

#### 4. TRUTH ABOUT THE MANCHURIAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

##### Japanese government prohibits involvement in independence movement

Historically, when Chinese rulers suffered defeat, they have fled, abandoning their nation and their compatriots. The Liutiaogou Incident was no exception. After every single official of the Northeastern government in Liaoning province had disappeared, the Liaoning Peace Preservation Committee came into being. Yuan Jinkai became the committee's chairman, and Yu Zhonghan was among those appointed to assist him. Wang Yongjiang, Yuan Jinkai, and Yu Zhonghan were the leaders of the Manchurian civil government group.

At the IMTFE (Tokyo Trials), Maj.-Gen. Katakura Tadashi, who had assisted the Guangdong Army's General Staff (and was appointed staff officer in October 1931) testified that a few Japanese acted as advisors to the Liaoning Peace Preservation Committee, at the committee's request, but that otherwise there was no relationship between the Guangdong Army and the committee. In fact, Foreign Minister Shidehara and War Minister Minami Jirō sent instructions on September 25 stating that "it is strictly prohibited to have any connection with the movement for promoting a new regime in Manchuria."<sup>1</sup>

Japanese civilian and military officials heeded the order, and avoided involvement in the independence movement. But as the trend toward an independent Manchuria became an *idée fixe* in the minds of the Chinese, Manchurians, and Mongolians, the Japanese were no longer able to ignore it.

##### Manchurians' thirst for independence

By the 1920s, the misgovernment and oppressive taxation imposed by Zhang Zuolin and his son Xueliang had left the Manchurian people in terrible distress. To feed their armies and enable them to engage in warfare, the two Fengtian warlords governed irresponsibly, even going so far as to issue inconvertible Fengtian currency and force Manchurians to pay their taxes several years in advance. According to the Lytton Report, at the time of the Manchurian Incident, military expenses incurred by Xueliang's government accounted for 85 percent of the total national expenditure.<sup>2</sup> It is not surprising that father and son earned the rancor of the Manchurian people.

Because intellectuals affiliated with Manchuria's Civil Government Group abhorred the Zhangs' despotism, they launched a campaign called *baojing anmin* (secure the borders and bring peace to the people), whose objective was to protect Manchuria from the upheaval in China proper. The campaign appealed widely to the residents of Manchuria, whose fervent hope (and also the ultimate, inevitable goal of *baojing anmin*) was independent statehood for Manchuria. Consequently, soon

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<sup>1</sup> IMTFE, Defense Document #2048-J: telegram from War Minister Minami to Commander of Kwantung Army, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7d/NDL10281227\\_Court\\_Exh.\\_No.\\_3422J-Telegram\\_between....pdf](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7d/NDL10281227_Court_Exh._No._3422J-Telegram_between....pdf); also cited during direct examination of Takeda Hisashi on 10 November 1947, 32,850-51, [https://archive.org/details/130.1990-2181/131.707-863/page/n95/mode/2up?q=%22riku-man+35%](https://archive.org/details/130.1990-2181/131.707-863/page/n95/mode/2up?q=%22riku-man+35%22).

<sup>2</sup> Commission of Enquiry, Earl of Lytton, *op. cit.*, 31.

after the Manchurian Incident occurred, Manchurian leaders began declaring independence: Yuan Jinkai in Liaoning province on September 24, Xi Qia in Jilin province on September 26, Zhang Jinghui in the Special Administrative Region of the Eastern Provinces on September 27, Tang Yulin in Rehe province and Yu Zhishan in Dongbian on September 29, and Zhang Haipeng in Taonan on October 1.

### **Manchurian politicians also envision independence**

So many declarations of independence would not have been forthcoming, especially within such a short period of time, had there not been momentum toward, and groundwork for, independence prior to the Manchurian Incident. Furthermore, the fact that such declarations emanated from places other than Fengtian and Jilin, namely, in regions where the Japanese military had no presence whatsoever, proves that the movement sprung up spontaneously from the Manchurian people.

On November 7 the Peace Preservation Committee in Liaoning announced that it would sever ties with the former northeastern government led by Zhang Xueliang, and with the Nanjing government. It also decided to rename Liaoning province, which became Fengtian province. The Self-Government Guidance Board was founded in Fengtian on November 10. Yu Zhonghan, a politician affiliated with the Civil Government Group, was installed as director. Yu's main political objectives with respect to Manchurian problems are shown below.

