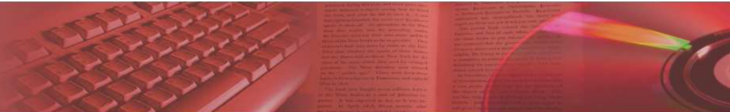

Yamamuro Shin'ichi. *Manchuria under Japanese Dominion.* Fogel. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006. viii + 335 pp. $59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8122-3912-6.

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Tragedy, Farce, and Ruin in Northeast Asia

John Stephan once suggested that the embrace of fascism by some in the White Russian community in Harbin constituted an example of "tragedy and farce in exile."[1] Fifteen years later, Yamamuro Shin'ichi invoked Karl Marx's wry observation to recount the contemporary efforts of Puyi, the exiled "Last Emperor" of China, in his attempt to establish some kind of authority (p. 166). Of course, neither Puyi, as the Kangde Emperor, nor would-be Russian fascists had any real chance of gaining power through such desperate measures, but that did not stop them from dreaming. Indeed, prewar Northeast Asian realities appear to have inspired a variety of desperate imaginings, most leading to ruin.

Dreams, realities, and their consequences are the subject of many historical studies, but Yamamuro's deals with some that refuses to go away. The legacies of the puppet state of Manzhouguo (Manchukuo) continue to stalk Sino-Japanese relations and identities, and Yamamuro's study is currently the most insightful study of it. Those who cannot read Japanese should be very glad of its availability in English translation. (It may also be available now in Korean.) While not a political history outlining Manzhouguo's rise and fall, it demonstrates the polity's flawed nature through a provocative exploration of the dreams, realities, and the consequences of some of the key actions involved in Manzhouguo's creation.

First published in 1993, Yamamuro's work received the Yoshino Sakuzô Prize.[2] As his work sparked debate, he eventually responded to his critics as well as to those seeking more of his thoughts in a 2002 interview with the journal *Kan* and in an afterward to a 2004 republication of the work. Both of these responses are included in this translation, as is a five-page chronology outlining a century of relevant events that appeared in 2002. Joshua Fogel, the translator and editor of this work, is to be applauded for not only an excellent translation, but also for bringing together these various pieces into a single work, albeit without the photographs or maps in the original.

The strength of the original work lies in Yamamuro's cogent analysis of the idealism apparent in Manzhouguo, an idealism that many postwar Japanese insisted was genuine. Dissatisfied with these kinds of justifications, however, Yamamuro dispassionately set about demolishing them. His study illuminates not only some of the contradictions inherent in the enterprise–something that smacked of an "extraordinary artificiality"[3]–but he also shows how Manzhouguo's ideals resulted in pain and distress for the various peoples of Manchuria. As such, the study debunks one of the central postwar myths regarding prewar Japanese activities on the Asian mainland–that Japanese goals of "liberation" were enlightened, if not noble. Yet it also corrects another common view, that the Manchurian Incident (beginning September 18, 1931 with the Liutiaohu, or Mukden, Incident) was simply a land grab. Popular Japanese support for Manzhouguo was likely due to what many thought were positive rationales, even if Manzhouguo's realities differed tremendously, if not entirely, from those idealistic goals.[4]

Yamamuro begins by acknowledging some of Manzhouguo's horrors, and that the "scars" of that experience remain present among not only Japanese but among Chinese and Koreans as well. Indeed, given the mass murder and "human furnaces," Yamamuro goes so far as to suggest that Manzhouguo could be called "an Auschwitz state or a concentration-camp state, more than just a puppet state" (p. 4). Yamamuro then suggests that while prominent Japanese published positive postwar descriptions of Manzhouguo, perhaps acting out of "psychological compensation," the majority of Japanese who were present know better (pp. 5-6).

