

14. *Ibid.*, 28.
15. Sheldon Garon, *The State and Labor in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 178.
16. Ronald P. Dore and Tsutomu Uchi, "Rural Origins of Japanese Fascism," in *Dilemmas of Growth*, ed. Morley, 209.
17. Quoted in Andrew Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 268.

The Road to the Pacific War

Few countries in modern history have been as subject to forces of the international environment as Japan. The reasons might be endlessly debated. Some observers might attribute the fact to geography and to geopolitical factors that have made East Asia so tumultuous an area of the globe. Most would emphasize economic factors that have made the Japanese economy particularly vulnerable to changes in the international market. Others might point to cultural factors that have rendered the Japanese peculiarly receptive to foreign influences and trends. Still others would emphasize historical contingencies and the particular timing of Japan's emergence from isolation, which came with the arrival of Western power and imperialism in the Pacific.

Whatever the causes, Japan has been ceaselessly buffeted by outside forces and its modern history uniquely shaped by them. During most of this time the nation moved cautiously, ever sensitive to such currents of power politics and cultural development. The leaders of Japan sought to use those currents, to capitalize on those trends by moving with them, with circumspection seeking to turn them to its advantage, and in this prudent fashion to achieve its national ambitions.

From the time of the Restoration down to the 1930s, Japan was motivated by a sense of insecurity, both physical and cultural, and by ambition for national power, respect, and equality. Those motives, intertwined and often inseparable, made up the peculiar nationalism that impelled its historic advance. Japanese diplomacy was remarkable for the way in which it sought to pursue those national ambitions by accommodating to the international system, as the leaders understood it. Thus, for example, during the first twenty-five years of the Meiji Period, revision of the unequal treaties was pursued by determinedly adopting European legal institutions and usages. With rare, isolated exceptions, that pattern of approach continued to guide Japanese diplomats. Only in the militarist era of the 1930s, to which we now turn, did Japan appear to abandon that circumspection, to assert

willfully its own way in international affairs and attempt to establish its own destiny in defiance of the forces rising up against it.

The Ending of the Imperialist System

World War I was to transform the international system in East Asia, much as it would transform the context of Japanese domestic politics. On the eve of the war, a stable order apparently prevailed among the imperial powers, after two decades of struggle. Finding itself isolated and outmaneuvered in the Triple Intervention of 1895, Japan had worked its way into the power structure by using skillful diplomacy, backed on occasion by military force. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 established a pattern of cooperation with Britain and contributed to the development of an understanding with the United States. In a series of agreements, the latter acknowledged Japan's position in Northeast Asia, in 1905 acquiescing to the Japanese protectorate of Korea. At the same time, Russia and Japan had by war delimited their spheres of interest, with the former now relegated to protecting its remaining hold on northern Manchuria. The "system" was in rough equilibrium by this time, with the interests of each power more or less acknowledged: the United States in the Philippines, France in Indochina, Britain in the Yangtze Valley and in South China, Germany in the Shantung Peninsula, and Russia and Japan in Northeast Asia.

World War I upset this balance, and eventually the East Asian power structure collapsed. The outbreak of war in Europe in the summer of 1914 and the preoccupation of the European powers allowed Japan, under the guise of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, to seize German holdings in Shantung and German-held islands in the South Pacific: the Carolines, Marianas, Marshalls, Palau, and Yap. Hard on the heels of those swift maneuvers came the delivery in January 1915 of Japan's Twenty-One Demands on China. This was an incident fraught with importance for the future of international relations in East Asia: first, because it was interpreted as a unilateral departure from the system of understanding developed among the powers in the preceding two decades; and second, because it marked a growing Japanese-American estrangement and the emergence of the United States' role as protector of the new Chinese Republic.

The Twenty-One Demands sought Chinese recognition of the transference of German rights in Shantung to Japan; the employment of Japanese nationals as political, financial, and military advisors in China; Chinese purchase of arms from Japan; and permission for Japan to construct railways connecting the Yangtze Valley with the South China coast. The demands elicited a sharp reaction in England and even more so in the United States, where President Woodrow Wil-

son reached the conclusion that the American people must be "champions of the sovereign rights of China." What was more, there was dissension within the Japanese government, particularly among the elder statesmen or *genrō*, who had not been included in the planning of the demands and who opposed the kind of diplomacy that needlessly riled the powers and damaged the Japanese image in China. Yamagata was especially disturbed, having warned a year earlier that "if we fail to dissipate China's suspicion of us, [it] will rapidly turn against us and turn more and more to America."¹ The Japanese government subsequently modified the demands, but the episode augured ill for Sino-Japanese relations and prefigured the problems that beset Japanese-American relations in the 1930s. For the nascent Chinese nationalist movement, the Twenty-One Demands stood as a symbol of Japan's predatory designs and, as Yamagata had feared, nationalism took on an increasing anti-Japanese tone in the aftermath.

It is of course possible to date the origins of the Japanese-American estrangement a decade earlier, in the tensions that developed after the Russo-Japanese War. In part the estrangement grew from racial friction raised by immigration to the West Coast. In 1905 the California legislature had unanimously passed a resolution calling on the government to limit immigration, characterizing Japanese immigrants as "immoral, intemperate, quarrelsome men bound to labor for a pitance." The following year the San Francisco School Board established an Oriental Public School for Japanese, Korean, and Chinese children. A "gentlemen's agreement" was worked out to resolve the crisis, whereby the school board rescinded its order and the Japanese government took it upon itself to prevent the issuance of visas to laborers bound for the mainland United States. But the incidents were frequently interpreted in the Japanese press as fresh evidence that Japan was still not accepted on an equal footing with the Western powers. The animosities aroused by those events also called attention to the potential conflict of interests of the two countries in the Pacific. The military in both countries, as a consequence, began to pay more attention to the relative strength of each other's armaments and to the possibility of a military encounter.

The clash of interests was, however, more sharply drawn by the Twenty-One Demands, for subsequent to their presentation the United States made clear its intention of maintaining an Open Door for American trade and investment in China and its growing opposition to Japan's continental aspirations. Wilson's "new diplomacy" proclaimed self-determination and the sovereign rights of every people, and from the time of the demands he made increasingly plain his opposition to international power rivalries at China's expense.

The issues raised by the immigration problem and by the Twenty-One Demands reappeared at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

Wilson was deeply embarrassed over his failure to support the Japanese request that a racial equality clause be inserted in the League of Nations Covenant, which would state "that the principle of equality of nationals and the just treatment of their nationals . . . [shall be] a fundamental basis of future international relations in the new world organization." The Anglo-American powers, fearful of its implications as to immigration, abstained from voting on the proposal, which was equivalent to voting against it. For the Japanese delegation, which included a number of future prime ministers and foreign ministers (Konoe Fumimaro, Matsuoka Yōsuke, Shigemitsu Mamoru, and Yoshida Shigeru), it was interpreted as another painful reminder that they were still not accepted by the Western world.

