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## Of Consuls and Colonels

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No single institution created Japan's prewar empire. Indeed, like Japan's revived imperial state itself, the empire was the product of divergent, often antagonistic factions, each with its own prescription for Japanese prosperity and stability, and each forming loose alliances with other factions as they best saw fit. Perhaps nowhere was this multiple and contentious approach to empire-building more apparent than in China (including Manchuria), and perhaps nowhere in recent work has the internal strife been made more plain than in Barbara Brooks's fine study of the fate of the "China hands" in the Japanese Foreign Ministry.[1]

The China hands were those members of the ministry with the most field experience in China and presumably those with the greatest understanding of Chinese society within the Japanese bureaucracy. The traditional view has been that their collective failure to secure a peaceful relationship between Japan and China in the 1920s resulted in the diminishing of their influence in policy formation in the 1930s. However, Brooks shows nicely that not only were they in a tight spot with regard to policy alternatives but also structurally, as their positions even within the ministry were not entirely secure.

The insecurity that facilitated their downfall is at the heart of Brooks's study—it was no sudden development.

Indeed, she demonstrates that bureaucratic shifts in the 1930s constituted a second period of change within the Foreign Ministry, the first occurring a decade or so earlier when junior members sought to alter the ministry's focus and means of determining policy. This was deemed necessary because the initial Japanese focus on treaty revision inclined the ministry towards working closely with the European and American diplomatic corps, which induced many Japanese diplomats to absorb much from Western models, including not only certain concerns but also an elitist approach to policy formation. Although an elitist approach may also have been the product of Japanese habits, it eventually led to dissension within the ministry as lower ranking officials—angered by cumulative slights and perceived errors culminating in the negotiations at Versailles in 1919—challenged their superiors regarding not only policy but also the method of its formation.

This revolt resulted in a greater recognition for the significance of Japan's China policy and a concomitant increase in the stature of those who implemented it. These adjustments, however, did not lead to a more cohesive ministry—although the China hands had greater voice within the ministry, they continued to occupy lower positions. Moreover, Brooks notes that some who contributed to the changing of Japanese policies in the 1930s were also among the dissatisfied in the earlier era.

Since men like Matsuoka Yosuke were present at Versailles, Brooks concludes that “the lessons they learned at Versailles had a formative influence on their thinking about and perceptions of international affairs” (p. 33). This is important to Brooks because “[t]he ultimate demise of the Gaimusho [Foreign Ministry] in China affairs was as much a result of inner dissent and factionalism as of outside interference” (p. 44).

Brooks then traces some of the factors that exacerbated the factionalism within the ministry and the external pressures to change. Some were inherent in the nature of consular service, having to do with either particular career tracks or the formation of interest groups within the ministry. Others involved consular duties, as “diplomats [in Chinese treaty ports] walked a tightrope between the fluctuating but consistent domestic demand for greater Japanese dominance in China and the international pressure to conform to the more limited rules of the treaty system in China” (p. 79). Brooks shows well how these problems combined to derail the influence of the China hands. The divisiveness within was compounded by pressures to change from without, since the consuls largely tended to resist increasingly militant tendencies among the Japanese in China, thereby antagonizing those in favor of further expanding the empire. Thus, even though the ministry was vital to establishing the empire, by the early 1930s the ministry was increasingly isolated in terms of its policy prescriptions.

Turning to the issues surrounding the Manchurian Incident (beginning September 18, 1931), Brooks finds many of the China hands striving desperately to halt the military takeover of China’s three northeastern provinces. Cables from all over the region arrived at the ministry’s headquarters in Tokyo claiming that the incident was an unprovoked attack on the part of the Japanese garrison and that the Chinese were not resisting. Such communiques were not without success—as is widely known, Japanese reinforcements from Korea were eventually held up at the border because of information provided by the consuls, perhaps especially Mukden Consul-General Hayashi Kyujiro, leading a Japanese commander to threaten Hayashi with the forcible prevention of any further consular communication with Tokyo (p. 142). The consuls ultimately had no choice but to acquiesce.

