

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF THE JAPANESE “PUPPET STATE”

OF MANCHUKUO IN CHINESE MANCHURIA

IN THE EARLY 1930S

by

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ABSTRACT

In September 1931, an explosion occurred on the Southern Manchurian Railroad line near the city of Mukden in the Chinese province of Manchuria. In response to the attack, the Japanese army stationed in Korea at the time moved into Manchuria and annexed the territory from China. This turn of events did concern the international community, but no decisive action was taken during the rest of 1931. The only nation to create any sort of policy regarding the Japanese actions in Manchuria was the United States, which created the Stimson Doctrine in December 1931. The Stimson Doctrine stated that the United States would not recognize new states that were created by aggressive actions, in many ways predicting what would happen in 1932. In early 1932, a new nation called Manchukuo was established in the region with Japan supporting its independence from China. The international community was shocked by these developments and the League of Nations established the Lytton Commission to investigate the Mukden incident and the validity of the new Manchurian State. The League of Nations, however, was slow in its response to the issue of recognizing Manchukuo as an independent nation with it taking over a year for the League to declare that it would not recognize the new state. There were several additional factors that affected this slow response by the League. There was no international precedence for state recognition; many member nations, including Great Britain, were not committed to the policy of non-recognition; and the international community had to consider the Japanese claim of Manchurian nationalism when deciding on the issue of recognizing Manchukuo. As a result, many nations expressed a wavering opinion regarding the recognition of Manchukuo despite the League policy of non-recognition. This lack of definitive action on the part of the international community allowed for the state of Manchukuo to exist for over a decade and for Japan to establish a strong position in China.

Introduction

On September 18, 1931, an explosion occurred on the South Manchurian Railroad near Mukden, a city located in northeastern China, known as Manchuria. At the time, the Japanese blamed the Chinese troops in the area. However, two members of the Japanese Kwantung Army, Lieutenant-Colonel Itagaki Seishiro and Captain Ishiwara Kanji, were actually the parties responsible for the explosion. The leaders of the Kwantung Army took advantage of the situation and, along with support troops from Japanese-occupied Korea, annexed the entire territory of Manchuria. Although the Japanese Imperial government did not sanction the initial actions of the Kwantung Army, Emperor Hirohito approved of later military action that the Kwantung Army took in Manchuria. This action included the creation of the satellite state of Manchukuo in early 1932. The state of Manchukuo would serve as a puppet state of the Japanese military and a vital base for Japanese operations on mainland East Asia for the next decade.¹

The turn of events in northeastern China shocked the international community and the Western democracies immediately began discussions to determine the course of action they should take in regards to the newly formed state of Manchukuo. The United States of America (U.S.) was the first to act, declaring in the Stimson Doctrine that it would not recognize Manchukuo. The Stimson Doctrine stated that the United States would not recognize any government created by conquest. U.S. policy therefore maintained that the territory that was now a part of Manchukuo rightly belonged to China. Although the United States acted quickly in making its position on the Manchukuo issue known by the beginning of 1932, the rest of the world was slower to act. The League of Nations, members of which included most of the world

¹Arthur Stam, *The Diplomacy of the "New Order": the Foreign Policy of Japan, Germany and Italy: 1931-1945* (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2003), 13-14.

powers at the time save the United States and the Soviet Union, needed to decide if it was going to recognize the state of Manchukuo. After over a year of discussion, on February 27, 1933, the League of Nations condemned Japan's "act of aggression" against China and refused to recognize Manchukuo as an independent nation. This decision came as a result of the influence of the United States on the League and the recommendation of the Lytton Commission, which led the League's investigation of the Mukden Incident and the state of affairs in Manchukuo.²

The Lytton Commission Report made clear that member nations would adopt a policy of non-recognition of Manchukuo. While this policy suggests unity, in reality, the members of the League of Nations took varying positions regarding Manchukuo. Moreover, those member states that demanded non-recognition often held ill-defined positions on the issue. This diversity of views resulted primarily from the fact that international laws regarding recognition of states were almost nonexistent at the time. The few laws in existence regarding recognition and non-recognition that existed at the time provided little guidance regarding the issue.

The conflicting views of the United States and Great Britain complicated the issue. The United States, which did not belong to the League of Nations, created its own policy independent of the League of Nations. Because of the global influence of the United States, the member states of the League of Nations could not ignore U.S. policy toward Manchukuo. Many British officials believed in the imperial might of Great Britain and felt that the British policy should shape the League's policies. In other words, the might of Britain's global power should allow it to have a preponderance of influence on League policy, compared to smaller nations. The unwillingness of either country to bend to the will of the other dashed attempts to establish unified policies

² "Non-recognition: A Reconsideration," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 22, no. 1 (1954): 261.; Stam, 14-15.

regarding Manchukuo. Since Great Britain's policy was also the League's policy, this meant that the League's policy and the United States' policy differed. The United States' Stimson Doctrine seemed to firmly declare that no country that was a product of war or conflict would be recognized, while Great Britain and the League declared a policy of non-recognition towards Manchukuo without taking any steps against Japan, the aggressor.

Another major factor leading to the lack of a unified response to the Manchurian Crisis was that Western nations had different historical relationships with China and Japan. Past conflicts with China prevented Western nations from supporting China on the Manchukuo issue with any significant force. The European influence in Asia had increased in the past one hundred to one hundred and fifty years. The differences in the political and economic situations in Japan and China led these nations to respond differently to Western attempts to open these nations up to trade. While many Japanese had embraced Western influence and a few minor acts of resistance did initially occur, the Chinese response can be characterized as negative. Several major conflicts with China during the nineteenth century cost the Western powers significant time and resources. When compared to Japan's relationship with the West, China's opening to the West was violent and forced. Although this does not mean that Japan did not suffer from the same unequal treatment as China when it came to trade negotiations, it does mean that many Westerners favored the Japanese over the Chinese in later international relations.

Lastly, the League of Nations took a stand against the formation of Manchukuo as a puppet state of Japan, not against the independence of Manchuria from China. The historical and ethnic differences between the people of Manchuria and China Proper gave credence to the idea of Manchuria functioning as a separate entity from the rest of China. The issue of Manchurian nationalism complicated matters for many nations and led them to reconsider when condemning

the formation of Manchukuo. The fact that many nations proved willing to consider the idea of an independent Manchuria prevented definitive united action against Japan.

This paper argues that while League of Nations adopted an official policy of non-recognition against Manchukuo, the actions of the nations, most notably Great Britain and the U.S., shows a less defined policy of non-recognition than one might believe. Newspaper articles, documents from Foreign Office of Great Britain and from the United States Department of State archive pertaining to the time period in question reveal that the issue of non-recognition of Manchukuo was far from clear-cut. Unclear rules and regulations regarding recognition of new nations muddied the issue and allowed nations to continue some form of relationship with non-recognized states. This indecisiveness on the part of the League and the United States led to the state of Manchukuo continuing to function as a nation for over a decade until the end of World War II when the territory returned to China. The lack of action by the West led to serious consequences for both China and the rest of the world.

International Law

Even before the debate over Manchukuo, recognition of states had presented the international community with a complicated issue. Consider for example, the recognition of the Confederate States of America during the American Civil War. When the conflict broke out in 1861, Great Britain almost immediately declared neutrality in the conflict. Behind closed doors many British politicians believed that a civil war and split would permanently limit the United States' global power, which had been threatening Britain's global dominance for almost a century. However, Britain did not want to risk going to war with the United States over support for the Confederacy. Therefore, Britain decided that it would remain neutral on the matter until it

became clear whether the Confederacy had any chance of winning the war. However, the Confederacy did not view Britain's claims to neutrality as a neutral position when it came to state recognition. By claiming neutrality, the Confederate leaders argued, Great Britain was acknowledging that the war was not a civil war but a war between two independent nations, thereby recognizing the Confederate States of America as such. This technicality mattered little in the outcome of the war, but it points out that international recognition of new states had already become a complicated matter by the mid nineteenth century.³

It took the First World War and the formation of the League of Nations for the international community to recognize that nations needed to act in a consistent manner to maintain international peace. However, the League of Nations could not force member and non-member states to conform to a consistent approach to state recognition. In addition, nations find it hard to adopt a single policy, especially if they have failed to achieve a consistent policy regarding recognition. The Manchurian Crisis would provide the first major test of the League's ability to not only enforce a collective policy of recognition on its member nations but to act efficiently when confronted with a potentially global crisis.

Some people may acknowledge only two positions concerning the issue of recognition: recognition of the new state or non-recognition of the new state. However, the legal issues regarding recognition of a new state are vast and complex. This complexity is one of the reasons that most nations at the time of the Manchukuo Incident had inconsistent views regarding the issue of recognition of new states.⁴ Even basic principles of recognition can be vague. In

³ Steven E. Woodworth, *This Great Struggle* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012), 66-69.

⁴ Frederick Middlebush, "Non-recognition as a sanction of International Law," *Proceedings of the American Society of International Law at Its Annual Meeting (1921-1969)* 27, (1933).

“Recognition at International Law,” J. G. Starke describes the idea of recognition as two paradoxes, stating “paradox No. 1 is that non-intercourse between states does not necessarily imply non-recognition. Paradox No. 2 is that non-recognition does not necessarily signify non-intercourse.”⁵ One can easily see from Starke’s statement that the difficulty defining ideas of recognition and, by default, non-recognition. Starke goes on to state that recognition in and of itself does not immediately create a relationship between two states. Rather, it serves as the important first step in establishing that a relationship could in fact exist in the future. This notion is one reason that no consistent policy of recognition had developed up to this point in history – one country’s definition of recognition or non-recognition may be, and certainly was, different from another country’s definition. Despite these differences, by the time of the Manchukuo Incident, some were attempting to shape international law in such a way as to resolve these discrepancies.⁶

A state can receive two types of recognition from another state: *de jure* and *de facto*. Although similar in some aspects, they differ significantly, especially in terms of importance. In the simplest terms, the difference between *de jure* and *de facto* recognition involves the exchange of diplomats. *De facto* recognition results when a relationship develops between two countries, but they have exchanged no diplomats. *De jure* recognition involves the exchange of diplomats, usually with the establishment of consuls in the major cities of the two countries. The difference between *de facto* and *de jure* recognition, involves many more intricacies, but the establishment of this diplomatic relationship has great significance and relevance in the context of this paper. In the early twentieth century, these definitions of *de facto* and *de jure* recognition

⁵ J.G. Starke. “Recognition at International Law,” *The Australian Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (1950): 15.

