Imagining Asian Modernity: Japanese Intellectuals in Manchuria and Their Agrarian Movement, 1931 – 1943

By

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Sitting on a deckchair, I had repeatedly imagined what my life would become in the ‘new world’ called Manchuria. The first view I had of Dalian from the sea was strikingly beautiful…and I was watching it as if I could never have enough of the view.¹

- Nonomura Kazuo, *Kaisō Mantetsu Chōsabu*, 1986

**From Manchuria to Manchukuo: a Brief History**

Like thousands of Japanese immigrants arriving in Manchuria during the 1930s, Nonomura had many aspirations for his life across the Sea of Japan. His confidence was not at all uninformed. Compared with land-seeking immigrants swarming to the countryside, Nonomura, a college graduate and a former bureaucrat in the Japanese colonial administration in Taiwan, lived the life of the colonial elite in Dalian after his arrival in 1939.² Hired as a researcher by both Japanese and Manchurian authorities, Nonomura contributed to the actual policies adopted in Manchuria, and joined a group of agrarianist thinkers to advocate reforms until he and other pro-reform activists were arrested by the Japanese military police in 1942. Although Nonomura was imprisoned during the government-initiated crackdown, Manchuria nevertheless resembled something of a land of opportunity for him when he reached the port city Dalian.

For a contemporary Chinese audience, however, the sense of novelty and excitement Nonomura felt for “Manchuria” upon his arrival may seem bizarre, partly because the word Manchuria (Manzhou) is no longer used, in either ethnic or geographical terms, in discussions about contemporary Chinese society. The region that this term used to represent – the vast land extending from Shanhai Pass north to today’s Beijing to the Amur River bordering Russian

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² Ibid, 1-3
Siberia – is now familiar to Chinese as northeastern China (Zhongguo dongbei), or simply as “the northeastern” (dongbei). Furthermore, the ethnic root of this word – deriving from the Manchu (Jurchen) ethnic groups living in these lands – has ceased to reflect the place demographically since the late 19th century, when Han Chinese became the dominant ethnic group through immigration. At some point, the word “Manchuria” lost most of its practical significance and is now reduced to a historical term.

For historians, Manchuria as a place has never ceased to be important, and has become even more so in recent years, attracting increasing attention in scholarship. Thanks to Japan’s Total Empire by Louise Young, the study of Manchuria in the early 20th century, especially its role in the expansion of the Japanese Empire, has enjoyed something of a revival. Manchuria’s meanings, for both Imperial Japan and the Republic of China, have become a heatedly debated subject among historians of modern Sino-Japanese history. Benefit from the resurging interest in reevaluating the significance of Manchuria in Japanese history, this thesis contributes to this on-going discussion by focusing on Japanese colonial elites like Nonomura. At the outset, this thesis hopes to use the roles Japanese colonial elites played in Manchuria – pro-reform technocrats, agrarianist thinkers, and dissenting intellectuals against the authoritative government – to complicate and contribute to our understanding of the intellectuals’ group in the colonial peripheries of Japanese Empire.

3 The origin of the word Manchuria was not all clear: one argument claims it to be a European invention, yet another insisted that the word is a translation of the Japanese word Manshu. In either case, the word Manchuria was not used by Chinese (and Jurchen people known as Manchurians, who latter established the Qing Dynasty) themselves in the first place. For more discussion about the word Manchuria, see Herbert Allen Giles, China and the Manchus (Cambridge: University Press, 1912).

In addition, when put under the larger scope, the study of the group of Japanese agrarianists in Manchuria in this thesis also engages with other aspects of the tensions that shaped the modern history of Japan. On one hand, the blueprints these pro-reform advocates proposed for rural Manchuria may inform a comparative study of similar efforts in Japan during the 1930s, which was relatively more successful compared to their counterparts in Manchuria. On the other hand, the wartime experiences of these activists in Manchuria also contributes to our understanding of their postwar experiences in academies and politics, as some became political scientists and historians in Japanese Universities, and others leaders in leftwing movements. Veterans of the Manchurian bureaucracy played seem to have played an outsize role in shaping postwar Japan, and their histories and agendas have not been much studied. In other words, this thesis believes that investigating the experiences of Japanese thinkers in Manchuria in the 1930s has the potential to inform studies that, both chronologically and geographically, exceeds that of wartime Manchuria.

Before discussing Japanese pro-reform activists in Manchuria and interpreting their interventions, it is in order to explain first what Manchuria was like before and at the time of their arrival, as well as how the circumstances there attracted people like Nonomura. Admittedly, the current discussions about Manchuria deal almost exclusively with recent developments there, and focus especially on the waves of modernization that reached the region after the mid-19th century. Both topics – Japanese rural reforms and the intellectual discourses of Japanese activists in the postwar period – have attracted historians to contribute through their scholarly works. Kerry Smith, in his A Time of Crisis, discusses in detail the rural revitalization movements (nōson kōsei undō) in Japan during the 1930s. Julian Victor Koschmann explores the development of Japanese intellectual discourses in the postwar period in his works, which involve Japanese activists formerly in Manchuria. See Kerry Smith, A Time of Crisis: Japan, the Great Depression, and Rural Revitalization, (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001); Sven Saaler and Julian Victor Koschmann, Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, Regionalism and Borders, (London: Routledge, 2007); and Julian Victor Koschmann, Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
century. Beforehand, Manchuria, as a distant and sparsely populated borderland of the Qing Empire, had seldom enjoyed much attention from ruling elites at China’s center. Although the place bore a historical and even religious significance for China’s Manchu rulers – considered “the rising place for the dragon” (longxingzhidi), Qing emperors had long forbidden Han Chinese immigrants from entering the territory – Manchuria did not contribute much to the empire when compared with the more populated and prosperous heartland provinces to its south. Such seclusion persisted even after the Sino-Russian Border Conflict in the last three decades of the 17th century. For the Qing emperors, Manchuria was considered a sacred place reserved for the Manchu royal lineage, even when the vast underdeveloped wilderness in Manchuria might provide a valid answer to the growing demand for farmland in inner provinces.

The tranquility Manchuria had enjoyed for centuries came to an end in the mid-19th century. Suffering from imperialist interventions and internal upheavals in the latter half of the 19th century, Qing emperors feared the loss of control over the empire’s northeastern borderland, and thus softened their ban on Han Chinese immigrants entering Manchuria. As a consequence, waves of Chinese farmers seeking farmland swarmed to Manchuria, and demographically reshaped the region. Simultaneously, the vastness of Manchuria attracted foreign attention, especially from the Russian Empire, which was seeking to expand its influence south of Siberia, and the Japanese Empire, which was on the rise after the Meiji Restoration. The Sino-Japanese War in 1894 and Russo-Japanese War in 1904 both made Manchuria a hot zone for competition and for the demonstration of imperialist ambitions.
As the competition for Manchuria came to a pause with Imperial Japan’s decisive victory over Russia in 1905, Manchuria at the turn of the 20th century was no longer a secluded, distant Chinese borderland province. Instead, because of its strategic position in northeastern Asia, its vast potential for agricultural development, and its rich resources, the region became something of a land of opportunities for immigrants and investors. In metropolitan cities like Dalian (Dairen) and Harbin, foreign leaseholds, railroad companies, and foreign communities began to emerge, while Chinese magistrates and landlords sprawled tenaciously in the vast, yet not at all unpopulated rural area, striving to establish and then maintain control.

This period also witnessed for the first time in three centuries an absence of central authority in Manchuria. The collapse of the Qing Empire in 1911 created a political vacuum, which was soon occupied by regional warlords, who only answered to the central governments in Beijing – and in Nanjing – when it was expedient to do so. Since 1916, Manchuria had become a de facto independent region under General Zhang Zuolin, a local warlord whose control of Manchuria persisted until his assassination by Japanese forces in 1928. His son, Zhang Xueliang, assumed control after his father’s death.

The absence of a central government opened the door for foreign powers seeking to expand their influence in Manchuria. This was especially true for Japanese expansionists. Due to its exclusive rights to the south Manchuria railroad – Russian held the rights to railroads in north Manchuria until the revolution in 1917 – Japan sought every opportunity to enhance its control over the Kwantung leasehold through a myriad of development projects. The development
projects in leaseholds along the south Manchurian railroad brought in Japanese immigrants from
different ends of the social spectrum – bureaucrats, intellectuals, clerks as well as railroad
workers, peasants, and wage laborers. To a lesser degree, the development projects in leaseholds
also impacted Chinese populations nearby. As railroads cut through the countryside between
cities, the leaseholds also affected rural communities, attracting landless peasants to become
wage labors along the railroad. Urban middle-class intellectuals and technocrats also sought
employment in Japanese companies. Despite discrimination and hostility from their Japanese
employers, some even made their way into administrative institutions in Dalian and other
leaseholds. As a result, Japan rapidly expanded its influence in Manchuria throughout the 1910s
and 1920s, and became a central if not dominate power in the region. In 1931, it gained full
control over Manchuria through establishing its puppet state Manchukuo in a military adventure
initiated by the Japanese Kwantung Army.

*Leftwing Intellectuals, Agrarian Activists, and Sinophile Journalists in Manchuria*

The effort to strengthen Japan’s presence in Manchuria along its railroads inevitably yielded
more power and authority to its proxies in the field. One such beneficiary, and certainly the most
important one, was the South Manchurian Railroad Company (*Minami-Manshū Tetsudō
Kabushiki Gaisha*), or Mantetsu as it often abbreviated in Japanese, a semi state-owned company
entrusted with full authority over Japanese railroads and after 1905 even basic administrative
functions in Japanese leaseholds. The growing settlements under its control had stimulated the

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Mantetsu to recruit professionals in administration, who it then placed in increasingly populated cities along the newly constructed railroads. Between 1905 and the Manchurian Incident in 1931, Mantetsu grew from a chartered railroad company into a behemoth with thousands of employees spread among many different branches.

A clear indication of Mantetsu’s expansion is the astonishing level of modernity in the port city Dalian, which had been under its administration since 1904. Differing from its Russian predecessors, who valued above all its military significance, Mantetsu under its first president Gotō Shinpei made a great effort to develop the economic potential of Dalian. Taking advantage of the port infrastructure, Mantetsu started various industries in the city, and made it the economic and political center of the railroad leaseholds (Mantetsu fuzokuchi) it controlled. As Itō Takeo, who arrived in Manchuria in 1920, wrote in his memoir, “Russia used the railway as a vehicle of military advance into the region. Unlike Russia, Japan cleared and developed the land in Manchuria.” Benefitting from these development projects, the banks, factories, and institutes in Dalian set the pace for rapid development in early 20th century East Asia. As the gateway to Manchuria, Dalian’s prosperity and dynamism attracted Japanese investors from both private and state-owned sectors to flock to what in their eyes was the “virgin land” of Manchuria.

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a population boom in Manchuria: the number of Japanese residents in Dalian on the eve of the Manchurian Incident in 1931 was quadruple its population in 1908. Similar demographic patterns were seen in other cities along

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7 Manchuria under Russian reign and Japanese governance is compared in various sources. Ito Takeo, in his memoir _Life along the Manchurian Railroad_, wrote “Russia used the railway as a vehicle of military advance into the region. Unlike Russia, Japan cleared and developed the land in Manchuria.” Yet another example comes from the development of the city Dairen – Dalny (Дальній) under Czarist Russia – in different periods. For the comparison the city development under Japan gained its control, see O'Dwyer, _Significant Soil_, 28-33.
the railway, including major metropolises such as Fengtian, Changchun – which became the capital Shinkyō under Manchukuo –, and Harbin. In addition to the growth of the Japanese population, economic growth in the railroad zone also attracted Chinese immigrants from other provinces. The Chinese population underwent a tenfold increase in the first 25 years after the end of the Russo-Japanese War, reaching about two hundred and fifty thousand in 1930.

The rapid growth of the Japanese population in Manchuria had invigorated advocates for expansionism, who saw Manchuria as indispensable to Japan’s ambition on mainland Asia. Gotō himself was a devoted advocate of this idea, who interpreted the role of Mantetsu as that of “military preparedness in civil garb” (bunsō teki bubi). According to Itō Takeo’s, when Gotō assumed leadership of Mantetsu in 1906, he expressed clearly to Mantetsu employees that Manchuria was surely to become a Japanese colony, and Mantetsu should see to this end on behalf of the empire:

In short, colonial policy is military preparedness in civil garb; it is carrying out the hegemon’s strategies under the flag of the kingly way…We have to implement a cultural invasion with a Central Laboratory, popular education for the resident populace, and forge other academic and economic links. Invasion may not be an agreeable expression, but [language] aside we can generally call our policy one of invasion in civil garb.

For people who agreed with Gotō, forming a better understanding of Manchuria became a necessary preparation for such an “invasion” to succeed. In 1907, Gotō established the Mantetsu Investigation Department (Mantetsu Chōsabu) whose primary responsibility was to conduct research on Manchuria – social, economic, and political – and to provide decision-makers with

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8 Kantō-shū narabi minamimanshū zairyū hon hōjin oyobi gaikoku hito jinkō teki-hyō 関東州並び南満州在留本邦人及び外国人人口統計表, cited in O’Dwyer. Significant Soil, 38, table. 1.1.
9 Ibid, 50, table 1.3.
information and advice. The nature of its duty distinguished the Investigation Department from other branches in the Mantetsu. The Investigation Department engaged in neither administration in leaseholds nor railroad operations, which were by then the most common duties performed by Mantetsu employees. The technocrats, bureaucrats, and clerks who made up the bulk of Mantetsu employees were largely absent in the Investigation Department. Instead, the department mainly recruited intellectuals trained in social sciences, especially in economics, as investigators and archivists.

The founding of the Mantetsu Investigation Department provided an attractive career path for people like Nonomura. Recruitment for the Investigation Department was conducted in various ways, and a main method was through hiring recent college graduates. In 1919, after Professor Matsumoto Jōji of Kyoto University became a director in the Investigation Department, employment opportunities were provided to graduates from elite imperial universities including Tokyo and Kyoto Universities. In addition to imperial college students, archival and executive positions at lower levels were provided to graduates of commercial high schools, foreign-language high schools, and the East Asian Common Culture Academy (Tōa Dōbunshoin Daigaku) in Shanghai, as the Investigation Department wished to recruit people with language skills and background knowledge about China.\(^{11}\) Although it is easy to understand that for new college graduates, accepting positions provided by the Mantetsu Investigation Department would have been a financially attractive choice, it is equally important to note that employment opportunities in Manchuria were also important to intellectuals with heterogeneous ideologies –

\(^{11}\) Ibid, 39.
namely socialist and communist – in the 1920s, when the political environment in cities was becoming less tolerant for leftists. For people with connections to leftwing movements – such as Satō Daishirō, who later became a central figure in the agricultural reforms in Manchuria – a position in Manchuria meant an opportunity to leave Japan and flee from the surveillance of the Special High Police (tokubetsu kōtō keisatsu).

In addition to recent graduates, the Investigation Department also recruited established scholars and experienced sinologists. For instance, Tachibana Shiraki, an established journalist and sinologist working for Japanese papers in China, was recruited by the Investigation Department and in 1925 became a part-time employee (shokutaku sha’in). It is worth mentioning that although Tachibana only served as a part-timer in the department, and left to found the journal *Manchurian Commentary* in 1931, his influence on his peers in the department is not to be underestimated. He was often seen by a group of Japanese intellectuals – mostly leftists – as their representative and mentor. Itō, who entered the Mantetsu Investigation Department after graduating from college in 1920, spoke highly of Tachibana in his memoir and recognized his influence:

> I first imagined that, being a veteran journalist, he had had to leave the world of journalism and come to the SMR [i.e. Mantetsu] for sustenance, but I found that judging by his attitude at the company, he was not about to sell his honor as a journalist for salary…When one thinks of the intellectual and scientific pedigree of the Research Department of the SMR, the scholarly debt owed to Tachibana Shiraki, both directly or indirectly, is enormous.

Itō was not the only one to speak of Tachibana’s role as a charismatic leader in the intellectual

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14 Itō Takeo, *Life Along the South Manchurian Railway*, 118.
community. Tanaka Takeo, who worked in the Shanghai branch of the Investigation Department and later served in the Manchurian Commentary as chief editor, remembered him as “a self-made man…Tachibana has an unrivalled charisma that attracted youth [intellectuals] to him.” Such acclamations from his colleagues partly reflect their admiration for Tachibana’s extensive experience in China and Manchuria. Tachibana arrived in Dalian in 1906 and spent most of his life from then on in China. He worked for several major newspapers – including Kyoshin Nichinichi Shinbun and Ryōtō Shinpō – and wrote extensively on Chinese culture and politics. Tachibana also corresponded with famous Chinese scholars, including Lu Xun and Chen Duxiu. The abundant knowledge and first-hand experience Tachibana had in Chinese affairs prior to his employment at the Investigation Department accounted for his prominence among new recruits. As most of them had only recently arrived in China and Manchuria, it was natural for them to see Tachibana as a mentor figure. The popularity Tachibana enjoyed among Investigation Department employees later contributed to the success of Manchurian Commentary, which he founded in 1931. His former colleagues became the main supporters of and contributors to the journal.

The Dawn of Manchurian Commentary and the Rise of New-Agrarianism

For Japanese intellectuals in Manchuria, personal connections formed in the classrooms of

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16 The friendship between Tachibana and Chinese intellectuals lasted until Manchurian Incident in 1931, when Tachibana turned to support Japanese expansion and divided himself from his Chinese friends who criticized it fiercely. See Hamaguchi Yūko 浜口裕子 “1920 Nendai zenhan no Chūgoku ni okeru han'ichi undō to Nihon: Tachibana shiraki no ronpyō o toshite” “1920年代前半の中国における反日運動と日本: 橘樸の論評を通じて,” Takushokudaiigaku ronshū. Seiji keizai hōritsu kenkyū 9, no. 1 拓殖大学論集 政治・経済・法律研究 第9巻第1号 (2006): 32-43
imperial universities, as well as comradeships established in the offices of Mantetsu, had all contributed to the formation of their intimate social circles. As in Tachibana’s case, intellectual groups emerged at the workplace on the basis of shared academic orientations and political ideals. Two of the most important circles created at this time among the well-educated Japanese elites in Manchuria were the “Manchurian Commentary faction” (Manshū hyōron-ha) and the “Economy Investigation Group faction” (keizai chōsa-ha). Both groups played important roles in their interactions with the Kwantung Army and the Manchukuo authority throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

As the name entails, members of the former faction were mainly Tachibana’s followers among the the editors of *Manchurian Commentary*. In 1931, with the support of Koyama Sadamoto, the executive of Manchurian Youth League (Manshū seinen-kai), the journal was established in Dalian, with Tachibana as its first chief editor. As a weekly journal publishing primarily commentary articles and interviews on politics, the *Manchurian Commentary* relied on part-time writers (dōjin) – especially those working for the Mantetsu Investigation Department – for its content. This relationship further strengthened Tachibana’s connections with Japanese intellectuals in Mantetsu, who came to see Tachibana’s journal as a platform for them to express their political opinions.

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17 The two titles – keizai chōsa-ha and Manshū hyōron-ha – has been used by both cotemporaries and historians to refer to the two informal groups of Japanese intellectuals in Manchuria. They appeared in both the wartime reports composed by the military police of Kwantung Army, and the postwar memoirs composed by Nonomura, Tanaka, and Ishidō. In addition, historians including Kobayashi Hideo and Fukui Shin’ichi also use the terms to refer to the factions within the Japanese intelligentsia in Manchuria. For a brief list of works that cited the two terms, see Kangō kenpeitai shirei-bu 関東憲兵隊司令部, *Zaiman nikkai Kyōsan shugi undō* 在満日系共産主義運動, (n.p.: 1944) Reprinted in Kangō kenpeitai shirei-bu 関東憲兵隊司令部, *Zaiman nikkai Kyōsan shugi undō* 在満日系共産主義運動, (Tokyo: Kyokutō kenkyūjo shuppan-hyō, 1969); Nonomura, Kazuo 野々村一雄, *Kaisō mantetsu chōsabu* 回想満鉄調査部, (Tokyo: Keisōshobō, 1986); Kobayashi Hideo and Fukui Shin’ichi 小林英夫 福井紳一, *Mantetsuchōsabu jiken no shinsō* -- shin hakken shiryō ga kataru “chiteki shūdan” no mihatenuyume 満鉄調査部事件の真相 -- 新発見史料が語る「知の集団」の見果てぬ夢, (Tokyo: Shōgakkan小学館, 2004).
However, this does not mean that the *Manchurian Commentary* only published commentaries composed by Tachibana’s cohorts. On the contrary, the journal’s political stance was to some extent blurry at this point. Due to Koyama’s close ties to the Kwantung Army – he was by then a paid advisor for it – as well as to the right-wing expansionist groups including the Manchurian Youth League and the Daiyūhō Group (Daiyūhō-kai), the journal secured direct subsidies from the army and possibly accepted contributions from right-wing groups as well.\(^\text{18}\) In return, the journal published not only the articles composed by Koyama and his followers in the Manchurian Youth League, who used the journal to promote Japanese expansionist claims, but also those composed by officers of the Kwantung Army, who would speak on the Army’s behalf in the journal.\(^\text{19}\)

Although the journal was used as a platform for propaganda by various parties, its editors remained primarily Tachibana’s supporters. As Tanaka Takeo, the third chief editor of *Manchurian Commentary* describes, the editors’ group consisted of a circle of “comrades” (nakama):

> There, under the directorship of Tachibana, group editing was encouraged in the editors’ body, which was mainly composed by young members of the Mantetsu Economic Investigation Group. A free, democratic, and cheerful atmosphere overflows [in the editorship].\(^\text{20}\)

In contrast to what Koyama and right-wing group writers contributed to the journal, its editors produced articles that were largely leftist and even Marxist in nature. They often criticized

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\(^{19}\) Nonomura, *Kaisō mantetsu chōsabu*, 170-171.

\(^{20}\) Tanaka, *Tachibana Shiraki to Sanō Daishirō*, 41: “そこでは、橘を指導者と仰ぐ、満鉄経済調査会の若いメンバーを主とする六人の編集委員会による共同編集が行われ、自由な、明るい、民主的な空気にあふれていた。” on the same page, Tanaka used the word 仲間 (nakama) to describe the relation between the members of the editorship.
Japan’s expansionist policy in China.\textsuperscript{21} The leftist inclination of the Manchurian Commentary faction was one of Tachibana’s legacies. Even after Tachibana passed on the position of chief editor, his successors Yamaguchi Shin’ichi, Tanaka Takeo, and Satō Daishirō all made sure that the group of editors for the \textit{Manchurian Commentary} remained a leftist one.

Unlike Tachibana’s followers in the \textit{Manchurian Commentary}, who worked rather independently outside the Mantetsu system – although some were still part-time employees at the Investigation Department – members of the economy investigation faction came almost exclusive from within the Mantetsu Investigation Department. The name comes from the Economy Investigation Group (\textit{Keizai Chōsa-kai}) established within the Mantetsu Investigation Department at the command of the Kwantung Army. When the Kwantung Army seized control of Manchuria through the Manchurian Incident, the need for a thorough investigation of the economic potential of Manchuria and northern China had propelled Army officers to call upon investigators from the Investigation Department to participate in the research projects they needed.\textsuperscript{22} Although the economy research group was nominally headed by a senior department chair, Miyazaki Masayoshi, the leadership for most of the 1930s actually fell to Ōgami Suehiro, a young scholar attracted deeply to Tachibana’s ideas. As a research group answering directly to the Kwantung Army, the Economy Research Group under Ōgami was involved deeply in the actual policy-making process of Manchukuo, including investigating economic development in Manchuria, compiling the \textit{Annual Report of Manchurian Economy (Manshū Keizai Nenpō)}.

\textsuperscript{21} Nonomura, \textit{Kaisō mantetsu chōsabu}, 172.
\textsuperscript{22} Ishidō Kiyotomo 石堂清倫, \textit{Jū go-nen sensō to mantetsuchōsabu 十五年戦争と満鉄調査部} (Tokyo: Hara shobō 原書房, 1986), 22.
starting in 1933, and even drafting a Five-year plan for the Manchukuo government in 1936.\textsuperscript{23} As will be discussed in more detail in this thesis, such experiences had made Ōgami and a group of his followers advocates for gradual reforms under the guidance of Japanese and Manchukuo authority.\textsuperscript{24} Furthermore, it is worth adding that the two intellectual circles were not isolated from one another. This was certainly true for Ōgami, who was deeply influenced by Tachibana and wrote extensively for the \textit{Manchurian Commentary}. In addition, members of the Economy Investigation Group often became part-time editors in Tachibana’s journal. As a result, people sometimes belonged to both groups simultaneously and had close ties to people in other circles.

The frequent interactions between the two intellectuals’ circles helped Tachibana promote his “new-physiocracy” (shin-jūnōshugi) among his followers in both intellectual groups when he first proposed the idea in 1932. It is worth noting that although Tachibana – along with his followers including Ōgami and Satō – called this idea “new-physiocracy,” it had little in common with the ideas proposed originally by French physiocrats in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. Unlike François Quesnay and Baron Turgot, who considered agriculture the sole source of the wealth of nations, Tachibana and his followers did not openly address the relation between industrial productions and agriculture in the national economy.\textsuperscript{25} Instead, Tachibana focused on the socio-political aspects of agricultural communities in his proposal, explaining what roles rural communities ought to play in the social structure and in the government. In this regard, Tachibana’s idea has a lot in common with Japanese forms of agrarianism (nōhonshugi), which

\textsuperscript{23} See Nonomura, \textit{Kaisō mantetsu chōsabu}, 41-53.
\textsuperscript{24} See Ishidō, \textit{Jū go-nen sensō to mantetsuchōsabu}, 35-42.
\textsuperscript{25} For a brief introduction and definition of the physiocracy in its original terms, see Philippe Steiner, “Physiocracy and French pre-classical political economy,” \textit{A Companion to the History of Economic Thought} (2003): 61 – 77.
considers rural communities more ideal and superior to urban societies, and advocates that national policies should reflect more on the interests of the rural communities. Therefore, to avoid possible confusion, this thesis will use the term “new-agrarianism” to refer to the set of ideas Tachibana and his followers proposed.

