The Wang Jing-wei Regime and the German-Japanese Alliance

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1 INTRODUCTION

After the Mukden, or Manchurian, Incident in 1931,1 Japan intensified its aggression against China. For a more effective control over the newly acquired territories, Japan started setting up governing boards. As the powers manifested their opposition to the Japanese operations in Manchuria, Japan hired Chinese to form local governments and carry out its policies, so as to avoid international interference. The Japanese Government then pushed for international recognition of these regimes. ‘Man-Zhou Guo’ (hereafter Manzhouguo, also called Manchukuo)2 under Pu Yi3 was the first of the puppet regimes established under such models. On 1 September 1939, the predominantly Han Chinese puppet governments of South Chahar Autonomous Government and North Shanxi Autonomous Government were merged with the Mongol Autonomous Government, creating the new Mengjiang United Autonomous Government. The ‘Reformed Government of the Republic of China’ in Nanjing (Nanking) under Wang Jing-wei4 of 1940 was the final one of this type.

Manzhouguo was not recognized by the League of Nations or the international community as a political entity due to the fact that it was the outcome of the Japanese invasion, which the League of Nations condemned. The Republic under Wang met a similar fate. The long-standing Republic led by Jiang Jie-shi (Chiang Kai-shek), moved to Chongqing...
(Chungking), and still kept on good terms with the major powers. After the outbreak of war in Europe, the United States and the United Kingdom realized that a partner in Far East would be helpful to balance power in this region and to serve their national interests. Under such circumstances, Japan hesitated to promote the recognition of the new regime in Nanjing. Only after all the negotiation with Jiang Jie-shi had failed did Japan turn to Nanjing. Efforts to acquire international recognition of its puppet regime were made, without noticeable results.

This chapter examines the dilemma of the Japanese government during the establishment of the Wang regime. To put the problem in perspective, a contrast will first be made between the Japanese diplomatic efforts in gaining support from the powers for Manzhouguo and for the Wang regime.

2 ESTABLISHING PUPPET REGIMES

Soon after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, Japanese forces took northern China and pushed southwards. By the end of 1937, Jiang Jie-shi gave up his capital and moved westwards along the Yangtze River, first to Wuhan, then to Sichuan, in order to gain a foothold for prolonged war. On occupying the northern provinces of China, the Japanese army set up some ‘committees for the maintenance of public order’, which followed the model in Manchuria and served as a ruling board. The first such board was the ‘United Committee for the Maintenance of Public Order for Beijing (Peking) and Tienjin (Tientsin)’. A ‘Provisional Government of the Republic of China’ under the leadership of Wang Ke-min was then organized to control Shangdong, Shangxi and Hebei provinces as well as Beijing and Tienjin. After taking Nanjing, the ‘Reformed Government of the Republic of China’ headed by Liang Hong-zhi was established at the end of March 1938. By mid-1938, four puppet regimes existed in China. Yet the powers still recognized only the government in Chongqing, under Jiang Jie-shi.

The puppet-regimes created with To-kyō’s support met with quite different reactions from the powers. Japanese attitudes towards each regime varied. For those regimes in northern China, it was not necessary to win recognition from the powers. For Manzhouguo under Pu Yi, it was quite different. ‘The Provisional Government of the Republic of China’ and ‘the Reformed Government of the Republic of China’ both existed at the same time and claimed to be ‘heirs’ of the Republic of China. Which should represent China? How should China be ‘divided’ between them? Was there an issue of mutual ‘recognition’? In fact, these issues were not discussed seriously, for the Japanese intention was merely to put these ‘governments’ under Japanese rule so that it could effectively control the vast area it had occupied. Manzhouguo was clearly another issue. Recognition by the powers was always the goal of the Japanese officials in Xinjing, where Manzhouguo’s government was located.

To solve the functional and territorial overlap of both of the ‘Governments of the Republic of China’, a ‘Joint Committee of the