

Japan's Drive to Expand in Manchuria

The island nation of Japan had long wanted to expand into Manchuria, the northeastern region of China. “Manchuria is for the Japanese the only region for expansion. . . .As Asians, the Japanese must of necessity live in Asia.” These were the words of Japanese military leader Yamagato Aritomo early in the 1900s.

Why were the Japanese so eager for expansion? The table below gives some clues. The rate of natural increase of Japan’s population was 12.8 per 1,000 each year. The vast area of Manchuria offered plenty of room for Japanese migration. It also had the advantage of lying fairly close to the Japanese homeland. Manchuria also had the natural resources that Japan lacked. Manchuria also could supply the food that Japan needed to import in great quantity.

The Russians, too, wanted to control Manchuria. This conflict led to the Russo-Japanese War in 1904. When the war ended in 1905, Japan regained control of southern Manchuria. Japan began its expansion there, building railroads and plants to manufacture iron and steel. By the 1920s about one million Japanese had moved to Manchuria.

The Chinese then began trying to reestablish control in Manchuria. They built railroad lines to compete with the Japanese lines. Japanese military leaders feared that these actions would threaten their interests in Manchuria. They therefore set the stage to take over all of Manchuria.

On September 18, 1931, the Japanese blew up a section of its own Southern Manchurian Railway at Mukden. They claimed that the act had been committed by the Chinese. Within 24 hours, Japanese troops had captured all the key cities along the railroad. Soon the Japanese had conquered all of Manchuria.

The League of Nations and the United States condemned this Japanese aggression. In response, Japan withdrew from the international organization. The Japanese then increased their agricultural and industrial buildup in Manchuria.

Japan and Manchuria in the Early 1900s

	Japan	Manchuria
Land Area	144,000 square miles	475,000 square miles
Population	49 million	14 million
Fertile Soil	15% of the land usable for farming	large area containing some of the best farmland in China
Iron Ore	almost none	rich deposits
Coal	a good supply, but unsuitable for many industrial purposes	rich deposits of industrial quality
Petroleum	almost none	rich deposits

