

## *The Manchurian Crisis*

**The Sinister Face of the Mukden Incident**, by Chin-tung Liang, *Jamaica, New York: St. John's University Press, 1969.* 188 pp. \$3.75.

ON THE NIGHT of September 18, 1931, a section of the South Manchuria Railway near Mukden was blown up by explosives planted along the tracks. Almost simultaneously Japanese forces invested and occupied the Manchurian capital. This was part of a carefully prepared plan, put into operation by the Japanese military without prior consultation with the government at Tokyo, thereby producing a chain of crises which led ultimately to the Pacific War. Professor Liang's study of the Mukden Incident, as it is called, is the latest volume of the *Asia in the Modern World Monograph Series*, prepared under the auspices of the Center of the Asian Studies of St. John's University; he has made an admirable job not only of reconstructing the incident in minute detail, but also of placing it within a broad historical perspective. He does this by tracing the rising militarist spirit among the younger Japanese army officers, by probing the various clandestine conspiracies in which these young officers were involved, and by analyzing the impact of the incident and its aftermath.

The organization of the book is unusual and effective, reflecting the author's legal training. Instead of giving us chapters following one another in chronological order, Professor Liang arranges his materials in such a way as to make one aware that one is reading not only an elaborate work of historical research, but also a cogently reasoned argument on a case prepared by an able lawyer. In the first of the six chapters he discusses the traditional rivalries in Manchuria of Japan and Russia; he then sets the era of world-wide depression as the background for the approaching crisis,

quoting Henry L. Stimson, then U.S. Secretary of State: "If anyone had planned the Manchurian outbreak with a view to freedom from interference from the rest of the world, his time was well chosen." In two ensuing chapters Professor Liang presents various sources of evidence to show where real responsibility for the incident lay, refuting the pretexts used at the time and afterward by the Japanese. He goes on to identify the main participants in the conspiracy and traces the covert activity of the young militarists in a series of plots aimed at establishing a Fascist Japanese hegemony in East Asia. It is here that he develops and ably defends his thesis that "the Mukden Incident was an extension of Japanese internal revolt rather than an act purely of external aggression."

Two following chapters deal with the reaction to the Mukden Incident in Tokyo and Nanking. The real nature of the oft-mentioned differences between Tokyo and the Kwantung Army has come to light; so have the mounting difficulties that the Nanking government faced as a result of the stepped-up Japanese aggression. In the last chapter, the author, after dismissing the conventional arguments advanced by Japanese diplomats and scholars, sets forth what he terms the three real causes of the Mukden Incident, namely, "(1) a subtle shift of naval strength in the Pacific; (2) fluctuations in Sino-Soviet relations; and (3) the hopelessness of the Manchurian-Mongolian separatist movement."

Three main primary sources are used in this study: the League of Nations papers, the records of the Tokyo International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE), and the files of the Japanese Foreign Office covering a period of seventy-seven years, which became available after 1949. The last two sources are used most extensively by the author to clear up many points of historical ambiguity and to refute early allegations. On the shaping of the conspiracy, for example, Professor Liang cites seven sources of evidence from the testimonies and diaries of the participants

presented at the Tokyo trial to prove that the Mukden Incident was a meticulously planned and neatly executed plot. As for the alleged bombing of the South Manchuria Railway tracks that touched off the crisis, Professor Liang again enumerates no less than six sources to show that the bombing was the handiwork of the Japanese intended to blame China for a train derailment that did not occur. In both cases, by presenting convincing evidence, the author obliges the reader to come to unmistakable conclusions.

The meddling in politics by military men is not new in Japan. Indeed, the Japanese Government was not unaware of the danger, for dating back to the Emperor Meiji, a decree had prohibited military persons from participating in political organizations, and this ban was later reaffirmed in the penal codes of the Army and Navy. This did not deter the young and ambitious army officers from organizing secret societies to study "national reforms" and "national defense." The pinch of worldwide depression and political corruption in government only strengthened the determination of the young officers, born of physically vigorous and economically hard-pressed peasant stock, to take the destiny of the nation into their own hands. Long before the birth of the "Cherry Blossom Society" in early 1931, to which most of the perpetrators of the Mukden conspiracy belonged, there was already a flowering of secret societies, bearing such names as "Left-shoulder Clique," "Double-leaf Society," "Heavenly Sword Society," "Imperial Commander's Society," etc. Their ultimate objective was not merely external expansion, but also Socialist reform and military dictatorship at home "so as to avoid the fate which befell the ancient Greek and Roman Empires." One abortive plot following the Mukden Incident even called for a palace coup against the Emperor. It was this rising militarism that overwhelmed Japan and ultimately led the nation down the road of defeat.

In discussing the dilemma faced by the

Chinese Government between war and peace after the incident, Professor Liang cites three main factors involved: student unrest, the Chinese Communist Party, and the existence of a schismatic government in Canton. As early as 1928, in a conversation with Japanese Premier Tanaka, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek had already sensed the Japanese ambition to seize Manchuria by force. But at the time of the Mukden Incident, he fully realized that, with the campaigns against the Communists still under way and with the government split between Nanking and Canton, China was too weak to deal with Japan militarily. In adopting a nonresistance policy, the Nanking Government counted in vain on diplomatic efforts, particularly through the League of Nations. The nationwide student anti-Japanese protest soon turned into an antigovernment movement, which was further aggravated by Communist agitators who were more interested in overthrowing the Kuomintang than opposing Japanese aggression. (Resolution of the Chinese Communist Party adopted four days after the Mukden Incident.) The following passage from Tai Ch'uan-hsien's *Collected Writings* is particularly pertinent:

Most of the young students were, on the one hand, fired by their sense of patriotism and, on the other hand, utilized by those who wanted to fish in troubled water. As a result, they staged strikes and demonstrations, making themselves obnoxious at the Central Kuomintang Headquarters, the National Government and the Executive Yuan, where it not only became impossible for the employees to conduct routine business but also to move about.

Professor Liang contends that the naval agreement worked out at the Washington Conference of 1921-22 unwittingly encouraged Japan's ambition in Manchuria by leaving the entire China Sea within the Japanese sphere of naval influence. Stalin's failure in China emboldened Japan, while Chang Hsueh-liang's pledge of allegiance

to the Nanking Government finally convinced Japan that separation of Manchuria from China could only be achieved by force. Looking back, all these factors certainly influenced Japan's course of action, but the root cause must still rest with Japan's set policy to control Manchuria. On this basic policy, it should be stressed that the Kwantung Army and Tokyo were in full agreement. The often exaggerated differences between the two were on the timing of action, not on the action itself. Indeed, as early as May 1928, the General Staff had already prepared a mobilization plan, the implementation of which was put off only because of international pressure, particularly that from the United States.

Within less than one year of the Mukden Incident, the puppet regime of "Manchukuo" was set up. The following year, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations. From Marco Polo Bridge to Pearl Harbor Japan was bent on realizing her Grand Design as the Pacific War unfolded. And when Japan finally collapsed, as the author observes, "the Grand Design benefited no nation except, perhaps, the Soviet Union."

Reviewed by TA-LING LEE