

History Issue in East Asia

Week 2: The Road to War

The “Road to War”

More than one hundred years ago, vast colonies possessed mainly by the Western powers stretched out across the world. With their overwhelming supremacy in technology, waves of colonial rule surged toward Asia in the 19th century. There is no doubt that the resultant sense of crisis drove Japan forward to achieve modernization. Japan built a constitutional government earlier than any other nation in Asia. The country preserved its independence throughout. The Japan-Russia War gave encouragement to many people under colonial rule from Asia to Africa.

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After World War I, which embroiled the world, the movement for self-determination gained momentum and put brakes on colonization that had been underway. It was a horrible war that claimed as many as ten million lives. With a strong desire for peace stirred in them, people founded the League of Nations and brought forth the General Treaty for Renunciation of War. There emerged in the international community a new tide of outlawing war itself.

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At the beginning, Japan, too, kept steps with other nations. However, with the Great Depression setting in and the Western countries launching economic blocs by involving colonial economies, Japan's economy suffered a major blow. In such circumstances, Japan's sense of isolation deepened and it attempted to overcome its diplomatic and economic deadlock through the use of force. Its domestic political system could not serve as a brake to stop such attempts. In this way, Japan lost sight of the overall trends in the world.

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With the Manchurian Incident, followed by the withdrawal from the League of Nations, Japan gradually transformed itself into a challenger to the new international order that the international community sought to establish after tremendous sacrifices. Japan took the wrong course and advanced along the road to war.

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The screenshot shows the official Japanese government website for the Prime Minister's Office. The page title is "Speeches and Statements by the Prime Minister" and it features a section for the "Statement by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe" dated August 15, 2012. The text of the statement is visible, including the opening paragraph: "On the 75th anniversary of the end of the war, we humbly reflect upon the fact that we, the Japanese people, have suffered and caused tremendous suffering to the people of other countries as a result of our aggression and military expansion in the past. We deeply regret that we have caused such suffering to the people of other countries. We sincerely apologize to the people of other countries for the suffering they have experienced. We will continue to work for a world of peace and friendship."

A conservative statement

It avoids casting Japan as an aggressor.

It avoids any negative comments on Japanese imperialism.

The “Road to War”

During a certain period in the not too distant past, Japan, following a mistaken national policy, advanced along the road to war, only to ensnare the Japanese people in a fateful crisis, and, through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. In the hope that no such mistake be made in the future, I regard, in a spirit of humility, these irrefutable facts of history, and express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology. Allow me also to express my feelings of profound mourning for all victims, both at home and abroad, of that history.

The Murayama Statement, 1995

The “Road to War”

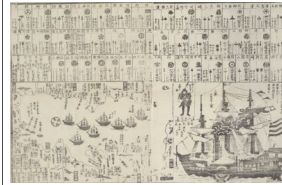
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The “Road to War”



Black Ships 1853-4



Surrender 1945

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The “Road to War”

1853 & 1854	Perry's Black Ships
Late 1850s	Unequal treaties and opening of Japan
Early 1860s	Domestic terror and political violence
1867	<i>Taisei hokan</i> : Return of power to the emperor
1868-9	Boshin War
1869	Annexation of Ezochi (creation of Hokkaido)
1873	<i>Seikanron</i> , subjugate Korea debate
1874	Taiwan Expedition
1875	Kanghwa Incident (1876, Treaty of Kanghwa)
1877	Satsuma Rebellion
1879	Annexation of Ryukyu (Okinawa)

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The “Road to War”

1884	Gapsin Coup (Korea)
1889	Meiji Constitution
1894	Tonghak Rebellion, First Sino-Japanese War
1895	Treaty of Shimonoseki, Japan gains Taiwan
1895	Triple intervention (Japan returns Liaodung peninsula)
1900	Boxer Rebellion
1902	Anglo-Japanese Alliance
1904-5	Russo-Japanese War
1905	Korea becomes a Japanese protectorate, Japan gains Karafuto
1910	Annexation of Korea

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1914	World War I: Japan captures Tsingtao and Pacific Islands
1915	The Twenty-one Demands
1918	Siberian Intervention (to 1922)
1919	Treaty of Versailles
1919	March 1 Movement (Korea), May 4 Movement (China)
1920	Nikolaevsk Incident (Japan occupied northern Karafuto, to 1925)
1922	Washington Naval Treaty
1923	End of Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Kanto Earthquake
1924	Racist immigration laws in the US
1926	Ascension of Emperor Hirohito
1929	Wall Street Crash, Great Depression
1930	London Naval Treaty

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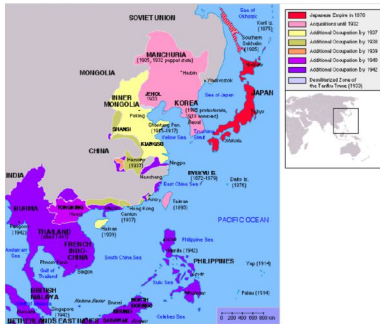
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1931	Manchurian Incident
1932	Shanghai Incident, May 15 incident (Inukai assassination)
1933	Japan withdraws from the League of Nations
1936	February 26 Incident
1936	Anti-Comintern Pact
1937	Marco Polo Bridge Incident, Second Sino-Japanese War
1939	Nomonhan Incident (but border clashes 1932-1938, too)
1939	World War II begins in Europe
1940	Fall of France, Japan occupies French Indochina
1940	Tripartite Pact (Japan, Germany, Italy)
1941	April: Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact (modelled on 1939 German-Soviet Pact)
1941	July: US oil and steel embargo on Japan
1941	December: Pearl Harbor, invasion of South East Asia

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Japan's Empire, 1942



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Naming “the War”

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China Incident	支那事変
Sino-Japanese War	日中戦争
Second Sino-Japanese War	第二日中戦争
Fifteen Years War	15年戦争
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Pacific War	太平洋戦争
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Interpretations of War and/or Imperialism

- Asia liberation theory: Japan fought a just war to liberate Asia from Western colonialism.
- The “Shiba view” (and Abe view?): Bright Meiji Period, but mistakes and aggression of the Showa Period.
- Marxist-Leninist view: Clash of capitalistic empires.
- Progressive view: Japanese aggressive war.
- Dominant Allied view: Liberal democracy vs fascism, Allies vs Axis.
- Pacifism: All war is bad.

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Key Decisions for Japan

- 1850s and 1860s: To open up or remained a closed country?
- Meiji Period: Modernization with imperial expansion or without imperial expansion?
- Allies: Britain or someone else? Germany or someone else?
- The China Question: How much of the “China pie” to aim for?
- The Resources Question: “Look north” or “look south” for access to natural resources?
- The American Ultimatum: To withdraw from China or not?
- The War Option: How and when to start hostilities?

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The Debate

- Japan had no choice but to go to war in 1941 against the United States and Britain.

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