Introduction

Japan’s entry into the ranks of great-power status was an exercise in humiliation. On April 23, 1895, just one week after the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki and the sealing of Meiji Japan’s victory over Qing China, the Russian, French, and German ministers to Tokyo delivered a note of advice to the vice minister of foreign affairs regarding Japan’s recently acquired territory on the southernmost tip of northeastern China’s Liaoning region. It read in part, “The possession of Liaotung [sic] peninsula would be a constant menace to the capital of China, and would at the same time render illusory the independence of Korea; it would henceforth be a permanent obstacle to the Far East.”

Taken aback, prime minister Itō Hirobumi summoned army minister Yamagata Aritomo and naval minister Saigō Tsugumichi for an impromptu conference at the temporary imperial headquarters in Hiroshima, where Emperor Meiji remained, full of pride at his nation’s successful first show of military prowess abroad. By early May the full cabinet had been consulted and the decision made to accept the “advice” of the powers and renounce possession of the peninsula, site of many of Japan’s battles and the promised first bulwark on the continent. On May 9, Germany, France, and Russia cabled their satisfaction with the outcome, and a day later the emperor relayed the news to the Japanese people by imperial rescript, laying out the details of the retrocession and offering assurance that Japan’s national dignity had been in no way impugned by acceptance of the advice of the “friendly powers.”

The public was not pleased about this triple intervention, and for many—try as they might—it was difficult to heed the emperor’s injunction and “be circumspect in all things.” The press was unflinching in its criticism of alleged government weakness, and a handful of
ultranationalists made clear their anger via well-publicized ritual suicide. For others the humiliation was borne in private. Ōsugi Sakae, who would later gain notoriety as a leader of Japan’s fledgling anarchist movement, acted out his rage by memorizing and then reciting the emperor’s May 10 rescript every morning. Journalist Tokutomi Sohō also used words—his own, not the emperor’s—to register his dismay, writing in his diary that upon hearing the news while touring through the Manchurian interior he was “vexed beyond tears.” Returning to Port Arthur at the southern tip of the Liaodong Peninsula, Sohō famously grabbed a handful of gravel from the rocky beach jutting into the Yellow Sea and carried it back to Tokyo, where it would remain on his desk as a “souvenir of what had been, for a time, Japanese territory.”

The Liaodong Peninsula again became Japanese territory ten years later—fruit of the September 1905 Treaty of Portsmouth, which declared Japan victorious over imperial Russia after nineteen months of fighting and 1.73 billion yen in expenditure. It was a hard-won victory, and all the more thrilling for its validation of Japan’s strategy of investing the bulk of its Sino-Japanese War indemnity in the buildup of armed forces capable of defeating the czar’s army and navy. Victory celebrations remade Tokyo, with the construction of a memorial arch in Ueno Park and installation of statues of the heroic naval commander (and soon to be enshrined gunshin, or “war god”) Hirose Takeo and his loyal subordinate Sugino Magoshichirō outside of the capital’s grand Manseibashi rail station.

It was neither the arch at Ueno nor the bronze statues at Manseibashi that would become the lasting legacies of the immediate Russo-Japanese War settlement, however. (Indeed, the arch was not erected until December 1905, and the statues until May 1910. Perhaps more to the point, neither still stand.) Rather, it was the anti–treaty rights rallies at Tokyo’s Hibiya Park in early September 1905 (and later, elsewhere nationwide) that marked a defining moment in the political awakening of the Japanese populace, for if humiliation was the mood du jour in 1895, ten years later it was bitter disappointment at a treaty that yielded no indemnity and only three modest scraps of land: the southern half of Sakhalin, the Kwantung Leasehold on the Liaodong Peninsula, and a narrow strip of rail zone abutting a trunk line that stretched north through Manchuria to Changchun. (The trunk line was built by Russia under the terms of a treaty negotiated with the Qing dynasty just three years after the Triple Intervention.) The popular appetite for territory had become incremental and, whereas redemption in the form of the
peninsula’s “return” was welcomed, it was not enough for many of Japan’s subject-citizens forced to endure punishingly high tax rates to fund the Meiji wars (Map 1).

The cabinet of prime minister Katsura Tarō was, however, satisfied.6 There were, at any rate, larger concerns on the horizon—specifically, fears of a Russian revenge attack. A popular song in postwar Saint Petersburg was “Na sopkakh Manchzhurii” (The hills of Manchuria), which memorialized the 89,000 Russian soldiers killed at the Battle of Mukden in early 1905 and ended with the lyric

Rest in peace, heroes of the Russian land,  
Dear Fatherland’s sons.  
You fell for Russia, perished for Fatherland,  
Believe us, we shall avenge you  
And celebrate a bloody wake.7

A sense of insecurity surrounding Japan’s victory was thus twofold: on the one hand, fear of military reprisal and, on the other, a repeat of the powers’ proffering of advice on how Japan might best handle its war gains. Certainly, Prime Minister Katsura and Foreign Minister Komura Jutarō understood the chagrin behind French diplomat Victor Bérard’s rueful characterization of late nineteenth-century Anglo-French rivalry: “It is a tradition that France gets colonies in order that John Bull may take them.”8 But what was certainly not wanted was a repeat of the humiliation of the previous five years, nor the ceding to Russia of any more of Japan’s justly won gains.

