# Examine the circumstances behind the Japanese decision to enter into the First World War and assess the consequences for Japan and other countries in the region

## Nicole Lee, F5 Delonix

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In 1914, Japan entered the First World War with an alliance with Great Britain because of the Anglo-Japanese treaty. The circumstances that allowed Japan to enter the WW1 reflected strongly on the consequences of the war. These consequences also affected countries around the region, such as Korea and China. In this essay, I am going to show the circumstances behind Japanese’s decision of entering WW1, and I will show the positive and negative consequences on Japan and nearby regions.

The first circumstance that allowed Japan to enter the WW1 is modernization from the Meiji era. They aimed to become successful in political, economic, social and cultural aspects. They realized they needed to catch up with other countries such as Great Britain and USA, which were under Industrial Revolution. This started in 1868 with the proclamation of the “five Articles of the Charter Oath”. The five oaths included having open discussion, breaking social classes and evil customs, sending people to all around the world to learn different skills. This movement had three slogans. First is ”rich country, strong military”. This shows that they are aiming to expand their economy and military forces. This was executed by sending students to learn skills overseas, which was included in the Five Oaths. The students learned about western technology and brought this knowledge back to their homeland. Along with this slogan there was “promotion of industry”, which was crucial in making a stronger economy. To industrialize the country would help they to increase productivity and efficiency, there will be more consumers because industrialization lower the cost of products. The last slogan “civilization and enlightenment” was to encourage Japanese people to embrace foreign cultures so they can become a modern country. To help Japanese people to adapt to foreign cultures, they started with clothing, food and customs. They started using tables, which were not a traditional Japanese custom. They wore Western style clothing and hairstyles. They also adapted drinking beer in their diet. Modernization has helped Japanese decision to enter the WW1 because it directly affects their need of lebensraum.

As modernization was on going in Japan, their economy and industry expanded quickly. People who went overseas to learn new skills brought home their knowledge and started to construct their own industries. The economy expanded because of the increase of productivity. This lead to high population growth in Japan. They were running out of both space and natural resources. While this problem was on going, they signed a treaty in alliance with Britain. This gave them an opportunity to gain territories in WW1. They had the desperate need of lebensraum, they were also at an advantage because they were fighting along side with the Great Britain, which was still the most powerful country at that time.

On top of all these reasons, the Japanese wanted to take revenge on Germany for Triple intervention. They were one of the three countries that helped to force Japan to give Liaodong back to China. This area was important to the Japanese because they had natural resources that Japan could use. The Kaiser of Germany also once referred the Japanese as the “yellow peril”, this hurt their pride deeply. Japanese people value honour and pride very much. In traditional Japanese customs. The samurai will have to kill himself if he did not fulfill his orders. This shows their perspective on the pride of a soldier and the importance to take revenge.

The consequences that came after WW1 had both positives and negatives. Firstly, they gained numerous of territories in the region. For example. They captured the areas which was once Germany’s territories. Such as Shandong, Qingdao, Micronesia, Mariana, Caroline, and Marshall islands. Capturing these territories helped them to take revenge on Germany, also increase lebensraum for Japanese people. they had a minimal number of casualties, losing 2000 solidiers. Comparing to Germany, which lost a million, they were doing much better than other countries. They also proved themselves to the western countries, as the first Asian country that had power to defeat a western country like Russia. They had gained the honor to be equally respected with the Big Four, and gaining a place in the League of Nations.

The war also helped to boost Japan’s economy. Since Japan has gained their pride, the people increased their productivity. This helped to diversify the country’s industry and increased exports. They turned from being a debtor to a creditor. Instead of relying and owing other country money, they were they ones that were so rich that they could lend money. This only lasted for a short period of time.

With the wartime boom in the city, it led to rice riots in rural area and inflation. the wages of the workers in the city were increasing, therefore, so did the price of food. while people in the city who were workers were able to afford food and necessities, people who live in the country side weren’t experiencing the same thing. They were still earning the same amount of money as they were, but since the price of necessities has gone up, they were not able to afford them. this led to rice riots in major cities, the people of Japan were demanding to have what they need. Therefore, the wartime boom did not last long.

Japan gained a degree of status and power on a international level. However, they were still under pressure of western powers. During the peace conference in Paris, USA showed a negative reaction towards the 21 demands, therefore they were forced to change some details to maintain a good relationship with other countries. During the Washington conference, japan also had to conform under the pressure of four other countries to sign the five power treaty, which was unfair towards Japanese. They retrained Japan’s naval force by reducing their total tonnage of capital ships. While the Great Britain and USA had the ratio of 5, Japan only had 3. The naval force was very important to Japan. Japan is an island, which needs to be protected from China and Pacific ocean. Therefore, reducing their naval force build tension between Japan and western powers. Their pride was also damaged, because they felt like all they had accomplished during modernization and WW1 was now all gone. Their anti – western hostility was growing.

Although they had power in the League of nations, when japan purposed having racial equality to the council, the proposal was rejected. The countries that rejected them were USA, Great Britain and Australia. This deepens their damage to their pride.

China was perhaps the most affected country by Japanese. Japan’s occupation in Shandong had influence on the May Fourth movement. During WW1, China was aligned with Great Britain and Japanese fighting against Germany. They had an agreement that if they won the war, they would have Shandong again. This area was significant to Chinese people. it was the birthplace of the great lecturer Confucius. They wanted this area because they believed it was the origin and base of Chinese culture. During WW1, the Japanese took over this territory, which was once Germany’s in 1914. After WW1, in the peace conference in Paris, Japan purposed 21 demands, although some parts of the treaty were too extreme and they were forced to change some details, all the other countries involved in the conference agreed to let Japan keep the territory. This made China furious. The May Fourth movement demonstrated China’s nationalism and anger towards Japanese. This created tension between these two countries, which had influence on WW2.

Japan’s influence on Korea began before WW1, they were occupied by the Japanese from 1910 to 1945. Korea was under pressure from both China and Japan. Korea were always seen as being a “little brother” to China, they always turned to China when they needed protection. On the other hand, Japan was rising rapidly from modernization. When China was defeated in the Sino – Japanese war, Korea was than easily occupied by Japan. The members of the royal family were assassinated, Japanese government took over and forced their customs onto Koreans. They were banned from learning Korean language, historical documents were burnt, they were forced to adapt Japanese customs. WW1 stirred up a riot in Korea. In the peace conference of Paris, Korea claimed themselves to be a self governed country. The Japanese ignored their claim. Therefore, students in Seoul stirred up demonstration for their independence, the Japanese captured thousands of students. Some of them died from being tortured and beatings.

Japan’s decision to enter WW1 were logical based on their circumstances. However, the consequences that came after the war threatened their positions in colonies, such as May Fourth movement and demonstrations in Seoul. It only helped japan for a short period of time, it led to more problems than it had before the war.

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