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Mantetsu Democracy

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Abstract

The Mantetsu Employees' Association, founded in 1926 by a group of elite university-educated employees of the South Manchuria Railway Company, was an organization of unprecedented scope and vision which provided for the development of a limited form of self-government by the Japanese in the Kwantung Leasehold and Rail Zone during Japan's occupation of northeast China. Its founding principles resembled the ideological tenets of the metropole's movement of Taishō Democracy which had since the post-Russo-Japanese War energized supporters of widened popular access to the job of national governance. This paper traces how the Mantetsu Employees' Association reflected the political zeitgeist of post World War I metropolitan society whilst simultaneously developing in response to heightened Chinese nationalism in the northeast throughout the 1920s. It shows how the Association encompassed a wide range of employee ambitions—from increased involvement in imperial decision-making to labour advocacy on behalf of the Company's lowest-ranking Japanese workers to a critique of colonial policy as dictated by Tokyo's political parties. The paper introduces key Association players and their ideas as a means of questioning the nature of democracy in an imperial setting.

Introduction

In March 1926, an anonymous contributor to *Readers' club* (*Dokushokai zasshi*), a magazine for Japanese employees of the South Manchuria Railway Company (hereafter, 'Mantetsu'),[1] proposed a radical change

[1] Mantetsu was at its founding, and remains today, the largest company in Japanese history. While its operations centred on the railway that stretched south from Port Arthur (J: Ryojun) north to Changchun, the company by no means limited itself to the rails. Operation of steel mills, iron works, and docks represented an additional source of profit. Mantetsu operated at the heart of the colonial economy, employing thousands of workers—both Japanese and Chinese. In addition to funding Japan's expansion on the continent, the charter of the company stipulated administrative responsibilities for land in the so-called 'Rail Zone' that abutted each side of the rails

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to how the semi-public company was run. Writing under the pseudonym 'Deaf-Mute from Liaoning' (遼畔聾),[2] the author declared: 'It is time to make manifest what we may call '*Mantetsu democracy*'. The mobilization of all at Mantetsu (*Mantetsu sōdōin*) must begin now'.[3]

The impassioned appeal was in response to nearly a decade of scandal at the railway company and colonial financing mechanism which saw corruption scandals (followed by Diet hearings into the alleged abuses and subsequent jailing of chief offenders) wear away at the image of Mantetsu as noble behest of the Meiji emperor in whose name employees daily laboured. Mantetsu, it seemed, had become a plaything of the spoils system, whereby the ruling political party after each metropolitan general election distributed prestigious postings to loyal supporters. The company's substantial profits[4]—gained primarily from the transport of coal and soy-related products from the resource rich Manchurian interior to Dairen Port and then on to markets in Japan, mainland China, and overseas—were uniquely vulnerable to political party profiteering.[5]

Bribery, corruption, and illicit commissions were one problem, disregard for the welfare of Mantetsu's thousands of Japanese workers another. Something had been lost, growing numbers of employees complained. Mantetsu's first president, Gotō Shinpei, understood well the importance of promoting a long-term commitment to empire by safeguarding employee livelihoods. The much lionized colonial administrator had once famously said, 'As a rule, the most important thing in managing anything is the individual. The second most

in a narrow strip from north to south, and which included several branch lines. In 1931, the company counted 35,000 employees, a number which jumped to 296,000 in 1942. For more on Mantetsu in English, see Tak Matsusaka, *The Making of Japanese Manchuria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). In Japanese, there is a vast literature. For a comprehensive overview, see Katō Kiyofumi, *Mantetsu zenshi* (Tokyo: Kōdansha Sensho Métier, 2006).

[2] Liaoning is the name of the region in South Manchuria of which Japan's Kwantung Leasehold formed the southern part.

[3] *Readers' club*, March 1926 (Dairen): 83.

[4] In 1926, Mantetsu operations registered 215 million yen in income, 108 million of which came from rail operations. Total profit amounted to 34.1 million yen. *Kyōwa*, 6/15/32 (Dairen: Mantetsu Shain-kai): 32.

[5] Although Mantetsu was formally classified as an 'incorporated stock company' (*kabushiki gaisha*) and therefore would be expected to allow stockholders a say in naming the board of directors, in fact, assigning individuals to top positions in Mantetsu management was the exclusive privilege of the metropolitan government, which after all held 50 per cent of company stock. In 1934, stockholders in Tokyo unsuccessfully demanded a say in naming the directors.

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important thing is also the individual, and the third most important thing is, yes, the individual'.[6] Two decades on, the human capital of empire was imperilled by the negligence of Mantetsu's board of directors which, it was alleged, myopically prized party over empire.

How could 'democracy' solve these problems? A second anonymous writer in the same issue of *Readers' club*—writing from Fengtian and using the pseudonym 'Voiceless' (無声)—proposed the establishment of a regional assembly in which elected representatives could speak their mind on all manner of Company-related issues.[7] His (or her?)[8] proposal overlaid the vocabulary of workplace equality with that of imperial boosterism, both of which were garnished with a flourish of utopian idealism. A management informed by democratic principles, Voiceless urged, would allow Mantetsu to correct past abuses and 'easily become an earthly paradise without equal worldwide'.[9]

These visions of 'Mantetsu democracy' were made concrete in March 1926 with the establishment of the Mantetsu Employees Association (*Mantetsu shain-kai*; hereafter, 'MEA') which launched a limited form of popular imperial management in Japanese Manchuria that lasted to the end of empire in 1945. Under the auspices of the MEA and identifying as both private workers and public servants, Mantetsu employees began in the years after World War I to re-conceptualize the divide between *kan* (officialdom) and *min* (people) in the colonial setting. No longer was it enough for the *kan* and *min* merely to be unified (the harmonious unity of *kan* and *min* having been among the most exalted of Meiji aspirations); by the late 1920s, the Mantetsu *min* sought to assume the duties of the *kan*. It was a hoped-for assumption of roles made possible by an exceptional situation in which a semi-public company with legions of employees high and low—who represented a wide gulf of the economic spectrum yet all straddled the line between workers and public servants—began to take advantage of Mantetsu's unique status to effect the kinds of social policy that the *kan* was unequipped or unwilling to provide.

[6] *Kyōwa*, November 1927, p. 69.
[7] *Readers' club*, March 1926, p. 80.
[8] As of early 1924, Mantetsu employed some 500 female workers, roughly one-third of whom were nurses and the remaining two-thirds assigned to clerical jobs. Whilst the odds suggest that both anonymous writers were male employees (Mantetsu's total Japanese workforce by March 1926 counted 21,200 workers), by 1924, female employees were becoming increasingly organized in their demands for better working conditions.
[9] *Readers' club*, March 1926, p. 77.

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Advocacy of local self-rule via elected bodies (created to oversee education, social services, and other everyday matters related to the prosperity of Japanese society in South Manchuria), betterment of workplace conditions for Japanese employees of every rank, and defending Mantetsu's good name represented the MEA's main goals—all of which were striven for by democratic means.

Historian Kinbara Samon has encouraged thinking about Japan's early twentieth century democratization as having occurred across two levels.[10] The first is the national, as exemplified by the Protect the Constitution Movement of 1913 and large-scale demonstrations on Tokyo city streets demanding universal suffrage in 1919 and 1920. The second is regional, and may include the early 1900s activism of Tanaka Shōzō and fellow Tochigi villagers who demanded a measure of local self-governance, framing their protests against pollution by the nearby Ashio Copper Mine as a violation of intrinsic rights guaranteed by the Meiji Constitution.

Would it not be possible to push Kinbara's argument one step further to include a third level on which Japan's early twentieth century process of democratization took place? MEA members (and the Japanese population of the Kwantung Leasehold more generally) did after all consider themselves to be very much a part of Japan's constitutional system and cognizant of both the privileges (albeit curtailed in the crucial matter of suffrage) and obligations such inclusion entailed. When metropolitan commentators criticized the Association's attempts in summer 1931 to formulate policy suggestions for resolving 'the Manchuria problem' and claimed that only those with suffrage[11] were entitled to make proposals regarding national policy, the leadership was indignant and 'astonished that in a constitutional order, there are those who could claim such a thing'.[12]

On a practical level, the habits and presumptions of democracy were clear at every level of the MEA's operations. Council elections were rigorously monitored to prevent fraud, elected positions open to all, access to free speech zealously protected (and hindrances to the same by the Kwantung Army after 1932 much lambasted), the mechanisms of self-governance carefully tended to allow widespread

[10] Kinbara Samon, *Taishō demokurashī: Kindai Nihon no kiseki (4)* [Taishō Democracy: The Trajectory of Modern Japan] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan), p. 9.

[11] The word used by metropolitan critics was '*ken-nō*' (権能) which may, depending on the context, mean power (as in elected authority) or the power to vote.

[12] *Kyōwa*, 9/1/31, p. 1.

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employee participation, and the basic proposition that the fruits of empire were not just for capitalists, but for workers too, everywhere exalted.