What exactly, then, was Tachibana proposing in his “new-agrarianism?” A central belief in Tachibana’s agrarian blueprint was a distinction between the agrarian East and the industrialized West. The latter, he argued, caused “distortion” in the former through industrialization and colonization. Such an idea was to some extent linked to Tachibana’s fascination with the Confucian concept of “the kingly way” (ōdō, wangdao), a state in which social harmony is emphasized and conflicts prevented. Calling himself a traditionalist, Tachibana considered the kingly way a Confucian legacy that was unique to Asian countries, and was still politically significant to China, Manchuria, and Japan. The goal of Tachibana’s new-agrarianism was to restore East Asian countries to their rightful status as agrarian societies under the principle of the kingly way, to find the means to exploit the full potential of agrarian societies, and thus to withstand the interference from the west. In other words, although Tachibana proposed to establish an agrarian state only in Manchuria when he first announced his new-agrarianist platform, he had hoped that the idea would influence the actual political agendas in other countries – namely China and Japan – across East Asia.

27 Li, China Factor in Modern Japanese Thought, 69.
However, Tachibana did not argue that Japan should also become an agrarian state and abandon the goal of “enriching the country, strengthening the military” (Fukokukyōhei) it had pursued since the Meiji Restoration. Explaining that the process of industrialization is irreversible, Tachibana believed that Japan could not return to the agrarian stage, and should instead assume a different role in the agrarian blueprint for East Asia. For Tachibana, Japan could serve as an enabling force in other regions of East Asia, namely China and Manchuria, and make them fulfill their “historical destiny” as agrarian states. The leadership role Tachibana assigned to Japan in his agrarian blueprint had partly contributed to his willingness to cooperate with the Kwantung Army and the Manchukuo regime, since he had hoped that the newly established Manchukuo government would conduct agrarian reforms under the Kwantung Army’s guidance.

Another aspect of Tachibana’s agrarianism that needs to be addressed is his vision for actual practices in agrarian communities. These were spelled out clearly in his design for Manchuria. As Tachibana explained in “a Personal Proposal for Establishing a New State in Manchuria” (Manshū shin-kokuka kenkoku taikō shian) in 1931, he was reluctant to incorporate any industrial development in Manchuria, and argued that it should rely predominantly on land agriculture and husbandry. Furthermore, Tachibana envisioned that agrarian society in Manchuria should be a highly autonomous one. There would be a central government of limited power, while a

29 For Tachibana’s argument on industrialization and Japan’s role in agrarian states, see Tachibana Shiraki, “Manshū shin-kokuka kenkoku taikō shian” Manshū shin-kokuka kenkoku taikō shian in Manshū hyōron 2, no. 1 (1932), reprinted in Manshū hyōron fukkoku-ban Manshū hyōron fukkoku-ban (Tokyo: Ryūkeishosha, 1980), 2:11-12.
30 Li, China Factor in Modern Japanese Thought, 70.
significant portion of the political power was to be given to local and provincial autonomous groups. Tachibana’s preference for the decentralized state over that with a strong central government is, according to Lincoln Li, rooted in his belief that the best check against the inevitable bureaucratic abuse and exploitation are powerful rural communities standing in solidarity. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the socio-political agendas Tachibana pursued in his new-agrarianism are, as Young explains, ones in which “the movement championed local autonomy against central power…an agrarian against an industrial economy, and agrarian democracy against semifeudal tyranny.” In other words, Tachibana treated the new-agrarianism as means through which Manchuria, under the rule of Manchukuo and the protection of the Kwantung Army, could become a peaceful agrarian paradise for peasants in rural communities.

Tachibana’s vision of Manchukuo as an agrarian state, as well as his hope for Japan as the enabling force for his plans, motivated him to cooperate with the Kwantung Army and the newly established Manchukuo regime. In the early 1930s, Tachibana was keen to associate his narrative of the new-agrarianism with the propaganda slogans the Kwantung Army and the Manchukuo regime used, including the “paradise of the kingly way” (ōdō rakudo) and “secure the borders; pacify the people” (hokyō anmin). This effort continued into the mid-1930s, when a large portion of Tachibana’s work was devoted to incorporating his agrarian pursuits in the national

32 Ibid, 12-14.
33 Li, China Factor in Modern Japanese Thought, 72.
34 Young, Japan’s Total Empire, 284.
35 For the propaganda slogans used by the Manchukuo government and the Kwantung Army in China and Manchuria, see Barak Kushner, The Thought War: Japanese Imperial Propaganda, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 119-133.
projects of Manchukuo.

However, although Tachibana’s agrarian blueprint, especially his idea for Manchuria as an agrarian paradise, was accepted by his followers, his willingness to cooperate with the Kwantung Army raised some doubts even among his agrarianist comrades. For instance, one of Tachibana’s favorite students, Satō Daishirō, openly questioned whether it would be possible to conduct agrarian reforms under the Manchukuo government in 1935 and 1936. Different ideas about how to conduct reform in the late 1930s and early 1940s eventually led to the formation of two separate agrarian movements led by Ōgami Suehiro and Satō Daishirō respectively. As noted earlier in this chapter, Ōgami and his cohort in the Economy Investigation Group supported cooperation with the authorities, and imagined government-initiated reforms through what they called “reform from above” (ue kara no henkaku). Their vision of agrarian reform was partly – and briefly – realized in 1936, when the Kwantung Army asked Ōgami’s group to draft a Five-year plan, and gave Ōgami a chance to incorporate his version of agricultural reform into the actual policies the Manchukuo government would enforce in rural communities.

Unlike Ōgami, who pursued agrarian ideals by collaborating with the Manchukuo authorities, Satō took a rather different path and helped form grassroots movements in villages in north Manchuria. In 1937, Satō left his position with Manchurian Commentary for Suika County (Suihua Xian), hoping to start agricultural cooperative groups (nōgyō gassaku-sha) in local villages. From 1937 to 1940, Satō made much progress there, not only in establishing agricultural cooperatives that operated under protocols he ascribed, but also in recruiting and
installing activists in villages across north Manchuria to help spread his design for grassroots agricultural cooperative groups.

However, despite the fact that both Satō’s bottom-up movement and Ōgami’s top-down reforms looked promising at the start, both attempts eventually failed. Ōgami’s draft for the Five-year plan was rejected by the Kwantung Army and replaced by a much more conservative version in 1937. Satō’s agricultural cooperative groups were taken over in 1940 by state-initiated cooperative groups that favored the interests of rich landlords and grain merchants. In addition, following Satō’s arrest in 1941 by the military police of the Kwantung Army, Ōgami and other supporters of the agrarian cause were apprehended in the Kwantung Army’s massive crackdown against non-conforming activists in Mantetsu and Manchurian Commentary. With more than ninety intellectuals in both organizations arrested, convicted, and imprisoned, their pursuit of an agrarian blueprint in Manchuria was reduced to an unrealizable dream.

As the brief introduction above illustrates, the rise, the development, and the eventual collapse of these different programs of agrarian reforms in Manchuria offers a valuable perspective from which to evaluate intellectuals’ roles in prewar and wartime Manchuria. Due to their affiliation with Tachibana’s agrarian ideals and the various attempts made to bring these plans to fruition in Manchuria, this thesis focuses on these “agrarianists,” and traces how their pursuit of Tachibana’s new-agrarianism was carried out both through discussions in Manchurian Commentary and in activities engaged at both the central and local levels.

Leftist Dissidents or Reformists for Modernization – Redefining Japanese Intellectuals in
Manchuria

Before discussing how pro-agrarianism activists in Mantetsu and *Manchurian Commentary* gained and then lost their ability to shape policy in the 1930s and the early 1940s, it is in order to examine first how this group has been presented and discussed in the existing scholarship. It is clear that the various activities these Japanese experts engaged in Manchuria, as well as their convoluted relations with the authorities, have complicated historians’ work to understand them and their endeavors. Despite a considerable amount of scholarly work devoted to the study of these Japanese intellectuals’ roles in the political agendas of both Manchukuo and Japan, few works have explored the specific roles they played in Manchuria and their actual endeavors on the ground. Rather, the fact that most agrarianists were leftists – namely socialists and Marxists – suppressed by the military police of the Kwantung Army as communists in the 1940s prompts some scholars to focus on the ideological production of these intellectuals, arguing that their conflict with the Manchukuo authorities was akin to that between rebelling dissidents and suppressive authoritative governments. Kobayashi Hideo and Fukui Shin’ichi, in their *Mantetsuchōsabu jiken no shinsō* are the banner-bearers for such an argument. They believe that the tight connections – both ideological and interpersonal – among Mantetsu technocrats suggest that together they made up a collective resistance against the Kwantung Army. The members of the Mantetsu Investigation Department and activists associated with them – such as Satō and Ōgami – formed a well organized “intellectual group” (chitekishūdan) and acted together from
an anti-military stance.\footnote{36} According to Kobayashi, the various reforms these activists advocated for Manchuria, as well as their criticism against the Kwantung Army in journals, reflect both their pursuit of “rationality” (gōri-sei) and “pan-Asian cooperation” (tōa kyōdō-tai) in Manchurian modernization and posed a challenge to Kwantung Army’s authority.\footnote{37} Therefore, since this collection of ideologues was predominantly guided by what Kobayashi calls “Mantetsu Marxism” (Mantetsu Marukushugā), the Kwantung Army was prompted to crack down on them as an act of anti-communist patriotism.

However, Kobayashi’s argument that the liberal minds among the Mantetsu technocrats formed a collective resistance against the militaristic authority of the Kwantung Army does not stand unchallenged. Matsumura Takao and Eda Kenji disagree with Kobayashi’s interpretation, arguing in Mantetsu no Chōsa to Kenkyū that these Mantetsu employees did not engage in the activities they were accused of, and that there was never an organized, consistent opposition to the Kwantung Army’s authority among the intellectuals in Manchurian Commentary and Mantetsu Investigation Department.\footnote{38} The massive arrests, as Matsumura claims, were simply a political witch-hunt based upon the Kwantung Army’s red scare and its belief in unreliable information gained in interrogations.

Although both Kobayashi and Matsumura’s arguments are not without evidence, the two scholars may risk an overgeneralization in their definitions of these individuals. More
importantly, they may also have failed to recognize the role agrarianism played in shaping how they interacted with the Manchukuo government and the Kwantung Army. Kobayashi’s argument, which categorized the apprehended activists into one clearly defined group with shared pursuits and ideals, could hardly explain the various conflicts, both ideological and methodological, among them throughout the 1930s. In Matsumura’s case, his emphasis on the role of ideological factors – namely an anti-communist atmosphere – on the Kwantung Army’s side risks ignoring the intensified conflict between Satō’s cohort and the Manchukuo government over actual agricultural policies after 1937. Therefore, it is possible to argue that paying little attention to the agrarian elements in the interactions between Japanese pro-reform technocrats and the Manchukuo authorities in the prolonged period, both Matsumura and Kobayashi emphasized the ideological front and discourse too much, and put relatively little effort into exploring the activists’ actual endeavors, both intellectual and practical, in print and in rural communities.

In addition to the narrative about the ideological collision between leftwing intellectuals and rightwing authoritative governments, other scholars have focused on these intellectuals’ relations with the authorities, especially on how the former influenced and contributed to the actual policies the latter adopted in their national projects. Louise Young, in *Japan’s Total Empire*, makes such an effort and argues that Japanese intellectuals were to some extent active participants in Japan’s imperial project in Manchuria. Proposing the idea of “total empire” to illustrate the popular psychology regarding Manchuria from 1931 to 1945, Young adopts the analogue of total war and argues that the construction of total empire in Manchuria was, like total
war, a process of “multidimensional mobilization of domestic society: cultural, military, political, and economic,” and through the mobilization “opposition to the imperial project was sometimes forcibly silenced or drowned out, more often it was co-opted.” Young believes that these Japanese intellectuals were no exceptions to this mobilization, and were actively incorporated, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, into the process of empire building in Manchuria.

Young is not the only historian situating these colonial elites in the context of imperial projects. Both Prasenjit Duara and Yamamuro Shin’ichi make similar efforts, explaining how Japanese intellectuals in Manchuria were associated with a grander progress of modernization taking place in many corners of the Japanese empire. In Kimera: Manshūkoku no shōzo, Yamamuro shares Young’s argument about the cooperation between Japanese technocrats and the regime in the name of a collaborative imperial project. In addition, he also believes that what motivated Japanese intellectuals to actively participate in the expansion in Manchuria was a romanticist pursuit of modernization. Disappointed by the economic downturn and political turmoil of the 1920s, the idealists among the left-wing reformists at this time became disillusioned with Japanese society, and pinned their hopes instead on Manchuria.

Duara expresses a similar idea in Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern, arguing that Manchuria attracted these pro-reform activists as “a frontier where

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39 Young, Japan’s Total Empire, 13.
they could realize a vision that many considered impossible to achieve in the established society of Japan.”

Thus, as Duara and Yamamuro point out, the relation between these intellectuals and authority was itself an agglomeration of ambivalences: for the idealists writing for *Manchurian Commentary* and working for Mantetsu, the Kwantung Army and the Manchukuo regime were on one hand impeding their goals, but were on the other hand providing the means that they could utilize to attain their designs. Thus, although cooperating with the authorities seemed to be a natural alternative for intellectuals who wished to put their plans into action, their relationship with the state was rather unstable.

Indeed, Young, Duara, and Yamamuro’s studies do an excellent job fitting these intellectuals within the context of national projects, and offer a holistic view of how their actions responded to and resulted from the prewar and wartime expansion of the Japanese empire. However, such narratives may risk oversimplifying the struggles and transformations these reform advocates experienced as they attempted to pursue agrarian reforms in Manchuria. Although the three scholars have, to a certain degree, made efforts to clarify that the Japanese intelligentsia in Manchuria was highly diversified, the fact that they intend to provide a holistic explanation for the role educated Japanese technocrats played in their interactions with the authorities makes it hard to pay adequate attention to the nuances between individual intellectuals. For instance, Young defines Tachibana in her book as a “genuine tenkōsha [convert],” depicting him as a renowned Marxist analyst who renounced his support for Chinese revolutions and

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whole-heartedly incorporated himself into Japan’s national project in Manchuria.\(^{42}\) However, as explained earlier, Tachibana was actually quite consistent in his political stance as a traditionalist, whose longstanding fascination with the Confucian ideal – namely the kingly way – made him a faithful advocate to his own proposal of new-agrarianism. From Tachibana’s case, it is not unreasonable to argue that the current attempts in the scholarship, which provide a comprehensive evaluation of the actions Japanese activists conducted in interwar and wartime Manchuria, may overlook the distinctions between individual intellectuals and fail to notice the transformation these agrarianists underwent in their interactions with the regime.

Consequently, the nuances between individual intellectuals motivate one to wonder: how did each of them perceive his own role in Manchuria? Did some take their work as a nation-building process that aimed to create an ideal state quite apart from Japan, while others participated in the process in order to further the goals of the Japanese empire? Were some simply reformists, or were they revolutionaries intending to transform Manchuria in its entirety? To answer these questions, and without undermining the efforts Young, Duara, and Yamamuro make to situate them in Japan’s national project, this thesis wishes to examine the actual endeavors – namely their ideas for the agrarian state and activities in agrarian movements – these advocates engaged in Manchuria. In other words, this thesis highlights the agencies agrarianists had in their actions, and explores how they actively engaged in their pursuit of agrarian ideals. Instead of treating these intellectuals as either mobilized imperial subjects or victims of an oppressive government, I wish to view them as fully active, responsive agents in Manchuria, who found themselves

\(^{42}\) Young, Japan's Total Empire, 276.
struggling between two different worlds – a promising perspective of an ideal Manchuria based on agrarian principles and the difficult reality characterized by hostility, neglect, and suppression at the hands of both the Kwantung Army and powerful Manchurian landlords. In this way, in addition to its effort of resituating these agrarianists in their interactions with the authority, I wish to lay the groundwork for further studies on the significances this group bears, as their struggle and eventual collapse not only pose a stark contrast to the relatively successful reforms taking place in rural Japan at roughly the same time, but also informed the postwar endeavors that some of them involved in the postwar period.

*Sources, Methods, and Structure*

In order to trace how the new-agrarianism was invented and furthered by Tachibana and his followers, this thesis pays close attention to the journal *Manchuria Commentary* and its contributors. As noted earlier, *Manchuria Commentary* was founded by Tachibana in 1931, and its editors remained Tachibana’s supporters until the Kwantung Army’s crackdown in the early 1940s. Because of its role as the platform for agrarianists to express their ideas, this journal provides insights into the agrarian discourses produced by the group this thesis addresses, including shifts in their interests over time, their disagreements – and moments of consensus –, and the sets of arguments that were most prominent within the group.

However, that is not to say this thesis intends to produce an exhaustive analysis of the journal. Rather, I wish to investigate only the key debates that reflect central concerns among agrarianists in Manchuria, especially those involving the key figures in the agrarian movement.
We will look first at Tachibana and Yamaguchi, founding members of the journal who held opposing views on the Manchurian Incident and the establishment of Manchukuo in 1932. The second debate, from 1934 to 1936, was between Nakanishi, Suzuki and Ōgami and was over the Manchurian agricultural crisis and what forms agricultural reforms would take. A third “debate” – or more precisely, the open criticism by one intellectual of the other – was between Satō and Ōgami, in which the former questioned the latter’s hope for “reform from above” and proposed a grassroots, bottom-up agrarian movement. This thesis wishes to use these debates to have a better grasp on the different visions of agrarianism, and how they were proposed, evaluated, and criticized by a group of agrarianists in Manchuria.

In addition to debates in the *Manchurian Commentary*, this thesis also examines the interactions between agrarianists and the authorities, namely the Kwantung Army and the Manchukuo government, when the two parties both cooperated and collided in their ideas about rural communities. This thesis will focus especially on Ōgami and Satō’s cohorts and their attempts, both top-down and bottom-up, to pursue agrarian ideals between 1936 and 1941. By tracing how both pro-reform activists attempts to bring about agricultural reforms in rural Manchuria were tolerated – and supported, as in Ōgami’s case – at the beginning yet met strong opposition in the end, this thesis reflects on the intellectuals’ delicate situations in dealing with the Manchukuo authority, and how the latter’s ambivalent attitude toward reforms contributed to the eventual collapse of both Ōgami’s vision top-down initiated agrarian reform and Satō’s bottom-up agrarian movement.
Covering the period from 1931 to 1932, Chapter I focuses on the two founding members of the *Manchurian Commentary*, Tachibana and Yamaguchi, and their debates over the Manchurian Incident and the establishment of Manchukuo in 1932. Their prolonged debate, as a whole, offers insights into the dilemma many intellectuals faced when Manchukuo was established. The national propaganda launched by the Japanese government in 1931 deliberately created an image in which the establishment of Manchukuo became an honorable conquest, through which the “paradise of the kingly way” (ōdō rakudo) and “unity between five nations” (gozoku kyōwa) would be established in Manchuria. For intellectuals seeking to realize their agrarian ideals, such as Tachibana, the promises made by the newly established Manchukuo authority become an opportune moment for him to pursue his agendas. The possibility of participating in the creation of an ideal polity turned the former advocate for Chinese sovereignty into a supporter of the Kwantung Army and its goals. Tachibana’s decision to collude with the military deeply frustrated Yamaguchi, who warned repeatedly in *Manchuria Commentary* that the founding of Manchukuo was no more than an act of colonial expansion and that only capitalists and the military would gain from the situation. This chapter will thus explain how Tachibana’s vision for an agrarian paradise in Manchuria started to take shape, and with his victory in 1932 in the journal, became the basis for the agrarian movements Japanese intellectuals initiated later in the decade.

Chapter II will focus on how agrarianists developed their ideas not only through discussing and debating in journals, but further through active attempts to bring about agricultural reforms. The first part of Chapter II will trace another debate taking place in *Manchurian Commentary*
regarding the Manchurian agricultural crisis in 1934. Responding to the widespread poverty in rural Manchuria, this debate from 1934 to 1936 involved Nakanishi and Suzuki on one side, arguing that the impoverishment Manchurian peasants suffered was the result of capitalist exploitation at the hands of the landlords and the invasion of foreign capital. On the other, Ōgami attributed Manchuria’s failing agriculture to the backward, feudal relationship between landlords and their tenant peasants. The first part of this chapter argues that their debates became the basis for two distinctively different approaches to their shared agrarian picture in Manchuria. Concerned especially with the suffering of lower-class peasants and opposed to the presence of exploitative foreign capital in rural communities, Nakanishi and Suzuki’s arguments prompted the pursuit of grassroots agricultural reforms focusing almost exclusively on lower-class peasants while avoiding cooperation with either Japanese capital or Manchurian landlords. In contrast, Ōgami’s argument pushed his followers in the Economy Investigation Group to pursue “reform from above,” in which agricultural reforms would be brought about by a coalition between Japanese capitalists, the Manchukuo government, and Manchurian landlords.

The second part of chapter II will then elaborate on how the two approaches were embraced by pro-agrarianism activists, namely Ōgami and Satō, in their attempts to put some of the agrarian ideals Tachibana proposed into practice. By tracing Ōgami and his cohorts’ pursuit of top-down reform in their brief cooperation with the Kwantung Army on the Five-year plan in 1936, as well as Satō’s doubt about Ōgami’s plan and his grassroots efforts to establish agricultural cooperatives in rural communities in 1937, this chapter seeks to highlight how
different proposals for agricultural reform motivated agrarianists to act. In addition, this chapter also seeks to illustrate that although their proposals appeared different, the top-down, state-initiated reform and its bottom-up, grassroots counterpart were arguably different expressions of a shared agrarian vision for Manchuria. Both Ōgami and Satō faced a fundamental dilemma in their attempts to create agricultural reforms. Their pursuit of an agrarian blueprint posed a threat to the interests of Manchurian landowners, who were also the pillars of the Manchukuo regime that Kwantung Army had to rely on for its control of Manchuria. As a result, their efforts, whether radical or moderate, would eventually put them on the opposite side of the authorities, which would not hesitate to trade possible reforms for political stability.

Following Satō’s effort in north Manchurian villages, chapter III will focus on how economic mobilization after the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 caused Japan to pursue a controlled economy in Manchukuo, and thus intensified the conflicts between Satō’s cohorts and the Manchukuo authority. This chapter will explain how the period from 1937 to 1941 witnessed a growing tension between agrarianists and the authorities. The government’s efforts to further its control over rural communities in order to regulate agricultural production for wartime needs clashed with Satō’s project of helping lower-class peasants through agricultural cooperative groups. Despite Satō’s protest, the Manchukuo government eventually put an end to his movement by unilaterally putting all cooperative groups under the state’s direct administration. However, the setbacks did not force Satō to comply with Manchukuo authorities. Cooperating with his former colleague and sympathizer among the Manchurian Commentary
editors, Tanaka Takeo, Satō had made him an open critic against the agricultural policies Manchukuo government enforced. Using the platform provided by the *Manchurian Commentary* to publish criticizing articles, Satō antagonized the Manchukuo government and became a troublemaker in the eyes of the Kwantung Army.

Satō’s defiance did not go unpunished. The growing skepticism among agrarianists towards the future of Manchukuo had put the government in an awkward position, as it could neither openly renounce its promises of a “paradise of the kingly way” and “the unity of five nations,” nor could it defend its policies in rural Manchuria in the face of surging black markets, which undermined its control over agricultural production. From 1941 to 1943, a large cohort of intellectuals in the agricultural cooperative groups, the *Manchurian Commentary*, and the Mantetsu, including their leaders Satō, Tanaka, Ōgami, were arrested by the military police of the Kwantung Army. With the core members of the Mantetsu group and the main contributors to the *Manchuria Commentary* imprisoned, the agrarian agenda they had pursued lost its momentum and eventually disappeared entirely. The efforts these intellectuals made to realize a progressive, agrarian blueprint in Manchuria inevitably collided with an unforgiving political reality and consequently, ended under the military’s suppression.
Now, when the SMR [i.e. South Manchurian Railroad Company] rail line was bombed, however [sic], and the military activities of the Kwantung Army pushed forward, the SMR itself was still surprised. There is an immense gulf between the sense that “it has to happen” and the actual act of trying to do it.\textsuperscript{43}

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\textit{— Itō Takeo, Life along the South Manchurian Railway}
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\textbf{Contesting Asia’s Future: Tachibana and Yamaguchi on the Manchurian Incident, 1931 – 1932}

When the Manchurian Incident broke out on September 18\textsuperscript{th}, 1931, even well-connected people like Itō were caught by surprise. After the bomb planted on the tracks near the city Fengtian (Shenyang) went off, units from the Kwantung Army stormed the city controlled by the Chinese Northeastern Army (Dongbei Jun) and commenced attacks on Chinese garrisons across Manchuria. Under Ishiwara Kanji, the central figure in the General Staff of the Kwantung Army, the plan to take Manchuria by force went smoother than anyone expected. Major cities – Fengtian, Changchun, and Qiqiha’er – were successively taken by Japanese forces, with few casualties to the Kwantung Army. Ordered by Commander Zhang Xueliang not to resist, the Chinese Northeastern Army retreated to interior provinces and de facto surrendered Manchuria to the Kwantung Army.

Despite the dazzling military success in taking Manchuria, a heated debate arose among the Army leaders over how to manage those gains. On September 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 1931, only four days after the Incident, officers in the Kwantung Army decided to erect a pro-Japanese, cooperative government with Aishi Gioro Puyi, the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty who abdicated in 1911, as its figure head. This is well articulated in their meeting report:

\textsuperscript{43} Itō, \textit{Life Along the South Manchurian Railway}, 122.
With the support of our country, they can establish a Chinese regime with the Xuantong Emperor [Puyi] as leader and the four provinces of the northeast and Mongolia as its terrain. Thus will it be turned into a paradise for people of Manchuria and Mongolia.\textsuperscript{44}

However, even among the Kwantung Army officers, the plan for a puppet state in Manchuria did not go uncontested. Although the plan received support from the General Staff Headquarters (Sanbō honbu), Ishiwara Kanji argued fervently against it and proposed alternatively that, instead of controlling indirectly through a puppet state, Japan should take direct control of Manchuria and Mongolia by force.\textsuperscript{45} Although pressure from Tokyo eventually pushed Ishiwara to back down and forced him to concur with the proposed plan, the tension between a dissenting group in the Kwantung Army and the Army Central staff suggested that even within the group of instigators the expected outcomes of the Manchurian Incident was still a debatable issue.