Thus the newly acquired territory had to be secured—not only from Russia but also, in later years, from the powers, China, communism, warlordism, and all other threats. Just as the maintenance of national security was Japan’s abiding concern for the first fifty years of its existence as a modern nation-state, so too was the integrity of Japan’s rights of (temporary) ownership over South Manchuria carefully guarded, often in innovative ways.

Just how authorities—and, increasingly settlers, who came to South Manchuria as soon as the first restrictions on immigration were lifted by order of army minister Terauchi Masatake on January 14, 1905—made the new territory Japanese in the prewar period complicates understanding of the very meaning of the term colony, for the Kwantung Leasehold, where the majority of sojourners and settlers established residence, looked
much like a colony under Japanese rule. Indeed, a partial definition of colony presumess a place where laws differ from those of the home country. It was not just the extension of domestic legal protections, administrative conveniences, and familiar lifestyle amenities and patterns of commerce that facilitated the quasi-nationalization of colonial territory but also, fundamentally the exercise of political will by rank-and-file settlers, which provided the support necessary to ensure that the leasehold not twice slip from grasp.

Between 1905 and 1937, residents of the Kwantung Leasehold—and especially its principal city, Dairen—acted with determination and initiative to shape local governance such that the leasehold occupy a prominent place in Japan’s expanding empire. Determined to secure Japan’s holdings on the continent and protect the massive investment that lay at the heart of the national mission of “managing Manchuria,” Tokyo supported early settler initiatives aimed at aligning leasehold governance and society with metropolitan norms.

Self-governance in Dairen began as product of the efforts of its civic elite: self-made entrepreneurs, bankers, lawyers, doctors, teachers, retailers, construction foremen, and high-ranking employees of the South Manchuria Railway Company. Over time it grew to include large sections of the population, with participants ranging across social classes and of both genders. What drew them together was a determination that Dairen be treated on a par with the ranks of Japan’s other second cities, many of which it had eclipsed in size by the 1920s. They did not demand inclusion of the leasehold as an extra prefecture within the Japanese polity. At any rate, this was beyond the bounds of geopolitical possibility. Nor was it desirable, for Dairen enjoyed distinct advantages associated with its liminal status as primate city in an imperial holding unlike any other in the empire. Rather, they—as well as their compatriots in the South Manchuria Railway Zone—were content to conceive of themselves as part of a broad imperial sphere, possessing rights not circumscribed by geographical place of residence, with many of them propelled by hopes of creating a society better than that on offer back in Japan. They wished, like their compatriots in Fukuoka, Köchi, Osaka, Sapporo, Tokyo, and elsewhere, to be considered kokumin (people of the nation), though of a particular sort: imperial kokumin.

The basic proposition of this book is that the political aspirations and actions of South Manchuria’s settler population were born of and constantly shaped by a process of competition and conflict with those forces
perceived as threatening to South Manchuria’s primacy of place in Japan’s imperial portfolio. As Japan matured as a democracy over the course of the Meiji (1868–1912), Taishō (1912–26), and prewar Shōwa (1926–37) eras, and as Japan’s stake in continental affairs grew with a doubling of the South Manchuria Railway Company’s capitalization first in 1920 and again in 1933, Japanese residents of the Kwantung Leasehold and South Manchuria Railway Zone increasingly defined their political identities around protection of their corner of the empire, which they consistently preferred to view through a domestic rather than colonial frame of reference.

The colonial frame of reference remains essential, however, for the historian. And indeed, moving beyond the colonial frame to an imperial frame provides distance from the increasingly outdated field of teikoku-shugi-shi, or “history of imperialism” (which concentrated on the economic factors that guided imperial acquisition and administration and characterized much of early postwar scholarship on Japan’s empire) to the developing field of teikoku-shi, or “imperial history,” which allows for a look at political structures within multiple colonies alongside analogous institutions in Japan.11 Teikoku-shi—a genre into which the present volume aims to fit—considers the broad imperial sphere in which interactions between metropole and colony, as well as interactions among individual colonial spaces are essential to understanding the political dynamics situated in each place.

Terms and Framework

Settler political activity was conditioned by the structures of government, commerce, and society allowed for under the terms of the Portsmouth Treaty and the Treaty of Peking which, respectively, concluded the war with Russia and dictated the terms by which acquired privileges were to be passed along. The starting point for understanding the space in which South Manchuria’s settlers carved out a political identity for themselves is the unique (and indeed convoluted) dispensation of Japanese power and authority in the region.
SPECIAL RIGHTS AND GOVERNANCE(S)

Not all empires are the same, nor, all parts of empires. Japan’s prewar empire represented a diverse array of governing arrangements, sources of industry, and patterns of settlement. This diversity was to be expected, for as one 1921 commentator remarked, “Acacia trees don’t bloom in Taiwan, and pineapples don’t grow in Manchuria.”

