Japan's Total Empire
Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism

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2 The Jewel in the Crown
The International Context of Manchukuo

Japanese expansion in Northeast China in the 1930s was part of a complex geometry of imperialism, comprised of the Japanese, their rivals for empire in the Asia-Pacific region, and the peoples over whom they sought dominion. Both governments and communities took part in the imperial enterprise, and in each case the course of empire was directed by the institutions that shaped the possibilities for individual action, as well as the individuals themselves. To take one example, the Kwantung Army officers who played such a prominent role in the creation of Manchukuo operated within a multiplicity of frameworks. Institutionally, they occupied positions within a colonial garrison army, which itself was part of a larger military bureaucracy, and, beyond that, one branch of the Japanese government. Living in the Northeast, the officers were part of an expatriate community of Manchurian Japanese, who were themselves members of a greater colonial elite. The configuration of international power at a given moment in time prescribed the interactions of these officers with different groups of Chinese, as it did their relations with Westerners in China. In this sense, the outcome of an imperial intervention initiated by Kwantung Army officers could not be reckoned in a single equation: it required a more complicated computation, taking into account bureaucratic politics, the politics of collaboration, and the diplomacy of imperialism. These were the power grids overlaying the Manchurian situation; the calculations they engendered defined the geometry of empire.

They were not static configurations of power. The spatial dimensions of empire changed over time, and there were good reasons for—even a logic to—the transitions. The creation of Manchukuo was part of this logic and thus represented a particular phase in the chronology of Japanese imperialism. In 1931 the initiation of a new military imperialism in Northeast
China marked a turning point for the Japanese empire. Thereafter Japanese made Manchukuo the centerpiece of their empire; they crafted it into the jewel in Japan’s imperial crown. Why 1931 became the moment of departure for a new kind of imperialism is a complicated question to which I will come back over and again in the course of this book. The answers suggested in this chapter focus on the external pressures on Japanese policy, in particular the ways in which Japan and its imperial rivals responded to the challenge of the Chinese Nationalist movement. I rephrase the question of imperial chronology slightly: What defined the character of the new imperialism in Manchukuo? How was it set apart from earlier phases? The answers in this case look to the significance of Japanese characterizations of Manchukuo as “autonomous” of Western influence—going it alone against Western opposition—and “revolutionary” in the approach to colonial subjects—embracing the challenge of Chinese nationalism through the creation of a new kind of colonial state.

Defining the new imperialism at once in terms of Japan’s relationship to the West and its relationship to Asia was a resonant dualism in the history of Japanese imperialism. Since the beginnings of Japanese expansionism in the 1870s and 1880s, the course of empire building had moved through several distinct phases, each defined by changing constructions of this same dualism. Thus the phases of empire building represented on one hand major transitions in Japan’s relationship with Europe and the United States as it moved from being the object of imperial ambitions to becoming an imperial rival and enemy. On the other hand, each phase also marked an accumulation of experience with colonial subjects, the acquisition of new cultural forms of colonial capital, which were then deployed in the next phase. Knowledge garnered from this wealth of experience—both in the diplomacy of imperialism and the arts of colonial management—provided the foundation on which Manchukuo was built. For this reason, the story of the jewel in the crown demands a return to Manchukuo’s imperial beginnings in order to separate out the old from the new.

**IMPERIAL BEGINNINGS**

The first push for influence in Northeast China gathered force at a turning point in the history of the Japanese empire. Victories in wars with China (1894–1895) and Russia (1904–1905) gained Japan entry into the ranks of the world’s great military powers. During the same period, the new commercial treaties of 1894 and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 signaled Japan’s admittance into the Western community of nations on terms of
equality. These were momentous steps for a nation that, in 1853, had been forced by American gunboats to accept unequal treaties—the same treaties that turned China into a quasi-colony of Europe before Japanese eyes. The specter of China’s humiliation provided a powerful incentive for Japan to expand in self-defense.

Yet Japan’s turn to imperialism was more than a simple reaction to Western pressure. The expansionist impulse sprang as well from the social and political upheavals of the mid nineteenth century and drew on a sophisticated discourse on Asia.1 Together, internal and external forces propelled Japan into the precocious imperial activism of the 1870s and 1880s. As American and European commerce wreaked havoc on native industry, Japanese statesmen used European international law to enlarge their national territory, asserting claims to Ezo (present-day Hokkaidō), and the Kurile, Ryūkyū (Okinawa), and Bonin Islands. The Japanese government launched a military expedition to Taiwan in 1874, and sent soldiers and gunboats to Inchon in 1876 to force Korea to sign a commercial treaty, even while lobbying European diplomats unsuccessfully for the revision of their own unequal treaties. Thus it was that Japan began its career as a modern imperial power under the imperialist gun, escaping its aggressors by becoming an aggressor itself.

Japanese empire builders first trained their guns on Korea. In the official discourse of Meiji Japan, intervention in Korean court politics and an increasingly belligerent Sino-Japanese struggle for influence represented a new approach to Asia, one fusing older Confucian ideas with newer Western conceptions of international relations. Replacing China as the head of a Confucian family of nations, Japan had the prerogative to guide younger Asian brothers down the path it had itself so recently trod—toward Western-style modernization, civilization, and enlightenment. Articulated in the language of military geopolitics, it was strategically imperative to secure the Korean peninsula, transformed metaphorically into a “dagger pointed at the heart of Japan.” In an international order where the “strong devour the weak,” Japanese concluded they could either join the West as a “guest at the table” or be served up with China and Korea as part of the feast.2 Such were the narratives of imperial mission in the

2. For a useful essay summarizing the Meiji discourse on Asia, see Marlene J. Mayo, “Attitudes toward Asia and the Beginnings of Japanese Empire,” in Grant
formative years of empire, shaped by ambitions to dominate Korea. And it was that mission that led Japan, pursuing empire in Korea, on into Northeast China.

The desire for a foothold in Manchuria, known to the Chinese as the Three Eastern Provinces, or simply the Northeast, emerged within Japanese Army circles as early as the 1880s. If control over Korea was essential to defend the home islands, then Manchuria's strategically placed Liaodong Peninsula was critical to secure Korea. When the Sino-Japanese rivalry over Korea erupted into war in 1894 and Japan proved victorious, the army added a Liaodong leasehold to the terms for peace. But a new rival for domination of the region deprived Japan of the Liaodong concession and soon threatened even the influence won in Korea itself. Supported by France and Germany in the Triple Intervention of 1895, Russia forced Japan to retrocede the Liaodong Peninsula to China. Quickly concluding its own agreement for a leasehold in 1898, Russia then invested heavily in its new sphere of influence in Manchuria and began to push into Korea as well. Tensions escalated and war soon broke out, Japan's second imperial contest over Korea. Victorious once again, Japan declared a protectorate over Korea and appropriated Russian interests in South Manchuria. Although it would later be claimed that the Russo-Japanese War was fought over Manchuria, Korea was the paramount objective and the real prize of the war. Indeed, army concerns notwithstanding, the lack of general interest in Manchuria led to a serious debate in 1905 over whether to sell the Russian rights to an American railway magnate. The government decided, of course, to keep Manchuria. But the point to remember is that at the outset, Japanese interests in Northeast China were overshadowed by the then favorite son of the Japanese empire—Korea.4


With a new diplomatic status, a new military reputation, and a new collection of colonial possessions, Japan turned a fresh page in its imperial history. During this second, developmental, phase of empire, Japan’s sphere of influence in Northeast China took shape. An admixture of formal and informal elements, Manchuria represented the two faces of Japan’s nascent empire. The Portsmouth Peace Treaty of 1905 transferred to Japan all Russian rights and interests in South Manchuria, originally signed over by China in 1898. These comprised 1) the balance of the twenty-five-year leasehold over the Liaodong Peninsula, which under Japanese rule became the Kwantung Leased Territory and included the port of Dalian and the naval base of Lushun; 2) the southern spur of the Russian-buit Chinese Eastern Railway, which ran from Changchun to Lushun and which the Japanese renamed Mantetsu (the South Manchurian Railway); and 3) the so-called railway zone, which included a land corridor on either side of the railway track and the railway towns adjacent to important stations. As the result of the Portsmouth Peace Treaty, the Kwantung Leased Territory and the Japanese sections of the railway towns became effective colonial possessions, administered as part of Japan’s growing formal empire. The rest of Manchuria, however, remained under Chinese government jurisdiction; Japanese influence was informal and their control indirect. Under these circumstances, the expansion of Japanese interests relied on using a combination of threat and bribery to extract ever more concessions from the local Chinese leadership. Equally important, such negotiations were never simply between Japan and China, but were embroiled in the multilateral intricacies of China diplomacy.

