

The Shogunate Strikes Back

The Rise of Japan to 1942



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Foreword

This presentation is one of a series given over the years by my colleague Dr Carolyn De Wytt and myself at Greenslopes Private Hospital. Greenslopes was founded as a military hospital and the patients are still mainly of service background. These talks are designed to acquaint staff with the background of some of the conflicts patients have been involved with.

The Shogunate Strikes Back

Introduction

In World War II, the enemy Axis Powers consisted of three major nations. There were significant differences in the way they were perceived. Italy, the initial Fascist power, was not considered a serious adversary and changed sides in 1943, joining the Allies. Germany was in the power of the Nazis and Allied propaganda was aimed mainly at the Nazis themselves, rather than the German people. The attack was often condensed to the person of Hitler himself. Churchill, for example, when speaking on his support of Communism after Germany invaded Russia in 1941, said “ If Hitler invaded hell I would make at least a favourable reference to the devil in the House of Commons.”

The Japanese, however, came out of the war probably with the worst reputation of any of the powers since there was no sub-group to focus on and the enemy were simply known as “The Japs”. Any atrocities committed by the Japanese in the 1930’s and 40’s were thought to be due to cultural or even racial factors. President Franklin Roosevelt, for example, took serious scientific advice as to whether there were any biological reason for the Japanese being so different to Europeans. Wartime propaganda posters usually depicted the Japanese in caricature as a buck-toothed, cross-eyed, somewhat ape like Asian figure.

As far as Australia is concerned, it is almost as if Japan is populated by two separate peoples. Firstly there are the “Japs”, our enemy in World War II, a fanatical and cruel race. Secondly there are the Japanese, an industrious, cultured and peaceful people, our allies in World War I and our major trading partner. In this paper, I present a personal view as to the cause of this dichotomy and what was different for the Japanese in the 1930’s and 40’s.

Early Japan

The Japanese date their history back to the 7th century BC and the mythical Emperor Jimmu, said to be descended from the Sun God. The first historical emperor only appeared in the 4th century when mentioned in Chinese writings. Though this was the time of the Dark Ages in the West, it was a time of greatest light for the Chinese civilisation. The Chinese believed themselves to be the Middle Kingdom between Heaven and Earth. The shadow of Heaven fell on earth and the area encompassed by this shadow was China. Outside lived Barbarians who were not so much lesser people as simply persons unschooled in the proper way of behaviour. In return for these Barbarians paying tribute, the Chinese undertook to advance their education. In this way scholars from Japan went to live in China for some years and were taught the Chinese language, philosophy and arts. On return to Japan they introduced Chinese writing, there being no indigenous Japanese writing. Many of the features we associate with Japanese culture, such as the distinctive five line poems and stylised paintings are of Chinese origin. The Chinese language itself served Japan much as Latin served Europe in the Middle Ages as the language of scholarship and religion.

Buddhism was also introduced to Japan in this way. The previous religion had been a polytheistic religion that came to be known as Shinto to differentiate it from Buddhism. Buddhism and Shinto got along well enough since neither were exclusivist religions as are the Middle Eastern religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Japanese retained one major difference to the Chinese society. The Chinese Emperor was said to enjoy a temporary mandate from Heaven and when there were rebellions it was thought this mandate had ceased and the Chinese dynasties were frequently changed. The Japanese, on the other hand, regarded their Emperor as being of divine descent and the dynasty remained unchanged over the centuries. All land was said to be owned by the Emperor and imperial officials came round every few years and redistributed the land according to need. This led to great inefficiencies since there was no incentive for the peasants to improve their land if it were to be distributed to someone else in a couple of years time. Because of this, land came to be left with the occupying families. Human nature being what it is, and through good luck and good management, it was not long before some families had most of the land and other families none at all and were forced to work as peasants on the new landowner's property. The landowners became known as lords or Daimyo. Since they now had land to defend, their young men became a military class of Samurai.

The Formation of the Shogunate

Up to this time, the Japanese Emperor's duties had been simply to function as the chief priest of Shinto. There were now headstrong military lords to contend with and it was thought inappropriate for the divine Emperor to be involved in the day to day politics. More and more, the running of the State was left to his military chief, who took the Chinese title of "Chief Suppressor of the Barbarians". The Japanese abbreviation of this title is Shogun. The major problem in having such a concentration of power in one person was that whenever the Shogun died or was killed, there was a civil war to decide who would be the successor. In order to prevent this, and to insure a smooth succession, the office of Shogun came to be hereditary, so that Japan came to have both a hereditary Emperor and a hereditary Shogun. The first formal Shogunate, dating from 1185, was that of the Minamoto family of Kamakura, and became known as the Kamakura Shogunate. This form of government, often referred to as the Bakufu, literally "tent government", lasted for almost 700 years.

The Kamakura Shogunate itself lasted for about 150 years. In 1333, Emperor Go-Daigo became dissatisfied with the arrangement and felt he could perform the duties of government without the Shogun. He moved to restore political power to the Emperor and his forces under his chief of the bodyguard, Ashikaga Takauji, defeated the army of the Shogun. Ashikaga now double crossed his Emperor, and, finding a lesser prince of the blood royal, offered to make this prince Emperor, if in turn, Ashikaga could become the new Shogun. Emperor Go-Daigo was deposed, but not killed, and fled south to set up a Southern Court as rival to the new Northern Court. The Southern Court survived for some decades until another Ashikaga shogun, Yoshimitsu, reunified the empire.

