

Japan under Militarist Rule

Characteristics

- No equivalent to the single strong leader like Fascist Italy's Mussolini or Nazi Germany's Hitler
- However, still saw...
 - A failure of democracy
 - Power yielded by a small group of leaders

Political Consolidation

From the formation of the majority military cabinet in 1932, the military increasingly consolidated their control.

Increased Military Influence

By 1934,

- The civilian politicians were too divided by party differences to stop the growing influence of the military.
- At the same time, the Japanese people increasingly supported the military
 - Military successes since the Meiji period, especially in Manchuria, had become a source of pride.
- As a result, these factors emboldened the military to expand their influence and tighten their control over the Japanese government
 - Military officers could now take civil positions originally reserved for non-military politicians
 - Supervision of Manchuria was handed over to the military

From 1935...

- The military controlled government conducted a campaign of “electoral purification” which it claimed aimed to remove corrupt practices in the government
 - In truth, it was aimed at individuals and groups who held views that the military government found unacceptable (e.g. socialism and communism)
- With the military increasingly in control, the political parties and even elections became less important
 - Few Japanese bothered to vote

Emergence of Control Faction

While the military was getting strong, it was not united.

- It was divided between the Imperial Way Faction and the Control Faction
- This feud between the two factions was a bitter and a turning point in their relationship was the **February 26 Incident in 1936**.

The Imperial Faction

- Made up of some military commanders with more radical views, such as Araki Sadao, junior officers and some civilian supporters
- Believed that Japan should put less emphasis on modernising its economy and military, and put more emphasis on the Bushido spirit and developing personal qualities such as honour, loyalty, obedience and patience.
- Wanted Japan to be freed from corrupt government officials and greedy zaibatsu, and to be run directly by Emperor Hirohito

Control Faction

- Made up of very senior commanders in the army with more moderate views, including the powerful and influential General Tojo Hideki
- Thought that war with the West, especially the United States, was inevitable, and wanted to mobilise and prepare Japan for such a war.
- Believed that the government should collaborate with the heads of the zaibatsu and give them control of key industry sectors or important construction projects

February 26 Incident (1936)

- Young officers in the Imperial Way Faction led a military coup. They attempted to assassinate key government leaders and demanded for a new government.
- This was part of their call for a Showa Restoration, which aimed to restore Japan's glory by honouring the Emperor, defending the empire and improving the life for ordinary people.
- The coup failed and the Emperor condemned their actions. Nineteen leading figures in the Imperial Way Faction were arrested, tried in a secret military court, and executed.

Loss of Political Power by the Civilian Politicians

- The growing influence of the military caused the civilian politicians' power to diminish. The Japanese people supported the military officers and their expansionist plans.
- In July 1937, Prince Konoe Fuminaro was appointed as Prime Minister. In the same month that he was appointed, the military led an invasion into China.
- In October 1937, he also permitted the formation of a Cabinet Planning Office made up of mostly military officers. Japan's finances was now controlled by a military rather than a civilian politician.
- In October 1941, the army minister, General Tojo Hideki, took over the role of the Prime Minister. This signalled the military's total control over the Japanese government.

Economic Consolidation

- Under the militarist government, measures were put in place to strengthen the economy and tighten its control.
 - This enabled Japan's economy to improve, especially after 1932, as evident in the graph.
 - In fact, its economic recovery in the 1930s was far quicker than those of Western powers.

Japan's Industrialisation

- The militarist government continued to promote Japan's industrialisation.
- It was encouraged by its new emphasis on expanding the empire and preparing for war.
 - It shifted from developing consumer industries to heavy industries and chemical production

- This led to the production of weapons and big infrastructure projects like roads, railways and bridges.
- The government also increased spending to stimulate the economy
 - More money was set aside for heavy industries, expanding the manufacturing industries and strengthening Japan's economy.
- The set-up of these new industries gave rise to new zaibatsu.
 - E.g. Nissan, Nichitsi and Mori
 - They were, at that time, closely linked to and influenced by the military.
 - They played a key role in developing Japan's empire economically and exploiting the resources in Korea and Manchuria
 - The military hoped that this would enable Japan to develop into a self-sufficient and industrially strong state.

