

# Japan Builds an Empire

## READING FOCUS

- What were the causes and effects of Japan's growing military power?
- Why was the Manchurian Incident a turning point for Japan's civilian government?
- What was the initial outcome of Japan's war against China?
- Why did Japan look beyond China for future expansion?

## MAIN IDEA

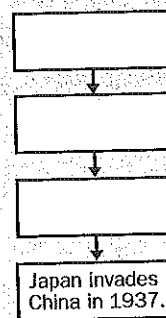
The Japanese military expanded Japan's power into China and southeast Asia and came to dominate Japan's government.

## KEY TERMS

Manchurian Incident  
puppet state  
Burma Road  
Greater East Asia  
Co-Prosperity Sphere

## TAKING NOTES

Copy this flowchart. As you read this section, fill in the boxes with some of the major events that led to Japan's invasion of China in 1937.



**Setting the Scene** Japan emerged from isolation in the mid-1800s. The United States forced Japan to open its markets to foreigners when Matthew Perry sailed into Tokyo Bay in 1853. That event pushed Japan to strengthen its military and modernize its economy in order to defend itself. Japan also developed a constitutional government, although the emperor remained a respected figure and the divine leader of the nation.

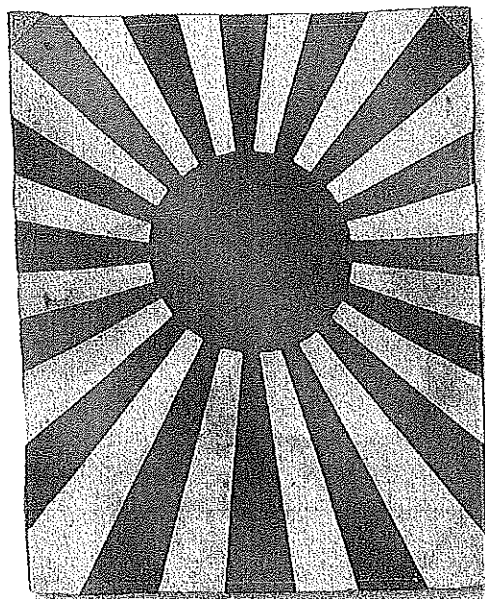
By engaging in wars against China (1894–1895) and Russia (1904–1905), Japan expanded its sphere of influence in East Asia. It took control of Korea and gained considerable influence over the northern Chinese province of Manchuria, where it stationed soldiers. By the eve of World War I, Japan had developed into the strongest nation in East Asia and one of the most powerful nations in the world.

## Growing Military Power

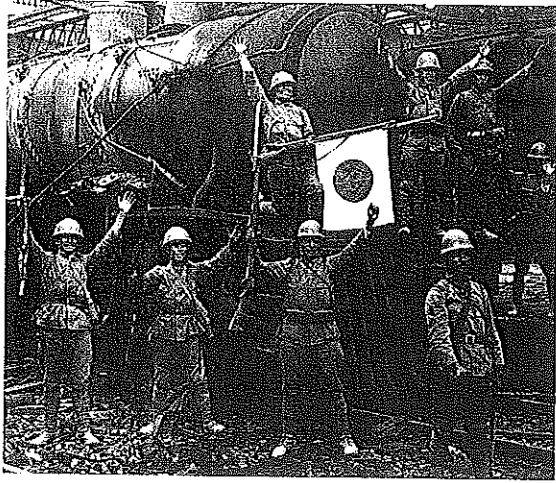
During World War I, Japan joined the Allies. Although Japan played just a minor military role, it conquered several German possessions in the Pacific and won access to markets abandoned by the Europeans. As a result, Japan's economy prospered.

After the war, Japan enacted political reforms that resulted in a two-party parliamentary system and a sharp increase in the number of people allowed to vote. Japan also slowed its territorial expansion. It helped found the League of Nations and signed international agreements designed to keep the peace. By signing the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, Japan condemned war and pledged to solve all disagreements peacefully. Events would soon show how little influence such international peace agreements really had.

**Democracy in Crisis** In the early 1920s, a series of recessions rocked Japan's economy. As in Germany, conditions grew worse after 1930 because of the Great Depression. Japan's industries depended on selling their goods to foreign countries, but many of the nation's trading partners put high tariffs on Japanese goods to protect their own businesses. The resulting industrial decline led to



**VIEWING HISTORY** The rising sun was the symbol of Imperial Japan. **Synthesizing Information** Why was this an appropriate symbol for Japan in the early 1900s?



Japanese troops in Manchuria

massive layoffs, strikes, and widespread political discontent. Many Japanese blamed the new multiparty system of government. Politicians, they believed, had taken too long to deal with the mounting economic problems. While economic conditions were worsening, some politicians had enriched themselves by taking bribes from the huge family-owned companies that dominated the economy.

The Japanese military, too, expressed dissatisfaction with democracy. At the Washington Conference in 1922, the Japanese government had accepted limits on the size of its navy. Later it had cut the strength of the army and prevented the military from challenging the Chinese troops in Manchuria.