Though the principles of the "new diplomacy" were primarily intended for Europe, Wilson wanted to apply them to Asia as well and spare China further buffeting. He told his European counterparts at the Paris conference that "there was nothing on which the public opinion of the United States of America was firmer than on this question that China should not be oppressed by Japan."² The balance of power among the imperialists in East Asia would have to be replaced by a new order, in which all would refrain from military and political expansion. The test of Wilson's determination came over the settlement of the Shantung issue. Should Japan be allowed to keep the former German concession? Wilson finally acquiesced, believing that Japan would otherwise refuse to join the League, and recognition of Japanese interests in Shantung was written into the Treaty of Versailles.

Nonetheless, a new phase of East Asian international relations was opening, only in part because of America's shift in policy toward Japan's aspirations on the continent. Japan was confronted as well with increasing diplomatic coolness from another direction. Her special position in Korea and Manchuria had been protected under the imperialist system by agreements with Russia since 1905. But after 1917 the Soviet Union repudiated those agreements, owing to both ideological reasons growing out of Leninist doctrine on imperialism and strategic reasons that included closer Sino-Soviet relations. Perhaps even more ominous for the future, Japan now faced a rising tide of Asian nationalism in the form of anti-Japanese student demonstrations, which broke out on March 1, 1919, in Korea and on May 4, 1919, in Peking.

The Washington Treaty System

Hara and other perceptive Japanese leaders were acutely aware of such "new world trends" and came to feel that it was inevitable that Japan move in accord with them. They signaled their willingness to

trim down Japan's continental aspirations, accept the disappearance of the former structure of imperialist diplomacy, and participate in a redefinition of mutual relations among the powers. A conference for this purpose was convened in Washington, D.C., at American initiative, in the autumn of 1921. American insistence led to the replacement of the expiring Anglo-Japanese Alliance by the innocuous Four-Power Treaty, in which Britain, Japan, America, and France agreed to confer should the rights or possessions of any of the four in the Pacific be threatened. A Nine-Power Treaty laid down the principles that were to guide the new order in East Asia: condemning spheres of influence in China, pledging equal opportunity for commerce and industry, and promising to respect the "sovereignty, the independence, and the territorial and administrative integrity of China." The conference sought to forestall a runaway naval arms race and to provide mutual security in the Five-Power Naval Limitation Treaty, which restricted competition in battleships and aircraft carriers by setting a ratio of 5:5:3 for Britain, the United States, and Japan, respectively. The Japanese delegation believed this ratio of capital ships was sufficient to guarantee Japanese dominance in the western Pacific.

Japanese acceptance of the new framework of international relations was exemplified by the attitudes of Shidehara Kijūrō, who was ambassador to Washington at the time of the Washington Conference and who was to serve as foreign minister (1924–1927 and 1929–1931). He shared the American vision of a liberal capitalist world order characterized by peace, political harmony, and economic interdependence. Cooperation with the United States was, after all, good business; the United States was Japan's largest supplier of capital and best trading customer, purchasing 40 percent of Japan's exports in the 1920s. Shidehara therefore advocated a posture of internationalism and peaceful development of Japan's overseas trade. Japan's policy, he held, should be to seek economic advancement in China and promotion of its own interests within the framework of international agreement. This willingness to abstain from aggressive pursuit of its political interests in China was, of course, pleasing to American policymakers. Franklin Roosevelt, who had earlier been among the sharp critics of Japan in the U.S. Navy, wrote in 1923 that the two nations "have not a single valid reason, and won't have as far as we can look ahead, for fighting each other."³

Yet there were many flaws marring the vision that Shidehara and the American policymakers shared. One appeared glaringly, the year after Roosevelt's statement, when Congress passed the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924. Secretary of State Charles E. Hughes was "greatly depressed" by it and wrote that Congress "has undone the work of the Washington Conference and implanted the seeds of an antagonism which are sure to bear fruit in the future."⁴ It made no difference that

the Japanese themselves had been guilty of violent racism months earlier, in the massacre of thousands of Koreans after the earthquake; the Japanese media saw the new legislation as a national affront, and many writers interpreted it as further evidence of American perfidy.

Perhaps a more fundamental flaw in the new international vision was the failure of the high hopes held for economic expansionism. Partly, as we have seen, owing to the mistakes and indecisiveness of Japanese economic policymakers, foreign trade did not perform up to expectation. There were many obstacles. The United States followed a strongly protectionist course, and Britain was making preferential tariff agreements within its empire that were detrimental to Japanese exports. In China, too, the nationalist movement demanded tariff autonomy and increasingly opposed Japanese economic interests. When to all these obstacles was added the onset of the Great Depression, the discontent and restlessness with Shidehara's internationalist diplomacy mounted. "It is a good thing to talk about economic foreign policy," said Matsuoka Yōsuke with sarcasm in the Diet in January 1931, "but we must have more than a slogan. Where are the fruits? We must be shown the benefit of this approach."⁵ Matsuoka, who was to become foreign minister in 1940, believed that Shidehara's vision was bankrupt and that Japan must, by force if necessary, create its own economic bloc.

Throughout the 1920s a strong undercurrent of opposition arose in Japan to Shidehara's cooperation with the new order established by the Washington Conference. Beginning with the Versailles Peace Conference, many Japanese had regarded Wilsonian principles with suspicion. Konoë Fumimaro, who became Japan's most important political leader in the 1930s, denounced the League of Nations and the Washington Treaty System as high-sounding principles to mask Anglo-American self-interest. Britain and the United States, he consistently argued, were trying to contain Japan's legitimate aspirations on the continent. "We must overcome the principles of peace based on the maintenance of the status quo," Konoë wrote, "and work out new principles of international peace from our own perspective." Konoë and a growing number of other "revisionists" said that the Washington Treaty System must be revised to ensure an equitable distribution of land and natural resources among the world's great powers. Japan as a late developer was being denied its just place by the Anglo-American powers, who were trying to preserve the status quo, pitting the "have nations" against the "have-not nations." Late-developing countries such as Japan, said Konoë, were condemned "to remain forever subordinate to the advanced nations" and, unless something was done to allow Japan "equal access to the markets and natural resources of the colonial areas," Japan would be forced to "destroy the status quo for the sake of self-preservation."⁶

The most ominous threat to the Shidehara diplomacy was the challenge that the rising tide of nationalism in China represented for Japan's interests there. Shidehara worked with considerable skill to try to remove obstacles to the expansion of Japanese trade and investments in China, but history was hardly on his side. As China struggled painfully for institutional change and national unification, the question was insistently put to Japanese foreign policymakers: would Chinese nationalism cost Japan its special position in China? The *Kuomintang*, the Nationalist Party in China, embarked on its campaign of national unification, accompanied by radical anti-foreign outbursts and by slogans demanding an end to the unequal treaties that the powers (including Japan) had forced China to sign. Beyond the problem of Japan's economic advancement was the still thornier question of Manchuria. If the *Kuomintang* campaign succeeded, could Japan preserve its treaty rights and interests in Manchuria? As this question was raised, Shidehara's "soft" policy of internationalism and support for the Washington Treaty System began to rouse bitter resentment at home.