Control of Industry - Formation of Cartels

- The government also began to exercise control over Japan's industry, especially the zaibatsu.
 - The government believed that competition between the zaibatsu was wasteful, and feared that they would seek to make profits, sometimes at the expense of the country.
 - For example, they might choose not to build a railway because it was unprofitable, even though it would have improved Japan's transport network.
 - To manage the zaibatsu, the government passed the **Principal Industries Control Law in 1931.**

Principal Industries Control Law

Intended Outcome

- To form cartels that would control prices and production across the various zaibatsu so as to limit competition and regulate the production and prices of the products they sold.
- The zaibatsu chiefs would manage these cartels.

Actual Outcome

- Over time, the government became more directly involved in the cartels and even controlled the cartels.
 - For example, in 1936, the officials and military commanders in the Cabinet brought the electric power industry under direct government control.
- The zaibatsu chiefs were furious at this law but were unable to resist the government.
- In 1937, the government introduced the Five-Year Plans setting targets for production in

various industries.

Control of Labour Unions

- In the 1920s, the government had encouraged the formation of labour unions as it could bring stability to the country.
- However, by 1936, the militarist government had a different attitude towards labour unions.
 - It no longer favoured unions and forced thousands of workers to withdraw from the union of government employees

Improving Conditions in Japan's Countryside

- The Great Depression hit Japanese farming and farmers hard. By 1932, many farmers were heavily in debt. They struggled to pay their rent, taxes and feed their families.
- To address this, the government introduced a range of measures to help farmers pay off their debts.
 - For example, the government increased public works in the countryside to provide jobs for people living there.
- In 1932, the Ministry of Agriculture launched the **Campaign for Economic Revitalisation**

Campaign for Economic Revitalisation

- The campaign was a mix of propaganda and practical proposals aimed to strengthen the countryside.
 - The campaign stressed the need to revive the spirit of cooperation in rural areas
 - It also encouraged farmers to utilise scientific farming methods instead of traditional ones.
 - Farmers received guidance on how to better manage crops and finances on their farms.

Outcome

- Many farmers signed up for the campaign.
- Helped farmers to increase their income
- The government presented success stories to motivate more farmers to take part.
- **However**, conditions did not improve significantly because the government was more focused on industrialisation

Control of Japanese Thought

- The government took action to promote loyalty to the state and the Emperor, as well as a strong military spirit.

Controlling the countryside: The Campaign for Economic Revitalisation.

- In addition to improving the conditions in Japan's countryside, it emphasised the traditional values seen in the lives of the peasant in rural Japan.
 - It contrasted the peaceful, hardworking rural peasant communities with the chaotic and corrupting influence of the cities.
 - The campaign also praised women in rural Japan for their traditional roles in working on the farm and managing the home.

Controlling Workplaces

The government began to search for strategies to manage workers and increase productivity. In 1937, the government implemented a network of "discussion councils" in all workplaces.

- These councils were made up of worker and manager representatives
- They were to cooperate to prevent conflict in the workplaces.
- Workers were told that companies were like families, where every member was equally valuable before the Emperor.

Censorship

- There was censorship of ideas that did not conform with the government's beliefs or were seen as threats to Japanese national identity.
 - The **Publications Monitoring Department** published guidelines for all publishing companies and scrutinised all media, including fictional books.
 - In 1936, the government also formed the **Information and Propaganda Committee**
 - It worked with the Publications Monitoring Department to further control the media and promote their militarist ideas.
- Materials that presented the military or Emperor in a bad light were considered inappropriate and censored.

Eliminating Opposition

- Individuals who promoted ideas that did not conform to the government were also silenced.
 - This included individuals with socialist beliefs, such as political leaders, intellectuals and university students. They were imprisoned or dismissed from their positions.
- These individuals were silenced or imprisoned by a special police force in Japan and the military police or the Kempeitai in the Japanese empire.

Control of Education

- Even before the militarist government came into power, Japan’s education system already had a strong emphasis on national pride and the importance of Japanese traditions. It also stressed Shinto beliefs, loyalty to the Emperor and the community over the individual.
- In 1937, the Ministry of Education published a document called **Fundamentals of Our National Policy** (Kokutai no Hongi) and used it as a basis for Japan’s education system.
 - This document was distributed to the officials and educators, and was intended to guide teachers in inculcating Japanese traditional ethics in their students.

Conclusion

- By the mid 1930s, Japan had come under an authoritarian rule with the military completely in control of the government.
 - It had tightened its control over Japan’s politics, economy and society.
 - National pride was championed through military successes and education.
 - This pride would embolden the military to pursue expansionist policies, despite the increasing international pressure from the West. All of these would set the stage for Japan’s role in the outbreak of WWII in the Asia-Pacific.

