Boeicho Kenkyujo (National Institute for Defense Studies, or NIDS) in Tokyo and studies by scholars there provide three new revelations. First, the emperor was regularly and extensively informed about military planning for at least six years before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Second, he was given a detailed explanation of the plan to attack Pearl Harbor by surprise one month before its execution. Third, he did not question military plans in imperial conferences because they were top secret and because he demanded the opportunity to suggest revisions in private before official approval. In short, handwritten records from the Imperial Army and Navy general staffs illustrate that the emperor was consulted about military planning, on occasion demanded and achieved revisions of specific plans, but was not able to dictate plans or basic strategy.

From Bix, H. *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (2016), HarperCollins, New York, United States, pp. 16–17 Source 11.14

A major concern of this book is Hirohito's failure to publicly acknowledge his own moral, political, and legal accountability for the long war fought in his name and under his active direction, both as head of state and supreme commander. Hirohito did not abdicate when disaster came, for he believed himself to be a monarch by divine right, and the indispensable

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essence of the Japanese state. He lacked all consciousness of personal responsibility for what Japan had done abroad and never once admitted guilt for the war of aggression that over thirteen years and eleven months cost so many lives.

Summary

- Japan had differing foreign policy aims during the 1920s and 1930s. Initially, it pursued a policy of internationalism, where it worked with other countries through treaties, trade agreements and the League of Nations.
- In the middle of the 1920s, aggression towards China decreased under 'Shidehara diplomacy', but this changed towards the end of the decade with increased troops on the Asian mainland, and an attack on Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin by the Kwantung Army.
- From 1930, Japan had dual foreign policy – the foreign policy the government sought to pursue, and the foreign policy conducted by the army as it tried to force the government's hand and acted without orders. This culminated in the attack on Manchuria following the Mukden Incident, leading to Japan leaving the League of Nations.
- After Manchuria, the rise of militarists in government led to an aggressive policy in Asia that sought to protect Japan's interests and limit Western influence.
- Historians debate Hirohito's role in the rise of militarism to this day. Two sides of the argument have developed: historians who think that Hirohito was limited in what he could do despite his position as Emperor; and those who view Hirohito as playing an active role in rising militarism and the destruction of democratic government. Hirohito's guilt was not tested at the war crimes trials which followed Japan's surrender in World War II.



Figure 11.7 Shidehara Kijuro

Key personalities and terms

Personalities

Baron **Shidehara Kijuro** (1872–1951) was a leading supporter of positive and beneficial international relationships with both China and the wider world. As Foreign Minister, he pursued trade agreements in China, which led to him being forced from politics by military figures who wanted to pursue aggressive policies. Shidehara was appointed Prime Minister post-war to oversee the reconstruction of Japan.



Figure 11.8 Emperor Hirohito

Emperor Hirohito (1901–1989) was a controversial figure at the end of World War II, particularly as he was not placed on trial due to political

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considerations. As Emperor, Hirohito had overseen his country's path to war, and only intervened in the later stages when the war turned against Japan. He announced the surrender of Japan over the radio on 15 August 1945.

American General **Douglas MacArthur** (1880–1964) oversaw the Pacific campaign and occupation of Japan by the United States forces. He accepted the surrender of Japan aboard the USS *Missouri* in Tōkyō Bay, and assumed almost singular control over Japan for the next eight years.



Figure 11.9 Douglas MacArthur

Terms

Anti-Comintern Pact: an agreement between Japan, Germany and Italy to prevent the spread of Communism around the world.

Asia for Asians: a slogan of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere seeking to restore Asia to the control of Asian powers, and remove western influences.

Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: countries occupied, or working with Japan, fell under the control of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, which was a propaganda notion about the unity of Asian peoples.

International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE): the international body established to investigate war crimes, which tried, sentenced and punished criminals.

Internationalism: the policy of cooperating with other nations to bring common good to all countries involved.

Kellogg Briand Pact: a 1928 pact designed to ensure borders between countries were respected, and disputes negotiated to a peaceful settlement.

Kokutai no Hongi: a national pamphlet distributed to the Japanese people to explain the ideology of the military and government.

Protectionism: the policy of taxing imports from other countries (tariffs) in order to ensure your own industries can grow and remain competitive.