The Joining of Domestic and Foreign Crisis

In the years from 1928 to 1932 the ferment of political community at home was brought to crisis point by the onset of the Great Depression and by the rising opposition to the framework of foreign relations established by the Washington Conference. Resentment against the government's China policy was intense among leaders of the *Kwantung Army*, the unit of the Japanese army assigned to protect Japanese interests in Manchuria. They feared that without strong measures an opportunity to secure the Manchurian holdings would be lost. In 1928 as the *Kuomintang* troops moved closer to Peking and successful extension of nationalist authority throughout North China, extremist elements in the *Kwantung Army* arranged the bombing of the train carrying Chang Tso-lin, the Manchurian warlord. Their expectation that this act would create disorder and give a pretext for expanded control of Manchuria failed to materialize, but the inability of Tokyo to punish the extremist elements in the army revealed not only the weakness of party government but also the potential for future insubordination.

Increasing tensions with China coincided with mounting discontent and unrest at home, as conservatives in and out of the government believed that Japan was besieged by radical thought. Following the general elections of 1928, the first in which the so-called proletarian parties participated, the nervous government on March 15, 1928, carried out a mass roundup of leftists. After sacking their headquarters, the government invoked the Peace Preservation Law of 1925 to

disband the Labor Farmer Party, the All-Japan Proletarian Youth Federation, and the Council of Japanese Labor Unions, which had fallen under the domination of the Communist Party. A year later the police arrested more than 1,000 additional leftists in another lightning roundup.

The sense of crisis in society was further heightened by the collapse of the economy and the hardship it brought. From 1929 to 1931 exports fell by 50 percent, with disastrous effect on both city workers and farmers. In the cities unemployment rose and in the countryside, as the bottom fell out of commodity prices—especially silk and rice—real income was reduced by about one-third from its 1925 levels. The government responded, as it had customarily to economic crises, by initiating another vigorous campaign of nationalist mobilization, on the one hand attacking leftist ideology as an un-Japanese importation from abroad and on the other hand exhorting still more intense loyalty to Japanese values and to the imperial symbol. In the past such campaigns had helped to dilute class consciousness and to undermine leftist social movements, but in this case the program contributed to an extremist patriotic movement, led by right-wing groups that proved difficult for even the government to control. Nervous bureaucrats, heretofore concerned with control of leftist groups, now found the secrete ultranationalist groups a bigger threat to social stability. It is a key to the events that followed to understand that decades of indoctrination, intended to overcome the social problems of industrialization by unifying the nation around traditional values of loyalty and solidarity, had created a populace highly receptive to the appeal of the most extreme nationalist slogans. In this time of social and economic crisis, when left-wing organizations were subject to intense scrutiny, radical right-wing groups came to exercise influence on reserve elements in the army and in the civilian population.

Such an atmosphere made the party governments, which as we have seen had failed to develop a sense of legitimacy in the Japanese value system, particularly vulnerable to charges of failure and corruption. Above all, it made the maintenance of Shidehara's diplomacy, with its emphasis on internationalism and cooperation with the Anglo-American powers, increasingly difficult. The London Naval Conference of 1930, which was intended to extend the Washington Treaty System, was particularly ill timed in the light of domestic developments in Japan. The prevailing 5:5:3 formula for capital ships was applied by the conference to heavy cruisers; and, in effect, a 10:10:7 formula for light cruisers was established for Britain, the United States, and Japan. Admirals in all three countries opposed the London treaty, but in the volatile atmosphere existing in Japan the opposition was explosive. Prime Minister Hamaguchi Osachi was charged with having compromised Japan's national security and with

having trammelled the independent judgment of the naval command for the sake of a spurious friendship with the Anglo-American powers. On November 14, 1930, presaging an era of what a *New York Times* correspondent called "government by assassination," a young ultranationalist stepped from a crowd of well-wishers in Tokyo Station and shot the prime minister as he was preparing to board a train.

In the tense months that followed, Shidehara's hopes of establishing a new order in East Asia through cooperation with the United States and England were dashed by the determination in the Kwantung Army to resolve the Manchurian issue. It is surely true that the Anglo-American powers had not done enough to encourage and aid the hopeful effort of Shidehara, and by 1931 the opportunities for avoiding a collision between Japanese and Chinese nationalism were nearly gone. As one authority writes, "a strong government in Japan might have restrained army action in Manchuria and postponed a showdown with China on the basis of some compromise settlement on the issue of Japanese treaty rights. But the government in Tokyo was too weak and too unwilling to risk its existence by a strong stand." The government was subjected to increasing pressure from rival politicians and from the press to assert Japan's supremacy, and, on the Chinese side, Chiang Kai-shek was under pressure to adopt an inflexible attitude toward Japan. By the summer of 1931 "nothing short of the miraculous could prevent a clash in Manchuria."⁷

With the tacit consent of members of the General Staff, field grade officers of the Kwantung Army provoked an incident in Manchuria on the night of September 18, 1931. A small explosion on the tracks of the Japanese railway just north of Mukden was taken as sufficient pretext for mobilizing the Kwantung Army, attacking Chinese troops in the area, and expanding Japanese control. It was a critical moment for party government in Japan, although the response was in many ways foreordained by the nature and character the parties had formed as they rose to power. It was a moment when strong leadership and an appeal to traditions of responsible civilian government might have been effective, but the parties were accustomed to circumvention, compromise, and negotiation with the other elites. The Minseitō government of Wakatsuki Reijirō, who had succeeded Hamaguchi, tenuously and attempted tactfully to limit the sphere of army action in Manchuria. But tact was ineffectual.