These events were to be of some consequence, since at the end of World War II, there was a move to try Emperor Hirohito as a war criminal. Criticism was to be met with the claim that Hirohito was not the legitimate emperor, being descended from the usurper emperor of the 14th century.

The Arrival of the Europeans

In 1460, one of the Ashikaga Shoguns died without a successor, and this led to civil wars of the Ashikaga Succession that lasted for well over a 100 years. These occurred at about the same time as the English Wars of the Roses, another dynastic war, which lasted only 30 years. The continued civil war occurred at a dangerous time for Japan, since it was now that the Portuguese turned up. It might seem puzzling that a few European ships, full of sick and dying men, thousands of miles away from their home, could have wielded such influence, so that Europeans came to colonise much of Asia dominating some ancient and powerful Asian empires. The situation was not, in the main, due to superiority in weaponry, since a single European armed with a muzzle loading smooth bore musket did not out-gun even a single Australian Aborigine with his arm load of spears until the 1870's and the advent of repeating rifles. Rather the Europeans got their chance in times of civil war or in the bitter competition between small rival states, as occurred in India. By offering support to one of the protagonists, in exchange for trading privileges or overlordship, they could assist this faction to be victorious. Their new ally then had an advantage and could conquer a third party that, in turn, could be added to the fold. The three new allies could then take on a fourth and bit by bit a small European presence could come to dominate an entire nation.

The Portuguese in Japan were not so much interested in domination as in trade. In order to gain wealth, and hence military advantage, one of the Japanese Daimyo gave the small fishing village of Nagasaki to the Portuguese as a trading base. The Portuguese vigorously attempted to convert the Japanese to Christianity with St Francis Xavier, founder of the Jesuits, visiting Japan for a while. As well as religious conviction, some Daimyo saw political advantage as well, in converting to Christianity, since this gave them even greater access to European weapons and supplies. Several Daimyo became Christian, and, because of the emphasis on loyalty in Japan, the followers of these Daimyo all converted as well. In a short time, some three hundred thousand Japanese, representing about 10% of the population, were Christian. This was a real threat to Japanese order, since now, rather than owing allegiance to the Shogun, the new converts owed allegiance to God. As we have seen in the Middle East, this is a somewhat nebulous concept. Particularly so if God's word was interpreted by some person in Rome, (wherever that was).

As the Civil Wars came to an end, late in the 16th century, the Japanese Shogun was able to start to bring the divided nation under control again, and ordered the expulsion of Christian priests and the suppression of Christianity. The Christians fought back and there was a major uprising which was brutally quelled by military force. In one incident, 26 Christian martyrs were crucified in Nagasaki, as a demonstration. Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu achieved final unification and suppression of Christianity in the early 1600's.

The Tokugawa Shogunate

Tokugawa now decided that Japan needed stability and firm control. He forbade Japanese subjects from contacting foreigners, such that any Japanese planning to go overseas was liable to execution. He also decreed that there be absolute stability in the social order, so that peasants were to stay peasants, Samurai to stay Samurai. To insure the loyalty of the Daimyo, he decreed that every second year they had to spend their time at his new court in Tokyo. The other years they were free to go back to manage their estates, but had to leave their wives and children as his hostages at the court. The only trading allowed was with the Dutch, who now had the trading concession in Nagasaki. The Dutch had supplanted the Portuguese as the dominant trading power in Asia, and were quite happy to assist the Japanese in expelling the Portuguese. The Protestant Dutch were not Christian, as the Japanese, not to mention the Portuguese, understood the term. Thus, the Tokugawa Shogunate remained stable for around 200 years. The ethos was that of a military aristocracy with the emphasis on loyalty, honour, and the willingness to sacrifice oneself for the common good. Wealth was measured in land ownership and wealth generated by trade considered decidedly inferior.



The Opium Wars

In the 1840's, however, two things happened which were to shake the stability. The first was the discovery by the English of tea drinking. The English soon became addicted tea drinkers and fast clipper ships were sent to China to bring the tea back. The Chinese authorities regarded trade with Barbarians as being essentially a form of tribute and insisted that the tea be paid for with silver bullion. It was not long before the English ran out of silver and looked around for something else to trade for tea. The Chinese did not want English manufactured goods, with the exception of mechanical clocks, since they were a self-sufficient society. The English hit on the brilliant idea of opium. Opium was a frequently used drug in those times of gastrointestinal parasites and infrequent public facilities. Opium trading was a brilliant success,

and, in a short time, much of Chinese society was addicted. The Chinese were now forced to pay for the opium with silver bullion, with great disruption to the Chinese economy and society. A Chinese official wrote a letter of complaint to Queen Victoria, which went unanswered. The Chinese Governor of Canton then impounded some British ships, jailed the crew, and seized the opium. The British demanded the ships be reinstated, the crews released and the opium paid for. When the Chinese refused war broke out. This occurred at the time of the greatest relative technical superiority of the industrialised English, and they were easily able to defeat the medieval Chinese army. They forced trading concessions on the Chinese, gained the colony of Hong Kong, and insisted that British trading posts be treated as British territory under British laws. Any Chinese citizen working for the British were therefore also under British laws. The other European trading nations soon demanded similar concessions. King William IV of Holland, the major trading partner of the Japanese, wrote a letter to the Emperor recommending that he open Japan for trade, or the Europeans could well force it on him. The Shogun's officials replied, thanking the king for his presents, but confident in the stability of the Japanese system, declared that they would not enter into any more correspondence on the subject.

