

# Japanese Militarism in the 1930s: Causes and Effects

The Great Depression of the 1930s was a significant factor in increasing Japanese militarism after World War I. To stimulate the economy and create jobs, Japan began to pursue expansionist policies abroad. This increased focus on military power was supported by Emperor Hirohito and his allies, who saw it as a way to show off Japan's strength both domestically and internationally.

Many Japanese were unhappy over the loss of traditions after the Meiji period. Under Emperor Meiji Japan very quickly sought to modernize and westernize. Its social, political and economic foundations were upended. So much change so quickly led to resentment and nostalgia for a traditional way of life.

Japanese citizens were not happy.

## Signs of Militarism

As a result, they turned their attention to militarism as a way to regain national pride. People were encouraged to be more loyal to the emperor and Japan's values instead of individual freedoms and democracy, which had previously been embraced.

This led to an increase in nationalist sentiment, with many people seeing military power as a sign of strength and superiority.

Japan also withdrew from the League of Nations in the 1930s and refused to sign any non-aggression treaties with other countries. This further demonstrated Japan's militaristic ambitions and led to increased hostility from surrounding countries, such as Korea and China.

Also, the Great Depression left the Japanese economy in tatters. For example, the Great Depression reduced Japan's production volume by 50 percent, causing massive unemployment and poverty. This necessitated the search for new markets and resources, leading to an aggressive foreign policy that focused on expansionism.

The Great Depression led to a rise in militaristic sentiment among Japanese leaders who sought to make their country a major world power. The public looked for ways to make Japan great again, and militarism was seen as one of the possible solutions.

## Emperor Hirohito's Response

The military's expansionist agenda was pushed forward by Emperor Hirohito and his supporters in the government, who believed that it would help raise Japan's prestige and power abroad.

As Japan continued its aggressive pursuit of resources and greater influence throughout Asia, its militarism reached a fever pitch. This culminated in the country's invasion of Manchuria in 1931, which marked the beginning of a war that would last for the next 14 years.

### **Impact of Japanese Militarism**

The effects of Japanese militarism were catastrophic; it resulted in millions of lives lost and severe damage to many economies. The impact was far-reaching. It led to numerous conflicts with other nations in East Asia, including China and Korea, which eventually resulted in full-scale war between Japan, China and the United States during World War II.

Additionally, it caused economic hardship at home due to the high costs associated with maintaining a large military force. Finally, Japanese militarism also contributed to an atmosphere of fear and insecurity in the region, as other nations saw Japan's ambitions with increasing concern.

### **Essential Questions:**

1. How did the Great Depression influence Japanese militarism after World War I?
2. What were some of the social and political changes that resulted from Japan's push to westernize during the Meiji period?
3. How did Japanese citizens react to a more militaristic agenda in the 1930s?
4. What role did Emperor Hirohito play in Japan's pursuit of military power?
5. What are some of the long-term consequences of Japanese militarism both domestically and abroad?