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CHINESE GOVERNMENT LEADERS IN MANCHUKUO, 1931–1937

INTERTWINED NATIONAL IDEALS

Jianda Yuan

Chinese Government Leaders in Manchukuo, 1931–1937

Drawing on the historiography of the Japanese occupation in the Chinese, Japanese, and English languages, this book examines the politics of the Manchukuo puppet state from the angle of notable Chinese who cooperated with the Japanese military and headed its government institutions.

The war in Asia between 1931 and 1945, and particularly the early years of the conflict from 1931 to 1937, is a topic of world history that is often glossed over or misinterpreted. Much of the research and public opinion on this period in China, Japan, and the West deem these Chinese figures to be traitors, particles of Japanese colonialism, and collaborators under occupation. In contrast, this book highlights the importance of analyzing the national ideas of Manchukuo's Chinese government leaders as a method of understanding Manchukuo's operating mechanisms, Sino-Japanese interactions, and China's turbulent history in the early twentieth century.

Chinese Government Leaders in Manchukuo, 1931–1937 fills a gap in this research and is an ideal resource for scholars studying wartime Asia and Europe, as well as non-specialist readers who are interested in collaboration in general.

Jianda Yuan is a visiting research scholar at the National Institute of Japanese Literature. His research interests pertain to modern China and Japan, with a particular emphasis on Manchuria in the 1930s and the 1940s. His recent work is "The Manchukuo Young Girl Envoys and Their Visit to Japan" (2022).

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Key Chinese and Japanese leaders of Manchukuo. Photo taken inside the Kantō Army's headquarters in Fengtian (present-day Shenyang), February 16, 1932. The persons in the front row from left to right are, respectively, Ma Zhanshan, Zhang Jinghui, Honjō Shigeru, Aixin-Jueluo Xixia, and Zang Shiyi.

Itagaki Seishirō (back row; third from left), Komai Tokuzō (back row; fourth from left), Ishiwara Kanji (back row; sixth from right), Katakura Tadashi (back row; first from right), and Miyake Mitsuharu (back row; fifth from right) are also present in this photo. From *Da Manzhoudiguo jian'guo shi zhounian ji'nian xiezhentie* [大滿洲國建國十周年紀念寫真帖 Memorializing photo collection of the tenth anniversary of the empire of Manchuria's foundation]. Xinjing: Jian'guo shi zhounian zhudian shuwuju 建國十周年祝典事務局, 1942.

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Note on Language

This book uses Pinyin for Chinese names and terms, including Taiwan, with three exceptions: Sun Yat-sen (instead of Sun Zhongshan), Chiang Kai-shek (instead of Jiang Jieshi), and Manchukuo (instead of Manzhouguo), for a broader audience. For consistency, it uses “Fengtian” rather than “Liaoning” when describing the territory of today’s Liaoning province and its capital of Shenyang, although the Republic of China government changed the province’s name from Fengtian to Liaoning and its capital’s name from Fengtian to Shenyang between 1929 and 1932. Based on the same reason, this book uses “Beijing” instead of “Beiping” to address the city between 1928 and 1949. Chinese, Japanese, and Korean cultural customs always place the last/family name ahead of the first/given name (Zheng Xiaoxu, not Xiaoxu Zheng; Tōjō Hideki, not Hideki Tōjō; Choi Kyu-hah, not Kyu-hah Choi); the book follows this rule unless when addressing scholars who write in English. This study adopts the pronunciation of “Xixia,” instead of “Xiqia,” for Manchu figure Aixin-Jueluo Xixia (愛新覺羅・熙洽), as contemporary publications marked his first name as “Hsi-hsia” instead of “Hsi-chia.”

Introduction

Deconstructing the Intertwined Chinese National Ideals of Manchukuo

Manchukuo treated ethnic harmony as the nation's central ideology and strove to cultivate the national characters of Japanese, Han Chinese, and other ethnicities together. In the field of politics, economy, and society, it aimed at realizing full-scale coordination and ethnic affinity, thereby leaving a mark of each ethnicity's struggles for harmony. It is thus not possible to overlook the history of Manchukuo when discussing the nations that treat coordination and fusion as the basis of their ethnic policies today.