Commodore Perry's Black Ships

The next major event was the Mexican-American War, in which the United States came to possess California, with its long Pacific seaboard. American ships were soon trading with China, and this brought them into Japanese waters. Three American ships were wrecked in Japan and their crews imprisoned and some even tortured. The Americans, in response, sent Commodore Matthew Perry to Japan in 1853 with his famous "Black Ships" to demand that the Japanese sign a treaty to protect American seafarers and to open Japan to trade.

The Japanese were very embarrassed by the weakness of their defences and put cloth coverings over what cannons they had so the Americans could not see how ancient they really were. The Shogun wrote to his Daimyo requesting their advice on how best to handle this new threat. Several of the replies are still in existence. Though many of the Daimyo recommended war, when Commodore Perry came back in 1854 with ten ships, the Shogun was willing to sign "unequal treaties" granting Americans similar rights to those enjoyed in China.

This was a tremendous loss of prestige for the Shogunate, and, in the southern Japanese feudal domain of Choshu, a group of Samurai decided that if the Shogun could not expel the Barbarians, they would. They adopted the slogan "Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians". The site they chose for a demonstration was the Shimonoseki Straits, where there were Japanese forts on both sides of a narrow strip of water. They opened fire on European ships negotiating this strait. In response, 17 European ships, including several warships, returned, and, with their superior weaponry, were able to silence the Japanese forts. The Japanese were using ancient muzzle loading, smooth bore, solid shot cannon, whereas the Europeans had modern breach loading, rifled, guns. Long boats were then sent ashore and the forts captured. This resulted in a major rethink of the rebellious Samurai, who now decided that if they could not beat the Europeans, they had best join them. Quantities of modern weapons were purchased from the Europeans, and the Samurai, acting in the name of the Emperor, were able to defeat the forces of the Shogun in a brief civil war.

The Meiji Restoration

At this time the old Emperor died and the teenage Prince Mutsuhito took the throne. He adopted the name of Meiji (Bright Rule) Emperor. The new Shogun resigned, leaving the Meiji Emperor as the sole ruler of Japan. He gathered around him some bright young advisers and decided that the Japanese, as regards the Europeans, would either “be guests at the table or part of the feast”. In order to catch up with the West, envoys were sent to Europe and the United States seeking suitable role models. It appeared that some sort of participatory democracy was the most successful system, though the Japanese wanted the Emperor to have a major say in the running of the state. The United States was felt unsuitable, as a political model at least, because it was a Republic, as was France, which had just been defeated in the Franco-Prussian War. The United Kingdom had some attractions, but Queen Victoria played little part in the affairs of state, being mainly a figurehead. Germany, on the other hand, had been recently united by Bismarck and was obviously an up-and-coming state. It excelled in the new technologies of chemistry and engineering, had outstanding education facilities and the best army in the world. Germany was therefore chosen as the role model for much of Japanese society. Even today, Japanese High School students wear uniforms reminiscent of those of 19th century Prussia. Universal conscription of young men was introduced and a modern army, trained by German officers, was formed under the command of General Yamagata Aritomo. General Yamagata, who was a young man in his 30’s at the time, would command the Japanese army for more than 40 years. He was an intelligent, farsighted man, and though he started life as a sword-wearing samurai, he would shape the Japanese army into a disciplined modern machine. His very long tenure as commander would mean that he had tremendous influence on the ethos of the army and he was able to transmit many of the Samurai traditions to the new force.

The Daimyo were called to an imperial conference, given European titles such as Baron, and told that, though they could keep their land, they had no further political power. The Samurai were literally pensioned off and forbidden to wear swords in public, or their distinctive hair styles, or even wear blue socks, which had been the badge of a Samurai warrior. Many of the young Samurai, though, were able to obtain employment as officers in the new army.

Not all the Japanese liked the idea of Japan becoming the Prussia of the Northwest Pacific. A sizeable proportion looked to Britain as their role model. One of the most famous was Baron Kato Takaaki, who was to become the Japanese Foreign Minister in World War I. He was very impressed with the liberal British Institutions and conducted himself and his household as would a British gentleman. He saw Japan becoming the Great Britain of the Northwest Pacific. The other major Japanese institution to follow a British lead was the navy. The Royal Navy was easily the largest and best navy in the world and it was this navy that the Japanese used as their role model. British officers trained the Japanese naval personnel and warships were bought from British naval yards. Brighter, or at least more technically minded officers, tended to go into the navy rather than the army. The Japanese navy even had its own medical school on British lines, whereas the army medical school was modelled on German schools. The navy and the army were never to get along, and, in World War II, Japanese naval headquarters was surrounded by tanks, which were said to be there to defend against the enemy, but, were in fact, stationed to prevent the army taking the naval headquarters over. This difference between the navy and army, however, did not mean that the navy was a pacifist organisation. Their role model, Great Britain, had the largest empire the world had ever seen, and the one thing the army and navy agreed on, was that Japan should have an empire, and that empire should be in China.