⁶ Starke, 13-20

were more fluid than today. This fluidity contributes to much of the confusion regarding the actions taken by certain nations during the Manchukuo controversy. Although one cannot say, with any certainty, what each individual country perceived as the definitions of *de jure* and *de facto* recognition, one can assume that each country's definition differed at least to some extent, since until the establishment of League of Nations, each nation acted independently and thus dealt with international issues differently. The international community created the League of Nations in part to resolve these issues, but the League was so new at the time of the Manchukuo controversy that not all member nations had adopted these legal definitions.⁷

Non-recognition of a state, however, does not imply the nonexistence or illegitimacy of the state. For example, even though it took time for a majority of nations to recognize the Soviet government in Russia, the United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) still existed. Therefore, the League of Nations' non-recognition of Manchukuo did not mean that the state of Manchukuo was any less legitimate. One reason Japan insisted that the international community recognize Manchukuo is that such recognition had a strong influence on helping to legitimize Japan's actions in China. By refusing to recognize Manchukuo, which Japan had created, the League condemned the actions of the Japanese government in the region.

Even nations from similar backgrounds, which one might expect to behave similarly in their foreign policy, do not always do so. Consider for example, the difference between the United States and the Great Britain over the question of recognition of the USSR only a few years prior to the Manchukuo controversy. When the Tsarist government of Russia ended in 1917, the world had to decide if it would recognize the new communist regime when it came into

⁷ Starke, 15

power in 1922. Great Britain extended *de jure* recognition of the USSR in 1924, but the United States took almost 16 years to do so. A more recent comparison involves U.S. recognition of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Israel. The United States, though quick to recognize Israel when it came into existence in 1948, denied recognition of the People's Republic of China, established just a year later. Great Britain, by contrast, quickly recognized the People's Republic of China but hesitated to recognize Israel. In regards to the Manchukuo controversy, the United States and Great Britain found themselves in completely different situations. The United States, not a member of the League of Nations, could adopt a policy regarding recognition of Manchukuo independent of the League of Nations' policy. Great Britain, as a member of the League of Nations, had no such independence. Its official policy concerning the recognition of Manchukuo had to conform to the League of Nations' policy. However, an official policy of non-recognition did not stop officials in Great Britain and other countries from questioning the validity of the policy.⁸

Great Britain, as part of the League of Nations, did not official recognize Manchukuo as a separate nation from China, but openly complained that the issue was not one in which the West should be involved. Great Britain's leaders believed that this was a minor Eastern conflict that would resolve itself in the end. Great Britain was not the only country to express doubts over the League of Nations' policy, both publicly and privately. Many important players in the international community such as France and the Soviet Union took actions that may seem contradictory to the official policy against the recognition of Manchukuo. Foreign governments, as well as the press, soon pointed out these discrepancies, and several awkward situations resulted. For example, at one point, the Soviet Union sent consuls to several Manchurian cities

⁸ Starke, 13-14

and Manchurian consular posts came into being in the Soviet Union.⁹ In addition, the *New York Times* reported that the Soviet Union and Manchukuo were negotiating economically beneficial deals.¹⁰ This cooperation seems to imply imminent Soviet recognition of Manchukuo. Japan, in addition, did not wish to dissuade this rumor. However, the Soviet government had to release several official statements clarifying its position regarding Manchukuo before the international community would accept its explanation.¹¹

The Soviet Union was not the only nation having trouble making its position on Manchukuo clear to the international community. France also had to reiterate its position on several occasions when the international press released articles claiming that the country was considering departing from the League's policy of non-recognition.¹² Members of the future Axis powers, Germany and Italy, although not faced with the same public scrutiny as other member nations, were eerily silent on the issue during League of Nations meetings to discuss the findings of the Lytton Commission, perhaps foreshadowing the future alliance.¹³ Another significant blunder by a member nation was the apparent ambiguity of Norway during the crisis. Norway had a reputation for neutrality and so when the Manchurian crisis erupted in 1931, it assumed the role of peacekeeper in the conflict. However, this neutrality collapsed when in 1934 the Norwegian foreign minister sent a telegram to Manchukuo congratulating Emperor Pu Yi on his ascendance to the throne of Manchukuo. Many nations saw this praise as recognition in all but name. In addition, the apparently pro-Japanese leanings of officials from Norway in the time

⁹ A.T. Steele, "Manchukuo Starts Consular Service," *New York Times*, 23 October 1932, E7.

¹⁰ Hugh Byas, "Manchukuo Sees Recognition Hope," *New York Times*, 6 July 1933, 4.

¹¹ "Russian Recognition Denied to Manchukuo," *New York Times*, 27 September 1932, 10.

¹² "France and Manchukuo," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 September 1932, A4.

¹³ Florentine Rodao, "Japan and the Axis, 1937-8: Recognition of the Franco Regime and Manchukuo," *Journal of Contemporary History* 44, no. 3 (2009): 431-47.

between the Mukden Incident and the foreign minister's telegram ruined Norway's reputation as a promoter of peace. This incident not only caused Norway international embarrassment, but also led other member nations, believing that Norway had a hidden agenda, to question Norway's loyalty to the League of Nations.¹⁴

These issues make it clear that the world was unprepared for the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and emergence of the state of Manchukuo. The Manchurian Crisis was in effect the first global crisis that the League of Nations faced since its creation. The League of Nations was created with the idea that nations would come together and prevent future aggression, but the League's ability to deal with the Manchukuo controversy revealed its weakness. Without cohesion, the League could not act effectively. Although, the League of Nations could articulate a non-recognition policy, it could not enforce it for member nations which had not committed to following that policy. In effect, this inability to enforce the League's policy killed it.¹⁵

The League of Nations was an attempt by the nations of the world to create an international organization for the benefit of all. The Manchurian Crisis was its first test and it failed. Looking back, once can see that the nations of the world were not ready for this type of long-term commitment. The United States' refusal to join despite being integral to the creation of the League offered the first, and most obvious, sign of the issues that the League would face in its short history. Many member nations, especially Great Britain, struggled continuously with committing fully to the League. Their imperialist tendencies from the previous century would not allow them to view themselves as subordinate or equal to other Western Nations. How could a

¹⁴ Eldrid I. Mageli, "A Real Peace Tradition? Norway and the Manchurian Crisis, 1931-1934," *Contemporary European History* 19, no. 1 (2010): 17-36.

¹⁵ Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 116 – 117.

country like Great Britain maintain its position as a global power when many people advocated for a certain level of global unity and equality? By way of answer, at the time, an organization too weak to prevent its member nations from, in effect, choosing the policies that they wished to follow. However, it became obvious, during the 1930s, starting with the Manchurian Crisis, that the League would fail.

Great Britain's Policy

Unlike Norway, the USSR, and France, Great Britain kept its ambiguous and conflicting opinions regarding the Manchurian Crisis behind closed doors. Rufus Reading, Britain's Foreign Minister, had been in the position less than a month before the incident and did not deal with the situation effectively. Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald appointed Sir John Simon as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in November 1931, less than two months after the Mukden Incident. Sir John Simon had extensive experience in the British government in a variety of positions but none that had to do with anything outside of domestic affairs. Even so, Sir John Simon had to work with the League of Nations to establish a policy for both the League and for Great Britain. However, the British Foreign Office Files reveal open discussion and a variety of opinions concerning China.¹⁶

The British worried primarily about economic issues, just as did the Soviets and Americans. All three nations had trade interests in the region, but Great Britain's trade empire dwarfed the trade interests of the Soviet Union and the United States, though the latter's global economic power was quickly catching up. Making sure that ports and railway lines remained

¹⁶ Elizabeth Deanne Malpass, *Sir John Simon and British Diplomacy During the Sino-Japanese Crisis, 1931 – 1933* PhD diss., Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, 1969.

open for trade was of major significance to Great Britain. Therefore, stability in the region was of the utmost concern to Great Britain. Thus, Great Britain's primary opinion reflected in the Foreign Office Files concerned what course of action would achieve this stability. As long as the Japanese invasion did not threaten British holdings in Shanghai and Hong Kong and Japan's trade with Great Britain continued uninhibited, many British officials saw little to no reason to intervene in Manchuria.

Compared to many other British leaders, Sir John Simon showed greater concern about the situation. Although inexperienced in foreign affairs, Sir John Simon saw that the situation in Manchuria could quickly escalate. He thus took the most proactive stance when it came to discussing the situation with Japan, China, the League of Nations, and the United States. Yet Sir John Simon's task became all the more difficult due to the actions of his predecessor, Rufus Reading.

Rufus Reading was only the Foreign Secretary for a few months beginning in August 1931. Almost immediately, he received messages from the British diplomats in Japan and China warning him that the situation in the region was explosive. Japan supported the Manchurian nationalist movement and it was increasing in strength while the Chinese Nationalist government seemed to be losing control in the region. They predicted that it was only a matter of time before something happened in the region. Less than a month into his time as Foreign Secretary, the Mukden Incident occurred, leaving Reading in a position of trying to sort out the situation. He contacted the Foreign Office personnel in Japan and China to ask for their opinions. However, no one in the Foreign Office saw a need for immediate action, so Reading followed their advice despite the potential threat to British investments in the region. Moreover, Reading and the Foreign Office did not wish for the rest of the world to see the British as being "well-intentioned

busy bodies.” It is unclear why Reading refused to take a strong position but it is possible that the British did not want to appear to be too involved in international affairs despite its vast empire.¹⁷

Despite his caution, Reading began the initial talks with the League of Nations and the United States. When it came to the League of Nations, Great Britain charged its representative Lord Robert Cecil with ensuring that Great Britain’s policy became League policy. In effect, this meant that Lord Cecil had to convince the League that an agreement restricting Japan’s forces to a railway zone, which it had the right to maintain, was sufficient to resolve the situation. This belief implied that Japan would adhere to this promise with such an informal agreement and not expand its control to the rest of the Manchuria. However, in the coming month, Japan continually broke the agreement and effectively separated Manchuria from the rest of China. In September and October of 1931, Lord Cecil convinced the League members, save China, that the League did not need to interfere in Manchuria since the issue involved not the League Covenant but the Kellogg Pact and the Nine Power Treaty, therefore requiring U.S. involvement.¹⁸

By invoking the Kellogg Pact and the Nine Power Treaty, Lord Cecil and Great Britain effectively forced the United States to become involved in the situation. As discussed later in this paper, the United States did not want to get involved in the situation, though concerned, especially if it meant tying the United States to the League. This unwillingness to work with the League held true not only for the initial discussions of the Manchurian Crisis in 1931, but also when Manchukuo declared independence in 1932. However, the initial disagreements involving

¹⁷ Malpass, 27-29

¹⁸ Malpass, 31-32

the League of Nations, including Great Britain, and the United States made future agreement on the issue almost impossible.