The diplomacy of imperialism turned, in China, on a complex interplay between Chinese domestic politics and European rivalries, punctuated in the early twentieth century by American and Japanese entries onto the imperialist playing field, the Russian and Chinese revolutions, and World War I. From the establishment of the unequal treaty system in the mid-nineteenth century to the “carve up of China” into spheres of interest in the late 1890s, European powers had joined together to wrest from China concessions of collective benefit. But behind the front of unity, commercial


6. For a definitive treatment of the treaty port system, see John K. Fairbank,
competition was cutthroat; Europeans suspiciously scrutinized every move their rivals made.

Imperialist pressures heightened the domestic political crisis, leading in 1911 to the overthrow of the Qing dynasty and the establishment of the Chinese Republic. Yet the end of imperial rule brought neither a halt to foreign aggression nor an abatement of political unrest. Far from it: both internal and external pressures intensified in the wake of the revolution. As Chinese leaders came and went and the seat of government jumped from city to city, the country descended into military and political chaos. Between 1915 and 1922, rivalries between local warlord armies erupted into ten separate civil wars and turned China’s political map into a constantly shifting power grid. Onto this kaleidoscopic political landscape Japanese cast increasingly calculating eyes. To an offici®d®m newly attuned to the importance of export expansion, logic decreed China—with the commercial opportunities offered by an already mythically prodigious market—to be the next frontier.7 Their position in Korea was secured by annexation in 1910; maneuvering against Western rivals for a piece of China now occupied the attention of foreign policy makers.

Having learned from the experience of the Triple Intervention that diplomatic isolation spelled disaster, policy makers developed tactics for exploiting European rivalries to gain cover for Japanese expansion. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 was the first successful application of this strategy. The British were interested in halting Russian expansion in China; by guaranteeing French neutrality, the alliance encouraged Japan to do the job for them. The policy of playing pawn to British interests in Asia served Japan well. Not only was the alliance essential to victory against Russia, but it allowed Japan to occupy German holdings in Asia during World War I. While this conflict withdrew European power from China, Japan moved in to press the Twenty-one Demands on the Chinese government, gaining an extension of Japanese rights in the Northeast, the transfer of German interests in Shandong, and other concessions to what

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Japanese were now calling their “special relationship” with China. When the war ended, opportunities for unilateral action closed up, of course, but in the new arrangements set forth at the Washington Conference of 1922, Japan joined its rivals to present a recast united imperialist front to China. Looking back, the empire had progressed far since the days of the Triple Intervention. The inexperienced protégé of Great Britain had learned to ride the winds of Europe’s political storms, and its special relationship with China was now secured in the legal embrace of the diplomacy of imperialism.8

As China diplomacy preoccupied Japanese foreign policy makers, the development of a growing array of colonial possessions was absorbing the attention of a new group of colonial administrators. Building up the apparatus of colonial rule in Taiwan (1895), Karafuto (1905), the Kwantung Leased Territory (1905), Korea (protectorate 1905, annexed 1910), and the equatorial Pacific Islands known as Nan’yo (occupied 1914, League of Nations mandate 1919), an empire which the Meiji discourse on Asia had only vaguely imagined grew a material dimension and sunk experiential roots.9 In the diverse Asian communities over which they ruled, Japanese created a network of new institutions to concentrate political power in their own hands, extract financial profits, and suppress any resistance to the Japanese-imposed political and economic order. To meet the first objective, the new rulers established the powerful office of the governor general, granting to this single authority combined executive, judicial, and legislative powers. Buttressing the power of the governors general were military garrisons which collectively constituted a sizable overseas force: two divisions in Korea, one in the Kwantung Leased Territory, and several


regiments in Taiwan. These units, particularly the Korea and Kwantung Armies, evolved into seasoned imperial troops with their own distinctive esprit de corps.

In order to make colonialism pay, Japanese authorities organized financial institutions such as the Banks of Taiwan and Korea, charging them to take control of the monetary system and to finance colonial trade and investment. To facilitate the exploitation of what were, at the time of annexation, overwhelmingly agricultural economies, Japan set up semipublic companies such as Mantetsu (the South Manchurian Railway) and the Oriental Development Company. These restructured the landholding arrangements and oversaw the transfer of large blocks of land into Japanese hands. They promoted the commercialization of agriculture and steered production toward such profitable export crops as sugarcane in Taiwan, rice in Korea, and soybeans in the Kwantung Leased Territory.

Standing between the political and economic apparatus of the colonial state on one hand, and native society on the other, were the agents of enforcement—the colonial policemen. These factotums of Japanese administration performed a wide variety of tasks. In addition to their ordinary policing duties, they collected taxes, mobilized labor for road construction, oversaw land purchases, enforced tenant agreements, and taught school. To carry out all these functions, Japan built up enormous colonial police forces. In Korea and Taiwan, for example, the police operated through four levels of administration. At the base of this structure the colonial state maintained 2,599 police substations in Korea in 1926 and 1,510 in Taiwan in 1931. The total forces numbered 18,463 (40 percent native) and 11,166 (20 percent native), respectively.10

Such were the institutions Japanese developed to rule their formal empire in the early twentieth century, and which shaped and schooled the first generation of colonial elite. Adjusting this experience colonizing Asia to fit with the imagined Asia of the past, Japanese discourse on colonialism sharpened the definition of the imperial project and its local colorations. When Japanese spoke now of “Japan and Asia,” distinct images of Taiwan, Korea, China, and Manchuria leapt to mind. To the abstract notion of “empire” were now attached concrete details: a police station in Seoul, a colonial currency in Taiwan, the pyramids of soybean cake stacked on the

Dalian wharves. Empire had smells and sounds; it could be touched and tasted.

In their first articulations of an imperial mission, Japanese had used various metaphors to describe their new relationship with Asia: as head of an East Asian family of nations, as victor in an international struggle for survival, as vigilant defender against the threat of a peninsular dagger that pointed at Japan. Whether expressed in Confucian, Social Darwinist, or geopolitical terms, early Meiji calls for the expansion of Japanese interests in Asia represented prescriptions for future behavior, not descriptions of existing relationships. However, colonial experience gradually transformed moralistic imperatives of Confucian tutelage into the crisp bureaucratic professionalism of the science of colonial management; older goals of enlightenment (kaika) made way for the new teleology of progress (hattatsu).

In the international jungle of the new era it was no longer Asia but the West with which Japan battled for survival. The lines of advantage that military leaders called on their countrymen to secure in the 1890s became the lines of sovereignty in subsequent decades. Soldiers first fought and won these territories; then they patrolled them against enemies within and without. In the process, experience infused geopolitical imperatives with memories of sacrifice, death, and the hatred of war.