1. Build a new, independent state rooted in *baojing anmin*.
2. Sever ties with the Nationalist government in Nanjing.
3. Abolish warlord politics and oppressive taxation.
4. Eliminate the army; entrust national defense to Japan; following the principles of the Kingly Way (benevolent rule), build a paradise that has no equal.
5. Pursue autonomy gradually, giving due consideration to history, and human sensibilities and customs.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, the idea of breaking off from the Nanjing Nationalist government and founding a new independent nation in Manchuria came from politicians belonging to the Civil Government Group to whom the politics of the Zhang Xueliang faction was anathema. It was decidedly not an illusion dreamed up by the Japanese.

### **Northeast Administrative Council members all native Manchurians**

As already stated, the Japanese government had on more than one occasion ordered Japanese military personnel stationed in Manchuria to refrain from participating in attempts by Manchurians to establish a new government. The aforementioned Katakura Tadashi testified at the IMTFE as follows:

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<sup>3</sup> “Yu Zhonghan no shutsuro to sono seiken” (Yu Zhonghan’s emergence from retirement and his political views) in *Gendai shi shiryō: Manshū jihen*, 7 (Documents from modern history, vol. 7: Manchurian Incident) (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 1964).

In view of the policy laid down by the central authorities, the Kwantung Army on its own part placed special emphasis on the preservation of law and order. The attitude taken by the Kwantung Army with respect to the various independent movements in the various areas of Manchuria under various leaders was silent watch – was one of watchful silence, and to contact these parties after those independence movements matured.<sup>4</sup>

Based on the considerations outlined above, as independence movements were established in various parts of Manchuria, the Guandong Army may have been in contact with their leaders. But it is clear that the independence movement *per se* was not the product of Japanese manipulation, but a spontaneous expression of the will of the Manchurian people.

According to the testimony of attorney Okamoto Toshio at the IMTFE, in addition to regional independence movements like those described above, there was also a popular movement backing Puyi, the emperor. For instance, Luo Zhen'yu, one of Puyi's advisors, was in contact with Gen. Xi Qia of Jilin and Gen. Zhang Haipeng of Taonan. Those generals, along with Zhang Jinghui and the Mongolian royal family, were steadfast supporters of the restoration of Puyi to the imperial throne.

On February 16 of 1932, the year after the Manchurian Incident, Gens. Zhang Jinghui, Zang Shiyi, Xi Qia, Ma Zhanshan, and Tang Yulin, along with Qi Wang and Lingsheng (both Inner Mongolians), and Zhao Xinbo, founded the Northeast Administrative Council in Fengtian. The council became the basis for the new state, but as is obvious from the names I have just listed, the planners were Chinese, Manchurians, and Mongols. There were no Japanese participants.

The main objectives of a civilian government leader like Yu Zhonghan were severing ties with the Nationalist government in Nanjing and establishing a new independent state. Additionally, the fact that the Northeast Administrative Council (established in February 1932), which served as the seed from which Manzhouguo sprang, was composed solely of Manchurians, Chinese, and Mongolians, proves that the Manchurian independence movement was the manifestation of the voluntary will of the Manchurian people. There is no justification for condemning that movement as a Japanese plot. On February 18 the committee declared independence for Manchuria, and elected Puyi sovereign by unanimous resolution. He was installed as head of Manzhouguo's head of state on March 9, whereupon the first government of Manzhouguo was organized, with Zheng Xiaoxu as prime minister.

### **Japan's rebuttal to the Lytton Report**

On October 2, 1932 the Report of the Commission of Enquiry (commonly referred to as the Lytton Report) was made public. On November 18 the Japanese government presented a rebuttal to the League of Nations, in which it refers to the injustice of the report's view that the independence movement exploited the Manchurian Incident.

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<sup>4</sup> IMTFE, Direct examination of Maj.-Gen. Katakura Tadashi, witness for the defense, on 21 March 1947, 18,946; <https://archive.org/details/124.2038-2239/125.2065-2152/mode/2up?q=Katakura>.

Finally, the report makes the point that such a movement [the independence movement] in favour of a change of Government could not have been carried through but for the presence of the Japanese troops. But the Japanese troops were there in the exercise of their just rights. ... If the independence movement took advantage of the conditions thus created, that altered in no wise the spontaneity of the movement. There are many instances in other continents where the presence of foreign forces has afforded the possibility of attaining independence, and where that independence has never been questioned.<sup>5</sup>

The fact is that there are numerous instances in which nations have achieved independence through the chaos of war or the might of foreign troops. They include Outer Mongolia, the nations of Southeast Asia, and Korea. Furthermore, in none of those cases was that independence rejected.

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<sup>5</sup> IMTFE, Observations of the Japanese Government of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry <https://archive.org/details/163.1836-2060/163.1405-1553/mode/2uphttps://archive.org/details/163.1836-2060/163.1405-1553/mode/2up> (retrieved 04/25).