Furumi Tadayuki, *Wasure enu Manshū* [*Unforgettable Manchuria*] (Tokyo: Keizai ōraisha, 1978), 1.

Manchukuo, literally the country of Manchuria, was a short-lived state that existed between 1932 and 1945 in the Three Eastern Provinces, the northeast part of Inner Mongolia, and part of Hebei province of the People's Republic of China (PRC) today. Furumi Tadayuki (1900–1983) was a Japanese official who served as the vice director of Manchukuo's guiding department, the General Affairs Board (Ch: *Zongwu ting*; Jp: *Sōmu chō*), between 1941 and 1945. The sentences at the beginning of this chapter are the opening part of his 1978 memoir. Although arguments like this are largely dismissed by historians, especially in the PRC today, as an apology for invasion, Furumi's view implies that Manchukuo had different political forces and that political conflicts and negotiations between the officials of different ethnicities were, for this central Japanese decision-maker, underlying features of the country's 14-year development.

Politics is important for one to understand the history of Manchukuo. Observing Japan's path from expanding into south Manchuria during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895 to treating Manchuria as a "lifeline" that could decide the fate of the Japanese Empire by 1932, when it created Manchukuo, historian Liu Jianhui argues that "contemporary Japanese history unfolded itself around Manchuria, if this description is not overly exaggerating."[1] Indeed, based on the November 1945 demographics that the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs conducted, the Japanese population in the former territory of Manchukuo was 1.23 million (excluding soldiers)—2.5 times those who resided in China proper: 466,000.[2] Today, Manchuria, especially the bitter history of Japanese repatriation from Manchuria between 1946 and 1948, occupies a great portion of the publications on the Japanese Empire in Japan.[3] Manchuria-related Japanese civil organizations, such as the International Friendly Neighbor Association (*Kokusai zenrin kyōkai*) and the

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alumni associations of Manchukuo's Great Unity Academy (Ch: *Datong xueyuan*; Jp: *Daidō gakuin*) and National Foundation University (Ch: *Jian'guo daxue*; Jp: *Kenkoku daigaku*), remained active in Japan for more than a half century after the end of the Second World War. Members of these organizations hosted regular reunion activities each year, and they published volumes of reviews and recollections on Manchukuo and Manchuria more broadly between the 1960s and the 2000s.[4] One may argue that without understanding the operating mechanism of the country's highest government level, especially in the early years of its creation between 1932 and 1937, one will neither be possible to grasp a comprehensive image of Manchukuo's national ideals nor to understand the reasons behind the lingering influence of Manchukuo in Japanese society after 1945. One may also argue that Manchukuo-related research that generates from such misunderstandings hardly helps one better comprehend Japan's and China's interactions in the early twentieth century.

For those Japanese who used to live in Manchukuo, nostalgia might be a shared feeling of the majority, regardless of social status. Furumi's contention is a voice from the country's high-level officials. Ordinary Japanese people likewise often positively recall their life in Manchukuo. Andō Kazuko, the daughter of a lower-level Japanese official of Manchukuo, for example, wrote in 2004, "No matter what history says…to reject Manchuria means to reject our identity and to make our parents' struggles disregarding their lives in vain."[5] Commenting on many Chinese people's use of the adjective "bogus" (Ch: *wei*; Jp: *gi*) to describe Manchukuo, Andō contended, "[T]he days that we spent [in Manchukuo] in our childhood were neither fake nor illusionary."[6] Challenging a specious opinion that the Japanese were reluctant to introspect and apologize for their wartime actions against their Asian neighbors after the Second World War, unlike the Germans, Liu Jianhui observes that the Japanese in reality often mixed their introspection of Japan's military expansions, especially in Manchuria, with a sense of nostalgia given their prolonged interactions in the land. As the ratio of introspection and nostalgia varied from person to person depending on elements like occupation, education, age, ideal, ambition, and personality, regarding Japan's contemporary history, "different people might reach [different and sometimes] opposite conclusions."[7] Liu's insightful note on Japanese nostalgia motivates one to reconsider the limits of terms like "apology" and "apologist" when examining the postwar writings of the Japanese Empire's participants.