On the face of it, the most striking feature of the territory acquired by Japan in 1905 was its small size. The Kwantung Leasehold—the lease for which Tokyo took over from that concluded between Czar Nicholas II and the Qing dynasty in 1898—measured only 3,462 square kilometers. Both Taiwan (which became Japan’s first colony in 1895) and Karafuto (Sakhalin’s southern half, colonized in 1905) were more than ten times that size; Korea (which became a protectorate of Japan in 1905 and was annexed in 1910) was sixty-three times larger. The Railway Zone was similarly meager: just 5,296 square kilometers of land stretched over almost 650 kilometers. South Manchuria may have had limited physical dimensions but its importance, as later Japanese residents would proudly attest, far surpassed what could be measured with surveyors’ tools.

Only in South Manchuria did Japan hold special rights (tokushu ken’eki)—a vague term that referred originally to the rights secured by Japan upon the December 1905 transfer of leases. Thus did the Treaty of Peking endow Japan with the rights and privileges of administering the leasehold, managing the southern branch of Russia’s Chinese Eastern Railway, and extracting value from the region’s resources until 1923. These rights could and did change—an adaptability that Japanese authorities tested almost immediately in the late Meiji years with requests for expansion of the various rights originally won by the Russians. In other cases it was the codification of informal rights that was demanded of Qing officials. Intent on formalizing the Russian arrangement of employing troops to police the infrastructure of its Chinese Eastern Railway, in December 1905 the Katsura cabinet pressured Qing authorities to agree in writing to the provision of fifteen Japanese soldiers per kilometer of rail. The result was the stationing of up to 9,375 troops of the Kwantung garrison (a 1919 reorganization resulted in the more widely known name, the Kwantung Army) in the northeast during the preconquest period—that is, prior to September 18, 1931.

In 1915 the cabinet of Ōkuma Shigenobu imposed the Twenty-One Demands on Yuan Shikai’s government in Peking, revealing the extent
to which “special rights” had become an eminently expandable category (the land lease was extended with a scheduled expiration date of 1997; the lease on the Changchun-Port Arthur trunk line now was to expire in 2002).

As in Korea, Karafuto, and Taiwan, civil governance in the leasehold relied on the office of a government-general. At first, the government was under military leadership, but in 1906 was changed by imperial rescript to civil governance (while maintaining a strongly military flavor). The extent of its powers, as enumerated in its August 1906 charter (Imperial Ordinance 196), centered on providing oversight for the South Manchuria Railway Company, issuing special government-general orders (furei), levying punitive fines not exceeding two hundred yen, and providing police protection within the leasehold and along the Railway Zone. The Foreign Ministry held oversight privileges for government-general officials who were headquartered in Port Arthur. In 1917, additional oversight (especially for political affairs) would be provided by the prime minister’s office. In 1929, the creation of the new Colonial Ministry (Takumushō) meant another change in administrative oversight for the Port Arthur bureaucracy. The Colonial Ministry assumed full oversight responsibilities (until another change in 1934), thus relieving the Foreign Ministry of this duty.

Tokyo had established a consular presence in Manchuria in June 1906—the opening of its diplomatic mission in the region coinciding with the abolition of the military government. On June 1, 1906, a consulate-general opened in Fengtian. One month later, a newly created consular police force (tetsudō yobitai) charged with policing the rail lines in the Railway Zone reported for duty; so began—almost immediately—a long-lived series of conflicts with the Kwantung Government-General police, itself charged with similar duties in the region. Two levels of policing also held within the leasehold where the government-general police shared responsibility with the Kwantung garrison, which received its command and payment from the Army Ministry in Tokyo.

As the above outline suggests, the lineage of leasehold rule was complicated by a tangle of overlapping jurisdictions and divergent administrative philosophies. The complexity of such arrangements is perhaps best represented by reference to the South Manchuria Railway Company (Minami Manshū tetsudō kabushiki gaisha)—established by Imperial Ordinance 142 on June 7, 1906, with the mandate of “managing Manchuria.” (The company was known throughout its history by the
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abbreviated title Mantetsu.) Reflecting the will of its first officeholder, Gotō Shinpei, the Mantetsu president served in an advisory capacity to the government-general, which itself held a portion of Tokyo’s supervisory rights over Mantetsu. (The other metropolitan ministries placed in charge of overseeing Mantetsu were the Foreign Ministry and Ministries of Telecommunications and Finance. What was more, Mantetsu assumed full governmental responsibilities for the Railway Zone.