Japanese industrialisation proceeded, and Samurai who had supported the Emperor, were given large contracts to set up manufacturing plants. Mitsubishi and Mitsui were founded in this way.



Tsu-un Maru, launched in 1877, the first Japanese built steamship

In 1890 the Japanese Emperor proclaimed a constitution on German advice. A limited democracy was envisaged, and the sovereignty of the nation was vested in the Emperor. General Yamagata managed to obtain an imperial decree that the Minister for War needed to be a serving army officer. This was to give the army a great deal of leverage in the future, since the army could now select the candidate. Any candidate chosen by the Prime Minister, who was thought to be unsuitable by the army, would simply be sacked and therefore ineligible for the position of War Minister.

The Sino-Japanese War

In 1895, Korea had also been attempting to modernise. The program was financed by taxing the peasants, who rose in rebellion. The Korean rulers invited China to send an army to assist in quelling this uprising. The Japanese regarded Korea as in their sphere of influence, and to maintain this influence, also sent an army, though this army was not invited. It was not long before a war broke out between the Chinese and the Japanese over control of Korea. The disciplined and efficient Japanese army was victorious and the Japanese captured the southern Manchurian province of Kwantung, to the northwest of the Korean Peninsula.

The Chinese vigorously protested and asked their trading partners, France and Russia, to intercede. The Japanese were persuaded to return the captured territory and reluctantly evacuated the Kwantung province. The Chinese then added insult to injury by leasing the province to Russia which, at the same time as Japan was extending its influence westward, was extending its influence eastward. The Russians fortified a harbour at the tip of the Kwantung Peninsula, named it Port Arthur, and used it as the base to build up a Far Eastern fleet.

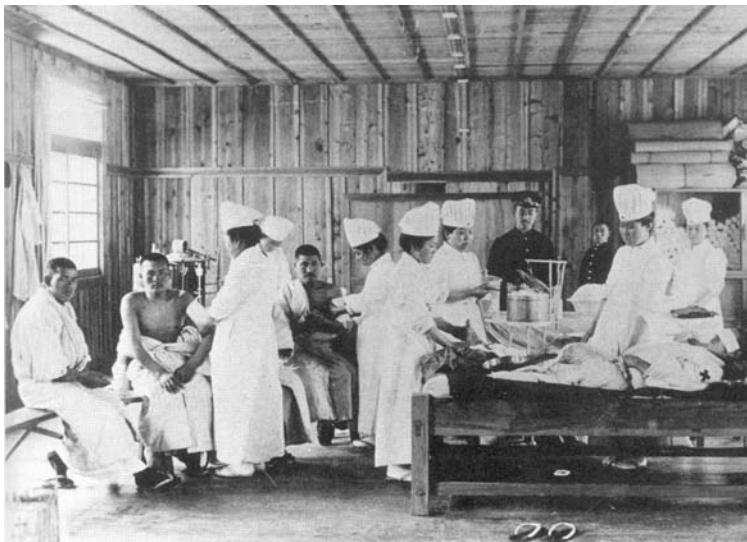
The Russo-Japanese War

In 1902 the Japanese signed a formal alliance with Great Britain. British defence policy was based on Russia as being the likely enemy. Germany, however, was a rising power and the British need to bring many of their ships back to home waters to maintain their naval superiority. They hoped to leave the Japanese to contain the Russians in the east. With the British now as allies, the Japanese decided to attempt to recapture Port Arthur. In 1904, without warning, Japanese torpedo boats attacked the Russian fleet in Port Arthur and damaged several of the capital ships. Russian naval power was essentially neutralised in the area. With this achieved, the Japanese landed troops on the Kwantung Peninsula, cut the railway line to Port Arthur, advanced north towards the railway town of Mukden and south to besiege Port

Arthur itself. The siege of Port Arthur resulted in furious fighting, but with a loss of some ten thousand casualties, the Japanese captured the critical hill overlooking Port Arthur and were able then to use their artillery to silence any Russian defence. The Russian commander surrendered Port Arthur. The Japanese advanced north and, in early 1905, again defeated a Russian force defending the vital railway junction of Mukden. The Russians, in an attempt to regain the dominant position in the east, sent the Russian Baltic fleet on the long voyage to Japan. This was one of the great naval operations recorded in history, with the Russian fleet taking many months to arrive in Japanese waters. The British refused to allow the Russian coaling privileges at British Naval Stations, and, in order to make the voyage, the Russian ships were forced to use even the officer's cabins to store bags of coal. They finally arrived at Tsushima Strait, between Japan and Korea, with the ships badly in need of refit and the crews exhausted. There they were met by the Japanese fleet under Admiral Tojo and annihilated.

