CHAPTER 6

CONTINENTAL EXPANSION, 1905–1941

GREATER JAPAN OR LESSER JAPAN?

The world’s attention turned toward Japan after its victory in the Russo-Japanese War. This small island nation in East Asia not only had escaped falling under the colonial control of the Western imperialist powers, but it also had emerged as an imperialistic nation in its own right, on its way toward hegemony in East Asia and the western Pacific. The advanced countries that opposed or supported Japan in the war against Russia, and other Asian countries that were the targets of Western expansion, contemplated Japan’s future with a mixture of admiration and wariness.

In retrospect, it can be said that the Russo-Japanese War brought Japan to an important crossroads in the path of its national destiny. The basic issue was whether Japan should be satisfied with a limited success as a solid middle-sized nation or should drive toward becoming a great military power dominating the Asian continent. In the postwar years, journalists and intellectuals debated Japan’s goals and direction during its next stage of development. The debate considered several issues: greater “Japanism” versus little “Japanism,” northern advance versus southern advance, and army-first versus navy-first. Greater Japanism implied continued expansionism, whereas little Japanism implied satisfaction with the postbellum status quo. Northern advance and southern advance were somewhat more ambiguous terms. The first was generally understood to mean a policy of continental expansion from the Korean peninsula through Manchuria into China proper; the second was understood to mean expansion from Taiwan into south China and Southeast Asia. Army-first meant that the army would carry the main burden of expansion, whereas navy-first implied that the navy would. There was a tendency for greater Japanism to go hand in hand with northern advance, which in turn implied continental expansion and an army-first policy. Little Japanism tended to be associated with the southern advance and navy-first positions. The debate necessarily had strong politi-
Map 6.1. Areas of China penetrated by Japan, 1941.
cal implications because it involved competition between the army and the navy over the expansion of military armaments.

One of the leading monthly journals, *Taiyō*, ran issues in 1910 and again in 1913 in which the contributors debated the pros and cons of the northern advance–southern advance strategies. It is apparent that the northern advance argument was not popular among the contributors, the majority of whom supported the southern advance argument that stressed the primacy of the navy over the army. Takekoshi Yosaburō, a leading journalist and critic who warmly supported the colonial development of Taiwan, argued that it was a “disadvantage for an island country to employ its strength on the continent” and that it was better to pursue economic advances to the south (by which he meant Southeast Asia). “Our future,” he wrote, “lies not in the north but in the south.”1 Inukai Tsuyoshi, leader of the minority Kukumintō and a sympathizer of the Chinese revolutionary movement, argued that because there was “no danger of war in the North for the next ten years,” Japan should assume a defensive posture in north Korea and instead turn toward the south, a task for which a “great navy” was necessary.2 On the other hand, Major General Kusao Masatsune, a reserve general who saw the implications of a move south, wrote, “If Japan moved northward and northwestward beyond our present location, it would be aggression, but a war between Japan and the United States would be even more foolish.”3 Opposed to expansion of the navy, he proposed instead peaceful expansion into the South Seas.

A number of writers for the *Tōyō keizai shinpō* (The Oriental Economist)—Katayama Sen, Miura Tetsutarō, and Ishibashi Tanzan, among others—carried Kusao’s argument to its logical conclusion. They opposed the ambitions of greater Japanism to expand in either direction, north or south. Instead they called for a lesser Japanism with the goal of building a compact “island welfare state” through the expansion of industry and trade.4 Ishibashi wrote that Taiwan, China, and Korea were not “defensive palisades but highly flammable and dangerous dry brush.” Japan, he said, should “abandon Manchuria, give independence to Korea and Taiwan, abandon economic rights in China, and live in peace with those weak nations.”5

Arguments in favor of the southern advance and lesser Japanism remained a minority opinion. The northern advance or continental policy not only had the overwhelming support of public opinion, but it also was the path chosen by the government. There were disagreements over timing and method, but the northern advance policy remained the mainstream position in Japanese foreign policy for the next several decades. As Tomizu Hiroto, a professor of law at Tokyo Imperial University, observed, "Northern advance is a historical reality."

Komura Jutarō, foreign minister in the Katsura cabinet, was one of the chief architects of the continental policy. As the Japanese representative at the Portsmouth Peace Conference in 1905, Komura had crossed swords with Sergei Witte, the Russian delegate, but he had been unable to negotiate a peace settlement completely satisfactory to the Japanese public. Many Japanese, elated at their military victory over Russia, had expected Komura to bring home as prizes a huge indemnity and territorial cessions in Siberia. Professor Tomizu acquired his nickname "Professor Baikal" because he advocated cession of Siberia east of Lake Baikal to Japan. Such grand hopes did not materialize. Under the Portsmouth Treaty, Japan obtained only territorial control over southern Karafuto, a paramount position in Korea, a leasehold in the Liaotung peninsula, and the South Manchuria Railway concession. When the contents of the treaty became known, antitreaty demonstrations erupted into rioting—the so-called Hibiya incident—and an angry mob attacked Komura's residence.

Although Japan had failed to obtain either an indemnity or any territory apart from Karafuto, Komura hoped that Japan could maintain a foothold on the Asian continent as a springboard for further expansion. When he returned home from Portsmouth, he learned that the Katsura government had decided that because it would be difficult to operate the railway concessions in Manchuria because of postwar financial difficulties, it would give unofficial assent to the sale of the railroad line to E. H. Harriman, the American railroad magnate. Komura persuaded Katsura to cancel this decision, and despite poor health, Komura traveled to Peking, where he obtained the Ch'ing government's consent to Japan's new interests in Manchuria.

Yamagata Aritomo, the dominant senior figure in the army and another key figure in the shaping of the continental policy, insisted that Japan "should expand its national interests and sovereign rights"
toward the Ch’ing dynasty. His protégé, Colonel Tanaka Giichi, a strong advocate of continental expansion and later war minister and prime minister in the 1920s, wrote in 1906 that Japan “should break free from its insular position, become a continental state, and confidently extend its national power.” These arguments, of course, were linked to an army-first and navy-second position and naturally invited resistance from the navy. Captain Satō Tetsutarō, known as the “Japanese Mahan,” warned against pushing north, arguing that “an ocean state should not go too far into the continent.” He advanced a navy-first position, arguing that there was no danger of an island country like Japan being invaded by a foreign power and that Japan could defend its own trade routes if it had a powerful navy.

The views of army leaders like Yamagata and Tanaka were far more moderate than those of Colonel Matsuishi Yasuji, an army general staff officer who urged expansion first on the Asian continent, then into Southeast Asia and the South Seas, and finally into South and Central America. His position combined the northern advance and southern advance views. It can also be seen as a harbinger of the concept of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Clearly, however, a grand scheme like Matsuishi’s was a mere dream given Japan’s real capabilities. By contrast, the views of Meiji leaders like Yamagata and Komura, who had worked hard to build a modern state, were fairly realistic and cautious.

The government’s caution can be seen in the decision taken by the Katsura cabinet in July 1908 that “Japan should solidify the alliance with England, strive to maintain the entente with Russia, improve old friendships with Germany, Austria and Italy” and reaffirm cooperation with the United States. The cabinet’s view was that its continental expansion policy should be carried out within the limits permitted by the European powers and the United States and within a framework of international harmony. Such caution and realism diminished as time went on, eroded by the popular nationalism induced by two victorious wars in 1895 and 1905, by the displacement of older leaders by a younger generation, and by the army’s increasing vociferousness and influence.

The government’s commitment to a greater Japan orientation in...
foreign policy encouraged the military services to make plans for arms expansion. Military leaders ignored the postwar political clamor to "lift the tax burden from the people," and they had no qualms about intervening in politics to achieve their objectives. The army justified its call for a military buildup by citing the need to prepare for operations on the continent and the danger of a war of revenge by the Russians; the navy argued that it was necessary to counter the trend of the American navy toward expansion. These claims were not entirely convincing, as they raised suspicions that hypothetical crises were created in order to expand military armaments. Yamagata, concerned lest the differing policies of the two services cause discord between political goals and military strategy, promoted a unified policy. The resulting doctrine, "The Aims of Imperial National Defense" (Teikoku kokubō hōshin), sanctioned by the emperor in February 1907, listed Japan’s hypothetical enemies as Russia, the United States, Germany, and France, in that order. It called for the buildup of the army to twenty-five divisions and the creation of a grand fleet with a core of eight battleships and eight battle cruisers (the so-called 8:8 plan). The document mainly promised both the army and the navy a substantial increase in strength.

The projected scale of arms expansion under the 1907 policy was 150 percent greater than the levels achieved at the end of the Russo-Japanese War. The expenditures required far exceeded what the government could afford to spend, as it had obtained no indemnity from Russia. The 1895 indemnity from China, of course, had been used to finance the arms buildup that enabled Japan’s victory over Russia. When the emperor unofficially showed the national defense policy statement to Prime Minister Saionji Kinmochi, Saionji commented, "Our financial situation since the war does not allow the implementation of the whole military armament program at once. A little more time is desirable, so in reaching your decision please consider our national strength in light of these circumstances. . . ."12

The army and the navy, hiding behind the shield of national defense, continued to press the government for increased military expenditures. The situation was exacerbated by continuing army–navy rivalry for budget support. In 1910 the army requested that in addition to the existing nineteen divisions, two more be added to the Korea Army. Public sentiment favored naval expansion, and the Saionji gov-

ernment refused the request on the grounds of financial stringency. Frustrated and overzealous, the army leadership decided to bring down the Saionji cabinet in 1912 by arbitrarily ordering the war minister to withdraw from the cabinet. The ensuing political upheaval sidelined the two-division issue in the short run, but the increase was finally authorized by the Okuma cabinet in 1915 after the outbreak of World War I.

The navy continued to press its own demands for the implementation of the 8:8 fleet-building plan. After funds were appropriated for an 8:4 fleet and an 8:6 fleet, the Diet finally approved the 8:8 fleet plan in 1920. Because the size of capital ships had increased, it was predicted that naval expenditures would make up 30 percent of the national budget and that by the time the program was completed in 1927 that figure would reach 40 percent. It was obvious that maintenance of such an immense navy was financially impossible for Japan. Thus, as a result of the Washington Conference in 1921–2, the 8:8 fleet plan was abandoned.

The emergence of both military services as powerful lobbying groups or veto groups within the state had great long-term significance for foreign policy. By taking advantage of regulations that required the service ministers to be generals or admirals on active duty, the military services could bring down cabinets they disliked or could manipulate them by hinting at such action. As the oligarchic generation died off, the ties that had united both the civilian and military sides of the hanbatsu weakened. The army began to function as an increasingly independent group, often moving away from government control. The army, of course, played the main role in the development of the continental policy, but the navy, which had originally been opposed to such a policy, did not neglect to exploit the opportunities when they arose.

