Objectives

• Explain the effects of liberal changes in Japan during the 1920s.

• Analyze how nationalists reacted to Japan’s problems during the Great Depression.

• Describe how the militarists used their power in the 1930s.
Terms and People

- **Hirohito** – the Japanese emperor who reigned from 1926 to 1989
- **ultranationalist** – an extreme nationalist
- **Manchuria** – a northern Chinese province
How did Japan change in the 1920s and 1930s?

Japan used its strong economy to become an imperialist nation, expanding into China and Korea.

The 1920s were a period of liberal reforms in Japan. By the 1930s, however, Japan experienced a backlash against liberalism due to the combined effects of the Great Depression and growing militarism.
During WWI, Japan grew into a major economic and imperial power.

Japan:
- Annexed Korea as a colony in 1910
- Sought further rights in China with the Twenty-One Demands
- Was awarded former German possessions in East Asia by the Allies at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference

Japan was a growing presence in East Asia.
In 1926, Hirohito became emperor of Japan.

- According to Japanese tradition, he was the nation’s supreme authority and a living god.
- He reigned for 63 years, until 1989.
Japanese democracy during the 1920s was fairly liberal, but dominated by powerful business interests.

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<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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<td>• Political parties grew stronger.</td>
<td>• Political parties were manipulated by the zaibatsu, Japan’s powerful</td>
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<td>• Elected members of the Diet exercised their power.</td>
<td>business leaders.</td>
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<td>• All adult men won the right to vote.</td>
<td>• Women did not win the right to vote until 1945.</td>
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Western powers grew weary of Japan’s aggressive growth. Japan slowed down its foreign expansion. Japan:

• Signed a 1922 agreement with the United States, Britain, and France to limit the size of its navy
• Agreed to leave Shandong
• Reduced military spending
Japan experienced turmoil in many parts of its society during the 1920s.

| Economy                  | • Rural peasants remained poor while the rest of the country prospered.  
|                          | • Peasants and factory workers were drawn to socialist ideas.        |
| Culture                  | • Younger people adopted Western fashions and philosophies.           
|                          | • Conservatives blamed Western influences for the lack of obedience and respect for authority. |
| Politics                 | • Tensions grew between the government and the military.              
|                          | • Conservatives complained of government corruption.                |
A devastating earthquake struck the Tokyo area in 1923, killing 100,000 and causing major property damage and unemployment.

As Tokyo began to recover, Japan faced another economic crisis: the Great Depression.

Trade suffered and urban unemployment soared. Rural peasants were close to starvation.
Military officials and ultranationalists responded to the Depression in Japan by blaming Western influences and preaching independence. They:

- Condemned politicians for agreeing to Western demands to stop overseas expansion
- Condemned Western racial policies that shut out Japanese immigrants
- Demanded renewed expansion to provide Japan with the natural resources it needed to fuel its industries
In 1931, a group of Japanese army officers in the Chinese province of **Manchuria** pretended that the Chinese had attacked a Japanese-owned railroad line.

Claiming self-defense, the Japanese army attacked and conquered **Manchuria**. They then set up a puppet state.
The League of Nations condemned Japan for the Manchurian incident. Japan withdrew from the League, which did not take military action. The Japanese army had not told the government of its plans, and politicians were upset, but the Japanese people sided with the military.
In the 1930s, ultranationalists plotted to overthrow the government. The unrest forced the government to accept military domination in 1937.

- Cracked down on socialists
- Suppressed most democratic freedoms
- Revived ancient warrior values
- Built a cult around Emperor Hirohito
- Used schools to teach students obedience and service

Shifting focus to please the ultranationalists, the government:
The Japanese government followed the Manchurian incident by nullifying the agreements it had made to limit its navy, and in 1937, Japan attacked China, starting the Second Sino-Japanese War.

Japan had ambitions to conquer China, but the onset of World War II in 1939 changed Japan’s focus.

Japan signed the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy in September 1940, cementing the alliance known as the Axis Powers.