The Japanese Red Cross

It is often thought that the Japanese did not recognise the Red Cross for cultural and historical reasons. In fact, Japan had been one of the founding nations of the International Red Cross and had easily the largest Red Cross Society in the world. The patron was the Japanese Empress herself. The Japanese Red Cross was very active in the Russian-Japanese war. Japanese treatment of their Russian prisoners of war was also exemplary and, for example, after the Battle of Mukden, Russian prisoners of war were given small presents to prevent them being too down hearted by the defeat.



Japanese Red Cross workers treating Wounded in the Russo-Japanese war 1904

The Effect of the Japanese Victory

The Japanese victory over the Russians was the first time an Asian country had defeated a Western power since Tamerlane in the 14th century, and therefore caused major repercussions in the Pacific area.

In particular, native inhabitants of European colonies, such as the Congress Party in British India, were unable to understand why they were still a British colony, whereas Japan, another Asian state, was a full ally of Great Britain and had just defeated one of the major Western powers. Moves by Asian countries toward independence from their European masters were greatly strengthened.

The other place that the Japanese victory was felt very keenly was Australia. Australia had only recently federated in 1901. One of the major reasons for Federation was defence, following the advice of the Imperial Defence Committee, under Lord Kitchener, who had recommended Australia federate to better defend itself. The enemy postulated was Russia. The other major reason for Federation was the White Australia Policy. We are used to thinking of the White Australia Policy as a right wing policy. In fact, the White Australia Policy was that of the trade unions and the left wing, and was designed to prevent Australians workers having to face competition from Kanaka cane cutters and Chinese agricultural workers. The socialist newspaper "Worker" on 3rd October 1891 had stated that "the ejection of the Chinese from Australia was a big clang of the workman's hammer on the anvil of socialism". The White Australia Policy is, in fact, the major reason that Queensland is a member of the Australian Federation at all. Metropolitan Brisbane voted 2 to 1 against joining the Federation, since industrial workers were concerned they would lose their jobs due to competition from the more heavily industrialised southern states. The metropolitan vote was overwhelmed by the 93% of Rural and Regional Queenslanders who voted for Federation in order to obtain the White Australia Policy and protect their jobs in the agricultural and mining sectors. The White Australia Policy was the first law voted in the new Parliament. The Australian view of the world was now greatly upset by the defeat of their predicted enemy Russia, by an Asian nation, Japan. In 1908 the Americans sent the "Great White Fleet" on a 'show the flag' trip around the world. The Australian Government ostentatiously invited the Fleet into Sydney Harbour, against the wishes of the British. It is thought that it was John Curtin who, in December 1941, first looked across the Pacific to America to defend Australia against the Japanese. He was rather following the precedent set in 1908.

The First World War

In 1914, the First World War broke out. This was a major challenge to Japan. Previously, there had been various strands of opinion as to which role model to adapt, with some leaders supporting a German, and some a British model. This had not previously been a problem when the British and Germans were friendly, but became a major challenge now they were bitter enemies. Baron Kato, an Anglophile, and who was Japanese Foreign Minister, was able, after an all night cabinet session, to bring Japan in on the side of her ally Great Britain. Japanese warships escorted the first Australian troop convoy to the Middle East. Japanese forces captured the German trading concession in the Shandong Province in China and also took the German Marshall and Caroline Islands in the central Pacific. While world opinion was focussed on Europe, Kato, the foreign minister, took the opportunity to present China with a list of 21 demands. The Japanese, perhaps disingenuously, stated they only wished to have the same

rights in China as the European powers, but these demands were seen by the Chinese as being essentially an attempt to make China a Japanese Protectorate.

The Chinese had been humiliated by the Western powers, but this could be rationalised by feeling that the West had simply stolen a march with their industrialisation. For China to be now pushed around by her one time cultural colony, Japan, was thought to be intolerable and there were violent anti-Japanese demonstrations in Chinese cities.

The Japanese reaped other benefits from World War I. Japan fulfilled large munition contracts for the Allies and her shipyards launched some 263 ships for the British, resulting in a major expansion of Japanese industry. It also resulted in a great increase in industrial workers with the usual left wing tendencies, particularly in view of the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The war brought closer contact with Japan's allies, the liberal democracies of Britain and France, and later the United States, and there was a great increase in calls for universal suffrage and formal party democracy. Japan, up to this time, had had a limited democratic structure, and these moves were viewed with some disquiet by the leadership. The Japanese Prime Minister, for example, felt that "the tidal wave of democracy will badly damage the Japanese political structure".

The Effects of World War I

By honoring her alliance with Great Britain, Japan had chosen the winning side, and was represented at the Versailles Conference in 1919. The Japanese were very keen to have a racial equality clause included in the final Covenant of the League of Nations. Australia opposed this clause, in order to avoid having the White Australia Policy undermined. The Australian Prime Minister, William Hughes, had some influence at the Conference because of the prestige gained by the major role played by Australian troops in the final defeat of the Germans. Australia was able to effectively veto the inclusion of the racial equality clause in the Covenant. The Japanese were very hurt by this, particularly since their allies, the British and the Americans, did not strongly support them in the issue. To add to the injury, the Japanese were leant on to evacuate the province of Shandong in China that they had captured from the Germans.