Sir John Simon inherited this complicated situation involving the United States when he replaced Reading in November 1931. Any joint action between the League of Nations and the United States was almost completely off the table due to the United States' refusal to be affiliated with the League and Lord Cecil had convinced the League that it would need to take no immediate action as long as Japan restricted its forces to a zone around the railroad, protecting the interests that it originally claimed. In many ways, Sir John Simon was stuck. Without any further aggressive action by Japan, the League of Nations policy of intervention would hold and Simon could take no further action against Japan. However, Sir John Simon did not sit idle in this vital waiting period and he did not have to wait long for an opportunity to challenge the League of Nations' almost non-existent policy towards Japan and Manchuria.

By the beginning months of 1932, the situation in Manchuria had changed drastically. The United States had declared its own policy of non-recognition of states in anticipation of Manchurian independence, and the State of Manchukuo had declared independence from China under the sponsorship of the Japanese military. In addition, the world could no longer ignore the fact that Japan was blatantly violating its railway zone agreement with the League and that its expansionist ambitions not only included Manchukuo but other parts of China. Though the previous months of inaction had limited any action that Great Britain or the League could take, Sir John Simon could now act on his fears of Japanese aggression. He and the League of Nations then chose to tackle the issue of recognition of Manchukuo. In a way, this was only another way of attempting to deal with the issue without angering Japan. By tackling the issue of Manchukuo and denying its existence as an independent state, the League of Nations was avoiding

“attacking” Japan directly. Japan could not overtly claim that the League was attacking it without admitting that Manchukuo was a territorial expansion of the Japanese Empire, not an independent state. This turn of events, however, did not prevent Japan from becoming increasingly hostile in regards to the Manchukuo situation and alienating itself from the Western powers.

Although the British government took some steps toward deciding what to do about the situation in Manchuria, it took no definitive action until the Japanese army moved into China proper in 1932. As the Japanese military approached Shanghai, the Japanese government claimed, once again, that it was protecting its interests in the region, citing two examples of how Chinese civilians were threatening Japanese interests. First, the Japanese claimed the Chinese had attacked five Japanese men in Shanghai early in 1932. These men, according to the Japanese, were Buddhist monks and should have posed no threat to the Chinese population. The second incident, or series of incidents, was the increasing number of anti-Japanese boycotts in China, which hurt Japanese trade. Obviously, as the Japanese government claimed, the Chinese were openly hostile to Japan. This hostility gave the Japanese enough of a reason to send troops to Shanghai to protect Japanese interests and civilians. Now the British became concerned. Not only was the Japanese military moving further into China, but just as the situation threatened Japanese trade, it also threatened British trade. For every page within the Foreign Office files concerning Manchuria, ten more concerned the situation in Shanghai.¹⁹ Although the files indicated regular discussion of the Manchurian crisis, British officials seemed almost as aloof

¹⁹ These numbers are not a reflection of any sort of statistical study conducted by the author or another third party. They are simply being used to emphasize the disparity between the number of times one issue was discussed versus another.

toward the situation as the United States, despite the United States' almost immediate refusal to recognize Manchukuo.

The British public seemed to share the same aloofness as their leaders, a situation that would be repeated across the Atlantic in the United States, which will be discussed later in this paper. Although initially interested more than their American counterparts, by the end of 1931 the British public quickly tired of the situation and simply just wanted it to go away. They blamed neither the League nor the British government for the non-interventionist stance on the issue of the Japanese invasion of the region or for the recognition crisis involving Manchukuo later in 1932. The British public didn't even wholly blame Japan for the chaos and seemed to believe that Japan had realized its mistake and was working to correct it. The British did appear blame China, however, for no real reason other than allowing the situation to go on for so long. This view shows that many people did not understand the situation and took it more lightly than they should have, as did their representatives in Parliament and the League of Nations. Although it is impossible to accurately predict future events in a situation such as this, the British public generally seems to have continued to downplay the severity of the Manchurian Crisis even as the situation became more dire throughout 1932.²⁰

In the initial stages of the Manchurian Crisis, the British press seemed optimistic that Japan and China would resolve the situation quickly, without any further violence or conflict. Even as late as November 1931, the correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian* predicted that,

²⁰ The statement concerning who the British public seemed to blame for the issues in the Far East is based on the author's observations of sources coming from several different newspapers during the time period. Due to the opinions expressed in these sources, which are listed in the bibliography and referenced in the main text later on, the author has felt that this blanket statement regarding the general opinion regarding the view of the Manchurian Crisis is sufficient and will be expanded on later in this paper.

while the situation had taken longer than expected, no further violence would occur. The correspondent also seemed to blame China for the delay in progress, stating that China had refused to accept a resolution amiable to both sides. It is unclear what exactly led to this view, but it is possible that the fact that the main arguments in League discussions were occurring behind closed doors prevented British journalists from assessing the situation accurately. This correspondent felt, like the British government and the League, that Japan would honor its promise to peacefully restrict its activities in Manchuria. This is not the only instance when the British press was uninformed about the situation. For example, in the summer of 1932, the *Manchester Guardian* had a correspondent in Japan write a piece discussing Japanese culture in relation to the crisis and Japan's view on "self-determination" in Manchukuo. It is unclear why the *Guardian* felt the need to publish this article, but an article trying to explain Japan's viewpoint to the British public was too late to change British views on the topic. An article written in 1931 about the Chinese viewpoint of the situation would have informed the British public about the situation more fully but by the summer of 1932 the situation in Manchuria had already deteriorated to the point that many British had already made up their minds about the crisis.²¹

The *Guardian* was not the only British paper to fail to report on the Manchurian Crisis in a way that would sufficiently keep the British public informed about the current situation in Manchuria, especially in regard to how the Japanese and Chinese governments were responding to the Crisis. The *Times* also reported in a fashion that prevented the public from completely understanding the situation. In one article the *Times* seemed to depict Japanese soldiers in

²¹ Our own Correspondent, "League's Manchurian Plan," *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, Nov 26, 1931, 4.; Our Correspondent, "Japan And China," *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, Jul 04, 1932, 5.

Manchuria as the victims, possibly confusing its readership about Japan's role in the situation. This article, written right before the Mukden Incident, discussed the recent death of a Japanese officer, Captain Nakamura, in Manchuria and how the Chinese refused to allow for a proper investigation of the death. Ironically, it was later discovered that Captain Nakamura was a Japanese spy, but the article at the time seems to suggest that British outrage should be directed at China. While this incident occurred before the Mukden Incident, the *Times* continued to write articles that obscured the true nature of the Manchurian Crisis from the British public. In fact, many *Times* articles have titles along the lines of "The Japanese Case," which shows that *Times* readers were only hearing the Japanese side of events in Manchuria for the most part. The *Times*, however, does appear to be a little bit more critical of the League of Nations' performance during the crisis. Hardly any critical comments appear in the *Manchester Guardian* about the situation. This shows that the British public was largely unaware of the difficulties that the British government and the League were struggling with during the first year of the crisis. There were some criticisms of the situations, as seen in the few articles printed in the *Times*. These pieces include a letter to the editor from the President of the National Peace Council, which criticizes the lack of a strong recognition policy on the part of the League. The rarity of these articles criticizing the League's response shows that either the British public, which was receiving only partial information on the topic, was fine with the League's reaction or did not care enough to state otherwise.²²

Of the major newspapers, the *Daily Mail* seemed to be the only one that criticized the League's policy and Japan's continued involvement in Manchuria. For example, the *Daily Mail*

²² Our own Correspondent, "Manchurian Outrage," *Times*, Sept 9, 1931, 12.; F. W. Norwood. Harrison Barrow, "Manchuria And the League," *Times*, Jan 1 1932, 6.

was the first major newspaper in Britain to report the Mukden Incident as an act of Japanese aggression. The *Times* blamed the Chinese and the *Manchester Guardian* avoided blaming any particular group for over a month before finally blaming the Chinese. By contrast, the *Daily Mail* reported within forty-eight hours that the Japanese initiated the attack. These initial reports were critical of Japan, but the *Daily Mail* also reported that the Japanese would withdraw from the area immediately after the Mukden Incident, coloring its reporting for an extended period of time. These criticisms continued through the end of 1931 and into 1932 when Japan declared the independence of Manchukuo. The *Daily Mail* also covered the ongoing situation in Manchuria more comprehensively during the period after January 1932. While most other papers became relatively silent on the matter, the *Daily Mail* devoted several articles per day to the situation in Manchuria, which gave its readership a more comprehensive view of the situation compared to the readerships of the *Times* and *Manchester Guardian*.²³

The *Daily Mail* also took the unusual stance of characterizing the situation in Manchukuo as a Japanese occupation. It criticized the Japanese involvement in the region at the time while other papers and the League did not seem to acknowledge the potential severity of the issue. For example, the *Daily Mail* directed strong criticism at the Japanese claim of bringing security to a region by providing military support to the new Manchukuo government. By the summer of 1932, the *Daily Mail* heavily criticized Japanese forces for their inability to deal with the bandit situation in Manchukuo, implying that with a significant military force in the area Japan should have been able to handle the problem and restore law and order. However, this issue was not mentioned until bandits had kidnapped and held several British nationals for ransom. This criticism of Japanese behavior in Manchuria is important, it is apparent that in many cases