To be certain, local self-governance existed elsewhere in both Japan's informal and formal empires. The Residents' Corporation Law enacted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Gaimushō*) in March 1905 provided for a substantial measure of autonomous self-governance through the creation of overseas residents' associations charged with overseeing local administration.[13] By 1907, Japanese communities in the Chinese treaty ports of Tianjian, Hankou, and Shanghai had residents' organizations endowed with legislative bodies responsible for civic affairs and the levying of taxes—duties supervised and empowered by the local consulate-general. Even in treaty ports where the Japanese presence was slight (Suzhou, Fuzhou, Hangzhou, Amoy, Chongqing, and Shashi), residents' associations oversaw financial and administrative regulations that affected the Japanese community at large. The Manchurian interior was home to more residents' associations which, similar to their treaty port cousins, managed education, sanitation, and construction for local Japanese communities. The first Mantetsu Rail Zone residents' association was organized in Fengtian in July 1906, followed shortly thereafter by analogous groups in Tieling, Changchun, Jilin, and elsewhere on Mantetsu's north-south railway axis through China's three northeastern provinces.

[13] The definitive guide to self-government in Japanese concessions in China remains Mark Peattie, 'Japanese Treaty Port Settlements in China, 1895–1937', in Peter Duus, Ramon H. Myers and Mark Peattie, eds, *Japan's Informal Empire in China, 1895–1937* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). Barbara Brooks describes the function of the consul *vis-à-vis* China's expatriate communities in *Japan's Imperial Diplomacy*: *Consuls, Treaty Ports, and War in China, 1895–1938* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000). Japanese local self-governance in Shanghai (in which Japan never maintained a concession, but was rather a member of the city's International Settlement) has been treated by Joshua Fogel, '"Shanghai-Japan": The Japanese Residents' Association of Shanghai', *Journal of Asian Studies* 59, 4 (2000): 927–950; and Christian Henriot '"Little Japan" in Shanghai: An Insulated Community', in Robert Bickers and Christian Henriot (eds), *New Frontiers: Imperialism's New Communities in East Asia, 1842–1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). The case of Tianjin is covered in Marjorie Dryburgh, 'Japan in Tianjin: Settlers, State and the Tensions of Empire before 1937', *Japanese Studies* 27, 1 (2007): 19–34. Settler politics in Korea is the subject of Alain Delissen, 'Denied and Besieged: The Japanese Community of Korea, 1876–1945', in Robert Bickers and Christian Henriot, *New Frontiers: Imperialism's New Communities in East Asia, 1842–1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); and Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876–1945*. (Cambridge: Harvard, 2011).

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The inclusion of two Japanese members by 1927 on the Shanghai Municipal Council represented a further avenue for local self-governance. In Korea too, between 1906 and 1911, elected assemblies governed Japanese residents' associations in the peninsula's largest cities. In 1920, deliberative councils (now shorn of the authority to issue local regulations) reappeared, providing Korea's resident Japanese with a new institution for voicing opinions on local issues.[14] Finally, Japanese chambers of commerce in Korea and throughout Japan's concessions and settlements in China maintained a constant presence, throughout the prewar and wartime years, as brokers of local business interests (what Jun Uchida calls 'brokers of empire'[15]) to authorities and colonial officialdom. Closer to home, the 1915 establishment of municipal councils in Dairen and Port Arthur represented a unique dispensation on the part of the national government in Tokyo to extend an administrative privilege, typically reserved for domestic soil, to the Japanese urban populations of South Manchuria.

The experiment in local self-governance headed by the Mantetsu Employees Association was nonetheless an unprecedented undertaking. Simply stated, it was the largest, most organized and sustained attempt to insert popular participation into the workings of colonial governance in the empire. A brief catalogue of the Association's exceptionalism must include its development in the Kwantung Leasehold where Japanese laws were paramount and the ratio of colonizer to colonized was amongst the highest in the empire[16]; its reach to every corner of the continental empire by 1937 through the maintenance of branches from Dairen to Harbin to Mudanjiang to Tianjin and northern Korea[17]; its leadership by an elite thoroughly steeped in the intellectual currents of interwar liberalism and population by thousands of rank and file members of both genders; its freedom from consular oversight; its focus on issues

[14] Another reform in 1930 created elected local councils with decision-making powers, but here too the might of the Korea Government-General precluded significant input from settlers on matters of governance.

[15] Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire*,' passim.

[16] Dairen (C: *Dalian*), home to the MEA headquarters, was the largest city in the Kwantung Leasehold and home to the highest concentration of Japanese settlers. Throughout the pre-conquest period, the percentage of Japanese in Dairen *vis-à-vis* the colonial other (Chinese, Korean, or Manchu) consistently hovered around 35 per cent.

[17] By 1937, the MEA counted 28 chapters (*rengōkai*) and 380 branches (*bunkai*) where voting took place.

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of local administration and, crucially, labour advocacy; and finally, its sustained critique of the imperial project. Together, these features made 'Mantetsu Democracy,' as practiced by the MEA, one of a kind.

Imperial bedrock: the Mantetsu Employees Association

The MEA scheduled its inaugural festivities for 31 October 1926, a date chosen to coincide with the birthday of the Taishō emperor and which marked the culmination of a year of organizational activity.[18] Beginning in autumn 1925, approximately two dozen young employees, who had joined Mantetsu after graduation from prestigious metropolitan universities, met several times a week at the opulent Yamato Hotel (situated on Dairen's grand central circular) to plan the formation of an employee association.[19] Behind closed doors, they conceived a self-governing organization that would give workers a say in both the governance of empire and the conditions of their labour as sub-imperialists. Male and female employees alike would be invited to join, regardless of rank. The belief that all citizen employees (excluding Chinese labourers) were equal owners in the public organ that was Mantetsu would be the foundation of an effort that was expected to hold broad appeal.

By February 1926, the group had submitted a request to Mantetsu management for permission to organize. In the months that followed, the founders of the MEA endeavoured to convince a sceptical board of directors of the proposed group's non-radical aims and dedication to the Mantetsu mission of 'managing Manchuria'. By early May, official permission was granted and two weeks later, the group released a 'Mantetsu Employees' Declaration' which began as follows:

> Japan and China coexist in Manchuria. It is our nation's solemn duty to contribute to the flourishing of Asian civilization by sharing the benefits of this land's abundant resources and developing its culture. Mantetsu is of pivotal importance in the efforts of the *kokumin* to fulfill this national responsibility.[20]

[18] *Kyōwa*, 8/15/37, p. 24.

[19] No records of the meetings or roster of members exist. Kikuchi Kan, however, described the gatherings in his informal history, *Mantetsu gai-shi* (1941) in *Kikuchi Hiroshi zenshū* Gunji Katsuyoshi, ed. Vol. 20 (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 1993): 564.

[20] *Kyōwa*, May 1927, p. 2.

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The group's philosophy, built upon this bedrock, took the shape of the *Principles*, which would later be referred to as the 'MEA constitution' (*shain-kai no kenpō*)[21]:

1. To cultivate a spirit of independence and self-reliance, and foster the practice of self-governance;
2. To protect the Mantetsu mandate and defend its sincerity of purpose;
3. To advance the welfare of employees in accordance with the healthy development of the Company.[22]

The May 1926 release of the *MEA Declaration* and *Principles*—accompanied by the group's *Bylaws*, a handbook of rules governing everything from procedures for voting to the establishment of regional branch offices—attracted wide attention in both Manchuria and Japan.[23] Imperial booster and metropolitan journalist Tokutomi Sohō pitched the story in the 21 July 1926 edition of his *Kokumin shinbun* in terms of a conflict between middle class workers and management.[24] Given the predominance of high-ranking employees in the MEA's provisional committees combined with the recent trend in metropolitan workplaces of so-called 'salaryman unions', Tokutomi's assumption was a fair one. Yet, the idea of categorizing the MEA within garden-variety salaryman unions was anathema to many members. 'The MEA does not engage in a struggle (*tōsō*) to fight for individual rights. . .The only thing it shares in common with salaryman unions is the fact that it too is an organization', declared Etō Guzō, a local lawyer in Dairen and passionate advocate of the fledgling organization.[25]

Post-World War I Japanese Manchuria

Although the basic facts of the MEA's founding are clear, originary impulses have been subject to varying interpretations in official and unofficial histories. Some saw its rise as a natural development of the associational fervour of the post-World War I era when both railway workers and white-collar salarymen (as well as countless other

[21] *Kyōwa*, 1/15/33, p. 5.
[22] *Kyōwa*, May 1927, p. 3.
[23] See *Kyōwa*, April 1928, pp. 180–184 for the text of the original *Bylaws*, which were amended at least twice between 1928 and 1937.
[24] Excerpted in *Kyōwa*, 9/8/28, no. 6 weekly, p. 7.
[25] Ibid.

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segments of metropolitan society) organized in makeshift unions to promote common interests.[26]

Others, in a related vein, attributed the birth of the organization to the prevailing trend of democratization in all aspects of Japanese public life: from civil law, diplomacy, and politics to the diffusion of knowledge and expression of opinion.[27] Even the colonies experienced a change of air. As is well known, Korea's March First Movement of 1919 ushered in a wave of reforms to colonial government across the length and breadth of the empire. In Korea, this meant the switch from *budan seiji*, or 'military government' to *bunka seiji* or 'cultural rule'—a largely superficial change epitomized by the abolition of uniforms for the colonial bureaucracy. In Taiwan, 1919 saw the appointment of Den Kenjirō as first civilian governor-general and the adoption of a new colonial policy of assimilation (*dōka*), as well as the outlawing of short swords for civilian bureaucrats (who remained in uniform.) In the Kwantung Leasehold, liberalization came chiefly in the form of a revised colonial apparatus, reaffirmation of the guiding principle of *Ni-Shi shinzen* or, 'Japanese-Chinese amity' and a re-naming of things: the top executive at Mantetsu changed from the more pro-consular '*sōsai*' to '*shachō*' or, 'company president' while the official name for Chinese labourers shifted from 'coolie' (*kūri*) to the more neutral and Sinicized '*kakō*'.