**WORLD WAR I AND JAPAN**

The basis of Japanese foreign policy immediately after the Russo-Japanese War was to advance on the continent within the framework of international cooperation. This policy reflected the domestic necessity of recovering from the Russo-Japanese War. The government concluded treaties and agreements, one after another, with the major powers in East Asia, laying the groundwork for a stable international environment. The postwar diplomatic network centered on the Anglo-

13 Ibid., p. 182.
Japanese alliance, regarded as the "marrow of imperial diplomacy." It was woven together by the Russo-Japanese Entente (1907; later renewed in 1910, 1912, and 1916), the Franco-Japanese Entente (1907), and the U.S.-Japanese understanding known as the Root-Takahira Agreement (1908). Skillful diplomatic give-and-take was required to advance on the continent without threatening the interests and ambitions of the other advanced powers. In order to obtain Anglo-American assent to the Japanese position in Korea, the Japanese proposed trading the joint defense of India in its bargaining with Great Britain, and the security of the Philippines in its bargaining with the United States. In the Franco-Japanese Entente of 1907, the Japanese traded the recognition of French rule over Indochina in return for France's recognition of the results of the Russo-Japanese War. In short, if the Western powers agreed to Japan's new rights and interests in Korea, the Japanese in return would recognize their colonial possessions. Thus, despite the international appeals of the Korean emperor, no objection was heard from the Western powers when Japan announced its annexation of Korea in 1910.

In its entente with Russia, Japan reached a secret understanding that Manchuria would be divided into two equal spheres of influence, with both powers having the ultimate intention of annexation. But this arrangement was not to the liking of the United States which had expected the "Open Door" principle to apply to Manchuria. The Taft administration, inviting the backing of Great Britain, attempted to extend its own influence into the area. In 1909 Secretary of State P. C. Knox initiated the "dollar diplomacy" policy aimed at putting all Manchurian railway lines under the joint management of the powers in order to "smoke [Japan] out" of southern Manchuria. But the Japanese and the Russians, erstwhile enemies, forged a joint front to stop the so-called Knox plan, and in March 1913 President Woodrow Wilson finally announced an end to the dollar-diplomacy offensive.

In the meantime, revolutionary forces toppled the Ch'ing dynasty in late 1911. The internal political confusion in China intensified among the powers competing to grab the lion's share of the fragmenting polity. As a result, the "partition of China" proceeded even further. In Japan, Yamagata and the army leadership wanted to use the revolution

14 Cabinet council decision, "Tai-gai seisaku hōshin kettei no ken" (September 25, 1908), in Nihon gaihō nenpō narabini shuyo bunsho (hereafter NGNSB), vol. 1, p. 309.
as an opportunity to occupy southern Manchuria, but the Saionji government hesitated to go that far. Yamagata lamented, “We have missed a god-given opportunity, and I am truly and mightily indignant for the sake of our country.” The Russian government had considered taking over northern Manchuria but decided not to out of concern for opposition from the United States, Germany, and Great Britain. The Russians, however, did succeed in making Outer Mongolia independent and securing “freedom of movement” in western China in return for recognizing the same rights for the British in Tibet. Under the third Russo-Japanese entente in 1913, the Japanese obtained a sphere of influence in the eastern part of Inner Mongolia.

Strong displeasure lingered in the Japanese army over the failure to seize control of southern Manchuria. Continental adventurers, in secret collusion with the army general staff, plotted military uprisings aimed at establishing independent regimes in Manchuria and Mongolia under the old Manchu and Mongolian ruling dynasties. The basic plan in 1912, and again in 1915, was to provoke a military clash that would involve Japanese forces. But both plots failed because the Japanese government remained aloof, allowing the local warlord, Chang Tso-lin, to put them down. The Japanese army simply lacked the prerequisites and the power to act independently, as it would in 1931. In the meantime, the real power in Manchuria remained in the hands of Chang Tso-lin, whom the Japanese government had to rely on in maintaining its vested interests there.

When World War I began in 1914, it would have been possible for Japan to stay out, but the Okuma cabinet almost immediately declared war on Germany. The government declared that “Japan must take the chance of a millennium” to “establish its rights and interests in Asia.” Clearly, the Japanese were less interested in what was going on in Europe than they were in the advantages that the war might bring in Asia. The war opened the way for the pursuit of a more vigorous continental policy unimpeded by the restraining influence of the Western powers. As a member of the allied coalition against Germany, Japan was able to obtain both “the gains of a participating country and the gains of a neutral country.”

The main Japanese military operations were to seize German bases on the Shantung peninsula and in the Pacific. The German base at

19 Ibid., p. 114.
Tsingtao surrendered without much resistance after being surrounded by a single Japanese army division, and the defenseless Pacific islands were seized by the Japanese navy without bloodshed. The Allied powers wanted Japan to dispatch troops to Europe, but the Japanese government limited its military cooperation to sending convoy-escort destroyers to the Mediterranean and stalking German converted raiders operating in the Pacific and Indian oceans. Its main might was concentrated on expanding its sphere of influence in the Pacific.

In early 1915, six months after the beginning of the war, the Ōkuma cabinet presented China with the infamous Twenty-one Demands. Proposed as a draft treaty, the demands included provisions for Japanese to take over German interests in Shantung, for an extension of the leasehold in the Liaotung (Kwantung) peninsula, for an extension of commercial rights in Manchuria, for joint Sino-Japanese control over the Han-yeh-p’ing mines in central China, and for a limitation of China’s right to cede control of coastal areas to third powers. The fifth and final group of demands, however, was really designed to turn China into a second Korea, by requiring the Chinese government to use Japanese advisers in its military, police, and financial administrations. Some Japanese diplomats had misgivings about the wisdom of the move. At the end of 1916, Foreign Minister Motono Ichirō wrote, “There are those who say that we should make China a protectorate or partition it, and there are those who advocate the extreme position that we should use the European war to make [China] completely our territory. . . . But even if we were able to do that temporarily, the empire lacks real power to hold on to it very long.”20 His reference to the lack of Japanese power to maintain a long-term hold on China recognized the resistance of the Chinese populace—through boycotts and demonstrations—to Japanese pressure. But had the United States not lodged strong and repeated protests, the Japanese government might well have begun the aggression in China that it delayed until 1931.

The Ōkuma cabinet issued an ultimatum that forced the regime in Peking to accept most of its demands, but Japan had to back off from the radical Group Five when Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan sent a strong note indicating that the United States could “not recognize” them. Although the United States, mindful of the balance of power, was flexible in its reaction, it also held fast to the principles of the Open Door doctrine and consistently expressed disapproval of

Japanese actions that violated Chinese sovereignty. The doctrine of nonrecognition implied in the Bryan note was later taken up by Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson in 1931, and it reappeared yet again in the Hull note of 1941. It might even be said that the Bryan note laid down the "moral obligations" (taigi meibun) that led to the war between Japan and the United States.

As the war in Europe approached an end, the situation became ever more favorable to the advancement of Japan's continental policy. The United States entered the war in 1917, and the Russian Revolution erupted the same year. Given the likelihood that the Western powers would return to Asia after the war's end, many Japanese leaders were anxious to gain as much ground as possible beforehand. In the summer of 1918, a few months before the German surrender, the Terauchi government sent a force of seventy thousand to Siberia as part of the joint Allied intervention in the Russian Revolution. Significantly, Japan committed the most forces, and its forces stayed the longest, even after the other Allied powers had pulled out of Siberia. The Terauchi cabinet also concluded a joint-defense treaty with China under the pretext of preventing the spread of revolutionary currents from Russia to the Far East. Its provisions enabled the Japanese troops to move freely throughout almost all of China. By the time World War I ended in November 1918, Japanese military forces were able to operate in a zone that extended from Lake Baikal in the north, into the hinterland of Sinkiang Province to the west, and as far south as the former German-held island territories in Micronesia to the south. It was an area almost equivalent in extent to the regions occupied by the Japanese forces in 1942 in the Pacific War.

The question was whether the Western powers, especially the United States, would recognize these established facts. In November 1917 while on a visit to the United States, Ambassador Ishii Kikujiro succeeded in concluding a joint statement with Secretary of State Robert Lansing. Even though both countries recognized the principles of China's territorial integrity and equal opportunity for commerce and industry, the agreement also acknowledged that Japan had special interests in China. Ishii interpreted the agreement to mean that the United States recognized Japan's exclusive sphere of influence in all of China, and the emperor honored Ishii with a gracious message for his "diplomatic victory." But just as many Japanese leaders had expected, once the war ended, the Western powers, led by the United

States, began a daring offensive to roll back Japan's position in Asia and to restore their prewar position.

THE VERSAILLES—WASHINGTON SYSTEM

The new international order formed under the leadership of the victorious powers, especially Great Britain and the United States, after the smoke of war had cleared, is generally called the Versailles—Washington system. It originated in the Versailles Peace Conference of 1919 and was elaborated at the Washington Conference of 1921–2, where the Four Power Treaty and the Nine Power Pact attempted to freeze the status quo in the Pacific.

This international order had been organized to protect the interests of the two major victorious powers, Great Britain and the United States. The new system led to dissatisfaction among the countries that later turned fascist, such as Germany, which was suffering under the heavy burden of reparations, and Italy and Japan, which, although victorious, felt deprived of adequate rewards. The system also excluded the Soviet Union, which had survived the Allied intervention and was building the first socialist regime in history. The Soviet Union acted as a powerful outsider, seeking to expand the influence of the international Communist movement through the Comintern and making special efforts to support rising nationalist movements in colonial areas. The advanced capitalist countries scrambled to devise material and psychological countermeasures to defend their colonies abroad and to check subversive movements at home.

By the early 1920s, then, a balance of power had emerged among the three major world power blocs—the United States and Great Britain, leaders of the Washington system; the discontented powers of Germany, Japan, and Italy; and the Soviet Union, with its goal of creating an international socialist order. The equilibrium among these various blocs did not survive the buffeting of the Great Depression, a storm that struck the world economic system in 1929. International politics was swept on toward another great war in a series of crises brought about by attempts by the fascist countries to overturn the status quo. As it happened, it was Japan that led the way with the Manchurian incident.