²³ "Japan to Withdraw Troops from China," *Daily Mail Atlantic Edition*, Sept 20 1931, 7.

criticism was reserved for when British interests, in this case the lives of British citizens, were threatened. In addition, a Chinese national in the region later reported that the communist threat in the region was too much even for the Japanese forces supporting Manchukuo. This showed that the League's, and Great Britain's, hope that Japan would be able to stop the spread of communism by controlling Manchuria was unfounded. The *Daily Mail* took a critical tone toward Japan during a period when both the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Times* had either become indifferent to the situation or criticized the Chinese. Compared to the *Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Daily Mail* articles reflected sympathy for the Chinese. An article about the Japanese invasion of Shanghai, for example, read "Japan invades Shanghai" in the *Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* while in the *Daily Mail* it would read "China loses Shanghai." It can be assumed that at least a small portion of the British public, which had access to all of the above-mentioned newspaper, was receiving a comprehensive look at the situation. But it is unlikely that many British citizens had access to all of these newspapers, due to circulation limitations and the cost of purchasing multiple subscriptions to these newspapers. Because of this, the readership of only one of these newspapers could not convince the majority of the United Kingdom that the Manchurian Crisis was worth its undivided attention.²⁴

Another contributing factor to the apparent apathy of the British public is the apparent confusion of British press about the League's position on the situation. As mentioned earlier, although the League of Nation's policy did not recognize Manchukuo as a separate nation, but the member states of the League did not feel bound to that policy because of the weakness of the League in general. This ambiguity regarding the recognition of Manchukuo would no doubt

²⁴ Our Own Correspondent, and Reuter, "Bandits' Captives," *Daily Mail*, Sept 13 1932, 12.; Our Own Correspondent, "Red Peril in China," *Daily Mail*, Aug 3 1932, 3.

cause confusion about the League's policy and the possibility of future recognition. The *Manchester Guardian* even reported in October 1932 that France supported Japan's imperialism and that nothing less than the separation of Manchuria from China could resolve the situation. This article, though seen elsewhere, seems to indicate that the British public was divided on the issue of Manchurian recognition. Although newspapers reveal some comprehension of the severity of the issue, the British public only seems to want peace in the region, which could potentially be achieved if Manchukuo was recognized as an independent nation. Therefore, one could not expect them to take a strong stance on the situation when their own government and the League of Nations were failing to do so.²⁵

Despite the initial interest in the situation in Manchuria, the British public seemed less and less interested in the affair. The British press', save the *Daily Mail*, diminishing coverage of the Manchurian Crisis is a sign of this trend. While coverage grew intense in the opening months of the crisis, particularly on the League's response to the crisis and Britain's opinion about it, the coverage waned during 1932. During this time, the Manchukuo recognition issue really started to become crucial and the relationship between the League of Nations and Japan became more strained. At the same time shadows of the impending conflict in the Far East became evident. While the British newspapers, both right and left leaning, continued reporting regularly on the Manchurian Crisis and the League of Nations' response to it, it became increasingly difficult to focus on a fight half a world away when the rise of fascism was occurring on the European continent and, to a lesser extent, at home.

²⁵ "Opinions on the Lytton Report," *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, Oct 04, 1932. 6.

The British response to the Manchurian Crisis was part of a larger period in British diplomatic history known as “appeasement.” As shown above, the British government attempted to avoid conflict with other nations by offering concessions in exchange for peace. This type of action not only occurred in the Far East but also much closer to home with the rise of Hitler and Germany. Extremely popular at the time, this policy received heavy criticism only after World War II had broken out. The book *Guilty Men* criticized a small group of British politicians who dominated politics during the 1930s and, by default, caused World War II. Those targeted for criticism included Sir John Simon, whose tenure at the Foreign Affairs Office began with the Manchurian Crisis. This book turned public opinion against all of the “guilty men” and effectively ended their political careers.²⁶

However, the public easily forget that the policy of appeasement belonged to Great Britain itself not just to Sir John Simon. Although integral to the decision about Japan and Manchuria, Sir John Simon had to rely on the League of Nations for at least part of the policy. Certainly, Sir John Simon could have pushed the League for a more aggressive policy that condemned Manchukuo and Japan. But he was just one man who had to balance the will of the British government, the will of the British people, and the will of the League of Nations on his shoulders. He also had to deal with cleaning up the mess that Rufus Reading, his predecessor, had left behind, which was almost impossible given the fact that during his short time in office both Rufus Reading and Lord Cecil, Great Britain’s representative to the United Nations, had downplayed the severity of the situation in Manchuria to Reading and pushed the United States

²⁶ Cato, *Guilty Men*, (London: V. Gollancz, 1940). Upon consulting the Encyclopedia Britannica, the author finds that none of the men mentioned in the novel *Guilty Men*, including Sir John Simon and Ramsey Macdonald, ever held significant political position following the end of World War II. The entries that are relevant to this paper are listed in the bibliography.

into discussions with the League of Nations. Sir John Simon had to deal with an ineffective policy from the League of Nations, which delayed any sort of action for months. He also had to cope with an irritable Stimson, who decided to issue the United States' policy without consulting the League. As a result, Sir John Simon and the League of Nations had to take the United States' policy into account, and since the United States seemed unwilling to work with the League, appeasement became the easiest path to take.

The United States' Policy

The United States was, at this time, a rising international power. Its movement away from isolationism during the First World War, by first bankrolling and then providing troops to the battle against Germany, had dramatically moved it to center stage in global politics for the first time since its establishment. Immediately following the war, the United States had an opportunity to take part in the League of Nations, an organization that the America's allies and President Woodrow Wilson supported in an attempt by the world to prevent another Great War. However, for various reasons, the United States decided to pass on membership in an organization that included almost every Western power. A little more than a decade later, the world faced a crisis in Manchuria that had the potential to explode into something far bigger than World War I. Although few predicted this in September 1931, the Manchurian Crisis set in motion a chain of events that led to a war not just in Europe but also in Asia and the Pacific.²⁷

The United States, in contrast to the League of Nations, immediately began looking into the Mukden Incident. State Department documents reveal a detailed description of events and extensive correspondence between the U. S Secretary of State Henry Stimson and both the U.S

²⁷ Mazower, 118 – 119.

ambassador to China and the U.S. ambassador to Japan beginning on September 18 and 19 in the State Department Files. While not committing the U.S. to any specific response, Secretary of State Stimson clearly investigated if the incident violated the Kellogg Pact.²⁸

As early as September 20, 1931, Secretary Stimson and the League of Nations indicated that the Japanese government had assured the League and the United States that this incident would not lead to international conflict. However, at the same time Dr. Wellington Koo, the Chinese delegate to the League, was communicating with the United States, trying to convey the gravity of the situation, which he feared was just the start of Japanese aggression. However, over time the communications between the United States, China, and Japan became disproportionate. The communications between the United States and China became more scarce and limited while the communications between the United States and Japan, which included meetings in the U. S. between Stimson and the Japanese ambassador remained constant and detailed. Two factors became obvious over the course of the next year. First, Japan was trying to “sell” its version of the Manchurian Crisis to Secretary Stimson and the United States even after the Stimson Doctrine condemned Japan’s actions in Manchuria and ended any possibility that the United States would recognize Manchukuo as an independent nation. The Stimson Doctrine stated that the United States would not recognize a country that was created due to war or the aggressive actions of another nation. After the U.S. issued the Stimson Doctrine, the Japanese government continued its correspondence with Stimson to make sure that the United States would not side against Japan if conflict broke out over the issue. The second factor was that the United States favored Japan from the beginning. The strong economic ties between the United

²⁸ United States Department of State, *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1931. The Far East*, Volume III, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931.

States and Japan made Secretary Stimson and other American officials more willing to consider Japan's explanation for its actions and less willing to listen to China's pleas for assistance. For example, Stimson often chided Chinese Diplomats rather than taking a hard stance against the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the establishment of Manchukuo.²⁹

Despite the apparent "hardline" approach of the Stimson Doctrine to the Manchurian Crisis, the United States continually downplayed its own policy in a way similar to Great Britain's response to the League of Nations' official policy. This reaction may have resulted from the policy of Great Britain and the League of Nations. Lord Cecil's claim that the incident was a violation of the Kellogg Pact and the Nine Powers Treaty forced the United States to cooperate with the League of Nations, a relationship that the United States wished to avoid. After all, the U.S. had refused to join the League of Nations in order to avoid the kind of commitment that the League implied. It did not help that Great Britain initiated the partnership and whose relationship with the United States had always been strained on a certain level. Lord Cecil's argument about the Kellogg Pact committed the United States to action in the Manchurian Crisis could not have been appreciated by a nation wanting to remain neutral in order to maintain its relationship with Japan.

Not surprisingly, communications between Secretary Stimson and Sir John Simon in November 1931, reflected a cool relationship. This indicated Sir John Simon's attempt to assess the American response to the situation in Manchuria and that Secretary Stimson and the Hoover

²⁹ United States Department of State, *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1931. The Far East*, Volume III, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931.; United States Department of State, *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, Japan: 1931 – 1941*, Volume I, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931 – 1941.; United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1932. The Far East*, Volume III, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932.

