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US and Japan: From Enemies to Allies- A Study of Reconstruction and Diplomacy

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Letters and English Language in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Language and Culture

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Dedication

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Abstract

The relationship between the U.S. and Japan has changed dramatically, transitioning from wartime hostility to a long-term alliance. This dissertation examines the evolution of U.S.-Japan relations from World War II to the postwar period, focusing on the American occupation, Japan's reconstruction, and the formation of a strategic partnership during the Cold War. The political and economic reforms implemented between 1945 and 1952, as well as the signing of the 1951 Treaty of San Francisco and the establishment of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, were critical to this transformation.

The study focuses on how American-led democratization and economic revitalization reshaped Japan's domestic landscape, laying the groundwork for future cooperation. The Cold War's geopolitical pressures also accelerated the alignment of interests between the two countries. The work argues that these intertwined factors—reconstruction, reform, and strategic necessity—were instrumental in converting a former enemy into a key ally, shaping a bilateral relationship that remains vital to international politics today.

الملخص

شهدت العلاقة بين الولايات المتحدة واليابان تحولًا جذريًا، حيث انتقلت من العداء خلال الحرب إلى تحالف طويل الأمد. تتناول هذه الرسالة تطور العلاقات الأمريكية اليابانية من الحرب العالمية الثانية إلى فترة ما بعد الحرب، مع التركيز على الاحتلال الأمريكي، وإعادة إعمار اليابان، وتشكيل شراكة استراتيجية خلال الحرب الباردة. وقد كانت الإصلاحات السياسية والاقتصادية التي نُفذت بين عامي 1945 و1952، إلى جانب توقيع معاهدة سان فرانسيسكو عام 1951، وإنشاء معاهدة الأمن بين الولايات المتحدة واليابان، عوامل حاسمة في هذا التحول

تركز الدراسة على كيفية إعادة تشكيل المشهد الداخلي لليابان من خلال جهود المقرطة والتنشيط الاقتصادي التي قادتها الولايات المتحدة، مما مهد الطريق للتعاون المستقبلي. كما ساهمت الضغوط الجيوسياسية للحرب الباردة في تسريع تقارب المصالح بين البلدين. وتُبرز هذه الرسالة أن هذه العوامل المتداخلة—الإعمار، والإصلاح، والضرورة الاستراتيجية—لعبت دورًا حاسمًا في تحويل عدو سابق إلى حليف استراتيجي، مما أسس لعلاقة ثنائية لا تزال تحتل موقعًا محوريًا في السياسة الدولية حتى اليوم

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviation	Full Name
U.S.	United States
B-29	Boeing B-29 Superfortress (U.S. strategic bomber aircraft)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
G5	East Group of Five (Japan, U.S., West Germany, France, and United Kingdom)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMTFE	International Military Tribunal for the Far
JSP	Japan Socialist Party
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
MITI	Ministry of International Trade and Industry
NSC	National Security Council
SCAP	Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers
TNT	Trinitrotoluene (a chemical explosive)
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union)
VERs	Voluntary Export Restraints
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

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Introduction

The transformation of U.S–Japan relations from wartime hostility to strategic alliance stands as one of the most striking geopolitical reversals of the 20th century. Between the 1930s and the 1990s, Japan moved from imperial expansion to postwar reconstruction and integration into a U.S.-led international order. Central to this shift was not only Japan's internal evolution, but also the decisive role played by the U.S. in reshaping Japan's political, economic, and military structures. While this course is often celebrated as a story of democratic reform and economic revival, closer examination reveals a more complex reality, one shaped by externally imposed reforms, constrained sovereignty, Cold War calculations, and political passivity under American strategic dominance.

This dissertation investigates how U.S power influenced Japan's postwar history moving beyond narratives of equal partnership to critically assess the nature of the alliance. It asks:

- How did the U.S. Japan relations shift ?
- Was the transformation of Japan a mutual process, or one largely driven by American interests?
- How did the U.S. project its vision for Japan's future, and to what extent did Japan retain agency in this process?
- Was the U.S–Japan relationship after World War II defined more by cooperation or by control ?

These questions point to a broader problem: how global power, particularly during the Cold War, shaped the reconstruction of defeated nations and embedded long-term strategic dependencies.

To explore these issues, the dissertation is organized into three chapters, each contributing to a comprehensive historical and analytical study. The methodology draws on a mix of primary sources, including official documents, articles, and political speeches, and a wide body of secondary literature on U.S.–Japan relations. Rather than simply recounting historical events, the analysis focuses on uncovering the motivations, consequences, and asymmetries of postwar power.

Chapter One provides historical context, tracing Japan's rise from the isolated Edo Period of the Tokugawa Shogunate to the Meiji Restoration to its prewar imperial expansion. It examines Japan's modernization, military victories, and growing regional ambitions, which challenged Western dominance and eventually led to conflict with the U.S. The chapter ends with Japan's alliance with the Axis powers and the deterioration of U.S.–Japan relations, culminating in the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Chapter Two analyzes the war and occupation years, focusing on the American response to Japanese aggression and the decision to use atomic weapons. It considers the military and political calculations behind the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and explores their long-term consequences. The chapter then turns to the led occupation (1945–1952), examining how the U.S. sought to reshape Japan's institutions, society, and economy through constitutional reform, demilitarization, and democratization. It also explores how Cold War pressures gradually redirected these reforms toward stability and anti-communism, reflecting American strategic concerns more than Japan's internal development.

Chapter Three examines Japan's post-occupation political evolution from 1952 to the end of the Cold War. It focuses on the consolidation of power by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), backed indirectly by American support, and the suppression of left-wing opposition. The chapter also assesses Japan's dependent role in the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty, its

constrained foreign policy, and its emergence as an economic power within limits set by the alliance. Despite some efforts at diplomatic independence and regional engagement, Japan's strategic direction remained closely aligned with American objectives.

This dissertation argues that the transformation of U.S.–Japan relations after World War II was driven more by American geopolitical strategy than by equal cooperation. It contends that Japan's postwar recovery and democratization were structured within a framework of dependency, shaped by Cold War imperatives and U.S. global ambitions. The alliance, while stable and productive in many ways, masked enduring imbalances in power and influence.

By tracing the arc from wartime destruction to Cold War partnership, this study contributes to broader debates on sovereignty, postwar order, and the costs of strategic alliance. It offers a critical perspective not only on U.S.–Japan relations, but also on the mechanisms through which dominant powers shape the destinies of others in the name of peace and reconstruction.

A thorough understanding of how U.S-Japan relations transitioned from wartime adversaries to postwar allies will depend on the engagement of the analyses of a few serious scholars, especially when examining the occupation, Japan's reconstruction, and geopolitical imperatives of the Cold War. John W. Dower's Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II (1999) is one of the most influential works on the topic. Not only provides a comprehensive historical account of Japan during the U.S. occupation, but his own unique approach is attention grabbing in regards to how Japanese society dealt with this defeat, how American inspired reforms were instituted, and the accompanying psychological and cultural transformations in implementing democratization.

Ellis S. Krauss and Robert J. Pekkanen's The Rise and Fall of Japan's LDP: Political Party Organizations as Historical Institutions (2011) provides a groundbreaking institutional

analysis of how Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) kept supremacy from 1955 to 2009, before briefly losing power. Using historical institutionalism and detailed case studies, the authors argue that the LDP's adaptive organizational structure, especially its factional system and clientelist networks, initially ensured stability but eventually contributed to its demise as electoral reforms and shifting public demands eroded its traditional support base. While the book is praised for its careful approach and extensive empirical evidence, several opponents argue that it underestimates the impact of leadership, external shocks, and ideological shifts in the LDP's trajectory.

Marius Jansen's The Making of Modern Japan (2000) is a classic, clearly written description of Japan's evolution from feudal isolation to modern power, expertly mixing political, intellectual, and cultural history. While his focus on elite decision-makers and institutional reforms provides incomparable insight into Japan's top-down modernization. Jansen's large work remains the most imposing single-volume history of modern Japan, connecting the gap between older institutional studies and newer critical approaches, even as contemporary scholars increasingly supplement it with works emphasizing basics perspectives and postcolonial critiques.

In addition, Michael Schaller's The American Occupation of Japan: The Origins of the Cold War in Asia (1985) offers a geopolitical perspective, illustrating how the Cold War influenced U.S. policy toward Japan. Schaller argued that the initial focus on demilitarization and democratization gradually gave the way to a strategy of economic revival and anti-communist alliance building, especially the Korean War started in 1950.

Finally, Andrew Gordon's A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present (2014) discussed Japan's postwar transformation within its broader historical path, illustrating how the occupation reforms built upon, and in some cases, radically departed from prewar political and economic structures.

Together, these works demonstrate that the U.S Japan alliance was not truely an alliance through a combination of imposed reforms, strategic Cold War calculations, and Japan's own agency in embracing ,or resisting, postwar changes. The literature emphasizes that while American power shaped Japan's reconstruction, Japanese leaders and society played an active role in redefining their nation's position in the new international order.

Chapter One

Japan's Historical Background

Through the decades Japan's history has witnessed many events that characterized its history to be a remarkable story of adaptation, resilience, and transformation in their social, cultural, and economic life. This chapter tends to follow the historical background of Japan through different periods starting from the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1868) when Japan was isolated and governed by the feudal system to the transformation during the Meji restoration that affected all aspects of feudalism and helped Japan to be open to the world. A great importance will be also given to Japan's role in the WWI, an important episode that it shaped its international position.

1.2 Japan's Geographical Location

Japan is an island country located in the east coast of Asia. It consists of a great chain of islands in a northeast-southwest arc that is spread for approximately 2,400 km through the Western North Pacific Ocean. The four main islands of the country take the entire land area; from north to south these are Hokkaido (Hokkaidō), Honshu (Honshū), Shikoku, and Kyushu (Kyūshū). Also, there are smaller islands, the major groups are the Ryukyu (Nansei) Islands (including the island of Okinawa) to the south and west of Kyushu and the Izu, Bonin (Ogasawara), and Volcano (Kazan) islands to the south and east of central Honshu. The national capital, Tokyo (Tōkyō), in east-central Honshu, is one of the world's most populous cities, and a large racial and homogeneous population. Japan is exposed to natural disasters due to its geographical position, which is covered with mountains and volcanoes, 60 of them are active, and also three of the tectonic plates meet nearby, causing more than a thousand earthquakes every year (Latz et al.). Despite the fact that the land was harsh land scape that made mountainous land and generally poor soils, it made it possible to raise a multi kinds of agriculture.

Fig. 1. Japan's Geographical Location

Source: Latz et al. Japan. https://www.britannica.com/place/Japan 19 March 2025

1.3 Historical Background

This part will be about the early history of Japan that started from the Edo Period when Japan was an isolated nation, under the Tokugawa shogunate (The Edo Period) rule (1603-1868), the system of government was feudal with military leadership (the governments of samurai). This feudal system granted the Daimyo (regional lords) the authority to govern their territories under the oversight of the Shogunate, the ultimate ruler of Japan. It established a centralized authority that contributed to cultural and economic flourishing, as well as overall stability in the country (Ohno 21).

1.3.1 The Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1868) and its Social System

The Tokugawa system established a balance between centralized government and regional autonomy by giving daimyo enough power to govern their domains while ensuring they could

not challenge the supreme power of the shogunate (Jansen 34). The shogun held ultimate authority, keeping a check on the daimyo as long as they remained loyal. Japanese society was divided into a rigid four-class hierarchy called *shi-nō-kō-shō* (士農工商). The samurai, the top class, served as the ruling military and administrative elite under the shogun or daimyo.

The second-class farmers, were vital to the economy as rice production was both a food source and a form of currency. Artisans, the third class, produced essential goods. While merchants, the lowest class, engaged in trade and commerce. Despite being looked down upon for not producing tangible goods, merchants grew increasingly wealthy over time (Totman 250-251).

Although Tokugawa Japan was pacified and bureaucratized, it was not entirely unified. The daimyo maintained self-governing within their domains, including their own administrative systems, military forces, and economic policies, despite their reliance on the shogunate's approval. Edwin O. Reischauer's concept of "centralized feudalism" captures the paradox at the heart of Tokugawa Japan's political system, which was neither entirely centralized nor purely feudal. Although Tokugawa Japan appeared quiet and bureaucratic, it was not politically unified. The daimyo governed their domains with significant autonomy—they maintained their own armies, levied taxes, and enforced local laws—despite being nominally subordinate to the Shogun (Jansen 33). Reischauer used the term "centralized feudalism" to describe this hybrid structure, where regional lords exercised considerable freedom while remaining under the overarching authority of the Shogunate.

1.3.2 Isolation Policy

Unlike European nations and China, which adopted colonization to expand their influence, Japan adopted a self-imposed isolation known as sakoku, focusing on internal stability and protection from external threats, especially Christianity and colonial powers. Foreign trade was restricted, with limited exchanges occurring at Dejima, a small island in

Nagasaki harbor, where Dutch and Chinese merchants were allowed. Japanese citizens were prohibited from traveling abroad, and foreigners were banned from entering the country, except for minor allied relations with the Ryukyu Kingdom (modern Okinawa) and Korea (Reischauer 110). This isolation boosted a strong resistance to foreign cultural influences, a legacy that lasted into the 20th century.

Fig. 2. Nagasaki.

Source : https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Nagasaki/312629. Accessed 20 mars 2025.

However, the emphasis on agriculture and internal development initiated economic progress in the country. While the feudal political system remained stable, societal changes continued to spread. The Tokugawa shogunate's strict control over foreign interactions reinforced internal cohesion and cultural protection. This approach allowed Japan to maintain its independence while gradually advanced cultivating in various aspects of life (Reischauer

110). Thus, despite limited external engagement, Japan's focus on internal growth assisted with a unique path of development during this period.

The Tokugawa system was based on an ideal view of society where each social class had a fixed role. However, its rigid structure caused conflicts, especially as economic shifts started to weaken these traditional divisions (Jansen 56). The Tokugawa shogunate maintained a strict social hierarchy in which each class samurai, farmers, artisans, and merchants had specified roles. The unequal system was meant to ensure stability, however over time, economic growth and urbanization eliminated these class separations. As merchants gained wealth and samurai faced financial struggles, the traditional order weakened, creating social tensions that assisted to the eventual decline of the Tokugawa regime.

1.3.3 Factors of the Collapse of Shogunate

Jansen in his book stated that despite the rule for over two centuries economic growth and inner peace, the Tokugawa shogunate system begun to collapse when it failed to keep control over Japan and its inability to adapt new economic realities when it faced both internal issues from the social classes, and external pressure and foreign threats from the western powers (297).

One of the key internal factors contributing to the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate was its governmental structure, which, although successful in maintaining peace and stability during the Edo period, gradually began to weaken after over two centuries. Tensions among social classes intensified, particularly as the rigid class hierarchy restricted upward mobility. Members of the lower classes—such as merchants, peasants, and artisans—began to rise in influence, especially as Japan started to open to the outside world and new economic opportunities emerged (Masamoto et al.).

The situation deteriorated further when Japan, after more than two centuries of isolation, faced increasing pressure from Western powers to open its ports. This led to the signing of unequal treaties that granted special privileges to foreigners, triggering widespread economic disruption and public discontent. Many samurai, who had lost their traditional privileges, grew increasingly resentful and joined in the resistance. Regional clans began to align against the Shogunate, while popular support for the emperor as a symbol of national unity continued to grow (Masamoto et al.).

The Treaty of Kanagawa, signed in 1854 between Japan and the U.S., marked the beginning of the end of Japan's long-standing policy of isolation. The treaty was concluded under pressure from U.S. Commodore Matthew C. Perry, who arrived with a fleet of warships to demand access to Japanese ports. It granted American vessels the right to enter the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate, initiating Japan's gradual integration into the global economy. This opening provided new opportunities for members of the lower classes—such as merchants and artisans—to engage in international trade. However, the combination of foreign pressure and unresolved internal tensions ultimately culminated in the Boshin War (1868–1869) ("The Fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate and the Meiji Restoration").