The weakness of the government, the diffuseness of decision-making power, the general confusion and uncertainty attending both domestic and foreign turmoil—all created an opportunity for resolute action by the Kwantung Army. It pushed ahead to conquer all of Manchuria and establish a Japanese puppet state, Manchukuo. Wakatsuki resigned and was replaced by a Seiyūikai cabinet headed by Inukai Tsuyoshi. It was the last party government in prewar Japan.

The efforts of the aging Inukai to restore order were ill-starred. His own party's Diet members voted to withdraw from the League of Nations, should that body censure Japan's action in Manchuria. Ultrana-tionalism as a popular phenomenon now gained strength. Fanatic groups, committed to cleansing the body politic by replacing the political and economic elites and carrying out a "restoration," assassinated the former finance minister in February 1932, then the chief director of the Mitsui zaibatsu in March, and finally Inukai himself on May 15.

Going It Alone

After decades of sowing the winds of nationalism among the Japanese people, the elites were now reaping the whirlwind. They had used education, the media, and a variety of grassroots organizations to mobilize nationalist sentiment among the populace for the hard struggles required to support industrialism and imperialism, and now the government was caught in a trap of its own making. Popular nationalism became a runaway force, extremely difficult to control—especially where government was so weak and so cumbersome. This nationalism was particularly unruly among leaders of society at the local level—the elementary school principal, the Shintō priest in the village, the mayor and headman of the community, the head of the local chapter of the military association, and the like. That stratum of lower middle-class leadership, which had climbed only halfway up the ladder of success, was the group toward which government mobilization efforts had been particularly directed. Such local leaders had been exhorted to interpret Japan's mission to the masses, and charged with responsibility for fulfilling Japan's destiny. As "true believers" in the collectivist ethic, they were the most impatient with the cosmopolitanism of the business elite and the squabbles and corruption of party politicians. Ultranationalist groups seeking radical solutions to the nation's problems could count on their support.

Nationalism gripped every part of Japanese society. Even the Communists—in overwhelming numbers—underwent swift conversions in prison in the early 1930s, renouncing their earlier theories and in many cases joining enthusiastically in the rhetoric of nationalism. Leaders of the ultranationalist groups set the tone of Japanese politics in the ensuing several years. Following Inukai's assassination, the one remaining genrō, Saionji Kimmochi, turned to moderate elements in the military to lead in the formation of cabinets, hoping that they could succeed where party politicians had failed in controlling the extremist elements in the army. For the next four years, from 1932 through 1936, the country was governed by cabinets twice headed by admirals. It was no easy matter to maintain moderate policies in the

face of mounting ultranationalist sympathies, which were fueled by a growing sense of isolation as the seizure of Manchuria drew international condemnation. When the League of Nations voted 42 to 1 to condemn Japan as an aggressor, the Japanese delegation walked out of the hall and out of the League.

The Manchurian Incident thus proved a turning point—a point at which Japan abandoned the general policy of cooperation with the powers, which had for the most part controlled its international behavior since 1868, and chose to pursue its own destiny in East Asia, to trust its own strength to protect and advance its interests. The leadership now spoke of an "Asian Monroe Doctrine," declaring Japan's responsibility for maintaining peace in Asia. In thus choosing to abandon its customary circumspection, and to withdraw from the Washington Treaty System, Japan set formidable requirements for the nation's defense. To maintain the strategic posture demanded by its "Monroe Doctrine" and by the commitment to Manchukuo, Japan now needed military power sufficient for three major tasks: to defeat the Soviet army, whose strength on the borders of Manchuria had been vastly augmented; to guarantee the security of the home islands against the U.S. fleet; and to compel the Chinese government to accept Japan's position in Manchuria and northern China.

These three strategic objectives required a military capability that Japan was never able to achieve. The Meiji oligarchs would have been appalled at the incautious way in which policy commitments were made that exceeded the nation's capacities. How was it that Japan's leaders in the early 1930s embarked on so perilous a course? In part, the answer lies in the fragmented nature of decision-making in the Japanese government, which at that time lacked a strong, central controlling leadership able to exercise its will over all factions of the administration, and able to coordinate and develop prudent and balanced policy goals. In part, too, it lies in the combination of ambition for Asian leadership and frustration with the Washington Treaty System and with events in China. Moreover, leaders in the early 1930s were making policy in an atmosphere often dominated by the ultranationalist sentiment that, although they may not have sympathized with it, subtly affected and conditioned their thinking.

Initially the reorientation of national policy seemed to be a success. In spite of the League's condemnation, Manchuria was now secure to be developed and integrated into the Japanese industrial machine. Moreover, in the years after the Manchurian takeover, Japanese economic policy scored phenomenal success in achieving rapid recovery from the depression. Patrick calls it "one of the most successful combinations of fiscal, monetary, and foreign exchange rate policies, in an adverse international environment, that the world has ever seen."⁸ To a considerable extent it was a matter of good luck. In the

aftermath of Manchuria, the government was required by the new international conditions to begin a rapid buildup of its industrial and military plant. Over the next two years the government increased expenditures by 26 percent, under a great deal of pressure not to raise taxes. Therefore the increased government spending was deficit financed, and as a result greatly enlarged private demand and consequently stimulated the economy. Most of the increase in government spending during the 1930s was, of course, for military purposes, but all sectors of the economy benefited. Japan gave up the gold standard in December 1931, and this proved a boon for Japanese exports. Overall, the growth rate of the real net domestic product during the 1930s was more than double that of the previous decade. Economic growth however did not, as it sometimes does, moderate policy. If anything, it seemed to confirm the new course.

In the five years after the seizure of Manchuria violence and ultranationalist sentiment continued very much a part of the domestic political scene. Rival cliques vied for ascendancy in the army, resorting to assassination of one of the top generals in 1935, and culminating the next year in an all-out insurrection. On February 26, 1936, fourteen hundred soldiers from the First Division in Tokyo, led by young officers plotting a radical reconstruction of the government, rebelled. They seized control of the Diet and the main army and government offices and murdered the finance minister, the lord keeper of the privy seal, and the inspector general of military education. The prime minister, the last of the genrō, Saionji, and other leaders narrowly escaped. With the Emperor's backing, the rival faction subdued the young officers' insurrection and disposed of its leaders. Discipline was reestablished, but the range of political debate was still further narrowed and ultranationalist sentiment heightened.

The Question of Japanese "Fascism"

Having withdrawn from the League of Nations and the Washington Treaty System, Japan drew closer to the European fascist powers to overcome its international isolation. Kono and other Japanese leaders had long identified Japan's plight as a "have-not" country with Germany and Italy: they too were latecomers to industrialization who felt denied access to needed land and natural resources by the prevailing international order. In 1936 Japan concluded the Anti-Comintern Pact, which provided for cooperation with Germany and a defensive alliance against the Soviet Union. Four years later, in 1940, the Tripartite Pact was signed with Italy and Germany, which committed Japan to a military alliance that would confront the United States and Britain.