Brooks’s study reveals three basic problems confronting the ministry. The first was that not all members of the Foreign Ministry shared the perception that a peaceful solution was possible (or desirable). The second

was that the Japanese empire in Manchuria before 1931 was also fractured, and the ministry did not monopolize its administration. For example, the ministry even refused to take on some of the burdens of empire, as shown in chapter 3. This shared administration could not help but result in jurisdictional conflict with the military, with whom the minority within the ministry—unhappy with ministry policy—could easily join sides in order to make changes in foreign policy.

The third and deepest problem for the ministry, however, was the nature of the Meiji state itself. Although this study deals with foreign policy, it can also be read usefully as a study of domestic politics. As part of the imperial bureaucracy, the Foreign Ministry was subject to the same kinds of pressures and processes as other elements of the Japanese state. Factionalized and subject to pressures both popular and political, the ministry increasingly lost influence and prestige and was eventually eclipsed.

In this context, Brooks agrees with those in the ministry who thought Foreign Minister Shidehara Kijuro’s tactics wrong; his “reliance on international censure (*gaiatsu*), rather than domestic confrontation as urged by the consuls in Manchuria, proved a fatal mistake for Japan’s international direction in the 1930s” (p. 158). However, Shidehara’s chances for success in implementing any such confrontation in the crisis atmosphere of the early 1930s were poor, as evidenced by the continued decline of the ministry’s status, especially after it attempted to prevent China south of the Great Wall from becoming another Manchukuo. By the time of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (July 7, 1937), even Ishiwara Kanji would not come out openly in alliance with the ministry in an effort to stop the further expansion of the China Incident (p. 183). Thus, gradually, the army and the so-called “reform bureaucrats”—including some within the ministry—gained the upper hand in determining foreign policy. This eventually produced a revolution in Japanese foreign policy, as indicated by the recognition of the government of Wang Jingwei and the alliance with Germany and Italy.

The China service diplomats, concludes Brooks, were caught between two groups within the Foreign Ministry: those who were more Anglo-American oriented and those who were more nationalistic and willing to follow a more autonomous course. While the China hands initially rose to the fore in a context where the Anglo-American faction predominated, a continued alliance with them proved necessary because of the re-

alities of their consular duties. In the 1930s, however, even though China's significance for Japan was increasingly recognized—something the China hands had long demanded—most of them found they could not support the new policies for China demanded by the more nationalistic and militant group. Still, many remained in the ministry, which made useful witnesses at postwar trials, though some became liable for prosecution themselves (p. 212).

Thinking about these changes more broadly, the eventual displacement of the China hands suggests to Brooks that the 1930s did not witness any “aberration” in the course of Japanese history, as has often been suggested.[2] Instead, Brooks thinks that “[t]o label the 1930s and the war as ‘aberrant’ ignores the systemic instability that seems to have plagued Japan from late Meiji times until the postwar period. The Anglo-American-oriented tradition in diplomacy was only one critical force among many influencing the processes of politics and foreign affairs in the prewar period” (p. 211).

This useful point dovetails with much that has been written about the Japanese state, but perhaps reminds us

of other situations as well, for these were not the only China hands whose concerns were so recklessly overruled. Yet at the same time, one cannot help but wonder what kind of empire could have continued if their prescriptions had somehow remained.

#### Notes

[1]. Another good, though less poignant, recent study illustrating the conflict inherent in Japanese empire-building is Yoshihisa Tak Matsusaka, *The Making of Japanese Manchuria, 1904-1932* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2001). This broader perspective examines Japanese strategic thinking about Manchuria among not only top Foreign Ministry officials but also prime ministers and officials in the army, the South Manchuria Railway, and, to some extent, the navy. I have reviewed this work in *Pacific Affairs* 74:4 (Winter 2001-2002), pp. 608-10.

[2]. That the rise of militarism was an aberration in the course of Japanese history has been suggested by several authors, perhaps most prominently by Harvard University historian Akira Iriye.

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