The Kwantung Army’s exploits in Manchuria also sparked intense responses outside the circle of military leaders. Japanese intellectuals in the Mantetsu Investigation Department and those in the editorial board of the journal \textit{Manchurian Commentary} also felt the impact of the Kwantung Army’s victory. These Japanese intellectuals, who had been working in offices in Japanese leaseholds prior to the incident, were presented suddenly with the possibility of a Manchuria incorporated exclusively into Japan’s sphere of influence.

Once they recovered from the initial shock, these intellectuals soon engaged in discussions no less intense than those in the military headquarters. They used \textit{Manchurian Commentary}, a


\textsuperscript{45} See Yamamuro, \textit{Manchuria Under Japanese Dominion}, 40-42.
Japanese language journal established two months before the Incident, as their main platform for exchange. Unlike the clandestine debates limited to Army officers in the General Staff, the discussion among Japanese intellectuals was conducted openly in print. Because the journal was widely circulated among both Japanese intellectuals in Manchuria and officers in the Kwantung Army, it helped articulate conflicting views about the Incident through articles published by contributors and read by their peers, some of whom also joined the debate by submitting their own pieces for publication.

Among the most active participants in the discussion of the Manchurian Incident, Tachibana Shiraki and Yamaguchi Shin’ichi, both of whom were founding members of the Manchurian Commentary, became the standard-bearers of two opposing camps. As the first and the third chief editors of Manchurian Commentary, both intellectuals were widely respected and regarded as experienced sinologists in Manchuria’s intellectual community. As influential figures, their writings shaped the flow of the discussion in the Manchurian Commentary in the first year after the Incident. Although Yamaguchi and Tachibana seldom challenged each other directly in print – perhaps because of their close personal relationship – the two nevertheless took very different positions in their articles at each step of the establishment of Manchukuo, from 1931 to 1932. The back and forth between the two was resolved only after Yamaguchi’s writings attracted the attention of the Kwantung Army, forcing him to quit his position with the journal and return to Japan in December, 1932.46

46 In 1933, Yamaguchi was reported as a “leftist” to Kwantung Army and put under investigation. As a consequence, Yamaguchi quit his jobs with both Mantetsu and Manchurian Commentary and returned to Japan for a year. See Okada Hideki 岡田英樹, Bungaku ni miru ‘Manshūkoku’ no isō 文学にみる「満洲国」の位相, (Tokyo: Kenbun Shuppan 研文出版, 2000), 224-225.
A question to ask, then, is why Tachibana and Yamaguchi, the journal’s most experienced sinologists famous for their close relationship with Chinese intellectuals in the 1920s, come to an irreconcilable disagreement with each other over the Manchurian Incident? The existing scholarship would suggest that the answer lies in “political conversion” (tenkō), which was a frequent occurrence for Japanese intellectuals, especially leftists, in prewar Japan. As Louise Young argued in *Japan’s Total Empire*, Tachibana resembles a “genuine tenkōsha [convert],” as a renowned Marxist analyst who renounced his previous sympathy for the Chinese revolution and its nationalist goals and whole-heartedly supported Manchukuo after 1931.\(^47\) Tachibana’s conversion stands in stark contrast to Yamaguchi, who, as Okada Hideki argues, remained throughout the Incident a leftist and an open sympathizer of the Chinese revolution.\(^48\) In this sense, the Incident became the point of disagreement for this pair of perceived pro-Chinese intellectuals, and Tachibana and Yamaguchi seem to embody the division between two leftists’ camps.

However, a closer examination of Tachibana’s writing compiled throughout the Manchurian Incident suggests an alternate interpretation. As the introduction chapter explains, instead of a convert who traded his previous belief for the official ideology promoted by the Kwantung Army, Tachibana was actually quite consistent and did not stray from his agrarianist political goals, which were formed before the Manchurian Incident. Echoing Chinese revolutionary Sun Wen’s Three People’s Principle (Sanmin Zhuyi), especially its emphasis on bringing relief to people’s

\(^{47}\) Young, *Japan’s Total Empire*, 276.

livelihood (Minsheng Zhuyi), Tachibana demonstrated his support for Chinese revolution under Sun’s Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT) or more precisely, the agrarian principle embedded in his political agenda. In other words, unlike Yamaguchi, it is possible that Tachibana did not genuinely support Chinese revolution, but was driven more by his endorsement for Sun’s agrarian pursuit.

Tachibana’s supportive attitude towards Chinese revolutionary struggle persisted until 1928 – after Chiang Kai-shek became the head of KMT and unified Chinese provinces in the southern heartland through the Northern Expedition (Beifa) – partly because Tachibana had hoped Chiang would inherit the political blueprint Sun proposed. However, Tachibana became disillusioned with Chiang and was convinced that the new leader of KMT had no interest in pursuing Sun’s political agenda to aid the peasantry. Therefore, it is possible that Tachibana saw the Manchurian Incident in 1931 more as an opportunity for self-manifestation than for conversion: holding firmly to the agrarian ideal, Tachibana was remarkably consistent in 1931 when he abandoned his previous support for Chinese revolution, since Manchuria had now replaced China as the ideal experimental field for his political agenda.

Thus, a possible argument to make about the difference between Tachibana and Yamaguchi is that their division was not that between a persistent leftist and a former one. Rather, it more closely resembled the tension between two sets of vastly different ideas in the first place. Although it was true that Tachibana and Yamaguchi were alike in their backgrounds as sinologists and were once supporters of Chinese revolution, they were far apart from each other
on the political spectrum: while Tachibana remained largely a supporter of agrarianism and demonstrated his determination in preserving the existing Japanese polity, Yamaguchi had affiliated himself with a predominantly leftist ideology and supported whole-heartedly Chinese revolution and national independence alongside his Chinese friends. Elaborating on the ideological differences between Tachibana and Yamaguchi, this chapter examines and contrasts the different views each intellectual developed on three different topics – Chinese revolution and the role of Manchuria in it; the rise of Fascism in Japan and its correlation to the Kwantung Army; the legitimacy of Manchukuo and its larger implication for Asia – until Yamaguchi was investigated by the Kwantung Army for his radical writings and had to leave Manchuria for Japan in December, 1932. This chapter argues that the Manchurian Incident prompted two intellectuals to confront one another and fleshed out the ideological conflict between two genres of thoughts – a conservative, agrarian ideal on one side, and a leftist, pro-revolutionary one on the other – which was present prior to the Incident.

In addition, this chapter, as a case study of the intellectual discourses of two central figures in the *Manchurian Commentary* from 1931 to 1932, reveals how the Manchurian Incident became a defining moment for the newly established *Manchurian Commentary*. As the opposition between two camps in the editorial board – one supporting Yamaguchi and the other standing with Tachibana – was resolved with Yamaguchi’s departure in late 1932, the editorial board of *Manchurian Commentary* seemed to have united under Tachibana, as few contributors who were with Yamaguchi would openly express their doubts about the new state after his
departure. Adopting Tachibana’s cooperative attitude towards the Kwantung Army and the
regime, the journal became a vessel for Japanese intellectuals to coexist with the new regime and
allowed idealists like Tachibana to lay out their agrarian agendas for Manchuria’s future in full
view of the military.

*A Paradise for Peasants or A State of Revolution – Tachibana’s and Yamaguchi’s Perceptions of
China and Manchuria at the Time of Manchurian Incident*

To understand the division between Tachibana and Yamaguchi, it is necessary to understand
first how each perceived the future of China, and the role Manchuria would play in it, on the eve
and in the immediate aftermath of the Manchurian Incident. Tachibana, for example, maintained
a benevolent, if not overtly supportive, attitude toward the nationalist struggle for Chinese
reunification before 1931. In 1928, when the leader of KMT, Chiang Kai-shek, unified Chinese
provinces in the southern heartland, Tachibana wrote passionately about his expectations for
Chiang as a leader for Chinese bourgeoisie class and as an inheritor of Sun Wen’s political
agenda:

The Chinese bourgeoisie class is now bearing a historical duty and must overcome [the
impediment of] warlords and bureaucrats by all means necessary. This duty is an
indispensable part in the [larger] program of national revolution. We believe that
Chiang is not only leading the [Chinese] capitalist class to strive for this duty, but is
also cooperating with the petty bourgeoisie supporters of Sun Wen to prevent
capitalists from becoming excessively powerful. [We] think that this coincides with the
ideal Sun Wen wanted to achieve in [his] principle of people’s livelihood.49

49 Tachibana Shiraki 橘樸, “Shou Kaiseki to Fū Gyokushou” “蔣介石と馮玉祥,” Chūōkōron 中央公論, November, 1928, reprinted in
Tachibana Shiraki 橘樸, Chūgoku kenkyū Tachibana Shiraki Chōsaku-shū 中国研究 橘樸著作集, (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō 劲草書房, 1965), 1:560:
“中國資産階級は今や軍閥と官僚階級を何を何等かの手段で克服せねばならぬ歴史的使命を負はされて居る。 吾人は、 蔣氏が一方に資本家階級を導いてこの使命の為に努力せ
しむると同時に、他面、小資本家的孫文主義者と提携して資本家勢力の過度の膨脹を牽制することが、孫文の民生主義に託した理想
It is worth noting that Tachibana, in his praise for Chiang Kai-shek, cited specifically the Principle of People’s Livelihood in Sun Wen’s famous Three Principles of the People. Proposed as a part of his grand prospect for a republican regime in China, Sun Wen’s Principal of People’s Livelihood prioritized bringing relief to the masses – and especially to the peasantry – through launching land reforms called “distributing land to the tillers” (pingjun diquan). 50 As Tachibana had in many of his own political writings echoed Sun’s belief in bringing relief to the impoverished masses, it is possible to argue that Tachibana’s praise for Chiang Kai-shek – which lasted only briefly and collapsed soon after 1928 – actually comes from what he perceived to be a shared political pursuit between Chiang and himself. 51 In other words, Tachibana’s own sympathy for the conditions of the peasantry class, which he saw reflected in Sun’s political ideals, informed his support for Chiang whom he perceived to be the successor of Sun in the KMT.

However, it risks over-generalization to take Tachibana’s praise for Chiang as an indication of his support for Chinese revolution. Unlike his friends in the Chinese intelligentsia, Tachibana was less concerned with the question of Chinese reunification and was more attracted to the ideal of agrarianism and whether it could be realized in China. Consequently, it is not surprising to find Tachibana retracting in 1929 his previous praise for Chiang as the leader of the revolution that would reconcile the interest of capitalists with that of petty bourgeois. Instead, Tachibana

51 See Li, *China Factor in Modern Japanese Thought*, 37-44.
defined the nationalist regime under him as “an alliance of capitalists, landlords, and rural gentries whose privileges were perishing.”\textsuperscript{52} Thus, rather than explaining away his later positions on Manchuria as the result of some sort of intellectual conversion, an alternative speculation to make about Tachibana is that he was not a genuine supporter of Chinese revolution in the first place, but was rather a supporter of the agrarian ideal embedded in Sun Wen’s political agenda and the efforts made by KMT under him.

Tachibana’s emphasis on agrarianism over the nationalist goals in Chinese revolution clearly affected his ideas about the future of China and the role Manchuria should play in it. For Tachibana, the significance of Manchuria as a frontier for agrarian practices was more important than its role in a reunified China. This point is clearly articulated in his goals for Manchuria as an agrarian state, which were published in the first issue of \textit{Manchurian Commentary} in 1932, a few months after the Incident. In “A Personal Proposal for Establishing a New State in Manchuria” (Manshū shin-kokka kenkoku taikō shian), Tachibana discussed in detail his plans to improve the conditions of the agricultural population in Manchuria. Calling Manchuria an “agricultural state” (nōgyō kokka), Tachibana proposed establishing a highly autonomous society in Manchuria to protect it from capitalism’s influence:

The main components of the Manchurian society – Chinese, Manchuria, Mongolian, and Korean ethnic groups – are generally dependent on agriculture and husbandry for living. Because of this, there is no room for doubt that the new state founded upon these [nations] should become an agricultural state. In theory, agricultural states have a natural tendency to become industrial-commercial states, which are also the capitalist states. To prevent [the new state] from the harm of

\textsuperscript{52} Such a comment comes from Tachibana Shiraki. 橘樸, " Shisan kaikyō haken-ka no Kokumintō" “資産階級覇権下の國民黨,” in Mansū 滿蒙, September, 1929, reprinted in Tachibana Shiraki 橘樸, Chūgoku kenkyū Tachibana Shiraki Chosaku-shū 中國研究 橘樸著作集. (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō 勁草書房, 1965), 1:579.
capitalism, it is not impossible to stop the natural tendency explained above and let [the new nation] remain as an agricultural state...I don’t have to explain that to establish a reasonable rule for an agricultural society, it is necessary to become an autonomous, self-governing state with the separation of power.\(^5^3\)

Although his plan for Manchuria to remain an autonomous society dependent solely on agriculture seems unrealistic or even naïve, this statement nevertheless provides insight into Tachibana’s political goals as a supporter of agrarianism at the time of the Manchurian Incident. As Prasenjit Duara notes, Manchuria had become after the Incident “a frontier where they [i.e. Japanese agrarians] could realize a vision that many considered impossible to achieve in the established society of Japan.”\(^5^4\) When Manchuria became for Tachibana a better place to anchor his agrarian ideals, it is not surprising that he “abandoned” his support for the nationalist efforts made by KMT under Sun Wen and supported Manchurian independence, as the new state in Manchuria had now replaced China as the experimental field for his political agenda.

Compared to Tachibana’s half-hearted support for Chinese revolution, as well as his fascination with the opportunity provided by Manchuria to achieve his agrarian pursuit, Yamaguchi’s position as a pro-China leftist at the time of the Manchurian Incident is much clearer. Before joining Mantetsu and Manchurian Commentary in Dalian, Yamaguchi was studying at the East Asian Common Culture University in Shanghai, and maintained close relations with Chinese leftist writers active in the Chuangzao Society (Chuangzao She), a

\(^{53}\) Tachibana Shiraki 橘樸, "Manshū shin-kokuka kenkoku taikō shian" "滿洲新國家建國大綱私案,” Manshū Hyōron 2, no. 1 滿洲評論, 第 二巻第一号, reprinted in Manshū hyōron fūkoku-ban 滿洲評論復刻版, Vol.2, no. 1, Tokyo: Ryūkeishosha 龍渓書舎, 1980. p.12 “満洲社會の主要成分たる漢、满、蒙、鮮民族は、概ね農牧を生業とする故に、この上に樹てらゝ新國家が農業国家たるべきことは、疑を容るゝ餘地なし。農業國家は理論上、工商業國家即ち所謂資本主義國家に化成する自然の傾向を有すれども、資本主義の弊害より免がれん為に、前記の如き自然の傾向を阻止し、永久又は半永久に農業國家として存続せしむること決して不可能にあらず...而して農業社會に対する合理的統制の機構が、分権的自治的国家たるべきことは多言を要せざるところなり。”

\(^{54}\) Duara, Sovereignty and Authenticity, 62.
Chinese literature society established in 1921.\textsuperscript{55} When the society began after 1925 to openly advocate leftist ideologies, namely socialism and Marxism, Yamaguchi was deeply attracted to its promotion of “revolutionary literature” (kakumei bungaku) and helped translate Chinese leftist writings into Japanese.

Yamaguchi’s long-term interaction with Chinese leftwing writers influenced greatly his political beliefs, and made him a lifetime sympathizer with Chinese revolutionary struggles, especially those inspired by leftist ideals. Yamaguchi’s position as a supporter of Chinese revolution was well recognized by his Chinese comrades. In “An Open Letter to Mr. Yamaguchi of Japan” (“Gong kai zhuan da Riben Shankou jun”) written by Yu Dafu in 1927, the Chinese intellectual regarded Yamaguchi as a foreign comrade in the leftist revolution, and expected him to take an active role in a future transnational proletariat movement in the future:

At the end of your letter, you [i.e. Yamaguchi] wished that the Chuangzao Society will develop, and it will eliminate old [social] power as well as building up new ones. This is not only the hope from you, our good neighbor from the east [i.e. Japan], but also the hope from the new youths in our country, who stand with us, sympathize us, and encourage us…We hope you will translate our struggle and determination [into Japanese], and tell your youth comrades in Japan that all of us should unite, eliminate national boundaries, and defeat our common enemies.\textsuperscript{56}

As the letter from Yu Dafu demonstrates, Yamaguchi had written to him earlier and expressed clearly his hope to replace the current established power (Shili) with new structures. Since Yu was a famous Chinese revolutionary who openly expressed his affiliation with socialist ideals, it

\textsuperscript{55} Okada, \textit{Bungaku ni miru `Manshûkoku' no isô}, 220.

\textsuperscript{56} Yu Dafu 郁达夫, “Gongkai zhuang da Riben Shankou jun” “公开状答日本山口君,” \textit{Hongshui} 3, no. 30 (洪水 第三卷第三十期 (1927)), reprinted in \textit{Yu Dafu Quanji} 郁达夫全集, Vol. 10. (Hangzhou: University of Zhejiang Press 浙江大学出版社, 2007), 277-279: “你的信的末段，是希望创造社的进展，希望创造社的攻破旧势力，希望创造社的努力于新的建设的。这不但你这东邻的好友的希望是如此，就是国内一般同情于我们，和我们站在同一战线上的许多真的新青年，也在一样的希望，一样地督促…希望你能够将我们的努力，我们的志愿，翻译过去，告诉你们日本的青年同志，我们大家都应该联合起来，废除国界，打倒我们共同的敌人。”
is easy to recognize that the “new power” he and Yamaguchi agreed to establish in China was a leftist one. In addition, it is worth noting that nationalist pursuits – unifying China under a central government and protecting its sovereignty from foreign powers – were embraced not only by nationalists, but also by left-wing revolutionaries in the socialist camp. Regarded by Chinese revolutionaries as a foreign supporter of their efforts, it is possible that Yamaguchi also embraced the nationalist elements in the leftist struggle. This point is well articulated in the debate between Yamaguchi and Tachibana over the legitimacy of national self-determination in Manchuria, which is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Like Tachibana, Yamaguchi’s position before 1931 persisted in the aftermath of the Incident. His sympathy for the Chinese revolution and support for leftist ideals were spelled out in an article he wrote in 1932, in which he signaled his high regard for the Chuangzao Society and openly applauded its “revolutionary literature” for enlightening Chinese revolution. Therefore, just like Tachibana, who persisted in his support for agrarianism in the aftermath of the Incident, Yamaguchi also maintained his position as a leftist and continued to support the efforts made by his Chinese comrades after 1931.

*Unification under Kokutai or Ideological Warfare: Tachibana and Yamaguchi on the Implications of Rising Fascism*

In addition to their contradicting views of China’s future and the role Manchuria might play in it, a closer examination of Tachibana’s and Yamaguchi’s writings at the time reveals that the two also disagreed on how to respond to the rise of fascism in early 1930s Japan. Only two

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57 Okada, *Bungaku ni miru `Manshūkoku' no isō*, 221.
months after the Manchurian Incident, major metropolises previously under Chinese control had fallen into the hands of the Kwantung Army, and the Japanese advance in Manchuria was largely unopposed by Chinese forces. Motivated by the developments in Manchuria, Japanese mass media, both state-owned and civilian, had fostered what Louise Young called a “war fever” and provided domestic audiences with exhaustive coverage of the Incident. In the ceaseless coverage of the ongoing invasion in Manchuria, the Japanese media employed a predominantly nationalist and even militarist narrative: the press often depicted Chinese as cowardly enemies and interpreted the intervention of Western powers as the acts of imperialist bullies. At the same time, the Japanese media justified the Kwantung Army’s invasion of Manchuria as necessary to ensure Japan’s “lifeline” (Seimei-sen). Such support for the military had become commonplace for Japanese media in their coverage of the Manchurian Incident.

Surging militarist sentiments in the Japanese mass media, as well as its popularity among Japanese audiences, led leftist Japanese intellectuals to consider whether the Manchurian Incident had given momentum to fascism in Japan. In the immediate aftermath of the Manchurian Incident, members of the Japanese Communist Party compiled a report, “About the Recent Political Circumstances and the Current Proletariat Struggle” (“Saikin no seiji jōsei to puroretariāto tōmen no tōsō ni tsuite”), in which they drew a connection between the military adventure in Manchuria and the surging support in the mass media for what they saw as the “robber’s war” (gōtō sensō). For these communists, the success the Kwantung Army achieved

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58 Young, Japan’s Total Empire, 68-74.
60 See Nihon Kyōsantō 日本共産党, “Saikin no seiji jōsei to puroretariāto tōmen no tōsō ni tsuite” “最近の政治情勢とプロレタリアート当面
in Manchuria was no doubt alarming news: in addition to the fact that the Japanese military – or at least a portion of it – had now openly embraced and exercised what they saw as fascist expansionism, the acclamation it received in the mass media had suggested its potential appeal to the general population.

Tachibana, however, disagreed with the communists’ claim and dismissed their concerns about growing support for fascism. On November 14th, 1931, Tachibana published “The Manchurian Incident and Fascism” (“Manshū jihen to Fashizumu”) in Manchurian Commentary, in which he defended the military by defining the motives behind its actions as predominantly nationalist rather than fascist. “The Army is no doubt the supporter of the Greater Japanese Doctrine (Dai Nihon shugi-sha),” Tachibana wrote, “and in general, they are the supporter of the Greater Japanese Doctrine not only in their plan for national defense, but also in the cases of diplomacy and even civil administration.”

To substantiate this definition and to draw a distinction between fascism and nationalism, Tachibana further delineated what he believed to be the premises for a fascist movement: “the emergence of a government founded upon the consensus of that recognition [i.e. fascism] among its citizens – or a change to the current government form – is the necessary condition for the success of this movement.”

From Tachibana’s perspective, since the Kwantung Army only wished to secure a Japanese “lifeline” in...
Manchuria and intended not to overthrow the current political system, a concern for the rise of fascism was to a large extent a false alarm. Tachibana’s defense of the Kwantung Army contrasts starkly with the argument made by communist intellectuals, who believed that the two concepts Tachibana tried to differentiate between – the so-called Greater Japanese Doctrine and fascism – were essentially identical, the former merely a form of expression of the latter.

However, it would be unfair to describe Tachibana as a defender of fascism in 1931 based solely on the hindsight historians gained in the postwar period. Rather, Tachibana’s attitude to fascism in 1931 was best categorized as dismissive. As demonstrated in Tachibana’s article, an essential feature of fascism is its attempt to overthrow and supersede the current political system. However, Tachibana did not even entertain the possibility of a fascist takeover that Japanese communists warned of in their report. This is because of his firm and to some extent overly zealous belief in the so-called “Japanese polity” (kokutai). For instance, Tachibana argued that even if officers in the Kwantung Army embraced fascism and it had gained momentum from the Manchurian Incident, fascism as a school of thought would be absorbed by and incorporated into the established system, and thus cause little damage to the current Japanese political structure:

The reason is, those who wished for Japan’s expansion are capitalists, militarists, or simply patriots. Their types are extremely varied…Instead of calling them capitalism or militarism, it appears that they are actually closer to the “national socialism with the royal household as its center.”63

Imagining that different or even contradicting ideologies would reconcile with one another in the

63 Ibid. 8: “何となれば、日本の大を欲するものは資本家にせよ、軍国主義者にせよ、又単純なる愛国者にせよ。其の種類は極めて多くあるべきだからである…それは資本主義や軍国主義であるよりも、寧ろ「皇室中心の國家社會主義」に近い傾向を示すものではあるまいか。”
Japanese polity with the help of the Court, Tachibana actually imagined a grand union of different ideologies under the current Japanese political structure. In other words, Tachibana did not favor a particular genre in the political spectrum and was open to any ideology, including Fascism, so long as it agreed with the established Japanese polity.

Tachibana further illustrated his belief in a union of different ideologies under the current polity by arguing that the political structure of Japan would remain stable as long as the royal household serves as the basis for the *kokutai*:

> However, because of its *kokutai* [national polity] and the national character of its citizens, Japan has an indestructible national structure. This statement is undeniable not only from inspecting the history of the god-bestowed state of Japan, but also from scientific considerations. As ideologies of different kinds are synthesized and digested, various ideologies will certainly unite around the royal household. [Therefore], I believe it is necessary to bring in advantages even from [ideologies like] socialism. It should be well understood that *kokutai* is separated from economy and social organizations.\(^64\)

From the cited statement, it seems that *kokutai* used by Tachibana was a concept more mystical than concrete. Indeed, as Germaine A. Hoston explains, when used in the context of prewar Japan, *kokutai* was an emperor-centered notion that went beyond the political sphere to possess civic and even spiritual significance.\(^65\) It is clear that in his article, Tachibana fully appreciated the spiritual aspect Hoston points out about the *kokutai*, and had argued for a separation between *kokutai* and the actual political structure. Recognizing the *kokutai* as a separate and indisputable aspect of Japanese political structure, it is possible to appreciate Tachibana’s indifferent or even

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\(^{64}\) Ibid, 8: “但し、日本は國體上から、又國民性の上から、決して滅びない國柄である。それは神國日本の歴史を眺め且つ科學的に考へても否めない現實である。各種の思想は融合消化され、各種の主義は必ず皇室を中心として圓融されるからだ。僕は社會主義の如きもその良いところはどんどん取り入れべきだと思ふ。國體と經濟社會組織を、よく分離して把握すべきだ。”

condescending view of fascism: for Tachibana, fascism is merely a genre of ideology that concerns the practicality of politics, and its existence and rise would reconcile with other political ideals under the spirituality of the Japanese national polity.