This book approaches Manchukuo's top-level politics in the early 1930s from the question of why many Japanese who experienced the Manchukuo era felt nostalgic for, in the eyes of many observers today, such a failed state and ideology of "ethnic harmony" (Ch: *minzu xiehe*; Jp: *minzoku kyōwa*) from a perspective that few researchers have intently examined: Sino-Japanese cooperation. Due to political reasons in the PRC, former Manchukuo officials on the Chinese side, including ethnic minorities like the Manchus and the Mongols, were hardly able to express their views of Manchukuo other than criticizing Manchukuo's false and puppet nature after 1949. Focusing on Japanese accomplishments, the Japanese in their postwar recollections often overlooked the significance of Chinese cooperation to the formation of Manchukuo and their nostalgic feeling toward the country partly because sources on the Chinese perspectives were "impossible to trace considering China's current political situation."[8] This is likely a major reason why existing studies of Manchukuo in English and Japanese often tend to emphasize the Japanese and downplay or omit the Chinese. Nonetheless, because ethnic harmony served as an identifying national ideal of Manchukuo for the Japanese, the contributing force of Manchukuo's creation is unlikely limited to the Japanese, be it military officials, politicians, intellectuals, continental activists, and idealists. Indeed, historian Yamamuro Shin'ichi argues that Manchukuo's creation was "the first time in history that the Japanese tried to coexist with those who had different language, customs, and values on a large scale."[9] Historian Rana Mitter agrees that "the Japanese occupiers" of Manchuria required local Chinese cooperation, to justify their "imperialistic opportunism and pan-Asian idealism."[10] Historian Thomas DuBois argues that Japan, a country with almost exclusively one ethnicity, borrowed the "multi-ethnic portrayal of the Chinese ethnicities" from the Republic of China (ROC) in 1912—namely, "harmony of the five ethnicities" (*wuzu gonghe*)—to shape the legitimacy of Japanese participation in the government of Manchukuo.[11] Apparently, the Japanese were not the sole characters in the ruling institution of Manchukuo in the early 1930s. To address and rectify this academic oversight on the study of Manchukuo politics, this book focuses on the Chinese instead of the Japanese government leaders, as the latter has received considerable attention from scholars in both Japan and the West in the past 40 years.

External and Internal Forces of Manchukuo's Creation: Thesis and Focus

Given Manchukuo's proclaimed national entity as a multiethnic country, its birth originated from external and internal forces; those two forces shaped the political landscape of Manchukuo through cooperation and competition before the war between Japan and the ROC broke out in July 1937. That external force, a Japanese force, mainly consisted of senior officials in the Japanese Kantō Army and Japanese civil servants—many of whom had working experiences in the South Manchuria Railway Company (SMR). The internal force, on the other hand, was a Chinese force that mainly consisted of those who became the head of Manchukuo's supreme departments in March 1932. Chinese-, Japanese-, and English-language studies of Manchukuo in the past four decades have emphasized the roles that lower-level government officials, institutions, intellectuals, and revolutionaries played in stabilizing or shaking the country's foundations. Although the ideals of Manchukuo's top-level Japanese officials have received considerable academic attention, few have directly analyzed those Chinese at the top. As the co-founders of Manchukuo, Chinese government leaders were equally important figures in the making of the country's national policies and the planning of the country's future development. This book focuses on the internal contributing forces to the creation of Manchukuo.

As a group, Manchukuo's Chinese government leaders had different national ideals and personal interests, but collectively, they chose to cooperate with the Japanese in the making of a new state independent of the ROC's administration.

Previous PRC studies on Sino-Japanese relations in the government and institutions of Manchukuo often portray an image of Japanese repression and Chinese subservience. While repression and subservience might be a phenomenon in the lower and county levels of Manchukuo's government, especially after 1937, they were by no means the whole story of the country's politics. At the top, cooperation, mutual benefit exchange, or struggles between Japanese decision-makers and Chinese government leaders better summarize the political ecology of Manchukuo's inner circle in the early 1930s. A unified voice or policy regarding the development of Manchukuo did not exist when the country was created in 1932. In fact, as Chapter 1 suggests, those Japanese who directly participated in the making of Manchukuo had at least four different construction plans, and each of them would lead Manchukuo in a distinctive direction. Given the absence of consensus among the Japanese and the Chinese, let alone between the two groups, the future of Manchukuo was filled with uncertainties in the early 1930s.

