

Module 8: World War II - 1939 to 1945
Topic 1 Content: Setting the Stage for War: Japan Notes

Introduction



Changes in Japan were taking place during the first part of the Twentieth Century. Japan sought to become more like the western countries of Europe and the United States. In an effort to mimic western countries, Japan copied some of their less desirable traits, as it attempted to dominate parts of Asia both militarily and economically.

Click **Next** to explore the reasons why Japan entered into World War II.

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Militaristic

Bushido

Bushido is the samurai warrior code that includes the ideas of loyalty to one's leaders, being a strong fighter, and bringing honor to one's family.



Japan's desire to dominate militarily could be traced in part to its heritage, which included the samurai warrior code known as Bushido. This code included the ideas of loyalty to one's leaders, being a strong fighter, and bringing honor to one's family. These ideals helped motivate the people of Japan to strongly support their military, allowing it gain power over the Japanese government. Because Japan's people and government supported the military and military action, they were considered a militaristic people.

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Early Virtues of Bushido



The virtues of the Bushido included integrity, respect, courage, honor, compassion, honesty, and loyalty. These seven early virtues were characteristics that heavily influenced the soldiers in the Japanese military. Hover your cursor over each of the symbols to learn what each represents.

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Economy



Japan also wanted to dominate Asia economically because it did not have many natural resources to support its economy. Japan was very dependent on other countries, including the United States for imports of raw materials. The Japanese leaders wanted to expand their influence into areas with lots of raw materials to help Japan prosper and reduce its dependence on other countries. This desire to expand would eventually lead to war.


Japan was lacking the raw materials and natural resources that would help the country become more independent. What resources was Japan lacking? Think about Japan, its location in the world, and its landscape. Then drag each of the resources and drop it onto the outline of the country to see if Japan was lacking this resource prior to World War II.

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Steel

Steel ✕

Japan lacked the iron and steel resources it needed for both its economy and military resources. The United States was Japan's main supplier of steel and iron resources.



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Agricultural Resources

Agricultural Resources ✕

Japan had abundant arable land and had a surplus of agricultural resources. Agriculture was not a reason for Japan's dependency on other countries.

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Rubber

Rubber ✕

Japan lacked the rubber resources it needed for both its economy and military resources. British Malaya, now Singapore, was Japan's main supplier of rubber.



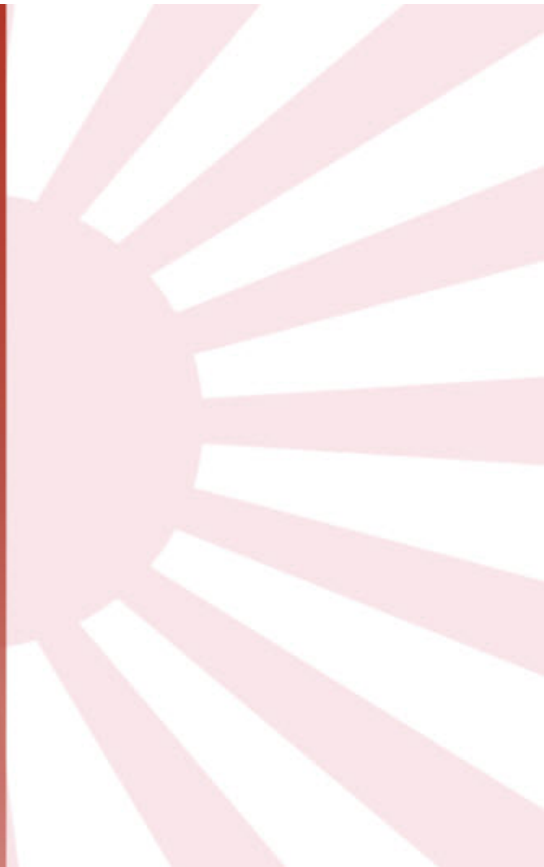
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Fish

Seafood ✕

Surrounded by water, Japan had plenty of resources from the ocean, including seafood. Lack of seafood was not a reason for Japan's dependency on other countries.



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Coal



Coal ✕

While Japan contained a large amount of coal, it was not the type of coal required to fuel ships, railroads, or industrial consumption. The United States and Great Britain were Japan's largest suppliers of anthracite coal.

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Oil



Oil ✕

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Manchuria China

Invasion of Manchuria

Wanting to extend its empire, Japan invaded China in September of 1931.



Map of Manchuria, China



Japanese Invasion, September 1931

In order to obtain natural resources and to extend its empire, Japan focused on resource-rich areas. In September of 1931, the Japanese military acted on its own, without the support of the Japanese government, and invaded Manchuria, China. The military's quick success in China forced the Japanese government to support the invasion and effectively gave control of the government to the military. The Japanese military was very brutal in its attacks on China, doing little to avoid harming civilians. Culturally, the Japanese considered surrender dishonorable, so they treated prisoners very poorly. Even today, tension between Japan and China over the poor treatment of Chinese civilians during World War II continues. Japan remained in control of Manchuria until the end of World War II.

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Embargo

Embargo

As a result of international condemnation, the United States imposed an embargo on the export of all oil and steel to Japan.



Extent of the Japanese Empire in the Pacific and Indian Oceans (excluding China)



From 1931 until 1937, the Japanese continued to strengthen their empire. They were now in control of parts of Eastern China, many of the Pacific Island chains, and many Indonesian islands. The Japanese engaged in small skirmishes with China until 1937, when Japan began a full invasion. This escalation of the conflict led to international condemnation, including from the United States. The United States did not recognize the Japanese conquests. In late 1940, the United States imposed an embargo on the export of oil and steel to Japan. Because Japan needed those materials, this caused tensions between the two countries to rise. Both countries began negotiations to try to resolve the tense situation.