Tachibana’s uncaring attitude towards the rise of fascism in Japan in the aftermath of Manchurian Incident clearly disappointed Yamaguchi, who voiced his response in an article published only two weeks after Tachibana’s appeared. In “the Manchurian Incident and the Opposition” (“Manshū mondai to hantai-ha”), Yamaguchi addressed Tachibana’s article directly and called his own argument “an antipode” (taishoteki) to that of Tachibana. In his article, Yamaguchi rejected Tachibana’s idea that reconciliation between different ideologies under Japanese kokutai was possible, and instead proposed that the rise of fascism in the Manchurian Incident had suggested a split in Japanese society along class lines, with the progressive proletariat and bourgeoisie on one side, and the alliance between capitalists and the majority of both petty bourgeoisie and proletariat on the other:

As a faction in the petty bourgeois ideologies, fascism is supported by the majority of petty bourgeoisie and proletarians. But what is worth noticing most is that the current [Japanese] policies in Manchuria are “conforming to the intentions of financial capitalists.” [One the other hand], the social basis for “the opposition” is the progressive groups in proletarians and petty bourgeoisie.66

Unlike Tachibana, who thought optimistically that fascism was yet another political expression to be incorporated into a predetermined Japanese kokutai, Yamaguchi held that the conflict between

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fascism and its opposition was in fact a class struggle. To substantiate his point and to further challenge Tachibana’s, Yamaguchi proposed in his conclusion that people instead of royalty are the ultimate determinant for the future of Japanese polity, and thus warned that the irreconcilable confrontation between fascism and its opposition could only be resolved when one overcomes the other entirely by winning the people over to their side:

Under current circumstances, [people] must note that fascism and its opposition are divided up distinctively, and are competing with each other over the masses. The decisive moment is [when] the masses decide which way to go. Though suppressed, actions and claims from ‘the opposition’ are not going to stop. This character of putting [their ideology] into practice is clearly [the reason] ensuring their right to exist.67

Praising the struggle of “the opposition” against fascists in the military, Yamaguchi clearly demonstrated his own support for those who opposed fascism. Furthermore, it is possible to argue that Yamaguchi used this article to provide a different view of the kokutai, one that contradicted Tachibana’s: as Yamaguchi insinuated, the kokutai, which Tachibana believed to be constant and unchangeable, did not have any control over ideological conflicts; while the royal household, which Tachibana valued as central to the concept of kokutai, was equally powerless and irrelevant in determining the ideological discourse for Japan.

Although this confrontation between Tachibana and Yamaguchi was brief – it only existed in November, 1931 and did not reemerge in 1932, partly because both intellectuals’ attentions were diverted by the growing possibility of an independent Manchuria – this crossfire between the two journalists in late 1931 nevertheless contextualized the division in their political beliefs. The

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67 Ibid, “この場合に、ファシズムと、その反対のものとが、紅白に分れて、大衆といふ網と引き合ってゐることとを注意しなければならぬ。決定的な瞬間に、大衆はどちらにいくであろうか。壓殺されつつも、「反対派」は叫ぶことを、行動することを止めはしない。その實踐的な性格は、強く存在の権利を主張してゐる。”
different views Tachibana and Yamaguchi had about the rise of fascism during the Incident yield a clear picture of the reasoning behind their different attitudes towards the Kwantung Army. For Yamaguchi, the danger of a fascist takeover was real, and the competition between left-wing ideologies and Fascism would not end with the reconciliation under the Japanese kokutai, but rather with a complete dominance of one specific ideology within the general population. This contrasts with Tachibana’s argument, which denied the threat of fascism to the established political system, and took a more tolerant if not all indifferent attitude toward its growing popularity in the mass media. Consequently, it is not surprising to see that Tachibana was more open to the Kwantung Army’s endeavors in Manchuria while Yamaguchi held a more skeptical attitude towards them. This difference had further informed the opposition between the two intellectuals regarding the Kwantung Army when it pushed for Manchurian independence in early 1932.

*A Base for Asian Emancipation or a Colony: Tachibana and Yamaguchi on the Legitimacy of Manchurian Independence*

As the Manchurian Incident was approaching its end with an indisputable victory achieved by the Kwantung Army in 1932, it pushed Tachibana and Yamaguchi to confront each other once again, this time over the implications of an imminent Manchurian independence. After a brief period of tranquility at the end of 1931, the powder keg between Tachibana and Yamaguchi was ignited at the beginning of 1932, when Tachibana suddenly became the most active advocate in the *Manchurian Commentary* for Manchurian independence, and published a series of articles
laying out possible structures for the new state.

Tachibana's extraordinary passion for a Manchurian state was especially curious, considering the fact that in late 1931 he had been quite hesitant to even entertain the possibility of establishing an independent state.68 What motivated Tachibana's sudden enthusiasm for the new state? Two possible reasons might have contributed to Tachibana's change of heart. One is the fact that by January, 1932, the last major city in south Manchuria, Jinzhou, was captured by the Kwantung Army, and the Chinese Northeastern Army retreated to the inner provinces. Although Chinese forces still had control over Harbin, its last metropolis in northern Manchuria, the fall of Jinzhou dealt a decisive blow to Chinese resistance. Since the connection between the Chinese heartland and Manchuria was now cut off, all of Manchuria was now de facto under the dominance of Japan.69 In other words, Japan now possessed the absolute freedom to enforce its designs for Manchuria. Such a decisive victory achieved by the Kwantung Army might have encouraged Tachibana, and finally enabled him for the first time to imagine an alternative possibility for Manchuria decided by the Kwantung Army rather than by the Chinese.

In addition to the decisive military success, the potential implications of an independent Manchuria for Asia as a whole further stimulated Tachibana's excitement. Imagining Manchuria to be the model state of his agrarian ideal, Tachibana now expanded his horizon and wondered what the impact of his political experiment, should it be adopted in Manchukuo, would be on

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68 Tachibana's reserved attitude towards a new state in Manchuria was best seen in two articles he published in 1931 in *Manchurian Commentary*, "The preconditions for the autonomous movement in the Northeast" ("Tōhoku jichiundō no zentei jōken," "東北自治運動の前提条件") and "The criticism for the Designs of the New Country" ("Shin kokka sekkei hihan," "新国家設計批判"). In both articles Tachibana had argued against the plan to establish a new state in Manchuria, criticizing it to be too radical to pursue. See Manshū Hyōron 1, no. 13, no. 14, 滿洲評論 第一巻第十三、十四号 (1931), reprinted in Manshū hyōron fukkoku-ban 滿洲評論復刻版, Vol.1, no. 13 & 14, Tokyo: Ryūkeishosha 龍渓書舎, 1980.

Asia as a whole. This idea was spelled out in an article he wrote on this topic in 1934. In “The Manchurian Incident and My Conversion” (Manshū jihen to Watashi no hōkō tenkō), Tachibana explained that the reason he decided to support Manchurian independence in 1932 was his vision for a gradual reform spreading from Manchuria to Japan that would eventually lead to a broad “Asian emancipation” (Ajia no kaihō):

Indirectly [from Manchuria] I expect to reform the motherland and emancipate the laboring masses from dictatorship and exploitation by capitalist parties. In this manner, [I expect to] encourage [people] to follow the trend of building an ideal state, which is the initial driving force for a real emancipation in Asia.70

Imagining a change that diffused from Manchuria to Japan and eventually to the rest of Asia, this statement provides a glance into the grander significance Tachibana imagined for the new regime on a pan-Asian scale. Indeed, it is hard to ignore that Tachibana’s pan-Asian vision, as it appeared in this statement in 1934, was not without sympathizers in the leadership of Kwantung Army – including head officers Ishiwara Kanji and Tsuji Masanobu. It even resembled some elements of the so-called “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” (Dai-tō-a Kyōeiken) later propagated in the 1940s. Yet it is equally true that Tachibana’s plan was different from what the Army had planned for Manchuria in the early 1930s. Its leaders mostly valued Manchuria’s strategic value as an economic and military base for Japan’s expansion and dominance in the mainland.

For Tachibana, establishing an independent nation in Manchuria was not an end, but rather

the means to achieve an ideal state of governance in the pan-Asian sphere. Although it might be
hard to determine from Tachibana’s statement whether he actually believed in the feasibility of
his plan, the seemingly unlimited potential of a new state in Manchuria was clearly tempting for
him. Consequently, the prospect of Manchuria as a model state for his agrarian blueprint was the
last straw pushing Tachibana to abandon his cautiously optimistic attitude towards the Kwantung
Army and openly ally himself with it.

The first and foremost question Tachibana needed to address for the new state was the
question of legitimacy involved in its establishment: on what basis was Manchurian
independence found? The question had become especially difficult as the Kwantung Army’s
military actions in Manchuria met strong opposition not only from the Chinese side, but also
from the League of Nations which in 1933 reached a consensus condemning Japan for violating
Chinese sovereignty. Due to his belief in the correlation between an ideal state in Manchuria and
the pan-Asian liberation, Tachibana could not, as the zealous nationalists would, defend the
military adventure by appealing solely to Japan’s national interests. Instead, Tachibana had to
find an alternate explanation that would reconcile his own beliefs with the actions of the military.

The solution that Tachibana found was in an argument for a nations’ right to
self-determination, support for which gained momentum in the post-World War I period. In the
first issue of *Manchurian Commentary* in 1932, Tachibana wrote to defend the Manchurian
Incident by appealing to the idea of national self-determination, defining the military’s actions as
a response to a popular desire for independence in Manchuria, and depicting the Kwantung Army
as the supporter for local demands:

The demand for [resolving] the Manchurian issue from Japanese people and government had coincided with the demand from the [local] Chinese population, which composed the majority of Manchurian residents. As a consequence, it is not far from saying that the founding of a new independent nation is already a settled course [for both parties].

Although it is hard to determine whether Tachibana, as an experienced sinologist who had spent decades in China, actually believed that such popular demand for independence was authenticate, he nevertheless argued so to justify the Kwantung Army’s actions. Naturally, Tachibana’s argument disappointed Yamaguchi, who avowed his opposition to the military actions in the Manchurian Commentary in 1932. In the article “A Changed View of Manchuria” (Manshū no minaoshi) published on the Manchurian Commentary in 1932, Yamaguchi opposed arguments defending the military’s stance by calling them “merely sentimental arguments or the products of a limited scope.” Because of the censorship, Yamaguchi had to express his idea covertly by writing an introduction for an article originally published in Ryuka Gekkan (Liuhuo Yuekan) called “the World Economic Crisis and the Manchurian Problem” (Sekai keizai kyōkō to manshū Mondai). As Yamaguchi summarized the article, the Kwantung Army’s military action was by no means supporting a Manchurian self-determination, but was in fact an imperialist approach to the Manchurian issue. In addition to debunking the argument for Manchurian self-determination,

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73 Ibid, “簡単に論者は結言してゐます。 「満洲問題は帝国主義的解決！」と。” In addition to Ōuchi, Takao, Yamaguchi also used other
Yamaguchi also provided in his conclusion an alternate interpretation of the Manchurian Incident by associating it with the global economic recession during the 1920s:

If [you] read the way I conduct this introduction, there is no need for me to write any postscript...[this work makes me] to reread the world economic crisis and Manchurian issue, and [wonder] if we need to reconsider our position on problems of this world, and [in particular] the Manchurian issue in the context of this world [sic].

By defining Japanese military aggression in Manchuria as imperialist as well as linking it to the global economic crisis in the 1920s, Yamaguchi’s argument has a lot in common with those favored by other Japanese leftists at the time, which warned about the possibility of creating political crisis to divert people from the consequences of the economic collapse. Thus, when Yamaguchi cited this reasoning, he was concurring with the leftist perspective defining Japanese expansion in Manchuria as imperialist practices, and through such argument denied the legitimacy of the so-called national self-determination.

In addition to his criticism of the military, Yamaguchi also engaged directly with Tachibana’s argument for Manchurian self-determination, which was then being cited by Chinese collaborators in Manchuria – including Zhao Xinbo and Yu Chonghan, who later became important political figures in the Manchukuo government – in order to legitimize the founding of the new state. According to these collaborators, as well as the propaganda machine under the Kwantung Army, establishing a new state in Manchuria was a legitimate course based on the pennames, including Xu Huangyang 徐晃阳, Huangyang Sheng 晃阳生, and Yama Kōyō 矢間に. For a list of Yamaguchi’s pennames, see Yamamoto, “Manshū hyōron” kaidai sō mokuji, 79.

74 Ōuchi, “Manshū no minaoshi;” “この紹介の仕方を書いていただければ、別にもう私は附言しなくてもいいと思ふのです...世界経済恐慌と満洲問題。私は誤り返す。世界の問題、世界の中の満洲の問題。私達は考慮すべきではないのでせうか。”

75 This point is mostly seen in documents produced by Japanese Communist Party. See Nihon Kyōsantō, “Saikin no seiji jōsei to puroretariāto tomen no tōsō ni tsuite,” 545-547.
right to self-determination of the so-called Manchurian nation. Responding to the widely propagandized argument, Yamaguchi published yet another piece in the journal on January 30th, 1932, just two weeks after the previous one. In “The Single Economy and National Self-determination” (Tan’itsu keizai to minzoku jiketsu), Yamaguchi openly doubted the sincerity in Chinese collaborators’ support for national self-determination. He even went on to argue that the version of national independence that Zhao and Yu advocated did not exist in the context of Manchuria, which was under the dominance of Japanese imperialism, and was instead merely a means to advance their own interests:

The making of a real nation-state must mean independence from the imperialist bourgeoisie. It is impossible to establish a nation-state when it is controlled by an imperialist [country] and dominated by it in politics, laws, and culture. Moreover, history proves that this great duty is not to be performed by the nationalist bourgeois class in a colony.

Arguing that the bourgeoisie class in the colony could not bring about a real national independence, Yamaguchi made clear his opposition to Chinese collaborators’ reasoning for national self-determination. His argument also coincided with that embraced by both Chinese nationalists and leftists. As discussed previously, Yamaguchi’s close ties with Chinese leftists had made him a long-term sympathizer for Chinese revolution by Chinese socialists and communists. Therefore, when Yamaguchi referred to the making of a nation-state free from imperialist sphere

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76 Different ideas were cited by Chinese collaborators to justify their support for a Japanese plan to erect a new state in Manchuria, including “protect the territory and relieve the people” (baojing anmin) as well as national self-determination (minzu ziju). See Young, Japan’s Total Empire, 283-286.

of influence as a “great duty” (Idaina yakuwari), which could not be achieved by the submissive bourgeois class living under the dominance of imperialism, he was actually insinuating an alternative route he imagined for the independence of Manchuria and China. As Yamaguchi and Yu Dafu agreed in their open letters, a true independence could only be gained through a leftist, bottom-up revolution.

Like Tachibana, who had hoped Manchuria would serve a bigger role in the future of Asia by fulfilling its purpose as a model state, Yamaguchi also explored what implications Manchuria would have on a larger scale. Instead of becoming a model agrarian state as Tachibana wanted it to be, Yamaguchi suggested that Manchuria should remain part of China and work together towards that nation’s own decolonization, as should any colony that wished to gain its independence. This point is clearly spelled out by Yamaguchi in the same article, in which he proposed that compromise and gradual reforms under imperialist influences could not deliver decolonization. Instead, he believed it was necessary for any decolonizing movement to eliminate imperialist interventions in the first place:

The making of a nation-state out of a colony or semi-colony, even if it has the meaning of an independence from its mother country, does not necessarily mean separation. [Yet] a part of Japanese critics found their arguments and theories [for Manchurian independence] on this reasoning. However, even for [British] India, a peaceful decolonization was impossible. Similarly in the case of China, a peaceful decolonization is nothing but a dream. The only option is the peace from surrender and compromising. The only means to decolonization is to achieve it on its own.78

78 Ibid. “殖民主半植民地の民族国家への形成は、その母国からの独立を意味するといっても、それはつねに必ずしも分離になるといふのではない。日本の一部の論者は、この微妙な點をねらってその議論を打ち立ててゐるようである。だが印度でも、平和な発展は不可能であった。同じく中国に於いても、平和な脱化は全く夢想である。有るものは屈伏の平和、妥協の平和のみである。殖民地脱化論はそれ自身から脱化しなければならぬ。”

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Arguing that national independence was not equal to a separation from its mother country, Yamaguchi provided a view contrasting starkly with that held by Tachibana. In addition, Yamaguchi argued for fierce resistance against imperialist domination, and denied the possibility of establishing a nation-state through peaceful reforms conducted gradually under an imperialist regime. In this sense, Yamaguchi once again echoed his Chinese comrades in advocating a bottom-up revolution in China, and drew a distinctive line between himself and Tachibana on the future of Manchuria, China, and Asia as a whole.

Conclusion

Although the debate between Tachibana and Yamaguchi came to a premature end when Yamaguchi had to give up his position in both the journal and Mantetsu in late 1932, the debates between the two founding members of *Manchurian Commentary* still offer a representative case of the dividing intellectual discourse that Japanese intellectuals in Manchuria reflected, expressed, and debated in the journal. This is largely due to the prestige Tachibana and Yamaguchi enjoyed among editors of the *Manchurian Commentary* and in the circle of Japanese intelligentsia in Manchuria. When the debate between Yamaguchi and Tachibana was carried out openly in journal articles, it motivated their readers to themselves form two different camps based on their positions in the Tachibana-Yamaguchi debate, and to write in support of their champion.79 Consequently, the questions Yamaguchi and Tachibana addressed in their debate also became the focus for their followers, and thus shaped the discussion that took place in the

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79 The main supporters for Tachibana in the editorship were Koyama Sadatomo and the group of intellectuals led by Ōgami Suehiro, while Yamaguchi was supported by Mantetsu intellectuals including Koizumi Yoshio, who was apprehended in the round-up against leftists in 1942.
Manchurian Commentary alongside their debates. In this sense, it is not unreasonable to argue that the debate between Tachibana and Yamaguchi not only reflects a split on the individual level between two prominent figures within the Japanese intelligentsia in Manchuria, but also sheds some light on the division on a larger scale among editors and Mantetsu contributors to the Manchurian Commentary over the course that Manchuria should take.

To illustrate this point, this chapter first traced the intellectual discourse of Tachibana and Yamaguchi before the Incident, and found that although both Tachibana and Yamaguchi supported Chinese revolution before the Incident, their motives were vastly different from one another. For Tachibana, a determinant belief in agrarianism, which echoed Sun Wen’s Three People’s Principles, had become the dominant element in his brief support for the nationalist effort under KMT. Thus, when Tachibana became disillusioned with the KMT regime under Chiang Kai-shek in 1928, it was natural for him to abandon his support for Chinese revolution and replace China with Manchuria as the new frontier to repose his political pursuit on. In contrast, Yamaguchi was deeply attracted to leftist ideologies, namely socialism and Marxism, and was recognized by Chinese leftists as a foreign supporter for Chinese revolution that included both a bottom-up struggle and a nationalist goal of preserving Chinese sovereignty.

The different views towards China between Tachibana and Yamaguchi, as informed by their different ideological affiliations, also drove them to engage each other on other topics over the course of the Manchurian Incident. This chapter discussed in detail the two debates Yamaguchi and Tachibana contributed to –those over the rise of fascism in Japan and its correlation to the
Kwantung Army, and over the legitimacy of national self-determination in Manchuria and its larger implication for Asia – through articles published on *Manchurian Commentary*. These debates, as a whole, reveal that the conflicts between the two figures were still largely derived from their previously held political beliefs, with an agrarian-oriented, pro-establishment position on one side and a leftist, pro-revolutionary one on the other. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the Manchurian Incident served as a catalyst, helping to flesh out the previously hidden conflict between the two prior to the Incident.

However, Tachibana’s victory in the *Manchurian Commentary* was only temporary. Yamaguchi’s departure merely tabled the tension between the journal and the authorities in the newly independent Manchuria. Those tensions resurfaced in 1936 after a short period of quiescence. Although it seemed to Tachibana that the journal’s deference to the Kwantung Army assured that the authority would permit his imagination for the agrarian society in Manchuria should it cooperate with the authorities’ plan, it did not take long for Tachibana and his supporters to find out that there was a great gap between his agrarian ideal and the blueprint that the Kwantung Army and the Manchukuo authority had in mind for Manchuria.

In 1934, when Tachibana wrote his “confession article” explaining his so-called conversion, it seems that Manchuria was running on the course that he had imagined: Manchukuo was successfully established in March, 1932, and opposition from both abroad and from China had failed to cause major setbacks. The economic connection between Japan and Manchukuo,
through a series of treaties signed between the two parties, was tighter than ever before. Under such circumstances, Tachibana focused on putting his agrarian agenda into practice with help from Satō Daishirō, a young intellectual who had just arrived in Manchuria and joined the editorship of *Manchurian Commentary* in 1934. However, as Tachibana and Satō pursued agrarian reform in rural Manchuria, confident that they had the support of the authorities, neither could have expected how quickly that support would be withdrawn.

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80 For the efforts made to strengthen economic endeavors in Manchuria and connections between Japan and Manchukuo after 1932, see Young, *Japan's Total Empire*, 186-233.
[This plan] aims to promote agricultural productivity and to stabilize peasants’ livelihood. In order to attain this goal, [it is needed] that three main policies – the reorganization of landownership, the development of rural cooperative organizations, and the exploitation of unused farmlands – are practiced along with other related policies.\textsuperscript{81}


\textbf{Zealots, Bureaucrats, and Naysayers: Rural Reform in Manchuria, 1934 – 1937}

Despite their great success in gaining control of Manchuria in 1932, the next few years were not good ones for the Japanese authorities. The economic crisis that swept the globe in 1929 also impacted Japan. In addition to the damage to the industrial sector, the scale of the harm brought by the economic crisis was also visible in the countryside. Japanese farmers faced a collapse in the prices of many of their agricultural products. Because of rapidly declining demand for some products – especially silk cocoons – as well as weather-caused fluctuation in agricultural yields in 1930 and 1931, the financial situation of many farming households had become dire.\textsuperscript{82} This led to a sharp increase in household debt and economic hardship in rural areas. Such a phenomenon was especially common in the northeast, which saw mass migrations of peasants to Manchuria in the 1930s.

Like their Japanese counterparts, Manchurian farmers also experienced great financial difficulties caused by the agricultural crisis in the early 1930s. Unlike Japanese farmers, whose main market products had been rice and silk cocoons, Manchurian peasants grew soybeans: in


\textsuperscript{82} For further information on the development of agricultural crisis in Japan in the early 1930s, see Smith, \textit{A Time of Crisis}, 50-83.
1931, soybeans accounted for 43% of the gross sum of all Manchuria’s exports. Thus, when the production of soybeans declined drastically because of the frequent natural disasters in the early 1930s – a major flood in northern Manchuria in 1932 and severe weather conditions across Manchuria in 1934 – Manchurian farmers, whose livelihood relied on the sale of soybeans and other agricultural products, faced severe financial challenges.

In addition to the disruption of agricultural production, the absence of financial institutions for farmers exacerbated their already bleak situation. Prior to 1931, agricultural merchants and brokers supported by state-chartered banks and financial institutions were responsible for providing loans to farm families. However, the Manchurian Incident put an end to these established relationships, while the new regime’s plan to install agricultural banks specifically to support peasants remained largely on paper throughout the chaotic transition period. Thus, Manchurian farmers, who had little savings and had no choice but to rely on usurious private lenders, could reach neither the already collapsed old supporting system nor the yet-to-be-established new financial institutions.

Consequently, the dire economic circumstances further polarized the economic gap between the rich and the poor in rural Manchuria, and caused drastic changes to the patterns of landownership in agricultural communities. As a Mantetsu’s research report from 1942 documents, the number of tenant farmers and hired laborers soared after 1934, and many of these

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84 Ibid, 56-58.
new tenants were once landowners. Small landowners who were in debt lost their farmland to richer landlords with the means to withstand the crisis, and many had no choice but to become hired agricultural laborers.

The widespread financial crisis in rural Manchuria attracted Tachibana’s attention, along with that of his fellow advocates for agrarianism in the *Manchurian Commentary*. Tachibana and his cohort had imagined Manchuria to be an “agricultural state” in which each farmer would be given a fair share of farmland and become financially self-sustainable. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that these advocates for agrarianism became deeply concerned with the increasingly uneven distribution of wealth in rural area as well as with the concentration of farmland in the hands of big landlords. Agrarianists in the editors’ group of *Manchurian Commentary* went on to research the agricultural collapse, and published their detailed observations on the “Manchurian agricultural crisis” (Manshū nōgyō kyōkō) in *Manchurian Commentary* from 1934 on.

It is worth noting that the different ideas these intellectuals developed regarding the agricultural crisis once again reflected the intellectual differences in the editors’ group of the *Manchurian Commentary*. Two camps led by three leading experts in the agricultural researches – Ōgami Suehiro on one side, Suzuki Kobei and Nakanishi Tsutomu on the other – engaged each other in heated debates from 1934 to 1936. The two camps disagreed with each other on the

85 Minami-manshū tetsudō kabushiki-gaisha chōsa-bu 南満洲鉄道株式会社調査部, Hokuman ni okeru yatoi nō no kenkyū 北満に於ける雇農の研究 (Tokyo: Hirofumi-kan 博文館, 1942), 10-12. For employed workers in Manchurian rural area, see Manshū kokuritsu kaitaku kenkyūjo 満洲國立開拓研究所, Man'nō koyō rōdō jijō chōsa 満農雇傭労働事情調査 in Manshū kokuritsu kaitaku kenkyūjo shiryō 満洲國立開拓研究所資料, 第一四号, (Shinkyō: Manshū kokuritsu kaitaku kenkyūjo 満洲國立開拓研究所, 1941).
primary cause of the crisis in Manchurian agriculture: for Nakanishi and Suzuki, the problem was primarily one of landlords’ exploitation of tenant peasants and hired laborers, which reduced them to wage laborers, a status comparable to proletarian factory workers. In addition, both intellectuals believed that the invasion of foreign – namely the Japanese – capital in Manchuria had contributed to the development of this practice in rural communities. Disagreeing with Nakanishi and Suzuki, Ōgami argued that it was feudal landownership that bound tenant peasants to their farmlands, and not a capitalist system of exploitation. This intellectual divide between the two parties eventually led to two separate and to some extent contradictory approaches to agricultural reforms in Manchuria – Ogami’s gradual, top-down approach that aimed to cooperate with the regime, and a radical, bottom-up counterpart rooted in the self-organization of lower-class peasants advocated by Suzuki, Nakanishi, and Satō. The two alternatives competed with each other for much of the mid-1930s.