**Rise of Nationalism** Several radical nationalist groups formed in response to the government's perceived weaknesses. They demanded a return to traditional ways and an end to multiparty

rule, powerful businesses, and other Western-style institutions. Radicals assassinated several business and political leaders. By committing terrorism, they hoped to force the military to take over the government. Some members of the military, especially younger officers, supported the radicals.

## The Manchurian Incident

Japan, located on a chain of volcanic islands, experienced a population explosion in the 1900s. By 1930, the population neared 65 million, and it was growing by about one million people per year. Japan lacked the land needed to feed its rising population and the raw materials and markets needed to power the Japanese economy. Many Japanese saw the acquisition of Manchuria as a solution to these problems, both for its coal and iron ore and for its immense areas of undeveloped land.

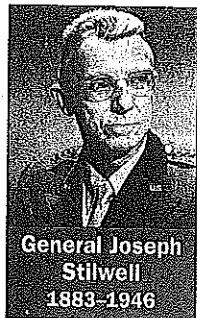
In September 1931, a Japanese army stationed in Manchuria took matters into its own hands. Claiming that Chinese soldiers had tried to blow up a railway line, they captured several cities in southern Manchuria. Chinese troops withdrew from the area. Japan's civilian government tried but failed to prevent the army from taking further action. By February 1932, the army had seized all of Manchuria. World leaders and most Japanese expressed shock at what came to be called the **Manchurian Incident**.

In response, Japan announced that Manchuria was now the independent state of Manchukuo, under Japanese protection. Japan installed a new head of state—P'u-I, China's last emperor from a Manchurian dynasty—with Japanese advisors to run the government. In fact, Manchukuo was a **puppet state**, or a supposedly independent country under the control of a powerful neighbor. Japan sent more than a million farmers, entrepreneurs, and soldiers with the goal of securing Manchuria as a Japanese colony.

The United States and Britain protested that Japan had broken the Kellogg-Briand Pact, but they did not act to halt Japan's aggression. The League of Nations ordered Japan to end its occupation of Manchuria. Japan refused and withdrew from the League instead.

The Manchurian Incident greatly increased the army's power over the government, but some radicals in the military wanted complete control. In 1932, naval officers helped assassinate the prime minister. Other military leaders did not support the assassins, but they used this opportunity to end the multiparty government, putting the parliamentary system itself in danger. In 1936, an uprising by junior military officers resulted in the murder of several high government officials. The uprising failed, but it gave the military even greater power. Civilian politicians began to

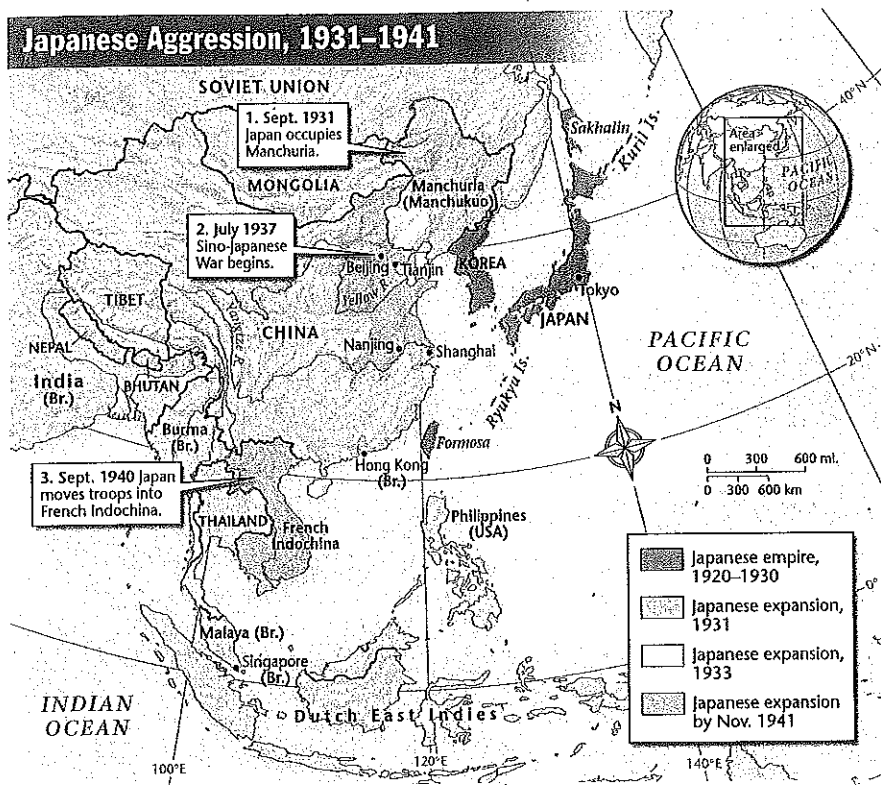
## BIOGRAPHY



**General Joseph Stilwell**  
1883–1946

One high-ranking American soldier witnessed Japan's aggression in China from a local perspective. A West Point graduate, Joe Stilwell served in the Philippines and France before returning to the United States where he learned Chinese. From 1926 to 1929 and 1932

to 1946, Stilwell lived in China, where he represented the United States Army and developed close ties to Jiang Jieshi. Stilwell rose from Jiang's chief of staff to commander of U.S. forces in China, Burma, and India. During World War II, he played an important role in defending South Asia from Japan and in keeping China's links to the West open.