The term commonly used by contemporaries to describe Japan’s governing arrangement in the northeast was four-headed governance (yontō seiji), which referred to the powerful competing interests of the Kwantung Government-General, the Foreign Ministry, the South Manchuria Railway Company, and the Kwantung Army. It was a complex arrangement and one that demonstrated the granularity of colonial rule within the Kwantung Leasehold and Railway Zone (to say nothing of the empire as a whole). Suffice it to say that political authority in South Manchuria was diffuse and subject to contestation in numerous turf wars waged in Dairen, Fengtian, Port Arthur, and Tokyo. As a result, the door was open to a range of possibilities for a transplanted citizenry awakening to its political potential.

MANTETSU

It is difficult to overstate how completely Mantetsu determined the nature and development of Japanese imperialism on the continent. Other historians have charted every detail of the company’s founding, organizational principles, corporate structure, and financing mechanisms. There is good reason for the considerable attention Japanese historians, both prewar and postwar, have lavished on the semipublic railway company. Mantetsu was—and remains today—the largest company in the whole of Japanese history. No matter the metric used—size of workforce, capitalization, range of operations, or name recognition—Mantetsu has no rival. It was the first of Japan’s special companies (tokushu gaisha) and thus, in a very particular way, defined the meaning of the term, revealing the power unleashed by a joint stockholding company buttressed by solid governmental support in pursuit of national goals.

Focusing just on capitalization, at its founding in 1906, Mantetsu’s original capital amounted to 200 million yen, half of which was financed by private investors. The staggering volume of such capitalization (up to 440 million yen by 1920 and 800 million by 1933) was not lost on a 1935
reporter from the *Tōkyō nichi nichi shinbun* who correctly judged the amount to be unprecedented not just in Japan but worldwide.\(^22\)

Though the potential of a railway company to become the most re-doubtable symbol of Japanese capitalism was lost on most anti-treaty rights agitators in 1905 (including philosopher Nishida Kitarō, who famously exclaimed, “A railroad concession to Changchun!? I cannot bear it”\(^23\)), by the early 1920s the terms *Mantetsu* and őkoku (kingdom) were inextricably entwined and representative of all that was modern in science, engineering, and finance.

*Mantetsu’s* formal mandate ordained that the company act as governing authority in the Railway Zone, with responsibility for education, policing, construction, utilities, sanitation, and all matters in the public interest. *Mantetsu’s* Rural Affairs Department (Chihō-bu) was even authorized to levy a public services fee (kōhi) on Zone residents for services rendered. Even in Dairen, *Mantetsu’s* governmental aspect loomed large: Chinese laborers reputedly referred to the stately main office as yamen, the traditional Chinese term used to describe a regional governing authority. Similarly, among Japanese nationals, the company was informally branded as yakusho, or “government office,” owing to the bureaucratic swagger of top management.\(^24\)

*Mantetsu’s* tenth president, Yamamoto Jōtarō, analogized the company’s straddling of responsibilities in both the corporate and governmental sectors as befitting “a two-headed snake.”\(^25\) This image strikes to the heart of the central ambiguity that determined the oversize impact *Mantetsu* had on the nature and development of Japanese continental imperialism: a blurring of the line between property and sovereignty. As Japan’s special rights grew—typically through appeal for expanded access to resources via construction of new rail lines, the opening of new mines, and permission to grow new forests\(^26\)—China’s sovereign control weakened. And, as new rights were won and claimed by the increasingly omnipresent *Mantetsu* symbol (which as one later commentator noted was emblazoned on everything *Mantetsu* touched), the naturalization of Japan’s continental presence was duly strengthened in settlers’ minds.
A POPULAR ENTERPRISE

The significance of the *kokumin* has long been downplayed in scholarship on Japan’s empire. In her 1964 study *Defiance in Manchuria: The Making of Japanese Foreign Policy*, Sadako Ogata wrote, “The relative weight of the ‘people’ in the fascist movement of Japan was insubstantial; their influence existed more as shadows in the minds of the self-styled leaders.” Ogata’s remarks refer to the domestic *kokumin*, who figure insubstantially in her narrative of events tracing the immediate causes and consequences of the Manchurian Incident. Ogata’s protagonists are the army, metropolitan politicians, and bureaucrats; the Japanese civilian population of Manchuria is barely mentioned in what is otherwise a very thorough study.

Indeed, a substantial portion of postwar scholarship—in both Japanese and English—treated nonstate actors as objects of policy or education and never as agents in their own right. The classic studies on Japanese imperialism in Manchuria that emerged in the 1960s and ’70s were most concerned with mechanisms of rule and the colonial economy. Similarly Ramon Myers’s 1989 article “Japanese Imperialism in Manchuria: The South Manchuria Railway Company, 1906–1933” makes only glancing reference to nonelite actors. The public, in collective form, gets most attention in Myers’s account as an enthusiastic source of capital in 1906 for financing the new railway; Mantetsu staff and Dairen residents are represented by numbers and charts. Opinions quoted regarding the railway and environs that do not belong to Meiji statesmen and scholars belong to foreigners.

