

Framing the Manchurian Question: The *Manshū Nippō* and Regional Autonomy After the Return of Shidehara Diplomacy in 1929¹⁾

Andrea Revelant*

Abstract

In the late 1920s, the *Manshū nippō* was the leading Japanese newspaper in Northeast China. Owned by the South Manchuria Railway Company, it played a semi-official role in the dissemination of imperial discourse among Japanese expatriates and the Chinese elite. The *Manshū nippō* watched with apprehension the rise of the Nationalist Party in China, which it perceived as a threat to Japan's position in Manchuria. Previous studies have argued that from 1928 the newspaper advocated a hardline policy toward the Nationalists, thus preparing public opinion for the invasion of the Northeast and the subsequent establishment of Manzhouguo. This article investigates how the *Manshū nippō* discussed the “Manchurian question” in the second half of 1929, while Japanese diplomacy under minister Shidehara Kijūrō was coping with a Sino-Soviet conflict in the northern part of the region. The analysis shows that the newspaper exploited that crisis, together with the resurgence of civil strife in China, to buttress its argument for regional autonomy from the Nanjing government. Commentators, however, did not attempt to build a narrative that would justify the overthrow of the Fengtian regime. Therefore, at the time the *Manshū nippō* was not yet being used to generate support for a military solution to Sino-Japanese rivalry in Manchuria.

* Ca' Foscari University of Venice

1) This work was funded by the Institute of Economics, Aoyama Gakuin University (2019 Fellowship for Overseas Researchers, program “The Image of Nationalist China in Japanese Public Opinion, 1926–1931”). The author is grateful to program coordinator Takashima Shūichi. My thanks also goes out to Shimizu Yuichirō, who granted access to sources held at Keiō University.

Introduction

The South Manchuria Railway Company (Minami Manshū tetsudō kabushiki-gaisha, or Mantetsu for short) was the core agency for the advancement of Japan's strategic interests in the Northeast of China for over two decades, that is from its establishment in 1906 until the occupation of that region by the imperial army in 1931. Thereafter, and until 1945, the company functioned as a key economic actor in the puppet state of Manchuria. Although it had mixed ownership, from the start its management was under state control. Besides developing a regional transportation network, the Mantetsu was engaged in a wide range of activities, from mining and the production of steel to urban planning and public services. Outside Japan's leased territory of Guandong, the company administered an area of over 200 square kilometers, spread thinly along its railway lines, in which it enjoyed extraterritorial jurisdiction.²⁾

Among its secondary undertakings, the Mantetsu played a significant role in the local press industry. Above all, it was the sole owner of the main Japanese language newspaper circulating in the Northeast until the end of the Second World War. Founded in 1907 as *Manshū nichinichi shinbun*, this daily changed its name into *Manshū nippō* twenty years later, after acquiring its principal competitor and merging with it. Reversion to the original name followed in 1935, as a result of a second merger. For simplicity, this article refers to both names with the abridged form *ManNichi* (MN in footnotes).

The motives underlying the launch of the *ManNichi* went beyond providing timely information and leisure to Japanese expatriates and visitors. The first Mantetsu president, Gotō Shinpei, allegedly assigned the newspaper the mission of guiding public opinion on issues of national interest.³⁾ From its birth, the *Man-*

2) For a comprehensive history, see Kobayashi H. (ed.), *Kindai Nihon to Mantetsu*, Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2000; Matsusaka, Y.T., "Japan's South Manchuria Railway Company in Northeast China, 1906–34", in B.A. Elleman and S. Kotkin (ed.), *Manchurian Railways and the Opening of China: An International History*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2010, pp. 37–58.

3) Tsurumi Y., *Seiden: Gotō Shinpei*, Tokyo: Fujiwara shoten, 2005 (orig. ed. 1937), vol. 4, p. 364. Gotō (1857–1929) was a prominent bureaucrat and politician. Before leading the Mantetsu (1906–08), he headed civil affairs in the governorate-general of Taiwan. The biographical data in footnotes hereafter are mainly from Hata I. (ed.), *Nihon rikukaigun sōgō jiten*, Tokyo: Tōkyō daigaku shuppankai, 2005; Hata I., Senzenki kanryōsei kenkyūkai (ed.), *Senzenki Nihon kanryōsei no seido-soshiki-jinji*, Tokyo: Tōkyō daigaku shuppankai, 1981; Shūgiin, Sangiin

Nichi could thus rely on both abundant funding and the protection of the Japanese authorities in Manchuria, as the Northeast of China was informally called at the time. Those institutional connections were a major factor in the newspaper's rise to a leading position in the regional press. Because of its semi-official status, broad circulation, and 38-year-long history, the *ManNichi* is a valuable source for the study of the public discourse and propaganda surrounding Japan's imperial policy. So far, however, only a few studies have dealt with it.

Li Xiangzhe has devoted most of his research on the Japanese-owned press in modern Manchuria to the *ManNichi*. Along with charting the entire evolution of the company, through selected editorials Li has outlined what kind of political discourse on Manchuria unfolded in the *ManNichi* year after year, up to the creation of Manzhouguo. He shows that editors expressed continuous support for Japan's special position in the region, as rooted in treaty rights and geopolitical conditions.⁴⁾ In the late 1920s, when the rise of the Nationalist Party in China started to pose a threat to those established interests, the newspaper stiffened its stance. In this way, Li argues, it increasingly became a tool in the service of the imperial army, where hardliners were plotting a military solution to the "Manchurian question".⁵⁾

Ikeda Kazuyuki, who has drawn a shorter history of the *ManNichi* up to 1931, focuses his attention on the short-lived attempt that a new management made in that year to free the newspaper from its condition as an organ of the Mantetsu.⁶⁾ He points out that efforts to establish an independent line of opinion in the summer took the shape of a moderate position toward China, but pressure from the Guandong Army forced the editor-in-chief to resign in October, shortly after the

(ed.), *Gikai seido 100 nenshi*, Vols *Shūgiin giin meikan*, *Kizokuin-Sangiin giin meikan*, Tokyo: Okurashō insatsu kyoku, 1990.

- 4) Ri S., *Manshū ni okeru nihonjin keiei shinbun no rekishi*, Tokyo: Gaifūsha, 2000. For a history of company management and public events sponsored by the MN prior to the 1927 merger, see Rong Y., *Soshakuchi Dairen ni okeru nihongo shinbun no jigyo katsudō: Manshū nichinichi shinbun o chūshin ni*, PhD dissertation, Hayama: Sōgō kenkyū daigakuin daigaku, 2017.
- 5) Ri, *Manshū ni okeru* . . . , pp. 259–64. The expression most frequently used at the time was *ManMō mondai*, or "the question of Manchuria-Mongolia". It included the eastern part of Inner Mongolia, which Russia had recognized as part of the Japanese sphere of influence after the war of 1904–05.
- 6) Ikeda K., *Kishatachi no Manshū jihen: Nihon jōnarizumu no tenkaiten*, Tokyo: Ningen no kagaku shinsha, 2000, pp. 69–109.

outbreak of the Manchurian Incident. Satō Katsuya has further investigated that period, detecting some inconsistencies among the articles that suggest a rift between the chief editor and other journalists.⁷⁾

More recently, Matsushige Mitsuhiro has surveyed 19 articles published in the *ManNichi* between 1926 and 1928 as opinions on the Chinese Nationalist Party and its burgeoning leader, Chiang Kai-shek.⁸⁾ The period examined is that of the Northern Expedition, a series of military campaigns through which the Nationalists, after a decade of civil war, made decisive progress toward the reunification of China. Matsushige's analysis shows that the *ManNichi* perceived the Expedition in hostile terms, chiefly because of the Nationalists' militant agenda for the abrogation of the "unequal treaties" imposed on China by foreign powers from the nineteenth century. Writers were also skeptical about the ability of Nationalist leaders to turn their country into a modern state under the newly established government in Nanjing. Matsushige concludes that growing apprehension for the future of Japan's rights in Manchuria led the *ManNichi* to request a "new policy" toward China. With this shift in tone, he claims, the newspaper lay the ground for a justification of the Manchurian Incident in the eyes of Japanese society.

To summarize, previous studies have stressed the semi-official role of the *ManNichi* in the dissemination of imperial discourse, which legitimized Japan's influence over Manchuria by stressing that there were substantial differences between that region and China "proper". Scholars have also noted an incremental shift toward a hardline defense of Japanese interests, as a reaction to the emergence of Nationalist rule. The failed attempt to change editorial line in 1931 stands out as the only deviation from that trend. These considerations require further inquiry in two respects at least. One is the time span, the other is the agency behind the discourse under scrutiny.

7) Satō K., "Manshū jihen boppatsu zengo no *Manshū nippō* ni kansuru ikkōsatsu: kokusaku kaisha-Mantetsu no kikanshi no ronchō no henka to sono haikai", *Nihon daigaku daigakuin sōgō shakai jōhō kenkyūka kiyō*, No. 10, July 2009, pp. 11–22.

8) Matsushige M., "'Hokubatsu'-ki ni okeru *Manshū nichinichi shinbun* shijō no Shō Kaiseki ninshiki ni kansuru oboegaki: 'gaichi' nihonjin shakai no Shō Kaiseki ninshiki ni kansuru shiryō shōkai", in Yamada T., Matsushige M. (ed.), *Shō Kaiseki kenkyū: seiji, sensō, Nihon*, Tokyo: Tōhō shoten, 2013, pp. 35–56.

In the first place, there is a gap of about three years in the evidence supporting the thesis of a linear progression toward a hard China policy. The last article Matsushige quotes in relation to the Manchurian question dates from April 1928. That was ahead of the assassination of Zhang Zuolin, ruler of the Northeast, in a plot orchestrated by Japanese officers (4 June). It was also months before Zhang Xueliang, Zuolin's son and successor, raised the Nationalist flag (29 December) as a result of negotiations that had granted large autonomy to his regional regime.⁹⁾ In his study, Li considers three more editorials from June–July 1928, together with one from June 1929, before skipping to the summer of 1931.¹⁰⁾ The first two pieces reaffirmed the special character of Manchuria and looked with concern at the possible advance of Nationalist influence into the region; the last one lamented the intensification of the anti-Japanese movement throughout China. On this limited basis, it is risky to conclude that from 1928 the *ManNichi* kept on building a narrative hostile to the Nationalists, and even prepared public opinion for a military solution to pending issues. Owing to the same gap in the textual evidence, the analysis of articles published from July 1931 – as done by Li, Ikeda and Satō – lacks a term of comparison with the preceding period. Therefore, there is no sufficient proof that the management turnover carried out earlier – in February of that year – determined a temporary shift in the editorial line.

Secondly, previous studies have not sufficiently clarified what political actors influenced the editorial choices of the *ManNichi*, and through what channels. These questions are central for a critical assessment of discourse formation before the outbreak of the Manchurian Incident. The three-year interval that has been overlooked so far deserves attention, because in July 1929 a change of cabinet in Tokyo brought about the return of “Shidehara diplomacy”, so called after foreign minister Shidehara Kijūrō. With respect to China, the salient features of

9) As a recent study on the Fengtian regime, see Kwong, C.M., *War and Geopolitics in Interwar Manchuria: Zhang Zuolin and the Fengtian Clique During the Northern Expedition*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2017. See also Nishimura S., *Chō Gakuryō: Nitchū no haken to “Mansha”*, Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996, pp. 37–77.

10) In addition, Li quotes three editorials from 1930 on the issue of Korean immigrants, as background information on the Wanpaoshan incident of 1 July 1931. Ri, *Manshū ni okeru . . .*, pp. 267–68.

that policy were non-interference in internal affairs and a cooperative attitude toward the demands for a revision of the unequal treaties.¹¹⁾ Such approach contrasted with that of the previous administration, led by former general Tanaka Giichi (1927–29). Premier Tanaka, who concurrently held the portfolio of Foreign Affairs, had pursued a policy of containment of the Nationalists that did not refrain from military intervention in China.¹²⁾ Over the course of the 1920s, the two policy orientations became distinctive traits of the two parties that alternated in government in the interwar period: the conservative Rikken Seiyūkai and the relatively liberal Rikken Minseitō (named Kenseikai until its reorganization in 1927). While Tanaka was also Seiyūkai president in 1925–29, Shidehara did not belong to the other party. Since his first tenure as foreign minister, however, he had been enjoying the trust of top Minseitō leaders. In those years, appointments at the head of the Mantetsu were part of a spoils system between the two main parties. The question, then, is whether cabinet change in 1929 pushed the *Man-Nichi* to reconsider its past views on China and align itself with the incoming administration.

As a first step in filling the current gaps in the literature, this article investigates how the *ManNichi* discussed the Manchurian question and related issues throughout the second half of 1929. The reasons for this choice are manifold. To begin with, the selected time frame allows us to check how the newspaper took stock of the foreign policy implemented by the Tanaka cabinet over the previous two years and what it expected from the return of Shidehara diplomacy. Secondly, from July to December 1929 North Manchuria was the theater of an international crisis that put Shidehara's approach to Nationalist China to the test, namely the Sino-Soviet conflict over the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER). This conflict, which escalated from border skirmishes to a sweeping Soviet offensive into

11) A former diplomat, Shidehara (1872–1951) was foreign minister in 1924–27 and 1929–31. For a recent outline of Japanese diplomacy under his lead and reference to the literature, see Hattori R., *Shidehara Kijūrō: gaikō to minshushugi*, Tokyo: Yoshida shoten, 2017, pp. 101–155, 172–229.

12) See Usui K., *Nitchū gaikōshi: hokubatsu no jidai*, Tokyo: Hanawa shobō, 1971, pp. 62–200; Hattori R., *Higashi Ajia kokusai kankyō no hendō to Nihon gaikō 1918–1931*, Tokyo: Yūhikaku, 2001, pp. 191–251; Satō M., *Shōwa shoki tai Chūgoku seisaku no kenkyū: Tanaka naikaku no tai ManMō seisaku*, Tokyo: Hara shobō, 2009. On the positive reception of “Tanaka diplomacy” by the MN, see Ri, *Manshū ni okeru* . . . , pp. 245, 253–54.

Chinese territory, put Japan in a delicate position as a neighboring power. Finally, the latter part of the period examined offers further cues to probe the attitude of the *ManNichi* toward Nationalist leadership, as the resurgence of armed opposition to the Nanjing government among rival factions in China cast uncertainty on plans to unify the country. Table 1 shows the parallel progression of events in each of these three spheres.

The documentary basis of the analysis is the complete series of editorials relating to China published from July to December 1929, along with relevant columns and other opinion pieces. Supplementary evidence comes from reports on key events. For the sake of clarity, each thematic cluster is discussed in a separate section. The first to be considered is Japan's China policy after the handover of responsibility from Tanaka to Shidehara, especially concerning bilateral issues in Manchuria. Next comes the CER crisis, which raised additional questions on the regional balance of power, as well as on the relationship between Nanjing and Zhang's regime in the Northeast. Lastly, the focus shifts to civil strife in China and its implications for Japan. It should be noted, however, that writers in the *ManNichi* would weave more than one thread at the same time, so that a regular reader could easily draw connections between different themes. The conclusion ties these threads together to reach an overall assessment of the discourse on Manchuria. As a preliminary step to the survey, the first part of this article defines the *ManNichi*'s place in the press industry of Northeast China, defines its target readership, and inquires about the political background of the newspaper's management. Research on the last aspect had to deal with a dearth of primary sources, in terms of both company documents and private papers. Consequently, it has been necessary to rely on third-party observers who published their comments after the facts had taken place.

Whose voice in Manchuria?

In the late 1920s, Japanese nationals residing in the Northeast were a small minority of about 200,000 people out of a population of 30 million, within which the Han Chinese were by far the largest ethnic group. Of that minority, 80,000 people lived in Dairen (Japanese for Dalian), the economic heart of the Guandong

territory, while another 20,000 resided in Fengtian (also known as Mukden, present-day Shenyang). The latter city was the seat of the Chinese government for the Eastern Three Provinces and a major hub in the railway network of the Mantetsu.¹³⁾ The state of the daily press in the region did not only reflect the presence of different ethnicities, but also power relations among them. According to a survey conducted by the Mantetsu in 1926, in August of that year there were in all 57 newspapers based in Manchuria: 35 were written in Chinese, 22 in Japanese, eight in Russian, and two in English.¹⁴⁾ No record was given of publications in Korean, despite a sizable immigration of farmers from Japan's colony.

Although Chinese newspapers were relatively numerous, most of them issued less than 1,000 daily copies and depended either on local authorities or commercial associations. Those under Japanese ownership, which included the largest ones, had a combined circulation of about 74,000 copies, or 65 percent of the press in Chinese. The most widely read (30,000 copies) was the *Shengjing shibao*, based in Fengtian. The Mantetsu had acquired control of it in November 1925, at the request of Japan's Foreign Ministry.¹⁵⁾ The second largest one (19,547 copies) was the *Manzhoubao* in Dairen. Concerning both, *Japan's Newspaper Yearbook* later observed that "they are considered important as press organs of our country directed at the Chinese people".¹⁶⁾ Newspapers in Japanese, on the other hand, had a cumulative circulation of approximately 134,000 copies. They were all under Japanese ownership and management. Their sales were remarkably

13) Nagayo S. (ed.), *Nihon shinbun nenkan: Shōwa 5 nenban*, Tokyo: Shinbun kenkyūjo, 1929 (reprint: Tokyo: Nihon tosho sentā, 1985), Part 2, p. 87. Other issues of this yearbook are cited further as NSN. The three provinces were Fengtian (later renamed Liaoning), Jilin, and Heilongjiang. With the addition of Rehe (the eastern part of Inner Mongolia) they became the Eastern Four Provinces under the Nationalist government.

