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It is possible to divide the political history of modern Japan into three phases. The first, which saw the failure of agrarian liberalism came to an end with the adoption of a formal constitution and the outward signs of a parliamentary democracy in 1889. The second saw the failure of democratic forces up to the beginning of the great depression in the early 1930s. Then began the phase of a right totalitarian regime and a war economy.

In the first phase the liberal movement began with a demand for liberty and people's rights and gave rise to the Jiyuto (Liberal Party), largely backed by smaller landlords and protesting the domination of the Meiji oligarchy. They demanded a greater participation in the political process of the country. They protested the increased taxation by the Meiji leaders and tried to get peasant support but the radical demands of the peasants led to a split and finally in 1884 the dissolution of the Jiyuto.

While conditions began to improve, the Meiji government began to use an effective mixture of police repression, through the Peace Preservation Laws and through economic measures meant to lessen discontent without effecting their power. The constitution, with its support of Imperial legitimacy reflected the lack of a united and effective opposition, for the industrial working class was small, the peasants, weak and divided and the
commercial classes barely emerging from the controls of the feudal aristocracy. Further we find the weakness of the Diet, particularly its limited control over finances and secondly the power of the army, reflected in its access to the Emperor. The resignation of Ito in 1901, saw the collapse of civilian rule.

The twenties saw a rise in the democratic character of Japanese politics. It also saw the rise of the influence of the business classes in politics. The high point, according to some was the ratification of the London Naval Treaty in 1930.

However the depression put an end to all this. It was able to, because capitalism was still dependent on the State, as a purchaser of its products and a protector of its markets; for Japan lacked a vigorous internal market. Secondly, in Japan capitalism had never become a carrier of democratic ideas, for various historical reasons as it had been in nineteenth century Europe.

With the assassination of Premier Inukai and the attempt at a coup by the radical right (May 15, 1932) democratic hopes were put to rest in Japan. A period of semi-military dictatorship began. The army responded to the lack of electoral support for patriotic radicalism in the 1936 elections with another coup and only surrendered on the Emperor's personal command. According to Maruyama this was a defeat for 'fascism from below', that is the anti-capitalist and popular right and 'fascism from above' began to consolidate its position. Political parties were dissolved
and the Imperial Rule Assistance Association set up. Radicals were arrested and national mobilization was decreed. It was a government propelled movement, largely which engendered feelings that included a sense of mission, a fear of foreign enemies, the ABCD encirclement and stressed the subversive quality of Western ideas. Japan joined the Anti-Comintern Triple Alliance and suppressed all trade unions in the country.

The anti-capitalism of the right did in no way affect the interests of the business class. Through nominal government control the zaibatsu were able to dominate, fairly completely all industry. Big business needed fascism, patriotism, Emperor worship and the military just as the army and the patriots needed big industry to carry out their programme, as Barrington Moore points out.

While a large number of the army, by the 1930s were from rural Japan and supported peasant radicalism and opposed the financial oligarchy and court cliques they were unable to affect the position of industry. Thus their failure to develop Manchuria, independent of business.

In Japan, like in other fascist movements the fundamental feature was repression at home and expansion abroad of a regime based on a coalition of the commercial-industrial elites and the ruling classes in rural Japan, the landowners. The oppression was directed against peasants and industrial workers.

Since Western ideas had made no really deep inroads Japan
was able to rely on an appeal to traditional symbols and some careful application of terror. Ultranationalism or fascism was a reaction to foreign crisis and to the problems of industrial growth and the political problems that this gave rise to. If the strength of Japan was to grow through economic expansion, which meant trade, then workers and farmers would have to be restricted in their consumption of imported food and raw materials. Ishihara Kanji of Toa Rengsei Kai expressed the idea well, when he said, "hold down the standard of living and uphold the ideal of simple living."

The occupation authorities started with the aim of eradicating all ideological and institutional sources of Japanese ultra nationalism. They identified these as the family structure, the pattern of authority and the concentration of economic powers in urban and rural areas. And so they began to tackle them through a series of reform measures like land reform, deconcentration of economic power, the disestablishment of imperial authority, and the weakening of the structure of authority through greater freedom to trade unions, political dissenters and so on. But the family structure remained intact. As Maruyama Masao has pointed out in his studies of Japanese nationalism total loyalty was broken into atomistic loyalty and the latter found its resting place in the family. It was no longer the Emperor or the State but the family which was the focus of individual loyalty. The traditional pattern of authority remained in the family and
this could at any time be expanded to a wider area and become an effective social force.

The so-called 'reverse course' has in Japan put back the educational system on the old standards and concentration has increased in business in a new form while political authority has reverted to the tradition of cliques.

While ultra nationalism is not seen as a major force in Japanese society the social and cultural units which are its currency continue to matter and this study concentrates on an appraisal of their role.

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