Monographs by Peter Duus in 1995 and Louise Young in 1998 were breakthroughs that changed the historiographic landscape, each endowing the previously undifferentiated Japanese colonial population with faces, names, and stories. Gone was the dry formalism characterizing earlier works that focused on state actors in what rarely went beyond a static cataloging of the structures of administrative rule and colonial economy. Jun Uchida’s recent work on settler colonialism in Korea has made the picture even more clear while emphasizing that the story of empire goes well beyond how imperial projects were vital components of reconstructing the Japanese nation at home.

The Japanese-language historiography of Manchuria has similarly been refreshed by a focus on nonstate actors and close analysis of the multiple layers of Japanese society in China’s northeast. Pioneering scholars
of this work include Yanagisawa Asobu, whose 1999 monograph on members of the chamber of commerce in Dairen provides rich ethnographic texture to the story of the city’s economic development, and Hirayama Tsutomu, whose close-grained study of Mantetsu white-collar professionals reveals a dynamic micro-society with strong opinions on imperial management.34

There remains much to tell about Japanese settler society in South Manchuria. Whereas scholarship in English charting every particular of how railroads represented “the geometric principle of imperial thought” remains abundant—Tak Matsusaka’s work is the most thorough in mapping the importance of railroads to continental policy—little attention is paid to the men and women for whom work as stationmasters, track inspectors, conductors, signalmen, dispatchers, engineers, surveyors, secretaries, switchboard operators, and accountants earned them their daily bread and constituted their formal role as local agents of empire.35 And, since Mantetsu was not just a rail company (as any promotional pamphlet was quick to inform), hundreds more worked as longshoremen, miners, teachers, doctors, harbormasters, chemists, botanists, edaphologists (soil specialists), factory workers, and hoteliers, and at a host of other occupations in Mantetsu’s many subsidiary operations. The variety of educational attainment and social backgrounds of Mantetsu’s Japanese employees was vast.

At every point in Mantetsu’s history, Japanese workers outnumbered their Chinese colleagues, many thousands of whom worked in the company’s dirtiest, most dangerous, and least well-paying jobs. In 1907 Mantetsu had a total of 13,217 workers, 31 percent of whom were Chinese unskilled laborers. By 1933 Mantetsu counted 38,785 employees, 27 percent of whom were Chinese.36 By 1942 the tally had mushroomed to 296,213 employees, though the percentage of Chinese was greatly diminished (11 percent). Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to claim that Mantetsu fielded an army of workers—and one in which nationality was the single most important indicator of securing a livable wage.37

For the most part, the life histories of Mantetsu’s Japanese workers have been occluded in the postwar era by the same “complex intersection of history-writing and memory-making” that Uchida points to in explaining how the many thousands of Japanese settlers in Korea “have almost vanished from Japanese public memory.”38 Of course, some former Mantetsu employees went public with their stories during what Carol Gluck has termed “the Manchuria boom” of the late 1980s.39
majority of these remembrances were, however, issued by former members of Mantetsu’s vaunted Research Bureau (Chōsa-bu), which existed in postwar minds as free of wartime tarnish, resplendent in its significance of Mantetsu’s allegedly benevolent mission of bringing science and reason to the modernization of Manchuria. Also available are glimpses of the inner workings of Mantetsu in the biographies of luminaries such as Gotō Shinpei, Matsuoka Yōsuke, and Yamamoto Jōtarō, each of whom served for a time as Mantetsu president. So iconic are these men in the annals of twentieth-century Japanese political history that one enterprising novelist blended their stories in 1959 with those of rank-and-file employees to produce a work of fiction titled simply Mantetsu shain (Mantetsu employees).

The task of profiling Mantetsu’s thousands of employees need not rely on fictional accounts nor even the recollections of one small subset of their number. Owing to the proliferation of employee journals chronicling every aspect of company operations, as well as qualitative discussions of work life and satisfaction, it becomes possible to examine employee attitudes on everything from company personnel policy, to the philosophy (and best practices) of empire building, to the wisdom of allowing employees of all ranks and educational pedigrees to assume agency in shaping the execution of the company’s mandate—as well as many mundane matters besides.

Attending to these voices reveals important truths unavailable in the abundant institutional histories of Mantetsu. Specifically, it sheds light on the multiple layers of rule that transversed settler society. Mantetsu employees—especially those with university degrees—believed themselves to occupy a prominent place in the space between state and society in South Manchuria, an identity easily extrapolated from their employer’s responsibilities in both governmental and corporate spheres. In the 1920s and ’30s, the elite employees who formed the editorial backbone of employee journals encouraged rank-and-file employees to embrace their hybrid status and consider themselves responsible for imperial upkeep not just as private employees but also as public servants. Such a burgeoning identity among many thousands of employees laid the groundwork for complex responses to political power, especially following the 1932 establishment of the army-led Manchukuo state and subsequent encroachment of military governance on leasehold traditions of civilian self-rule.
The continued publication of many employee journals across the conquest divide allows the historian to understand how the creation of Manchukuo (and attendant rush of newcomers to the continent) was greeted by settlers in South Manchuria, where a three-decade-long struggle for the maintenance of special rights yielded to new struggles associated with preserving Dairen’s importance as the fulcrum of empire shifted northward.