**MAP SKILLS** Japan's gradual expansion in Asia led to an outright war with China in 1937. **Location** List three countries or colonial possessions that appeared to be likely targets of Japanese aggression in November 1941. Explain your reasoning.

fear for their lives so much that they dared not criticize the military. The new prime minister said:

“The military are like an untamed horse left to run wild. If you try head-on to stop it, you'll get kicked to death. The only hope is to jump on from the side and try to get it under control while still allowing it to have its head to a certain extent.”

—Hirota Koki

Japan's military leaders never actually seized control of the government. However, they took a much stronger hand in governing the nation, especially in the area of foreign policy. They began to develop Manchuria as a base for even further Japanese expansion in Asia.

## War Against China

In July 1937, Japan resumed its invasion of China. The Japanese army turned a minor clash at the Marco Polo Bridge outside Beijing into a full-scale war. By the end of the month, Japanese forces occupied the major cities of Beijing and Tianjin and threatened the rest of northern China. The Chinese Nationalist army, led by General Jiang Jieshi (jyawnng jeh SHEE), fiercely resisted the invasion. In battle after battle, however, Japan's superior weapons overcame China's huge manpower advantage. Japanese warplanes ruthlessly bombed Chinese cities. During the “Rape of Nanjing,” Japanese soldiers brutalized or killed at least 100,000 civilians, including women and children, in the former capital of China.

The United States and other nations condemned Japan's actions. President Roosevelt spoke out against international aggression, saying that “the epidemic of world lawlessness is spreading” and calling for a “quarantine” to protect peaceful nations. Meanwhile, Congress passed a series of Neutrality Acts that prevented the United States from becoming involved in foreign conflicts. The

### READING CHECK

How successful was Japan's 1937 invasion of China?

## An American Partner in the Pacific

Since the 1930s and 1940s, when they competed for control of the Pacific, Japan and the United States have become important allies and trading partners. The two countries share concerns about aggressive moves by North Korea and China.

Japan had renounced war and had limited the use of its much-reduced military to defense purposes after World War II. In 1998, the Japanese government announced that Japan would offer non-combat support to American troops in "areas surrounding Japan." This bill upset many Japanese who were unwilling to send any troops overseas, even in noncombat roles, to avoid association with Japan's wartime past.

? **Why did the United States and Japan come into conflict in the 1930s and 1940s?**

Soviet Union also voiced its concern and backed up its words with arms, military advisors, and warplanes for China. Later, Britain sent a steady stream of supplies to the Chinese over the **Burma Road**, a 700-mile-long highway linking Burma (present-day Myanmar) to China.

The war brought two longtime enemies together. Jiang and Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong, who were locked in a bitter struggle for power, put aside their differences to fight the Japanese. When direct resistance failed, Jiang withdrew his armies to the mountains of remote Sichuan province in the south. Mao split his army into small groups of soldiers who organized bands of Chinese guerrilla fighters to harass the Japanese. While Japanese troops controlled the cities, these guerrillas dominated the countryside. By 1939, the war in China had reached a stalemate.

## Looking Beyond China

Meanwhile, the start of the war in Europe distracted European powers from the defense of their colonies in East Asia. Japanese leaders took this opportunity to expand their influence in the region to its south. In 1940, Japan's prime minister announced a **Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere** to

be led by the Japanese, extending from Manchuria in the north to the Dutch East Indies in the south. Japan declared it would liberate Asia from European colonizers. In reality, Japan needed the region's natural resources, especially oil and rubber, to carry on its war against China. In this way, Japan's co-prosperty sphere resembled Hitler's invasion of other countries for *lebensraum* ("living space").

In September 1940, Japan allied itself with Germany and Italy through the Tripartite Pact. That same month, Japan moved troops into the northern part of French Indochina, with the reluctant permission of the Vichy government of France. With the Netherlands in German hands, Japan also set its sights on the oil-rich Dutch East Indies. Then, in April 1941, the Japanese signed a neutrality pact with the Soviet Union. The stage was now set for Japan to challenge the Europeans and Americans for supremacy in Asia.

## Section

## 3

## Assessment

### READING COMPREHENSION

1. (a) Who among the Japanese was responsible for the conquest of Manchuria? (b) How was this invasion different from Germany's invasion of Poland?
2. Why was Japan unable to win the war in China?
3. (a) According to Japan, what was the purpose of the **Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere**? (b) What was Japan's real goal?

### CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

4. **Drawing Conclusions** What do Japan's actions indicate about the way economic problems affect foreign policy? Cite evidence from your reading.
5. **Writing an Opinion** Read the quote from Hirota Koki. Write a paragraph defending or criticizing Hirota's response to the military's actions.



### Take It to the NET

**Activity: Writing a Newspaper Article** The massacre at Nanjing was a terrible episode of World War II. Using eyewitness accounts and other primary sources, write a newspaper article on this topic. Use the links provided in the *America: Pathways to the Present* area of the following Web site for help in completing this activity.

[www.phschool.com](http://www.phschool.com)