In May 1928, Chinese Nationalist (Kuomintang) armies advancing toward Beijing to complete the Northern Expedition\(^1\) clashed with the occupying Japanese forces stationed in Jinan in Shandong province. Fighting started on 3 May 1928 and resumed several days later. The Japanese had grown increasingly worried that a Kuomintang (KMT) military victory would threaten their dominant position in Manchuria. They intervened in 1928 primarily to protect their considerable interests there. But they also acted to protect the large number of Japanese citizens living in the Japanese sphere of influence in Shandong. This effort, however, had an opposite effect: 230 Japanese soldiers were killed and more were wounded; in addition, 16 Japanese civilians were killed. The Chinese suffered heavier casualties, with over 3,000 dead.\(^2\)

But the incident has far more profound consequences. After the incident, Chiang Kai-shek, then commander-in-chief of the National-
ist army, made the removal of national humiliation the top priority, placing it ahead of even the KMT's Three People's Principles, the Five Power Constitution, and all other matters. Chiang thereby served notice that the Jinan Incident was a major turning point that had forced the KMT to make a fundamental reevaluation of its policies in two major respects. Prior to the incident the KMT had emphasized the problems of internal politics over foreign relations, and its foreign policy had primarily focused on maintaining smooth relations with Japan. Following the incident, foreign affairs became the primary concern of the KMT, and the party sought to develop a close relationship with the United States in order to counteract aggressive Japanese activities in China.

This essay focuses on only a part of this transition: the change in the attitude of the KMT from ignoring the United States to emphasizing American importance to China and seeking its assistance. Nevertheless, it is necessary to discuss domestic politics and address the linkage to foreign policy. Up to the Jinan Incident, the KMT's foreign


4. This is a large theme which itself needs at least an independent article to explore. In general, modern Chinese nationalism had two interrelated aspects: It was constructive in that it sought to unify and reconstruct China as a nation; and it was hostile or defensive in that it sought to eliminate foreign control that impinged on China's sovereignty. The KMT incorporated both aspects of nationalism into its ideology, but until the Jinan Incident it focused primarily on national unification. Its logical focus, after the nominal unification of China in 1928, should have been national reconstruction. However, beginning with Jinan, foreign relations determined China's international orientation, rather than vice versa, and played a larger role in shaping the course of domestic developments. Any ruling political group of China had to face this reality. This analysis should not be seen as implying that Chiang minimized his struggle with the remaining warlords or the Communists. His first priority was always to insure his power in China. See below for an elaboration of these points. My dissertation also explores these themes in greater detail. See Zhitian Luo, "The Dynamics of Nationalism: Chinese Revolution and Sino-American Relations, 1926–1931" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1993), 18–30, 247–48, 400–401.

5. There are not many published works on Sino-American relations in the late 1920s. Dorothy Borg's pioneer work, American Policy and the Chinese Revolution, 1925–1928 (New York, 1947) ends in 1928. Iriye's After Imperialism is the only one which deals with the late 1920s, but his study is a broader examination of East Asian international relations in which Sino-American relations in the late 1920s is less focused than those in the early 1920s. Warren I. Cohen's The Chinese Connection: Roger S. Greene, Thomas W. Lamont, George E. Sokolsky and American-East Asian Relations (New York, 1978) has a large section on the 1920s Sino-American relations, but his approach and focus are different from those of this article.