14) Minami Manshū tetsudō kabushikigaisha shomubu chōsaka (hereafter Mantetsu chōsaka), *Manshū ni okeru genron kikan no gensei* (stamped "confidential"), series *Manshū chōsa shiryō*, No. 61, Dairen: Minami Manshū tetsudō kabushikigaisha, 1926, pp. 4–5. Comments on each group of newspapers are on pp. 6, 29, 67. Digitized version in Kokuritsu kokkai toshokan (NDL), *Kokuritsu kokkai toshokan dejitaru korekushon*, <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/976555>. Reprinted in Ikawa Mitsuo (ed.), *Senzenki 'gaichi' zasshi, shinbun sōran: Chōsen, Manshū, Taiwan no genronkai*, vol. 3 (*Chōsen, Manshū hen 1*), Kanazawa: Kanazawa bunpokaku, pp. 7–123.

15) See Ri, *Manshū ni okeru* . . . , pp. 120–22.

16) NSN, 1930, Part 2, p. 96.

high in comparison to the number of expatriates; this likely reflects a high level of education among readers and their engagement in industry and trade.¹⁷⁾

In terms of quality and circulation, until 1927 two Japanese newspapers stood neatly above the rest: the *ManNichi* (41,812 daily copies in December 1925) and the *Ryōtō shinpō* (45,108 daily copies in June 1926), both based in Dairen. The latter, a private enterprise founded in 1905, had a reputation for its “anti-Mantetsu” tone.¹⁸⁾ When the two rivals merged in November 1927, a major outcome of the operation was the removal of the *Ryōtō shinpō* managers, without any turnover on the other side.¹⁹⁾ In terms of sales, reportedly the *ManNichi* was able to retain the combined volume of the two former companies, and even to increase it steadily, so as to become “in name and in fact the foremost authority in the media world of Manchuria-Mongolia”. The person who expressed this opinion praised the “impartial argumentation” that readers could find in the *ManNichi*, and stressed how the latter was “accomplishing the mission of a compass for the development of Manchuria-Mongolia, a harbinger of public opinion on diplomacy toward China”.²⁰⁾ By merging the two main newspapers of Dairen, the Mantetsu lay the groundwork for the more aggressive plan of press concentration that the Guan-

17) NSN, 1926, Part 2, p. 97.

18) Mantetsu chōsaka, *Manshū ni okeru . . .*, pp. 7–9. There is a significant discrepancy with other data on circulation at the end of 1925, as collected by the Information Division of Japan’s Foreign Ministry. These are, respectively, 39,500 copies for the *Ryōtō shinpō* and 29,800 copies for the *ManNichi*. The same authority recorded similar figures for the end of 1923 (*Ryōtō shinpō* 39,582, MN 27,000) and 1924 (*Ryōtō shinpō* 39,588, MN 29,861). One possible explanation for the divide is that the count may not have included the evening edition of the MN. See Gaimushō jōhōbu, “Shina (fu Honkon) ni okeru shinbun oyobi tsūshin ni kansuru chōsa”, confidential, 1926.7, p. 121, Tokyo: Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, jō-27. Digitized copy in Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (JACAR), <https://www.jacar.archives.go.jp/aj/meta/reference>, ref. code B02130807700. Same author and title as above, confidential, 1924.5.6, p. 1; 1925.7, p. 110. JACAR, ref. code B02130800000; B02130800900.

19) For an account of the circumstances leading to the sale of the *Ryōtō shinpō*, see Sueki G., *Manshū nippō ron*, Tokyo: Nisshi mondai kenkyūkai, 1932, pp. 21–22. From 1922, Sueki was one of the directors of the *Ryōtō shinpō*.

20) Nakamura M., *Manshū Chōsen shinbun zasshi sōran*, Dairen: Shinbun kaihō ManChō shisha, 1929. Reprinted in Ikawa, *Senzenki ‘gaichi’ zasshi, shinbun sōran*, vol. 4 (*Chōsen, Manshū hen* 2), pp. 219–20. Nakamura headed the Dairen subsidiary of a company specialized in providing information on the Japanese press industry. On circulation of the MN after the merger, see also NSN, 1928, Part 2, p. 68.

dong Army would carry out after 1931.²¹⁾

Concerning readership, the survey of 1926 included the following considerations:

The core aim of newspapers in Japanese characters in Manchuria should be to take as their first principle to provide China with accurate information on Japan's national conditions. However, judging from the present situation, the impression is that they are merely information organs for the Japanese. Of course, editorials, commentaries, and the like, appearing in Japanese character newspapers in Manchuria, are being translated into Chinese and Russian, and are thus relayed to both Russian and Chinese people. Although we cannot deny this truth, the majority of Japanese character newspapers have the Japanese who reside in Manchuria as their main purchasers.²²⁾

In other words, the compiler expressed his disappointment for the limited circulation of a “correct” image of Japan among the Chinese public. On the other hand, he noted that the two major Chinese-language newspapers under Japanese management were “cultivating a remarkable influence” among those readers, thanks to their “impartial comments and rapid news reports”.²³⁾ Another observer, however, acknowledged that the *ManNichi* was “considered by Chinese high officials and educated merchants” to be “representative of Japan”.²⁴⁾ In conclusion, the *ManNichi* was fundamentally a newspaper written by Japanese for fellow nationals in the Northeast, but it also functioned as a means to disseminate imperial discourse among the Chinese elite. Of course, it is disputable whether its political message sounded persuasive to either readership, especially the latter.

In its early days, the *ManNichi* tried to reach an international public by including some English articles within its main text. However, this supplement was not enough for the Mantetsu: in 1908 it launched the *Manchuria Daily News* as

21) The Mantetsu already controlled the *Harubin nichinichi shinbun* in North Manchuria. See Ri, *Manshū ni okeru* . . . , pp. 122–23.

22) Mantetsu chōsaka, *Manshū ni okeru* . . . , p. 6.

23) *Ibidem*, p. 29. For a similar note on the *Manzhoubao* see Gaimushō jōhōbu, “Shina (fu Honkon) ni okeru . . . ”, 1926.7, p. 5.

24) NSN, 1926, Part 2, p. 97.

a short evening newspaper. Its daily circulation was 1,218 copies in December 1925.²⁵⁾ The only other English-language newspaper printed in the region was the *Russian Daily News*, founded in 1918. With just 500 copies in November 1925, it chiefly served the needs of US traders and other foreigners in Harbin.²⁶⁾ That city, the main urban center in North Manchuria, was home to a large community of Russians and, consequently, to most of the regional press in their mother tongue. The estimated circulation of those newspapers totaled about 21,000 daily copies at the time of the Mantetsu survey, with a clear predominance of pro-Soviet publications over those managed by White Russians.²⁷⁾

Harbin had grown as a trading hub along the Chinese Eastern Railway, originally laid out by tsarist Russia at the turn of the twentieth century. It is expedient to spend a few words here on the CER, as it was the object of contention in the Sino-Soviet conflict of 1929.²⁸⁾ The West-East line extended beyond China's borders, connecting Čita to Vladivostok as a faster alternative to the easternmost section of the Trans-Siberian railway. From Harbin a second line headed south, reaching Dalian and Lushun (Ryojun in Japanese) on the Yellow Sea. After the Russo-Japanese War, in 1905 the Portsmouth peace treaty assigned

25) Mantetsu chōsaka, *Manshū ni okeru* . . . , p. 68. For a brief history, see Ri, *Manshū ni okeru* . . . , pp. 98–101.

26) Mantetsu chōsaka, *Manshū ni okeru* . . . , p. 75.

27) *Ibidem*, p. 67. On the political leaning of the Russian press, see also Gaimushō jōhōbu, “Shina (fu Honkon) ni okeru . . .”, 1926.7, pp. 130–32.

28) On the CER history, see Lensen, G.A., *The Damned Inheritance: The Soviet Union and the Manchurian Crises 1924–1935*: Tallahassee, FL: The Diplomatic Press, 1974; Paine, S.C.M., “The Chinese Eastern Railway from the First Sino-Japanese War until the Russo-Japanese War”, in Elleman and Kotkin, *Manchurian Railways* . . . , pp. 13–36; Elleman, B.A., “Sino-Soviet Tensions and Soviet Administrative Control over the Chinese Eastern Railway, 1917–25”, in Elleman and Kotkin, *Manchurian Railways* . . . , pp. 59–80; Asada M., *Chūtō tetsudō keieishi*, Nagoya: Nagoya daigaku shuppankai, 2012. For a review of the literature in Japanese on the 1929 crisis, see Tōmatsu H., “ChūSo funsō to Nihon”, in Tsutsui K. (ed.), *Shōwa-shi kōgi* 2, Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 2016, pp. 45–62. Additional reference to studies in Russian, Chinese, and English is in Hattori, *Higashi Ajia kokusai kankyō* . . . , pp. 288–89. As later works in English, see Elleman, B.A., *Moscow and the Emergence of Communist Power in China, 1925–30: The Nanchang Uprising and the Birth of the Red Army*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2009, pp. 192–205; Patrikeef, F., “Railway as Political Catalyst: The Chinese Eastern Railway and the 1929 Sino-Soviet Conflict”, in Elleman and Kotkin, *Manchurian Railways* . . . , pp. 81–102; Walker, M., *The 1929 Sino-Soviet War: The War Nobody Knew*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2017.

to Japan the southern line up to Changchun, which became the main trunk of the Mantetsu. Russia kept the rest as the backbone of its residual sphere of influence in North Manchuria.

The October Revolution and ensuing civil war, in which Japan intervened against the Bolsheviks, caused a temporary eclipse of Russian power in the region. In 1924, however, Moscow signed two separate treaties for joint management of the CER with the Chinese authorities. One agreement had the Beijing government as counterpart, which nominally ruled the whole of Republican China. The other treaty was signed in Fengtian with the regime of Zhang Zuolin, the actual ruler of the Northeast. The following year, when the Soviet Union and Japan normalized their relations, confirmation of the Portsmouth treaty amounted in practice to the two powers' mutual recognition of their respective influence over North and South Manchuria. Thereafter, however, both countries had to deal with the rise of Chinese nationalism. The compiler of the Mantetsu press survey of 1926 describes the situation in the following terms:

China is still the holder of territorial rights in Manchuria, but in practice the latter appears to be a place of free competition between the three countries of Japan, China, and Russia.²⁹⁾

The Northeast authorities started reclaiming the former tsarist rights attached to the CER well ahead of making peace with the Nationalist Party. The Soviets, while making several concessions, held on to their dominant position in the management of the company and the related trade. Tension over the unequal partnership grew steadily in 1929. On 27 May, the Harbin police stormed into the Soviet consulate general. Allegedly, it found evidence of subversive activities by communist agents. Those charges later served as a pretext for the forceful takeover of the CER, which Zhang's regime carried out on 10–11 July with the consent of Nanjing. The armed conflict that followed ended in December with China's defeat and the restoration of Soviet rights.

Among the Japanese press, the *ManNichi* was able to gather information on those events from a privileged vantage point. In 1929 the newspaper had branch

29) Mantetsu chōsaka, *Manshū ni okeru* . . . , p. 2.

offices in nine cities across the Northeast, starting from Fengtian and Harbin.³⁰⁾ In the preceding years, Japan's two largest dailies, the *Ōsaka mainichi shinbun* and *Ōsaka asahi shinbun*, had increased their sales in the Eastern Three Provinces to the point of becoming serious competitors for the *ManNichi* on the regional market.³¹⁾ Their organization on the ground, however, still consisted of a single branch office in Dairen and some correspondents posted in the principal cities outside the Guandong territory.³²⁾ In order to get timely information on Manchuria, newspapers based in Japan relied chiefly on the two main news agencies of the empire, the Nihon denshin tsūshinsha (Dentsū) and Nihon rengō tsūshinsha (Rengō), both of which had their own offices in Dairen and Fengtian. The Rengō operated from Harbin and Changchun as well.³³⁾

In short, by the end of 1929 the *ManNichi* had absorbed its long-time competitor and was still resisting the advance of Japan's big editorial groups. *Japan's Newspaper Yearbook*, however, argued that the fortunes of the *ManNichi* rested on a double-edged sword:

[B]ecause this newspaper is a press organ of the Mantetsu, it has a solid management, but on the other hand it has a weak point: as a newspaper in the service of the authorities, it shares the lot of the political parties; every time there is a commotion in the political world, it cannot avoid a reshuffle of its president and higher managers. [. . .] It seems that public opinion in general wishes the actual independence of this newspaper, for the sake of

30) South of the Great Wall, there were three more offices in Beiping (the name given to Beijing after it lost the status of China's capital), Tianjin, and Qingdao. The MN had also branch offices in Tokyo, Osaka, and Keijō (colonial Seoul). Nakamura, *Manshū Chōsen shinbun zasshi sōran*, pp. 223–24.

31) NSN, 1928, Part 2, p. 68; 1929, Part 2, p. 87. According to the respective companies, in 1929 the *Ōsaka asahi* was issued in 966,400 copies on 5.20, while the *Ōsaka mainichi* in 1,503,589 copies on 1.1. New Year's Day was typically the peak of sales for newspapers. Asahi shinbun hyakunenshi henshū iinkai (ed.), *Asahi shinbun shashi*, vol. *Shiryō hen*, Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, p. 320; Mainichi shinbunsha (ed.), "*Mainichi*" no 3 seiki: *shinbun ga mitsumeta gekiryū 130 nen*, Tokyo: Mainichi shinbunsha, 2002, vol. 3, p. 97.

32) Nakamura, *Manshū Chōsen* . . . , pp. 315–16.

33) *Ibidem*, pp. 288–92. On news agencies and communication networks in Japan and China from the First to the Second World War, see Ariyama T., *Tsūshin gijutsu no kakudai to sendensen*, Vol. 2 of *Jōhō haken to teikoku Nihon*, Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2013.

its original mission.³⁴⁾

The issue of partisan turnover is discussed at some length in the earliest critical essay on the *ManNichi*, written by Sueki Gitarō in 1932. According to this author, the problem had arisen relatively late, as a spillover of party infiltration in the Mantetsu. He explains it as follows. Although the spoils system had spread to the railway corporation as early as 1913, under the first Yamamoto Gonbei cabinet, party rivalry had not affected the *ManNichi* until the appearance of the Hara Takashi cabinet (1918–21). Since then, with a few exceptions, appointments at the direction of the newspaper had followed those in the Mantetsu, whose president and vice president would be replaced “at every change of cabinet”. The negative effects of that practice had become evident under the Tanaka administration. At the time, Mantetsu president Yamamoto Jōtarō had placed Yamazaki Takeshi, a former Seiyūkai representative in the Lower House of the Imperial Diet, at the top of the *ManNichi*.³⁵⁾ Yamazaki had then used the newspaper in blatant pursuit of partisan interests and personal aims, such as getting reelected to the Diet. As a result, readers

came to know early on that President Yamazaki was not a journalist, but the customary profiteer of the Seiyūkai, so that trust in the *Manshū nippō* was damaged considerably.³⁶⁾

Sueki’s critique was published in November 1932, that is months after the fall of the last party cabinet in imperial Japan and its replacement with a “national unity government”. It was a time of widespread aversion to party politics, often

34) NSN, 1929, Part 2, p. 87.

35) Yamamoto (1867–1936) was a businessman with long experience in Shanghai as an executive of the Mitsui Trading Company. In 1920 he won a seat for the Seiyūkai in the Lower House and was continually reelected thereafter. He served briefly as secretary general of the party in 1927. Yamazaki (1886–1957) was originally a journalist of the *Keijō nippō*, the main press organ of the colonial government of Korea. Also elected to the Diet in 1920 for the first time, he joined Yamamoto’s faction in the Seiyūkai. His political career extended into the postwar period, when he became affiliated with the Liberal Party.

36) Sueki, *Manshū nippō ron*, pp. 4–5, 23–25. Sueki is the source of additional information on Yamazaki reported in Ri, *Manshū ni okeru* . . . , pp. 106–07.

denounced as a source of corruption and inconclusive debates. Moreover, the main thesis of the essay was that official newspapers such as the *ManNichi* were obsolete tools, which survived only in the colonies and in Manchuria. These should be “liberated” from official service, like the press in Japan had been already.³⁷⁾ This may sound disingenuous, as at that time the space for independent opinions in the mass media was shrinking steadily in the face of rising militarism.

In fact, what the author was openly invoking was not more pluralism, but rather a policy of efficient press concentration and censorship of “incorrect” articles. In the conclusion to his pamphlet, he urged the Mantetsu president (by then a member of the House of Peers) to entrust the *ManNichi* to someone able to make an accommodation with the military, and thus “preserve the reputation” of the corporation. The incumbent president of the newspaper, Matsuyama Chūjirō, who was a veteran journalist appointed under a Minseitō cabinet in 1931, was deemed unfit for that task.³⁸⁾ Although Sueki conceded that Matsuyama had “an extremely thin party color”, he also claimed that his lack of “awareness” of recent developments in Manchuria had caused the *ManNichi* to “lose the trust of the military”, with great embarrassment to the Mantetsu as well.³⁹⁾ These remarks reveal the true character of Sueki’s essay as a piece of propaganda in support of aggressive expansion on the continent.⁴⁰⁾

To assess the impact of national politics on the *ManNichi*, Li has compiled a comparative timeline of appointments to the presidency of both the newspaper and Mantetsu under each successive cabinet, from 1906 to 1945. His conclusion is that party politics exerted the strongest influence on both companies in 1913–29.⁴¹⁾ Table 2 reproduces the central segment of the chronology, with additional

37) Sueki, *Manshū nippō ron*, pp. 1–2. See also pp. 34–36, 45–47.

38) Matsuyama (1870–1942) worked in the *Tōkyō asahi* until 1918. As editor-in-chief, he was forced to resign under government pressure after the newspaper criticized the cabinet over the Rice Riots. He then became president of the *Yomiuri shinbun*, but company troubles following the Great Kantō Earthquake led to his resignation in 1924.