At the highest levels of Mantetsu management, however, little changed. Positions within the Mantetsu executive continued to depend on political party patronage. Indeed, following the formation of the

[26] The metropole's Railway Bureau was home to a variety of informal workers' associations in the immediate post-World War I years. An association of blue-collar workers (*gengyōin-kai*) was established in 1919, followed a year later by an association of locomotive engineers and train personnel (*Nihon kikan-sha jōmuin-kai*). Both were short-lived. In May 1920, the Railway Bureau established a factory council for workers to discuss issues of concern in a monitored environment. *Kaizō*, July 1931 (Tokyo): 88. So-called 'salaryman unions' had been commonplace in Japan since 1921 when workers in Osaka apparel stores first organized under the name 'Shinsei-kai'. In 1925, a resolution by the Japan Federation of Labour to recognize salaryman unions passed unanimously, leading to the rapid formation of ten such unions between June 1925 and December 1926 that together boasted over 3,000 members. *Shakai kenkyū*, February 1928 (Dairen): 31–3. With the unemployment rate for salaried employees and intellectuals hovering at 31.5 per cent in 1925, the reason for the broad appeal is evident. *Kindai seikatsu*, October 1929 (Tokyo): 79. See also Kotori Seiichi, 'Hōkyū seikatsu-sha no kaikyū tenkai to handō undō', *Chūō kōron*, November 1926 (Tokyo): 39–53.

[27] *Readers' club*, February 1927, pp. 45–49.

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Hara Kei cabinet in 1918, this tendency intensified.[28] As imperial democracy was transformed from a 'movement' into 'a structure and ideology of rule' during the era of party cabinets (1918–1932)[29], the yielding of director chairs from Seiyūkai to Minseitō supporters (and back again) became a matter of custom. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, the gulf between Mantetsu management and employees grew wider, not narrower, following the advent of party cabinet rule.

Employees objected forcefully throughout the 1920s to the disruptions caused by frequent cabinet changes. It was, after all, not only the directorate that turned over, but frequently large numbers of Mantetsu's department and section chiefs also. Thus, in the months surrounding the four general elections held between May 1920 and February 1930, employees paid close attention to the respective fortunes of each party. Employee's election-watching was thus no idle interest (to exercise their suffrage, male residents of the colonies were required to return to metropolitan hometowns). Rather, it served as an advance indication of the likelihood of acquiring a new boss. New personnel (indebted for their jobs to political sponsors settling into new positions of responsibility in Tokyo ministries) naturally obstructed the creation of a cohesive and coherent Manchuria policy—another chronic source of dissatisfaction expressed by the MEA founders.

Still others found the MEA's origins in a reaction to what were viewed as the negative effects of the Great War. Unbridled consumerism amidst postwar affluence and a general society-wide disposition towards sloth and greed were particularly severe, it was alleged, among Mantetsu's freewheeling *mobo* ('modern boys'), elite employees' wives (whose discretionary income far exceeded that of their sisters in the metropole), and Mantetsu's top brass.[30] The avarice of the metropolitan political parties in using Mantetsu's financial heft to enrich party coffers—as made evident in a pair of high profile scandals in 1920 in which collusion between Seiyūkai partymen and the Mantetsu executive grabbed newspaper headlines and

[28] Beginning in 1913 with his appointment as interior minister in Prime Minister Yamamoto Gonnohyōe's cabinet, Hara Kei made a concerted effort to extend Seiyūkai influence in Manchuria as part of his larger goal of overturning clique politics (*hanbatsu seiji*) and moving towards a party cabinet. Katō Kiyofumi makes the argument in 'Hara Kei to Mantetsu', in Kobayashi Hideo, ed. *Kindai Nihon to Mantetsu*. (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan): 32–63.

[29] Andrew Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1991): Introduction and *passim*.

[30] *Kyōwa* 6/15/32, p. 59.

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condemnation before the 44th Diet in December 1921[31]—similarly provoked a strong reaction amongst employees who sought to instill a new accountability towards empire.

For every commentator who traced the MEA's origins to the currents of Taishō Democracy or reaction to the hedonism of postwar society, another looked not to peace and liberalism as the hallmarks of the post-Versailles order, but rather to the legacy of uncertainty and instability that defined Japan's relations with Russia and China after 1919.[32] With Soviet designs on northern Manchuria uncertain and a new determination among mainland Chinese youths to restore national sovereignty to the northeast, the patriotic defence of empire was, some would later argue, a decisive factor in the MEA's formation.

Certainly, both the inspiration of postwar liberalism and the threat of challenge to the empire were influential in the founding of the MEA. Yet, equally germane a question as to 'what prompted the employee-founders' is why did Mantetsu's board of directors under President Yasuhiro Ban'ichirō finally agree in spring 1926 to its formation, especially in the light of previous refusals?[33]

Unfortunately, the historical record provides no concrete answer. Directors' board meetings were strictly off-limits to reporters and notes were kept highly confidential.[34] Nonetheless, a brief collage of the social, political and economic crises confronting Japanese authorities in the Kwantung Leasehold and Rail Zone in the early 1920s provides a useful frame for considering why the directors finally gave permission for an employee-led experiment in self-governance.

[31] The scandals were the Manshū-Maru Incident in which one of Mantetsu's subsidiary companies purchased a monstrously over-valued 8,500-ton steamship from shipbuilding magnate Uchida Nobuya who then donated the profits to Seiyūkai campaign funds. The second incident, the Tōren Coal Mine Incident, was of a similar nature but distinguished itself by implication of Mantetsu's vice-president Nakanishi Seiichi. Commenting on the latter incident, Kenseikai representative Hayami Seiji denounced Mantetsu before the 44th Imperial Diet as 'a ghoulish stomping ground of ne'er-do-wells scheming under cover of night'. Takeuchi Ayayoshi, '*Mantetsu ōkoku-ron*' *Kaizō* (March 1930): 105.

[32] *Kyōwa*, October 1927, p. 22.

[33] There were of course a number of employee-led organizations prior to the establishment of the MEA, though membership tended to be limited to employees with managerial responsibilities. One such group was the Kyōmeikai (共鳴會), begun in October 1919, which provided a setting for likeminded 'gentlemen employees' (*yūshi shain*) to gather socially and discuss current events. *Kyōwa*, 6/15/37, p. 20.

[34] Only a handful of the minutes survive and are collected in Itō, Ogiwara, and Fujii, ed. 'Jūyaku kaigi jikō' in *Gendai shiryō 32: Mantetsu shiryō* (2) (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobo, 1966).

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By the 1920s, threats to the stability of Japan's special rights in Manchuria, and by extension, undisturbed functioning of the colonial economy were legion. Rail employees, teachers, doctors and other Mantetsu employees in Rail Zone cities had front-row seats to conflicts between Japan's client warlord in the region, Zhang Zuolin and other local warlords intent on seizing territory and resources. As Zhang's Fengtian Army clashed with the Zhili clique first in 1921 and then again in 1924 and as military expenditures rose precipitously, the spiralling inflation of the Fengtian local currency, or *Fengpiao* nearly bankrupted Zhang's regional government.[35] In turn, the immiseration of the local Chinese peasantry led to an uptick in armed robberies against Japanese nationals throughout the region. In summer 1923, following a series of high-profile heists on Mantetsu trains, the Kwantung Army increased security on train-cars as irate Japanese residents lambasted the 'weak-kneed' diplomacy of Shidehara Kijūrō for its policy of non-intervention in the worsening civil war taking place in their backyards.[36] By late 1925, the Katō Kōmei cabinet was compelled to act and bolster Zhang's power when a mutiny by the warlord's long-time ally, Guo Songling threatened to bring an end to Japan's 'special interests' in the region.

In ideological terms, Mantetsu faced new and potent threats from a rising Chinese nationalism. In 1923, the Rights Recovery Movement swept from Beijing to Shanghai and even parts of the Rail Zone (despite assurances by Zhang to the Japanese authorities that all disturbances would be handled with an iron fist), exercising protesters who demanded the nullification of the Twenty-One Demands of 1915 (which had extended the land and railway leases from 25 years to 99) and immediate restoration of Chinese sovereignty.[37] In spring 1924, unrest extended to protests against Mantetsu-managed education for Chinese students in the rail zone. Here, the antipathy was mutual. Whereas Chinese students boycotted local academies (Ch. *Gong xue*

[35] Ronald Suleski, 'The Rise and Fall of the Fengtien Dollar, 1917–1928: Currency Reform in Warlord China', *Modern Asian Studies* 13, 4 (1979): 643–660.

[36] Fukuda Minoru, ed. *Manshū Hōten Nihonjin shi: Dōran no tairiku ni ikita hitobito* (Tokyo: Kenkōsha, 1983): 107. Chinese passengers too were robbed during various heists, prompting an angry letter to the editors in the 26 June 1923 issue of the Chinese newspaper, *Tung-pao*, which condemned Mantetsu for failing to guarantee security. Mark Peattie, 'Japanese Attitudes Toward Colonialism' in *The Japanese Colonial Empire 1895–1945*, Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie, eds, 80–127. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989): 127.

[37] March 1923 marked the original expiration date of Russia's lease with the Qing for control over the two areas.

