

Political challenges

- Emperor Yoshihito was sickly + many of the Genro left due to age → divisions between court officials, civilian politicians and military worsened
- Military: opposed the internationalist policy of diplomacy and trade (led by c.p.) and resented the P.M. and their cabinets for cutting military's budget, HENCE, they began to act on their own, disregarding the PM and their cabinets → Emperor also could not enforce much control over them + appointed by the emperor, so PM did not have authority to remove military officials who did not follow his policies
- Civilian politicians (in the cabinet): much divided because of emergence of party politics → Two parties that were elected (Seiyukai and Minseito) in the Diet were fighting for power and influence in the govt. → made it hard for the PM to gain support of the majority + Diet was a coalition with multiple political parties and they could refuse to support the PM's decisions
- Privy council: advised the emperor + had power to overturn decisions made by the PM, even forced some PMs to resign

Economic challenges

→ After war had ended, Japan began to face economic problems, e.g. 1920s: severe inflation that made goods very expensive, like the price of rice increased by 174% + there was unemployment + there was also decline in overseas demand for Japanese goods, so large companies dismissed thousands of workers → growing resentment among Japanese towards the civilian government

Countryside:

- industrial growth did not benefit them much + insufficient land due to the large population growth
- 1920s: productivity of farmers stagnated as technological advances in farming (like better tools and cultivation techniques) did not spread as fast to the countryside
- Tenant farmers: struggled to survive as most of their harvest went to paying their landlords → not much to eat → even if they had their own land, the land they owned were often small and had poor harvests

Tensions in Japanese society

Rural-Urban divide:

- Japanese government supported the wealthy zaibatsu → resulting in wealth being concentrated in the hands of big businesses while workers and peasants lived in poverty → widen gap between rich and poor
- Countryside: richest landlords made up about 2-3% of the population + did not work on the farms but lived on rent from tenant farmers, living in luxury and engaged in leisure activities, while farmers remained poor → growing resentment and unhappiness toward the rich led to uprisings like the rice riots in 1918 because of sudden increase of prices of commodities like staple food
- Women: some got jobs, got more involved in politics etc, which was seen by a threat to traditional Japanese society and values, serving their own interests instead of the needs of their families

Impact of Great Depression

- Demand for Japanese exports like silk (main export) fell drastically → cause their economy to fall by 20% between 1929 and 1931 → public resentment grew

Impact on Farmers:

- Lower demand for farmer's produce → income (of farmers) fell by 43% between 1929 and 1931
- Tenant farmers tried to get landowners to reduce their rent but landowners disagreed, and even tried to evict those who could not pay on time but many resisted → ended up organizing themselves into unions, holding protest meetings and taking landowners to court

Impact on Small Business Owners:

- Shops, restaurants, small factories struggled to attract customers
- 1930: there were twice as many closures of small business as in an average year
- Many owners ended up joining protest movements led by the Imperial Middle Class Federated Alliance, who claimed the parties were looking after the landowners, banks and zaibatsus while letting business owners go out of business

Unemployment:

- 15-20% of Japan's workforce lost their jobs between 1930-1932, and they were only entitled to 14 days' pay when dismissed → led to protests against employers who were usually from elite classes

Fear of communism:

- Increasing unemployment → many attracted to the messages by communist agitators who criticised the state and called for a revolution (however the Japanese communist party was small and never took root in Japan)
- Government still feared the threat of communism, given that USSR was close to Japan

Growing distrust in the government:

- All this amounted to the civilians thinking the govt only cared about the banks, landowners, zaibatsu (the elite basically) and many were distrustful, believing that the civilian politicians were in cahoots with the zaibatsu, or receiving money and benefits from them

Rise of Military influence in the government

Discontent from the military:

- 1920s: many officers felt political parties and the zaibatsu were corrupt and self seeking → they were not interested in serving Japan, only themselves + these officers were young and came from families of the poorer rural farming communities or new urban middle classes (both that were affected a lot by the G.D.)
- Also felt that civilian politicians did not respect military due to (military) budget cuts + they favoured zaibatsu more than them

London Naval Conference (1930):

- NAVY were discontent with the civilian govt
- 1922: Japan signed agreements with B,F,US at the Washington Naval Conference to limit number of warships being built → BUT number of warships Japan could have was fewer than them
- Navy felt the civilian government had let them down by agreeing to unfavourable terms of disarmament
- L.N.C: was to review the treaty + limits on building warships, BUT Japan's demand to build more warships were rejected by the western powers, and they were forced to back

down and sign the treaty. Several ministers were removed from cabinet due to refusal to sign, but the government reluctantly signed as it knew the country was not ready to confront the Western powers → BUT in Japan this was presented (by press and navy commanders) as a form of betrayal → undermine people's faith in the govt

Manchuria

- Was seen as the solution to Japan's lack of natural resources (iron+coal)
- From 1916, regions China were ruled by various warlords who fought one another for power, and initially Zhang Zuolin (Manchuria's warlord) had friendly relations with Japan and the Kwantung Army → BUT his inability to defend Japan's interests in Manchuria made the Kwantung Army increasingly frustrated with him