39) Sueki, *Manshū nippō ron*, pp. 28, 45, 47–48.

40) Sueki chaired the company of the monthly magazine *Nisshi* [*Japan-China*], launched in 1928 by the Society for the Study of Japan-China Issues. Between 1928 and 1944, the same society published a book series that included two works by Sueki. In addition to *Manshū nippō ron*, see Sueki G., *Manshū mondai kaiketsu no itto: fu, ManMō no tetsudō gensei hihan*, Tokyo: Nisshi mondai kenkyūkai shuppanbu, 1931. NDL, <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1280543>.

41) Ri, *Manshū ni okeru* . . . , p. 105.

information and a few date corrections. The grid confirms that a transfer of power in Tokyo from one party to the other regularly brought about a reshuffle at the head of the Mantetsu, along with the replacement of the Guandong governor. The same pattern, however, does not emerge consistently for the *ManNichi*. What stands out, instead, is the continuous hold of the Seiyūkai over this newspaper from 1919 until 1929.⁴²⁾ Moreover, the formation of a Minseitō cabinet in 1929 did not lead to a takeover of the press by the same party. To further complicate things, Yamazaki's successor took office before the new Mantetsu president, which appears contrary to the logical order of facts. Let us take a closer look at these departures from the expected pattern.

Appointments in 1929

In the sequence of *ManNichi* presidents, the absence of proven ties with the Kenseikai/Minseitō seems to reflect the restrained approach of this party to seeking office overseas, at least in comparison with its rival. While the Kenseikai was in power (1924–27), it did not remove Guandong governor Kodama Hideo, who had strong connections with the army establishment. As Mantetsu president, Seiyūkai-affiliated bureaucrat Kawamura Takeji was replaced with Yasuhiro Ban'ichirō, a senior figure in the conservative bureaucracy.⁴³⁾ With such a lineup, Kenseikai leaders might not have bothered to press the Mantetsu for a change at

42) Murano Tsuneimon (1859–1927), MN president in 1919–23, was a senior Seiyūkai member. As party secretary general, he played a leading role in the Movement for the Protection of Constitutional Government of 1913. He sat in the Lower House from 1898 to 1920, and was appointed Peer two years later. His successor, Koyamauchi (1869–?), was a professional journalist. From 1914 until his move to the MN he was editor-in-chief of the *Chāō shinbun*, the main press organ of the Seiyūkai.

43) Kodama (1876–1947) was the elder son of general Kodama Gentarō, best known as governor of Taiwan (1898–1906) and chief of staff of the Manchurian Army in the Russo-Japanese War. A finance bureaucrat, he also served in Korea under general Terauchi Masatake, who was his father-in-law. He was then secretary general of the Terauchi cabinet (1916–18), vice governor of Korea (1929–31), and minister in several cabinets between 1934 and 1945. Kawamura (1871–1955) adhered to the Seiyūkai while serving in the Home Ministry. He was governor of Taiwan in 1928–29 and Minister of Justice in the Inukai cabinet. Yasuhiro (1859–1951), another career bureaucrat, was a close aide of elder statesman Yamagata Aritomo (1838–1922). Appointed Peer in 1900, he then sat in the Privy Council from 1916 until his appointment in the Mantetsu.

the head of the *ManNichi*, as long as the latter did not cause any trouble. Although the matter invites further inquiry, previous research has not produced any evidence of negative criticism directed against the Kenseikai administration by the newspaper in that period.⁴⁴⁾

Later on, when the party came back to power as Minseitō, the Hamaguchi cabinet had to face the problem of how to secure control of key positions in Manchuria without replicating the unpopular excesses of its predecessor. The Guandong territory was entrusted to Ōta Masahiro, who had entered the House of Peers in 1926 by designation of the Wakatsuki cabinet. The presidency of the Mantetsu instead went to Sengoku Mitsugu, a senior party member with long experience in railway management, both as a businessman and in official positions.⁴⁵⁾ In Japan, Sengoku's appointment was well received in the independent press, which was usually rather critical toward the spoils system. The *Tōkyō asahi shinbun*, for instance, thought that Sengoku might help the cabinet to regain public credit after some "unimpressive" reshuffles in Taiwan and Guandong:

When it comes to Mr Sengoku, it must be said that there is nothing to criticize about his reputation, character, and ability. In terms of pure ideals, the Mantetsu president should be someone completely unrelated to parties and factions. If that is difficult under the present situation, however, we must be satisfied with a person like him, who despite having a political color, is extremely candid and is known for having an integrity that transcends partisan calculations.⁴⁶⁾

44) In the annual survey by the Foreign Ministry, the MN was labeled as "Seiyūkai-connected" in 1924–25. In 1926, which is the last year available in that series, the definition turned to neutral, as for other newspapers in Dairen. Gaimushō jōhōbu, "Shina (fu Honkon) ni okeru . . .", 1924, p. 1; 1925, p. 110; 1926, p. 121. The only editorial Li and Matsushige cite as critical of Shidehara diplomacy dates from the time of the Tanaka cabinet (1927.10.20).

45) Ōta (1871–1951) was a home affairs bureaucrat, chief of the Tokyo metropolitan police under the Kenseikai cabinet. He was governor of Taiwan in the latter part of the Minseitō administration. Sengoku (1857–1931), educated as an engineer, headed several railway companies in Japan and participated in the founding of the Mantetsu. He presided over the Agency of Railways (later Ministry) in 1914–15. First elected to the Lower House in 1915, he held the portfolio of Railways in 1924–26.

46) *Tōkyō asahi shinbun*, editorial (hereafter ed.) "Shin Mantetsu sōsai", 1929.8.14. Further citations of press articles omit the year when it is 1929. When not specified, the cited newspaper is always the MN.

The *Ōsaka mainichi shinbun* appreciated the choice of Sengoku with similar words, confident that he was the least likely person to turn the Mantetsu into “fodder” for the Minseitō. Notwithstanding past abuses in the management of the company, the idea that party men should be excluded from colonial posts, to the advantage of old military men and bureaucrats, seemed to the editor an expression of reactionary thought.⁴⁷⁾ These remarks on Sengoku’s personality, and on the expectations that public opinion put on him for an unbiased direction of the national policy company in Dairen, are useful elements to understand why the *ManNichi* did not fall under direct party control in the following years. Before turning to that question, however, it is necessary to address the issue of the anticipated turnover in the direction of the newspaper.

According to a concise article in the *ManNichi*, President Yamazaki announced his intention to resign on 11 July. As a result of separate meetings of the company directors and shareholders (that is to say, representatives of the Mantetsu), director Takayanagi Yasutarō became the new president on 24 July.⁴⁸⁾ Further information appears in a guide to the Japanese press in Manchuria published later that year. Takayanagi, who had joined the company board seven years earlier, was also a “contract employee” (*shokutaku*) in the Mantetsu. He was chosen as “the most appropriate person” to lead the newspaper because he was “an expert on the national conditions of both Russia and China, which is most important for accomplishing the special mission of the *Manshū nippō*”. Once in charge, Takayanagi appointed as new editor-in-chief Satō Shirō, who at the time was heading the *Harubin nichinichi shinbun* (another newspaper under Mantetsu ownership). To fill other managerial positions, he picked members of the *ManNichi* staff.⁴⁹⁾

The nature of Takayanagi’s expertise is explained later on in the same book. He was a retired army officer who had participated in practically all military campaigns on the continent: from the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) and the North China expedition (1900–01) to the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), the siege of Qingdao (1914), and the Siberian expedition (1918–22). After moving to Manchuria in 1922, Takayanagi had been involved in “important matters” under contract for the Mantetsu, finally leaving the army with the rank of lieutenant-

47) *Ōsaka mainichi shinbun*, ed. “Mantetsu shinsōsai”, 8.15.

48) “*Manshū nippōsha shachō kōtetsu: kanbu ichibu jinin*”, 7.25 (2nd edition), p. 2.

49) Nakamura, *Manshū Chōsen* . . . , p. 218.

ant general. He had then become one of the executive directors of the *ManNichi* following its merger with the *Ryōtō shinpō*.⁵⁰⁾ As is known from other sources, while on duty in Siberia Takayanagi had played a leading role in the organization of army intelligence and propaganda. On these grounds, Satō has conjectured that, while the retired general was at the head of the *ManNichi*, the Guandong Army would often use that newspaper to manipulate information. This sounds plausible, also considering Takayanagi's later career in occupied Manchuria.⁵¹⁾

Allegedly, Takayanagi had joined the Mantetsu at the invitation of then director Matsuoka Yōsuke, with the task of developing a “public information” office.⁵²⁾ Matsuoka himself had recently entered the company upon recommendation of Yamamoto Jōtarō, the influential Seiyūkai member who would become Mantetsu president under the Tanaka cabinet. Matsuoka resigned in 1924, when the Ken-seikai came to power, only to return as vice president three years later, riding on Yamamoto's coattails.⁵³⁾ In his brief history of the *ManNichi*, Sueki attributes the appointment of Takayanagi at the head of the newspaper to the “poignant humanity” of Matsuoka. The latter, it seems, had great esteem for the retired general, who was committed to “Japan's management of Manchuria with no selfish intention”. However, while in office he could not persuade Yamamoto to

50) *Ibidem*, p. 220. From 1927, Takayanagi (1869–1951) was also editor-in-chief of the *Manchuria Daily News*. NSN 1927, Part 2, p. 50; NSN, 1928, Part 2, p. 69; NSN, 1929, Part. 2, p. 88.

51) Satō, “Manshū jihen boppatsu zengo . . .”, p. 13. In Manzhouguo, Takayanagi occupied several official positions, including those of chairman of the organization for propaganda (Kōhō kyōkai) and president of the state news agency.

52) See Shirato K., “Chūgoku tōhokubu ni okeru Nihon no media bunka seisaku kenkyū josetsu: Mantetsu no kōhōka no katsudō o chūshin ni”, *Kyōto daigaku shōgai kyōikugaku-toshokan jōhōgaku kenkyū*, Vol. 9 (2010), p. 124.

53) Matsuoka (1880–1946) is now best known as the reckless foreign minister of the second Konoe Fumimaro cabinet (1940–41). A career diplomat, he became acquainted with Yamamoto when both were working in Shanghai. He left service in 1922 to enter the Mantetsu, whom he led as president in 1935–39. In 1930 Matsuoka was elected to the Lower House for the Seiyūkai, but he left the party three years later to campaign for the establishment of a fascist-like regime. Sent to Geneva by the government, in 1933 he announced Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations after its general assembly condemned the invasion of Manchuria. Charged with war crimes by the occupation authorities in 1945, he died in prison before the trial. On Matsuoka's role in the Mantetsu, see Katō K., “Matsuoka Yōsuke to Mantetsu: Washinton taisei eno chōsen”, in Kobayashi, *Kindai Nihon to Mantetsu*, pp. 64–107. For a full biography, see Lu, D.J., *Agony of Choice: Matsuoka Yōsuke and the Rise and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1880–1946*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002.

promote Takayanagi to some important position. When the fall of the Tanaka cabinet prompted Yamazaki to resign, Matsuoka grabbed the chance to recommend Takayanagi for the vacant presidency at the *ManNichi*. Sueki comments on the outcome as follows:

[O]bviously the Mantetsu president was able to decide freely. Even so, at a time in which he was about to leave office, to carry out such a change of staff was somewhat rude. Yet, it was something within his power, so it must be said that there was nothing to do about it after the appointment. Moreover, in that situation even the next Mantetsu president, right after taking office, would have found it hard to have the president of the *Manshū nippō* replaced immediately.⁵⁴⁾

In other words, Yamamoto put Sengoku before the fait accompli, in disregard of established practice. Although Sueki explains the events by invoking Matsuoka's personal sense of obligation, it is hard to believe that the hasty replacement of Yamazaki did not have a political aim, namely to preempt a move from the Minseitō.

For Sengoku, it would have been awkward to appoint a different president shortly after arriving in Dairen. This does not explain, however, why he left Takayanagi undisturbed until 1931. Li has found an answer to this problem in some issues of *Shinbun oyobi shinbun kisha*, a monthly magazine on current affairs in the press industry.⁵⁵⁾ According to that source, Sengoku wanted to sell the *ManNichi* as part of a broader cost-cutting plan, as he believed that the Mantetsu did not need any press organ. Most cabinet ministers, though, opposed the initiative because they valued that newspaper as a national asset: its mission was to illustrate Japan's policy in Manchuria to China and the foreign powers. The cabinet found a member of the House of Peers close to the Minseitō as prospective president, despite criticism from both Mantetsu and public opinion, but the candidate stepped back after a failed attempt to buy the newspaper. In the end, Sengoku offered the job to the above-mentioned Matsuyama, who promised to

54) Sueki, *Manshū nippō ron*, pp. 25–26.

55) Ri, *Manshū ni okeru* . . . , pp. 107–13. The issues cited are those of 1930.2, 1930.4, and 1931.4. For other details, see Sueki, *Manshū nippō ron*, pp. 27–29.

pursue independent and unbiased journalism.

The moderate response of the *ManNichi* to the mounting Sino-Japanese tension in the summer of 1931, as analyzed by Ikeda and Satō, suggests that under Matsu-yama the newspaper adhered to the policy line of the Minseitō cabinet. But does the same apply to the previous period of “cohabitation” between Sengoku and Takayanagi? If it is correct to assume that Matsuoka was the latter’s sponsor, he must have expected from the *ManNichi* a more vigorous defense of Japan’s special rights in Manchuria. Let us see, then, how the newspaper treated the Manchurian question after Shidehara’s return at the helm of Japan’s foreign policy.

Shidehara’s comeback

Premier Tanaka announced his intention to resign at the cabinet meeting of 28 June 1929. Although he had been struggling for months with several policy failures, the fatal blow to his administration came from the domestic aftershock of Zhang Zuolin’s assassination by bombing, which had happened one year earlier on the Mantetsu line near Fengtian. As the army establishment covered up the officers’ plot in an effort to avoid scandal, Tanaka found himself unable to provide a satisfactory explanation of the facts to public opinion, the opposition in the Diet, and even the emperor.⁵⁶⁾ To solve the crisis, on 2 July elder statesman Saionji Kinmochi recommended to the sovereign that he appoint as new prime minister Hamaguchi Osachi, leader of the main opposition party.

The *ManNichi* praised that choice as respectful of popular support for the “normal course of constitutional government” (*kensei jōdō*), particularly as it had feared “a revival of old bureaucratic politics” under a non-party cabinet.⁵⁷⁾ On the other hand, the newspaper claimed that the cause of Tanaka’s resignation was not a policy stalemate, nor his response to the “Manchurian incident”, which had already received imperial approval. Regrettably, the real reason was some

56) Murai R., *Seitō naikakusei no tenkai to hōkai 1927–36 nen*, Tokyo: Yūhikaku, pp. 45–47, 52, 62–66. On press coverage of the issue (1928.6–1929.4), see Keiō gijuku daigaku hōgakubu seiji gakka Tamai Kiyoshi kenkyūkai (author and publisher), *Chō Sakurin bakusatsu jiken to Nihon no masu media*, Vol. 15 of *Kindai Nihon seiji shiryō*, Tokyo, 2009.

57) Ed. “Kōkei naikaku ikan”, 7.2; ed. “Minseitō naikaku shutsugen”, 7.3.

“unconstitutional machination”.⁵⁸⁾ Who was responsible for that? The editor pointed at “those who are in the strongest position to set politics in motion, moreover those who should abide the most to fairness”.⁵⁹⁾ He even went as far as making explicit mention of the “Court and senior statesmen (*jūshin*)”.⁶⁰⁾ These were the same accusations that the Seiyūkai secretary general and one minister had voiced in learning about Tanaka’s decision.⁶¹⁾

Looking back at the achievements of the outgoing administration, the *Man-Nichi* remarked that the Tanaka cabinet had successfully accomplished one of its two most important tasks, that is putting the financial world in order. This was an implicit reference to the bank crisis of 1927, which had been the immediate cause of the fall of the Kenseikai government. As for the other task, namely “renovation of diplomacy toward China”, the results were mixed. Popular expectations had been high in the wake of “irresolute Shidehara diplomacy”. Although the gist of Tanaka’s policy was correct, too much “noise” about its implementation had caused “misunderstandings” in Japan and abroad, so that the cabinet had not been able to reap the expected outcome. Still, a solution had been found to several problems left open by Shidehara, finally leading to official recognition of the Nanjing government. Concerning the cabinet’s policy toward Northeast China, the editor thought that any coming government should make it an “iron rule” to pursue the same objectives, regardless of its opinion about the means previously used to achieve them.⁶²⁾

Clearly, the *ManNichi* showed a strong bias in favor of the Tanaka cabinet, both in the appraisal of its policies and in commenting on its resignation. While charging Shidehara of weakness, the editor omitted any mention of trouble caused by Tanaka’s muscular policy, starting from the Jinan incident of May 1928 and

58) “Tanaka naikaku no sōjishoku wa hirikkenteki sakudō ni yoru: jūdai ken’an wa enman kaiketsu shi Manshū jiken ni mukankei, 7.1, p. 2. “Manchurian incident” was an expression commonly used in public debates to indicate the affair of Zhang’s demise. The MN upheld the official explanation that Japanese officers were guilty only of insufficient surveillance of the railway. Ed. “Kiji keisai kinshi no jūyōsei”, 7.12.

59) Ed. “Seihen rai”, 7.2.

60) “Kōkei naikaku ikan”.

61) Murai, *Seitō naikakusei* . . . , p. 67.