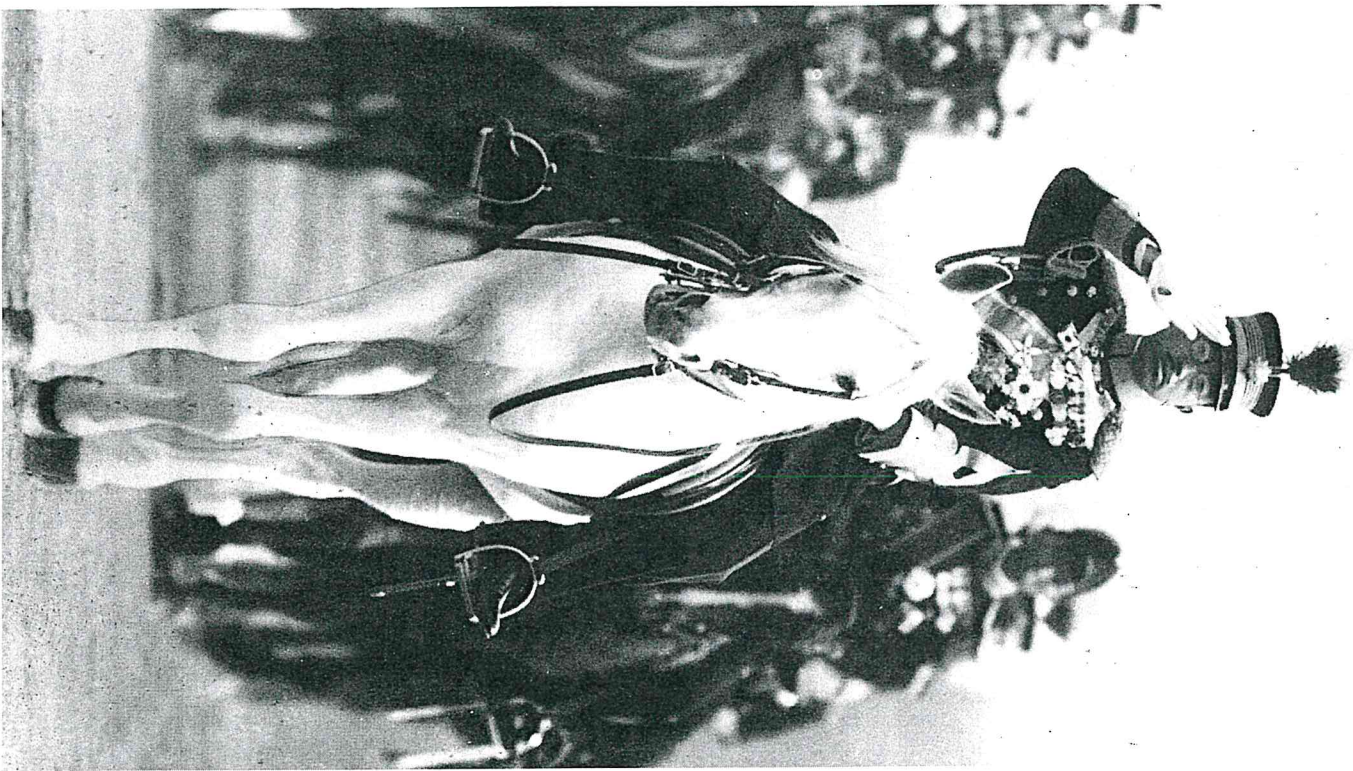
Because of this alliance and because the political principles that

Japanese leaders espoused in the 1930s were similar to those of Germany and Italy, it became common from this time to label the Japanese political system as "fascist." In its expansionist foreign policies and militant nationalist ideologies, which demanded fundamental revision of the international status quo, Japan's program bore many similarities to those of Hitler and Mussolini. In all three countries, leaders responded to crisis, as Andrew Gordon writes, "by repudiating parliamentary rule and turning to shrill nationalism, anti-communism, and antidemocratic, yet capitalist, programs to restructure the economy and polity and mobilize for total war."⁹

Yet, in important ways, the Japanese experience was different. The 1930s produced no Japanese mass leader, no Hitler or Mussolini haranguing the people. There was only the awed reverence for the Emperor, who remained a distant symbol of national identity. No vanguard party or mass movement succeeded in overthrowing the Meiji Constitution and establishing a new political order. It is true that many right-wing organizations advocated a new political order. By the mid-1930s more than fifty rightist journals with a total circulation approaching 100,000 proposed various blueprints for radical change. Although they expressed the tensions that domestic and foreign crisis had wrought in society, the rightist movements did not succeed in overthrowing the existing order. They influenced the climate of opinion, but the uprisings by young right-wing terrorists and junior officers in 1932 and 1936 both failed.

The long-established military and bureaucratic elites remained in control. Therefore, Japan's leading postwar political scientist, Maruyama Masao, called the new policies "fascism from above," because it was the bureaucratic elites who directed Japan's precipitous response to the multiple crises. To other observers, the Japanese case differed so significantly from European fascism that the term becomes misleading when applied to Japan. Two Stanford scholars, for example, Peter Duus and Daniel Okimoto, conclude that "The leaders of the 1930s . . . were 'the brightest and the best,' not the posturers, street fighters, and misfits who took power in fascist Europe. With occasional exceptions like Kono and Fumimaro, most were bureaucrats not so very different from the leaders who had dominated in the 1920s. They were graduates of Teidai [Tokyo Imperial University], the National Military Academy, or the National Naval Academy—products of the meritocratic process of elite recruitment."¹⁰ Although Duus and Okimoto dismiss fascism as a useful concept of analysis, Gordon finds sufficient commonality among Italian fascism, German Nazism, and Japanese militarism to retain the term.