Administration wished to work with Great Britain and the League of Nations to come up with a similar policy condemning Japan's actions in Manchuria. However, overtime it became clear that the American view on this "joint" policy did not represent an equal partnership between the United States and the League of Nations. The American idea for a "joint policy" appeared to involve the League of Nations declaration on the issue and the United States' declaration of support for the policy. Not a member of the League, however, the United States had no obligation to take part in any actions set out in the League's policy, such as a possible trade embargo against Japan. Therefore, any "joint policy" between the United States and the League was all talk, but no commitment to action on the part of the United States.³⁰

However, Great Britain and the League considered implementing this type of joint policy, mainly because of the United States' international importance, not only generally but also compared to the majority of League member nations. The League invited the United States to send a representative to take part in initial discussions on the incident and how the League would respond. Despite Japan's protests, Secretary Stimson sent Prentiss Gilbert to the League meetings as an "observer and auditor." However, after only a few days of talks, Stimson recalled Gilbert, because of Stimson's aversion to upsetting Japan and the American public's anger at the League's failure to immediately invoke the Kellogg Pact.³¹

This turn of events distressed Sir John Simon, who understood, like the rest of the world, that the United States must take a hard stance on the Manchurian issue for any League policy to be effective. After the United States failed to participate in discussions about the League's policy towards Japan and Manchuria, a "joint" policy between the League of Nations and the United

³⁰ Malpass

³¹ Malpass, 41-42

States became impossible. The crisis broke at the beginning of 1932 when the U.S. announced the Stimson Doctrine. This policy meant the United States act independently of the League of Nations, but the doctrine was also ineffective in doing anything more than slightly angering the Japanese. Without establishing a stronger policy, the United States was essentially giving the Japanese permission to take more significant actions in the region.

Well aware of this fact, Japan continued its policies in Manchuria and, as 1932 progressed, invaded other areas of China. But Japan still worried that the United States would change its mind. The Stimson Doctrine, essentially a letter to both Japan and China, stated that the United States would not take part in territorial disputes in the region. At any moment, the United States could change its mind and take a harder stance on the issue. This fact may explain some of the actions taken by the Japanese government during the first year following the Mukden Incident. As mentioned earlier, one can see the meetings between Stimson and the Japanese ambassador as a way for Japan to court American support during the controversy. By reassuring Stimson and other American officials that the Mukden Incident was an isolated action and later, after the declaration of Manchukuo's independence, by expressing that this turn of events would not affect American trade, the Japanese prevented the United States from taking a hard stance on the issue.

As time went by, however, the United States' "hardline" stance on the issue began to waver not only in government but also among the general public. The American public, much like its leaders, had never fully committed to the Stimson Doctrine, as reflected in the type of stories in the American media. Newspapers predicted that Manchukuo would gain recognition eventually, pointing out that El Salvador and the Dominican Republic had already recognized the

new state.³² However, no major world power, save Japan, had recognized the legitimacy of Manchukuo. Without recognition from at least one major international power, Japan had little hope of seeing Manchukuo ever achieve recognition as an entity separate from China. In addition, the American press at the time seemed to assume that recognition of Manchukuo was a question not of if, but when. A 1934 article in the *New York Times* focused on which would be the first nation to grant official recognition of Manchukuo and not whether the state would achieve recognition. Clearly, this opinion shows that some observers expected Manchukuo to become independent of China, especially with the current Chinese government inspiring little confidence. Indeed, later in the decade, major European powers did begin to recognize Manchukuo. Germany, Italy, Spain, and Russia had officially recognized Manchukuo's independence by the end of the 1930s. However, by that time, the chaos of World War II had shifted the world's focus from Manchukuo to the aggressive actions of Germany and the Axis powers in Europe and the Pacific.³³

As mentioned previously, the United States was the first nation to establish a policy regarding the formation of Manchukuo as an entity separate from China with the Stimson Doctrine, which officially refused recognition from Manchukuo in January 1932. The Stimson Doctrine officially established the United States' opinion regarding territory annexed during conflict. Its stance on governments created by conquest, beginning with Manchukuo, established a precedent that still holds to this day. However, despite this seemingly clear cut stance against Manchukuo and the actions of the Japanese, the United States did not wholeheartedly back the

³² "Manchukuo Receives Second Recognition," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 May 1934, 8.; Associated Press, "Manchukuo is Expecting Dominican Recognition," *New York Times*, 29 December 1934, 5.

³³ Charles A. Selden, "Expect Manchukuo to get Recognition," *New York Times*, 23 March 1934, 13.

Chinese position on the issue. For example, in a survey conducted a few years after the initial incident and debate regarding Manchukuo's recognition, a majority of those who responded believed that the US policy in the Far East was ineffective, but offered no good alternative. Those polled, students, teachers, and businessmen from around the country, showed no consistent opinion on the issues presented to them except when asked about the situation regarding Manchukuo. The study reported that "recognition of Manchukuo is advocated by five and denounced by nine of those replying, while two believe any formal declaration should be delayed."³⁴ Thus, the United States population showed no clear-cut opinion on the issue in a way similar to the varying opinions seen in the British public.

Not only did the American public show no strong opinion on the Manchukuo issue, but in general, Americans took an apathetic attitude towards the situation in the Far East. Many of those who responded to the poll pointed out that China had little economic importance to the United States at that time and, thus, the United States had no reason to become involved in the situation. One individual responded saying, "since America's trade with China is very small – only one third that with industrialized Japan – a unified China under Japanese control has the potentialities of being of greater value to American business than it is at the present time."³⁵ American politicians showed similar positions on the issue of recognition. In an article in the *University of Chicago Law Review* in 1954, the author shows that conflicting views on the handling of the issue of Manchukuo caused many politicians to waver in their views over the

³⁴ Russell E. Hall, "Americans Look at Their Far Eastern Policy," *Pacific Affairs* 10, no. 2 (1937): 191.

³⁵ Hall, 194

course of the 1930s. The only consistency found in these opinions is the lack of commitment to strong action in the region.³⁶

Henry Stimson and the United States government were unwilling to enforce their policy of non-recognition for numerous reasons. At the beginning of the Manchurian Crisis, the “meddling” of Lord Cecil, the League ambassador from the U.K., and the League of Nations pushed the United States into taking a stance on the issue of the Japanese presence in the region. However, it appears that the United States wished to remain neutral in the situation. While only having minor interests in China, the United States’ relationship with Japan became the backbone of its policy. The U.S. did not want to anger the Japanese government, so Stimson came up with a vague response to the issue. The Stimson Doctrine represented much less of a threat to U.S.-Japanese relations than an outright condemnation of Japan’s presence in the region.

International Views towards China and the Lytton Report

Like members of the American public, whose government had supposedly taken an immediate and strong stance against the recognition of Manchukuo, the Manchurian Crisis concerned the citizens of other Western nations. These countries, the majority of which were members of the League of Nations, expressed doubts about the Lytton Commission’s findings and the official policy of non-recognition it advocated. The official position of the League of Nations, as determined by the Lytton Report, theoretically excluded any type of recognition of Manchukuo, de facto or de jure. However, in practice this was not the case. Several member nations took actions that caused much confusion in regard to what constituted recognition of a state. This confusion created doubts regarding where many countries stood in regard to the

³⁶ “Non-recognition: A Reconsideration,” 261-263; Hall, 190-195

Manchukuo issue, which, as previously mentioned, primarily stemmed from the historical precedence of recognition procedure that varied from nation to nation. In addition, some of these doubts came from the historically conflicted relationship that the West had with China.

In the century prior to the Manchukuo controversy, China and Japan took two very different paths regarding international relations. Japan had opened itself up to foreign interests and adapted to Western culture, technology, and government. Many newspapers of the time associated Japan with a progressive form of government that would be beneficial to the Western world. This form of government also benefited Japan because most Western nations perceived Japan as anti-communist. The *Daily Worker*, a communist leaning newspaper, wrote numerous articles about Japan's anti-communist and pro-capitalist policies. These reports ingratiated Japan with the Western world, which at the time regarded the communist regime in Russia with suspicion. In some ways, Japan's presence in Manchuria helped lessen fears that the unstable Chinese government might turn to communism. Indeed, a Japanese puppet state like Manchukuo could serve as a perfect buffer between Soviet Russia and Nationalist China.³⁷

By contrast, China had tried and failed to maintain a relative distance from the Western world. The conflicts of the last century between China and the West primarily stemmed from economic-based disagreements. Western nations wished to expand trade in the region and repeatedly tried to convince China to open its borders for greater trade. China, however, was unwilling to give in to Western demands. One can best see the reasons for this reservation in the

³⁷ British Foreign Office Files for China, 1930-1937, "FO 371/16180 China: The Lytton Report; situation in Manchuria; Sino-Japanese relations; recognition of Manchukuo by Japan" UK, National Archives, accessed March 2016.60-62

letter that the Qianlong emperor sent to Britain's King George III in 1793.³⁸ Not only were the emissaries sent by the British government rude to the Chinese emperor, but the deal put forth to the emperor did not benefit China in the least. As a large country, China was relatively self-sufficient and did not require extensive trade to maintain itself. The Chinese saw most of the products that Britain offered to trade with China as novelty items that did not add to China's wealth. In addition, in later years, the most significant British export into China was opium, a highly addictive drug that caused numerous problems. When China tried to curb the influx of opium, which caused social and economic problems in the country, Britain reacted harshly and the Opium Wars began.

China lost two wars to Great Britain and, as a result, the West forced China into unequal treaties that further opened up trade with Western nations. Having fought two wars in China to increase its economic position in the region, Britain undoubtedly had a huge stake in maintaining its economic interests in the region. By the end of the nineteenth century, Great Britain had significant holdings in most if not all the major port cities in China and had just leased the island of Hong Kong for the next ninety-nine years. Hong Kong by itself would be significant reason for Great Britain to wish to maintain its economic hold in the region. Great Britain's interests in Japan, however, prevented Great Britain from taking any action that may anger Japan and thus threaten its interests in the country.