This civil conflict pitted the supporters of the emperor, including many disaffected samurai and nobles, against the weakened Tokugawa regime. Despite resistance, the Shogunate was unable to withstand the military and political momentum of the imperial faction. The victory of the emperor's forces marked the definitive end of over two centuries of Tokugawa rule and ushered in the Meiji Restoration, a period of rapid modernization and adoption of Western political and social structures ("The Fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate and the Meiji Restoration").

1.2 The Meiji Restorations (1868-1912)

The Meiji Restoration of 1868 played a crucial role in Japan's history, symbolizing the end of Tokugawa rule and the establishment of the new centralized government that had come to Japan with a rapid national development. It established after decades of political struggle to the opening of Japan by force to the West. It was driven by factors such as loyalist sentiments, financial instability, Western pressure, and the rise of reform-minded leaders from the samurai class. Despite different interpretations, the Meiji Restoration remains central to understanding Japan's modernization and its response to internal and external pressures during the late 19th century (Sakata and Hall 31-32).

The Meiji era took place in 1868, taking its name from the emperor Meiji, it was officially restoring imperial rule under Emperor Meiji. A group of aspirational young samurai from kingdoms such as Satsuma, Chōshū, and Tosa made extensive reforms to modernize Japan, while the emperor himself shifted from being a symbolic figure to a central figure and restored political powers to him that led Japan to adopt imperialistic policies to have territories such as Taiwan, Korea, and parts of China ("The Meiji Restoration").

3.1. The Meiji Restorations and Reforms

In his notable book, The Economic Development of Japan, William W. Lockwood an American academic, stated that the Meiji government enforced a mass reform across multiple sectors, relying on foreign proficiency and models. The military (army and navy), education, legal system, public health, and civil administration were all modernized. Additionally, Meiji leaders took direct initiative in industrial and financial development, establishing new institutions such as a centralized tax system, banks, insurance firms, railways, steamship lines, postal and telegraph networks, and industrial factories (9). This era came as a response to western imperialism by adopting its technology and institutions but keeping the Japanese sovereignty.

3.1.1. The Charter Oath

The Charter Oath, statement of principle issued on April 6, 1868, by the emperor Meji after the imperial family overthrew the Tokugawa Shogunate. It included five key principles. First, deliberative assemblies shall be established on an extensive scale, and all governmental matters shall be determined by public discussion. Second, all classes, high and low, shall unite to carry out vigorously the plan of government. Third, all classes shall be permitted to fulfill their just aspirations so that there will be no discontent. Fourth, evil customs of the past shall be discontinued, and new customs shall be based on the just laws of nature. Fifth, knowledge shall be sought throughout the world in order to promote the welfare of the empire ("Charter Oath").

These principles aimed to encourage national unity under a centralized government andwelcomed innovation and development; giving the chance to all classes to participate making a collective decision for improving international connection for the strength of the empire. It also called for the abolition of the old system traditions. For the Meji Restorations, plans were set for political, social, and economic changes, making Japan able to interact with western nation equally. The oath acted as "a declaration of intent to modernize Japan through collective effort and innovation" (Totman 147).

3.1.2. Political Reforms

One of the major problems that faced the Japanese society during the Edo period was the unequal social classes, the Meji Restoration sought to end this unequal class system by creating a better social mobility with fair traits. The establishment of the prefecture system abolished Japan's feudal domains and introduced a centralized administration based on Western-style governance (Sansom 432).

Every country is governed by a constitution that establishes the legal foundation of its political system. Japan's Meiji Constitution, promulgated in 1889 and enacted in 1890, was a pivotal step in the nation's efforts to modernize. Influenced by Western constitutional

models—particularly those of Prussia and Britain—the Meiji Constitution reflected Japan's aim to consolidate its sovereignty and avoid colonization by Western powers ("The Meiji Constitution"). Its adoption demonstrated Japan's effort to strike a balance between embracing modern legal and political structures and preserving traditional hierarchies.

One of the features that came into this new constitution was the declaration that gave the emperor the full and ultimate power and authority over the government and military as the supreme ruler, as Article 4 of the constitution stated: "The Emperor is sacred and inviolable" (qtd in. Beasley 112). Unlike the former system the new constitution gave the ultimate authority to the emperor to be the supreme ruler over the country.

The parliamentary system was similar to the British parliament; it was a bicameral legislature parliament called The Imperial Diet composed of House of Representatives and House Peers that could legislate and pass law, however its power was limited due to the authority of the Emperor who had the supreme ruler to have the final decision to approve or veto the legislation. This ensured that the real power was in the emperor's hands, and the system was not fully democratized. Despite the difference and the tensions between the two houses, the bicameral legislative system helped balancing the conflicting interests and increased the presence of the representative democracy in Japan, the state that helped to create a framework for contemporary governance (Jansen 201).

The Meiji Constitution laid the foundation for Japan's modern legal and political systems but has also been criticized for its authoritarian tendencies. It was replaced by the post-World War II Constitution of Japan in 1947, which emphasized pacifism, democracy, and human rights. Despite its flaws, the Meiji Constitution is credited with transforming Japan into a modern state capable of competing on the global stage (Dower 34).

3.1.2. Economic Reforms

The reforms of Japan's economy started in 1871 after the abolition of the feudalsystem that was based mostly on agriculture, measuring the country wealth on land and the rice production in which rice was considered as a currency not money. After the Meiji government cancelled the feudal domains in 1871 and replaced them with a centralized state, the Land Tax Reform that was in 1873 introduced tax system based on cash, to shift from the traditional rice-based taxation (Beasley 62). This reform promoted the economy and provided the government with a stable income source.

First, the feudal system relied mostly on agriculture and especially on rice production not only as food but as a sign of wealth measured in Koku and also used as a currency to pay, however this wealth was restricted only for samurai who were paid with rice and lived in castle towns near to their lords to protect their lands. The restoration came to establish a new taxation based on paying with a real currency creating a stable income and boosting the economy. Second, in the first fifteen years the Japanese government prioritized building both social and industrial basis for modernization. State budgets were oriented into infrastructure projects (Sumikawa 9).

Admitting the lack of private investors with sufficient budget or willingness to undertake large scale projects, the government took the lead. It distributed significant percentage of the national budget to adopt Western technology and hire foreign specialists to create modern industrial factory (Sumikawa 9). This approach proved essential for Japan's rapid transformation, as private enterprise alone could not achieve such quick modernization.

3.1.3 Military

One of the most significant transformations of the Meiji Restoration was the establishment of a national army in 1873, which marked a decisive step in Japan’s modernization. The new military system, influenced by Western models, particularly those of

Europe, aimed to move away from reliance on the traditional samurai class. The government introduced universal male conscription, requiring all men to serve, thereby democratizing military service, and reinforcing national unity through a strong emphasis on loyalty to the emperor and the state. This shift recognized the strategic importance of maintaining a modern, professional army to protect Japan's sovereignty on the international stage (Jansen 348–351).

The military reform was arguably the most profound change during the Meiji period, as it directly challenged the samurai's privileged position. Although many samurai opposed the new system, fearing the loss of their status and influence, the government remained committed to its reform agenda, viewing military modernization as essential to safeguarding Japan's national security and international prestige.

The sweeping reforms of the Meiji period enabled Japan to break away from its traditional feudal structure and transition into a modern nation-state. This rapid modernization not only strengthened Japan internally but also laid the foundation for a shift in focus toward external expansion—one of the central objectives of Meiji-era leadership. Yamagata Aritomo, a key figure and Prime Minister during this time, argued that Japan needed to extend its influence beyond its borders to ensure national security, especially in the face of growing threats from neighboring powers. The eastward expansion of the Russian Romanov Empire was perceived as the most significant threat to Japan during the late Meiji period. In response, Japan aimed to establish "a line of interest" beyond its territory, particularly by bringing Korea under its sphere of influence as a strategic buffer zone (Ohno 73).

Japan's desire to establish a "line of interest" beyond its borders, particularly in Korea, soon brought it into direct conflict with another regional power: Qing China. While Japan viewed Korea as essential to its national security and influence, China had long considered the Korean Peninsula part of its traditional sphere of influence. As Japan's modernization advanced and its ambitions grew, tensions between the two nations escalated. These

competing interests over Korea set the stage for a decisive military confrontation—the First Sino-Japanese War—which would not only test the strength of Japan's newly reformed military but also mark a turning point in East Asian geopolitics.

1. The First Sino-Japanese War

In the late 19th century Korea became a battlefield for imperial competition between Japan and China, as they both wanted to dominate. In 1876, Japan, using Western strategies, deprived Korea of its economic sovereignty and imposed unfair treaties, forcing Korea to open its ports using military threats. Japan wanted to stop China's dominance over the peninsula and economically use Korea under the pretended modernization. China fought Japan's advance. Yuan Shikai and Chinese officials modernized China's strategy by controlling infrastructure and intervening financially. The Treaty of Tianjin in 1885 temporarily reduced tensions, but the Sino-Japanese War in 1894–1895 revived enmity (Kim 4-6).

4.1 The Struggle for Korea

China saw itself as the cultural center of Asia and had been a dominant power there for centuries. However, as Europe and North America rose as global powers, they introduced new forms about modernization, industry, and trade, while expanding their influence through imperial control. This shift created a new global power structure centered in the West. China's weakness compared to Western powers became clear during conflicts like the Opium Wars with Britain 1839–42 and 1856–60 and the Sino-French War 1884–85, which increased Chinese interests about foreign invasion. Before these wars, China and Japan tried to avoid conflict by signing the Tianjin Convention in 1885, agreeing to withdraw their troops from Korea. However, when Korean farmers rebelled in 1894 and the Korean king asked for help, China sent troops to Korea. This move angered Japan, especially after Japanese supported leader Kim Ok-Kyun was assassinated. After a government meeting, Japan believed China

had broken the Tianjin agreement. In response, Japan sent thousands of troops to Korea and offered assistance to China, when China refused, Japan's prime minister saw that "no policy but to go to war'' (Greve and Levy 159–160).

The First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) was a pivotal conflict between China and Japan, rooted in competing interests over Korea. Long regarded as a tributary state under Chinese influence, Korea attracted Japanese attention due to its strategic location near the Japanese archipelago and its valuable natural resources. Japan saw control over Korea as essential to its national security and regional dominance. Tensions intensified after Korea began to assert greater independence in its foreign relations—particularly following the 1875 Treaty of Ganghwa, which opened Korean ports to Japanese trade and marked a shift away from Chinese oversight. The war ultimately exposed the declining power of the Qing Dynasty and signaled the emergence of Japan as a modernized and influential global power ("First Sino-Japanese War").

4.2 The Direct Combat

War was officially declared on August 1, 1894. At the outset, many foreign observers assumed that China, with its larger army, would easily overpower Japan. However, Japan's modernized and well-organized military quickly proved superior in both land and naval combat. Despite having fewer troops, Japanese forces were better trained, equipped with modern weaponry, and operated with greater strategic coordination. By March 1895, Japan had successfully invaded key regions such as Manchuria and Shandong Province and had established control over vital maritime routes leading to Beijing. These victories forced China to sue for peace. The failure of Western powers to intervene or mediate effectively emboldened Japan to pursue its military objectives further. The defeat of Chinese forces, both on land and at sea, underscored the effectiveness of Japan's modernization and marked a

turning point in East Asian power dynamics (“First Sino-Japanese War“). Ultimately, China was compelled to accept defeat and sign a peace agreement.

4.3 The End of the War and the Treaty of Shimonoseki

Following China's defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, it was compelled to sign the Treaty of Shimonoseki, which imposed significant concessions. Under the treaty, China ceded Taiwan, the Penghu Islands, and the eastern part of the Liaodong Peninsula to Japan and recognized Korea’s independence. Additionally, four more ports—Shashi, Chongqing, Suzhou, and Hangzhou—were opened to Japanese trade, paving the way for Western powers to expand their commercial interests in China (Van Dijk 254–255). Japan’s victory shocked the world and marked its emergence as a major imperial power, prompting colonial powers to reassess their holdings in the Far East.

4.4 Sino Japanese War Outcomes

In The Making of Modern Japan, American historian Marius B. Jansen explains that Japan experienced a temporary economic boom following the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), driven by wartime spending, rising wages, and rapid industrial expansion (436). However, the postwar period soon brought economic depression, as the financial burden of securing new territories and maintaining regional influence strained national resources. Crucially, the large war indemnity imposed on China through the Treaty of Shimonoseki provided vital funding for previously stalled industrial projects (431). This influx of capital enabled the establishment of the Yawata steel plant, a landmark in Japan’s industrial development, even though it initially depended on Chinese raw materials (436). The financial gains from the war ultimately outweighed political resistance to large-scale industrialization, paving the way for transformative investments in Japan's heavy industry.

While the immediately following was economically in chaos, the compensation accelerated Japan's industrial growth. Yawata became a symbol of modernity despite ongoing

supply weaknesses. The battle also strengthened Japan's imperialist goals in East Asia. By investing war incomes on infrastructure, Japan established the foundation for long term industrial strength. Therefore, despite early challenges, the war pushed Japan toward becoming a modern industrial power.

Japan's military gained essential strategic, territorial, and ideological advantages from the Sino-Japanese War, which led to the permanent acquisition of Taiwan and the Liaodong Peninsula, growing Japan's imperial expansion in East Asia. Japan's military showed its expanding strength by defeating Qing forces, even though more soldiers died from disease than war, highlighting the need to improve military organization and hygiene. The victory also changed public perceptions of military service, helping to redefine it as an obligation for all male citizens rather than samurai. This state shaped a new sense of cultural and racial superiority over its Asian neighbors and a patriotic military identity through state sponsored media and popular culture and raised regular soldiers to the status of national heroes and strengthening Japan's national integration and imperial aims (Kyu Hyun 1-27).

The First Sino-Japanese War marked a turning point in East Asian geopolitics, displaying Japan's rise as a formidable imperial power and signaling the decline of Qing China's regional dominance. Through its decisive victory and the resulting Treaty of Shimonoseki, Japan not only gained significant territorial concessions and economic advantages but also earned international recognition as a modernized nation capable of challenging established powers. However, Japan's newfound influence soon brought it into conflict with another imperial contender in the region: Russia.

Fig. 3. Japan's Empire Year

Source: Darwin and Sidney, Year 9 History.https://year9hist.weebly.com/darwin-and-sydney.html 25 March 2025.

The map shows the terretories Japan gained after the first Sino-Japanese war in which they had spread their influence in the East of Asia, taking Manchuria, Korea, Taiwan, and Liaodong Peninsula, and other regions by signing the Treaty of Shimonoseki.

5. The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905)

After Japan defeated China and took control over the Far East, some European powers took into consideration how powerful Japan was, especially drawing Russian attention in

Korea and Manchuria with the intervention of European powers. The end of the Sino-Japanese war was the origin of the later conflict between Russia and Japan with the massive overextension of the Japanese military under the public support of the nation (Nish 21-22). The conflict would further redefine the balance of power in the region and affirm Japan's status on the world stage.

5.1 Before the War: Causes of the Conflict

The Russo- Japanese war was a pure imperialist war the only clash between great powers that was considered purely imperialistic. Japan's impressive modernization proved a successful protection from the Russian dominance in the Pacific. Thus, from the Japanese security viewpoint, this battle can only be described as with a term of no more than preventive imperialist war (Steinberg et al. 87).