However one may resolve this controversy, it is essential to be clear about what did happen in Japan—a shift in power from the parties to other elites. Following the 1932 assassination of Prime Minister



The Emperor reviewing army troops in 1937. UPI/Bethmann Newsphotos

Inukai, the last of the party prime ministers until after the war, the power of the parties sharply declined. This loss of influence, however, did not mean that the military simply took over the apparatus of the state. On the contrary, the institutionalized pluralism of the Meiji state continued. That is, the structure of multiple elite power that we analyzed in our discussion of the Taisho political system remained, but the parties were no longer able to play the critical role of coordinating the elites. What occurred in the 1930s was a shift in the relative power among the elites. The military and the bureaucratic elites gained increased power, but they never succeeded in consolidating their power into a monolithic or totalitarian system comparable to the regimes in Germany and Italy. Despite many efforts in the 1930s by reformists inside and outside the government to restructure the constitutional system and overcome the pluralistic distribution of power inherent in the Meiji state, the existing political system survived fundamentally intact. Therefore, as Gordon Berger writes, "the apparently sharp break in political development between the 1920s and 1930s was less apparent than many have insisted." Even after the country went to war with the Anglo-American powers in 1941, "pluralistic elite politics persisted."¹¹

As the influence of the political parties receded, the military and bureaucracy gained the upper hand in political struggles. They had the technical expertise and nationalist agenda to fit the times. They had complementary strategies to deal with the national crisis. Among the military, a school of strategic thinking known as "total war planning" became dominant. In the bureaucracy, a group of so-called reform bureaucrats, preoccupied with strategies for surviving the Great Depression, proposed plans for a state industrial policy and a managed economy. The merging of these military and bureaucratic schools of thought was a key development in domestic politics.

Total war planning was a product of new strategic thinking in the aftermath of World War I. Army strategists concluded that future warfare in the twentieth century would require the mobilization of the full resources of the nation-state. It would require a self-sufficient industrial base that would not be vulnerable to economic pressure from other countries. This concern with economic security led military planners in the 1920s to the pursuit of autarky and to the control of resource-rich territories such as Manchuria. Moreover, it was their conviction that Japan must have a comprehensive plan for mobilization of the domestic economy. If Japan hoped to maintain its great-power status, it must have a self-reliant industrial base and must be able to mobilize all its human and material resources for protracted conflict. In 1927 the Seiyukai cabinet, headed by army General Tanaka Giichi, established a central mobilization agency, the Cabinet Resources Bureau, to create comprehensive plans for all of Japan's economic activity. Military planners succeeded in getting legislation to enhance the efficient

production of strategic industries. The first example of such a law with military implications was the Petroleum Industry Law in 1934.

The joining of the domestic and foreign crises, that is the great depression and the Manchurian Incident, brought total war planners in the military into common cause with civilian bureaucrats who wanted increased state intervention in the economy to bring an end to the great depression. These so-called reform bureaucrats appeared in many of the ministries at this time. They were not new; they had long favored social reforms that would strengthen national cohesiveness. Many of them had worked with parties, particularly with the Minseitō, to try to achieve social reforms in the 1920s. Frustrated by the failures of those efforts and faced with the growing domestic and foreign crisis, they looked for stronger political allies and strengthened government control of the society and economy. They found these allies among the military men who had come to believe that Japan needed an industrial policy.

Within the newly established Ministry of Commerce and Industry, economic bureaucrats formulated strategies for reorganizing industry to achieve economies of scale, adopt new technologies, and so increase the productivity of the labor force. German theories of achieving greater efficiency through "industrial rationalization" were influential. These theories entailed limiting competition through government-sponsored trusts and cartels. In 1931, the reform bureaucrats succeeded in gaining Diet approval of the Important Industries Control Law, which legalized cartels among Japanese enterprises and gave government the authority to oversee production levels, prices, and marketing. As a result, more than a score of cartels were established in key industries to limit competition and restore profitability.

Total war planners and reform bureaucrats both saw the need for strict control of the economy and for centralization of political power to achieve policy integration. The state must manage resource allocation. Coal, iron, and steel, the sinews of military-industrial power, must have priority, while civilian goods should be limited to a minimum. Working together the military and civilian bureaucrats secured Diet approval of a series of laws designed to help individual strategic industries with government financing, tax benefits, and protective measures designed to curtail foreign and domestic competition. First came the Petroleum Industry Law in 1934. In 1936, the Automobile Manufacturing Law gave the government licensing authority. Toyota and Nissan were licensed; Ford and General Motors were not and had to close their operations. Similar laws in the next three years were passed for steel, machine tools, aircraft, shipbuilding, and many other industries. The laws gave government the authority to exercise some administrative guidance, but they left private ownership and a large measure of private management intact.

In the face of mounting foreign tension in the late 1930s and influenced by fascist thinking in Germany, the military planners and reform bureaucrats sought still tighter state controls over the economy and society. As one young economic planner (who later played a key role in postwar Japan's rapid economic growth) wrote in 1937: "It is no longer possible to realize this goal [of a managed economy] by simply depending on entrepreneurs' initiative. Nowadays, the state has to exercise its power and directly assume its leadership in economic activities. In a semiwar situation, an economy led by the state has to be coercive."¹² It was necessary to establish "state capitalism" and shift the economy from "profit orientation" to "production orientation."

In 1937 the military and civilian bureaucrats succeeded in establishing the Cabinet Planning Board to serve as a kind of "economic general staff" to bring together skilled technocrats who would devise comprehensive controls by the state. The following year the bureaucrats overrode conservative resistance from the party and business elites and won passage of a national mobilization bill to establish widespread controls over production, profits, finance, foreign trade, and transportation. Two years later, the so-called New Economic Structure provided for still greater government control of industry. At the same time, feeling a need to achieve greater consensus among the elites and to ensure Lower House support for government programs and citizen identification with the goals and policies of the state, the military and bureaucratic planners set out to create a new political party that would embrace all existing groups in the Diet. On October 12, 1940, all political parties were dissolved and replaced by the Imperial Rule Assistance Association. Intended as a mass political party that would be the nucleus of a new political structure, it never fulfilled this function because local leaders and conservatives in the old-line ministries resisted a surrender of their power to the new organization.

On paper, Japan appeared to be in the grip of a totalitarian political-economic structure, inspired in many respects by fascist institutions in Europe. The reality, however, was different. Zabatsu and business leaders often resisted government controls that were in any case implemented in helter-skelter fashion. As Mark Peattie writes, "The myriad of controls, under which Japan fought first the China War and then the Pacific War, provided no overall coordination, but rather left the prosecution of these conflicts scattered among various and competing agencies. At the same time, Japan's economy, subjected to conflicting pressures from business and military leadership, remained partly free and partly controlled. Such a system could hardly be called totalitarian and in any event was ultimately disastrous for Japan's war effort."¹³ How closely, then, did the Japanese system approach the totalitarian experience in Europe? One of the most careful scholars of this issue concludes that "severe schisms within bureaucratic and military

leadership groups prevented any individual or faction from achieving a dictatorship or degree of political control analogous to that of contemporaneous wartime regimes in Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union. Conservative forces in parliament, business, the bureaucracy, the right wing, and traditional local elites in the countryside blunted the reformists' attempts to reorganize the state, enhance their own power, and establish a monolithic system of governmental controls over all political and economic activities."¹⁴