In Northeast China, as elsewhere, a distinct variation of colonial mission emerged, merging the historical specificity of this dominated territory with the broader goals of the empire as a whole. Inscribed in the slogan “managing Manchuria” (Manshū keiei), the quest for empire in the Northeast combined strategic and economic imperatives in equal measure. It is to the development of these interests in the early years of Manshū keiei that I now turn.

"MANAGING MANCHURIA"

In 1905 and 1906 the Japanese government established a Kwantung governor general to administer the Kwantung Leased Territory and created a network of consulates throughout the Northeast to act for the Foreign Ministry. Their influence, however, was quickly overshadowed by the growing prominence of the institutions created to spearhead the military and economic penetration of the new continental foothold. Indeed, the Kwantung Army and Mantetsu together defined the nature of empire in the Northeast.
In keeping with the strategic importance accorded the new acquisition, a sizable military presence was established in the Northeast. The Kwantung garrison (reorganized in 1919 under its better-known appellation, the Kwantung Army) was composed of a regular army division and a heavy siege artillery battalion, both stationed within the Kwantung Leased Territory.¹¹ Supplementing this force were six independent garrison battalions of railway guards deployed along the railway zone, making a total troop strength of some 10,000 men. Except for a temporary loss of two railway guard battalions during military retrenchment in the late twenties, the Kwantung Army remained at this strength until the outbreak of the Manchurian Incident in 1931.

Fearing a revenge attack after the Russo-Japanese War, Japanese Army planning concentrated on countering the Russian threat by turning Manchuria into a strategic buffer zone. Staff officers believed that in order to defend Japanese interests it was imperative to expand Mantetsu’s lines into a network connecting Japan, Korea, and Manchuria which could move men and materiel quickly into position in north Manchuria. Thus the Kwantung Army was assigned a two-fold strategic mission: first, to help secure concessions from the Chinese to build new rail lines deemed strategically necessary; and second, to ensure that Manchuria remained free of the political and military disturbances beginning to spread throughout China.

Over the course of the following two decades, the Kwantung Army pursued this mission with zealous determination. Acting sometimes at the behest of the army high command or with the unofficial support of civilian officials, and sometimes on independent initiative, Kwantung Army officers made the army into an agent of subimperialism. To the plotters, the revolutionary overthrow of China’s imperial dynasty in 1911 and its subsequent descent into civil war provided a stream of opportunities to reshape the Chinese political situation to Japanese advantage. In the Northeast, Kwantung Army intrigues turned on nurturing the power base of the collaborationist warlord Zhang Zuolin and scheming to wrest Manchuria and Mongolia from Chinese control.¹²

The practice of seconding military advisers to Chinese leaders (an estimated fifty Japanese officers advised Zhang’s army in 1928) provided ample opportunity for various forms of Japanese intervention. During the late teens and twenties these military advisers supplied influence, information, funds, weapons, and even Japanese soldiers to ensure Zhang’s victory over rival warlords. None of this came free, of course, and in exchange Japanese advisers secured promises of mining, railway, lumbering, and other concessions.

At a low point in what had always been an uneasy partnership between Zhang and the Japanese, Kwantung Army plotters decided they were best rid of him. Leading the conspiracy, Colonel Kōmoto Daisaku ordered the destruction of Zhang’s railway car while he was traveling north to Fengtian. Russian-made bombs, the suitably attired corpses of three murdered Chinese, and secret papers were left on the scene to deflect suspicion onto one of Zhang’s rival warlords. The conspirators anticipated that Zhang’s death would lead to major disturbances, giving the Kwantung Army a pretext to occupy Manchuria and install a puppet leader. But although the war minister proposed dispatching additional troops to Manchuria for just this purpose, the rest of the Japanese cabinet refused, and the Kwantung Army plot to precipitate war with China and occupy the Northeast failed. Nevertheless, nothing was done to dislodge the conspirators or to quell the destabilizing predilection of Kwantung Army officers for military intrigue and imperial agitation.

While the Kwantung Army labored to strengthen Japan’s strategic position on the continent, the mighty South Manchurian Railway (Mantetsu) undertook to open Manchuria to economic exploitation. A semi-public concern created in 1906 to manage the former Russian railway network with a capitalization of 200 million yen (increased to 440 million in 1920), Mantetsu was easily Japan’s largest corporation. Mantetsu quickly expanded the Russian-built railway into an enterprise of staggering proportions. In addition to running freight and passenger services, the company operated coal mines at Fushun and Yantai as well as harbor and port facilities at Andong, Yingkou, and in the hub of Japanese activities in the Northeast, Dalian. Mantetsu maintained warehouses for goods and hotels for travelers; it administered the railway zone, which involved running schools and hospitals, as well as collecting taxes and managing public utilities. The research wing of Mantetsu became the center of Japanese colonial research, generating studies on all aspects of imperial policy

throughout the formal and informal empire. Within a decade of operation, Mantetsu began to launch a string of subsidiary corporations. These included Dalian Ceramics, Dalian Oil and Fat, South Manchurian Glass Company, Anshan Iron and Steel Works, electric light companies and gas plants in the major cities, a shale oil factory, a machine workshop, and plants to mill flour and refine sugar.14

For the first twenty-five years of its existence Mantetsu was an extremely profitable enterprise. Company assets rose from 163 million yen in 1908 to over a billion in 1930. A rate of return of 20 to 30 percent for all but a few of these years meant that not only was it the largest of Japan’s companies, but frequently the most profitable as well.15 During the 1920s yearly revenue for this single company averaged 228 million yen, a sum equal to about a quarter of total Japanese tax revenue.16 The great majority of company revenue (75 percent) was generated by freight services.17 While the railway transported significant quantities of millet, sorghum, and coal, the key to Mantetsu profits was soybeans—exported to Europe for manufacture into vegetable fats and oils, and to Japan for fertilizer and feed. Mantetsu’s development of the soybean trade reshaped Manchuria’s agricultural economy into a heavily commercialized export economy reliant on the production of a single crop. It was the classic pattern of an extractive, colonial economy. Soybean production increased four times between 1907 and 1927, by which time half of the world’s supply came from Northeast China. By monopolizing transportation and storage facilities, Mantetsu was able to charge premium rates on export-designated agricultural produce and maintain the company’s extraordinary profitability.18

By 1931, large numbers of Japanese had acquired an immediate taste of empire in service to one of these two institutions. Since the Kwantung Army was not composed of a permanent garrison unit, but rather was made up of regional divisions rotated for two-year postings, officers and conscripts from all over Japan saw service in Manchuria. By 1930, divisions based in Utsunomiya, Kyoto, Himeji, Zentsūji, Hiroshima, Sendai, Asakawa, and Kumamoto had taken their turns in the Kwantung Army. Moreover, Japan had fought one major military engagement on Manchurian soil and launched a second from the Manchurian garrison. The Russo-Japanese War mobilized over a million soldiers, a figure that exhausted the military reserve system and meant that one in eight households sent a family member to Manchuria. The casualty rate was very high—close to half a million dead and wounded, leaving a popular association of the Manchurian battleground with sacrifice and grief. The Siberian Intervention, launched against the newly constituted Soviet Union from 1918–1922, involved 240,000 men. Here the fighting was much less bitter and casualties were a fraction of the Russo-Japanese War figure, but the four-year conflict deposited yet another layer of military experiences into public memories of Manchuria.