Why did Japan eventually break away from the Versailles—Washington system? The main reason was that the rollback begun by the United States and Great Britain at the war's end forced Japan to give up most of the wartime gains it had made in the Asia–Pacific area. The rollback
included the abolition of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the withdrawal of Japanese troops from Siberia, the 5:5:3 ratio in capital ships in a naval arms limitation treaty that left the Japanese fleet inferior in strength to those of the United States and Great Britain, the return of the Shantung concession to Chinese sovereignty, and the suspension of the Lansing-Ishii agreement. Many of these developments took place as a result of the Washington Conference. The most important agreement concluded at the conference was the Nine Power Pact of 1922, which liquidated all existing treaties between the powers and China and replaced them with the Open Door principles so long espoused by the United States. The pact was an indisputable victory for American diplomacy. According to A. Whitney Griswold, it was the “apotheosis of the traditional Far Eastern policy of the United States.”

The Japanese viewed these agreements with mixed feelings. There were those like Mochizuki Kotaro, a prominent journalist and Diet member, who complained, “Our empire has lost everything and gained nothing, and only the expense of building warships is spared.” Even stronger sentiments had been expressed in 1918 by Konoe Fumimaro, later to become prime minister, who argued that Japan “would be left forever a backward country” under the Versailles settlement. The Japanese government, especially the diplomatic authorities, did not share these negative sentiments, however, nor did they regard the Versailles–Washington system as a total defeat for Japanese interests. In the early 1920s, many leaders, beginning with Prime Minister Hara Takashi, had enough self-confidence to accept the “world trends” and tried to extend Japan’s national interests while adjusting to the new international framework centering on the League of Nations. To some extent, the same trends toward progressivism and pacifism expressed in Woodrow Wilson’s idealism were at work in Japan.

From a practical point of view, the advantages of the new international system, especially those coming out of the Washington Conference, were by no means negligible. First, the treaties signed at Washington were the product of an ideology of the status quo, and they held out the possibility of a joint defensive front by the United States, Great Britain, and Japan to contain the expansion of Soviet international

COMMUNISM AND CHINESE NATIONALISM. Second, in regard to the mutual relations among the three powers, it was understood that in principle, the restrictions imposed on Japan were to be applied in the future and that they did not touch on those established special interests, especially in Manchuria and Mongolia, regarded by the Japanese as vital to their survival. Third, because the League of Nations lacked the ability to enforce any of its sanction provisions, it was clear that Japan could easily break away from the system whenever it felt advantageous to do so. As long as Japan remained able to expand through free competition and as long as Japan's special interests in Manchuria and Mongolia were not threatened by either China or the Soviet Union, the concessions Japan made in China—the return of the Shantung territory, for example—were not thought an undue price to pay for an end to international isolation.

Japan's commitment to the Washington naval arms limitation treaty created pressures to reconsider the army expenditures as well. First under War Minister Yamanashi Hanzō in 1922 and under War Minister Ugaki Kazushige in 1925, increases in military appropriations were checked. The resulting decline in the military's authority seemed to provide an opportunity to remove the ill effects of "dual diplomacy," which gave the military services as much voice in the making of foreign policy as the civilian diplomats had. It was an opportunity to restore real control over diplomacy to the civilian cabinets, now dominated by the political parties. Prime Minister Hara Takashi, and later Prime Minister Takahashi Korekiyo, both informally considered a plan to abolish the office of army chief of staff, though ultimately their scheme came to naught.

The main exponent of working faithfully within the Washington-Versailles system without abandoning practical considerations in the Asia-Pacific area was Shidehara Kijūrō, the first career diplomat recruited by means of civil service examination to serve as foreign minister. Shidehara, who held that post under five Minseitō cabinets, had been vice-minister of foreign affairs, ambassador to the United States, and plenipotentiary at the Washington Conference. The interlinked components of his foreign policy were international collaboration, economic diplomacy, and nonintervention in China's domestic affairs.

1. International collaboration was generally accepted to mean diplomacy centering on the League of Nations, but basically it involved a policy of cooperation with the United States and Great Britain.

2. Economic diplomacy referred to emphasizing peaceful economic advance and shifting away from the policy of military pressure embodied in the Twenty-one Demands, the Siberian expedition, and military assistance to Chinese warlords, which had invited nationalistic resistance. This aspect of Shidehara’s policy responded to the demands of Japanese industrial capitalists who had prospered greatly during World War I. It reflected an optimism and a confidence that Japan was strong enough economically to compete with the advanced Western economies without excessive political or military protection. In fact, the volume of trade with China and other countries climbed under “Shidehara diplomacy.” Shidehara himself was rather inflexible and intolerant of actions that violated economic rationality or infringed on economic interests as a result of “extraeconomic logic” or “noneconomic logic.”

3. Nonintervention in China’s domestic affairs, the most important element of Shidehara’s policy, meant accepting the unification of China by the Kuomintang and sympathizing with China’s demands for tariff autonomy and the abolition of extraterritorial rights. This was closely tied to the principle of economic diplomacy. It rested on the judgment that the establishment of a stable and unified government in China was desirable for the advance of Japanese economic interests and the expansion of its markets and that an imprudent policy of intervention would provoke nationalistic hostility and anti-Japanese boycotts.

These principles of Shidehara diplomacy dovetailed with the prevailing diplomatic environment. After the resumption of normal diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Japan in January 1925, Japan appeared to be moving away from international isolation, on the path to stable peaceful expansion. Yet this illusion of stability was soon demolished by the launching of a new Chinese Nationalist offensive. The resulting sudden shift toward Sino-Japanese confrontation brought the collapse of the entire Washington system.

SHIDEHARA DIPLOMACY VERSUS TANAKA DIPLOMACY

At the time of the Washington Conference, the Kuomintang controlled only a small local regime in the region around Canton. But with the support of the Comintern and the Soviet Union, it launched the northern expedition against local warlord governments in 1926. By the

end of 1928 it had unified nearly all of China proper, excluding Man-
churia. In the midst of this campaign, a coup d'état within the party
shifted power from pro-Communist leftists to rightists under the lead-
ership of Chiang Kai-shek. The influence of both the Soviet and Chi-
nese Communists in the party vanished.

During this period of domestic turmoil, the Western imperialist
powers competed to acquire the most advantageous position to guaran-
tee their special interests. But they all agreed that the expansion of the
Kuomintang’s radical unification of the whole country was not desir-
able, and they all wanted to check the advance of Soviet influence.
The most intransigent of the imperialist powers was Great Britain,
which had the largest interests in the Yangtze River region. In 1927
the British tried to arrange a military intervention with American and
Japanese help on the pretext of protecting foreign residents in China.
In response, Chinese antiforeign nationalist movements were directed
against Britain’s gunboat policy, and trade between Britain and China
was interrupted for nearly a year and a half.

In face of these developments, Foreign Minister Shidehara clung to
his policy of nonintervention in Chinese domestic politics. In March
1927, during the so-called Nanking incident when revolutionary sol-
diers attacked consulates and foreign residences, Anglo-American gun-
boats responded with a bombardment, but the Japanese declined to
join in. In negotiations with the Chinese to resolve the affair, Shide-
hara displeased the other powers by refusing to blame Chiang and by
insisting that order must be restored on Chiang’s initiative.27 According
to unofficial reports from the Japanese consul general in Shanghai,
Shidehara had already learned of Chiang’s plan to carry out an internal
party coup against the left wing. Because Shidehara wanted to stabilize
Japanese relations with a united China under Chiang, he thus avoided
offending the Chinese leader.28

In April 1927, just a week after the antileft coup, the Minseitō
cabinet led by Wakatsuki Reijirō fell from power. Shidehara was re-
placed by Tanaka Giichi, president of the Seiyūkai, who served as his
own foreign minister. The immediate cause of the change in cabinets
was a domestic matter, the Privy Council’s rejection of the Wakatsuki
government’s plan for dealing with the bank panic. But the real reason
was the conflict of opinion over Shidehara’s China policy. Criticism of
Shidehara’s “weak diplomacy” grew stronger during the Nanking inci-

28 Ibid., pp. 37–9.
dent. A young navy officer attempted suicide, infuriated because he mistakenly thought that Shidehara was responsible for giving the order that forbade the bombardment of Nanking, and the naval landing force at Shanghai, acting in concert with the British and the Americans, requested the dispatch of army forces. The situation had even reached the point that the Asahi shinbun, supportive of Shidehara diplomacy in the past, urged the foreign minister to reconsider. Taking advantage of the anti-Shidehara mood, Mori Kaku, a key Seiyūkai leader, allied with hard-liners in the army and the Privy Council to unseat the cabinet. Even War Minister Ugaki Kazushige, a member of the Minseitō government, wrote that the fall of the cabinet “might well be good fortune for the empire.”

It is not difficult to imagine how strong the dissatisfaction with the Shidehara policy had become.

The new Tanaka cabinet adopted an outwardly tougher policy toward the disorder brought about by the northern expedition. In May 1927 the government, following previous Seiyūkai demands that it “protect local residents,” dispatched an army brigade to Shantung, where it forced the northern expeditionary forces back to the Yangtze River. This display of military force was known as the first Shantung intervention.

In June 1927 the Tanaka government brought local military and diplomatic officials to Tokyo for the Eastern Regions Conference, to enunciate the Tanaka cabinet’s new foreign policy. The man who planned and chaired the meeting was Mori Kaku, parliamentary undersecretary for foreign affairs. He exercised real control over diplomacy, even though Tanaka formally held the post of foreign minister. The basic elements of Tanaka’s diplomacy were (1) a policy of sending Japanese troops to protect local Japanese interests and residents whenever danger threatened and (2) a policy of “separating Manchuria and Mongolia” (Man–Mō bunri seisaku), intended to confirm Japan’s special position in both areas and to prevent the Chinese revolution from spreading to Manchuria. These policies were clearly the opposite of Shidehara’s, which had respected China’s sovereignty over Manchuria and had called for the evacuation of Japanese residents to safety if their lives were endangered.

The Eastern Regions Conference confirmed the principles of the Tanaka diplomacy, but it ended without agreement on specific plans. The general public impression was that Japan’s China policy had been

reversed 180 degrees. In China, an anti-Japanese economic boycott began, and it soon spread to Manchuria, where the first anti-Japanese demonstration took place at Mukden in September 1927. The Tanaka government adopted military countermeasures that were even stronger than before. When Chiang Kai-shek resumed the northern expedition in 1928, the Tanaka cabinet again dispatched two army divisions to Shantung. In May, Japanese and Chinese forces clashed at Tsinan. But Chiang’s northern army bypassed Tsinan, moving toward Peking in pursuit of Chang Tso-lin’s retreating forces. Anticipating certain victory by Chiang’s forces, the Japanese advised Chang to abandon north China quickly, return to his old base in Manchuria, and try to rebuild his forces there under Japanese protection.