Shidehara diplomacy: a policy period where a stronger relationship with China was desired, which fostered the growth of trade and diplomacy.

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Activities

Thinking historically

1. Create a list of Japanese foreign policy aims in the 1920s and 1930s.
2. Explain how Japan was internationalist.
3. Why would Baron Shidehara desire peaceful relations in Asia?
4. Assess how Japan had a 'dual foreign policy' in the late 1920s and 1930s.
5. How do you think the United States and Great Britain would have responded to Japan's 'Asia for Asians' slogan?

Tug of war

- Consider the guilt of Hirohito in allowing, or contributing to, the rise of militarism in Japan.
- Create a table of evidence for and against this argument – these are the 'tugs'.
- Using the 'tugs', write the text for the debate topic: Emperor Hirohito was directly responsible for the rise of militarism in Japan.

Writing historically

1. Essay question: To what extent did Japanese foreign policy achieve its aims in the period 1904–1937?
   - Create an essay scaffold for this question using the following table:

Overall thesis statement:				
	Paragraph idea	**Topic sentence**	**Key facts**	**Historians' views**
Paragraph I				
Paragraph II				
Paragraph III				
Paragraph IV				
Paragraph V				

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Glossary

anarchists people who desire a society where there is no hierarchy, government or control, instead of a self-governed and self-managed society.

Anti-Comintern Pact an agreement between Japan, Germany and Italy to prevent the spread of Communism around the world.

Asia for Asians a slogan of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere seeking to restore Asia to the control of Asian powers, and remove western influences.

authoritarian demanding that people obey completely and refusing to allow them the freedom to act as they wish.

Bank of Japan the large Japanese bank, founded 10 October 1882, and responsible for issuing money across Japan.

Black Dragon Society an ultranationalist society in Japan that publicly attacked both Communist and democratic practices.

Bolshevik the early name of the Communist Party of Russia, which overthrew the semi-democratic government that took power after Nicholas II's abdication.

bushido translated as the 'way of the warrior', *bushido* was the ethical code followed by the samurai.

Communism a type of government with no class structure where the 'state' owns everything and redistributes it to the people.

demilitarised zone an area which cannot have military forces within it.

false flag attack the faking or staging of an attack, often to cast the blame for the attack on another person, group or country.

Fascist a political system based on a powerful leader, state control, and being extremely proud of country and race.

General Election Law the law passed by the Diet which established 'universal' suffrage in Japan (although this was limited to men, within a certain age, and with a certain amount of money).

genro a powerful council of elder statesmen, who had played a leading role in the 1868 Meiji Restoration and in the organisation of the new government that followed.

Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere countries occupied, or working with Japan, fell under the control of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, which was a propaganda notion about the unity of Asian peoples.

hanbatsu a political system based upon the power and influence of the clans.

Imperial Diet the name of the Japanese parliament, which featured a House of Representatives and a House of Peers.

Imperial Rule Assistance Association (IRAA) was founded to unify the two-party system of democracy in Japan into a more authoritarian form of government.

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imperialism a policy of gaining territory, and empire, possibly through conquest.

industrialisation the process of a society converting to a socio-economic system which is dominated by machines.

International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) the international body established to investigate war crimes, which tried, sentenced and punished criminals.

internationalism the policy of cooperating with other nations to bring common good to all countries involved.

Kellogg Briand Pact a 1928 pact designed to ensure borders between countries were respected, and disputes negotiated to a peaceful settlement.

Kenseikai translates as Constitutional Politics Association, was a Japanese political party that was generally in opposition to the Seiyūkai, and supported labour and voting law changes.

Ketsumeidan the 'League of Blood' society, an ultranationalist group that targeted politicians and businessmen for assassination.

kokutai sometimes translated as 'national essence', *kokutai* meant displaying Japanese traits or characteristics; it is perhaps best defined by saying that it meant not protesting, not being Communist, and not resisting the Japanese government.

Kokutai no Hongi a national pamphlet distributed to the Japanese people to explain the ideology of the military and government.

Kwantung Army a prestigious Japanese army situated on mainland Asia, responsible for aggressive foreign policy in the region from the late 1920s.

labour unions organisations of united members seeking to protect their rights, and negotiate better working conditions or wages.

liberalism a political ideology that promotes equality, liberty, protection from injustice and economic opportunity for all people.

limited liberal democracy a form of government which recognises the rights and freedoms of its citizens and elects representatives by vote, but has deliberately restricted or limited some of these rights and freedoms by law.

