

The Shōwa Era of Japan

to·tal·i·tar·i·an·ism

noun

a system of government that is centralized and dictatorial and requires complete subservience to the state.

free will

noun

the power of acting without the constraint of necessity or fate; the ability to act at one's own discretion.

Complete subservience cannot exist as long as free will exists, there will always be people that disagree. Hideki Tojo ruled Japan with a totalitarian government in the 1930's; the Shōwa era. The word Shōwa, translated to "bright clear path" is a combination of the Japanese words Shō (bright, clear) and wa (path) this reflects the nationalistic views that were prominent in the Shōwa era. Japan's economy was on a steady road to greatness at the time, mostly due to the land they were conquering in Eastern Asia, but what was the point of having a good economy if none of the citizens were truly happy. A flawed ideology that violated human rights, totalitarianism was an effective form of government in Japan in the 1930's.

The death of Emperor Taishō in 1925 marked the beginning of change in Japan. After World War 1 a lot of Japanese citizens were unsure of Japan's economic future and radical movements began to spread, this led to government enactment of the Peace Preservation Law later in 1925, this outlawed any demonstrations of political activism, and pretty much crushed the leftist movements that were gaining traction after the Russian Revolution. On the

other hand, this was the first sign of the rise of totalitarianism in Japan. The Peace Preservation law gradually “expanded” by silencing more and more movements in Japan. It would eventually outlaw any opposing government views. This was the time Hideki Tojo began to rise through the ranks of the Japanese military. He would eventually ascend to prime minister and become the dictator of totalitarian Japan.

The Showa financial crisis of 1927 hit Japan hard. The Great Depression pretty much started 3 years early in Japan. The Japanese government blamed the economy's crash on the lack of natural resources within Japan's borders, their solution to this problem of course was, invade and conquer. Japan felt it was time to expand its navy, but the London Naval treaty prevented this. Japanese Nationalists blame the Prime Minister for not solving this issue, and did the only logical thing possible in this situation and had Prime Minister Hamaguchi Osachi assassinated.

Nationalist Movements began to spread throughout Japan, the military began to expand and eventually had more influence and power than the actual government, especially after Japan left the League of Nations. After leaving those pesky peacekeepers, Japan had the freedom to invade whoever they wanted, more specifically, China. As time went on, the military began to invade more and more of eastern Asia. In 1932 the military staged the assassination of another Prime Minister (Inukai Tsuyoshi) although this event is not considered a Coup, the assassination led to an actual coup in February of 1936, this marked the beginning of Japan's Militarist state era, as well as, the second Sino-Japanese war. Nationalism began to grow even more, but so did the GDP (Gross Domestic Product), the more land Japan invaded, the more resources for a growing economy. The invasion of China steadily became more violent (on both sides), and many massacres were performed by the Imperial Japanese army, most notably, The Nanjing Massacre, which resulted in 50,000 - 300,000 civilian casualties, and various other heinous crimes against women, elderly, and children of Nanjing. The Second Sino-Japanese War, ended in a stalemate, although Japan's forces left China after WWII.

The Totalitarian government of the late 1930's committed many atrocities, but they did boost Japan's GDP by 5% per year, this was quite impressive considering most industrialized countries were in the midst of the great depression at this time, but does this economic growth justify the war crimes committed by the Imperial army? Not at all. Despite the fact that most

Japanese citizens were full on nationalists at this point in time, the citizens wouldn't of been truly happy if they knew what occurred on the battlefields. In addition, there aren't many records of any leftist movements in Japan after the coup despite them being popular just a decade earlier, the rise of nationalism in Japan was brought upon via fear of the military in Japan. Hopefully, by understanding the events in Japan in the 1930's will help us speak up before it's too late, because after all, history repeats itself if we don't educate ourselves on it.