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tang) as agents of aggressive imperialism, Japanese settlers in the region angrily demanded that Mantetsu halt its contributions to Chinese education—deemed, at best, an unnecessary expenditure. Mantetsu complied in part, cancelling plans for construction of a new academy.[38]

Political protest among Chinese residents of the northeast overlapped with a sharp rise in labour disputes. A dramatic increase in the price of sorghum (a basic staple of the Chinese labourer diet) in 1923 set off a wave of strikes and demands for higher wages.[39] Like previous strike activity, these revolts were put down with quick dispatch by Japanese authorities. However, the establishment in early December 1923 of branches of the Chinese Workers Association (Ch. *Huagong xuehui*) in Dairen and Shahekou (home to Mantetsu's main locomotive factory) heightened fears that Japanese Manchuria would 'go red'.[40]

By spring 1925, the Chinese Workers Association had aligned itself with the All China Railworkers Association (Ch. *Quanguo tielu zong gonghui*). In the months that followed, activist and organizer Zhuan Jingyang worked to expand the influence of the association from Dairen to Changchun, compiling a membership roster of 3,000 workers by October.[41] Qin Maoyi, a member of the Chinese Communist Party recently active in both the Tsingdao strike of April 1925 and the May Thirtieth Incident in Shanghai, distributed copies of Communist youth magazines and organizing pamphlets to Mantetsu's Chinese workers.[42] In November, the Association dispatched member, He Xin to the newly opened Soviet Consulate in Dairen to send congratulations on the eighth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution.[43] By year's end, 52 labour disputes had been recorded—the highest annual tally ever, exceeding even that of 1919 when agitation surrounding the repression of Korea's March First

[38] Fukuda, *Manshū Hōten Nihonjin shi*, p. 124.

[39] Itō, Ogiwara, and Fujii, ed. 'Jūyaku kaigi jikō', p. 558.

[40] Su Chongmin *Mantetsu-shi*, trans. Yamashita Mutsuo, Wada Masahiro, and Wang Yong. (Tokyo: Ashi Shobō, 1999): 115.

[41] Tachibana Shiraki, 'Shina rōdō undō to Minami-Manshū' *Manmō*, December 1926 (Dairen): 9.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Dalian-shi zhi ban gong shi, *Dalian shi zhi: Da shi ji, song shen gao* (Dalian: Dalian-shi shi zhi ban gong shi, 2001): 32.

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Movement combined with post-war inflationary pressures gave rise to about 44 disputes.[44]

Issuance of a Manchuria Peace Preservation Edict (Imperial Ordinance #317) by the Taishō Emperor in 1925 notwithstanding, strike activity reached new levels of intensity in early 1926. A three-month long strike by Chinese labourers at the Manshū Fukushima Spinning Mill—aided in its longevity from support networks operating in Tianjin and Shanghai—proved the porosity of the border separating labour in Manchuria from the 'dangerous thoughts' rife in workplaces southwest of the Great Wall.[45]

Add to the ferment a general malaise among South Manchuria's Japanese community caused by a lingering recession that since 1920 had caused a swell of repatriations to the metropole, a scramble by colonial authorities to develop adequate social services for those who stayed, and increasing bitterness among settlers towards Chinese neighbours who, it was alleged, were stealing Japanese jobs. Following the August 1924 collapse of the Longkou Bank (a joint Chinese-Japanese venture), Dairen, lynchpin of the colonial economy and home to thousands of Mantetsu employees, was declared to have hit rock-bottom.[46]

Amidst such trials was born a new functioning of Mantetsu as bulwark of colonial governance and supreme guardian of livelihoods for Japanese residents of the northeast. Since its founding, Mantetsu had been locked into the tangle of colonial governance caused by the overlapping bureaucracies of the Kwantung Government General, Foreign Ministry and, after 1919, the Kwantung Army. Calls for the untangling of institutions and jurisdictions had been more or less constant since Mantetsu's founding in 1906. However by the early 1920s, a chronic shortage of operating funds at Kwantung Government headquarters in Port Arthur (caused, on the one hand, by a ballooning of the leasehold's population in the immediate post-World War I era, and on the other hand, by a drop in revenue from

[44] Nakazawa Hironori, 'Manshū ni okeru rōdōsha undō no sūsei' *Manmō* (January 1927): 29.

[45] Su, *Mantetsu-shi*, p. 118.

[46] The Longkou Bank's declaration of bankruptcy initiated a panic that spread like wildfire. Numerous banks and companies throughout the Leasehold and Rail Zone declared bankruptcy in quick succession, forcing the Dairen stock exchange to mandate a temporary suspension of trading. Yanagisawa Asobu, 'Zai 'Manshū' Nihonjin Shōkōgyō-sha no suitai katei: 1921-nen Dairen Shōkōgyō-kaigisho kai-in bunseki' *Mita Gakkai Zasshi* 92, 1 (1999): 66.

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both opium commissions and postal receipts)[47] translated into a new reliance on Mantetsu's assumption of quasi-governmental duties, not only in the Rail Zone (as was its mandate) but in the leasehold too. By 1927, Mantetsu contributed a full 52 per cent of the Kwantung Government General's annual operating budget (47.9 million yen), whereas the Tokyo government contributed a mere four million yen, or 8 per cent.[48] Contributions from Mantetsu became a lifeline for Japanese small businesses, as well as for civic groups and organizations.

It becomes possible to speculate that in spring 1926 Mantetsu's directors came to view the idea of an employees association as something to be welcomed, not feared. The young employees had after all presented no especially controversial claims or demands. They were asking neither for extension of the Parliamentary Election Law nor for incorporation into Japan proper—as were colonists in Karafuto at precisely the same moment.[49] Nor were they proposing the extension of home rule and granting of local parliaments for *indigènes* as Mochiji Rokusaburō, Yanaihara Tadao, Ōtsuka Tsunesaburō and others had in the wake of the 1919 pro-independence movement in Korea.[50]

The advantages to be gained from promoting local deconcentration—the delegation of some functions to local-level institutions—cannot have been lost on Mantetsu management. An organization such as the proposed employee association could provide a variety of services that would not only prove Mantetsu's dedication to the job of supporting continental empire but also provide a bulwark against subversive thought and action. It was

[47] Throughout the prewar period, the Kwantung Government relied for much of its operating revenue on profits from opium sales. Though after 1914 opium-selling licenses were held by Chinese merchants, substantial revenue from trafficking continued to fill both Kwantung coffers as well as the personal bank accounts of prominent, well-respected members of Dairen's Japanese financial community. See Yamada Gōichi, *Manshūkoku no ahen senbai: Waga Manmō no tokushu ken-eki no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2002): 20. The Peking Treaty of 1905, negotiated between Japan and the Qing following the conclusion of Japan's peace with Russia, allowed for the creation of Japanese post offices on Chinese soil. Revenue from these post offices amounted to a second major source of revenue for the Kwantung Government—a curiosity explained by the fact that opium smuggling outside the leasehold into the Manchurian interior relied on parcel service. Yamada, *Manshūkoku no ahen senbai*, pp. 476–480.

[48] *Shintenchi*, January 1929 (Dairen): 33.

[49] Shiode Hiroyuki, 'Nation or Colony? The Political Belonging of the Japanese in Karafuto' *Social Science Japan Journal* 12, 1 (2009): 101–119.

[50] Komagome Takeshi, *Shokuminchi teikoku Nihon no bunka tōgō* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1996): 209–215.

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also likely that the directors viewed the leadership of an employee association as providing a valuable link between themselves and the Company's swelling ranks of employees (the number of Mantetsu's Japanese employees doubled between 1912 and 1922.)[51] If MEA members could be persuaded to serve as role models to the Japanese settler community at large—of which they occupied an ever larger percentage (by 1930, Mantetsu employees and their families together with the staff and families of Kwantung Government bureaucrats constituted roughly half of South Manchuria's 200,000 Japanese settlers)[52]—so much the better. The MEA could serve as an icon of Japan's peaceful expansionism in the region.

Final approval for the organization depended on the identification of a trusted stalwart to oversee matters. In 1926, that man was Ishikawa Tatsuo.

Creating a new culture at Mantetsu

Ishikawa graduated in 1910 from the law faculty of Tokyo Imperial University, or 'Teidai' where he had studied under Christian educator, journalist and diplomat, Nitobe Inazō. Subsequently, he taught German at the Fourth Higher School, earning praise as 'a great educator' from another prominent Christian reformer, Uchimura Kanzō.[53] In 1919, Ishikawa moved to Dairen to begin work as the head of Mantetsu's research department. It was Ishikawa who may be considered responsible, in the years that followed, for raising the profile of the research department as a home away from home for an emerging caste of imperial intellectual elites.

The year 1919 was pivotal in Japanese Manchuria not only for the administrative changes it brought to colonial governance empire-wide

[51] In 1912, Mantetsu's salaried Japanese employees numbered 4,239. This number jumped to 6,698 in 1922. The real area of growth however was in the expansion of the unskilled and semi-skilled workforce. In 1912, there were 7,666 Japanese *yō-in* (傭員) a designation that included Japanese workers engaged in a variety of blue-collar trades within the company. By 1922, there were 12,041 *yō-in*. In 1921, a further designation was added (*ko-in* 雇員) to accommodate the growing work force; by 1922, 2,684 Japanese workers fitted within the new designation. During the same period (1912–1922), Mantetsu's Chinese employees increased in number from 8,570 to 14,614, all of whom occupied the ranks of *yō-in*. *Manshū kaihatsu yonjū nen-shi* quoted in Harada Katsumasa, *Mantetsu* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1981): 81.