Despite the fact that neither party gained a decisive victory in the debate, Ōgami’s vision for top-down reform appeared to agrarianists as the more viable plan of the two, and thus gained most attention from 1935 to 1936. This is because in addition to debates carried out in Manchurian Commentary, agrarian ideals also won sympathizers from outside the small intellectuals’ circle. Influenced officers in the Kwantung Army, such as Ishiwara Kanji, were attracted to the reform blueprints presented by Japanese agrarianists.86 As a result, the Kwantung Army, which was seeking to establish firm control of economic development in Manchuria,
ordered the Economy Investigation Group led by Ōgami to work on a Five-year economic plan and emphasized the need for agrarian reforms in rural Manchuria in 1936. However, cooperation between these researchers and the Kwantung Army was short-lived. Although the Economy Research Group finished its draft of a Five-year plan in mid-1936, it was poorly received by Kwantung Army officers later that year. According to the explanations provided by former Mantetsu employees Miwa Takeshi and Itō Takeo in their postwar memoirs, the Kwantung Army’s need to remain on good terms with Manchurian landowners played a key role in jeopardizing the cooperation between pro-reform intellectuals and the military. As the General Staff of the Kwantung Army was at the time seeking cooperation from the Manchukuo officials, many of whom were large landowners in villages, it is not surprising to see that when the Five-year Plan for the Development of Manchurian Industries (Manshū sangyō kaihatsu gokanen keikaku) was approved in January 1937, the agricultural reforms – including regulating landownership in rural communities, distributing undeveloped farmland to landless peasants, and providing financial support through agricultural cooperatives supported by Japanese capital – all proposals that Ōgami and his cohort had put in their draft – were nowhere to be seen.

Ōgami’s failed attempt to cooperate with the authorities as part of a top-down reform actually gave momentum to the rise of its bottom-up counterpart. Under Satō, who quit his position in the Manchurian Commentary in 1937 to start a grassroots movement in rural communities in Suika County, agrarianists were attracted to north Manchuria, and many

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87 Ibid, 58-59
88 Ibid, 67.
89 Ibid, 67-68.
participated in the establishment of local agricultural cooperative groups. Through recruiting supporters and placing them in villages across north Manchuria, Satō’s movement for bottom-up agricultural cooperative groups, which aimed to protect the interests of lower-class peasants, developed rapidly in 1937 after Ōgami’s faction failed in its attempts.

Reflecting on the decline of top-down reform and the rise of its bottom-up counterpart in 1937, it is easy to fall under the impression that the two movements under Ōgami and Satō were vastly different and even in opposition to one another. Such an impression is not entirely unfounded. While Ōgami, because of his intention to cooperate with the authorities, resembled a moderate reformist in his movement, Satō looked a lot like a revolutionary, whose suspicion of landlords and authority made his proposals appear much more radical. However, despite the different methods employed in each movement, Satō and Ōgami’s respective proposals for agricultural reform actually resembled each other to some degree. Both Ōgami and Satō had agreed that the current agricultural practices and landownership in rural communities were underdeveloped, and it would be necessary to replace the established system with what in their eyes were more efficient practices. For Ōgami, cooperation with the authorities would invite a government-sanctioned intervention in villages controlled by landlords, allowing it to alleviate and regulate the landlords’ exploitation of lower-class peasants. For Satō, a grassroots collectivization movement that united lower-class peasants in agricultural cooperative groups would change their disadvantageous position in dealing with landlords, and thus make it more likely that the latter would compromise, or agree to terms more favorable to tenant farmers. In
other words, the different approaches that arose within this cohort of agrarianists ought not to be seen as radically opposed to each other – it would be a mistake to characterize one as reformists and the other as revolutionaries. Rather, the varying approaches were best interpreted as different means to their shared ideal, namely a harmonious agrarian society in Manchuria.

Investigating both the conflict between the radical and the moderate advocates for agricultural reform in Manchuria, and the brief cooperation between the Economy Research Group and the representatives of the Staff General of the Kwantung Army, this chapter seeks to highlight how different proposals for agricultural reform evolved within the pro-agrarian intelligentsia community. Although their proposals appeared different, the top-down, state-initiated reform and its bottom-up, grassroots counterpart were arguably different expressions of a shared agrarian vision for Manchuria. Both Ōgami and Satō faced a fundamental dilemma in their attempts to create agricultural reforms. Their pursuit of an agrarian blueprint posed a threat to the interests of Manchurian landowners, who were also the political allies that the Manchukuo regime and the Kwantung Army had to rely on for maintaining their control in Manchuria. Radical or not, it was all but inevitable that the reforms Satō, Ōgami and their colleagues imagined for Manchuria would put them in conflict with the authorities, which would not hesitate to abandon reforms in pursuit of political alliances.

*Capitalist vs. Feudal – Debates over the Manchurian Agricultural Crisis, 1934 – 1936*

Satō arrived in Manchuria and joined the editors’ group of the *Manchurian Commentary* in May 1934, an opportune moment. The pro-agrarianism members under Tachibana among the
editors’ were starting to take a strong interest in the agricultural crisis in Manchuria, and had begun research into the widespread impoverishment of rural Manchuria. Taking advantage of their positions in the Mantetsu Investigation Department, main contributors to the journal including Suzuki and Ōgami were able to access field research and economic reports on rural Manchuria, and wrote extensively in *Manchurian Commentary* as well as in the *Monthly Mantetsu Investigation Report* (*Mantetsu chōsa geppō*), the internal journal for Mantetsu employees.90 In addition, although Suzuki and Ōgami’s works laid important ground for heated discussions and debates in 1935 and 1936, the fact that they did not conduct field research themselves – both were writing from their offices in Dalian – meant that their discussions in *Manchurian Commentary* were by and large moderate ones, and would not have been out of place in any published debate between scholars in an academic journal. Although disagreements never ceased to exist among the agrarianists, the intensified debate, which later separated these technocrats into two camps and informed their two different approaches to agrarian ideals, was nowhere to be found in 1934.

Satō’s arrival admittedly gave new momentum to the discussion that was already beginning to take shape in the *Manchurian Commentary* in 1934. As Tanaka Takeo, the co-chief editor under Satō in the *Manchurian Commentary*, wrote in his memoir, Satō immediately became one of Tachibana’s favorite students in the editors’ group and received Tachibana’s support to become

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90 Suzuki and Ōgami were among the earliest – and therefore most influential in 1934 – writers who paid close attention to the crisis in Manchurian economy and the declining agricultural production. Both were employees of the Mantetsu Investigation Department – the former was in the documentation sector (Shiryō-ka) while the latter was in the Economy Investigation Group.
the fourth chief editor of the journal in February, 1935. In addition to his role as the main proponent for Tachibana’s agrarian blueprint in the editors’ group, Satō aspired to conduct field research in rural communities in north Manchuria – which earned him a name of “Japanese bureaucrat in bucolic society” (den'en uchi no nikkei kanri) among his peers – in mid-1935. Satō was positioning himself to provide Suzuki and Ōgami with first-hand research for their analytical work.

While Satō was busy conducting field research in north Manchuria, a serious debate about the agricultural crisis was emerging in Manchurian Commentary. Much like the Tachibana-Yamaguchi split in 1931, this new debate again divided the editors’ group. On March 5th, 1935, Suzuki published Agricultural Institutions in Manchuria (Manshū nōgyō kikō) in Dalian, in which he summarized research on Manchurian agriculture and defined it as an industry that is “semi-feudal and semi-colonial” (han hōken han shokuminchi).

Suzuki’s book met strong opposition from Ōgami almost immediately after publication. Ogami critiqued Suzuki’s arguments directly in a book review published in Manchurian Commentary: “the author does not understand the interrelation between the feudal aspect and the semi-colonial aspect of agriculture in this country [i.e. Manchukuo],” Ōgami wrote, “and it is possible to think of it as the origin of [his] mistake.”

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91 Tanaka, Tachibana Shiraki to Satō Daishirō, 63-71.
92 Ibid, 83-88
93 Yamamoto, “Manshū hyōron” kaidai sō mokui, 53.
entered into a debate that went on into 1937, and ultimately involved not just the two scholars but their supporters both in the journal and in the Mantetsu Investigation Department.

Although the debate between Suzuki and Ōgami was comprehensive – both scholars covered a wide range of topics that included labor relations, land distribution, the family structure in farming communities, and even the spread of agricultural machineries – the focus of their conflicts centered on two key questions. First, should hired laborers relying on farmland rented from rich landowners be seen as proletariat workers? For Suzuki, the “agricultural hired workers” (nōgyō hiyōsha), who had to rent farmland from landowners, were landless workers trading labor for profit. Ōgami concisely summarized Suzuki’s conclusions as follows:

[Suzuki believes that] the foundation of the dominance of the serfdom based on the subsistence farming [in Manchurian agriculture] is an unprecedented high-rate rent for farmland paid with [agricultural] products (Chapter three). However, notable class stratification took place even within this semi-feudal agricultural society symbolized by the steep rent (chapter three), and through interacting with various factors innate to the Manchurian agriculture, inevitably led to the emergence of many ‘agricultural hired workers’ in Manchuria (chapter four). 95

For Suzuki, since Manchurian peasants had to pay extremely high rent for farmland owned by rich landlords, their conditions were similar to those of proletariat factory workers, whose “surplus value” (yojō kachi) was exploited by factory owners. Suzuki further elaborated this point in an article published in the *Monthly Mantetsu Investigation Report*, writing that “they [i.e. Manchurian peasants] are the sellers of their only commodity – labor. As a result, the surplus value their employers take should be considered as [a result of] an essentially

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95 *Ibid,*  "かゝる支配的な隷農的零細農耕な本質的に規定し基礎づけてゐるものは、いふ迄もなく高率現物地代である(第三章)。だが高率現物地代に表現されたこの半封建的農業社会も、著しい階級分化が行われてゐるのであり(第三章)、このことゝ満洲農業に於ける自然的諸契機との相互関聯の下に、多くの‘農業被傭者’が存在せざるを得ない(第四章)。"
capital-for-wage-labor relationship." Obviously, as Suzuki’s article – which later became a part of the evidence the Kwantung Army used to prove his involvement in communist activities – suggests, the Mantetsu scholar arrived at his conclusion that the relation between landlords and their peasants was very much a capitalist one, in which the former exploited the latter.

Disagreeing with Suzuki’s definition, Ōgami argued that these people were petty landowners and “indentured peasants/serfs” (saimu-reinō teki hiyōnō), who participated in agricultural production as “tenant peasants” (kosakujin) through their contracts with landowners. Ōgami summarized his own counterarguments to Suzuki in “the Current State of Manchurian Agricultural Crisis” (“Manshū nōgyōkyōkō no gen dankai”) published in the Manchurian Economic Annual Report (Manshū keizai nenpō) in 1935:

[The so-called hired workers] are impoverished serfs, who owned nothing other than farmland, or those who disregard the future of their living and “possess no tool and farm stocks necessary for agricultural production.” This means that [they] borrow the necessary equipment for production from their employers, and repay by “providing agricultural labor.”

According to Ōgami, the hired laborers Suzuki identified were also landed peasants, and the labor they provided for their employers was simply a form of payment in exchange for agricultural equipment. Ōgami also challenged Suzuki’s conclusions by arguing that instead of exploitation for surplus value in a capitalist system, the relation between landlords and peasants was best described as a feudal system, which “coercively bound Manchurian peasants to their

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96 Suzuki Kobei, 鈴木小兵衛, “Chūbu manshū ni okeru nōmin bunka” Mantetsu chōsa geppō 満鉄調査月報, October, 1935, 27: "彼等にとっては唯一の商品たる労働力の販売者であり、従って、その雇傭者の取得する餘剩価値は…その限りにおいて資本対賃労働の関係をその本質とするものと考えられる。"

97 Ōgami Suehiro, 大上未広, “Manshū nōgyōkyōkō no gen dankai” 満洲農業恐怖の現段階, (Dairen: Manshū keizai nenpō 満洲経済年報, 1935), 352: “これは、窮迫せる極農が、僅かの土地しか所有しなか、或いは経営しつつあるに拘らず、「これが耕作に必要な農具・家畜を所有しないため」、その雇主から必要な生産要具を借りうけ、その代償として「農業上の労働を提供する」ことを意味する。”
land.” In other words, Ōgami saw feudalism as the cause of the underdevelopment of Manchurian agriculture, while Suzuki blamed capitalism for it. The debate for whecapitalist the status of tenant peasants in rural communities had marked the major difference between Suzuki and Ōgami. Such a division had later informed agrarianists of two distinctively different approaches in realizing the agrarian blueprint in Manchuria.

In addition to the different ideas about the financial and social statuses of Manchurian peasants, another point of focus in this debate had to do with the role of Japanese imperialist capital in Manchuria, and more specifically whether it had made Manchuria into a de facto colonial economy. This debate was mainly between Ōgami and Nakanishi Tsutomu, Suzuki’s colleague and main supporter in Mantetsu. As it has been demonstrated in the Ōgami – Suzuki debate, although Ōgami defined Manchurian agriculture as semi-feudal and semi-colonial, he attributed its underdevelopment largely to feudalism and, largely if not entirely, ignored the impact of foreign capital. Naturally, Ōgami’s stance was criticized by Nakanishi, a communist influenced deeply by the Labor School Faction (Rōnō-ha) in the prewar Japanese Communist Party.


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98 Ibid, 350.
100 The Labor School Faction was composed a group of pro-revolution, radical Marxists in prewar Japanese Communist Party, in contrast with the pro-reform, liberal group called the Lecture School Faction (Kōza-ha). For further discussion about the Labor School, see Germaine Hoston, Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

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**Monthly Mantetsu Investigation Report** in which he addressed Ōgami’s argument and criticized his failure to recognize Manchuria as a colony:

It is indeed the Annual Report’s achievement that it correctly recognizes the “feudal” aspect [in Manchurian agriculture], a response to the wrong [argument] in which the “feudal” aspect “evaporates” completely. This [contribution] is much more than anyone else’s. However, [in order to] make more progress, isn’t it necessary to correctly evaluate other factors – colonial, commercial – as well?

Although Nakanishi did not completely agree with Suzuki – he also criticized Suzuki for ignoring the influence of feudal landownership – in his analysis, he clearly shared the latter’s idea that the growing influence of foreign capital, especially Japanese capital, was responsible for the difficulties prevalent in Manchurian agricultural communities. This point is also evident in an earlier article “the Current Situation of Manchurian Economy, Part I” (“Manshū keizai no genjō (ichi)”) that Nakanishi wrote, in which he identified foreign capital as the cause of exploitation for Manchurian peasants:

In rural areas, the dominant foreign capital is on one hand destroying the established agricultural economy and impoverishing it, and on the other hand tenaciously trying to maintain the semi-feudal, subsistence farming mode of production. [And] the so-called “single-agriculture production” reorganized impoverished peasants as semi-feudal, colonial peasants, and engaged them in the subsistence farming.

For Nakanishi, it is clear that compared with feudal landownership, which was identified by

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102 Nakanishi Tsutomu 中西功, “Manshū keizai no genjō (ichi)” “満洲經濟の現状（一）” Dairen: Mantetsu chōsa geppō 15, no.7 滿鉄調査月報 十五巻七号 (1935): 151: “農村においては、外国独占資本は、固有の農民経済を崩壊をとらし、窮乏化させつつ、他方では、その半封建的零碎農耕を執拗に維持しつつ、所謂「単一耕作」を当てがうことに依って、窮乏農民を半封建的植民地的零碎耕作農に再編成した。”
Ōgami as the origin of underdevelopment in Manchurian agriculture, the exploitative foreign capital is equally if not more detrimental to the livelihood of Manchurian peasants. In addition, it is worth noting that although Nakanishi used a general term “foreign capital” (gaikoku shihon) in his article, he actually made clear in various articles written during this period that it was Japanese capital that was dominant in Manchuria.¹⁰³ Nakanishi’s opposition towards the damage Japanese capital caused to Manchurian peasantry was shared by Suzuki, and later became an important source informing their version of agrarian reform in Manchuria, which differs from Ōgami’s in important ways.

Although these public debates largely came to an end in November 1935, Nakanishi, Ōgami, and Suzuki and their supporters continued to argue among themselves for another year. The debates did not lose momentum until the end of 1936.¹⁰⁴ It seems clear in retrospect that these debates had a significant impact on the agrarianists involved in them. Various interpretations have been provided to evaluate the influence of this debate taking place among Japanese intellectuals in 1935 to 1936, including a prevalent argument attributing the debate to factional conflicts within the intelligentsia by Nonomura Kazuo, a former colleague of Ōgami in the Mantetsu Investigation Department. According to him, this so-called “debate on the Manchurian economy” (Manshū keizai ronsō) was largely a conflict between two factions among the Mantetsu intellectuals, namely the keijo faction under Ōgami and the Shiryō-ka faction with

¹⁰³ See Nonomura, Kaisō mantetsu chōsabu, 49-52.
¹⁰⁴ The last article addressing the debate was published by Ōgami on Manchurian Commentary in December, 1936, in which he lamented how the debate had deviated from its original purposes and became a partisan conflict. See Ōgami Suehiro 大上未広, “Shotō zakkan” “初冬雑感,” Manshū Hyōron Vol. 13, no. 24 満洲評論 第十三巻第二十四号. Reprinted in Manshū hyōron fukkoku-ban 満洲評論復刻版. (Tokyo: Ryūkeisho 龍渓書舎, 1980), 13:767-771
Nakanishi and Suzuki, in which the latter challenged the former’s authoritative role as the directorate for the investigation department. In other words, Nonomura believed the division between Suzuki and Ōgami was largely a competition for power in which the latter struggled to maintain his authority against the challenges posted by newcomers like the former.

Although Nonomura’s interpretation has merit, since the line between the two opposing parties in the debate was very much drawn along the established factions within the Mantetsu Investigation Group, it is equally important to note that this debate actually suggests an ideological division within the pro-agrarianism camp, and reflected two different understandings of their once shared agrarian ideals. The two contradicting sets of ideas regarding the conditions of hired agricultural laborers, as well as those about the dominance of Japanese capital in Manchurian economy, had informed this division of the two distinct and even contradicting approaches to agrarian reform in Manchuria. According to Ōgami, Japanese imperialist capital was not dominant in Manchuria, and lower-class peasants who had to “rent” farmland from large landowners were farmers rather than landless peasants. Such a belief had convinced Ōgami that it would be more beneficial than harmful to introduce Japanese capital to Manchurian agriculture, which meant that the relationship between the Manchukuo authorities and the Manchurian peasantry was potentially cooperative, and a sought for outcome. As a consequence, Ōgami possessed faith in “reform from above” (ue kara no henkaku), and imagined state-initiated agricultural collectivization as well as the founding of financial institutions with support from both the Manchukuo authorities and Japanese banks.

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105 Nonomura, *Kaisō mantetsu chōsabu*, 52.
In contrast, intellectuals who favored Suzuki and Nakanishi’s idea were deeply concerned with the exploitation impoverished peasants suffered as well as their disadvantageous position relative to landowners and foreign capital. Consequently, they imagined reforms that focused exclusively on landless peasants. In addition to their determination to relieve lower-class peasants, their opposition to Japanese capital, especially from banks and state-sponsored zaibatsu, prevented them from seeking cooperation with the Manchukuo regime and the Kwantung Army. As a result, the agricultural reform that Suzuki and Nakanishi preferred was bottom-up, self-organized collectivization for impoverished landowners. Their approach contrasts starkly with the top-down, state-initiated one favored by Ōgami.

The Birth of the Manshu-Einen Development Plan and Opposition to “Reform from Above,” 1936 – 1937

Unlike his counterparts urging bottom-up reform, who did not pursue their blueprints until mid-1937, Ōgami’s vision for “reform from above” was put into practice even before the debate concluded in late 1936. In May that year the Kwantung Army asked Ōgami and his colleagues in the Economy Investigation Group to form a committee of six, and instructed them to compose a basic development plan for the Manchukuo economy and list all the necessary reforms to be executed. Ōgami was the de facto leader of this committee because of his position in the Economy Investigation Group. For Ōgami, the committee clearly provided him an opportunity to realize the grand design he had for Manchuria, as it was given the authority to command investigators and conduct field research necessary for the project. With support from

both the Manchukuo government and the Kwantung Army, the draft, referred to as the *Manshu-Einen Economy Development Plan*, was completed in July 1936, and was presented to the General Staff Headquarters of the Kwantung Army for review.

As the tacit head of the committee, Ōgami was responsible for the entire plan, which was a detailed, comprehensive draft covering policies regarding heavy industry, finance, and agriculture in Manchukuo. However, Ōgami’s focus was almost exclusively devoted to the section on agriculture; as an internal report from the Kwantung Army pointed out, Ōgami himself wrote the sections on land reforms, with assistance from his supporters in the keijo-faction. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to argue that the *Manshu-Einen Economy Development Plan* reflected faithfully what Ōgami and his supporters had in mind for their top-down reform.

Although the *Manshu-Einen Economy Development Plan* provided an exhaustive and detailed plan for agricultural reform, two core policies were central to it. One was the implementation of centralized, state-initiated collectivization, and the other was the imposition of clear regulations on landownership in rural communities. As Ōgami puts in the draft:

(1) On one hand, the formation of rural cooperation groups is to increase peasants’ productivity and consumption capacity. On the other hand, it is to further incorporate Japanese capital into Manchurian rural communities, and to ensure the central government’s firm control of the autonomic groups in rural areas… (2) [The goal is] to establish state-directed, centralized cooperation groups and integrate them with the [existing] self-governing organizations in rural areas.

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107 Ibid, 197
108 Mantetsu keizai chōsa-kai, *Manshū sangyō kaihatsu einen keikaku* (taikō), 72: “（一）郷村協同組合を組織して一方農民の生産及消費能力を増大せしめ他方日本資本と満洲農村との直接的融合の強化を図り且農村自治単位を中央政府に於て集権的に把握す…（二）官治指導的中央集権的組合を組織し且組合単位を村落自治単位に結合せしむ。”
According to him, these new cooperative groups under the command of the Manchukuo government provided a means to strengthen the latter’s authority in the loosely controlled rural areas, and could thus develop agricultural productivity as the authority saw fit. Favoring the regime’s control of the agricultural cooperative groups, Ōgami’s preference for governmental intervention in his top-down reform is clear.

However, it is important to note that although Ōgami’s plan was to strengthen the authority of Manchukuo regime, it did not please all parties in the Manchukuo government, especially the large landowners in rural communities. The plan to introduce centralized control of agricultural cooperative groups in rural Manchuria was naturally in competition with the established power structure dominated by powerful landowners in local communities, who would see it as an intrusion undermining their authority. Thus, Ōgami faced a dilemma in his reform, as his plan to strengthen the regime was bound to disappoint those who were powerful in it.

In addition to his plan for state-run cooperative groups, which challenged rich landowners’ established authority in rural communities, Ōgami also proposed in the Manshu-Einen Economy Development Plan a regulation of landownership, which was equally if not more threatening to rich landowners’ interests. As Ōgami wrote in the plan:

(I) the goal of landownership policy is to principally sustain the current system of landownership for landlords, and therefore to regulate the landownership, to establish the single ownership [system], and to expand the national revenue… (1) the body for [land] ownership is in principal the [farming] household. (2) The ownership of ordinary tenant farmland and sharecrop-tenancy farmland is given to landlords. (3) The ownership of perpetual-lease farmland and originally-owned farmland is given to current occupants… (IV) State-owned land is recognized as private land unless it is necessary otherwise for the state… (2) The farmland belonging to unknown
landowners is under the management of the local administration.\footnote{109} It is hardly surprising that Ōgami’s proposal was not favored by Manchurian landlords. As explained earlier, Manchurian landowners were taking advantage of chaotic circumstances in the post-Manchurian Incident period, which lacked regulations regarding landownership, to annex farmland of disadvantaged small peasants. Therefore, Ōgami’s draft plan to push for regulations and clearly-defined landownership would put an end to landlords’ practices. Still, Ōgami was not an adversary of Manchurian landowners, as this proposal actually made various compromises, including the recognition of landowners’ claim to their tenant peasants’ farmlands in most cases. In this regard, what Ōgami had in his design was far from a radical, revolutionary change to Manchurian rural communities, but rather a gradual reform based on collaboration between the state, Japanese capital, and powerful local landowners.

Nevertheless, despite all the compromises made in Ōgami’s plan, big landowners still found his reform a threat to their interests. This is largely because of their advantageous status in the then unregulated landownership system, in which they were able to benefit from competition with the less wealthy, underprivileged farmers.\footnote{110} In other words, any regulation introduced by Ōgami would prevent them from furthering their interests at the expense of lower-class peasants. Therefore, despite the fact that Ōgami’s plan was much less radical than the self-initiated,
grassroots version that Nakanishi and Suzuki favored, it still presented a challenge to the established practices in Manchuria, where big landowners possessed great influence in the newly established Manchukuo state.

Interestingly, the Kwantung Army did not immediately oppose Ōgami’s plan when it was being developed. On the contrary, the delegate from the Kwantung Army in the committee, Akinaga Tsukimi, was supportive when Ōgami and his colleagues drafted the plan. This was attributed partly to the pro-reform atmosphere in the General Staff Headquarters of the Kwantung Army at the time, which put emphasis on the creation of “the paradise of the kingly way” (ōdō rakudo) and the “cooperation between the five nations” (gozoku kyōwa). Nevertheless, pressure and opposition from powerful landowners remained, and played an important role in altering the Kwangtung Army’s stance towards the Einen Plan when it was presented to the General Staff Headquarters and reviewed in 1937.

