

# OVERVIEW

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When war broke out between Japan and China on 1 August 1894, most Western observers assumed that China would prevail because of its size, but the war turned out like the biblical fight between David and Goliath; the smaller combatant won with better weapons and tactics. What was a surprise to many had been the fruit of Japan's effort to modernize in the late nineteenth century, driven by a quest to maintain national independence and to attain equal status with Western nations. With the acquisition of its first colony, Taiwan, as the prize of its victory over China in 1895, Japan embarked on building an empire, just as Western powers had done before. The Japanese empire lasted for only half a century, and it vanished in the same way it had begun—in a war with China. The Second Sino-Japanese War, started in 1937, eventually led to the Second World War, which resulted in Japan's surrender and the dismemberment of its empire in 1945.

More than half a century has elapsed since the demise of Japan's empire, but because of its centrality in early twentieth century East Asian history, it still continues to attract the attention of numerous scholars. They, just as generations of scholars before them, reinterpret the past in light of the present, especially now that Japan's role in Asia is growing again in the fields of economics, politics, and culture. They usually place the creation, dynamics, and termination of the Japanese empire within worldwide trends of imperialism, nationalism, totalitarianism, and modernity with reference to particular circumstances and developments in East Asia.<sup>1</sup> They often differ in their respective overall assessment. On the one hand, are scholars who view Japan's pursuit of empire, at least in its earlier stages, as the normal course of action in a general climate of imperialism. On the other hand, are those who call for new theoretical para-

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the state of scholarship in English on the formal and informal Japanese empire see Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie, eds., *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984); Peter Duus, Ramon H. Myers, and Mark R. Peattie, eds., *The Japanese Informal Empire in China, 1895–1937* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989); and Peter Duus, Ramon H. Myers, and Mark R. Peattie, eds., *The Japanese Wartime Empire, 1931–1945* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Marius Jansen, "Japanese Imperialism: Late Meiji Perspectives," in *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945*, 61–79.

digms to explain the special features of Japanese imperialism.<sup>3</sup> In this conference volume, scholars from Europe, Asia, and the United States discuss the historical significance of the formal and informal Japanese empire. Prasenjit Duara in his opening remarks introduces the "East Asian modern," a regional discourse of the modern and the unique, as a background for the interpretation of the construction of empire in an age of nationalism. The other contributors, many of whom are just embarking on an academic career, are grouped according to three broad themes: the domestic foundations of Japanese imperialism, the workings of the Japanese empire in Asia, and the Japanese empire's postwar legacy.

The volume begins with four essays that assess the domestic foundations of Japanese imperialism. Fred Dickinson shows the place of Asia in the struggle for power among Japanese elites during the First World War, the end of which saw the dissolution of a national consensus for continental expansion. While recognizing the influence of international events and Wilsonian ideas on Japan, he stresses the initiatives of Japanese policymakers in the promotion of overseas expansion in order to distract from domestic issues. Christopher Szpilman then explains in a case study of the prominent intellectual Ōkawa Shūmei how pan-Asianism could appeal to an important stratum of the conservative prewar elite. With his pan-Asianism, Ōkawa justified Japan's mission to liberate Asia from Western influence, if need be by war. Hyung Gu Lynn describes the development and shifting goals of Japan-Asia associations. Members used the Japan-Asia associations to form interest networks in foreign affairs in a prewar polity often characterized as ridden by rivalry between different elite groups. Janis Mimura concludes this section with her examination of wartime state planning, especially in matters of technology policy and ideology. In the writings of members of the supraministerial Asia Development Board, she sees justifications for Japan's political dominance in Asia based on its technological leadership role. Also, she finds fundamental similarities in Japanese thought on technology policy with those of "reactionary modernist engineers" in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia.

The workings of the Japanese empire in Asia is the subject of the next three essays. Karl Gerth analyzes the rise of Chinese nationalism in the spread of an ethic of nationalistic consumption. This ethic increasingly defined consumption of Chinese goods as patriotic and became a force in sustaining anti-Japanese boycotts. Harumi Goto-Shibata shows how Japanese on the turbulent frontier turned economic imperialism into more vi-

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<sup>3</sup> Japanese imperialism is called "backward imperialism." See Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

olent forms of imperialism. Her study of the Japanese community in Shanghai reveals how businessmen increasingly relied on the navy instead of the consulate to protect their commercial interests in the face of anti-Japanese boycotts. Adam Schneider examines sub-imperialist drives for economic expansion in colonial Taiwan. Motivated by a desire to lessen dependence on trade with metropolitan Japan, the Taiwan Government-General promoted economic integration with South China and Southeast Asia, but trade failed to take off until the mid-1930s, when the policy of industrialization for Taiwan became effective.

The three final three essays focus on the empire's postwar legacy, especially for Sino-Japanese relations. Daqing Yang describes the existence of a continuity in Sino-Japanese economic and technical cooperation in the immediate postwar period, which was only terminated by the incipient Chinese civil war. Chinese authorities and Japanese managers encouraged Japanese contributions to Chinese technology development, and many Japanese experts remained in China after 1945 to work. C.W. Braddick examines diplomatic history without diplomatic relations. In the early Cold War, when no official ties existed between Japan and China, powerful Japanese politicians sought a special relationship with China, which they viewed foremost as an Asian country and only secondarily as a communist country. Joachim Glaubitz discusses Sino-Japanese diplomacy before the normalization of diplomatic relations. He credits the Chinese leadership for astute manipulation of Japanese public opinion and politicians to obtain a treaty on China's terms.