62) “Seihen rai”. On public criticism of Shidehara at the time of his first ministry, see Usui K., *Nitchū gaikōshi: hokubatsu no jidai*, Tokyo: Hanawa shobō, 1971, pp. 52–55.

the spread of anti-Japanese boycotts in China. It is also noteworthy that the newspaper took a firm stand in support of the party cabinet system, which meant seeing a transfer of power to the Minseitō as a lesser evil compared to bureaucratic rule. Overall, these findings confirm the political leaning that other sources attribute to the *ManNichi* under Yamazaki's presidency. The authorship of editorials remains uncertain, as it was common journalistic practice to leave them unsigned. Published under the responsibility of the editor-in-chief, they represented the newspaper's line. Individual opinions had their separate spaces, such as columns and interviews. In the case of the *ManNichi*, a column that requires special attention is the one titled "Tekisen hōdan", or "Tekisen's Freewheeling Talk". The person using this pen name was none other than Takayanagi Yasutarō, the retired general.⁶³⁾

Regarding the diplomatic legacy of Tanaka, "Tekisen" wrote a long critique that appeared in four installments between 10 and 17 July. In his view, Tanaka's China policy had been a reaction to that of his predecessor, who had shown sympathy for the Nationalist Revolution without considering the involvement of "companions of Russia's Communist Party" in the Northern Expedition.⁶⁴⁾ Shidehara had not just failed to preempt violent incidents by Chinese soldiers; he had also responded with measures that were "too weak", thereby arousing the wrath of the (Japanese) people. This had been one of the causes of the (Wakatsuki) cabinet's downfall. To protect Japanese residents, the Tanaka cabinet had sent a military expedition to Shandong. As a minority cabinet, however, it lacked the

63) As explained in Sueki, *Manshū nippō ron*, p. 26. The same pen name (which reads "Okigawa" in *kun'yomi*) features in the title of a book that Takayanagi wrote on Manchuria: Takayanagi Y., *ManMō no jōsei: Tekisen manpitsu*, Dairen: ManMō bunka kyōkai, 1925.

64) As Matsushige shows, the alliance between the Nationalist and Communist Party in the initial phase of the Northern Expedition was a major source of concern for the MN. In Japan, as well, there was alarm among the main newspapers, excepted the *Ōsaka asahi*. Matsushige, "'Hokubatsu'-ki ni okeru", pp. 39–40; Revelant, A., "Revolution Deconstructed: Chiang Kai-Shek and the Northern Expedition in the Japanese Press, 1926–1928", in L. De Giorgi and G. Samarani (ed.), *Chiang Kai-shek and His Time: New Historical and Historiographical Perspectives*, Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, pp. 130–34, <https://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/en/edizioni4/libri/978-88-6969-127-0/>; Revelant, A., "The Spectre of 'Red China': The Northern Expedition and Japanese Public Opinion, 1926–27", in A. Mayayo, J.M. Rúa, A. Segura (ed.), *Centenary of the Russian Revolution (1917–2017)*, Barcelona: Edicions de la Universitat de Barcelona, 2018, pp. 455–65.

confidence to stand up to the opposition, and was soon forced to withdraw the expeditionary corps following protests by the Nationalist government. The lesson to be learned here was that domestic political strife should be taboo in foreign policy, as proven by the subsequent events. Believing that Japan's government had given in because of their propaganda, the Nationalists had grown aggressive, despite having purged the communists in the meantime. As a result, when the Tanaka cabinet had sent a second expedition to Shandong, the Nationalist army had provoked the Jinan incident.⁶⁵⁾

The Nanjing government had reversed the truth, falsely claiming that the purpose of the Shandong expeditions had been to hamper the advance of the Nationalist army and "protect the military clique" in the North. That clique, however, had retreated behind the Great Wall precisely because Japan had issued a call for peace. This had allowed the Nationalists to capture Beijing, as they had planned. If they feared Japanese intervention in Manchuria, why had they not attacked and defeated the northern forces before their retreat? The answer was that the Nationalists simply did not have sufficient strength to do that. The real fault of Tanaka diplomacy had been, rather, its excessive concern for criticism by the Nationalists, which had made it waver.⁶⁶⁾

After turning the Tanaka cabinet into a scapegoat for their inability to complete the Northern Expedition, the Nationalists were now greeting the return of Shidehara "with a smiling face". Therefore, the Japanese people should stay alert. Practically all newspapers and magazines in Japan were calling on the minister not to repeat past mistakes, as "weakness is taboo in diplomacy toward China". The Japanese people knew that China "always breaks off reciprocal cooperation". Tanaka diplomacy, which had been "like a springing hare at the start, like a maiden in the end", might well have been one of the reasons for the demise of that cabinet. If the approach did not change, the Japanese people would clamor for a hard stance toward China, so that foreign policy might get embroiled in political disputes at home.⁶⁷⁾ Such controversies should be avoided, as Japan's

65) *Tekisen hōdan* (hereafter TH) 64, "Shidehara gaikō (sono 1)", 7.10, evening edition, p. 1. The subsequent citations of this column omit the edition and page number, which are always the same.

66) TH 65, "Shidehara gaikō (sono 2)", 7.12.

67) TH 66, "Shidehara gaikō (sono 3)", 7.14.

fundamental policy of “coexistence and co-prosperity” with China was not going to change from cabinet to cabinet. Thus, Takayanagi concluded his analysis with a call to preserve “the unity of national opinion”.⁶⁸⁾

From these comments, it is clear that Takayanagi was not only critical of Shidehara’s past performance, but also dissatisfied with Tanaka. In this respect, there is a significant divergence with the editor’s opinion, which stressed instead the merits of the Seiyūkai administration. It should also be noted that the reason for complaint with Tanaka, that is a lack of firmness, was quite different from the one put forward by the leading newspapers in Japan. The latter, while having reservations about the effectiveness of Shidehara diplomacy, were unanimous in condemning Tanaka’s aggressive approach, which they considered a major cause of the worsening of Sino-Japanese relations.⁶⁹⁾ Takayanagi, on the contrary, approved both the sending of troops to Shandong and Tanaka’s public “statement for peace”, which in fact was a threat to intervene in Manchuria if the Nationalists and the Northeast regime continued to fight. Takayanagi’s concern for the possible rise of hardline opinions in Japan implies that he saw military force as a deterrent, rather than a solution to contrasts with China.

While reviewing the record of Japan’s diplomacy, commentators considered the prospect of further negotiations. The *ManNichi* did not take the change in cabinet as an opportunity to recapitulate long-standing issues in detail, probably because readers were already familiar with them. On the one hand, there were problems specific to Manchuria. Besides a looming uncertainty on the established treaty rights, concrete disputes had arisen over the construction of new railways, the lease of land for productive use outside the zone under Japanese administration, and the treatment of Korean settlers by the Chinese authorities. The railway issue, it goes without saying, was of foremost importance to the Mantetsu. Although Yamamoto and a reluctant Zhang Zuolin has signed a preliminary agreement to build five more lines, talks for its implementation had stalled. In

68) TH 67, “Shidehara gaikō (sono 4)”, 7.17.

69) Ed. “Shin naikaku to tai Shi gaikō: ninki ryōkō”, *Ōsaka asahi shinbun*, 7.4; ed. “Fukkatsu seru Shidehara gaikō”, *Tōkyō asahi shinbun*, 7.5; ed. “Shin naikaku no tai Shi gaikō”, *Ōsaka mainichi shinbun* and *Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun* (same text), 7.5. For a survey of press opinions on Japan’s China policy during Shidehara’s first ministry and under Tanaka, see Revelant, “Revolution Deconstructed”, pp. 145–54.

the meantime, the Fengtian regime had laid out a plan for developing other lines on its own that would compete with those of the Japanese company.⁷⁰⁾ On the other hand, there were matters relating to the whole of China, which involved a thorough revision of the unequal treaties. In this respect, the most pressing demands from the Nationalists were the restoration of tariff autonomy and the abolition of extraterritoriality.

Treaty revision had to be negotiated with Nanjing, by then recognized internationally as the legitimate government of the Republic. As for regional issues in Manchuria, it was still open to debate whether Japan should not rather pursue a deal with the Fengtian regime. In the choice of a negotiating counterpart, it was crucial to realistically assess the prospects for integration of the Eastern Three Provinces into Nationalist China. Indeed, the core of the “Manchurian question” lay in the unification of the country, which could undermine Japan’s position in the Northeast. At the time of his first ministry, Shidehara had followed the customary policy of treating China and Manchuria separately. When he came back into office, however, the political situation had changed considerably in the Republic. This time, Shidehara’s priority was to improve relations with the new central government. If Japan could reach an agreement on the abolition of extra-territoriality with Nanjing before the other great powers, that would become a solid foundation for constructive dialogue on other matters. Discussion on Manchuria, to be conducted later on within such a framework, did not rank high in Shidehara’s agenda. On the basis of this approach, from September Shidehara and the new minister to China, Saburi Sadao, held some preliminary talks with the Nanjing authorities.⁷¹⁾

The *ManNichi*, instead, maintained a dualistic vision of continental policy. On 5 July, the editor wrote:

70) On Sino-Japanese rivalry over railway issues in Manchuria (1927–31), see Ogata Y., “Dainiji ‘Shidehara gaikō’ to ‘ManMō’ tetsudō kōshō”, *Tōyō gakuhō*, Vol. 57, No. 3–4, Mar. 1976, pp. 466–500; Ogata Y., “Tōhoku kōtsū iinkai to iwayuru ‘Mantetsu hōi tetsudōmō’”, *Shigaku zasshi*, Vol. 86, No. 8, Aug. 1977, pp. 39–72; Ajia keizai kenkyūjo toshokan (ed.), *Shiryō: Mantetsu to Manshū jihen*, Vol. 1: *Manshū jihen zenshi*, Iwanami shoten, 2011.

71) Taneine S., *Kindai Nihon gaikō to ‘shikatsuteki riei’: dainiji Shidehara gaikō to Taiheiyō sensō eno jokyoku*, Tokyo: Fuyō shobō, 2014, pp. 87, 95–96.

Regarding the China question (*Shina mondai*), there is optimism and there is pessimism, therefore some differences may arise in terms of policy. However, there must be one decisive will shared by the majority of our people on these two things: to solve outstanding problems in the question of Manchuria-Mongolia (*ManMō mondai*), which have piled up and grown complicated; and to protect our interests in Manchuria-Mongolia, which we have acquired through treaties. Therefore, the new Hamaguchi cabinet of the Minseitō, too, shall make a considerable effort with regard to the question of Manchuria-Mongolia.

The editor's advice to the cabinet was to negotiate with the authorities of the Eastern Three Provinces regarding regional issues, such as railways and the lease of land. He feared, though, that the Nationalist government would hamper a solution. To put pressure on Japan, Nanjing might play its usual card of instigating economic boycotts through "patriotic" organizations. Moreover, calls were already rising for the repeal of the "21 Demands Treaty" and the reversion of Ryojun-Dairen. Such an attitude would make it hard to solve the Manchurian question locally. It would make things even worse if the cabinet took Nanjing as its counterpart. In the light of past events, the Hamaguchi administration should be aware that "ordinary and usual means" would not work with China.⁷²⁾

The following day, the editorial focus shifted to prospective negotiations with China over a new trade treaty. It had to be stressed, in the first place, that there was a difference in the approach of the two countries: while Japan wanted to discuss only the economic aspects, China would clearly also raise the issue of extraterritoriality, as well as that of the reversion of concessions. Although Japan was sympathetic to those demands, it would be impossible to accept them until China had enforced the necessary legal reforms. Even a distinguished intellectual such as Hu Shi had acknowledged in the press that, under the present domestic conditions, there were no certain guarantees for the rule of law and human rights in his country. As for trade, the problem was that China might not like Japan's request of preferential tariffs on certain goods. The editor urged all organized

72) Ed. "Kokuron no itchi seru ManMō mondai", 7.5. The so-called 21 Demands Treaty, signed in May 1915, granted Japan a 99-year extension of the former Russian rights in South Manchuria, with additional advantages.

stakeholders in Manchuria to raise their voice and pressure the Japanese authorities, as “the achievements of diplomacy depend in great measure on the strength of national opinion”.⁷³⁾

Other opinions appearing in the *ManNichi* as early reactions to the change in government brought up similar concerns. An unsigned article reported that “various Japanese organs” in Manchuria were foreseeing an aggressive approach to pending issues from Nationalist diplomacy; they hoped Shidehara would “take a firmer stand than usual” for the “preservation of the special interests of the Empire”.⁷⁴⁾ Another anonymous author set a precondition for opening talks on the trade treaty: Nanjing should first stop the anti-Japanese campaign at home, as it had promised to do in the settlement of the Jinan incident. Although “the blind friends of China” might object that such a demand would rather give another pretext to that movement, Japan should stand firm. If the Nationalist government proved unable to control the local party sections, then it would not qualify for negotiations.⁷⁵⁾

Tekisen had already contested Nanjing’s claim to act as the national government of China. In his view, unification of the country had been but superficial, and the government itself was just the “despotism of Chiang Kai-shek’s faction”, which bore “no difference with the politics of the Qing court before the Revolution”. Moreover, as that despotic rule rested upon military force, it did not differ from the preceding tyranny of the military cliques. Amid widespread discontent, the fate of Chiang’s regime looked uncertain. The allegiance of the Northeast to the Nationalist government, as that of other factions, might not last long. To gain legitimacy, Chiang had turned to a hardline foreign policy, first targeting seemingly mild Japan. That was a gross equivocation of Japan’s sympathy toward the Chinese Revolution. If those in Chiang’s faction insisted on using foreign policy

73) Ed. “Nisshi jōyaku kaitei ikan”, 7.6. Liberal philosopher Hu Shi (1891–1963) was one of the leading intellectuals in the May Fourth Movement and the New Culture Movement. He served as ambassador in Washington in 1938–42.

74) “ManMō seisaku wa taiei hōshin o haisu: zai Man kaku kikan no yōbō”, 7.3, p. 2.

75) ABC-sei, “Mazu reisei ni ka o miyo”, 7.3 evening, p. 1. Denunciation of the anti-Japanese movement was a leitmotiv in the MN’s discourse on China. In the period surveyed, the issue was the main subject of ed. “Shina no fukahiteki haiNichi undō”, 8.31; ed. “Nan no tame no haiNichi haika ka: tainai jutsusaku toshitewa gengo dōdan”, 9.11; and ed. “HaiNichi wa Shina o rieki suru ka: Shina yūshikisha no hansei o unagasu”, 9.22.

“as an expedient to maintain authority at home”, they would only harm themselves.⁷⁶⁾ Tekisen then added that, if the Nationalist government wished to abrogate the unequal treaties, it should first put its own country in order.⁷⁷⁾

It is evident, then, that from the outset there were significant differences between the China policy invoked by writers in the *ManNichi* and Shidehara’s intentions. Although the minister did not disclose his agenda to the public, he sent out some signals that elicited further reactions. On 9 July, the Hamaguchi cabinet issued a press statement on its overall program. Point four, “Renovation of diplomacy with China”, tried to strike a balance between “amicable cooperation for the achievement of Chinese popular aspirations” and “the preservation of those rightful and important interests that are indispensable for the survival or the prosperity of our country”. With respect to the latter, however, there was no explicit mention of Manchuria. Rather, with a slap in the face of the preceding administration, the cabinet declared:

To be uselessly caught up in particular interests is not to look after the general situation. Moving soldiers heedlessly, of course, does not increase national prestige.⁷⁸⁾

The *ManNichi* editor approved the general principles of this policy, but he objected that the anti-Japanese movement was on the verge of spreading into Manchuria. In practice, how did the cabinet intend to protect Japan’s vital interests in the region? According to a telegram from Beiping, the Nationalist government had decided to assume control of Manchuria’s external relations with Japan. If that was the case, problems that had not been solved “even as local issues” would become inextricable once transferred to the center. Moreover, if Japan gave up its interests in Manchuria, China would obviously press forward with

76) TH 60, “Jōyaku kaitei (sono 3)”, 7.2. The editor, too, warned China not to mistake Japan’s sympathy for weakness. However, he did not touch upon the quality of the Nationalist leadership. Ed. “Shina gawa no gokai o oshimu”, 7.9.

77) TH 63, “Reisetsu”, 7.8.

78) The statement appeared on the following day in all newspapers, including the MN: “Mottomo kinkyū o yōsuru shoseisaku jitsugen o kitai: tai Shi gaikō no sasshin, kin’yu kaikin tō: shin naikaku seimeisho happyō”. See also the *Minseitō* journal: “Hamaguchi naikaku shisei hōshin no seimei”, *Minsei*, Vol. 3, No. 8, Aug. 1929, pp. 3–4.

further demands.⁷⁹⁾ On the same day, the newspaper featured an address to Japanese expatriates by Ōtani Kōzui, a former Buddhist leader who had just arrived in Dairen to spend the summer at his residence there.⁸⁰⁾ Ōtani expressed perplexity at the cabinet's statement, which did not clarify whether the Mantetsu and Ryojun-Dairen fell within the scope of Japan's "important interests" or not. If the intention was to give the leased territory back to China, how would the government guarantee the properties of Japanese residents? He invited the latter to send a formal request of explanations to the minister of foreign affairs.⁸¹⁾

Ōtani received further visibility through a lengthy interview, published in the *ManNichi* from 13 to 15 July. He reiterated that the cabinet's statement did not make him feel safe. Shidehara's policy in case of disorders was to evacuate Japanese residents, as at the time of the Nanjing incident (March 1927). This meant allowing a great loss of property, without ensuring a timely escape. Some people would object that Tanaka's policy to protect nationals in the area had been no better, as it had led to the Jinan incident. Ōtani, however, argued that in that case there had been victims only among those who had not gathered at the consulate. Therefore, he could "not approve of so-called Shidehara diplomacy".⁸²⁾ Japanese citizens were safe in the Guandong territory and most of the Mantetsu railway zone, which were "absolutely inside our sphere of interest". In the rest of the region, though, nationals risked the kind of oppression that Koreans were already experiencing. China was resorting to all possible means to take over the CER and get rid of Russian influence, so "who may ever assure that such things will not be done against us from now on"? If Japan's government replied to the

79) Ed. "ManMō ni okeru ken'eki no hoji", 7.11. The mentioned telegram appeared later as "ManMō mondai no gaikōken: chuō ikan wa jūdai: Kokumin seifu kara mada tsūchō wa kitanu: Yoshizawa kōshi kisha ni kataru", 7.12, p. 2.