[52] *Kyōwa*, 5/1/30, p. 1.

[53] Ibid., p. 5.

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but also for its significance in marking the stepped-up recruitment of Japan's best and brightest to man the think tanks at the heart of Mantetsu's vast web of operations. Director Matsumoto Jōji, a former Teidai professor who had left academia in 1919 to join Mantetsu, led the hiring initiative.[54]

In 1920, 20 Teidai graduates joined Mantetsu. It was an impressive cohort by any measure, and launched a revolution of sorts. The graduates brought with them an energy and fervour for social change that in the university setting had found an outlet in extracurricular pursuits such as the 'New Man's Association' or, *Shinjinkai*, an association of liberal students founded in 1918 at Teidai and inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution of the previous year.[55] The new recruits were socially and politically engaged and not afraid to display their convictions in the workplace. Together they forged a new culture of intellectual vibrancy and engagement that contrasted sharply with one commentator's observation of Mantetsu culture in 1917: 'Why is it that the employees with grit and backbone and an interest in politics are the ones who get mired in obscurity, while the high-ranking conservative employees get all the fame and glory?'[56] By the early 1920s, the atmosphere was much changed.

Ishikawa presided over this change—both in his role as head of the research department where many of the elite graduates found their first posting, and in his contributions to the magazine, *Shintenchi* which launched in 1921 and at once distinguished itself for its opposition to old-fashioned bureaucratic imperialism (*à la* Taiwan and Korea) and advocacy of a new populist imperialism animated by democratic practice. In the postwar, Itō Takeo would remark that the magazine catalyzed the shift 'from Taishō Democracy to Mantetsu Democracy' by the attitudes it fostered in pitching 'democracy' against the colonial bureaucratic machine.[57]

Ishikawa's aversion to labour unions made him a safe choice as guarantor for the proposed Mantetsu Employees Association. His

[54] Following Japan's defeat in 1945, Matsumoto would be appointed Chairman of the Constitutional Problems Investigation Committee and charged with presenting ideas for constitutional revision to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Force (SCAP).

[55] Henry Smith describes the founding, membership, and activities of the *Shinjinkai* in *Japan's First Student Radicals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

[56] *Chōsen oyobi Manshū*, 3/1/17 (Keijō): 64.

[57] Itō quoted in Imura Tetsuo, ed. *Mantetsu chōsabu: Kankei-sha no shōgen* (Tokyo: Ajia Keizai Kenkyūjo, 1996): 644.

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intimate familiarity with the elite employees who filed the petition in 1926 clinched the deal. He was their boss; he knew them better than anyone.

By day, Ishikawa and his charges would research and write the encyclopeadic *Manmō zensho* (eventually published in 1922 as a ten-volume set of facts about Manchuria); by night, they penned articles on topics ranging from the debate over mixed residence in Dairen, to commentary on Soviet Russia's policy in the Far East, to critiques of the ability of Mantetsu's executive to fulfill Japan's 'Mission in Manchuria'.

Two young employees who mirrored Ishikawa in this immersion in Manchuria's topographic, zoologic, and archaeologic minutiae by day and modern social and political problems by night were Itō Takeo and Miyazaki Masayoshi.

Itō and Miyazaki should be familiar by now to students of Japanese imperialism. Itō has emerged, much by his own telling in a 1964 memoir (translated into English in 1988 by Joshua Fogel), as a Sinophile whose scholarly interests led him and other liberal-minded intellectuals into a collaboration with the Kwantung Army in the 1930s. Miyazaki's inclusion in the English language historiography of empire has highlighted his leadership of the wartime economic think tanks that paved the way for Japanese expansionism on the continent after 1931. For the most part, Miyazaki has been branded a 'right-winger'.[58]

In her writing about pre-war departments of Asian history (*Tōyōshi*) in Japanese universities, gathering places for scholars such as the East Asian Common Culture Institute (*Tō-A dōbun shoin*) in Shanghai and the intellectual publishing community, Louise Young has described a 'Sinology network' composed of members of 'elite cultural institutions that produced an intellectually hegemonic discourse on Sino-Japanese relations' in the years leading up to the 1932 establishment of Manchukuo.[59] Itō Takeo was part of this network, as was Tachibana Shiraki, another familiar prewar Sinologist. Both contributed actively to *Shintenchi* under Ishikawa's editorship between 1926 and 1928. (Miyazaki Masayoshi, for his part, was involved in a much smaller 'Slavic network'.) Whilst the contributions by members of this Sinology network to the inter-war discourse on Sino-Japanese relations and the

[58] Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998): 273.

[59] Ibid., pp. 269–270.

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'Manchuria Problem' have been much studied, far less attention has been paid to the concern these writers demonstrated for the *internal* workings of the imperial machine, namely, how Mantetsu ought to take care of its own and what an ideal colonial society might actually look like.

It was the role of *Shintenchi* and a second Mantetsu-publication, *Readers' club* (*Dokushokai zasshi*), first published in January 1920 that provides insight into how Manchuria's 'best and brightest' conceptualized these issues. The vast majority of contributors to both publications—men such as Ishikawa, Itō, Miyazaki and Tachibana—were, at one time or another, members of Mantetsu's research department. Others knew each other as classmates from the post-World War I graduating cohorts of Teidai, others from *Shinjinkai* activities in Tokyo. The realm of print bound these elite employees, who were scattered throughout Mantetsu's many departments and divisions from Changchun to Peking.

Shintenchi and *Readers' club* provided a space for Mantetsu's socially conscious employees to express often strong opinions about how Japanese Manchuria could be made a better place. Throughout the 1920s, members of what might be called the 'New World Network' (in honour of the *Shintenchi* editors' preferred translation of their title[60]) held forth on the need to eliminate cumbersome three-headed governance by instituting Mantetsu as the pre-eminent governing authority in the colonial administration, claim a place for the imperial *kokumin*[61] in the administration of their empire, and advocate on behalf of the labour rights of Mantetsu's employees at the bottom of the corporate hierarchy—particularly blue-collar train operatives, trainyard workers, and watchmen. If *Shintenchi* was the forum in which elite employees assumed agency (in print at least) in the planning of colonial policy, *Readers' club* became a mouthpiece for espousing labour rights, a forum for workers to demand fair reward for their service, and a how-to manual for training Japanese unskilled labourers to recognize their duties as sub-imperialists.[62]

[60] The masthead pronounced the 'building of a new society', 'creation of new culture', and 'propagation of liberal thought' as the magazine's foundational goals.

[61] Nomenclature linking 'the [Japanese] people' (*kokumin*) to their empire (*teikoku*) or colony (*shokuminchi*) gained currency in the colonial presses in the early Taishō years. Examples include '*shokumin-teki kokumin*' (*Tairiku*, January 1914, p. 9) and '*teikoku kokumin*' (*Tairiku*, November 1914, pp. 16–18.)

[62] Six years after the start of publication, the circulation of *Readers' club* in 1920 numbered 8,000, a figure equal to just over one-third of Mantetsu's Japanese

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If, looking ahead to the 1930s, one might say that the builders of a 'brave new empire' in Manchukuo made a pact with the devil by finding political shelter in wartime empire, members of the New World Network a decade earlier admitted no such compromise of principles. For them, there was promise for good in the empire and a chance to reform Japanese labour-management relations in an atmosphere far from the corrupting influence of Diet politics and big business interests, promote opportunities for women both in the workplace and at home, and propose new and local solutions to increasing the health and welfare of all Japanese residents of the northeast.[63] This is not to excuse the job of empire in their minds as a wholly idealistic undertaking, but to name members of the New World Network imperial democrats *par excellence*, that is, Mantetsu democrats.

Building and sustaining democratic institutions and practices

The establishment of the Mantetsu Employees Association in May 1926 provided an ideal environment (and institutional endorsement) to nurture and develop the democratizing impulses of the early 1920s. By late August 1926, the MEA boasted a membership of 18,300 Japanese employees—comprising 89 per cent of Mantetsu's total Japanese workforce at that time. (Annual membership dues for individuals amounted to 20 *sen*.)[64] Two weeks later, on 15 September, the MEA held its first election for seats on the deliberative assembly, or 'Council' (*hyōgiinkai*). Male and female MEA members cast ballots at their local workplaces, choosing which candidates would represent them before the assembly as a whole.

When the ballots were counted, 383 employees were elected to the position of council delegate. The majority of new delegates occupied middle management positions of section chief or above,

workforce at the time. Hirano Ken'ichirō, '*Shintenchi* kaidai: Chūgoku zasshi kaidai I' *Ajia keizai shiryō geppō* (March 1972): 28.

[63] Rejection of the principle of 'extending the metropole' (*naichi enchō-shugi*), was a hallmark of the MEA's activism and generally included a disavowal of anything (from colonial policy-making to tatami-based interior design) that uncritically adopted metropolitan models unsuited for the Manchurian environment.

[64] The exceedingly high rate of enrollment in the early MEA casts doubt on the voluntary nature of membership. Management's interest in forestalling the possibility that the MEA would become centred on class identity may explain such a high percentage of enrollment, especially given the (albeit nominal) fees associated with membership.