Brought over to carry out the rapidly expanding activities of Mantetsu, the Japanese civilian population of Manchuria grew rapidly from 16,612 in 1906 to 233,749 in 1930. Together with their dependents, Mantetsu employees accounted for about a third of this population; a large fraction of the rest were involved in commercial operations indirectly dependent on Mantetsu. Indeed, everyone’s livelihood was reliant on the continuation of Mantetsu activities, just as company services—transportation, housing, sewage, electricity, entertainment, and much more—were an omnipresent feature of expatriate life in Manchuria.

Mantetsu gave to the Japanese civilian population a predominantly elite, overwhelmingly urban cast. After briefly experimenting with importing unskilled labor from Japan, the company abandoned higher-priced Japa-

nese workers in favor of the economies of Chinese labor. This meant that Mantetsu's Japanese work force—grown from 10,754 in 1910 to 21,824 in 1930—was of an exclusively elite character: it was an aristocracy of skilled laborers, white-collar workers, professionals, managers, and administrators.24 The private commercial and manufacturing sector that sprouted from Mantetsu's foundations did not alter the sociological balance in the Japanese community. The private sector divided into two groups, one of giant firms like the Mitsui Trading Company, the Yokohama Specie Bank, and the Òkura Trading Company, which bought from, sold to, and financed Mantetsu, and the other of small owner-operated shops, restaurants, and consumer-manufacturing establishments which catered to the expatriate community. The Japanese work force supported by the large firms was managerial and professional, and that supported by the small concerns, petit-bourgeois. The port city of Dalian, where almost half (100,000) of the 230,000 Japanese residents in Manchuria lived in 1930, well illustrated this trend. Less than 1 percent (1,000) of Japanese were involved in the manual occupations of farming or fishing, and only .3 percent (282) were found in mining. In contrast, 25 percent (24,507) were occupied in manufacturing, 23 percent (22,575) in commerce, 22 percent (21,823) in transportation, and 20 percent (19,532) in public service (schoolteachers, bureaucrats, and policemen).25

Like the memories of sacrifice on the battlefield and evocations of pride in service to the Kwantung Army, participation in the economic project in Manchuria created fertile ground for the imperial imagination, generating visions of colonial privilege and cosmopolitanism. In the strategic imperatives of the Kwantung Army, "managing Manchuria" meant quelling civil unrest and manipulating the warlords. In the economic mission of Mantetsu, it signified managing the soybean trade, tending to company investments, servicing the Japanese community, and controlling Chinese society. Such was the apprehension of Manshū keiei on the eve of the Manchurian Incident—the product of an empire built to the strategic and economic specifications of the Kwantung Army and Mantetsu.

After eighty years of experience with the diplomacy of imperialism, two imperial wars, and a thirty-five-year-old colonial empire, Japan had at its disposal a sophisticated understanding of international law, an army practiced in colonial warfare, and a seasoned colonial bureaucracy. This represented the overall accumulation of Japanese imperial capital in 1931.

In Manchuria itself, twenty-five years of investment had produced the well-entrenched sphere of influence that spread out from the colonial core in the Kwantung Leased Territory, anchored by the multifarious investments of Mantetsu and guarded by the Kwantung Army. A quarter of a million Japanese lived in this partially informal empire; many more had come once and returned home. Yet compared with the efforts that followed, all this would seem inconsequential—a short preamble to the extraordinary history of Manchukuo. Something changed in 1931, and with this change empire building took on a new urgency, a new audacity, and a new vision.

THE CHALLENGE OF CHINESE NATIONALISM

The immediate forces behind Japan’s shift in gears emerged out of the breakdown, in the late 1920s, of the system of imperialist diplomacy in China. On the Chinese political front, the character of the civil war changed as the corrosive warlord conflicts gave way to a struggle between nascent Nationalist and Communist organizations to mobilize popular support and lead the unification of the country, with critical implications for foreign powers. Republican China’s first modern political party, the Nationalist party, or Guomindang, was originally organized in 1912 by anti-Manchu revolutionaries associated with Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen). After moving through a series of reorganizations, the Guomindang fell under the leadership of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) in the 1920s and expanded rapidly. By 1926 it boasted a powerful national organization and an army of 85,000 troops. The Chinese Communist party also grew to power in the turbulent years of the twenties. Formed in 1921 with advisers, money, and arms from the Soviet Union (and, initially, a political alliance with the Nationalists), the Communist party began to organize workers and students in large numbers. By late 1925, Chinese Communist party membership reached 20,000.26

Both the Nationalists and the Communists represented a new form of mass mobilization whose popular strength was directed first at unloosing the political grip of the warlords. Their challenge to the regional military rulers culminated in the Northern Expedition of 1926–1928. Setting off from Guangzhou in the south, Jiang Jieshi led his army north to Beijing, driving some warlords into retreat and absorbing others into his swelling

forces along the way. Uniting the country under the single, centralized political authority of the Guomindang, Jiang’s Northern Expedition briefly ended the era of political fragmentation and chaos. Yet soon after unification, the Nationalist-Communist alliance unraveled, leading to the outbreak of a new sort of civil war. The Nationalists emerged as the clear victors in the first phase of conflict. Jiang’s bloody surprise attack on Communist organizations in Shanghai in April 1927 and the suppression of Communist-organized “Autumn harvest” insurrections the following fall decimated the Communist movement. Their scattered forces retreated into the hills of the southeast where, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, the peasant-based organization of the People’s Liberation Army took shape and developed its strategies of guerrilla warfare. The Communists used these strategies with growing effect, challenging the Nationalist hold over a politically unified China.

Both the Nationalists and the Communists rode to power on the rising tide of anti-imperialist nationalism. The inception of the Chinese Nationalist movement is usually dated from the May Fourth Movement of 1919. After witnessing their own officials at the Paris Peace Conference sell out the former German holdings in Shandong to the interests of Japanese imperialism, enraged students organized a nationwide series of demonstrations. From that point on anti-imperialist protests became an increasingly common occurrence in Shanghai, Hankou, and other foreign centers of manufacture and trade. Merchants and workers joined with students to boycott and strike against foreign enterprises. The protesters frequently singled out British and Japanese firms, since these two nations dominated foreign economic influence in China. Both countries were divided over how to best respond to the Nationalist challenge, flip-flopping from military suppression to appeasement and back again. Coordinated imperialist action was the casualty to such confusion. Thus when the British used force to suppress protest in May and June of 1925, Japanese officials adopted a conciliatory attitude, urging cotton manufacturers to compromise with strikers. Later, when British policy makers decided to back Jiang’s moderation against Communist radicalism, their loans and diplomatic support contrasted sharply with Japan’s military expeditions to Shandong in 1927 and 1928. What was true for Britain and Japan was equally certain for the other foreign interests in China. Individual national interests overrode advantages of collective action, as bilateral negotiations swept aside the cooperative diplomacy prescribed by the Washington Conference.

In 1929, the collapse of the American stock market and ensuing shock wave of global depression dealt the interimperialist alliance another pro-
found blow. All parties responded to the economic crisis with economic nationalism. As they sought to barricade their own interests against any competitors, the imperatives of economic survival seemed to leave less and less room for compromise. To Japanese policy makers this meant sealing off their extensive investments in Manchuria from the rest of China, for special steps seemed necessary to secure a sphere of interest from the forces of Chinese nationalism.