80) Ōtani Kōzui (1876–1948) became the hereditary head of the Ōtani school in 1903, but he resigned in 1914 because of a scandal. He was widely known for sponsoring educational and cultural activities. In 1913 he served as an adviser to the republican government of China. During the Sino-Japanese War, he was appointed twice to advisory posts in Japan's cabinet.

81) Ōtani Kōzui, "Hamaguchi naikaku no seimeisho o yomite zai Man dōwan ni tsugu", 7.11 evening, p. 1.

82) "Zai Man no hōjin e: Ōtani Kōzui-shi dan", 7.13 evening, p. 1. On the Nanjing incident, see Usui, *Nitchū gaikōshi*, pp. 30–47; Tochigi T., Banno R., *Chūgoku kokumin kakumei: senkanki higashi Ajia no chikaku hendō*, Tokyo: Hōsei daigaku shuppan kyoku, 1997, pp. 259–62. On the MN reaction to the incident, see Matsushige, "'Hokubatsu'-ki ni okeru . . .", pp. 42–43.

expatriates that it would not offer compensation in the event of incidents, they should be ready “to protect their lives and property with their own forces”.⁸³⁾ In the end, however, Ōtani expressed confidence that the concerns of nationals in Manchuria would not be ignored, if each of the 200,000 of them sent a petition to the government.⁸⁴⁾

Thus, although the *ManNichi* refrained from sharp criticism of the announced China policy, it gave ample space to a non-partisan voice that urged the government to take a clear stance in defense of Japanese interests in Manchuria. In his appeal, Ōtani mentioned the CER crisis, which had just broken out. He used that news as a warning to readers about the impending threat of Chinese nationalism. We shall see how the newspaper further elaborated on that theme throughout the rest of the year.

The future of Manchuria

On 28 July, shortly after the managerial reshuffle that had accompanied Takanagi's rise as the head of the *ManNichi*, an editorial took up the topic of Japan's economic expansion overseas.⁸⁵⁾ Although the author was aware that a difficult economic situation required a retrenchment policy at home, he was also concerned about the adverse effects of expenditure cuts on production, employment, and people's living conditions. In any case, austerity should not apply to enterprises overseas:

The fundamental reason why Japan's economy got stuck is that there is no way it can stand up only with the people of mainland Japan, which has a small land area and is poor of resources for production. Therefore, in order to find a real way out of the present economic difficulties of Japan, we must in the first place broaden our economic horizon by heading toward new territories, dependent territories, lands under mandate, or special regions and the like; develop the productive resources of these areas, and look there

83) “Zai Man no hōjin e (2): Ōtani Kōzui-shi dan”, 7.14 evening, p. 1.

84) “Zai Man no hōjin e (3): Ōtani Kōzui-shi dan”, 7.15 evening, p. 1.

85) Ed. “Kaigai eno sekkyokuteki shinshu seisaku”, 7.28.

for foodstuff and industrial raw materials.

In short, it was mandatory to “pursue an active, enterprising policy” beyond the borders of “Inner” Japan. According to such a strategic vision,

the special region of Manchuria-Mongolia, combined with the leased territory of Guandong, occupies the most important place. That is why the economic development of Manchuria-Mongolia has an especially great significance for the survival of Japan.

Accordingly, Japan should not only maintain its established rights in the region, but also lease more land, build new railways, and so on.⁸⁶⁾ All Japanese residents had welcomed the efforts of Mantetsu president Yamamoto to proceed in that direction. In conclusion, the editor stressed again that “to be entirely absorbed in a retrenchment policy hampers the vitality that makes a country prosperous, and the spirit of enterprise”. This was a transparent allusion to the austerity policy of the Hamaguchi cabinet, which Sengoku would eventually impose on the Mantetsu. This concern had already surfaced in the *ManNichi*, and it would appear again later.⁸⁷⁾

As a logical follow up to the call for investment in Manchuria, on 10 August the editor reaffirmed the need to protect Japan’s position from the tide of Chinese nationalism. Although the Nanjing government had recently taken charge of foreign relations for the Eastern Three Provinces, that transfer of power had not changed in the least “the special character” of the region, which was “a universally known truth” grounded in historical and geographic evidence. Japan had acquired its first rights in Manchuria through two successive wars, against the Qing empire and Russia; several treaties and other documents testified to the legitimacy of those rights. Consequently, if China intended to “ignore the special

86) Afterwards, the editor clarified that such a policy did not envisage any territorial acquisition for Japan. He rejected as “unwanted attention” the advice to purchase Manchuria from China, which had appeared in the US press. Ed. “Yokeina osekkai: ManMō baikyakuron nado”, 9.26.

87) See ed. “Iwayuru kinshuku seisaku”, 7.9; ed. “Iwayuru shōkyoku kinshuku seisaku”, 7.18; ed. “Kinshuku seisaku mo mata teido mono nari” 7.24; ed. “Kochū ni sekkyoku no naiyō ari: shinsō wa jijitsu ni rikkyaku seneba”, 9.27.

character” of Manchuria and “infringe on Japan’s rightful interests” there, “our country shall take appropriate means to retain her interests”.⁸⁸⁾

The editorial of 22 August, which dealt with the issue of Korean immigrants, further highlights the imperial vision that made Manchuria an essential part of Japan’s continental policy. The author observed that in recent times migration to Japan from the colony had increased considerably, at the pace of about 40,000 to 50,000 people per year. In the “Inner land”, Koreans posed “a threat to the living” of Japanese workers, because industries hired them for the same jobs at lower wages. It was not possible to stop the flow, though, owing to the immigrants’ status as “new Japanese”. To solve the problem, the authorities should address the causes of migration, such as unemployment in the peninsula. The latter depended on several circumstances, including “the laziness and lack of spirit of Koreans themselves”. Nevertheless, there was potential for creating jobs in the colony. Another required action was to redirect the flow toward Manchuria, where Koreans could farm the land. One reason for the upsurge of immigration in Japan, in fact, was that Koreans had “become uneasy” at the prospect of settling across the continental border. Therefore, all Japanese authorities in Manchuria should unite to ensure them “thorough protection”.⁸⁹⁾

Obviously, apprehension for the future of both Japanese and Koreans in Manchuria was not unrelated to China’s aggressive take on Soviet interests in the northern part of the region, as reported in the same weeks. The above-quoted editorial of 10 August touched on the CER crisis condemning China’s “illegitimate acts against international good faith”, which had won her no sympathy from the great powers. It also foresaw that, once the dispute with the Soviet Union was settled, China would open negotiations with Japan over the trade treaty. As the outcome of the CER crisis would affect the question of Japanese rights in Manchuria to some extent, Japan could not watch the Sino-Soviet conflict as if it were just “a fire on the opposite shore”.⁹⁰⁾

More articles entirely devoted to the Manchurian question appeared in autumn, until the days just before the CER crisis reached its climax. In October, an offi-

88) Ed. “ManMō no tokushusei: issō meihaku ni seyo”, 8.10.

89) Ed. “Ijū Chōsenjin ni kansuru mondai”, 8.22. The occasion for this article was provided by the appointment of the governor-general of Korea, retired admiral Saitō Makoto.

90) Ed. “ManMō no tokushusei”.

cial visit to Guandong of Matsuda Genji, Minister of Colonial Affairs, was the occasion for an assessment of the prospects for Japanese initiatives in Manchuria. Chiefly thanks to the CER in the north and the Mantetsu in the south, over the past decades the region had undergone remarkable development both in economic and cultural terms, to the point of having become “the most prosperous part of China”. In recent times, however, Manchuria had started losing its “special character as a special region” owing to the efforts of the Nationalist government to bring it under central control. Although Japan’s rights were guaranteed by treaties, China was “always trying to break the status quo”. Therefore, it was necessary to find “in a rational way” how to achieve “coexistence and co-prosperity” with that country. In the editor’s view, the significance of the Manchurian question was “economic, rather than political”. It was natural to turn to Manchuria in search of a solution to Japan’s population growth and food supply problems. In practice, though, little could be expected regarding the first problem, given the steady immigration of Chinese people from Shandong and the low attractiveness of the region to Japanese emigrants. The latter preferred moving to the Americas, where they could find the comforts of modern life, such as electricity, running water, gas, and the radio. On the other hand, it might not be hard to solve the food problem by economic means, in cooperation with China.⁹¹⁾ The moderate tone of these considerations was in line with Shidehara’s approach to Sino-Japanese relations, which emphasized mutual interests in the economic sphere to ease political tension. At the same time, though, the article expressed a negative view of Manchuria’s integration into Nationalist China.

The latter aspect was more pronounced in the conclusion of a detailed review of regional issues, published in 20 installments from 21 September to 10 October. According to the anonymous writer,

China [. . .] is trying step by step to push Japan toward the same fate as Russia in North Manchuria. All the actions she is taking appear in our eyes as a war without weapons. This, by accumulation, could turn into a war with

91) Ed. “Matsuda takushō ni teisu”, 10.6. Similar arguments reappeared later in ed. “Sengoku Mantetsu sōsai no rainin o mukau”, 10.26. A more encouraging view on the future of Japanese farmers in Manchuria, though not openly related to the population problem, followed in ed. “Nihonjin no nōgyōteki Manshū hatten”, 11.19.

weapons. Fighting, regardless of who wins, certainly does not bring happiness to either state or either people.⁹²⁾

The author based his analysis on numerous data, which readers might have found useful in view of the Third Conference of the Institute for Pacific Relations (IPR).⁹³⁾ Held in Kyoto from 28 October to 9 November, after some preliminary meetings in Nara, this international event brought together experts with diverse backgrounds from the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, China, and Japan. The *ManNichi* followed the debate through a special envoy, as the Manchurian question occupied three days in the program (4–6 November). Matsuoka, the former Mantetsu vice president, spoke in defense of Japan against Chinese charges of expansionist policy. He also held a public lecture, in which he called for Sino-Japanese cooperation as necessary for the development of Manchuria. Participants then put forward their proposals for solving the question, including the creation of a conciliation organ.⁹⁴⁾

The IPR conference provided inspiration for four editorials in the *ManNichi*. The first presented the event as an opportunity to explain Japan's reasons to an international audience. Regrettably, the Chinese were making "unreasonable demands" due to their emotional attitude, while "misunderstanding the conditions of their own country".⁹⁵⁾ The second article, on the other hand, conceded that

92) Ikkisha, "Taiheiyō mondai chōsakai nite rongi sareru Manshū (20)", 10.18 evening, p. 1.

93) The IPR was a nonprofit international organization, founded in 1925 and based in Honolulu (New York from the 1930s). Its declared mission was to build dialogue among nations across the Pacific. For a study on the IPR focused on US-Japan relations, see Akami, T., *Internationalizing the Pacific: The United States, Japan, and the Institute of Pacific Relations in War and Peace, 1919–45*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

94) "Manshū mondai o toraete sakan ni Nihon o kōgeki: Shina iin ga ijōni kōfun shite: kinō no Taiheiyō kaigi", 11.5, p. 2; "Shinryakushugi ni arazu: Nihon iin ga hanku setsumeī", 11.5, p. 2; "Manshū no han'ei wa Nisshi no teikei ni: yūbe no kōkai enzetsukai ni okeru Matsuoka Yōsuke-shi no enzetsu", 11.5, p. 2; "Manshū no heiwa han'ei wa Nihon no doryoku ni yoru: Matsuoka-shi Shina iin no enzetsu o hanku: Taiheiyō kaigi zen'in kaigi", 11.6, p. 2; "Manshū no Nisshi fungi chōteian teishutsu: muika entaku kaigi ni teishutsu", 11.6, p. 2; "Entaku futatsu zōka shite yama nasu gian o tōgi: Manshū mondai tōgi saishūbi", 11.7, p. 2. A Japanese translation of Matsuoka's reply to the Chinese delegate, together with summaries of the debate, appeared later in Japan's main journal on foreign affairs. Matsuoka Y., "Nihon no Manshūkan (Shina no Manshūron o bakusu)", *Gaikō jihō*, No. 601, 1929.12.15, pp. 117–31.

95) Ed. "Taiheiyō mondai chōsakai", 10.27.

some Japanese residing in Manchuria should amend their behavior toward the Chinese:

When there is an encounter with a different people (*iminzoku*), the people with a superior culture must have a good sense of superiority, that is accept a different people, guide it, and show it how to improve. To despise and insult it because it is inferior to us, that is a bad sense of superiority.⁹⁶⁾

The third editorial voiced skepticism about the usefulness of a conciliation organ, of the sort which had been proposed from the time of the Washington Conference (1921–22). Although that kind of committee might attenuate conflict, it would certainly not solve the Manchurian question. Rather, as China would use that space to repeat its “outrageous” arguments, there was a risk that the problems would only worsen. In this respect, a reason for concern was that the United States and Britain would participate in the negotiations.⁹⁷⁾ Here the editor reaffirmed a tenet of Japan’s China policy, that was to keep the other great powers out of Manchuria. Shidehara was no exception to this diplomatic tradition, as he was willing to conduct multilateral negotiations only on issues pertaining to China south of the Great Wall. He acted consistently with that stance during the CER crisis, as well as in his later response to the Manchurian Incident.

Finally, the editorial of 15 November pointed to a basic fault in the Chinese attitude toward the issue of treaty revision, as it emerged again at the IPR conference. The Chinese authorities did not bother to encroach on Japan’s rights because they contested the legitimacy of the unequal treaties. It was undeniable that China and the whole world had considerably changed after the Great War, and that past agreements should be modified accordingly. Nevertheless, this did not justify the violation of those treaties, which remained binding until a legal revision came into force.⁹⁸⁾ This argument was a common ground for all administrations in Japan. Shidehara always made it a point to base negotiations on the observance of international law, as he did in the case of the CER crisis.

96) Ed. “Arawareta Manshū mondai no ronkyū”, 11.7.

97) Ed. “Manshū mondai no chōtei kikan”, 11.12.

98) Ed. “Shina no ranbō naru jōyaku jūrin”, 11.15.

The CER crisis and Japan's response

Previous studies on Japan's role in the Sino-Soviet conflict over the CER have shown that the crisis had a damaging effect on Shidehara's plan to mend relations with China. The seizure of the railway disrupted the minister's agenda, because it forced him to take a stance on Nationalist policy in Manchuria before he had made any progress on other issues. While pledging the neutrality of Japan, Shidehara advised both contenders to reach a peaceful settlement based on the restoration of the *status quo ante*. This, in practice, meant support for the Soviet Union against China's attempt to force a change in the regional balance of power. Moreover, after reckoning that Nanjing's uncompromising attitude posed an obstacle to the recommended solution, in October Shidehara urged that government to let Fengtian conduct negotiations with the USSR. Nanjing rejected the advice but was nonetheless compelled to take that path a few weeks later, owing to the military debacle suffered by Zhang's forces in Manchuria and the rebellion in central China. Shidehara's shift in support of a "local" solution to the crisis marked a significant departure from the unified China policy he had envisaged initially, as it meant acknowledging again an autonomous role for the Northeast. In this way, the minister aroused resentment from the Nationalist government and unintentionally fostered the latter's rapprochement with the United States, thereby missing his objective to make Japan the leading power in the revision of the unequal treaties.⁹⁹⁾

An additional source of tension with China during the CER crisis was that Japanese authorities in South Manchuria hampered the movements of the Northeast Army. On 27 July, the Guangdong governorate ordered tight restrictions on foreign military transports on the Mantetsu lines and the passage of foreign troops across the railway zone. These measures were consistent with the policy adopted in January by the Guangdong Army, which was to support the Soviet Union in case of Chinese seizure of the CER. The governor issued the order after a meeting with representatives of the Guangdong Army and the Mantetsu, against opposite instructions from the War and Foreign Ministries in Tokyo. The latter came

99) Hattori, *Higashi Ajia kokusai kankyō* . . . , pp. 255–63, 288–92; Tsuchida A., "1929 nen no ChūSo funsō to Nihon", *Chūō daigaku ronshū*, No. 22, Mar. 2001, pp. 17–27; Taneine, *Kindai Nihon gaikō* . . . , pp. 85–110.

to know about the decision three weeks later, through the Ministry of Colonial Affairs, and managed to obtain a relaxation of the new rules only on 20 December. The consequent delay in the deployment of Chinese troops in North Manchuria was one of the circumstances that caused their defeat.¹⁰⁰⁾

Some authors have argued that the unexpected efficiency of the Soviet forces in the confrontation with China raised alarm in the imperial army about a possible revival of the old Russian might in the Far East. In their view, that sense of menace became a stimulus for Japanese officers to advance preemptively into Manchuria, as was to occur two years later.¹⁰¹⁾ Taneine Shūji, however, has objected that at the time neither the Guandong Army nor the general staff in Tokyo were impressed to the point of considering the Red Army an immediate threat. Their underestimation of the Soviet war potential would turn into a major cause for the disastrous Japanese defeat at Nomonhan in 1939.¹⁰²⁾

Coverage of the CER crisis in the *ManNichi* reflects the reporters' limited knowledge of what was going on in diplomatic meetings and in the combat zone. Shidehara, for instance, kept silent about his exchanges with the Soviet ambassador and the Chinese minister in Tokyo. Nevertheless, from the beginning it was clear enough that Japan would remain neutral and encourage a settlement between China and the USSR.¹⁰³⁾ Premier Hamaguchi, who was slightly more talkative on the issue, explained in an interview that Japan was not going to step forward as a mediator in the dispute.¹⁰⁴⁾

Regarding the role of the Japanese authorities in Manchuria, the *ManNichi* paid little attention to the problem of Chinese military transports. This is striking, as it was a significant issue that directly concerned the Mantetsu. It was concisely reported that the general staff in Tokyo had discussed the matter on 12 July.

