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HOW DID WW1 FAN THE FLAMES OF CONFLICT IN EAST ASIA?

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Historic rivals: Video transcript

China and Japan have long vied for power and influence in East Asia.

China was the dominant force for centuries, but this balance of power was upset in the mid-1800s when it came under increasing European influence.

Nations such as Britain, France and Germany set up colonial outposts that encroached on China's land and trade monopoly.

At first Japan sat safely on the side-lines, largely isolated from the outside world. But in 1853 Japan was forced to open up to free trade after coming under pressure from U.S warships.

Fearing Western imperialism Japan began a process of rapid industrial and military modernisation.

The Japanese wanted to expand their territory to supply much needed resources. During 1894 and 1895 they fought China for control of the Korean peninsula in what became known as the First Sino-Japanese war.

The Western world was shocked when Japan's newly modernised military defeated the much larger Chinese army. China was forced to give up a lot of territory, including Korea and Taiwan.

Japan continued to seek power in the region and in 1905 war broke out between Japan and Russia over control of Korea and the Northern Chinese region of Manchuria.

When Japanese forces defeated Russia, Europe realised they could not assume they could suppress supposedly 'inferior' nations.

Chinese nationalists also resented European influence in their country. They launched a series of revolts and finally, overthrew the Qing dynasty in 1911.

However, while the revolutionaries set up a republican state with a government in Beijing they failed to unite the country behind it. The country fell prey to disorder, with many regions controlled by local warlords.

So at the outbreak of World War One Japan had taken China's place as the principal power of East Asia.