In the Northeast, the rise of the Nationalist movement changed the relationship between Japan and its local collaborators. The increasingly forceful demands for the recovery of economic and political concessions from Japan—expressed in newspapers and through boycotts, strikes, and demonstrations—put pressure on the local warlord Zhang Zuolin to appease some of these demands lest he, like his rivals to the south, find himself the target of nationalist anger. The pressures he was under from nationalist protesters strengthened Zhang’s hand in bargaining with the Japanese, who kept up their own demands throughout the 1920s. Zhang maneuvered shrewdly between these two opposing forces, using each as a shield to stave off the other. Although Zhang’s repression never permitted boycott and strike activity to reach the intensity it did in the south, whether by accident or design protesters sometimes slipped through his control, as happened in the 1923 Jilin and Qiqhhar demonstrations demanding the return of the Kwantung leasehold and railway rights. Japanese officials never entirely believed his protestations of helplessness; they grew increasingly irritated with both Zhang’s pleas for patience and his promises to respond to demands later, when nationalist tempers had cooled.27

Even worse, Zhang and his allies were beginning to make investments that would compete with Japanese enterprises and threaten its economic dominance. These included railways and a port facility aimed at creating a parallel Chinese transportation and marketing network in order to break Mantetsu’s monopoly. Zhang also established a cotton mill in Fengtian, and his associates created companies for sugar, timber, and coal production. With Zhang’s encouragement, Chinese-owned public utilities sprang up, and Chinese merchants opened new businesses throughout the growing cities of the Northeast. While Japanese colonial officials looked on in outrage, the man whose wars they had bankrolled and whose armies they had protected seemed to betray their trust.

27. McCormack refers to this as “two-faced diplomacy”: McCormack, pp. 124–126.
Complaints about Zhang's insincerity mounted; but when Kwantung
Army officers conspired to resolve the situation by assassinating Zhang,
they gravely miscalculated. Zhang Zuolin was succeeded by his son, Zhang
Xueliang, who proved to be even less tractable than Zuolin. Well aware of
Japan's role in his father's death, Xueliang took his revenge by pushing
harder than ever for rights recovery, stepping up investments, and— the
crowning blow— signing an agreement with Jiang Jieshi that brought
Manchuria under the control of the Guomindang. While this did not mean
full political and military integration, Zhang Xueliang now referred all
diplomatic matters to the Guomindang, greatly complicating Japanese nego-
tiations concerning Manchuria. Their worst fears appeared to have been
realized when Jiang Jieshi announced in the spring of 1931 that the new
principles of Guomindang foreign policy included the return of the Kwan-
tung Leased Territory and the recovery of rights to operate Mantetsu.

The sense of crisis among the Japanese in the Northeast intensified, as
a fall in profits in the late 1920s seemed to confirm that the nationalist
strategy of economic encirclement was working. Though the contraction
in colonial revenues was in fact caused by other factors— Mantetsu profits
fell due to a drop in world demand for soybeans rather than the Chinese
railroad network, and Japanese shopkeepers were imperiled by competition
from a Mantetsu consumer co-op and not Chinese merchants—the Japa-
nese blamed it squarely on what they called the "anti-Japanese movement."
Within the various sectors of the colonial state and at every level of colonial
society, people compiled catalogs of grievances: obstructions to land pur-
blishes, illegal seizures of goods, triple taxing, refusal to permit construc-
tion of previously agreed upon railways, unpaid debts, scurrilous news-
paper reports, hostility in textbooks, assaults, vandalism, and murder.
Settler society organized itself and began to lobby the metropolitan gov-
ernment. Through petitions and speeches they insisted on firm measures
to settle the "over 500 pending cases" in what became the catchphrase of
an appeal for military intervention.28

Responding in part to these lobbying activities, in part out of their own
perception of the gathering crisis, government officials began to discuss
options for an independent Manchuria. This was not entirely a new idea,
for since the 1911 Revolution Japanese policy makers had flirted with the
possibility of severing Manchuria from China. The issue was seriously
taken up at the Eastern Conference of 1927, and in 1929 the Kwantung

Army began developing operational plans for occupation. Matters came to a head in the summer of 1931, when the Wanbaoshan and Nakamura Incidents became the focal point of agitation for military intervention.

The Wanbaoshan Incident involved a dispute over irrigation rights between 200 immigrant Koreans, whose settlement in eastern Manchuria had been facilitated by the Japanese authorities, and a handful of Chinese landowners. In a climate of hostility where the Chinese regarded the Koreans as tools of Japanese aggression in Manchuria and the Japanese responded angrily to harassment of Japanese nationals (as the Koreans in Manchuria were considered), the dispute quickly escalated. Chinese police told the Koreans to leave, but Japanese consular police insisted they could stay. A group of 400 Chinese farmers then attacked the Koreans and were in turn fired at and driven off by the Japanese police.29

In the meantime, the arrest and execution of a Japanese intelligence officer by Chinese soldiers created a second cause célèbre. When discovered near the border of Inner Mongolia, far into the Russian sphere of interest in north Manchuria, army captain Nakamura Shintarō claimed he was an agricultural expert. However, because his belongings included a military map, narcotic drugs, weapons, and surveying instruments, the Chinese soldiers assumed he was a military spy and shot him.30

In and of themselves, there was nothing extraordinary about these two incidents; similar things had occurred numerous times in the past. But in the contentious atmosphere of 1931 they became lightning rods for sentiments on both sides. While Chinese nationalists rioted against the Japanese, the Japanese settler organizations Yūhokai and the Manchurian Youth League dispatched representatives to Japan to make speeches and lobby government officials. They were joined by right-wing organizations, political party hawks, and army spokesmen who supported their demands for government action to end the “outrages.”31

By 1931 there was widespread consensus among the Japanese in Northeast China about the need for a new approach. Although this imperial establishment was a big fish in its own pond, it figured very little in the sea of international and domestic concerns which beset Japan at that time.

This would change, however, as a series of increasingly ambitious imperial projects carried out over the 1930s made Manchuria the centerpiece of the empire and led to the birth of Manchukuo.

THE PUPPET STATE OF MANCHUKUO

The Kwantung Army set the construction of Manchukuo in motion with the military conquest of the Northeast known as the Manchurian Incident. Between September 18, 1931, and the Tanggu Truce of May 31, 1933, a series of campaigns brought the four provinces of Jilin, Liaoning, Heilongjiang, and Rehe under Japanese military control. The occupation began with a conspiracy engineered by Kwantung Army officers. What had failed in 1928 worked to spectacular effect in 1931. Staging an explosion of Manchetsu track near the Chinese military base in the city of Fengtian (now known as Shenyang), the conspirators used the alleged attack as a pretext to open fire on the Chinese garrison. Over the ensuing days and months the army quickly escalated the situation, first moving to occupy the railway zone and then embarking on the operations to expel from Manchuria the estimated 330,000 troops in Zhang Xueliang’s army. Unlike in 1928, the metropolitan government ultimately sanctioned army action; the army high command in Tokyo refused to rein in their forces in Manchuria, and the cabinet was unwilling to relinquish territory gained in a fait accompli. Thus the Kwantung Army was permitted to overrun the Northeast, and Japan found itself in full possession of Manchuria.32

Early in the campaign, it became clear to the plotters that their home government would not approve the formal annexation of the Northeast and the creation of a Japanese colony in Manchuria. Instead, they enlisted the collaboration of powerful Chinese, organized a “Manchuria for the Manchurians” movement, and declared Manchukuo an independent state. Manchukuo was created in March 1932 with Chinese serving as the titular ministry and department heads; actual power, however, resided with the Japanese vice-ministers and the Japanese-dominated General Affairs Board. Japan quickly recognized Manchukuo and signed a mutual defense treaty making the Kwantung Army responsible for its national security. Behind the fiction of the puppet state, Japan had effectively turned Manchuria into a colony of rule. As transparent as this fiction may have seemed to many, Japanese labored mightily to convince themselves and others of

32. For basic sources on the military history of the Manchurian Incident, see Chapter 1, note 1.
the truth of Manchurian independence. In the puppet regime they sought a form of colonial state that represented a new kind of collaboration between imperialist and subject, a formula for colonial rule neither formal nor informal that would accommodate nationalist demands for sovereignty and self-determination.