100) Hidai H., "HōSo sensōji ni okeru Kantōcho: Chūgoku guntai no Mantetsu yusō narabini tetsudō fuzokuchi tsūka ni kansuru Kantō chōkan naikun o chūshin ni", in *Sōritsu 20 shūnen kinen ronbunshū hakkō bukai* (ed.), *Higashi Ajia ni okeru shakai to bunka*, Ōsaka keizai hōka daigaku shuppanbu, 1992, pp. 85–134; Taneine, *Kindai Nihon gaikō* . . . , pp. 111–33.

101) Hayashi S., "Kantōgun to kyōkutō Sorengun: aru tai So jōhō sanbō no oboegaki", Tokyo: Fuyō shobō, 1974, pp. 44–46; Kurosawa F., "Tanaka gaikō to rikugun", *Gunji shigaku*, Vol. 21, No. 3, Dec. 1985, p. 28; Tsuchida, "1929 nen no ChūSo funsō to Nihon", p. 26.

102) Taneine, *Kindai Nihon gaikō* . . . , pp. 135–59.

103) "Chū Nichi RoShi taikōshi kinō Shidehara gaishō o otonau", 7.20, p. 2.

104) "RoShi no kōsō wa ikan: seifu wa jitai no suii o chūshi: Ise jingū, sanryō sanpai ni mukatta Hamaguchi shushō no jūō dan", 7.22, p. 2.

Similar news followed about the meeting at the Guandong governorate of 26 July. In both instances, however, the outcome of the discussion remained unknown.¹⁰⁵⁾ Shortly afterwards, it was noted that the Chinese were unjustly accusing Japan of obstructing their military transports to Russia's advantage.¹⁰⁶⁾ The *ManNichi* dismissed such "one-sided interpretation" of Japan's neutrality as groundless, though it confirmed that the Jilin Army had been denied one transport and two crossings.¹⁰⁷⁾ Despite this pretense of innocence, the same newspaper had reported earlier from Tokyo the opinion that a stop to Chinese transports on the Mantetsu would make it quite easy for the Russians to take Harbin by force.¹⁰⁸⁾ Whereas the issue of military transports was conveniently downplayed, commentators had a lot to say about other aspects of the Sino-Soviet conflict. Let us examine how the discussion proceeded from the outbreak of the crisis to its conclusion.

The seizure of the CER, which the Chinese authorities in Harbin accomplished on 10–11 July together with the shutting down of related agencies and the arrest of numerous Soviet citizens, did not strike Japanese observers as a sudden twist in Sino-Soviet relations. Rather, it came to them as the culmination of a years-long dispute between the two countries, in which the USSR had tried to revive Russian imperialism in the Far East. A telling sign of the perceived continuity in the causes for conflict is that journalists still customarily used the word "Russia" to indicate the Soviet Union. Although "Red propaganda" had offered a pretext for the Chinese coup, the railway seizure had to be condemned as a patent violation of international law, whose real goal was the expulsion of Russian influence from North Manchuria.¹⁰⁹⁾ Initially, it seemed that the USSR would merely protest and swallow the loss, as it had done repeatedly in the past, because its modest military forces would not allow more than demonstrative actions at

105) "Tōtetsu kaishū jiken ni kanshite waga gunbu taisaku o kyōgi: Mantetsu oyobi keibi ni eikyō ari to: kinō shunōbu kaigi", 7.13, p. 2; "Shina guntai yusō mondai: Kantōchō de kyōgikai", 7.26 evening, p. 1.

106) "Waga gensei chūritsu ni Shina gawa fungai", 7.27, p. 2.

107) "Waga gensei chūritsu o Shina gawa gokai: sakusenjō sogo o kitasu, to", 7.29 evening, p. 1.

108) "Nihon wa zettai chūritsu: waga iryūmin no seimei zaisan to ken'eki o okasarenai kagiri", 7.19, p. 2.

109) TH 68, "TōShi tetsudō (sono 1)", 7.18; ed. "Roshia nimo mata jakuten ga aru", 7.19; ed. "RoShi jiken no chūshinten o miyo", 7.26.

the border.¹¹⁰⁾ By mid-July, though, Moscow's firm reaction proved that China had underestimated its opponent. Escalation into war still looked unlikely, as both sides lacked the necessary confidence and material resources. At the same time, however, neither country would give in easily.¹¹¹⁾

Facing an uncertain scenario, commentators in the *ManNichi* pondered the possible effects of the crisis for Japan. The editor promptly took the CER seizure as a case in point to remind readers about the threat that Chinese nationalism posed to their country:

If this [*i.e. the CER takeover*] is a manifestation of China's popular aspirations, our country, which has major interests in South and North Manchuria through the Mantetsu, must pay close attention to China's desire to restore her national rights. Now that the Northeast regime has struck a deal with the central Nationalist government, that desire is bound to grow. The same craving hand that was turned toward the CER might turn toward Japan at some time.

Certainly, when the Hamaguchi cabinet had declared its readiness for "amicable cooperation for the achievement of Chinese popular aspirations", it had not meant to include "unjust and unreasonable" demands, such as a reversion of the Mantetsu and Ryojun-Dairen. The wording of that statement, however, was prone to equivocation. Even China's legitimate requests, like tariff autonomy and the

110) "Buryoku taikō wa konnan naru rōnō gawa: kokkyō chūtongun yonka shidan", 7.13, p. 2; "Shina no yōkyū o ire heiwateri kaiketsu no hōshin: aikawarazu yowagoshi no Rokoku seifu", 7.14 evening, p. 1; "Rogun no kokkyō shutsudō wa mokka no kokujo dewa fukanō: kore ga Shina gawa no neraidokoro", 7.17 evening, p. 1; "Sentan o hiraku madeni akka sumai: Rōnō no buryoku dakkai wa konnan da: Osutoromofu [Ostromov]-shi kansoku", 7.17 evening, p. 2; "RoShi ryōgun shōtotsu wa zenzen arienai: shutsudō wa shii ni sugizu", 7.19 evening, p. 1; 23 "Tōtetsu mondai wa zenzen Shina no sekinin: Rōnō gawa no buryoku kaiketsu wa konnan: Nagai Chōshun [Changchun] ryōji no dan", 7.23 evening, p. 1.

111) Ed. "RoShi kokkō kiki", 7.16; "Tsuyogatta kokumin seifu ga hayaku moshintai ryōnan ni ochiiru: Rōshiya gawa no angai naru kyōkō taido ni hitasura heiwateri kaiketsu o setsubō", 7.19, p. 2; "Ryōkoku tomoni kaisen shigataku tōbun kokkyō de niramiai ka: sono nariyuki wa waga ken'eki ni jūdai eikyō", 7.19, p. 2; "Ryōhō tomo jishū shite shōtotsu o sakuru ka: guntai idō wa shii nomi", 7.19, p. 3; "Shina gawa ga oreteide RoShi kaigi seiritsu o miru ka: ŌA [Ōshū-Ajia] renraku mondai kaiketsu no yōkyū ni Rōshiya ni ōdaku no kiun", 7.22, p. 2; ed. "Tōhoku no dōin to kokufu no hara", 7.23.

abolition of extraterritoriality, could not be accepted without conditions. As the process of state building was still incomplete, jurisdiction on foreign residents could not be handed over in a short time. Furthermore, because of its special economic relationship with China, Japan could not consent lightly to tariff autonomy without an agreement on preferential rates. Above all, though, China had to understand that Shidehara diplomacy and public opinion would not remain silent at any attempt to deprive Japan of its vital interests in Manchuria by the same “violent means” used for the CER.¹¹²⁾

A second editorial examined three possible outcomes of the Sino-Soviet confrontation. The first was a negotiated settlement, which would mean the “utter submission of Russia”. In that case, it was easy to predict that an emboldened China would next turn against Japan in South Manchuria. The alternative results entailed an armed clash between the contenders. If China won, its anti-Japanese behavior would grow even more rampant. If Russia emerged victorious, on the other hand, its influence would expand south, up to Changchun. In that case, Japan would remain without the buffer zone that protected it against the menace of Russia, which was both ideological and economic. Therefore, whatever the outcome of the crisis, Japan could not look on unconcerned.¹¹³⁾ The writer did not consider a fourth possibility, that is a peaceful solution less detrimental to the USSR. As can be inferred from other articles published in those days, his reasoning was that, since China had already taken control of the railway, for Russia the only effective way to take it back was to use military force.

On the following day, the newspaper featured an interview with the outgoing Mantetsu president. Regarding the CER crisis, Yamamoto noted that

Manchuria-Mongolia, which lies between those two countries [*i.e. China and the USSR*], is just like the Balkan peninsula before the Great World War; it is not excessive to say that it is the core zone as far as threats to international peace are concerned. Therefore, Japan must always pay close attention to the maintenance of order in Manchuria-Mongolia; if someone

112) Ed. (bis) “Shina no kokuminteki shukubō naru mono”, 7.16. In a similar tone, another editorial warned China that “the Japanese people are always ready to take adequate means” to defend their rights. Ed. “Kokusai kūdetā”, 7.21.

113) Ed. “RoShi funsō to wagakuni no tachiba”, 7.20.

tries to disrupt it, she must not look away, but protest and make the utmost effort to preserve peace. Our nationals in Manchuria, too, on this occasion need an extraordinary resolve to protect our interests.¹¹⁴⁾

Besides raising the usual argument for the maintenance of established rights, Yamamoto thus pointed at Japan's responsibility as the guarantor of regional order. It was not clear, though, what kind of "resolve" such a role would imply with respect to the CER crisis. At the time of the Northern Expedition, the Tanaka cabinet had openly threatened to deploy military force in Manchuria. This time, however, there was no immediate danger to Japanese interests in the southern part of the region. The question was therefore whether the empire should remain a vigilant onlooker, or rather use diplomacy to foster a peaceful settlement. Shidehara discreetly encouraged the contenders to reach an agreement by themselves.

The *ManNichi* did not comment explicitly on Shidehara's response to the Sino-Soviet conflict. Numerous articles, however, make it clear that from an early stage the newspaper wanted Nanjing to step back and allow Fengtian to resume control of its external relations. Takayanagi was the first to point out that Nanjing and the Northeast had conflicting interests at stake in the CER crisis. He insinuated that while the latter center of power sought to avoid a military escalation with the USSR,¹¹⁵⁾ the central government might choose that course to weaken the regional regime, as it "can't help bringing down the remnants of the military cliques". Zhang had to be aware that "if things go smoothly, the merit will go to the Nationalist government; if things proceed badly, the blame will fall on him."¹¹⁶⁾

On 30 July, the editor reminded the Fengtian authorities that their current predicament was their own fault, because they had joined Nationalist China and ceded control over foreign relations to Nanjing "as an expedient to avoid bothersome negotiations with Japan". As a result, they had been obliged to follow

114) Special envoy Nakamura, "Mantetsu jigyō no teishi wa ManMō keizaikai ni dageki: RoShi mondai ni hōjin wa zensho seyo: senchū nite Yamamoto Mantetsu sōsai dan", 7.21, p. 2. On 7.22, Yamamoto made similar considerations in his speech at the Mantetsu farewell party. See "Mantetsu o saru ni nozomi: Sei-fuku ryōsosai no aisatsu", 7.23 evening, p. 1.

115) TH 69, "TōShi tetsudō (sono 2)".

116) TH 70, "TōShi tetsudō (sono 3)".

Nanjing's orders and to take the CER from Russia forcibly. Such behavior was like "digging one's own grave". Now that the central government was inclined to accept the US proposal for mediation, which required giving back the "stolen" railway, Fengtian was about to lose face completely. An involvement of the United States in the dispute was also a reason for deep concern to Japan, as it would "enhance that country's right to speak about the question of Manchuria-Mongolia". To avoid all this, the editor's advice to Fengtian was to submit a plea to Russia for direct negotiations and show good will to restore the *status quo ante*. If the situation grew "more delicate", Japan might "have to take appropriate measures". However, if the leaders of the Northeast "awakened", they might "turn from darkness to light".¹¹⁷⁾ This opinion, which was expressed even more bluntly than in Tekisen's column, held Chiang Kai-shek responsible for instigating Zhang against the USSR as a means to consolidate his own central power. Although at the time similar suspicions arose in China as well, historians have found no documentary evidence that confirms them.¹¹⁸⁾ What is clear, instead, is that such a claim aimed to discredit the Nanjing government.

Similar articles followed in August, when the failure of negotiations with the Soviets exposed the lack of coordination between central and regional authorities in China. In the editor's view, discord proved that "the New China who professes the unification of North and South, the National Revolution, has not yet regenerated herself as a modern state". Although Russia was rather weak, it was only logical that it would adopt a hardline stance after seeing China in disarray. The Chinese authorities should abstain from an aggressive foreign policy, and rather carry out the much-needed reforms at home.¹¹⁹⁾ Nanjing's belated decision to send diplomat Zhu Shaoyang to Manzhouli struck the editor both as proof that the Northeast regime was tottering and as a sign that China was running out of resources against Russia.¹²⁰⁾ Then, after the Soviet negotiator had refused to meet with Zhu (6 August), the *ManNichi* explained the affront in these terms:

117) Ed. "Jirenma ni tatsu Tōhoku seiken", 7.30.

118) Kwong, *War and Geopolitics in Interwar Manchuria*, p. 141; Tsuchida, "1929 no ChūSo funsō to 'chihō gaikō'", p. 183.

119) Ed. "Mazu ashinami o soroeoyo: Shina gawa shikisha ni hansei o unagasu", 8.3.

120) Ed. "RoShi kōshō no tai Hō [Hōten] eikyō", 8.7.

Although authority over China's diplomacy has been transferred to the Nationalist government, is the latter able to bear responsibility toward other countries? Or has it been a formal unification in name only, and China has no ability to bear responsibility, like a castle in the air? [. . .] at least, seen from the Soviets, a clear distinction has been made between the nominal representative and the real representative.¹²¹⁾

As at the root of China's diplomatic failure with Soviet Russia lay Nanjing's plans to subjugate the Northeast, the editor made the following recommendations:

[I]t is wise for the Nanjing regime to renounce its ambitions toward the Eastern Four Provinces, in terms of both internal and foreign relations. What about renouncing these ambitions and entrusting authority over foreign policy and transports to the Fengtian regime (at least for some time)? What about letting the Fengtian regime and Soviet Russia negotiate directly?¹²²⁾

In other words, isn't it true that Nanjing might not find any way out of the impasse, other than backing away from issues in the Northeast, at least for some time?¹²³⁾

As these passages suggest, Nanjing's retreat from the Northeast did not merely have to do with the CER crisis. To the *ManNichi*, it meant reasserting Japan's working relationship with the local regime against the pretenses of China's central government. From that standpoint, diplomatic engagement by the United States or other great powers had to be avoided as undue meddling with Japan's sphere of influence.¹²⁴⁾ The newspaper's stance against international diplomacy

121) Ed. "Shu [Zhu] no tsugi Chō Kei [Zhang Ji]-kun", 8.7. See also ed. "Sō Shibun [Song Ziwen] no jii wa nani o monogatari: Shina wa imada kunsei jidai ni arazu", 8.8.

122) Ed. "Ubaeru mono o kaese", 8.14. The same argument occurs in ed. "Nankin seiken wa te o hike: Shu [Zhu] no shōkan ijō ni", 8.16.

123) Ed. "Tai Ro dakaisaku: Nankin gawa ga te o hiku hoka nashi", 8.25.

124) Regarding the possible involvement of the League of Nations, the editor observed that no effective action could be taken through it in the case of the CER crisis, as neither the Soviet Union nor the United States were among its members. Ed. "RoShi mondai to EiBei to", 7.27. Another editorial, which dwelled on Fengtian's desperate need to redress its financial situation

did not differ in substance from that of Shidehara, who refused twice (in July and December) to participate in US-led joint initiatives for peace.

Until late autumn, no progress was made toward a solution of the crisis in the desired direction. The *ManNichi* criticized both contenders for their lack of goodwill, insisting especially on Nanjing's obstinacy to use foreign policy as a tool for its domestic agenda, and reiterated the appeal for a peaceful settlement negotiated autonomously by the Northeast authorities.¹²⁵⁾ The newspaper also chastised the Fengtian regime for its inconsistency: after relinquishing control over foreign policy matters to avoid talks with Japan, it now wanted that power back to end the crisis with the Soviets.¹²⁶⁾ As the conflict dragged on, the editor briefly considered the possibility of Japanese mediation. Like Tekisen before him, he thought that Tokyo should take the initiative only as a last resort, in case China and the USSR proved unable to sort out the dispute by themselves.¹²⁷⁾

Lessons from the CER crisis

The turning point in the Sino-Soviet conflict was the limited yet powerful offensive that the Red Army carried out on 17–27 November into the western border region of Manchuria, between Manzhouli and Hailar. Accurately planned, the operation was a complete success on the ground. It also fully achieved its political objective, which was to force China to accept all demands for a return

with foreign capital, seemed to imply that Japan would gladly provide that help. Ed. "Tōhokushō no heisei tatenashi: gaishi ni yorazunba fukanō", 10.31.

