
The Road to the Fifteen Years War (1931–1945)

The establishment of Manchukuo, its prosperity and its collapse happened from the 1930s to the 1940s. At that time, the potential problems which the government of the Meiji period had happened to take onto itself and which had continued to be skillfully contained finally became actual. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Japan put an end to the Edo period which was the time of the Samurai and started to walk on the road to a modern state. Because of this circumstance, I have to begin this chapter with the Meiji restoration.

The principal goal for the leaders in the Meiji period was to build a prosperous country and to have a strong army. This meant that the government had to modernize its economy and its military forces. In this regard, other Asian countries were far behind Japan at that time. If modernization had failed or had been delayed, Japan would have become a satellite nation or a colony of Great Britain, France, the United States or some other European country, as had been seen in a number of other Asian countries. Because of this situation, Japan had to be modernized swiftly. To purchase up-to-date weapons was not enough to modernize the military. In the Edo period, there was a class system; the warriors, the top of the caste, used to be engaged in military affairs. However, in November 1872, the Meiji government emphasized, by announcing a national service charge, that to be a soldier was a national obligation. Beginning in January 1873, all Japanese men had by the call-up law to be soldiers for a certain period of time. There were many exceptions to this system. For example, householders, government clerks, and people who paid a “substitution fee” could escape this obligation. As a result, the military obligation weighed heavily on the second and the third sons of farmers. Some of these exceptions were abolished by an amendment to the law in 1879, and they were completely abolished in 1889.