This book argues that Manchukuo was a product of intertwined Chinese and Japanese national ideals rather than a mere project of Japanese imperialism. Like the existence of multiple Japanese construction plans for the new state, Manchukuo's Chinese government leaders also had different expectations, ranging from the rebuilding of the Manchus' dominant positions in China proper to the revival of China's monarchical system, and from the preservation of Manchuria's self-governance to the construction of Manchuria as a republic governed by a modern legal system. Those Chinese and Japanese ideals not only often mutually competed but also competed within their own circles, thereby preventing the triumph of one ideal over the others at least before the reorganization of Manchukuo's cabinet in May 1935. This explains why Manchukuo's status as a republic was altered to an empire two years after its creation, and why the Kantō Army adopted the Mencian notion of the Kingly Way or Way of Benevolence (Ch: *wangdao*; Jp: *ōdō*) as the new state's moral precept in the early 1930s. It was those intertwined national ideals, instead of a unilateral Japanese ambition, that contributed to the creation of Manchukuo and the construction of the country's political systems between 1932 and 1937.

The use of the term "Chinese government leaders" contains no intention of simplifying the ethnic diversity and complexity of the population of China, especially the remarkable Han-Manchu conflicts in the early twentieth century. It uses "Chinese" both because ethnic identities inside the Chinese-speaking officials of Manchukuo is not a major element of this book—although the chapters do not disregard them—given historians Mark Elliott's and Dan Shao's research findings on relevant subjects, and because a concise term that could encompass the ethnic issues of China in English, Chinese, and Japanese is absent.[12] The term "Manchurian" has limits compared with "Chinese," as many of Manchukuo's government leaders, even the former Qing emperor Aixin-Jueluo Puyi (1906–1967), originated in China proper and had little connection with Manchuria before 1932. Moreover, because the senior officials of Manchukuo in the early 1930s, especially the research targets of this book, were overwhelmingly Han Chinese, and the Manchu figures that this book analyzes spoke and wrote in the Han language, this study thus opts to use "Chinese government leaders" to refer to this internal force, for concise purpose. Adopting the term Chinese does not necessarily place the question of what it meant to be Chinese for all the research targets of this book at the center partially because of the aforementioned reasons. It gives up detailed explorations of that question mainly due to the inadequacy of sources; to emphasize such a perspective based on the limited declassified Manchukuo-era materials in China today, one has to rely more on conjecture than empirical examination. The possible declassification and discovery of more sources on Manchukuo's different ministries and Chinese leaders in the future might gradually make that approach a feasible task, motivating this study to emphasize the ways in which Manchukuo's Chinese government leaders justified their cooperation with Japan.

Protecting Japan's Continental Lifeline: Manchuria and the Japanese

Manchuria was a term that Japanese, Europeans, and Americans commonly used, especially in the first half of the twentieth century, to address a vast region that consisted of Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang provinces and the northeast part of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of the PRC today. Known in Chinese as *Manzhou* and in Japanese as *Manshū*, Manchuria was initially a tribal name rather than a regional term. Pronounced as *Manzhu* in Mandarin and *Manju* in Manchu, the founder of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912), Huang Taiji (1592–1643), unified all the tribes in the Qing territory and named them *Manju*, or Manchu in English, but Han Chinese gradually misinterpreted *Manzhu* as a place name and replaced *zhu* (pearl) with *zhou* (island) given the two terms' similarity of pronunciation.[13] The Netherlands was one of the first European countries to adopt Manchuria as a regional term for the northeast territories of the Qing Dynasty in the early eighteenth century, including the lands that Russia took away from the Qing Dynasty in 1858 and 1860, as the Dutch copied the term "Mantcheou" on a Qing map of the Kangxi period (1662–1722) in the 1730s and reproduced it in their own maps of East Asia afterward.[14] Because Japan kept a limited trading relationship with the Netherlands in the Edo period (1603–1868), Dutch geographical terms likely influenced Japanese people's worldview; *Manshū* was arguably a transliteration of Mantcheou.[15] By the mid-nineteenth century, Manchuria had become a commonly used geographical term among Japanese intellectuals; famous Edo thinkers like Satō Nobuhiro (1769–1850) and Yoshida Shōin (1830–1859) frequently used it in their written works.[16]