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betraying hopes held by the more liberal of the founders for a council representative of the MEA's broad-based constituency. The *Fengtian Daily News* (*Hōten mainichi shinbun*) reported on 18 September that far from realizing the idealism of its founders, the MEA suffered from a tendency to 'exalt the powerful'. Four days later, the same paper reported that the nascent Association was already divided into two factions: a group of moderates who were agitating for a 're-do' of the election to begin the experiment of participatory self-governance on a more auspicious footing, and a group of hardliners who argued that the directors might not be willing to acquiesce to the election of a younger, potentially more radical group of delegates.[65] The latter held sway and the election results stood.

Soon after the votes were tabulated, the newly elected delegates returned to the ballot box—this time to choose the MEA's first secretary general and secretariat from among their number.[66] Kibe Shuichi, head of the provisional committee formed the previous May, was elected to the position of secretary general with 60 per cent of the vote.[67] Below him, 20 delegates were chosen to the position of secretary. Among them was Ōkawa Shūmei, the right-wing ideologue and member of Mantetsu's research department who had just published in Tokyo what would become one of his most influential treatises, *Japan and the Way of the Japanese* (*Nihon oyobi Nihonjin no michi*).[68] Ōkawa's inclusion serves as a telling reminder that the MEA should not be mistaken for the apotheosis of pre-war liberalism.

The first convening of the secretariat took place on 25 October 1926 in the recently built Employees' Club in Dairen where the election of the executive secretariat and assignment of bureau chiefs for the MEA's inaugural ten departments[69] were the first orders of business.

There is a striking correlation between the roster of newly named MEA bureau chiefs and the middle management personnel assigned to the various social service bureaus established by Mantetsu in the early 1920s. Tamura Yōzō, for example, had been section chief (*kachō*) of Mantetu's Social Services Section (*shakai-ka*) since 1923, just a year

[65] *Kyōwa*, 7/15/37, p. 6.

[66] The Mantetsu directorate was allegedly deeply involved in deciding who filled the seats of the group's first executive secretariat.

[67] *Kyōwa*, 7/15/37, p. 6.

[68] Ibid., p. 7.

[69] In 1926, the departments were: general affairs, accounting, research, editorial, mutual aid services, operations, public affairs, recreation, youth corps, and women's affairs.

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after its founding. Okumura Shinji, also an employee of the Social Section, was named first chief of the MEA editorial bureau, which was responsible for the publication of the MEA organ magazine *Kyōwa* which replaced *Readers' club* in April 1927. There was a notable overlap as well between the staff of Mantetsu's Human Resources department (*jinji-ka*) and the MEA leadership: Human Resources employee Katō Shinkichi, for example, assumed duties as the Association's Public Affairs chief.

What these overlaps suggest is a transfer of knowledge gained on company time to the problems prioritized by the MEA ideals. So, for example, did Tamura Yōzō's work in the Social Section—and particularly his sponsorship of the Mantetsu Women's Association, founded in February 1924 by seven female employees intent on collective action to secure benefits matching those of their male colleagues—inform his advocacy of making the MEA a group dedicated to the representation of all employees, irrespective of gender. Similarly, Kamimura Tetsuya, another MEA pioneering member and co-head in 1926 with Okumura Shinji of the editorial board, had a history of supporting the advancement of women in continental society. He helped found the female employees' journal, *Jūkoku* (柔克) in 1924 and was instrumental in the creation of a vocational school for women in Dairen.

In similar fashion, Tamura, Okumura, and Katō all applied what they learned from involvement with the household expenses survey (*kakei chōsa*) conducted by Mantetsu's Social Section in 1924—a six-month long survey which concluded that the majority of the company's semi-skilled Japanese workers in Dairen lived barely above the subsistence level[70]—to advocacy of improving labour conditions for all Japanese workers, regardless of rank. At first, such advocacy took the form of critiques (heavily influenced in Okumura's case by Marxist rhetoric) against the inequities generated by modern capitalism and

[70] Concerned that a surfeit of discontent would give way to worker radicalism, Mantetsu management ordered the Social Section to conduct a six-month survey of three levels of Japanese employees in Dairen: skilled labourers from the Shahekou locomotive factory; unskilled labourers whose workplaces included Mantetsu's trains, boats, and wharves; and white-collar office staff. The results of the survey revealed what many suspected: Mantetsu's lowest-ranking workers were barely earning a subsistence wage. While most semi-skilled Japanese workers earned between 70 and 100 yen per month, an exhaustive study of living expenses by the survey-takers determined that a family of four in Dairen required a monthly salary of at least 130 yen to live comfortably. Mantetsu Shomu-bu, Shakai-ka, *Dairen zaikin Mantetsu hojin shain seikei-hi chōsa* (Dairen: Mantetsu, 1925): 11–12; 79.

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the need for a new social order responsive to the needs of workers.[71] Later it would inform support for the MEA's proposals for basic change to the remuneration policies for low-level workers, and thereafter, to the heavy rotation of labour-related bills (*gidai*) on the Council docket.

The first MEA Council and the 'personnel problem'

On 26 December 1926 the MEA convened its first Council meeting. Proposals were divided into two categories based on their submission by either members of the secretariat or by delegates. Many concerned the fine-tuning of election procedures and other agenda items relating to the smooth running of the organization. What stood out, however, were eight bills that concerned the improvement of working conditions, leave policies, and bonus pay for Japanese unskilled workers that had been submitted by Sasaki Noboru, a 19 year old delegate representing the Dairen Docks, and two others.[72] The bills did not receive a majority vote from the Council and so were abandoned—for the time being. They did however propel change through the creation of a special investigative committee formed to research best practices for determining the needs of low-level employees and how such needs might, in the future, be brought to management's attention.

What is more, the mere presence of the bills on the docket of the first Council meeting was decisive in drawing support from blue-collar employees to the fledgling organization. It provided a glimmer of hope to a workforce increasingly fearful of sudden unemployment as Mantetsu trimmed its workforce in a series of across the board lay-offs beginning in June 1920 when 15 per cent of white-collar (*shokuin*) and 20 per cent of semi-skilled and unskilled workers (*yō-in*) were dismissed. Between 1923 and 1927, another 3,000 employees (of various rank) were let go. Cuts to allowances and other benefits—a reflection of the directors' February 1925 decision to trim the personnel budget by 5 per cent—further raised anxiety among workers, as well as criticism over the damage levelled on the health of a settler colony by a myopic obsession with short-term profits.[73] By

[71] See, for example, Okumura Shinji, 'Kojin ware yori shakai ware e', *Readers' club* June 1925, (Dairen): 15–21.
[72] *Kyōwa*, 8/15/37, p. 25.
[73] *Shintenchi*, November 1927, pp. 1–3.

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early 1926, there was 'no hotter topic at Mantetsu' than the 'personnel problem' (*jinji mondai*).[74]

Mantetsu's blue-collar Japanese workers and their families suffered not only from reduced paychecks, but also from feelings of dignity denied. The company's tremendous growth in the post-World War I era created great stratification between employee ranks and accordingly, new markers of difference. Where one lived, how many days vacation one received, and even what day was payday—all provided specific information about employee rank. Issues of class and what was increasingly viewed as a mismatch between financial recompense and patriotic duty to empire—it was station staff, not directors, who suffered 'bandit attacks'—became a topic of frequent comment in the pages of first *Reader's club*, and after April 1927, in *Kyōwa*.

The prominence of the personnel problem on early Council dockets—44 per cent of bills featured at the second Council meeting on 14 May 1927 dealt with salary, status and benefits issues (a percentage that increases to 60 per cent if retirement benefits are included)[75]—not only cemented the MEA's populist appeal, it united supporters of both liberal and conservative persuasions by a shared belief that Mantetsu's sub-imperialists could not express their patriotism and support for the imperial mission if they did not have enough to eat or a proper place to live.

Indeed, those who would become best known during wartime for their right-wing ideologies—men like Ōkawa Shūmei and Miyazaki Masayoshi—involved themselves in the advocacy of labour issues, both before and after the MEA's founding. In a diary entry from July 1922, Ōkawa recounts how after listening to fellow Teidai alumnus, Kamimura Tetsuya, complain bitterly about Mantetsu's insufficient personnel policies and argue the need for wide-reaching reform, Ōkawa offered his help in providing leadership for the proposed reforms.[76]

Miyazaki for his part shied away from direct commentary on the matter of whether or not the MEA should advocate on behalf of Mantetsu's unskilled Japanese labourers. He did nonetheless argue vehemently for the MEA to hold together in summer 1928 when it

[74] *Readers' club*, February 1926, p. 1.

[75] Hirayama Tsutomu, 'Mantetsu shain-kai no setsuritsu to katsudō' *Mita gakkai zasshi* 93, 2 (Tokyo: Keio University, 2000): 114, chart 5.

[76] Ōkawa Shūmei kenshōkai ed., *Ōkawa Shūmei nikki, 1903–1949* (Tokyo: Iwasaki Gakujutsu Shuppansha): 116–118.

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teetered on the brink of collapse, weakened by allegations that it was a labour union on the make and a breeding ground for Marxist thought. Miyazaki's defence of the MEA went hand in hand with his defence of continental empire at a time when members of Tokyo's educated elite had grown weary of 'special interests' in Manchuria and all that was required to maintain them.[77]

For Miyazaki, the MEA's key objective was to nurture a generation of young employees whose intimate knowledge of empire would prevail over the selfish interests of party politicians from the metropole.[78] It was imperative that the MEA stay together, Miyazaki argued, and withstand slander of alleged extremist politics. (Most critics took aim at what they saw as radical leftist politics though the label of 'fascistic organization' also surfaced.[79]) To Miyazaki, dispute over the politics of the MEA was mere squabbling. What was essential was its role in safeguarding the future of both continental empire and employee self-governance.