Compared to Ōgami and his supporters in the Economy Investigation Group, those who argued for a spontaneous, bottom-up reform in the debate made little progress putting their blueprints into practice in 1936. This is partly because of the absence of the most active proponent for Suzuki’s side, Nakanishi, in Manchuria – he was assigned to the Mantetsu office in Tianjing, the port city in north China, in July, 1936. In addition, the atmosphere among the editors’ of the *Manchurian Commentary*, including its mentor Tachibana, was at this stage quite optimistic about the reforms that seemed likely to happen under the administration of

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112 Yamamoto, “Manshū hyōron” kaidai sō mokuji, 56.
Manchukuo and Kwantung Army. That atmosphere did not encourage those advocating for a bottom-up reform to lay out their blueprints in the journal.

However, despite their lack of success advancing their own version of agricultural reform, advocates for bottom-up reform attracted an important figure to join their cause: when Satō finished his field research in north Manchuria in 1935, he returned to Manchurian Commentary and started writing about his experiences interacting with peasants. Described by both Nonomura and Tanaka in their memoirs as a determined idealist, Satō was appalled by what he had observed in rural Manchuria. As a result, the young agrarianist became in 1936 a sympathizer for lower-class peasants, and strongly opposed the exploitation that landowners inflicted on their tenant farmers. Consequently, Satō’s position stood in stark contrast to that held by Ōgami, and resonated more with Nakanishi and Suzuki, turning him into a supporter for their version of the reform.

Satō’s inclination towards reform from the bottom-up was clearly observed in the articles summarizing his field trips in north Manchuria. Becoming suspicious of Ōgami’s defense of landowners, Satō wrote “Visiting North Manchuria on the Line of Crisis” (“Kyōkō sen jō no hokuman o iku”) and had it published in the Japanese journal Japanese Commentary (Nihon Hyōron) in May, 1936. In this article, Satō summarized his field research conducted in the Fuyū County in north Manchuria, and accused landlords of treating their tenant farmers with cruelty:

However, in reality it is clear that they [i.e. hired laborers] are trapped by their debt in the village, and as a result are forced to work for their debtors and rich landlords under

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113 Despite minor concerns, Tachibana was quite optimistic towards possible reforms under Machukuo authority and the Kwantung Army. See Tachibana Shirō 橘樸, “Shin nōgyō kōryō-an o yomu” “新農業綱領案を読む” in Manshū Hyōron 10, no. 18, Manshū評論 第十巻第十八号, reprinted in Manshū hyōron fukkoku-ban 満洲評論復刻版, Vol. 10, (Tokyo: Ryūkeishōsha 龍渓書舎, 1980).
poor [working] conditions…Therefore, even in villages that appeared to be peaceful and tranquil on surface, the feudal, exploitative agency, which takes advantage of the impoverished lower-class peasants, is mercilessly plundering [peasants] through a trinity of landlords, commercial [institutions], and usury capital.\textsuperscript{114} According to him, the current system in rural Manchuria, in which lower-class peasants had no choice but to enter into unequal contracts with landowners and became de facto indentured workers, was the source of the underdevelopment and suffering in Manchurian villages. Such an idea clearly contrasted with Ōgami’s blueprint, in which reforms were to be carried out with the premise of protecting rich landowners’ interests. Having expressed his concern, Satō then concluded in the same article that a reform in rural areas was essential for the regime: “if strengthening the control of peasantry is considered as one of the most important things to the Manchukuo politics,” Satō wrote, “then why couldn’t the impoverished circumstances of lower-class peasants I saw and heard become the basis of a cry for new developments in policies regarding rural communities?”\textsuperscript{115} Thus, it is not unreasonable to argue that Satō was not only a researcher of the circumstances in rural Manchuria, but was also a keen advocate for agricultural reforms addressing the problems he observed.

Satō’s call for rapid reforms also prompted him to express dissatisfaction towards the development of state-initiated financial cooperative groups (kin’yū gassaku-sha) that Ōgami intended to promote in his reform plan. Designated to support peasants with loans, these

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\textsuperscript{114} Satō Daishirō 佐藤大四郎, “Kyōkō sen jō no hokuman o iku” " 恐慌線上の北満を行く,” Nihon Hyōron 日本評論, May, 1936, 375: “併し現実に彼らを屯にしばりつけける負債の状況は、より悪い条件の下に於いてすら、債権者たる地主富農のために働かねばならない結果となるのは見え透いた話である…かうして表面で存気で平和な農村の中でも、下層農民の貧困を前提とした地主＝商業＝高利貸資本の三位一体の封建的搾取機構が網を張って、苛酷な収奪を加へてゐるのだ。”
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\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, 376: “農民統制の鞏化と云ふことが満洲國政治の最も重要なものゝ一つであるとすれば、私の見聞した範囲での農民、就中下層農民のこの窮乏の姿は、農村対策の新たな躍進を要望させるべきひとつの論據となりはしないか。”
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financial cooperative groups were established by local administrations with support and funding from the Manchukuo state. In a report published in *Manchurian Commentary* on December 5th, 1936, Satō targeted financial cooperative groups under the control of local authorities, claiming that these government-sanctioned organizations, which were seen by Ōgami as a necessary means for agricultural reform, had already defeated their purposes:

Even judging from common sense, the passiveness in authority’s [action] is clearly observed. What is the reason behind the central [government’s] decision to “consider the local circumstances?” Is it because of financial cooperative groups’ need to gain profit? The so-called cooperative group spirit is not found anywhere in reality…In the colonial, feudal agricultural society of this nation, it is not possible to help and relieve impoverished peasants.¹¹⁶

Unlike Ōgami, who believed that reforms would be possible with just a few changes to the current order in rural Manchuria, Satō argued that the problem Manchurian agriculture faced was structural, and any reform within the established order in Manchurian villages would be rendered futile. In this sense, Satō ultimately denied the facts on the ground that Ōgami’s blueprint for agricultural communities in Manchuria had taken for granted, and his vision for how the reform should be conducted is therefore entirely distinct from what Ōgami proposed in the *Manshu-Einen Economy Development Plan*.

To conclude, Ōgami’s reform plan and Satō’s criticism for it indicate offered a clear view of the two contrasting ideas about how to realize the agrarian blueprint in Manchuria, which caused

the once united cohort of agrarianists to divide. As a result, Ōgami and his keijō-faction started to work with the Kwantung Army on a top-down reform founded upon cooperation with local landlords, even as Satō openly expressed his concerns about Ōgami’s plans and called for a bottom-up, fundamental change that would serve the interests of lower-class peasants.


Despite the doubts and concerns raised by Satō, the draft of the *Manshu-Einen Economy Development Plan* was completed in mid-July 1936. However, when the draft was presented at the interim review committee meeting (Chūkan hōkoku-kai) held on August 17th, 1936, Ōgami’s group was “ambushed” by harsh criticism from Hanaya Tadashi, the delegate from the General Staff Headquarters of the Kwantung Army. “[The plan] has upset important figures in the Manchukuo government and risks inviting unrest,” Hanaya claimed, “and it has had a significant influence on Japanese [policies].”¹¹⁷ The hostile attitude that Hanaya demonstrated to Ōgami’s proposal was in stark contrast with Akinaga’s, who had been supportive of the Ōgami’s plans throughout the drafting process.

The tough position demonstrated by the delegate from Kwantung Army came as a surprise to Ōgami and his cohort: although it is hard to determine how much faith Ōgami and his supporters actually had that their cooperation with the Kwantung Army would bear fruit, the fact that Kwantung Army entirely retracted its support for agricultural reform in Manchuria proposed in

¹¹⁷ According to Miwa Takeshi, who were present at the meeting, Hanaya’s words were (in Japanese): “満洲國政府の満系要人等に不安を与え、動揺させるおそれあり、また日本への影響も重大だ。” see Miwa, “Mantetsu chōsa kankei-sha ni kiku – 13,” 59.
their draft surely brought enormous disappointment to these intellectuals. Due to the Army’s opposition, when the formal _Five-year Plan for the Development of Manchurian Industries_ was approved and announced in January 1937, the passages regulating landownership as well as affirming lower-class peasants’ entitlement to occupy unused farmland were erased.\(^{118}\)

Why did the Kwantung Army suddenly retract its support for agricultural reform? A possible explanation provided by Miwa Takeshi, who was at the time working under Ōgami in the committee, is that pressure from powerful figures in the Manchukuo government had pushed the Kwantung Army to compromise in exchange for their support. As discussed earlier in this chapter, although Ōgami made clear his intention to work with landlords in his reform plans, the regulations he proposed were nevertheless a threat to landowners. For instance, General Zhang Haipeng, the vice-chairman of the Manchukuo congress, was claiming unused farmland in north Manchuria for himself. According to Ōgami’s plan, such land would remain under the administration of local county governments.\(^{119}\) As the Kwantung Army needed support from powerful figures within the Manchukuo regime, they were little motivated to support any reform that would threaten the latter’s interest.

However, though the actual policies Ōgami wished to propose were stripped out of the plan, some of his vision for agricultural reform, including the establishment of agricultural cooperative groups, remained in principle in the approved version of the _Five-year Plan for the Development of Manchurian Industries_. Kwantung Army’s Five-year Plan passed in early 1937 prompted the

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Manchukuo government to issue its “Agricultural Cooperative Organization Law” (nōji gassaku-sha hō) later that year, allowing agricultural cooperative groups to be established across Manchuria. Although the original plan of the Manchukuo government was to let local administrations take the initiative in creating the agricultural cooperative groups, it turned out that agrarianists, especially Satō and his supporters, had assumed leadership in such endeavors. It is arguable that the new regulation gave momentum to agrarianists like Satō to put the agrarian blueprint into practice.

Nevertheless, for Ōgami and his supporters, the impact of the collapse of their hopes for “reform from the above” was enormous. After his plan was voted down in the review committee and his proposals removed from the actual *Five-year Plan for the Development of Manchurian Industries*, Ōgami left Mantetsu in early 1938 for Japan, where he took a position in the newly established Institution for East Asian Studies (Tōa kenkyūjo) before joining the faculty of Kyoto Imperial University (Kyōto Teikoku Daigaku). With Ōgami gone, intellectuals in the keijo-faction lost momentum. Most of former members in the Economy Investigation Group retreated to their positions in Mantetsu – for instance, Miwa went to Tianjin and worked under Itō Takeo – and never again had the chance to influence agricultural policies in Manchuria.

However, the decline of Ōgami’s vision of a top-down agricultural reform actually led to the rise of its grassroots counterpart among the cohort of other agrarianists in *Manchurian Commentary*, in that it had stimulated agrarianists to pursue their designs on-site in rural

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120 Nonomura, *Kaisō mantetsu chōsabu*, 175.
121 Yamamoto, “Manšū hyōron” kaidai só mokuji, 22.
communities. This point was especially true in Satō’s case. Since late 1936, Satō had been reaching out to his acquaintance and former colleague, Otsuka Junzaburo, a supporter of Satō’s agrarian ideal who was at the time the head of the financial bureau of the Suika County. As both intellectuals had agreed to use Suika County as an experimental field for the development of bottom-up agricultural cooperative groups, Satō quit his position as the chief editor of Manchurian Commentary in January 1937, and left for Suika County to become an advisor for the preparation committee of a local agricultural cooperative group.122

To prepare for the agricultural cooperative groups, Satō conducted a field investigation in Suika County from February to March, 1937, and concluded his observation in a report that later served as the basis for the actual policies subscribed in local cooperative groups’ regulations. In this report, Satō made an evaluation of the Manchurian villages that contrasted starkly with the one made by Ōgami in the draft of the Five-year Plan. Unlike the latter, who preferred to recognize established practices in rural communities, Satō argued that the lack of financial independence in rural communities in Suika Country for lower-class farmers was to blame for the stagnation and underdevelopment in agricultural communities. As Satō explained in the report:

Although [it is true] in our observations that daily workers, after floating up and down for thirty, fifty years, could eventually arrive at where the majority of peasants are [economically], we are obstructed [to understand] their hopeless circumstances, in which they are bounded to a state of slavery in villages with self-contempt and without any rights. Thus, even though the cohorts of daily workers appear to be “free laborers”, it is a fact that their “freedom” does not mean anything else than “a result of an invasion of capitalist economy that relatively weakens the influence of a patrimonial

122 Tanaka, Tachibana Shiraki to Satō Daishirō, 177.
serfdom.” [Instead], [this freedom] should be understood as “wage-earning serfdom after falling victims to debt slavery.\(^{123}\)

From Satō’s criticism of the exploitative relationship between landlords and lower-class peasants they hired, namely tenant farmers and hired laborers, the influence Nakanishi and Suzuki had on him is obvious: identifying the exploitation as a capitalist one and attributing the “debt slavery” (reinō-teki) to it, Satō seems to have inherited Suzuki and Nakanishi’s arguments from their debate with Ōgami, and offered a clear contrast to the latter’s much moderate view for landlords. Therefore, it is not surprising to see Satō adopting a different approach to agricultural cooperative groups in his practices, which emphasized changing peasants’ disadvantageous status in villages.

However, although Satō remained an open critic of landlords’ exploitation of lower-class tenant peasants and hired workers, he was not as “revolutionary” in practice as he once was in the *Manchurian Commentary*. Instead, Satō softened his anti-establishment stance in the policies he proposed for agricultural cooperative groups in Suika County. This point is seen in Satō’s conclusion of his field report, in which he argued that while the primary goal for agricultural cooperative groups was to organize lower-class farmers and protect their interests, it was equally important to keep the reform process smooth and harmonious:

> In detail, [the cooperative organization] is founded upon [thinking about] these

\(^{123}\) See Satō Daishirō 佐藤大四郎, *Suika ken nōson kyōdō kumiai hōshin taikō* 綏化縣農村協同組合方針大綱 (Dairen: Manshū hyōron-sha 滿洲評論社, 1938), reprinted in Satō, Daishirō 草藤 大四郎, *Manshū ni okeru nōson kyōdō kumiai undō no kensetsu* 滿洲に於ける農村協同組合運動の建設 (Tokyo: Ryūkeishosha 龍渓書舎, 1980), 61: “我々の見聞によれば、日工を三十年、五十年と続けて一生浮ぶ瀬なき多数の農民のあるとこを確め得たのであるが、彼等の自己卑下、屯内に於ける完全なる無権利、奴隷的観覧、その希望なく暗き状態は、我等の目を掩はしむるものがあった。まことに此の日工層は「自由なる労働者」の如くであり乍ら、事實に於いて、この「自由」は「所謂貨幣経済強侵の結果として、家父長制的隷農の色彩を比較的失ってゐる」こと以外何ものを意味せず、「債務奴隷につきおとされた隷農的賃稼ぎ」として理解せらるべきものである。”
principles in reality: (1) why we have to incorporate the class of extremely impoverished peasants into our organization and movement (2) How [we] can, base on a correct evaluation of the interrelations between different social classes in rural area, improve the livelihood of agricultural households of different classes with fewer conflicts caused while holding on to the first point. (3) Through what methods our endeavors can function well, and what the structure of [our] organization should look like to improve the fundamental goals listed above.\textsuperscript{124}

Despite his sympathy for lower-class peasants’ circumstances under rich landlords, it is clear that Satō was not a revolutionary in actual practices, who would promote the interest of peasants at the expense of the landlords. Rather, Sato sought to prevent interclass conflicts – namely those between lower-class farmers and landlords – from escalating while uplifting peasants’ economic circumstances in rural communities. Therefore, Satō’s vision for rural communities was not vastly different from that proposed by Ōgami, as both agrarainsts sought to take a practical approach to reforms that would reduce possible interclass conflicts to minimum and keep the reform process harmonious.

With agricultural cooperative groups established gradually across Suika County in 1937, Satō also made efforts to expand and recruit others to his cause. According to Nonomura, to make sure that his plan of organizing lower-class farmers in village was a success, Satō recruited more than fifty “former leftists” (sayoku zenreki-sha) and placed them in official positions in various counties in north Manchuria.\textsuperscript{125} With his cohort, Satō had become closer than ever to his agrarian ideal in which agricultural cooperative groups would bring relief to lower-class farmers.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid, 93: “詳言すれば、（一）極貧農層すら何故に我々の組織竜に事業の対象把握せねばならぬか、（二）現在農村内諸階級間の力関係の正確な算定に基づき、前項方針に重点を置きつつ、各級農家の安定と向上の圖るに、如何にすれば摩擦少く有効だらしめ得るか、（三）從って如何なる部面から如何なる方法により事業の運営して行けば良いか、組織構成は如何にせば右の根本目的に寄び得るか、と云ふことの現実的な基準を確立するに在った。”

\textsuperscript{125} Nonomura, Kaisō mantetsu chōsabu, 175.
However, it did not take long for Satō and his cohorts’ efforts to be challenged. The conflict between agrarianists and the Manchukuo authorities once again surfaced when the second Sino-Japanese War broke out in late 1937. In light of the growing need for economic mobilization in Japan, its colonies, and puppet states, Satō’s agrarian blueprint was a challenge to the authorities’ wartime plans for rural Manchuria.

Conclusion

The collapse of Ōgami’s Manshu-Einen Economy Development Plan marked the end of the seemingly cooperative relationship between the agrarianists in *Manchurian Commentary* and the Kwantung Army, one that Tachibana had hoped for as early as 1933. The need for agricultural reform designed to modernize agricultural production in Manchuria collided with the authority’s need for political allies and the stability those alliances brought. For advocates of agrarian reforms, Ōgami’s failed attempt to initiate “reform from above” left many agrarianists disillusioned once they realized how their plan for Manchuria had little in common with what the Kwantung Army had in mind. To Satō and his followers, the only option for the reforms they envisioned to succeed would be through grassroots movements that operated independently of both the Manchurian authority and the Kwantung Army.

In addition to the conflict between the group of pro-reform technocrats and the Kwantung Army, this chapter also traced the debate among agrarianists from 1934 to 1937, demonstrating how the debate over the Manchurian agricultural crisis was reflected in two different sets of ideas about how to realize agrarian reform in Manchuria. Addressing the different problems Nakanishi,
Suzuki, and Ōgami identified for Manchurian agriculture—capitalist exploitation under landlords, the invasion of foreign capital, and the feudal landownership binding tenant peasants to their farmlands—these pro-agrarianism thinkers had proposed to either pursue cooperation with landlords and the state for a gradual modernization of agricultural practices, or argued for the formation of a coalition of oppressed peasants through building grassroots agricultural cooperatives.

Comparing the two sets of approaches proposed by each camp, it is possible to argue that the two sets of policies articulated by Ōgami and Satō, the banner-bearers for each camp, actually resonated with each other. Despite the different practices involved—namely a government-sanctioned intervention aiming to alleviate and regulate the landlords’ exploitation of lower-class peasants and a grassroots collectivization movement to unite lower-class peasants—both camps had recognized the need to replace established agricultural practices with progressive counterparts, and the necessity to avoid interclass conflict during the process. In other words, the different approaches Ōgami and Satō proposed are perhaps best interpreted as means to a shared vision these intellectuals had for Manchuria.

The year 1937 was a watershed moment for pro-agrarianism thinkers. When Ōgami’s plan for “reform from above” eventually failed to appear in the official Five-year Plan in 1937, Satō’s grassroots movement, which emphasized the interests of lower-class peasants, had became the only alternative for agrarianist thinkers. However, the beginning of Sino-Japanese War later that year had once again put the conflict between intellectuals and the authority in a critical situation.
When Satō and his cohort pushed for grassroots agricultural cooperative groups in rural communities, none of them had expected that the growingly demand for wartime economic mobilization had driven the authority to identify them a threat to its economy plan, and would not hesitate to suppress any resistance and dissent defying its purpose.
Just as the various slogans – paradise of the kingly way, the unity of five nations, and the rejection of capitalism – when Manchukuo was founded were no more than the ‘fig leaves’ [i.e. decorations] for the fascists in the military, so too were my honest belief [in these slogans], living in rural Manchuria, and siding with impoverished peasants an anachronistic fantasy.\textsuperscript{126}

— Nonomura Kazuo, \textit{Kaisō Mantetsu Chōsabu}, 1986

\textbf{From Reform Activists to Wartime Dissidents: Agrarianists in Wartime Manchuria, 1937 – 1943}

When the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out in July 1937, few people expected it to drag on until Japan’s final surrender to the Allied Forces in 1945. Japan’s swift advance into China’s coastal provinces followed by the fall of Nanjing in December, 1937, the capital of the Republic of China, seemed to suggest a swift victory over Chiang Kai-Shek’s regime. However, when the nationalist government retreated westwards to mountainous areas and held its ground in Hunan and Hubei provinces, the conflict turned, gradually but surely, into a war of attrition. One of the effects of the ill-advised campaign in China was an increasing demand for economic mobilization. Responding to these demand, Japan passed the National Mobilization Law (Kokka Sōdōin Hō) on March 24\textsuperscript{th}, 1938, which allowed it to move aggressively towards a war economy.\textsuperscript{127} Although the law was not without opposition in the Diet, the strong request from the military to exploit the full potential of Japan’s economy for war eventually overcame that dissent.

The military’s demand for economic mobilization at home also impacted its policy in Manchuria. The original Five-year Plan passed in 1937, which emphasized the need to develop

\textsuperscript{126} Nonomura, \textit{Kaisō mantetsu chōsabu}, 179: "満洲国建国初期の王道楽土、五族協和、資本主義排撃などスローガンは、軍部ファシズムの「いちじくの葉」にすぎず、それを真正直に信じこんで、自分自身、満洲農村に下屯して、貧農の側に立つということ自体、時代錯誤的な幻想にすぎないと考えていた。"

Manchuria and expand its industrial and agricultural productivity, was replaced by the goal of exploiting Manchuria’s current productivity to its full extent in order to support the war. This was especially true in agricultural production: under the principle of creating a “controlled economy” (tōsei keizai) in Manchuria, the agricultural sector was no exception to state’s efforts to get a firm grasp on all industries. Various institutions, including ration distribution agencies as well as collection agencies that coercively purchased agricultural products at fixed-prices from producers, were established across Manchuria after 1937.

The transition to a wartime economy and the military’s decision to invade China had further disappointed agrarianists in Manchuria, who were at the time trying to help impoverished farmers through establishing grassroots agricultural cooperatives. Among the agrarianists in Manchuria, Satō Daishiro and Tanaka Takeo, who had assumed leadership in the post-Ōgami period, were especially active expressing their dissent to authorities. From 1937 to 1940, Satō and his cohorts in the agricultural cooperative groups in north Manchuria openly resisted the policies that the Manchukuo authority wished to impose, and insisted on their own regulations in the cooperative groups. When Satō’s efforts were cut short by the Manchukuo government in 1940, his former colleague in the Manchurian Commentary, Tanaka Takeo, worked closely with him and together made the journal a platform for criticism against the regime’s policies. 

It took less than one year for the regime’s patience for Satō and Tanaka to wear off. In November 1941, military police from the Kwantung Army rounded up fifty Japanese activists involved with the agricultural cooperative groups in north Manchuria, including both Satō and

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Tanaka. The “Cooperative Groups Incident” (Gassaku-sha jiken) marked the collapse of Satō’s entire movement – Satō himself died in custody in 1943 – but the Kwantung Army’s hunt for Japanese intellectuals in Manchuria continued. With the information provided by Suzuki during interrogation, the military police made two more waves of arrests in 1942 and 1943, and rounded up 43 more technocrats and journalists in Mantetsu and Manchurian Commentary, including prominent figures like Nonomura, Ōgami and Yamaguchi.129

The Kwantung Army’s arrests from 1941 to 1943 have become a focus for debates among historians, who have provided different interpretations for the motives behind the Kwantung Army’s crackdown. Were these arrests simply a political witch hunt responding to the anti-communist atmosphere in the Japanese military, or a preventive strike on an organized anti-regime movement in Manchuria? Matsumura Takao and Eda Kenji have been the banner-bearers for the former camp, and argued in Mantetsu no Chōsa to Kenkyū that intellectuals apprehended in 1941 and 1942 under the suspicion of “committing communist activities” did not engage in what were accused of. There was no organized communist movement in the Mantetsu Investigation Department, they concluded.130 The massive arrests, therefore, were largely based on the Kwantung Army’s “frame-up,” and not on any concrete evidence. However, Matsumura and Eda’s conclusions have been challenged by Kobayashi Hideo and Fukui Shin’ichi, who argued that the tight connections among Mantetsu intellectuals are evidence of their solidarity in a form of collective resistance against the Kwantung Army.

129 For the cooperation between Kwantung Army and Suzuki in initiating the second and the third waves of arrests, see Nonomura, Kaisō mantetsu chōsabu, 223-225. For the list of intellectuals apprehended, see Kantō kenpei-tai shirei-bu, Zaiman nikkai Kyōsan shugi undō, 65-85.
130 See Matsumura, Yanagisawa, and Eda, Mantetsu no chōsa to kenkyū.
According to Kobayashi, the members of the Mantetsu Investigation Department and linked activists – such as Satō and Ōgami – had formed a well organized “intellectual group” (Chitekishūdan) and acted together from an anti-military stance.\textsuperscript{131} Kobayashi thus concludes that the intellectual group, which was predominantly guided by “Mantetsu Marxism” (Mantetsu marukusushugi), had alerted the Kwantung Army and prompted it to initiate an anti-communist crackdown.\textsuperscript{132}

Both Kobayashi and Matsumura’s arguments were not without flaw. Focusing on the ideological aspects of the apprehended intellectuals, both scholars have formed their arguments around broad ideological conflicts between pro-reform activists and the regime without paying adequate attention to the actual arguments these agrarianists produced at the time. Prior to their arrests in 1941 and 1942, agrarianists in wartime Manchuria underwent a significant change in their approaches to the agrarian ideal. As discussed in Chapter II, the collapse of Ōgami’s hope for “reform from above” in 1937 made it clear for Satō and other intellectuals in the Manchurian Commentary that it would be hard if not impossible to pursue their plans for an “agrarian state” in Manchuria through allying themselves with the Kwantung Army and the Manchukuo regime. Believing that the regime would not hesitate to pacify powerful landowners at the expense of lower-class peasants, after 1937, Satō and his supporters had no alternative but to initiate an

\textsuperscript{131} See Kobayashi and Fukui, Mantetsuchōsabu jiken no shinsō.

independent, grassroots agrarian movement

Even when his agricultural cooperative groups were forcefully annexed by state-initiated cooperatives in 1940, Satō’s pursuit of agrarian ideals did not come to an end. Rather, supported by his former colleague Tanaka, Satō became an active critic of the agricultural policies implemented in Manchukuo. Until his arrest in November 1941, Satō used the *Manchurian Commentary* to promote his proposals for agricultural reforms. Reflecting upon the activities Satō, Tanaka, and their supporters engaged with before their arrests, it is clear that the experiments involving the agricultural cooperative groups, as well as the criticism against the agricultural policies that the Manchukuo authority imposed, had been the focus of this group of agrarianists at the time of their arrests. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to argue that instead of chasing the broad ideological conflicts between Satō’s cohorts and the Manchukuo regime, an alternate narrative of the agrarianists’ wartime experience is to focus on how their attempts to bring agrarian reforms clashed with the regime’s plan for economy mobilization as well as its need to strengthen the control of agricultural production. The arrests, in this regard, may shed some light on to what extent had Satō’s agrarian activities brought impact to the authority’s wartime economic plan for the rural communities.