By the end of the Sino-Japanese war, Japan found a great opportunity taking lead in the Far East. This progress threatened the Russian dominance which sought to stop this Japanese spread. With Russia, U.S., Britain, France, and Germany, the Japanese government was forced to express the terms of the war. After discussions, a group of powers was selected including Russia, France, and Germany but eliminated the U.S., Italy, and Britain. Japan was aware for the possibility for outside interventions and had to prepare for it. Russia led the triple intervention pressured Japan to return the Liaotung peninsula (including port Arthur), at that time Japan was already overloaded with the six months war efforts that made it afraid to make any extra move while considering (Nish 24).

Following the Triple Intervention, which successfully curtailed Japan's initial expansion, Japan was left humiliated and increasingly distrustful of foreign powers. Its suspicions were soon validated when Russia occupied Port Arthur—a valuable warm-water port vital for trade—thereby encroaching on Japanese interests in both China and Korea. Tensions escalated further as Russia extended its presence in Manchuria, constructing

railways that linked the region to its broader empire. In response, Japan sought a diplomatic resolution, proposing mutual recognition: Russian control over Manchuria in exchange for Japanese dominance in Korea. However, negotiations collapsed, and Japan concluded that containing Russian expansion would require military force if diplomacy failed (Minardi 8).

Japan was internationally recognized after Britain abandoned its long-standing policy of "splendid isolation" in 1902, when the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was signed. It aimed to stop Russian expansion in East Asia to preserve regional stability. Britain wisely wanted to spread its influence in the Far East, while Japan gained a powerful ally to enhance its position. They were collaborating on naval because of both nations' maritime capabilities. This agreement shaped the way for further agreements and became a crucial part of Asia's geopolitical dynamics in the 1900's (Nish 1).

1.2 The Direct Conflict and its Aftermath

Negotiations between Japan and Russia over their respective interests in Manchuria and Korea broke down. Aware of Russia's growing military presence in Manchuria, Japan launched a surprise attack on Russian warships anchored at Port Arthur on 6 February 1904, initiating the Russo-Japanese War two days later, on 8 February. This preemptive strike gave Japan a decisive advantage at sea. One of the most significant moments of the war came in May 1905, when the Russian Baltic Fleet arrived in the battle zone after an arduous seven-month journey, only to be decisively defeated by the Japanese navy in the Battle of Tsushima. This naval victory cemented Japan's maritime dominance and marked a turning point in the conflict. On land Japanese troops had also progressed. They took Dalian, and Port Arthur. Accordingly, Japan successfully had conquered about half of South Manchuria (Van Djik 431-435).

Britain during the Russo Japanese war remained neutral but kept its commitments to Japan as an ally, Japan also assured not to ask assistance from Britain only if necessary. Because

Japan was decided to act in its own, Britain avoided mediating the situation. It was ready to protect its own interests even if Russian naval movements required action. Japan was uncertain of the British public opinion, so it sought to clear any possible anti-Japanese feeling in the British press and defend its actions by claiming self-defense (Nish 283-284).

Russia and Japan, both weakened by the War, sought peace in 1905 through U.S. intervention. President Roosevelt mediated negotiations in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to restore regional stability. Japan wanted Korea, South Manchuria, Sakhalin Island, and reparations, while Russia refused payments and sought to keep its influence in the Pacific. Conflicts over Sakhalin stopped negotiations until Roosevelt suggested Japan to have southern Sakhalin without compensation. As a result, Japan had Korea, South Manchuria, and half of Sakhalin, while Russia restored its fleet with no reparations. The treaty terminated U.S.-Japan cooperation, which increased future tensions, but it also improved Russo-Japanese relations ("The Treaty of Portsmouth"). The war was short but effective causing a lot of changes in the world.

The Treaty of Portsmouth did not satisfy Japan and created a tensions and aggressions toward the west, for Russia the loss showed how fragile the system was leading to the inside revolution. Financially, both sides took international loans, after the big losses that happened due the use of modern, heavy, and deadly weapons. The victory made Japan more ambitious for later invasions and weakened the global powers showing that they could be beaten (Steinberg 19-23). Japan at the end of the war gained the rank of a great power, proving how the Meiji opening and modernizing strategy was effective (Soren 312).

2. Japan during World War l

World War I was one of the most significant events of the twentieth century—an international conflict that lasted from 1914 to 1918. It pitted the Allied Powers, including France, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, and Japan, against the Central Powers, primarily

Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. Most European nations were drawn into the war, along with Russia, the U.S., and parts of the Middle East. In 1917, the U.S. entered the war on the side of the Allies, a turning point that contributed to the eventual defeat of the Central Powers and the war's end in 1918. The scale of death, destruction, and human suffering was unprecedented (Showalter et al.). The following section focuses on Japan's role and actions during the First World War.

6.1 Before the War

After winning the Russo-Japanese war, Japan had no clear strategy; the army wanted to expand for security and resources, however, they were exhausted from the war costs. The government wanted a less focus on the army and preferred diplomacy. The army refused the civil commands, and the war minister stated that only the emperor had the supreme power, until the army found an excuse of Korea's need for more troops. Even though the government refusal, the army kept moving creating a tension between the army and civil authority (Drea 126-128).

The second Anglo-Japanese Alliance expanded upon the original agreement by affirming mutual support between the two powers in defending their respective territories and special interests in East Asia if either was attacked. This alliance also allowed Britain and Japan to jointly address challenges posed by other powers, particularly Germany, which had been a disruptive force in Far Eastern politics for the previous two decades. Japan harbored strong resentment toward Germany, especially after the Triple Intervention—led by Germany—which had forced Japan to relinquish Port Arthur (Treat 418–420). As a result, Japan saw Germany's presence in China as a threat and aimed to eliminate it as part of its evolving strategic goals

6.2 The Beginning of the War

The Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, and his wife were assassinated on June 28, 1914, by a Serbian terrorist. The leaders of Europe made a military, diplomatic, and political choices during the crisis that would lead to a world war. On July 28, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia with German support. Due to Russia's support of Serbia, France became part of the war too. Germany declared war on Russia, and then France. On August 4, Britain and its empire entered the war due to Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality and British fear about German dominance in Europe ("How the World Went to War In 1914").

During World War I, Japan sided with the United Kingdom. While the war was particularly in Europe, Japan took advantage and focused on spreading its influence on Asia and dominate its markets by occupying German territories because it supported Britain, France and Russia while quitting some crucial military operations. The campaign at Qingdao showed the weakness in aviation technology and logistical support of the Army, however, this operation helped to strengthen Japan's strategic position in China andand was an opportunity to develop its economy and military to be prepared for future conflicts (Drea 137-140). While the European imperialists concentrated on war and security in Europe Japan and the U.S. quickly increased their influence in the world especially Asia (Soren 312).

Despite internal debates, logistical challenges, and concerns about the impact of German propaganda, Japan chose to prioritize the defense of its regional interests in the Far East rather than deploying troops to Europe. Nevertheless, Japan played a significant military role early in the war. In 1914, during the Siege of Tsingtao, approximately 20,000 Japanese troops—supported by British forces—captured the German-controlled port of Qingdao. Japan also contributed by escorting Australian troop transports, patrolling the Pacific, and driving German naval forces out of the region and into the Atlantic, where they were destroyed by the British navy. The Japanese navy thus played a vital role in securing Allied dominance at sea.

Moreover, by October 1914, Japan had seized German possessions in the Pacific, establishing bases in the Marshall and Caroline Islands (Treat 421–425).

6.3 The War Aftermath

Soren Dosenrode, a Danish political scientist in his book World War I: The Great War and its Impact stated that after World War I, Japan saw significant economic, political, and social changes. Economically, Japan benefited from its limited engagement in the war, allowing it to focus on industrial growth and supplying goods to its allies. This increased exports and allowed Japan to convert from an importer to an exporter nation, which led to a major shift in its global economic status (312). Politically, Japan took advantage of Europe's weak position to increase its influence in Asia, by taking former German areas such as Shandong and then using military claims to defend its rapid expansion into Manchuria in 1931 and China in 1937. These imperial acts, which included crimes against civilians, further isolated Japan on the international stage. As one of the primary winners of World War I, with the U.S., Japan emerged with a broader international position, but one that set the foundation for future war and transition (Soren 313; 320).

In his notable book Japan and the League of Nations Empire and World Order, Thomas W. Burkman stated that Japan became a founding member of the League of Nations in 1920 and had one of the League Council's four permanent seats, indicating its early significance in international diplomacy.apanese diplomats actively participated in League issues, helping to establish the League Covenant and Geneva Protocol, develop disarmament programs, and resolve European boundary issues. Japan's early participation included attempts to promote racial equality, as indicated by its proposal for a racial equality the supply at the Paris Peace Conference, which was motivated by a desire for worldwide recognition and home confirmation of its standing as a world power (77).

Tensions escalated during the 1931 Manchurian Incident when the Japanese army in Manchuria acted without authorization from Tokyo, attempting to bomb railway lines. Neither the civilian government nor the emperor was able to restrain the military's actions. With the League of Nations unable to enforce its authority, Japan rejected the League's Lytton Report, which had invalidated its puppet state of Manchukuo. In defiance, the Japanese cabinet decided to withdraw from the League on February 20, 1933, and officially submitted its resignation on March 27. This marked a significant step toward diplomatic isolation, as Japan abandoned a vital platform for international dialogue and legitimacy. Diplomat Sugimura Yōtarō later referred to this decision as a grave diplomatic error that damaged Japan's global standing and ushered in a period of isolation. Although the League condemned Japan's bombing of Chinese civilians in 1937, Japan, no longer a member, disregarded the criticism—underscoring the League's diminished moral authority and its inability to contain Japanese militarism (Burkman 165; 208).

During World War I, Japan supported the Allies by seizing German colonies in Qingdao and the South Pacific, protecting Allied ships, hunting submarines in the Mediterranean, and sending 70,000 men to Siberia. Economically, Japan benefited from the war, as exports increased between 1914 and 1919, and the country achieved its first ever balance of payments surplus in 1916. Its new importance was recognized across the world, with Allied nations demanding Japanese military help; Japan's participation in the Paris Peace Conference marked its debut as a world force. Despite its huge contributions, Japan suffered minimal casualties, just over 2,000 deaths, demonstrating the gap in cost and benefit it faced compared to the main European belligerents (Dickinson 14-17; 40-41).

Fig. 4. World War I.

Source: Nintendo. https://worldhistoryarchive.wordpress.com/2018/03/13/world-war-i-1914-1918 . 20 March 2025.

Japan's history up to the First World War reflects a dramatic transformation from isolated feudal society to an emerging global power. During the Tokugawa Shogunate, Japan deliberately isolated itself from the outside world, limiting foreign access and focusing on internal stability and cultural consolidation during the Edo period. While this seclusion

restricted Japan’s international presence, it allowed for significant domestic development.(Nguyen 105)

This changed with the Meiji Restoration in the late 19th century, which marked a turning point in Japan’s political, social, and military modernization. The rapid reforms implemented under Emperor Meiji not only dismantled the old feudal structures but also positioned Japan on the global stage as a rising power. Victories in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and, more significantly, the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), shocked the Western world and demonstrated Japan’s capacity to challenge established powers. These achievements elevated Japan's status and opened the door for its recognition as a legitimate imperial player in East Asia.(‘’Meiji Restoration’’)++++++++

Japan’s role in World War I, though geographically distant from the main European battlefields, further solidified its international position. By seizing German-held territories in the Pacific and safeguarding Allied Sea routes, Japan presented itself as a valuable ally in maintaining regional order. However, the postwar period also sowed the seeds of disillusionment. Japan’s ambitions at the Paris Peace Conference were ignored or downplayed by the Western powers, fostering a sense of humiliation and mistrust(Best 132).

This frustration culminated in Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933, following international condemnation of its aggression in Manchuria. This act not only marked Japan’s diplomatic isolation but also symbolized the collapse of international cooperation in restraining rising militarism. In turning away from collective security, Japan set itself on a path toward renewed rivalries and future conflicts that would lead to the outbreak of the Second World War.

Thus, Japan’s journey up to World War I reflects both remarkable ascent and growing tensions, shaped by modernization, imperial ambition, and evolving global dynamics. Its

actions during this period laid the foundation for both its temporary success as a regional power and the deeper conflicts that were to come.

Chapter Two

The American Occupation of Japan (1945-1952)

The American occupation of Japan following World War II marked a crucial moment

in both Japanese and international history. From 1945 to 1952, Japan came under the authority of the Allied Powers, with the U.S. assuming primary control under the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur. This occupation followed a period of intense hostility between the two nations, who had been fierce enemies during the Pacific War, a conflict defined by devastating battles, deep mutual animosity, and the unprecedented use of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

This chapter begins by examining this wartime enmity before turning to the occupation itself, which was not merely a military presence, but a comprehensive effort to transform Japanese society, politics, and institutions. The goals were ambitious: to demilitarize Japan, democratize its government, and rebuild its economy in line with Western liberal values. At the same time, the occupation was shaped by emerging Cold War tensions, which shifted American priorities from punishment to reconstruction and alliance-building. The chapter also explores the complex process of occupation, highlighting the reforms implemented, the resistance and cooperation of the Japanese people, and the legacy of this unique period in U.S.-Japan relations.

Tensions between the two countries had been growing well before December 7, 1941. Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933, its invasion of Manchuria, and its wider military expansion in Asia challenged the Western-led global order. At the same time, the American response was shaped by both moral criticism and strategic interest. Although the U.S. condemned Japan's actions, it often ignored or tolerated similar behavior by European colonial powers in the region. Sanctions—especially the 1941 oil embargo—were meant to pressure Japan, but they also pushed it toward war, making the U.S. appear both as a defender of international rules and as a player in global power struggles (Rogers 12).

Rather than relying on a simple military narrative, it also examines key American decisions that shaped the course of the conflict. These include the response to Pearl Harbor,

wartime mobilization, the use of atomic bombs, and the goals of the postwar occupation. Each of these choices is considered in terms of both long-term impact and the tensions between values and strategy.

In the end, a question can be rised: how U.S. policy combined ideals of democracy with a desire for global influence, and how this blend helped reshape Japan into a Cold War partner. In doing so, it offers a deeper understanding of the complex forces that defined the modern U.S.–Japan relationship.

2.1. Japan's Entry into World War II and the Road to Pearl Harbor

By the late 1930s, Japan had fully committed to a policy of military expansion in Asia. This direction was fueled by economic insecurity, nationalist ideology, and a desire to become a major world power. In 1937, Japan launched a full-scale war against China, aiming to dominate the continent. The conflict was marked by widespread violence, including the Nanjing Massacre, which shocked the world but failed to bring a strong or united response from Western countries (Marcus 98-100).

Around the same time, Japan's ambitions began to align with the rise of fascist powers in Europe. In 1940, Japan signed the Tripartite Pact with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, forming the Axis Powers. This alliance was meant to discourage the U.S. from interfering with their growing empires (Dawsey). While Germany and Italy focused on Europe and North Africa, Japan turned toward Southeast Asia, hoping to control the region's key resources—especially oil, rubber, and tin.

Japan's move into French Indochina in mid-1941 raised tensions with the U.S. even further. In response, President Roosevelt's administration froze Japanese financial assets and placed an oil embargo on Japan, cutting off over 80% of its fuel supply. These actions were designed to apply economic pressure, but Japan saw them as hostile. Japanese leaders concluded that war with the U.S. might be necessary to protect their empire and avoid

economic collapse (Rogers 12).

Although diplomacy continued through the fall of 1941, neither side would back down. The U.S. insisted that Japan withdraw from China and Indochina—terms that Japan believed would destroy its status as a great power. At the same time, Japanese military leaders were already preparing a surprise attack. Their plan was to destroy the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, giving Japan time to take over Southeast Asia without facing immediate American military resistance (Hackler). On December 7, 1941, Japan launched its attack on Pearl Harbor, killing more than 2,400 Americans. The next day, the U.S. formally entered World War II.