By the 1930s, to varying degrees, most Western countries held a similar viewpoint. The United States had some interests in the region but significantly less than those of most of the nations in Western Europe. France had some investments in China, but the vast majority of its

³⁸ "Qianlong's Letter to George III," 1793, rhs.roklinusd.org/subsites/AP-World-History/documents/1450-1750/Qianlong.pdf.

investments were in Southeast Asia. In any event, by the 1930s all major world powers had some interest in the area and worried about the political developments in the region. However, the interests of these nations primarily focused on southern China, in cities such as Shanghai and Hong Kong. The Manchurian region of northeastern China did not provide these nations with significant economic benefits. Russia had the most economic interest in the region, primarily because of its border with China. In addition, none had significantly explored the mineral wealth, such as oil and gold, that Manchuria had to offer. It is not surprising, then, that the Committee of Nineteen, a League council created to oversee the creation of a policy regarding the recognition of Manchukuo and the situation involving Japan and China, primarily focused on the situation in Shanghai and almost completely ignored the situation in Manchuria. The Committee of Nineteen eventually reviewed the Lytton Commission Report and defined the League of Nations opinion on the matter.³⁹

In contrast, Japan was very interested in the region. As with its early conquest of the Korean peninsula, the Japanese government saw Manchuria as an extension of its defensive policy against China and the Soviet Union, and a way for the Japanese mainland to have greater access to natural resources. The cities in Manchuria were already industrialized and the Japanese gaining control of these factories would allow Japan to increase its manufacturing potential, especially in case of a future war with China. More importantly, however, was the agricultural potential of the region. Manchuria was a largely agricultural province and the Japanese government could use these food resources to support the population living on the Japanese mainland. The extra food would help to feed the Japanese population in case of large scale crop

³⁹ Hugh Latimer, "The Committee of Nineteen and the Sino-Japanese Dispute," *Bulletin of International News* 9, no. 16 (1933): 3

failures back home. In addition, with the rapid growth of the Japanese population, the lands in Manchuria could be sold to landless peasants, who would then migrate to Manchuria and establish a large Japanese population in the region. The Chinese government had thwarted previous attempts to colonize Manchuria in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, the loss of control of the region following World War I allowed the Japanese to slowly increase the number of citizens in the region. The presence of the Japanese military in Manchuria following the Mukden Incident also encouraged more settlers to move into the region.⁴⁰

In addition to the apparent lack of interest in the Manchukuo issue, the League was not forthcoming in responding to the situation, even failing to address the situation before the League could decide on an official opinion. The Mukden Incident of September 1931 shocked the world, but no states offered any official or unofficial opinion on the situation for months. The United States was the first to respond, issuing the Stimson Doctrine in January of 1932. This reaction happened four months after the incident, but was also the official opinion of a country that had minimal interests in the region. The League of Nations, whose member nations undoubtedly had significant interests in the region, did practically nothing until the spring of 1932 when it sent the Lytton Commission into Manchuria to investigate Manchukuo's bid for independence. The League of Nations hesitated to take decisive action in the Manchurian crisis, possibly because it did not know that Manchuria would seek independence from China until early 1932. Although this explanation for the League's actions is plausible, it does not explain why the League allowed for the significant military movement of Japan into Manchuria.

⁴⁰ Rana Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000), 23.; Sandra Wilson, *The Manchurian Crisis and Japanese Society, 1931 – 33* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 123-170.; Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian modern* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 48.; Duara, 61.

However, most member nations did not care about Manchuria because their interests lay in China proper, particularly Shanghai and Hong Kong, and did not feel immediately threatened by Japan's actions in Manchuria. In any case, the member nations appear short sighted when one considers the implications of Japan's increasingly aggressive actions in the region.

The fact that the League of Nations did nothing for half a year after the initial seizure of Manchuria is surprising. When the Lytton Commission finally went to Manchukuo in the spring of 1932, it spent six weeks investigating to determine if Manchukuo should achieve recognition as a separate nation from China. It also spent considerable time in Japan and China, primarily to hear the claims made by both governments for or against Manchukuo's independence and to foster good will between the League and these nations. Although the League had already heard arguments in Geneva from both the Japanese and Chinese representatives, the Lytton Commission wished to hear from other officials about the issue. The Lytton Commission returned to China by the end of the summer of 1932 and completed its report regarding the Manchukuo situation, signing the report on September 4, 1932, in Beijing, almost a year after the Mukden Incident and the subsequent invasion of Manchuria.

However, the League's official statement was not forthcoming. Although signed on September 4 in Beijing, the League did not publish report in Geneva until October 2 because the Japanese representative at the League demanded that the League delay publication until the Japanese delegation completed certain preparations. The Japanese representative gave multiple vague excuses for the need for two additional months of preparation, and the League granted Japan's request despite China's protests. Most likely Japan wished to delay the publication so that it could fortify its position in Manchuria in case of an unfavorable report and any subsequent League action against Japan. Japan, however, had no need to worry about the unfavorable report

since the League's subsequent inaction regarding the issue allowed Japan to solidify its position in the region.⁴¹

The publication of the Lytton Report on October 2 brought no immediate League action. The Japanese delegation claimed that its government wished to review the observations of the Lytton Commission and prepare counterarguments, again successfully deferring discussion of the report until November 14. Although this time the Japanese gave a slightly sounder reason for a deferring discussion, this deferral allowed Japan to strengthen its position in the region and worsened the Manchukuo situation. Japanese and Chinese delegates restated their arguments regarding the position of Manchukuo to the international community with Lytton Commission's report now supporting China's opinion when the League of Nations finally started official discussions of the issue in mid-November. The Japanese representative's delay tactics continued throughout the League's meetings regarding the issue. These repeated delays and superfluous arguments caused chaos in the meeting and, at points, antagonized the Chinese representative.⁴²

Nonetheless, by the end of the year, the League of Nations had more or less adopted its official policy, following the recommendation of the Lytton Report not to recognize Manchukuo as independent from China. The League, however, continued to hold out hope for a reconciliation between Japan and China, even with Japan now bitter over the League's decision and China's anger over Japan's continued presence in Manchuria. The League continued to hold meetings through January and into early February 1933 to resolve the issue, with Japan repeatedly demanding recognition of Manchukuo. The failure of these meetings ultimately led to Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations in late February 1933. Despite the League

⁴¹ Latimer ,3-4

⁴² Latimer,3-4

refusal to recognize Manchukuo, the continued delay of an official response from the League and the lack of action by the League in the initial stages of the issue exacerbated the issue and caused Sino-Japanese relations to further deteriorate.

In addition, although the Lytton Commission gave overarching support for the non-recognition of Manchukuo, the actual issues discussed in the report were far more mundane. The Lytton Commission's report discussed issues concerning postal services, passports, and recognition of Manchukuo currency. Although such issues affect relationships between countries, one would assume that more pressing issues, such as Japan's influence in the region and the acceptance of Manchukuo officials in other countries, would take the forefront of the report. The League discussed only one of these issues in detail, the issue of establishing consuls in other countries, but the Lytton Report focused on numerous less pressing issues. In fact, the British Foreign Office documents discussing the Lytton Reports findings indicate that the issue of postal services and import/export certificates were the most prominent issues mentioned in the report. At first glance, when considering the presence of the Japanese military in the region, these issues seem insignificant in the grand scheme of things.⁴³

Several factors explain this lack of important international issues in the Lytton Report. First, most of the member nations of the League of Nations had keen interests in their own economic investments in the region. Most Western nations had almost exclusively trade-centric interests. Although not uncommon, this focus caused most nations to care little about the welfare of the region as a whole. As long as the Japanese occupation did not threaten these nations'

⁴³ Frederick A. Middlebush, "International Affairs: The Effect of the Non-recognition of Manchukuo," *The American Political Science Review* 28, no. 4 (1934): 678; British Foreign Office Files for China, 1930 – 1937, "FO 262/1802 Lytton Commission report" UK, National Archives, accessed March 2016.

individual investments, they took little interest in the antagonism between Japan and China. A lack of knowledge about the history of the region may help explain why it appears that Western nations did not care about the situation. Many officials in Britain knew about past conflicts between Japan and China. As a result, many officials viewed the Manchurian Crisis as another spat between the two countries that would eventually resolve itself. For this reason, the British Foreign Office files often mention trade certificates because Britain wished to preserve what little trade interests it had in the region. Postal service issues also reflect the wishes of most nations to preserve the postal system in the area, not to communicate with individuals in Manchukuo but to communicate with the countries surrounding it, particularly Japan. With postal service in Northern China stopped, mail delivery would have to follow a path that went through the Pacific Ocean, significantly lengthening the time it would take to receive mail from the region. In fact, the League members' greater interest in Japan led many nations to give Japan preferential treatment in such conflicts between China and Japan.⁴⁴

The conflicts between China and the Western powers over trade issues caused many Western countries to resent China, leading some of the countries to express hesitation over supporting China during League of Nations meetings when the Chinese representative, Dr. Wellington Koo, expressed outrage at the actions of Japan toward China. Besides their attitude against China, most nations seemed to have no opinion one way or another regarding the situation. On the several occasions on which the Chinese representative, Dr. Koo, and the Japanese representative, Mr. Matsuoka Yosuke, made speeches about the situation in Manchuria, most nations remained silent. This silence impacted individuals around the world but particularly

⁴⁴ British Foreign Office Files for China, 1930 – 1937, “FO 262/1802 Lytton Commission report” UK, National Archives, accessed March 2016.

the Chinese. The Chinese media at the time reported rumors that various nations, Britain in particular, had made a secret agreement with Japan that allowed the Japanese to continue their aggressive policies towards China. Ironically, the inaction that many nations believed would protect their interests in China actually led to Chinese threats against foreign interests. In several cities across China, Chinese citizens called for a boycott of British goods to protest Britain's inaction regarding Manchukuo and the possibility of Britain's plotting against China with Japan. Although the boycott of Japanese goods in China did not directly affect the trade of Great Britain and other Western Nations, it did cause issues once the Japanese military decided to end these boycotts with force during 1932 in Shanghai. Therefore, when Western nations finally condemned Japanese actions in China, they were primarily focused on the Japanese actions in Shanghai, not Manchuria.⁴⁵

Dr. Wellington Koo and Mr. Matsuoka Yosuke, the Japanese representative to the League of Nations and Japan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, faced off regularly during League meetings to discuss the issue of Manchukuo. Matsuoka argued convincingly that Manchuria sought independence from China, that Japan was merely assisting in the process, and that the presence of Japan's military forces in Manchuria was a sign of aggression against China. He also argued that these acts of perceived aggression were merely the product of the co-existence of nations. He presented a geopolitical theory similar to social Darwinism stating that the state is like a biological organism that is constantly in a struggle for survival. This argument is contrary

⁴⁵ British Foreign Office Files for China, 1930-1937, "FO 371/17075 China: Sino-Japanese dispute; League of Nations discussions; new regime in Manchuria" UK, National Archives, accessed March 2016.119; R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 32.

to the free trade centric worldview of most Western nations at the time.⁴⁶ One would think that, based on this idea alone, many Western nations would remain skeptical of Japan's supposedly progressive Western worldviews. However, the Foreign Office files made little note of Matsuoka's statement.