Yamamuro's argument proceeds with a brief but useful contextualization of Japanese initiatives in the 1930s through an overview of northeast Asian realities in the 1920s. A genuine sense of crisis encouraged radical thought among the Japanese residents of Manchuria, for they recognized that the Japanese sphere of influence

there was increasingly less tenable. Japanese ideologues, however, were incapable of effecting change on their own. For that they needed clout, and, fortunately for them, ambitious Japanese military officers in Manchuria, similarly unhappy with contemporary trends, were willing to listen. Indeed, if they were ever to create an independent Manchuria on their own, these officers would need allies capable of addressing some of Manchuria's touchy political realities.

The result was a marriage of convenience of sorts between civilian ideologues from groups like the Manchurian Youth League and the Majestic Peak Society on the one hand and the semi-autonomous Japanese Guandong Army (also known as the Kwantung Army or Kantôgun) on the other. This alliance, however, was destined to collapse, for most in the military held goals for Manchuria that differed fundamentally from those of Japanese settlers. That said, the rhetoric that emerged in the early years of the Manchurian Incident gathered a momentum of sorts, for even after the falling out between the civilian ideologues and the military, Guandong Army officers and their new allies–high-level bureaucrats from Tokyo–maintained the idealistic rhetoric. In part this was because the vagueness inherent in concepts like the "kingly way" enabled multiple definitions, but it was also a product of the times. The chaos of the era inspired a variety of efforts to overcome it, and the new Japanese leadership apparently evinced little compunction when it came to employing empty rhetoric.

Given these realities, it was impossible for there not to be a discrepancy between rhetoric and reality in Manzhouguo, something that became manifest in multiple ways. Not only does Yamamuro note the evolving positions of key figures like Ishiwara Kanji–from military plotter to romantic ideologue to Manzhouguo critic–he also analyzes the contradictions apparent in Manzhouguo's organizational structure. For example, despite official denunciation of the Republic of China as a dictatorship, Manzhouguo was itself organized as a dictatorship. Alternatively, despite Manzhouguo's rhetoric for ethnic harmony, Japanese officials tended to use Manzhouguo to their own advantage, in effect becoming "legal bandits" (p. 180). Thus, instead of "liberating" Manchuria from European colonial practices, Japanese control over Manzhouguo was ultimately no different.

Another of this study's strengths involves how it speaks to Japanese today. In addition to reminding readers of Manzhouguo's grisly realities, Yamamuro observes its continuing legacies, such as how experiences of Manzhouguo helped shape postwar governments in Japan, China, and Korea. Moreover, in pointing out just how badly Japanese idealism failed Manchuria's various residents, Yamamuro suggests that twentieth-century Japanese appear to have developed a habit of "deceiving" themselves when it comes to analyzing broader Asian history–too often have non-Japanese been ignored (p. 215). Nor is postwar Japanese society the only target of his asides. For example, in addition to observing that Manzhouguo's paternalism towards Chinese was reminiscent of attitudes among American Occupation authorities towards postwar Japanese (pp. 72-3), Yamamuro observes that Manzhouguo's espousal of pacifism in order to allow another country to behave militaristically was similar to postwar Japan's international stance (p 58).

Yamamuro's analysis includes biographical material. His discussion of Puyi reveals a man trapped fatally between ambition and reality. Although Puyi benefited from a supporting entourage, Yamamuro reports that not only did the Guandong Army have other options to Puyi, but there were Japanese who resisted adopting Puyi as "chief executive." His eventual promotion to "emperor" in 1934 occurred only after the initial marriage of convenience was over, and the authority of the Japanese military had become paramount. This meant that Puyi was by then no threat, requiring that he find other means of asserting himself, such as choosing to worship Amaterasu (p. 164). Unable to establish any authority, however, he apparently spent his time "shouting, fortune-telling, taking medicines, and being afraid" (p. 166).