As a young officer during the Russo-Japanese war, Tanaka had saved Chang from execution as a Russian spy. He now aimed at expanding Japan’s influence in Manchuria by supporting Chang’s puppet regime while building new Japanese-controlled railway lines there. The Kwantung Army garrisoned in Manchuria, however, wanted to replace Chang—who had become too strong and difficult to deal with—with a more pliant figure. On April 18, 1928, Colonel Kōmoto Dai-saku, a Kwantung staff officer, told a friend on the army general staff that he intended to assassinate Chang. “I will do it this time for sure,” he said, “... with the determination to settle everything of twenty years’ standing once and for all.” The return of Chang to Manchuria presented the Kwantung Army with a golden opportunity. On the morning of June 4, 1928, Kōmoto, in collusion with several of his colleagues, set an explosive charge under Chang’s personal train as it passed through a suburb of Mukden. Chang died soon afterward from the injuries sustained in the blast. Kōmoto had hoped that the authorities in Tokyo would call out the Kwantung Army to occupy Mukden, but the order never came, and so the whole plot ended in failure.

The Kwantung Army announced that the Northern Expeditionary Forces were responsible for Chang’s death, but rumors of a Japanese plot behind the incident spread quickly at home and abroad. The opposition parties in Japan questioned the government in the Diet, referring ominously to a “certain serious incident in Manchuria.” Prince Seionji, the last genrō, reacted strongly. “I would never have let things get out of hand,” he told a confidant. Tanaka, who lamented

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that "children never know their parents’ mind," had originally intended to punish Kōmoto and his fellow conspirators. He had promised the emperor that he would do so. But because of strong army opposition, Tanaka was able to impose only light administrative punishment on the Kwantung army commander and on Kōmoto for having "committed a mistake in guarding the railroad." This leniency cost him his office. After the emperor reproached Tanaka for breaking his promise, his cabinet resigned in July 1929. Several months later, Tanaka died in despair.

Imperial ire over the handling of the Chang Tso-lin affair was the immediate cause of Tanaka’s downfall, but his diplomatic policy had already reached a dead end in China. The two Shantung interventions, both intended to demonstrate a tough stance toward China, had not only failed to check the Kuomintang’s effort to bring north China under control; they had also caused casualties among Japanese residents and provoked a growing popular anti-Japanese movement. To make matters worse, Tanaka’s hope to resolve the Manchurian problem by gradually bringing Chang under control was thwarted by Chang’s assassination. In December 1928, Chang Hsueh-liang, who had succeeded his father as the warlord of Manchuria, ignored strong warnings by the Japanese and merged his territory with the new Kuomintang government at Nanking. Just before his resignation the following July, Tanaka himself had been finally forced to recognize the Nanking government.

As Sino-Japanese relations deteriorated, Japan’s ties with the Western powers, especially Britain and the United States, cooled as well. Both countries had made timely concessions to the Nanking government, including agreement to tariff autonomy, and both were trying to establish new and cordial bonds with the Chinese. Only Japan lagged behind.

Although the Tanaka and the Shidehara diplomacies have often been viewed as alternative policies, it is inappropriate to contrast them as completely opposite. Tanaka had no intention of blocking the Kuomintang’s unification of China or abandoning traditional cooperation with the Anglo-American powers. He certainly did not envisage a plan for world conquest such as outlined in the counterfeit “Tanaka memorandum.”33 However, it is difficult to deny that in contrast with Shidehara, who maintained a consistent policy, Tanaka appeared vacillating and contradictory in his actions, swinging first one way and then

another. For example, when Chiang visited Japan in the fall of 1927 while temporarily out of office, Tanaka indicated his intention not to interfere in the Kuomintang’s unification of China. Despite that assurance, a few months later Tanaka dispatched the second Shantung expedition when Chiang reopened his northern campaign. Tanaka also revealed that he lacked the capacity to control the conflict over the direction of foreign policy between the foreign ministry and the army and its civilian allies such as Mori. Although Tanaka had succeeded Yamagata as head of the Chōshū lineage in the army, he was unable to budge it on the matter of punishing the Kwantung Army plotters like Komoto. In effect, that meant that he had abdicated to the army his initiative in continental policy. Tanaka was succeeded as prime minister by Hamaguchi Osachi, president of the Minseitō, and as foreign minister by Shidehara. Shidehara diplomacy took a new lease on life, but its failure was in sight.

WAS MANCHURIA A LIFELINE?

Nothing better expresses the romantic view of Manchuria than one of the most popular military songs in Japan, written right after the Russo-Japanese War. It went as follows:

Here in far-off Manchuria
Hundreds of leagues from the homeland,
Our comrades lie beneath the rocky plain
Lit by the red setting sun.

During the Russo-Japanese War, Japan had spent ¥2 billion and shed the blood of nearly 100,000 soldiers. Its material rewards were the Kwantung Leased Territory, including Dairen and Port Arthur, and interests in southern Manchuria centering on the South Manchuria Railway Company. After the Chinese Revolution of 1911, Manchuria, the homeland of the Ch’ing rulers, slipped from the reach of the central authorities in China. It then came under the control of Chang Tso-lin, who enjoyed the backing of the Japanese army, and then of his son, Chang Hsueh-liang. Although the area was Chinese in name, it was thought of as a special zone to which Chinese sovereignty did not extend. Even the Lytton Commission of Enquiry dispatched by the League of Nations in 1932 to investigate the situation in Manchuria partially acknowledged this.

For those Japanese unable to satisfy their ambitions at home, Man-
Manchuria was a new frontier where they could fulfill their dreams of fame and fortune. Adventurers and merchants with a desire to get rich quick rushed to Manchuria. Some young men even joined mounted bandit gangs. When Japanese-American relations deteriorated as a result of the Japanese immigrant problem in California, Foreign Minister Komura urged a policy of concentrating Japanese immigration in Manchuria and Korea (Man–Kan iminshūchūron). In hopes of shifting the destination of immigrants to ease the population problem, he drew up a twenty-year plan to send 1 million immigrants to Manchuria. The number of Japanese residents in Manchuria increased from 68,000 in 1909 to 219,000 in 1930. The majority were employees of the South Manchuria Railway Company and their families. About 1,000 were farmers, and the rest were adventurers, unscrupulous merchants, get-rich-quick artists, and other social undesirables. By contrast, each year 300,000 to 500,000 Chinese, mainly peasants, drifted into Manchuria, reaching a peak of 780,000 migrants in 1927.

After the failure of the plot to take over Manchuria by assassinating Chang Tso-lin, a sense of crisis grew more intense within the Kwantung Army as the Chinese began to construct railway lines parallel to the South Manchuria Railway line and as Chang Hsueh-liang began to exert economic pressure on the Japanese settlers in Manchuria. It is usually argued that the Kwantung Army provoked the Manchuria incident because the diplomatic policies of Foreign Minister Shidehara were unable to cope with the extension to Manchuria of the Kuomintang regime’s nationalistic “rights recovery” movement and its “anti-Japanese policy.” Because diplomacy had reached an impasse, it is said, the Kwantung Army resorted to force to achieve its long-held ambition of bringing the region under Japanese control.

It remains doubtful, however, whether Japanese “rights in Manchuria” (zai–Man ken’eki) were of such enormous importance to Japan or so critically threatened as to justify a response by military action. For example, it was probably an exaggeration that the new parallel railway lines built by Chang Hsueh-liang brought about a decline in the profitability of the South Manchuria Railway line. At the time, Kimura Eiichi, a director of the company, argued: “The parallel lines are not the cause. The depression is. The public thinks the income earned in the good old days is normal, but the fall in income for the

parallel Chinese lines is greater [than ours].” Although the South Manchuria Railway admittedly made smaller profits because of the world economic slump, the competing parallel Chinese lines would have collapsed before the Japanese line did. Even Colonel Kōmoto, the plotter of Chang Tso-lin’s assassination, admitted that the economic pressure felt by the Japanese residents in Manchuria was essentially due to their inability to compete with the Chinese immigrants’ low standard of living, that it was not due to the Chiang government’s anti-Japanese policy.

Seen in this light, the Manchurian incident was really the product of a false “crisis in Manchuria and Mongolia” (Man–Mō no kiki). The Kwantung Army, as well as Japanese colonists favoring the use of force, worked hard to convince the Japanese government, the military high command, and the public at large that such a crisis existed. “Manchuria and Mongolia are not territories of China; they belong to the people of Manchuria and Mongolia,” wrote Lieutenant Colonel Ishiwara Kanji. “It is a publicly acknowledged fact that our national situation has reached an impasse, that there is no way of solving the food, population, and other important problems, and that the only path left open to us is the development of Manchuria and Mongolia.” There were discrepancies, however, in Ishiwara’s logic. Even if neither Manchuria nor Mongolia were Chinese territory, how did that justify Japan’s claims to territorial rights? Would Japan’s resource and population problems be solved even if Manchuria and Mongolia were seized? In the midst of hard times, would it be possible to raise the capital for their development? Ishiwara offered no concrete answers.

The Manchurian Youth League, organized by hard-liners in the Japanese resident community, also called for an end to Shidehara diplomacy. They sent a lobbying group to Japan to publicize the crisis of the South Manchuria Railway, but the public reception was cool. This was only natural, considering the disastrous economic situation

36 “Explanation by Director Kimura at the Department of Overseas Affairs Meeting of December 7, 1930,” Kikan gendai shi, November 1972, p. 162. According to statistics for 1937 found in Minami Manshu tetsudō kabushiki kaisha sanjūninen nyakushi (Dairen: Minami Manshū tetsudō kabushiki kaisha, 1937), profits were consistently made (although the curve was downward), and dividends were paid between 1927 and 1931; ibid., p. 724. Concerning the rumor of the South Manchuria Railway’s loss of business, see Yamaguchi Jūji, Manshū teikoku (Tokyo: Gyosei tsushinsha, 1975), p. 52.

37 Sagara, Akai yūhi no masunogahara ni, p. 149.


in Japan, where unemployment was mounting and popular hardship was widespread. There were crises enough at home without having to worry about Manchuria.

The central military authorities in Tokyo, though concerned about developments in Manchuria, took a more prudent position. A month before the Manchurian incident took place, the army prepared a document called "An Outline of Measures for the Solution of the Manchurian Problem." It called for taking a year or so to consolidate the situation at home and abroad and to create a favorable public mood before resorting to a solution by force in Manchuria. Even though Ishiwara and his colleagues in the Kwantung Army were willing to defy the rest of the world, the central army authorities were concerned that the League of Nations would impose sanctions on Japan if force were used in Manchuria. Moreover, they thought that a local incident would be difficult to enlarge as long as Shidehara's foreign policy views prevailed. To overcome these obstacles, it would be necessary to administer a multiple shock by simultaneous coups at home and abroad.