Dr. Koo took a different position in the debates, pointing out the obvious aggressive nature of Japan's actions and the fact that the region of Manchuria was also home to a significant population of non-Manchu people, including Mongolians, Koreans, and Han Chinese. While Matsuoka's evidence regarding the historical divide between Manchuria and the rest of China was significant, the obvious aggressive actions of Japan stood out. However, for the most part, the international community ignored this evidence. Although the Lytton Commission submitted a report criticizing Japan's actions as illegitimate, this statement falls short of claiming outright that Japan's goals were expansionist in nature. While hindsight may make Japan's intentions seem obvious, the influence Japan had on the global economy may have prevented many nations like the United States and Great Britain from condemning the actions directly.

Manchurian Nationalism

Another problematic issue regarding the League of Nations' stance on the recognition of Manchukuo was that the Lytton report condemned only the actions of Japan in the events leading up to the creation of Manchukuo and its continued involvement in the Manchukuo government. This criticism implies that the League of Nations objected only to recognition because of the continued involvement of Japan in Manchukuo's affairs, suggesting the new state was a puppet

⁴⁶ Janis Mimura, *Planning for empire: reform bureaucrats and the Japanese wartime state* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011), 49.

regime. In fact, the very definition of “puppet state” complicates the issue. Scholars cite two different definitions of *puppet state* and which one a writer uses can affect how one perceives the situation. The traditional definition of a puppet state, the one with which most people are familiar is “a country whose major policy decisions are made by a foreign government or a hegemon.”⁴⁷ The other, less commonly used definition is “a country that allows stationing of foreign troops or has military links with great powers for its defense.”⁴⁸ Obviously, such definitions apply to Manchukuo, with a significant number of Japanese troops stationed in the regions following the Mukden incident in 1931. However, this second definition does not necessarily imply evil intentions on the part of the power providing defense of a puppet state. This is the definition that Japan would have preferred to use when discussing Manchukuo. However, the League of Nations focused its concerns on the application of the more traditional definition to Manchukuo. With Manchukuo’s petition for independence from China, the League of Nations needed to determine if the traditional definition of puppet state applied to Manchukuo, especially when Japan claimed that Manchukuo came about via a nationalist movement and was only receiving support from Japan. This idea of Japan providing troops to support Manchukuo’s independence from China falls nicely within the second definition of puppet state. However, the Lytton Commission could not verify a significant nationalist movement, so the League of Nations adopted the traditional definition of puppet state to Manchukuo.

This paper does not seek to determine which of these definitions applied to Manchukuo, but acknowledges that the specific definition has an influence on how nations viewed the issue. As mentioned previously, the second definition does not necessarily imply an imperialist or

⁴⁷ Suk-Jung Han, “The Problem of Sovereignty: Manchukuo, 1932-1937,” *Positions* 12, no. 2 (2004): 459.

⁴⁸ Han, 459

threatening situation. Japan's position in Manchukuo would support this definition if one believed that Japan had invaded the region to provide military aid to a new nation. Yet the League of Nations stated that the traditional definition of puppet state applied to this situation. The League's position does not necessarily imply that all member nations held this view. What each member nation thought about Manchukuo's status as a puppet state was open to debate. Evidence presented earlier, regarding the contradictory actions of several key nations, suggests that these states were at least aware of this issue and this awareness caused them to waver in their position. In fact, several key members of the League of Nations would have had their own puppet states if one applied the second definition.⁴⁹ The multiple definitions of a puppet state, which could have a variety of connotations. One can see where a nation could waver in its position regarding a puppet state.

As mentioned previously, Japan argued for the existence of a historical divide between Manchuria and the rest of China. And after all, Manchuria was not always a part of China, and the ethnic group originating from the area, the Manchu people, had a language and culture distinct from the Han Chinese. The Manchu people had come to prominence with the establishment of the Qing dynasty that lasted from the 1644 to 1912. Despite this newfound power, the Manchu people constituted a minority of the population and remained concentrated in their homeland of Manchuria. The Manchu population seldom mixed with the Han population of China proper, with many Han Chinese being excluded from government power during this period. Even if unaware of this difference at the time, Western sources indicated that Chinese officials were primarily Manchu. Political cartoons from the nineteenth century, make this fact clear. The clothes, hairstyles, and facial features of the "Chinese" caricatures reflect Manchu

⁴⁹ Han, 460

characteristics and not the Chinese population as a whole. It is highly possible that most Europeans, especially those who had not spent time in China, were unaware of the difference. With the overthrow of the last emperor of China in 1912, the Manchu lost their hold on China proper and the Han Chinese population once again rose to dominate China, including Manchuria.

The Manchus are ethnically more similar to the Mongol peoples of what is now Mongolia. Their language is from a language family that includes Mongols and Turkic ethnic groups, which differ significantly from Chinese. In addition, the Manchu culture is also more similar to Mongol culture than Chinese culture. Manchuria is an area that consists mainly of grasslands, which is better suited to a nomadic lifestyle than the sedentary agricultural lifestyle that occurs in China. This nomadic lifestyle gave the Manchu people a distinct military advantage over the Chinese during the transition between the Ming and Qing dynasties in the seventeenth century. During the establishment of the Manchu dynasty, instead of encouraging integration between Manchu and Han Chinese, the Qing government maintained a distinct difference between Manchu and Han Chinese. When the Qing dynasty fell at the beginning of the twentieth century, the ruling Manchu elite lost significant power. The establishment of a new nation to regain this lost power was a significant motivator for a nationalist movement in Manchuria. Japan's interference in the region seemed to support this nationalist movement because Japan allowed Manchu elites to serve once again in a government. Japan even installed the last Qing emperor, Pu Yi, as the new emperor of Manchukuo, though many contemporary and modern writers tend to question how much power Pu Yi and other Manchu elites had in the running of the Manchukuo state.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ British Foreign Office Files for China, 1930-1937, "FO 371/18103 China: Recognition of independence of Manchukuo – attitude of Maharaja of Nepal, the Chinese Government, San

In addition, Manchuria differed from the rest of China in a number of significant ways. For one, due to its location, Manchuria was much more ethnically diverse than the rest of China. In China proper, the Han Chinese made up a vast majority of the population, with a very small minority of different ethnic groups found primarily in major cities on the coast such as Shanghai and Hong Kong. Manchuria, in contrast, was ethnically diverse throughout the whole region. Although the Manchu were still a minority, a single dominant ethnic group did not overwhelm them. Russians, Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese all called Manchuria home. These populations were significant enough that the government posted most public signs in Manchuria in Korean, Japanese, and Chinese. Evidence that also indicates this ethnically blended society led to the growth of a more ethnically tolerant region when compared to China proper and perhaps the rest of East Asia. For example, interracial marriages seem to be tolerated to a greater extent in Manchuria compared to China proper. The Manchukuo government even tried to emphasize this racial harmony by designing a flag with five colors to represent the five major ethnic groups of Manchuria existing in harmony.⁵¹

In contrast, China's geography and its previous government policy, had isolated the Manchu people from other ethnic groups. The experiences of the previously hundred years had prevented the Chinese of China proper and Europeans from mixing to the extent seen in Manchuria. Manchuria's geography also contributed to the ethnic situation because control of Manchuria had shifted significantly in the past two thousand years, with Koreans, Russians, and Chinese all controlling parts of the region at one point or another, and Manchuria functioned

Salvador, America, and Nicaragua; visit of Emperor of Manchukuo to Tokyo; attitude of Holy See towards Catholic Missions in Manchukuo; Sir M. Hewlett new adviser to Chiang Kai-shek" UK, National Archives, accessed March 2016. 10-13

⁵¹ Han, 464

independently for significant periods of time. Functionally, then, residents of Manchukuo behaved differently from residents of China proper. This difference in behavior may have led many Western nations to look favorably on the independence of Manchukuo because of the potential of establishing a firmer relationship between the West and China. Manchukuo could potentially be more willing to work with Western interests similar to how Japan was during the Meiji period.

These reasons comprise most of the major points of Japan's argument for Manchukuo's independence from China. A nationalist movement in Manchuria had begun before the Mukden Incident, but Japan claimed that the nationalists held off on declaring independence from China, due to a lack resources. One such resource was military support. Even with the main Chinese army distracted by internal affairs, a small force would be enough to destroy the Manchurian Nationalists who had virtually no military experience or weapons. The Japanese claimed that its military stayed in Manchuria after Japan recovered the railway lines in the region to protect the new Nationalist Manchurian government from the Chinese, who could invade and destroy Manchukuo at any time. The Japanese said they would stay until the country was well established and could train a sufficient military force. In addition to the Chinese threat, Japan was also supposedly protecting Manchuria from Communist Russia to the north. This claim had an additional appeal to the Western Powers which, in many instances, feared communists more than anything else. When faced with a situation in which either Communist Russia or Democratic Japan could control Manchuria, the West would pick Japan every time.⁵²

⁵² Mitter.

Another fact that helped Japan's case when claiming to help the Manchu nationalists is that Japan had, in fact, helped such nationalists in the past. The Manchurian warlord, Zhang Zuolin, had launched a military campaign against China in the mid-1920s, in part, paid for by Japan. Even after Zhang Zuolin's death in 1928 (from a bomb planted by Japanese soldiers), Japan provided funds to his son Zhang Xueliang during the period immediately prior to and during the Manchurian Crisis. Although neither Zhang was pro-Japanese in any sense of the word, but it became increasingly apparent that the Zhangs' power in Manchuria depended almost completely on Japanese support by the late 1920s. In *The Manchurian Myth*, author Rana Mitter shows how the relationship between Japan and the Manchurian nationalists evolved over time. A relationship founded on financial dependence turned into one of collaboration when Japan invaded Manchuria in September 1931. Many of the elites in Manchuria had two options beyond this point – resist and be crushed by Japanese might or cooperate and retain some semblance of nationalism in the form of Manchukuo, a Japanese-occupied nation. Eventually nationalists began to resist the Japanese occupation of the region. However, at least in the beginning of the crisis, when the League of Nations and the rest of the world were trying to decide what to do with Manchukuo, Japan was indeed supporting the Manchurian nationalists.⁵³

However, the Lytton Commission, when conducting its investigation of Manchukuo during the spring and summer of 1932, did not find a significant nationalist movement like the one described by the Japanese representative to the League of Nations. Modern scholars do agree that a nationalist movement existed in Manchukuo and tend to suggest that this movement was stronger than that reported by the Lytton Commission. In particular, scholar Prasenjit Duara argues that the nationalist situation in Manchukuo was more complicated than the Lytton

⁵³ Mitter.