**IMPERIAL SPACE**

The December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor focused new attention in the West on the extent to which Japan used its colonial holdings as stepping-stones to aggression. The mandated islands in the South Pacific, which Japan had taken over from German control in 1914 under the terms of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, had after all been instrumental in providing base support for the attacks. As Japanese fighter planes stormed Singapore shortly thereafter, new attention was paid to Japan’s habit of referring to Taiwan as an “aircraft carrier” and “stone aimed at the south.”42 It was with an eye to eliminating such cunning that British journalist and longtime Asia watcher Hugh Byas called in 1942 for the “geographical disarmament” of Japan once the nation was soundly defeated.43

But a concern with space and place was, of course, no peculiarity of prime minister Tōjō Hideki nor of his predecessors but instead a basic axiom of empire building from Calcutta to Dar es Salaam to Manila and Saigon. In Japan’s case, the political and strategic considerations attached to the physical shape of the empire represented a crucial component of imperial management between the 1890s and early 1920s. Who can forget prime minister Yamagata Aritomo’s famous speech before the first Diet in November 1890 when he asked the assembled to imagine a map of East Asia and envision “a cordon of sovereignty and a cordon of advantage” upon which Japan’s future security must rest? Emperor Meiji made a similar appeal to security through geography in a February 1904 speech in which he described the Russian threat in terms of its threat to Korea.44

More practical considerations of how distances between lands and over sea might best be navigated to facilitate intraimperial trade and communication routes were also a matter of much concern and were almost always linked in one way or another to strategic concerns. What is of
importance in this regard is how the strategic geographies of empire (as prioritized by Tokyo, and especially the Army Ministry) overlapped with the economic geographies of empire (prized by both economic sojourners and established settler business interests). It was in the shaded area of overlap between these two powerful agendas—protecting mobilization routes and capital flows—that the expansion of Japan’s special interests on the continent proceeded most forcefully and effectively. When these agendas came into conflict (as they did on multiple occasions throughout the prewar and wartime years), the resultant disputes were driven by a pointed sociospatial differentiation that bound partisans together and fiercely divided rivals in a “struggle over geography” that only imperialism could provoke.\(^{45}\)

It is instructive to think of imperial space in answer to other questions too. Cognizant of the perils of imposing the nation-state on history, it is wise to remember that the Japanese world in the early twentieth century remained very much locally and regionally defined. Thus it should come as no surprise that Japanese inclusion in a broad East Asian sphere was a commonplace to many Meiji intellectuals, spawning the creation of groups such as the East Asia Common Culture Society (Tō-A dō bun-kai), founded in 1898 to promote Ajia-shugi, or “Asianism,” or the Asia Friendship Society (Asu washin-kai), organized in 1907 to promote exchange between Japanese and Chinese writers and activists interested in socialist thought. For the less intellectually inclined, circulation through the empire in search of work or adventure was unexceptional. What is more, the privileges of direct political inclusion remained circumscribed by wealth and property (and thus limited to a very few) until 1925 and the advent of universal male suffrage. Thus, in terms of political enfranchisement, it mattered little where one lived—within the metropole’s borders or beyond.

World War I changed all this as rapid urbanization transfigured Japan from rice paddy idyll to island of steam-belching metropolises and burgeoning second cities. And it was precisely in these years that wider swaths of the Japanese public envisioned their cities as part of a wider imperial sphere—a conceptualization that increasingly pitched cities in direct competition with one another in pursuit of lasting prosperity. To take one example, cities such as Niigata, Sakata, and Toyama, located in the so-called back of Japan (Ura Nihon) region were intensely competitive in their quest to establish active trading links with proximate Asian neighbors.
Dairen, too, exhibited a keen competitive edge during these years, more often than not pitching itself against imperial rivals in Pusan and Seoul (Keijo). The endowment of Dairen and Port Arthur with municipal codes in 1915—the move was unprecedented outside the home islands—was a political victory for civic boosters and did much to strengthen the Kwantung Leasehold’s sense of inclusion in the Japanese national polity. But what was truly noteworthy in the extension abroad of the metropole’s “municipal moment” was how the leasehold’s monied elite were given a political outlet for voicing concerns relating not just to local but also empire-wide issues. Fundamentally, the municipal codes also provided—as they did for metropolitan cousins—a not insignificant check on bureaucratic power. In the years that followed, successful popular demands for change to council representativeness marked a striking parallel to the democratization of national governance underway in the metropole.

THE URBAN IMPERIUM

Cities are important entities. It is a truism, yet one that bears reiterating—not least because the in-depth study of individual cities is a relatively recent phenomenon in modern Japanese history. The importance of cities was a fact well understood by contemporary actors. Why else would Tokugawa Iesato, who headed the shogunal clan following its 1868 fall from power, have run for Tokyo mayor in 1889? Yet, as Minagawa Masaki has pointed out, not until Japan’s high-growth period of the 1960s through 1980s did Tokyo receive sustained scholarly attention. And indeed, the outsized attention paid by urban historians to Osaka (not Tokyo) reveals the extent to which cities are not all created equally—at least not in the historical imaginary. Louise Young’s recent book *Beyond the Metropolis: Second Cities and Modern Life in Interwar Japan* is a promising sign of change in determining which cities count when it comes to assessing the construction of Japan’s modern nationhood.