2.2. "Day of Infamy" Speech and the American Reaction

President Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed the nation on December 8, 1941, in a declaration that the attack on Pearl Harbor was a **"**date which will live in infamy," he captured the collective shock, grief, and fury of a nation that was suddenly pulled into war. His words were carefully put together to unify the American people, guiding their outrage and turning it into a determination for victory. He vowed, "No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory" (Roosevelt, "Day of Infamy" Speech).

Although the speech was clear, concise, appealed to the emotionally to the people, and achieved national unity, it portrayed the attack as completely unprovoked, yes the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was shocking in its timing and method, and its heavy cost in American lives made it clearly an act of war. But the conflict did not start that day. For years, U.S.-Japan relations had been worsening, especially after America placed strict oil bans and money penalties to oppose Japan's growing control in China and Southeast Asia (Schaller 20). These steps, meant to limit Japan's military actions, instead forced Tokyo to take a huge risk which striking first to weaken U.S. Sea power in the Pacific.

Roosevelt's speech never talked about these deeper issues, framing the attack as a sudden evil act instead of the decisive step in a long fight for control of the Pacific. This approach was smart politics, it made Americans view the war as a noble fight against a sneaky attacker, not a complicated battle between competing powers. According to Sandra Silberstein, the speech followed a well-established tradition of how "through rhetorical conventions, presidents assume extraordinary powers as the commander in chief, dissent is minimized, enemies are vilified, and lives are lost in the defense of a nation once again united under God" (15–17). Roosevelt's words defined how Americans saw the war, painting it as a clear battle against pure evil while ignoring the hidden truths of international relations and power struggles.

The speech electrified the nation, creating an unprecedented unity among American. Within hours, the country's divisions seemed to vanish; isolationists who had argued against foreign entanglements stood shoulder-to-shoulder with interventionists, all shared a sense of betrayal. Newspapers captured the national fury in furious, bold-lettered headlines screaming "JAPAN ATTACKS U.S." and "DAY OF INFAMY WILL LIVE IN SHAME," their pages filled with graphic photographs of the destruction at Pearl Harbor, lists of the dead, and out the top eyewitness accounts. The radio kept sharing the news in quick, excited updates. Even the usually calm reporters sounded shocked and upset (Bosch).

Public opinion hardened immediately. Polls showed that after the attack, 97% of Americans supported going to war as everyone agreed, which was rare. The small number of people who disagreed were ignored as patriotism spread. More people enlisted in the military, factories worked nonstop to support the war effort, and even Hollywood celebrities pledged to support (Saad).

Congress moved with extraordinary speed. On December 8, 1941, the politicians gathered for a meeting. The decision to go to war passed with everyone agreeing as only one

person voted against it. That only one standing in opposition was Senator Jeannette Rankin from Montana. She lived her life as a pacifist and had even refused to support World War I back in 1917. Her brave choice was very unpopular at the time, and most people ignored it (Kidney). By the afternoon, the U.S. had formally declared war on Japan, irrevocably committing the nation to the global struggle of World War II.

The idea that Americans universally rushed to enlist after Pearl Harbor is not accurate. While many were motivated by the attack to volunteer, most U.S. forces in World War II, around two-thirds of the 16 million service members, joined through the draft, not voluntary enlistment (Waxman). Neighborhoods organized first aid training sessions, where men and women practiced bandaging wounds and responding to emergencies, while schools and community centers held blackout drills to prepare for the possibility of nighttime air raids.

Rationing systems for essentials like sugar, gasoline, and rubber were quickly implemented by the federal government. Propaganda posters and films encouraged Americans to buy war bonds, report suspicious activities, and remain committed to the cause. In this environment of total war, every citizen was made to feel like a soldier on the home front as by war's end, "over 16 million Americans had served in uniform, representing 11% of the total U.S. population at the time" (Kennedy 623). This massive mobilization raises questions about why so many people signed up. Was it just patriotism or was it also because of economic necessity or social pressure?

2.3 The Hiroshima and Nagasaki Bombing

The final months of World War II in the Pacific ended with one of the most debated decisions in modern history: the use of atomic bombs in Japan. Aimed at forcing a swift Japanese surrender and avoiding a costly land invasion, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki also marked the beginning of the nuclear age. Beyond their immediate military impact, they raised long-lasting questions about ethics, necessity, and the exercise of power.

This section explores the strategic thinking behind the decision, the human toll of the bombings, and the wide range of reactions they provoked in political, military, and public discussions.

2.3.1. Events Leading to the Bombing

By mid-1945, World War II had reached its deadliest concluding chapter. In Europe, the fighting ended when Nazi Germany surrendered on May 8, leaving cities in rubble and survivors in shock at the destruction. But in the Pacific, the war grew even more brutal. Though weakened and running out of supplies, Japan refused to surrender. Its soldiers putting up a strong resistance, believing that death was better than defeat. The battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa had already revealed the terrible cost of invading Japan's homeland. On Okinawa alone, close to 12,000 U.S. troops died, alongside over 100,000 Japanese soldiers and countless civilians trapped in the crossfire ("Battle of Okinawa…").

American military leaders understood that attacking Japan's homeland would be far worse than anything they had faced so far. Their invasion plan, called Operation Downfall, would be the biggest sea-to-land attack ever attempted - but also the most brutal. Early calculations warned that up to a million American and Allied troops could be killed or wounded, while Japanese deaths might reach into the millions. Troops were warned that every Japanese person soldiers, women, even children might fight to the death with whatever they could find. As President Harry S. Truman in his war-planning conference on the 18th of June 1945 is believed to have expressed his concern by saying "it'll be Okinawa from one end of Japan to the other" (Giangreco).

The reports on his desk described the harsh reality that even with Japan's navy destroyed and its cities burning from the never-ending firebombing, military leaders warned that surrender was not coming. The Japanese cabinet had secretly vowed to fight to the last man, and intercepted messages revealed that their defensive plan was to allow the use of the

Civilian Volunteer Corps, a mobilization not of volunteers but of all boys and men 15 to 60 and all girls and women 17 to 40, except for those exempted as unfit. They were trained with hand grenades, swords, sickles, knives, fire hooks, and bamboo spears. General Marshall's staff estimated that the invasion's first phase alone, Operation Olympic, which was targeting Kyushu could cost half a million American lives. With each passing week, more body bags filled transport ships heading home (Polmar and Allen).

By the end of July 1945, President Truman's advisers presented him with two stark options. On one side stood General George C. Marshall, holding maps of the beaches of Kyushu, where an estimated 350,000 Japanese defenders which was three times more than previously expected awaited the planned U.S. invasion. The Joint Chiefs warned that the first day alone could result in over 10,000 American deaths, surpassing even the losses on D-Day. The alternative came from the Manhattan Project scientists, led by J. Robert Oppenheimer. They had just demonstrated the atomic bomb's devastating power during the Trinity Test on July 16. In his memos, Oppenheimer noted that the explosion was so intense it turned the New Mexico desert sand into glass. Secretary of War Henry Stimson argued that using the bomb might shock Japan's leadership into surrender. While some privately described the bomb as barbaric, many acknowledged there were no better alternatives (Correll).

After considering the options, President Harry S. Truman decided to use the powerful new atomic bomb. The goal was to bring a quick end to World War II and avoid an even bloodier invasion of Japan (Rhodes 747-748).

2.3.2 Hiroshima and Survivors Accounts

On the morning of August 6, 1945, the specially modified B-29 bomber called Enola Gay took off. At exactly 8:15 a.m., over the city of Hiroshima, the crew released the bomb. Known as"Little Boy,"it was the first uranium-based atomic weapon ever used in war. The

bomb went off nearly 600 meters above the city, the explosion was equivalent to about 15 kilotonsof TNT. The immediate impact was hellish with an estimation of 69% of Hiroshima's buildings were destroyed and 70,000–80,000 people who were killed instantly. By the end of 1945, the death count rose to approximately 140,000 due to injuries and radiation exposure (Wellerstein).

The survivors' accounts show just how terrible the atomic bomb was. Survivors faced a terrifying new illness such as acute radiation sickness with symptoms doctors could not explain at the time like violent vomiting, uncontrolled bleeding, and rapid hair loss. Medical facilities were in ruins, and the few remaining staff could only give basic help. Dr. Tabuchi, a physician who survived the blast, recorded the devastation in his diary "The sight of them was almost unbearable. Their faces and hands were burnt and swollen; and great sheets of skin had peeled away from their tissues to hang down like rags on a scarecrow" (Hachiya 37).

2.3.3. Nagasaki and Survivors Accounts

Despite the unprecedented destruction of Hiroshima, Japan's military leadership remained divided over surrender. On August 9, 1945, and just three days after the first atomic attack the U.S. decided to drop a second, more powerful plutonium bomb nicknamed "Fat Man". Originally, the plane was supposed to bomb the city of Kokura, but poor visibility made the crew switch to their backup target which was Nagasaki (Briggs and Kobayashi).

At 11:02 a.m., the bomb exploded over Nagasaki with terrifying force. Around 40,000 people died immediately, and the city center was turned to ash and rubble. Because Nagasaki was built on steep hills, the damage did not spread as far as it had in flat Hiroshima, but for those caught in the explosion zone, the destruction was just as bad. Survivors stumbled through burning streets, many with terrible burns, searching for family members who were gone forever (Lengel, "The Bombing of Nagasaki…").

A sixteen-year-old postal worker and was delivering mail two kilometers away from the point of impact. The heat rays of the explosion hit him from behind, and the forceful blast threw him off the bicycle. After a few minutes, he was able to stand up and realized he was injured. In his own words, “The skin from the shoulder to the fingertips of my left arm had peeled off and was hanging down like a tattered old rag. I passed my hand around to my back and found that the clothes that I had been wearing were gone. When I brought back the hand and looked at it, I saw that it was covered with something like black grease. I had suffered terrible burns all over my back and left arm. Strangely enough, there was no pain or bleeding whatsoever...” (Sumiteru). Like Hiroshima, Nagasaki's medical infrastructure was completely devastated, leaving survivors to suffer without proper care. Many endured the agony of radiation sickness, dying slow and painful deaths in the weeks following the attack source. The twin atomic bombings created an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe that would haunt survivors, known as Hibakusha, for the rest of their lives.

2.4. Reaction to the Bombing

The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki triggered a wide range of reactions worldwide. While American leaders justified the attacks as necessary to end the war quickly and save lives, many critics—both inside and outside the U.S.—raised moral and strategic concerns. These differing responses highlight how the U.S., at the height of its power, worked to shape global opinion and silence opposition to defend its decision. The bombings also sent a clear message to the Soviet Union and the world: the U.S. was prepared to shape the postwar order not through shared cooperation, but through unmatched military force.

2.4.1. Internal Reaction

Right after the bombings, U.S. leaders presented the atomic weapons as a necessary evil. President Harry S. Truman’s statement following Hiroshima’s destruction “The Japanese

began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid many fold…" ("Statement by the President Announcing the Use of the A-Bomb at Hiroshima"). This made the bombing seem like some kind of revengeful justice, but it hides the fact that Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not major military targets but urban cities with high civilian populations. Japan was militarily weakened and facing starvation, shortages, and relentless U.S. firebombing of its cities. Military leaders and most citizens supported this view, believing the bombings punished Japan's aggression and would quickly end the war. But opposition surfaced immediately as key Manhattan Project scientists like Leo Szilard challenged the decision, arguing the U.S. should have first revealed the bomb's power in an empty area (Bird and Sherwin 515-517).

Several members of the U.S. military leadership believed Japan was already close to surrendering such as Admiral William D. Leahy, Truman's Chief of Staff, wrote in his memoir "the use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan" (Leahy 441). Similarly, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe at the time, later recalled "First, the Japanese were ready to surrender, and it was not necessary to hit them with that awful thing. Second, I hated to see our country be the first to use such a weapon" (Carney). These internal critiques reflect that even within the highest ranks of the U.S. command, there were serious doubts about if the use of bombs was necessary. Yet, Truman and his advisors proceeded.

2.4.2 International Reaction

The Soviet Union, which declared war on Japan on August 8, 1945, just two days after the Hiroshima bombing had interpreted the use of atomic bombs as a strategic display of American power aimed at limiting the Soviet influence in the region. This view continues in modern Russian histories which mostly presents Hiroshima and Nagasaki as examples of America acting alone and ignoring civilian deaths. The Cold War made this belief stronger, as

the nuclear arms race became a key part of U.S.-Soviet competition (Sayuri , “The Soviet Union and the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.”).

In Asia, particularly in China and Korea, the response to the bombings has been influenced by the complex legacy of Japanese imperialism. While there was a lot of sympathy for the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, these sentiments were weakened by memories of Japanese atrocities during the war, such as the Nanjing Massacre and the colonization of Korea. The Chinese government has maintained a balanced stance, acknowledged the tragedy of the bombings while emphasized the broader context of World War II. A 2015 statement from the Chinese Foreign Ministry declared that they remember Hiroshima, but they must also remember Nanjing (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs ,“Hiroshima Deserves Attention, and Nanjing Should Never Be Forgotten.”).

For many Koreans, the bombings helped bring about the end of Japanese colonial rule, which had lasted from 1910 to 1945. This perspective views the bombings as a steppingstone for Korea's liberation “God often borrows the hand of a human to punish the evil deeds of men” (Dong-Won), although it was achieved through immense human suffering as around 70,000 Koreans were living in Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the time of the bombings, many of whom were forced laborers under Japanese colonial rule. Estimates suggest that roughly 50,000 Koreans died in Hiroshima and approximately 20,000 in Nagasaki and survivors even often faced discrimination and were denied health benefits for decades (Jeong et al.)

Religious leaders and groups have influenced how people worldwide view the atomic bombings. The moral questions raised by Hiroshima and Nagasaki have often been powerfully mentioned religious teachings. The Catholic Church has been especially clear in condemning nuclear weapons. During his historic 1981 visit to Hiroshima, Pope John Paul II stated “To remember the past is to commit oneself to the future. To remember Hiroshima is to abhor nuclear war” (“Pope John Paul II’s Appeal for Peace…”). His words did more than

reflect on the tragedy as they called for peace and rejected war to solve conflicts. He stressed that remembering history is both a moral duty and a guide for the future.

Continuing this tradition, Pope Francis strengthened the Church's position during his 2019 visits to Nagasaki and Hiroshima. He visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial and described it as a place where death and life, loss and rebirth, suffering and compassion have met. He reaffirmed that the use and possession of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral. Speaking directly "the use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possession of atomic weapons is immoral" ("Japan's Bishops Promote Peace and the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons."). His statement was seen as a demand for worldwide nuclear disarmament.

President Truman defended using atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by claiming it would save many American soldiers' lives. He wanted to avoid invading Japan, which military leaders believed would be extremely bloody. The planned invasion, called Operation Downfall, had two parts. The first attack on Kyushu (Operation Olympic) alone might have caused between 130,000 and 220,000 American losses which included deaths, injuries, and missing troops. Some experts at the time warned the total cost could reach over a million Allied casualties if Japan fought as hard as expected (Giangreco).

President Truman later claimed the atomic bombs saved up to a million American lives, but most historians now consider this number exaggerated. As Stanford historian Barton Bernstein noted that there was no credible evidence that support the claim that a million American lives were saved. Military estimates from mid-1945 predicted between 20,000 and 46,000 American deaths just for the invasion of Kyushu and these calculations were based on previous battles like Okinawa, where the U.S. suffered nearly 40,000 casualties while Japanese military and civilian deaths exceeded 150,000, including civilians (Mawhorter).