Commission was able, or willing, to perceive, with nationalism and transnationalism playing significant roles in Manchukuo. Duara points out that the heavy influence of Japanese and Chinese culture in the area, especially in the more densely populated areas of Manchuria that the Lytton Commission visited, concealed the full extent of Manchuria's nationalist movement. The natural mixture of ethnic groups in Manchuria and the recent influx of Japanese immigrants due to the Japanese government's promotional campaign to encourage Japanese civilians to move to the area may explain why the Lytton Commission denied the existence of a significant nationalist movement in Manchuria and criticized Japan's involvement in the area. If Commission members had visited rural areas of Manchuria, they would have seen the extent of the nationalist movement more clearly.⁵⁴

Still, the Lytton Commission did indeed have good reason to be skeptical of Japanese claims of Manchurian nationalism. Not only did the continued military presence concern the League of Nations, but the increasing number of Japanese civilians in the region seemed to suggest that the Japanese presence was more permanent than the Japan had indicated. As mentioned previously, the Japanese government was promoting the immigration of Japanese civilians into Manchuria, which served a two-fold purpose. First, over the past decade, Japanese grain production had fallen and the increasing Japanese population made the grain shortage worse. Manchuria was a rich agricultural region and had a relatively small population. The immigration of Japanese civilians would not only relieve population growth pressure on the island nation but also would give Japan new food resources. Secondly, if a large Japanese civilian population was in the area, it would be harder for Western nations or China to loosen Japan's grip on the region. Although the Chinese or a Western army could have removed a

⁵⁴ Duara.;Wilson.

Japanese army from the area by force, it was much harder to remove an entrenched civilian population.⁵⁵

Since the end of the Great War, the West had overlooked the increasingly imperialist character of the Japanese government. This imperialism primarily resulted from domestic conflicts, such as major upheavals in Japanese politics. Japan's having to deal with economic difficulties similar to those confronting many European countries at the end of the war. The enthronement of a new emperor, the Showa Emperor, in 1926 also meant that Japan had a new head of state whose ruling style would soon be tested. Since the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese government had been primarily expansionist, leading them to conquer and occupy Korea, but this did not necessarily mean that this policy would continue under the Showa Emperor. In addition, an expanding electoral base caused a temporary halt to imperialist ambitions as the Japanese government gauged the receptiveness of the electorate to its policies. By 1931, however it became clear that expansionism would continue to be the Japanese policy and it naturally began in nearby Manchuria. For the time being, Japan could claim that all civilian and military presence was necessary to help establish the new nation of Manchukuo and at least the military presence would leave after the establishment of a government and China no longer threatened it. However, these claims became harder to believe as the Japanese military moved farther south, past the Great Wall (the historical boundary between China proper and Manchuria) and began to threaten Shanghai.⁵⁶

Despite this obvious clue to Japan's true intentions in the region, most nations continued to see this conflict as just an issue revolving around Manchukuo's independence from China.

⁵⁵ Wilson, 125-127.

⁵⁶ Malpass, 22; Wilson.

Several sources, including League of Nations minutes, conversations from the British Foreign Office and various newspapers, hint that recognition of Manchukuo would occur in the near future. The chaos in China at the time made many people doubtful about the very existence of the nation as a unified entity and acknowledged the possibility that, in the future, China might split into several nations. In addition, many Western officials were aware of the ethnic and cultural differences between Manchuria and the rest of China. Japan's argument that the Manchurian people desired independence seemed plausible at the time, and so many nations kept this desire in mind when considering any action regarding Manchuria. Many modern scholars acknowledge that the Japanese claim of Manchuria wanting independence before, during, and after this period, had some validity. However, the excessive involvement of Japan in Manchukuo's affairs, particularly with the ever-increasing Japanese military presence in Manchuria, did concern the international community and pressured rapid recognition of a separate Manchurian nation.

Conclusion

On September 18, 1931, the Mukden Incident, an explosion on the Southern Manchurian Railroad line, led the Japanese military to quickly take control of the region of the Northeastern China known as Manchuria. However, the Japanese military's claim that they were in the region to protect Japanese interests in the region did not stop them from supporting the creation of a new nation, known as Manchukuo, in early 1932. As a result, the United Nations, including Japan and China, and the United States had to decide whether or not Manchukuo would be recognized as a nation separate from China. The uncompromising stances of China and Japan

regarding the situation made more difficult for any positive resolution. However, the parties involved could have handled the situation better. The League of Nations, the world's first attempt at international cooperation following the First World War, was ineffective at diffusing the situation and, in some ways, made things worse. The League spent over a year after the attack on the Southern Manchurian Railroad near Mukden to make an official decision regarding the recognition of Manchukuo. Although supported by sound logic behind the delay, the League's allocation of time for the Lytton Commission to assess the situation in Manchuria brought a delay that allowed tensions to rise between China and Japan. The only nation of significance to make a relatively quick decision on the issue of Manchukuo recognition was the United States but the apathetic and self-serving views expressed by the citizens of the United States allowed the U.S. to maintain a policy regarding the situation between China and Japan that was ineffective.

Several factors made the non-recognition resolution of the League of Nations ineffective from the beginning. The fact that the League of Nations was a relatively new organization contributed significantly. Having only existed for twelve years, the League had little experience settling recognition disputes. Its member nations, however, had plenty of experience individually in these sorts of situations. Nevertheless, the historical precedents set by each country varied widely from country to country and from situation to situation. Even the United Kingdom, which had been the most consistent of all of the member nations, departed from its historical precedent when the situation benefited it.⁵⁷ As a result, each member nation could interpret the League's policy of non-recognition differently. Even when the League set guidelines for the non-

⁵⁷ Starke, 13

recognition of Manchukuo, member nations tended to behave differently towards situations involving Manchukuo.

The global power of Great Britain and the United States also affected the League's ability to establish and enforce a policy of non-recognition toward Manchukuo. Great Britain's wealth and prestige, which came from controlling about twenty-five percent of the globe's landmass, made its opinion on the matter significantly more important than that of other nations that belonged to the League of Nations. An organization in which one member sees itself as more important than the rest will not be effective when trying to operate democratically and enforce its policies in all member nations equally. In many ways, the prestige and influence of Great Britain was largely a matter of popular perception especially among the political figures leading Great Britain at the time. Despite retaining a vast empire, Great Britain's global influence was slowly slipping away. Beginning after World War I, Great Britain's control over its Empire was crumbling, and for the rest of the century this trend would become painfully obvious. However, Great Britain believed that it was, in many ways, the "first state" in the League of Nations and therefore entitled to a special status when shaping League policies. Great Britain's dissension toward the League's policy on Japan and Manchukuo severely damaged the effectiveness of the policy. The League tried to ignore this dissension, but ultimately failed.

The League could not ignore the rising global star that was the United States. Since World War I, in contrast with Great Britain, the United States' global significance had grown, in many ways much to the chagrin of the European nations. However, the United States did not join the League of Nations, severely hampering its long-term effectiveness. Any United States policy that clashed with that of the League would make the League's policy less effective. The League could, therefore, not afford to ignore the United States on any matter of any significance, least of

all the Manchurian Crisis. The League wished to work together with the United States in order to ensure a stronger policy towards Japan and Manchukuo. However, the global power conflict between the United States and Great Britain made this almost impossible. Although the League did eventually adopt a policy similar to United States, in the end the policies were distinct and lacked global support that would have made them more effective.

Secondly, the Western powers, especially Great Britain, had a better relationship with Japan, the aggressor in the situation, than with China, the victim. It would be hard for a nation such as Great Britain to forget the costly wars that had it had experienced with China within the last hundred years. Japan, in contrast, put up little resistance to Western demands for trade during the same period. One can easily see that any nation would avoid harming relations with another nation that had economically benefited them for the sake of a nation that had caused trouble in the past. Many documents from the British Foreign Office focus on economic issues in China during this period and shows that Great Britain was more concerned with the economic consequences of the conflict than anything else. As long as the independence of Manchukuo did not harm their economic interests, Great Britain and other nations were inclined to ignore the obvious aggression that Japan was exhibiting towards China.

Beyond international considerations, some of Manchuria's citizens wanted to become independent from China. Although ethically most of China is homogenous, several regions, including Manchuria, are home to ethnic minorities within China. The Western powers were aware of this fact, and so Japan's argument that the Manchu people wished for independence did not seem outrageous. In fact, the chaos in China at the time convinced many that China would split apart into several nations eventually and the historical separation of Han Chinese of the south from the Manchu peoples of the northeast seemed a natural outcome. One of the goals of

the Lytton Commission, in fact, was to determine the validity of the Japanese claim of a large Manchu separatist movement. Although the Commission found that the claims made by Japan were erroneous to some extent, they were not false, so this idea of the Manchu people existing separately from China had historical support, making it hard for most nations to condemn the existence of a Manchurian state outright. This fact and the other reasons mentioned previously, made it hard for any nation to take a firm stance against the formation of Manchukuo. The biggest issue that most nations faced was not the creation of a new state, but rather the involvement of the Japanese in the incident. Because most nations refused to harm their own interests in the Far East due to this issue, no definitive action against Manchukuo or Japan occurred and thus Japan could pursue its aggressive policies against China without much fear of significant retribution. As a result, the situation in China continued to escalate until the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937 and the world finally had to take notice.

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