

# THE THREAT FROM JAPAN

## Japanese expansion

As you have read (page 2) Japan fought a war with China in 1895 in order to get Chinese land. As a result of the war China had to give Formosa (now called Taiwan) and the Pescadores Islands to Japan, and to allow Korea, one of its colonies, independence.

Japan gained more land in China after fighting a war with Russia in 1904–5 for control of Manchuria and Korea. Both countries already owned railways, ports and factories in Manchuria and Korea; and now, as a result of winning the war, Japan gained control of the Liaodong Peninsula and the South Manchurian Railway. Five years later, in 1910, Japanese troops moved into Korea and made it a Japanese colony.

During the Great War of 1914–18 Japan grabbed even more land from China. As soon as the war began, Japan entered it on the side of the Western Allies and took control of the German-held port at Kiaochow. Then, in 1915, the Japanese government presented China with Twenty-One Demands, trying to increase its economic control of Manchuria (see page 6).

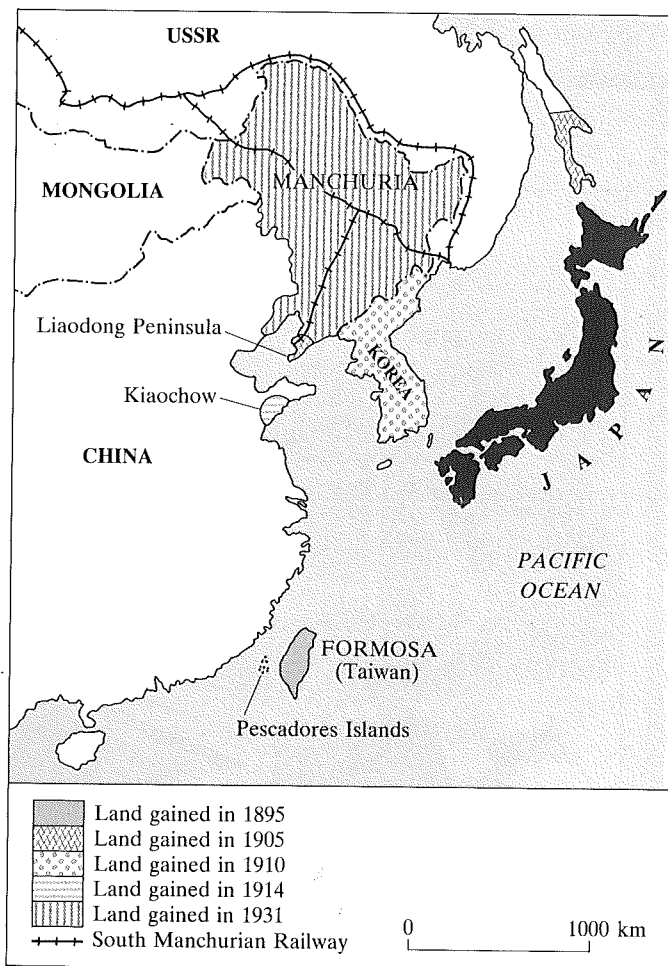
## Manchuria

Manchuria was the part of China which Japan wanted above all the others. The attractions of Manchuria were clearly described by the Prime Minister of Japan, Baron Tanaka, in a letter to the Emperor of Japan:

'It is an area of 192,000 square kilometres, having a population of 28 million people. The territory is more than three times as large as our own empire, not counting Korea and Formosa, but it is inhabited by only one third as many people. The attractiveness of the land does not arise from the scarcity of the population alone; its wealth of forestry, minerals and agricultural products is also unrivalled elsewhere in the world. In order to exploit these resources . . . we created especially the South Manchurian Railway Company.

The total investment involved in our undertakings in railways, shipping, mining, forestry, steel manufacture, agriculture, and in cattle raising . . . amount to no less than 440 million yen. It is veritably the largest single investment and the strongest organisation of our country.'

By 1927, the year in which Baron Tanaka wrote that letter, the Japanese had a stranglehold on



*The expansion of Japan, 1895–1931*

Manchuria's economy. 'They controlled all its most important mines, railways, factories and ports. To protect these investments, the Japanese kept a large army in Kwantung in southern Manchuria. And to make their position even stronger, the Japanese had a friendly agreement with the warlord of Manchuria, Zhang Zuolin. They were happy to let a warlord rule Manchuria because this weakened the central government in Beijing – and a weak Chinese government suited Japan's interests very nicely.

Japan's control of Manchuria was threatened in 1928 when Chiang Kaishek marched into Beijing and set up the National Government with himself at its head. When Zhang Zuolin agreed shortly after to recognise Chiang's authority, the Japanese began to fear that Zhang and Chiang would together be strong enough to oppose their domination of Manchuria. To prevent this from happening, two Japanese colonels assassinated Zhang by dynamiting his private train. They expected that his son and successor Zhang Xueliang, a high-living, gambling drug-addict, would be easy for them to control.