At the dawn of the twentieth century, especially after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, systematic studies of Manchuria began to emerge in Japan. Combining Manchuria and Mongolia with the term *Man Mō* (Ch: *Man Meng*) and using *Shi'na* (Ch: *Zhi'na*), a term that today's Chinese people commonly regard as a derogatory address of China, to describe China proper, the Japanese intended to theoretically disaggregate the home territory of the Qing Dynasty in order to justify their intrusions and investments in Manchuria and Mongolia.[17] Researchers of the regions often relied on personal travel to gather local sources and historical documentation for analysis, and their research outputs on the association of Japan and Manchuria were praised as "culturally decorated armed forces" (*bunsō teki bubi*) by Gotō Shinpei (1857–1929), the SMR's first director.[18] In official Japanese rhetoric after the Russo-Japanese War, Manchuria was a "national heritage" that Japan acquired through "the expenditure of two billion national currency and the sacrifice of 100,000 people"; no interlopers would be tolerated.[19] Even Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), the founder of the ROC and a key figure who ended China's 2,000-year-long monarchical system, reportedly agreed to let Japan absorb Manchuria if the country could provide him with weapons and money against his political rival, Yuan Shikai (1859–1916), during his visit to Japan in spring 1913. Speaking with former Japanese prime minister Katsura Tarō (1848–1913) in Tokyo, Sun suggested, "It does not hurt to give territories like Manchuria to Japan, if that could foster Japan's understanding of China and make [the Japanese] help [the Chinese] construct the new China."[20]

To defend Japan's interests in Manchuria, the country relied on military means through the creation of the Kantō Army in 1906. Literally meaning "east of the Pass," Kantō or Guandong in Chinese refers to a vast region to the east of the Shanhai Pass—namely, the Liaodong Peninsula (also known as south Manchuria). Initially named Manchuria Railway Defense Troop (*Manshū tetsudō shubitai*), the army used to be a defense organization for Japan's newly acquired Kantō concessions: Dalian (Dairen), Lüshun (Port Arthur), and the SMR, a 1,116.64-kilometer railway that the Russians laid in 1898 and opened in 1903, between Lüshun and Changchun.[21] According to an official agreement between Japan and the Qing Dynasty after the Russo-Japanese War, the army could not station more than 15 soldiers per mile along the SMR, and the total number of the army thus could not exceed 10,410 people based on the railway's length (Figure 0.1).[22]

Over time, however, the army gained more privileges, and its roles became more complicated. After becoming an independent garrison and receiving the title of "Kantō Army" in 1919, the army managed to acquire privileges relating to railway transportation, communication, shipping, finance, mining, and heavy industry in south Manchuria. Establishing multiple departments relating to military operations and intelligence, the army gathered local intelligence ranging from Manchurian political activities like the attitudes of important officials in the warlord regime of Zhang Zuolin (1875–1928) toward Japan, to military intelligence like the equipment of Zhang's warlord soldiers, to Manchuria's industrial and agricultural outputs.[23] Historian Huang Zijin observes that the Japanese tried to legitimize their military activities in Manchuria by rejecting Chinese sovereignty over the region; they consider the 1900 Russian occupation the moment of Manchuria's transformation into Russian territory. In that sense, Japan's rights and interests in the region were legally acquired from their previous owner, Russia, not the Qing Dynasty, after the Russo-Japanese War.[24] Even if just for the safety of the local Japanese residents, Japan could not step back in front of Chinese protests for sovereignty.[25] Departing from the Japanese portrayal of Manchuria as a wilderness that Japan acquired from Russia with the sacrifice of countless soldiers, the Han ethnicity of China had cultivated the land for more than two centuries before the Russians and the Japanese arrived, and they played an important role in the region's development in the early twentieth century.