Yamamuro's work is certainly scholarly. His work references prominent European philosophers and resorts to classical metaphors. Most notably, Yamamuro, a professor of modern Japanese political thought, likens Manzhouguo to the mythical chimera. Just as Thomas Hobbes used the Leviathan from the Book of Job to symbolize the state and Franz Neumann used the Behemouth to represent the Nazis, Yamamuro suggests that Manzhouguo is represented well by the chimera: the lion's head represented the Guandong Army, the sheep's the emperor system, and the dragon's the Chinese emperor and modern China.

Despite this praise, there remain some questions to be answered. For example, Yamamuro does not explore exactly how the Guandong Army was able to act so autonomously. While the usual answer provided by historians is that the Meiji Constitution allowed multiple sources of authority, according to that document there was only a single chain of command within the army. Yet the Guandong Army acted not only independently of Tokyo, but also of "Army Central" (the translator's term

for *rikugun chûô*), compelling the Army to reassert control over the Guandong Army in the fall of 1932. Yamamuro acknowledges that there were some military officers interested in reforming Japan itself (pp. 141-2), but does not pursue that angle very deeply in the original text, nor in the later appendices (cf., pp. 230-232, 264-266).

Of course, asking Yamamuro to explore aspects of Japan's internal crisis is akin to asking him to write a different book. Japanese domestic troubles, however, were never far from Manzhouguo's particular forms, and the study may have benefited from a closer linking of the two. Manzhouguo was dreamed of as revolutionary, and not only for Manchuria. Its ruin dashed the dreams of more than the Japanese in Manchuria.

Manchuria under Japanese Dominion is an important book, revealing some of the internal debate regarding Japan's prewar and wartime past.[5] The author acknowledges Japanese idealism in a manner that indicates its human costs, and makes his points with contemporary relevance. Perhaps Yamamuro's most pointed contemporary observation emerges in the 2002 interview. While Japanese prime ministers in the early postwar era all had experience in China and understood local conditions to some extent, later Japanese policy towards Asia "became thoroughly clumsy and unskilled." Singling out in particular the era from Hosokawa to Koizumi, Yamamuro encourages young Japanese interested in entering politics to "spend two or three years wandering about various sites in Asia" (p. 240). Sage advice perhaps, for would-be national leaders anywhere.

Notes

[1]. John J. Stephan, *The Russian Fascists: Tragedy and Farce in Exile, 1925-1945* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

[2]. Originally published as Yamamuro Shin'ichi, *Kimera: Manshûkoku no shôzô* [Chimera: A Portrait of Manzhouguo] (Tokyo: Chûô kô ronsha, 1993). First awarded in 1966, Chûô Kôron's Yoshino Sakuzô Prize (Yoshino Sakuzô Shô) honors Japanese works on political theory in memory of the theorist Yoshino Sakuzô (1878-1933). The award, however, is somewhat ironic. Like the creators of Manchukuo, Yoshino sought to reconcile popular democratic initiatives with an imperial system; his concept of "people-as-base-ism" (*minponshugi*) argued for a democracy assuming imperial rather than popular sovereignty. For a short time, moreover, Yoshino too lived in China serving an assumedly progressive role, as a tutor to the son of Yuan Shikai.

[3]. A study defining Manchuria from geographic and ethnological perspectives is Juha Janhunen, *Manchuria: An Ethnic History* (Helsinki: The Finno-Ugrian Society, 1996).

[4]. On prewar Japanese support for the creation of Manzhouguo, see Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Bill Sewell, "Reconsidering the Modern in Japanese History: Modernity in the Service of the Prewar Japanese Empire," *Japan Review* 16 (2004): 213-58. Of related interest is Barak Kushner, *The Thought War: Japanese Imperial Propaganda* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006). Kushner shows well how Japanese propaganda, both public and private, included goals that resonated well with Japanese, precisely because such visions were thought to be progressive.

[5]. For those interested in more Japanese views, the journal *Kan* published a variety of articles concerning Manchuria as a single book: Nakami Tatsuo et al., *Manshû to ha nan datta no ka* [What Was Manchuria?] (Tokyo: Fujiwara shoten, 2004).

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