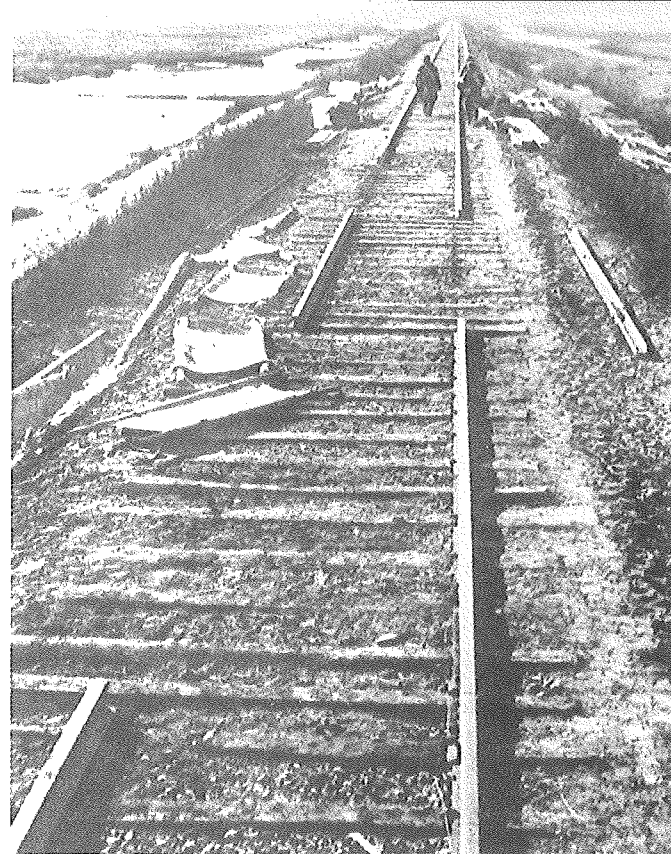


*Japanese soldiers of the Kwantung Army guard a street in Shenyang in 1931*

## The Manchurian Incident, 1931

Having control of Manchuria's economy and of Zhang Xueliang did not solve any of Japan's basic economic problems. By 1931 the Japanese economy was in desperate trouble. The Great Depression which began in the USA had shattered Japan's trade, closed half its factories, and ruined millions of peasants. When the government proved incapable of overcoming the Depression, young officers in the Japanese army began to talk of foreign conquest as a way out of the Depression. With new colonies, they argued, Japan would have more trade, more raw materials, and more jobs. And where better to start than Manchuria, where Japan already had an army in place?

Acting against the orders of the Japanese government, officers in the Kwantung Army planned a military take-over of Manchuria. In the night of 18 September 1931 the Kwantung Army occupied the town of Shenyang, claiming that Chinese soldiers had tried to blow up the Japanese-owned South Manchurian Railway just north of the town. Ignoring the protests of the League of Nations, 50,000 Japanese soldiers went on to occupy the rest of Manchuria.



*A Japanese photograph of the damage to the South Manchurian Railway*

Zhang Xueliang, who by now had cured himself of drug addiction, and was proving to be an effective military governor of Manchuria, wanted to fight the Japanese invaders. But Chiang Kaishek, at the head of the new National Government, favoured relying on the League of Nations to stop the invasion. Neither he nor Zhang had the strength to fight Japan, he argued.

The League of Nations set up a Commission of Inquiry to investigate Japan's invasion but did not take any military action against Japan. While the Commission was still travelling to China by sea, the Japanese went on to occupy all of Manchuria. In February 1932 they renamed it Manzhouguo, meaning Manchu Land, and put the ex-Emperor of China, Puyi, on the throne. But Puyi was only a figure-head. The real rulers of Manzhouguo were the Japanese officers of the Kwantung Army.

### Work section

- A. Study Baron Tanaka's letter opposite, then answer these questions:
  1. Why, according to Baron Tanaka, were the Japanese attracted to Manchuria?
  2. According to Baron Tanaka, in what economic activities were the Japanese involved in Manchuria?
  3. What Japanese-owned company organised all these activities?
- B. Study the photograph of the damaged railway above, then answer these questions:
  1. How seriously does the railway seem to be damaged?
  2. For what purposes do you think the Japanese took this photograph?
  3. Why do you think the Japanese reacted to the alleged attack on the railway so strongly?
- C. 'When Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 it was not really much of a surprise.' Judging by what you have read in this chapter, and by the map opposite, what evidence can you find to support this opinion?