Thus, tracing the wartime conflict between pro-agrarianists and the Manchukuo government, this chapter seeks to analyze how the former’s pursuit of an agrarian ideal in Manchuria clashed with the latter’s push to strengthen its grasp on rural communities. By doing so, this chapter also proposes to reevaluate how Satō and his cohorts’ agrarian movement led to their tragic end at the
hands of the military police. In light of the economic instability, the surge of black markets, and the loss of control over landlord collaborators in the countryside in the early 1940s, Satō’s criticism of the regime’s agricultural policies were not only a reminder of its failures, but also posed a potential threat to the regime’s ability to use of propaganda to enhance its legitimacy. As a result, although agrarianists under Satō did not present themselves as active anti-regime dissidents, their criticism, though mild and reserved, could no longer be tolerated by the increasingly impatient regime, whose failed policies had made it more sensitive than ever to possible challenges to its authority.

*Contesting Wartime Economic Policies – Satō and the Manchukuo Government, 1937 – 1940*

The outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 drastically changed the role Manchuria played in Japan’s economy. Despite the increasing tension between the two nations in the mid-1930s, China remained a major supplier of raw materials for Japanese industries. The war thus cost Japan one of its most important sources of imports, and it had no choice but to find a replacement for China to fulfill its need for raw materials. Under such circumstances, Manchuria and occupied Chinese provinces took on new importance to the Japanese government. Under the direct control – or control through its puppet state – of Japan, both Manchuria and the occupied Chinese provinces had the potential to supply products and materials Japanese industries craved. The increasing dependence on materials from Manchuria and occupied

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Chinese provinces is demonstrated by Japanese decision-makers themselves in the fourth report of “Estimation of National Economy and Power” (Honpō keizai kokuryoku handan) on February 7th, 1940, as the report acknowledged the “intensification” (nōka) of Japan’s dependence on Manchuria and “north and middle China” for imports, especially for raw materials including coal, timber, and wheat. Japan’s increasing dependence on Manchuria for raw materials is a clear indication of Manchuria’s new role in Japanese economy, which was to act as above anything else a supply base of raw materials.

How, then, did the economic mobilization plan that Japan enforced after 1937 impact rural communities in Manchuria? As illustrated in Chapter II, the original Five-year plan passed in 1937 used local landlords as proxies in villages and did not seek active, direct governmental control over agricultural production. The principle of creating a self-sufficient agricultural economy through “growing suitable crops for suitable lands” (tekichi tekisaku shugi) composed the core of the agricultural policies in the 1937 Plan. However, in 1938, a consulting group was established within the Kwantung Army to modify the original Five-year Plan to reflect wartime demands. In “Suggestions for Measures regarding the Five-year Plan for Manchukuo Development, From the Second Year on” (“Manshū-koku sangyō kaihatsu go-nen keikaku dai-nen nendo ikō taisaku ni-kansuru iken”), the committee proposed a planned production project based on the actual needs from the government, and emphasized the role of direct governmental control.

in overseeing and collecting agricultural products. The changes the Kwantung Army suggested in this document were soon put into practice by the Manchukuo government, when it reaffirmed and further strengthened the edict “Regarding the Elimination of Excessive Profits” (“Bōri torishimari ni kansuru ken”), which was passed in 1937 to grant local administrations the power to establish collection and directing agencies. Instead of selling their agricultural products to grain merchants in the market, both farmers and landlords came under increasing pressure to sell their harvests at fixed prices to agencies established by local administrations.

The regime’s effort to strengthen its control over agricultural production and the exchange process in the market had various side effects, among which was the deepening gap between the fixed price sanctioned by the government and the actual market price of agricultural products, in which the former was significantly lower than the latter. The effort to suppress the price of agricultural products was recognized and even encouraged by Japanese decision-makers. On March 23rd, 1940, Kōno Ichirō, a Japanese politician of the Rikken Seiyūkai, announced openly in the Diet that the effort to lower the price of agricultural products, especially soybeans, was in Japan’s interest and thus should be encouraged:

The Manchukuo government is weighing the method of coercively buying. In this case, although some [concern] would rise because the market price is somewhat higher than the sanctioned price, it can be considered that coercive purchasing is a proper [method] to ensure stable shipments [of agricultural products]...cheap [agricultural products] are necessary for the current circumstances of our country, and the need to ensure agricultural products from Manchuria should be acknowledged. From the larger picture,

it is in order to recognize it [i.e. coercive purchase], and request the Manchukuo government to make further efforts and ensure the supply.\textsuperscript{137}

As Kōno’s statement demonstrates, both the Manchukuo authority and the Japanese government acknowledged the difference between the market and the official prices, while at the same time both parties approved the necessity to conduct coercive purchasing in Manchuria. In other words, the coercive purchasing (kōsei shūbai) that the Manchukuo government initiated after 1937 was a deliberate move to ensure the supply of agricultural goods for Japan’s war demands at the expense of agricultural producers and market stability.

However, Satō and his cohort did not share Kōno’s enthusiasm for this plan. Rather, the regime’s attempt to regulate agricultural production at the expense of agricultural workers contrasted with Satō’s attempt to strengthen and enrich impoverished farmers. As one of the founders of agricultural cooperative groups in Suika County, Satō had made various efforts to strengthen peasants’ position in selling their agricultural products.\textsuperscript{138} In The Construction of Rural Cooperative Groups Movement in Manchuria (Manshū ni okeru nōson kyōdō kumiai undō no kensetsu) published in 1937, which became the basis for the actual practices in agricultural cooperative groups in Hinkō province, Satō proposed the idea of “collective selling” (kyōdō hanbai) to protect peasants’ interest when they sell harvests to grain merchants. As Satō argued in

\textsuperscript{137} Kōno Ichirō, cited in Manshū hyōron-sha dōjin 満洲評論社同人, Manshū ni okeru nōgyō seisaku no shomondai 満洲における農業政策の諸問題 (Shinkyō: Manshū hyōron-sha 満州評論社, 1942), 64: “満洲国政府としては強制収買の方法をとることも考慮している。この場合市価が公定価格より多少上廻っている事も考へ若干引上げをしたが、強制収買を行うことが出荷の円滑を期す上において妥当なりと考へられたのである…我が国の現況としては価格低廉も必要ではあるものの、満洲農産物の確保をさらに需要なり認め、大局上の見地からこれを承認するとともに満洲国政府当局に対し供給を確保つき一段努力を要望している次第である。”

\textsuperscript{138} Although Satō was not given an official title until he became the head of the bureau of counseling committee secretariat of agricultural cooperative groups in Hinkō Province (Hinkō shō nōji gassaku-sha hodō inkai jimukyoku) in May, 1938, he was the actual head and the initiator of agricultural cooperative groups in Hinkō province. See Tanaka, Tachibana Shiraki to Satō Daishirō, 361-362.
his book:

Peasants were commercially uninformed and economically powerless. In addition, they were not organized. Consequently, [they] are unable to become an equal party in their trade with grain merchants, who are taking advantage of the [weak] points listed. Grain merchants were earning excessive profit freely through their economic power and other powers. Hereby, [it is necessary to] regulate trade agencies, to advocate the removal of grain merchants’ [monopoly], and to establish a trade market.\(^{139}\)

Having demonstrated his concern for the disadvantageous position of peasants in their trade with grain merchants, Satō then proposed that cooperative organizations, through organizing farmers and collecting their harvests in a common granary, could represent its members and negotiate with grain merchants on their behalf.

Satō’s proposal was quickly put into motion. In 1938, Satō became the head of the Bureau of Counseling Committee regarding Agricultural Cooperative Groups in Hinko Province (Hinkō-shō nōji gassaku-sha hodō iinkai jimukyoku), and used this opportunity to make his design for the collective sales official in the guidebook provided to local cooperative organizations. In a guidebook for cooperative groups in Suika County, Satō had made it clear that employees of the cooperative groups should encourage peasants to store their harvests in the common “agricultural warehouse” (nōgyō sōko), and delegate the cooperative group to invite, negotiate, and trade with grain merchants on their behalf.\(^{140}\) Satō clearly believed that agricultural cooperative groups, as a means of organizing as well as mobilizing producers, would


\(^{140}\) See Satō, *Suika ken nōson kyōdō kumiai hōshin taikō*, 109-121.
be able to protect and even further their members’ interests.

Although Satō’s idea for collective sales was not designed just to challenge coercive purchases, it nevertheless became an impediment to the government’s attempt to purchase agricultural products at low prices: on one hand, since coercive purchases were often delegated to powerful grain merchants with connections to the authorities, Satō’s collective selling made it difficult for these merchants to take advantage of peasants. On the other hand, Satō’s vision for markets administered by local cooperative groups also contradicted the authority’s plan for an agricultural market answering directly to the central government’s command. The different ideas that Satō and the regime had for agricultural markets were a source of conflict right up to the point when the Manchukuo authority annexed the local agricultural cooperative groups Satō established in 1939 and 1940.

The conflict between the two parties was further intensified when the latter attempted to assert its absolute control in rural communities and put agricultural cooperative groups under its direct administration. In late 1939, the Manchukuo government began strengthening its authority in rural areas by incorporating established local cooperative organizations into government-sanctioned Agricultural Prosperity Cooperative Groups (APCG, kyōnō gassaku-sha). In August 1940, the Manchukuo government passed legislation making APCGs the only sanctioned agents for trading agricultural products. Unlike the grassroots, locally established agricultural cooperative groups under Satō the newly established APCGs were representatives of the Manchukuo government, and cared little beyond complying with the government’s aim to

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141 Chen Xiang “Nitchūsensō ni yoru ‘Manshūkoku’ nōgyō seisaku no tankan,” 79.
control agricultural production.

The indifferent attitude that the APCGs demonstrated towards agricultural reforms is clearly observed in its reluctance to provide lower-class farmers financial support. Before APCGs, Satō’s cooperative groups had been providing financial support to those in need through low-interest or interest-free loans, and required neither monetary nor material deposit. “The first condition for members to borrow money from the organization contains no material things,” Satō wrote, but “harmony in the family, work in the field, honesty toward neighbors, and healthy bodies are the best measurement for the members’ credibility.”

Insisting on providing interest-free loans to peasants in his agricultural cooperative groups, Satō argued that since financial support is to replace usury lenders that lower-class peasants had to borrow from, the primary goal for loans is not to generate profit, but to provide underprivileged farmers a secure source of financial support, and thus to prevent them from being financially exploited by money-lenders.

However, bureaucrats in the newly-established APCGs did not carry on Satō’s policies. Instead, Satō was frustrated to observe that it had become commonplace for executives in the APCGs to treat loans as a means of generating revenue for the organization. As Satō noted in 1940 in an introduction he wrote for a collection of essays on agricultural policies:

First, facing difficulties in daily operations, [bureaucrats in the APCGs] now treat their duties as focused on generating profit. For instance, in the case of the [loan] credit department, the goal of [providing] low-interest [loans] is impeded by [problems] on the management side. [The department asks that] the loan generates

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142 Satō, *Saika ken nōson kyōdō kumiai hōshin taikō* 103: “組合員として本會より借款を受ける第一条件は、何等物的のものを含まない。組合員として一家和合し、耕作し、隣人に対して誠実であり、更に健康と云ふ條件が附加せられるならば、信用程度に於て最高である。”
more-than-necessary revenue when it is repaid. The hope for an interest-free loan, which the agricultural cooperative groups in Hinko Province expected, is now no more than a dream.\footnote{Satō Daishirō 佐藤大四郎, *Manshū nōson gassaku undō ronsō* 満洲農村合作運動論叢 (Harbin: Hinkō-shō kyōnō gassaku-sha rengō-kai 濱江省興農合作社聯合會, 1940), 7: “（一）経営が苦しいので勢ひ仕事は營利化する。假に、例へば信用事業部門にしたところで、低利方針も経営上から限界を受ける。利子稼ぎに、必要以上に貸付け回数せねばならぬということも生じて来よう。濱江省の農事合作社会でその実現を図期し得た無利子貸款への展望の如きは、いま単なる夢にすぎない。”}

Speaking on behalf of his own cooperative groups in Hinko Province, Satō expressed bluntly his opposition to the changes that the APCGs brought to his groups. In addition to the APCG’s financial policy, Satō was also dissatisfied with the hierarchical relationship between Japanese employees and their Manchurian colleagues, in which the latter were marginalized in the organization and only served at lower-level positions. As Satō argued in the same article:

…because of the overflow of Japanese employers [in cooperative groups], even though the [goal of the organization] is to serve Manchurian villages, Japanese employers would become directors in different levels of the organization. Not to mention that Manchurian employers would take most of the responsibility and occupy lowest positions [in the organization].\footnote{Ibid, 7: “…日系職員の氾濫のため、満洲農村相手の仕事であり乍ら、各級機関に於いて日系でさえ主任にすら却々なれず、まして満系職員の如きはてんで責任ある併し最下等の地位にも座れない。”}

The stratification in the APCGs that favored Japanese bureaucrats and discriminated against Manchurian employees resembled, in Satō’s eyes, an offense to the current regulations in the cooperative groups he established. As the “Provisional Regulations of Agricultural Cooperative Groups in Suika County” (“Suika-Ken nōson kyōdō kumiai rengō-kai zankō teikan”) defined, members of the executive level are decided through general elections conducted in the cooperatives.\footnote{See Satō Daishirō 佐藤大四郎, “Suika-Ken nōson kyōdō kumiai rengō-kai zankō teikan” “綏化縣農村協同組合暫行定款,” in *Suika ken nōson kyōdō kumiai hōshin taikō* 綏化縣農村協同組合方針大綱 (Dairen: Manshū hyōron-sha 滿洲評論社, 1938), Reprinted in Satō Daishirō 佐藤大四郎, *Manshū ni okeru nōson kyōdō kumiai undō no kenjutsu* 滿洲於における農村協同組合運動の建設 (Tokyo: Ryūkeishosha 龍渓書舎, 1980), 138-139.} As managers in the APCGs were directly nominated by the central committee in Shinkyō without consulting members in local branches, it was natural for Satō to see it as an
attack on the democratic management that he intended to establish in agricultural cooperatives.

The APCGs’ violation of the established practices in Satō’s cooperative groups clearly angered him. In response, Satō expressed his frustration through various channels, including internal reports to the Suika County government, open speeches in forums for cooperative employees, and articles in the *Manchurian Commentary*. For instance, in the introduction he wrote for a collection of works composed by cooperative groups’ employees published in June 1940, Satō was openly critical of the newly established government agencies:

> From seeing the circumstances of the villages and farmers in our work, as well as from [witnessing] how established agencies of collection and distribution exercised the government’s pursuit of fairness in controlling [the economy], everything ended up being distorted. Without bringing necessary, sufficient reforms to the established agencies, it is impossible to ensure that the controlled economy, which [no one] knows how many years it will last, would function properly.\(^\text{146}\)

It is worth noting that Satō not only criticized the established agencies – namely the APCGs – for their reluctance to help peasants and agricultural communities, he also expressed in a rather subtle way his dissatisfaction with the controlled economy. In this regard, Satō had made himself an open dissident to the institution he and his followers belonged to.

Satō’s criticism was largely ignored and did not produce outcomes he desired. In March, Satō stepped up his opposition, and led thirty representatives from various agricultural cooperative groups – mainly his supporters recruited before the APCG was established – to confront Kodaira Gon’ichi, the president of the central APCG committee, and protested against

\(^{146}\) Satō, *Manshū nōson gassaku undō ronsō*, 5: “我々の仕事の縄張りである農村及び農民の状態をみても、政府の統制に於ける公正な意圖も従来の蒐荷機構、配給機構を殆どうのみにしてゐるやうな今の方法の中では、全く歪められてゐるだけである。従来の機構の改革、それの必要にして充分な改革を行ふと在らには、尚今後何年つづくかわらない統制経済の進行状態を良好に保つことは不可能である。”

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the policies APCG practiced in rural communities.\textsuperscript{147} This intervention almost certainly made the Manchukuo administration see Satō as the representative of dissidents – namely his followers in local agricultural cooperative groups – within the APCG. As a consequence, the central APCG made the decision to remove him from his position in north Manchuria, and send him away from his supporters in the villages and in the local branches of the cooperatives groups.

In November 1940, the Manchukuo government responded to Satō’s open defiance by “exiling” him to a marginal department of the APCG in Shinkyō. The transfer only temporarily ended his struggle against the regime, as the developments from 1937 to 1940 had clearly demonstrated that the conflict between Satō’s cohorts and the Manchukuo authority was irreconcilable. Although it seems that the Manchukuo regime achieved a victory by late 1940 with APCGs established in most agricultural communities in Manchuria, Satō and his cohort did not give up their struggle. Rather, their failures within the agricultural cooperative organization led Satō and his followers to pursue their resistance from outside if it, cooperating with their old allies in the \textit{Manchurian Commentary}.

\textit{“Rebuilding Manchurian Commentary” and the Alliance of Defiance between Satō and Tanaka, 1940 – 1941}

Satō’s hope for an alliance outside the agricultural cooperative groups did not go unanswered. Tanaka Takeo, co-chief editor with Satō in 1934, had by 1940 started to make efforts to restore \textit{Manchurian Commentary} to its former glory as a platform for intellectuals’ opinions on Manchukuo policies. The journal had been in decline more since 1937 after its

\textsuperscript{147} See Tanaka, \textit{Tachibana Shiraki to Satō Daishirō}, 336-337.
leading intellectuals – Satō, Ōgami, and Tachibana – left. The new editor-in-chief, Miura Mamoru, was concerned about the increasingly intolerant political atmosphere the war had fostered, and made the decision to avoid publishing any potentially provocative criticism in the Manchurian Commentary.\footnote{148} The journal once known for its sharp criticism and commentary on policies in Manchukuo had been reduced to a mundane intellectuals’ journal under Miura.

The decline of Manchurian Commentary disappointed Tanaka, who resumed his work at Mantetsu in 1937 and only worked part-time as a co-editor for the journal. However, when Tanaka received a new position in the company and left Dalian for Shinkyō in December, 1940, he came across with Satō, who by then had been removed from his position in north Manchuria and was working in the Archival Department of the central committee of APCG. Tanaka was inspired by his reunion with Sato, and decided to attempt a “reconstruction movement for the Manchurian Commentary.”\footnote{149} In January 1941, in a meeting with Satō, Matsuoka, and other editors of the journal, Tanaka announced his plan to rebuild it as an independent platform for commentary on Manchukuo politics. The plan gained support from most of the editors present, and as a result Shinkyō, instead of Dalian, had become the de facto headquarter for Manchurian Commentary and Tanaka the de facto leader of the journal.\footnote{150}

Tanaka’s plan provided Satō a great opportunity to express his opposition against what in his eyes were the failing policies employed by the APCGs. With support from the Manchurian Commentary, Satō produced a series of articles on agricultural policies in 1941. Starting with

\footnote{148} See Nonomura, Kaisō mantetsu chōsabu, 177.  
\footnote{149} Ibid, 177-178  
\footnote{150} Yamamoto, “Manshū hyōron” kaidai sō mokuji, 25.
“Controlled Economy of Collection – Distribution and the Cooperative Groups” (Shūka = haikyū tōsei to gassaku-sha) in March, Satō condemned the AGCG authority for its corrupt bureaucrats, tolerant of exploitative merchants and landlords while ignoring ordinary farmers’ sufferings:

The recent chaos and inequality in the distribution of essential materials in the rural area is, above all, the result of local merchants, despotic rural gentries [i.e. landlords], and corrupt bureaucrats who collude with them...It is because of the mistake in cooperative organizations’ policies resulted by the reason mentioned above, that the [spirit of] practicality is most strongly demanded [in future reforms].

Satō’s criticism was not unfounded. The collection and distribution system operated by APCGs did rely on grain merchants and big landlords, who would in turn support the APCG’s authority in local communities. Concerned himself with the livelihood of ordinary and lower-class peasants, Satō was openly against the “despotic landlords and evil gentries” (dogō resshin, Chinese: tuhao lieshen) in the rural communities. It was natural for him to feel betrayed and become infuriated by the cooperation between the APCG and the local merchants.

In addition to APCG’s deference to grain merchants, Satō also expressed his unhappiness with the Manchukuo regime, criticizing its unwillingness to protect the interests of lower-class farmers. In “the Significance of the New System of Agricultural Collection in Hinkō Province” (“Hinkō-shō ‘nōsan shūka shintaisei’ no imi”) published in August, Satō openly doubted the regime’s goals, defining the new policies as the continuation of the same exploitative system that

151 Sugino Shunsuke,杉野駿介, “Shūka = haikyū tōsei to gassaku-sha” “蒐荷 = 配給統制と合作社” in Manshū Hyōron 20, no. 13 満洲評論 第二〇巻第十三号 (1941), reprinted in Manshū hyōron fukkoku-ban 満洲評論復刻版. (Tokyo: Ryūkeishosha 龍渓書舎, 1980), 20:443: “最近における農村必需物資の配給における混亂と不公平は、就中、地方商人、土豪劣紳及びそれらと結びついた貪汚な官吏の操作に主として因由するものである...この點における合作社の活動方針の誤りなり確立—実踐こそいま最も強く要請される。” Sugino Shunsuke was one of Satō’s pennames in the Manchurian Commentary. For a list of Satō’s pennames, see Yamamoto, “Manshū hyōron’ kaidai sō mokuj,” 78.

had been the norm before the founding of APCGs:

What opposes [the interests] of farmers is the common storage institution operated by grain merchants, and what opposes their [interest] [i.e. grain merchants’] is the county’s supervision… [However,] it is inevitable that the so-called county’s supervision exists only on paper. [The new system] can only be recognized as a legalized version of the old system, which was based on the trinity of landlords, bureaucrats, and merchant capital.\(^\text{153}\)

It is worth noting that Satō cited once again the concept of an oppressive “trinity” (sanmi-ittai) of landlords, bureaucrats, and merchants in rural communities, an idea which appeared frequently in his earlier writings in 1935 and 1936. The seemly revial of old exploitative sustem in rural communities had troubled Satō. As Nonomura recalled in his memoir, Satō was at this time swayed both by a strong sense of anxiety and a self-sacrificial impulse to become a martyr against the establishment.\(^\text{154}\) Witnessing the reform he envisioned obliterated and the same old system he had vowed to work against reinstalled, it was not surprising that Satō might choose to carry out such a straightforward, unembellished criticism against the regime.

However, despite Satō’s acute criticism against policies implemented by the Manchukuo regime and the APCG, it is problematic to argue that Satō and his allies in the Manchurian Commentary were leading an open rebellion against the Manchukuo regime and the Kwantung Army behind it. Rather, Satō still considered himself a dissident seeking to alter the system from within rather than a revolutionary vowing to overthrow it. Satō’s inclination is clearly expressed


\(^{154}\) Nonomura, Kaisō mantetsu chōsabu, 178.
in another article published in *Manchurian Commentary* in early September 1941. In “Expectations for the New President of the Agricultural Prosperity Cooperative Groups” ("kyōnō gassaku-sha shin riji-chō e no kitai"), Satō – using his penname Kojima – expressed his optimism towards possible reforms under the new director Matsushima Abumi:

The only way to ensure the fundamental [values of the cooperative group] is a complete, comprehensive reform from within the cooperative group itself…In this sense, if people had expectations for the new president, it is neither because of his perfect personality nor his experience and knowledge from his career of administrating Manchurian agriculture. [Rather], it is because of his decisiveness in [judging] fundamental issues, and his political aptness to enforce [his thoughts] in reality. These [traits] were absent in the former president. ⁱ⁵⁵

Although Matsushima did not deliver the fundamental reform that Satō advocated, this statement nevertheless suggests Satō’s place in the political spectrum. Instead of a revolutionary advocating for an unconditional resistance towards established institutions, Satō was more of a dissenting reformist, whose purpose was to provoke a change from within the establishment.

Reflecting on Satō’s criticism against the agricultural policies employed by the Manchukuo government and the APCG in 1941, it is clear that he remained largely a pro-reform activist who was consistent in his longstanding pursuit of agrarian ideals in Manchukuo. However, although Satō expressed a desire for reform rather than revolt, the Manchukuo authority nevertheless saw him as a threat. His disobedience in the agricultural cooperative groups, as well as his active role in the revival of *Manchurian Commentary* as a vehicle for criticism of the regime’s policies, all

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contributed to the authority’s decision to treat him as an adversary of the state. Such animosity played an important role in the massive crackdown against Satō and other dissenting intellectuals in 1941 to 1942.

_The Downfall of Dissenting Intellectuals and the End of the Manchurian Commentary Faction, 1941 – 1943_

With the increasingly intense political atmosphere in both Japan and Manchuria in the latter half of 1941, it did not take long for the Manchukuo authority and the Kwantung Army to respond to Satō’s defiance. On November 4th, 1941, military police from the Kwantung Army stormed the residences and offices of more than fifty members of both _Manchurian Commentary_ and agricultural cooperative groups not only in Shinkyo and Dalian, but also in rural communities spread across north Manchuria. The Cooperative Group Incident (_Gassakushajiken_) uprooted almost Satō’s entire cohort: in addition to Satō and Tanaka, the arrests also included important figures among the agrarianists, including Suzuki, who had been active in the debate over the Manchurian agricultural crisis.