In 1922 the Washington Naval Conference was held to negotiate the relative strengths of the naval powers in the post World War I period. After much debate, it was agreed to maintain the status quo with the total naval tonnage being limited in a ratio of the US to Britain to Japan of 5 to 5 to 3. Even moderate Japanese were distressed at this agreement, which confined Japan to an inferior status. Right wing extremists assassinated the Japanese Prime Minister for signing the treaty at all. On the other hand, Japan was able to keep the Caroline and Marshall Islands which were squarely between the American possessions of Hawaii and the Philippines. In response, the Americans developed "War Plan Orange". It envisaged a future war with a Japanese strike south at the Philippines. The American planned response was to use naval power to cut the Japanese off from the Philippines, then launch an attack straight at Japan. The development of the United States submarine force and aircraft carrier based battle groups, between the wars, was in accordance with War Plan Orange.

The Japanese were further insulted when the United States Congress voted restrictive immigration laws in 1924 to prevent Japanese migrating to the United States and undercutting the white trade unionists, particularly in Californian fruit picking.

These several grievances greatly strengthened the hand of Japanese right wing and military circles who felt that the world order was a European organisation, and that Japan could not advance within it.

Right wing circles in Japan were also greatly disturbed by the general increase in social disharmony with strikes, demonstrations and the rising influence of Communism, whose prestige had increased since the Bolshevik victory in the Russian Civil War, which followed the Revolution of 1917.

The Rise of Fascism

It was at this time, that a new world movement arose, founded by the Italian, Benito Mussolini, a brilliant writer and charismatic leader. His movement, Fascism, was an effort to counter the class warfare advocated by Marxism. Fascism was rather based on government led cooperation between the sections of the community, with suppression of dissent. It was essentially Nationalist in character and, because of the differences in national history and culture, the Fascist movement in one country cannot be really compared with that of another. Fascism uses national mythology and tends to see the past as containing a golden age, which gives it an advantage over Marxists who must see the past as being a time of suffering and exploitation. German Fascists looked back to the Pagan heroes of the forest; Scandinavian Fascists to the Vikings and Italian fascists looked to the past glories of Rome.



Fascism makes unashamed use of emotion. As Adolph Hitler pointed out, if a person can be convinced by reason to one point of view one day, he can be convinced by reason to another point of view the next day, but if the person's emotions are engaged, they will be loyal forever. Fascists tended to see the "Age of Reason" and the Enlightenment as being the beginning of the decline of Western civilisation.

One of the key features of Fascism is the way it separates its followers from the rest of humanity. This division into "them and us" is often felt to lead necessarily to racism, but it depends on the criteria used to divide groups. Italian Fascism was aimed against Communism and was not a racist party, and, in fact, the Chief Rabbi of Rome was a member of the Italian Fascist Party. Other Fascist movements may divide persons on the basis of race, ideology or religious belief.

Fascism also gains credibility by being portrayed as essentially a defensive movement. Adolph Hitler repeatedly referred to Germany's "struggle for existence". Extreme acts are justified if they are felt to be necessary to defend values held to be vital. Just as an ordinary, decent, citizen will commit violent acts in defence of home or family, so ordinary people can be induced to extraordinary acts if they are thought to be in defence of deeply held beliefs.

Many in the Japanese military and of right wing political view, seeing the strikes and social disorder around them, were of the opinion that Japan had lost its way and was being overwhelmed by foreign influences. The Japanese, the Sacred Race, were in danger of being destroyed as a people. If Japan could only recapture the purity of the Shogunate, when Japan was free from outside influences, and when there was discipline and order, then Japan would regain its true identity and find its way again.

Similar views are expressed by some Islamists in the Middle East who feel that Islam is being overly influenced by the West. If they could just re-establish the purity of the 7th century Arab Caliphate, then they would save the souls of the believers from the godless forces of materialism and rationalism.

Fascists, however, are not just a group of emotional romantics. Fascism was also a thought out economic system based on industrial corporations. In these corporations, industry, government, and trade unions cooperated to reach agreements that were then enforced and dissent was not allowed. The great Fascist legacy to the world has been these continuing corporations, often supported by persons who would be horrified to be labelled as Fascist.

Fascists also put emphasis on the military virtues of loyalty, duty and self sacrifice and tend to glorify heroic death. Fascists despise democratic politicians whom they see as being self-serving parasites. Businessmen who are purely in private enterprise for their own gain, are also viewed with distrust, and Fascists would prefer business be concentrated in corporations where they can, to some extent, be controlled.

The military virtues and control of trade espoused by Fascism fitted nicely with the Samurai traditions of the Bakufu. This led to a great movement to re-establish the order and discipline which was believed to have been present prior to the Meiji restoration. Japanese Fascists saw themselves as a Sacred Race with a divine Emperor in competition with the rest of humanity and particularly in competition with the Europeans. They saw the future as "Asia for the Asians" with themselves as the natural leaders.