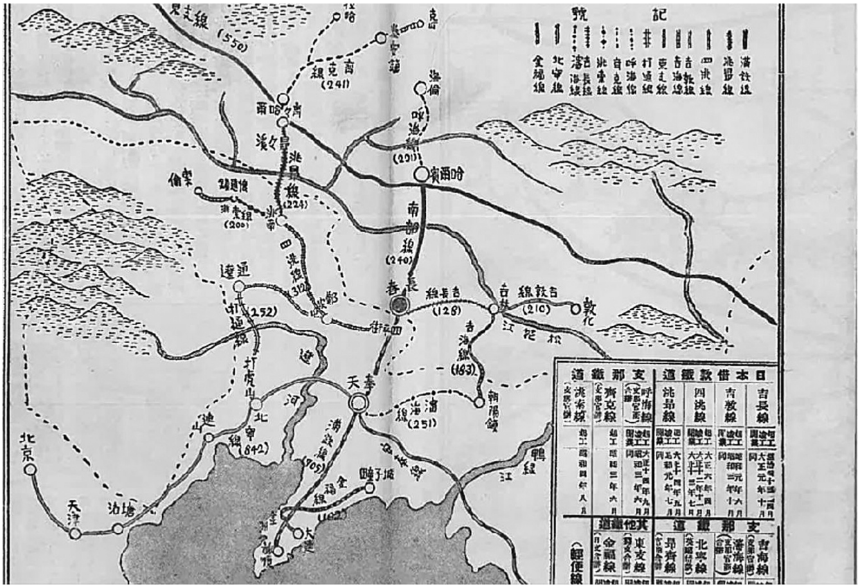

Figure 0.1 Map of Manchuria's railway system in 1932. The SMR is marked on this map with a number (905). Changchun is in the middle of this map, while Lüshun is at the bottom.

Source: Jitsugyō no Nihonsha, ed., *Shin Manshūkoku haya wakari* [Simple explanation of the new Manchukuo], Appendix of *Jitsugyō no Nihon* [Business of Japan] 35:7 (March 1932): no page number.

Cultivating the Manchu Ancestral Land with Han Power: Manchuria and the Han Chinese

Han Chinese commonly described Manchuria as *guanwai*, literally "outside the Pass," in the Qing Dynasty. The Manchu Qing authorities formally closed Manchuria to Han Chinese migration between 1740 and 1907 due to political, ethnic, and economic reasons. Besides criminal deportations and infiltrations, the Han Chinese population virtually had no way to enter Manchuria throughout most of the Qing Dynasty.[26] Obviously, the vague term "outside the Pass" suggests that Han Chinese in China proper had little knowledge about the vast northeast. This began to change in the late nineteenth century when Russia and Japan gradually penetrated the region, and "when Manchuria came to be seen by many Chinese as a region with fertile land for farming and abundant natural resources which benefit the nation."[27] Since migration restriction in Manchuria was officially abolished in 1907 when the Qing Dynasty established the Three Eastern Provinces (Fengtian, Jilin, and Heilongjiang from south to north), immigrants, especially from Zhili and Shandong provinces in north China, flooded into the region for a better life or bare survival in the following three decades.

Besides fertile farmlands, wages were notably higher compared to northern Chinese provinces. For example, an agricultural worker in Fengtian province could earn 42 *fen* (Chinese cents) and 36 *fen* in Jilin province every day in the early

1920s, whereas the daily wage of their counterparts in Shandong was 13 *fen* and 14 *fen* in Shanxi.[28] While Chinese provinces suffered warlord skirmishes and periodic famine in the early 1920s, relatively stable life in Manchuria attracted at least 200,000 immigrants annually from north China and elsewhere. Although many returned to their hometowns after gaining enough money for living each year, Manchuria's population continued to increase in the 1920s.[29]