While Truman justified the bombings as necessary to save lives, historians continue to debate this decision. Some scholars argue Japan was already nearing surrender, especially after the Soviet Union's August 1945 invasion of Manchuria. Others proclaimed the bombings served dual purposes which was ending the war while at the same time demonstrating U.S. military might to the Soviet Union (Kaiser). Whatever the motivations, the atomic attacks ended World War II quickly but at horrific human cost.

2.5. U.S. Occupation and Reconstruction of Japan (1945–1952)

Following Japan's surrender in August 1945, officially ending World War II, the Allied nations started an important period of controlling Japan. These seven years from 1945 to 1952 completely changed Japan's government, money systems, and society. While the control was supposed to be by all the Allied nations together, in truth the U.S. was in charge. General Douglas MacArthur, named as the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), managed one of the biggest country-rebuilding efforts in recent times. The aims were straightforward, which were to take apart Japan's military, make its government more democratic, fix its economy, and make sure it could never endanger world peace again (Dower)

The importance of the occupation went far beyond just changing Japan; it became an example for how the U.S. would help rebuild other countries later. MacArthur called this effort a crusade to bring democracy to a feudal society. Even though some people doubted it would work at first, the Japanese people adjusted to the changes surprisingly fast. Many welcomed the reforms, especially those that matched their own hopes for becoming more modern (Dower 312–314).

One of the first things SCAP focused on was taking apart Japan's entire military system. They broke up Japan's armed forces completely and arrested military leaders to put

them on trial for war crimes. The biggest of these trials was called the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE), which ran from 1946 to 1948. Twenty-eight top Japanese military and government officials were charged with starting wars, committing war crimes, and harming civilians. Seven were sentenced to death, including Japan's wartime Prime Minister Hideki Tojo. But Emperor Hirohito was never put on trial, this controversial choice was meant to keep Japan stable, but many questioned whether justice was being applied fairly (Bass 102). As historian Gary Bass explains, “The Tokyo Trials were a political compromise as much as a legal reckoning.”

The choice not to punish Emperor Hirohito was carefully planned. U.S. leaders thought keeping the emperor in place would help keep Japan stable and make it easier to work with the Japanese people. As historian John Dower explained that the emperor went from being seen as a god-like leader, someone who was almost worshipped, to just a symbol of the country, with no political power. Even though this change happened, he kept his title as emperor. He did not step down, and he never said that he did anything wrong or made any bad choices. Instead of taking responsibility, he stayed in his position while the way people saw him completely changed. While this approach worked well for keeping peace during the occupation, it left important questions unanswered about who should take responsibility for the war and how Japan should remember this history (Dower 277–78).

At the same time as Japan was getting rid of its military power, big political changes were also made. In 1946, the American-led group in charge, called SCAP, wrote a new set of rules for how Japan would be run that became known as the “MacArthur Constitution.” It was officially approved in 1947 and made huge changes to Japan’s political system. The emperor no longer had real power and was turned into a ceremonial figure who only represents the country. The people were now the ones who held the real power (Dower 365). In one important part, called Article 9, Japan gave up the right to go to war, “Aspiring sincerely to an

international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes ” (Japan Const. art. 9). This peaceful promise became one of the most well-known and talked-about parts of Japan’s new identity after the war. That new constitution also protected people’s freedoms, made everyone equal under the law, and gave all adults the right to vote—including women, who had not been allowed to vote before (Stockwin 119–121).

Japanese leaders did not have much say when the new constitution was first written. Beate Sirota Gordon, an important American who helped write it, later explained that she authored the articles guaranteeing women's equal rights herself because Japanese laws at that time did not protect women's rights at all. She added rules to make sure women had the same rights as men because the old Japanese laws did not do that (Russell). Even though this constitution is still used today, the fact that it was mostly created by people from another country has continued to be a sensitive and often debated issue in Japanese politics.

2.5.1. Economic Reconstruction and Reform

Japan's economy was destroyed by World War II. Major cities lay in rubble, factories were not working, and prices were skyrocketing out of control. To fix this, SCAP (the U.S. occupation authority) introduced major economic changes. These reforms had two main goals: first, to break up the economic systems that had helped Japan's military expansion, and second, to create a strong, peaceful capitalist democracy (Johnson 102).

The land reform program became one of the occupation's biggest successes. Before the reforms, much of Japan's farmland belonged to wealthy landlords who did not live on the land, while tenant farmers did all the work. The 1946 land reform law let these tenant farmers buy the land they worked at affordable prices, turning Japan into a country where most farmers owned their own land. By 1950, about 90% of farmland was worked by its owners.

These changes brought several important benefits: farm output increased, poor farmers became better off, and a major cause of inequality disappeared (Johnson 46-48). Economist Chalmers Johnson noted that these reforms resulted in “one of the most equal distributions of land tenure in the world.”

During the occupation, American authorities implemented reforms targeting Japan's zaibatsu—the vast industrial and financial organizations that had dominated the prewar economy. These family-controlled empires, including the “Big Four” of Mitsui, Mitsubishi, Sumitomo, and Yasuda, controlled critical industries while bankrolling Japan's military expansion. Their deep ties to both the military establishment and civilian government made them prime targets for reform, as occupation planners believed economic decentralization would prevent future aggression while fostering democratic institutions (“Zaibatsu | Japanese Business Organization.”).

The occupation pursued several concrete measures to dismantle the zaibatsu system. Authorities broke up holding companies, forced the sale of subsidiary firms, and implemented strict antitrust regulations. Thousands of executives were purged from leadership positions, while company shares were redistributed to create broader ownership. These efforts sought to democratize economic power by preventing excessive concentration in any single entity's hands and encouraging competitive market forces (Edwards). However, the reforms achieved only partial success due to shifting geopolitical priorities.

As Cold War tensions escalated, U.S. policy increasingly emphasized Japan's rapid economic recovery over structural transformation. While the formal zaibatsu structure disappeared, many companies reorganized into keiretsu—modern corporate networks centered around major banks rather than family ownership. These new groupings maintained cooperative relationships among member firms while operating within the legal framework established by occupation reforms, demonstrating both the lasting impact and practical

limitations of the economic restructuring efforts (Aoki).

Perhaps the most significant economic policy came in 1949 with the implementation of the “Dodge Line”. Named after American financial expert Joseph Dodge, this strict Disciplinary program aimed to fix Japan's struggling postwar economy, which faced runaway prices, massive government debts, and failing industries. Dodge's solution was straightforward but tough: force Japan to live within its means by cutting subsidies, balancing the budget, and setting a firm exchange rate of 360 yen to the dollar. While critics called the plan too severe, Dodge argued this painful medicine was necessary to restore economic health (Sugita 218).

The Dodge Line marked a complete change from earlier occupation policies that had focused on emergency recovery. Now, Japan had to follow firm financial rules being no more printing money to cover deficits, no more artificial price controls. The immediate results were brutal: businesses closed, jobs disappeared, and many workers suffered. But the plan worked where it mattered most - it stopped inflation dead in its tracks and made the yen trustworthy again (Ladejinsky).

As Dodge is believed to say that one cannot begin to hope to have economic recovery without first achieving fiscal discipline. His approach matched America's Cold War strategy of building a strong capitalist Japan as a bulwark against communism. While some complained the reforms helped big companies at the expense of workers, there is no denying the Dodge Line gave Japan the stable foundation needed for its incredible growth spurt in the 1950s and 60s (Masai et al.).

SCAP also introduced significant reforms to Japan’s labor system, trying to make companies fairer and give regular workers more power. They created new rules that let workers start unions, negotiate as a group with bosses, and go on strike which where things

that were not allowed before the war. These changes were meant to fix the old system where company leaders had all the control and normal workers had almost no rights. The occupation leaders thought strong worker groups would help democracy grow by giving regular people more say in business matters (Kurtulus 39).

Right after these new rules started, unions began popping up everywhere in Japan. Factory workers, miners, textile workers, and transportation employees all formed unions to fight for higher pay, safer workplaces, and more input in company choices. In just two years and by 1947, more than 6.7 million Japanese workers had joined unions. Many of these worker groups became very political, often supporting socialist or communist ideas that became more popular after the war (Smith).

But this time of strong worker movements did not last long. As tensions grew between America and the Soviet Union (the Cold War), U.S. leaders started worrying about communists taking over Japanese unions. As part of what became known as the “Reverse Course,” the occupation government began taking back some of the worker rights they had earlier supported. They cared more about keeping Japan stable and its economy growing than about continuing all the democratic changes they had first pushed for “Occupation and Reconstruction of Japan, 1945–52”).

During this later period, the government began stopping aggressive union actions and got more involved in worker-boss fights. They shut down or weakened unions they thought were too extreme or connected to communism. With support from the occupation forces, Japan's government made new laws that reduced what government worker unions could do and took away some strike rights for certain jobs (Nimura). These actions showed how America's main goals had changed - instead of helping workers gain power, they now wanted to control the labor movement to fit their bigger plans for the region.

2.5.2 Educational and Social Reforms

Alongside political and economic changes, SCAP also sought to reform Japanese society at its roots. One of the most important parts of this was changing the education system. Before the war, Japanese schools were very controlled by the government and pushed strong beliefs. They taught students to obey authority, honor the emperor, and be extremely loyal to their country. Schools were not just for learning—they were used to teach militaristic and strict values that matched the emperor's rule (Dower 205). After Japan lost the war, the people in charge of the occupation saw education as a key tool to make Japan more democratic and to change its culture for the long term.

To make this happen, SCAP made substantial changes to Japan's education system. They removed people from the old Ministry of Education who were intricately linked to wartime propaganda and military ideas. New school rules were made to support democracy, human rights, equal rights for men and women, and thinking for yourself. Textbooks were either changed or removed to take out content that promoted extreme nationalism and empire-building. Americans and Japanese reformers worked together to create new lessons that helped students think critically, be responsible citizens, and respect different opinions (Dower 209–210).

They also changed the school structure to match the American model: six years of elementary school, three years of junior high, three years of high school, and four years of university (Anderson 112). This system was meant to make education fairer and more available to everyone. Local school boards were created so that schools could make decisions for themselves instead of being told what to do by the central government (Duke 78). This helped get communities more involved. Teachers, who used to follow imperial ideas without question, were trained again so they could help students learn in a democratic way (Beauchamp 203).

As historian John Dower notes, the U.S.-led occupation leaders viewed education reform as central to democratizing Japanese society (203). Prewar schools had emphasized loyalty to the emperor and ultranationalism, but SCAP overhauled this system to promote democratic values, individual rights, and critical thinking (204–205). These changes included rewriting curricula, purging militarist content from textbooks (208), and restructuring schools to align with democratic principles, such as adopting the American 6-3-3-4 model (209). Remarkably, Dower observes, much of this reformed system endures today (213).

Along with changes in education, there were also major improvements in women's rights, which were some of the most groundbreaking changes of the occupation. Before the war, Japanese women had very few legal rights - they were excluded from voting and had limited control over marriage, property, or political participation (Gordon 191). The 1947 Constitution, drafted under SCAP's direction, explicitly guaranteed women equal rights including suffrage and equality in family matters (Mackie 82). These constitutional rights were reinforced by comprehensive revisions to the Civil Code in 1947-1948, which granted women new rights in marriage, divorce, and inheritance (Upham 117). The effects were dramatic and immediate - in the April 1946 election, over 13 million women voted for the first time (Garon 193).

In 1946, during Japan’s first election after the war, women could vote for the first time, and 39 women were elected to the National Diet. Beate Sirota Gordon, who helped write the women’s rights sections of the new constitution, later said about the big effect of these changes that he had finished a draft of the section on women’s rights, and that he wanted to be sure not to skip a single thing that might help Japanese women in the future (156).

SCAP also worked to improve other parts of Japanese life, especially public health, which had been neglected during the war. Occupation authorities recognized that poor health conditions and inadequate sanitation hindered national recovery, leading to comprehensive

health initiatives (Bowers 143). These programs targeted sexually transmitted infections among demobilized soldiers and displaced populations (Koikari 77), while also establishing maternal and child welfare systems (Matsubara 112). Public health campaigns promoted hygiene education, nutritional improvement, and regular medical consultations (Aldous 89). SCAP simultaneously rebuilt hospital infrastructure, expanded vaccination programs, and democratized access to modern healthcare (Watt 206).

Statistical evidence confirms significant public health improvements during the occupation period. Infant mortality rates declined from 76.7 per 1,000 live births in 1947 to 55.9 by 1950, while life expectancy increased by 8 years for males and 10 years for females between 1945-1955 (Taeuber 128). Contemporary analyses attribute these gains to SCAP-initiated disease control programs, expanded medical infrastructure, and nutritional reforms (Jannetta 214). Quantitative health outcomes paralleled developments in education and gender equality, collectively contributing to postwar social stabilization (Dower 299). These systemic changes occurred alongside economic recovery, though scholars debate the relative weight of occupation policies versus Japan's own institutional adaptations (Gordon 237).

The occupying forces introduced sweeping reforms for the decentralization of the media system in Japan. The Press Code of 1945 (SCAPIN-33) abolished wartime censorship legislation, such as the Publication Law of 1909 and Article 12 of the 1925 Peace Preservation Law (Kasza 178). Quantitative analysis indicates newspaper circulation returned to prewar levels, achieving a daily circulation of 15 million copies in 1947, up from 3 million in 1945 (Yamamoto 112). While official press freedoms were defined, SCAP maintained content control through the Civil Censorship Detachment until 1949, reviewing an estimated 75 million printed materials (Rubin 43). This transition mechanism provided for investigative reporting absent during the war years, including political corruption scandals by the Mainichi Shimbun in 1948 (Feldman 91), within the parameters set by Cold War imperatives from and

after 1947.

While promoting press freedom, SCAP maintained censorship over sensitive topics including occupation policy critiques, atomic bomb reporting, and wartime responsibility narratives. This contradiction between democratic ideals and strategic control reflected what historians' term ”censored democracy”. Nevertheless, these reforms established institutional foundations for Japan's contemporary media diversity (Kushner 112). Meanwhile, SCAP actively promoted cultural Americanization through imported films, literature, and music, particularly targeting urban youth (Yoshimi 73).

The occupation's education reforms mandated English instruction and sponsored U.S. study programs, with over 5,000 Japanese students attending American universities by 1952 (Azuma 156). These cultural diplomacy initiatives served dual Cold War purposes: disseminating democratic values while countering communist influence. But not everyone welcomed American culture. Some Japanese thinkers, artists, and traditionalists felt uneasy or pushed back. They worried that fast Americanization would weaken Japan’s deep cultural traditions and national identity. Arguments about staying true to Japanese culture and dealing with Western influence became common in postwar Japan, and the struggle between moving forward and keeping old ways lasted long after the occupation ended (Shibusawa 89).

2.6. The ”Reverse Course“

The Reverse Course (1947–1952) shifted the U.S. occupation of Japan from an experiment in democratization to one of stabilization against communism, which was implicated by the deepening Cold War. Historian Michael Schaller has noted that several of the early reforms—such as the abolishment of monopoly structures (the zaibatsu) and labor union rights—were quickly reversed or rolled back to restore economic recovery and a more conservative political environment (112, 115). The Supreme Commander for the Allied

Powers (SCAP) curtailed leftist movements, repaired the career of wartime bureaucrats, and secretly rebuilt military authorities through the 1950 Police Reserve. The austerity initiative, The Dodge Line, formally launched in 1949, for example, fueled economic recentralization and regime stabilization (Dower 531-533). The policy repositioning was pragmatic and prompted by communist victories in China and accompanying anxieties about Soviet influence in Asia. While it preserved a democratic framework for Japan, any vestiges of democratic governance that were anticipated to develop with U.S. postwar occupation were available for Cold War objectives—a productive paradox that some scholars have termed, "democracy by directive" (Finn 161).