Lytton Report a report conducted by the Lytton Commission, which concluded Japan had been the aggressor in Manchuria, and had wrongfully invaded the country.

Manchukuo the puppet state created in Manchuria, under the puppet Emperor Pu Yi.

Manchuria a region of north-east China, which was fought over by Russia and Japan before Japan extended control into this region in 1931.

Marxism a social, political and economic theory based on the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

Meiji Restoration the political revolution which restored the power of the Emperor (Emperor Meiji) and brought an end to the reign of Shoguns in Japan.

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militarism a belief that a country should grow its military forces to achieve its foreign policies or national interests.

Minseito the renamed Kenseikai Party from 1927 onwards.

Mitsubishi *zaibatsu* one of the four major conglomerates which dominated Japanese industry and the economy, with a close connection to the Kenseikai.

Mitsui *zaibatsu* one of the four major family conglomerates which dominated Japanese industry and the economy, with a close connection to the Seiyūkai.

modernisation the process of changing and adapting society from something older and traditional to something new.

monopoly exclusive control of a service, trade or industry.

Mukden Incident a staged attack by the Kwantung Army which provided the justification for its invasion of Manchuria.

nationalism the promotion of the interests of one's own nation above all others.

oligarchy a small group of wealthy and powerful people who rule a country.

Open Door Policy a United States policy which called for all countries to be given equal access to trade in China.

Pan-Asianism an ideology promoting the cooperation and unity of Asian countries.

Peace Preservation Laws a sequence of laws which led to the arrest of anyone who protested against the government, or did not display Japanese cultural traits and traditions.

plutocracy a government based upon those with wealth.

protectionism the policy of taxing imports from other countries (tariffs) in order to ensure your own industries can grow and remain competitive.

protectorate a country controlled and protected by another.

Public Security Preservation Laws a sequence of laws which led to the arrest of anyone who protested against the government, or did not display Japanese cultural traits and traditions.

racial equality clause a proposal recognising that all races were equal, submitted by Japan during the negotiations for the Treaty of Versailles.

radical right wing these people had similar views to right-wing nationalists, but wanted to use violence, intimidation, threats and assassinations to achieve their aims.

right-wing nationalists people who tended to support more authoritarian governments, backed by the military, and based upon nationalist principles.

samurai a member of a military class of high social rank in Japan from the eleventh to the nineteenth centuries.

Seiyūkai (Rikken Seiyūkai) translates as Friends of Constitutional Government, was one of the main political parties in Japan and was generally regarded as conservative.

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Shidehara diplomacy a policy period where a stronger relationship with China was desired, which fostered the growth of trade and diplomacy.

Shintoism a Japanese religion according to which people worship past members of their families and various gods who represent natural forces.

Shogun the chief military commander in Japan from 1603 to 1868.

Shōwa Financial Crisis a time of financial panic in 1927 Japan, which led to the closure of 37 banks.

Shōwa Renovation a plan among nationalist supporters to 'renovate' Japan in the same way the Meiji Restoration had occurred, but this time focusing on the removal of foreign influences, and a return to traditional Japanese values.

Thought Prosecutors otherwise known as *shiso kenjii*, thought prosecutors investigated, arrested and 're-educated' those arrested under the Peace Preservation Laws.

Tokko the policing organisation that arrested Japanese citizens under the Peace Preservation Laws.

total war a society that has dedicated everything to support the war effort.

transcendental government a type of government led by men who were supposedly above petty political fights, instead making decisions in the best interest of Japan.

Twenty-One Demands a list of demands Japan sent to China during World War I, which threatened war if China did not agree to give Japan territory and restrict other foreign influences.

universal suffrage the right of all adult citizens to vote in an election, especially for representatives in a government.

urbanisation the transfer of the population from the country to cities.

westernisation the process whereby western cultures (European or North American) influence the ideas, customs or practices of another culture.

Yamato spirit used to generally describe the traditional and cultural soul of Japan.

zaibatsu a group of industrial and financial companies that controlled a large part of the economy of Japan until World War II.

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