The Great Depression

The Depression of the late 1920's and 1930's hit Japan particularly hard. Japan was an exporting nation, with one of its major commodities being silk, a luxury item, and the silk market had collapsed. Japanese manufactured goods were also barred from the United States and Europe because of tariff barriers raised to protect the industries of these nations. The country that could take Japanese imports, China, was boycotting Japanese goods because of Japanese activity during and after World War I.

The Manchurian Incident

The Japanese army, in the Kwantung province of southern Manchuria, decided to assist in finding a way out of the economic crisis. They reported a terrorist attempt to sabotage a train

on the railway to Mukden. The train arrived safely, but the Kwantung army used this incident as a pretext to invade all of Manchuria. In 1932, the last of the Chinese Manchu Emperors, P'u-i, was installed as the puppet Emperor of Manchuria. The army moved to set up corporations in Manchuria on Fascist lines. China appealed to the League of Nations who demanded that Japan evacuate Manchuria. Japan refused to do so, walked out of the League of Nations meeting and left the organisation. The navy also landed troops at Shanghai, in 1932, to force open this port to Japanese exports.

War Against China

Despite these aggressive military moves, Japan was still a democracy with a civilian government. The government, however, had great difficulty in restraining the military, who, in the tradition of the Shogunate, felt themselves to be the legitimate government of Japan. This perceived lack of support for the military by the civilian government, led to a major mutiny in 1936 by a Japanese army regiment on the way to Manchuria. The regiment captured downtown Tokyo and assassinated the brother-in-law of the Prime Minister, mistaking him for the Prime Minister himself. The rebellion was put down with the use of loyal troops. In fact, up until the Second World War, right wing forces had assassinated six Japanese Prime Ministers. There was usually an inquiry and several persons would be hanged, but it was felt **by some** that these persons were being sacrificed by the right wing in order to make a political point. The Imperial decree, engineered by General Yamagata Aritomo in the 1890's, that the Minister for War be a serving army officer, was also a powerful tool in the hands of the army. It meant that the Prime Minister was unable to choose his own Minister of War since, if he picked an officer who was not the army candidate, this officer would be sacked by the army and therefore no longer eligible for the position.

The continuing implied threat of assassination, plus the positioning of a War Minister reflecting the views of the army, did give the military great leverage in the conduct of Japanese affairs. In November 1936, Japan signed an Anti-Comintern pact with Nazi Germany. Things, however, did not always go smoothly for the military. Unlike Germany, or for that matter, Italy, Japan still conducted general elections. In 1937, a parliament was elected which contained many members of mildly left social democratic views. If these members were to unite, they would be able to form a social democratic government, probably with anti-military views. The army knew how to handle this situation. An incident was engineered at the Marco Polo Bridge between Japanese and Chinese frontier forces, and this was taken as a pretext for the Japanese army to invade China. Still a very disciplined and well-led army, the Japanese defeated the defending Chinese forces, and entered Nanking, the Chinese capital, towards the end of 1937.

The Nanking Massacre

The entry of the Japanese army into Nanking was followed by one of the worst massacres in modern history. Two hundred to three hundred thousand Chinese residents were said to have been massacred, often in terrible circumstances. Japanese took photographs of themselves using Chinese prisoners of war as live targets for bayonet practise. These pictures, which were taken to be developed by local Chinese photograph shops, were copied and sent around the world. The Japanese General Officer commanding the army, General Matsui, had been on sick leave because of tuberculosis. When he recovered, returned to the front and found what had happened, he furiously upbraided his staff and was so distressed, he said to an American war

correspondent “the Japanese army is the most ill disciplined army in the world”. There were, however, no courts-martial and the “Rape of Nanking” continues to poison relationships between Japan and China, almost 70 years after the event. It also was a major propaganda defeat for Japan. The civilian foreign office had conducted a successful anti-Western propaganda campaign, on the “Asia for the Asians” line, emphasising a Japanese led “Greater Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere”. News of the massacres in China did much to blunt the effectiveness of this propaganda, and insured that Chinese persons living in Asia could be counted on to support the Allies in the coming war.



Nanking, Xmas 1937
Japanese officer at massacre site

Japanese aircraft also sank a United States gunship, USS Panay, which was escorting three oil tankers on the Yangtze River near Nanking. Though the civilian government profusely apologised, it was widely thought that this had been a deliberate act by the Japanese military. Relationships between the United States and Japan, already markedly worsened by news of the Japanese massacres, now sank to a new low.

In 1938, and again, in 1939 the Japanese and Soviet army tested themselves against each other in several major battles fought on the Manchurian frontier. Though there were no clear victors, it did indicate that the Soviet army would be a difficult enemy and made the Japanese unwilling, in the coming World War II, to support the Nazi attack on Russia by an attack from the East.

War In Europe

In 1939 the Second World War broke out with the well lead and determined German forces achieving rapid victories. In June 1940, France was defeated and Japan signed the Tripartite Pact bringing it into an alliance with Germany and Italy. The alliance was specifically aimed at a third power, which was not named, but widely understood to be the United States. Following the defeat of France, French Indo-china was in the hands of a quasi-Fascist French government which was collaborating with the Nazis. The Japanese military eyed this territory with great interest. It was well to the south of Japan and within easy striking distance of the European colonies of Malaya and the Dutch East Indies and the US colony of the Philippines.