In 1930 and 1931 the conditions for a military usurpation of political power at home continued to ripen. The Hamaguchi cabinet included three of the finest leaders produced by party politics—Prime Minister Hamaguchi Osachi, Finance Minister Inoue Junnosuke, and Foreign Minister Shidehara. But their policies produced distrust and dissatisfaction among all strata of the Japanese population. In fiscal policy, the Hamaguchi cabinet tried to strengthen Japan's economic capacity to compete in the international marketplace, in order to overcome the chronic slump. But Inoue's policies of tight finances, industrial rationalization, and a return to the gold standard coincided with the onset of world depression in 1929, and the economy sank to unprecedented depths. Many economic indicators fell to 50 to 70 percent of their normal levels. Because all the sacrifices were borne by the farm communities and small- and medium-sized businesses, "Inoue financial policy" was interpreted as a policy to extend the political power of the parties who represented the interests of the zaibatsu. Successive revelations of political graft and corruption further diminished public confidence in party politics. In foreign policy, the compromise reached with the United States and England in 1930 at the London Naval Conference, where Japan agreed to an

inferior ratio of auxiliary vessels, incurred the displeasure of the
navy’s “fleet faction.” And criticism of Shidehara diplomacy con-
tinued to grow when the Kuomintang government called for “the rapid
abolition of all unequal treaties and the recovery of all rights and
interests.” The “revolutionary diplomacy” of the Chinese overlapped
the “crisis in Manchuria and Mongolia,” widening fears that Japan
might be forced to pull out of the continent completely.

The impasse at home and abroad provided the rationale for the
sudden emergence of a “reform movement” (kakushin undō) in the
army and the right wing. The movement hoped that the army would
become a political force to replace the political parties, which had lost
their purity and their ability to deal with the country’s problems.
There were disputes within the movement over which should come
first, political reform at home through a “Shōwa restoration” (Shōwa
ishin) or military action abroad to resolve the Manchurian problem,
but efforts to accomplish both moved hand in hand. The Cherry
Blossom Society (Sakurakai), organized by young army officers in the
fall of 1929, plotted a military coup in March 1931 to place General
Ugaki in control of the government. This so-called March incident
failed when Ugaki refused to cooperate, but it was followed in the fall
by another, even larger coup plan, the October incident, involving
young naval officers and civilian right-wing activists.42

Meanwhile, in Manchuria a group of Kwantung Army officers led
by Lieutenant Colonel Ishiwara and Colonel Itagaki Seishirō pushed
forward preparations to deal with the Manchurian crisis by military
force. Ishiwara, who blended his faith in Nichiren Buddhism with a
knowledge of recent trends in military science to develop a unique
theory of ultimate global war, was the theorist behind the plot;
Itagaki, who as a military cadet had joined a secret society dedicated to
continental expansion, was the practical manager. They maintained a
liaison with the Cherry Blossom Society through Colonel Kōmoto, the
assassin of Chang Tso-lin, now retired from active service. Their plans
reached fruition in the fall of 1931.

On the night of September 18, Lieutenant Kawamoto Suemori of
the Second Battalion of the Railroad Garrison set off an explosive
charge on South Manchuria Railway tracks at Liutiaokou in the sub-
urbs of Mukden. The conspirators had intended to stir up local confu-
sion by derailing the Dairen Express, scheduled to arrive in Mukden

at 10:30 P.M. The train reached the blown-up section of track shortly after the explosion, swayed a bit, but passed over it safely. Nonetheless, the Manchurian incident was set in motion.

Plans for military action in Manchuria had been hastened by leaks of the plot. Rumors had reached informed circles by mid-August, causing a drop in the stock of the South Manchuria Railway. The consul general at Mukden had sent reports of a plot to Foreign Minister Shidehara, who at a cabinet meeting asked War Minister Minami Jirō about their authenticity. When Minami ordered Major General Tatekawa Yoshitsugu of the army general staff to Manchuria to stop the plot, Ishiwara and Itagaki stepped up their schedule by ten days. Even before his departure, Tatekawa had secretly informed the Kwantung Army that their plans were known. After conferring with Itagaki en route to Mukden, Tatekawa arrived several hours before the explosion went off, got drunk, and fell asleep in a Japanese restaurant. Later he excused the failure of his mission by commenting, “I didn’t make it in time.” There were other general officers like Tatekawa who had committed themselves to the conspiracy or at least had guessed what was going on but pretended not to know. In this sense the Manchurian incident—as well as the March and October incidents—can be interpreted as a direct army challenge to political party rule.

THE OCCUPATION OF MANCHURIA

The initial phase of the Manchurian incident ended with an almost bloodless victory, the overnight fall of Mukden. Chang Hsueh-liang, who was in Peking, ordered his subordinate officers to adopt a policy of nonresistance. But if the Kwantung Army were to occupy all of Manchuria, as planned, Japanese troops had to advance outside the railway zone where Japan had treaty rights. On September 21, Ishiwara and his colleagues requested that the Kwantung Army commander Honjō Shigeru dispatch troops to Kirin to establish local order there. In fact, disturbances in the area had been provoked by the plotters. By this time, Honjō, who had not been privy to the plot, began to realize what his staff officers were up to. According to the
army’s military code, it was a capital offense for a local commander in a foreign country to move his troops without the emperor’s consent. All through the night, the staff officers worked on Honjō, until at dawn he finally agreed to their request. The dramatic effect of the troop dispatch was heightened when the Korea Army sent a division to relieve the Kwantung Army in Manchuria without first obtaining permission from the central army authorities.

The Wakatsuki cabinet, in which Shidehara remained foreign minister, adopted a policy of not expanding military operations. The central military authorities in Tokyo reluctantly followed suit. But the Kwantung Army completely ignored both their instructions and the cabinet’s nonexpansion policy. A group of army general staff officers making preparations for the October incident to support the Kwantung Army’s actions spread rumors that the Kwantung Army was planning to declare its independence from the homeland. In December 1931 the Wakatsuki cabinet finally fell. The cabinet of Inukai Tsuyoshi, the Seiyūkai’s president, reversed the direction of national policy by recognizing the occupation of Manchuria as an accomplished fact.

In response to the Japanese military action, Chang Hsueh-liang, who had concentrated his defeated soldiers in north China, continued guerrilla-like attacks across the southwestern border of Manchuria. Chiang Kai-shek, whose plan was to appeal to the League of Nations and to recover Manchuria through pressure by the great powers, held back the central Kuomintang army as well. Chiang, who wanted eventually to unify all of China, including Manchuria, was preoccupied with his domestic enemies, especially in the areas under the control of the Chinese Communist movement, and he was reluctant to commit his forces against the Japanese. If any force had been able to check the arbitrary actions of the Kwantung Army and its supporters in Tokyo, it would certainly have been international pressure by Great Britain, the United States, or the Soviet Union. But in fact, none of them decided to intervene. In the United States, Secretary of State Henry Stimson proclaimed the “nonrecognition doctrine,” a refusal to accept the Japanese fait accompli, and the Hoover administration concentrated the Pacific Fleet at Hawaii under the pretext of...
maneuvers. But the Americans were not able to take effective measures against the "Far Eastern crisis" because the country was foundering at the bottom of the depression. Great Britain was also in economic difficulty and was inclined toward appeasement, hoping to use Japan as a counterbalance to the Soviet Union. And the Soviet government was in the midst of economic reconstruction after the long period of factional strife between Stalin and Trotsky. Consequently, the Soviet leaders wanted to avoid international disputes for the moment. The Soviet government thus did not protest the Japanese advance into northern Manchuria, and in 1935 it sold the Soviet-owned Chinese Eastern Railway to Japan and withdrew to the Amur River line. If the Manchurian incident had been planned with the thought of avoiding foreign intervention, it can be said that its timing was perfect. The international circumstances served Japan well.

When fighting spread to Shanghai at the end of January 1932, international pressure against Japan's actions in Manchuria increased considerably. The Shanghai incident was touched off by a plot hatched by the Kwantung Army and Major Tanaka Ryūkichi, the Japanese military attaché stationed in Shanghai. Its purpose was to divert domestic and foreign attention away from Manchuria so that the Kwantung Army could complete its occupation of Harbin and the establishment of the new state of Manchukuo at a time when anti-Japanese sentiment reached its height overseas. But the incident soon expanded into a large military clash. Three army divisions had to be sent to rescue the beleaguered Japanese marine units. The army high command, however, was worried that a penetration of central China would provoke a joint intervention by the powers. Unlike Manchuria, where the Western powers had few substantial interests, central China had long been an area of Western economic and political activity. Just when the entire city of Shanghai had been occupied, the army clamped down on the hawkish elements and pulled out the Japanese troops.

In March 1932, having completed the occupation of all Manchuria, the Japanese created a puppet state there. The idea of establishing a new and independent nation in Manchuria had taken shape in the Kwantung Army immediately after the incident began. Their plans called for a new state free from the evils of domestic capitalism and unified under the slogan of a "paradise of benevolent government" (ōdō rakudo) and "harmonious cooperation among the five races" (gozoku kyōwa). Many government officials, economists, rōnin, and

50 Hata, Taiheiyō kokusai kankei shi, chap. 7, concerning Stimson's diplomacy.
farmer migrants rushed to Manchuria to become part of the ruling apparatus. As a result, Manchukuo literally became Japan’s “lifeline colony.” In 1934 Manchuria’s original republican structure was changed to a monarchy. Henry Pu-yi, previously the head of state, was elevated to the position of emperor, with the authority of the Japanese emperor delegated to him. But the real power was kept in the hands of the commander of the Kwantung Army, who concurrently held the post of Japanese ambassador to Manchukuo.

The League of Nations’ Lytton Commission, whose perceptive observers visited the scene in the spring of 1932, fully fathomed the situation inside Manchuria. The Japanese army, which expected the commission’s report to be unfavorable to Japan, tried to stir up public opinion by promoting a movement to recognize Manchuria’s independence. Foreign Minister Uchida Yasuya announced his “scorched earth diplomacy” (shōdo gaikō). “I will not yield one step in achieving this demand [the recognition of Manchuria],” he said, “even if our country is reduced to ashes.” In September 1932 Japan formally recognized Manchuria. In March 1933, after having been defeated by a vote of forty-two to one on the acceptance of the Lytton Commission’s report, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations. This meant that Japan had seceded from the Versailles system and had chosen “splendid isolation” instead. Italy and Germany, seeing the League’s impotence, took a leaf from Japan’s book and embarked on their own paths of expansionism.