The Coming of the Pacific War

In the summer of 1937 Japan blundered into war with China. It was not a war that the army General Staff wanted. The truth is that even the most able of the total war planners were acutely aware that it would require considerably more time to develop and integrate an effective industrial structure before Japan would be prepared for all-out war. To them it was critical to avoid hostilities and concentrate on a fully coordinated effort to develop Japan's economy. But having chosen to abandon the principles of the Washington Treaty System, and operating in an atmosphere dominated by ultranationalist goals and a growing willingness to resort to military solutions, the government was ill-prepared to restrain itself. In June 1937 Konoe Fumimaro was chosen by Satonji to become prime minister. Prince Konoe was a widely respected figure from an old noble family, who might, it was thought, succeed in uniting the country and restraining the military. He spoke of achieving "social justice" in domestic affairs, but he proved a weak and ineffectual leader. It was during his first tenure as prime minister (June 1937–January 1939) that the nation stumbled into full-scale war with China and during his second tenure (July 1940–October 1941) that fateful steps were taken toward Pearl Harbor.

Since 1931 the general consensus held that if new conflict came, it would most likely be with the Soviet Union. A prime goal of the General Staff, therefore, was to concentrate on the economic development of Manchukuo and its integration into the industrial complex of Japan so as to increase the strength of the military establishment. Conflict with the nationalist government in China was, therefore, to be avoided as a hindrance to the implementation of the plans designed to prepare for war with Russia. The General Staff in the spring of 1937 had, in fact, ordered Japanese commanders of military forces in north China to avoid incidents that might disrupt the status quo. When a minor skirmish broke out on July 7, 1937, between Chinese and Japanese troops stationed in the Marco Polo Bridge area, just outside of Peking, the Japanese army sought to achieve a quick local settlement. But the incident could not be so easily contained; instead it swiftly escalated



Schoolgirls in celebration at the Imperial Palace after the fall of Nanking in December 1937.
National Archives

into full-scale hostilities. Chiang Kai-shek, the nationalist leader, under immense pressure to resist Japanese encroachment, was doubtless determined not to allow any new pretext such as the Manchurian Incident of 1931 to serve the Japanese expansionist cause. He therefore responded to the Marco Polo Bridge Incident by dispatching four divisions to north China. Konoe responded with an ill-advised sword-rattling statement, which only served to confirm Chiang in his suspicions, and hopes of attaining a local settlement evaporated.

It is not easy, even in retrospect, to see how conflict between China and Japan could have been avoided. History sometimes brings nations into logjams from which they are extricated only by force. Chinese nationalism could no longer tolerate the status quo with Japan. Yet Japanese of all persuasions looked at Japan's position in China as sanctioned by economic need and by their destiny to create "a new order in Asia" that would expel Western influence and establish a structure based upon Asian concepts of justice and humanity. Chiang's government was regarded as an obstruction that had to be overcome on the way to this "new order," and so in 1938 Konoe called for an all-out campaign to "annihilate" the nationalist regime. The expectation was that Chinese resistance would be short-lived; a "fundamental resolution of Sino-Japanese relations" could be achieved by compelling the



Prime Minister Kōnoe leaving his residence for a conference with the Emperor, 1937. UPI/Bettmann

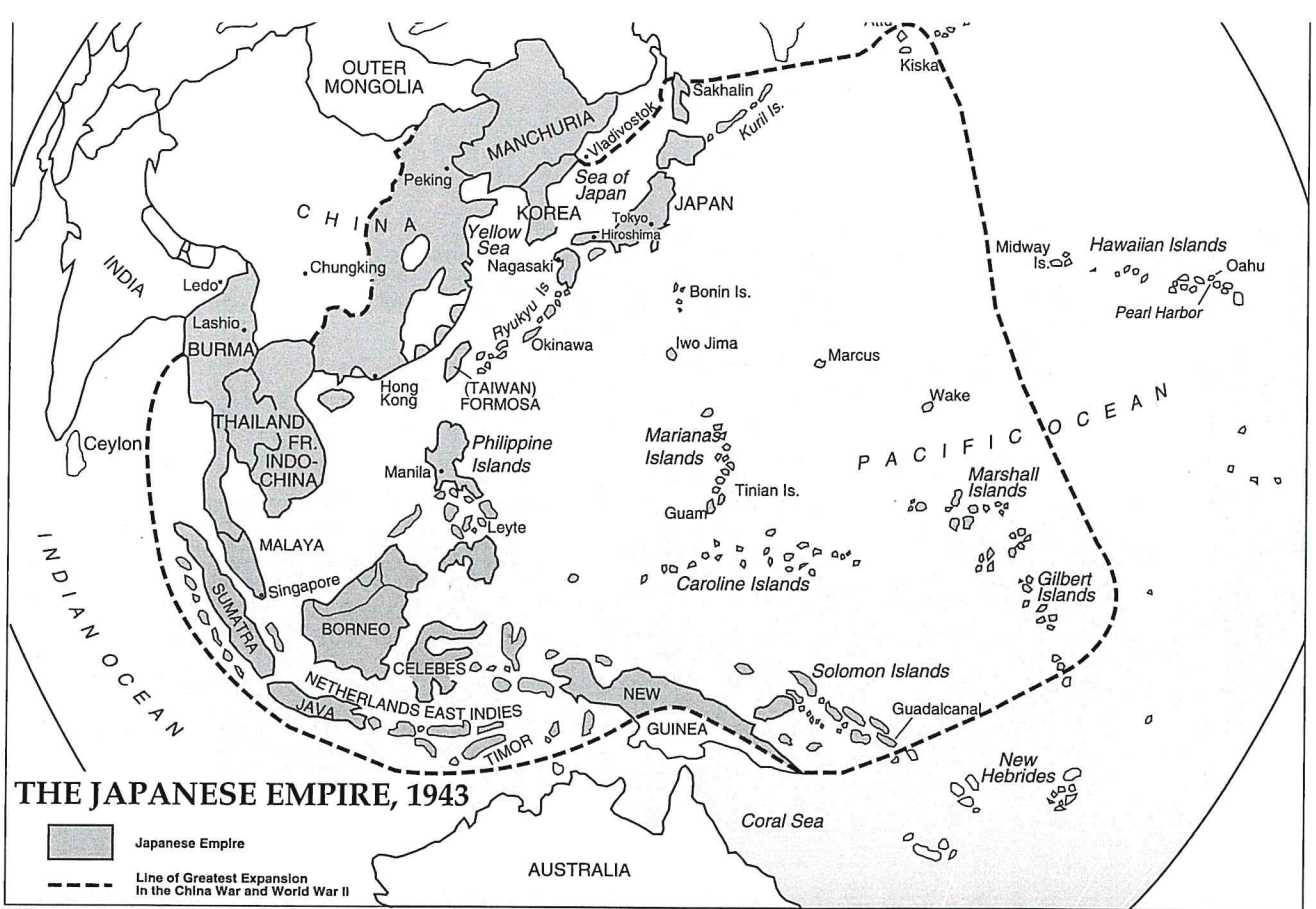
nationalists to accept Japanese leadership in creating an Asian community of nations, free of Anglo-American capitalism and Soviet Communism. It was a fateful decision. It tragically underrated the difficulties involved, not least the strength of Chinese nationalism; it justified tighter controls at home and brought vastly heightened tensions with