To Young’s contention that Japanese modernity was coconstituted via the circulation and exchange of people and ideas throughout Japan’s second cities and beyond, this book shows that the process extended far into the empire as well. Studies of cities as sites deeply involved in determining the functional meanings of imperialism are beginning to proliferate. The Manchurian cities of Benxi, Changchun (Shinkyō), Dairen, Fengtian, and Harbin have all found their historians, as have Pusan
and Seoul in Korea; Jilong, Kaohsiung (Takao), and Taibei (Taihoku) in Taiwan; and Qingdao on China’s Shandong Peninsula. The combined force of these studies—as well as the now abundant literature chronicling Japanese concessions in China’s treaty ports as well as Japanese membership in Shanghai’s International Settlement—reveals how imperial power was not the same throughout the zones of imperial space yet wore similar finery and marched to similar cadences.

This study is divided into four sections; analysis in each follows a generally chronological pattern. The first section, comprising just one chapter, provides the reader with necessary geographic and ethnographic background information on the city of Dairen while also sketching Japanese administrative control over the Kwantung Leasehold and Railway Zone. It focuses on what made Dairen “unique,” a description that found its way into most every tourist’s assessment of the city, as well as what made it very much like its metropolitan counterparts. It was, after all, comparison and not contrast that Dairen’s Japanese residents preferred.

The book’s second section—spanning chapters 2 through 4—describes the process by which residents of Dairen carved a place for their city within the empire at a moment when the geography of Japan’s empire was not yet set, the tumult of post-Qing China threatened to upend Japan’s position of privilege in the northeast, and the West was moving increasingly away from the age of empire. Both inter- and intraimperial rivalries form the backdrop to the events of these years, which take the reader from the late Meiji to late Taishō periods. Chapter 2 considers the question of why Dairen was granted a municipal code in 1915, with attention directed to the uncertainty of Japan’s special rights in Manchuria on the eve of the Great War. Chapter 3 examines how a rivalry among the colonial bourgeoisie in Dairen, Fengtian, Pusan, and Seoul—sparked by army plans to rearrange the pivot point of continental empire—forged a new political subjectivity among Dairen’s gentlemen elite and provided the first instance in which the municipal council acted with political, not just administrative, authority.

Chapter 4 shifts the focus to reveal how the evolution of Dairen as a modern polity, equipped with a set of laws and civil procedures identical to those in use in metropolitan cities, represented an adaptation to the heightened instability to leasehold interests occasioned by both the Washington Conference of 1921–22 and the fragmentation of political
authority in the northeast during China’s warlord era (1916–28). At a time when China was lawless, the Kwantung Leasehold distinguished itself by transformation into a leasehold based on law. Yet in so doing it created a widening gap between Japanese residents and members of the Chinese bourgeoisie whose cooperation in helping to manage the colonial economy had been a crucial ingredient in the leasehold’s economic growth of the 1910s. Chapters 2 through 4 thus add a political framework for examining Dairen’s development and the shaping of urban space—a reprieve from contemporary histories of the city that prioritize detailing the expanding population and vast accumulation of Mantetsu’s wealth as shorthand for the alleged success of Japan’s mission in managing Manchuria.

The book’s third section focuses on what became widely known in the early 1920s as the kingdom of Mantetsu (Mantetsu ōkoku). Chapter 5 examines Manchuria’s “social question” and the initiatives taken by an elite group of young Mantetsu employees to provide social services for the leasehold’s Japanese population and thereby fulfill a duty of civic governance increasingly unmet by the Kwantung Government-General. It will be noted that the timing of these efforts during the late Taishō and early Shōwa years matched that of similar efforts taken by Home Ministry bureaucrats in the metropole. Chapters 6 and 7 continue the theme of how Mantetsu employees established themselves at the center of self-governance initiatives throughout the 1920s as well as at the forefront of efforts to protect the leasehold and Railway Zone from new external threats. Chapter 6 charts the broadening of “people’s politics” among Japanese settlers in 1928 as the unification of China under Chiang Kai-shek and intensification of anti-Japanese sentiment spelled new worries for leasehold longevity. Chapter 7 examines the impact of the worldwide economic depression on Dairen, in particular, and how Mantetsu employees endeavored to save their company in its hour of need.