One of the reasons that neither the League nor the powers were able to impose effective restraints on Japan was that its pattern of response defied expectation.51 “Dual diplomacy” had been a problem since the time of the Siberian expedition, but there was no precedent for what occurred during the Manchurian incident, when local army forces ignored the nonexpansion policy that the Tokyo government had pledged to follow. Once the powers realized that Shidehara diplomacy was no longer effective, they stepped up the international pressure on Japan. But by that time it was too late to have any restraining effect. Japanese public opinion, which had stiffened overnight, backed the occupation of Manchuria as an accomplished fact. It was only ten years later on the eve of the Pacific War that the United States made effective use of the nonrecognition doctrine in the famous Hull note which called for a return to the pre-1931 status quo and demanded the liquidation of all faits accomplis.

Was Japan's foreign expansion— from the Manchurian incident through the China conflict to the Pacific War—blind aggression whose objectives were military conquest and plunder like that of the Huns or the Mongols? Or was it a limited action aimed at achieving a "quest for autonomy" as the world divided into economic blocs in the face of the Great Depression? Historians' interpretations have veered back and forth between these two extremes, but whichever position one takes, the period of transition from the Manchurian incident to the China war was clearly an epoch-making turning point.

The Manchurian incident played a role in Japan similar to that of the New Deal in the United States. The reflactionary effects of increased military expenditure and increased war production revived the Japanese economy from stagnation. The same thing happened in Germany when Adolf Hitler, after pulling the country out of the depression by building public works such as the autobahn and putting to work six million unemployed, embarked on a program of rearmament. All three countries—the United States, Germany, and Japan—were unconsciously putting into practice the Keynesian methods of stimulating recovery and achieving full employment by means of military armaments expansion or public works projects.

Nevertheless, the worldwide spread of economic nationalism aimed at domestic economic recovery upset the self-regulating mechanisms of the international economy and promoted the formation of closed economic blocs. Japan and Germany, late-developing countries lacking self-sufficiency in natural resources, had to establish control over extensive economic zones in order to compete with the blocs controlled by the advanced nations. To justify such a policy, there emerged in Germany the notion of Lebensraum advocated by Nazi geopoliticians, and in Japan there emerged the notion of a "Japan-Manchukuo economic bloc." The reactionary folkish doctrines that permeated the fascist ideology in both countries can also be viewed as essential to their rejection of economic internationalism and their formation of closed economic blocs.

53 Nakamura Takafusa, ed., Senkanai no Nihon keizai bunseki (Tokyo: Yamakawa shuppan, 1981). See, in particular, the article by Blumenthal. General demand increased by 1.5 percent, as opposed to an increase in military expenditure of 2.2 percent from 1931 to 1936. The growth rate expanded from 0.5 percent in 1929 to 10.5 percent in 1933.
For many years Japan’s overpopulation and shortage of raw materials had been a cause of concern for the advanced countries. Although the population problem may simply have been (in Ishibashi Tanzan’s phrase) an aggressor’s “last excuse,” there was a widespread international feeling that a social explosion in Japan could be prevented by providing Japan with an appropriate safety valve. Even in China there was a tacit acceptance that the occupation of Manchuria, where Chinese sovereignty was by no means completely clear, was a necessary evil. In any case, for the Kuomintang regime, the defeat of the Chinese Communist forces under Mao Tse-tung continued to be the most pressing objective. Under these circumstances, between 1932 and 1935, harmony based on a tacit acceptance of the accomplished facts seemed to have been restored in Sino-Japanese relations.

In October 1935 Foreign Minister Hirota Kōki asked the Chinese to accept his “three principles”: suspension of anti-Japanese activities, recognition of Manchukuo, and a joint defense against Communism. Hirota intended first to obtain China’s agreement in principle and then to move on to specific and detailed arrangements. The real power over foreign policy, however, had shifted into the hands of the military. With the rise of a promilitary faction in the Foreign Ministry, the old “Kasumigaseki diplomacy” was on the wane, and some began to talk about the ministry as the “War Ministry’s Foreign Affairs Bureau.” As if to ignore Hirota’s diplomacy, elements in the army, especially middle-ranking officers in the Kwantung Army whose appetite had been whetted further by the success in Manchuria, began to advance into north China, Inner Mongolia, and eventually mainland China in the latter part of 1935. Their pattern of action, relying on subversion, threats of force, and the establishment of puppet governments, was similar to that of the Kwantung Army at the time of the Manchurian incident. The rationale for their actions was to check the emergence of a strong and unified China.

After signing the Umezu–Ho Ying-chin and Doihara–Chin Te-chan agreements in June 1935, on the pretext of settling some trifling incidents, the Kwantung Army and the China Garrison Army drove the Chinese central armies from the provinces of Hopei and Chahar. Major

57 Tung Hsien-kuang, Shō Kai seki, trans. Terashima Masashi and Okuno Masami (Tokyo: Nihon gaisei gakkai, 1956), p. 173. Tung stated: “On September 18, China was obliged to choose whether it should opt for a military counteroffensive or await the opportunity to drive the Japanese out of Manchuria through foreign intervention; China chose the latter. Japan, however, continued its aggression, taking advantage of China’s internal strife.”
General Doihara Kenji was sent to north China where he tried to form an autonomous pro-Japanese regime by pulling together various warlords in the five northern China provinces. But these plans did not materialize because the Kuomintang central government successfully intervened politically. Although the Japanese created the East Hopei Autonomous Council, a pro-Japanese puppet regime in the northeastern part of Hopei, the Kuomintang countered it with the Hopei–Chahar Political Council headquartered at Peking. Using funds gained from smuggling operations through East Hopei, the Kwantung Army also formed a puppet government under Prince Te in Inner Mongolia and began to expand to the west. Major General Ishiwara Kanji, now holding a key position in the army general staff, did not agree with such rapid and disorderly expansion. Rather, he stressed the immediate need to develop the resources of Manchuria and to build sufficient national strength for Japan to cope favorably with coming changes in the world situation. However, given his own previous record of defying central authority, Ishiwara had difficulty in controlling the adventurism flourishing among the junior officers.

The result was that the Japanese, after seizing Manchuria’s resources, lunged toward the main part of China in search of new and easy gains. In the meantime, a bloody factional struggle over leadership was raging within the army between the Control faction (Tōseiha) and the Imperial Way faction (Kōdōha). The struggle, culminating in the February 26 incident of 1936, ended with the victory of the Control faction and a shift in emphasis from internal reform to external aggression. It is clear that the aggressive actions of the Japanese military from the Manchurian incident onward were hardly so moderate as to be called a “quest for autonomy.” Military action came first, and ideological justifications for faits accomplis were churned out afterward. By the time the “Japan–Manchukuo economic bloc” had broadened into the “Japan–Manchukuo–China economic bloc,” Japanese forces had already invaded all parts of the Chinese mainland. Slogans extolling a “new order in East Asia” (Tōa shinchitsujo) and an “East Asian Gemeinschaft” (Tōa kyōdōtai) were soon supplanted by the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” (Daitōa kyōeiken) when it became clear that the targets for further Japanese conquest were to be extended from East Asia to Southeast Asia and the western Pacific. As a result, the costs of acquiring a “self-sufficient economic sphere”

exceeded the expected advantages. A paper prepared by the Research Bureau of the Foreign Ministry at the end of 1936 argued: “The practical advantages of an expansionist policy are slim. Ever since the Sino-Japanese War [of 1894–5], there has been a national deficit, and this deficit could not be paid off by ten or twenty years of colonial rule in the future.” Instead, the paper explained, Japan should put aside considerations of profit or loss and pursue the ideal of “universal harmony” (hakkō ichiu, literally, “the eight corners of the world under one roof”).  

Because Japan’s limited national strength made it difficult to support the rapidly growing Co-Prosperity Sphere, Japan made up for its disadvantages by a ruthless policy of local plunder, reminiscent of early Spanish colonial policy. Land was seized for the settlement of Japanese immigrants in Manchuria; on the Chinese mainland business and enterprises were confiscated; and Japanese forces fighting in China and later in the Pacific lived off the land. The army purchased daily necessities with excessive issues of unbacked military scrip that inevitably brought local inflation. In modern history there has been no other instance of a foreign expeditionary force’s adopting a policy of local self-sufficiency from the very outset. It was a glaring demonstration of the enormous disparities between slogans and realities. It was only natural that the Japanese army alienated the inhabitants of the occupied areas, who joked that the “Imperial Army” (kōgun) was an “army of locusts” (kōgun).

THE CHINA CONFLICT

Recently it has become popular for Japanese historians to call the chain of aggression from the Manchurian incident onward “the fifteen-year war” (although strictly speaking, it lasted only thirteen years and eleven months). In this sense, the Manchurian incident, the war in China, and the war in the Pacific should not be viewed separately but as one continuous war. The only occasion when war was formally declared in accordance with international law was in December 1941, but after 1931 not a day passed without gunfire (including guerrilla action) in the areas where Japanese forces operated.

It is questionable whether this war can be viewed as the conse-

quence of deliberate action based on a conspiracy by Class A war criminals, as Allied prosecutors insisted at the Tokyo war crimes trials. Although few in number, some Japanese did sense that the country’s eventual downfall was inevitable if the war continued beyond the point of no return. At each crucial turning point during the 1930s, there were confrontations between “expansionist” and “nonexpansionist” factions, between those who wished to push forward and those who wished to restrain Japan’s military advance to some extent. The distrust of Japan abroad, however, contributed to the failure of the nonexpansionist camp.