Unlike the increasingly immigrant nature of Manchuria's local population, governors of Manchuria in the 1910s and the 1920s were predominantly native Han Chinese, and many were military leaders. Known in Chinese as *junfa* and warlords in English, they were a group of military men "who took power through the force of arms and who usually lost it in the same manner."[30] Zhang Zuolin was the most powerful and prominent warlord governor of early Republican Manchuria. Born into a Haicheng family of shop owners in southern Manchuria in 1875, Zhang was a merchant and a veterinarian who often engaged in gambling activities in his early years. He served as a cavalry sentinel head of a local Qing army during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, and the army's commander greatly appreciated Zhang's ability to cure horse-related injuries and diseases.[31] In 1902, Zhang joined the Fengtian Army with a group of local ruffians that he organized for self-defense during the Russian invasion of Manchuria in 1900 and commanded several successful attacks against local bandits. During the Russo-Japanese War, Zhang helped the Japanese explore local Russian activities, and the Fengtian government named him the commander of five newly established defense battalions in 1906; native Manchurian men like Zhang Jinghui (1872–1959) and Zhang Zuoxiang (1881–1949)—prominent followers of Zhang Zuolin—served as the battalions' leaders.[32] Based on further military merits, Zhang Zuolin's status in the Fengtian Army continued to rise, and by 1911, he became the second-most powerful military leader besides the governor of the Three Eastern Provinces (*Dong sansheng zongdu*).[33] From 1912 to 1916, Zhang became the top military commander of Manchuria.[34]

Between the 1910s and the early 1920s, Zhang's warlord regime turned Manchuria from a frontier into one of the most economically prosperous regions of China. Although many believe that Zhang's dominant power in the region was the result of military force, historian Ronald Suleski argues that the civil and economic reforms that Zhang's Manchurian officials carried out in the decade were equally important factors that legitimized Zhang's control in Manchuria.[35] Among the few civil officials around Zhang, Wang Yongjiang (1872–1927) and Yu Chonghan (1871–1932) were major figures who helped Zhang stabilize Manchuria's order and relations with Japan. Wang's currency reform between 1917 and 1920 stabilized the Fengtian currency (*Fengpiao*), increasing the ability of Fengtian to secure larger loans from Japanese and Western consortia for infrastructure and ordnance.[36] Thanks to Wang's policies, Manchuria not only built more telegraph and telephone lines each year but also laid more than 7,000 miles of commercial highways for motor vehicles and mule carts by the end of the 1920s, enabling people and goods to reach the regions that had no railways.[37] Due to Yu's proficiency in Japanese and personal relations with Japanese military leaders, he became Zhang's foreign affairs negotiator handling financial and military issues that involved the Japanese. He frequently occupied top posts in Sino-Japanese joint ventures and was crucial for gaining Japanese military aid for Zhang's warlord regime in the early 1920s.[38] Manchuria's economic success and relative stability compared with China proper was likely the main reason why Qing loyalist and scholar Luo Zhenyu (1866–1940) described the region as a place that had "yet to fall into decadence" in 1931.[39]

Regardless of his achievements, Zhang Zuolin's governance had obvious faults, something that official Manchukuo narratives often highlighted, to shape Manchukuo's legitimacy. The 1932 *Declaration of National Foundation of Manchukuo* [*Manzhouguo jian'guo xuanyan*] started with criticism of Zhang's luxurious and decadent life, contending that he "only strove for his personal interests."[40] According to Suleski, Zhang "built an imposing home in the French chateau style" in Fengtian with provincial funds after the ROC government in Beijing appointed him the General of the Three Eastern Provinces in 1918, and he added at least five concubines "who produced many children for him."[41] The *Declaration* then denounced Zhang's military ambitions in China proper for "interrupting the stability of [Manchurian] currency and various industries" besides "harming the livelihoods of the people" of China proper.[42] This is likewise not a groundless contention. Officials like Wang Yongjiang and Yu Chonghan were not interested in the affairs of China proper and thus left little space for Zhang to increase his military expenditures. But when Zhang needed more money to supply his Fengtian Army after entering Beijing in 1924, he began to abandon both Wang's and Yu's policies and forcibly collected more taxes from local Manchurian business owners.[43] The economy of Fengtian thus collapsed in January 1928 when the Fengtian currency tumbled, which led to a radical increase in prices because desperate merchants wanted compensation for their losses.[44] Intending to free his Fengtian clique from Soviet-Japanese encirclement by expanding into China proper, Zhang's military campaigns between 1925 and 1928 suffered frequent setbacks, and the Kantō Army assassinated him on his way back to Fengtian in June 1928 by blowing up his train.[45] Zhang's tragic ending was, for historian Kwong Chi Man, not merely a result of personal oversight but also a sign of Japan's intention to preserve "Manchuria's position as part of a Japanese-centered economy."[46]