What Manchurian independence in fact accommodated were Kwantung Army demands for greater authority. Assuming position of all the key posts in the new state, the Kwantung Army created for itself an imperium in imperio. Before the establishment of Manchukuo, the army shared power with Mantetsu and, to a lesser extent, with the Kwantung governor general and the Japanese consulate. In the administrative reorganization, however, the latter two were effectively excluded from the decision-making loop while Mantetsu was forced into a subordinate relationship with the Kwantung Army. Moreover, in a parallel reorganization in Japan, the Army Ministry outmaneuvered the Colonial and Foreign Ministries, dominating the newly created Manchurian Bureau. This gave the military control over official communications between Japan and Manchukuo. Thus, not only did the Manchukuo government give the Kwantung Army a vehicle for expanding its power within the Northeast, but it also provided a channel for extending its influence over metropolitan government.

The size, reputation, and hubris of the Kwantung Army increased in tandem with the expansion of its power base in the new colonial state. Troop strength grew rapidly, reaching its peak at twelve divisions in 1941. The rapid and efficient occupation of Manchuria greatly enhanced the prestige of the army and brought the Kwantung garrison a wave of adulatory publicity. As the army redefined its strategic mission to focus on the threat from the Soviet Union along the Manchukuo-Siberian border, Kwantung Army units were built up into the crack troops of the Imperial Army. Preparing for a decisive strike north, the Kwantung Army forayed into Soviet territory, provoking border skirmishes that flared into war in the Nomonhan Incident of 1939. At the same time, the expulsion of Zhang’s forces south of the Great Wall created a new turbulent frontier over which the army was anxious to establish control, spawning yet another series of plots and connivances to push down into north China and beyond. Interpreting liberally its mandate for the defense of Manchukuo, the army drove relentlessly forward to expand the territory under its control.

33. For a brief account of the Kwantung Army, see Coox, “The Kwantung Army Dimension,” pp. 409–428. For exhaustive treatment, see Coox, Nomonhan, vols. 1–2.
The second phase in the construction of Manchukuo was economic. The puppet state became more than just a military project when the metropolitan government stepped up its involvement, gambling heavily on a bold experiment in the restructuring of the colonial economy. Against the backdrop of unprecedented economic crisis, the Japanese government began to view industrial development of Manchukuo as the means to rejuvenate the economy and create a self-sufficient trade zone protected from the uncertainties of the global marketplace. The military luster imparted by the early triumphs of the Kwantung Army was now enhanced by the investments that made Manchukuo a jewel of unrivaled value. The levels of money that poured in provided some of the most dramatic testimony of the Japanese commitment to Manchukuo. In Manchukuo’s first five years, Japanese invested 1.2 billion yen, a figure almost equal to the 1.75 billion yen supplied to the region over the previous twenty-five years. Between 1932 and 1941, 5.86 billion yen were injected into Manchukuo, more than the 5.4 billion yen accumulated in the entire overseas empire—China, Korea, Taiwan, Manchuria, Karafuto, and Nan’yō—by 1930.34

It was more than just capital that Japanese invested. Starting in 1933, the metropolitan government sent a parade of bureaucrats including Kishi Nobusuke, Shiina Etsusaburō, Minobe Yōji, Kōda Noboru, and Shiiseki Ihei to take up important posts in the Manchukuo administration.35 Mostly from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, these men were among the brightest of a new breed of planners—the “new bureaucrats”—interested in developing industrial policies to extend government management over the economy.36 Unlike the pool of colonial bureaucrats who had spent their careers in the empire and identified themselves with the colonies they


36. Sometimes called the reform bureaucrats, the term new bureaucrats is loosely applied to officials who supported a variety of state-strengthening economic and social reforms which often had a Fascist tinge. For more detail, see Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle*, pp. 116–156; Barnhart, pp. 71–76, 173–175; and William Miles Fletcher, *The Search for a New Order: Intellectuals and Fascism in Prewar Japan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 88–105.
managed, these policy makers had little or no overseas experience; their concerns were with the domestic economy. For them, Manchukuo represented a laboratory in which to test economic theories which they would later apply to Japan.

At the heart of the Manchurian experiment were two novel ideas of economic governance beginning to circulate in the industrialized world, though never before applied to a colony. The first, state-managed economic development, borrowed the Soviet model for the command economy. The second, the self-sufficient production sphere, or bloc economy, drew on economic analyses of military production in World War I. Replacing the old mandate for “managing Manchuria,” the new economic mission of development (kaihatsu) called for coordinated industrialization of Japan and Manchukuo and aimed at military self-sufficiency.37

Under the banner of “Manchurian development,” the Manchukuo government created twenty-six new companies by the end of 1936, one company per industry in such fields as aviation, gasoline, shipping, and automobiles.38 Five-year plans were instituted beginning in 1937, setting ambitious production targets. While Manchurian development was skewed toward heavy industrialization, the agricultural sector was also brought within the sphere of government planning. Although policies like the introduction of new crops and the establishment of agricultural extension services and marketing cooperatives were geared primarily toward enhancing Japan’s agricultural self-sufficiency, the developmentalist agenda of the Manchukuo government also sought to legitimate the colonial project in the eyes of the subject population. Recognizing that poverty created a breeding ground for anti-imperialist sentiment and communist agitation, administrators tried to eliminate some of the economic causes of discontent. Of course, developmental policies aimed at improving the welfare of the Chinese peasantry were easily compromised when they conflicted with imperatives for resource extraction or the interests of the collaborating Chinese elite. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of colonial development showcased new ideals of social reform that borrowed from the movement to mitigate rural poverty within Japan.

The new program transformed Mantetsu’s role in the colonial economy. Previously, the economy was its private domain, and Mantetsu executives

37. For basic references, see Chapter x, note 2.
presided over an imperium in imperio. In the face of the Kwantung Army’s advance into economic management, however, Mantetsu retreated from its mining and manufacturing activities, concentrating on management of its transportation network. Final control over its empire of subsidiaries was relinquished in 1937 to Manchurian Heavy Industries, the large public-private firm created to coordinate the industrial production targets of the Five-Year Plan. This represented a defeat for Mantetsu in its struggle with the army for control over the government institutions left vacant by the withdrawal of Zhang Xueliang from Manchuria. Victorious, the army used its domination of the puppet state of Manchukuo to initiate the heavy industrialization of the colonial economy and to reconfigure the institutions for managing Manchuria. Forced by these initiatives into a series of unprofitable investments in the new state-run industries and a network of strategic railways, Mantetsu’s capital strength and profitability were gradually whittled away.

There were compensations. The new program put a premium on planning and generated an enormous demand for research. Mantetsu became the brain trust for Manchukuo development, later expanding into a center of planning for the empire as a whole. Mantetsu’s prestige as a research institute reached its peak in the early 1940s, when the Research Department commanded a staff of 2,200 to 2,300 researchers. In addition to its new role in planning, Mantetsu was given a free hand in the economic development of north China—rapidly becoming the next frontier for Japanese imperial expansion—to offset its loss of jurisdiction in the Manchurian economy.

Following close on the heels of the new military and economic programs, the announcement in 1936 of the Japanese government’s intent to carry out mass Japanese emigration to Manchuria signaled a third radical departure for the imperialist project. Grand in scope, the plan aimed to send five million farmers, a figure equivalent to one-fifth of the 1936 farm population, to a “new paradise” in Manchuria in the space of twenty years. By placing in Northeast China a large settler community that would reproduce itself, Japanese hoped to mount their imperial jewel in a permanent setting.