During the years between the Manchurian incident and the China war, the nonexpansionists foresaw that an invasion of China would prove fatal to Japan. They continued to insist that Japan concentrate on the development of Manchuria for the time being. As Finance Minister Takahashi Korekiyo observed to a group of ministry officials departing for Manchuria, “We opposed the Manchurian incident. Now that matters have come this far, I think that there is no more use talking about it. But we should not meddle in north China.”62 As we have already seen, during the latter half of 1935, the Kwantung Army had begun to advance into north China, even though order had not been established in Manchuria and investigation of its potential resources had not advanced very far. The military, disappointed at the rather unexpectedly low quality of iron ore and coal in Manchuria, could not resist the temptation of high-quality iron and coal in north China. Colonel Ishiwara, doubtful of the wisdom of penetrating north China, dispatched a trusted economic officer to Manchuria with a report that Manchuria alone could provide the resources necessary for the buildup of a national defense state, but it was difficult to dissuade the adventurers in the Kwantung Army.63

In July 1937 all-out war finally began between Japan and China. It began with a small military clash at the Marco Polo Bridge in the suburbs of Peking. The truth behind the incident, especially the question of who fired the first shot at the Japanese troops engaged in night maneuvers there, is one of the biggest remaining mysteries of the 1930s. In regard to who fired the first shot are the following hypotheses, in descending order of probability: (1) The “accidental shot” hypothesis is that a low-ranking Chinese soldier fired the shot out of fright at the Japanese night maneuvers; (2) the “Communist plot”

63 Hata, Gun Fashizumu undō shi, p. 234.
hypothesis attributes the incident to a conspiracy by the Chinese Communist Party's northern bureau, under the direction of Liu Shao-chi; (3) the "warlord plot" theory is that the clash was plotted by northern warlords such as Feng Yu-hsiang; and (4) the final hypothesis is that the first shot was fired as part of a private plot by special intelligence organs of the Japanese army or those connected with it. To make matters more complicated, it is possible that those who committed the overt act were not those who instigated it. Whatever the truth of the matter, to the Japanese government, the Japanese military, and the Chiang government, the incident began as an accident.

There is also disagreement about why conditions had reached the point that a local clash could turn into a full-scale war. On the surface, Sino-Japanese relations had been in a lull after the end of 1936. There were no noteworthy points of contention between the two countries except for pending negotiations with Sung Che-yuan concerning the economic development of north China. In fact, during the six months before the Marco Polo Bridge incident, fewer newspaper articles appeared on the subject of Sino-Japanese relations than at any time since 1935. Should the period be viewed as a time of eased tension or as a calm before a brewing storm?

Before the incident, the Kuomintang government had been pursuing a compromise policy, resisting on the one hand and negotiating on the other. In 1935 with help from the British, the Nanking government had effected a currency reform that shifted the country from a silver standard to a managed currency, and strengthened the economic basis for national unification. In the summer of 1936 the government had suppressed the southwestern warlords and used the Suiyuan incident to pull together the various warlords in north China. After the Sian incident in December 1936, when Chiang Kai-shek was briefly confined by Chang Hsueh-liang, there was progress toward cooperation with the Chinese Communists. An anti-Japanese mood had been rising among the Chinese public, whose self-confidence had deepened as a result of these gains. But because the Nanking government still had not achieved its goal of complete unification, and because its military modernization was still in progress, it was premature to plunge into a war with Japan.

From the Japanese point of view, the Nanking government made a serious miscalculation when it adopted a confrontational stance and

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directed its central army to move north the day after the Marco Polo Bridge incident. Japanese army leaders thought that the crisis could be resolved by negotiations at the local level, just as other small disputes had in the past. At first the Japanese high command issued instructions calling for nonexpansion and local negotiations. Thus when it learned of the movement of the Chinese central army, it was perplexed. Within the Japanese army there emerged both expansionist and nonexpansionist factions. The expansionists wanted to use the incident to strike a military blow at China to break the deadlock in north China. The nonexpansionists, on the other hand, opposed sending troops lest a clash with awakening Chinese nationalism drag Japan into the morass of a protracted war that, in Major General Ishiwara’s words, would be like Napoleon’s Spanish campaign. It was a reflection of this split in army circles that decisions to mobilize were made and canceled four times before a final decision was taken to send three divisions to north China on July 27. Neither Prime Minister Konoe nor Foreign Minister Hirota had clear views about what to do. In the final analysis, they simply followed the lead of the expansionist faction within the Japanese army. The decision was also much influenced by the press and public opinion which, stirred up by the army press, rashly called for the “punishment of a disorderly China” (bōshi yōchō).

All the while, fighting continued in north China. Peking fell after an exchange of fire lasting only one day and night. Sung Che-yuan’s troops withdrew after offering almost no resistance. Japanese military forces then began to move south, heading toward the Yangtze River. On August 13 the situation in Shanghai worsened when fighting broke out between the Chinese army and Japanese naval landing units. The Japanese Navy, which had been passive until this point, called on the army for help. The cabinet decided to send a relief force of two divisions to Shanghai. On August 15 the Chinese general headquarters decreed a general mobilization, and with that the two countries plunged into a full-scale war that lasted for eight years.

In comparing the expansion of the China conflict with the Manchurian incident, there appear to be points of both similarity and difference. The occupation of Peking, like the earlier occupation of Muk-
den, ended quickly without bloodshed. Japanese forces achieved their ostensible goals of "appropriate self-defense" and "chastisement." But whereas the expansion of military action was instigated by the Japanese forces during the Manchurian incident, Chinese forces were responsible in the case of the China war. In this sense, the dispatch of Japanese troops to Kirin in 1931 resembled the dispatch of Chinese troops to Shanghai in 1937. The Nanking government had taken no action to resist the Japanese in 1931 when Chang Hsueh-liang failed to do so, but in 1937 it opted for military resistance, even though Sung Che-yuan's forces initially offered almost no opposition. The final clash of the Chinese troops with a Japanese naval landing force at Shanghai, however, finally provoked the dispatch of a Japanese expeditionary army.

THE ABORTED PEACE WITH CHINA

The Sino-Japanese War was the inevitable consequence of the precipitous continental policy that Japan had pursued since the Manchurian incident, but when the war began, not the Japanese government, nor the army, nor the military forces in China had the preliminary plans or the resolve to embark on a full-scale war. The Japanese army leadership, which had a low view of Chinese military strength and morale, optimistically believed that Japan could achieve a quick victory. Japanese forces seized Nanking in December 1937 and Hankow and Canton in October 1938, and in 1939 Japanese airplanes began bombing raids on Chungking. But Japanese expectations for quick victory remained unfulfilled.

The Chinese Communist Party wanted to engage in a total war of resistance against the Japanese. They restrained the peace view in the Kuomintang government which was inclining toward a compromise as Chinese military operations faltered. In March 1938 when the Suchow campaign ended with most of north China in Japanese hands and the prospects for China looked bad, Mao Tse-tung enunciated his famous "protracted war" theory, calling for final victory and inspiring a national fighting spirit. In military strategy as well, the Communists, who had acquired much experience in the civil war, advocated arming the populace and carrying on guerrilla warfare. Eventually these became standard tactics for the entire Chinese army and caused the Japanese forces much difficulty.

In the fall of 1938 after the completion of the Hankow campaign,
Japanese forces abandoned their pursuit of the Chinese army. The Kuomintang government had evacuated from Nanking to Chungking in western China, where it assumed a defensive posture. Even with the commitment of 600,000 men, the Japanese could barely secure the "points and lines," the main cities and the railroad lines in the occupied territories. Except for a small number of officers in the nonexpansionist faction, neither the army nor the government had expected the hostilities in China to drag out into a long war of attrition.

Around the time of the fall of Nanking, in December 1937, some military leaders began to have second thoughts and urged an early end to the fighting. In modern warfare it was common sense that a country surrendered when its capital fell, but the Japanese military was upset when this common sense did not prevail in China. Impatient to make peace with China on appropriate terms and to end the war quickly, a host of peace movements came crowding onto the scene. In Shanghai, Hong Kong, Tientsin, and other cities with concessions under the control of neutral powers, self-proclaimed "China experts" of all sorts—military men, politicians, and rōnin adventurers—opened secret negotiations. All ended in failure. On the Japanese side, there were disagreements over the severity or leniency of the terms as the war progressed; on the Chinese side there was distrust that the Japanese would not keep their promises even if the negotiations succeeded. A stalemate ensued. In the words of Bradford Lee, "Neither side wanted war, but neither adopted a conciliatory stance."

Even today there remain many unanswered questions about the debate within the Kuomintang between those who favored resistance and those who favored peace, and about which elements in the complex class structure supported resistance and which did not.

The Japanese government finally abandoned the idea of making peace. It turned instead to a policy of establishing a puppet government under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek’s political enemy, Wang Ching-wei, in hope that the Kuomintang regime at Chungking and its resistance by attrition eventually would wither away. However, the overextended Japanese lines were constantly exposed to guerrilla counterattacks launched by both Chiang’s army and the Communist armies. It also became clear that the Wang Ching-wei government was a weak regime, unable to draw popular support and unlikely to survive.

67 Hata, Nisshō sensō shi, chap. 3.
a day without the backing of the Japanese army. In its treaty with Japan, the Wang government accepted humiliating terms, including the recognition of Manchukuo, which John Boyle described as far more severe than the conditions of the cease-fire treaty in France between the Vichy government and the Nazis.69

Meanwhile, there were new anxieties for the Japanese in the north. The Japanese army had traditionally devised its operations plans and conducted maneuvers with the Russian (later Soviet) forces in East Asia as their principal hypothetical enemy. After the Manchurian incident, the Kwantung Army and the Soviet forces faced each other directly across the Amur River. Even though the danger of a clash between the two armies increased, the main force of the Japanese army was pinned down in the China theater. When two border incidents finally occurred—the Changkufeng incident (July–August 1938) and the Nomonhan incident (May–September 1939)—the Kwantung Army, which prided itself on the superior morale of its troops, met defeat at the hands of Soviet forces equipped with up-to-date military equipment. At a time when Europe was moving rapidly toward another great war, it seemed that Japan was on the verge of losing its valuable free hand in global politics.

The depth of Japan’s frustration was revealed by the zeal with which it pursued various peace overtures toward China. The army was put in the awkward position of having to explain to the public why the continuous string of military victories and the huge dissipation of manpower in China did not end with the surrender of the Kuomintang. Out of this desperate quandary came the Konoe government’s sudden and unprecedented announcement in January 1938 that Japan “would not negotiate with Chiang Kai-shek” (aithe ni sezu). This opened the way to an endless war.

The government tried to shift to the powers the blame for the prolongation of the China war, by insisting that Chinese military resistance was kept alive by military and psychological assistance from the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, and France. In fact, the Japanese army knew very well that the military value of “aid” from the United States, Britain, and France—entering China through the coast, over the border with French Indochina, or on the Burma Road—was negligible, that it amounted to little more than small-scale smuggling. Only the Soviet aid coming in through the northwest was at all substan-

Nevertheless, the Japanese government launched a strong anti-British movement on the grounds that Britain was a barrier to the solution of the war with China. It did so not only because Britain was the country with whom the Japanese had most friction over interests in China but also because Britain seemed to be a safer scapegoat than the United States, as Britain was tied down by pressure from Nazi Germany. False logic, however, often turns into real logic. Having abandoned any effort to resolve the conflict with China through negotiations between the principals, Japan moved toward a solution by a strange detour, namely, by arranging a military alliance with Germany and Italy to confront Great Britain and the United States, the two alleged interlopers. Had the same kind of psychology prompted Germany to abandon the war against Britain and strike against the Soviet Union? The war in the Pacific need not have been the logical consequence of the war in China, but the Japanese leadership, acting as if under self-hypnosis, chose the path toward certain self-destruction.