2.6.1. End of the Occupation and Legacy

The end of the Allied occupation of Japan was official in the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, which took effect on April 28, 1952. As historian Michael Schaller explains that the treaty negotiations reflected America's Cold War priorities since the Occupation, allowing Japan to regain sovereignty while maintaining U.S. military bases under a separate security treaty (Schaller 78-79). The Korean War (1950-1953) significantly influenced this agreement, as Washington sought to transform Japan into a "bulwark against communism" in Asia while starting its economic recovery (Schaller 82). The dual system of the treaty created what became known as the "San Francisco System" - a framework that enabled Japan's remarkable postwar economic growth while keeping it within America's Cold War alliance network (Schaller 85). This agreement has stayed in place and remains an important part of U.S. strategy in East Asia today.

The U.S. occupation's legacy remains challenging among historians. As John Dower said that while it successfully transformed Japan into a pacifist democracy with the 1947 Constitution (including Article 9) enduring as "one of the world's most progressive governing charters" (563) the process also enforced foreign values through terms "imperial democracy"

The Reverse Course (1947–52) illustrated this tension: economic recovery and anti-communist priorities often replaced initial democratization efforts, with SCAP abolition of left-wing labor movements and restoration of wartime conservatives (Schaller 118). As historian Andrew Gordon noted that the tension created a paradox: “Japan achieved stable democracy but through American commands that occasionally denied local ambitions“ (241).

The American response to the attack on Pearl Harbor marked the beginning of a profound shift in U.S. involvement in the Pacific and its role in shaping postwar Japan. President Roosevelt’s speech unified a divided nation, setting the stage for full-scale mobilization and the pursuit of victory. Yet the speech, while effective, framed the attack as entirely unprovoked, overlooking the prior tensions between Japan and the U.S., including embargoes and regional power struggles.

The decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki brought World War II to a swift end, but at an extraordinary human cost. The bombings remain among the most controversial acts of the 20th century. Although justified at the time to save lives and force surrender, they targeted civilian populations and introduced nuclear warfare to the world. Dissenting voices from military and scientific communities raised early concerns, and later scholarship has continued to question whether Japan was already on the verge of surrender, particularly after the Soviet Union’s entry into the war.

Following Japan’s defeat, the American-led occupation initiated far-reaching reforms. The new constitution, drafted under SCAP’s supervision, transformed Japan into a pacifist democracy, curtailed the emperor’s power, and introduced civil rights including universal suffrage. Land reform reduced economic inequality, and labor laws empowered workers—at least initially. However, rising Cold War tensions prompted a reversal in U.S. policy. Economic recovery and anti-communist stability took precedence over democratization. Union rights were curtailed, labor activism suppressed, and the dissolution of the zaibatsu

gave way to the formation of keiretsu corporate networks.

This chapter has examined how American military, political, and economic strategies reshaped postwar Japan. The occupation achieved significant reconstruction and laid the groundwork for Japan's postwar recovery, but it also revealed the complexities of balancing ideals with strategic priorities. While stability and growth were achieved, the legacy of the bombings and the nature of foreign-led reform continue to invite critical reflection.

Chapter Three

Reconstruction and Diplomacy

Following its defeat in World War II, Japan came under Allied occupation until the signing of the Treaty of San Francisco in 1951, which formally restored its sovereignty and marked the end of the occupation. This chapter examines the evolution of U.S.–Japan relations in the post-occupation era, focusing on how Japan, while regaining its independence, remained deeply influenced by the U.S. during the Cold War. It explores Japan's transformation from a war-torn and defeated nation into a leading economic power, highlighting the strategic, political, and economic dimensions of the bilateral relationship that shaped the course of postwar Asia.

3.1. Economic Recovery

In the period between 1952 and 1959, Japan's recovery faced powerful external challenges, mostly due to difficulties in balance of payments. When the economy of Japan was expanding rapidly, the country had to depend on importation of raw materials and crucial goods. This dependency brought a lot of pressure on Japan's poor stock of foreign budget. For example, in 1953, imports increased by $970 million, while exports saw only small decline. This led to a massive trade imbalance. According to reports from that time, this caused several months of more outcomes than incomes of money, threating the economy. In addition to the outside pressures, Japan's development also had a high investment and development followed by recessions. These cycles also led to lack of imports and worsened the trade deficits (Patrick 69). Soo even if Japan was on the rise, its progress was stopped by these weaknesses in its inside and outside economy trade.

Year	Total Exports	Total Imports

1951	1,355	1,995
1952	1,273	2,028
1953	1,275	2,410
1954	1,629	2,399
1955	2,011	2,471
1956	2,501	3,230
1957	2,858	4,284
1958	2,877	3,033
1959	3,456	3,599
1960	4,055	4,491
1961	4,238	5,811
1962 (Jan-June)	2,225	2,959

Table 1. Economic Growth of Post War Japan

Source: Saburo Okita,12.

https://www.ide.go.jp/library/English/Publish/Periodicals/De/pdf/62_02_01.pdf . Accessed on 22 May 2025.

This data depicts Japan's remarkable postwar economic development in the 1950s and early 1960s, dubbed the“Japanese Economic Miracle.“After WWII, Japan's industrial and manufacturing sectors recovered quickly, with the U.S. help, government-led industrialization, and technical innovation. The rise in these statistics, which indicated

industrial production, trade, or GDP, demonstrates the country's move from recovery to supported high growth, leading to Japan's rise as a worldwide economic power in the coming decades. The decrease in 1958 might be linked to a short recession, but the spike in 1961 reflects the flourishing economy before to the 1960s upswing.

Among the key events that transformed U.S.–Japan relations in the early Cold War period were the Korean War. The conflict, which erupted in 1950, reshaped American strategic priorities in Asia and elevated Japan's role from a defeated, occupied nation to a critical ally in the fight against communism. As the war intensified, Japan's geographic proximity and industrial potential made it an indispensable partner, prompting a major shift in U.S. policy that would redefine the bilateral relationship in the decades to come.

3.1.1. The Korean War 1950-1953

Korean War, conflict between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea), at least 2.5 million people died. In June 1950, North Korea attacked the South, backed and supplied by the Soviet Union. The United Nations, with the U.S. as the major participant, joined the war on the side of South Korea, while the People's Republic of China supported North Korea. After almost a million combat losses on both sides, the conflict concluded in July 1953, leaving Korea separated into two hostile nations. Negotiations in 1954 resulted in no further agreement, and the front line has since been acknowledged as the de facto border between North and South Korea.

The outbreak of the Korean War on June 25, 1950, marked a turning point in Japan's postwar recovery. In response to the conflict unfolding on the Korean Peninsula, the U.S. began remilitarizing Japan, harnessing its industrial capacity to support the war effort. This shift revitalized Japan's stagnant economy through U.S.-funded military "special procurements," which significantly boosted industrial production and laid the foundation for long-term economic growth. Although the Allied occupation formally continued, its focus

shifted from demilitarization and political reform to economic recovery and strategic realignment. The war not only underscored Japan's emerging role as a key U.S. ally in Cold War geopolitics but also signaled the country's reluctant yet undeniable reentry into international affairs (Dower 526-528). This situation would pave the way for what would become Japan's postwar economic miracle.

The Korean War, as presented by Bruce Cumings in The Korean War: A History, is not to be understood as a war that began in June 1950; rather, it was the culmination of deep-seated historical grievances arising out of Japanese colonization and the Cold War's geopolitical divisions. Cumings argues that the war can be understood as a "forgotten or never-known" conflict, based on the division of Korea at the 38th parallel and the long-standing resentment against Japan, which arose from its colonial rule from 1910 to 1945 (231).

Upon North Korea's invasion of the South, the U.S. quickly intervened militarily, with Secretary of State Dean Acheson making key decisions to commit U.S. forces well before consultations with Congress or the United Nations, driven by a desire to protect American prestige and Japan's economic well-being more than Korea's inherent strategic value.The character of the conflict quickly turned from defensive to offensive, as outlined in NSC 81, which authorized General MacArthur to push into North Korea to begin a rollback of communism, if there was no immediate threat of Soviet or Chinese intervention (Cumings 231, 271). Japan itself did not send troops but took a key and direct part in the war by serving as the logistical base for U.S. military actions and benefiting economically from wartime production, which accounted for its postwar boom (Cumings 295). The legacy of Japanese colonialism also framed the ideological aspects of the war, with North Korea depicting the leadership of the South as a group of Japanese collaborators and framing the North's efforts as part of anti-colonial resistance.

3.1.2. The High Growth Era (1955-1973)

By 1955, Japan's industrial output had returned to its pre-World War II levels, marking the end of the nation's immediate postwar recovery and the beginning of a period of sustained economic development. Despite the burdens imposed by the war's aftermath—particularly the significant payments made as "postwar resolution funds" to the occupying forces, which were used to purchase goods and compensate personnel—Japan began to rebuild (Shimabuku 24–37)

These payments were widely criticized by Japanese citizens and placed additional strain on an already fragile economy, exacerbating inflation. Nevertheless, the implementation of effective economic reforms, combined with foreign aid and U.S. support during the occupation, laid the foundation for recovery. By the mid-1950s, factory production had fully rebounded, setting the stage for the rapid economic expansion that defined the High Growth Era (Shimabuku 24–37). The period from the end of the war to 1955 was therefore crucial in establishing the conditions for Japan's economic miracle.

Japan's postwar economic growth was significantly supported by its integration into the global trading system, through institutions like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which provided a stable framework for exports (Johnson 15). While exports were crucial, the high-speed growth era (1955–1970) was primarily driven by domestic demand, with exports constituting a smaller share of gross national product (GNP) compared to other industrialized nations (Johnson 15–16). The Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) controlled technology imports, foreign capital, and joint ventures to develop strategic industries before gradually liberalizing trade (Johnson 16–17;26–27). Additionally, Japan's alliance with the U.S. allowed it to minimize defense expenditures, redirecting resources toward economic development, though the text does not indicate explicit preferential access to U.S. markets (Johnson 15).

Ultimately, Japan's export success was less about external market privileges and more a result of state-led industrial policies, domestic market expansion, and strategic global engagement (Johnson 30–31; 39).

The "miraculous" postwar economic growth of Japan was characterized by increasing investment ratios, that went from 25.0% in 1955 to 34.0% in 1962. High productivity incomes, with "unexplained residuals" accounting for 33–35% of growth, or approximately twice prewar levels. In the 1960s salaries in the modern sector increased faster than productivity, indicating a shift in supplying job flexibility. With the help of capital-intensive borrowed technology, investment was changed to do with manufacturing and "productive" industries, Furthermore, because of the decrease of relative prices, export growth consistently surpassed GNP. Postwar government consumption stayed low (6.6–10.2%), indicating an economy centered on the civilian sector (Ohkawa and Rosovsky 1-5).

3.1.3. Industrial Policy and the Collaboration with Private Sector

The Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) played a significant role in shaping Japan's postwar economic strategy, particularly by promoting key industries such as chemicals, electronics, and machinery. Rather than imposing rigid regulations, MITI guided industrial development through strategic cooperation with the private sector and encouraged efficient resource allocation. During the 1960s, Japan's industrial output was led by machinery—including automobiles and electronics—which accounted for approximately 39% of production, followed by metals and metal products at 26%. One of MITI's most ambitious initiatives was its collaboration with the Economic Planning Agency to implement the Income Doubling Plan, aimed at doubling national income within a decade. Although challenging, the plan succeeded in boosting public confidence and stimulating investment. While the plan eventually granted the Economic Planning Agency greater independence, MITI continued to play a decisive role in economic policymaking. Improvements in productivity and technological innovation, facilitated by MITI's coordinated efforts, helped accelerate Japan's

rapid economic development (Johnson 158, 237). Ultimately, MITI's strategic planning and close public-private cooperation were instrumental in driving the country's postwar economic miracle.

3.1.4 Oil Crisis and Economic Transition

Japan's rapid economic growth continued until 1973, when it was abruptly disrupted by the onset of the global oil crisis. In response to the October 1973 Arab Israeli War, Arab oil-producing nations imposed an embargo on countries supporting Israel, including the U.S. and its allies. This led to a dramatic surge in oil prices—from around $3 to over $12 per barrel—triggering widespread inflation across developed economies, including Japan and Western Europe. As companies passed rising energy costs onto consumers, prices soared, prompting panic buying and long lines at gas stations. The resulting fuel shortages severely impacted industrial production and everyday life. In Japan, government officials responded swiftly by implementing energy-saving measures and seeking alternative energy sources to reduce dependence on imported oil. The crisis exposed the vulnerability of modern economies to fluctuations in global oil supply and marked a turning point in both economic and energy policy. It led to stagflation—high inflation combined with stagnant growth—and its effects were felt for years, reshaping Japan's long-term approach to energy planning and economic management (Yergin 621-625).

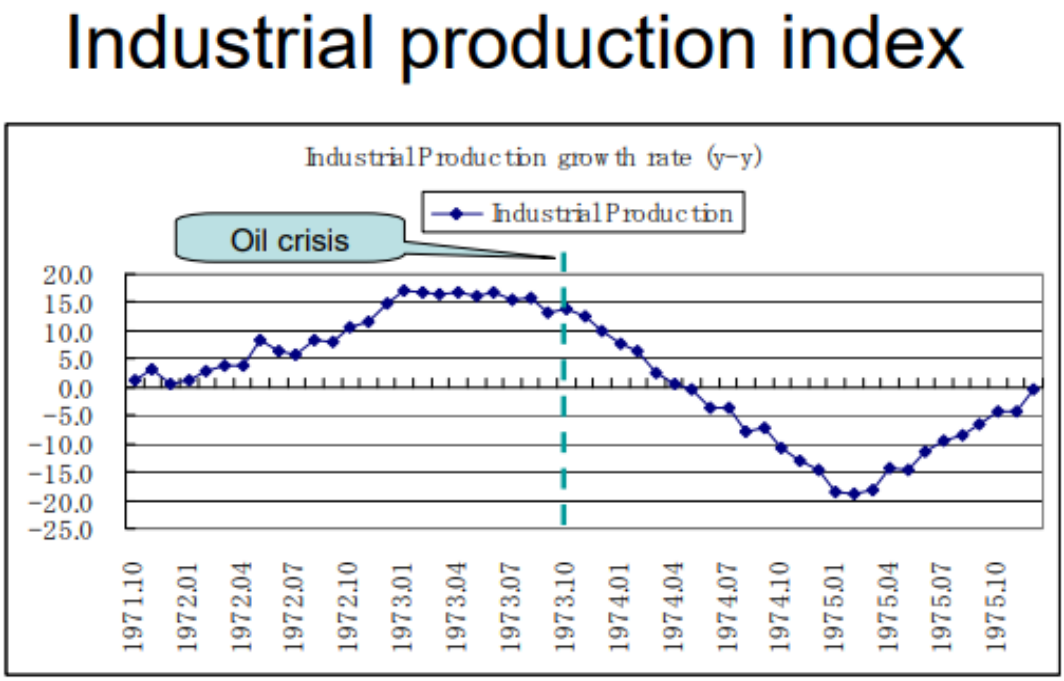

Fig. 6 . Industrial Production Index.

Source: Ito, "Great Inflation and Central Bank Independence in Japan'' .https://www.nber.org/system/files/chapters/c9166/revisions/c9166.rev2.pdf. Accessed on 25 May 2025.

The graph shows the industrial production growth rate of Japan starting from 1971 with a marked event which is Oil Crisis in 1973. The impact of the crisis as it is shown led the economy to disrupt.

The 1973 oil embargo marked a turning point in Japan's energy policy and its relationship with the U.S. In the wake of the crisis, Japan accelerated its efforts to reduce dependence on imported oil—investing heavily in nuclear energy, expanding strategic reserves, and promoting energy efficiency. Within a decade, Japan successfully reduced its reliance on oil from 77% to 50%. While the U.S. was also pursuing energy independence, it viewed Japan's rapid and effective energy diversification as a competitive threat in global markets (ogel 72-75).