In July 1941, Japanese forces occupied French Indo-China, though the United States government had warned Japan against this action. The United States now acted vigorously. They proclaimed an embargo of oil and strategic supplies to Japan. Most Japanese oil came from United States sources, and this meant that their military campaign in China, not to mention any further campaigns they might embark on, were severely compromised.

The Shogunate Reestablished

The civilian Prime Minister of Japan, Konoye Fumimaro, offered to evacuate Japanese troops from Indo-China if the Americans would lift the embargo. The Democratic government of the United States under Franklin Delano Roosevelt was, however, drifting towards war on the side of Britain. The US navy was already actively escorting convoys to Great Britain, and the destroyer, *USS Reuben James*, would shortly be sunk in a battle with U-boats. The United States was not interested in the Japanese offer and Prime Minister Konoye resigned. General Tojo Hideki took his place. Now at last the army was happy. The military was in charge of the government, they had a Divine Emperor, and the stage was set for return to the glories of old Japan. The Japanese needed oil for the military, and the closest supply was in Dutch East Indies. American bases in Hawaii, however, would threaten their flank, and on the 7th December, the Japanese naval forces struck at Pearl Harbour.

US Submarine Base in Brisbane

The Americans had predicted a Japanese strike south for over 20 years, and had developed a naval submarine and surface force specifically to counter this. The submarine campaign was very successful. In the first year of the Pacific War, in 1942, only 43% of oil embarked in the Dutch East Indies reached Japan. In the second year, the figure was down to 15%, and in the third year 1944 only 2 or 3% of oil embarked got through, mainly as oil drums, on the decks of small cargo ships. In 1945 no oil got through at all. It is not widely realised that Brisbane was one of the major United States naval submarine bases in World War II. An American submarine tender, *USS Fulton*, was moored at the Goldsborough Mort docks in New Farm. It was to this tender that an American submarine, *USS Growler*, returned, having been damaged in a battle with a Japanese destroyer. The Captain, Commander Howard Gilmore, had been wounded on the conning tower and ordered his chief executive officer to submerge the submarine under him, thereby sacrificing himself for his boat. When the time came, the Americans too, knew how to die. The *Growler* was repaired in the dry dock in South Brisbane. One of the most famous submarines operating out of Brisbane at the time was *USS Bowfin*, which sank 16 ships on 9 patrols, won a US Presidential citation, and is a floating museum in Hawaii to this day.

As in all wars, military action can have unintended consequences. One of the Japanese ships sunk by US submarines was the *Montevideo Maru*, proceeding from Rabaul to Japan with 1000 Australian Prisoners of War on board. All of the Australians were lost.

The End of the War in the Pacific

The war came to its inevitable conclusion, hastened by the atomic bomb. The outcome of the war was never in doubt: American industrial capacity was 17 times that of Japan. Japanese strategy had relied on the United States being willing to talk peace after the devastating loss of the warships at Pearl Harbour and the surrender of the Philippines. When the Americans

refused to do so and moved to all out war on Japan, victory was assured. The final defeat of Japan resulted in another great loss of prestige by the military and, when the United States occupied Japan, though not quite welcomed as liberators, they were not met with the sullen hatred expected of the fanatical Japanese.

The last military Prime Minister of Japan, General Tojo Hideki, was put on trial as a war criminal. He had been Minister for War during the Rape of Nanking and was held responsible for many of the atrocities committed by Japan in World War II. When he was hanged, the last Shogun of Japan died.

Summary

The Second World War left the Japanese people with a very damaged reputation. The sinking of the Australian Hospital Ship *Centaur* off the Queensland coast is often thought of as being a typical Japanese action. This and other atrocities carried out by the Japanese military against civilian populations and prisoners of war are felt by many to be due to a basic racial defect in the Japanese. At the very least, the problem is thought to be due to the Japanese having not got beyond an essentially medieval culture by World War II.

In this paper, I have tried to show that, in fact, in the 1930's, Japanese society was increasingly captured by a military and civilian Fascist movement. These Japanese Fascists feared that Japan had been subverted by 80 years of Western influence, and that the Sacred Race would be lost. They looked back to what they perceived as a golden age of the Japanese Shogunate when Japan was pure and untouched by Western influence. The ethos of the Shogunate, a dictatorship, was of the military virtues of loyalty, discipline and heroic death which coincided with the values espoused by the Fascist movement. This effort by the Fascists to return Japanese society to the past, taken out of historical context, resulted in major changes in Japanese attitudes and practices. Prior to the Fascist takeover, the Japanese had, for example, the largest Red Cross Society in the world and Japanese treatment of prisoners of war in the beginning of the 20th century was exemplary.

Like other Salvationist movements: the German Nazis, the Russian Bolsheviks, the present day Arab Islamists or the Christian Church of the Middle Ages, the Japanese Fascists believed it was necessary to be ruthless in order to achieve their objectives. The reputation of the Japanese people in general suffered because there were no identifiable persons or subgroups, such as Adolph Hitler and the Nazis in Germany, Joseph Stalin and the Communists in the USSR, or Osama bin Laden and Al'Qaeda of today to otherwise bear responsibility.

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