For many Japanese, events in China raised the issues that most stirred the nation from early Shōwa until the conflict broadened in 1941. Chinese exigencies hastened the rise of military influence, the retreat of party politics and the concomitant inhibition of critical comment in the public sphere. And just as China dominated the public sphere in Japan, Japan’s presence in China came to dominate perceptions of Japan received in the West.

An important early feature of the press controls operating in Japan in the 1930s is what appears to have been an official effort to keep newspaper readers, Japanese and foreign, from gaining knowledge of the extent of Japan’s involvement in the government of Manchukuo. More specifically, gags imposed between September 1931 and March 1932 seem to have been designed to avoid allowing the Japanese public to gain the least hint that the establishment of Manchukuo was anything but the expression of the spontaneous will of the people of Manchuria.\(^1\) Bans were likewise issued on reporting the establishment of a permanent Japanese army in Manchuria.\(^2\) The intention may have been to forestall any adverse reaction among liberal elements in Japan, and in the armed forces themselves. Bans on reporting civil and other disturbances at home were intended to diminish news of discontent but may not have prevented rumours from spreading.

In July 1932, Joseph Grew was informed that most of the bans applied to the press published in Japan, which included the English-language newspapers, but not to despatches sent abroad. This meant that Hugh Byas could send to the *New York Times* information that Wilfrid Fleisher could not print in the *Japan Advertiser* but could despatch to the *New York Herald Tribune*. However, information restrictions in Tokyo meant that neither Byas nor Fleisher had that much to report. Byas’s Tokyo despatches to the *New York Times* often contradicted Hallett Abend’s despatches to the same newspaper from China, while Fleisher told *Tribune* readers no more than he could tell *Advertiser* readers (who included many Japanese) in Japan.\(^3\)

Between the Manchurian Incident and late June 1932 all Japanese newspapers, including those in the Foreign Ministry network, operated under strict Metropolitan Police Board restrictions. Most journalists in Tokyo had to work their way round delays and gaps on the story in China. Most journalists patched together their reports and despatches from Foreign Ministry Information Bureau briefings, facts
and commentary translated by Rengō and, after 1936, by Dōmei, and from what they could pick up from the local English-language newspapers, which were just as much in the dark. As a result, even seasoned observers like Wilfrid Fleisher, Hugh Byas and James R. Young tended to reflect the official view of events in China in their local and international reports. At the same time, correspondents in China often wired their stories direct to the US. As a result, there were often contradictions between reports wired from Tokyo and reports sent from in China.

After 1931, the Advertiser network should have been the predominant influence on news coming out of Tokyo, or at least the most significant corrective to dispatches emanating from the Foreign Ministry network. However, as the surveys of news of East Asia in US and British papers given in the concluding chapter of this study show, during the Manchurian Crisis references to the reports of the Japan Times in particular began steadily gaining on those of other English-language papers in the US and British press. Not only the Japan Times but also its leading vernacular contemporaries and Japan’s national news agencies of the day, Rengō and Dōmei, built on this lead steadily throughout the 1930s. During the Pacific War it became unassailable.4

On the face of it, the Advertiser network certainly held the strongest cards in the US. Wilfrid Fleisher was managing editor of the Advertiser and the New York Herald Tribune correspondent. Hugh Byas was a past editor of the Advertiser and would become the longest-serving New York Times and London Times correspondent between the wars. James R. Young was an Advertiser journalist and INS correspondent. R.O. Matheson was an ex-Advertiser journalist and the Chicago Tribune correspondent. Frank Hedges was an ex-Advertiser editor who wrote the Christian Science Monitor, Washington Post (and Daily Telegraph Tokyo) correspondence. John B. Powell was a long-serving Chicago Tribune correspondent and a regular contributor to the New York Herald Tribune and the Associated Press.5 For all of B.W. Fleisher’s connections, for all the commitment and dedication of the ‘Missouri Mafia’ and distinguished mentors like Fleisher himself, Powell and Thomas Millard, the Foreign Ministry network took the lead on news of East Asia in the early 1930s and held on to it all the way to 1945.

A significant problem for Tokyo correspondents was that they were reporting from a city that was suffering a virtual news blackout, but despatches from Advertiser network reporters on the ground in China also had problems getting through to the outside world. Although he did not utilize it in 1932, in the middle 1930s Hallett Abend found that he could get round Guomindang censorship in China by utilizing a Japanese cable that ran from Hongqu in Shanghai to Nagasaki. Abend’s friendly Japanese contacts let him use this line to send reports to Hugh Byas in Tokyo, who would then send them on to the New York Times office.6

Having an Advertiser or Missouri connection was no guarantee that a journalist would follow the Advertiser’s editorial line or enlist in its network. Frank Hedges (1895–1940) was a Missouri graduate, the