The crisis revealed Japan's economic vulnerability but also highlighted a growing divergence in U.S.–Japan priorities. American officials, concerned about burden-sharing within the alliance, criticized Japan for not contributing enough to regional security despite its growing economic strength. At the same time, the oil shock underscored the limitations of U.S. power: it could protect its allies militarily but not shield them from economic disruption (Vogel 72-75). The episode deepened Japan's resolve to pursue greater autonomy in energy and economic policy, subtly shifting the dynamics of the bilateral relationship in the post-crisis era.

During the 1980s, the U.S. faced growing trade deficits and mounting pressure from domestic industries affected by the overvalued U.S. dollar. In response, the finance ministers and central bank governors of the G5 nations—Japan, the U.S., West Germany, France, and the United Kingdom—convened at the Plaza Hotel in New York in 1985 to negotiate a coordinated strategy to depreciate the dollar. The resulting Plaza Accord aimed to make U.S. exports more competitive by reducing the dollar's value, particularly in relation to the Japanese yen. However, the sharp appreciation of the yen raised serious concerns in Japan, whose export-driven economy feared a loss of competitiveness (Eichengreen 144-147).

To ease bilateral tensions, a compromise was reached: Japan agreed to expand domestic spending to stimulate internal demand, while the U.S. toned down its rhetoric on currency manipulation. This agreement took place amid escalating trade friction between the two countries, marked by voluntary export restraints (VERs) on key Japanese goods such as automobiles and electronics. The Plaza Accord not only became a landmark in international financial cooperation but also exemplified how currency policy was deeply intertwined with trade diplomacy. By the end of the decade, the dollar had fallen by over 40% against the yen, reflecting the powerful impact of coordinated exchange rate interventions and underscoring the increasingly complex economic relationship between Japan and the U.S. (Eichengreen 144-147)

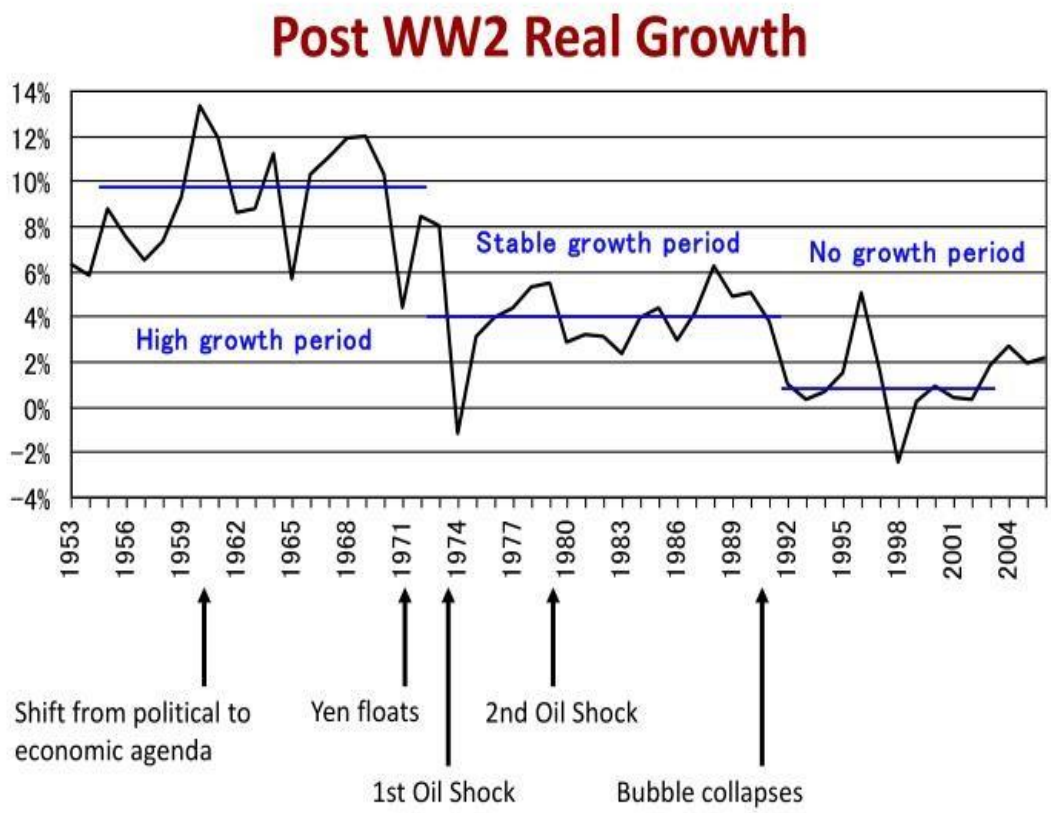

Fig. 7. Post WW2 Real Growth.

Source: Ezoe, ‘’Japanese Economy A 2012 Fall’’.

https://www.slideserve.com/tarmon/japanese-economy-a-2012-fall-seinan-gakuin-university

According to the graph, Japan's post-World War II economy can be divided into three phases. The high growth era which marked a great increase of Japan’s economy. The stable growth period began with a high-growth era, driven by rapid industrialization and export expansion, however ended by the bubble economy fall, followed by a no growth phase as the economy matured. A significant shift from political to economic priorities occurred in the 1970s-90s, marked by key events such as the yen's floatation (1973), the first and second oil shocks (1973, 1979), and the eventual collapse of the asset bubble in the early 1990s, which

led to decades of stagnation. These transitions reflect Japan's evolution from a booming postwar economy to a more complex, challenge-ridden financial landscape.

3.1.5. The Bubble Economy (1986-1991)

Japan's economy has suffered significant swings since the late 1980s. Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, the bubble caused a significant spike in asset values. Long-term economic growth depends on the money supply and credit. After the bubble burst in the early 1990s, Japan saw a drop in asset values, an increase in nonperforming assets, difficulties for financial institutions, and a protracted recession (Okina et al. 396).

3.1.6. Causes of The Bubble Economy

Kindleberger and Aliber argue that Japan’s economic situation deteriorated further after the 1985 Plaza Accord, which significantly strengthened the Japanese yen. In response, the Bank of Japan injected liquidity into the economy to offset the rising currency’s impact (151). The resulting asset bubble of the late 1980s was driven by multiple factors, including financial liberalization, distortions in the market, and shifts in global financial policy. Early in the decade, Japan eased restrictions on bank lending—especially in financial hubs like Tokyo and Osaka—enabling institutions to increase loans for real estate both domestically and abroad (284).

Because strict regulations made money deposits unprofitable, real estate emerged as a more attractive investment for individuals and institutions alike. Japan’s financial system became what Kindleberger and Aliber describe as the equivalent of a“perpetual motion machine,“where rising property values allowed banks to continually expand their lending, which in turn inflated prices further (150-151). At the same time, U.S. pressure forced Japan to liberalize its financial markets, granting greater access to American interests and enabling Japanese capital to flow into U.S. markets. This deregulation led to a surge in speculative and

risky investments (121). Taken together, these domestic and international factors contributed to one of the most significant financial bubbles in modern history.

3.1.7. The Fall of the Bubble Economy

During the 1990s, Japan faced significant economic challenges as a result of shifting financial policies. In an effort to curb soaring asset prices—particularly in the real estate sector—the Bank of Japan implemented a tighter monetary policy, raising interest rates in 1989. This move marked the end of the era of"unprecedentedly low official discount rates"that had previously fueled widespread borrowing. As the cost of borrowing rose sharply, bank lending began to contract, especially in the property sector (Ito and Iwaisako143-149).

This slowdown contributed to a steep decline in land prices, which had been artificially inflated by speculative demand. The situation was further exacerbated by the close linkage between the real estate and stock markets. As scholars have observed, "stock returns lead land returns," meaning that the fall in stock prices was quickly followed by a collapse in property values. Notably, the surge in stock prices in late 1989 and the parallel rise in land prices in 1990 could not be justified by conventional asset pricing models, whether based on fundamentals or rational expectations (Ito and Iwaisako143-149).

This disconnect revealed the extent of speculative excess, where investors were driven by irrational expectations rather than underlying economic indicators. The bursting of the bubble exposed deep structural vulnerabilities in Japan's financial system, rooted in risky lending practices and unregulated investments, and left policymakers grappling with long-term macroeconomic instability.

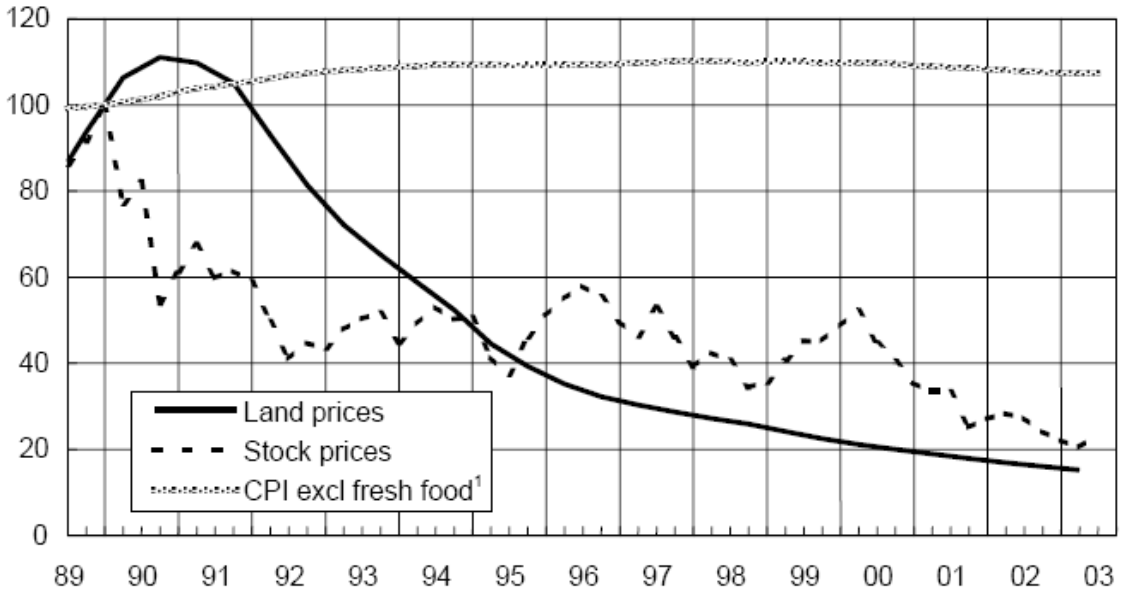

Fig. 8. Asset Price Deflation.

Source: Shiratsuka ,The asset price bubble in Japan in the 1980s: lessons for financial and macroeconomic stability . https://www.bis.org/publ/bppdf/bispap21e.pdf

3.2. Political Recovery

After the end of the Allied Occupation, Japan officially regained its sovereignty with the San Francisco Peace Treaty. It was represented by Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru at the conference, where the treaty recognized the independence of Japan in return for the abandonment of claims to the former colonial territories of Korea, Taiwan, and the Kuril Islands. Yoshida managed the political landscape of the early Cold War years. Although he was tactically cautious, he secured advantageous terms by resisting demands for massive rearmament, after creating the National Police Reserve, a precursor to the Self-Defense Forces. Behind the scenes, Emperor Hirohito assisted the negotiations by signaling to U.S. officials his approval to allow American military bases on Okinawa in exchange for Japan being allowed to retain remaining sovereignty, an early expression of the nation's postwar strategic alignment with the U.S. (Jansen 696-704).

Jansen also mentioned that Japan was tortured by ideological divisions at that moment. A dominant conservative grouping, typically former prewar liberals, emerged with the U.S. backing, whereas the left, and especially the Communists, were treated to the“red purge“, which eliminated their influence in the Diet (704). Such tensions were reflected in debates over Article 9 of the new constitution, which officially renounced war and kept armed forces. Although conservatives gently considered the clause problematic, it was used by the public and left-wing groups as a symbol of peace and democracy to such an extent that even a large number of conservatives hesitated to demand its amendment (675-715). Consequently, Japan continued its existence as a sovereign state under the shadow of Cold War alliances and internal political polarization.

3.2.1. The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan

The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) was formed in 1955 to unify two conservative parties: the Liberal Party and the Japan Democratic Party. The step was taken in order to stand against the growing of the influence of socialist movement. The LDP since its emergence as the most powerful political force in Japan, ruling the country for the majority of its time. The party was characterized by its conservative policies and its close association with business interests. It was crucial for Japan's postwar economic growth and evolution. The LDP also had a close alliance with the U.S. during the Cold War (Christensen). Although it faced occasional defeats, it quickly regained power. The LDP remained a central player in Japanese politics.

3.2.2 Merger of Conservative Parties

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was formed by a tactical union of Japan's Liberal and Democratic parties, which had failed to maintain political dominance as separate parties. Intra-party forces had a key role. Kohno argued that the merger was motivated, not by external pressures like fear of big business or socialist influence, but by “nested“ intraparty

agreements within each of the conservative parties' inner power struggles. Its aim was to strengthen the conservative bloc and avoid fragmentation that had weakened its capacity to respond to the expansion of socialism in postwar Japan. The new party also had a collective leadership to balance the influence of the merging groups, postponing for the time being total control centralization. In April 1956, Ichirō Hatoyama was chosen as party president, a move toward centralized leadership. The LDP also reflected a wide merger of non-leftist forces, from rural farmers to urban business leaders. This inner diversity was kept together by a flexible and pragmatic policymaking approach (Krauss and Pekkanen 70). The conservative merger enabled the LDP to dominate Japanese politics in the postwar period.

3.2.3 Role of U.S. Cold War Interests in Supporting the LDP

The geopolitical situation of the Cold War influenced the political environment in which the Liberal Democratic Party dominated Japan. The LDP was a pro-capitalist and anti-communist principles that the U.S. advocated for. This ideological position made the LDP a natural ally of U.S. interests in Asia, where containing the communist expansion was a key strategic priority. The anticommunist stand of the party helped to mark it from left wing opposition forces, including the Japan Socialist Party and the Japanese Communist Party. The party's pro capitalist standpoint and its adaptation of American military and economic policies served to establish its authenticity and external support. Therefore, the American Japanese cooperation supported the LDP's internal power and supported its political dominance over the long term (Krauss and Pekkanen 145-148).

3.2.4. Supported Networks and Clientelism

The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan has maintained power for a long time, and not just because of its popularity. Their success came from a mix of organizational strategies and electoral rules. At its origin, the system was built on a strong clientelist network, where the party distributed government resources to loyal voters, especially in countryside areas. This

approach was supported by Japan's centralized budget system. Before 1993, Japan's electoral system utilized the single nontransferable vote, and the LDP later profited the mixed member system, by giving more representation to rural districts. These districts, which were often isolated from big cities, and protected from urban voters' dissatisfaction caused by demographic imbalances. This allowed the LDP obtain most of the parliamentary seats with a minority of the national vote. The opposition parties faced internal conflicts, lack of local support, and unclear policy positions, which hurt their credibility and popularity (Scheiner 1-6). The LDP could keep its power through a combination of clientelist practices, centralized finance, electoral system design, and protected rural districts.

3.2.5 Factional Politics

In The Rise and Fall of Japan's LDP Political Party, Krauss and Pekkanen highlight how the internal dynamics of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) were heavily influenced by factional politics. These factions consisted of groups of party members who pledged loyalty to senior leaders in return for political patronage and financial backing (82). Under the leadership of Kakuei Tanaka, factions functioned not only as political support bases but also as policy support networks. Tanaka famously described his faction as a "general hospital," emphasizing its breadth of expertise across various policy areas to address local and national concerns (78).