125) Ed. "RoShi no kiki: kaihi shitsutsu sensō ni", 8.23; ed. "Kokusai gaikō no gōrika", 8.28; ed. "Shina gawa no jōho: tōmen no funkyū wa kaiketsu sen", 8.29; ed. "Sei o motte kōshō seyo: RoShi no Tōtetsu funkyū", 9.8; ed. "RoShi funsō no chōtei ikan", 9.15; ed. "Heiwa kiun ni gyakkō suna: kokumin seifu no kōmei o nozomu", 9.17; "Ikuzumareru Shina no naichi gaikō: Shū Kachō [Zhou Kechang] no Hōten haken wa sono isshōsa", 10.8; ed. "Tōhokushō no gaikōken", 10.16; ed. "RoShi funkyū o bōkyaku suru na: Tōhokushō wa jiyū shuwan o furui", 10.24; ed. "Kannenronteki Shina no genjitsu naiyō", 10.29.

126) Ed. "Tōhoku yonshō to gaikōken", 11.2. A report from Tokyo announced that on 11.3 Nanjing had finally accepted Fengtian's demand to conduct negotiations with the USSR, provided it did so in the name of the central government. "HōRo tandoku kōshō wa Hō-ha no jishuken yōnin: waga tai Man kōshō nimo eikyō", 11.6 evening, p. 1.

127) TH 71, "TōShi tetsudō (sono 4)", 7.26; ed. "RoShi funsō no chōtei ikan".

to the *status quo ante*. Zhang's regime independently negotiated a provisional agreement with the USSR, which Chiang Kai-shek then approved. A Fengtian official, invested with plenipotentiary powers from the central government, signed the final settlement in Khabarovsk on 22 December.¹²⁸⁾ This put an end to the armed conflict but did not solve the multiple issues that had provoked it. To the latter purpose, talks began in Moscow in October 1930, after much delay caused by second thoughts on Nanjing's part. The two parties had not yet reached an agreement in September 1931, when the Japanese army invaded Manchuria. To avoid conflict with the new masters of the region, the Soviet Union entered long negotiations with Japan for the sale of the CER to Manzhouguo, which was finally concluded in March 1935.¹²⁹⁾

With remarkable insight, in August 1929 Takayanagi had conjectured that, in case of a prolonged stalemate, the Soviets might attack using the tactical advantage of their position along the "outer line" of Manchuria.¹³⁰⁾ When that prediction turned true, news of the Soviet offensive started appearing in the *ManNichi* as reported from Harbin. Although information was scarce and sometimes inaccurate, by 27 November readers learned that the Chinese army had retreated past Hailar, and was having trouble setting up another line of defense.¹³¹⁾ Two days later, a telegram from Moscow (dated 27 November) announced that Zhang had accepted the Soviet conditions to negotiate a settlement, as a result of exchanges begun on the 19th of that month.¹³²⁾

The editor deplored the shameful conduct of the Chinese soldiers, who had

128) On the issue of Fengtian's diplomatic autonomy, see Tsuchida A., "1929 nen no ChūSo funsō to 'chihō gaikō'", *Tōkyō geijutsu daigaku kiyō: dai 3 bumon: shakai kagaku*, No. 48, Jan. 1997, pp. 173–207.

129) Lensen, *The Damned Inheritance*, pp. 125–171, 212–334.

130) TH 83, "Gaisen", 8.22.

131) "Shinagun mattaku sen'i naku zensen o hōki kōtai: Kōanrei [Xing'anling]-sen ni shūketsu konnan", 11.27, p. 2. The first report (dated 11.17) on the offensive was "Rōnō iyoiyo sekkyoku kōdō / Darainōru [Dalai Nur] o senryō ka: Mitsusan [Mishan] kenjō wa hōi saru", 11.19 evening, p. 1. Manzhouli fell to the Soviets after the Northeast forces had suffered a crushing defeat. The MN, however, reported from a Chinese source that the defenders had left the city for tactical reasons. "Rōnōgun no shūgeki o yosō shi Manshūri no Shina jinchi hōki: Jarainōru [Jalainur] yori Hairaru [Hailar] ni kōtai ka", 11.23 evening, p. 1.

132) "Shina gawa no daijōho ni yori RoShi kōshō kaishi ni kettei: Shina, Tōtetsu no genjō kaifuku o shōnin: kaigichi wa Habarofusuku [Khabarovsk] de shōgi", 11.29, p. 2.

fled from Hailar after looting the city “like wild beasts”. Fearing their arrival, civilians were hurrying to leave Harbin. Such was the sorry state of China: while calling for the abrogation of extraterritoriality, the government was not even able to protect its own citizens. It was unlikely, though, that the Soviets would advance further. As their aim had been only to gain a negotiating advantage through “intimidation”, they would halt military operations and use diplomacy.¹³³⁾ The editorial of 30 November further dwelled on the Chinese debacle as an outcome of Nanjing’s interference in previous negotiations between Fengtian and Soviet Russia. The author once again took the opportunity to address a favorite topic of his, that is the failure of the Nationalist attempt to build a centralized state:

China is still the old China [. . .] even if it mimics a modern state, [. . .] central authority has not been established. As there are rather strong reasons for the distribution of power among regional authorities, it should be known that the expectations of the Nanjing regime are just an empty dream.

On the other hand, the editor was not impressed by the performance of the Red Army. Internal conditions hardly made it possible for the USSR to wage war, therefore the offensive had been only a “momentary intimidation”. Soviet Russia did not have “much actual force”, but it had been enough to expose the “impotence” of China, whose soldiers only knew how to flee and loot.¹³⁴⁾

Indirectly, criticism of China’s frail polity and lack of security reinforced the argument for the maintenance of a Japanese military presence in South Manchuria, which the editor had put forward a few days earlier. It was evident that

the so-called sovereignty of China is a shadow-like presence; it does not rest on its own strength, but mainly depends on the benevolence of others.

With turmoil and banditry having become endemic south of the Great Wall, “there

133) Ed. “Shina no genjitsu bakuro: Hairaru [Hailar] kaisōhei”, 11.29. The same page featured a dreadful account of the violence committed by the fleeing soldiers, from unspecified sources: “Marudashi ni saretā Shinahei no yajūsei: Rōki shūgeki no hi Hairaru ni uzumaita ryōdatsu ya bōkō ya hōka”, 11.29, p. 3. American and British witnesses made similar descriptions, which the consular body in Harbin considered reliable. See Lensen, *The Damned Inheritance*, pp. 70–73.

134) Ed. “Inkan wa tōki ni arazu: genjitsu bakuro no Rōshi jikyoku ni miyo”, 11.30.

is no doubt that our Guandong Army is indispensable for order and peace in Manchuria”. It could be recalled that, at the time of the Northern Expedition, “China’s dangerousness” had obliged the government of Japan to issue a statement for the preservation of peace in Manchuria and to send troops to Shandong. Moreover, Japan was certainly not the only country to protect its nationals abroad by deploying troops: “Does not America station her military in Mexico, a country of disorder like China?”¹³⁵⁾

In December, the *ManNichi* followed the progress of Sino-Soviet negotiations with some concern, as it seemed unlikely that the two parties would be able to reach a definitive settlement of the dispute in a short time.¹³⁶⁾ At such a delicate moment, the US-led international call for peace in the name of the Kellogg-Briand Pact brought “unwelcome attention” that might hamper negotiations.¹³⁷⁾ This was, in substance, the same reason that Shidehara gave to turn down the US invitation to adhere to the initiative, even though he used a more diplomatic language.¹³⁸⁾ On the other hand, the editor was pleased about the restored autonomy of Fengtian diplomacy, which would ease the search for an agreement with Soviet Russia. The Nationalist government was now too busy to interfere again, owing to the resurgence of factional warfare in China. The attempt to impose central authority on the foreign policy of the Northeast had led to a complete loss of face for Nanjing, shaking its prestige “at the root”. The editor therefore admonished Nationalist leaders to stop seeking popular support by means of a hardline foreign policy.¹³⁹⁾ In his column, Tekisen commented on the Chinese defeat and consequent negotiations with the same arguments.¹⁴⁰⁾

135) Ed. “Nihon-gun to Manshū no chian iji”, 11.26.

136) Ed. “RoShi kōshō no kaiketsunan”, 12.3; ed. “RoShi kōshō: kantan ni kaiketsu shieru ya ina ya”, 12.12.

137) *Ibidem*. A report from Tokyo explained the content of the US appeal: “RoShi funsō no hei-wateki kyōtei seiritsu o netsubō su: Bei kokumu chōkan oboegaki naiyō”, 12.5 evening, p. 1.

138) “5 koku kyōdō heiwa kankoku: Beikoku no sankā shōyō o kyozetsu”, 12.4, p. 2; “Beikoku no chōtei wa muimi: HōRo chokusetsu kōshō shinten no sai”, 12.4, p. 2.

139) Ed. “HōRo kōshō to KokuHō no kankei”, 12.4. See also ed. “Chūgen no fūun to Hōten no tai Ro saku”, 12.7. On 11.9, Zhang Xueliang had announced to the Nanjing government that thereafter the Northeast would take charge of its own foreign relations. “Tōhoku yonshō no seiji gaikō wa kongo shōseifu nite shori: seihoku mondai ni taishite wa chūritsu taido: Chō Gakuryō-shi dentsū o hassu”, 11.9, p. 2.

140) TH 127–30, “RoShi shōtotsu (sono 1–4)”, 12.3, 12.5, 12.7, 12.10.

The Khabarovsk Protocol did not elicit an immediate response from the *ManNichi*, probably because everyone saw that document as a preliminary step to the Moscow conference. In January, however, the editor drew a general lesson from the recent conflict. China's failed attempt to seize the CER by illegal means had proven that "no matter how illogical some international relations might be, acting with brute force cannot lead to anything at all". Although the allegations of Red propaganda on the Soviets' part were probably true, using that pretext to deprive Russia of its rights had won China no sympathy from the great powers. The Nationalist government would do better to change its attitude:

He who is in a hurry arrives late. Can impatient behavior, like that of a spoiled child, be a shortcut for the abrogation of China's unequal treaties? That is highly doubtful. On China's part, they should put in their head the bitter experience of the Eastern Chinese Railway problem.¹⁴¹⁾

Clearly, for the *ManNichi* discussing the CER crisis was primarily a way to address issues in Sino-Japanese relations. Mention of the Soviet motives and actions in opinion pieces was much less frequent, and mostly functional to explaining the Chinese position in the dispute. The disparity in interest for either country becomes even more marked if we consider editorials that did not deal directly with the CER. While China was constantly under scrutiny, the USSR rarely got any attention. When it did, the topic was not its relations with Japan.¹⁴²⁾

The only reason for concern with regard to the Soviets seemed to be the subversive activities which the Comintern sponsored in China and Japan. Although the Chinese communists had lost most of their power after being purged from the Nationalist Party, it seemed that they could still cause trouble, not least by exploiting the CER conflict.¹⁴³⁾ The editor's advice to Fengtian authorities for countering Red propaganda, however, was to improve the living conditions of the people rather than insist on repression.¹⁴⁴⁾ Similarly, the recommendation to

141) Ed. "Tōshi tetsudō mondai no kyōkun", 1930.1.8.

142) Ed. "Rokoku no sangyōsaku", 7.7; ed. "EiRo no shin sesshō", 7.17.

143) Ed. "Shina jishin no sekika o fusege", 8.1; ed. "Chūgoku kyōsantō no kimagure: shisō yūgi toshite no kannenron", 8.6; Ransui-sei, "HanShō fūchō to Shina kakumei no shōryū (6)", 10.21, p. 2.

144) Ed. "Mizu wa afureru", 7.10.

Japan's government was to "pursue the growth of healthy thought by putting the utmost effort in the thorough implementation of social policy, while restraining the selfishness of the bourgeois class."¹⁴⁵⁾ While this might have been an endorsement of the Hamaguchi cabinet's agenda on welfare and thrift, it sounds more like an anticipation of policies sponsored by the army and reformist bureaucrats in the 1930s. In any case, no attempt was made to stir public alarm about a Soviet military buildup.

Regional autonomy in a divided China

Political instability, insecurity, and the lack of a modern legal system in China were the major problems that the *ManNichi* had been pointing out for years to justify Japan's opposition to a rapid abrogation of the unequal treaties. The resurgence of civil warfare in the late summer of 1929 provided commentators with further evidence to reiterate that stance, and at the same time to speak in support of regional autonomy for the Northeast. Their thesis was that the Nationalist government lacked both the authority and means to run the whole country. Attempts to enforce a centralization of power, it seemed, would not only arouse domestic unrest, but also invite international conflict, as in the case of the CER crisis.

Even before the start of military disturbances, editorials were drawing a desolate picture of the Republic. The fighting among warlords may have been over, but what about the brigands, communists, radical students, and anti-Japanese organizations? What about the local military cliques, which instead of protecting the people were exercising full powers over "life and death, giving and taking away" as under martial law? Despite such conditions, the Chinese were so carried away by "empty ideas and empty arguments" to fret for the abolition of extraterritoriality. They should better think it over and reform their country first.¹⁴⁶⁾ The author here referred to the negative answer that the great powers were about to notify to the Nationalist government concerning the latter's

145) Ed. "Waga taigaiteki nanbutsu no kōitai", 11.9. On preemptive education, see also ed. "Manshū kyōsantō jiken ni tsuite", 8.21.

146) Ed. "Shina no genjitsu ni kaerimiyo: chigai hōken teppai wa shōsō", 8.13.

demand to place foreigners under Chinese jurisdiction from the start of 1930.¹⁴⁷⁾ The powers' rejection of that request was obvious to the editor, since China's judiciary system was still primitive and corrupt. Overall, "state building in China is all but formal; in reality, there is nothing to be seen".¹⁴⁸⁾ Although Chiang Kai-shek's government in Nanjing posed as a national authority, it could rely only on the fiscal revenues of Zhejiang and "three or four nearby provinces".¹⁴⁹⁾

While complaining about the backwardness of China, the *ManNichi* cautioned its leaders to proceed on the path of reform without haste. Chiang's attempt to centralize power in a short time was bound to bring opposite results: "by provoking clashes of interests and inducing opposition from the country, won't it rather cause a turnaround of China's political situation?" The editor argued in particular that the tension between Nanjing and Fengtian following the CER crisis might lead the latter clique to a rapprochement with those of Yan Xishan and Feng Yuxiang in the North, which were already plotting against Chiang.¹⁵⁰⁾ In September, the rebellion of general Zhang Fakui in Hubei seemed to corroborate the prediction that attempts to "forcibly build a modern state" could only bring about "the continuation of the annual event of internecine disorder and strife". Resistance to change did not stem merely from the selfish attitude of factional leaders, who acted "only out of calculation" and sought to obtain power by any means necessary.¹⁵¹⁾ At the root, there was a 5,000-year-old history of local self-government. It was just unreasonable to expect that the Han people would accept a different system overnight.¹⁵²⁾ In other words,

China is muddy like the Yellow River: it cannot absolutely renovate herself into a modern state in five or ten years. It must be said that strife among the military cliques, old and new, is the ordinary condition [there]. Of course, today's military cliques differ greatly in appearance from the old ones.

147) The decision was announced informally on 8.10. "Hōken teppai wa shōsō: kakkoku betsun dōji ni kaitō su: rokkakoku no iken itchi", 8.12 evening, p. 1.

148) Ed. "Shina no chigai hōken teppai shōsō", 8.15.

149) Ed. "Miseihin Shina: jijitsu wa ikan tomo subekarazu", 8.27.

150) Ed. "Shina seikyoku no hōkō tenkan ka. Hōten seiken to Nankin seiken no hanpatsu", 8.18. The same thesis is in TH 90, "Shō Kaiseki", 9.6.

151) Ed. "HanShō renmei to Shina no genjitsu", 9.10.

152) Ed. "Kakumei riron no rittaikan", 9.19.

However, is it not true that their content and substance has not changed in the least from that of the old-style military cliques?¹⁵³⁾

For these reasons, in late September the editor's advice to Chiang was to exert self-restraint, and not misuse foreign policy as a tool for his domestic ambitions. At that time, the loose factional "league" pitted against the supreme leader did not seem strong enough yet to topple the central government.¹⁵⁴⁾

Although the Hubei uprising was short-lived, mounting tension within the Nationalist Party led the *ManNichi* to observe that "while Chiang's faction has Nanjing as its base, the anti-Chiang league is expanding countrywide".¹⁵⁵⁾ In October, this opposition materialized with special intensity in Henan, where military commanders associated with Feng staged a large rebellion. The editor noted sarcastically that it was autumn, the season of "China's annual event" of fighting between cliques. Such recurrent outbursts of warfare on the other side of the Great Wall were an extreme nuisance to the Fengtian regime, "which is acquiring a little stability", as well as to neighboring Japan.¹⁵⁶⁾ All things considered, a commentator pointed out, Chiang Kai-shek looked like an emperor but his true nature was just that of a leader of "a semi-feudal military clique". The only difference compared to other similar factions was the support Chiang had obtained from "China's capitalist class", which was "the fundamental force" of the Nationalist Revolution.¹⁵⁷⁾ The regional cliques could not shake Chiang's legitimacy as a ruler, as long as he remained loyal to the capitalists. At present, however, he was facing serious danger.¹⁵⁸⁾ Another writer predicted that Nanjing would give back to the Northeast its autonomy in foreign relations, in exchange for support against domestic rivals. The fate of the government seemed to depend on the coming battle in Henan, which might also determine Fengtian's choice of which side to take.¹⁵⁹⁾ To the editor, Yan Xishan might still be able to act as a

153) Ed. "Nenchū gyōji no gunbatsu kōsō ni: Shina mata jōtai no nairan ka", 9.29.

154) Ed. "HanShō renmei no ugoki: Tōkoku no kiso o ayauku suru", 9.25.

155) Ed. "Shina no kakumei to nōmin no genjō", 10.11.