The fourth and final section considers South Manchurian society in the wake of the Manchurian Incident of September 1931. A primary objective of this section is to correct a common misunderstanding regarding Manchukuo and the culture of Japanese wartime imperialism: the continental empire was never in fact total. For the thirteen years of its duration, Manchukuo never annexed the Kwantung Leasehold. On wartime maps of Japan’s empire, the narrow strip of land always appears in red, a semiotic cousin to Karafuto, Korea, the South Seas islands, and Taiwan. (Manchukuo was often depicted on such maps in
green, denoting its difference from Japanese colonial possessions while affirming its separation from China and the rest of mainland Asia.\footnote{50} Although Manchukuo assumed the role of leaseholder in September 1932 and the Kwantung Army took control of the leasehold’s main administrative organs in a series of incremental changes beginning in August 1932, never did Japan yield sovereignty of the peninsula.

This administrative distinction mattered to contemporary Japanese settlers, as place became increasingly associated with ideology. Thus did contemporaries describe Dairen as a center of liberalism promoted by the Mantetsu elite while contrasting it with the statism favored in Manchukuo’s new capital of Shinkyō, where throughout the mid-1930s reform bureaucrats busily set about constructing a bloc economy as their army counterparts mobilized for war in North China. Chapter 8 examines the tensions and dissatisfactions Japanese residents of Dairen experienced during 1931–32, thereby qualifying the pervasiveness (and longevity) of war fever. Chapter 9 focuses on two moments of widespread opposition in Dairen to proposed administrative changes to Mantetsu and the Kwantung Leasehold. Each reveals the strength of civilian commitment to the project of empire while revealing that the new threat to leasehold interests after 1932—when talk of “special rights” dissolved into the ether—was the Kwantung Army and its overseers in Tokyo. Throughout the mid-1930s the majority of leasehold residents remained firm in their dedication to protecting established political traditions against army-mandated directives pitched in the interest of Japan’s national security. By late 1937, Mantetsu’s organizational structure and the shape of civilian governance in the leasehold were nonetheless much changed. What remained unchanged, however, as war between China and Japan spread down the mainland Chinese coast, was the continued designation of soil on the Liaodong Peninsula as Japanese.

**Significant Soil**

The title of this volume will be familiar to admirers of T. S. Eliot; it is taken from the final stanza of the poet’s *The Dry Salvages*, written in 1941. It is the genius of Eliot that his lines invite endless interpretation and, as Eliot himself said of “genuine poetry,” can “communicate before [they are] understood.” For Eliot, the phrase summoned the plot of earth wherein he hoped to be buried:
We content at the last
If our temporal reversion nourish
(Not too far from the yew tree)
The life of significant soil.

It is used as title of this book to suggest the fundamental and particular importance of place in the formation and maintenance of a political identity among Japanese settlers in the Kwantung Leasehold and Railway Zone.

Tokutomi Sohō’s devotion to soil—an adherence almost religious in nature—has already been mentioned. But he was not alone. The prevalence of soil metaphors in writings about the Kwantung Leasehold and Railway Zone—and indeed Manchuria more broadly—was constant during the years of Japanese occupation. Songs urging listeners to “smell the fragrant soil” (tsuchi no kanbase), to marvel at the “vast plains” (banri tsuzukeru hirono ni), and to feel the “echo of their heartbeats in the great land” (mune wa taka naru daichi ni hibiku) abounded while artwork celebrated the tending of the land.51 Mantetsu’s company song, penned by Yamaguchi Shin’ichi in 1927, famously opened with the lines “A light rises from the East / and shines upon the soil of Great Asia” (Tō-A no tsuchi.52 A poetry contest sponsored by the local daily newspaper Dairen shinbun in 1933 yielded titles such as “Build a storehouse on this Manchurian soil” (Manshū no tsuchi de kura tate yo) and “Make Manchurian soil familiar soil” (Manshū no tsuchi ni shitashimi tsuchi to nare).53 Such abundant reference is unsurprising given the soil’s symbolic importance as stand-in for the contract that held that Japan’s title to the peninsula was—legally, at least—temporary.

The prevalence of soil imagery continues in today’s colonial nostalgia industry. The 1995 television adaptation by public broadcaster NHK of Yamazaki Toyoko’s 1991 novel Daichi no ko (Child of the vast land) is only the most well known of Japan’s many postwar reminiscences of wartime empire in China and its aftermath that appropriate natural landscapes to describe deep emotional attachments. Another trope common in the prolific catalog of memoirs and pictorial representations is that of something grown magical and effervescent as a result of distance in time and space. The most commonly used word in this regard is maboroshi, “a phantom or illusion.”54

The choice of title for this book rejects the airbrushing of history through a pleasing shimmer of phantasmagoria and wonder. Instead it
seeks to unearth the connection between settler lives (almost always conducted at the expense of Chinese neighbors) and Japan’s gradual strengthening of its position on the continent as well as its development as a modern polity. In so doing it seeks to give shape and substance to lived history while honoring the wishes of civic booster Kaise Kingo, who on the occasion of Japanese Dairen’s thirty-fifth birthday in 1939 proclaimed, “Otagai ni Nihon no rekishi o sonchō suru to tomo ni Dairen no rekishi o seishi shitai” (To respect Japanese history is to take Dairen history seriously).