By the late 1970s, factional rivalry intensified, particularly during the so-called Daifuku War, coinciding with the LDP's participation in local primary elections. This new political environment enabled faction leaders like Masayoshi Ōhira to build powerful local support structures known as *kōenkai*, which were often instrumental in swaying leadership contests, occasionally through unethical tactics (Krauss and Pekkanen 78–79). Over time, this deepened grassroots involvement was referred to as the "massification" of factions, reflecting how factionalism became increasingly tied to local-level mobilization and party growth. In

some instances, faction leaders were even accused of purchasing votes through their affiliated *kōenkai* organizations (Krauss and Pekkanen 171).

3.3. Opposition Movements and Political Unrest

While postwar Japan, especially under the control of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), seemed politically stable on the surface, this period also saw considerable unrest. Diverse groups, including left-wing parties, student movements, and civil society organizations, strongly opposed both domestic policies and the U.S.–Japan alliance. These movements expressed growing dissatisfaction with the country's political direction and concern about the extent of American influence on Japan's internal and foreign affairs, shedding light on the tensions that lay beneath Japan's seemingly quiet political landscape (Jones "The Protests That Made and Unmade Japan's Postwar Left.").

3.3.1. Left-Wing Opposition: What Happened to Japan's Postwar Left (1945–1960)?

In the year's right after the war, Japan's left-wing political groups, mainly the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) and the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), became extremely popular as many people wanted peace, fairness in the economy, and no more military. At first, the U.S. occupation supported these changes as part of making Japan more democratic. By 1947, the JSP had the most seats in the Diet (Japan's parliament), and labor unions that supported left-wing ideas were growing quickly (Dower 538-539).

But this move to the left soon ran into trouble with U.S. goals during the Cold War. After China became communist in 1949 and the Korean War started in 1950, the U.S. changed its approach. The occupation leaders started pushing back against left-wing power as they stopped government workers from striking, fired tens of thousands of workers who were thought to be leftists, and ended trials for war criminals so they could bring back leaders who supported capitalism (Dower 538-539).

The JCP became briefly more popular during this time, but it was also attacked.

Communists who got elected were removed from their jobs, and the party almost lost its legal status. Secretly, the CIA gave money to help the new Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) so that conservative groups would stay in power for a long time. By the middle of the 1950s, Japan's left-wing groups had been pushed aside—not just by losing elections, but because of planned actions by both the U.S. and Japanese leaders. Even though opposition parties still existed, they never got back the power they once had, and Cold War politics became the main force in Japan's government for many years (Kapur 28-33).

3.3.2 The 1960 Anpo Protests

The 1960 Anpo protests were the biggest political movement in Japan after the war. They started because Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi tried to change the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. Even though the latest version seemed fairer—saying both sides would defend each other and talk before taking action—it still allowed the U.S. to keep its military in Japan, which many people saw as a sign that Japan was still being controlled by another country. Many groups quickly came together to fight back. Students (Zengakuren), labor unions (Sōhyō), women's groups, and people who wanted peace all joined in—more than 6 million people protested across Japan. In Tokyo, thousands gathered around the Diet building, calling for the treaty to be canceled. Things got worse on June 15, when a student protester named Michiko Kanba died during a police attack, shocking the whole country, even with so much protest, Kishi pushed the treaty through Parliament in a secret meeting where opposition lawmakers were taken out by force. The effects came fast: Kishi quit, President Eisenhower called off a planned visit, and the protests became a symbol of people standing up against unfair rule (Kapur 34).

As Nick Kapur says, "the wide-ranging impact of the 1960 Anpo protests on US-Japan relations and Japanese politics, society, and culture was only just beginning" (34). The treaty stayed in place, but the protests became the highest point of civil resistance after the war.

They stopped nationalist plans for many years and helped start a new kind of public expression in media, books, and art—while also leading powerful leaders to build stronger ways to stop future protests (Kapur 28–34).

3.3.3. 1970s Radicalism (Student Protests & Environmental Movements)

In the 1970s, protest energy in Japan changed. Instead of large political movements like Anpo, protests became more focused on specific issues and were more scattered. Some student groups, frustrated with both the government and the regular left-wing parties, turned to violence. Groups like the United Red Army carried out kidnappings, bombings, and even killed their own members. In 1970, the Red Army Faction hijacked a Japan Airlines plane, which shocked the country and gave the government a reason to increase spying and security (Steinhoff 215).

These violent actions pushed regular people away, and student radicalism started to fade. At the same time, environmental protests became stronger. People were outraged by Minamata disease—mercury poisoning caused by pollution from the Chisso Corporation. Citizens' groups stood up, asking for companies to take responsibility and for better environmental rules. Their work led to substantial changes, like the creation of the Environment Agency in 1971 and Japan's first major laws to fight pollution (Steinhoff 215). While extreme politics lost support, local and environmental protests grew stronger. These new movements focused more on solving real-life problems than on big political ideas.

3.4. Japan's Cold War Foreign Policy

During the Cold War, Japan's foreign policy had to carefully balance its pacifist constitution with its dependence on the U.S. for security. Although Article 9 of the postwar constitution rejected the use of military force, Japan remained part of a U.S.-led security system through the 1960 Security Treaty. This allowed Japan to avoid building a large

military while still receiving protection from the U.S. At the same time, Japan worked to improve its reputation in Asia—especially in Southeast Asia and China—through economic cooperation, as past imperial tensions still affected regional relations. Japan's foreign policy during this period was shaped both by its limited military role and by its effort to regain influence through peaceful, economic means.

3.4.1. The U.S.–Japan Security Treaty and Military Dependence

The renewal of the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty in 1960 showed Japan's role in the Cold War as a junior partner to the U.S. Even though the latest version of the treaty promised more balance—saying the U.S. had to talk to Japan before using its bases there—it still allowed American military bases to stay in Japan with no end date. This gave Japan protection at a low cost, but it went against its postwar beliefs in peace. For many Japanese people, the treaty felt like Japan was still under U.S. control. The Self-Defense Forces (SDF), created in 1954, became Japan's way of having a military without breaking the constitution, which banned having one. These forces were officially civilian, but over time they grew and became more like a real military, with dedicated support from the U.S. Japan started building up their military again without officially calling it that, and it was all supported and protected by the U.S. military alliance (Pyle 201).

A big part of this military deal was Okinawa. Unlike the rest of Japan, Okinawa stayed under direct U.S. control until 1972. It was used as a key base during the Korean and Vietnam Wars (McCormack and Norimatsu 47). When Okinawa was finally given back to Japan, it was seen as a success for Prime Minister Eisaku Satō. But the U.S. kept its military bases there. People in Okinawa, who hosted over 70% of U.S. troops in Japan despite making up only 0.6% of Japan's land area, faced problems like having their land taken, pollution, and being treated as less important (Rabson 32). These problems still have not been fully solved. In short, Japan's Cold War defense was based not on its own military, but on following U.S. goals (McCormack and Norimatsu 49). This helped keep peace but also caused ongoing

problems in Japan's democracy and peace-based constitution.

3.4.2. Japan's Regional Strategy: China and Southeast Asia

Even though Japan depended on the U.S. for defense, it acted more freely in regional politics and trade (Green 412). In 1972, Japan made a big move by fixing relations with the People's Republic of China, after the U.S. also started talking to Beijing. Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka's government officially recognized Beijing and cut ties with Taiwan. This change matched Japan's economic interests. The joint statement clearly said: "The Government of Japan recognizes that Government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal Government of China" ("Japan-China Joint Communiqué"). Making peace with China not only reduced political tension but also allowed trade to grow fast. Japan quickly became one of China's top trade partners, selling industrial products and helping with modernization (Green 414). This economic connection has helped keep peace in East Asia, even when political problems come up.

At the same time, Japan also grew its role in Southeast Asia. Through its Official Development Assistance (ODA) program, it funded roads, schools, and factories in the region (Rix 112). While the U.S. focused on military power, Japan used economic power as its primary diplomatic tool (Rix 115). Countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand received Japanese loans, granting Japanese companies access to critical markets and natural resources (Rix 118). This strategy often termed "comprehensive security" helped Japan fix its wartime image while avoiding military entanglements. Japan's Cold War policy blended U.S. military dependence with autonomous economic diplomacy, using trade and aid to stabilize domestic politics and expand regional influence (Rix 120).

3.5 Political Shifts in the 1980s

In the 1980s, Japan experienced important political changes. A stronger sense of national identity developed, the alliance with the U.S. grew deeper, and public concern over

political corruption increased. These changes happened during a time of Cold War tensions and strong economic growth driven by exports. The U.S. continued to play a key role in shaping Japan's military and economic direction, keeping Japan in a largely dependent position within the alliance and encouraging neoliberal reforms. Meanwhile, domestic figures like Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro used U.S. support to promote internal reforms and boost national pride. Yet this decade also revealed deeper problems in Japan's political system. Scandals such as the Recruit Affair showed the weaknesses behind the long rule of the Liberal Democratic Party.

3.5.1. Nakasone Yasuhiro and the Push for Global Leadership (1982–1987)

The 1980s marked a turning point in Japan's political tone, Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro (1982–1987) started making Japan more confident in how it acted internationally and how it saw itself as a nation. Nakasone was known for being both a proud nationalist and a reform-minded leader. He had two main goals: getting closer to the U.S. and making Japanese people feel proud of their country's history and traditions. Internationally, Nakasone made Japan's alliance with the U.S. even stronger, especially with President Reagan. The two leaders had a famously close friendship, often called the "Ron-Yasu" era. Nakasone promised to make Japan the "unsinkable aircraft carrier" of the Pacific, increased defense spending, and supported U.S. goals during the Cold War, especially against the Soviet Union. Even though Japan's constitution still limited its military, its defense forces quietly grew stronger, especially at sea and in intelligence (Pyle 298-301).

At home, Nakasone worked on government reform. He sold off big government-run companies like Japan National Railways and Nippon Telegraph and Telephone (NTT). This helped modernize Japan's government and economy, but it also led to people losing jobs and made unions upset (Vogel 78). Nakasone said these changes were needed to make Japan more competitive. More debated was Nakasone's push for nationalism and changing how Japan

remembered its history. He often visited Yasukuni Shrine, where war criminals are honored, which caused strong anger in China and South Korea. He also supported changes in education to encourage patriotism and to downplay Japan's wartime actions (Dudden 63).

As historian Alexis Dudden said, Nakasone's political views showed a move away from being sorry for Japan's actions after the war and instead focused on bringing back national pride even if that meant ignoring parts of Japan's past (63). Nakasone helped raise Japan's position in the world, but he also reopened old wounds in Asia and caused political division at home. People still see his time in office in diverse ways: some praise his clear goals, while others blame him for ignoring the darker parts of Japan's past.

3.5.2. The Recruit Scandal and the Erosion of LDP Legitimacy (1988–1989)

Even though Japan's economy was strong and it had global respect, its politics started to fall apart in the late 1980s. The main cause was the Recruit Scandal—a huge case of insider trading and corruption that showed how deeply connected politicians, government workers, and big companies had become. A tech company called Recruit Cosmos gave early stock shares to many top people before going public. When the company's stock started selling to the public, these people made huge profits—as if it was a legal bribery. Those involved included Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita, former Prime Minister Nakasone, and other powerful members of the ruling LDP party from diverse groups. Few were punished, but the public was shocked. The news covered it every day, people got frustrated, and many demanded changes. This pressure forced Takeshita to resign in 1989 (Schlesinger 231-235).

The scandal also happened around the same time Emperor Hirohito died, ending the Shōwa era—a sign that Japan's postwar chapter was closing. After the scandal, the LDP lost control of the upper house of the Diet for the first time. People started demanding changes in how elections and political donations worked. Even though the LDP stayed in power for a few more years, its strong control was clearly getting weaker. This led to the big political shift in

1993, when the LDP was removed from government for the first time in almost 40 years (Curtis 180-182).

From 1952 to 1991, Japan's political landscape appeared stable, but this stability was deeply shaped by its close alignment with the U.S. The long-standing rule of the Liberal Democratic Party was not just the result of domestic politics—it was reinforced by Cold War priorities that favored a loyal and pro-American government. While opposition forces, including leftist parties and mass protests, pushed back against this direction, they were often sidelined, sometimes with quiet support from U.S. policy.

The U.S.–Japan Security Treaty became central to Japan's defense and foreign policy, anchoring it within a U.S.-dominated security framework. Though Japan rebuilt its economy and began re-engaging with Asia diplomatically, its foreign policy remained limited by alliance obligations and strategic dependence.

Even in the 1980s—when nationalist rhetoric grew stronger and Japan appeared more confident—its political and economic choices remained closely tied to American interests. Leaders like Nakasone promoted a stronger national identity, but their actions still reflected the constraints of a junior partnership.

In sum, this chapter has shown that Japan's postwar democracy operated within boundaries shaped by external pressures and internal compromises. Beneath the surface of stability and growth, Japan's autonomy remained restricted, revealing the lasting influence of U.S. power on its political development during the Cold War.

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored how U.S.–Japan relations changed from the 1930s to the end of the Cold War, showing how the two countries moved from being enemies in war to close allies in peace. It argued that this transformation was not equal or truly cooperative. Instead, it was shaped mainly by American interests and carried out through occupation, reform, and Cold War strategy. The findings support the main idea: Japan's postwar recovery and political direction were shaped inside a system designed by the U.S.

The key question of the dissertation of whether this shift was a shared process or managed mostly by the U.S. and by examining how the U.S.–Japan alliance was built on an

imbalance of power. While Japan rebuilt its economy and institutions, it did so within limits set by the U.S. and under its constant influence. From the U.S.-written constitution to the long-term presence of American military bases, Japan's independence was reshaped to fit American strategic goals.

Chapter One explained how the conflict began, looking at Japan's rise as a modern imperial power and how this brought it into conflict with the U.S. The war was not sudden but followed years of rising tensions. Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor marked a turning point, and after the war, the U.S. took full control of Japan's future.

Chapter Two focused on the end of the war and the U.S. occupation. The atomic bombings were not only used to end the war but also to show power—especially toward the Soviet Union. During the occupation (1945–1952), the U.S. made major changes to Japan's government, economy, and society. While some reforms were positive, they were chosen to make sure Japan stayed loyal to the U.S. Once the Cold War started, the U.S. moved away from liberal reforms and focused on anti-communism and stability instead.

Chapter Three looked at Japan after the occupation ended. It showed how U.S. support helped keep the Liberal Democratic Party in power, which limited political change. Public protests, especially against the 1960 security treaty, showed many Japanese people were unhappy with the alliance. Still, the system built by the U.S. remained strong. Japan's foreign policy followed U.S. goals, and even its economic success depended on American protection and Cold War planning.

Japan's economy grew rapidly, but this was also part of a U.S. plan to stop communism in Asia. The "economic miracle" was not only the result of Japan's efforts—it was supported and shaped by the U.S. However, this success also came with problems like inequality and dependence on exports.

In the end, the evidence shows that the U.S.–Japan alliance was not a partnership between equals. Japan gained many things—peace, growth, and international respect—but it had to follow the rules of a system built by the U.S. The effects of the occupation did not stop in 1952. They continued through Japan's foreign policy, its politics, and even its memory of the war.

This study shows how power works in international relations. It reminds us that democracy and alliance can exist alongside control and dependency. The U.S.–Japan relationship is often seen as a success story, but it began with pressure, limits, and Cold War needs.

In conclusion, Japan's postwar transformation was not fully its own. It was part of a carefully controlled process meant to create a stable, loyal ally. Japan became modern and democratic, but the foundations of its new role were shaped by outside forces. The long-lasting influence of the U.S. still shapes Japan today, raising important questions about sovereignty, memory, and the price of security.

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