At the beginning of this chapter was mentioned the grandiose scheme devised by Colonel Matsuishi Yasuji in 1906 for the conquest of the Asian continent, then Southeast Asia, and finally an invasion of the American continent. By 1940 this grand design, which seemed only fantasy a generation earlier, was on the verge of realization. The only difference between Matsuishi’s scheme and the scope of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere enunciated by Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yosuke in the summer of 1940 was that Matsuoka substituted Australia for South America.

The debate between the northern advance and the southern advance that had so enlivened late Meiji journalism also reappeared in a somewhat altered guise. By 1940 the original goals of the northern advance—the conquest of China south of the Great Wall by way of Korea and Manchuria—had already been achieved. The idea of a northern advance now literally meant moving into Siberia, that is, going to war with the Soviet Union. The southern advance meant using Hainan...

70 With respect to Soviet assistance to China, see Hirai Tomoyoshi, “Soren no dōkō (1933 nen–1939 nen)” in TSEN, vol. 4. For U.S.—British help, see Nagaoka Shinjirō, “Nanpo shisaku no gaikōteki tenkai (1937 nen–1941 nen)” in TSEN, vol. 6. The amount of aid that flowed into China, including by way of the northwest route, was at its peak in June 1939 but amounted only to about 25,000 tons monthly, or merely two large cargo shiploads, according to NGS studies; Nagaoka, “Nanpo shisaku,” TSEN, vol. 6, p. 27.

Island as a springboard to solidify the Japanese position in northern Indochina, then heading into Southeast Asia, a treasure house of natural resources centering on the Dutch East Indies.

With outbreak of World War II in Europe in 1939, two of the major colonial powers in Southeast Asia, France and the Netherlands, had been overrun by the Germans, and a third, Great Britain, seemed on the verge of collapse. Faced with this golden opportunity, advocates of the southern advance coined the phrase “Don’t miss the bus.” But the American government, which had continued to remain a spectator to Japan’s southern advance into Southeast Asia. The Japanese government, hesitant because it was assumed that Great Britain and the United States were inseparable, used its first chance to move south in the summer of 1940 to occupy the northern part of Indochina. When a second chance arrived a year later with the outbreak of war between Germany and the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, after repeated internal debate on whether to invade Siberia or to resume a military advance to the south, the Japanese government made the fateful choice of occupying southern Indochina. The American government retaliated by announcing an embargo on petroleum, which assumed a resolve to go to war. From this point onward, war in the Pacific became inescapable.

Although historians have advanced various arguments about the immediate and more remote cause for the outbreak of war between Japan and the United States, no theory appears to have won universal acceptance. The Japanese government blamed the start of war in 1941 on the Hull note which demanded that Japan withdraw totally from China and return to the status quo before the Manchurian incident. From that standpoint, the prevailing view has been that the basic cause of the Pacific War was the problem of Japan’s withdrawal from China72 and that it “clearly and consistently lay in the problem of Sino-Japanese relations.”73 Hard-line Japanese navy leaders, who called for war in 1941, also thought that war with the United States had been made inevitable by confrontation with American attempts to “interfere” with Japan’s continental policy under the slogans of maintaining the “Open Door” policy and the “territorial integrity of China.” As Captain Ishikawa Shingo, a leader of the navy hawks, observed, “Ja-

Japan and the United States are engaged in a struggle for the China mainland.” In fact, during the negotiations with the United States that began in the spring of 1941, the Japanese concentrated on the China problem, especially the withdrawal of Japanese troops. However, it is doubtful whether the United States, which consistently assigned first importance to the situation in Europe, placed as much importance on China as the Japanese thought it did. Stimson’s “non-recognition doctrine” in 1931 and Roosevelt’s “quarantine speech” in 1938 were harsh in tone. But as Robert A. Divine observed, they actually represented nothing more than “hesitancy and indecision.” In fact, some American observers at the time thought the war in China might be to the United States’ advantage. Stanley Hornbeck, adviser to the Far Eastern Division of the Department of State, pointed out that there might be some benefit if Japan continued to be bogged down in China, where it would fritter away its strength.

If one looks closely at American reactions to Japan during this period, it becomes evident that the United States was extremely nervous about the Japanese move southward. Just before the outbreak of fighting, the United States suddenly withdrew a modus vivendi acceptable to Japan and offered instead the Hull note, which in the view of some amounted to a declaration of war. The American government did so because Washington had received intelligence that a Japanese convoy was moving south through the Taiwan Straits. “The immediate cause of the war,” Akira Iriye wrote, “was the Japanese policy of advancing to the south by force.” The Japanese leadership, preoccupied with the China problem, was not sufficiently cautious about the move south and did not understand the decisive impact that the action would have on the United States. This does not mean that the United States had special vital interests in Southeast Asia, including southern Indochina. To be sure, if Japanese air power were deployed to Saigon, the Philippines would be threatened by a flank attack, and so would Malaya, which produced rubber, the only major resource in which the United States was not self-sufficient.

Nevertheless, the cumulative weight of those factors was rather...
small. The decisive factor is probably to be found in broad American strategic perspectives. Because wars usually occur as the result of a gradual intensification of crises, it is not inappropriate to seek the turning point toward war or peace in the general world situation immediately before the outbreak of war. In my view, the point of no return regarding war in the Pacific came with the conclusion of the Tripartite Pact in the fall of 1940. Of course, even after the point of no return had been passed, the possibility of avoiding war did not completely vanish. Rather, it should be understood that from the signing of the Tripartite Pact to the American embargo on petroleum, an already narrow range of choices narrowed even further until ultimately there was no way to avoid war. I stress the importance of the Tripartite Pact in particular because it determined finally the lines of allegiance and belligerence that governed World War II. After the outbreak of European hostilities in 1939, only two great powers remained neutral, the United States and the Soviet Union. It was clear that the entry of these two nations into the war would be the decisive key to victory or defeat. President Franklin D. Roosevelt assigned priority to the overthrow of Nazi Germany. He guided American world strategy by the simple but easily understood logic that Germany’s friends were America’s enemies and that Germany’s enemies were America’s friends. Leaders in Germany and Japan, on the other hand, seemed to have been under the influence of the fashionable Marxist view that confrontation between capitalism and socialism was inevitable, and they expected that by the end of the war the world situation would conform to this perception. In other words, because it was in the interest of the United States, Great Britain, Japan, and Germany to cooperate in the common goal of an anti-Communist crusade, a compromise among them should be possible under suitable conditions.

Events gradually undercut these expectations, but there remained another possible alignment of world powers, a joint front between fascism and socialism, as suggested by the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. But Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yōsuke, who had urged the signing of the Tripartite Pact, had an even grander dream. What he had in mind was to restore the world balance of power by bringing the Soviet Union into the Tripartite Pact so as to pit the Eurasian continent against the American continent. * Opponents as well as supporters of the Tripartite Pact placed considerable hopes on Matsuoka’s conception, but the idea went no further than the signing of the Japanese-Soviet Neutral-

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ity Pact in 1941. Because the Soviet Union did not join the Tripartite Pact, its global strategic value was decisively reduced. Japan and Germany lay separated at the opposite ends of the Eurasian landmass with the Soviet Union in between.

On the eve of the Pacific War, when the alignments among the powers were changing rapidly, to misread the world situation was to invite fatal collapse. The worst possible misreading was for Japan to strike an alliance with Nazi Germany that had little direct advantage. The effort to use the Axis alliance to promote the resolution of the China war and to ease a move southward into Southeast Asia not only ended in disappointment, but it also decisively turned the Americans and the British into enemies of Japan. Perhaps it was only natural that Japan's strategic thinking, which focused exclusively on the Pacific and East Asia, could not adjust to strategic thinking on a global scale. From the vantage point of the Allied powers, however, Japan had become the enemy of the United States by befriending the "Nazi devils." Leaders in China, which had been on the verge of collapse, sensed this and regained the self-confidence needed to continue its resistance. On the day the Tripartite Pact was concluded in September 1940, Chiang Kai-shek wrote in his diary, "This is the best thing that could have happened to us. The trend toward victory in the war of resistance has been decided."80

Germany's inexplicable attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 drove the Soviets into the Anglo-American camp, literally turning the war between the Axis powers and their opponents (or between the fascists and the antifascists) into a confrontation between the "have" and the "have-not" nations. In a total war, where matériel and technology were decisive factors, it was obvious from the outset who would win and who would lose under such an alignment. With the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 8, 1941, the China war was absorbed into the Pacific War. The Pacific Ocean became the main battlefield, and Japan shifted to a defensive stance on the Asian mainland.

For a time the United States considered using China as the shortest route to mount an attack on the Japanese home islands, but it became clear that the military capacity of China, the weakest ally of the United States, was not up to the task.81 The Americans also hoped that China would replace Japan in assuming a leadership role in Asia once the war ended, but those expectations were also disappointed: It was not the

The Japanese defeat in 1945 resulted in the complete withdrawal of Japan from the Asian continent, and it returned to the status of the small island state it had assumed before the Sino-Japanese war of 1894–5. However, not only the defeated but the victors as well found it difficult to maintain colonialism in the postwar period. The United States, which embarked on a continental policy in Japan’s place after the war, was also unable to secure China, Korea, and Vietnam, and it was able to maintain a military presence only in the southern half of the Korean peninsula.

When one looks back at Japan’s continental expansion from the 1890s to 1945, one can draw several conclusions. First, the pace of Japan’s expansion was extraordinarily rapid. The extent of Japan’s conquests, especially during the decade that followed the Manchurian incident, went even beyond what the Mongols had achieved under Genghis Khan. Second, Japan’s mode of expansion, which began simply as the maintenance of colonies, turned into a policy of pillage and plunder. Third, despite that, the costs of Japan’s conquest exceeded its profits, and it became clear that continental expansion was a losing proposition. Finally, it was difficult for Japan to establish Lebensraum as a world power on the Asian continent, which was relatively poor in resources. In this sense, a continental policy inevitably contained an impulse toward the next step, to press on toward a conquest of Southeast Asia. It was this in turn that led to war between Japan and the United States and brought catastrophe to the Japanese empire.