156) Ed. "HanShō kisei no ugoki: zenkokutekini, katsu nōkō ni biman", 10.13.

157) Ransui-sei, "HanShō fūchō to Shina kakumei no shōryū (6)", 10.21, p. 2. A similar opinion is in ed. "Hokō [Pukou] heihen to guntai no soshitsu: ichijiteki ni genshō ni arazu".

158) Ransui-sei, "HanShō fūchō to Shina kakumei no shōryū (7)", 10.21, p. 2.

159) "Shina wa ikani ugoku: tenka bunmoku no kiro ni tatsu", 10.26, p. 2.

balancing force between Chiang and Feng. If he succeeded, the Northeast would be sheltered from instability. It would mean “unity and peace for Northern China” under Yan as the “leader of a league”.¹⁶⁰⁾

From the above it is evident that the *ManNichi* was hardly sympathetic to the cause of Chinese unification under the Nanjing government, and that such an attitude emerged more clearly as Chiang’s chances to score a neat victory grew uncertain. In November, Takayanagi went a step further in the analysis of the situation, making a proposal for a federal state. He set out from the assumption that “Chiang Kai-shek has already turned into a military clique centered on Jiangsu and Zhejiang”. If Chiang lost the battle in Hebei, China would slip back into disorder; if he won, internal strife would continue for quite some time anyway, because a single victory could not be decisive.¹⁶¹⁾ Although Chiang had the merit of having broken ties between the Nationalist Party and the communists, from Russia he had retained “one-party despotism” as his form of government. For that reason, his opponents were calling for the convocation of a national assembly and the formation of a representative government. The goal of Japan’s diplomacy, then, should be the achievement of such “politics of the whole people” in China.¹⁶²⁾

For the Eastern Four Provinces, which held “the key to a politics of the whole people”, it was time to make a clear decision: if they still wished to cooperate with Nanjing, they should set the end of party despotism a condition. Otherwise, they should break off and “stand on the anti-Chiang side”.¹⁶³⁾ Considered the vastness of China, its history, and its ethnic diversity, the principle to be adopted through a national assembly should be the “self-government of federated provinces” (*renshō jichi*).¹⁶⁴⁾ This thesis had circulated widely in the Republic before the establishment of the Nationalist government, especially among politicians and intellectuals in the North. By reviving the concept, Takayanagi was giving

160) Ed. “Shin dōran no kagi o nigiru En Hyakusen [Yan Baichuan]”, 11.8.

161) TH 118, “Jōyaku kaitei (sono 1)”, 11.12. As the editor later put it, factional leaders were too shrewd to engage in a decisive battle, like Sekigahara or Dan no ura. Ed. “Shina gunbatsu kōsō no eizokusei”, 11.23.

162) TH 119, “Jōyaku kaitei (sono 2)”, 11.14.

163) TH 120, “Jōyaku kaitei (sono 3)”, 11.16.

164) TH 121, “Jōyaku kaitei (sono 4)”, 11.19. The same proposal reappears in TH 130 “RoShi shōtotsu (sono 4)”, 12.10.

legitimacy to the rebels. Moreover, his direct appeal to the Fengtian regime sounded as an encouragement to join the league against Nanjing.

Takayanagi's proposal became a recurrent feature of editorials in December. In those weeks, despite the rebels' defeat in Henan, armed opposition to the central government did not subside. The *ManNichi* observed that Chiang, so far, had prevailed thanks to a combination of talent, fortune, and money. These, however, were relative factors that might not work to his advantage in the future.¹⁶⁵⁾ By 8 December, following a statement of independence by prominent generals, the editor felt confident enough to announce that "the downfall of Mr Chiang Kai-shek nowadays has become an incontrovertible reality". He worried, though, that anarchy might follow. After all, "any bad government is better than no government". Hopefully, the Nanjing government would remain in place under someone like Yan or Wang Jingwei, while regional leaders would ensure order in the various provinces:

In China, at the present cultural level, a unified state or centralization is impossible in practice. Is a standoff among the military cliques, of the sort ensured by the self-government of federated provinces, not unavoidable (although self-government means the despotic maintenance of order by the local military cliques)?¹⁶⁶⁾

Differently from Tekisen, the writer made no pretense to portray Chiang's removal from power as a way to achieve the "politics of the whole people". In his opinion, since "a renovation of the national character" in China would take centuries, for the moment a system that guaranteed internal order would be enough.¹⁶⁷⁾ The author seemed oblivious to the view, previously expounded in many articles, that the military cliques were a constant source of disorder and oppression for the people.

Despite repeated challenges, Chiang held on to power. The *ManNichi* adjusted

165) Ed. "Shina mata ōni midaren ka", 12.6.

166) Ed. "Shō-shi botsurakugo no Shina seikyoku", 12.8.

167) Ed. "Nani mono omo shōrai senu gisei: kakumei Shina no kōsō", 12.11. The argument that centralized government in China was impossible to maintain over a long period of time was then presented in a historical perspective in ed. "Gunbatsu kōsō no gōka", 12.17.

its tone to the situation without any apparent effort. Certainly, Chiang tended to act in a despotic manner. However, that was the only way possible for anyone seeking to unify China. It was said that only decentralization could bring stability. “However, the self-government of federated provinces is a resurrection of feudal politics, it is a revival of the military cliques”. The new China should instead follow the ideals of Sun Wen, pursue mutual understanding within the party-state, and eradicate the military cliques. “Chairman Chiang” and other important personalities in the Nationalist government should reflect on that agenda, which also required a correction of their foreign policy.¹⁶⁸⁾

Conclusion

The research presented in this article confirms that the *ManNichi* was a staunch advocate of Japan’s interests in Manchuria. Besides calling for the maintenance of established rights, the newspaper envisaged a greater role for national enterprises in the region, which it considered a key supplier of foodstuff and raw materials to Japan. The findings also substantiate previous studies that noted how the *ManNichi* feared the spread of Nationalist influence in Manchuria, precisely because such a process appeared detrimental to Japanese interests. In the period examined, editors and other writers systematically built a case for the autonomy of the Northeast from the new central government in Nanjing. Their assumption was that Japan would work out local problems more easily by dealing with Zhang Xueliang’s regime, without interference from outside the region. To buttress their arguments, writers drew evidence from both China’s domestic affairs and its international relations.

168) Regarding the latter aspect, in addition to the usual issue of extraterritoriality the author mentioned China’s refusal to accept the minister plenipotentiary designated by Japan in substitution of Saburi. The latter had committed suicide in suspicious circumstances at the end of November. Ed. “Kokumin seifu no kaerimiru toki”, 12.20. The editorial commenting on Saburi’s sudden death had as its main argument the continuity of Japan’s China policy under any administration. Ed. “Chū Shi kōshi no shi: waga tai Shi seisaku ni hen’eki nashi”, 12.1. The editorial protesting against the Chinese rejection of the designated minister still called the Nationalist government “a local military clique that has grown some hair”. Ed. “Nisshi kokkōjō no itazura”, 12.18.

On the one hand, they claimed that the resurgence of factional warfare south of the Great Wall proved the futility of attempts to centralize power in the Republic. To discredit Chiang Kai-shek, commentators portrayed his government as basically similar to any other military clique. As the rebellion grew larger, they openly favored a regime change. Their recommended solution to political instability was a loose federation of regional blocs. When Chiang proved more resilient than expected, however, the editor switched nonchalantly to a more moderate suggestion for reform under the existing government. Throughout the period, emphasis on Chinese disunity was instrumental to justifying the postponement of negotiations on the unequal treaties. At the same time, the *ManNichi* took the Sino-Soviet conflict over the CER as a case in point to demonstrate that no good could come to China from pursuing the recovery of national interests by aggressive means. The message sent to Fengtian authorities was that, for their own good, they should take back control of foreign relations and exercise moderation. Nanjing, which the newspaper blamed for the outbreak of the crisis and its escalation, received an admonition not to meddle with the Northeast again.

No sufficient evidence has instead been found to support the thesis that the *ManNichi* aimed to prepare Japanese public opinion for a military solution to the Manchurian question. While backing the autonomy of the Northeast within China, the newspaper never put forward arguments that might legitimize a complete secession of the region from the rest of the country. Nor did it cast the Fengtian regime in such a negative light as to make its overthrow seem beneficial to Japan. The Sino-Soviet conflict might have offered an opportunity to argue in favor of stern diplomatic intervention, or even the use of force in Manchuria. Indeed, at the onset of the crisis, editorials hinted at the Japanese readiness to use “adequate means” and take “appropriate measures” in case of need. Thereafter, however, the *ManNichi* encouraged direct negotiations between the USSR and Fengtian, with Japan only playing the role of a vigilant observer. It is impossible to say whether the decision not to invoke more active involvement depended on the managerial reshuffle carried out after the resignation of the Tanaka cabinet. In any case, the newspaper did not incite intervention by exploiting concerns that the Chinese seizure of the CER might set a precedent for similar action against the Mantetsu.

Moreover, the Soviet response to the Chinese coup did not ignite alarm over

the reemergence of Russian military power. Commentators showed little interest for border clashes. They described the November offensive as a limited scale operation by a rather weak country, which only aimed to press an even weaker China for a return to the *status quo ante*. The Chinese debacle, seen as the outcome of extremely poor discipline among soldiers, was not an eye opener about the military buildup of the USSR. Consequently, no argument was made for a pre-emptive strike against the spread of Soviet influence in South Manchuria. The only apparent problem with the USSR was communist propaganda, to which the recommended countermeasure was social policy rather than outward action.

Notwithstanding its cold reception of Shidehara, the *ManNichi* did not find much reason to criticize the minister. The newspaper only asked for an explicit commitment to the defense of Japanese interests in Manchuria, which was lacking in the foreign policy program of the Hamaguchi cabinet. Aside from that, Shidehara's ostensible behavior did not run against commentators' advice. Japan joined the other powers in rejecting the Nationalist demand for abolition of extraterritoriality within the year. Neutrality in the Sino-Soviet conflict and the minister's stance against multilateral negotiations were also in tune with policy recommendations from the newspaper. The main difference between the latter and Japan's actual diplomacy was that the *ManNichi* wanted Nanjing to accept the autonomy of the Northeast early on during the CER crisis, while Shidehara shifted to that position in October. However, as the minister did not disclose to the press his opinion on Fengtian's role in the Sino-Soviet negotiations, journalists did not have any evidence to comment on the matter.

The above analysis indicates that it is necessary for scholars to reconsider the role of the *ManNichi* in the formation of public discourse. In the period surveyed, the newspaper was not the harbinger of an aggressive continental policy, but rather a conservative promoter of the status quo. The assumption that the editorial line reflected the political color of Japan's government holds only partially. Opinions published in July show the lingering influence of the Seiyūkai in the interval between cabinet change and replacements at the head of both the *ManNichi* and Mantetsu. The situation that followed, though, was peculiar. In several respects, the new management represented continuity with the preceding administration. The editorial line remained supportive of the "active policy" of the Tanaka cabinet for the development of Manchuria as an autonomous region. The

ManNichi was able to keep that position without antagonizing the Minseitō government, which had not taken a strong public stance on the issue. Notwithstanding Takayanagi's ties with the Guandong Army, there is no decisive evidence to consider him an agent of the military within the newspaper. If that hypothesis were true, however, it would show that at the time hardline officers had not yet planned any propaganda in support of an invasion of the Northeast.

The agenda for further research is to survey how the *ManNichi* developed its narrative on Manchuria from 1930 to mid-1931, amid growing difficulties for Shidehara diplomacy. The argument for regional autonomy under Zhang's regime rested on the premise that the latter would cooperate with Japan and keep its distance from Nanjing. Both expectations, however, were disappointed in that period. Shidehara's effort to strike a deal on the railway issue through direct negotiations with Fengtian bore no fruit. Moreover, in September 1930 Zhang Xueliang abandoned neutrality in the Central Plains War to side with Chiang Kai-shek. The intervention of the Northeast Army was a major blow to the anti-Chiang coalition, which disbanded in early November. The resulting consolidation of the Nanjing government and the strengthening of its ties with Fengtian made it unfeasible for Japan to pursue the "local" settlement of issues in Manchuria any further. Did the *ManNichi* respond to those developments by accepting the prospect of a unified China? Or did it rather start calling, openly or indirectly, for a drastic solution to the Manchurian question? In the latter case, the personnel changes implemented in February 1931 may have been a reaction on the part of political overseers to an unacceptable divergence between the editorial line and the cabinet's policy. It is also unclear whether the reshuffle produced a deviation from the opinions published in the preceding months. Future research should address these questions in order to clarify the direction of discourse in the crucial years leading up to the Manchurian Incident.

Table 1. Main events affecting Sino-Japanese relations in the second half of 1929

	Japan-China relations	Sino-Soviet conflict and international diplomacy	Civil strife in China
July	2. Hamaguchi cabinet is formed 9. Cabinet's statement on China policy 9. Nanjing informs Japan of having assumed control of foreign relations for the Northeast	8–10. Zhang Xueliang meets Chiang Kai-shek in Beijing 10–11. Northeast authorities seize the CER 13. Soviet ultimatum to China (return to status quo ante) 17. USSR breaks off relations with China 18. Start of border skirmishes 19. Shidehara receives separately Soviet ambassador and China's minister to Japan 22–. China-USSR negotiations through Northeast authorities (–8.4)	
Aug.	Saburi Sadao designated minister to China (10.27 official appointment)	6–. USSR forms a Special Far Eastern Army 6. USSR refuses to negotiate with Nanjing's envoy in Manzhouli 17. Red Army attacks Manzhouli and Chalaïnor 28–. China-USSR negotiations through Germany (–November)	28. Attempt on Chiang's life in Nanjing
Sep.	5. Nanjing's envoy Zhang Ji meets Shidehara in Tokyo	1–. China seeks support from the League of Nations 7. Red Army attacks Manzhouli	18–. Rebellion of Zhang Fakui in Hubei (–early October) 27. Declaration of Wang Jingwei's faction against Chiang Kai-shek
Oct.	In China, Saburi holds preliminary talks on treaty revision	12–13. Chinese defeat in battle at Lahasusu on the Sungari river 24. Shidehara advises China to let Fengtian negotiate with USSR	10–. Rebellion of the Northwest Army in Henan (–early December)
Nov.	4–6. Debate on Manchuria at the IPR conference in Kyoto 29. Saburi found dead in Hakone	17–. Main offensive of the Red Army into North Manchuria 20. Red Army captures Manzhouli and Chalaïnor; Zhang Xueliang sues for peace 26. Fengtian acknowledges the 7.13 demands as basis for negotiations	
Dec.	China refuses to accept Obata Yukichi as successor to Saburi	3. Fengtian-USSR provisional agreement signed in Nikol'sk Ussurijsk 3. US-led advice for peace to China and USSR 13. Start of negotiations in Khabarovsk 22. China and USSR sign the Khabarovsk Protocol; status quo ante restored	3–. Rebellion of Shi Yousan in Anhui 6–. Rebellion of Tang Shengzhi and others in Henan

Table 2. Official appointments and *ManNichii* presidents

Year	Cabinet	Guandong governor	Mantetsu president	Mantetsu vice president	<i>ManNichii</i> president
1919	(1918.9.29-) Hara Takashi (S)	4.12 Hayashi Gonsuke	4.12 Nomura Tatsutarō	4.12 Nakanishi Seichi [S]	4. Murano Tsuneimon (S)
1920	"	5.24 Yamagata Isaburō	"	"	"
1921	"	"	5.31 Hayakawa Senkichirō (died in office 1922.10)	5.31 Matsumoto Joji	"
1922	11.13 Takahashi Korekiyo (S)	"	"	"	"
1922	6.12 Katō Tomosaburō [S]	9.8 Ijūin Hikokichi	10.24 Kawamura Takeji (S)	—	"
1923	9.2 Yamamoto Gonbei 2 (n)	9.26 Kodama Hideo	"	—	12. Koyamauchi Dairoku (S)
1924	1.7 Kiyoura Keigo (n)	"	"	—	"
1924	6.11 Katō Takaaki 1 (K+S)	"	6.22 Yasuhiro Ban'ichirō	11.11 Ōhira Komatsuchi	"
1925	8.2 Katō Takaaki 2 (K)	"	"	"	"
1926	1.30 Wakatsuki Reijirō 1 (K)	"	"	"	"
1927	4.20 Tanaka Giichi (S)	12.17 Kinoshita Kenjiro [S]	7.19 Yamamoto Jotarō (S)	7.19 Matsuoka Yosuke	9. Yamazaki Takeshi (S)
1928	"	"	"	"	"
1929	7.2 Hamaguchi Osachi (M)	8.7 Ōta Masahiro [M]	8.14 Sengoku Mitsugu (M)	8.17 Ōhira Komatsuchi	7.24 Takayanagi Yasutarō
1930	"	"	"	"	"
1931	4.14 Wakatsuki Reijirō 2 (M) 12.13 Inukai Tsuyoshi (S)	1.16 Tsukamoto Seiji [M] (-1932.1.11)	6.13 Uchida Kōsai (-1932.7.6)	6.13 Eguchi Teijō (-1932.4.7)	2.21 Matsuyama Chūjiro (-1934.2.21)

K: Kenseikai M: Minseitō S: Seiyūkai n: non-party cabinet In square brackets: external support for the cabinet or informal party affiliation
 Sources: (a) for Guandong territory and Mantetsu: Hata, Senzenki kanyōsei kenkyūkai, *Senzenki Nihon kanyōsei* . . . , pp. 401, 413; (b) for the *ManNichii*: Ri, *Manshū ni okeru* . . . , p. 105; Rong, *Soshakuchi Dairen ni okeru* . . . , p. 27–29, 37, 59, 203; “Manshū Nippō-sha shachō kōtetsu”, MN, 1929.7.25 (2nd ed.), p. 2.