Assassination of Zhang Zuolin (1928)

- 1928: Kwantung Army assassinated Zhang to replace him with a better leader + since Zhang was an ally with the Army, they thought they could blame his death on the ongoing rivalries among the Chinese warlords, and force the Japanese government to let them take over Manchuria
- BUT the emperor criticised their actions and demanded the PM to discipline them → but without any real authority, PM was unable to force the military leaders to punish those responsible for the assassination → shows emperor could not control the military + military can defy the civilian government

Mukden Incident

- Ishiwara Kanji: convinced that a war between Japan and US is inevitable, and Japan should prepare for it → hence he had plans to settle Japanese farmers on Manchuria's large and fertile agricultural lands + he wanted to take control of Manchuria as a colony and build a society which all Japanese worked for each other and the emperor (not themselves and corporations), a lot of other commanders thought the same
- September 1931: Kwantung Army blew up the railway tracks at Mukden, blaming it on the Chinese government and used that as an excuse to take control of Manchuria
- March 1932: Japanese renamed Manchuria as Manchukuo (in theory it was an independent state, but in reality it was a Japanese colony)
- Military supported the Kwantung Army, while the PM and the civilian government could not control Ishiwara and his supporters → showed that civilian officials had a weak control over the military as military had a greater say in Japan's foreign policy

- Invasion of Manchuria was also very popular with the Japanese public → many saw Manchuria as the solution to Japan's economic problems, victory was celebrated through songs, plays, newsreels and more

Growing opposition to Civilian Government

- Ultranationalistic and anti-democratic activists surfaced:
 - Included junior military officers who had secret backing of senior military commanders + they were against civilian political leaders and zaibatsu (who they thought were self-serving)
 - E.g. Showa Restoration Faction, Cherry Blossom Society, League of Blood etc: remove all aspects of democratic govt and restore direct rule to the Emperor
- Assassination:
 - Nov 1930: PM Osachi was shot and died
 - Feb 1932: League of Blood murdered former Finance Minister
 - League of Blood also assassinated the head of Mitsui corporation (zaibatsu)
 - This intimidated civilian politicians → cause them to drop their opposition to the military → create sense of instability which military exploited to "Restore Order"
- May 15 1932 Incident:
 - PM Inukai Tsuyoshi: assassinated by LOB and other activists due to opposing actions of military and refusing to give official government acceptance of the state of Manchukuo when announced in Feb 1932
 - Mitsubishi Bank, Seiyukai headquarters and several power stations were attacked and they tried to assassinate other government officials, an attempted coup d'état → hoping the people would rise up to support them and overthrow Japan's democratic government
 - BUT people did not rise up, rather LOB activists were arrested and put on trial, but military commanders did not condemn them and even issued a statement which effectively excused the officers for their actions and demanded political reforms in Japan

- 26 May 1932: Emperor appointed a navy admiral as Japan's new PM → his cabinet consisted of 15 members, 5 were civilian party representatives and remaining were military officials and govt officials → marked when Japan came under militarist rule

4. Life under Militarist Rule Japan's Economy Control of the industry

- The government also began to exercise control over Japan's industry especially the zaibatsu + believed that competition between the zaibatsu was wasteful, and feared that they would seek to make profits at the expense of the country
- To prevent this, the government passed the Principal Industries Control Law in 1931 → made it legal for the zaibatsu to form cartels to limit competition and regulate the production and prices of the products they sold Improving conditions in Japan's Countryside
- The Great Depression had hit Japanese farming and farmers hard:
 - 1932: many farmers were heavily in debt → they were struggling to pay their rent and taxes as well as 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
 - 1932: the Ministry of Agriculture launched the Campaign for Economic Revitalisation → a mix of propaganda and practical proposals aimed to strengthen the countryside + stressed the need to evolve the spirit of cooperation in rural areas + encouraged farmers to utilise scientific farming methods instead of traditional ones + farmers received guidance on how to better manage crops and finances Link: These helped to rebuild Japan's economy and the government had improved the lives of the Japanese

Social Changes

Control of Japanese Thought:

- The government took action to promote loyalty to the state and the emperor, as well as a strong military spirit
 - the Campaign for Economic Revitalisation emphasised the traditional values seen in the lives of the peasants in rural Japan → contrasted the peaceful, hardworking rural peasant communities with the chaotic and corrupting influence of the cities +

praised women in rural Japan for their traditional roles in working on farm and managing the home

- *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 fiction books*
- *1936: the government formed the Information and Propaganda Committee which worked with the Publications Monitoring Department to further control the media and promote their militarist ideas → materials that presented the military or the emperor in a bad light were considered inappropriate and censored + Individuals who promoted ideas that did not conform to the government were silenced +*
- *Individuals with socialist beliefs, such as political leaders, intellectuals and university students, were imprisoned or dismissed from their positions Control Of Education + Japan's education system also had a strong emphasis on national pride and importance of Japanese traditions + stressed loyalty to the emperor and the community over the individual beliefs → the government continued to strengthen their hold over Japan through education*