However, the Kwantung Army’s crackdown against the so-called “reds” did not end with Satō and Tanaka’s supporters. Based on information from interrogations in the first half of 1942, especially Suzuki’s – who agreed to cooperate and provided his interrogators with a list of “communist activists”–, the Kwantung Army initiated a second wave of arrests in September, rounding up employees of the Mantetsu Investigation Groups. The scale of arrests the

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156 Kobayashi and Fukui, _Mantetsuchōsabu jiken no shinsō_, 190-191.
157 Suzuki had identified more than forty individuals as leftist activists in his confession, which then became the basis for Kwantung Army’s arrests in 1942. For Suzuki’s confession and the list of names he provided, see Kantō kenpei-tai shirei-bu, _Zaiman ni kkei Kyōsan shugi undō_ 佐満
Kwantung Army made in 1942 was quite extensive: Ōgami, who had returned to Japan and was working as a professor in the Imperial University of Kyoto, was apprehended by the military police along with thirty-two current members of the Mantetsu Investigation Department spread across in branches in China, Japan, and Manchuria. Similar to the first wave of arrests in 1941, the military police of the Kwantung Army compiled yet another list of “communist activists” from new interrogations, and arrested ten more intellectuals in July 1943. In total, more than ninety Japanese intellectuals, connected with or affiliated to Manchurian Commentary, Mantetsu, and agricultural cooperative groups, were imprisoned by the military police.

What was it about Satō and his cohorts’ criticism that led the Manchukuo authority to respond as harshly as it did? One factor is the persistence of a group of Satō’s supporters in the agricultural cooperatives, even after he was removed from his position in the north Manchuria. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Satō’s supporters in the local branches of the APCGs had joined Satō to confront their president in 1940. This had left a deep impression on the military police, who concluded in its report that Satō’s supporters remained a potential threat to the Manchukuo government’s authority over rural communities, especially in north Manchuria.158

In addition to the threat posed by his potential insurgent supporters, an equal if not more important aspect of Satō’s challenge to the state was the symbolic significance embedded in his criticism. For instance, Satō’s critiques of agricultural policies had coincided with the setbacks that the Manchukuo authority faced when it attempted to regulate agricultural production in 1941.

日系共産主義運動, 65-85.
158 Ibid, 470-472
As discussed earlier in this chapter, the two core methods for APCGs to enforce their control in villages were the distribution agencies, which were in charge of how many daily necessities were available in the rural communities, and the collection agencies, which forced peasants to sell their harvests to the official market at unfairly low prices. However, contrary to what the authority expected, the two agencies disappointed both ordinary peasants and rich landlords. For the former, the dearth of daily necessities available to them not only caused inconvenience, but further impoverished them as they had to make up for shortages on the black markets, at extra costs.\(^{159}\) For Manchurian landlords, the newly lowered official prices for agricultural products decimated their profit margins.

Consequently, the government’s intervention in agricultural markets was opposed by people from both ends of the social spectrum in rural communities. The number of black markets (yamiichiba) as well as the volume of agricultural products circulated in them soared after 1941.\(^{160}\) The fact that an increasing share of agricultural production was traded in the black market instead of in the official markets made it clear to the Manchukuo authorities that their plan to regulate agricultural products had disappointed its subjects. Such a concern was articulated by bureaucrats in the Manchukuo government, who concluded in a financial report in 1943 that the authority had lost its control over the illegal trade of agricultural products, and

\(^{159}\) The prices of daily necessities in black markets had exceeded the official prices by large. For instance, an investigation of the black markets in the Haidong County in 1942 shows that a chunk of soap was 80 sen in the black market, while a similar product was 20 sen in the official market. For 500 grams of sugar, the price was 250 sen in the black market and 44 sen in the official market. See Nōson haikyū kikō chōsa umishiro han 農村配給機構調査海城班 Umishiro ken haikyū kikō chōsa hōkoku-sho 海城県配給機構調査報告書. (n.p.: 1942), 18, cited in Chen Xiang 陳祥, “'Manshū-koku' tōsei keizai-ka no nōson yamiichiba mondai”「満州国」統制経済下の農村闇市場問題” Kan Higashiajia kenkyū sentā nenpō 環東アジア研究センター年報 5 (2010): 88

\(^{160}\) See Chen Xiang 陳祥, “'Manshū-koku' tōsei keizai-ka no nōson yamiichiba mondai” 「満州国」統制経済下の農村闇市場問題” Kan Higashiajia kenkyū sentā nenpō 環東アジア研究センター年報 5 (2010)
could not prevent substantial amounts of money from flowing into rural areas through black markets:

In exchange for “black substances” [i.e. agricultural products traded in black markets] going into the city, a large sum of black money flows from cities to villages every month, and falls into the hands of farmers. Calculating from the amount of black agricultural products in the cities, it can be said that more than 1 billion or even 1.2 billion yen flows from cities to villages annually. Manchurian farmers currently have a considerable amount of money simply because of [their involvement in] the black [markets] that deals not only with grains, but also with vegetables and other foods.\(^\text{161}\)

As the report admitted, the large amount of capital involved in the black markets offered a clear indication of authority’s setbacks in its attempt to regulate the sale of agricultural products.

Naturally, the failure made it harder for the state to either ignore or refute Satō’s criticism against its policies. In addition, for bureaucrats in the Manchukuo government, it was even more frustrating to see that Satō’s constant attack on Manchurian landlords, who were treated as their allies in local communities, had been proven correct. When government inspectors were sent out to evaluate the effectiveness of agricultural policies, it had struck them that instead of cooperating with the government, powerful landlords and grain merchants, who were considered by APCGs as its main supporters, actually played important roles in keeping the black markets running.

This alliance between landlords and grain merchants in off-record dealings is seen in a report

written in 1942 regarding the Tsūyō County (Tongyang Xian), in which investigators noted a web of connections between landlords and grain merchants. “The interpersonal connections of people in the Rural Maintenance Committee are worrisome,” the investigators wrote, “it appears that because the committee members and merchants are familiar with each other, [the former] to a certain degree gives acquiescence to merchants’ illegal [activities].” Therefore, the less reliable the authority found its landlord proxies in local communities, the more appealing and reasonable Satō’s counter proposal of allying with lower-class farmers and battling against grain merchants and landlords appeared to be. The inability to prevent its supposed collaborators from smuggling their products to black markets, as well as the fact that the authority’s attempt to regulate agricultural products through new APCGs was not as effective as it expected, had all made Satō’s criticism a constant reminder of the regime’s failures, since it pointed out exactly where the agricultural policies had failed.

In addition, Satō’s criticism for the policies employed by the Manchukuo government also jeopardized the authorities’ effort on the propaganda front. In March 1941, Ozaki Hotsumi, a former member of the Mantetsu Investigation Department who was later arrested and executed in 1942 for his involvement in Sorge’s espionage, wrote “An Open Letter to Manchuria” (“Manshū e no kōkai-jō”) for the Manchurian Daily News (Manshū nichinichi shinbun). In it, Ozaki wrote that the Manchukuo government had deviated from the ideals – the unity of five nations, and the

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paradise of the kingly way – it had claimed to abide by when it was founded in 1932. In response, Satō openly addressed Ozaki in *Manchurian Commentary*, concurring with his observations and further providing a pessimistic view of Manchukuo in 1941:

Policies regarding farmers’ reform, which include agricultural policies, are significantly insufficient. In addition, the passion of putting agricultural reforms into practice has been swept away almost entirely in the dizzying stream of bureaucratic, petty bourgeois snobbery that spread rapidly and widely. In both central and local [spheres], the efforts regarding farmers’ reform made by aspiring groups are mostly futile and produce no real result.

By expressing his dissatisfaction with the current circumstances in Manchuria, Satō concurred with Ozaki’s view that the Manchukuo government had failed to deliver the ideals it delineated a decade ago. However, it is important to note that Satō was not, like Ozaki eventually proved to be, a revolutionary against the regime itself. In his response, Satō did not question the founding ideals directly. Rather, he remained in his role as a reformist dissident and attributed the failure of agricultural reforms to the stagnating politics and bureaucracy of the Manchukuo government.

Satō’s reserved, non-confrontational position is in stark contrast to Ozaki’s blunt criticism against the legitimacy of the Manchukuo regime.

Nevertheless, Satō’s criticism in the *Manchurian Commentary* called into question the propaganda efforts of both the Manchukuo regime and the Kwantung Army. In addition to the Manchukuo government’s continuing need to strengthen its legitimacy, after 1940 the Army also needed to win support for its blueprint of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

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164 Satō Daishirō 佐藤大四郎, “‘Manshū e no kōkai-jō’ ni kotae futu” “「満洲への公開状」に答ふ,” *Manshū Hyōron* 20, no. 14 満洲評論, 20: 485: “…農業政策を含めての農民対策の内容の著しい貧困と加之農民対策の實踐への情熱さへもが急速且つ廣汎に浸漫した官僚主義・小市民的俗物根性の滔滔たる風潮によって、殆ど完全に押流されつゝあるといふことであります。中央・地方に亘って、有志の人々が盡した努力はと度農民対策に関する限り、多くは徒勞となって、殆ど實を結んでおりません。”
(Daitōakyōeiken). As a result, both parties could not – at least not openly – retract their promises for making “paradise of the kingly way” and “the unity of five nations” in Manchukuo. Therefore, Satō’s criticism of Manchukuo’s failure to deliver on it its promises was potentially if not directly harmful for both Japan’s propaganda and Manchukuo’s need for political stability.

The threat that Satō’s articles in Manchurian Commentary posed to the authority was even recognized by the Kwantung Army itself. In its internal report on Satō’s arrest, the military police of the Kwantung Army concluded that what Satō and his cohorts composed, as “leftist propaganda,” was threatening to the Manchukuo regime because of its potential appeal to Manchurians:

The fact that [they are] core employees in the agricultural cooperative groups and the representatives of state’s authority has made this movement [i.e. Satō’s movement] extremely influential to ordinary people. Furthermore, since their targeted groups – Manchurian and Chinese peasants – are not entirely convinced by the idea that Japan and Manchuria have the same interests, there are more factors that make it easier for them to be incited. This has multiplied the level of threat [of Satō’s movement].

As the Kwantung Army admitted in this report, Satō’s efforts, in both rural communities and the Manchurian Commentary, substantiated and even expanded on already established doubts about the pro-Japanese regime among Manchurian and Chinese populations. This point is also seen in the fact that the Kwantung Army was especially concerned with Sato’s “propaganda efforts” in the journal. “For the Hinkō cause [i.e. Satō’s movement], although on the surface its propaganda appeared as ordinary comments on policies,” the report wrote, “it skillfully buried hints of
Marxist theories which are intended to enlighten the collective consciousness of [Marxism]. [The propaganda’s] role in recruiting new comrades is worth special attention.\textsuperscript{166} In this sense, although Satō appeared to be a critic of the regime’s agricultural policies and did not label himself an anti-regime revolutionary, in the eyes of the military police of the Kwantung Army his articles in the \textit{Manchurian Commentary} nevertheless posed a threat to the authority’s need for legitimacy, and were worryingly destabilizing.

As this section of the chapter demonstrates, it is possible that the challenges Satō and his cohorts posed to the Manchukuo regime contributed to the latter’s animosity toward these agrarianists. On one hand, the fact that the ongoing policies in rural communities did not produce ideal outcomes and created instead great economic instability had made Satō’s criticism a reminder of the state’s failure. On the other hand, Satō’s criticism that the Manchukuo government was deviating from its founding ideals undermined the propaganda efforts of both Manchukuo and the Kwantung Army while fueling existing anti-regime sentiments within the general population. Therefore, Satō and his cohorts’ arrests could also be interpreted as the end of a prolonged conflict between agrarianists and the Manchukuo authority, in which the former’s challenge to the latter’s plan for rural communities had become less and less tolerable in light of the policy failures in the early 1940s.

\textit{Conclusion}

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid, 480: “而も其の宣傳たるや、表面濱江コースを一般的に國策なるかの知く見解せしむると同時に、巧妙なるマルクス理論の伏線に依り相互意識の啓蒙を図り、騒て新たな同志獲得の役割を果すものとして特に重要視してゐた。”
Reflecting upon the development, and the eventual collapse of the group of agrarianists under Satō from 1937 to 1943, this chapter traces how these pre-war pro-reform activists became determined dissidents during wartime. Both developments on the authority’s side and those on the intellectuals’ side contributed to such a transition. For the government, the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 and Japan’s transformation towards a war economy reoriented its economic plan for Manchuria, especially in agricultural production. The impact of creating a controlled economy, in which collecting and distributing agencies were established across Manchuria to regulate agricultural production at farmers’ expense, inevitably exacerbated the already declining relationship between pro-agrarianism activists and the Manchukuo state. As intellectuals sticking with their pursuit of agrarian ideals in rural Manchuria refused to endorse the government’s plans for a controlled economy, these pro-reform thinkers had become, in the eyes of Manchukuo decision-makers, a threat to stability.

For agrarianists, the period from 1937 to 1941 witnessed their final, irreconcilable break with the regime. As Satō and his supporters pushed for locally established agricultural cooperative groups aiming to protect the interests of lower-class peasants, they were clearly on the opposite side of the Manchukuo authority, whose plan for controlled relied on its cooperation with grain merchants and rich landlords. When his efforts from within the agricultural organization failed in 1940, Satō soon found an alternative approach, expressing his criticism against the government’s policies in the *Manchurian Commentary*.

The collision between agrarianists and the Manchukuo authority ended tragically for the
dissidents. From 1941 to 1943, more than ninety intellectuals associated with the *Manchurian Commentary*, Mantetsu, and agricultural cooperative groups were apprehended by the military police of the Kwantung Army. However, instead of treating the arrests as an isolated incident fueled by early 1940s anti-communist patriotism, this chapter argues that the arrests should be understood in the context of agrarianists in their prolonged conflict with the regime. The fact that Satō’s criticism had become a reminder of the regime’s policy failures, and the potential threat Satō posed to the regime’s legitimacy, all contributed to the regime’s increasing animosity to the agrarianist. In other words, although agrarianists under Satō did not present themselves as anti-regime dissidents, their criticism, though mild and reserved, could no longer be tolerated by the suspicious regime terrified of the rising opposition and the economic instability caused by its own failing policies.
“The East Asian modern” occupies this labile interface between novelty and the past in the region. As such, it addresses problems of identity, change, and authenticity that politically powerful forces seek to appropriate for their particular projects. The term East Asian modern represents both an analytical category, where the past is repeatedly re-signified and mobilized to serve future projects, and a substance category, referring to the circulation of practices and signifiers evoking historical authenticity in the region.167

— Prasenjit Duara, Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern, 2004

From Manchukuo to Postwar Manchuria

The conclusion of the war in 1945 symbolized an end for many entities – states, groups, and projects. As Emperor Hirohito broadcast news of Japan’s unconditional surrender to the Allied Forces on August 15th 1945, Imperial Japan’s expansion since the late 19th century came to an end. The Emperor Aisin Gioro Puyi abdicated on August 17th, and terminated his short-lived reign of Manchukuo in Manchuria. Manchurian Commentary, which was established shortly before the Manchurian Incident in 1931, also came to an end after Manchukuo’s collapse. Thousands of Japanese immigrants spread across Manchuria had to leave their farmland and property behind and wait for repatriation that would send them away from the places they had lived for years or even decades.

For other groups, however, the end of the war marked a new beginning. This was especially true for the group of Japanese intellectuals apprehended by the Kwantung Army in 1942 and 1943. Although most were released on probation before 1945, some were still held in custody because, according to the Army, of their non-cooperative attitude – except for Nakanishi, who was transferred to a prison in Japan for espionage – until the end of the war. For instance, both

Nonomura and Nakanishi were released from prison cells after the war concluded. Yet not all apprehended intellectuals lived to see the end of the war. Both Satō and Ōgami, the two main activists for Tachibana’s new-agrarianism, died during their imprisonment. Their deaths, along with that of their mentor Tachibana in October 1945, marked the tragic end of their agrarian agenda in Manchuria.

The immediate postwar period also witnessed Japanese intellectuals who survived the war taking separate paths. Suzuki, who cooperated with the Kwantung Army and informed on his comrades, remained in China after the war as a professor in Jilin University. According to Nonomura, his cooperation with the Kwantung Army continued to burden him mentally in the postwar period, and eventually drove him to commit suicide. In contrast, after being released from prison by the order of the GHQ, Nakanishi immediately devoted himself to the reconstruction of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP). Nakanishi’s unyielding resistance to the imperial government had won him respect from his comrades, who then supported him to assume office in 1947 in the House of Councillors (Sangiin) of the National Diet on behalf of the JCP. However, Nakanishi’s political career did not last long; he was involved in the internal split of the JCP and was expelled from the Party in 1950.

In addition to some intellectuals’ participation in politics in the postwar period, many of the activists – including Nonomura, Itō, Tanaka, and Ishidō – returned to Japan to work in the

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170 Ibid, 189
academy. As academics, their postwar memoirs have provided historians abundant – and sometimes conflicting – evidence with which to reflect on the interwar and wartime experiences of Japanese agrarianists in Manchuria. Despite the fact that some expressed a strong sense of nostalgia for Manchuria, most of these intellectuals never again set foot there.

The Conclusion – From Co-opted Participation in Imperial Projects to Failed Imagination for Asian Modernity

In its three chapters, this thesis traces the rise, the development, the setbacks, and the collapse of the agrarian movement Japanese agrarianist thinkers pursued in Manchuria in the 1930s and the early 1940s. In each chapter, I identified key advocates who played significant roles in the course of new-agrarianism, arguing how their interactions with each other, as well as with the Manchukuo authorities, shaped the development of new-agrarianism in interwar and wartime Manchuria. By exploring how these identified intellectuals shared – and contested – an agrarian blueprint in Manchuria, this thesis has separated a group of agrarianists from the Japanese intelligentsia in Manchuria, elaborating on the agrarian elements embedded in their actions and discourses.

How, then, could the analyses of pro-agrarianism figures in this thesis, as a whole, contribute to our evaluation of the role Japanese technocrats and colonial elites played in mid-20th century Manchuria? Addressing the issue of agency in the agrarianists’ activities, this thesis complicates Young’s argument for total empire, in which elite bureaucrats in Manchuria are treated as mobilized imperial subjects, in a twofold manner. As this thesis demonstrates, most agrarianists
including Satō, arguably the most defiant of them all, were co-opted into an imagination that the authorities created for Manchuria. Their submission to the founding ideals of the Manchukuo — namely the “paradise of the kingly way” and the “unity of five nations” — has substantiated Young’s argument that they were largely passive in their interactions with the authorities. As Young puts it in her book, the creation of a Manchurian myth mobilized imperial subjects to participate voluntarily in Japan’s projects in Manchuria:

Much of the dynamism, the pluralism, and the contradictory complexities of total empire rested on the gossamer foundation of dream. Most Japanese encountered Manchukuo within their shared universe of symbolic meaning, a place where the evanescent and mutable qualities of popular culture permitted a sense of both unity in principle and diversity in interpretation...images of Manchukuo ennobled personal ambitions by association with ideals that transcended those ambitions. What Japanese shared – and what gave to total empire its essential unity – were these transcendental ideals; they made Manchukuo more than just the sum of its disparate parts.171

Various examples are provided to affirm Young’s argument in all three chapters of this thesis, including Tachibana’s hope for the Kwantung Army as an enabling force in prompting an agrarian state in Manchuria, Ōgami’s vision for “reform from above” which motivated him to cooperate with the Kwantung Army on its Five-year plan, and Satō’s reluctance to denounce the founding ideals of Manchukuo even after he openly opposed the policies practiced by the Manchukuo government. In all three cases, it is clear that agrarianists were attracted to the transcendental perspectives that the Kwantung Army and the Manchukuo government created, which prompted them to pursue their agrarian blueprint without challenging the state’s authority. As a result, all three chapters have demonstrated that agrarianists, moderate or radical, remained reformists and did not become fierce adversaries against the state even when it rejected their

171 Young, Japan’s Total Empire, 425.
agenda. This faith in the founding ideals of the Manchukuo government contributed to their deferential attitude to the regime when the latter shut down their movements.

However, it would be unfair to argue that agrarianists had no ideas of their own at all in their pursuit of the agrarian ideal. Tracing the grassroots movement initiated by Satō and his cohorts, this thesis challenges Young’s argument that the elite intellectuals were largely separated from other social groups in Manchuria, and thus had little knowledge about the subjects of the reforms they proposed. As Young argues in her book:

Yet the recurrent disjunctures between dreams and reality sorely tested the binding power of these ideals…what happened when the Mantetsu intellectual learned of the genocidal tactics being used in the war against China, or the farm settler realized that real Manchurian paradise was to be found in the new urban centers? Though such epiphanies were possible, the remarkable compartmentalization of the imperial projects minimized the opportunities for Japanese to draw these sorts of connections…Segregation of the imperial projects both in their social realities and in their cultural constructions fostered a sense of dissociation among the three groups [i.e. elite intellectuals, Japanese rural settlers, and urban Japanese residents], placing each other out of the other’s reach.¹⁷²

As demonstrated in this thesis, it risks overgeneralization to categorize Japanese intellectuals in Manchuria as a clearly-defined group of colonial elites, who according to Young had little access to social groups beyond their own. Satō and his cohorts in their bottom-up agrarian movement provide a counterexample – and indeed a powerful one due to their impacts on the Manchukuo regime – to what Young sees as the segregation imperial projects created between different social groups. Although Satō admittedly answered to the imperial project in Manchuria and remained a faithful believer in the perspective – namely “the paradise of the kingly way” – that the Manchukuo government delineated, he was not at all deferential to the regime and made

¹⁷² Ibid, 426.
significant efforts to challenge the segregation between urban and rural communities. In Chapter II and the Chapter III, I’ve shown that Satō’s field investigations – which aimed to form a better understanding of the real situations in rural communities –, as well as his attempts to address the problems identified in his field work through grassroots agricultural cooperatives, have all suggested Satō’s effort to articulate the agrarian ideal amid obstacles in the field. In this way, Satō’s endeavors in the rural communities in north Manchuria not only resembled an attempt to introduce his own agrarian design, but also presented a countermovement to the dissociation between the reality and the imagination of imperial projects.

In addition, Satō was not alone in attempting to break down the segregation between urban intellectuals and rural farmers. As explained in Chapter II and Chapter III, individual agrarianists including Nakanishi and Suzuki, whose debate with Ōgami became a source of inspiration for Satō’s agrarian movement, and Tanaka, whose support for Satō’s defiance in the Manchurian Commentary helped him to voice his dissent from the authority, are all examples of a group of agrarianists who were still skeptical of the vision the authorities created. This group of agrarianists poses a stark contrast to the group of “elite intellectuals” that Young identifies in her book.

Furthermore, as Chapter III suggests, it is also possible to argue that these intellectuals’ personal tragedies at the hands of the military police may shed some light on the regime’s dilemma with the modernization project it launched in Manchuria. Although both the Manchukuo government and the Kwantung Army created promising visions for Manchuria, they
were eventually unable to deliver what they had promised. However, that is not to say that both authorities did not try. Rather, as Chapter I and Chapter II demonstrated, the state had supported – though in limited and short-lived ways – the agrarianists’ efforts. Its acquiescence to – and to some extent encouragement of – the discussion of agrarian agendas in Manchuria, as well as its brief collaboration with Ōgami’s cohort on a Five-year plan for Manchukuo, have all suggested some level of sincerity in the authorities’ pursuit of an ideal, modernized rule in Manchuria.

Nevertheless, the Army’s ambition for expansion in mainland China, and the Manchukuo government’s desperate need to strengthen its control of local communities through alliances with powerful landlords in the vast rural areas, trivialized the reform projects that agrarianists craved. As a result, mobilization for total war replaced that for total empire, and the imperial projects that once attracted agrarianists became little more than exercises in propaganda. As Young notes, Manchukuo as “a new imperial paradigm” failed due to “the congeries of short-term forces unleashed by the depression and the anti-Japanese movement.” Under such circumstances, the agrarian vision that pro-reform activists imagined for Manchuria could become no more than a Don Quixote’s quest until its eventual collapse.

Despite the fact that this study sheds light on the matter of agency in the reform movements of Japanese agrarianist thinkers and their interactions with the authorities during the 1930s and 1940s, more work needs to be done in order to fully explore the meanings embedded in the intellectual discourse of this group. As mentioned in the introduction, the attempt to initiate rural reform in Manchuria was not an isolated case in the Japanese empire at the time. In Japan,
activists and policy-makers dedicated themselves to rural revitalization projects, and made much progress relieving impoverished farmers in Japanese countryside. The relative success in Japan poses a stark contrast to the utter failure of bringing out agricultural reforms in Manchuria, and thus merits a comparative study of the two movements, one in the colonial peripheries and the other in the empire’s heartland. In addition, many of the intellectuals mentioned in this thesis remained active in the academy and politics in the postwar period, including Nakanishi in the postwar socialist movement and Nonomura in the study of Marxist economy theories. It is not unreasonable to assume that the study of their wartime endeavors and thoughts may help scholars understand the intellectual origins of their actions and thoughts after 1945, and may thus open the door to a potentially rich line of inquiry into postwar Japanese history.

Seventy years after the Japanese agrarianists’ failed attempt to bring agricultural reforms, Manchuria, or today’s northeastern China, is once again at the crossroad in its course of development. The outflow of capital and talent from this land, which had once been proud of its industrial productivity and level of urbanization, seems irreversible. Under such circumstances, the region is again witnessing debates among policy-makers, journalists, and scholars, who either argue for “revitalizing the old industrial base of the northeast” (zhenxing dongbei lao gongye jidi), or advocate for its transformation into the agricultural base of China. Therefore, it is important to remember that the imagination of modernity – and the proposals to realize it – in

this region does not fade into history when the word “Manchuria” did. Instead, it is still very much alive in contemporary China, where it tenaciously occupies the contested place between vision and reality.
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