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This image, circa 1878, is maintained at the Library of Congress where it bears this caption: "Samurai on horseback, wearing armor and horned helmet, carrying bow and arrows."

Japan embarked on territorial expansion less than seventy years after it had abandoned two-and-a-half centuries of isolationism. Its past had included shoguns and samurai (with its Bushido culture). Its future, beginning with Emperor Meiji, included modernization and fledgling (Taisho) democracy.

By the end of the 1920s, Japanese society was in turmoil. The effects of the Great Depression had reached its shores. Military leaders were running the country while its financial resources were controlled by a "wealth group," mostly of powerful families, called zaibatsu. In 1931, the army invaded northern China.

Japanese propaganda stated:

With the help of Japan, China and Manchukuo [a resource-rich section of Inner Manchuria which Japan occupied in 1932 and in which, among other things, Japan intended to create and control an "Israel in Asia"], the world can be in peace.

At the same time, a document entitled "Basic Concepts of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" more clearly expressed an imperial intent:

Although we use the expression 'Asian Cooperation,' this by no means ignores the fact that Japan was created by the Gods or posits an automatic racial equality.

Put differently, the Japanese people were racially superior to their Asian neighbors and, thus, could subdue them (and appropriate their resources). While Hitler - with his racist motivation - was consolidating his power in Germany, the Japanese army began invading its neighbors, including China. Troop actions were inconsistent with the concept of "cooperation."

Japanese soldiers were not afraid to die. As a German journalist who had lived in Tokyo (Albrecht Fürst von Urach) observed in his 1943 booklet about Japan (*The Secret of Japan's Strength*), members of the imperial army believed they would become "a kind of god" if they died in battle:

Death as such holds no terrors for the Japanese warrior. For the Japanese, death is not an end, but rather a stage in the eternal progression from ancestors to posterity. It is a door that is not the end, but the beginning.

Death on the battlefield makes one a kind of god, a "Kami," who does not dwell far from the living, but rather always and ever joins with millions of others to hold his protective hand over the Japanese nation and people. He defends their happiness and growth, and takes a living role in all the earthly affairs of the entire people.

The fallen become divine, and remain close to the coming generations. They are honored by them daily and live on in the nation as models and defenders of coming generations.

Soldiers who do not fear death - but welcome it - make for dangerous opponents.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/DANGEROUS-OPPONENTS-Flags-Of-Our-Fathers>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

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Media Stream



Emperor Meiji

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Japanese Propaganda - Co-Prosperity Sphere

Propaganda poster, from 1935, by the Manchukuo State Council of Emperor Kang-de Puyi.

Online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Propaganda Poster - Japan Occupying Manchuria

Image, described above, online courtesy *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*.

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Map of Manchuria Region

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