The settler community created by the government’s colonization pro-

gram bore little resemblance to the Japanese society that had grown up in Manchuria in the years before Manchukuo. The older community was exclusively urban; the new settlements were in the countryside. A privileged elite of administrators, entrepreneurs, and professionals made up the urban community; the rural immigrants were drawn from the ranks of impoverished tenant farmers and the lumpen proletariat. Unlike the colonial elite, who eagerly flocked to the continent in the 1930s, swelling the urban population to close to a million in 1940, the farm immigrants needed to be bribed with offers of free passage, free land, and a long list of other enticements before they would be persuaded to take advantage of the opportunities in Manchukuo.

Among other reasons, urban life was more attractive because fellow Japanese citizens comprised a large proportion of the population. In the two centers of urban settlement, Dalian and Fengtian, Japanese made up 29 percent and 39 percent of the 1932 population, respectively. The 300,000 rural settlers, in contrast, entered a world where they constituted a fraction of a percent of the estimated 34 million natives. The settlers were divided among just over a thousand villages scattered throughout the rural hinterland. Often the sole Japanese outpost for many miles, these immigrant villages were swallowed up in the Chinese multitudes that surrounded them. In addition, few of the urban Japanese intended to take up permanent residence in Manchuria, a fact much lamented by the ideologues of colonization. Since urban settlers had financial mobility, they often chose to return to Japan after finishing their tour of duty in the colonial service or their company’s Manchurian branch. The agricultural settlers, however, came for good. The price of government aid was a lifetime commitment to their new home. Even if they changed their minds, returning to Japan was far from easy. They had severed ties with their home villages, selling off land and property, and in most cases they were financially dependent on the government and would be hard pressed to find funds to pay the fare home. Unlike their urban counterparts, the rural settlers were stuck in Manchuria—permanent residents, if not out of choice, out of necessity.

Government involvement in the welfare of the farm settlements extended far beyond what was provided urban colonists. Rather like the economy itself, the immigrant villages were state-planned and state-managed. A swelling bureaucracy and ever-larger budget appropriations were given

41. Manshikai, vol. 2, p. 84.
over to the micro-management of the immigrant villages. Everything from
the number of livestock to the crop mix was prescribed by plan. State-run
cooperatives bought colonists' produce and sold them seed, fertilizer, and
sundries for everyday use. State agricultural agents advised them and re-
ported on their progress. Such attention aimed to secure their long-term
survival and, at the same time, to ensure that colonists stayed put on the
land.

Like everything about Manchurian government policy, there was a
heavy military coloration to the agricultural settlement program. Behind
the big budgets and the state preoccupation with the welfare of the colon-
ists lay a two-fold strategic agenda. First, in constructing Japanese villages
in north Manchuria along the border with Siberia, administrators aimed
to create a human buffer zone against the Soviet Union. Second, by settling
Japanese in the rural centers of the Chinese resistance movement, officials
hoped to deter further guerrilla warfare against the colonial state. To pre-
pare them for their paramilitary role, the state included military maneu-
vers in the course of training provided to all agricultural settlers, and issued
them arms along with tools and seeds when they arrived in their new
homes. In effect, the settlers were turned into a strategically deployed
reserve of the Kwantung Army.

Through the agricultural settlement program, Manchukuo administra-
tors created a new colonial society, one comprised of a weak and subordin-
nated farming class that could be controlled in ways not possible with the
urban colonists. Like the gamble for power by the Kwantung Army in
1931 and the risks taken to test out the planned economy, settlement was
an experiment; it was an attempt to create a new instrument of the colonial
state.

These three projects involved more money, more resources, and more
people with each passing month. Each step grew bolder and each decision
more brash, as Manchukuo increasingly defined the cutting edge of im-
perial policy. By the late 1930s Manchukuo had become synonymous with
the Kwantung garrison, pride of the Imperial Army, with the command
economy and the yen bloc, and with the noble labors of the settlers who
tilled the rich earth of Manchuria. What had been developed in the North-
est to meet the challenge of nationalism in China created a model for the
construction of a new kind of empire. Japanese applied this model to an
Asia where the rise of anti-imperialist nationalisms threatened the old
formulas for imperialist cooperation and colonial management. In this way,
the creation of Manchukuo ushered in an era of autonomous imperialism
for Japan in Asia.
AUTONOMOUS IMPERIALISM

This third phase of imperialism lasted until the end of World War II. What Japanese officials called “autonomous diplomacy” signified two departures from past practice. First, it meant liberating imperial interests in Asia from a consideration of relations with the West. In the past, fearing diplomatic isolation, Japanese policy makers took careful stock of how a potential move in Asia was likely to be received in the West. Interventions were preceded by judicious multilateral negotiations. After 1931, however, the “Manchurian problem,” the “China question,” and the “advance south” all were decided unilaterally and in the face of Western opposition. The standoff between Japan and the great powers in the League of Nations in 1932–1933 signaled this change in direction. In the spring of 1933, failing to gain Western endorsement for its actions in Northeast China, Japan left the League and isolated itself diplomatically. Of their own volition, Japanese statesmen withdrew from the great power club into which they had labored so long to gain entry.

Second, autonomy betokened a new independence for the colonial armies. In this sense the origin of the new phase of imperialism in a Kwantung Army conspiracy was of more than passing importance. Indeed, military faits accomplis followed one upon the other, as aggressive field officers took their lead from the success of the Manchurian Incident. Since Meiji times, imperial expansion began with military conquest. But by the 1930s, the imperial garrisons had multiplied and the institutional complexity of the armed services opened new possibilities for subimperialists. The trigger-happy prodigality of the garrison armies turned the boundaries of the empire into a rolling frontier. And as the army gained influence over political institutions both at home and in the empire, the tendency to resort to force when negotiations stalled only grew stronger.

This “shoot first, ask questions later” approach to empire building drew Japan into a series of military conflicts. At first, China and the Soviet Union responded to Japan’s go-fast imperialism with concessions. In the early 1930s, the Nationalists were too busy fighting the Communists to resist the takeover of Manchuria. Stalin, preoccupied with agricultural collectivization, the five-year plans, and purging the party, decided to sell off the Chinese Eastern Railway in 1935 and retreat before Japan’s advance into north Manchuria. But after the formation of a united Chinese Communist-

Nationalist front in 1936 and the Soviet fortifications of the Manchurian-Soviet border, both China and the Soviet Union began to stand their ground. War broke out with China in 1937, and with the Soviet Union in 1938 and 1939.

Similarly, American and European interests in Asia were initially consumed with domestic economic problems and the dissolution of the international financial system. The day before the Manchurian Incident, Great Britain went off the gold standard; there was little attention to spare for the Far East. Although after 1937 the United States opposed Japan indirectly by supplying Jiang Jieshi with war materiel, only in 1940, after the outbreak of war in Europe and the Japanese advance into Indochina, did the United States begin embargoes on strategic materials to Japan. The tightening of the economic screws led to the decision, once again, to attack; from December 1941, Japan was fighting a war against Britain and the United States, and the boundaries of the empire became an endless war front. In the process, the empire and the war grew indistinguishable. The hallmark of the new imperialism was a perpetual state of war. From the creation of Manchukuo to the occupation of Southeast Asia, policy makers and foot soldiers alike were propelled by a sense of crisis and the extraordinary needs of a nation at war.