Event/Development	Details of Event/Development	How did this enable the military establish greater control?	Did this have a political, economic or social impact on Japan?
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26 February 1936 Coup	<p>A group of young officers from the revolutionist 'Imperial Way' faction of the army unsuccessfully tried to instigate a military coup and assassinate key government leaders. The failure allowed the conservative 'Control' faction of the army to seize control of the military and reunify it as a cohesive political force.</p>	<p>The military leadership was able to regain control over most of its soldiers and officers, increasing their strength. The new strength of the military leadership over the cabinet allowed them to appoint an active general as the Minister of War, a previously civilian post.</p>	<p>The conservative military leadership now had more direct power in the Cabinet and influence over the remaining government, which enabled them to holistically shape Japan for war. Therefore it impacted Japan politically</p>

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Japan's Industrialisation	New industrialisation efforts shifted the emphasis from consumer industries to heavy industries that would promote self-sufficiency, while increasing the production of military goods.	The military leadership's strong and generous support for these new productions led to the new emergence of new zaibatsus that were closely allied with the military government. The close cooperation ensured that the military had key resources and production facilities, as well as capability to better exploit the raw resources of Korea and Manchuria	This impacted Japan economically as the dominance of pro-militarist zaibatsus meant that Japan's economy was repurposed for war preparation while under increased state control.

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Formation of Cartels	To minimise competition between the zaibatsus, the military government implemented the Principal Industries Control Law of 1931 which allowed zaibatsus to form cartels. These cartels limit competition by regulating price and production share across the industry. Soon, the government would play a direct role in influencing these cartels.	The virtual elimination of competition from key heavy industries created an environment that was more conducive for the military government's goal to coordinate and direct economic activity in Japan. The cartels created a platform for the military government to later control the production activities of wartime industries.	With the military's direct intervention in cartels, the military leadership had gained a virtual monopoly over production and resource extraction across the growing Japanese empire.

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Increased Control of Labour Unions	In 1936, the military government began to oppose labour unions; thousands of workers were forced to withdraw from government employee unions.	Workers in Japan were less able to negotiate or campaign for more favourable working conditions or contracts; the military government now could more easily 'silence' the country's economic manpower.	Besides increasing government control over the economy, the opposition towards labour unions led to a repression of individual rights in Japan. Society had less avenues to oppose the imposition of the military government's values and goals onto them.

Event/Development	Details of Event/Development	How did this enable the military establish greater control?	Did this have a political, economic or social impact on Japan?
Campaign for Economic Revitalisation	This initiative was a mix of propaganda and practical proposals to improve the crop yield in rural areas while increasing the incomes of farmers	The initiative was successful in addressing the agricultural issues that hindered Japan's industrialisation, therefore enabling the military government to better manage resources and production. Moreover, the success of the campaign helped to increase the military government's popularity with the rural population, especially with the campaign espousing the merit of reviving traditional values. This enabled the government's values and goals to be more deeply entrenched	The success of the campaign increased the political influence of the military government over the rural countryside in Japan. Furthermore, the improvement of the farmer's situations helped to improve the social stability and cohesion in rural society.

		How did this enable the military to establish greater control?	Did this have a political, economic or social impact on Japan?
Event/Development Censorship	Details of Event/Development In 1936, the military government formed the Information and Propaganda Committee that censored material which either painted the military or the emperor in a bad light. Furthermore, the military police detained and silenced individuals espousing undesirable political or social views.	The legal control of information helped the military government maintain a positive public image in the eyes of the public, while making their values and beliefs increasingly persuadable. In short, the military government could now police the circulation of opinions among Japanese individuals.	The censorship of alternative views repressed the Japanese individual's ability to express contrarian thoughts, while shaping society to become more rigid and dictated by the authoritarian government.

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Increased Control of Education	<p>The Japanese curriculum sought to instil a sense of patriotism, ultranationalism, and militarism in youths. In particular, youths were shaped to disregard individualism for their nation.</p>	<p>Education proved to be potent in shaping society's values and beliefs to be increasingly aligned and subservient to the goals of the military government. Moreover, individual youths are nurtured to become more conforming to ideological and military expectations than to develop their own individualism.</p>	<p>Socially, an education system that inducts youths into a militarist system led to a more regimented and ultranationalistic society. Politically, alternative and more moderate political views became less common as the new generation of youths were limited by a militarist mindset. Support for aggressive foreign policy became increasingly unanimous as a result.</p>