The MEA's 1928 identity crisis

MEA institution-building continued in 1927 coincident with official commemoration of Mantetsu's twentieth anniversary. The year began with the creation of a local MEA branch (*rengōkai*) at the Fushun Colliery, 'coal basket of the empire' and shared workplace of 2,000 Japanese and 4,300 Chinese unskilled labourers.[80] In the months that

[77] During a visit to Tokyo in early summer 1931, Shinozaki Yoshirō, a prominent member of Dairen's financial community, was astonished at the following outburst by a politician who demanded of him: 'What in heaven's name is so important about Manchuria?! Leaving aside rail revenue, Fushun coal, and Anshan iron, what achievements are there to speak of??! Emigration is a disaster, Russia's no longer a threat, and we have ample food supplies here in Japan . . .'. On the same visit, Shinozaki made a stop at Waseda University, there to discover that the words 'empire' (*teikoku*) and 'war' (*sensō*) were used with scorn by students. *Shintenchi*, July 1931, pp. 50–51.

[78] *Kyōwa*, 8/4/28 no. 1 weekly, p. 9.

[79] In May 1931, Tanikawa Hiroshi, a reporter at the *Dairen shinbun*, branded the MEA a 'fascistic organization' (*fashisuto dantai*), citing both the group's mobilization of lower-level workers to support aggressive imperialism in extra-company affairs, and domination by monopoly capital of all internal matters. *Kyōwa*, 6/15/31, p. 15.

[80] *Kyōwa*, May 1927, 12–3. These figures reflect worker totals at Fushun as of September 1925. Additionally, 700 Japanese were employed at the colliery in white-collar administrative positions. Sada Kōjirō ed. *Minami Manshū Tetsudō Kabushiki-gaisha nijūnen ryakushi*. [8](Dairen: Manshū Nichi Nichi Shinbun, 1927): overleaf between pp. 44–45.

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followed, MEA branches cropped up in Andong, Sipingjie, Fengtian, Shahekou, and elsewhere along the length and breadth of the railline. The branches were the operational heart of the MEA, where members voted for Council delegates,[81] gathered at regular division meetings to propose bills that might then be adopted by delegates for presentation at the annual Council meeting,[82] assembled for lessons on lifestyle rationalization (*seikatsu kaizen*) and other activities deemed essential by the MEA Cultivation Department (*shūyō-bu*). It was to the branches that the Association's headquarters in Dairen issued news bulletins, directives, and the like.[83] In short, branches—as well as their subdivisions called *bunkai* or 'chapters' —represented the shopfloor of Mantetsu democracy. And, it was from within the branches that the first serious challenge to the MEA emerged during the third Council of February 1928, scene to an explosive rift between polarized factions representing respectively urban and rural branches—a geographical distinction that correlated in the main with class distinctions.

The point of contention was an emergency resolution proposed by delegates from the Fushun Colliery who were dissatisfied with what they viewed as foot-dragging by the Mantetsu executive on personnel issues in general, and retirement bonuses for low-ranking workers, in particular. At the February 1928 council, Fushun delegates proposed offering Mantetsu an ultimatum: management would have eight months (until 1 October) to institute retirement bonuses for *yōin*. Though the negative repercussions of an unfulfilled ultimatum went unspecified, the very idea of up-ending the power dynamic between workers and management was interpreted by many (chiefly, delegates representing urban white-collar workers) as a prelude to a strike, or other 'union-like behaviour'.[84] Tachibana Shiraki—who

[81] Per MEA bylaws, Council delegates were allotted to branches proportionally based on branch membership. In 1928, a branch's first ten members entitled the branch to one delegate. Thereafter, an additional delegate was allotted for membership of up to 45 members, a third for membership up to 80, and a fourth for membership to 150. Membership of 151 members or more was entitled to an additional delegate for every 100 members.

[82] Occasionally, special Council sessions (*rinji hyōgiinkai*) were called to address a particularly pressing order of business. Beginning in 1933, regular Council meetings in Dairen were held twice yearly.

[83] In May 1928, Secretary General Ishikawa instructed local branch leaders to warn their constituents against provocation of Mantetsu's 24,000 Chinese employees given the threat of instability following recent violence in Shanghai. *Kyōwa*, June 1928, p. 122.

[84] *Kyōwa*, 9/22/28 no. 12 weekly, p. 8.

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reported with a breathless sense of urgency on the resulting spat among Council delegates—defended the Fushun delegates against allegations of intent to launch class warfare by declaring, 'In fact, banding together in support of a common belief is the foundation of democracy'.[85]

In the weeks that followed, the MEA secretariat embarked on a series of public relations tours throughout the Leasehold and Rail Zone in an attempt to ease tensions. Ishikawa Tetsuo, newly appointed as secretary general in early 1928, urged unity, declaring that the MEA had been founded on a groundwork of morality, humanism, and equality.[86] Yamamoto Katsuyasu, a delegate from Fushun, urged conciliation between the two opposing factions, referencing Bakumatsu-era peacemaker Katsu Kaishū as he implored each side to understand the other's viewpoint. 'Whether above or below you [in rank], are not all your Mantetsu colleagues of the same Yamato flesh and blood?'[87]

At the root of the MEA's 1928 identity crisis was disagreement over what weight to assign to each of the three *Principles* that had been made public at the MEA founding two years earlier. Should 'cultivat[ing] a spirit of independence and self-reliance, and foster[ing] the practice of self-governance' (Principle #1) take precedence over 'protect[ing] the Mantetsu mandate and defend[ing] its sincerity of purpose' (Principle #2)? Were not the Fushun delegates making too much of Principle #3 ('To advance the welfare of employees in accordance with the healthy development of the Company') to the detriment of the other principles?

As questions such as these exercised the MEA secretariat and delegates, an early morning explosion on 4 June 1928 on the Mantetsu trunk line just outside Fengtian recast the debate over the MEA mission. The assassination of Zhang Zuolin and resulting Chinese protests against Kwantung Army perfidy exposed the tensions that ran like fault lines beneath the surface of Mantetsu democracy. In the wake of the so-called 'Kōmoto Incident', issues of divisiveness between high and low among Japanese workers at Mantetsu could always be glossed over as the conflict between Japanese sub-imperialists and the Chinese and Manchu local populations assumed a position of fundamental importance. As Kamimura Tetsuya remarked in early

[85] Ibid.
[86] *Kyōwa*, 8/4/28 no. 1 weekly, p. 4.
[87] *Kyōwa*, 11/1/28 no. 20 weekly, p. 1.

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1929 on the subject of the inequalities empire produced between colonizer and colonized and the MEA's position on the matter, 'we cannot deny that blood is thicker than water'.[88]

Kamimura's comment offers a forceful reminder that no matter what conflicts existed among Japanese residents of the leasehold, the fundamental conflict in China's northeast remained as ever between colonizer and colonized.

Postscript: the MEA and Manchukuo

As with so much else in the three northeastern provinces, the MEA was transformed by the Manchurian Incident of Autumn 1931 and the establishment of Manchukuo in March 1932. On 21 September—just three days after the destruction of Mantetsu track outside Fengtian, and as Kwantung Army troops celebrated the fall of Jilin further north—the MEA leadership convened a special emergency meeting to draft a declaration of steadfast support for army actions and refutation of the 'false propaganda' forwarded by China to the League of Nations. The document—released on 1 October with 2,000 copies reserved for metropolitan distribution and an additional 3,000 published in English for foreign consumption—marked the MEA's debut in the courts of both Japanese domestic, and international opinion. Throughout the Autumn, Association representatives travelled both to Tokyo to participate in citizen gatherings and 'turn popular opinion in the right direction' and to Shanghai to join residents' associations in public cries of outrage at Chinese depravity.[89] A donation of 5,500 yen was quickly forwarded from the MEA accounts to army coffers.[90]

In the first 12 months after the Incident, around 24,000 Mantetsu employees were engaged, to one degree or another, in fighting the Chinese resistance. By mid-September 1932, a total of 18 employees had been killed (half of whom were Chinese), 53 wounded, and 37 kidnapped.[91] Of the nine Japanese killed, three were enshrined at Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo—an exaltation of sacrifice that Director Godō Takuo declared should inspire employee self-identification as

[88] *Kyōwa*, 1/29 weekly, p. 3.
[89] *Kyōwa*, 3/15/32, p. 19.
[90] Ibid.
[91] *Kyōwa*, 9/1/32, p. 1 and 9/15/32, p. 25. By early 1935, a total of 40 employees had been enshrined at Yasukuni. See names in Ibid., 4/15/35, p. 27.

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public servants (*kōri*).[92] Army production of a film documenting the Association's dedication to the national cause played before metropolitan audiences whilst definitively silencing those who would continue to fault the organization for the selfish pursuit of individual advantage.

The MEA also enjoyed fulfillment of some of its longest standing goals during the first months of Manchukuo's founding. In October 1932, three new directors were appointed to Mantetsu's executive board (to replace those who had resigned in solidarity with President Uchida Yasuya following Tokyo's abrupt dismissal of his vice-president Eguchi Teijō the previous April). What resulted was a board of directors evenly split for the first time between 'outside appointments' (directors, known colloquially as 'Mr. Outsider' (*tozama riji*)[93] who had begun their professional lives elsewhere and would likely return to the metropole given a change in the ruling party) and 'employee directors' (those who had risen through the ranks at Mantetsu, thereby demonstrating a familiarity with company history and, it was alleged, dedication to permanent settlement on the continent.)