Following the model pioneered in Manchukuo, the autonomous phase of empire also denoted a new kind of colonial rule. This was signaled first in official rhetoric, which sought to depict the Japanese colonial state as the ally of anti-colonial nationalism. First, Manchuria was "liberated" from China by a movement for independence; later, Japanese set up an administration in Southeast Asia under the slogan "Asia for the Asians." As vacuous and self-serving as these declarations seem in retrospect, at the time they were initially effective in mobilizing support both among Japanese at home and among the Asians who helped Japan create the new colonial institutions.

The organizational structure of the puppet state which was developed in the Northeast subsequently became the prototype for the creation of a string of collaborationist regimes in occupied China. In Southeast Asia, the picture was more complex. With the support of local nationalist movements, Japan drove out Western colonial rulers, establishing two types of

administration. In Thailand (the sole independent country at the time of Japanese occupation), and after January 1943 in Burma and the Philippines, alliances gave Japan the power of indirect rule. In Indonesia and Malaya, the occupying forces governed through a military administration. With the exception of French Indochina, where Japan ruled in collaboration with the French authorities and was opposed by Ho Chi Minh’s newly organized Vietminh, Southeast Asian nationalists cooperated with Japanese colonial rule, especially in its initial phase.45

Strategies of mobilization were part of the Manchuria formula. Military, political, economic, and cultural institutions were created or reshaped to organize new communities of support for Japanese rule. Ambitious young Chinese found the Manchukuo Army and military academy a route of advancement, as did their counterparts throughout the empire. Military institutions formed in the late colonial period in Burma, Korea, and elsewhere became the training ground for postcolonial elites. Similarly, Japanese established mass parties such as the Putera in Indonesia and the Kalibapi in the Philippines, patterned on Manchukuo’s Kyōwakai. Throughout the empire, Japanese created joint ventures with local capital. Sometimes this was a mask for Japanese control, sometimes a cover for appropriation of native capital, and sometimes, as in Korea, a means of cultivating a collaborative elite and splitting the nationalist movement.46 Assimilationist cultural policies were widely applied over the course of the thirties and forties, in an attempt to create an elite cadre of youth loyal to Japanese rule. These went furthest in Taiwan and Korea, where the kōmin kara (imperialization) movement sought to erase native cultural traditions,


replacing them with the Japanese religious practices of shrine Shinto, the use of the Japanese language, and the Japanization of given names.47

It was not just colonial state institutions, but also the experiment with economic autarky in Manchukuo that became the guiding spirit of the wartime Japanese empire. The integrated industrial and trading unit formed with the Japan-Manchuria bloc economy was extended first to include north China, then the rest of China, and finally Southeast Asia in a self-sufficient yen bloc. In Korea, Taiwan, and north China this involved industrialization and heavy investment, as it did in Manchukuo. The lessons of economic management learned in Manchukuo, including currency unification, production targets, semipublic development companies, and other tools of state control, were also applied in these new economies.

In all these ways the experiment in Manchukuo marked the beginning of a new imperialism, made necessary by the upsurge of revolutionary nationalist movements throughout the empires of Asia. European powers responded to the rise of Asian nationalism with a policy of appeasement, attempting to shore up the crumbling colonial edifice through political concessions in the Middle East and India. Japanese dealt with the same challenge by claiming a unity with Asian nationalism. They tried to coopt the anti-colonial movement by declaring the Japanese colonial state to be the agent of nationalist liberation.

In its international context, the story of Manchukuo focuses on the interactions of states and societies across space and time. On the global stage, Japanese empire builders acted and reacted within a specific configuration of power, the logic of which both expanded and delimited the available choices. The crumbling of the great power alliance in China in the face of the Chinese Nationalist challenge and the shockwave of global depression cleared a path for Japanese unilateral action in the late 1920s, even while it closed off possibilities for cooperative diplomacy. The considerable growth of Japan’s military and industrial power relative to other regional powers—particularly China—opened up possibilities for aggression on the continent. At the same time, the gathering strength of the Guomindang closed off the option of conciliation toward China, and created a time limit in which the Japanese would have to act to expand before the Chinese Nationalists grew too strong. Similarly, the escalation of the arms race

between Japan, the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain weighted the scales toward precipitous and preemptive action on Japan’s part, in order to capture territory before a military deterrent emerged to block such a move. The assembling and disassembling of alliances, the continually changing balances of power, and the dynamics of cooperation and competition that these produced all figured into the geometry of Japanese imperialism.

This same geometry of empire placed Manchuria among a number of interrelated imperial projects. What happened in central China affected Manchuria, just as events in Manchuria influenced Taiwan. Practices developed in Korea were applied in Manchuria, while Manchuria, in other aspects, became a model for Korea. While Manchuria became the dynamic centerpiece of the empire in the 1930s, the bulwark of autonomous diplomacy and the vanguard of revolutionary imperialism, the imperial strategies innovated in Northeast China were applied elsewhere in the empire as well, often more boldly and with greater consequence. The chapters that follow concentrate almost exclusively on the metropolitan response to Manchukuo. This focus on Manchukuo necessarily eclipses the domestic connections to Taiwan and Korea as well as the mobilization of popular support for the new imperial frontier in Southeast Asia. Yet, even though my narrative places it out of sight, the empire in its entirety was very much a part of the social and cultural context of the 1930s.

Manchukuo did occupy the central space of the Japanese empire of the 1930s, though this special position only developed over time. The stages of this development were intrinsic to the chronology of the Japanese empire. In the first phase, interest in continental expansion and the formation of an imperial mission in Northeast China took shape during the emergence of an imperial Japan in the late 1800s. At that point, Korea rested atop the pinnacle of imperial ambition; Manchuria represented merely a strategic buffer to keep Japan’s rivals out of Korea. Acquisition of a foothold in the Northeast, however, coincided with the beginnings of a second phase of empire building, when Japan began to construct and develop institutions of domination in its burgeoning colonial empire. In the process of institution building in the Manchurian leasehold in the teens and twenties, Japanese turned the strategic buffer into an empire famed for the modernizing activities of Mantetsu and the martial spirit of the Kwantung Army. And yet, until Japanese felt their claim to the “rights and interests” in the Northeast challenged by an increasingly importunate Chinese Nationalist movement, these Manchurian holdings were merely in the second string of their colonial possessions. But when boycotts, strikes, demands for rights recovery, and the steady progress toward political unification
seemed to imperil all that Japanese empire builders had worked to produce, the Manchurian empire suddenly took on new importance and new commitment. Primed for action, when the old rules for collaboration with local warlord interests broke down, Japan quickly elected a course of military confrontation. In the process, Manchuria became the testing ground for a host of experimental colonial institutions, including the puppet state, the command economy, and state-managed colonization. As the Manchurian experiment took hold and was deemed a success, it became the model for a new imperialism. In the third phase of empire, Japanese unleashed their colonial armies on Asia. The armies proceeded to engage in risky (and ultimately catastrophic) games of brinkmanship with other regional powers, even while they created institutions that were highly successful in mobilizing indigenous support for Japanese rule. Thus, inscribed in the course of expansion in the Northeast—from its beginnings at the turn of the century through the era of autonomous imperialism in the 1930s—was the developmental logic of Japanese imperialism.

These reflections on the large spatial and temporal structures of empire provide the international context for the chapters that follow. Such a context is important because the metropolitan aspect of Manchukuo with which this book is primarily concerned represents only one dimension in the wide spaces of total empire. It is important, moreover, because this book concentrates on the period between 1931 and 1945, a small, though critical, slice of time in the larger history of Japan in Manchuria. Narrowing the field of study, we now move into this different world, focusing on Japan in 1931—a nation swept up in war fever.