the United States. Atrocities committed against Chinese citizens, especially the pillaging and the rape and massacre of many tens of thousands at Nanking in early 1938, left a lasting outrage against the invaders. But Japanese leadership pushed ahead with supreme nerve justifying their goals with Pan-Asian slogans and, ultimately, with the vision of a Greater East Asia Coprosperity Sphere from which all vestiges of Western imperialism would be erased.

The dilemma that Japanese diplomacy had struggled with ever since the Manchurian Incident now became still more difficult, for as the China conflict expanded, the nation was the less prepared to deal with the Soviet army on the Manchurian border and the American fleet in the Pacific. A succession of border skirmishes with the Red Army revealed the vulnerability of the Kwantung Army; at the same time the U.S. Navy was now embarked on a resolute program of building additional strength in the Pacific. By the spring of 1940 the Japanese navy General Staff had concluded that America's crash program would result in its gaining naval hegemony in the Pacific by 1942, and that Japan must have access to the oil of the Dutch East Indies in order to cope with American power. Kōnoe's impulsive and unstable foreign minister, Matsuoka Yōsuke, set out to resolve the impasse by a witt demarche. In the autumn of 1940 he signed the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy, in which the signatories pledged to aid one another if attacked by a power not currently involved in the European war or the fighting in China. Matsuoka thereby hoped to isolate the United States and dissuade it from conflict with Japan, thus opening the way for Japan to seize the European colonies in Southeast Asia, grasp the resources it needed for self-sufficiency, and cut off Chinese supply lines. Furthermore, to free his northern flank he signed a neutrality pact with the Soviet Union in April 1941; and when Hitler attacked Russia in June the Manchukuo-Soviet border seemed wholly secure. Within weeks Japanese troops entered Indochina.

American reaction to the Tripartite Pact was, to Matsuoka, unexpectedly strong. President Franklin D. Roosevelt forbade any further shipment of scrap iron to Japan, and after the entry into Indochina he embargoed oil. Negotiations between Secretary of State Cordell Hull and Ambassador Nomura Kichisaburō foundered in a morass of confusion and ineptness. It is doubtful that negotiations had much opportunity for success in any case at this juncture—given the positions taken by the two sides. Hull's insistence on Japanese withdrawal from China was seen as nullifying a decade of foreign policy and reducing Japan to a second-class power.

Rather than turn back, Japanese leaders were prepared to take risks. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained," Matsuoka concluded. "We should take decisive action."¹⁵ And the new prime minister, General Tōjō Hideki, was quoted as saying, "Sometimes people have to shut



their eyes and take the plunge."¹⁶ The navy General Staff in particular pressed for war, arguing that oil reserves were limited and American naval strength increasing. Ultimately its reasoning was accepted, and the president of the Privy Council explained to the Emperor a month before Pearl Harbor, "It is impossible from the standpoint of our domestic political situation and of our self-preservation, to accept all of the American demands. . . . If we miss the present opportunity to go to war, we will have to submit to American dictation. Therefore, I recognize that it is inevitable that we must decide to start a war against the United States. I will put my trust in what I have been told: namely, that things will go well in the early part of the war; and that although we will experience increasing difficulties as the war progresses, there is some prospect of success."¹⁷

The approach of war was accompanied by a crescendo of nationalist sentiment that had as its main theme a determination to establish not only Japan's strategic autonomy in East Asia but also its cultural autonomy and independence from the West and its own sphere of influence in which Japanese culture would predominate. This preoccupation with Japan's unique cultural identity had been a central theme in modern Japanese nationalism since the 1890s. Partly to compensate for the massive borrowing from the West that industrialization entailed, nationalism asserted Japanese moral superiority. The war brought to a culmination these themes of cultural self-determination. In a study of attitudes in the Pacific War, John Dower found Japanese thinking characterized by an "intense self-preoccupation" that emphasized Japanese virtue and purity.¹⁸ Nationalists characterized Anglo-American values of individualism, liberalism, and capitalism as motivated by materialism and egocentrism. In contrast, Japanese society had its foundations in spiritual commitments of selfless loyalty to the welfare of the entire community. As a result, society attained a natural harmony and solidarity in which everyone found their proper place. This moral order had divine origins in the unique imperial line, and the Japanese consequently had a mission to extend its blessings to other peoples. Japan's purpose in the war was to create a "new world order" that would "enable all nations and races to assume their proper place in the world, and all peoples to be at peace in their own sphere." As the "leading race" of Asia, Japan should create a Coprosperity Sphere in which there would be a division of labor with each people performing economic functions for which their inherent capabilities prepared them. Nationalist writings often contained themes of Pan-Asianism and liberation of Asians from Western imperialism. A report produced by Japanese bureaucrats, however, privately described the goal of the new order as creation of "an economic structure which would ensure the permanent subordination of all other peoples and nations of Asia to Japan."¹⁹ Cultural policies throughout the

Coprosperity sphere stressed "Japanization," reverence for the Emperor, observance of Japanese customs and holidays, and use of Japanese as the common language.

Japan paid a terrible price for the bold gamble of its leaders in 1941. Abandoning the cautious realism that had traditionally characterized Japanese diplomacy, the nation entered into a conflict that cost it the lives of nearly 3 million Japanese, its entire overseas empire, and the destruction of one-quarter of its machines, equipment, buildings, and houses. Generations were left physically and psychologically scarred by the trauma.

The outcome was heavy with historic irony. War sentiment in Japan had been impelled by an ultranationalist ideology that sought to preserve the traditional values of the Japanese political order, that vehemently opposed the expansion of Bolshevik influence in Asia, and that wanted to establish the Japanese Empire. Instead, war brought a social-democratic revolution at home, the rise of Communism in China, and—for the first time in Japan's history—occupation by an enemy force.

Notes

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16. Maruyama Masao, *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics*, ed. Ivan Morris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 85.
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18. John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 205.
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