Creating Manchukuo with Dissidents from China: Manchuria's Problems after 1928

Zhang Zuolin's death exacerbated the confrontation between Fengtian and the Japanese. By assassinating Zhang, the Kantō Army initially planned to install a leader who may protect Japan's national interests in Manchuria, but Zhang Xueliang (1901–2001; Figure 0.2)—the first son of Zhang Zuolin—quickly claimed the leadership of Fengtian and allied with Fengtian's erstwhile opponent, the Nanjing Nationalist Government of Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975).[47] Inheriting his father's ambition to unify Manchuria and north China, Zhang Xueliang moved his base to Beijing in September 1930 in the name of assisting Chiang's military efforts against hostile forces.[48] By referencing the articles in support of China's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the 1922 Nine Power Treaty, Zhang refuted the legitimacy of Japan's possession of Dalian, Lüshun, and affiliated

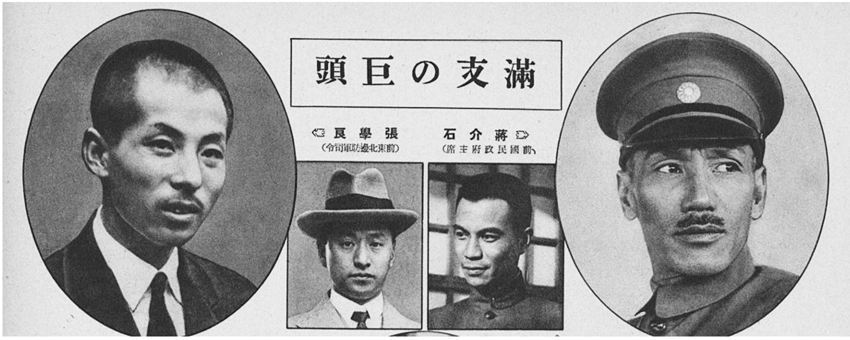

Figure 0.2 Zhang Xueliang (circled photo on the left) and Chiang Kai-shek (circled photo on the right) in 1932. The person in the left rectangular photo is ROC diplomat Gu Weijun (1888–1985; Willington Koo), and the person next to Gu is Fengtian general He Zhuguo (1897–1985).

Source: Asahi shinbunsha, ed., *Asahi gurafu rinjigō* [Temporary issue of Asahi graph] (February 1932): 25.

lands of the SMR on the one hand and connived at anti-Japan activities in Manchuria and north China on the other.[49] Since Manchuria's Japanese residents were dependent on the SMR for a living, the army and government of Japan had to face Zhang's challenges.

The military occupation of Manchuria was a solution that senior-level officials in the Kantō Army planned to solve Japan's plight. By the late 1920s, issues like economic crises, overpopulation, labor disputes, and party monopoly of political resources convinced many Japanese people of the necessity of total reform to the current government system—a perceived culprit of the existing social problems. Supporting the army became an option, as radical Japanese military officials shared similar goals.[50] For Kantō Army officials, overpopulation and food shortages were pressing concerns of the Japanese Empire, whether or not Japan could "clear a path in Manchuria was a matter of the survival or death of the Empire."[51] Ishiwara Kanji (1889–1949), staff officer of the Kantō Army who planned to occupy Manchuria with force, for instance, considered Manchuria and Mongolia bases for Japan to "realize ethnic co-prosperity and coexistence of the Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, and Mongolians" and to "defeat the repressive white forces that hindered Japan to carry out its heavenly duty of saving China."[52] Itagaki Seishirō (1885–1948), Ishiwara's colleague who participated in the creation of Manchukuo, wanted to turn Manchuria and Mongolia into "a major battleground for the war against the Soviet Union and a supply base for the war against the United States."[53] To realize the military occupation of Manchuria, the Kantō Army conducted a series of investigations and military drills in places like Harbin, Qiqihar, Hailaer, Manzhouli, Changchun, Fengtian, and Jinzhou from 1929 to 1930, spreading across Manchuria. The army invaded the region on the evening of September 18, 1931, by occupying the city of Fengtian, known today as the Manchurian Incident or September 18 Incident.[54]

One of the major mysteries surrounding the Manchurian Incident of 1931 is how the Kantō Army managed to conquer Manchuria and defeat the local 179,505 soldiers with its 10,400 men and 4,000 reinforcements from Korea—within four