Whereas the first employee director had been named in December 1921, it was not until the mid-1930s that employee directors comprised a significant proportion of directorate seats. This was by no means a trivial development. First, it made possible Mantetsu's rebirth as a true meritocracy. Since, according to company regulations, Mantetsu's president could be drawn from the ranks of the directorate, a higher percentage of employee-directors corresponded with an increased likelihood of seeing a veteran employee determine the course of continental empire. As talk swirled between employees in the first year after Manchukuo's founding of a 'Manchuria Restoration' (*Manshū ishin*), the increasing prominence of employee directors was a hopeful sign.[94] Placement of veteran employees among Mantetsu's top brass was celebrated as well for its promise of finally resolving the aggrieved personnel problem, which had become increasingly fraught following cuts to employee pay and benefits in August 1931 as Mantetsu experienced its first year of deficits. Efforts to reverse

[92] *Kyōwa*, 7/15/34, p. 18.

[93] Use of the phrase *tozama* is a direct allusion to the "outside daimyo" (*tozama daimyo*) of the Tokugawa period (1603–1868). These were the lords whose allegiance to Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) dated to the post-Sekigahara settlement and consequently was viewed as less secure than that of the *fudai* daimyo who were long-time Tokugawa allies. Kawara En, 'Ōkura Kinmochi no tai-Man kokusaku-ron' *Rekishi kenkyū* (786): 43, note 14.

[94] *Kyōwa*, 4/15/33, p. 1.

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the cuts—which would remain in place until early 1935, causing much hardship in the intervening years as employees on fixed salaries struggled to stay afloat in the post-Incident inflationary economy—would remain a constant focus of the MEA's efforts throughout the early Manchukuo years.

The employee directors issue is notable as well for the way in which it represented a shared goal of MEA leadership and the Kwantung Army command, both of which viewed progress on the issue as a victory in liberating Mantetsu from the influence of the metropolitan political parties. The sharing of concerns on management matters was, however, very much limited to this one issue. In the months following the signing of the Japan-Manchukuo Protocol on 15 September 1932 (an agreement which not only established formal relations between the two nations, but switched the lessor of the Kwantung Lease from China to Manchukuo), the Kwantung Army demonstrated a new and aggressive determination to control Mantetsu and its employees.

It was to the thwarting of such attempts and the protection of civilian-run empire in the Kwantung Leasehold (which remained autonomous from Manchukuo governance and where Mantetsu maintained its Dairen headquarters) that the MEA turned, beginning in 1933, when the secretariat fiercely and very publicly opposed the army's plan for stripping Mantetsu of its quasi-governmental duties. The MEA 'won' its first direct challenge to the Kwantung Army and Mantetsu remained intact—a development that inspired one lieutenant colonel to admit army defeat in the face of employees' ardent and patriotic defence of their company.[95] Unabashedly anti-military sentiment continued to appear in the pages of *Kyōwa*, and tensions between the MEA and the Kwantung Army leadership remained constant as Manchukuo was transformed from republic to empire in 1934. By 1937, however, opportunities for open dissent had all but disappeared, and in December, the Kwantung Army's plans to fundamentally reorganize Mantetsu to better serve the needs of the army's war machine were realized.

Throughout this time, MEA branches and chapters extended their reach far and wide in Manchukuo, north China and northern Korea mirroring the tremendous expansion of the rails after 1935. In June 1940, as Mantetsu's capitalization swelled to a staggering 1.4 billion yen, the 22nd MEA Council convened for the last time in its original

[95] Hōjō Shūichi ed., *Sogō Shinji to tairiku* (Hōjō Shūichi jimusho, 1971): 115.

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form. In 1941, it was replaced by a 'Central Consultative Committee' that met three times a year and served primarily as imperial booster and mouthpiece for army directives.

In May 1945, Yamazaki Motoki was appointed Mantetsu president, only the second employee to rise from employee ranks to director and then on to president.[96] Yamazaki's career at Mantetsu had been inextricably intertwined with the growth and development of the MEA: he had served as chief of the Fushun branch from its founding in January 1927 and had been a staunch advocate of improving employee welfare. The Mantetsu he governed for three months in summer 1945 was but a pale shadow of its previous kingly stature, its operations reduced to the rail transport of munitions and its workforce enfeebled by the near wholesale enlistment of young, able-bodied male employees. On 17 August 1945, as Soviet troops occupied Manchukuo's capital of Shinkyō, Kwantung Army Commander Yamada Otozō delegated all governing responsibilities to Yamazaki before fleeing to safety. It was an ironic fulfillment of the idealistic vision at the heart of Mantetsu democracy: ultimate responsibility for governing Japan's continental empire and its settlers now rested indisputably with employees. But now there was no empire.

Taishō democracy's imperial inflections

Judging from the MEA case, it is entirely reasonable to believe that the currents of Taishō democracy did not end abruptly at the metropole's borders. Indeed, if the recent vogue for transnational history has taught nothing else, surely it is that ideas and ideologies are among the least likely phenomena to be constrained by the boundaries of the nation-state. An earnest embrace of democracy and its promise was just as evident among employees in Dairen as it was among marchers in Tokyo or farmers in Tochigi.

Yet, even if Japanese living in the empire called themselves 'democrats' and their organizations 'democratic,' why take them at their word? Surely, it is as George Orwell suggested: 'Words of this kind are often used in a consciously dishonest way. That is, the person

[96] The other was Kohiyama Naoto who was appointed to Mantetsu's top spot in July 1943.

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who uses them has his own private definition, but allows his hearer to think he means something quite different'.[97]

Was the MEA denatured by its conflation with nationalism and support for empire? In accepting the basic premise of imperialism—the exercise of absolute power by one sovereign power over another—was the very presumption of rule by the people nothing more than an ill-disguised sham? Is 'Mantetsu democracy' a spurious notion?

Certainly, the most liberal of Mantetsu democrats had their blind spots. Just as both the pervasiveness of the emperor system and persistent discrimination against citizens of *buraku* descent denatured Taishō democracy in the metropole, so too did the exclusion of Mantetsu's Chinese labourers compromise the experiment of Mantetsu democracy. Promises of liberty, of any sort or degree, were completely withheld from Chinese labourers—a withholding that had as much to do with the conditions under which Mantetsu management extended permission for the MEA, as it did with the organization's lack of concern for the wellbeing of the colonized. Manchuria was, after all, to be 'developed' (*kaihatsu*) not 'liberated' (*kaihō*). Again, to quote Orwell, Mantetsu democrats, like the British ruling elite during World War II, 'believe[d] in democracy and civil liberty in a narrow and partly hypocritical way'.[98]

Yet such monumental imperfections aside, the movement for Mantetsu democracy deserves attention. Its presence reveals fundamental truths about the imbrication of empire and democracy in the prewar. First, the 1926 establishment of the MEA carved a political space for the imperial *kokumin* that the organs of colonial governance could rely upon for help in promoting the work of empire for decades to come. No matter the limitations of the representative assembly—Mantetsu's board of directors were by no means obliged to give a hearing to the MEA secretary general and his periodic presentation of the Council's passed resolutions, much less act on the suggestions therein—employees believed in the value of airing their opinions to management about how the empire should be run. Though begun as an idea among a small group of the imperial intellectual elite,

[97] George Orwell, 'Politics and the English Language' *Payments Book*, 11 December 1945. Reprinted in Peter Davison, ed. *Orwell and Politics* (London: Penguin Books, 2001): 403.

[98] George Orwell, 'Extract from London Letter, 15 April 1941' *Partisan Review*, July–August. Reprinted in Davison, ed. *Orwell and Politics*, p. 141.

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Mantetsu democracy proved enduring for the support it received from the company's rank and file.

As noted above, the ascent to power of the Kwantung Army after 1932 gave rise to chronic tensions between the MEA leadership and military personnel. What these tensions reveal in abundance is that even tacit or temporary acceptance of force in empire fundamentally denatured the ideas and institutions of self-governance so carefully crafted during the interwar period. Having supported army actions to enable the creation of an ideal society which might be governed by peace and democratic principles (as opposed to warlord despots), the MEA could not then simply vote away the army once fighting had ended.

Likewise, military-led imperialism was changed for its encounter with what might be termed democratic imperialism. In the absence of such contact, we can speculate that the push to total war would have happened sooner and with potentially more far-reaching consequences. These mutual interactions reveal a second source of fundamental truths about the imbrication of empire and democracy in the prewar.

Finally, popular activism in the MEA increases our understanding of how the liberalization of the 1920s led to the aggressive imperialism of the 1930s and 1940s. It supports our conviction that militarism after 1931 was neither a consequence of the failure of democratic institutions nor an indication of peculiar development. By contrast, the considerable overlap in membership—and later breaking of ranks—between the MEA and populist imperial boosters of the late 1920s such as the Manchurian Youth League (*Manshū seinen renmei*) and the Majestic Peak Society (*Daiyūhōkai*) is a reminder that for many, democratic thought was just one part of a larger equation composed of equal parts popular representation, patriotic pursuit of national glory, and fundamentally, exaltation of the Imperial Will.

Popular reaction to military encroachment on civilian governance in the empire during the mid-1930s adds an extra dimension to our understanding of army ascendancy in metropolitan governance at the same moment—a dimension only visible when we examine Japan's prewar democracy and process of democratization on not just two, but on three levels.

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